

My romantic life is falling apart again. I sense a wall from D. And I can't blame her, I haven't spoken to her in years, and all of a sudden I'm barging very suddenly and cancerily into her presence. We had a meal where she seemed to be obliging me. She called me "dude" at one point. Sarah, can you imagine anyone referring to me as dude?

S:

Maybe it was a compliment?

M:

I don't really know how to talk to people about my illness in a nondestructive way, or how they're supposed to listen.

S:

Always, always, Max wanted to know what was the best way to listen.

M:

You write really wonderful listeners.

Also, a big chunk of our conversing today ended up in a very strange poem-thing. Wanted to share with you, since you are a prime mover in the poem. I would love your input.

*Max goes to the microphone and reads:*

## LISTENING, SPEAKING, AND BREATHING

Pianos are told to repeat  
the grieving tones of a bird.

How does the bird focus?  
How does the piano focus, in turn?...

I have never listened, alone...

Even the unlistening God  
listens more than your own life...

In case of silence, could I cope?  
The slender rod of my sense  
white and pocked and feathered,  
draws a triangle of fire in pure salt...

If I am still an object,  
then we'll know that, won't we?

I hope then, you'll talk to me,  
and I promise I'll make sense of you.

S:

It is gorgeous and sublime.

That is my input.

My other input is that the answer to the question posed in your poem is always yes—the yes of the poet's immortality.

*A shift.*

S:

That Spring, a group missive from Max:

M:

Bleak news, though no immediate death sentence impending. My tumors remain unchanged, despite the new chemo. My lungs have been too irradiated due to my first cancer for a second attempt. Surgery also doesn't seem to be a likely option given the sub centimeter size of my tumors, their deep enjambment in my lungs, and the slipperiness of Ewing's cells.

It's more likely that I will embark upon a clinical trial. These trials are trials because they are promising, and they are trials because they are not proven science. I will be on the periphery of medicine. Empiricists (like Dad) love the sentiment that man's reach should always exceed his grasp. My body is being fanned and fumbled by the gloved fingertips. I hope they can get a grip on me, but I can't say the odds are very good.