

Jacob's ladder

He was coming in dead, the man who fell off the ladder. Pulseless
for ten minutes, travelling in from somewhere near Yarmouth. They told me
what an opportunity this was, as we waited
to put a tube in a dead man's throat (even if he were dead, or more so
perhaps if he were,

because intubations are not easy,
and chances to practise are rare).

Here is the device to lift the jaw — you must not break
any teeth: even people whose lives have been saved
will sue over broken teeth,

although the ladder-man, when he came, was beyond saving.
I pulled at his jaw, shining the light
into his throat, looking
for the opening to the trachea. Don't intubate his esophagus, I thought.
But there was nothing to see except fluid
in his stiffening throat. There was no point in trying further, and I said so
to the ERP, who nodded.

I think there were other things we did, too,
minor procedures that I have forgotten, just as I have forgotten
how he looked, lying on the stretcher,
or his name,

or what was said when we decided to stop.
The point was, we were trying to save his life,
in a way.

I didn't feel too bad
that I didn't get the tube in. I was only an intern.
They say to breathe life into the dead takes practice.

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