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poems
by
doctors

Why Did You Become a Doctor?

Miles Burrows

I originally wanted to be a witch
Sitting inside a Leiden jar
In the pathology museum
Or manifesting suddenly in a wardrobe
Or a trick of the light in a motorway café.

My fallback application
Was to become one of those nuns in *La Dolce Vita*
In an enormous starched wimple
Like the collar of Phillip II
As if my head was something that had fallen into a serviette.

I wanted to be Dr Zhivago
And have a Russian mistress on a sledge.

There are no crosswords in heaven
Because there is no tomorrow for the answer.

Later, psychiatry took my fancy.
I wanted to rescue an enchanted mad princess
From a tower in a wood
Where the senior registrar was making curry.

I hoped to meet some brilliant eccentric
Cataloguing shadows, or decanting clouds like Harpic
Into old sherry bottles.

The works of Freud were like a prolonged
Businessman's lunch in a German restaurant
Where the waiters have aprons that reach down to their ankles
And there is only one course on the menu but it is very good.

I was looking for an Irish country hour, Grade II listed,
Set in parkland, where the Medical Director
Organised an annual rough shooting party
For the staff to take potshots at each other
From behind hayricks
While inside the building huge women sat in stone circles
And we taunted them like boys taunting a dolmen.
Or the Persian king whipping the sea.

Sitting in the water tower on night duty
Waiting for the arrival of the princess
I found further philosophers plied their antique charms.

Minswanger, Glogg, Jaspers,
Kleist, Heidegger, Snoek
Opened their swing doors to me
Like bistros in Charlotte Street with irresistible names.

And I would conjure with their smoky names
Savouring their names like baroque Italian ice creams
Or like a harpsichordist
Who slowly releases his fingers from the keys
And looks up at the candlelit ceiling
As if the music were someone he had left behind.

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Chosen by Femi Oyeboode.

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