Breast exam

And now we are going to drop the front of your gown.

Silently, she complies, but her eyes fix upon some light that shines behind us, over our heads. Her chin aligns with the tile floor, her neck becomes a stone column.

The doctor continues small talk—Sunday bread baking, slapstick antics of two young nephews, Labor Day lake swimming, the resilience of succulents—as her undulating fingers search our patient’s drooping breasts and soft, unshaven underarms for small stones hidden deep.

Our patient is now a lady of marble, harder than anything we can palpate. Closing her eyes, she takes the softer things to a place our prying fingers cannot reach.

Trang Diem Vu

Ms. Vu is a member of the Class of 2016 at Mayo Medical School. This poem won honorable mention in the 2014 Pharos Student Poetry Competition. Ms. Vu’s e-mail address is: vu.trang1@mayo.edu.

Photo by Robert Kato.