

## post-surgery blues in e minor

my father tells me, crouched on the bathroom stool, that a scar still bleeding must be some form of regret or whatever. he ends most sentences with a casual “man.” i dab tissue behind his ear where his aneurysm honeyed out thirty years ago, my age, a mudpie of flesh tucked under slick black hair. a german doctor sawed the abscess off twice before a tassel of blood softened into a toad’s back a week later. normally my sister does this. the dirty work. our father in a closer state than the antique of a hug. he can’t help talking while i wash it, his jaw an eccentric crank of a locomotive, an obstacle. in the ’80s a surgeon would’ve been terrified as a man who looked as if he didn’t belong in a BDU, uncharmed by anesthesia, warmed conversation like they were sipping beers in the village square. maybe in another life they are friends, skiing with the avalanche crew, finding first loves five different times in Kissingen alone. but i wished my father would’ve said to me something like how a man shouldn’t have to wear a grave or a crown even if you’ve slept in a foreign jail cell. or because of the smoke he’s put in my lungs. or dammit, man, how you can sleep without blankets in winter long enough to know what death feels like. that warmth, that flower of a cigarette in your chest. how all bad shit can be good shit, man. i wish he could remember what i don’t either, the lives of my grandparents before they were picture frames, the feeling of holding him, the pull of a trigger aimed toward a grave, deer watching us without a flinch. the gauze sanctions tight under his golf cap, his bald patch a faint half-moon, lurching up & away as if i had done nothing. he has nothing left to fear.