

SHALOM CAMENIETZKI

A Dry Depression

PAT, MY WIFE OF THIRTY-FIVE YEARS, couldn't believe that much of the time I was helpless. On Tuesdays, when I saw Barbara Graham, my psychiatrist, Pat got particularly testy. "You're lazy, not ill," she often bellowed. At other times she got jealous. "Your other woman spoils you like a baby. She has turned you into a slacker."

Almost resigned to Pat's diatribes, I tried to answer rationally: "Dr. Graham empathizes with me. She soothes my suffering."

"Here you go, Matt, talking like a shrink!" At this juncture, my tall, strawberry haired, bespectacled wife hollered, "Does that doctor-shmoctor ever suggest that you do the dishes? Since you hurried into early retirement, you don't lift a finger around the house. I do all the work—the repairs, the cooking, cleaning, laundry. Do you ever talk with that woman about *that*? I've the feeling you go there just to bitch about me and yak about your bad moods."

I slid my palm across my mouth, not to yell something I might regret, a device I'd used with difficult clients while practising law. "I told you, many times, that I feel terribly helpless. I stand by the sink, and an inner voice insists, 'I can't do it! I *can't*!' The pots and pans, the greasy dishes, and the warm water disgust me, cripple me. Pat, I feel awfully guilty. I—"

"Guilty and helpless my foot! You sit by the computer three or four hours a day without ever getting tired! What the hell are you going to do when you finish your memoirs, uh? Work in the garden, I hope?"

"I'm going to write about depressed people being utterly tongue-tied."

She shook her head. "Yes, I know. Small talk is hard on you. But are you going to crank out a whole tome about your miseries?"

"I don't have enough material for a book. There's only so much I can communicate about the impossibility of communicating. I don't want

to shoot myself in the foot by writing a volume that illustrates how depression *is* communicable. So, I'll probably end up with a four-page article."

It helped me to stay away from nasty fights when I reminded myself that Pat is truly action-oriented: in addition to the courses she took at the university, she volunteered at a nursing home, teaching fitness classes to the residents. For thirty years she had been a successful real-estate agent, and when a deal closed, she worked until after midnight. A teacher by training, she early on concluded that, for her, there wasn't enough "action" in the classroom. She had no plans for retiring and announced that she felt young and bouncy. She had a really tough time dealing with my passivity—her word for my helplessness. I didn't stand up to her much because we'd had a reasonably good marriage until my illness struck. Despite her bitching, I was grateful: overall, she took good care of me and the house.

■ ■ ■

Shortly after that argument about my helplessness, an e-mail from Patrick White arrived. That old friend from high school let me know that our grade-eleven class would get together at the home of Heather Lowry, in Mississauga. Heather, a gourmet cook, had volunteered to prepare a buffet dinner. Everyone was kindly requested to provide hors d'oeuvres, wine, or booze. The organizing committee stipulated that the event was for graduates only; spouses and partners were not invited. "Please notify Heather whether you're coming," Patrick wrote at the end.

I was about to reply that I couldn't attend the reunion "for personal reasons," when Dr. Graham's soft and velvety voice purred in my mind's ear, "Don't throw in the towel before you go over the problem with me." (The same warm voice had twice told a suicidal me to check into psychiatric wards.) I would bring up the event with her next Tuesday; my reply could wait. Meanwhile, I told myself, I might as well discuss the reunion with Pat. She often complained that I was married to my psychiatrist, and left "the cook and cleaning lady" out of the soul searching and excitement involved in decision making.

"What a wonderful idea." Pat's greenish eyes shone. "A fifty-year class reunion, without partners! Marvellous! The old gang together, under one roof. You're going, right?"

"Not really." I scrunched up my face. "I don't feel like spending an evening with beer-bellied guys and big-breasted matrons just because we went to high school together. What do I have in common with them, today? Since we graduated, I ran into several classmates, and they didn't sweep me off my feet."

She puckered her lips and shook her head. “Here you go again, Matt, passive as all hell, making excuses not to interact with people. What’s the matter with you? Miss a landmark like that? Are you crazy?”

“Pat, I resent the word ‘crazy.’ It’s unempathetic. I need encouragement, not criticisms. But I’ll think about the reunion,” I said, conciliatory. Since my lousy moods started, even mild confrontations scared me.

“Whenever you say, ‘I’ll think about it,’ it means that you’ll rack your brain for further excuses. I know you by now.”

I sighed, succumbing to the weight of her words.

■ ■ ■

The next Tuesday with Dr. Graham, for a good ten minutes, without repeating myself even once, I enumerated my paralyzing anxieties about taking part in the reunion. Pat’s harshness figured highly in my complaints. When I worked with Dr. Graham—a brown-eyed, chestnut-haired, thickset woman, whose dimple came to life whenever she smiled—my ambivalence about my wife rose to the foreground. Not only would I complain about Pat angrily, but also vent a petrifying fear of her dying before me. Alone and anxious, I would have to fend for myself.

The gap between Dr. Graham’s eyebrows narrowed, a sign that she was about to “challenge cognitions,” as she called her gentle confrontations. I stopped talking, waiting for her verdict.

“Your wife may be hard on you, but in this case she’s right. It would be a shame to miss the reunion. Think about Hilary.”

What a betrayal! Instead of siding with me, my therapist added one more reason for me to drive to Mississauga! “Do you feel,” I moaned, “there’s any point in meeting her, after all these years?”

“Yes. She meant a lot to you. Of all the chapters of your memoirs, you asked me to read the one on first love—the account of your relationship with Hilary.”

“I told you, Dr. Graham, I dread the drive to Mississauga, and I dread the party. People will kid around, they’ll enjoy themselves, and I, with nothing to say, will look like a telephone pole in the middle of the room.”

“You had a lot of fears about other parties. The pattern is: you worry a lot before a get together, but when you face the challenge, you end up having a reasonably good time.”

I went silent. She had a way of disarming me by reminding me of my accomplishments. She kept lengthy notes about our sessions, and I often

sensed that she remembered my problems better than I did. I stared at her bunions.

“It’s unfortunate that you’re so afraid of changes in your routines,” she continued, unsmiling. “But you have to express *all* your emotions, good and bad, Matt. You bottle up your sadness, and instead of getting in touch with it, you worry about mundane details until they appear insurmountable. Try to let go. You’ve done it before. It worked for you.”

I was so absorbed in comparing her soothing voice with Pat’s confrontations that I lost track of her speech. My poor concentration didn’t bother me much; I was so used to it that I even expected not to listen even to a kind, constructive critic like Dr. Graham. In a while I came to and heard her say, “It’s a shame you never cry, Matt. Yours is a dry depression.”

By way of homework, she asked me to keep a journal of all the events where a good cry would have relieved my melancholy moods.

■ ■ ■

I thought a lot about Hilary during the days prior to the class reunion. I even edited, for the umpteenth time, the chapter in my memoirs dealing with her. This time I added a few sentences to the passage where she rejected me: we were grade-eleven sweethearts, and had our dates at her home. That romance lasted about four months and came to an end when I felt her breasts while we were sprawled on her bed. This wasn’t the first time I fondled her below the neck, but this time I frantically tried to unfasten her bra. She grabbed my arm with both hands and said angrily, “Stop! Stop!”

“Why?”

“I’m not ready to go there.”

I ignored her plea and continue to struggle with the fastener at her back. She sat up in bed and said it would be better if I went home. From that day on, she barely spoke to me at school and wouldn’t answer my phone calls. I wrote her a letter, offering my deep apologies. She didn’t reply.

Devastated for weeks, I writhed in bed, blaming myself for her rejecting me. Why, I asked in self-loathing, did I struggle with her bra? Why be so insistent, even forceful, with a girl I loved so much? A sensitive adolescent consumed by notions of right and wrong, justice and injustice, I couldn’t, wouldn’t, move on with my life. I wasn’t able to tell myself that nothing momentous had happened.

For years rejection and unrequited passion were often on my mind. I resumed dating only at the end of high school but harboured fears of making sexual advances. The only woman I dated at university was Pat.

We consummated the relationship a week before our wedding, at her insistence. In my memoirs, I wrote long comparisons of my love for Hilary to my sentimental love for my mother and to my mature feelings for Pat. I expressed regret that my botched first love led me to know, in the Biblical sense, only one woman.

■ ■ ■

In the afternoon prior to the class reunion, I spent a long time brushing the remains of my white hair and ruminating about what I should wear for the occasion. It became extremely important how I'd come across to my old classmates, especially to Hilary. Pat, who for many years had known about Hilary, saw me in front of the mirror, trying on a couple of shirts. Laughing, she said I wouldn't come back home that night. "The love birds will be reunited," she laughed, louder.

"Is that what you're praying for? Getting rid of the old coot?" I said, almost smiling. In the last few hours I'd grown quite excited. My prevailing lousy mood had receded, giving way to a sense of expectant impatience. I couldn't wait to be with the old crowd from high school. I even mentally rehearsed some of the things I'd say to them.

Pat accompanied a nervous me to the garage. I sat on the driver's seat, attached the safety belt, and drove a few yards in reverse. A bit dizzy, I halted and rolled down the car window. "Pat," I mumbled, my stomach in acute knots. "I don't think I can drive to the party. I'll take a cab."

"What happened?"

"I'm afraid I'll get lost on the way. It's irrational, I know. But still, I'm terribly worried."

"You can't arrive by cab, Mart. You'll look like an old man unable to take care of himself. Be a good sport! Drive, look independent, enjoy yourself." Her voice was soft, conciliatory, supportive. Her advice giving, her musts and shoulds now sounded reasonable, achievable, within reach. I thought of Dr. Graham.

"Do you mind if I call you if I get lost, Pat? Just to hear your voice. I'm so anxious about the trip."

"You can call me from the car. I'll be home." She gave me a worried look. "Make an effort: don't call me from the party. Don't come across needy and clinging." She bent down and stroked my chin. "And don't broadcast your illness, honey, don't put your worst foot forward. The reunion is about catching up with the old crowd, smiling, laughing, having a good time." She covered her mouth and laughed. "You've my permission to flirt with your Hilary."



The map I had to Heather's house turned out to be very helpful. Contrary to my dire prophecies, I didn't get lost on the way. When I arrived at her place, the party was in full swing. At the entrance to the off-white large living room, on a small carved table, stood a brown basket full of tags with names and small pictures of the kids we were at grade eleven. I fastened my tag to my shirt and thought, "What a nice touch! The organizing committee did such a good job! It'll be easy for me to recognize the old crowd."

Several classmates came up to me, and one by one hugged me effusively. "Great to see you, Matt! You haven't changed one bit! The same sparkling eyes, the same smile. Just your hair is completely white!"

Were they talking about me, I wondered. Whose smile were they referring to? Me, smile? In social gatherings, I extended my mouth until it stiffened. Did it look like a phoney grin now, or were they projecting their own cheery mood onto me?

I had a hard time identifying some of the people who were bellowing my name. Despite my embarrassment, I bent down, to consult their nametags. What an intriguing game: to study aging faces and let a name tag with a youngster's picture help me recognize the wizened oldie smiling in front of me.

For a while I listened to people assembled in a circle. How hard for me to smile! (One of my startling discoveries, when I first became ill, revolved around humankind being a smiling species; a vulnerable me probably looked austere and dour, a judge reading a verdict.) My problems in displaying merriment were only intensified by others at that party being so excited, so communicative and loud! They spoke a lot about how fortunately life had treated them in the last fifty years, and how well they were faring those days. People proudly broadcast that they led a busy and meaningful golden age. No one alluded to the brutal fact that we were all six and a half decades closer to death.

"What a gloomy thought," I chided myself and remembered Dr. Graham saying that when I'm very down the whole world is painted the colour of shit.

Soon, Heather passed by. Tall and blond, how matronly she looked now. We hugged, kissed, and spent a few moments catching up. "Hilary is over there," she whispered in my ear and pointed. I wondered how many people remembered that romance, two generations ago.

"Are you uptight about meeting her?" Heather smiled, provocatively.

“No,” I lied and headed to the kitchen, to get a beer. I didn’t crave alcohol in my veins, but wished to hide my sad face and awkward grins behind a bottle. I joined another group and listened to their loud, animated conversation. When asked direct questions, I managed to make small talk about my life in the last five decades and the memoirs I was writing. My inner restlessness rattled me, but it surprised me how well I conducted myself, at least outwardly.

I decided not to stay around the same people, but to circulate in the room. Exchanging hugs and repeating my spiel about my career as a lawyer and my life in retirement was easier on me than hanging around relaxed people swapping memories and jokes. They laughed spontaneously, while I thought of snuggling under blankets, to cope with the icy knots in the pit of my stomach. Yes, I ordered myself, circulate, move about. Don’t let people pick up on your awkwardness. Just keep repeating the same safe phrases rather than display how I had nothing lively, nothing amusing, to say. I experienced my depression as a despicable inner flaw that must be concealed. I fantasized people finding out how sick I was and getting angry at my pretence of being one of the guys. They would shake their heads disapprovingly and categorically reject me: my impaired concentration, my debilitating moods, my nodding repeatedly to simulate a live, interested listener.

I felt somebody tapping my shoulder. I turned around. Hilary! She smiled, as lively and effusive as a beer commercial. We hugged, and I pecked her on both cheeks. When our exclamations came to an end, I noticed that her left eye was permanently half-closed. Her golden hair shone, whereas I remembered it being chestnut. Her face had few wrinkles: she was clearly overweight, and her neck bloated. I glimpsed at her huge, conical breasts—probably moulded by a rigid bra. It amused me to think how those breasts had, at the time, turned me on wildly, and I’d allowed the guilt connected with them to subdue other feelings.

We caught up with each other. She had been a special education teacher. In the ten years prior to her retirement she consulted with other teachers. She had two children, a boy and a girl, from her first marriage. I also summed up my adult life and noticed that I’d perked up in the process, breathing less anxiously. Still, I worried: would she bring up the past? So far, I had avoided reminiscences. Too vulnerable to delve into old memories, the prospect of getting in touch with bygone pains paralyzed me. I was afraid to be the first to bring up our past relationship.

“Where do you live?” she asked when I had been silent for a long while.

“On Woodlawn Avenue. And you?”

“In a condo, at Yonge and Eglinton, not too far from you. Matt, could you give me a ride home? My car broke down this morning.”

An almost pleasant twitch churned my stomach. I flashed my canines, hoping that my grin wasn't too phoney. “But of course!” I blared. “I'd be glad to. But how did you get here?”

“I took a cab.”

Were it not for my vow not to discuss my condition at the reunion, I would have shared with Hilary why I too had almost taken a cab to the party. Pat, I told myself, would laugh her head off when she'd hear about me, of all people, playing chauffeur to an old flame.

I heard a glass tinkling. I turned around and saw Heather smiling. “The buffet is open!”

Hilary and I stood in line. The food glowed splendid: a large roast beef, barbecued breasts of chicken, a variety of grilled vegetables, plenty of salads, several kinds of bread. Without ruminating about what was the “right” thing to say, I exclaimed, “Eat like that until you're a hundred years old, and you'll get to live a long life!”

Hilary and several people in line laughed. I felt I was blushing as I heard, from behind me, “Right on, Matt!” Someone else said, “Good, Matt, you've whetted my appetite!” Hilary turned to me. “You were always good with words, Matt! No wonder you're a writer of memoirs these days. I still remember Mrs. Hilldale, our grade eleven English teacher—remember her?—praising your essays.”

This time, my smile felt less forced, less strained. Despite a disturbing wave of self-consciousness, I even enjoyed the attention I was getting.

■ ■ ■

After the dinner ended, I sat on a sofa, trying not to immerse myself in the drippy songs of the Platters in the background. (When I'm really down, music of any kind irritates me.) My tolerance of stress was approaching its limits; though anxious, I felt at ease sitting alone, sipping my coffee, not schmoozing with anyone. To hell with what people would think! Drained, ready to go home, I regretted promising Hilary a ride. I needed to hide in an island of silence, to recuperate from the loud hilarity of others and my clumsy attempts to grin and chit-chat. True, I had a few enjoyable moments connecting with the grade-eleven crowd, but now it was time to slither into my shell, to conceal my raw wounds.

Unfortunately, Hilary was in no hurry to leave. On and on she went from one group to the next, laughing and patting classmates on the shoul-

der—all the signs of wanting to prolong her stay. My irritation was peaking. I resented her and resented promising her a ride. On our way home, she would rehash the party and excitedly yak about all those who had showed up and comment on those who hadn't. Her good mood would be a burden. Unable to tolerate my agitation further, I stood up, went up to her, and said it was getting late. She seemed to resent my urging, but got her jacket and purse and followed me to my car.

Sitting next to me, Hilary read the map and gave me instructions how to get back to Toronto. We had no difficulties finding the Queen Elizabeth Way. I stared at the highway, so busy even that time of the night. Anxious about driving in the dark, I drove in the right lane, slowly. Swaths of blinding white light flooded the lanes to my left whenever cars passed. Ahead, I saw the dim red back lights of a small truck. I felt relieved that in the darkness inside my car Hilary could gaze only at my profile. I thought about the windows of the soul: as she couldn't vet my eyes, I could let down my guard a bit. All night I'd heard about the joy and accomplishments of others, and little or nothing about their problems. I longed to be in my pyjamas, report to Pat about the reunion, gulp down my bluish sleeping pill, and plunge into a sea of forgetfulness until next dawn.

"Did you enjoy the evening?" Hilary pierced my reveries.

"Yes . . . yes . . . of course. And you?" I said, cagey that the conversation might head in a direction too personal for me to handle.

I heard her titter. "It was a *party*, so I put on a front that my life is just fine, and everything is under control. D'you know what I mean?"

I wished I had the guts to tell her that the whole night long I'd worn a mask of normality. Grinning like a chimp, I'd been intent on impressing others that I could manage all crises, big and small. "Yes, Hilary," I turned to her for a moment. "I also felt that way." In my mind I heard Pat pleading with me not to flash my symptoms.

"Matt," she said, "why don't we park in front of my building. We can talk, really talk. It's hard to open up when we're not facing each other."

A stab of anxiety pierced the pit of my stomach. She wanted a heart-to-heart after an evening of fun and polite deceptions. The prospect of swapping confessions filled me with dread. Almost fondly, I remembered how I'd grinned and grinned during the reunion, fooling so many people!

Driving up Yonge Street I realized that with Hilary I wouldn't be able to play polite games. She wanted to share something significant with me; having no idea what she had in store, I feared I wouldn't escape unscathed.

It occurred to me to flee her confessions, to claim, for example, that I had a headache, or that I had to wake up early next morning to take my

grandson to a hockey game. She would despise me, think I was a coward, unable to face the miseries she needed to disclose. But I took refuge in the knowledge of never seeing her again. My shame would be transient: a few phoney excuses, her piercing look, a passing stab of guilt. Next morning I'd forget about it.

When I parked in front of her building, I discovered, to my enormous surprise, that I had a lot to tell her. I'd loved her once, and despite the chasm of fifty years I felt close to her. I had no idea if she reciprocated my feelings, or whether she was just trawling for a listening ear, and anyone would do.

In the almost darkness of the car I stared her in the eye. Where else could I gaze? "Matt," she said, "I can talk to you. I think I was in love with you once, and this helps me break the ice."

"*Think?*" I retorted, wondering about my sudden sharpness. "You *think* you were in love? You don't know?"

She jerked her head to the side. "I never knew much about love until I met Michael, my second husband. Until then, my feelings about men were a muddle." She patted my forearm. "I didn't treat you any worse than other men, believe me."

I listened, heart pounding.

"At any rate, what I wanted to tell you—and I couldn't open up during the reunion—was that Fred, my son, has lung cancer. I—"

"I'm sorry to hear about your son, Hilary." My turn to pat her forearm.

"This is not the only thing. His wife freaked out, and left him. She took their two kids to Vancouver. Fred is living with me, for the time being. I miss my grandchildren terribly. Sometimes I'm sure I'm falling apart."

"You have no other grandchildren?"

"My daughter can't have children, and she doesn't want to adopt. I'm in so much pain I could scream."

I noticed tears welling in her eyes. I racked my mind for something comforting to tell her, but I came up with nothing. I felt sad—really sad—not just my habitual depression.

We sat in silence for a while until she broke it. "Don't you have a problem, a conflict, to tell me?" She smiled, a tear streaming down her cheek. "Or is your life trouble-free, the way we—I—behaved at the party?"

I wanted to disclose my suffering. Not merely repeat my daily moaning to Pat, nor my weekly soliloquies in Dr. Graham's office. I felt connected to Hilary and wanted to dive with her to the bottom of the mud, pound the rock with a fist, unearth the man beneath the layers of complaints. I'd

been out of touch with that kernel of my character since my lousy moods started to rule my life.

“No ... Hilary,” I whispered. “I’ve a lot to tell you ... I’ve so much to say ... that I’m afraid.” Here I stopped, waiting for a breakthrough, an ounce of inspiration. “I wonder if I can find words to express myself. It’s all buried. For years and years ... I haven’t been in touch. It’s so hard to let it out. I wish I could.” I stopped again, frozen. “I guess ... I really can’t.”

She looked worried. “Begin at the beginning and tell me what’s bothering you, Matt. Get it off your chest, you’ll feel better. You men are so afraid of a few tears it’s ridiculous.”

My chest churned, a hurricane. Yet, I felt wordless, mute. I wished I could cry like a baby, fat tears rilling down my cheeks and joining at the chin, soothing the storms inside. I remembered Dr. Graham’s diagnosis and took a finger to my eyes. They were dry, a piece of chalk. I felt disappointed. I was disappointing Hilary.

“You can’t let it out? You don’t trust me?”

I kept quiet.

She broke the long, embarrassing silence. “But your eyes are sore, Matt!” She gently fondled my hand. “You need eye drops, Matt, like me. Try Visine. Aging eyes get dry, awfully dry.”

I felt relieved. She’d shifted the conversation away from my inability to open up onto my getting older, frailer, needing medication. Her motherly, nurturing concerns had masked my disconnection from innermost feelings. Though frustrated with my limitations, I realized I’d escaped, almost unscathed..

“Thank you for your concern,” I said.

She opened the door on her side of the car. “Good night, Matt. Thanks for the ride.” She placed one foot on the street, then the other. “Let’s hope that in our next reunion, you’ll find words for what troubles you.”

I was taken aback. “You mean fifty *years* from now?”

She laughed. “You got it. Let’s hope you’ll be better in touch with yourself then and—smile more.” She laughed louder, then slammed the door shut.

I’d miserably failed her: apart from polite condolences, I hadn’t come up with words of support for her plight. I didn’t reciprocate her openness; I’d babbled like an ape while trying to remove my layers of self-pity.

I longed to set my fingers on my computer’s keyboard and work on my memoirs. It would have been relatively easy to slog away on a manuscript: one could revise and rewrite the text, almost endlessly. Letting hot words leave my lips seemed so final! Spoken words had a life of their own,

one couldn't rewrite them, their impact was irreversible. By the same token, what was left unsaid to Hilary, what didn't surface at all, also bore the mark of finality. I would never be able to resume where I'd left with her. The circumstances of our encounter—the reunion, the bantering, the concealment of pain—could never be replicated. This awareness intensified my disappointment.

■ ■ ■

When I arrived home from the reunion, Pat was sitting up in bed, waiting for me. "How did it go?"

"Not too bad."

"Is that all you have to say?"

"I'm tired."

"Did you talk to people? Did you smile or display a long face?"

"I managed. It was safe to repeat the spiel about my life over the last fifty years."

"And how about your Hilary?" Her impish smile insinuated romance and intrigue.

"We talked. Her son is very ill, Pat." I deliberately omitted my attempt to reveal to Hilary what lies beneath and beyond my lousy moods. Pat, a woman so committed to unceasing self-improvement, wouldn't—couldn't—grasp the significance of what was brewing beneath the surface. What counted in her eyes were actions to change one's lot in life. Introspection and reflection, supposedly the hobbies of lazybones, didn't mean much to her.

"You see? You interacted with *people*. Now, now, don't deny it: you *enjoyed* the party! It was far healthier than to sit all cooped up in front of the computer screen, gaze your navel and obsess about words—and more words. Matt! You need *to do* something about your lifestyle."

Too demoralized to defend myself, I said good night and turned off the reading light. It would have been useless to convey to Pat how incapacitated I felt inside. Carved in stone, her worldview left little room for those too weak to fight back.

■ ■ ■

On Tuesday, a curious Dr. Graham asked me right off the bat how the reunion had gone. I elaborated on how I couldn't open up to Hilary. As usual, Dr. Graham first tried to comfort me. "The silver lining in the cloud is that Hilary shared some deep feelings. Being the recipient of somebody else's honesty is also beneficial."

Her chronic optimism was annoying, the second woman to dump positive thinking on me. "But I *failed*, Dr. Graham!" My loud outburst surprised me. "Nothing meaningful came out of my mouth."

"But you improved your track record. Now you know: it's not so daunting to approach women. It'll help you to stand up to your wife."

"But Dr. Graham, I feel that my authentic feelings *are* inaccessible!"

She raised her forefinger and waved it, to signify that reason and sanity were on their way. "Only *a few* feelings seem unavailable to you."

By way of homework, she asked me to keep a journal on my reactions whenever emotions perceived to be genuine rippled through my protective barriers. I was to rate, on a scale from one to ten, how gratifying were those experiences.

I left Dr. Graham's office more lonely than ever. In just a few days I had failed to connect with three women who meant so much to me. Hours later it dawned on me: perhaps my refusal to live life on others' terms was my own way of connecting most truly to myself.