

## Tomorrow is a New Day

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/34578754) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/34578754>.

Rating:	<a href="#">Teen And Up Audiences</a>
Archive Warning:	<a href="#">Major Character Death</a>
Category:	<a href="#">Gen</a>
Fandom:	<a href="#">Dear Evan Hansen - Pasek &amp; Paul/Levenson</a>
Relationships:	<a href="#">Cynthia Murphy/Larry Murphy</a> , <a href="#">Larry Murphy &amp; Zoe Murphy</a> , <a href="#">Connor Murphy &amp; Larry Murphy (Dear Evan Hansen)</a>
Characters:	<a href="#">Larry Murphy</a> , <a href="#">Connor Murphy (Dear Evan Hansen)</a> , <a href="#">Cynthia Murphy</a> , <a href="#">Zoe Murphy</a>
Additional Tags:	<a href="#">Angst</a> , <a href="#">Grief/Mourning</a> , <a href="#">Dysfunctional Family</a> , <a href="#">Family Issues</a> , <a href="#">Larry Murphy is a Human Being</a> , <a href="#">Healing</a> , <a href="#">Cycle of Abuse</a> , <a href="#">Cynthia Murphy Tries</a> , <a href="#">Family</a> , <a href="#">Zoe Murphy Deserves Better</a> , <a href="#">Humanizing Hated Characters Because I'm Bored</a> , <a href="#">Part 2</a> , <a href="#">Canonical Character Death</a>
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2021-10-18 Words: 2,274 Chapters: 1/1

# Tomorrow is a New Day

by [BlackberryHoney](#).

## Summary

What else is there, really? After your kid dies, what can you fight about except the things they left behind?

## Notes

See the end of the work for [notes](#)

Connor is too much like his father.

Larry winces, the contract he'd been trying to look over crumpling in his fist. He wants to throw it across the room, wants to swipe everything off his desk and tip over the bookshelf, but he can't. Not when Zoe would hear, and certainly not when Cynthia is already so fragile.

The problem is that Larry spent his teen years a lot like Connor, full of anger he didn't know how to control and a whole lot of pot, not that he'd ever admit that to his kids, and he knows his children have that same quick-to-anger streak. Zoe has always been his firecracker, going off with a showy little pop and fizzling out quickly, but Connor has inherited Larry's temperament. If Zoe is a firecracker then he and Connor are bombs, going off at a touch and leaving devastation in their wake.

They're just so similar in that way, and Larry sort of thinks he knows how it's all meant to go down. Connor finishes puberty, his emotions start to even out just a little when he gets to about seventeen. He realizes he's been screwing up his life but he's still so angry, so he tries to fix it by himself and when he can't he comes to Larry, reluctant and petulant but he comes. Larry hugs him and they can finally talk about how to clean up the destruction, how to keep from going off at the people they love.

They'll bond over the little things that set them off, baseball and horror movies or something, and Connor will level out a bit. Connor will start smiling again. Then Connor will go to a four-year college that's far enough to give him independence but not too far to visit on weekends. He'll fall in love with someone who is steady and kind and one day he'll have his own little boy to look after, with Murphy curls and Murphy eyes and a family that loves him to the ends of the earth.

As Connor's son grows up Connor will hope beyond hope that his little boy didn't inherit the Murphy temper, too. But he will, just like every Murphy man before him, and he'll come to Larry and ask how to help him mitigate the damage.

And Larry will tell him everything. Never give your kid an inch, fight him tooth and nail, give him discipline and structure and let him reach out to you. It might take time, more time than you're comfortable with, but it happened to Connor and it happened to Larry and it happened to Larry's father before him.

Larry will refrain from telling Connor about his father's iron fist, how the iron had been a belt buckle and it hadn't been a metaphor at all. Larry had vowed to never do that to his children no matter how big that angry feeling swelled, and Connor will see the look on his face and think of something Larry did to him that he refuses to make his son go through. The Murphy temper will live on but so will the Murphys.

Connor is too much like Larry, and Larry wants to scream when he realizes he's been thinking about Connor in the future tense. Because there is no future tense for his son, no first day of college and no little baby Murphy for Connor to love so much he comes right back around to anger again.

Larry gets up, giving his wastebasket a kick just to let some of the pressure out. It's destructive, yes, but Larry justifies that a dented trash can won't change anything.

He thinks that he should have a drink. Larry generally doesn't drink, finds it makes him feel a little too fuzzy for his liking. But if there's any time to drink until he can't think any more it's this moment, so he creeps down the stairs and grips the banister just hard enough for it to hurt.

Cynthia is sitting in the dark. She's crying, and Larry wants to go over and hug her but he isn't sure they won't end up arguing over something like who will take over Connor's night to do the dishes, or who will be the one to collect the laundry from the floor of his room. What else is there, really? After your kid dies, what can you fight about except the things they left behind?

Larry knows the past few years have been hard. Cynthia's had Connor wreaking havoc on one side and Larry's supposed indifference on the other, and he sometimes feels like he's taking advantage of how steady she's always been. He doesn't want to, but sometimes his chest is full to bursting with anger and he's got the choice between holing up in his office or breaking all their plates in a fit of rage.

He will always choose the office. Cynthia is *good*, consistent in a way Larry isn't and light in all the places he's heavy. He has loved her since the day he met her, and some days he wonders what she sees in him, grim-faced Larry Murphy and his tight little smiles. But sometimes she'll give him this quiet, tremulous look of awe like she's wondering how she got so lucky to have Larry, and he'll thread his fingers through hers and pray she knows how much she means to him. He never wants the bomb to go off when she's around to feel it. Cynthia deserves so much more than Larry can give her, and she doesn't deserve his anger.

So Larry trudges back up the stairs and stops in front of Zoe's bedroom door. She's playing something quiet through her laptop speakers but he can still hear her crying, can imagine her swiping away angry tears that she's angry she's even shedding. He loves Zoe with everything in him, but he's never understood her like he does Connor. In a way it makes things easier between them, but it's these moments when he's struck with the thought that he doesn't really know her all that well. He knows that they sit on the same side of the table at dinner, knows she loves music but not why.

The wishy-washiness of the arts has always made Larry a little nervous, but he goes to every concert and claps at the right moments; he supports her because he loves her and not because he gets her passion for it. He wonders if she even wants him to ask about it, or whether her reasons for loving music are the quiet, private sort of thing that Connor's art was.

He swallows. Everything's coming up Connor tonight, and maybe that's why Zoe seems so angry at the dinner table every night. He and Cynthia have spent years laser-focused on Connor, and he has that feeling again, like he's taking advantage of something without realizing it and hurting his daughter in the process. He tries not to think about it as he walks away.

Larry stares into the quiet abyss of Connor's bedroom, bracing himself the empty door frame. There's a hairbrush on Connor's nightstand, a mug on his desk with a paintbrush still sticking

out. He wonders what he had been painting as he sits gingerly on the edge of the bed, running his hand over the cool navy sheets. He'd bought Connor these sheets in July and isn't sure Connor has changed them since, too wrapped up in his own head and whatever it was that had been eating away at Connor before their eyes.

He picks up a sweatshirt from the floor and presses it to his nose. It smells like pot, but also like that shampoo Connor always added to the grocery list on the fridge, like crayons, or maybe pastels. Larry doesn't know the difference, not really. There's a tiny silver key in Connor's left pocket.

And Larry is struck by the fact that he will probably never know what it's for, never know what he was painting before he died or whether Connor had ever known how much Larry loves him, how many of Larry's hopes and dreams are centered around a Connor that smiles with his eyes and not just his teeth.

Tears brim in Larry's eyes and he blinks them away, pushes back that vicious, angry swell in his chest that he'd lived with for so long, that one he'd always assumed Connor just hadn't quite learned to swallow down yet.

He'd wanted so much for Connor. He'd given Connor everything and watched him throw it away, watched him sink further and further into his own head until all Larry could see was himself at seventeen, and maybe that was the problem the whole time.

Maybe Connor wasn't that much like Larry after all; maybe there was no "Murphy temper" and Larry just had a shitty dad. Maybe in Larry's quest to be the opposite of James Murphy he swung too far to the other side and left his family to deal with the consequences.

Maybe the thing in Connor's chest hadn't been the same one as the one in Larry's. Maybe he'd never understood Connor in the first place and now he was grieving a future for a kid who hated Larry because he thought Larry hated him. Maybe pretending to be indifferent is what had killed his son.

And Larry is crying these huge, angry sobs that he can't seem to stop, because his son is dead and he never really knew him, not in any way that mattered. He's sitting here crying pathetically instead of comforting his family; he's failing them in the same way he'd failed Connor.

It isn't fair that Larry had survived the worst of it and Connor hadn't. It isn't fair that he has to live to bury his son because Connor had these moments of kindness and wittiness and *goodness* that Larry never had, and Connor was just a kid. He didn't deserve to die like that.

"Larry, I can't find the—" Cynthia is standing there and Larry is crying and he can't stop and he isn't sure if he's here mourning Connor or the idea of him. He's thinking that if he'd just known Connor better or hugged him more, he might have been able to fix this. He might still have two kids. "Oh, Larry."

Cynthia's arms go around him and he can't stop crying and holding that stupid fucking sweatshirt Connor was always wearing; he's crying because he wants to fight something,

someone, but he can't fight his way back to Connor because Connor is dead. Connor doesn't get to live past seventeen.

Zoe steps into the doorway, nose as red as Larry's, and Cynthia opens her arms. She only hesitates for a moment before diving into them, and then the three of them are sitting on Connor's disgusting sheets together and Larry still can't stop crying.

There's supposed to be four Murphys living on Maple Drive and now it's only three, and he can't stop thinking about the unfairness of it all as Cynthia strokes his back, shushing him as he lets out these awful gasping noises.

He's not angry but he doesn't think this is any better. He can't stop crying and Larry isn't sure what he's meant to do anymore.

All he knows is there are three Murphys left sitting among all the things the fourth one left behind, and Larry will be damned if he lets them go. So he lets Zoe cry into his shirt, face tucked into his chest so tightly he can only see her hair.

His son is dead and he pulls his daughter into his lap like she's a little kid as she curls her hands around Connor's raggedy old sweatshirt. His son is dead and Larry puts an arm around his wife's shoulders, leans her into them both and feels her tears soak his collar.

Zoe will cry herself to sleep in his lap; Larry is sure of it. So he'll carry her to bed with him and Cynthia, let his sixteen year old sleep between them so that he and Cynthia can reassure themselves that their baby girl is still there.

Larry doesn't know what comes after this. No one prepares you for your child's suicide. He knows that he'll spend the rest of his life wishing he'd done something different, agonizing over what he could have changed if he'd only known how sad Connor was. He knows this feeling will never go away completely.

Larry looks down at his wife and daughter piled on top of him. There's a space where Connor is supposed to be that makes him ache all over, and as Zoe snuffles into his shirt and he squeezes Cynthia tight he thinks about how a tiny Connor used to tuck his legs under himself whenever he wanted one of them to carry him. Connor had been so little to him, but so big to a baby Zoe.

Larry strokes Zoe's hair, sees the fading indigo streaks that he's always secretly liked on her. He wants to tell her just how much she means to him, how she and Connor are his end and his beginning and he spends every moment loving them, but he isn't sure she needs to hear that at the moment.

He leans over and kisses her head, silently vowing to tell her in the morning. Connor is dead but Zoe isn't, and Larry thinks that maybe, just maybe, he might be able to keep the Murphy house three-quarters full.

No more empty spaces.

## End Notes

Hey y'all, hope you liked the story. I've been on a Dear Evan Hansen kick recently and when I was listening to Requiem for like the eightieth time I was struck with how Larry's 'asides' were "I have a heavy heart" and "my world has gone dark." In the privacy of his own thoughts he admits to himself that his world has been knocked off its axis without his son, and I guess it got me thinking about cycles of abuse and what happens when you take too long to break them, and thus 'Tomorrow is a New Day' was born. I just wanted to make Larry a person, I guess, not a caricature of the closed-off dad who doesn't get his kid. So here we are, I hope you... well, enjoyed is the wrong word. I hope you got something out of this. Edit: I posted this with all of the 'Murphy's autocorrected to 'Miller's. Sorry; it's fixed now!

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