

Lunch and Afterwards · *Dannie Abse*

Lunch with a Pathologist

My colleague knows by heart the morbid verse
of facts—the dead weight of a man’s liver,
a woman’s lungs, a baby’s kidneys.

At lunch he recited unforgettably,
“After death, of all soft tissues the brain’s
the first to vanish, the uterus the last.”

“Yes,” I said, “at dawn I’ve seen silhouettes
hunched in a field against the skyline, each one
feasting, preoccupied, silent as gas.

Partial to women they’ve stripped women bare
and left behind only the taboo food,
the uterus, inside the skeleton.”

My colleague wiped his mouth with a napkin,
hummed, picked shredded meat from his canines,
said, “You’re a peculiar fellow, Abse.”

No Reply

Why?

because
when I went home no-one was home
because I knew I was awake
(a man asleep is a man enslaved)

I stood up, walked into the hall
where I dialled the number
because of some strange ancestor
because I'm Welsh because I'm a Jew
because the audible clock's rounder
than any circle I can draw
because I've shared the particular
lunatic boredom of caged animals
because I've been touched on a scar
and felt nothing or almost nothing
because when sick I'm still a doctor
because pathologists aver
"The first organ to disappear
is the brain—the uterus the last"
because I shan't forget that ever
because I walked into the hall where
I stood next to the telephone
I thought of a number doubled it.