MIND TO MIND

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

Carol Wiley Cassella, M.D., Editor

Little Black Boxes

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We swaggered through that ward like it wasn't a graveyard,
It wasn't our cemetery,
Like we had the key, like we knew the way out.
We filled in those holes like we never dug one,
In the first place,
Like we never knew what that shovel was about.
But it's not like they ever taught us to pray,
Or what words to say,
Before or after we kicked in the dirt.
It wasn't like compassion ever got a grade,
Or even the moment,
To slap some salve on the thing that hurt.
And it wasn't like we didn't care
When we had no time to care,
Back when it would have mattered.
We just had to trust,
That the doggie bags they gave us,
Would always serve to save us
Before the ashes and dust got scattered.

We haunted Death on His unappointed rounds
We hunted Him across these hallowed grounds,
And made our careers of barely getting in His way.
But it wasn't like we didn't try,
Like we didn't fight the fight
'Til the fleeting hand of hope was stayed.

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<zdoi;10.1097/ALN.0000000000000878>

It's just that we never sensed,
That in those next moments,
Our presence,
Was worth more than our brilliance,
To the dying, the helpless and afraid.
So we turned away,
To bear false witness to the sorrow,
And made the darkened bargain,
To feel their pain tomorrow,
Would He please just box it up today.

But tomorrows come by every day,
And every day our promise slips away,
To little black boxes still gathering on our shelves.
God help us should we ever peer inside,
To finally mourn these souls,
And find instead the dying and the dead lost pieces of ourselves.