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Studio for Portrait Masks, Paris, 1917

Richard Waring

For Anna Coleman Watts, American sculptor and painter

Some say men without noses
are very beautiful, like antique
marbles. They wait outside my studio
on park benches painted blue,
a warning that the mutilated
who sit here may be hard to look at.
I take up the task where surgeons
leave off, painting to hide
what's missing, masks held on
by glasses or string around the ears.

If an eye is gone I'll render
its twin. You may not guess
which one is true. Artfulness
takes months and I can paint
only a few hundred for the thousands
in the Union of the Facially Wounded.
My masks are galvanized copper,
thin as a visiting card,
worth their weight in gore.

For lashes and brows, perhaps
a mustache, I cut their hair,
sliver foil in the manner
of Greek statues. There are
no mirrors here. Only the blind
keep their spirits up. Where
do I paint the melancholy?

Some say I give them back
their souls. A woman told
her husband she no longer
finds him hideous as she
had a right to. They last
a few short years, my thin
soldiers, become battered,
dog-eared. You should have
seen them. They're gone now.
The men wanted to be buried
with theirs on.

The Stabbing

Richard Waring

No big deal, he says, it was
an accident. But I know it wasn't.
His wounds say otherwise, my son's
blood on his bedroom floor, splattered
on doors and walls, on his copy
of Schumann's Ghost Concerto.

He survived his girlfriend
who cut him—off from family,
from colleagues, and now—
with a knife she found in his desk.
I am on my knees cleaning blood.

Dried blood runs down his leg
like tears on a cheek after weeping.
His sister redresses his wounds.
Then he sleeps and I watch
the boy I love more than God.

She stabbed him twice in his back—
once in his thigh—under his arm—
and the middle finger of his left hand
that he needs to play the oboe.
He had wanted to break things off.

Just not this way.

Richard Waring is a poet and senior layout artist for the New England Journal of Medicine. His poems have appeared in numerous journals and anthologies. A book of poetry, *What Love Tells Me*, is forthcoming from WordTech Communications. Email: rwaring@nejm.org.