

FINAL BATH

By Marc Hudson

Only Saturday, when I squeezed the last
of the coconut shampoo into my palm,
& lathered your hair, you laughed,
leaning forward on your straps. Water
streaming down your chin made a brief
translucent beard.

 This morning, I borrow
a hospital's wash cloth, dip it in a basin,
& daub your face, the fuzz along the line of your jaw,
your narrow chin. With great care, I trace
the rigid wing of your left arm, while your mother
stands opposite, performing the same silent office.

Saturday's ablutions were under the sign of Top Hat,
Fred & Ginger swirling in the mist, "dancing cheek- to-
cheek again" amid scarlet arpeggios, while we
listened to Casey Kasem's Top Forty—me clucking
at the insipid love lyrics to a surfer boy, you cracking
up at my antics, mocking my aged tastes with your sidelong
squint. I loosened your chest straps & laved your shoulder
blades, a little brusquely perhaps, surprised again

you were no longer a boy, but a lithe young man
with the shoulders & lats of a swimmer, narrow hips,
and, how shall I put it, your virginal male beauty?

 Now I pass the cloth over your chest,
your skin strangely flushed where the blood has pooled
above your heart. (Or is it from the EMT's
frantic lunge at your stillness?)
Now down the relaxed slats of your belly,
along your thighs, marbled calves, lovely
ungainly feet, our cloths sweep
as if, together, we are Christ
ministering to the desert body of Christ.

Under their long lashes, Ian, your eyes appear
half open. Most carefully, they seem to be considering
a difficult equation. Has your breath contrived
somehow to continue without its body,
the way a boat does, when its oars are shipped
and it lifts into the further wave?