

Chapter Nine
 Stories 10 and 11
 The Universal Stressors

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 about # 10
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Negative-Depressed Aggregate Stories The negative-depressed may be subdivided into "Detour," consisting of stories 7 through 9, and the "Universal Stressors," common to all human beings, minimally modified by particular cultures, Stories 10 and 11. Story 10 focuses on loss, desertion and abandonment, whereas Story 11 reflects injury, coming either from man's malice toward man, as in criminal or wartime invasiveness, or on the other hand, random catastrophes of nature, where the protagonist suffers from having been at the wrong place at the wrong time. Primitive people may interpret the latter as the wrathful acts of a judgmental god. In the Hebrew Bible, Job's friends took for granted that Job's suffering was God's punishment for his sin. When a distraught person cries, "Why did God do this to me? What did I do wrong?" or, on a more sophisticated level "Why do bad things happen to good people?" the assumption behind the question is that everything that happens is God's doing.

Not many people grasp the full implications of our belief in free will. In retrospect many medical examiners imagine that every death is explainable in their terms, so they have no room for random accidents, just as theologians fail to see that exercising free choice may counter another's free choice, placing us at cross purposes from each other, resulting in tragic collisions along the way. We present a detailed verbatim psychodrama that operates along this backdrop, showing the protagonist coping with the depression catastrophic loss invites. We shall deal with the Universal Stressors first, and come back to the Detours later. Few directors have any difficulty recognizing the three detour stories 7, 8, and 9, but dealing with them effectively challenges therapeutic skill.

Noel's Psychodrama, Loss and Survival

This takes place in a hotel room at Chateau D'Oex,

Switzerland in the Winter of 2000, where two engaged couples in their mid-twenties, all southern Californians, are on vacation. Melody and Jim are one couple, and Angie and Bob are the other couple. Jim and Angie are brother and sister. A chance encounter with the Italian stranger in the next suite leads to Jim and Melody's cooperative effort to get Noel's balloon flying, even though his heart is not in it.

Melody, a graduate student in clinical psychology, recognizes that Noel is dangerously depressed. Her lover, Jim, graduate student in Film Production at the same university, has fully occupied himself with the balloon challenge, leaving both Melody and Noel with plenty of free time. Noel becomes attached to her, and Melody feels an enormous responsibility to curb the suicide risk, on hold for the moment because of Noel's transference feelings for her. She lacks the legal and professional standing to get Noel into the system.

Then Salvatore Manetti, Noel's employer, arrives on the scene out of his concern for Noel. It turns out he's an uncle to the brother and sister, Jim and Angelina, and is delighted to find them here, as the couples reunite after brief sidetrips. Sal is well aware of the Noel problem. He sent Noel on this venture in the hope of hastening recovery, but it wasn't working. The five people decided on a collaborative effort, which involved Jim's intuitive skill in psychodrama. Jim was so preoccupied with ballooning he was the last to recognize the need, but once the group got him on board, he responded fully to the immediate challenge. Melody, who kept a personal journal, is responsible for the elaborate account we have here and which she shares with us, with Noel's kind permission. Melody writes,

Jim's reading an Italian technical manual is no obstacle for one who grew up with the Italian language at the same time he was learning his own native English. Satisfied that Jim had a great deal to occupy his attention, and released from the necessity of full interaction, Noel fell back into a slump. And here I am, close at hand. Jim, caught up with his new toy, failed to notice, but I kept to Noel's side to keep him going. No easy task, for Noel was very depressed, and though I'd like to think

I'm a professional prepared through hands-on course training the fact remains I had not yet fulfilled all my internship requirements. What's worse, I have no supervisor on hand to prompt me or to correct the mistakes I'll surely make. I've been away from my program over a month, with a full semester yet to go, and here I feel rusty in responding to the un-asked-for challenge of holding the grief-stricken Noel Dubois together.

Despite Jim's being so close at hand, Noel was developing strong transference feelings toward me---all too easy to do. How dare Salvatore send him off like this? But Salvatore, the businessman and friend, for all his intelligence and good will had no notion of the possible dynamite in this situation, but he knows it now. Noel felt Salvatore wanted him out of the way when he made it so easy for him to lay aside his work commitments. He had clung to Salvatore, as the one port in the storm, to keep his life on an even keel. In Noel's view, Salvatore had abandoned him, so he pinned his whole hope on me, even before I realized it. What a blessing that Salvatore had second thoughts about Noel's coming here alone. He came on his own initiative without my having to seek him out. Even if Jim's mind is elsewhere, Noel himself can give me whatever information I require, if he knows it.

Ruefully I acknowledge to myself that all the leisure I'd thought I was going to have to consolidate my relationship with Jim had suddenly evaporated, and at least so far, no one knows it but me. How I missed Bob and Angie at the very time I was being thankful for being temporarily independent of them. Bob and Angie are caught up in their own thing, but at least Bob has his feet on the ground.

Jim has an intuitive grasp of human interaction, benefits from graduate education in theater plus an indeterminate amount of technical training handed down from my renowned clinical psychologist father to pastor Nick, and from childless father-figure Nick to son substitute Jim. If I can pry Jim away from his balloon pilot obsession, he may function as a desperately needed colleague.

I'm scared to ask the real expert, Dad. His expectations are too high. I considered phoning my clinical psychologist mother (Lyn Freeman), but mom would tell me to get out of there and come home to finish things properly. She'd declare I have no business working at such a critical level already. After all, the malpractice insurance won't cover me. I have no license, no contract, and the patient doesn't even know he's a patient---but boss Salvatore should.

Should I risk alarming Salvatore? He took time off to come onto the scene, even though he had been busy filling the chef gap Noel's emotional impairment had created for their restaurant business back in Courmayer, Italy. Here come Salvatore, who couldn't quit worrying about Noel, and Bob and Angie, who have just arrived from their side trip. Jim had reserved the suite on the other side of us for them.

Meanwhile, thankfully, Jim's passion persists every night, but the inevitable demand of working through Noel's transference toward me threatens to sabotage my love connection with Jim. Now how can I discuss that with my parents? They probably hadn't even faced the fact I'm already sexually active. It isn't easy being a child, an adult and a professional all at the same time. I'm way out of my depth, with no superior to consult. How did I get myself into this mess? If I were billing Noel by the hour, I'd be making a fortune. The fact that he chose to speak with me privately in French rather than English was insurance against Jim's hearing a chance remark, but my French is a skill acquired as an adult and now without the constant community reinforcement I'd had at my year's fellowship in Quebec, I couldn't let up for a moment. Very tiring.

Tomorrow I shall demand that we all be together, speaking in English, not only at breakfast, but also out on the tarmac preparing Noel's balloon for actual flight. It will take at least three of us and probably more for adequate ballast. How good it is that the size of our group has doubled. Is Sal a naive optimist like his brother Mario? I'll scare him half to death. I hope so. Noel could be suicidal, but we can't let that happen.

First Flight

The night routine did not flow as planned. Noel's insomnia interfered with our rest. He was prone to pace the halls, stroll outdoors alone, watch TV---not programmed for my taste, nor his either, I should think. This led to long siestas in the day, which pleased me at first, till I realized it meant he'd be up half the night again, dropping things, shifting furniture...etc, just enough to interrupt my blissful dreams---or whatever. No, he was not in the same room. He was next door, but for the racket he made it seemed like he was right in there with us.

When I heard Jim tell Noel he needed some hands-on experience, I saw a golden opportunity. "Sounds great," I said, "I want to watch. Maybe I'll learn something too." With which clever (?) ploy I forced us into a group, despite the fact that my curiosity over what Jim was learning here was less than keen. I wouldn't kid you. I've no aspirations for sainthood. I sought my own comfort and convenience.

But it happens that this is precisely the proper move for the sake of Noel's condition. A depressed person's inaction contributes to his feelings of helplessness, and helplessness prevents his trying anything he'd conceivably fail at, thereby spiraling him down to a halt. How many days had we already been here without his ever getting off the ground? Indeed, out of his chair or off his back. When he got into one of those semi-supine positions, I'd throw in a jab to straighten him up. "How can I talk to you if you're so eager to fall asleep on me?" So I waxed enthusiastic: "Tomorrow we'll have an early breakfast and get out on the tarmac, where you and Jim can blow up (not a good choice of words) your balloon, and we'll all go for a ride."

But at the last minute I had to sacrifice myself to get Noel into the basket. I'd chosen to keep Bob company, who was not about to risk getting up in 'that thing.' Jim hadn't the foggiest notion how hard at work I'd been with Noel. As if he were the only one with a responsible work ethic.

With Angie leaning over the edge of the basket trying to take it all in, and Jim functioning as apprentice pilot, Noel gets Sal off to one side and whispers, "I thought Melody and Bob

were already married." Sal explains, "They pretend to be married. Essential for their cover in seeking out a fugitive. It's not a clandestine relationship.'

NOEL (eyebrows raised): Very effective cover, I'd say. What this is going to do for my fantasies about Melody. Oh my!

SAL (ever gracious): That you're allowing yourself some fantasies is a healthy sign after what you've been through---as long as you don't act on them. (He grins) Jim is a karate expert, you know. Don't get any ideas about Angie either. She is too.

NOEL: This younger generation. I was born too soon, but if I hadn't been, I wouldn't have had the chance to marry Lisa. And I wouldn't trade that for anything. *He sighs, goes into himself. Noel is fragile.*

Noel's psychodrama, Jim directing

The day was not yet over. One doesn't balloon at night. We hurried back to our hotel, after having consumed second and third cups of coffee, because we had important work to do. Noel had no idea he was it. No one let him escape to his lonely room, for his boss, Salvatore had tapped him as tonight's protagonist. Everyone else present knew what that involved, except Bob, and he was intrigued to see where psychodrama may lead. Here's how we warmed up, with the whole group on hand.

JIM: This is old hat for a few of us, but out of respect for Bob and Noel, I'll make an introduction. Bob, you're not entirely new, because you weathered the bibliodrama of the comic opera *Cosi Fan Tutti* we staged in Zurich, but Noel, Salvatore says you've never seen a psychodrama.

NOEL: That's so. Sal described what he went through years ago in Woodhaven, US A....

JIM: So let's get beyond the past. Psychodrama moves through present moments. That's how we make past, future, and the imaginary world come alive, and subject to our changing.

NOEL: Huh?

BOB: I agree, Noel.

SAL: Be patient. We prefer to demonstrate rather than

describe. Protagonists retain control, and end up understanding completely.

JIM: Anyone here scared to be protagonist?

NOEL: I see where this is headed. Sal, you've set me up. Bob, would you like to be protagonist?

BOB: Not tonight, but I promise I will.

MELODY: I'll see to it.

NOEL: OK, I'm game, if you'll pick up the pieces when you're done. But I can't think of anything I need to work on.

ANGIE: Famous last words. But rest easy, we'll not shove you anywhere but where you're ready to go. Like the security council of the United Nations, you retain veto power.

JIM: Noel, I'll tell you what I already know. Recently you've suffered a terrible trauma and a married person's ultimate loss. You're still hanging on the ropes. Anyone would be. We'll have to take account of that sooner or later, but when it comes up, you'll be ready for it. You're free to stop the process, though we hope, for your sake, you'll see it through. We're on your side all the way. Aren't we, gang? *Unanimous group affirmation.*

SAL: Noel, we love you. I didn't want to put you on display. What I hope we'll do is draw upon our friends here in your behalf. We realize it may be painful, but it can also be very satisfying, and shield you from what may jeopardize your life.

NOEL: Sal, you think I'm suicidal. Good Catholics don't go that route. No pain, no gain is our motto. Like taking the first balloon ride, or piloting my own balloon.

Or (laughing) when I came to you twenty-five years ago, seeking a chef position, you evaluated my **Filet de perche, fried in butter, served with boiled potatoes and slices of lemon.**

SAL to the Group: Today we consider this the prime specialty of our Lake Geneva region. To work for me, you'd have to have it down pat. When my brother Mario came in, I served it to him. He thought I'd made it. Noel, you didn't disappoint me then, and you won't now. Please, please don't leave me behind.

JIM: Noel, have you developed a suicide plan?

Scene One: Bypassing Suicide

NOEL: Am I transparent? I've told no one, not even my priest.

SAL: Especially not the priest.

JIM (setting forth a straight back chair): This is your place in the confessional. You're safely enclosed with the booth all around you. (placing another chair back to back) And here on the other side of the wall sits one you cannot see, your confessor. May we ask Bob to play the role of the priest?

Bob slips into the priest chair, awaiting instructions.

So that Bob may know how to represent your priest, take the priest chair. Be your priest. Bob will move over to your chair. We call that role reversal. All you do is trade places. (They move) Now I interview you as Father....

NOEL: Capriati.

JIM: Describe yourself so we can see you.

NOEL as Father Capriati: I wear the black cassock. I'm short, with a ruddy fat face behind thick, horn rimmed glasses, about fifty years old with thinning grey hair. I'm vigilant, frowning, wary of Catholics who stray. I stop them in their tracks.

Out of role: Jim, I already said I wouldn't talk to him.

JIM: I wouldn't either. But let's have Bob imagine what he might say if you did talk with him. Speak as Father Capriati, as if you're still in the confessional.

BOB as the priest: Sorry about Mrs. Dubois. It was a good funeral. She was a faithful Catholic. One day you will join her.

JIM: Noel, I'd like you to have the satisfaction, in this safe place, to tell him off. Let him be the one to seek a place to hide. This is our psychodrama sanctuary, where you trump his authority.

Reverse back to your own chair. Bob, as Father Capriati, turn your chair around to face him. Noel, stand up on the chair seat. He doesn't look so sure of himself now. He's afraid to look at you. See him squirm. He knows he's in for it. Wave your finger in his face. Give him a piece of your mind.

NOEL: How you got to be a priest I'll never know. You've got a heart of stone. Suicide crossed my mind, but I made no plan.

You have no right to condemn me. A thought is not a deed. I talked it over with Lisa---yes, even though she's dead ...

JIM as director: she's still very much alive in you...

NOEL: Thank you, Jim. (back to the priest) Lisa said "You'll come to me anyway, when your work is done, but in the meantime, our kids need you too, even as adults. Be there with them for me."

Father, you wouldn't let me explain. I'd never get this far with you. You're no priest. You're a prosecuting attorney.

JIM: Like the zealous Saul before he became St. Paul.

NOEL: I'm sorry to have to tell you this, but the Lord's work is not what you're doing. I don't care if you are a priest.

JIM: Let's pretend you got through to him. Bob, I want you to be a penitent Father Capriati. Noel's words have touched your heart. What will you tell Noel now?

BOB as Father Capriati: Please sit down, Noel, and let's level with one another. What you said made me realize that my zeal has gone overboard. I've pushed you away at a time when I should have drawn you close. Lisa is our loss too, and your suffering is our suffering. I'll pray for you, that you'll feel the loving arms of our Lord about you, as you dare face the future.

JIM: Stand up. Noel, do what you want to do.

Tears flowing, Noel embraces Bob as Father Capriati.

Scene Two: Losing Lisa

JIM: Noel, sit here. Be Lisa. Describe what you look like so we can see you.

'LISA:' I'm ten years older than Noel, but I look ten years younger. Noel always said I look like an angel. My friends told me I was robbing the cradle, but we waited till he was eighteen to get married. Our age difference notwithstanding, he was more mature than I was. He took care of his widowed mother in her declining years when she couldn't take care of him. A heart attack, and she was gone. I was all Noel had. What could I do? It was his turn to be cared for. So I cared for him.

Noel, out of role: But I didn't take good care of you.

JIM: Let's ask Melody to be Lisa to stage the scene where you failed to take care of Lisa. Noel, when is this? Where are we?

NOEL: This is the day after Christmas, about a month ago. I feel like I was named 'Noel' to make Christmas extra special for me. A season of joy and gladness. The best of times was about to become the worst of times, like in this Dickens novel I read recently. Our grown up kids had urged us to take a Christmas vacation. The two of us hadn't gone anywhere as just a couple since our honeymoon twenty-five years ago. Besides, it was their turn to holiday at their respective in-laws, who were entitled to equal time. We'd been to southern Germany on Lake Constance and had a wonderful time, but on Christmas Day we learned that hurricane Lothar was coming our way. If we hurried we thought we could beat it. We should be home near family at a time like this. I already told a few of you the story...

JIM: Telling your story and putting it into action are quite different, as you are about to discover. Besides, this is how you can include those who haven't heard. *Moving four chairs into two rows, one row behind the other.* Noel, show us your car.

NOEL: Not our car. It's a sports vehicle rental. Our youngest borrowed our car and paid for our use of this one. It's a beauty, maroon, this year's model with all the bells and whistles. Our car might not have made the long trip without some kind of problem coming up, and besides, I would've had to buy new snow tires to make it across the Alps in Winter. It's odd. Here is Sal with our old car the kids returned, which I need to tug the balloon trailer, and here is Sal, having come by train, complete with its trailer for hauling the balloon back home. It turned out to be more trouble than I'd expected to get my balloon here by train. I was thinking I could avoid a lot of troublesome details this way. Well, it wouldn't have been that troublesome for me under ordinary circumstances. Now Sal and I can drive home together, hauling the balloon ourselves. That way we won't stay away from work too long. The rental was a casualty, along with all the goodies we bought the family and each other for Christmas. Our simple luggage was expendable. Indeed,

everything was expendable---except Lisa.

JIM: Show Melody as Lisa where to sit.

NOEL: It's her turn to drive. I'm the worn out passenger.

JIM: Who's speaking?

NOEL: I am. Lisa, we've never driven in worse weather. Every kilometer we go it's a chore. We're seeing more cars alongside the road rather than on it the further we go. Let's look for an inn and weather the storm there. We're not going to make it all the way home at this snail's pace. When daylight comes, we'll make better progress. Besides, what's the hurry?

JIM: Role reverse.

MELODY as NOEL; "What's the hurry?"

NOEL as LISA: It's always darkest before the dawn, and if we can hang on we won't need to stop. A couple of hours. After the last detour I don't know where we are but it should be half way at least. You're exhausted. You know I got a little shut eye as you drove. It's your turn to recuperate. I'll let you have the wheel again after breakfast---if we can ever find a place that's open. Should we be climbing already?

NOEL as Himself: I'm sure we're lost. Let's pull over.... Oh look, there are lights ahead, but they're emergency lights. That means trouble. Let's turn around and find another way. Where did the road go? Can't tell with swirling snow above and slush beneath.

NOEL as LISA: We passed lights just a little way back. Maybe there's a place we can stop.

NOEL as Himself: What happened? You're off the road. Now we're stuck. Lisa, let's see if we can change places without getting out of the car. I know it's not designed for this, but thank God, neither of us are bulky. *After several vain attempts to move the car forward.* According to my watch it should be daylight now. If we walk to where the lights were, maybe there's a garage which will send a tow truck. Maybe someone will come along and give us a ride.

Arm in arm we plod wearily through the accumulating wet snow.

It's daylight now. Even if we can't see very well, let's hope someone can see us. Where are the police when you need them? There goes one now. Wave your arms. That's his siren blaring. Is it a warning? What's the rumbling? Getting louder. Coming our way. Hang on. Avalanche! We can't outrun it. Maybe the slide will run out, or go another way. Hold on, Lisa. Lisa, hold on!

(To the group): Too late, the greedy monster devours us.

Silence. Deadly silence. One arm is up where I've been waving, and the other has Lisa's hand. At least I'm tall enough, my head is high enough I can still breathe. But I can't move. Like I'm set in concrete. It's so cold. We can't last long like this. We'll freeze. I hope Lisa has an air pocket. I squeeze her hand. She doesn't squeeze back! I hear a plane, very close. How can they see us? It's landing. Skidding toward us. Hope he stops. Can he hear me? I can barely hear myself. He sees me. Digs furiously. At last I move my upper body. I help free myself. I see my buried hand. It's numb, with an empty glove in its grasp. Lisa's still in there. Lisa was at my side.

NOEL to the stranger: Help me dig. My Lisa's in there. Not far. I still have her glove in my hand. *He plunges farther, deeper.*

JIM to Salvatore: Be the stranger.

SAL as himself: No stranger. I know who he has to be with his Cessna there, Link Morganstern. We worked side by side in the rescue operation at Mt. Blanc tunnel.

Now Sal takes the Morganstern role.

Noel is directing his own scene. As if he were Link, he pretends to speak German into his hand held radio---giving our position, I think. He rejoins me, tossing rocks, ice and snow aside with both hands. Too risky to use a shovel. I am frantic. I'm crying. His husky 'Javert,' sniffs around and starts digging furiously a couple of yards farther on. He's found Lisa. A helicopter lands and a paramedic rushes to our side. The dog has done the hard part. Together we grasp Lisa as we pull her free from the spent avalanche. The medic does his best to revive

her but it's too late. He shakes his head, and puts his arm around me. Death by asphyxiation. I plummet to the ground. But Morganstern has no mercy.

SAL as Morganstern: *He speaks Italian. I speak Italian.* The cop who tore by you two on foot saw a car further back. We've got to reach them. Sorry about your wife, but we can't stop. Someone else may be alive in there. You've got to keep on moving. Don't give up. Dig now. Grieve later.

Paramedics found our rental. No one there.

SAL as Morganstern: Don't slow down. We can't be sure.. Javert is covering the wider area. Let's scan the surface we can see. A cap, a ski pole, a hand like yours. Save another life.

Closure

Scene Three: Finding Lisa

NOEL to the group: It was futile. I was right. It was our car the cop saw. I was mad at my rescuer because he forced me, when Lisa was dead. But we picked up her body. He flew us home.

JIM: Show Morganstern how you feel about him now.

NOEL (*embracing him*). I owe you my life. Sorry I hollered at you.

SAL as Morganstern: Glad you did. You kept on fighting, but you're still in shock. Keep warm. Where is home? Which hospital shall I take you to? I'll land this crate anywhere.

JIM: Cut scene. We've been through your brutal reality. Psychodrama represents reality, but it can also improve upon it with 'surplus reality,' a fantasy option often more profoundly real than reality itself. Had you known you were losing Lisa, you'd have had a lot to tell her. Those at the bedside of a dying patient have had a privilege denied you, but here it's not too late. You will have your moment. Lisa-inside-you hears you. Melody continues as Lisa, sitting in this chair across from you.

NOEL *overwhelmed and momentarily speechless. He stands, walks over to his outdoor jacket, and removes a glove. He hands it to Melody, and she puts it on. He moves his chair closer, and takes both her hands in his. Tears come. He drops her hands.*

At long last he leans back in his chair, dries his eyes, and begins to speak:

Lisa, you have always been and shall continue being the most important person in my life. When Mom and I lost Dad, I was still a boy. Dad assumed Mom was helpless, but it wasn't so. We had no insurance, but we owned our own cottage. Mario hired Mom, first as waitress, later as hostess of our restaurant. I was there a lot, and everyone got used to seeing me around. Of course they thought I came to be with Mom, but Lisa, I came to see you. I couldn't help myself. You are the most beautiful woman in the whole world. I had to be devious, not underfoot. I gazed at you from across the room. After a while, you realized that this little boy, not yet a teen, had a crush on you. You didn't shame or embarrass me. You always treated me with respect. When I got Mom to invite you to my thirteenth birthday party, you came, and even though none of the kids my age were there, you took it in stride. Mom saw it wasn't all one way, but she wasn't worried. I'd been an altar boy, and you have a living faith. Our mutual attraction will run its course. No harm done. I'm a rapid learner, easily keep up with my school work, and have been granted more time off than any of the others. With Dad no longer in the picture, I figured it would be up to me to support Mom when she was too old to take care of herself. But how? I started hanging around the restaurant kitchen, while you and Mom were out front with the customers. Everybody was so used to seeing me around, no one paid any attention. No one else could have gotten away with it. I watched the expert chefs at work, made notes on their moves, as if I were a spy---which I was. When the time came, and it came sooner than anyone expected, I was able to cash in on my covert education. Lisa, you had several admirers over the years come and go, but you wouldn't let any of those relationships get serious. Mario would tease you about it, and you'd draw yourself up straight, wink, and say you were waiting for Mr. Right to come along. Well, it wouldn't be either of the Manetti brothers. Salvatore married early and Mario had a fantasy of being a priest. He kept his distance from women.

As the years went by, Mom's health declined. She relied more and more on me. And you were there too. I heard Mom telling you, "Lisa, you're like a daughter to me." Your quick witted reply, "Then how can I marry your son?" left me gasping for breath. I never told you I'd heard. It kept my hope alive.

The last movie the three of us saw together was Gigi. So much like our real lives, except the genders are reversed. We were so quiet going home. Were you thinking what I was thinking?

I kept telling myself that one day you and I would be together. I heard your last boy friend accuse you outright. Pointing at me, he said in my hearing, "You'd rather be with that kid than with me. What can he give you?" Your retort hit me like a thunderbolt: "Yes, I would rather be with that grown up kid. He can give me all I'll ever need." The guy's ego couldn't take it. "Link up with him, and when you're old and grey, he'll be chasing younger women." You arch your eyebrows and look straight at him. "I'll have to risk it." Sadly, we'll never get the chance to prove how wrong he was.

Lisa, we'd never been on a date. I'd never kissed you, before that night. The barriers were down. I dared to open up to you. Mother, bedridden in the next room, overheard me tell you how much I've always loved you. Instantly she called for us, and gave us her blessing. You smiled tenderly at her and at me. She passed away peacefully in her sleep that night.

Suddenly it was all on my shoulders. I had to get a job, and I told Salvatore I was eighteen. Sal knew better but he didn't call me on it. When he granted me a formal interview, he was amazed at what I knew and what I could do. The people here have already heard the story, how Sal hired me for my first full time job, and the only job I've ever held. And you, Lisa, were my first and only girl.

On my eighteenth birthday, Lisa, we were married. We had kids right away, and now they're having kids of their own. What a shame our grandchildren won't get to know what a beautiful, loving and giving person you are.

JIM: As touching a love story as I've ever heard. Now, Noel,

for next novel

I want you to role reverse with Lisa, and in the role of Lisa say what you need to hear from her.

NOEL as Lisa: I feel like God gave me **to you**, just to be God's gift **for you**. Our relationship had to come from Heaven. We had a lot of practical problems to work out---doesn't everyone? Sometimes we were angry with one another, but never, not even once, did we let the sun go down on our wrath. Whoever thought he'd been wrong sought forgiveness, and forgiveness was freely given. Our rare disagreements never weakened our relationship. Each time we ended up closer and stronger than ever before. Our last Christmas together was great, despite Lothar. Keeping my hand in that glove was not in my power. But keeping you in my heart is. Let me be there inside you to guide you, wherever you go and whatever you do. I've been there watching you this week, how you've found four great new friends. So they're a lot younger than you. Now when has age ever been a problem? Get over your survivor guilt. God calls us home when the work we came here to do has been done. That doesn't mean we have to do it all ourselves. Enough to plant a seed or get the ball rolling. One last thing. I'm inside you now to help you take care of yourself. Don't do anything stupid or foolish to get to me here ahead of your time. I want you to have a rich, full life, so you can tell me about it when you come to me.

JIM: Reverse back to yourself, Noel. As Lisa, Melody will pass as much on back to you as she can remember---maybe throw in an idea of her own if she thinks you need it.

She does, they stand, and close the scene with an embrace.

Close your eyes, Noel, imagine leaving Lisa here where she'll always be for you. Open the door to your future, prepare to meet it head on. With the door's opening, open your eyes. She's the lens you see through.

Scene 4: Healing Trauma

Noel, we know you're a night owl. Depressed persons often

no kids

have sleep problems, but I think it's more than that. When you sleep, do you dream?

NOEL: Yes, and it's always the same nightmare. It terrifies me. I stay awake to avoid it, but sooner or later I doze off, and it closes in on me again.

JIM: We can build a whole psychodrama around a nightmare, but considering the territory we've already covered, that won't be necessary. I'll take some short cuts. Choose someone to be you, so you can show us the dream without being in it yet.

NOEL: Salvatore. He's the one here nearest my age.

SAL: And I'm willing to do anything I can to help.

JIM: Do you remember the first time you had the dream?

NOEL: A few days after Lisa's funeral.

JIM: Have you ever told anyone your recurring dream?

NOEL: No. It's too embarrassing.

JIM to the Group: How many of you have had weird dreams? Let's go round the group with one sentence examples

Some mentions: Naked in a crowd, caught shoplifting, standing before colleagues to speak but I go blank, other children make fun of me, facing a firing squad, being totally alone, missing a final examination.

Noel, will it be easier to tell your dream to a man or a woman?

His uplifted hands gesture says it makes no difference.

MELODY: You've been open with me, Noel. If I'd asked, would you have told me about the dream which keeps you awake?

JIM (placing a chair across from Noel): Melody, come up here and ask Noel now. *But before she asks, Noel is already answering.*

NOEL: Several times I almost told you, but I didn't want to presume too much. I want you as my friend. I didn't want to push you away, as if I were just seeking a professional opinion.

MELODY: I promise to keep my analytic mind on hold, and listen to you as a friend.

JIM: Very good. Noel, you are about to tell Melody a story. As

you tell it, with Sal on stage in your role, we'll enact it. We'll represent any others there, and repeat any words spoken. We'll find ways to get by a film censor, if that becomes a problem.

NOEL: This is weird. I'm both an observer and a participant. It's at a graveside at the end of a funeral. The casket has no lid on it, and the one in the coffin is me, but I'm not dressed up. I'm wearing what I wear in the restaurant kitchen. The mourners standing round are not dressed formally either, but more like you are, here and now---including the priest. Bob, would you take the role. It's in a language I don't understand, not the Latin I'm used to. Lisa is there weeping. Angie, please take her role. I don't know how you'll stage this, but the observer me enters and puts an arm around Lisa. A wolf circles, but he keeps his distance, waits for us to leave.

JIM: At any point I may say, "Stop." In that way I can get more information, and introduce any changes. Or simply to provide emphasis for Noel's benefit. When I say "Go" continue as before..

If we run out of auxiliaries, we'll have to double up, as we did for the bibliodrama of "Cosi fan Tutte." I'll make it clear which role for you to play at any given moment.

We're in pause now. Bob, continue with the priestly liturgy. Angie as Lisa, stand over the casket and start weeping. Noel, no longer the observer, go over to Lisa and comfort her.

Bob holds a book before him as if reading. He's actually slowly and softly reciting the twenty-third psalm in Hebrew. Melody knows what he's doing, but Noel doesn't. 'Lisa's' hands cover her face, and she's shaking as if she were sobbing. Noel puts an arm around her, begins to weep himself, and then embraces her with both arms. Angie's tears are real. I've been circling the group as the wolf. Noel turns round seeking the director, and is about to break role. I stop moving.

JIM: Everybody keep your positions, going on silently as you were before, but I want Noel to return to his observer's chair, where he tells Melody what happened to him a moment ago.

NOEL to Melody: This part of the dream I hadn't remembered

*you
intended
me to
do*

till just now. I'm five years old, and the neighbor kids and I are playing at the edge of a tiny cave in a wooded area where we live. I've just lost my father, so we decide we're going to play funeral. It's to be my funeral, so they stick my feet into the cave, which is about all that will fit there. Then they heap leaves over me till I can no longer see the sky. I wake up shouting, but no one hears me. I'm in my bed.

MELODY: The first dream hasn't happened in reality, but the second sounds like a painful memory. But they're like two versions of the same thing. Whoops. I promised not to do that.

NOEL: It's OK. I figured out that much myself.

JIM: In psychodrama we don't analyze dreams, we change them in action. Which of the versions would you like to go into first. This time you'll not be an observer, but a participant who has the power to alter the outcome of the dream scene. So let's cut the first version. Clear the stage. Do the second. Sal, continue in the role of five year old Noel. The rest of the group are childhood playmates. I'm turning over this straight-back chair so that its protruding legs can stand for the cave. Those little cushions can be leaves. We'll begin with Sal as the five year old with his feet in the cave. Noel as his adult self today stands back here with me, and is free to do whatever he wants to do. The others improvise in ways that seem fitting.

The group gets into the children roles, starting with an energetic game. Sal as Child Noel points to the cave, then points to himself. The group nods in understanding. The child places his feet into the 'cave,' and reclines, with his hands folded over his chest. The others drop small cushions on top of him till he's covered. Noel shouts as he dashes over to throw cushions aside, pulls the child to his feet, and with one arm around him, wags his index finger at the other children reprovngly. Child Noel was scared, but now he's laughing. Others dust him off.

JIM: Pause! Now Noel, who is it that rescued the child from the heap of leaves?

NOEL: My dog kept barking till my father came. But wait a minute. It couldn't have been father. We'd buried him a short

time before. It had to be my mother. In reality it must have been my mother.

JIM: Let's return to the original version with the participant-you in the open casket, only this time you role reverse with the observer-you. You shifted into the child scene without having finished the adult scene. **How do you want to finish this one?**

NOEL: We did bury Lisa a few weeks ago. I was in tears beside the sealed casket. They concluded the service. People offered me their sympathy and returned to their cars. I couldn't leave. I was almost alone watching them lower the sealed casket, and saw the grave diggers throw dirt into the grave.

Spontaneously group members position themselves as they were before, and Melody as Lisa takes the supine place. The mourners drop the cushions on top of Lisa in the casket. Noel himself places the last cushion on top of her. This time Noel allows Sal as himself to lead him back to their car. Sal had actually been present, and this is what he now thinks he should've done then. All this is done in silence.

NOEL to JIM: At the real funeral, I felt I should've been the one buried, with Lisa instead of me as the survivor. But as we redid it this time, I was able to let her go, because --- don't ask me to explain how, she leaves the body behind so her spirit can dwell within me.

Jim, I know what it is to be buried immobile. I felt what Lisa felt, but because of that Morganstern rescuer we broke the bonds that held me, and I'm alive with a second chance.

BOB: Noel, do you see a religious parallel?

NOEL: Indeed I do. I'm no longer afraid to die, because in his own good time the Lord will set me free.

JIM: If you ever have this dream again, while you're still dreaming, you will be lucid, remembering this psychodrama, and redirect the outcome. You will be in charge. It will not be in charge of you.

Sharing

Let's pull in closer now for sharing. Tell Noel what in your

experience came to mind as we did his psychodrama. In this way he'll find he's not alone. We're with him the whole way. Don't limit your sharing to the last scene, but reflect on all four scenes, for each one leads to the next. One way to share is from the standpoint of the role you played in the psychodrama. For example Bob, how did you feel as Noel's priest? Or Melody, what was it like to be Lisa? Or Sal, what came to you as you encounter the child-Noel? Or as you lay in the coffin as the dead adult-Noel? Or Angie as mother? More commonly we cite parallels from our own personal experience. I'll role model what I mean.

Nick Capel and Mario Manetti are both very much like the idealized priest Bob portrayed in giving Noel the spiritual counsel the situation calls for. Regardless of the director's personal view, I'm an agnostic myself, every person of faith can recognize the genuine article. Forget institutional labels.

I lost my natural father before I was born, but I keep on finding father figures for me nearly everywhere I look. I wouldn't be surprised to find one right here in Switzerland.

Though I've yet to experience the long term love relationship you showed us, Noel, I'm hopeful. You've shown us what to look for. My present relationship already shows several of the qualities you cited in your relationship with Lisa.

I've lived on the edge, and flirted with disaster, but the trauma that nearly took your life reminds me how fragile and vulnerable I am, which rarely I face, but tonight I've faced it with you, Noel.

And I want to throw myself into saving who I can, no matter what burdens weigh me down, just as you rallied and put forth the extra effort when Morganstern demanded it of you, no matter how fresh your loss.

In another fifteen minutes Jim officially concluded the psychodrama, but spontaneous pairs kept on going a while longer. In making the transition back to the everyday world, the protagonist digressed from the psychodrama itself.

Comment

Inasmuch as I had access to a journal containing Melody's near total recall, and have received Noel's permission, I've placed relevant portions before you. I took advantage of details, however, for you who are new to psychodrama. It frustrated me as a graduate student that texts cited therapy with such brevity one could not be sure what actually went on in sessions. You didn't require all I presented, but I went ahead anyway, because the way one matter led to another gave you the flavor, as abstractions cannot.

This was hardly a routine hospital sponsored psychodrama. The clinical record puts necessary constraints on reporting we don't have to observe here. Jim lacked credentials, but no one questioned his knowledge or talent. In psychodrama he'd been an unofficial apprentice, intent on being with mentor Nick. That was relevant to his career choice of theater, in which field he was completing his graduate study. His approach was through story, which I believe transcends the various theoretical views.

He handled the warm up so well we only recognized in retrospect that was what he'd done. He made contact with everyone's background in order to make Noel feel more at home, and even though Noel tumbled to what was going on, Jim responded with such sensitivity, by then Noel had gained enough confidence in his leadership he was willing to risk it.

In a single sentence Jim told Noel what he knew about him, in contrast with others there who knew much more. That told Noel that what he chose to bring up was entirely up to him, for Jim had no hidden agenda. He was completely upfront. To hear that he had veto power gave Noel nothing to rebel against.

Most of our potential protagonists are there with a problem for us to work on. Noel professed to have none. Jim didn't argue. He merely kept on talking, referring to what was uppermost on Noel's mind. Meanwhile he was getting into Noel's script that hadn't been working. There was the option of the Catholic confessional, which this good Catholic wasn't using.

The natural question, "What got in your way?" led to a small surplus reality scene which brought out the obstacle and did something about it. It didn't get him to the confessional, which

would've made matters worse, but to a modified form more in accord with what he needed. As protestant pastor of a large church, Bob easily fit into the role of a priest, giving competent pastoral care. The right auxiliary at the right time. He respected Noel's faith, and made appropriate use of it. And neither were put off by Jim's agnosticism, for Jim understands religious language better than many clergy do. I am making the point that a psychodrama director is quite willing to work from within a world view other than one's own.

Noel balanced the beautiful love story with the sudden, painful loss. His nightmare connected with a childhood trauma redone brought relief, **finished the story, and opened his future.**