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# THERESA

EMILEE  
HERRINGSHAW

“Em.”  
Hi Sue.  
“No, come here.”

*I look back.*

“Your 1:40 can’t complete her paperwork. I’ve helped her through the insurance portion, but I’m wondering if you can do the medical history.”

*The schedule is skewed towards over-crowded, and I need to room the 1:00. The group in the waiting room consists of anyone from restless teens glued to their iPhones (growing i irritable from our office’s lack of wi-fi) to anxious elderly patients, desperately hoping to complete their appointments in time for their assigned ride.*

“She’s legally blind.”  
Be right back.

*My eyes glaze over in conflict, considering how to juggle my impending clinical responsibilities with the care of this patient, who needs help. I walk towards the waiting room door. Stop. Pace towards the medical assistant room. Stop. Consider the best approach to take, then room Theresa ahead of schedule.*

Theresa.  
*The grey, feathered bob facing the opposite wall migrates upward in the chair.*

**Yes??**  
Hi, how are you. Right this way. We’ll be right down the hall, in room six today.

*As we walk down the hall, questions about the weather help pass the time. Theresa remarks about how large the office is and a bolus of guilt rose in my chest. I am taking her all the way down the hall.*

I’m going to help you with your paperwork.

*She looks up, furrowed brow strewn in a line that pointed to another string of questions. Why isn’t there anyone with her? How did she arrive here? Does she have kids, a family, an aide? Anyone?*

I’m going to help you complete your paperwork, to inform Miss Simons of your medical history.

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[Gasping: relieved, maybe exhausted, or some combination of the both] **Ohh, okay.**  
What is the reason for your visit?  
**Huh?**  
Why are you here?

*She recounts a history of an itchy back that bothers her from time to time. Then conveys the discomfort with her ear, which she doesn’t want me to have to look at because it is gross.*  
*No diabetes. No breast cancer. No asthma. No allergies.*  
*A tick falls into the “Yes” category for eye problems: macular degeneration. Ultimately, the culprit for her being unable to complete the paperwork.*  
*Heart problems? Again, yes. A heart valve had been replaced in 1988. The year she quit smoking.*

And what about your family?  
**Well, I have two daughters, aged fifty-six and fifty-eight.**  
Okay. All done with the paperwork. Let’s have you undress to expose your back for Miss Simons to examine.

*I walk towards the drapes, grabbing one only to toss it to the side so I can help (or refrain from helping) Theresa remove her shirt, intervening minimally to preserve her dignity.*  
*She pulls the shirt over her head, stretching the left sleeve over the crimson Christmas-colored bracelet that sports her key. The doorknob cocks to the right, and Meg walks in.*  
*Time moves quickly as I room the next patient—then slowly, I wait for Theresa’s appointment to come to a close. I stand outside the door, waiting for something to signal the end of the appointment, wondering if she needs help redressing.*  
*Meg walks out and we both move towards her office so I can hear my instructions.*

<<So, she’s having a hard time remembering... I’ve told her a couple of times... the medications we are sending in will be processed by a home delivery service. Can you review them with her again? Then write up some instructions in layman’s terms so she can review them when she needs to apply the topicals we are prescribing?>>  
Sure!

Hi, Theresa... I am coming back to check in and review the medications Meg is prescribing.  
[Looking longingly] **Medications, what medications...**

*The repertoire of info is dispensed one more time. Then I call it time to walk to check-out, where Theresa will have the written instructions provided.*  
*I stand behind the check-out desk, watching the appointment get scheduled, making sure it is on a Monday when her daughter Kara would be free from work.*  
*Done.*  
*As I walk to room the 2:00 appointment, I see her standing back in the waiting room.*

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[Panicking] I can't find my keys.

Let me help you.

*I suggest we come back in the office to look through her purse and gently ask her if the keys are on her arm.*

**No. I would know if they are on my arm. [Angrily] I would know.**

Okay. I can take a look at your purse...

**No, they aren't there. Let's go back to the room.**

*As we start to move in that direction, she pats her arms. I see her hand land across her left arm, where I had a strong suspicion her keys would be, but I knew she needed to find.*

*[Frowning] Oh.*

It's okay! You have them and that's what matters.

**I can't do this alone. I'm ninety-three. This is my first time here. Maybe if it was my second, I'd be okay. But I can't do this alone.**

*Broken. She stands looking worried, disoriented, upset she might miss that ride that will take her back.*

Let's go to the elevator.

**I can't do this alone.**

*The walk to the elevator, she doesn't have to do alone—and hopefully her next appointment wouldn't be alone, either. She shouldn't do it alone, and to her disbelief, she did. She can do it alone. But ninety-three, heart beating to the satisfaction of the mechanical valve and eyes giving up before she would, she had to today.*

*I call her around four, making sure she was home and in a calmer disposition.*

**I'm sorry for being so frazzled today.**

*As I tell her not to apologize, I can still feel the sinking disappointment in her voice.*

And your prescriptions will be delivered tomorrow, I called the pharmacy to verify the drop-off.

*What prescriptions?*

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# WOMEN'S MARCH

CAMERON FISHER

