**Episode 2: Institutionalized**

“Hi Tiffany. Come on in.”

“It’s nice to meet you Dr. Way. Dr. Scott told me that he would connect with you about the work I’ve done with him.”

“Yes. We had a chance to speak and I think I have a good understanding of your condition. You two have done a lot of good work. You’ve come a long way. There’s still more work to be done, though. We only have a short amount of time with each other before Dr. Scott comes back from leave, so I’m going to be extra hard on you.”

“I noticed that you have three chairs—a couch, a recliner, and an office chair. I chose to sit in the office chair. What does that say about me?”

“This is not a test. It’s up to you as to which one you prefer. It doesn’t say anything about you.”

“You have a hole in your shirt sleeve.”

“Tiffany, focus.”

“Where is your clock?”

“Why? It’s behind you.”

“I can’t see it.”

“I know.”

“I’ve heard that psychiatrists don’t decorate their offices because they don’t want the patient to infer anything about them.”

“You’re off track. This isn’t about me, it’s about you. Focus, Tiffany.”

“Dr. Scott said that we weren’t going to put a label on my condition because my case is complicated. What do you think I have?”

“If you came to me at the beginning, I would have institutionalized you right away.”

“I have been in the hospital—lots of times.”

“Did it help you?”

“The first time I was in the hospital, I was put in the eating disorders unit because they ran out of room in their adult, acute wing. They wouldn’t let me eat with the other patients; I had to sit at my own table. I found out that the eating disorders patients were locked out of their bathrooms so they couldn’t throw up. Every time they had to go to the restroom, they had to get a nurse to unlock the door. They weren’t allowed to pace the halls or even stand up because standing burned calories. Every day they had to meet with a nutritionist and plan their meals. One man, who was six feet tall, weighed only 90 pounds and he had to eat 3,000 calories a day in the hospital.”

“How did it feel to be in the eating disorders unit?”

“One girl, an aspiring artist, said that her illness was about being perfect. That stuck out to me and I remembered that.”

“Do you feel that you have to be perfect?”

“Well, one of the other patients in my unit said that her mantra was, ‘I am enough.’” That stuck out to me. She could only see out of one eye, but “I am enough,” is what she tells herself every day. Still, I wondered how she ended up in the hospital with a mantra like that.”

“There are many, many reasons why people end up in the hospital.”

“Eating my meals, by myself, at the table next to these eating disorder patients, watching them eat, made me want to lose weight. I guess, I know what it’s like to be fat. I gained 40 pounds from my anti-psychotic medication and I tried to starve myself—even throw up—to try and shed those pounds. Dr. Scott said he had a patient who gained 50 pounds in just three months from his medication. That scared me. I tried every diet in the world—eating only protein, controlling my calories. I went to see a nutritionist who calculated exactly how many calories I needed to eat in order to lose weight given my activity level. She literally pulled out a calculator. I told her I was swimming an hour a day—five days a week. She asked me how fast I swam. I said I swam slowly. She looked up exactly how many calories I expended every day and asked me what my target weight was. I said, 127 pounds. Then she calculated that I needed to eat 1,500 calories a day if I wanted to get to my target weight. She gave me examples of meals I could eat that were low in calories. She taught me to read nutrition labels. Foods with the least number of ingredients were the best. She told me what brand of yogurt to eat, which supermarkets had that brand, and gave me a recipe for granola. Well, I gained ten pounds under her watch, so I stopped seeing her.”

“You look fine now.”

“Once I changed drugs, I slimmed down automatically. But, I’m still very careful of how many calories I eat. I feel like I’ve been on a diet all my life. Dr. Scott said that it’s up to the psychiatrist to monitor his patient’s weight. For those patients who gain a ton of weight, he wonders, ‘Where was the doctor’?”

“What else?”

“You aren’t saying too much Dr. Way.”

“That’s my style.”

“Your style is not to say anything?”

“Yes.”

“I’ve heard that the best psychiatrist is one where you have a good rapport. How will we have a good rapport if you don’t say anything?”

“Focus, Tiffany.”

“Well, I ran away from home to Las Vegas twice. I wanted to be in Sin City because it felt like a place where you could make mistakes. I met Satan there and he made hell seem like a good option. But, I ended up in the hospital both times I landed in Vegas. I have to say that Monte Vista is all about cigarettes. There are people who show up with two cartons of cigarettes and share them with the other patients. It’s how patients bond. The psychologist there, who had long blond hair, a ton of jewelry, and a history in alcohol abuse, took me to the ATM machine in the lobby so I could take out money for him to buy me cigarettes. He also donated cigarettes to the unit. Also, the hospital rolled their own cigarettes. They called them the Monte Vista specials. They rolled unfiltered cigarettes for the patients. One of the patients taught me how to pick up cigarette butts that were smoked to the filter and fit the Monte Vista specials in the filtered butts and make my own filtered cigarettes.”

“This is what you learned from the hospital?”

“The cigarette culture was telling of the patients. I was never able to finish my cigarettes, so I always gave my half-smoked cigarette to other patients. One of the patients, when he was discharged, had his girlfriend give me four cigarettes in a small envelope. He said thank you for sharing your cigarettes with me and here are some cigarettes so you don’t have to ask anyone else for them.”

“What else?”

“There was one person who I didn’t share my cigarettes with. My roommate in the hospital was pregnant and smoking. She asked if she could share my cigarette and I told her I was uncomfortable sharing with her. She then asked to transfer rooms because she said I was too messy and she wasn’t used to living in such dirty conditions.”

“Yes.”

“They put me in the drug and alcohol unit when I first arrived. I loved the drug and alcohol unit because they had a little patio where all of us could go and smoke whenever we wanted to. They then transferred me to the adult, acute unit and I hated it. There was a smoking patio there, but it was locked for most of the day. Time passed according to the scheduled patio breaks. The feeling there was frenetic. There was something exceptional about the patients in there, but they were so sick, they couldn’t harness their energy for something commonly productive. The person I remember the most in my stay at Monte Vista was the young man who taught me how to filter my cigarettes. He got into a lot of fights during his stay at the hospital. But, there was something special about him. Even when he was fighting, his reaction time was phenomenal and he knew exactly what he wanted to say. I was in the common room with him one morning before everyone else woke up. They had just set the coffee out and we were watching television together. The television program was on the economy. He wanted to discuss the show and he had such an intuitive understanding of economics and finance that I was immediately intimidated. I didn’t want to tell him that his handle on economics was better than mine even though I was majoring in it. He said that, in school, he could always anticipate the answer to his teacher’s questions. He asked if I could relate and I muffled my response—not wanting to admit that I had never experienced that kind of raw intellectual firepower. He got into so much trouble in the hospital, but he and I bonded. He looked into my eyes and said that it was clear that I had gone through something. He could see something in my eyes. Later that day, we were smoking when he saw the team of doctors come into the patio and he said, ‘Hurry, the doctors are coming, act crazy.’ I smiled because I knew that we had all learned how to act normal or crazy on demand.”

“That’s our time for today. Any last thoughts?”

“I didn’t even see you look at the clock.”

"Should we talk about medication before you leave? I want to start you on some anti-depressants.”

“Why? What did I say?”