

Intake Report

The Subject has been admitted to the Psychiatric service by direct transfer from the Surgical Recovery Room. Over the past week she has undergone an extensive neurophysiologic workup culminating in a brain biopsy yesterday, which was aborted when a call came from an outside source alleging that she suffers from Munchausen Syndrome. While denying the allegation, she has committed herself voluntarily for psychiatric evaluation on condition that her case be publicized.

The Subject is seated at a conference table in the Meditation Room and presents as a twenty-seven-year-old white female of adult stature but indeterminate development, owing to cachexia and multiple surgeries. Her gauntness is accentuated by an ill-fitting plaid pantsuit of a '60's style. A pressure-dressing spans the left temple.

Having greeted the Subject, the Therapist takes a seat across the table. The Subject does not return the Therapist's greeting but rises and proceeds to lurch around the room, yanking up a windowblind and pulling open the hinged panel of a corner folding-screen to disclose a spare gurney. Passing the lighted cabinets of Indonesian artifacts, she stops to scrutinize a skin medicine-rattle from New Guinea, then gravitates to the painting beside the door, a portrait of the room's donor. She chuckles hoarsely at the inscription welcoming all travelers to meditate here, possibly because this intended shrine is a teak-panelled conference room in the locked psychiatric wing. In the painting the benefactor sits behind a consultation desk, smiling into the unseen face of an angular woman leaning toward him confidingly; the Subject, bending slightly to inspect her, mirrors her position.

Now the Subject reseats herself at the conference table, across and down as far as possible from the Therapist. She peers out at an ancient maple, whose two divergent pillars split early on from a common trunk. As a breeze ripples the crop of shoots over the woody bifurcation, the Subject shivers or recoils, fixing her gaze directly ahead of her. In the interval thereafter she produces a distinctive sound suggesting nausea. She repeats this groan, then rises with apparent effort and moves unsteadily back toward the painting by the door. With a stony glance at the Therapist, she appears to be reaching slowly toward the doorknob.

"You seem to be feeling hostile," the Therapist observes.

Now the Subject levels a stare that migrates inchwise over the Therapist's seated figure while evading eye contact. Meanwhile, the hand has abandoned its vector toward the doorknob. Haltingly, she crosses back to the window, places palms on the sill and leans forward until her bandaged temple rests against the glass. Back turned to the Therapist, she quietly remarks, "Spare me the claptrap." A pause. "Spare me the transference." A heavily-drawn breath. "Transcribe me; publish me. There is, in the medical community, one who will read my case and palliate me."

After a silence the Therapist responds, "Go on."

With a huff of possible exasperation, the Subject turns and gestures toward the folding screen around the spare gurney.

"Behind there. If you please," she says with a hitchhiker's thumbjerk, and reiterates, "Behind there. On that condition."

The Therapist gathers pad and pen, rises, and walks behind the partly open screen. The Subject promptly re-spreads the panels of the screen, closing the Therapist into a space nearly filled by the gurney. In the room beyond, the Subject can now be heard pacing, shoving a chair or two, coughing abruptly, and expectorating once into the metal wastecan.

The Therapist hatches up the back of the gurney, mounts it, and takes up a Fowler position to begin transcription.