



God's Hotel: A Doctor, a Hospital, and a Pilgrimage to the Heart of Medicine

Victoria Sweet

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San Francisco's Laguna Honda Hospital is the last almshouse in the country, a descendant of the Hôtel-Dieu (God's hotel) that cared for the sick in the Middle Ages. Ballet dancers and rock musicians, professors and thieves - "anyone who had fallen, or, often, leapt, onto hard times" and needed extended medical care - ended up here. So did Victoria Sweet, who came for two months and stayed for 20 years.

Laguna Honda, lower-tech but human-paced, gave Sweet the opportunity to practice a kind of attentive medicine that has almost vanished. Gradually, the place transformed the way she understood her work. Alongside the modern view of the body as a machine to be fixed, her extraordinary patients evoked an older idea of the body as a garden to be tended.

God's Hotel tells their story and the story of the hospital itself, which, as efficiency experts, politicians, and architects descended, determined to turn it into a modern "health care facility", revealed its own surprising truths about the essence, cost, and value of caring for body and soul.

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