

THE EMERGENCY APPOINTMENT

by Stella Baker

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SCENE

We are at the reception desk of a doctor's surgery. This is a dialogue between RECEPTIONIST and PATIENT.

RECEPTIONIST: Can I help you?

PATIENT: Yes. Do you have any emergency appointments?

RECEPTIONIST: When for?

PATIENT: Well now. This morning. I badly need to see a doctor.

RECEPTIONIST: What seems to be the problem?

PATIENT: I have a bad back.

RECEPTIONIST: It looks okay to me. But I admit I've only seen you from the front.

PATIENT: No please. I'm in a lot of pain.

RECEPTIONIST: Oh okay. But where's the blood coming from?

PATIENT: What blood?

RECEPTIONIST: There, on the reception desk.

Pause.

PATIENT: Oh I'm very sorry. I didn't notice.

RECEPTIONIST: You should. It looks like it's your blood.

PATIENT: I'm sorry, I cut my finger on the door.

RECEPTIONIST: Well can you please stop bleeding?

PATIENT: I'm sorry?

RECEPTIONIST: Stop bleeding. Bleeding is not permitted anywhere in this surgery. Our cleaning operatives don't get here until eleven.

PATIENT: Oh.

RECEPTIONIST: Healthy and safety regulations I'm afraid. Here's a tissue.

PATIENT: Now about my appointment. Can you fit me in this morning?

RECEPTIONIST: Certainly. Eleven twenty suit you?

PATIENT: Nothing sooner?

RECEPTIONIST: Ten twenty.

PATIENT: Oh that's better.

RECEPTIONIST: Your name?

PATIENT: Elizabeth Donahue.

RECEPTIONIST: Donahue? How do you spell that?

PATIENT: I couldn't tell you. I'm dyslexic.

RECEPTIONIST: Date of birth.

PATIENT: Ten eleven sixty four.

RECEPTIONIST: Ah here you are. Just book you in.

PATIENT: Thank you.

RECEPTIONIST: Are you paying by credit card?

PATIENT: Credit card?

RECEPTIONIST: Yes. The appointment is sixty five pounds. But if you pay by credit card we throw in a free blood test.

PATIENT: But isn't this the NHS?

RECEPTIONIST: Yes it is.

PATIENT: So what's going on? Aren't the appointments and everything free?

RECEPTIONIST: Well yes, some are.

PATIENT: Some?

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RECEPTIONIST: Yes. Since Monday. The Government has privatized the NHS behind everyone's back.

PATIENT: Oh. I didn't know.

RECEPTIONIST: You will have to pay for your emergency appointment, I'm afraid.

PATIENT: But I can't afford sixty five pounds. Do you do emergency appointments which are free?

RECEPTIONIST: Yes we do.

PATIENT: Can I have one?

RECEPTIONIST: But you need to have a genuine emergency to qualify for one.

PATIENT: My back is killing me.

RECEPTIONIST: No a genuine emergency, like a heart attack, stroke, clinical death, something like that. Or you need three health problems.

PATIENT: Three health problems?

RECEPTIONIST: Yes.

PATIENT: Does my cut finger count?

RECEPTIONIST: Has it stopped bleeding?

Pause.

PATIENT: Yes it has.

RECEPTIONIST: Well if you can find a knife somewhere and cut it again it will qualify. You will however still need a third health problem.

PATIENT: Oh that's easy. I'm depressed.

RECEPTIONIST: So is the rest of the country. Many have been for years.

PATIENT: Oh. Oh dear.

RECEPTIONIST: Unless you can go off and get pregnant. Then you will need only two.

PATIENT: Get pregnant?

RECEPTIONIST: Yes.

PATIENT: But I can't do that.

RECEPTIONIST: Why not? There's a couple of decent looking men upstairs in the waiting room. I'm sure if you ask nicely...

PATIENT: Oh please. My back is really hurting me. I'm not in the mood for jokes.

RECEPTIONIST: Neither is anyone else. At least not now. Not like when we last had a General Election. Seems that quite a lot were up for a good laugh.

PATIENT: Yes.

RECEPTIONIST: But anyway, you wanted a free appointment, yes?

PATIENT: Yes please.

RECEPTIONIST: As an emergency?

PATIENT: If it's possible.

RECEPTIONIST: Well I've got one available February 8th next year.

PATIENT: What?

RECEPTIONIST: I said I can book you in as an emergency to see the doctor for free February 8th next year. We have a bit of a waiting list for emergency appointments to see the doctor you see.

PATIENT: Oh Lord. Are you being serious?

RECEPTIONIST: Yes I am. Since last Monday our healthcare trust has been taken over by Croydon Wings, a budget airline, London Gatwick to Torremolinos and a resort in Greece I can't even pronounce. But they go there three times a week for twenty quid.

PATIENT: But I can't wait till next February. Surely you have something for today?

RECEPTIONIST: Yes I have. Two appointments in fact.

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PATIENT: Okay, please let me have one.

RECEPTIONIST: Okay. But there are conditions.

PATIENT: Yes?

RECEPTIONIST: It depends which appointment you choose, I have one at ten forty and another at twelve twenty.

PATIENT: I'll take the one at ten forty please.

RECEPTIONIST: Okay. Would you like to know the condition?

PATIENT: Yes please.

RECEPTIONIST: I can book you in for ten forty, but you're not allowed to leave the surgery until the last Saturday this month.

PATIENT: That's almost two weeks away. What about the one at twelve twenty?

RECEPTIONIST: One minute, let me check....

Pause.

RECEPTIONIST: I'm so sorry, seems I've made a mistake.

Pause.

RECEPTIONIST: Seems that the twelve twenty is for the Virility Clinic.

PATIENT: Oh dear.

RECEPTIONIST: But maybe if you go upstairs and... (pause) No sorry forget that.

PATIENT: What?

RECEPTIONIST: It doesn't matter. Let me try and find another appointment for you, okay?

PATIENT: Okay.

Pause.

PATIENT: I don't believe this. Who thought of this crazy idea?

Pause.

RECEPTIONIST: Boris Johnson of course. It's all part of his Brexit Plan.

PATIENT: Ridiculous. What is going on with the world?

RECEPTIONIST: If you think it's bad here maybe you want to go to America.

PATIENT: Why? What's happening in America?

RECEPTIONIST: Brexit. Only they're not calling it Brexit. But it's making a lot of Americans upset and angry.

PATIENT: Why are they upset and angry?

RECEPTIONIST: Well they're having an outbreak of the Orange Panda.

PATIENT: The Orange Panda? What's that?

RECEPTIONIST: You don't know anything about the Orange Panda on Twitter?

PATIENT: The Orange Panda?.

RECEPTIONIST: Yes the narcissistic Orange Panda. He's orange, he wears goggles on the sunbed and he's completely mad. He's also in charge. Many say he's mentally ill.

PATIENT: Oh dear. Don't they treat the mentally ill like they do here?

RECEPTIONIST: No they don't. How can they? Don't have anything like the NHS in the States? If you're mentally ill in the States you join a political party and run for office.

PATIENT: But isn't that what we do here?

RECEPTIONIST: Well yes. Which I guess is the whole point of Brexit..

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PATIENT: Really? But anyway, my back is killing me.

RECEPTIONIST: Yes of course. Please accept my apologies. Let me see. Ah yes, I have another appointment at two twenty today.

PATIENT: Two twenty. That's not until the afternoon.

RECEPTIONIST: But it's free. That is, unless you want to stay here until Saturday.

PATIENT: Oh okay then. I guess it will have to do.

RECEPTIONIST: That's okay, just booking you in.

PATIENT: Thank you.

RECEPTIONIST: And I'll have the address where you need to get to for the appointment.

PATIENT: What? You mean it's not here?

RECEPTIONIST: No, I'm afraid it isn't.

PATIENT: Where is it then?

RECEPTIONIST: It's in Aberdeen.... Scotland.

PATIENT: You what? Scotland? This is ridiculous. We're in South London. My back is so bad I've struggled to get from Clapham. How do you expect me to get to Aberdeen?

RECEPTIONIST: There's frequent train services from London Kings Cross. Oh and you can get flights from London Heathrow.

PATIENT: But there's no way I'm going to get to Aberdeen in time for the appointment. It's quarter to ten now.

RECEPTIONIST: That's a point. I'm sorry, but all appointments are now made through a central booking service in Albania.

PATIENT: Albania?

RECEPTIONIST: Yes. The Government pay for the service and in making cuts they went for the cheapest available service.

PATIENT: This is ridiculous.

RECEPTIONIST: Tell you what. I have a cancellation in the Psychiatric Referral Clinic.

PATIENT: But I'm not mad. At least I hope not.

RECEPTIONIST: No, I know that. But if you're quick you'll get to see the doctor. Just tell him you're a compulsive liar.

PATIENT: Oh okay then.