



# Meeting Molly

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I found my first job at a vibrant and quirky health center in Washington, DC. I loved my patients and colleagues there so much that I thought, perhaps naively, that it might be both my first and my forever job. Just after my second anniversary there, we got the news. My husband was being relocated for work. As a family doctor, I was optimistic that I would find a new job, but I questioned if I would ever find the kind of wholehearted relationships that I had with my patients and colleagues in DC.

Last summer, I started in my new role at a well-established teaching practice in suburban New Jersey. At first, I felt overwhelmed by the quiet outside my window each day. It was markedly not Washington, DC. There was no one selling handbags on the sidewalk, no one with a squeegee in the parking lot, no music pouring from car speakers. I wondered if I was in the right spot, if these patients would ever feel like my patients, if this office would ever feel like my place.

I dove in, reminding myself that I was new in DC once, too. I met patients and listened to what they shared with me and tried to take the best care of them that I could. As I did, I felt a little less overwhelmed each day and stopped concentrating so much on the quiet outside my window.

There was a handful of patients, though, with whom connecting felt more difficult. A few times a week, I'd talk to a patient who was noticeably hesitant, almost verging on upset. Within a few minutes, they'd become gracious and more open, but nearly every such visit ended with the same question.

"Do you know when she'll be back?"

Dr Grant. They had tried for 20 to 30 minutes to suspend the disappointment they felt by being in her office and not seeing her. They talked about hard, complicated things to a new person and let that new person try to help, but they missed seeing the face of the person they had trusted for so many years.

"I'm not sure," I'd say. Because I wasn't. Dr Grant had a serious medical condition, and I wasn't sure about the details or her plans to return. As the newest person in the office, I tried not to pry. Her patients filled in the gaps in what I knew about Dr Grant. Invariably, they all described her the same way, in the way people describe Mother Teresa or a beloved aunt. The most caring, the most present, the most trusted, her patients would tell me.

It was obvious Dr Grant wasn't just refilling blood pressure medications all day. One patient told me that when she finally left her abusive marriage, it was because Dr

Grant had been her support. Dr Grant had kept her whole when she was broken. Dr Grant had answered the phone with love and concern every time the patient called. Every. Single. Time.

I started to develop an image of Dr Grant, or Molly, as her long-time colleagues here call her. I tried to describe what I was feeling to my boss one day.

"Dr Grant's patients are so devoted. I like to think of them as congregants in the Church of Molly," I told her.

My boss tilted her head and paused for a moment, a slow smile forming across her face. "Yeah," she said, "that sounds about right."

In reality, it seemed like everyone in the office, including my boss, had attended services at the Church of Molly at one time or another. It was clear from the hole she left that she was an anchor, a compass, and a beloved friend. Even in her absence, she was becoming a compass for me.

It has been 9 months since I arrived and a bit longer since Dr Grant last saw patients here. I get tidbits about her here and there. She's doing better, but she's not returning in the foreseeable future. I don't tell her patients that, unless they ask

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me directly. Her patients seem less adrift now. When I enter the room, there is warmth and trust. It's not Dr Grant-level trust, but it is trust nonetheless.

"So, you'll stay with me, you'll keep taking care of me?" A long-time Dr Grant patient asked me recently.

"Of course," I said, "as long as you'll have me."

"That's good," she said. "You remind me a lot of Dr Grant. She'd approve."

High praise, I think to myself. One day, I hope to meet Dr Grant in person. Until then, I'll just be here

meeting Molly in my own way every day.

**AUTHOR NOTE:** "Molly Grant" is a pseudonym.

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