

## **Vignette 2: Echoist**

Jaz, a married woman, employed as a pharmacist, was in her early forties. She came into therapy asking for an urgent appointment, saying she felt depressed and frustrated. Her relationship with her husband was breaking down and he, having felt that she was a bad influence on their three children, aged nine, twelve, and thirteen, had asked her to move out while she sorted herself out; he was giving her a last chance to address her behaviour. He had said that he found her destructive and aggressive, and that if she didn't attend to it they would have to separate permanently. She rearranged her assessment twice, then arrived late. When she asked for confirmation of my fees she said she had very little money to pay for therapy (which I thought surprising, given her profession) and she tried to negotiate with me. At the end of the assessment session she asked a series of questions in an attempt to go beyond the fifty-minute time boundary, and seemed reluctant to leave. Based upon this evidence, I wondered if she was the partner of a man who had decided to put a boundary in place and that this might be her narcissistic attempt to enlist my support against him. I suggested a second assessment session to determine whether I could find or reach a part of her with which I could work.

In her second assessment session, I became aware that the urgency of the request, the negotiating of fees, and the rearrangement of sessions were actually not at her instigation. The session proceeded as follows:

Jaz: I wanted to be on time and I've brought the money. I felt you were angry with me last time, that I had done something wrong. I kept remembering you saying that I seemed to think it would be OK for me to pay what I wanted and cancel appointments when I felt like it, with little regard for your time or work.

Therapist: That is what you heard me say.

Jaz: Yes. You did say that, didn't you? I hope I got that right. My husband asked me what you had said. I tried to say exactly what you had said. He was angry ...

[Silence]

Jaz: He thinks I am planning on spending too much money on therapy. He wanted me to get some help and now he is angry that I came to you and he wants me to look for someone else. The times you mentioned that you are free for sessions are both times he goes to his club, and that means he would have to stay at home with the children. He likes to go to the club most evenings to wind down from the day. He thinks I could have found a cheaper way of getting help ... that I am wasting our money in

coming to you when there is free counselling available through the GP, and he thinks it should be at times that would fit in better ...

Therapist: It seems you feel he is angry with you for not doing what he wants, and that I am angry with you because you understood from my comments that you had not behaved in a way that I found acceptable.

Jaz: Yes, it's dreadful really. I shouldn't have made him angry and I don't want you to be annoyed with me. I told him I would try to see if I could come at a different time, maybe early before I go to work in the morning. But maybe that is not possible for you?

Therapist: You have come in today and are trying to express a wish to see if we can make this work. I think you felt last time, that you were coming here with a set of conditions that you wanted me to meet and which you expressed as demands with some degree of entitlement.

Jaz: [Tearful] I'm sorry, I didn't mean ... It's just that ... I thought... My husband said ... I'm ...

Therapist: It feels difficult for you to finish a sentence, to be able to follow through on any of those wishes, expressed as demands ...

Jaz: I feel like I'm disappearing ...

[Long silence]

Therapist: I wonder if we look at what happened and try to see if we can understand what led you to that feeling that you were disappearing. I think it's a feeling you know well ...

Jaz: Yes. I feel it a lot with my husband.

Therapist: When you made the provisional appointment and then rearranged the sessions and tried to negotiate the fees, you presented your demands as if they were coming from you. It seems that if I had gone along with them, your husband would have been pleased and you would not have experienced angry feelings from him or me.

Jaz: Well yes, that's what I was hoping at the time.

Therapist: And you wanted that so much that you delivered your wishes quite powerfully. And you hoped I would be suitably acquiescent that I would just agree.

Jaz: I can see how manipulative I have been ...

[Silence – reaches for a tissue and weeps a little]

Jaz: Sorry I don't normally cry, my husband hates it when women cry. He says it's manipulative. I don't want to be manipulative any more.

Therapist: I think you felt that you had to express your husband's conditions as if they were your own ... but when I did not simply accept them, you felt us both to be punishing you for not giving the right response. You spoke his words to me as if they were your own, and then my words to him.

[The patient nods and cries gently]

Therapist: It is hard to know what your own feelings and words are but you present the other person's as if they are yours, then you can't cope with the response, because you were not the originator of the thought or the demand.

Jaz: It's true ... I couldn't take it, because I hadn't actually felt it, but when P said it, it sounded so reasonable ...

Therapist: So, you disappear ... Not being able to take responsibility for your words because they are in fact your husband's wishes, his thoughts, his demands, his words.

Jaz: It's true. I hadn't really seen that before. But he is so compelling and usually right and I can't say no to him. And he hates me to be weak ... and here I am crying to you.

Therapist: Do you notice how as soon as I point out that you were not the originator of your own thoughts, you immediately serve a judgement or criticism upon yourself. Is that your own view or is that also your husband's I wonder?

Jaz: I don't know, my mum and sister say I'm strong when I'm not with him ...

Therapist: You are telling me about yourself through other people. I have no idea what you actually feel about yourself.

Jaz: I don't know. But I do feel I have seen something today. And I would like to keep coming. If you can see me. I know it is difficult and that I might have to become a little stronger before I can go back to P and say what I want.

Therapist: I think you feel you can say that to me, and to accept whatever response I make to that, because that is your own wish.

Jaz: Yes. So will you work with me?