

# The Doctor is In

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*One of the privileges accorded to the physician, probably unknown to most of the rest of the world, is the opportunity to meet people from every walk of life, from every country, every religion, and every persuasion. I don't have to go anywhere. It inspires me that they come to tell me the most amazing stories. These are the unknown tales from my friends, my patients, told one on one, in those rarest of moments, related here anonymously to preserve that other rarity, confidentiality.*

The white-haired old lady with the tremulous lips and cane came to my office for her regular visit. After I listened to her heart and checked her chart, she remarked that she seemed to have lived long enough. Why you are talking like that, I asked. She said she was not afraid to die and it didn't appear to be useful to keep on. I have a habitual curiosity about what others think of an afterlife, so instead of trying argue her out of this notion, I asked, what is your opinion of an afterlife? That's the nub of it, isn't it? The older we get the more we wonder.

Oh, I'm no longer afraid, the old lady said. Why? Because of the time I had a vision. What was that? I could have skipped over her last sentence, but I know that if you don't take a hint about what others say, and you just keep blathering on, you miss a good story. She said she had just gone to lie on her bed "when I saw a sign on the ceiling above me". What did it say? It said "I am all right, don't worry about me." She said she knew it was a message from her 50-year old son who was in the hospital for a heart condition. How did you know that? Because he said so. What was the sign made of? It was like smoke. Were you just dreaming? No, I was wide awake. I got up and went to my other son, Jacob, who was in the parlor and told him I had seen a sign on the ceiling and I knew it was from Robert.

Jacob was in the examining room with me and his mother and he volunteered that the story was true.

He said then the phone rang. Robert had just died in the hospital during cardiac surgery.

I don't know what to make of this true story, but there it is, unvarnished and as true as can be