

Two Poems

Curt Last

Bed Care on A Detainee

The detainee slowly prays
to Allah
as the pain in his stump may
be increasing—
what remains
of his left leg.
HM2 Gambino and I
reinforce
the bled-through gauze,
HM2 places
the abdominal pads
around the site,
covering crimson
as I hold each on,
and he begins to wrap
the ace wraps around
the stump to secure.
The detainee winces,
lifts his stump,

trying to move against
the pain.

I pull out drenched
chux pads, quickly
toss them onto the floor,
since a biohazard can
is not within reach, slide
fresh ones under his wound.

HM2 leaves to man
the night check-in
at Patient Admin.

I enter the sanitation room
to prepare wash supplies.

The detainee is a young guy,
beard caked with mud,
a fine dirt powders him—
dirtiest patient
I've bathed so far—
must have been the 50 cal.
shell that knocked him
on his ass,

flying into the air
and meeting the earth,
no glory as Icarus,
he lives,
his left leg ripped off
below the knee.

I wash him with warm water
out of a metal basin,
shoot in
a bit of shaving cream—
a little trick
Lt. JG Karp taught me—
supposedly
gets the patient smelling
crisp and fresh.

Water turns brown
as I work through the beard,
getting out those clods
of dried dirt,
do a quick wipe
of his face,
arms, working around the restraints

and the IV site,
chest, working around the leads,
then a fresh, new basin
with warm water,
some shower gel
this time.

Now to work on that hair.

I place a pink
port-a-potty behind his head
as a water catch, a towel
around his neck and shoulders
to absorb and comfort.

I lather his thick, short hair,
as most locals have great beards
and short, well-kempt head hair.

It's a process,
though I'm cleaning him for surgery,
as he will get at least one more wash
of his amputation site
to scrape away dead meat,
ensure nothing foreign
is in the wound site.

I've gotten most of the obvious dirt,
so I head to the sanitation room
again,
empty the basin,
wash out the silt at the bottom,
fill it again with warm water,
throw in 2 Betadine scrubs
to really clean—kill bacteria—
get the water frothy
with the pink liquid soap
dripping out of the small,
silver Betadine packages,
let every drop fall in,
throw out the old wash cloth,
drying towels,
draw fresh cloth to wash
and towels to dry—this basin
for the whole body—
his arms, again, chest, again,
his groin and right leg.
He shivers from the cold—
I wipe the wetness off,
ask the Army guards to remove

the restraints so I can get
at the dirt better.

Engaging them in conversation,
I get some of the details
of the detainee's story—
caught planting an IED
with a friend, "who wasn't so lucky,"
as the short Mexican Specialist
puts it. His end I would like clarified,
for curiosity and a good story,
but I let it go.

The detached and distant know
that most of these guys plant IEDs
for the money, no religion
or politics involved,
as this is a piss poor country
where money and resources
are few, and shared only
through clans.

I work on his foot,
the Betadine scrub's hard,

plastic bristles sprinkle
dirty water on me.
I run the wet hand towel
between his toes,
wipe the brown foam
from his sole,
getting it all off somehow.
The nurse preps the bedroll
that is to replace the one
covered in dirt and water
from the bath I've given him.
We log roll him on his side
toward me,
a pillow between stump
and leg
to prevent painful contact
between the two—
arterial lines, IV lines, EKG leads
are all carefully gathered
to make sure they don't snag or pull out
with the old bed sheets,
or are mistakenly placed
under the elastic of the new bedding.

As the nurse wipes his back and ass,
I pull away the old sheets
and throw them on the floor quickly.
We lay him back down,
then log roll him toward her.
I get the fitted sheet corners in,
we lay him back down
and the bathing and linen change
are complete.

Coagulated Blood

CDR Riser tells me to clean her up. She's an Afghan National—
as we call them—40 or 50 yoa, a coif of gray in her black hair.

I return from the linen stow with a washcloth, gloved up for BSI,
lean into her—slowly work the dried blood off her left cheek,
right cheek, forehead, being careful around the loose flesh—
flaps of skin on the upper right and left sides of her face,
her flesh is delicately held together and to her head by stitches—

as the meat was torn—almost ripped off completely—in an MVA.

A neck brace bejewels her, the stem of a blackening crimson rose—
something one doesn't always see, but she has a fractured atlas—
the circular bone which the skull floats upon, connected to the axis
by four complex joints collectively known as the atlanto-axial joint.

The ICU staff's greatest worry is that she may awaken in a panic,
thrash around in delirium, and inadvertently break her neck.

Betadine and water moisten the coagulated blood coating her face
like a mask, glued into her hair, which is pasted to scalp.

The metallic odor of platelets comes back to life with the cleaning,
attacking my sense of smell. I silently gag my way through the task,
and curse my great sense of smell, though my face is unmoved.

I imagine vomiting, which would not bide well in any healthcare setting, let alone a military hospital in a war zone.

The tear along the left side of her face is open—no stitching, so the flesh is really loose. I place a wet cloth over it to moisten the dried blood, and then work away on the right side, cleaning out her ear to clarify whether or not the bleeding is run-off from facial wounds or cranial leakage.

Nothing is coming out of her ear, and there are no signs of yellow in the seepage, so she's safe, for someone with a fractured atlas.

Her face becomes clearer with each wipe, fine features keen to eyes—a working thought—*she must have been something when she was young.*

Curt Last lives between Huntington Beach, California and Chigasaki, Japan. He earned his Bachelor's Degree in Pre-Law from the University of California, Santa Barbara (1994) and his Master of Fine Arts in Poetry from California State University, Long Beach (2006). He served from 2008 to 2016 as a Hospital Corpsman in the United States Naval Reserves. Duties included various Navy clinics and hospitals, a humanitarian mission to East Timor (2010), and a deployment to the Role 3 Combat Hospital in Kandahar, Afghanistan (2011). He has been published in *Proud to Be*, *Verses and Curses*, *The Chiron Review*, *California Quarterly*, *Squaw Valley Poets Review*, *Pens On Fire*, *Literary Chaos*, *East Coast Literary Review*, and the *San Pedro River Review*, among others.