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Poems by doctors

When I heard them

Merrill Moore

When I heard them telling the pitiful facts of their lives
I realized that my life might be pitiful too
For the first time. They were talking about unappreciative wives
And husbands and children whose affections withdrew
(if they ever existed).

One woman said to me:
"One October day, my father died.
Then we took him to the family cemetery to be buried.
The funeral had to go on a ferry boat
From the mainland to the island where we had lived
And it rained –"

And a man told me: "When I got to town
I called her up for I finally knew I wanted
To marry her but a servant answered the telephone
And told me she would be away all day
At a funeral, taking her father to bury him,
So I never called back: somehow I changed my mind
And I think to this day she never knew I called."

Merrill Moore (1903–1957) was born in Columbia, Tennessee. He graduated in medicine from Vanderbilt Medical School in 1928. He practised as a psychiatrist at Boston City Hospital and taught at Harvard Medical School. He is reputed to have written between 50 000 and 100 000 sonnets. This poem is from *Clinical Sonnets* (1949), Twayne Publishers, reprinted by kind permission of Adam Moore.

Poem selected by Professor Femi Oyeboode.

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