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Prognosis
—for Danny Wallace

Woods Nash

It's a regular checkup—
a wellness visit, the clinic calls it—
but I ask the doctor to tell me
I'm dying. *Say it plainly,*
like Samuel Beckett, I suggest
helpfully. *Or like a sunset figure*
from Cormac McCarthy.
Only then might the curtain rise
and let me see what the play
has been: maybe just a man
standing in rain, alone outside
the diner's glow. He placed an order
long ago, but still he's waiting
for to-go. *Please, I say, grant me*
the relief of a final verdict. The faith
of a finished script. My hands hang
limply. *I don't even have lines to forget.*
The doctor opens her long white coat,
plants both fists on her hips. No,
she says gravely, *you've been served*
enough. If it's clarity you want, start
with the woman who scrubs your tub.
Ask about her arthritis, her plastic crucifix,
her three teenage kids. Offer her
a glass of water. You'll find death
and life in covalent bonds. I begin
to object that I can't speak Spanish,

flunked basic chemistry, but the doc
interrupts. *You must stop outsourcing
everything—especially the turbulence
of concern.* Now I try to flee
the exam room, but the doctor side-steps
to block the door. *Your prognosis is worse
than terminal,* she says. *If you don't learn
to ignore yourself,
you'll be condemned to live
apart. And like a shuttered theater's
darkened seats—red, plush,
abandoned—you'll go on expecting
to be spared destruction.*

About the Poet

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