

Preferred Imaging

“SENSITIVE EQUIPMENT
NO PHONES” says the sign
below the desk. We’ve made
it here on time for your latest scan.
The chairs are comfy
enough. A nurse shouts
for Jacobson, so the man
in too tight khakis disappears
behind a heavy door.

On the television,
a stock-footage starfish
drifts through the luminescent
ocean toward the phone number
at the bottom of the screen
in a beachside rehab’s ad.
They provide a soothing environment
and one-on-one personal care.
Medicaid or your insurance
may pay for your treatment. Call now.

The nurse calls another patient.
The tennis balls of the woman’s
walker whisper against
the confetti carpet’s weave.
Trying not to think
of what could be growing inside
her either, I try to remember
whether starfish grow back arms
like lizards grow back tails,
or if, like earthworms, they

blossom whole bodies
from lost halves. Where did I learn
that anyway, and when
did I forget?

What good
is remembering?
No doctor would pass those genes
along, or even if
they did, would forbid the therapeutic
amputations certain
to cure depression, cancer,
and the common cold. They prefer
these endless tests and guesswork,
rows of impotent orange
bottles arrayed on the sink.

Sitting here, I think I could
put the factory farm
disassembly line to good use,
lop off limbs to stanch
the hemorrhage of loss,
cultivate the body's
fertile wound before the nurses
get to any other name.

But I don't buy my own
bullshit, and I'm sure
you don't either. I know
I'd have no trouble mangling
myself to teach my body
how to behave, because I've
never understood the shock
at the flagellant's centripetal penance

but can hardly watch the nurses
searching for your veins,
how easily they can perforate
your skin again and again
without flinching until they're sure
they've opened up a way.