

MIND TO MIND

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

Stephen T. Harvey, M.D., Editor

My Brother's Ghost

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I In my grandfather's hospital, the ghosts are transient. If only because they are retracing their steps—they were alive here last, or lived here first. So much of his life was spent here: peering into the intimate clockwork of each person. As a child I would watch my father reset the clocks inside of people, as *Papang* did. The job requires the sureness of hands. I have no such certitude, and I am almost never on time. But who is always so sure? The day after my brother was born, *Papang's* heart gave—he collapsed on the bathroom floor. I imagine how my father must have fumbled for the vital signs, watching the seconds run out of him too quickly, standing witness to how life beckoned in the birthing room next door and death passed in this one, leaving my father to become a father on his own. Everybody trusts doctors, nobody trusts them to die. I will never know *Papang*, except in memorial parks and hospitals, the portrait of him in our living room, and his name. A thief tried to steal the brass lettering of it at the clinic entrance, but it is safely kept in my father's own name, and my brother's after him. In the office I am only an observer; words are no good for saving lives. Only, sometimes, for comfort. I imagine *Papang* must visit the child born in the other room, and so the rest of us. Nowadays, the clocks in the hospital all work. My brother reads x-rays, raises his own son. My father's hair is white. When I am called, late as usual, I squeeze through the patience of patients filing across the waiting room, which is sometimes fuller when people bring their ghosts with them. Sometimes I find myself checking my watch too frequently, hoping there is no emergency.

This poem is one of the finalists of ANESTHESIOLOGY's 2018 annual creative writing competition, The Letheon. reginecabato@gmail.com.

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