

Travels  
Michael Crichton

### **Lousy on Admission**

**Narrator 1:** Emily was a seventy-six-year-old woman who lived alone in a small apartment. On a routine visit by a social worker, she was found lying unconscious on the floor, and was rushed to the hospital. In the emergency ward, she was noted to be semi-comatose for unknown reasons. Her clothes were filthy and unkempt. She was infested with lice. She was cleaned up, deloused, and admitted to the medical floor.

**Narrator 2:** When I first saw her, Emily was a tall, gray-haired, sharp-featured woman, sleepy and unresponsive. If you tried to wake her, she would grunt and push you away. Nobody knew what was wrong with her, how long she had been lying on the floor of her apartment, or why she was stuporous, but lab tests showed her chemistries were severely unbalanced. My resident, Tim, reviewed her chart.

**Tim:** “Lousy on admission. Obviously a lot of neglect here, probably some senility. God knows how long she was lying on the floor.”

**Narrator 3:** Emily was given intravenous feedings to correct her body chemistries, but she did not awaken. Meanwhile, nobody was able to find out anything more about her. Apparently she lived alone in a small apartment in an unfashionable part of town. Apparently she had no friends, no living family. No one came to visit her.

**Narrator 4:** She was an isolated, neglected woman, obviously unable to care for herself. She was in our hands. And we were not able to determine why she was unresponsive. She appeared to be in a deep sleep, but we couldn't tell why. Abruptly, on the third day, Emily awoke. She looked around at all of us.

**Emily:** “Oh crap.”

**Narrator 1:** Her language further distanced her from the resident staff. An old lady who swore: she was obviously senile. We questioned her.

**Medical student:** “Ma'am, can you tell me your name?”

**Emily:** “You don't think I know? Go away, Daddy-o.”

**Medical student:** “Do you know where you are?”

**Emily:** “Don't be ridiculous!”

**Medical student:** “Do you know what day it is?”

**Emily:** “Do you?”

**Narrator 3:** She had a point there.

**Medical student:** “Do you know who the President is?”

**Emily:** “Franklin Delano Roosevelt” (cackles).

**Narrator 3:** A psychiatric consultation was requested. The psychiatrist found Emily to demonstrate “bizarre ideation, strange flow of ideas,” and “hostile affect.” Noting that she had been lousy on admission, he suggested that she might be in the early stages of senile dementia.

**Narrator 4:** We still had no idea why she had been comatose, and we ran more and more tests on her. In the meantime, she seemed to sleep less, to be more generally alert. But she remained distinctly odd: you never knew how she would greet you when you walked in the room. One day it was...

**Emily:** (corny Italian accent) “Ah, *Dottore*, how are you today? What news from the Rialto?”

**Narrator 1:** One day it was...

**Emily:** “All quiet on the Western Front?” (irritating cackle)

**Narrator 2:** One day it was...

**Emily:** “Going to stick me full of needles again today? You think you can treat me like I’m some kind of guinea pig, Daddy-o?”

**Narrator 1:** I asked her the usual questions you asked old people.

**Medical student:** Do you have any hobbies, Emily?”

**Emily:** “Hobbies? *Hobbies*? I have better things to do with my time. Do *you* have any hobbies, *Dottore*?”

**Narrator 2:** She had a point there too. I’d abandoned my last hobby, assembling dinosaur replicas, at the start of third year.

**Medical student:** “Well, then, how *do* you spend your time, Emily?”

**Emily:** “None of your damn business, *Dottore*.”

**Narrator 3:** She puzzled me. She was evasive, but there was a strange strength to her, a kind of imperiousness. I speculated she might be a rich old Boston lady fallen on hard times, and now embarrassed by her condition. I speculated she might be foreign-born. She seemed to know a lot about artists and literature and music, making all sorts of references to Pablo and Ezra and Thelonius and Miles. Later, when Emily and I were alone, Emily asked me about her diagnosis.

**Emily:** “What do you think is wrong with me?”

**Medical student:** “We’re not sure.”

**Emily:** “Nothing is wrong with me. I feel fine. I don’t want any more tests.”

**Medical student:** “I can understand that feeling.”

**Emily:** “Well then, why do I have to have them? Besides, that Dr. Tim is mean. I want to go home.”

**Narrator 4:** I was on dangerous ground now. I had to choose my words carefully.

**Medical student:** “If you want to leave the hospital, no one can stop you.”

**Emily:** “You mean I can just walk out of here?”

**Medical student:** “No, you have to be discharged. But if you insist on it, they have to discharge you.”

**Emily:** “They do?”

**Medical student:** “They will try to talk you out of leaving, but they can’t make you stay.”

**Emily:** “Good, I’m sick of all you ridiculous doctors and your ridiculous tests.”

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**Tim:** “Guess who checked out? Emily.”

**Medical student:** (nervously) “Oh yeah?”

**Tim:** “Yeah. Discharged herself against physicians’ advice.”

**Medical student:** “When?”

**Tim:** “Tonight. Screaming and swearing, nobody could talk any sense to her. They had to let her go. I think somebody put the idea into her head.”

**Medical student:** “Oh really?”

**Tim:** “Yeah. Somebody talked to her.”

**Medical student:** “Do you have any idea who?”

**Tim:** “Yeah. I think somebody from Accounting. They’re not sure if all those tests were covered by Medicare, you know, and I think Accounting got nervous about the expense and decided to get her out.” (sighs). “But you wait. She’ll be back in a few weeks, covered in lice, just like before. Crazy old witch.”

**Narrator 1:** Two months later, I was walking through the lobby of the outpatient department when I felt a pain in the ribs. Somebody had banged into me. I grunted and kept going.

**Emily:** “Hey! Doctor!”

**Narrator 2:** I stopped and turned. A rather elegant woman stood there, wearing a green cape and a beret set at a rakish angle. She smoked a cigarette from a long ivory holder. She carried a cane in one hand. She was staring at me expectantly.

**Emily:** “Don’t want to say hello, Doctor?”

**Narrator 3:** Patients never understand how many people you see, how many faces pass before you, particularly in the outpatient clinic. You may see fifty in an afternoon.

**Medical student:** “I’m sorry, but do I know you?”

**Emily:** (looks amused) “Miss Vincent.”

**Narrator 4:** I didn’t have a clue.

**Medical student:** “Miss Vincent?”

**Emily:** “Emily.”

**Narrator 1:** I stared, still not recognizing her. I tried to dredge up anybody named Emily Vincent. And suddenly it all fell together. Emily! The lady who was lousy on admission! Seeing her now, her stance, her dress, her manner, I understood.

**Narrator 2:** Emily was a bohemian. In the 1920s she had been one of those rebellious, independent, artsy women. Of course she knew all about artists and writers. Of course she had never married. Of course she swore and smoked and was fiercely independent and advanced. Of course she was contemptuous of the doctors around her. Of course she liked to say shocking and outrageous things. As the years went on, Emily would have been in turn a flapper, then a wartime riveter, and then an aging beatnik. Of course she said things like, “Daddy-o.” Emily was a hipster.

**Medical student:** “Emily, how are you?”

**Emily:** “Quite well, *Dottore*. You may call me Miss Vincent.”

**Medical student:** “You’re coming to the clinic?”

**Emily:** “They say I have a little something with my thyroid, and I take pills. Frankly I think it’s crap, but my doctor is so handsome, I indulge him.”

**Medical student:** “You look wonderful, Miss Vincent.”

**Emily:** “You too. Well, I must be off. *Ciao*.”

**Narrator 3:** And, with a dramatic wave, she turned, cape flying, and was gone.