

Dr. Fish
By Murray Schisgal

Charlotte waits in the doctor's office. Her face is veiled. Dr. Fish bursts in.

Dr Fish

Sorry to have kept you waiting Mrs. Mendelsohn. Please, sit down. Quite a morning. It's been quite a morning. I find the more I do, the more there is to do. There just doesn't seem to be an end to it. So many people to deal with, so much to be done, it's....Is there any particular reason why your face is veiled?

Charlotte

No, Dr. Fish.

Dr Fish

Then please remove it.

Charlotte

Yes Dr Fish.

Dr. Fish

I think it may relieve some of you anxieties if I filled you in on a few personal details about myself and my practice. First of all, I want you to know I am not a psychiatrist. I am not a psychologist. I am not even a lay analyst. There'll be none of that mumbo jumbo head shrinking nonsense here. As a matter of fact, my doctorate is in American history. Since I was a young man, however, my interest in the purely social relationship, and in particular, its sexual aspects, far exceeded any interest I had for historical events. It always seemed to me that history itself is merely a gross reflection of the sexual, the give and take of two individuals magnified to historical proportions. So it was on natural, I suppose, that I would eventually wind up counseling and researching and delving into the great unfathomable mystery of the sexual experience.

Charlotte

You've been doing marvelous work, Dr Fish.

Dr Fish

I try. Let us say I try. But there has been so much resistance, so much criticism...One would have thought that in this day and age there would be no more bickering about what is permissible and what isn't permissible. But such is not the case, I'm afraid. We're still surrounded by a howling mob of prudes and philistines who refuse to acknowledge that a revolution is taking place which is overthrowing all the old taboos and prohibitions that have plagued us for so many centuries. You wouldn't believe the mail I get. Anyway, as you probably know, I accept a limited number of clients for professional counseling. The fee I charge is nominal. And I perform this service merely to keep abreast of current trends. Once or twice a week, you visit with your husband. And after evaluating the

problem, I try to say something that will be of value to you. It is no more complicated than that. Will your husband be here?

Charlotte

He promised to come during his lunch hour.

Dr Fish

Good. Now: who recommended me to you?

Charlotte

I heard you on the radio and on television and I read your book.

Dr. Fish

Which book is that?

Charlotte

“Fifty two Weeks of Sexual Happiness for the Modern American Woman”

Dr. Fish

I See. How long have you been married?

Charlotte

12 years.

Dr. Fish

Husband’s occupation?

Charlotte

Several years ago he started his own truck rental firm and so far, knock wood, he’s been very successful at it.

Dr Fish

Children?

Charlotte

Two boys. Eight and ten.

Dr. Fish

Education?

Charlotte

High School graduate

Dr. Fish

Husband’s education?

Charlotte

Oh, I also took a course in Love and Sex in the Bible at the New School for Social Research.

Dr. Fish

Husband's education?

Charlotte

He dropped out of high school after two years. I begged him to go back but he says if he had the extra time he'd prefer making cabinets for the kitchen.

Dr Fish

I see. Well, what is it, Mrs. Mendelsohn?

Charlotte

Doctor, I'm really very nervous.

Dr. Fish

Is your problem primarily sexual?

Charlotte

Yes, it is.

Dr. Fish

Then we will merely talk like two adult intelligent human beings about your sexual problem that is all.

Charlotte

I know. That's what's making me so nervous.

Dr Fish

Would it be easier if I asked you a few more questions?

Charlotte

It would. And it would be a lot easier if I could wear my hat.

Dr Fish

Your hat?

Charlotte

I'd appreciate it.

Dr Fish

Then go right ahead.

Charlotte
Thank you.

Dr Fish
Mrs. Mendelsohn, does your husband share your bed with you?

Charlotte
You mean in the house?

Dr. Fish
Don't you have a bedroom?

Charlotte
Yes, Doctor.

Dr. Fish
Well, then does your husband share your bed with you in the bedroom which I presume is in the house?

Charlotte
He does.

Dr. Fish
Do you and your husband continue to have sexual intercourse?

Charlotte
Continue?

Dr. Fish
Do you and your husband have sexual intercourse?

No answer

Dr Fish
Do you know what sexual intercourse is, Mrs. Mendelsohn?

Charlotte
Yes Doctor.

Dr. Fish
Good, we're making progress. Well, then, do you and your husband have sexual intercourse?

Charlotte
We do, doctor.

Dr. Fish
How frequently?

Charlotte
It's hard to tell.

Dr. Fish
It's hard to tell? Don't you know when you and your husband have sexual intercourse?

Charlotte
Not all the time.

Dr. Fish
Mrs. Mendelsohn!

Charlotte
I know it sounds incredible, but it's the truth. I need your help desperately, Doctor Fish. My whole sex life is a mess, an absolute mess. It's driving me to the brink of a nervous breakdown.

Dr. Fish
All right, calm yourself, just calm yourself. Let me ask you this, do you find your husband physically attractive?

Charlotte
Yes, I do.

Dr. Fish
Undressed as well as dressed?

Charlotte
Doctor, I can tell you very frankly that there is no ambivalence in my attitude towards my husband's sex and when he is undressed, naked as it were, I am not in any ways repelled by the visual sight of his....of his....of my husband's...my, my, my husband's....

Dr. Fish
Your husband's what? Can't you say it? I want you to say that word! I insist you say that word, loudly and clearly! Mrs. Mendelsohn, I will not tolerate that sort of naïve Puritanism in this office. I have fought against it all my adult life! Here we speak freely and openly of sex. Here we delight in our sexuality. We find freedom and joy in our sexuality! Now I insist you say that word, Mrs. Mendelsohn!

Charlotte
P-p-p-p-p...

Dr Fish
Go ahead, say it!

Charlotte
P-p-p-p-p....

Dr Fish
I said say it! Say it!

Charlotte
P-p-p-penis!

Dr. Fish
There. Now don't you feel better for having said it?

Charlotte
I do. I think I do.

Dr Fish
Of course you do.

Charlotte
I feel wonderful. I really feel wonderful. I can't get over it. It was like a release, a complete physical release.

Dr Fish
There is nothing obscene or vulgar in the words we use to describe the sexual experience or the sexual organ. Get that notion out of your head once and for all.

Charlotte
I will. I definitely will. Do you want me to say any other words?

Dr. Fish
Not right now. There are more pressing

Charlotte
Vagina!

Dr. Fish
I said not right now Mrs. Mendelsohn!

Charlotte
Yes, Doctor.

Dr Fish

There are more pressing problems at the moment. I am still trying to understand how it is possible for you to have sexual intercourse with your husband without even knowing it!

Charlotte

It's possible. It is possible.

Dr Fish

Will you please tell me how?

Charlotte

We have signals.

Dr. Fish

Signals?

Charlotte

When one party is desirous of having sex he signals the other party.

Dr. Fish

And how may I ask do you signal Mr. Mendelsohn when you're desirous of having sex?

Charlotte

I turn over on my left side.

Dr. Fish

I see.

Charlotte

I always sleep on my right side so when I turn over on my left side my husband gets the signal.

Dr. Fish

It seems like an ideal arrangement.

Charlotte

It is. Except when I turn over in my sleep.

Dr Fish

You don't have to go any further. I think I understand now. And how may I ask does your husband signal you?

Charlotte

He clicks his tongue. *(she clicks her tongue)*

Dr. Fish

Mrs. Mendelsohn, did it ever occur to you that it would be far less confusing if you spoke about having sex instead of you turning and your husband clicking (*clicks his tongue*) like that?

Charlotte

I'm ashamed to admit it, but we rarely speak about sex, whether it's about having it or anything else.

Dr Fish

May I ask why not?

Charlotte

My husband says what goes on in his pants is his own business.

Dr Fish

Your husband is beginning to strike me as a most extraordinary man.

Charlotte

He is. He's very extraordinary. When I read your book it was like a whole new world opened up to me. Not only did you suggest that people should and must speak to one another, but you also suggested, and brilliantly so, that they should encourage one another to do different things, experimentation, exploration, improvisation. You made sex sound so fantastic, Doctor, that I couldn't believe that what you were talking about and what I was doing was the same thing.

Dr. Fish

Sex, Mrs. Mendelsohn, can either be a frightful exercise of mutual boredom or a ladder, a transcendental ladder, that takes one out of oneself and lifts one through the highest reaches of the highest heavens to the highest twinkling star.

Charlotte

That's beautiful. Can I write it down, Doctor?

Dr Fish

Of course.

Phone rings.

Dr. Fish

Excuse me.

Charlotte

I remember reading something like that in your book.

Dr. Fish

(Into Phone) Yes, what is it? Hold him for a moment. *(hangs up)*. Your husband's outside. I'd like you to wait in the study until I've had a word with him. You'll find some literature in there that might be of interest to you.

Charlotte

Yes, doctor. I'll look through it. I only wish my husband would read more. But he has imagination, no inquisitiveness. He won't even make love with the lights on. Would you believe it?

Charlotte touches his arm.

Dr. Fish

Don't touch me, Mrs. Mendelsohn. That is one thing you are never to do. You are never to touch me, never, under any circumstances.

Charlotte

Yes doctor.

Dr Fish

Now please go into the study and wait until I call you. I will try my best. For you and your children.

Charlotte

Thank you doctor. And God bless you.

She exits to study.