

The Space Heater

On the then-below-zero day, it was on,
near the patients' chair, the old heater
kept by the analyst's couch, at the end,
like the infant's headstone that was added near the foot
of my father's grave. And it was hot, with the almost
laughing satire of a fire's heat,
the little coils like hairs in Hell.
And it was making a group of sick noises-
I wanted the doctor to turn it off
but I couldn't seem to ask, so I just
stared, but it did not budge. The doctor
turned his heavy, soft palm
outward, toward me, inviting me to speak, I
said, "If you're cold-are you cold? But if it's on
for me..." He held his palm out toward me,
I tried to ask, but I only muttered,
but he said, "Of course," as if I had asked,
and he stood up and approached the heater, and then
stood on one foot, and threw himself
toward the wall with one hand, and with the other hand
reached down, behind the couch, to pull
the plug out. I looked away,
I had not known he would have to bend
like that. And I was so moved, that he
would act undignified, to help me,
that I cried, not trying to stop, but as if
the moans made sentences which bore
some human message. If he would cast himself toward the
outlet for me, as if bending with me in my old
shame and horror, then I would rest
on his art-and the heater purred, like a creature
or the familiar of a creature, or the child of a familiar,
the father of a child, the spirit of a father,
the healing of a spirit, the vision of healing,
the heat of vision, the power of heat,
the pleasure of power.

-- *Sharon Olds*