

“The Man Who Finds That His Son Has Become a Thief”

Coming into the store at first angry
At the accusation, believing in
The word of his boy who has told him:
I didn't steal anything, honest.

Then becoming calmer, seeing that anger
Will not help in the business, listening painfully
As the other's evidence unfolds, so painfully slow.

Then seeing gradually that evidence
Almost as if tightened slowly around the neck
Of his son, at first vaguely circumstantial, then gathering damage.
Until there is present the unmistakable odour of guilt
Which now seeps into the mind and lays its poison.

Suddenly feeling sick and alone and afraid,
As if an unseen hand had slapped him in the face
For no reason whatsoever: wanting to get out
Into the street, the night, the darkness, anywhere to hide
The pain that must show in the face to these strangers, the fear.

It must be like this.
It could hardly be otherwise.

—Raymond Souster

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1. This poem does not depend on imagery in the way that some poems do; instead, it poem focuses on telling a story—or at least a segment of a story. What, in your own words, is the story being told in this poem (provide details)? In your answer try to explain the different emotions the father feels as the events of the day unfold.
 2. Does it make sense to say “the unmistakable odour of guilt,” considering that guilt is not actually something that can be smelled? Explain your opinion.