*[Margaret Atwood](http://www.ronnowpoetry.com/poetspoems.html" \l "Atwood)*

**Footnote to the Amnesty Report on Torture**

The torture chamber is not like anything  
you would have expected.  
No opera set or sexy chains and  
leather-goods from the glossy  
porno magazines, no thirties horror  
dungeon with gauzy cobwebs; nor is it  
the bare cold-lighted  
chrome space of the future  
we think we fear.  
More like one of the seedier  
British Railways stations, with scratched green  
walls and spilled tea,  
crumpled papers, and a stooped man  
who is always cleaning the floor.  
  
It stinks, though; like a hospital,  
of antiseptics and sickness,  
and, on some days, blood  
which smells the same anywhere,  
here or at the butcher's.  
  
The man who works here  
is losing his sense of smell.  
He's glad to have this job, because  
there are few others.  
He isn't a torturer, he only  
cleans the floor:  
every morning the same vomit,  
the same shed teeth, the same  
piss and liquid shit, the same panic.  
  
Some have courage, others  
don't; those who do what he thinks of  
as the real work, and who are  
bored, since minor bureaucrats  
are always bored, tell them  
it doesn't matter, who  
will ever know they were brave, they might  
as well talk now  
and get it over.  
  
Some have nothing to say, which also  
doesn't matter. Their  
warped bodies too, with the torn  
fingers and ragged tongues, are thrown  
over the spiked iron fence onto  
the Consul's lawn, along with  
the bodies of the children  
burned to make their mothers talk.  
  
The man who cleans the floors  
is glad it isn't him.  
It will be if he ever says  
what he knows. He works long hours,  
submits to the searches, eats  
a meal he brings from home, which tastes  
of old blood and the sawdust  
he cleans the floor with. His wife  
is pleased he brings her money  
for the food, has been told  
not to ask questions.  
  
As he sweeps, he tries  
not to listen; he tries  
to make himself into a wall,  
a thick wall, a wall  
soft and without echoes. He thinks  
of nothing but the walk back  
to his hot shed of a house,  
of the door  
opening and his children  
with their unmarked skin and flawless eyes  
running to meet him.

He is afraid of  
what he might do  
if he were told to,  
he is afraid of the door,  
  
he is afraid, not  
of the door but of the door  
opening; sometimes, no matter  
how hard he tries,  
his children are not there.