

Still Life in Number Seven

Bryan Maxwell

A prelude of iodine, a quickening,
a slipping away of friction,
then a slice that seemed to precede
its own motion of graceful opening

into a smoke jellied scene
of avocado and pomegranate.
This was how an abdomen,
quartered off with baby blue sheets,

unfolded beneath an unassuming
blade in my father's double-gloved hands
to reveal, for the first time,
the dirtied secrets of inner slick and color,

a crudeness I knew I could not
ask anyone to explain, a sight I felt sure
belonged back in its drawer. But
perhaps that is why our breathing,

even when it slides along without the help
of the gentle marking hand of a machine,
is so measured. So patiently insistent.
To give us time to sort through

the shifting nervousness
of organs packed neatly away.
To let us see the most ordinary and sterling
face of things: pigment, texture,

light. A table forever set
for two. A wine bottle forlorn
and cold. A bowl of pears
that no one will ever eat.