

Abu Ghraib Suggests the Isenheim Altarpiece

Arms behind him shackled to the wall,
Jamadi's knees buckle. He lands on air.
Let us reposition him to stand erectly,

homo sapiens, place the irons higher up
on the window bars. When again he falls
forward, hangs like Jesus from his wrists,

call it faking, possum-playing. Persist.
Lift him up on legs that ragdoll-sag
into a third collapse, the effect

grotesque as Grunewald's Christ: bones
about to pop from their sockets. The silence
curious, raise the hood that hid a face,

asphyxiation, wag a finger past the eyes.
It has begun, the turning of the skin
to purple, the indigo of Tyre and Sidon. Note

as he's lowered to the floor, the stunning
rush of blood from nose and mouth,
the Red Sea. In this heat, let us blur

the time of death, pack the flesh in ice
like fish or meat, pretend he's merely
sick, hooked to an I.V., a patient

on a stretcher. Destroy the crime scene.
Throw away the bloodied hood. It stings
with the quality of mercy.

Note: This poem is based on material in "A Deadly Interrogation" by Jane Mayer, *The New Yorker*, Nov. 14, 2005.