

OUT-PATIENT, FALSE BAY HOSPITAL



Clarke

He drops his card into the box at the window & turns to find a seat in the crowded waiting room of the hospital among the sick, the lame, the soon-to-be halted for ever & ever. They're all waiting their turn to see a doctor. His appointment is for 10 am. He relaxes, looks about, picks up a magazine from a batch some charitable organization deposits at the hospital, people talk, cough. There is even laughter. At a certain time another charitable organization will serve soup & a piece of bread to all who want it. On this winter day hot toddy nourishing soup is welcome. He ~~gets~~ his soup & bread & afterwards reads the magazine.

The thought occurs to him, "Here I sit, an old man with an old man's complaints waiting for the doctor & for death." Once a long time back he too was a cute, cute baby & then in turn a toddler, a young child, a teen ager, an adult. He enjoyed a robust active life with only the odd insignificant ailment from time to time. "The human body is like a machine," he mused, "absolutely air-tight in the beginning. But even this machine starts to break down as it ages. Then — problems — you can't find spare parts with which to repair it." Long ago he resigned himself to the inevitable. "I wouldn't like to live for ever."

He will see the doctor. Afterwards, from the dispensary, he will obtain the packets of pills for various purposes which, in reality, he sees as basically representing delaying tactics on the way to the grave.

Detail: "Out-patient—False Bay Hospital"
(Plate 99 in Michael Stevenson & Peter Clarke, Fanfare, Cape Town: Michael Stevenson, 2004).

James Matthews Tribute
Peter E. Clarke (2.6.1929–13.4.2014)



the time of departure has arrived
the moment we met measured fifty years and more
Peter, you knocked on my front door
was it a Saturday, i am not sure
the bonding started with the claspings of hands
our friendship matured the passing of years
sweetened with the drinking of many a glass of wine
and listening to John Coltrane and Nina Simone
i visited in turn while you were still in Simonstown
you became familiar with my household
a member of the family and my children called you Uncle Peter
you became godfather to my daughter Terry
gentle were you in demeanour but you would not allow
others to occupy your space
your passing had placed me in a void
my spirit has been deeply wounded
the passing of time will bring about the healing of pain
Peter the memory of your being shall always be
in my heart and mind