

The Starring Sound of Pulse by Ellaraine Lockie

The gift of a hotel credit. A vacation to downtown Seattle. The Inn at Virginia Mason spreads blocks and blotches the sky. An Emergency Ward facility next to the entrance. Blood pressure comfort in this coincidence.

Daisies and cosmos
in the window planter box
A black bee buzzes

Plastic flowers mimic on the front desk. A grandfather clock ticks a countdown for the next three days. On a pedestal: "Breakfast: Cold cereal, Skim milk." *Is this the only cafe?* I ask the man at the desk. *Yeth, Ma'am. On Thaturdays there's limited thervice though.* A sign on the elevator door: "Out of order. Use service elevator."

A hint of garlic
battles air rights with bleach
The hush of silence

The World War I era elevator clamors open. A white-haired woman shaped like a question mark asks *What's wrong with you?* Floor 3 arrives before I can think of what I might have done.

No towels in my sparse room. A call to the front desk. He'll *thend thomeone* right up. I open the door to puppy brown eyes, a horizontal tic on the half-face smile of a man holding blankets. He quivers when I tip him after the second trip.

My dead Lab comes to
me with wagging tail in dreams
The beat of my heart

Seagulls serve as alarm clock. The breakfast waitress
hobbles out of the kitchen dragging one leg. Says she is
also the hostess, cook and flower arranger. At the next
table a man scolds a boy in German. Elderly single
women at other tables. I look into an outside room with
sky ceiling. Potted plants, ferns and flowering vines
crawl walls in shades of lush. A small Garden of Eden.

White lights on the trees
A Bridge Over Troubled Water
on the sound system

I take an apple from a basket on the front desk. Ask for
the location of a coffee shop and a city bus schedule.
Oh, and who is Virginia Mason?

News that I'm in one of the world's premier medical
centers. On vacation. There's an observation deck on
Floor 17 though.

Patio bees pluck
nectar, pollen, propolis
Royal jelly for health

An out of the way elevator the size of a cattle car. Floor
4. I walk through a corridor separating Cardiac Rehab
and Critical Care en route to the bus pick-up. Tully's
Coffee Bar tucked into a closet space. I secure the one
tiny table and chair.

Blue cotton scrubs and plastic shower caps stand in line
beside faces that wear the glaze of satin and itch of

cheap wool. Hospital gowns glide by in wheelchairs
powered by orderly uniforms. Doors opening and
closing the gates of life. Electricity that sizzles the last
hours of life. Or not. I touch the live wire and three
poems spill onto the table.

A bulletin board
with Go-Green and Wills on Wheels
Someone lost a watch

Bus 2 downhill to the waterfront and Pike Place Market.
A low buzz from the hive of tourists and locals. Stalls
shout flowers, produce, crafts. A sea of freshly caught
fish for sale. A sign: *Low-Flying Fish*. Newcomers
learn why when a fishmonger tosses a salmon over their
heads so it can be purchased.

Paparazzi flashes of tourists sitting on a bronze piggy
bank named Rachel. Where people make deposits in the
name of charity. Rub her snout for good luck. A street
guitarist plays blues beside an open empty case. A
bicycle holding his belongings.

In the crowd a child
rides on his father's shoulders
Crabs swarm in a tank

Incense of scampi, barbeque, chocolate croissants baking
and tap beer. A kaleidoscope swirl of Crayola Big Box
colors in fruits, vegetables, blossoms and paintings.
Accompanied by the clink of dishes, espresso thunder
and belly laughs. Whoops and chants of fishmongers
throwing fish. Screams from shoppers. The bassoon of
a foghorn in the distance.

But I hear the dove-soft call of Virginia Mason. Am
summoned back as audience to its private dramas.
Where pulse is the starring sound. Breathing pure air
reason to celebrate. Where people eat a second bowl of
Cheerios as though it were Thanksgiving.

Flowers from Pike Place
blood red, sky blues, sun yellow
Chapel and lobby

On Floor 17 I look for the observation deck. Find a
small lounge that glows with enough sunshine to gloss
any affliction. A picture window looks across staggered
heights of hotels and convention centers. Down on
rooftop parking lots, patio umbrellas and chairs. Down
further the bay, dollhouse vehicles and pedestrians.

The window looks inward on a man sitting with ankle
over knee. Hospital gown hoisted to hips. The nurse at
his side says no, he is not in a holding room. There are
no Russian troops. That sometimes fantasies seem real.
He looks up into the halo of light and seems to dissolve.

I ask the nurse where the observation deck is. She says
Floor 9. This is the Psychiatric Ward.

Through glass the lull of
motors, construction, bird cries
A drugged siren

In the elevator a woman wearing a Montana sapphire
necklace. Stones found by her husband on Mt. Helena.
Her fingers linger on the pendant. Mist clouding her
eyes tell me why she's here. Would I like to have dinner
with her?

Two girls step out of high school and into the elevator on Floor 4. A Lolita bursting out of bustier, tutu and thigh highs. The other could be Little Bo Peep. A blonde wig in big-roller curls, frilly dress so short that ruffled panties peek out. The woman's eyes grow grandmotherly.

The girls just arrived for a nearby animation convention. Ask if there's a bar with live music or maybe a spa. By Floor 1, the woman has invited them also to dinner. In the lobby:

Air carries fried fish
and the tail-end tick of time
The mint in my mouth

Ellaraine Lockie is a widely published and awarded poet, nonfiction book author and essayist. Her thirteenth chapbook, *Tripping with the Top Down*, was recently released from FootHills Publishing. Earlier collections have won the Encircle Publications Chapbook Contest, the Poetry Forum Press Chapbook Contest Prize, San Gabriel Valley Poetry Festival Chapbook Contest, the Aurean Chapbook Choice Award and Best Individual Collection Award from *Purple Patch* magazine in England. Ellaraine teaches poetry workshops and serves as Poetry Editor for the lifestyles magazine, *Lilipoh*.