

# ***The Doctor's Dilemma***

**George Bernard Shaw**

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- The play was first performed on 12 November 1906 at the Royal Court Theatre, London, directed by Harley Granville Barker (who also played Louis Dubedat).
- A film adaptation of the play was made in 1958 ( directed by Anthony Asquith).

# What happens in the play?

## Act I

Act one opens with Doctor Colenso Ridgeon having been recently knighted for developing a cure for tuberculosis. Other doctors arrive at his home/clinic to congratulate him on this honour. Among his congratulators are Sir Patrick Cullem, a distinguished old physician; Mr. Cutler Walpole, a hard-line surgeon; Sir Ralph Bloomfield Bonington, a charismatic society doctor; and Dr. Blenkinsop, a “flabby and shabby” honest government doctor. Their views on illness and cure are incompatible – one man’s cure is another man’s poison.

Meanwhile, Mrs Dubedat, a young woman, has read of Ridgeon’s Knighthood and his medical research, and has come to entreat him to take on her husband’s case (her husband suffers from tuberculosis).

# Act I

She arrives at Ridgeon's home and tells him that her husband is a man of great artistic genius and that only Ridgeon can save him. She shows the doctor a number of her husband's drawings which greatly impress him. He tries to explain to her that he cannot take any more patients: "My laboratory, my staff, and myself are working at full pressure. We are doing our utmost. The treatment is a new one. It takes time, means, and skill; and there is not enough for another case." However, Ridgeon invites Mrs Dubedat and her husband to dine with him and his fellow physicians in a private dinner intended as a celebration of his knighthood where he and his colleagues will determine if her husband is worth saving.

## Act II

Louis Dubedat and his wife Jennifer charm the doctors attending the dinner. But they are sent home so that the husband's tuberculosis does not get worse. Once they have left, the others discover that Louis used his charm to borrow money from them. He even borrowed money from Dr. Blenkinsop who was left with no money to return home.

The doctors are then approached by Minnie Tinwell who works as a maid in the hotel where they were having the dinner; she tells them that Louis was her husband and that she has documents to prove it.

## Act II

Moreover, Dr. Blenkinsop tells his fellow doctors that he suffers from tuberculosis. One of the 10 patients that Dr. Ridgeon has chosen to cure is dead and so now he has room to accommodate one more patient. But who is it going to be? Who is he going to choose?

Ridgeon's dilemma is whether to save Louis Dubedat, the young genius artist who appears to have little honour or his fellow doctor, Dr. Blenkinsop, who is an honourable man but an average doctor.

To complicate matters, Ridgeon has fallen for Dubedat's wife and he desires her for himself.

# Act III

In this act, the group of doctors pay a visit to Dubedat's studio in order to question him and try to determine his character. They are still charmed by the artist who does not deny his marriage to Minnie and says that he and Minnie agreed to end their relationship.

Later, Mrs. Dubedat (Jennifer) is surprised to learn that Bonington is to take on her husband's case and not Ridgeon. She believed after the dinner -in the previous act- that Ridgeon was going to take the case. She fails to convince him and he explains to her that his 10<sup>th</sup> patient is going to be Dr. Blenkinsop who also suffers from tuberculosis. Ridgeon succeeds in convincing her that the best thing to happen to her is for her husband to be left in the care of Bonington.

## Act IV

The treatment does not work, and the artist's situation worsens. As he lays dying, he tells his wife not to mourn him but to be happy and always look beautiful so that people can see it in her eyes and in her looks that she was happily married to him, he entrusts her to display his pictures at the one-man show, and he wishes her to marry again after his death; he tells her "people who have found marriage happy always marry again." The doctors attending the scene are quite sympathetic except for Ridgeon.

Louis dies in Jennifer's arms. After his death she immediately changes into fine clothes as her husband wished and bids farewell to his friends excluding Ridgeon who is not considered or treated as a friend.



## Act V

The last scene of the play takes place at a picture gallery where Louis' works are being displayed in a one-man show put on by Jennifer. Ridgeon arrives early at the gallery to mark some works for purchase. In a conversation with Jennifer, he admits to killing her husband through what he did (refusing to cure him and leaving him to Bonington instead). He also confesses that he did that because he loves her. She is shocked to know that but she shocks him more when she informs him that she has already remarried.