

ANGELS

Play

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Cast of Characters

<u>Fred Selkirk:</u>	Director, Department of Hospitals
<u>Clark Whipple:</u>	Chief resident of Medicine
<u>Greg:</u>	Chief resident of Surgery
<u>Deborah Birney:</u>	Resident in Medicine
<u>Dave Zefrin:</u>	Resident in Medicine
<u>Samir:</u>	Resident in Medicine
<u>Chester Barnett:</u>	Resident in Surgery
<u>Fran:</u>	Intern in Medicine
<u>Toni:</u>	Intern in Medicine
<u>Pat:</u>	Medical student
<u>Teresa:</u>	Medical student
<u>The Director of Nursing</u>	
<u>Doctor Enrique Martin:</u>	A physician
A nurse	
An orderly (nonspeaking)	

Scene

A public hospital. The stage is bare except for chairs, desks, and other props moved on and off for each of the 21 scenes. Time is the present.

SCENE 1 - Orientation

Curtain rises on a dimly lit, shabby office.
A desk is left, chairs are scattered about for a meeting. A tattered couch sits among the chairs.
Sprawled, sleeping, is DAVE, in wrinkled white coat and pants, no tie. A clock on the wall reads 6:50.

DEBORAH enters from right twirling a stethoscope.
Pert and businesslike, she wears a blouse and a rumpled white skirt. After pacing restlessly for a few beats, she straddles Dave and punches his shoulder.

DEB

Dave... Arouse me.

No response

DEB (cont'd)

What an opportunity. What man could resist?

No response

DEB (cont'd)

Dave! I haven't been to bed all night.

He stirs.

DEB (cont'd)

Say something!

DAVE

You need a breath mint.

Sighing, Deborah rolls to one side.

DEB

I'm sleepy.

DAVE

You're a doctor, Deb. You know what to do if you're sleepy.

DEB

Can't. Dexedrine gives me diarrhea... Why are you so wrecked? You weren't on last night.

DAVE

I got stuck... I was socializing with a nurse on 6A, and a patient had a seizure. And I knew the guy. I just signed off on him yesterday.

DEB

(chuckles)

It's poison to go back to a ward after you leave. You always get sucked in.

DAVE

I didn't trust the new interns. So I spent the night working up his seizure and his fever.

DEB

That's totally inspiring. You're really bucking for chief resident.

DAVE

I am, but no one picks chief residents for their inspiring qualities.

(gesturing at the vacant desk)

Witness the incumbent.

New interns FRAN and TONI hurry in, both wearing fresh white blouses and pants.

FRAN

We're really sorry, Doctor Nilson. We came straight from the airport. We'd have been here yesterday-

DEB

(interrupting).

It's O.K. I know your story...

They hesitate.

DEB (cont'd)

Go to 6A. Two flights up. You'll find two pissed-off interns. Apologize and take over. I'll be up in half an hour to see how you're doing.

Fran gestures toward the exit.

FRAN

What should we do with our luggage?

DEB

Don't let it out of your sight.

She shoos them out.

DAVE

Many excuses have I heard for late arrivals, but a plane crash...

DEB

It was just a forced landing. No one was hurt.

DAVE

What were they doing in Africa?

Deborah shrugs.

DAVE (cont'd)

Working in a crummy run-down hospital.

DEB

(not getting it)

Something like that.

DAVE

Why did they leave the country? We can provide that experience here.

Deb chuckles. SAMIR, an East Indian resident, enters.

SAMIR

I just observed the two late interns. Very nice.

Deb ignores this. Dave settles back to doze.

SAMIR (cont'd)

They look like friends. Clark never assigns friends together.

DEB

They asked to be together.

SAMIR

Clark would never do that.

DEB

They asked the dean.

SAMIR

What substantial balls! I assume Clark did not like that.

DEB

Not much. They also asked to be assigned to me.

SAMIR

Ooooooh! His favorite person.

(suddenly suspicious)

But why would they choose you?

DEB

I guess they wanted a good education.

SAMIR

Women do not naturally choose another woman as their master. Do you know them?

DEB

(nodding)

They spent two months on my ward when they were students.

SAMIR

You are well known as a natural woman. Are they natural women? You must know.

DEB

(surprisingly tolerant)

You'll have to ask them yourself.

More residents drift in.

SAMIR

To change the subject, I have to admit someone to the I.C.U.

CLARK and FRED SELKIRK enter and overhear. Short, slim, clean-shaven, and impeccably dressed in white, Clark looks younger than the other residents although he is a few years older. Fred, thirty-five, wears a business suit and carries a briefcase.

DEB

So? You don't need my permission.

SAMIR

I need a bed. You filled them up last night.

DAVE

Aw, shit! No ICU beds again.

He glares at Clark.

SAMIR

One of your patients seems to be dying.

DEB

(nodding)

Mr. Perez. Dying, but he's not dead yet.

SAMIR

Move him out. Let him die on the ward.

Deb shakes her head firmly no.

DEB

You can't transfer a patient to a ward to die. The nurses hate it.

SAMIR

I have done it many times.

DEB

And the nurses hate you. Dying patients are a lot of work. It's not nice to dump them on the wards.

SAMIR

Fuck the golden rule! Are you going to help me?

DEB

(thinking a moment)

I'll move Mr. Lopez. He's not quite out of his coma, but we can handle him on the ward.

Deborah dials her phone. Delighted, Fred slaps Clark on the back.

FRED

Did you see? They're pulling together! We're going to turn this place around!

Not sharing Fred's enthusiasm, Clark crosses to the desk. Fred takes a seat far right to observe.

CLARK

(addressing the room)

Come get your schedules. Deborah, I'd like to see you after the meeting.

The residents approach and carry away a sheet of paper.

CLARK (cont'd)

(all business)

OK! The year begins! Most of you were interns here but we've got two new residents.

(pointing)

Al Holland from Seattle. Benny Goldstein from Mass General.

DAVE

Massachusetts General! Hot shit!

CLARK

Hot shit indeed. We have a good training program, and it's getting better all the time... This year we filled every intern slot with American graduates.

There is a loud raspberry from Samir. Several residents chuckle and nudge him good-naturedly. Clark hurries on.

CLARK (cont'd)

They're good. We need good people because...

He takes a paper from his desk. Knowing what's coming, the audience grows uneasy.

CLARK (cont'd)

(reading)

The County Department of Health, due to budgetary reallocations...

The residents mutter, groan, and shake their heads angrily.

SAMIR

They will downsize the toilets!

CLARK

...has made the following changes in county hospital operation.

DAVE

They're going to close X-ray and hire Superman.

CLARK

...Because of the hiring freeze, two medical wards will close.

Generalized cursing. Clark waits for the noise level to drop.

CLARK (cont'd)

That leaves six. But we don't lose all those beds. Each ward will go up to thirty-two.

DAVE

That's sixteen per intern. They can't handle that!

CLARK

(primly)

A good intern can. With a good resident.

(reading on)

The laboratory will no longer come to the ward and draw blood. You'll have to do it...

Clark raises his voice to be heard.

CLARK (cont'd)

Keep it down!... No more transportation. If you want to take a patient to X-ray, do it yourself.

(looking up)

Naturally, when I say "you," I mean the medical students.

DAVE

That's not fair to the students!

SAMIR

You should pity the patients, You should see students trying to draw blood!

DAVE

They won't do it! Students used to do that shit, but they won't do it anymore!

CLARK

Students do what they're told.

(with authority)

Sit down! Stop whining! We go through this every year!

DAVE

Every year it gets worse.

CLARK

You guys have a hard job. The interns are new, and they're supposed to know how-

DEB

Skip the fucking pep talk!

Clark glares at her and then switches to another paper.

CLARK

The nursing supervisor says - quote - nurses are not - repeat - not - to be asked to draw blood, start I.V.'s, discontinue I.V.'s, change I.V.'s, transport patients, fill out lab slips, carry messages, find X-rays, take electrocardiograms, pass feeding tubes, or make phone calls.

A rustle of amusement from the audience.

CLARK (cont'd)

(discarding the paper)

Seriously. There's been a lot of complaints. Remember the rules.

DAVE

Sometimes they'll help. If they like you.

CLARK

Good advice. Be nice to the nurses... Last announcement. I'll be on every ward once a week for chief's rounds. Pick me out a good case.

He gathers up his papers. Several residents rise to leave, but Clark stops them. Getting to his feet, Fred crosses to Clark's desk.

CLARK (cont'd)

Hold it. Important news. This is Fred Selkirk from the Department of Hospitals.

FRED

Thank you, Clark.

(addressing the audience with enthusiasm)

I knew it was right to get into the trenches to see how you people cope in the present budget crisis. And you wonderful doctors proved we're on the right track. Together we're going to make this work!

Dave dozes. Deb and the rest fidget. Clark doodles.

FRED (cont'd)

Never far from my mind is that cutting unnecessary services, waste, inefficiency, and our bloated bureaucracy must never compromise the superb medical care that you deliver and that is the envy of the world. I worry about that. That's why I'm so happy I came. You've inspired me!

He points.

FRED (cont'd)

You. What's your name?

Deborah takes a second to realize she is being addressed.

DEB

Birney. Deborah.

Fred points again.

FRED

You. Your name.

SAMIR

Samir. You are not capable of pronouncing my last name.

FRED

I heard your discussion earlier. You, Doctor Samir, had a problem. You, Doctor Deborah, wanted to help. You spoke among yourselves and found a solution. Thank you for that demonstration of how we can pull together to bring back effective government.

Still no response from the audience.

FRED (cont'd)

You want to get to work so I won't keep you, but I want to share some good news.

No response.

FRED (cont'd)

It's about money. This hospital is about to get a lot more.

A mild stir of interest.

FRED (cont'd)

Yesterday the Board of Supervisors approved my plan for a twenty percent reduction in the hospital budget.

The audience reverts to its previous somnolence.
Fred chuckles.

FRED (cont'd)

What, ho! This sounds like less money. How can it be more? But I wasn't kidding. You'll realize when I mention a deplorable statistic... Thirty-two percent of this hospital's inpatients are illegal immigrants.

No response. Fred shows a trace of impatience.

FRED (cont'd)

Thirty-two minus twenty! That leaves twelve percent more dollars for sick Americans who pay the taxes that support our welfare system. More for medicine, more for salaries and equipment and nurses -

SAMIR

(puzzled, not hostile)

You want us to kick out the immigrants?

FRED

Of course not. Qualified people at the door will turn away those whose life is not threatened. Those admitted will receive your usual fine care. When the immigrant is well enough to travel, we will transport him to a qualified Mexican facility.

Silence. The residents yawn, stretch, fidget, and look at the clock.

FRED (cont'd)

Don't you believe Mexico's government has a responsibility to care for sick Mexican citizens?

Dozing, Dave does not bother to open his eyes.

DAVE

Yeah.

FRED

And if the Mexican government sends its sick citizens flooding into America, are we obligated to care for them?

DAVE

Yeah.

FRED

Yes?! Yes?! Who said that?

Dave raises his hand.

DAVE

(matter-of-fact)

Someone gets sick. We gotta take care of 'em.

FRED

Yes. Naturally. I respect your idealism -

DAVE

Not just idealism. Isn't that...like... humanity. Or Christianity.

FRED

Charity is a Christian obligation, but no American church approves defiance of our nation's immigration laws.

SAMIR

(to Dave)

Does not the Catholic Church?

Fred ignores this. Other residents drift off.

FRED

You doctors are doing God's work, but the American taxpayer is fed up. Mexico has a Christian duty, too.

SAMIR

You want to send patients back to Mexico? Is this OK with the Mexican government?

FRED

No. They refused.

Samir scratches his head

FRED (cont'd)

Where government fails, private enterprise steps in. We contacted a Mexican physician who owns a hospital just across the border.

SAMIR

You want to ship patients to Tijuana?

FRED

This is a qualified physician, and the hospital is fully certified by Mexican authorities.

Most of the audience has left.

FRED (cont'd)

So. Are you with me?

SAMIR

Sadly, no. I require education, and for that patients are essential. I favor keeping them.

He exits.

Dave remains, dozing on the couch, with Deborah slouched in her chair. Fred takes out a handkerchief and mops his brow. Clark looks up from his doodling.

CLARK

Tough audience.

FRED

Were they on drugs?

CLARK

Some. They work too hard.

FRED

Well, shit! We're going to take away a third of their patients.

CLARK

They didn't get this residency by wanting to avoid work.

Slapping his briefcase on Clark's desk, Fred removes a piece of medical equipment.

FRED (cont'd)

It is common knowledge that the medical system is awash with waste, inefficiency, expensive gadgetry, overtesting, unnecessary surgery, bureaucratic make-work... For example. I'm sure you know what this is.

He holds up a small case from which extends several feet of black tubing.

CLARK

A fiberoptic endoscope.

FRED

Used to look up people's rectums. Right? Made in...?

Clark shrugs.

FRED (cont'd)

Japan. Cost?...

Clark shrugs again.

FRED (cont'd)

Three thousand dollars.

Setting it down, he extracts a two-foot long plastic tube.

FRED (cont'd)

And this is?....

CLARK

(chuckling)

Haven't seen one of those in a while. That's the old rigid sigmoidoscope.

FRED

Also used to look up people's rectums. Made in the U.S.A. Cost?... Three hundred dollars!

(growing angrier)

This hospital has these three thousand dollar Japanese gadgets all over the place. It hasn't bought an American scope in thirty years!

CLARK

Because the fiberoptic is better.

(wiggling the tubing)

It's flexible, so it goes in easier. Patients have a lot of pain when they get the rigid scope.

FRED

That's the only advantage? American taxpayers are feeling pain, too.

CLARK

It's longer, so we see further up the colon.

FRED

I respect your expertise. We're still going to remove all the Japanese instruments and bring back the American. But we'll let the gastroenterology department to keep one in case a doctor feels the need to see further up.

Clark's face falls at this decision, but Fred moves on.

FRED (cont'd)

More waste. Look what I found in the trash.

(holding up a needle)

A used hypodermic needle.

CLARK

It shouldn't be there. We have special containers.

FRED

Look at it. Good as new.

Fred demonstrates by touching the needle to his forefinger.
Clark reacts with dismay.

CLARK

Don't do that!

FRED

A minute in boiling water and this needle is usable. Maybe fifty times. It's plain common sense, a quality painfully lacking in you medical people. You use thousands -

Clark interrupts, eager to set him right.

CLARK

No, no, no, no! To reuse needles, we'd have to buy sterilizers and pay people to operate them. We'd have to collect the needles and carry them back and repackage them. Also, needles you can sterilize cost more. It's cheaper to use them once and throw them out.

Fred hesitates only a beat.

FRED

I'll check on that... This is what I mean by working together.

He repacks his briefcase.

FRED (cont'd)

Other changes are in the works. Frankly, these meetings have been less productive than we planned.

He snaps the briefcase shut, takes a few steps toward the exit, and then turns back.

FRED (cont'd)

Let me ask your opinion. Do you know our anesthesiology service costs eleven million dollars a year?

CLARK

Didn't know that.

FRED

Our committee did some research. We could hire eight acupuncturists for under half a million a year.

CLARK

Acupuncturists? For anesthesia?

With a gesture of dismissal, Fred turns away.

FRED

Western medicine doesn't always have the answer.

CLARK

Acupuncture works.

Fred turns back, delighted.

FRED

You believe in acupuncture? Wonderful! We're going to turn this place around!

CLARK

It works, but it's not reliable. Some patients respond better than others. It's not suitable for surgery.

FRED

Then maybe you can explain why it works so well in China?

CLARK

But it doesn't.

FRED

Yes, it does!

CLARK

No it doesn't. Chinese surgeons don't use acupuncture much. When they do, patients sometimes have a lot of pain. We couldn't do that in the U.S.

FRED

(exasperated)

Every time we have a good idea, you people whine about how much patients will suffer.

He stalks out. Clark sighs, then notices Deborah.

DEB

What did you want to see me for?

CLARK

Your two late interns have arrived. I want to transfer one.

DEB

Vetoed.... Why?

CLARK

This is a very hard internship. Physically hard.

DEB

I've already sent them off to take over.

CLARK

I don't want three women alone on a ward. For one thing, it's dangerous.

DEB

Actually not. Since Charlie got murdered last year, security is much better. It's the one department they increased the budget.

CLARK

Moving heavy patients can be a problem. The nurses feel better if at least one of the ward staff is a man. And you know how male Hispanic patients feel about women doctors.

DEB

(matter-of-fact)

Me and my girls will do fine, Clark. If you think it'll improve the atmosphere, you have my permission to come by now and then and wave your dick around.

She exits. Clark notices Dave grinning at him.

CLARK

She's so abrasive.

DAVE

Nah, she's OK. You just have to treat her like one of the guys. Of course, you can't even do that to guys.

CLARK

Having everyone on a ward female is a problem. Wait till they start having their periods. Moaning in the bathroom, taking days off.

DAVE

(taken aback)

Whoa! That's pretty strong.

CLARK

(defensive)

The female house staff do it all the time.

DAVE

Who? Who does that?

CLARK

It used to wipe out my mother every month. She couldn't get out of bed.

DAVE

(delighted)

Your mother?!.... Your mother!!....

He suppresses several jokes. Rising, he crosses to Clark and pats him on the shoulder.

DAVE (cont'd)

Relax, Clark. That was the older generation. Women these days don't have periods.

He exits in high spirits. Lights dim.

SCENE 2 - First Day on the Ward

Fran and Toni sit at a table piled high with charts. Deb enters.

DEB

So how was the Congo?

TONI

I never want to sweat so much again. I'm going to practice in Greenland.

DEB

I mean how was the medicine?

TONI

Basic. The country is corrupt and poor. The hospital is falling apart.... Don't make wisecracks about this place; there's no comparison.

DEB

You must have worked hard. Count on working hard this year.

TONI

We know how you operate. That's why we finagled to get you.

DEB

I'm flattered. Last year you were helpful, but you were students. Internship is not an intellectual experience. Let's get to work.

Scooping up charts, the interns pile them into a rolling chart rack then follow Deb to stage center.

A NURSE enters.

NURSE

We have an admission coming up.

DEB

Shit. That's early.

NURSE

Who do we discharge?

DEB

We'll let you know.

The nurse exits.

TONI

Just because the beds are filled, why do we have to discharge someone? Can't we admit him to another ward temporarily?

DEB

You go crazy running all over the hospital. We hate boarding.

Fran takes a chart.

FRAN

This is Mr. Webb, a 45-year-old man who drinks. Admitted last week for pancreatitis. He's not vomiting any more but still has abdominal pain.

DEB

As we know, a drinker with chronic pancreatitis has a bellyache most of the time.

FRAN

Does that mean we can discharge him?

DEB

You're the doctor.

FRAN

We'll discharge him.

She walks offstage with the chart. Toni presents her patient.

TONI

This is Mr. Lopez, a 58-year-old man who had a stroke three days ago... Why isn't he on the neurology ward?

DEB

Neurology doesn't take strokes. They don't have the staff to handle really sick people.

TONI

He's definitely sick. He should be in the ICU.

DEB

He was - until this morning. He's had a big stroke, and his chances aren't good.

TONI

Maybe, but fifty-eight is too young to give up on.

DEB

Don't give up. And he's not a discharge, so let's move to someone who might give us an empty bed because -

The nurse has re-entered.

(BLACKOUT)

SCENE 3 - First Night on the Ward

The same setting as Scene 2. Toni is writing in a chart. Deb reads a medical journal. Fran enters carrying an X-ray and hangs it on a viewbox.

TONI

Deb, I'm on my sixth admission.

DEB

Good news. This is a bad night. We won't have too many like this.
(turns her attention to the X-ray)

What do you see?

FRAN

I don't think his bowel's obstructed. Just a lot of feces.

DEB

Fortunate for the gentleman, not so good for our bed situation. Obstruction goes to the surgeons. Constipation is our problem.

An aide enters pushing a gurney, leaves it, and exits.

DEB (cont'd)

Oops. I forgot.

TONI

Is that an admission?

DEB

Transfer. Man with a stroke. Neurology got him by mistake.

Fran moans in frustration.

FRAN

I suppose I can discharge someone.

DEB

You can't.

FRAN

Yes I can.

DEB

(shaking her head no)

Not after midnight. They were walking out, getting mugged, and coming back with their bones broken. Orthopedics was complaining, so they made the rule. No late discharges.

FRAN

There's no male beds!

DEB

I know. We're boarding him on...

(consulting a slip of paper)

44D. East wing.

FRAN

(despairing)

That's half a mile away!

(with authority)

We can't let this ward get out of hand.

The lights fade.

SCENE 4 - Half an hour later

The ward is deserted except for Fran pacing restlessly. An X-ray hangs illuminated on the viewbox. CHESTER strolls in from upstage, swinging a stethoscope thoughtfully. Tall, with a full beard, he wears a green scrub suit over Levis.

FRAN

Are you the senior resident on surgery tonight?

CHESTER

(nodding)

Chester Barnett.

FRAN

Fran Tarnoff.

He holds out a hand, and they shake formally. He peers at her name tag.

CHESTER

From medicine. What can I do for you, Fran from medicine?

FRAN

(businesslike)

There's a man with gallstones we'd like transferred. Do you have room?

CHESTER

(congenial)

If we don't have room for a gallbladder, we make room.... Actually I just took a look at him.

He peers more closely at the X-ray.

CHESTER (cont'd)

Lots of stones.

He squints at the identification on the film.

CHESTER (cont'd)

"Male. Age 76." Not a young fellow.

(turning to Fran)

Didn't seem in a lot of pain.

FRAN

(hedging)

Not a lot.

CHESTER

And you think he needs surgery tonight.

After looking at his watch, Chester scratches his head. He is torn between attraction for Fran and contempt for her crude maneuver.

CHESTER (cont'd)

It's the wee hours. You want to send us a patient that's not urgent... Am I missing something?

FRAN

(taking the offensive)

The man belongs on surgery. If you don't want him, say so. We can wait till morning...
(emphasizing)

...when your ward stops admitting. He'll go to the next ward.

CHESTER

You got a point. I'd hate to lose a good gallbladder.

(reluctantly)

Still... A wee hour transfer!... Not particularly urgent...

FRAN

So the answer is no?

Pulling the film from the viewing box, he hands it to Fran.

CHESTER

You people are mighty generous. But sometimes you offer these tempting cases. Then we find - attached to this tempting case - is a little old man with a little old diseased heart and little old diseased lungs... Much as we love surgery, it blunts the satisfaction if the patient doesn't survive.

FRAN

His last heart attack was six months ago.

CHESTER

(more in sorrow than anger)

Doctor Fran.... If I accept a patient who's not suitable for surgery, my chief resident gets awful pissed at me.

Fran says nothing. Chester surveys the ward thoughtfully.

CHESTER (cont'd)

...I don't see an empty bed...

Fran's lips tighten, but she says nothing.

CHESTER (cont'd)

Would you consider it a big favor if I took this fellow?

She hesitates at this personal approach, then decides.

FRAN

Yes. I would.

CHESTER

In that case, Doctor Fran, I will risk the wrath of my chief resident. Send him over.

Relieved, she maintains her composure. He takes three steps left, and then turns.

CHESTER (cont'd)

Transport him yourself. Don't ask one of our guys to do it.

(BLACKOUT)

SCENE 5 - THE ICU

Two a.m. The stage is brightly lit, and one hears the beep of cardiac monitors. Downstage stands a bed, its foot facing upstage. Wearing a stethoscope, Toni bends over the bed as Deb enters carrying a large tray covered with a cloth.

TONI

(looking up)

His heart rate's down to thirty. He needs a pacemaker.

DEB

You're right.

TONI

I'll call cardiology.

Deb sets her tray on the bed.

DEB

No need.

TONI

What's that? A pacemaker?

Deb unfolds the cloth and hands several items to Toni.

DEB

Scrub that arm. I'm going to show you how to put in a temporary pacemaker.

(to the patient as she puts on surgical gloves).

This sounds like a big deal, Mr. Sims, but it isn't. We're going to slide a little wire into a vein to speed up your heart. You won't notice anything, and the only pain will be the Novocain.

(to Toni)

First I cut down to a vein. Have you ever done a cutdown?

TONI

Plenty.

DEB

I forgot. Africa.

Clark enters quietly and crosses to her side. He carries surgical gloves. Aware of his presence, Deb does not pause.

...I see you're putting in a pacemaker...

CLARK

No response.

How many have you put in?

CLARK (cont'd)

A couple.

DEB

A couple...

CLARK

(thoughtfully)

Putting on his gloves, he gently nudges her out of the way.

Excuse me. I'm going to pull a little rank and take over.

CLARK (cont'd)

She gives way without overt protest.

Why don't you assist? Take that wire over there.

CLARK (cont'd)

(tactfully)

You said you don't need me.

DEB

(evenly)

Stripping off her gloves, she hurls them to the floor and stalks off.

(BLACKOUT)

SCENE 6: The Emergency Room

Toni and Fran enter from right, not seeing Dave and Samir seated at a table far left covered with papers, coffee cups, and a pizza carton.

FRAN

It looks slow. Maybe we'll get some sleep.

TONI

I smell something good.

Seeing the table, they approach.

DAVE

A surrender party. The interns have come to beg for mercy!

FRAN

Could we have some?

DAVE

The interns have come to beg for mercy and pizza.

The women help themselves.

SAMIR

How are you holding up?

FRAN

Working fast, but patients are piling up.

SAMIR

Do you think you'll get some sleep?

The women shrug.

DAVE

I hear young people are fond of sleep these days.

SAMIR

It is back in fashion. I had some myself the other night.

DAVE

So why don't we help them out?

SAMIR

Done...

(addressing the women)

We will give you two patients. But they will be no work. Because they are dead.

DAVE

When nursing homes see someone dying they like to ship him to the hospital. It saves paperwork. So we get quite a few patients who are dead on arrival. But a patient isn't dead until we say he's dead.

SAMIR

Maybe we make a mistake. We admit them. You look. You say, ah, this patient is dead. He goes to the morgue. No work for you.

DAVE

But he's on the books as your admission. You're off the hook until the other wards get their admissions.

TONI

It sounds weird.

DAVE

We don't do it too often. Other wards get mad if they hear about it.

FRAN

Thanks.

The women exit with their pizzas.

(BLACKOUT)

SCENE 7

The following morning. Clark's office. Deb stands before his desk.

CLARK

(mildly)

I don't like coming in at night, but Cardiology said no one called them, so they couldn't interfere. They were not happy.

She says nothing.

CLARK (cont'd)

Let a cardiac fellow check you out before you do a complicated procedure. We've had some disasters.

DEB

I worked two years in a dog lab.

CLARK

(supercilious)

A dog lab. Is that so?...

DEB

(annoyed)

And I took two months of cardiology as a student. I can put in a pacemaker.

CLARK

Peachy. We like aggressive residents. But we have obligations to our patients.

DEB

(bristling)

What does that mean?

CLARK

(patiently)

This is a public hospital. You can do whatever you want to your patient. But it's also a teaching hospital - meaning whatever you do, you have to do it right. Show us you can do it, or we'll teach you. Don't go off on your own.

He pauses for a response. There is none.

CLARK (cont'd)

...O.K.?

DEB

(evenly)

You tell us you rely on our judgment. If I need help, I'll ask.

CLARK

Deb, that's a smart-ass answer. Smart-ass house staff make things hard for themselves.

DEB

You're the one making difficulty. I hope you don't keep doing that.

Wheeling, she walks toward the exit, right. Clark opens his mouth to object when a husky resident in a scrub suit rushes in, colliding with Deborah and knocking her down. Pausing a beat, he is on the verge of apologizing. Then he seems to recognize her, and he erupts into rage.

RESIDENT

You're the one who dumped that gallbladder! Manipulative bitch!! If he doesn't have your ass, I will!

It's the chief resident of surgery, GREG. Wheeling, he bears down on Clark.

(BLACKOUT)

SCENE 8: The Ward

Fran hurries up to Deb.

FRAN

Mrs. Bender's having bloody diarrhea again. I need to do a sigmoidoscopy, but I can't find the scope.

DEB

It's in the case labeled "sigmoidoscope."

FRAN

No, it isn't.

DEB

I saw it today.

FRAN

No. There's just some old rigid scope.

DEB

That's a sigmoidoscope, too. And it's all we have.

FRAN

That old thing? It's like a medieval torture. I never used one.

DEB

I'll show you.

They move off left, talking.

FRAN

She's seventy-five. Is it safe sticking that into her?

DEB

No, but we'll be careful. The G.I. office has the only flexible scope. But they're backed up for weeks.

They exit. Lights fade.

SCENE 9: Ah, There you are.

The cafeteria. Five tables with chairs are scattered about.

Clark enters with his tray, sees Dave dozing over a meal, and approaches.

CLARK

Ah, there you are.

(sets down his tray and sits)

Dave, you have to stop taking X-rays. It's not legal.

Dave takes his time waking up.

CLARK (cont'd)

You have to stop -

DAVE

(interrupting)

Heard you. I had a girl friend who was a tech. She taught me.

CLARK

I know there's always a crowd, but you can't take your own X-rays.

DAVE

I can't let my guys wait around when machines are sitting unused. We got too much work.

CLARK

It's not legal. Only certified technicians -

DAVE

(interrupting; matter-of-fact)

Fuck it, Clark. I don't think it's illegal.

CLARK

Maybe. But it's a terrible precedent. If the county thinks we can take our own X-rays...

DAVE

I can't think about the future. We got too much work.

Fran enters with a tray and sees Dave.

FRAN

Ah, there you are.

(sitting next to him)

I learned to X-ray in Africa, but we had this ancient machine. I don't understand the one downstairs. If you show me, I could do our patients.

Dave nods agreeably.

CLARK

This is a bad idea. There are other ways to handle this.

DAVE

Like hire more X-ray techs? Ha!

CLARK

The administration is working on something. Getting tech students to train here. Talking to retired techs about volunteering.

Deborah hurries in carrying a sheaf of papers.

DAVE

Ingenious idea! Asking people to work for nothing. I know a retired surgeon. He's almost blind, but he'd work free.... I know an elderly dentist with a tremor –

Deborah hurls her papers onto Clark's lunch.

DEB

What shit is this! Did you make up these?

DAVE

(picking up one)

I was going to mention them.

CLARK

Selkirk's got this bee in his bonnet about illegal immigrants.

Deborah snatches a form and waves it in Clark's face.

DEB

Thirty-five of these just arrived on my ward. Apparently I'm supposed to fill them out for every illegal patient. Did you make these up?

CLARK

(nodding)

Selkirk asked me. He's having trouble getting patients to ship back to Mexico.

DEB
And you're going to tell him who to deport?

CLARK
Not me. I'm too busy.

DEB
Then who?

CLARK
I don't know. He'll find someone.

DEB
Did you seriously think I'd fill these out?

CLARK
Naturally, I didn't.

DAVE
They're going to have a low priority with me, too.

CLARK
So don't.

FRAN
Why go to all that trouble when you don't care?

CLARK
Diplomacy. Selkirk asked me to walk through the wards and pick out those to deport.

DEB
Don't try that with me!

CLARK
I told him I could not overrule a patient's physician.

DEB
You do that all the time.

Samir enters, hurries to the table and addresses Clark.

SAMIR
There you are! What is the rumor of us not getting medical students next week?

CLARK
A tempest in a teapot.

SAMIR

They say they want to go to Cedars-Sinai for their third year..

Dismay from the residents.

DAVE

Is this more bad news? We got to have students.

CLARK

The only news is that last night the students voted to change their clerkships to Cedars.

DEB

Shit.

CLARK

This isn't the sixties. The fact that students want something doesn't mean they get it.

DAVE

They didn't like the extra scut they did last year.

CLARK

And they'll do a lot more this year.

SAMIR

You say this will not come to pass. Tell us why.

CLARK

(didactic)

This crumbling hospital is the jewel in the crown of the medical school. It attracts outstanding staff like you. Cedars is a nice hospital, full of nice patients who have nice doctors who don't want interns to touch them. Students love it, but we wouldn't, and the medical school doesn't. This place would not be a jewel if we didn't have medical students to help out.

The group agrees wordlessly.

CLARK (cont'd)

So the medical school has no sympathy for the students... The county needs the free labor, so no sympathy there... We were once students, some at this very institution where we spent too much time running stupid errands, drawing blood, and other scut. We know how students feel. Do we sympathize?

Everyone agrees that they don't.

CLARK (cont'd)

So no one sympathizes with the students.

Toni enters with her tray and hurries over.

TONI

There you are! Did you hear the latest about the students?

The group nods. Toni sets down her tray.

TONI (cont'd)

What are we going to do?

CLARK

It won't be a problem.

TONI

Are you sure? They've gone on strike. They're picketing the hospital.

(BLACKOUT)

SCENE 10: The Ward

Four a.m. A frazzled Toni waits impatiently beside a bed holding a covered tray of instruments. Chester strolls on.

TONI

Am I glad to see you!

(pointing)

He needs a chest tube.

CHESTER

(shaking his head in wonder)

Jesus Christ! Back again!...

(explaining)

It's Arthur the addict. Arthur has educated a generation of doctors. What's the story now?

TONI

Came in with pneumonia. An hour ago he got real short of breath. I think he collapsed a lung.

After applying his stethoscope, Chester nods agreement.

CHESTER

Tension pneumothorax. Did you stick in a needle in his chest?

(noticing)

Good.

Taking the tray from Toni, he strips it open, arranges the instruments on the bed, and puts on sterile gloves.

CHESTER (cont'd)

Hang in there, Arthur. I'll fix you up.

(turning to Toni)

You look pooped. Find me a student, and go to bed.

TONI

Students? Where have you been?

CHESTER

What about Fran? She likes my company.

TONI

Down the hall with a GI bleeder.

CHESTER

Busy night... Why don't you scrub his chest?

He chats as he works.

CHESTER (cont'd)

Arthur had his GI bleed last year. I took out his kidney the time he got stabbed.... Having Arthur for a patient is the real test of a humanitarian. You heal him, but he won't stay healed. You work your ass off; don't expect a thank you.

(turning to Arthur)

Listen, Arthur... Time to put in the tube. There's lots of Novocain, but you're still going to feel it. Be brave.

(to Toni)

Hold his hands. He may get a little jumpy.

As Chester goes about his business, Arthur begins struggling. Pulling free, he strikes out at Chester but hits Toni instead. She pins his wrists momentarily. Again he flails out, slapping her face, grabbing her shirt, tearing off a pocket, scattering pens and instruments onto the floor. Finally he clutches a handful of her hair. Crying out in pain, she immobilizes his hands but cannot break the grip.

CHESTER (cont'd)

(straightening up)

Done! Relax, Arthur. The worst is over.

As Chester frees Toni, Arthur makes guttural noises.

CHESTER (cont'd)

Watch out! Arthur's a sneaky vomiter.

He jumps back a step, but Toni is not quick enough.

CHESTER (cont'd)

Gotcha, didn't he?... All in a night's work.

(to Arthur)

I'm going to sew you up, Arthur. You won't feel a thing.

(to Toni)

Hold his hands, just in case.

Almost immediately, blood spatters her face and blouse.

CHESTER (cont'd)

A little bleeder there.

(looking up)

Bad luck... Arthur's blood transmits hepatitis from across the room. Get yourself a gamma globulin shot. Check his HIV, too.

Still restraining Arthur, she nods obediently. Chester hums contentedly as he sews.

Disheveled, dirty, and bloodstained, Toni is a picture of dejection as lights fade.

SCENE 11: Clark's Office

Fred sits behind the desk. Two men slouch in chairs: Greg, the chief resident of surgery and a black man in white coat and pants. Clark enters, conceals his annoyance at seeing Selkirk at his desk, and sits.

CLARK

(to Fred)

Any progress on the student strike?

FRED

(shaking his head regretfully)

America has made so much headway toward a color-blind society. It infuriates me to see racism pop up on our doorstep.

CLARK

I don't think that's the issue.

FRED

Then what do you call it when medical students - mostly white - refuse to lift a finger to help our patients who are almost entirely not white? I call it racism, and I call it a disgrace.

CLARK

They're objecting to the working conditions.

FRED

Everyone in this hospital is making sacrifices. Those students should do no less.

CLARK

They will. Once they set foot inside.

FRED

We should have an injunction within a week.

GREG

Fuck the law. Get the little shits in here. Promise 'em anything.

CLARK

I hear they've agreed to compromise with the medical school. Whatever it is, accept it.

FRED

No, sir! Those limp dick liberals promised students they wouldn't have to lift a finger. That's unacceptable.

GREG

Sounds fine to me. Promise it.

CLARK

We can handle students once they set foot in the hospital.

FRED

That's not the subject of this meeting. Talk to me after.

He looks over the group.

FRED (cont'd)

Is everyone here? Where's the director of nursing?

BLACK MAN

I'm the director of nursing.

FRED

Ah. A male nurse.

BLACK MAN (cont'd)

(coldly)

I'm the director of nursing.

GREG

Where's the pediatrics chief? Didn't you invite her?

FRED

Pediatrics has not been helpful. She refused to come.

GREG

It's that simple? You just don't show up? I'm out of here!

He leaps up and dashes toward the exit. Clark grabs his jacket as he passes.

CLARK

Stay. We need your help.

FRED

I have good news today.

Clark forces Greg back into his seat.

FRED (cont'd)

We have eliminated this hospital's chronic shortage of nurse's aides.

DIRECTOR OF NURSING

What do you mean by "eliminated?" Half my aides didn't show up today. I guess you're responsible for that.

FRED

One hundred twelve of your aides were undocumented immigrants taking jobs that rightfully belong to Americans. They're heading home as we talk.

DIRECTOR OF NURSING

So who's going empty bedpans and clean up vomit and shit?

(chuckles)

Americans? Ha!

FRED

More Americans than you can shake a stick at. Waiting in the auditorium for your instructions are not one hundred twelve but over two hundred new workers.

The director of nursing is unimpressed.

DIRECTOR OF NURSING

You're giving me welfare women, aren't you?

FRED

Social Service is putting them to work. We split the salaries so everyone saves money. This is an example of government working together -

DIRECTOR OF NURSING

I don't want welfare women. Most of them don't stay. They're not motivated.

FRED

If anyone goofs off, fire her. Anyone fired loses a third of her benefits. That'll motivate them.

DIRECTOR OF NURSING

It will not motivate them. A lot of these women never held a steady job, and nurse's aide is bitter hard work. They'll screw up no matter what the consequences. Mexicans are better.

FRED

Americans are all we have for you. Put aside your prejudices and work with them.

GREG

The shortage of help is a pain in the ass. Why don't we just hire more?

FRED

Ask your colleagues about the budget crisis.

GREG

You tell me. Why are things so bad?

FRED

The county supervisors have a certain amount of money to spend, and there isn't enough.

GREG

So? Let the county supervisors get more.

FRED

(patiently)

That would involve raising taxes.

GREG

So?

FRED

The taxpayers don't want their taxes raised.

GREG

Fuck what the fucking taxpayers want!! I spend three quarters of my time doing things I don't want to do. That's what being a grown-up means!!

He is on his feet again; the others clutch his shirt to restrain him.

FRED

We don't need more tax money to run this hospital - just good management and common-sense... For example, the underprivileged need help when they're alive but not afterwards. So we're discontinuing autopsies

CLARK

That's not a good idea.

FRED

The county spends six million dollars a year on dead people. No one benefits.

CLARK

Patients benefit. Doctors learn from autopsies.

FRED

Medical education is not the county's concern. Moving on, we're saving another nine million dollars by discontinuing kidney transplants.

Not paying attention, Greg suddenly perks up.

FRED (cont'd)

Patients will remain on dialysis.

GREG

How are my residents going to learn the surgery?...

(realizes this is not a good argument)

Transplants are better. Patients don't want to stay on the machine.

FRED

Maybe, but dialysis is acceptable treatment for kidney failure.

GREG

(working himself up again)

"Acceptable?" My residents don't provide "acceptable" treatment...

CLARK

This won't save money. Transplants are cheaper.

FRED

Not for the County. Back when you fellows invented artificial kidneys, Congress passed a law to pay for dialyzing anyone who can't afford it. So dialyzing doesn't cost the County a cent. Transplants cost... Now what should we do with this fifteen million we've saved?

GREG

Shove it up your ass....!

FRED

The answer is: it goes right back into our budget which remains deeply red. Undocumented aliens are down to twenty-nine percent, hardly any drop.

CLARK

We can't turn them away if they're too sick.

FRED

But once you admit them, you seem to forget they're not citizens. And that our sister hospital across the border has plenty of beds.

Greg tears himself free and escapes. Fred gathers his papers.

FRED (cont'd)

We won't have any more of these meetings.

DIRECTOR OF NURSING

Amen!

FRED

You'll learn about the ongoing restructuring as it occurs.

He exits left.

CLARK

Uh oh.

The director of nursing gets to his feet and stretches.

DIRECTOR OF NURSING

What do you mean "uh oh?" Assholes have taken over the world. You have a smart way to deal with that?

CLARK

He doesn't realize when he does more harm than good. Someone has to tell him.

DIRECTOR OF NURSING

Shit, man. Half you doctors are Jews, and you still don't get it. It's like Jews negotiating with Nazis. They'll negotiate - to find the easiest way to turn you into soap. Talk all you want. They got the power. You're going in the oven.

CLARK

So what's your plan?

DIRECTOR OF NURSING

No plan. I come to work. I do my job despite the overwhelming presence of assholes. Us black folk are used to that.

He exits right. Clark hurries out left to catch Fred. Lights fade.

SCENE 12: The Surgery Ward

Fran writes in a chart as Greg enters

GREG

Are you the medical consult we called for Mr. Abel?

Fran nods.

GREG (cont'd)

I know all the medical residents, and I don't know you.

Since she is bent over the chart, he must contort himself to see her name tag.

GREG (cont'd)

You're just an intern. Why are they sending interns to do our medical consults?

FRAN

(evenly)

It's busy on medicine. Anyway, consults from surgery are easy.

Greg does not appreciate the dig.

GREG

Aren't you the intern that transferred that old man too sick to operate on?... You know, if you suck our residents' cock they'll do anything.

Fran looks up.

FRAN

Thanks for the tip. That'll make surgery transfers a lot easier.

Chester enters and crosses to the pair.

CHESTER

What's the verdict? Can we take out his spleen? It's big as a grapefruit.

FRAN

Why do you want to do that?

CHESTER

Doesn't he have ITP? We had an ITP last year, and we took out his spleen.

FRAN

I think he's got kala-azar.

GREG

Never heard of it.

FRAN

It's a form of leishmaniasis.

GREG

Never heard of that either.

FRAN

It's a protozoan infection, common in Africa. I saw a few, and he was in Africa last year.

GREG

So is it a surgical case?

FRAN

(shaking her head no)

Treated with drugs. We order them from the CDC in Atlanta. Send him over.

GREG

Will wonders never cease? Medicine accepts a transfer.

FRAN

A great case! I'll present him on Grand Rounds.

Greg exits. Closing the chart, Fran hands it to Chester.

FRAN (cont'd)

I guess that old man didn't get his gallstones out.

CHESTER

Nope.

FRAN

I guess the chief resident was mad.

CHESTER

He threw one of his tantrums. Genuinely frightening the first time you see it, but I can't say you ever get used to it.

I'm really sorry.

FRAN

CHESTER
Don't apologize. I exposed myself to his wrath in order to put you under obligation. Do you consider yourself under obligation?

FRAN
Well... It was a big favor.

CHESTER
Now I need a favor in return.

FRAN
Does it involve patients?

CHESTER
No.

FRAN
Certain favors are not in the cards.

CHESTER
I'd like to socialize. Maybe dinner, conversation, a movie.

FRAN
That's no favor. I'd like that.

CHESTER
Saturday?

FRAN
I'm on call Saturday. Sunday?

CHESTER
That's call for me.

Realizing the problem, both extract a crumpled sheet of paper from a pocket, move close, and compare. Lights fade.

SCENE 13

The set is dim. Toni works in a fuse box far up right with Deborah observing. Suddenly the lights brighten.

DEB

Terrific! You learned a lot in Africa.

TONI

This is temporary, and it isn't safe. You need to replace the fuses.

DEB

O.K. I know where Maintenance keeps supplies.

TONI

No! I've got too much work! Get the people responsible.

DEB

Unrealistic. We're lucky we're women, so they have to keep one toilet working.

Fran enters from right and joins them. Deb notices two women enter uncertainly from left.

DEB (cont'd)

Here's what looks like good news. You're the medical students, right?

They nod and exchange handshakes. They are PAT and TERESA.

TONI

Are we glad to see you!

DEB

Did Doctor Whipple give you an orientation?

PAT

He said it would be hard work, but we'd learn a lot. The usual bullshit.

DEB

It's bullshit in the sense that most of the hard work isn't educational.

TONI

(to the students)

I have two admissions downstairs. Could you see them?

TERESA

Sure. Do you want us to do an exam and then present them to you?

Toni hands a sheet of paper to each.

TONI

Eventually. But first I want you to draw these bloods and take them to the lab. Urines, too. Then go to Medical Records. Find their old charts and old X-rays. Then bring them up. Bring the patients, too.

PAT

(resentfully)

Didn't you hear the news? We don't do scut.

Toni looks at Deb.

DEB

(to the students)

Sit down, girls.

They sit.

DEB (cont'd)

(agreeably)

You don't have to do scut if you don't want to.... You can follow us around and ask questions and examine the patients and read their charts. You can go to the library. You can go to your conferences. You can go home and study and get a good night's sleep.

She smiles. The students wait for the other shoe to drop.

DEB (cont'd)

At the end of the rotation you'll learn some medicine. No one will test you on it. There are no finals, no essays, no grades.

(she pauses)

..... Just an evaluation. I write one. The interns write one. Dr. Whipple writes one. We rate medical knowledge, but we also discuss your attitude, professionalism, dedication. If, in the future, you want an internship at a decent hospital -

PAT

(interrupting)

Hey! That sounds like you're threatening us.

Deborah remains agreeable

DEB

You bet. This is the real world - actually one of the worst parts of the real world: a charity hospital in a country without much charity.

(more serious)

But we still have to take care of things. If a patient needs something, and the institution won't provide it, we provide it. It takes knowledge to practice here, but even more it takes scut and shit and hard labor and wasted effort... We need help. Students are at the bottom of the totem poll, so scut is mostly what you do.... So. How about it?

The students exchange a glance. Taking the papers from Toni, they exit. Fran turns to Toni.

FRAN

I have to drive to UCLA to pick up some drugs. Will you cover for a couple hours?

TONI

Why are you going to UCLA?

FRAN

To pick up chemotherapy for Mrs. Manual.

DEB

Pharmacy doesn't have it?

FRAN

It's a new protocol for hairy cell leukemia, not FDA approved yet. Much better than the old one - over eighty percent remission.

TONI

Can't the pharmacy get it?

FRAN

Only by mail. The protocol has to begin tomorrow.

An orderly passes upstage pushing an empty gurney.

TONI

Can't they send someone?

FRAN

We don't have a messenger service anymore.

TONI

Then send a medical student?

DEB

That's the only thing a student can't do. Liability. Insurance doesn't cover hospital business in a private car.

TONI

(to Fran)

But you're going.

FRAN

I'm the doc. It's got to be done.

Toni accepts a sheet of paper from Fran. She notices the orderly has reappeared, pushing a gurney with a patient.

TONI

Isn't that your lady with leukemia?

Fran crosses and stops the gurney.

FRAN

Where are you taking her?

No answer. Apparently the man speaks no English. He attempts to push the gurney, but Fran keeps hold.

FRAN (cont'd)

She's not supposed to go anywhere. Take her back.

After more efforts to move the gurney, the orderly makes a gesture of frustration and exits.

FRAN (cont'd)

The only time you find an orderly is when you don't need one.

As she pushes the gurney, another MAN, accompanied by the orderly, enters and stops her. He is impeccably dressed in a business suit and carries a clipboard.

MAN

Excuse me, doctor. I am Doctor Enrique Martin, Director of Hospital Autonoma de Baja California. This patient,

(consulting his clipboard)

Mrs. Carmela Manual is a Mexican citizen. She is entitled to care in a Mexican hospital, and I am authorized by your superiors to transfer her.

FRAN

This lady has leukemia, and she's getting a new treatment. You can't take her.

DOCTOR MARTIN

That is a cancer of the blood. You have no worry. In Mexico we have many cures for cancer that your government refuses to permit. I will personally choose the most powerful for Mrs. Manual.

He exits. Lights fade.

SCENE 14: The Surgery Ward

Fran sleeps, her head resting on a table, surrounded by charts.
Greg and Chester enter.

GREG

(observing Fran)

Chet, do I have to teach you the difference between medicine and surgery? After you fuck anyone on medicine, let her get some sleep. Otherwise she's no good the next day.

CHESTER

Can't take the blame for that. She was working all night.

Greg shakes Fran awake.

GREG

Sleeping beauty! We're here to check out that fascinoma you want to give us. I'm here to make sure you don't exert undo influence on my romantically inclined resident.

She hands him a chart. Greg glances at the cover then marches off.
Chester sits by Fran.

CHESTER

You doing OK?

FRAN

We're sort of on automatic pilot.

(noticing)

You don't look so good yourself.

CHESTER

I was going to ask if I could lie down in your call room. Greg locks ours during the day.

FRAN

You want me to drive you home? I get off around ten.

CHESTER

You don't want me in your car. I must have ate something bad.

Greg reenters, pushing a gurney.

GREG

On your feet, Chet. Have you had your vascular surgery rotation?

Shaking his head no, Chester rises. Deborah enters.

GREG (cont'd)

Then I'll teach you some. This fellow's got a cold, white leg, so we have to fix him now.

DEB

Say, Chester. Your eyes are yellow. Are your eyes normally yellow?

Fran jumps up and looks.

FRAN

Your eyes are yellow! You've got hepatitis!

CHESTER

Aw, shit.

FRAN

(to Greg)

Didn't you see that he's jaundiced?

GREG

Nowadays most of my residents are dragging a little.

(to Chester)

They say you're sick. Are you sick? Should I get someone else?

CHESTER

I'll do O.K.

Greg pushes the gurney.

GREG

Then let's put some blood back into this man's leg....

They exit as Pat hurries on.

PAT

(to Fran)

I need your help again. That man with the heart attack in the ICU. He's not doing well.

FRAN

Not doing well in what way?

PAT

He's still having chest pain.

FRAN

What does his EKG look like?

PAT

Bundle branch block... I'm afraid he's going to arrest.

FRAN

You can handle an arrest.

PAT

Would you look at him?

FRAN

When I have time. I have sick people, too.

PAT

I'm a student. I shouldn't be responsible for these critical patients.

Deborah chuckles.

DEB

(amused)

Last month you were bitching about scut. Now you're doing cardiology.

PAT

It's no joke. I shouldn't have this responsibility.

FRAN

You're right. Do your best.

Pat moves to exit but stops as Toni and Teresa enter.

TERESA

I've tried and tried, but I can't get in.

TONI

What's the rule with difficult spinal taps?

TERESA

Keep trying. But--

TONI

That's the spirit.

After an encouraging slap on the back, Toni hurries out.

TERESA

(to Pat)

We'll never be prepared for the seminar tomorrow.

PAT

Don't worry. Half the class won't make it.

TERESA

Is this a substitute? Is this a learning experience?

P.A. SYSTEM

Code blue. Seventh floor ICU. Code Blue Seventh floor ICU.

PAT

Fuck! I bet that's my patient!

She hurries off as Clark enters with Fred.

FRED

Another thing I want to mention is the odor of urine. There's a pervasive smell when you walk in the ward. Have you noticed?

He sniffs to demonstrate, but Clark is not paying attention.

CLARK

No... Well, yes. Maybe I have...

FRED

We can't have that.

CLARK

I suppose. But that's a nursing function. Talk to them.
(to Teresa; congenially)
How did the tap go? Did you get in?

TERESA

No.

CLARK

You know the rule. Keep trying.

Giving her a fatherly pat on the shoulder, he exits.

FRED

(to Teresa)

I'd like to talk to you about the pervasive smell of urine -

TERESA

Fuck you! I'm not a nurse!

She stalks off, passing the director of nursing as he enters.

FRED

You're the man I want. I'd like to talk to you about the pervasive smell of urine.

No response.

FRED (cont'd)

It reminds me of a nursing home.

DIRECTOR OF NURSING

Urine odor in a nursing home is a sign of understaffing and neglect.

FRED

Not acceptable in a hospital. Would you look into it?

DIRECTOR OF NURSING

Eventually. Urine is not a major health hazard, and I'm short of cleaning staff.

FRED

Be flexible. Find an area where staff is not efficiently employed, then move them to where they can do the most good.

DIRECTOR OF NURSING

Like maybe I should pull a few ICU nurses and give them a mop and bucket.

FRED

I don't appreciate sarcasm. Our goal is to do more with less.

DIRECTOR OF NURSING

Then let me suggest you practice holding your nose. Urine won't be the only body product you smell if you keep cutting my staff.

Clark enters from left and hurries to the director of nursing.

CLARK

There's a problem in the ICU!

The men wait expectantly.

CLARK (cont'd)

I just came from a cardiac arrest - presided over by a third year student!

DIRECTOR OF NURSING

What's that have to do with me?

CLARK

I read the chart. Not a single entry by an MD. All orders written by a medical student.

DIRECTOR OF NURSING

Aw, c'mon... We're too busy to check ID's on everyone with a white coat.

At this moment, Deb strolls on from right. Clark breaks off and rushes across to her. Fred and the director exit to opposite wings.

CLARK

One of your students is handling an arrest in the ICU!

DEB

(nodding)

Pat. How's she doing?

CLARK

Why aren't you there to find out? You're supposed to supervise your students!

DEB

And I do. When I have time.

CLARK

"Have time!!" "Have time!!!" A medical student in the ICU taking care of a critically ill -

Deborah places both hands over Clark's face to silence him.

DEB

Relax, Clark... Since Dale had his nervous breakdown and Sam quit and went to chiropractor school, we're short of interns. My ward has thirty-five patients. Get it?

CLARK

(calming)

That's a lot. That's too many.

Dave hurries on.

DAVE

Hey, Deb. I want dibs on that ICU bed. I got a bad GI bleeder waiting outside the door, and he needs scoping as we speak...

DEB

Which bed?

DAVE

That arrest you got going. He's not going to make it. Pat's dragging it out, so would you -

Clark loses control again.

CLARK

What's that? A patient's dying without a doctor or a doctor's note in the chart! -

DEB

(cutting him off)

Shut up, Clark! If you want a fucking doctor's note, write it yourself!

Producing a pen, she shoves it into his shirt pocket and then stalks off, passing Samir hurrying on. He turns and calls after her.

SAMIR

I'm taking that new ICU bed. I have a lady in failure-

DAVE

Oh, no, you don't! I got dibs. My patient's waiting outside the door.

SAMIR

You don't queue up for an ICU bed. You tell the head nurse. That's what I did.

DAVE

That's what I did, too.

SAMIR

You talked to Gloria?

DAVE

(nodding)

Gloria.

A pause.

CLARK

Are there two dead patients in the ICU?

The three men hurry off as Deborah reenters, consoling Pat.

DEB

You did OK. His heart was mostly dead muscle.

PAT

I didn't know what I was doing half the time.

DEB

Keep that in mind, and you'll make a fine doctor.

PAT

I'm exhausted. I was up all last night.

DEB

Me, too. But we have five admissions waiting, and I want you to take one.

PAT

I'm too tired. I'm just a student.

DEB

(cajoling)

Aw, c'mon. One more.

PAT

I've got to get some sleep.

DEB

O.K. Get some sleep.

PAT

(suspiciously)

If I do, are you going to write a bad evaluation?

DEB

(cheerfully)

I might.

(holding out a vial)

Have a Dexedrine.

Before Pat can respond, Teresa rushes in.

TERESA

My patient just had a seizure, and he's got pus in his spinal fluid. I put him in the ICU.

Before Deb can respond, Dave and Samir hurry on.

DAVE

(to Deb)

Who's that patient in my bed?

SAMIR

No! Who's that patient in my bed?

DEB

Who am I? Goldilocks?

Samir whirls on Teresa.

SAMIR

That's your patient! You can't put someone in the ICU whenever you feel like it.

TERESA

I got the nurse's permission. He's got meningitis.

DAVE

Big fucking deal! You can handle meningitis on the ward. If I don't get an ICU bed my man is going to bleed out.

Clark and the director of nursing are heard arguing offstage before they enter.

DIRECTOR OF NURSING

No, no, no, no! I told Gloria it's not her job to ration out beds. If you doctors think someone's sick enough, you figure what to do.

CLARK

The residents have enough to do without fighting over ICU beds.

DIRECTOR OF NURSING

Nurses work hard, too. Closing one of the ICUs was a bad idea. Maybe we should open it.

CLARK

We should, but we can't. Can we add a couple beds?

DIRECTOR OF NURSING

No! We already did, and that was a bad idea, too.

Fred reenters from left.

DAVE

So does that mean I don't get an ICU bed?

CLARK

I'll open the G.I. laboratory, and you can scope him in there. It has all the equipment.

DAVE

But there's no nurses or aides. I can't do a scope alone.

CLARK

You'll just have to improvise.

FRED

(with satisfaction)

Ah, "improvise." I love that word.

(BLACKOUT)

SCENE 15: Chief's Rounds

The stage is dimly lit. Fran enters and crosses to Chester, supine on a bed far up right.

FRAN

You didn't answer the phone.

CHESTER

Sorry. I'm too nauseated to move.

She sits on the bed.

FRAN

You're awfully jaundiced. You look like a banana.

CHESTER

I better get out of here.

He tries to rise, but Fran has no trouble restraining him.

FRAN

I'll tell Greg you're out of commission. And I want to draw some bloods.

She bends over him as lights fade on that area and brighten over most of the stage - the ward. Clark sweeps in from left. Deborah, Toni, and the students are waiting for him.

CLARK

I don't want to discuss a case today. Let's go on rounds and see what you know.

Pat pushes a rolling chart rack as everyone moves down left. Teresa takes a chart.

TERESA

Ivan Walker. 38-year-old man admitted last week with pneumonia. Started on levofloxin. His coughing's better, but the chest X-ray still looks abnormal.

CLARK

What do you think he has?

TERESA

Pneumonia that isn't responding to levofloxin.

CLARK

You just told me that. Answer the question.

Teresa hesitates. Clark addresses the group.

CLARK (cont'd)

What's the most common pneumonia in a healthy person?

PAT

Viral. And there's no treatment.

CLARK

Right! So what do you do now?

TERESA

Stop the levofloxin and observe him?

CLARK

No.

PAT

Send him home.

CLARK

Right.

TERESA

With an abnormal chest X-ray?

CLARK

What are you doing for him in the hospital?

TERESA

But what if he gets sicker?

CLARK

What did he do the last time he got sick?

TERESA

He came here.

CLARK

He did it once. He can do it again. Send him home.

Fran hurries in.

You're late. CLARK (cont'd)

You didn't miss anything. DEB

Chester's really sick. Look. FRAN

She gives Deborah several lab slips.

He's in our on-call room. FRAN (cont'd)

What!! DEB AND TONI

I didn't realize he'd get so sick. FRAN
(defensively)

Has he vomited? Has he used the bathroom? DEB

Probably. FRAN

Aw, shit! DEB

With these numbers, he's an admission. CLARK
(inspecting the lab slip)

That's what I thought. FRAN

He belongs on the nineteenth floor. CLARK

Of this place? I don't want him in this shithole! Take him to UCLA. FRAN

CLARK

Hold your horses. I'm doing you a favor.

TONI

What's on the nineteenth floor? I've never been there.

CLARK

It's the research unit. Funded by the NIH, not the county. It's got more nurses than they know what to do with. It's better than UCLA.

Lights fade..

SCENE 16: The Research Unit.

Clark stands with hands in his pockets. A nurse walks by.
The three women hurry in.

DEB

I hear you called all the big liver men.

CLARK

(nodding to agree)

Brains we got plenty of. But fulminant liver failure has a dismal prognosis.

DEB

You need to work on your bedside manner. Tell us what they say.

CLARK

They say put him on steroids and interferon. Give him clotting factors. Keep him hydrated. We're measuring his pulmonary artery pressure, and we may put a catheter inside his head. They'll try a transplant if he stabilizes.

DEB

That's the usual stuff. Didn't they come up with anything new?

CLARK

They're talking about an exchange transfusion. Since they're talking about it, they'll probably do it.

He exits. Fran turns to Deborah.

FRAN

What do you think of exchange transfusions for liver failure?

DEB

(tactfully)

They used to do them all the time.

FRAN

Do they work?

DEB
They might. Some mavens think they work.

FRAN
Is he going to die?

DEB
I don't know. He might not.

Lights fade.

SCENE 17: The Cafeteria.

Sitting around a table in the cafeteria are Deb, Fran, Toni, Dave, and Samir.

Teresa and Pat walk by carrying trays.

TONI

There's our students from last fall. Long time no see.

DEB

What's your rotation now?

The students set down their trays and sit.

PAT

Surgery.

SAMIR

Ah, the joys of surgery! How do you like it?

TERESA

We learned a lot on Medicine though it was a miserable experience. Now it's just a miserable experience.

SAMIR

Surgery is five years of slavery, and then you become God. I hear it's worth the wait.

PAT

You're not making us feel any better....Are any of you coming to the demonstration tomorrow?

DAVE

What, precisely, is being demonstrated?

PAT

The mayor and governor are at a Memorial Day rally, and we're sending people to demonstrate for more money. We need to fix this place up. The students organized it, but a lot of the staff are going.

DAVE

That's right!... It's Memorial Day. And I'm not on call.

PAT

So you'll come.

DAVE

I'm afraid not. On my days off I sleep.

PAT

The whole day?

DAVE

If at all possible.

Toni turns to Deb.

TONI

We're going. What about you? You're not on call.

DEB

It's not my thing.

TONI

Huh!... But you're always complaining.

SAMIR

This is a wonderful hospital compared to where I received training in Bengal. Only one patient per bed. The food is free. The bedding is changed before it is dirty. A person washes the floor and empties the trash. So up to date!

They ignore him.

FRAN

(to Deb)

You don't think we'll accomplish anything?

DEB

Elected officials pay attention to demonstrations if there's a lot of them which I don't believe will happen here. Most voters have health insurance and feel sorry for people without, but they don't want to pay their hospital bills. Elected officials pay attention to them, too.

FRAN

That's cynical. You hate the facilities. You hate how much time we waste. It'll be worse next year.

DEB

(unsympathetic)

I imagine you're right... It's a tax supported hospital. You knew it would be a shithole when you chose it. You knew you'd have a miserable time and get a great education taking care of poor people. Then you'll go into practice and take care of middle-class people and make money and become Republican. You'll suffer here and then you'll be in heaven. It's guaranteed, so it's better than Christianity. So demonstrate. Feel good about yourself.

Greg passes with a tray, notices Pat and Teresa, and turns back.

GREG

Why are you here? I know you didn't finish your dressing changes.

TERESA

We missed dinner. We're hungry. It's not urgent.

GREG

If I tell you to do something, it's urgent. There's a roomful of dressings that need changing. Get up there. You can take your donuts and eat while you work.

For several seconds it looks like Pat and Teresa will defy him, but they take their food and exit.

DEB

(amused)

You are such a cartoon surgeon. I know surgeons with big egos, but you seem too obnoxious for reality.

GREG

(matter-of-fact)

I save lives and fix people who are broken. You people on Medicine just postpone death. You treat heart disease and lung disease and diabetes and kidney disease, and your patients all die of it anyway; you just make sure it takes longer. Then you have long, boring conferences on the biochemistry or physiology or genetics of some aspect of the poor guy's problem in the hopes of finding something so you can make the next guy die a little later.

SAMIR

Your patients are immortal! So satisfying.

Greg exits.

DEB

(still amused)

There's an asshole who's got his act together.

SCENE 18: End of the year.

The entire staff is gathered for the year-end party.

All stand quietly for a period of silence. At its end Fred addresses them.

FRED

I want to add my grief to yours. I can't say enough for the sacrifices you make in the service of your Hippocratic Oath. What I've witnessed here will stay with me forever including the ultimate sacrifice of that fine resident.

(a pause for a mood change)

Some of you didn't believe you'd get through the year. Let me tell you: sometimes I didn't think I'd make it.

(expansively)

But we did, and we accomplished our goals. I and the people of the county want to thank you. I - not the people of the county - sprung for this celebration.

He removes a cloth from the table revealing liquor bottles and plates of snacks.

FRED (cont'd)

We aimed for a twenty percent budget savings, and we met that with flying colors. Downsizing went so well I'm requesting only a five percent reduction this year. And if the sale of the public libraries goes through, we can eliminate that. I'm proud of how we took politics out of your duties. Setting up a sister hospital south of the border has taken a weight off all our shoulders.

Dave and Samir rise, cross to the table, and help themselves. During the following exchange, others do the same. Dave hands Fred a drink and toasts him. Greg joins them.

DAVE

A toast to our All-American hospital.

FRED

You're being ironic, but I'm proud of it.

SAMIR

I assume we're paying for this Hispanic hospital.

FRED

(brightening)

Some of it. You wouldn't believe how little a Mexican doctor earns. Less than an intern. And nurses! Not even minimum wage!

(joking)

We may keep that in mind when your salary contracts come up.

Dave hands Fred another drink.

FRED (cont'd)

(to Dave)

Congratulations on your chief residency. We'll be working together this year.

DAVE

My door is always open.

FRED

Let me bounce this off you. A day in our coronary care unit costs \$2500. It turns out the English don't even put heart attacks in the hospital. They take care of them at home.

DAVE

Not exactly. The English send low risk heart attacks home. Not everyone. It's probably safe, but we couldn't do that in the U.S.

FRED

I don't see why not.

Fred begins to look ill.

DAVE

The English have an extensive government visiting nurse setup. English doctors make house calls. With their National Health Service no one pays, so no one can say the doctors are cutting corners. Anyway, the English don't sue doctors. You know - socialism...

FRED

Where you see a problem, I see a challenge. We plan to look closely at the coronary care unit. The savings...uh...

He hurries off right. The residents' eyes meet. Clark crosses to Deb and smiles.

CLARK

Don't make a face. I'm not chief resident any more.

DEB

I don't care what you're not.

CLARK

I'm an assistant professor of medicine. I'll be teaching.

DEB

Don't teach on my ward.

CLARK

I go where they send me. I've been promoted to the bottom of the academic ladder.

Deborah moves off. Clark follows.

CLARK (cont'd)

I wrote you a good evaluation.

She does not respond.

CLARK (cont'd)

I mentioned your abrasive personality. No matter how smart you are, that'll drag you down.

They are now far down left. Halting, Deb turns deliberately and faces him.

DEB

(matter-of-fact)

Men will take a lot of abuse from women who arouse them. They'll give a lot, too.

(suddenly provocative)

What are you doing, Clark? Is this your move?

CLARK

(exasperated)

I'm trying to be friendly.... Forget it!

He turns to go, but she grabs his sleeve.

DEB

Don't give up! You might succeed.

She pulls him toward the wings.

DEB (cont'd)

I'm impulsive, and I never let personal feelings interfere.

CLARK

Forget it!

DEB

(lascivious)

Wine gives me gas. Let's go get really drunk!

His jaw drops in amazement. She yanks him offstage.
Fred reenters from right, fuming.

FRED

That bathroom was filthy! And there was only one functioning toilet!

SAMIR

Why do you need more than one?

DAVE

Are you O.K.?

FRED

If I'm not careful what I eat, I sometimes...

He groans and bends over, clutching his abdomen.

FRED (cont'd)

Where can I go? I don't want to go back to that bathroom.

Samir points left. Fred hurries off. Greg takes a bottle from the table to pour himself a drink, but Dave gently takes it from him.

DAVE

This burgundy lacks a je ne sais quoi.

He hands it to Samir who carries it offstage. All this is lost on Greg who takes another bottle and addresses Dave.

GREG

I'm going to Alaska. I'll be the only surgeon in a hundred miles. They've guaranteed me three hundred thousand a year, and nobody is going to downsize me or tell me what to do.

SAMIR

What will you do for amusement?

Greg glares at him.

GREG

Surgery.

Greg wanders off. Fred stumbles back in, haggard.

FRED

That was a terrible bathroom... I'm sorry, but I'm really sick.

Except for Greg at the buffet, the others gather around.

SAMIR

What seems to be the trouble?

FRED

My irritable bowel is acting up. But it's never been so bad...

He moans and bends forward.

FRED (cont'd)

Could somebody drive me home?

SAMIR

Is that wise? You seem not well.

Dave crosses to a gurney upstage.

DAVE

We'll help. You chose the right place to get sick.

The residents help Fred onto the gurney.

SAMIR

You say you have irritable bowel syndrome. How often does it act this badly?

FRED

Never! I don't think this is it.

SAMIR

Have you other problems or bad habits or perversions we should know?

FRED

I'm in perfect health.

DAVE

He's in a lot of pain. Maybe some morphine.

SAMIR

Not before a diagnosis. I think an X-ray is called for.

DAVE

Agreed... But it's a two hour wait.

SAMIR

He is urgent. Urgent cases go to the head of the line.

DAVE

Everyone's calling half the cases urgent nowadays. It's a cat fight down there.

SAMIR

Ultrasound is across the hall. Let's do an ultrasound.

DAVE

Ultrasound was privatized the first of the month. It closes at five. We could call the night tech, but he doesn't live close.

SAMIR

Some blood tests?

DAVE

They won't tell us anything.

FRED

Please do something!

Another moan and all three abruptly take a step backward.

DAVE

(to Greg)

Do you have anything to contribute?

Greg finishes his current mouthful.

GREG

(matter-of-fact)

You want to make sure he doesn't need surgery. First clean him up. I'll examine him after.

DAVE

Who volunteers to clean him up?

No offers.

GREG

He can clean himself up. Let's dump him in the ER shower.

They wheel him offstage as lights fade.

SCENE 19: The on-call room.

A dark stage. Fran and Toni enter and turn on a light which illuminates a small area containing Deborah sprawled on a bed.

FRAN

Hey!... What are you doing in the on-call room?

No response. Fran pokes her.

FRAN (cont'd)

What are you doing here?

DEB

I'm drunk - don't shake me.

FRAN

We start residency tomorrow. We need sleep.

Toni crosses to the left and turns on another light, revealing Clark, naked, kneeling on the floor, arms grasping a toilet bowl. He groans and retches.

Wheeling, she marches back to Deb and, with difficulty, prods her awake.

TONI

God dammit, Deb! Why is he in the bathroom?

DEB

(groggy)

Hm?... What...?

TONI

Clark! Get him out of here!

DEB

(sitting up)

Can't hold his liquor, eh?

(chuckling)

That's not all he can't hold.

It's filthy in there! He's throwing up.

TONI

I'll clean it up tomorrow.

DEB

She lies back down. Toni prods her again.

I want to go to the bathroom!

TONI

Piss in the sink.

DEB

(BLACKOUT)

SCENE 20: Back to Fred.

Greg is holding up X-rays to the light as the other residents look on. Fred, now in a hospital gown, writhes on his gurney.

GREG

Amazing how much stool in his bowel considering all he's deposited on the gurney... I don't see anything surgical. Anyone disagree?

No one disagrees. Greg lays the films aside.

FRED

Can you give me something now?

DAVE

We're still not sure what's going on.

SAMIR

The ultrasound will tip the balance.

FRED

Then do it. Let's get it over.

DAVE

I phoned three times. The tech has to drive in from Long Beach...

Fred moans in frustration.

SAMIR

Blood tests are necessary. A white count and electrolytes.

DAVE

Maybe so.

FRED

How long will that take?

SAMIR

Only one lab tech on duty after eight, and he's for emergencies. We hate ordering tests at night.

We could scope him.

DAVE

That might work.

GREG

How long will that take?

FRED

Ten minutes.

SAMIR

Whatever you need.

FRED

Samir exits.

What do you mean "ten minutes?" You have to track down the chief of the GI lab. You have to convince him that your patient is sicker than ten other patients...

GREG

Don't worry. We're not using the precious fiberoptic scope.

DAVE

Samir returns with a metal case. Opening it, he extracts a stiff plastic tube, two feet long. He holds it out for all to see. The residents contemplate it with satisfaction, then turn to gaze at Fred.

Lights fade.

SCENE 21: Back to the on-call room.

Clark moans as Toni washes his face. Fran mops the floor.

TONI

I so much looked forward to this day. I've finished the hardest year of my life, and I did fine.

Fran agrees.

TONI (cont'd)

I'm not an intern any more. I can teach and read and think and appreciate what a wonderful career I've chosen. .

Fran nod as she mops.

TONI (cont'd)

On day one after the worst is over, I'm cleaning vomit off one of the persons in the world I most dislike. He has just fucked one of the persons I most admire who is lying drunk in my bed. When I meet my interns in a few hours, I will have had no sleep.

She drops the washcloth on Deborah's face. Deborah flicks it away.

DEB

Beat it, Clark. And take a bath.

In the distance, a male voice cries out in pain, a long, drawn-out wail. Fran stops mopping to listen. Deborah rouses herself, sits up, listens, smiles. She notices Fran and Toni.

DEB (cont'd)

You didn't have to clean up, but thanks.

Another distant cry of pain. They all listen.

Curtain