

Doppelgänger

My grandfather smokes in the hospital
(they all do) none realizing
ash and nicotine violate the Hippocratic oath.

Miss Fredericks, his nurse, presses
his palm with instruments crafted in Europe.
The heft of that icy metal slices through
subcutaneous layers like a hymn.

In the medical school photo he stands
beside a man butterflied and propped
as if struggling to rise,
skin peeled from muscle and tendon,

the cranium sawed and hinged upwards
at an angle such that the dead man looks
to be doffing his cap. A flirt, a cad.

My grandfather beams a hero's smile,
formaldehyde dripping from his elbows.

Lunchtime: the repetitive prayer of hands to mouth.

The smell sticks no matter how much I scrub.

The others name the dead man Oscar
so he will have a name.
Calluses on the palms and the ripple of muscle under skin
suggest that he, dead at 43, was a hard worker.