

## Cautery

As the scalpel parts the flesh  
The senior across from me says  
"Are you okay with blood?"  
It's a little late for that, as  
The white shock wears off  
And blood seeps in.

Slowly,  
The resident dissects. Down,  
Down into the depths of the abdomen  
Down past the fascia and the muscle  
Down past any reasonable barrier  
Far past all I've ever known of a person.  
There is surprising warmth from this  
Body that I didn't expect. I guess  
I have gotten used to the cold and dead,  
Not the living.  
Not the rise and fall of a ventilated chest,  
The rhythmic dance of a heartbeat's fist.

I am grateful for the mask covering my face  
For my mouth is agape.  
Blood is the most beautiful red.  
And I swear I have never seen this exact shade  
Of crimson before.

It pools as the patient bleeds,  
Filling him.  
The level rising like an inevitable overflow  
Like a bathtub left running  
And a holy grail of an artery hidden  
In its depths.

Surgery is the most loving violence.  
It cuts and burns and pierces only  
To tie and staple and sew.  
And so too is medicine, as it tears us slowly  
Carefully  
Away from who we used to be.  
Dissected out are the pieces that  
Would have cringed at the sight of blood  
Would have hesitated to fit a hand into an open wound

Would have wondered about the ease at which  
The person beneath the drapes  
Became an open field.

And I find myself elbow deep in  
Abdomen  
Pulling fat and skin aside  
Peering in to the darkness  
Trying to distinguish different shades of yellow.

"Trust us," they say,  
"They're different" but it all looks the same  
Light yellow on light yellow  
Indistinguishable mesentery  
Held by metal arms more capable than mine.

We could not walk away.  
There is, as with all things,  
"A point of no return"  
I guess, when you have felt

The pulse of an aorta  
Hidden in a person's depths  
Smashing against your fingers  
Firmly saying  
I'm alive  
I'm alive  
I'm alive

There is no turning back.

We are not who we used to be  
And we cannot know how much more  
Will be dissected out  
Which parts will be stapled together  
What ragdoll self we will find  
Emerges on the other side of this  
Black box.