American Family: A Syndrome
Early Death Syndrome (EDS)

Remember that time cops
found cousin Rosa
on the East Side
carjacking some woman?

Said she stepped right in front
of a silver Caprice,
pulled that frightened lady
out of her car,
like a rag. Remember

how her daughter had to go
down to the precinct,
had to explain that
her mother got them voices?
Remember her brother—

that slim shell of a boy—
how he put three bullets in their mother,
then left himself shot
and dead in the drive?

Coward
Uncle Otha called him.
The Devil said mama.
hypoparanoidschizophrenic
say the docs.

And remember
that girl he loved?
When she heard
she dropped all her body,
rubber band legs
and horse shoulders,
dropped them all
in the middle of the den,
like a sack of oranges.
Remember

how the whole family
came to the cemetery
to put mother and son

Terminal Illness— Upon learning
the short life expectancy of men
and women from his/her
community, a patient suffering
from EDS embraces the
inevitability of an early death.
Usual signs of EDS exhibit in
black males and females ranging
from ages 10 to 35. Early
symptoms include testing the
limitations of pain by engaging in
suicidal activities such as
dislocating joints out of sockets,
jumping from rooftops and/or
participating in backyard mixed
martial arts competitions.
Generally these activities are
followed by an unhealthy
consumption of processed food
and insomnia.

In many cases a patient imagines
his limbs disappearing and
reappearing. Most patients have
been known to whisper to friends
and family that they are already
gone. Almost all have experienced
dreams depicting their own deaths
and/or funerals. Patients express
debilitating survival behavior such
as, a distrust all strangers and
feelings of constant
endangerment. At the same time
the knowledge of an early demise
causes fearless behavior.

Some have been known to stand
in close proximity to high-speed
traffic, while others resort to
consuming poisonous substances.
In most common cases, patients
violently provoke others suffering
from the same illness. In rare
occurrences patients develop
debilitating behavior similar to
the avoidant personality disorder
in the ground;
how Rosa refused
to buy the coffins?
Said she’d rather
build boxes
from the planks
of her picket fence;
said each board
carried the sound
of her family’s
southern snared grief,
each of her dead
meshed with the wood grain.
And who hasn’t seen Death—

that ruthless engineer—
stack the bricks
of this rickety house,
one broken brain
on top of another.
Rosa’s uncle took his wife by knife
and cousin Robert still hold
a bullet in his back
from when his mother
tried and failed.
Death can be relentless
with his building, cain’t he?
You remember Rosa in the street
screaming down at that woman?
Something about the car
or was it something about her brother—
I mean granddad
or was it about auntie or me
or—

otherwise known as the Hermit Complex.

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Unfortunately, neither denying
nor provoking an early death has
proven to be resourceful in the
treatment of this fatal disease.

Almost all patients find their
demise under the following
circumstance: violence inflicted
by a member of private security,
mistaken identity by law
enforcement, self-inflicted wounds
or lethal assault by private
citizens.