There’s a man in the road, waving.  
We’re driving home from Hot Springs,  
my wife and I, and our three kids.  
He’s holding something bundled  
in his arms. Don’t stop, my wife  
telegraphs to me with a sideways glance.  
I’m okay with that.

It’s a dog! the kids shout, He’scarrying a dog! So, okay, I stop,  
roll down the window.

Please help, the man says, tears  
leaking down his stubbled chin.  
The dog is bleeding. He’s rolled up  
in an old rug, eyes open, miserable.  
I just run over my dog, the man  
blubbers. He’s drunk. And stinks.

Okay, I’m thinking, I’m stuck  
with this. The kids squeeze together;  
the man and dog huff and groan,  
sniffle and slide themselves into  
our lives. My kids’ faces in the rearview  
are pinched, afraid to breathe—  
wet dog, blood, booze, rotting socks.  
The man whimpers, cradles his dog,  
I’m f-ing sorry, man. So f-ing, f-ingsorry. This is less than okay.  
We spit gravel behind us and speed  
back to Hot Springs to find a vet.

It’s Sunday, my wife whispers, everything’slocked up. I’m thinking, Okay, what now?  
At the one payphone on Main, I pull over  
to let the man and dog out. You better callsomeone, I say. My voice sounds afraid.  
The man’s eyes are shut, not asleep,  
but almost. The dog’s eyes are shut, too.  
You better call someone, I say louder,  
Okay? Okay?

The man stands at the payphone, his dog  
bundled on the sidewalk. He just stands there.  
My kids cry silently. My wife trusts me  
to be the man she hopes I am. I don’t  
know what’s okay and what’s not. The man  
is fumbling in his empty pockets for change.  
I feel a lot like that.