

ten
minutes
with
Warren

10 minute Janet Kuypers
show in Chicago 06/14/11

The Things Warren Says

I know about this guy,
he sucked his eyeball out
with a shop-vac

he went to the hospital
brought the shop-vac
with him

he was okay, but they
couldn't put his eye
back in:

it was all mangled, and
besides, it was covered
in potato chips

*(in the live feature, this poem was adapted from and broadcast
from a computer-generated "Steven Hawking" voice generator)*

no one will

everything about you now is a poem

i think of how you'd make a face at the camera
before we'd put on our little show
for no one

i think back to all the music we made

(you were the first, you know)

everything about you now is poetic

we'd sit on the phone
coming up with ideas
you'd tell me ridiculous stories
and i'd listen, laugh

i treasure these memories now
they're permanently etched in my mind
and i swear, i won't let them go

i want the world to know of you and me
but they won't understand
they won't get what we had

no one will

warren stories

i heard this story about this fat woman
who sat naked on a pork chop bone once

and didn't notice when it lodged itself
among her folds of fat. years later,

when she felt a sharp pain, and the doctors
couldn't figure out what it was, they opened

her up and found the pork chop, and realized
that her skin just eventually grew over it.

*(in the live feature, this poem was adapted from and broadcast
from a computer-generated "Steven Hawking" voice generator)*

Before I can Put a Smile on my Face Again

when the people who organized
your high school class reunion
found out you had ALS

and for the past six months
you were bound to a wheelchair

they moved up the reunion date
to the fall
because they wanted to make sure
you were alive
long enough
for all your high school friends
to see you once more

and I thought,
wait a minute
Steven Hawking has ALS
and he's lived for decades
while bound to a wheelchair

they're really jumping the gun here

you're not about to die

#

since I didn't go to school with you
I wrote our band name on my name tag
at your class reunion
held at your favorite local bar

saw you there
in your wheelchair
now unable to speak

but still holding court with all the girls
from your high school days
(yeah, in your high school yearbook,
you were rated the Biggest Flirt)

the girls still swooned
as you periodically played
pre-programmed messages
in the computerized
Steven Hawking voice

when you saw me,
he told me
that I looked really beautiful today
and I blushed

(what am I supposed to say?)

and I heard you later on
with other swooning women
telling them
one by one
that they looked really beautiful today

and it made me smile,
and then John was there
when you complimented
one more woman
that's when this man responded
(loud enough for the group to hear)
"stop complimenting me like that
in front of everybody"

and everyone had a good laugh,
reminding me
of how you always
put a smile on people's faces
how you'd crack jokes
and make everyone smile

later in the evening
I saw your buddy
ask you if you wanted a drink
you agreed on rum
so he got some in a syringe
and injected it into a tube

it's hard to see you like that,
you know

#

you were always the one
cracking the jokes
driving to my place in Chicago
to practice music with me
or joining me at bars for our performances

you drove to central Illinois with me
to perform music live
at a local radio station
and before we appeared on the air
you kept singing a once popular song
because it repeated your wife's name

so yeah, I'm far away
and it's hard to see you like that now
when there's nothing I can do for you

#

after that reunion
I couldn't call you
to tell you how I feel

if you could have answered
you wouldn't want to hear it

no matter what you were going through
you didn't want to hear others tell you
of how seeing you made them suffer

how selfish of them

they're not the ones knocking on death's door

everyone else
needs to keep on their happy face

it's the least we could do

#

when I heard you just died
I had the hardest time not crying

but if I started crying,
I'd stop myself

what am I doing
he's no longer in prison
while his body is destroyed
cellularly

I have to keep telling myself,
look, I know this hurts you
but you knew it would eventually happen
and now he's no longer in pain

I'd be living at that point
where I'm always about to cry
until I was asked,
What Would Warren Want?

and I'd stop
and then I'd say
he'd want me to laugh
he'd want me to be happy

just give me a minute
because
after seeing such bad things
happen to such good people
I need to pull myself together
before I can put a smile on my face again

It's Someone's Job

it's someone's job
to stitch the eyes and lips
of a corpse up

it's someone's job
to take a generic beige powder and concealer
to give my friend the color of life

it's someone's job
to trim the facial hair
that extrudes after death

it's someone's job
to style a corpse's hair
so it still looks like the one you love

it's not my job
to think of these things
when you're the one in the coffin

it's not fair
that we see the powder along your face
that we see the powder on your hands

is also on your nails

it's not right
to see you like this
why must we make you up this way?

it's not the way you lived
and this shouldn't be you
after you died

it's someone's job
to staple you shut,
to make you look more alive

it's someone's job
to cosmetically placate our fears
to make us not see

what your body has become

it's someone's job
to keep out fantasy going
because even though you've stopped living

we can't cope with your dying

You Carried It

the priest said
before you were interred
“you shared the cross of the lord”

the lord carried that cross
in his walk before his mortal death
and you carried that cross for years

as that cross became heavier and heavier
you could no longer lift that cross with your arms
but still, you carried it

you never forsook the ones
who gave you this death sentence
and still, you carried it

you never spoke to me of the pain
you never spoke to me of the injustice
and silently, you carried it

for months, you could no longer
even speak of the cross you bore
and still, you carried it

you spoke only light-heartedly
you brought out true love
from everyone around you

and how you made people love,
how you made people good
only now reminds me

that with you, like our teacher, like our friend
that I can only continue to pray
that the world will be a better place

because you were a part of it

ten minutes with Warren

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