

Doctor Shopping

By

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FADE IN:

INT. DR WILLIAMS' OFFICE - RECEPTION-AREA - DAY

Several PATIENTS sit on a bank of cheap, plastic chairs opposite a sterile desk with a stern, middle-aged receptionist behind it. Her name badge reads, VICKY.

The computer holds Vicky's attention even after HOWARD GOULD (40s), unkempt, overweight, shaggy beard, coughs to alert her to his presence.

HOWARD
Hi...Mr Gould.

VICKY
Take a seat.

She stares, daring him to speak again.

Howard smiles an apology and takes a seat at the front, avoiding eye contact with everybody.

A wall-mounted clock ticks by far faster than usual.

With each fleeting minute, sweat beads Howard's forehead and as he looks around he notices that he is the only one left. Desperation furrowing his brow, he looks over at Vicky.

HOWARD
This is an emergency. I
specifically said over the phone...

He stops to catch his breath, pulls out an inhaler, shakes it quickly then puts it into his mouth, calming before even the first squirt has gone in.

DR WILLIAMS (50s) sees out his final patient. His smile evaporates once he notices Howard's hopeful, expectant look and he barely nods before walking into the office -- leaving the door open.

INT. DR WILLIAMS' OFFICE - DAY

Dr Williams reclines in a tall back, leather, swivel chair and drums his fingers on the desk.

HOWARD
I told them it was an emergency.

With ever-increasing pain fighting against his every movement, Howard manages to take a seat.

Dr Williams sighs.

DR WILLIAMS

Howard.

HOWARD

It was really bad this morning. I was writhing in agony. I mean...look at me. I'm a wreck.

Howard wipes sweat from his brow with the back of a hand and shows it to Dr Williams before reaching for the inhaler and having another couple of squirts.

DR WILLIAMS

Doctor shopping, Howard?

Howard swallows, realises he's been caught.

DR WILLIAMS

I gave you as much as I could. More than enough for anyone with your supposed conditions to never feel anything again. Why would you visit several other doctors for the same prescription?

HOWARD

The pain. It's everywhere. I think I need another blood test.

Howard takes another blast from the inhaler and searches for mercy in Dr. Williams' impassive glare.

DR WILLIAMS

It's more than my job's worth.

HOWARD

Then give me something stronger.

Howard scratches his leg.

DR WILLIAMS

I'm sorry, Howard. If you'd only stuck with me, I could have done something for you.

HOWARD

What about my depression? The IBS? The Diabetes?

Dr. Williams shakes his head.

DR WILLIAMS

You don't have diabetes. The IBS is doubtless caused by the medication your pour down your throat.

HOWARD

You can't do this.

DR WILLIAMS

Your unethical practices leave me unable to deal with you in an ordinary doctor, patient manner.

HOWARD

Without the medication....

DR WILLIAMS

Let's just try it for a while.

Howard stands.

HOWARD

I'll find somebody.

DR WILLIAMS

No doctor will touch you. Your tests are in and you're fine. I hate to say this, Howard, but you're an addict and... and it's partly my fault.

HOWARD

Partly! It's all your fault. I need those drugs.

DR WILLIAMS

I'm sorry, Howard.

Howard clutches his stomach and has a coughing fit.

Dr Williams reaches into a drawer and tosses a packet onto the desk.

Howard recovers...snatches the packet, reads the print.

HOWARD

Is this a joke?

Howard tosses the packet onto the desk. Written upon it in bold writing, "PARACETAMOL".

DR WILLIAMS
For the pain.

HOWARD
I've got cupboards full of it. I
need the hard stuff. Come on doc',
you know how much pain I'm in.

DR WILLIAMS
It's for your own good, Howard.

Anger overriding pain, Howard stands, trying to hold his
tongue. He turns to leave. Turns back.

HOWARD
You.....absolute....cunt!

Howard storms out, slams the door.

INT. DR BRESLIN'S OFFICE - RECEPTION AREA - DAY

Sweating profusely, Howard leans against the counter, hand
clutched to his chest.

HOWARD
It feels like it's about to go.

Behind the desk, SARAH (18), naive face full of concern,
stands on tenterhooks, a phone clutched to her ear.

SARAH
He's really bad....Yes, I think
he's a patient.

She looks to Howard who nods vigorously in confirmation.

SARAH
His name?

HOWARD
(unintelligible)
Howard Gould.

SARAH
Sorry?

HOWARD
Howard Gould.

SARAH
Howard Gould.....
(an eyebrow raises)

SARAH

.....
 (a doubtful look at Howard)
oh, right.

She hangs up.

SARAH

He said he won't see you. Something
 about doctor shopping?

Howard avoids accusatory glances from PATIENTS in the
 waiting area.

HOWARD

It's not true.

SARAH

I'm sorry, I just started. I wish I
 could help, but I'm...
 (shrugs)

HOWARD

Do you take pain killers?

Sarah shakes her head.

Howard appeals to the room.

HOWARD

Anyone?

Patients avert their eyes.

With a derisive snort, Howard staggers away.

Patients watch him go, shaking their heads and tutting.

EXT. DR NIGHTINGALE'S OFFICE - DAY

Dr. NIGHTINGALE (50s) locks up the office and heads towards
 an executive-type car. As he opens the door, Howard lurches
 out from nowhere and clasps his arm.

Nightingale pushes him away.

NIGHTINGALE

Keep away from me or I will call
 the police.

Nightingale fights Howard with the door.

NIGHTINGALE

They threatened to take my license!

Howard steps away, allowing Nightingale to close the door.

HOWARD

Just one more prescription, please.

Howard clutches his chest and collapses to the ground as Nightingale drives away.

With the wind generated by the accelerating car, a newspaper clipping lifts into the air and waves around before settling between Howard's thumb and forefinger.

It's an advertisement for: "DR. DEATH -- TREATING ILLS, SINCE FOREVER. WE DON'T TURN ANYONE AWAY...NEVER!". The address is in blurred print.

EXT. DARK STREET - NIGHT

Using the satnav on his phone, Howard staggers past a street sign declaring, DARK STREET.

He stops outside number 669. The 9 hanging lower, almost as though it was once a 6. It belongs to an abandoned office.

Howard scrunches the newspaper advert and tosses it to the wind -- missing it disintegrate into ash.

As he turns to leave, a neon light comes on above the doorway, illuminating the word, "OPEN".

Chest pains spur him on and he heads along the short path to the door. He nudges it open and, of course, it creaks.

INT. DR DEATH'S OFFICE - RECEPTION - NIGHT

Very plush, very red.

Behind the counter, ELVIRA (20s), files her nails.

Howard notices the empty waiting area and, sweating profusely, turns to Elvira.

HOWARD

I'd like to see Dr Death, would that be possible? I...I have money.

An office door squeaks open an inch or three.

Elvira points the nail file toward it.

INT. DR DEATH'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Dr. DEATH, as old as time, sits at an ornate desk, powerful fingers drum a beat atop a gleaming white, goat's skull.

Howard pokes his head around the door.

HOWARD
Dr. Death?

DEATH
Please...Death.

Death indicates for Howard to sit opposite. Howard obliges, crumpling painfully into the chair.

DEATH
How does that feel?

Death points to Howard's ribcage.

Howard screams out and clutches it in absolute agony.

DEATH
And there?

Death points at Howard's head.

Howard holds it and screams.

HOWARD
Oh God, yes!

DEATH
And...
(looks to Howard's heart)
This?

Death eases his hand closed as though crushing something very slowly.

Howard clutches his chest, legs stiffen and twitch.

DEATH
Hm?

Howard dribbles.

DEATH
I see.

Death relaxes his hand.

Howard gasps as the pain subsides.

DEATH

I can help.

Hope. Glorious hope!

HOWARD

The depression, the anxiety, the
asthma, the diabetes, the.....
heart disease?

As Howard appraises him, Death pulls a red pill from a
drawer and places it on the desk.

DEATH

A cure-all.

HOWARD

Cure-all?

DEATH

You'll never feel pain again.

Howard stares at the pill, wipes sweat with a sleeve.

HOWARD

How much?

Death places a "CONTRACT", handwritten in bold Gothic text,
onto the desk.

DEATH

A simple signature.

Death pushes the contract toward Howard and taps it,
indicating for him to read it.

Howard reads through.....

Then, face full of consternation, reads it through again.

Death unscrews the lid from a gold fountain pen and offers
it to Howard.

HOWARD

I get to live my entire life
though, right?

DEATH

The rest of your natural. You'll
live every day just as you would
normally, only completely painless.

After some hesitation, Howard takes the pen and signs.

Death rolls the contract up and places it into a drawer.

Howard examines the pill.

Elvira enters with a glass of water, rests it on the desk, then leaves without a word.

Howard places the pill into his mouth and picks up the glass of water.

Death raises an eyebrow.

Howard takes a large gulp.

DEATH

The effects are immediate.

Howard sits straight as euphoria travels his spine.

HOWARD

I'll feel like this all the time?

DEATH

Forever.

HOWARD

Thank you.

DEATH

No.....thank you.

On cue, Elvira sashays in and takes Howard's arm.

INT. HOWARD'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The Twilight Zone jingle ends. Lights from a TV play across Howard's euphoric face as he sits on the couch, a cup of coffee on a small table in front of him.

DEATH (FROM TV O.S.)

Your soul belongs to me now. We had a deal, remember!

Howard reaches for the coffee and the cup drops from his fingers. He stares at his hand, clenches it into a fist.

VICTIM (FROM TV O.S.)

You tricked me!

He attempts to retrieve the cup but cannot grip the handle properly. He grasps the entire thing and it shatters, slicing open his finger.

DEATH (FROM TV O.S.)
 You'll never feel anything again,
 your body will shut down and you'll
 feel nothing until the day you die.

Blood pours from Howard's finger.

DEATH (FROM TV O.S.)
 And then...then you're mine.

INT. HOWARD'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Howard struggles to bandage his finger and drops the roll onto the floor.

He bends too quickly and bangs his head off the oven, knocking him unconscious. A huge gash opens up on his forehead and blood pours freely down his face.

LATER

Howard's eyes shoot open and he stands, lifts his feet up and down then sobs, barely able to remain upright.

He manages to turn the handle on the kitchen door using both hands and staggers out.

INT. HOWARD'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Phone in hand, Howard fumbles in numbers before hitting speakerphone and dropping it to the floor.

Ringin comes from the phone.

VICKY (V.O.)
 Dr Williams' office.

Howard's jaw slackens, dribble leaks down his chin and he speaks as though his tongue is swollen.

HOWARD
 I can't feel anything.

VICKY (V.O.)
 Who's calling please?

HOWARD
 It's Howard...

The phone goes dead.

HOWARD

You bitch!

He attempts to stamp on the phone and twists his knee, falling into the fire, his clothes catching alight.

Without realizing he is on fire, Howard struggles upright and swoons. Then, he smells burning and looks in a mirror -- spies the flames licking at his back.

He throws himself onto the couch in an effort to beat out the flames, setting fire to it as he flails.

With fresh stuff to burn, the flames eat their way through the couch, mostly disappearing from Howard's back.

He looks in the mirror and cries out at the badly scorched flesh surrounding his partially exposed spine.

Flames threaten to completely envelop the room as Howard staggers to the front door, flinging it open.

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET - NIGHT

PEOPLE give Howard a wide berth as he struggles along.

EXT. DARK STREET - NIGHT

Howard falls, paralyzed, to the ground outside number 669.

A sign below the door that reads "CLOSED" comes loose and swings free on one screw, creaking loudly.

FADE OUT.