

One Day In Therapy · *Dinty Moore*

THE THERAPIST pulled at his faint moustache, plopped himself on his chair and waited with paranoid, wandering eyes for someone to speak. When Eddie finally spoke, the therapist twitched.

“Who are you?” Eddie asked.

The therapist’s eyes filled with wonder at the impoliteness of the question. A plump man, dressed for a round of golf, he calculated the connections between impoliteness and schizophrenia, then answered as if the room were bugged.

“I’m the therapist.”

“I know.”

“I am Mr. Johnson.”

“Oh.”

Eddie sank uncomfortably into his chair while the therapist searched his desk for a clean sheet of paper. The therapist considered many sheets before he found one to his liking. The therapist looked at Eddie with arched brows.

“Do you have parents?”

Eddie hadn’t wanted to come to see the therapist in the first place. Eddie was forced to. It was that or his wife, Gerta, would leave him or kill him. “I will either leave you or kill you,” she had said, one night when Eddie was whimpering himself to sleep. “Do you feel lucky?” Eddie was whimpering because he didn’t like himself. Gerta liked herself fine. Eddie had straight, sandy hair and green eyes. Lately he felt old. He and Gerta were both 30.

Eddie worked as a waiter. Gerta painted oversized canvases of nude men with grotesque faces, most of them lounging on tables covered in green cloth. Her paintings, which Eddie thought to be the ugliest things he had ever seen, were becoming popular. When Eddie would lie in bed whimpering Gerta would push him off the bed. He had taken to sleeping underneath.

“Do I have parents?”

“Yes. I mean, of course, are they living?”

Eddie realized the therapist had settled in and was beginning to therapize. He decided to be a model patient.

"My mother is alive and my father is dead."

"Fine. What are their names?"

"Harry and Esther."

The therapist wrote the names carefully on his clean sheet of paper.

"Do you have any brothers and sisters?"

"No." Eddie saw the therapist's grip tighten slightly on his pencil.

"None at all?"

"No. None."

The therapist stared at his piece of paper. He drew a short line from Eddie's parents to a spot he marked "Eddie." He leaned back in his chair and crooked a stubby finger under his nose. He stared at Eddie for a long time.

"What made you think you wanted to come and see a therapist?"

"I have a problem with my wife."

"What sort of problem?"

"She hates me because I don't want to have sex."

"How does that make you feel?"

"Guilty."

"How do you think your wife feels?"

"Angry."

"Oh."

The therapist paused again. He drew another line on his sheet of paper and wrote in the name "Gerta." He asked if Gerta had any parents, and wrote their names. He asked if Gerta had any brothers and sisters, and wrote their names. He asked if Eddie's father had any brothers or sisters, and was sad to find out that Eddie's father was an only child.

Eddie was being lulled into an eerie calm by the 'white noise' machine placed in the corner of the room. It reminded him of the hum hospital machinery makes when you are sedated. Eddie decided the therapist was very sad and he wanted to cheer him up.

"I was a virgin until I was 24."

The therapist looked up, his eyes alive again.

"Why do you think that was?"

"I wasn't very aggressive with women."

"Why not?"

"I had a low self-image. An inferiority complex."

"How did that make you feel?"

"Inferior."

Eddie had trouble making love to Gerta. She was bigger than he, and had very large breasts. When they first met and were dating, the breasts drove Eddie crazy. He called them “never-ending mounds of desire.” Now he was afraid of them.

At first Gerta was understanding. She said sexual desire often waned in men “with insignificant, low-paying jobs.” But lately she had become hostile. She had begun having affairs. She had begun rolling over in the middle of the night and pushing him to a corner of the queen-sized mattress. Then she had started pushing him out of bed, and he had begun sleeping underneath.

Gerta was a tall woman with big bones. But she was not fat or unattractive. She was heroic, like a woman in a Spanish painting. She had large, brown eyes that could hypnotize.

“What is your earliest childhood memory?”

The therapist had put away the sheet of paper in a small yellow folder and had begun rolling his pencil back and forth between his hands, which were held as if he were praying. Eddie felt a little more at ease. He was warming up to the therapist. He was telling him all sorts of things.

“I remember when I was three and my Aunt Mary dressed me up like a girl so we could go shopping.”

“You said you didn’t have any aunts or uncles.”

“She wasn’t my real aunt. She was my mother’s friend.”

“Oh.”

“Do you want to know about it?”

“What?”

“Why she dressed me up like a girl.”

“Well, if you want to tell me.”

“I’m supposed to tell you things, right?”

“Only if you want to.”

“I want to tell you.”

“That’s okay, too.”

“She wanted to take me shopping, but she was afraid that I would need to go to the potty. She couldn’t go in the men’s room with me, so she dressed me up like a girl.”

“How did that make you feel?”

“I was only three.”

“Do you think your wife is being unreasonable?”

“No. I should have sex with her. I’m her husband.”

“But you don’t want to.”

“That’s not normal.”

“But maybe it’s normal for you. Did you ever think of that?”

“No.”

The therapist gazed up at the spot above Eddie’s head, slowly massaging his moustache with the side of this stubby index finger. He was in deep contemplation. When Eddie finally couldn’t stand it any longer he broke the silence. The therapist looked surprised to see him in the room.

“I want to make love to my wife. But when we get into bed, I just can’t. I try to work up to it slowly but then she says something, or moves a certain way, and I can’t anymore. I get mad at her for moving her arm, or something like that, and I can’t do it. I want her not to want to, but she always wants to.”

“You don’t think she should want to?”

“Well no.”

“Why is that?”

“I don’t know. I feel like women shouldn’t want to. I can’t imagine my mother wanting to.”

“Your mother didn’t want to have sex?”

“I never asked her.”

“Yes, of course.”

The therapist stopped and rummaged through a desk drawer. Eddie wondered what the therapist looked like when he was making love to his wife. Eddie could barely imagine what other people looked like making love. He could picture them brushing their teeth, but not flailing around in a bed. He could never understand why women weren’t scared to death of the whole matter. He wouldn’t want anybody getting near him with a penis.

The therapist found what he was looking for in the desk. It was a paper clip, which the therapist used to clip Eddie’s papers to his folder.

Just the night before, Eddie had tried to make love to Gerta. Gerta had come from a gallery opening and was happy from champagne. She was being nice to Eddie. She had brought him a cocktail napkin filled with miniature dogs-in-a-blanket, Eddie’s favorite munchie. They shared a can of beer and crawled into bed.

Eddie reached over and gently put his hand on Gerta’s stomach. He

planned to leave it there a few minutes, gradually massage her, then maybe move up to her breasts and tease at them, and then lean over and kiss her, and so on and so forth. While he was thinking all of this, feeling pretty good about his sexuality, Gerta fell asleep. Eddie rolled over and whimpered. Luckily, it didn't wake Gerta up.

Eddie noticed that the therapist looked distraught. He was wringing his hands behind his back, which made sitting in the chair a gymnastic event. The therapist had a look in his eye like he expected the walls to fall in on him at any moment. Eddie thought he had better ask what was up.

"Is therapy always like this?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean are you assuming my anxieties? You seem a little upset."

"Why do you say that?"

"You are almost falling out of your chair."

"Oh, does that make you uneasy? I can stop doing that."

"Is this part of therapy?"

"What do you think?"

"I don't know, this is my first time."

"How does that make you feel?"

"I don't know. I don't know what to expect. Am I doing it right?"

"Oh, you are doing very well."

Eddie noticed that the therapist was rummaging in his desk drawer again. This would have been okay, since Eddie was trying not to have any expectations, except the therapist pulled a very large handgun out of his drawer. Eddie was concerned.

"Is this part of therapy?"

"Maybe not."

"Oh. What are you going to do with the gun?"

"I don't know. I might shoot out the window, or something."

"You aren't going to shoot at me are you?"

"Why? How would that make you feel?"

"Dead."

"You don't want to be dead?"

"No, not at all."

"Your wife hates you."

"I know, but I could change that."

"They are going to drop a bomb on us."

“Who?”

“The Russians. The Pentagon. The Palestinians. They all have the bomb, you know.”

“Please put the gun away.”

“Why? How does it make you feel?”

“Like you are going to shoot me.”

“Do you think I’m crazy?”

“No, you’re the therapist.”

“Therapists can be crazy, too.”

“But this is my first time. You are supposed to help me with my problem.”

“I could shoot you and then say you attacked me.”

“Oh my God!”

Eddie wondered what Gerta would think, him shot to death at his first therapy session. He wondered if she would marry one of the acned art students who hung around her studio. He wondered if she would miss him. Mostly he wondered if it would hurt much to be shot.

The therapist resumed looking at the spot just above Eddie’s head and stroking his moustache with his free hand. The gun was more or less pointed at Eddie.

“I could say it was your gun, I wrestled it away from you, you tried to strangle me, and I had to shoot you.”

“Oh my God!”

“I could shoot people out the window and say you did it, and that I shot you to stop you.”

“Oh my God! You are out of your mind.”

“How does that make you feel?”

“My God!”

“Let’s say I give you the gun and you shoot me. How do you think that would make you feel?”

“Christ! Why don’t you let me go. I’ll get you some help. Or I won’t tell anyone. I’ll say therapy went really well and you should get a raise. I’ll say anything. Just let me walk out the door.”

“Your time is up anyway.”

“My time is up?”

“Yes. Your hour. I can’t spend any more time with you today. You should schedule another appointment.”

“I can go?”

“You have to go. I’m sorry. Do you need to see me again this week?” The therapist pointed to a stack of business cards with his free hand. “Here is my number. Call me if there is an emergency.”

“An emergency?”

“With your wife. But I think everything will be okay. I think you are just going through a hard period. I think years from now when you look over your whole life you will see that this difficult period was just part of getting well. You just need to learn to love yourself. We’ll talk about that next time.”

“Next time?”

“Check with the receptionist. Try to get an appointment next week.”

“Next week? Right.” Eddie edged to the door.

“Eddie. Don’t expect too much. This is going to take time.”

“Thank you, doctor.”

“Oh, I’m not a doctor. I’m a therapist. Do you want to see a doctor?”

“No. No. This was great.”

Eddie left the room. He glanced back once to see the therapist writing in his file, the gun switched to his left hand. Eddie didn’t tell the receptionist that there was a maniac in the third office down to the left. He didn’t make another appointment. He went to his wife’s studio and screamed at the male model to get dressed and get lost. He took white paint and smeared it all over Gerta’s breasts and made love to her on a long table next to jars of paint and brushes in coffee cans. When they were done, Gerta made him pose for a painting. Eddie liked the painting. It wasn’t nearly so grotesque, though he thought the ears were too big.

“You should go to therapy more often, Eddie!” Gerta laughed, thrilled by the lovemaking. “What did the therapist say about your problem?”

“He said I had to learn to love myself.”

“Do you think he was right?”

“He seemed to know what he was talking about.”

Eddie and Gerta spent the night in bed. Eddie’s lust could not be abated. Twice Gerta tried to go into the kitchen to make dinner, twice Eddie pounced on her and dragged her back to bed. Finally, they sent out for Chinese food. She asked him when he would be going back to the therapist.

“He said I was cured.”