

public health the silence of god

TELEHEATH

registrar calls to say, *I know the phone seems strange. How are you?* Since for years, the best way you could bear a clinic wait was cast it as a Bergman film, & now: to sit at home. Reply, *not quite sure where I am*, except it looks like here: the drain-aged epidemic as a new pandemic starts to rain.

WHISPERING

phlebotomist, misplace your bloods. Collect, repeat. Bibi Andersson; no persona. Need to know you're still the same. Three weeks, three phone calls: no reply. *Outpatient* is an awful word. But you know doctors: silence means there is no change. So practice every scene inside. Your Swedish: prophylacted. God's so quiet this century sonata in HIV.

INGMAR,

how the months roll by, & now: to take the bus. Body on a public route. A different registrar will buzz your pocket, speaking *early*. You tell him that you're coming in. *Any specific issue you have to see me in person for?* Specific issue is you want to be there in person. This crawling irritation: God, have you become your grandmother? Except Alison could never have accepted her strange baby should live longer than his strange infection –

[close-up]:

for the five years or so before she passed, Alison would proclaim with a terrible certainty that this Christmas would be her last. it was almost funny: how many times to be wrong, just to be proven right. & then, there was the last: lost in her body. unable to move, unable to speak. a different illness & a different time. silence, still ...

CLIMBING

stairwells, like you always do. The Pavlov-comfort in returning to a place you thought you should despise. Another registrar jokes, *how's that for service?* First time on human record immunology is running before the clock. He opens files; he taps on keys. He says, *here's something odd. Looks like we have no blood from you since eighteen months ago.* Except – how can that be? When you so easily recall those days you've sat before appointments; all the ways you've been assured. What happened to evidence? All those results; scripted to their mouths between. Revolving-doctor: unconcerned. *Lack of communication. Sometimes tests will fall into the vault; they never reach the file we see.* He tells you, *why not go again today?* & then: you'll know. Pull the stairs down as you leave.

HANDSOME

phlebotomist, collect with ease. Chat up trainees as the colour pools. Say, *used to it now; but I'll never get it exactly right, you know?* You ask how long it takes to learn. How many years before you could empty yourself instead? How long just to find a vein? Think of it as a party trick. Think of it as editing. Now cut the future, phone will ring: some new voice tells you, *quiet same.* Receive it. Receive it like piano keys. Close-up of the verb for faith. The body-work shudders to its next long take, & still: you faith –

But sometimes, I am left to wonder ... where is this vault?

Is it beneath the hospital? Undergrounded; hiding from the light?

What locks keep it closed? Who walks it; stacks it; sweeps its floors?

What future longs to launch it from the earth?

Am I there now? ... bodied in reams of paper?

Call out into the bright. Of course, the point is no reply.

No science, & no fiction.

I wish Bergman had made *Star Trek* instead.

If I ever die, shoot Liv Ullmann into space.