

## **EUGENE ALEXANDER**

### **Ilisa's Choice – Special Screening**

What happens when an aging analyst takes on her last patient only to have his traumatic experience slowly but inexorably bring back her own deeply buried memories?

In this play, Dr. Ilisa Stein accepts her last patient, a young anthropologist who has sought her out initially for a referral but, because she is fascinated by his story of cannibalism and his subsequent eating disorder, she begins to treat him. In accepting the patient, she unexpectedly alarms her husband, a rabbi with his own views and concerns. A loving but contentious battle between them ensues; she with her analytical feistiness and he with his rabbinical wisdom, as he tries to dissuade her from initially accepting the patient and then continuing the treatment.

Meanwhile the therapy proceeds, becoming increasingly difficult and filled with counter-transference tension. In the midst of the work, patient and analyst seem, through a dream sequence, to trade roles and the symptoms of the patient become the symptoms of the analyst. Or were they always connected to her own trauma?

Finally, the past trauma, which has been represented derivatively throughout the play, comes to light and Dr. Stein faces her own past, a past rooted in her struggle for survival in the concentration camps. The play speaks to us about the danger of refusing to remember our own history and the unexamined choices we make as therapists when we accept particular patients. It also speaks to the arrogance that may come with old age and wisdom.

*Eugene Alexander, MFT has been in private practice in San Francisco for over 30 years. He was co-founder of Caselli Street Poets Co-operative and has been reading and writing poetry for the last several years. He has an abiding interest in the use of fiction in psychotherapy.*

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