

POETRY

Being on call for dead men

Previously published at www.cmaj.ca

Dead men call. I tell them the most important thing,
wisdom dangling like a jumper from my stethoscope. "If love were true,

then we'd all have spotlights on." Dead men are past all things,

despaired of earth, and I listen to the sepulchre, to an age.
Dead men have one word: *Why*, and my bedside manner fades

to the dizzily anemic physican to the rich and famous,
to the medicine man who says *Shazam* and turns into a shaman,

who cannot heal himself and says, *Friend, I reassure*.
Dead men know where that goes. I take their calls at odd hours.

There is no home visit for *Why*, no two aspirins, no complete physical.
If I could take the pulse of Mr. Melanson, his threadiness beating a bush
telegraph,

or peer deeply into the white blood cells of Mr. House, their maws
lip synching *We Shall Succumb*, I'd learn the mien needed for not-long men

who call me by my first name, who order affairs according to the settling of pain.
The true is a roll call. I write *Now* as the cause of death on the certificate.

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DOI:10.1503/cmaj.101399