

# POETRY

## ***Gross Anatomy***

From dream of a steamy  
Baltimore day, he returns,  
eyes open at last. Nearer

to death than I'd ever been,  
I'd stripped his muslin pajamas  
and peeled back dusky skin

to find pale latissimus  
dorsi and lung's empty  
pockets. His final job,

medical school cadaver, for  
me to trace radial artery's  
stream into hand's

gesture, his caress. More  
hours spent with him than my lover,  
I longed to tell him my name.

Not just an unclaimed body  
I met him again  
as dock worker, waiter, a man as

determined to survive as this woman  
in a lab full of men. So eager  
I was to pry open a door

to my future, I roamed hospital  
wards each weekend searching  
for surgery, for child-

birth, anything to begin. In dream  
he wakes and takes my skinny  
white hand. *You people don't know*

*how to dance but I'm going  
to show you.* Once more he offers  
his arm and together we glide.

**Connie Donovan**

***Being a Surgeon***

*For My Father*

Your mother introduced you as her son the surgeon,  
followed immediately with a detailed description  
of all the schools you attended out East.  
She'd explain it like a recipe with step-by-step directions  
and as if no one else accomplished such feats.

Your neighbors pointed to your house on the corner,  
would say proudly that a doctor lived there  
as if your presence raised their status somehow,  
as if they were safer for it, knowing that  
in the middle of the night if their child were to  
become deathly ill or their own chest to tighten  
and their breath to fail, you, the doctor, would come  
running from across the street, bag in hand.

Whatever the case, when the big, black phone rang  
during dinner, we knew as your children that a patient  
was describing some condition of the body  
and when you diagnosed in a language  
of long, syllabic words, naming medicines  
the way an engineer names parts or fixtures,  
we'd stare at each other in wide-eyed amazement  
and you were as great as a president,  
an astronaut, and Olympic athlete.

But long ago in the early phases  
of your specialty, you realized the isolated side  
of being a surgeon. The nights when in a deep slumber  
the screaming phone jerked you awake into darkness,  
where you dressed your body like a blind man reading Braille,  
entered the black night, and drove to a home somewhere  
in the city – back at dawn to do it all again.  
The mornings walking the long halls of white-walled hospitals,  
the sterile surgery room in the back corner,  
the sedated patient who couldn't talk,  
the hours of cutting, removing, calling out  
for instruments, closing up. The afternoons

moving from room to room, one condition  
to another, consulting patients, struggling

for laymen terms. And hours before heading home,  
the charting, the dictating, the returning phone calls.  
Then later at home when asked about your day,  
you could only say it was fine because  
the language you knew to describe it  
only another doctor could understand.

**Yvonne Higgins Leach**

## **Anatomy Lessons**

### 1. Anatomy of the Body

If I hadn't worked for a doctor I wouldn't have had  
the chance to help suture a girl who fell through a glass window,  
arm flayed, ulna exposed elbow to wrist. None of the nurses  
had the stomach for it, so Doc came out to the front  
where I was receptionist, asked if I could handle it.  
From then on I helped excise sebaceous cysts, planter warts,  
assisted with pap smears, gave the injections: allergy, baby,  
hormone; assisted with pre- and postnatal checkups, learned  
how to pick up an infant firmly, confidently weighing it;  
helped remove hot lead from a guy's face, his eyelashes  
had to come out. Learned how to spell diarrhea, hemorrhoids,  
that duodenitis was common, saw men faint, several times.  
Held one man, applying pressure to his lacerated jugular,  
while we waited for an ambulance. Comforted a distraught  
woman who could barely walk as two men held her up by the arms  
dragging her in for a sedative because her poodle died. Couldn't  
understand how she could react that way until 30 years later  
*my* legs buckled when they had to put my Westie to sleep.

### 2. Anatomy of the Mind

If I hadn't answered Sister Florine who asked in an interview  
if I was Catholic with, *No, but I have a good friend who is*,  
I wouldn't have been the only non-Catholic hired  
at *Our Lady of Providence* under the strictest order of nuns,  
*Daughters of Divine Providence*. Might have missed the chance  
to work with abused, autistic girls; learn that Diane Sexton had a split  
personality, undiscovered until I heard her speak each day in two distinct  
voices. The submissive, left side of *Diana's* body bruised from the bullying  
of *Diane's* right fist. What if I never met shy Andrea, who repeatedly drew  
stick figures of herself folded inside a circle? Couldn't have coaxed her into  
telling me the circle was the window of the clothes dryer where her mother  
stuffed her for being a "bad girl." And I wouldn't have met Marie, 14,  
diminutive "bird girl," tiny as a five-year-old, contorted features, webbed  
feet and language so nasal, it was barely comprehensible. No one had listened  
to her talk about the musculoskeletal system. She found an old anatomy text,  
showed it to me day after day, pointing to the ulna, wrist, elbow,  
pressing my arms to feel mine. I let her touch my face, my head. She  
studied every bone in the human body, told me she was going to be  
a doctor, and that she knew she wasn't pretty.

### 3. Anatomy of the Soul

If I hadn't been drawn to art history I might not have risked opening a gallery, giving up a secure job. Drawn to the psychology behind Munch's *Scream* which sublimates anxiety, reverberates loss, or Magritte's *Lover's*, portrait of a couple with cloth draped around their heads; the image inspired by the suicide of his mother whom he discovered washed up on the shore, nightgown wrapped around her head. Wouldn't have learned about Picasso's cruelty toward women. How distorted faces of his weeping women weren't simply the influence of African art on Cubism, but also trophies of masochism. Wouldn't have realized how heavy baskets on the backs of Rivera's peasants gathering Calla lilies, seemed to be lightened by their quiet dignity, the figures appearing sturdy and ethereal all at once. Or the lacerating truth in the self portraits of Frida Kahlo who made the pain of a broken spine and a broken heart palpable, her intact spirit holding it all together. I wouldn't have learned that I could stage something of myself in the theater of Rembrandt's, *Dr. Tulp Demonstrating the Anatomy of the Arm*, physicians studying the ulna and tendons, their detachment and restraint exposed as the bruised passion of Van Gogh, Pollock who used color as pulse. Saw that beauty can be an emollient that sinews through the smallest openings to soothe even the deepest wounds.

**Diane Shipley DeCillis**

### **Listening**

I am listening to the audiotapes of the Scott Peterson trial.  
The fertilizer salesman accused of double homicide;  
a charge for his wife Laci  
and one for Conner, his unborn son of 8 months.

There are no cameras in this courtroom.  
So I listen to taped conversations  
of Scott, and his mistress Amber  
as I watch still pictures of them on TV.

He is making these calls from the house he shared with Laci;  
the house where the nursery waits for baby Conner,  
who is at the bottom of San Francisco Bay with his mother.  
I cannot stop listening.

He tells Amber he is on a business trip in Europe,  
But he is home in Modesto while friends and strangers search for Laci.  
He tells her elaborate lies – like details in a novel  
and I think of the times some man has lied to me.

He tells her about the Eiffel Tower  
at night with fireworks on New Year's Eve  
wishing her a Happy New Year  
sometimes I forget this is not a love story.

He tells her he went jogging in Brussels  
and tripped over cobblestones in the street  
he tells her he misses her, he calls her baby and sweetie  
I remind myself this is a murder trial.

Amber knows he is lying,  
she is taping calls for the police  
because they suspect he is the murderer.  
I wonder if she still cares about him.

There are over 200 calls of Amber and Scott on tape.  
It's like I'm eavesdropping on lovers,  
and sometimes when he says goodnight  
just for a minute – I believe him.

**Janet Flora**

### ***Five Sure-Fire Steps For Rescue***

1.  
How it's done  
(you know already)  
no one knows. Feather-not-possible,  
it flies. You say *how? how?* and hear:  
the noise we make in pain.
2.  
Yet pressed  
like a blade along a life  
pain leaves  
these parts enlarged.
3.  
Swollen, it returns, asking  
*How?* How did you  
survive me? Also meaning:  
how did I find you, kindly host  
who gave me a place  
to blaze, to die?
4.  
You become the vast  
sky specializing in birds  
and other longing.
5.  
And you are the grave:  
the finished, what flies.  
What are the major feathers of the wing?  
You will answer *Pain, our darling*,  
who brought parting, knowledge, arms.
6.  
What comes after  
is similar to the day you were named:  
open, intentioned, prone  
to cherish and err.

**Nancy White**

**Father Damien Observes His Feet**

If life is a frozen pond etched by skates  
of Flemish youths built like oxen,  
scarved and ruddy in fields of snow,  
sniffing winter the way a hound  
scents a rabbit darting into the woods,

then death is a colony of faceless souls,  
a forest of scarred skin, lost fingers, claws  
and stumps, its leaves a canopy of bindings  
that tape a hand together, or patch a foot  
for walking crutchless.

And heaven is a jungle teeming with orchids,  
filling a hole where a nose once was, with stems  
of clean bone and petals of immaculate flesh,  
where strong hands, once mittened and stinging,  
lace leather work boots and wield a hammer  
to build white houses and a church on the green.

And hell is an island where lava of ash and fire  
cannot scour pocked cheeks, cannot swallow  
lesions inch by senseless inch or, where nostrils  
merge, cannot mend the dark void of breath.

So sighs a Belgian priest in the hills of Kalaupapa  
who peels off his socks, and, in an evening ritual,  
soaks his feet in a scalding tub, only to discover  
he cannot feel his toes.

**Donna Pucciani**



***Moon Ingenue***

above Chautauqua pulls clouds  
before her face as I pull silk  
aside to look at her.  
Somewhere west of here  
her face is pink,  
she is large as a balloon,  
as she was perhaps here  
while I listened to music.

How often she must  
play her parts over again,  
rising pink, or red, or orange,  
a baby's face, fire in the trees,  
a piece of fruit,  
only to put on the silver of elegance  
or the white of mourning  
as she climbs the curved ceiling.

She does this, often  
unnoticed, every night,  
and every night shows us  
more, or less,  
of her dusky face,  
which the sun tints for her,  
like a madam  
with powder and brush.

She offers no sound,  
no scripted message,  
no voice of Perdita or Portia  
pleading her case. We  
have only the vision,  
a pattern that we watch  
over and over until it  
matches ours.

**Gay Baines**

**Georgia O'Keeffe: Pastel, 1941**

*(after a painting by Georgia O'Keeffe)*

girl, just look at that flower

all green and yellow  
swimming together  
spilling  
over the edge  
like rainbow sherbet  
mama made in july  
and spooned into glass cups  
that slipped  
from our sticky hands,  
crashing  
on the black and white  
linoleum she laid  
when too old  
to bear children.

just look at those petals

fringed in lavender  
a feather boa  
she tossed  
over her shoulder  
cascading  
down a satin back  
saturday nights  
as daddy dipped her  
to radio blues  
with us praying  
for long legs  
and to stay up past nine.

never cared for real orchids

those hothouse types  
too busy  
being fussed over  
and still don't bloom  
like that purple flower  
mama loved

*Poetry*

---

to wear on her birthday  
storing it  
in the icebox  
till petals turned brown.

**Chella Courington**

***For Leah Like Chocolate***

I feel you like some kind of half-melted chocolate ice cream,  
the creamy, natural kind  
all melted down into my gears.

That would be, down into the middle plate, the sac of intestine...  
NO! It is the interlocking gears that you see in a factory  
where the grease occasionally drips from the heat  
and the sprockets do their destined work over and over,  
one clockwise, and one counterclockwise,  
though they meet as a river and flow together in the same direction  
spiraling into their eddy – the river eddy,  
of American rivers, and rapids and river bends.

There have been eons of life, and plants regenerated.  
There have been suntans peeled, and seasons half-spent.  
There have been the long walks where the rubber wears through.

Where is your finger right now??  
Holding your mouse, c'mon, admit it!  
Where is your brow?  
Where is your thirst, somehow??  
Where are your plans and your line of sight???

Where are the elephant ears, swaying heavy and thick?  
Where are the elephant ears...turning in the grass?  
Where are the elephant trunks, swinging for water?  
Where are the elephant trunks, speaking to their brothers?  
The grasses of Kalahari growing sweet with the heat.

My thinking head, feels you as chocolate, living in my body.  
My thinking plate, remembers you from a long time ago.  
My remembered, leaning shoulders  
drink from the cup of your summertime.

This ant crawling a thousand miles, three times  
or, three miles, a thousand times  
will look to the left, and then to the right,  
and entertain her travels until she reaches her goal.

Leah, oh, the melted chocolate Leah

*Poetry*

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You are ordained on this day  
to find me sleeping in my bed,  
because I may have risen too early.  
You are destined to find me in my sleep, and having risen too early,  
you are ordained to find me, sleeping in your melted chocolate.

**Patty Boss**

***I tried to sleep***

beside you in the night,  
but could not seam the space between us:  
you, far in depths I could not fathom,  
and I, peering into benthic realms.

No comfort in the room, dead  
silent in the lateness of the hour.  
The clock spun out its digits one by one  
into the deep. You dreamt.

And sighed. I became  
a single bell. No one to touch  
the calyx of the flower.  
The bed was all I had to hold me.

**E. Louise Beach**

***Down Light Years***

The angel  
looked like my daughter  
and like my mother's mother.  
She was the size of the former  
and the shape of the latter.  
Her hair hung long and loose.  
She emanated light.  
She ran as nimbly as a child  
and led me to the threshold.  
She sat down in my lap.  
I knew that she was very old.  
She filled me with the joy  
that I remembered from my mother.  
I asked, Can other people see you, too?  
Without a word she told me, They will see,  
when you show them.  
And there, where I had touched her,  
my hands shone forth

**Anesa Miller**

### ***Ruminations in the Parking Lot***

Why are the sea gulls shopping here,  
if not for *White Stag*, *No Boundaries* or *Faded Glory*?  
Is there some other story? Coffee, Tea or You,  
or just practicing beach and gray-sky calls  
over concrete, carts, and Handicapped Blue?  
This turf is for blackbirds of the piercing cry, haughty  
strut and beady stare. It's not for you to straddle  
halogen in your evening wear of dove-gray,  
black tie in this car-lot of no swells,

no breakers. What lures you, displaced  
gracefuls—calls you from rides  
on a rogue wind, pushing lace-topped tides  
to stock minnow meals in pellucid sloughs?  
You've paid your dues, and dour land birds  
are the parking lot denizens. Surely you harbor  
an unnatural appetite for hors d'oeuvres  
that do not swim or paddle, though you buzz  
pedestrians on stony reaches as when  
dive-bombing the deep, or cruising

the beaches. For whatever draws you  
to the superstore, super birds, I pray you reap  
the sea god's pardon as you vie for the rail  
over the holy grail of the WAL-MART sign  
where no whitefish, black fish, shrimp  
or snail, no fiddler crab scuttles for safety.  
And may *our* God absolve us our sins  
of the past—our ever-advancing  
tsunami of concrete, steel, and glass.

**Nola Perez**



***Catherine, the Côte d'Azur; The Anhinga  
On My Dock***

At the edge of the dock he perches  
in his shadowy beauty, as dark as Lucifer,  
at the edge, always, where he lives.  
Facing east to the rising sun, wings outstretched  
like Christ crucified, his tubular neck twists

snake-like, as he warms in Jesus light.  
He does not live in the temporal light I love,  
its gift-wrapped, pulsing, transforming reflections  
through windows from the lake, igniting  
a thousand candles through the leaves'

obeisance to breeze like whispered messages  
of Chinese fans. Beak preening feathers  
are his morning ablutions, preparatory to flight—  
wings wide to the sun, a mighty stretch  
in his neck as he drinks in warmth

like Catherine in the little cruiser on the breast  
of the *Méditerranée*, offering body to sky,  
eyes closed, legs dangling over the edge,  
face lifted to the sun: its Côte d'Azur blaze,  
storing light for the gray Paris winter.

Catherine, in her solitude, the water bird  
in his. No child, no anhinga offspring,  
no cheers nor clapping hands, just this lone  
observer drawn to window and boat  
for the pleasure of prayers.

**Nola Perez**