

# *The Twilight Zone:* **The Eye of the Beholder**

by Rod Serling

## **Characters:**

**Narrator/Serling's Voice**

**Janet**

**Doctor**

**Leader**

**Nurse**

**Nurse Two**

**Smith**

## **Hospital room Night**

(Production note: Throughout the play until otherwise indicated, all characters with the exception of Janet are played either in the shadows or the camera is on their back, but never are actually seen face first.)

Janet Tyler lies in a bed, her face is entirely swathed in a bandaged mask, with only a little slit left open for the mouth. She remains motionless. A nurse has just entered with a medicine tray.

**Janet**

Nurse?

**Nurse**

Brought you your sleeping medicine, honey.

**Janet**

Is it night already?

**Nurse**

It's nine-thirty.

**Janet**

What about the day?

**Nurse**

What about it?

**Janet**

Was it a beautiful day? Was the sun out? Was it warm?

**Nurse**

Kinda warm.

**Janet**

Clouds? Were there clouds in the sky?

**Nurse**

I suppose there were. I never was much for staring up at the sky all the time.

**Janet**

I used to look up at clouds a lot. If you stare at them long enough they become "things." Do you know what I mean? Ships, people, pastoral scenes...anything you want, really, if you stare at them long enough.

**Nurse**

Time to take your temperature now.

**Janet**

Just one other thing...?

**Nurse**

Well?

**Janet**

When...when will they take the bandages off?

**Janet**

How long?

**Nurse**

Until...until they decide whether they can fix up your face or not.

**Janet**

(very softly)

Oh. I guess it's...I guess it's pretty bad, isn't it?

**Nurse**

I've seen worse.

**Janet**

But it's pretty bad, isn't it? I know it's pretty bad. Ever since I can remember...ever since I was a little girl...people have turned away from me. The very first thing I can remember is a little child screaming when she looked at me. I never wanted to be beautiful. I never wanted to look like a painting. I never even wanted to be loved.

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(a pause)

I just wanted...I just wanted people not to scream when they looked at me.

(a pause)

When, nurse? When will they take the bandages off this time?

**Nurse**

Maybe tomorrow. Maybe the next day. You've been waiting so long now...it really doesn't make too much difference whether it's two days or weeks now, does it?

(On the intercom)

Dr. Bernardi. Evening report on Patient 307. Resting comfortably. No temperature change.

**Doctor's Voice**

(over intercom)

Thank you, nurse. I'll be down later.

**Nurse Two**

Ever see her face? 307?

**Nurse**

Indeed I have. If it were mine, I'd bury myself in a grave someplace. Poor thing. Some people want to live no matter what!

(a pause)

Got a cigarette?

**Serling's Voice**

Suspended in time and space for a moment.

You have been introduced to Miss Janet Tyler, who lives in a very private world of darkness; a universe whose dimensions are the size, thickness, length of a swathe of bandages that cover her face. In a moment we'll go back into this room, and also in a moment we'll look under the bandages.

(a pause)

Keeping in mind, of course, that we're not to be surprised by what we see, because this isn't just a hospital. And this Patient 307 is not just a woman. This happens to be The Twilight Zone...and Miss Janet Tyler, Patient number 307...with you, is about to enter it!

END OF SCENE

SCENE TWO

(At Janet's bedside)

**Doctor**

Come back about eleven, nurse. Give her the usual sedative then.

**Nurse**

All right, doctor.

**Doctor**

Warm this evening, Miss Tyler.

**Janet**

I thought it was. I couldn't be sure, though.

**Doctor**

Very warm. You can take my word for it. We'll have those bandages off you very shortly. I expect you're uncomfortable.

**Janet**

I'm used to bandages on my face.

**Doctor**

I've no doubt. This is your...ninth visit here? Is it the ninth?

**Janet**

The eleventh.

(a pause as she turns her bandaged face toward him)

Sometimes I think I've lived my whole life inside a dark cave. The walls are gauze. And the wind that blows in from the mouth of the cave always smells of ether and disinfectant.

(a pause)

There's a kind of a comfort though, doctor, to living in this cave. It's so wonderfully private.

(she turns her head away)

No one can ever see me.

(another pause)

It's hopeless, isn't it, doctor? I'll never look any different.

**Doctor**

That's hard to say. Up to now you haven't responded to the medication or to the shots or any of the proven techniques. Frankly, you've stumped us, Miss Tyler. Nothing we've done so far has made any difference at all. But we're hopeful of what

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this last treatment may have accomplished. There's no telling, of course not till we get the bandages off. Unfortunately your case is one that can't be handled with plastic surgery. Bone structure, flesh type...many factors prohibit this kind of approach.

(continuing thoughtfully)

Your eleventh visit.

(pause)

**Janet**

No more after this, are there? No more tries.

**Doctor**

Eleven is the mandatory number of experiments. No more are permitted after eleven.

**Janet**

Now what?

**Doctor**

Well you're kind of jumping the gun, Miss Tyler. You may very well have responded to these last injections. There's no way of telling till we get those bandages off.

**Janet**

But if I haven't responded then what?

**Doctor**

There are alternatives.

**Janet**

Like?

**Doctor**

Don't you know?

(pause)

**Janet**

(very softly)

I know.

**Doctor**

You realize, of course, Miss Tyler, why these rules are in effect? Each of us is afforded as much opportunity as possible to fit in with society. In your case, think of the time and money and effort expended to make you look....

(pause)

**Janet**

To make me look like what?

**Doctor**

Normal.... The way you'd like to look.

**Janet**

Doctor? May I walk outdoors? May I sit out on the lawn? Just for a little while. Just to smell the flowers. Just to...just to feel the air. Just for...just for...

(pause)

To make believe, doctor! To make believe that I am normal. If I sit outside in the darkness, then I know the whole world is dark. I'm more a part of it that way. Not just one grotesque, ugly, deformed woman with a bandage around her face...with a special darkness that belongs to her.

I want to belong! I want to be like other people. Please help me, doctor.

(now her voice catches in a sob)

Please help me.

**Doctor**

(softly)

You're not alone, Miss Tyler. You realize that, don't you? You're hardly alone. There are many others who share your misfortune. People who look much as you do. One of the alternatives...should this last treatment prove unsuccessful...well, this is simply to allow you to move into a special area in which people of your own kind have been congregated.

**Janet**

(bitterly)

People of my own kind!

(a pause)

Congregated, doctor? You don't mean congregated, you mean segregated. You mean imprisoned. You're talking about a ghetto now.

A ghetto designed for freaks!

**Doctor**

(shouting over her)

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Miss Tyler! The State is not unsympathetic. Your presence here in this hospital attests to this. It's doing all it can for you. But you're not being rational, Miss Tyler. You can't expect to live any kind of life amongst...  
Amongst normal people.

**Janet**

I could try. I could wear a mask or this bandage. I wouldn't bother anyone. I'd just go my own way. I'd take a job. Any job.

(pause)

Who are you people anyway? What is this State? Who makes up all the rules and the statutes and the traditions? The people who are different have to stay away from other people who are normal. The State isn't God, doctor.

**Doctor**

(firmly)

Miss Tyler, please!

**Janet**

The State is not God. It hasn't the right to penalize people for an accident of birth. It hasn't the right to make ugliness a crime

**Doctor**

(now shouting)

Miss Tyler, I must ask you to stop this kind of talk immediately! Now, Miss Tyler, now!

(Janet runs over to the window)

**Janet**

(softly)

I feel the night out there. I feel the air. I can smell the flowers. (she turns slowly to face the doctor. Both hands go up to touch the bandage, in a very small, still voice)

Please take this off me. Please take this off me.

Take this off me!

END OF SCENE

SCENE THREE

In the reception area

**Janet's Nurse**

The doctor's decided to remove the bandages in 307. He wants to have the anesthetist stand by.

**Nurse Two**

Of course, it's not for me to say, but I think they spend an awful lot of time and trouble on some of these face cases these throwbacks: Why not ship them out in the beginning?

**Janet's Nurse**

Is that what you'd want? If it were you?

**Nurse Two**

(in the intercom)

Anesthesia, please. Wanted for 307. Yes. She may get violent.

**Janet's Nurse**

Leader's speaking tonight. Goes on in just a few minutes.

**Announcer**

And now, ladies and gentlemen, our Leader.

**Leader's Voice**

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. Tonight I shall talk to you about glorious conformity...about the delight and the ultimate pleasure of our unified society. You recall, of course, that directionless, unproductive, overs-sentimentalized era of man's history when it was assumed that dissent was some kind of natural and healthy adjunct to society. We also recall that during this period of time there was a strange over-sentimentalized concept that it mattered not that people were different, that ideas were at variance with one another, that a world could exist in some kind of crazy, patchwork kind of makeup, with foreign elements glued together in a crazy quilt. We realize, of course, now, that...

END OF SCENE

SCENE FOUR

Janet now sits in a chair in the center of the room. A single overhead light has been turned on so that she alone is illuminated almost as if by a spotlight. The doctor comes in.

**Doctor**

Now I have to ask you once again, Miss Tyler. I must insist that you promise to remain rational. No tantrums. No temperament. And no violence. You understand?

Janet nods.

**Doctor**

Now I'll tell you precisely what I'm going to do. I'm going to cut the bandage at a point on the left side of your head. I'll start to unwind the bandage very gradually. The process has to be slow so that you can become accustomed to the light. As you know, the injections may have had an effect on your vision. Now as I unwrap, I want you to keep your eyes open and I want you to describe to me the different shading of light as you perceive it as each layer of bandage comes off.

**Janet**

(softly)

All right.

**Doctor**

Now if you make any movement or if you start getting emotional on us, Miss Tyler, I'm going to have to have the nurses hold you down and have the anesthetist put you under sedation. Is that understood?

**Janet**

I promise...I won't.

**Doctor**

All right then.

(pause)

**Doctor**

Do you see any light now, Miss Tyler?

**Janet**

Just a little. It looks...it looks gray.

**Doctor**

All right now, just be very quiet.

(pause)

**Doctor**

Now, Miss Tyler?

**Janet**

Much brighter. Very bright.

**Doctor**

Look up toward the light.

(pause)

**Doctor**

How about now, Miss Tyler?

**Janet**

It's bright. It's very bright.

**Doctor**

Good.

I'm at the last layer now, Miss Tyler.

**Janet**

I can...I can just distinguish your outline. Just vaguely...but I can see you.

**Doctor**

Now I'm going to remove the last bandage, Miss Tyler. Now do you want a mirror?

**Janet**

No. No, thank you. No mirror.

**Doctor**

Now I'm going to remove the last bandage, Miss Tyler. And I want you to remember this please. Miss Tyler? Are you listening?

**Janet**

Yes, I'm listening.

**Doctor**

We have done all we could. If we were successful all well and good. There are no problems. If, however, this final treatment has not achieved the desired results, keep in mind that you can still live a long and fruitful life among people of your own kind. As soon as we discover these results, we'll either release you...or....

(pause)

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**Janet**

Doctor?

**Doctor**

Yes.

**Janet**

If I'm still...if I'm still terribly ugly, is there any other alternative? Could I...could I be put away?

**Doctor**

Under certain circumstances, Miss Tyler...the State does provide for extermination of undesirables. There are many factors to be considered, though, that bear on the decision. Under the circumstances, considering your age...your general physical condition...I doubt very much if we could permit anything but your transfer to a communal group of people with your...your disability.

**Janet**

You'll make me go then?

**Doctor**

That will probably be the case. All right, Miss Tyler. Remain very quiet please. Keep your eyes open.

(pause)

All right, Miss Tyler. Now here comes the last of it. I wish you every good luck!

(long pause)

No change! No change at all!

(Janet raises her head. Her face is *normal*, she is *quite beautiful*.)

She tries to run out of the room.)

**Doctor**

Needle, please. I was afraid of this.  
Turn on the lights!

(As the lights come on the faces of the doctor and nurses are grotesque and deformed. Noses, eyes, mouths, ears, everything, almost as if they were cartoons; almost as if they were caricature drawings come to life.)

Janet runs out of the room.

**Doctor**

(shouts)

Stop that patient! Stop her!

(As she races down empty corridors *all* of the people in the hospital have the same grotesque face, and the leader on the TV too.)

**Leader's Voice**

I say to you now...I say to you now that there is no such thing as a permissive society, because such a society cannot exist! They will scream at you and rant and rave and conjure up some dead and decadent picture of an ancient time when they said that all men are created equal! But to them equality was an equality of opportunity, an equality of status, an equality of aspiration! And then, in what must surely be the pinnacle of insanity, the absolute in inconsistency, they would have had us believe that this equality did not apply to form, to creed. They permitted a polyglot, accidentbred, mongrellike mass of diversification to blanket the earth, to infiltrate and weaken!

(now he shrieks)

Well, we know now that there must be a single purpose! A single norm! A single approach! A single entity of peoples! A single virtue! A single morality! A single frame of reference! A single philosophy of government!

(shrieking again)

We cannot permit...we must not permit the encroaching sentimentality of a past age to weaken our resolve. We must cut out all that is different like a cancerous growth!  
It is essential in this society that we not only have a norm, but that we conform to that norm. Differences weaken us.

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Variations destroy us. An incredible permissiveness to deviation from this norm is what has ended nations and brought them to their knees. Conformity we must worship and hold sacred. Conformity is the key to survival.

(Janet runs into a room, sees someone, and then falls to the floor in fear. Then the doctor enters from another direction and bends down to her soothingly.)

**Doctor**

Don't be afraid, Miss Tyler. This is a representative of the group you're to live with. Oddly enough, you've come right to him. Come on now he won't hurt you.

(Walter Smith steps into the light. He is a youthful, tremendously attractive young man with a normal face.)

**Doctor**

This is Mr. Smith, Janet. Walter Smith. He's in charge of the village group in the north. He'll take you there tonight. You can live among your own kind now.

**Smith**

Miss Tyler?

(pause)

We have a lovely village and wonderful people. I think you'll like it where I'm going to take you. You'll be with your own kind, and after a little while you'd be amazed how little a while you'll feel a sense of great belonging. You'll feel a sense of being loved. And you will be loved, Miss Tyler.

(pause)

Miss Tyler? Would you get your things now? We can leave any time.

**Janet**

Mr. Smith?

**Smith**

Yes?

**Janet**

Why...why are some of us born so ugly?

**Smith**

(smiles sadly)

I don't know, Miss Tyler. I really don't know.

(a pause)

But do you know something? It doesn't really matter. There's an old saying...a very, very old saying. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder. When we leave here...when we go to the village...keep that in mind. Try, Miss Tyler. Say it over and over in your mind. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.

(a pause as he takes her hand)

Come on, now. We'll get your things and we'll leave.

(The two of them walk out together past the silent doctor and nurses.)

**Serling's Voice**

Now the questions that come to mind: Where is this place and when is it? What kind of world, where ugliness is the norm and beauty the deviation from that norm? You want an answer?

The answer is...it doesn't make any difference. Because the old saying happens to be true. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder. In this year or a hundred years hence.

(a pause)

On this planet...or wherever there is human life, perhaps out amongst the stars.

(a pause)

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder. Lesson to be learned...in The Twilight Zone.

FADE TO BLACK.