

Dissection manual

When you start, bright-eyed, at first whiff of formaldehyde—
it's hard to recognize yourself in the dead.
They bend the light differently.
Your pulse is a panther, painted in twilight and violet as it sleeps
in the hollow of your throat, and jumps at the flick of your wrist
Her pulse is faded like a memory, color of fog above the canopy.

But, you make her acquaintance.
You trace the lines on her palms, and the nerves beneath them
amateur fortune teller reaching out for a greeting,
inching toward an introduction.

Her heart perches in the cage of her ribs, memory of a melody,
and you remember your own nested in your chest.
You too are only a handful of heartbeats,
made of veins and clay and haste,
numbered exhales and sinewy folktales.

To you, who gifted us with seeds to plant flowers in our minds,
we have not forgotten to water them.
We will tend gardens and dedicate forests in your memory.
Thank you.

Irtiqia Fazili

Ms. Fazili is a second-year medical student at the University of Tennessee Health Science Center College of Medicine. Her poem received first place in the *The Pharos* Poetry Award competition 2018. Ms. Fazili's e-mail address is ifazili1@uthsc.edu. Illustration by Jim M'Guinness.

