

PATIENT #47
a short play by Joe Hanrahan

Characters

MR. D An old, sick man

GRACE An attendant

Setting

A table, with water bottle with straw, some magazines, under the magazines a sealed manila envelope. A chair for MR. D. Second table with tissues, disposable plastic gloves, hand sanitizer. Second chair on the side.

GRACE walks in, holding MR. D by the elbow. She helps him get to his chair, helps him sit. He takes off his sunglasses, his cap.

MR. D: Thank you.

(during next few lines, GRACE adjusts his pillow, spreads blanket over him in chair)

GRACE: My pleasure, Mr. D. Now wasn't that a beautiful day? All that sunshine.

MR. D: Mm.

GRACE: We need to get you outside more often. Take a longer walk next time, maybe.

MR. D. (shakes his head) Aaaaah...naaaah...

GRACE: I don't know why on earth you fight it. It's good for you.

MR. D: (small laugh)

GRACE: Now how's everything else? You all set up? How's your water?

MR. D: (takes water bottle, eyes contents) Good. (sips) Good.

GRACE: Magazines? Got everything you need?

MR. D: That new Playboy come in yet?

GRACE: (laughs)...you...old...rascal! I'm going to have to keep my eye on you.

MR. D: (small laugh)

GRACE: I see a Playboy around here, I'm going to hit you over the head with it!

MR. D: (bigger laugh)

GRACE: Now I'll be back around in a couple hours. Getcha for dinner, OK? It's pizza night!
All right, Mr. D...

(GRACIE begins to leave)

MR. D: Gracie...

GRACE: Yes, sir.

MR. D: Thank you...thank you...for all you do.

GRACE: Well, you're welcome.

MR. D: No, I mean...do you have a few minutes to, uh...?

GRACE: (checks phone or watch) Um...I guess, yeah. I have a couple minutes. I'm expected down the hall to take care of Mrs. Billington soon.

MR. D: Oh, yeah...

GRACE: Well, watcha want? (pause) You just want to talk a bit?

MR. D: Yeah.

GRACE: OK. (GRACE pulls up the extra chair. Sits.) What's on your mind? (He's hesitant to start.) Mmm, Mr. D? I've...noticed you don't...socialize with the other patients much. It's good to talk. You should get together with some of the other...

MR. D: I just...want to tell you...I appreciate...what you do. For me. I know it's your job to take care of me. But... you always...do it with a smile. You never make me feel like...y'know...

GRACE: Well, I like helping people.

MR. D: You do?

GRACE: Sure. Makes me feel good.

MR. D: Yeah. So...you've been helping me for, what? A year now? I don't know anything about you. I guess I never asked. Are you married?

GRACE: No. No sir! Was.

MR. D: Other...family?

GRACE: I have three kids.

MR. D: Three kids. Well...are the...

GRACE: Two girls and a boy. Girl, 16, the oldest. Boy 14. Another girl 10.

MR. D: But no...

GRACE: Dad? No. Got a little too much for him

MR. D: Must be a lot for you.

GRACE: (sighs) Yeah.

(GRACE waits for his next question/comment. He's reluctant.)

GRACE: But...Mr. D...do...did you have a family? You just...never get any visitors...or cards...and...and I...

MR. D: No. No family. I, uh...travelled...around when I was young...and then, just...never got to it.

GRACE: You have some...any friends...still around? From the old days?

MR. D: (quickly) No...no.

GRACE: (standing) Well, I'm going to make sure I try to give myself a few extra minutes when I come by. Huh? So we can walk a little more, maybe have another talk now and then. But, right now, I better be...

MR. D: Gracie. I...uh, want to give you something.

(MR. D. reaches into manila envelope under magazines. Unseals manila envelope Takes out document. Reseals manila envelope, Reaches document out to her.)

MR. D: This...this is for you.

GRACE: What is it?

MR. D: It's...a legal document. It's a...kind of a will.

GRACE: Yeah?

MR. D: It's...my will. But it's private. No one will ever know about it. It's between you and me...and a lawyer. And he's been paid. (pause) You're the beneficiary.

(GRACE takes document from him.)

MR. D: That...when I'm gone...that means what I have goes to you. There'll be a little less...I still have...some time to go, and that'll have to be paid for. But the rest goes to you.

GRACE: Uh...what is it...uh, how...what are you leaving me?

MR. D: Uh, there should be...there would be...a couple million.

GRACE: Couple million? Dollars?

MR. D: Well, yeah, sure. It's all cash. It's spread around but once I go, the lawyer'll round it up and get it to you. He's already got his cut, OK?

GRACE: OK. (pause) I don't know what to say. I...uh...thank you, I guess. I mean...I mean...sure I can use this, but...

MR. D: Sure you can. I know you can. And I'm betting you're going to use it well. You're a good girl...a good person.

GRACE: Well, uh...thank...I (laughs)...I don't know what...

MR. D: But, Gracie...I want to ask you a favor.

GRACE: A favor. OK.

MR. D. OK? Put some gloves on.

GRACE: What?

MR. D: Put on some gloves.

GRACE: Gloves?

MR. D: Please.

(after a pause - GRACE puts on a pair of disposable plastic gloves.)

MR. D: (MR. D touches manila envelope, moves it a couple inches towards her.) Inside here are four envelopes. They're already addressed and stamped. I want you to take this today. Hide it. And when I'm gone, I want you to mail them for me. Use gloves then.

GRACE: O...K. Why the gloves?

MR. D: And after you mail them, destroy this manila envelope. Use gloves.

GRACE: All right.

MR. D: And then...

GRACE: Yeah?

MR. D: Dispose of the gloves.

GRACE: Uh-huh. And then?

MR. D: That's it.

GRACE: That's it.

MR. D: That's it.

GRACE: OK. Why...the gloves?

MR. D: Don't touch any of this without gloves. That...that will, that's OK...you'll just keep that private. But these...they can get fingerprints out of the air now.

GRACE: Who can? Who can get fingerprints out of the air? What is it?

MR. D: Don't worry about that. Gracie. I'm giving you everything I got. I'm happy to do it. I got no one else. I like you. You deserve a good life. I just...need someone...I need you...to do this favor for me. And I don't want you to get hurt.

GRACE: I kinda need to know why I might get hurt doing this. For you.

MR. D: It's better that you just do what I say.

(pause)

GRACE: Mr. D. I appreciate this...the will, the money. I mean...I certainly do. I don't know what to say about it. But I do know what I want to say about...that. I kinda need to know. And I'm not just curious. Though nobody could blame me, could they? I have to hide it. Mail the envelopes. Destroy everything. And I might get hurt. I'm sure you understand. I need to know.

(MR. D unseals manila envelope. Pushes manila envelope another inch towards her. GRACE picks it up, takes a white business envelope out. Reads it.)

GRACE: New York Times?

MR. D: The others are to...Washington Post, Chicago Tribune...LA Times. (She looks at him, searchingly.) Those are all the big papers I know about.. Wouldn't know where to start with the internet stuff anyway.

GRACE: What's in the envelopes?

(small laugh from MR. D. Looks at her like "C'mon...")

GRACE: Your story? Something that happened to you? Some secret?

MR. D: Mmm.

GRACE: But something that might...get me hurt?

MR. D: I...don't think so. I think we're OK. They've never found me here. Or ever.

GRACE: Find you? Who? Who's looking for you?

MR. D: I changed everything. Name. Social Securities. My face. Couple times. New passports. New names. Money's all offshore. Soon I'll be gone. No trace of me left. And they won't find you.

GRACE: Who? Who won't find me? And why are they...?

MR. D: It's better if you don't know. Safer I think...

GRACE: I don't think so. Safer.

MR. D: Once you hear something...you want to be able to tell somebody, that's how it goes...

GRACE: Mr. D. I need to know. You know I do. And what's to stop me from opening an envelope once you're...

MR. D: But you wouldn't, would you? If you promised me?

(pause)

GRACE: No.

MR. D: You're a good girl. That's why I'm doing this. Trusting you with this...and the money. Think of the money as your pay...not only for doing me a favor. But for...not...having to know.

(pause)

GRACE: We're gonna talk again bout this (GRACIE starts to leave, comes back) No. We'll talk now. I can walk out of here and look at this in the hall right now. Or you can tell me. You don't have to tell me everything. Just tell me...what I need to know.

(pause. MR. D stands up. Looks out towards door. Paces slowly around the room.)

MR. D: I...I...

(MR. D paces some more, comes uncomfortably close to her).

MR. D: I...I...I shot...John F. Kennedy.

GRACE: (half-laugh) You what?

MR. D: You heard me.

GRACE: (moving away from him) And you're going to tell...everybody...with these...you're going to...

MR. D: That's the idea.

GRACE: Help me out on this, Mr. D. You did it...you say you...SHOT HIM?

(MR. D holds finger to lips to shush her)

GRACE: (softer) You shot him?

(MR. D nods, whispers "yeah")

GRACE: But you've been...what?...hiding all this time. And...

MR. D: I been moving all this time.

GRACE: Then who...who exactly... is going to want to get you, find you...hurt me? Who...?

MR. D: There's not many left. But there's still...friends, family...people who want to protect memories...reputations...the credibility of the United States government. But I think I outlasted them. And with your help, we're going to get away with this.

GRACE: We're...my help, huh? Mr. D, I'm not ignorant. I read some. I watch History Channel a lot. I've seen...I know something about the Kennedy assassination. How did you...?

MR. D: I don't know. I was a crazy kid. Teenage marine...early days Vietnam. Assassination was part of the strategy.

GRACE: And you...?

MR. D: Yeah, I had missions...coupla...(refers to himself) Sharpshooter.

GRACE: Wasn't Oswald a sharpshoo...

MR. D: Oswald...Oswald couldn't have hit the side of a battleship if it pulled into Dealey Plaza.

GRACE: So you were...what, the grassy knoll...?

MR. D: (laughs) I've never talked about this before. Yeah. Grassy knoll. I was up there. Me and this Corsican fella. He was from Corsica. Didn't know him. Didn't know his name. He was backup.

GRACE: So you shot...

MR. D: Yeah, I shot him. Wasn't easy. Had to use this damn Italian rifle. Same kind Oswald used. I got him with the first shot. Then the rifle backed up on me. I let a couple fly. Think I hit the governor in the same car with him. Then he was right there. I took a deep breath. (takes a deep breath) And...(softly)...bow!...finished him off.

GRACE: And then...?

MR. D: Then I split. Town, state, country. Knew they were going to take out people who knew. Starting with me.

Went everywhere. Back to Asia for a while. Africa...South America...Middle East. Would get work from people who heard I was the JFK guy. They liked the cachet. I liked the price I could charge.

(laughs, coughs) I've never told anybody about this before.

It's all in there. (gesturing toward manila envelope.)

GRACE: Is it in here...who was behind it?

MR. D: You'd need a big box for that. Everybody wanted him dead.

GRACE: Everybody loved him.

MR. D: Nobody that mattered loved him. Everybody was in on it...New Orleans mob got the ball rolling, CIA helped out...Cubans, Chicago mob, military/industrial guys, everybody was behind it. Joe DiMaggio's buddies...everybody supported it. There were a couple false alarms before Dallas. Supposed to be Chicago, then someplace else...

GRACE: But why did they have to kill him?

MR. D: Kennedy was making everybody mad. Shaking things up, shaking money and power loose. And...turning his back on some of the people who'd helped him get elected.

Sinatra? You don't think he knew a hit was going down?

GRACE: But it's never been proved...never came out...

MR. D: It's all been out there...laying out there. Hide in plain sight. That's how you get away with it.

GRACE: Why did...you do it?

MR. D: I don't know! Told you, I was a crazy kid. That's who they get to do these things...be a soldier, kill a president. Crazy kids.

After Nam, I was still full of juice. Went home to New Orleans. Got connected, did some work. And then was put on this one.

GRACE: But shoot the president...Mr. D?

MR. D: (long stare at her) Seemed like everybody I knew then, everybody I worked for...they all said we had to get rid of him...had to get rid of this punk rich kid, this grandstanding peace loving prick, this backstabbing bastard nigger lovin' motherfu...

(long silence after those words)

Sorry.

I kinda liked him, you know.

But he was lucky, too. Lucky we got him when we did. He was not a well man. He was in pain and he wasn't going to last long. Wound up a young, good-looking corpse. We made him a legend.

GRACE: I...I...

MR. D: I know...I know what you're thinking...you're a good girl...you're wondering, with what this guy did...how can I do what he's asking? How can I keep the money when he...did...Look, I'm doing this because of you.

GRACE: Because of me?

MR. D: You remember, in April, I was real sick?

GRACE: Yeah...

MR. D: And you took real good care of me?

GRACE: Yeah...

MR. D: You were like an angel. No, you were...an angel. I said to myself, right then, maybe I can do something...maybe I can do one good thing...tell the truth. With all the bad I've seen...done...I thought...maybe I can do one good thing.

GRACE: You know..it's kinda hard for me to believe all this...

MR. D: I know! Me, too! It's so long ago now. Everything. What I told you...more...names...are there. Keep 'em safe. Mail 'em. And then just take a a look and see what happens.

GRACE: (checking watch) I...really...gotta go. Work.

MR. D: Yeah. (Sitting)

GRACE: But I'll see you again and we'll talk more...

MR. D: No, you won't. I'm outta here tonight. Docs say...it's moving a little faster than...they're coming to get me in a bit...taking me to a...a...what are those things?

GRACE: Hospice.

MR. D: Yeah. Yeah. Hospice. So...

GRACE: So...

MR. D: So, just go. Do your work. Do that favor for me. Be safe.

GRACE: About the money...and...

MR. D: (holding his hand up to quiet her) I know. You'll do fine. Things are going to be good for you. You're a good girl.

(GRACE starts to walk off, overwhelmed. She comes back, fixes MR. D's blanket once more. Pats his shoulder. Leaves MR. D bows his head)

THE END