Our Son Swears He Has 102 Gallons of Water in His Body

by Naomi Shihab Nye

Sometimes a mistaken word distorts the sum:
divide becomes multiply so he’d wrestle his parents
who defy what he insists. I did the problem
and my teacher said I was right!

Light strokes the dashboard.
We are years away from its source.
Remember that jug of milk?
No way you’re carrying one hundred of those!
But he knows. He always knows. We’re idiots
without worksheets to back us up. His mother never remembers
what a megabyte means and his dad fainted on an airplane once
and smashed his head on the drinks cart. We’re nice but we’re
not always smart. It’s the fact you live with, having parents.

Later in a calmer moment his dad recalculates
the sum and it comes out true.
Instead of carrying giant waterfalls inside,
we’re streams, sweet pools, something to dip into
with an old metal cup, like the one we took camping,
that nobody could break.