

Leonard Romus

# DIARY OF A MARRIAGE

*This is an extract from a novel completed early in 1972 after some experience of encounter groups and related activities. It takes the form of an imaginary co-counselling situation, recorded and transcribed from tapes, but only my side of the conversation in the role of client is given, while the responses of Janice, my counsellor, are eliminated in order to prevent the co-counselling device getting in the way of the story.*

*The main theme of the book is my emotional life, past, present and potential, especially in relation to women and most particularly in relation to my mistress Gert, my present wife Stephanie, my former wife Rita and my mother. The project was undertaken in the hope that readers would not sit back and see the experiences as only relevant to the author, but would be willing to identify themselves either with him or other characters, as children, parents, husbands, wives, lovers and friends.*

Another thing with Joan was her physical stature. I had this again recently with a woman called Freda. It's not only their size and strength. They have an apparent largeness of spirit. Their self-possession makes them appear strong and I doubt my ability to influence or dominate them when I need to. I need to dominate women because of my claustrophobia, I think.

I seem to remember my mother hugging me closely about the head when I was small. I felt trapped, in danger of smothering against her. I can't picture a scene but I can sense her hugging me hard to her bosom. The emotion from her is protective, urging me to forget or feel better about something that has upset me. I feel pressed too strongly against her.

You're squeezing me too hard Mom. You're hurting my eyeballs through my eyelids, squashing my nose and cheek, pulling my ear. I can't breathe properly. I don't feel comforted because you're stifling me. I don't want this kind of protection. I should have faced up to what happened. I shouldn't have come whimpering to you for comfort because I hate feeling suffocated. Why can't you understand me? I've been upset. Look into my eyes, show me we are communicating. Don't hug me blindly so I choke and want to escape. It makes me want to turn elsewhere for comfort, but to whom? I don't think I need comforting because you've told me not to cry. You say I must be a little man so I fight back the tears. That's what I'm doing now, fighting away your comfort, wanting to be independent and strong. In the midst of my weakness I want a second chance to go back and face up to what seemed so threatening.

I haven't cried for many years. I've tried. When things get bad with Stephanie I wish I could. I feel tremendously stirred up inside, and when I suppress my feelings, it's worse. I want to show how hurt, disturbed or desolate I feel but she's monopolised the tears. In recent years, even she's found it hard to cry, which makes me uneasy. Maybe I've stifled her tears, blunted her love.

Rita accused me of destroying her love for me, and Stephanie sometimes seems to echo her cry. Gert's hinted at it too, and my mother's deathly face at the airport says it. She pleads: Lennie, what have I done that's so bad you can't forgive me? Don't you know you must learn to forget and forgive in this world? You can't go through life so inflexible, never making allowances for people's faults. You'll make life harder for yourself because other people won't tolerate yours. You won't accept your own.' She's prattling. I'm not sure she'd have said these things.

Rita says, 'You've killed my love for you Lennie'. How, what have I done that wasn't a reaction to your provocation? How deep a love can it be if it's so easily destroyed? My love is very deep, I won't ever let it go. You'll have to walk out, divorce me. I'll never do it.

I did it. We had a series of terrible clashes. One day - I'll never forget it - we're rowing, two full-blooded adults at the height of our tempers letting fly at each other in our most familiar

surroundings. Althea, aged two, is sitting against the back of an armchair, wild-eyed with excitement and jumping up and down in a reflection of our violence. The argument is about the ever-present crowd of hangers-on she keeps about the flat. I'm overwrought and furiously resentful. I'm not quite certain about what but I'm sure it has something to do with her.

Rita, I can't go on like this. I'm trying to do a job. I'm working hard, until late at night, because you want me to. You say you want money, more security, more comfort. You pushed me into getting the job. I did it to keep you happy and because my insecurity was growing too, and what do you do? I come home at any time, day or night, and there are people here. Neither of us particularly likes them. Why are they here? Why do you let them sponge on us all the time? We can't afford it. They can go elsewhere. What do they want from you? What are you giving them? I'm fed up with the dirty work of having to kick them out. They're your friends. Why can't you get rid of them at a reasonable hour so I can have some peace and be alone with you when I get home.

This is taking me into a different scene, clearer and more fundamental.

I came home at supper time, earlier than usual, to find Rita and Fred, an American friend, in the flat. He looks subdued, doesn't meet my eye. She's discomposed, surprised I'm home at this time. I suspect something's been going on between them and I resent her trying to create a friendly atmosphere. She hands me some poetry he's brought to show us. I'm impressed but feel resentful because I feel uneasy. What's been happening? Why do you spend so much time here? Are you interested in Stephanie, as both you and Rita have repeatedly told me, or is it Rita you're after? Why are you always here, bumming meals and cups of coffee, taking up Rita's time when she might be doing something useful? I don't want him here any more. I've had enough of him creeping in and out, avoiding my eyes, bumming off us and distracting you. What have you done to clear up this flat today? How badly have you neglected Althea? You're a lazy inconsiderate bitch. You don't care about feeding me on time, clearing the place out, letting me write and relate to you. You keep moving out of my reach into this crowd of people. I want them cleared away. They're a nuisance.

I ask her whether anything's been going on between her and Fred. He's drifted out, mumbling some excuse. She: Why should you think that. You know it's Stephanie he's keen on. He came all the way back with us from Cornwall because of her. You don't think he'd see anything in an old married woman like me do you? I'm not convinced, Rita. There's something inconclusive in what you've said, and I can't forget how ruffled you looked when I got home. Come on, Rita, it's bedtime now, and I'm feeling randy. Don't put on any acts. Don't say you're too tired or don't feel like it. I want to know why you have so much time and energy for the others and none for me. If that's how it is, I'm going to feel entitled to my due as a husband. I'm working for you, doing a job I don't care twopence about, so come and open yourself to me.

I start to caress her. I don't feel tender but by now I've developed some skill and I go ahead, wilfully ignoring my misgivings, turning a blind eye to her troubled expression. She's flushed and seems to be responding. The more she responds, the more detached I feel, and the more convinced she's been lying. I feel more and more certain of it. She comes and I follow. I'm heaving with disgust but I let her lie on me because I can't bear to indicate my distaste for her and for our relationship. The situation has got beyond me. I hate what our love-making stands for. I've held our marriage above those of others. I've thought myself superior, more sensitive, more exalted. I thought I'd found a partner to match me in those aspirations and here I am, groaning in mistrust, anger and jealousy.

'I couldn't tell you, Lennie. You were so obviously unprepared for the truth. You were angry and unreasonable, despite your saying we should have affairs, despite your starting first and indulging whenever you get the chance.'

I feel too stirred up, too jealous and out of control to make sense of this right now. I'm trembling all over, but mainly in my abdomen, under my heart. Now there's a slight pain in my heart, a choking sensation in my throat with a sensation of nausea. I could be sick. There's a knot of something coagulating in my stomach, near the top, as if undecided whether to well out through my throat or subside through my bowels. It's an indeterminate mixture of anxiety and poisonous

substances, churning, shuddering, collecting here in a lump which I hold on to. I'm concentrating on this lump of indefinable murky matter in my guts.

You, lump of murk, are what I use to distract myself. You, when you tremble, draw my attention to my body because I'm too weak-minded to face what I'm thinking. I feel the choking, slight nausea again. It's more pronounced. My burping feels like an impulse to retch but I'm holding back. I've always held back from vomiting. I hate it. I don't want to vomit now. It's so unpleasant and uncomfortable.

Dad, don't make me vomit. Don't force me to. I hate vomiting and I hate enemas. Why do you always force me? You may be right, it may be the best thing but I loathe it. You're forcing me because you want to dominate me. You're insisting on making me do what you want. You're saying it's best for me but you're crushing me. You're not letting me live, develop or be myself. Stop crushing me, stop forcing me down this horrible toilet. I don't want to be here. Let me go! I don't want an enema. I don't want to be sick. I'd rather be alone to cope with it in my own way. Stop bullying me. I hate you! I don't feel love for you, only fear of your domination. I want to vomit you out, not what's inside me. I want to swallow you so I can vomit you out again, get rid of you, get some other father. I don't want a father whom I hate and fear, who beats me up and does horrible things to me. You take out on me your disappointment, your feelings of weakness. Why don't you go back to your partner in the office where your violence belongs. Stop yelling at Mom. Stop forcing me to do things I hate. I'm in a trap. I can't stand being bullied but I can't stand being alone. How can I get out of this?

I've seen the way out. I stopped rocking, curling myself into a stifled ball and going through agony when I realised I want to be involved with others without them dominating me. All these women. I want to be free to surrender to you. I want you to be tender, sympathetic and sensitive to me. Stephanie, you always were. That's why I came to you after the bitter pain of Rita. You were wise, kind and loving beyond your years. At seventeen, eighteen and nineteen you were wonderful. I went to you out of weakness and I needed you. I loved your sympathy. I could lay my head on your breast while half of me was being your father and teaching you about sex and life. I want you to take charge completely and stimulate me. I want to lose myself sexually. I think this is crucial among my needs.

I'm dizzy. My arms are going numb. They're tingling. I don't know what to do, I'm frightened. There's a tremendous feeling of electricity, energy running through my arms. It's getting to my fingertips - and it's what I need. I don't know where this electricity is going to. It's like an electric shock centring in my hands and fingertips, rushing out of me into the air, leaving me at a fantastic rate. It's a shocking feeling. Now it's paralysing me. My face is working too, I must breathe.

Mommy I'm afraid. I'm feeling insecure. I want comfort from somebody. Stephanie, I need comfort. When I'm acting so strong and so frozen against you, look what I'm doing to myself. This is what's happening to me, but I'm suppressing it. This is what I go through without knowing it. Gert, it's me that's self-centred! I patronise you, but I'm only distracting myself from my own problems. You give me an opportunity to be kind, gracious and wise because you're worse off than I am. I can only be good to you because you're weaker, more in need than I am. I can afford to be generous but whenever I'm threatened I freeze up like you do.

Oohh - thank goodness! Gert, Stephanie, even my poor unhappy mother - you've helped me. I've got through to something. I've been able to break down. I've felt what I couldn't believe, incredible vibrations or electricity - call it orgone energy if you like Mr. Reich. Oh - the flow of words is incredible, I've never flowed like this before, with movement, breath, understanding of myself and sympathy for others, especially you, Stephanie. You've gone through so much at my hands, and I've put up with so much from you. We have a tremendous struggle ahead of us, like every couple.

Oh - how released I feel! My energy's flowing. The electricity's still there, threatening to return, but I don't care. The fear's subsided. I'm flowing a little more efficiently, my system is less blocked. I want to cherish this moment. I want to stop talking and yet I don't. I want to talk nonsense, gibberish. I want to make noises and shout, shout how free I am, how free I can be.

I've helped myself for a minute. I've understood what I've been driving at. I could help you, Gert. I

could run with you on the grass like I didn't the other day. We were doing a blind walk on Primrose Hill after an encounter group. Suddenly I stopped and said: I've done it for a while. I've seen the point so I needn't do it any more. Why indulge, why go on and on? There's no new experience here, no danger. But look what I missed. The freedom of being and expressing myself. Why do I always sit and criticise? I hold myself back and worry about how foolish I may look. Oh, the sum of my sins, when it comes to bottling myself up, is incredibly large.

I want to burrow into you and fling you to the four winds, kick you to the five continents, smash you into kingdom come! All you bottling up impulses and hurt feelings. Why can't you be free and hit a cushion and be ridiculous or insane if you like? Express yourself! You have capabilities, you have a brain. You're always fuzzing it up with nonsense. You used to be intelligent, you are intelligent. You can do whatever you want. You can be a writer. You're writing now! Don't you see it?

Yes, I see it.

It's been wonderful. What an incredible session. I must stop talking about it.

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Yvonne Brock

## HOW P ARE YOU

Back in the 1950s I was engaged full time in the selection exercise. As a Personnel Selection Officer on the staff of the Senior Psychologist to the Admiralty I was dressed as a WRNS officer but my working day was spent exclusively with young males; both those who had already been accepted for naval service and, as a member of Artificer Apprentice Selection Boards, with those school leavers who had passed various educational hurdles and hoped to be accepted for that particular entry to the Royal Navy.

As PSOs we were a mixed bunch, partly naval, partly WRNS officers and, as members of selection boards, we worked with and for the industrial psychologists employed in the Senior Psychologist Department of the Admiralty. A mixed bunch indeed; of the three other women I did my training with in 1950 two (including myself) were fugitives from the teaching profession, while the other two had the requisite social science qualifications, though none of us had what was ideally required, namely a degree in psychology. In these days of increasing emphasis being placed on paper qualifications it is interesting to note that my fellow school ma'am and I were far happier and more successful than the two 'qualified' entrants who escaped fairly speedily, one into matrimony and the other into WRNS administrative work.

The whole emphasis of our training was on the 'scientific' approach. In those days tests of intelligence - or more in our case of aptitudes and attainments - were rather more revered than they are today, and it was a kind of heresy to question in any sense their validity. I think I always retained a faint scepticism here, realising that the brilliant if slightly unorthodox candidate might easily misunderstand the nature of a testing session and perhaps fail to treat it with sufficient seriousness. However, on the whole we were not dealing with brilliant though unorthodox characters but with young men who approximated more to the 'norm' postulated by the Senior