

ICU

is a fortress, you press a button
and wait
like some malevolent bacterium.
"I'm here to see my wife"
a click, a heavy sliding. Arterial corridors
a nurse at a station
an orderly with a trolley of folded white sheets.
Another nurse, a tiny ante-room.
Hygiene is vital: over your clothes, you pull
a white gown of tough matt paper, you tie the back
slip on a face-mask, elastic behind your ears —
your breathing's toxic.
An electric ecology
bed, ventilator, ECG, all centred
on your wife, invaded by pneumonia.
Somehow you've reached the soul.
You hold her hand, you smile
and watch those eyes
see past this, past today
backwards into both-of-you.
Nurses come and go, shifts start and end.
You sit, you walk, you stow the useless gown
and mask into a rubbish bin for burning.
The hospital exhales you. You drive, you sleep.
You press a button, name, door slides.
This morning the nurse doesn't insist you tie
your sterile gown.
Beside the bed, holding that failing hand
you have no mask.

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