

Recall

2800 words

Dr. Moore ushered a patient out at 12:12, went back in the office, and she greeted Pete on the button at 12:15.

There'd been another therapist, a Dr. Stride, but that guy disqualified himself because he and Pete ended up socializing at a bar. This was the second go-round now with the Dr. Moore gal.

“You run a rightfully tight ship,” Pete said. “Would that be Type A behavior, if it were a patient? Something that would qualify for you making a note?”

“It would depend,” she said, “whether it was an extension of other compulsive behavior, or an isolated example of the patient behaving responsibly.”

“How do you tell?”

Dr. Moore smiled. “You should become a psychologist. You're quite curious how we operate.”

“What did you study before that?” Pete said. “Or this was it.”

“I was a linguistics major actually,” she said.

“I’ll give you credit then, dang . . . Something bad happen at that point, that turned you introspective?”

“A friend and I took a summer, and we hiked the Appalachian Trail. When we returned we applied to PhD programs together.”

“How’d that work out?”

“Things don’t always go completely as planned,” she said. “But here I am.” Nice comfortable smile, obviously at ease with her decision from back when, despite the bit of mystery with the apparent boyfriend.

Pete sat there a minute. He tried not to stare at her chest, which, no other way to put it, was abnormally large. Maybe it was just coincidence, or the light--but her get-up today--a cream-colored cotton blouse buttoned down the front--seemed to accentuate the situation worse than last time, when he made the unfortunate couple of comments.

Of course you’d assume the woman just went in the closet every day and put something on like anyone else, no deep-rooted thought to that aspect of the presentation . . . and for God’s sakes give the lady a

break, none of us can control the luck of the draw when it comes to physical features.

Dr. Moore said, “Is that enough about *me* at the moment? It’s your dime of course. But my sense is you had a different motivation in reaching out this morning.”

“There you guys go again, with the reaching *out* . . . But fine. For starters, something that’s been bugging me lately . . . I had a friend with large breasts one time. There were issues.” What a surprise that he’d lead off with this topic, after the introspection.

“Uh-huh,” Dr. Moore said.

“She wasn’t, like a girlfriend. She was older.”

“Might she have been someone’s mother? *Of* a friend?”

“Oh brother. We can’t get past this. Now you have me in the womb again, or fresh out of it. You’re going to ask me if I was breast fed.”

“Were you?”

“I would assume so. But honestly, it was never brought up. And it won’t be. My mom’s not around. Neither of my parents, unfortunately.”

“How old was she, your mom?”

“When she had me? Or when she passed?”

“Both.”

“Let’s get back on topic here. This friend, it was a summer during college, one of my roommates got us jobs in Florida. We had a band too, nothing official, just kicking it around a little, and then someone hires us to play . . . not the wedding obviously, but what do you call it when girls have a bachelor party?”

“A bachelorette party?”

“Probably. Not even that, it was when they all came back *after*. We played in someone’s apartment.”

“Do you play an instrument currently?”

“You’re not complicated, you know it? I know where you’re going, that music is good therapy, yada yada. Let me finish this.”

She was taking a note.

Pete continued, “One of the people from the party -- she *wasn’t* someone’s mother--not that kind of age difference--but she might have been like a big sister or family friend. I never established it frankly.”

“Umm-hmm.”

“Anyways. When we’re packing up the instruments she asks me if I give lessons. I never had, but I said sure, it seemed harmless enough . . . and only when the lessons began and we’re both sitting there with the guitars on our laps, and you have that certain angle . . . then I noticed it, or them, you couldn’t help it.”

“Hmm,” Dr. Moore said.

“And you know how when you purposely try *not* to call attention to something? And your eyes are roaming every which way *but* there? How that makes it worse?”

“Continue.”

“So fine, I must have given her a half dozen lessons, it wasn’t hard, she wasn’t a rank beginner . . . and then the final one, she announces that she can’t come for a while because she’s going in for some minor surgery.”

“Ah.”

“So I figured that was it, I picked up a few bucks spending-money out of the deal and I moved on. But then my roommate, he tells me he heard she's going in for breast reduction surgery.”

“Uhn-huh. And that bothered you.”

“Very much so, are you kidding? So I called her up. I tell her, it’s none of my business, and it’s fine if you hang up--but what the hell are you *doing* here? . . . Or *had* she done here, if it’s too late already.”

“Yes?”

“She was embarrassed, but she addressed it. She said she had second thoughts, she’d received some negative advice from a few people, and put the procedure on hold for the time being . . . I told her that was a wise decision . . . and did she want to set up another lesson in that case, and she said she’d let me know, but I never heard from her again.”

“I see,” Dr. Moore said. She looked at her notes. “You prefaced this discourse by labeling it ‘something that’s been bugging me lately’. How so?”

“I never got closure, is why. For all I know she went in a month later and took care of it. I know it sounds silly, and you probably think I’m a nut case.”

“Let’s explore that for a moment. How many years ago was this?”

“20. Give or take.”

“Would you characterize this experience as having been on your mind often, since then?”

“Not really. Only when something reminds me of it . . . like in a porno flick once in a while, that type thing.”

“And why do you think it still disturbs you occasionally? Is it a lack of control?”

“I think you got it,” Pete said. “I can’t stand it when people don’t listen to me. In certain cases.”

“And you feel this woman did not.”

“Put it this way. She ignored me, which is worse.”

“And why do you feel that?”

“She canned the lessons, for starters.”

Dr. Moore wrote something down. “Did it occur to you that she may not have returned for the guitar lessons because you touched on a sensitive subject?”

“Fine, that too,” Pete said.

“Did you have sexual feelings for this person? And part of your frustration stems from not being able to explore those further?”

“Fine. *That too* . . . plus it was like, if she shrunk her situation, right in my face so to speak, she wasn’t giving anything a chance to play out.”

“And you wouldn’t have been as attracted to her, if she’d had the reduction procedure.”

“Again, you’re going to shake your head . . . but correct.”

“Have you been involved in any relationships with older women?”

“I thought I was one time, and I got dumped pretty quick.”

“Tell me about it.”

“Nah, it’s not worth it. But okay in a nutshell, I worked at a newspaper once. When you start off they stick you on the late shift, 5 to 2. Some gal comes in after midnight, I say can I help you, and it turns out she’s a roving food critic, turning in a restaurant review? This is before the internet was in full swing at newspapers, a lot of people still turned shit in.”

“And a brief relationship followed.”

“Yeah, about 10 minutes later, if you know what I mean. That late shift, it was pretty dead in the newsroom, and there were empty offices and so forth.”

“I see . . . So that was the extent of it.”

“I didn’t want it to be. I bought Warriors tickets for a couple nights later. I picked her up, it was all good. But she left in the 3rd quarter . . . No idea how she got home. I guess she took BART.”

“What was your age difference?”

“I was like mid-20’s, she was probably early 40’s? . . . Right about where *I* am now, in fact . . . Jeez, weird to think of like that.”

“So . . . anything else you can add Pete? From any direction that might be helpful?”

“Yeah well, I was in the central valley not too long ago. Do you like small towns?”

“Sometimes. I grew up in one. Do you?”

“I hear you. Good place to be from, might not want to live there though? . . . I’m taking care of some nonsense, it’s running me a few days, I’m in a hotel, the staff is friendly, it’s not the worst thing, you know what I mean? You’re not in a major rush to get out of there, but even so.”

“I believe you’ve mentioned your affinity for hotels before. Why do you think you’re comfortable in that environment?”

“No, no. The womb stuff *again*? . . . Security? No responsibility? They even make your bed for you and clean up?”

“I’m detecting sarcasm.”

“You’re wondering if truth is sprinkled in though. Fine. I’ll add when you’re on the road, residing in those type places, your commitments are less. Normally.”

“Life is not as complicated for you.”

“Yeah. So I meet this high school kid, he’s probably 18, he’s a senior, he’ll be out of there in a couple months. Guy has a good name, Pike.”

“Unh-huh.”

“What I did, TV was bad one night so I found the high school track. You figure 4 laps to a mile, so if I go 8, I’ve done a little something. I’m talking walking, no big thing. I stop at 6, but anyway I’m sitting in the bleachers, this kid comes along, putting on running shoes and we start talking, and I can tell he’s fine with it, because you always *want* to procrastinate your workout, it’s human nature.”

“What did you talk about?”

“Nothing monumental at first, except I found myself envying the heck out of this kid. He was athletic, all-American features, genuine smile. Polite, well-spoken. Everything ahead of him, is what I’m thinking . . . It also made me want to turn back the clock myself and do it right.”

“Correct your high school experience.”

“Sure. It had its moments, but plenty of stuff to straighten out. Wouldn’t you?”

“Please re-direct,” she said.

“So I’m assuming this kid’s got it all squared away, and the sky’s the limit . . . and I even tell him this--and I’m paraphrasing--but it’s like, take it from me son, you don’t always know how good you have it, until later on . . . and my unsolicited advice is keep right on having fun, and not waste time worrying about what comes next.”

“How did this Pike respond?”

“He seemed to consider what I was saying, and then he shifted gears. Which surprised me. Maybe me being a stranger. That he figured he could open up, it wouldn’t come back to bite him.”

“How did he shift gears?”

“He told me a terrible story. There was an accident. A drunk driver ran up on a curb and killed a woman. The Pike kid knew the family, went to school all through with one of the daughters. It happened last fall, a lot of people were still reeling bad, he said.”

“And?”

“How did you know there was more? Isn’t that enough?”

“I didn’t.”

“Well there is more . . . Pike is having enough trouble wrapping his head around it. A couple weeks later the daughter is going through her mom’s things, and she comes across a diary and some letters. Bottom line--and don’t forget, it is a small town, but she informs Pike that her mom--and Pike’s dad--were having an affair.”

“Currently? At the time of the accident?”

“That wasn’t clear. They tried to piece it together, it may have ended a while back, or it could have been one of those on again off again deals. Eventually the daughter tells Pike that she figured out the timeline, and the affair had already been over for some time.”

“But he didn’t necessarily believe that.”

“Correct . . . You know something, you must be tough to go to the movies with. You’d be one of those people who keeps calling out what’s about to *happen* . . . Would you ever want to *go* to the movies by the way? I mean I know you’re married, you said that last time, but this is 2019.”

Dr. Moore took a moment. “Are you saying--to pick up on that--that you, for one, behave differently therefore? That in 2019 anything goes?”

“I don’t know *what* I’m saying. Pike finishes telling me all this, I sort of apologize for assuming his life is all idyllic Camelot, since it’s clearly anything *but*, and he leaves off by saying--pretty darn matter of fact, too--that he has the ability to do something *about* it . . . and he’s going to. And he says good night, and takes off on his jog.”

“What do you feel he meant by that?”

“You’re supposed to tell *me*. I don’t know if he was serious or joking, like as a defense mechanism . . . or being symbolic or some shit.”

Dr. Moore was writing something down, drawing an arrow it looked like, connecting a couple things. She looked at her watch. “We’re going to need to conclude. In about 6 minutes. Anything else, Pete? What possessed you to call me this morning?”

“None of this. Jesus . . . But if you *need* one more topic . . . I guess that could be: If a guy had a terminal disease--but he got better--but he kind of changed his general approach while thinking he *had* the terminal disease--and yes he may really *be* disease-free--but the new approach he developed *remains*--is that *okay*.”

Another note from Dr. Moore. “How did he change his approach?”

“More aggressive with others, maybe? . . . I don't know, more impulsive? Less concerned about ramifications? Less worried whether people like him? More apt to move on?”

“As opposed to dwelling on a particular?”

“I guess. But that’s *it*? I listed about 6 *things*.”

“Do you feel he should *alter* his current approach?”

Dr. Moore said.

“Well,” Pete said, “in a perfect world, sure.”

“Does he feel energized by the new outlook? The qualities you alluded to, they represent a sort of liberation, do they not?”

“Yeah? Could *be* I guess,” Pete said, rubbing his chin, giving that one a going over, no one quite putting it that simple before.

“Does this person have a best friend?” she said.

“I don’t think so . . . If you define it as a couple people he can count on in a crisis, then maybe.”

“Does this person consider himself out of the loop, socially?”

“Now and then.”

“And that partial degree of alienation--he feels it’s the result of the *current* approach?”

“Maybe.”

“Under the *original* approach, he was more prominently in the social loop?”

“I told you,” he said, “*maybe*. What part don’t you understand?”

Dr. Moore cleared her throat and straightened up her paperwork. “That’s sufficient for today, Pete.”

“*I’m* sorry . . . That was on me, getting worked up for a second. Nothing to do with you. You’re doing your job.”

“Thank you.”

“Did you call the police on me though? Last time?”

“I did.”

“Oh . . . How ‘bout this time?”

“I’m not planning to.” They stood up.

Pete wanted to give her a hug last time, even brought it up, and who knows, maybe that was part of the deal, why she did call the cops.

But now she opened the door for him and he hesitated a second and then reached around and gave her one . . . and like a good human being--flicking the switch on the therapist role for just a minute--she hugged him back, and it felt real enough, and you could always use one.

