

CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

0 MALE / 6 FEMALE

ELEANOR, a neurology patient (F—50s/60s)

PAIGE, Eleanor's older daughter (F-30s)

GLORIA, Eleanor's younger daughter (F-20s/30s)

ROBYN, a medical student (F-20s)

THE AMNESIAC, a quadriplegic (F—20s/30s)

DR. GWENDOLYN FALK, a brain surgeon (F—50s)

SETTING

The neurology ward of private hospital in a major American city. The present.

ACT ONE

1. Paige and Robyn. A hospital corridor. Robyn carries a towering stack of patients' charts.

PAIGE

Let me ask you something, doctor.

ROBYN

I'm *not* a doctor. I'm a medical student.

PAIGE

That's all right. So here's my question—

ROBYN

Honestly, I'm probably not the best person to ask. This is my first day at the hospital....I've only been working here for three hours....

PAIGE

Don't worry. It's an easy question, doctor. Let's say you'd been having debilitating headaches every afternoon for the past six months. Headaches so bad that you thought your brain was on fire. What would you do?

ROBYN

I suppose I'd see a doctor....*which, for the record, I am not.*

PAIGE

So you wouldn't try to work through the pain?

ROBYN

I'm a medical student. They expect me to work until I keel over....

PAIGE

Very well. But let's pretend you aren't a doctor. Let's say—hypothetically speaking—you're a senior marine biologist at the city aquarium. Now would you seek medical attention? Or would you put it off until one day, when you were halfway through feeding the dolphins, you ended up keeling over into a tank of salt water with dozens of schoolchildren looking on?

ROBYN

Oh, no. I wouldn't do that.

PAIGE

I didn't think so. Now tell me this, doctor: If you had a serious and longstanding medical condition, would you tell your daughters, your daughters who love you more than any other human beings on the entire planet? Or would you tell nobody?

ROBYN

Please don't call me *doctor*....My name's Robyn.

PAIGE

Very well, Robyn. You'd tell your daughters, wouldn't you?

ROBYN

I don't have any daughters....

PAIGE

But if you did.

ROBYN

....I guess I would....

PAIGE

Of course, you would. You've only been a doctor three hours and *already* you know that.

ROBYN

Listen to me. I am a medical student. *NOT* a doctor. We're required by law to make that clear to the patients and their families....It's the very first thing they tell you when they give you your white coat. Honestly, it's the *only* thing that they tell you. That *under absolutely no circumstances* are you allowed to pass yourself off as a physician. Otherwise, you can get expelled—or sued—or you can even go to jail for practicing medicine without a license....So *please* don't keep calling me doctor. Because I'm only a layperson. An ordinary citizen, just like you. There is *nobody* in the world who is less a doctor than I am!

(Robyn loses her grip on the patients' charts and they topple to the ground. Pages fly in all directions.)

Oh God!

(Robyn falls to her knees and begins to sort through the charts, attempting to guess which pages belong to which patients. Paige kneels down alongside her and assists her as best she can.)

PAIGE

It's okay. I know you're not a doctor....

ROBYN

And I'm never going to become one at this rate.

PAIGE

What should I do with the torn pages?

(She holds up two halves of a ripped page from a patient's chart. Robyn takes the scraps from her and examines them. Then she stuffs them inside her blouse.)

PAIGE

It's just that it's so hard to find a *real* doctor to talk to around here....

ROBYN

Please don't tell anybody I got the charts mixed up.

PAIGE

—I suppose I'd have better luck on a golf course—

ROBYN

—Dr. Falk would have my head if she ever found out.

PAIGE

—Or maybe a carwash....Doctors always drive such clean cars. Have you noticed that?

ROBYN

(Breaking into sobs.)

I didn't go to medical school to play golf....or to drive a shiny car....All I wanted to do was help people, as old-fashioned as that sounds....and now I'm going to get expelled on my first day in the hospital....

PAIGE

Oh, honey.....It's not such a big deal, is it? The pages don't even seem to be *so* mixed up. All of *these* over here are for the same patient. Sally Brown....and she sounds like a very sick woman anyway....although I suppose I shouldn't be reading through her records.....

ROBYN

(Robyn uses the chart pages as tissues: first she dabs her eyes, then she blows her nose.)

All of these charts are for *different* patients named Sally Brown. Dr. Falk sent me to get Ms. Brown's files from medical records...but there were nineteen different patients named Sally Brown who've been treated in this hospital at one time or another....and I didn't know which one she wanted, so I brought them all....

PAIGE

Damn. This is serious.

ROBYN

You don't know the half of it. Dr. Falk sent a medical student home last year for *slouching*....
(Robyn stuffs additional pages into her blouse until papers are poking out of her clothing from all sides.)

PAIGE

Do you know what else is a serious matter?

ROBYN

....No. I'm afraid I don't.

PAIGE

My mother's health is a serious matter.

ROBYN

Of course, it is.

PAIGE

You know that. *I* know that. The only person who doesn't appear to understand that is my mother. Has anybody told you *why* my mother's head hurts?

(Robyn gathers the charts and stands up. Several pages fall out of her blouse. She tucks them into her pants.)

ROBYN

Who is your mother again?

PAIGE

Eleanor Powell. Room 125, Bed 2. Do you know why Eleanor Powell's head hurts?

ROBYN

Honestly, I don't.

PAIGE

My mother has a wrist watch lodged inside her skull.

ROBYN

A wrist watch?

PAIGE

A man's wrist watch....

ROBYN

I didn't know that was possible. Last year, they showed us slides of a drunk musician who tried to swallow a clarinet on a dare. You could see all the tiny gauges on the X-ray of his stomach.

PAIGE

Well, my mother didn't swallow anything....My mother had a benign brain tumor removed as a teenager....while she was at boarding school in Switzerland....and it appears one of the Swiss surgeons accidentally left his watch inside her cranium....

ROBYN

That *does* sound painful.

PAIGE

So much for Swiss precision.

ROBYN

At least it wasn't a cuckoo clock.

PAIGE

Although who can be certain it was even an accident? Maybe the surgeon did it *intentionally*.

ROBYN

Or a clarinet. Can you imagine having a clarinet lodged in your skull?

PAIGE

All sorts of crazy people become doctors. You'd have to be rather crazy to spend your life cutting open other people's skulls, if you ask me....

ROBYN

But I guess nobody brings a clarinet into an operating room.

PAIGE

Are you listening to me? My mother has a forty-year-old timepiece trapped inside her head. I'll bet they didn't teach you about that in medical school....

ROBYN

I'm not done with medical school yet.

PAIGE

The bottom line is that my mother has been keeping this a secret. She found out about the watch in the 1970s, when they installed metal detectors at the airports....But since it didn't cause her any discomfort her, she didn't bother to tell anybody....

ROBYN

Maybe you should be telling this to someone with a medical degree....

PAIGE

It's easier to tell you know and wait for you to graduate....Besides, it's not very complicated: After minding its business all these years, the watch has started encroaching on things inside my mother's head. Important things: Arteries, ventricles, gray matter.

ROBYN

Those are important.

PAIGE

So I'm told. If she doesn't have surgery soon, the watch may cut off the blood supply to her cerebral cortex—and I'm sure you understand what that means....

ROBYN

It doesn't sound very promising.

PAIGE

Precisely, Robyn. It doesn't sound very promising...Needless to say, when Mom collapsed, my sister and I consulted the leading neurologists in the country and they all recommended the same surgeon. I'm sure you've heard of him: Dr. Hiram T. Luxby.

ROBYN

You mean the Dr. Luxby who—

PAIGE

I swear that man's résumé weighed more than I do. Harvard Medical School, surgical residency at Johns Hopkins in Baltimore, a fellowship at the Mayo Clinic, specializing in the removal of foreign objects from within the cranium. The ideal candidate for the job....So we sent Dr. Luxby my mother's X-rays....He was so intrigued by her case that he flew in from Heidelberg four days later to perform the procedure.....and then he dropped dead.

2. *Hospital room 125. Eleanor and the Amnesiac, in adjacent beds.*

ELEANOR

Right there in the operating room....One minute he was holding the scalpel and the next he was what the doctors call R.A.R.T.

AMNESIAC

R.A.R.T.?

ELEANOR

Rapidly Assuming Room Temperature....Not that I actually saw him collapse, you understand. I was still under anesthesia. But I knew I was in trouble when I woke up and the bandages were on my chest, not my head....During his heart attack, Dr. Luxby fell on the scalpel....

AMNESIAC

That's just awful....

ELEANOR

So then my daughters brought in another surgeon, Dr. Lawrence Spatnick, who was Luxby's protégé at Harvard. He's such a decent, likeable young man, this Dr. Spatnick—nothing at all like a surgeon. He even plays the harp in a chamber quartet....I'll confess I was hoping that I'd wake up from the surgery and he'd be having coffee with Paige. She's my single daughter, the one there's still hope for....Gloria threw herself away on a....Oh, I can't bear to say it....

AMNESIAC

It can't be *that* bad, can it?

ELEANOR

A professional grave robber....

AMNESIAC

I'm sorry.

ELEANOR

The man was a real life body-snatcher. He'd slink around cemeteries, waiting for the mourners to leave, and then he'd shovel out the corpses, strip them of their valuables, and sell the bodies to medical schools in California. You can't imagine how mortifying it was for Gloria to give back all that jewelry....

AMNESIAC

At least she found out while she was young....She'll have a second change with someone else....

ELEANOR

She's *still* with him!

AMNESIAC

At least there's hope for your other daughter and Dr. Spatnick.

ELEANOR

Unfortunately, there isn't. Instead of waking up from surgery with a future son-in-law who doesn't pinch wedding bands from cadavers, I found myself in the recovery room with another chest wound. That poor man, Dr. Spatnick...surrounded by all those doctors and all that equipment...and nobody could do anything for him.

AMNESIAC

Another heart attack?

ELEANOR

So you understand why I won't let them try again. It's not only that I've killed two leading neurosurgeons in the prime of their careers, but you have to consider all of the future patients whose lives they might have gone on to save....I could be indirectly responsible for hundreds of deaths....even thousands....

AMNESIAC

I hadn't thought of that.

ELEANOR

So that's *my* story, honey. I won't let them operate and my daughters won't agree to take me home without the operation....And what about you? What's your name?

AMNESIAC

I don't know.

ELEANOR

For real?

AMNESIAC

I wish I did know. All they can tell me is that a road crew found me at the side of the interstate with a bullet in my neck and another lodged in my brain. So I could have been the victim of a carjacking or a drive-by shooting. Or someone close to me—maybe even my own husband—might have abandoned me for dead....You can't imagine how horrific this is! My own husband might have tried to murder me, and I don't even remember whether I'm married.

ELEANOR

So you honestly don't know who you are...?

AMNESIAC

(Suddenly angry.)

I know exactly who I am. You heard the doctors this morning. I'm Jane Doe. Quadriplegia with Retrograde Amnesia.

ELEANOR

I never cared for the name Jane....You look more like an Amanda. I think I'm going to call you Amanda, if that's all right. Until you remember who you are.

AMNESIAC

And what if I *never* remember?

ELEANOR

Then at least you'll have a name that suits you....Now, quick! It's nearly four o'clock. Pretend you're in a coma.

AMNESIAC

I don't understand.

ELEANOR

Just trust me, Amanda. The new medical student is coming.

(Robyn enters, carrying a clipboard, and approaches Eleanor's bed. Eleanor and the Amnesiac play dead.)

ROBYN

Sorry to disturb you, Mrs. Powell. Would you mind if I asked you a few questions?

(Robyn attempts to rouse Eleanor. Eleanor does not move.)

Mrs. Powell? Do you know where you are, Mrs. Powell...?

(Eleanor says nothing.)

You're in a hospital, Mrs. Powell. Please wake up. I only have a few questions and then I'll let you go back to sleep. I promise.

(Eleanor remains silent.)

Do you know who the President is, Mrs. Powell? Try to answer me....

(The room remains silent. Robyn grows desperate.)

So I read your chart, Mrs. Powell. And *yesterday*, you were oriented to time and place and knew the name of the President. Nothing has changed since then, has it?

(Eleanor continues to play dead. Robyn writes on her clipboard)

“Oriented to time and place....Knows the name of the President. Patient reports that she is well, without any complaints, but sleepy during the afternoon.”

(Robyn attempts to place her stethoscope on Eleanor’s chest, but Eleanor rolls over without warning. Then Robyn attempts to take Eleanor’s pulse, but Eleanor yanks her hand away. Finally, Robyn removes her reflex hammer from the pocket of her white lab coat and taps Eleanor’s knee. Eleanor’s leg does not move. Robyn hits her harder. Still no response. As a last measure, Robyn swings down her reflex hammer and pounds Eleanor on the kneecap. Eleanor “reflexively” kicks Robyn in the stomach, still without “waking.” When Robyn regains her composure, she writes on the clipboard as she speaks:

“Powell, Eleanor. Heart sounds normal. Regular rate and rhythm. Lungs clear. Abdomen non-tender. Reflexes moderately brisk.....”

(Robyn crosses out these last words.)

“Reflexes significantly brisk.”

(Robyn approaches the Amnesiac’s bed. The Amnesiac follows Eleanor’s example and pretends to be sleeping. Robyn is unable to rouse her.)

How about you, Ms. Doe? Do you know where *you* are?

(The Amnesiac says nothing.)

Fine, be that way.

(Robyn writes on her clipboard)

“Oriented to time and place....Knows the name of the President. Patient reports that she is well, without any complaints, but sleepy during the afternoon.”

(Robyn takes her reflex hammer out of her white coat, then changes her mind and returns it to her pocket.)

“Doe, Jane. Heart sounds normal. Regular rate and rhythm. Lungs clear. Abdomen non-tender. Reflexes moderately brisk.....”

(Robyn exits. Eleanor opens her eyes.)