

Phobia

A Short Film

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Synopsis: A businessman seeks treatment for his panic attacks.

***Phobia** is a short film of 5-10 minutes. This document describes the general sequence of events in the story, with dialog and details to be filled in later.*

INT – HOSPITAL PREP ROOM – 30 YEARS AGO

FADE IN.

We are in a surgical prep room in a big city hospital. It is 30 years before the present day.

We focus of on a two young PARENTS, a man and woman in their 20s. They are are hugging each other and are obviously in great distress. We hear an off-screen nurse speaking in reassuring tones to a young child.

We move wider and see both the NURSE and the CHILD, who is about four years old. She is preparing the child for surgery as his parents look on. He is sitting on the edge of an examination table in his underwear while the nurse performs some routine tests: taking his blood pressure, etc. The parents know what is going on, but the child doesn't really understand. All he knows is the nurse is being especially nice to him.

"What a good boy you are!" says the nurse. Every time she asks him to do something, she heaps praise on him. The boy looks to his parents for reassurance. They put on a brave face, smile and assure him that everything is fine.

The Nurse puts on a stethoscope and tells the boy she is going to listen to his heart. As she does, we notice that there is a dashed line drawn with magic marker down the middle of the boy's chest.

"Is that the line the doctor drew?" asks the Nurse in reassuring tones.

The boy nods.

"When you wake up, there is going to be a big bandage there," she says.

The boy doesn't react, but his parents do. They are torn. They are horrified by

the idea of their child being cut open, but they also want to display calm and strength for their child so he doesn't get upset.

The nurse asks the boy to put on "special pajamas" with buttons on the back instead of the front. As she helps the child put them on, she continues a gentle patter intended to keep him relaxed.

After the pajamas are on, the Nurse's face brightens as she tells the child...

"Guess what? You're going for a ride!"

She points, and we see a side of the prep room we haven't seen before. There a small electric Jeep is parked. It is a brightly colored plastic toy Jeep with an open top and roll bars, just big enough for the child to drive. Behind the Jeep is a long hospital corridor leading into the distance.

"Do you know how to drive a car?" asks the nurse.

The child's eyes widen and he nods enthusiastically.

"Would you like to try?"

He certainly would! With his parents' nodding approval, he jumps off the examination table and runs to the car. After a minute of driver's education, he is moving! The Jeep makes electric sounds as it moves. It can't go very fast, but the boy is in full control of it.

The nurse tells the boy to follow her down the hall. The nurses gives a reassuring nod to the parents, but the child is immersed in his driving.

As the boy drives down the corridor accompanied by the nurse, the parents stay behind. From the parents' point of view, we see the boy drive away down the long corridor. It takes a while. At the end of the corridor, the boy take one last look toward his

parents. Then the nurse and boy turn around a corner and vanish.

With the boy out of view, we see the parents collapse into each other's arms. The mother cries and buries her face in her husband's chest.

FADE TO BLACK

In the blackness, a title fades up and away...

“Thirty Years Later...”

EXT – CITY STREET – PRESENT ERA – DAY

On the busy sidewalk of a big city, a BUSINESSMAN hustles to work. He is carrying a briefcase and holding a premium coffee. He looks self-confident but rushed. He glances at his watch, suggesting he is late.

He turns a sharp corner around the blank wall of a bank building and passes out of our view.

A moment later, he rushes back into view in a panic! Suddenly, his composure is gone. He is still holding his briefcase, but he has lost his coffee. He quickly hides behind the corner of the building (on our side of the corner). His back is against the wall; his briefcase is clutched to his chest; he is hyperventilating, and there is terror on his face. It is as if he has just seen a gunman on the street and wants to get out of shooting range.

Slowly, the man composes himself. He breathes deeply. He inches toward the corner of the building and very cautiously looks down street from which he has just fled.

From the other side, we see the man's forehead and eyes peek around the corner.

Then we see what he sees — the thing that caused his panic. It is a Jeep! It is a open-top jeep with rollbars parked in a metered parking spot beside the side walk. It is a full-size Jeep, but it is the same color and general design as the tiny one he drove into surgery 30 year before!

The man pulls back behind the corner again. He is still panicked. He leans against the wall as though he was experiencing an earthquake.

He tries to continue walking in the same direction he was going, past the Jeep, but his legs give out and he can't bring himself to turn the corner.

In his movements, we can see he is conflicted. He knows this behavior is ridiculous, but his body doesn't seem to listen to his brain. Finally, he gives up and starts walking in another direction. He is going to follow a different route to work, avoiding the parked Jeep altogether.

CUT TO...

INT – MEDICAL CONFERENCE ROOM – DAY

We are in a conference room in a big city hospital where the businessman is giving a presentation to a group of doctors and nurses. We know they are medical personnel because most of them are wearing hospital scrubs.

Behind the businessman is a big picture window looking out on a hospital parking lot. There are venetian blinds on the window but they are open, so we can see cars passing behind the man as he gives his presentation.

Turns out, the man is a sales representative for a big pharmaceutical company, visiting the hospital to explain the company's new medication to the doctors and answer their questions. His presentation is given in dense technical medical language that we don't understand, and the questions from the doctors are in the same language—meaningful to them but incomprehensible to us. The only thing we grasp is that the man is confident of his knowledge. The doctor's ask pointed and skeptical questions, but the man doesn't miss a beat when he replies. His responses seem to satisfy the skeptical doctors.

We are watching the man from the doctors' point of view as he wraps up his presentation – when a Jeep rolls up in the big picture window behind him and parks.

It is an open-top Jeep with rollbars but a different color and slightly different design than the one seen earlier. We see the Jeep looming behind the man, like an ominous shark, but he isn't looking in that direction so he doesn't see it at first. He continues his presentation with great confidence.

Then he glances behind him and sees the Jeep, and his composure instantly

collapses. He tries to continue his presentation, but he can't. He ducks down and moves to one side of the window, so the Jeep can't "see" him. He is like a shell-shocked soldier reliving the traumas of battle.

As the doctors look on in confusion, the man reaches for the strings of the venetian blinds and slowly closes them.

The doctors look at each other as if to say, "What is wrong with this guy?"

CUT TO:

EXT – SUBWAY – EVENING COMMUTE

The man is on the subway heading home. He is clearly distressed by his performance earlier in the day. He glances up and happens to see a display ad inside the subway car. It says, in big letters:

"DO YOU HAVE PHOBIAS?"

As the man reads the ad, we hear an authoritative medical voice read the ad in voiceover, as though it was happening inside the man's head. The ad is requesting participants for a research study into a new investigational medication for phobias and panic attacks. The symptoms described match the ones the man is experiencing: panic attacks that disrupt ones work or personal life. The ad invites anyone with these symptoms to call a toll-free phone number to participate in the study.

The man takes out his smartphone and snaps a photo of the ad.

FADE TO BLACK to indicate a passage of time.

Then FADE IN to...

INT – BEDROOM – NIGHT

The man is sitting on the edge of his bed, reading some medical instructions. On the bed table beside him is a blue pill and a glass of water. The man has signed up for the program, and the blue pill is the experimental medicine.

With some ceremony, he examines the pill and swallows it. Then he lies down and turns off the light.

After a moment of darkness, FADE IN to...

INT – BEDROOM – MORNING

On a bright and cheerful morning, the man wakes. He looks well rested.

He sits up and looks around him. He feels great!

CUT TO...

EXT – CITY STREET – DAY

We are on the same sidewalk where the man had his panic attack earlier. He walks jauntily down the street, carrying his briefcase and a premium coffee. He cruises right past the corner where he stopped last time.

Then he glances to the side of the road and sees the same Jeep parked in the same parking spot.

This time, there is no adverse reaction. It is just like any other car.

The man smiles to himself and approaches the Jeep. He finds it quite appealing!

Carefully at first, he reaches out and touches the car. Still no bad reaction!

He even starts caressing it! He can't stop touching the car.

Suddenly, the owner of the car appears behind him. The owner clears his throat to get the man's attention.

The man looks embarrassed. "Nice car," he says, apologetically.

The owner gets into the car and starts the engine.

As the owner is turning away from the curb, the man shouts out to him:

"I need to get one of those!"

The man looks longly at the Jeep as it drives away into the distance.

EXT – HOSPITAL PARKING LOT – DAY

We are in a hospital parking lot—a different hospital than last time.

We hear a loud stereo playing, then the man drives into frame driving a brand new open-top Jeep! He turns off the engine, gets out of the car, then stands and admires his new purchase. It is the same style of Jeep he drove down the hospital corridor and that once caused him so much panic. Now he owns one and loves it!

He touches the rollbar lovingly. He almost doesn't want to leave the car, but he has to go to work. He grabs his briefcase from the car and reluctantly leaves the Jeep behind.

INT – HOSPITAL CONFERENCE ROOM

The man is giving an identical presentation as before, but in a different conference room to a different set of doctors. He knows his spiel, and he gives it with great confidence. Then he asks the doctors if they have any questions.

One doctor politely raises his hand, and the man points to him.

“You’re a very good boy!” says the doctor.

The man does a double take. “What?” he says.

Another doctor speaks: “Guess what? You’re going for a ride!”

The man must be going mad! The doctors appear to be asking questions about his product, but all he hears from their mouths is the reassuring words the nurse told him just before his surgery 30 years ago.

The man recoils from the doctors in horror. His irrational fear of Jeeps has been replaced by an irrational fear of medical personnel!

Seeing he is in distress, the doctors approach the man trying to help, but this only increased his panic. Every time they speak, the words of the nurse echo in his head.

Finally, he races out of the room in terror.

EXT – HOSPITAL PARKING LOT – DAY

The man races back to his parked Jeep. When he reaches it, he hugs the rollbars like a baby clinging to its mother. The Jeep is his only island of calm in a sea of chaos! His panic attack subsides only when he is touching his car.

After he has composed himself, he gets into the driver’s seat the drives away,

haltingly.

We see him depart in a scene resembling his drive down the hospital corridor. The Jeep drives into the distance down a long aisle in the parking lot. It doesn't drive smoothly but lurches from side to side like the toy jeep did.

At the Jeep moves we don't hear normal engine sounds. Instead we hear the electric sounds of the original toy jeep.

The Jeep turns the corner and the end of the aisle and vanishes from view.

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FADE OUT

THE END