

A M A N D A N E W E L L

On Amputation

Dear Adam, When I look
at the photo taken

after the roadside bomb
exploded—how the singed

wires and shredded metal
spill like entrails

from the splayed shell
of your M-ATV—

I understand why
no one thought

you would survive.
Should I therefore greet

the news that you may only lose
your left foot

with relief? You tell me
it's like a sack of rocks.

Four months now,
and you still can't feel it.

On my last visit,
I watched the nurse

unwrap your bandages
to check for necrosis

while you, practical as you had been
as my student, explained

how your foot was wired with pins,
the ends of which pierced

your heel. I couldn't help
noticing your new

right shoe on the floor.
And your left one in its box.

438 East

When my former student stopped by my classroom
with news he'd be deploying soon
to Afghanistan, I imagined him

arriving at Dover in a flag-draped coffin.
He could come back mangled,
or burned beyond recognition,

like the photographs I'd seen of soldiers
with faces like melted candles. Then I decided
not to worry about Adam:

He'd be one of the lucky ones.
Whether it's luck, God, or his own
determination that keeps him alive now,

I can't say. And whether it's the morphine
or brain injury that makes him mumble
about IEDs and Humvees,

I know he's dreaming of war as I sit beside him
in his room at Walter Reed, wearing
latex gloves so I don't expose him

to something foreign. His left foot,
which may have to be amputated,
is propped on pillows and protrudes

from the covers with ashen toes.
How long ago it seems that we read *No Exit*,
and I asked my students

to imagine hell. In Adam's version,
he was tormented by a persistent ticking.
No one could see or hear him.

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