

Poem with Sedative Effect · *John Engman*

On the hospital unit where I work
a young girl wrote "I love you" on the walls

with excrement. A Valentine of shit.
I wrote in the proper blank space, "Patient

has apparently expressed hard feelings
on the evening of the 25th." There are

no easy feelings in the books I've read
about the schizophrenic, psychopath,

psychotic. "There are feelings lodged between
my stomach and my mouth I can't cough up,"

she said. Then she wept because
the color of some old hallway linoleum

was very red. I knew
of no technical term for such an act, I wrote

"This patient does not seem to be herself."
I meant neither one of us knew who she was.

Pleased to be involved in the act of love
anyone could issue

the ugly, guttural noises she did.
She called every name of god

from Lucky Stars to Elohim.
Thorazine finally put her to sleep.

Because I am instructed to mistrust appearances
every fifteen minutes

I was an astronaut lost in space
and charted the position of the girl who never moved.

She was like a mural of the dark and stars.
In a blank space on the brainboard I wrote

“Patient has apparently slept last night.”
And then I went home and wrote this poem at dawn.