

ANOINTING OF THE SICK

EMILY SCHULTEN

The man who came was not clad in robes,
he was dressed in black and he stood over you.

You were getting smaller right in front of me—
hospital gowns have a way of shrinking people.

He made pictures on your forehead with olive oil
and prayed, signed crosses into your hands.

A ritual like our mother's, when we'd cough
late at night and she'd bring the thick syrup

and a spoon, press her backhand to our
foreheads, wipe the medicine from our chins.

Father asked you to confess all your wrongs,
recounted the passion, prepared you for health

or God. I made a point to hold your hand
after the priest left, to feel the slick blessing

and pull it away on my fingertips, take it
for myself, for my fear. In my room, I moved

my hands over my whole body before kneeling to pray.