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Poems
by
doctors

To the Madhouse

Edward Lowbury

What she has told us all a hundred times –
That old, unwanted women can again
Be hunted down, accused of pointless crimes
And burned in the public square; that it is vain
To plead – or prove – one’s innocence; that men
With solemn looks will come into the house,
And say, fearing a scene, ‘You’ll feel no pain;’
‘It’s for your good;’ ‘We’re not ungenerous;’
What she foretold, when we dismissed her fear
Saying ‘You dreamed such things’ – it now comes true:
The door is open, and the men are here.
Calmly they question her, and with a new
Smiling indifference drag her from the room
And through the streets to the expected doom.

Edward Lowbury (1913–2007) studied medicine at University College Oxford and completed his clinical studies at Royal London Hospital. He was appointed Head of Bacteriology at the MRC Burns Research Unit Birmingham in 1949. He was a distinguished researcher, publishing over 200 papers. His research interest was in the mechanism and emergence of antibiotic resistance and its prevention. In 1990 he edited an anthology of poems by doctors to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the BMA. The poem is from his book *New Poems 1935–1989*. Reprinted by kind permission of The Hippotamus Press, Frome.

Poem selected by Professor Femi Oyeboode.

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