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POETRY | SPRING 2021

## All Tuned Up

By Albert Howard Carter III

Mortality and morbidity rounds—nobody likes them.  
The residency director speaks of “quality assurance,”  
As he must, but everyone knows the meeting  
Is about mistakes that hurt or kill patients.

A resident physician takes the chair in front:  
“Mr. Chen was doing great. We got him through pneumonia.  
His numbers were all good—finally.  
He was all tuned up. Then he goes and dies on me.”

The resident is a big man, with a dramatic mustache.  
As a third-year, almost finished, he’s seen a lot.  
He shakes his head and raises his strong, tanned hand  
To wipe tears from his cheeks. “Dies on me!”

The director gently recalls the patient’s advanced age:  
“Maybe he was just tired,” he says. “Sometimes death’s okay.”

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**Albert Howard Carter, III, PhD is a faculty affiliate, Trent Center, Duke University. His latest book is *In Peril: All People, All Life, Our Earth; In Prospect: Better Healthcare and Medicine* (UC Medical Humanities Press.com, 2019). Of five earlier books, one is *First Cut, A Season in the Human Anatomy Lab* (Picador, 1997). His prose and poems have appeared in *New England Journal of Medicine*, *JAMA*, *Hiram Review*, *Ars Medica*, *Blood and Thunder*, *Broadkill Review*, *Statement*, *The Thomas Wolfe Review* and *Intima: A Journal of Narrative Medicine*. He has been a pastoral care volunteer in an ER/Trauma Center, also a licensed massage therapist and certified Qigong healer working with cancer patients. Carter taught literature at Eckerd College, St. Petersburg, Fla., for many years. He and his wife live in Chapel Hill, North Carolina.**

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