

## Hospital Fugue

'to endow a bed in memory of her husband and little son'

text from a restored Donor Board in the old Royal Infirmary Edinburgh, now  
Edinburgh Futures Institute, *in gold*

Fugue, noun:

1. *Music.* a polyphonic composition based upon one, two, or more themes, which are enunciated by several voices or parts in turn, subjected to contrapuntal treatment, and gradually built up into a complex form having somewhat distinct divisions or stages of development and a marked climax at the end.
2. *Psychiatry.* a period during which a person experiences loss of memory, often begins a new life, and, upon recovery, remembers nothing of the amnesic phase.

[www.dictionary.com](http://www.dictionary.com)

ah stone

ah, my heart

ah, my heart

ah stone of the floor, revealed again

after decades of sleep

and running feet

the cold stone

can breathe again

the stone corridors can be paced again

forgetting, wishing to forget

the trolleys

draped in red sheets

the nurses carrying soup

babies bandages bed pans

forgetting where my shoes are  
walking barefoot  
what did I need to forget?  
that life that could not be lived  
the woman who fell from the bridge  
her voice  
her girl's voice that was golden  
burnt honey, her voice, falling  
falling  
falling  
the doctor said they had won awards  
for saving lives in the 'poison department'  
until the patients all started  
dying  
why was it again?  
the inquiry results...  
that the man who had connected the pipes  
to the oxygen tank and the other gas  
had mixed the silver cannisters up  
and we killed them, the doctor said  
'yes, we killed them,' he said in a strange voice,  
'while trying to keep them alive.'  
ah, stone  
my heart  
my heart that I carried through streets  
barefoot, in the golden dawn  
while the party raged forever on  
forgetting you and our disease of love  
as I wandered, forever lost,

grateful to be lost from my life  
a hundred bottles  
a thousand pills  
thrown from the towering bridge  
my shoes  
forever  
lost, left  
in the palm of a hand  
or the floor of someone's car  
or flung from the bridge  
falling  
falling  
falling  
while the people in the church  
getting ready for Sunday service  
found you barefoot, wandering  
or did you limp through their open doors  
the mother who lay in the bed  
forgotten, for all those years  
her – yes – her tears, the ones  
you could not bear to hear  
because there is nothing  
anyone can do  
downloading identities  
freezing the half-dead  
until we are *vampyre*  
or something else – that  
which longs for sleep,  
no way from this conundrum, even

– othering – manipulation

still – what *grasps us* in the night is

death which makes the heart race

the skin go cold as stone

lost, forgetting, forgotten

they asked my name

they asked his name

they asked

if I was hurt –

I had no shoes

you could hardly speak

as if you'd forgotten

his name

my name

where you'd left your shoes

the place where the party

that party, the circle of faces

the bath, hands outstretched

a ride in a blue car

a street bathed in sunlight, strange

as night had just been

embracing

your sense of time

lost

the kind doctor asked

where he'd been

to war

to war

he'd lost his shoes

he'd forgotten

the little one

the names

of all he loved

and the white sheets

and the clean beds

and the tall windows

and the golden light

and the brass planter

and the great palm fronds

and the cold flagstones

on which feet dragged

with no shoes

and the staircases in the clocktower

and the Sisters scrubbing the floor

and the blue whale whose spray

wets the pelican above

and the feathers from the chest

plucked for their blood

to feed the starving children

whose throats are so dry

and the damp polished stone

aching for the sun

and his wife who loved him so much

and her hands that held his face

and his boy crouching in the shadow

cast by a ball of golden light

and the doctor

who asked my name

what you'd been drinking  
where you'd been  
and her tears when he returned  
with no eyes for her and no voice  
with no arms to hold the boy  
with no feet to fill the shoes  
what shoes?  
I'd lost my shoes  
in the hospital, you were barefoot  
they looked concerned  
they gave me a shot  
they made me drink  
they brought hot tea  
and buttered toast  
the little baby waved her arms  
her rosebud lips searched for the breast  
the nurses taught the mother to nurse  
they held the baby's head in the night  
a soft and feathered globe  
of dreaming a new world  
where swans on golden water  
reflect a circle of perfection  
they tried to feed him  
to make him well  
his little boy was next to die  
in spite of care and space and fresh air  
the germs, the unquenchable fever  
even though the place was clean  
awash with gold, with golden light

and the scent of disinfectant  
and the blood of little boys  
and the blood of wounded men  
and the gold of women's tears  
and the gold of floating souls  
and the gold is what is left you  
when you choose to leave your mind  
when you lift out of your body  
as if rising toward the light  
all is gold and all is sorrow  
when she's falling through the air  
and the image of her child  
flutters by, a hummingbird  
whose beak in nectar  
blinds with gold  
whose tiny wings  
cast lustrous gold  
until the water takes her life  
and she forgets  
and he forgets  
and I forget  
and you forget  
and I forget cold stone beneath my aching feet  
and you forget  
and I forget the pain  
and you forget  
and I forget  
and you forget  
his big shoes

and his little shoes

ah stone

ah my heart

ah stone

ah stone

ah my heart