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poems
by
doctors

Medical Students

Rachel Clarke

You come at me with needles bared
And smiles acquired from library guides.
Your coats don't fit, your badges clank,
Your morning shave's a waste of time.

You ask for blood with baited breath,
And furtive attempts to elide
Your novice status at my bed
That I've lived too long to buy.

Your gods, the docs that barely deign
To grace this old-folk dumping-ground,
Dismiss our ward as nine-tenths dead
And we're so dull, the moribund.

Our dicky hearts, our wobbly turns,
Our chewed-up, doe-eared ends of days,
No wonder you young bloods are urged
To use us for your skills, our veins.

So come on then, don't drop your swabs,
Be tighter with your tourniquets,
And try to tame those quaking hands:
The old, you'll find, we don't complain.

But as you poke and prod and stab
These crabby, withered arms to find
The blood you need to tick some box,
I ask one thing, please don't be blind

To me, a man whose blood once roared
On Dunkirk's sand, in love, in war,
Who drank, raised hell, devoured life,
Ran marathons, adored his wife.

My soul still burns inside dead skin
I'm still your age in leather hide.
I'll let you loose on my old bones
If you'll just look me in the eye.

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Chosen by Femi Oyeboode.

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