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, dutiful 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.”