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 palimpset 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.”

Your mountain home.

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

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1 Lines 183-184