

# MIND TO MIND

*Creative writing that explores the abstract side  
of our profession and our lives*

*Carol Wiley Cassella, M.D., Editor*

## All in a Day's Work

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THERE was unusual activity in the cubicle I had been occupying for the last month. Never had there been so many people in this room of 10X8 feet; a bed, a table, a chest of drawers and a piece of baffling machinery, left very little space for anything else.

I wasn't a convict being subjected to isolation, yet I can't say I wasn't a prisoner. I had been here for more than twenty days now. I had to be here—for my parents, my relatives, and for myself, too. The people holding me in this room had poked needles into my skin, strapped me down, denied me water and food and inserted all sorts of strange instruments into my nether regions. I had complained, vigorously at times, but a sedative stifled my screams, and even the sounds I could make were muffled by a mask strapped to my face. I was tormented and tortured. Still, I don't think ill of my tormentors. Some sympathized, and when I became unreasonable they explained the situation to me. Others only reprimanded and went back to their work. When I vomited blood, they came, looked, and went away. "He won't last long!" one said. The other answered, "We've only got to keep him alive till the next shift. I wouldn't want a death on my duty." And then another hypodermic and I drifted off to sleep.

This morning I had trouble breathing and my mask filled with blood. A swarm of people entered the room. I knew I was going to die. Suddenly, I saw myself lying on the blood-stained bed. The mask was still there but the straps had been removed. I heard voices discussing me:

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“Let’s intubate him.”

“What’s the use?”

“At least give him a try.”

“That’s what we’ve been doing for the last 20 days!”

“I never believed he would make it.”

“Look at the blood pressure, it’s dropping!”

“He has a flat line. Start CPR!”

“Leave him, let him die in peace.”

It was almost amusing to see them try to save me. When I used to beg them to relieve me of my suffering, I was chided. They asked me to bear the pain and the discomfort. When I complained that I couldn’t, they assured me they were doing their best!

“We should have intubated him sooner!”

“He would have collapsed the minute we would put the tube in!”

“That would have been better. At least he and his family wouldn’t have suffered so much. The money they could have saved on his treatment all these days could have bought someone else relief!”

“Hey, you two! Stop being sentimental. Sister, give him morphine. That will be painless at least.”

“Let’s have lunch. I am starving. I just hope none of the other patients decide to conk off while we are eating!”

My parents came into the room and I watched them cry over my body. The tree they had planted and nurtured for twenty years lay axed to the stump, their dreams shattered and their support for old age gone. The doctors were chatting and joking as they ate. I was already a forgotten entity, my life and death all in a day’s work!