

# James Hoch

## Breathtaking

When your father, dying of cancer,  
suddenly sits up in bed and says  
*Don't you fucking do it to me*  
it can take your breath away.

The way the sky late winter blank,  
then sacked with starlings,  
leaves you stunned, groping  
for a stone to put on your tongue.

See something; say something.  
A bicycle with no one riding—  
A joke, cruel child, uncool god  
wagering the getting wrecked.

In possible realms of suffering,  
a father dying is no big deal.  
Even the kid who owns the bike  
laughs his way to a happy life.

Not you, chasing in your earnest  
galoshes, enthralled that it is  
the dead pedaling, that it is  
your soul perched on handlebars

singing your favorite songs,  
begging the dead to pedal on  
as the bike wobbles and tilts—  
A red bike down a gray street

flanked with rows of forsythia.  
Starling, father, whiskey, song—  
In the end he wanted to be  
none of these things, not even

a ghost in the poem you are  
writing him into. *Don't*  
*Don't you fucking do it to me*  
It takes your breath away.