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Night shift: intensive care

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Flying through the chill magnet
of midnight,
this strange space ricochets between the stars,
hallways piled high with the darkness
that seeps in under doors, around pipes and wires.
In the cargo bays, fretful on their high beds,
the sick, whom we shepherd
through the shards of night,
dream their jittery dreams, unconscious,
scissor-step from light to nightmare
and back again.

An old wife sits unseeing,
in her usual padded chair,
between his bed and the black window.
A lined notebook
in her lap reiterates her simple and unerring
calculus—
of him, of anything, there will never again
be quite enough. What can she do
but sit?

Not everyone
lands on a warm and happy planet,
the automatic doors clanging open,
greeted by family in a pink haze,
taken to the car in a wheelchair,
and home,
and dinner, and a bowl of peonies.