

# Prison Break

Category: Poems

written by Jack Coulehan | July 29, 2016

## **Jack Coulehan**

I eavesdrop on the cells in your brain,  
which are trying to bust out of a prison  
surrounded by broken connections.

They make an almost inaudible hum  
beneath mechanical whooshes and pings  
surrounding your hospital bed. I listen

while sitting with your hand in mine,  
not comforted by the confusion  
of intensive care—I know your brain

is scheming, despite these machines  
and my heartache, to escape. Its intention  
is clear—get out while there is still time.

Some of the doctors say, *She's young and strong.*  
Do the tunnelers in your brain hear them?  
I eavesdrop—the messages you send are thin

and receding. There must be a billion  
routes to escape your prison  
and each one takes you away from me.

## **About the poet:**

Jack Coulehan is a poet, physician and medical educator whose work appears frequently in medical journals and literary magazines. His sixth collection of poetry, [The Wound Dresser](#), selected by former poet laureate Robert Pinsky as a finalist for the 2016 Dorset Prize, was published this summer by JB Stillwater. In 2012 he received the Nicholas Davies Award of the American College of Physicians for “outstanding lifetime contributions to the humanities in medicine.”

## **About the poem:**

“For decades I’ve observed unresponsive patients in ICUs, and their distraught friends and family members. I’ve wondered about the mystery of human consciousness. Despite the advances of neuroscientists, no one has any idea how electrochemical reactions create a self, an interior life. In this poem I imagine myself confronting this mystery in someone I love.”

## **Poetry editors:**

Johanna Shapiro and Judy Schaefer