HOSPITAL SOLARIUM

Elisabeth Stevens

It is empty this morning, almost circular

with green slat blinds flapping

at high windows which face the river, the city skyline.

The couches are covered with green or brown plastic leather,

the chairs push back and come up with footstools.

A bowl of pink and red carnations left by someone

gone in one way or another wilts on the magazine table.

The electric nurse call button dangles from the wall like a broken arm.

There are no patients in the solarium this morning,

but the sun is here. Where are the patients?

The patients are in their rooms,

the patients are stretched out on their beds.

They wear hospital gowns that snap at the shoulders

and down the arms with red bathrobes, blue negligees or

whatever they prefer. The patients are eating, moaning,

bleeding, sleeping. Some have gone down on gurneys to x-ray.

Do the patients know the sun is in the solarium?

The sun will not go to the north-facing private rooms with

nameplates where orderlies insert signs that say:

“NOTHING BY MOUTH” the night before an operation.

The sun will not reach to their breakfast trays, their draw sheets,

their stiff, expensive arrangements of florists’ flowers.

The sun is not allowed in the west-facing, six bed wards

where someone always comes early to draw the long grey shades.

[MORE]

HOSPITAL SOLARIUM (2)

The sun lives in the solarium.

It is caressing the scuffed, red-brown floor tiles

like soft, sterile, plastic-gloved hands.

It is moving up the legs of the chairs with

gentle, exciting, surgical fingers. It is revolving

with myriad motes of dust which have lain still so

long and patiently. The sun is loosening dry seeds of

red and pink carnations. The sun is ready to dance.

Tell the patients to come to the solarium––

on crutches, in wheelchairs, or clinging to long hall railings.

In the solarium they can unsnap their hospital gowns––

not for needles and scalpels, not for probings and stitchings.

Let the sun warm sundered flesh!

Go! Summon the quick and the dying!

Here in the solarium, only in the solarium,

the sun will dance with anyone.