Also by Janet Sutherland:

Burning the Heartwood
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For Paddy, my mother

Patricia Evelyn Sutherland

David Miners
3rd August 1949 – 22nd March 2009

Jo Jones
12th December 1934 – 3rd December 2006
1.
lately I’ve been walking
in the gardens of the dead
and made myself
at home

the plum trees
are weighed down
their branches propped
with sticks such fruit

hangs abundant
as wasps scout juice
and enter the glass
traps impossible

texts are written
in their bloom
my thumbs ache
to trace them
Illumination

At dark all our houses are lit up
no one speaks but of glory in light
whatever we are most afraid of

you’d lie naked and alone
under stars
they’d make you cry if you could

be adrift
spaced, faint, distant
from fear that lights us all

rush lamp, candle, bare electric bulb
Garden

1

letting the stones drift
through soil
upwards as if gravity
could be absent
as if the heart
was light

as if the sun pulls
not just the green
leaf and stem
and the sap
which will subside
but the hard stuff
it’s built on

2

bindweed and couch
unravel
their parchment
sinews
gathered in the soil
will burn like straw
the earliest broad beans
bitter in the pod
and I remember

it wasn’t worth going home
you said
“just the white lights shining
through the dark trees and
not a soul passing”
The lost wax process

I cut my nails and make
the image of a child in wax

imagine the fragile bone
begin the heart summon

its strength stroked skin
luminous as a pearl

I look beneath translucency
to where fine webs of vessels
curl in scripted labyrinths
impossible to read
Cicatrice

spreading her legs
the labia minora
opened like a bud

the clitoris
is easy to excise
a penknife will do it

roughen the inner edges
of the labia majora
tie her knees and thighs

haemorrhage shock
septicaemia fever

types I to III in pictures
document how much is altered
how much cut
and what is sewn with gut or thorn
or held abraded till the scar
can form

how tissue thin it is
at first
the female element
how dangerous

urinary and rectal fistula

on a dirt floor or in a doctor’s offices
woman to woman
down the matrilineal line
these secret lacerations
type IV (not pictured)
gathers all the rest
like pricking of the clitoris
with pins or narrowing the opening
with herbs or other harmful substances
one hundred million women
three million girls each year
infertility still birth
“they pulled my legs apart”
“four strong women
held me down”
and I’m reminded how we used to go
into the pen at home
I’d hold a six week calf against the wall and he
with burning iron
would press against the growing tips of horn
 disbudding them
cysts abscesses open wounds
her monthly blood backs up
and exits drop by drop
when asked she says her urine flow is
“normal”
the question is rephrased—how long to urinate?
“15 minutes, normal”
is what she says

*pelvic infections*  *UTI*

then there’s the second cut

her husband on their wedding night
must cut her to consume
to consummate

*vaginal closure*  *painful intercourse*

her husband goes to war
her husband’s mother sews her smaller
keeps her pure

*acute urinary retention*
*prolonged obstructed labour*

one hundred million women
three million girls each year