

PATIENT X

a one-act play

by Brent Englar

2124 Heritage Drive
Baltimore, MD 21209
(443) 414-3202
brent.englar@gmail.com
www.brentenglar.com

CHARACTERS

MOLLY RODNEY, the spirit of a deceased woman (80-ish)

TAMARA, her granddaughter (35)

DONALD CONE, the spirit of a recently deceased man (60-ish)

JON, his son (32)

TIME

The present.

Eternity.

PLACE

The afterlife, from which Molly and Donald observe:

- An examination room in the clinic where Jon works as a general practitioner.
- An examination room in the hospital where Tamara works as a radiologist.
- Briefly, Jon's home.

Transitions between scenes are fluid. The same table and chair(s) represent each interior. The afterlife may be simply a few platforms, framing the present.

SCENE: Jon’s exam room.

At lights, TAMARA fidgets on the table. MOLLY and DONALD watch from the afterlife.

MOLLY
That’s my grandchild, Tammy.

DONALD
Is she sick?

MOLLY
Nothing serious, I’m sure.

DONALD
Why?

MOLLY
Rodney women are blessed with good health. I lived to see eighty-five. And I smoked!

DONALD
What about Rodney men?

MOLLY
They die young.

JON enters in his doctor’s coat.

JON
What can we do for you, Ms. Rodney—

TAMARA
—About time! Do you know how long I’ve been sitting here?

MOLLY
And we hate to wait.

JON
What’s the problem?

TAMARA
My eyes.

JON

What about them?

TAMARA

I’ve developed X-ray vision.

JON

You realize I’m a general practitioner.

TAMARA

I’ve already seen ophthalmologists. They’re no help at all.

JON

Have you considered a psychiatrist?

TAMARA

In your coat pocket is a pen, two sticks of gum, and forty-seven cents.

JON

What flavor gum?

TAMARA

How the hell do I know flavor? It’s linty.

JON

Ms. Rodney—

TAMARA

—Tamara. Christ, you make me sound like my Gramma.

MOLLY

I raised her from a baby—ever since her mother . . .

MOLLY sighs. JON hands TAMARA a specimen cup.

JON

Tamara. We’ll need a urine sample.

TAMARA

The problem’s my eyes.

JON

Who’s the general practitioner? Down the hall, twelfth door on the right.

TAMARA exits with the cup. JON takes the pen, gum, and coins from his coat pocket. He places the pen behind his ear, slips half the coins

and one stick of gum into his pants pocket, and returns the rest to his coat pocket. He thinks for a moment, then chews off a fingernail and drops it into his coat pocket. As this happens, DONALD and MOLLY converse.

DONALD

What happened to her mother?

MOLLY

Never mind.

DONALD

I thought you said “good health”?

MOLLY

She’s plenty healthy. Enough to run off with an airline steward when Tammy was two.

DONALD

I was an airline steward.

MOLLY

Cheats and liars, the lot of ’em!

DONALD

Excuse me—

MOLLY

—What?

DONALD

The preferred term is “flight attendant.”

MOLLY snorts.

DONALD (Cont’d)

What was your daughter’s name? Tammy’s mother?

MOLLY

Why?

DONALD

I don’t remember. . . . Strange.

MOLLY

Not strange. There’s lots here you won’t remember.

TAMARA re-enters with the filled specimen cup.

TAMARA

Here.

She thrusts the cup into JON’s hand and stares at his coat pocket.

TAMARA (Cont’d)

One stick of gum, still linty, and twenty-four cents. And a fingernail.

JON

That’s unbelievable! How?

TAMARA

I woke up one day, and when I looked at things I saw through them. It was my birthday.

JON

That doesn’t—what do you want me to do?

TAMARA

I want you to cure me, doctor.

JON

I don’t know how to cure—people would kill for this gift!

TAMARA

Mister, I’ve seen things no one should see.

JON

skimming through her chart

You’re a radiologist?

TAMARA

Yes.

JON

You work with X-rays.

TAMARA

This isn’t an occupational hazard!

JON

You work at a hospital?

TAMARA

YES! I already wrote all this on the—

JON

—Calm down.

TAMARA

Don’t tell me to—

JON

—All I mean is you must know doctors more qualified than me to—

TAMARA

—I can’t tell people I know! Why do you think I’m talking to you?

JON

A mutual patient recommended me?

TAMARA

Your office is literally the farthest I can drive during lunch.

JON

You can’t beat the rent.

TAMARA

Stop joking and HELP ME!

JON

I DON’T KNOW HOW!

TAMARA

Shock. Well, at least you got my piss.

She starts to exit.

JON

Tamara. Ms. Rodney—

TAMARA

—I will NOT be recommending you.

She exits. JON sighs, makes a few notes, and exits.

MOLLY

Typical useless doctor.

DONALD

It’s longer than I’ve been dead.

MOLLY

How long have you been dead?

DONALD

Why can’t I remember?!

MOLLY

Donald. Listen to me. If it’s something you want to remember, you will.

DONALD

When?

MOLLY

There’s really no hurry. Look here . . .

Lights change and music begins to play: the uncertain strains of a sixth-grade orchestra giving its first concert. MOLLY and DONALD listen and watch as though the scene were just beyond the audience.

MOLLY (Cont’d)

That’s Tammy on the end. Second row. I made her dress. She’s eleven.

MOLLY closes her eyes. One violin in particular is louder.

DONALD

This is a memory . . . ?

MOLLY nods.

DONALD (Cont’d)

How did I get it?

MOLLY

Up here we can share.

DONALD

Up?

MOLLY shrugs.

DONALD (Cont’d)

I’m sorry . . . why do you want to remember this?

MOLLY
Don't like it?

DONALD
“A” for effort?

MOLLY opens her eyes. The music abruptly cuts off and lights return to normal.

DONALD (Cont'd)
I'm sorry.

MOLLY
No, they're lousy.
She laughs.
Tammy's my only grandchild. I want to remember everything.

DONALD
Can you watch anyone you want?

MOLLY
You mean live?

He nods.

MOLLY (Cont'd)
Long as they remember you.

DONALD
Why is that a rule?

MOLLY
God only knows.

DONALD
Is there a God?

MOLLY
Haven't seen any.

DONALD
Maybe He doesn't remember you.
He thinks.
I guess Jon remembers me.

TAMARA

What are you doing here?

JON

I need an X-ray. Hurt my ankle.

TAMARA

No you didn't.

JON

Um, I think I'd know—

TAMARA

—Your ankle's fine.

She points to her eyes.

Remember?

JON

You're right, it's a ruse, I'm sorry. But I really do need an X-ray.

TAMARA

Wait right here . . .

She starts to exit. JON takes off his backpack.

JON

Dr. Rodney, please, I need your help. My father died two months ago.

DONALD

Two months . . .

TAMARA

I'm sorry?

JON

We weren't close. But he left me this.

He opens his backpack and takes out a combination safe.

To be precise, I inherited a safe deposit box, as next-of-kin, and this was inside.

TAMARA

Another safe?

JON

And no combination, no instructions, not even a letter. He died unexpectedly, I guess. I mean, he did—plane crash. He was a flight attendant.

MOLLY

I’m sorry . . .

JON

Anyway, in a nutshell . . . I mean, bigger than a nutshell . . .

TAMARA

You want me to look inside.

JON

Please.

TAMARA glances at the safe. She gasps.

JON (Cont’d)

What is it? What?!

TAMARA

Please go.

JON

No!

TAMARA

I have other patients.

JON

What’s in here?

TAMARA

Goodbye.

She exits. JON stands, bewildered.