

**CHRIS HAYES**  
**Young Fathers**

*—after Sharon Olds*

That look of vigilance  
in the eyes of the young father  
who waits for the slits

between the window blinds to fill  
with light. He brings ice chips,  
empties the bedpan, is held apart

from the thrust and grunt. He watches  
the blue sack of his daughter's body  
slip fishlike into the room. He snips

the blood vine. This young man  
whose seed-filled pouch of flesh  
hangs hidden and necessary in the dark.

Now he swabs with alcohol the clamped,  
black stump that hangs from the child's  
belly button like the stem of a mushroom.

Now his home becomes a womb, filled  
with detached light streaming out in small  
bright planes from under every closed door.

■

Again he is held apart  
from the thrust and suck

which shape the daylight hours  
that burn down around them.

The mother presses her flesh  
against the breast pump's cups

while the child naps. The house  
quiet, except for that rhythmic

tugging. He buries his face in her  
nightshirt as she sleeps, and inhales

the milk-soaked cotton her breasts  
rise against like knolls of dough.

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The spongy pith of his daughter's body  
ripens with every hour she's asleep.

Belly paunch and thigh fat, her flesh  
grows more dense by morning.

The watery stones of her eyes  
drip with new light. They loll upward  
toward the fan's five-tongued whirl,

hazy and fixated. Her heart floats  
in her chest like a plum, and the father

knows that despite the bone-wall  
which encloses it, it will be bitten.

■

When the house fills with the sound  
of his daughter's colicky throat,

his body, like a wall, refuses movement.  
His sleeping ear is fine-tuned

to the creaking weight of a bootheel.  
He memorizes every loose floorboard

from door to bed, the slackened nails  
beneath the carpeting that rise with age.