*[Margaret Atwood](http://www.ronnowpoetry.com/poetspoems.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22Atwood)*

**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.