



Photo Paul Linden

## HE DREAMED OF GENIE

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Originally published by *Stitches*, the Canadian Journal of Medical Humor

*“Let us consider that we are all partially insane. It will explain us to each other.*

Mark Twain

Call him crazy, but insanity in the Emergency Room taught my husband how alike human beings are. Every corner of the globe has its share of people who see life from a different perspective than the ever-debatable norm. Insanity crosses cultural borders. Whether you're in Western Canada or Eastern Arabia, you never know who might dip into the cuckoo cocoa puffs next.

Weary of battling the Canadian government and ready for adventure, we moved to the Middle East in September of 2000. The automatic doors of the hospital built to service the national population of the United Arab Emirates had recently slid open for business. Staffed primarily by Canadian physicians, the hospital was earning a reputation for excellent care, along with fine Islamic architecture. Just walking through the waiting room was like crossing the desert sands into a new culture. Local women, clad in cloaks of long, black fabric, known as abayas, their highlighted hair peeking out beneath designer head scarves called shaylas, and men dressed in traditional robes called dishdashas, chatted on mobile phones while waiting for a doctor.

One night that doctor was my husband. The locals believed blue eyes ward off evil and usually that served my man well, but not that night. It's hardly fair to expect a doc on night shift to wage war against evil with his eyes. They're barely open. So, when Agitated Abdul showed up at 3:35 a.m., Dr. I'd Rather Be Anywhere But Here (not his real name) wasn't in the mood for

a battle. He certainly wasn't up for insanity.

Abdul presented like any crazy Canadian would, wild eyed and hollering. Only hollering in Arabic is a lot harder to understand and a translator had to be called in. The good doctor read the paper work and said, "According to his chart, Abdul is upset."

The translator raised his eyebrows. "Well," the tired doc said, "Here we have another example of excellent history taking. Can you get the patient to elaborate?" Shrugging, the translator turned to the patient and asked him, in Arabic, to explain why he was upset. As he listened to Abdul's response, he suddenly doubled over, clutching his lower abdomen in laughter.

"What is it?" The doctor asked.

"He says," giggled the translator, "That he has a genie inside his testicles. And the genie is running around in there."

Putting his pen to Abdul's chart, our doctor looked like he might laugh but being a professional, he only snickered. "You're telling me, Abdul, that you are upset because there is a genie running around inside your testicles. Is that correct?" The translator confirmed the history but given the doctor's limited experience with genies, he felt he needed more information. "Abdul. How did the genie get there, inside your testicles?"

As it turned out, Abdul had awoken to find the genie at the foot of his bed. Rather than exiting when asked, like a good houseguest would, the genie made a running jump for Abdul's body, so Abdul made a mad dash for the door. Nude, he got as far as the street before the genie overtook him, jumped on his back, and entered his body. Next the genie headed south, where the weather's warm even though the sun doesn't shine. Apparently he wasn't finished running for the night because he was still doing laps inside Abdul's reproductive parts.

Our doctor was struck with the remarkably similar presentation of this psychosis compared to most he'd seen. Unfounded beliefs—or delusions—religious in nature, are a common theme. Crazy was a connecting thread between the West and the East. Knowing that some Muslims believe that jinns (Arabic for genies) are mischievous spirits, the doctor called the Arab psychiatrist and explained his patient's symptoms.

"Oh, no!" The psychiatrist breathed. "This could be bad!"

"Yah," I know," the ER doc replied. "But he isn't the only guy around here who believes in genies, so what should I classify him as, delusional or hysterical?"

"Well, that depends," the psychiatrist said. "What kind of genie is it?"