

A Certain Anesthesia

Category: Poems

written by Arthur Ginsberg | May 30, 2008

Arthur Ginsberg

Exhaustion sets in by day's end
when the old Pakistani woman
hobbles into my office.
Raccoon eyes underscore the pain
she feels in her left leg. More cavalier
than a Hippocratic disciple should be,
I pull up her djellaba* to expose
the dark, tumescent flesh of her calf
monogrammed by serpiginous veins.
I am too aggressive with the needles
that search for the source
of the white-hot poker lancinating
from ankle to groin, muscular infidelity.

She is stoic,
so well schooled in cruelty
that even I pretend not to see
the slight jiggle of her jaw, enough
to tell me I have crossed the border
of disrespect. Apocryphal as it may be,

this is what I have to give
at the end of the day, a certain anesthesia
for the provenance of pain, how
she stands after it is all over,
rearranges her covering, and leaves me
speechless with the tent of her hands.

*pronounced je-lab': A long, hooded garment with full sleeves, worn especially in Muslim countries.

About the poet:

Arthur Ginsberg MD is a neurologist and poet based in Seattle. He has studied poetry at the University of Washington and at Squaw Valley with Galway Kinnell, Sharon Olds and Lucille Clifton. Recent work appears in the anthologies *Blood and Bone* and *Primary Care*, both from the University of Iowa Press. He was awarded the William Stafford prize in 2003.

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