

THE VON HEFFLEHORN THERAPY

By David J. LeMaster

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ISBN 1-60003-014-9

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(A psychiatrist's office. 1 is DR. VON HEFFLEHORN. 2 is the PATIENT. They may be either male or female. The office may be complex or simply consist of two chairs. All of the props, including the box, the jar, and the pen and paper may be mimed.)

- 1: Good afternoon.
2: Good afternoon, Dr. Von Hefflehorn?
1: Yes.
2: I'm John **(Joan)** Smith.
1: **(consults chart)** Ah! Yes.
2: Thank you for agreeing to see me.
1: Of course. Have a seat. **(takes out a stopwatch, which may be mimed, and deliberately sets the stopwatch to time the session)**
2: I've never seen a psychiatrist before.
1: Really?
2: I'm a little nervous.
1: Oh, don't be nervous. It's all quite painless really.
2: Good.
1: Not like a dentist with his little drills, you know.
2: Dentists terrify me.
1: Me, too. **(makes drill noise)** Ree! Ree!
2: Oh!
1: I'm sorry. Did I frighten you?
2: Well...
1: Don't worry. No drills here.
2: Good.
1: So. Why are you here?
2: I've got to overcome my phobia.
1: Ah? You're afraid of -
2: Everything.
1: I see.
2: The world simply terrifies me. I'm a businessman and I'm afraid to travel. I have to talk with people and I don't like to do it. When appointments come see me, I hide in the corner of my office and wait until they go away.
1: Fascinating.
2: Is it serious, Doctor?
1: Well, that depends. **(retrieves pen and paper)** Are you afraid of this pen and paper?
2: No.

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- 1: Then you're not afraid of everything, are you? (*laughs at own joke; pause, then writes*) No sense of humor...
- 2: I'm sorry. Is that bad?
- 1: Tell me, Mr. Smith. Why do you think you're so afraid?
- 2: I don't know. Maybe it's my childhood.
- 1: Yes?
- 2: It was terrifying.
- 1: (*excited*) Oh, tell me more!
- 2: My parents forced me to do things I was afraid to do. Ride on the freeway. Take trips in airplanes...
- 1: Did you ever crash!?
- 2: No!
- 1: Always got on that plane and stared out the window to make sure there wasn't an engine fire, right?
- 2: Yes - oh, that's so frightening! You know, if something goes wrong when you're in the air, there's nothing they can do but take you straight down. And it's not just crashes, there's other horrible things lurking on a plane. You're locked into that big room with a hundred people you don't know. People who have colds and germs that could be transferred to you. The germs are trapped right there! I once heard of a whole plane getting meningitis. Everyone died. Oh, this is horrible!
- 1: Anyway. You were saying?
- 2: I'm terrified!
- 1: Of what?
- 2: Planes! I have to take a business trip next week, and I'm too frightened to get on the plane now. What should I do?
- 1: What's the matter with you, you stupid, sniveling little baby!?
- 2: What?!
- 1: A loser like you who's afraid to get on an airplane. You're probably afraid of your own shadow, aren't you?
- 2: Please, Doctor! I'm just trying to open up to you.
- 1: Little bitty baby. Cry, baby, cry. Stick your finger in your eye.
- 2: You stop that!
- 1: (*mimic*) You stop that!
- 2: Cut that out!
- 1: (*mimic*) Cut that out!
- 2: I'm not kidding!
- 1: (*mimic*) I'm not kidding!

(2 does a slow burn. 1 imitates it, then fakes crying like a baby.)

- 2: I refuse to stand here and be insulted!
- 1: Then what are you gonna do about it?

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2: I'll report you to the board.

1: Oh, yeah?

2: Yeah! And I'll call the news stations.

1: You wouldn't dare.

2: I'll call the newspapers! I'll contact my Congressman. In fact, I'll fly all the way to Washington and tell Congress myself. I'll drive you out of business!

1: **(closes notebook, stops the stopwatch)** And that, my friend, ends our session. You're cured.

2: **(pause)** What?

1: You're cured. Congratulations. Next case.

2: How am I cured?

1: You just said you you'd do all the things you fear. Your anger so completely overcame your fear that you completely forgot about it. Presto. Instant cure. Congratulations.

2: Gee.

1: Brilliant, isn't it? I call it the Von Hefflehorn Therapy.

2: You're a genius.

1: I know.

2: No, really. I mean it. I'll recommend you to all of my friends.

1: I thought you were afraid of people.

2: My new friends, as I make them.

1: Very good, and it only took **(consults stop watch)** three minutes and forty-five seconds.

2: Is that a record?

1: Afraid not, but it's a very good time. You should be proud of yourself.

2: Well. Still. There are things -

1: Things?

2: That frighten me. You know.

1: Like what?

2: Like... well...

(The following exchange builds in rate and intensity. 2 slowly loses control as 1's insults become more biting. By the end of the exchange both are raging.)

2: Snakes.

1: Wussy turd.

2: Spiders.

1: Whiney nose.

2: Heights.

1: Doodoo head.

2: Clowns.

1: Dingleberry.

2: Rodents.

1: Scaredy-cat.

2: Dark closets.

1: Angst-ridden cowardly klutz.

2: Thunder storms.

1: Faint-hearted, frightened little girly girl. Twinkie head. Shaking, shivering, shimmering baby freak face. Twaddling, whining, crying, hiding, twiddling, tingling little tinkle bell!

2: I'll kill you!!!

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