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## Numb

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N u m b

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- Anonymous

## one

The scrub nurse asks me to move a bit of suction  
because she hates the sound it makes  
as it tries to swallow  
a few more drops of blood and clot at the edge of the sterile field.

Its sound is somewhere between a straw trying for the last bit of milkshake  
and your mother sucking her teeth at you.

When you're in one place for so long,  
certain things start to bother you.  
Call it sensory overload.

For me, it's the scent of burning flesh:  
An odd mix of rancid pork and scalded rubber.  
It lingers like cheap wine staining good linen.  
But you get used to it. Even Prometheus went numb at some point.

A resident rolls her eyes and talks about a patient screaming  
so loudly you could hear her from the other side of the ER,

and we add this to the list of our grievances:  
The incessant gurgling of suction swallowing liters of blood,  
Charred flesh, burning to stop the bleeding,

Pained screams, broken bodies, sick people.

## two

Once, I interviewed a patient's family before a transplant. Then, he was dead.  
Once, I told a woman her mother was dying. Then, she did.  
Once, a man died, and we tried to make it so he didn't—  
a time machine built from epinephrine and chest compressions.

And is this not our role? To turn back time.  
Make what is shattered whole again.

## three

My hands are still cold from the water  
that washed the stain of your mother from them.

I am sorry we've become so familiar with the taste of tragedy  
that we've forgotten how it bitters the tongue.

I know she is was your mother.  
I know you ~~love~~ loved her.

When you ran out of the room in tears, I wanted to follow.  
But my attending checked his watch. Glanced to the clock.

Sometimes it's just best to leave them alone.

## four

I've lived long enough to know the five stages of grief are bullshit.  
The depression always comes first. Then the anger. Then depression again.

So bring the body, the broken pieces of man,  
the soon-to-be memory of a husband.

We will fix him back together,  
And I'll do my best to remember the human this flesh belongs to.