

Reflection Story

Metamorphosis of a Doctor

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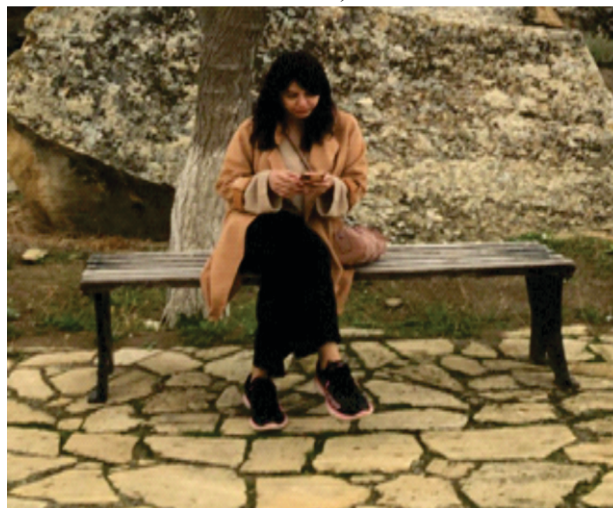
All of us talk to ourselves. The inner monologue helps us reflect and see things more objectively. I often indulge in a rendezvous of deep thoughts and unspoken words with myself and pen them down. I seek solace and advice on paper. Although there is a drought of the former in the sea of people, the latter is found in unsolicited abundance. Today's verbal thought is an analysis of my professional metamorphosis as a doctor.

My younger self was engrossed in books. The goal was to get into medical school. Honestly, there were a myriad of reasons for this obsession. I cannot enlist all of them here for obvious reasons. So, let me outline a few. Firstly, as a child, I envisioned myself as clad in a crisp white apron with a shiny stethoscope ornamenting around my neck; hair neatly tied in a high ponytail and a sleek pair of glasses falling low on my nose. Basically, a prototype doctor straight out of a drama series aired on television every week. Secondly, I was inspired by how swiftly a doctor can lift aches and pains by scribbling down a few unreadable words. Thirdly, the label of "doctor" was utter proof of the brilliance of one's brain. I desired to achieve the label to prove the stated to others (and maybe to myself). Lastly, I was not good at mathematics, which did not leave me a lot of options. The numbers made me dizzy. They still do.

I was never pressured into taking up medicine. My parents were completely alright with anything I chose, as long as I worked hard. And getting into medical school did require a lot of sweat. As a result, there were books scattered all over the room. And somewhere under the pile of papers lived yours truly. With dark circles and droopy eyes, I occasionally emerged from the literary cocoon to find food.

Once I bagged the admission, I thought I had it all under control. After all, it only takes five years to become a doctor, followed by another year to let it sink in. Those years witnessed huge lecture halls that were sometimes empty, packed wards that were sometimes dark, and close friendships that were sometimes broken. Unknowingly, those years were not just about building a doctor but also a personality.

In a blink of an eye, this student, who once carried big books in her hands, now stood outside a hospital holding



even bigger responsibilities on her shoulders. This is where I was going to experience the authenticity of the urban legends of internships as narrated by the seniors. It was scary but real. I learned that the brilliance of one's brain has to be proven repeatedly as it is volatile. And it has to be done in an arena of round with patients and attendants as an audience, who sometimes feel sorry for you. Among all the mayhem, I became exactly opposite of the spitting image of the glamorous doctor my naïve mind had once pictured. With my messy mane and chaotic brain, I was barely keeping my life together, let alone the hair. I was constantly in motion, like the planet we live on.

That year, I also witnessed the impermanence of life up close. Death felt tangible. I learned that unreadable words do not always give life.

The end of the internship was actually the beginning of a new journey towards post-graduation, which was not just a training program. It was a complete transformation, not only as a doctor but also as a human being. It taught me how to have compassion in my heart, even though I might not have money in my pocket. The day I got enrolled was the day I got an annulment from my already scarce social life. It was like being born again. And exactly as the babies cry to communicate their needs and feelings, I did too. There were tears shed, confidence shattered, and abilities doubted. Little did

I know that these are the essential ingredients needed to make a tough shell around you that does not crack easily, nor does it make a sound when you fall.

Every time I was down, I took consolation in the fact that it was going to be fruitful in the end. That helped me cope with sleepless nights and exhausting days. And though it felt like a heartbeat, I had finally survived the most crucial and brutal 1460 days of residency. On the day of my final clinical examination, my heart was spilling with mixed emotions. I was proud to have reached a point that I had always dreamed of. But at the same time, I was terrified. It was the fear of not being good enough, the fear of being a failure.

I recall standing outside the exam station, waiting for the bell to ring to start my examination. My heart had never beaten as fast and as loud as it did that day. I was afraid I might need to be defibrillated. For once in my life, I felt like a patient rather than a doctor. I realized that one essential tool lacking in my exam kit was the nerve of steel. I wished there was a mandatory workshop for stress and anxiety management that was a part of the residency curriculum.

In that moment, I thought of the three things that actually mattered at that point. My past. My future. And my present. I thought of every sweat I had broken and every

tear I had shed in the past. I thought of all the good things the future holds in store for me. And I thought of how all of it desperately depended on my present. So I had no choice but to pull myself together. Once I entered the station, everything seemed normal. It was nothing like the horror stories that had struck my ears. My heart rate went back to normal without any intervention. One station after the other, it was all over. The day I had worked ceaselessly for was finally over. And so was my quantum change from being a student to a consultant when I was declared successful. My year's worth of "adventure" ended with one piece of paper that I found joy and relief in. My journey thereafter deserves a separate story. This was another stage of evolution I had attained and the process continues today.

There is no specific form, shape, or color that marks the end of this metamorphosis. However, there are a few signs that mark its commencement. If you have developed a tough exoskeleton that shields criticism from permeating and sustains worldly pressure, acquired unseen wings that soar so high that your legs cannot be pulled, or obtained reliable gills that help you breathe through waves of stress, congratulations! You are evolving.