

POETRY

The secret of hospitals

The hospital secret: each room has a pulled curtain.
Each bed has hospital corners wrapped around that secret,
An antiseptic's sharp smell covers the scent of the secret.
Over the PA: *surgical assist in the OR* and
stat clean-up in room 413.

As a doctor, I wear a white coat.
Electric sweepers amble up the hall.
A yellow sign with a man slipping says,
WATCH YOUR STEP.
In each patient chart is a golden key.
Bedpans gleam like the eyes of maniacs,
the plastic pee bottles lined up like bowling pins.

Today I tell a man he has a kind of cancer
that refuses treatment like pride refuses help.
I write great gravestrokes in the chart
that hit the centre of the secret,
that record the bullied whelp of grief granted his revenge.

The secret is the greatest palliative of all: a pain a wince,
the stack-em-up-and-knock-em-down sorrows
that I preface with *Sorry*.

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