

The Patient

by
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CHARACTERS

THE PATIENT (M) - Terry Gillian, ordinary husband and father

THE NURSE (F) - who does not work for your average HMO

Total Roles: 2 (1 female, 1 male)

SETTING

A doctor's exam room.

SYNOPSIS

When Terry Gillian shows up for a doctor's appointment—an appointment he doesn't remember making—the visit becomes anything but routine. As the Nurse grills him on his phobias and how often he yells at his kids, Terry must convince her this visit is a mistake before she sends him to meet the doctor.

(A doctor's exam room, which may be as simple as a place for the PATIENT to sit. The NURSE and the PATIENT enter, the latter dressed in a white examination robe.)

NURSE

Right this way. Just have a seat, please. I'll be right with you.

(She exits. The PATIENT sits and after a brief pause finds a reflex hammer and starts playing with it, hitting his knees, etc., to test his own reflexes. The NURSE re-enters with the PATIENT's chart.)

That's not a toy.

PATIENT

Sorry.

NURSE

Let's see, Terry Gillian? Age thirty-five, from Saint Paul?

PATIENT

Yes, that's right.

NURSE

Good. We'll have you taken care of in no time.

PATIENT

Great.

(Slight pause)

I'm sorry, can you remind me what this is for? I can't seem to remember why I made this appointment.

NURSE

It's just a routine examination, that's all. We do this with everyone.

PATIENT

I see.

NURSE

Now it says here that you like beer, fast food, double cheeseburgers... My, my, not very healthy, is it?

PATIENT

I know, I know.

NURSE

Well, we're all entitled to a few vices, aren't we?

PATIENT

I'm trying to do better, really.

NURSE

No point in worrying about that now.

(Reading)

Also, you like to watch baseball and football, surf the Internet, and yell at your kids.

PATIENT

Excuse me?

NURSE

I'm sorry, do we have that wrong?

PATIENT

Well, when I'm home late, and tired, and... Wait, that's on there? How did you...?

NURSE

We're quite thorough, Mr. Gillian. It is our job, after all.

PATIENT

I suppose. But that's all confidential, right?

NURSE

Oh of course it is.

PATIENT

Good. Can we just get this over with?

NURSE

If you like, though if I were you I wouldn't be in such a hurry. Now let's take a look at you. Look straight ahead, please.

(She takes a small light and shines it into each of the PATIENT's eyes.)

Looks normal. What sort of movies do you watch, Mr. Gillian?

PATIENT

You know, whatever's popular.

NURSE

Lots of sex and violence?

PATIENT

I guess. I hadn't really thought about it.

NURSE

Good. What about television? Do you watch a lot of that?

(The PATIENT nods.)

I thought so.

(She starts checking his ears.)

PATIENT

I mean, I know I should be more active. My wife's always pestering me to get outside more, go play with the kids.

NURSE

And did you?

PATIENT

I try, when there's time, you know.

NURSE

Oh yes, always something that gets in the way, isn't there? Paying bills, working late, just keeping ahead.

PATIENT

Exactly. The kids don't seem to get that.

NURSE

No, they usually grow into that later. Open wide.
(He does and she peers at his throat.)

My, my.

PATIENT

What?

NURSE

Mouth open, please.

(He obeys.)

Doesn't look so good in there. Speak a lot of harsh words, do you? You must yell at your children quite often.

PATIENT

I beg your pardon? I mean, you can tell? Just by looking?

NURSE

Of course, we're quite experienced at this.

PATIENT

I don't really mean it, you know, when I yell at them.

NURSE

Oh of course you do. But it's quite normal.

PATIENT

Good... I guess.

NURSE

Now, any allergies I should be aware of?

What? PATIENT

Allergies? NURSE

Oh, no. Not that I know of, anyway. PATIENT

(Writing this down)
All right, I'll see what I can do about that. NURSE

Huh? PATIENT

What about phobias? NURSE

I'm sorry, but what does this have to do with— PATIENT

It's just routine, Mr. Gillian. NURSE

All right. Spiders, I guess. Maybe heights... PATIENT

(Laughing)
No, no, not that sort. Fears of commitment? Emotional attachment? NURSE

(Trying to laugh it off)
Same as any man. PATIENT

Good, that's what we like to hear. Anything else? NURSE

Well... fear of being a bad father. PATIENT

Ah. I was afraid of that. NURSE
(She writes this down.)

PATIENT
Is that bad?

NURSE
It encourages introspection, that's all.

PATIENT
Oh, and fear of death, of course.

NURSE
You don't need to worry about that one any longer, Mr. Gillian.
(She finishes writing.)
Very good then.

PATIENT
This isn't my usual doctor. In fact, I don't think I've ever been here before.

NURSE
Not as such. But you'll be surprised at how familiar it all feels.

PATIENT
And I don't remember driving here.

NURSE
Let's continue, shall we? I still need to check your reflexes.

PATIENT
Sure.
(Using the reflex hammer the NURSE gives him a short quick rap on the head.)
Ow!

NURSE
(Writing)
Pain receptors in working order.

PATIENT
Of course they are. Did you think they wouldn't be?

NURSE
We like to make sure.
(She consults her chart.)
Let's see now...
(She taps him on the heart with the hammer.)
Feel anything?

PATIENT
Not really.

NURSE

Perfect.

PATIENT

Look, I don't remember why I even needed this check up.

NURSE

It's standard procedure, of course, for everyone going in.

PATIENT

Going in where?

(Slight pause)

I think I should be going now.

(He tries to stand but the NURSE sits him back down.)

NURSE

Not until we're finished, I'm afraid. Are you religious, Mr. Gillian?

PATIENT

What?

NURSE

Are you religious?

PATIENT

I'm sorry, I don't see how that's relevant.

NURSE

Just answer the question, please.

PATIENT

Does it matter?

NURSE

Not as much as you might think.

PATIENT

I take my family to church almost every Sunday.

NURSE

And?

PATIENT

And what?

NURSE

Thank you, that's most helpful.

PATIENT
Excuse me, but where's the doctor?

NURSE
I'm sorry?

PATIENT
Shouldn't I be seeing the doctor?

NURSE
The doctor will be seeing you very soon. Just a few more quick tests.

PATIENT
I'd rather not. I'd like to go now.

NURSE
I'm afraid that's not possible.

PATIENT
I'll finish this later, I promise.
(He stands and tries to leave in the direction from which he came.)

NURSE
Sir!

(The PATIENT stops.)

PATIENT
I thought the door was over here.

NURSE
The only door is there.
(She points opposite.)
To see the doctor.
(She starts preparing to give the PATIENT a shot.)

PATIENT
But I came from over here.

NURSE
There's no going back, you know. May we please finish? I have many more patients to see today.
Sir?

PATIENT
All right. But I don't understand what...

NURSE
 You will.
 (She gives the PATIENT the shot.)

PATIENT
 What was that for?

NURSE
 It takes care of the remaining infection. There's some good left in everyone, you know. Now, I just need to take another look.
 (She shines the light in his eyes again and looks.)
 Yes, you're almost set. How do you feel?

PATIENT
 I... I don't.

NURSE
 Excellent.

PATIENT
 But what happened?

NURSE
 Don't you remember?

PATIENT
 No. I thought I was going to work.

NURSE
 Yes, that's right.

PATIENT
 (Trying to remember)
 I was on my way to work and... and...

NURSE
 We're all finished here. Right through the door, please.

PATIENT
 (Remembering)
 Wait a minute, there was a car, and I... I... Oh God.

NURSE
 I'm afraid not. Through the door.
 (The PATIENT crosses to look through it.)

PATIENT

No, no, this isn't right. I was a good person.

NURSE

Everyone says that.

PATIENT

But I was.

NURSE

It's not about that, you know.

PATIENT

This can't be right. You must have made a mistake.

NURSE

We don't make mistakes, Mr. Gillian.

PATIENT

But...

(He has nothing left to say.)

NURSE

You seem surprised, but this is what you wanted.

PATIENT

No it's not.

NURSE

Well it's what you chose.

PATIENT

I didn't mean to. I thought that if I just did my best...

NURSE

Yes, most people do. That's how we get so many. But you can't have it both ways, you should have realized that.

PATIENT

Please, my wife and kids...

NURSE

I'm sure you'll see them again.

PATIENT

No! Please, if this is what I chose then... then all right, but my family... Please, I have to tell them. Can't I tell them?

NURSE

It doesn't work that way, I'm afraid. Now go on, Mr. Gillian, the doctor's waiting.

(Having no other choice the PATIENT exits through the door. The NURSE tidies up for a moment.)

Next!

(Blackout.)