SPLIT SESSION

Written in December 2017

(**A therapist’s office. There’s a knock**)

ALLEGRA

Oh, Shannon, I’d given up on you. You’re almost half an hour...(**DAVID enters. ALLEGRA stops when she sees it’s not Shannon**)

DAVID

Hi. I’m not Shannon.

ALLEGRA

Oh, sorry. Are you a sales rep? We don’t usually –

DAVID

No, no. I’m David.

ALLEGRA

David? Do I know you?

DAVID

Oh, well, sort of. I’m Shannon’s husband.

ALLEGRA

Oh, David, right. I don’t usually do couples therapy. I mean, Shannon should have texted me if she wanted –

DAVID

No, it’s not – Shannon’s not here.

ALLEGRA

She’s not here?

DAVID

I’d like to take her session, if that’s okay.

ALLEGRA

Wait a minute. What do you mean take her session?

DAVID

Well, you know how she is about money. (ALLEGRA is stony faced) And she knows she’d have to pay for the session anyway since she would have been canceling at the last minute, and with what’s been going on, trying to, you know, fix stuff with the marriage – right, she talks about that to you, right?

ALLEGRA

Listen, David –

DAVID

Anyway, she thought maybe I could get something out of it since I’m not in therapy.

(Pause) And it’s paid for. (Pause) So is that okay?

ALLEGRA

Did something happen to her?

DAVID

Something about work. She said her boss needed her for a last minute business trip...(beat) to Aruba.

ALLEGRA

(As she hears this ALLEGRA realizes Shannon has taken a precipitous step. Her concern shows in her body language and she sighs deeply) Oh.

DAVID

So? What do you think?

ALLEGRA

David, I have to say this is probably not a good idea.

DAVID

Right. I didn’t think so either, no offense.

ALLEGRA

Of course not.

DAVID

But Shannon was pretty insistent I come. And you know what she’s like when she gets something in her mind, right?

ALLEGRA

See, David, I can’t talk to you about Shannon. You do understand that, right?

DAVID

Oh, I guess. I mean I am her husband.

ALLEGRA

Well, maybe particularly because you’re her husband I can’t.

DAVID

Oh. Right. But I guess I’m feeling like I could use someone to talk to. (silence) Someone who’s good to talk to, Shannon thinks you’re the best. (silence) Someone who kind of knows me, which you do because Shannon must talk about me. (darker silence).

ALLEGRA

Look, David. This is really unethical. You can tell Shannon that I’ll give her a pass on this missed session.

DAVID

Yeah, okay, that’s generous. (**DAVID turns to go but stops**) So what if I didn’t talk about her, you know, just about myself? (ALLEGRA softly shakes her head). I mean I could have come here, made an appointment, not told you I was married to Shannon and, you know, right, it would just be another patient, client, which do you prefer?

ALLEGRA

Patient.

DAVID

Here, let me give you a start. This is something I’ve been thinking about. What is love?

ALLEGRA

Look, Mr. Quinn –

DAVID

Klein. Quinn is Shannon’s maiden name, she’s kept it.

ALLEGRA

Mr. Klein, I’m going to have to ask you –

DAVID

I prefer David, though.

ALLEGRA

I’m going to have to ask you to leave. (DAVID looks dejected and again turns to go) (More to herself with some regret) And I don’t know what love is so I couldn’t have helped you anyway.

DAVID

(Turning back, a bit energized) Right. See I don’t think anybody knows. I mean, sure, everyone has a personal meaning for it. But when I use it I’m guessing that my wi – whoever I’m talking to hears what I say and thinks I’m talking about what *they* think it is.

ALLEGRA

Perhaps. But you need to –

DAVID

Is that what you say to all your patients – I mean, all of them except Shannon cause we can’t talk about her –that you don’t know what love is?

ALLEGRA

Uh, no. I just told you because you’re not one of my patients and I was kinda hoping it would get you out of here.

DAVID

Anyway, I don’t think it’s really important until love is gone from a relationship. Then you really need to know what it means to the other person, hypothetical person. “I love you” is just a way of touching someone you love and they take it to the best possible place when you say it, usually. But when it’s gone, and you need to get it back or replace it, and you don’t know what it is – get what I’m saying?

ALLEGRA

Right. Would you like a referral? I know some wonderful people who are really good at talking about this stuff with their patients.

DAVID

Oh.

ALLEGRA

Man or woman, do you have a preference?

DAVID

In general?

ALLEGRA

For a therapist.

DAVID

Huh. Never gave it much thought.

ALLEGRA

(Handing him a card) This is Warren Cummings. He’s really focused on exactly what you’re talking about.

DAVID

(Taking and looking curiously at card) Oh.

ALLEGRA

And he doesn’t know your wife.

DAVID

Yeah. (Somber beat; more to himself) Apparently neither do I.

ALLEGRA

(After a long beat as ALLEGRA looks more intently at DAVID) Shannon didn’t tell you to come down here today, did she?

DAVID

Oh, good. We can talk about Shannon now?

ALLEGRA

If she didn’t send you down here then we’re not talking about her, right?

DAVID

Oh. I guess not.

ALLEGRA

And she didn’t, did she.

DAVID

No. I lied.

ALLEGRA

(After another beat of looking at him, ALLEGRA walks back to him, snatches the card gently from him and says:) Have a seat.

DAVID

What? But you –

ALLEGRA

Have a seat. Or you can stand if you want. I’m sorry, I don’t have a couch.

DAVID

I’m not getting what just happened

ALLEGRA

Yeah, I’m not sure I’m getting it either. Why did you lie?

DAVID

Oh, um. I have no idea.

ALLEGRA

Well, try to find one.

DAVID

I guess I didn’t think you’d see me if I just barged in.

ALLEGRA

Why did you think that telling me Shannon “insisted” that you come would make a difference?

DAVID

Well, cause she’s your patient and you try to take care of your patients.

ALLEGRA

You said you’re not currently in therapy?

DAVID

No. I guess it shows, huh?

ALLEGRA

It’s not a test.

DAVID

Oh. (beat) Feels like it.

ALLEGRA

Okay, let me see if I can help. I can’t talk about another patient.

DAVID

Yeah, I got that.

ALLEGRA

You can talk about whatever you want.

DAVID

Including Shannon?

ALLEGRA

We’re having a chat. You came here to have a chat with me. Like we’re sharing a table at Starbuck’s. You said before you could use someone to talk to. You can talk *with* me about the weather or politics or what love is, but if you talk about Shannon you’ll be talking *to* me. Is that making any sense?

DAVID

Not sure about the sense part, but I understand what you said. (Beat) So, I start?

ALLEGRA

I think we’re past the start at this point.

DAVID

Oh.

ALLEGRA

I’ll help. Why do you feel like you could use someone to talk to?

DAVID

Well, I do have friends. I talk to them about the weather and politics … and what love is. But I don’t talk to them about Shannon…and what love isn’t. So maybe I kinda lied again. I don’t need someone to talk to generally; I need someone to talk to about Shannon.

ALLEGRA

You don’t talk to your friends about your marriage?

DAVID

Shannon doesn’t like it. She’s very private. (almost chuckling) I guess all the more reason why you shouldn’t talk to me about her.

ALLEGRA

So you never talk to anyone about Shannon?

DAVID

Oh, yeah, I do.

ALLEGRA

Who?

DAVID

Shannon.

(Therapy beat, i.e. the therapist waits for the patient to say something)

DAVID

Why do people come to therapists?

ALLEGRA

Why did you?

DAVID

I just told you. Not too convincing, I guess.

ALLEGRA

Most times, people come if they’re in pain.

DAVID

Aha. Got it. They’re sad.

ALLEGRA

Or angry. There’s a sort of rhyming list of feelings. Are you familiar with that?

DAVID

I don’t think so.

ALLEGRA

Sad, mad, glad, bad, scared.

DAVID

Scared doesn’t really rhyme.

ALLEGRA

Depends how scared you are.

DAVID

(Beat) How often do you have patients come in because they’re glad? (ALLEGRA smiles)

ALLEGRA

Not very often. But they come in for all the other feelings when it gets to the point that these feelings are causing some kind of pain in their lives.

DAVID

Right.

ALLEGRA

It’s actually usually a combination. For example, most people don’t get mad until they’ve had some other feeling first.

DAVID

Like sad.

ALLEGRA

Right.

DAVID

You could get mad at someone who’s made you sad.

ALLEGRA

Exactly.

DAVID

Or made you feel inadequate.

ALLEGRA

Yes. Do you have feelings of inadequacy?

DAVID

Well, I don’t know what you mean by *feelings* of inadequacy.

ALLEGRA

Do you think of yourself as inadequate in some way, how about that?

DAVID

Yeah, that’s kind of tricky. I mean does it count as having feelings of inadequacy if you actually *are* inadequate?

ALLEGRA

Well, I’m not sure I know what you mean. Are you saying you think you’re inadequate?

DAVID

I’m saying I am.

ALLEGRA

Everyone is a combination of thoughts and feelings that reflect who they are –

DAVID

Everyone but Shannon, you mean.

ALLEGRA

No, Shannon too but – right, everyone but Shannon.

DAVID

Cause we’re not talking about her.

ALLEGRA

Right. So you are who you are. How do you get to inadequate? Does that mean you want to be something you’re not, or do something you feel you can’t?

DAVID

Well, yeah. I guess I do think of myself as not being enough to get what I want.

ALLEGRA

I see.

DAVID

Or keep what I want. (Therapy beat) So how do you help them?

ALLEGRA

People who feel inadequate?

DAVID

Anyone who walks in your door. What do you do for them?

ALLEGRA

We talk. We try to identify what the issues are. We try to discover what role each individual plays in creating the issues, because that you have some control over, as opposed to, in many instances, trying to fix the person who you imagine is the cause of your pain.

DAVID

You can’t do anything about that.

ALLEGRA

Not usually.

DAVID

You can’t fix somebody who’s not in the room.

ALLEGRA

(She says the following knowingly and sadly. From this point on ALLEGRA begins to feel increasingly guilty about how she dealt with Shannon) No, you can’t.

DAVID

(Therapy beat) I wouldn’t want your job.

ALLEGRA

Oh? Why not?

DAVID

Too much pressure. Say someone comes in, someone really desperate for guidance, and then you tell him or her stuff and they do what you tell them, and then…I mean, scary.

ALLEGRA

That’s not how I work. I try to get him or her to see what’s best for them, to see what the best choice is for them under the circumstances.

DAVID

And once they see that they’ll probably do it.

ALLEGRA

(Silence)

DAVID

So, is most of what you do about helping people with relationship problems? You get a lot of that, right? People walking in unhappy in their marriages, you know.

ALLEGRA

There’s a fair amount of that.

DAVID

So we guys, the patients, take care of the falling in love part and you take care of the falling out of love part.

ALLEGRA

That’s sometimes an issue that needs to be addressed. Often when people first fall in love they’re overwhelmed with a cocktail of chemicals, norepinephrine (nora-pin-EF-rin), dopamine (DOPE-a-mean) phenylethylamine (fennel-e-THELL-a-mean), estrogen, testosterone. It creates that heightened euphoria that we associate with falling in love. But the body only produces those chemicals for so long. And when it stops…

DAVID

That’s the falling out of love part.

ALLEGRA

And one of the things that I try to do when someone is experiencing this “where has the love gone” feeling is find a way to get them to reconnect with the more essential aspects of who they and their partner were together.

DAVID

Doesn’t always work, I guess.

ALLEGRA

(Slightly dark beat) No, it doesn’t always work.

DAVID

And then, as you try to get them to see what’s best for them, what’s best for one of your patients who maybe is missing the love, they may decide that they need to find it somewhere else.

ALLEGRA

(Darker beat) Yeah.

DAVID

What do you tell them?

ALLEGRA

That they should try to work things out first, to see if what they have with their partner is fixable.

DAVID

How often does that work?

ALLEGRA

(Darkest beat) Not very often.

DAVID

Nah, I wouldn’t think so. Fixing something that’s fallen apart as opposed to getting another dose of dopamine; not a close call.

ALLEGRA

It depends.

DAVID

On?

ALLEGRA

The patient.

DAVID

Hmm.

ALLEGRA

No, that’s not right. It’s never the patient’s fault (Sighs) David, I have a 6:45 coming in.

DAVID

Oh, right. Sorry. Kinda turned into a session didn’t it?

ALLEGRA

Look, I –

DAVID

It was really helpful to talk. Got some stuff off my chest.

ALLEGRA

Huh.

DAVID

So thanks for that.

ALLEGRA

You’re welcome.

(**DAVID gets up and starts to leave**)

ALLEGRA

Same time next week?

DAVID

Isn’t this Shannon’s time?

ALLEGRA

(As kindly as she can) I don’t think she’ll be coming back.

DAVID

(Beat) No, I don’t either. Same time next week.

(**DAVID leaves. ALLEGRA sits there in sad thought**)

**End of play**