

THE DOCTOR'S DOCTOR

Written by

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INT. DR GAINSFORD'S OFFICE - MORNING

A plush office full of a certificates and two older doctors sit talking. One, DR GAINSFORD - fastidious, late 60s - opens a drawer, takes out a bottle of very good scotch and hands it to LOU - relaxed, mid-50's - who is sat in a leather chair opposite.

GAINSFORD

This was the one I was telling you about.

LOU nods approvingly.

LOU

I reckon that one set you back more and twenty buck down the supermarket.

GAINSFORD

A little more, but it's certainly worth it.

(BEAT)

Want me to open it?

LOU

Well I didn't think you'd called me up here to talk about x-rays.

He hands it back and watches as DR GAINSFORD places two glasses on the desk and pours a slug into each.

LOU holds one up to the window.

LOU (CONT'D)

Ain't that's a thing of beauty.

He sips it.

LOU (CONT'D)

You weren't kidding, were you? That's some damn good scotch.

GAINSFORD tips his glass to LOU and sips. An uncomfortable silence develops, GAINSFORD looking everywhere but at LOU.

LOU (CONT'D)

What's the matter, Earl? You look like you've got the worries of the world on your shoulders. Neither of us mind a sip of the good stuff every now and then, but you don't usually start this early.

GAINSFORD reclines in his chair, swirling his glass of scotch thoughtfully.

GAINSFORD

McAllister- heh, he finally took his balls out of his wife's handbag. Told me if I wanted to keep practicing here, that I had to go for an annual check-up, this afternoon. He *demande*d I take one. Told me he'd cleared my diary, to make sure I had the time.

LOU

D'ahhhh you've never worried about what McAllister said in the past. You ain't going soft of me, are you?

LOU grins teasing his friend, then gets serious when Earl doesn't respond.

LOU (CONT'D)

Sure, a check-up's a pain in the arse. No-one enjoys em, but you go every year, right? If there was something wrong they'd have picked it up by now. You got nothing to worry about.

GAINSFORD glances side on at LOU and plays with his glass nervously.

GAINSFORD

I've- never mentioned this to anyone, Lou, but the last time I had a check-up Walsh was still practicing.

LOU

Walsh?

LOU slams the glass on the table.

LOU (CONT'D)

Goddamnit, Earl, Jack Walsh retired nearly ten years ago!

GAINSFORD

I know, I know. But what with one thing and another, I never had the time to go, never had a reason or a need to.

LOU

Whose seeing you?

GAINSFORD

That youngster, Ted Simons

LOU

Good! That boy'll tell you straight that you're a damn fool! He won't stand none of your nonsense.

FADE TO:

INT. DR SIMONS' CONSULTING OFFICE - AFTERNOON

Doctors GAINSFORD and SIMONS sit opposite each other at Simons' desk. SIMONS - dark haired, clean-shaven. early-40s, averagely-built white man.

GAINSFORD

So, what's the verdict?

SIMONS doesn't look up from his notes while he speaks.

SIMONS

What would you like me to say, Doctor Gainsford? You haven't a check-up for the best part of ten years, you know what you've been doing to your body in that time.

SIMONS puts down his notes and focuses on GAINSFORD.

SIMONS (CONT'D)

Would you like me to lie to you? Make something up? Pretend that everything is well in your world, doctor?

GAINSFORD

Just tell me, boy.

SIMONS

You're fine, doctor Gainsford.

SIMONS waves a dismissive hand & GAINSFORD stands.

SIMONS (CONT'D)

Sit down! That was me lying to smooth your ruffled feathers.

GAINSFORD glares at the younger man, not used to being spoken to this way.

SIMONS (CONT'D)

You're not fine, by any stretch or definition of the word. You- you're a wreck! You drink too much, smoke too much, and I've seen for myself how you are day-to-day. You're a bitter, angry, old man, and that puts extra strain on your heart.

(MORE)

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SIMONS (CONT'D)

Quite frankly I'm surprised that you've made it ten years.

GAINSFORD

So, what do you suggest? A love-in at some hippy commune? Peace out with the beatniks singing happy little tunes all day? Should I organise a safe space for myself in case I feel threatened by the world?

SIMONS

No. I suggest you stop smoking, cut down on the drinking, and do some exercise. Maybe that'll go some way to stopping those shakes you get.

GAINSFORD is stunned that SIMONS know about the one thing he's been trying to keep secret.

GAINSFORD

How-?

SIMONS

You're damn lucky they haven't happened while you've been in surgery. Why the hell do you drink so much anyway?

GAINSFORD

None of your damn business!

SIMONS

It most certainly is my business as your doctor, and most definitely if you end up responsible for a law suit against this hospital. Everyone's reputation gets tarnished because one old man can't give up the bottle to do the job, or give up the job to finish the bottle!

GAINSFORD

So now we get down to it. That's what this is about, where it's going, is it? Looking for a way to get rid of me, huh? Who put you up to this? McAllister? Boone?

SIMONS

This isn't about getting rid-

GAINSFORD

Horseshit! You think I'm too old,
can't carry on as the best doctor
this hospital has!

SIMONS is gobsmacked

SIMONS

Is that what you think? What do you
think would happen if you left?
Have you somehow convinced yourself
that this hospital would crumble to
dust without **you**? My God, I knew
you were vain, arrogant even... but
this? Let me tell you, doctor
Gainsford, we have plenty of damn
good doctors at this hospital who
could replace you, should the need
arise.

GAINSFORD

And I'll just bet you're one them,
aren't you boy?

SIMONS

No, actually I'm not. I don't know
enough to do what you do, to even
begin to do what you do, not yet,
but others do.

GAINSFORD

So, don't smoke, don't drink and
get some exercise. That's your
prognosis? Pathetic. A prognosis
like that was the reason I haven't
had a check-up in so long. A half-
arsed assessment by a child still
wet behind the ears.

SIMONS folds his arms

SIMONS

Oh really? So that's the reason?
the real reason, is it? It's not...
oh, I don't know, the fact that you
lost a patient in surgery, or that
you never took to a single one of
the counselling sessions doctor
Walsh suggested afterwards?

GAINSFORD stares at him in surprise

SIMONS (CONT'D)

Yeah, I know about all of that.
You, of all people, should what's
likely to be in your case file.

(MORE)

SIMONS (CONT'D)

I lied about not knowing the reason why you drank. I thought I'd give you the opportunity to man up and tell me yourself, but you didn't. Yes, I know what happened in surgery that afternoon. It was before my time of course, but then everything is, isn't it? Us young doctors still wet behind the ears, what would we know? Us riding our rising stars?

GAINSFORD

Do you even know what it's like to have someone on the table and see their life seeping out of them? Watch it slipping away, and nothing you do stems it? When all you can do is watch them fade further and further away until that spark of life is gone?

GAINSFORD's face is hard-set, and his voice is dangerously low.

GAINSFORD (CONT'D)

Don't you dare *judge* me until you've made my mistakes, *boy!*

When SIMONS replies, he talks softly, clearly remembering.

SIMONS

August second nineteen ninety nine, I was in Kuwait City as an medical student when the first bombs fell. They rushed the injured and the dying wherever they could. There weren't enough doctors to cope with the number of bodies coming in. So they threw students and interns at them, told them "do your best."

SIMONS looks up at GAINSFORD

SIMONS (CONT'D)

Have you ever seen what bombs, shrapnel, concussive force, and falling masonry do to the human body, doctor Gainsford? No? Let me tell you, it isn't pretty. What about this? Have you ever seen what happens to ill-prepared students forced to confront a continual flood of bodies, ravaged by violence day in, day out? No? That's not pretty either.

SIMONS pauses.

SIMONS (CONT'D)

Let me tell you about a- a young woman... Alice. She was one of the brightest students you could ever hope to meet. Knew her stuff inside out and back to front. She could organise anything, from a trauma room to an emergency operation in a field. But there was no way she was ready to be thrown in to a war zone. No-one's ever ready, but Alice-- She lasted two weeks. A cleaner found her one morning in a back stairwell of a hotel they were using as an emergency hospital. She'd- er- she'd shot herself. Shot herself... so she didn't waste any of the medicine, because she knew someone else would need it. That was Alice.

SIMONS smiles sadly for a moment, then his tone hardens.

SIMONS (CONT'D)

So please don't ever lecture me about losing patients, doctor. I've lost enough to last my career, and probably yours too.

GAINSFORD

And you don't regret it? Never once hit the bottle? Horseshit! Of course you did.

SIMONS

I regret that I wasn't able to save the ones we lost, regret that I couldn't stop Alice, but then maybe that's the lesson. You know can't save everybody, but you do your damndest for the ones you can save, even if they are too stupid to save themselves. And no, doctor, I didn't hit the bottle. Muslim country, no easily available alcohol for us civilian medics. The only alcohol we had was the medicinal alcohol, and there were always other people who needed it a damn sight more than me. I just had to try my best to live through it and hope I'd come out the other side.

GAINSFORD regards the younger man, feeling humbled.

GAINSFORD

Anything else you feel I should do?

SIMONS

You know what you need to do,
doctor Gainsford. You don't need
someone like me telling you what to
do.

GAINSFORD

Yes, maybe I did. Thank you, doctor
Simons.

GAINSFORD rises, and leaves the consulting room

SIMONS

And don't leave it so long before
your next appointment!

FADE TO:

INT. BUSTLING HOSPITAL CORRIDOR - AFTERNOON

GAINSFORD is walking down the corridor when he meets JEANIE,
a long-time colleague. She is 5' 8, ash brown hair, late 50's
with a stern face that only softens for certain people.

JEANIE

Hey, Earl. Heard you had your first
check-up this side of the
millennium today.

GAINSFORD seems distracted.

GAINSFORD

Hey, Jeanie. Yeah, first one in a
while. Not sure it's a millennial,
but yeah, maybe it is.

JEANIE

So? Come on then, who'd you scare
the pants off?

JEANIE grins broadly.

JEANIE (CONT'D)

One a them young bloods?

GAINSFORD

No-one. Not this time.

JEANIE eyes him critically.

JEANIE

That's not like you. You slipping,
Earl?

A thought hits her.

JEANIE (CONT'D)

It wasn't anything serious, was it?

GAINSFORD waves the question away.

GAINSFORD

No. No, nothing like that. I think I might have met my match though.

GAINSFORD gives a wan smile.

JEANIE

What? We got some *other* antediluvian sawbones prowling these ol' corridors, or you just been talking at yourself in the mirror again?

JEANIE tries to make light, but is obviously concerned.

GAINSFORD

Hardly. It was Simons.

JEANIE

Simons? Whatta you talking about, Earl? That boy's a pussycat.

GAINSFORD

He's got sharp claws for a pussycat, Jeanie.

JEANIE

So what'd he say?

GAINSFORD

Nothing I didn't already know. He just got me to listen this time.

JEANIE

Damn! He *is* good. Look, I'm going out for a smoke. You can tell me about it outside.

JEANIE takes two cigarettes out of her pack and offers one to GAINSFORD. He looks at the offered cigarette, hesitates for a moment, then shakes his head.

GAINSFORD

No, not for me, thanks Jeanie. I've got some errands to run, but I'll catch up with you for coffee sometime.

GAINSFORD gives her a peck on the cheek, and leaves. JEANIE watches him go, stunned.

10.

JEANIE

What the hell'd that boy do to you,
Earl?

FADE TO BLACK.