



Hot Lights, Cold Steel: Life, Death and Sleepless Nights in a Surgeon's First Years

By Dr. Michael J. Collins

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When Michael Collins decides to become a surgeon, he is totally unprepared for the chaotic life of a resident at a major hospital. A natural overachiever, Collins' success, in college and medical school led to a surgical residency at one of the most respected medical centers in the world, the famed Mayo Clinic. But compared to his fellow residents Collins feels inadequate and unprepared. All too soon, the euphoria of beginning his career as an orthopedic resident gives way to the feeling he is a counterfeit, an imposter who has infiltrated a society of brilliant surgeons.

This story of Collins' four-year surgical residency traces his rise from an eager but clueless first-year resident to accomplished Chief Resident in his final year. With unparalleled humor, he recounts the disparity between people's perceptions of a doctor's glamorous life and the real thing: a succession of run down cars that are towed to the junk yard, long weekends moonlighting at rural hospitals, a family that grows larger every year, and a laughable income.

Collins' good nature helps him over some of the rough spots but cannot spare him the harsh reality of a doctor's life. Every day he is confronted with decisions that will change people's lives-or end them-forever. A young boy's leg is mangled by a tractor: risk the boy's life to save his leg, or amputate immediately? A woman diagnosed with bone cancer injures her hip: go through a painful hip operation even though she has only months to live? Like a jolt to the system, he is faced with the reality of suffering and death as he struggles to reconcile his idealism and aspiration to heal with the recognition of his own limitations and imperfections.

Unflinching and deeply engaging, *Hot Lights, Cold Steel* is a humane and passionate reminder that doctors are people too. This is a gripping memoir, at times devastating, others triumphant, but always compulsively readable.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Collins begins this personal chronicle with an account of a choice he had to make between amputating a 14-year-old boy's leg and saving the limb at a greater risk to the boy's life. (He amputated the leg.) This dilemma came at the conclusion of Collins's grueling four years of residency at the Mayo Clinic, culminating in his appointment as chief resident in orthopedic surgery. Now in practice in Illinois, he details, with admirable humor and insight, the early, virtually sleepless years when he learned not only to perfect his craft but to come to terms with the emotional impact of causing pain and losing patients. Collins brings to life the dramatic moments when he made his first, terrifying incision and hand-drilled a traction pin into a weeping six-year-old's leg. Collins and his wife, Patti, wanted a large family, but the economic strain of having three children in three years (they eventually had 12) forced him to moonlight every other weekend at rural hospitals. There are moving passages about his love for Patti and the bonds he developed with other residents, and empathetic evocations of those he treats. Collins describes powerfully how he came to understand that his calling was not just to develop as a skilled surgical technician, but to treat his patients humanely as individuals.

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From [Booklist](#)

Starred Review If he didn't feel overwhelmed before the Mayo Clinic senior orthopedic surgery resident lobbed a beeper at him with the nonchalant order, "Cover for me," 29-year-old ex-cabdriver, ex-construction worker, and, at the time, brand-new resident Collins certainly did then. It was his first day on the job, and instantly he began fielding calls from staff nurses requesting orders for patients he hadn't laid eyes on. If it hadn't been for his innate sense of humor--brilliantly demonstrated in this memoir of his Mayo residency--and a sense of perspective derived from that experience, he might have failed. He didn't, and here he honors those who helped him along the way and those whom he helped. As a man who recognizes that he, too, makes his living with his hands, Collins anguishes over the options available to a carpenter who had severed four fingers. After assisting at a young cancer patient's leg amputation, only to learn later that she had died within months, anyway, he agonizes over what drew him to his profession in the first place and what could possibly keep him on course. "I wanted to be the guy who confronted the arbitrariness of life and strangled the unfairness out of it." Instead, while honing his craft, he learned from a Vietnam vet that the main thing patients deserve is compassion. If Collins' scalpel is as sharp as his pen, his patients are in capable hands, indeed. *Donna Chavez*

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Review

"Like the very best episode of *ER*, Collins' memoir races from one trauma to the next, keeping this reader spellbound all the way. Collins' life as a surgical resident is heartbreakingly one minute and triumphantly the next. You'll laugh and cry and cheer along with him as his epic journey to become a doctor races toward its gripping conclusion. I love this book and won't soon forget it." ?Augusten Burroughs, New York Times bestselling author of *Dry* and *Magical Thinking*

"One of the best, funniest medical memoirs I have ever read. *Hot Lights, Cold Steel* is at once darkly humorous and truly compassionate. Not since *House of God* has there been such a ferociously funny look at the world of hospital medicine." ?Michael Palmer, New York Times bestselling author of *Fatal* and *The*

Society

“I adore this book. It's so polished and hilarious. It brought back all the stomach-churning anxieties of my own residency so vividly that I felt exhausted reading it. Dr. Collins has my highest admiration. I give this book a 10+!” ?Tess Gerritsen, New York Times bestselling author of *The Surgeon* and *The Apprentice*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Juan Palmer:

The book *Hot Lights, Cold Steel: Life, Death and Sleepless Nights in a Surgeon's First Years* make one feel enjoy for your spare time. You can use to make your capable much more increase. Book can to get your best friend when you getting tension or having big problem together with your subject. If you can make reading a book *Hot Lights, Cold Steel: Life, Death and Sleepless Nights in a Surgeon's First Years* to be your habit, you can get much more advantages, like add your own capable, increase your knowledge about a few or all subjects. You can know everything if you like open and read a guide *Hot Lights, Cold Steel: Life, Death and Sleepless Nights in a Surgeon's First Years*. Kinds of book are a lot of. It means that, science reserve or encyclopedia or others. So , how do you think about this guide?

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Alberto Turcotte:

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books that are good idea. Many of us recommend that straight away because this publication has good vocabulary that can increase your knowledge in terminology, easy to understand, bit entertaining but nonetheless delivering the information. The author giving his/her effort to set every word into joy arrangement in writing Hot Lights, Cold Steel: Life, Death and Sleepless Nights in a Surgeon's First Years yet doesn't forget the main stage, giving the reader the hottest and also based confirm resource information that maybe you can be one among it. This great information could drawn you into brand new stage of crucial thinking.

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