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K (King)

It is an office on Manhattan's Upper West Side. Modern, massive, all glass windows, family-friendly. Doorman. Foyer. In the office, there is African Art, masks on the bookshelves, sculptures of bodies or gods. The therapist, Dr. Peters, is tall and lean, wearing tight pants and a slim fitting blouse. A high-waisted belt divides them. She has long brown hair. When the door opens onto the waiting room, she smiles a little uneasily toward the new patient, motioning her in. She has a very deep voice. She looks delicate and mischievous. The room is small but one wall is a window. Gila, twenty-five, wears jeans and a loose-fitting dress shirt, loafers, a messenger bag. She has short curly hair. It is October.

Gila: "So. Hi. You should know, I'm not good at being a patient."

Dr. Peters: "Hm. That's an interesting way to begin."

Gila: "Oh, really? What's so interesting about that? I'm being honest."

Dr. Peters: "I didn't say you weren't. It's just, well...How shall I put this...not that typical for a new patient to introduce themselves that way. That's all. Did you hear it as a condemnation?"

Gila: "That *would* be interesting wouldn't it? Then we could talk about *why* I heard it as a condemnation. Thank you but no. I heard it as you saying you're surprised. But I'm not typical. And, I don't have time. To waste. I don't want to spend week after week just analyzing *why* I feel something or what it *means*, that kind of thing."

Dr. Peters: "That kind of thing?"

Gila: "Oh, seriously, are we going to do *this* the whole time?"

Dr. Peters: "When you say *this*, what do you *mean*?"

Gila: "Oh my god. Is this a joke?"

Dr. Peters: "I'm afraid I don't know what you're talking about.
What would be a *joke* in what I asked you?"

Gila: "I think we should start this again."

Dr. Peters: "Oh-kay. I suppose. What did you have in mind?"

Gila: "I don't know."

Dr. Peters: "Shall we start with you telling me a little bit about yourself?"

Gila: "Sure. What I'm doing now or the whole personal-biography thing?"

Dr. Peters: [chuckles] "Anything you like."

Gila: "I just finished a graduate degree in Literature and Philosophy at Chicago. It was amazing. I worked on theory and psychoanalysis. And, yeah. I don't know, fascinating. I want to do more of it, but I don't know how yet. I need to figure that out."

Dr. Peters: "So, you studied psychoanalysis?"

Gila: "Yeah. I guess that's kind of why I want to skip all the micro-analysis of my every word and manner of expression. I can kind of do that myself. Although, it's not because of studying psychoanalysis so much that I am a close-reader of literature. It's kind of the same thing."

Dr. Peters: "Is that so?"

Gila: "Yes. When you ask that I can't tell if you're surprised or skeptical."

Dr. Peters: "Hm. Is it important to you to know what it is I'm feeling?"

Gila: "No. Yes. This again?"

Dr. Peters: "By *this*, what is it that you mean?"

Gila: "Oh god. I thought we said we'd start again. I just explained that I don't want to do this micro-analysis of my every word routine."

Dr. Peters: "Yes, I suppose you *did* say something about what you *didn't* want to do, but I guess I don't quite understand it. Perhaps you're trying to insinuate that I'm not intelligent enough for you?"

Gila: "No, it's nothing like that. If I wanted to say that, I would. I wouldn't *insinuate* it. What I'm trying to say is different than that. I don't know. I don't want to talk about irrelevant stuff that I can figure out on my own."

Dr. Peters: "And, is it important for you to figure stuff out on your own?"

Gila: "Not in and of itself it isn't, no. But, I can't help that it comes pretty naturally to me. My point is that isn't what I need your help with."

Dr. Peters: [silence]

Gila: "Does that make sense?"

Dr. Peters: "I don't know yet. It sounds like you're saying you don't need anyone's help to analyze yourself. So, I'm wondering what brings you here."

Gila: [silence] "Yes."

Dr. Peters: "I am assuming you're not here against your will?"

Gila: [laughs] "No, no. Not really. Which doesn't really mean I want to be here but I think I see that I have no choice."

Dr. Peters: "You have no choice? Really? Did something happen to force you to come here?"

Gila: "No. Yes. I don't know. I'm holding back when I need to speak. When I want to say something, like in my writing or when it is important. Or, talking to someone who is important. I get totally silent. It's like I freeze or something. I don't know."

Dr. Peters: "I'm not sure I fully understand. You seem to have no problem expressing your opinions here with me?"

Gila: "That sounded a little sarcastic."

Dr. Peters: [smirking] "Was it? I didn't exactly mean to be sarcastic. I was just letting you know what I've observed so far."

Gila: "Whatever. Yes. I have no problem speaking my mind here, but this is silly. This is easy. What I'm saying here doesn't even qualify as thinking. It's just responding to the stupid questions you're asking. It's just impatience talking. What I'm referring to is when it comes to something meaningful. It's like...I don't know how to explain it. I don't mean to be withholding but then I cannot talk. This came up in a paper I was writing. In Chicago. On a book. There was so much I was trying to talk about but when it came time to talking I couldn't say what I was *actually* thinking. Am I making any sense? I don't know how to explain it."

Dr. Peters: [silence]

Gila: "Is something wrong? That last question wasn't rhetorical."

Dr. Peters: "I'm not sure yet, I'm afraid. It seems like you experience my questions as *nonsense*?"

Gila: “Actually, I think I said they were stupid. Are you still stuck at that part? I said so much since then. Did I offend you somehow? Is that why you take us back there?”

Dr. Peters: “Well, no, Gila. I’m not *offended*. But, I am surprised that you would think it’s not important to talk about why you experience my questions as – *stupid*, did you call them?”

Gila: “Because they are. Listen, I really am not trying to be offensive. You’re smiling like this is amusing. I am not usually such an obnoxious kid but I’m trying to focus on something and you’re getting distracted.”

Dr. Peters: [laughs]

Gila: “Is that funny somehow?”

Dr. Peters: “Didn’t you mean it to be?”

Gila: “Not at all, no. I have no idea what’s funny to you.”

Dr. Peters: “Really?”

Gila: “Yes.”

Dr. Peters: “Well, you’re – what shall we call it? – style is unusual to say the least.”

Gila: “Okay?”

Dr. Peters: “And I’m not used to someone talking that way to me, telling me my questions are dumb. Perhaps, you can appreciate that that is a little insulting?”

Gila: “Not really, no. I’m not insulting at all. I’m just trying to be clear about what’s relevant and what isn’t. I was trying to tell you a story about what brings me here. Your questions were distracting. And irrelevant. And, you get insulted easily. Why is that? I don’t really care. It’s not my business. The point is

there was something I was trying to say and that's all I really want to focus on. Can I go back to outlining the issue, so you can understand what I'm trying to talk about?"

Dr. Peters: "Um, yes. But perhaps, if you don't mind, of course, you can give me a little background about your life, like where you were born and grew up and your parents, things like that? Perhaps it would help me to understand you better."

Gila: "I don't think it would. But fine. Toronto. I was born there. Parents had a bakery business that they started when I was born. Dad got sick when I was eight, died when I was 12. I took care of my mother and brother after that. My older brother died too when I was 14. Otherwise, nothing much else. I got a scholarship to study in Boston and went, and then Chicago for graduate school after that. Now, I'm here in New York City trying to figure out if I should apply to PhD programs or do something else instead. I don't know what. Psychoanalysis is interesting to me too, maybe one day."

Dr. Peters: "Wow, well, you said you wanted to study psychoanalysis? Do you mean therapy?"

Gila: "You sound surprised."

Dr. Peters: "Well, naturally, yes, I am a little since you seem to rather *detest* the experience of being a patient. I guess I'm wondering what your interest in this is, but –"

Gila: "I am not always like this."

Dr. Peters: "Oh?"

Gila: "I mean, I'm usually the one that everyone talks to and I help them figure things out. I'm actually very gentle. I like feelings – other people's. What you're seeing now is different. It's because it has to do with me, I think. I could do what you're doing, no problem. It's the being a *patient* part that gives me a hard time."

Dr. Peters: "Uh huh, if you say so. Can we go back to your biography for a moment, please, if you don't mind?"

Gila: "You have a lot of books here on relational psychoanalysis. Is that your particular orientation?" [looking around the room] "It's certainly a compelling critique of classical analytic technique, but I'm not sure that I'm convinced. It claims to be more modern but there are blind spots too in its theorization of technique. Don't you think?"

Dr. Peters: [silence]

Gila: "Are you not going to answer that?"

Dr. Peters: "I think it was *your* turn to talk about your biographical history?"

Gila: "Whatever."

Dr. Peters: "You said your father died?"

Gila: "Yeah. Got sick and died."

Dr. Peters: "Don't you think that would be important to this work?"

Gila: "Not really, no."

Dr. Peters: "Care to explain?"

Gila: "More than I have already?"

Dr. Peters: "You didn't."

Gila: "Really? Okay. What do you need to know?"

Dr. Peters: "Um, well, maybe you can start by telling me a little bit about what that's been like for you?"

Gila: "Watching my father die? It fucking sucked. He was the parent I was closest to. He was a parent, period. My mother, she, well, she can be difficult to deal with. My dad and I were very close. Then he got blood cancer, some rare and incurable kind, and died four and a half years later. What else is it you *need* to know?"

Dr. Peters: "You imply that your mother is difficult? Difficult how?"

Gila: "I didn't *imply* anything, I said it outright. She's kind of more like a teenager, so it's like raising a teenager, if that makes any sense? But she's better now. She's...outrageous still but older. It's like there's a little less crazy stuff she can pull. She takes me shopping. Or, sends me clothes. I don't mind. It's a way we can relate. My brother is my baby. He is not very high-functioning in the world or anything, but he's brilliant in his own way. Does all this information help you? Can we move on now?"

Dr. Peters: "Well, just one moment there, if you don't mind? You say your mother is like a *teenager*, if I'm understanding this right, but you have a good relationship with her?"

Gila: "Is that hard to understand? It's complicated. Obviously. But she's older now and she doesn't yell or anything, not from far away. She's lonely. Calls to tell me what new outfit she's bought me. We go shopping together. I don't mind. I don't care much about what I wear and, at least this way, we have something in common."

Dr. Peters: "Oh-kay. Do you like shopping with your mother?"

Gila: "What? I don't understand. It's what works."

Dr. Peters: "Yes, but I'm wondering if you enjoy –"

Gila: "I don't know what you're getting at. It works. She buys clothes she thinks I should wear and it's fine. What aren't you understanding?"

Dr. Peters: [pauses] "I don't know. And then you say your brother is your baby? Is he much younger than you?"

Gila: "No, not really, only two years younger, but he's always struggled more. With everything. I wouldn't know how to explain it. It's like...he just can't navigate the world. Language, dealing with people, school, traffic, stuff like that. I guess that's everything? Everything is hard for him but...so, it sometimes takes a lot of talking. Before and after he goes to work. Before and after he needs to eat dinner. Before he goes to sleep. In the morning when he gets up. I don't know if that makes sense. I *think* he's getting better, but the truth is I don't know. I worry."

Dr. Peters: "You feel responsible for him?"

Gila: "I *am* responsible for him."

Dr. Peters: "Uh-huh [she exhales loudly]. What I mean is that you're only two years older yourself. That makes him what, about twenty-three years old? He's not, properly speaking, a *baby*, as you called him."

Gila: "Is there a question there? Or, are you just proving you can do arithmetic?"

Dr. Peters: [laughs] "Wow, okay, *no*. I wasn't just proving my math skills [laughs a little more]. Although, they are rather impressive, aren't they? [leans back in her chair]. No. I was trying to understand why, if there was so little of an age difference between you, it somehow made sense that you had to take care of him."

Gila: "I don't understand your question."

Dr. Peters: "Well, it's actually pretty straightforward –"

Gila: "Apparently not straightforward enough."

Dr. Peters: "Or, in your case, *too* straightforward?"

Gila: "Whatever."

Dr. Peters: "What I mean is, you have no problem seeing that he has difficulty with certain things, but when it comes to your own life everything is fine and you don't need help."

Gila: "You're kidding me. Is that what I said? I'm *here*, aren't I? I never said I didn't need help. But, it's different, what he needs and what I need. He can't manage in the world, but that's never been difficult for me. Managing. In the world. You can't compare. Why are you comparing? You didn't get what I just said about D, did you? Don't bother answering that, I'm not actually asking. Just shocked that's all."

Dr. Peters: "I'm sorry that you feel I didn't –"

Gila: "And don't give me this, *I feel you didn't understand me crap*. Please. It isn't *subjective*. You *didn't* understand. You think my taking care of him is some *deflection* of my own suffering?"

Dr. Peters: "I didn't say that. I was –"

Gila: "You didn't need to. You just don't get the stakes, that's all. The *situation*."

Dr. Peters: "Which is that you feel he is your baby?"

Gila: "He *is*. Forget it."

Dr. Peters: "That you're a very generous sister who is helping him out?"

Gila: "Really. Just forget it. You don't have the terms –"

Dr. Peters: "I don't have the terms for what?"

Gila: "To understand that it's my *job*."

Dr. Peters: "I understand you feel very responsible for him. That you care about him a great deal."

Gila: "Okay, we're really done having this conversation. It's fine. It is unusual. I get it. You can only think in very familiar terms. It's fine. You tried. Can we move on now? It's time to move on."

Dr. Peters: "Well, Gila, yes. I suppose we can move on if you'd like to, but –"

Gila: "Good, yes, I'd like to."

Dr. Peters: "But, it's just, well, I can't believe you wouldn't think this isn't important to talk about with someone?"

Gila: "I didn't say it isn't important to talk about with someone. I said it isn't important to talk about right now with *you*. Or, at least not in the way you're approaching it. I had a teacher in high school. We're still very close. Ms. Tobin. I think she understands this stuff. I talk to her."

Dr. Peters: "Oh? Can you tell me a little bit about her, then?"

Gila: "No, not really, not now. I don't *know* you at all. Talking about a dead parent is one thing. But, Ms. Tobin, I wouldn't know how to talk about her. She takes care of me. Like, Gila you-need-to-eat-dinner-takes-care-of-me, you need to sleep-once-in-awhile-takes-care-of-me. I wouldn't be here if she didn't help me when she did."

Dr. Peters: [silence]

Gila: "Are you going to say anything?"

Dr. Peters: "Your voice changes when you talk about your teacher. I am struck by that, that's all."

Gila: "She is the closest person to me."

Dr. Peters: "Hm. And friends your age?"

Gila: "They're children, unfortunately. No offense to them. They like me. They are always asking to be closer, but what am I supposed to talk about? How to get my brother out of jail? How to convince my mother not to sign away the business the next time she's furious or falls in love? They worry about who to date and what their parents did that annoyed them. There isn't a tremendous amount of common ground. Which is fine. It's been that way for most of my life."

Dr. Peters: "It must be hard to be so alone with all of this experience."

Gila: "I don't know."

Dr. Peters: "Well it is certainly hard to lose a parent when you were so young, wouldn't you say?"

Gila: "I guess. But I worry you're not really paying attention. I survived whatever happened. Yes, it sucked, and maybe I wished that things had gone another way but they didn't and it's over now. I'm more or less okay."

Dr. Peters: "Well –"

Gila: "Please, spare me the part where you tell me that my life is hard. That's really not the point. The –"

Dr. Peters: "What is the point?"

Gila: "The point is that I got away. I'm here now – on my own. I'm free. I get to read. I used to think...I don't know. Maybe that I wouldn't? I'd be too busy with the business, with D. But then, after I met Tobin, I accepted that I didn't need to be there all the time. I could still do the things I needed to. But I could leave. Have my own life. That kind of thing. That *that's* what grieving meant or something. Moving on."

Dr. Peters: "And?"

Gila: "So, I did that. I opened up a little. I know that's funny to you, but I said *nothing* before. *Actually* nothing. There was a shrink or two in high school that, after my brother died, thought, hey, maybe this kid should talk to someone? But that didn't...basically when my mother found out, she lost it. What's wrong with you? How dare you make yourself a problem? That kind of thing. Fine. I didn't ask for it and had nothing to say anyway. But after Tobin and then Raynite, I talked more. Or, talked to *them*. Or, just talked to all those ghosts *less*. So, things are normal, more or less. Does that make sense?"

Dr. Peters: "I'm not quite sure. It's hard for me to see how you can say you're not affected by the things that happened. Or, say with such conviction that you do not need to talk about them. But, even if that was the case, what is it that brings you here right now? I'm not sure I fully understand that."

Gila: "I don't know. Whatever. Maybe it's too hard to explain. It's that when I went to Chicago, I finally got to read things I had always been so desperate to study; human psychology, literature, philosophy, loss and grief, gender, all that fun stuff. I wrote papers on these things and did well enough by other people's standards. Got nominated, best thesis stuff. Except my professor, Raynite, she was incredible. She knew the work wasn't complete. That I was holding back what I really thought and meant to say. 'Stop being so withholding!' she always told me. 'Come out and say what it is you think!' She said that I was too defensive or self-protective. I can't keep

track. It's kind of complicated. She said I need to grow up, let go, stop hiding and being so quiet."

Dr. Peters: "So, you want help trying to say what's on your mind?"

Gila: "It sounds simple when you say it that way. That isn't what I mean. I mean, I *couldn't* say what I was actually thinking. When I tried to, it's like, I don't know, like my mind is underwater. Or, my brain is. No, my brain is fine. I read a few books every day. That's easy. It's my mind or what I think. When we walked and talked, Prof. Raynite would say to me, 'It's *your* turn now. Tell me what you think of theory x or of this concept,' and I would completely freeze. It drove her crazy. I don't blame her. She said, 'Stop being coy. It's clear your mind is thinking a bunch of things.' But, the problem was I *wasn't* being coy. Or, *doing* anything. My thoughts were there, I guess. But, it's like I couldn't reach them. Something holds me back, but I don't know what. I am trying not to. I want to speak. I need to practice talking more, I think. Maybe saying what I think will loosen up whatever grip I have or something like that. I don't mean to be coy or withholding now either. It's just so hard to explain."

Dr. Peters: "It sounds like you have a lot you're trying to figure out."

Gila: "Sure. I guess. And then what?"

Dr. Peters: "Then what? What?"

Gila: "Do you have any insight into what I'm talking about?"

Dr. Peters: "Well. Hm. I think I have a way of understanding what you're saying but, of course, I imagine that you'll find what I say to be *simplistic*."

Gila: "If it is simplistic, then I'll find it that way, you're right. But, can you worry less about your own feelings for just a moment and tell me what you think?"

Dr. Peters: "You really are a rather difficult patient, you know that?"

Gila: "I'm not trying to be, I'm sorry. This isn't personal, of course. I just need you to focus on what's important and not get distracted by your own sensitivities and bad listening habits that you've developed while becoming a shrink."

Dr. Peters: "Wow! Well, that's quite the damning assessment, isn't it?"

Gila: "Really? I didn't mean it to be that way. I'm just trying to encourage you to listen for what I'm *actually* saying and not the things you're trained to listen for. That's all. Sorry if that's hurtful. I'm really not trying to be that way at all. I like you, I –"

Dr. Peters: "Ha!"

Gila: "Is that funny for some reason?"

Dr. Peters: "I'm just a little shocked to hear you say that. It seems like you can't tolerate anything I say."

Gila: "Really? No, I just think you're getting distracted and then defensive when I point that out. This isn't personal. Aren't you supposed to have a better practice of remaining neutral about the things a patient says? I'm not trying to hurt your feelings at all. Believe it or not, most people think of me as a pretty sweet kid."

Dr. Peters: "Well, yes, that is rather surprising, I admit."

Gila: "Ouch."

Dr. Peters: "It seems I'm not the only one who takes things personally then, yes?"

Gila: "Nice."

Dr. Peters: "I'm glad you approve. Now back to what I began to say...Where was I?"

Gila: "You were going to say something simplistic."

Dr. Peters: "Oh right, yes, *that*. Well, I guess I was thinking that perhaps you are describing difficulties talking because you haven't actually worked through your loss around your father when you were younger. I was thinking that talking about that might help you feel more comfortable talking about other things."

Gila: "No."

Dr. Peters: "No? Care to expand on that?"

Gila: "You are completely wrong. So, no. I don't need to talk about my fucking childhood. That stuff is boring. Over. Old. I need to find a way to talk about the things I'm thinking now in real-time. Like when I'm walking with Prof. Raynite and she looks at me and says, 'your turn.' I need to be able to answer that. To have the guts to self-express. I don't need more of a shitty childhood."

Dr. Peters: "Yes. But, perhaps those issues will make more sense once we understand better what you've been through? I know it may be hard to believe, but I *do* know something about trauma and grief. Some of my colleagues might even say it is my *expertise*."

Gila: "That may be. But do you know that line from Eminem, where he talks about not being understood because – you're looking confused?"

Dr. Peters: "Did you say, Eminem?"

Gila: "The rapper, yes. Do you know him? No?"

Dr. Peters: "You do?"

Gila: "I love Eminem. It's not all Chaucer and Steinbeck and Henry James for me. I started listening because for years it's all D would be blasting from his room, and I figured if I could understand what he liked that maybe I could relate to him better. Make my way of talking closer to how he understood things. And I've loved him ever since. You should give him a try."

Dr. Peters: [smiles, a little uncomfortably] "You were saying something – about what you've been through? What you DON'T want to talk about here?"

Gila: "Yeah, I don't remember. It doesn't matter. You're seeing me as some condescending smart-ass grad student trying to intellectualize, but that isn't right. I'm not saying you don't know anything. Just that you don't know me. I don't know how to insist on that distinction without offending your sense of *expertise* or whatever."

Dr. Peters: "Yes, well, perhaps you will come to trust me more eventually. You seem to have developed fondness for these other teachers in your life. Therapy is different, of course. But, you might see that I do know a thing or two. Our time is up in a moment or two, but if you'd like to come in the same time next week we can continue this. And maybe I will understand you better. Shall I put you in for this same slot next week?"



It is a classroom, rectangular with fluorescent lights. It is a few minutes into the first day of class. The new students are unfamiliar to each other and the space. They are sitting around the u-shaped seminar table waiting nervously for class to begin. Gila is at the back, directly opposite where the teacher will sit. She is twenty-four, with hair just past her ears, plastic glasses, playing with a pen, looking skeptical. Some people are chatting amongst themselves. The Professor is late.

She ambled in, one shoulder weighted down by her briefcase, marching awkwardly and reluctantly to the front of the seminar room.

“Is it me or is it dark in here?” She looks around knowing exactly what she’ll find, “Are there no windows here? Holy shit, that sucks for us! Although, after all, it is a course on trauma, so what the hell! Maybe it helps! Anyone want to check if there are chimneys nearby?”

She was wearing faded black unfitted jeans that seemed like a relic from the 1980s and a dark purple blouse with a wide open neckline that seemed like someone else’s idea of what dressing fancy looked like. As she walked, her feet seemed to stomp and drag behind. When she finally made it to the table’s head, she seemed, all at once, beleaguered and bemused. Or, exasperated but willing to put on a show of being the brilliant professor preparing to unveil the truth.

“So, hi!” she said with cheer that was so palpably at odds with the wounding etched into her furrowed brows and worried face.

“I’m Professor Raynite. Obviously.”

She dumps her pile of books and endless loose leaf papers on the table and, with difficulty disproportionate to the task, shuffles her thin, muscular, boyish fifty-year-old body into the school-room’s plastic seat. She shoves her sleeves upward, as if they’re in the way of whatever rugged task she’s about to launch into and leans forward. Her legs spread out wide under the table

inelegantly, her eyes wide open assessing the new batch of bodies she'll have to find a way to teach.

"I guess this is like Trauma 101 or something. It's fucking 8am, so someone should tell me if I'm in the wrong place. Huh, anyone? Which, since no one is saying anything, means either you're terribly nice – are you all such well-behaved graduate students you'll sit through a class with the wrong teacher teaching the wrong thing – or, maybe this isn't wrong and that's just my brain on little sleep you're hearing. I'm an insomniac and there are studies now that tell us we need like – what is it? Six hours? No? Am I the only one who cares about this stuff?"

The Professor scans the room, smiles, and giggles.

"Okay, well, anyway, this is what happens when you don't sleep enough, which by the way is not exactly unproblematic from an ideological standpoint. Since if you're thinking about insomnia, you're also needing to be thinking about the worker and the state and capitalist constraints that make sleep basically a bourgeois privilege. So, really who am I to kvetch about not-sleeping? And, yet it isn't like the university is somehow outside capitalist modes of exchange. What are you paying for tuition these days? Don't answer that. I don't really care. Still, no one is running out, so I guess this is the class. Or, you really are so timid it makes me want to cry. Oh well. So, hi again! We're going to be stuck together every morning here, so let's just start with what we're doing here, okay? This is a course on trauma. So, I get that no one with "happy" childhoods is cramming to get a seat in here. Not like "happy" is something we wouldn't want to deconstruct, but, anyway, maybe some of you actually had happy childhoods. What the hell do I know? But, seriously I don't care about what ever bad thing has happened to you. Okay? I know it might seem like I do because we'll be talking about painful stuff and all this Holocaust and sexual abuse stuff makes everybody sentimental, but I mean it when I say that I don't want to hear it. This is a class on theory and literature. If you need to talk about your feelings, go to therapy."

She looks around the room to survey the squirming her opening number engendered. Students caught red-handed, seeking confession and relief.

Referring to how hard she is to follow, she sometimes called her talking-style “jazz,” except that what makes her shtick so untouchable and stunning is that she alone self-propellingly plays every single part. She speed-talks and then, at certain words, hard-stops abruptly. She scans the room for signs of comprehension, weakness, disarray, signs of anything at all to feed her vigilance and play.



It is the campus coffee shop attached to the university bookstore. It is bustling with students buying lattes, wraps, hovering over their laptops, talking. Prof. Raynite goes to the table where a student is waving to her. The Professor looks besieged by the weight of books she is carrying and dumps them on the table before sitting down.

Professor Raynite: "Hey! Do I know you from somewhere? You waved, so I kind of assumed that was directed to me, but who knows?! People make outrageous assumptions all the time based on their own psychological needs. Duh! Ideology critique! I mean and that's what we're reading about all the time, isn't it. Anyway, that could be what just happened. For all I know you were stretching your muscles or something. Were you stretching your muscles? That would be kind of funny I think. You haven't said anything yet. Oh dear, are you really not the student I'm supposed to be meeting? You look kind of familiar though. Do I know you from somewhere? Are you in my class? Say something, you're making me nervous."

Gila: "Uh, yes, sorry. I'm sorry, yes, Gila. I'm in your trauma theory class."

Professor Raynite: "Phew! That would have been inconvenient. Although, not really, I mean we both could have learned something by encountering otherness where we expected something else. A teachable moment! Ah well, instead we'll just have to settle for some kind of normal teaching or whatever it is you think I can do for you."

Gila: [smiles uneasily]

Professor Raynite: "Is there a reason you are not talking right now?"

Gila: "Um, no, sorry. I didn't realize that I was supposed to be saying something. I'm sorry, I -"

Professor Raynite: “Holy shit, you need to chill out. Seriously. What’s with all the apologizing? We’re meeting to talk about papers, so what is it you need to ask me? Don’t just sit there. I have things to do. And you should have a list of questions you’ve prepared. I’m kidding. Relax. They don’t need to be in list form. Although, that would be nice, save me having to listen to you finding your question and focusing on it. Whatever. What are you writing about? It’s the first paper. You’re nervous. Everyone is. What is it you want to know?”

Gila: “Um, yes, of course. I’m really, I think I’m really interested in the trauma material. In the theory. I’ve never learned anything like that before. So, I wanted to write something about that I think.”

Professor Raynite: “Yes, and?”

Gila: “And?”

Professor Raynite: “And that’s not a topic. Trauma theory is the subject of the class. What is it you like? Freud? Caruth? Lacan? Be specific.”

Gila: “Everything. All of –”

Professor Raynite: “Would you mind if I got lunch? I don’t think I’ve eaten yet today. Let me think about that for a minute. Nope, don’t think so. I’m going to go and get something, okay. And maybe while I’m gone you can think about an actual question to ask me as opposed to just falling over yourself about liking the class. Okay? Be right back!”

Gila: [waits for Professor Raynite to settle down with her plastic containers of chickpeas and iced tea] “Maybe memoir. I think maybe I’m interested in memoir.”

Professor Raynite: “Great, now who? Or, what kind? Are you talking early American memoir, slave narratives, religious

confessions, trauma memoir? You can't just say *memoir*. Be specific."

Gila: "Oh. Sorry. I didn't really know...I don't..."

Professor Raynite: "It's fine. Keep going. What memoir specifically?"

Gila: "I don't know. I was thinking maybe –"

Professor Raynite: "And, by the way, this should be obvious to you already, but, just in case it isn't, you should really know the differences among the genres the next time we meet. I mean, it's fine with me for now, you're just starting out as a graduate student and whatever. But, seriously, it isn't scholarly to say just *memoir*, as if that has meaning on its own. Got it? So, you need to do your homework."

Gila: "Okay, of course, I'm sorry. I –"

Professor Raynite: "And can you stop apologizing for god's sake! Seriously, it's distracting. Are you *that* nervous? I mean, I know I'm intimidating but come on! Usually students get over it eventually. Where are you from?"

Gila: "Toronto."

Professor Raynite: "And, what's your deal? Are you interested in this course because of some major childhood trauma or something?"

Gila: "Um, no. Yes. I don't know. I don't think so. I don't –"

Professor Raynite: "Wow! You don't even know the answer to personal questions!"

Gila: "Sorry. I mean, no, I'm not sorry, not, excuse me. I just. I don't know why I'm interested. Maybe because of things

that happened. I never knew there was such a thing as trauma theory. I –”

Professor Raynite: “Yeah, I get it. Fine. Don’t start telling me about your childhood, please. I was just curious if you’re, like, overwhelmed by the material or something or if this is how you always are. But, it’s fine. Keep going. Memoir. Eggers. You were saying?”

Gila: “Yeah, yes. His memoir *Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*. I was thinking maybe I could write about that?”

Professor Raynite: “Sure. Why?”

Gila: “Because it’s different.”

Professor Raynite: “How?”

Gila: “Because he’s deliberately trying to write against the way most people talk about grief.”

Professor Raynite: “Good. What are ways most people talk about grief?”

Gila: “That you get over it. And if you don’t, there’s something wrong with you.”

Professor Raynite: “What’s wrong with that?”

Gila: “I don’t know.”

Professor Raynite: “You can do better than that.”

Gila: “I don’t know.”

Professor Raynite: “Try. You say he’s doing something unconventional. I agree. Eggers is great. I love Eggers. You’ll never get into a PhD program if you write about him, mind you, because most people don’t take postmodern trauma memoirs

seriously *to say the least*. But, anyway, he's awesome. Fine. Do whatever you want. Have you read his other books by the way? I'm assuming you're going to before writing about this, because when you write about an author you have to read across their oeuvre. You can't just read one text, obviously, anyway. Who knows? Maybe you don't care about your career prospects, do you? Are you interested in becoming an academic? Anyway, whatever, you should think about that at some point, but, not now, while we're talking. I'm just here to help you develop a vocabulary for sustaining critical inquiry, which means, by the way, that whatever you do with this paper is your responsibility, understand? But, for now, since you're in my class and we're meeting about paper topics, what is it you're trying to ask? Formulate a question. And why aren't you taking notes while I'm speaking?"

Gila: [startled] "Oh, sorry. I didn't –"

Professor Raynite: "Fine. I'm going to keep talking while you get out a pen. You should get into the habit of writing things down during meetings like these. Anyway, yes, tropes of survival. You were questioning the credibility of certain normative mourning teleologies, right?"

Gila: "I don't...I guess. I don't know. Is that...I was just trying to say –"

Professor Raynite: "Right. I know what you were *trying* to say but you're not using *critical* language. And, part of what the pedagogy of this course has to do with is training you to bring a refined critical apparatus to bear on questions such as these so that you're turning incoherence into something that can be productively engaged as a question, right?"

Gila: "Okay. I don't know how to do that."

Professor Raynite: "Do you have anything specific about the readings you don't understand? I'm here and this is your

time, so you might as well ask if there's something you're not getting."

Gila: "No, I don't think...no. The Freud is interesting. All the readings are fascinating."

Professor Raynite: "Really?"

Gila: "Yeah, yes, absolutely. I have never read anything about grief or loss or anything like that."

Professor Raynite: "Okay, so go ahead and write about Eggers.

Read the history of the confessional genre, obviously, and trauma theory and what it means in the development of poststructuralist self-representation to craft a narrator that is damaged and incoherent but that somehow is charged with the project of healing. I have to go now. I'm probably late. Do you have a phone or watch or something with the time on it? [Getting up] You don't have to get up too! God, you're so *formal*. Anyway, it's only a first paper. I wouldn't lost too much sleep over it. There'll be other assignments to improve your grade. Of course that doesn't mean that you should be lazy. I don't want to waste my time readings things that you have barely thought of. Good. Bye! See you in class! You should talk more by the way!"



It is an office on Manhattan's Upper East Side. Prewar, cozy, the halls are laminated by dim lights and luxurious gold fixtures, carpeted hallways. In the waiting room, there are many antique chairs, some pillows, magazines. Dr. Watson is short, elderly and round with a bulb of dyed-blond hair, big tortoise glasses, gold necklace, bracelets, watch, a matching single-colored pantsuit. She has a southern accent. Gila is wearing jeans, a long sleeve shirt, a winter dark brown jacket. It is late November.

Dr. Watson: "Well, hello there! How do you do? My name is Katie. Katie Watson. You must be Gila? Is that a hard G or a soft one?"

Gila: "It doesn't matter. Hard G. Hello."

Dr. Watson: "I don't know too many Gilas. What kind of name is that?"

Gila: "Israeli. My father was Israeli."

Dr. Watson: "Is that so? How interesting. It is a lovely name."

Gila: "I've always hated it."

Dr. Watson: "Oh, well. I'm sorry to hear that. Maybe one day you can tell me why that is."

Gila: "Okay."

Dr. Watson: "So? Do you want to start by telling me what brings you in today?"

Gila: "I guess."

Dr. Watson: "Okay then, well, whenever you're ready."

Gila: "I'm not sure where to start."

Dr. Watson: "Well, just start anywhere you'd like. That's what I tell people. What matters is your comfort. There's no hurry here. We don't have to cover everything. It would just be helpful to start by getting to know you a little bit and finding out who you are and what you're looking for."

Gila: "Okay. Whatever. I never know where to begin. My dad died when I was small – that kind of thing?"

Dr. Watson: "Oh, sure, yes, if you want to start with that. Whatever feels most comfortable."

Gila: "*None* of this feels comfortable so whatever, but you guys typically want to know the history-biographical crap. So, I thought I might as well start there."

Dr. Watson: "I'm sorry to hear that none of this feels comfortable to you. Do you know why that is?"

Gila: "Um, I don't know. Going over the same irrelevant childhood material I guess."

Dr. Watson: "You don't think it's relevant that your father died when you were little? How old were you? I didn't catch it."

Gila: "I didn't say. 12. He was sick for a while, so it wasn't exactly a shock. And, no, of course, I don't think it's irrelevant. It's just not what I want to be talking about. And, as soon as I open with that, you all get caught up in how traumatized I must be feeling."

Dr. Watson: "And, it seems like you're saying that getting *caught up* in that would be the wrong response. Is that right?"

Gila: "Yeah. There's nothing necessary to say about my father. He was the person I was closest to. I have a mother and a brother, but I take care of them. It's not the same as it was with him. He talked to me. He listened. Stupid stuff like that."

Dr. Watson: "Why would you call that stuff silly? It sounds heartbreaking to me that you were so close to your father and then, while you were still so young, he died unexpectedly. And then to be left with, did you say a brother and your mom? It sounds like they weren't very supportive."

Gila: "Being sick for four and a half years isn't exactly *unexpected*. And, secondly, about my mom and brother, it's just more complicated. I don't like when people start assuming she was evil or anything like that. She couldn't manage anything, and he's severely incapable of functioning in a normative way but we made it work. I don't want pity. It sucked for him to die. But, I'm not some stricken victim not knowing how to cope."

Dr. Watson: "Well, sure, I suppose that's true. But, it doesn't change the fact that you were very young. And, here you are, losing the person you're closest to. That's such a sad story and I can see why maybe you'd prefer not to talk about it."

Gila: "Wait a second there. Are you implying that I don't want to talk about my dead dad because it hurts too much? You must be joking."

Dr. Watson: [surprised] "That doesn't sound right to you? Well, who knows? I could be wrong. It just seems to me that sometimes when things are hard to talk about it is easier to avoid them. That's all. Everyone does that."

Gila: "I don't."

Dr. Watson: "What is that? You don't do *what*? Can you explain things to me better, so I can understand them?"

Gila: "Well, I can try. You're obviously very nice and well-intentioned and this folksy style you have is charming. It really is. Almost disarming. But, even if I do explain, that's not a guarantee you'll understand the point I'm trying to make."

Dr. Watson: "And, what point is that?"

Gila: "That I don't need to talk about my father. Or his stupid getting sick and dying. It was gross. It was disgusting. Do I wish it never happened? Absolutely. Do I wish he didn't leave me to take care of them, especially when it was an uphill battle with a teenager who refused to listen to anything and a child who really can't function? Yes, of course. But, I survived that stuff. Which is not to say I'm not still wounded, damaged, or just plain old fucked up, if you don't mind me swearing in here. But, I know about all that already. I've *talked* about that. What I need now is different."

Dr. Watson: "Who did you talk about that with?"

Gila: "*That's* your question?"

Dr. Watson: "Yes. It made me curious to hear that you have talked about this with someone. I was wondering if you could tell me a little bit about that."

Gila: "Tobin. She was a teacher in high school, English. She is the closest person to me. When I go back to Toronto and there's nowhere to sleep in my mother's house, I have stayed at her place. She has five children, but she has kind of adopted me as one of her own. I don't know where I'd be right now without her."

Dr. Watson: "You feel she's helped you that much."

Gila: "She saved my life."

Dr. Watson: "How did she do that?"

Gila: "I don't know what you mean? She was my teacher. She saw I did so much, and didn't eat too much or sleep at all. She made sure I went away to school. To Boston. She still thinks I do too much for the two of them. But, she doesn't really get that it's my job. The point is...I don't know. She knows me. She's the only one."

Dr. Watson: "It sounds pretty special – what the two of you have."

Gila: "Um, yeah, it is. I know I'm very lucky. I have no idea why she has taken me under her wing the way that she has, but I'm grateful. I really...I can't imagine where I'd be without her."

Dr. Watson: "That's really something, isn't it? Gila, I can't help notice that you said Toobin? Was that her name? Oh yes, Tobin. That this Mrs. Tobin noticed you didn't *sleep* or *eat* too much? Is that a recurring issue of yours that you're struggling with?"

Gila: "Are you asking if I'm anorexic?"

Dr. Watson: "Well no, not exactly. I just...well, I guess I am. Maybe I am. I am trying to get more of a sense of what your concerns are. And, since you said she was the only one you talked to and you mentioned that she noticed these things..."

Gila: "Wow. No. I am not anorexic. Nor do I have any other eating disorders. Or self-harming tendencies generally. I'm quiet. Smart. Serious. I am devoted to work, writing, trying to think. Wanting to do good somehow. I don't drink or smoke or anything. I never have. I never had the time. Or even interest, I guess. No. The point I'm trying to make is different. I wish that you could listen to what I'm *actually* trying to tell you instead of worrying about all these other irrelevant things."

Dr. Watson: "Well, I'm sorry that you experience my questions as irrelevant. I'm just trying to get to know you better, that's all."

Gila: "Then, why don't you start by paying attention to what I'm *actually* saying?"

Dr. Watson: "And what is that? I apologize if you feel you're being misunderstood."

Gila: “I don’t just *feel* that way. It’s true! You’re sitting there asking me if I barf up my food after I told you about the most important person to me! You’re telling me my dead dad is important after I told you that the problem is in the *present* tense. I really don’t understand what’s wrong with your training. Do you *learn* to ask these misguided, inaccurate questions, or do they come naturally to you?”

Dr. Watson: “I hear that you’re really disappointed with the questions I’ve been asking. Maybe there are reasons for that – that we can explore later on in the treatment? It sounds like it’s hard for you to trust someone. And, with the loss you’ve had, that makes a lot of sense. It takes some time. Sometimes, it’s just putting one foot in front of the other together and slogging it through?”

Gila: “What? Can I ask what in god’s name you’re talking about?”

Dr. Watson: “Oh, sorry if I wasn’t clear. Treatment. I’m talking about treatment. I’m telling you that I understand how skeptical you might be feeling and I’m telling you that it’s okay. This process takes a lot of time. But, I can be patient. I’m not going anywhere anytime soon. Alright? Gila, how does that sound?”

Gila: [silence] “Idiotic. No offense. First of all, you have no idea whether or not you’re going anywhere anytime soon. Seriously. I can’t believe you just said that to me. My father was healthy one minute, the next minute –”I have four months to live” – so spare me, please, these bullshit promises you are not authorized to make or keep. You seem really nice, genuinely. You really do. And so I feel bad being harsh with you. But, I don’t think you’re listening. Or, maybe, in spite of this great effort that I think I’m making, I’m still not being clear. I was in school last year in Chicago. I studied trauma theory. Does that make sense? I studied *trauma* theory, like how it works, like what is happening to the mind when something comes from nowhere and breaks it. I *wrote* about these things. I had a teacher whom I adored. She had some

similarities to Tobin I suppose, but also different. Brutal. Brilliant. Raynite. I can't try to talk about her here and even begin to do justice to how special she is. But anyway, the point is that I wrote things: about Joan Didion's memoir of losing her husband, Eggers losing his parents. I wrote about Freud. *Mourning and Melancholia*. That work kept me awake at night for *weeks*. For *weeks* I couldn't think of anything else. It was exhilarating. For the first time I was studying things I was *actually* interested in. Given that I've been in school for years, I had four majors! And, I've always done so well and never had to break my head, not once, not ever. It was such a treat to actually *need* to think. Hard. To think hard about something and try to figure it out. Does that make sense? It was amazing. Really. Feels like what I've been intending to do my entire life. Thinking about what motivates people to do the things they do. Trying to understand them. Using philosophy to take apart the mind and make some sense of it. Writing theoretically. I learned things I didn't *know* existed. Or, maybe that's not exactly right. More like I learned there's a way to talk and write about things I have been dying to write about for as long as I can remember. Raynite taught me that. She said, "Turn things you don't know into questions and then go ask them." And, I did that. I *did* that. And then you know what happened? I got stuck. Whenever it was time to say something, I couldn't. I'd get quiet. I would mumble. Raynite said it drove her crazy. I know it did. I couldn't help it. I tried to talk. Whatever. I don't get it. I would feel so much, but, instead of *using* it, my head got quiet. Can you follow what I'm saying?"

Dr. Watson: "I'm not sure I can, not really. I would love to try to though? Do you think that that can happen over time?"

Gila: [looking around the room] "You have a lot of Freud here but no Lacan? Or, Klein? Some Winnicott, I see. That's good. Who doesn't love Winnicott? He's such a sacred cow, as thinkers go."

Dr. Watson: "Is it important to you that I have the right books?"

Gila: "There aren't any *right* books. There are only the books you have and it's always interesting to me, that's all."

Dr. Watson: "I'm a little lost. Forgive me."

Gila: "Forget it. I'm not saying anything. Just getting a sense for what you're interested in. What were we saying? Oh, yeah. Is there anything in what I said that makes some sense to you?"

Dr. Watson: [shifting her weight in the chair] "Well, let me see. I think you've said so much, and it's all important really. You've talked about your interests at school. And that seems really valuable and meaningful. You talked about this teacher of yours. I can't quite recall her name this second, but it was another teacher who helped you a great deal. And, that seems important too. So, I understood all of that, yes. It seemed very interesting. And, talking about writing about grief. I imagine that must have been very cathartic for you, isn't that right? And, I think, although we're almost out of time for today, so I won't be able to say too much more but I think you're also talking about how important your mental and intellectual life is to you. I see that, certainly. I see that loud and clear. So, I'm glad that you told me as much as you did. Does it feel like I understood things? I know we're out of time, but if there's anything you'd like to add please do feel free. We can stay an extra minute or two."

Gila: "Thank you for your time. I don't want to stay overtime. There isn't any need for that. I appreciate how hard you tried."

Dr. Watson: "Alright then, wonderful. I'm glad to hear we made some progress. I can put you in for next week? Does that sound good?"

It is a classroom. Gothic architectural exterior, inside plain beige walls, white boards, a long rectangular seminar table the graduate students are sitting around. It is Chicago. Late November. It is the early afternoon. The heat is working, but the temperature in the room is frigid. The teacher wears a purple scarf while lecturing, and the table is covered with water bottles, mugs of coffee, books all opened to the same pages.

Professor Raynite: "So. Hi. You all look cold. Wear layers. Tell me about *Nachträglichkeit*. Anyone?"

Student #1: "Deferred Action?"

Professor Raynite: "Yes. And?"

Student #2: "Um, something about trauma?"

Professor Raynite: "Okay. Not really an answer. But keep going. Can anyone here speak in full sentences?"

Student #3: "I think Freud is talking about how we process trauma, and that, like, you're always late to it or something like that. I think."

Professor Raynite: "Good, better. Yes. There is a time delay. Why is there a time delay? What kind of delay are we talking about here?"

Student #3: "Like a delay in processing or something like that. I think Freud is talking about why you can't process trauma while it's happening, or that –"

Professor Raynite: "Why?"

Student #3: "Well, I think because it's too horrible or something like that?"

Professor Raynite: "Anyone else? Think about the text we read today. That dream of the burning child. What happens in

that dream? Why are you all looking at me? You should be looking at the text. [reading from the article in front of her]

"This is Freud: 'A father had been watching beside his child's sick bed for days and nights on end. After the child had died, he went into the next room to lie down but left the door open so that he could see from his bedroom into the room in which his child's body was laid out, with tall candles standing around it. An old man had been engaged to keep watch over it and say beside the body murmuring prayers. After a few hours' sleep, the father had a dream that *his child was standing beside his bed, caught him by the arm and whispered to him reproachfully: "Father, don't you see I'm burning?"*' He woke up, noticed a bright glare of light from the next room, hurried into it and found that the old watchman had dropped off to sleep and that the wrappings and one of the arms of his beloved child's dead body had been burned by a lighted candle that had fallen on them."

[the Professor stops reading and looks around the room]

"Holy shit. This is so powerful. Every time I read it."

[the Professor shakes her head]

"What's happening here? What does this child mean, 'Father, don't you see I'm burning?' What makes this so haunting? That the child in the dream is reprimanding the father for letting him die. But, what do we do with the fact that the child is also actually burning again in real life? So, in a sense, it's as if the father is dreaming that his child is reproaching him for letting him die, but it is by *dreaming* of it that the father *actually* lets the child burn all over again. So, at first it looks like, yeah, maybe this dad is telepathic! He goes to sleep and dreams his child is burning when in fact his child's sleeve has caught fire in the other room. Great. Fine. Whatever. But, forget about the temptation to think about this purely along those lines for a moment and think about the trauma. A dad has *lost* his child. He goes to sleep because grief is so goddamn exhausting and then he has a dream in which he *fails* to see that he's *allowed* his child to die. The child says: 'Father, don't you see I'm burning?' Why would a father *dream* something like this? You should be asking yourself this question. Why would a father have this kind of dream? It seems unbear-

able, doesn't it? And, yet that's not it, right? Because what's happening here is that the father has a dream that he's being reproached for allowing his child to burn and, by the very fact of having this dream, I mean, *the father is sleeping and not being awake like he should be*, he is *allowing* the child to burn. Is this hitting you? Are you as blown away by this as I am? It's fucking heartbreaking."

[the Professor shakes her head]

Student #2: "Yeah, I was confused about that. Why wouldn't the father awaken when he heard his son calling him? Because, otherwise, it's like, he sleeps through what's happening. Whereas, if he got up, he could have rescued him from the candle falling."

Professor Raynite: "Right. It's like the child in the dream is telling the father what's happening in real life. Right? So, why doesn't he listen? Why doesn't the father, who we assume wants his child to live, listen to his child telling him that he's on fire?"

[silence, no one raises their hands]

"Think about this business of the *time lag*, *Nachträglichkeit*. There is a time delay in trauma because the event is too unbearable for the mind to assimilate at once. What does this mean? That the father keeps sleeping because in the dream, as opposed to real life, his child is still alive. The father doesn't wake up because, if he wakes up the child is gone again, he is back in a reality where his ill child is dead. The father dreams about the child still being alive because he can't yet be present to the fact of his child's *actual* burning. I'm assuming you're all following this. The father would rather *dream* that his son is burning than be awake and find out that his child has *already* died. There is a time delay. The father *can't* be awake and also be conscious of the fact that his son is no longer living. So, he *dreams* that the son is still living. And he'd rather stay sleeping and hear his son reproach him than wake up and find out the son already died. Any questions? So, what does this have to do with the *time lag* that we're talk-

ing about? What are we learning here about the way the mind works?”

[the class is silent. No one moving or rustling papers]

“It’s so haunting. I know. I know. It’s awful. But, let’s try to understand it. Lacan teaches us about a *time lag*. What does this mean? C’mon guys. *Time lag*. No one? That when something happens that is too unbearable for the psyche to assimilate, to tolerate, or to take in, then it goes away, the mind dissociates. What does this mean exactly? That a person can’t be a witness to her own unbearable event. And, as a result, the person misses it. It happens – the child dies, the house burns down, a rape takes place – but it’s traumatic so the person doesn’t *know* it happened. Is this making sense to you? Some of you are taking notes, but all of you should be because this is complicated and it’s the basis for understanding trauma and how traumatic narratives are constructed. How subjectivity can function in a belatedness that is constitutive of its being. I’m going to continue. What *time lag* is teaching us is that we can’t help but be late to those events which have affected us traumatically. It’s as if we are affected but we can’t really know it. So, it’s as though, in spite of the fact that it happened to us, since it was too impossible to understand or take in or just plain goddamn bear, we end up circling ourselves endlessly, trying to get back to the moment when the world fell apart and we missed it. It happened to us, but we didn’t get to witness it take place.”

[silence]

“Questions?”

“You” [the Professor is pointing to Gila, who is sitting directly across from the Professor at the end of the seminar table]. “You’re staring right at me, looking like you’re thinking something. What can you say about this dream or any of this?”

Gila: [stunned] “No. I’m not...nothing. I don’t...I can’t. I wasn’t thinking anything. I don’t –”

Professor Raynite: “Really? Because you look really intense, like you know something or have something to say.”

Gila: "No, really, please. I don't understand it really."

Professor Raynite: "What part?"

Gila: "Um, I don't know."

Professor Raynite: "*Méconnaissance? Nachtraglichkeit?* What is it that you don't understand? You need to give me more to work with. Other people? Let's remember that we're trying to comprehend this with tools of critical theory and practice. Let's be scholarly. What about this dream do you have questions about?"

Gila: "I don't...know. The time lag."

Professor Raynite: "What about it?"

Gila: "I don't understand it. I don't understand how it works."

Professor Raynite: "Try. I or someone else here will correct you if you don't make sense. Go for it. Stop worrying so much if you're getting it right. You people need to learn to put yourselves out there and be willing to be wrong. That's how you learn. You want to skip the step where you're fumbling around in the dark trying desperately to make sense of things. Well, let me spare you the suspense and tell you that you can't. Well, not if you want to be real intellectuals, you can't because you're going to have to accept at some point that you have your ideas in public. And, sometimes what you say is profound and sometimes you're making a fool of yourself. So what? Maybe someone else will learn from what you're not getting right. You need to share. Intellectual life is not a place to be ungenerous and withholding. Well, actually, sadly it is, but it doesn't need to be! Gila, go, you were saying? You were about to teach us what you don't understand about time lag."

Gila: "Yeah. Um. I don't know. You disappear from something that you can't confront while it's happening. But then...I don't think I get it. How do you catch up later?"

Professor Raynite: "You don't."

Gila: "But I thought...that's what I don't understand."

Professor Raynite: "That's what is so powerful about the father's dream. That's why we're talking about it. Because the father is dreaming that his child is alive and he's having this dream because he keeps desperately trying to return, in his mind, to the moment when he can see that his son has just died. But when he closes his eyes and falls asleep, what does he hear?"

Gila: "Father, can't you see I'm burning."

Professor Raynite: "Father, *don't* you see I'm burning? Right. But, as soon as the father hears his child ask him this question, it's already too late. Just as in reality the child is already on fire in the room next door. So for the father, by the time he hears his son ask him this question, he has already failed to save him."

Gila: "But I don't understand."

Professor Raynite: "The father is traumatized. Do you know what that means?"

Gila: "No."

Professor Raynite: "Anyone else know what that means? It means he keeps replaying the impossible moment when his son tells him that he's dying and the father isn't stopping it. There is a fire in the room next door. There is a fever that makes the child ill. It doesn't matter. The point is still the same for the father – he let his child die. And this is impossible to bear."

Gila: "Why?"

Professor Raynite: "Why *what*? You need to put more language around your questions. This is a graduate seminar, guys. Why *what*?"

Gila: "Sorry. Why is it impossible? Or, why can't he just wake up and get the child away from the burning candle?"

Professor Raynite: "Because the child is dead. That's the whole point. The father, who's traumatized, dreams that the child is alive and asking him a question, but what the dream is also about is the fact that the father isn't there when the son needs him to see that he's dying. The father is gone. The father is sleeping. So, when the child tells his father, 'Can't you see I'm dying?' The answer is, 'I can't.' Because if I could see it, then I wouldn't be having this dream. I'd be awake and rescuing you from the fire. But, instead I'm sitting here dreaming. And I'm dreaming about how I was *too late*. And I'm dreaming it because I'm trying to catch up. I keep trying to get to the moment before you ask if I see that you're burning. But *I don't see it*. I *hear* it instead. And, by the time I hear it, it's too late to save you. It's always already too late."

[the Professor sighs and looks around the room]

"Are there any other questions? How about you? Gila, did this clarify what you were asking about?"

Gila: [sitting as if frozen, transfixed, staring at the Professor]

Professor Raynite: "Okay. I think you probably understand it fine. I'm not convinced you can't say more about this. But, okay. Can someone else push this question forward, so we can create some intelligibility here? It isn't good enough just to have feelings about all this. We're learning to be scholarly and critical and to use the apparatus of theory to develop vocabulary for precisely those things which make us incoherent to ourselves. Come on. I can't do all the work myself. Did I see a hand somewhere?"



It is a first floor apartment on Manhattan's West End Avenue. It is a quiet, wide street lined with prewar residential buildings and no stores. There are many families going into and out of the buildings, doormen holding taxi doors open, children with their backpacks slipping off as they bolt toward home. This apartment enters through its own door on the side and inside there are several rooms, each with different doctor's names on the doors. Mrs. Barish is in her mid-fifties, thin, with short chestnut hair and rimless glasses. She speaks very softly, with a faint New York accent. She walks slowly but confidently out to greet the new patient. Gila is in jeans, sneakers and pinstriped dress shirt. She is wearing a short winter jacket, a bomber, and gloves with the fingertips cut off. It is late December. It is snowing.

Mrs. Barish: "Hello."

Gila: "Hi. Where should I sit? There are a lot of chairs."

Mrs. Barish: "Anywhere you'd like. Choose what is most comfortable."

Gila: "Then I'd sit outside."

Mrs. Barish: "Oh. I see."

Gila: "Yeah."

Mrs. Barish: "But it's so cold outside. It's snowing."

Gila: "I know. But the snow isn't going to make me feel like I'm doing something wrong."

Mrs. Barish: "And this will?"

Gila: "Probably."

Mrs. Barish: "I wonder why that is."

Gila: "Probably for a lot of reasons. Not least of which is that I don't know how to be a good patient."

Mrs. Barish: "What's a *good* patient?"

Gila: "I don't know. Someone who sits down and talks about their *feelings*. Or their *childhood*. You're looking at me like you don't know what I mean."

Mrs. Barish: "That's because I don't."

Gila: "Really? I'm not sure I buy that. But, if that's how you want to play it, it's fine."

[long pause]

Gila: "Are you going to say anything?"

Mrs. Barish: "What should I say? I think this is your time and you should feel free to talk about whatever is important to you."

Gila: "You're quiet, aren't you?"

Mrs. Barish: "I'm not sure what you mean."

Gila: "I don't know. It's just...other people talk a lot more."

Mrs. Barish: "Is it a good or a bad thing? My being quiet."

Gila: "Good."

Mrs. Barish: "That's good."

Gila: "Yeah. I still don't know what to say though. I heard from someone that you specialize in trauma. So I guess maybe you know something that maybe other people don't. I don't know. I studied trauma but theoretically, not really clinically. I don't know the clinical theory on it, not really. Except that I

think Freud is wrong about something. But, I haven't worked that out yet, exactly. I finished graduate school in philosophy and literature last year, and now I'm here in the city taking some course work in psychoanalysis and trying to decide if I should go on to apply for a PhD. I want to, but I'm not sure. Professor Raynite says I could, but that I shouldn't necessarily go in that direction since I'll lose some of the human dimension that I'm interested in. She says that academic work won't necessarily get me closer to what I really care about – understanding how people work.

Mrs. Barish: "Do you agree with her?"

Gila: "I think so, yeah. She teases me about that, says what I want to do isn't 'normal science.' I don't know what that means but she's probably right. Seeing something I don't really see. She's right that I wouldn't be happy just writing academic papers. I *do* want to figure out how the mind works or something like that."

Mrs. Barish: "How the mind works. You mean psychologically?"

Gila: "Yeah."

Mrs. Barish: "Is that something you've always been interested in?"

Gila: "Yeah, I think so. Ever since I was small. Wanting to understand why people act as they do. What motivates them. My mother is crazy, kind of. I don't know if that's an official diagnosis or what hers would be. But, she's difficult to deal with. I imagine that factors in somewhere in terms of what I'm interested in. Although maybe not, who knows? I have no idea really."

Mrs. Barish: "Yes, it's not uncommon for people to be interested in using their minds to process difficult emotions."

Gila: "But that's not what I said."

Mrs. Barish: "Oh? It isn't? Perhaps I misunderstood."

Gila: "No, I don't think you did. You're probably just conflating rather separate psychological endeavors. The difference here is that I'm not trying to *work through* something, I'm just trying to *understand* it better."

Mrs. Barish: "And those are two different things?"

Gila: "Yes. Of course. I'm not trying to use my mind defensively but just trying to use whatever insight I have, having *been* the kid of certain kinds of people, to make some sense of things. Produce knowledge. Put it out in the world. Be critical and try to produce intelligibility."

Mrs. Barish: "Uh-huh. I think I understand what you're saying. You want to make a difference."

Gila: "Sure. I guess that's part of it."

Mrs. Barish: "What a noble aspiration that is."

Gila: "Are you trying to flatter me? Don't try to flatter me, please. It just annoys me. Makes me wonder why you'd feel the need to do that. Makes me wonder what you're *really* thinking. That kind of thing."

Mrs. Barish: "Oh. I'm glad that you're telling me you're hearing it that way. I wasn't trying to flatter you at all. No, not at all."

Gila: "You don't have to justify yourself. It's fine. Whatever. You didn't do anything wrong. I'm just telling you what I don't like, but there's no way you could have known that. It's fine. Really."

Mrs. Barish: "You seem worried that I would feel bad. Is that true?"

Gila: "I'm not being *nice* or anything, if that's what you're implying. Trust me. I am *not* a nice patient. I'm terrible. Difficult. You're going to hate me soon."

Mrs. Barish: "Oh dear, I can't imagine that's the case."

Gila: "Why would you say that? You have *no* idea. You don't know me one single bit."

Mrs. Barish: "That's true, I don't know you yet. But there's nothing wrong with you telling me what you need from me. I consider that a strength. It helps me get to know you better."

Gila: "You're reading this wrong. I know you can't see that right now. You're thinking I have anxiety and guilt about my needs or something, and so you're encouraging me to express myself. You're reassuring me. Don't reassure me. That's not what's going on."

Mrs. Barish: [smiles] "If you say so. What *is* going on Gila?"

Gila: "Well, it's more like when you're wrong about something you say or you say something dumb, I can't help myself. I *have* to point it out. But, this was nothing. It was just a tendency perhaps, on your part, to identify and join my feelings. Which is fine as a clinical technique with a certain kind of patient. But, it doesn't work with me that way. Not when I care more about the fact that you *understand* me than that you think you know what I feel."

Mrs. Barish: [smiling]

Gila: "Are you going to say anything? Why are you smiling? Was something I just said *amusing*?"

Mrs. Barish: "Not *amusing*, no. But you really do speak quite differently than most people do."

Gila: "I know. That's why I told you I couldn't be a good patient."

Mrs. Barish: "Well, but that's not what I said. I didn't say you *couldn't* be a good patient, just that you're not really, or, so it seems to me, a typical one. But, why should that be a problem? Who said I need you to be a typical patient?"

Gila: "I don't know. But it always seems that way."

Mrs. Barish: "Well, that might say more about the clinician than it does about you."

Gila: "I'm not so sure about that. You're feeling like you understand me so you're saying that. But wait. We're only just beginning. I haven't told you yet that you're an idiot –"

Mrs. Barish: [laughs] "When you put it that way!"

Gila: "No, I wasn't saying that. I was just saying that I *might* say that. When you say dumb or inaccurate things, I can't help myself. I'll have to correct you because I need you to understand what I'm really trying to get at."

Mrs. Barish: "And, accuracy is really important to you it seems?"

Gila: "Yeah. Of course. But, I think *precision* is the better word. So yeah, precision is important. Otherwise, how do you ever get at the truth?"

Mrs. Barish: [laughs]

Gila: "Why are you laughing?"

Mrs. Barish: "Because that was a case in point! I said one word and you refined it for another, more *precise*, one."

Gila: "Oh, I guess so. Yeah. They're different words though. And the difference matters."

Mrs. Barish: [smiling] "Indeed. I am seeing that."

Gila: "I don't understand your tone. Is something wrong with demanding precision in how one analyzes something?"

Mrs. Barish: "No, I wasn't criticizing you. I was just observing that accuracy is important to you. But that there might be other ways."

Gila: "Precision."

Mrs. Barish: [smiles] "Precision."

Gila: "What other ways are there?"

Mrs. Barish: "Oh I don't know. Say, feeling?"

Gila: "Feeling? What about feelings?"

Mrs. Barish: "Well, it's just that you're talking so much about *accuracy* and being *understood* and I am wondering what about your feelings."

Gila: [looking at the bookshelves] "It's hard to see the titles on these shelves. They're far away. I see a lot on trauma stuff but no early development? Attachment theory not your thing? There's Kohut though, that's a pleasant surprise. Maybe it's good I can't see the shelves too closely. It's always distracting."

Mrs. Barish: "Looking at bookshelves?"

Gila: "Yeah. You were saying something about feelings. Well, what *about* them? Is there a question there? I didn't hear a question."

Mrs. Barish: "Um, I'm not sure yet. More of, well, an observation."

Gila: "Of what? What are you trying to say? Can you just say it please?"

Mrs. Barish: "Well, I'm not sure yet. I think maybe it's simple. Just that you're talking so much about needing to make sure that someone understands you and I'm wondering what you're feeling about things. And whether or not it's important to you that someone can also share some of your feelings."

Gila: "What feelings are you talking about?"

Mrs. Barish: "Well, I don't know yet. I don't really know you at all. But, I found myself wondering if feelings were getting lost here somehow."

Gila: "Tell me you're not trudging out that tired old bullshit thinking and feeling divide?"

Mrs. Barish: "Maybe I am and I didn't even know it?"

Gila: "I think you are. I think next you're going to tell me that I'm *too much in my head*. That maybe I'm even in denial about my loss or something. Or better, I'm *dissociated*. That's a *popular* word with you clinicians these days."

Mrs. Barish: "You sound dismissive of that possibility."

Gila: "What another good observation that is." [silence] "Are you going to say something to that?"

Mrs. Barish: "I'm not sure yet. I believe you just insulted me. So, I'm thinking for a minute."

Gila: "I didn't insult you exactly. You shouldn't take things so personally."

Mrs. Barish: "Uh-huh."

Gila: "Are you upset with me now? This is what I warned you about. That I was going to be difficult. No, no, you said, I can handle difficult and then the first thing out of my mouth."

And, I wasn't even annoyed with you just now. Well, so much for trying to tell me you can try to understand –"

Mrs. Barish: "Now just hold it there, Gila. I didn't say that I couldn't handle anything. I just said I needed a minute to think about how to respond. There's nothing wrong with taking a minute. Not everyone thinks on their feet as quickly as you do. Did that ever occur to you?"

Gila: "Okay." [long silence] "My father died when I was twelve. I realize I didn't say that, but I know you people care about that sort of thing. He was sick for 4 and a half years, rare blood cancer, disgusting, died and then it was me and my mother and brother. They're kind of like my kids, kind of, I guess, I don't know. I take care of them, run the business – it's a bakery. It's fine. Another brother died then too, but I guess the big event is my dad and all that crap."

Mrs. Barish: "Thank you for telling me. Yes, I think that's relevant, don't you?"

Gila: "Sure."

Mrs. Barish: "You mention that you help *run* the business? What does that mean? Are they living nearby?"

Gila: "No, no, they're still in Toronto. My mother is remarried, kind of. I'm not sure. She gets married and divorced depending on her moods. It's better now, I guess. Or, maybe not. I don't know. My little one is there too. He is my baby. He has a hard time but he's managing. I talk to him a few times a day. And her too. They call frantically when something isn't going the right way, and I talk to them. It's harder to do from far away but it works out. I go back often too, every two months or something to check on the business and things like that."

Mrs. Barish: "That's a lot of responsibility, wouldn't you say? For someone so young as yourself."

Gila: "No. Why would you say something like that? I'm not too young at all."

Mrs. Barish: "Maybe I'm not fully understanding something. It seemed from the way you were describing it like it was a lot of responsibility for someone in their twenties to manage the affairs of their family."

Gila: "I don't know what you're talking about."

Mrs. Barish: "Oh?"

Gila: "The bakery is *my* business. D is my littlest one, and she – well, it would be nice if she were more independent but she's not there yet. But, I hope she will be. One day. I don't know. I don't get what you're telling me."

Mrs. Barish: "Gila, it just seemed like a lot of responsibility. That's all. Even if you feel very close to your brother."

Gila: "That isn't making sense to me. It is my *job*. And, we're not close in a typical way. You're misunderstanding it. We don't talk or anything like that. He isn't very verbal or his sentences don't work like yours and mine do. It's...almost kinetic. He's like a raw wire or something, and I help by formulating his reactions into language. Or, something like that. It's always been that way."

Mrs. Barish: "Do you think it's possible that maybe you have other feelings about that?"

Gila: "What?"

Mrs. Barish: "Do you think it's possible that a part of you, maybe not the logical, reasonable part, has other feelings about everything you are doing for your family?"

Gila: "Can you just say what you're trying to say, please? More directly."

Mrs. Barish: "I didn't think I wasn't being direct."

Gila: "Well, you're not. Please get to where you're going more swiftly. That sounded harsh. I'm sorry. I'm just not getting what you're trying to say and I want you to stop hedging incessantly."

Mrs. Barish: "I can try. I mean, don't you think there is a part of you that could have feelings of resentment with everything you have to do? Other people your age aren't dealing with these kinds of things. You can acknowledge that. Maybe you are angry with it. Or, at least there's a part of you that is."

Gila: "But, I'm *not* angry. Or frustrated. Exasperated sometimes, absolutely. She can drive me crazy. And him, I can't ever be more than two minutes away from my phone. I don't know what he'll do if I'm not there in time to talk him down a cliff or intervene or...But, what you're saying, about some secret part of me being secretly angry makes no sense to me. Besides, *who* would I be angry with? Them? They can't help it. I'm only relieved he isn't dead or in jail and she hasn't lost everything yet."

Mrs. Barish: "Maybe you are angry with your father?"

Gila: "For what? It's not his fault."

Mrs. Barish: "Well, in a certain sense, his dying is what led you to have to deal with this stuff."

Gila: "It's not like that. Not that simple. I mean, yes. It did technically. But...but, it's also that...I promised."

Mrs. Barish: "You promised what?"

Gila: "That I'd take care of them. I *said* I would. Who else would -"

Mrs. Barish: "But, that's a very heavy burden, Gila."

Gila: "No. It is the *job*. There isn't any other way...Or...even if it sucks sometimes, it's...I don't know how to say it...what I *do*. It's how the system works. We can't be dead or in a ditch or homeless. The way you say it...it's...I don't know. It's as if I chose it, or I have a choice. As if I'm doing something I secretly resent. But you can't resent the thing that keeps you, all three of us, alive. That would make no sense. There isn't any other way. I'm not saying there aren't *moments* when I wish that I could have a day *off* from ten phone calls a day, *really* off, or do my readings for class without being interrupted by one of them frantically telling me to fly to Toronto and bail this or that one out of court or...But, until they're independent and can manage on their own, there's nothing I can do. I told you. It's just reality. It's the *job*, even if it isn't normal or ideal."

Mrs. Barish: "It certainly seems like you're doing a very good job at that."

Gila: "That's *not* what I'm saying at all. I think I suck at what I'm doing. Maybe because I'm here instead of there? Even though it wasn't any better when I was physically there all the time. I don't know. The boy is barely keeping a job. I speak to him a bunch of times a day, but it never feels like enough. I speak to him every morning to get him out of bed and off to work. Then, when he's done. Then, when he's angry. Then, when he almost smashes another car with his own because he's furious the coffee is hot or the light is still red. Then, at night when he says he won't go to work ever again because his boss insulted him and he can't calm down when he's running through scenarios of how people he doesn't know are out to get him. She is married, divorced, almost broke. – I can't keep track. Always telling me the business is going to be taken away because it's making no money. I look at the books and money coming in, so I don't exactly get it. But fine. I make business plans but...I don't know what she does with them. I don't know. The man she lives with is kind of a tyrant. I have no *idea* what you mean when you say I'm doing a *good* job. I'm failing. I'm trying but failing. You're just flattering me again. And I can't stand bullshit. Please, don't lie to me to prove

you understand something you clearly don't, in the least bit, understand."

Mrs. Barish: "Oh-kay."

Gila: "Are you offended again? I thought I told you not to take things personally."

Mrs. Barish: "I'm just processing what you're saying to me. I'm not always as fast to speak as you are, remember?"

Gila: "Yeah. Fine."

Mrs. Barish: "Did it occur to you that maybe I'm not smart enough to be your therapist?"

Gila: "Oh god, you're really going to get discouraged that easily? I can't believe that."

Mrs. Barish: "I wasn't getting discouraged."

Gila: "Yes, you are. Why else would you say that? You're trying to get rid of me by saying you can't possibly change the way you relate to me, so it must be that I need someone different."

Mrs. Barish: "Well?"

Gila: "Well, what?"

Mrs. Barish: "I really don't see that as trying to get rid of you. I'm just -"

Gila: "Well, it is."

Mrs. Barish: "I don't think so. I really am just trying to help you and I want you to get the best person to help you. You seem to be getting impatient with me so that got me thinking that maybe with someone else who was maybe quicker on their feet -"

Gila: "No. That isn't true. I know it's hard to believe but I like you. I like how quiet you are. And, you're unflappable. You're quiet and you seem almost fragile but you're tough in your own way. Although, it's hard to tell at first. This session's going well. It may not seem that way to you but trust me. I've said more here than probably to anyone, anywhere else in this context."

Mrs. Barish: "Oh! Well! That's helpful to know."

Gila: "Yeah, so, just try not to take things too personally. Okay? Can you just remember that or something?"

Mrs. Barish: "I can try."

Gila: "Okay." [silence] "We're almost out of time."

Mrs. Barish: "Yes. We still have a few minutes though."

Gila: "Do you think you can help me?"

Mrs. Barish: "What do *you* think?"

Gila: "No. No, answering-a-question-with-a-question bullshit. I want to know what you think."

Mrs. Barish: "Is it okay if I need more than one session to come to a decision about that?"

Gila: "Well, then, is there anything you *can* say? Can you at least tell me what you think the problem is or what I need help with? What your *observations* are?"

Mrs. Barish: "Hmm. Let me think about how I want to word this." [silence] "I think that you clearly have a lot of feelings and maybe you need an opportunity to talk about them. You're very comfortable using your mind to work things out for yourself, but maybe what you need is a space where we can talk about your feelings."

Gila: "But I don't *know* them."

Mrs. Barish: "Well, maybe that's something we can figure out together. Over time. Slowly. Some things take time, you know?"

Gila: "And, let me guess. You're *good* at going slowly."

Mrs. Barish: [smiling] "I think so, yes. It comes in handy sometimes." [she tilts her body slightly forward] How does that sound?"

Gila: "Whatever."

Mrs. Barish: "Whatever?"

Gila: "Yeah. Whatever. Fine. We'll try it your way. *Slowly*. Whatever that means. Even though I have *real* questions. *Actual* things I need to understand and I don't see...how going slowly is going to get us anywhere...whatever. *Slowly*."

Mrs. Barish: "I'll see you next week."



It is a hallway in a university building, long and winding with a wooden bench against the wall. They are sitting on it. The Professor is wearing a black leather jacket and black jeans with a loose fitting blue patterned t-shirt underneath. She has big black plastic glasses on and short curly hair that is messy but clear of her face. Gila is wearing jeans and a purple V-neck sweater. Her messenger bag is draped over her shoulders and chest. It is snowing outside. It is March.

Gila: "Thank you, Professor Raynite, for meeting with me. I really appreciate it."

Professor Raynite: "Yeah, yeah, sure, I know. Shoot. What did you want to meet with me about?"

Gila: "Thank you, yes, I –"

Professor Raynite: "Vivian."

Gila: "Sorry?"

Professor Raynite: "Vivian. Can you call me by my first name? Or, would that be too traumatic for you? Seriously. You're so freakin' formal! Are you always like this? What's that about anyway?"

Gila: "Um, well, I don't know. Maybe, not, I don't know. It depends."

Professor Raynite: "On what?"

Gila: "Excuse me?"

Professor Raynite: "You said it depends, so I'm asking *what* it depends on."

Gila: "Oh. Sorry. I don't know. I think my father was kind of formal. I'm not blaming some childhood shit for my own shortcomings or anything, it's just –"

Professor Raynite: [laughing] “Okay, okay, see – that’s what I mean! You’re funny! I can tell by your writing that you see a lot more than you’re ever willing to say out loud. Why is that? It’s not nice to be withholding.”

Gila: “No. I know. I don’t know.”

Professor Raynite: “I don’t know, kiddo, if I’m buying this whole scared-to-death-of-me routine. Because, from what I can tell, you have a very sophisticated sense of what you think about things. I mean, sure you don’t say much in class, but your paper last month was great. I don’t say that lightly, but really. Holy shit. Where did that come from? Who knew? You never raise your hand or say anything, so I was taken aback to find you had it in you to write the critique you did of Didion’s memoir. I was surprised, frankly, which I love. I love being surprised. Are you ever surprised? It’s good. It means you’re open to being teachable and transformative moments and that’s what’s necessary to effect social-political change, isn’t it? So, teachable is good, as long as it’s not the traumatizing kind, which of course it always could be. I mean *you never know*. That is the whole point Lacan is always making, isn’t it? About the indeterminacy of the signifier and how context could determine the impact of a given event?”

Gila: [staring at the ground]

Professor Raynite: “What’s up? Why are you so shy? I know you’re thinking something. *That* much is clear. What did you want to ask me about? I don’t have all day.”

Gila: “Sorry. I was wondering if you would be my advisor for the thesis, if you would –”

Professor Raynite: “I don’t really have the time. You can work with someone else. You’re smart enough. Find someone. You shouldn’t have waited this long into the term. People were asking me months ago.”

Gila: "I know. I'm sorry. It's just that – I don't know. I couldn't yet."

Professor Raynite: "It's like, how far into the second term? I can't take on more students. Have you asked Professor Samuelson?"

Gila: "It has to be you."

Professor Raynite: "Excuse me?"

Gila: "I'm sorry. It has to be...I have to work with you. You *know* this stuff."

Professor Raynite: "Wow. That's like the first time you've looked at me directly, instead of at the ground. Okay, well, of course I know this stuff. So what? I write about it and all the rest. But, so do others. Take Katie –"

Gila: "It's not the same. I've taken courses. Other people's. I've been in school my entire adult life. It's not the same. I will do anything, I –"

Professor Raynite: "Relax, okay? Stop prostrating yourself, it makes me uncomfortable." [laughs] "You're just idealizing me, projecting the wish for someone who knows something onto me. So, I can bear it, because you can't. I get it. You probably can't help it. But you have to chill out a little, can you? Seriously. Okay? If this is so important, why didn't you ask me sooner when everyone else was coming to me a few months ago? You're so shy! I never hear from you in class."

Gila: "I don't know. I'm sorry. I never know what to add."

Professor Raynite: "Really? 'Cause you look like you're thinking a lot."

Gila: "I'm sorry, I just never knew this stuff existed. I thought trauma was all about how victimized you were or something

and that kind of sentimental angle which I couldn't stomach –"

Professor Raynite: "Why not?"

Gila: "Um, I don't know. Because it sounds too simple, maybe? I don't know. I couldn't relate. Maybe something about the stories people tell, I couldn't ever talk like that...or, maybe, just that something terrible happens and then you survive. I wasn't in a war or had a leg blown off. I more or less had food that I could easily enough obtain. I went to school. I didn't think anything that horrible ever happened to me, but I know that things were...complicated. And, yet even when there was some un-fun stuff once upon a time, it wasn't ever like *that*."

Professor Raynite: [smiling] "So, you *do* have a lot to say!"

Gila: "I don't."

Professor Raynite: "But you just articulated the poststructuralist critique of subjectivity's normative tropes!"

Gila: "I did? No, I was just saying –"

Professor Raynite: "Right. I know what you were saying but it's what we're trying to get at in this class with Derrida and Lacan. And, Foucault of course. The fantasy of an intelligible subject who always *knows what* event has compromised his precious self-coherence. But how it wouldn't be *trauma* if the subject *knows!*"

Gila: "Because what trauma does is compromise your ability to know yourself?"

Professor Raynite: "And remember Freud's burning child, right? Trauma is the very thing you couldn't bear to know, observe, and be a part of. When it happened, you were gone."

Gila: "So, then how could you say, *x is the bad thing that happened to me.*"

Professor Raynite: "Exactly."

Gila: "That part about not knowing *what* the trauma is."

Professor Raynite: "*Nachträglichkeit.*"

Gila: "Yeah. That."

Professor Raynite: "What about it?"

Gila: "That seems so true somehow. I don't know. I hate how everyone is always presuming they know *automatically* what the worst part of something is or where the damaging thing occurred, or something. But, really, how do you know because...yeah...you can't. You might just be too busy or...it's just..."

Professor Raynite: "Or, too tired. People underestimate how hard it is to *know* yourself when you're just scrambling or hustling, scraping by, just trying to survive. All this *knowing* is so damn heroic all the time."

Gila: "And especially – never mind."

Professor Raynite: "What?"

Gila: "Nothing."

Professor Raynite: "Oh, come on. What were you gonna say?"

Gila: "Just that, well, *how* do you know? That's what I never understand."

Professor Raynite: "What do you mean?"

Gila: "I don't know. Just...what if you couldn't go to therapy? What if it didn't work for you? And you didn't really talk about things personally with people. I don't know what I'm asking. I just –"

Professor Raynite: "That's what reading's for!" [laughing]

Gila: [smiling] "I guess so...I'm sorry I didn't ask you sooner if you could be my advisor. I didn't think...I waited because I needed to see first if I could do the work."

Professor Raynite: "I don't know about any of that, but that Didion paper was awesome. Seriously. I couldn't believe you wrote it because you're always so quiet. Great work. You should take the compliment! I don't give them often."

Gila: "Okay."

Professor Raynite: "You're not really listening, are you? That's fine. That's your business. Being gracious is a skill though, by the way. It does no good to discredit what you're good at. There's enough out there you can't do right. For example, you should have been more critical of the theory. You didn't develop an argument that expressly challenges the theory, which is what I thought you wanted to do."

Gila: "I did want to, yeah. How do you –"

Professor Raynite: "Well, that's *your* job to figure out, isn't it? But, start by really figuring out how to use the book to critique the theory. Basically, don't assume the theory is necessarily right about what's it saying, get what I mean?"

Gila: "Yeah. I don't think it is."

Professor Raynite: "Continue."

Gila: "Oh, just that something doesn't add up in what we're reading about trauma. Or grief. The idea that you mourn and then you're over it. Eventually."

Professor Raynite: "You don't agree with that?"

Gila: "I don't know if it's that I don't *agree*. I probably don't understand it well enough. The material is hard, but –"

Professor Raynite: "I think you understand it. What else are you trying to say? Spit it out. Stop mumbling."

Gila: "Sorry, I...I don't know. I don't understand the model of *mourning* that is acceptable versus the kind that Freud is calling *too much*. He's trying to say that certain kinds of grief make sense and others don't, and I don't know. I guess that's true, but something...I don't know yet. Something isn't adding up."

Professor Raynite: "Keep going."

Gila: "I don't know. I love Eggers because he has the guts to say to the reader: You know what? Fuck this conventional traumatized trope. Don't pity me. My parents died. Bad shit happens. I'm making it work."

Professor Raynite: "And, what about that do you love?"

Gila: "Everything. I don't know."

Professor Raynite: "Try. I do too, by the way. But, you need to articulate it."

Gila: "That he tells it like it really is. No easy answers like my *mother died and therefore I am x*. I hate that crap. It makes no sense. It feels good, maybe, but it makes no actual sense."

Professor Raynite: [smiling] "See? This is what I mean! Look how opinionated you are! You have so much to say about

these things. And, you're funny. Stop hiding behind some *aw-shucks sorry I don't know anything* routine. I don't buy it for a minute. Seriously, you need to get over whatever hang-up you have about talking out loud and *do* it, in class, in person, whatever."

Gila: "But, it's not an act."

Professor Raynite: "Well, whatever it is, you should get over it."

Gila: "But, I'm not *doing* anything. This is –"

Professor Raynite: "Oh, please. I've seen you sometimes before class, chatting with people, being friendly. I even saw you laughing! Don't deny it. It's true. And, yet, whenever we talk, you're silent, deferential, whatever."

Gila: "But it's different talking to you."

Professor Raynite: "Why? Don't let it be. I'm not that scary. Besides, what are you afraid of anyway? I don't get the sense you're trying to impress me, which is unusual but it doesn't feel like you're just an anxious or ambitious student, even though you're anxious about *something*, so –"

Gila: "It's nothing like that."

Professor Raynite: "Yeah, I didn't think so."

Gila: "It's just talking to you is different than to anyone else. Sure, I can talk and be funny and even charming. People tend to like me. I don't know why. I listen. I'm well-behaved. I say smart things. I had a teacher in high school that I talked to. That's the only other time I felt something like this. With everyone else, I don't know. It's not the same...they...you *see* everything."

Professor Raynite: "So, you have a thing for teachers."

Gila: "No. I don't think..."

Professor Raynite: "Relax. I'm teasing you. Kind of. What were you saying?"

Gila: "That you see so much. It's...I feel you understand."

Professor Raynite: "So do you, I bet."

Gila: "No, no, I don't –"

Professor Raynite: "I think you do. I think you see a hell of a lot more than you ever let on. I see the way you are in class. Taking everything in. I don't know you anywhere else, so what the hell do I know? Maybe nothing. I could be totally wrong. But, my guess is, you'd have a lot more to say if you actually said what you're thinking."

Gila: "I don't –"

Professor Raynite: "Remind me. Where are you from again?"

Gila: "Toronto."

Professor Raynite: "Canada! I love Toronto."

Gila: "Yeah, everyone does."

Professor Raynite: "Not you though?"

Gila: "No. I don't know. It's fine. I don't really know it, to be fair. I grew up in a bakery business."

Professor Raynite: "No way! How cool is that? So your parents are bakers or something, is that it?"

Gila: "Yeah, something like that. My father started it when I was born. Gave up whatever he was doing before and told my mom let's start making cakes! So yeah, they did that and

we were just always around it. You know how it is with small businesses...Anyway, and then when he died I kind of took over or something like that.”

Professor Raynite: “Huh. That’s interesting. Does your family still have the bakery?”

Gila: “Yeah, my mom is there in Toronto. She makes the cakes. I have a little brother too, but he’s not really involved. He likes cars and things like that. I go back often and help out, or I try my best to manage things from here.”

Professor Raynite: “Cool!”

Gila: “Yeah.”

Professor Raynite: “Eggers writes about taking care of his brother after both parents die. Is that what you like about the book?”

Gila: “Maybe? I don’t know.”

Professor Raynite: “Don’t look at *me*. I have no idea. It’s just most people find him kind of obnoxious as a narrator, so it’s interesting that you like him.”

Gila: “He has the guts to say that there’s no such as thing as *normal mourning*. Or, that what counts as *normal mourning* is actually just a delusion and the real process is messier and doesn’t end when you think that it will or the way that it will. That you can be fucked up a long time.”

Professor Raynite: “And, what’s your deal? Are you like one of those kids who always wanted to be an English professor or something? You don’t strike me exactly that way, but who knows? I have no idea.”

Gila: “I don’t know. No. I don’t think I want to be an academic.”

Professor Raynite: “But, you want to write. Clearly.”

Gila: "I guess. I don't know."

Professor Raynite: "Oh, please. Don't be disingenuous. It's clear you have a mind for thinking theoretically. If you could talk more it would help. But maybe you have to figure that out on your own time or something. Not my business. Have you always been interested in psychoanalysis?"

Gila: "I haven't read it, until your class, until now."

Professor Raynite: "No way! I don't believe you."

Gila: "Yes."

Professor Raynite: "Wow. Really? Did you do your college degree in a cave or something? Then you're even better at this than I thought. Fine. Did you not study this in school or something? What college did you go to?"

Gila: "Brandeis in Boston. I got a full scholarship. I'm only saying that because I don't know if I would have chosen it, but I wouldn't have been able to afford to come to the States otherwise."

Professor Raynite: [laughing] "Relax, you don't need to worry. I *won't* think you're arrogant. Promise. What did you study there? Molecular physics or something? How come you didn't come across psychoanalysis?"

Gila: "No, not science. I had a few majors. But I never learned theory."

Professor Raynite: "Can you look at me while you're talking? I bet you can be even a *little* bit more comfortable than this. It makes me feel like I'm a scary person, which I kind of am, but not *this* scary."

Gila: "Sorry. I can try."

Professor Raynite: "And, stop saying sorry."

Gila: "Sorry."

Professor Raynite: [laughing and rolling her eyes] "So, you were telling me you never learned theory? That's hard to believe. You just avoided it or something? Didn't it come up in your gender studies coursework?"

Gila: "I didn't take any gender studies classes."

Professor Raynite: "What?"

Gila: "Yeah."

Professor Raynite: "But you're so –"

Gila: "The type that would be interested?"

Professor Raynite: "I don't know. I guess. I wonder what I'm trying to imply. Hm. That's interesting. I have to think about that some more."

Gila: "It's embarrassing how little I know about any of that stuff. I want to take a course. You're teaching gender studies in the spring? I just never got around to it, I guess. Got married young and then just focused on more traditional subjects. Probably I'm just putting off some bigger question, or –"

Professor Raynite: "Wait a second. Did you just say you're married?"

Gila: "Yeah, I know. It's –"

Professor Raynite: "Holy shit, seriously?! But you're so –"

Gila: "Young?"

Professor Raynite: "Yeah, for one thing. How old are you? Twenty-five? I thought so."

Gila: [laughing] "I know. We got married young."

Professor Raynite: "That's seriously young. Were you fleeing something? That's not just *young*. You're like a child bride or something."

Gila: "He's in law school. I'm here in this program. I don't really think of it as *married* in that conventional sense."

Professor Raynite: "Wait a second. To a man? You're straight? I don't believe you!"

Gila: "I know."

Professor Raynite: "Wow. [playfully punching Gila's arm] Well, kiddo, married is married. Even if you are *ambivalent*. Which you clearly are. I never noticed you wearing a wedding band?"

Gila: "I don't wear one. I can't. Makes me feel trapped or something. I told you. It isn't a typical marriage. We're doing things together. It is a partnership, but not, well, domestic or...I can't explain."

Professor Raynite: [laughing] "Yeah. *Ambi-valent* means two directions at once. Just saying. But, wait, you must talk to your husband more comfortably? Doesn't that mean –"

Gila: "No. It's different. Talking to J isn't anything like this. We do things together, we're committed to getting certain things we want. But, I don't...I don't talk about this stuff."

Professor Raynite: "Gender? Trauma? *Ambivalence*?"

Gila: "Yes."

Professor Raynite: "Hm. But, you don't talk with *me* either. You just listen and let me do all the talking."

Gila: "I know, but I don't mean to. I just don't know enough to say anything yet, but I want to –"

Professor Raynite: "Sure you do."

Gila: "But not like I *want* to."

Professor Raynite: "You mean you can't talk in a way that's commensurate with your understanding."

Gila: "Yes. How did you know that?"

Professor Raynite: "So learn."

Gila: "I know. Can I ask you something? How did you learn to talk about these things? You know this stuff, what it *feels* like but also how to *think* about it. You don't get overwhelmed."

Professor Raynite: "I am a teacher, of course I know so much. And, who says I don't get overwhelmed? Don't assume you know what my defenses are. You know this stuff by reading it, rereading it, practicing producing intelligibility despite your incomprehension."

Gila: "But not just know so much about the theory. It's like you *know* so much. About the pain. Or, loss or something. Sorry. I don't know."

Professor Raynite: "So do you though."

Gila: "Know something?"

Professor Raynite: "You're unusual, you know that? Do people tell you that a lot?"

Gila: "Yes. People tease me that it's because I didn't have a childhood or something. I don't mean this to mean that I'm a victim. It's just a fact. No Sesame Street or playing with toys. You're six. Here's Dostoevsky kind of thing."

Professor Raynite: "It's because you were busy baking cakes!"

Gila: "Well, no, not at the age of four I wasn't. I don't think. But, then who knows? My father wasn't always sensitive to the difference between adults and children. Anyway, maybe that was it. Combined with his European formality or something –"

Professor Raynite: [laughing] "That's funny."

Gila: "No."

Professor Raynite: "What? Did that make you uncomfortable or something? Girl, you need to chill out! It would be so much more fun if you could just be more *comfortable*. Really. Trust me. Or don't trust me, whatever."

Gila: "I know. I'm just not used to talking. Like this."

Professor Raynite: "Like what?"

Gila: "Like this. Like with you. Where I can say what I'm actually thinking."

Professor Raynite: "Are you busy being *good* all the time? That kind of thing? Is *that* what your problem is? I was like that a little too when I was younger."

Gila: "Something like that, yeah. Being quiet. Saying what people want me to say or expect me to say. Having no preferences. I have no preferences ever. It's actually a skill! Comes in quite handy when you're running a business and raising some kids. Anyway, yeah, what I think doesn't matter. It can't."

Professor Raynite: "That sucks. But you're gonna need to get over that somehow if you want to think and write for a living, you know that right?"

Gila: "I know. I don't know how though."

Professor Raynite: "You seem to be doing alright. More or less. When you're not falling over yourself and apologizing every two seconds and staring at the ground, you're actually kind of fun to talk to. Who knew?!"

Gila: "Were *you* always like this?"

Professor Raynite: "You're going to have to be specific. Always like *what*?"

Gila: "I don't know. Always able to talk in this way. I don't know. I'm not sure what I'm asking."

Professor Raynite: "I'm not sure either. But, the short answer is *kind of*, yes and no. I had phases of self-destructiveness – things I did to try to stop the world from spinning out of control, stupid, desperate shit, which, of course, didn't really help. *As you know*, so yeah, it wasn't always like this if, by this, you mean that I seem stable and organized and that kind of thing?"

Gila: "I just don't know how you get there."

Professor Raynite: "Where?"

Gila: "I'm not sure. To where you can talk about this in some way. Or, understand how it works."

Professor Raynite: "Who said I understood how it works?"

Gila: "I mean, it's just that you can *talk* about trauma and not just feel it. Or, it doesn't stop you from speaking. I think maybe I get so overwhelmed or something. I don't know what

happens. It's as if I can read this stuff and feel so much and have so much that I want to say but then I can't talk about it. Or, maybe it's more like I can't really *think* about in any productive way. I just get so quiet. Inside. Maybe it's because I'm overwhelmed and it's stopping me from being able to use my head the way I'm used to? I don't get it. I don't know. I've never had a problem *thinking*."

Professor Raynite: "You'll learn. You're overwhelmed. This stuff can be *intense*. Really. You're only just starting. Be patient. Besides, you just told me that you're not good at saying what you actually think. Don't be so hard on yourself."

Gila: "How did you learn not to get overwhelmed?"

Professor Raynite: "You mean, how do I manage the affective impact of this material in such a way that enables me to transform feelings into intelligible thoughts?"

Gila: "Exactly. Even that sentence –"

Professor Raynite: "I compartmentalize! [laughing] No, seriously. I don't know. That's what inhabiting a critical vocabulary is for. That's what I keep trying to teach you guys. Listen. As kids we used to joke that compared to our mother, at least *Hitler* liked his *dog*. Which was more than you could say about our mother. You get the picture? So yeah, sure. I'm interested in trauma for a *reason*, as they say. But, I'm teaching you that there is a *language* out there, tools for learning how to *think* about the problem critically, in theoretical, historical, structural terms."

Gila: "And, that will help?"

Professor Raynite: "Of course *I* tend to think that organizing emotional experience in theoretical terms is helpful. That making incoherence intelligible is a good and worthy critical enterprise and all that stuff. But then, on the other hand, my

shrink thinks it's a defense, so what the hell do I know?" [both start laughing]

Gila: "I just want you to know how much this means to me."

Professor Raynite: "I get it. It's fine."

Gila: "But, I mean, *really*. Like, I didn't even know trauma was a field of study. And now I'm trying to understand it. And use this theoretical language."

Professor Raynite: "That's a good thing!"

Gila: "Yeah, I know. I want to thank you. Because –"

Professor Raynite: "Oh please, spare me this scene of your prostrating yourself. Seriously. It makes me anxious. I don't know what all that's about but, seriously, you need to chill. I'm just a teacher who knows this stuff better than you do, so far. This is my job to teach this material."

Gila: "It's more than that. You're different. You understand this stuff. Most people don't."

Professor Raynite: "What did you say your question about Didion was? Sure, I'll be your advisor. Just to be clear –"

Gila: "I will take up no space or next to no space. I promise. Thank you. Oh my god, thank you."

Professor Raynite: "Fine. It's fine. I know you don't need me to hold your hand and that's a good thing because I don't have time for that."

Gila: "I won't. I promise. I'll work by myself. I'm good at that."

Professor Raynite: "I'm sure. Do me a favor though? Before the next time we meet, work on your anxiety or something. So you're not just sitting here falling over yourself. But, actu-

ally talking, like a graduate student about the material. Stop thanking me and apologizing. It's making me anxious, okay? You need to practice getting it under control. Do that and we're good. Yes? Go. Start reading. I don't need to tell you to read around Freud if you're going to begin to deconstruct his argument about mourning? You have your work cut out for you! I am exhausted. I still have papers to write and read this evening. It's exhausting when you never sleep. Or, don't sleep well. Or, dream. Anyway. Do you still bake?"

Gila: "I'm allergic."

Professor Raynite: "To what?"

Gila: "Flour, dairy, sugar. The business basically."

Professor Raynite: "Get out. [teasingly punching Gila's shoulder] Are you for real?"

Gila: [looking bashful, smiling] "Yes. It is ridiculous, I know."

Professor Raynite: "That's *hilarious*. You are a walking symptom! Do you know that about yourself? [shaking her head] It's –"

Gila: "So obvious, I know. It's kind of embarrassing. I mean, *really*? The daughter of a baker allergic to sweets. That seems to be as transgressive as my unconscious gets."

Professor Raynite: [laughing] "Sometimes I'm afraid my dreams are boring too. I mean, I'm supposed to be wanting revenge for old abuses, shit like that. My shrink says there is rage somewhere but sometimes there are just these kittens there who want me to pet them you know? Or, feed them or teach them, ha! Something domestic and sentimental like that. And, I wonder: am I being a bad patient or is this really the scarier wish?"

Gila: [laughing]

Professor Raynite: “Oh, like *you* should talk! Miss I’ll make these cakes but I won’t *eat* them, *ever*.”

Gila: [laughing] “I wasn’t being rejecting!”

Professor Raynite: “*Of course* you are, in your own way. That’s how symptoms work! Have you read Phillips on “the symptom”? You would love it. He describes how we’re all more or less desperately attached to some idea of ourselves as having a personality that is somehow beyond these knots of fixations and compulsions but, of course, that *is* our personality! So, anyway, take my kittens. Maybe I’m afraid of tenderness, who knows? Were you always allergic? We can walk together out the building. What time is it? Shit. I have a meeting I am very late to. Oh, well. We were talking about the genealogy of psychosomatic truth-effects in us. Continue.”



It is a sunny afternoon, mid-winter, in Mrs. Barish's office. The sunlight is shining through the windows in the garden floor office apartment. Mrs. Barish is wearing dress pants, a thin purple turtleneck and a dark navy blazer. Gila has arrived to the waiting room early. She is wearing sneakers, jeans, and a short wool peacoat. There is still snow in the ringlets of her curly hair when Mrs. Barish, in hushed tones escorting her last patient out, comes over to say it's time for their session.

Gila: "I don't know what to say."

Mrs. Barish: "That's okay."

Gila: "Is there somewhere we can start or something?"

Mrs. Barish: "You can start anywhere you'd like."

Gila: "There *isn't* anywhere. I don't know how to do this."

Mrs. Barish: "You can just talk about whatever is on your mind."

Gila: "It doesn't work that way. I can't just sit down and...it's not even that. I have no idea what I would talk about."

Mrs. Barish: "Anything."

Gila: "I need more guidance than that, seriously."

Mrs. Barish: "Let me see. How about right now? Do you know how you're feeling right now?"

Gila: "Nothing. Cold."

Mrs. Barish: "Yes. I noticed you are keeping your jacket on."

Gila: [begins to take it off] "Sorry. Yes. It's cold outside. I should be used to it, being from Toronto, but I never am. Why do people always say, 'you're from Canada you should be used to

cold weather!' How do you get used to cold weather? That's like getting used to being hungry."

Mrs. Barish: "You don't like the cold."

Gila: "I don't know. I don't *mind* the cold. I just hate winter clothes."

Mrs. Barish: "Oh, yes, you're not wearing boots!"

Gila: "Nope. I hate them. And winter jackets, as if we're skiing all the time. And gloves and hats and scarves. I know, I know. It's no wonder then, I'm freezing. Ms. Tobin scolds me all the time about this. I mentioned her to you, I think? The teacher from high school who saved my life? Fed me, told me I should go to school, that sort of thing? You aren't nodding. I didn't then? Anyway, that was her. She is the person closest to me. When she sees me in Toronto, when I go back, she yells at me, in a parental way, about needing to suck it up and put on some clothes but still I can't do it."

Mrs. Barish: "It sounds like she's giving you good advice."

Gila: "Yeah, she always does. She has five kids. She told me once she doesn't mind a sixth. But, she wants to kill me when she sees me like this in the cold." [smiling]

Mrs. Barish: "She cares about you."

Gila: "Yes. I don't know why. We talk about books. I know this might be hard for *you* to imagine, but I can be pretty good company."

Mrs. Barish: "That isn't hard for me to imagine."

Gila: "Yeah, so. I see her when I am in Toronto or when she comes here. She has a farmhouse in Vermont and I've joined her there a few times too. It's peaceful when I'm with her."

Mrs. Barish: "So, what do you think it is about the winter weather that you don't like?"

Gila: "I didn't say I didn't like the winter weather. I said I didn't want to wear the winter *GEAR*, as if I'm skiing when I'm walking, that kind of thing."

Mrs. Barish: "So, what is it that you don't like? Is it the style or the effort it takes? Something like that?"

Gila: "Not being able to feel things as closely. I don't know how to explain it, but with gloves on, you can't know exactly what you're touching. Does that sound strange? It probably does. But it's like, with boots, you don't feel the ground. All that fake material blocking what the environment feels like. It scares me. Everything being so far away in that way. There but *not* there. Like you're in some artificial self-created bubble and everything you touch is something you can't actually *feel*. Ew. I hate it."

Mrs. Barish: "Hm. I never thought about winter clothes in that way. That's interesting."

Gila: "I'm not sure that it's so *interesting*. It's just an idiosyncrasy of mine, I guess."

Mrs. Barish: "Well, but it *is* interesting to hear you talk about what you don't like."

Gila: "Why?"

Mrs. Barish: "Because you're describing how important it is for you to *know* what you're doing and where you're experiencing all the time. Knowledge is very important to you. And, if you can't have that, then you feel unstable."

Gila: "Is *that* what you heard in what I said?"

Mrs. Barish: "Yes. It is."

Gila: "Because that sounds dead wrong. You're interpreting my attachment to knowledge. You're saying that I *need* to *know* things all the time. And, that's plain wrong. I *like* to know things. I *strive* to know things. But, if you were listening to what I was *actually* saying, you'd hear that I emphasized how the sensation I am most disturbed by is being blocked from *feeling* my surroundings."

Mrs. Barish: "And, what does that mean to you?"

Gila: "That I'm not this cerebral, defensive, basically intellectualizing machine that you're imagining me to be."

Mrs. Barish: "Who said I'm imagining you that way?"

Gila: "Oh, please. *Of course* that's what you're saying. But, I said something else that's so much more important. I can't believe that's what you heard."

Mrs. Barish: "Hm. Well. Maybe we can have two different ideas about that?"

Gila: "*What?* That's even worse than the wrong thing you said."

Mrs. Barish: "Really? Oh dear. Only *your* idea is right and my idea is wrong? Now that doesn't sound fair, does it?" [smiling]

Gila: "Are you trying to be condescending? That's how it sounds. Or, patronizing? Or, whatever. I don't appreciate it. I'm not saying 'I'm always right because I am me.' That is ridiculous. Do you think I'd ever say that? What is this, second grade? I wouldn't have said that when I was *in* the second grade. I am offended. Seriously? No. I'm saying that contradictory interpretations often reflect incompatible hermeneutic strategies. Not to mention that different ideological structures undergird the different things we privilege when we're reading, or, in this case, listening. I'm saying that –"

Mrs. Barish: "And, what is your interpretation that is different than mine?"

Gila: "Why are you cutting me off?"

Mrs. Barish: "I didn't mean to."

Gila: "Yes, you did. But it's fine. You're signaling that you won't take up the argument."

Mrs. Barish: "Was I doing that? I thought I was just asking you to share what your idea was, since it seemed that mine was so wrong."

Gila: "You're being condescending."

Mrs. Barish: "I'm sorry you're hearing things that way."

Gila: "That's how you're *saying* them!"

Mrs. Barish: "I don't think so. Maybe this is a miscommunication. Because –"

Gila: "A *miscommunication*? Seriously? Did you really just say that?"

Mrs. Barish: "I did. What's wrong with that? Is there something wrong with that word?"

Gila: "There's nothing wrong with the *word* in and of itself, of course. But, isn't this *psychoanalysis*? In which case, don't we kind of dismiss the idea that the things we say are *irrelevant* or *accidental* or *meaningless*, even if they *seem* that way at first? In fact, isn't that the whole edifice upon which this therapeutic enterprise is constructed? The belief that we should take even the littlest things we're feeling, thinking, doing, *seriously*?"

Mrs. Barish: [silence]

Gila: "Why aren't you saying anything?"

Mrs. Barish: "I'm thinking about what you're saying, that's all."

Gila: "Can you think more quickly?"

Mrs. Barish: "I don't think as quickly on my feet as you do, remember?"

Gila: "Yes. You like to do things slowly. Which is fine, I guess. Even though I don't like being kept in suspense."

Mrs. Barish: "I am wondering why it seems so important to you that you know what I'm thinking."

Gila: "Because we're in this room together talking? Because I need a mind that I can trust?"

Mrs. Barish: "You seem annoyed."

Gila: "It's an annoying question."

Mrs. Barish: "Why?"

Gila: "Because you're implying *again* that all I care about is obtaining knowledge, certainty, whatever. You're not hearing a single thing that I'm saying."

Mrs. Barish: "Oh? I didn't see it that way."

Gila: "Well, of course you didn't. You *wouldn't*. You prefer to proceed as if your questions are innocent and psychologically mindful. When in reality you're asking me why I need to spend so much time arguing with another person's mind."

Mrs. Barish: "Well, why do you?"

Gila: "See! That is your question."

Mrs. Barish: [smiling] "You know I really fail to see the problem with what I'm asking you. You're telling me that everything I'm saying is wrong and then, when I'm quiet you ask me what I'm thinking. But, if you don't like what I'm thinking then you ask me *why* I am thinking it, and then you want to talk about *that*."

Gila: "You're saying that I'm defensive."

Mrs. Barish: "I didn't say that."

Gila: "You didn't need to. It's the only answer that every road leads to. You're describing me as difficult and demanding and severe. You're saying that all I care about are *ideas* and differences and distinguishing between what is right and wrong. As if this is a classroom. Which I know in moments it can feel that way...That's true. But that isn't what I'm after. I'm trying to connect to you but I need your mind to meet me there. What's wrong with that? I need to know how your mind works, how you move through thoughts and problem-solving."

Mrs. Barish: [smiling]

Gila: "You're smiling again. Why are you smiling? Was something I just said amusing?"

Mrs. Barish: "It's just not typically what *therapy* is about."

Gila: "I don't understand."

Mrs. Barish: "Well. Typically. And, I understand that you're not typical. But, *typically*, therapy is about working through what the patient *feels* about things. What they feel about their conflicts or their needs or their loved ones. Or, in this case about who they've lost. It isn't supposed to be about how *my* mind works. It's supposed to be about what *you* are *feeling*."

Gila: "But...I don't get it. What if my mind and feelings are connected? Like, what if I don't know how I feel about things unless I can have a frame for thinking about them too?"

Mrs. Barish: "Yes. That's what I was trying to get at earlier when you took offense."

Gila: "When? And, I didn't take offense. Or, maybe I did. What part?"

Mrs. Barish: "When I tried to say that you're more interested in *knowing* things then *feeling* them. I was trying to point out that you have a very well-developed intellectual apparatus. And, clearly a powerful mind that serves you well in your endeavors. But, that part of you is not letting another part of you express how you feel."

Gila: "I don't understand."

Mrs. Barish: "It isn't that hard to understand. It is what happens when people, especially when they're young and have powerful minds like you do, go through a traumatic event. Their feelings become scary for them, so they approach the world through their *thoughts* instead. It's not unusual."

Gila: "I don't see how that's what I'm doing. Because I use my mind to feel secure?"

Mrs. Barish: "Sure, that's part of it. But it's more general than that."

Gila: "How? You're not making sense."

Mrs. Barish: "Let's say there are two Gilas. There is the intellectual one who knows so many things and is powerful and secure and can reason her way through any situation. And, then there is also this more emotional Gila who is scared and maybe sad, grieving still. She has a lot of feelings about things that have happened to her. But she doesn't talk about them."

She has learned that it's safer to just be smarter than everyone else."

Gila: [silence]

Mrs. Barish: "You seem to have gotten quiet."

Gila: "Yeah."

Mrs. Barish: "That's okay."

Gila: "I guess."

Mrs. Barish: "We can just sit here quietly for now."

Gila: "I don't know."

Mrs. Barish: "It's okay not to know."

Gila: "Is it time to leave yet? Is the session almost over?"

Mrs. Barish: "No, we still have some time. You don't need to worry about that right now."

Gila: "Whatever."

Mrs. Barish: "You seem nervous. Do you want to just sit back in your chair for a moment? You look very worried. We still have some time. And, we can always pick up where we left off the next time."

Gila: "You talk very quietly."

Mrs. Barish: [nodding]

Gila: "I like how quiet you are."

Mrs. Barish: "That's good."

Gila: "I feel tired all of a sudden. I don't know."

Mrs. Barish: "Maybe it's a lot to take in."

Gila: "No."

[silence]

"I think you're right about feelings. There's something to do with feelings here that's important."

Mrs. Barish: "Yes. I think so."

Gila: "Well I already know *you* think so. I'm saying what I think. I'm not sure about the two-Gilas thing. I'm not sure that's right. You make it sound like...I don't know. Like I'm defensive. Like my mind is primarily or essentially a defensive machine. Cerebral, intellectualizing. Like my primary mode of operating is to intellectualize the things I'm feeling so that I don't have to feel them. But, that's so...I don't know. So conventional. Which doesn't mean I'm special. That's not my point, just that I *know* about that already. I've gone down that road and wondered if that's what I'm doing and...it presumes that I'm holding things back."

Mrs. Barish: "Sure. Not consciously. But, that it feels safer to think about things than to feel them."

Gila: "Yeah, I get it. Non-consciously, of course. That whole repression business. But, I don't know. It feels like something else is going on."

Mrs. Barish: "Like what?"

Gila: "Well, I don't know yet."

Mrs. Barish: "Maybe you think I'm saying that something is wrong with you but I'm not. There's nothing wrong with intellectualizing or with splitting the self off into different components. Sometimes, it's what you need to do in order to survive."

Gila: "I know. I've read the literature. That isn't it. It isn't that I'm feeling blamed or something. Or, maybe I am also. I don't know. That's just distracting. No...it's something else..."

Mrs. Barish: "I just want to let you know that we're almost out of time for today."

Gila: "Okay."

Mrs. Barish: "We still have a few minutes. I just wanted to warn you. Please, finish your sentence."

Gila: "Thank you, yeah. I don't know though. It's like the intellectualizing thing presumes I'm holding something back. I'm trying not to feel too much. That thinking is a way of making me feel *less*. But, it doesn't work that way for me. *Thinking* helps me sharpen *what* the *feelings* are. I think this is related to what happened at Chicago. I know there isn't time now...but, the point is that...I don't know. That something is holding me back, but it isn't *me* that's doing it. I don't know how to say this. But, it's more like I don't know. Like, I can *tell* there is a feeling there inside me somewhere, but there's nothing I can do to get it. I try and nothing...That's what I'm looking for. That's why I'm here. That's...yeah. We're out of time, aren't we?"

Mrs. Barish: "We'll have to continue this next week."

Gila: "Did what I said make any sense?"

Mrs. Barish: [shuffling her feet, getting ready to stand] "Yes. I think sometimes it can be a very long process to trust one's feelings. And, to work with defenses that are very strong indeed and very powerful to get them out of the way and allow the feelings to come out."

Gila: "Okay."

Mrs. Barish: "I'll see you at the same time next week?"

Gila: "Actually, do you have anything at the end of the day? I like to have the day at least before it. Since I can't really do anything after the sessions."

Mrs. Barish: "Let me look." [finding her calendar on the side table and checking it] "Five o'clock?"

Gila: "Thank you, yes. That's good."

Mrs. Barish: "Five o'clock then. I'll see you next week."



It is a café under the El train stop, a station in Hyde Park, the South Side of Chicago. The walls are painted white and bright orange. Several tables are occupied with people from the university campus, which is nearby. It is early summer; the school year has almost ended. It is early in the afternoon, humid, and people are in t-shirts, tank tops, shorts. At a small table near the window, the Professor is in a black long sleeve shirt and black jeans. Gila is in jeans and a buttoned-down navy plaid shirt. There are cups on the table, a glass of iced tea, which the Professor has nearly finished drinking, and a mug of coffee that Gila ordered but hasn't touched and is getting cold.

Gila: "Thank you for meeting me. To talk about the paper. I appreciate it."

Professor Raynite: "Yeah, no problem. I'm happy to discuss your work. I love this place. Is it okay to meet here instead of on campus? It's right near my house."

Gila: "Yes, please, anything is fine, of course."

Professor Raynite: "So, what's on your mind? You seem upset."

Gila: "I don't know. What did you think of it?"

Professor Raynite: "I gave you an A+! Are you seriously wondering what I think of it? It was fantastic! Did you want another +? You realize that stuff begins to look ridiculous in graduate school? I mean a PhD program isn't going to care how many pluses are after the A's. Or, about A's for that matter generally. Is that what's making you doubtful?"

Gila: "No. It's not that."

Professor Raynite: "Then what? I never give that grade. And, I mean *never*. But your paper was fantastic. I mean, I can't believe you're the same student who couldn't pronounce Lacan when you first started here in September."

Gila: "Thank you. Yes."

Professor Raynite: "Well then, why do you seem so upset about it? Other students in your place would be ecstatic. Your paper was chosen as among the best in the program! What's *wrong* with you?"

Gila: "I don't know. I don't care about the grade."

Professor Raynite: "Well then, what is it? [leaning forward] I've never seen you this upset before."

Gila: "I know. I'm sorry. I just – I tried my best and –"

Professor Raynite: "Gila, listen to me. It is better than most graduate papers I read, okay? Seriously. I wouldn't be saying this normally but you look like you really need some perspective. You did a close reading of Eggers through trauma theory that you routed through gender theory and sexuality. Two months ago when we were talking, you had never read a gender theory book! The ground you've covered since then, but also since I've met you, is incredible. Listen to me – I've been teaching twenty plus years and I have never seen someone absorb as much as you did and put it all together, as if they were a pro. Okay? You should feel really *good* about the work."

Gila: "Thank you. But something's missing."

Professor Raynite: "What do you mean? What kind of –"

Gila: "I take the paper as far as I can take it, but at the end, when it's my turn to say what I *think* about how trauma works, I can't do it."

Professor Raynite: [staring at Gila]

Gila: "It's true, isn't it? I critique the preexisting theory. I say there is a problem with the narratives we use of trauma. They all adhere to the familiar tropes. I'm grieving, now I'm healed."

I was broken, now I cohere. I was blind but now I see, fine. I saw the link to sexuality. How non-normative sexual practices give us a way to challenge the frameworks we use for thinking about how the experience unfolds, what it means, that maybe not everything ends with children and a fence and being *properly* mourned. I did that well enough. I know. Who cares. But –”

Professor Raynite: “But Gila, six months ago you could never have articulated that series of thoughts. Give yourself a little credit.”

Gila: “I can’t. Because I set out to say *more* than that. Or, to say something different. Bigger. That...I don’t know what. About –”

Professor Raynite: “But, Gila it takes time. You’re how old? Twenty-five?”

Gila: “That’s not the point, you know it. You don’t need to make me feel better. I know the paper didn’t make the point I meant it to. It failed, didn’t it?”

Professor Raynite: [staring at Gila] “It started to say that grief can be unconventional but, no, it didn’t say how or what you mean by that.”

Gila: “I said the stories that we tell of grief are all straightforward, easy. Even when they take a longer time or someone does it Holden Caulfield style, there’s always a catharsis and relief. There’s always, somehow, a heroic moment of seeing you’re beyond your losses. Even Eggers, playing frisbee on the beach. But I don’t get it. I don’t see how you can lose the things that keep you whole and then regain them, ever. Everything I read keeps saying there’s a moment that’s *beyond* what happened. You grieve and then, at some point, there’s the other side and magically you got there. But there’s something I don’t understand. What if you’ve given up the voice, the ghosts, and still you aren’t free? The nights are yours, okay. You aren’t the

same kid who talks to those who left a while ago, but you aren't back to normal either."

Professor Raynite: "Loss is complicated. You don't need to understand it all in a single graduate paper."

Gila: "I'm not just trying to understand it, there was something I was trying to *say*. I used the words we learned in class. I used the readings. I learned everything, and –"

Professor Raynite: "And *then* some."

Gila: "Fine. I read *a lot*. Reading is easy. You always told me not to hide behind the reading but to say what I actually *thought*, what I actually *saw*. But I didn't do that, did I? Couldn't. Grieving doesn't look like letting go. But then *what is it*? It isn't simply stuckness. It's more complex. It's neither letting go nor holding on."

Professor Raynite: "It sounds like you're onto something with that thought."

Gila: "Then why can't I *finish* it? If it's neither of those things, what is it?"

Professor Raynite: "What do you think?"

Gila: "But *that's* just what's wrong, I *can't*."

[the Professor looks at Gila, tilting her head concerned.
Gila looks at the ground]

"And this time, I'm not being shy. Or, holding back. I have the language that *you* taught me. I can say, 'there's something incoherent about the teleology of losing' but when it's then my turn to say just what I mean, it's quiet in my head, it's blank. Do you know why this is happening to me? I don't get it. I don't get what I did wrong? I thought...I thought if only I had *language* I could channel what I *feel* but don't know how to say. But then I get there, when it's time to formulate what I know of grief, and I can't say *anything*. It's quiet still.

And, I'm not overwhelmed this time. I don't get where I went wrong in all of this. This is the first paper I ever worked so hard to write."

Professor Raynite: "You wrote a fantastic paper, Gila."

Gila: "I took my thought as far as I could take it and then...it's like the film reel ended."

Professor Raynite: "Do you want to be an academic? You could get in anywhere you wanted to go. I'm not saying that's what you should do necessarily, but you can spend years working on questions like these, if that's something you're interested in."

Gila: "I thought so, maybe. But not if this is all I'm capable of."

Professor Raynite: "Come on, Gila, don't you think you're being a little harsh with yourself? I mean, don't get me wrong, I'm game for all kinds of self-hating habits, but really? Maybe you just need more time to think this through?"

Gila: "*Time* is if my mind was tripping up but that's not happening. It's not my *brain* that's getting stuck. It's not something I'm having trouble *thinking*. I know this doesn't really make sense, Professor Raynite, does this not make sense? It's like I'm having trouble *seeing* what I think. Does that sound weird? What's wrong with me? I feel like something must be wrong with me. I gave up everything that held me back. I left. I let him go. I said I have to do my own thing now. I served as I had promised but...I'll watch them still, of course, but now I'm David. I am David now, running where I feel like it, doing my own thing...I'm free. I'm free. Why can't I *see* the place my thinking takes me? I am a former prince who ran a kingdom once, until Ms. Tobin said, "I bet you *behind every prince there is a young man yearning to be free*, be free." And, I went once and went again and then came here and here you taught me how to talk about the things I know and now...What's

wrong with me? Can you please tell me? Help me see? I'm sorry, I said more than you care to know, I'm sorry, I just –”

Professor Raynite: “It’s fine. I don’t know what to tell you though.”



It is mid-winter, in Mrs. Barish's garden floor office on the Upper West Side. The streets outside are quiet in that late hour after school, before dinner. Mrs. Barish is wearing a dark blue turtleneck and slacks, her suit jacket hanging over her chair. Gila is in jeans and a pin-stripe pink buttoned-down shirt, loafers, her messenger bag. Mrs. Barish is sitting, slightly reclined, in her analyst chair across Gila who is upright, at the farthest edge of the office sofa.

Gila: "I don't know what to say."

Mrs. Barish: "That's okay. We can take our time."

Gila: "Is there anything you can ask me? To help me start?"

Mrs. Barish: "Maybe you can talk about whatever is on your mind?"

Gila: "What if I can't?"

Mrs. Barish: "Maybe you can just let yourself see what it feels like to try."

[long silence]

Gila: "I don't know."

Mrs. Barish: "What don't you know?"

Gila: "What to say."

Mrs. Barish: "Well, what are you feeling? Why don't we start with you telling me about that?"

Gila: "Oh."

Mrs. Barish: "Oh what?"

Gila: "That isn't any easier."

Mrs. Barish: [smiling] "Feelings are hard to talk about, aren't they?"

Gila: "I don't know. I guess."

Mrs. Barish: "Sometimes the defenses we use in one instance in our lives are no longer good for us at other moments in our life."

Gila: "Oh yeah, you were saying something along those lines the last time."

Mrs. Barish: "Yes."

Gila: "If I'm understanding you correctly, you're basically suggesting that I use my intellect as a defense against my feelings?"

Mrs. Barish: "What do you think?"

Gila: "What do I think? I think you're dead wrong."

Mrs. Barish: "Oh?"

Gila: "What I don't understand about that interpretation is that it doesn't account for what I was trying to tell you last time, and also the first time I came in here. About what happened in Chicago. How I tried to write about grief and then I couldn't. How I got stuck."

Mrs. Barish: "Yes, I remember you talked about that."

Gila: "You don't seem to be registering what a big deal that was."

Mrs. Barish: "What is it you feel I'm not understanding? Maybe you could explain it a little better for me."

Gila: "I'm not sure I necessarily can because it seems so obvious how relevant that story is but if you don't think so then I think maybe it wasn't...I get discouraged easily. But I really

think it's kind of essential to understanding what I'm trying to describe."

Mrs. Barish: "Go on. Please."

Gila: "Do you think you could try to do a better job of paying attention, please?"

Mrs. Barish: [smiling] "I'll try."

Gila: "So, I told you that I was writing a paper on grief and that I was deconstructing Freud's argument on the difference between 'mourning' and 'melancholia,' wherein he basically designates the difference between healthy and pathological mourning as a difference in scale and length of duration. The right kind of mourning is linear, straightforward, more or less abides by normative tropes of progress and self-development, that whole thing. And, on the other hand, there's melancholia, where the mourner does not let go, holds on tightly to the lost object well past the point when he should be doing so and has a kind of haunted semi-life as a result. I talk about Eggers and gender and sexuality and all manner of things that aren't relevant here, to you, but the part that is has to do with the fact that I wanted to say something *isn't* working about this model of the psyche."

Mrs. Barish: "That paper by Freud is a very interesting one."

Gila: "Right, but I was trying to deconstruct it. By which I mean *critique* it. I thought it didn't get things right."

Mrs. Barish: "Uh-huh. But you know, Freud isn't saying that all melancholia is necessarily a bad thing. He understands that there's a range of ways of mourning."

Gila: "Okay, sure, but that isn't really my point."

Mrs. Barish: "Oh?"

Gila: “No, I’m not having an issue with Freud, per se. And, I’m not saying this theory is being dogmatic or formulaic or whatever. I get bored with those kinds of arguments. I’m saying something else, about how mourning doesn’t work that way.”

Mrs. Barish: “It’s more complicated than that.”

Gila: “Yeah. Exactly.”

Mrs. Barish: “Of course. I don’t think any clinician actually believes that mourning has to fit into either one of those categories.”

Gila: “Okay. Right. But, that isn’t really what I’m saying either. I’m not trying to say some version of this theory is outdated. Or, simplistic. I’m saying there’s a flaw in the underlying logic by which Freud imagines that loss can adhere to a certain kind of developmental template.”

Mrs. Barish: [smiling] “Do you want to say more about that?”

Gila: “Well, just that I think Freud is trying to superimpose a familiar way of thinking about growth onto the way trauma works and I don’t think they work the same way. Growing up may follow a certain pattern but losing someone doesn’t, necessarily.”

Mrs. Barish: “And, what does it mean to you, this argument about Freud?”

Gila: “What do you mean, what does it mean to me? Aren’t you understanding what I’m saying?”

Mrs. Barish: “I think I am, but I’m trying to focus on how this is relevant to what’s going on here.”

Gila: “I’m *telling* you how this is relevant. I’m telling you that I think grief works differently than we tend to think it does. And, I can work through his argument, pointing out the

inconsistencies. But then, when I have to say how I think it *does* work, something happens, and I can't. I want to say something about how mourning isn't a straight line, or even just a messier one, but something else. That it's not like: you were there and now you're here and healed, and we get it, you've *been* through shit, you're broken but...that it's something else."

Mrs. Barish: "You're talking about how painful it is."

Gila: "No. I'm not. I'm talking about how it isn't *good enough* to say, you've been through stuff and now you're damaged, ravaged, riven, torn."

Mrs. Barish: "Why not?"

Gila: "Because it's more than that. Because you're fucked up, in some deep way that you don't get over, even after years or months or talking or whatever they say helps you move on."

Mrs. Barish: "Do you think your ideas about this are influenced by your experience?"

Gila: "Are you serious? What else would they be influenced by?"

Mrs. Barish: "Yes. So, what's the problem then?"

Gila: "The *problem* is that I can't say what I actually think is going on. How grieving *actually* works. Okay, it isn't conventional or the conventions need to be changed. But then, what's going on? The thought is right there, in my mind, but I can't touch it. I can't say it, clearly. Can't *say* it at all."

Mrs. Barish: "Hm. But aren't you saying it to me, right now?"

Gila: "No, not really. I'm just saying something about x doesn't work, but I'm not saying what *I* think instead. What is happening when we lost something we needed? What happens in the mind? I am circling the answer but every time it is the time

to say it, I can't see it. It goes blank inside my head. Or, quiet. Something...I don't know. There's something I'm not seeing but it isn't that my brain's not working. It isn't --"

Mrs. Barish: "Maybe it has to do with feelings."

Gila: "Say more, please."

Mrs. Barish: "Well, I was just finding myself wondering what you're *feeling* about grieving and if that is relevant here."

Gila: "Continue."

Mrs. Barish: "Well, just that maybe what you need isn't really to *think* about it more, but to *feel* something about it."

Gila: "Well, you're right, it has to do with feelings. That's where I got to, also. After Chicago. That's why I'm here. It seemed to me that I know my mind well enough to tell that the problem isn't technical, so to speak. I read everything. I read so much. I understand it. That part is easy. But something is getting stuck."

Mrs. Barish: "I think you have good instincts Gila."

Gila: "I don't know. I don't see what else it could be."

Mrs. Barish: "I think you're right that your feelings are what need attention."

Gila: "So, what do I do?"

Mrs. Barish: "What you're doing. You start to talk about your feelings. Like you're doing."

Gila: "But, this isn't getting anywhere. Or, not getting where the feelings are."

Mrs. Barish: "Yes, but we're just starting. I think that over time it will."

Gila: "No, I don't agree. These aren't feelings that I'm expressing now. These are ideas. Let's not get distracted with classifying different states of being. I only mean, that I'm not feeling something now. I'm just talking about what I think."

Mrs. Barish: "Hm. Well, can you try to talk about your feelings?"

Gila: "I don't have any!"

Mrs. Barish: "Maybe you're just letting your mind do all the work so you don't have a chance to know what you're feeling. Maybe we can pause this conversation for a moment and try to see what you might be feeling?"

Gila: "I'm *not* feeling anything."

Mrs. Barish: [smiling] "Perhaps this is what we were talking about the other day, that you have two different parts of yourself. An intellectual and an emotional self, and the mental side is just so much more powerful than –"

Gila: "You aren't listening. I'm not being defensive."

Mrs. Barish: "Of course you're more comfortable talking about mourning in the abstract, but that's what makes therapy different from writing a paper."

Gila: "I'm going to ignore the implicit hierarchization of self-reflective activities because that would take too long to deconstruct. Although, it *is* annoying, by the way, how you can't acknowledge the power of thinking and writing to organize and push feelings forward. Anyway, yes, I was saying that writing about mourning isn't abstract! I have more feelings reading papers and talking about them than I *ever* do in here when you ask me, when we're talking about things that I'm *supposed* to have deep feelings about! Reading Eggers, Henry

James, AIDS memoirs, Joan Didion, John Donne, *that* stuff brings me to tears. This stuff...I can't relate to what you're asking me."

Mrs. Barish: "Maybe that's because it's harder to have your own feelings."

Gila: "But, I do have my own feelings! Just not when I'm sitting here talking to *you*."

Mrs. Barish: "Well, maybe that's because I'm asking you to talk about things that are uncomfortable for you."

Gila: "Like what?"

Mrs. Barish: "Like your feelings about your loss, for one thing. Or, about your past more generally. You don't say anything about your mother even though I'm sure you have a tremendous amount of feeling about her. It sounds like she was very difficult? You never mention your husband, so I don't know anything about him. There is a whole lot that most people talk about in here that you are refusing to approach and I think we need to start there if we want to get to know you better."

Gila: "But, this *is* getting to know me. Why would I need to talk about that stuff? It's so goddamn boring. I wouldn't survive the process of telling it to you. There is this scene in Eggers where he says, *there, I've told you all the gruesome details of my parents' deaths, you even know many times a day I masturbate, now what do you know? I have given you nothing. This is like a snake shedding its skin!* I love that moment; it's how I feel in here. I wish that you could understand –"

Mrs. Barish: "But, Gila, you haven't told me those details, about the losses you've endured. You refuse to talk about them at all."

Gila: "Because they're *not* relevant. To my question. To this. They are relevant to my life, of course. To how I ended up here, to why I talk in this way, and whatever, but they are not the reason I can't see what I'm trying to say, or that something is blocking me. You're looking for some terrible thing I've repressed, but I haven't. Can't you understand that?"

Mrs. Barish: "I didn't say you were *repressing* anything."

Gila: "No, maybe not but that's the logic you're using. And also, why do you keep saying I'm *refusing* to talk. I'm not refusing in some obnoxious way. When I say I'm a good kid everywhere else, it's because I would do whatever you wanted me to if I could. I don't *want* to be difficult anywhere, ever, with anyone, but this isn't about my personal preferences. I thought we were trying to figure something out? So, if I'm not going certain places, it's because they aren't in the right direction. You reading it that way, though, suggests to me that you're interpreting my behavior based on your own sense of being injured by the way I'm asking to be heard."

Mrs. Barish: [smiling] "Gila, does it occur to you that maybe you don't always know the right direction to go in?"

Gila: "You're smiling like you think it's obvious that this whole diatribe of mine is really a defense."

Mrs. Barish: "Well? Do you think it's possible that maybe *I* know something about where you need to go?"

Gila: "No. No offense. But no."

Mrs. Barish: "Maybe that's a problem. That you don't trust me."

Gila: "You're getting distracted."

Mrs. Barish: "Excuse me?"

Gila: "You're getting distracted by stupid things like do I trust you? *Of course* I don't trust you. Why would I? But, that doesn't matter. I need you to set aside your own shrink-ego for a moment, please."

Mrs. Barish: "What matters then?"

Gila: "I don't know. At least that's finally a better question though."

Mrs. Barish: "You say the past is irrelevant. That you don't need to talk about it in order to understand what's happening now. But, what about your feelings about your family? Do you think any of that is relevant to what you're going through now?"

Gila: "I don't know. Like what?"

Mrs. Barish: "Like losing your father. You must have been angry? Or, your grief at being left with your mother. That must have been difficult. I'm sure it wasn't easy to be fighting with your mom right after your father died."

Gila: "But, I *didn't* fight with her. I have never fought with her."

Mrs. Barish: "But, you mentioned that she was difficult and –"

Gila: "She was. She made everything ten times more difficult than it ever needed to be. But, I couldn't *fight* with her. She couldn't help it."

Mrs. Barish: "You feel protective of her?"

Gila: "You're not getting it. It's not that kind of thing where I have secret feelings about her that I've *repressed* and now you're going to get me to *express* them. It was my *job* to raise them both, that's all. That's what I tried to do. Do you get mad at a teenager for being a teenager? Maybe sometimes, but you *understand* it. That's how it was with her."

Mrs. Barish: "I'm not trying to say there are certain feelings that you should have felt, I just think there must be a lot of feelings there."

Gila: "Maybe, but not the way you're looking for them."

Mrs. Barish: "How can you be so sure?"

Gila: "I'm *telling* you how! Because, I don't have that *feeling self* that you keep looking for. You keep saying, what about *this* feeling? Let's go back and be defenseless and talk about *that* feeling. If only I would stop my mind from getting in the way, all would be revealed etcetera, but you don't seem to understand that I don't *feel* things in the way that you're describing. Never have."

Mrs. Barish: "Yes. But, I think that's because your intellectual self is more powerful and you need help letting your emotional self out."

Gila: "Again with that dichotomy! What if I don't have the kind of emotional self you're talking about?"

Mrs. Barish: "Of course you do. It's just that you're resistant because that is the part of you that doesn't know everything all the time. That's vulnerable and you don't want to be in that place, which I can't blame you for. But, that's where we would need to go if you want this work to help you."

Gila: "But...I don't get it. It doesn't add up."

Mrs. Barish: "Sure it does. Everyone has resistances, Gila."

Gila: "Fine. Yes, maybe. But, what I *don't* get is why you're talking about this, about me as though my cerebral self is somehow like a gate that we need to slip past to get to my feelings."

Mrs. Barish: "I couldn't have said it better myself."

Gila: "But, *I'm* not saying that. That makes no sense."

Mrs. Barish: "Of course it does. You just said yourself that your feelings are blocked."

Gila: "But not by my thoughts!"

Mrs. Barish: "This is semantics, Gila."

Gila: "Are you kidding me? This is language. And, we communicate in *language*, for better or worse."

Mrs. Barish: "I just think you're doing here exactly what you're describing. You're trying to bring an emotional moment under the control of your rational mind."

Gila: "I can't believe you're *actually* saying this, actually *believing* that I have a feeling 'self' hiding behind an intellectual one. It is so simplistic that it's embarrassing. It is so...you obviously didn't hear the part where I explained that I am trying to talk with you. That I am *not* holding my feelings back."

Mrs. Barish: "Well, sure I did, I heard you say that, but then I can also see that you're *not* sharing your feelings with me."

Gila: "I know but not because I am *resisting*, or whatever. I'm *trying* to talk to you."

Mrs. Barish: [throwing up her hands, exaggeratedly] "Well, then what's going on?"

Gila: "I don't know! *That's* the problem I'm trying to solve! Why can I only have deep feelings when I'm reading or talking to teachers? That's what *I* don't understand. Because it's more than just small differences, or that I don't trust you, or that you ask distracting, often inane questions. That all seems beside the point. I can't even *relate* to the person you're describing, who's been through shit and feels some things about it. It's like you're describing someone else. When I

listen to Professor Raynite or when Ms. Tobin talks to me, I know that there are things I feel. But otherwise, I don't know, it isn't there."

Mrs. Barish: "I think by now this kind of verbal acrobatics is probably second nature to you."

Gila: "Meaning?"

Mrs. Barish: "That your intellect is a very precocious machine, protecting you from unwanted feelings. So that even when you try to feel something, you can't."

Gila: "I can't believe this! It doesn't seem to matter what I say. In your mind, my feelings are there but I don't want to talk about them because...I am resistant? Because I'd rather be a shithead, going from therapist to therapist, each one calling me a different version of an asshole? You're right, my feelings *are* in prison and I'm the guard holding the keys. I'm just too *fucking* comfortable or resistant or chicken shit to let them out. My mind is precious armor, lucky me! That must be why the *only* time I've gotten *close* to any feelings that felt deep, it was with people who could *think* with me. Why I have the most intensity of emotion when my *mind* is helping me to sharpen what I see."

Mrs. Barish: "I'm not saying your mind is the bad guy."

Gila: "Yes you goddamn are! I can't believe it."

Mrs. Barish: "I think you're misunderstanding me. Your mind is very important to you, and no one is taking it away from you. I'm only saying that it has a defensive function as well."

Gila: "But, you're absolutely *wrong*. Not that a mind can't be defensive. Not that I can't intellectualize. Not that I can't enlist my mind in the service of some heavy-duty resistance to the cure. But, that's *not* what I'm describing here. I want to know the things I feel. I am desperate to find out what I

know. For god's sake, I write and have always written. I break my head. I talk to teachers. I always want to know what's true. I am begging you to help me see the things I can't see, but you're just getting distracted by some reductionist distinction that misses the point and, therefore, the problem and...what-ever, it doesn't matter."

Mrs. Barish: "But, Gila, I *am* trying to help you."

Gila: "Then, tell me what I need to do. I know something isn't working."

Mrs. Barish: "I *am* telling you what I think you need."

Gila: "To talk?"

Mrs. Barish: "That's right."

Gila: "About my feelings."

Mrs. Barish: "Yes."

Gila: "Even though I say I can't."

Mrs. Barish: "I think you can."

Gila: "I should just check my thinking at the door and surrender to what's buried deep inside."

Mrs. Barish: "Well, hey, you don't have to check your mind anywhere. You have a wonderful mind. Maybe we can trust that it will still be there, when you need it."

Gila: "What if I don't think the two parts are separate?"

Mrs. Barish: "I can't force you to talk, if you don't want to. You know that."

Gila: "But, I didn't say I didn't *want* to."

Mrs. Barish: "Well, then I think you can."

Gila: "Whatever."

Mrs. Barish: "I'm not sure what that's supposed to mean."

Gila: "It isn't. Nothing."

Mrs. Barish: "Well we're out of time for today. But, maybe next time you can tell me what it means?"

Gila: "It means you aren't listening. I'm sorry. I like you but –"

Mrs. Barish: "I like you too."

Gila: "I wish I could be different, so that maybe I could work with you. I'm sorry. I am. It's probably my fault. But I'm not built that way. I can't."



It is the end of January. Bitter cold temperatures, hard ice, and snow. On this Saturday morning, in Midtown Manhattan, the auditorium is being warmed by the crowds of eager students and clinicians filling its seats. The famous Dr. Caroline Jaspers is lecturing on the future of feminist thought within psychoanalysis. Gila is sitting in a row at the back, alongside other students and friends taking courses on psychoanalysis that term.

Before the lecture begins, Gila has been saying to the person next to her that she has never read any of Jaspers's work but thinks it's a little more historical-political than what she's usually interested in. They are chatting and laughing before the lecture begins. As soon as the lecture is over, Gila, restless to get up, says to her seatmate that she has to run down the auditorium steps, to the edge of the stage. When noticing Gila's nervousness, the girl asks her if everything is okay. Gila says that she can't breathe, she needs to talk to Dr. Jaspers, needs to find a way to introduce herself before she leaves.

Caroline Jaspers is in her late sixties, a small, angular frame, rugged open face and bright blue eyes. She has short and shaggy white hair that she runs her fingers through periodically. She is wearing faded black jeans and a black half-zip sweater, looking mannish, confident, and athletic. She looks simultaneously sprightly and immersed intensively in thought. She has an accent but it's not traceable to any particular language, so much as the culmination of multiple fluencies: German, French, English, the American Midwest. After a train of people have come on stage to congratulate her on her lecture and shake her hand, and some familiar friends have spent excited moments catching up, Dr. Caroline Jaspers glances over at Gila, who is looking up at her on stage, waiting. Dr. Caroline Jaspers notices that Gila is still there. Ten, then twenty minutes later and when there is a break in the parade of people vying for her attention, she takes a few steps to the edge of the stage and bends her knees, leans forward, asks, "Are you waiting for me?"

Gila: "Yes."

Dr. Caroline Jaspers: "What can I do for you?"

Gila: "My name is Gila. Ashtor. You need to be my analyst."

Dr. Caroline Jaspers: [smiles broadly and looks surprised] "Is that so?"

Gila: "Yes, please. I am begging you. I know that you don't know me but I've been looking and...it's you. You need to please say yes. I am a student, I finished a degree and now I'm planning a PhD. I study philosophy and literature, I –"

Dr. Caroline Jaspers: "Whoa, okay, hold it there. What did you say your name was?"

Gila: "Gila."

Dr. Caroline Jaspers: "Now, Gila, I am very flattered that you think maybe I can help you. But, this is a little unusual."

Gila: "I know, I'm sorry. It's just that I've been looking. Everywhere. And just now, the way you talked. I know that I can talk to you. Please. I will do anything. I will –"

Dr. Caroline Jaspers: "Now, now, let's not get so far ahead of ourselves, okay? How about I give you my card? I am sure I have a card somewhere."

[she begins rummaging through the pockets of her jeans. Then, not finding one, calls to an assistant nearby to pass her a card, which she does]

Dr. Caroline Jaspers: "Good. Here it is. This is my card. What do you say you call me and we can make arrangements to talk about this more in person? What did you say your name was? Ah, yes, Gila. I'll remember. Call me and leave me a message and we'll make a plan to meet, okay?"

It is a frigid and bright January winter day on New York City's Lower East Side. The streets, normally bustling with skaters, dealers, high school kids and local area inhabitants, is deserted and quiet in the morning. Like most buildings in the area, this one is decrepit: the paint is peeling off the doors, the buzzer isn't working, and there is faded graffiti across the residents' directory. Gila checks the business card again and again, walks back and forth to see the addresses on other buildings, to make sure this is the right one. She is wearing jeans, a buttoned-down navy sweater and loafers. After waiting for someone from the building to leave so the door can open again, Caroline Jaspers appears in the same faded black jeans and black half-zip sweater.

Dr. Caroline Jaspers: "Oh, come in, come in! It is so cold outside! This buzzer isn't working, eh? Ach! Come and get warmed up."

[Dr. Jaspers winds them through to a dimly lit corner basement apartment, at the back of the building. There is a single bookshelf of dusty hardcovers, a desk with piles of papers covering its surface, two leather armchairs with end tables propping up lamps and a small dark chestnut velvet couch]

Dr. Caroline Jaspers: "Come in, come in. Would you like some tea?"

Gila: [startled] "No, thank you. It's okay."

Dr. Caroline Jaspers: "I have a kettle here, it's very easy? Will you let me know if you change your mind? I drink so many cups of tea sitting here all day."

Gila: "Thank you, very much. Thank you for agreeing to meet me."

Dr. Caroline Jaspers: "Yes, well. It's not everyday someone comes up to you at a conference as you did and says what you said, eh? Pretty unusual? And I've been doing this a very long time. But we'll get to that a little later. You can call me Caroline, if

you'd like. I tell my patients and my students to do whatever feels comfortable to them."

Gila: "Thank you, Dr. Jaspers."

Dr. Caroline Jaspers: "Yes, I didn't think you would elect to use my first name. There's something very formal about you, isn't there? So unusual for your age. That's okay, whatever helps you feel at ease. Get comfortable, please. You look so nervous."

Gila: [shifts in her seat, tries to lean back but then sits upright again] "Thank you, yes, I can get very nervous sometimes. I'm sorry."

Dr. Caroline Jaspers: "We all do, don't we? And, it's just so cold out there. I apologize you had to wait out there. These aren't very fancy digs for a scholar of psychoanalysis, yes? Ach, it'll have to do, won't it."

Gila: "It's very warm."

Dr. Caroline Jaspers: "You like it? Good, I'm glad to hear that. It is my corner. I can't complain. Of course, it would be nice to have more space and slightly better, more, how shall we say, presentable surroundings. I know so many of my colleagues are uptown on the West or East Side. But, I have always been here. I'm rather comfortable with it, I have to say. It's a little rough. But, it is warm, isn't it?"

Gila: "Yes."

Dr. Caroline Jaspers: "So. Would you like to tell me a little bit about yourself? You mentioned that you are a student, is that right? I don't think I caught the nature of your studies, do you mind telling me again?"

Gila: "I studied literature and philosophy at Chicago. Now I am taking some courses in psychoanalysis. I want to continue on

to a PhD, I think. I love psychoanalysis, but I miss the rigor of academe and...I don't know. I came here, to the city, trying to figure something out about myself, but I don't know how to be in therapy. That's why I came up to you the way I did. I know it is unusual. I'm sorry. But...the way you lectured. It's like, I already trust you. I know that sounds very strange but I've felt this way before with certain people. So, I know that I'm not wrong. Even though it sounds like I'm basing it on almost nothing."

Dr. Caroline Jaspers: "I'm not too concerned with how unusual it sounds. I believe you can see something in someone pretty quickly. That doesn't sound so hard to comprehend. Now I'm not exactly sure what you saw in *me*, per se, but that's a different matter. I understand the general feeling you're trying to describe, I think."

Gila: "Thank you, so much, thank you. I was worried you would dismiss me out of hand. I brought things that I've written in school, so you can see that my interests are related to things you're interested in. In case that will help you decide to take me on as a patient."

Dr. Caroline Jaspers: "Oh? If you brought me papers that you'd like me to read, I'm happy to do so. Sure. Of course. It would be a good way to get to know you better."

Gila: "Thank you. Oh, thank you so much. I am so grateful; I don't know what to say."

Dr. Caroline Jaspers: "Well, but let's hold it there a moment, because it's not that simple. You see, I'm leaving psychoanalysis. Well, not leaving the field, of course, but I'm moving to a different country, where I will focus more on writing. I have been appointed the general editor of Winnicott's papers, which is a lovely honor of course, but also a tremendous time commitment. I am winding down my practice here, you see? I can't take on new patients."

Gila: "But –"

Dr. Caroline Jaspers: "I know, this must be terribly disappointing for you and I'm deeply sorry about that. You seem like you're really and very determinedly searching for something. I am sorry because I can see that you thought that I could give it to you. But there's just no way around it. It isn't personal, you can see that, I hope?"

Gila: "But you would be perfect. I can't go back, out there, to looking. I can't. You don't understand. I have...I met so many people. I tried. Please. You have to hear me out. This isn't typical. I –"

Dr. Caroline Jaspers: "I know. I'm sorry. I can see this is terrible news for you. I am very sorry. Now, would it help, do you think, to tell me a little bit about what you're looking for? Or, what it is you think I understand that other people don't? Maybe it would help me get to know you a little better to hear some of that. Shall we try that?"

Gila: [shaking her head, looking at the ground] "I don't know. I've tried to be in therapy. I keep trying. Different therapists. So many different kinds. More Freudian, less Freudian. People who specialize in trauma, in Kohut, in working with grief, whatever. But all I hear, from everyone, is that I'm defensive. Or, resistant. That I don't know how to be in therapy. That I don't know how to talk. Which is true. I don't know how to talk. Except to certain people that *aren't* therapists. Everyone has told me that I'm either playing games, protecting my defensive self, or refusing to surrender. They all say different versions of 'you aren't willing to do the work of really being a patient,' even though I don't think I'm *doing* anything at all. I just can't talk the way they want me to. I don't know why."

Dr. Caroline Jaspers: "Hm. Why do you think they're saying that?"

Gila: "Because it's difficult for me to talk. And, when they try to ask me questions, I get distracted by their underlying assumptions, which I can hear in their questions. But, when I try to point that out, it just devolves. And then they say I'm intellectualizing or displacing my emotions or distracting them on purpose so I don't have to be the vulnerable one. I can see how it would look that way. I can be very rude, I guess. But, I'm not doing what they *think* I'm doing, I'm really not. I'm *trying* to talk, but I can't do it. Not like that."

Dr. Caroline Jaspers: "Well, I can see, I think, how that might happen. People don't take too kindly to having their prejudices pointed out to them, now do they?"

Gila: "No. But it's my fault, really. I know it is. I am impatient. And I don't talk about what I'm supposed to talk about."

Dr. Caroline Jaspers: "And, what is it that you're supposed to talk about?"

Gila: "I don't know. My childhood. My father died when I was 12. He got sick when I was eight. He had a rare blood cancer. My mother is difficult and I took care of her and my baby brother. She is volatile and destructive. But we got along, made it work. And, the bakery business. I ran that when I was there and now I take care of things from afar. Which is different but we're all very close. I had an older brother too – who died."

Dr. Caroline Jaspers: [sighing and rustling her hair] "I'm sorry to hear that. It's awful to have so much loss when you're still very young. You said you were how old?"

Gila: "Eight when he got sick, twelve when he died."

Dr. Caroline Jaspers: "Such a pivotal age."

Gila: "I don't know."

Dr. Caroline Jaspers: "Well, sure you do. You have read something of child development, I presume? So, you know that 12 is an age when you are going from being a child to becoming an adolescent. It is puberty. It is such a difficult time where so much change is happening. And, for you to lose your father then [shakes her head]. It's such a difficult time for that kind of loss. You were close to your father, I take it? From the brief way you described it, I gathered that was the case."

Gila: "Yes. Very. We talked. We could connect that way. I couldn't ever do that with anyone else."

Dr. Caroline Jaspers: "You mean with your mother and brother?"

Gila: "Yeah. They are both very different. I get along with them fine, it's nothing like that. I just...I never talked to them. I only could do that with my dad."

Dr. Caroline Jaspers: "That's a tremendous loss then, isn't it, of course?"

Gila: [her voice is beginning to crack] "I don't understand why I can feel the effect of that here but not when I'm talking to others, other therapists."

Dr. Caroline Jaspers: "Hm. I wonder. What do you think?"

Gila: "I don't know. With you, when I say these things, they have meaning, somehow. Like you *understand* it. But, I don't feel that when I try to talk to others. I end up thinking it all means nothing, I have no feeling, or something like that. I'm so confused."

Dr. Caroline Jaspers: "Hm, yes, that is interesting. I wonder what you're trying to tell me."

Gila: "It's like you know me, somehow. Already. The way you listen. I don't know."

Dr. Caroline Jaspers: "I'm surprised because I don't think I'm really listening in a particularly special way. I'm just hearing what you're saying."

Gila: "But then, why do I feel comfortable? Why do I trust you?"

Dr. Caroline Jaspers: "Well, I don't know, why do you? Do you think it's something I said in my lecture? Did something seem meaningful to you then?"

Gila: "No, I don't think so. The truth is, I don't even know what you said in your lecture. I couldn't really concentrate. As soon as you started talking, it was your voice. All I could pay attention to was the *way* you sounded."

Dr. Caroline Jaspers: "And what way was that?"

Gila: "I don't know. Rigorous. Warm. Tender and severe. Precise. I felt that I could tell you anything and you would understand it."

Dr. Caroline Jaspers: "Hm. Interesting." [she runs her fingers through her hair, then folds one leg across the other and leans an elbow on her knees] "So, perhaps it's something then about my being an academic. A professor. Perhaps, it has something to do with that?"

Gila: "Yes, maybe. It's like I know your mind is solid. I can trust it with my thinking and I guess the feelings follow afterward?"

Dr. Caroline Jaspers: "Ah-ha. Yes. That makes some sense."

Gila: "It does?"

Dr. Caroline Jaspers: "Sure. Yes. You need to know there is something solid, as you say, underneath you. And, without that, you feel unsafe."

Gila: "But then, why is everyone saying my thinking is defensive?"

Dr. Caroline Jaspers: "Well, I don't know. Of course thinking can be defensive. But, as I'm sure you know from what you've read, *anything* can be defensive."

Gila: "But, does that mean I can only talk to someone who is also a professor? Please, that can't be true. I have been looking for so long and everything always ends up the same way. Is there any way you can talk to me long-distance? Anything? Please. It is impossible for me to talk to anyone."

Dr. Caroline Jaspers: [leans her head back and then brings it forward again] "Gila, don't I wish I could. I see how much you long for some kind of understanding. It is palpable, your yearning for relief."

Gila: [starts to cry a little] "Please. I will do anything. I am a good student. I can take a course? I can visit wherever you'll be once in a while?"

Dr. Caroline Jaspers: "Oh, Gila, it isn't *like* that. Believe me, if I could take you on I would. I would do it in a heartbeat. But –"

Gila: "Then, please. You have to help me. I am so lost out there and I just keep thinking I don't know how to change enough to work with some of the people I've met."

Dr. Caroline Jaspers: "I know. And, believe me when I say that if there was any way I could do it, I would. I really would. Which doesn't mean it wouldn't be a battle between us, you and I, for sure. But, I could take it on, or at least I think I could."

Gila: "But, maybe it doesn't have to be a battle? I will be very good."

Dr. Caroline Jaspers: "Oh no, I don't *want* you to be very good! It would be a challenge, there's no doubt. But, I would do it, I would, if I were continuing to stay in private practice. And, in the country. But, I'm leaving, you see. When you get to my stage in life, it's about time to redirect things and I simply don't have the time to write the way I'd like to when I'm working with so many patients. This was a very tough decision, trust me. Precisely for reasons such as these. I feel drawn to try to help you, but what can I do? I am leaving in a few weeks."

Gila: "But. What...I don't know what to do. I really don't."

Dr. Caroline Jaspers: "Yes, that is the question isn't it?" [leans forward, runs her fingers through her hair, exhales, and leans back again]

Gila: "I wish I knew how to be like this with other people, but I don't. I can't. I never know what to talk about. Or, *how* to talk."

Dr. Caroline Jaspers: "And, you can't start talking as you have done here, with me. Because you don't yet trust their minds and so you don't feel that they'll understand. Yes? I see. But then the process of trying to know their minds, so you can feel comfortable, ends up making you seem like you're defensive and intellectualizing, yes? When really I think you're trying to steer them in a different direction?"

Gila: "Yeah, *toward* my feelings. I don't *want* to get caught up arguing about what I think about x or y."

Dr. Caroline Jaspers: "But, that happens anyway?"

Gila: "Because they think that I'm resistant instead of actually struggling. That I'm *withholding* feelings or something. But, I'm not! That's what I don't know how to make them see."

Dr. Caroline Jaspers: "Ah yes, I think I'm starting to understand. They assume that if you can be so eloquent about what you're thinking that you must be able to talk about what you're feeling as well."

Gila: "And, that if I'm not, I'm being difficult. But, I'm not *being* difficult. I don't think? I don't know anymore. Maybe I am without realizing it, I don't know. I keep trying to tell them that I don't have the feelings I'm supposed to have. I don't know why this is."

Dr. Caroline Jaspers: "No one is seeing that you're scared. You're not withholding. No, that isn't right, no. I see that clearly. You want the *truth*. That is clear. Some patients *don't*, and you have to understand that too. It is something you see in this work all the time. You have to respect that and move slowly... Remember Freud said that patients come in and say, doctor I am sick, fix my symptom, yes? You remember that? Of course. Well, so you can see that not everyone wants to really know what's going on in their own minds, but I see that you *do*. You are hungry to understand what's going on with you. It's very admirable, Gila, very brave."

Gila: [shakes her head and stares at the ground, trying not to cry]
"How did you understand all that? It is exactly right, exactly what happens. It doesn't matter what I say, it ends up seeming like resistance of some kind. I don't know how to say what you just said. But also, I don't know how to talk to them if they can't understand that, right away. Why can't other people see it, like you do? You know me even less than most of them. I don't understand."

Dr. Caroline Jaspers: "This is difficult work. And, actually, I think the truth is that you don't really need someone who *understands* things better, per se. I think you understand quite a bit already. I think you're probably far more brilliant than you're even willing to let anyone see. But in time, that will take time. You're very nervous. Very restricted. You haven't leaned back

in your chair a single time. You know that? You're very scared, but of *what* I'm not exactly sure."

Gila: [staring at the ground] "I don't know either."

Dr. Caroline Jaspers: "My hunch would be, based on the little I know, that you don't really need someone who can *explain* things to you. You need someone who can listen. Who you can trust and who can listen. My analyst was a man who said very little and every now and then he would cough just to remind me he was there! He teased me about it, of course, that I was doing the work for both of us. But, he was on to something as well. I didn't need someone to interpret things for me, and I suspect neither do you."

Gila: "No."

Dr. Caroline Jaspers: [leaning forward and resting her elbows on her knees] "But you *do* need something. Because when I sit here looking at you I see a very frightened girl. How old do you think you are right now? Maybe twelve years old, even a little younger. Yes? And, she needs to talk, and someone needs to listen."

Gila: [her head is bent towards the ground; tears are falling on her sweater]

Dr. Caroline Jaspers: "I really wish that I could give you what you want. And what you need. It would be a pleasure, really, I want you to be able to hear that, okay? What can I do instead? I can't think right now of someone I could recommend. Hmm. There are people, smart people of course. Where will you do your PhD? I can find colleagues in any city, that won't be a problem of course...but ah, you know? I also am not sure it's what you need right now. What do you think? Especially after this, after our meeting, it will be hard to suggest someone new, I think. You will want to feel *this* right away, but that's not very easy, as I'm sure you know."

Gila: "Yes. I do."

Dr. Caroline Jaspers: "Hm. [leaning back in her chair, stroking her chin] "I'm not sure what to suggest. There are smart people out there, of course, many smart people who have written smart books. People I think you will like, but there is also something you feel *I* specifically can teach you, yes? And, if that's the case, I don't know what good it would do to send you to try again with someone else. Tell me, since you know about yourself better than I do, what do you think you need right now, given these less than ideal conditions?"

Gila: "I don't know. I'm tired. Of meeting new people and trying to say something and seeming like a jerk all the time. I...I feel that I must be either crazy or very difficult. I will go to someone if you think...I don't know. That they can help me. But I don't know –"

Dr. Caroline Jaspers: "Yes, of course. It must be very draining."

Gila: "Discouraging."

Dr. Caroline Jaspers: "And that too, of course."

Gila: "Is it my fault that this only seems to work for me when the other person knows so much about me without my having to explain it? Does that mean that the problem is with my having to explain myself? Is that where I trip up? Maybe I should learn to do that better?"

Dr. Caroline Jaspers: "Oh, Gila, I don't know that it's so simple. And that question sounds to me a little like you think that it's your fault?"

Gila: "But, it *must* be! If it keeps happening. *I* am the only common denominator."

Dr. Caroline Jaspers: "*And* therapy, don't forget."

Gila: "What do you mean?"

Dr. Caroline Jaspers: "I mean this is a process, a very particular one. And, like any complicated system, it has its strengths and weaknesses. It has blind spots. Like you and I have blind spots. That is to be expected. *You* read Freud. In his better moments, even he understood that, sometimes better than anyone else. It's not for everyone. It sometimes takes a lot of work. "

Gila: "But, I was trying, I really was, I –"

Dr. Caroline Jaspers: "Yes, I'm sure you were. I'm sure you were. You don't strike me as the type to give up easily, on anything. Very persistent, yes?" [smiles warmly] "Just like you're sitting here now because you felt that I could maybe help you."

Gila: "I *know* you can."

Dr. Caroline Jaspers: "Indeed. So you say. You may be right. I know I would certainly try to. I am not perfect either, eh? You know that."

Gila: "It's not about the person being perfect. It's...in graduate school, Raynite would always tell me that I shouldn't idealize her, she didn't have all the answers, etc., and I kept saying that isn't the point. I don't think you're a god. It isn't like that at all."

Dr. Caroline Jaspers: "No?"

Gila: "No. It's about how you know something about me that I don't really know yet. Something like that. And, with everyone else, I'm just trying desperately always to explain myself but never manage. Then with you, it's like, you listen to me differently. You hear it differently for some reason."

Dr. Caroline Jaspers: "I have been doing this a long time."

Gila: [shaking her head] “It isn’t anything like that. It’s you, who you are. I am sorry if that sounds silly. It always made Professor Raynite uncomfortable. But, I don’t know how else to say it. I hear it in your voice. When you lectured. When I heard you talk, I knew a few sentences in that – I knew.”

Dr. Caroline Jaspers: “You mean it is something about my *voice* that you feel drawn to?”

Gila: “That sounds ridiculous, doesn’t it? I’m sorry, I know it does. But as soon as I heard you speak. You sound familiar. Your accent, intonation, everything. And when you lectured, there was...I don’t know...so much sharpness in your arguments. The way you made them. Maybe it is the precision? Makes me feel safe. Like I could trust you. Like you would understand. You could *think* about things with me and...I don’t know...I’m not sure why that’s important...maybe then I wouldn’t be so alone, I don’t know...I don’t...” [looks down at her hands and tries to hold back tears]

Dr. Caroline Jaspers: “Ach Gila, I am sorry you have had such a hard time finding someone you could talk to.” [she leans forward and bends down, resting her elbows on her knees] “It sounds from the way you describe this feeling, that you’ve felt this way before, perhaps in other instances. Is that so?”

Gila: “Yes. Two other teachers. They are brilliant too. In different ways. Tobin knows exactly what she wants, she sees everything. Raynite is magnificent. I think she sees more than she can bear. They saved my life, both of them. I can’t even imagine where I’d be without them. They...I felt this same way then too, immediately. I knew.”

Dr. Caroline Jaspers: “Ah-ha. We are your three guardian angels then, yes?”

Gila: [smiles and looks up] “Yes.”

Dr. Caroline Jaspers: "You mentioned that you were considering going on to do a PhD, is that right? Do you *want* to do that?"

Gila: "I think so. I don't know."

Dr. Caroline Jaspers: "You remember Freud's paper 'On Negation'? What did he say there, eh? That there is no *no* in the unconscious. *I don't know* means I don't *want* to know!"

Gila: [blushing] "But, I really don't –"

Dr. Caroline Jaspers: "*Try* to know."

Gila: "Yes. I have applied, but I'm not sure. My professor, who I worked with, says I would be missing things in academe and maybe wouldn't like it. But, I've always wanted to think and write. There's so much I want to learn and do. I just don't..."

Dr. Caroline Jaspers: "Yes? Well, academe isn't perfect, of course. But, you must do it. The PhD. It will be good for you. There will be plenty of things you don't like, no doubt, but you need it too. To refine your inborn skills."

Gila: "Thank you. I haven't been sure. I was worried that..."

Dr. Caroline Jaspers: "No, no, [brushing her hair away from her face] nothing to worry about. It will be good for you. I'm sure about it. And then, we can talk more about philosophy, yes? Who are you interested in? Maybe you'll visit me, if you're ever in Montreal and we can grab lunch or something. How does that sound?"

Gila: "Oh, yes, of course. Thank you. I appreciate –"

Dr. Caroline Jaspers: "Well, it isn't what we hoped for, is it? No, but it will have to do for now. You can write to me. Would you like that?"

Gila: "But, what if my notes are too long? I wouldn't know what is appropriate."

Dr. Caroline Jaspers: "Ah, so much fear, Gila. So much restriction! Eh? You need some help with that, yes? Always feeling so nervous. Always checking yourself. Stopping yourself. You must feel so constrained. That's okay. It will take time. Yes, perhaps a lot of time. And help. I think you could find someone eventually. But, it will be good for you to start a PhD, begin to do your scholarship. I don't believe I exactly know what you're interested in? Maybe we can talk about that a little bit, if you'd like. It will be good to have a little rest from this search for a therapist, I think. You never know, maybe in a different moment, depending on what you're working on or thinking about, things will shift and move around a little and something that was hard before may feel a little different. From a different angle, that kind of thing. What do you say? Does that sound like a reasonable plan? You are so constricted, I can barely tell if you're nodding, you poor thing! Perhaps a PhD will help you with that too. It will be good to gain some grounding and the mind is a wonderful way to do that. Don't let anyone tell you otherwise. Of course it shouldn't come at the expense of a vivid emotional world, but I suspect that's not quite a risk for you. You seem to feel things very deeply, very intensely from what I can tell. I believe it could be different at a later point. And, who knows? Perhaps our paths shall cross in the academic world? For now, what about we say you'll write to me and I will be sure to always write back."

Gila: "But –"

Dr. Caroline Jaspers: "No, no. No hesitation. Shall we say that then? You'll write to me, whatever length you feel like, and I'll write back. Now, of course, my letters may be briefer than yours because I have commitments that I have to be accountable for, you understand that, of course? And, you won't take it too personally, I hope?"

Gila: "Yes, I can try that. Thank you."

Dr. Caroline Jaspers: "I know it isn't what you were hoping for. I understand that. We can meet a few more times before I leave, if you'd like? Try to get to know you a little bit better?"

Gila: "I wouldn't know what to say, I..."

Dr. Caroline Jaspers: [sitting upright] "Then let's do that, yes? I think my next patient may already be here and that means I'm going to have to go to the door. We don't want her standing outside now, do we? [standing up] We can walk to the door together; would that be okay? I'll see if she's already here. I haven't cured her of her tardiness just yet, alas! Shall we? Why don't you tell me what philosophers you'd like to research?"



It is one year later. Early summer. Sunday. Sunny. Near a public bench in a small leafy park in the East Village, New York City. The streets are bustling with people riding bikes, walking, talking, skateboards cutting across concrete. There are sounds of music and honking and brunches at restaurant patios filling the air. Gila has just bought a scoop of mint-chip from a boutique dairy-free shop, a treat for finishing the first year of her PhD coursework. The cell phone in the pocket of her jeans is vibrating. It is a call from D, she lets it go to voicemail. The day is beautiful and maybe it can wait. A few seconds later, when he calls again, she plants the spoon into the scoop and answers.

D: "Yo."

Gila: "Hi there. What's going on today?"

D: "Don't know. Nothing much. Whatever."

Gila: "Are you okay?"

D: "Why?"

Gila: "Because you don't sound okay. What's going on?"

D: "Nothing. Don't know, I – Whatever."

Gila: "You need to say a little more than that, please. What's going on? Fill me in. We talked last night and you seemed fine?"

D: "Yeah whatever, I – It's – Fuck it, I don't know. Don't fucking know."

Gila: "Hm. That doesn't sound too good. What's going on, D? Fill me in, okay? I can't read your mind. Can you help me out? Let's help me out. Please. I'm listening."

D: "It's nothing, just – I'm – Fuck it, G, I'm done."

Gila: "You're done? What are you *done* with?"

D: "Everything."

Gila: "You can't be done with everything. What happened? Did someone do something confusing or offensive? Did you get into another fight with Mum? Tell me, so I can figure it out. Okay? Come, I'm listening. Please try to talk."

D: "I'm just done, yo, fucking done. I've had it. Everything – It's fucking everything, okay, it's – everything. I'm – gonna go, okay?"

Gila: "No, it's not okay. Where exactly do you think you're going?"

D: "It doesn't matter. Forget it."

Gila: "Um, I don't think so, buddy. Where exactly do you think you're going?"

D: "I'm just done, okay? So fuck it, really. Don't try to talk me out of it. You can't, you – can't do anything. I did this and there's nothing you can..."

Gila: "D, tell me right now. What did you do?"

D: "I got in trouble – bad. Fuck yeah, this girl – She's bad news, she's – has something. I don't know. Can't say what. Doesn't fucking matter, but – if I go with her, like live with her, some shit like that, she says it'll all work out – Okay, I'm going. I decided."

Gila: "You are going *nowhere*, understand? Is this girl the girl you have been dating for the past few weeks? You told me she was dangerous, that's why you broke up?"

D: [laughs] "Fuck yeah. Didn't think – Hoped you wouldn't. I should have fucking known that you'd remember – fucking – anyway so what? She seemed that way before, but now – it doesn't matter 'cuz I'm heading out."

Gila: "I don't understand. Why? Who will you talk to? How will you deal with stressful things by yourself, if you're saying the person you are going to be with is crazy?"

D: "Yeah, she's some crazy ass – anyway, I know you don't like when I talk that way but – seriously G, I'm finished here."

Gila: "I know you say that when you get discouraged about something, but let's figure out what's getting to you and we'll go from there. Okay?"

D: "I'm fucking done okay – Okay? What kind of life is this? I can't do anything. A fucking waste of life I am. At least she likes me..."

Gila: "You are not a waste of life, don't say such things, you're brilliant. You have a job that you're managing very well in. Think about it: just last year you were almost in jail, okay? Look at that improvement. Because you work so hard. There are days that are discouraging, so what? I have them too. But, then you have to just stick with it, talk and think it through."

D: "No more. I can't no – can't do it anymore. I'm not like you, okay?"

Gila: "I know that, okay? I never asked you to be anything like me. Do I? I'm just saying you can't run away somewhere with someone dangerous when things get hard."

D: "They're always hard."

Gila: "Well yes, but..."

D: "I'm fucking *done*. G, you have – You are the best. You are – have – done as much as possible but maybe I'm too – fucking lazy."

Gila: "That *doesn't* mean you just give up, and hurl yourself off a mountain cliff, okay? It means you take a step back and breathe and talk and –"

D: "I can't."

Gila: "You can."

D: "I can't."

Gila: "I know you can. You are despairing. That makes sense. I'll come to Toronto tomorrow, and we'll find a therapist. A good one. I already have someone in mind. A colleague of someone I know in Boston. I think he's good. I would have suggested him before...maybe I should have. I didn't think you would be ready, but maybe this is the right time. Also, we can look to find another job, okay? We can..."

D: "I can't. I have no money. Can't just do shit like you make it sound – so easy. It isn't like that isn't –"

Gila: "I will take care of that, for now. Okay? I've always worked. I have savings I can use. And, you'll see that maybe this will be a moment you can deal with things. Confront things you've been unable to address before. How does that sound? I'll fly in tomorrow, and we'll have some lunch, at the business, or maybe somewhere else. And then, we'll get to work, and find things to make things better."

D: "It's so much work."

Gila: "I know. It is. But I am right here with you. I have always been. And this is just the next step, okay? This makes a lot of sense. You're getting older. You want a more fulfilling life. That takes some time, for you to get better at some things, but it can happen."

D: "Not for me."

Gila: "Yes, it can. Stop saying no. Stop being so despondent. You are not alone with this. I'm right here. We are going to make things better. Find you a better job? Working with your hands? I've always thought that would be a better fit."

D: "Is that shit more school?"

Gila: "No, I don't think so. We'll find one that isn't. How about that? Okay? I promise you, we'll find something. We always do. As long as you just stick with this, it is a process..."

D: "Feels fucking stupid."

Gila: "Well, yes, I know sometimes it *feels* that way. Sometimes the world is hard for me too. But you put one foot in front of the other and..."

D: "Fuck it. I'm not like you, G. Just give it up, okay? Just fucking forget you ever knew me. Forget. Stop with this shit about how things will be one day. I'm tired, fucking tired, do you – understand?"

Gila: "I do. But..."

D: "What's the worst shit – Okay, name the worst thing."

Gila: "That can happen? If you run away with someone who you've described as volatile and violent and whatever else?"

D: "Yeah that shit. So what? What's gonna happen?"

Gila: "I don't know what's *going* to happen, only that that kind of instability isn't safe for you. It takes a lot of work to make sure you don't get set off, aren't reeling all the time, but here you're throwing yourself right into it. Into something that will set you off in ways you can't manage on your own."

D: "And then what? So what? What's after that?"

Gila: "I don't know."

D: "I fucking kill myself?"

Gila: "I don't know. I can't think –"

D: "So what? Who fucking cares? Not everyone is you, G. You are good to me but – fuck everyone else – I really mean it – fuck 'em. I don't care and – they don't care. No one cares, but you. You have your own life anyways. You – I did my best, okay?"

Gila: "Now you listen, buddy, I don't like how this is going. You're despairing? We can talk about it. You have hard feelings; we can change some things. We did not make it *this* far, past so much motherfucking shit I can't even *tell* you, to have your smart ass throw your hands up one day and say, sorry yo, I'm checking out. You got it? That's not happening. You're going to put on some music, go to that new burger place you like, get something to eat, then call me when you're back home and we'll talk more. And tomorrow, I will be there and we'll figure this stuff out."

D: "Too late, G. Too fucking late."

Gila: [raising her voice] "Too late for *what*? Answer me. Too late for what?"

D: "Don't know. I'm tired, 'kay. I'm fucking done. Don't worry –"

Gila: "Don't worry? You have some fucking nerve. I goddamn raised you, little shit. You understand? I have pulled your stupid ass out of every single well you've fallen into, every hole you thought was interesting, every corner of trouble you thought you would check into. I have pulled you out, by the hands or by the hair. I don't care how or what, but I am not about to give up now. So you are going to have to..."

D: "You don't get it. You're so smart and all but – you just – don't see it. How the game – it's fucking rigged, G, fucking rigged yo. It's fucking *rigged*."

Gila: "What are you talking about? What game? I don't understand what you're trying to say."

D: "This – This whole shit we're in. It's fucking – Fuck it – Doesn't matter what I do. I won't be normal. You keep trying, saving me from shit. Stop doing that, can't you? You don't see – it doesn't matter. I just get into more shit the next day, or after that, okay?"

Gila: "That is simplistic."

D: "Whatever yo. You're lying to yourself. Thinking I am better than I am – Some shit like that or – whatever."

Gila: "I don't think I have illusions about what you are, okay? But it's my *job* to make sure you're okay. Do you understand that? D? You listening? My fucking job."

D: "You did your best, 'kay? I know that. I don't mean to be – I just can't keep doing this. It's not personal, okay. Not personal. It's just – I can't keep trying. Let me go. If I fuck up from now on, that shit's on me. Goodbye."

Gila: "Oh, don't you dare hang up on me you. Can't. This is the. Fucking job. It's not about my feelings it's. The kingdom is on fire and I hear you. Can't you see I'm burning. D. I hear you loud and clear. But listen. This is not a game. You there? It's fucking life. If you don't. If I don't find you this whole house can burn and. Everything. He built will burn. And it's my *job*. You understand?

I am what stands between you and the blazing burning all around.

Land mines.

All the shit she pulls to trigger your outrage and loathing.
Feelings.

You can't understand or manage.

Thinking you can't reach. My words are bandage
don't do this or that or that or this. We're here together
little shit. You're going nowhere. Out this field like it's a
game?

There is no exit
only forward. Nothing left. What are you doing
saying sorry, tried my best, we're not the same? you fuck-
ing joking?

If I'm not like you, who fucking am I.

If I'm not with you, where am I. And

if we're not in this together. You're my baby
don't go acting like I'm doing favors. Like you didn't know
I did all this. This all was meant to save us
now you're leaving like-

you're *tired*?

every day and year we talk I find another.

Other better way to reach you. Teach you. I'm not stop-
ping.

I'm not dropping out. Not giving up/

there was a vicious God coming for the last-borns first.

I said not happening.

I said not all non-talking baby boys are cursed. To be
destroyed

from inside 'cause they can't fight back. Get overwhelmed
because they have no one to teach them. I have arms.

I made a basket. Baby Moses. I didn't choose it but I.

Won't leave you alone. I made a basket baby.

Put my basket in the reeds. You can't jump ship!

I'll go down with you. Cleaving to your sneakers if I have
to

weaving myself into your jacket if I have to

running after you over the cliff and gliding faster

putting a soft net down before you land to stop disaster

this is my fucking *job*. No matter if it kills me

no matter. As a matter of fact

you think it didn't?

It is me
who watches over you. The shit you pull.
You fall apart it's
me who stands between you and exploding
hears the burning cry in every call. And answers. I live in
constant dread. Foreboding
what will the kid do next.
How will I get him out.
It's me
who fucking raised you up. And me-
how dare you call this shit a game
that you can just walk out off.
Leave. Because you're tired? Don't you think a thousand
times I dreamed of saying fuck it! No
I couldn't leave you in a house on fire
I built a tent within the battlefield. To tend to you. A
medic. This is a war. We're in it together. Here is the home I
made, it isn't much but
we are playing house.
Don't be afraid.
See here's a helmet made from meals I cook you. Armor.
You can't keep it on? It itches? I'll stand in front of you. You
get hurt anyway? I'll put in stitches.
My mind. It's working overtime. My brain
is tough enough to hold your frantic chronic melting down
to stop the train your wordless fury jumps up on.
I'm always on the other end
don't worry what the people say. I'm going nowhere till
you are safe and sound
I'm going no
where are you going?
You can't walk out. Like it's some childhood game
this is my *job* I thought
and in this game you are the boychild and I am the –
I am the –
Who the hell you calling Gila?
I am not some *sister* you can disappoint.
I have been appointed
Been anointed

Dip my head in oil my cup overflows
 I am not your mother. Father. Friend
 I'm not your bro. I am not your keeper
 Listen boy, I'm not in charge. The king is. Dead. Is
 dad said. Watch them. Dad's dead
 Wait.
 I'm just the helper I am
 Just the.
 We are waiting for the king
 to come. And I'm the –
 one who built a tent within a desert where the land is
 burning. Father
 cannot see he's gone but I can hear you. Screaming. I'm
 the –
 one who tells our father who art in heaven. Hallowed be
 thy name.
 What's going on? The
 one who said I do, who said. I'll keep it going when you're
 gone.
 Who said –
 our kindly kingly dad is dead but we are not. Yet
 who said
 this is my *job*
 I have no other jobs but this. Who said
 we won't survive this?
 yes, we will. I promised
 even if I have to be the one. Who
 is the king?
 Now that the boy is gone there's nothing left to lose.
 Fuck it. Fuck it Gila. Fucking shit what do we do.
 In the name of the father and his only son. What
 have I done?
 He said I'm outta here. Said G we're through. Said fuck it I
 say fuck it too.
 Now there's nothing left to do.
 Who am I?

I don't know.
You go the game is over.



It is late October, windy, grey in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The office is colorful, a group practice shared by youthful middle-aged women with clinical PhD's. It is located atop a bagel shop and the waiting room smells like rye and pumpernickel, even in the afternoon. Gila is wearing jeans, a grey hoodie, and sneakers. No jacket. Dr. Teresa Betson is in her early fifties, short salt and pepper hair, angular face and olive skin, athletic shoulders, moving quickly on her feet as if she's on a tennis court. She's wearing a patterned blouse, black slacks, and clogs. She smiles readily to welcome but not to overcompensate. She found Gila in the waiting room, her head bent down staring at the ground and said, in what sounded like a lowered tone, "I'm Terri, you must be Gila?"

T. Betson: "Hi there."

Gila: "Hi."

T. Betson: "I'm Terri. You can just call me Terri."

Gila: [head hanging down, facing the ground] "Ok."

T. Betson: "And, Gila, is that with a hard G or soft one?"

Gila: "Hard."

T. Betson: "That's what I thought. Is it –"

Gila: "Hebrew."

T. Betson: "Are you Israeli?"

Gila: "No. Father was."

T. Betson: "Uh-huh. Yes, I thought it was Israeli."

Gila: [silence, staring at the ground]

T. Betson: "I noticed you haven't looked up once yet. Is it difficult to be here now?"

Gila: "I don't know."

T. Betson: "Okay. That's okay. Therapy can be overwhelming."

Gila: "I don't know."

T. Betson: "We can start with simple basic things? Like, how you found me? On the phone yesterday when we scheduled this appointment, you said you're doing your PhD around here?"

Gila: "Yes."

T. Betson: "In what?"

Gila: "Literature and Philosophy."

T. Betson: [smiling, leaning slightly forward] "That sounds really interesting. Do you have a historical period that you work in, or is that not how it works in English? Forgive me if I'm not too knowledgeable about how specialization works in your field."

Gila: "Theory. I do mostly theory. Psychoanalysis. Trauma. I like every historical period. Or, I don't really notice them. Not sure which."

T. Betson: [laughs] "I think I understand. And, was it someone on campus that gave you my name or...did you find us some other way?"

Gila: "Online. Insurance. Your name was on the list of approved providers. I promised J, my other half, I'd see someone. He's worried and I finally just said ok. Three people. You're the last person."

T. Betson: [leans back a little] "Really? An insurance list? How did you choose then? It's so random that way, isn't it?"

Gila: "I guess. I don't know. Therapy doesn't work for me anyway. I've tried, a lot. I've seen experts, people whose books I read and liked. It doesn't make a difference. I can't be a patient. So. Whatever."

Dr. Betson: "That's surprising. To hear you say how challenging therapy has been for you. You seem easy enough to talk with?"

Gila: "Yeah."

Dr. Betson: "No? Am I missing something?"

Gila: "Whatever. That was never the problem. My being able to *talk*. I can talk to anyone."

Dr. Betson: "Then what was the problem?"

Gila: "I don't know. Actually, I don't care."

[silence]

Dr. Betson: "I'd like to hear if you –"

Gila: "I *don't*."

Dr. Betson: "You knew what I was going to say?"

Gila: "Something about talking more. I don't want to. Once upon a time I could have analyzed this all with you. I can't now."

[silence]

Dr. Betson: "Can I ask then: how did you choose *me*? I mean, if it was an insurance list you had no way of knowing anything about me, right?"

Gila: "I liked your name."

T. Betson: "My name?"

Gila: [head hanging down, facing the ground] "Yeah."

T. Betson: "Hm. Well that's certainly a first. That's funny. Then you won't have a hard time calling me Terri. Or, wait, was it Teresa that you liked?"

Gila: "Yeah."

T. Betson: "Terri?"

Gila: "No."

T. Betson: "Teresa?"

Gila: "I don't know. I just did."

T. Betson: "*Really?* I've never had anyone say that to me before. Hm. Interesting. Well nobody calls me Teresa, so it's just Terri to everyone. Or Dr. Betson, but I'm not usually that formal."

Gila: "Okay."

T. Betson: "Okay?"

Gila: "I'll say, Dr. Betson."

T. Betson: "Did you just say something? You almost whispered, I'm not sure I caught it."

Gila: "Nothing. I am formal."

T. Betson: "Oh. Okay. That's okay, of course."

[silence]

"Do I know you from somewhere? You look kind of familiar."

Gila: [lifts her head slightly to catch her eyes, pauses for a moment, then looks back to the ground] "I don't think so."

T. Betson: "Yeah, just thought I'd ask. You're not from Boston are you? You just look a little familiar."

Gila: "Yeah, so do you."

T. Betson: "I can see you're very quiet. And that's okay, of course. Can I ask what brings you in today?"

Gila: "I promised J."

T. Betson: "J?"

Gila: "My other half. He's worried."

T. Betson: "Is he right to be worried about you?"

Gila: "I don't know. A few months ago, the summer, my brother. Left. He ran away. He got into trouble. I guess, I just, I was responsible for him and failed. And, ever since I just...I guess. Things are difficult."

T. Betson: "I am sorry to hear that. How old is he?"

Gila: "Two years younger, but don't tell me he'll be fine, please. In fact, don't say anything about him. There's no way you can understand. The other two I met just tried to talk me out of it. Don't do that, please. It's hard to understand."

T. Betson: "Okay. I think I can try to do that. What I can see is that you seem to be in a lot of pain."

Gila: [looks up for the first time] "What?"

T. Betson: "You look like you're in anguish."

Gila: "I don't know. My head hurts."

T. Betson: "Oh. I'm sorry about that. Did it just start?"

Gila: "No. Yes. I don't know. I have these headaches."

T. Betson: "Can I ask you about them?"

Gila: "Sure. Whatever."

T. Betson: "Do you get them often? Or, just at certain times of the day?"

Gila: "Always. The whole day, pretty much. Sometimes, when I'm reading, I feel it less. Doesn't matter. Just hurts like hell, whatever."

T. Betson: "And, what do you do? Does anything help?"

Gila: "Curl up on the cold floor."

T. Betson: "Oh, Gila, that sounds really awful! Have you always had headaches like this?"

Gila: "No."

T. Betson: "So, do you think –"

Gila: "Yes. I do. Related to D leaving. Everything that's going on. Yes. Doesn't make them better though, knowing that. Nothing helps."

T. Betson: "Hmm. So, they're like migraine-type headaches? I'm no expert or anything, I'm just trying to think about this for a moment because it obviously seems really important if you're in so much pain all the time."

Gila: "Whatever."

T. Betson: "You don't want to see a doctor, a specialist or something? At least for meds of some kind?"

Gila: "I did. Two neurologists. They're stumped, said something about how it doesn't fit into how migraines normally work. Shouldn't be happening this many times in a single day. But, whatever. One of them said something about a chronic condition you can get...after a really stressful event. Doesn't matter. I told them it probably is just my way of falling apart."

T. Betson: "And, what did they say to that?"

Gila: "Nothing. I don't think. They are neurologists. There are more meds I could try but I don't want to. I've already taken a bunch of different things. Nothing works."

T. Betson: "Gila, do you feel in some way that you deserve this pain that you're in?"

Gila: "I wouldn't use the word *deserve*. But, it makes sense to me I guess."

T. Betson: [leans forward and crosses her legs] "I think I can try to see that, see it your way. Maybe, I don't know but I could *try* for sure, I will, but I still don't know that you need to be in so much *physical* pain all the time. It must be excruciating?"

Gila: "Just forget it."

T. Betson: "Forget what?"

Gila: "Just forget it. The headache. Leave it alone."

T. Betson: [leans back in her chair] [silence]
"I don't want to push you to talk about something –"

Gila: "Then don't. Just forget it, please."

T. Betson: "Okay. It's kind of hard when I see you squinting and holding your head with your hand. You look very weak. I feel responsible –"

Gila: [looks up and directly at her] “You said you weren’t –”

T. Betson: “Okay, I know. I’m sorry. It might take me a little while to teach myself not to be distracted by that.”

Gila: [silence]

T. Betson: “Would it help to tell me a little bit more about your brother? About him leaving?”

Gila: “I guess. I don’t know what to say. I had another older brother who killed himself.”

T. Betson: “Oh.”

Gila: [looking down at the ground]

T. Betson: “I didn’t know. I mean, of course I didn’t. But, hm, that’s a lot. And, you’re young. Shit. Gila, is that what you’re worried about? That he will do something to hurt himself?”

Gila: “He did. He *left*. I...can’t explain. He’s not okay. He just gave up. Finally, gave up.”

T. Betson: “And, how about you? Are you thinking of hurting yourself?”

Gila: “No.”

T. Betson: “Did you just say no? You’re speaking very quietly and I want to be sure I’m hearing everything.”

Gila: “Yeah. I said no. You’re getting distracted though.”

T. Betson: “I’m getting what? I missed that last part.”

Gila: “Nothing. Doesn’t matter.”

T. Betson: "Because it would make sense to, if you're suffering so much. People have all kinds of thoughts when they're in pain. It would be important for me to know about anything like that, so that we can find a way to support you."

Gila: "There's nothing to worry about. I want to be dead. That part is true. I wish that I could do something because I can't be here, like this, without him and everything...he was my life. Raising him. Taking care of everything. There's nothing left. But I can't hurt myself. It's not my style."

T. Betson: "Oh-kay. I want to believe that you're not going to do anything to endanger yourself but let's keep talking about it, okay?"

Gila: "Not now."

T. Betson: "You don't want to keep talking about it now?"

Gila: "No."

T. Betson: "Okay, I can understand that. We can return to it later. Is that okay?"

Gila: "Whatever."

T. Betson: "Is there anything else you can tell me about what you're going through? How is your eating and your sleeping? How are you managing at school?"

Gila: "Fine. I don't know."

T. Betson: "Let's break it down then into different questions, if that makes it easier."

Gila: "School is easy. I don't know how I get there or stay in class but I don't notice it. It's fine."

T. Betson: "You can write papers like this? While you're in this state, I mean? Even with the headaches?"

Gila: "I guess. It's not that big a deal. They're papers. It's school. Anyway. Maybe being able to dissociate can come in handy."

T. Betson: "That's kind of incredible. Really. I've been doing this for, well, long enough and, frankly, it's hard to imagine someone in the state you're in being able to write papers for graduate school."

Gila: "Whatever."

T. Betson: "You don't think so?"

Gila: "I don't care."

T. Betson: "I'm sorry?"

Gila: "Who cares? I've been doing shit I have to do forever. It's adrenaline, auto-pilot, whatever. I don't notice. No one else does either."

T. Betson: "Yeah." [she exhales deeply and leans back in her chair] "Yeah. That must be very true."

Gila: "People write about this. I'm not saying anything new. There was something recent that came out...never mind, it doesn't matter. People have been saying this, how after illness or combat experience you can get used to things. Doing things, a certain way. It's no achievement, just the way things are."

T. Betson: [silence]

Gila: [pauses and continues staring at ground] "I don't have any more to say or anything, just saying. I'm explaining I guess, that it's nothing special. Nabokov said he could write with bullets flying over his head. So, yeah."

T. Betson: "Gila? where'd you go?"

Gila: "What? What do you mean?"

T. Betson: "Just now. You were telling me something about coping and how you manage and then, I don't know, your *feeling* went away."

Gila: [startled, looks up from the ground and straight ahead and directly at Betson for the first time]. "How did you notice –"

T. Betson: "I can hear it. In your voice. What happened?"

Gila: "I don't know. No one's ever noticed that before." [she shakes her head faintly]

T. Betson: "You're shaking your head."

Gila: "Yeah. I'm surprised I guess. I just...I'm not used to anyone noticing anything. Like that."

T. Betson: "It probably happens a lot, doesn't it? Feeling something and then shifting into your head and back and forth."

Gila: "I don't know. I don't...no one's ever asked what I'm feeling, in that way. Like you just did."

T. Betson: "Okay. It's subtle, but I'm trying to stay close to what you're feeling. That's what I'm interested in."

Gila: "But I don't *know*...what I'm feeling. I don't –"

T. Betson: "It's okay. We can try to find out."

Gila: "But, what if I can't?"

T. Betson: "Why wouldn't you be able to know what you're feeling?"

Gila: "I don't know. I just...I don't think I know."

T. Betson: [leans forward again, sitting upright] "I want to ask you about sleeping. How about sleeping? Are you sleeping?"

Gila: "No. Two hours, sometimes three."

T. Betson: "You can't fall asleep?"

Gila: "Don't want to."

T. Betson: "Did you say you don't *want* to? Why is that?"

Gila: "Because, then I have to wake up."

T. Betson: [exhales and leans forward, almost resting her elbows on her knees] "It's heartbreaking to hear you say that."

Gila: [silence]

T. Betson: "Tell me about waking up. Please? What's so terrible about doing that?"

Gila: "I don't know."

T. Betson: "I really want to understand so it's okay if you don't know. We can figure it out together. Do you think you're having bad dreams?"

Gila: "Sometimes. More like visions. My father is walking, with tubes coming out of his arms and wires from machines he was linked up to everywhere. He's saying something. He's a ghost but also right there, in my living room. I'm on the couch. I won't lie in my bed. My bed can fuck itself. And then, I don't know. It's more that when I wake up I know again that D is gone and he isn't coming back. Every time I sleep I have to find that out again. I can't." [she is choking up and holding back tears]

T. Betson: [makes a cooing sound that expresses painfulness]
“I’m so sorry, Gila, that you have to go through this every time you wake up. It sounds traumatic.”

Gila: “I don’t know what trauma is. I don’t know anything. I was fine, that’s what I don’t understand. I was *fine*, for years. And now...I don’t know. He’s gone and it’s like they’re all dying again, but for the first time.”

T. Betson: “Keep going.”

Gila: “I don’t *know*. I don’t.”

T. Betson: “That’s okay. Just keep saying what you’re feeling.”

Gila: “But I don’t *know*. Okay? I *don’t*...I’ve never had these feelings.”

T. Betson: “What feelings, Gila?”

Gila: “These. This kind of...I just *can’t*. I can’t *do* this all without him.”

T. Betson: “Your brother.”

Gila: “Him, my father, everything. All of it. I can’t” [starts to cry] “I am so tired. I am so fucking tired. You don’t understand. There was...I raised him. I took care of him because...it doesn’t matter now...I needed to but if he’s gone, there is no other way to be alive. I have no other *reason*. I just don’t. It’s over. This time I’m really done.”

T. Betson: “It’s almost as if he was like your skin, or something. Protecting you from feeling so many things?”

Gila: “Yeah. And taking care of him. It was my job. *I* don’t have another purpose. I don’t have anything.”

T: Betson: "I want to ask you too...I realize I don't have a sense of who you're living with? Are you living alone? You mentioned a partner, a husband I think? But, on the phone, I think you said he's in another city?"

Gila: [looks up, startled] "Hey. Now it's your turn."

T. Betson: "Excuse me?"

Gila: "Where'd *you* go? Just now."

T. Betson: "Where did I go? What do you mean exactly?"

Gila: "Just now. You shifted gears. We were talking about my job and taking care of things and then you asked me about my living situation. Did something happen to make you turn away from what I was describing?"

T. Betson: "Wow" [laughs a little and runs her fingers through her hair] "I thought I was good, but I may have met my match here, may I?"

Gila: "Was it something I said?"

T. Betson: "No, no. Well...maybe. Yes. I think I just got anxious that's all, for a minute. Realizing you're describing very frightening feelings and realizing that I don't know too much about you and I felt responsible to get some facts there for a moment. Sorry about that. I can't believe you noticed that, I didn't, actually. I'm going to have to be on my toes with you, aren't I?"

Gila: "Sorry that you're anxious. I do live alone, yes. I'm not going to *do* anything, I don't think. Please, you don't have to worry about that, okay. Don't get scared. I'm not...it's not something I care about."

T: Betson: "Okay. Thank you. I think that's reassuring. I think. Now, where were we? Oh, yes, we were talking about it being

your job to take care of him, your brother and without that you don't know what to do."

Gila: "No. Without that there *isn't* anything. There's no secret *me* crouching behind that task. I *was* that *job*. That's it. And, when it's over, so am I."

T. Betson: "Say more. I think I'm beginning to understand."

Gila: "And, please don't say it *feels* that way. I'm not talking about some sentimental shit like that, okay? This is the truth. This is a fact."

T. Betson: "I believe you. And, I believe you are trying to get me to see something that's incredibly crucial and painful. I am trying to follow you. I want to understand, I really do. Tell me more about what you mean when you say there's no one there. What do you mean by that, exactly?"

Gila: "People always talked to me as if my taking care of him was some *defense* mechanism. Like by taking care of him I didn't need to deal with my own feelings or whatever. I knew that wasn't right but I didn't know how to describe it. But, now I see it. I get it. That I just don't exist except as the person who tried to do all that stuff. There just isn't...there's just no one else there."

T. Betson: "Gila, what are you feeling right now, when you say these things?"

Gila: "I don't know."

T. Betson: "Grief or anger? Or loss?"

Gila: "I don't know. I don't...that's the *point*. I don't know *anything*. I don't. I *did*. But that was when the world was organized a certain way."

T. Betson: "With you taking care of him. It's almost as if he was the pin in the bomb and now someone has taken it out."

Gila: "And, everything's exploded everywhere."

T. Betson: "That's horrible. It sounds like you've been working so hard and –"

Gila: "It was my *job*. I just don't have another one is all. I was a soldier. Now, the war is over. He just got up and said he's leaving, going somewhere else. And, maybe he'll be fine, eventually. I have no idea. But, I don't have...I can't" [starts to cry faintly again] "I'm sorry. I don't cry in front of people."

T. Betson: "It's okay, Gila. Really."

Gila: "No."

T. Betson: "This is a tremendous loss. And, a huge shock too. And, after everything you've already been through."

Gila: [shaking her head] "No. I'm not used to crying. And now, that's all I'm doing. All the time. I don't know what's going on with me. This isn't *me*. I've never...shit's happened before but I was fine. I felt things but I was *okay*; I was always okay."

T. Betson: "But, Gila, you're telling me that you didn't really feel things in the same way before."

Gila: "But, why not? I don't get it. I don't understand."

T. Betson: "Maybe because you were focused on helping him. And, it sounds like maybe your mother as well? You haven't mentioned her but...I'm just guessing."

Gila: "Yeah. But...where was all this feeling? I wasn't a robot. I felt a lot of things...I don't get it. I don't understand what's happening to me." [cradles her head in her hands]

T. Betson: "What's going on right now?"

Gila: [silence]

T. Betson: [leans forward and speaks very quietly] "Gila? Is your head hurting?"

Gila: [faintly] "Yeah. I can't."

T. Betson: "Keep going. What do you mean?"

Gila: "I'm crying, all the time. Like *now*. This never happens. I don't *talk* like this. I just can't...manage. Or, I don't want to. I don't know. I don't recognize the way I'm acting. I'm not *like* this. You don't understand. I'm not like *this*."

T. Betson: "I can hear that you're surprised and maybe confused as well."

Gila: "I just don't understand. I wasn't hiding from these feelings. Never. Sure I compartmentalized or whatever but this is like...whatever."

T. Betson: "What were you going to say?"

Gila: "Nothing."

T. Betson: "I want to know. Can you please try to continue?"

Gila: "Nothing. It's stupid. What I'm saying is stupid."

T. Betson: "Somehow I doubt that it's either of those things."

Gila: "You don't know that. It's so stupid. Stop asking me okay."

T. Betson: "Hm. I don't want to do that just yet, okay? I think this is really important. I want you to continue. Please. You weren't compartmentalizing before. You weren't running

away. But something was happening. Let's try to figure that out."

Gila: "No."

T. Betson: "What are you so scared of?"

Gila: "Are you fucking kidding? *Everything*. I don't know anything right now. Okay? *Anything*. I thought I was okay. I thought I made it. More or less. Survived some shit. I gave up all those stupid ghosts, my father and his voice and shit. It's all I hear, and now I wake up sweating and see his body in the hospital, my older brother and his head shot through with a bullet on my birthday. All of it. It's all just there – where the fuck was all of it, until now, huh? I don't understand. [shaking her head and starting to cry] I don't *fucking* understand."

T. Betson: [leans forward and looks directly at Gila, whose head is still facing the ground] "Gila."

Gila: "What? Why are you saying my name like that? Do you understand this? Can you please explain it to me? I don't get it. I don't understand."

T. Betson: "I wish I could. I really do. I would. I don't know yet. We need more time."

Gila: "I can't."

T. Betson: "You can't what?"

Gila: "Nothing."

T. Betson: "You can't *what*?"

Gila: "Nothing. Forget it."

T. Betson: "Manage? You need to tell me what you mean. Please. I'm listening."

Gila: "Sure. Maybe. I don't know."

T. Betson: "You need to say more."

Gila: "I *can't*."

T. Betson: "Why not?"

Gila: "Because I don't know *anything*. I don't understand the words coming out of my mouth. This isn't *me*. Do you understand? I am smart and sharp and...in control of what I'm feeling and now...I can't stop hearing him tell me that it's over. It's all over. I can't stop...I can't do anything. This isn't me. My head is breaking. It isn't...I don't understand."

T. Betson: "It sounds scary, what you're telling me."

Gila: [starting to cry] "I just can't do this. Okay? I can't start again from scratch. I fucking *mourned* him. I did my time in grieving. I can't go through it all again. I *can't* keep *losing*. I can't keep...I can't *do* it. And, I don't even get it. Why am I like this? I make it through whatever's happened and then I fall apart with this? It makes no sense. I don't..."

T. Betson: "Maybe you were holding things together for him. In order to take care of him."

Gila: "But...still...why would I rather die right now then feel this? I am not a weakling when it comes to painful...anything. I...I don't understand."

T. Betson: "But, maybe this is different?"

Gila: "How? I don't understand. Why?"

T. Betson: "Maybe because then, when you were taking care of your brother, there was a limit to what you could let yourself feel. You knew you were responsible for taking care of him and you needed to be strong in a certain way."

Gila: "But...I don't understand. This is different...I can't function now. I don't know how."

T. Betson: "Say more."

Gila: "I don't know."

T. Betson: "Try. Please. I'm listening."

Gila: "I can't. I don't understand. I don't get any of this. I was fine, I thought. I made it out. I had...teachers. School. I was okay."

T. Betson: "Gila, what can't you do? When you say *function*, can you explain a little more about what you mean?"

Gila: "I don't know."

T. Betson: "Try."

Gila: "I can't *do* anything now. I can't read, not really. Enough for school but not more than that. Or, talk to people. School is different; I could be half-dead and get through that. But Tobin, who is...I always talk to her. I can't now. I can't write an email. I can't say anything. I'm...I don't know."

T. Betson: "You're in a lot of pain."

Gila: "But, I've been in pain before. This is different."

T. Betson: "You're feeling everything more acutely. Do you think that's part of it?"

Gila: "I guess. I don't know."

T. Betson: "Try."

Gila: "I don't *know*."

T. Betson: "Okay. It's okay. Let me ask you a different question, okay? Can I? You said that you experienced mourning before. You have gone through grief. Do you mean that you experienced your loss and sadness?"

Gila: "I don't know what you mean."

T. Betson: "You said you had a lot of those feelings before. I'm just trying to get a picture of you, before this, that's all."

Gila: "I felt things, but...it was different. I felt scared about what would happen. I didn't want to lose my father, I felt that. But...I don't know. It makes no sense."

T. Betson: "How about on your own behalf?"

Gila: "I don't understand."

T. Betson: "For yourself. Did you feel the impact of things for *you*? Did you get comfort out of talking about it in a certain way."

Gila: "But, I *didn't* talk about it."

T. Betson: "But, you just said there was a woman, I can't remember her name, Toobin or something? Someone that you did feel comfortable with? A teacher?"

Gila: "But, I didn't *talk* to her. I listened. She told me what I might be thinking and I just...I didn't say anything."

T. Betson: "Hmm."

Gila: "What?"

T. Betson: "I'm just wondering if you ever talked to anyone about what things have been like for *you*, Gila, specifically *you*."

Gila: "I don't get it."

T. Betson: "What don't you get?"

Gila: "You say *me* as if there's someone but...I'm just the one who keeps things going. I didn't *have* anything to say. I just...I didn't *need* to talk. I needed us to be okay."

T. Betson: "But, Gila, isn't that part of the point? Maybe?"

Gila: "I don't get it. It was my job. I needed to do my job. Or, we'd lose everything."

T. Betson: "I understand. And, you did that."

Gila: "No. I fucked up. He is gone. I tried to. I tried and fucking failed."

T. Betson: "But I want to focus on one thing for just a moment, okay? You were entirely devoted to doing that, *job*, as you call it. And, maybe –"

Gila: "It doesn't matter. It's over now. Okay? I fucked up and it's over."

T. Betson: "But, Gila, maybe that's why you don't feel like yourself. Because you're not used to thinking about your own feelings."

Gila: [silence]

T. Betson: "Gila? You're not saying anything. Where did you go?"

Gila: "I don't know what to say."

T. Betson: "Can you try?"

Gila: [silence]

T. Betson: "Gila, where do you go when all of a sudden you get so quiet?"

Gila: "I don't know."

T. Betson: "Is it feeling difficult to talk?"

Gila: "I don't know."

T. Betson: "Hm. You seem like you might be overwhelmed."

Gila: "I don't know. How would I know?"

T. Betson: "What you're feeling? How would you know what you're feeling?"

Gila: "I guess. Maybe. I don't know. I don't know anything."

T. Betson: "Well, that's not true, that you don't know anything. You know *a lot* of things, actually. More than most, in some ways. But then, it's true, there are these moments when you get so quiet. It's almost as if you go away. I wonder what's happening then."

Gila: [silence]

T. Betson: "Gila?"

Gila: [silence]

T. Betson: "Gila? Where have you gone again? Try to tell me okay?"

Gila: "I don't know."

T. Betson: "Maybe something we're talking about is scaring you?"

Gila: "I think...I don't...have what to say. No language there."

T. Betson: "Where?"

Gila: "I don't know. When you talk to me. About what I'm feeling."

T. Betson: "When I talk to you about your *feelings*, you go quiet? Do you know why?"

Gila: [shakes her head]

T. Betson: "Oh, Gila, you seem so very young right now. Like a little girl almost."

Gila: [silence]

T. Betson: "It's almost as if this little girl has all these feelings that she doesn't know how to talk about."

Gila: [starts to cry]

T. Betson: "What are you thinking, Gila? Tell me, please."

Gila: "I'm not, I can't be a *girl*, I'm not supposed to be a little... I'm in *charge* of everything. This can't be happening. I don't understand."

T. Betson: "Can you keep going?"

Gila: "I don't know. Please stop, *please*. I don't know what's happening to me."

T. Betson: "I think maybe you're feeling things, that's all."

Gila: "I can't."

T. Betson: "Why not?"

Gila: "Because I have a *job* to do. Because...I don't understand."

T. Betson: "If you have these feelings, you won't be able to do what you need to do?"

Gila: [nods]

T. Betson: "Why is that?"

Gila: "I don't know. Because...being in charge of things means I *tell* us what to do. I do what my dad did, try to anticipate and plan for things. Protect us. If I'm doing that, there *can't* be anything else. There just can't. [shakes her head] I was just doing what he asked me...what I promised to."

T. Betson: "You were helping –"

Gila: "But, I didn't *realize* that meant that *I* was gone, that entire time."

T. Betson: "What do you mean, can you explain what you're seeing when you say that?"

Gila: [holds her head in both hands] "I *can't*, I can't believe this can't..."

T. Betson: "Please try, okay? I'm listening. I really am. I want to know."

Gila: "I kept believing I was helping. But...I got it all wrong. I got it fucking wrong didn't I? He's dead. He has been dead for 15 years. I wasn't *helping*, I was *him*. I thought...I knew I was a soldier but I didn't know. I couldn't have been a soldier if there was no one giving orders. Oh my god, my fucking...I can't, I was so stupid!"

T. Betson: "But, wait there, a minute, okay, Gila, you needed to be in charge of things, it sounds like. That's what you did. How can you blame yourself for that?"

Gila: "I would die if I was left alone with her. You don't understand. If she sees something *existing* in some way, I don't know, she...has to kill it or cause it pain. I can't explain. He was the only person there, even when he was gone. To talk to or relate to. At least I had a way of *being* something. I can't explain, I don't know how..."

T. Betson: "Try."

Gila: "I gave instructions to D and her, myself. I was doing that, all this time. Trying to keep things stable or normal or something. I knew that but...I thought it was *his* voice but it was actually mine, or my voice became the voice of reason, rules, commands, whatever. A kingly voice. What I mean...I *became* my dad, his job. That meant there wasn't anything else I was thinking or feeling. I was just him, just only that...I only had ideas about things commensurate with my post. About the business, D, mortgages, how to get this or that for him or her, I didn't think about...anything else. What other people kept asking me, what I felt or wanted, was I hungry, what I needed, did I want to travel, what city did I like, what clothes to wear, what food to eat. It didn't...none of it was...every now and then it seemed strange how malleable I was, how unassuming. Raynite used to say I was complacent. Said, what do you really think about this idea or that? I tried. My brain could make an argument but when I needed to access what my *own* sense of something or what I felt about it, I would go blank. It bothered her. And me. But, I didn't understand. How could I have *been* so stupid? How could I have been so *blind*?"

T. Betson: "You became what he needed you to be. And –"

Gila: "But, I didn't know...I thought I was just helping."

T. Betson: "And, you were."

Gila: "No. *I* was the one in charge. Who was I helping? There was no one there to help. He was dead. Can't you see? I thought I was helping him, and like an idiot I kept talking to him and

checking things with him and whatever but that was all just a way of not realizing that *I* was in charge now, he was gone. I was alone with them and I couldn't stay there the way things were, the way – I hope I die after I say all this, I hope I fucking die, I can't believe I've been so blind, I –”

T. Betson: “Let's not get ahead of ourselves just yet, okay? No dying or talk of dying. When you say that thing about not being able to be the same or the way you were? What do you mean by that?”

Gila: “I don't know. It doesn't matter.”

T. Betson: “I think it does. Please tell me.”

Gila: “She doesn't...she...doesn't *talk*, like normal people do. She doesn't...I don't know how to say this. I was a threat to her, always. Just this thing that tormented her and she wanted to destroy. We all were but she would at least treat D like a vulnerable pet sometimes who would enchant her. Me, she hated, she still...doesn't know what I'm doing or where I live. If I say I'm coughing because I have a cold, she cuts me off, mid-sentence says – I bought a purse today! – or, if I say it snowed in Boston, she says, annoyed – you're in Boston? Did I tell you what a customer said? – I don't exist with her, I can't. He talked to me. Had a way of seeing me. It was a wasteland otherwise, a desert, or...I don't know. I *can't*. I *really* can't.”

T. Betson: “She wasn't a parent, at all. And, it sounds like she was dangerous too.”

Gila: “I just kept the conversation going. I just...I didn't know how else to...”

T. Betson: “But, of course you did. You stayed connected to your father, that makes sense Gila, it really does.”

Gila: “No. Because all this time...I didn't know how it was working. I thought I was still *me* connecting to *him*. I even

thought I was *rebell*ing when I went to school. Or talked to Tobin, Raynite...what a *fool* I've been! I was terrified I would forget his voice. *Terrified*. When all along...I'm such an idiot... All along *I* was his voice, it was my own that disappeared."

T. Betson: [leans back] "And, now when we're trying to talk to the little girl inside, she has no language. She's not used to talking."

Gila: "I didn't even know it was there! I didn't know...I..."

T. Betson: "Of course you couldn't have known. You were doing what you needed to do, in order to survive. Gila, is your head hurting you now? You're wincing, as if you're in excruciating pain?"

Gila: "I just can't I can't believe...I believed there was an off-duty soldier somewhere. The one that talked to teachers, wrote smart essays. But, that was still just a soldier, writing from his tent during a lull on the battlefield. That's *why* I couldn't find a way to say something about trauma when I wanted to. Or, loss. That's what happened at Chicago. I tried but it didn't matter. I was still *in* it."

T. Betson: "You clearly have a very powerful mind. And that's good because it means that we can think through things together, we can –"

Gila: "It doesn't *matter*. You don't get it. My mind has always worked, but still – that's why everyone thinks I'm fine or just being difficult when I can't answer but – it's so easy to deconstruct an argument. I can see that, clearly. I don't need to feel anything to do that kind of thing. But, people only notice that or think it means I'm aware of everything but...I don't know how to say something about...I don't even know, I..."

T. Betson: "Yourself?"

Gila: "Personal. Anything personal. I don't *have* things I'm secretly wanting or needing."

T. Betson: "And having a mind like yours probably makes it even harder to see. Because you always have something you can say or figure out. And because you sound so self-assured when you're talking. Actually, I found myself wondering that too, when you first started talking when you walked in here, like, what does this girl need from me, she seems to know everything already, but –"

Gila: "But, I don't!"

T. Betson: "No, I know. I see that now. I do. But it's hard because –"

Gila: "But, I didn't *know* how to tell people that something wasn't working. I tried but...I couldn't."

T. Betson: "It's almost as if you're missing an internal apparatus or something, an emotional system that tells you when you're feeling certain things. Like an immune system. Or, whatever the right physiological metaphor is, do you know what I mean?"

Gila: "Yeah. That's why I don't *know* what I'm feeling when people ask me."

T. Betson: "The absence of that personal voice is subtle. In a way, it is obvious when I listen to you, but it's also subtle."

[silence]

"You're holding your head like it's hurting." [leans forward] "You look like you're in a lot of pain."

Gila: "I don't care. I don't, I *don't* understand. It didn't come up before because I just did what I knew I needed to do. Only now, when he's gone, when it's over..."

T. Betson: "It's the first time anyone's asking you?"

Gila: "It's the first time I don't have the answer. Because I'm not the king. I'm not in charge, nothing to be *in charge of*. I'm used to being him, I don't *have* another way, I don't. I really *don't*."

[silence]

"I thought because I let him go...I thought when I stopped *listening* to him that meant he was gone. That's what people said...grieving is letting go. I *did* that. I tried to. But, what a fool I've been, an idiot! Because all this time, I wasn't *really* letting go of him. I just wasn't *aware* of holding on. Better yet, I *wasn't* holding on. It was my own voice now; *I* knew the ropes of what he would have said or done. I knew his voice by heart, I...All that *forgive me father*...what an idiot! I *was* him. I wasn't *me*, there *was* no me. That's what it meant to promise him...I can't...believe...I can't..."

T. Betson: "Gila, this is a lot to have to recognize. Okay? I want us to slow down a bit. Not let you get so overwhelmed."

Gila: "Am I getting overwhelmed? How do I *know* that? I don't know that. How can I tell?"

T. Betson: [leans forward] "I know you don't know that. But, I'm getting worried because this is a lot of material and... you're fragile now."

Gila: "Fragile? Who is fragile now? I'm not fragile. What are you talking about?"

T. Betson: "You are. Remember that little girl we talked about? Inside you. I think she's screaming for attention. I think she needs...we need to listen."

Gila: "Screaming. The little girl. The headache...But I *can't* do that. It's too late. The boy was right, D, when he said it's too late for certain things. It's too late. I'm twenty-six. I've...my entire life has been this way. I *can't*."

T. Betson: "I know it feels that way."

Gila: "It *is* that way. I don't have anything. It's all over. I had him, a way of being, a mind I could use, not totally freely, it's probably connected. Now...I don't know how to sleep or what to eat. I can't live without a voice that tells me what to do."

T. Betson: "I know you can't. But that can change."

Gila: [silence]

T. Betson: "Gila? Are you listening? Can you nod so I know that you're here with me? You look like you're in so much physical pain. Your poor head, you just keep holding it, like it's breaking."

Gila: [silence]

T. Betson: "I think that we can do this together, okay? I want you to think about that. I really believe you have so much –"

Gila: "Stop. Please. Don't comfort me. I don't need that. Please."

T. Betson: "What do you need then?"

Gila: "I don't know. But, it's the truth. The things I'm saying. Finally, you have to bear it or don't listen, and I won't talk. I don't care. No more illusions. I won't be comforted by anything."

T. Betson: "Okay. I hear that. I do."

Gila: [crying softly]

T. Betson: "It's a lot to bear."

Gila: [silence]

T. Betson: "Gila, unfortunately, we're going to need to end soon. And, I need to know you'll be okay. Can we try to talk here for a minute about how you'll be, when you leave? This was

a difficult session. We covered a lot. And, I don't know you at all, so...maybe you can give me a sense of where you'll go from here?"

Gila: [silence]

T. Betson: "Gila? You're going away again. Let's bring you back. Okay? Let's talk about how you're going to manage."

Gila: "I don't know."

T. Betson: "Well, can we talk about some things that might help? Some things you can do? Does exercise help? Would talking to someone, you mentioned a teacher? Can you call her and talk to her a little bit? Does talking to your partner help?"

Gila: [silence]

T. Betson: "You said reading isn't working right now. Maybe because you're not sleeping. Should we talk about sleep medication? I can give you the name –"

Gila: "Sorry."

T. Betson: "For what, Gila? What are you apologizing for?"

Gila: "Talking. I'm sorry. I didn't...I don't know what's happening to me."

T. Betson: [leans forward and shuffles almost out of her chair to be closer to Gila, who is looking at the ground] "You're not doing *anything* wrong. I want you to hear that, if you can. You're supposed to talk. There's nothing wrong with that, okay?"

Gila: "I'm taking time. I'm sorry for taking time. Is the session over? Did I go over? I didn't notice. I'm so sorry I didn't..."

T. Betson: "It's okay, please, it's okay. You don't need to say sorry for anything. We went over a bit but I don't have anyone right after, so it's fine. This is important. Can we please talk for a moment about how you're going to be okay? We can meet again next week, if this time slot works for you?"

Gila: [silence]

T. Betson: "Does it work for you?"

Gila: [silence]

T. Betson: "Can you nod to indicate that you can hear me?"

Gila: [nods faintly]

T. Betson: "Okay, that's a start. We need to close things up a little, we're running out of time. I need to know that you can be okay when you leave here."

Gila: [sits up a little] "Okay."

T. Betson: "Okay, what?"

Gila: "I don't want you to be getting anxious. You sound anxious."

T. Betson: [smiles] "I guess I do, don't I? You can still read other people, huh, even given where you're at? That's really something. I *am* anxious, yes, I'm wor –"

Gila: "Okay. It's okay. I'll be...don't worry. Thank you."

T. Betson: "Okay? That's good. I guess. But, do you want to tell me how you're going to manage, so I have a sense of –"

Gila: "No."

T. Betson: "No? Hm. Do you know what you're feeling right now?"

Gila: "No. I need to go."

T. Betson: "You look very sad. Very small and very sad."

Gila: [silence]

T. Betson: "Gila?"

Gila: "I'm sorry."

T. Betson: "It's not an accusation, please, it's just the opposite. I'm sorry you can't hear it that way."

Gila: [silence]

T. Betson: "We're going to need to end. I'm sorry about that."

Gila: "I know. I'm sorry. I...it's just..." [tries to hold back tears]

T. Betson: "What is it? Tell me."

Gila: "It's hard to get up and leave."

T. Betson: "That's okay. We can take an extra minute."

Gila: [silence]

T. Betson: [silence]

Gila: "Tell me what to do, please."

T. Betson: "You're going to get up in a minute or two and head back home. You're going to be okay, try to keep things together as you have been doing so far. And then, you're going to come back in here next week, at the same time. I have the same time available."

Gila: [silence]

T. Betson: "How does that sound?"

Gila: [shakes her head]

T. Betson: "No?"

Gila: "I don't know *anything*."

T. Betson: "I know. That's why we're going to just keep talking."

Gila: [shakes her head]

T. Betson: "Why are you shaking your head?"

Gila: "I *can't*."

T. Betson: "I know."

Gila: "But, I can't. Keep going."

T. Betson: "I hear that. You have been through so much already. But, we don't have to understand everything right away, okay? You're very strong, really, even though I know you don't feel that way now. It's clear that you are and I think, I really do, that, in spite of everything, there is a part of you that really wants to figure this out."

Gila: "I can't. I *tried*."

T. Betson: "I know."

Gila: "I *tried*. I can't. Again."

T. Betson: "But, you need to, Gila. You need –"

Gila: "I don't. That's the difference now. I *don't. Need. To do anything*. It's *over*. The game is over."

T. Betson: [silence]

Gila: "It's over."

T. Betson: "There's a part of you that wants something better for yourself, I believe that. Okay? And, frankly, if there isn't, we're going to have to take another approach, but I think there *is*. And, that's the part of you I'm talking to."

Gila: "My head hurts."

T. Betson: "I know. I see that."

Gila: [crying] "My head hurts me."

T. Betson: "I hear that, Gila, I do. We're going to keep things very simple. For now, all you have to do is get yourself back home and maybe eat something. Maybe take a warm bath. Do you think you can do that? You look so cold, you're shaking. I want you to try to take in what I'm saying to you. Can you hear my voice? Try to listen to me telling you what you need to do. Do you think that you can do that?"



I was a girl who thought I was a prince.

In the game we were playing, my father the king decreed and pleaded to bequeath me all his kingdom in its glory.

Yes, I said. Oh yes. A psalm this is by david. His voice is my shepherd I shall not want.

In situations of danger I hear him, in moments of crisis he tells me what to do. Although I walk in the valley of shadows I don't fear death for his voice is with me.

Your voice is my guide is my rod, leads the way.

Three women came, archangels in their leather jackets, grey black hair, punk fairy godmothers, ghostbusters all. They said where is the smart-ass girl who's pulsing under there? You ain't no humble shepherd boy, there's fire in those eyes, it's blaring. Ditch the lofty regal gig and play.

I stared in awe. I told them nothing.

I listened anyway.

Oh Father if you are in heaven, *don't*.

Being david didn't interfere with princely duties.

It was being king that interfered with being david.

You see. When it was time I tried to hear the girl inside, my head was quiet.

I looked everywhere. I offered everything. I sought out reinforcements. Specialists. People with expertise in coaxing kinderlach behind their papa's coattails, hiding.

It answered nothing.

I gave up looking when one day the kingdom fell, the palace burned, the boy had gone. A child was there, under the rubble, naked, howling.

Do you know why I didn't hear it burning? Father, can't you see? Your kingdom was on fire, *was* a fire, and when you left I wore the crown.

When yes I said, oh yes, I meant: becoming an exalted soldier.

You didn't warn me: orders would be needed and *I* would be the one to give them.

You didn't *say*,

When I become the king, the girlchild vanishes.

That being you meant I was banished.

I get it now.

I needed someone – there was no one else to be.

There is no such thing as a prince david.

O. Rex took out his eyes when he realized how he got the throne.

O what a futile plea, trying, crying, to un-see,
with me it was becoming rex that blinded me.

Oh yes, I said, *hineni*, yes.

And while I was him, no one was me.

The way she always wanted things to be.

A David psalm.

You dip my head in oil, my cup overflows.

Of course I said I can't let go.

Now my head wet, dripping with anointment, is breaking, no.

I was a girl who did not want –

I am the girl who didn't know I was king who did not know I
was a girl.





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When, as a rising sophomore in college, I first wrote the phrase “forgive me father, for I have sinned,” I had a lot of psychological conviction but very little writerly insight about what it meant. Later that summer, in my first experience in a writing workshop, Jim Miller asked me why I worded things that way, and when I said I had no idea he said, “well, whatever it is, I guess it’s important to you. If you want to keep it, you should go figure that out.” That relationship to writing was eye-opening to me: you could say something you meant and figure out what you meant later. In the same spirit of pedagogic generosity and amusement, Jim asked me if I was deliberately participating in the tradition of confessional autobiography and when the nineteen-year-old that I was said “what is confessional autobiography?” he shook his head and in some combination of disbelief and affection said, “start reading, kiddo, start with St. Augustine.”

I met Phillip Lopate that same summer and he has been my primary and closest reader ever since. Every time I think I know what he’s going to say or whether he will like or dislike something, he surprises me. His wisdom, knowledge, and aversion to “hysteria” is indispensable to me. We have our share of running disagreements but even when he’s critical, I’ve never felt that he needs me to agree with him. That freedom is a true gift.

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