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poems
by
doctors

Back Ward at Glenside

Charles Montgomery

The years are a tide on this shore
That has ebbed into distance
Leaving row after row of bedstead
Washed-up like driftwood
Where I am called in the dead of night.
I lock the door behind me
And sink into a fabulous noise
That rises like the keening of gulls
Scattered on a seaweed wind.
Here all our grandparents stand dribbling
And half naked on the smooth vinyl,
Staring with the tired eyes of fish.
Forgetting what was forgotten
They part as I am led to a bed in the corner.
For some reason the smell of pine forests
Thick with evening drifts from the blankets
Clutched by fingers bleached bone white,
But she is pale and pulseless now
With the smashed crab of nothing-to-be-done
From where she fell
Matted in her hair.
I fill out a form that she does not need
And notice in her notes a photograph :
Faded and brown, a young woman
With smooth skin and a squint
Smiling at something
Beyond the camera.
Pigtails and lace collar dated 1920, insane.
Back behind the curtains
I lift the sheet clear of her face
And meet the same smile and cloudy eyes
Staring over my shoulder
To what was always out of sight,
Just behind this moment,
Her seventy lost years eddying into night.

Charles Montgomery, Consultant Psychiatrist, Exeter.

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