

Dr Tango  
A short play  
by Clark DesSoye

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# Characters

*Dr. Khachatryan* any gender, pre-Medicare age

*Pat* any gender, Medicare age

*Setting:* A simple doctor's examining room, including:  
- a low table  
- a straight-backed chair with Pat's clothes draped over it, shoes below  
- a scale next to a chair with wheels.  
Each character speaks directly to the audience in hushed tones, revealing thoughts they do not say to each other. When speaking to each other, they each use their regular voices with some forced cheerfulness.  
Tango music plays throughout.

Act 1, Scene 1

*At Rise:*                    *Before lights up Tango music comes up and plays for 20-30 seconds then as lights come up, the music volume goes down staying in the background throughout. Pat sits at the end of the examining table wearing a paper gown, feet swinging in rhyme to the music.*

**PAT**

We've all been here, right? The nurse has taken your vitals, asked all the silly Medicare questions, updated your family medical history, checked all the boxes on the forms on her ever-present iPad; seemingly attached to her left hand.

*(in a higher-pitched voice)* "Now please remove everything except your underwear and put this on," she said cheerfully, adding, "with the opening in the back. The doctor will be with you shortly," as she strides from the room.

And, dutifully, as you've done hundreds — no probably more like thousands — of times before, you undress in a sterile, cold room like this and put on a flimsy thing that barely covers you *(pause)* and provides no warmth whatsoever; though I have to admit this little paper number seems to "fit" better than many I've tried to drape over myself over the years.

And you sit. *(pause)* And wait. *(pause)* Thinking, I really should have asked to use the restroom before changing. *(pause)* I purposely didn't go before leaving home, thinking I might be asked to leave a urine sample. *(pause)* Didn't we always have to leave a sample during these exams? When did **that** stop *(pause)* being a thing?

*[Pat hops off the table and walks over to stand on the scale, closely staring at it.]*

**PAT (CONTINUES)**

Yeah, the one at home is a good ten pounds off. *(pause)* Or this one is!

*[Pat slowly walks back to the table and hops back onto it, swinging his/her feet.]*

**PAT** (CONTINUES)

Oh, what difference does it make? *(pause)* I mean, I'm reasonably "fit", *(pause)* right?

I won't be running any marathons or climbing any mountains, *(pause)* but who does at my age, *(pause)* except fanatics and, well *(pause)* you know, those tanned and botoxed types you make it a point to avoid at parties. *(pause)* "Here I am," you know they're thinking, "don't I look great for my age?" *(pause)* Or strutting around the hotel pool in their speedos, green-brown smoothy in hand. "Aren't I beautiful?" Ugh! *(pause)* Give me a beer and a book instead of you and your *(pause)* vanity. What did she say my blood pressure was? *(pause)* It seemed ok, right? *(pause)* Why can I never remember it? *(pause)* I really should make an effort. It's something I should know; *(pause)* should keep an eye on. Don't we have one of those cuff thingies at home someplace? *(pause)* It syncs up to your phone somehow. *(pause)* I should get the app on my phone while I'm thinking about it.

*[Pat gets off the table and rummages around in the clothes on the chair. Pat finds the phone and returns to the table, playing with the phone.]*

**PAT** (CONTINUES)

Of course, *(pause)* I have absolutely no idea what the app is called! I'll text Jean. *(pause)* "Do you know the name of the app that syncs to the blood pressure thing?" *(pause)* Jean will probably have no idea what I'm talking about. *(pause)* Haven't even seen the thing in *(pause)* months. *(pause)* Where is the doctor?

*[There is a knock on the door.]*

**PAT (ANSWERS)**

Yes. *(to audience)* Why do they always knock? *(pause)* What do they think we might be doing in here?

*[The doctor enters, iPad in hand and sits on the rolling chair. Pat quickly drops the phone on the pile of clothes and returns to the table.]*

**DR. KHACHATRYAN**

Hello, Pat. *(pause)* It's great to see you. You're looking well. *(pause, looking at iPad)* It's been nearly a year and half since...

**PAT**

I tried to come in earlier, but there weren't any appointments...

**DR. KHACHATRYAN**

Yes, yes, *(pause)* we've been very busy *(pause)* flu season *(pause)* and...  
*(to audience)* You understand, *(pause)* right? These routine exams have to be fit in between *(pause)* actual *(pause)* sick cases, right?

**PAT**

Yes. I'm sure. *(pause)* It's been a crazy year, *(pause)* right? *(to audience)* Why does this always feel like a first date or something? *(pause)* We've known each other for years, *(pause)* sort of... *(to the Dr)* I understand perfectly.

**DR. KHACHATRYAN**

Good, good. *(pause)* Any issues? *(looking at iPad)* I see you had a colonoscopy last August... *(to audience)* They finally got our office synced to the specialists in town. *(pause)* I can see all the procedures and consultations *(pause)* this is so much better!

**PAT**

Yes. **That's** always fun. *(to audience)* Ugh! *(pause)* should I mention that I've been told to double the prep next time, 'cause I was still, literally, "full of shit" the first try. *(pause)* I mean how fuckin' anal retentive **are** you that, even after two gallons of Miralax, half your intestines are... *(pause)* Ugh!

**DR. KHACHATRYAN**

They found a couple of polyps. *(to audience)* Which, apparently, you weren't going to mention.

**PAT**

Yeah. That was a first. *(to audience)* I mean, really, I must have had six or seven colonoscopies before. *(pause)* Nothing.

**DR. KHACHATRYAN**

We'll want to be watching that. *(pause)* So another one in, what, five years? *(to audience)* Polyps aren't really a big deal, but with Pat's family history of cancer, we need to keep an eye on these types of things.

**PAT**

They said three. *(to audience)* I can hardly wait: Four gallons of prep, sit on the can all night, put on another fun gown like this, go out for half an hour, then fart for the next three days...

**DR. KHACHATRYAN**

It's best to keep on top of it. *(looking at iPad)* We're also watching your TSH levels; your hypothyroid issues? *(to audience)* You live long enough, you **are** going to have thyroid issues. *(pause)* It's simply a fact of life.

**PAT**

Yes, I've got a script for a blood test. *(pause)* I have an appointment with the ENT next month. *(pause)* The guy you sent me to last time. *(to audience)* Where was that office? *(pause)* Way over on the other side of town someplace, *(pause)* if I remember right. *(pause)* Jean 's better at remembering directions....

**DR. KHACHATRYAN**

Any fatigue? *(pause)* Feeling run down? *(pause)* Digestive issues? *(to audience)* You know; the symptoms of just about every other ailment in the books?

**PAT**

No. Doing fine. *(to audience)* Yeah, like I haven't been having tummy trouble since I was what, seven, eight? I learned way back then to not complain about it. Mom made me chug Kaopectate *(pause)* that awful pink stuff. *(pause)* but then that time I was staying at Granny's, she gave me an enema when I had a belly ache; *(pause)* much worse. *(pause)* So. *(pause)* No. I will simply bear the pains of my "stomach issues"; thank you very much.

*[The Dr stands, puts the iPad on the chair and moves to the examining table, stethoscope in hand. The Dr listens to Pat's chest and heart throughout next.]*

**DR. KHACHATRYAN**

Good. All good. I'll just take a listen now. *(pause)* Sorry it's so cold. *(pause)* Deep breath, in. *(pause)* Now, out *(pause)* Again. Deep breath in. And out. *(pause)* Good. And again. *(to audience)* I wish everyone had lungs that sounded this clear, *(pause)* so many of 'em are suffering with something in there these days. So much pollution!

**PAT** (WHILE BREATHING IN AND OUT AS INSTRUCTED)

*(To audience)* Yes. It is cold, but *(pause)* not in an uncomfortable way, *(pause)* just a pleasant coolness, really. *(pause)* They're always so apologetic, *(pause)* which, I guess, is a good thing. *(pause)* Considerate. *(pause)* That's nice, these days. So much rancor everywhere.

**DR. KHACHATRYAN**

Everything's looking — sounding — good. *(pause)* Sorry, my hands are so cold...

**PAT**

It's fine *(pause)* really.

**DR. KHACHATRYAN**

I'm looking for possible melanomas back here. *(pause)* As we discussed before, these spots and moles are just *(pause)* old age *(pause)* and heredity. *(pause)* I don't see anything to be concerned about. *(to audience)* Another inevitability of old age, "you **will** get skin cancer," *(pause)* if you live long enough.

**PAT**

Not even that flaky one up by my shoulder blade? *(to audience)* I'm glad I can't see what's back there. *(pause)* Ugh.

**DR. KHACHATRYAN**

No, it's nothing to be worried about. *(pause)* Now, please lie back. *(to audience)* There aren't very many settings, where you can get away with saying **that** to a casual acquaintance these days.



*[Pat slides fully onto the table and lies down, as the Dr. gently places his hands on Pat's legs, thighs, stomach and neck.]*

**DR. KHACHATRYAN (CONTINUES)**

Circulation in your legs is fine... *(pause)* Any sensitivity here? *(to audience)* Ah, the laying on of hands, I remember how nervous I was in med school doing my first examination on a real person. *(pause)* I'm sure she was as nervous as I was; a cute, blushing pre-med — I wonder if she went on to med school, if she....

**PAT**

No. *(to audience)* Though a few days ago, there was that sharp stabbing pain I got when I stepped off the curb wrong.

**DR. KHACHATRYAN**

Here? *(to audience)* Now that's a solid thigh!

**PAT**

No. *(to audience)* I've always had strong legs. *(pause)* Probably from riding my bike so much in high school.

**DR. KHACHATRYAN**

Still using the stationary bike regularly? *(to audience)* Keeping people active after retirement is always a challenge. *(pause)* And most of 'em lie *(pause)* though, by the evidence here, Pat **is** keeping fit.

**PAT**

Yes, four or five times a week *(pause)* for at least an hour. *(pause)* or swimming *(pause)* when possible. *(to audience)* God, it seems like months since it's been warm enough to get in the pool. *(pause)* Is it just me, or has the weather been miserable for a **really** long time?

**DR. KHACHATRYAN**

Good, keep it up. *(pause)* How about here? Any pain? *(to audience)* People this age often have hernia issues, but everything here seems fine. *(pause)* Pat does seem to be staying active and taking care. *(pause)* Never misses a checkup!

**PAT**

No. It's fine. *(to audience)* You know, just the rather full bladder and the usual colon rumblings. *(pause)* We've been down that rabbit hole already. *(pause)* Testing for this. *(pause)* Testing for that. *(pause)* Scanning. *(pause)* Probing. *(pause)* Naught! *(pause)* "It's just how your body works," the gastro guy concluded. *(pause)* I can live with it.

**DR. KHACHATRYAN**

All good. *(pause)* Everything looks great, Pat! *(pause)* You can sit back up now. *(to audience)* That went well, don't you think? *(pause, looking out the window)* And it looks like it'll clear up before my three o'clock tee time! *(pause)* I need to check my email, see if the gang got back to confirm. *(pause)* It's been weeks since we've played.

**PAT**

Thanks, Doctor, you have such a nice manner *(pause)* telling me what you're doing and seeing — or not seeing. *(to audience; struggling to sit back up)* Not as easy as it was back in those bicycle-riding days. *(pause)* I could go all day long. *(pause)* If mom and dad ever knew how far I went *(pause)* they'd have flipped out!

**DR. KHACHATRYAN**

Transparency, right *(pause)* That's the thing these days, isn't it? *(pause)* I'll just get you a script for some blood work. *(pause)* You can get dressed and I'll be right back. *(to audience)* I love it when things go this smoothly. *(pause)* But there's only so much you can determine with an exam *(pause)* and routine Qs and As. *(pause)* There are any number of indicators or potential problems that we can detect with a thorough blood test. *(pause)* Luckily, for Pat, I don't expect to find anything to worry about. *(pause)* But....

*[The Dr exits. Pat hops off the table and goes to the chair with clothes, picking up the phone to see that there is a text.]*

**PAT**

Ah, Jean got back to me: *(pause)* "What blood pressure thingy?"

*[Tango music comes up and Pat strides across the room a couple of times, as if in a dance embrace, before returning to start getting dressed.  
Lights out.  
End of play.]*