

a pathologist's prayer

what I see first is a child's corpse
naked on a steel gray morgue table
my work so long
swallowing hard against soured
stomach curds hiding those tidy
faces beneath surgical towels
as if their stone-open eyes
didn't speak, as if their mouths
hadn't begged for honey or Mama
as if those tidal fists limp and flat
hadn't reached just yesterday
for hair, an earring

as if they no longer feel
yet what if

and who are we who scalpel, probe
claw for clues
desecrate bodies
as if naming disease delivers us

our flesh still warm, we suck air
bite our nails, go home to bed
feast on uranium

but at night
when he's done with me
I wonder if
some thing of them hovers

a skull vibrating after a tuning fork's
removed the umbra of a hand protecting
a lash cutting her cornea

a vase of lonely

my daughter says *empty*
vases are sad mouths howling
for food or love or maybe

I make that part up we walk through
her Paris basement where the
cave wine cellar homes bottles

shelves of excess boxed glass
marbles to fix stems
her lover buys her flowers, often

I do too when I visit
it's Paris vendors adorn
corners even in pockets

of January freeze when she calls
homesick I fly over retired now
and she asks so little

works through my visit
I spend days honing ways
to close in on her

again like we fell together weekends
she in Illinois I, Ohio doctor
she growing to prime

I, seeping from mine
we climb stairs
pass a forest of vases

she whispers
empty, waiting
and I think—in a flash—when she was

five drew a nurse
big kindergarten drawing
what I'll be when I grow up

why nurse? I asked
so I can come home and be
with my children I saw

how hollowed a cavity
I'd given her
called it childhood, called it love

