They don’t teach you the proper pressure to use. They teach you how to hold the scalpel, where to make the cut. But how can anyone teach the pressure that just barely slips blade into skin, the strained space in the room of bright lights and starched fabrics and strange smells—and then, the sense of absurd normalcy. This is just what we do.

We peel back the flaps we’ve created—as we would draw back drapes or unveil artwork—freeing the muscles underneath. And suddenly I crave silence, solitude, some means to feel my own awe—that feeling of being unable to speak because speaking and feeling at once has become impossible.

Only with silence can I hear our anesthetized language—rostral, distal, lateral—describing such a simple place, maybe the space on his back always just out of reach in the shower. Or the spot by his ear where his children poked clumsy hands, climbing up to kiss his cheek.

Only with silence can I begin to reconcile what this will be, to separate the fibers of the body from the fiber of the person and yet to remain in awe of both.

I never expected muscles to be beautiful.

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