

What It Was Like

When people ask me
what it was like dissecting
a cadaver, I tell them I didn't eat
anything with a face

for three months.
I don't say that I couldn't look
at her face when I made first cuts
and slid the skin from her torso.

Nor do I mention the way
I swiftly reduced her life to detritus—
tossing scraps of fat and bone
into a bucket at the end of the gurney.

When I kissed my husband,
the Latin names *lingua* and *oris*
filled my mouth with ash.
Sometimes, as my fingertips traced

the arc of his cheekbones,
I imagined a scalpel's delicate work—
the ivory glisten of bone laid bare.
The reek of formaldehyde stained

my hair and skin as I tunneled
into her body and mined secrets—
a whorl of tumor, the clotted blood
nestled between furrows of her brain.

I dissected down to the marrow,
unearthing the way my own body
might also harbor
one hundred ways to die.

But I was young with a new
husband at home, who only asked
that I scrub my hands
before we touched.