



She Won't Be Back

Richard Bronson, MD

(Fam Med. 2020;52(4):301.)

doi: 10.22454/FamMed.2020.634042

They sat at the kitchen table, last patient seen,
blackout shades drawn, end of the day.
Silence, then the distant whistle
of an air raid warden and his call “Lights out!”
New York 1942, a world at war.

Five walk-ins, not much of a practice,
but better than the day before.
My father completed medical training in ‘41.
His in-laws had paid for the furniture, the equipment.
They hoped he’d pay the rent.

Front rooms of the apartment for his medical office,
the back their kitchen, bedroom, a lounge at night
the waiting room by day. My mother the receptionist—
they had no money for a nurse.

“That women who came in this afternoon
left empty handed, without a prescription...”
My mother shook her head. “She won’t be back,
expecting something, leaving with nothing!”

“She’s stressed, not ill, and I’m no Barnum!
You want me to prescribe a vitamin pill?”

“You, no P.T. Barnum, sitting there
sporting those rimless glasses you don’t need,
only wear to look more professional?”

They sat looking at each other across the table,
listening to voices in the street. Again, she shook her head.
“How are we going to pay the rent
at two dollars a visit, three dollars a house call?”

He took off his glasses, placed them on the table,
rubbed his forehead.

CORRESPONDENCE: Address correspondence to Dr Richard Bronson, Stony Brook University Medical Center, Department of Obstetrics & Gynecology, T9-080, Stony Brook, NY 11794-8091. 631-444-2731. Richard.Bronson@Stonybrookmedicine.edu.