



Semantics

Ien Li¹ 

Published online: 8 June 2022

© The Author(s), under exclusive license to Springer Science+Business Media, LLC, part of Springer Nature 2022

Keywords burnout · medical student · medical education

Clammy are my hands squirming inside latex gloves,
Picking at zigzag wrinkles
Cascading down ill-fitting scrub pants.
Under trimmed bangs, my wide eyes peer out
Through safety goggles one exhalation away
From a blanket of condensation.
My mask—it obscures both my frozen smile
And the heart in my throat.

Every third of an hour in the geriatric clinic,
A cleaned room seats a new, frail,
Patient in the flesh.
Their hands, gripping sheets of written griefs,
Refrain from shaking mine
As they ready to recount the reasons
They dared break strict isolation
For these precious minutes
With not their loved ones,
But a tremulous trainee.

I should have shriveled from pure unworthiness
When the dainty lady recessed in the corner chair,
With her reading glasses and notebook ready,
Ignored the first half of my introduction as *Student Doctor*
And waved off my stammered correction with,
“You’re a full doctor to me.”

✉ Ien Li BA
ienalice10@gmail.com

¹ David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA, Los Angeles, CA, United States

Yet in an instant, my back stood straighter
The light at the end of the tunnel shone brighter
The gut-wrenching, heart-rending,
Learning moments of school nights past
Slackened their fierce grip around my lungs,
And my throat buried deep the primal scream
That so often punctuates twilight-hour studying.

As the two-syllable melody of *doctor*
Swelled my chest
And ricocheted in my eardrums,
I carefully harbored them within every muscle of my being
For the longest of nights and days to come.

Funding N/A

Declarations

This manuscript has not been previously published and is not under consideration in the same or substantially similar form in any other journal.

All those listed as authors are qualified for authorship and all who are qualified to be authors are listed as authors on the byline.

Li, Ien is the sole author responsible for the ideation, writing, and editing of this final submission.

To the author's knowledge, no conflict of interest, financial or other, exists.

Open Access This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons licence, and indicate if changes were made. The images or other third party material in this article are included in the article's Creative Commons licence, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the article's Creative Commons licence and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder. To view a copy of this licence, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

Publisher's Note Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.