

DOCTOR BOB

A SKETCH

BY

MARY D'ESTE and ALEISTER CROWLEY

PERSONS OF THE SKETCH

DOCTOR ROBERTS (*"Doctor Bob"*)

MRS. ROBERTS, *His wife.*

DOCTOR FIELDING

JANE SKIRING

WILL STANLEY } *Patients.*

TWO GENTLEMEN

A MANSERVANT

DOCTOR BOB

A SKETCH

BY

MARY D'ESTE and ALEISTER CROWLEY

[The Scene represents the waiting-room of DR. ROBERTS' house. Doors L., R., and C. Door L. leads to dining-room; door R. to entrance-hall; door C. to consulting-room. This is a wide double door, which when open shows the doctor's bureau, chairs, and other usual furniture. Curtain may be used instead of door if more convenient.]

The waiting-room has a large table, with illustrated journals, &c. There are easy chairs, but no other furniture. On the table lie the hat and stick of a patient who is closeted with DR. BOB.

Time 2.30 p.m. A bright winter afternoon.

Enter the SERVANT, preceding DR. FIELDING, who is wearing his motor coat and cap.

The SERVANT goes through to Door L., and returns with MRS. BOB, who goes to greet DR. FIELDING warmly, while the SERVANT goes out R. and closes door.]

Mrs. B. How good of you to come so promptly!

Dr. F. I could never respond quickly enough to a call from you. I should have been here ten minutes earlier, but the Daimler doesn't like so much snow in the streets.

Mrs. B. How perfectly sweet of you!

Dr. F. I hope this is not professional; at least, I'm sure there's nothing the matter with you.

Mrs. B. Heavens, no! I have health enough for six.

Dr. F. And there's nothing wrong with Dr. Bob?

Mrs. B. Nothing serious; he has had a bit of a cough this month back.

Dr. F. Heaven help him if he has to make his own diagnosis—you know we call him Doctor Doom'em!

Mrs. B. It's just that I want to talk to you about.

Dr. F. You don't mean to say you mind?

Mrs. B. Mind! It's driving me mad.

Dr. F. But he's the greatest consultant we have; nobody ever comes to him while there's a chance anywhere else.

Mrs. B. Yes; but whatever other drug he gives them, he never gives them hope.

Dr. F. But they come for his opinion.

Mrs. B. And don't want to know it.

Dr. F. Perhaps it would be better if they didn't.

Mrs. B. That's it; that's what's driving me mad. I see them come there one after another, some cheerful, others desperate; some looking healthy, some looking half dead already; some hoping, some doubting; all fearing. But one and all go away hopeless, utterly hopeless. I could bear it better if his were not so great a name. But he's right—he's always right. That's what's so terrible—he's always right!

Dr. F. Come, come! Don't break down, Mrs. Bob!

Mrs. B. Wouldn't it be better to let them go on blindly to the end? Think of them watching and waiting! Think of the drawn faces, and the ghastly stare into the eyes of Death! Think of their ears strained if perhaps they may hear his stealthy tread! Their tongues licking their parched lips—oh, is there no hope? Then, at least, is there no mercy?

Dr. F. I should be inclined to deceive them nearly always. I'm sending him a girl this afternoon. Hang it! I must have his opinion, and yet I hesitated—long—over the wisdom of the course I was taking. She hasn't any idea of how seriously ill she is; the shock might kill her. I begged him in my note to spare her the full knowledge.

Mrs. B. Poor child!

Dr. F. Well, if he says there's no hope You know her, I think—Jane Skiring?

Mrs. B. The little school teacher. Oh! I'd no idea she was so ill. I *am* sorry.

[*The consulting-room door opens, and an elderly man, whose hat and stick are on the table, comes out. His face is drawn and his eyes haggard. He takes no notice of the people present, or of his hat and stick, but goes straight out, R. The banging of a door is heard. Enter the Servant, running; picks up the hat and stick, and runs out after him. Dr. Fielding and Mrs. Bob exchange glances significant of shocked pain.*

The consulting-room doors being now wide open, the audience can see Dr. Bob sitting at his bureau. He rises, and comes down stage, heartily, cheerfully, masterfully.]

Dr. B. Hullo, Fielding! Glad to see you. Just got your note before lunch; I'll find out for sure what's up. Pretty girl—pity! See that old boy just went out? A typical Brightic; fellow who devilled his own kidneys. Ha! ha! ha! I wonder if he'll see that Christmas turkey—ha! ha! ha! Hullo, dear! Didn't see you, little white mouse! Let's have coffee, dear, and the brown brandy. No more patients for a bit. Come along, Fielding, eh?

[*He leads FIELDING to the consulting-room, while MRS. BOB goes out L.*]

Dr. F. This is an exceptional case, old man. I do hope you won't frighten her.

Dr. B. Great God! always the same old story. They never come to me until the rest of you have finished them, and then it's my candid opinion you want. Then you get it, by Heaven! and instead of blaming yourselves, or the patient, or the disease, you blame me. Why don't you give me a chance? Why don't you bring them while there *is* hope? You all look upon me as the undertaker—Doctor Doom'em, isn't it?—because you are afraid to tell the patient what nine times out of ten you know as well as I do. Doctor Doom'em!

Dr. F. Now, old man, don't get excited.

Dr. B. Excited! Why my life would be one long hell if I hadn't chosen a very simple method. Tell the truth. I'm not a lawyer, paid to tell lies. Tell the truth. Then I've done my part; my conscience is clear; I eat hearty and sleep sound.

Dr. F. But is it always best to tell the truth? May you not sometimes overlook a grain of hope, and kill it by your diagnosis? [Enter MRS. BOB with coffee.

Mrs. B. I can't believe it is right to send away people smashed.

Dr. F. Yes; you're a hanging judge.

Dr. B. I only record the effect of the verdict of the jury—twelve good symptoms and true.

Mrs. B. I can never forget seeing young Joe Whitney when he came from you. He had the face of a lost soul. And the next day the papers had the news that he had shot himself.

Dr. B. Well, what of that? He saved himself about four months of the most persistent and horrible torture that the mind of a devil could imagine. . . . People wonder why doctors are nearly always Atheists!

Mrs. B. Oh, Bob!

Dr. B. In his place I should have done as he did.

Dr. F. No, you wouldn't. You'd sit in a corner with your teeth clenched, waiting and watching and recording, killing each hope as it was born, yet wishing to God that you dared hope—even though you knew it to be vain.

Dr. B. There's where you are wrong. What's the use of lying and cheating? I never saw any good come of it. You tell a man he may get well this year—next year—sometime—never—like a silly girl blowing a puff-ball. Pah!

Mrs. B. If you only had sympathy, Bob dear, if you only had imagination! If you only could realize what these people really feel when you condemn them!

Dr. F. And hope is the best medicine; at least it helps the man to live out the little life that remains to him. An artist might finish his creation.

Dr. B. Oh, artists! Another set of liars!

Dr. F. A doctor will go on with his work better if his brain is not clouded with his own mortal fear.

Dr. B. Rot! if he's finished, he'd better finish. And besides, despair can often do more than hope. Put

the biggest coward in the world in a tight enough corner, and he'll show his teeth, and very likely win out. (*He coughs.*) By the way, have a look at this throat, will you? There's a little chronic irritation somewhere.

Dr. F. Why, of course. *[The bell rings.*

Dr. B. A patient, hang it all! I must leave you to talk to Nan. Send em along!

[He goes into consulting-room and closes the door.]

Mrs. B. He's set on this telling the truth.

Dr. F. Oh, it's wrong: I know it's wrong. There's always a chance in the most hopeless cases.

Mrs. B. Can't we—can't we make him see it?

Dr. F. But how?

[Enter SERVANT, showing in WILL STANLEY.]

W.S. (*surprised*) How do you do, Dr. Fielding?

Dr. F. I didn't expect to see you here; I thought you were better months ago.

W.S. So I was—in fact I am—only the mother insisted on my seeing Dr. Bob. I guess he won't find much wrong with me!

Mrs. B. Oh, you mustn't mind even if he does. Doctors live on people's fears.

Dr. F. (*laughing*) Oh, Mrs. Bob, come now!

W.S. They can't frighten me; but they do mother. She wants to coddle me all the time.

Dr. F. You're a No. 1 size pet.

W.S. Rather; I'm the strongest man in college. If this silly old heart hadn't started to play the goat.

[DR. BOB'S bell rings. SERVANT enters, shows WILL STANLEY into consulting-room, closes doors, returns, and goes out.]

Dr. F. Poor devil! I've known for months that it was all over with him.

Mrs. B. Oh, how dreadful! He's not twenty yet.

Dr. F. He never will be.

Mrs. B. In my mind I can see him coming out; I can feel and understand. Oh, why won't Bob let him take hope to his mother?

Dr. F. It's a shame. It's silly, useless cruelty. I'd like to punch Bob's head. . . . oh! I beg your pardon,

Mrs. Bob—if he breaks down that fine boy's courage.

Mrs. B. Oh, I quite agree with you.

Dr. F. Then I say that he'd be all the better for a dose of his own medicine.

[Silence. Then MRS. BOB clasps her hands, gives a little laugh, and cries out.]

Mrs. B. Oh, I've got such a good idea.

[The bell rings. Enter JANE, ushered by SERVANT.]

Dr. F. Well, here you are, Jane. How splendid you're looking to-day. Fit as fit, eh?

Jane. It's this weather. I do love the snow. I'm as happy as happy; every fibre of my being quivers with joy. How do you do, Mrs. Roberts?

Mrs. B. I'm so glad to see you. I'm so sorry to see you.

Jane. Oh, it's nothing. Dr. Fielding tells me it's sure to be all right. Dr. Bob—oh, I mean Dr. Roberts—will say the very worst he can, and then we've got to hope for the best.

Dr. F. Yes. I always get his opinion; and then we're sure to err on the safe side. Eh?

Mrs. B. Yes; but he's so anxious to make people take proper care, and follow his instructions absolutely. Jane. Yes, of course. I know I've been careless.

Dr. F. Yes, yes. A bit of a fright is the very thing to do one good.

[Enter Will Stanley, his hair dishevelled, a wild look in his eyes. He does not see Mrs. Bob and Jane, who are up L. at back of stage, but addresses Dr. Fielding, who is at table.]

W.S. I say, doc., it's all up.

Dr. F. Nonsense. Cheer up, old son. It's never as bad as

Dr. Bob makes out.

W.S. Yes; I'm finished. God! but this will break up the mother.

Dr. F. Then you mustn't tell her.

W.S. I'm not going to. But she'll guess. Mothers seem to feel things. Look here, doc., I'm on for a night with the Indians. I'll have forgotten about it myself by to-morrow. That's the best way.

Dr. F. I'm with you. And in the meantime, remember we doctors know very little.

Mrs. B. (*coming forward*) I wouldn't believe the whole lot of them if they said I had to die to-morrow.

Dr. F. Quite right.

[DR. BOB'S *bell*. SERVANT *enters and shows JANE into consulting-room.*]

Dr. F. I'll be with you in a moment, Jane (Jane *nods and smiles and goes in.*) Take my word for it, Will, there's always hope. I'll see you at the Club at 8 o'clock. W.S. Right you are! (*Seriously and pathetically*) And thank you so much for—lying to me!

[*He bows to MRS. BOB, shakes hands with DR. FIELDING, and goes out R.*]

Mrs. B. Another victim!

Dr. F. It's a shame!

Mrs. B. Will you stand by me?

Dr. F. You know I will. What is it?

Mrs. B. Let's teach him a lesson. I've got a splendid idea. It isn't hardness of heart; but he doesn't see clearly. I want to make him feel and understand what it is that he's doing.

Dr. F. And how do you propose to do it?

Mrs. B. Well, you know he asked you to look at his throat. Tell him it's something terrible, that he's got to die! Can you think of anything?

Dr. F. Why, of course, cancer!

Mrs. B. (*shocked*) Oh!

Dr. F. Cancer of the throat has just such slight symptoms. Nobody can tell without examination.

Mrs. B. Oh, you don't think it really might be that?

Dr. F. Not one chance in a thousand. But he'll believe me if I tell him that that is what it is. . . . Do you really wish me to do it?

[MRS. BOB *and* DR. FIELDING *look at each other steadily. From within the consulting-room comes the sound of a cry, a fall, and overturned furniture.*]

MRS. B. Yes, I do.

[*The consulting-room door bursts open.*]

Dr. B. (*in doorway*) Here, Fielding!

[FIELDING *goes in. JANE is lying on floor in utter collapse. Both doctors work hard on her with heart massage and injections, at last recovering her sufficiently to bring her out.*]

Dr. B. Here, Nan, tell them to light the fire in the spare bedroom!

[MRS. BOB *goes out. DR. BOB'S telephone on bureau rings. DR. BOB goes to it.*]

Dr. B. Half a minute, Fielding. Look after her.

[JANE *gasps and opens here eyes.*]

Jane. You've been lying to me. Father of Heaven! I don't want to die. I cannot be so ill as he says!

Dr. F. No, dear child, no. The fact is—er—er—well, we've just discovered he's a bit mad, do you see? Listen to me, Jane.

Jane. Oh, I'm trying to.

Dr. F. He says the same thing to everybody—it's his mania. Don't believe a word of it.

Jane. No, no.

[*She collapses again. DR. BOB replaces telephone receiver, and comes forward. He and DR. FIELDING carry JANE out L. Outer bell. SERVANT ushers in a patient. Enter L. MRS. BOB in a state of violent excitement.*]

Mrs. B. Go! go! Why will you stay in this house of death?

(*The Patient manifests surprise.*)

Go! go! I say. My husband can see no more patients to-day.

[*She shows him out, returns to centre of stage, breaks out crying, and goes off L. as DR. BOB and DR. FIELDING return. Their loud voices are heard arguing without.*]

Dr. F. It might have killed her; and it very nearly did.

Dr. B. Look here, Fielding, this is too bad. Hang it, if you'd brought me the girl a year ago I might have cured her.

Dr. F. And now you've killed her.

Dr. B. I killed her? Well, let me tell you, you killed her yourself. You let her think that she was not as

bad as she was; that led her to neglect herself, and now you bring her to me with about a cubic inch of lung left to breathe with, and expect me to tell her that she'll live to be ninety. It's this infernal system of lying that's at the bottom of all the trouble.

Dr. F. Well, she'll die now, for sure. (*They are now in the consulting-room*). By the way, shall I look a that throat of yours?

Dr. B. Yes, I wish you would. It's very slight, but it's been hanging about for a month.

[*He sits and throws his head back for the examination, which DR. FIELDING begins. MRS. BOB comes in L., sees the two men, and draws back, facing audience, with a pleased expectant smile.*]

Dr. F. Whew! My God!

[*He draws himself up with a gesture of utter agony.**]

Dr. B. What's the matter?

Dr. F. My God! Pull yourself together, old man. I've bad news for you.

Dr. B. (*gone white*) It's you that need to pull yourself together. Come, out with it! It isn't it isn't

Dr. F. Yes, it is.

Dr. B. Cancer?

Dr. F. Cancer. Oesophagus involved, too; it's no use operating even. You haven't a month.

Mrs. B. (*aside*) What splendid acting!

Dr. B. Oh, my God! (*He falls back in his chair, sick and limp.*)

Dr. F. I'm sorry—I'm awfully sorry—but it's true.

Dr. B. Oh, my poor wife. Here! Think! Think! How shall we ever break it to her? (*He rises and staggers out of the consulting-room. Seeing MRS. BOB he stops.*)

Mrs. B. (*pretending not to notice his agitation*) Well, dear, and what does Dr. Fielding say?

Dr. B. (*hoarsely*) Nan, I hardly like to tell you. Oh, Nan, it's the very worst. It's the most malignant form of cancer. I haven't a month to live. (*Wildly*) Ha! ha! ha! Dr. Doom'em doomed at last! (*Breaking down*) Oh, Nan, Nan, what am I to say to you? And what am I to do about my work?

Mrs. B. You've been working too much, dear. I dare-say it's not really very bad; and the rest will do you good.

Dr. B. A pretty long rest. From now to the Day of Judgment. And you have nothing better to tell me than the same old lies! Lies! Lies! Here, I've work to do. Good God!—I've work to do.

[*He rushes into the consulting-room and bangs the door. MRS. BOB, hiding her face in her hands to cover her laughter, rushes off L., followed by FIELDING, his face white and sad. He hesitates a moment, stops, and says (aside)*]

I can't tell her—I daren't tell her. I must keep up the farce.

[*The door banged by DR. BOB swings open on the rebound, and he is seen at his bureau arranging papers. He completes this work methodically; then goes to a drawer, picks out a hypodermic syringe, and fills it, injects his arm. He then comes to the table, opens a box of cigars, and selects one, then puts it back with a little laugh and takes and lights a cigarette.*]

Dr. B. Ten minutes!

[*He seats himself comfortably, and puffs at the cigarette. A long pause. MRS. BOB and DR. FIELDING return.*]

Mrs. B. I must tell him—I must tell him! He's suffering too much. (*Runs in.*) Bob! . . . What is it?

Dr. B. I have about seven minutes of life left, Nan. I could not bear to let you see me suffer for a month.

Mrs. B. What do you mean? Oh, don't you see it was all a joke? We wanted you to understand how the people felt when you condemned them. There's nothing the matter with you.

Dr. B. More of your lies. You've killed me with your lies now. I've injected cobra venom, and nothing can save me. Good-bye, Nan!

[*She is dazed, staggers, and falls into his arms, fainting.*]

* This is genuine. Dr. Bob has really cancer; this is the tragedy of the joke. Dr. F. must indicate this by his manner. But he daren't break it to Mrs. Bob, who thinks throughout that he is acting.

A pleasant joke, Fielding. Well, you never had much sense.

[*He falls. FIELDING, distracted, walks about, waving his arms in despair. DR. BOB dies. MRS. BOB recovers, and kisses and embraces the corpse, sobbing.*]

Mrs. B. I've killed my husband! I've killed my husband!

Dr. F. Mrs. Bob, I can spare you one sorrow. It was no joke. Your husband really had cancer.

Mrs. B. Oh, you can't lie to me!

CURTAIN.