Take Her, She's Yours
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playfully was replaced by the thick cord that has been there all along. That cord emerged, in the analysis, as a symbol of this unconscious conflict and its brutal enactment.

**Entrapment**

I never saw Dr. O use the bathroom in the waiting room. I, on the other hand, used it almost every time I had a session, either before or after, to pee or sob or empty my cramping gut or wipe my smudged eye makeup. It had a shower in it that was never used. Sometimes it housed a fragile tall plant that seemed to tremble under its overhead light. When I felt most trapped and angry at having to undergo this dreadful process, I would gaze through the shower glass at the willowy plant. She and I were captive to this man, who hoarded us down there with him in the gloom of the underground.

One spring I noticed she was gone. I couldn’t stop thinking about her. I worried that she had died and been thrown away. Finally, I blurted out, at the end of the session,

“What happened to the plant in the shower? Did you kill it?”

I think he had been about to say “and that’s our time for today,” but realized that I really needed to know. “The plant is outside, and healthy because of having been sheltered indoors through the cold winter.”

I was relieved at the answer and that he had answered me. The relief didn’t last long, however, because, upon second thought, I perceived sympathy in his response. This perturbed the balance that I liked him to maintain. I wanted him to demonstrate, continuously and without fail, that he was not capitulating to me. When I cried and shook in front of him, I worried that I was exposing myself to effect. Perhaps my tears weren’t genuine. Perhaps they were just a ploy that I was using to hook him in. So if he seemed to reassure me, I got angry that he was being gullible.

It was quite a spiral. At one point of it I’d begin to work myself into anger over his stupid male susceptibility to my wiles.
Then I would realize that he wasn’t falling for me. He wasn’t going to be nice and let me stop doing this painful work of speaking. That would make me hit the point in the spiral in which I feared that he was a collector, a man who would take advantage of his power and my trust by cutting me off from the outside world. He was going to trap me so as to keep me close.

My father–daughter incest fantasies and fears reemerged in one of the turns of this cycle. Echoing the story of enthrallment with which I started the analysis, I began talking with fascinated fear about the Austrian Josef Fritzl, who imprisoned his daughter in his cellar for twenty-four years. Fritzl attempted to defend himself by saying that he was trying to stop her from doing drugs or having sex.

I couldn’t stop imagining what her life must have been. Trapped in the basement, she would have waited anxiously for him, her only bearer of food and supplies, knowing that if he did not return, she and her children/siblings would be trapped without possibility of rescue. At the same time, she would have dreaded the footsteps of her jailer, rapist, and father.

I, too, felt trapped by a cruel authority figure who demanded I delve into the darkness of the basement! And he, too, reassured me that he would be constant, and help me manage life down there! I knew I was exaggerating, but my panic was palpable as I drew the similarities between Fritzl and Dr. O.

“The children in my psyche fear that we’ll be forgotten. That you’ll stop coming and leave us locked up. But, at the same time, I desperately want you to leave me alone, to just stop making me be here with you.”

“Ah… Brer Rabbit.”

I was startled. Dr. O didn’t often offer a free association of his own.

He continued, “When Brer Rabbit begs to not be thrown in the briar patch, he’s playing at not wanting to be released into the place where he will be most comfortable and safe.”

I thought for awhile, then said, “So it’s like when I beg you not to fall for me — ‘don’t love me so much that you want me all
for your very own.’ I fear your love or care because I insist it will smother me, break me down, or break me open. But you’re saying I’m like Brer Rabbit, because what I actually want is for you to care for me and make me feel safe. So maybe I am actually asking you to hoard me, smother me, keep me in a constrained place that I will be able to break open or break down.”

The next day I came in, unable to shake the memory of Fritzl’s daughter, of Brer Rabbit’s pleas. I said, “Here is what it has been like for me. I’ve talked, flirted, and been open with a man. The encounter leads towards sex. I have to. I’m trapped. I’ve gotten myself into this. So I fake wanting it. It’s a way to stay smooth, to not expose a fault line that could break me apart. It’s rape. Maybe I don’t admit it, and he doesn’t know it, but it is rape. Because I don’t want to be there. I’m nervous. I’m out of control.”

I felt like I was going to throw up. I muttered, “I hate them, those stupid fuckers, for thinking we had a good time. I hate myself, for trying to think of it as yet another sexual exploit.”

Dr. O was silent for a long time, and then said, “Fault line?”

I too was silent for minutes. And then I began to speak as if I were recounting a dream. One time David and I hiked in a forest in California. The thick moss that covered the ground gave a spring to our steps. We looked over at a line of tall ferns that had wisps of steam surrounding them. When we went closer and peered down at the ground between the plants, the heat hit our faces. We were standing on a fault line, looking down into the red and orange embers of the insides of the earth itself. It scared the fuck out of me to see the danger that lay below the soft cool ground on which I was standing.

I started to shake. “What does it even feel like, to penetrate? To push a pulsing part of your own body into the warm interior of another person? I allowed those men inside me. That’s what we straight women do. We get penetrated. We fuck, we receive, we take in. I’m so compliant I even come when I get penetrated.”

I knew that I didn’t usually think of sex in this way. I didn’t know why I was saying this. I was so angry, so aggressive towards Dr. O as those burning words flowed out of me.
“How do I know I even wanted to be analyzed? Maybe I just agreed to it because I felt trapped by your male authority. What if I have just fallen into another relationship with a man that reenacts this fucked up father-daughter shit?”

He was silent. My sobs subsided. I became silent too. Our listening penetrated deep into the boiling emotions that lay below my smooth exterior.

**Splitting**

At parties, David would watch me from across the room as I laughed and confided and listened attentively in a group. On our way home, he would say, “You really hit it off with those people!”

I’d roll my eyes, “Them? What insufferable bores!”

Since he was unable to fake it in social situations, he found this to be, at first, an interesting twist of my personality, and later, proof of my inauthenticity and dishonesty.

I would say, “I don’t know, it’s just what you do, you give the other person what they want in order to get through the evening.”

Even my switch from first person to second with the use of “you” shows how accustomed I was to splitting myself. I thought of it as commonplace social behavior. “Take her, she’s yours” wasn’t just something that had been done to me, but something that I did routinely.

Talking about this to Dr. O, I remembered a miniature porcelain duck family that I had as a child. The mother and one of the ducklings swam on the surface of the blue china pond, but the third one gave the illusion of diving since it was just a tail and little webbed feet. As I described it, Dr. O referred to a poem called “Autotomy” by Wisława Szymborska, about a sea creature that protects itself through a self-imposed mutilation. The second I got home I looked it up: