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Abnormal Psychology

1. The Diagnosis

"Sir!" The tweed-suited figure exclaimed as he genuflected to the stately figure atop the throne of books. "The diagnoses are in. I am afraid it is far more dire a situation than we had previously thought.

"Go on, Doctor." He adjusted his round glasses on his narrow, pointed nose.

"The number of people developing abnormal Issues this year has tripled," the Doctor announced, swallowing hard. "We don't have enough Shrinks to keep them under control any more. At this rate..."

"...I assure you we will have this under control," he said. "This is how we have done things for centuries. People know to turn to us for help with their Issues. And as for those who are too prideful to seek our aid, we have agents in every law enforcement agency, business, and school. They are our eyes and ears. We can contain this epidemic as we always have."

"But the Diagnostic Statistical Manual alone has grown in size since its last edition. The sheer variety of Issues, let alone the number of them-"

"Doctor, I assure you once again, we will have this under control."

2. Gerald

"No, Brock! Doctor Erlinn said you had to stay home."

The deadbolt clunked securely into place from the outside of the door before Brock could whine out a plaintive “But, Gerald!” as his roommate imprisoned him in their fourth floor apartment for the duration of the work day. Gerald heaved a sigh, leaned against the cream-colored hallway wall, and took a mental inventory. Wallet? Watch? Briefcase? Laptop? Keys to all of the locks on the front door, the fridge, the liquor cabinet, and all of the windows? All present and accounted for. Gerald was safe to begin his day.

The taxi was waiting at the appropriate time, as always, to whisk him away to the studio. He lamented the extra cost to assure the driver’s promptness and regularity, but Gerald’s unique home situation made a speedy getaway essential for all involved parties. He also portioned out a generous tip to encourage the driver to refrain from asking any questions.

Gerald’s arrival was always well received at the studio. He was blessedly appreciated for his craft, knowing full well that writers frequently disappeared into virtual nothingness once big-name actors began speaking their carefully constructed dialogue. His creative control was so unarguable that Mr. Hauser was the director in name only.

The coffee girl, Nadine, handed him his mint hot chocolate at the door. Vince and Miguel, the aforementioned big-name actors, slapped him on the back in practiced unison. Nadine already had another hot chocolate on hand to replace the one that was now mostly on the floor. Their routine had been well established over the past five seasons.

“Gerald,” Vince said with a smirk, as he flung a thoroughly worn hand towel over the spill. “I know you said that you were open for suggestions if anybody ever had any, but ... well, me and Miguel know that was just for show. But I gotta say it. I had a great idea for season six of *Friend*.”

“Sure, I’ll humor you.” Gerald entertained his actor’s notion as he made his way to his office a little faster than usual.

“All right, get this,” Vince began. Gerald fumbled with his keys, with his suitcase tucked under one arm and very little attention turned to Vince's ramblings. “What if Brock got out?”

Gerald’s suitcase clattered to the floor. “What did you say?”

Vince flinched at the sound of the expensive leather case popping open. “I said, what if Bruce got out? You know. Out of the apartment. Man, that would be wacky.”

3. Brock

“But, Gerald!”

The deadbolt hurriedly scraped its way into position, as it did every morning. Doctor Brock Dangerstein voiced his rhetorical lamentations as he always had. Patent leather dress shoes made a quick tattoo against the linoleum in desperate retreat, as always.

Doctor Brock Dangerstein knew today would be different. Oh yes. Very, very different. He raised an eyebrow toward the kitchen window, and slipped the padlock key out of his shirt pocket.

4. Doctor Erlinn

“Gerald. Gerald. Gerald! Please, slow down.”

Doctor M. Erlinn cupped a hand over the receiver of the telephone and whispered. “It’s really unprofessional of me to do this, you know.”

Mrs. Lafayette opened the frosted door of Doctor Erlinn’s office just a crack, and peered in. Doctor Erlinn raised one index finger in indication for her to wait just a moment. She nodded, and closed the door silently. “Yes, that does mean I will check your apartment. Yes, we both know it’s probably fine, but I also know what this will do to you if you keep worrying about it. I will be billing you for this. All right.”

Dr. Erlinn placed the receiver back on the base of the old beige telephone, and stood from his antique burgundy-upholstered desk chair. He sternly jammed his steel grey fedora onto his head as if he were angered that it had run off.

“Doctor?” Mrs. Lafayette prompted.

“Call my ten o’clock and reschedule him for me, will you? Tell him I accidentally double-booked myself today.” He disappeared through the oaken door of the waiting room.

5. Whitney

“This is the precise reason why we broke up, Gerald.”

Whitney twirled her pen between her thumb and forefinger. Gerald startled into awareness after having stared out the writer's room window for an undocumented number of minutes. "Sorry. I'm just really distracted today."

"Yeah, what was it this time? Think you left the oven on, even though you never cook anything? Worried you put your toothbrush in the cup upside down, and you're thinking about all the germs crawling through the bristles? Can't remember the exact amount to the penny that you owe for your cell phone bill that isn't due for another month? Am I getting close?" Whitney's voice grew in volume with every inquisition.

"Well, I wasn't. But now I am. Thanks."

"You really need to deal with your issues."

Gerald's unused pen sailed across the room as his cell phone startled him into a tachycardic fit of terror. "Hello?"

Whitney watched Gerald's face contort until it was twisted into a mask of pure panic. She chewed her lip. Gerald kept speaking hurriedly to the unknown caller. "Are you serious? I knew this would happen. I knew it. What do we do? How do we... You want me to what? I can't! We're in a session! But I... Okay. I'll try. Bye."

"Who was that?" Whitney asked, hoping Gerald would take the time to catch his breath before answering her.

"Um. Never mind. Look, can we take the day off? I need ... I need a day off. You do, too. Will you go to, uh, lunch with me? Or out to ... buy a ... I don't know. I

just need you to come with me. Right now.” Gerald haphazardly shoved his belongings back into his dented suitcase. “Right now. And we need Miguel.”

“Miguel’s out,” Whitney said. “He said you left him a note telling him to take the day off. Are you having a seizure or something?”

6. Miguel

“Dude, it’s not even lunch time, and you’re totally trashed.”

Doctor Brock Dangerstein plunged another shot of whiskey into another pint of beer. “Still before lunch time? Good. I got a lot of years to make up for. Sounds like I’m getting all my digs in with time to spare.”

Miguel kicked back the final gulp of his own boilermaker. “How many you had so far, Gerald?”

“Dang, man, you think I’m counting?” Brock laughed. “Come on. Let’s take the Jag out and see just how many babes we can cram into it before it’s too heavy to exceed the speed limit.”

“Don’t you think we oughta get it back to the dealership soon? ‘S been a pretty long test drive.”

“Don’t matter. I’m gonna buy this beauty anyway. In my mind, I already own it.” Brock poured himself into the driver’s seat with a drunken fluidity that he thought passed for confidence and style.

“I had no idea you were so freakin’ cool, Gerald. Man! Why haven’t we done this before?”

“Cause I hadn’t busted outta my cage yet!” The engine growled with ill-acquired confidence.

7. Sir Erlinn

“His Issues have grown out of control, Grandfather.” Doctor Erlinn, on bended knee, lowered his eyes to his elder and president of the Board of Shrinks.

“You must bring them down to size,” Sir Erlinn instructed from his throne of textbooks. “Now is your time to triumph over the Issues of mankind. Do our sacred order justice, my boy.”

“But Grandfather, I’ve never had to shrink an Issue of this size or diagnosis before. His diagnosis isn’t even in the latest Diagnostic Manual. He’s entirely impulse-driven. I can’t predict his next move.”

Sir Erlinn raised a liver-spotted, knobby finger to his white bearded chin. “Ah yes,” he mused. “My boy, I feel it is time for me to entrust you with our order’s most sacred treasure. It is the only thing that can bring order to the chaos that your patient’s Issues might cause.”

“Sir, you don’t mean –“

Sir Erlinn produced a single dusty journal from the side of his throne of textbooks. With an aged and frail arm, he extended it to his grandson. “Yes. Sir Jung’s Book of Shadows. This is the only book powerful enough to defeat an Issue of such abnormal psychology. It is the only book capable of defeating an undiagnosed Issue.”

Doctor M. Erlinn bowed low as he accepted the precious tome. "You won't regret this, sir."

8. Issues

"You can't make me go back! I'm free now, and I don't need you!"

Miguel stared, mouth agape, at the two Gerald's. The smell of burnt rubber wafted about his nose from the abrupt stop of the stolen sports car. "Wait – I didn't know you had a twin! What's going on here?! Which one of you is Gerald?"

"I'm Gerald!" the Gerald in the passenger's seat of Whitney's car shouted.

"So am I, technically," Miguel's drinking companion said. "But you can call me Doctor Brock Dangerstein. I'm way cooler than he is. Didn't we have a great time today?"

"Well, yeah, but I threw up like six times at 90 miles per hour. I'll have to live with that regret forever."

"Or you could live with the triumph of it!" Brock announced. "It's all a matter of how you look at it. I mean, how many other people do you know who have puked on that many people at one time?"

Another set of wheels skidded to a halt in the busy intersection. Dr. Erlinn emerged from his thirty-year-old Volvo, clutching an ancient leather journal. "I came as soon as I could!" He shouted. He grappled open the door of the Jaguar and presented the book to Brock. "Do you know what this is?"

“No!” Brock hissed, more of an exclamation of terror than of denial. “Not Sir Jung’s Book of Shadows? You’ll never take me, Shrink!”

Whitney’s arms dropped from the steering wheel to her lap. “Wow. I had no idea that this is what you meant.”

8. Shrinks

“Doctor Erlinn! Gerald! Whitney!”

Miguel fumbled open the door of the Jaguar and tumbled out onto the pavement. He tripped over his own feet on the way to join with his more reasonable friends. Beside them, he turned back to see the Jaguar. He was still sitting in the passenger’s seat. “Hey, how am I over there and also over here?”

“You’ve abandoned your Issues!” Doctor Erlinn said. “This is terrible!”

The shadow copies of Miguel and Gerald departed the stolen car in unison, and stood side-by-side in the intersection, encircled by Whitney and Gerald, Doctor Erlinn and Miguel, and a cavalcade of policemen who were entirely out of their element. They struck a dramatic pose.

Doctor Erlinn approached them, his trench coat billowing in the suddenly manifesting breeze. He thrust the Book of Shadows forward, and opened it to the center page. A bright blue light emanated from its interior.

Gerald and Miguel’s shadows clasped hands and looked to each other as everyone around them seemed to grow in size. “We had a good run,” Brock said. A gargantuan hand plucked him up by the shirt collar and lifted him into the heavens.

Another grasped Miguel's copy. As they were gingerly inserted back in to the bodies of their original sources, all went black and quiet.

"That was super weird," Whitney said, staring at Dr. Erlinn and his curious book.

"That's why they call it abnormal psychology," he explained.