

POEM

William Carlos Williams circumcises Ernest Hemingway's first son

So I said, sure, and why not? The next sweet
morning of Paris
drunk with the warm scent
of rain on gravel
in Luxembourg Gardens
and my head as big as a bucket
a — shall we say — aftereffect
of the prizefights we went to
the night before
the four of us
roiled in the grit and sawdust and sweat
— *Kill him!*
Kill the bastard! — Flossie cried.
So I picked up my leather kit and went back
to Hem's flat
laid the kid on the kitchen table
and lopped off his foreskin
— *his teeny binky*, Hadley cried —
which in those days
was what you did. At the sight of Bumby's blood,
bloody big Hem
standing at the side of the table
holding the kid's head
collapsed
a sack of potatoes, a tin of lard
fainted *ker-boom*
dead to the world. After the days in Paris
they kept asking me
how could I go back
to the pale complexities of practice?
To the grime
of Rutherford's bodies?
The drum of routine —
I think of Hem on the floor at the first drop
of his son's blood.
What a man! It isn't anything
I could explain, I tell them. Just call it
making a living.



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Dr. Coulehan's most recent collection of poems is *Medicine Stone* (Fithian Press; 2002).