

The Catabolism of a Medical Student

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Here I am: free of pride –
Free of anything, in fact –
Nothing more than a tabula rasa.
I’ve made it through the trenches
And stand ready to rotate.

I am your canvas,
And I crave your clinical artistry;
I pray that you make me your masterpiece
For you have all the tools at your disposal
To craft a professional wonder:
The osteopathic physician I believe
You want me to be.

And just like that, you glance at your tools:
You note a classic easel representing
Your fundamental medical training,
A weathered paintbrush drenched
In years of experience,
And a vast array of hand-selected paints
That represent your unique, clinical touches.
You then glance at my overt emptiness,
But instead of making your first stroke,
You chuckle and leave me behind.

What am I to think?
That your art is not mine in the same?
Am I not your present,
Your past,
Or your future?
Am I of no importance to you?

Maybe I’m just insecure.
Maybe this is character building.
Maybe tomorrow will be different.
Maybe you’ll finally throw me a bone,
So I can prove my value,
So I can prove why I’m worth your time.

Tomorrow is no different—
Nor are the coming days or weeks.
There are certainly moments of hope
When I notice a faint glimmer
Of excitement in your eyes
As if you’re finally ready to paint,
But again it fades,
And I remain devoid of purpose.

I try to envision
The unique image I will one day reflect.
This, they say, is key to moving forward:
“Keep your head in the game
and your eye on the prize.”

Time quickly passes
With much of the same.
I’ve not shined the way
I once thought I would,
But at least I’m here
And I can cling to a forming image
Of what my future may hold.

Alas, a shift:
You’ve finally taken to an initial sketch
Of who you plan for me to be,
But I no longer care.
In spite of my efforts to see my future
I am swept up in my nothingness;
For I cannot see the completed
Canvas I will become.

I’ve lost myself in this process.

Catabolism: it’s as if you tore me up
Into shreds of my former self
Only to piece me back together at square one,
Brush in hand, paint on tip.
Now you believe in me.
Now’s the time to hone my craft.

While I welcome the change,
 There's still a lingering feeling
 Of doubt, anger,
 And unease about what lies ahead.

Our time together comes to a close.
 You've hurriedly thrown together
 Some semblance of an image
 Far from the ideal,
 And put me in a package
 Ready to be sent to another artist.

Such is the clinical experience
 Of a medical student.

We are mass-produced canvases
 That are delicate and fortified.
 We find life in finding value
 But so often are made to believe
 That we have none
 Only to be told that it's always been this way;
 We simply need to grit through it and deal
 Because time will justify the process.

Is this true?
 Is there no other way?
 Can we not reach the same heights
 Without the breakdown?

This is the moral of the story:

We should find solace in knowing
 That we too will become the artists.
 We are aware
 And will no longer accept the
 Paints of others
 When they tell us, without challenge,
 To "find our places within the system
 That already exists."
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