



What the Body Told

Rafael Campo

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What the Body Told is the second book of poetry from Rafael Campo, a practicing physician, a gay Cuban American, and winner of the National Poetry Series 1993 Open Competition. Exploring the themes begun in his first book, *The Other Man Was Me*, Campo extends the search for identity into new realms of fantasy and physicality. He travels inwardly to the most intimate spaces of the imagination where sexuality and gender collide and where life crosses into death. Whether facing a frenetic hospital emergency room to assess a patient critically ill with AIDS, or breathing in the quiet of his mother's closet, Campo proposes with these poems an alternative means of healing and exposes the extent to which words themselves may be the most vital working parts of our bodies. The secret truths in *What the Body Told*, as the title implies, are already within each of us; in these vivid and provocative poems, Rafael Campo gives them a voice.

Lost in the Hospital

It's not that I don't like the hospital.
Those small bouquets of flowers, pert and brave.
The smell of antiseptic cleansers.
The ill, so wistful in their rooms, so true.
My friend, the one who's dying, took me out
To where the patients go to smoke, IV's
And oxygen tanks attached to them—
A tiny patio for skeletons. We shared
A cigarette, which was delicious but
Too brief. I held his hand; it felt
Like someone's keys. How beautiful it was,
The sunlight pointing down at us, as if
We were important, full of life, unbound.
I wandered for a moment where his ribs
Had made a space for me, and there, beside
The thundering waterfall of his heart,
I rubbed my eyes and thought "I'm lost."

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