

EtOH

By Sophie Palmer

Dad,  
when J. was five, you forgot him at soccer  
unknown until halfway through the game  
J. had a stomach bug  
and was later found  
vomiting  
nearby in the woods  
by some other kid's mom

No one knew where you had gone  
(drinking from the River Lethe).

By the time I was eight  
I knew never to ask  
to take  
take without asking  
a sip from your  
water bottle/orange juice/coke  
even at midday  
because it was spiked  
(often I have smiled at that word  
because it's what you called me as a baby  
when my hair stuck up all funny)  
I think I would prefer to hear "spired"  
in addition to also being sharp  
spires were made to reach to the heavens

You were busy getting to a place you thought was better than here.

You would have remembered though, dad,  
how mom left when I was nine  
right after she threw a bottle of tabasco sauce  
at your head  
which hit the wall and exploded;  
you would have remembered  
how we were still cleaning tabasco sauce splatter  
off the ceiling, seven years later, when we sold  
that house, sometimes home

Sepulchre.

Do you remember?  
when I was thirteen

I started driving you home  
from events like Christmas, Thanksgiving, birthdays, and PG-13 movies  
because this time  
you couldn't afford to get another DUI  
maybe do jail time

What do you remember of me?

When i was sixteen  
you went to rehab  
you came back with this painting  
of our family  
done in some art therapy class  
we were together under the Northern lights  
you, me, J., and mom,  
as if my childhood  
was a palimpsest  
as if  
I could  
be painted over

(To the gallows, dad)

When I was eighteen  
I sat down in  
the blue chair  
the one that used  
to be in our living room  
(the one that eventually  
was ruined in the  
flood)  
and you said  
I have cancer  
and I said okay  
and I went upstairs  
and thought  
about how much  
you deserved it

when I was eighteen  
I drove you  
to the ER  
you were drunk  
you vomited in triage  
the nurse asked you  
don't you know that you're

killing yourself  
and I said  
fuck you  
to the tired nurse  
because you knew  
and I knew  
do you think we don't know  
do you think I don't know  
how painful it is to watch  
your father die--  
slowly poisoning himself?

Together, we grew ashen.

When I was twenty-one  
"Take it Easy," by The Eagles  
(your favourite)  
came on the radio in this coffee shop  
and I burst into tears  
in the middle of the place  
on the threshold  
of no longer being able  
to throw you away so easily  
like the al-anon pamphlets  
my doctor had so deftly  
handed me  
on my way out of her office

In loving memory; the questions of memory.

When I was twenty-two  
it was my turn,  
I woke up in the ICU  
tubes alarms restraints  
I had tried to poison myself too  
only the quicker way--  
the chalky sludge of your leftovers:  
crushed hydromorphone down my throat  
followed by the last of your favourite gin

The apple  
of your eye  
(the poison  
in the fruit).

When I was twenty-four

I finally had the courage  
to scatter you  
charred bone  
bone to earth  
earth mountain sky  
I held you in my hands  
and I kissed you  
before I flung you  
into a world  
you could finally  
be at peace with

Not a step or a prayer, but the blindest kind of trusting.

When I was eighteen  
I read to you  
after your surgery  
“David”  
by Earle Birney

*“Around the marks of that day on the ledge of the Finger  
That day, the last of my youth, on the last of our mountains.”<sup>1</sup>*

Your mountain home.

(I flung you  
into a world  
I could maybe  
start  
to try  
to be at peace with).

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<sup>1</sup> Lines 183-184

Birney, Earle. “David.” *David and Other Poems*. Ryerson Press: 1942, Toronto. Print.