



## 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)

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