

MIND TO MIND

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

Stephen T. Harvey, M.D., Editor

Dying Alone

Kristina L. Goff, M.D.

I sit next to your bed in the filtered light of this hospital room—
the place I work transformed into something much more personal.
And it is inexplicably quiet.
We are perfect strangers really,
But somehow I'm the only one here in this most intimate moment with you.

I stroke your age-worn fingers with mine, gloved,
hoping the message is reaching you:

—you are not alone,
You are much more deeply loved,
And by many more people,
Than this video screen can ever show you—

Your nails are ragged, rubbed uneven, maybe from years of working with your hands,
And I find myself wondering about your life,
Feeling inadequate for not knowing even the most basic things about you.

And so I begin to meditate on the sounds of your breathing rather than my own,
It makes me feel closer to you as I wait for you to slip away.

I hope desperately it will be peaceful—please let me be able to give you at least that.

The white noise of my PAPR helmet and the soothing rhythm of your breath lull me to sleep
for a second, my eyes drift shut
and then fly open in a panic to check on you.
Nothing has changed:
You are still there, your breath growing more and more shallow.
Your daughter softly sobs from across the room, across the city.

I am so tired, and I know you are tired too.

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