

Stupid little boy

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A few weeks ago I received a call from a client, whose name sounded familiar. He said he wanted to come for a single session, and I agreed. He told me he is a psychiatrist, whose just been given a position as head of an important ward.

I was slightly nervous (slightly, well here's an understatement for you).

And he sat on the chair, and said:

"I want to tell you something. I want to tell you something and I want you to listen to me, and I want you to not say anything until I'm finished, and when I finish I will ask you a question, and I want a straight, no bullshit answer. Can you do that?"

"Sure," I said, "shoot".

The following monologue is not a verbatim extract – he was too articulate, too complicated for my English. I had to keep reminding him that English was not my first language. I had to remind him to talk to me as if I was a stupid little therapist, and so – when he remembered – he did.

"I was born to a working class parents, in quite a poor neighbourhood, and I was dyslexic. I am the youngest of four, and the stupidest of them all. I always knew I was a stupid little boy, because my dad told me that. And my mum told me that. And when I went to primary school all the teacher kept reminding me know that I was a stupid little boy and the kids didn't let me forget for a moment that I was a stupid little boy."

"And so, when one day one teacher told me that I'd be better off helping my dad at his business, I left school and went to help my dad. But that wasn't good enough, because I was too stupid to do maths. And I was too stupid to calculate, and made many mistakes and received a lot of abuse from my dad until I had enough and I decided to prove them all wrong."

"So I took two jobs in delivery and took private tutoring and worked so hard, until I got my O levels. These stupid teachers didn't notice just how stupid I was. And I think that they were probably as stupid as me, because nobody found out the truth about me all these years. But I still felt stupid, and my dad told me that I was a stupid little boy; and my mum told me that I was a stupid little boy; and my brothers told me that I was a stupid little boy."

"And I decided to prove them all wrong, and went and studied harder and took my A levels. And I probably had to work twice as hard as any of the other students, because I was so stupid – but the one thing I do know how to do is working hard! And when I got my A levels I was shocked that these stupid teachers didn't notice just how stupid I was and that nobody found out the truth about me. But I still felt stupid, and my dad told me that I was a stupid little boy; and my mum told me that I was a stupid little boy, and my brothers told me that I was a stupid little boy."

"So I thought, what would really show them that I wasn't so stupid, and I decided that being a doctor will prove them all wrong. And I prepared so well for the interview

and the entry exams, that all these clever people around me never even noticed how I fooled them all, and that I was in fact nothing but a stupid little boy. And I made it in. I probably had to work twice as hard as any of my colleagues, because I was stupider than them, but that's the one thing I really know how to do, and so I worked hard and fooled them all. And all these clever people were probably too stupid to notice who I actually was, and to that day nobody really found out about me. And for two days I actually felt good about myself, I felt that I'm actually not that stupid. But then I was reminded of the truth by my dad who told me that I was still a stupid little boy; and my mum who told me that I was still a stupid little boy, and my brothers who told me that I was still a stupid little boy."

"And you can imagine the rest of the story, I studied to become a psychiatrist, and I became quite successful because the people around me were either too stupid to notice who I really was, or too crazy to care, and I've been promoted to this job and I'm surrounded by brilliant people who probably have some defect in them because they just fail to see the obvious."

"But that's not why I came here. In work I already know how to pull it together; in work I already know how to not get caught. I came here because I met a woman. And I fell in love with her, and because I became such a master of disguise and because I worked so hard in anything I do, she fell in love with me too, and she moved in and we are thinking of getting married. But since we met I cannot sleep. She is definitely not stupid, and I cannot sleep. I cannot sleep because I'm afraid that I might say something in my sleep that would reveal the entire truth to her, and then she would leave me. And in my heart of hearts I know it is inevitable, and that one day – sooner or later – she would find that I'm nothing but a stupid little boy and would leave me. And I have had to deal with a lot of difficulties in my life, and a lot of rejections, but I don't think I could take this one too. So what I wanted to ask you is this: have I been fooling myself? Have I got any chance of staying with her without her noticing, am I still just a stupid little boy?"

So I looked at him, and said: "let me tell you a story"

"When Albert Einstein was in secondary school, his teacher approached him and said: 'Albert, you might as well go home and help your daddy because you will amount to nothing'. And Albert went home, and felt that he had been caught, and spent his entire life proving everybody wrong. And he worked really hard to prove people wrong, but even his greatest ideas weren't the fruits of his own conscious efforts but rather came to him in his sleep, or when he was daydreaming, or when he was doodling or listening to music. His unconscious might have been clever, but he wasn't anything but a stupid little boy. And if Albert Einstein were here, sitting in this chair just like you and asking me the same question I would say to him:

Yes, you are still just a stupid little boy. But aren't I glad you spent all these years trying to prove everybody wrong! Now, isn't it time to let go?"