

Letter to a Four-Year-Old Daughter

Linda Sillitoe

The days you instill in me only exhaustion,
reverberating from living room walls,
leaping, hanging, hurling as you instruct,
“Listen but don’t look—tell me what this hits!”
I force my eyes to look calmly at a coloring book,
stained-glass with fifty colors patched on a waxy duck,

and send you off to sing, riding breakneck
on your toy horse to rhythms of “I am a child
of God”, leaving me penitent in my fatigue.
As you compose, “Joseph Smith was a good prophet . . .”
I recall with renewal the day at your insistence
you learned how he was murdered. Refusing evasion,

you required whole truth, scorning attempts
at explanation, tolerance, and a happy ending
in heaven; you choked down scrambled eggs, weeping,
“But they didn’t have to kill him,” and again
at bedtime, “they didn’t have to kill him.”
Like Porter Rockwell, one of few, you inquired,

“Who were they, what were their names?”
Now, horse providing percussion, you end your song,
“It was so long ago, we don’t know their names,
don’t know their names.” In a sudden double-exposure
I glimpse a hounded man—a prophet—and a blond head
bowed for blood that shines from a newly found grave.

Linda Sillitoe is a graduate of the University of Utah and a widely-published poet.