

MAGIC SHOP

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Even though the most effective use of this method is in psychodrama, where it originated, persons without psychodramatic skills may nevertheless use it to advantage. More than anything else, what is required of the magic shop keeper is more than ordinary spontaneity, the ability to think on one's feet, sensitivity to the wish which underlies the manifest request, boundless energy, sense of humor...etc. No, I didn't say you had to have them all, but it would help!

As I have with the clinical examples, I shall present without programming, so that the reader may experience this in something like the way the client does. The first part is a verbatim, the last part a summary of the psychodrama that followed from it. For the third person the magic shop functioned as a warm-up to the psychodrama.

The setting is a fictitious general hospital in Riverside, California. The physician in charge is Dr. Karl Quorum, an obstetrician. The patient is 'Mary,' in her late twenties, wasting away for no discernable medical reason after an abortion performed at the same hospital by a resident technically under the supervision of Dr. Quorum, the department head. Dr. Quorum has called in a friend, a clinical psychologist, Dr. Luke Freeman, and Dr. Freeman's assistant, Sherry Lane, who is finishing up her doctorate. Dr. Quorum hopes his friends can help reverse the downward trend of Mary's health. We begin with the entrance of the three to the

still private room of the barely living Mary Smith.

"Well, well, how are we doing today?" boomed Dr. Quorum.

"You're doing fine, but I'm not so good," she replied. How could she come up with a smile? "Who's the handsome newcomer you've dragged along with you?"

Luke cut in: "I came voluntarily, because the people who mean a lot to me care about you. You've met my brother-in-law, Lieutenant Marshall, and my student here, Sherry Lane. I'm Dr. Luke Freeman. Call me 'Luke'."

"What do you teach, Luke? Police science?"

"No, I teach clinical psychology at Sunset Shores University, where Sherry is a graduate student and my assistant."

Mary turned to Sherry, "How many people do you assist, and what are you doing with me here today, psychologizing or policing? Just to keep the record straight."

"The three I'm currently assisting are here now," Sherry acknowledged. "To the nursing staff I'm policing. Among present company, I'm trying to remember what Luke taught me."

Mary turned to Dr. Quorum. "You decided I was pretty far gone and called in help, huh? I wouldn't think a guy your size would need any help."

Karl was a little flustered, afraid the others wouldn't think she was as sick as he knew she was. He said, "Believe it or not, Mary, Luke's a volunteer. But yes, I'd be glad to use all the help I can get. Young

lady, there's no medical reason for you to be on the skids. Luke here is a psychodrama expert. It's a radical kind of treatment which sometimes works faster than pills or surgery. I don't know what else to do for you. By the way, Mary, I'd like you to call me 'Karl.' If Luke can do it, I can too."

She gave him a warm smile. "Karl, you don't talk like any doctor I've ever known, but then Walter isn't just like any policeman" (refers to an encounter the day before) nor is Sherry like any policeman's assistant I've ever met. If this is a dream, I want to stay asleep and see how it turns out. Luke, if you run true to form, you'll not be like any psychologist I've ever met either. Do you think I'm crazy, Luke?"

"No" came his unadorned reply, without hesitation or qualification.

"Wow! That's something. A straight answer. You're sure your a psychologist?"

"Card carrying."

"Well, I called it right. You're just like the others: different!"

Sherry cut in: "When you talk like this, Mary, it's hard for us to keep in mind how depressed you are."

She grinned. "I learned that from my mother, April Smith, night club comic. She was depressed for years, but she packed the customers in. She was even on stage at home."

"Like you are here," Karl observed. "Luke, what can you do to break through her stage presence?"

"We can play magic shop," he replied.

"What's that?" Mary was curious.

"A game of fantasy and imagination with a very serious intent," Luke replied.

"What have I got to lose, that I haven't lost already?" A touch of irony.

"We'll see," said Sherry. "Magic shopkeepers ask you to give up something in order to get something else that you want." She'd caught her interest. "For example?" Mary looked to Luke.

"Nothing material like money," Luke started.

"Who needs it?" quipped Mary, rolling her eyes.

Luke continued: "The best way to answer questions is to show you the answer rather than tell you about it."

She looked them over. "OK doctors, performers or whatever you are, I'm game."

"I'm the magic shopkeeper," Luke began, walking to the far side of the room by the unoccupied second bed. "This is my magic shop. I'll set up the scene for you."

"We're in the bayou country of South Louisiana, not at all like this dry place. The air, even at night, is like tepid bath water enclosing your body. Dark, still water, sprouting lily pads, cypress knees, tall swamp grass, dead and dying trees covered with Spanish moss, its strands almost reaching down to the water. The gentle breeze brings whiffs of fish, or salt, or decay – along with an occasional swarm of mosquitos. Don't let it trouble you. You're among the blessed people mosquitos ignore."

"I don't like being ignored," said Mary.

"A high price to pay for notice," Luke continued. "I give you the right to swat any mosquito who dares light on you. But there are far more threatening dangers.

He pointed to a pillow that had fallen to the floor: "Here you see an alligator, and over there, masquerading as an innocent stocking, lurks a deadly water moccasin. The surface, seemingly as firm as a rubber mat, conceals treacherous quicksand.

With one false step you may sink out of sight before help can reach you.

"Needless to say, we're not in the high rent district. My low overhead allows me to pass the savings on to you. Moreover, the dearth of hardy customers permits me to give you my whole attention the moment you arrive. You deserve every benefit for believing I exist, and that I reward the resourceful who persist in seeking me out.

"When you come close enough you'll be able to make out my unpainted, weather-beaten cabin, between the boards of which streak the light of a flickering kerosene flame. You note the structure vaguely resembles a bed as it stands high above the surface of the water on its sturdy stilts. "There are no roads, of course. The water surface provides the lone avenue of access." Seizing a straight-back chair and straddling it, Luke explained, "This pirogue glides where clumsy craft cannot. It has been the boat of choice among those who've set out on this arduous journey through the wilderness – and have returned!"

He leaned back on a rocking chair. "Here I am waiting patiently on the porch for whatever business may come my way. Bring your surplus traits and tendencies as barter for the dreams, values and desires with which your predecessors have stocked my shelves.

"But beware! I strike hard bargains. You may be unwilling to pay the price, at least not yet. No matter. Come as your courage and strength let you make the journey. It's been a long, hot, humid day and nightfall is coming soon. If there are any travellers out there, I hope you may find me before it gets too dark."

Sherry grabbed the straight-back and skidded herself across the floor toward the figure seated lotus position at the far end of the hospital room's other bed.

"Voila, monsieur le Pierre Freeman," she said in her best French accent. "The magic shopkeeper, n'est-ce pas? It is pauvre, petite Sherry Lane who would do business with you."

"Bonjour, mademoiselle Lane. Welcome to my humble establishment." He reached out to guide her pirogue to his porch. "Had you a difficult journey?" He asked. "Indeed," she nodded, "but I expect a profitable exchange which will make it well worth my effort."

"And what is it mademoiselle wishes?" He asked.

"Sex appeal."

As Luke caught his breath, Mary cracked, "Like working on your second million?" Sherry tried to ignore her. "Pardon me, shopkeeper, I must be more specific. I just ask for sex appeal for men. I want to turn on at least one of the men who turn me on."

"Are you asking for a love potion, like Dulcamara (my worthy competitor) marketed in Donisetti's L'Elsir d'Amore?" Luke was filling in time, while he tried to fathom where Sherry was coming from. Instantly she came back with "Not at all! I want nothing to do with fakery. Nor have I any wish to trap a man. I want him to want me of his own free will. I want to be the kind of person my kind of man would want."

"I'm not convinced you lack sex appeal," Luke said.

"I am more than a quarter century old, and I'm not going steady. I'm not even playing the field. The sad truth is that I've not had

an old fashioned date in six months. How's that for starvation rations?"

"When in the course of events you run onto an eligible man, what happens?"

"Nothing at all."

"Nothing at all?"

"Nothing that matters. They're aware of me all right, but not as a woman. They lean on me, confide in me, and ask my advice on how to handle women. Or they're picking my brain on some technical matter. I save them trips to the library. Or I remind them of a sister, whether or not they've ever had one. Maybe a daughter. That doesn't bother me nearly so much as being mistaken for a mother!" Mary's jaw dropped. "Sherry, how can these things be? Nearly every man I've ever been out with a second time has made a serious pass at me...except for the last one."

"Mary, I'm not talking about the guys who are just looking for a warm body. I want to be able to share more than a bed. Recently I've only had that kind of come-on from strangers, never from the men I've known as students or fellow workers. In fact, I'd appreciate the chance to keep in practice saying 'No'. Otherwise in a moment of crisis I might not be able to come up with the word, and where would I be then?"

"Pregnant, like me – or like I was," said Mary.

"What do you want to do with the sex appeal when you get it?" Luke asked. "You don't relish holding wolves at bay." She frowned. "You don't seem to understand. I want to be accepted and appreciated. I refuse to be used, or what is almost as bad, to be put on a pedestal. The likely options seem to have been the sultan and

the slave, the goddess and the worshipper, the guy who only wants a buddy not a sweetheart, and the prize fighter. In fact, all of the four put together don't begin to include all of me."

Luke spread his hands. "What you don't want is crystal clear. What you do want is a bit fuzzy." He continued apologetically, "I may be under something of a handicap because of the way our relationship has been structured. I may be up too close. May I have a consultant from further back. OK, Karl?"

"Sure," said Karl, "What do you want to know?"

"How would you describe Sherry to a colleague?"

"First impression: a very attractive woman who comes on strong. Later I was less aware of her beauty and much more of her brain."

"Tell Sherry directly, Karl."

"You come across as a first-rate professional already."

"Karl, assume you're her age and unattached. How'd she stack up as a girl friend?"

"First thought: wow! But after a little while, remembering how I was in my mid-twenties, I think I'd pass her by for someone more in my league. As 26-year-old Karl Quorum, Sherry, you scare me. I doubt whether I could keep up with you. You're so frank, I'd try to do it too and then I'd end up with egg on my face. You'd be so far ahead of me the other guys would take me for your kid brother.

"One more thing. It may be related to your frankness. You're not romantic. You're not mysterious... If you knew I saw you as more than a sex object, you might suggest sex out of the clear blue sky and wonder why I couldn't perform."

Now Luke was ready. "Sherry, hold your response to our consultant later. I'm ready to quote you a price for sex appeal.

"I offer you a large slice of humble pie, to be munched on in the presence of eligible men. And here is a cassette tape of some key sounds you should memorise and use at opportune moments, such as 'fantastic', 'wonderful', 'I wish I'd thought of that', 'Would you explain that to me again?' Moreover, spend your money on clothes rather than books. Make sure that no one but your professors hear your creative ideas. Spend some leisure time with other women and see if you can pick up some of their techniques. At the same time, consider the woman nearby as a competitor and the nearby man as the prize, never the competition. The man plays in another league and follows another set of rules." She broke in: "No deal. I refuse to pay those inflated prices even if I never get married. I'll be real. I'll be direct. I refuse to play games. Some man is going to take me the way I am, which is exactly how I'll take him. No window dressing."

"Sherry, you're amazing," said Mary, fascinated. "I wish I could be more like you, but I wouldn't even know where to begin."

Karl was ready. "Shopkeeper, are you still open for business?"

"Certainly. What may I do for you? Paddle your pirogue up a little closer. Be careful not to tip it while you're getting out. Pirogues are not built for your size." "That's what I want to see you about, my size. I'm not talking about my height, which was a problem when I was growing up. Now it has its advantages, and there's no changing it, even if I wanted to. What troubles me is the horizontal di-

mension. As a physician I cannot plead ignorance as to how I got this way. Besides, I know several diet routines which should do the job. What I want from you, shopkeeper, is the power to put my knowledge into practice. Action's your speciality, isn't it?"

Luke laughed. "I love a challenge. But Karl, tell me what's wrong with your being the way you are?"

He was very serious. "Fat people don't live as long. Fat is hard on the heart, for one thing. When I dash up or down the stairs I end up huffing and puffing like a steam locomotive."

"Doesn't everyone?"

"Yes, but I don't recover as quickly as I should."

"This hospital has several elevators running. Do you suffer from claustrophobia?"

"No, but waiting is very painful for me. The elevators have run half-speed, and people get on and off at every floor."

Luke nodded. "You're a man in a hurry. I'm surprised you take time to eat."

"Only at the beginning and end of the working day... and all the time between."

He sadly wagged his head, as he slipped a giant Baby Ruth bar from where it was nestled next to his stethoscope, and flung it on the nightstand. "Something to nibble on, Miss Smith?"

"I have lost some weight, haven't I. It used to be such a chore. I did this without even trying. Of course, the fetus weighed something."

"A couple of pounds," Karl informed her.

"I figure you're down at least 15 pounds. Off you it shows. Off me you'd need a scale to tell it."

Luke took charge. "Coming back to you,

Karl. Next to yourself, who would be the most pleased to see you lose your middle?"

"My wife."

"Does she nag you about it?"

"She used to. Lately she's found other things to gripe about."

Luke guessed, "Like, you're always at the hospital, or you're never home."

"A common complaint in doctor's families, I guess that's how you knew. But my wife should've known better. She's a nurse, and she knows how important it is to take good care of people. My wife's a very good nurse... for patients."

"But she doesn't take very good care of you?"

"She could if she wanted to."

"Is there something we could do to help her want to?"

"She's always got a chip on her shoulder. It's like trying to make love to a buzz saw."

"So you don't make love very often?"

"And she's too little?"

"She's six feet tall herself, though not at all overweight compared with me."

"Does she like to cook?"

"Does she ever! But she never knows when I'm coming in, and she's never up when I leave in the morning. On days off, though, she makes up for lost time... cooking."

"Karl, tell me about your children."

"Don't have any."

"A matter of choice?"

"Definitely not. I'd look into adoption, if we got along better."

"You work with pregnant and recently pregnant women every day, don't you?"

"It's my job."

"You take good care of your patients?"

"The very best," responded the patient in the other bed, before Karl could answer. "Your opinion, Karl."

"I work at it more than the other guys. I have to. When I'm at work my mind wanders off to what's happening at home. When I'm at home I worry about what's happening here."

"You sound like my brother-in-law. He's a worrier too. Now don't answer the next one too quickly. Think it over first. That speech you made at breakfast about getting overly involved with patients was delivered as much to yourself as to us. I got on the defensive and didn't see it immediately. Do you identify with your patients, doctor? How much do you identify with them, Karl? Enough for your body to show it?"

He understood. "Yes, enough to look eight months pregnant, the way I'd like my wife to be. Why hadn't I ever thought of that? What my patients must think of me!"

"On the conscious level, I'm sure there's been nary a whisper, but on the unconscious level they may sense it. But Karl, what's the harm? When you've delivered one of theirs, they keep coming back to you - for the next one, don't they?"

"I guess so. I don't lose very many patients. Shopkeeper, we haven't discussed your fee."

"You've already paid it. You've faced some painful parts of your life. You've been able to connect your body with those parts. I offer you a telephone. The next time you reach for a candy bar, reach for a telephone instead."

"Who am I to call?"

"Your wife, of course. Make a pact with her. She can help you. Trust her with the

things you've told us. Make her your ally rather than your opponent. And make up the menu for your days off, using your best professional judgment. Respect the child in your wife. She feels rejected and neglected. Respect the child in yourself. When you've given those hungry children the love due them, then, one way or another, get a child of your own together. When you've done all that, you may terminate your 'pregnancy'. In the meantime, you may take this salve," he said, handing him an empty tumbler from the nightstand, full of imaginary salve. "Rub it on yourself. Let her rub it on you. Take your time. It soaks in better that way." "Find yourself an assistant here. If you already have one, let him make a few of the decisions. Take more time to chat with your patients when you're with them. Maybe they won't call you back so often for so-called medical reasons. You'll know them better this way and have more confidence in their judgment. Also the husbands. Put them to work for you too. That way there will be enough of you to go around. You won't need the whole 275." "Do you follow up, doctor?" He asked respectfully. "Of course." "Then I accept your offer. It's a pleasure to do business with you." "Well, have a safe trip back, Karl. Watch out! That alligator nearly caught your foot." The doctor returned to his chair. After a small pause, Luke said aloud. "It's going to be dark soon. I guess I'm not going to have anymore business today." "Oh yes you are," cried the patient, as she swung out of bed, plopped into a chair, and dragged it over toward the magic shop, saying, "Mr Shopkeeper, I heard a

vicious rumour you'd denied a previous customer sex appeal. Is she likely to return?

He winked at Sherry. "Oh I think so." "Then I'd like to unload about two-thirds of mine. I've no practical use for all that sex appeal I've accumulated over the years. And I'd like to have a baby."

"You don't need to come to the magic shop for babies. Hadn't you better hold back on some of that sex appeal till you acquire a husband?"

"But I don't want to trap him with sex appeal. The man I marry must appreciate personality, brains and talent, not just a warm body."

"Didn't you have a boyfriend who was aware of your spiritual qualities?"

Wistfully she replied, "Odd that you should use the word 'spiritual.' Yes, I did, but I don't have him now. He has no idea where I am."

Luke was incredulous. "Has he no way to trace you, even though you haven't contacted him?"

"No way." With an ironic laugh: "He doesn't even know I'm a teacher."

"How secretive can you get? You believe in separating love and work, don't you?"

"That's the way it looks, but that's not how it feels, not now. The college where I teach was founded on the principle of the unity of learning and life, and now I know how right they are. I wish I could relive this past week."

She swallowed hard. There were tears in her eyes. "It all started with my feeling neglected and rejected, like Karl and his wife. I had a chip on my shoulder too, especially after the boyfriend and I slipped into the sack the last night we were together. Oh it's not what you think. Worse

luck! After I was all warmed up and ready to go, his conscience cut us off, bless his self-righteous hide. I wasn't too cordial after that."

The magic shop had done its work. Luke recognised she was there as a protagonist, so, without any preamble, he began: "What shall we call the boyfriend? Make up the name, if you'd rather not use the real one".

We continue in summary fashion. After a name for the boyfriend, Luke got a name for the baby. She balked at that, saying, "You make it seem so real." She complied. He made the contract: "There's no way I can turn the clock back, but I know how to alter one's relationship with the past. We'll face the past, but not alone this time. With the support of all of us here, we'll help you change your relationship with what happened, and make things come out better this time. Therefore, Mary, for two-thirds of your sex-appeal, much of your courage in facing painful realities, and the willingness to share your fantasy with us, I hereby promise you the ability to grasp your present reality in order to build a solid future on it." She agreed, and the story unfolded.

1. We began with the visit to the doctor's office, the clinic at the same hospital. She'd been scheduled to see Dr. Quorum but when she arrived they gave her this 'stupid resident' instead. The doctor had an emergency. "What was I?" she asked. Karl knew him well; he had supervisory responsibility for him. Luke set up the scene of the examination, saying he'd just play the first part. Sherry offered to be the 'stupid resident.' He suggested that Karl break in at his signal to give the scene a

different outcome.

Sherry, as the resident, knew what to say. "Sure you're pregnant but we can change that." Karl couldn't stand it. He broke in on his own. "How do you know that's what she really wants? What's the hurry?" Karl sent the resident out, and sat down for the interview himself, exploring all the possibilities. He learned that they'd had a fight over having had sexual intercourse, because he didn't like being seduced. Karl reassured her. "I'm sure he was a willing victim. Nobody forced him." But because of the fight they had broken off contact, or she had. Karl explored the possibility of having the baby anyway, but she protested financial problems. He asked about her family, but they were dead. Karl even suggested welfare. She was insulted. He argued that impossible situations are what welfare is for. She asked, "How could I give my baby away?" Karl was very perceptive? "Then you want him, don't you?" "Not this way." "For this particular baby, your first, it's this way or no way at all." "But it isn't fair to bring in a baby unwanted." "You just admitted you wanted him." Luke interrupted, summarising the dilemma. He didn't attempt to resolve it, for the important part of this scene was to give Mary the experience of having a caring doctor.

2. He jumped to the next scene, the abortion itself. Karl suspected that the resident hadn't adequately prepared Mary for what to expect, and he hadn't.

Again on the assumption that the abortion was her decision, Dr Quorum set about preparing her properly. This time Mary put the doctor on the spot about doing abortions at all, and it emerged that Karl had a conscience about it. They nearly got into a discussion of social issues, which Luke cut off, much to Karl's frustration. Mary was the protagonist, not Karl.

3. Next they went to the operation itself as it had happened. This was very difficult for Mary, and Luke put Sherry in as a double. Luke had them leapfrog to the aftermath of the abortion. Mary had expelled the fetus after having taken the saline solution. He lay there on the floor. She stared at him, saying "I can almost hear him speak." Luke took the cue and called on Karl to be the articulate fetus. He reversed Mary into that role and had her speak what she imagined the fetus saying, with Karl playing her role, listening. At first the baby was angry with her, and topped it off, saying, "Who do you think you are, to decide who is to live and who to die? Have you cheated the world out of another Einstein, Schweitzer or Mozart?" Luke reversed her to her own role; she couldn't continue anyway, and Karl as the baby gave the same speech back to her. But Karl was so caught up in his own feelings he couldn't stay with the baby's anger. He spontaneously produced another side: "Mother, I don't care what you've done, I still love you. Letting me kill you wouldn't do either of us any good, and it would deprive the world a very exceptional person:

you! I'm proud of you. You've been honest with me. You have your whole future ahead of you. Make the most of it - for us!" The tears flowed, as Mary asked for the baby's forgiveness and received it. Karl didn't wait for prompting. He gathered Mary into his arms, and Luke and Sherry joined too. Sharing followed, and, to anticipate, the patient recovered.

The previous pages have been quoted from my unpublished novel, The Psychodrama Solution.

DISCUSSION

Just as creative play and film writers are likely to re-invent what is already well known elsewhere, as someone did with 'Equus' after the fashion of a psychodrama, or even in 'Stop the World, I Want to Get Off', Magic Shop has been duplicated in almost all essential details in the 'Wizard of Oz.' I assume you're familiar with the Wizard of Oz and I shall have occasion to refer to it below. When psychodramatists use Magic Shop as a warmup, rather than making it the whole program, there is often a division of labour between the magic shopkeeper and the psychodrama director. In the example above, owing to the small size of the group, the same person filled both roles. The key idea in magic shop is this: the director agrees to give the client what the client wants, but by the time it's given the client already has it. The magic shopkeeper must discover the answer to the question, "Why doesn't the client already have what he wants? What gets in the way? Or who gets in the way?" Usually it is something within the client himself,

and when we know what it is, we may have to re-create the social context in which the restricting pattern developed, so that we can change it.

The shopkeeper takes what the seeker asks for apparently at face value, but all the while, he is checking to see whether there is something beneath the request which is 'the real reason' for asking in the first place. When a clue emerges, he must decide whether there is more to be gained or lost by confirming it. Or he may confirm indirectly in suggesting alternatives, and noting the seeker's reaction to those. Thus Sherry wanted sex appeal, she thought, but in the process of refusing to pay the price she got in touch with what was really important to her. The process increased her self-awareness and her self-acceptance. She may get what she wants without sex appeal. The others present thought she already had it anyway.

On the surface Karl was concerned about his body image. The concern was real, but it was less important than something else. In taking care of the something else directly, he'd lose weight also. The obstacle had to be brought to his consciousness. Mary offered to give away her sex appeal in favour of having a baby. Of course she wanted to replace what she lost, but how did she happen to lose it in the first place? That needed to be understood. The purpose of the psychodrama, however, was to provide her with a catharsis for her anger and her grief and to restore her self-esteem. Of course Karl's goal was to save her life, and this is how it was done. She had something to live for after all.

With a series of questions the shopkeeper learns what the seeker believes about himself, and how that leads to what he

usually does. The shopkeeper reframes the situation, shows another way to look at it which implies the seeker is not deficient after all. What he has may be more important than what he has not. The shopkeeper makes an assignment or a demand upon the seeker which supports the shopkeeper's way of construing the seeker's reality. If the seeker agrees to the barter or carries out the assignment it is because he believes the magic shopkeeper and the 'magic' has done its work. The Wizard of Oz gave his seekers a task which required all that they were asking him for. When they completed the task, it was obvious they had what they had sought. He awarded credentials to validate who they were, and how they could accept the credentials, for what they had done gave plausibility to the awards.

The Journal of Group Psychotherapy and Psychodrama (Winter 1984. Vol. 36, No.4, pp 148-161) provides a systematic way of using the Wizard of Oz as a model for Magic Shop. Two of the formulas are worth reproducing here:

The seeker's situation is conceived as a 'story line', the structure of which is:

1. This is what I believe about me.
2. But I want to be different.
3. This is how I try and fail.

The shopkeeper's response is conceived of as an 'empowering message', like this:

1. What you believe about yourself is not the whole truth.
2. You can be what you want to be.
3. But you're going to have to go about it in a different way.