

The Story Spectrum
Story 23. Love
Dependence VS Independence

opposed, betrayed, unrequited, asynchronous, enduring

Love defies logic: Why does Sue turn me on, while Mae leaves me cold? Mae's the 'better catch'--so they tell me. And I agree, but do I care? How do we ever get together when one pursues another, who, finally yielding becomes pursuer, as the newly-pursued runs for cover? How is sex so much fun that we avoid it when we might enjoy it? That means, of course, that we need each other. What's so bad about that? If we need each other, who's in charge? Does that make one the possessor and the other the possessed? Let's compromise, try neither or both. How do we stay together without speaking? Have we so much to say we say nothing? What do you want me to say, that I'm sorry, I never meant to hurt you? If I convince you, will you forgive? If you forgive, do you fear having to do it again? Tell me that you love me. Must we hang on to the past or dread the future, forfeiting today?

This category embodies an affirmation of the cohesive power of relationships. The intimate relationship between two special to each other aspires to include as many of the varied manifestations of love as human beings can handle. Psychodramas on these themes join in a common effort to cope with the challenges of similarity and difference which normally emerge in the daily lives of couples. Giving and receiving affection has high priority. Rarely does a psychodrama fail to come forth with at least one hug, even if, on stage, half the hug represents an absentee. Psychodramas which explore marriage conflict, desire, frustration, and fulfillment provide opportunities for protagonists serially and in combination to improve the quality of ongoing relationships.

As noted in the heading above, love may be opposed, as it was in 'Romeo and Juliet,' betrayed, as in 'Strangers When We Meet,' and unrequited, as the Quartet from Rigoletto sings (translated from the Italian: "the pangs, the pangs, of unrequited love").

Asynchronous should be replaced with a more common word, but I couldn't come up with one. This resembles the game 'tag.' I chase you till I tag you, we turn and you chase me. Love is more than pursuit. That's why courtship can't last forever. Too exhausting! The director shows protagonists what in them keeps the game going.

So often lovers tell each other, "We'd be fine if the world would let us be." Others suppose their interests are jeopardized through a particular love relationship. To what extent is this interest of theirs a matter of choice, and if it is, who's choice? A parent's, a child's, a friend's interest all may receive attention through psychodrama scenes, leaving the protagonist to decide whose claim comes first. Especially troublesome is the 'eternal triangle,' involving two persons competing for the same lover. The obvious resolution requires one person drop out, but which one? And to what effect? Here follows an outline of one such psychodrama, called 'Lu.'

Lu psychodrama, 34

Bo, more mirage than oasis

Lu is a real estate salesperson who has been married more than 20 years to a teacher. She was a short-term patient at a New England psychiatric hospital. Her discharge was imminent. Lu worked part-time as a model, which brought her into regular contact with an older male model. She was attracted to him instantly, and tried to overcome it at first, but the relationship got out of control.

1) Lu discussed her situation with a staff member on the way to psychodrama. I brought them both to the stage, had them role reverse, with the staff member telling the story as if he were Lou. This kept it brief, without risking Lu's talking away her warm-up.

Lu had separated from her husband a couple of months before, but had halted divorce, so that they could get marriage counseling. "He was good to me," she said, "but I've not been good to him."

2) We established how the relationship with the other man, whom we shall call Bo, developed. Hy, the husband, was off on a trip. Lu and Bo both were attracted to each another. Bo wished Lu weren't married. Through Lu's soliloquy we found her making comparisons: "Hy is Catholic, but he's not spiritual, whereas Bo is deeply involved with the interdenominational church he attends. Bo's feminine side is highly developed. He appreciates music and art." Lu confided that she'd been a virgin when she married Hy and had been monogamous till then. She took the initiative with Bo, however, disrobing and inviting him to bed with her. **Closure**

- 3) Director: How did this get you into the hospital? Her answer was this scene: Hy heard Lu speak of Bo. They got together at the husband's birthday party, at Lu's insistence. Bo presented his research on the life of a celebrity, and Hy was impressed. Bo also spoke of his experience as a pilot.
- 4) Apparently Hy was aware something was amiss. He told Lu he'd had Bo investigated, and found he'd lied about his background.
- 5) Lu phoned Bo to tell him, but before she could, he levelled with her that he'd lied. He'd been telling these stories for years, because they made good conversation. He wasn't as well educated as he pretended. His love letters required great effort, because he had a reading disorder. Lu forgave him of this, because he confessed to her before she could tell him what Hy had said.
- 6) Lu seized every opportunity to stay in touch with Bo, driving over a hundred miles every other day. Her soliloquy brought out her sexual longing. She'd never known an orgasm before. On the way back she dreaded Hy would arrive first, but he didn't, though she had only minutes to spare.
- 7) When she'd made up her mind to leave Hy, he found her packing her suitcase, and blocked her exit. She indicated that his controlling behavior was one of the reasons she was leaving him, but he followed her around anyway. With Hy listening she phoned Bo to tell him she was headed there and he'd better be ready for her. Bo told her he loved her and would marry her as soon as possible. Hy confronted Bo from the extension, reminding him how he'd abused his hospitality. Nevertheless, Lu made the trip. She stayed in a motel that first night, but Bo held her the whole night. They couldn't afford to continue that. Finally she returned to another bed back at her own home.
- 8) Hy presented more data on Bo from the investigator's report. He was alleged to be 'some kind of pervert' who 'trolls the malls like a dirty old man.' Lu knew Bo to be naturally friendly and figured the investigator just got the wrong idea, but he did create doubt.
- 9) Hy phoned Bo who agreed to meet him at a restaurant and have it out. Hy upbraided Bo for 45 minutes, and Bo took it. Lu heard the story later from both men, and the versions matched. Bo denied the dirty old man charges. He said he would clear that up.
- 10) Again Hy confronted Bo. He told Bo that Lu has been seriously ill. "Would you stand by her if she needs more care?" he asked. "Lu will not always be this age. Will you stand by her as she ages? I will, will you?"
- 11) We staged the parts of her in conflict: She's in the middle, torn, on the one side, between Hy, whose word she can trust, whose faithfulness is sure, but with whom she lacks emotional contact. And on the other side is Bo who turns her on, but who has lied to her, and whose character is open to question. Lu: If I can't have Bo I don't want to live. I'll run out in front of a railroad train. Director: How angry you are! Who are you angry with, Lu? After a vain attempt to get an intrapsychic scene going, it emerged that mother had abused Lu emotionally while Lu was growing up.
- 12) This led to a first mention of Lu's children, who were grown and living away from home. I suggested that, at least on stage, she level with them regarding what was driving her to suicide. Her two boys didn't understand, but in the role reversed position as she played her daughter she imagined daughter's acceptance. This meant a lot to her, and altered Lu's mood perceptibly.
- 13) I took Lu three years into the future. She saw herself as the wife of another man (not Bo) and Hy married to someone else. That presupposes, of course, that she hadn't killed herself, which we left unsaid. She suddenly remembered that one of her sons had come to see her and was waiting back at the residential unit for her.

Sharing and Commenting

A staff person present shared with Lu in some depth, which enhanced Lu's self-acceptance. The staff person said she'd draw circles as an exercise during another group. There she made herself larger than anyone else, with the boyfriend's circle large beside hers, and the rest of the family small and distant. But now at the end of this psychodrama she imagined drawing circles again. The discrepancy in circle size had disappeared. The small and distant had become larger and nearer. Our paths crossed some time later in the dining room. Her son was with her and she introduced us. Her affect was bright. Perhaps the above psychodrama will help answer the question of whether infidelity belongs in the **love** category rather than under **deviated**. Lu's infidelity was out in the open, and she'd

committed herself to marriage counseling, which implies a bias in favor of staying married. In the psychodrama it seemed as if she'd given up on the marriage, but she'd also given up on the other relationship. Here it was Lu opting out of the triangle! This is probably a viable resolution for her future. To classify this psychodrama as betrayed, I'd require more evidence of exploitation. Where people are able to put the breach of faith behind them on the basis of love and forgiveness, this makes continuing the relationship a possible and desirable solution. Then we regard it as an obstacle to love rather than as an addictive detour. There is no shortage of psychodramas we could present.

Melvin's Psychodrama, age 38. How can I ever trust her?

He described himself as nervous and confused, but willing to participate. If protagonist he'd work on obsessive thoughts about his wife's cheating on him, and on anger and **physical violence**. There have been incidents in the past with his alcoholic father he'd gone through. 12 years ago, just one week before Mel and his wife were to have been married, she cheated on him.

1) Melvin's then fiance got off work at 9:30 pm, and in anticipation of seeing her Mel had his brother drive them to the parking lot where they saw his wife Irma's car. Mel's sister's boyfriend (who later became the sister's husband) was also in the car with them. As they arrived, a pick-up truck (carrying a camper), which had been parked next to Irma's car suddenly took off. They never actually saw her in the truck, but the car Melvin was in gave chase. At that moment they thought someone might have been stripping Irma's car. They followed closely for ten minutes, but the truck peeled off to the left at a Y without warning, and they got turned around too late to continue.

2) They returned to the parking lot and Irma's car was still there. They checked with where Irma worked and learned she'd punched out on time, so where was she? Mel phoned Irma's father, who was unconcerned because Irma had called, telling them she'd gone out for ice cream with a friend. Mel and the others waited in the parking lot alongside Irma's car, but she hadn't returned at midnight. Then they became alarmed, called Irma's father again, so we called the police, who investigated and pieced it all together by 2 am. By then they knew that it was the guy who owned the pick-up that Irma had gone out with, apparently of her own choice. Mel went numb at the news.

3) When Irma showed up for work the next morning, her father and Mel met her. Irma cried, her father hugged her, and left her with Mel. She apologized in tears, and explained that he was a friend, that they'd gone out to get ice cream, but when Mel pulled into the parking lot, he'd panicked, they'd given chase, and then having given them the slip, they didn't know what to do. When they came back to the parking lot in another car, they saw the police there and left without having made their presence known.

We extended the original scene for Mel to express the full range of feeling he hadn't expressed then. He put his sadness into words, but not his anger. He claimed not to have felt it.

4) Back then he'd gone to her father's house (where she'd been living) to talk with her, saying "I need to find out what happened." At this point she maintained her innocence, saying that the other man panicked when they arrived and gave chase, and that when they returned to see the police there, they were even more frightened and spent the night driving around.

5) Melvin had talked with his brother before Irma confessed the truth. The brother was convinced Irma was lying. 'Everyone' advised Melvin to stay away from her. Irma granted that she was confused and agreed it might be better that they part. Her father called off the wedding, broke the lease on the apartment they'd rented, and sold back the furniture. Mel felt like he'd had no say in what was done.

6) They hadn't seen one another for a month, when Irma phoned Melvin. He reminded her how long it had been and told her he'd met someone else. Yet he agreed to meet Irma, and when they did, they made love in the car. Now he knows he hadn't forgiven her, but it felt so good to be back together, they went ahead with the wedding.

Closure

7) We created an imaginary scene in the present for the purpose of Mel's levelling with Irma about what he was feeling. He started with what she was wearing, jeans so tight "nothing was left to the imagination." He told her that when men see women dressed that way, they want to have sex. "She never used to argue the point, but now she does," he said. We brought in the auxiliary who'd played

his brother to double for him. Mel kept on telling her about 'overdressing,' wearing all these provocative new outfits. Irma told him it made her feel good. Mel asked for a compromise. It made him uncomfortable, and it scared him that he might lose her.

8) While they were separated (a flashback), she came into the bowling alley all dressed up. The men there greeted her, but she said nothing to him. He kept getting angrier. (another flashback)

9) Melvin spoke of his alcoholic father who beat his mother on weekends. He slept in the hall and could hear everything, "but I never could do anything about it." He'd never confronted his father back then, and his father stopped drinking six years ago.

10) Therefore we took Mel back in an imaginary scene to when he was 15, to do now what he'd been unable to do then, confronting his father, whom we had sober for the occasion. The projected episode became a plea not to drink or to hurt Mom. "It scares me," Melvin said, and he looked frightened.

11) The director called for an intrapsychic scene, in which Mel began saying to his double what he'd been saying to himself. "I don't know what I did to deserve what she did, and what I have to do to prevent its happening again.." He confessed feeling weak and insecure. When she dresses up he gets furious. "I've been a good husband and father," he maintained, "but if she's ten minutes late I go crazy. I need to work on myself as a person. I would have something to offer other people. I want to block out my worries about her, but I must work these things out. I want to keep the relationship," he said.

Now he recognizes he should work the thoughts through rather than trying to block them out. He told the director: "She's going out this weekend, and I'm upset about it. I'm afraid she'll get angry with me, and I'll upset the apple cart, just as we're working on getting back together again."

12) We staged a future scene, in which he told Irma that her plans to go out really hurt him and scared him. He represented Irma as saying to him: "I'm committed to you. I love you. The only thing in the way of our getting back together is your not getting better." They embraced. Mel's wife has protected him; she has never called the police about his violence.

Comment

In the sharing one peer focused on the feelings of powerlessness, and another peer made the correct connection between Mel's feelings about his parental interaction carrying over into Mel's own marriage. That peer had also been abusive toward his own wife, had served as his brother and double in the psychodrama, is perhaps a step ahead of Mel in his own treatment, and was especially helpful to him here.

Reese and Dick, 40 and 42. Silent Husband and Bitchy Wife:

Here's a combination you'll surely meet again. It provides us with a convenient starting place for situations that gradually work themselves out more than those beyond repair. Reese described herself as tired and a bit anxious. If chosen protagonist she'd work on low self-esteem, and feeling rejected, "like not being picked (as auxiliary) in psychodrama." She'd also work on her relationship with her husband. He says she's insensitive and domineering. She says he's a passive-aggressive hypochondriac. "Rather than put his sense of being in control at risk, he withholds sex," she said.

1) She took the role reversed position as her husband. We learned that he stands 5'8", is 'on the pudgy side,' has brown hair, 'congenital' moustache and beard, wears glasses and is 44 years old. He has a degree in biology and works at a local drug factory. They met at Stanford, where she was an undergraduate junior and he was a graduate student. They've been married 13 years and have children, a girl 7 and a boy 5. Father is a bit upset with his son's having 'failed' the Gesell and remaining in 'developmental' kindergarten. The daughter is especially bright, testing at the fourth grade level already. They don't have 'fun.' They're too busy "with the kids, house, garden and jobs." He is an only child, and comes from Oregon. He wants to go back to graduate school, with a view to becoming a statistician. He said, "My wife has been in school ever since I've known her, but my time is coming." I noted that Reese grew sadder and sadder as she took his role. I asked, *Is this a relationship you want to keep?* She said that she did.

Therefore I asked for that moment *when they became special to each other*. They were in Portland and she had attended a meeting. He had walked in and she could have sworn he had a girlfriend, because he kept asking for a ride to Port Angeles for the weekend. He did not get one, but his parents live there, and he's still very tied to them. That Friday, they had gone to the movies on campus. I asked her to tell him why she finds it special being with him and she became quiet, so I asked her to reverse roles with her husband. As her husband, I asked him to tell her why she is special. He said, "Because you are the Mother of my children. You're fun and have a good sense of humor, and you go shopping without spending a lot of money." I reversed her back to herself and she said, "You will always be my cute little Dickie. You appreciate my interests and humor. You are a good Father to our children. And you garden with me, always help out and stand beside me no matter what happens." They embraced.

2) I asked her what was uppermost on her mind to bring her to the present difficulty. After some thought, she came up with a scene in the mall parking lot last Saturday. They have a light blue Dodge. They were going to the shopping center with the children to get their haircut. She had asked her husband before she left the hospital to call and find out how late they are open to. When she arrived home, no one had called. She called and found out the barber shop closes earlier than she had expected. When they arrived at the barber shop it had closed. Reese said, "I want to get some things at the hobby shop." Dick said, "what do you mean? I didn't plan on going there. I came here to have the children get their haircuts. I have my own things to do." Reese replied, "I have some projects at the hospital and they don't have the ribbon I need; I want to finish the projects." Her husband persisted, "if you wanted to go, why didn't you tell me? You should have told me, so I would know." Reese explained, "I was planning on going to the hobby shop while you were with the kids getting their haircuts. That way it wouldn't have taken extra time." He says with a great sigh, "well alright, hurry up." Reese says to the group, "I don't like hurrying for things and I don't like making appointments for everything." She did go to the hobby shop and when she was finished it was around 4 p.m. Next to the hobby shop was her favorite restaurant. She had told Dick that she wasn't planning on cooking dinner during this pass. She would pick up chicken wings or something.

Reese reluctantly asks, "Can we go to the Hickory Bar-b-que?" He says, "Absolutely not. We can't afford that. It's gonna cost \$30 dollars or more." (He walks back to the car) Reese in protest, sits on the curb. Their children are playing on the island in the parking lot. Her daughter walks over to her Father and says, "Come on Daddy, Mommy wants to talk to you," as she pulls him by the arm. He finally agrees to have dinner there, but insists they can't afford it.

3) I have them sit down and face each other and her husband says, "You know I can't eat there." She says, "good, it'll cost even less. Go get some food you can eat and bring it in." He went into the restaurant and before he ate anything, he asked the waitress what everything was made of. During dinner Reese said, "you look like you are enjoying those ribs." He responds, "yeah, they'll probably make me sick." After dinner Reese takes the bill and was relieved to find it was less than 25 dollars. Dick yells, "I told you we couldn't afford this!" Reese says, "we have enough here for another 2 meals and the one we just had."

As they go out of the restaurant, Dick says, "See, you always get your way. It's never what I want to do." Reese asks, "why don't you tell me what you want? I'm supposed to read your mind. Besides the kids wanted what I wanted to do. I'm not programming them!"

The director in a stage whisper: "He won't hear this. He was an only child. His parents probably anticipated his every need and he wants you to do the same. Tell him about that."

After telling him, Dick says, "You leave my mother out of this. What does my Mom have to do with your being so selfish?" Reese replied, "It has a lot to do with what you expect of me." He says, "you're the one who's sick and in the hospital." Reese says, "you're hopeless." Reese was smiling when she said that, but imagine how hurt she must feel. I said the smiling takes him off the hook, so I asked her to tell her husband how it hurt her.

Reese says, "This is our problem. You act like you're fine and 'they' need to work on me more to get

along with you. Let's take care of both of us. I'm not coming back if this continues. Everything is my fault; none is yours." Dick admits, "Maybe there could be some small thing that I could change---possibly. You're insensitive to my needs, domineering and controlling."

Reese replies, "no, I'm not. You think you need so much. In what way do I not meet your needs?" He says, "You gave me a Walkman and you took it to the hospital with you." She says, "I'll buy you one." He says, "We can't afford that." Reese says, "What's the real reason?" Her husband finds it difficult to talk and Reese gets more and more frustrated and says, "I can't read your mind. You have to talk and tell me what you're thinking."

Dick replies, "I'm conditioned by you. I'm preparing for the kill. I'm expecting you to strike, because you always do. It's your fault I keep this guard around me. I wasn't like this before." Reese says, "I wasn't like this either. It's frustrating living with you and trying to communicate when you don't talk. You say I'm trying to pull my will over everything." He agrees saying, "You always take charge."

Reese continues, "You don't risk. You don't put anything out on the table. Talk to me. Tell me how you are feeling. When you are silent, I feel rejected. I feel like you don't care enough; you focus too much on yourself. What would it take to get you to talk?" "I don't know," he responds, much to Reese's frustration.

4) I asked Reese whether they are able to talk about sex. In the role of her husband, she replied, "She wants it every week!" His need is not so great. She holds back because she doesn't want to hurt his feelings. I told her we didn't have to stage anything risqué, only put the matter into words, so as herself she addressed him: "Dickie, we have to have sex more often.." "I'd like to also," he said. "So why don't you?" she asked. "I always have to take the initiative." He requires considerable warm-up, likes things to be planned, and know that they are coming, so that he can work it into his schedule somehow. He said to her: "We always have to do it when you want to. I do it on your schedule. It's another way you control me. Why is sex so important to you?" She laughed, "I like it. I like being close with you, loving and caring. Not all these power struggles."

The challenge seemed to be fitting the sex in somehow. I suggested a trade off: "I'll do less if you'll do less" kind of thing. Reese thought of all the things she had to do, but noted that it was less than before. I suggested that if they took more time out for a social life that could lead to more sexual interest. The husband is willing to go in for couples therapy. They've done it before.

Closure

5) I shifted the focus of the psychodrama away from the marriage to the pain of Reese's childhood. As a kid she moved around a lot because of her father's job. This meant she was always going to a different school, and arriving on the scene to find everyone already in cliques, with no room for anybody new. I asked and we learned that she was larger than most of her peers and brighter, which made her stand out from the others in ways they couldn't identify with. I asked whether she ever fought back in the face of the name calling...etc., and she said that she got hurt, not angry. In adulthood this carried over to her relationships with neighbors. She feels different from them, is hesitant to approach, for she is so vulnerable to rejection. I suggested they might think she was aloof and thinks she's better than them. She said, "I'm never invited in and I don't ask to be in." Without reassurance she holds back, and holding back puts her at a greater distance.

6) Our concluding scene was *intrapsychic*. *She began by giving her double-as-herself some advice*. "Don't be so hard on yourself," she began. "It's done now." She flashed upon a medical situation where she felt responsible for not having made the best decision. The patient didn't die, but did suffer a severe reversal. We felt she'd done the best one could do under the circumstances. At some level she must recognize that. Reese went on to say: "I don't feel good enough. No one wants to talk to me." She began to cry. We noted how very young she felt as the child part of Reese. I moved her over to the adult role and said, "If you found your child like this, what would you do?" She embraced the double (as her rejected child self). I acknowledged the tears flowing, saying, "Tell little Reese what the tears are saying to her." The adult Reese said, "You're valuable. There's no one else in the world like you. Who cares if you're not like everybody else! You're special. You mean a lot. I'll be there for you."

who had. This part of the session served to underscore the futility of suicidal behavior, and promised to reinforce a barrier against considering the possibility once again. A few had altercations with siblings, which had been worked through, making room for more mature relationships.

COMMENT: This psychodrama had the merit of bringing the protagonist to terms with his nuclear family relationships, and putting that past behind him. Now he is free to enjoy his current and upcoming relationships. With the security they provide, he gains an edge over suicidal tendencies. The protagonist's girl friend is quite a bit older than he is, but that did not emerge as an issue, particularly in that Sam consciously accepts what that difference contributes to their relationship. Is there any reason to assume that an older woman-younger man combination are any more at risk than the older man-younger woman combination? This couple choose not to allow cultural expectations to have an adverse influence on their judgment.

A word on technique: Using the **mirror** rather than have the protagonist play that part of the scene himself eliminates the danger of practice effects. Once having done that we gave him the chance to undo what he did before. No danger of practice effect there, except in the positive sense which automatically excludes the negative outcome to be avoided.

The psychodramatic baby is a self figure, and although many protagonists are unaware of the connection at the outset, most spontaneously come to that perception during the scene. If they don't we tell them. If they're not ready for it, the interpretation won't sink in, at least not this time around.

Cindy psychodrama, 49 Life threatening fall-out from old grief

She yielded to the encouragement from her peers and agreed to be the protagonist today. Cindy lost her daughter 4 years ago, and she became suicidal 3 weeks ago. I sought a connection and found that wanting to see her daughter again was prominent in her thinking when she attempted suicide.

1) We began with interviewing Cindy in the reverse role position as her daughter. We learned that the daughter's death was sudden, the result of an automobile accident on New Year's Eve. Neither another car nor the consumption of alcohol contributed to the tragedy. The daughter was slim, 23 years old, 5'6" tall, divorced with a small son. "She had everything going for her," her mother said. I called for a scene based on the last time Cindy saw her alive. It was about 10pm New Year's Eve. Several persons were seated together at a table when the daughter dropped by, telling them that she had a couple of movies. "Maybe you'd like to come by later," she said, but her parents declined, for they'd made some plans of their own. 2) They had been asleep when the telephone rang at 2am. Cindy got out of bed to answer. The male voice at the other end inquired whether this was where the daughter lived, and Cindy explained that the daughter no longer lived there, but that they were her parents, and "Was anything wrong." The other asked about her husband, and she called to him, but the person on the other end of the line didn't wait. He said they should come to the hospital at once. There had been an accident in which she was involved. He would supply no other information.

3) The husband was fully awake now, getting dressed, but Cindy was ready to go first and was down at the car scraping the windshield when he finally got there. She learned from him later that he'd had a premonition that Rachel was dead, but he didn't say so at the time. They hardly spoke to one another on the way to the hospital.

4) When they arrived at the hospital they encountered a policeman sitting at a desk. When they identified themselves to his satisfaction, he told them immediately that she had died instantly. Cindy became hysterical. They offered to let her see the daughter, but she declined, doing the identification by way of a photograph.

5) The next morning (which came quickly) they had the task of telling her brothers. When they told the one to appear first, Lance, he responded with anger, banging his fist through a wall. I asked her what had brought the death of her daughter to mind three weeks ago. "I needed to see her," she replied. "Yes, but why at that particular time rather than some other time?" I persisted. She alluded to a fight between her husband and one of her sons, and then added that she'd just put her mother in a retirement home.

6) I followed up on her mother first, through staging the moment when Cindy presented mother with

the possibility. Cindy's mother did not object, and was active even in the selection of the particular retirement home, which she liked. Guiltily Cindy apologized for not having enough room for mother at her place, but mother brushed that aside, saying, "I wouldn't consider living with any of my children." I asked whether Cindy thought mother might've said that 'tongue in cheek,' and Cindy said she thought so. Nevertheless, it was clear that mother did nothing to contribute to Cindy's feeling guilty, and Cindy admitted that, taking full responsibility herself for the guilt. She could find no rational basis for it, and saw it as in some way related to her perfectionism. "I should've had a place for her,"

7) Next we focused on the tension between father and son. Cindy found herself in the middle. She had sympathized with the son, but felt she should've supported her husband. This showed the struggle was internal, but I followed the sequence of dealing with the 'external' pressure first. I placed the auxiliary playing the husband downstage left and the auxiliary playing the son downstage right with Cindy downstage center between them. I asked her whether she found herself drawn more in one direction than the other, but she remained rooted to the spot. Therefore I directed her to stand nearer one of the sides and express her feeling. Then I directed her to the other side with the same assignment. That done, I returned her to the middle, bringing the auxiliaries in, with each taking one of her hands, both pulling, and both at the same time trying to enlist her as an ally at the expense of the other. This intensified her experience. I told her she could free herself and she did. I said, "Rather than try to take yourself out of the picture by swallowing pills, hand the problem back to each of them, abdicating the role of the mediator, which was destroying you,"

8) First she dealt with her son, admitting her sympathy for his quest for independence and freedom, but also saying that if he was ready to strike out on his own it was up to him to take full responsibility for it. She did not intend to plead his case with father, but as mother she could understand and accept what he wanted to do. She'd had a talk with his brother, who was much more involved in the business than he was, and was disinclined to break loose. His brother didn't mind taking up the slack if he wanted to take off to Oregon. If he ever changed his mind and wanted to come back, as far as the brother was concerned, he could.

9) This greatly simplified Cindy's approach to her husband, and now she spoke from a position of strength, free to acknowledge both points-of-view without trying to reconcile them. She left to them whatever they wanted to do without trying to program the outcome for them. We concluded

10) with an intrapsychic scene, which showed her now at more peace with herself. She said she'd never again try to kill herself, but would face matters as she had in the psychodrama, taking no more of the responsibility than actually was hers to take. I reminded her how important it was to talk with someone if ever she became suicidal again, and to consider in advance who that might be. Cindy's peers shared readily with her. They were glad she'd overcome her reluctance and done the psychodrama.

Comment

I overlooked mentioning above that in the imaginary scene with the daughter returned from the dead, Cindy in the role reversed position as the daughter said a firm "No" to the wish to go to her through taking her life. "You fought for my son, and have adopted him as yours. Now I want you to raise him. I couldn't want for a better mother for him. Think of him, his needs, and of me and my needs. You can overcome your pain. Now you know how." Not the exact words, but the substance of them.

Media: Somewhere in Time, Dr. Zhivago, Affair to Remember, The Goodbye Girl, Beauty and the Beast, Love Story, Sleepless in Seattle, Thorn Birds, On Golden Pond, The African Queen, Harry Loves Sally, Adam's Rib, The Sound of Music, Father Goose, The Ghost and Mrs. Muir, It Happened One Night, Gigi, Pocahontas, Ghost. We construe the 24 stories as if they were scripts we are living out. Each has its own problems, calling forth counterscripts to rescue the program underway, or to offer another route to fulfillment. Some may lead to happy endings, but others, detailed in psychodrama, make matters worse. Here are the director's options: 1) replace the counterscript which isn't working with another which might.

2) ask the purpose of my life. If my life script no longer fits who I've come to be, shouldn't I seek one which does? If I opt for a replacement script, the old counterscript becomes obsolete. Shouldn't I let it go too?

3) If the new script works, why resist it? If flaws emerge, try another counterscript. Does the new counterscripts work? If not, return to 1 above.