

Operating Room Suite

Audrey Shafer, M.D.*

I. A train of patients
before and after
but the one here now
lies supine, quiet, eyelids taped shut.

II. Tubing, stopcocks
draw sheet, up drape
the Japanese moon bridge
of chlorhexidine swabbed over the belly.

III. Bits of the patient
squiggle on monitors
shadow x-rays; inside is out
magnified on videoscreens
trimmed into specimen jars.

IV. The circulating nurse
keeps her scrub pants rolled and tucked
as if ready to ride a bicycle
as she declugs the suction again.

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V. Too narrow, too wide
too purple, too red
too worn out;
and then there is cancer
calling to the wife in the waiting room
pray, pray now.

VI. The medical student at 2:00 AM
is told to sew: evert, big bites, don't dogear
it is a small prize, a gift, a bone;
the anesthesiologist sighs,
keeps the sevoflurane on.

VII. Telephone, thermostat
pillows, computer—
the surgeon slides her hand behind omentum—
and no matter what
afterwards it is always the mop.

VIII. The anesthesiologist watches
the patient breathe piped oxygen;
hears the bellows force the chest to rise
listen:
each breath says
yes
yes to time
yes to health
yes to life.