

INDIGNITAS

(or: A Necessary Evil)

a short play

by

Jonathan Skinner

*(running time 10 mins)*

## CHARACTERS

FOSTER..... male, 40

DOCTOR..... female, 20s

## SYNOPSIS

In ten minutes Foster will be dead. But that's no surprise for Foster. After all, it was his idea.

Following the latest and most brutal global financial crisis, the Voluntary Euthanasia Act offers parents over the age of 40 an option. In return for removing the financial and social burden of their own lives on the state, their children will receive a free education and a start on the housing ladder. And in these difficult times, what's a guy to do when he has three kids and has just been made redundant again?

Yes, Foster's last drink – like his first – will be from a plastic beaker. After a few final questions have been answered...

## WRITER BIO – Jonathan Skinner

- Writers Bloc, Old Red Lion Theatre, London, Dec 2012
- Finalist, Euroscript Screen Story Competition (judges special commendation), 2012
- Shortlisted, Little Pieces of Gold, June 2012.
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Round qualifier (ongoing), Kaos British Short Film Competition, 2012
- 2nd place, Art's Council Next Big Author, Sept 2012

*A table. On it, a small box. Two chairs. On one of them sits Philip FOSTER (40) wearing a jacket and tie. A likeable, thoroughly decent man, he is filling in forms on a clipboard.*

*ENTER a FEMALE DOCTOR (20s) wearing a white coat. Her manner is brisk, businesslike, smooth and breezy. She carries a small tray upon which is a plastic baby's beaker with a mouthpiece. She places the tray on the table.*

DOCTOR: How are you getting on, Mr Foster?

FOSTER: It's a lot of paperwork. A lot of forms to fill in.

DOCTOR: A necessary evil, I'm afraid.

*FOSTER stares at the plastic beaker. Reality beginning to sink in.*

FOSTER: Is that it?

DOCTOR: Yes. That's it.

FOSTER: Funny really, I suppose I had my first ever drink out of a plastic beaker like that one.

*She sits. Gives him a professional smile. She's heard it all before.*

FOSTER: What's the box for?

DOCTOR: Your personal effects.

FOSTER: Right...

*The gravity of what's about to happen seems to hit him.*

DOCTOR: Your watch...

FOSTER: Yes, of course.

*He takes his watch off. Holds it in his hand.*

FOSTER: I bought this when I was twenty-one. The chap in the shop said it would last me a lifetime. Didn't believe him at the time...

*He places his watch in the box.*

DOCTOR: Car keys?

FOSTER: I took the train.

DOCTOR: Any loose change?

*Foster empties his pockets. Examines the contents.*

FOSTER: About ten quid and a packet of chewing gum.

*He drops them in the box.*

DOCTOR: It will be returned to your family. I gather they don't know of your decision.

FOSTER: *(short)* No.

DOCTOR: That's not unusual. An increasing number of our clients are opting to act alone.

FOSTER: I'm a "client", am I?

DOCTOR: A valued client. You'll need to remove your tie, Mr Foster.

FOSTER: I put it on specially. Wanted to try and look, you know, dignified.

DOCTOR: Sorry. Health and safety. We'll need your top button undone too.

FOSTER: Health and safety? I'm about to drink a beaker of poison...

DOCTOR: Potassium cyanide solution to give it its correct name. Thirty millilitres.

*She holds out her hand. He undoes his tie. Folds it carefully. Hands it to her.*

FOSTER: *(sarcastic, in a child's voice)* I'll make sure I drink it all up.

DOCTOR: *(serious)* Yes, you must.

FOSTER: Wouldn't want to half-do the job, hey?

DOCTOR: Quite.

FOSTER: Does that ever happen?

DOCTOR: Occasionally.

FOSTER: A last minute change of mind?

DOCTOR: *(shrugs)* I suppose so...

FOSTER: Understandable.

DOCTOR: Mr Foster, you do want to end your life?

FOSTER: *(angry, shouts)* Of course I don't want to.

*A beat. She takes the clipboard from him. Looks at his forms.*

DOCTOR: But you've signed your consent form.

FOSTER: That's hardly the same thing as wanting to... Sorry, I'm just a bit...

DOCTOR: It's alright. I understand. Are you sure you're not having second thoughts?

FOSTER: *(sullen)* I can't afford to have second thoughts. *(pause)* You know, I remember when all this started. 2013.

DOCTOR: Before my time.

FOSTER: Yeah, well... There was a financial crisis back then too. Not nearly as bad as this one. But still bad. Some bright spark in the government had the idea that parents should be encouraged to give up their pension pots to give their kids a start on the housing ladder.

DOCTOR: It...doesn't seem unreasonable...

FOSTER: To you. Because you've never know anything different. You've fallen for it.

DOCTOR: Mr Foster, I'm not supposed to engage at a personal level...

FOSTER: No, of course not. It's nothing personal, is it? Taking a man's life.

DOCTOR: We're not taking your life, Mr Foster. You're offering it. If I may remind you, it's called the Voluntary Euthanasia Act.

FOSTER: Voluntary for those who don't have a choice.

DOCTOR: But you do have a choice.

FOSTER: I have three kids, right? 12, 15 and 19. Great kids. Smart, kind, switched-on.

DOCTOR: That's commendable, I'm sure...

FOSTER: I was just about managing the university fees for my eldest when I was made redundant...again. And since they've scrapped student loans, she can't even...

DOCTOR: The economy simply couldn't support them, Mr Foster. Sacrifices had to be made.

FOSTER: Then when they introduced fees for secondary education too...

DOCTOR: It was necessary to maintain standards.

FOSTER: I just want my kids to have a chance.

DOCTOR: *(soothingly)* Then you're doing the right thing. Your childrens' education costs fully funded, plus a start on the housing ladder for each of them in return for...

FOSTER: In return for their father's life.

DOCTOR: In return for you generously and unselfishly unburdening the state of any further financial or social obligation to you...

FOSTER: *(nods)* In return for my life.

DOCTOR: You're doing your children and your country a great service.

FOSTER: It's immoral.

DOCTOR: It's inevitable. The state simply can't afford to continue to support the population indefinitely.

FOSTER: Yeah, I know the theory. I saw the TV ads.

DOCTOR: It has been quite an effective campaign. Over two hundred thousand takers so far.

FOSTER: Are you lot paid on commission then?

DOCTOR: Not at all. *(embarrassed pause)* Although we do receive a modest annual bonus based upon overall client satisfaction levels...

FOSTER: I knew it. And how do your "clients" indicate their satisfaction? Give you the thumbs up as they take their final breath? *(he mimes this to demonstrate)*.

DOCTOR: *(huffily)* There is a short optional satisfaction survey just before--

FOSTER: *(sarcastic)* --Yeah well, put me down as "fairly satisfied" would you? *(chuckles)*  
Better rephrase that. I shouldn't say "put me down", should I?

DOCTOR: Shall we finish your paperwork? *(glances at watch)* We're running out of time.

FOSTER: You can say that again.

DOCTOR: Each client has a fifteen minute appointment.

FOSTER: So Andy Warhol was right.

DOCTOR: Andy who?

FOSTER: Never mind.

DOCTOR: *(referring to the clipboard)* Now... Are you in good health generally?

FOSTER: *(astonished)* Does it matter?

DOCTOR: *(shrugs)* It helps for statistical analysis.

FOSTER: *(again, in a child's voice)* No, I've got a cold. Please may I be excused extermination please, Miss?

DOCTOR: Mr Foster...

FOSTER: Yes, I'm in good health generally. I worked out. Watched what I ate. Took care of myself.

DOCTOR: *(ticking his form)* Excellent.

FOSTER: Don't know why I bothered. If I'd known it was going to end like this, I could have enjoyed myself more. I could have smoked a pipe. Stuffed myself full of pies. Put my feet up on the sofa instead of going jogging...

DOCTOR: *(puts pen down)* Mr Foster, you don't seem very pleased about any of this.

FOSTER: Now that you mention it I'm not overly thrilled, no.

DOCTOR: If I may remind you, in addition to the benefits your children will receive, your own processing here at the clinic is being provided free of charge.

FOSTER: (*sarcastic*) "Processing". Is that what you call it? I'm so sorry. It's most generous.

DOCTOR: The usual cost is five thousand pounds. Then there's the VAT at forty percent.

FOSTER: Please, don't think me ungrateful.

DOCTOR: It's the cost of living.

FOSTER: The cost of living. Don't I know it.

DOCTOR: (*hesitates*) Mr Foster, I realise you haven't told your wife about your decision, but... I just wondered if she was aware of our "two-for-one" offer...

FOSTER: Your what!

DOCTOR: Should both parents elect to terminate at the same time, there's a bonus of free lifetime healthcare for all offspring. It's quite a bargain. The offer closes in—

FOSTER: --Actually, I'd rather my kids were left with one parent, thanks all the same.

DOCTOR: Fine, it's your choice. Well, hers. Would you have any objection to us sending her a leaflet?

FOSTER: Yes, I damned well would. Anyway, why would my kids need free healthcare when there's the NHS?

DOCTOR: Come now, Mr Foster. You know very well that's only going to cover Accident and Emergency as from next year.

FOSTER: Thank God, my wife's ineligible for your "scheme". She's only thirty-eight.

DOCTOR: She'd have to wait two years then...

FOSTER: Don't look so disappointed.

DOCTOR: Although there is talk of the eligibility age being lowered from forty to thirty-five.

FOSTER: Oh, super. Why not make it thirty?

DOCTOR: I think that would be stretching things a bit, don't you? That reminds me, you did bring your birth certificate?

*He retrieves it from his jacket pocket. Passes it to her.*

FOSTER: Won't be needing that any more.

*She examines it.*

DOCTOR: *(frowns)* Oh... If I'm not mistaken you're... Forty today?

FOSTER: I've been waiting for this for months...

DOCTOR: Well then, many happy returns!

FOSTER: Thanks. You didn't bother with a cake did you? I could have snuffed out the candles while you sung Happy Birthday.

DOCTOR: *(taking him seriously)* It does say on the application form that you should provide ten days notice of any special requirements...

FOSTER: Don't worry. I didn't want a cake anyway.

DOCTOR: *(returning to the form)* You haven't indicated your preferences for the funeral, Mr Foster...

FOSTER: What funeral?

DOCTOR: Yours. *(breezily)* Would you prefer to be buried or cremated?

FOSTER: Prefer? I've never really thought about it.

DOCTOR: I can't tick both options...

FOSTER: I don't fancy either. It's a bit like asking a vegetarian if they'd prefer a corned beef sandwich or a bacon roll. You choose for me.

DOCTOR: I'm afraid I'm not allowed to.

FOSTER: Can I phone a friend? *(pause)* Cremated then. No, buried! No... cremated...

*She gives him a school-teachery look. Ticks the form.*

DOCTOR: Would you like flowers at the service?

FOSTER: No, don't bother.

DOCTOR: They're complimentary. I'd encourage you to—

FOSTER: --Fine then...

DOCTOR: What sort?

FOSTER: *(mischievous)* Well, if they're on the house I might as well get my money's worth. How about some rare species of orchid?

DOCTOR: It's chrysanthemums or carnations. We buy them in bulk.

FOSTER: The personal touch. Carnations please.

DOCTOR: What about music?

FOSTER: Don't you have a choir of angels standing by?

DOCTOR: Do you have a favourite hymn?

FOSTER: I was never a big one for hymns.

DOCTOR: You can choose any music you like. We have a full Dolby sound system.

FOSTER: Oh good. I wouldn't want any hiss as I drift away. *(pause)* I've always loved jazz.

DOCTOR: Well then... Something jazzy?

FOSTER: You know, I'd sometimes imagined my perfect death scene... *(dreamily)* There's me in a deckchair on a beach aged about ninety, my grandchildren playing happily on the sand, my children nearby, my wife next to me holding my hand. A glass of vintage port close by...

DOCTOR: I'm afraid we have a strict no alcohol policy...

FOSTER: ...and in the background, Astrud Gilberto singing "The Girl From Ipanema".

DOCTOR: I'm not familiar with the piece but I can check our music library...

FOSTER: *(singing)* "Tall and tan and young and lovely, the girl from Ipanema goes walking..."

DOCTOR: *(glancing at watch)* Mr Foster...

FOSTER: *(still singing)* "And when she passes, each one she passes goes – ahhhhh..."

DOCTOR: Mr Foster, we really are running short of—

FOSTER: --And the last thing I'd see as I let go of life would be the shimmering blue ocean...

DOCTOR: Mr Foster...

FOSTER: *(snapping back to reality, very bitter now)* Not a cold bleak windowless room in Basingstoke.

DOCTOR: Our centres are located to provide optimum transport links from all major...

*She realises Foster is silently sobbing.*

DOCTOR: *(softening)* Listen...we have a projector... And a number of slides... You can choose your last view.

FOSTER: *(dabbing his eyes)* Have you got one of the ocean then?

DOCTOR: I don't think so. But we have a nice one of an oak tree.

FOSTER: "Mighty oaks from little acorns grow..." Anything else? Just out of interest, what's the most popular?

DOCTOR: There's a slide of David Beckham.

FOSTER: No no no...

DOCTOR: Then what...?

*He has a sudden thought. Turns to challenge her.*

FOSTER: What will you choose when it's your turn?

DOCTOR: *(embarrassed)* I'm in the new pension scheme so I don't expect to have a... "turn".

FOSTER: And you trust them, do you? Like I did?

DOCTOR: I'm not supposed to discuss this.

FOSTER: *(gently)* Sorry. I'm not being fair on you. None of this is your fault. You know, you remind me of my eldest. Gillian. She's studying biochemistry at—

DOCTOR: --Mr Foster, I'm sorry to cut you short but I do have other clients waiting.

FOSTER: How many do you get through in a day?

DOCTOR: I'm afraid that's confidential.

FOSTER: Do you sleep at night? Seriously — do you?

DOCTOR: Please...

FOSTER: *(giving up)* Alright. Let's get on with it.

DOCTOR: So you'd like the oak tree and "The Girl From...?"

FOSTER: Ipanema. No, it's okay. Forget the music and the slideshow. Let's just get it over with.

DOCTOR: As you wish.

*Foster sits up in his chair. Reaches for the beaker. Hesitates.*

FOSTER: The benefits for my kids. They are absolutely guaranteed?

DOCTOR: One hundred percent, Mr Foster. It's a government-backed scheme!

FOSTER: Right.

*He takes the beaker in one hand.*

DOCTOR: Remember, you must drink it all down in one go. I should warn you, you may experience a constricting, choking feeling. That's quite normal and nothing to worry about.

FOSTER: Fine, I won't worry. *(pause)* Would you...do something for me?

DOCTOR: If I can...

FOSTER: It's a sort of last request.

DOCTOR: Very well...

FOSTER: You're a beautiful young woman...

DOCTOR:       *(uncomfortable)* Mr Foster, if you're suggesting what I think you may be suggesting,  
I'm afraid it's strictly against--

FOSTER:       --Would you hold my hand?

DOCTOR:       *(relieved)* Of course I would.

FOSTER:       I know it's silly but...

DOCTOR:       It's not silly at all.

FOSTER:       It would mean so much to me.

DOCTOR:       It's quite a common request.

*She takes a disposable plastic glove from her pocket, rolls it onto her hand.*

FOSTER:       What's that?

DOCTOR:       Rules, Mr Foster. A hand hold is fine. But no skin-to-skin contact.

*She offers her gloved hand. He takes it with his free one.*

FOSTER:       May you all be forgiven. Cheers.

*As he raises the beaker to his lips...*

LIGHTS DOWN