

Do They Have Telephones Up in Heaven?

R. R. Pravin

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This is curated poetry for anyone seeking solace in sickness.

In the poems of *Do They Have Telephones Up in Heaven?*, R. R. Pravin grapples with his experiences as a first-year pediatric resident. He explores the full range of emotions he felt when dealing with illness and death, with an emphasis on the sick children he worked with.

Pravin proves to be a master observer as he relays the thoughts and feelings of the sick and their loved ones, while never discrediting his own feelings regarding suffering and death. Each poem is followed by an anecdote relating the genesis and inspiration for the piece, which helps build a coherent narrative throughout the collection.

The book's title comes from one of its most memorable poems, "Gone too soon." While the lines "Do they have telephones up in heaven / where I can make a long distance call" stick with the reader, the main impact of the poem is in lines like "Your little brother looks at me / Breaking down in the kitchen / Quietly wondering why you left / Without growing up to say goodbye." Pravin's attention to detail makes his work personal and appealing.

Other highlights in the collection include "Preordained," "Mommy when will you get better?" and "Angel's Circus," which all speak to Pravin's penchant for accurately relaying the trauma of others. He even goes so far as to channel various people affected by illness, from the father of a dying daughter to the son of a dying mother.

Although the poems sometimes utilize clichés, familiarity becomes a means of reaching deeper, more difficult truths. Pravin's style leans more toward long-form, unpunctuated poems defined by their stanzas and line breaks.

The book opens and closes with emotional punches, though by the final piece, "Winds of Time," there's a shift in tone and a resounding sense of closure. Pravin writes, "Sometimes it is so hard to ask so much of time / When time asks haven't we been given enough / When it comes to a child, there is never enough time." Like "Gone too soon" and other earlier poems, this is a lament for time lost, particularly from the life of a child. However, the poem also provides hope, with imagery that suggests that everyone will meet again, without the constraints of time.

Do They Have Telephones Up in Heaven? is a hard-hitting, well-crafted collection that offers a sliver of light in the dark world of illness and childhood cancer.

LILLIAN BROWN (September 11, 2017)

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