

Preparing the Heart

When it's scribbled on a church bulletin
by a three year old, it seems insanely simple.

But then it's stripped down, this oblong
organ, a pig's heart in your hands.
Heavy and firm, life clings to its
membrane like snow to ground in middle May.
The collapsed aorta sags
like breasts when the children are all weaned.
The ventricles, still reeling from their sudden stop,
shudder in the small curve of your palm.
Your fingers plunge into valves
and arteries, washing out what remains
of days spent rooting
for clods of grass or mangle beet.
The heart strings, languid keepers
of the atria, snap with the knife's quick
tug, splaying the valves
wide as canyons. And the pocked landscape
of the endocardium, furrowed as a meadow
after forage, holds the entire story

like a single sentence whispered
into the sliver of space that separates two lovers
when the wine is deep and the evening light, sung
every time there is a breath.

Then again, the clots, red and bright as rubies
hidden in the ruddy chambers, barely
leave a trace in the sink
as they slip slowly toward the drain.
And the apex, steady arrow pointing
onward, sits aimless on the counter top.

Amy Schmidt is a poet by passion, farmer by necessity, and nurse by trade. Her poems have been published in several journals including *Calyx* and *Santa Clara Review*. She lives with her husband and daughter in northeast Minnesota where snow is a given and sun is a gift.