

Wilderness House Literary Review 1/4

Unlikely

The words, "Smell my shit
and surmise from it when I will die"
sum up every patient request
today, regardless of diagnosis
(strange, even for urology).

The one exception, a woman
who pushes in her husband
for another unneeded checkup.

Her underlying motive
is to have his tampered catheter
pulled out again, hard.

She volunteers to inspect
his scrotum, feeling his body
for quivers of pain,
the last obvious sign of life remaining.

You bend to pick up his legs.
Your nurse's clothing is loose, easier
to remove than any porno costume.
I can now solve every geometric
equation involving your thong.

Management is quick to flee the sick
and the nighttime maintenance crew.
Even visitors are glad to leave
the dying they see
and the dead they cannot.

Though our office is far
from the overnight beds,
we stay late, for overdue work

but also because we feel as them.

Let's wait for the ammonia
to be doused in the rooms,
until the patients' scents
remain only on us.

Let us pick one and enter,
disrobe to be cleansed
by each other's sweat.

We can trust this
more than any doctor
to show we actually are alive.

Gathering

To Simon Schattner

If a poet falls and no one bothers to call
and tell the rest of us, was he really here?

Your time of death estimated, we search
for your date of birth like the police
tearing through a homeless man's bag.

Your family has already claimed you,
taken you home. Luckily, they throw us
scraps of fact, anecdote. There will be closure
only after we've pried the door open again.

At your memorial, your recorded voice seems
muffled, behind closet doors with your poems,
your harmonica, taken back to New York.
Will they be ever put to use again?

The older poets speak, at race with their words
hoping their recitations outlast them—even by minutes—
drinking in hopes of finishing quicker.

In this way, immortality can be faked. However,
their lines for you are sweat-stained whispers,
the words long having placed and gone home.

Selfish as it is, this gathering is for all of us.
We might not get another chance.