

MIND TO MIND

Creative writing that explores the abstract side of our profession and our lives

Stephen T. Harvey, M.D., Editor

Surgery

E. A. Akindele

From the hospital bed, I watch the rain
begin to pour with gloomy droplets that deluge
the gauzy windows like stray swallows
smashing into glass.

I imagine the falling—
first, a droplet on the pavement, then another
spreads, metastasizes to the rooftops, to the lady
crossing the street, to the houses, to the churches,
till the whole city is drenched.

The doctors tell me that this procedure is routine
as one guides me to counting down, but I can't help
that religious feeling that comes when practicing
total submission.

When practicing
total submission, the rush
is in the waiting & the pleasure is in the guidance
as the shaman turns the dial and I begin
down the river Styx, not to Hades,
but to the edge— the furthest edge, pushing forward,
edging closer—deeper,

deeper.

"Surgery" is the winning poem of ANESTHESIOLOGY's 2019 annual creative writing competition, The Letheon. eaakindel3@gmail.com.

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And then it is over and I am lying still. Breathing.
 Still breathing. I am awake in another room. Nothing
 is familiar, except for sound of the rain beating
 & dripping & wailing against the window
 as my eyes roll up towards the ceiling
 and I try to remember, try to think back
 as I listen & listen & try to listen,
 inscrutably listen
 for the time that the clocks
 did not tell.

Editor's Note

Don't be fooled by the title's simplicity. "Surgery" is a deceptively sophisticated and haunting work of art. Behind Akindele's unassuming language, a musical fluency pervades this dreamlike narrative. Though it is composed in first person, the poem deftly invites the reader to share this perspective, peering through a hospital window into the heart of the speaker.

With phrasing that is ornamental without being sentimental, the speaker confesses to a "religious feeling that comes when practicing / total submission." Here, the anesthesiologist is described as a "shaman" carefully guiding a patient who surrenders control during the induction of general anesthesia. The speaker is led "to the edge, the furthest edge" and brought back safely later on. But what has happened to that period of time—where did it go?

That's the question Akindele all but asks the reader. As if the concept of timelessness is not elusive enough, we are left to wonder about the mysterious nature of anesthesia and how the two are connected. The poem's opening imagery may be strikingly memorable, but the ending is even more beautiful. I find myself returning again and again to the last line, listening with the author "for the time that the clocks / did not tell."

Author's Note

I wrote "Surgery" years after my own experience under the scalpel. Of that experience, all I have left are hazy memories of blanched walls, oozing fears, fleeting faces surrounding my bed. I feel more, however, under the surface of what I remember, more that breathes and moves and lingers in unconscious shadows, inaccessible. The weighty mysteries of lost memory, of lost time and of lost self are what drew me to

this poem, and they are what fascinates me about anaesthesia and its strange, manifold miracles.

About the Author

E. A. Akindele is a nascent essayist and poet who currently resides in Canada. He enjoys discovering new artistic devices and the emotions they elicit. He is currently working on more rigorously engaging with the evolution of poetic thought and the limits and borders of form, craft, and language.