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The Operating Room

By Susan Carlson

is where I end again, the center
of attention in a room centered around me,
a room stainless with tools and precision, so many
precise people – scrubbed and crisp with a plan
to take more of what I've been dying to keep
to myself.
      I am not an emergency
any more, have become a regular member of the cast
in this surgical theater where my abdomen steals scene
after scene in its ongoing test
of intestinal fortitude
      I've arrived as expected,
to be readied then splayed cold in a cold
operating room that is cold in every kind of way, cold,
to be blacked out cold under a cold blaze of light brighter
than any bright sun shining white on me in this sea of cool blue
scrubs and again
      I am counting down
to when and again my guts are to be gutted,
to be resected once more before restored, and perhaps –
if there is enough left
over – returned again
           to the center
           of me.
      After the first time,
before the last, and in between them all, I've taken to holding a rock
in the palm of my hand, a rock the size of a peach pit which is like
holding a part of the ground, holding a part of what holds me
here, trying to hold on to what it means to be
without, when again and just before the count
down I hand my rock, this solid bit
      of ground, to the blue-masked
      nurse at hand
           and I am prepared to be

       empty-handed as long
       as it takes for more
of me to be
taken out
of me and
that's when the anesthesiologist
who is positioned above my head, just to my right and out
of sight, takes my hand, holds it in his own gloved one
and then, with his other, takes from the nurse my not-peach
pit, its worn surface smooth from hours and my idle hand,
and tapes it, he tapes it into the center of my empty palm,
folding my fingers around something that will not fall away.

Susan Carlson lives and works in southeastern Michigan. Her work has appeared in various journals including Passager, River Heron Review, Gyroscope Review, Typishly and Persimmon Tree. Carlson has received a Best of the Net nomination.