

NORMAL SHNORMAL  
by  
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PLACE: A doctor's waiting room

AT RISE: MRS. MENDELBAUM, a 70-ish woman sits in a doctor's waiting room. After a moment, a harried DR. WILSON (40) rushes in with some paperwork.

DR. WILSON

Mrs. Mendelbaum, good to see you here again.

MRS. MENDELBAUM

At my age, it's good to be seen anywhere. (beat) You seem out of breath. You've been running a race or something?

DR. WILSON

No, no, just one of those busy days. All right, let's see...I've got your test results here.

MRS. MENDELBAUM

Oh boy, here it comes.

DR. WILSON

No, no, nothing to worry about. That's why we ask our patients to come in once a year for a physical. Totally routine.

MRS. MENDELBAUM

So it was a normal thing to have me come in?

DR. WILSON

Absolutely normal.

MRS. MENDELBAUM

Thank God. I've been having such *shpilkes*.

DR. WILSON

Well, let's just hope it's not catching. Heh heh. (She stares at him.) Ahem. OK, let's take a look here. (He reads the readout.) Uh huh...uh huh...blood pressure 140 over 88...

MRS. MENDELBAUM

That's normal?

DR. WILSON

In the realm of normal for a woman your age.

MRS. MENDELBAUM

A realm? A realm I'm in and I'm not supposed to worry?

DR. WILSON

No. It's fine, really. Now I see your blood sugar is a little high...

MRS. MENDELBAUM

So it's not normal?

DR. WILSON

Well, it's not like you're diabetic.

MRS. MENDELBAUM

Oy! I knew it. Here comes the diabetes.

DR. WILSON

No, no, not necessarily. But the numbers are getting close to pre-diabetic, so you should probably cut back on your carbs.

MRS. MENDELBAUM

My what?

DR. WILSON

Carbohydrates. Things like bread, bagels, sugar...

MRS. MENDELBAUM

Oh good. Why not just kill me now?

DR. WILSON

No, just cut back; you don't have to give them up completely. We can give you a list of healthy foods for you to focus on instead. OK, your HDL and LDL appear to be in the range of normal...

MRS. MENDELBAUM

Huh. First I'm in a realm now I'm in a range.

DR. WILSON

I mean as long as you're between acceptable numbers, you're fine.

MRS. MENDELBAUM

I'm in between? Can't you just pick one for me?

DR. WILSON

No. Um...it's more like a statistical norm. Like an average.

MRS. MENDELBAUM

So I'm just average you're telling me.

DR. WILSON

No, there's no such thing as an average person; it's just statistics. Almost everyone falls on one side or the other.

MRS. MENDELBAUM

Which side am I falling down on?

DR. WILSON

You're not falling! Look...say there were two men in a room; one of them is six feet tall, the other is five feet tall. So the statistical norm would be five foot, six. That would be considered the norm.

MRS. MENDELBAUM

So if you're not five foot six you're not normal?

DR. WILSON

No! See...

MRS. MENDELBAUM

Because my late husband Artie I'm guessing was five foot eight. He would not have been happy to find out he wasn't normal.

DR. WILSON

I'm sure he was perfectly normal.

MRS. MENDELBAUM

Ha! With that snoring? You should've tried sleeping with him. Actually you shouldn't because then you wouldn't be normal.

DR. WILSON

We in the medical profession don't consider homosexuality to be quote/unquote abnormal.

MRS. MENDELBAUM

No? All right, fine. Your private life is your business, I guess.

DR. WILSON

Mrs. Mendelbaum, not that it really matters, but I'm married with two kids.

MRS. MENDELBAUM

Oh that's nice. Just the two? Is that the normal number these days?

DR. WILSON

I don't know. They used to say the average number was 2.5.

MRS. MENDELBAUM

Point five? As in a half? Who has half a child?

DR. WILSON

Again, just a statistical norm.

MRS. MENDELBAUM

At least you're a doctor. Two people come in with half a child each, maybe you could perform an operation of some kind...put them together...have one normal child...

DR. WILSON

I don't think that's possible.

MRS. MENDELBAUM

Probably not. So why were those two men alone in the room?

DR. WILSON

What?

MRS. MENDELBAUM

The tall one and the short one. They were in there alone together because they were gay?

DR. WILSON

No, no, that was just...

MRS. MENDELBAUM

Because if they're not gay, they should go out of that room and meet some nice girls.

DR. WILSON

Yes, that's probably true. But you see...

MRS. MENDELBAUM

That's the problem with the young people today. All the beep beep beep and boop boop boop with their phones and their internets. They keep to themselves too much; they don't get out and meet other people. It's not normal how they're acting. That's not how things used to be in my day, let me tell you. We used to socialize.

DR. WILSON

Well, those are certainly words to live by. (He checks his watch) All right, well I've explained all your readouts now. So...if you don't have any questions...?

MRS. MENDELBAUM

You're saying there's nothing on that paper that says 'abnormal'.

DR. WILSON

No. Abnormal would mean a test came back positive; like if we did an X-ray and found evidence of say, breast cancer, then...

MRS. MENDELBAUM

I knew it! I knew I had the breast cancer.

DR. WILSON

What? No!

MRS. MENDELBAUM

I told you about the lump I felt over here. See? I knew it!

DR. WILSON

Mrs. Mendelbaum, what you're feeling there is your rib.

MRS. MENDELBAUM

That's a rib? And that's normal?

DR. WILSON

Having ribs? Yes, very normal.

MRS. MENDELBAUM

Huh. That's a rib. Go figure. (beat) I had some the other night.

DR. WILSON

What?

MRS. MENDELBAUM

Ribs. They were delicious.

DR. WILSON

Oh. Yes. Nothing like some good old-fashioned pork ribs.

(Mrs. Mendelbaum stares at him.)

MRS. MENDELBAUM

You're being a comedian with the pork?

DR. WILSON

Sorry! Beef. Beef ribs of course.

MRS. MENDELBAUM

I had them at Langer's. Have you ever been?

DR. WILSON

No I don't think so.

MRS. MENDELBAUM

You should go. The size of the food on the plates! They're not normal they're so huge. Artie used to try to finish the whole thing; I would say, "Stop. This'll make a nice sandwich tomorrow." Did he listen? No. Probably what killed him.

DR. WILSON

Well, I guess that's why they have doggy bags.

MRS. MENDELBAUM

Sure they have them. But who would give such a nice piece of meat to a dog, I don't know.

DR. WILSON

All right. Well, I have other patients I need to get to, so...

MRS. MENDELBAUM

I had a dog once, Daisy, when I was growing up. She would eat garbage and be perfectly happy.

DR. WILSON

Well, I guess that's normal.

MRS. MENDELBAUM

Normal? You call eating garbage normal?

DR. WILSON

No, I mean it's normal behavior for a dog to want to do something like that. You know, like drinking out of the toilet. But of course, you shouldn't let them.

MRS. MENDELBAUM

I don't care how thirsty I got, I would *plotz* before I drank from a toilet.

DR. WILSON

Well, good. Not your *plotzing*, but, you know... (beat) Anyway, like I said, I should really get to my other patients.

MRS. MENDELBAUM

How many people do you see in a day?

DR. WILSON

Oh, quite a few. Sometimes as many as fifty.

MRS. MENDELBAUM

So many? And that's a normal day?

DR. WILSON

Well, there are a lot of people who come in for their check-ups just like you.

MRS. MENDELBAUM

You're so busy. Maybe a little too busy. But at least your days are filled.

DR. WILSON

Yes...really filled. (beat) So, I'll just see you out now...

MRS. MENDELBAUM

Fine. Just push me out the door.

(She stands.)

DR. WILSON

No, no one's pushing. It's just that we're done now and...

MRS. MENDELBAUM

You said you have two children. They're young now?

DR. WILSON

Yes, twelve and ten.

MRS. MENDELBAUM

That's nice. Those are nice ages. So are they like the others nowadays? Always with the computer and the videos?

DR. WILSON

Oh yes. But I restrict the amount of time every day that they spend glued to their screens.

MRS. MENDELBAUM

And why is that?

DR. WILSON

Well, you know...make sure they get outside...see their friends face to face...

MRS. MENDELBAUM

And spend enough time talking. Like a doctor should with his patients.

DR. WILSON

Well...yes.

MRS. MENDELBAUM

Good. Enjoy the children while you can...because in ten years or so, they'll be moving out. Trust me. Sometimes across the country they go. And at first, sure, they come back and visit. Then, it's just a phone call once in a while. Then...not so many.



## MRS. MENDELBAUM (CONT'D)

That's what's normal when you get old. Friends...they go too. The memorial services I've been to; four already this year. First your kids go, then you lose your spouse, then your friends. Of course, some of them don't even live to be that old, like me; they die young. Who knows why. (beat) Well, maybe not you. Maybe you'll be one of the lucky ones. All right. God willing, I'll see you again next year

(She starts for the door again, than stops.)

You know, maybe you should follow your own doctor's orders.

## DR. WILSON

What do you mean?

## MRS. MENDELBAUM

All the time, you're running from patient to patient. Probably here all hours. You should enjoy while you can. Don't be like those two men in the room; maybe make time to socialize a little. Spending time with others...it's a blessing. Believe me, I wish I'd had more time with everyone, even the ones I wasn't too crazy about. Well, too late now, hm? (beat) Oh, don't listen to me; it's your life. You decide how you want to live it. God bless.

(She starts to exit.)

## DR. WILSON

Wait, Mrs. Mendelbaum. Um...out of curiosity, where are you off to now?

## MRS. MENDELBAUM

Oh, just home. Have some leftover soup; watch some TV. The normal thing. Pretty exciting, eh?

(He looks at his watch.)

## DR. WILSON

You know...I think I actually have a few more minutes. Have a seat.

## MRS. MENDELBAUM

You're sure?

## DR. WILSON

Sure I am. Mr. Cartwright in the next room just needs me to check his corns and to tell you the truth...I'm really not looking forward to it.

(She comes back in and sits down.)

## MRS. MENDELBAUM

Who would?! Touching stranger's feet? *Feh*, I couldn't do it.

DR. WILSON

So what else is going on with you?

MRS. MENDELBAUM

What else? Did I tell you about Mrs. Klein next door? The outfits this woman wears! Helen Keller could pick out better clothes! So I see her the other day... she's got her dog dressed up in a matching outfit!

DR. WILSON

No! That doesn't sound normal.

MRS. MENDELBAUM

Normal? Ha! Of course it's not! You want to hear more? I got plenty more. Make yourself comfortable; we'll be here for a while.

(Wilson sits opposite her and pats her hand.)

DR. WILSON

No worries; I've got all the time you need.

FADE OUT

THE END