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TIMEPIECES

In 1964, Dr. Armstead, the present funeral director, gave up his practice as a doctor. "My former patients are all dead," he told the hospital. "I'm going into the business of burials."

"My employment is less than ideal," grumbled his assistant, a young man flunked from medical school. "I'd prefer off-hours at night. I want to be out with the full moon, a rat's eye, out from the cracks in the sky." "The night shift's our time," Dr. Armstead answered. That was all he said. He felt guilty that his patients had died.

"I forget the time," said Dr. Armstead to a journalist writing an article on the costs of death. "At night, the days fly by; nothing changes much except the faces. You see, our business starts very late."

"Yes, tell me again . . .," said the journalist.

". . . my assistant and I work together, stitching lips and eyes. The eyes must be shut tight; no exceptions. My job helps prepare me to go under, as any doctor would say—off the record—when all the clocks' faces will scream: Doctor Armstead! Doctor Armstead!"