

Medicine Man

by Philip F. Clark

The scalpel is
prescient --
it knows
blood before
it cuts.
Every surgeon
is a seer.

We start here,
just below the neck.
The slide of its
sharpened silver
touches softly,
enters the skin
with care; half

the cut is question,
and half an answer.
This is nothing that has died.
A long, thin sluice of red
between the breast.

The knife, a planchette,
moves from nipple to
stomach, to rib. What word
will come, and of what disease?
Metal listens well.

And who was this? Some Jim
or Anne; we cannot tell. Heart,
spleen, bladder, ovary or scrotum?
The body's secret unguents

are perfume beneath the knife.

Skin reveals its secrets:
alcohol, nicotine, an adipose
on the lung; hard tissue,
multiplying cells. A scent
of something slowly
seeping -- what, at last,
is breath?

