BYPASSES

SCOTT DALGARNO

I thought this to be a drop-off affair,
but when Reception asks her
for her living will, I decide to stay.
I cannot remember her name, this quiet,
duteous woman who I think of now

like the shy aunt you never quite got
to know. We wait in pre-op three hours
before the surgeon shows up,
and I take in the word, Mercy,
printed upside-down on his head-wrap.

He repeats what she already knows –
that they cannot determine how many
bypasses she will require until they open her
chest and take a look. He says this
without using the words *open* or *chest*

and makes clear that he has little idea
what surgery might buy her. After a silence
that stings she lifts her eyes to ask
if she might have a heart transplant.
She is aware she is asking for something big –

maybe not the moon, but surely one of the moons
of Jupiter, it has so many. He blushes
with practiced apologies and in a moment
is gone. Any hope in the room bleeds out
and I see abandonment bead up on the glossy

white wall behind her. She reads this, I think,
in my eyes. Smiling crookedly, she says,
"I got heart-lucky once. He was sixteen.
Came in my bedroom window. Even sang to me.
I thought to make him shush, but I couldn't."