

POEM

Aesculapius

From Apollo, whose portfolio
included music, poetry,
and the sun, and who as usual

had philandered with a mortal,
came Aesculapius, whose arrival
was anything but normal.

Slashed from his mother's womb
as his father's sister killed her
for her human failings, abused

by fosterage with a centaur
who trained him to be a doctor,
and pestered by another

of his father's militant sisters
by dosing him with Gorgon,
no wonder the bastard stood out

from the assembled heroes,
the real thing, the consummate
doctor, the Argive Osler,

who could cure Philoctetes' sore,
Medusa's hair, Medea's tortured
character, or Achilles' heel,

until he succumbed to the lure
of fame and glittering gold,
by tinkering with the nature

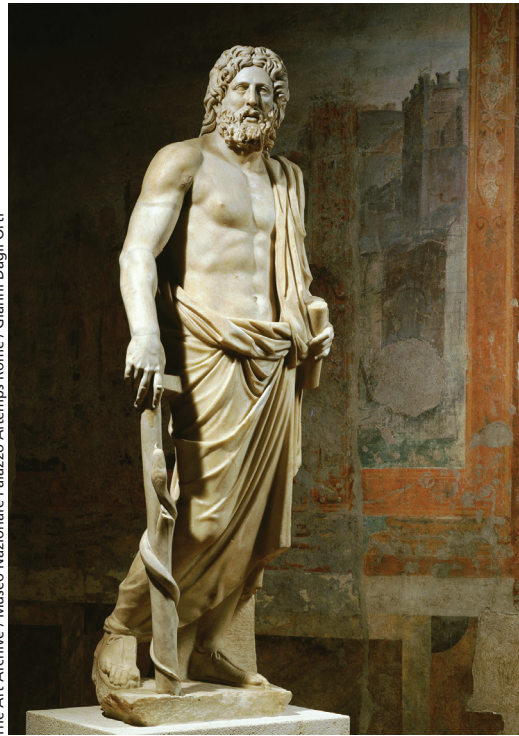
of Fate, refusing to surrender
a patient whose time had come,
by conjuring intensive care,

bypass, ventricular assist,
and CPR. Zeus cast a bolt
of lightning at his grandson's
hubris-ridden body, but, in a move
as close as Thunder Bringer
ever came to love, transformed

the corpse of his wayward grandson
into the god of healing, a gift
of being born with good connections.

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Dr. Coulehan's most recent collection of poems
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The Art Archive / Museo Nazionale Palazzo Altemps Rome / Gianni Dagli Orti

This marble statue of Aesculapius, the Greek god of medicine and healing, presides over his sanctuary on the Tiberine Island, Rome, Italy.