



The Interaction

by Deanna Morse

"NAME three things that you are afraid of."

"Needles." That's one. let's see. I can't think of anything else.

"Needles?"

"Yes. Hypodermic needles. That's all that I am afraid of."

"You have to name three things."

Softly. "Two more needles?"

He glared at me. I waited for him to smile. He didn't. Let's see. Needles. Getting shots? No, just needles. This ringing in my *head* scare me . . . but . . . What are most people frightened of? Bugs and spiders, I guess. I could tell him that I am afraid of getting raped, or losing my virginity or something like that. I bet a fear like that would make his book a little more racy.

"Well?" He raised one eyebrow.

Grey hairs interspersed in the black furry eyebrow mass . . . and Wow, just one! We stared at each other. God, he certainly has a stereotyped face. Even with only one eyebrow raised. Stereotyped? No "common" would be a better word. I guess that we probably all do, though. What can you do with the fundamentals: two placed eyes, one middle nose, two attached lips. Considering all of the people that we produce

(would that be reproduce?) each and every day, there is bound to be some sort of a standardization among them, or we would. . . .

He cleared his throat. I've been staring at his nose. Jeesh. Look at the floor quick. Buzzing in my ears. What was I supposed to be answering? Oh yeah, fright.

"I am afraid of being killed by a train while I am riding in a car." How's that for pulling a good symbolic fright from my childhood? I wonder if he will ask me how *much* I am afraid. How would he word it? Do you cringe or get goose-pimples when you cross railroad tracks? What do you feel as you approach railroad crossings? Is your fear manifested physically as well as psychologically? Maybe he doesn't have a graph for recording that sort of thing. No, he must not. I crossed my legs and sat back, letting my shoulders lean against the wall.

"That's all that I am afraid of."

"You have only listed two things. I asked for three."

"I am only *afraid* of two things." Is that not possible? Are numbers that important?

"What is a third fear?"

Bastard. Why do I have to put up with this? They told me that this man wouldn't play games—that we could just talk. I should have known better. I was trusting him, too.

"I am afraid of dying." Why not?

"Why are you afraid of dying?"

"I don't believe in an afterlife." I stared at his shoes. I could hear his pencil jottings. Then this room must actually be quiet. That sound is in my head. I thought that I was just sensitive to secondary sounds. I wish that it would stop. He is wearing shoes with brown woven material on the top of them. Functional? It could be for ventilating the foot, so that he won't have smelly feet. His socks are brown and they have little "V's" of red and yellow traveling down his leg, and pointing at his bony ankle. Bony ankle? All ankles are by nature bony. No, maybe not all. I bet that most all are, though. If you were to take a survey and all, I bet that you would find more bony than fat ankles. I wonder how one would conduct a survey on that. "I have called you all here

today for the explicit purpose of observing your. . .”

“Miss Druver. There is no use continuing this session if you don’t feel like communicating. I can’t help you until you tell me your real problem. Tell me what is really troubling you.”

“I realize that psychologically I am probably not accepting reality and through oversleeping I am building my own reality as a means of escape.”

“Please answer what you really feel. Don’t give me the answer that you think is right. Tell me what is true for you.”

“I didn’t know that there were right and wrong answers in this game. I am trying to be sincere.”

Was that a shrug? He’s looking at the paper on the table in front of him. He hasn’t written anything for a while. Damn my head. I wish that I could do something about this buzzing. Ah. A question.

“If you could have three things in the world, what would you have?”

Not a bad question. At least I can answer it. “First I would have an end to wars, and people would live in peace, tapping each other’s minds rather than the land.”

“No,” he said, smiling, “these must be things that affect you personally.”

“This *would* affect me personally. There is no way that it couldn’t.”

“I meant for you to name three things that you want—tangible items.”

“Oh.” I thought that we were going somewhere. We’re back at the same place that we began. “If we are referring to material items, then the answer is nothing.”

“Nothing? You want nothing?”

“Nothing. I hoard my money because I do not like to buy things. If there was anything that I wanted, I would get it.”

“Oh, there must certainly be something that you want.”

“No, there is nothing.”

“Please co-operate, Martha. Don’t tell me what you think is correct. Tell me what is really true for you. You don’t have to play a role for me. Let’s be honest.”

So we are on a *first* name basis now! How did he know

my name? Oh, yeah, on the chart, probably. I looked down and the area around the nail was starting a bead of red. I put my thumb to my mouth, hoping that he wouldn't notice. The skin felt rough on my tongue. I wonder what he would do if someone jumped out from behind the bed, with a long sharp and shiny bread knife and stabbed me. What would he do if it were a night of a full moon, and he looked in my mirror and didn't see my reflection? I giggled.

"*Martha.*" Very sternly.

"What was your question?" meekly.

"I asked you to be honest with me and quit playing a role. Tell me what is true for you, not just what you think is right."

Why do I always stare at the ceiling anyway? There's nothing of interest. One squashed looking globe hung over a lightbulb. I wonder if they made the mold for the globe out of putty, and dropped it along the way . . . cracked paint in the corners. I should really be nice to this man. He might think me crazy, and I wouldn't want . . . *No*, why am I so afraid of being crazy? It could mean that I could free my mind—totally. I probably couldn't relate with people, but they don't really try to understand me anyway. Not even this doctor, and it was even his *job*. So I'm afraid of being crazy and having them lock and chain me up, and never being able to see a sun. Should I have told him *that*? I'm just sitting here staring at the ceiling. He's staring straight ahead. That's kind of weird, too. At least it's no less weird than staring at the ceiling. What are we doing here? He's waiting for something. Three somethings. Always the trinity. I don't feel like talking. Or thinking. Why do I have to talk when I don't feel like it? We listen to people only because we know that when they finish speaking it will be our turn. Who said that? Games. I'm willing to shut up. Toadstools and owls. If I were normal, I would tell him that I crave toadstools and owls, *anything* with a toadstool or an owl. Those are the "in" things now. *Damn* this pressure in my head. I should see how clever he is and tell him about it in a secret code. He'd never figure it out, though.

He's just sitting there still. I wonder how long he'll stay. This ringing. *Damn*. I wish that *he* had this ringing to con-

tend with. It just gets louder and louder. It's going to drive me crazy. God. It just thuds on my brain. Think of something else. It will go away. Toadstools. Oh, lord. I wish that I could play your games, and I would tell you all of the things that I am afraid of, and what three things that I want to purchase, and I bet that for your next visit you would bring me a little something that I had asked for, and pat me on the head, and we would be friends forever, but sometimes I would bite your hand, and then you would forgive me, and bring me more crayolas, and a novel by Dostoevsky or something like that but for this damn ringing. I just can't think with this ri

Old Greyhounds

by Roger Katz

The old Greyhounds
come alive with soul,
humming rhythms on miles and miles
of groovy tune,
carryin' the week-end gypsies,

They'll be there soon,
the kids,
filling empty halls
with their soul rhythm
of calicos sounds.