

Thank you for your insides.

AMELIA L. GURLEY

“That’s an embarrassment to medicine,”
Our professor said, when he saw you lying
Dead at fifty, from colon cancer
We’d not yet breached your insides
Nor your secrets
I did not know you were a teacher then
Or that the embarrassment was not your wounded flesh
 Our clumsy scrapings
 We couldn’t section you cleanly
 Only hack
And hope we hit the good bits

We did not know a lot of things
Like that you never got around
To having children when your heart still beat
Or what your unbeating heart would feel like, ripping
In our bloody hands

There are many things you learn in med school
That death is a spectrum, not a line
I saw a woman last night, emptied
“there’s nothing there,” the doctors said
And talked of her daughter’s birthday party
And how the machines would be turned off after
And she would stop breathing
Her heart would stop beating
All on its own
Her brain was dead, but her body didn’t know yet.

Your death is unambiguous
Your disassembly
Laid before us each Monday in ordered steps:
“Remove the skin and outer fascia
Resect the muscles
Split the ribs”
There were no beeping codes
 Or wailing kin
 Or colleagues to distract us
From that moment when you slipped away
Before we even knew you.

I do not know your name
I do not think that I can know it
I do not want to put your face together again
To see that space where your eyes were, watching
As if, once whole, you might see what you'd become
Disassembled
And unmake your last wish.

That's what got me through, really
Knowing you wanted this
And though I can't imagine
 What might bring a person
 To have that kind of faith in us
 I never really got faith anyway
So I'll respect yours: your faith, and wish, and hope
That we can carry these pictures of your insides with us
To keep our patients' insides whole
As we couldn't keep yours.

Your miracles unfolded to us
A heart, unbeating
Gut-tube unfeeding
Your brain all unfeeling
In the palms of our hands

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