

Refinding the Object and Reclaiming the Self

Dreams in Therapy of Families with Adolescents



David E. Scharff M.D.

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DREAMS IN THERAPY OF FAMILIES WITH ADOLESCENTS

Adolescence is a particularly fluid period of development. During this time of "second separation-individuation" (Bios 1967) and of identity consolidation (Erikson 1959), adolescents are particularly focused on the relationship to their objects. The family members who have contributed the original experience out of which the adolescent's internal objects were made are still usually there, still involved with the adolescent, and still able to

contribute to the formation of the adolescent's evolving self. Unresolved object relations issues are carried by the parents and other family members and continue to influence the adolescent.

In turn, the growth of the adolescent influences the object relations of the parents. Parents hope to repair old deficits in self and object relations through relationship with their children, and they hope to validate what they have received from their parental objects by passing loving object relations on to their children. Difficulties with child object relations, therefore, have profound implications for the selves of parents. In the context of the continuing cycle of renewal of self and object relations, family therapy has a unique role in fostering mutual differentiation and repair to

object relations for parents and adolescents alike.

In therapy with adolescents, the struggle of the teenager to differentiate the self from his or her objects has particular energy and poignancy. It is often as if adolescents will wrench their own identities from their families "over the dead bodies" of their parents, leaving them with a self in isolation from its actual parental objects and likely to repeat self-defeating struggles with new objects.

Dreams have a unique ability to contribute to this adolescent struggle between self and object. We have seen how dreams stand on the boundary between conscious and unconscious aspects of self and communicate aspects of the relationship of the self to its objects within the

individual and between people in primary relationships. In the flux of adolescence, the dream offers a particularly fluid medium for communication and recombination of the elements of self and object.

This chapter gives examples of the therapeutic use of dreams in two families, allowing us to examine the formation of self in interplay with objects in contrasting adolescent girls. The first case demonstrates the use of a dream to add to a shaky alliance between self and object, between adolescent and parent, and between family and therapist. This girl was seen with her parents because she refused treatment on her own and, in the absence of any alliance with her, family treatment seemed the only alternative to residential treatment. In the second case, an adolescent girl who was fully

cooperative and invested in treatment was seen individually on a regular basis immediately following the weekly family sessions. The dream she volunteered was catalytic both in the family session and in her own following session.

THE RELUCTANT DRAG-IN

Tanya Matthews was a middle class black girl who came to therapy at 15 because she had been expelled from boarding school during her freshman year for drug and alcohol use. Her divorced parents, both college teachers, related amicably around her care, but Tanya had managed to exploit their shared laissez-faire attitude to pursue a downward trend even before going away to school. By the time I saw her, she acknowledged that she had no motivation for schoolwork, no career ambitions, and no life hopes. She drank and used any drugs that were

available because there was no reason not to. Her apathy was a thin cover for a dense depression. As therapy progressed, she began to notice the impact of loss due to her parents' divorce four years earlier. In self-defense, she quickly returned to the refuge of her "I don't care" stance.

I began therapy, meeting with Tanya and both parents. I was surprised by the ability of these divorced people to work in therapy together, support Tanya, and confront their shared history of turning a blind eye on her increasing drug use and acting out. I convened a family-wide meeting, which included Tanya's three sisters when they returned from college. They had also used drugs and alcohol in high school—and presumably still did—but were on smoother courses nevertheless. They confronted both Tanya and their parents—and then promptly left town for their own activities.

The first couple of individual meetings with Tanya were friendly enough, but our sessions soon lapsed into a resentful silence in which she claimed she simply had nothing to say. At first, I prodded her a bit. If I even tried to keep the conversation going, she moved to angry retorts. She was only there at her parents' insistence and did not intend to use the session. After working unsuccessfully with this negativistic defense, I recommended that therapy should consist of twice-weekly conjoint sessions, some in which Tanya met with each parent separately and some in which she met with both father and mother.

I was again pleasantly surprised that the therapy went fairly well, even though Tanya never admitted any interest in it or in the educational plan that evolved. She was accepted at St. Thomas, a local Catholic school that had an interest in children with emotional difficulty. She began with a steady effort and did well, all the while protesting vigorously. She said

she hated all the kids at the school, but made friends steadily. She protested energetically and regularly about having to come to therapy. She often began sessions by refusing to speak and left the talking to be done somewhat painfully and laboriously by her parents. Then regularly-if reluctantly—she responded to them.

In saying that I was surprised at the benefits of this treatment and at her progress, my intention is to convey the idea that I was dubious about Tanya's effective treatment as an outpatient at all. I had consulted two educational psychologist colleagues about referring Tanya to a residential school before adopting this therapy plan on a trial basis. In addition, her consistent negativism and the regularity with which she dismissed my offerings—a dismissiveness that echoed her attacks on her parents when they began to set limits or impose conditions —left me feeling chronically unappreciated in a way that is familiar to

any parent of a surly adolescent, or perhaps parents of most adolescents.

Nonetheless, I felt buoyed by a growing alliance with her parents. The father said that as the noncustodial parent, he just did not have a good feel for what was needed and left it to Tanya's mother. He, too, had been thrown out of school for alcohol use as a teenager. Although he identified with Tanya's plight, he had found therapy useful in making sense of what he wanted out of life. He knew that Tanya needed more structure and was willing to help in a more active way. Mrs. Matthews said that she felt guilty whenever she said no to Tanya, because her own mother had set such firm and forbidding limits on her. Out of fear of being like her own mother whom she had resented, she had been lax about limits with Tanya.

I found myself working therapeutically with the parents on the themes that interfered with their capacity to parent and

set limits, even while Tanya sat there watching me helping them gain the capacity to cooperate in setting limits. I have never before conducted a therapy quite like it, and so was beset with constant doubts. However, Tanya's school and social life continued to improve.

The session with the dream that I present here occurred after about eight months of work. Tanya and Mrs. Matthews arrived ten minutes late for an appointment that they had asked me to begin early.

Tanya began with a renewed protest. "There isn't anything to talk about. I don't have anything to say. And I don't think you should have to talk, Mom, just to fill up the time." She shrugged her shoulders and grimaced sarcastically at her mother, with an angry glance at me.

Mrs. Matthews said, "By the way, Dr. Scharff, Tanya's father will be out of town all next week. Could we meet only once?"

I don't want to come three times in a row with Tanya by myself."

I felt pulled. I was sympathetic to her wish for relief from having to provide all the energy for the session, but I did not agree that Tanya should come only once a week. My ambivalence was heightened both from my own experience dealing with Tanya's reluctance and because the request suited my convenience. Pressed by a crowded schedule the following week, I opted to let the request stand for the moment. But I was aware that it set a theme of reluctance for the session, echoing Tanya's statement that there was nothing to say. I felt not yet up to confronting the pair about their resistance, fed from my own sense of how much I also had to struggle to keep things going.

Mrs. Matthews now tried to talk about Tanya's philosophy.

"Tanya, you insist that life is just fate, that there's no point in worrying. It's hard

to get you to do things on your own behalf. But life just isn't that way."

Tanya wasn't having any of this. "See! You're just talking to fill up the time."

Mrs. Matthews said, "I know you don't want to talk. I think that's why Dr. Scharff asked your father and me to come in with you to these sessions to raise issues. There are things to discuss, and there's certainly work to do."

"I don't really think it's any of your business anyway what I want to do with my life," said Tanya. "I should be able to do what I want. It's a free country."

The discussion turned, again at the mother's initiative, to where Tanya would go to school the next year. It was January, and Tanya would have to be thinking of a new school or else would have to stay at the current school, which she still said she hated.

"I don't even have to go to school next year. I'll be 16, and you can't make me."

Mrs. Matthews forced the issue. "You are going to school."

"I hate St. Thomas! I'll go to school if you make me, but I just want to go somewhere else."

"Like where?" asked Mrs. Matthews. "You haven't developed any options."

Tanya mocked her mother. "I know. I can 'develop my options.' "

I felt Tanya's hardening but engaged negativism. As her mother pushed, Tanya seemed to be coming out of her lair. I suddenly thought of her as a dragon practically breathing fire. I could feel the tension rising, and I could sense Mrs. Matthews wanting to retreat from Tanya's awakened anger.

"Do you feel like retreating, Mrs. Matthews?" I asked.

"Sure, I do," she said. "As soon as I start to discuss the realities, she gets nasty. But it's true that if she doesn't

pursue the question of applying to other schools now, the options will be closed. And she says she hates St. Thomas. I feel in a bind, and there are lots of times I wish I could just get away from it."

"Well, I'll be 16. And you can't make me go to school," Tanya repeated.

"It's not in the realm of possibility!" said her mother, seeming strengthened by my question. "Look what happened to Michael. That's the kind of thing I worry about with you."

Michael was Tanya's reputed boyfriend, another 15-year-old who had also been dismissed from the same school for drug use a few months earlier than Tanya. Michael was now enrolled in a residential treatment school in New England and had run away from it. There had been recent phone calls from Michael to Tanya, and then from Michael's mother trying to locate him.

I took Tanya's choice of boyfriend as another sign of the poverty of her self-image. Michael seemed to be an even more troubled version of herself, as were several of her friends, according to the description she gave of them. I felt heartened to hear her mother's reference to Michael in this way, because until now the parents had not monitored Tanya's interactions with this sort of friend, allowing her a large loophole for acting out.

I understood the session so far as representing their shared feeling of hopelessness. I was thinking of Tanya's opening comments about there being "nothing to say" and of Mrs. Matthews' wish to cancel a session. This discussion about Michael spurred me to intervene.

"This session really has been about the inability to talk that the two of you share," I said. "This discussion about refusing to go to school represents the bottom line threat that Tanya is big

enough to make it impossible for you, Mrs. Matthews, and for her father to do anything. It's true that if Tanya forced things as Michael has done, you and her father would have to decide what your own bottom line is, as Michael's parents have. Short of that, I believe you're saying, 'This is the situation. There's no discussing it. You have to go to school.' Perhaps what is not being directly discussed in this kind of non-discussion is that Tanya prefers it when the two of you are firmer. She may be afraid that if you don't put your foot down, she'll end up in the kind of desperate position Michael has been in, alone, on the loose, and destitute with no capacity to take care of herself."

Mrs. Matthews looked upset. "It's just like my dream," she said. "I dreamt that a girl named Amy was in the school where Michael is, which was like a prison. Amy is a troubled girl my older daughter Shandra knew, a girl who has been in a treatment school. Shandra had talked

about dropping out of school sometimes, too, although she has managed to graduate from college and is doing fine. But she frequently threatened to drop out when she was Tanya's age. That's all there was to the dream." She began to cry and wiped her eyes with a tissue from her purse. "It makes me feel that to control Tanya, I'll have to send her to a prison like the school I think of when I think of Michael or Amy."

Now the full story about Michael came out. His situation had deteriorated so that he finally called Tanya to ask for her credit card—or her mother's—so that he could buy a plane ticket home. Failing to get that, he turned to his parents, who said they wouldn't talk to him about anything until he was back at school. After some time elapsed in which no one knew where he was, he showed up back in the residential school, where he had remained.

I said, "This dream tells us where the conflict is between your mother and yourself, Tanya. It's like what she fears about Michael. In the past your mother has been reluctant to set limits on you for fear you'll hate her, but now she is afraid that failing to do so will leave you alone and lost. She fears your anger. She worries that insisting on school for you will be like sentencing you to jail, but she fears for your safety and well-being if she doesn't."

Still in tears, Mrs. Matthews said, "It's true. You have to understand that I'm so scared for you. I don't know if you can use anything I can give you, and I'm scared if you can't. But when I try and you're so mad at me, I feel you hate me as I hated my mother when I used to think she kept me in prison and made me do so many things I hated. I swore I would never do that to you or your sisters, but now I think that you all needed me to insist on more things. You've all had trouble because I was scared to insist on

things. I know that now. Believe me, Tanya, I want you to have a life, and I'm scared about what will happen to you. Michael could be dead by now, and you run so many risks with yourself. And I know I won't always be able to stop you. But I do want to do everything I can. I *will* do all I can, but it's not easy."

Tanya was silent, but now seemed to listen without her habit of shrugging her shoulders and grimacing.

I said, "I think Tanya, you're afraid that your parents won't be able to see how frightened you are underneath your anger and refusal. It's crucial for them to know that you will also be relieved when they can insist on things you need to do and on limits you need. It's not important that you like your parents right now, but it is important they survive your anger and stand up to you without being scared by your dragon threats to breathe fire.

"I also can say now that we all agreed to cancel one of next week's sessions

because of the shared fear of words and the painful process of trying to talk. But these things have to be dealt with. I think we should meet twice next week as we had planned."

"I can see what you mean," Mrs. Matthews said. "I think I can face it."

Tanya did not exactly thank me on her way out, but she seemed at least less reluctant.

This vignette illustrates a specific aspect of the dependence of the self on the object in adolescence. The young child is overtly dependent on the external object for definition of her self. The adolescent is often involved in rejecting the external family objects in order to strengthen her internal objects, her identity, or sense of self, and to build new peer relations that validate and test this newly emerging self. Tanya had lost her sense of self in a premature

separation due to the divorce and even more so because of her parents' failure to be the appropriate limit-setting objects she required to keep up her development of a central self positioned between excessively need exciting and rejecting objects.

Mrs. Matthews' dream let us understand together that her fear of being a persecuting and rejecting object for Tanya had left the teenager at the disorganizing mercy of exciting internal and external objects, alone, lost, and sedated instead of limited and defined. Her depressed apathy was a sign of the repression of her longing for an object to encounter her. It saved her from the pain of this position much of the time, but when it threatened, she became an angry dragon turning to attack others rather than feel the pain of the loss of herself, the loss that Guntrip

(1969) has told us is the ultimate tragedy of the schizoid position—the loss of self experienced when there is no object to meet the hidden longing of the libidinal self.

The dream let Mrs. Matthews see that she abandoned Tanya in this way because of her own fear of aggression. She could only understand limit-setting as an imprisoning attack on her child. She saw it as imprisoning not only because of how she felt in her mother's care and control, but also because in her own inner loneliness, she wanted to keep Tanya so close to her that it might damage her as she felt damaged by similar issues of her own mother. That set of issues remained to be worked on. Meanwhile, the dream let Mrs. Matthews contain Tanya's anxieties about being lost without a holding object. Over the next few months of therapy I

noted Tanya's increasing definition of an evolvingly active and constructive self.

"MY PARENTS WEREN'T LOOKING WHILE I GREW UP!"

Sally Bly, aged 15 and the middle child of three, was brought to treatment by her parents. Her mother was a nurse and her father a county administrator. They told me they had been devastated when Sally told them she had become sexually active and wanted to go to the gynecologist for the pill. They could not support this idea and had grounded her until she agreed not to have any more sexual activity. When they first saw me, they were adamant on this point. There was, at this moment, no other way they could see things. It was their only complaint, for Sally was a model student and class leader, and although not much of an athlete, was well liked and, if anything,

overinvolved in extracurricular activities. Her academic dedication and her activities had been a relief to them after the troublesome learning disabilities of her 18-year-old brother, Zach, who was now, however, settled into a modestly successful college career. She also had a younger brother, Burt, aged 7, who, they said, was energetic and lovable.

When I saw Sally, I found her to be an extremely appealing girl. She was bright, funny, and thoughtful. I was not, however, unsympathetic to her parents' concerns that she might be prematurely involved in a sexual life. Still, she seemed to have a more flexible and thoughtful point of view than theirs. She said that her parents had always said to her that she should turn to them with problems, even if she thought they would disagree with her. She knew that they would not approve of the sex, but everything she had learned had led her to believe it was better to tell them and to get proper birth control than to be at risk. She felt she loved her boyfriend

and was going to be involved with him sexually, so she concluded that she had acted responsibly.

But she felt the problems really were more general. She said, "They don't understand that I have grown up. They weren't looking my way, and I just grew up. I think they were too busy fighting. I miss them—my parents. But I have another problem. I don't know a single girl who has managed to stay on good terms with her mother, and I worry this will happen to my mother and me. She doesn't get along with her mother, and my mom's sister and my cousin don't speak. So I figure that since Mom and I don't get along too well now, with all of this, we don't have much of a chance. It's not helped any by the fact that Mom and Dad don't get along well. In a way, I've turned to my boyfriend to get away from home."

I was quite taken by Sally, a girl who seemed wise beyond her years. I knew that her view, infinitely more interesting

than her parents', could not be the whole story either, but its precocious charm was appealing.

During several months of meetings with Sally and her parents, in which I maintained a neutral position about her sexual activity and their grounding her, we worked on the distance between Sally and her parents and the frightening model of relationships she drew from their bickering. Mr. and Mrs. Bly softened their position about the grounding, and the three began to talk about the fears Sally had about the years of distance between herself and her parents.

I also met with Sally individually, partly because she was unwilling to offer personal revelation in the family setting because of the expectation that her parents would ground her. In the individual sessions, she worked hard and began to see the ways in which she, too, fended off her parents and repetitively chose boys who were emotionally

negligent and even abusive. She was reevaluating her view of her parents' relationship. She unconsciously felt there was no alternative to it, and yet she hoped desperately to change it. As she worked on these matters, she realized not only that she was trying to solve her depression, but that despite her outward academic success, she actually constantly undermined her considerable ambition and seldom maintained her best performance.

The following family session occurred after about a year of treatment. By now, the sessions included her brothers, the younger Burt because the Blys realized that their chronic distress had affected his peer relationships and was causing him anxiety. Since Zach, the older brother, was home from college, he was there, too.

The session began with some uncharacteristically outrageous behavior by Burt. There had been a ceremony at

his school at which he had received an award for spelling. Burt said to his father that he shouldn't talk about it in front of Zach, who was somewhat uncomfortable in the family sessions because he attended only when home from college. Burt then began to attack his father physically in a way that he said was a combination of "hugging and bugging." He pretended to choke his father, but he really applied a fair amount of pressure. In the end, Mr. Bly had to hold Burt's arms tightly to stop him so that they were then locked in an embrace. Burt kept up the activity despite the rest of the family's objections and threats of discipline. It dominated the first few minutes of the session. Meanwhile Sally snuggled up against her mother, who was trying to say how well Burt was doing at school.

No sense could be made of Burt's behavior, nor would he stop. Each of the others commented on how much Burt wanted attention.

Zach said, "Do I have to come home from college for this?"

Sally said, "Look at how Burt turns a silly objection into the center of attention."

Mr. Bly said, "Well, I have a theory that he's uncomfortable with success."

"Perhaps," said Mrs. Bly, "he thinks this means he'll have to keep it up, have to keep doing well when he'd rather be playing baseball."

"But none of you thinks you can really make much sense of his disruptiveness," I said.

"Be quiet, Dr. Scharff," said Burt. "This isn't any of your business." He was being uncharacteristically rude. He was an outspoken boy but not usually unfriendly.

Mr. Bly spoke up from his position of holding Burt firmly. "I've not been behaving very well with the family either. I've been rude and kind of my Napoleon self. In fact, my wife thinks Burt's been

like this because I have been pretty difficult this week. My father died a year ago yesterday. I've been missing him a lot. Realizing that this was the anniversary of his death let me feel less tense and more able to treat people better."

"Oh, he was quite a bear this week," Mrs. Bly said. "Saturday I cooked a special meal and he was such a grouch I felt like throwing it at him. But since we realized the connection to his father's death, he's calmed down."

So far I had been riveted on Burt's physical acting up. The energy behind his tenacious grasp on his father's attention had looked murderous, but at the same time paradoxically playful, close, and loving. It had made no sense until this moment of explanation of the loss of his father's. That also made sense of the physical fondness between Sally and mother in their huddle, as if defending each other from loss and disruption.

I said to Mr. Bly, "Identifying that you have been angry while unknowingly struggling with the loss of your father makes sense of Burt's looking like he wanted to kill you while also getting all that loving closeness. It also says something about Sally and Mom cuddling to have each other."

Mr. Bly turned to Sally. "Do you want to tell Dr. Scharff your dream? It meant a lot to me because it was that dream that helped me realize that I was struggling with my father's death."

"Okay," said Sally. "I dreamt I was at my grandparents' house, the one they used to live in before they moved away from Washington when I was little. In the dream, they were moving away, loading up a moving van. I was struck that it was from United Moving Van Lines. They got in the van and my grandfather started to drive. But he headed right for me in the van and was going to run me over. Then I woke up."

I noticed that Burt had now stopped moving around and was sitting comfortably and quietly held by his father. His quieting down led to a change in tenor of the whole family, which indicated that we were now approaching the emotional material that underlay his struggle.

"Any thoughts about the dream?" I asked Sally.

"Well, I think the van is really my father's car, which is a big red van. In fact, sometimes I think of him like a van because he's bigger than I am and thinks he can run people over. So I guess it's like he runs me over. I think that was the feeling in the dream, that he was running over me by moving away."

"Do you think your parents are united in moving away from you?" I asked.

"Well, not this week," she said, "but they are more together lately and I miss the closeness I've been developing with Mom now they're getting along better.

And I used to have something of a special relationship with Dad at some of the times he and Mom would be fighting the most. So I guess I'd have to say yes. When they are more united, I feel they've moved away from me."

"Whose parents are the grandparents of Sally's dream, and did they move away?" I asked the family, looking for additional object relations history of this dream and current family constellations.

Mrs. Bly said, "These are my husband's parents. They lived here until Sally was 7. At that time Pops retired and they moved to Florida. Sally had been real close to them. She'd see them after school when I was on shifts at the hospital. I was pregnant with Burt when they left and delivered soon after, so then I became preoccupied with him as soon as they were gone. Sally used to tell me how much she missed them when I was nursing Burt, and she always did remember them fondly. She continued to

have a pretty special relationship to them, although she always had a hard time understanding why they moved and left her."

"This is the grandfather whom Sally lost when she was 7 and whom Dad lost last year," I said. "That loss is attacking Sally right now through Dad's behavior."

"Yeah. I think that's right," said Mrs. Bly. "It's like a ghost is living in my husband and attacking Sally—and the whole family—through him. He's so preoccupied with his father's death, he can't tune in on the rest of us."

"She's right," Mr. Bly nodded. "I haven't been able to stop obsessing about what I missed having with him and now will never have. He was a distant man. We never managed to have the close relationship both of us would have liked. Actually, we did speak of it some in the past few years, but we didn't quite make up for it. So I guess it's fair to say I'm haunted by the sense of deprivation, by

his moving away from me for my whole life. Maybe I felt it most when I was Sally's age and had some trouble in school. It was the only time I ever failed any course and I needed help. He couldn't understand. I think my problem bothered him and he withdrew, probably feeling he had let me down."

"I didn't know you had ever failed a course, Dad," said Zach, who had been completely quiet.

"Well, I had a girlfriend who was throwing me over, and I was so devastated I couldn't even think about school," Mr. Bly continued. "But Pops was upset that I would do so badly when I had been an A student."

"Dad, maybe you were turning to your girlfriend because you felt lonely with your parents, too," said Sally.

"Maybe so, Sally," he acknowledged. "Anyway, your dream really hit me hard this week. It was a favor, really. It let me

see what I was doing to you and the family, and it helped me pull together. Do you agree that I've been better since we talked on Tuesday?"

"Yeah, I do," she said. "You've been not bad for a father. Before that, I think Mom and I had been getting close by talking about how difficult you were being."

Burt had remained quietly folded in his father's arms for all of this time. Now he said, "See, and that left me on my own. Dad was mad at everyone, and Mom and Sally had each other."

"Well, Burt," I said, "in the beginning of the hour, I think maybe you thought I was driving a moving van headed right for your family and you were trying to protect them from me because you were afraid I was going to stir up trouble."

"Maybe," he said, not necessarily convinced.

I continued, "But I also think you've been trying to do a *Ghostbusters* on your dad. You've been trying to save the family from the ghost of your grandfather by making your dad so mad-trying to strangle the bad father who left your dad and you, and get your good dad back. In a way it's worked today. I can see you got your good dad back."

"Yeah," Burt grinned. "Good Daddy." And he turned and put his arms around him with an energetic bear hug as Mr. Bly mimed at gasping for breath.

THE DREAM IN SALLY'S INDIVIDUAL SESSION

"We'll meet you at home, honey. Drive carefully!" called Mrs. Bly as she closed my office door and left Sally for her individual weekly session.

Sally took off her shoes and curled up on the love seat, relaxing into the "real

thing" where she could let her hair down and tell me the things she did not say with the family there —the things her friends told her, the parties she had been to, occasionally sexual matters.

"I'm worried about the way I keep messing things up for myself," she said. "That's what I'm figuring out here, right? Like now, I have this new boy I like, Max. He's really a decent guy. He understands me. He doesn't pressure me and he's a lot of fun."

"So you're finding such a good guy kind of a puzzling experience?" I asked.

"Right! You got it!" she said. "He's nice and fun and I can't like him like I used to like Craig, who really conned me and used me. And I knew down deep he was using me. Like, Max invited me to his prom. He goes to a different school. I do want to go, but I haven't invited him to my school's prom because I keep thinking he won't know my friends, but I know he would get along with them fine."

"Let me tell you this story. Max and I were supposed to have a date Saturday night. I was trying out for cheerleaders and the meeting went a long time. Then I had lost my car keys and my mom had to come get me, so by that time instead of showing up at his house at 9 o'clock, I show up at midnight. I'm telling him I'm really sorry and he won't ever want to see me again, and Max says, 'No problem.' He just laughs about it and says okay, but we have to go out to get a coke. And he takes me to the American Diner where we sat and laughed and had a great time for an hour. But I felt guilty and said I had to pay the bill 'tho I didn't really have the money. He said, 'There's no need for this. I want to do it.' But I felt I had to make it up to him."

"We've been talking about you maybe being drawn to slightly abusive relationships with guys," I said. "And now we're seeing something that goes with that. You're actually uncomfortable with a guy who wants to treat you well. Your

thinking you don't belong in a good relationship might relate to the dream we were just discussing with your family."

"Hmm," she mused. "Well, maybe it's hard for me to think about a relationship being interesting if there isn't some fighting and pushing each other around. That's all I've known with my parents all these years. I mean they don't hit each other or anything. They're just a bit nasty and quarrel a lot."

"How about losing your grandparents?" I asked. "I hadn't known they were so important to you when you were little."

"I hadn't thought much about it for a long time, you know," she said. "They've lived away for 7 or 8 years, and they were kind of old and crotchety. We went to visit after Pops died and Mums was picky about keeping her apartment clean, something Burt absolutely cannot do! But I remember now how Pops used to bounce me on his knee and Mums fed me brownies when Mom was working. And

then they left and Burt was born. And Zach always used to get attention from Mom and Dad because of his learning troubles. So, yeah, I think I missed them then like Dad missed Pops when he died. That must have been a hard time for me, but I don't think I knew it."

"I've been thinking about what you said when you and I started meeting. That you didn't think it was possible for girls to grow up and have good relationships with their moms. You must have felt you lost the chance of a good relationship with her when you were little and had to turn to your grandparents. I think you held that against her for years. But today there you were, snuggled up with your mom."

"It's true," she said. "We've been getting along real well. Kind of joking about Dad, but mainly we've been pretty good friends for a while now. Mom can have some bad days, but they don't seem to set us back much. And even when I get in trouble or something goes wrong like I

get behind at school, Mom doesn't really land on me."

"So it's become a different thing than last year?" I asked.

"Yeah. I think maybe we'll do okay," she said. "But you know, when you said that about my missing Mom when I was little, I was remembering that at some point she was sick and in the hospital. And I was little. They sent me to Aunt Betsy's. She is one pretty difficult lady, off-putting and bitchy when anyone is feeling they need things. I think it must have been a time I felt all alone. I can only remember it a little."

"So Aunt Betsy is like the mom you thought you had when you first came here," I said, "the bitchy woman who wouldn't stand for people needing something from her. That seems to have started when your mom had to send you away for a little while, and maybe you felt then that it was her moving away from you, too."

"Maybe so," she agreed. "I'm remembering some other things. I don't know why. Like being in my crib, which I stayed in until I could talk at about three. I wanted my parents to come in and read me a story. They wouldn't, and I cried all night by myself. And I remember a time when Mom took me to school and I didn't want her to leave me and she left anyway. I think that's like the way I felt she gave all her attention to Burt when he was born."

"These are the events that fit with your dream," I said. "The loss you felt when you couldn't have your mom at these times. Because you probably handled some of the loneliness by turning to your dad and some by going to your grandparents. Then when they left at about the time Burt was born, you must have felt there'd be no one to turn to. Sometimes grandparents are an ideal substitute for parents. And you thought your grandparents got along well, unlike the bickering of your parents. I think when they left, you felt life might not be safe

anymore, that the 'united' parents were gone and you had the ones who weren't safe because they were divided."

"Score one for you!" she said, making a "high five" sign in the air. "You know, when I don't get my homework in and feel so badly treated, I think it's because I'm feeling sorry for myself and that no one cares for me. Like it's then I want my parents to take care of me like I was a little girl."

"Then, if they don't or can't, you're disappointed and down?" I asked.

"Yes. And I think then I want a boyfriend who has troubles so I can help him do better. Someone like Craig so I can help fix him up. But the trouble is, he doesn't necessarily want to be fixed up. So I end up feeling he's pushing me around, kind of like he's the one driving a van over me. But really, I get myself into it in the first place. I kind of hire the van and put him in the driver's seat. Maybe I'm kind of like my dad after all, except I find a

boy to do it for me. It's like I'm the moving company, and I go out and find people who aren't good drivers and act like I can teach them. Then, when they really don't want to learn and they mow me down, I act like I had nothing to do with it. But I hired them! I do it to myself! Oh, wow!"

This vignette from family and individual psychotherapy illustrates Fairbairn's concept of the internal saboteur, this time discovered in the shared work on Sally's dream. The family and Sally herself were clearly working well in the therapeutic setting, open to discover repressed and denied parts of themselves, and like the Green family, described in Chapter 8, each able to look at themselves as well as each other.

The dream here was actually a "moving vehicle" for the exploration of loss that had been transformed into anger and rejecting object

relations within several family members and between them. The lost good grandparents, the parents of the father, carried forward in identifications as rejecting and persecuting objects, could be seen to be affecting the selves of the parents.

To begin with, the dream can be understood as a description of the "endopsychic situation" of the dreamer (Fairbairn 1952). The internal object relations view presented in the dream is not literally the family situation, but the constellation that the dreamer carries inside. Here, Sally dreamt not only of a rejecting father but of her antilibidinal ego or "internal saboteur" in relationship to it. The structure also illustrated the rejecting parental pair, who were, in the dream, united in leaving her and aiming their "United Moving Van" at her murderously. In

cuddling with her mother while telling the dream, Sally tries to recreate an exciting object pair for herself to compensate for the rejection she feels. Her central ego or self is the dreamer and reporter of the dream, whereas an ideal object is only present in this dream by the implication of the kind of loving and accepting object she feels is moving away from her.

However, the more interesting view of the dream is supplied by the associations of Sally's family to the grandparents' move away from Washington at the time of Burt's birth. The family is united in their experience of loss of parents then and more recently with the death of Mr. Bly's father. Identifying the rejecting objects that have been voiced or enacted in various ways —through the father's embodiment of persecution, through Burt's attack on the father

—allows the family to see how they as a group have been haunted by and tied to persecuting objects. They long for the united parents, but feel they cannot hope to have them safely embodied inside the family. They cannot imagine that Mr. and Mrs. Bly will be able to constitute a united and loving couple, who can be loving parents as well. Consequently, they set up substitute couples, who try to compensate the family for the sense of ongoing loss: Burt and Father, Mother and Sally, Sally and her boyfriend. With work on Sally's dream, the pattern can be explored and changed.

Through this session, Burt at first has the role of protecting the family from the intrusion of the therapist, who seems to be driving a moving van into their midst. He threatens to move the family toward the experience of loss

and pain. When the dream is shared, the therapist becomes no longer a persecuting object to the group, but a helpful agent of family and individual movement. Then the self and object relations of each family member and of the family as a group can be explored and understood, and the family resumes its own process of development. And, as members re-find their lost objects, they begin the process of reclaiming their selves.

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