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.