

TRANSCRIPT OF AUDIO FILE:

BEGIN TRANSCRIPT:

THERAPIST: Hi.

CLIENT: Hi. (pause) I kind of need a haircut. (pause)

THERAPIST: Me too. (pause)

CLIENT: So I would a couple of days ago, but all of my friends are depressed; like all of them. And (pause) I was talking to Lucy about this; about how, you know, I had plans with Yvonne later this week, and I was really dreading it, because Yvonne's miserable about the divorce, and she feels like her life is over, and she's behind on work; she does freelance writing and she also has a day job; like 25 hours a week. [0:01:29]

But like whenever we hang out, it's just this constant stream of like, "I can't write; I'm so blogged; I have all these projects; they're all behind deadline; I feel so terrible; my house is a shithole. But no, don't help me clean it, because I'm too embarrassed to let anyone help me clean it. But I'm just going to tell you about how miserable I am that it's a shithole." While we're sitting in the middle shithole, while I'm sitting Lego's literally, because I can't put them away, because that would shame her. But like there are no places to sit that aren't covered in fucking Lego's.

And like her kid is misbehaved, but then she doesn't discipline her kid. I'm also watching her, like actively not discipline her kid, while her kid is misbehaving while she's telling me that she's so miserable that her kid misbehaves. And like, it's just really draining and horrible. You know, (chuckle) Lucy put it, "Are you familiar with the spoon metaphor for energy?"

THERAPIST: I'm not.

CLIENT: (chuckle) So some disability activist wrote about it to describe what it's like to live with lupus. And it's just this, (inaudible at 0:02:37), but like, you have these physical tokens; let's call them spoons, like you're holding a handful of spoons from the silverware drawer. And every action you do requires you to give up a spoon, and when you're out of the handful of spoons, you're just done for the day; you can't do anything more. You can't go out, you can't read the Internet, you can't cook dinner.

THERAPIST: Yeah, you're done.

CLIENT: Done. Days are (burnt) (ph), so like -

THERAPIST: It stinks.

CLIENT: Yeah. So the metaphor is, you know, how many spoons do you have? Are there a lot of spoons? Lucy (chuckle) made the analogy that, hanging out with Yvonne is like having Yvonne take all of my spoons and drops them down the garbage disposal. (chuckle) And that I should not make myself the patron martyr of like horribly mangled spoons dropped down the disposal.

She kind of had a point. But like, (pause) I tell her that I care about; and more importantly, everyone I lean on for emotional support, is also like horribly depressed, and like feels like their life is spinning out of control; is miserable. [0:03:44]

Last night, I had an hour long conversation with my friend Vanessa, who just gotten tenure last week after like years of working towards it. But she feels like a failure, because she hasn't published enough papers, and she had to step down from like some leadership position in her department. And she's going through another divorce, and her kid is severely autistic. Because her kids' therapist had been embezzling the insurance for like six years, the government decided that all of his therapist patients were going to be denied services, because they're not really sick. And she has to restart the whole evaluation and diagnostic process over with a new therapist. I was like –

She's got a lot of horrible circumstances going on, but like she spent any hour telling me about she's an academic failure, when she just got tenure. She's deeply depressed, like borderline suicidally depressed, and I don't really know what I can do to help her, other than encourage her to go find a therapist of her own, which I have been doing. [0:04:53]

(chuckle) But it's not helping me at all to like spend an hour on phone with someone who is telling me in detail about their suicidal ideations. (pause) But you know, this is someone I've been friends with for a long time and who I care about. (pause) Yeah, I don't – none of my friends are happy and it sucks. (pause)

I really miss Ashley, and I realize that part of it; well I mean, part of it is just that you know, I'm still half in love with him, and part of it is, you know, the physical and sexual aspect of the relationship. And certainly part of it was, in spite of knowing intellectually, that he was really depressed and miserable, and has been for quite awhile, he fakes being okay really well.

So when we were on dates, he would pretend everything was normal, and he didn't talk about his depression the way all of my other friends did. (inaudible at 0:06:22) from that. (pause)

THERAPIST: Well, one thing that (pause) seems to be (pause) (inaudible at 0:07:27), but that seems to be true in the way you're describing Yvonne and Vanessa sort of talking to you, (pause) you'd also know you're talking about it, is (pause) it's a little more show than tell.

CLIENT: Mm-mm.

THERAPIST: You know like with Yvonne, you see it all over the place, (pause)

CLIENT: Yeah.

THERAPIST: And you sort of see it demonstrated in how she talks.

CLIENT: Yeah.

THERAPIST: But it's not exactly what she's talk – I don't know if it's what she's talking about or not.

CLIENT: No, it is. Yeah. (pause)

THERAPIST: How so? [0:08:28]

CLIENT: Like, I mean, she'll talk about how she's feeling, about how she'll say, you know, "I'm miserable, because Christopher is yelling at me to move my stuff out of his apartment faster. And I really can't, because I don't have any – because I don't have the time, and have this job, and I'm behind on my deadlines, and it feels miserable that I'm behind on my deadlines. Every time I sit down to write, I have panic attacks, and I'm just on floor crying."

And then as she's saying this, she'll be like crying, and it's just – yeah.

THERAPIST: I see. (pause) I guess something related that I like about Vanessa is the spoon metaphor. I'm sorry, Lucy's spoon metaphor, is (pause) the garbage disposal doesn't digest spoons; it just mangles them. [0:10:01]

CLIENT: Yeah.

THERAPIST: And there's that kind of feeling what you're describing like, (pause) Vanessa and Yvonne seem kind of mangled, like they're not – this stuff is just racking them.

CLIENT: Yeah.

THERAPIST: And what they're saying is racking you.

CLIENT: Yeah.

THERAPIST: It's not like, this may be happening, but it's not the affect that you're describing that like what they're feeling is getting metabolized.

CLIENT: Right.

THERAPIST: Or you're helping them metabolize it. It's just like you're all getting mangled.

CLIENT: Yeah.

THERAPIST: By what's happening to you. And -

CLIENT: Like I wonder if there isn't just some kind of feedback link going on, that we're all depressed, and we all have stressful, unhappy things going on; just dwelling on it with each other is just kind of exacerbates the negative feelings for all of us; I don't know. [0:11:12] (pause)

THERAPIST: Well it also makes me think that maybe (pause) it feels like something similar here, that (pause) you kind of say these things, but it doesn't feel like I'm really taking in, or in some way helping you with how kind of overwhelmed and sort of chewed up you're feeling from all of this.

Like you're saying it, but it's spinning around and around, more than it is like feeling as though – kind of like it's going anywhere. And I imagine part of how that works is, (pause) (sigh) probably that there's something it feels like; I know you may well be missing about what this feels like to you to be listening to them. [0:12:51]

CLIENT: Like it's – it's exhausting, and then guilty for being exhausted by it. (pause) Yeah.

THERAPIST: And more, it sounds gut wrenching. You know, I mean, (pause) And there's something very parallel that seems like also characteristic of the way that this is disturbing. How old is Yvonne's kid? Like five or something?

CLIENT: Five, or six or something like that; yeah.

THERAPIST: I mean to see a kid that age, and sort of that vulnerable and out of control. [0:13:59]

CLIENT: Yep.

THERAPIST: With a mother who's so passive and helpless,

CLIENT: Right. Well the kids' father isn't any better, and neither of them disciplines her. And in part, because they both came from abusive authoritarian households, and so they're both terrified that they -

THERAPIST: They're reacting, yeah.

CLIENT: If they ever like say no, or exert any discipline, or try to take control of her behavior in any way, that they'll tip over the line into abusive with her -

THERAPIST: I'm really - I'm not - this probably sounds weird, but my intent is not to be critical of her as a mom so much as to say, I imagine it's terribly disturbing to watch.

CLIENT: Yeah.

THERAPIST: And more so because, you both know it.

CLIENT: Yeah.

THERAPIST: Like she's not containing the kid at all.

CLIENT: No. And like it's super frustrating when we hang out, and like when she has the kid, because we can't actually have a grown-up conversation, because the kid interrupts, like every 30 seconds, and needs constant attention at times. [0:15:11]

THERAPIST: Right. And that's expectable for like a two or three-year-old, but not so much with a six-year-old.

CLIENT: Yeah. Well with two or three-year-olds, you'd expect them to be asleep by 9:00 at night, which Madison didn't like, they've never had a consistent bedtime for her either, which doesn't help. I've been over at their place like when we split up, at like 11:30, midnight, and the kid would still be awake and hanging out and watching TV. And it's just like not - I don't know what they're going to do when she starts school in the fall.

THERAPIST: Does the mom or - yeah, the mom does have a therapist?

CLIENT: Yeah.

THERAPIST: The therapist or something [need a file] (ph). (pause) But that's not really (pause) Yeah, and you probably feel like, you go over there at pretty much any hour, and the kid is likely still up. [0:16:31]

CLIENT: Yeah. And like in the past, I've tried saying, you know, Madison, I'm having a grown-up calm conversation with your mom, please don't interrupt. Like not stepping into the role of disciplining her, but like speaking to her as I would to another adult. Like, "I'm having a conversation; can you hand on a minute?"

THERAPIST: Sure.

CLIENT: And then the kid just has a total meltdown, and says you know, goes into a total kid mode of, "You're not the boss of me; you're not my mom; you can't tell me what to do; I want to talk to my mommy." And then it's just like a zillion times worse. It's just like there's no - I mean I guess there is no reasoning with, you know, a kindergartner no matter what, but -

THERAPIST: There can be. I mean a kid who's heard that 300 times before, which is probably about the number there've going to have heard it most of time, like from a parent. You know, you can say that, and they're like, okay. (chuckle) I mean you know, neither really work out or something, but you can say that. [0:17:42] (pause)

CLIENT: Again, one time, (pre-before) (ph), so I was over at their place for a movie night, and they were trying desperately to get the kid to go to bed, and trading off doing bedtime rituals while we were watching the movie, which I thought was a little strange. But the bedtime ritual

lasted an hour and a half, and there was the peeing, and brushing the teeth, and then demanding a snack, and then brushing teeth again, and then demanding water, and then demanding a story, and then coming out of the room, and demanding more water, then wanting another story, because now she was out of bed. And at one point she insisted she wanted me to read her a story. [0:18:27]

They both just kind of looked at me helplessly, and were like could you go read her a story please? I was like, what the hell is this? (chuckle)

THERAPIST: Right.

CLIENT: I didn't sign up for babysitting duty, I came over to watch a movie.

THERAPIST: Right.

CLIENT: (sigh) So I read the kid a story, and then she didn't like the way I read the story, so I had to read it again, using funny voices for the funny characters. I was just like Jesus Christ.

THERAPIST: Yeah.

CLIENT: (sigh) (pause) And I feel bad criticizing their parenting, because, you know, I don't have kids myself, and so that way you never know what it's like to parent a difficult child until you have one. And it's like, I'm not there on the ground 24/7 with it, but it just – (sigh) [overlapping conversation at 0:19:24] it's disruptive and stressful.

THERAPIST: Yeah, but you have something there that's incredibly wrong.

CLIENT: Yeah. Like it's disruptive and it's stressful, especially the kid starts shrieking like high-pitched loud wailing, and it's just like it's pitiful to be over there.

THERAPIST: Parenting a regular little kid looks different from what they're doing. I mean it's not obvious from this, but I mean I'm child trained, and I until a few years ago, saw kids, you know, and (inaudible at 0:19:51). Parenting; it can be incredibly hard, and hard to know how hard it can be to parent a difficult kid, but that's not what it looks like.

You know, if they were there sort of going through the ritual, and trying to fit the limits, and you know whatever timeouts, or something, and all of that, and the kid was still going nuts, that's one thing. If the kid was autistic, and they like had some elaborate structure that the kid just could not fit into, but they were trying, you know, that would be one thing.

Or the kid was incredibly anxious, and just comes out of the bed every ten minutes, because they're, you know, afraid of a ghost or something, and they sort of are gentle, but firm, that's different. This is not that.

CLIENT: Yeah.

THERAPIST: I mean it didn't sound like they had anything.

CLIENT: No. (pause)

THERAPIST: And that – yeah. [0:20:57] (pause)

CLIENT: And like I've tried suggesting to Yvonne that we hang out on nights when she doesn't have the kid, but on nights when she doesn't have the kid, she's usually like going to lectures, or like going to events that she's going to be reporting on, or in the office late working.

So she doesn't want to hang out on nights that she doesn't have Madison. And I've tried suggesting, well just hire a babysitter; I'll pay for the babysitter, and let's go out for dinner. But, you know, then she's like, "Well, you know, Madison only sees me part of the time, and I don't really want the babysitter, and Christopher might use that against me in the divorce proceedings." She's worried that Christopher is going to try to get full custody of Madison with only supervised visits for her.

Frankly, I kind of see her point, and if I were Christopher, I sure as hell would want full custody with only supervised visits for her, because she's not like – Christopher is also permissive, and doesn't discipline the kid, but at least like he keeps his house clean, and the kid isn't living in filth. [0:22:07]

THERAPIST: Yeah. (pause)

CLIENT: Yeah, like Yvonne actually told me; I didn't witness this, but Yvonne told me that, you know, the kid had been sleeping on sheets that smelled like piss for three nights, because she didn't have the spoons or energy to like wash the sheets after Madison peed on them again. And she hoped that maybe now, Madison would learn a lesson about peeing in the bed; having to sleep in pissed-smelling sheets.

And I was just like so horrified; so immensely horrified, like, "Sure, you want to teach your kid not to wet the bed." And since Madison had been sleeping completely dry for like two years, like, it's pretty clearly acting out, because she's unhappy about the divorce. But the answer is not have your kid sleep in sheets that smelled like piss; like that's just awful.

THERAPIST: Yeah.

CLIENT: And I know it wasn't like deliberately vindictive, or deliberately intended as a punishment, but you know, she just really couldn't cope with like doing another load of laundry. But still, like – (pause) Yeah, if Madison were my kid, I wouldn't want Yvonne to have – even have full custody. [0:23:25]

And of course I can't say that to her, because I'm supposed to be on her side with the divorce, and just -

THERAPIST: Right.

CLIENT: I'm sorry; this has turned into like third party diagnosing of Yvonne's problems instead of talking about me.

THERAPIST: I don't think so actually. (pause) I think (pause) it seems to me that part of what's disturbing for you about watching Yvonne with her kid, is like your own mixed sort of feeling, or mixed sense about judging her, or thinking about how she should be doing things differently or better. [0:24:53]

CLIENT: Yeah.

THERAPIST: And, you know, in that way, I think yourself, feeling kind of helpless about the situation.

CLIENT: Yeah.

THERAPIST: So, I guess it seems to me that for you to feel more sure about how things there are fucked up, and how she really should be responsible for her kid; like she's being mean to her kid.

CLIENT: Yeah.

THERAPIST: Probably reassuring for you. And I don't hear in the way you're putting it, amounts toward her, like it doesn't sound to me like you are saying this with intents to be critical of her per say. More like, I mean you are critical of how she is with the kid, but you're protective with the kid. [0:25:50]

CLIENT: Yeah. (pause) I do feel almost like I'm litigating a case here; like here is all this evidence I've collected, and I'm presenting to you; please validate that my feelings are not crazy. (pause) But like, I'm supposed to go hang out with her in her house tomorrow night, but I'm just already feeling anxious and upset about it, and dreading going over and like, yeah. (pause) [0:27:00]-[0:28:00] (pause)

THERAPIST: I mean this is – (pause) I kind of feel like – (pause) [0:29:00] (pause) I mean this is tricky; like so the thing I'm sort of trying to get my head around here, is there's this sort of (perfection) (ph) parallel where on a smaller scale, you're sort of presenting to me how you feel unable to manage things with her.

CLIENT: Mm-mm.

THERAPIST: So that you cannot become like disturbed, and overwhelmed, and unhappy in a way that you can't control by seeing her. Obviously the parallel is with, you know, her doing the same thing to you with the kid. Like in that instance, you're me, she's you, and the kid is the kid.

CLIENT: Yeah.

THERAPIST: And – (pause) also clearly, you know, what's going on here is on a much smaller scale, [overlapping conversation at 0:30:51] because she's an adult. (chuckle) You know, she not your kid.

CLIENT: Right.

THERAPIST: But, (pause) it seems to me that both, like yeah, I think you're probably right, that there's a way in which you are wanting me to kind of (pause) just validate, but also like tip in and kind of encourage your right to sort of protect yourself from them. You know, either by telling her that you don't want to see her, or don't want see her without the babysitter. Or though you don't necessarily think her kid should be with her ex, that, you know, you don't feel like you'd be her friend, if you didn't tell her you thought you could handle her kid, you know, she shouldn't handle her kid. Whatever; some kind of limit that would also help to protect you. [0:32:01] But (pause)

CLIENT: Well like, part of me is also frustrated, because she didn't take my advice when Christopher first asked for the divorce. I told her, "You need a lawyer; you need to split the assets now; you need to have bank account in your name." And she didn't listen; she was like "Christopher and I were together for ten years, and he loves me, and he cares about me, and he wouldn't screw me over."

Now he's like, not giving her the password to their joint account; like he changed the password; won't give it to her; drained it; put most of the funds in a private account for him. And like, he's been a total asshole, and she was trying to negotiate with him and his lawyer on her own, and like she has screwed herself over financially, and even though she has legal counsel, I'm like she's not going to get as much financially as she could have.

THERAPIST: Yeah. [0:33:03]

CLIENT: And now she's complaining to me about how she's screwed financially, and she didn't expect this with Christopher. I was like, "I told you four months ago, that you needed a lawyer."

THERAPIST: Yeah. (pause)

CLIENT: It's really hard for me not to respond to that with, "Well you brought that on yourself." (pause) But like I feel, I don't know, I feel like a jerk every time I tell her I think she's doing something wrong. Like, she wanted couples counseling, and she wanted to know why Christopher wanted to divorce. And she, I don't know, from where I'm standing, it looks like she emotionally coerced him and belittled him into going to counseling with her. [0:34:16]

And, you know, Christopher said in counseling, and he said before counseling, and he has been very consistent about saying that he feels like their marriage has been emotionally abusive towards him, and he just wants out, and there's nothing she can do to convince him otherwise.

She made him do this like ten-week counseling program to try to repair their relationship anyway. And I tried telling her like, "This is not fair to him. Even if he's wrong about calling you abusive, and I think he is, and even if he's being a kind of a dick about this, if he wants to be out of the relationship, he gets to be out, and he doesn't owe you an explanation." I'm like, "It would be nice if he did out of respect for like the ten years you were together, but you know, he gets to leave a relationship he doesn't want; we all have that right."

But where a woman saying her husband was forcing her to like try to repair the relationship when she wanted out, we would both be infuriated. And Yvonne was like, "But like, he owes it to me." And I was just like, there's no – I don't know, it's – [0:35:23] (pause)

Or maybe he's not wrong about coping emotionally in this relationship, I don't know. He's got – (pause) he is really messed up from his parents; he has numerous problems. (pause)

THERAPIST: We should stop.

CLIENT: Okay.

THERAPIST: Thanks (inaudible at 0:35:54).

CLIENT: Yep.

END TRANSCRIPT