

DR. GATEKEEPER
Ezra Endamne-Wamba

© 2024 by Ezra Endamne-Wamba
650-445-8765
e.endamnewamba@gmail.com

CHARACTERS

DR. G. Psychiatrist. Lives and dies by the DSM.

PATIENT. A patient. College student. Doing their best.

SETTING

Dr. G's office.

A nightmarish rendition of a psychiatrist's office. On one side of the stage we have the desk, perfectly tidy. On the sides and below it, rows and rows and rows of color-coded file cabinets. Many impressive looking degrees litter the wall. A bookshelf filled exclusively with the same copy of the DSM-V. On the other, the patient's seat. It's far too small. Various stim toys blown up to several feet tall are strewn across the floor.

DR. G is immaculately dressed in tastefully minimalistic designer clothes. PATIENT is in college and doesn't have a lot of money to spare. They're dressed like they're doing their best.

A projector screen above the actors' heads. Projection: SESSION #91

Lights up. The PATIENT hurries onstage and gingerly takes a seat.

DR. G
You're late.

PATIENT
Yes, I'm so sorry Dr. G. My time blindness got the best of me today.

DR. G says nothing and scribbles a note into her notepad. She looks up. She says nothing. She stares at PATIENT. Still nothing. PATIENT grows increasingly uncomfortable.

DR. G
Adequate amount of eye contact. You're improving.

She resumes taking notes. PATIENT sits nervously in their chair.

DR. G
So, how are you?

PATIENT
I've been okay. School's been tough, but I'm getting by.

DR. G
I see.

PATIENT
Actually, I've been feeling a little moody these past few weeks.

DR. G
The weather has been a bit dull.

PATIENT
Yeah, I haven't been getting outside as much as I'd like.

DR. G

Have you thought about getting a light therapy lamp?

PATIENT

Sure, yeah. I'd like to, but I can't really afford one right now.

DR. G

It's simple. You can get your insurance to cover it.

PATIENT

That's great, how can I do that?

DR. G

Well, you need to be diagnosed.

PATIENT

Okay, can you diagnose me?

A beat.

DR. G

No.

PATIENT

No?

DR. G

With the way you're presenting right now, no.

PATIENT

I don't understand.

DR. G

Allow me to explain.

She gets up and starts to rifle through the file cabinets.

You see, to be diagnosed you have to meet a specific set of criteria, as outlined by the DSM. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders.

PATIENT

I know.

DR. G

Don't interrupt. With the way you're presenting in my office today, I couldn't possibly diagnose you with Seasonal Affective Disorder. No, absolutely not.

PATIENT

But I just said--

DR. G

I said don't interrupt. I take the rules very seriously. If you don't meet the criteria, you don't get a diagnosis. And if my memory serves... yes, right here. Two years ago you said you quote "tend to get a little sad in the winter, like in December."

She stares at PATIENT expectantly. Right before they're about to speak, she scoffs and continues.

DR. G

The criteria very clearly states you have to have symptoms of depression in January and February. Otherwise, you must have something else.

PATIENT looks at the shelf containing the DSM-V.

PATIENT

Can you double check?

DR. G

Do you really think I wouldn't remember something so crucial?

PATIENT

I would just prefer it if--

DR. G

You don't have Seasonal Affective Disorder. I would know.

PATIENT

... So... what do I have then?

DR. G

I don't know.

They stare at each other.

PATIENT

I don't care about whether or not I have Seasonal Affective Disorder, I just want the lamp. Can you help me with that?

DR. G

They may cover it without a diagnosis. You just have to call and explain. But since it's already the end of December, they probably won't do it in time for this season.

PATIENT

Okay... so what exactly should I tell them?

DR. G

Just call and explain.

PATIENT

Explain that I want a light therapy lamp for my Seasonal Affective Disorder that I'm not diagnosed with?

DR. G

That you don't have.

They stare at each other some more. PATIENT stands up and exits through the door. A moment passes. They re-renter. Projection on a screen: SESSION #38

PATIENT

Yeah.. I think I get some seasonal depression.

DR. G

Tell me more.

PATIENT

I get really sad and unmotivated when it's cold and gray and I don't see a lot of sun.

DR. G

Uh huh... When specifically?

Projection: PATIENT SHOWS SYMPTOMS OF TIME BLINDNESS, IE A DIFFICULTY WITH ESTIMATING AND JUDGING TIME.

PATIENT

Um. Well I'm not really sure... I dunno... maybe December ish?

DR. G nods and takes notes.

DR. G

There's no such thing as seasonal depression.

PATIENT
Oh-- okay.

DR. G
What you would be describing would be called Seasonal Affective Disorder.

PATIENT
Okay.

DR. G
But that's not what you have.

PATIENT
Okay?

DR. G
For that, it would have to be in January or February. But you said December.

PATIENT *(to the audience)*
I said December.

The patient exits through the door. A moment passes. They re-enter. Projection: SESSION #91

PATIENT *(mumbling)*
I was only estimating.

DR. G
What was that?

PATIENT
I was only estimating... I get depressed in January too.

DR. G
Oh, I see how it is. So you think you can change your story up two years later?

DR. G takes a very pointed note.

PATIENT
No, I didn't change my story.

DR. G
But you did. It says very clearly right here--

PATIENT

I know what I said, it's not what I meant.

DR. G scribbles a note, sighs exasperatedly, and flunks her notepad onto her lap.

DR. G

Can you *please* work with me here?

PATIENT

I *am* working with you! I don't have any choice but to fucking work with you!

DR. G raises an eyebrow.

DR. G

Do you know what Oppositional Defiant Disorder is?

PATIENT

No...

DR. G

It is an utter inability to respect authority.

PATIENT

That's not a disorder.

DR. G

It's in the DSM. Remind me when your birthday is?

PATIENT

I turned 18 two months ago.

DR. G

Oh, right. You're an adult.

PATIENT

Yeah?

DR. G

Nevermind then. It's only applicable to children.

PATIENT *(to audience)*

Crazy the difference two months make.

DR. G

In any case, how are your meds? Is the dose working for you?

PATIENT

Yes.

DR. G

And you've been taking them exactly as I directed you to?

PATIENT

Yes.

DR. G

How many pills do you have left?

PATIENT

13.

(to the audience)

She quizzes me every time.

DR. G

Perfect. Well. That's all. I'll see you in two weeks.

PATIENT

Thank you, Dr. G.

PATIENT exits. A few seconds later, they re-enter the same way they did at the start of the scene. Projection: SESSION #92

DR. G

You're late.

PATIENT

Yes, I'm so sorry Dr. G...

End of play.