HEALING ARTS

Materia Medica

In School, We Play with Dead Bodies

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My hands are lost—
 They peel away yellow flesh to
 Uncover silicone pouches
 Coarsened with time. (The body
 Wars with the unnatural).
 Naïve to our insides, we play
 With scissors, probes, and fingers
 Teasing apart nerve from vein.
Write about your first cut:
 The plastic bag of bowels,
 The manicured nails,
 The pool of formaldehyde affectionately
 Known as *cadaver juice*, and
 The unconquerable palms and soles
 Are the main characters in my tale.
 But my real first cut:
 I am sitting at the operating table,
 Hands tensed in the sterile position
 (Rewriting my body's habitus).
 I watch as she slices open the back of this
 man's hand
 The adrenaline hits—my heart is
 pounding—
See this muscle?
 I nod.

It isn't usually here.
 She quizzes me:
What's this?
A tendon,
 I pipe back.
 (I passed. Knowledge I did not know I knew.
 Constructing norms of the body's
 Architecture.)
 She scrapes his bones and straightens
 Them with metal rods
 I snip sutures as she sews canyons into crevices
 I walk outside—the air is dense, the
 Sky seems deeper,
 I am wide-eyed as ever
 But somehow saturated with the
 Knowledge of vessels laden with blood
 And a little hardened—
 Like the scar we drew by blade,
 Slowly transforming from new to toughened.

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