

At Swedish Hospital

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by Alison Jennings

I see *patients*, apparently named
for their capacity to wait,
defenseless, afflicted by disturbances
in biorhythms, the ebb and flow.
We used to know our bodies,
felt connected to the earth,
knew that morbid mixtures
of our humors could cause damage:
fevers in the flesh, murmurs of the heart.
We vibrated with the flow of energy,
sensing rain, or earthquakes early,
without instrumentation,
predicting fate,
and the time to laugh, the time to cry.

Ancient medicine
mocks modern sensibilities,
with its inscrutable instructions,
beeped at us from impersonal machines,
ordained by irksome tests
that gouge us, grab our blood.

X-rays peer into bones,
surgeons slice open flesh,
deadly rays bombard the cells,
but all will fail to penetrate
the central layers of our being;
the soul remains elusive,
nowhere to be found
within the gray mass in our skulls,
or fibrous tendons of the heart.

Healing is a blessing
from an unknown source. Lines of life
dissolve, when miracles are no longer
expected, and so, do not appear.

The body shrinks, illness
the only way it has
to fight its own confusion.