

James Leishman Etchison

At Home Alone While My Wife Visits a Dying Old Man

He smoked Chesterfields.
He blew big ZEROs of smoke
Punctuated with pieces of pink.
Lung.
Hack hack hacked up with tired eyes.

fathers are for catching

He calcified for that long time in his
Laz-E-Boy.
He stared at The Machine,
Vacant as a sea squirt.

fathers are for saying
"Run and fly! I will catch!"

He squinted at his guests occasionally
Through the dandruff on his glasses.
He would say, "You want Lucy or Jackie Gleason?"

fathers are for setting you
one-handed on the gold-flecked kitchen table
neverminding dusty Ked-prints.

He kept his fishing gear ready to go,
In the trunk of his wheel-less Olds '98.

*fathers are for coaxing you,
arms strong, callused,
ready to catch you,
fathers can be trusted.*

He grew on his arms patches of corpuscles like purple cabbage.

*fathers are for catching.
you can run arms-out—a jet fighter—
you can fly.
you can trust a father for a soft landing,
if you are very young.*