POEM

William Carlos Williams circumcises Ernest Hemingway's first son

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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 — after-effect
 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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Jack Coulehan's most recent collection of poems is *Medicine Stone* (Fithian Press; 2002).