

## 16. TRAVEL THERAPY

My therapist leaves left a message on my voice mail

“It’s not really a good time to stop your treatment.”

I ask myself when would be a good time. I can just hear my analyst’s advice. “Once you start therapy, it’s never a good time to quit. This is a lifetime process of discovering who you are and what you want for your life.”

How did this turn into a lifetime commitment? What does she think? That we’re married..

“You act like you have the answer for every crisis in your life. In fact, you only use humor to hide from your fear.”

Humor, fear, they’re all pretty much the same thing. Emotions. At what point did I realize that I just needed to live with myself? And if my answers to my problems are rather glib, that is also part of me. I just need to take a deep breath and plough on.

It’s not as if I’m depressed all the time. I never thought that I needed to see someone until I had my first session with a therapist. And I have to say that Shirley Rousseau has an amazing bed side manner. I’m not admitting that I have crush on my therapist. She just knows how to exaggerate that hollow in the soul. I’d sit across from her just reaching for that lifeline to pull me from my troubled waters. She knows how to raise a tempest in a tea cup. Once she sets off the perfect storm, she assumes her role of lifesaver extraordinaire.. I’d walk out of her office just amazed at her dexterity. Like a magician, she can tie me up in knots and, with one wave of the wand, free me from my conundrum.

From the moment that I break off with Shirley, I start to have these headaches. Maybe I have brain cancer. That is what she has been trying to tell me all along. That I have been coming apart from the inside.

“I think that’s the greatest fear of my life.”

Here I go again. I don’t think that I ever had a deep fear of cancer until I ventured to see Ms. Freud. She knows just enough to transform every occasion of self-doubt into a full blown mania.

I am sitting in front of TV with a glass of scotch nearby. I just need something to ease this pain. These are the kind of pressures that tempt me to call Shirley again. But when I broke it off with her, I broke it off. I ‘m not going to go whining back to her with my tail between my legs. I’m a proud dog even if I’m a hurting one.

I close my eyes and try to let go. But there she is staring me in the eyes. What am I supposed to do? This is cruel punishment. Fortunately my phone is at the other end of the room, But I am too indisposed to make the move.

I take another sip of scotch in the hopes that my ex-shrink will not weasel her way back in to my consciousness. I can still feel my head exploding. What possible remedy could Shirley have for this dilemma?

It is as if the same story is playing over and over again in my head. And I’m just being spun around like a shirt in the wash cycle. The more that I work to free myself, the more that I’m tied in knots. I just feel more and more attached to her. The force twists and turns me about so that I become entangled in her clutches. Oh, if I could only release the pressure. I am trying to

control myself. She has me brainwashed and I am under her spell.

I have resolved that I will not call her back. She cannot will me into her office. If I ignore her phone calls, there is nothing that she can do. I feel safe. At least I think that I am. What's that noise from outside. Damn! I take another sip of my drink.

I remember my last session with Shirley. She was wearing a short skirt without any hose. I couldn't help looking at her legs. She kept catching me with one of her stares as if to punish me. She'd spent the session rubbing her legs and licking her lips.

"What's wrong," I wonder. "Is your skin dry?"

"Did you say something?"

"No. Not at all. That was just your imagination."

And she just goes on with her rubbing. I can't help but look.

"Are you nervous?"

She smiles, "I'm not the one with the problem."

"I guess not."

She really is quite attractive. And she does everything that she can to play it up.

"How much do you spend on shoes in a year?"

"Did you ask me a question?"

"No. I was just mumbling. A bad habit!"

Like you rubbing your legs. If she would just sigh to go along with her seductive gesture.

"Your hair looks great. Did you do something with it?"

"Your mind really isn't in this today, is it?"

I want to tell her that I have these obsessive fantasies about her.

"Would you mind opening your shirt a little to help feed my dirty thoughts a little more?"

It is crazy! She just obliges me as if she is following my commands. What else does she want me to do? Maybe take pictures of her while she reaches for a book on her top shelf.

"What were we discussing last session?"

"You're the doctor. Don't you take notes?"

"You told me that you wanted to discuss your bad habits. This one particularly nasty one."

"Do you want me to get into graphic detail?"

"That really won't be necessary."

She wants to inspire this fantasy. But she isn't willing to give me enough kindling to get the fire going.

"What kind of underwear are you wearing?"

"I don't wear underwear."

"Maybe, you could show me. You know that I don't believe you."

As I look over at her skirt, she raps her knuckles on her desk.

"You really aren't concentrating."

It is hard concentrating with her giving me the wildest stares.

"I need your help."

"That is why you're here."

"I know. It just doesn't seem to be going anywhere. I do the work, but it just won't come out."

“Speak more clearly.”

“I am saying it as plainly as I can.”

“I have no idea what you mean. “

She leans back and stretches out. She looks even more inviting. As she does, she begins to massage both legs.

“Is there anything that I can help you with,” I catch her off guard.

What is she expecting? She can't lead a young guy on without expecting some trouble. So much for the methods of modern psychiatry.

“Can you prescribe drugs?”

“You know that I can. But you already seem lively enough.”

“And what's that supposed to mean?”

“That I'm not that the sort of doctor who believes that drugs are the answer for what ails us.”

I am ready to hear her recount the deep troubles of the soul. At that moment she licks her lips. I've seen it all before, but it gets me every time.

“Did you apply extra lipstick before my session?”

She doesn't seem to understand a word that I said. Perhaps, I'm not speaking loudly enough.

*“This is your big break!”*

“You do stare a lot. Are you losing concentration?”

I want to complement her, but I am losing my nerve.

“I'm trying to help you with your lack of confidence. I can tell that you just hold things in. You have to come up with a creative way to get rid of some of that frustration.”

“I thought about kick boxing!”

“I'm sure that's a great way to get rid of that pent up feeling. But you don't want to nurture your aggression.”

I am sure that she has a method of her own to release pent up aggression. She is rubbing her legs again. And sighing slightly.

“Is your skin dry?”

She seems to ignore my comment.

“Take off your shoes, and I can massage your feet.”

“Do you have a foot fetish?”

“I'd massage more than that, but that would get me kicked out of her office.”

She looks at me sternly.

“You have not heard a word that I said in the last ten minutes.”

“You said something about my mother.”

All my problems flow from a desire to get with my mother. Oh well, Shirley, you are a great Mommy substitute. I wave my hands to get her attention. She doesn't see me. I am a prisoner in my own lucid dream.

“Do you have a lover?”

“This is not about me? Besides, I'm too old for you. That's the issue here. You have this thing for older women. You think that you seduce your problem away.”

“There's nothing that a little roll in the hay won't cure.”

“You’re mumbling again.”

“If you really heard what I was saying, you’d slap me. I know what this psychiatry game is about. You get all this young meat in here, and you have a free pick of the litter.”

“Women don’t think like you do. We have standards. We have morals. We have taste.”

“Is that a slit in your skirt?”

“Hello, hello! Come back to reality. The session is almost over.”

“How do you know? Are you about to come?”

I only trust the biological clock. I just know how to stretch its ticking to meet my needs. Have you finished, Dr. Rousseau?

The doctor makes me feel lonely. That is her secret. It has been a week since I cut it off. And I feel these deep attraction for her.

*“Think of it this way. There is a routine for your day. You get up, you go to work. And then there is a larger pattern to you existence. You go to school, you get a job, you buy a house. Then there are these larger patterns. And you don’t see these. And they determine all the fine detail of your everyday.”*

There has to be a pattern to all this silliness!

I don’t want to get better! I want to see Dr. Shirley Rousseau.

“I’m going to have to step out of the office for a moment. I’ve got the tape recorder running. Continue without me.”

I might be able to continue if she left a tape of her voice on to help me complete my fantasy.

“What have you been doing with yourself?”

“Thinking about you.”

“I’m your therapist. So you’ve been thinking about coming here to tell me your problems.”

“I think that I have a crush on someone. But she is ignoring me.”

“Maybe you’re ignoring her.”

“Do you like to be ignored?”

“We all want attention.”

“Flowers.”

“Flowers are good.”

“What kind of flowers do you like?”

“I like gardenias. But this isn’t about me.”

“Do you like bubble baths.”

“Baths can help relax you. They can work as personal therapy. But you still need to talk through your problems.”

“So I am floating on this river that goes back to my mother.”

“I didn’t put it in quite so obvious terms.”

“But that does the trick!”

“If you want a picture, I can give you a picture.”

“I have some pencils. I am looking for a self-portrait.”

“That wouldn’t be accurate.”

“You can make it as accurate as possible. I can use it for my masturbation fantasy.”

“That isn’t what I meant. It wouldn’t be accurate to call it a self-portrait since I am doing a picture of you.”

“Do you want me to pose naked?”

“That wouldn’t be appropriate.”

“I’m not asking if I’m appropriate. I’m asking you if you want me to get naked.”

“You’re mumbling again.”

“When I say all these juicy erotic things to you, do you get offended?”

“I can’t hear half the things that you say.”

“Maybe you only hear what you want to hear.”

*“You’re lucky. Sure you have problems. But you’re so young. You can be helped.”*

“Who set you up?”

“What do you mean?”

“All this coy dialogue about your supposed crush on me. Your very literate asides. Your sly digs at my research. Someone is putting you up to this.”

“My ideas are mine and mine alone.”

“So you spend time in the library reading my papers.”

“I can download a lot of them.”

“And that’s where you’ve developed your opinions about what I write.”

“From our sessions as well.”

“So you really have some quarrels with my approach to the psyche?”

“You are so conservative. It’s all about a break from the origin, and the constant longing to return to the source.”

“I have to take into account the traumas to the psyche and how they distort how the world is seen.”

“But the so-called trauma could simply be a way of escaping from a restrictive environment.”

“Like a boy trying to get away from his mother.”

“Or a patient trying to escape from his therapist.”

“Another dig at my work.”

“But isn’t the intention of the therapist to make the patient create this eternal bond with her?”

“There is going to be a natural process that links the patient to the therapist. But that relationship has to be based on trust.”

“What’s the problem?”

“You’re trying to interfere with my private life.”

“You ask me all kinds of questions about my life. All this private material. I’m forbidden to ask you questions. Does that mean that your life is perfect?”

“I have my own therapist. And she deals with my problems.”

“So no sharing with the therapist.”

“You’ve read my papers!”

“That’s why I question the role of the therapist.”

“What’s the alternative. Then the session becomes a relationship. The two parties end up disagreeing. And there is no progress.”

“Your relationships are that bad.”

“You’re reading into my life.”

“What else does a shrink do? You try to impose an image of yourself on your patients.”

“It doesn’t work that way.”

“You’re really aggressive with me because you get a kick out of it.”

“I’m not aggressive.”

“No, you create such a dominant image that it’s impossible for the patient to get over it.”

“I’m not trying to make things worse.”

“So go back to your theory. You assume this magnetic force that appears to drive desire. But such a unitary view of the universe reinforces the idea of dominance.”

“I’m trying to explain things.”

“But each situation may be different. And there isn’t one force to pull it all together.”

“You have a great body!”

“You really didn’t say that, did you. You need to look for a girl your age.”

“I like older women. They don’t have the complications of young girls.”

“We need to analyze what you’ve been saying. What does that mean: she has a great body?”

“I don’t know.”

“Well, you need to have a great body to see that she has a great body.”

“I don’t think that it’s quite the same thing. It’s not as I look at my body in the mirror, and I feel enthused about myself. Then I look at her, and I think that I have to share my great body with her great body.”

“How about you say I have a body that is great because it enables me to see, and in seeing I can see that you have a great body?”

“So is it the seeing or the being seen that makes the body great?”

“It’s believing that the seeing is real.”

“Which is an illusion.”

“What about the illusion? Do I need someone to help me get over the illusion?”

“If you want to hold on to the illusion. Which is also part of the illusion.”

“What’s wrong with this?”

“A woman is more than a seeing?”

“What’s a man?”

“Someone who is always taking a look. Do you like what you see?”

“I get attached to her.”

“And that attachment makes the body into a great body.”

“So that is my problem?”

“We could say it is. Your way of seeing.”

“Are you telling me to cut out my eyes?”

“Only metaphorically.”

“Is that the definition of therapy?”

“How is that?”

“Taking out my eyes.”

“It could be a beginning. Then you never have to see bad things again.”

“So my therapy is working.”

“What do you say now?”

“She has a body.”

“What do you have?”

“Eyes to see her body.”

“You don’t understand.”

“I’ll never be cured.”

“There is really no such thing as a cure. Then you’d have to quit therapy.”

“Isn’t there an end to my treatment. Or will I always be diseased?”

“It’s not a disease. It’s more of a distraction.”

“Will I always be distracted?”

“If you keep looking at things through the same eyes.”

I realize that Shirley has been developing her own theories about me. I am going to do my best to find out what she really thinks. She has an office that is full of loads of files. My file is among them. I plan to break into her office.

I used to work as a night watchmen. I still have the uniform. I put it on. It is part of my overall strategy. I show up and tell the guard that the security company has sent me over to check on things. He lets me move unattended through the offices. I am able to move through her office without any interference.

I have an amazing power with all these files. I could use the information to rule all these people. To get them to do whatever I want.

Dr. Rousseau has taught me something. My own files are going to be sufficient. There is one dilemma. If I take them out of here, she is going to know that something is wrong. I need to use the copy machine quickly if I am going to be successful.

I leave the building with the copy of my file. It is as if I was never there.”

I get really embarrassed when I start to read. I imagined that Dr. Rousseau has been taking me seriously. She views me as a little boy with a sexual problem. What a let down. She only gives me credit when I say what she wants to hear. She gets none of my jokes. She ignores my flattery.

Her notes are so cold. She refuses to let me in her world.

Perhaps, the notes are just her way of not admitting that she is fucked up. Down deep, she really likes me. I have to find out.

Dr. Rousseau believes that she is curing me. I play her silly word association games. She acts as if she is a mind reader. But should I have taken these files? I need to know what is happening for my own good.

I suspect that the good doctor is denying her own feelings. She has no life. I wish that I could have taken some of the other files just to compare them. Maybe, she meant for me to break in. I am at a loss to explain what I should do.

I can’t go back to a state of blissful ignorance. It is as if I have read her diary. I need to use this for my advantage. When she says that she does not want me, I have to take it to mean that is all that she wants.

I have to plot out our next session. To figure out what she is going to say based on the notes. There has to be a system to her therapy. A way that she can distance the patient from her

own life. That is why everything is so abstract. The reduces the situation to all these comments. And she accuses me of having a problem with women. But she protects herself behind these great walls.

The more that I look at the notes, the more that I think that I have found my way in. I have to make my own set of notes about Dr. Rousseau. She acts if she is hidden. But I can see everything that she is doing!

Dr. Rousseau was once deeply in love. She gave so much of herself. But then she didn't want to go any further. She used her job to help extricate her from the relationship. And she blamed the man for his distance. That is why she can do nothing about me. I am invisible. I am everywhere.

I have to become this man that she has abandoned. And I have to play the part to the hilt so that I can be successful this time. I wish that there was a case study of her former lover.

I open my files with a new view. These are the files of her lover. And she has tried to get back at me so that she could dismiss her lover from her consciousness.

"If you're going to be my doctor, I want you to be honest with me."

"Are you telling me that I haven't been?"

"I don't know. You act as if you're listening to me. But are you really? Or are you afraid of being open with your emotions."

"My emotions are not part of your treatment."

"And what am I being treated for? For loving you. Is this why you're a therapist? You can't get your lovers to do what you want so you get your patients to do it instead."

"How's that? Where is this coming from?"

"You're always so secretive about your personal life. But can you just put it on a shelf outside your office and come here ready to do battle."

"I'd love to be obliging if I could. But you're my patient. Maybe I never gave you what you needed. You could have told me more about yourself instead of getting in to these head games. "

"And what would you have given me in return?"

"What I've always given you. A professional attitude."

"What is professionalism but the fear to have a human emotion. All your theories are just more abstract excuses not to involve yourself in your own life."

She is not giving ground. I thought that my new information would benefit me. But I am getting no closer to Dr. Rousseau.

"There are boundaries that a therapist needs to establish. I have made every effort to hold to those boundaries. I have never shown you any sign whatsoever that things are different. To believe any differently is a mania. It is treatable."

"You've established those same boundaries to yourself. You don't even know who you are."

"You could be right. But you have no evidence to go on. I have been treating you for almost a year. I have files. I have analyzed those files. I have charted your progress. I have become in advising you about your life. This has never been about my life. I didn't seek you out to help me with my life."

“Would you ever do that?”

“Why? You’re a kid. You need to find a girl your age.”

“And do what?”

“Learn to love her. Maybe get your heart broken. Do what other kids do.”

“They don’t come to see Dr. Rousseau.”

“It helps to talk.”

“I don’t know if it’s helping me anymore.”

“Will you be back?”

“I’m not sure. I’m not waiting for that warm feeling in my heart that is going to tell me things are all right.”

“But it’s a journey back to the heart!”

“What does that mean. Another fuzzy feeling that helps justify you charging people to talk to you.”

“This is a service that I offer.”

“What’s my choice? Is someone on the street going to talk to me this long?”

“Have you tried?”

“I’m not desperate.”

I leave her office with a sense of defeat. I have developed all these fantasies about her because that is her style of treatment. Now, she is abandoning me. How did I read things so wrongly? Then it hits me. That is just what happened with her lover. He revealed herself to him. And she rejected him. I need to make her reveal herself to me!

How can I take back what I said? How can I act cool when I’ve already blown my act?

Shirley, I do love you. Let me count the ways.

I can see the picture. This neurotic kid tries to take on his therapist as his way of not looking into himself. He creates this scenario about her and her jilted lover. It so fits the boy’s desires even if it is not true.

So here I am. My illusion has been exposed to the rest of the world. She could even publish my case. Change the names. Alter some of the details. I am her freak.

Is Shirley Rousseau her own freak? Is she at home right now full of self-doubt. Of course, she is. And she doesn’t know why?

“We often make choices for some mysterious reason. We are irrational. We come to a psychiatrist to put the story back together. To find reason in one part of our lives that we can apply to some other part.”

“How does that work?”

“It’s part of seeing the art in the chaos.”

At our next session, she no longer wears her short skirt. I have caught her in her lie. I am ready to punish her.

“I probably made too many promises to you in the beginning.”

“You are going to have to take them back.”

“I am going to change them by making some new promises. Real promises.”

This I have to see. There is no more tugging on her skirt. Or opening her blouse. She has been found out.

I am the evident winner here. I have no ability to collect my prize. What do I do? I reach

to touch her hand. An accidental touch. She pulls back. Her reactions are good.

“I don’t know what I can tell you.”

“Do you still have feelings for me?” she is asking the question of a lover.

“What do you want?”

“This was never about me.”

“It’s only about you. Are you going to tell me how you really feel.”

“What?”

“You asked me about my feelings. You could have changed the subject. But you still wanted to know because you believe in me.”

“I’m confused.”

“You came in your office. You didn’t explore what I was feeling. You asked me if I still had feelings for you. For you!”

“That is what you talked about last session.”

“You could have changed the subject. Even approached the subject from a different angle. You made it about you.”

“So let’s make it about you?”

“How? I do have feelings for you. Or you have feelings for me.”

“More of your fantasies.”

“Why are they fantasies. Because it’s easier to dismiss them if they are fantasies.”

“You’re not good at playing this game.”

“What game? I thought that this was my therapy session. You are so far out of your league. And you want to play therapist again. You can do that with your patients. But not with me, Shirley.”

“What are you doing?”

“Telling you that I can’t see you anymore. Or is that what you want to hear?”

“You’re being melodramatic.”

“Love is melodramatic.”

“Are you leaving for good?”

“Leaving you as a lover?”

“Leaving?”

“Are you going to miss me? Is that what you are asking? You are going to miss me, and you don’t want me to go. Have you ever said that to anyone?”

“You can’t create love by saying the same thing over and over again. That is a mania!”

“Do you want me to kiss you. Will that help?”

“I’m your doctor!”

“And I’m beyond help.”

“You’re not going to hurt yourself.”

“Why? Do you have some drugs so that I can do it quicker. Is this how you get people to care for you?”

“What?”

“By driving them to desperation?”

“Are you desperate?”

“No, I ‘m not desperate. But you wish that I was so that you could work your charms on

me. I don't need your medicine!"

"What do you want?"

"I want you."

"You're going around in a circle."

"The only way to break the circle is to leave."

"I can leave too!"

"This is your office. Are you ever going to admit something honest to me?"

"That isn't why I'm here."

"Get out of your silly role, and be a human being."

"I'm not a rent-a-friend."

"I'm not the one who needs a friend."

"Do you think that if I really needed help that I could ask you?"

"If you had a flat tire, you'd ask me for help."

"It's not the same!"

"What would be the same? If I cut myself?"

"Are you planning to hurt yourself?"

"Are you planning to hurt me? Would you know what it meant to hurt me? Do you know how to hurt me?"

"Don't be so silly!"

"Go on! Try to hurt me!"

"I can't hurt you. I'm your doctor!"