

## *TIGHTWIRE*

Curriculum And Reading Guide – The Therapeutic Process

By Amy Kaufman Burk

*Dear Reader and Educator,*

*Tightwire is a work of fiction that grew out of my experience initially as a psych trainee, then as a therapist, consultant, supervisor and patient. After more than twenty years, I changed careers and became a novelist. People often ask if I lifted my work with patients into the story of Tightwire; the answer is no. The character of “Collier” is entirely fictional.*

*Thank you for your interest in Tightwire.*

*Amy Kaufman Burk*

*Doctor of Mental Health*

## CHAPTER 1

### “First Session”

Collier Z. Tratner, the patient, has his first meeting with his therapist, Caroline Black. Collier is Caroline’s first patient in her internship year at Oasis Psych Clinic, County Hospital, San Francisco, CA. Collier reveals to Caroline that he is fluent in French, Spanish, German and Italian, as well as English. He grew up with a single mother, as a child of the circus. The issue of child abuse is raised but not discussed. He explains that he has run away from the circus, and is now working as waitstaff at a restaurant, temporarily living at the YMCA. Collier’s favorite song is “Tight Rope,” by Leon Russell.

### CHARACTERS

Caroline Black: a rookie therapist, beginning her internship year of training to become a psychologist.

Collier Z. Tratner: the patient, ran away from the circus to find himself.

Collier’s mother: a clown, unicyclist, contortionist on the circus team of the Club Med Resort.

### DISCUSSION

Treatment begins in the first session. The first session is not a preface to treatment; it’s the beginning of treatment. In the initial meeting with a patient, many more issues are raised than can be addressed in one session. A parallel process exists in the first chapter of *Tightwire*; I offer many more topics for discussion than can be covered in one class.

### GOALS OF A FIRST SESSION

*Gathering Information*

The patient's style of revealing information is as useful as the information itself. (*Form vs. Content*). The first session is also an opportunity for the patient to gather information about the therapist, see if their style is a strong match.

#### *Mental Status Exam*

Watch and listen closely to see how the patient thinks, processes feelings. Look for *physical appearance, ego strengths, ego deficits, medical issues, affect, mood, insight, judgment, thought content, abstract/concrete thinking*.

#### *Clarify Goals Of Treatment*

People seek treatment because they're in pain, and don't know how to feel better. Find out what kind of pain the person is in, and what they hope to accomplish in the work with you.

#### *Identifying Issues*

What are the issues that the patient can identify? Would you identify the same issues, or different issues?

#### *Forming A Connection*

Relationships are an important part of a healthy life. Your first clue regarding the patient's ability to form healthy relationships (*object relations*) is the quality of their connection to you.

#### *Seeing If The Match Feels Right For Both Therapist And Patient*

Keep an open mind. Ask yourself if you think you can help this person. If you have questions, or if they have questions, bring it out in the open for discussion.

#### *Giving The Patient A Sample Of The Therapeutic Experience*

The initial meeting gives the patient and the therapist their first taste of the therapeutic experience, working together. Does it feel productive to you both?

#### *Content vs. Form*

*Content* is what the patient says; *form* is how the patient says it.

### *COLLIER'S TREATMENT WITH CAROLINE*

#### *Collier's First Session*

What interventions does Caroline make that set the stage for Collier's treatment?

What does Collier say/do that will promote the therapeutic process?

Can you identify any of Collier's *resistances* and *defenses*?

Can you find evidence of *transference* and *countertransference*?

#### *The Match Between Collier And Caroline*

What aspects of Caroline's style do you anticipate will work well?

What do you anticipate might be personal issues that Caroline will have to address as she progresses in her training?

How do their styles work together? (An interesting match – Collier is a gorgeous child of the circus, who has been worshipped for his looks; Caroline is cerebral, intellectual to a fault.)

### *Object Relations*

Look at the way Collier relates to Caroline (seductive, sexualized, angry, provocative). You can extrapolate from that to understand how he relates to people in his life outside of his treatment.

### *Collier's Issues With Sex*

Why do you think Collier brings a sexual charge/sexual tension into the office?  
Why is it important for Caroline not to flirt or act seductive with Collier?

## CHAPTER 2

### "A Healthy Baby Girl"

Caroline is born. Her parents, Leah and Geoff, insist on a natural childbirth, going against the hospital's policy in 1958. Two nurses, Rose and Deborah, step in as midwives. Caroline is born in the hallway of the maternity ward, behind a heap of laundry. We find out that Leah attended Radcliffe College and UCLA medical school, where she was one of two women in her class, and graduated #3. Geoff attended Harvard College, where he played football.

### CHARACTERS

Leah Black: new character, Caroline's mother.

Geoff Black: new character, Caroline's father.

Nurse Deborah: new character.

Nurse Rose: new character.

Dr. van Heyst: new character.

### DISCUSSION

Family history is extremely useful in understanding the person's issues in the present.

### *Caroline's Family – Leah And Geoff*

What do you learn about Caroline's mother and father? How do you think their characteristics might affect Caroline as she grows up and becomes a therapist?

Leah and Geoff are determined and tenacious (willing to give birth in a hallway, to allow Leah to refuse drugs and stay conscious through the delivery); they are progressive (trying out Lamaze which is new); they are fiery (Leah swears and Geoff stands up to the doctor); they are closely bonded as a couple. These are the "plain English" words to describe their *ego strengths*, *defenses* and *object relations*. What are the psychological terms for their personality traits?

### *The Language Of Treatment*

Why is it important to be a “simultaneous interpreter” between English and jargon? (If you can’t define a jargon term in English, you probably don’t understand it well enough to help your patient.)

## CHAPTER 3

### “Maurice”

Caroline sets up an appointment with her supervisor, Dr. Laura Stilwell. Along with Collier, Caroline has seen two other patients: Gigi, an adolescent whose best friend was killed in a drive by shooting – Dr. R., a female chemistry professor, who builds music stands as a hobby, extremely intellectual. Collier tells Caroline about his circus act on the trapeze with Maurice.

### CHARACTERS

Caroline

Collier

Dr. Laura Stilwell: new character, Caroline’s primary supervisor.

Maurice: new character, on the Club Med circus team with Collier.

Gigi: new character, Caroline’s patient, an adolescent girl from the projects, her best friend was shot in a drive by shooting and bled out in Gigi’s arms, isn’t speaking.

Dr. R.: new character, Caroline’s patient, extremely intellectual

Wanda: new character, Collier’s mother, on the Club Med circus team with Collier

Gregory: new character, on the Club Med circus team with Collier.

### DISCUSSION

“Child Abuse” and “Sexual Abuse” are catch-all phrases, which cover a variety of circumstances. Many situations which clinicians would call “abusive” fall outside of the category of legal abuse, but still can be experienced by the survivor as trauma.

#### *Child Abuse And Sexual Abuse*

How would you describe Collier’s background from the perspective of child abuse?

Do you know the laws for reporting child abuse in your state?

#### *Collier’s Therapeutic Process*

From Collier’s presentation in this session, what emotional issues would you watch for as his treatment goes forward?

What are his coping mechanisms?

(*Defense and resistance* – think about how Collier uses anger and sexuality.)

## CHAPTER 4 “Everyone Does It”

Leah and Geoff return from a 5-day vacation. Rose (one of Leah’s labor nurses) and Ted (Rose’s husband) have taken care of Caroline (age 2) and her brother Derrick (age 5) during those 5 days. Caroline is speaking in full sentences. She has been throwing tantrums.

### CHARACTERS

Caroline

Derrick: new character, Caroline’s older brother.

Leah

Geoff

Rose: one of Leah’s labor nurses, a family friend.

Ted: Rose’s husband, a high school English teacher.

### DISCUSSION

This chapter deals with child development; Caroline is two years old.

#### *Child Development*

Go over normative child development in the first 5 years, and identify the range of “normal.” In what ways is Caroline precocious? In what ways is she very much her age?

Discuss age appropriate narcissism.

(Think about the chapter’s name: “Everyone Does It”. Children take for granted their own characteristics, as well as their home environments. Each child assumes their circumstance is the “norm.”)

How would you describe the relationships within Caroline’s family?

## CHAPTER 5 “Dr. Stilwell And Mandy”

Caroline has her first meeting with Dr. Stilwell, her supervisor. To Collier’s intense surprise and discomfort, he cries in his session as he describes his relationship with Mandy, and his leaving her without saying goodbye.

### CHARACTERS:

Caroline

Collier

Dr. Stilwell

Mandy: new character, Wanda’s daughter, Collier’s girlfriend, she and Collier grew up together on the circus team.

## DISCUSSION

Strong supervision is a vital component of becoming an effective therapist.

### *Supervision*

What are the most important qualities in a supervisor?

How is supervising new trainees different from supervising more experienced clinicians?

Do you think Dr. Stilwell does a good job in her first meeting with Caroline?

### *Collier's Therapeutic Process*

Collier says to Caroline: "I know I've been an asshole in here. A total jerk. I don't know how you've put up with me. The truth is, I get nervous whenever I even think of coming here."

What does this reveal about Collier's ego structure and about his prognosis?

(When Collier shows the ability to step back and evaluate his own behavior, he demonstrates the capacity for an *observing ego*. He shows the capacity for empathy when he acknowledges that he's been difficult. He shows *ego strength* when he admits his fear of therapy. All of this shows a potential for a higher level of *object relations* and *ego functioning* than previously demonstrated.)

### *Tears*

Tears are often a part of the therapeutic experience. How would you describe the way Collier cries (the *form* as well as the *content*)?

How would you describe Collier's relationship to his own tears?

## CHAPTER 6

### "Artistic Vision"

Caroline overhears her father when he loses his temper on the phone, speaking to a movie director. Caroline throws a tantrum.

## CHARACTERS

Caroline

Geoff

## DISCUSSION

Toddlers are infamous for throwing tantrums.

### *Tantrums*

What leads to Caroline's tantrum?

From a developmental perspective, how do you understand the underlying purpose of her throwing a tantrum?

### *Family Dynamics*

What do you learn about Geoff as an individual and as a father?

## *Developmental Psychology*

Why do toddlers throw tantrums?

### CHAPTER 7

#### “Hairballs And Hope”

Dr. Stilwell helps Caroline understand the power of hope, and the need to keep the office safe in a way that surprises Caroline. Dr. R's favorite movie is *The Wizard Of Oz*. Gigi is still not speaking in therapy, but is starting to connect with Caroline through playing the game Hangman.

Collier rents a basement apartment from a lesbian couple (Jeanne and Tracy) and their two children (Heather age 6, Henry age 9).

#### CHARACTERS

Caroline

Collier

Dr. Stilwell

Jeanne and Tracy: new characters, Collier rents their basement apartment, will become role-model-parents to Collier.

Heather and Henry: new characters, ages 6 and 9, Jeanne and Tracy's children.

#### DISCUSSION

Hope and Hopelessness both play important roles in treatment.

##### *Hope and Hopelessness*

Most patients enter a treatment with a mixture of hope and hopelessness. Acknowledging this balance can be an important foundation for starting treatment. As therapy progresses, the balance shifts, as feelings of both hopefulness and hopelessness spike at different times. This is part of the process of healthy emotional change.

##### *The Unconscious*

*You can't win an argument with the patient's unconscious.*

At a certain point, Caroline realizes she is having an argument with Collier's unconscious.

What does this mean?

Why can't you win an argument with a patient's unconscious?

##### *Analytic Neutrality*

What does *analytic neutrality* mean?

How does this concept apply to Collier's therapy session?

## CHAPTER 8 “Tea Party”

Leah tells Caroline important pieces of her family history. Caroline becomes overwhelmed when she senses her mother’s emotions, and throws a tantrum. Leah doesn’t understand the extent of her daughter’s intuition.

### CHARACTERS

Caroline  
Dr. Stilwell  
Collier  
Dr. R.  
Gigi  
Leah

### DISCUSSION

Family history, even going back several generations, can be extremely helpful in a treatment. However, history is only useful when its place in the present is understood.

#### *Family History*

How is Caroline’s family history important in the development of her *ego*?

#### *Caroline’s Tantrums*

What leads to Caroline’s tantrum?

From a developmental perspective, how do you understand the underlying purpose of her throwing a tantrum at this time?

What do you learn about Leah as an individual, and about Caroline’s relationship to her mother?

## CHAPTER 9 “Lorna”

Dr. Stilwell guides Caroline on how to use countertransference to help her patient. She tells Caroline that therapy takes place in the preconscious. Gigi has begun to speak in therapy.

Collier brings his sexual history into his treatment – both through his words, and through the transference. He talks about masturbating until he hurts himself.

### CHARACTERS

Caroline  
Dr. Stilwell  
Collier  
Gigi



Lorna: new character, Collier will fall in love with Lorna as the story unfolds.

## DISCUSSION

### *The Process Of Psychotherapy*

What is your opinion of Dr. Stilwell's stating that therapy takes place in the *preconscious*?

How are *transference* and *countertransference* influencing Collier's treatment?

Caroline and Dr. Stilwell talk about Collier's speaking in metaphors. Why is it important to listen for metaphors and symbols? (Keep in mind that the *unconscious* manifests itself in images and symbols.)

### *Collier's Object Relations*

What qualities draw Collier to Lorna?

Why is he simultaneously drawn to Lorna and afraid to connect with her?

What can you infer about the quality of Collier's object relations?

### *Talking About Sex*

Talking about sex with patients can feel uncomfortable for both the patient and the therapist. Have you experienced a patient talking explicitly about a sexual act?

## CHAPTER 10

### "Autograph"

Leah and Geoff meet with Terra, Caroline's kindergarten teacher. Terra is concerned that Caroline is too academic, not artistic enough. Terra asks for Geoff's autograph, which infuriates Leah.

## CHARACTERS

Leah

Geoff

Terra: new character, Caroline's kindergarten teacher (minor character).

Marsha: new character, Caroline's best friend.

## DISCUSSION

Narcissistic issues can be difficult to diagnose, and more difficult to treat.

### *Leah And Geoff*

What do you learn about Leah and Geoff as individuals?

What do you learn about their relationship?

Both Leah and Geoff have *narcissistic issues*. What form does Geoff's narcissism take? What form does Leah's narcissism take?

### *Narcissism*

What is the difference between *healthy narcissism* and *unhealthy narcissism*?

What is a *narcissistic personality disorder*?

What's the difference between having a *narcissistic personality disorder* and having *narcissistic issues*?

### *The Therapeutic Process*

Why is *narcissism* so difficult to treat?

## CHAPTER 11

### "A Hopeless Case"

Caroline tells Dr. Stilwell that she doesn't feel lost all the time in sessions anymore. Dr. R. talks about the misogyny she deals with in her chemistry department.

Collier called his mother who is furious at him for abandoning her. He described how he always loved to read, but his mother gave him no support for his intellect. Mandy eloped with one of the Club Med guests and is married.

### CHARACTERS

Caroline

Dr. Stilwell

Dr. R.

Collier

Lorna

Mandy

Therapists are only human, and mistakes are a part of every treatment. Handling mistakes productively is important.

### *Caroline's Mistake*

What does Caroline miss in this session?

Where does she make her mistake?

(Caroline's mistake demonstrates the difference between being "right" and being "on track" in a therapy session. Caroline doesn't say anything "wrong," but she misses a crucial moment that would have kept the session "on track." Caroline follows the *manifest content*, instead of following Collier's *affect*.)

### *Slips Of The Tongue*

Sometimes slips of the tongue are meaningful, sometimes not. How can you tell the difference?

### *Collier's Relationship To His Own Intellect*

Collier describes his relationship to his own intellect as “forbidden.” How would this influence his *ego development*?

## CHAPTER 12

### “Cinderella Needs Analysis”

Caroline goes to Marsha’s birthday party and one of the mothers tells Caroline that she is overweight (she isn’t). Caroline and Marsha are both growing up in film industry families, and neither wants to be an actor. At the party, they saw the animated movie *Cinderella*. Caroline tells Leah that the movie doesn’t make sense because after her traumatic childhood, Cinderella doesn’t need a prince to make her happy; she needs analysis.

### CHARACTERS

Caroline

Leah

Marsha

### DISCUSSION

Caroline is absolutely correct: Cinderella could benefit from an analysis.

#### *Cinderella’s Treatment*

What issues do you imagine Cinderella will need to work on?

(Think about Cinderella’s history: death of her mother, father remarries, death of her father, abused by her stepmother and step sisters...and then catapulted into “Happily Ever After”.)

Why doesn’t the “fairy tale approach” work in real life?

(Because a sudden change to “happily ever after” doesn’t take into account layers of development, layers of emotional investment, layers of identity formation. Those layers have to be worked through.)

#### *Body Image*

Caroline tells her mother about the pressure to be thin among her peers and from their parents.

How do you think this could influence a child’s *body image*?

## CHAPTER 13

### “A Name Without An Identity”

Dr. Stilwell tells Caroline that she is earning a strong reputation in her training program. Caroline figured out the meaning of a series of drawings from a young child. Caroline becomes anxious, feeling like people have high expectations that she can’t meet. Dr. Stilwell

suggests that Caroline might want to pursue her own therapy, and Caroline is completely taken aback.

Collier is extremely upset that Mandy is married. Collier realizes that both he and Mandy needed a way out of the circus, and both of them leaped when an opportunity presented itself. He's worried about her, and about himself. He describes himself as having a name without an identity.

#### CHARACTERS

Caroline

Dr. Stilwell

Collier

Mandy

Bob: new character, Mandy's husband.

#### DISCUSSION

In other medical specialties, doctors have tools. They have stethoscopes, blood pressure cuffs, MRI machines to help them arrive at a diagnosis and choose a treatment. But as psychotherapists, we *are* those tools. We need to know ourselves well.

#### *Qualities Of An Effective Therapist*

What does Caroline's meeting with Dr. Stilwell reveal about Caroline's character? What qualities will be strengths as she becomes a psychologist?

What qualities do you think might get in her way of becoming an effective clinician?

#### *Self-Constancy*

This is the first time Collier refers to a previous session in his work with Caroline. Why do you think this is important?

(He refers to a theme in a previous session when he says, "I've got a name, but I don't have an identity." Collier is beginning to make sense to himself -- to experience both his therapy and his life outside as therapy as continuous, rather than a discontinuous series of freeze-frames.)

Collier's experience of his own self is extremely disjointed. As Collier makes more connections between therapy sessions, he is also connecting parts of himself, and developing an *integrated ego*.

#### *Diagnosis*

How would you diagnose Collier? Can you define the diagnosis in plain English?

#### *Caroline's Strengths And Weaknesses*

Strengths:

Her ability to interpret the drawings, her capacity for symbolic thinking, her ability to interpret a metaphor.

Although she has no idea how it happens, Caroline intuitively understands that symbols come from the unconscious, and that in order to help her patients, she needs to help them to connect those unconscious symbols to their conscious experience. Caroline's accurate assessment of what she still needs to learn is important – we all need to be aware of our strengths and weaknesses as therapists.

Weaknesses:

Caroline is extremely uncomfortable when she is seen as talented.

At this point, she adamantly refuses to accept her own need for therapy.

## CHAPTER 14

### “Haircut”

Caroline gives her Barbie Doll a haircut so she'll look “more real.” More information about Leah's background and Geoff's background is revealed. Leah realizes that Caroline remembers everything people say, word for word.

#### CHARACTERS:

Caroline

Leah

Geoff

Millie Charlemagne: new character, actor (minor character).

#### DISCUSSION

“She'll look prettier when she's more real.” Caroline's words about her doll reveal her emerging personality.

#### *Ego Development*

What does this statement reveal about Caroline's *ego strength*?

#### *Cognitive Development*

Caroline is extremely perceptive about her parents, and she is beginning to have words to structure her understanding. A few chapters ago, if she felt her mother's struggle with identity, she might have thrown a tantrum. In terms of *cognitive development*, how would you understand Caroline's ability to find words to structure her intuitive understanding of her mother?

#### *Age Appropriate Narcissism*

At the end of this chapter, Caroline is surprised by the idea that everyone doesn't remember conversations verbatim. Is this *age appropriate narcissism*?

(Children believe that their experience is everyone's experience. This self-referenced approach to the world is normal in child development. Discuss narcissism from a developmental perspective – *age appropriate narcissism vs. pathological narcissism.*)

## CHAPTER 15 “Signature”

Caroline is impatient for Collier to have more insights, and Dr. Stilwell encourages her to slow down. Gigi is making progress in her therapy.

Collier gets back in touch with Lorna after cancelling their date. Lorna makes metal sculptures and plans to go to medical school.

### CHARACTERS

Caroline  
Dr. Stilwell  
Collier  
Gigi  
Lorna

### DISCUSSION

Dr. Stilwell, like all good supervisors, points out issues of *countertransference*, but doesn't analyze the issues (which would cross the line into the role of a therapist).

#### *Caroline's Work With Gigi*

*Caroline tells Gigi that it was “important for her to catch herself on her own horseshit.” Gigi answered that Caroline “wasn't as dumb as I looked. Then she laughed. Then I said there were two smart people in the room. Then she cried.”*

Why is this important? What does it show about Caroline as a therapist, and about Gigi's issues?

#### *Transference And Countertransference*

Dr. Stilwell cautions Caroline that she was “born and raised to be an audience” and Collier was “born and raised to perform.” Why is this important?

#### *Identity*

Collier says to Caroline, “I was brought up not to have a signature.” What are the implications of this in understanding his level of *ego development*?

## CHAPTER 16 “Profiteroles”

Leah and Geoff give a dinner party, and one of their guests reveals confidential information about a patient. In reaction, Caroline begins to shake uncontrollably.

### CHARACTERS

Leah  
Geoff

Caroline

Dr. and Mrs. Koslucher: new characters, therapists who cross ethical lines revealing confidential information.

Deborah and Steve: (Leah's labor nurse and her husband)

Rose and Ted (Leah's labor nurse and her husband)

Hadley Lindquist: new character, actor.

Maia Pompelli: new character, actor.

## DISCUSSION

At this point, although the reader knows that Caroline is on a path to become a therapist, Caroline herself doesn't know it yet.

### *Confidentiality*

What does Dr. Koslucher do that is unethical?

Why does it matter that therapists protect confidentiality, even in situations where the patient will never know that confidentiality was breached?

### *Motor Behavior*

Why does Caroline shake uncontrollably?

If Caroline were your patient, how would you help her find words for the shaking?

### *Therapeutic Process*

Why is it useful in therapy to find words for *motor behavior*?

## CHAPTER 17

### "Tears For Zeus"

Collier attends a concert at a church with a discussion afterwards. He realizes he doesn't know his religious heritage, and calls his mother to ask (father Presbyterian, mother Protestant). He tells Caroline that his mother joined the circus at age sixteen after both of her parents died. Collier feels the emotional impact of knowing that his mother didn't cry when her parents died, but was inconsolable when Zeus (her dog) died when Collier was a child.

Dr. Stilwell and Caroline talk about Collier's living in the moment, trying to detach himself from a sense of continuity, disconnected from his past and not thinking about his future.

## CHARACTERS

Caroline

Dr. Stilwell

Collier

## DISCUSSION

### *Coping Mechanisms And Defense Mechanisms*

How do you understand Collier's discontinuous approach to his own emotions?  
What *defense mechanism* does this rely on?

### *Healthy Narcissism vs. Pathological Narcissism*

Collier worries at one point that he is being too self-centered because his own therapy focuses entirely on him. Is this healthy narcissism or pathological narcissism?

### *The Road To Healing*

Collier realizes that his mother didn't cry when her parents died. Why is this *insight* important?

### *The Language Of Treatment*

Define the following: *breakthrough, insight, the ego.*

### *Healing Is A Jagged Course*

At the end of the chapter, Collier talks about his relationship to his own tears. He decides to test the idea of becoming comfortable crying, but then admits it's not true at all. Why is this important?

(This is a step toward *insight* and healing. Collier can own his words, even if he can't yet own the feelings attached to those words. Healing is a jagged course, not a smooth line.)

## CHAPTER 18

### "Madeleine"

Caroline attends an entertainment industry party with her parents and brother, Derrick. Caroline and Derrick walk in on a group of adults having sex.

## CHARACTERS

Caroline, age 9

Derrick, age 12

Leah

Geoff

Dolly Bracker: new character, financing Geoff's project.

Beau: new character, Dolly's boyfriend.

Madeleine: new character, Dolly's daughter, age 11.

Matt: new character, Dolly's son, age 14.

Bronze: new character, Dolly's therapist.

## DISCUSSION

Sexual trauma in childhood can take many forms.



### *Trauma*

What happens in this chapter that Caroline experiences as sexual trauma?

### *The Language Of Treatment*

Define *trauma*.

## CHAPTER 19

### “Halloween”

In supervision, Caroline discusses the different styles of speech in her patients. Dr. R. loses her temper with her colleagues.

Collier attends a school pageant with Jeanne and Tracy. He is upset by some of the costumes. Collier is developing a stronger relationship with Jeanne and Tracy.

### CHARACTERS

Collier

Dr. Stilwell

Jeanne

Tracy

### DISCUSSION

Each person has a unique style of speaking, and a unique relationship to her/his own language.

#### *Understanding Each Patient’s Use Of Language*

Dr. Stilwell and Caroline talk about the meaning of each patient’s style of language. Why is this important?

#### *Stages Of Moral Development*

Collier becomes offended by costumes at the school pageant.

What does this demonstrate about the level of his *moral development*?

What are the stages of *moral development*?

### *The Language Of Treatment*

Define the following: *moral development, conscience*.

## CHAPTER 20

### “It’s All In The Notebooks”

Leah’s mother (Caroline’s Grandma Ruth) has died. Leah, Geoff, Caroline and Derrick are packing up her belongings. Caroline figures out that Leah’s mother was dyslexic. The reader

learns the story of Grandma Ruth and the Academy Awards, as well as more family history about Leah's parents (Ruth and Sam).

#### CHARACTERS

Caroline  
Leah  
Geoff  
Derrick  
Grandma Ruth  
Grandpa Sam

#### DISCUSSION

*Learning disabilities* are often misunderstood, and can be a source of shame.

#### *Learning Disabilities*

Caroline figures out that her grandmother was dyslexic.  
What does this reveal about Caroline?

#### *The Language Of Treatment*

Define *learning disability, dyslexia*.

#### CHAPTER 21

"Tomato Wedges And Barf"

Caroline talks to Dr. Stilwell about Collier's new ability to feel anger without becoming consumed by anger. Caroline realizes that Collier is a great teacher.

Collier babysits for Heather and Henry, who become ill with the stomach. Jeanne and Tracy are becoming role model parents for Collier. For the first time, Collier can imagine being a father some day.

#### CHARACTERS

Caroline  
Dr. Stilwell  
Collier  
Jeanne  
Tracy  
Heather  
Henry

#### DISCUSSION

Role models can strongly influence psychological development.

*Owning The Feelings vs. The Feelings Own You*

When Collier becomes angry but isn't consumed by the anger. What does that show about his ego development?

*Role Model Parents*

Two important supporting characters are Jeanne and Tracy, a lesbian couple with two children, who become role-model-parents for Collier.

What makes Jeanne and Tracy such strong parents?

Why does Collier end this chapter with the idea that he can imagine being a father?

CHAPTER 22

"Empathy And Boundaries"

Caroline and her family are in Rome for the summer, on location with Geoff. Caroline is upset by the way other families at their hotel treat each other. Caroline is startled when her mother tells her that feeling both empathy and boundaries, experienced simultaneously, are essential components of being a therapist. Caroline decides to become a psychologist when she grows up.

CHARACTERS

Caroline

Leah

Guests at the hotel, including a boy who beats up his sister while their mother reads a magazine.

DISCUSSION

To be an effective clinician, the therapist must simultaneously maintain strong *empathy* and clear *boundaries*.

*Caroline's Decision To Become A Therapist*

Why is the idea of simultaneous empathy and boundaries an emotional revelation for Caroline?

What makes her decide to become a psychologist?

*Witnessing Violence*

How does witnessing violence affect Caroline? Does she show any signs of trauma?

*Puberty*

Caroline has just entered *puberty* (see the description of her diving into the pool). From a developmental perspective, how does her capacity for empathy evidence itself at different stages – as a toddler, young child, older child, and now as a young adolescent?

How does Caroline experience the idea of boundaries?

(She experiences boundaries as protection against empathy, which still overwhelms her).

*The Language Of Treatment*  
Define *empathy, boundaries, puberty.*

## CHAPTER 23 "Jerry"

Caroline reports to Dr. Stilwell that Collier has been talking about fatherhood. Dr. Stilwell points out that Collier is talking, but not attaching emotions to his therapy sessions.

Collier meets Jerry, a gay man. They begin to have sexual contact, and Collier panics. Jerry is a role model for how to handle the situation, and they begin a friendship. Collier is frantic and suicidal in his session with Caroline.

### CHARACTERS

Caroline

Dr. Stilwell

Collier

Jerry: new character, gay, will become Collier's first close male friend.

### DISCUSSION

Sexuality can feel confusing, scary, threatening. Collier questions his sexuality, and becomes suicidal.

#### *Suicidal Patients*

Why does Collier become suicidal?

What makes Collier's sexual encounter with Jerry so frightening for Collier?

Create a list of levels of suicidality, including the degree of danger at each level. (For example, you might begin with a fleeting suicidal thought that the patient experiences as entirely *dystonic*, and end with imminent danger, calling 911 in the session.)

#### *Friendship*

What allows Collier and Jerry to establish the foundation for a healthy relationship?

How does the experience with Jerry have the potential to shape Collier's *object relations* going forward?

#### *The Therapeutic Process*

Do you think Caroline does a good job handling Collier's suicidal presentation?

Do you think Caroline's comment about the song *Tight Rope* is important? Why or why not?

What is the significance of Collier's being able to see clearly Jerry's eye color?

*Supervision*

In supervision, Dr. Stilwell teaches Caroline the difference between a discussion and a therapy. What do you think makes the difference?

*Answering A Patient's Questions*

Toward the end of their session, Collier asks Caroline a question about her own experience in the hour. She hesitates, and then chooses to answer. What do you think of her decision? When is it helpful/unhelpful to answer a patient's questions?

*The Language Of Treatment*

Define the following: *ego syntonic, ego dystonic, object relations, decompensate.*

CHAPTER 24

"Special Dessert"

Caroline attends a musical theatre production and party with her parents and Derrick. Maia Pompelli, an actor, gives Caroline a piece of candy which turns out to be a laxative, and Caroline becomes quite ill.

CHARACTERS

Caroline

Leah

Geoff

Derrick

Maia Pompelli, an actor.

DISCUSSION

Child abuse can take many forms.

*Defining Child Abuse*

Would you call this a form of child abuse? Why or why not?

If you were Caroline's therapist, what would you watch for in the aftermath of this experience?

*Family Interaction*

What do we learn about how Caroline's family interacts in a crisis?

CHAPTER 25

"Attention 911"

Caroline describes to Dr. Stilwell the previous session, where Collier was suicidal. She is worried because her emotions broke the surface, and Collier accurately read her feelings.

Delano Hardy, who calls himself “Pierre,” dislocates his own shoulder to become the center of attention at the restaurant where Collier works.

#### CHARACTERS

Caroline

Dr. Stilwell

Mr. Anesta: new character, Collier’s boss at the restaurant.

“Pierre” or Delano Hardy: new character, his only appearance in the book.

#### DISCUSSION

Wanting attention is often equated with something bad. Actually, wanting attention can be healthy.

##### *Attention*

What are healthy and unhealthy ways to want attention?

#### CHAPTER 26

##### “Waterfall Blossom Ranch”

Caroline, age 13, is at camp with a suicidal counselor.

#### CHARACTERS

Caroline

Leslie Rockwell: new character, age 18, a camp counselor who attempts suicide.

Darian: new character, a camper who targets Leslie and Caroline.

#### DISCUSSION

Caroline is now a young adolescent, carrying a teen version of her heightened intuition.

##### *Caroline’s Thought Process*

How is her level of intuition both a gift and a burden for her to carry?

##### *Bullying*

The girls bully Leslie (their counselor) and also target Caroline.

From the perspective of developmental psychology, why does Leslie’s vulnerability cause her to become a target for 13-year-olds?

Why do the girls target Caroline, and then reach out to her as a friend after Leslie’s suicide attempt?

#### CHAPTER 27

##### “Through The Looking Glass”

The holidays can be evocative, setting off a storm of emotion, and Gigi is having a difficult time. Dr. R. met a man who teaches kindergarten, her first serious boyfriend. Dr. Stilwell tells Caroline she is becoming a good therapist.

Collier spends his holiday with Lorna and her parents, and joins Jeanne and Tracy to help the kids decorate their tree. His mother continues to be enraged at him for pursuing his own life. Collier realizes that he is taller than Maurice.

## CHARACTERS

Caroline

Dr. Stilwell

Collier

Gigi

Dr. R.

Maurice

## DISCUSSION

The chapter's title, "Through the Looking Glass," is a reference to the novel by Lewis Carroll. In Lewis Carroll's novel, Alice's adventures are a series of changing perspectives. In any therapy, for any patient, changing perspective is a necessary part of healing.

### *Double Bind*

Dr. Stilwell shows Caroline how Collier sets up an emotional conflict in the transference. (This has been called a *double bind*, which means that the patient sets up a situation with a choice, and whichever option the therapist takes is wrong. Although this can be tricky for the therapist to navigate, it's a necessary part of many treatments, because the client sets up the same impossible dilemma for himself in his life outside of treatment.)

### *Transference*

Collier begins this session by becoming furious at Caroline. What makes him so angry?

### *It's Never Too Late*

Collier gave Jeanne and Tracy stuffed animals and a card that says, "It's never too late."

What does this reveal about Collier's progress in therapy?

(The *unconscious* doesn't work on Eastern Standard Time and has no statute of limitations. The bad news is that events from any time in the past can be problematic in the present; the good news is that it's never too late to address those issues and heal. That's why patients can start therapy at any point in their lives, and have the possibility of healing.)

### *How Therapy Works*

Caroline and Collier define the therapeutic process. What do you think of their definition?

### *Insight*

At the end of the chapter, Collier realizes that he is taller than Maurice. Until that moment, Collier viewed Maurice as larger than life, a monster of mythical proportions. What does this *insight* reveal about Collier's ego development?

## CHAPTER 28

### "The Living And The Dead"

Black Eagle/Jefferson Quincy Eagleton visits Geoff. The two men served together in the Marine Corps, World War II. Caroline intuitively understands her father's friend and the emotional issues he carries. She becomes overwhelmed.

### CHARACTERS

Caroline

Black Eagle/Jefferson Quincy Eagleton

Leah

Geoff

### DISCUSSION

Caroline is now an adolescent, and her intuition leads her to an unexpected understanding of her father's friend. She can articulate her understanding, but she is still overwhelmed.

#### *Caroline's Intuition*

Look back over the chapters about Caroline's relationship to her own intuition (Chapters 6, 8, 22, 26, 28).

Can you track her development from the perspective of her intuitive abilities?

How does her intuition manifest itself in different ways as she grows?

#### *Defenses*

Caroline uses *Plato's Republic* as a shield in this chapter.

What is she trying to shield herself from?

What *defense mechanism* is she using?

#### *Racism*

From a psychological perspective, what is *racism*?

How does racism influence *ego development* and *ego strength*?

The author chose to write this chapter to respect the mindset of the time; for example, the author wrote "black" instead of "Black." What is your opinion on the author's choice?

#### *Substance Abuse*

What's the difference between heavy drinking and substance abuse?

Do you think Black Eagle is an alcoholic?



## CHAPTER 29

### “Dream”

Caroline is growing more confident as a therapist.

Collier has a recurring dream about the board game Monopoly.

#### CHARACTERS

Caroline

Dr. Stilwell

Collier

#### DISCUSSION

Dream theory and dream interpretation can be useful parts of a treatment – but only if the dream’s place can be understood in the patient’s current emotional life.

#### *Dream Theory And Dream Interpretation*

Why are dreams useful in therapy?

Do you agree with the way Caroline handles this session?

What do you think is therapeutic for Collier about understanding his own dream?

## CHAPTER 30

### “The Immortal Oscar”

Maia Pompelli (who gave Caroline the laxative) was nominated for an Oscar (she lost). Geoff won an Oscar for cinematography. When Caroline finds out Geoff voted for Maia, she throws Geoff’s Oscar through a window. Caroline is sent to see a therapist, Dr. Marvin Fein.

#### CHARACTERS

Caroline (age 14)

Dr. Marvin Fein: new character, a therapist.

#### DISCUSSION

A certain skill set is essential for treating adolescents.

#### *Working With Adolescents*

What qualities are essential to working with adolescents?

If Dr. Fein came to you for consultation, how would you help him understand what he did that pushed this session so far off course?

Can you track Dr. Fein’s mistakes, the moments when he missed opportunities?

### *Catch Their Attention*

To treat adolescents, you have to catch their attention quickly.

If you were Caroline's therapist, what would you have said to catch her attention?

## CHAPTER 31

### "Sex As A Weapon"

Caroline and Dr. Stilwell agree that something is brewing with Collier.

Collier uses sex and sexuality as a weapon in his session with Caroline. She has no idea what to do, and handles it terribly, one mistake after the next.

#### CHARACTERS

Caroline

Dr. Stilwell

Collier

#### DISCUSSION

This chapter demonstrates how transference and countertransference can create a confusing, emotionally high-voltage session. Caroline has no idea how to handle the situation, and she makes several huge mistakes.

#### *Transference And Countertransference*

Can you identify the transference and countertransference issues that rocket to the surface in this session?

#### *Mistakes*

What are Caroline's mistakes in this session?

## CHAPTER 32

### "Dale"

Caroline attends an entertainment industry party with her parents. She meets Dale, who will become a close friend.

#### CHARACTERS

Caroline

Leah

Geoff

Dale: new character, will become Caroline's close friend.

Stash and Eve: new characters, entertainment industry.

Chet and Hillary: new characters, Caroline's godparents.

Skye Patterson: new character, a singer.  
Misty Wade and Tray Mornell: new characters, actors, dancers.  
Ned Brisman: new character, dancer.

#### DISCUSSION

Caroline and Dale seem like opposites. But from the moment they meet, they build the foundation for a strong friendship.

#### *Adolescent Object Relations*

What makes Caroline's connection to Dale distinctly adolescent in quality?  
(They connect in their rebellion against the values of the entertainment industry, and in their search for identity in an environment where they don't fit in.)

#### CHAPTER 33

#### "Perspective"

Caroline feels terrible about the previous session with Collier. To her surprise, Dr. Stilwell is supportive.

Collier, assuming Caroline is going to throw him out of therapy, returns to say goodbye and apologize. Instead, they work together and he continues his treatment.

#### CHARACTERS

Caroline  
Dr. Stilwell  
Collier

#### DISCUSSION

Mistakes are a part of being a therapist. This is a field of continuous learning, a

#### *Supervision*

What does Caroline do that earns Dr. Stilwell's respect?  
(She is brutally honest in presenting the session.)

#### *Recovery*

Caroline is certain that she has ruined both the treatment and her career. But she is wrong. In the previous session with Collier, what did Caroline do that allows Collier to return and continue his treatment?  
(Caroline holds the sexual boundary.)

Have you ever made a big mistake in treating a patient? Was the therapy able to get back on course? Why or why not?

What does Caroline do in this chapter that helps the treatment get back on track?

## CHAPTER 34 “Three Boyfriends”

Marsha and Caroline exchange letters (snail mail, pre-internet/email/texting). Caroline and Dale are in Massachusetts together, at a summer session at Andover Academy. Marsha is in West Virginia, doing research on lung damage in coal miners.

### CHARACTERS

Caroline

Marsha

Dale

Jason: new character, Caroline’s first boyfriend.

### DISCUSSION

This chapter is about the quality of adolescent friendships and the first sexual relationships.

#### *Developmental Milestones*

How do Caroline’s relationships with Marsha, Dale and Jason (her first boyfriend) promote the developmental milestones of adolescence?

## CHAPTER 35 “Therapy Is Weird”

Caroline complains to Dr. Stilwell that Collier’s style has become boring. They talk about how Collier frightened himself when he used sex as a weapon, and this is his reaction. Dr. R. turns out to be extremely funny, and Gigi is discovering her own intellect while being a wonderfully sassy adolescent. Dr. Stilwell explains that Collier is most frightened that Caroline forgave him. Collier emerges from his need to be boring, and talks about his mother’s impossible expectations.

### CHARACTERS

Caroline

Dr. Stilwell

Collier

Dr. R.

Gigi

### DISCUSSION

Psychotherapy can feel strange to the patient, and it’s important to identify the different pieces feeding into the feeling. In fact, therapy *is* a curious process, and acknowledging that with your patient can promote the treatment.

### *Boredom*

What frightened Collier so much about his own behavior?

Why is Caroline's forgiveness both healing for Collier, and simultaneously frightening?

What is the purpose (*unconscious*) of Collier's need to be boring?

### *The Therapeutic Process*

The relationship between a therapist and a patient is unique, and the patient can experience it as "weird." This is an aspect of therapy often overlooked, but it can be extremely useful if addressed.

How is the "weirdness" part of the effectiveness?

How is the therapeutic relationship different from other relationships?

Why is this difference (or "weirdness") essential to the therapeutic process?

### *The Language Of Treatment*

Define the following: *unconscious, preconscious, conscious, transference, countertransference.*

## CHAPTER 36

### "Two Firsts"

Caroline goes with Leah and Geoff to an entertainment industry New Year's Eve party. She becomes furious at Tray, and verbally takes him down in front of all of the guests. She smokes pot for the first time with Dale, and they lose their virginity to each other.

### CHARACTERS

Caroline

Dale

Leah

Geoff

Tray

Misty

Skye

Eve

### DISCUSSION

When she becomes angry at Tray, Caroline surprises herself by fighting back.

#### *Caroline's Anger*

Why is Caroline so angry?

How does she handle her anger? (She is furious, but extremely articulate.)

What does this say about her *ego strength*?

#### *Losing Virginity*

Losing virginity is an important developmental milestone. It can feel empowering, devastating, and anywhere in between.

What do you think of this development in Caroline and Dale's relationship?  
What makes this sexual experience healthy for both Caroline and Dale?

#### CHAPTER 37 "Always Wild"

Caroline and Dr. Stilwell acknowledge that both Caroline and Collier love to learn.

Collier talks about his reckless, dangerous behavior at Club Med.

#### CHARACTERS

Caroline  
Dr. Stilwell  
Collier  
Mandy  
Collier's mother

#### DISCUSSION

This chapter demonstrates how a memory can change in character, as the affect attached to the memory becomes clear.

#### *The Therapeutic Process*

What *insight* does Collier gain about his relationships to his mother and to Mandy?

When Collier becomes angry at Caroline, how do you understand the *transference*?

Why is it so important for Collier to feel fear in this session?

Would you call this a *breakthrough*? Why or why not?

#### CHAPTER 38 "Brad"

Caroline is in college at Yale and meets Brad. She is surprised to find herself extremely drawn to him.

#### CHARACTERS

Caroline  
Brad: new character, will become Caroline's boyfriend and husband.  
Alyssa: new character, Caroline's college roommate.

## DISCUSSION

### *Object Relations*

What draws Caroline to Brad?

What does her attraction to Brad demonstrate about the quality of her *object relations*?

What does Alyssa realize about herself and about Caroline?

## CHAPTER 39

### “He Still Counts”

Caroline is excited to tell Dr. Stilwell that she figured out Collier’s style of speech is uneven because it reflects his uneven ego development.

Collier asks Caroline for his diagnosis.

## CHARACTERS

Caroline

Dr. Stilwell

Collier

## DISCUSSION

Families grow from many constellations. One constellation is not better or worse than another, but each raises different issues. When a child grows up, if a parent is absent, the child may develop a relationship with the absent parent in their mind. This is not necessarily a problem or a deficit, but its impact can be important.

### *Language And Psychotherapy*

Dr. Stilwell and Caroline talk about Collier’s language, and how his style of speaking reflects the state of his ego. How can you use a patient’s language to guide your treatment?

### *Diagnosis*

Do you think a patient has a right to know their diagnosis?

How would you diagnose Collier?

Has your diagnosis changed from your initial impression?

### *Family Constellations*

What psychological purpose does a fantasy relationship with an absent parent serve as the ego matures?

## CHAPTER 40

### “New And Different”

Caroline and Brad make love to each other for the first time.

## CHARACTERS

Caroline  
Brad

## DISCUSSION

Positive sexual experiences can be empowering and healing.

### *Healthy Sex*

What makes Caroline's first sexual experience with Brad so healthy?  
What makes it "new and different" on many levels for her?

### *Therapeutic Process*

If you were Caroline's therapist, how would her sexual history be important in understanding her reaction to sex with Brad?

### *Psychosexual Development*

How would you track Caroline's psychosexual development, including her experience with Brad?

## CHAPTER 41

### "Maximal Impact"

Dr. Stilwell helps Caroline understand that she has become a role model for Collier.

Collier decides on a career. At first, he says he wants to be a therapist like Caroline. But as they talk it over, he realizes he wants to be a teacher.

## CHARACTERS

Caroline  
Dr. Stilwell  
Collier

## DISCUSSION

When a therapist becomes a role model for a patient, the patient enters a new stage of treatment, with the potential for tremendous growth.

### *Role Models*

Do you think Caroline does a good job being a role model for Collier?  
Why are Margery and John important characters in Collier's development?

### *The Therapeutic Process*

Caroline makes a comment that changes Collier's perspective and guides him to choose the right career. Can you find her comment in the text? (Caroline points out that he expects her support only if he chooses her career.)



### *Choosing A Career*

Choosing a career is a developmental milestone (identity on a different level, resolution of *multipotentiality*).

### *The Language Of Treatment*

Define the following: *multipotentiality*.

## CHAPTER 42

### “The Power Of Silence”

This chapter consists of two letters, one from Marsha to Caroline, and one from Caroline to Marsha. Marsha forms new friendships with women in college at MIT. Caroline takes charge of a hostile situation by using silence.

#### CHARACTERS

Caroline

Marsha

#### DISCUSSION

#### *Object Relations From a Developmental Perspective*

Caroline and Marsha are college juniors, on the cusp between adolescence and adulthood. How does the quality of their friendship reflect both adolescence and adulthood?

#### *Silence*

In a therapy session, when is silence therapeutic?

## CHAPTER 43

### “Repeating History”

Caroline is proud to report Collier’s emotional growth and development. Dr. Stilwell reminds her that progress is an ambivalent process.

Collier opens his session by announcing that he is returning to Club Med. It turns out Mandy’s husband is a serial child molester, and has been arrested. She has returned to Club Med and Collier, consumed with guilt, initially commits to returning as well. As he and Caroline talk it over, he decides to stay in San Francisco and commit to his own pursuit of a healthy life.

#### CHARACTERS

Caroline

Dr. Stilwell  
Collier  
Mandy

## DISCUSSION

This chapter marks a turning point in Collier's therapy. This is the moment when he commits to a healthy life, on his own terms.

### *Fighting Progress*

Why is this chapter so important in Collier's emotional development?

How does Caroline handle Collier's announcement in the beginning of the session that he is going back to Club Med?

What makes Collier change his mind?

### *Developmental Perspective*

How does Collier move from emotional adolescence into emotional adulthood?

(This question is about *ego development*, which does not always coincide with chronological age.)

### *The Therapeutic Process*

Dr. Stilwell talks to Caroline about the jagged road of therapeutic progress. Why isn't therapy a smooth, downhill, well-paved path to healing?

(*Resistance, defense, regression, layers of emotional issues.*)

Sometimes people ask about therapy: Why can't people just shrug it off and get over it?

That's a question worth addressing. If Collier weren't in treatment, he'd probably go back to Club Med at this point in his life.

How does Caroline help him during this crucial juncture?

What stops him from shrugging it off and just getting over it, without therapy?

## CHAPTER 44

"Juaquin And A Hex"

This chapter is Caroline's personal essay on her application to a doctoral program in clinical psychology.

## CHARACTERS

Caroline

## DISCUSSION

Think about your own life, and the most important influences that led to your career decision.

### *Becoming A Clinician*

If you were on the admissions committee and you read Caroline's application essay, would you accept her into your psychology graduate program? Why or why not?

What do you think are the most important qualities in a psychotherapist?

## CHAPTER 45

### "Baseball"

Caroline and Dr. Stilwell talk about Caroline's anxiety. Dr. Stilwell suggests Caroline consider therapy. She asks Caroline to call her by her first name, Laura.

Collier watches Jeanne, Tracy, Heather and Henry deal with a family problem and reach a healthy resolution. He invites Lorna to one of his baseball games, where she meets Jerry and AZ (Jerry's boyfriend).

### CHARACTERS

Caroline

Dr. Stilwell

Collier

Lorna

Jerry

A.Z.: new character, Jerry's boyfriend.

### DISCUSSION

Being in treatment can be an important part of becoming a therapist.

### *Becoming A Therapist*

From her background, how do you understand Caroline's reluctance to go into her own therapy?

### *Idealization*

This is the first time Jeanne and Tracy are presented as flawed. Suddenly, Collier sees his perfect role model parents as imperfect.

How does Collier react to their mistake?

How does this serve as a catalyst for Collier's therapeutic growth and change?

(Collier goes through a sequence of reactions to Jeanne and Tracy's mistake. He is frightened, crushed, furious. He doesn't know how to resolve his *ambivalence* -- good parent vs. bad parent, reality vs. *idealization* -- which is indicative of a *borderline/narcissistic* emotional state. But through the session, he rethinks this, and begins to talk about how people can be both good and flawed -- a more *neurotic level* approach.)

### *Relationships Can Heal Old Wounds*

What is important about Collier's second baseball story?

What changes in his relationship to Lorna?

*Role Of Wishes*

Why is it important for Collier to acknowledge his wish that Jeanne and Tracy were his parents?

(Think about the role of wishes in healing, using fantasy as a guide to shape reality in a healthy way.)

*The Language Of Treatment*

Define the following terms: *idealization, ambivalence, mixed feelings, narcissistic, borderline.*

CHAPTER 46

“Spitfire With A Heart Of Gold”

Caroline is in the same psych grad school program as Madeleine Bracker (from the entertainment industry party where her mother sends Caroline and Derrick into a room with adults having sex). When they reconnect as adults, they immediately feel a strong bond. Caroline finds out that her suicidal camp counselor, Leslie Rockwell, is beginning treatment with Madeleine.

CHARACTERS

Caroline

Madeleine

DISCUSSION

*Healing Power Of Friendship*

Do you think Caroline’s connection to Madeleine is healthy? Why or why not?

Reconnecting with a childhood friend can be powerful in a special way. Can you describe it?

CHAPTER 47

“I Think I’ll Get There”

Dr. Stilwell points out that Collier is keeping something secret from Caroline.

Collier has been accepted into San Francisco State University, and will begin college in the fall. He is worried that Caroline will be angry that he kept his application process a secret from her.

CHARACTERS

Caroline

Dr. Stilwell

Collier

## DISCUSSION

One theme of *Tightwire* is that if the client is motivated, it's never too late to change, and the possibilities are boundless.

### *The Therapeutic Process*

Looking back over Collier's sessions, can you track his capacity for change?  
Why are Collier's parting words in this session so important?

### *Fantasies*

How does Collier's fantasy relationship with his father promote his emotional development?

## CHAPTER 48

### "A Great Singer"

Caroline is visiting her parents, and runs into Skye Patterson (singer) in the market. Skye unexpectedly offers Caroline a helpful perspective.

## CHARACTERS

Caroline

Skye Patterson

## DISCUSSION

To her surprise, Caroline learns an important lesson from Skye. Throughout the book, several characters are surprised by different experiences with teaching and learning. For example, Caroline teaches Collier, and also learns from him, which surprises Collier, and changes his view of his own worth.

### *Teaching and Learning*

Both teaching and learning can be empowering. Why?

### *Superficial vs. Layers*

Even the most seemingly shallow people have unexpected layers. As people reveal more layers, the therapist can use these layers to promote the treatment. If you were Skye's therapist and she told you about this encounter with Caroline, how would you *intervene*? (Possible ways to speak to Skye: Why would you present yourself to Caroline as so shallow? What purpose does it serve to present yourself in this way? What would it be like if you allowed others to see you as thoughtful, intelligent, caring?)

## CHAPTER 49

### "Surfboard And Passport"

Dr. Stilwell and Caroline talk about how therapy isn't about rewriting the past; it's about rewriting the future.

Collier runs into a couple he knew from Club Med. He talks about his childhood, and integrating the past into the present. Caroline realizes that she and Collier have a similar style of speech. For the first time, Collier talks about the positive parts of his background, along with the difficult parts.

#### CHARACTERS

Caroline

Dr. Stilwell

Collier

#### DISCUSSION

This chapter is a turning point in Collier's emotional development. He is able to integrate "good" and "bad" feelings about his life in the circus. He connects the child in him ("Coll") to the adult in him ("Collier").

#### *The Purpose Of Therapy*

In supervision, Caroline says that therapy isn't about rewriting the past; it's about rewriting the future. Do you agree? Why or why not?

#### *Saying Goodbye*

Why is it important for Collier to say goodbye to Club Med in a different way, acknowledging both the good and the bad? How does this reflect changes in his ego structure?

(He needs to integrate his *ambivalence* into a cohesive blend of *mixed feelings*.)

#### *The Language Of Treatment*

Define the following: *borderline split*, *integrated ego*.

#### CHAPTER 50

"Derrick's Finest Creation"

Caroline and Brad visit Derrick and Zoe, who have just given birth to their first child. Caroline and Brad are getting married.

#### CHARACTERS

Caroline

Brad

Derrick

Zoe

## DISCUSSION

Post partum depression is extremely common. Usually with a presentation like Zoe's, the woman's depression fades over time, with no psychiatric intervention. However, sometimes an intervention is needed.

### *Post Partum Depression*

What are signs that a post partum depression isn't resolving itself, and an intervention is needed?

## CHAPTER 51

### "Your Own Free Agent"

Caroline talks to Dr. Stilwell about how hard it is to trust therapists enough to pursue her own treatment.

Caroline is surprised to learn that Collier and Lorna haven't had sex yet. Collier tells Caroline about being assaulted by Maurice.

## CHARACTERS

Caroline

Dr. Stilwell

Collier

Maurice

Lorna

## DISCUSSION

An important part of a long-term therapy is talking over the same events, layer by layer, each time with new perspective, leading to the potential for *insight*. When the patient owns enough layers, then a new kind of emotional autonomy is possible.

### *PTSD*

It's extremely difficult, often impossible, to get a baseline diagnosis on a patient who suffers from *PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder)*. Looking back over the treatment, can you identify aspects of Collier's emotional state that were a part of his reaction to trauma?

### *Sexual Assault*

Collier's experience with Maurice was a sexual assault, and needs to be respected and validated as trauma. Discuss reactions in sexual assault survivors, and how they can present in a treatment.

Why is it so important for Collier to tell Caroline about his experience with Maurice?

What internal changes weigh into Collier's decision to tell Lorna?

*The Therapeutic Process*

From one perspective, the goal of any therapy is for the patient to become a “free agent.” What does that mean?

CHAPTER 52  
“The Tiny Victorian”

Brad and Caroline find a house to buy.

CHARACTERS

Caroline

Brad

Mr. Nards: new character, real estate agent.

DISCUSSION

As Caroline and Brad wander through the house, the reader sees how Caroline’s way of thinking applies to all aspects of her life, not just to her work as a therapist.

*Caroline’s Thought Process*

If you were Caroline’s therapist and she described her experience in this chapter, what would you learn about her?

CHAPTER 53  
“World Shifted”

Caroline understands that Collier didn’t need to vomit; he needed to feel safe in case he vomited. Dr. Stilwell agrees that the core of therapy is feeling safe.

Collier tells Caroline that he and Lorna made love and her eyes stayed brown.

CHARACTERS

Caroline

Dr. Stilwell

Collier

DISCUSSION

Healthy sex can be powerful, empowering and healing.

*Sexual Healing*

Why does Collier describe his sexual experience with Lorna as causing his world to “shift”? Why does he cry?



How does sex with Lorna become a healing emotional experience for Collier?

#### CHAPTER 54 “Patient Therapist”

Caroline and Madeleine have become friends. Caroline has received her masters degree, and will begin seeing her first patient – Collier. Caroline asks Madeleine to recommend a therapist.

CHARACTERS  
Caroline  
Madeleine

DISCUSSION  
The experience of being a patient is important in becoming an effective clinician.

*Why Should Clinicians Get Treatment?*

How do you think therapy might help Caroline improve as a clinician?

People have all sorts of ideas about therapy and therapists, and their ideas sometimes include a stigma. In fact, Caroline herself is extremely anxious about becoming a patient. Why is she so afraid?

#### CHAPTER 55 “A Window And A Skylight”

Dr. Stilwell welcomes Caroline into the field, and refers her first private case.

Collier and Caroline talk about how far he has come in his therapy, and that he will continue treatment in her private practice.

CHARACTERS  
Caroline  
Dr. Stilwell  
Collier

DISCUSSION  
Setting up an office and beginning her own psychology practice is more than a career move for Caroline; it’s a developmental milestone.

### *The Therapeutic Process*

At the end of this session, Collier tells Caroline, "You're hired." This is a sharp contrast to Collier's first session. What does this suggest about his *ego development* through his treatment?

## CHAPTER 56

### "Another First Session"

Caroline begins her own therapy with a psychiatrist, Clay Gittleman.

### CHARACTERS

Caroline

Clay Gittleman, M.D.: new character, Caroline's therapist.

### DISCUSSION

During my 20+ years as a clinician, I was always fascinated by first sessions. In the initial fifty minutes, patients make several choices, both conscious and unconscious – what to say, how to say it, in what order, affect, physical appearance, body language. Likewise, the therapist has fifty minutes to show the patient how the therapy might become a healing experience. Together, they need to figure out if the match is strong between them.

### *The First Session*

Do you think Dr. Gittleman does a good job in his first session with Caroline?

Do you think the match is strong between them?