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This is a poem-story about the predicament and anguish of an alienated parent who has tried everything, including court, to no avail; and now faces giving up and losing a child.

AN ANGUISHED FATHER

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Deep is my pain.
Profound is my grief.
Doubts and questions torment me.

Why does my son avoid me?
Why does he spurn all contact?
Why does he not love me?
What went wrong
When he entered adolescence two years ago?
We had been so close for thirteen years.
Did I say or do something wrong?

These thoughts torment me,
Even though I know
Nothing he could say or do
Could possibly cause me to stop loving him.
And I have always known that his love for me
Matches mine for him.
We were like mirrors of each other.

Even now, after two years
Of grief, anguish and self-doubt,
I know,
Because it is an undeniable fact,
A part of my very being,
That my love for him is indestructible.

What has happened to his love?
I know that what we have,
Who we are,
And the connection we enjoyed,
Are timeless and ever-lasting.
Thirteen years of bonding and shared life
Were not a delusion.
They were the realest thing that ever happened to either of us.

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Yes, he suffered an earthquake in his heart:
His mother and I divorced when he was only two.
The tsunami and aftershocks marked his childhood:
Animosity and no communication between his parents;
Resistance to child-sharing on the part of his mother;
Enmeshment with mother around imagined illnesses;
Many court appearances;
Two custody evaluations recommending shared parenting;
A divided life between two isolated homes.
A polluted family atmosphere, to be sure,
Full of mostly invisible but toxic gases.

What happened to his love for me?
And to our invisible but rock-solid bond?
Where did I go wrong?
I tried so hard to make it work:
To keep a sense of family,
And of respect.

I counted on our love and bond,
On his resilience and mine,
On thirteen years of being beloved father and son.
I know he did too.

Yes, it has been two agonizing years.
Lately, I have been suffering dreadful temptations.
The gnawing, incessant, daily pain
And self-doubt,
Rooted in my deep, abiding love
For my son,
My boy,
My child,
Causes me to have thoughts of giving up.

Maybe I could find a way to stop caring.
Maybe I could pretend it is gone,
Or has died,
My love for him,
And his for me.

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Maybe I could find a way to forget
All that we shared,
All the good times,
For so many years.

I know!
I could pretend he doesn't care,
And maybe never did.
I could imagine it was all an illusion,
Not real.
I could deny his love,
And mine,
By pretending,
Working hard to pretend,
All sorts of negative stuff.
I could blame him,
Or his mother,
For all the trouble.

This would stop the torment and confusion
In my heart and mind.
Maybe I could get others
To help me vilify him
And blame him for all this trouble and pain.

These temptations,
These once unthinkable thoughts,
Caused me to consult with a seer of the human heart.

He said the strangest thing:
"You know, when there is a mysterious problem
In someone you love very much,
Your own mind and heart will begin to feel
The very same pain
That is causing your loved one's reaction.
You will begin to have the same thoughts and feelings
That resulted in his reaction."
He called it "The Mirror Principle".

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I pondered this unusual but intriguing notion.
My tempted reactions,
Stemming from the pain and turmoil in my heart,
Certainly match my son's behavior and reactions.
Word for word, actually.

If my heart indeed mirrors his,
It would mean that his love for me
Somehow became so painful and confusing,
So threatening to his adjustment and functioning,
That his mind needed to protect his heart
By unknowingly adopting the very processes
Tempting my tormented heart.

But how could his love for me
Have become so painful,
So confusing,
So stressful,
That he needed to deny it,
By pretending the opposite?
And why did it happen as he entered adolescence?

The seer said,
"It is the nature of the human heart
To love and attach to people who are attached to each other.
Trying to be attached and loyal to people
Who are enemies, or despise each other,
Or fear each other,
Or hate each other,
Is very stressful and confusing."

"Such stress often becomes intolerable
At adolescence,
When development takes away
The young child's naiveness, unquestioning acceptance,
And ability to switch worlds easily.
These are replaced with all kinds of confusing questions,
And frequent disillusionments."

"Often," he said, "Living a divided life,
Being caught in the middle,
Intense loyalty conflicts,
Constant parental blaming and arguments-about-truth,

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And the danger of too much disillusionment,
Cause the adolescent's mind
To deny one of the confusing attachments."

But why, I ask, did his mind pick me?
I was the one who tried to maintain respect,
And make the family work,
And insist on my son's need for a father.
We were so solid.
I loved and admired
His growing maturity and strength.
We had a whole world of adventure opening before us.

Why did his heart close off all of this,
And me?

What danger was there
In continuing our journey of friendship
And growing up?
Why did his mind and heart
Stay aligned with his mother,
And give me up?

The seer said,
"When the Nazis,
As a matter of sport and torture,
Saw a parent coming into the camp with two children,
They told the parent only one child could be kept.
The other had to be given up.
The parent had to choose which child to keep,
And which to give up.
An abominable choice to put to a parent.
Invariably," he said, "The parent would choose
To keep the weaker child,
And give up the stronger one,
The one more able possibly to survive."

"So it is with the adolescent:
(Except it is a reaction,
Not really a choice,
And we must not pretend it is a choice,
Lest we put the poor child in the Nazi position.)
The adolescent's mind,

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To survive a toxic family atmosphere,
Generates, without consulting the adolescent,
A denial of attachment to one parent,
Usually the healthier, stronger parent.
The parent whose love in fact
Can be counted on to survive.”

My temptations,
My unthinkable thoughts,
A mirror reflection of my son's,
Vanished.
I always knew they were not really me,
Any more than they are really him.

I always knew,
Deep down,
That any denial of the love between me and my son
Could be accomplished only by pretence,
Only by fooling myself.

I realize now,
After all remedies have failed,
That my job is faith,
Faith in the certainty and indestructibility of love:
Our love.

“After all,” the seer said, “Your son's mind would not have to work so hard,
Go to such lengths,
Generate such negative notions,
Forget all the good times,
Disallow any experience of its attachment
And its history,
If the love it is denying
Was not in fact very great and strong.”

I came to see
That all my son's reactions
Were in fact testimony
To the love between us,
The realest thing about both of us.

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I must not be fooled.
I must not be deceived by appearances.
They are all a compelled pretence.
Not really a choice at all,
But rather a testimony
To the fact that his love for me,
And all I represent about growing up,
About becoming his own person,
Is for now
Too threatening and stressful.

Yes, my job is to to keep the faith,
The faith in what is undeniably realest between us
And in us.

And I can live on hope,
While I go on loving,
Even though it is so painful.
I will suffer the pain,
As his pain is solved by denial through pretending.

I must not succumb to,
As his mind was compelled to,
Deny our love and bond.
Deep down,
He counts on me.
I must hang onto our reality,
Our love,
Until he is able to reclaim it.

After all,
All that he is doing
Is surviving his adolescence
In the tsunami of his family,
Ever since the earthquake,
When he was two.

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