



Thud: the cadaver

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It's finally here
In front of me
The cadaver
Stiffly stretched
Naked and brown
On a
White metal table
In the Dissection Hall.

It's finally here
Fine specimen of Human Anatomy
And he's not that bad.
Except for the smell of formalin
And human fat
Gone rancid.

I am going to get beneath the skin
Of this cadaver
Who
Might have been
Somebody's father
Someone's lover
Breadwinner
Philanderer?
I will dissect
The cadaver.

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Thud
What was that?
Over there.
Near the big picture window
Through which I see a Laburnum.
Someone's fainted.
(Do people really faint "Thud!" like
that?)
What's his name?
It's first day in dissection
None of us know each other.

They said
(Last night at dinner in the hostel
mess)
One of you will faint.
Someone always does.

So...Thud!
It's over.
They're taking him (whoever he is)
Out for some fresh air.
It is a bit stuffy in here
Think it may be the fumes of formalin
Coming off my man's dead body.
The cadaver I mean.
That I will dissect.
Have to dissect.

(Thud!) I wonder why he fainted.
Maybe someone just died
In his family.
I would find that very difficult
To think...
Must not think.
About this man
The cadaver.

Brand new shiny scalpel and forceps
Brand new white lab coat with pockets
It's me here finally
Me and my cadaver.

Guess he was not a huge eater.
Mr. Jack Sprat's
Got no fat
Just as well
The little he does have
Is very greasy and rancid.

The Hall is massive
Diluting my horror
To a vague uneasy rumbling
That resembles nausea.

The dissection manual
On my lap
Lies freshly open to
The Upper Limb.
I need help to work my way through
The fat and gristle
Careful not to ruin
The nerves and vessels
In Jack Sprat's skinny-winny
Right arm.
(The Tutor said he wants it
Nicely exposed
And demonstrated.)

I'm lost in this book
Hard cover bestseller
Maze of dead Latin
Flexor digitorum superficialis
Flexor digitorum profundus
Subclavius. Anconeus. Trapezius.

We're easing off the skin and fat today
(It's taken most of the morning)
Tomorrow we begin the slow
Unraveling of Mr. Sprat
Upper Limb
Lower Limb
Abdomen
Pelvis
Perineum

It's a very structured program
Limbs and all below the diaphragm
Now
Everything above
For later.

I step back and admire my handiwork.
I'm pleased
And relieved
I've survived
(Thud)
The cadaver.

Dissection over
Time for lunch
And
Time to wash instruments
And greasy hands
With a dull brown carbolic soap
Like the kind we use on the dog
At home
(I miss him).

The washing place at the back of the
Hall
Is a clean white communal
Porcelain sink.
All taps are open
As novice dissectors
Rinse and watch
Grease and gristle go down the drain.
Some burial ground.
(Poor cadaver.)

What's the thing over there?
I ask the Tutor
Looking over my shoulder.
At a long gray cement coffin.
That? That's the formalin head tank.
(The Tutor's bored by polite
conversation)
What's in it?
(Scrub, scrub, scrub)
(My hands are still greasy)
Heads.
(Wash gristle and fat down the drain)
Heads? What heads?
Cadaver heads. (Stupid)
For next Semester. (Thud)
