

Reflections of a Hospital Worker

By Tom Smario

Sitting on a wooden bench
in the subtle winter sunlight
outside this hospital
I've worked at for 27 years,
careful to avoid the callous
that envelops hospital staff
too long employed.

We forget, underneath our carapace
the emotions, the lives we touch
and destinies connected to
the faint shadows of all
who enter and leave
by the front door.
Some come laughing in,
others come crying out.
Babies are born two floors
above the morgue.
We try to realize
what we can do
with what we should.

We have the technology
to deny nature. We try
to balance knowledge
with wisdom. Doctors
have to live with their
decisions. They have to
look into God's glass eye
and see their own reflection.

I know anxiety and fear
because I've had my own
family here. I've sat
at my father's bedside
and tasted tears. Whenever
I hear an overhead page
"CODE 99," I stop and wonder
if someone's leaving,
or going to paradise.

I look down at my own nametag
with my photograph on it
and thank God it hangs
from my breast pocket,
not my big toe. Today
I took a baby aspirin
to keep my blood thin.
Tears taste salty.
Babies are born
two floors above the morgue.



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