
KEVIN CLARK

Approaching Days

That night, my wife's face strobing afloat above me, rubber footsteps chirping
on linoleum, a syringe
blurred away on a chrome dish, I tried to hone in on the diagnosis
I'd been told
but hadn't heard. Her mouth worked a newly practiced script, her voice

swallowing the shrill tremor: *the kids with the neighbors, a clot in my lung.*
Behind her, cinderblocks morphed
from sage to Sixties pink: Each day's test tube of dark red spinal fluid
hung above my father's hospital bed
like a chronicle

of wounds: dark, light, lighter—
but then too dark again.
That's how they measured the aneuristic blood. That's how my young mother
read his worsening.
A week earlier, I'd listened

from feigned sleep
when the ambulance closed around him. Fourteen, I focused on his quick return,
though a new adult hum
prepped my bones for the worst. Finally, in the last days, she took me to him,
her hand steering me

through the hallways: Tapped awake, he found me into view, tried to work a smile.
I placed a book
on the table beside the strange blue flowers. The moment I noticed
the tubes, her eyes
sharpened upon me, exacted

my silence. I never saw him again. Now, it's deep night. A whispering
in the fluorescent provinces.
A tangle of dreams. Broken breathing
above the near beds.
Pinprick LEDs

blinking in code. Over and over, my wife's face is forming words
in the air. Sometimes my son,
sometimes my daughter
offers a single question I can't understand, their voices snarled like roots.
A long way off, the doctors ask my mother

to leave the room. My father looks up at me, reads the approaching days
in my eyes. Morphine travels
my arm like an old excuse. My wife waves good-bye, as if no one
can save her, the kids.
My father sits up, holding my gift. He keeps reading

the same page, but can't remember the story. I reach to unclasp the book
from his fingers. Let me
read it for you, I say. But his eyes pan the room like a blind man's.
Hello? he searches.
I'm not here, I say.