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Your Anesthesiologist Self

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Y Your anesthesiologist self pockets memories:
a mentor perched in a corner like a long-legged cricket
another, the violin maker, hovered inches from your fingers
your tribe of fellow residents: exhausted, elated, covalently bound
the long list of surgeons, nurses, techs, clerks

its sinews learn the elastic give of needles puncturing fibers
the yogic poses—one hand on bag, the other on stethoscope bell

but mostly, patients sculpt your anesthesiologist self

each eager systole
each rise of bellows in a pas de deux with lungs
each push of medication into bloodstream currents
each check of eyelid, elbow, exhalation

each patient you render unable to blink
then return back, back to those he loves—
is connected to you

even—especially—the patient who died

the practice of anesthesia molds your anesthesiologist self

This poem is one of the finalists of ANESTHESIOLOGY's first annual creative writing competition, The Letheon.

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but its kernel germinated long ago
when tenderness cocooned you in your baby blanket
fostered curiosity about otters, street food, hockey, guitars

the great world opened, and you, wising up
understood the luck of your circumstances

your anesthesiologist self blooms

over decades, until you and your anesthesiologist self entwine
you wonder how long can you be quick and savvy
who will you be without your anesthesiologist self?

but today, this is what matters:
in the preop holding area
your patient's shoulders relax, ever so slightly
meeting a human being he now trusts

you.