

ERICA BERNHEIM

*Nightdoctors*

A grave must be robbed within ten days  
of burial, a simple but back-breaking process.  
Medical students in eighteenth century  
London had to supply their own cadavers.  
Discovery was the enemy;  
they were often beaten by the families  
of the deceased. You can recognize  
the words and not understand the sentence.  
What is the only other option,  
kneeling beside a grave, anabolic  
minds reminding them why we do  
learn without bleeding, without  
cutting into what we've taken such  
pains to resurrect. Best to define this  
as love not ringing true. A broken finger,  
a horse's tail, the forgotten end of a hedgehog  
always open, always the proof of your crimes.

Somewhere in Sussex, in his bedroom,  
a small boy is lifted by these thoughts.  
One day, people will scramble to fetch things  
for him, and he will never sit by bright windows  
again. He will dream of darkness and of the feel  
of his fingernails against a burlap death sack,  
how they catch against the rough edges,  
the one whose legs swung to the ground  
when he ran with her, and it seemed to him  
the earth beneath her naked feet gave of her,  
her bumping against him in quick time.