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POEM

'Death' by Elizabeth Jennings

Selected by Femi Oyeboade

Elizabeth Jennings (1926–2001)

was born in Boston, Lincolnshire to a medical family. Her father was the Chief Medical Officer. She read English at St Anne's College, Oxford, and later worked as a librarian at Oxford City Library. She was awarded a Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) in 1992. She had a psychiatric hospital admission in the early 1960s and is reported to have attempted suicide. Two volumes of poetry describe her experience of being in a mental hospital, *Recoveries* (1964) and *The Mind has Mountains* (1966). 'Death' is reproduced from *Elizabeth Jennings: New Collected Poems* (ed. M. Schmidt), published by Carcanet. © 2002 Estate of Elizabeth Jennings.

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They did not speak of death
But went round and round the subject deviously.
They were out of breath
With keeping it at bay. When would they see
That they were burdened with
Dying like other men?
Immediate mourners know the whole of grief
When they've seen the dying in pain
And the gradual move toward the end of life.
O death comes again and again
And starts with the crying child and the
doctor's knife.