Ode to the Hotel Near the Children's Hospital

By Kevin Young

Praise the restless beds
Praise the beds that do not adjust
    that won’t lift the head to feed
    or lower for shots
    or blood
    or raise to watch the tinny TV
Praise the hotel TV that won’t quit
    its murmur & holler
Praise the room service
    that doesn’t exist
    just the slow delivery to the front desk
    of cooling pizzas
    & brown bags leaky
    greasy & clear
Praise the vending machines
Praise the change
Praise the hot water
& the heat
    or the loud cool
    that helps the helpless sleep.

Praise the front desk
    who knows to wake
    Rm 120 when the hospital rings
Praise the silent phone
Praise the dark drawn
    by thick daytime curtains
    after long nights of waiting,
    awake.

Praise the waiting & then praise the nothing
    that’s better than bad news
Praise the wakeup call
    at 6 am
Praise the sleeping in
Praise the card hung on the door
    like a whisper
    lips pressed silent
Praise the stranger’s hands
    that change the sweat of sheets
Praise the checking out

Praise the going home
    to beds unmade
    for days
Beds that won’t resurrect
    or rise
that lie there like a child should
sleeping, tubeless

Praise this mess
that can be left

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Kevin Young was born in Lincoln, Nebraska. He studied under Seamus Heaney and Lucie Brock-Broido at Harvard University and, while a student there, became a member of the Dark Room Collective, a community of African American writers. “I feel like a poem is made up of poetic and unpoetic language, or unexpected language,” Young said in a 2006 interview with Ploughshares. “I think there are many other vernaculars, whether it’s the vernacular of the blues, or the vernacular of visual art, the sort of living language of the everyday.” For roughly a decade, Young was the Atticus Haygood Professor of Creative Writing and English and curator of Literary Collections and the Raymond Danowski Poetry Library at Emory University. Young is the poetry editor of the New Yorker and the director of New York Public Library's Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.

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