

Not Easy

ELLIE ANDERSON

I was talking to my father, "Don't
call me 'the kid' anymore.
Not Cisco. No Billy. You know
my name."

I was fifteen.

Daddy said he knew me,
named me in fact,
held me when I was born,
washed my face in wine,
then drank the wine.

"I know everything about you,"
he said. "From Bee Bop to Elvis to
blouses with small flowers. I was the
first one on this earth to see the mole
in your armpit."

I never could tell him about Donny
meeting me at the train
wearing a suit and no socks.
"Where are your rubbers?" I asked him.
He giggled and leaned against the
conductor. "You're not my mother," he said.
In the middle of the sixties,
In the middle of the plains
between
Regina and the Rockies,

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Donny dropped acid.
He said it was easy,
that fallacy was spelled “phallusy.”
Six months later I tried to explain
to Daddy about acid, mind expansion,
blowing out.
But Daddy kept waiting for Donny to
come back. He talked to him,
sang, imagined looking in his eyes,
waiting.

Daddy never called me
‘the kid’ again.

Just outside of Red Deer,
snow driving out of darkness,
a white horse appeared
in our headlights and then went
down.

They black-listed Harry Bearkoff
so he couldn’t buy booze
in our small town.
He was too proud to ask his friends.
He hung himself
in his kitchen and Daddy cut him down,
laid him down with the belt around his neck,
laid him down in a litter of empty bottles of
vanilla and aftershave lotion.

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At home, afterwards, Daddy stood at the window,
and shielded his eyes with his hand.
I didn't wonder why he didn't move away from
the brightness. I smeared butter
on the wall, made a spot
that came through every coat of paint.
"It should've been easier to
die than that," Daddy said.
I didn't know
there are a lot of ways to die
and you don't always stop
breathing.

Not many years later, in a house out
on the edge of the tundra,
he said the morphine made him cold.
He asked for extra blankets.
He said it would be easy.
When you freeze
your blood slushes your veins,
you sleep,
and stop breathing.

But I think of him now,
whenever I hear a siren,
whenever I hear the words:
shooting up,
shooting star.

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We held him back
blazing
thrashing.
We kept him from falling
out of bed.
He dug holes in the wall
with his fingers.

Donny and I held Daddy
in his blankets and
flashed through the streets
in an ambulance.
In the hospital, Donny shredded
the sheets between his fingers.
And that night
we shot Daddy down
with morphine.
We let him go.
And it wasn't easy.
Has never been easy.