Ordinary People

by Judith Guest

August

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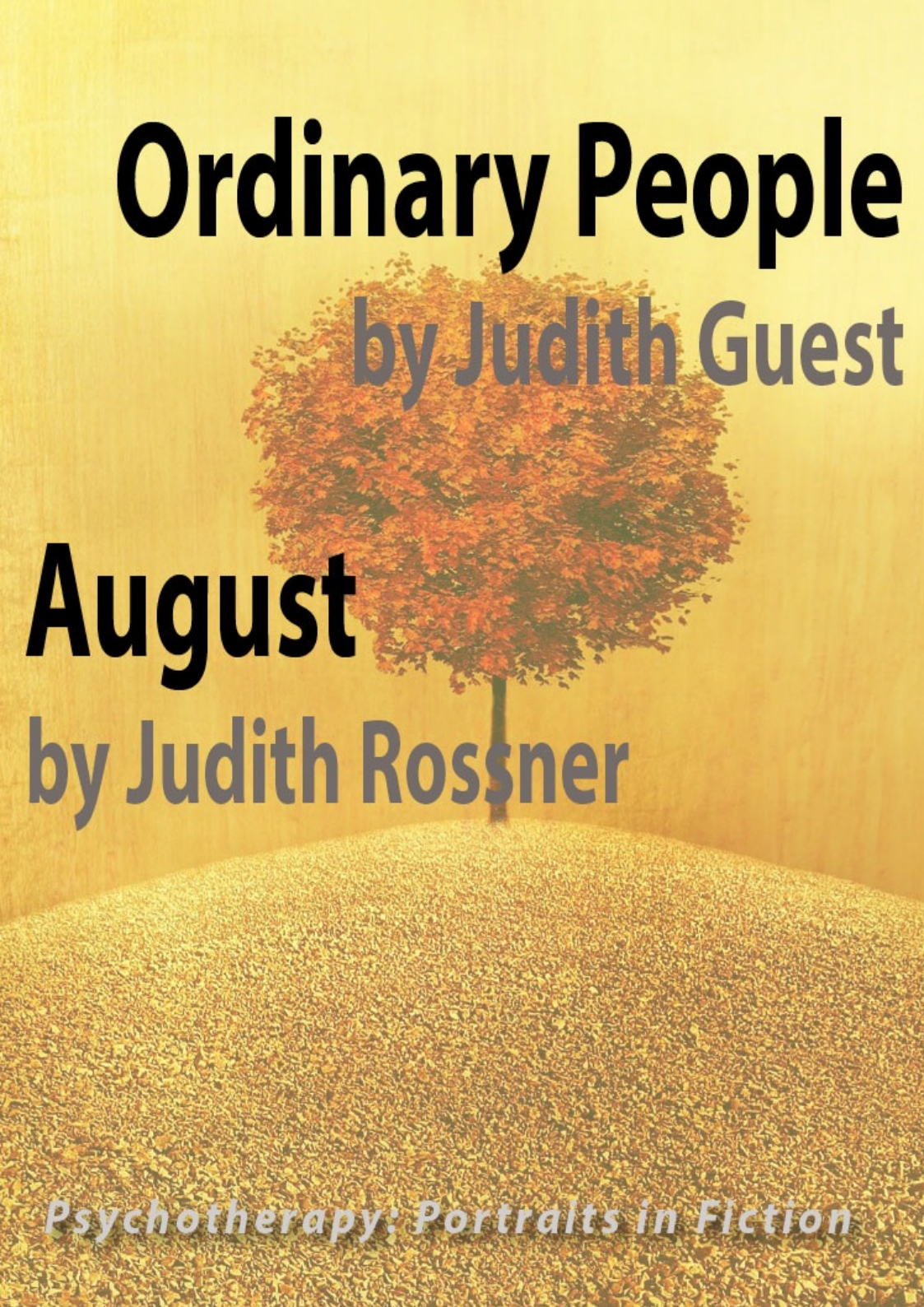

Psychotherapy: Portraits in Fiction

August by Judith Rossner

Ordinary People by Judith Guest

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Introduction

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The excerpts from the novels *August* and *Ordinary People* dramatically highlight the work of two therapists. The patients in both cases are adolescents, suicidal, and coming for their first sessions. The therapists differ radically in approach and style. In the selection from *August,* Dawn meets a female psychoanalyst, Dr. Schinefeld, whose interventions are shaped by attention to abstinence, neutrality, and objectivity. In contrast, Judith Guest's Dr. Berger is informal, personable, and talkative.

Asking which of these two styles indicates the better therapist is like evaluating whether jazz is better than classical music. Successful therapy depends on the elusive fit between therapist and patient. The chemist can predict how two elements will interact; there is no comparable science of human chemistry.

August

Judith Rossner

Dr. Lulu Shinefeld opened the door to her waiting room and said hello to the girl who was scheduled for a consultation. The girl, whose name was Dawn Henley, nodded coolly.

"Would you like to come into the office?" Dr. Shinefeld asked.

Dawn Henley stood. She was tall, even taller than Dr. Shinefeld, and quite beautiful, with dark brown, almond-shaped eyes, a startling, almost olive complexion, and honey blond hair cropped to shoulder length along a straight and severe line. It was July. Dawn wore white cotton pants, a white T-shirt, and sandals, but she might have had on a ball gown for the grace with which she preceded the doctor into the office, sank into the chair facing the doctor's, and inspected her surroundings.

The waiting room was nondescript, but the furnishings in the office were attractive, if spare. The walls were white; the couch, brown; the two chairs were covered in a splendid cherry red wool. A kilim rug with predominating colors of brown, teal blue, and red covered a portion of the wood floor. Aside from the rug, the artwork in the room consisted of a semi-abstract painting, in which shapes suggestive of humans seemed to be posing

for what could have been an old-fashioned family photograph, and a small sculpture resting on the table at the foot of the couch that was reminiscent of one of Henry Moore's primordial shapes, an egg embraced by some delicious, unidentifiable object. On the doctor's desk stood a slender blue vase that held three purple irises. Through an open door near the windows, it was possible to see another, smaller room with a thick brown carpet. Visible in this room were a bookcase containing various primary toys, a large dollhouse and a couple of yellow plastic beanbag chairs.

Dawn's eyes came to rest on the doctor.

No adolescent unease here. No suspicious glances or shifting in the seat. The girl's expression was neutral.

"So," Dr. Shinefeld said with a smile, "let me think of what you've told me. I know that you're eighteen years old, that your home is in Vermont but you've been going to boarding school in Westchester, and that you're entering Barnard College in September."

Dawn nodded.

From her canvas shoulder bag, which she'd placed on the floor, she extracted a small cassette recorder, which she placed on her lap.

"Do you want to tape our conversation?" the doctor asked.

"It seems like a good idea, don't you think?"

"Why's that?"

"Well," Dawn said coolly, "then one can be clear later about what was said . . . and anyway, if something should happen to one of us . . ."

"Yes?"

"Well, then, everything wouldn't be lost."

When the doctor didn't reply, Dawn turned on the recorder.

"What is it?" she asked in response to a flicker of expression on the doctor's face. "You don't mind this, do you?"

"I don't know," Dr. Shinefeld said. "I'm certainly not accustomed to it."

"Well," Dawn said calmly, "if it really bothers you, I'll turn it off. But see if you can't get used to it."

Dr. Shinefeld was disconcerted. While many patients attempted to control sessions from the moment they entered the room, the recorder added a new dimension. Anyway, control in that sense might not even be what Dawn was after.

"All right," the doctor said. "Well, then . . . perhaps you'd like to tell me why you're here."

"I have no reason," Dawn said without animosity. "That is, while I don't mind being here, I wouldn't have chosen to see another analyst if Vera . . . my

mother . . . hadn't asked me to."

"Why do you think she asked?"

"It's actually quite clear why she asked. I had an automobile accident in which I nearly killed myself. That had happened to me once before. I mean, it was a bicycle that time. I was thirteen, but I went into a car in such a way that I really had to take full responsibility for what happened. My neck was broken, and one arm and leg. As soon as I could move around again Vera sent me to an analyst. Dr. Leif Seaver. I know you must know him, since he gave me your name. As I told you on the phone."

For the first time a hint of feeling showed through Dawn's extraordinary facade.

The doctor nodded.

"I saw Dr. Seaver for four years," Dawn said. "Until the beginning of June, when I also graduated from high school. He was . . . extremely helpful to me."

This last had an almost rote quality. The doctor waited.

"Then, a couple of weeks ago . . . I had another accident. I was driving the car this time. I was in Vermont, near Marbury. Where Vera is. Where I grew up. Anyway, I fell asleep at the wheel. It would've been the end except the boy who was with me grabbed the wheel, so we went into some bushes

instead of a tree." She smiled. "He thinks he's in love with me. You'd think if someone nearly killed you, you'd never want to see her again . . ." Her tone had grown abstract. "A few people *think* they're in love with me."

"Both times you said *think* they're in love," Dr. Shinefeld pointed out. "Is that different from *being* in love?"

"No," Dawn said. "Not really. I guess. I mean, if you think you're in love, then you're in love. Anyway, who can say you're not?"

"Have you ever thought you were in love?" the doctor asked. "Oh yes," the girl said without hesitation. "I was in love with Dr. Seaver."

"What was the difference in the way you felt about Dr. Seaver and the way these boys feel about you?"

"That's easy," Dawn said. "They're in love with the way I look. I have the kind of looks you're supposed to have in this country. Blond hair, long legs, all that junk. None of it has anything to do with *me*, with who I *am*. If I showed any of them what's inside my head they wouldn't want to have anything to do with me. Dr. Seaver—Dr. Seaver didn't care what I looked like. He barely looked at me when I talked to him. I remember that right from the start. Nothing I said ever surprised him because he didn't even *see* the Outside Me. And I didn't care what he looked like. I knew some people would think he was ugly, sort of knotty looking, and with that funny little hunch to his back so at first when you see him you think he's just sort of scrunched over on purpose.

I didn't care about any of that."

There were tears in Dawn's eyes. She didn't bother to wipe them. "Why do you think you had the accident?"

"Because he left me."

"You finished the analysis?"

"He thought I was finished. I was sort of okay. He didn't understand I could only do all the things I was doing because I had him." "Did you tell him that?"

"I tried to, but I must've not said it right because I can't believe he would have done it if I had. I was in a trance a lot of the time. Maybe that sounds crazy, but it's true. From the day he started to talk about ending, I was in a sort of trance . . . The same thing happened after the first accident. For a few minutes I was so numb, I didn't even know anything was broken. They said I was in shock. Well, this was the same sort of thing, where I didn't exactly feel what was happening, only it lasted for months and months instead of for minutes."

Dr. Shinefeld was silent. She was already deciding to find the time to see Dawn if the girl wished. Her history even before Seaver was fascinating, from what Vera Henley had told her on the phone. Seaver himself was an interesting man; his reputation, most particularly as a diagnostician, was

superb.

"Why do you think you had the first accident?" the doctor asked.

"Because my parents got divorced. I imagine you know about my parents."

"My conversation with your mother wasn't very long. I'd prefer that you tell me whatever you think I should know."

Dawn smiled. "Well, there's a lot, and it's pretty crazy. At least most people would think so. I grew up taking it for granted."

Vera Henley wasn't Dawn's natural mother, but her aunt. Her mother had committed suicide when Dawn was six months old and her father had drowned the following year when his sailboat capsized in a storm off the northern Massachusetts coast. Dawn had no memory of either of her two unfortunate parents. When she spoke of her parents she meant Vera and—well, Vera was actually a lifelong lesbian who had lived, since before Dawn's birth, in what was essentially a marriage with another woman, Tony (Antonia) Lubovitz. Vera and Tony were who Dawn meant when she talked about her parents, and it was their "divorce" that had been the precipitating factor in her first accident.

This was where life became confusing, because while Dawn had just referred to Vera as her mother, she had actually called Vera Daddy during

their first years together. Tony was the feminine of the two women, wore makeup, jewelry and skirts, although it was also Tony who left each morning to work as chairman of the mathematics department in a Vermont high school three towns away. Vera didn't work and had never made any pretense at being other than who she was. Although (Dawn smiled shyly) this was New England they were talking about, and her aunt obviously hadn't gone around town proclaiming that she wasn't just a rather athletic old maid. Not that anyone would ask. One of the reasons Dawn loved Marbury was that really, whoever you were was all right as long as you followed the rules for public behavior. Upon coming to live with Vera, Tony had taken the name Henley, and the two women were assumed to be relatives. Dawn herself had never thought about the matter of their sexuality until she was in analysis with Dr. Seaver. Like a lot of other kids she knew, she'd rather taken it for granted that her parents, who shared a bedroom, had no sex life to speak of.

None of the children had ever questioned Dawn about her household, although at the beginning of school there had been nomenclature problems with the teacher. In the previous year, Vera, anticipating some such problems, had tried to train Dawn away from Daddy and toward Aunt Vera. What had remained with Dawn was that she was to call Daddy Aunt Vera when she was talking to other people. In first grade (Vera hadn't sent her to the optional kindergarten) Dawn had begun to read, learning from the primer that Daddy went to work and Mommy stayed home and took care of the children. The

book was quite clear on this. Daddy might leave for a variety of places—bank, office, store, etc., but Mommy's work was done at home. It would not have occurred to Dawn's friends to support her claim that the opposite was true in her home because that would have involved arguing with the teacher, but as it turned out their support would have been useless. Dawn explained to the teacher that it was her daddy who stayed home and her mommy, Tony, who went to work. The teacher's task became clear. The child had suffered some elementary confusion and would have to be straightened out with drills. The drills were not done in a punitive manner, and by the time Parent's Day arrived, Dawn was calling Vera Mommy and Tony Daddy—in school. By the time she had acquired the conceptual vocabulary that would have enabled her to explain to her teacher that both her mommy and daddy were women, the class was absorbed in Vasco da Gama and the multiplication tables and no explanations were called for.

Dawn seldom invited other children to her home. The few who lived nearby remained her friends throughout eighth grade, but she rarely sought them out. After a full day at school she wanted only to return to the bosom of her family. The long New England winters that horrified so many people represented love and warmth to Dawn Henley.

The walk from school was about half a mile, and Dawn would make it with the other children unless they dawdled, in which case she would break away from them in her eagerness. Sometimes she and Tony, who would be

driving from three towns away, reached home at the same time and raced, giggling, for the door. Dawn still recalled with pleasure arriving once before Tony's car was in sight, hiding behind a bush, then dashing to the front door just in time to beat Tony up the steps.

Afternoons were occupied with homework, sewing, baking. Tony gave Dawn piano lessons. In the evening they read, knitted and played cards, chess, and checkers. The television was in a little room of its own. No one watched it very much.

Dawn supposed the most important thing to say about Vera and Tony was that for all she'd learned of their problems, she adored them both and felt they'd given her much more than average parents gave their children, in time alone. In her analysis with Dr. Seaver, she had come to see that there were periods in her life when, like any child, she'd wished for one of her parents to "disappear" so that she could have the other to herself. That was, as Dr. Shinefeld must already know, why she'd had the accident when they separated; it was guilt over getting that old wish, for she still had them both but they didn't have each other anymore. With Dr. Seaver she'd understood that loving them both so much hadn't balanced out her jealous, hostile feelings but had tended to make them more intense, harder to bear.

They had been an extraordinary couple. What one lacked, the other possessed in abundance. Vera was your prototypical New England WASP

patriarch—large and strong, with features almost identical to those of her brother and their father. What she lacked in warmth (the cuddling of little Dawn was left to Tony) Vera made up in strength, bravery and a broad range of talents. Aside from being a superb skier and horsewoman, she knew more about animals than most veterinarians, and she could fix, or build, for that matter, almost anything in the house. She was an excellent cook and a nearly miraculous gardener.

Tony was dark, pretty and plump. Her grandparents had emigrated from Russia, but she'd grown up in a Brooklyn ghetto that mirrored to a considerable extent the conditions of the old country. It was only when, over her parents' objections, Tony accepted a scholarship at a college outside New York that she finally lost the accent foreign to her English. Tony's clothing was marvelous, exotic even by New York standards in those days just before the sixties. Embroidered Roumanian blouses with drawstring necks and full sleeves. Full skirts of trimmed velvet in the winter, cotton when it grew warmer. Huge earrings and pendants set with turquoise and other stones; delicately wrought rings and bangle bracelets that rattled and clanked on her wrists as she gestured. Her shiny black hair, which came down to her waist, she braided, knotted, and swept up with an array of golden barrettes, tortoiseshell combs, and special hairpins with enameled heads that Dawn had never seen anywhere else, even in Europe, where she'd been sent on a graduation trip just this past June. Tony didn't like to cook, although she could

do it if the occasion arose. She was a dressmaker and made most of her own clothes and Dawn's; Vera's attire consisted of men's shirts with jeans in the summer and slacks in the winter. All of them had sweaters knitted by Tony. Her mathematical abilities went beyond mere proficiency, and Tony had told Dawn a few years earlier, after the divorce, that she had sacrificed a fellowship to leave Boston because she'd promised Vera (they had met in Vermont the previous summer and fallen in love; Vera was twenty-one years her senior) that when she finished college she would get a job that would enable them to live together. It was inconceivable to Vera that they could be comfortable under the scrutiny of a university town.

Dawn smiled.

So Tony had given up a more interesting career for love. Just like a lot of other women.

The doctor returned Dawn's smile. They had gone past the full hour she allowed for consultations. The buzzer had sounded and a patient was waiting.

"How old were you when the women actually separated?" she asked Dawn.

"Fourteen," Dawn said. "It was my first year in boarding school."

Dr. Shinefeld hesitated. "I'm reluctant to end now because I have other questions I'd like to ask. But there's someone waiting. Would you like to come

back later this week?"

Dawn shrugged. "Sure. If you want me to." She switched off the tape recorder and returned it to her satchel.

For a moment Dr. Shinefeld considered asking her to come without it the next time. Then she decided the moment wasn't opportune. The truth was that she would have liked to ask Dawn for a copy of the transcript.

As it turned out, the request was unnecessary. Dawn began the next session, at two o'clock on Friday afternoon, by offering the doctor a copy. "In case you should find it useful."

"Thank you," the doctor said. "That was very thoughtful."

Dawn had an overnight bag with her as well as her satchel. She was going from the doctor's office to Penn Station, where she would board an Amtrak Metroliner to Boston. She was going to visit Tony and her husband.

"A man?" Dr. Shinefeld asked.

Dawn nodded.

"Was he the reason for the divorce?"

Well, Dawn thought, yes and no. Vera claimed that Tony had left her for Leonard Silverstein, but Tony said it wasn't true and that *Vera* had really left *her,* in spirit if not in body, years before. Where once Vera had met her eagerly

at the door, Tony claimed, now her "housewife" barely seemed to notice her arrival. Where once Vera had listened with reasonable interest and unwavering support to Tony's stories of her day among students and faculty, now Vera seemed uninterested in Tony's life and increasingly turned in on herself. Restless. Vera had started talking about going to Europe at the very beginning of that school year—just as it became impossible for Tony to do so.

And Vera was drinking. Liquor had been a problem in the Henley family, and for a long time Vera had refused anything stronger than beer. But gradually she'd begun to drink whiskey, and by the time Dawn was preparing to leave for boarding school Vera was drinking quite heavily.

Dawn herself, by the way, had never really accepted the boarding school decision, although she didn't argue because she took it to mean that Vera and Tony didn't want her with them anymore. She'd been over all that a good deal with Dr. Seaver . . . Strangely enough, she'd felt the same way about her graduation trip to Europe. That she was being sent away. Some sort of collusion between Vera and Dr. Seaver. So she wouldn't notice that her sessions had ended.

For a while Dawn had believed that Vera's decision to send her to boarding school had nothing to do with her—Dawn's—developing sexuality, with the fact that she was growing breasts, had begun to masturbate, and so on. Lately she'd become uncertain again. It was the punishment aspect. While

she was with Dr. Seaver she'd lost the sense of having been sent away as a punishment, but now it was back . . . as though she'd never really believed his version. It was only that his ideas had been more powerful than hers in her own mind while she continued to see him.

Dawn was quiet. For the first time in the hour she seemed uncertain of what she wanted to say next. Perhaps she was waiting for a response.

"How did you find boarding school?" the doctor asked.

"Oh, it was all right. At first I was miserable, but then I got used to it. Like the others. But when I went home for . . . I couldn't wait to go home for Christmas, and when I got there, it was awful. Tense and unpleasant. Different from ever before. I should've known something was up. Then, when I went home again at Easter . . . Tony was gone." Dawn paused where perhaps her voice had once broken as she remembered. "The whole house was quiet. Tony was the one who made noise, who talked, who played music. I still . . . when I remember . . ." She shuddered. "The only important thing that happened to me at Sidley was the art classes. I learned to make lithographs. Art class was the only reason I wanted to go back after the accident. What I didn't want . . . Vera rented our house and moved down to Westchester to be near me at Sidley. That hurt me almost as much as the divorce. It was the only house I'd ever lived in."

"The only house?"

"Mmmm." Dawn seemed barely to notice the question. "But once Vera made up her mind . . . She took an apartment near school, and I had home study until I could walk again. I still lost half a year. I couldn't concentrate on my work and I was having terrible dreams. It was worse after the casts came off. And even worse when I was finished with the crutches and the neck brace. They were so awful, they gave me some kind of focus. Once they were off I became aimless. I didn't want to do anything. That was when Vera started bringing me to New York to see Dr. Seaver. Later she went back to Marbury and I came in on the railroad."

"Do you think Vera chose a male analyst on purpose?"

"I think she got a few names from the guidance people at school and talked to them all. He sounded the smartest to her. Actually, I think they were all men. She just took it for granted that I should . . . He *was* terribly smart, as you probably know. I should say, he *is.*" Dawn laughed, a little embarrassed.

"Anyway, it was that year that I started making prints. Someday I'll show you . . ." She laughed again, embarrassed again. "I forgot. This is a consultation. If you think I should continue, you're going to send me to someone else."

"Not necessarily," Dr. Shinefeld said. "I know we began on the phone on that basis, and I'll be happy to refer you elsewhere if you want me to. But if you'd rather work with me, as long as you have a certain flexibility in your

hours, I can see you when I return from vacation. After Labor Day."

Dawn smiled sadly. "Labor Day. When all the analysts come back to New York and give birth to their patients."

But her manner had altered radically in that moment after Dr. Shinefeld's offer to continue seeing her. She had become almost childlike, and there were tears in her eyes.

A few moments passed.

"When are you leaving?" she asked after a moment.

"The end of July. Two weeks," the doctor told her.

"Will I see you until then?"

"It can be arranged."

Dawn nodded.

"You remind me of Tony . . . except that you're bigger. And not so fluffy."

Dr. Shinefeld smiled, and they paused together in that restrained mutual good feeling that was so essential to satisfactory treatment while raising such difficult issues for those involved in it.

"What I was going to tell you before," Dawn said after a while, "was that I did a series of lithographs, in my last year at Sidley. My last year with Dr. Seaver. I was making the best one to give to Dr. Seaver on my birthday." She

smiled. “I wanted to give it to him on *his* birthday, but he wouldn’t tell me when it was.” Amusement didn’t keep her from falling into sadness, now. “Anyway, he didn’t want me to give him anything on my birthday *or* his. He’d already begun talking about the end of treatment. That was why I made that series in the first place . . . That whole year was a nightmare. Not exactly a nightmare; I just didn’t feel anything most of the time. I don’t understand what happened to me. He thought I was all right, but I wasn’t.”

“Have you considered seeing Dr. Seaver again-rather than another analyst? Or at least talking to him before you see someone else?”

“Oh, yes,” Dawn said. “Of course. It was the first thing I thought of when I woke up. I was knocked unconscious and I bruised my head on the steering wheel, but I wasn’t hurt, just shaken up. There was something else that happened, actually. Before the accident. But I don’t know if I can talk about that yet. It may have to wait until September.”

The doctor nodded.

“When I came back from Europe three weeks ago and I knew . . . something was wrong . . . I called and said I needed to talk to him. He said it was too soon and I guess I pleaded with him but . . . Anyway, I called again last week, after the accident, and when I told him he said he’d see me . . . Vera didn’t think it was a good idea. I think she knew that I loved him too much. She thought I should see a woman and I liked that idea, in a way, but first I

needed him to know what had happened to me . . . I'd brought the print. Not to give him. I just needed him to see the message. The words were very important. I showed it to him, thinking of all the times we'd argued about it, and I kept waiting for the light to go on. He was finally going to understand this terribly important thing and explain it to me, and then I'd feel better. Instead he said, *Nice work, Dawn. You're doing some really nice work. Keep it up.* He didn't even remember the arguments! I felt as though I had no importance to him at all, and never had. I was less than a patient. I wasn't even a person!"

"Was that when you decided to see a woman?" the doctor asked after a moment.

"You'd think so," Dawn said with a wry smile, "but not quite. I was still . . . You have to understand something. Vera was my father until I met Dr. Seaver. Then he became my father. He didn't stop being my father just because he wouldn't see me anymore."

Dr. Shinefeld glanced at the clock.

"Is it time for me to go?"

"We have another minute or two."

"I don't remember what I was saying."

"We were talking about when you decided to see a woman."

"Oh. Yes. Well, I told him I was thinking of doing that. And he said I had to make the decision myself. He could refer me to some good women analysts if that was what I wanted. Or, he said, perhaps it would be just as well to work it out with him. I was about to thank him. Or to cry. And then he added . . ." She paused, trying to get over the words. ". . . that since he knew me already, if I came to him the work would go much faster." Her voice trembled, and her lips twisted so she wouldn't cry.

"And that was the end for you."

"Of course. I could see that the same thing would happen all over again."

Dawn stood and stretched, then put the cassette player in the satchel.

The doctor picked up her appointment book and they arranged times for the following Tuesday and Friday. At Dawn's request, regular appointments were scheduled for the additional week in July. Dawn was staying in Westchester with a friend from Sidley. She would spend August with Vera in Vermont.

The hour was at an end. They walked together to the door, which the doctor opened.

"Dawn?" the doctor asked on impulse as the girl passed over the threshold, "what were the words at the bottom of the lithograph?" "Dylan Thomas," Dawn said. "*After the first death there is no other*."

At the outset of her third visit, Dawn offered Dr. Shinefeld a transcript of the second, then seated herself, as she had previously, in the chair facing the doctor's. Dr. Shinefeld hadn't spoken again with Vera Henley. The matter of Dawn's continued visits had been arranged between the girl and her aunt.

"In your analysis with Dr. Seaver," Dr. Shinefeld asked as Dawn reached for the tape recorder, "did you lie on the couch?"

"Yes, sure," Dawn said, momentarily distracted from the machine.

"Would you like to do that now?"

Dawn glanced at the couch uneasily.

"I feel as though I hardly know you," she said, then laughed. "I know that's not the only reason, because Dr. Seaver asked me the second time and I did it right away. I guess I feel as though . . . if I lie down, I'll get attached to you. And I don't want to get attached when you're just going away for the longest time."

"Tell me about the longest time."

"No," Dawn said after a moment. "I don't want to talk about that now. I'll do it when I come back."

She had been looking toward the couch, avoiding the doctor's eyes, which she now met. "You know that I'm not a lesbian, don't you?"

"Actually," the doctor said, "I don't know anything about your sexual preferences."

"Well then, we're even," Dawn said. "Because neither do I." She giggled. "I mean, I don't actually have any at the moment. Yes, that's what I mean. I prefer at the moment not to have any sexual preferences."

Dr. Shinefeld smiled. There was a lengthy silence.

"I had an abortion when I came back from Europe."

"Oh?"

"I never slept with my boyfriend until April. My *then* boyfriend. Alan Gartner was his name. Not that it matters. I never even worried about getting pregnant, that was the weird part. Before that, I didn't sleep with him just because I didn't feel like it. I never slept with anyone before him, either. He thought I was on the pill but I wasn't on anything. I'm chattering like this because the whole business made me crazy and still does."

"When did you have the abortion?"

Her eyes filled with tears. "Three weeks ago. A week before the accident."

"Don't you think you might feel a little less crazy if you talked about it?"

Dawn studied the doctor's face. "You know what I'm thinking? That I

still haven't turned on the tape recorder and you don't want me to turn it on."

The doctor was silent.

"I wish I could understand why you don't like it."

"It might be more useful to understand why you *do* like it."

"Are you going to make me put it away?" Terribly anxious and childlike.

"No, but I'd like to keep talking about it."

Dawn laughed. "Okay. Go ahead. Talk." There was a nervous, slightly hostile edge the doctor hadn't heard in her voice before. Dawn switched on the recorder.

"You could die," Dawn said after a moment. "Or get sick. Or go away on vacation and never come back. Or maybe get sick of seeing me. The first year or two I was seeing Dr. Seaver he never went away for more than a week at a time. Then suddenly . . . everything changed. August! Easter! Christmas! I don't know what else. The first time he went away for August I really thought I was going to die before he got back. I went up to be with Vera, but then I couldn't stand being there. She was so unhappy. But that wasn't it. Dr. Seaver ruined me for people like Vera. It wasn't just that she didn't understand anything that had happened to me. She doesn't *want* to understand things like that. She's all closed off. It was worse than being alone. . . . It wasn't just because Tony was gone. Tony was right, Vera was the same only more so.

Before Dr. Seaver, I thought that was just the way men were . . . Anyway, Vera couldn't even stand it when I played the radio. I think music reminded her of Tony, so she just decided to shut that out of her life, too."

Dawn shuddered. "I left after four days. I felt guilty but . . . I told Vera I'd taken a couple of incompletes and I had to work in the school library. I was really going to Boston. To Tony. But I didn't want to tell her that. She'd have felt worse. Not that she ever let me know how she felt. . . . Anything I know about what happened between them I know from Tony. I figured I'd be able to talk to Tony about how I felt, but even she didn't really understand. Not the way Dr. Seaver did. Sometimes I didn't even have to explain things to him . . . He spoiled me for other people, you see . . ." A long pause, and then, her voice breaking: "That was the worst of it. He spoiled me for everyone else in the world and then said I had to get along without him."

Dawn had picked Alan Gartner because he was older than the boys from school and looked a little like Dr. Seaver. He had black hair and he was very tall and skinny, with tortoiseshell glasses. And he was reasonably intelligent. Boys, as Dr. Shinefeld had probably noticed, were terribly *boring,* and Alan was somewhere in between Dr. Seaver and the boys of the world. He had a doctorate in literature but was acting with an improvisational group at a cafe in the Village. During the last year she'd tried to explain to Dr. Seaver about the difference between going out with a Young Man and a Man. Dr. Seaver had told her a lovely story, as a matter of fact, about his daughter. (She hadn't

known until then that he had a daughter and she'd been horribly jealous; she had a dream in which his real daughter died and he adopted her to take the real daughter's place.) Anyway, when Dr. Seaver's daughter was in nursery school, she'd asked one day who she could marry who wasn't already taken. He had explained that by the time she was ready to marry, there would be many boys who were ready too, and he'd mentioned two or three from her nursery school whose names he knew.

"Oh, no!" the little girl had protested vehemently, "I don't want a boy! I want a man!"

Dawn had understood very well the point of that lovely anecdote. But she was quite old enough to understand that people grew up and changed. Boys, on the other hand, didn't change fast enough. There might have been a time when it made sense for girls to wait for them. But in this world, why would you wait for someone to grow up when the chances were he'd leave you for someone else when he did? Of her three best friends at school, the parents of two had been divorced during the last three years because the man left for a younger woman. The third—that was Bevvy Gartner, actually, Alan's younger sister—her parents' marriage had been what you might call open at one end from the beginning. Bevvy's father had always done pretty much what he wanted without having to pay for two households. Probably he'd leave, too, once Mrs. Gartner got old and pathetic enough so she really needed him. Alan still lived at home when he wasn't traveling or living with some girl

who had her own apartment. It seemed to Dawn that more and more kids weren't exactly leaving home, and maybe it was because they didn't have real homes to leave.

The office was quiet. The sounds from Central Park West were muffled by the air conditioner's hum. Briefly Dr. Shinefeld had a sensation familiar to her from other moments of intense absorption in patients' lives—that the office wasn't in a large building but was floating around freely somewhere in space with the two of them inside. It was at times like this that she most missed cigarettes. For a while after she'd stopped smoking, she had kept a saucer of rock candy on her little table and sucked on a piece when she felt in danger of being sucked too thoroughly into a patient's psyche. Occasionally, though, forgetting herself, she'd crunched on the candy, and once a patient had leaped off the couch, at once frightened and angry, demanding to know what she was doing. It was all very well to analyze the patient's fear of being devoured, but of course one wasn't allowed to be the active catalyst for such associations. Pencils weren't bad to chew, but pens were better for taking notes, which she found herself doing now. She had the wry thought that she was going to miss the transcriptions once she'd persuaded Dawn to leave the recorder at home.

"So," Dr. Shinefeld said, "if I die while I'm on vacation, you will have a piece of me in the transcriptions."

"You're not sick, are you?" Dawn asked, clutching the arms of the chair.

"Not that I know of."

"I don't suppose you'll tell me how old you are."

"No."

"You're not that old. You look about Tony's age and she's . . . forty. Much younger than Vera . . . Vera's healthy as anything . . . You can't even promise me"—but she seemed almost to be trying to find a way to bear to do what the doctor wanted her to do—"that you won't get sick."

"No," the doctor said. "Although I'm also a rather healthy person."

Dawn didn't speak or move.

"There is one promise I can make to you," Dr. Shinefeld said after a while. "That I won't ask you to leave here until you're ready. In other words, you can be the one to decide when you're finished."

"Finished." Dawn's eyes filled with tears and her voice quivered. "That has such a funny sound. People don't get finished. They're not jobs. Or books." But she relaxed in the chair.

"It's the analytic work that gets more or less finished."

"But what if I finish and I leave and then a week or a month or a day later something terrible happens to me? Something I have to talk to you

about?"

"Well, in that case you'd call me up and come back and we'd talk about it."

"Why wouldn't Dr. Seaver let me? What was such a big deal?" Dawn cried. "He said I was going out into the world, that I had to really be finished. Then, when I found out I was pregnant and came home to have the abortion, I called him up and . . . He was still . . . In my mind . . . I don't really want to tell you this . . . If Alan's sister wasn't my best friend, if I hadn't needed her help, I never would've told him. In my mind Alan had nothing to do with the baby. I mean, he was barely in my mind at all. It was Dr. Seaver who was there. I kept thinking, now he'd *have* to understand. I really don't know what I thought he'd understand. Except . . . This is awful. I don't know if I can say it . . . I delayed. The abortion. This is very hard for me to talk about. In my house . . . I didn't know about menstruation until I got to boarding school. Which was before I got my period, fortunately. Even Tony didn't like to talk about those things. Anyway, I didn't want to have the abortion right away. The truth was, I'd been feeling sort of nice while I was in Europe, and I'd thought to myself, Dr. Seaver was right, it was really hard for a while but I'm getting over him. It never occurred to me that . . . It was as though Dr. Seaver had left a big hole right in my center and somehow it had gotten filled up. I didn't know—at least I didn't know I knew—it was only that I had his . . . the baby . . . It was his baby in my mind, not stupid Alan Gartner's, and that was why I was all right."

Dawn was crying. “I didn’t want to give it up. At least not until I was ready. I didn’t want to lose the baby just because I wasn’t supposed to have it in the first place!”

Now she was crying in earnest, the only sign that she wasn’t oblivious to the world outside herself, Dr. Seaver, and her aborted baby being that at some point she clicked off the recorder.

“No sense recording seventeen hours of me crying my eyes out,” she said when the tears had finally abated. “I hardly ever cried until I got to Dr. Seaver’s. Vera and Tony used to tell me how when I was little, if I fell and hurt myself, I never cried.”

“Why do you think that was?”

The question surprised Dawn. “I don’t know. They thought I was brave. I might’ve talked about that a little with Dr. Seaver. I remember telling him I just didn’t mind if I hurt myself a little. What’s the big deal if you fall off a bike and scrape your knees.” There was no bravado in her voice. She was puzzled at how easily girls cried. “Crying is worse than most of the reasons people cry.”

“Why?” Dr. Shinefeld asked.

Dawn turned on the tape recorder. “It can make you choke, for one thing. Especially if you’re lying down. Dr. Seaver said I choked to cut off the

bad feelings . . . as though I were afraid of getting them out of my system . . . but I don't think that was right. It's more that I can't help it. I choke if I cry a lot."

"Why did you turn on the tape recorder just now?"

"Because I could tell I was going to cry."

"But after you cried, you didn't turn it right back on."

"What were we talking about?"

"You said that crying was more unpleasant than most of the reasons people cried, and I asked you why."

"And that's when I turned it back on." Dawn laughed. "Well, I can believe it. Just thinking about the question . . . It makes me uncomfortable. It makes me wish I had a friend here."

"I guess that's why I don't like the tape recorder," Dr. Shinefeld said.

"Cassette player," Dawn corrected.

"I feel as though it's your friend and it comes between us."

Dawn laughed but then quickly became serious. "It's not that I don't like you. I don't even *want* anything to be between us. I want to feel better. If I didn't like you . . . Dr. Seaver gave me three names. I picked yours first. But if I didn't like you I would have tried the others." "Was my name the first on the

list?"

"No, the last. But he said there was no order of preference." "Why do you think you picked mine?"

"I don't know. I liked the sound of it. It sounds like water gurgling. Lululululu." Dawn giggled. "And Shinefeld. A shining field. It sounds so wonderful. I thought you must be beautiful. I had to see what you looked like. You are beautiful, you know. I can't tell if you're one of those people who can tell she's beautiful, because it's not in the conventional way. Not where I come from, anyway." A long pause. "I remember when I was looking at the piece of paper he gave me." Slow and thoughtful, now—Dawn was trying to remember the details. "The other two were on the East Side, so they were less convenient to school. On the other hand, with the Number Five bus, that's no big deal. And they were both in Dr. Seaver's neighborhood, so I'd maybe see—Oh, my God! I know what it was. It was your initials. They're the same as Dr. Seaver's! I remember how they struck me when I was looking at the piece of paper, because he makes his capital letters five times as big as the small ones." Dawn turned off the cassette player. "You see," she said, "I really couldn't bear not to see him anymore. But I couldn't see him, either. It was too frightening. So I picked someone safer. A woman with his initials. I was hoping from the beginning you'd say I could keep seeing you. I didn't know what I would do if I had to try the others."

Lulu Shinefeld turned the corner of Seventieth Street onto Central Park West. It was ten to two and she'd just finished lunch. The day was crisp and sunny, and she was minding that she had to go back indoors. As she walked toward her building, Lulu became simultaneously aware of the doorman grinning at her and the girl with her face hidden behind a camera—of course it was Dawn —snapping pictures of her.

Dr. Shinefeld smiled grimly and proceeded into the building. Dawn ran after her.

"Are you angry with me?"

"Let's talk upstairs," the doctor said.

Dawn's mood in the office was contrite and extremely anxious. She was willing to apologize, to analyze, to do anything, in fact, that might appease the doctor short of offering to give up the film, which the doctor did not suggest she do.

"I'm going to make a series of prints," Dawn said. "Of you, sort of. While you're on vacation. But I need a photo to look at. Even if the print doesn't end up having anything to do with the photo . . . I didn't bring the cassette . . . I didn't even transcribe the last tape . . . You're angry with me."

"I was a little annoyed," the doctor said. "Not because you wanted to take a picture of me. I'm willing to talk about that. It's more about your not

asking. And with the fact that we weren't in the office."

"But I couldn't do it indoors. I don't have the right equipment. My flash is in Vermont. And if we'd talked about it, you would only have wanted to analyze me out of it. And if you had, then I wouldn't have the photo!"

It was an unproductive session. Dawn was defensive and angry with the doctor for being angry when it was clear to her that the need to take the picture had been an absolute if she was going to give up the cassette recorder. It had seemed pointless to the doctor to deny an irritation that had been palpable to all concerned, but there were moments when she wished she had tried. Dawn spoke less freely than she had during previous visits, as though she were all too aware of the power of free association and was afraid that in the unraveling of the meaning of her act she would find herself giving up the film without really wanting to. On the other hand, it was surely self-defeating to deal with a girl who thought that crying was more painful than pain by pretending not to be annoyed at her acting out. In any event, Dr. Shinefeld was certain that the bond already established between them was strong enough to withstand this early storm and that Dawn would return as scheduled.

At their next meeting it turned out that Dawn had believed Dr. Shinefeld might refuse to see her again. Her own anger during the previous session had been a conscious preparation for being cast out in disgrace. She and the

doctor discussed on a rather elementary level the various degrees of anger, ending with that rage so powerful as to make one abandon another. Dawn said that neither Tony nor Vera had ever really gotten angry with her. Vera was very firm and had no problem giving orders or forbidding various activities. But there was little visible change of emotion if Dawn did occasionally, very occasionally, disobey. Tony was light and gay, tending to respond to both good and bad with little jokes and laughs and wasn't Dawn a wonderful girl? Dawn had never experienced the feeling she knew was common among her friends, that a benevolent parent had turned into a raging beast. Bevvy Gartner said that when she was younger she'd called her mother the Hulk, after the comic strip man who, when he was angry or in pain, metamorphosed into a great green monster.

"Did I turn into a great green monster?" Dr. Shinefeld asked.

"Well, no," Dawn said, "but I thought that if you let even that much show, there must be much worse somewhere. Analysts don't usually show anything at all."

"You generally see us in the office. Away from our offices we're just like other people."

"I wonder," Dawn said. "I wonder if that's possible."

The snapshots of Dr. Shinefeld had been overexposed and came back from the

drugstore with the doctor's face blurred. Dawn was in a panic.

"Are you thinking it's just as well?" she asked, sitting on the edge of the couch. She didn't want to lie down. "Maybe I did it on purpose. Set the meter for the wrong exposure. I had to fail because I knew you wouldn't want me to do it. But I needed them. I still do. I'd be afraid to go through that whole routine again and make you angry again, but that doesn't mean I need them less than I did before."

"Tell me."

"I *have* told you." The girl was wild-eyed. "I'm sick of saying the same thing over and over again."

"Why?"

"It's like a kind of whining. I don't like to whine. I get sick of myself. And it doesn't *help*."

"Sometimes," the doctor pointed out, "as you repeat yourself, new elements are added."

"I can't."

"Can't what?"

"I don't know. I can't go past a certain point. It's as though there's a wall. Once or twice I tried to find out what was behind the wall, but . . . It's solid . . .

Oh, my God, every time I think of the photos I want to run out of here screaming."

"Talk about that."

"I can't. I'm at the wall."

"I know that it might be difficult for you to lie down just now," the doctor said, "but if you could do it anyway, and say what comes to mind, something useful might come up."

Dawn lay down, but her body didn't relax at all.

"My mind is a blank. I mean it. I'm not saying it just to . . . Even the normal things aren't there . . . Usually when my mind wanders, I make up stories about the rug. About the people who wove it, say, or the dyes they used for the colors. Now when I say *dyes,* I think about *dying* without the *e* and then I'm right back at the wall."

"Is the wall about dying?"

"No. It's just a wall that keeps me from getting anyplace."

"A place you want to go?"

"No. There's no place I want to go."

"So the wall is sort of protective. It serves as—"

"Don't you see?" Dawn burst out. "We're sitting here talking about walls

and all I can think of is that I don't have a picture of you!"

"Then maybe you'd better talk about what you'd planned to do with it."

"First I was going to make copies and put them in different places so I couldn't lose all of them. Then I was going to enlarge the best ones, maybe one up to poster size if the image held. Then I was—What's the sense of all this? I don't have it! I don't have anything of you!"

"Don't you have me, in a sense, even when I'm not here?"

"No! I don't! Certainly if I can't be sure you'll ever be here again! I was going to do a lithograph . . . not just one, another whole set . . . something with the rug. You and the rug." She rambled on about various projects she'd considered in connection with the photographs, but when she stopped talking, she was as rigid and upset as she'd been all along.

"Tell me," the doctor said after a long pause, "about *After the first death there is no other*."

There was a moment when the tension in the room was as powerful as an electric charge. Then Dawn's body went through a remarkable series of motions, beginning with a violent shaking of her head, back and forth on the pillow, the movement then extending to her hands, her torso, and finally her legs, all thrashing around in a series of violent, rigid motions that resembled nothing so much as the convulsions of severe colic. Finally she relaxed, quite

thoroughly. Her body took on the air of a beatified saint. Several minutes passed.

"Uh . . ." Dawn said, ". . . What were we talking about?"

The doctor debated whether to answer the question. Finally she said that they'd been talking about the lithographs Dawn had done.

"Oh, yes," Dawn said easily. "You mean, the *First Death* series? What about it?"

When the doctor failed to respond, Dawn sat up and turned around. "If you don't answer I can't tell for sure that you're there."

The doctor smiled. "I'm here."

"I *know.* But when I can't see you I don't always feel as though you are . . . You know, when I was a little kid I could never stand to play hide-and-seek. I couldn't stand to be It. And if I was hiding I was too worried about how It would feel, so I'd let her see me or make some noise so she'd find me . . . Something happened to me just now but I don't know what it was."

The doctor waited.

"Did you know something happened to me?"

"Yes."

"Good. Because I don't know what it was, but it was pretty weird. And it

would be weirder if you thought everything was normal."

"Mmmm. I can understand that."

"But what happened?"

"Maybe you can tell me what you remember."

"I don't remember anything," Dawn said. "That's the funny part. I was in a *white space.* Once or twice with Dr. Seaver I was in a white space, but it wasn't complete because the words *white space* were printed in it. This was total." She shuddered. "What's that about?" But she was fairly calm. "I'm not scared now," she said after a moment. "But if I don't know what happened I'm going to be scared later."

"In fact," the doctor said. "I think that's what happened. You got scared."

"Of what?"

"Well . . . of something I said. It's possible that I was too abrupt with you."

"Too abrupt? How? What did you say?"

"I referred to the caption of the lithographs."

"After the first death?" Dawn was incredulous. "But how could that bother me? I've been trying to find *out* . . . For most of the last year I was with Dr. Seaver I was trying to get him to . . . I *need* someone to tell me what it's

about."

"Sometimes," the doctor said, "a patient wants to know what something's about in order to gain mastery over it with words . . . without actually living through the painful feelings that meaning involves . . . She may be terribly eager to learn some *why* but also quite frightened to know. It makes sense if you realize that virtually every aspect of life that's been buried has been buried for what the self considered to be an excellent reason. In other words, she's trying very hard to find out something she already knows but wishes she didn't."

Dawn giggled. "I like that."

The doctor was silent.

"But if I didn't want to know, why did I keep trying to find out?"

"Did you?"

"You know that I kept asking."

"Asking what?"

"To bring him the lithograph."

"Why?"

"I needed him to see it. Part of it was showing off, but also I needed him to see what was written on the bottom."

"Why?"

"So he could tell me what it meant."

"Did you ever just say the words to him?"

A long silence. "I'm trying to remember. I must have. I'm not sure. I think . . . The truth is, sometimes I tried and I couldn't. I got all choked up. That's why I wanted to show it to him. I couldn't say the words."

"Why do you think that was?"

"I don't know," Dawn said. "I remember I was very excited about the whole series. I went around high all the time. Kids at school asked me if I was *on* something, but I was just naturally high. Of *course* I talked to him about it. I talked to him about everything. He was a part of everything I did . . . First I was doing this series of prints, then . . . I remember I felt mischievous when I said it was going to be for my birthday . . . Anyway, by then nothing I said got to him. You probably think I knew *that,* too. But I don't think so. I think it was that I was desperate by that time. Nothing else worked. I don't know what I mean by that. Yes I do. The part of what you're saying that's true . . . It wasn't that I was afraid to know. It was more that I was afraid to unlock the last secret. I mean, I didn't *feel* afraid. I hardly felt anything. But it kept passing through my mind that if I knew what that line meant, I'd know all I had to know, and then we'd *really* be finished." She began to cry.

At their final session she had explained to Dr. Seaver that there was something terribly important they hadn't figured out, a great secret of her life. He had said that many patients had that feeling at the end of an analysis, that if they'd only unlocked one more door, everything would be all right. In reality, life was difficult, and there was seldom a time when everything was all right. There were many secrets and many doors, and one didn't stop opening them because one ceased having analytic sessions. She had learned a new system of thought, Dr. Seaver had told her, and she would continue to think that way, and to learn.

And Dawn had lain quiet on the couch, thinking, *Don't argue. It will feel worse if you argue. Don't cry. You'll get hysterical. You'll choke.*

Anyway, he'd been wrong. Because she hadn't been able to think that way at all since he'd left her. That way of thinking was about him and therefore too painful. She hadn't been vaguely analytic about anything she'd said or done since the first week of June. She still found herself reluctant to think analytically unless she was right here in the office.

Dawn had forgotten the catalyst for her brief "fit" of amnesia. Indeed, she appeared to have forgotten the fit itself, although she was eager to discuss the issue of whether she'd been unfair to be angry with Dr. Seaver. She was looking for a way to return to her former state of untempered adoration.

The issue was a complex one for Dr. Shinefeld. A misstep might send the

girl back to Seaver, apologetic at having “blamed” him for not understanding what he hadn’t been told and eager to resume the transference romance. Not only was the doctor reluctant to lose her patient, but she suspected that Seaver had been somewhat blinder than the circumstances dictated. She was coming around to the belief that like a number of other analysts, he had a deep resistance to exploring that period of life before the relatively comfortable and specific Oedipal attachment began. This was the most difficult and frightening period of life for the obvious reason that words did not exist that were adequate to describe the over-powering feelings engendered in an infant who did not yet have words to describe and sort out those feelings. If that were the case, then, Dr. Shinefeld thought, she might be more helpful to Dawn than Dr. Seaver could be at this stage.

Dawn spent considerable time evaluating the merits of female as opposed to male psychiatrists and eventually held fast in her determination to return to regular treatment with Dr. Shinefeld. The matter of the first death seemed to have vanished and would not reappear until August had come and gone and the bond between Dawn and the doctor had been reestablished.

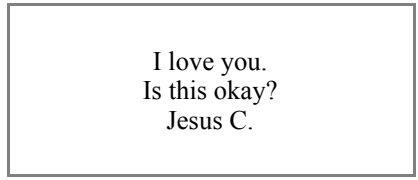
Ordinary People

Judith Guest

The building is shabby, and inside, the lobby is hot and dark. He glances at his watch; too dark in here to make out the numbers. The crisp and sunny day he has left outside has nearly blinded him. A directory on the far wall; he goes to it; scans the list of names. Eleven in all; seven with M.D. after them. The top name on the list is the one he is looking for: T. C. BERGER M.D. 202. Would any of these guys be of use in an emergency? All specialists—podiatrists, optometrists, psychiatrists—but what if an accident were to happen in front of the building? Or a mugging? It looks like a great neighborhood for muggings.

Glancing at his watch again, he finds his eyes have adjusted to the dim light. Four o'clock. Exactly. *Well then get on it no backing out now* an idea he has toyed with all week not going just not showing up won't work. He is to meet his father at his office at five-fifteen. "Don't be late. I've got a meeting tonight. I'd like to get out of there as close to five as I can." Translated: "Don't let the guy upset you, show up when you're supposed to, it only takes ten minutes to walk from Sherman and Tenth to the Plaza, I have clocked it." No. Not fair. Not necessary to take everything so personally. He probably does have a meeting tonight. Everything's all right, everything's fine, keep it that way. On an even keel, as his grandfather would say.

Stuck between the directory and the wall is a small white business card:



The edges of it are furred; curved slightly inward. As if it has been there a long time. He shakes his head, making for the staircase; forces a growl from the back of his throat. He is being strangled.

In the narrow hallway on the second floor, a single light bulb burns, helpless against the invading gloom. High, old-fashioned doors, with windows of bubbled glass in them; all dark on both sides of the hall, and looking as if they haven't been used for years. Any people in this building? Is this an emergency? Even a podiatrist would do. Panic begins to settle in around him.

At the end of the hall is a doorway with light behind it. He goes to it. The letters, stuck to the opaque glass with adhesive backing, spell out T C BERGER M D. They slant upward, crooked rectangles, like a kid would print them on unlined paper. He pushes experimentally at the door, but it works on a heavy spring mechanism. Even when he turns the knob, it doesn't give. He pushes harder this time, and it opens. He steps inside. The door closes sharply behind

him.

He is in an entry, empty of people, longer than it is deep, with a chair in it, a floor lamp, a small table strewn with magazines, a green metal wastebasket. Barely furnished, the room still seems cluttered. Opposite him is a doorway; an overturned chair blocks it. From inside the other room mysterious, shuffling sounds are issuing. A scene of total disorder confronts him as he moves toward the door. Books, magazines, loose piles of paper are everywhere; empty plastic cups, pieces of clothing, a cardboard box, THE BAKERY lettered in script on its lid, all tossed together in the middle of the floor. Several ashtrays are dumped, upside down, on the rug. A gooseneck lamp lies, like a dead snake, beside them. In the midst of it, a man stands, bent over, his back to the doorway. As Conrad approaches, he turns. About him there is the look of a crafty monkey; dark skin, dark crinkly hair sprouting in tufts about his face, a body that hunches forward, an elongated question mark.

"Wait," he says, "don't tell me. Jarrett."

The eyes, a compelling and vivid blue, beam into whatever they touch. They touch Conrad's face now, and the effect is that of being in an intense blue spotlight.

He snaps his fingers. "Yeah. You look like somebody Crawford would send me. Somebody who's a match for my daring wit and inquiring mind."

Conrad, cool and polite, asks, “Am I seeing you? Or are you seeing me?”

He laughs, delighted. “That oughta be easy. This my office, or yours? No. No good. Lotsa guys in this business make house calls now. Let’s see your appointment book.” He steps over to his desk, rummaging fiercely for a minute; he comes up with a gray stenographer’s notebook. “Here. Tuesday, four o’clock. Conrad Jarrett. Ah. I knew it.” He grins, then.

Conrad is not easily charmed. Or fooled. Eccentricity. A favorite put-on of psychiatrists. He does not trust them. Too many oddballs floating around the hospital. Only Crawford had behaved as if he knew what he was doing. He bends to pick up the overturned chair.

“Bring that over here,” Berger directs him. “Sit down.”

He continues to prowl around the room, lifting books, setting them aside, retrieving papers from the floor, stacking up empty plastic cups. On further examination, he resembles a compact, slightly undersize gorilla. Conrad cannot take his eyes off him.

“I think I was ripped off this afternoon,” he says. “Or else the cleaning lady did one hell of a job on me. Place didn’t look this bad when I left. Somebody was after drugs, I guess. What a neighborhood. Nothing but placebos here. Use ’em myself for quick energy sometimes. Just sugar.” He smiles, arms raised, palms turned up in an attitude of perplexity.

"You were robbed?"

"Looks like."

"You going to call somebody?"

"Who? You mean cops?" He shrugs. "What's missing? Maybe nothing. Maybe they even left something, who knows?" He moves to the small sink, half-hidden in the corner behind a huge pile of books. "You want some coffee? Listen, do me a favor, look on the desk there, see if you can find a data sheet-you know, name, age, date of birth, et cetera—fill it out for me, will you? Gotta keep records, the state says. Rules." He sighs. "Now what am I supposed to do with those poor bastards lying on the floor, I ask you?" He indicates the overturned filing cabinet, its contents scattered. "Did you say yes or no?"

"What?"

"Coffee. Yes or no? Sit down, sit down."

"No. Thanks." Obediently he goes to the desk; searches through the papers on top of it until he comes up with a blank information card. He begins to fill it out. Berger empties the other chair of debris and drags it over to the desk.

"How long since you left the hospital?"

"A month and a half."

“Feeling depressed?”

“No.”

“Onstage?”

“Pardon?”

“People nervous? Treat you like you’re a dangerous man?”

He shrugs. “Yeah, a little, I guess.”

“And are you?”

“I don’t know.”

Berger grins, then. “You look sensible enough to me. At least, you looked sensibly disgusted when you walked in here. God, it is disgusting, isn’t it? The second time this year. What do you think I oughta do about it?”

He is used to this technique; he looks for psychological design in the question. No. Too farfetched. Nobody would go to this much trouble just to set up a test for him.

He says, “I guess I’d just clean it up and forget about it.”

“Yeah, you’re right. Christ, what a gigantic pain in the tail though, huh?” The man sits back, fingers curved around his coffee cup, watching as Conrad finishes filling out the card. “Sure you don’t want any coffee? I’ve got clean cups around here somewhere.”

Conrad shakes his head; hands him the card.

He reads it quickly. “Good, strong print. Neat. Like an engineer. So. What’re you doing here? You look like a healthy kid to me.”

“What I’m doing here,” Conrad says, “is that I had to come.”

Berger nods. “Uh huh. Rules again. Authority reigns.” He tosses the card onto the desk. “So, suppose you didn’t have to come. What would you be here for?”

“I wouldn’t.”

He finds himself firmly enveloped in the piercing blue gaze; shifts uncomfortably in the chair.

“How long were you there?”

“Eight months.”

“What did you do? O.D.? Make too much noise in the library?”

“No.” Looks steadily at the bookcase in front of him; floor-to-ceiling, jammed with books. “I tried to off myself.”

Berger picks up the card again; studies it as he blows on his coffee. “What with? Pills? Gillette Super-Blue?”

He sees the way to handle this guy. Keep it light. A joker. Slide out from under without damage. “It was a Platinum-Plus,” he says.

The eyes are fixed upon him thoughtfully. They hold him still. “So how does it feel to be home? Everybody glad to see you?”

“Yes. Sure.”

“Your friends, everything okay with them?”

“Fine.”

“It says here, no sisters, no brothers. Right?”

“Right,” he says. *Don’t squirm don’t panic release is inevitable. Soon soon.*

Berger leans back in the chair, hands behind his head. It is hard to figure his age. He could be twenty-five. He could be forty. “So, what’d you want to work on?” he asks.

“Pardon?”

“Well, you’re here. It’s your money, so to speak. What d’you want to change?”

He thinks, then, of his father; of their struggle to keep between them a screen of calm and order. “I’d like to be more in control, I guess. So people can quit worrying about me.”

“So, who’s worrying about you?”

“My father, mostly. This is his idea.”

"How about your mother? Isn't she worried?"

"No."

"How come?"

"She's—I don't know, she's not a worrier."

"No? What does she do, then?"

"Do?"

"Yeah, what's her general policy toward you? You get along with her all right?"

"Yeah, fine." He is abruptly uncomfortable. An endless grilling process, like it was in the hospital. He forgot how it tightened him up; how much he used to hate it.

"You've got a funny look on your face," Berger says. "What're you thinking?"

"I'm thinking," he says, "if you're a friend of Crawford's you're probably okay, but I don't like this already. Look, what do you know about me? Have you talked to Crawford?"

"No." The blue high-beams have switched to low. The smile is benign. "He told me your name, that's all. Told me to look for you."

"Okay, I'll tell you some things." He turns his head slightly, taking in the

narrow window at the left of the bookcase. Sunlight streams in from the slot, cutting a bright path across the carpeting. “I had a brother. He’s dead. It was an accident on the lake. We were sailing. He drowned.”

“When?”

“Summer before last.”

Staring now at the bookcase, he tries to make out the titles of the books from where he is sitting. He cannot. They are too far away.

“I suppose you and Crawford talked about it,” Berger says.

“Every day.”

“And you don’t like to talk about it.”

He shrugs. “It doesn’t change anything.”

A pigeon, dull-gray, lights on the cement window sill. It pecks inquiringly at the window for a moment; then flies off.

“Okay,” Berger says. “Anything else?”

“No,” he says. “Yeah. About friends. I don’t have any. I got sort of out of touch before I left.”

“Oh?”

He does not respond to this technique; the comment in the form of a

question. He had cured Crawford of it by telling him it was impossible to concentrate on what a person was saying if you were listening for his voice to go up at the end of the sentence.

"Well, okay," Berger says. "I'd better tell you. I'm not big on control. I prefer things fluid. In motion. But it's your money."

"So to speak."

"So to speak, yeah." Berger laughs, reaching for his notebook. "How's Tuesdays and Fridays?"

"Twice a week?"

He shrugs. "Control is a tough nut."

"I've got swim practice every night."

"Hmm. That's a problem. So, how do we solve it?"

A long, uncomfortable silence. He is tired and irritated. And again, there are no choices; it only looks as if there are.

"I guess I skip practice and come here twice a week," he says.

"Okeydoke."

It is over, and Berger walks him to the door. "The schedule," he says, "is based on patient ratings. A scale of one to ten. The higher I rate, the fewer times you gotta come. Example: You rate me ten, you only have to see me

once a week."

Conrad laughs. "That's crazy."

"Hey, I'm the doctor." Berger grins at him. "You're the patient."

The worst, the first session has been gotten through. And the guy is not bad; at least he is loose. The exchange about the razor blades reminded him of something good about the hospital; nobody hid anything there. People kidded you about all kinds of stuff and it was all right; it even helped to stay the flood of shame and guilt. Remembering that day at lunch when Stan Carmichael rose from his chair pointing his finger in stern accusation: "Profane and unholy boy! Sinner against God and Man, father and mother—" Robbie prompted him "—and the Holy Ghost, Stan-" and he ranted on "—and the Holy Ghost! Fall on your knees! Repent of evil! Ask forgiveness for your profane and evil ways, Conrad Keith Jarrett!" and he had nodded, eating on, while Robbie leaned across the table, and asked, "Stan, may I have your gingerbread? Just if you're not going to eat it, buddy." And Stan broke off his ravings to snarl petulantly, "Goddamn it, Rob, you're a leech, you scrounge off my plate at every meal, it's disgusting!"

So, how do you stay open, when nobody mentions anything, when everybody is careful not to mention it? *Ah, shit, Jarrett, what do you want? Want people to say, "Gee, we're glad you didn't die?"* Poor taste, poor taste.

He is suddenly aware of the other people on the street, hurrying by,

intent upon their business. See? No one's accusing. They don't even seem repelled. As a matter of fact, they don't even notice. So. No need to be affected by them, either, right? Still, as they pass him, he carefully averts his gaze.