

HOSPITAL KNEES UP

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Waiting to be called, a nervous, pained stillness.
Cases, plastic carriers, beach bags, litter the floor.
An old man drifting in and out of sleep, a girl gulping tepid coffee.
Awkward attempts at conversation, slip quickly into silence.
I limp into this group, united only by fearful anticipation.
Nothing, only the ticking of the slow, leaden minutes.
My name is called. I don't hear it at first
in the bleak anonymity of this collective waiting.

Can't recognise the surgeon masked
and scrubbed up for the next sacrifice.
I hope he may be smiling beneath his armour?
I'd pray anxiously for a general anaesthetic,
Hoping to sink into woolly oblivion,
An hour or so to practise dying.
But no! only a jab in the back, an epidural,
offers a suspension between life and death.
Desperately I nod as a masked man promises, "No pain!"
Confusing, I've lost my legs.
Now I'm an ancient, marble torso in the British Museum.
I lie on one side of the Styx, awaiting a masked Charon
to row me across.
Suddenly, I'm in a blacksmith's workshop,
Hammering, tapping, metallic echoes,
Workmen banging out iron on an anvil.
Sounds of sawing, metal against bone.
Does my arthritic knee demand such violence?
I feel slightly sick, hearing my bones dismantled;
we begin life with creation and end in demolition!
I grieve for my knee, so faithful when riding horses, bicycles, running,
walking through bluebell woods, trudging through snow.
Going down escalators, up in elevators!

In Recovery now – well, just the remaining parts of me,
more metal, a little less bone.
Another step down the path of degeneration.