

MIND TO MIND

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

Carol Wiley Cassella, M.D., Editor

Lines Written on Viewing “Ether Day, 1846” in the Bullfinch Amphitheater

Douglas L. Hester, M.D.

Ungloved hands appear to restrain
the painted patient, his head turned
away, inviting the metal blades to invade,
dissect his neck, carve the cervical growth.

Men in expensive dark hues lean toward
the operation. They clench fists, grab
lapels, watch each cut. They inhale quietly
whiffs of this magic. Clear ether wafts

through the colored oils, the fragrance
diffusing from their faces, the sweet
carbon binding this man in red-striped
white. Organic vapors roil in his blood

and deflect the pain as the eldest
slices. His thin-rimmed glasses are flecked
with arterial spray. To keep cuffs clean,
his sleeves are rolled up. His legs straddle

the patient. The unpaintable moves these
still men: the gas of surgery without screams
even as blood dribbles down the neck,
the white cloth, the bare fingers

From the Vanderbilt University Medical Center, Nashville, Tennessee. doug.hester@vanderbilt.edu

Accepted for publication October 20, 2015.

Permission to reprint granted to the American Society of Anesthesiologists, Inc., and Wolters Kluwer Health, Inc., by copyright author/owner.
Anesthesiology 2016; 124:1408-9

of history. The tumor leaves in silence,
and the gentlemen physicians—still
anesthetized—exhale, savor the first
scent of the future and understand

that's no humbug.



"Ether Day, 1846" by Warren and Lucia Prosperi (2001). Reproduced with permission of Massachusetts General Hospital, Boston, Massachusetts.