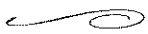


THE ONLY WAY OUT IS THROUGH



The camping trip was Fetterman's idea. Carla had reached the end of her rope months ago and had been looking into one of those hard-core rebellious-teen boot camps, where the unspoken motto seemed to be that you have to be broken before you can be fixed. But then there was a death at the very camp they'd researched: A boy named Martin Lee Anderson—who was also fifteen and even looked a little like Derek—had died after collapsing during a march and then being kicked in the abdomen by one of the counselors. There was a lawsuit, and a 20/20 exposé, and it quickly became clear to both Fetterman and Carla that perhaps tough love was not the answer.

Out of desperation, and maybe a little out of self-loathing, Fetterman decided to confide his child-rearing woes to his ex-wife, a psychoanalyst still living and practicing in their old colonial in Wellesley, Massachusetts. It needed him to think of her in that house. They'd bought it as a fixer-upper, then spent the next seven years accosted

by constant noise, clutter, and inconvenience. And dust—at one point they discovered sawdust even in the empty ice-cube trays in the freezer. By the time the renovations were complete, the marriage had fallen apart. Sonya offered to split the house—let him have the upstairs and she'd keep the downstairs, and her practice—but this seemed the sort of arrangement that kept psychoanalysts in business, and Fetterman didn't bite. Instead he packed his bags and moved to Arizona.

Sonya was a highly respected therapist who'd first become interested in the field when her college roommate told her she gave exquisite advice. She had a way of making her patients feel she was always on their side, deep down, even if she disagreed with them on the surface. Which had made it all the more objectionable to Fetterman that it felt as if she were secretly against him, waiting for him to screw up—and now he finally had, as predicted. Telling her that things had gone from bad to unbearable with Derek, that they'd lost control of him, that they'd even considered one of those boot camps, was as close to self-flagellation as he had ever come. No wonder he could only bear to do it via e-mail. His ex-wife meted out her disapproval succinctly: "When you correct others don't humiliate them. Show them new tenderness; then they will humble themselves." At first Fetterman had dismissed such lofty naïveté—and from a woman with no children of her own—but in short order began to accuse himself of a possible failure of imagination. A few days later, racking his brain for ways to try "new tenderness," he'd conceived of the camping trip.

Fetterman worked in tech support and had never been

on a camping trip, but it seemed the sort of excursion on which a father and son might reconnect. In his old life, he might even have imagined a touching lesson imparted while fishing, or a tender explanation of the constellations in the night sky, or a reconciliation after a near-death experience—perhaps a bear attack, or an unsuccessful river fording. In his old life, that is, before he'd had to apologize to the neighbor whose cat Derek lit on fire, before he'd had to explain to a third-grade teacher that there was no way his son had access to actual anthrax. Before his understanding of the world and its inhabitants had been completely transformed.

Fetterman saw no reason to let a simple lack of experience stand in his way. On his lunch hour he drove to the bookstore in the strip mall down the road from his office and picked up *Wilderness Camping & Hiking: The Ultimate Outdoors Book*. The store was out of *Camping for Dummies*, which was fine by Fetterman; one of his overachiever classmates had patented the franchise, and Fetterman would sooner have been bastinadoed (*Medieval Torture for Dummies*) than add to that guy's profit stream.

He sat on a footstool and flipped through the pages, stopping at a diagram that showed how to use your jeans as a backpack by roping the waist and bringing the legs up over your shoulders as straps. The chapter featured all kinds of ingenious solutions to unlikely scenarios; "In Case of Emergency," it was called. Fetterman closed the book, thinking: *Isn't life just one big, long emergency, happening very, very slowly?* He bought a carrot muffin

and an iced coffee and browsed the rest of the store, skipping the comic book section, of course. The only other book he considered buying was a memoir showcased among the new releases. It was written in the form of a letter from a mother to her runaway teenage daughter. On the back, a savvy blurb read: "Every fifteen-year-old is a runaway, whether she runs away or not." Fetterman returned the volume to the shelf. Best not to give the boy any new ideas.

Fetterman and Derek had been in the car for an hour and a half. Derek had yet to speak. He sat in the backseat, surly in his headphones, practically a caricature of teen angst. If Fetterman hadn't put away his pencils for good, he might have been inspired to try to capture the embattled disinterest on his son's features. He stole furtive glances in the rearview mirror: Derek had no nose piercings, no Mohawk, no black eyeliner, no trench coat. His face was so nakedly defiant, it was as if he didn't need the props.

It was not an unattractive face. As an infant, Derek had been the most beautiful baby. Everyone remarked on it. And so placid; he seemed to possess an otherworldly calm. "That boy is a Rembrandt cherub!" said a barista with horn-rimmed glasses the first Saturday Fetterman and Carla took him out into the world. That Derek had been such a well-behaved, delightful baby was one of the most painful ironies of their current situation. Carla had once gazed into his eyes the way a woman who has lived

her whole life in the mountains would gaze at the sea. Now she'd started taking five milligrams of Valium every morning, and still it didn't stop her hands from shaking.

"Jesus!" said Fetterman, swerving just in time. A deer was standing in the middle of the road. In the backseat, Derek remained unfazed. They rounded a curve and passed a deer warning sign. "Little late now," Fetterman muttered. He'd always thought deer warning signs had a lot more artistry than other road signs; the deer were rendered in much greater detail than humans. Derek took off his headphones, and Fetterman seized the opportunity to ask him a question. "Do you know why deer graze so close to the road?" he said, regretting that his earnest attempt at conversation sounded like the setup to a joke. Derek ignored him, made a minute technical adjustment, and put the headphones back on. Fetterman answered anyway. "Because the grass is saltiest there, especially in winter," he said, a fact he'd learned in his defensive driving course. "It's the foie gras of grass." He could hear the metallic scree of what sounded like a symphony of Bessemer converters. There were still two hours to go before they reached Lockett Meadow, and he suspected they would spend it in silence.

By the time they passed the first sign for Flagstaff, Fetterman was already wondering if the trip was a mistake. He hated outdoor activities and tried to avoid them as much as possible. Once, when he and Sonya were first courting, she'd invited him on a ski getaway with two other couples. Fetterman had pointed out that skiing combined three things he loathed—extreme cold, extreme height, and extreme speed—but agreed to go anyway. He

spent the majority of the weekend in a foul mood, watching stand-up comics on HBO while Sonya and her friends donned Thinsulate and tested the strength of their anterior cruciate ligaments. He figured he had only himself to blame: He should have said no. Bad things happened when you followed the crowd. Maybe he would say that to Derek at some point over the weekend, tell him that he agreed in principle with wanting to strike out on your own, rebel against everything, find your drummer, but it was possible to do so in a less destructive way. In his head, he searched for phrases that wouldn't sound pedantic and square. Then he tried to imagine what would have happened if his own father had ever said such a thing to him.

Fetterman had been a wayward teenager himself—*Who wasn't?* he liked to ask, when telling stories of his youth—and had never really connected with his father, who worked in radio and died shortly after Fetterman went to college. In fact, the closest he'd felt to him was an experience that took place when his father was absent. It happened on an afternoon in the summer of 1977, when Fetterman was seventeen. He'd just had a blowout fight with his girlfriend and had gone for a long walk on the jetty in Gloucester, Massachusetts. He thought he was alone, but then he spotted an old man fishing by himself at the end of the pier. The old-timer had a radio with him, and when Fetterman approached, he looked up at him with watery blue eyes. "Elvis is dead," he said. Fetterman's first instinct was to run home and tell his father the news. His father had worshipped Elvis, had gotten his first job in radio in the 1950s after seeing Elvis on *The Ed Sullivan Show*. But by the time he got home,

Fetterman realized, his father would already know. If he didn't know now. He looked at the old man sitting alone, and suddenly he understood: His father *did* know; he could feel it. "Elvis is dead, Pop," he said, staring across the wide, churning surface of the ocean. His father died of a heart attack the following year.

Fetterman needed to use the bathroom and fill the gas tank. He got off at a rest area in McGuireville, stepping out of the car with one hand at his lower back. The rush of heat took him by surprise. Twenty years in the desert, and most days he still felt like a Yankee. He opened Derek's door and a strange smell spilled from the car that he hadn't noticed while in it.

"Time to do your business," he said, not hearing until the words had left his mouth that this was language usually reserved for dogs. Derek continued to stare angrily at nothing. "I'm going to use the men's room," Fetterman said, hooking his thumbs in his belt loops. "This may be our last chance for a while. Care to take advantage?" Derek yanked the door shut.

Outside the men's room there was a warning sign about poisonous snakes and insects; the drawing pictured a coiled rattler and a scorpion. An oddly placed reminder that there was no escaping danger, even during the most banal activities. When he was reading up on campgrounds, Fetterman had learned how to deal with an aggressive mountain lion—wave your arms, throw rocks, but *never run*—and that kangaroo rats were so efficient at recycling the fluid in their bodies that they sometimes urinated crystals. What exactly was a kangaroo rat? He wasn't sure he wanted to know. The tone of some of the

writing had surprised him. In addition to the vermilion cliffs and house-sized boulders described at Toroweap, it also said that the Colorado River was only thirty seconds away—"a 30-second, 1,200-foot free fall, that is!" Ah, the old gleefully-awaiting-the-Apocalypse approach. Fetterman marveled that he had once found this attitude amusing.

When he returned to the car, the door handle lifted flimsily; the door remained shut. Derek had locked him out. "Unlock the car, Derek," he said, sighing heavily, regretting that he'd left the keys in the ignition in case his son needed some air. Without making eye contact, Derek gave him the finger. You'd think they'd beaten him as a child, or made him shovel feces in a hundred-degree factory from dawn to midnight. Instead he'd had the most comfortable middle-class upbringing imaginable. Where did it come from, the sea of rage within? "I'm serious," Fetterman said, pulling repeatedly on the impotent handle. "We need to get going so we can make it before dark." As it was, it was unclear how much time he'd need to pitch the tent and set up camp. Fetterman had been ready to leave at two, but Carla, a physician's assistant, had insisted on putting together a homemade first-aid kit, and spent twenty minutes showing him how to make a proper tourniquet.

Aside from giving him the finger, Derek was unresponsive. Fetterman gathered his thoughts and tried to keep a lid on his frustration. He knew from tech support that solutions always presented themselves sooner or later; the trick was not to lose your head. Instead of supplying Derek with whatever reaction the child was trying to provoke,

he'd just wait him out. He sat down on the pavement, not a good idea—that must be what fiery brimstone felt like—and immediately stood up. It was so hot the soles of his sneakers were tacky against the asphalt. “Open the door!” he yelled, just as a mother heaved herself out of a Buick station wagon that had pulled in beside him. She had a gaggle of kids in the back; there must have been five or six, all under the age of sixteen.

“He lock you out?” the woman said. Fetterman nodded, and her face curled as if the act of defiance had been performed by one of her own brood. “I tell you, what that child needs is a good whupping. Open the door, you little shit!” she said, slapping the window. Her kids gathered around the car with their bruised shins and neon flip-flops. “Open the car, you little shit!” one of the girls shouted. She kicked a tire while one of the older boys hit Derek’s window again. Then a different boy slapped the rear bumper, and before Fetterman knew what was happening, they’d all joined in, chanting: “Open the car! Open the car! Open the car!” while they rocked the vehicle and pounded on the glass.

“That’s enough!” Fetterman shouted. All of them stopped at once. “This is between us. I’ll take care of it.” The mother sniffed, and the pack headed for the 7-Eleven, but their energy didn’t change, it only shifted, and they walked away pinching and pushing one another.

You’d think there would have been some gratitude for the rescue, but if anything, Derek became more intractable than ever, and still wouldn’t unlock the door. Fetterman removed his cell phone from a holster attached to his belt.

“Derek, I’m going to call Triple-A now, and I’m going to tell them that I’m locked out of my car. They will tell me they’ll be here within half an hour, and then they will come, and unlock the door, and you will have to sit there while they do.” Derek didn’t seem to care. Fetterman dialed and made the report. Two minutes after he hung up, Derek rolled down the window and hurled the keys at the pavement. Fetterman called Triple-A back and told them their services were no longer needed. Then he picked up the keys and got in the driver’s seat. He spun around to face Derek.

“Talk to me,” he said, putting his hand on the boy’s knee.

“Just leave me alone!” Derek was close to tears. “All I fucking want is to be left alone!”

Fetterman started the car, wondering why Derek had agreed to come in the first place. “I can’t leave you alone,” he said. “I’m your father. I have to deal with you, whether I like it or not.”

Once they were back on the road, the troubleshooting part of Fetterman’s brain tried to come up with ways to solve the communication problem. It was true, they didn’t talk; Derek never told him anything about his life. All Fetterman knew was that some of his friends looked like hoodlums in training. Derek had been in therapy since he was six, without much success. Fetterman wasn’t surprised; he didn’t think much of the entire enterprise. He’d once shown his first wife a cartoon he drew, called “Jesus in Therapy.” The psychoanalyst was asking: *What*

about you, what about your needs? Are you going to keep letting people walk all over you like this? Sonya had frowned and accused him of being passive-aggressive.

Of course, Fetterman didn't tell his son much about his own life, either, but it seemed the boy didn't *want* to know him. One morning at breakfast he'd broken the silence to say: "I used to be in a band." But then the silence had descended again, and Fetterman felt pathetic—the epitome of pathetic, pathetic's apogee. In fact, Pathetic's Apogee would have been a better name for their band, instead of Hair of the Dog. *We weren't that bad*, he wanted to tell his son, and they weren't. They'd even booked a bunch of gigs, and had a small following. In 1993 Fetterman had played the drums in half the clubs in Arizona.

When Fetterman turned west off SR 89, Lockett Meadow was only twenty minutes away. He passed a slow-moving Subaru with a bumper sticker that read: I'M ALREADY AGAINST THE NEXT WAR. Then he passed a pair of hitchhikers. Fetterman had hitchhiked once, after something he said had so pissed off Carla that she took the car and left him at the Lone Coyote. Fetterman had no money in his wallet because he'd already spent it buying her milk-and-Kahlúa cocktails all night. In many ways, Carla and Sonya were perfect opposites. Where Sonya was hyperintellectual, Carla read *In Touch* magazine. While Sonya had cycled through being macrobiotic and vegan and militantly organic, Carla ate McDonald's hamburgers. Even physically, they were reverse: Sonya with her black helmet of hair and sharp nose, Carla with her frosted bangs and Cupid's-bow mouth. Fetterman had thought marriage to Carla would be easy after all

the mind games with Sonya, but all marriages are difficult at times, just in different ways. The most important difference between his wives was that Carla wasn't one for grudges. And she didn't fault him for not living up to some imaginary potential.

He wasn't a complete failure as an artist. He'd had one breakthrough: *The New Yorker* had plucked one of his cartoons from the slush pile. It featured a well-dressed couple sipping cocktails at a fancy restaurant. The man's caption read: *On the contrary, most men's lives of desperation are not nearly quiet enough.* But Fetterman had never been able to make a living at it, and when he had to reenter the dating pool after his marriage broke up, he decided to get a real job and quit cartooning for good. Not because Sonya had screamed: "Everything's a joke to you, even our marriage!" the day she told him she was filing for divorce, but because there comes a stage in life when you have to be more realistic. Not everyone makes it. Or, as his magazine editor friend liked to say: Many answer; few are called.

When they arrived at the campsite, Derek refused to get out of the car. Fine. Fetterman would set up the tent, and Derek could join him if he wanted. If not, he could bivouac in the Nissan. He fished the instructions out of the trunk. Step 1: Find a flat, dry area. Well, at least Step 1 sounded reasonable. He set out in search of a suitable spot, this time taking the car keys with him, after rolling down the windows. In the distance, the San Francisco Peaks loomed like a huge set of problems they hadn't

even gotten to yet. There was the temptation to give up, to say, "We tried our best," and be done with it. Perhaps it was just as noble simply to let things play themselves out, one way or another. His own father, who mostly interacted with Fetterman through his mother, would never have indulged such disobedience. Rarely a presence at his games, his dad happened to be sitting at the kitchen table the day Fetterman came home with his first Little League uniform. His dad eyed the shirt. "Eighty-eight means hugs and kisses in ham radio," he said. Fetterman didn't know what to do with this information; it vaguely made him want to trade numbers, but it was too late for that. The comment—not the meaning, but the intent—baffled him then, as it baffled him now. His father must have said other things to him over the course of their eighteen years together, but on some days, "Eighty-eight means hugs and kisses" was all he could remember.

He found the perfect spot, about five hundred feet from the car. Not bumpy, not wet, but dry and flat, with a tree nearby. A Goldilocks spot. He headed back to get the tent, but when he was still several yards away, he stopped. He knew something was wrong even before his mind could register what it was. Then he saw: Derek was holding a gun. The barrel was pointed at his own temple.

"Derek," he said. To his horror, he observed that the boy's hand was not shaking. It was Fetterman's hands that had begun to tremble. "Don't do this," he said.

"This way you won't have to deal with me anymore," said Derek.

"You know I didn't mean that the way it sounded," Fetterman said. Derek wouldn't look at him. "Son,

whatever it is, we can get through it. I'll try harder, things will be different—"

"Save it!" Derek shouted. "I already know all the bullshit, and I can tell you, I'm not interested. There isn't one fucking word that could come out of your mouth that would possibly interest me." It occurred to Fetterman that his son must have been preparing for this—perhaps for a long time. He felt his body go blank. Derek's eyes squeezed shut.

"We didn't want you," Fetterman said. "You were unplanned. We had only been married a month when your mom found out she was pregnant. Things were just getting going with my job, and—" He paused. "We didn't think we were ready for a child. We wanted more time." He let out a laughlike huff. "And then you came early. I was playing a gig in Tucson when your mother called to say she was going into labor." Derek was still holding the gun. His eyes were still closed. But he was listening. "You were born on July fifth, but it was after midnight—really, it was the night of July fourth. I left the club and made it from Tucson to Phoenix in just over an hour. For the entire drive, the sky was exploding. There were fireworks going off on both sides of the road, for miles and miles. And they weren't ordinary fireworks, they were"—Fetterman felt his throat constrict—"beautiful," he said. "It was the most beautiful sky I've ever seen." Now that the words were out, his face collapsed. "Please don't do this. I'm begging you. Not as a father to a son. As a brother to a brother."

"You didn't want me," Derek said. "That's perfect, that's fucking priceless."

"Not at first," Fetterman said. "But when you arrived, it was the best thing that ever happened to us. Sometimes you don't know what you want until you get it." He swallowed. "I know you're in pain," he said.

"You don't know anything!"

"Then tell me. Tell me how I can help you." Derek made no motion and no sound; it was possible he was considering. "Tell me what to do," Fetterman said, slowly moving closer to the car.

"I just want to be left alone!" Derek said. His arm slackened a little. Fetterman continued his advance.

"We can make it better. But not if you end it. If you end it now, it will never get any better than this."

As Fetterman reached the car, Derek broke down. Fetterman opened the door. "Give me the gun," he said. Derek was crying silently, his chest heaving. He handed the gun to his father and continued to sob. Fetterman locked the weapon in the glove compartment and sat in the car with his son.

"Do you want to talk?" he said.

"I want to go home."

On the way back to Phoenix, Fetterman stayed fifteen miles below the speed limit. His body ached as if he'd just run a marathon; he drove like an old man. He *was* an old man. A gun. Where on Earth had Derek gotten such a thing? He'd save the interrogation for the morning; tonight he was too exhausted, and he still had the three-hour drive ahead of him. His ambition was singular: Bring the child safely home. Still, the feel of the weapon's

heft lingered in his hand. One of Carla's friends, an army medic, had recently shipped off to Iraq, and before she left, her commanding sergeant told her to take as many Tampax as she could fit in her suitcase. Apparently they were perfect for plugging bullet wounds in the field and stanching the flow of blood.

In the rearview mirror, he caught Derek surreptitiously flipping through the camping book. He was probably reading about the poisonous mushrooms with names like angel destroyer and jack-o'-lantern, or how snakes have been known to inflict fatal bites by reflex action even after death. Fetterman and Carla agreed: Their son had a bizarre attraction to the medically macabre. When Derek was in the sixth grade, Fetterman had to have an appendectomy. His son came running after him before he left for the hospital; Fetterman thought it was to say good-bye. "Dad, did you know that you can wake up while they're operating on you, and feel the pain of everything, but not be able to talk?" Fetterman did not know this; in fact, he hoped it wasn't true. Derek went on about how redheads were more resistant to anesthesia than other people, and how the inventor of anesthesia had gotten the idea from Genesis, the part where it said that God put Adam into a deep sleep before removing his rib.

By that point, Fetterman and Carla already knew that their son was going to give them trouble. What they didn't know, what they had no way of knowing, was that the rebellion and the acute pain of adolescence would pass, but that the fascination with medicine would endure; that their son would go on to become a doctor, who in the course of his lifetime would help bring thousands of

people out of their suffering. On the way to the hospital, Fetterman had turned to his wife. "Is that true, about the anesthesia wearing off?" he said. "It's extremely rare," Carla said.

As they drew close to home, on the narrow stretch of 117, at almost the exact spot where they'd passed the deer before, they came upon a dead deer in the road. Fetterman pulled over and put on his hazards. He got out of the car and grabbed the animal by its legs, but he was weak, and the deer was heavier than he'd expected. "Help me," he said to Derek. Derek took the front legs and Fetterman took the rear, and together they began to drag the deer to the shoulder. Halfway there, Derek stopped.

"She's still alive," he said.

"That doesn't matter!" Fetterman snapped. It was dangerous to be standing in the middle of the road, in the dark, just ahead of a curve. "Help me get her across."

From the safety of the side of the road, Fetterman could see that his son was right: The limbs were supple and freighted with life; the eyes still had light in them. But the body was broken. In the distance, he could hear coyotes' yips and howls. Derek was waiting for him to speak.

"Get the gun," Fetterman said, handing him the keys. Derek obeyed, and a moment later, Fetterman was holding the weapon. Derek knelt beside the wounded animal, staring into its face as if he recognized something. Then he stood back. Fetterman had never fired a gun before. He placed the muzzle between the doe's brown eyes, braced himself, and pulled the trigger.

GOOD IN A CRISIS



At night, for an hour before going to sleep, Ginny read the personal ads. Not because she was looking for a lover, but because she was mesmerized by the language people chose to describe themselves. She found herself underlining standout lines by women and men, old and young. *Platinum frequent flier, phenomenal legs, does museums in two hours max* wrote a thirty-six-year-old businesswoman. *Generally a barrel of laughs when not contemplating thoughts of an untimely death* quipped a fortysomething filmmaker. Ginny also enjoyed *Capable of holding entire conversations with answering machines, and Rides badly, speaks three foreign languages badly, cooks badly, but does all with vigor & enthusiasm*. She sometimes thought of pairing up two ads with each other: *Zero maintenance* having sushi with *Non-needy seeks other non-needy*. Her affection was stirred by the fellow who claimed to *appreciate all manner of candor*—he was seeking a mate with *poise, wit, and joie de vivre*. There