

Visiting Hour

Have you observed that the one behind moves what
he touches? The feet of the dead are not wont to do so.

—DANTE, *Inferno*, Canto XII

Down the long torpor of corridors the grey men echo.
Each face has the anaemia of a bankrupt.
When asked, they wince a new complaint.
Spirit has been sterilised here in the panoptic
Of chrome and enamel. The ward's breath
Is merciless as a chemistry lesson.
Outside, the day moves on, rush hour to rush hour,
But viewed as if through a gauze.
Inside are the tones of the Confessional, where
The wards are Poor Houses, named for Saints.
The corridors come briefly alive at the hour
When the bluff and sanguine circulate
Their evasive optimisms. Perhaps they hope
There is nothing quite as contagious.