

## *A Week My Wife Had the Nightshift*

Hours before dawn, house dark  
except for my laptop, I listen for owls,  
so still I could hear them.  
Hospital hasn't called, almost my turn  
to sit with our daughter,  
but I don't turn the furnace up.

Cold shoulders shake the cortex  
like a deep massage, a grizzly  
showing an oak to make fat acorns fall.  
Up there, a rafter pops. Soon, I'll shower  
and start the car, headlights shocking  
whatever's caught on the highway,

bright eyes like agates, bobcat  
or coyote. For another chilly minute,  
I pray the sun will rise,  
the fever break, the cancer disappear—  
a bad dream after all. I work  
with the prayer all fathers know.

This heater at my feet could melt  
the ice off forty degrees  
below freezing, but I don't  
turn it on. Hot coffee's chilled  
in the cup. I sip and sip it,  
even though it's cold.

—Walt McDonald