Spinal tap

The long needle glints ominously between my index finger and thumb.

Breath held, I stab the beveled tip through orange swabbed skin past a fortress of bony ramparts till I feel, more than hear, the pop of the membrane buttressing the moat that guards the kingdom. Stylet withdrawn, the shaft becomes an aqueduct, sluicing the clear elixir that pours from a well housed deep in the citadel overhead.

I’ve traveled here before, on the outskirts of the sanctum sanctorum—a disciple unworthy of this intimacy, this trust.

The column of fluid settles at 100 millimeters on the manometer, fluctuation timed with respiration, rhythmic as waves, no bloodstain or yellow blight. All fears of invasion erased.

Once I knew nothing of this anatomy, the precise geometry of disc on bone, sac that holds the tendrils of our nerve roots more intricate than any man-made marquetry.

The cold smell of the cubicle, a soft groan from the woman curled like a fetus on her side, turns my reverie to the drip, slow as snowmelt, the steel shaft that slips out to clatter in the tray—the only weapon these hands will ever wield.
Spinal tap
Arthur Ginsberg

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