

VIGNETTE 3:2 - "CRIMES AGAINST THE STATE"

The following vignette takes place in another country:

Background: Dr. G, a 40-year-old economist, is brought from a prison for people suspected of crimes against the national interest to a maximum-security ward at the government's forensic psychiatry institute. During his arrest and detention Dr. G was uncooperative and government police referred him for a forensic psychiatric evaluation on the possibility that his behavior might be caused by chronic mental illness.

Four months before referral, government agents found that Dr. G was publishing materials subversive of the government. Dr. G denies the criminal nature of his activities, and he claims that his publications were only in pursuit of his interests as an economist. Government investigators provided summaries of treatment from a local health center and a district mental health clinic. These summaries note that Dr. G had a "stormy adolescence" during which he was described by his teachers as "stubborn, oppositional, and obsessed with ideas." A school principal noted he had a promising intellect but was, "too sensitive and intense for his age...and his tastes in art and music are bizarre." Local draft board records revealed that Dr. G was relieved from compulsory military duty because of "psychoneurosis" established by a district mental health clinic psychiatrist who described him as "moody, preoccupied...precise and compulsive in his habits, with excessive concern about his health." He was seen at the mental health clinic three times with no further treatment or follow-up.

Mental Status Examination: The forensic psychiatrist notes his "burning and penetrating eyes, and a Christ-like beard." During the interview Dr. G was noted to be suspicious, insisting on taking notes, and writing down all questions asked of him, and then refusing to participate in the interview when told that he could not take notes. On the ward, he was observed to become isolative and "withdrawn, with long staring spells, and persistent refusal to discuss his thoughts and feelings." The staff notes he is suspicious and paranoid about the food he is served; he is preoccupied with the concern that someone has put medication into it. He is generally mistrustful of the medical staff, and fails to recognize his symptoms as pathological or acknowledge his need for psychiatric treatment.

Hospital Course: By the end of the first week, Dr. G is increasingly preoccupied with the belief that he is somehow "special" and entitled to special treatment. For example, he repeatedly demands to see the hospital medical director (who has never met Dr. G). When the medical director obliges, Dr. G accuses him of "collaborating in crimes against humanity" and reminds the director of the fate of the Nazi doctors during the Nuremberg Trials."

By the end of the third week, the Dr. G is given small doses of a neuroleptic medication. He refuses the medication and actively resists taking them so they it is administered involuntarily. Dr. G becomes weak and apathetic, complaining of dry mouth, increased appetite, daytime grogginess, and an increasing troublesome tremor, so the neuroleptic medication is discontinued.

By week four, Dr. G looks more cheerful, and he finally agrees to cooperate with the three forensic psychiatrists managing him. During the interview, he is noted to be guarded with "hypervigilance" and manifesting of "obvious ideas of reference." The forensic psychiatrists diagnose him as having a mild variant of schizophrenia that carries a relatively favorable prognosis compared to others with schizophrenia. Involuntary treatment is recommended for Dr. G because of lack of insight into his condition and his history of poor adherence to appropriate treatment. "