

Copperline

A few years ago, my roommate asked why my brother Danny and I always cut cake and brownies into such small pieces and then eat a bunch of them. Why not just cut one large piece and eat bites out of it? We shrugged at each other, then shrugged at my roommate. We didn't know. We just did.

Months later, I was back home in Massachusetts, cutting myself a bite-sized square of brownie. I moved aside for my little sister Melissa to carve out a piece, and hers was much larger. Moments later, my dad entered the kitchen, spotted the crumbs falling from Melissa's brownie-laden hand, and proceeded to complain about how much he hated crumbs because they get squashed and then stick to the floor and harden and are just a huge pain to clean up. As he made Melissa wipe up the crumbs, I grinned and made a mental note to text Danny.

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People often get my dad's name wrong. It's just Jon, not John or Jonathan, though companies and people who don't know him frequently assume otherwise. It's an easy indicator of how well the person knows him. Once I realized that "Jon" could indeed be spelled with an "h" and that that wasn't a silly mistake the Bible writer had made, I asked him where he got his name from. He said his mom liked the name Jon, and she'd left his middle name up to his dad. My grandpa had apparently done a lot of typing because he picked "Kevin" purely so that my dad's initials, JKL, would be easy to type out. I remember being confused, so my dad showed me the computer keyboard and sure enough, J, K, and L were all in a row.

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In a recent conversation with my aunt Joanna, she told me that meeting my dad made her nervous about marrying his brother, Jeff. My dad seemed so bossy and forthright and in charge that she was afraid that the normally mild-mannered Jeff would suddenly develop similar qualities. They still got married, but she said that for the longest time, she wouldn't ever let Jeff tell her what to do.

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Back when I was small and learning to dress myself, I would frequently put my shirt on backwards and not realize it. Whenever my dad caught sight of me though, he'd call me over. He would help me take my arms out of my sleeves and then hold my shirt and say "spin, spin spin!" I'd spin around and around, the shirt's collar rubbing my neck, and then suddenly my shirt would be facing the right way! My dad would then help me put my arms back into my sleeves and kiss my forehead.

I have few memories from that young age, but there is a particular instance that stands out clearly. I had massive, ~~concerning~~ health problems back then and ~~I so~~ had to take all sorts of awful tasting medications. Normally, my mom gave these to me, but one night she told me to wait in the kitchen for her while she took care of something quickly. I waited by the counter for her to come and distribute the nightly torture, and my dad came in from the family room. Probably deducing my purpose, he said he'd get me my meds and pulled a bottle out of the cabinet. I remember being suddenly unsure; Mom knew what to give me. Did Dad? Could I trust him? Mom had said to wait, so shouldn't I wait for her? My dad gestured for me to follow him into the family room so he could give me the meds, but I stayed in the kitchen and held onto the counter until my mom appeared a few moments later. As she got my meds ready, my dad came back from the family room looking for me. He asked me why I hadn't come, but I don't remember saying anything. ~~But~~ I do remember feeling bad that I had disappointed him, that I hadn't let him help me.

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Some two or so years ago, my sister Amanda started campaigning for a dog. There were finally few enough kids—four, instead of the total eight—in the house that my parents started to actually consider her request, rather than just shoot it down. However, my family has all sorts of sensitivities and allergies and the like, so it couldn't be just any random dog. So my dad bought Amanda a bunch of books about dog breeds and how to take care of dogs and how to train dogs and told her to read them all, research what dog would be best for our family, and then write him a report explaining her reasoning and her plan for not only taking care of the dog, but also her plan for proving she was capable of the responsibility. After a year working through all the materials and several subsequent book-gifts, Amanda submitted her report along with a PowerPoint presentation that highlighted her major arguments. She was ten.

**Commented [SC1]:** Change sentence punctuation

**Commented [SC2]:** Restructure, "for...to start actually considering"

**Commented [SC3]:** Run on sentence

My dad told her he would take her suggestions under advisement and get back to her.

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When I was six or seven, I swore, using a word I'd heard at school. I was playing Rodent's Revenge, a silly 90s computer game where you're a mouse trying to capture cats and not die in the process. I kept dying over and over, and so I swore. It seemed a natural thing to do, but my dad gave me a seriously angry look and demanded that I never say the word again. I nodded agreeably, intent on obeying, then turned back to my game. I promptly forgot, however, and ~~some times~~ sometime later swore again. This time, my dad was much less calm about it. He growled and told me that if I *ever* said it again, he'd wash my mouth out with soap, just like he'd done with Danny.

While I had not been there for Danny's mouth-cleansing, I had heard enough about the traumatizing experience to tremble at this threat. In fear of forgetting again and having to face that punishment, I just stopped playing the game.

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I don't really have any clear memories of my dad completely losing his temper. Just vague notions of everything being ~~so~~ loud, ~~and~~ frightening, and red. I would always flee and cower somewhere until it had all passed. I could never face him when he was like that. My mom could sometimes soothe him out of it, but ~~it~~ once he was all worked up, it was hard for him to calm back down into patience and clear thinking. And it was hard for us to come ~~back~~ to him.

Commented [SC4]: Weird phrasing

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My dad used to play all sorts of games and tricks with us when we were little. He had this trick where I'd ask him for more water or juice and he'd point his finger into my cup and go, "Swooooooosh," and suddenly my cup would be full. I still don't know how he did that, and he still hasn't told me ~~now~~, though he has consented to comment that I was much less observant back then. Another favorite pastime of his—or perhaps, more correctly, ours—was being the Tickle Monster. He'd chase us all around the family room, giving teasing roars ~~and tickling our sides and feet and necks~~. We would laugh and scream and run, and he would catch one or two ~~of us~~ and force ~~us~~ them to submit to his all-powerful tickling rule. Then the rest of us

Commented [SC5]: A lot of "and" usage

would converge from behind him and try to knock him over and distract him long enough for his prisoners to escape. More often than not, he would just wind up capturing all of us. We have this picture of us six kids lying in a row on the ground with terrified expressions and our dad kneeling over us, a grin-growl on his face and his hands pretending to claw at the camera. It's one of my favorites.

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One evening when I was ten, my family somehow had tickets to a baseball game. My whole family was going, but I didn't want to and I was finally old enough to not need a babysitter, so they were letting me stay home alone. I stood ~~off~~around to the side, watching, not part of the painfully extended procedures that made the simple task of getting everyone into the car take upward of half an hour. Shoes, jackets, snacks, trips to the bathroom, tracking down the two little ones and making certain they had everything, checking for tickets, searching for ~~so-~~and-~~so~~ for ten minutes and then realizing they'd been waiting in the car, realizing two more had been lost during that hunt and sorting them out, then squabbling over who sat where and what radio station to play until my dad's face was sunburned from his frustration and I was grateful I wasn't going.

Commented [SC6]: Punctuation?

Commented [SC7]: Huge run on sentence

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I have inherited my abiding passion for James Taylor from my dad. He has this story about how in high school or early college he won a ~~this~~ contest and the prize was three James Taylor records. He's been in the love with the man's music since then, which is saying something since my dad doesn't generally express deep interest in things. Moderate affection is acceptable, but there aren't a lot of things that warrant continualed following over the years. He puts up with our sci-fi nerdiness, our love for Star Trek (all five series) and Stargate and Firefly, ~~and~~ even consenting to watch them with us —or rather, fall asleep to them. ~~—with us~~. He was fairly annoyed when I introduced my mom to Doctor Who though, since she took to it right away. He said that Doctor Who ~~that~~ was what nerds watched when *he* was in high school and he'd been so grateful Mom hadn't ever caught onto it.

My dad does enjoy books and movies, but he's extremely selective about what ones are worth his time. But James Taylor, he loves. And so James Taylor will forever make me think of my dad.

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My dad when he's angry seems to transform into a different person. You can hear it happening, the tension in his words changing into a this growl in his throat. His face begins to redden, and you know if you don't start helping or stop arguing quick—and maybe even if you do—things are going to get bad. At his worst, he roars. Not a yell or a shout. A lion's roar, full and guttural and animal. I think the worst part is that it never seems to be intentional. It's just something that escapes him and you're left to wonder what else must be in there since ~~for~~ something so terrifying can ~~to~~ slip out.

Once when I was twelve or so, my dad came home all tired from work. We lived in California then, but my dad worked in Mexico and had to cross the border twice every day. Getting in was no problem, but coming back could take hours; so he always missed dinner. This particular night, nothing in the kitchen had been cleaned up; so he asked us to help. When no one moved; the growl began. I hurriedly started to clear the table and help unload the dishwasher, but suddenly my dad *roared* my name and I was so startled and alarmed I fell to my the knees and nearly broke the plate I was carrying. What had I done wrong? I'd been helping, hadn't I?

It got extremely quiet, and my dad turned to me, but I was too afraid to look at him. He murmured that he'd meant Danny, my brother, and then he tried to tell me he was sorry. I can only imagine how bad he felt then, but at the time, I was just glad he wasn't mad at me.

My dad tried to grow a beard once. He was successful at cultivating the hairs, but unsuccessful at cultivating appreciation for the red monstrosity. Fortunately, this was all before I was able to retain memory. Unfortunately, there is photographic evidence.

When I was sixteen, my parents took us camping near the coast. We were still in the woods, but the air was so fresh and damp and full. Most of my siblings complained, and then there was a storm and everything got soaked and David—age five at the time—got sick, so my mom decided to take him and most

**Commented [SC8]:** Totally random section

**Commented [SC9]:** Use different conjunction

**Commented [SC10]:** About what?

**Commented [SC11]:** Right then?

of the ~~family~~, ~~people~~ and ~~equipment~~, ~~stuff~~ home. I stayed with my dad though. I felt so bad; he'd taken days off work to do this with us and nobody wanted to actually be there with him.

We helped everyone pack up, and once they were on their way, he asked me if I wanted to go on a bike ride. I had, and still have, terrible stamina, and I'm a horrible cyclist, but he was so excited about this trail that lead out to a lighthouse on the cape that I wanted to do it anyway. It was drizzling and threatening to rain harder, but the summer air was warm and we were wet anyway.

We took it fairly easily, probably for my sake. There were lots of hills and falls and curves, but the houses were beautiful, quaint, ~~and~~ well-kept, and loved. At one point I needed a break, so we stopped; and my dad asked me what music I'd been listening to lately. I mentioned Jack Johnson, and he asked me to sing one of his songs. Inspired by the rain, I sang "Banana Pancakes," and then we went on our way again. We made it to the lighthouse, but it was closed; so we circled it, took another break, and then headed back. Ten miles round-trip, the longest bike ride of my life ~~up to that point~~~~then~~. But my dad still tells me how much he loves that song because I sang it for him and rode that trail despite the rain.

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For me, Saturday mornings are the domain of James Taylor and Billy Joel and dancing while gently cleaning up. My dad used to wake us all up by playing "Your Smiling Face" or "Copperline" or "Uptown Girl" throughout the whole house and dance with the first girls to make it downstairs to him. He'd spin us in circles and dance with two, sometimes three; of us at a time, swaying and swirling and smiling. He and my mother met on BYU's ballroom dance team. My mom was one of those "dance people" and my dad was a statistics major who wanted fun classes to audit. She thought he was kind of lame at first, though she's ~~never~~ said if that was because she thought he was a lame dancer or a lame person. He got better though, in both respects, in her eyes. The result is my nostalgia for Saturday mornings.

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My dad flew out to Utah with me when I came to BYU. I was seventeen, super anxious about being out west all by myself, and unsure whether I'd even made the right choice in university. He helped me check-in though, made certain I got the better bunk in my room, took me to Walmart and bought me so much stuff

I forgot about my nervousness and just felt guilty he was spending so much money on me. He encouraged me and helped me get excited about the classes I was about to start. And in the end, he gave me a father's blessing, a prayer over me to help me in my new life. In it, he asked that I would be strong, that I would be reassured that I had made the correct choice in school, that I would feel the love he had for me and know he was proud.

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My dad's skin is so fair that we joke that all it takes is for him to look at a picture of the sun and he'll get skin cancer. He burns so easily, despite sun screen and hats and covering up. I remember a swimming outing several summers ago. My dad had the day off; so he came with us to the pool. He spent the whole car ride layering and layering on the sun screen. I thought his skin would stop absorbing it he put so much on. He also wore a full-body suit, so only his head and the very top of his neck were exposed.

After less than an hour, he became so sun-sick that he had to go lie down in the shade for the rest of the time we were there. He had the worst sunburn out of all of us.

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Somewhat surprising to me was to realize that I could talk to my dad about my problems. Not just about life choices and what classes to take and how to fix my résumé, but about slightly less practical concerns. I was eighteen, back from my first year at BYU, and in the midst of emotional whiplash from once again being on and off again with my former on and off "not-boyfriend". It had always seemed to me that my dad tried to steer clear of such things—my mom certainly did—but for whatever reason, one afternoon I came back from the young single adult congregation of our church in great distress over some dumb thing that had happened with the guy and my dad saw me and asked me to talk to him about it. I was tentative at first. —Could he really stand to listen to what must obviously seem like teenage foolishness?—But eventually I started telling him about it and ended up crying on his shoulder for a time, and he never once gave the impression of judging me.

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**Commented [SC12]:** Maybe rearrange this sentence

**Commented [SC13]:** Shorten this sentence or make it clearer

That same summer, I got back from work one night to find my dad half inside our new dishwasher. He'd gotten it for my mom for her birthday the week before, since our old dishwasher made dirty dishes moderately clean and clean dishes moderately dirty. Apparently, the installation man hadn't installed it right or something, so my dad was trying to work out the issue himself. We were both sad and frustrated, for different reasons, but he was trying to do something kind ~~and~~ so I tried to do the same by staying up with him. He hit his head on the counter at one point, and his face grew red and a faint growl escaped. In an effort to help, I put on a James Taylor album. The air eased, and soon we were both singing along.

When "Fire and Rain" started playing, my dad asked if I knew the story behind it. I confessed my ignorance, so he explained. Apparently James Taylor had had a severe drug addiction and other issues and ~~consequently so~~ went to rehab for a while. He met a young girl there, Suzanne, and they helped each other through a lot of the rough patches. But then she died, and the loss struck him hard. The song refers to her in its lines "I've seen fire and I've seen rain/ I've seen sunny days I thought would never end/ I've seen lonely times when I could not find a friend/ But I always thought I'd see you again."

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My mom nearly always wins when we play Boggle, but my dad dominates at most ~~every other~~ games. He doesn't come off as competitive, merely casually competent. He plays nice at the beginning of a game, setting up a solid foundation without really stepping on anyone's toes and extending small favors to people so that they feel kindly disposed toward him. Then he plays weak, making you feel bad for him and want~~ing~~ to help. Besides, all those favors, you owe it to him, right? So you mosey along, feeling pretty secure in your position, pretty good that you still stopped to help the suffering dad, pretty sure that in another few rounds you'll be ready to make your winning move, and then BAM! My dad's suddenly won and you don't even know what just happened. The only way for someone else to win is if everyone works together to knock my dad over at the beginning of a game and then sit on him for the rest of it. ~~B~~but there's always that one person who feels bad and helps him near the middle and then BAM! Every time.

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Several days after this last Christmas, I witnessed a conversation between Amanda and my dad. It's strange, I still think of her as being seven or eight because of how little she has changed in nearly every respect. She's eleven now, but she's still as small and obstinate as ever. Trying to talk to her is like trying to talk to a river—it just keeps going and going and rushing past you and it doesn't even matter what you said because the little bit that she might have heard has been lost in the torrent. But my dad was trying to reason with her, explain why she should help him take down the Christmas decorations, or just help out at all in some way.

Through his words, I suddenly realized, I think for the first time, how hard my dad has worked to change, how much he hated ever seeming a monster to us. Years ago, he would have growled and roared by this time, and I'd be either helping or crying in a corner somewhere. With Amanda, he was trying *so* hard to be loving, encouraging, ~~reasonable~~and reasonable. And I could see how badly he wanted her to care ~~at all for him~~, to just listen without him having to scare her. But she was just being so rude, so callous, and so unfeeling that I wanted to be angry for him.

Why did you choose this ending?

What is the overall message or idea you are trying to portray?

Are there whole sections that aren't necessary?

By explaining the good and bad sides of your Father what are you trying to explore, learn, show, teach, etc?

I think you need to tie in your title "Copperline" a little more.

There needs to be a connecting thread for this to be an essay. Right now it's just a collection of stories.

## Copperline

*Even the old folks never knew  
Why they call it like they do  
I was wondering since the age of two  
Down on Copperline*

A few years ago, my roommate asked why my brother Danny and I always cut cake and brownies into such small pieces and then ate a bunch of them. Why not just cut one large piece and eat bites out of it? We shrugged at each other, then shrugged at my roommate. We didn't know. We just did.

Months later, I was back home in Massachusetts, cutting myself a bite-sized square of brownie. I moved aside for my little sister Melissa to carve out a piece, and hers was much larger. Moments later, my dad entered the kitchen, spotted the crumbs falling from Melissa's brownie-laden hand, and proceeded to complain about how much he hated crumbs because they get squashed and then stick to the floor and harden and are just a huge pain to clean up. As he made Melissa wipe up the crumbs, I grinned and made a mental note to text Danny.

I'm not normally given to reflections on my habits or how I feel about things. We never really talked about such topics in my family when I was growing up, so that's not a habit I developed naturally. It's a skill I've had to consciously cultivate. Very often, the mental conversation is still along the lines of "How do I feel about this?" "I dunno." "Oh, okay." And then I move on.

However, when I do take that time to genuinely reflect, I'm frequently surprised by my realizations, by the connections between events and memories and habits that now are suddenly illuminated.

In a recent conversation with my aunt Joanna, she told me that meeting my dad made her nervous about marrying his brother, Jeff. My dad seemed so bossy and forthright and in charge that she was afraid that the normally mild-mannered Jeff would suddenly develop similar qualities. They still got married, but she said that for the longest time, she wouldn't ever let Jeff tell her what to do.

It's still strange to think that my father is a person outside of my perception of him. Dad has always been just "Dad" to me, so shouldn't he appear the same to everyone else? Obviously not, but it took me most of my childhood and teenage years to understand that simple idea. But now all sorts of questions are raised. Who was he before I knew him? How many changes and iterations of himself did he go through before he became my father? Since then? Have I even paid attention?

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*Copper head, copper beech  
Copper kettles sitting side by each  
Copper coil, cup o'Georgia peach  
Down on Copperline*

Back when I was small and learning to dress myself, I would frequently put my shirt on backwards and not realize it. Whenever my dad caught sight of me though, he'd call me over. He would help me take my arms out of my sleeves and then hold my shirt and say "spin, spin spin!" I'd spin around and around, the shirt's collar rubbing my neck, and then suddenly my shirt would be facing the right way! My dad would then help me put my arms back into my sleeves and kiss my forehead.

I suppose from a very young age I've had a somewhat unreasonably intense desire to please my parents, my dad in particular. He's always seemed so strong and wise and powerful in judgment that to make him proud of me seems like the highest possible achievement in life.

I have few memories from when I was so small, but there is a particular instance that stands out clearly. I had considerable health problems back then and so had to take all sorts of awful tasting medications. Normally, my mom gave these to me, but one night she told me to wait in the kitchen for her while she took care of something quickly. I waited by the counter for her to come and distribute the nightly torture, and my dad came in from the family room. Probably deducing my purpose, he said he'd get me my meds and pulled a

**Commented [m1]:** This is the first list of questions I've noticed but you have other lists further on. Questions can get a little overdone, though I totally understand what tone you are going for. Maybe try to throw in some Indirect questions instead of all direct e.g. I wonder... bs. Who was he?... Anyway just a thought

**Commented [m2]:** The lyrics for each section should have a connection to the following paragraphs. It doesn't have to be blatant but at least recognizable.

**Commented [m3]:** Weird phrasing I think it's the powerful as a third adjective that's getting me.

bottle out of the cabinet. I remember being suddenly unsure; Mom knew what to give me. Did Dad? Could I trust him? Mom had said to wait, so shouldn't I wait for her? My dad gestured for me to follow him into the family room so he could give me the meds, but I stayed in the kitchen and held onto the counter until my mom appeared a few moments later. As she got my meds ready, my dad came back from the family room looking for me. He asked me why I hadn't come, but I don't remember saying anything. I do remember feeling bad that I had disappointed him, that I hadn't let him help me.

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*One summer night on the Copperline  
Slip away past supper time  
Wood smoke and moonshine  
Down on Copperline*

When I was six or seven, I swore using a word I'd heard at school. I was playing Rodent's Revenge, a silly 90s computer game where you're a mouse trying to capture cats and not die in the process. I kept dying over and over, and so I swore. It seemed a natural thing to do, but my dad gave me a seriously angry look and demanded that I never say the word again. I nodded agreeably, intent on obeying, ~~then~~ and then turned back to my game. I promptly forgot; however, and ~~some times~~ sometime later swore again. This time, my dad was much less calm about it. He growled and told me that if I ever said it again, he'd wash my mouth out with soap, just like he'd done with Danny.

This was kind of my dad's MO when I was young. If you didn't listen the first or second time, he would essentially scare you into being obedient. So, while I had not been there for Danny's mouth-cleansing, I had heard enough about the traumatizing experience to tremble at this threat. In fear of forgetting again and having to face that punishment, I just stopped playing the game.

Now, I'm glad I don't swear. My dad was likely right in reprimanding me and helping to teach me to not use profanity. But, to this day, it is still physically painful for me to even contemplate swearing or saying a banned phrase like "shut up." I suppose in my mind somewhere is this still very frightening, looming image of my father waiting to drag me off to the bathroom and force soap into my mouth.

**Commented [m4]:** A little clunky... maybe say "teaching me to avoid profanity"

One evening when I was ten, my family somehow had tickets to a baseball game. My whole family was going, but I didn't want to and I was finally old enough to not need a babysitter, so my parents agreed to let me stay home alone. Because I wasn't going, I didn't necessarily have to help people get ready to go, so I stood around to the side, watching, not part of the painfully extended procedures that made the simple task of getting everyone into the car take upward of half an hour. Shoes, jackets, snacks, trips to the bathroom, tracking down the two little ones and making certain they had everything, checking for tickets, searching for so-and-so for ten minutes and then realizing they'd been waiting in the car, realizing two more had been lost during that hunt and sorting them out, then squabbling over who sat where and what radio station to play until my dad's face was sunburned from his frustration and I was grateful I wasn't going.

I don't completely remember my motivations for wanting to stay home. I'm pretty sure the main reason was that I thought baseball was utterly boring, but I think another part is why nearly all family outings make me hesitant. I love spending time with my family, but we're not the most patient with each other. Very easily, a fun idea turns into my dad's voice angrily telling us to get it together and just be good.

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*Took a fall from a windy height  
I only knew how to hold on tight  
And pray for love enough to last all night  
Down on Copperline*

My dad when he's angry seems to transform into a different person. You can hear it happening, the tension in his words changing into a growl in his throat. His face begins to redden, and you know if you don't start helping or stop arguing quick—and maybe even if you do—things are going to get bad. At his worst, he roars. Not a yell or a shout. A lion's roar, full and guttural and animal. I think the worst part is that it never seems to be intentional. It's just something that escapes him and you're left to wonder what else must be in there for something so terrifying to slip out.

Once when I was twelve or so, my dad came home all tired from work. We lived in California then, but my dad worked in Mexico and had to cross the border twice every day. Getting in was no problem, but coming back could take hours, so he always missed dinner. This particular night, nothing in the kitchen had been cleaned up, so he asked us to help. When no one moved, the growl began. I hurriedly started to clear the table and help unload the dishwasher, but suddenly my dad roared my name and I was so startled and alarmed I fell to my knees and nearly broke the plate I was carrying. What had I done wrong? I'd been helping, hadn't I?

A sudden silence. My dad turned to me, but I was too afraid to look at him. He murmured that he'd meant Danny, my brother, and then he tried to tell me he was sorry. I can only imagine how bad he felt then; but, at the time, I was just glad he wasn't mad at me.

My dad used to play all sorts of games and tricks with us when we were little. He had this trick where I'd ask him for more water or juice and he'd point his finger into my cup and go, "Swooooooosh," and suddenly my cup would be full. I still don't know how he did that, and he still hasn't told me, though he has consented to comment that I was much less observant back then. Another favorite pastime of his—or perhaps, more correctly, ours—was being the Tickle Monster. He'd chase us all around the family room, giving teasing roars and tickling our sides and feet and necks. We would laugh and scream and run, and he would catch one or two of us and force the captives to submit to his all-powerful tickling rule. Then the rest of us would converge from behind him and try to knock him over and distract him long enough for his prisoners to escape. More often than not, he would just wind up capturing all of us. We have this picture of us kids—six at the time—lying in a row on the ground with terrified expressions and our dad kneeling over us, a grin-growl on his face and his hands pretending to claw at the camera. It's one of my favorites.

I sometimes wonder what the difference is between the terror of being tickled and the terror of being yelled at. I mean, being chased around a room, the threat of being knocked over and tickled mercilessly until you give in, is scary in its own way. You don't want to be caught and you fight not to be. It can also be fairly rough, all the running and tackling and minor scrapping. Being yelled at though? There isn't really a physical component, so where is the fear coming from? Why did even the idea of my father's anger hold so much sway?

Perhaps I felt I'd disappointed him.

As I grew older, I began to feel that he could be unreasonably angry about things. It would make me angry back; couldn't he see I was trying? Or that these things didn't need to happen this very second for the world to keep spinning (or dinner to be made)? I would always snap to it when the growl started, but the fear was tinged with obstinance then. I didn't want to consider his point of view or how he might be feeling if he didn't want to consider where I was coming from either. It made it hard for me to want to be close to him. I was never really one to talk back, but I would get a tightness in my throat and a desire to hiss.

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*One time I saw my daddy dance  
Watched him moving like a man in a trance  
He bought it back from the war in France  
Down onto Copperline*

For me, Saturday mornings are the domain of James Taylor and Billy Joel and dancing while gently cleaning up. My dad used to wake us all up by playing "Your Smiling Face" or "How Sweet It Is" or

**Commented [m5]:** Switch around to: "When my dad is angry he..."

**Commented [SC6]:** This section of lyrics fits well.

“Uptown Girl” throughout the whole house and dance with the first girls to make it downstairs to him. He’d spin us in circles and dance with two, sometimes three, of us at a time, swaying and swirling and smiling.

My dad is an excellent leader when it comes to dancing. You don’t need to know how to do the waltz or the west coast swing for him to guide you through the steps by the sheer firmness and strength of his movements. And besides, when you’re small, it doesn’t really matter to you if your steps aren’t on the beats. It wasn’t until I was older and could really appreciate the grace and smoothness my parents showed whenever they danced together that I wished I was better.

He and my mother met on the ballroom dance team at Brigham Young University. My mom was one of those “dance people” and my dad was a statistics major who wanted fun classes to audit. She thought he was kind of lame at first, though she’s never said if that was because she thought he was a lame dancer or a lame person. He got better though, in both respects in her eyes.

When I dance with my dad, I do worry a bit about the steps and if he thinks I’m following well. But mostly I like the feeling of closeness, even though we don’t talk and it’s just us moving around a half-cleaned family room.

I’m not certain when it dawned on me that my dad had feelings. Not that he didn’t express emotion when I was younger, but I know I didn’t always understand that he had likes and dislikes and things that made him happy or sad. Or that he had feelings that could be hurt. Dad just *was*; he existed outside and above ~~of~~ such mundane, knowable things as preferences and feelings.

When I was sixteen, my parents took us camping near the coast. We were still in the woods, but the air was so fresh and damp and full. Most of my siblings complained, having been forced to come, and then there was a storm and everything got soaked and David—age five at the time—got sick, so my mom decided to take him and most of the family and camping gear home. I stayed with my dad though. I felt so bad; he’d taken days off work to do this with us and nobody wanted to actually be there with him. *Can’t you see he’s trying? That he’s trying to share something he enjoys with us?* I wanted to ask them.

We helped everyone pack up, and once they were on their way, my dad asked me if I wanted to go on a bike ride. I had, and still have, terrible stamina, and I’m a horrible cyclist, but he was so excited about this trail that lead out to a lighthouse on the cape that I wanted to do it anyway. It was drizzling and threatening to rain harder, but the summer air was warm and we were wet anyway.

We took it fairly easily, probably for my sake. There were lots of hills and falls and curves, but the houses were beautiful, quaint and well-kept and loved. At one point I needed a break, so we stopped, and my dad asked me what music I’d been listening to lately. I mentioned Jack Johnson, and he asked me to sing one of his songs. Inspired by the rain, I sang “Banana Pancakes,” and then we went on our way again. We made it to the lighthouse, but it was closed, so we circled it, took another break, and then headed back. Ten miles round-trip, the longest bike ride of my life ~~then~~. But my dad still tells me how much he loves that song because I sang it for him and rode that trail despite the rain.

Commented [SC7]: Maybe say “up to that point”

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*I tried to go back, as if I could  
All spec house and plywood  
Tore up and tore up good  
Down on Copperline*

Somewhat surprising to me was to realize that I could talk to my dad about my problems. Not just about life choices and what classes to take and how to fix my résumé, but about slightly less practical concerns. I was eighteen, back from my first year at BYU, and in the midst of emotional whiplash from once again being on and off again with my former on and off not-boyfriend. It had always seemed to me that my dad tried to steer clear of such things, but for whatever reason, one afternoon I came back from church in great distress over some dumb thing had happened with the guy and my dad saw me and asked me to talk to him about it. I was tentative at first—could he really stand to listen to what must obviously seem like teenage foolishness? It felt to me that being upset about a person, something so illogical and impractical and cliché, was a kind of failure.

And besides, he and my older sister had used to argue—sometimes loudly and passionately late at night—about the guys she would date or not date, and I was afraid that he would think less of me for my similar behavior. But eventually I started telling him about it. It was strange; it seemed like we so often just relied on unspoken, implied communications and affections. But when I started crying, my dad pulled me into his arms and told me he loved me. And, perhaps most significant to me, he never once gave the impression of judging me.

Such sensitivity was unexpected. It makes me wonder if I had tried to talk to him earlier or more, tried to connect in some way, we might have been closer before.

That same summer, I got back late from work one night to find my dad half inside our new dishwasher. He'd gotten it for my mom for her birthday the week before, since our old dishwasher made dirty dishes moderately clean and clean dishes moderately dirty. Apparently, the installation man hadn't installed it right or something, so my dad was trying to work out the issue himself. We were both sad and frustrated, for different reasons, but he was trying to do something kind and so I tried to do the same by staying up with him. He hit his head on the counter at one point, and his face grew red and a faint growl escaped. In an effort to help, I put on a James Taylor album. The air eased, and soon we were both singing along.

When "Fire and Rain" started playing, my dad asked if I knew the story behind it. I confessed my ignorance, so he explained. Apparently James Taylor had had a severe drug addiction and other issues and so went to rehab for a while. He met a young girl there, Suzanne, and they helped each other through a lot of the rough patches. But then she died, and the loss struck him hard. The song refers to her in its lines "I've seen fire and I've seen rain/ I've seen sunny days I thought would never end/ I've seen lonely times when I could not find a friend/ But I always thought I'd see you again."

Though "Fire and Rain" is one of my dad's favorite James Taylor songs, "Copperline" is my favorite. When I was little, its lyrics were a complete mystery to me. All those lines about copper and Copperline and copper this and that and those other random words like moonshine and creosote—completely nonsensical. I think I loved it for that reason. Growing older, I came to interpret it differently. James Taylor was singing about home and childhood and memories, and how when he went back later in life it was all different, but in a way it was still home.

In looking up the song, I've found a lot of different interpretations. Some say it's really about making moonshine or dealing with a drinking problem or such ideas, but that's not what it means to me. Whatever the song's intended message, I've chosen to think what I want about it.

Several days after this last Christmas, I witnessed a conversation between Amanda and my dad. It's strange, I still think of her as being seven or eight because of how little she has changed in nearly every respect. She's eleven now, but she's still as small and obstinate as ever. Trying to talk to her is like trying to talk to a river—it just keeps going and going and rushing past you and it doesn't even matter what you said because the little bit that she might have heard has been lost in the torrent. But my dad was trying to reason with her, trying to explain why she should help him take down the Christmas decorations, or just help out at all in some way.

Amanda gave retorts and rebuttals at various intervals, though one stuck out a bit. She said that even though he and Mom had just gotten her gifts and done so much for her, they had done plenty of upsetting things and regularly forced her to take her insulin shots and do other cleaning tasks and were just awful, so it wasn't at all fair for her to have to help.

I suppose you could choose to look at it as a sort of scale. You have this number of positive memories with a person and this number of negative memories; the positive number outweighs the negative number, therefore, you feel positively about that person. But some people have one bad experience with a person and that colors their entire perspective, no matter how many other marvelous, wonderful, sweet times they had with that person. So really, it's just the memories we *choose* to reflect on that we let determine our view.

My dad was extremely patient with Amanda. He listened to her detail how terrible she thought he was and why she owed him nothing and how she couldn't wait till she could leave and how she thought living in the woods alone would be better than being at home. Through his gentle responses to her, I suddenly realized, I think for the first time, how hard my dad has worked to change, how much he hated ever seeming

**Commented [SC8]:** After the other two "coppers" in the sentence this feels a bit redundant and unnecessary.

**Commented [SC9]:** This ending is so much better! Good job. ☺

a monster to us. Years ago, he would have growled and roared by this time, and I'd be either helping or crying in a corner somewhere. With Amanda, he was trying *so* hard to be loving, encouraging, reasonable. And I could see how bad he wanted her to care at all for him, to just listen without him having to scare her. But she was just being so rude, so callous, and so unfeeling that I wanted to be angry for him.