

# Downstairs My Father is Dying

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Downstairs my father is dying  
Upstairs we are sleeping  
It is 4:00 in the morning  
A noise below jerks me awake

The death rattle? A call for help?  
Heart thudding, I hurry down  
the steep stairwell

In his hospital bed  
my father is singing  
his voice quavering  
yet startlingly loud

I recognize  
a sturdy hymn  
from my childhood  
A Mighty Fortress is our God

What are you doing, Dad?  
I ask unnecessarily  
Singing, damnit, he replies  
annoyed at the interruption

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It is 4:00 in the morning  
We should be sleeping not singing  
But what can I do?  
He is my father  
and he is dying

On the next line I join in  
a little late  
Luther's sonorous melody  
our only bulwark  
against the dark