

FOR ALEX AT THE GLADMAN MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

Because he is kicking and knows
he's not going to make it, Alex
is in love with what he's painting.

He's got the mountain in, and the
mountain-and-sky-in-the-lake, is saving
all of tomorrow for the upper sky, because

“With that you got to take your time.”
There's something broken, something
whole in how he says it, and something

he's working on mending, like
how the black line of shore runs
between mountains, like *like*, like

knowing that whatever we're wanting
is not far from here—no farther, maybe,
than the fix he'll get to fix it when they

throw up their hands at his mum pastorals
and boot him out. He doesn't know
shit from you-know-what about shoes

but he's familiar with the facts upstream,
knows the paint on the Golden Gate
is poisonous and that here he wants

to use blues that refer to each other—
as in lake-blue mountain and what's
going to be the mountain-blue sky when

and if he gets there. You could say
he wants to get to the end of the line
beginning somewhere around lake-blue

mountain and moving to mountain-
blue mountain, then mountain, then m = o = u =
n = t = a = i = n and ending, presumably,

with the truth we can't quite get at.
He wants to agree with his body.
He wants to know about the bad gene,

and if it's got to do with signs
and the times—if we might as well,
for example, add the bridge to the school

lunch program: fish sticks, mashed
potatoes, jello and two licks
from a chip off the old bridge—

if he, that is, just happens to be
the century writ small enough to piss on.
But even if we *are* the scene

behind this scene, I'm still not going
to leave you with that squint from a distance
through some gritty air where bridge

and sandblaster meet as something like
a pale cloud of golden mist and the bay
below calm as a lily, but gray—

or with *gold close the mountain*
and part ways with syntax though
they're a fix of sorts. No, this

poem is for Alex. This is not a game
or a diversion. If you follow this road
as far as you can, you will arrive

at a blotch, which, if it's in the foreground,
recommends itself in the shade and the shape
of a bird, and, if it's in the background,

desires to desire to depict miles
of bay-blue sky, by Alex. It wants
the long reach out toward something true, say, —

say "True," say "Anyone can tell by looking
he's not much with us — and not for long,"
say "He was last seen in women's slippers,"

wrapped in a blanket, a man describing
a painting, clumsily describing
his many careful brushstrokes," and now

get all the way down there, say
"This could matter" say "to me,"
say it now, without blushing —

without turning elsewhere, which is
indebtedness, which is annihilation
when we can call it anything we want.