

Barium swallow

These billowing gowns flatter no one
but equalise and humble us,
sitting on plastic chairs, perfumed with antiseptic
and the thought-hollows of waiting.

The nurse who takes me through
is a girl I went to primary school with,
I redden at the recognition, the want
of a joke or phrase to burst the awkwardness
peters in my mouth, with grace she reassures me
with a hand on the shoulder.

Sometimes words only undo us.

I lie on the table as the radiologist starts,
instructing me to lie on my left side
then change positions as pictures are taken
from different angles, my inner workings
lit up large and white in X-ray,
as regrets course and anxieties butterfly.

The table tilts and I gulp more barium
and it is tracked through me,
a bad postured Vitruvian man,
raw honesty percolates in frail anatomy.

Drink plenty of fluids the nurse says,
her name comes to me too late to use it,
as I redress behind a curtain,
layering and securing behind button,
zipper and buckle.