

# The Spirit Is Too Blunt an Instrument

By Anne Stevenson

The spirit is too blunt an instrument  
to have made this baby.  
Nothing so unskilful as human passions  
could have managed the intricate  
exacting particulars: the tiny  
blind bones with their manipulating tendons,  
the knee and the knucklebones, the resilient  
fine meshings of ganglia and vertebrae,  
the chain of the difficult spine.

Observe the distinct eyelashes and sharp crescent  
fingernails, the shell-like complexity  
of the ear, with its firm involutions  
concentric in miniature to minute  
ossicles. Imagine the  
infinitesimal capillaries, the flawless connections  
of the lungs, the invisible neural filaments  
through which the completed body  
already answers to the brain.

Then name any passion or sentiment  
possessed of the simplest accuracy.  
No, no desire or affection could have done  
with practice what habit  
has done perfectly, indifferently,  
through the body's ignorant precision.  
It is left to the vagaries of the mind to invent  
love and despair and anxiety  
and their pain.

Anne Stevenson, "The Spirit is Too Blunt an Instrument" from *Poems 1955-2005*. Copyright © 2005 by Anne Stevenson. Reprinted with the permission of Bloodaxe Books Ltd.

[www.bloodaxebooks.com](http://www.bloodaxebooks.com)

Source: *Poems 1955-2005* (Bloodaxe Books, 2005)