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## Hangin' in There (For My Father)

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# Hangin' in there (for my father)

by Robert J. De Smith

The story as he tells it  
Is a comedy:

As he stepped from ladder,  
To flat garage roof—  
The push broom already tossed up,  
Ready to clean fall debris—  
The ladder went one way and  
He another—  
Without knowing how  
He found himself hanging by one arm  
From the sturdy gutter,  
Some twelve feet from the ground,  
Above the clutter including  
Ladder, scrap wood, and  
An ancient smith's  
Forge from Grandpa's shop.

I hear the slick whistle  
Of aluminum gutter against ladder,  
The jarring rattle of ladder  
Turning, tumbling, and settling.

Well, there he hung, and  
Mother not ten feet  
Away inside the travel trailer,  
Vacuum cleaner drowning not just  
The ladder's clash but an  
Ardent "Honey?" or two.

Fortiprovidently,  
It was his good shoulder he hung by,  
Though this prevented his gaining a better  
Grip—his other shoulder  
Cannot be coaxed, even *in extremis*,  
Above his head.

I can see him hanging,  
And I can feel him figuring,  
And I can sense him begin to swing,  
Foot catching the wall under the eave  
For one last push . . .  
And I can see him sail out  
In control—"Cagey" is  
His word for it—landing and tumbling,  
Just a gash on his shin  
(Didn't quite clear that ladder)  
To show for it.

But I also see  
A shattered ankle,  
A broken back,  
A concussion,  
Blood—all avoided,  
But lurking.

And I wonder:  
What's the limit on caginess?  
When will his innate sense of problem-solving  
Miss by that inch worth miles?  
How long can he hang?  
How long swing?  
Can I catch him the next time?