**5:00 a.m.**

The soft click of the double-locked back door

sends him to his feet, unslippered

beneath bare legs and rumpled night shirt.

Down the spiral stairs to the kitchen.

Voices murmur.

She is here again.

Her blue cellphone light at the foot of my bed shades

her dark form, hunched and muffled in damp fleece.

*Is it OK if we stay here till morning?*

she asks, haltingly, and leaves the room.

Downstairs he assumes the panic position,

pacing with hands on head, elbows cracked back

and angled, framing the circle of his mouth

open in shock at this recurring scene.

He hands me my purse for a wallet check.

Two twenties gone, both inside her pocket.

*They’re mine, Mom, swear to God,* crumpling

the bills in her palm. *Change from a Walmart run.*

Now she says they won’t stay. Another lie.

She’s got the money in hand.

Outside her child sleeps in the running car.