



THERAPY

by Constance McCutcheon

Amy Galleon sat in her usual chair in the large room. At her back were all those books, read and digested, she suspected, into formidable wisdom by the woman seated opposite her. Beneath them lay the expanse of plain green Oriental carpet she had dreamt very pleasantly of after seeing it for the first time. That had been three years ago. Across the room, to one side of the picture window, sprawled an ever-so-slowly dying ficus plant. Whoever thought pinning it to the draperies was okay had been proud of the idea as well. Conspicuous festoons of oversized safety pins hung along the length of the wiry stems secured by linchpins—the pins that at strategic intervals pinched the stem against the red material propping the tree up. Decoration. Very tasty. Amy faced that plant every session. Not directly. It ranged into her field of vision just behind Jeanne's left shoulder. Jeanne was the point of the whole affair, of course, seated in the middle of the room, challenging Amy

from her rich analyst's chair, the center of attention. The tree was of no consequence. Quite visible, but of no consequence.

Amy ducked her head and shifted her gaze from the tree to the view out the window. Tears were coming. Jeanne had just suggested she become a cleaning woman—Amy had been complaining about her job, that was right. Yes, she felt afraid of the future, very afraid. She felt uncomfortable at work, a little paranoid around the other members of her project team, around everyone, wondered why they snickered when she was at a distance, why whispering abruptly stopped when she entered a room. But Amy was an experienced, highly skilled graphic designer. How could Jeanne suggest she become a cleaning woman? Jeanne obviously didn't think much of graphic designers. Or of Amy. So much for peer review.

“A cleaning woman?” Amy murmured. Her response was barely audible but it was enough to dignify the highly insulting suggestion, and Amy hated herself for letting it escape her throbbing throat. The appropriate response would have been to jump up, rip Jeanne's ears off, and ask if that weren't preferable to listening to shit suggestions like becoming a cleaning woman. That would have been oh so appropriate. Of course, Jeanne would probably not hear the question. Tough.

The view out the window was dominated by a grand stucco apartment house just like the one Amy sat in for forty-five minutes every week. The two houses faced each other from opposite sides of a wide street in a prosperous section of Munich. In a narrow strip of hard dirt tamped down between curb and sidewalk, tortured city trees ranged shabbily in front of the old buildings, starved and strangled, bumped by cars being parked and used as bicycle stands, but they were not visible to Amy from where she sat. All she could see was the opposite building's impressive facade of elaborately modeled, artfully painted stucco. She was familiar with what lay within: twelve-foot-high ceilings; interior statues carved out of corner pilasters; wooden staircases; deep marble sinks; enormous hallways that opened onto quiet, airy rooms; pale Oriental carpets and more analysts, probably, seated in expensive chairs with metal tube frames encouraging their clients to become cleaning women. In those palatial buildings, you could almost hear your footsteps echo. Well-maintained *Altbau* in Munich were beautiful buildings to live in. Or to have therapy sessions in. Or to be a cleaning woman

in, apparently, because who else could afford a cleaning woman, who else would need one, except people living in that kind of building? Maybe Amy could do Jeanne's windows after the session. First, of course, she would do obeisance intellectually and emotionally by accepting her twaddling advice, thereby justifying the woman's collecting her fee; that had to be. Then she could let the woman step on her head to mount her horse, so to speak, by doing her windows afterwards. It was a posture Amy adapted to well. She assumed it so gracefully time after time that no one was ever aware of what they were doing: stepping on Amy's head to mount their horse. Maybe Amy liked that. If she slipped her head under their foot just as they stepped to mount, were they to blame for using her head to do so? Amy hitched. She did work well under pressure.

Perhaps Amy should show that she took Jeanne's novel suggestion as a witty joke. Such a witty joke. Laugh at it outright, however, she obviously could not, something someone even of her ilk apprehended. The humor, if there was any, was to be acknowledged with a subtlety someone of Jeanne's ilk would appreciate, a joke to provoke a wry, knowing smile ... indicating knowledge. Knowledge, though, of what? That Amy was a poor slob who should be a cleaning woman, waddling around in a drab cleaning frock smelling of disinfectant, slipping down public staircases on her own suds? Or that Jeanne was a snobbish jerk who, for some dishonorable reason, enjoyed suggesting that Amy be so stationed? Perhaps Amy could shrug, but she would only be able to manage a defeated shrug, acknowledging that ... Jeanne was a snobbish jerk completely out of touch with reality and that she herself was another for coming here each week knowing it ... and paying for it. Now that was knowledge to smile wryly at and Amy smiled wryly. She shrugged as well, involuntarily, just one shoulder, and continued to survey the room, skirting Jeanne's steady, probing eye while taking in the carpet the plant the view out the window until she mannered her expression—a cleaning woman's expression? No.

The decision to quit the sessions surfaced yet again, but how to break the news? That's what kept her coming back. Her reason had to be convincing without being impolite. Jeanne had to understand her reason, agree with it, accept it, acquiesce and allow her to go. Otherwise Amy wouldn't be able to discontinue.

She shrugged awkwardly again. “How much does ... rent ... here ... cost ... ?”

Jeanne drew her ankles in towards her chair, her knees rising slightly, her legs crossing tautly, her smooth calves falling athwart the chair’s cool metal frame. The fine gray knits she wore that day made her silky, flat body seem even silkier and flatter, almost a shadow. A deceptively modest gold chain hung around her neck. She fingered it from time to time with sleek, handsome fingers. An altogether sleek, handsome, dark woman was Jeanne Smith-Caton Wiesbach-Burkenmeier, looking like she came from the Mediterranean coast when she was in fact Canadian, preferring rich, cold Switzerland to sunny, public Italy. She hunched forward ever so slightly. “I’m sorry,” she said softly, shaking her head. “I didn’t catch ... what was that?” Her words were slightly slurred. Always. It was part of her deep elegance.

Amy’s eyes returned to the window. She needed time to put her face in place, time to make up her mind how to respond to Jeanne’s suggestion that she go to work in long, dingy dresses, a weighty bucket swinging at her side, a few handy rags hanging down from her pocket, to kneel down in front of everyone on central staircases to scrub steps. The better to let the issuing crowds step on her head. Jeanne had found her out.

“The rent,” Amy raised her voice obediently and her chin, albeit no spirit, along with it. “How much the rent for this kind of apartment is.”

Jeanne smiled politely. “I don’t follow.”

“It’s too personal.”

“I don’t see what bearing it has on our discussion.”

“On which discussion? On our immediate discussion of my becoming a cleaning woman? Or on our on-going discussion of my finding a new home for myself, maybe in a place like this, quiet, where a person can feel human again? Which is what you told me last week. I should make that clear, shouldn’t I? You said just now in our immediate discussion that I might get a job as a cleaning woman. *Might* used in the sense that it would be *so* well worth my while to do so, that I would be *so* foolish not to look into it, that this is just *such* good advice.”

There was aggression in Amy's voice, something Jeanne had never before detected, and all traces of good-spirited, timid naiveté, which had always dominated the modulation of Amy's remarks, were absent. Maybe this slightly unpleasant change was a good sign, an indication of progress, a token of Amy's confidence in Jeanne. Maybe Jeanne had done something right.

"They make good money." Jean responded blithely.

"So you said."

"Seventeen marks an hour."

A sullen look shadowed Amy's friendly features, better than the tears that were close behind.

"What's wrong? Don't you consider that good?" Jeanne persisted stupidly.

Amy looked at her blankly, another new event. "Now, do you expect me to be honest?" she asked flatly.

"Yes."

"Do *you* consider seventeen marks an hour a good wage?"

"Yes. For cleaning."

"I don't mean for cleaning, I mean for you."

"For me?"

"For you. For what you do. Would you consider seventeen marks an hour a good wage?"

"I never said it would be appropriate for what I do."

"But it would be appropriate for what I do, good as a matter of fact, which should be cleaning."

Jeanne sat very still.

Amy leaned forward. "Just last week you told me I could live in an apartment just like this one. Good management and organization was all it took. Money had nothing to do with it. At that time, last week that is, I had been complaining about noise. It's true. Complaining. Being really negative. Noise from the neighbors, noise from the streets, noise from the local crows, noise from the neighborhood in general and from idiots in particular, all those

idiots driving me up a wall! But you said if I wanted, I could get a place, any place I wanted, a place just like this, if I were well organized. A nice, quiet, pretty place.

“Now you’re telling me it would make really good sense to go out and get a job as a cleaning woman for seventeen marks an hour. But I’d still like to find a nice, quiet, pretty apartment for myself. So I’d like to know about how much the rent would cost me—but, come to think of it, could I get it? Because when I apply for a terrific apartment like this one and tell them I work as a cleaning woman, do you think I’d be their first choice? Would I be yours? Apartments like these are hard to get, something you don’t seem to know, and I don’t know how secure working as a cleaning woman is. I know things keep getting dirty but maybe they don’t need me to keep cleaning them up, much as I’d be there willing and ready to do it. I mean, people don’t specialize in that field, do they, unless maybe I bought myself a big floor-scrubbing machine? See, I need to know how I’d manage the rent for a place like this on my so many hundred marks a month. I’d like to plan a bit before I make my big move. That’s why I’m curious what an apartment like this would cost. That’s what bearing my question has on our discussion.”

Jeanne resettled herself carefully while quietly clearing her throat. “If I make two remarks, especially on two different days in two different conversations in response to two different problems, it doesn’t mean that I intend for both to be valid simultaneously.”

Amy directed her eyes unwillingly to Jeanne to show she was listening. She was not. She was clasping her hands anxiously, crossing and uncrossing her ankles.

Not yet comfortable, Jeanne shifted carefully again before continuing: “If you say ‘a’ and I answer ‘b’, then you say sometime later ‘c’ and I answer ‘d’, it doesn’t mean I expect you to do b and d both, but that in response to a, I feel b would be appropriate or helpful, and that in response to c, I feel that way about d. To be specific—”

“You don’t need to be specific!” Amy’s arms rose involuntarily, briefly clapping her head.

“Let me be specific ... if you aren’t happy in your apartment then I say you can get an apartment you do like. I stand by that statement.

If you don't like your job, I suggested something that ... well, maybe isn't appropriate, judging from—”

“Would you ever consider becoming a cleaning woman?”

“I'm not dissatisfied with my work,” Jeanne defended herself. “You apparently are.”

“If you were, would you work as a cleaning woman?”

“But I'm not.”

Amy wanted to repeat *but if you were*, just to hear Jeanne repeat *but I'm not*. It would sound so obstinate and so juvenile, and oh so appropriate. Amy could hear it already.

“But if you were.”

Jeanne's cool, muddy look settled on her, but her cheeks burned. “This is silly.”

“Isn't it though. You just suggested that *I* become a cleaning woman.”

“Yes. As I said, that was obviously inap—”

“Wear one of those funny dresses to keep your knees clean.” Amy returned Jeanne's look in full, stood her off, her pulse heightened to the pitch of riding into battle. The feeling surpassed stimulation, shooting into the realm of the euphoric where it lodged. Amy felt an enormous release. “Carrying a bucket around in public. Cleaning up after other people's slop. You must be out of your mind. Would you ever consider doing that for a single second?”

Jeanne shrugged as if surprised at Amy's surprise, as if slightly offended by Amy's surprise. She was very offended at Amy's turning the question around on her and very willing to pass on. “I never said it would be appropriate for me.”

“But you felt it would be appropriate for me.”

“I'd like to return to the objection you made before, Amy.”

“About a, b, c, and d?”

Jeanne's eyes flickered cautiously up to assess her client's mood. It had calmed somewhat. Amy was waiting. Jeanne spoke carefully, both to be clear and to hide the strong reaction she was still feeling

from Amy's verbal assault. "I never meant for you to get an apartment, any apartment you wanted, and then become ... a cleaning woman. When I made that suggestion just now, I wasn't thinking about what we discussed last week. I didn't expect you to, either." Instead of pacifying her, Jeanne's glib explanation incensed Amy.

"So I'm confused. Does that mean your advice is not cumulative? I'm supposed to throw out last week's advice for this week's—paying for both, mind you, but not paying too much attention to any of it knowing it will be debunked by next week's. That is not what I expect here, and it certainly isn't what I'm paying for which is a good deal more than any cleaning woman out there is getting. You charge over ten times that much. For that fee, I suppose I should be clear about what I expect. Should I have done that a long time ago? I expect you to develop an integrated picture of me and my situation, sort of get to understand me, and suggest things that are appropriate for the entire picture of me. I expect you to remember in a present session what you said to me in previous sessions and it should all fit into that big, complex, comprehensive picture, me. That's what I want advice for. I don't change that much, and you, you take notes. If I had wanted a job counselor, I wouldn't have come to you. My problem, which I addressed oh so briefly in this session of ephemeral truths, is not getting a new job or which one, but *why* do I feel the way I do at work. You didn't address that. You said I could get a job as a cleaning woman and you were serious about it. For you that was the solution to that particular problem. That response is not adequate. It's not worth a cleaning woman's wages, let alone ten times that amount."

Jeanne's attention sharpened. The tidal wave was not yet in.

Amy continued: "Forget about a, b, c, and d. Last week, you told me I could find an apartment like this one, that they weren't expensive, that *money* had nothing to do with it. All it took to have a huge, beautiful apartment, a child, and a cleaning woman for that matter, was determination and good management, and if I didn't believe you, I was lazy and envious and deserved my life in the ditch, that I actually really preferred being in the ditch. Easier than succeeding which I might just find out I couldn't do. Which brings us to your second point: your hinting that those people I keep calling privileged and sort of pampered and recipients of unfair

advantage weren't privileged at all. Privilege had nothing to do with it. No unfair advantage was at work. They really *are* better. Their intelligence, their insight, their character are simply superior. They got conveyed to the top because that's where they belong. I, the trash of the world, am in my rightful place in the ditch by the side of the road, not liking it, but it's the spot to which I happened to convey myself myself. I must become aware of that and realize that that is where I belong. Of course working as a cleaning woman would occur to you as a really keen suggestion to make to someone like me lying in that sewer. Get me lifted out of the muck just a little bit against my will, without my actually noticing. That's the only way to help someone like me, isn't it? I wonder when it's going to occur to you to suggest I chew my cud."

"That's hardly what I said."

"Sure it is. And the worst part of it is, while you were talking all this up all I did was sit here nodding as if what you were saying was really, really worth something and look very, very concerned to show you how capable I was of taking it all in, that I *am* interested in the truth no matter how bad it makes me look, that I am open, receptive to all this ... this wisdom of yours no matter how it stings, slender golden needles you forge from all these books, while in reality what I'm really saying is: yes, yes, yes, I'm one of them. Step on me."

Jeanne pulled her legs up a little closer, then shook her head and looked down at her notebook. "I ... uh ... am having trouble following ... just exactly ... What's brought all this on? This is such a ... a switch."

"You didn't stop to consider whether in fact all this is simply *your* excuse, *your* justification for not believing the people who complain about their so-called lot in life in order to stay on top. That's the normal reaction for a power structure. Maybe what those belly-achers say is all true and what you say is horseshit. Have you ever considered *that*?"

"So ... let's backtrack a little to ...uh ... what's brought all this on."

"How do you expect me to act when you tell me to become a cleaning woman? And now that all this has been brought on, I'm curious—what would the rent for an apartment like this, or the one across the street be? About? Just an approximation would do. I

know it's personal information, but I'm willing to tell you straight out that I pay a thousand marks a month for my one-room apartment in the middle of the city, near the train station and the crows and the idiots; very central, south-west exposure, great wide open terrace towards a courtyard. Loud people living all around. Students. Crows. Idiots. What would you pay here? Three thousand marks a month?"

"It wouldn't be nearly that much!" Jeanne protested, taken off-guard yet again.

"What do you mean 'wouldn't'? I mean it is or it isn't, isn't it?"

The waves were still crashing up against Jeanne this session. She had never experienced such a thing, she wasn't prepared for it. The onslaught was the more violent, surprising, and difficult to negotiate because it came from such a lamb as Amy. Amy had never shown aggression before, hardly ever shown anger. She had always been polite, and very inhibited, and ... and very polite. This outburst was good, Jeanne's mental rearguard whispered up to the stunned vanguard while Jeanne simply sat with lax mouth and burning face. It might all be very good, but she, in the vanguard, didn't know what was going on. She kept gulping air but wasn't getting any. The rearguard reminded the vanguard to focus on the fact that something had been achieved, that whatever had triggered this shifting of the impenetrable sludge that made up the formidably murky mentality of the blond lamb, she should be grateful for it and find out what it was; now was her chance, when the scent of blood was in the air; she must not lose it; her mark had been hit; the conquistadoress had penetrated, but with such an undisciplined lance that she knew not where entry had been made. Focus, Jeanne reprimanded herself mentally; focus.

She firmed up her mouth but that made her look a little prudish. She loosened it up again, the swift shift making her seem undecided. The session was going from bad to worse. "I'm afraid I don't follow."

"Two thousand?" Amy battered away. "I'm only attempting to inform myself. That was something else you said I should do. Inform myself about things. I had mentioned that I was too afraid to. Informing oneself, you said, is a right and an obligation. I can only blame myself if I suffer miserable consequences from

something I chose to remain in ignorance of. So. The rent. We're talking about how much the rent here is so I can figure out how I can afford it when I start scrubbing steps."

"You're certainly being negative today."

Amy hung her head. "You think I have a bad attitude because I think of scrubbing steps when you say become a cleaning woman. I don't want to have a bad attitude. I want to have a good attitude, become one of those people who does and says positive things and gets all that unfair advantage working for her." She lifted her head, all mock woe evaporating from her tone, which emerged as unpleasantly arid and sharp. "On the other hand I want to be direct and honest, react to things as they strike me. That's okay, too, isn't it?"

Jeanne opted to answer the initial question to dodge whatever snare the wayward Amy had laid for her with her concluding remark. "To tell you the truth, I don't know what the rent here is. It may not even be rentable. This apartment is owned by my husband's mother. We're just ... guests here, so to speak."

"Oh. So you have no idea how much it would cost."

Jeanne plumped her dusky lower lip and shook her head slowly and seriously. "No."

"But maybe you know how much the apartment across the street would cost."

"In general I think these apartments are occupied by their owners. We're an exception."

"I misunderstood. I thought you meant with my good management and cleaning woman job I could easily find an apartment like this one to rent. Did you mean I could easily find one to buy? I guess that would be better. I just never thought of it. Maybe that's part of my negativity coming out again, my thinking little. Thinking little, that's me. Chicken little-like, only littler probably, kinda puny."

Jeanne's foot jerked out and wagged for a brief moment. Amy's eyes shot to the wristwatch strapped to her ankle.

A timepiece of some sort always appeared somewhere in the room, always in a different place, always mounted somewhere meant to be inconspicuous, the signal obvious that Jeanne meant to shield her

clients from knowledge of the harsh fact that she would pitch them as soon as their forty-five minutes were up. The sinister watch had made its appearance dangling from the tubular arm of Jeanne's chair, fastened about the base of the nearby standing lamp, nestled between the books behind Amy. Once, it had been strapped upside down to Jeanne's chair leg with the comic result that Jeanne couldn't read it from where she sat. Unable to monitor the time remaining in the session, Jeanne had sat stunned and frozen until Amy took pity on her, sprang out of her chair to crawl up to Jeanne's, and read out loud from the watch what she needed to know. The watch had been strapped to her ankle once before. That was worrying. Had she forgotten, or was she running out of ideas?

"Is it time for me to go?" Amy slouched forward in her chair ready to jettison herself from it at Jeanne's command. Jeanne assured her there was time left. Amy settled herself again, then after a long moment confessed sullenly: "You know, it doesn't matter where you hide that watch. It's the first thing I see when I walk in. A normal wall clock would be better. Your little watches sprinkled all over the place just make me think you think I'm so neurotic that I wouldn't be able to stand finding out that you're really only doing this for the money. Just like a cleaning woman. She won't scrub a step she doesn't get paid for, and you do not lavish concern on a client a single second longer than you have to. I know that.

"Money? You laugh at the suggestion. You have no feeling for *money*. The only reason you require a hundred and fifty marks for forty-five minutes is ... blood. It's because *I* value the money, highly, that you demand it from me. That, in turn, assures that I value the services you render to me here. Without that really keen appreciation, your services might not be efficacious. The upshot is, through no fault of your own, that you will not listen to an extra breath I take for which you are not reimbursed. Haven't I explained all of this very adroitly?

"But you see you don't have to worry about me. I know what's going on. When I come in, I'm supposed to stretch out my neck and let you draw blood if you can. But no matter how deep you've dug or what vein you've hit, if those forty-five minutes are up, whatever blood of mine is still flowing will be lost. I am sent out dripping, meant to staunch myself as best I can but be ready to bleed the next time I walk in. What all this has taught me more

clearly week by week is that my blood is not quite as important as your time. That's what those little clocks hidden all over the place tell me. I keep talking like you were really interested but that's because I'm polite."

"What's up with you today? I don't actually feel abused, but I'm getting close to it."

"Huh?" Amy stopped, startled, her face turning bright red, highlighting her blond hair and eyebrows. "Do you turn people out before the forty-five minutes are up?"

"I can."

"But they don't pay for a full session, do they? Or do they have to sue?"

"You're being extremely provocative—provoking today. I said what's up?" There was no edge to Jeanne's voice. Miraculously, she had relaxed, her tone had softened, the pressure had dissipated.

"I still think" Amy began reluctantly then stopped. Her pugnacity having abated, she lay once again exposed to her battering anxiety and worry, the victim of a stinging hesitancy and torturing inhibition. The familiar Amy had repossessed the chair. "...that..." She stretched out her arms, hands clasped, "... I ..." pulled hard, palms outwards, "...spend..." The tension suddenly left her body. She looked away, hands separated and now clasped onto the arms of the chair. "... too much money."

"Oh!" Involuntary relief sounded in Jeanne's voice. What a commonplace, simple if annoying concern. "That'll take care of itself. Once everything else is settled. That's not a problem." Jeanne was not a financial counselor, nor could anyone reproach her for refusing to pose as one.

Amy lapsed into silence and stared past Jeanne toward the window, sitting stiff and wooden and stifled again after all her kick and fuss. She was immensely relieved. Having just made the most painful disclosure of all, hinting at her most humiliating and desperate problem, something she had never admitted to anyone but which she had admitted to Jeanne twice, just now and six months ago, she found it dismissed by Jeanne just as the good therapist had dismissed it six months before. Amy concluded the event today as

she had the first time, by abandoning the shameful subject immediately and willingly, but she had nothing else to say.

Amy was at fault. Jeanne hadn't understood her correctly. Amy had described the problem in vague, general terms: she spent too much money. Who wouldn't laugh hearing that? Weren't they all spending too much money? She should have been clearer. She should have said she had a bank overdraft so large that it never ventured into a positive profile even after her pay came in, that she had monthly debts exceeding her income which pushed her overdraft down further into the red all the time, that she had other debts beyond those debts to more forgiving creditors such as her parents who would never see their money, while she, she spent money on brief, ecstatic shopping splurges that tortured her for weeks afterwards ... until the next splurge. But she was too ashamed to go into all that.

Every month she received a phone call at the office from some woman at the bank as soon as her credit limit was exceeded—an event that was occurring a little earlier every month—to draw Amy's attention to the fact and suggest she make an appointment with one of their advisers for help. Amy was always polite, never showed the slightest sign of the outrage she felt at the call, never offered excuses—she said as little as possible with an officious of people around her ready to listen in. They would be able to put two and two together even if Amy couldn't. Amy, as guilty of her offence as they come, at least had enough character to accept the horrible fact of her situation, symbolically the call, with dignity.

But what had changed? Amy had had an over-overdraft at that bank for over a decade and no one had ever bothered her about it before. She had come to think it was natural and normal to have one, simply a matter of customer preference. And in so preferring, Amy had been for years one of the bank's best customers. She knew that. The institution raked 13% off her over-overdraft, a measly 9% off her approved overdraft. Every quarter the bank creamed over three hundred marks off her misery, debiting it from her over-overdraft and making that a little bigger all the time which in turn increased the amount of interest they would be raking off the following quarter. That's how banks made their money. She wasn't stupid. It wasn't as if they suffered. She wasn't about to feel guilty about it. The bank begged some portion of its customer base to take it up on its suspect offer of drawing credit, promoting the idea that it, the

bank, wanted to help the customer live better by taking upon itself all the worry of the financial details while the customer, the customer should simply live, and live well, in other words, a little beyond her means. That was the thrust of its current ad campaign anyway. So Amy was one of the customers who took them up on it, thereby providing the bank with its skillfully sought superior source of income. She and a multitude of poor slobs like her. People with the same inability to deduce facts from numbers and modern enough to have disassociated money from purchase, debt from spending, desire from material means, long, long ago. If you want it, you get it; you deserve it. It was not perverse egotism at work. It was the resulting indoctrination of effective marketing. Promulgated in a gentle, ubiquitous leitmotif composed by the highest paid marketing specialists of the modern world, that attitude had become quite common and sounded not just logical, but just and humane. Modern. The world had enough, there was surplus, what was the actual value of a stereo system anyway? What was all this fuss about money?

But things had just gotten worse, much worse. The bank had cut her off. Last week for the first time, the bank returned a payment she had made to the phone company with a letter saying it would not allow any money to be paid out of her account until the discrepancy between her permitted 5,000-mark overdraft and her actual overdraft of 8,000 marks had been corrected—about 3,000 marks. The sum was to be deposited before the payment would be retransmitted. Horribly enough, another, much larger payment was just due to go out and to another bank to which she owed 15,000 marks, a sum she had borrowed six months before to cover her bank overdraft. That payment should not be late. That payment could not be rejected.

Borrowing money from another bank as a normal loan to pay her swollen overdraft had been a stroke of brilliance, coming to Amy some time after she had mentioned the matter to another human being, to Jeanne, for the first time. Interest for a normal loan was lower than interest on an overdraft and far lower than the interest on her over-overdraft, and Amy could finally get used to budgeting on a positive sum and subtracting, being wary of the big zero, instead of working with negative numbers all the time to which she just kept adding more negative numbers which sum just kept getting bigger. Surely those negative calculations had something to do with

her problem. Now that she could work with positive numbers, she should be all right. And those dreadful phone calls from the bank would stop.

In being approved for the loan, Amy's debt problem seemed to fade out of existence. But after the initial, refreshing injection of wonderful money, her balance had dwindled in a consumptive manner until her overdraft limit had been reached and then exceeded with her over-overdraft approaching the desperate state it had been in only a half-year before. The single difference was that Amy now spent sleepless nights agonizing over how it could have happened. Again. And now she had the extra payments to make to her lending bank on top of it all. And payments to Kurt, her boyfriend, for the money he had lent her to help finance her last trip with him to Mongolia. She wouldn't be left behind. Stomp on her, squish her like a bug, force her to go deeper into debt, step on her head to mount a horse, but don't leave her behind.

So it was that Amy, on this particular day, was in the most severe sweating phase of all. She had spent the last several nights lying awake tortured by an intermittent panic—it came over her in waves then sucked her dry in its astringent backwash. She shifted under her damp sheets, ground her teeth, felt hot tears, heard her own groans, prayed her salary came in before the payment to her lending bank went out. What would she do if the order of those events came in the wrong way? She would be exposed. A call would be made to her company. She would be ruined, maybe fired. This was the unbearable situation she had just confided to her therapist and her therapist had dismissed it. Blithely. Professionally.

While the real question, the question Jeanne would never get to because she wouldn't consider the problem, was: why was Amy overcome with ecstatic fits that only spending all the money she had could satisfy? She repeated the same cycle every month: the scramble, the splurge, the sobering up, then the terror in the night, the sweating phase, agonizing over what would come of all this. How could she worry all night about spending too much money only to rise the following day to spend more? Even on normal days, she spent everything she had. That's why she never carried cash. But that didn't matter. She had the credit cards. With them, she spent money she didn't have on things of wild extravagance she afterwards couldn't admit to even wanting. What frightened the wits

out of her was to consider what subconscious mechanism might be at work setting the limits that she did observe during those outlays. Any way she looked at it, something deeply psychologically wrong was going on, forcing her to her knees time after time because she needed to buy—not the best of everything; that would almost be understandable—but trash, as long as the trash was just beyond her means.

Was it because she was worth it? That's what a friend had once told her. Amy had asked her if the three-thousand dollar Channel suit she had just purchased wasn't just a little expensive. *I'm worth it.* That had been her friend's response. She was worth it. She couldn't afford the suit any more than Amy could. Amy knew that. She recognized the symptoms. The two had the same problem. The difference was, Amy was getting therapy for it without saying it quite out loud, while her friend was out there buying Channel suits and Lalique vases. Solvency, financial independence however modest, living within her means were hollow, unworthy things. But the Channel suit, that was worth something and she was worth that. The declaration, meant to sound so bold, had only made her friend seem ignorant and helpless, a woman forced to her knees just like Amy, and Amy had felt more alone, scared, and doomed than ever.

What Amy now knew was that her spending ecstasies were triggered by a vitamin deficiency of the soul and that that deficiency was manifested by cravings, always sudden, always illogical, always unshakable. They focused on a mere object—a necklace, a second pair of bright pink high altitude sunglasses, a new knapsack—but the haze behind that simple object glimmered with overwhelming joy, morning light, the sense of feathering her nest. To get that object was tantamount to storing up beans for the winter, securing herself against wind and cold, making for herself a home, providing for her future. She resisted the craving for a few hours, no more. The craving behind the craving was what she couldn't resist. She could never deny, consciously or subconsciously, the emotion that asserted her right to feather her nest. Ejaculation followed, of money, as soon as opportunity allowed, igniting a ragged joy that animated mind and body but all too soon guttered out. After the high came the low: the sweating phase, exposure for many nights to a berating conscience telling her she was spending far more than she earned, that debts were piling higher, that she hadn't feathered her nest at all but had just ransacked it again. During this phase, fears

raged of what would happen to her when she retired. She had no nest now nor would she suddenly find she had one later. Even fate's mildest case would have her retired to a dark, stuffy, noisy apartment that stank of her own illness, Medicaid-paid assistants coming round to turn up their noses at her feeble requests to vacuum under the bed, and she too weak and cowed by age to scrape together the dignity she required to demand respect, to speak her mind. Sort of the way she was now.

But Amy hadn't been able to go into any of that with Jeanne. It had been hard enough to come out with the little statement that she thought she was spending too much. And Jeanne had given her the answer right away, how modern—it would take care of itself when everything else was worked out. So what about all that everything else?

What about the violent fits of jealousy she went through? What was the reason for that? Jeanne hadn't been able to help her there. Week after tedious week Jeanne sat through Amy's detailed descriptions of her childish, embarrassing tantrums privately wishing the present divulgence—therapeutically bathed in Jeanne's patient attention—would finally purge the tortured pigeon perched in front of her of its morbid preoccupation with other people, their lives and pasts, their acts and intentions, and heal the subject. But it didn't. Amy continued to come and perch there, feet dangling, spine pressed peculiarly against the back of the chair as if tacked to it, and pour out the same horrible stories she had poured out the week before. What was it all about?

Well, Amy knew what it was all about. Now. But Jeanne hadn't helped her figure it out. Jeanne had focused on her babylessness. In that room, in that chair, set in front of all those books, Amy had been forced, week after week, to testify to the high priestess of dreams that she believed that she did not want to have a baby. Now that statement was just as weak and damaging as her statement that she *thought* she spent too much money, and yet, in all honesty she couldn't put it any other way. She had no desire to be overemphatic when she knew perfectly well there were recesses of her mind inaccessible to her conscious mind which might harbor desires of which she remained unaware. But after examination of her conscious mind, she felt she could say and did say that she believed she did not want to have a baby. Jeanne simply did not accept this.

So they circled back to the topic again and again, and it was discussed as frequently and as tediously as Amy's bouts of jealousy. Week after week Amy, feeling like a baby herself, braced herself in that narrow red chair and waited dutifully for the spoon she would be dodging for the next forty-five minutes. It was hopeless for Amy to remark that she might be dreaming of babies every now and again because Jeanne insisted she talk every week about her desire, or lack of, to have one. And why Amy should have to convince Jeanne of this Amy failed to understand. Who was supposed to be getting therapy anyway?

Amy, however, had made a breakthrough all by herself. Through the painful static of the spending problem and the constant scrambling not to be left behind by Kurt, the glaring contradiction of her situation had slowly come into focus. The answer lay somewhere in the fact of Kurt's crudeness. Kurt was crude. His habits were crude, his wit was crude, his interests were crude. Being in his company was a trial of boredom. His most talked-about weekly event was his trip to the bathroom for 'a big one'. And yet she grew violently jealous of the man. Why? He bored her. She didn't even like him. Yet she could not stand being left behind by him. It didn't make any sense.

Other men whom she considered admirable, respectable, handsome, probably influential, important, good in their professions, overwhelmed her with a sense of inadequacy and from them she moved away even as a subtle disdain informed her that the man was—because he was successful, handsome, well-groomed—a sycophant, *commercial*. That's how she put it. That's how she put those men down. They were *commercial*. However, in Kurt's presence and critically aware of his crudities, she felt a releasing surge of personal power.

Unfortunately, as Amy grew to understand Kurt, in observing and accepting his qualities, an unforeseen switch took place in which she became the inferior one suddenly charged to match up to him, something she couldn't do and would never want to do. They were completely different types of people, with completely different goals, interests, capabilities, ways of thinking. However, as her patient scrutiny of Kurt's personality endured, she began to encompass it, understand it, and, inevitably, to see it as good and admirable in its own right. This gradual acquisition of respect for

him led Amy into a captivity of disorientation. Her own personality abruptly became totally wrong, lacking in qualities she never before strove to develop. All at once, she found herself a just target of his criticism and it made her furious, but it was too late. She had already lost. It was around that time that the violent bouts of jealousy began.

And yet, her real goal had thereby been achieved, hadn't it? She had wanted to bind herself to someone whom she could regularly, conveniently, systematically hate. There was no other explanation for her feeling simultaneously such strong attraction and repulsion for someone. This wasn't the first time. It had been the case in romance after romance. Let her not forget it. She offered her body to men she found repulsive. Repulsion, for some reason, turned her on. On that first afternoon, Kurt had smelled unmistakably of onions. He had made noises of having just eaten rapidly and a great deal and had still been cleaning his teeth with tongue and fingernail between burps and belches. His speech had been vulgar. Clad in extremely short leather shorts, he had seemed pathetically out of touch with his age. It was under this man's foot Amy chose to slip her head and mount he did, smelling like skunk squirt as sexual tensions heightened. When the act was over, he rolled away groaning, 'I've shot my wad'. It had been a brief, rash assault on her person after he had had a lot to drink late the night of the day they met, associated with neither affection nor intimacy. After a few drunken scuffles of this sort, the fact of a relationship between them was established. Thereafter those rash acts occurred extremely infrequently. Due to the fact that, in addition to their infrequency, they also occurred late at night after much had been drunken, Amy responded with a fierce sexual energy that Kurt pretended to admire but which secretly alarmed him.

It didn't take Amy long to realize that Kurt basically would have preferred a whore, a nice one, but someone whose satisfaction he would not have to bother about. Never in his life before Amy had he been confronted with the fact of a woman's sexual desire or the thought of having to satisfy anyone but himself during the sexual act. Ideally, the woman he coupled with should disappear afterwards and not come back until he was ready for her and then come back hungry for nothing but the opportunity to satisfy him again.

In the person of Amy, Kurt found himself confronted time after time with a woman whose furious sexual drive scared the wits out of him. He felt a moral obligation to her because she so bravely went along on all his unlikely trips: through Alaskan swamps, up Alpine ice fields, into bear-infested Russian hinterlands; trips even his lifelong comrades-in-arms, now married with families, refused to make. And he knew, at his age—fifty—he should, to save face, show some semblance of deeper affection for her if he was going to allow her to continue to be his girlfriend, which everyone he knew was now calling her, he himself having been the last to refer to her as such. That woman wanted sex or orgasms or whatever she was after, without end.

Far from being able to satisfy her, Kurt always left her in a state far heightened to that in which she began, breaking off to blow his nose or scratch himself and simply forgetting to resume unless Amy, forced into a most unflattering light, begged him to continue and even then he was known to fade back, ridiculing her sexual appetite, and simply refuse, in response to which Amy had fled the room more than once. Any curiosity or flattered vanity he may have had about her passion at the beginning was long dead. His response, in the months between his acts of phallic salivation, was to avoid to the degree he dared all personal association with her. That sharpened Amy's sense of aggression towards him, something he well suspected but, unbeknownst to both, it also whetted her lust, heightening her sexual drive to the point of neurosis. As Amy became increasingly frenzied Kurt grew ever more reluctant to sleep with her until he finally had to admit to her: 'I want to. I just can't.' The affair with her had brought him to the end of his powers. He had become completely impotent and, with his impotence, excused himself from the contest.

Amy went into a rage. She was not fooled by this. He could not because he would not. A clever ploy. With this trick, he had actually won for all time. He no longer even had to admit he was rejecting her. Her frame of mind deteriorated. During the day she became nymphomaniac, fantasizing compulsively about his sexual acts with other women; at night she turned into a murderess, dreaming over and over again of men and knives, of chases and attacks, of cutting and slashing. Could she really desire and hate someone so much at the same time?

Jeanne's monotonous response to Amy's timid references to any of this was to tell her to get rid of Kurt. Amy was going on forty, Jeanne sternly reminded her, so she had better make up her mind now about what she was going to do because she would not get a second chance at that late date. After forty, women lost their appeal. It would be nigh on impossible for Amy to interest another man in a year or two. Amy should beware.

Harsh medicine, but straightforward, clear, easy. Dump him. Only it wasn't easy. It was impossible. Amy couldn't end the relationship with Kurt until she had gotten even with him. Getting even with him could only mean rejecting him, but good. To do that, she had to lure him back into her arms first and then reject him. It was her dearest goal. Her soul ground away enacting grim fantasies of that final rejection rivaled only by her sexual visions of Kurt groining himself into endless lines of sleek, busty, widespread women.

Because that perfect, final rejection was out of reach, Amy began taking lethal swipes at Kurt whenever she could. Contemplating how, when, and where had become yet another of her consumptive pastimes. Her swipes never hit the mark because he was already gone, and the stroke whipped back onto her leaving painful welts. That was what would cure her in the end, she realized with masochistic amusement: his absence causing her to bear the brunt of her own blows, for how long determined only by the strength of her desire to deal them. That desire was getting weaker.

Amy's thoughts on all these matters twitched only occasionally and from the murkiest of depths. What glimmered up to her from down there, which links moved and possessed anatomical sense, which were illusory patterns traced by accident and stirred only by the breath of desire, she couldn't tell. She only knew she wanted to break free of the poisonous cycle. She was, after all, the only one on the rack and might stay on it for the rest of her life. No one was going to haul her down off that thing, and—worse, much worse—if someone did, there was no guarantee she wouldn't crawl right back up on it. That is, in fact, what she had been doing all her life. That was why she was on it now. No one had put her there. No one was even watching anymore, Kurt certainly wasn't. She had mounted that instrument of torture herself, and she had to get down by herself. But first, she had to want to get down. She didn't. As everyone who knew her to whom she imparted even the least bit of

the problem reflectively stated at one point or another, she did indeed seem to want to be up there. And as long as she craved revenge, the sensation of sinking in her teeth, of hitting the soft spot of her target, she would stay there.

Yes, of course she enjoyed it. She would accept that as truth rather than throw another denial onto the heap. But why did she enjoy it? Obviously, at thirty-nine, she wasn't enjoying it as much as she used to. Maybe her skill as self-torturer had so advanced that even she couldn't stand it anymore, or maybe, slowly, she was realizing that what she wanted to achieve was not to be achieved that way. Maybe her goals themselves had changed and she no longer quite so intensely wanted to sink her teeth into anything. In any case, in the past few years, through Kurt's blessed indifference, she had realized the folly of her outdated methods and acknowledged the painful fact that the man she currently held in opposition to herself was not the perpetrator of her pains and woes, he was not the foe nor had he ever been. She had picked him out solely because she thought he would make a good foe, and she had been oh so wrong. His refusal to participate had finally pointed up the fact that her real target had always been only herself, and the weight of that thought did hit its mark, her teeth sank deep, and she was brought to a gasping standstill. It was Jeanne's picture of her after all: the hopeless, resentful, primitive underling wanting to go on after her miserable fashion while pointing the finger at those who knew how to succeed and enjoy their lives, as Kurt was doing, although Amy called it leaving her behind.

Now that she had an inkling of what it was all about, Amy couldn't go on with it anymore. The thought that asserted itself ever more frequently was: there was no need; it was all too strenuous; the return was not worth the investment. Beneath all that lay a very complicated logic she had no hopes of fathoming, she knew that; but it didn't matter. She would allow herself to be guided by the banality of economy from now on. Sincerely wanting to stop, however, suddenly made it evident that she might not be able to. She really had been losing all those years, not just pretending to.

Amy stopped. The room seemed very still. She had been in reflection a long time. "This isn't easy for me, but ..." she faltered. "... this is my last session. I won't be coming back."

“That’s natural, but ... I’m surprised. This is quite sudden.” Jeanne responded incongruously. Outwardly she maintained her calm, but her heart fluttered and she became aware that she was sweating unpleasantly under all those clinging knits. She was not prepared for this kind of news. She told herself it was unprofessional of her, but she also felt insulted, deeply insulted. She stared, slack-mouthed, past Amy at the bookcase. “You’re certainly angry today,” she finally said, a very safe thing to say in a therapy session. The problem with it was, Amy didn’t sound angry now. She had sounded angry before, but not now.

“Oh, it’s not that I’m angry today. I’m angry every day. Today I am furious.”

“That’s good.” Another safe reply, a therapist’s pot shot, if Amy only knew, only possible to make if the therapist didn’t care, wasn’t really engaged. If the Amys of the world ever found that out, it would spell death to therapy. “What’s finally made you express it?” Jeanne took a deep, careful breath. Maybe she would be all right. Maybe it was nothing more than wild impulse that made Amy say she was quitting, an attempt to free herself of her inhibitions. Jeanne jounced her leg, glanced at the black stems on her watch and her face froze.

Amy understood that expression. Her eyes slid from Jeanne’s face to Jeanne’s ankle and the watch, where they remained fixed with frank attention. “I hate that.”

“Do you think it can keep till next time?” Jeanne asked.

“There will be no next time,” Amy reminded her. “This is my last time.”

“Yes, you said that but ... we have to have some sort of wrap-up of why ...”

“I don’t.”

“But ...”

“I am tired,” Amy stated rapidly but dully, “of hearing me malign myself. That’s all I’ve done ever since I started coming here. I haven’t been telling the truth because only the verbal side of me’s been talking. The verbal side is a negotiator and wants people to like and approve of me. I have another side that can’t talk and doesn’t

negotiate. That side is more important now. I suppose it always was. It's quite large and healthy and copes with things in a completely different way than I've ever described or could imagine, and doing very well, better than I could ever have described or imagined. It doesn't have any sides. It's fluid and intact and intelligent and incomprehensible. But it doesn't talk and when I talk about it, I criticize—malign it. I don't want to do that anymore. I don't want to lie anymore. I haven't been speaking the truth. I realized I cannot speak to you without lying. I can't afford to waste any more time doing that. It's damaging me. And why should I, why *should* I?"

"Which side is talking now?" Jeanne asked.

"The verbal side," Amy responded, her cheeks flushing momentarily.

Jeanne rose. Amy's time was really up. She would have to go now, whether this was her last session or not. Amy rose simultaneously, coordinating her movement to match Jeanne's, rising degree by degree only as Jeanne did, having been bred by a painstaking Christian mother to be the kind of creature to play lady-in-waiting to the world. Amy was ushered to the door and with a simple goodbye, she slipped out and descended the low, wooden, well-maintained *Altbau* staircase, breathing sighs of incredulous relief as she descended. She had really done it, sloppy and almost accidental as it had turned out to be, she was free now, she would never have to come back. Now she could act in her behalf without having to explain it convincingly first to a judge who had been conveyed from cradle to courtroom without ever having been out on the street.

Jeanne gently closed the door after her. Alone in the quiet apartment, she went back into the study where all her sessions were held, sank gently down onto the sofa that no one ever needed to lie down on, put her dark, smooth hands over her face, and began to sob. Another one gone. Another one? The last one was gone. Amy had been the last one.

"That's because you're good," Franz, her psychiatrist husband, told her that evening. "What did she give you for her reasons?"

"Well, all the right ones, really," Jeanne dissembled slightly. "But I wanted to keep her there. That was wrong. It's just that I seem to

lose so many clients. It's always so abrupt, and it's always just when we're getting somewhere. I mean it happens after they've renewed their sessions, when we're in our second set. Just the fact that they've renewed their sessions means they've reconsidered whether they want to continue or not and they've decided yes, they want to renew their commitment. So this just doesn't make any sense. Naturally it catches me off-guard and ... and I get angry. It's very disappointing."

"I'm not sure it's exactly the way it may seem to you. They've been considering and reconsidering without telling you."

"Franz! We discuss it and they decide to continue. Their decision is to continue and then this happens. It doesn't make any sense," she repeated carefully, puzzled by his lack of understanding.

"They have to make their decision alone. They can't tell you what they're considering in private, especially when they think what they want—to quit—will hurt your feelings. It would be embarrassing for them."

"That doesn't say much for the rapport I try to build up! Anyway," she relented with relief. "You're right, of course. That's what she's said ... sort of."

"Specifically?"

"That the verbal portion of her couldn't tell me the truth. That's pretty straightforward, isn't it?"

"I'd say so. Jeanne, honey, just remember: anyone who is good at what he does works his way out of a job. Very few people are that good. Most people are so anxious about being exposed as unnecessary that they do everything they can to keep the jobs they have, which means they never succeed, doesn't it? That's not how you work, is it?" He rubbed her shoulders. She pressed her face against him and cried softly but not for long. He comforted her.

"The fact that they can make the decision is a very positive statement about your work. It's hard for other people to see it that way, but you shouldn't ever forget it. If you kept the same clients for decades, *that* would be bad testimony to your work."

"You're right. Again."

“There are plenty of references I’ve been turning away because you said you were too busy. Would you like me to set up a couple of interviews for you now?” Jeanne was fortunate. Her husband never lacked for people to send to her. His practice was so large and in such demand that his overflow alone kept her in clients, even if they did all up and leave her at the beginning of their second series of sessions, usually in the middle of what she considered to be a particularly productive phase.

“For next week, sure. This week I still need to recover.”

Jeanne did not consider that her period of recovery should embrace a confrontation with her own cleaning woman, the woman whose narrow slot in prosperous Munich life had served so unhappily as the ill-fated paradigm of freedom and industry she had painted for Amy. That suggestion probably had been stupid, Jeanne whined inwardly the next day as she wrestled gloomily with the unwieldy box of old newspapers she kept in the front hall closet. It was the cleaning woman’s job to take the box down twice a week and dump its contents into the recycling bin in the courtyard. The cleaning woman didn’t like the chore so she simply always forgot to do it. Cleaning women were like that, Jeanne’s inward grumbling continued; they could construct adequate solutions that easily. In trying to outwit the woman, it had become Jeanne’s method to peek into the hall closet early on the days the box was supposed to be emptied and frequently thereafter to monitor if and when it had been taken down. At four-thirty on those afternoons, after the cleaning woman had gone without touching the box, Jeanne had been in the habit of hurrying the box down herself to keep herself from realizing that she would rather do that than what? confront a cleaning woman? Today, she resolved, would be the day she did confront her. While waiting for the woman to show up, Jeanne decided in a mild fury that she would push the box out onto the landing. The cleaning woman couldn’t ignore it there.

Whether her trick worked or not could not divert Jeanne’s attention from the fact that she was not really sure the cleaning woman would show up at all. Today was indeed the last straw. If Amy couldn’t take anymore, then Jeanne wouldn’t take anymore either. Everything else had flown away from her. She had her mornings

perfectly free now to confront that cleaning woman. If the woman was a second more than forty-five minutes late, Jeanne would turn her right around at the door and order her to march back where she came from with the message that she was out of a job there at any rate. Jeanne would then call the agency and cancel the difficult woman's employment with a very clear listing of her dissatisfactions. She would enjoy doing that.

Jeanne knelt down beside the cardboard box and gave it a careful but decisive jerk. The top of the heap slid smoothly off and down behind the box along the closet wall. Chiding herself to jerk in a more controlled way, she slowly pulled the box out into the hallway, then turned to retrieve the fallen paper. One of the pieces she swept up was an unopened envelope addressed to Franz at his office bearing the red-and-black sticker of registered mail. Startled to realize how bad that spot was for the box—envelopes obviously dropped unnoticed into it out of pockets as coats were being hung up—Jeanne interrupted her work to take the letter into her husband's study. As she did so, the name in the return address jumped up at her. It was Amy's. Back in the front hallway, she resumed her graceless chore.

Her good luck for the day was in catching the cleaning woman bounding up the stairs before her marginal forty-five minutes were up. Jeanne met her on the landing and simply pointed to the box. There was no need for discussion or coaxing. The young, robust woman swept it up in generous good cheer and marched right back down with it, her large purse, dangling low from her arm, bumping behind her down the stairs. In the meantime Jeanne, enlivened by her easy success, didn't mind fixing coffee for the energetic woman. It was just normal coffee. Jeanne never knew why the Turkish woman went on so about it. Yet the fact that she savored it so flattered Jeanne into believing against her will that there was something about her coffee that was finer than other coffees, be it in quality of the bean, preparation, atmosphere, or grace of the hand with which it was served.

That evening, Franz did not mention the registered letter Jeanne had placed on his desk. Not sure if he had seen it, Jeanne

mentioned she had laid it there for him, and he thanked her. He had indeed overlooked it, he admitted. He said nothing more.

“What was it about?”

“Dunno ... yet.”

“You mean you get registered mail, don’t open it, nearly lose it, find it again, and still don’t open it?”

His response was a look of wry humor mixed with patience. After a pause, he merely said: “That’s right.”

“Registered mail, Franz!”

“Honey, they all send registered mail. It’s nothing new or special. They could save themselves the fees, if they only knew.”

“Apparently. That one was from a former client of mine, if *you* only knew.” Her reply was arch and against her better judgement. Her irascibility made her realize how angry she was that that particular client had quit her. She had liked Amy. What’s more, she had thought Amy liked her. Her extreme touchiness on the subject made it obvious that she was not satisfied with the way things had turned out. She did not feel she understood what had happened, with Amy or with any of her clients. “How can you be so careless?” Another reckless comment and then after another pause: “Being registered mail, you had to sign for it.” Another pause. “And *then* ignore it. Do you always ignore things you sign for?” She bit her lip. She was nagging.

Slowly his jaw jutted out, followed by his pugnacious, stubborn lower lip. “I don’t sign for those things,” he said slowly. “Our mail service is something I have nothing to do with. We have five receptionists to take care of that sort of thing and they do a bang-up job. I don’t interfere with their work, they don’t interfere with mine. You’re accusing me of incompetence in an area in which I am,” his tone lightened markedly, his lips and jaw retracted, “incompetent. Don’t wear yourself out reproaching me for it. There would be no end to it. Just accept the fact, honey, that I am not an administrator.”

“If it’s addressed to you ... ?”

“Then I get it.”

“And this one ...” Hearing the exasperation in her voice, Jeanne checked it. “... addressed to you?”

“I didn’t get it.”

“You took the trouble of bringing it home and throwing it away here.”

“That’s the part I don’t understand,” he said easily. “I can only think one of our receptionists put it with my papers without telling me—or mentioned something vague about it that I didn’t understand—and I threw it out with a load of other stuff. I don’t remember ever seeing it.”

“Well ... it was from Amy.”

“So that’s it. Your most recent. Uh-huh.”

“Uh-huh!” she taunted. She hadn’t gained control of herself after all. She checked herself again. “Yes. Well, how about opening it now?”

He looked at her and smiled. “I don’t like to mix business with my very private home life, thank you very much. I’ll look at it in the office.”

“You! brought the letter home. I! didn’t.” She had suddenly dropped into a foul mood. She felt threatened.

“I did *not*,” he said, his voice rising on the third syllable in a mild warning she knew to pay attention to. “I told you, I never saw it before you put it on my desk. I still haven’t looked at it. You say it’s from Amy. Well, I don’t know that. But if it is, I can tell you without even opening the letter what it’s about. Your former client has not paid her bill and I’m sure that letter is just another one of her excuses why she hasn’t.”

“A bill for what?”

“For a consultation to get approval to renew her sessions with you.”

“But, Franz, that was over a year ago, wasn’t it?”

“She obviously doesn’t remember what took place during that time because she’s complaining about the charges now.”

“A year later?” she asked.

“A year later,” he affirmed.

“When did you send the bill?”

“A month ago, maybe,” he guessed. “At least she’s been complaining about the charges for that long. I don’t know when she got the bill. I’m not responsible for billing services, either.”

“That’s a fair gap, isn’t it, between service and billing? A year?”

Franz shrugged. “It’s not my business when they send those things out. All I know is, I do my part of the work, which has to be done and turned in by a certain time and is.”

“Amy keeps a very accurate diary.”

Franz’s look hardened. “What’s that got to do with anything?”

Jeanne laughed a little at his reaction. “What’s that got to do with anything? Gee, I dunno. I guess it’s just that she generally records exactly what happens. And I doubt she’d get upset about something unless it really happened. She looks things up a lot in that diary of hers to check herself. She’s extremely conscientious. What’s the matter with you?”

He sighed, the edge in his voice gone. “I find too late that we have been mixing my business with our home life. I’ll take care of that letter tomorrow in the office.”

“All right,” Jeanne said doubtfully, then suddenly, “When was that letter postmarked?”

“Now what’s that got to do with anything?”

“Just curious.”

“I don’t want to waste any more time discussing this.”

“Now isn’t that just what Amy told me,” Jeanne mused, in sudden discouragement. “She can’t afford to waste any more time talking about silliness either. Pretty serious criticism of my work. I am of another opinion, which you know very well, or I wouldn’t have spent half my life studying it. Let me look at that letter!”

“Now that’s a perfectly unreasonably request. Of course I won’t.”

“Let me open it and look at it, Franz.”

“Jeanne. No.”

“We can resolve all of this now. Let me read it.”

“Besides all the other things wrong with what you’re asking me to do, you’re asking me to violate the confidentiality between patient and doctor. It’s none of your business, Jeanne. You know that. I wouldn’t show it to you under any circumstances.”

The evening ended amicably. Jeanne admired her husband’s professional integrity, his clear-sightedness, and his loyalty to his patients and told him so. Neither one of them mentioned the matter again.

The following day, Jeanne broke all rules and called her former client. “Amy. This is Jeanne.”

Amy’s greeting echoed reservation and anxiety.

Jeanne went ahead hurriedly. “I would like to ask you something that is rather sensitive.”

Amy demurred.

Jeanne frowned into the phone. This wasn’t the right approach. She had been altogether too hasty, completely unprofessional, in making the call. Whatever confidentiality her husband had wanted to keep from her, she had decided she could spill out of Amy. So how was she going to do that? With one swift, deft jab? That was a laugh, and if Franz ever found out about it, she would have lots to explain. She cleared her throat. “Amy, it’s about the reason why you discontinued the sessions.”

“Well?”

“Can you come in for one more session, just one more ... this afternoon?” She was being rash now. “I need to know a little more ... for my—” She couldn’t say *records*, she realized; it sounded too pat. She cleared her throat again. “For my records.” It was in fact for her records. She didn’t feel she could take on a new patient ever again until she found out what had gone wrong with Amy and through Amy, with all the others.

“Am I going to get billed for this?” Amy asked.

Now that was a rude question. Jeanne kept her anger down and immediately redefined her conditions without betraying any sign of capitulation. “It’s not a session then. I used the wrong word, perhaps. I’d like to meet with you one more time. It’s for me, but it is about the sessions. A kind of debriefing for me. No charge. Can you come?”

Reluctantly Amy agreed to come over at the outrageous time Jeanne suggested, the middle of that afternoon, but she arrived punctual to the minute as always. Jeanne led her into the room, its soothing expanse of moss green Oriental carpet cushioning the sound of all footfalls; the rangy, slowly dying Fichus tree pinned in place against the straining drapery; everything as usual, except for the fact that no watch was tucked away anywhere. There was no clock to be seen at all. Apparently when it was Jeanne who wanted something from Amy, time no longer mattered.

Amy settled herself deep in the red-upholstered high-backed chair, pressing her back hard against its back for support until only her toes brushed against the carpet. She clutched the chair arms and waited.

“You sent a letter to my husband,” Jeanne said simply.

Blood rushed to Amy’s face. “I’ve sent several,” she answered with a strange severity that made Jeanne quake.

“You didn’t mention it to me.”

“I didn’t think it had anything to do with you. I see I was wrong.”

Suddenly Jeanne felt exposed and frightened. “Did that have anything to do with why you stopped our sessions?”

“Most definitely.”

“I see...” Would she say more? Or would Jeanne have to be tactful and clever and coax out whatever it was? How big was it? Was it in Jeanne’s power to be tactful and clever enough under these circumstances to coax it out? She didn’t think so. She was about to learn, she realized weakly, that Amy had been having an affair with her husband all this time. What would she do? What say? To Amy? To Franz? An affair with Amy. Why not? She was very blond, very attractive, very good, very— Amy’s abrupt response arrested any further development of Jeanne’s harrowing scenario:

“The reasons I stopped the sessions are those that I told you. But this matter was the impetus, one could say. Very definitely.”

Jeanne leaned forward, but looked down to hide her intense nervousness. “Was it about the bill?” she asked softly.

“Well, of course it was. I stated that very clearly.”

Her sense of relief so overwhelmed her that Jeanne decided not to even try dissembling the feeling. She dropped her head into her hands, ruffled her hair and moaned softly. She lifted her head and asked gravely: “You said you thought he had charged you incorrectly?” she guessed.

“Of course he had. Why? Has this happened before?”

Jeanne didn't hear the question. Her thoughts flashed over her triumph. She had, in fact, just managed the tact and cleverness she had required. Somehow the swift, deft jab had been executed and the mysterious reason she had so anxiously sought had popped out. Overwhelming gratitude eclipsed her relief. She was going to miss the goodness this woman had demonstrated to her time and time again in her spontaneous, uncontrollable honesty, in her strong desire to be honest.

Amy's face gnarled into a dark frown. “It didn't occur to me you might know. That makes it even worse. I was exactly right—what I decided to do. That was right. So what do you want to know?”

“I don't know anything about it,” Jeanne said softly. “Can you tell me?”

“Your husband cheats. He lies, and he steals. From me, from the insurance company. Just because I don't pay the bills directly doesn't mean I don't end up paying the bills. I do and so does everyone else in society. Except him. He's getting rich from it, and so are you, whether you know it or not. There's nothing worse in this world than people like him.”

“And what was it ... exactly?” Jeanne asked, her words slightly slurred.

“In order for the insurance company to continue covering the fees for my sessions with you, I required a medical—”

“Yes,” Jeanne affirmed, interrupting a little precipitously to hurry Amy on to something Jeanne didn’t know.

“—recommendation. He was the person to get it from because he was the person I went to in the first place. He was the one that suggested I go to you. So I went to him and I got it. That was last year, but I never got a bill for it and I began to think that he wasn’t going to charge me at all and I thought, gee, that’s appropriate, because he hadn’t actually done anything. What a naïve girl. The bill did come, but not until so much later that I wondered if he waited so long to send it on purpose. In that bill, a whopper in many ways, I was charged double the normal rate—it said so very clearly in a comment at the bottom which I guess the insurance companies require—double the normal rate because I couldn’t use the language well enough to make myself understood, which made it difficult for him to make a diagnosis. Then there was a surcharge because the diagnosis itself had been so complicated. The whole thing was terribly difficult for him, apparently. But that isn’t the worst of it. That’s just the cheating part. He also completely misrepresented his services.

“He didn’t make a diagnosis when I was there. I didn’t say anything when I was there. We hardly talked. I had to wait forty minutes past the time of my appointment to get in to see him. Once I got in there, he spent over ten minutes talking on the phone while I sat at his desk and waited, and then he spent sixty genial seconds with me during which he asked me, did I want to continue the sessions and I said yes, I thought I did, and then he gave me a great big smile and said, ‘well, that’s all that matters’ and that was the end of it. I was hurried out. I got a two-line letter from his office sometime thereafter recommending to the insurance company that I be permitted to extend my therapy sessions.

“For that visit, according to the bill he sent over a year later, he charged me fifty minutes of services and consultation, that is to say, I was to pay double for the time I waited for him. Now I understand why he made me wait so long and why he chatted away on the phone with me sitting by. That would be quite embarrassing for most people, but for him, it’s quite profitable. Don’t send them away too soon. I had no idea or I guess I might have complained about the wait. But there you go, blind respect for a profession your

husband crouches behind to reach out and twist my guts out. For once, I just can't accept it. What a sadistic crook."

"It was obviously just a mistake," Jeanne frowned, shaking her head. "The bill was for someone else and sent to you by mistake. That could easily happen."

"Then why didn't he answer any of my letters?"

... *they all send registered mail* ... The words echoed faintly in Jeanne's consciousness. They did?

"And it was for me because it referred to my inability to speak German on account of my being a foreigner. There couldn't be too many patients coming to him under those circumstances. Although, if he had trouble understanding my 'ja' that day, don't you think he might have said so, as a simple courtesy to me, to give me the chance to say it another way? Maybe mention that his wife is Canadian, that she speaks German as a second language, and that he listens to her all day long so he's sort of used to listening to foreigners speak the language. I've heard you speak German over the phone and I can't understand you. I have trouble understanding your English. You slur your words, if you'll pardon my saying so. And I've been speaking German for ten years in the office and at home, with friends and colleagues, and they all seem to understand me just fine. Hey, maybe I speak too clearly! But it was a ready excuse he could use. Subjective as well. Hard to prove in court.

"Well, I wrote a letter asking him to please correct the bill and he didn't answer. He never answered. I never received any acknowledgement that he received anything from me. He just resent the bill with a twenty-mark surcharge tacked on for late payment. I tried again, and again. All I got was the bill again with another late fee tacked onto it although only a few days had gone by. You can't tack on a fee for late payment after five days, but that's what he was doing. Every time. Finally I sent my letter registered mail. Nothing. By that time, he had escalated the thing incredibly, threatening to sue me if I didn't pay a bill I had gotten only a few weeks before. I knew by that time that I was either going to have to get a lawyer to defend myself and counter-sue him or pay the bill and forget the whole thing. So I paid the bill, but I did not and will not pay any fee for late payment. You can tell the great Dr. Wiesbach-Burkenmeier that from me. And you can tell him that if

he starts to make a stink about it, then I will get a lawyer and take him to court and make this all just as unpleasant for him as he's made it for me and as expensive as possible. I've kept a record of everything involved in the matter. I'm ready for that.

"But the question that keeps going through my head is: he knew I was getting therapy from you. Don't you think he might have taken into consideration, just a little bit, how all this might affect you? I mean, I come in here every week to divulge the deepest confidentialities and you tell me to go and get a job as a cleaning woman, after getting a bill like that. Well, things are going to break down at some point. That's obvious, isn't it?"

Jeanne nodded woodenly.

"When you told me that cleaning woman jive, I realized you were somehow cheating me, too, and once I realized that, I knew I couldn't come here anymore. You benefit from his cheating. I'm sure you're glad he takes such good care of you. But you better watch out when you talk to your patients about the so-perceived privileged people, that's all. Be wary of being too wise about debunking the myth of unfair advantage. Your husband has worked his way into the privileged position of being able to charge me six hundred marks for that big smile of his and is clever enough or experienced enough or cruel enough to know that if he starts adding late fees right away and threatening law suits, his intractable patients will soon back down. He's a crook and he may get away with it, but I can't let you get away with it. That would be too much. Anything that would happen in here after what happened with your husband would be a complete lie. That's it. Are you satisfied now?"

Jeanne fingered the gold chain her husband had presented her on their recent trip to Spain. Amy was gone now, had just departed, the last of her clients. Jeanne drifted through the large, quiet study to the window to watch the street below. Amy soon emerged from the doorway into the winter's early twilight, bundled up like a three-year-old against the bluster of the February weather. She fumbled with her bicycle for some time before mounting and riding slowly away, threading her way carefully between the deep, treacherous tracks of new snow. Large black saddlebags straddled the back wheel making the vehicle seem an even more primitive form of

transportation in Jeanne's eyes. Why would anyone choose to get around that way?

Fading back from the cold window, Jeanne could not deny the hazy sense of euphoria in which she felt suspended even now as her last client spun away from her into a vast, gelid, dark universe. There was lots of space out there where Amy could spin and tumble forever and Jeanne would never find out how she fared. She would never find out how any of her former clients fared. All those lightless constellations tumbling out there in the outer reaches of a black vastness, while Jeanne remained where she had always been, near light and warmth, affection, love and, yes, wealth.

It was no accident. Amy had been dead wrong in thinking there was some unfair advantage at work, and there Jeanne had failed. She had wanted to make Amy see that happiness was a state to be created by the one seeking it, by Amy herself, and that once Amy had learned to create it, it would be hers forever. The tendency was instinctive in all life forms, evident in every spider spinning a web, in every plant growing towards the sun. Amy only had to awaken to the latent intelligence inside herself to find out where her happiness lay. Moving towards it would come automatically, and she would ever afterwards choose to stay there. That Jeanne could guarantee. Jeanne had been doing it all her life. It was the mission she cherished in her counseling, to reveal that intelligence to each and every one of her clients.

But Amy had refused to learn. Her other clients had refused her, too. They came to her because they couldn't and would eventually leave her because she could.

THE END