

# IGNITION

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I'm at my psychologist's office for the first time. Yes, I just started seeing a shrink. I've tried everything else in this world—why not get my head examined? Of course, the poor woman won't know what hit her once I open up. She's used to dealing with divorcées and troubled kids, not centuries-old magicians with abandonment issues and more baggage than would fit in an aircraft carrier.

Of course, I doubt I'll fill her in on the whole story. She'd laugh in my face—I've seen it before—although she might hide it behind a professional mask of genial understanding. If she thought I was serious, she'd likely urge me to check in for psychiatric examination. I don't look centuries-old. Thirty, give or take.

More likely I'll give her a condensed version—just enough drama to comfortably fit into one lifetime. We'll see how much the woman can handle. My life can be too difficult for regular people. It can be too difficult for me sometimes, and I've lived it.

I wonder how long the sessions will last, since half the things I tell her will have to be fabricated. She even has problems right off the bat with my name.

“Please sit down, Mr.—” She looks down at her notepad, and pulls a lock of shoulder-length brown hair behind one ear with a nervous twitch. “Lytton. My name is Dr. Minnie Dilleck. May I call you—” She squints at her notes again. “Merry?”

She's definitely new at her job. That's my fault for picking the youngest, prettiest female psychologist in Vancouver, B.C. Not that it's a problem—I came for the experience of being in therapy, not to delve deeply into my psyche. I might as well enjoy the scenery along the way.

“Yes, of course. And before you ask, yes, Merry like the hobbit.” Although I came up with the name long before Tolkien ever dreamed of Middle Earth. I make it a game with myself to choose names similar to my true name. Depending on the country I’m living in at the time, this can be difficult or easy. Merry Lytton is my *nom du jour*. Given my tanned complexion and black-brown hair, cut short for this time, it’s not difficult to fit in wherever I please. And I’ve always had a flair for languages, especially after centuries of practice. It’s easy to slide completely into whatever persona I’ve chosen. I’m eminently adaptable.

“Am I supposed to lay down on the couch now?” I flop onto the surprisingly uncomfortable couch covered in gray faux-suede, swinging my legs up and resting my ankles on the armrest.

“If—if you’re more comfortable that way, by all means.” She looks a little flustered at my teasing. I take my fun where I can, so sue me. The experience will be good for her. Builds character, as my mother was fond of saying long ago. So very, very long ago.

“So, Merry.” Dr. Dilleck smooths her pencil skirt over her thighs. The glass coffee table between us houses a bowl of oranges and a discreet box of tissues. “Let’s talk about you. Merry is an interesting name. Is it short for something?”

“It’s short for Marybel, actually,” I say. Her eyes widen and her hand grips her pen more securely. I relent. “Only joking. Don’t look so worried.”

“If your name were Marybel, it would be perfectly all right with me,” she says. I raise my eyebrows. Perhaps the little mouse has a spine. This might be interesting after all.

“So, Merry, what brought you here? Is there anything in particular you’d like to discuss?”

Hmm. Good question. Luckily, I have my answer ready.

“I fight off and on with depression, and I’ve never come to anyone to deal with it. I thought maybe it was time. I’m feeling

good now, you understand, but it always comes back. I figure it can't hurt to explore a bit."

She's nodding before I finish.

"It's great that you're here, Merry. Good for you. It takes courage to face your inner demons. Now you have help—we can face them together."

I settle in for the hour. We talk for a while about what happens when I get depressed—I sleep, mainly, because it's not as if I need to worry about wasting my life away—and how I improve my mood. I don't have high hopes that anything will come of this. It's not depression as people today classify it, brain chemistry gone haywire. It's simply too many layers of loss, and sometimes grief gets the better of me. There's not much this doctor can do about it. That's okay. She has a very calming voice, and her eyes are large with pale gray irises—quite mesmerizing.

"Do you find there is a trigger, some way to release you from your depression?"

Air puffs out of my nose in a mirthless chuckle.

"I try to remember that someone might need me, someday."

"That's good. Try to hold onto that." She nods before continuing. "Do you have any family? A significant other?"

I stare at the ceiling. Did she really have to go there? I guess I should have expected it. Oh well, I can give her some real fodder to work with.

"Family long since dead. Never knew my father. No children. My wife," my most recent wife, that is, "died years ago also. Honestly, I'd rather not talk about it." There's the truth. It's only taken me thirty years to move on from Josephine's death. I swear, each time a woman I love dies, it gets harder.

"Okay." Her voice is soothing and low. "Whenever you're ready. There's no rush." I glance over to see her biting her lip and looking down at her notes. She's obviously itching to ask more but

is professional enough to respect my wishes. I almost feel bad denying her. Maybe I should throw her a bone.

“I guess I should tell you—I have very strange dreams.”

She sits up straighter.

“Oh?”

I try not to smile.

“I keep reliving my past. They’re very vivid dreams. More like memories, really.” I used to dream properly when I was younger, the usual nonsense about talking horses and flying castles and other bizarre things. Now, though, I’m only visited by the ghosts of my past. The intense memories fill me with joy and plague me with sorrow and guilt.

“Dreams can be very important parts of our subconscious. Often our brains are processing things in the night that we don’t want to deal with consciously. May I suggest you start a dream journal? In fact, journaling in general can be very beneficial.”

She’s about to ask more when I notice the clock strike three.

“Oops, looks like we’re done here.” I swing my legs to the ground and push to my feet with alacrity. That’s just about enough soul-searching for today. Perhaps this wasn’t such a good idea after all.

She almost looks a little disappointed.

“Yes, of course. Well, it was wonderful to meet you, Merry. I think we made some progress here today. I’d love to see you back here soon.”

We’ll see. I smile noncommittally and say goodbye.