VENT

A quarantine scene by Nicholas Priore

For Doug Rossi and Patricia Bosworth

NYC Hospital. 2020. The sound of one ventilator and two heart monitors beeping. Two people are hooked up to one ventilator. One is an older black man of about 60 or so by the name of DOUGLAS, and the other is a young white woman named PATRICIA. She is ill and short of breath, but not nearly as badly as he is...she still has a sense of hope, while he can barely breathe. They are both wheezing between lines, but he already has the death rattle...suggested run time, just under ten minutes.

PATRICIA
Welp...looks like we're ventilator buddies.

DOUGLAS
..........Pardon?

PATRICIA
Looks as though...the state of New York...has adopted a sort of buddy system...when it comes to vent...

DOUGLAS
I can't breathe.

PATRICIA
Neither can I.

DOUGLAS
You can talk.

PATRICIA
Oh am I....am I bothering you?

DOUGLAS
..........Just a bit.

PATRICIA
I wouldn't be here if I did...if I didn't need to be.

DOUGLAS
Sure.

PATRICIA
.................Smoker?
DOUGLAS
Pardon?

PATRICIA
You smoke?

DOUGLAS
.......Got one?

PATRICIA
No I don’t.

DOUGLAS
..........................Family?

PATRICIA
You’re asking if I have a family?

DOUGLAS
Yes.

PATRICIA
Are you suddenly interested or are.....are you you scrutinizing my value in the...world...my vent...ilator...ent...entitlement.

DOUGLAS
I want my wife.

PATRICIA
Yea, so...so where is she.......oh, right...no visitors...sorry...............No kid?

DOUGLAS
No...........You?

PATRICIA
Neither.

DOUGLAS
................Grandson.

PATRICIA
You have a grandson? How does that work?

DOUGLAS
I’m sixty....I have a son...he is not a kid...but his boy is.

PATRICIA
Well I just turned thirty so...so there...so there’s plenty of time.

DOUGLAS
Not for us.

PATRICIA
What?

DOUGLAS
This...doesn’t turn back...not from here...

PATRICIA
Point of no...no return you mean?

DOUGLAS
You got it.

PATRICIA
...............What’re you a doctor?

DOUGLAS
Yes.

PATRICIA
Oh...............well I work in medical too, so...

DOUGLAS
In what?

PATRICIA
Derm.

*He laughs and starts hacking.*

That’s funny?

DOUGLAS
Pardon..............Nurse?

PATRICIA
Medical es...thetician

*He laughs again and hacks even harder.*

Oh *fuck off* then.

*She hacks as well.*
DOUGLAS
Sorry…but you don’t often...come off a vent...

PATRICIA
Bullshit...maybe you won’t...but I will walk out...of here...and when...I do...I’ll be glad to return
my...return my...half of this vent...

She interrupts herself with an awful coughing fit.

DOUGLAS
You need...to stop.

PATRICIA
What?

DOUGLAS
Talk...talking.

PATRICIA
Still annoyed?

DOUGLAS
No.

PATRICIA
Oh...

DOUGLAS
Just........save...your breath.

PATRICIA
Okay look, I got about as much....capacity for this...for this...passive aggressive assessment of our...need
for a vent...ilator ...as you do...I am...just choosing to fight.

DOUGLAS
With whom?

PATRICIA
Not with you...even I don’t...have the energy for it...

DOUGLAS
You’re only...fighting your.....self...

DANIELE
..........What’s you’re name...

DOUGLAS
Doug...Douglas...
PATRICIA
Well Doug...Douglas......If you’re right, and I’m not......and you’re not......then we can’t t...urn on one another...I don’t want your last breath spent on pettiness...or mine.......but I refuse to accept...

DOUGLAS
Just stop.

PATRICIA
....................What’s your wife’s name.

DOUGLAS
I never said.......I had one...

PATRICIA
You had one?

DOUGLAS
No...I mean...yes, but...

PATRICIA
I’m sorry...

DOUGLAS
..........Don’t be...

PATRICIA
..........Dead or...

DOUGLAS
I cant...right now...

PATRICIA
Oh, was it recent?

DOUGLAS
No, I......it’s not that......I just can’t....

PATRICIA
Oh........

DOUGLAS
I can’t breathe...I’m so...sorry, I...seem to be suff....suffoc (hacking)...suffocating.

PATRICIA
No, you’re not...

DOUGLAS
I am……….and so are you.

PATRICIA
Don’t say that.

DOUGLAS
......Why not?

PATRICIA
Is that you bedside man...manner...

DOUGLAS
It’s my death bed man...ner...

PATRICIA
...............I can’t...I can’t imagine any...thing worse.

DOUGLAS
It’s worse...than you...can imagine...I never...never feared dying...but I saw the proc...process...that was my on...ly fear...slowly...losing...my br...eath...and never...catching it...again...

PATRICIA
...............I thought...this was just for the elderly.

DOUGLAS
Wipe us out...to...make room for more?

PATRICIA
You had time...twice my time...

DOUGLAS
You may...be...thirty years younger...but you’re only thr...three days...behind me.

PATRICIA
Stop.

DOUGLAS
I won’t be...long...and you can...have this vent...ilator...all...to your...self...when I’m...I’m through.

Long silence. The sound of the ventilator and heart monitors.

PATRICIA
...............Is this okay?

DOUGLAS
No.

PATRICIA
I mean sharing.

DOUGLAS
None...of this...is...

PATRICIA
But...

DOUGLAS
...okay...and it won’t be...

PATRICIA
...but...

DOUGLAS
...not for us...

PATRICIA
STOP IT! (Coughs and gags) No won...no wonder you’re dying....with that attitude.

DOUGLAS
Attitude has no...

PATRICIA
Positive vibes.

*He laughs and hacks.*

I’m not list...ening to this...if you’re gonna die then go on and die, because I’m here to recover, you hear me! (Crying) I AM A FUCKING HEALTH NUT! I DESERVE TO LIVE (Coughing and hacking) I tried...I tried...to be good all my life...why me, why this...

DOUGLAS
Why not you...why not...this...we all...have to suffer...suffocate...and die.

PATRICIA
NOT NOW!

DOUGLAS
Then when...

PATRICIA
AAAAHHHHHHHHHH I HATE YOOOOUUUUU OHHHHHHHH!!! (coughing and hacking and without breath) sor...sorry...I don’t...hate...anyone...but myss...self.......I jus.....just needed to...to vent...

DOUGLAS
...Till later...
PATRICIA
What?

DOUGLAS
...until later...

PATRICIA
......Later?

DOUGLAS
...only until later, my dear...

PATRICIA
Sshhh...sh...shhh...we’ll talk...later...shhhh...talk later...it’s okay...

DOUGLAS
I can...I can...

PATRICIA
Shh I know...I know you...you can, but...

DOUGLAS
I can...I can’t...I can’t breathe......

PATRICIA
Okay, don’t panic...take a...a deep breath...no, sorr...sorry, that used to work...

DOUGLAS
I...I...I love you...

PATRICIA
..........What?

DOUGLAS
I love you....Patricia...

PATRICIA
How do...do you know my...

DOUGLAS
I’m on my way, Patti.....

PATRICIA
......Was that her name?

DOUGLAS
I can.......I can’t.......I can’t breathe...
DOUGLAS suffocates as PATRICIA can do nothing but listen...this should occur at
eight minutes and forty-six seconds in...

PATRICIA
Me......me.......me neither...(wondering where anyone is, trying to call for help)...hel...hel....hellllll........

She hacks as as her head falls back, unable to support it, looking up the ceiling...

(Panting yet breathless) I can...I can...I can’t.......where...where...are you...

She sinks into breathless suffering and silence, to the sound of one ventilator and
now one heart monitor still beeping and the other having flatlined...