

Mind Over Matter
by Gwyneth Jones Nicholson

CHARACTERS

Marcie - 40's, working mother and nervous nellie

Ginger - any age, a perky spa receptionist

Mr. Madison - 30's, a successful money manager

(MARCIE walks in and goes to the counter where GINGER is standing.)

GINGER:

Welcome to the Mind Over Matter Day Spa and Rejuvenation Clinic. My name is Ginger. How can I help you today?

MARCIE:

Hi, um, I was wondering if you have walk-in appointments? I could use a little self-care.

GINGER:

Absolutely! Is this your first time here...?

MARCIE

Marcie.

GINGER

Marcie. Here's a list of the services we provide. You'll notice that we do not offer the same treatments you'll find elsewhere – no facials, pedicures, or waxing here.

MARCIE:

Oh. I'm sorry, I thought this was a spa.

GINGER:

It is! But we focus on true self-care, rather than tending to the outer façade. We help free our clients from worry, stress, and emotional turmoil.

MARCIE:

So...is it like therapy?

GINGER:

Heavens, no! Our cracker-jack team of brain scientists have found the key to inner peace and tranquility — we help our clients recover from the crushing anxiety of modern life through a simple procedure carried out right here in our luxury spa.

MARCIE:

That sounds amazing! I hate the crushing anxiety of modern life.

GINGER:

Tell me what's troubling you, Marcie, and I'll see if we may have a treatment to suit your needs.

MARCIE:

Gosh, there's so, so much. I'm worried about my job, my husband's job, the economy, politics, my kids, my future potential grandkids —

GINGER:

Why are you worried about grandchildren who don't yet exist?

MARCIE:

(Building to a wail.)

Well, you know — climate change. It just feels like we're running out of time. Those pictures of melting icebergs and emaciated polar bears, the endless heat of summer, the unceasing, unbearable arctic chill of winter and the blizzards, typhoons, and hurricanes that wipe out whole villages and the ocean's full of plastic and California's on fire and there's not enough water and we're all gonna die.

GINGER

There, there! It's no wonder you feel so stressed. But Marcie, this is your lucky day.

MARCIE:

It is?

GINGER:

Yes, we have the perfect spa package to suit your needs. You are a busy, modern woman, Marce! You shouldn't have to concern yourself with "global warming" when you already have so much on your plate.

MARCIE:

Well, it's a pretty valid concern...

GINGER:

(Ignoring her.) The Platinum package should be just the ticket. Our cracker-jack team of brain scientists will, through a simple, mostly painless procedure, give you the serenity you've only dreamed of. Following the treatment, those stuffy, scientific articles will read like celebrity gossip. And those sad pictures of emaciated polar bears and wiped-out villages?

MARCIE:

Yes?

GINGER:

Your brain will register the images as kittens frolicking through a field of wildflowers. In fact, you'll forget that climate change even exists!

MARCIE:

That sounds amazing!

GINGER:

It is! And more importantly, it's comforting. Why worry yourself about the affairs of the world? I want to give you permission, Marcie, to release yourself from the bondage of caring too much.

MARCIE:

I really do care too much sometimes. And it all feels so pointless, you know?

GINGER:

I do know. And with this three-for-one package, you'll have the peace of mind knowing that you can come back for a refresher whenever you need to.

MARCIE:

A refresher? So...this isn't permanent?

(MR. MADISON enters, waiting for his turn. He is impatient, looking at his watch.)

GINGER:

Oh, it's permanent. But, as you know, climate change keeps getting worse and worse. And for some reason, news outlets insist on bumming us all out every few weeks with the latest catastrophic updates. All it takes is a heatwave in February to bring some of those old feelings back to the surface. But, a quick visit to the spa puts everything right again.

MARCIE:

Oh, what a relief. Okay, I'm convinced. I'll go ahead and buy the package.

GINGER:

You couldn't have picked a better day! We have a promotional event – every purchase over \$200 gets you a month's supply of spa-quality Poland Spring waters!

MARCIE:

Oh gosh — isn't that a lot of plastic?

GINGER:

Well, yes...but by the end of your session, you won't care.

MARCIE:

Of course! Silly me.

GINGER:

Go ahead and fill out these forms, front and back, and Sebastian will call you in momentarily.

MARCIE:

Thanks. *(Crossing to chair, turning back, excited)* Hey – does this mean I can start using straws again?

GINGER:

Yes, Marcie. Yes it does. *(Turning to MR. MADISON.)* Mr. Madison, how wonderful to see you again.
(MARCIE sits to the side, at first filling out paperwork, then listening to the exchange between GINGER and MR. MADISON.)

MR. MADISON:

Ginger, I need a session. Today if possible. Can you fit me in?

GINGER:

Of course, sir. Remind me...you're on the corporate desensitization protocol, correct?

MR. MADISON

That's right. And I have definitely been noticing the return of some very uncomfortable sensations.

GINGER:

I see. Tell me more.

MR. MADISON:

Last Thursday, one of my low-ranking managers asked me for a ten percent raise.

GINGER:

Yes?

MR. MADISON:

And I gave it to him. Didn't even try to negotiate! I didn't demean him, debase his job performance...I ...just...gave it to him.

GINGER:

And how were you feeling at that moment?

MR. MADISON:

Fantastic! I felt ... generous, and like he really deserved it. I mean, he's twice my age and he drives a Toyota, you know what I'm saying?

GINGER:

Mmm. (*Ginger begins typing at her computer as the conversation continues.*)

MR. MADISON:

But I mean...I can't go around giving people raises. That's why I came here, Ginger, to toughen me up.

GINGER:

Of course, Mr. Madison. Now, have there been other instances where you've experienced unintended compassion or empathy?

MR. MADISON:

Lots of them! It's happening all the time. Yesterday, I gave a bum on the sidewalk a twenty, just because he was playing the mandolin. And lately, I've been having trouble spending money. It's like, knowing that all these people are starving to death in some third-world country ... maybe I *shouldn't buy* these new jet skis.

GINGER:

How awful for you.

MR. MADISON:

I actually didn't buy this really nice face cream the other day cause I was all like, "Oh, 40 million Americans are living in poverty, maybe I shouldn't spend 300 bucks on face cream." Which sucks, cause it was really nice. (*Getting choked up.*) Worst of all...

GINGER:

It's okay, Mr. Madison, you can tell me.

MR. MADISON:

Worst of all, I ... I made a sizable donation to NPR. I don't even listen to NPR!

GINGER:

Mr. Madison, I'm going to stop you right there. (*Picking up the phone.*) Sebastian, can you come in here right away? We have a code green.

MR. MADISON:

Code green? What the hell is a code green?

GINGER:

Please remain calm, sir. Sometimes, this happens.

MR. MADISON:

Look, I just want things to go back to the way they were. I don't want to care about this shit! I just want to drive my Beamer, sit in my corner office, and be an unbearable cliché of a corporate asshole. I come here, and next thing I know I ... I ... I CARE!

GINGER:

Sebastian? Where are you?

MR. MADISON:

You did this to me on purpose. You want me to be soft, you want me to be sweet, you want me to consider the feelings of others!

GINGER:

Mr. Madison, don't be absurd! Sometimes the treatments can have the opposite effect in certain individuals. Is it possible you weren't entirely truthful in your initial questionnaire?

MR. MADISON:

(*Pause.*)

I don't know what you're talking about.

GINGER:

I have your chart right here. You claim, for example, that you were a linebacker for your high school football team. But a simple Google search tells me that you were president of the Anime Club and a member of the Civil Rights Team.

MR. MADISON:

How did you find that?

GINGER:

You claim here that your nickname in college was "Jock" when in actuality you were called ... what is this ... Stinky?

MR. MADISON:

Okay, so I lied a little. What difference does that make?

GINGER:

We under-treated you. Significantly. Mr. Madison, if you want to be a heartless, rock-hard corporate asshole, you're going to need a total renovation.

MR. MADISON:

I am? Oh. Okay.

GINGER:

Have a seat, sir, and let me just walk back there and find Sebastian myself.

(She exits.)

MR. MADISON:

(To MARCIE)

So...what are you in for?

MARCIE

The Platinum Package. I'm hoping it will put my mind at ease. But...now I'm not sure.

MR. MADISON:

Oh yeah, my mom had that done.

MARCIE:

Did she? Did it work?

MR. MADISON:

Yeah, it's great, she doesn't care what I do anymore. My brother and I went skiing last Christmas instead of sitting around some lame tree, and she was all like, "Have fun, boys." Yeah. It's ah...*(realizing how sad that is)* it's great.

(Pause.)

MARCIE:

So this treatment will make me forget about everything that's stressing me out -- including my kids? They stress me out more than anything, but my god...they're my whole world. *(She stands.)*

I think I saw a spa down the street that's offering \$40 mani-pedis. That seems like it's more my style.

(She crosses almost to the exit, then turns.) Wanna come? *(She holds out her hand.)*

(MR. MADISON turns back to see if GINGER is coming. Seeing she's not, the two of them exit holding hands.)