

Showering My Son

Now over one hundred pounds,
your soft body like the lead drape
a technician places before an X-ray.
Like Titian's *Venus of Urbino*, white and pink—
sans all that hair, sans the sentience in the eyes.
Every day for almost twenty-four years,
my arms under your shoulder blades and knees,
I scoop you out of bed, pivot you
to the blue-mesh chaise on wheels.
Your three stomata—a constellation
from throat to belly to bladder. Oh, the way
plastic meets the flesh. Our little mystery,
our science experiment, our boy. Let us
wheel to the shower now. I'll sluice warm
water over your chest, little tuft of hair.
I'll lift each arm and rinse your musky
man odor. I'll soap your groin, your legs,
and your rocker-bottom feet with those
toes crossed for good luck. I'll shampoo
your hair, a sort of translucence. I'll shave
your chin, press a warm cloth gently
to each eye, the whorl of each ear,
the nape of your neck under the trach tie.
And then, the swaddle of towels,
the wheeling back to bed, and we'll
become *After the Bath* by Degas—
the hairbrush and the awkward limbs.
I'll lotion your knobby knees, thin shins,
each little finger that has never held
anything. I'll fluff your pillow,
cover you with your soft old blanket,
read you a poem. I'll be Frank O'Hara,
made for the lunchtime ritual of the city,
made for kangaroos, aspirins, beachheads, and biers.
"These things are with us every day," he says.
Made for the daily touch, for the reminder—
"You really are beautiful!" he says.