Burned out on bedside nursing

Leaving bedside nursing is often the first phrase a burned-out nurse types. Before you decide, look at the word under it. Burnout hides two different facts: the building's math, and the part that is still yours.

Before you decide anything, take one page and draw two columns: the building's on the left, yours on the right.

Already drowning, with no room to sit with a page? Write one line in each column on your phone at the red light. The rest can wait for a day off.

You refresh a job board on the toilet, at work, and you close it when someone comes in. You are not looking. You are looking.

You love a patient at 10:00 and you hate the job at 10:20, and both feelings are about the same hour. The patient needed you. The hour had too many of them and one of you.

You cannot remember, without effort, the reason you took the job. When you try, the first sentence is about the building. The ratios. The pay. The way it was supposed to be different from the last place. The person you meant to be is not in the first sentence. She is under it, and she has not been invited to talk.

If you have called it burnout for a year and tried to fix yourself, when half of it was the board and half of it was a sentence you had stopped saying out loud, this is for you. The sort comes first. The decision, if there is one, comes after. This page will not tell you to stay, and it will not tell you to go.

Whose finish are you trying to complete?

In the chapter called Fix the Ratios, the facilitator asks why they started. Asked for their own reason, most of them name someone else's finish first. Fix the ratios. Fix the staffing. Fix the way a hallway is used as a unit. The facilitator does not scold them for it. She asks questions. The building's failures are real. They are also a strange place to store the reason you, personally, walked into this work.

Alexis is 34. Hospice now, after years of travel contracts. The way of coping her alarm reaches for is Adventurer: flight. When the room gets heavy she is the one who is gone for six minutes, and nobody asks, because flight looks like a reasonable errand. Her pattern is the next contract. A new city has a way of feeling like a new nervous system for about as long as the apartment stays mostly in boxes.

The chapter after the ratios is called The Horse. The practice is two letters. Alexis writes hers to the six-year-old who gave her a crayon horse the night her father died. She does not read it aloud. Not a slogan the hospital prints on a mug. A sentence that was hers before the building started answering the question for her.

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That is the sort. When you ask why you are still here, notice the first answer. If the first answer is a repair of the whole system, you have named Circle 3 and called it your purpose. Circle 3 can be your anger. It cannot be your worth. Worth lives in Circle 1. Nowhere else.

Can the building be the problem without becoming you?

Staffing is Circle 3. The census is Circle 3. A hallway of boarders, one of them there since Saturday, is Circle 3. Nobody at that table caused it, and nobody at that table can fix a ratio with an exhale. If a page tells you the heaviness is only your attitude, the page is lying to protect the building. We will not do that.

The opposite lie says that because the building is hard, none of your patterns are in the room. Both can be true before lunch. Alexis has volunteered for every on-call week. Staying busy can still be the exit.

Flight is not always a suitcase. Sometimes it is a committee, a certification, or a move with the same alarm and a new badge. The test is whether you unpacked. Her finish in the book is the last box, another city's name still on the tape, opened. It shows one nurse whose busyness was the door out of her own reason.

If this is keeping you from sleeping or eating, or it is not easing, talk to your EAP or a clinician. If it has gone darker than that, or you are having thoughts of not wanting to be here, call or text 988 in the US, any hour.

Deciding the shape of your work is a daylight question. It goes badly at 3 a.m., and it goes badly on an empty stomach. The ten-second catch for the surge itself is on Dreading your next shift. Use that so you are not making a life decision inside a sprint.

How do you sort this without a verdict?

Get a page. Draw a line down the middle. You are not making a pros-and-cons list for quitting. You are sorting owners.

Left side, the building. Write only what you do not control. Ratios. The number of patients. Whether the hall is a unit tonight. If you catch yourself writing a feeling on the left, move it. Feelings are not the building. They are yours, even when the building caused them.

Right side, yours. The sentence you say when a new nurse asks if it gets better. Whether you eat. Whether the next yes is a contract, a committee, or a way to avoid the crayon horse. The reason under the repair. One sentence, not a manifesto. If the sentence that comes is "fix the ratios," write it on the left, where it belongs, and ask again. Who did you start this for, before the building handed you its unfinished work and called it a personality?

You do not have to read the sentence to anyone. Alexis does not. The not-reading is part of the safety of the practice. A sentence performed for the room too early becomes another way of coping. Leave it on the page.

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Then, and only then, look at the decision you have been pretending is urgent. Stay. Change units. Leave bedside. The decision may be obvious once the sides are honest, and it may not.

What does the usual advice smuggle in?

Practice gratitude. A specific thank-you you received can be a true memory. A demand that you feel grateful for an unsafe grid is the building asking you to do its public relations. Decline.

If you loved it enough, you would not be tired. Love is not a staffing ratio. Tired is what a body does. The question is which tired. There is the tired of a hard shift you would choose again for the sentence on the right side of the page. There is the tired of a life spent repairing someone else's finish. They feel the same at the time clock. They are not the same on the page.

Leave the profession or *never leave.* Both are someone else's finish, offered to you as courage. Courage is the sort. The leaving or the staying is a consequence, and it belongs to you in daylight, with a meal, and with a person who does not get a commission on the answer.

What does a Tuesday look like when you have not decided?

You do not need a sabbatical. You need one page and a shift you are already going to work. Before you badge in, the left column gets one line, written in the car. Today's building, named without a speech. The hall, the ratio, the boarder who has been there long enough to have a routine. That is Circle 3. You are not agreeing to it. You are refusing to call it your personality for the next 12 hours.

On the right, one line that is yours for this shift only. Not "be a better nurse." A thing you control. You will eat at a time you can point to. You will not open the job board in the bathroom. Small enough to finish.

Mid-shift, when the urge comes to fix the whole floor or to vanish, you ask which column the urge belongs to. Fixing the ratios mid-task is not available. Vanishing into a supply run you do not need is the six minutes in the hallway, and nobody asking. Both are the alarm. One pretends to be duty. One pretends to be a break. The right-column line is the one you come back to, because it is the only one that can be finished today.

After the shift, you mark whether the right-column line happened. If it did, the day had a piece that was yours. If it did not, you learn which way of coping ate it. That is data, not a verdict. Alexis's last box does not open because she hated the work on a Thursday. It opens because she could finally tell the city's name on the tape from the reason she started.

If the right column stays empty for a week, that is not a resignation order. It is a sign you have been living on the left, doing the building's job and calling it your character.

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What do you do before you decide?

The two columns, once, this week. Building on the left. Yours on the right. If the right side is empty, that emptiness is the information. Do not fill it with a slogan from a poster in the break room. Ask who the work was for, and write the name or the sentence you can stand. You do not owe anyone the reading.

One busy thing you are using as a door. A contract, an extra committee, a certification you do not want, a move you have not unpacked. Name it. You do not have to cancel it today. You have to see it. If naming it stings, it is probably yours.

No career verdict inside a surge. If you are awake at 3 a.m. drafting the speech, that is the dread page, not this one. Catch the alarm, sleep if you can, and come back to the columns when you have eaten. The book spends weeks on this because a Tuesday-night decision made of adrenaline is how that way of coping keeps the boxes taped.

The no that feels like abandonment, which is a different door, is Saying no to extra shifts. The opening of the book is on the nurses page. The book is the week Alexis opens the last box, the tape still printed with another city's name.

Be first to know when *Leave the Shift at the Door* is out

More reasons

Post-shift anxiety

How to decompress after a 12-hour shift

Saying no to extra shifts

Made a mistake at work

Dreading your next shift

The patient you still carry

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Tonight's move

Before you decide anything, take one page and draw two columns: the building's on the left, yours on the right.

What to do

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When the book is out.

Leave the Shift at the Door

Clock out and mean it

Get notified

Be first to know when Leave the Shift at the Door is out. We write once, when that book is out.

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The person still in the car after the badge has beeped. Send this page. They can read it without an account.

circle1living.com/nurses/why/burned-out-on-bedside-nursing

Circle 1 for Nurses · Brandon and Lorraine Cover · True Path Publishing

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