

Large interior in red: Matisse

Kitsch red Swedish modernity
As functional and expendable
As throw-away swabs
In an operating theatre
It casually meets itself
And introduces us coolly
To the new etiquette

This is nearly the twenty-first century
And we no longer recognise
Our friends so easily. Wasn't he
In Vietnam? Weren't we
At school together? I now manage a hospital
And that girl at the table in the Black Cat Cafe
Playing with her cutlery as if
They were surgical implements, wasn't she
The first one in that tiny room as a student
Fascinated with the little lake of blood?

Now she doesn't know you, or at least gives no sign
You watch the shimmer of veins
Just under the eyelids' skin
And embarrassed
Turn the colour of the painting.

This is the new nonchalance. It is just like
A waiting room
The colour of an extraction. All who view it
Are synonymous with catalogues.
Watch the small red dots appear
In front of your pale faces.
Take off your dark cold coats. Warm yourselves
At its glow. It is as flat
And red
As an accident.

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