



Before They Died

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Before she died,
I sat and watched, too young to know death,
As my grandma carefully
Formed chocolate chip cookies in her hands,
Molded specially for my cousins, siblings, and me.

She loved us fiercely.

Dementia crept in
And took so many parts of her away from us.
Only when I held her hand,
Squeezing it between my own,
Did she have a flicker of
Recognition of
How loved she was.

We loved her fiercely.

And now I stand,
Deemed old enough
To know death,
With the scent of formaldehyde
Baked into my pores, clinging to my body.

I hold a scalpel in my hand.

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I have seen deep into his body,
Learned to use this scalpel
Cutting into his skin.
Held his heart and his brain
In my hands.
Flipped his body over and
Back again.
Dissected his fingers

And then his toes.

Before he died,
Who held his hand?
Who was there in his last moments,
Squeezing his hands between their own?
Or was he alone?

What was his name?

I never learned it.
Did he have grandchildren
Who ate crunchy chocolate chip cookies with him,
Letting the long hours of the afternoon stretch out before them?

I hope he wasn't alone.

Before he died,
Did he imagine that I
Would be the last person
To hold his hand?

I hope someone will hold my hand.

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