

# 'Dentity Crisis

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1979

## Comic

**Setting:** The Living Room.

**Scene:** Jane is lying on the couch. First, an offstage voice, then Edith comes home carrying a bag of groceries and a dress, badly stained with blood, in a dry cleaners' plastic bag.

Edith: The mother, fairly insane, 40's.

Jane: The daughter, claims to have attempted suicide—wearing a disheveled bathrobe, late teens.

Robert: The son.

Mr. Summers: Jane's psychologist.

EDITH: No one in our family has ever attempted suicide before now, and no one since either. It's a sign of defeat, and no one should do it. You know what I think? Jane? Jane?

JANE: What?

EDITH: I don't think you ever attempted suicide at all. That's what I think.

JANE: How do you explain the stains then?

EDITH: I don't. (*Laughs merrily*) I always say stains will explain themselves, and if they don't then there's nothing can be done about it. (*Edith empties the grocery bag on the table. It is filled with loose potato chips, which Edith playfully arranges as if it is some sort of food sculpture.*)

JANE: I did attempt suicide.

EDITH: No, dear, you didn't. A daughter doesn't contradict her mother.

VOICE: Cuckoo, cuckoo.

JANE: Did you hear the voice of my therapist just then?

EDITH: No dear. (*Listens.*) Ah, now I hear it. He's saying what a fine daughter I have. (*Enter Robert.*)

ROBERT: Mother! I'm home.

EDITH: Oh, Jane, it's your brother.

(*Edith and Robert kiss passionately and long. Jane is very upset and rips up the plastic covering on her dress.*)

ROBERT: Darling, darling.

EDITH: Oh, Dwayne, this is mad. We've got to stop meeting like this. Your father will find out.

JANE: I'll tell him!

EDITH: Jane, you'd never do anything like that.

ROBERT: I'm made for you. I find you . . . exciting. (*They kiss.*)

EDITH: (*Looking off.*) Quick, there's the postman. Act busy.

(*Robert and Edith smash the potato chips on the table with their fists, then they brush the crushed chips into a wastebasket with a little broom.*)

EDITH: There, he's gone.

ROBERT: (*Holding her.*) Oh, why must you taunt me? Let's get married.

EDITH: We have different blood types.

ROBERT: Oh, Mother, I love you. (*They embrace.*)

EDITH: Oh, my god. Here comes your father.

(*Robert, with no change of costume—and without exiting or re-entering—becomes the father.*)

ROBERT: Edith, what are you doing?

EDITH: Oh, Arthur, I was just finishing off my morning shopping.

ROBERT: And how is our daughter?

JANE: You're not my father.

EDITH: Don't contradict your father. You love your father, Jane.

JANE: He's my brother.

EDITH: Dwayne is your brother, dear.

ROBERT: Has she been seeing that psychologist of hers?

EDITH: Well, not socially.

ROBERT: Good. (*Shouting at Jane.*) I don't ever want to hear of you dating a psychologist again.

JANE: I never have!

EDITH: Of course not, dear. You obey your father. You're a good daughter.

ROBERT: Not like some I could mention.

EDITH: No.

ROBERT: I could mention some.

EDITH: You could.

ROBERT: I could. I will.

EDITH: Now?

ROBERT: Now. Frances, Lucia, Henrietta, Charmant, Dolores, Loretta, and Peggy.

EDITH: Listen to your father, Jane.

ROBERT: No more of this slashing your thighs, young lady. I don't think that psychologist would ever go out with you again if he knew you were slashing your thighs.

JANE: I don't go out with my psychologist.

EDITH: Of course you don't. He has a wife and sixteen children. You're a good girl. You listen to your father.

JANE: *(To Robert.)* You're not my father.

EDITH: Jane, you know he's your father.

JANE: If you're my father, you must be close to fifty.

ROBERT: I am close to fifty.

JANE: Let me see your driver's license.

ROBERT: Here. *(Hands it to her.)*

JANE: *(Reads it.)* This says you're fifty. How did you get them to put that down?

EDITH: The truth is the truth no matter how you look at it, Jane.

JANE: How come you don't look fifty?

EDITH: Your father never looked his age. Most girls would be pleased that their father looked young.

ROBERT: Most girls are pleased.

EDITH: Jane's pleased you look young, aren't you, Jane? Don't you think Arthur looks young for his age, Granddad?

ROBERT: Eh? What?

EDITH: *(Shouting.)* Don't you think Arthur looks young, Granddad!

ROBERT: *(Smiling senilely.)* Yes, yes. Breakfast.

EDITH: Poor Granddad can't hear a thing.

JANE: Where's Father?

EDITH: Isn't he here? That's funny. I didn't hear the door close.

JANE: Granddad, Mother is having an affair with Dwayne!

ROBERT: *(Not hearing.)* What?

EDITH: He can't hear you. Besides you mustn't make up stories. I don't. Oh, listen to the doorbell. *(Bell rings. Enter Mr. Summers, the psychologist and the previous offstage voice.)* Why, Jane, it's your psychologist. *(To Summers.)* I recognized you from your photos. Jane has plastered her walls with your pictures. I don't know why.

SUMMERS: How do you do? You must be Jane's mother.

EDITH: Yes. I'm Edith Fromage. You probably saw my photo in the papers when you were a little boy. I invented cheese in France in the early portion of the century.

SUMMERS: In what way did you invent cheese?

EDITH: In every way. And this is my son, Dwayne Fromage.

ROBERT: How do you do, sir?

SUMMERS: How do you do? I didn't realize Jane's last name was Fromage.

EDITH: It isn't. I had Jane by another husband. A Mr. Carrot.

JANE: My name isn't Carrot.

EDITH: That's right, dear. It's Jane Carrot. *(Whispers.)* Jane's very overwrought today. The stains wouldn't come out of her dress.

SUMMERS: Oh, I'm sorry.

EDITH: You think you're sorry. You should have seen the woman at the cleaners. I thought we'd have to chain her to the floor.

ROBERT: Perhaps Mr. Summers is hungry.

EDITH: Oh, forgive me. *(Offers him wastebasket of crushed chips.)*

SUMMERS: No thank you.

EDITH: Then how about some entertainment? Jane, play the piano for Mr. Summers.

JANE: I don't play the piano.

EDITH: Of course you do. I've heard you many times. You play very well.

JANE: I've never played the piano.

EDITH: Jane, Mr. Summers would enjoy your playing. Please play.

JANE: I don't know how!

EDITH: *(Angry.)* How do you know? Have you ever tried?

JANE: No.

EDITH: There. You see then. *(To Summers.)* Cello is her real instrument, but we never talk about it.

ROBERT: Please play, Jane.

*(Jane walks hesitatingly to the piano, sits. Pause. Makes some noise on keyboard, obviously can't play, starts to cry.)*

JANE: I don't know how to play piano!

EDITH: But you do! Why else would we have one? No one else in the house plays.

JANE: I don't remember taking lessons.

EDITH: You probably forgot due to all this strain. *(To Summers.)* You

talk to her. She seems in a state. (To Robert.) Come on, dear. Call me if you want me, Mr. Summers.

(Robert and Edith kiss, then exit.)

JANE: (At piano.) I don't remember taking piano lessons.

SUMMERS: Maybe you've repressed it. (Sits.) My wife gave me the message about your attempting suicide. Why did you do it, Jane?

JANE: I can't stand it. My mother says she's invented cheese and I start to think maybe she has. There's a man living in the house and I'm not sure whether he's my brother or my father or my grandfather. I can't be sure of anything anymore.

SUMMERS: You're talking quite rationally now. And your self-doubts are a sign of health. The truly crazy person never thinks he's crazy. Now explain to me what led up to your attempted suicide.

JANE: Well, a few days ago I woke up and I heard this voice saying, "It wasn't enough."

SUMMERS: Did you recognize the voice?

JANE: Not at first. But then it started to come back to me. When I was eight years old, someone brought me to a theater with lots of other children. We had come to see a production of *Peter Pan*. And I remember something seemed wrong with the whole production, odd things kept happening. Like when the children would fly, the ropes would keep breaking and the actors would come thumping to the ground and they'd have to be carried off by the stagehands. There seemed to be an unlimited supply of understudies to take the children's places, and then they'd fall to the ground. And then the crocodile that chases Captain Hook seemed to be a real crocodile, it wasn't an actor, and at one point it fell off the stage, crushing several children in the front row.

SUMMERS: What happened to the children?

JANE: Several understudies came and took their places in the audience. And from scene to scene Wendy seemed to get fatter and fatter until finally by the second act she was immobile and had to be moved with a cart.

SUMMERS: Where does the voice fit in?

JANE: The voice belonged to the actress playing Peter Pan. You remember how in the second act Tinkerbell drinks some poison that Peter's about to drink, in order to save him? And then Peter turns to the audience and he says that Tinkerbell's going to die because not enough people believe in fairies, but that if every-

body in the audience claps real hard to show that they do believe in fairies, then maybe Tinkerbell won't die. And so then all the children started to clap. We clapped very hard and very long. My palms hurt and even started to bleed I clapped so hard. Then suddenly the actress playing Peter Pan turned to the audience and she said, "That wasn't enough. You didn't clap hard enough. Tinkerbell's dead." Uh . . . well, and . . . then everyone started to cry. The actress stalked offstage and refused to continue with the play, and they finally had to bring down the curtain. No one could see anything through all the tears, and the ushers had to come help the children up the aisles and out into the street. I don't think any of us were ever the same after that experience.

SUMMERS: How do you think this affected you?

JANE: Well it certainly turned me against theater; but more damagingly, I think it's warped my sense of life. You know—nothing seems worth trying if Tinkerbell's just going to die.

SUMMERS: And so you wanted to die like Tinkerbell.

JANE: Yes.

SUMMERS: (With importance.) Jane. I have to bring my wife to the hospital briefly this afternoon, so I have to go now. But I want you to hold on, and I'll check back later today. I think you're going to be all right, but I think you need a complete rest; so when I come back we'll talk about putting you somewhere for a while.

JANE: You mean committing me.

SUMMERS: No. This would just be a rest home, a completely temporary thing. Tinkerbell just needs her batteries recharged, that's all. Now you just make your mind a blank, and I'll be back as soon as I can.

JANE: Thank you. I'll try to stay quiet 'til you return.

(Enter Edith.)

EDITH: Oh, you're leaving. Won't you have some of my cheese first?

SUMMERS: Thank you, Mrs. Fromage, but I have to go now. Please see to it that your daughter stays quiet.

EDITH: Oh, you can rely on me.

SUMMERS: (To Jane.) Chin up. (Exits.)

EDITH: Jane, dear, I've brought you some sheet music. I thought maybe if you got settled on where middle C was, it might all come back to you.

JANE: Please leave me alone.

EDITH: I don't know why you've turned against the piano.  
JANE: (Suddenly sharp.) Well you know my one love was always the cello.  
EDITH: (Realizing Jane is being devious.) A good daughter does not speak to her mother in that tone. I'm sure you didn't mean that. When you are ready to play the piano, let me know. Oh, there's the doorbell.  
(Bell rings. Enter Robert.)  
ROBERT: (French accent.) Ah, Madame Fromage.  
EDITH: Oh, Count. How nice. I don't think you've met my daughter. Jane, dear, this is the Count de Rochelay, my new benefactor.  
ROBERT: How do you do, Mademoiselle? My people and I are most anxious for your mother to make a comeback. All the time, the people of France say, whatever happened to Edith Fromage who gave us cheese? It is time she left her solitude and returned to the spotlight and invented something new. And so I come to your charming Mama and I convince her to answer the call of the people of France.  
EDITH: Jane, say hello to the count.  
JANE: Hello.  
EDITH: (Whispers.) You have to forgive her. She's sulking because she's forgotten how to play the piano.  
(He embraces her.)  
ROBERT: Madame Fromage, I love you!  
EDITH: Please! I don't want my son or husband to hear you!  
ROBERT: (Whispers.) Madame Fromage, I love you. (Kisses her.)  
EDITH: Not now. First I must invent something new. Have you the ingredients?  
(Robert has a paper bag. Edith takes out a family-size loaf of Wonder Bread and makes a stack of six slices. Then she takes a banana from the bag and rams it into the center of the stack of bread.)  
ROBERT: Bravo, Madame!  
EDITH: Voilà! I have invented banana bread.  
ROBERT: Bravo! Let us make love to celebrate!  
EDITH: Please, my son or husband might hear.  
ROBERT: (Deaf.) Eh?  
EDITH: Shush, Grandad. Go down to the cellar.  
ROBERT: Madame Fromage, France will thank you for this.

EDITH: And I will thank France. It is moments like these when I feel most alive.  
(Robert carries Edith off.)  
ROBERT: Vive Madame Fromage!  
(Jane at piano hits middle C several times. Lights dim, slowly to black. As they do, the light of a flashlight flashes about the stage as Tinkerbell.)  
EDITH'S VOICE: (Offstage, as Peter Pan.) Tink are you all right, Tink? Tinkerbell?  
(Light of Tinkerbell starts to blink on and off.)  
JANE: Don't die!  
(Jane's solitary clapping is heard in darkness. Tinkerbell's light goes off.)  
EDITH'S VOICE: (Off, in darkness.) That wasn't enough. She's dead. Tinkerbell's dead.