
POETRY | SPRING 2018

Becoming a Doctor

By Brent Schnipke

I've split the head of a donated man,
teased out his eyeballs, probed his skull,
carved his lungs, scrutinized his heart,
held his disembodied bones and bifurcated
brain. I've forgotten his name.

I've committed acts which other contexts
would render criminal.
I've counted gallstones, counted bruises,
slid needles between knuckles, sucked out
yellow human fluid. I've asked questions of others
I would never ask myself.

I've sewn fiber lines into veins,
thrusting plastic tubes down throats.
I've smelled blood and bile,
bone glue and burning flesh.
I've seen knees sawed, spines screwed,
babies born, chests cracked, toes in jars,
death.

I've stitched skin
and split wounds open,
disemboweled babies
in the name of healing.
I've born witness
to the ugly and the holy,
and at times been the vessel
for both. I've listened to a dying woman
name her joys and fears, dying
not among them. I've wept.

I've handed a woman
her firstborn child.
I've saved lives by listening,
I've hurt by failing
to pay close enough attention.

I've been mistaken as the doctor,
and I've finally started to see it myself.
I've prayed with people on the brink
of the unknown, cringed
at my ineptitude, laughed
at the absurdity of it all. I've attended
to the gruesome and the divine,
in the name of learning
to be your doctor.

Brent Schnipke is a reader, writer, doctor and first year psychiatry resident in Dayton, OH. His professional interests include medical humanities, narrative medicine, and education. His personal interests include writing, exploring the outdoors, and spending time with his family. His essays and reviews have appeared in the Kenyon Review, Ploughshares, and Relief Journal, as well as Student Doctor Network and in-Training, an online magazine for medical students.

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