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THE FUNNY PAGES | TRUE-LIFE TALES

Celebrity Crazy

By SHALOM AUSLANDER

I have this problem with anger. I don't get into fights or anything — it's all painfully self-directed — but my incessant stream of furious unconsciousness was beginning to get me down. I decided to find a shrink, and was lucky enough to find one I liked.

I'm not doing the couch thing," I said.

"You don't have to do the couch thing," he said.

"Good. Because I'm not."

"That's fine."

"Should I do the couch thing?"

It was all going well until he began mentioning a few celebrity clients of his — not by name, of course, and only by way of clinical example: the train wreck of a rock star as an example of insecurity, the bashful Best Actress as an example of low self-esteem.

Cool, I thought. I'm as crazy as a rock star.

This wasn't just some vulgar depression. Mine weren't Joe Average issues. I was celebrity crazy. I was Oscar insane. I was Hollywood unhinged. I was dysfunctional enough to be brilliant. I was manic enough to be gifted. I was damaged enough to be profound. I was feeling better already.

It didn't last.

"Do you have anything Monday?" I asked.

"Nothing on Monday, how's Thursday?" he said.

"You didn't have anything last Monday, either."

"Monday's busy. How's Thursday?"

I was the dullest part of his week. How could my problems compare to Train Wreck's or Insecure Best Actress's? What's a little Jewish guilt compared with Train Wreck's heroin-fueled sex orgies? Why would he want to see me on Monday afternoon when he can start the week with Gorgeous Supermodel Sublimating

Her Emotional Needs Into Wanton Sexual Activity?

“I can’t do Thursday, Doc.”

“Gosh, I’m kind of booked up the rest of the week. . . .”

What was it, sweeps week? Was it the Emmys? What’s got these celebrities so worked up? Best Actress having a bit of stage fright? Not so easy when it’s live, is it, Precious? Well, every day is live for me, all right? Every day is live!

And so, each week, I padded. I embellished. I lied.

“Man, the amount of weed I burned through this weekend.”

“Mmm hmm.”

“Marijuana.”

“Mmm.”

“Canadian, Doc. Top shelf.”

“I’m sure she didn’t mean it.”

“What?”

“Huh?”

“Were you . . . were you just sleeping?”

“Don’t be ridiculous.”

To heck with him, I thought. I began to hold out. Lips pursed, arms crossed, I leaned back on his couch and examined nothing.

No, everything’s good. I’m fine, really. Nope, Mother’s good, too.

Long periods of high-priced silence were interrupted by brief periods of high-priced inanity: “Yeah, you know, Doc, I went with the Nikes. I liked the Pumas, but they’re so ‘Look at me, I’m not buying Nikes,’ it’s almost worse than buying Nikes in the first place, don’t you think?”

At the end of one particularly vacuous session in May, I put off making another appointment and lied, saying I’d call him the following week. I was halfway out the office door when he invited me to his house in the Hamptons for a Sunday barbecue with his family.

“We’d really love to have you.”

I . . . I'd never been so moved. I felt both incredibly special and monumentally foolish, and I accepted his invitation immediately.

There were at least 70 people there when I arrived, and more were on their way. There was a chartered bus. And a band. And a caterer. I found my shrink out back by the pool, and he took me on a tour of the house, the walls of which were covered with snapshots: my shrink and Train Wreck, my shrink and Best Actress, my shrink and Nympho Supermodel.

Maybe it was the four-hour drive. Maybe I'd had too much sun. Maybe I'd had too many deviled eggs. Whatever the cause, I lost it. I told him how second-rate I felt, how angry I was that I'd opened myself to him only to be neglected in favor of some transparent, adolescent Hollywood personalities. And then he put his arm around me. And he hugged me. And he told me how honored he was to be treating me, and how privileged he felt for the opportunity to get to know me, and how he wouldn't wish fame on anyone. He led me into his office, and he showed me a book manuscript he'd recently completed about the trouble with celebrity, and celebrities, and he invited me to be the first to read it.

It was going to be a long drive back to the city. I sat in my car for a few moments before setting out, flipping through his manuscript and feeling foolish once again. He respected me — not just as a patient but as a fellow writer. I had to laugh at myself. Why did I take it all so personally? Why was I so paranoid? And, wait a minute, why — why — does he thank Train Wreck at the end of this book? I don't understand. Train Wreck gets a thanks? For what? Urinating in humanity's gene pool? Thanks, Train Wreck! You know what I got? Deviled eggs. And sunburn.

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