

To a Daughter with Artistic Talent

By Helen Mirra

10 I know why, getting you with that offbeat
11 and wanting to follow
12 and give a test, look at the great child
13 almost ready, and that makes this painting
14 of those babies and toys
15 you paint (the only way) to get a drawing
16 to see what you'll do and give a test
17 and wonder if it's some

18 Some days are not given you
19 are given to them

20 bound by chains of nerves and danger
21 stronger than iron or steel, although
22 thinner. You have painted every day

READING

23 not as long as I can remember
24 and will be with you
25 when you look at the world
26 and distant December when the child
27 is old and the trees no longer silver
28 but black fingers scratching a grey sky

29 And you never know why I was in
30 before when I said I knew
31 you never know the force that drives you
32 to paint that sky, that bird (and
33 and is never satisfied today

34 but maybe tomorrow
35 when the sky is a sunset sea
36 in which you drown

37 I feel you this with love and pride
38 and sorrow, my first child
39 (while the birds change from green to blue to brown)

The "Daughter with Artistic Talent" poem from "The Poet's Daughter" by Helen Mirra is a collection of poems published by the University of Michigan Press in 1997. Although

Read the next two selections and answer the questions that follow.

To a Daughter with Artistic Talent

by Peter Meinke

I know why, getting up in the cold dawn
you paint cold yellow houses
and silver trees. Look at those green birds,
almost real, and that lonely child looking
5 at those houses and trees.
You paint (the best way) without reasoning,
to see what you feel, and green birds
are what a child sees.

Some gifts are not given: you
10 are delivered to them,
bound by chains of nerves and genes
stronger than iron or steel, although
unseen. You have painted every day
for as long as I can remember
15 and will be painting still
when you read this, some cold
and distant December when the child
is old and the trees no longer silver
but black fingers scratching a grey sky.

20 And you never know why (I was lying
before when I said I knew).
You never know the force that drives you wild
to paint that sky, that bird flying,
and is never satisfied today
25 but maybe tomorrow
when the sky is a surreal sea
in which you drown . . .

I tell you this with love and pride
and sorrow, my artist child
30 (while the birds change from green to blue to brown).

"To a Daughter with Artistic Talent" from *Liquid Paper: New and Selected Poems* by Peter Meinke. ©1991. All rights are controlled by the University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh, PA 15260. Used by permission of the University of Pittsburgh Press.

from Big Fish

by Daniel Wallace

- 1 He takes another sip of water. It seems not to be a matter of thirst so much as it is a desire for this element, to feel it on his tongue, his lips: he loves the water. Once upon a time he swam.
- 2 "But you know, my father was gone a lot, too," he says, his voice crackling soft. "So I know what it's like. My dad was a farmer. I told you that, didn't I? I remember once he had to go off somewhere to get a special kind of seed to plant in the fields. Hopped a freight. Said he'd be back that night. One thing and another happened and he couldn't get off. Rode it all the way out to California. Gone most of the spring. Planting time came and went. But when he came back he had the most marvelous seeds."
- 3 "Let me guess," I say. "He planted them and a huge vine grew up into the clouds, and at the top of the clouds was a castle, where a giant lived."
- 4 "How did you know?"
- 5 "And a two-headed woman who served him tea, no doubt."
- 6 At this my father tweaks his eyebrows and smiles, for a moment deep in pleasure.
- 7 "You remember," he says.
- 8 "Sure."
- 9 "Remembering a man's stories makes him immortal, did you know that?"
- 10 I shake my head.
- 11 "It does. You never really believed that one though, did you?"
- 12 "Does it matter?"
- 13 He looks at me.
- 14 "No," he says. Then, "Yes. I don't know. At least you remembered. The point is, I think—the point is I tried to get home more. I did. Things happened, though. Natural disasters. The earth split once I think, the sky opened several times. Sometimes I barely made it out alive."
- 15 His old scaly hand crawls over to touch my knee. His fingers are white, the nails cracking and dull, like old silver.
- 16 "I'd say I'd missed you," I say, "if I knew what I was missing."

17 "I'll tell you what the problem was," he says, lifting his hand from my knee and motioning for me to come closer. And I do. I want to hear. The next word could be his last.

18 "I wanted to be a great man," he whispers.

19 "Really?" I say, as if this comes as some sort of surprise to me.

20 "Really," he says. His words come slow and weak but steady and strong in feeling and thought. "Can you believe it? I thought it was my destiny. A big fish in a big pond—that's what I wanted. That's what I wanted from day one. I started small. For a long time I worked for other people. Then I started my own business. I got these molds and I made candles in the basement. That business failed. I sold baby's breath to floral shops. That failed. Finally, though, I got into import/export and everything took off. I had dinner with a prime minister once, William. A prime minister! Can you imagine, this boy from Ashland having dinner in the same room with a—. There's not a continent I haven't set foot on. Not one. There are seven of them, right? I'm starting to forget which ones I . . . never mind. Now all that seems so unimportant, you know? I mean, I don't even know what a great man *is* anymore—the, uh, prerequisites. Do you, William?"

21 "Do I what?"

22 "Know," he says. "Know what makes a man great."

23 I think about this for a long time, secretly hoping he forgets he ever asked the question. His mind has a way of wandering, but something in the way he looks at me says he's not forgetting anything now, he's holding on tight to that thought, and he's waiting for my answer. I don't know what makes a man great. I've never thought about it before. But at a time like this "I don't know" just won't do. This is an occasion one rises to, and so I make myself as light as possible and wait for a lift.

24 "I think," I say after a while, waiting for the right words to come, "that if a man could be said to be loved by his son, then I think that man could be considered great."

25 For this is the only power I have, to bestow upon my father the mantle of greatness, a thing he sought in the wider world, but one that, in a surprise turn of events, was here at home all along.

26 "Ah," he says, "*those* parameters," he says, stumbling over the word, all of a sudden seeming slightly woozy. "Never thought about it in those terms, exactly. Now that we are, though, thinking about it like that, I mean, in this case," he says, "in this very specific case, *mine*—"

27 "Yeah," I say. "You are hereby and forever after my father, Edward Bloom, a Very Great Man. So help you Fred."

28 And in lieu of a sword I touch him once, gently, on the shoulder.

29 With these words he seems to rest. His eyes close heavily, and with an eerie sort of finality that I recognize as the beginning of a departure. When the window curtains part as though of their own accord I believe for a moment that this must be the passage of his spirit going from this world to the next. But it's only the central air coming on.

30 "About that two-headed lady," he says with his eyes closed, murmuring, as if falling into a sleep.

31 "I've *heard* about the two-headed lady," I say, shaking him gently by the shoulder. "I don't want to hear about her anymore, Dad. Okay?"

32 "I wasn't going to *tell* you about the two-headed lady, Mr. Smarty-pants," he says.

33 "You weren't?"

34 "I was going to tell you about her sister."

35 "She had a *sister*?"

36 "Hey," he says, opening his eyes now, getting his second wind. "Would I kid you about something like that?"

From *Big Fish: A Novel of Mythical Proportions* by Daniel Wallace. © 1998 by Daniel Wallace.
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Use "To a Daughter with Artistic Talent" (p. 26) to answer questions 19–23. Then fill in the answers on your answer document.

19 In which lines does the poet use personification to create a somber mood?

- A** Lines 3 through 5
- B** Lines 9 and 10
- C** Lines 17 through 19
- D** Lines 28 and 29

20 Lines 20 and 21 suggest that the speaker —

- F** wants to be honest about how little he understands the creative impulse
- G** does not want to mislead his daughter into believing that she has special talent
- H** is now willing to risk hurting his daughter's self-esteem by telling her the truth about her work
- J** wants to admit his confusion about the sometimes-stifling life choices that creative people make

21 Read lines 26 and 27 from the poem.

when the sky is a surreal sea
in which you drown . . .

This image can best be interpreted as meaning that —

- A a child sees the sky as a magical ocean full of mysterious creatures
 - B the speaker hopes to save his daughter from a terrible future
 - C artists experience a sea of wild and unpredictable emotions
 - D there is a danger that artists may get lost in their own creations
-

22 The final line of the poem suggests that —

- F the daughter will develop an interest in more practical pursuits as she matures
 - G the speaker expects his daughter's art to transform as she grows older
 - H the daughter's paintings will become more whimsical as she develops her technical skills
 - J the speaker believes that his daughter will one day be a successful professional artist
-

23 Which sentence describes a shift in the poem's focus?

- A In stanza 1, the speaker focuses on his daughter's creative struggles, while in stanza 2, he imagines her eventual success as an artist.
- B In stanza 1, the speaker focuses on his daughter's paintings, while in stanza 2, he describes his own artwork.
- C In stanza 1, the speaker focuses on his daughter's art as an expression of childhood, while in stanza 2, he considers her future as a mature artist.
- D In stanza 1, the speaker focuses on his daughter's early artistic success, while in stanza 2, he questions whether she should pursue a career as a painter.

Use *Big Fish* (pp. 27–29) to answer questions 24–31. Then fill in the answers on your answer document.

24 Read paragraph 15.

His old scaly hand crawls over to touch my knee. His fingers are white, the nails cracking and dull, like old silver.

In this paragraph, the author uses imagery to —

- F** show the son’s fear of being touched by his father
- G** imply that the father may not really be dying after all
- H** emphasize how aged and decrepit the father appears to his son
- J** suggest that the son has little respect for his father

25 What does paragraph 16 reveal about the son?

- A** He blames himself for his father’s long absences.
- B** He thinks his father never gave them the opportunity to be close.
- C** He is too willing to forgive his father for lying.
- D** He is unwilling to share what he knows with his father.

26 Which line of dialogue provides the best evidence that the father is questioning his priorities?

- F *"Now all that seems so unimportant, you know?"*
 - G *"Remembering a man's stories makes him immortal, did you know that?"*
 - H *"I had dinner with a prime minister once, William."*
 - J *"I wasn't going to tell you about the two-headed lady, Mr. Smarty-pants," he says.*
-

27 In paragraphs 3 through 5, the phrases "Let me guess" and "no doubt" give the son's dialogue a tone that is —

- A naive
 - B hypercritical
 - C indignant
 - D sarcastic
-

28 Paragraph 17 suggests that the son is motivated to listen to his father because —

- F he values his father's advice
- G he regrets not paying attention to his father in the past
- H he believes his father is dying
- J he believes his father will tell him a secret

29 Which sentence best describes the father's moral dilemma?

- A He must choose between impressing his son with outlandish stories and admitting that he is a financial failure.
 - B He must resolve feelings about his failure to persuade his son to follow in his footsteps.
 - C He must decide whether to continue to pursue his dreams or devote himself to helping his son.
 - D He must reconcile his lifelong desire to be important with the knowledge that he neglected his family.
-

30 Paragraph 20 reveals that the father views his childhood home of Ashland as —

- F a place of tremendous comfort
 - G a place with limited opportunities
 - H the best place to raise a family
 - J a place of haunting memories
-

31 The story explores the theme of a son —

- A disappointing his father
 - B imitating his father
 - C trying to impress his father
 - D making peace with his father
-
-
-

Use "To a Daughter with Artistic Talent" and *Big Fish* to answer questions 32–36. Then fill in the answers on your answer document.

32 Read these quotations from the two selections.

To a Daughter with Artistic Talent

And you never know why (I was lying before when I said I knew).

Big Fish

I don't know what makes a man great. I've never thought about it before.

These quotations provide evidence that **both** the speaker in "To a Daughter with Artistic Talent" and the narrator in the excerpt from *Big Fish* feel —

- F as though they must prove something
- G embarrassed by their ignorance
- H compelled to admit their mistakes
- J challenged to explain something difficult

33 What is a **difference** in how the two selections portray fathers?

- A While the father in "To a Daughter with Artistic Talent" is optimistic, the father in the excerpt from *Big Fish* is cynical.
- B While the father in "To a Daughter with Artistic Talent" seems caring, the father in the excerpt from *Big Fish* seems self-centered.
- C While the father in "To a Daughter with Artistic Talent" is open-minded, the father in the excerpt from *Big Fish* is judgmental.
- D While the father in "To a Daughter with Artistic Talent" seems defensive, the father in the excerpt from *Big Fish* seems relaxed.

34 Both the daughter's paintings in "To a Daughter with Artistic Talent" and the father's stories in the excerpt from *Big Fish* —

- F** depict a world that seems more fanciful than realistic
- G** contain imagery drawn from well-known fairy tales
- H** are difficult for others to understand
- J** portray heroic characters

35 Read these quotations.

To a Daughter with Artistic Talent

*You have painted every day
for as long as I can remember
and will be painting still
when you read this, some cold
and distant December when the child
is old and the trees no longer silver
but black fingers scratching a grey sky.*

Big Fish

*"No," he says. Then, "Yes. I don't know.
At least you remembered. The point is, I
think—the point is I tried to get home
more. I did. Things happened, though.
Natural disasters. The earth split once I
think, the sky opened several times.
Sometimes I barely made it out alive."*

Both quotations use imagery that conveys a sense of —

- A** inner turmoil
- B** stubbornness
- C** guilt
- D** exaggerated self-confidence

36 Which sentence best states a **difference** between the attitude of the speaker in the poem and the attitude of the narrator in the story?

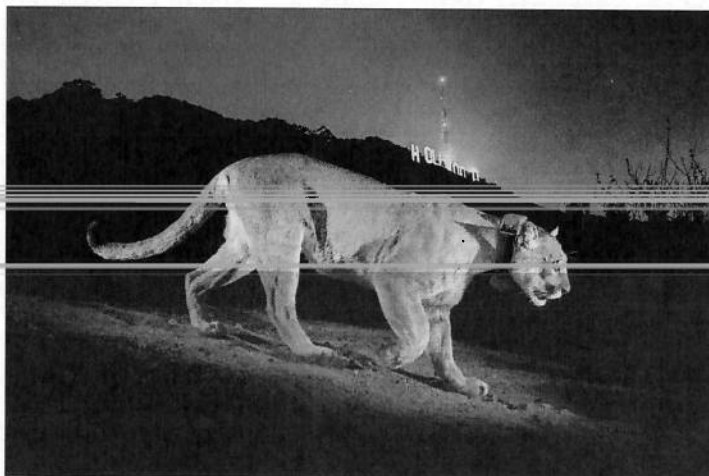
- F The speaker in the poem worries that his daughter gets carried away by her imagination, while the narrator in the story admires the way his father uses his imagination.
- G The speaker in the poem believes that his daughter paints to express her true feelings, while the narrator in the story believes that his father tells stories to escape reality.
- H The speaker in the poem thinks his daughter paints to bring them closer together, while the narrator in the story thinks his father tells stories to distance himself from others.
- J The speaker in the poem believes that painting is good for his daughter's health, while the narrator in the story worries that his father's stories are a symptom of illness.

Read the selection and choose the best answer to each question. Then fill in the answer on your answer document.

Where the Wild Things Are

by Beth Pratt-Bergstrom
Earth Island Journal

- 1 In 2012, I read a headline in the *Los Angeles Times*, "Mountain lion makes itself at home in Griffith Park," that radically transformed my life's work. At first glance I thought it simply a curious story that defied plausibility. How could a mountain lion be living in the middle of the second largest city in the United States? And why would the poor cat even want to?
- 2 Most of my 25-year environmental career has been spent in two of the largest national parks in this country—Yosemite and Yellowstone. Protected areas like those fit more with my preconceived notion of where wildlife should live, especially a large predator. My long-held view of Los Angeles (or of any city really) dismissed urban centers as environmental wastelands, full of endless highways, traffic snarls, and unchecked development that had banished all hope of even a butterfly being able to safely flutter through.
- 3 Like most opinions founded on ignorance, this proved to be very wrong.
- 4 After reading about the city-dwelling cougar, I contacted the National Park Service researchers studying the mountain lion—now famously known as P-22—and accompanied them on an excursion to track him in Griffith Park. The park is a hybrid of city and nature surrounded by a spider web of freeways, only two miles from the Hollywood Walk of Fame, and visited by 10 million people annually. As I trekked around, surrounded by people at every turn and confronted with the inescapable Hollywood sign and the imposing Los Angeles skyline, I dismissed this landscape as being about as far from the untrammelled wilderness of a Yellowstone or Yosemite as one could get. I scoffed at the notion of "nature" in a park with a golf course, tennis courts, a merry-go-round and miniature train, the Griffith Observatory, and the Greek Theater.



Steve Winter/National Geographic Creative