

# MIND TO MIND

Creative writing that explores the abstract side of our profession and our lives

Stephen T. Harvey, M.D., Editor

## Visitor

John Paul Davies

Corridors like desolate arteries, signs declare  
maternity wards, operating theatres, the mortuary,  
and finally the jaundiced glow of Ward 18.

Life-supporting machines thrum behind green curtains—  
the barely-born and the near-dead demanding privacy.  
Death steals in without fanfare, gently closes the door.

And there you are in your bed, coma-drifting  
between the abandoned islands of your remembered life.  
A temporary name on a cork-board. *Nil By Mouth*.

Reduced to oscillating vital signs,  
an artificial beep declares your existence,  
that here is life to be preserved.

Dabbing your forehead with a damp cloth,  
I watch your eyes skitter behind their lids.

A drip bubbles; amber liquid creeps along the tube  
taped to your forearm, bound for the perforated vein.

As I cross the ward to the window, I see the crematorium  
chimney stack rising like some temple to forsaken gods.

Ash fills the sky like an ill sleet of snow,  
as though all the outcast angels are descending at once.

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"Visitor" is the winning poem of ANESTHESIOLOGY's second annual creative writing competition, The Letheon.

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## Editor's Note

No one will confuse “Visitor” by Mr. Davies as the feel-good poem of the year; it is much too good for that. The poem speaks of profound loss and loyalty, beginning with a powerful image and ending with a better one. Poised with slow-paced gravity, it is methodical in its description of the institutionalized. The imagery is merciless and haunting, stripped of sentimentality, teleporting the reader to “corridors like desolate arteries,” where we stand alongside the author, looking down at the deathbed of a loved one.

The poem possesses such authenticity that we cannot look away: “And there you are in your bed, coma-drifting / between the abandoned islands of your remembered life.” Descriptions like this can only be conceived through experience. And while the author’s command of language is masterful—consider “amber liquid,” for example, or “ill sleet of snow”—it is never dishonoring or even distracting. As with every successful poem, “Visitor” engages the reader mentally and emotionally. Ezra Pound once wrote, “Only emotion endures.” Surely that applies here.

## Author's Note

“Visitor” welled up over a year after the passing of my grandmother. She’d spent her last days in Ward 18 of the local hospital, and the family would visit and try to keep her as comfortable as possible. Even then, walking along bleached corridors, searching for the correct ward, I was struck by the impersonal nature of the hospital, the patients’ names only temporarily displayed on cork notice boards, until sheets are changed on empty beds, awaiting the next occupant. It seemed an unheralded and lonely ending of my grandmother’s long and full life.

## About the Author

Born in Birkenhead, United Kingdom, John Paul Davies has published poetry and fiction in *Apex*, *Crannóg*, *The Manchester Review*, *QU Literary Magazine*, *The Maine Review*, *Rosebud*, *The Pedestal*, *The Fog Horn* and *Grain*.

In 2016 he was runner up in the Cheshire Prize for Literature, and winner of the RTÉ Guide/Penguin Ireland Short Story Competition. He placed second in the 2017 Waterford Poetry Prize, and was nominated for a Pushcart Prize in 2016 and 2017. He runs a regular creative writing group where he now lives in Navan, Ireland.