

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.

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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—

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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.