



Volume 18
Issue 1
2024

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

Woods Nash is Assistant Professor of Bioethics and Medical Humanities at the University of Houston Fertitta Family College of Medicine. His scholarship and creative work are at the intersections of narrative medicine, literary studies, and ethics. Email: mwnash@central.uh.edu