

Supervision: A Dialogue



The Sower by Vincent Van Gogh. 1888

by [Evelyn Hooven](#) (January 2022)

(The study/consulting room of a large, attractive house near a large city. The house is at the end of a long driveway. The consulting room is both well-embellished and uncluttered. There are ceramics, paintings, a framed quotation. There is a large window. It is the winter of the recession of 2008-2009, late afternoon.)

Characters: Lenore, the supervisor, late forties or early fifties.

Audrey, the supervisee, late twenties.

AUDREY

(Enters rapidly, goes to couch, removes jacket and backpack as she speaks)

There's a man alone in his car.

LENORE

Where?

AUDREY

Before your driveway starts—a kind of shoulder. . . .

LENORE

That's part of the lot next door. It was bought recently, then the sale fell through, as do many these days. Property signs haven't been up-dated.

AUDREY

The man looked desolate. A sad profile. Maybe desperate.

LENORE

Is he a patient at the hospital or from one of your training sessions?

(Audrey shakes her head)

LENORE (cont.)

A friend? Acquaintance?

AUDREY

No. But I could feel something coming on. It was almost like

weather. What if he—

LENORE (*Interrupting*)

What's that to us here? (A beat) If you have thoughts, associations. . .

AUDREY

I think he may need help.

LENORE

How much of your forty-five minute supervision do you intend to spend on this. . . stranger, his plight and choices?

AUDREY

Sometimes a person just needs support—from anywhere at all.

LENORE (*Annoyed by what she finds a lapse of expected concentration; tries to remain neutral*)

How are *your* patients?

(*Audrey nods, suggesting that they're doing okay*)

LENORE (cont.)

If you have thoughts, associations, a dream. . . .

(*A beat with no reply*)

AUDREY

A dream.

LENORE

Ah. . . (*Her notebook and pencil*)

AUDREY (*Faltering, tries to gather momentum*)

I'm accompanying a singer, a dramatic soprano. . . .

LENORE

On the piano, I presume?

(Audrey nods; Lenore goes quickly through some notes)

LENORE (cont.)

You've had music in your dreams from time to time.

AUDREY

This was last night.

LENORE

You should say. . . . You are accompanying a *(deciphering)* dramatic soprano.

AUDREY

She moves, without a break, through a long repertoire. My hands hurt, fingers stiffen, wrist also stiffens. She notices nothing.

LENORE

I had, early on, a patient with what he called hand injuries. He was tested and the conclusion was that the impairment was psychologically induced. Hysterical conversion, unusual in a man, but his conflicting displacements, somatizing, were all consistent. I was fortunate, at the time, to have a case so relatively classical.

AUDREY

Did it get better?

LENORE

How *could* it? I said I was fortunate.

AUDREY

I mean his hand.

LENORE

I don't remember. That would be twenty years ago. . .
. (*Slightly prodding*) You were saying—in last night's dream.
. .

AUDREY

In the dream, accompanying non-stop, fingers and wrists stiffen, pain the length of my arms. . . .

LENORE

You said that.

AUDREY

Finally, I say: "I need to take a breath." The soprano is offended: "It is for me to breathe." Then, in a kind of tantrum: "My trills, cadenza, my coda, rubato, my fiorituri, my. . . trills. . . ."

LENORE

What did you do then?

AUDREY

I don't know. Her tantrum is the last thing I remember.

LENORE

How far did you get with music?

AUDREY

I had intended. . . .

LENORE (*interrupting*)

We'll come back to that. Try to remember, associate to what happens after "My trills."

AUDREY

She says again, this time menacing, almost deadly: "It is for me to breathe."

LENORE

Anything after that?

AUDREY (*trying*)

No. . . . Nothing. . . .

LENORE

How far did you get with music? (*Looks at notes*) You *intended*—what did you intend?

AUDREY

For it to be my life's work.

LENORE

What stopped you?

AUDREY

I didn't have the. . . precise ego for a career in performance.

LENORE

Did you have the talent?

AUDREY

I was told I did.

LENORE

Could it be that you got in your own way?

AUDREY

My own way?

LENORE

Too entangled in personalities. . . distracted, sidetracked by. . . by what it takes to have a demanding career?

(Audrey cannot reply)

LENORE (cont.)

Don't you see—the man in the car's a mere distraction. His case may or may not be difficult, but the fact is *you* have had trouble being professional.

AUDREY *(thinking aloud)*

Or do professionals have trouble including something that matters—something crucial? *(A beat)* I see now that I might have countered the soprano with. . . . What about my rhapsody, elegy, my tone poems, variations, transcendental etudes? I couldn't, at the time.

LENORE

Music again—and not much of it before this. Have you been omitting—or intentionally holding out? *(A beat)* Did this. . . music commitment. . . far as you could get before you found fault with its demands—did it lead eventually to a kind of barter. . . fanciful, of course: If you can't get your first choice, make a second, with more profit? Your travels, artistic and otherwise, might have led to the place that George Bernard Shaw describes so well. *(Points to the framed copy)* It's there; I don't think you ever. . .

AUDREY

No. . . .

LENORE

No. You tend, in your ruminations, to look out the window. I'll tell it to you. "The soul is a very expensive thing to keep. It eats music and pictures and books and beautiful things to wear. In this country you can't have them without lots of money." The passage continues. All this *does* apply to some of us. Did you think you'd just pick up advanced degrees, and since you write well—musical training no doubt helps with phrasing—you might get to work with me? There's my name, reputation, to carry you much further than you managed to get with music.

AUDREY (*trying not to be provoked*)

In the healing professions, you can manage to make a difference even if. . . .

LENORE

Even if you're not a *star*?

AUDREY

Even *not* a star can be useful.

LENORE

And in art?

AUDREY

In art, sometimes less than the whole way can be quite lovely. But art is basically all or nothing. "An Old Woman Cutting Her Nails" is either a particular person who happens to be a woman grown old and happens at the moment to be cutting her nails

LENORE *(nearly aside)*

Such a momentous event!

AUDREY

. . . or is Rembrandt in the realm of forever. Besides *(She is saying this aloud for the first time)* I don't want a career in music.

LENORE

Do you *want* to be a professional at all? Why not be a dilettante? Turn the clock back—a few recitals, some psychology? *(A beat)* Do you want to be a psychoanalyst?

AUDREY

I consider it my calling.

LENORE

Then don't wander about distracted by someone in his car alone who—in profile, mind you—appears desolate. That's for a mere reporter or casual witness. *(Audrey cannot reply)* Did I come this far by picking up strays?

AUDREY

Certainly not.

LENORE

Would noting some desperate profile have gotten me where I am?

AUDREY

Where *are* you?

LENORE

You must know.

AUDREY (*straightforward*)

You're my supervisor.

LENORE

Is that all?

AUDREY (*genuinely trying*)

Head of the Analyst Training Division. Noted lecturer. Author.

LENORE

Have you read my monographs, articles, introductions to (*trying to be modest*) just a few *major* texts? And in spite of what this profession has been up against—insurance surveillance, pills and shortcuts, the constant and lucrative threat of groups—I still have a long waiting list both for patients *and* supervisees.

(Audrey is transfixed by something she sees outside, moves towards the window. Lenore is at the end of all patience.)

LENORE (cont.)

You have seven, no. . . five minutes left. How do you want to use them?

AUDREY

The car—I see flames starting. It might be possible. . . . There might still be time.

(Audrey remains calm and urgent. Takes something from outside pocket of backpack. Swift, efficient exit.)

LENORE (*As she begins to speak, moves as though against her will towards window*)

Your session has a few—very few—moments left. You choose to use the time not for closure or analytic insight, but to race

out, your backpack *and* your winter jacket strewn on my couch. The man has made a choice. Every few minutes, in bedrooms, bathrooms, cars, garages, someone chooses a disaster. In economic crises, all this increases. That one's choice is suicide; it's his to carry out. He's not your patient, certainly not mine. Why *should* you use your cell phone, pile snow on the fire, throw a rock at the passenger-side window? This is your last session with me. I know it, you don't.

(Sound of ambulance in the distance begins)

LENORE (cont.)

Native daughter of a country town, at a distance from the busiest thoroughfares, in *your* habitat—the winding roads, back roads, a few working farms, some older masonry—what will happen? Your supervision with me is over. What will you offer in times that are all-marbles-on-the-table, show and tell?

Give some music recitals. Locate, if you can, another supervisor, one who'll accept your unusual credential: someone who might have died is alive. Who would find that enough?

(Turns her back to window and to audience. As ambulance draws closer, its sound resembles the tolling of a bell. Lights from outdoors only.)

END

Author's Note: The circumstance of noticing and choosing to rescue a distressed stranger also appears in a very different context in my monologue, [*Her Light*](#).

[Table of Contents](#)

Evelyn Hooven graduated from Mount Holyoke College and received her M.A. from Yale University, where she also studied at The Yale School of Drama. A member of the Dramatists' Guild, she has had presentations of her verse dramas at several theatrical venues, including *The Maxwell Anderson Playwrights Series* in Greenwich, CT (after a state-wide competition) and *The Poet's Theatre* in Cambridge, MA (result of a national competition). Her poems and translations from the French and Spanish have appeared in *Parnassus: Poetry in Review*, *ART TIMES*, *Chelsea*, *The Literary Review*, *THE SHOp: A Magazine of Poetry* (in Ireland), *The Tribeca Poetry Review*, *Vallum* (in Montreal), and other journals, and her literary criticism in Oxford University's *Essays in Criticism*.

Follow NER on Twitter [@NERIconoclast](https://twitter.com/NERIconoclast)