

The poem about what it's about

by [Brian Doyle](#) in the [August 6, 2014](#) issue

Here's my question. What if there was a poem  
That didn't know what it was about until it got  
To the end of itself? So that the poet's job isn't  
To play with imagery and cadence and metrical  
Toys in order to make a point, but rather to just  
Keep going in order to find out that the poem is  
About how hard it is to watch your kids get hurt  
By things they can't manage and you cannot fix.  
If I had been the boss of this poem I would have  
Made it so they *can* manage things, or I could be  
The quiet fixer I always wanted to be as a father;  
But that's not what the poem wanted to be about,  
It turns out. This poem is just like your daughter:  
No one knows what's going to happen, and there  
Will be pain, and you can't fix everything, and it  
Hurts to watch, and you are terrified even as you  
Try to stay calm and cool and pretend to manage.  
Some poems you can leave when they thrash too  
Much but kids are not those sorts of poems. They  
Have to keep writing themselves, and it turns out  
You are not allowed to edit. You're not in charge  
At *all*—a major bummer. I guess there's a lesson  
Here about literature, about how you have to sing  
Without knowing the score . . . something like that.  
All you can do is sing wildly and hope it'll finish  
So joyous and refreshing that you gape with awe.