

A FREUDIAN SLIP

by

Mike Wright

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INTERIOR DAY

(The office of GILES FARNHAM, psychiatrist, it has pretensions towards elegance without quite making it. There is a desk with a red telephone and a certificate, framed and mounted standing on it. There is also the obligatory couch, a full-length mirror and shelves with a vast array of imposing looking books on them. GILES FARNHAM, mid-thirties, dapper, seemingly very self-confident is standing at the desk speaking into the phone. At the same time he is admiring his reflection in the mirror, smoothing down his hair, patting the smoothness of his stomach. He is clearly pleased with what he sees).

FARNHAM

No, of course I don't mind you ringing me at work...It is my job after all...Yes...Yes...It doesn't matter, really...Yes, I know you're only National Health but it's OK. Now listen...No, you must listen. I know you're on a ledge. What I don't know is where it is...Yes, it was kind of them to let you use their phone. But where is the ledge?...I know it's on the thirteenth storey of a block of flats. You keep telling me that. What you're not telling me is where the block of flats is...Hold on my pencil's broken...

(FARNHAM puts the phone down and hunts around his desk for a fresh pencil. As he searches he notices that his calendar is out of date, with a touch of petulance he puts it right, finds a pencil and picks up the receiver).

FARNHAM

Right, OK. Still there? Good-oh...Now, tell me. Where is the block of...Southside...Right. Got it...What's the weather like?...You can't stand out there you'll catch your death...Are you well wrapped up then? What?...No I wasn't...I wasn't. Look, I was not trying to be funny mother...Oh God...Look, how exactly can I help only it's a bit tricky just now. I've still three more appointments this morning...I can't say...I can't, that's all. They may be more urgent than you. I won't know until I've spoken to them and I can't speak to them because I'm speaking to you. It's most inconvenient. I don't suppose you could ring back around 2.00? I'll be free then. I'm quite free between 2.00 and 3.00. I could even ask Jennifer to make an appointment for you ... There's a first-rate ledge right outside my window ...

(There is a knock on the door)

FARNHAM

I'm sorry, mother, I'll have to go...

(JENNY HUGHES, FARNHAM's receptionist, enters with a file under her arm).

FARNHAM

(crashes the phone down)

Mother again.

JENNY

Hung up again?

(FARNHAM nods)

Another ledge?

FARNHAM

Somewhere in Southside. Keep the 2.00 free will you. In case she comes in.

JENNY

Oh, I'm sorry, Mr Farnham, I've already booked Mrs Dunwoody in at 2.00. She's had a relapse. Poor soul.

FARNHAM

Dunwoody...Dunwoody...Is that the little fat one who thinks she's Josephine or the ageing spinster who streaked at Twickenham?

JENNY

She's the one who's due to appear in Court on Wednesday for shoplifting.

FARNHAM

Ah, yes. The Tesco tea-leaf.

JENNY

I told her you'd see her at 2.00.

FARNHAM

She hasn't been to Tesco's again?

JENNY

It was Boots this time.

FARNHAM

(excitedly scribbling a note)

I thought there was a danger she'd go up-market. Very well. I'll see her at 2.00.

JENNY

What about your mother?

FARNHAM

If she comes, put her in the annexe. The ledge isn't as good but there's a better selection of magazines.

JENNY

I do so admire the way you cope with everybody's problems when you have so many of your own, Mr Farnham.

FARNHAM

A quirk of nature. I was born gifted. Now, you wanted to speak to speak to me?

JENNY

Only to say that your next appointment has arrived. A Miss Waters.

FARNHAM

Waters...Waters...Mmm...Can't say it rings any bells.

JENNY

She's new. I made the appointment yesterday. It's one I'm sure you'll appreciate.

FARNHAM

Young?

JENNY

Mid to late twenties, I'd say.

FARNHAM

Attractive?

JENNY
I'm sure you'll think so.

FARNHAM
Well heeled?

JENNY
As Croesus.

FARNHAM
Splendid. Splendid.

JENNY
(hands FARNHAM a file)
Her file.

FARNHAM
(puts his hands behind his back)
Now you know my rule, Jennifer.

JENNY
I think you should make an exception in Miss Water's case, Mr Farnham. It's for you own good, I assure you.

FARNHAM
Leave it on the table. I'll give it the once over after lunch.

JENNY
I think you need the background.

FARNHAM
I will not be cluttered up with such nonsense. 'Tabla Rosa', Jennifer, 'Tabla Rosa.'

JENNY
Yes, Mr Farnham.

FARNHAM
Well, what are you waiting for? Wheel her in.

(JENNY turns to go)

FARNHAM

Oh and by the way, try and get in here a bit sharper when I buzz for coffee, will you? Shoving a steaming mug of Nescafe and a custard cream into the sweaty hand of an emotionally aroused person at the wrong time can lead to irreparable psychological damage.

JENNY

They're chocolate digestives.

FARNHAM

Even worse. Right. I'm ready.

(JENNY exits. FARNHAM checks his appearance in the mirror. There is a knock at the door).

FARNHAM

Come in, please.

(JENNY enters with MISS WATERS. She is in her late twenties, long dark hair, elegantly dressed, very good looking and oozing class).

JENNY

Miss Waters, Mr Farnham.

FARNHAM

Thank you, Jennifer.

(JENNIFER exits).

FARNHAM

Would you like to take a seat?

WATERS

Where would you like me to take it?

FARNHAM

Ah, yes. Very good. Very droll.

WATERS

(sits)

I suppose they all say that.

FARNHAM

Only those with an under-developed sense of occasion.
Cigarette?

WATERS

You disappoint me, Doctor. I would have expected a Man
of Medicine to be more discriminating.

FARNHAM

I deal in minds, Miss Waters. Not bodies. And anyway, I
am not a doctor, I'm a plain 'mister'. Mr Farnham. But
you can call me Giles.

WATERS

But I hardly know you.

FARNHAM

Time will soon remedy that, Miss Waters.

WATERS

In fact, nobody I know knows you. Indeed, I go further.
Nobody I know has even heard of you, Mr Farnham.

FARNHAM

My credentials are impeccable, I assure you.

WATERS

If it wasn't for your entry in Yellow Pages I wouldn't be
sitting here now.

FARNHAM

A stroke of genius. Physician, reveal thyself.

WATERS

It was father that found you.

FARNHAM

I had thought of registering under 'Plumbers' but thought
the analogy would be lost on the Great British Public.

WATERS

He asked around - surreptitiously, of course. He's a
politician - and nobody had heard of you. So here I am.
He's ashamed of me, you see. Or, at least, my complaint.

FARNHAM

A politician you say. Not Sir Richard Waters by any chance?

WATERS

You've heard of him?

FARNHAM

He a keen conservationist, one hears.

WATERS

Oh yes. He attends all the big Hunts and Shoots.

FARNHAM

I look forward to making his acquaintance.

WATERS

In that case I fear you are heading for a great disappointment, Mr Farnham. Father is very much the snob, I'm afraid. But I didn't come here to talk about him. I came here to talk about myself.

(WATERS goes to the couch)

WATERS

Shall I lie down now?

FARNHAM

Contrary to the impression created by the media, the lying on a psychiatrist's couch is not obligatory, Miss Waters.

WATERS

(sits on it)

I think I'd prefer sitting on it - for the short-term at least.

(FARNHAM draws a chair towards her and with a flourish, turns it the wrong way round and sits on it with his arms folded across the top of the back of it. Silence).

WATERS

Well?

FARNHAM
Well what?

WATERS
Aren't you going to ask me anything?

FARNHAM
No.

WATERS
Oh!

(Pause)

FARNHAM
It's one of my Immutable Laws.

WATERS
What is - not talking to your patients?

FARNHAM
"The amount revealed by the patient about himself -" or herself, of course, " - is in inverse proportion to the depth of questioning he (or she, as the case may be) is subjected to."

WATERS
I'm not sure I've come across that one before.

FARNHAM
It forms one of the many cornerstones of my next publication as a matter of fact.

WATERS
Your *next* publication! Oh, Mr Farnham, I had no idea I was being treated by a man of letters.

FARNHAM
Let not the comparative modesty of the fee deceive you, Miss Waters. I am out of the top drawer, psychiatrically speaking.

WATERS
Father will be most relieved to hear it.

FARNHAM

You mention your father a lot.

WATERS

You disappoint me again, Mr Farnham. I would have expected a far more original opening gambit from a man out of the top psychiatric drawer.

FARNHAM

My reputation has been built on successful ends, not imaginative means, Miss Waters. Notwithstanding which, I hasten to add that I have never been accused of lacking imagination - or originality. My approach is flexible, comprehensive, intelligent and humane. I use the latest techniques, read all the most recent papers and specialise in a formidable array of psychiatric tools.

WATERS

I hope hypnosis is not one of them.

FARNHAM

Hypnosis, yes...I own to dabbling in hypnosis. A valid and effective procedure if used with sensitivity, common sense and moderation.

WATERS

I'm sorry but I categorically refuse to be hypnotised. Please make note, Mr Farnham - Hypnosis is out.

FARNHAM

You speak from the heart, Miss Waters. You have clearly had experience of the phenomenon.

WATERS

Indeed I have, Mr Farnham. And it's not one of my favourite memories.

(WATERS pauses, FARNHAM smiles encouragement).

WATERS

It was at the Hunt Ball. There was a cabaret. A hypnotist. He asked for volunteers.

FARNHAM

One should never volunteer for anything. The very act can unleash all sorts of repressed inhibitions.

WATERS

I didn't volunteer. I was a mere bystander. I wasn't even paying particular attention. Suddenly - wham!

(WATERS claps her hands).

WATERS

I went out like a light.

FARNHAM

(nods sagely)

The Ricochet Effect. You must be extremely sensitive and suggestible.

WATERS

Many believe that's the source of my current malaise.

FARNHAM

Did you behave yourself whilst under the influence?

(Silence. FARNHAM gravely takes up his pencil and opens his pad.)

FARNHAM

What exactly did you do?

WATERS

(reluctantly)

I poured a Whelan's Wonder over the Master of Hounds.

FARNHAM

A Whelan's Wonder?

WATERS

A cocktail. The speciality of the barman. A little Irishman who used to be a bouncer at an Algerian Brothel. That's where he learned to mix the cocktail.

FARNHAM

Was it expensive?

WATERS
Outrageously.

FARNHAM
Huhhuh...Now let's see if I've got this right. You wasted the most expensive drink in the house by pouring it over the head of one of the Unspeakables who while away their leisure hours terrorising the life out of Uneatables. Mmm?

(WATERS nods. FARNHAM scribbles away with satisfaction).

FARNHAM
There's two good clues in that little lot.

WATERS
He was attempting to remove a very personal item of my clothing at the time.

FARNHAM
Three good clues.

WATERS
... During the Gay Gordons.

FARNHAM
That shows great enterprise. If memory serves, the Gay Gordons is quite an energetic little dance.

WATERS
Oh we weren't dancing. We were watching. Hence the ready availability of the Whelan's Wonder.

FARNHAM
The things you rich people get up to. Had that been me I'd have been up before the local magistrate in next to no time.

WATERS
He is the local magistrate.

FARNHAM
Ah! And did anything else of any consequence occur?

WATERS

I don't remember. It's all a bit hazy as a matter of fact. My parents wouldn't speak to me for months.

FARNHAM

Ah, now that could be enlightening. Why was that?

WATERS

Father lost his chance of joining the local Hunt. It was all rather exclusive, you see. He was only just starting out on his social climbing. He was plain 'Mister' then, of course.

FARNHAM

A grave handicap. No title and a daughter who preferred to keep her pants on. Yes, I can understand his chagrin. And your mother?

WATERS

We had one hell of a stinking row. She's hardly spoken a civil word since.

FARNHAM

In some animal species the mother eats her young. Homo Sapiens tend to be more subtle.

(Pause as FARNHAM scrutinises WATERS closely.)

FARNHAM

Do you love your parents?

WATERS

Of course I love them.

FARNHAM

Both of them?

WATERS

Yes, yes, of course both of them.

FARNHAM

Why 'of course'?

WATERS

Because. That's why. I mean what sort of a bloody silly question is that anyway?

FARNHAM

It's a very good question as a matter of fact. You'd be surprised how often that self same question has proved that springboard to total recovery. Well?

WATERS

You're trying to make me say 'no', aren't you?

FARNHAM

Why don't you love them?

WATERS

For Christ's Sake, will you stop making these puerile assumptions.

FARNHAM

These hostile feeling you have against your parents..

WATERS

I don't have any hostile feelings towards my parents. The only hostile feelings I have at the moment are against you. And I wouldn't be at the mercy of the mumblings and fumbings of a third-rate shrink nobody ever heard of if my father hadn't been more concerned about *his reputation* than *my health*.

FARNHAM

Ah!

WATERS

And will you stop saying 'Ah' every time I say something that the space between your ears interprets as significant.

FARNHAM

One lump or two?

WATERS

What?

FARNHAM

I thought this might be an opportune time to stop for coffee.

WATERS

I don't want any bloody coffee.

FARNHAM

Ah!

(FARNHAM pauses).

FARNHAM

We were talking about your hostile feelings towards your parents. Did you have them before or after your inadvertent hypnosis?

(Silence)

FARNHAM

Well?

WATERS

After.

FARNHAM

Soon after?

(There's a pause)

FARNHAM

Well?

WATERS

Immediately after.

FARNHAM

Ah!

WATERS

(throws her head back, exasperated)

Jesus!

FARNHAM

And your... 'trouble'. Did that start before or after your hostile feelings began?

WATERS

After.

FARNHAM

Ah!

WATERS

Six years after.

FARNHAM

Oh!

WATERS

(stands)

I'm wasting your time.

FARNHAM

On the contrary. We're progressing very satisfactorily in my estimation.

WATERS

But we haven't discussed my complaint yet.

FARNHAM

A very encouraging sign. Believe me, Miss Waters, most patients can't wait to rabbit on about their problems.

WATERS

I may be more naïve than most, Mr Farnham, but I was rather expecting you to take that sort of initiative.

FARNHAM

That would be difficult, Miss Waters, given the fact that I am as yet unacquainted with the nature of your complaint.

WATERS

You mean you don't know what I'm here about?

FARNHAM

It is an immutable tenet of my philosophy that I undertake all preliminary discussions without knowing the kernel of the problem. It enables me to keep an open mind, you see. Besides, such is the power of my intellect that I soon manage to jot down an idea or two.

WATERS

And have you managed to jot down an idea or two about me?

FARNHAM

Indeed I have.

WATERS

Well?

(No reaction)

WATERS

Would it be too much to ask you to share your ideas with your patient?

FARNHAM

(considers)

Why not? The size of my fee - relatively small as it may be - demands some consideration. The diagnosis is quite straightforward. Young, impressionable, attractive girl - desperate to make her mark on the world - is snubbed and rejected by the parents she adores because of her instinct to cling to an outmoded moral code.

WATERS

Don't you think that's slightly simplistic?

FARNHAM

It's grossly simplistic but one needs to over-simplify in this job if one is to make sense of anything. Have you ever tried to actually *read* Freud?

WATERS

Extensively. His works were strictly taboo at my Finishing School. We read him avidly.

FARNHAM

Another of the Cornerstones around which my next publication has been founded. "The degree of enthusiasm exhibited towards a given piece of behaviour is in inverse proportion to the degree of approbation associated with the performance of that piece of behaviour". I call it 'The Forbidden Fruit Syndrome'. One over-simplifies in practice, Miss Waters, because of the over-elaboration of the Theory.

WATERS

You make it sound like a game. Life isn't simple, Mr Farnham. Life can be bloody complicated.

FARNHAM

Symptoms can be complicated, Miss Waters. Complex even. But motivation is invariably straightforward.

WATERS

And has your considerable talent unearthed my 'Motivation'?

FARNHAM

I jotted down a word down on my pad within minutes of your arrival.

WATERS

May I see it?

FARNHAM

That would be most irregular.

WATERS

Now look -

FARNHAM

(relenting)

All right, all right. Here, take it..

(FARNHAM hands WATERS the pad. WATERS takes it and tried to make sense of it)

WATERS

I can't make it out.

FARNHAM

It's in Latin.

WATERS

Would it be too much to ask for a translation?

FARNHAM

(takes the pad back)

I'll do better than that. I'll give you a prognosis. You are suffering, Miss Waters, from what we in the Trade call a sexually engendered disorder. How am I doing?

WATERS

It's amazing. I thought I had it under control. I haven't been exhibiting any of my usual symptoms.

FARNHAM

You forget you are dealing with a trained mind. I seek the nuances in speech, the unexpected gesture, the inappropriate body movement, the untimely facial expression. I sought and found, Miss Waters. The evidence is irrefutable. It was your very lack of response, you see. Your indifference. That's what led me, inexorably, to my findings. The word I jotted down, Miss Waters - I won't bore you with the Latin term - was ... Frigid!

WATERS

Frigid!

FARNHAM

Occasioned, no doubt, by the dual standards set by those most near and dear to you concerning your behaviour during that Gay Gordons.

WATERS

Frigid?

FARNHAM

I should have been more gentle. I favour the direct approach, you see.

WATERS

Frigid? Frigid? Oh if only that were the case, Mr Farnham.

FARNHAM

A natural reaction. The greater the Frigidity, the greater the vehemence with which it is denied. Your very vehemence is my final, irrefutable confirmation.

WATERS

Now look here, this has gone quite far enough. Do you know why I consulted you, you silly little man?

FARNHAM

You consulted me, Miss Waters - although doubtless you wouldn't express yourself in these exact words - so that I could set about removing the repressive block in your psyche which is inhibiting you from expressing yourself in that most joyous form of human communication.

WATERS

I came to you, Mr Farnham, because for the last six months I've been throwing myself at everything remotely resembling maleness that I've come across. I've been banned from church after an incident at choir practice - I used to play the organ - I was sacked from my part-time voluntary work with 'Help the Aged'; I was instrumental in creating a 400-fold increase in the membership of the local drama club; and last, but certainly not least, I've been taken on as mascot for the local Rugby Fifteen. Believe me, Mr Farnham, the one thing I don't want you to do is remove any more repressed blocks from my psyche. If anything I'd rather hoped you'd find a way of bottling some of them up again.

FARNHAM

Good Lord. What a challenge!