DUTY OF CARE

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WINDSCREEN WIPERS

scythe through heavy rain. Left, right, left, right. Their movements violent, robotic, emotionless. Rain runs down the glass in dark rivulets. Left, right. Left, right. Still the rain falls.

INSIDE THE VEHICLE --

-- a FIGURE sits in the dark. Quiet. Ready. A GUN lies in the passenger seat.

EXT. HOSPITAL - NIGHT

FRANCIS, 50s, greying and distinguished, expensive suit and overcoat, holds a briefcase above his head to shield himself from the downpour. The other hand clamps a phone to his ear.

FRANCIS

(into phone)

No, I've just finished. Absolute bloody nightmare, whole place is bursting at the seams... sorry? I-look, I really can't hear you. I'm trying to hail a taxi now... hello?

Francis peers at the phone, pockets it. He looks down the street, sees a BLACK CAB approaching, throws out a hand.

INT. TAXI - CONTINUOUS

The driver -- VICTOR, 30s, gaunt, shaved head -- flicks the indicator switch, starts to slow.

EXT. HOSPITAL - CONTINUOUS

The taxi pulls up. Francis opens the door, leans in --

FRANCIS

Waterloo Station, please!

He clambers in, slams the door shut. The taxi pulls off.

INT. TAXI - CONTINUOUS

Francis shakes out the collar of his suit, runs a hand through his hair. Victor watches him in the mirror.

VICTOR

(Eastern European accent) Shit night.

FRANCIS

I'm sorry?

VICTOR

The weather. Shit night.

FRANCIS

Well, that's November for you.

His phone RINGS. He digs it out, answers.

FRANCIS (CONTD.)

(into phone)

Francis Shelley. Darling, hi. Think I lost signal before... yes, I found a cab. Hm? Yes, I'm on my way to the station now. Didn't you hear? Big pile-up on the South Circular apparently, A and E looks like a field hospital in Kabul. They dragged me out of a board meeting, straight into theatre, meant to have a car booked once it was over but the fucker didn't show... What? No, shouldn't be too long now, with a bit of luck should make the last train out of Waterloo. I'll ring when I'm on one, alright? Love you too. Bye.

He hangs up, looks out the window. Seconds pass in silence.

VICTOR

So you are doctor?

FRANCIS

I'm sorry?

VICTOR

I pick you up at hospital. You talk of accident. So... doctor, yes?

FRANCIS

Were you listening to my private phone call?

VICTOR

Is just us two in here. Taxi not so big. I no listen, just hear. Are you? Doctor?

A pause as Francis considers whether or not to play along.

FRANCIS

(eventually)

A surgeon. Orthopaedic and trauma, if you must know. I treat musculoskeletal injuries.

VICTOR

'Muscu...'?

FRANCIS

Bones. Muscles. Joints. The bits that enable you to move.

VICTOR

You fix what is broken.

FRANCIS

(beat)

I try to.

VICTOR

On the phone. This is... your wife?

FRANCIS

Not to be rude, but I'm not sure that's any of your business.

Victor shrugs. Another pause.

VICTOR

My wife, Liza. Beautiful. Smile like shining sun. True love, yes?

They pull up at a deserted junction. The lights turn green. Victor glances in his mirrors, then indicates right.

EXT. JUNCTION - CONTINUOUS

The taxi turns right onto a darker street.

INT. TAXI - CONTINUOUS

VICTOR (CONTD.)

Tell me doctor, you do many surgeries, yes? Many patients?

FRANCIS

Yes. Lots of patients.

VICTOR

And they are hard? Your surgeries?

FRANCIS

If you're looking for career advice, I doubt you're qualified to suddenly make the leap from taxi driver to orthopaedics, let's just put it that way.

VICTOR

Ha. This is funny. Me as surgeon. Funny. So. Is hard. But have you ever... killed, a patient? This ever happen to you?

FRANCIS

What? God, no. Never.
 (looks out of window)
Are you sure this is the quickest route to Waterloo?

VICTOR

But this does happen, yes? A doctor, like you, meant to fix, kills them instead?

Victor wrings the steering wheel like a neck.

FRANCIS

Uh, sadly it's been known to, yes. From time to time.

VICTOR

I *know* this happens from time to time. I know this very well.

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

The taxi turns into a darkened, empty CAR PARK.

INT. TAXI - CONTINUOUS

FRANCIS

What exactly is going on? Where the hell are we?

EXT. CAR PARK - CONTINUOUS

The taxi stops. The engine cuts out. It's quiet.

INT. TAXI - CONTINUOUS

Victor unbuckles his seatbelt.

VICTOR

I kill a man, is murder. But one of you? 'Malpractice.' 'Settled out of court.' This...not right. Not fair.

Unseen by Victor, Francis quietly opens his briefcase and reaches inside.

FRANCIS

Look, what's your name? If you have a complaint about care, take it up with the relevant authority --

VICTOR

I am Victor. My wife's name was Liza. This is for her --

-- Victor's hand shoots out, grabs the GUN lying on the passenger seat next to him. He throws open his door --

EXT. CAR PARK - CONTINUOUS

- -- steps out, reaches for the rear door -- FRANCIS bursts out of the taxi, LUNGES at Victor, knocks them both to the ground. The gun goes flying --
- -- the two men land in a heap, Victor swings a fist, but Francis grabs his arm, pins it across his chest -- then SLAMS his forehead into Victor's face once, twice -- blood splatters as bones CRUNCH --
- -- a HYPODERMIC NEEDLE pierces the side of Victor's neck. His eyes go wide with confusion, he fights -- Francis holds him down -- but fades as the drugs take effect. His kicks become weaker, flailing limbs subside. His eyelids sag...

Victor goes limp. Francis breathes hard, waits to make sure Victor is out before he releases his grip.

He struggles to his feet, checks around to see if anyone heard. Satisfied, he bends down, grabs Victor's arms.

MOMENTS LATER

The taxi's engine starts up again. It turns in a circle, exits the way it came in.

INT. TAXI - CONTINUOUS

Francis is now at the wheel. He checks in the rear view mirror: Victor lies across the back seats.

EXT. RESIDENTIAL TOWER BLOCK - NIGHT

Twenty-five storeys of bleak concrete. Bad things happen here, and from the look of the building you can see why.

The taxi pulls into a parking space out front.

MOMENTS LATER

Francis carries Victor over his shoulder, wrapped up in his coat, towards the building.

At the ENTRANCE DOOR he pauses, fishes in his jacket pocket and brings out a key fob. He presses it against a panel by the door, pulls the handle and enters, steps into the --

INT. RESIDENTIAL TOWER BLOCK - ENTRANCE HALL - CONTINUOUS

Cracked tiles, peeling paint. Francis carries Victor towards the elevators. His squeaky footsteps echo around the space.

INT. RESIDENTIAL TOWER BLOCK - WALKWAY - NIGHT

The lift doors open, and Francis carries Victor out. He makes his way a few doors down, stops in front of one. Pulls out the keys again, puts one in the lock, looks up --

A KID loiters at the end of the walkway, leaned against the wall. Hooded tracksuit, baseball cap, face barely visible.

KID'S POV

Francis' face is caked in half-dried blood. Victor's trainers are clearly visible underneath the coat.

BACK TO SCENE

The two regard each other warily. Neither moves.

Then, the Kid stands up straight -- and walks away.

INT. FLAT - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Francis enters, kicks the door shut behind him. He flicks the light, which splutters into a sickly artificial glow.

Francis crosses the hallway, steps through into the --

INT. FLAT - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

-- and dumps his burden onto a padded table in the middle of the room. He rips the coat off, exposing Victor: bloodied, bruised, wrists bound by cable ties.

Francis switches on the lights. Victor stirs, groans.

FRANCIS

Oh, hello. Coming round, are we?

Francis takes off his jacket, lays it on a worktop, starts to unbutton and roll up his shirt sleeves.

FRANCIS (CONTD.)

Don't worry, I'll give you something else in a minute. You'll be better off that way.

Victor peers at his surroundings. The kitchen has been adapted into part operating theatre, part storage room. Shiny surgical implements on trays, boxes of rubber gloves. Sinister objects float in several murky jars.

VICTOR

Please...

FRANCIS

Let you go? I'm afraid not.

Victor tries to sit up -- Francis SLAMS him back down, then crosses to the sink, runs the tap, starts to wash his hands.

FRANCIS (CONTD.)

Liza Prozorova... I remember the case, as it happens. Terrible tragedy. I don't know if it's any consolation, but the locum responsible never worked here again. Straight on a plane, back to Nigeria. But you? What happened to your wife left you completely alone. I'm not sure anyone will even notice you've gone missing.

Francis starts to open a fresh syringe package.

FRANCIS (CONTD.)

Not entirely certain why you decided to take your anger out on me, but there you go. I understand what grief can do to a man. Yes, by God, I understand that.

Victor stares at him, wide-eyed.

FRANCIS (CONTD.)

But enough chit-chat. We'd better get started, hadn't w--

-- something VIBRATES inside Francis' jacket. Francis grabs it, pulls out his phone, examines the screen.

FRANCIS (CONTD.)

Fuck.

He looks at Victor, weighing his decision. Then he answers.

FRANCIS (CONTD.)

Darling, hi! I meant to call.

He looks down at Victor again, then walks towards the door.

FRANCIS (CONTD.)

No, afraid not. I'm not even the station yet actually, traffic's been god-awful so still en route...

He steps out into the hallway, still talking. Victor waits, frozen still. Francis' voice grows quieter as he moves away.

Gasping at the effort, Victor rolls over to the edge of the table, swings his legs round and gingerly puts his feet down onto the floor. He stands up tentatively, half-crouched. Listens for a second. No change.

Victor creeps to the doorway, leans and peeks out --

INT. FLAT - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

-- a door stands ajar at the end of the hallway. Francis can be heard, talking on the other side.

Victor slips out of the kitchen, tiptoes quietly but quickly towards the front door. He reaches up with bound hands, turns the latch, pulls the handle --

-- but it won't open. He casts a glance over his shoulder, tries again, desperate. Pulls, PUUULLLS... but nothing.

Victor turns, panic rising. Creeps back towards the kitchen -- Francis is nowhere to be seen. Victor spots a door at the end of the hallway, heads towards it, reaches out --

FRANCIS (O.S.)

NOT IN THERE!

Victor spins round -- Francis stands at the other end. His face is a mixture of anger and terror.

Victor turns the handle, pushes. It won't open. He SLAMS his shoulder into it -- Francis starts to run towards him -- Victor steps back and KICKS at the door with all his might -- it flies open --

FRANCIS

NO!

-- Victor dives inside --

INT. FLAT - BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

- -- slams the door shut behind him. Victor turns, sees a wardrobe to his left, grabs the edge and topples it over. It CRASHES DOWN in front of the door --
- -- just as Francis reaches it. The door shudders in its frame as he tries to open it, but in vain.

FRANCIS (O.S.)
Victor, please, no! NOT IN THERE!

Francis continues to shout and beat on the door, which BASHES against the wardrobe as he tries to open it.

Victor looks around. The room is dark, lit only by a lamp sat on a table next to a BED in the final corner. A SHAPE lies in the bed, obscured by a sheet. There's nothing else.

The walls are covered in PHOTOGRAPHS. Victor approaches the wall, squints to make out the details. Family portraits, some of Francis, a WOMAN of similar age, and a TEENAGE BOY. The Boy is smiling, handsome. They all look happy.

Victor turns his head: photos of Francis and the Boy, the Woman and the Boy, the Boy alone. A collage of memories.

Here and there, between the photos, newspaper clippings are stuck to the wall. Victor's eyes pass over the type - 'DRUNK DRIVER'. 'PEDESTRIAN DIES'. 'FAMILY MOURNS LOSS'.

Victor turns, looks at the bed. The shape under the sheet seems twisted, lumpen, wrong somehow -- but he steps towards it, drawn by some morbid force.

He reaches the edge, stretches out his trembling hands and lifts up a corner of the sheet --

-- his eyes WIDEN IN HORROR at what he sees. All the colour drains from his face. His jaw drops, but no scream escapes. He drops the sheet, staggers backwards, eyes on the bed.

The wardrobe SPLINTERS as Francis finally smashes his way in. He clambers over it, stares at the bed, at Victor.

FRANCIS

(afraid)

What have you --

- -- Victor CHARGES at him with a roar, catches Francis off-guard, knocks him to the ground --
- -- Francis holds his hands up to protect himself but Victor KICKS him in the stomach, ribs -- bones CRACK -- then starts to STAMP on his head, frenzied, AGAIN and AGAIN, yelling like an animal all the while --

VICTOR MMMOOOTTHHHEERRRFUCCCKKKKEERRRRR!!!

-- his foot meets less and less resistance, until eventually he's just treading on wet mush. He stops when he can't do it anymore and looks down, breathing hard. Sinks to his knees beside the dead man. Energy gone.

Silence.

It's over.

But then --

-- a CREAK from the corner. From the bed.

Victor slowly turns his head.

The shape under the sheet MOVES. Victor can only watch, petrified, as --

-- SOMETHING pulls off the sheet. Slowly stands.

It might have been a teenage boy, once. A jumbled mess of flesh and bone; patchwork skin, muscle peeking through the gaps. No eyes; one miscoloured, mangled arm. Knees turned inwards; head flopping to one side. A nightmare made flesh.

It sniffs the air like a dog. Takes a shuddering step forward, towards Victor --

- -- he scrambles back, press himself against the wall, but still it moves forward, drawing closer, and closer... It reaches out a mottled, four-fingered hand --
- -- Victor opens his mouth to scream --