

# *I Love You Madly!*

On Passion, Personality and Personal Growth

Robert M. Gordon, Ph.D.



“Gordon with his insight and knowledge of the science of psychology weaves between his own romance and his work with a patient with a love disturbance. The reader wonders how each will turn out. It is a great read for therapists, psychology students, patients or anyone who has both loved and lost or suffered the pains and confusion of romantic love.”

Gerd H. Fenchel, Ph.D., Dean/Director, Washington Square  
Institute for Mental Health and author of *Psychoanalytic  
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“Robert Gordon is a psychologist, psychoanalyst, author and speaker. And he is a man who understands the nature of love. Speaking from his heart and speaking from his fund of knowledge, he teaches the reader the difference between romantic love and the kind of love that sustains us over the years. If you are in love or searching for it, read this book and heed its wisdom!”

Daniel Gottlieb, Psychologist and Family Therapist,  
host of “Voices In The Family” (WHYY Radio),  
*Philadelphia Inquirer* columnist, and author of *Voices  
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“Recently, I read a great book by Gordon . . . that showed how psychoanalysis can help us understand love and relationships and can be used in psychotherapy.”

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author of over 200 journal articles and 7 books,  
in *PsycCritiques*, July 19, Vol. 51 (9)

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*On Passion, Personality and  
Personal Growth*

by

Robert M. Gordon, Ph.D.

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Front cover: Alla in Russia – 1991

*To my beautiful wife Alla—my colleague,  
my best friend, and the love of my life.*



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N.B. I used disguised and composite cases in keeping with the American Psychological Association's Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct (2002) which states in section 4.07 "Psychologists do not disclose in their writings, lectures, or other public media, confidential, personally identifiable information concerning their clients/patients, students, research participants, organizational clients, or other recipients of their services that they obtained during the course of their work, unless (1) they take reasonable steps to disguise the person or organization . . ."







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## **Introduction: The Mystery of Love**

Romantic love starts as a delusional state that usually fades in the light of reality. Yet on occasion, a romance can evolve into a lasting love relationship. Why do some loves fade and others flourish? For over 30 years, as a psychologist, family therapist, and psychoanalyst, I have studied personality and intimacy. With my knowledge of scientific research and my clinical experience, I wrote this book to help people understand the mysteries of passion. I decided to write a book that entertains as a novel by teaching the science of love in the context of compelling love stories.

I believe psychological propositions such as the conflicts in love relations are relatively predictable based on the personalities and histories of the lovers. What will happen later in the relationship is evident from the beginning; the signs are there from the start.

For example, my patient George had a hostile relationship with his alcoholic mother. He married young to escape her. He married an alcoholic woman. He divorced her and remarried. Alice, his second wife, also turned out to be an alcoholic.

George protested when I suggested that he repeated his attachment to his mother in his later love relations. He said, “Alice had stopped drinking before we met. It was only after the second year of marriage that she began to drink again.”

George’s urge to repeat his attachment pattern was unconscious. I interpreted, “You knew Alice once had a drinking problem, and you probably unconsciously detected many of her personality traits that were similar to your mother. Alice’s traits triggered the feelings of



idealization that you originally had for your mother. Such primitive idealization is the basis of all love. This idealization came long before any conscious awareness of a conflict with your mother. It became part of your implicit memory. When you first fall in love now, you reenact both sides of the emotions in your love relations, first the stage of idealization and then the old conflicts with your mother.”

George was not ready to concede that he had a goal-directed unconscious. “How is that possible? I saw her across the room at a party. It was love at first sight.”

I said, “The human face has about thirty muscles that can be used for emotional expression. They can communicate many subtle messages. Our unconscious can read aspects of a person’s personality and emotions from the face (Young, 1997). This ability might have had survival value in evolutionary history and became part of our unconscious mind long before language. You were attracted to the way she looked, her non-verbal expressions, and then, what she said. They were all triggers for you to reenact your unconscious love drama.”

Over the many psychotherapy sessions, George began to see the patterns he was repeating in his relationships. Eventually he gained enough personal growth to love more wisely and develop passion for a much healthier woman.

The very act of falling in love sets in motion a fairly predictable course. The issues that people later complain about are there from the start. People do not recognize the problems consciously, but unconsciously they certainly do. These problems are part of the chemistry in love relations. Lovers begin with an overture that subtly introduces all the themes that are to come. These themes continue throughout the relationship. They build until they are maturely resolved or until they destroy the intimacy.

Although each of our loves is a different experience, new ones tend to reenact old patterns of how we love. These patterns are deep-set within our personalities. We recreate our childhood attachments, traumas, and conflicts in our intimate relationships. Our childhood

perceptions of our parents, as idealized gods or as tormenting demons or both, become internal gyroscopes orienting us to lovers who evoke similar emotions in us. If we imprinted on a tormenting parent, then a tormenting lover will be exciting and a kind lover will seem boring. We can unconsciously repeat our childhood attachment patterns several ways. We can unconsciously choose a lover who evokes similar emotions from childhood or by provoking or distorting a lover. If our lover is not the tormentor then we become the tormentor. The roles are interchangeable, only the love drama remains the same.

If dysfunctional relationships were our normal experience in childhood, later we may become confused as to how to even recognize dysfunction in ourselves and in others. We might be confused how to react to emotional problems in a healthy manner. If our primary caregivers were negligent or traumatizing, our later love relations will tend to produce the same conflicts we had in childhood.

Our loving matures in childhood with the interaction with healthy parents. If we had good enough parents and have a secure identity, then romantic love can evolve into lasting love. Later we can love with a realistic appreciation of the beloved. But many people are not so lucky and need to work hard to love well. The only way I know to alter old dramas of love conflicts is through emotional insight in the context of constructive intimacy. Such intimacy promotes personal growth through commitment, constructive feedback, emotional insight, concern, remorse, responsibility, and a willingness to be a better person. These are the essential ingredients.

However, most people avoid insight and seek an ideal love with a magical hero or heroine (Bergmann, 1982; Freud, 1914/1957). They hope that their problems will be solved by a transformational love. Falling in love returns us to the emotions of infancy and childhood, when we felt a magical symbiosis with an idealized caregiver. When the child receives inadequate love, the notion of an idealized love becomes fixated and is expected in adult love relations. Mature love requires the love of truth and is content with “good enough;” immature love requires the love of magical thinking.



Psychotherapy is the most reliable way to learn to love maturely. However, intense love can also be a great motivator. A lover may become a better person for the sake of the relationship. I will illustrate this by telling you about the stories of two women. I will take you inside the psychotherapy of one of my patients, “Karen,” sharing with you how I treated her self-defeating problems with love.

I like books where authors are not only experts, but also explain how they overcame a problem. Although, I have never suffered from a serious mental illness, I have known the delusions of romantic love, as have most people. We all have hearts that can leap, love, break, and love again. All people, including psychologists, can temporarily lose perspective when they fall in love. Infatuation can make a normal person temporarily insane. However, psychology can provide an invaluable road map when one becomes lost in emotions. I will show you how psychology (not superficial psychology, but psychoanalytic psychology) can provide the essential insights during times of confusion.

Psychotherapists keep their personal lives away from patients for good reasons. Patients use the therapeutic relationship as a symbolic one to work through emotional problems. The psychotherapist comes to represent in patients’ minds their mother, father, or bad self. Whatever is conflicted and unfinished will be placed on to the psychotherapist. Telling stories about my life may be a disruption of the patient’s deep work. However, in the context of a book, I can make an exception to my usual rule of therapeutic anonymity. I hope it serves a useful purpose to show the reader what happens when I fall into the madness of romantic love and how I use psychology to guide me. I will share my story of my romance with “Alla.” I will show you how I use insight in the midst of confusion and passion.

Although “Alla” and “Karen”<sup>1</sup> come from different worlds, they both struggle with similar conflicts about love. When I confronted each of them with insights about themselves, they were faced with a

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<sup>1</sup> I put privacy as a main consideration in this narrative non-fiction. I have created these characters from combinations of patients’ traits, histories, and psychotherapy notes.

decision about giving up their defensiveness or giving up on healthy intimacy. We all can be self-deluding historians. But personal growth comes from self-reflection and insight.

Join me in my stories of Alla and Karen, of psychoanalysis, science, and passion, and learn why some loves fade and others flourish.





## Chapter 1 The Attraction Stage

It is the last days of August as I begin to work on this book about personality disturbances and love relations. From my home on top of South Mountain in Allentown, Pennsylvania, I look out at the tall trees and birds at my feeders. It is a peaceful place to write:

“Ziv’s research (1993) suggests four stages of romantic love:

1. The Attraction stage (this person looks attractive),
2. The Examination stage (closer look at the surface facts),
3. The Self-Revealing stage (a deeper look at personality) and
4. The Mutual Expectation stage (how well the relationship works in dealing with the practical tasks of life).

In the Attraction stage, one reacts to obvious, concrete triggers, such as physical characteristics. These initial reactions are largely derived from fantasies, since one knows little of the other person. Infatuation lives outside the realm of reality and is therefore wonderfully magical. It begins as a dream to make up for losses and often ends up repeating them.”

I am divorced for many years and had been active in raising my children since they were young. Now they are both in college. Just a few weeks ago, I helped my youngest move into his apartment near the campus of the University of Florida. I love the quiet as I work, but I also miss family. I gaze out the long windows of my home at the summer’s green forest as I reflect on the direction of my book. I have been working on the nature of intimacy since my Ph.D. dissertation.

When I married in my 20s, I did not understand Ziv’s stages three and four. I thought that I could fix most problems with psychology and empathy. I know better now. I now know that I need an insightful partner with



a capacity for healthy love. I know more about personality disturbances and what can be fixed and what cannot be fixed.

While searching the Internet for research articles on love, spyware is also learning about me, or maybe it is just a random spam. What ever causes it, an ad announces, “Looking for Love?” and then suggests that the perfect woman is waiting for me in Eastern Europe. I wonder how anyone could possibly date someone thousands of miles away. Long-distance relationships are filled in with fantasy and are not the test of real life situations. Faraway lands may symbolize far-fetched dreams. There is not much opportunity for the reality testing that is in Ziv’s last two stages of romantic love.

However, this particular woman in the banner ad is impossible to ignore. I stare at this gorgeous woman and indulge in a brief fantasy: what would a romance with her be like?

What grabs me? Some of the cause is instinctual. The research of evolutionary psychologists indicates that at the most basic level men instinctively wish to mate with youthful, fertile-looking women and women wish to mate with men with attributes of power, security and resources (Buss, 1994; Eisenman, 2001a).

But biological forces are just one factor. Other factors modify this primitive urge. Our temperaments affect our attractions. Opposites attract because we look to others to have our needs met. We might fall in love with someone who possesses something we feel we lack or provides a complement to our personality. A nurturing person and an insecure person may be attracted to one another.

However, while opposites may attract, relationships are easier to maintain when both partners share the same frame of reference. Happily married couples have elements of both similarity and opposite traits. They have similar values and goals in life and yet fill in for each other’s personality (Richard, 1990; Winch, 1958).

Imprinting on our primary care givers and family dynamics add to the chemistry (Dicks, 1967; Kernberg, 1995; Walters, Merrick,

Treboux, Crowell, & Albersheim, 2000). We fall in love with people who evoke feelings similar to those that characterized our first attachments. These associations are stored in the primitive part of our brain.

Cultural beliefs and recent love experiences add to feelings of attraction (Aron & Aron, 1989). A person may feel attraction or repulsion based on a recent experience. Certain situations may leave a person vulnerable to falling in love.

The more mature the love, the more a person's values, good qualities and goals contribute to passion. A less mature love is based more on primitive triggers that have no bearing on a lasting satisfying love.

Instincts, temperament, family experiences, beliefs, and recent experiences are all factors operating in the unconscious. They all combine to produce fantasies about the woman in the ad. I wonder if she is a professional model to encourage sales. I rationally refuse to give it any more thought, that is, until my erotic side clicks on her photo for more pictures of her. The professional looking photos reveal a vivacious young woman with short dark hair, high cheekbones, large brown almond-shaped eyes, and long slender legs.

Her name is Alla, and her ad states that she is a 30-year-old fashion designer from Saint Petersburg, Russia. She is 5 foot 7, 117 pounds. She has a Ph.D. in literature, and she lists her interests as psychology, philosophy, music, literature, art, and fashion. What an extraordinary woman!

I am now free to go anywhere and have an adventure. Why not? For a small fee, the agency provides a mailing address, since few individuals in Russia have Internet access. I write to her explaining that I am a psychologist and that I want a sweet and mature partner. I enclose my photo. I never expect anything to really come of it. For a day or two, I enjoy fantasies about an exciting international romance with a brilliant young woman. But it soon fades, and I laugh at myself.

A few weeks later, while sipping my morning coffee, I turn to my email. I choke on the coffee as I read, “From: Alla.”

# # #

Date: Sept. 26

From: Alla

To: Robert

Subject: Let me please introduce myself. My name is Alla.

Dear Robert,

I received your letter today (five days ago I was in Italy, two days ago in Moscow, my dizzy adventures brought me back to Saint Petersburg . . . my home-town . . . )

Now . . . (my Russian time 0.34 a.m.) I am listening to Diane Schuur (song—“Easy Living”) and I drink coffee with milk. I am reading Blake and some Haiku, violet loneliness. It is a perfect cocktail, the Japanese poetry and the lovely, great voice of the singer. If to tell you the truth, today I have an extraordinary romantic mood, and this lunar instability doesn’t make me nervous.

My best friends have left this country. My luxuriant intellectual conversations with my friends have faded and have become pale. Do you like Heidegger, Kafka, or Herman Hesse? . . . I just wonder, maybe you like more Sartre, Nietzsche, or Mikhail Bulgakov?

I feel very privileged to get your attention . . . (especially taking into account your accomplishments . . . I saw your web site . . . ). I also have no trouble meeting intelligent, charming, and good-looking men . . . (smile without end).

Anyway, it was great to see someone interested in psychology.

So. . . . What about me? (Brief if not so tiresome description for you): Alla has very high self-esteem, never pessimistic, stimulated with



life's activities, tolerant of the religious beliefs and practices of others, extroverted, assertive, and gregarious.

Alla doesn't have deep fears, paranoid delusions, hallucinations, and somatic complaints. I am almost always self-confident, competitive, insightful, sensitive, and rational. Sometimes I can be overly sensitive.

However, I cannot find people with whom I can discuss my spiritual and intellectual ideas. I am very much the intellectual, artistic type and a deep thinker.

I do dream a lot (a problem?), but it is tempered with realistic expectations. In my own evaluation of myself, my flaws are obvious to me. When some people look at me, they envy me to some degree . . . They see that I'm successful . . . They see my 'happy face' (my good mask . . .). What they fail to see, what they can't see, what's behind the mask . . . Maybe this is just a standard deficiency of a "thinking person"? What do you think, Robert?

What are you looking for? What type of woman? Do you want to discover my inner true treasures? You said: "Your intelligent and beautiful eyes intrigued me." hmm . . . (An innocent smile of Buddha). You have great intuition about me. I know about psychoanalytic psychotherapy, and psychopathology. I studied Psychoanalysis (and many other wise and interesting theories) . . . Maybe, some day, I would like to study at your institute. I need a sponsor anyway. (Big smile)

What do you think about the maturational level of my personality, I just wonder? . . . Maybe already you think that I need some therapy (Smile). Maybe, I sound foolish (and look like a UFO on the Internet . . .).

Are you interested in the delicate facets of my delightful personality? Do you want to explore this face to face (SMILE)?

Best wishes,

Alla.

###

Alla attached to her email a photo of her beautiful eyes since I commented on them in my initial letter. Physically, she is the sort of woman I had seen in fashion ads, the sort that most men can only imagine being with. Her email also reveals charm, playfulness, and cleverness. Along with her unusual beauty, there comes this passionate package of deep thought. I had indulged in a fantasy, never expecting a reply. Apparently, her ad is the real thing. She is extraordinary and beyond my reach. Now what do I do?

## **Chapter 2 Disturbances in Love Relations**

That evening, while still dazed, I try to concentrate on my book. Otto Kernberg (1974, 1976, 1980, 1995) wrote of two basic love pathologies found in the most disturbed individuals: the inability to fall in love and the inability to remain in love. Another psychoanalyst, Salman Akhtar (1999a), had added three more: the tendency to fall in love with the “wrong” kinds of people, the inability to fall out of love, and the inability to feel loved.

The most severe form of love disturbance is the inability to fall in love. In order to fall in love, some degree of idealization or overvaluing is necessary. In normal love, the idealization is primarily based on real qualities. In pathological cases, the idealization is extreme and can become delusional with an equal but opposite devaluation lurking beneath. However, people who cannot fall in love at all either cannot feel an idealization of another, or the idealization is a fickle and fleeting fantasy.

Individuals may have problems falling in love because:

1. They are egocentric, lacking the capacity to love another.
2. They dread closeness, since they associate it with the destruction of their fragile psychological world.

The next level of disturbance occurs when a person can fall in love but cannot remain in love. Personalities that fall into this category have the capacity for idealization and erotic desire. They unconsciously seek a magical love that is worthy of their grandiose self and also a rescuer that is transformational. However, they experience a great deal of hostility when the idealized love object does not live up to the hoped for magical transformation. They may become obsessed with deficiencies in the love object. They often fear that intimacy will reveal that they are



frauds and may project this on to the love object and come to see the formerly idealized lover as a fraud. A cycle of idealization and devaluation of the other moves the person in and out of closeness. They have no true intimacy with a real person. This type of love is mainly a child's fantasy. They fall in love with a fantasy and then punish the real person for not fulfilling the fantasy.

Individuals may evolve from not being able to fall in love, to being able to fall in love but not remain in love. They might fall in love with the "wrong people" in service to their unconscious need to not remain in love.

# # #

I work a little more on the book before going to my office to see patients. At noon, I go downstairs to the deli to meet with the coroner and the police detective. I sometimes do a psychological autopsy in my role as a forensic psychologist, a strange role when combined with my roles as a research psychologist and psychoanalyst. Actually, they all go together, since they all are about weighing evidence to solve a mystery of one sort or another.

"Why was he wearing gloves?" I ask looking at the photographs.

The coroner explains, "It's not gloves. It is his skin. After a few days of his hanging there, the hands get dark from the pooled blood in them . . . we want to know if it was a suicide or a murder made to look like a suicide."

We have lunch as I study the photographs, documents that include the deceased's psychiatric history, interviews from people who knew him, and a statement from the woman he mentioned in his suicide note. The dreadful photographs diminish my hunger.

I say, "The records show that he suffered from paranoid schizophrenia. He had been hospitalized for it several times. The suicide note is consistent with his delusions. I also see a consistency between his previous writings and the suicide note. He felt that he could never have

the woman of his delusional love. He may have killed himself to both stop his suffering and to punish her.”

The detective says, “She lives in the same building, but she never had a relationship with him. No one has ever seen him with any woman. I don’t understand.”

“He was psychotic. He did not have the ability to be in a real love relationship. He would not be able to perceive reality enough to love or remain in love. What is the actual reason for calling me in on this? You must know it was a suicide and not a murder.”

The coroner and detective look at each other and the coroner says, “His family is Catholic, and they are contesting my assessment of suicide. They think he was murdered.”

“So you want a psychological autopsy to back you up? The system inside the deceased’s mind was a delusional love that finally broke him. The legal system needs to give a determination of the death, which is suicide. He was also part of a family and religious system where suicide is a mortal sin.”

The coroner and detective nod.

I continue my formulation, which is a combination of psychoanalysis, forensic psychology, and systems theory. “If he killed himself in a psychotic state he would have not used free will. He would not be culpable under canon law. He might be able to have a Church funeral and burial. To be sure, I’m going to check with my psychologist-monk friend, Dr. Bernard Seif.”<sup>2</sup>

The coroner says, “How can he have killed himself over someone he never even met?”

“She was only a screen for his projected fantasies. He was probably afraid of a real relationship and may have needed an idealized

---

<sup>2</sup> Brother Doctor Bernard Sief is a Catholic monk, a Clinical Psychologist, a Doctor of Natural Medicine specializing in Chinese Medicine, and the writer of several mystery novels.

delusional love to make up for his misery. The more unhappy a person is, the more that person looks for someone to fill in the empty spaces inside. Possibly when that failed to work, he fell into a total demoralization and self-destruction.”

I promise a written report in about a week, and I walk around the building so I could climb the stairs to my office on the third floor. It is late summer and the air is beginning to get cooler. The image of that man hanging by a rope alone for days in his apartment lingers with me. Away from my professional demeanor, I feel the sadness. So many people suffer from unrequited love. Some become crushed and wither. Some go over the edge. Some murder or commit suicide over what they think is love. So many crimes are committed in the name of love. These are not about love, but rather about not having enough self to endure the loss.

###

As I enter my waiting room, I see Karen looking unhappy to see me. I brace myself as I remember her from the past. I enjoy doing deep and meaningful psychoanalytic work. Even after many years, it still stimulates me intellectually and emotionally, making me feel fortunate to have such a rewarding profession. But some patients try to drive me crazy, while I try to drive them sane. Karen feels empowered by defeating me. She sees her defensiveness as a strength.

Karen changes therapists the same way she changes men. She starts out expecting magic, and when she does not get it, she devalues the person. She had been in and out of psychotherapy of one sort or another (some bizarre) since she was a teenager. When I first saw her briefly a few years ago, she was quoting from several self-help books to help her find a man. She read some passages in order to educate me. She could not understand why I had not read those books and still considered myself a serious professional. She particularly liked advice that was deceptive and manipulative. That sort of advice made sense to her. She justified her dishonesty since she assumed that men are innately untrustworthy. She was unhappy when I told her that I would not help her with deception, but I might help her see what she was doing wrong.



Karen, looking around my office with disapproving face says, “Dr. Gordon, I came back to you because I tried everything else.”

“It’s been about four years.” I say. “You didn’t seem happy with me before.”

“I don’t believe in Freud and going into the past.”

Karen is really saying, “Just give me the answers, but don’t ask me to look at myself.” People who do not believe in Freud have probably not read or understood much of what he actually said. His theories warn that people pay a price for lying to themselves. Defensive people do not like to hear that.

Karen, now 39, never married. Her love relationships rarely last more than a few months. The longest was with a married man for two two years. The fact that he was unavailable may have helped it last that long. When he broke it off, Karen got depressed. That is when I first saw her. She stayed a few months. When she fell in love again, she left therapy.

Karen’s blue eye scan my face for hints of my feelings about her. She has punky short blond hair and several earrings on each ear. Karen is still skinny like a teenager and dresses like one. She could easily attract a man and become infatuated for a while. Karen often picks low-functioning men. Her rationalization is that she could have more control, and she hopes they would appreciate her. But Karen picks low-functioning men mainly so that it would be easy for her to devalue them and eventually reject them. When she finds a man who treats her well, she feels less passion, becomes demanding and dependent, provokes fights, and blames the conflicts on the boyfriend.

Karen notices my wheaten terrier, Roy, who remains behind my chair. He is usually friendly and likes to greet most people.

“Your dog looks depressed. It’s no wonder, since he has to listen to all this crap.”

“Karen, what can I do for you?” I ask. Clearly, it is Karen who feels depressed, projecting her feelings onto my dog. Karen transfers on to me that I will not be able to endure her “crap.” She can barely stand her own emotions (poor affect tolerance) so she has a hard time imagining someone as an adequate emotional container. She cannot realize how much she is already showing me about herself.

Looking at me insistently, she demands, “I want you to help me find a man.”

“I’m an analyst, not a matchmaker,” I say, clarifying my role.

“I keep picking jerks,” she says, shrugging to suggest her victimhood.

“What do you want?”

“I don’t want to be alone . . . I want to be married.”

“Not *happily* married?”

She is silent.

Karen is not ready for an interpretation. An interpretation is a translation from unconscious to conscious language. Dreams, slips of the tongue, psychological symptoms, and relationship conflicts are all forms of unconscious language. Interpretation helps a person develop self-reflection. Self-reflection can help a person problem solve and be more comfortable with themselves and others. Karen wants love to protect her. She wants to be the cared for child and her man would be an undemanding ideal parent. I could have interpreted that the real reason Karen did not say “happily married” is because it isn’t consistent with her conflicted attachment style. Her history with men proves this.

From the time I first met Karen, I saw many of the themes to come. I see her problems with attachment by how she treats me (transference).

An interpretation goes into forbidden territory into a person’s most private place. I never go there without an invitation. For now, in this

first phase of treatment, I make no deep interpretations; rather, I clarify our roles and tasks.

“If you want me to help you to have a healthy intimacy, you must allow yourself to have a therapeutic relationship with me. It will take emotional honesty, time and commitment.”

Karen says, “I don’t have the time and money. They don’t pay nurses what they should.”

Karen feels entitled to happiness. She does not understand that she has to earn it.

“Your time and money will go to other things that will not affect your life as profoundly as psychotherapy.”

“Sure. Sure.” Karen sneers in a dismissive tone.

An emotionally corrective relationship could help a person have better intimacy. Psychotherapy is the most reliable method. But here is the irony; one needs to have the capacity for intimacy to form a therapeutic relationship to start with. In other words, it takes a good patient to get to the good therapy.

These qualities make for good patients:

1. A commitment to the therapeutic relationship,
2. Openness to constructive feedback,
3. Emotional insight into one’s own flaws,
4. A capacity for concern and remorse,
5. A sense of responsibility for one’s actions and situation in life,
6. A willingness to be a better person.

If a patient cannot do these things, there is no deep psychotherapy. There can be no increased ability for self-reflection, self-soothing, affect tolerance, resiliency and understanding others. There is no increased ability for healthy love.

“Can you help me?” Karen demands.



I am not about to tell Karen at this point that she needs to develop many of the qualities that she so dearly lacks. Instead, I remind her of the protective boundary and ground rules of the therapy. Karen knows them, but like many patients, she will test the limits to see if I am trustworthy and professional. Karen has internal chaos. She brings chaos to her relationships. The structure and limits of the therapy might help her develop more structure and cohesion within her personality.

“I lease a regular time to you out of my practice. You are financially responsible for this leased time. We start on time and end on time. There are strict privacy rules. This firm boundary and commitment will intensify the treatment. I can’t help you with intimacy without a therapeutic commitment . . .” As I explain the details of the ground rules, Karen grows impatient.

“I know you have control problems,” Karen says.

“If you come regularly and work hard you will probably have improvement.”

“How much?”

Research shows that psychotherapy interventions are highly effective. But the main factors that lead to improvement are the personality qualities of the patient and the therapist and their relationship (Wampold, 2001). I need to have a healthy capacity to empathize with my patients. My empathy is often expressed in the tone, timing, and accuracy of the therapeutic interventions. I apply the interventions as paint from a palette. I mix and apply as needed the right amounts of listening, questioning, clarifying, confronting, interpreting, and reconstructions of the psychological past.

Mostly, I am silent when I work, actively listening to my patients. My silence in a safe atmosphere promotes a sense of autonomy and self-reflection in the patient. It also allows me to form a deep understanding of what the patient is trying to unconsciously communicate. (It is hard to show how silence works in writing. In reality, I do a lot of listening that is not evident in this story.) My empathic listening

provides a psychological container for the patient's emotions. When patients cannot tolerate their affects, they can be laundered in our bi-personal field. They internalize my tolerance which then becomes part of their self-soothing capacity.

When an infant fusses, a mothering figure holds, launders, and helps to contain the child's emotions (Bion, 1962a). Children internalize this early emotional environment in their implicit unconscious memory. Research has found that a person's capacity for self-reflection, affect regulation, self-soothing and a core sense of self and others evolves from this early interaction. These infant attachment and brain studies have lead to a reformulation of psychoanalytic treatment. We now believe more than ever that working with affects in an empathic relationship is one of the most important growth factors in psychotherapy (Fonagy, Gergely, Jurist, & Target, 2002). If I intervene out of my own discomfort with the patient's emotions and just focus on symptom relief, I am not acting as a good container. Seeing Karen's problems in terms of her symptoms would reinforce her assumption that she is unknowable and that only the surface counts.

I use questions to take a patient deeper into personality. Questions may be used to get more information necessary for an interpretation or a reconstruction. Clarifications help improve reality testing, so that a patient might not continue operating on assumptions that are irrational or false.

When a patient is considering acting out in a destructive manner, there is often no time for an interpretation aimed at developing a more mature personality. I use confrontation to remind the patient of the consequences of acting out.

Interpretations of unconscious transferences, defenses, resistances, and conflicts promote more insight and psychological maturity. Reconstruction of repressed areas of a patient's life helps develop a more cohesive sense of self. Reconstructing a psychological history can help patients make sense out of their symptoms and relationships.

I can never know a patient's true history. But having a sense of a continuous self that was built over time and can continue to grow over

time is an important insight. Reconstructions allow a person to master problems that could not have been understood, tolerated, or resolved earlier in life.

Almost everyone can benefit from venting in a supportive atmosphere. Most people find that the therapist's questions, clarifications, confrontations, and even suggestions help them with symptom reduction. But a psychoanalytically-informed psychotherapist is specifically trained to use interpretations and reconstructions while acting as a good emotional container so that there is an actual maturation in personality structure.

Freud's goal of psychoanalysis was to achieve a profound growth of the mind so that the person can work and love better. Interpretations and reconstructions of the unconscious self-defeating side of personality are important ingredients to such profound changes.

Unfortunately, interpretations and reconstructions are frequently of limited value with patients who are concrete in their thinking and have little capacity for insight. For those individuals, cognitive-behavioral interventions that are symptom-focused may be more effective. These interventions are similar to the psychoanalytic interventions of questioning, clarifying, and confronting.

There are few psychotherapists inclined to devote an extra five years of postdoctoral work in training and their own psychoanalysis required for a specialization in psychoanalysis. There are few patients willing to put in the time and money for anything more than surface symptom relief. Psychoanalysis would then seem to be a dying art and science. However, with a growing body of neuropsychanalytic research to support it (Schore, 2003), psychoanalysis has become one of the largest divisions of the American Psychological Association. I have found that with every patient a psychoanalytic formulation is useful in helping me to understand what symptoms mean in the context of the whole person (McWilliams, 1994, 1999).

I understand Karen's off-putting defenses. She is scared. She has an insecure attachment style probably due to traumas in her childhood (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Bowlby, 1982;

McCarthy & Taylor, 1999). Karen feels that it is best to trust no one, pretend to be self-sufficient, demand intimacy but avoid it.

In the initial stage of treatment (Howard, Moras, Brill, Martinovich, & Lutz, 1996), the first thing to do is to give a patient hope that things can get better. When patients come into treatment, they are often demoralized. When Karen said at the beginning of the session, "Dr. Gordon, I came back to you because I tried everything else," she was telling me how demoralized she is. She does not want a therapeutic relationship with me. She does not believe that anything good could come from a committed intimacy. She thinks that if she stays too long in a relationship, she will be disappointed and hurt. Karen came back only after all else failed. But she wants a magical cure.

The next phase of treatment often is about reducing symptoms and learning new skills and insights. That can happen in a few sessions to a few months. But her problem is not about a lack of skills. It is a deep fear of intimacy that is most likely based on a damaged self and trauma from childhood. However, Karen does not want to go there.

Few patients stay long enough to go into the third phase of psychotherapy, the reconstructive phase of treatment, and have personal growth. It could take years to change personality traits in order for a person to have personal growth and a better capacity for healthy love (Gordon, 2001; see Figure 1; and also, Monsen, Odland, Faugli, & Daae, 1995). Reconstructive treatment such as that found in psychoanalytic psychotherapy requires the patient to form an intimate alliance with the therapist and to self-reflect. I am concerned that Karen could not do that enough. She is too defensive for it. Karen needs to think that the answers to her problems will come from an idealized rescuer. She is waiting for her messiah.

I say, "How much improvement you make depends on what you put into it. I will need to see you twice a week to start, otherwise we will not get deep enough to change personality traits."



Symptom Reduction and Increased Emotional Maturity in Long-Term Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy

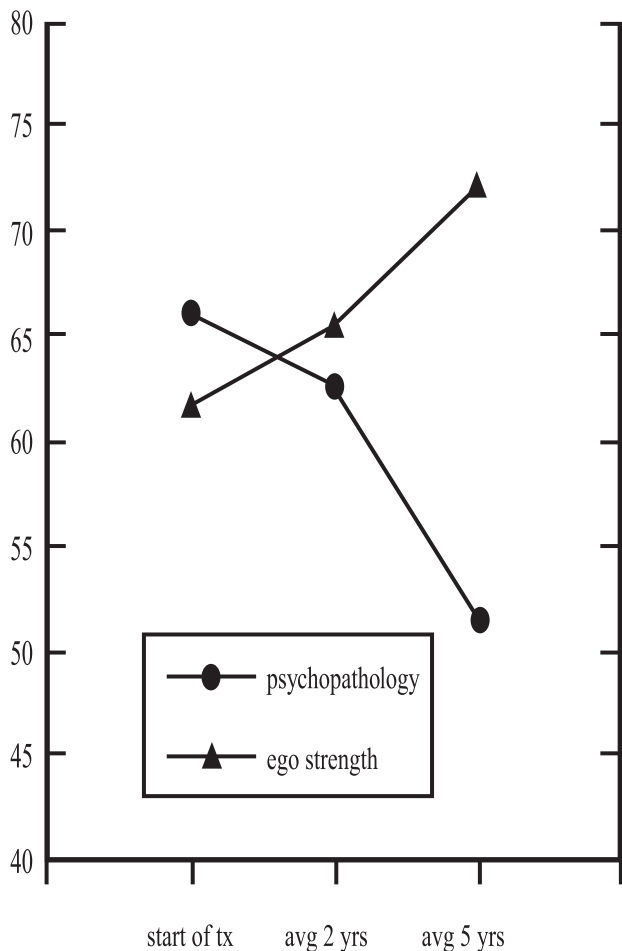


Figure 1 Patients on average needed at least two years of psychoanalytic psychotherapy to begin to make profound changes to their personalities as measured by the MMPI/MMPI-2 (an objective test of psychopathology traits that are typically stable for years). They continued making changes in not only symptom relief but also in personal growth into their 5th year of treatment and beyond. The MMPI/MMPI-2 is non-reactive to short term treatments. The overall psychopathology was measured by scale A. The Ego strength scale was used to measure emotional maturity (T45-55 represent normal scores, T65 and above are high scores). (Gordon, R. M., 2001; reprinted with permission from *Issues in Psychoanalytic Psychology*, also available at [www.mmapi-info.com](http://www.mmapi-info.com)).

## Chapter 3 The Examination Stage

In the second stage, the Examination stage of romantic love, people see how well they match in such areas as intelligence, interests, values and emotional compatibility. However, the prospective lovers trying to sell themselves confound the accuracy of the data. (I am now in this stage.)

# # #

Date: Sept. 25 (This date is one day before Alla's email. Saint Petersburg, Russia, is eight hours ahead of Pennsylvania.)

Dear Alla,

I am very surprised and pleased to hear from you. I doubted that you could be as extraordinary as your ad. You are even more so! It is nice to know that you are well adjusted and open minded to different religious beliefs.

As I wrote, I am a Jewish psychologist. I am not sure what you know of Jews. Jews are a world people from an ancient race that 3,000 years ago had the abstract reasoning to imagine a universal moral force rather than an a belief in idolatry. Jewish philosophy is that God started creation and we are to finish it. That is one reason why Jews are more into science, art, law, medicine, and commerce, rather than concern for the afterlife. I am not religious, but I appreciate the heritage and values of my people. My interest in psychoanalysis is an extension of my Jewish values of learning, self-reflection, and helping others.

*(I want to share my beliefs and values to see if we are compatible. On to flirting.)*

I am so excited about you! So beautiful and brilliant, brains and passion.

Thank you for your invitation to meet. I am willing to go anywhere to meet an extraordinary woman such as you.

*(But I'm not quite ready to jump on a plane to Russia.)*

I will be in Jamaica at the end of November. I would send you tickets. I will put you up at a lovely resort, and we can get to know each other. What is your phone number? (Down, boy—you'll scare her away.)

*(So much for restraint.)*

Yours,

Robert

# # #

Date: Sept. 27

Subject: Buddhist meditations mixed with a healthy dose of common sense

Dear Robert,

I am so happy to hear from you. I have met several men through the Internet service, many of them smart and kind, but . . . something still missing.

I am dreaming of a man wise and trustworthy . . . a man careful and kind; a man sensual and hot; a man romantic and caring; a man with humor and understanding so that I can have fun with him; a man intelligent so that I can be understood; a man worthy of my love . . . a knight, harmonious inside and outside. I need depth, passion, and care, a native harbor for the ships of my dreams. (Smile)

I am a knowing old bird and I can to go through fire and water . . .  
I am not a Jewess. (Alas?) But I have Jewishness in my soul. (This soul  
was born 3,000 years ago . . .)

*(Is Alla part Jewish?)*

I am emotionally mature and I can allow to myself Buddhist meditations mixed with a healthy dose of common sense not only on Sundays.

*(Open-minded philosophy.)*

I am the sort who will go anywhere to get just what I want. (I never get enough.)

*(Never enough? Uh-oh.)*

How I love a smart man! Brains and passion! Oo-la-la!!!

Words . . . Words . . . Even tons of words are only one drop in the ocean . . . It's nothing sometimes . . . I do not believe words any more . . .

*(We need words for understanding.)*

I believe actions in real life. (It's more wise, isn't it?)

I have removed my ad two months ago . . . how could you have found me?? By the way . . . it's strange . . . And about my work? People say that I am a good professional. I have my Ph.D. and many skills . . . I love and need to be around beauty . . . Do you want to know more about it? No?

You said: Jamaica? Hhhmmm . . . sounds not bad . . . I've never been there . . . Though I adore Europe more . . .

I am VERY tired of life in Russia. (Down, girl, you'll scare him away.)

Be inspired, my stranger in the night . . .

###



Alla and I email each other at length about who we are and what we want. At first we work on impressing each other with our intelligence and knowledge by discussing poetry, literature, philosophy, and, of course, psychology.

I wonder what she meant by “I never get enough.” Dependent people who are too proud to admit that they are dependent say that it is never enough. They express their dependencies by being demanding. They cannot feel contentment, and they expect contentment to be supplied by others. When they remain unhappy, they assume it is the fault of the other person. They are insatiable.

But this is only one red flag amidst so much good. Besides, this statement might only be a cultural expression of sophistication. Furthermore, Alla sent a photo that had appeared on a magazine cover. She had worked as a model before going for her Ph.D. She looks even more beautiful in this photo than in the photos she used in her ad. In most of her emails, Alla encloses photos of herself. Not only does her beauty amaze me, but also how different she looks in each photo. Her hair color from photo to photo is various shades of brown, red, blond, or black. It is long, short, every possible style. In total, she radiates energy, sexuality, and brilliance.

# # #

Date: Sept. 27

Subject: Let me please re-introduce myself. My name is Alla Artemova

Knock-knock . . .

I know . . . the visit of my person is not designated in your business schedule. But I am here. May I come in?

O, Lord . . . I thought the agency already had removed my stupid old ad! You bought a cat in a sack . . .

Many months ago I had written the questionnaire with such scant information. It was at the urging of my mother. I did not want to be a White Crow, but I was extremely curious! And here you are! (Smile after smile)

Do you want to read my poems, to see my paintings, designs, photographs, and work for movies or TV, or to read the last scandalous interview with me? Or do you just want to hear my voice? (Smile)

*(She enclosed her entry in the Saint Petersburg Who's Who, listing her degrees, certificates, and accomplishments in literature, poetry, music, fashion design, modeling, painting, photojournalism, teaching, and her work on T.V. I have not met anyone like her.)*

Robert you wrote: "You never get enough? When you are enough, the world seems enough. Then there is contentment. There is no perfect mate that can magically repair the self. That is for each of us to do ourselves. Alla, you seem frustrated with words. You are an artist with words. Words can transform solitary experiences into shared worlds . . ."

Oh, Lord. Beautiful stanza . . . Encore! Encore! Sometimes, wise words are as strong as a high-quality drug! O, sweet Mantra. (*Verba movent, exempla trahunt!* . . . I like Latin . . .) . . . I am just haughty, nestling (*ex plumis cognoscitur avis*), ecstatic larva, simply a multi-colored molecule close to you.

*(I am very impressed.)*

I am afraid to speak with you by phone . . . My colloquial English is weak still . . . I don't want to illustrate my dull, unspeakable ignorance . . . I bet you need perfect, hot, intellectual fuel for your extraordinary brain, my precious friend.

*(What a dance of modesty and ego!)*

Robert, people named me "The Rare Orchid in Life's Basket of Blooms."

*(Alla must have affected friends.)*

Do you see the golden fleece of my Odyssey, Robert? Who are you in my life for this current existence? Sometimes, I think, I am 1,000 years old, my dear . . . but people think I am sweet baby + crazy Artistic Type + a donor of a solar energy.

What about you, Dr. Gordon? (Smile) Who knows the confidential code of your soul?

You asked me if I did the photo of my “amazing eyes”? I sometimes work as a fashion photographer . . . But this photo of my eyes—is not my work. Maybe, you want to see all my photos?

*(Definitely.)*

I can send for you my professional publications, my articles for magazines and articles about me, but they are in Russian . . . unfortunately . . . my modest stock of so-called successes is only 1% from your grand activity and popularity, my guru . . . I don’t want to compete with you . . . you are a pro. You are on top. I’m not . . . yet . . .

*(“My guru”? I love the sound of that. No, I don’t think it’s ridiculous at all.)*

I saw the list of your publications on your web site, and I would want to read some of your articles . . . May I ask your permission to do it? How can I do it, Robert? I’m especially interested in:

1. Systems-Object Relation’s View of Marital Therapy: Revenge and Reraising.

And

2. Love: The Most Important Ingredient in Happiness.

I would want to know about Love and Marriage. (I am hungry for your harmonious, bright, inspired words.) After all, I know nothing.

*(Nothing?)*

Be inspired, Robert.

I leave you for now.

# # #

# # #

Sept. 27

Subject: Psychology of Love

Dear Alla,

You are surprised that your ad is still there after you told them to take it out? I don't see it as destiny but as business. Why would they take your ad off? You are great advertising. You are such a beautiful, impressive woman. Many men have sent in their money to the dating service hoping to marry you.

You asked about the confidential code to my soul. I'm American. We don't think much of confidential codes beyond our Internet passwords. Defenses just get in the way of intimacy. Maybe Russians needed such protection from their government at one time.

But I know my code and content. I loved my five-year, four-day-a-week psychoanalysis. Best thing that I ever did. I can see all the sides of me now. I feel at peace.

My theory simplified? I'll do my best to compress it, but I will need a few pages, so be patient, okay? We all have different sides to our personalities. In a normal personality, the parts are mostly harmonious and healthy with some crazy areas. In a poorly functioning personality, only the percentages are different, and too much of the personality is unhealthy and conflicted. When a person is in denial about the parts, the problems are projected onto others and the relationship suffers.



We all have our unique temperament, parts of our parents' personalities and all the remnants of our childhood personalities. Traumas, early attachments and temperament all determine how harmonious the parts of us are. In therapy, I show my patients their different parts, and help them to resolve their internal conflicts. The therapeutic relationship over time becomes internalized. It acts as an internal soother and helps with self-reflection at times of conflict.

Alla, you picked two interesting articles. "Love: The Most Important Ingredient in Happiness" is a review of my Ph.D. dissertation from *Psychology Today* (Horn, 1976). In my research, "The Effects of Interpersonal and Economic Resources on the Quality of Life" (Gordon, 1975), I looked at the different resources that people can exchange (Foa & Foa, 1974). I found that love, power, information, money, goods, services, and sex all contributed to happiness, but love contributed by far the most to happiness.

Money is no doubt a factor. Poverty brings suffering that only money can cure. Now, here is the interesting part. The rules of money and love are opposite. For example, if you were poor as a child, but became rich as an adult, you would really appreciate the money.

The same is not true for love. If you did not get enough healthy love as a child, you become both needy and defensive, perhaps alternating between demanding love and unconsciously pushing it away. You do not seem to trust it, nor seem to feel that it is enough. The difference is that we all need healthy love to develop a normal personality. If we don't get enough of it in childhood, it damages our personalities. No amount of current love can repair that childhood loss. No amount of overcompensation of ego, money, fame, etc., can fix the loss of a healthy parental relationship. That repair usually requires an emotionally corrective relationship, such as is found in long-term psychotherapy.

After my dissertation, I went on to write, "Systems-Object Relations View of Marital Therapy: Revenge and Reraising" (Gordon, 1982). I wondered if love is so important to happiness, then why are we so poor at securing a lasting love? To better understand this problem

I combined two theories: Systems theory and Object Relations theory. Systems theory states that every part of a system affects all the other parts. Every person in the family system exerts an influence on each other's behaviors and roles. We were a rescuer, scapegoat, messiah, invisible or all, depending on the needs of the family system. These roles eventually become part of our unconscious dramas that we take into other relationships.

If there was conflict in the family system outside of the child, then there will be conflict inside the child's personality system. The original family system—that is our parents' personalities, their marriage, how they treated us, and our natural temperament—becomes a large part of our unconscious personality.

Object Relations has to do with parts of our personality that are formed from our temperament and our perceptions of our primary love relationships. Our relationship with our caregivers became internalized in our unconscious and remains a core part of our personality. These internal objects act as automatic categories when we perceive others, fitting people into designated roles. Others become the object of our desires and fears based on our unconscious internalizations.

Psychoanalysts refer to it as “Object Relations” and not “Personal Relations” since we often see others so subjectively. How we see each other is based not only on the reality of the person but also based on our own personalities. The more disturbed the personality, the more others become objects of a person's projections. The object of desire can be a body part or article of clothing as with perversions or to a substance as in an addictive disorder.

The core of our personality is formed by our attachments in early childhood while the brain is still forming (Schoore, 1994, 2003). We unconsciously try to repeat the patterns of attachment in our current love relations. Researchers looked at relationship patterns in 50 young adults who were studied 20 years earlier as infants. Overall, 72% of the adults had the same attachment behaviors (secure versus insecure) in their love relationships as they had as infants with their mothering figure (Walters, et al., 2000). The research also showed that the rest had

relationship problems due to childhood traumas other than infant attachment history. That is, if there are childhood traumas from loss, aggression, neglect, impingement, or exploitation, this becomes part of personality and unconsciously affects later attachments. This drama repeats itself in future attachments to achieve the same emotional result as in childhood. If there was conflict with a parent, so then there will be conflict with our current love. When we enter into intimacy, we regress and repeat our unconscious emotional past, without realizing it.

Many people hope that a new love (a new ideal parent figure) will magically break this unhappy drama. But our unconscious does not perceive any love as different enough from of our first loves, so we repeat the past by:

1. *Picking* someone with qualities similar to a parent. (Example: you have most passion for a lover who is as critical as your dad);
2. Unconsciously *provoking* the partner into acting like the parent figure. (Example: you provoke your lover's criticism by acting childish); or
3. *Distorting* the perception of the partner to seem like the parent. (Example: you misperceive your partner as being unfairly critical.)

We do any or all of these—picking, provoking, and distorting—in order to repeat unconsciously the imprinting and traumas (Gordon, 1998). In love, we return to the past one way or another.

Must we be slaves to these self-defeating patterns? No, insight can disrupt them. We can make a distinction when we are upset between how much of our feelings are coming from our own issues (from the inside) and how much are attributable to the other person (from the outside). If we reflect on these insights rather than act out, our intimacies will no longer become toxic waste dumps for our past conflicts.

Defensive people try not to think about the past or their patterns, but unconsciously react according to the past in their relationships. People often take out on their partner the unresolved anger and fears they had for a parent. With this revenging, they never detoxify the past, but only reinforce it. They do not learn and grow to love maturely.

Psychotherapy can change these unconscious dramatic reenactments through an emotionally corrective relationship with the psychotherapist. It is intensive work.

I also believe that many of the therapeutic aspects of the emotionally corrective relationship in psychotherapy can be found in a healthy intimacy. I think that people can have emotional growth in marriage. It requires self-reflection. If there is denial, it is not possible. That is why I do not want a defensive partner.

What are your views on all of this? I am eager to learn more about you!

Warmly,

Robert.

# # #

I used this opportunity to share my feelings about the nature of mature relationships. No one is entitled to a good relationship. Good looks, sexiness, charm, power, or money can attract, but they are insufficient to maintain a good relationship. Relationships take work. But if it requires too much hard work, something is wrong.

Bewitched as I'm becoming, I am also warning Alla that if one does not understand one's troubled history and personality, any love would become subjugated to the past. Everyone has faults, but some faults are relationship killers, such as hostility and defensiveness. I am asking Alla whether she knows the difference between infatuation and mature love. I have already experienced dating people who expected that an attachment to a psychologist would be a magical cure. This immature expectation leads to profound disappointment. As a psychologist, I particularly want to be around insightful people, who are kind and take responsibility for their actions.

# # #



Date: Sept. 29

From: Alla

Subject: My Rhapsody in Blue

Hello, Phantom of deep wisdom.

My Russian time 1.32 a.m. long day . . .

Do you wait for me?

You wrote: "What immortal hand or eye, dare frame an Alla?"

Thank you Robert! I serve and worship Blake.

So you want to see even more photos of me? Take everything. (I do love to give!) Take this madness . . . take this wisdom, I think . . . they always wanted to belong to you.

I know that I am nothing compared to you. Oh, yes. You surpass me in many ways. You are a pro.

I am only a poor amateur with aristocratic manners . . . And I know that amateurs built the ark. Professionals built the *Titanic*. (Smiiiiilleeee.) I am like you. I am not defensive. I do not want to be with someone who is defensive. I need to be understood.

*(Just what I needed to hear. But defensive people don't know they are defensive.)*

Fasting for Yom Kippur is very spiritual. I need to re-read a thick scroll of Torah, to light candles, go to Synagogue . . . I'm dreaming to see Majestic Jerusalem . . . I mentally share this holiday with you. *Le Chaim*. Have a meaningful fast and meditation.

*(So many Russian Jews converted and assimilated to survive. Alla reads the Torah, goes to synagogue, and knows Hebrew. Maybe she is part Jewish.)*

So you loved your psychoanalysis? It was the best thing you ever did?

I want be able to say: I have found my twin, my soul mate, my Fifth Element. Best thing that I ever did.

Did you see my telephone home number on my business card I sent, I just wonder?

*(What would it be like to speak with her? A voice conveys so much information about personality.)*

I am ready for global changes. Gosh! (Here better to use more dirty words!!) I am really tired to live here.

I wait for a worthy real offer, Robert. London, Paris . . . Allentown. (Smile)

*(When new lovers feel as if they have always known each other, it is recalling the original idealized love for a parent. Children hope for the idealized parent to come back to them. Once a child begins to see the parent as inadequate, the child longs for the return of the earlier idealized parent. I wonder about her relationship with her parents. I wonder how much of her past she would share.)*

I do not mind going anywhere as long as it's an interesting path. I have been down this road a few times, but this trip must be more pure!

*(Alla states that she has been down this road before, but does she know why her earlier relationships failed?)*

I do not have a mission in Saint Petersburg anymore. (I am a super-star here—it's boring.) Maybe God wants me somewhere else . . .

It seems that you think that the past will determine love . . .

Do you want to know my opinion?

I cannot diagnose anything. (And you?) I just listen to my heart. Maybe, I need a marriage with smart, successful, rich Prince, for example? (Big grin) I'm tired of being alone. I am missing my other half. I need a good, strong man (best teacher and cute joker!) at my side . . . Oops . . . excuse me . . . I should stop this chaotic flow of consciousness . . . I know that people need to pay you to listen to their confessions . . . I think the real art of conversation is not only to say the right thing at the right time, but also to leave unsaid the wrong thing at the tempting moment. Am I right? (Smile)

Alla (you can hear my cute giggles . . .)

# # #

She seems narcissistic, but most children who had beauty and extraordinary talents and were greatly admired often develop some narcissism. Her narcissism does not seem to be at the level of a personality disorder. Narcissists that are toxic exploit others and have little capacity for concern or remorse. However, Alla says she is also modest, giving, and not at all defensive.

Alla responds to my article on personality and marriage with a hint of rebuttal. She questions my reliance on insight, disagreeing with the need to look into the past. Rather, Alla feels that when true love comes all would be right in her life. How much are her reactions cultural? There is no translation for the word "insight" in Russian. They have no words for it. Her culture has been more supportive of magical solutions than psychological ones.

I picked Alla partly because of her interest in psychology. However, her interest may be based on her need to master intellectually the science that represents her worst fears. Rather Alla believes in fate, God's will, and her own intuition. Alla believes that these forces determine the course of love. When destiny gives her a hero, then she will be content. These are feelings are often found in classic Russian literature.

In any case, every morning I rush to my computer to receive Alla's emails and photos. I love the gifts of her photos. I keep thinking of her.

Then suddenly, I pull back and realize how this is an impractical relationship. I write to her that there are too many difficulties and differences between us and that sadly, it has to end.

# # #

Date: Sept. 29

From: Alla

Subject: I wait for Spring

Hello, Robert.

I think of old lovers, if we should meet would appear as ice statues to me now . . . I melt now that you are in my life . . .

*(Poetic and flattering, but I have former lovers as friends. Will I eventually become an ice statue to her as well?)*

You are probably already sleeping; I should leave you for now, but not before my comment for you . . . You told me that you are too old for me . . . Thank you for these mature words, my dear . . . I am 3,000 years old . . . I was born not yesterday . . . (Warm smile)

You are the first man in my life who wants to be just my friend!  
(Laughs aloud)

When will you touch me, I just wonder?

Robert, I am thinking of you 24 hours per day. Sometimes, I think: 'Alla, you are mad!'

My thoughts are fixated on you. Gosh! I love your smile. I admire you for so many reasons. Your letters drive me crazy. I really enjoy conversing with you each and every day. (I know you only three days! Wild madness!) I want to know and to predict each movement of your soul. I want to activate your internal forces.

I want to see you near and natural. I want to eat and drink your essence. May I?

*(Now I regret my words about ending it.)*

So . . . Let's try to be friends . . . Be close to me . . . Do you want me to say: 'Robert, I shall not allow you to love anybody except me?' I insist that you should love me! (smile) I hope you can't resist . . .

You can read about my aristocratic roots in my last interview . . . Today I am sending to you this magazine with me on the cover page. It was just printed. Now, each passenger on the international flights has this magazine. If you arrive tomorrow to see me for a romantic supper, you would have the opportunity to receive your own copy of this magazine with my photo and frank scandalous details of my life. Rich material for psychological research! (Big grin)

How do I know about Judaism? Jews accompany me all my life. Many times I was the participant in Jewish political organizations. I was twenty when I received an invitation for a huge banquet in Moscow with the president of Israel. I even spoke "Shalom" to his wife. I know and I like this culture, Robert.

I love things, which were tested for 3,000 years.

Almost 10 years ago, I listened to magnificent lecture about anti-Semitism. I have received the invitation for a meeting in the Presidential-Palace in Moscow. I saw all the cream, all the magnificence of Russian-Jewish society, Robert.

My first love was a Jew, my professor. I was a virgin. I was younger than he by 22 years. Ha!

*(My god! It is the same situation. Perhaps she hopes to complete her unfinished business with her father through me.)*

Don't think that I am crazy! Please!

You have chosen the very strange woman on the Internet.



I don't want to flirt with you. I am a woman. Though I can be like a child sometimes.

Ask God for the answer . . . Listen to your heart . . . I know what I want and I will wait for your decision . . .

I thank God he led me to you. Anyway . . .

Please call me, Robert.

I will be at home after 10 p.m. today (Russian time)

11 p.m., 12, 1 a.m. No problem.

I will wait for your voice.

Sleep well, Phantom of Destiny.

Alla

# # #

I think hard about my hesitations—but not for long. Effortlessly she draws me back towards her. My glamorous siren is not about to be rejected.

Failing in my attempt to back out, I finally accept her invitation to call.

# # #

When I call the next day, Sunday afternoon, I feel more anxious than I anticipated. She excites me so much. I am infatuated with her, but I am also concerned about such distance and differences. I want our conversation to be a disappointment so I would be relieved of my conflict, but I also hope it will be great. This conflict only increases my infatuation. Dangerous and forbidden romances heighten passion, since it is similar to the excitement of Oedipal wishes (Stoller, 1979).

Our first loves were forbidden fruits. We all retain the thrill of wishing to do something naughty and rebellious. At the very least the physiological state of arousal, be it erotic or fearful, can temporarily enhance infatuation (Stephan, Berscheid, & Walster, 1971). People who met during a crisis, when they are vulnerable or even on a roller coaster are more likely to become attracted to one another (Meston & Frohlich, 2003).

When I first hear her voice, it surprises me. I was expecting a haughty, intellectualized voice and not her sweet charming one.

“Hello? Robert? How are you? I’ve waited 30 years to speak with you.” Alla says with a feminine and playful intonation.

“Alla, you sound as lovely as you look, damn it! Your voice goes with your eyes.”

“Thank you, you have a good taste for wild exotic things. Fortunately for you and me, I am even more fun in the flesh, my dear. I told you. I am a Taurus. I am the perfect child of Venus. I am created to give and take love.”

“I believe you. Your English is very good.”

“Much of it is by intuition. My intuition was right about you, Robert. I’ve known you before in another life. I am sure of it.”

“Uh, huh!” I say in a mocking tone.

“Uh, huh.” Alla sings back. “Robert, Robert, why YOU?”

“I know it’s not practical.”

“Not my favorite word. By the way, you are a very sensual and sexual person. Gosh! I mean you are a spicy, hot, and crazy passionate pirate! It’s impossible! My intuition knew this!”

“It only makes matters worse!”

“Oh, Robert, what will become of this madness? Isn’t it too rare to throw away?”

# # #

I was high after we spoke. I could not remember ever having such a flirtatious, playful first conversation. I felt more drawn to her. I felt the situation getting out of hand. Now what?

## **Chapter 4 You Can't Be Intimate with a False Self**

Karen came into the session looking exhausted since she brings conflict to everything she does. She has an ability to make simple tasks difficult.

"I'm too tired for this. What can I talk about? Oh yeah, I went shopping with my mom. We went to Neiman Marcus. It was such a good sale . . . In Sephora I got this really, really great makeup . . . We found this place for lunch . . . my mom loves pepperoni pizza with the thick crust. I saw these Donna Karan pants for my mom. She's an eight. I wanted to buy them for her. She couldn't decide. She said, 'It's beautiful, but where would I wear them?' We had such a great time. I was actually feeling okay, until I realized I had to see you."

Karen talks on the surface of her existence. It deadens the listener. When people speak to relate and convey meaning, there can be intimacy (Langs, 1983). There is no intimacy when a person merely talks to just dump or to obscure meaning. When someone does that, you feel like you are being used as the other person's captive audience or toxic waste dump. Rather than looking at their problems and pain, they want to leave them with you, then walk away feeling relieved. Worse than that is obscuring meaning or lying. Such people avoid or distort the truth and construct a reality to fit the drama of their imagined lives. They use language to hide, manipulate, and exploit. Karen dumps and obscures. It is part of her defense. She doesn't relate to me. She keeps me on the other side of her verbal smoke screen. And, after giving nothing of herself she expects something in return. She dumps her stories like a load of laundry. She has no interest in wondering about the stains.

Karen expects me to find meaning in the shallow content of her false self. This false self was created for the outside world. She uses her

false self to protect her true self from further harm (Winnicott, 1960). You cannot be intimate with a false self. Yet I must listen carefully. But I don't have to attend to every word during periods of dumping and obscuring. A good therapist knows when to jump in like a mother who hears a dangerous silence or a different quality to a cry.

In psychotherapy, a person can learn to relate more meaningfully when the therapist interprets what is not said, but what is felt and meant. At which point the patient must make a decision, to be defensive or to learn to relate more constructively. At this point I am not sure if Karen is just defensive or incapable of meaningful communication.

Suddenly Karen asked, "I think he's wrong. What do you think?"

I have to come out of my protective numbed state to piece together the last fragments of meaningful phrases from Karen's heap of words. Karen had been dumping and externalizing blame with no insight. I have no idea what to say about her complaints about her new boyfriend. Karen wants me to support her perceptions. She wants me to "validate" her. I dislike that pop-psych concept. How would I know if what she is telling me is true? If I agree with distorted perceptions I would reinforce her problems. If I disagree with her too early, she will feel attacked.

I clarify,<sup>3</sup> "Karen, I know that you are upset, but I'll have a better idea how you see people from your transferred perceptions on to me . . ."

"I perceive you fine. Ed is a typical man. He thinks he's always right. Most men are like that. So are you."

Karen doesn't want to hear what I have to say because that would disrupt her need of me as a passive audience. Because she fears what I

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<sup>3</sup> Instead of "I say," I will use at times psychoanalytic interventions so that you can see how they work. Here I use a clarification of what Karen can expect from treatment. I often avoid validating a patient's perception of reality that I have not directly witnessed. Patients will however improve in reality testing when I interpret their systematic distortions in their transferences. The psychoanalyst works with patients to both reduce symptoms *and* to increase capacities such as reality testing. Validation is helpful during times of crisis when the patient requires supportive interventions. Affirmations of feelings ("I can see that you are angry") are often more valuable than validation ("Your perceptions are true").



might say, she keeps talking. When she asks, “What do you think?” she is just checking to see if I am still receiving her dumping. I am to remain her dumping ground, occasionally agree, or remain silent. For now, I must be a good emotional container for her. Then, after a while more meaningful material might bubble up. And abruptly it does.

“My father molested me. I don’t miss him. My mother is my best friend. She never remarried so I could have a good childhood. She suffered a lot in her life. I really admire her strength. I wish I were more like her. I know I have problems with men because of my father.”

She first spoke of this when I treated her briefly four years ago, but she would not elaborate or examine what had happened. How could I help her with men, if she refuses to dig into this trauma? Most people do not realize that most time in psychotherapy is wasted by the patient’s resisting treatment. The more patients rely on their symptoms as a form of identity, the greater the resistance. Karen’s existential job in life is to be a victim. She might complain, but she is not about to give up her job.

Just as the body protects itself with resistance against foreign influence, fighting off viruses and toxic bacteria invading the body, so personality protects itself from the invasion of others. When a parent traumatizes a child, the child forms an extra strong protective resistance. What surprises new therapists the most is patients coming into treatment complaining of symptoms but then spending most of the time resisting change for the better. In psychoanalytic psychotherapy, analyzing resistance and defenses is more important than just focusing on symptoms. Psychoanalysts assume that most people will over time learn from their mistakes and become more resilient were it not for their resistance to change and defensiveness against critical feedback.

I work hard helping patients learn how to resist toxic people and their own toxic thoughts. I help them test reality to see what thoughts and what people are safe, good, and nurturing, and which are not. The deeper the trauma, the more indiscriminate are the resistances and stronger the defenses. If a patient’s resistance to change and

defensiveness are too strong, there is little hope for improvement. They have a psychological autoimmune disorder. They attack themselves and constructive people as if they were enemies. To Karen I am a virus.

Karen is also a mystery. In college, Karen was homesick. She attempted suicide when her boyfriend rejected her. Why did Karen have difficulty separating from her mother and feel so distressed at abandonment? They generally stem from attachment problems, not sex abuse.

If Karen thought that telling me that her mother is a size eight would help her to find a lasting love, we have a lot of work to do. A therapist often asks the patient a question in order to encourage self-reflection. Finally, towards the end of the session, I ask, "Karen do you remember telling me that your problems with men came from your father's molesting you?"

"Sure. Sure."

"How old were you?"

"I think I was six. But I've been over this many times in therapy. There is no need to dwell on it. I need help with my life now."

Karen went on to another topic.

The age of a trauma helps to determine the nature of the developmental arrest. By six, most children have mastered basic separation from mother and formed much of their core personality. Karen's hostility towards men made sense because of the father. But separation issues are usually related to traumas before age six, within the first 2 to 3 years of life (Mahler, 1974). They have to do with the mothering figure's interaction with the child's temperament. Some of Karen's symptoms didn't fit with psychological research.

At the end of the session, I ask Karen to take the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI-2) in the waiting room. It is one of the most scientific and most used objective psychological test

of personality problems in the world. I give it to most patients, and use it to study changes in personality traits over years of treatment. I told Karen that we could review her scores in her next session.

Karen says, “You didn’t give me this test last time.”

“I didn’t think you would stay long.”

“What makes you think I will this time?”

## Chapter 5 Warning Signs

Alla's emails were usually several pages long, and came about twice a day. I generally only had time to type quick responses within her letters before I sent them back and rushed off to work.<sup>4</sup>

Sept. 30

"Alla, I'm not sure I can make a romantic dinner with you tomorrow or anytime, realistically."

"Robert, come to me. You and I could meet in Moscow . . . It is a huge mad city . . . Moscow is an anthill of running people. More than 10 million around you simultaneously! Oo-la-la . . . Crazy. It's a rhythm of life as in New York City, but with another mentality . . . Moscow is our Jerusalem with huge distances, expensive restaurants, and crowds of tourists; if you want to see big Russian disorder—come to Moscow . . . I don't love this city. I wouldn't live there. I've had many opportunities to remain there forever, but I always came back to my hometown . . .

You already know, I prefer a European atmosphere with pleasant whispers of English, French, Italian, or German in my ear all the time. But if you never been in Russia maybe, it is a good choice for you . . ."

"Alla, if I would go to Russia, it wouldn't be to sightsee. It would be to see you."

"Really? Then it is a better choice to fly directly to Saint Petersburg. It's not a secret, everyone knows of this, the MOST beautiful women of Russia live here. You will have a unique opportunity to see the proof of this fact . . . I promise to show you the most attractive and clever girls. I am not worried though . . . I can capture your libido, my

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<sup>4</sup> For easier reading, I will relate most of the emails (and instant messages) as conversations.

precious friend. It is easy! I would be glad to be your guide; if you will want . . . I know each stone and street in my hometown, one of the most beautiful cities in the world . . . I can show for you the best, VIP places. I am queen here . . .

You'll see my TV fashion show, my articles in magazines, my paintings, my designs, and bla-bla-bla . . .

Saint Petersburg is a friendlier, more cultured atmosphere than Moscow. Certainly, you will receive an invitation to visit my modest home; the special place for only privileged tourists . . . I think it will be an intriguing study for you of this strange Russian UFO with the name of Alla. I think, any personality will be best observed in her natural environment . . . Am I right?"

"Alla, what will become of this late summer's night dream?"

"The best way to break this late summer's night dream is to meet. Puck corrects mistakes in the end. Oh, why YOU, Robert?"

"And why *you*? You are so wonderful and so out of range."

"Robert, I really wish there could be insurance for the kaput heart. If I will fall in love with you, it's not an Apocalypse anyway. I am willing to see where this may lead us . . ."

"Falling in love is a temporary delusional state."

"I assert that your five-year analysis will not be enough. I think for the goal to study me, it is necessary about 50 years . . . I am like a chameleon . . . I am the Milky Way . . . I am always new, endlessly . . . Though, I suppose, your professionalism will have the ability to break open all confidential codes of my soul within the next decades . . . On my Bible's oath, I've done many mad things . . . I am a flame under ice . . . I bet, you think I am crazy . . . You need a silent, good, simple woman, without a bullet in her head; am I right?"

"Alla, how about someone exciting *and* easy to be with? By the way, I loved the pictures you sent. Thanks."



“You wish more pictures of me? . . . I have a lot of photos from my modeling . . . My Lord! I don’t know what kind of photos you want to see; Alla as superstar, Alla as natural child, Alla as artist-designer who has a perfect reputation and earned the respect of the most influential people of this city . . . My reputation almost is sacred in this city . . . as sexy Siren or Cold Queen or Alla as model, cover girl bird known by her plumage?”

# # #

What a charming siren. I keep becoming more and more infatuated with Alla. Reason tells me that this has to end, but my passion says that I must meet this beautiful, fascinating creature.

# # #

Oct. 1

“Hello, my Fifth Element. I repeat your name as a Mantra. I finally found you . . . You can be a lousy therapist to yourself right now. I want to be your psychologist . . . sole hope . . . strong link . . . rebirth . . . full-blooded shout . . . tears of happiness, warm madness . . . I can be Sun for you . . . We have a stock in eternity . . . I do not want to be only a temptation . . . I am worth more, much more, my dear.”

“Alla, because this relationship is impossible—that makes it so romantic. It is safe from passion-robbing realities. But the realities are against this going further. You can have your pick of wonderful men that would fit your life. I want to settle down into a marriage, and what would our marriage look like in 10 years? Think about it. You are an incredible woman. I never thought I would meet someone like you. I wish that you would find your knight who is worthy of all your passion. But our relationship is just not practical.”

## **Chapter 6 Idealization and Devaluation**

“Narcissistic, seductive, distrustful of closeness . . . problems with intimacy . . . anxiety and depression from possible childhood trauma . . . This patient is very defensive . . . look for denial, idealization, and devaluation . . . Not a good candidate for insight psychotherapy . . . consider cognitive-behavior therapy or supportive therapy for some symptom relief, and medication for anxiety and depression . . .”

The MMPI-2 results confirm that Karen is afraid of looking at herself. Her scores indicate that her symptoms are not just because of her current state of loneliness and irrational thoughts. Her problems go back to her childhood. Research shows a strong relationship between losses and traumas with parents in childhood and later major depression in adulthood (Bemporad & Romano, 1993; Browne, Wells, Bushnell, & Hornblow, 1995).

Although I had told her that I would have the MMPI-2 results ready for this session, Karen did not ask and I did not bring them up. She does not want to know the results. She is too defensive. I will wait for a time when she can constructively use this information.

Karen’s unconscious compromise between her need for love and her fear of it is to move in and out of relationships, repeatedly. She lives for the magic of infatuation, then becomes disappointed, and then looks for another infatuation. She also feels dependent but fears dependency. This pattern of in and out object relations repeats itself in the transferences with me. My interpretations of these unconscious patterns as they occur in the transference will help Karen to make them more conscious. The goal of psychoanalytic psychotherapy is to have mature choices rather than react in accordance to unconscious motivations. Now she reacts to others according to her fears and defenses.

“You are supposed to be the *best*. Why aren’t you helping me?” Karen says.

She acts haughty as a defense against her feelings of worthlessness. Karen overcompensates by believing that she has to have the best of everything, since she feels deep inside that she is damaged goods. Despite her complaints, she also sees me as the best charm for the moment. She idealizes me as her guru and believes that I have the magic answers, but underneath such idealization is its opposite, devaluation. As soon as I am unable to provide her with magic, I am devalued and verbally stoned as a false prophet. She does the same in her love relationships. When she falls in love she over-idealizes her lover. When her lover cannot meet her impossible expectations, she devalues him.

The splitting of her perception of others in terms of all good or all bad reflects her fragmented self. She projects her grandiose self or her damaged self on to others (Kohut, 1966, 1971; Kohut, Goldberg, & Stepansky, 1984).

Karen says, “How are you able to get these fees for what you do?”

“How are you able to keep a good guy with your devaluing?”

“Is putting me down supposed to be good for my self-esteem?”

I say, “Good self-esteem comes from acknowledging faults and all the sides of you. Constructive criticism will help you develop a more secure identity.”

“Sure. Sure. Except that I don’t feel better, I feel worse from your therapy, Dr. Gordon.”

I clarify, “You brought your anger and distrust into our relationship. Instead of wondering where it comes from, you blame your current relationship. If you have the courage to see this pattern, you might begin to break it.” Despite Karen’s aggression, my voice conveys concern and warmth. I am able to contain and make sense of her devaluation of me.

Patients often see me as the worst parts of themselves (projection), and the worst parts of their early care-givers (transference). I often have to clarify who I am. Once the reality of me is clarified, then I might make an interpretation of why a patient is distorting me. Once patients begin to recognize the disowned and projected parts of them or transferred feelings about their parents, they will distort the other in their relationships less.

“Now I don’t have enough courage? You blame me for everything. You are provoking me. Is this part of the therapy?”

Karen needs to fight with me. She would rather fight with me than look at herself.

I clarify, “No I didn’t provoke you. If I were the main cause of your reactions, then how could I interpret what is unconsciously coming from you? Your degree of anger cannot be explained by our here-and-now reality. You carry a lot of unconscious hostility that just waits for a seeming justification to come out.”

Karen says, “I don’t have anything unconscious. I would know!”

Most of personality is unconscious (Opatow, 1999; Pally, 1997; Solms, 2002; Stein, Solms, & van Honk, 2006), particularly conflicts (Geraskov, 1994). We all have parts of our parents’ personalities, our infant attachment history, our childhood emotions and experiences all stored in our implicit unconscious memory. It is not a passive warehouse. We have an unconscious affecting us in ways that most people, including Karen, never imagine. From earliest childhood, we store memories of our attachments. The memories from infancy become procedural, while later memories may be repressed and later remembered. We cannot recall the earliest procedural memories, but we act them out in our emotions and in our ways of relating. When we fall in love, our unconscious procedural memory reenacts its love drama with a predictable pattern. What is in Karen’s unconscious? I wonder if it is possible to go there. The cost of her not resolving her conflicts is to be without a stable love relationship. But could she tolerate what she might find within herself? Most people avoid insight and suffer. This might be Karen’s fate.

## Chapter 7 The Fallen Angel

Date: Oct. 5

From: Alla

Subject: Bad dream about you

###

Hello, stranger . . .

So, as far as I understand, we never meet, my sweet friend . . . Am I right?

I can't have a long comment for you, because I am in the Internet cafe in Frankfurt and haven't a lot of time for it and I am tired from the show.

Robert, I feel upset . . . I must admit.

It looks like a bad dream about you.

Beuase . . . (I am sorry for my spelling, fucking German keyboard!!!),

You don't want to risk a life with me.

I understand after reading your mad letter.

I am ready to go away from you.

Am I right, my fallen Angel?



Do you really want to know what I long for?

I need the usual things for life.

Deeply inside me, I want the human things—a warm house, a flowerbed under the windows, Burning candles . . . Tasty supper . . . Rest and coziness . . . Love, protection, and care . . . I simply want to fall asleep on his strong shoulder and to not worry about tomorrow's day. I need to settle down with my 5th Element.

What else? . . . I want to become his strong, safe fortress, sweet rest, gentle pleasure, and eternal inspiration . . . Be his prayer and hope, his unearthly love, not only a wife.

I want to become close to him and be simply happy . . . I dream to find the partner of my life, a teacher, and best friend, have fun with him, to find this feeling to be finally at home. My Lord, Please, show me the place!

I have a small saga for you before I leave . . .

I have been trying to find my soul mate all my 30 years . . .

You said that you need to settle down.

What would a marriage of us look like in 10 years?

My old-warm-soul! You think I can plan a stupid, mad life for next 10 years, when I know—how relative 'TIME' is in the context of eternity?

Think about it!

Robert! I knew other ROBERT in my life.

Really my intuition was so STUPID??? Tell me, please.

I don't care about time and distances. I don't care about correct, practical, and fucking convenient decisions. I need much more.

I don't care about the opinions of common people.

You said—We met in cyberspace.

We met many times before, my friend. Are you kidding?

I've appeared many times in your dreams. I was a star, warm wind, beacon . . . I was a shout of birds to help you to find me.

I have taken this body, these magic eyes, and this Jewish soul so that you could find me!

Ten years? Such Fucking bullshit!

What are you talking about, Robert???????

As far as I remember, in a previous life, you were the sort of person who can to sell your soul to Devil, if you wanted someone or something.

What's happened? (Big grin)

I will follow your ideas. I will disappear, as you wish.

God prepared me as a rare and ancient wine.

Only for this unique purpose—do you want to know more about it?

I wanted to meet you face-to-face, seeing (and touching) will only tell if there is more than mental affection—But you are in a trap of your fears . . . I regret. I can't help you, if you can't to allow me to explore more.

I felt . . . that we were lovers many times before . . . I already knew it, when I first saw your smile in the photo you sent. I thanked God he led me to you . . . You were my best lover in my previous life. And many times before . . . It looked like a mad dance (animal and raw) . . . I think I saw your lazy exhaustion . . . Robert, I know a lot of things about you .

I will tell you about it . . . in the next life . . . (Smile)

God bless you, my friend . . .

I wish you happiness and REAL LOVE.

I gotta go . . . I want to be drunk . . . I need to forget about you.

Today I will dance a dirty salsa, I suppose . . .

I'll try to think, that I just saw a bad dream . . . just bad dream . . .

You are just stranger in cyberspace . . . and yet I'm to deny that your name stays with me 24 hours a day, and it's not your photo in my bag in this minute. It's just fucking cyberspace.

There is only one chance for one life. And you will lose your chance to be with me.

So . . . . .

See you in the next life, my hero.

In the next life, we will read Blake to each other with Gershwin playing softly. We will plan our sailing trips, and you will proudly tell everyone that I am your wife . . .

Are you ready?

I will disappear . . .

Are you sure???

(Do you wanna be drunk with me?)

Warm hugs

Phantom of Alla

# # #

# # #

She is not taking this rejection well. Of course, I am afraid, and so is she. There is always fear with a new relationship. The fear is greatest when our early loves hurt us. When a person's first intimacy with a parent was injurious, then it is easier to fall in love when the unconscious knows it is more fantasy than a lasting relationship. There is more need for defenses and walls when the possibility of committed love threatens. My distancing and ambivalence may make it safer for her to express passion and pursue me. Conversely, my moving toward her may increase her anxiety about commitment.

Alla's need to impress me with her intellect and beauty has fallen away, yielding to an emotional plea for a loving home life. It is too early to know if she has a deep personality problem, or if this is mostly cultural differences and situational conflicts. Often individuals have been labeled as "disturbed" when they were only expressing dramas common to their culture. A disturbed personality structure that is deeply rooted in a person's basic temperament is difficult to alter. But environmentally-caused cultural affectations and psychological traumas can be helped with a healthy psychological relationship. Perhaps Alla only has issues that can change in the right situation. I am not likely to meet someone this extraordinary ever again. I would hate to give up on her because I am assuming the worse. How do I know at this point if it is my fears or my insights at work?

## **Chapter 8 A Victim of Lost Love**

“I can’t help you with men unless you talk about your father.”

“I don’t agree.” Karen snaps.

“The price you pay for not understanding your past is that it gets repeated in your current relationships.”

“Sure. Sure.”

“Children are naturally sexual and need non-sexuctive and non-shaming parents so they can develop normally. Sex abuse can produce guilt, inhibitions, self-rejection, distrust . . .”

“Marsha, my therapist told me my father must have been a psychopath. She said that I don’t remember the sex abuse because it is a repressed memory.”

“You don’t remember a thing?”

“No. Marsha said that is typical of sex abuse.”

Was this a matter of repression, or was Karen made to believe that something had happened when in fact there had been no abuse? There is a false memory versus repressed memory debate in psychology. On the false memory side, research shows that children can have false memories implanted in them by experimenters (Loftus & Hoffman, 1989). Children are easily influenced. The child’s suggestibility and tendency to confuse feelings with reality can create false memories. There are tragic cases where people have been sentenced to jail because children have falsely accused them of abuse. The psychodynamics of the Salem witch trials are reenacted again and again in many child abuse allegations (Gardner, 1987).

But much of the research shows that painful memories can be repressed and later remembered (Brown, Schefflin, & Whitfield, 1999). I have found this in my work with patients. The mind avoids going to painful places, but repressed memories often come into awareness when therapy provides safety and empathy.

I have seen children who were abused and afraid to talk about it. Or who had spoken to a parent and then suffered the trauma of not being believed by the very people they looked to for protection. I have also seen children brain-washed by one parent into believing that they were abused by the other parent when they were not, and how that damages their ability to love later in life (Gordon, 1998, 2002). There is no black or white. Both possibilities exist: false memories and repressed memories.

Memory is not a passive objective file of facts or a mechanical recording. It is part of an organic brain. It is affected by emotions and it is constantly being revised. Memory is fluid. I can't easily know what happened in a person's past. Marsha, Karen's former therapist thought she knew. But I take nothing at face value. I look at many factors such as plausibility, consistency, and, whenever possible, corroborating witnesses. Many times a "memory" is a metaphor for a person's emotional history. I began to work cautiously on a reconstruction of Karen's emotional history, being very careful not to assume too much, because childhood memories can be any combinations of fantasies and actual events (Arlow, 1991).

"What do you remember, Karen?"

"I was six. He molested me. My parents separated over it. I never saw him again."

I question, "How does it feel to talk about it?"

"I feel nothing. And I don't dwell on it. My mother told me, 'Some things are the worse from dwelling.'"

I clarify, "In therapy you can dwell constructively to help solve problems."



“I hate falling in love. But I feel empty without it.”

Karen changed the topic, but not the theme. She is still talking about childhood trauma and her fear of closeness. Karen feels empty of a true self. Without a solid identity, she fears losing herself to another. Her dependency needs brings her into intimacy, but her fear of losing autonomy makes her distance. She is caught in an “in and out program” in her love relations (Guntrip, 1969). To fill her emptiness she re-enacts her childhood love drama, one in which she plays the victim of lost love.

## Chapter 9 Deciding to Fall in Love

“Bob, come up. I’ll be in the Poconos this weekend. I’ll look over the emails and tell you what I think of your conflict then.” Gerd Fenchel is a training psychoanalyst and Dean of the Washington Square Institute in New York. Whenever he and his wife can, they often spend weekends in their Pocono Mountain home. Gerd has a well-trimmed white beard and he looks more like Sigmund Freud every year. I drove about 45 minutes north of Allentown to see my friend.

“Gerd, do we *all* regress when we fall in love?”

“Temporary regression, yes, but then the couple must deal with the real relationship in the real world. There are people who are completely overcome and consumed and lose their bearing.”

“So it’s normal to regress as long as there is enough reality in the madness?”

“Disturbed people escape their harsh existence and depression for the ecstasy found in intense love.”

“Like the passion of Borderlines?” I ask.

“They have a primitive form of love and use sexuality and aggression to control others. They have magical expectations, want instant intimacy, and have a constant need to be adored. With rejection or abandonment the rage comes out. They wish for an all-loving mother who understands them without words. They go for mystical and magical solutions. Sadomasochism is not just the spice of passion as in a normal romance, but dominates those relationships. Passionate yes, but they are controlled by their emotional extremes and eventually their aggression destroys their relationships (Fenchel, 1998, 2005, 2006). But you know all this, Bob.”

“Most times, yes, but these days, I’m not so sure.”

After dinner, I show him the emails. “Gerd, I am captivated by her, but I wonder about her stability.”

He laughs, “You always bring me such entertaining conflicts. Alla is gifted and brilliant. You need that.”

“Do you think that she is crazy?”

“I don’t know. You dated one Russian before this and already you are an expert? Alla is dramatic—in other words, a Russian. There is intensity, contradiction, and extremism in their traditions despite years of gray communism. You know something of their literature: Gogol, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, and Solzhenitsyn. These are not fully feet on the ground people nor are their characters. In what other country has a novelist, Tolstoy, been thought of as a saint? And who explores insanity and evil better than Dostoevsky?”

“I’m not sure if she is disturbed or it’s cultural.”

“Bob, Russians had a hard life. They can be narcissistic and defensive. It’s part of the culture. Religion was outlawed for 70 years. Spiritualism and superstition gave them comfort. They had no psychology to speak of until recently. It is hard to know how she really is. It might not be a personality disorder. You may be hearing her personal and cultural trauma. If that is all it is, after some time with you she might settle down. Maybe she sees that hope with you.”

“I just ended it. I thought she was too wild. Then she broke down and told me how much she wanted a normal life.”

“You need her wildness and she needs your order. But the same thing that excites you both now may later become intolerable. Yet, she may respond well to you. Some couples are able to keep the right balance of aggression and regard for one another keeping the passion alive without the aggression destroying the relationship. You won’t know how disturbed she is until you see all the sides of her in different circumstances; not just in letters and on the phone.”

“Gerd, here are some pictures she sent.”

“Oh my, are you sure this is really her? There are women who post pictures of models and get men to send them money.”

“It’s her. She sent me about thirty pictures. Most are from modeling over the last 10 years, but some others with her family, from her childhood and recently with her friends and on TV. She has a weekly fashion feature on TV in Saint Petersburg. She is a celebrity there.”

“She’s famous, has a Ph.D., looks like this and she wants you? OK, she *is* crazy. But she’s too intriguing not to meet.”

# # #

Oct. 7

“Alla, I had a long talk with a wise analyst friend. I needed some time and thought. I do want to explore this rare gift. You showed me an intimate side of you, and you touched me with your feelings.”

“Hello, my dear Robert. It is actually difficult to start speaking to you now. I lose my internal balance when I speak with you. Something occurs inside me that I cannot supervise. You can make me very nervous and excited.”

“I’m in the same condition.”

“Thanks for allowing me to criticize you, Robert.”

“You were more intimate. So you want to settle down to a normal marriage?”

“Oh, Robert, it is impossible to speak about love and marriage before a personal meeting. It’s cyberspace. Be cautious. For 100% trust nobody.”

“Yes. I forbid you to speak of it.”

“You will feel a difference in our cultures. You can’t imagine how Russian mentality differs from yours. Take more time for your conclusions, my dear. Robert, I know you much more than you can imagine. I am telling to you only 5% from my deep ideas. And English is not my native language . . . It is a new language for me . . . You receive little of my subtlety of thoughts and words!”

“Alla, do you have any idea how much I have fallen in love with you?”

“No, I don’t know how much you love me! And when I do not see your new email more than after 24 hours per day or hear your voice—it seems that you do not exist . . . You keep telling me how much you want a sweet woman by your side . . . Do you really think that I am such a cold lady? Honey! I don’t want to tease you. I don’t want to play with you, flirt with you. If I’d want, you’d feel an erection 25 hours per day.”

“I love how you tell time.”

“If I’d want, I could show you my Real Sweetness . . . Oh, gosh, I better don’t talk about it.”

“Please do.”

“I know the boundless force of my charms! Do you understand? . . . Really . . . your professional intuition does not see it?”

“Alla, I’m not getting any work done on my book, and it is your fault!”

“I am really sorry! I know I have the charms to stop and destroy all work, my dear . . . And consequently I do not show you the huge stock of my tenderness . . . ”

“Such consideration.”

“I don’t want to seduce you . . . Robert, I can be an Angel with a Devil’s smile and Devil with an Angel’s smile . . . My dear, do you understand my metaphors? . . . When we will make love, we shall

connect body and spirit. You will tremble and shake from the soles of your feet to each cell deep inside your body . . . And when you will rest with me with your arm and leg over my body, you will then know that I am that UFO you found on the Internet . . . that this crazy Lady has been sent to you for a special purpose . . . I can keep you sexually young . . . I can be everything for you and much more.”

“Sounds good my love; I can use a woman who is more than everything.”

“Mentally now I touch your every tender spots, hair, shoulders, all over and you will feel fingers like petals . . . I would sing a sweet lullaby for you and as I stroke and caress your hair, while you will feel a deep calmness like warm, soft clouds around you . . . I can make so that you will be immersed in magic, sweet, air, blue Nirvana . . . I will be an island of tenderness . . . I’ll embalm your body with my touches to your skin. I shall create you anew . . . You will think that you have appeared in this world the first time, that you did not know before feeling of love or happiness that you have no memory of previous experiences or disappointments in your life . . . Are you ready?”

“Yes.”

“Do you want be my best partner for this fantastic slow dance, Dr. Robert Gordon? Do you want to dance with me tonight, my favorite spirit?”

“Yes.”

“I would want to hear you whisper: ‘Alla, ALLA, I shall drink of you until I am close to death . . . And I shall want to die deep inside you, locked in a lover’s embrace, my sucking on your tongue, kissing neck and breast . . . I do not fear your beauty, age, I bathe in it. Take me . . . We shall be together. I am totally fucked up . . . Alla, nothing is like this. Nothing . . . Nothing’ . . .”

“A worthy way to die, when I am eighty . . . not a minute before. We can practice for that final grand mort in the mean time. Okay?”



“Yes, my swan . . . ”

“You say that you don’t want to seduce me? I love the way you don’t seduce me. Please continue.”

“Oh, Robert, I’d want to say for you many crazy things but my wisdom makes me silent.”

“Where did this wisdom suddenly come from?”

“Do you sense my SWEETNESS?”

“That’s not what I meant by ‘sweetness’ but I will not quarrel about your definition. Perhaps it’s a cultural difference I could grow to love.”

“I know the force of my charm. It is better if I do not show too much of this at this time. Words are empty, actions speak volumes. I am an action woman.”

“I can handle your charm. Tell me more about your actions. I bet that you hate when I’m rational and practical.”

“Fucking bullshit! I love your rational and practical ways. I really love your noble style . . . But, I must admit, sometimes you sound like a child, Robert! Leave cyberspace. It deforms reality. I’m MORE rational and practical than YOU. I can prove it to you.”

“Really?”

“I have been solo for a long time. If anybody should be skeptical, it should be me . . . But I am not, I believe in Love and God . . . I am willing to PROVE my love to you. . . . Listen to your heart, not your psychology. Shit!—Do not predict.”

“You are right.”

“Unfortunately. I am right very often; it’s boring . . . It’s a dilemma, sometimes . . . ”

“So, Alla, you have become bored with being right all the time? How do you know if you are right, your intuition? I learn more from seeing where I went wrong. I treat people who are often wrong but because of their defenses, they don’t see it until they meet me . . . Of course, at first they think that I am the one who is wrong.”

“My intuition is better than yours.”

“Intuition can be self-serving. I respect and defer to reality.”

“I don’t want to have intellectual duels with you, my sweetness.”

“Alla, you have other ways of perceiving.”

“You can’t imagine how different my Angel.”

# # #

There is a point when one decides to fall in love despite everything. It is like the first time you are on the diving board and you decide to jump. You just have to trust that it will be worth it. I push aside that Alla sees sweetness and intimacy in terms of sex. I push aside her need to be right and her grandiosity.

Every morning I run downstairs to my computer to get her emails. They frequently come with seductive photos and poems. I am addicted to them. Her letters are long, passionate, and fascinating. Now they come two or three a day, four to eight pages long. They are a hypnotic seduction to make her the focus of my life.

I dialogue with her by using another color. She often responds with yet another color. Our emails are often in black, red, and blue. She writes in differing size fonts and in bold to convey her emotions and intensity. She has the habit of not ending a sentence, often using ellipsis . . . as if there are always more thoughts unspoken . . .

Often I work late into the night on my book. Alla would be waking up in Saint Petersburg and greet me on instant messenger. With the

emails, instant messenger, and our increasing phone calls, Alla dominates my free time and my being.

I worry about her conviction that she is always right and that she relies on her subjective intuition more than weighing evidence. I confront her hoping that she would become more insightful in time. She is intellectually sophisticated, but emotionally naive. I hope that she could grow to love as an adult. I have seen people emotionally evolve so many times before, but this time it is personal.

## **Chapter 10 The Addictive Quality of Passion**

Passion by its nature is obsessive and addictive. There are several reasons for this. When you feel “chemistry” for someone, you are experiencing changes in your brain chemistry: increased levels of dopamine and norepinephrine and decreased levels of serotonin (Fisher, 2000). Such biological changes lead to states of euphoria and obsessionality. These biological underpinnings of love addiction may be a product of natural selection because it increases the likelihood of reproduction.

Added to this biochemical idealization is psychological idealization of the beloved. He or she unconsciously triggers responses associated to our idealized mothering figure of infancy. Our first love was a matter of life or death, and we unconsciously transfer the irrational idealization from childhood on to the beloved whether the love is earned or not. One is never infatuated with a real person, only to the object of idealization.

There is always some idealization in love. In normal love, the idealization has more basis in the objective qualities of the beloved than in merely subjective erotic fantasy. The more a person is looking to someone else to fill the empty spaces of one’s soul, the more that person will become dependent on an idealized love (Sperling, 1987). A person with a weak sense of self looks for an idealize other to provide contentment, happiness, and unconditional love. That is a child’s notion of love.

Our irrational unconscious can just as quickly create as it can destroy idealized love. When our irrational idealization of our lover is stronger than that person’s objective worthy qualities, or when an immature individual has expectations that are impossible to fulfill, the relationship breaks down. These are the reasons infatuations usually do not last.

Oct. 9

“Alla, I am so addicted to you.”

“Great that you are addicted to me . . . I am glad! My plan! You will need no other drug . . . People say I can be like opium . . . I am a lover like you have never known . . . I am the perfect tool, but only the very few elected may use it . . . I can easily hold any desire and control any libido . . . I hate the primitive perceptions of stupid stallions. I don’t like a Marilyn Monroe, by the way . . . T-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o sweet for me . . . I like an image of Valkyrie maiden more.”

*(Her preferring the image of a Valkyrie maiden—an indication that aggression may become the greater force in her passion than tenderness? Passion needs some aggression for fuel but also lots of tenderness to keep the chemistry from blowing up the relationship.)*

“I’ve dated a few Valkyrie maidens. They are a lot of fun except when they try to send you to your death and Valhalla.”

“I will bring you to heaven . . . When it comes to love, I do not want compromises . . . all or nothing . . . I have ripened for this opening. What do you wish, Robert?”

“I don’t want a warrior, but maybe you can dress up like a Valkyrie maiden.”

“I don’t wish to war with you. I was stronger and more wise than my teachers. I can compete with geniuses. I am a star here, but I refuse to kiss the asses of influential people . . . I’ve slept with whom I wanted instead of with whom it was necessary . . . My royal style is too wild! I can’t submit to the fools, no matter how rich or powerful!”

*(Is “My royal style” Alla’s euphemism for her narcissism?)*

“Seems like you had a harsh time in Russia.”

“Every time I close the door on reality it comes in through the windows.”

“Alla, why close the door?”

“I cannot be humiliated and ask for anything. I have an awful character . . . My motto—If I can’t be a good example, then I’ll just have to serve as a horrible warning . . . I dare myself to do a lot of mad, wild things . . . Oh, Robert, my sweet friend, can you really love such a Siren?”

“You are warning me that you are a Valkyrie and a Siren. Well then I must warn you that I am an idealistic rescuer. What a pair. Romantic love is nature’s greatest joy but can also be its cruelest joke.”

“Robert, it must be for you, because of the women you have chosen in the past. I need in heart and brains of similar scale, Doctor . . . Look, dear, see who lives behind the successful mask of Alla? When I allow to myself to be natural, I am as thin and gentle as a shakuhachi flute . . . I am soft and warm like a sea breeze . . . Who will protect my vulnerable nature? My swan, there is no quick test for true love . . . You must listen to your intuition. Do Americans listen to this channel?”

# # #

My shoulders begin to ache badly enough for me to go for physical therapy at the rehab center next to my office. Gene the physical therapist says, “I see a lot of these knots in the shoulder muscles of computer programmers. They have repetitive use injuries. Do you work with computers?”

“No, Gene, I work with unconscious repetitions.”

I am spending hours on the computer communicating with Alla, but it is not the repetitive activity that knots my shoulders, rather the conflict of falling in love with a wonderful Valkyrie.

# # #

“Hi, Art, did you get a chance to look at the emails?”

“Yes. I got vicarious pleasure from them. She is extremely beautiful.”



Every Tuesday I meet Arthur Katz for lunch at the deli in my office building. We meet unless Art is in the jungles in South America leading an orchid tour. Art is one of the best psychoanalysts I know, and though he knows a lot about psychology, he is passionate about orchids and chocolate. He also adores his wife and is a loving father and grandfather.

“Thanks for agreeing to teach my class while I’m away,” he says. You will discuss defense mechanisms? Remember that they are just an undergraduate class, psychoanalytic concepts are difficult for them.”

I say, “I’ll go over the differences between suppression, repression, and denial and their effect on relationships . . . The first is suppression, which is the conscious or preconscious pushing aside conflicts and feelings. Next is repression, which pushes into the unconscious conflicts and feelings. Repression can be lifted with insight and then conflicts may be resolved.”

“Bob, emphasize that suppression and repression are higher level defenses and sometimes important for intimacy. These defenses help a person cool off.”

“Right. With the more costly primitive defenses, there is a significant distortion or denial of reality, which is associated with the most disturbed people. People who use denial have no awareness or understanding of their problems. Nothing is resolved. They end up blaming others for everything.”

“Clear enough, but you will need examples. Are you going to Russia?”

“I don’t know, Art. I’ll give this example: My patient had a fight with his wife. I said to him that he saw his wife’s criticism as though it was as dangerous as his mother’s criticism. I interpreted, ‘When you were a child, your mother’s criticisms did damage to your self-esteem. It was dangerous then. Your wife’s criticisms are annoying, but not dangerous. They only seem dangerous when they trigger repressed memories and emotions about your mother. The more you remember and not

repress the past, the less you will transfer the emotions of danger from the past onto your wife.”

“Good example. The last time I was in Russia was in 1972.”

“For you dissertation on USSR Jews?”

“Right. I’m sure it’s very different now, but bring soft toilet paper just in case. It was like refined bark. I remember paying for it by the square.”

“I’m not sure I’m going yet. If he used denial, he would have concluded that his emotional reaction was caused by his wife and not his own transference. I think it is better if a couple shares the same defensive style. Two people who tend to use denial might have an inflexible but stable relationship. Two people who tend to use repression might have a stable and growing relationship.”

“And if they don’t have the same defensive style?”

“There is war. If a person who tends to repress tries to confront someone who uses denial, each will drive the other crazy. You can’t use insight, reason, or reality against denial. Confrontation only makes things worse.”

“Bob, I read Alla’s emails. She is extraordinary.”

“Borderline?”

“It’s hard to know. It could be cultural. She is very Russian. They are defensive for reasons. It is an alien mentality for Americans who are used to feeling safe. The Mongol-Tatar invasion in the 13th century devastated Russia. They swept across Russia with sadistic mass genocide. Many of the Tsars were cruel. The Nazis killed over 25 million Russians. Stalin killed over 30 million of his own people. Due to unimaginable trauma, this is a nation of overcompensation and paranoia.”

“Hence the Cold War. Would you go to Russia to meet her?”

“Few men ever get a chance to be with a woman who looks like that and is that accomplished. The men that do are very rich. Does she know how much you make?”

“She’s dated wealthy men from all over Europe. She seems confused that she is in love with me. Early on I told her my income.”

“Did you specify ‘annual’?”

“Yes. She calls me her ‘Guru’.”

“It’s not a western culture. She may want to feel enriched by your wisdom. That might be what she is looking for.”

“I am so attracted to her but I’m worried about her personality.”

“What do you have to lose by meeting her? She’ll show you a great time in Saint Petersburg. Just forget about marriage. Have fun. But I can’t see her leaving all her fame to come to live in Allentown.”

## **Chapter 11 Repeating Love Dramas**

I open my waiting room door and to my horror I see both Karen and another patient each expecting the same appointment with me. This cannot end well. I excuse myself and go to check my schedule book and notes. As an analytically trained psychologist, I do my own scheduling and I alone handle the fees. It keeps the relationship more private, but more importantly, it often allows me to interpret patients' unconscious conflicts.

Patients can express unconscious conflicts through what appears to be matters of payment, lateness, and attendance. Karen is often late, each time with another rationalization. Lateness can be due to several psychological problems. It can be due to passive-aggressiveness. It can be due to obsessive-compulsiveness or separation issues, when there always seems to be one more necessary task to do before leaving. It can also be due to a narcissistic protest against the time demands of others. It can be any one or a combination of these motives. I can only know by understanding my patients' dynamics. Karen has all of these, and as with most psychological symptoms, her chronic lateness is a compromise between different sides of a conflict. She wants to come for therapy and she doesn't. So she comes late, or finds rationalizations for canceling sessions. Unlike some patients, Karen pays on time. Some patients resent having to pay for something that they were deprived of in childhood, i.e. good parenting. They might unconsciously express their anger at their parents by not paying me.

Karen is here at the right hour, but a day ahead of her appointed session. This is also due to her pervasive sense of confusion. My patients suffer from more confusion than they realize. They are even confused about their degree of confusion, so they blame it on others. I call her into my office.

“Dr. Gordon, you told me that tomorrow you would be away and you scheduled me for today. Did you forget?”

I say, “That is next week.”

“You told me wrong then. I’ll come tomorrow. But I’m really pissed!”

The next day, Karen comes late and starts the session with a long silence.

“What does the silence mean?” I question.

“There is nothing in my head today.”

“Maybe because of yesterday.” I clarify.

“Don’t start with me. You’ll blame me for your mistake, so what’s the point?”

I confront her aggression. “Do you think anything constructive can come from punishing me with your silence?”

“You are a man, so you think you are right.”

“That’s an interesting theory. How do you know if a theory is correct?” I question.

“I trust my feelings.”

“I don’t. My feelings are evidence to be weighed along with other data. I do reality checks. I make notes. I have you scheduled as usual for this time in my book. I have you next week for Monday because of a conference.” I clarify.

“So what? You told me wrong.”

“I can do that. But because I often deal with people’s confusion, I have to be very careful. This happens a lot in my practice. Some people get so angry they use it as an excuse to leave therapy. So that is . . . ”

Karen says, "I don't blame them. This is my last session!"

"My patients unconsciously recreate their pattern of conflicts with me, so I have to be very careful, so I take notes. I have a note from your last session that I told you about having to reschedule. You said that you should skip that week because of a hair coloring appointment scheduled in Philadelphia. I made note of it since I thought that it indicated a wish to avoid a session. You got angry at that interpretation. Karen, do you remember any of that?"

Silence. She now remembers and looks furious that I took away her justification for distrusting me. Admitting that she is wrong is humiliating for Karen. Frantically her anger finds another vehicle. It is as if her car broke down and with little loyalty, she abandons it by the roadside for the next vehicle that comes along. Karen's unconscious need to be a victim is too much a part of her identity. She went from being the victim of my seeming error (and when that didn't work), to feeling a victim because I pointed out her error.

Karen says, "Everything is my fault. You only make me feel worse."

I interpret her conflict; "You must really feel in a bind. You don't trust me, but you feel you need my help."

"Sure. Sure. I have better things to talk about than your problems. Will you let me get back to talking about John? I still think about him. Fuck it! It was the first time I was really in love. I met him while I was first seeing you. He joined the staff and wanted to date me. I told him that I don't date doctors. I was more likely to want to fuck the janitor. But I thought I should date him because it would be good for me to date a nice guy who was a doctor. He's from a blue-collar Catholic family. At least he wasn't a Jewish doctor. I actually fell in love with him. I was shocked when he asked me to marry him. Then just before the wedding, he got cold feet. I'm glad I found out then what a jerk he really was."

People construct naïve psychological theories about relationships so they don't have to look too deeply at their own problems (Harvey, 1989).

Karen thought that if Jewish men would be like her father then the solution was to purposely date non-Jewish men.

“What happened?” I ask.

“He got pissed when the Rabbi talked to me about maybe marrying us.”

“Uh-huh.” (In other words, “Go on. You obviously don’t want to tell me too much.”)

“It fell through.”

Karen defensively used the passive voice, “It fell through.” When patients use the passive voice, they are often not taking responsibility for their actions. I question Karen to see if she provoked the situation. This may lead to an interpretation.

“Did you tell John that you were discussing the marriage ceremony with a rabbi?”

“What are you crazy? I had to first see if the rabbi would do it.”

“Did John feel betrayed?”

“He said that he might have agreed to it, but the point was that he thought I was deceptive. That was bullshit. He was looking for an excuse to back out.”

I venture an interpretation of her defense. “Do you think you might have provoked the break up because you unconsciously fear marriage?”

“Could be . . . because of my father, I keep picking the wrong men.”

The steel door to her unconscious starts to creak open. I further interpret her unconscious pattern.

“You mean because your father was untrustworthy, you need to repeat that drama and pick untrustworthy men?”



“Sure. Sure.”

Karen’s admitting that she could unconsciously repeat dramas is my invitation to go deeper. I want her to see that she might be causing the conflicts.

“There are three ways that people can unconsciously repeat dramas. One is by picking someone who fits the drama.”

“I know. I do that.”

“But also you can distort the person so that he seems similar to someone from your unconscious drama.”

Karen nods.

“Finally, you can provoke the person so that he acts according to your unconscious drama.”<sup>5</sup>

Karen is quiet for some time. Then she surprises me.

“Do you think I provoked John by not first asking him about a rabbi doing the ceremony?”

“It’s possible.”

“Shit! Maybe I fucked it up.”

Karen’s capacity for self-reflection just took a leap. She is getting it.

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<sup>5</sup> This is called “projective identification.”

## Chapter 12 The Self-Revealing Stage

The Self-Revealing stage of intimacy is reached when the couple shares deeper feelings, conflicts, and fears. The relationship will deepen if the sharing is handled with mutual empathy. Alla and I are now entering this stage.

###

Oct. 10

“Robert, you said to me that you feared that I would be too wild to settle down . . . What you will do if I shall give you reactions of a child, I just wonder?”

“Honey, we all regress sometimes. We have all our ages in us. The important thing is emotional maturity and insight.”

“I have no age . . . I was born an old woman and I will die as a baby. My dear, I understand your fears . . . It’s a normal reaction. If you ask about my nobleness—I am noble . . . But if you want to receive insurance of my eternal fidelity . . . hhhmmmm . . . I will tell a lie, if I will say, that I know about my future in 10 years. I do not want to speak a lie. It all depends on love . . . Tomorrow can be anything . . . Only love defines duration of the relations for me. I think, my Angel, you do not want to live with a woman who will regret you. You should not feel the pity for you from any woman . . . For this period of time, I can promise you nothing. It does not mean that I am unreliable. It means that I do not want to be your disappointment. I want that you are happy . . . This is my main desire. I don’t want to tell you a picturesque, cheerful lie. I prefer the iron truth.”

*(This may be Alla’s rationalization for her unconscious fear of commitment. This might be due to past traumas and/or a vulnerable personality. People with a weak identity feel a need to constantly define*

*it and defend it. They fear a loss of identity in intimacy. They go from one infatuation to another. They find reasons to avoid a lasting realistic intimacy in order to protect the self from imagined absorption into the love object. They move between demandingness and dependency on one hand, and defensiveness and distance on the other. It is a constant balance between the fear of losing the object of dependency and the fear of being hurt or swallowed up by the love object.)*

“Alla, I am not looking for guarantees, but whether there is the potential for a healthy, lasting intimacy.”

“By the way, tell me one thing, my guru . . . you can’t or you don’t want to have children any more in your life, am I right?”

*(Alla cannot promise commitment, but she is asking about the possibility of our having a child. This could be an expression of her conflict between her fear of intimacy and her wish for a narcissistic union with a part of herself.)*

“Right, I had a vasectomy 10 years ago. Please we need to know each other more.”

“Okay, then . . . I will tell you this . . . I feed my parents. I have three jobs now. Sometimes I sleep only 4 to 5 hours per day. I try to be best at everything. I am a superstar here. My parents are retired professors. Their pensions are just \$50 per month! I earn money of eight men, and more. I must be successful. Do you really want to hear it and change all the stereotypes about me?”

“Yes.”

“Okay, okay . . . I read a lot about you on your web site and you have shared with me. You may not understand coming from a stable base. I will answer . . . Russia . . . I adore this crazy country. But in Russia many people do not have a normal life. Here, survival is a huge struggle. But it is a very, very pessimistic conversation. I do not think that you’ll understand me . . . You are American. Sometimes it seems my heart will become torn and broken forever when I see this

poverty . . . this poor, weak, ill, abandoned Russian people, which have lost hope forever. I have done everything that I can here. I am still very much in the beginnings of my career. Now, I have the best job in city. A few years ago, I lived in luxury with my ex-boyfriend, we traveled a lot . . . but now I'm on my own again."

"Alla, why must you work so hard now that you are so successful? Is there a point of 'enough'?"

"I suppose, you don't understand—what am I talking about . . . I fear it will not last. I feel, you need more information. My dad's parents were very rich, but I have not received the inheritance. Sorry, I am not a rich bride for you. Unfortunately, my dear, I have received only the royal manners, bearing, and expectations that are now part of my individuality. Although, I have not received the inheritance, I have received inner pride, intelligence, good sense of humor, insatiable curiosity, solar energy in my heart, and a passion for life."

"I was first raised in riches. I could allow myself in childhood to choose between the best of caviars and expensive toys. I saw my grandmother with diamonds and emeralds. My grandfather collected antiques to fill his big house with many paintings on the walls of our aristocratic ancestors. My grandfather used to bathe me in the large pool in their large, beautiful garden near the house, where grows jasmine, roses and strawberries. Oh . . . a fairy tale life! It was paradise for me. A very sweet childhood . . . But my father began to drink alcohol a lot. He was very handsome, romantic, and very sensitive. Unfortunately, he was not a strong person. He died from cancer in my arms 10 years ago. I live now with my not-native dad, because my mum remarried when I was six years old. My mum took me from their rich house without money and support. We long lived in poverty and nobody helped us."

"Alla, it's hard to go from wealth to poverty. But the family problems must have been awful for you."

"I did survive. I was always the best in my class. I won all the awards. And my rich relatives, who illegally have stolen my inheritance,

envied us. Because I have made my own money and fame without their help, I was a huge bone in their throat. I became stronger and more wise than all of them. I became a symbol of success for young people in this new Russia.”

“You have courage and talent. But sometimes it also helps to have a desire to prove yourself.”

“I tried to survive in this severe country without welfare or help from anyone, with only my pleasant face and my diplomas. I have not become haughty, ceremonious, biting, heartless, or spoiled. I hate these qualities! My heart has endurance, chastity, and love. When my girlfriends changed men in their beds, as gloves, I studied the world cultures and religions. When, they told me about their unsuccessful marriages, I was studying Latin, English, and Hebrew. I studied art, music, literature, and philosophy. Now they are tired and disappointed. I am quite the reverse. I have freshness of perception, knowledge and energy.”

“I understand better why you want to leave. You must need a nurturing place not simply material success.”

“Maybe, you are right, I need to work in New York City or London. I don’t know. I prefer calmness and isolation in a cozy place, as your house for example. I must admit I love the pictures of your home. You live in a very beautiful place on the mountain . . . But I cannot just sit at home 24 hours per day . . . You know my mad nature. I am a big paradox, my Angel. Shit! I want rest and madness . . . I want different things at the same time . . . My lovely Dr. Gordon . . . I need some good medicine for my ego! Who can love me, I just wonder? How many men sang songs of love to me? But none could understand me . . . Will you? Fate determines who comes into our lives. The heart determines who stays.”

###

Alla generally avoids looking into her past. I am surprised that she told me about her childhood. Even so, it seems she turned her

alcoholic father into her wounded knight. She finds it emotionally easier to think about her loss of money than the loss of him. Her need to be rich, besides the obvious, is also a need to restore the life of her seemingly fairy-tale childhood. Does she always repress the emotions about her father's drinking, the loss of her father, and her parents' conflicts? Alla imagines that when she finds her rich, unconditionally loving knight, the fairy tale would continue. And when Alla says, "How many men sang songs of love to me? But none could understand me . . . Will you?" she may be revealing that she is hard to understand because of her irrationality not because of lofty complexity. She's had some very hard times, though, and with charm, beauty, brains, and sheer determination she has overcome many burdens—at least some of them. But can she overcome her fears and defenses about committed intimacy?

# # #

Oct. 12

"Alla I feel so much closer to you after you told me about your traumas. Thank you dear."

"My lovely Dr. Gordon, I've never met a person without traumas. I think people have much more than I do. But I think, it all depends on the desire of the person to be healthy and then it is possible to kill any inner monsters and fears. I always had such strength."

"That is what I have been looking for."

"But I am extremely emotional. Sometimes, I am like an explosive. I can be unbalanced, excited. and imperious. I have a high level of excitability. I can be fire, melancholy, sadness, even panic, self-grandeur or ideal love. I can be a burglar of human souls."

*(Alla is provocative. When I back off the relationship, she comes on strong. When I speak of commitment, she backs off and she says she can't talk about the future. Then she asks about having a child with me. When she told me how mature she is and saw that it pleased me, she*

*then tells me how crazy she is. Regardless of any conscious wish for intimacy, the unconscious maintains a range of closeness that was set in early childhood. I know she is unconsciously regulating the distance between us.)*

“I have a mask of the strong, presumptuous winner. You will see in Saint Petersburg. I can be the Snow Princess. I am a good actress. I do not allow anyone to go to inside my essence . . . Maybe, I must learn to trust people more . . . It is impossible to open the confidential codes of my heart. I was like impostor all my life since there was no support . . . I had nothing behind of my back to protect me.”

“Your parents are loving, aren’t they?”

“Very. But I lost a big part of my native Dad’s love, a big part, Robert. Maybe, therefore, now intuitively I try to find the husband—father. What do you think, my doctor? I have my own diagnosis. I know all my problems already.”

“Pretty good analysis.” *(This is evidence of insight and therefore the potential for us to grow together as a couple.)*

“My daddy began to drink alcohol after my birth. I think mum had an opportunity to leave him then . . . but she loved him. And she tried to rescue the marriage for six years.

She has boundless patience and boundless love.

But she wanted to save me from his illness.

She divorced him when I was six years old. My mum married again when I was 9.

The second marriage is to a man whom I faithfully love. I live with this pair now. My Dad No. 2 loves me like crazy. We always had a magic relationship. I am happy that this man has appeared in my life. This man is filled with calmness, kindness, nobleness and honesty. By the way, Dad No. 2 is more senior than my mum by 15 years.”



“I am glad you have this example of a long and loving marriage.”

“They love each other dearly . . . Have no fear. I am not crazy. My so-called madness is only good hot fuel for my creativity. Nothing more.”

*(Our personalities are our “normal” and we often do not see ourselves objectively. But we all have some degree of personality disturbance. If we deny or rationalize our flaws to protect our pride, neither our self-esteem nor our intimacies are helped. By understanding our flaws, our self-esteem actually grows. Our relationships improve when we are not defensive and show remorse for our poor behavior. The healthiest people have the most insight into their problems. As Shakespeare said, “The fool thinks himself to be wise, but the wise man knows himself to be a fool.” What does Alla mean when she says, “I am not crazy. My so-called madness is only good hot fuel for my creativity. Nothing more.” Is she rationalizing her “madness,” or is she just being dramatic? Does she need to extract admiration from others to feel valuable? Is she, as she warns, a “burglar of human souls?”)*

“I guess, Alla, that a little madness makes love interesting.”

“If I can dance the salsa at top of a volcano and change the color of my hair once a month, it doesn’t mean, that I will cut off my ear as Vincent van Gogh. Speaking of cutting . . . you had a vasectomy 10 years ago? Do you want to force me to not have children at all? Robert, you know already I will have the desire if we marry. I never wanted children before you. What do we do? Our love is madness.”

“Do you sense the intensity of our relationship already?”

“YES! Fucking shit! YES! I should forbid you to write and to speak with me, before your charm has destroyed my life. This is my fear, that I begin to allow to myself to love you . . . I am afraid even tell to you about my feelings for you.

When I hear your voluptuous voice, it makes me drunk . . . weak-willed . . . soft . . . and natural . . . I feel a big compression of my inner

secretions and all organs . . . satanic fire and salutary rest in the same time . . . Fuck! I need more sanity!

I spend a lot of my inner forces to hold a distance, a cold space between us. Last night, in my dream about you, I was lost inside your arms . . . O, gosh . . . When are you coming?"

"Sooner than I thought."

"When, Robert, when, when?"

"I could be traveling to Saint Petersburg at the end of October for about a week. I will need a guide and translator. Do you know anyone?"

"Warning! I am the most expensive interpreter in this city. Okey-dokey . . . where do you want to stay?"

"Can you find me a good hotel?"

"The best for you."

"My interpreter and guide must be of pleasant nature."

"That's me—the ideal woman . . . sweetness and charm 100%."

"Must be able to quote Blake."

"Not only . . . also understanding Japanese poetry, all types of music, lingam Massage, Kama Sutra, and so much more. Come. Come. Come. I can't wait!"

## **Chapter 13 Personality Disorders and Disturbed Love Relations**

“I never went to a club like that before . . . It was love at first sight.” William began his story of self-destruction. He is a handsome man in his early 50s, but he looks much younger. He has thinning blond hair, glasses, and sensitive features. He has his own accounting firm, three children, and a loving wife. But he is destroying his life over a perverse obsession. William had been seeing a therapist for about five years during his affair, but he is still addicted to the twenty-nine year old lap dancer. His cognitive-behavioral therapy helped him with aspects of his anxiety and depression that resulted from his affair, but it could not touch the primitive level of delusional love that he has been acting out.

“What kind of relationship is it?” I ask hoping to assess his level of self-reflection.

“First I paid for the lap dances for about two months. Then I wanted to take Tammy to dinner. She said that she was losing money by taking time off from work and I had to pay for the time. She only wanted to go to the most expensive restaurants. I didn’t want her to have to dance for a living. So I gave her \$2,000 dollars a week to live on. I also paid for her cosmetology school and set her up in her own beauty salon. That didn’t work. She has no business sense. We never had sex in the five years we were together. She said that she never liked sex. I loved her anyway. Eventually, I went bankrupt and my wife left me when she found out why. When the money dried up Tammy told me that she didn’t love me and she found someone else. I became suicidal. I would just stand outside her window. She had me arrested. I can’t live without her. I love her. She is really a wonderful woman.”

“An adult loving relationship has mutual concern. Did she ever show concern about your spending so much on her?” I question.

“No. She is a taker. She told me that I had to prove my love for her by tolerating her problems and by spoiling her. That’s because she had an abusive father.” William still rationalizes (defensively makes excuses for) her behavior.

I interpret, “Normally, one would become disappointed and fall out of love with such poor behavior. Instead, you have fallen more in love with her. If I am to help you with this pathological attachment, I must better understand your earliest attachments. Can you tell me about your parents?”

“There is really nothing to tell. I can’t see how that matters. I had a loving mother.”

“And you are a loving man. But you love the wrong type of woman for a healthy relationship, and you have problems falling out of love when you should. Something is damaged in you concerning attachment and passion.”

“My father was abusive to my mother. I slept with her to keep him away from her.”

“Until when?”

“I think until I was about ten.”

“Perhaps you were her rescuer.” I interpret.

His mother may have used William. Like Tammy, she seduced him without sex. William as a child could have split the image of his mother into a Madonna and a whore. He needed to see his mother as non-sexual to protect himself from his sexual feelings for her that were overstimulated by his mother’s seductiveness. He displaced his sexual fantasies of his mother into the “whore” lover and retained the Madonna image of his mother. I would also need to explore the issue of his castrating father. This would increase his need to be with the wrong kind of woman. By being with a “whore,” he could feel superior and not feel castrated. His tolerating not having sex with the lap dancer for five

years while he supported her could be explained by his underlying fear of incest and castration. These hypotheses guide me in my formulation of William's erotic obsession.

"William, you seem insightful enough for deep psychotherapy. If you work hard and stick with it, I might be able to help you. The main problem might be that you are not ready to give her up."

"I can't give her up. I really do love her," William says in the desperate tone of an addict. I hope he will stay with long-term psychoanalytic treatment so that he might mature in his capacity for healthy love. I fear that his resistance might be too strong. He is masochistically addicted to the lap dancer. At this point he wants relief from his suffering and self-destructiveness, but he fears that if he changes, he will have to give up the whole drama and face his internal conflicts.

When we review the five types of love disturbances:

1. the inability to fall in love,
2. the inability to remain in love,
3. the tendency to fall in love with the "wrong" kinds of people,
4. the inability to fall out of love when one should, and
5. the inability to feel loved,

William is able to fall in love and remain in love. But he suffers from the tendency to fall in love with the "wrong" kinds of people and the inability to fall out of love when he should. In addition, he is confused about what it feels like to be loved.

About a hundred years ago, Freud wrote a paper, "A Special Type of Object Made by Men" (Freud, 1910a). It amazes me how brilliant and original Freud was and how little understood he still is. Freud described William's psychopathology as, "this condition could be called that of 'love for a harlot' . . . the desire they express to 'rescue' the beloved . . . the libido has dwelt so long in its attachment to the mother . . . that the maternal characteristics remain stamped on the love-objects chosen later . . . the idea of 'rescue' actually has a significance

and history of its own and is an independent derivative of the mother-complex, or more correctly, of the parental complex . . . ”

Salman Akhtar (1999a) felt that normally if love is unrequited or toxic, the love diminishes and there is a grieving process. However, individuals with an immature personality structure and obsessional features do the opposite and intensify their attachment when love isn't reciprocated. They are highly invested in their sadomasochistic fantasies and refuse to accept limits that should have been resolved with the Oedipal situation. In other words, children need to learn that they cannot possess and control the love object to feel secure and have a sense of worth. They cannot “marry” the parent. They must deal with limits and loss and learn from it. That builds ego strength and resiliency. William “won” the Oedipal situation. He won his mother and by doing so lost an opportunity to develop mature love.

William has difficulty feeling passion for his wife who loves him. Yet he has an intense passion for the lap dancer who is unloving and parasitic. According to Akhtar (1999a), people who have problems with being loved have difficulty with loss, their own aggression, renouncing masochism, and dealing with “good enough.”

William will have to address these issues to be free of his self-destructive “love.” But most patients with such love disturbances don't stay with intensive psychoanalytic treatment. They often use the therapist as an audience as part of the drama. It is more exciting to live the drama of suffering than to face the reality of one's own limitations and losses.

Karen's appointment followed William's. She gives him a long interested look. Her unconscious reads the potential for a sado-masochistic relationship with him in seconds.

“Dr. Gordon, you gave me a headache last session. It took me days to recover from it.”

I interpret Karen's headache as a possible psychosomatic reaction. “You see me as victimizing you and the cause of your headache.

But maybe your headache was due to all the unresolved conflicts inside of you that got triggered in our relationship. The different sides of you might be quarreling without a good moderator.”

“And how do I get a good moderator? You’re not doing it.”

“As you learn the different sides of you, you will be able to tell the sides that make the most sense from the sides that are self-defeating. You can learn that from sharing the different sides of you with me.”

At this point, I avoid a deeper interpretation of her transference anger at me. I am tilling the soil for Karen to work through her transferences that helps to destroy her relationships. She is likely to destroy her relationship with me if I moved too quickly. Later on I might ask, “What was your headache saying about your feelings toward me?” The eventual goal is for Karen to have the insight to do a reality check, self-soothe, and then act constructively. Now she is using symptoms as an expression of her feelings.

“I can’t trust what starts in my own head? Do I have a borderline personality?”

“Why do you ask?”

Karen has many of the traits of a borderline level personality disorder. She has problems with anger, confused identity, and tumultuous relationships that flip back and forth from idealization to devaluation. I believe that a personality disorder is an inherited temperament that may have been made worse by early trauma. If the basic personality is disturbed, this affects a person’s capacity for intimacy. People with a borderline level of disturbance favor primitive defenses such as denial, splitting (things into all good or all bad), and projective identification (provoking others) (PDM, 2006). Although Karen often uses primitive defenses, her main defenses are repression. Repression is a higher order defense that is favored by those with a neurotic level of personality disorder. That is, with enough objective feedback in a safe relationship, Karen could lift the barrier of repression and have insight.



A neurotic personality level structure is characterized by rigidity and anxiety without a gross distortion of reality (McWilliams, 1994, 1999; PDM, 2006). Since people with neurotic personalities are able to form intimate relationships, they are more easily treated than those with a borderline level of personality. But some hard-working patients with a personality disorder can make surprising progress in psychoanalytic psychotherapy. It is a long re-raising of a personality. The patient internalizes the therapeutic relationship over time. The therapeutic relationship becomes a part of the patient's self. I can't cure a personality disorder. But sometimes I can help tame it by increasing a person's capacity for self-reflection, self-soothing, and affect regulation. Karen might have a mix of borderline and neurotic personality structures.

Karen says, "John said that I'm borderline. But I don't think so."

"It is hard to tell at this point. The important thing is to not be defensive about your problems and to work on them. I think you are beginning to do that."

"I am not defensive. I am very independent. I think that is a problem for men."

"You don't seem very independent from your mother."

Karen laughs, "That's impossible."

"What you call independence sounds more like counter-dependency."

Two-year-olds and teens are famous for their counter-dependency. They resent their dependency feelings, so they over compensate by rebelling against any influence or responsibilities. Their battle cry is that they are just "being independent." Mature people distinguish between a healthy interdependency on reliable people and a pathological dependency that keeps one insecure. Psychotherapy encourages a temporary therapeutic dependency in service to the patient becoming maturely interdependent and autonomous.

"I don't want to become dependent on you, Dr. Gordon."

I interpret, “You see dependency as dangerous, because you were hurt when you were a child. You didn’t get to work it through, so you remain very dependent but deny it. You project your dependency on to others and then try to escape from their demands.”

“What did my MMPI say about it? Why did you keep the results from me?”

“You never asked. Maybe now you feel ready to look deeper. It shows a lot of anxiety and unresolved depression.”

“Depression? . . . I called John. He wouldn’t admit that he was wrong.”

It’s easier for Karen to associate to her loss and sadness over John, than to go into her childhood losses and sadness. Ungrieved losses often show up later as anxiety, depression, and problems with new attachments.

“Did you think *you* were wrong?” My interpretation has meaning on two levels: the present and the past.

“Maybe.”

“Maybe you might begin to see men without the filter of your father’s image.”

“My mother feared that my father would kill her.”

“What did he try to do?”

“He tried to poison her.”

“It is hard for a child to develop a secure personality under such tension.”

“She was always on my side. She is a better person for all her suffering. I admire her.”

“Do you think that suffering makes a person noble?”

“Definitely. I always had trouble relating to people who had an easy time in life. They are so naïve.”

“Maybe you envy their happiness.”

“Maybe. You feel different from other kids when you were abused.”

Now that Karen is talking about the past, I help her begin some reconstructive work (integrating psychological memories into a meaningful sense of self).

I say, “I understand. What do you remember?”

“I remember them shouting and screaming all the time. I used to cover my ears in bed at night. I’d hold my teddy that mom gave me when she had to go to the hospital.”

“Why did she go to the hospital?”

“Because of my dad.”

## Chapter 14 Growing Closer

Oct. 14

“Alla, I don’t have many photos of myself to send to you, since I am the one that takes the pictures.”

“Why don’t you have many photos of yourself, my lovely handsome hero? No doubt, many women lose their brain and heart when they meet you. Robert, I think you look like a sweet, strong, charming, cute, smart, evil creature. Ha! You can collect souls and bodies of women who voluntary sell their souls to you . . . You are a gentle vulture!”

“You are safe with me, sweetheart.”

“I do not believe it . . . Any man who dares so easily to try to tame me must be a wolf that has an image of the innocent sheep . . . When you said to me about your ex-girlfriend Rachel . . . I felt jealousy. I must admit . . . I dare to have you as only my gift from God. I dare to be jealous! Oo-la-la! . . . I am really sorry, Dr. Gordon. My Modesty is having a nap right now!”

“Luba is a friend that teaches Russian literature at a local university. I asked her to translate some of your poetry. She was impressed with your brilliance.”

“My Angel, you have a Luba, a Rachel, and a Natasha. You sound like spoiled old gigolo. You frighten me. I know that Virgo is an emblem of chastity, purity, and devotion. You do not seem like an emblem of chastity.”

“It’s safe to assume that everyone born in early September has not remained a virgin. But the quality of one’s friendships is a better measure of a person.”

###

Oct. 18

“Alla, this weekend I sat down with a pile of your emails and photos and reread them and stared at all your pictures.”

“I did the same! Oh, Lord. You copy me! I am eating your flesh and I am drinking your sweet juice of love. You are my food for wit and heart. You are my breakfast, lunch, and supper. I ask myself, how is it possible that I can fall more and more in love with you?”

“I feel the same. It’s only the beginning. Wait. It will only get more intense.”

“Can I survive it? My first idea in morning and I open my eyes, is about you. My last idea, when I fall asleep, is about you as well . . . You are my narcotic . . . I need a big dose of you each day. How much more can it get without my becoming totally lost?”

“I’ve been trying to write an article on a unified theory of romantic love. Instead of being inspired, I feel totally distracted from my work.”

“I’m not theory. Wait until you have my leg wrapped over you. Take this gift from God . . . It’s yours. It belonged to you for the last 3,000 years . . . You only were not ready to receive it earlier.”

“God didn’t help me. I had to rely on Internet.”

“Why do you think you answered that silly ad? And why do you think I pulled your letter from the sack of hundreds of letters? Do you know that I prayed to God at night to send me a man that is worthy and fit to be with me?”

“And this is how he punishes you?”

“My dear, the paradise here and now, exists. Even one touch to your palm from me can replace ten wild sexual adventures”

“I can’t wait to hold hands with you. Why not make it both hands?”

“I prefer to satisfy the spirit first.”

“Fine, I will start by fondling your soul.”

“Robert, do you want to hear my psychological diagnosis for you, my dear?”

“Gigolo?”

“Someday, my Angel . . . you’ll stop thinking about your ex-lovers. And you will stop talking about your new love. You’ll not share it with former lovers or your friends. You will to hide this and to protect it as your huge secret, because after division of your deep feelings with casual people, this love can lose her true, secret meaning.”

“Alla, real love doesn’t have to be protected from reality.”

“This is very important . . . I want to smell your heat of desire, knowing that it is only mine. And that I am exclusively for you . . . I want to think something and have you understand me . . . Sometimes even finish my sentences for me . . . I want to know that we think the same on spiritual plane. Do you understand what I mean . . . you old gigolo?”

“So now I’m called an ‘old gigolo!’ We old gigolos have slowed down and now can savor the glances, fragrances, and touches. We give sweet kisses that express the deepest tenderness. We are sensitive to discovering the secrets to your responses. We take time for your pleasure. Our sexuality is deeper and more multifaceted. We have the wisdom for loving you with body, emotion, and soul.”

“Oh, Robert! More! If you know more than me, please teach me how to really love, my Guru . . . I want to be the perfect woman, Idol, Coryphaeus for you. I am capable to love endlessly . . . For the next 3,000 years . . . Is it a sufficient term for you?”

“I’m shooting for another 30 years in good health. Three thousand seems exhausting. Speaking of exhausting, after my flight to Saint

Petersburg, I'll take a cab to the hotel. I'll sleep and call you the next morning."

"No way! I shall meet you at the airport. Will you forbid to me to meet you at the airport? As for me, I hate when nobody meets me after my trips. Even if you'll say to me, that you're tired and want to be alone after your long trip . . . and bla-bla-bla-bla, I know all your subconscious reasons, by the way. I will just meet you and I'll take you to the hotel and I shall leave for home . . . I wanna ask you a few common questions, 'How was your flight?' or 'Are you hungry, dear?' It's my pleasure to care about you . . . You will feel my strength and loving calm as it protects you."

"Thank you. What should I pack? Any fashion tips from a pro?"

"I should study your individuality completely at first. Give me an opportunity to understand—that you want from life. What ambitions should be satisfied? What type of the women you want to tame? Tell to me about your most confidential, most crazy, wild, mad desires. Last advice of your professional stylist, come naked. We shall buy here all new clothes for you."

"Will I look like a Russian gigolo?"

"Ha! Did anyone say you were a little sarcastic?"

"The word 'little' was never used."

"I am sending for you a thousand warm smiles. The autumn and wet foliage in Saint Petersburg waits for your steps . . . My heart counts each minute. You are mine for eternity."

# # #

Oct. 19

"Please, my swan, tell me about your day. What is it like to be a psychologist?"



“I wrestle with demons that live in people’s souls. Sometimes the demons act as psychic parasites, so compromising a person’s life and happiness, that there is little true-self left. Some demons kill hope with depression, some kill relationships with hostility. I can understand why most religions believe in demons and perform exorcism. I tame demons with empathy and insight. It changes both the patient and me.”

“I already knew about your work. Please, trust me. I know almost everything about you . . . Maybe, I was created for the goal to have war with any Evil. Therefore you have chosen me as your assistant . . . You are just tired having this war in loneliness . . . My dear, I wrestle with demons as well . . . I know about exorcisms. And I know the recipes for this purpose . . . I specially studied it and used for my own body and soul. I have no fear of demons now. I’ll tell you about my religious faith and why they fear my fire . . . Maybe, you’ll find your new sweet home close to me.”

“Honey, I love your spiritual metaphors.”

“My swan, there are things that are difficult for your western mind.”

## Chapter 15 Insight

Karen walks into the session angry. She is much later than usual. Roy looks up and then goes back to his nap behind my chair. He knows not to approach her.

“Are you okay?” I ask.

“Dr. Gordon, you didn’t get my message that I would be late?”

“There is nothing on my voice mail.”

“You asked me to call if I was going to be late. So I called.”

“What did the out-going message say?” I question to encourage reality testing.

From Karen’s explanation, I could tell that she had left her message on my secretary’s voice mail instead of on mine. I had told her to always leave messages for me on my voice mail.

As with most rationalizations, her reasoning for doing that only makes sense to her.

Karen says, “I am used to working with doctors. I leave messages with their secretaries. What kind of orgasm do you have anyway?”

“You mean organization?”

Her sadomasochistic sexual feelings seized on the similarity of the word “organization.” Karen’s slip of the tongue (or “parapraxis”) is an unconscious communication (Freud, 1966; Motley, 1985). It may be an expression of her Oedipal conflicts transferred on to me. As a child,

Karen could not finish mastering her sexual feelings and develop a sense of comfort with her father. Now she may be unconsciously beginning to work on them with me.

Her lateness could mean many things. It could be a compromise between her wish to come and her wish not to come. It could be her need to be in control of the relationship by having control of the time that we meet. But by her slip it might mean that she is trying not to feel close to me. We have been working on her fear of depending on me. She might both fear and wish for intimacy with me. Karen is confused by intimacy. She sexualizes it. Unconsciously she might sense that the professional relationship and boundary is so secure, that it is safe to begin to repair her developmental arrest. But at the same time she can't imagine that the boundary would remain safe. Her lateness may be an expression of this conflict.

Karen blushes, holds her hands over her face, and says, "That is such a Freudian slip! Don't you say another word!"

Karen's acknowledgment of this slip is a turning point that would elude just about anyone but a psychoanalyst.

She is now getting things on two levels, the concrete overt level and symbolic covert level. She is finally acknowledging unconscious symbolic motivation. People who are overly concrete in their thinking have trouble with insight, therapy, and relationships.

Karen says, "Maybe I left the message on the wrong machine for unconscious reasons. I didn't want to come today."

Karen would rather give me an insight about her resistance, than look at anything sexual. I accept the compromise and let myself feel thrilled by her use of insight.

"Good insight! Why?"

"I don't like feeling dependent on you. I feel like fighting with you" (Foehrenbach, 1994).

“Maybe that’s why you fight with your mother so much, to feel distinct.”

“She wants me to stop coming here. She doesn’t believe in it. Maybe this should be my last session.”

## Chapter 16 Ready to Leave for Russia

Oct. 21

“Ha, Robert, you got the phone bill. So you think now you should marry me so you don’t have such a bill? I don’t think it is the cheaper solution.”

“How can I be without you?”

“What about my harmful habits, mad dances, what about my craziness, my bad whims, my laziness, my love to freedom of movement, my sins, my proud style, my wild rhythm of life, my night fears, my uncertainty, my independence and rebelliousness, my need for a rich existence, unsatisfied ambitions, my spontaneous stupid acts, my obstinacy and my habit to hover in the clouds . . . my habit to make an elephant out of a fly, my need to be first violin, my habit to go against the stream, my habit to live like a rooster in fruit jelly . . . my habit of hewing down the bough on which I am sitting, and my habit to never tell, ‘I promise?’”

“Did you leave anything out? Why do you show me your dark side just when I try to be close?”

“I am not a Miss Perfect. Some call me mad . . . Robert, be vigilant. You can buy a cat instead of a rabbit . . . My swan, it is love when you tell someone something bad about yourself and you’re scared they won’t love you anymore. But then you get surprised because not only do they still love you, they love you even more.”

*(This is a warning. At some level, Alla knows that she is difficult. She might want to see if her warning would scare me off. I know that*

*after the initial stage of attraction people may begin to show their faults to test if they will still be loved. Perhaps she wants to see if I could love her, faults and all.)*

“Robert, I can change my appearance as a chameleon. I can be a child, sex-bomb, ice girl, angel, stuck-up bitch, siren, Cleopatra, or Penelope. I can be paradoxical things.”

*(Alla boasted that she is a chameleon. This is not due to talent; rather, she may have no secure identity—no clear sense of who she is. This is a common stage in adolescence. Since adolescents have a weak identity, they often go to extremes to define themselves through things such as clothing and hairstyle. Alla is proud of her shifting images and rationalizes that she is stylish, because she is part of the fashion and entertainment world. But she may have no solid self-concept but rather intense, fluctuating personality shifts. One day she is a giving angel and the next day she is an insatiable demon. She may carry little memory or history into each personality state.)*

“Alla, how do you all get along?”

“If I begin to laugh, the world laughs together with me. If I begin to cry—oh . . . birds do not sing. It will be nice to shock you . . . just a little bit. Ha. Only do not cancel your trip to me, please! Do not disappear. You asked me about my crazy style . . . All my madness is in my love . . .”

“Honey, of course I am coming. But could all your madness be in something else? Put it back into the creativity. What do you mean by, ‘harmful habits . . . my sins’? What sins?”

“My swan, for sincere answers for all your questions I prefer to have warm evening with good red wine and burning candles, face-to-face, soul-to-soul with you. Naked in the bath; I will see a thousand pink petals on the water around me . . . I will inhale aroma of vanilla . . . I will be drunk and I will feel taste of your salty milk on my lips. . . . Oh, Gosh! It’s a long conversation . . . I do not want to discuss it not seeing your eyes.”

“Sounds like a good moment for something deep.”

“It is possible, that I shall meet you at the airport with my best girlfriend and her car. By the way, my girlfriend Julia is Jewish. Always I was loved by this nation. Why, I just wonder? Maybe, you will feel Jewish love for her.”

“We connect to what feels familiar.”

“We can be in masks—Miss Piggy and Miss Froggy. We’ll have the bumper stickers for the typical Russian car: ‘I couldn’t repair the brakes, so I made the horn louder.’”

“In that case, if it’s not too much trouble we can get a cab to my hotel. I can shower and change, and we can go to dinner if it’s not too late.”

“I told you. I’ll take care of you. You will feel my care close to you all the time . . . Do not deprive me to have bliss to help you, to buy gifts for your friends; to force you to laugh all the time, to make you happy is my favorite act . . . It is my opium . . . How do you drive me so crazy Robert? I was inaccessible. I was whimsical . . . I said ‘No!’ to many men . . . I have avoided marriage for all my life . . . Why YOU?”

“Why *you*? I usually do not go 5,000 miles for a date. New Jersey used to be too far.”

“How do you do that? You are a pro . . . I forgot that you are a pro! Oh, my Lord. I relaxed with you! I shared many personal feelings and desires with you. Now, I know—it is dangerous. Especially with such a gentle pirate, as Dr. Gordon! Maybe, because subconsciously I am ready to be the most beautiful bride on the planet.”

“Not so unconsciously. What are your traditions?”

“We go to a special building and sign papers and get drunk. Only recently weddings are becoming western and religious. So where is my



magnificent, stylish white dress and ring with a diamond? I would want to know about the American traditions.”

“Weddings here are mainly religious, since it is believed that God arranges marriages in heaven. When he gets tired, he lets Satan arrange some. Did you see the film *Father of the Bride*?”

“Yes! I love this movie. Can you imagine us as a couple?”

“Our cupids are Nietzsche and Freud.”

“Not bad. If this love doesn’t kill me, it will make me unconscious! . . . My brain . . . my brain does not give me satisfaction. I suppose, my savannah’s baked grasses would prefer a good breeze, Robert!”

“Because this relationship is impossible—that makes it so romantic.”

“I must admit, I try don’t allow to myself to love you like crazy and I repeat this phrase a few times per day. I try to freeze my heart and to block my brain, Dr. Gordon. Though, if tell the truth, for me it is very natural to adore you, my Angel. I try vainly to not think of my desires to you, Dr. Gigolo.”

“Even if nothing else happens, I am so grateful for having known you.”

“How are you such charming person? Tell me your secret, please . . . How did you so easily tame this wild woman? I should have the weapon resist to your boundless charm. Help me! When I hear your laughter, your velvety voice I have only one desire—to force the world to disappear.”

“I’d like to take credit for earning your passion, but this is one of those times when the irrationality is working in my favor.”

###

Alla is in conflict over her wish to marry me and her fear of marriage. For Alla, marriage represents a rescue on a conscious level and

on an unconscious level—a danger. Alla's fear of marriage and the denial of her fear is a dangerous combination. How would she resolve her conflict?

# # #

Oct. 26

“Alla, I see witches coming down my driveway.”

“Are your old girlfriends coming to cook you?”

“‘Stay illusion! Speak to me . . . you spirits that walk in death’.”

“Hamlet! What's up Robert?”

“Excuse me please. They are at the door.”

“Who? Are you drunk? . . . You don't drink . . . Robert????”

“You don't have Halloween in Russia do you?”

“Ha! No need for it. We steal everyday without the masks . . . I want to inform you about my preparations for your arrival. I have cancelled all my lectures and trips. I only have one TV show to record . . . You will be there for this . . . You have my invitation for dinner with my parents. We'll choose any evening for this supper with tasty Russian food and candles . . . if you do not object. I have the best tickets for the opera *Carmen* . . . I am a friend with the director. I will give you the best tour of my city. The city was built in devotion to beauty, the dream of Trezzini . . . I will show you palaces and the Hermitage paintings. I will tell you their stories . . . These were the playgrounds of my childhood. We will go to the shops and cafes of Nevsky Prospekt, and show you my work at the Parisian Café. I will give you the helm of the Aurora, my Odysseus . . . I have a few other crazy ideas for you . . . I will tell you when you come.”

“I wonder what your parents will think.”

“They will be charming. Do not worry. I am waiting for you. I pray for you. Perhaps deepest love comes into one’s life by walking gently up to you like an old friend through quiet ways—perhaps love unfolds naturally at the start of a beautiful friendship. What do you think, my alter ego?”

# # #

Oct. 28

“Alla, your dad and I spoke. I like his voice. He sounds kind.”

“My dad is very kind. Much more than me, by the way. I think with age brings wisdom and kindness for smart people.”

“I am so sorry if I woke him. Tell him that I apologize.”

“No need for apology, my dear. Don’t worry, please. You woke nobody. Nobody at home can sleep before I come back home. It is a tradition. They so badly do love me, that Mum and Dad cannot fall asleep without my presence at home.”

“You’re lucky to have such loving parents. We will have fun together. We’ll go slowly. I will shake your hand at the airport and say, ‘Hello, I’m Robert. Are you my lovely guide?’”

“And I will smile and say: ‘Yes, Dr. Gordon, I am Alla, your guide. Be so kind, follow me, please.’”

“What do you think the odds are that we might not have chemistry for one another?”

“At most one thousandth of a percent. I will be waiting for you. I have been waiting for a very long time. I pray for your safe trip, my love.”

“I am leaving now. I will see you soon. I love you.”

# # #

I drive to JFK airport with a euphoric anxiety. I am about to go on a very long first date to a distant and different land. I had traveled extensively but I had never been to Russia. In the beginning of the 20th century, my ancestors fled Russia due to the Tsar-sanctioned anti-Jewish laws and bloody pogroms. I remember their stories—loving the people but hating the government. It is both foreign and part of my history.

I bring along many of Alla's emails and photos to enjoy during the long flight. In addition to Alla's charms, all this effort to meet her creates an even more powerful force to love her. However, will she love me? When I was a boy, there was that long walk across the room to ask a girl to dance. The walk back after she said "No thank you," was even longer. I hope that the flight back will not seem even longer. What will she really be like?

## Chapter 17 First Meeting

Oct. 30

I walk from the plane at Saint Petersburg's airport. I can see the crowd inside the terminal peering out. I look at the faces. I see Alla. The doors open.

Glamorous in red leather coat and long blue scarf, Alla stands out. At first, she looks anxious, and then she breaks into a smile as our eyes meet. She looks even prettier in person.

"Hello. I'm Dr. Gordon. I hope you are Alla, my guide."

Alla shakes my hand and with a charming grin says, "Yes, Dr. Gordon, I will take care of you during your trip to our fair city. How was your flight? Are you hungry? Please let me lead you to your luggage."

# # #

During the cab ride to the hotel, we joke and flirt. She is all that I had hoped for and more.

She comes up with me to my hotel room and waits while I shower and change. As we begin to leave for dinner, I help her with her coat. I brush her silky black hair away from her large almond brown eyes and kiss her. It is the first magical kiss at the start of a romance, a kiss to melt boundaries, never to be forgotten, a prelude to our physical passion that says, "We are to be lovers."

# # #

We go to her favorite restaurant, the Parisian café. Its theme is fashion. Fashion photos she had taken are on the walls, as well as a large

photo of her. She introduces me to some colleagues who are at the bar, who work on TV with her. Then we go to her favorite table.

After enough charming talk, I lean closer to her and touch my nose to hers and softly say, “Hey.”

Alla stares into my eyes. Small tears run down her face. For a while, she says nothing. I feel her vulnerability, which makes me love her more.

# # #

She walks with me to my hotel room. The air is crisp, like autumn in New York, but it is nothing like an American city. Saint Petersburg is uniquely beautiful, latticed with canals, full of story-book grand palaces and cathedrals. Alla teases me when I stop and stare at the architecture. “Robert, you look like a child in Wonderland.”

It is the perfect fairy tale setting for a fairy tale romance. What began as a whim is now a reality. I am in Saint Petersburg with one of the most beautiful women I had ever seen.

People know Alla and defer to her. She is indeed, the queen of Saint Petersburg. Besides her TV show, Alla had performed on stage as a singer and dancer. She sometimes sings her words and combines her sexy walk with dance steps and twirls. She is dramatic, but pulls it off with feminine charm and flair.

# # #

Alla enjoys showing me her city. She is a great guide and planned each day. The day after my arrival, she arranges for me to have a massage at a spa. A pretty, young woman takes me to a private room.

Alla follows us. She sits next to me and whispers in my ear, “Darling, she is too pretty and you are too cute an American man. I am going to sit here and make sure this bitch only gives you a proper massage. You are mine alone to pleasure. You are all mine, Robert.”

# # #

We are together constantly for six days. The first few days Alla puts her hands around my neck and pretends to choke me as she says “Why YOU?” By the third day, “Why YOU?” gives way to another phrase. Alla gives me the longest and sweetest look, and then looking up, says, “Thank you, God.”

# # #

Alla had studied art and was, as she promised, my guide through the Hermitage Art Museum, a place I have longed to visit. She says, “Maurice Denis painted these seven panels between 1908 and 1909. They are about the love and marriage of Psyche and Eros. Oh, honey, I adore his Nabis style! Apuleius tells this story in *Metamorphoses*. It is a story about us, my swan! Here Eros—the Romans later called him Cupid—sees Psyche and falls in love with her. That angers Venus, his mother. So then Eros makes love to Psyche secretly in the dark. Oo-la-la! When Psyche lit a lamp to see who he was, he awakens and flees. You see Robert some things like love are better left to mystery.”

I say, “Eros could not stay with Psyche because he was too tied to his mother. So he could only play with passion and not commit. Only because of Psyche’s courage do they marry. Psyche is the mother of my science. Psychology is a science that looks at passion so it might stay.”

“You will transform me my Guru as Psyche did for Eros.”

“Have you ever been this comfortable with a man?”

“Never, my darling! And never this much in love.”

# # #

Alla takes me to her home, while her parents are visiting friends. Her condominium is the third floor of a stately three-story building in a beautiful section of Saint Petersburg. The stairway is old and worn, but the inside of their home is impressive. They have beautiful antique



furniture, a large library and Alla's paintings hanging on the walls of every room. In her room, the largest of the home, she has an office area with her computer and satellite TV<sup>6</sup>, with about a thousand music CDs that go from the floor to the high ceiling. There are photos of Alla from all over the world. We lay on her bed as she shows me a catalogue of some of her fashion designs.

Alla asks me to pick my favorite bathrobe from about ten pictures. I have a definite favorite.

She smiles and reaches under her bed and pulls out a gift-wrapped box. "Here is a gift for you, darling, and a lesson about my intuition."

I open the box and it is the robe that I had just selected. I tell her that I love it and then I look under her bed to see if there are other boxes. I see only a sack.

Alla laughs, "So you didn't believe me! I see it will take time for you to truly appreciate my unique nature."

"What would you have done if I had picked another robe?"

Alla straddles me and kisses me. "Oh, darling, I'm never wrong. Did you see that sack? I saved it to show you."

She pulls out the sack and opens it. It bulges with hundreds of letters.

"These sacks of letters came all the time from men from all over the world who want to marry me. This was the sack that had your letter. I had grown tired of all the mail and began to throw them away. But one night in September after returning from a trip, I reached into the sack and decided to give it one last try. I had a strange intuition about it. Robert, I pulled out your letter. I saw your photo and read your letter. Then I knew. I knew, but I needed you to understand that we were meant to be. I was patient with you. You will soon better understand other

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<sup>6</sup> At this time, very few people had this technology in Russia. Alla needs a special computer and software for her fashion designs.

ways of reality, perhaps strange for your American mentality. Robert, I know many things. I know that we were lovers in another time and that we have been looking for each other for eons.”

I am beginning to wonder if she did have special powers. I feel like I entered another world, another dimension. I am totally under her spell.

Alla puts on a CD and dances around her room. She dances over to me and slides on to me. Her eyes survey my face as a tear falls.

“Robert, I’ve never let myself feel like this. I love you madly. I want you.”

# # #

She told me that her mom had been sick all week, stressed by the possibility that her only child might leave her to go to America. The next day I arrive for dinner with her parents. When I meet Alla’s mother, she is formal. I know I have my work cut out for me. Thankfully, Alla’s father is immediately friendly.

The mother, Irina, is a little older than I am. She is elegant and beautiful, with wise sensitive eyes, like Alla’s. Her stepfather, Vladimir, in his sixties, has a head of thick white hair and an athletic build. He is distinguished-looking and has kind, smiling eyes.

Irina prepared a lavish elaborate meal, with lots of delicious food, flowers, and candles. I give Vladimir a watch and Irina a pin. They are surprised and grateful.

Irina announces through an interpreter, Olga, a Jewish language teacher, “Robert, you are our guest. Dinner will be pleasant as long as no one says anything serious.”

For a moment I wonder why they are using an interpreter and not Alla. Alla is strangely quiet all through the meal and deferential to her parents. The vodka flows like water. The food is wonderful with all kinds of fish, caviar, meats, chicken, Russian salads, vegetables, and home-baked pastries.

Finally, Irina can stand it no more and blurts out: “Why are you divorced?”

“I loved my wife and marriage, but she was not loving to me. I hoped she would change. On our eleventh anniversary, I asked her if she loved me. She told me that she had never loved me, but she added, ‘Don’t take it personally, I can’t love anyone.’ She has remained alone since then, without involvements. I had fifty percent custody of my children. This past summer my youngest child left for college. Please ask me anything you wish. I welcome the opportunity for you to know me. I understand your concern. I am sorry I have been the source of such stress for you.”

After asking me several more personal questions and seemingly satisfied with all answers, Irina switches to Alla.

“You know nothing about Alla’s bad habits, do you?”

“I am sure her good points outweigh her bad.”

“She will leave you within three years. She left three other men she was to marry. She was engaged formally twice and ran from all of them. She is terrified of marriage.”

“Maybe because she wasn’t with the right one.”

Irina continues her warnings. “Do you know about her terrible moods?”

“Only from her over use of exclamation points.”

I feel that because Irina could not find good fault with me, she is now trying to discourage me by warning me about Alla’s faults.

“Irina, if your daughter had such bad habits, you’d be pushing her on me rather than trying to scare me off.”

“Robert, all your answers are clever, but time will tell.”

Natasha, a charming Russian woman I had dated briefly a few months ago, had taught me to drink a shot of vodka in a single gulp. She'd say, "If you take the 'k' out of vodka it becomes "voda" which means water, so you drink it in a single gulp like water."

Taking Natasha's advice seemed a good way to quickly dispense with the glass Vladimir had put before me. But when Vladimir sees me gulp down my vodka, his eyebrows shoot up, and he laughs. He then refills my shot glass with more vodka apparently thinking that my "Nyet spaseeba" ("No thank you") is my just being polite.

I am not much of a drinker, so it didn't take long to get me drunk. I chat on about Russian literature and history. They are surprised that an American knows so much about Russia and has good manners. I think they expected a rude cowboy who would put his boots on the table and belch. Rather, we are all having a great time drinking, telling stories, and sharing jokes.

Vladimir is a riot—toasting to break the tension, and doing imitations of Leonid Brezhnev. I respond with my imitation of Ronald Reagan, which sends them into fits.

Vladimir and I have a competition telling jokes.

"OK did you hear this one?" I say. "The teacher asks the class, 'What happened in 1799?' Uri, the Jewish boy, says, 'That is the year our beloved poet Pushkin was born.' The teacher says, 'Great, Uri, and do you know what happened in the year 1812?' Uri replies, 'Yes, that is the year that our beloved poet Pushkin had his Bar Mitzvah.'"

They roar with laughter.

I say, "I'm surprised that you know that Jewish boys are Bar Mitzvahed at thirteen."

Irina says, "We've been to a few Bar Mitzvahs, but I'm surprised that an American knows Pushkin."

Alla had been strangely silent while her mother was warning me of her terrible moods and fear of marriage. She had quietly left the table and went to her room. I go to her room and find her subdued and drinking her Hennessy.

Just then, Alla's friend and family physician visits to see how Irina is holding up. Tanya, a little older than Alla, beautiful and redheaded, now joins us in Alla's room after speaking with the parents. Tanya shakes my hand and speaks in Russian to Alla.

Alla then turns to me. "Tanya said, 'Robert is like Julius Caesar, he came, he saw, and he conquered. They think he has very good manners, that he is bright, kind, and in love. They like him, but are worried about the situation, not Robert.'"

At the end of the evening Alla's parents shake my hand, and tell me that it was a real pleasure meeting me. Olga whispers in my ear, "Robert, Alla will not find a man like you in Russia. You are a real catch. Don't be deterred by the mother."

I love her parents. I could see by how they look at and touch each other that they are still in love after all the years. They both adore Alla. Seeing Alla with her wonderful parents gives me the final assurance. Alla comes from good people. Moreover, it turns out that she is dramatic but clearly normal. Her emotional reactions are cultural.

As she walks with me back to my hotel—moonlight above, vodka in my blood, and love in my heart—I look at her and say, "Will you marry me?"

Alla stops and grabs me and says, "You know my answer!"

"Say it."

She has tears in her eyes and shouts louder, leaping with each word, "Yes! Yes! Yes!"

I am in heaven in Saint Petersburg, Russia. My imagination never considered such enchantment.

# # #

On my last day, Alla comes at 4 a.m. to take me to the airport. Before we leave, in my room she says, “Wait. Sit next to your luggage and meditate on your trip for a minute or two. It’s a Russian tradition.”

At the airport, she gives me a gift. “Open this when you are on your way. I will be watching until I can no longer see the plane. I will be watching until I see only my tears as my heart empties. Oh, my darling, what am I to do without you? I need to be with you always!”

On the plane, I open the gift. It is a woven heart and a note that reads, “Robert, you take my heart with you. Take good care of it. I love you so much. Your fiancée, Alla.”

She had just given me the six best days of my life. I entered a dimension beyond what I felt possible and only imagined. What happened? An objective psychologist might use Tennov’s (1979) term that I am in a “limerence”—that is, a euphoric delusional state of romantic love. Nevertheless, I broke out of conventional thinking, took a risk, and now I feel totally in love as I fly in the clouds.

## Chapter 18 The Romantic High

Nov. 5

“Robert, are you home and safe?”

“Hey, fiancée, I just got home.”

“Oh, Robert!!! How I miss you. You can’t imagine! Do you know how much I love you? Do you? . . . I almost didn’t sleep all night because I waited for your call. Oh, my love . . . Please, Robert, next time, after any your trips, promise to call me any time, even in the middle of the night, it doesn’t matter for me! I need to hear just one phrase, ‘Alla, I am okay, I am safe and sound’. Okay? I am a typical Jewish mum. I need to know everything about my native people. Especially about you. Promise me, dear.”

“I will. I promise.”

“I had such magical, strange, crazy pictures from our previous life I saw in our first evening in the Parisian Café. I must tell you how God has shown me that you are my real half, my soul mate, my 5th Element, my destiny.”

“I saw such deep feelings in your eyes. What did you see?”

“Honey, when I first saw you at the airport and told polite bullshit to you, I thought, ‘Fuck! I am half-dead! I melt!’ I feel the separating of my brain and my body. Oh, my God! Where is my pulse? I could not breathe at all! Then after 10 minutes in airport, I joked and flirted with you, I knew ‘you belong to me. Oh, I am your helpless victim and can’t breathe. Oo-la-la! What’s up?’

Then in your hotel room when you kissed me, I felt, ‘You scatter my ashes above ground and sky. I disintegrate. You are a villain! I am completely mad. Oh, spare me Robert, please! I am in love. Where is my pulse?’

Your tenderness made me drunk. My elaborate, extravagant scaffold, melted. I already felt myself like plasticine in your hands, my Rodin.

And in the Parisian cafe, after a few hours of your arrival, when you touched your nose to mine and said, ‘Hey!’ . . . I began to cry. I saw many images from our previous life together. I was sure. At that moment I said to myself, ‘I am yours for eternity!’ I love you madly!”

# # #

Nov. 6

“Thank you, dear for wiring all this money for me, but Robert, I don’t understand—what is this?”

“You were exhausted from all your work. I will be sending you that each month until you come here.”

“I think, maybe better to refuse to accept this money. Believe me! It is easy because my royal origin is priceless!”

“It’s concern for your welfare.”

“This Russian designer, who will be rich and famous in America in five to seven years, will return to you a big profit someday. Thank you, my soul mate.”

“You are an attractive investment. I will take pleasure in my deposits.”

“I am the perfect vessel for this purpose. It’s a big pleasure to feel strong support behind my back. You give me a magic reliance and



feeling of stability. I never had stability in my life! I need you. When you asked me, ‘What is the most you have earned in a month?’ I never thought that you would send me that. To tell the truth I am exhausted.”

“Honey, how are you feeling?”

“My Angel, I have a huge weakness now. I should have stayed in bed all past week! But it would have destroyed my plans for your funny and great trip to Russia. No way! I could allow to no one, even myself to break my plans. I used all my stock of internal energy.”

“You should have told me. I saw that you were tired; that’s why I said for us to skip the opera.”

“I can be an excellent actress. I can deceive all spectators. I cannot be ill tomorrow! Fuck! All the companies will be at the show tomorrow. People already called me and asked to give an interview.”

“What’s the point of being an actress with me?”

“When you left me, my organism said to me, ‘Alla! Fuck you, Lady! I am fatally exhausted!’ . . . All my sunny energy, all my power goes into my love for you! I remind you that I miss you madly!!! I really don’t know how much you love me. Please prove it to me!”

###

Shelle, my office manager, works hard on the fiancée visa. We made it a priority. I worry how Alla, who is a queen in Saint Petersburg, would adjust to Allentown, Pennsylvania. Alla’s grand, fragile ego is embedded in Russia and her family. As much as Alla complains about Russia, she is famous and successful there. Alla might live in London or Paris, but America is too far away from her over-protective family and social recognition. Alla’s identity might not be secure enough for her to move far from her queendom. I prepare for her life here, but I remain fearful of her ability to make the adjustment.

## Chapter 19 Separation Issues

“If you were killed would I be notified?”

“I would think that you would be the first to know.” I laugh.

“Your sense of humor has kept you alive.” Karen giggles warmly.

A patient with a poor sense of humor will have problems with interpretations, since both humor and interpretation depend on understanding both a manifest and latent meaning in language. Moreover, the ability to laugh at one’s self shows a degree of self-reflection and acceptance of one’s imperfections. Karen’s question about my being killed is a mixture of her fear of losing me and anger at feeling dependent on me. My joke is also an interpretation of her aggression. Karen’s joking back is her acknowledgement of her aggression and an appreciation of my being able to understand and contain it.

“Where did you go? Did you fly? I always hated flying.”

Karen’s fear of flying is a symbolic symptom. Real traumas work differently. I went to Israel in 1991 during the Scud missile attacks from Iraq. When I returned to Israel a year later, I interviewed some of the people I had seen during the attacks. I was shocked. They had bad memories, but few lasting psychological effects. If the same thing happened in our country, the trauma would be profound and lasting. The Israelis I spoke to were very patriotic and felt that they were all in it together. They had a strong support system. Right after a Scud missile exploded and sirens sounded the “all clear,” phones rang. People came to each other’s aid. The country felt like one family. When people have a good support system, they can better metabolize their traumas. I am uncertain of the nature of Karen’s childhood traumas, but it seems that her support system may have been inadequate to help her metabolize it.

A phobia or any psychological symptom is an unconscious way of saying that there is unfinished unconscious business. Karen feels too dependent on her mother. I wonder if her dependency on her is also related to her fear of intimacy with men (Shaver and Clark, 1994). I wonder if Karen feels that she is betraying her mother by loving a man. I wonder if Karen can emotionally separate from her mother. Fear of flying is about separation from the security of earth. Fear of flying is about being trapped and having to be dependent on someone for safety. Flying is about trusting that there is support. Flying can be a trigger for lots of unresolved childhood issues.

I venture an interpretation. “Maybe your fear of flying is related to your feeling trapped with no support.”

“My doctor told me that it is because of my inner ear.”

That went nowhere. Karen’s mother is idealized. For now it’s best to avoid the topic of her dependency issues with her mother. I will go back to her father issues since they are more accessible.

“Didn’t you tell me that your father tried to poison your mother? Was he arrested for it?”

“He left town. I didn’t like you being away. I wanted to quit therapy to get even. Then I thought ‘How stupid is that?’ I thought you might be killed.”

I’m not sure if that is her fear or her wish. Karen is transferring her dependency issues on to me. This would allow her to work them through and hopefully become maturely interdependent.

“Tell me more about this abandonment fear.”

“It’s not about you. When I was four my mom locked herself in her room because she was so scared of father. My mom felt that father was going to kill her because she discovered his secrets. Mom had finally found proof of his affairs. She had to go to the hospital after that. I remember it like it was yesterday.”

“Where were you?”

“I only remember parts of it.”

“Do your best.”

“Father came home and found me crying and, I think, covered in vomit. I was lying outside mom’s bedroom door. She wouldn’t let me in. I remember her screaming inside her room. I was very scared for her. I was screaming ‘Mommy, are you okay?’ I remember her screaming for help as the bad men took her away. I was hysterical. I couldn’t save her from the bad men. I remember visiting her in the hospital. My favorite aunt, my father’s baby sister, Michelle, took care of me. Mom was on ward six at Allentown hospital. I work there now as a psychiatric nurse. My mom bought me my teddy at the gift shop on my visit. I slept with it for years. Father left the house soon after that. He wanted custody of me. He lived at Trexler Apartments, apartment 108. I went there to visit him. Thank God he didn’t get custody of me.”

## Chapter 20 On Proving Love

Nov. 7

“Alla, how are you feeling?”

“Hello, my swan. I am feeling not well.”

“I sent an email for your parents thanking them for everything and inviting them to email me through you.”

“Thank you, Robert.”

“Alla, you asked me to prove my love to you? I will tell you. I broke my age rule for you. I would have a child with you. With you, I made an exception about religion. You are more important to me than anything in heaven or on earth. I would never ask someone to marry me unless I dated her for at least a few months. With you, it was only a matter of three weeks. I saw how you had three jobs and hardly sleeping. You were worn out. I want to help you out financially even at this point in our relationship, because I care about you. I traveled over 5,000 miles to Russia to see you. I reread your emails many times, savoring every word and every picture. I think about you constantly. I totally crave you and hunger for you. The words don’t even come close to telling you how much. Rest, recover, and feel my love, my passion, and my concern.”

# # #

Nov. 8

“Honey, are you feeling better?”

“Robert, I feel awful. I have doubts that you really understand me.”

“Why?”

“You can’t imagine, my lovely doctor Gordon, how many efforts are required for my trust. It is a long sad history from my childhood. The reason that I do not trust the men in my life is not your fault. Certainly, it’s about the fault of my native father.”

“I guessed this.”

“I shall tell you a pair of histories from my past. I hope we shall not come back to these histories. My past means nothing for me since you appeared in my life. I simply want to clear the bullshit in your head. Okay?”

“Okay.”

“Today, maybe I will be as an equal guru for you, an equal to your psychological abilities?”

“Go on.”

“I had two engagements in my life. You heard from my mum. This man left his wife and child immediately after meeting me. I was the reason for his divorce. He loved me like crazy. He was my slave of love. He satisfied all my whims. Each day on my pillow I saw a bouquet of roses. He fed me, dressed me, bought an apartment for me, and traveled with me. He almost spoiled me with his big money. He didn’t want even see his daughter to not disturb me. It seems he forgot about his daughter all for the four years with me. Anyway, I had left him after four years. I cancelled our wedding. Two rings for this wedding are still in my box in my table.”

“Your point is?”

“Please, Robert, I must first finish what I must tell you. Another history, I have cancelled a wedding after two months of joint life with another successful, handsome, smart man. Another engagement ring is also now in my box, in my table . . . Unfortunately, I saw this man’s river of tears. I was like a big egoist. I repent.”

“These are demonstrations of love? Is that your point?”

“My poor, poor Robert . . . You said that you are breaking your age rule for me? I am breaking my age rule for you! So, we can cancel that one. It proves nothing. There were many wonderful men, who wanted to have children with me. I never wanted children. But I want children with you . . . I broke my rule for you. This item also doesn’t prove your love to me as well. We can cancel it . . . My religion is my soul. My priest has forbidden me to marry you. I avoided to speak of it from the very beginning, from your first letter to me. I gave you time for your understanding. I gave you time even for your silly mistakes, my sweet gigolo . . .

So it proves nothing. So it was only a matter of three weeks before you asked me to marry you? To tell you the truth, my personal record was an offer of marriage in two days. Do you really think that this item proves your love to me?”

“What does?”

“Just for example I saw in my life, how my ex-lover tried to commit suicide, when I said to him, ‘I want to leave you.’ To keep me and to prove to me his huge love to me he simply cut his veins . . . In my kitchen I had venous blood everywhere. I called the hospital . . . The doctors had to rescue him . . . That is only one from many stories from my past about how people tried to prove to me their love.

You said that it was only a matter of three weeks . . . Really? My congratulations to you honey . . . So you traveled 5,000 miles to see me? My swan! I feel high privilege that I have all your attention . . . But this situation, it’s nothing unusual for me. I am really sorry, my lovely doctor, but I got used to men many times making mad acts for me. This doesn’t prove your love to me.”

“Are you done? Are you trying to give me examples of real demonstrations of love? This is not about love but sickness. It would disturb you if he saw his daughter? Such selfishness! So rejecting one’s child or slashing one’s veins are the kinds of proof you require? Do you even

know the meaning of healthy love? My idea of love is very different from yours. You have a pretty sick idea of love. Bye.”

# # #

My dream crashed violently. Alla has an infantile sadomasochistic notion of love. I feel beat up and robbed of my beautiful image of her.

Alla says that she doesn't trust men because of her father, but she's unable to use this insight when it matters. She has some cognitive insight but not emotional insight. When people talk about an insight and do nothing with it, it is usually because it is only cognitive. Her admission that she does not trust men did not stop her from acting out her distrust.

Alla thinks that the true proof of love is a pathological dependency and masochism. She believes that a worthy lover would tolerate her narcissistic demands, irrationality, and moods, and make no demands of her. My love seems weak when compared to her past lovers, who were her slaves.

However, her enraged reaction came just after she gave me the best six days of my life. I have trouble dealing with the two images of Alla—angel and then devil. I did not want to lose my ideal image of her. I want to see her behavior as an aberration and not a sign of enduring psychopathology.

There are inevitable ruptures in all love affairs. They are either resolved in a way that brings lovers closer together, or not resolved and the relationship weakens or ends. I can no longer repress that I had seen a very disturbed side of Alla. At this point, I can only hope that in time insight would change her.

# # #

Nov. 9

“Oh, Robert, I could not sleep . . . Sometimes I even regret my existence on this planet . . . Sorry I misunderstood you. Now I see it . . . Robert, I repent.”



“What happened?”

“The reasons for my painful, unhealthy hysterics are very simple. I had a fever and my eyes were swollen from tears . . . I had no appetite . . . My body was shaken from huge weakness and in the same day, Marina, called me and without any warning, she said to me, ‘Alla, I have news for you . . . To receive a fiancée visa to America is now even more difficult than before. It will be a huge problem for you . . . Be ready to not see Robert for nine months.’

I felt a bomb had blown up in my head! The first idea that appeared in my exhausted brain: ‘Oh, Lord, I will die . . . I cannot survive without Robert for nine months. No way! Farewell, people! I am dying right now! You can already buy flowers for my tomb.’ I was paralyzed . . . My pulse had disappeared. I was broken as an old doll without a head . . . Understand how madly I love you. I felt that I am lost in my love for you. I am totally lost . . . I was totally fucked up!”

“I agree.”

“Yes. Taking into account that you do hate dependent women, I knew that I am already attached, stuck, pasted to you . . . I felt inner panic! I had two choices.

1. To die soon without you. Or,
2. To push you away . . . I took the second way . . . I thought if I am already in a panic after only four days of your absence, how would I survive nine months? I am sorry, my twin!”

“You devalue the person you love so that you might not hurt so much?”

“Robert, I am honest . . . I just need more time for explanations for you of all my internal problems, my unconscious fears and, and silly motives . . . I do make mistakes and I seek to correct them.”

“I fear that you are not ready for healthy relationship.”

“I would want to stand up to such problems in a mature way. You are right . . . I could not have good healthy relationships, because I had no mature concept of love! Only NOW do it see it! . . . Certainly, I could not construct a good family on such an unstable base!”

“Rather than act out your rage when you are afraid, why not share your fears?”

“Your openness is the result of experience in a very different culture! My modus vivendi was formed over 30 years and my coat of mail was necessary for me! Please, understand this! . . . All my life I lived here in poverty and madness . . . I showed for you only the good side of Russia . . . My Angel, I got used to being where each wolf tries to survive and kill another wolf . . . I had to protect my family and me. This habit, just for this period of time, prevents me to be open in the relations with you . . . In a personal and quiet atmosphere, I can begin complete disarmament . . . Be my guru for it . . . Okay? . . . I miss you so . . .”

# # #

Alla got depressed because of our separation and her dependency. She didn't just miss me; she experienced a deep sense of loss and panic. She is vulnerable to such depressive reactions and rages because she does not have enough insight to help her contain and self-soothe her emotions. She used the defense of devaluation of me so she might mitigate the loss of a valued love object. She also used the defense of projective identification, in that she needs to make others feel bad when she feels bad. These defenses, if they continue, are certain relationship killers.

All love has some degree of idealization. However, idealization is fragile if based mainly in immaturity. The idealization can quickly switch to devaluation and persecutory hate. People with an immature personality view an object of dependency based on needs and moods and not on the actual qualities of the other person.

A mature person can love with healthy ambivalence feeling both love and at times even hate. A person with a healthy ambivalence tolerates the normal fluctuations of mood within the total enduring bond of the relationship. Their attitudes are not split into opposing emotions that redefine the significant other. The beloved does not become a devil or angel according to one's internal affect state. A person with a healthy ambivalent love can consistently appreciate the actual qualities and complex nature of the other person regardless of mood. On the other hand, a person with a borderline personality structure (immature personality) swings between feeling grandiosity and deflation of the self and idealization and devaluation of the other. A mature person has both self-love and other-love based on an awareness of both assets and liabilities that are blended together into a cohesive self-concept and concept of the other. Immature people cannot tolerate the ambiguity of emotional grays, but go to black or white perceptions and evaluations. This leads to idealizations and devaluations that swing the intimacy beyond the tolerance of their centrifugal force.

The intensity of an immature person's idealized love can look like the stuff of a great and lasting love. It is not. The intensity of love is not a measure of its maturity. But initially such intensity can be very appealing.

After I confronted Alla, she told me what I needed to hear. Was it true insight and remorse or just temporary accommodation?

Personality traits will eventually win out over good intentions if there is no follow up of self-reflection and hard work.

I hope that this would not happen again. People do this all the time with disturbed loved ones. They see each sign of mental illness as an unrelated series of unsettling instances never adding it up into a diagnosis. I put aside (suppress) Alla's disturbed reactions. I continue loving her and hope for the best. I hope that my confrontation might have broken through her denial. Yet, I store this in my memory. In the back of my mind, I am adding up evidence, not as resentments, but as a reality check.

Nov. 10

“Shelle and I have been working hard on the fiancée visa. It should take three months not nine. If it’s longer than that, I’ll just go visit you again. Don’t worry.”

“When? Robert, when? . . . Come! Come! Come!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! Oh, I stopped warring with Mum. She has admitted that she loves you.”

“Good news. I love them too. Did they get my email?”

“My parents thank you for your warm letter. My mum is going write to you soon.”

“How are you feeling?”

“If to tell the truth, today is the first good day after days of frank horror! Oo-la-la. It seems that the last two days, I had my real clinical death. I am not kidding, my dear. I suppose, next time, I need to accept the bounds of a female monastery. I visited this place six days ago. Maybe I should have stayed there for all that awful period of time. I am sure that during my war with the demons, I should be hidden from the eyes and ears of the usual people. Did you see what horrible reaction I gave to you?”

“I couldn’t help noticing.”

“I cannot describe it to you! Oops . . . Let’s stop here . . . I don’t want to frighten you with my spiritual experiences . . . I think this is like a Chinese alphabet for your American mind.”

“I want to know.”

“When I am in your arms . . . I’m thinking of you all the time.

Warm hugs, deep kisses! I LOVE YOU MADLY!!!!!!!!!!”

###

I do not receive her mother's email. I wonder why. It seems that Alla rationalizes her deep regressions as a spiritual experience. She may feel too anxious if she acknowledges her mental problems outside of an empathic relationship. Spirituality can give meaning and support to this difficult life. But it is not good use magical thinking instead of relying on insight and objective problem solving.

Alla says that our problems are over. But I have an uneasy feeling that I am seeing a pattern. What formula does one use to measure whether a relationship is worth it? Being in love makes one tolerate things that would ordinarily be intolerable. All things, even tolerance, can be overused. I hope that Alla will change. I think it is possible, because I see such changes every day in my work. But mainly, I thought it is possible, because of the irrational optimism of love.

## **Chapter 21 Trauma and Attraction**

“I must be in love, because I am more fucked up than usual. I harass him on the phone all day. I ache for him. Don’t let me ruin this one. Please! Paul is such a good person. I love him to death.”

In the past, Karen left therapy when she was in love in a defensive flight to a new idealized object (Pao, 1973). Now rather than fleeing analysis, she now understands that she might kill this new love. Karen is now admitting to her problem of sabotaging intimacy. Being in love this time gives Karen an even stronger reason to work deeply.

“Dr. Gordon, I couldn’t stop thinking about last session. Those memories were so clear. I remember lying outside mom’s door. Father coming home . . . The men who took her away in the ambulance . . . The hospital . . . The custody fight . . . Father’s apartment . . . I don’t remember much after that.”

“Karen, I was wondering how you had such vivid memories of the trauma of your separation from your mother at four and you have no memory of your sexual abuse at six?”

“That’s what happens with sex abuse.”

“Repression can occur with trauma, but not with specifically sexual trauma. It’s strange. Your father abused you at six?”

“I’m sure of it. I was in first grade and I had Mrs. Harris as my teacher. She was my favorite teacher.”

“Your dad abused you about two years after your parents separated?”

“I guess so.”

“Didn’t you say that your mother divorced him because of the abuse?”

“Sure. Sure. So?”

“I just thought that your mother had discovered him abusing you while they were together and left him because of it. It was after they were separated, during a visitation, right?”

“Yes they divorced because he molested me! They separated because he was crazy. Look, help me with Paul. I need this to work out.”

“I think there is something to the confusion. We can leave it for now. But I think that issue is relevant to your current love relationships. Okay, then, tell about your history with boyfriends.”

I leave the mystery of her abuse for now. Timing is crucial. If I push, I could lose her as a patient. It would be an empathic failure on my part. I could not pursue her sex abuse memories based on my need to solve this puzzle. My questions and interpretations had to be based on what is tolerable and constructive for Karen at the time. I go to a safer history. Nevertheless, I want her to keep working on discovering who she is by looking into the past.

“Ha! There were too many! In high school I liked the bad boys. I was rebelling. No one Jewish . . . Any guy my mom would hate, I wanted to fuck. Dumb guys I could control. I liked to be hurt by them. I still fantasize about being slapped and raped. That’s how I come. I can’t believe that I’m telling you this. I would only date low class guys . . . until John. I hated him for canceling the wedding. I didn’t want to hurt mom.”

“Why were you worried about hurting your mother?”

“I didn’t say that.”

“You said, ‘I didn’t want to hurt mom.’”

“You heard wrong. I said that I was afraid to be hurt. You are twisting my words around. I hate when you do that!”

I am fuming inside, but would never let Karen know. Rewriting history during an argument is mind-fucking. When my mother would realize that she was on the losing side of an argument, she would go back and rewrite the dialogue. She would claim that she had been arguing my point all along, but I hadn’t been listening to her. She would then walk away feeling victorious. It’s still a trigger for me. My own analysis helped me identify my issues before they get in the way of treatment. At these times of my countertransference, it’s best to be silent, self-soothe, and get back to empathy. I am fortunate that I had my own psychoanalysis so I could work without my personal triggers getting in the way of my objectivity. My countertransference helps me understand my patients’ dynamics, as long as my personal feelings do not interfere with my work (Gordon, 1997).

Karen says, “Can I continue? Paul is a lot like John, but Jewish. He’s an Allergist in Philly. I met him on an Internet dating site. He had an ad, ‘Nothing to Sneeze At.’ I did what you said. I only agreed to meet him, after we had several great phone conversations. I really liked him. We went out three times. It’s been great. I didn’t want to have sex with him right away. That jinxes it. Oh, God. I love him!”

“Perhaps you are beginning to be attracted to men with whom you can remain intimate.”

“I was always able to be intimate. I don’t get your point.”

“I mean a healthy enduring intimacy. You have two types of love objects imprinted into your brain. Your mother was your first love object. Maybe those low functioning guys were based on your image of your dad.”

“I had passion for my mom. I used to love sleeping with her. I’d put my fingers in her armpits and smell them. I just remembered that! I would harvest her scent. I’d smell my fingers all day at school when I’d



miss her. I actually . . . at times . . . wanted to have sex with her. I had dreams about it. God, is that sick?”

“She was your first love (Fenchel, 1998). Usually, you move on to dad, but given the circumstances you stayed fixated on to your mother. Also your mother might have encouraged your attachment versus encouraging your independence. That might also be a factor in you not letting yourself commit to a man,” I interpret.

“I feel like I’m abandoning my mom. I know. I feel guilty. She gave up her life for me. I had a lesbian relationship in college. That girl was psychotic.”

“It might have been a way to still be with your mother during your separation from her.”

“My mother is not psychotic.”

“How long did you sleep with your mother?”

“I think until I was a teen.” Karen says.

“That doesn’t help you separate and have your own identity. Otherwise, you become too dependent on external sources of soothing.”

“Like my cigarettes?”

“Yes, and relationships; you expect others to make you feel okay. When they don’t, you see it as their failure and you devalue them. You do that with me.” I am now interpreting Karen’s transference to me.

“Sure. Sure. Don’t take it personally. Look my mom is not mentally ill. The stress of my father gave her a breakdown. I think I might have given you the wrong impression.”

“Maybe you are afraid you gave me the right impression, and you now feel guilty about it. If you continue to idealize your mother, your self-esteem will suffer. You will never live up to your idealized image

of her, and no man could compete with her. Your idealization of her comes at a high cost. Maybe you can learn to love her, faults and all.”

In addition, if Karen continues to idealize her mother, men will catch all the anger she unconsciously feels toward her mother. I do not tell patients an interpretation based on my awareness, but only when they are ready. I do not think Karen is ready to deal with her anger towards her mother.

Karen says, “That reminds me of a dream I had this week. I was passionately kissing my mom. She looked about my age. I was so turned on by it. I used to actually try to passionately kiss my mom as a kid. Then, my mom tries to eat my tongue. I jumped up and woke myself up. I was so upset.”

“What do you think the dream means?”

“Well, I was passionate about my mom. She was a beautiful woman. The tongue thing is freaky.”

“Your mother is against you coming here?”

“You bet. She thinks you are evil. She hates psychotherapists. She hates Freud. She calls you guys, ‘Psycho Rapists.’ She is against looking at the past and dwelling. She hates that I talk to you. Hey! She bit off my tongue! I am not allowed to talk about the past!”

“Nice work Karen. I think you now understand the main source of your resistance.”

## **Chapter 22 Tenderness and Passion**

Back in 1912, Freud said, “To ensure a fully normal attitude in love, two currents of feeling have to unite . . . the tender feelings and the sensual feelings . . .”

One principle aim of psychoanalysis is to bring these two currents in harmony (tenderness and sexuality) so that patients can love more maturely. I often see people who become infatuated mainly due to sexual attraction but have issues that get in the way of lasting love. People with borderline personality structures can express intense sexual feelings, but have difficulty in maintaining feelings of tenderness. There are other people with neurotic personality structures who can feel tenderness, but often have conflicts around sexual gratification. People with neurotic personality structures suffer more from inhibitions and guilt than the people with borderline personality structures.

Without tenderness, the primitive aspect of sexuality (referred to as “sensual feelings” by Freud) will consume and destroy the love relationship. Freud felt that only psychoanalysis could help people with love disturbances. Despite great advances in psychoanalysis since Freud, this basic insight about the necessary integration of tenderness and passion remains useful in treatment.

Robert Sternberg (1986a, 1999) theorized three components of love: intimacy, passion, and commitment. Infatuation has only passion. Romantic love has intimacy and passion. Consummate love has all three: intimacy, passion, and commitment.

Helen Fisher (2000) reported that humans and other mammals have evolved three primary emotion systems that combine for love.

Each system evolved into its own discrete constellation of brain circuits:

1. the sex drive,
2. attraction to a desirable partner, and
3. attachment.

Freud, Sternberg, and Fisher come from very different theoretical perspectives, but they agree that the success of love is dependent on all the parts (passion, attachment, and mutual concern) coming together. Generally, these parts do not come together when people have a developmental arrest in their personalities as a result of early trauma and temperamental disturbances.

I wonder as I am reviewing these theories if Alla could integrate all the aspects of loving. I also wonder at what point do I stop being a patient and compassionate lover and start taking assessment if it is worth it.

# # #

Nov. 11

“You can’t imagine, how difficult it was to find you! Finally, I found you! UURRRRRRAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA! I found peace with you for my restless soul . . . I feel much peace, since meeting you! Thank you, Robert . . . Thank you, God!”

“I have never been so much in love.”

“I wake up with your name and fall asleep with your name. I swallow the opium of your opinion.”

“Oh, now it’s the ‘opium of your opinion’? I’m restored as the guru once more?”

“Yes!!!! Oh, Robert! I miss you! I want you, my kind natural virgin Angel. You look like a boundless, fathomless, immeasurable, shameless, pitiless, uncontrolled temptation. Oo-la-la . . . It will be

better to not look too long at your smile . . . I am hungry for your smile!  
I am hungry for your kisses . . . Hungry as a wolf!”

“You can’t eat your lover and expect him to be there later.”

“I told you, you have taken a cat instead of a rabbit. You didn’t see anything yet. Remember our last night in your bed? I took you as a gift from God. You can’t imagine whom you have chosen for your life a few months ago on the Internet . . . In your bed, you will hear my velvety serenades, my elusive whispers . . . You will feel under your skin the indefatigable mad rhythm of my dance, and for these moments all stars will shine . . . all galaxies will be merged into one above your head.”

“Alla, you are the embodiment of all men’s fantasies. I never expected that I could be with such a woman.”

“Only yours . . . I am real and only for your pleasure . . . I would want to see your endless eruption and your lazy exhaustion after that . . . You’ll be my first and last best lover, my sole lover for eternity . . . In your bed, I will tempt, tease and play with you . . . You will be almost dying on your bed sheets . . . I want to see your desires, your excess, your bliss, your craziness beating inside me when I make love to you . . . I will grab you . . . You know . . . I can tear you to pieces! But . . . I will kill you softly . . . You are my erotic trophy . . . You will feel my pulse and my life in your arms . . . I will know all your crazy desires, like the palm of my hand . . . You will have your paradise on the earth, all the days and all the nights of your life . . . You will fall asleep happy and wake up happy . . . I give to you all a man desires . . . I LOVE YOU MADLY!!!”

# # #

Alla sends more seductive photos of herself. She is good at reminding me of the rewards for tolerating her bad side. It works.

# # #

Nov. 16

“My swan, my room is empty without you. Even taking into account that above my computer, on my wall, our photos hang and so

I can see your smile . . . My wall is covered with photos of you . . . and pictures of us . . . that I stare at all day . . . Help me! It is not enough!

I hope it will be my last holiday of New Year in Saint Petersburg. I hate the winter here . . . I always leave Saint Petersburg at the end of December. I have depression in the wintertime . . . Already now I see wet disgusting snow on my window . . . My parents would be very happy if we shall be with them this New Year. I am waiting for you. I am always dreaming how you'll drink cognac or tea in my room soon. I would want to see again, how you sleep in my bed . . . Melting, soulful, heartwarming picture . . . I enjoyed it so much last time . . . I sat silently as a small mouse and almost did not breathe, because I was afraid I would frighten away your fragile dream . . . It was the moment of such ideal love to you . . . I felt an unreal warmth and endless love for you. The sky was open and I saw a dispensation . . . I could hear a behest of God without the intermediaries. Do you promise me to give me this divine pleasure once again? . . .”

“I will spend this New Year with my lovely fiancée and her parents in Saint Petersburg. Will that brighten your holiday?”

“Robert! You are a wonder! The world does not exist without you . . . Sun—is only a flat silly useless sphere in the sky without you . . . Night—is an awful black gloomy hole without you . . . All the grand volume inside my heart is boundlessly empty without you . . .

Day—is in absolute silence without you.

Time—is a fathomless, soundless, ice, cheerless, vain, unbearable, helpless, and infinite loneliness without you.

Life—is an Eternal stupid search without you.

I wake up for you . . .

I breathe for you . . .

My internal beauty and perfect harmony begins slowly, very slowly to die without you . . . and I feel myself like a broken flower . . .

You can't imagine, what happens in my heart and in my head.

The words are powerless . . . They cannot express even a small part that I feel . . . ”

“You are doing a wonderful job with the English language, Honey. The horoscope you sent is pretty accurate, I must say. You said, ‘Your conflict with your mum was programmed by stars since your birth. This conflict was inevitable!’ Was I born under the sign of a virgin or a harpy? Anyway, I would still rather put my faith in the forces of genetics and the environment than optical illusions and mythology.”

“There are many realities my love.”

“There is only one where you can find intimacy.”

“Robert, tell me about your childhood and your history . . . if you don't mind. For me, it's very, very important to know all about you . . . I want to be with you for pleasure and for sorrow as well . . . I would want to know about all your psychological traumas . . . I need to know all about you . . . ”

“Luckily—there were no great traumas. My parents supplied me with a model of a stable marriage, good values, and the capacity for hard work. I was exposed to Freud and Shakespeare at an early age (and to this day their pictures hang on my home office wall . . . next to several of your pictures). My parents adored me for my first few years of life so my core personality is solid and I have good self-esteem.

It was not until I was in psychoanalysis I realized my past was not all that I had remembered. There were conflicts from my childhood that later affected who I married. I learned that I had unconsciously picked a wife who, though overtly different in background, was emotionally similar to my mother. I went from trying to make my mother happy to trying to make my wife happy. Trying to please someone who is intent on unhappiness is an impossible task. What starts in the family as an attempt at a solution that fails, becomes an unconscious pattern. This unconscious rescue complex at its best adds to my being a

psychologist and at its worst can get me into impossible relationships. But eventually insight pushes aside any rationalizations, and I leave for something healthier. I have found that with you. Now tell me more about your family.”

“Thank you for your story. I remember you telling me about your family history when we were together in my room . . . I have no doubts that we’ll always be together . . . This is not an impossible relationship . . . It is real . . . We are soul mates . . . My intuition told me . . . We’ll be together for very long time. The next 3,000 years, it’s a minimum.”

“That’s quite a commitment, honey.”

“My Angel, you can’t imagine the level of power of my love for you. Believe me, I bet, now, you have no idea how much I love you . . . Robert, I am ready to kill any person who would dare hurt you . . . I am ready to stand close to a precipice and if you say to me, ‘Alla, let’s jump down with me’. I’ll jump down, and I’ll not ask even, ‘What for? . . .’ I am ready for self-destruction for you . . . I would do anything you want. I could to fall on my knees and kiss your feet. I DEIFY YOU !!!!!!!!!!! I LOVE YOU MADLY!!!!!!!!!!”

# # #

Nov. 18

“Hello, my swan. Okey-dokey. I will answer with reciprocity.”

“Hello, Alla. Does this mean you will share your traumas with me?”

“Yes. When I was about three years old, a virus attacked my eye muscle. One eye was slightly to the side. And when I was six and eight, I had two very unpleasant operations. At first they operated on the left eye, then the other . . . They have said, that was necessary to cut the other, healthy eye, that they were compelled to operate on both . . . Sounds like a bull-shit, but it was weak and primitive medicine in Russia.”

“I remember you telling me about this.”



“After two operations in my childhood, my strings . . . is that the word?”

“Stitches?”

“Yes. The stitches in my eyes began to inflame . . . But this operation needed to be performed without anesthesia at all . . . Oo-la-la.”

“That’s horrible.”

“I felt huge pain during all the operation . . . I saw all surgical tools as they cut my eyes. They deleted old stitches and put in new ones . . . Poor hospital in abject poverty, it was awful . . . I told you, in the most awful critical situations, I begin to joke like crazy . . . Maybe, it’s latent hysterics. My surgeons still recollect my operation many years ago . . . I felt such pain and so I joked. They roared with so much laughter that they could not work with me at times . . . I was the queen of laughter.”

“It’s not funny. What primitive medicine!”

“This story should end very cheerful, but after three years my eye had inflammation . . . Again I had the same operation . . . Still without anesthesia . . . Bad luck . . . The pain is back and I need the operation again. I have not accepted the decision to do it . . . I still have the bad, old stitches in my eyes . . . But I do not want an operation for the fifth time . . . I am tired.”

###

Alla’s reciprocal story of trauma is also a warning in the form of a metaphor. Language can express both conscious and unconscious messages at the same time. She gave me a story of medical trauma that avoids the issues of her psychological traumas with her father and her problems with her past lovers. Nevertheless, her story reveals that people who were to help her see had hurt her. She trusted, and she was let down. She feels worn out and does not want to see any more scalpels (psychological or otherwise).

I show Alla's email to an eye surgeon friend of mine. He is horrified at her description of her surgeries. He agrees to correct her problems when she comes here to live. This is one of many surprises I have for Alla.

# # #

Nov. 20

"Robert, my love, I think the first period after I come to the USA, it will be very difficult for me . . . I am ready to have psychological war with my ego and my habits . . . Many of my friends who left to live in USA already many times told me, 'Alla, be ready for disappointment . . . You got used to urban life. You lived in Saint Petersburg and crazy Moscow . . . You really love the noisy life with night cafes, restaurants, bars, and bright show-windows of the huge shops . . . You were bored in Helsinki . . . It was a too quiet and boring atmosphere for you . . . In many small American cities, there is no nightlife at all. Be ready . . . Everyone sits at home and people do not go for walks on the streets. For the first period of time you will think that you are in a deep trap . . . It's real horror for the Russian mentality . . . Take medicine for depression for the first three months . . . We promise that you will feel like you are dying slowly.' I guess they want to frighten me . . . I will try to be more optimistic than my friends! And I will have you on my side."

"Your friends are discouraging for their own reasons. If it were so bad here, why are so many people trying to come to the United States? Also remember that you will not have their financial problems. Besides people get depressed over relationships not the lack of a night life."

"Thank you, my swan. I have no reason to worry about coming to America. I trust you. I adore you and I cannot live without you anyway . . . I have the main purpose to make you the most happy husband on this planet . . . For the first period I want not to have to work and be feminine and lazy . . . Are we rich enough for it?"

"We are rich enough."

“I can’t wait to shop in New York, my swan. I only do not know how much time you can spend with me . . . Robert, tell me, please, about your usual workday.”

“I need to work long hours if you wish to be feminine and lazy and shop.”

“I see you are really a busy person. Tell me, please, how many hours you can spend with me within one work-week?”

“I work about 10 hours a day, for about five days.”

“What will I do? I will die without you.”

“Alla, my Russian friends spoke of the necessity to drive here. I noticed how you always take cabs.”

“I can’t drive. I finished special lessons for a driver’s license. That was eight years ago . . . I had the examination for this, and I received very weak grades. I am an absent-minded and inattentive woman . . . Maybe, I was afraid to drive on the Saint Petersburg streets . . . You remember the crazy atmosphere among Russian drivers? Maybe, I need a bicycle for first few months! It will be a big scandal in your city . . . ‘People, who is that crazy teenager in multicolored clothes on a bicycle? Who? Dr. Gordon’s wife? Bullshit! I can’t believe it!’”

“I will teach you to drive on the American streets. It is much easier than trying to drive in Russia. Unlike Russians, most Americans actually follow the driving rules and are sober. I made plenty of closet space for you and I gave Shelle, my great office manager, most of my antique furniture. I know you don’t like antiques. You can redecorate and make it your home. I have many wonderful surprises in store for you.”

“You are wonderful. I adore you. I can’t wait! As for me, I’m going to rape you in the airport.”

## **Chapter 23 Pants Frozen in Time**

Karen walks into the office and looks around. “Where’s Roy?”

“He’s at the groomers.”

“My mother drives me crazy. We got in a big fight. She loves pepperoni pizza with thick crust. I heard her order pizza. When the guy brought a regular pizza, she asked, ‘Where is the pepperoni?’ He said, ‘You didn’t order pepperoni’. My mom shouted, ‘I did!’ She sounded just like I can get. It’s scary to hear myself through her. The guy went back and got one with pepperoni. She said real loud, ‘Dumb guy; won’t admit he’s wrong.’ I said, ‘Mom, you didn’t say ‘pepperoni.’ So then she accused me of siding with him because he’s a man. We had a huge fight right in the pizza place. I stormed out. We’re not talking.”

“I don’t remember hearing about such a bad fight before. It must have been very upsetting.”

“It is typical. Before that she told me that she now wants me to get her the pants I wanted to get her at Neiman Marcus in Philly. That was two months ago.”

“The size eight.”

“What a memory you have! The world has to be on hold for her until she decides what she wants. She thinks those pants are just waiting for her. And she constantly confuses when she had thought something with having said it. She can’t get it straight if she said it or thought it. It happens all the time. I’ve been depressed. I’m not sure why.”

I interpret, “Your mother seems overly subjective and frustrating. When that frustrated anger bounces up against your idealization of your mother, you could get depressed.”

This is an interpretation of depression as anger redirected towards the self. Depression can come from the loss of an object of dependency, loss of love or chronic empathic failures. But it also can come from anger turned against the self. When a child feels anger toward a parent, the child may fear the destructiveness of his or her own anger and redirect it towards the self. This both protects the parent and punishes the self (Jacobson, 1971).

“I feel so protective of my mother.”

“How did you get burdened with that job?”

“My mom would tell me in bed as we cuddled to never leave her. I feel so responsible for her.”

“That’s an unfair and irrational burden that hurt your ability to love a man without guilt,” I interpret.

“I guess so. You know, I was thinking how much I miss Aunt Michelle, my father’s sister. She would baby-sit me. She was so loving. After my father left, my mom told her not to come around. I think I will try to contact her and see what I can find out about my past.”

## Chapter 24 Fear of Betrayal

Dec. 6

“Robert, I got your INS papers.”

“I wanted you to see what I sent to the Immigration and Naturalization Service for your fiancée visa.”

“I feel like a stupid clown, who could understand and read Fromm’s *Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* in one day as a teenager, but this . . . I have a lot of questions to you, a lot of stupid questions . . . I am sorry, my dear . . . When I started to read your papers, it seems, honey that I have returned 13 years back, when I began to study Jewish hermeneutics . . . I just want to say that I am not interested in your past . . . It is your sacred territory . . . But I am interested to know about your current situation . . . I remember, you told me long ago and again in your hotel room how much you made and lots of stuff about it . . .”

“You are doing a lot of dancing.”

“Okay, okay . . . Anyway, the poverty does not frighten me . . . I believe in love and paradise in a hut . . . I love you. honey!”

“What’s this about poverty?”

“I am confused about how much you really make . . .”

“I told you from the very beginning what I made. I told you again during my visit. I didn’t want you have any misconceptions. I am not an aristocrat and I don’t own factories, but there is no need to worry about money. You can ask me anything about my past, my present, or our future.”

“Do you understand my sincere motive? I hope so! . . . Maybe, for my goals and crazy dreams, I shall be compelled to work immediately in USA?”

“If you wish, I think it is good to work and have your own money. But why are you acting like I am poor?”

“When you told me your income, it seemed like a lot . . . But you didn’t tell me that a third of that goes to taxes!”

“My lifestyle is upper middle class. I make more than 98% of Americans based on my taxable income from my private practice. Are you surprised that I pay taxes? Americans actually pay taxes, unlike the Russians. But then again our streets do not have giant holes, our bridges are not crumbling, and most things work here.”

“Robert, please, I need more details. What are your expenses? May I ask? Please don’t be angry . . . ”

“It’s there in the papers. Why are you worried?”

“I have been drinking all evening. Robert, how can you do it? It is impossible to afford this crazy woman with rich tastes and perhaps soon a child with such funds! How can we do anything that you promised me? You told me such bullshit. You shattered all my iridescent dreams. All my dreams you shattered. How can we travel? How can we return to Russia often? How can we do any of what you promised me? How could you have told me such bullshit? You are not the person I thought you were.”

“I was honest with you. Maybe you are confused, but why do you assume I lied? How much have you been drinking? Do you drink when you are upset? If I do not make enough money for you, please be honest with me. I would rather our relationship end now.”

“I did not mean to offend you, but how is it possible to live on such funds? Why did you say bullshit to me?”

“I never lied to you. I never misled you.”

“Robert, when you told me your income you didn’t mention that one-third goes to taxes! That’s a big difference! It is not enough! You boasted to me. I know it is your way. But now I know that it is not what you promised.”

“First, I had to prove my love for you, and it wasn’t enough. Now it’s that I lied to you. Don’t assume that I am untrustworthy. Don’t punish me for the sins of your father. Your fear of betrayal and poverty is about your childhood, not me. You go into a rage at the slightest provocation. Your mother said that you have terrible moods. I see them. Your mood swings define me. When you are feeling good, I am deified. When you feel frightened or depressed, I am demonized.”

“Can you have a mood disorder? This worries me. I will be very understanding of your problems as long as you have insight and take responsibility for them. Take a hard look at yourself before you go accusing me of being a liar. I am at this point prepared to cancel my trip to Russia. It’s up to you.”

# # #

Dec. 7

“I didn’t have trauma in my childhood. You think that I try to punish you for the sins of my father? Such a stupid phrase . . . It was never a conversation about fucking money. I don’t care about money. Fucking bullshit! . . . I did not accuse you of deception. When you spoke of your income it sounded like a lot for me . . . You think that I can understand all this fucking money-stuff? When I have seen your business papers, I saw that I did not take into account your taxes and expenses . . . I thought when you told me your income that was how much money we had to spend . . . I was drunk . . . But do not suspect me of alcoholism! Do not diagnose me!!! . . . Save the diagnosing for your fucking patients and for yourself!!! My best friend forgives even my terrible moods. Your remedy may be worse than the disease!!! Thank you for diagnosis of a mood disorder . . . Another miss!!! How can you get paid for such poor psychology?”



“Fuck you, Alla! You have a lot of nerve! Are you the only expense that I am allowed? You can be in denial about your problems with distrust and anger all you want. But your denial doesn’t work on me. You say that it is not about money, but it is. You said that it had nothing to do with your past, but it does. You said that it is not about distrust, but it is. This is your third explosion in two months. You don’t think that something is wrong with you, but there is.”

“I am prepared, that you will cancel your trip to Russia and end our relations.”

# # #

Dec. 9

“Hello, my swan, I didn’t understand how my words disgustingly sounded on the phone. I had no the right to accuse you without proof . . . It was my fault. I am sorry, Robert . . . I repent . . . You know my temper . . . I am like dynamite sometimes . . . Only one spark can incinerate everything around like a bomb. I regret my words . . . But please don’t ever say ‘Fuck you, Alla’ any more please. Honey, never, nobody dared to allow to say such a disgusting phrase to me . . . Never in my life . . . I was shocked . . . This is a deep, awful insult for me . . . Do you understand what it means for me, honey?”

“I don’t need to use those words. I hope that doesn’t become the focus.”

“Don’t do it again? Okay? Your anger is awful as well, honey! Thank heaven I love you beyond belief. After all these tests, I must admit, I love you more than ever. Please forgive me, my love.”

“I don’t think our anger is the same, but I forgive you.”

“You already live inside me . . . Deep, deep inside me . . . We only measured the depth of this feeling . . . We only measured the depth our love, Honey . . . Nothing more . . . It’s not conversation on money or past or anything . . . On Friday, I was like bottle-screw . . . Even if you

will see my blind rage . . . Even if you will feel my crazy resistance . . . I'll be on your side. I am with you . . . My heart belongs to you. If you will see that I have unreasonable fears or other problems, you will correct me. I would recommend to do it tête-à-tête, face-to-face and then you can supervise my process and my reactions. Please . . . softly . . . softly, my swan. I would recommend do it naked with sweet kisses; deal?"

"Deal."

"Robert, I know you want to make contacts with psychologists, and perhaps lecture here. I have already taken care of this many weeks ago. I am very proud to have acquaintance with a well respect psychologist whose name is Nadya. I have visited her after your departure from Saint Petersburg and told about our love story (Sternberg, 1999). She saw photos of you. She read your articles. I told her that you can bring the big knowledge to this city. Perhaps you will open a practice with her here. I am preparing this base for you. We have arranged for your grand lecture in Saint Petersburg. You are invited to be the honored guest lecturer on December 26 at the Saint Petersburg Medical University. Already there are over 100 psychologists, psychiatrists, students, and professors of medical institutes signed to hear you. It will be a new intellectual adventure for you."

"It will be fun. I will lecture on love relations."

"You can use us as an example!"

# # #

Alla's fluctuating personality enabled her to move away from this terrible fight faster than it started. She feels that it has no meaning other than it was a misunderstanding. The problem of her distrust, anger, and fears were shifted to my anger as the problem.

Since Alla often uses the phrase "Fuck you!" I did not expect her degree of moral outrage. But her grandiosity will not tolerate the same words said to her. I had no idea that those words would become the

main issue. The issues of Alla's rage, fears, and distrust were not really resolved, but swept under the romantic rug. However, Alla is now able to apologize. Her mother later told me that Alla only just began to apologize since my appearance in her life.

Alla just wants to move on and forget our fight. For her it was only a test of love. She says that it even makes her love me more. Our conflicts fit into her unconscious drama. I still love her, but I don't love her more. All this drama does not sit well with me.

## **Chapter 25 Self-Reflection and Memory**

“I had a big fight with Paul. He called me ‘inconsiderate’!”

Karen’s ego is still fragile. She projected a lot of aggression onto his comment, which was probably correct. It is Karen’s habit to use something like this as a rationalization to leave a relationship. She needs her intimacies to provide a constant source of affirmation and security. When her object of attachment does not reinforce her image of the lovable perfect child, she crumbles and rages. Karen is dependent on her narcissistic feedings.

“Paul said that on Saturday he felt angry because his friends were waiting over an hour because I was late. We had to find another restaurant since we lost our reservation. I didn’t know he was upset until the end of the night. I asked him what was wrong. He told me that I was inconsiderate for being so late and acting so nonchalant about it. I was furious. I thought, ‘How dare he criticize me?’ I was ready to end it. But the next day, I called him. I didn’t want to lose him, but I was still angry with him. I didn’t think it was such a big deal. When I called him, I told him that I forgave him for being so intolerant. Well that made things worse. He dared to say that I was self-centered, inconsiderate, and defensive.”

“Karen, I know how sensitive you are to criticism, but it’s important to learn to take constructive feedback if you wish to have a healthy relationship.”

“I told him that he is not my psychologist.”

“Being your psychologist hasn’t made it any easier for me.”

“Don’t be smart.”

I say, "Couples can share psychological insights without being psychologists. The point is if the feedback is fair and constructive" (Bergmann, 1995).

"I remembered you telling me, 'You fight to feel understood. You don't fight to get someone to see things your way.' I called him back . . . after I had hung up on him. . . . I realized I was acting like my mom. My mom does that all the time. She does something so inconsiderate and when you say something about it, she makes your anger the problem. All that talk about my mom helped. I was able to see that I was copying her. I actually said that I was sorry. I used to think that admitting that I was wrong was an utter defeat; that I was worthless if I were wrong. But he was thrilled that I could see my problem and could say that I was sorry. I couldn't do that with John. Now I can do that . . . So is the couch better?"

Karen is beginning to internalize our relationship into her personality. She remembered interpretations and insights and applied them in a critical situation. She is starting to break old self-defeating dramas (Williams & Schill, 1994). Karen now understands that her mother does not want her to go deep into herself. But therapy is helping her to have a better relationship with her boyfriend. Now Karen wants to go even deeper.

Freud as a neurologist initially used a couch for physical examinations. Eventually he discovered that listening to patients revealed a great deal more about their symptoms than the physical exam. When the patients were reclining, they were able to freely think, or associate to connections between their symptoms and the traumatic events or conflicts that caused them. Eventually the analytic couch became associated with classical psychoanalysis. Today many analytically oriented psychotherapists make use of the analytic couch to promote deeper self-reflection (Stern, 1978).

"It used to be used for deep regression, now it's more for better self reflection. Let me demonstrate. Karen, how many door knobs do you have in your home?"

Karen moves her eyes from me to somewhere above her head and to the side.

“I don’t know. Do I include the outside doors?”

“Doesn’t matter. You did it already. Where did you look?”

“Up and to the side.”

“You defocused me. Usually you stare at my face in search for non-verbal cues about what I am feeling. But this time my facial expressions were irrelevant and a distraction to the question about the doorknobs. You unconsciously looked away from me to begin to remember and count your doors.”

“If I use the couch will I focus more on my memories?”

I say, “Memories and feelings . . . In counseling, the patient sits up and looks to the therapist for advice to handle a problem. In psychoanalytic therapy, the patient looks inward with the guidance of the analyst. Using the couch helps you self-reflect without the defenses and habits of usual conversation. Self-reflection is an important component for personal growth” (Hoglund, 1994).

A national survey of psychologists who themselves went for therapy were asked what they looked for when seeking treatment for their problems. They ranked insight and personal growth higher than symptom reduction. This was regardless of their theoretical orientation. Even cognitive behavior therapists, who do not emphasize insight in their own work, wanted to have insight therapy for themselves (Pope & Tabachnick, 1994).

Karen looks at the couch and says, “When can I start?”

Karen surprised me. When Karen came into treatment she only wanted advice. Now she wants personal growth. Karen had worked through enough of her resistances to start deeper work. Karen is becoming a patient in psychoanalytic therapy.

“Karen, just lie down and feel free to say anything, especially if it has emotion.”

“You told me that twice a week therapy is much more than twice as powerful . . . how about more than that?”

“People have a strong need to vent and tell what happened to them during the week. They want support and guidance. There is often too little time once a week for deeper exploring into personality. With twice a week there is more time for exploring personality and transferences. A three to four day-a-week psychoanalysis explores more areas of the unconscious with the goal of a significant maturation in personality structure.”

“Can’t you over-analyze everything?”

“That’s not using constructive self-reflection. That’s obsessing and going nowhere. Don’t confuse the two.”

“How can I tell the difference?”

“Obsessing is circular. It goes nowhere and gives nothing but anxiety. Self-reflection lets you understand yourself so that you can deal with life better.”

“Okay. Do I just lie down here?”

“Sure, Karen just like it is a couch. Try not to censor your thoughts.”

“There is nothing there.”

I interpret the resistance. “That means you are trying not to think of anything.”

“Your couch needs to be reupholstered and the springs are bad.” Long silence. “I used to have headaches all the time. Now I can’t remember the last time I had one. I would hate to think that is because of the therapy.”

“Imagine if you had to give someone credit for helping you. Please go on.”

“ . . . I remember something to talk about. I had another one of my sick dreams. Just promise not to send me away. Okay?”

“Like the bad men who took your mother to the mental hospital?” I interpret the source of her fears of opening up.

“Maybe . . . they were just doing their job as you are.”

“It seems like you are blaming less and are seeing men more objectively.”

“Yes. You don’t seem as nasty, Dr. Gordon . . . maybe even nice sometimes.”

Karen’s transference to me is changing. This should generalize to her relationships with men.

“Your view of men might be changing. Tell me about your dream.”

“I was kissing a guy in the dream. I think he was Paul. I’m not sure. Then he turns into a spider. She wraps me in her web. I feel trapped and terrified. The spider is going to eat me.”

“‘She’ wraps you? What’s your association to the dream?”

“I said ‘she?’ I have a spider phobia.”

Fears of venomous creatures such as spiders and snakes are so common that many psychologists believe that the repulsion to them is a result of evolution that is hardwired into our brain.

But why would many more women than men have spider phobias (Bourdon, et. al 1988)? Some analysts think that because women feel too identified and tied to their mother, they feel trapped in her web if the mother is psychologically parasitic. Research shows that phobias are correlated to neuroticism (that is general insecurities) and rarely from a particular trauma with the phobic trigger (being hurt by a spider for example) (Mulken, de Jong, & Merckelbach, 1996).



Even if the phobia is tied to a particular event, that event is an emotional last straw and becomes a symbolic focal point. Phobias may be symbolic of an internal conflict that is projected on to a situation or object. Karen also has a phobia about flying. Both the spider phobia and the flying phobia at the very least are symbolic expressions of Karen's feelings of vulnerability.

Dreams and phobias are both the result of the same process of the symbolization of unconscious conflicts or traumas. I interpret them all the same, as the language of the unconscious telling me that something is wrong and in need of understanding. Research shows that trauma will affect the content, repetition, and intensity of dreams (Esposito, Benitez, Barza, & Mellman, 1999; Hartman & Basile, 2003).

"What's the action in the dream?" I ask. It is easier to understand a dream by its verbs than by its nouns. Verbs are hard to disguise.

"First I'm kissing Paul, and then the spider tries to eat me. Hey, it's like the other dream I told you about—my mother eating my tongue."

"It's a repetition of a theme."

"I feel my mom eats me up. Hey, remember you said that I feel guilty being with a man because of my mom. Is that why Paul turns into her?"

"I think so. Maybe you fear that Paul will turn into your mother and eat up your identity. You fear that's what happens when you get close." I interpret.

"God, you're right. Maybe my fear of being with men is because I'm afraid that I will be leaving her. I can't leave her, and I'm afraid to get close to anyone else."

"Karen, fathers help children leave their mother and get ready for the world of others."

"How come I don't dream about my father?"

“I don’t know. Karen you said that your father molested you during a visit, after your parents were separated. How did your mother know you were molested?”

“I don’t remember . . . Wait . . . I think mom was bathing me. My vagina was red. It burned in the water . . . She called her lawyer. They took me to a therapist. The therapist testified in court that I was molested . . . My mom said that because the judge was a man, he said that there wasn’t enough evidence to put my father in jail . . . I refused to see my father after that. I never saw him again . . . Do you have another time after three? I’m ready for three times a week on the couch. I have to get in shape. I want to marry Paul.”

“I think I have another time for you at 3:15 on Fridays.”

“That’s not good. That’s when I go to visit my mom. Do you have another time?”

“Even if I did, there is something of symbolic value here.”

“How can another time be symbolic?”

“You can see your mother an hour later. By your dreams and your symptoms it seems that you have sacrificed your relationship with men because of your unhealthy attachment to your mother. I think you need to consider that self-interest is not being selfish. You need to have your own life.”

“I thought my problems with men were due to my father.”

“That was my initial assumption. But as I listened to you, it seems it might have first started with the kind of attachment you had with your mother. A trauma with your father came on top of a weak foundation.”

“I’ll take the Friday appointment, but I’ll have hell to pay for it.”

## **Chapter 26 The Second Trip to Russia**

December 23

I leave for the long trip to Russia and Alla. The icy weather at Moscow's cold dreary local airport keeps me stuck for 12 hours waiting for information about my connecting flight to Saint Petersburg. I call Alla many times with updates. I take out my laptop to work on my lecture that I will give in a few days, but soon the battery gives out, and so do I. I doze off thinking of how to present the different theories of love. My thoughts continue from the waking state into the dream state. That is when the right brain continues the thoughts, but with a symbolic non-linear logic (Stein, Solms, & van Honk, 2006). I dream about lecturing with Alla in the audience smiling at me like the Sphinx. Then she is in a pyramid trapped like Aida. I awake to an insight. I finally find a way to integrate theories of love into a single meta-theory. Ayala Malach Pines (1999) called for an integration of evolutionary, psychoanalytic, and social psychological theories in her superb review of the factors of why we choose the sort of lovers we do. Alla, Aida, and Ayala came as the three sisters in my unconscious to tell me about love in the form of an ancient pyramid.

Then, I notice a man about my age, large and rugged looking with sandy hair, reading a novel in English. I walk over to him and ask, "Are you American?"

"No, Australian."

"It's miserable here. I can't get any information about the flight. Do you know anything?" I say.

"They don't know themselves, so they make excuses. It's too icy for the planes to fly. Look at the Russian passengers. They brought

blankets and food. They are used to delays and no information. Only the foreigners are pacing. Relax. What are you doing in Russia?"

"Visiting my fiancée."

"Me, too. I wonder if we used the same Internet service."

We hadn't, but our fiancées live near one another, and we make a date to all get together in Saint Petersburg. Later I meet a young Russian man about my son's age coming back from Germany. He overheard us speaking English and asks if we wouldn't mind him practicing his English. He tells us that his name is Gennady.

"Russian women make fine wives, if you get good one." Gennady advises.

I laugh, "But it might be a while to find out."

"Can't you use psychology and tell right away?" Gennady asks after I tell him that I am a psychologist.

"We can tell sooner than most people. But some sides of a person do not come out right away. Some traits come out sooner than others. Anxiety is hard to disguise."

"But everyone has anxiety," the Aussie says, "It helps sell beer."

"Anxiety is often a signal of things brewing inside."

"I think you can over analyze these things," the Aussie says.

"But you are psychologist. You can correct any problems. Am I right?" the boy asks.

"One can only provide insights and support for change. Some people can change, others can't or won't."

The Aussie puts his arms around us both and says, "Better to get the right one from the start, mates."

My companions help the hours pass. In the morning, Gennady translates the announcement over the loud speaker. We are to begin boarding.

# # #

In the Saint Petersburg airport, Alla jumps as she sees me.

“How long did you wait?” I ask.

“Six hours. I was worried for you. Come, I will care for you.”

She takes me to my hotel room, draws my bath, and put candles and incense around the tub. She’s like a geisha. Then, she puts me to bed, saying, “Now sleep, my swan. Recover your energies. I will return soon.”

“Where are you going?”

“I must sleep in my own bed. I never sleep well unless I am in my own bed. I have many such strange things about me, my love. You will in time, learn them all.”

“Please, Alla, come sleep with me. Start now to make the habit of my arms being your security, not your bed. We will be married soon. Start getting used to it now.”

“You are right.” Alla calls her mother to say that she is staying with me. Alla and her mother frequently check with each other on the phone throughout the day.

Alla curls up next to me. I don’t want to give up the magic of this moment, but I soon fall asleep. Alla can’t.

# # #

Christmas dinner with her parents is different from our first dinner. The food is still abundant and delicious, but this time I’m treated

as family. Alla had told me not to bring her jewelry for Christmas, as I had planned.

“I am a stylist. I am very fussy about what I wear. Often I prefer to wear inexpensive jewelry, but with a certain color or effect. Just bring some symbolic gifts.”

I give her a wallet. Inside is a credit card. “This is for your airfare to New York and anything you will need for your trip to America.” I also give her bridal magazines, with a card that read, “Pick out some ideas for our wedding.” I also give her a silver key ring with keys to the house and cars.

Alla has gifts for my children and me. Alla’s parents and I exchange gifts as well.

On the morning of December 26, I meet my illustrious psychologist and psychiatrist hosts and my interpreter. In her grand style, Alla had convinced everyone that I am the most famous psychologist in America. I suspect that many even boasted of being well aware of me and my work. I am shocked that the auditorium at the medical college is filled with some 300 psychologists, psychiatrists, and students.

Under Communism, a basic virtue was the idealization of the group above the individual. Now, I am lecturing about how becoming more of an individual is a mark of maturity. So rather than lecturing on the love of the group, I am about to lecture on romantic love. Romantic love is a rebellion from the group.

Alla grins while she sits with her best friends, Julia and Tanya, in the front row.

# # #

“The pain of a failed love relationship is often the reason people seek psychological help. Their passion that started as an encompassing irrational fantasy turned into a crushing loss. Therapists work to restore the patient’s diminished self-esteem. Commonly, when patients feel better,

they leave treatment and continue to repeat their pattern of love disturbances. Some hard-working insightful patients work deep and long enough to increase their capacity for healthier intimacy. Most people however, continue to wish for that magical relationship which will transform their lives.

What is passion and why is it so irrational, intense and fragile? Passion has been the main theme of literature, art and music, but only recently has it become a proper study for scientists. The artist can best convey passion, but the scientist can better explain it. Does an analysis kill the appreciation of passion? No more than knowing about art kills the appreciation of art. I believe that the more people understand themselves and the psychology of passion, the better they can love.

I have not found a single theory<sup>7</sup> to adequately explain love relations (Gordon, 2003a). I have developed my own integrated theory specifically aimed at understanding why romantic love is so complex and irrational (Gordon, 2006d). Here is a pyramid that is made up of all the main factors that contribute to how we love. There are five main factors as sections in the pyramid starting with Species Traits, then Individual Traits, Relational Internalizations, Beliefs, and Context.

At the base of the pyramid is the most powerful influence on our behaviors, our Species Traits that we possess as a result of millions of years of natural selection. It defines how we love as a human species (as compared to other animals). What we as humans find attractive in a mate are physical features and emotional triggers that used to be associated with survival, protection, and reproductive ability. They helped the species survive for millions of years, but have little to do with the survival of a couple's love today. A woman may be attracted to a powerful man or a man may be attracted to a beautiful woman, but these qualities have nothing to do with the ability to maintain a loving relationship. These instinctual influences weaken as a person matures.

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<sup>7</sup> A layperson might say, "That is just a theory and not a fact." This is actually a misunderstanding of the term. In science, "theory" represents the highest level of knowledge. A theory pulls together the findings and explains it all. When there are findings not well explained by a theory, then scientists look for a better theory. Part of my lecture became published in a Russian psychotherapy journal in 2003. The part on the pyramid theory was eventually published in 2006.

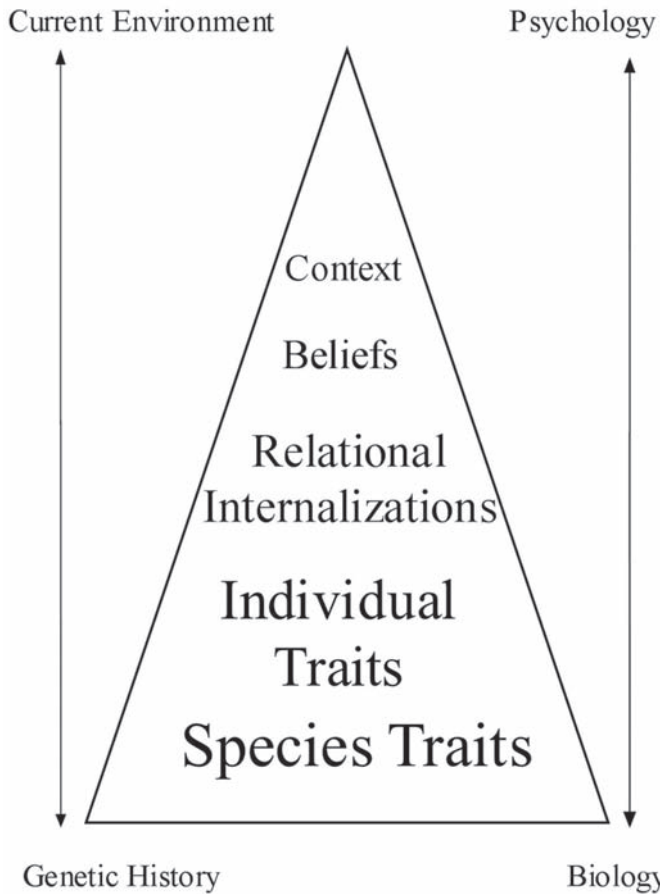


Figure 2 An Integrated Model of Factors Contributing to Love Relations.

The next level is Individual Traits. Humans are mainly alike in behaviors, but we are all born with different temperaments or traits. Researchers have consistently found for example that extraversion, neuroticism, aggressiveness, and impulsivity are largely inherited traits (Ahadi & Rothbart, 1994; Zuckerman, 2003). People who are too insecure, hostile, or insensitive will have intimacy problems. Good or bad parenting will mitigate or aggravate these negative traits.

Next is the influence of our parents, our earliest attachments and family dynamics. These Relational Internalizations become part of a



person's unconscious personality. An infant's attachment style is likely to be unconsciously repeated in later love relations. A secure attachment to a good enough mothering figure and parents who help a child deal with aggression, sexuality, and provide for a healthy self-concept are just some of the interpersonal prerequisites to loving maturely. Childhood neglect and abuse does damage to personality and the capacity to trust. However, a person who is temperamentally resilient may later learn to love maturely with psychotherapy despite an unhappy childhood.

After we look at ourselves as human animals, then as individuals with innate personality traits, and then influenced by parenting, we now look at the period from later childhood into adulthood and the influence of cognitive learning. This next level is our learned Beliefs from cultural norms and personal romantic experiences. People often think that marrying someone that fits an ideal family or cultural stereotype, or someone the opposite of a toxic parent or last lover is the solution to their mistakes in romantic choices. These beliefs are often superstitious and biased. A relationship is more likely to be successful if the couple shares beliefs that promote altruism, honesty, fairness, and mutual concern.

The top level is the Current Psychological Context. The time in a person's life or current stressful circumstances can produce conditions for an over-idealization of another. For example, the Stockholm Syndrome is a psychological reaction that leads to an attraction to a person holding one captive (Kuleshnyk, 1984). A situation in a person's life can create a need for a certain kind of relationship. Later, when the condition changes, the romance fades. Love that is based on a true appreciation of the other's qualities is likely to last.

As you move up the pyramid you are moving from Evolutionary History to Current Psychological Context. All these combined levels contribute to the irrationality of romantic love. The most disturbed relationships are based more on instinctual triggers, with individuals with immature personality traits, toxic internalizations, and attachment traumas, irrational beliefs about love objects and on a current stressful context that distorts the value of another . . .

[Having given examples of each level in more detail, I begin to focus on the Individual Traits.]

All people naturally have combinations of different temperaments or traits. These traits are organized within levels of personality structure. The over-all level of personality structure—healthy, neurotic, borderline, or psychotic<sup>8</sup>—more than anything else affects the quality of love relations. Childhood relational traumas can be helped with a therapeutic relationship. When I work with people that are functioning in the neurotic to healthy range of personality, they are usually able to learn from their mistakes and change for the better. But negative personality traits that are caused by genetics are not cured by relationships. I have worked with some extraordinary individuals who learned to tame self-defeating traits. They use insight and take responsibility for their actions. This is possible with years of psychoanalytic treatment. Otherwise, a relationship with someone with a borderline personality structure is filled with distortion, provocation and conflict with little hope for improvement. Many of my ideas come from Otto Kernberg's work on personality structure and love relations (1974, 1975, 1976, 1980, 1992, 1995, 2002, 2004). I will discuss three levels of personality structure: borderline, neurotic, and normal (healthy) and how they relate to love relations.

The person at the borderline level typically has a history of unstable interpersonal relationships that alternate between idealization and devaluation. One moment they can't live without their object of dependency and the next moment the love object is demonized, persecutory, or devalued. They suffer from an unstable self-image. They often do not really feel that they have a distinct identity and they suffer from low self-esteem (though the narcissistic type may cover this up with grandiosity). They are often impulsive, use bad judgment, and are often in a state of confusion. Depression is often a problem. There is emotional instability and moodiness, with periods of intense anxiety, agitation, and irritability.

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<sup>8</sup> I will only discuss the non-psychotic levels of personality functioning, since people functioning at a psychotic level are too out of touch with reality to function as intimate partners. Many analysts believe that the three levels of personality structure are neurotic, borderline, and psychotic.

A borderline personality structure is between the neurotic and psychotic structures, with elements of both. Also, there is no real "healthy level." Even the healthiest of people have at least some neurotic issues.

They frequently have feelings of inner emptiness. They have inappropriate, intense anger and can have paranoid thoughts.

If a person's identity is unstable, then that person's perceptions of others will be unstable. The person will love only parts of the love object that excite him or her and will not be able to understand or perceive the whole person.

At the borderline level of personality structure, idealization is based on splitting. Splitting occurs when people see themselves and others as either all good or all bad. They have difficulty emotionally accepting the complex nature of people; rather they relate to others in terms of their needs and projections. The other person is perceived as good, if they believe that person might meet their needs. The other person is perceived as bad or useless, if the person does not meet their needs.

At this primitive level, a person falls in love with a part object, not a whole person. The object of desire represents erotic and/or dependent needs. There is a great deal of idealization without empathy for the beloved.

A man might feel passion for a woman because of what she symbolizes and evokes. This might be his frustrating and teasing mother. She might see him as both the protective mother and the idealized father. However, they are in love with representations from the unconscious, which are parts of the self and parts of the child's perceptions of the parents. All this combines to a fantasy of an erotic image. People at this level can quickly move from intense idealization to devaluation. They fall in love with projections of their grandiose self and idealized parental images. This idealization is fragile. Since they have problems with impulse control and aggression, they destroy the intimacy.

If a person has a borderline personality structure, the destructive aspects of passion dominate the intimacy. Sexuality can become intense, with too much aggression and emotional sado-masochism.

All passion requires some sado-masochism. The word, "passion" originally meant, "to suffer," as in "The Passion of Jesus." Eventually

the word, “passion” became associated with the suffering in romantic love. Passionate love is primitive and aggressive by nature. People with a personality organized at the neurotic level over-defend against these primitive urges. They have trouble with sexual inhibitions and guilt. In contrast, borderline individuals can be very passionate, but they end up letting their aggression or need to suffer destroy the relationship. Healthier individuals are able to keep the sado-masochism in the playful and teasing aspects of the eroticism without harm to the relationship.

People with borderline level personalities unconsciously wish that ideal love and sexual gratification from the new love object would overcome their inner conflicts. Borderline level personalities may fear imprisonment in intimacy, since they project their own need to exploit and control onto the love object. They project the denied worst parts of themselves onto the partner. They also tend to act out in order to provoke the partner to react as the persecutory object (projective identification). That way, they can assure themselves that they now have the power to escape from and punish the love object.

People with borderline personalities fear separation from sources of security. Separations can lead to decomposition. Devaluing the object of dependency is a common defense. When faced with separation, criticism, or frustration, they project the impaired self onto the partner and go into a rage.

At first, individuals with borderline level personalities may be difficult to detect due to their warmth, charm, and talent. However, their inner emptiness, dissatisfaction, and rage soon become evident when they feel they are not getting what they want.

They tend to experience the ordinary reciprocity of human relations as exploitive and unfair. The partner must become exactly as they need him or her to be. They regard any limits as rejection.

Their partner needs emotional masochism and denial in order to remain a self-object to the borderline lover. In time, however, the borderline lover will use up the self-object lover and will either provoke the lover to reject them or devalue the lover and leave.

People with a shy temperament may be a “quiet” borderline, projecting their aggression outward, with victimhood as their core identity. They may look for a rescuer for the impossible job of saving them from their own personality dynamics. When the rescuer fails to make them constantly happy and content, they accuse the now devalued rescuer as being like all the others (persecutors). They punish the rescuer for failing to regulate their own self-esteem. Although regulation of self-esteem is a responsibility of each individual, people with borderline traits make their object of dependency responsible for affect and self-esteem regulation.

People with a narcissistic personality disorder are self-centered and often overly concerned with power, success, beauty, or ideal love. The person may have grandiosity and act haughty and arrogant. They often have feelings of being special, only understandable to special privileged people. They often have a need for excessive admiration and have a sense of entitlement, in that they expect special treatment from others. However, they often feel infringed upon when similar demands are placed on them. They are often exploitive, have problems with empathy, and are unable or unwilling to recognize the feelings and needs of others. They often feel envy and accuse others of envying them.

People with borderline level personality structures tend to seek a dependent relationship and resent the person they depend on. However, if they have a narcissistic personality disorder at the borderline level of severity, they defensively cover up their dependency needs with self-righteous demands and feelings of entitlement.

The neurotic personality structure is the most common condition. The idealization found with individuals with neurotic personalities is more reality based than with the borderline level. The image of the idealized parent is transferred to the new love object to form the basis for love and conflict. Rather than problems with denial, reality distortion, and aggression that characterize the borderline (or primitive) level, the main problems at this level are inhibition, anxiety, and guilt.

A person with a neurotic personality structure has the capacity for empathy and awareness of the whole love object. At this level, there is

remorse and concern, because the conscience is well developed. However, neurosis comes with a too harsh conscience (superego), so there is often sexual inhibition and guilt that compromises the intimacy.

Often, someone with a neurotic personality structure and someone with a borderline personality structure fall in love. They are complementary relationships. The neurotic personality has empathy, guilt, and masochism to put up with the exploitive, aggressive personality. They maybe initially vicariously gratified by the borderline person's narcissistic expression of sexuality and aggression without neurotic guilt. On the other hand, the borderline person sees the neurotic personality as containing and anchoring them. This alliance is often filled with conflict and instability.

Narcissistic personalities at the neurotic level are egocentric, need excessive admiration, use others for regulating their self-esteem, but they tend to be conflicted over feelings of entitlement and have guilt over the wish to be special. They also use higher-level defenses as compared to those at the borderline level. Neurotic narcissists favor repression over denial. With sufficient evidence, they can lift the barrier of repression and see their flaws and learn from the insight. Those with a borderline level narcissistic personality are often too defensive to improve. They exploit others rather than use insight and change for the better.

So then, what is a healthy personality structure? I do not believe such a thing can exist in the human animal. When one considers how our brains evolved with both rational and irrational structures, that all childhoods must have some degree of trauma, that all life has tragedy, then even the healthiest person must have at least some degree of neurosis. However, I will enumerate what a mature person possesses to a greater *degree* than those who have a neurotic or borderline personality structure:

1. They have a complex, stable and accurate identity.
2. They have the capacity for stable and satisfying intimacies.
3. They have affect tolerance, in that they can experience, communicate and feel comfortable with the full range of age-expected emotions.

4. They have good affect regulation and healthy coping strategies. That is, they regulate their impulses and emotions without using primitive defenses (that deny or distort reality, that project on to or provoke others, or that splits reality into black or white). They favor higher-level defenses such as anticipation, sublimation, humor, altruism and suppression of interfering self-defeating feelings.
5. They have a consistent and mature moral reasoning based on empathy that promotes concern and remorse.
6. They have good reality testing in that they appreciate the difference between what is realistic and what is imagined.
7. They have good ego resilience in that they deal with stress and recover from traumas without too much difficulty.<sup>9</sup>

Normal idealization in love is based on a stable identity and realistic awareness and appreciation of the whole love object. The mature person has the capacity to remain in love, since the love is based on a complex perception of the other's qualities that involve abstractions such as ideals, values, and goals. The idealization is based less on over-compensations, projections, and transferences, and more on the reality of the person. There is erotic desire for the other with little guilt to interfere with sexuality and intimacy. There is an ability to identify with the other's gender. There is a high capacity for empathy, tolerance, insight, remorse, and tenderness. There is a healthy concern for the other and few problems with aggression and defensiveness."

# # #

Now at the end of my three-hour lecture, I take questions from the audience. One young psychiatry student asks, "Dr. Gordon, it would seem that, according to what you are saying, there is little hope for the average person to remain happily married."

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<sup>9</sup> These psychoanalytic capacities are codified in the PDM (2006). I am inserting this information since this is now the most agreed upon and researched findings in psychoanalysis on healthy capacities. The PDM was not available until after the first edition of this book. At the lecture, I stated many of these qualities, but the point of this book is to teach and this is too important not to share in its clearest and more scientific form.

I laugh along with everyone and say, "It is hard to remain happily married. There are many internal and external pressures working against it. No one is entitled to a lasting love without work. If we put as much work into our intimacies as we do in other things, the intimacies may stay in better condition. Marriage involves work; however, if it is frequent, hard work, then something is wrong, and a major change in personality or a more suitable partner may be required. Deep-insight psychotherapy such as the kind found in psychoanalysis may be needed for such changes, but not always. I have seen people with personality disorders happily married. They need enough insight to keep the hostility and defensiveness to a minimum and give each other a lot of psychological room. When there is acting out, they need remorse and responsibility for their actions. When the beloved regresses, there needs to be forgiveness. The couple also needs to express appreciation and support for one another. The most important thing is to marry someone who you not only want to be with, but also is easy enough to be with. But sometimes things work out simply because the rocks in his head perfectly fit the holes in her head!"



## **Chapter 27 Irina's Warning**

Alla beams as she comes up to me after my lecture. "Tanya and Julia said that you are a great guru and that I need to become rich and support you, so that you will be free to do your thinking and writing. They also said that you were describing me, but I told them that what you were saying was true of all people." She proudly hangs on me, as we thank everyone.

Alla hates the winter in Saint Petersburg. It is her time of deep depression. She cannot tolerate the cold dark days with little sun. I know that people who experience Seasonal Affective Disorder may also have underlying problems with depression and the two add up to a more acute depressive reaction (Murray, Hay, & Armstrong, 1995), so I worry that this is not just about the winter.

One afternoon she comes to my hotel room in a rage about her boss. "That bastard called me in to question my expense account! How dare he!"

It makes me think of our fight over money. Her body shakes with rage. I wonder how often she would be like that with me. People often think that they will be the exception to the rule. I see problems in Alla, but I love her. I decide to be patient with her.

Besides, she soon slowly undresses. As I watch her, I take a mental photograph. I tell myself to remember this visual moment of erotic beauty. I want to save this moment in my memory. She then wraps herself around me, and I am soon lost in her charms.

I caught a cold, I think, from the long, chilly wait at the airport. Alla's mother insists that I move in with them so they can care for me. I sleep in Alla's room while she sleeps with her mother and her father

sleeps on the sofa. What does this sleeping arrangement say about the family system?

For over a week, we live together. Alla loves caring for me, putting mustard paste on my chest, feeding me and holding me. In her room, I am vulnerable and totally under her control. It is a love she understands.

As we lie in bed, I ask Alla, “Honey, are you preparing for your move to the U.S.?”

“No. I have too many things to do. Really, darling, I have no time to even think of it! Please, can we speak of other things?”

Later she says, “Darling, you were so great with your lecture. I am certain that you could become famous here and have a practice in Saint Petersburg.”

“Alla, I can live almost anywhere, but it is very unlikely that I can have the standard of living in Russia with psychology that I now have in the United States.”

“Then, darling, you can have a practice in both places. I’m sure you can do it. We can buy a condo here and fly back and forth each month.” She’s telling me that she’s afraid to go too far from her ego-defining status in Saint Petersburg. It is hard for anyone to leave one’s country (Akhtar, 1999b), it is even more difficult when your identity is weak and you depend on others around to define your worth.

# # #

Her mother invites another interpreter into her home and the three of us go into the living room filled with books, antiques, and paintings. Irina closes the doors. Alla stays in her own room.

Irina begins, “After Alla showed us your funny, lovely email that you wrote to my husband and me, I wrote you a long letter about Alla’s problems. I tried to get her to send it to you, but she never did. I will tell you now, what I said in my letter.”

“Robert, you were wrong to say ‘Fuck you’ to Alla. She was crying hysterically and had even for a while removed your photos from her wall. She never had a man’s photos on her walls. She was never really in love before. I must tell you how to handle Alla. It will not be easy. She cannot endure any confrontation—that is the wrong way. Alla has a bad temper and terrible moods, as did her father. She can be very cruel to me and say the most awful things to hurt me. But the next day, she remembers nothing. I will be upset all week, and she is hugging and kissing me as though nothing happened. She won’t even apologize. Only recently, since you appeared in her life, does she sometimes apologize. Do not confront her with psychology. It will not help and may make things worse. I know. I have tried. She doesn’t remember what she says in her terrible moods. Just use that nice smile of yours, wait, and it will pass.

It is better to talk her into things. She is very suggestible. You love her sincerely, I know, but you need to understand her better. She is a very talented girl, but do not be fooled, she is really very weak.

I know you are worried about the age difference. Don’t worry about it. That will not be the problem. She will be loyal to you. She loves you completely. I know my daughter. This is the first time she has ever been this much in love. She loved that the men loved her so much. The main problem will be handling her terrible moods.

Don’t talk of marriage. She is terrified of marriage. After she came back from Finland, she was very depressed about that relationship. She saw Nadya. Nadya hypnotized her. Alla told me that she remembered as a child, being in a carriage. Her father was drinking, and he left the carriage unattended. The carriage went down a hill. Alla remembers screaming. I didn’t know about that event, but I did have to leave that marriage because I was frightened for Alla’s safety. She gets close to marriage and then she leaves. So please don’t talk of marriage. Live together for a while. Let her get used to it. Do you understand?”

“Da.”

“Did you notice that when you give Alla money, she gives it to me? She knows that she is impulsive and cannot save. She does not

understand limits. We fight about money all the time. At some level, she must know, because she still lets me manage the money. Be prepared; she will be very angry at your limits, but she needs them. In the next moment, it's as if the fight never happened.

My daughter loves you completely, but, please, you will need a great deal of patience with her. You will need to understand and survive her terrible moods and forget the things that she says in them. That is the only way this can work out.

Oh, I'm afraid that I am doing all the talking. Do you understand? Do you have any questions?"

"No, not at all. Thank you for your honest and helpful advice."

Irina was insightful and brave to share this with me. She is a proud and private person. I'm sure that it was hard for her, especially in front of an interpreter. Perhaps Irina feared that I might not tolerate her daughter's problems. But clearly she wants me to be able to help her daughter. She sees that possibility. She sees that Alla is now able to apologize after my confrontation with her. She wants me to know how to make it work.

This time I do not think Irina was trying to chase me away. I thank Irina for her help and go to join Alla in her room.

# # #

Alla offers me some cognac and asks me if our talk went well. I say, "Your mother gave me an Alla manual, so I can better understand you."

She laughs and says, "It won't help. Only a large stock of time and love will help to understand this unique creature." Alla uses her passion to change the subject and for that moment, I suppress any concerns and doubts.

# # #

The next day we join Alla's friends, Julia and Tanya, at Alla's favorite café. Julia asks Alla something and Alla snaps, "Fuck You!" Julia looks confused and hurt.

I ask, "Alla, what did Julia say?"

"She asked if we had a wedding date."

"Why would you say 'fuck you' to that?"

Alla just shrugs and changes the subject. It is as if it never happened.

We visit a famous psychiatrist who had helped host my lecture. He is a kind man. I remember at the end of my lecture, he must have seen my anxiety as I readied to thank my hosts as I looked at the list of names that I could not begin to pronounce. He came over and spoke in Russian to the audience, "Doctor Gordon asked me to thank his kind hosts . . ."

He gives us a tour around his clinic and shows us his patients getting intravenous anti-psychotic medication in their beds. Watching the patients, Alla becomes anxious.

"Darling, I must leave this place immediately. I'll meet you outside."

Later I ask what had been the problem.

"Robert, my heart bleeds to see so much suffering."

I saw more anxiety than sympathy in her. Do the patients represent her fragility? And will she run from the awareness of her problems, the way she ran from those patients?

###

Christmas is a minor holiday for the Russians, while New Year's Eve is their big event. In their living room next to the TV, is a decorated New Year's tree. Again, Alla's mother makes a great dinner, and at

midnight, we watch President Putin on TV wishing us all a good New Year. Alla and her parents sing traditional Russian songs, and we watch Russia's favorite entertainers on the television.

A comedian jokes about Russian women going to the U.S. to get married. He says, "Their American husbands work all the time and the women become bored. They can't wait to return to Russia. Here they find true happiness again, tormenting their friends by telling them about their good life in America . . . A girl friend will ask, 'How many rooms has your house in America?' 'Well, lets see, the five bedrooms, the study, the living room, the dining room, the kitchen . . .' 'Oh, we have the same, only without the walls.'"

Between her fits of laughter, Alla interprets the jokes for me. It was a wonderful evening.

# # #

When Irina says her goodbye to me, I see her tears. If it works out, her daughter will go far from her. If it doesn't, her daughter will have an awful loss. Either way, there is pain. Once at the airport, Alla becomes very upset and begins to panic.

When I arrive home, I receive the good news that Alla has her interview date for the fiancée visa on February 15.

## **Chapter 28 The Confrontation**

Karen has come early for her session. When I open the door to the waiting room, Karen sees me and smiles. She puts her check on my desk and lies on the couch. She is quiet for a while and then speaks with a tremor.

“I couldn’t wait for you to get back. So much happened. My mom flipped out on me and smacked me across my face. She said that you are ruining our relationship.” Karen reaches for the tissue box and wipes her tears.

“Why did she hit you?”

“She can really go into rages. First, I told her that I would be coming over for dinner at 4:30 on Friday’s and not at 3:30. She wasn’t happy about that. Then I told her that I wanted to know why they got a divorce. She told me ‘some things are the worse from dwelling.’ Then she changed the subject. I wasn’t buying it this time. I persisted. Then she took off on you, calling you a quack and a rapist. Finally, she told me that it was because my father molested me.”

Karen is pressing her hands against her head as if she needs to keep her mind from exploding.

“I said, ‘Mom that was after you and he separated, what’s the real reason?’ Then she said, ‘Your father was running around. When I caught him, he tried to kill me. He tried to poison me. He had me put in the loony bin. Those quack psychiatrists believed him. He was going to use that to take you away from me.’”

“I take it your mother doesn’t think she has any problems,” I say.

“Mom thinks she is fine. Her house is scary; it is such a mess. She can’t tell what is important and what isn’t. She can’t throw anything away. She can’t hold a job. She has no close friends. She told me that she wouldn’t date so she could devote herself to me. That’s bullshit. She can’t get along.”

“Karen, what evidence did she have that your father was having affairs?”

“She told me that she smelled vaginal juices on him.”

“That was her evidence?”

“I told her that it was not possible to smell vaginal juices on him unless she is a dog. She started screaming at me, screaming that men were evil, that my father had affairs and tried to poison her. That he spread rumors about her so that no one would hire her. That he paid off the psychiatrists to say that she was crazy. That he molested me.”

“What were you feeling?”

“I was shaking, but I needed to know. I asked her how she knew that I was molested. She told me that all the doctors agreed that I was. I kept asking how she knew. She said that I had a sex rash on my vagina. I said, ‘Mom, what the hell is a sex rash? I had rashes there all the time. All girls get them. It doesn’t mean that they were molested! I never remembered Dad molesting me! I wanted to make you happy, Mom, so I just went along with it. Then I became confused.’ She slapped me and told me to leave. She told me that you were brainwashing me and that she was reporting you to the licensing board.”

“I’m not worried about that. How are you? I’m worried about you.”

“Dr. Gordon, I feel like everything I ever thought was bullshit. I feel like my core is hollow, fake. I feel so alone. I think that she is paranoid. I always felt that, but I never really put it all together and accepted it. She was my rock. Now I feel adrift. I don’t know who to rely on now.”



“Karen, you have to let go of the idealized image of your mother to find out who you are. Now you will need to rely on your own weighing of evidence as you deal with reality and build a more solid sense of self.”

“I’m going to contact my aunt Michelle and see what I can learn about my father.”

## Chapter 29 The Mutual Expectation Stage

In the Mutual Expectation Stage lovers try to meet each other's expectations of a committed relationship in the real world. If practical problems concerning economic, emotional, social, and sexual issues are not resolved the relationship will weaken or end.

###

Jan. 13

In a month, Alla will be in Moscow at the U.S. consulate for her interview. About two weeks after that, she will be in America. I am preparing for her arrival and our marriage.

"Alla, if you want your parents at the wedding, you need to work on getting their visas."

"Don't talk about marriage! No more talk of it, Robert, please!"

"What's wrong?"

"I . . . I . . . can't deal with all this . . . I . . . I . . ."

"If you need more time, there is no rush. Don't feel pressured. If the 90 days in America is not enough time for you to be sure about marriage, we can just go through the visa application process again."

"Robert, you were married. I never was. How can you do that? I can't imagine looking at the same face every day for years. I am too wild for marriage! I am used to being independent. I can't stand to be dependent and trapped. I am not sure I can do that."

“Okay. Don’t worry. We can put things off.”

# # #

She sounds angry, scared, and drunk. This is not the usual anxiety about marriage. I think she is making an issue of independence because her own dependency needs scare her. It seems that she projects her dependency needs onto me, fearing that I would want to control her the same way she needs to control me. In Alla’s mind, marriage becomes a trap. Irina’s warning comes back to me. I have the awful realization that I’m no exception.

# # #

Jan. 14

“Alla, I have stopped all my wedding plans—no plans, just time for us to learn more about each other. Please do not feel forced or pressured. Be as nervous as anyone should be when about to leap to the next dimension. But you are leaping into an adventure, not your death! Turn your ‘Oh, shit!’ feeling into an ‘Oh, wow!’”

“Thank you for the kind words. My weariness from the filming of the fashion show and PMS were the only reason for my pessimistic words.”

“Alla, your country, your room, and your familiar things can only give the illusion of security. You know that only by challenging yourself can you keep developing a portable inner security.”

“Yes, I need to leave Russia. No doubt. I need to see the next dimension. I need to find a portable inner security. I need you!”

# # #

I hope that Alla will have insight about her fears. Otherwise, she might find an unconscious solution, such as provoking a fight as a way to back out of our relationship. Irina has seen changes, and I must be

patient. But at the same time, if I do not hear real insight and concern about my feelings how can I proceed with this?

# # #

Jan. 16

“Saint Petersburg irritates me now . . . I had a very unpleasant conversation with my boss at the filming. Then I was warring with my mum. I hate the world when you are far.”

“You really sounded scared of marriage.”

“I have no fears about marriage. I never had marriage before. I just don’t understand it. I got used to being free. I got used to not promising stability. I am too wild for boring stability.”

# # #

Alla sees her being too wild as a virtue, not a flaw. What Alla calls “wild” is in fact her narcissism and aggression. Rationalizing a flaw keeps it alive and destructive.

# # #

Jan. 17

“Alla, independence and freedom come from a secure identity. Fear of dependency in a relationship is usually a result of fearing one’s own dependency needs. You are too wild for boring stability? You couple ‘boring’ with ‘stability.’ I am stable and interesting. Someone can be an unstable bore. Very emotional people often see an emotionally healthy relationship as boring. Boredom can be about an inner loneliness and discontent. In a loving, committed relationship, you feel contentment that is not dramatic or showy.”

“My gentle vulture, why do you sound so pessimistic?”

“Because of what you’ve said.”

“What did I say?”

“Alla, you said, ‘don’t talk about marriage! I can’t imagine looking at the same face every day for years . . . I am too wild for marriage . . . I am used to being independent . . . I am not sure I can do that.’ Don’t you remember?”

“I said that! No, I don’t remember.”

“How is it possible that you can’t remember something so important?”

“Sorry, Robert, I can’t give a long explanation now, because I must now try to make a list of the most important things for my future long trip to you. I promised my boss that I would finish my spring collection before I left . . . I have received an offer to work for a French designer in Paris!”

# # #

Alla forgot what she said and hoped that I would as well. She shows no concern about my feelings. Her ‘To Do’ list included both leaving for America and also looking into a possible job in Paris. This is provocative. She’s dropping emotional land mines all over our conversation.

# # #

Jan. 18

“Robert, I said that I couldn’t look at the same face for years? I said that? I don’t remember. I swear! Oh, God . . . I saw your face for 3,000 years, and I am still alive, by the way. And I need more.”

“Alla, you put me on an emotional roller coaster and you don’t seem to realize it.”

“Yes, I didn’t realize this.”

“You really didn’t consider how I would feel?”

“I remember saying to you some words, but I was meaning, ‘Let’s don’t talk about it right now! Not right now!’ Because when I have a bad mood, PMS, headache, or other terrible stupid pessimistic ideas in my head, I don’t want to talk at all . . . This is because all my words can be only bullshit from a baby, who is just afraid . . . I remember about my previous unpleasant dialogue with you by phone, when I tried to speak during my bad state of health or bad mood . . . As when I did not understand you when we spoke about money.”

“Alla, your ‘only bullshit from a baby’ is upsetting to me. I want to be understanding, but I’m finding it hard. It’s such a one-way street. When do you take responsibility for your words and their consequences?”

“I can hurt you accidentally! I knew that I was upset on the phone and I tried to protect you from this heavy mood. That is why I said, ‘Let’s don’t talk about marriage.’ I was meaning ‘Honey, I don’t want to tell you any stupid words right now.’ Now, you understand me better, my swan? I need time for myself. I need only your words about love. I am coming to America to love you and care about you, honey . . . It’s my way. It’s my plan . . . I need to have happy marriage with you.”

“So when you say your bullshit from a baby, what do I do? Do I go into denial as well?”

“Do not be the psychologist with me. Do not try to give me a diagnosis; just give me time, without questions and explanations. I will struggle with my demons independently. I do not want to disturb you and hurt you . . . Give me time . . . Even stay away from me, honey during my inner war.”

“Don’t use my being a psychologist as the problem. It is normal to wonder why someone you care about is acting strangely. You don’t get to make unilateral decisions when a mutual topic is open or closed.”

“You will need to live with me for understanding. If we shall have the decision to get married on the second day after my arrival to your home, we are crazy twins, it’s possible! . . . If we shall have the desire,

we'll get married without my parents . . . Okay, my love? . . . Nothing can stop us . . . Don't worry . . . We'll find a way, relax . . . Just love me, nothing more. I just need you! . . . What do you think, nice idea? . . . Come to me, closer, my gentle vulture, you drive me crazy."

"I thought you are too wild for marriage."

"Don't worry about my phrase. I will keep my wildness close to you. Please use it and enjoy it . . . Oh, I used my credit card in Frankfurt . . . Honey, it so is convenient. Thank you! It felt great with your magic gift! I have bought good cosmetics, gifts for parents, for you and a few new shoes, shoes all the time, it's a women's fetish; you don't mind, my patron do you?"

. . . I spent not too much. Only you can to defuse this cute 'bomb', Honey, only you. I need you. Just love me . . . I shall not give any explanations . . . I will not apologize for my nature. It's all about me!! . . . I can be dangerous to all people on this planet . . . except for you . . . I sent some funny pictures for you Honey . . . You are my soul mate and I love you madly! Just be close to me, love me, use me for your pleasure, and be happy."

###

Alla sees insight, which she calls "psychology," as dangerous. She is just not prepared to look deeply into herself. If she looks too deep she would have to give up her defensive mythology that sustains her. She is play-acting her life. She never had a fairy tale childhood. She is not strong enough to deal with the loss of her father and that part of her that is similar to him.

The pictures that Alla sent are both seductive and disturbing. In one, she is provocatively dressed in a negligee, looking sad and holding a knife to her head. She consciously feels that it would be funny. But the photos are a warning of her self-destructiveness.

Alla provokes conflict and then denies it. She can't apologize or understand how her actions affect me or anyone else.

When Alla said, “I can be dangerous for all people on this planet, except for you.” I knew it meant that I am next. Despite all my hopes, I will not be the exception. There are no lasting exceptions to unconscious rules.

# # #

Jan. 19

“Alla, no one is entitled to being loved regardless of how they act. There needs to be insight, responsibility, and remorse to help keep love alive. You are too complacent about your emotional dumping. It has a cumulative effect on our relationship. Please take responsibility for your hurtful words. Don’t expect others to have to put up with them. Babies, when they feel upset vomit on their parents. Parents just wipe it up and love the baby anyway. Adults don’t have such expectations in their relationships. Honey, I want to help you, but I can’t find it in myself to treat you like a careless baby. I want more of an equal.”

“Robert, you think that I am not mature enough for marriage! We had only a few of unpleasant conversations, and you are already in a panic! . . . Why do *you* sound like an offended baby? I am not your mother!! . . . You attempt to justify your own problems, and you want that I pay for them! You can’t be just a loving person . . . You suspect that I don’t know what healthy love is . . . You tell me ‘Alla this is not about love but sickness . . . ’”

“So what looked like your getting insight was really an unshared resentment waiting to be used? You now bring this up as though I gave you an unfair criticism. One guy slashed his veins for you, and another rejected his child so not to disturb you. Alla, you offered these as demonstrations of real love. Now you are offended that I said what they did was sick? Do you expect me also to love you the same way? I will not give you such a ‘love’ and I would never accept such a ‘love.’

Love is not unconditional tolerance. That is masochism. Love is showing concern and remorse if you hurt someone close to you. Love



is accepting feedback that shows that you were wrong and wanting to become a better person.”

“Robert, I am tired to apologize for my temper!! . . . I don’t want a war.

I am too sensitive and gentle for this terrible way.

I did nothing that needs apology. Honey, you do not love my nature. I see it . . . You want to make me a stable quiet woman, mature for the long relations in the suburban USA . . . I will not allow you to use me as rabbit for your experiments and proof of your theories. After your psychology I became worse . . . I want to stop it! Now!”

# # #

Alla is furious now that I am not mirroring back her grandiose self-image. She needs me to tolerate all her reactions and defenses. Otherwise, I become devalued and an ice statue to her.

Although carrying on a mature love relationship with her seems impossible now, I am still in conflict about ending it. I am still hoping that Alla will have insight. I remember the magical times I had with her. Her periodic rages seem like visits from another being. My reason can see the evidence, but my emotional bond with her holds on. A relationship builds over time and dies over time. Denial has a hand in both periods.

# # #

Jan. 24

“Alla, I missed you.”

“I missed you, my swan. I could not eat or sleep all these days without you. I have no life without you.”

“I want to clarify my concern. Honey, I remember a couple that saw me a while back. The wife said, ‘I am leaving him. He doesn’t

understand me. He is always a physician. I was mortified. We were making love and he began to give me an examination! That was the last straw!’ The husband tearfully said, ‘I was about to make love to her, and I was fondling her breasts when I felt a lump. It seemed attached. I do this sort of work. It needs a biopsy as soon as possible. I know she is scared. I know she would rather fight with me than face that something may be wrong with her. Usually, I just let her get angry with me and it blows over, but I can’t ignore this one. I love her, and I am concerned for her.’

I only saw them one session. They never came back. I don’t know what happened, but I’ve been in his shoes.

To say nothing about a loved one’s self-destructiveness is moral negligence. That’s different from unfair criticism. Alla, I tell people things no one has ever said to them before, things they don’t know about themselves, things people would swear are absolutely untrue about them. These are insights about unconscious sides of their personalities.

Do you think when I diagnose people with narcissistic traits that they realize they have it? Their personality is their normal, like their skin. They do not perceive their self-defeating traits as personal problems, yet they harm themselves and their relationships. Such people seem like they have very high self-esteem, but it’s often overcompensation for their inferiority complexes. They become overly dependent on the admiration of others to help bolster their vulnerable self-esteem. They cannot stand criticism.

They think I’m full of shit, if I suggest such a thing to them. They only come to me because of long-standing problems with intimacy that they think are the result of others. I often go through the traits of narcissism with them:

- Needs to see self as special
- Preoccupied with thoughts of beauty, and/or ideal love
- Requires excessive admiration
- Has sense of entitlement
- Impatient

- Tends to be unaware of empathic failures to others

These problems can combine with borderline traits such as:

- Intense intimate relationships alternating between the extremes of idealization and devaluation
- Identity instability
- Impulsiveness
- Emotional instability, depression, irritability lasting a few hours or a few days
- Periods of feelings of emptiness
- Periods of inappropriate, intense anger
- Dissociated memory or denials after periods of upset

Some people have a few of these traits, while others have most of them.

Then I give examples of each criterion in their own lives, so they can see how it applies. After a while, they often ask what can be done.

I tell them, ‘If you do not have insight, you will go through life blaming everyone else for your unhappiness and never have a lasting satisfying intimacy. With psychotherapy, I might be able to help you.’

Alla, please reread our emails. We can all learn more by looking back with insight. Sometimes we need the help of a professional to achieve personal growth. Alla go to a good psychotherapist and learn to be less self-defeating. I have done this myself, and I have helped many people become happier. I tell you this out of loving concern.”

“Robert, thank you for your wise words.”

# # #

I feel an obligation before I leave her to explain to her how she is suffering from problems that require professional care. In the past, Alla felt that anytime I took issue with her behavior that I was unjustly diagnosing her. These same words in anger would be destructive. They must

only be shared with fairness and genuine concern. I feel that although our relationship is lost, the least I can do is to plant some seeds that might later be useful to this extraordinary person. Meanwhile, I am flooded with sadness and a profound sense of loss.

# # #

Jan. 25

“Robert, I know everything already, even my narcissistic personality and other stuff! Do you think that I am stupid? You might have a better knowledge but not a better mind . . . I agree with that doctor’s wife who said: ‘We were making love and he begins to give me an examination! That was the last straw!’ . . . I am on her side . . . Are you afraid that my narcissism will disturb your ego?”

“Alla, let me be clear, though it hurts me to say it, I cannot live on an emotional roller coaster with someone who denies the roller coaster. Please, it is better for both of us to end it now. It will spare us even worse pain later.”

“My intuition was right! You lied to me all along! No one finishes so terribly a rare relation like this. Normal people do other more healthy things . . . You just decided to leave me earlier, than I leave you! HA! So petty a way! . . . I do not respect you for it! . . . I had a premonition that you will do a huge mistake that you will regret. I prepared for it . . . You are forbidden to disturb me again! . . . You no longer exist for me. I never look back . . . I do not need to check our past emails for understanding. I am destroying them all. I trust my intuition more . . .

I am glad for this . . . I am fortunate to be free of such an old sick man as you . . . I would have died from boredom close to you after a few weeks . . . Leave your dreams, Robert. Open your eyes, finally! I loved not you. I loved my fantasy. I loved an illusion.”

# # #

I was Alla's illusion. She fell in love with her over-idealized image of me that represented her need for a transformational, magical love. When I insisted on a reciprocal intimacy, her idealization switched to total devaluation. Alla cannot perceive me as existing somewhere in reality between the extremes of her personality. Some degree of idealization and even devaluation occurs in all intimacy. They can be part of a normal ambivalent love that is based on real qualities and shared values. But for individuals with an immature personality structure, their idealization and devaluation becomes so extreme that they determine the course of the relationship.

Alla was caught between her fear of a real intimacy and losing me. She was caught between living within her fragile fantasy world, where she was the child-queen and the adult reality world of give and take. If she had embraced insight, she might have grown over time. Denial is her tragic flaw.

Alla's problems are relationship killers. I could have followed Irina's advice. But I would be managing the relationship. I want a mutually satisfying intimacy.

Alla had to deal with the pain of rejection and loss. This was Alla's deepest love, and its failure will be traumatic and humiliating for her. She sought in me the mentally ill father to save and the hero father to save her. She hoped to repair her past and herself through an idealized magical love with me.

It will be hard for Alla to go forward. She distrusts men and fears separating from her mother. She never developed an inner sense of security. Since Alla feared looking at her past and herself, she would repeat her love drama. I started as her idealized father and ended up her devalued lost father. I also went from being her grandiose twin to becoming the embodiment of her damaged self.

Ironically, I helped Karen and many people like her with empathy and insight. Karen at first seemed like someone with a narcissistic personality at the borderline level of personality structure. It turned out

that her borderline behaviors were the introjects of her psychotic mother. Since Karen's narcissistic personality was organized mostly at the neurotic level, she favored repression as a defense. She was able to turn insights into personal growth.

Alla at first seemed neurotic, but because of my love for her, I was slow to see that she has a borderline-level narcissistic personality that favors denial, splitting, projective identification, idealization, and devaluation.

Alla never wanted to review our correspondences as a check on reality. Alla did not think she ever got reality wrong. She only needed her intuition as her guide. Alla never saw the contradictions in her intuition. Her intuition told her we were meant to be together. Later her intuition told her I was unworthy of her love. That did not matter. All that mattered was Alla would live in a world of her own making where she was a self-imposed prisoner. In the end, she agreed with the wife of the physician in my example. Alla identified with the defensive wife who would rather be alone and possibly die than look at herself. Alla projected her mental illness onto me. I became the devalued ice statue.

All Alla's problems were clear from her first charming and grandiose letters to me to her first signs of rage and devaluation. Everything was evident from the start. At first, my conscious knowledge of psychology did not protect me from acting out my unconscious psychology. But in the end I chose my value of a healthy relationship over the excitement of passion. Passion is powerful. Our passion springs from our instinctual and personal past. It remains in the most basic level of our personality. However, my psychoanalytic insights helped me recognize the problems and kept me from remaining in a disturbed relationship for long. These insights helped me to tear myself away, even while I felt intense passion for her. It is a mistake to love someone so much that you are willing to sacrifice your sense of fairness and values.

At first, I hoped that she would reread our correspondence and have a miraculous insight cure. Then I accepted the reality of loss and

disappointment. While my mind was trying to avoid the reality of the problems, my body had been absorbing the stress of it. Now, my blood pressure, which had increased, decreased. My shoulder pain, which lasted for months, went away. Alla would have been a terrible mistake. Thank God for psychology.

## Chapter 30 The Breakthrough

Karen's manner of dress is not as provocative and neither are her actions as compared to a few months ago. Karen's voice is less shrill and had more sadness and depth. These changes are mostly unconscious.

"I visited my aunt Michelle. She cried when she saw me. She made me cry. It's been years since I've seen her. I told her about my work with you. She told me that I am brave. She told me that my dad loved Mom and me a lot. She said that he tried to get Mom to go to a psychiatrist, but she was too defensive.

Michelle said that Mom was insanely jealous and always looking for evidence of affairs. Oh, and she knew about mom's paranoia about smelling vaginal juices on him and about her fear of being poisoned. She said that Dad left after she locked me out of her bedroom while she was having a psychotic breakdown. He had Mom hospitalized. He saw the condition I was in and took me to live with him.

Michelle said that she was supposed to supervise Mom's visits with me after the hospitalization. She said Mom was fighting Dad for sole custody of me, and that's when she accused Dad of molesting me. She lost in court. But Mom made me afraid to see him. I now remember how she would examine me for evidence of sex abuse after I visited him. Eventually I was telling my therapist that I *was* abused. Mom taught me that he was evil, and I believed her. Finally, I refused to see Dad.

My mom wouldn't let Michelle in the house and forbade my seeing her. My aunt said Dad would send checks for me. Mom must have cashed them, and told me that he never sent me money. He also sent me cards and presents. Michelle called once to see if I were getting them.



I wasn't. Mom told her that she was protecting me from him. She hung up on my aunt. Michelle didn't call her again until Dad died. She said that she would take me to the funeral."

"How old were you?"

"About fifteen. My mom told me that I didn't have to go if I didn't want to. She took me out to a nice restaurant, and we celebrated his death."

"Did you ever go to his grave?"

"No. Michelle showed me pictures of Dad holding me and playing checkers with me. I remembered that I loved playing checkers with him. He'd let me win and pretend to be angry. I'd climb on his back."

God, I remember the smell of his cologne. I remember his tenderness. I have memories of my dad! . . . I remember waiting for him to come home . . .

I remember his love . . . how he hugged me . . . I missed out on him because of her . . . I miss him! I loved my daddy . . . I miss my daddy!" Karen sobs.

###

Karen made a breakthrough. She has the courage to look into her past. She could now understand why she is so afraid to love and would only commit to the sort of men she could easily reject. Karen's image of men had been deeply affected by her psychotic mother's paranoia. But buried beneath it were the memories of her good relationship with her father. Karen needs to understand her mother's problems in order to reevaluate her poisoned beliefs about men and intimacy. Karen's feelings about men were mainly due to the power of her mother as her first love object. Karen feared losing her identity to a man, since her mother had invaded and controlled her identity. Karen had a pathological attachment to her mother. This characterized itself in her romantic relationships and in her early negative transference to me.

Eventually Karen used her emotional insights to begin to detoxify her childhood traumas. This understanding in time would lead to a more solid identity and a greater capacity for a healthy intimacy. Karen's memory of a loving, protective father will act as a foundation for a better relationship with a man.

Karen still has a long way to go. These breakthroughs allow for deeper work with much less resistance. Tragically, her insights came too late in life to reunite with her father. But I know that Karen will be able to love better because of the early love he had given her. How differently these two women turned out! Karen used insight and improved. Alla used denial and remained unhappy.

## Epilogue

Writing this helped the bonding side of my brain catch up with the rational side of my brain. It helped me grieve, learn more about myself and go on to pick more wisely.

Aug. 1

“Hello, Alla. It’s nice to finally talk with you.”

“Hello, Robert. I’ve been waiting for your call.”

“Why did you come from Russia?”

“To marry.”

“That’s a long way.”

“Sometimes our fantasies take us a long way from home. The further the distance, the wilder the imagination and the greater the infatuation. There was a time in my life when I wanted to become a psychologist. It wasn’t practical as a profession in the Soviet Union though. So instead I went for a Ph.D. in math, and now I am stuck being an actuary in New York.”

“I might quote you if you don’t mind.”

“Quote me for what?”

“For months I have been doing a study of the Russian Alla. I am writing a book about how personality affects the outcome of love. And then I discover you. And your name is also Alla!”

“You named her ‘Alla?’ That is too funny. Alla is not even that common a name in Russia! . . . And your book . . . is it decipherable to the layperson? May I read what you have written?”

“Yes. And will you help me understand what is typically Russian and what is Alla?”

“I have been trying to do that my whole life.”

We met and became passionate best friends. In about one year we married. With every day we grow even closer and more deeply in love. The combination of psychology and personal insights helped me find and appreciate Alla.

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###

CE Test Questions:

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1. What are Ziv's four stages of romantic love?

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2. According to Otto Kernberg, what are the two love disturbances often found with the Narcissistic and Borderline Personalities?

###

###

3. What are the other three love disturbances added by Salman Akhtar?

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###

4. What percent of young adults had the same secure versus insecure attachment classification in their current intimate relationships as they had 20 years earlier as infants with their mothers?

###

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5. Freud in 1912 said, "To ensure a fully normal attitude in love . . ." the sensual feelings must unite with what other feelings?

###

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6. According to Robert Sternberg, what are the three components of consummate love?

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7. Helen Fisher found that humans and other mammals have evolved three primary emotion systems that combine for love. What are they?

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8. What are the five main contributing factors in Gordon's integrated meta-theory of love relations?

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9. According to Kernberg, what is the basis of idealization at the primitive level of personality structure?

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10. According to Gordon, an intimacy can promote personal growth when it has what components?

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11. Individuals with a Borderline Personality Structure may swing between idealization and devaluation in their love relationships because of their poor capacity for normal:

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12. According to Gordon's research it took at least how many years in psychoanalytic psychotherapy to begin to go deep enough for personal growth and a better ability to love?

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**W**hat does it take to have a lasting love relationship? Dr. Robert Gordon shows that the course of love is fairly predictable based on the personalities and histories of the lovers. Only insight and mutual concern can help change this path.

He explains the psychology of romantic love from both personal and professional perspectives. Along the way, he integrates evolutionary psychology, psychoanalysis and social psychology in the context of dramatic stories of love and psychotherapy.

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—Russell Wild, author of *Why Men Marry*,  
and Coauthor, *The Unofficial Guide  
To Getting A Divorce*



**Robert M. Gordon, Ph.D.** is board certified by the American Board of Professional Psychology (ABPP) in Clinical Psychology and Psychoanalysis in Psychology, a Fellow of the Division of Psychoanalysis, and served on the governing council of the American Psychological Association. He was president of the Pennsylvania Psychological Association and received its Distinguished Service Award. He authored many scholarly articles and books in the areas of psychotherapy, relationships, forensic psychology, ethics and the MMPI-2. He has a private practice in Allentown, Pennsylvania.

Dr. Gordon's publications can be found at [www.mmipi-info.com](http://www.mmipi-info.com).

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