The surgeon speaks to his shadow

I have stitched the seam between birth and earth,
threaded flesh's rent fabric, called it mercy,
and yet my hands remember what they could not hold:
the wind leaving lungs, the unripe seed
falling back into silence.

Half a century,
I have watched bodies bloom like orchard boughs
and break under the same sun.
Each child I delivered arrived with a cry
I mistook for my own:
a small herald against the dark corridor.

How youth mocks the scalpel's edge:
skin taut as drumskin, bones sure of spring.
But age is a slow surrender:
knuckles knot, tendons fray,
and the mind recedes behind shuttered eyes.

I have cut away tumors and gangrene,
but could never excise that creeping shadow.

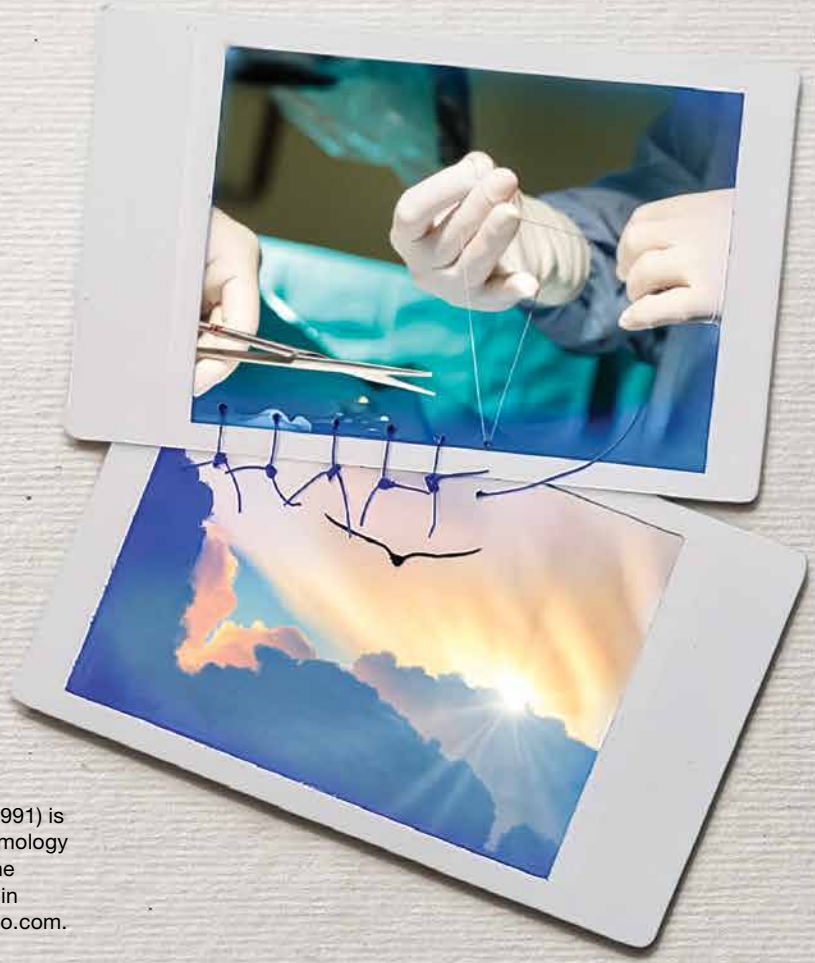
We learned to weigh risk like a coin:
one face promise, the other cost—
held briefly in the balance
before it slips beyond the circle of light.

There is no perfect relief, only intervals
when suffering loosens its grip.
I have knelt in blood and stitched despair
into something resembling hope,
though even hope wears thin with years.

What remains is not the record, nor the scar,
but the pulse carried forward in younger hands:
the students who stood behind my shoulder,
watching darkness yield, if only briefly,
to a gloved hand and a careful light.

So I pass the lamp into steadier hands,
my bones an archive of small mercies,
content that the knife, the suture, the vow
outlive my own unsteady grasp.

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