

## Catch

Sydney Lea

Listen, stop reading now if fat sentiment makes you mad.  
But if you hear me out, don't say my good wife throws  
Like a girl, as my middle school baseball coach once claimed I did,

The jerk. I didn't — until my arm got robbed by age.  
Don't remind me: there are much worse losses. Now go stand  
Beside her exactly at sixty feet, six inches away

From the target, whatever you choose, and then by God we'll see  
How many times she can take a ball or even a stone  
And hurl it, and how often she hits the can, the post, the tree,

And we'll see how often you do. I love that woman madly,  
And you — but no: there's no reason to start all this in anger  
At you, whom I don't even know. Not that I'm not angry,

I won't pretend that at all, but in fact despondency  
Has made me talk this way. I've now and then pictured that girl  
Playing catch with the only boy in her whole five-sibling family.

He fought cancer fiercely, battled it over a span  
Of ten years, and I loved him too, which is doubtless crucial here.  
I've seen photographs of those two, kids with gloves on left hands,

Half-smiling and squinting in sun, decades and decades ago.  
They were a good-looking pair, and my wife is to this day.  
He was handsome right along, though his hair was robbed by chemo,

And some of his teeth. My wife recalls that when they got home  
From school, each day they'd head out into the yard together  
To toss the baseball around and talk all afternoon.

To me that's the very picture of innocence and love,  
And if you, anonymous you, consider it the stuff  
Of Norman Rockwell or Hallmark, just haul your sick ass off...

But there I go again. Forgive me, I'm just uncertain  
Which emotion is which. For all I can really say,  
You're innocent too, and known as a decent, caring person,

And it's not as if I can pose as some exemplary human.  
I probably should have been paying better attention to him  
And to her, come to think about it, and all of our own fine children.

Though it doesn't do any good to keep whacking myself on the head.  
It won't change a thing. If it could, I'd do it forevermore.  
On those afternoons, my wife learned to throw like a man. Instead

Of moping and cursing, I wish that I were man enough  
To report all this and not break down. But do I really?  
A man by that definition — furious, fearless, tough:

Well, there are better things to crave. Her brother and I  
Used to go down and watch our Red Sox play at Fenway,  
And then came our kids, we took them too. And then our lives

Just seemed to get too busy. Then the cancer suddenly showed  
In his colon, just for starters, and it traveled everywhere after.  
I sit and type up nonsense, weeping even now,

And my poor wife is still plagued by sadness, and I  
Wouldn't blame her if now, years after those precious summers,  
She picked up something and threw it, dead-center between God's eyes.

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**Sydney Lea** served as Vermont's Poet Laureate from 2011 to 2015. The author of 23 books, he was the 2021 recipient of his home state's most prestigious artist's distinction: the Governor's Award for Excellence in the Arts. A former Pulitzer finalist and winner of the Poets' Prize, he is the founding editor of *New England Review*.