

**A Curious Arrangement:** I begin; it's stilted, awkward. I refine and try many times to get a thought to coalesce. Kat<sup>1</sup> listens to me closely, four days a week. I stumble around in sentence fragments, jitters in my limbs, a nauseous stomach, but humiliation has given way to humility. For a long while it came as a surprise when Kat contributed something of herself. In the middle years, when she spoke, I suffered quick flashes of shame that I couldn't think something so incandescent on my own. Now I crave her engagement; her responsiveness means a workable new thought may be in hand.

Kat and I are a creative couple with a curious intimacy arrangement called psychoanalysis. It can feel surreptitious. In fact, the intimacy in the layers of identity within the given societal context is generally kept private. The workings of this closeness are professional purview, and also a private couple relationship. It's an open secret that I have felt much erotic longing for her. I know now that I have turned to thoughts of sex with her to skip over the inadequacies of words and maybe to put a stop to my angsty verbal efforts to communicate myself in order to be found by her. Sex could spare me the pain of continually confronting how she is a proxy for all those past figures who missed finding me, yet I was in plain sight; meaning maybe they didn't actually bother to look for me in the first place. While compelling, such an insight does not make up the whole of the feelings of love grappled with in this analysis, in one life recounted on a couch.

I have a recurring dream that takes place in my analyst's office, and sometimes in my own office with my own patients. I dream: *the consulting room is crowded with others: strangers, parents, patients, colleagues, friends and lovers vie for space*. I've interpreted these dreams as expression of some difficulty with containment—why can't I close the door and keep others out?

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<sup>1</sup> Pseudonym. See Appendix.

However, paying more attention to feelings of love and desire, specifically, discovering credence for their existence outside of analysis, nudges me to take up the dream wish to invite you in. What follows are my attempts to convey something of the *more of it all*.

**On Not Kissing, May or June 2020:** I realize at some point in session that I am leaning in, extremely close to the camera, hands up to my face, no awareness yet of what constitutes an appropriate distance on screen for analysis with Kat. As I regain a degree of self consciousness, I feel pleased that for the first time during the pandemic, I temporarily forgot our physical separation, the pain of it. I consider later that night my unconscious movement towards the camera may have been a wish to kiss her.

I fall asleep and dream: *in a curved hallway, two women, whom I recognize to be established analysts in a shared office space, pack luggage for travel to a conference. One analyst looks up from where she is kneeling on the floor over her open suitcase and says to the other analyst, "I've made a casserole for him to heat up while I'm gone."*

*"That's nice," the other analyst responds. "He'll need it. My husband will be OK while we're away, but I'll give him a call to check in right before we leave."*

They have husbands?! Panic rises up in me. Am I am wrong in my thinking the two women are a couple? The dream scenario contradicts an actual memory.

She had said to me about a Psychoanalytic Institute dinner once in the past, before I began training, "You can come as my guest."

Then, there at the Institute, didn't I see them kiss?

"Here is my suite mate!" The one had said to introduce me to the other, making a pun to reveal the duality of their relationship as if I couldn't interpret the kiss on the lips witnessed.

Next, in the dream, *I feel Kat standing just behind me, all four of us going to the conference. In dream logic, I must now believe Kat to also have a husband. I turn in shock to look at her;* but startle awake with my fingers sealing off my lips as if to prevent my always prohibitive, already inevitable kissing her.

I recount the dream in session the next day, describing all the detail, but admit a pestering amnesia. “What did you forget?” Kat asks.

“Did I cover my lips with my hand on camera yesterday? Do *you* remember?”

**A Cover Story for Love:** On a Saturday mid pandemic, I’m impressed by the adaptation one 70-something year old analyst has made to teach over Zoom. When lecturing in person, this man is fiery and dynamic, his life experience and professional acumen make one sit up and listen, only to realize that he’s also a comedian, he tells a good story. He carries on with teaching virtually as if it is only slightly unfortunate that we are not in a lecture hall together. I take pages of notes, but it’s only the unscripted love that I remember now. At the end of a several-hour-long event, the lecturing analyst called out to another elderly male analyst in attendance, who, naturally, was on mute and had visibly stood up and walked away from his arm chair that was parked in front of his computer screen.

“Joe, are you there? Where did you go? I want to talk to you! Where did you go?” Demands our elderly speaker.

“Joe, I want to talk to you and you’ve walked away. I want you to come back. Where did you go?” His voice plaintive, then desperate.

This goes on for several minutes. It is painful to wait for Joe to return and respond, many of us listening as one man calls out to another on screen. All of us staring agape into Joe’s unkempt

study. Finally, Joe comes back and sits down. Realizing he is the object of the lecturer's desire in that moment, he leans into the frame, watched by dozens, trying to make eye contact with the only other person who matters.

"I love you, Joe. I love you. That's what I want to say. I love you."

"I love you too. I sure do. I love you." Joe responds.

Both men cry, and then the lecturer blows kisses off his fingertips all around as the event came to a close. I am deeply moved. An appreciation of the aesthetic of loss and time passing lingers all afternoon.

The next day, I recount the ending of the event to Kat. The event of my narration she calls, "an extensive cover story for love." Me needing to be an old man, needing her to be an old man, for *our* love story.

"Well?" I insist. I ponder shabby cardigans, eclectic bookshelves, and male autonomy . . .

"I don't want to be an old man," Kat says plainly.

It surprises me to realize I had assumed she had. My only imaginable solution for *us*, (agape: unselfish, non-sexual, brotherly love) is revealed to be unnecessary nostalgia in the time it takes my contemporary experience of love to break into awareness.

**MI-5 Masks:** Months later, in another online session it is discussed, we are both vaccinated. I will return to see Kat in person exactly one year from the start of the pandemic. The body is no longer an idea suspended in a dream. A date is set, but then it's as if neither of us know what to do with our mouths. Finally, dialog rushes in, an escalating response to the extreme pressure gradient the imminent return initiates.

"At least we won't kill each other with COVID," Kat says, speaking first.

“Yes, we can get on with figuring out if we are going to kill each other a different way,” I spontaneously reply.

“That’s what I meant,” she clarifies, and we both laugh.

“But I am hoping we first enjoy at least a moment of sweetness and warmth at the reunion.” I try to undo the aggressive bite of my just previous provocation; suddenly afraid of the intensity that gets generated between us.

Kat takes a step back too by disclosing one of her uncertainties: she’s not sure if we will need to wear masks together or not.

*Mature, I think, professional; her mind turning towards protection and boundaries.*

“New guidelines are coming soon which should clarify that point,” she adds.

Indeed, the CDC guidelines come out the following week. This is, of course, a time in which such announcements have all of our attention. The statement I read online specifies that two vaccinated people can meet safely indoors without masks. So, when I arrive for the in-person session, I take off my mask in her private waiting room. Yet, she opens the office door wearing her mask. Fumbling the difference, we settle on resuming our embodied ways, barefaced, before she brings up that she hadn’t specifically said that she would “allow” no masks in the office.

I interject that this had been discussed.

Then I come around to admit that I didn’t actually hear her say “allow,” though clearly—my protest continues—we had a shared understanding that we wouldn’t wear them together.

Silence.

Science! I argue. I assumed we would do whatever the national guidelines stated, which I was perfectly capable of reading on my own.

She suggests I've assumed her mind without her saying.

I'm irked by Kat's insistence on the missing specificity around saying exactly what we would do. I think of the BBC TV drama *Killing Eve* while we try to work out this conflict. The plot of *Killing Eve* revolves around two characters: seemingly socially acceptable Eve is a former UK MI-5 security officer tracking down a for-hire sociopathic assassin who goes by the handle Villanelle. The two women with intersecting obsessions don't know whether they will have sex, or kill each other first. What would become of the sensual, sexual drama of Eve and Villanelle without their active interpretation of the other's intended meaning in every gesture? And didn't Kat teach me to value our shared unconscious material in the first place? Over the years of analysis we have co-created a lexicon that includes impressions and references that I freely draw upon. I say, "When Villanelle sends Eve an elegant dress in the mail, Eve does not wonder, *what should I do with this?* No, she puts it on. When I recall you talking about my return to your office I hear, *take it off.*"

"Oh, so you are the investigator Eve, and I'm the assassin Villanelle in this scenario?...I thought I was Eve." Kat thoughtfully contemplates.

**I Fall in Love Outside of Analysis:** It was six weeks after we met when I faced my first king tide jealousy for sole possession of a new lover. We had just walked past Queer Bar in Northern latitude sunshine and I asked if if they had ever been.

"Yes, on a date once," they report.

"How did the date go?" knowing full well what ugliness was rising in me by way of my question.

“The date at the bar was fine. She was fine. Ha! But, I went home with her and she lived with her ex husband. He banged on the bedroom door in the middle of things. There had been some noise. As is goes. And she wouldn’t open the door, but was texting him from the bed. I stayed absolutely silent. It was not great.”

Who could be jealous of this date? *Me*. In that moment, I was the patriarchy, the priest, the nineteenth century original psychoanalyst. My jealousy was hideous to me in it’s scope, and I said nothing about it to the new lover for a long while, certain this to be cause for rejection. Instead of talking about my feelings, I shared with them some of the ideas the sexy analyst writes about, to be sexy myself, but not this:

Freud begins with the idea that the demand for virginity in marriage is the demand that the girl will bring with her no memory of sexual relations with another. He calls this the “logical continuation of the right to exclusive possession of a woman, which forms the essence of monogamy and the extension of this monopoly to cover the past” ([1918] 1995, 193) (Webster, 2019, p.104).

I suffer this passage of text, shrinking at my unacceptable thought that I want a monopoly on another other human that covers their past. I only speak of this in the confidential, confessional space that is Kat’s office, expecting her help to make it right, but she says instead of my wish to have always, already known them, “it sounds like something of falling in love.”

Maybe redemption is taking a queer love story to a queer analyst. *Don’t just think harder*, Kat implies, *feel*. Think of a patriarchal understanding of the exclusive right to a woman including a monopoly on her past as consummation without personal responsibility. Without the

pulse of present-moment attunement, the vulnerability of my feelings, exclusivity is no different than capitalism, a purchase of goods for which no origin story is required. It's one and done.

I went searching for someone who wouldn't demean my feelings for Kat, but it still surprised me to meet a person who openly questions why love is corralled into something deterministic. More expansive in their feelings than I ever imagined, I find them soft and accepting of my intimacy with Kat. I relax and begin to enjoy. The beautiful other and I fall deeply in love out in the real world. I'm simultaneously ushered into the final chapter of my long analysis.

**Incest, or *Unfortunate Events*:** While non-monogamy soothes my fears about being subjected to a demand that I give up important emotional attachments, I know I am approaching the time to relinquish my hours on the couch in Kat's office. I think a lot about what contact will look like with her after analysis. Who will we be to one another? How will we hold the intimacy established between us, having given up the working space to attend to it? These questions are hard to tackle head-on; what's needed is a kernel of the unconscious to reconcile the reality of analysis with the emotion of love. This is the art of psychoanalysis: threading truth into the emotional wrench of connection.

One day, I find myself summarizing the plot of *The Mysterious Benedict Society*, a TV drama for children: four precocious children are recruited to destroy a subconscious infiltrating invention developed by an evil Director of a school called *The Institute*, in order to save the world from having to choose between depression or mind control.



The explicit reference to *The Institute* sounds an awful lot like an analysand's paranoia about psychoanalytic training. Yet, in the twists and turns of dialog that follow, the shape of post-analysis connection with Kat, which is, in fact, the current analysis relationship, snaps into focus.

Kat says, "... a powerful secret organization operating in plain sight! . . . Like your mind, I suspect?"

"Ha! Yeah." I respond, thinking of the gifted children. "They're a family of sorts, all the kids with dead parents. Or they have a parent, or a potential new adoptive parent, but that parent is either tragically inadequate—for instance the real father who is found but has had his memory erased—or evil."

I feel Kat, seated behind me, engage. I feel her lean forward in her chair, but unbeknownst to me in the moment, she is picturing the young Baudelaires from another children's TV show called *A Series of Unfortunate Events*: three siblings come to grief when their parents mysteriously die in a fire leaving them with great wealth but no appropriate guardian. Much woe and deprivation unfold. Kat says, "...and there are these terribly sad moments when you feel they are right on the verge of actually having what they need..."

I interrupt, "They have each other, though! They turn to each other, the orphan siblings."

Kat's voice is the epitome of crestfallen, "Right, they form a new parental couple with each other, the siblings, a new Oedipal arrangement, but the dread of this is overwhelming. Deep dread. It's all wrong." At that, I catch on to Kat's association to the *Unfortunate* Baudelaires.

I plead, "They have to! They have to turn to each other in order to survive. How else can these kids make a life?"

It's quiet for a moment and I smile to myself as I mentally picture Violet in *Unfortunate Events* holding her 8 month old baby sibling, Sunny, on her hip. The infant baby-babbles delightfully at all the right times and subtitles reveal to the viewer the baby's astounding vocabulary and wit that Violet and her brother Klaus have no trouble translating.

Kat says over the top of my thoughts, "Or they make a life by conjuring precocious intellectual development."

I laugh aloud responding to the familiar shock of seeing what's been hidden in plain sight: we are siblings Kat and I. No, we don't share biological parents (inadequate, dead, or evil), but we share the custodianship of psychoanalysis, having both opted to take the "precocious intellect" developmental track early on I imagine, verbose babbling babies. Feeling the erotic mixed with manic efforts to survive, to make a life, reveals the unconscious dread of the incest bond. While life may feel at times to be a series of *Unfortunate Events*, loving inside and out of analysis is my achievement, not our tragic ending. My dread of post analysis contact dissipates.

**Dream, February 28, 6:34am:** *I'm with a little child—first there are horrors and I feel fear—so I decisively take the child beyond a gate, off of a dangerous street into a natural area: a park, a pond, many wooden bridges that have been burned in a fire make up the path. I carry the little girl carefully, sometimes setting her down to usher her through on foot. There are sharp, charred wood splinters on either side of us, alarming hazards that make the route narrow and treacherous. Then I become aware of someone behind me. They reach around me now and then to move sharp pieces of wood to the side, as one would hold a branch back in a forest, so I can focus on navigating the path ahead with all my attention, this little girl in my care.*

I wake up with a feeling of deep gratitude and think of Kat helping me to love.

## Appendix

### Choosing a Pseudonym for My Analyst

If I say ‘it is a real cat’ that sees me naked, this is in order to mark its unsubstitutable singularity . . . It is true that I identify it as a male or female cat. But even before that identification, it comes to me as this irreplaceable living being that one day enters my space, into this place where it can encounter me, see me, even see me naked. Nothing can ever rob me of the certainty that what we have here is an existence that refuses to be conceptualized [*rebelle à tout concept*]. And a mortal existence, for from the moment that it has a name its name survives it. It signs its potential disappearance. Mine also, and that disappearance, from this moment to that, *fort/da*, is announced each time that, with or without nakedness, one of us leaves the room (Derrida, 2010, p. 9).

—Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I am*

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