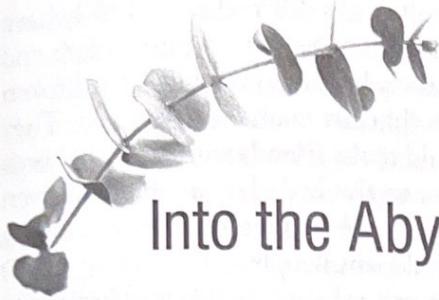


## CHAPTER 2



# Into the Abyss

## A Series of Moments in the Clinical Process for Client and Therapist

**DAVID**

### *Prologue*

The little boy sits hunched over the curb, elbows on his knees, forehead slumped in his hands. He wants to throw a really big stone into a car window or something worse. Trouble is, the street is so clean he can't find a pebble to kick, never mind the giant potholes he liked to jump over where he used to live. The boy wants to yell really loudly, but he's afraid that if he makes a commotion in a place like this—which is cleaner and quieter than anywhere he's ever been except for church—he'll get in big trouble for sure. He turns and looks up at the big hill of grass behind him. It belongs to the gigantic white house he was brought to by the man and woman who picked him up from the terrible place and told him they were his new parents. He wants to roll down it but knows he'd get stains on the stiff pants and itchy white shirt they make him wear and is afraid that he'd be punished by the lady with the big scary smile who keeps telling him to call her "mother."

The little boy doesn't want to call her that. He used to have his own mama. He tries hard not to think about her; it hurts too much when he does. He doesn't understand why he couldn't have just stayed with his real family, with his auntie and cousins? He misses them so much but worries in his heart that it's his fault. If he hadn't been such a bad, useless boy, maybe his auntie wouldn't have gotten sick and stopped loving him and sent him away.

He wishes he could just disappear. Maybe if he tries really hard, if he's really good and does everything they ask him to do, maybe these new parents won't send him back to that awful place where all the little boys with no mommies and daddies to love them have to stay. It's really hard to behave though when these people keep taking away all his things from before and saying bad things about them: his old clothes, his favorite toy (a little broken but still good!), even his thick, curly hair that his mama always loved. They told him they had to shave it off so he could make friends with the other boys in the neighborhood. That made no sense to the little boy at all. They even told him that the plain old words he's always used are no good and that he has to learn new words now that he lives with decent people.

The only thing the boy still has of his own is his name. David. He remembers the morning they sent him away, how his auntie gave him a long, hard hug and whispered a secret to him about his name. She told him it came right out of the special book she always keeps by her bedside. That it is the name of the bravest boy of all: the boy who slayed the giant. She told David he was her brave little boy but then started crying and hurried off into her bedroom and closed the door. That was the last time he saw his auntie.

David does not feel brave, only sad, and scared, and terribly angry.

### 1. The First Session

David Stapleton sits in the waiting room of Dr. Susan Thalman's private practice, located in an affluent, tree-lined neighborhood of a metropolitan city in the northeastern United States. Classical music streams into the room from small speakers tastefully concealed from view. The chair is surprisingly comfortable, and several magazines that match his interests rest on the coffee table in front of him. David is not at all sure he wants to be here. He and his wife are talking more heatedly now about getting a divorce. His daughter is out of control. Worst of all, David's work, which has always been his anchor and his refuge, has somehow started falling apart. All of this is his doing, or at least this is what has been hammered into his brain by his wife, Joyce.

Vexed, David ruminates about how all this came to be. He is pretty certain that for years he had been appreciated by his wife and daughter as a hardworking and devoted husband and father. Morning after morning David would awake, unchanged, the exact same man. Somewhere along the way, though, his family apparently grew frustrated with his reserved nature. David can't pinpoint when, or for that matter understand why, being quiet and deferential to how his wife runs the household and disciplines their daughter suddenly became a source of resentment and evidence of his being emotionally vacant and neglectful. Lately he's even managed to stumble blindly into a hornet's nest of entitlement and retribution with the new generation of up-and-coming engineers at his firm. Since when does nearly two decades of being task-oriented, highly productive, and minding your own business lead

people to question whether you "continue to be aligned with the values of the team"? Is all this headache because I raised my voice one time at that totally incompetent, snotty new Ivy League recruit they ended up letting go just a few months later?! And where the hell does Joyce get off telling me that I'm the one that needs therapy? Maybe she should take a closer look in the mirror!

David has the urge to get up and walk out and leans forward in his chair. He notices that his chest has tightened and his heart is racing. He takes a slow, deep breath and wills his head to clear.

The door opens. A gray-haired woman with bright, inquisitive eyes gently smiles at him and invites him to enter. Dr. Thalman strikes David as shorter, frailer, and older than she looked to him from her website photo. Dr. Thalman offers him coffee. He declines. David chooses the chair furthest from the one she clearly uses.

After some niceties and introductions, Susan Thalman asks David what has brought him in. He inhales deeply and then launches into a story that strikes Susan as simultaneously rehearsed and exhausting. David portrays his 20-year marriage as one constant argument with his wife, typified by her chronic objections and righteous complaints and his sullen resignation and inward retreat. He describes always feeling criticized by his wife no matter what he does—never feeling accepted by her, nor ever being able to stand up for himself. And now that their once demure, obedient daughter Grace is exhibiting what he imagines is typical teenage rebellion and exploration, his wife is a nervous wreck and attributing Grace's "acting out" to his failure to be emotionally available as a father. David tells Susan, "My wife insisted that I either get into therapy to work out my issues, or else maybe it's time we just throw in the towel. Well, those weren't precisely Joyce's words," David corrects. "No, it was some equally annoying cliché about her being 'ready to wave the white flag.' Now that I think of it, I'm sure she slipped that comment in as a subtle jab." Susan responds with a look of puzzlement. "Because I'm only half-white, obviously." David clarifies, widening his eyes to emphasize the obviousness of this point.

As David pauses and shifts in his seat, Susan attempts to synthesize three emerging observations. First, despite how articulately this man conveyed his predicament and the poignancy of the details surrounding his marital conflict, his opening story was rendered with such affective flatness that she finds herself feeling emotionally detached and wonders whether she might be getting an initial glimpse into one aspect of David's dynamic with his wife. The second has to do with his physical presentation. A lean but fit-looking man of above-average height in his early 40s, David nonetheless carries himself with an almost droopy meekness, accentuated by his conservative and somewhat bland, white-collar office attire.

Susan finds herself most curious about her third observation—the realization that despite his relatively light complexion, this man is visually recognizable to be of mixed African American descent. However, it was not until



he brought this matter of race up that she noticed David was anything other than one more of the many emotionally constricted Caucasian men she had treated over the past two decades. David speaks and carries himself in the manner of other clients she feels she knows so well. And yet the act of his bringing up this aspect of his identity in the context of a perceived devaluation, coupled with the fact of her initially overlooking it, signals to Susan that David's relationship to his ethnicity will hold some kind of relevance to whatever work is to ensue between them and could ultimately pose a challenge to the comfort zone in which she has grown accustomed to practicing. Did she not already detect in David a hint of annoyance with her for missing the boat on this? Susan notices a rustle of energy in her limbs and a brief clenching of her stomach and feels momentarily unnerved. Attempting to sit more deeply in her chair, Susan is uncertain this challenge will be one she welcomes wholeheartedly.

Susan replies by asking David how he feels about his wife pushing him to come to therapy. He responds that he is willing to give it a try for the sake of his family. When she asks him if he has ever been in therapy before, David tells her he saw someone last year for a few sessions but didn't feel connected to the therapist. He then curtly informs Susan that he expects to be in treatment for 2 to 3 months tops and wants a road map for how she is going to help him. Susan says that they will need to meet several times before she will be able to provide much in the way of specific treatment recommendations, so he can get a sense of how she works, and so that she can start to understand what is and is not working for him. David lets out a defeated-sounding sigh and replies, "Alright I guess, but I wish I knew where we're going with all this," his voice trailing off to almost a mumble and his head turning downward and away from Susan.

## 2. Clinical Consultation

Susan tells her supervisor about her first session with David, describing his request for a road map and the highly ambitious time limit he has set. They share a brief laugh over this, but then Susan admits that she is worried that he will quit once he realizes that she cannot give him what he has asked of her. Susan shares what she describes as a "bumbling oversight" regarding David's ethnicity and her apprehension about whether she is truly qualified to take on this particular client. Furthermore, because of his marital conflicts, Susan wonders whether she should recommend couples therapy or at least give David a "consumer warning" that individual therapy can be hard on a marriage when the presenting problem centers on partner conflict. "Wow! If you're feeling such pressure right now, imagine what he's feeling!" Her supervisor then provides her with a solid round of encouragement, reframing and recommendations for initial approach and pacing at this very early stage of treatment. Although the advice is more or less what Susan expected to

hear, the recommendations are the same ones she would give were the roles reversed, and the feedback is of the kind she usually welcomes, Susan notices that in this instance none of this provides much relief.

Driving home following the clinical consultation, Susan finds herself perturbed, anticipating that she will continue to struggle to get a foothold with this client. Even though only one session has transpired, every time she tried to test the limits by encouraging David to consider his feelings, he launched into another angry but flat diatribe. As Susan pulls into her driveway, she lets out a short whistle and muses to herself, "Let's hope I'm not getting in over my head with this one."

## 3. David's Story

When David returns for the next session, Susan asks him to tell her about his history. David tells her that as a young child he had to fend for himself a lot until he was adopted at age 6. Before his adoption, he grew up in a poor neighborhood in Georgia, born to a white mother and an African American father. The neighborhood was primarily black, most of his friends were black, and he grew up speaking the southern black vernacular. David's dad was in and out of the house, and his mother, who had gotten pregnant with him when she was 17, was struggling. He remembers his mother sleeping on the couch a lot during the day. She would go out frequently with friends or sometimes with a man, and when she came home, she would slur her words. He recalls being scared when she went out because often he was left home alone. Susan stops David mid-story to ask about this fear. His memories are vague, and he cannot really say anything else.

David brushes this question off and continues with his story. He acknowledges that it bothers him that he can no longer picture what his mother's face looked like. He remembers once his mother asking him to comb her pretty, straw-colored hair while she lay on the couch, but that is all. David concludes this story by informing Susan of the abrupt death of his mother when he was around 5 years old. He acknowledged a hazy recollection of the details surrounding his mother's death and limited memory fragments. "Looking back as an adult, I assume it had something to do with drugs or alcohol and the troubled men she spent time with, although I think this may have been complicated by her having some kind of chronic illness. Anyway, I came home from school, and there were lots of people and cars outside my house. My dad wasn't there. I never saw him again either. A neighbor lady took me to stay with an aunt, my dad's older sister. Not long after that I was sent to a kind of orphanage for boys. I guess I must have been too much trouble for my aunt to manage on top of her own kids. I don't remember too much about that orphanage either, other than hating it, and wanting to leave, and these big rough hands and a stern voice that would shake me awake each morning and loudly remind me to make by bed and stay on my best behavior and tuck in

my shirt and keep my face clean and stuff like that or else I would have to stay there until I was all grown up. There was no way I was going to let that happen, and to this day I am obsessively organized, tidy, and punctual. Next thing I remember I was picked up by this very white family who drove me away from that place in what I thought at the time was a broken-down, ugly gray-colored station wagon—turns out it was an expensive Volvo, which sounded noisy to me because of its diesel engine. I drive one myself now. That's about it," David finishes with a shrug.

When David finishes speaking, he notices that Dr. Thalman is regarding him silently and that a tear has formed in one of her eyes. He supposes she is responding empathically to his story, which he recognizes is objectively sad, although certainly not nearly the worse of what he imagines she's heard. He feels frustrated and defective, almost alien, that he can't join her in these feelings. David regards Susan with a look that perplexes her, leading her to pause and consider the most effective way to respond in this fragile early juncture to the heartbreaking but powerfully dissociated story of loss and resilience she has just heard.

#### 4. *Everything and Nothing*

Weeks more have gone by in therapy. Susan is pleased that David has been willing and able to explore his feelings more, but something else has begun to nag at her. She likes him but continues to feel little, and at times no, emotional connection to him. Usually she feels strongly engaged with her clients. Susan tells her supervisor, "I feel like I'm everything and nothing to David all at the same time. Like he's absolutely desperate for my help, answers all my questions, comes to every session . . . but I could disappear from his life tomorrow, and it would barely register. I just feel so far away from him."

#### 5. *Nowhere Man*

A couple of months have passed since David began treatment with Susan. David always comes in with an agenda, written down in bullet points. He tells Susan that his wife Joyce has been complaining that he isn't "working" in therapy and that he hasn't gotten to his "core issues." David quickly runs through a list of topics his wife put together for him to address in therapy: (1) your adoption, (2) your parents, (3) your anger, and (4) your inability to be intimate.

Susan is a little taken aback and cannot decide whether to be grateful to David's wife for encouraging him to explore these difficult topics or annoyed at her for trying to direct the therapy. Wondering if David's wife is addressing her own issues in her own therapy, Susan considers how little she knows about her. In their second or third session, David had only briefly described his wife Joyce, an attorney, as a woman he met during college who also came from

a biracial family background. Today Susan decides it's time to express some curiosity about wanting to get a better picture of Joyce as a person.

David replies by labeling Joyce as the "opposite of me in almost every sense." He describes her as extroverted, funny, and messy. Eventually, he reveals that they differ most in regard to their upbringing and background. David informs Susan that Joyce comes from an intact stable family headed by a Lebanese American mother and a Peruvian father. Her parents shared similar enough Christian backgrounds, their families accepted each other, and they went on to raise Joyce and her siblings to be proud of their heritage. David's voice catches when he notes that Joyce's parents remain happily married to this day. Susan then observes an abrupt shift in David's tone: "Whatever. They had it easy. No one in America really gives a damn about the difference between Lebanese and Peruvians. For all anyone notices, her parents could have been Guatemalan or Greek. To Joyce, biracial meant being adored and well fed by two nutty but stable extended families and being exotic looking and popular in school. That's not race where I come from; that's ethnicity. In the ugly, real world, my mixed heritage is viewed entirely as an issue of race. Doesn't matter one bit that science has proven that race has no biological basis and is just a social fabrication. I love Joyce, but the bottom line is she just can't understand what I went through growing up. I didn't fit anywhere. Not with the white kids. Not with the black kids. I still don't. You know that Beate's song, 'Nowhere Man'? That's me in a nutshell."

Susan finds herself at a loss for words, filled with associations and emotional reactions to the poignant information David just unleashed. She attempts to slow the process down a bit by exploring his feelings about even making this list, noting internally some anxiety about pushing him to talk about his feelings. To her surprise, David says that it is difficult for him, but he knows that he should work on these things. He acknowledged that he often finds himself struggling in therapy for topics to talk about, wanting to entertain Susan and keep things "light." He says that he doesn't "know how to go there." Susan notices that she feels energized by David's ability to talk about the therapeutic process, even talking about his fears of getting to topics that are more emotional. She works throughout the rest of the session to help him stay in this place—reflecting on his emotional experience of the therapy process without actually going into any vulnerable emotions. They don't talk about any of the topics on the list. At the end of the session, Susan asks David what the experience was like for him. He looks very pleased, saying that he feels that they really got to some important stuff that day. They agree that they will come back to talk about the topics on the list if he feels that they are important, but Susan reassures him that they have plenty of time to get to those things and emphasizes that she is most concerned about him as a person and about making sure that the work that they do together is helpful. David smiles, makes eye contact with her, and for the first time since they first met, holds out his hand to shake hers at the end of the session.



## 6. The Letter

David is sorting through a box of files when he finds a letter from his paternal Aunt Selma to the adoption agency. The letter is ripped in half and has yellowed with age. The letter is addressed to the "Dear Man and Woman who Adopted my Nephew David." In the letter, Aunt Selma blessed his adoptive parents for taking her nephew into their home and hearts and for trying to make a better life for him. She expressed guilt that she hadn't been able to keep him when he was living with her after his mother's death because of her own health problems and the stress of raising her own three kids. She implored his adoptive parents to allow David to maintain a relationship with his kin and said that she was sending along a box of his things. David's heart starts thumping in his chest. He has a flash of memory—playing in his aunt's backyard with his three cousins and the dog. He and his favorite older cousin, Wendell, are wrestling. Aunt Selma comes to call them inside, and Wendell gets distracted. All of a sudden, David is on top and has his cousin pinned. Wendell smiles and shoves him off, "all right, you win, you win." David remembers feeling tough and proud as he swaggers into the house.

David scans the letter again. He feels ice cold as he imagines his adoptive mother ripping up the letter. Of course, she wouldn't show it to him or tell him about it. That wouldn't have fit in with her plans for him. And he never got that box. He never knew that his aunt missed him. He flashes on an earlier memory of his father. David is around 3 or 4, and it's his birthday. His father, who wasn't usually around, had come home with a huge cake. He remembers the heat on his face from the candles and looking around at everyone singing happy birthday to him, then looking up at his father, who was leading everyone singing. His father had a big smile on his face. He was so tall, so strong, and David wanted to be just like him.

David brings the letter into Susan for her to read. "Imagine if you'd known that your aunt missed you, that she wanted to see you!" she exclaims. David is relieved: *She gets it!*

## 7. Completely Invisible

In their next session, David talks about the abrupt change in his life when he arrived at his adoptive parents' house. They lived in a formal home in Connecticut, with a manicured lawn and a pool. The first thing he recalls his new mother saying when he entered that house was, "First things first. Let's draw you a bath and get you out of these grimy clothes. We have nice new clothes for you to wear." His hair had been growing out in thick tight curls, and she took him to get it clipped close to his skull. "They changed me into what they wanted me to be," David explained. His mother worked with him on his language, telling him that he would never be accepted by the "good people"

of their community and school if he spoke "like an uneducated hoodlum from the slums." All of a sudden, he had strict rules: he had to eat bland food; he had to dress appropriately; he had to do Saturday morning chores and homework every day after school; he had to have his friends approved. Driven by the fear that David would be taken back to the orphanage, he worked hard to "get rid of" his personality in order to fit in and make them like him. Eventually, he succeeded in "not being who I was anymore. I became someone else they needed me to be, someone who fit with the family's image."

As David is talking, Susan starts to feel very . . . white. She thinks about how his adopted parents pushed away this very tough, resilient, and alive part of David. She wonders if that part of him identifies more as being black. Susan wonders how he feels about her, as a white woman, as a Jew, as a professional. Does he look at her and see his parents? She imagines there could be ways in which David feels safer with or as if he has more in common with her than he would with a black therapist, but she cannot decide whether this is a good thing. Can Susan use her vantage point to help him identify and embrace aspects of himself that he had to push away? Or, on the other hand, to help David recognize and appreciate any redeeming qualities his adoptive parents may have had? At the very least, they certainly afforded him a huge number of opportunities in life. She wonders if, despite his anger with them, David yearns for greater emotional connection to them as well.

Remembering this time in his life, David begins to talk about how he learned to lock his feelings away. He remembers spending hours alone in his room, terribly sad, but knowing there was no space in his new family for his feelings. He had to appear perfect. Act perfect. Be perfect. And soon David was perfect, and the sadness went away. He tells Susan about a time, around the age of 8, when he fell off his bike, hit his head, and got a big, gushing cut above his eye. He ran home, but his mom was nowhere to be found. So he'd washed it off, found the bandages and iodine, and cleaned it out. David was so proud of himself and, in fact, knows he's always been good in a crisis because he had learned to take care of himself from an early age. Susan says, "There's such an amazing strength in you, such incredible resilience. Like, no one's helping me, so I will just take care of it myself."

David responds, "I didn't see any other options. I mean, what do you do? Do you just give up, and, I don't know, commit suicide or something?" He glances then at Susan and notices that she is looking at him with such care, maybe even admiration! He is surprised to feel a wave of emotion start to rise up. "Yeah, but I was invisible," David finds himself continuing, the tears starting to come. "All my childhood, until I met my wife, I was completely invisible. The person my parents perceived me to be was such a distortion of who I was. And they gave me plenty of feedback, telling me who they thought I was or how I should be, and I thought, isn't this amazing. You don't have a clue, do you? And yeah, I could take care of myself, but I also really wanted to

be taken care of. It's hard to admit, but after that bike accident, a part of me wanted my mom to scoop me up in her arms, tell me I was going to be okay, clean me up, and give me a big bowl of ice cream."

"Yeah, you needed that," replies Susan. "What does it mean now for us to see beneath that extremely capable part of you, to see both the resilience and an amazing competence, and also the pain of feeling invisible?"

David takes a deep breath, and a look of sorrow crosses his face. "It's funny," he says. "I've always thought of my childhood, once I got adopted, as being basically fine. I mean, I had everything I needed. But I don't know, maybe it wasn't so fine. They had all these rules for me, all these rules about who I had to be to keep up their image. But they never really cared to see me—to get to know me."

### 8. Cultural Disconnect

A few months have passed. In supervision Susan describes a recent interaction with David that caught her particularly off guard. David was exhibiting increased access to his feelings of anger and sadness. Excited by this breakthrough, Susan looked for an opportunity to explore with David what he might need to risk expressing his feelings toward someone with whom he had an ongoing relationship. Eventually, Susan asked David to consider practicing expressing his feelings by sharing any he was willing to, positive or negative, about her. After an awkward silence, David offered that he felt appreciative of Susan "hanging in there with him" in his efforts to work through his painful childhood experiences. Susan notes to her supervisor that this disclosure struck her as being genuine but incomplete, as if a "but" was being withheld. She decided to pursue this issue, asking David directly if there might be other, less positive elements of his feelings toward her that he was holding back. After some fumbling around, David told her that at times he resented her interest in his "ethnic identity," emphasizing these last two words by making quotation marks in the air with his fingers.

Susan thanked David for sharing this feeling with her and asked if he would be willing to say more. David exclaims with frustration that he is sick and tired of everyone having expectations for him based on their perceptions of his race. Growing up with his adoptive parents, he felt intense pressure to be, act, and look white. With male friends and colleagues, he often had to endure the opposite. "Then there's Joyce, who imagines that just because I'm biracial I'm supposed to be proud and assertive and confident. She's never going to be happy with me as is."

"I see," Susan replied. "How do you see me wanting you to be?" "I don't know," David muttered, "self-accepting and well integrated, maybe, but it's not really that." Susan waited, trying to reach out to David with an expression of openness and warmth. "No, with you it's more like I wonder if you find me more interesting when I talk about my struggles with being who I am than

you would if I were just a 100% white guy. Like maybe it's exciting for you to pretend you're all down and culturally sensitive exploring identity issues with a "black man," only because in reality you're feeling pretty safe sitting in this room week after week with me, a light-skinned, mild-mannered, and for the most part white-acting man. Sometimes I bet if I looked or acted more like your mental image of a real black man you'd be scared shitless and have referred me out by now."

"Boy," Susan's supervisor replies in their next meeting, "I can't imagine what you said to that." "Neither can I, and I'm the one who said it!" "I told him, for starters, how incredibly brave I thought he was for sharing these doubts about me, and how honored I felt for him trusting me enough to do so." "That sounds like a wonderful reply," her colleague offers. "I suppose so, but then maybe I went too far, and admitted to him that on some level he might very well be right."

### 9. Therapeutic Rupture

Over 6 months have passed since Susan began her treatment with David. She is now rushing to get everything done in preparation for her trip to Key West next week. She has a handful of clients she is concerned about because of her vacation, including one client who struggles with suicidal thoughts and gets overcome with waves of panic and resentment whenever Susan goes away. She is pushing through a particularly busy day but is in a buoyant mood, and she can feel herself already beginning to distance herself from "work mode." David comes in stressed and dejected. He describes how his daughter was caught smoking pot and how as usual his wife blamed this on his emotional absence and spent the week berating him.

As David is talking, Susan has a moment of anxiety when she realizes that she may have neglected to forewarn David of her impending absence. She tries running through the last few sessions in her mind and is sure that she would have mentioned it at some point, but she cannot recall. She realizes that David has gone quiet, and her mind spins to come up with a response because she has now missed some of what he has been sharing. "So what are you going to do about your daughter?" she asks. David does not seem to have noticed that her attention had wandered. He is staring at the floor, slumped down into his chair. His hands are limp in his lap. "There's nothing I can do," he says, "my daughter does what she wants."

Susan sees that they only have 10 minutes left of their session. She is anxious to tell David about her absence next week, but she also feels guilty for feeling so upbeat while he is obviously so dejected. She reasons with herself that he has the money to take a vacation if he wanted to, but she quickly recognizes that she is just trying to make herself feel better. David's life is in such chaos right now, Susan cannot imagine him even thinking about a vacation. "Well, it sounds like you've had a really difficult week. Let's think a little



about some things that you can do to take care of yourself this week." David continues staring at the floor and sighs. "I really can't think of anything. I'm just beaten down." Susan glances at the clock again—5 minutes. "Well, you've mentioned that sometimes just taking a mental break, exercising, or spending time with your friends can be helpful." He glances at her, "Yeah, I guess."

"Okay, so, we've just got a couple of minutes left," Susan says, "so let's look at scheduling. I think I mentioned to you a few weeks back that I'm not going to be able to meet next week, so let's look to the following week." "Oh. I must have forgotten," David replies, sounding surprised. "Are you traveling for work or going on vacation?" he asks. "Oh, a little vacation," she says, smiling. "Anywhere good?" he asks, "or can't you tell me?" "I'm just going to the beach," she says, and looks back down at her planner. They plan to meet again in 2 weeks.

When David leaves, Susan realizes that she might have sounded a little defensive, saying that she was "just going to the beach," particularly because it is February. She reflects that David seemed a little awkward when he left. She hopes he is okay, and she goes to greet her next client.

David gets into his Volvo and slams the door. He grips his steering wheel, staring at Susan's office building. He feels pressure in his chest, and his hands heat up against the leather of the steering wheel. Everything is going wrong, and he has no idea what to do about it. "Forget it," he thinks, "I'm sick of this therapy shit. I just go there every week and moan and complain. What good does it do me?" He turns over the engine and guns his car out of the parking lot, unintentionally cutting off another car. The other driver lays on his horn. David looks in his rearview mirror at the other driver, who promptly gives him the finger. David laughs and then bears the weight of his foot down hard on the accelerator, increasing the distance between himself and the other car. He momentarily accesses a welcome feeling of power and control.

### ***10. The First Visit with David's Younger Self***

Nearly a year has passed since David began therapy with Susan. They have been talking more about a younger part of him that is holding grief and sadness, and he has been able to build some empathy for this young boy. He is reflecting on a recurrent memory of himself as a young child, maybe 4 or 5, alone in the house, staring out the window at the rain, waiting for his mother to come home. He remembers feeling completely alone, frightened, and hollow inside.

Susan invites David to enter that scene as his adult self. David is not sure about this suggestion—it seems kind of whacky! But he has come to trust Susan, so he figures he will give it a shot. She explains the technique to him, and he pictures himself walking into that room, seeing the little boy just staring out of the window. "Now what?" Susan tells him he should let the