My Dad and my Daughter

by Cristina Nehring (February 2024)



James Wyatt and His Granddaughter Mary, John Everett Millais, 1849

My father is still on Facebook.

He died a decade ago.

The pictures on the page

Are all of an age

Where my daughter was two or three or four

He died before

She turned five.

My daddy was very vain It caused him pain To think that he was sufficiently old To be told he had a grandchild. A flirt, perhaps, and a lover, But no grandfather; The notion was noxious to him. He was gallant; he was handsome, He turned the heads of many ladies And had no interest whatsoever in babies. But what a sea-change! He stepped out of his range. The pictures of him and my child Are wild In their winsomeness In their overarching affection. The smile that for a long while He reserved for his lovers He lavished upon a toddler. And it wasn't simple My girl had a dimple But she also had Down syndrome. A situation by which He would have been shocked A few years ago. To and fro, my father Mastered—without any effort— A love for his grandchild That drove him quite crazy; He looked into her hazel eyes And all lies slipped away. He loved her like mad This man who didn't Want to be a dad, Not even that. A bachelor type, A Casanova; the love of his life Proved not his wife, nor his daughter

Nor his female friends But his disabled grandchild. What a rise to glory What an improbable story My father and my kid He would never get rid Of his passion for her. I hope she knows The total surrender She unleashed in my dad. If he died It was because he tried To cuddle her when she had a flu. But it was he who was through, Who caught her affliction And there was no fiction That he could ever recover. Not her: She survived And she thrived And she kissed his moribund face. Forever she'll remember This gentleman so tender. This man who loved her so much That he was killed by a touch

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Cristina Nehring published The Child Who Never Spoke: 23 1/2 Lessons in Fragility on October 24, 2023. She is also the author of A Vindication of Love which made the front page of the New York Times Book Review as well as of two books in French. She writes for the Atlantic, Harper's, the New York Times and the Wall Street Journal. She lives in Paris with her daughter.

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