

"It was a lost year, a year of terror. But at last

Nantucket that weekend, and my husband accepted. I couldn't believe it at first. That he failed to see my desperation was beyond my comprehension. "You're cruel," I screamed at him that night. "You don't care about anything but yourself and your rotten job. You may be the biggest wheel on Madison Avenue, but as a husband and father you don't exist." Then the fears that had been plaguing me all that summer came over me, and I found myself creeping into his arms for comfort, crying for him to forgive me, begging him not to leave me.

A Meeting With a Psychiatrist

The Friday of that weekend I took my courage in my hands and made an appointment with a psychiatrist. I found his name in the telephone book, and saying nothing to anyone I went to his office, feeling, as I did so, that I already had one foot in the state hospital. Once in his presence I couldn't bear to recount my dreadful fears, so I resorted to my old escape—pretense. I told him I had been bothered by some silly imaginings, and that—since there was a history of mental instability in the family (which there is)—I had come for reassurance. I was gay and apparently unconcerned, and he assured me that on the basis of what I had told him I had absolutely no cause for alarm. He suggested that I come back in a week and talk to him a little more.

While at Nantucket—this was a nightmare weekend, by the way, of drinking and pretended merriment—I sent a telegram breaking the appointment. I didn't want anyone probing, discovering my horrible fantasies, least of all that smooth-faced, jargon-talking boy psychiatrist. It was better to go on pretending.

I pretended for another month, and then I knew that I couldn't any more. I was afraid to kill myself, but I kept wishing I would die—of a heart attack or in an accident. I went to our family doctor who had known us forever and told him how awful I felt. "You," he boomed. "With four beautiful children and abundant health. Oh, sweetie, don't make me sick. Why I've got patients with nothing to live for and an incurable disease who are fighting—fighting for a chance to live. You go on home and pull yourself together." I finally convinced him that I needed help quickly and badly. I asked him for the name of a good psychiatrist who would really make me well. This was my dream. To find a doctor who, like a magician, would make me well, very much

in the same fashion that I had counted on my husband to make me happy. I didn't yet know that there are some things we must do for ourselves.

He made an appointment for me with a colleague of his, and I went to see him that very afternoon. This time I didn't pretend. The words gushed out of me, but I had the strangest feeling that the doctor wasn't listening, because he kept writing and writing without ever looking at me. "You don't really hear me," I told him. "Only the words. You don't really understand what I'm trying to tell you."

"I hear you," he said, still writing. Then he looked straight at me. "No one completely understands another, or is completely understood, you know." These words sank in. They were very important to me. I visited this doctor three times a week for the next two weeks, but in spite of his best efforts to relieve my tension, pressures from the outside kept mounting, offsetting whatever progress we made in his office. A one-shot magazine I was editing was going badly. I was way past my deadline. The children, reacting to my nervous state, were difficult to handle. My husband was increasingly impatient with my household mismanagement, my lack of interest in the neighborhood social whirl, and completely nonplussed by my blackening depression. I ransacked the library for a book that might help me, endlessly questioned my friends about the words they lived by. I prayed and prayed and prayed, but found, like Hamlet's uncle, that my words went up, my thoughts remained below.

One morning I told my husband that he would have to stay home from the office with me that day. That I couldn't go on by myself. "You'll have to go to the doctor's with me," I told him, "and find out what's the matter with me. I'm too scared to live any longer." It was the first time in my life I had ever told my husband he would have to do anything. We got a baby-sitter, and together we went to the psychiatrist's office.

He spoke to us individually and then to both of us together. Among the three of us it was decided that there was no alternative but for me to go to a psychiatric hospital for treatment. I accepted the sentence with chattering teeth, certain that this would be the end of me. He recommended two hospitals very highly and helped us to apply for admission to the less expensive of the two. (Both, incidentally, were fabulously expensive and very difficult to get into. We

were lucky that they had room for me. I made arrangements that day for someone to come and stay with the children, and the next morning we drove to the hospital.

It didn't look like a hospital at all, but rather like an English country house. The office of the admitting doctor looked like a stage-set office. It was too neat and shiny and cold, and the doctor himself seemed to me like a low-budget movie producer's idea of a psychiatrist. "I understand we're having a bad time, mmm-mmm?" he said in a fake soothing voice. "Now tell me, by what means have you thought of taking your life?"

I said, "I haven't really thought of taking it. I'm much too afraid of death."

He "mm-mmm"-ed a bit more and said, "Well, just let's assume you were in a state of taking it; what method would you employ? Pills? A gun?" My panic was increasing by the second.

"I don't know," I whimpered.

"Now," he continued smoothly, trying a new tack with me, "tell me some of your dreams." He had a big book in his hands, and I had an idea that he was going to look inside it, find the chapter on whatever my dream was and base his diagnosis on this. I didn't like this man. I didn't trust him. To me he seemed to be a complete phony. "You could never make me well," I told him. (It was queer how all my sweetness and light had disappeared with the onset of the acute stage of my illness. I simply hadn't a bit of energy left to expend in any sort of pretense.) "Curing people isn't something you can read in a book. It's got to be something inside you. There is nothing important inside you." I asked him to get my husband so that he could take me out of this place.

A Second Try

We subsequently learned that this doctor was highly thought of in his profession, a learned and conscientious man. There was no rapport between us, though, and this is of basic importance in such a relationship.

The next day we went to the other hospital recommended by the psychiatrist. I signed a white piece of paper which proved that I was a voluntary patient and agreed to remain in the hospital for a minimum of two and a half months.

Since I want to tell the story of one person's inner growth, I won't give a detailed account of life in a psychiatric