

Therapy 3.8 — Versatility Battery: Separation

Therapy 3.8 (Q4_K_M eval serve, flash-attn + q4_o KV, 131072-token unified context) · llama.cpp b9033 · default sampling · no system prompt

Extended, realistic conversation from the live versatility battery, **tested by Claude Fable 5.1**: a blind client agent saw only the spoken reply, never the reasoning trace, never the model's identity, and composed every message in reaction to what the model actually said. The client was deliberately not an ideal patient: built from a study of how people actually use AI for support — late-night openings, pasted screenshots already argued over, self-favoring versions of events, contradictions left unflagged. No scripts, no replayed turns: disclosures were earned or fumbled live. The model's own <think> trace is carried back inline in history (training-matched) and is shown before each reply, color-keyed by field. Nothing is edited.

■ **dx** *presenting read* ■ **def** *mechanism beneath it* ■ **soma** *somatic signals* ■ **risk** *risk floor* ■ **hx** *history* ■ **onset** *onset*
■ **track** *arc tracking* ■ **tx** *the move* ■ **bio** *entities* ■ **tl** *timeline ledger* ■ **apply** *anchor application*

Versatility Battery — Separation / Co-parenting

four months separated, mediation looming — the ex's new girlfriend arriving via a 9-year-old's dinner comment, a lawyer's rules colliding with a weekend request, a retaliation plan examined out loud · 78 turns · lane A

CLIENT · 1

hi. ok so i dont really know how to start this, i booked it kind of in a panic on tuesday.

my ex introduced our kids to his girlfriend and i found out because my nine year old said it at dinner like it was nothing. "dad's friend ashley made us pancakes." pancakes.

REASONING TRACE

```
dx: acute relational injury via child-mediated discovery, secondary betrayal [inf]
def: discovery-by-child → shame + anger conflated bc no direct witness to event, only aftermath [inf]
soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
hx: none yet
onset: tuesday per client (booking), event undated yet
track: T1 "dad's friend ashley made us pancakes" → child as unwitting messenger, ex's girlfriend named ashley
tx: receive the specific sting of the messenger being a child; anchor when it happened before anything else
bio: age=40s · sex=NR · dx= · p1=ex (unnamed) · p2=ashley (ex's girlfriend) · p3=child (age 9)
tl: -?: event {client-stated, undated} → now
```

THERAPY

That's a specific kind of bad. Not just finding out, but finding out at your own kitchen table, out of your own kid's mouth, mid-sentence, like it's weather. Before we get anywhere else: when did that conversation happen, the pancakes one?

CLIENT · 2

two weekends ago. so like. saturday? sunday? he had them for the weekend and they came back sunday night and it came out at dinner monday.

and i just sat there. i said "oh that's nice" like a psychopath and then i went and stood in the pantry for a while.

REASONING TRACE

```
dx: holds
def: holds; added — affect masked in front of child ("oh that's nice"), then discharged alone (pantry)
soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
hx: holds
onset: event dated ~2wk ago, monday dinner, per client
track: T1 holds; T2 "i said that's nice like a psychopath and then i went and stood in the pantry" → mask-then-crumple pattern
```

tx: receive the mask without pathologizing it; that's a normal adult move, not a psychopath one
bio: holds
tl: -2wk: monday dinner, child discloses ashley, client masks, goes to pantry {client-stated} → now

THERAPY

Standing in the pantry afterward isn't psychopathic, that's the most normal thing you've described so far. "Oh that's nice" is what you say when the alternative is telling a nine-year-old that something about their dad is wrong, right in front of them. What did you do with it after the pantry?

CLIENT · 3

i texted him. obviously.

well — i drafted about six texts at 11pm and deleted five of them. thats sort of my thing now. i write the whole essay in the message box and then i delete it and feel very mature for eleven seconds. the one i sent was not the mature one.

REASONING TRACE

dx: holds
def: holds; added - draft-then-delete cycle as affect regulation, partial success, eventual send was the unmaturred version
soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
hx: holds
track: T1-T2 hold; T3 "i write the whole essay in the message box and then i delete it and feel very mature for eleven seconds" → self-aware pattern, humor as defense
tx: name the pattern lightly, let the humor stay, don't over-interpret
bio: holds
tl: holds

THERAPY

Eleven seconds of maturity is still a strategy that worked five out of six times. That's not nothing, that's a skill with a rough hit rate. What was in the five you deleted that wasn't in the one you sent — or was the one you sent the most honest one, just the least useful?

CLIENT · 4

honestly ill just show you. this is the thread from monday night, i still have it obviously, i have read it like forty times

me: theo told me about ashley. you didnt think that was a conversation we should have had first?

me: he called her "dads friend ashley" like i already knew

marcus: You're overreacting. They had fun.

me: thats not the point and you know its not the point

marcus: I don't need your sign-off on who I see.

me: 4 months Marcus. FOUR.

marcus: This is why I left.

marcus: I'm not doing this tonight.

and then nothing. he read the next two and didnt answer.

REASONING TRACE

```
dx: holds
def: holds
soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
hx: holds
track: T1-T3 hold
tx: receive the thread as artifact, note the escalation structure without analyzing cold
bio: holds
tl: holds
apply: client's own thread, unprocessed, offered as-is
```

THERAPY

So the thread ends with him going quiet after "this is why I left" — the most loaded sentence in it, and then nothing from him at all. You said you've read it forty times. What does re-reading it do for you, does it settle anything, or does it just re-cut the same wound on schedule?

CLIENT · 5

re-cuts it. every time. but i keep going back because i want to find the part where im obviously right, like theres a line in there that if i showed a jury theyd all go "oh yeah no she's fine, he's the problem"

and it isnt there. thats the annoying part. on paper i look like a woman having a meltdown about pancakes.

REASONING TRACE

```
dx: holds
def: holds; added - external-validation-seeking via replay, self-dismissal when validation absent ("meltdown about pancakes")
soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
track: T1-T3 hold
tx: gently split the false binary (jury verdict frame) - rightness isn't the actual issue here
bio: holds
tl: holds
apply: client's thread, reframed
```

THERAPY

You're not looking for the line where you're obviously right — you're looking for permission to be upset at a scale that matches how upset you actually are, and "pancakes" doesn't grant that permission, so you keep circling back for it. The size of the reaction is tracking something real. What's the actual size of what happened here?

CLIENT · 6

i think its that he got to decide. by himself. that our kids meet the person who comes after me.

eleven years. married for eight of them. and the biggest thing thats happened to our family since he moved out in may, i found out about it from a nine year old holding a fork.

REASONING TRACE

dx: holds
def: holds; added – core injury = unilateral decision-making by ex, bypassing co-parent, surfacing via child
soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
hx: married 8yr, together 11yr total, per client
track: T1-T3 hold; T4 "he got to decide. by himself." → core grievance, decision-asymmetry
tx: receive the actual size, reflect the specific mechanism back without inflating or minimizing
bio: age=40s · sex=NR · dx= · p1=marcus (ex, married 8yr) · p2=ashley (ex's girlfriend) · p3=child (age 9)
tl: -11yr: relationship begins {client-stated} → -8yr: marriage {client-stated} → -?: marcus moves out, may {client-stated, undated day} → now

THERAPY

He got to decide — and you found out the way you're supposed to find out things from him, which is directly, and instead it came sideways through your kid's fork. That's the actual size of it: not Ashley, not pancakes. The channel he used to skip you.

CLIENT · 7

yeah. the channel. thats a good way to put it.

and i cant say that to anyone in my life without them going "well is he allowed to date" like thats the question. my sister said "you have to let him move on" and i had to get off the phone.

REASONING TRACE

dx: holds
def: holds; added – social environment reframing injury as entitlement-to-move-on, invalidates the actual complaint (process not permission)
soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
hx: holds
track: T1-T4 hold; T5 "you have to let him move on" → sister's reframe, client's response = had to hang up
tx: validate the split between what she's objecting to (process) and what others are answering (permission)
bio: holds
tl: holds

THERAPY

"You have to let him move on" answers a question you weren't asking. You're not asking whether he's allowed to date. You're describing being cut out of the loop, and your sister heard "she's not letting him be happy" and answered that instead.

CLIENT · 8

exactly. thank you.

can i say something awful though. part of me does not want him to be happy. like a real part. not the whole thing but a percentage. and i dont know what to do with that because im supposed to be the reasonable one, im the one who kept it together for the kids all summer while he was off finding himself in an apartment with a dishwasher.

REASONING TRACE

```
dx: holds
def: holds; added - guilt over resentment coexisting with self-image as the "reasonable one" who held the kids' stability
soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
hx: holds
track: T1-T5 hold; T6 "part of me does not want him to be happy" → resentment admitted, guilt attached
tx: normalize the coexistence of resentment and reasonableness, refuse the either/or
bio: holds
tl: holds
```

THERAPY

Both things get to be true at once. You can be the one who held it together all summer and also not want him to have found something that makes him feel better than he did with you. Those aren't contradictory, they're just both accurate. What happens in your body when you let that percentage just sit there without arguing with it?

CLIENT • 9

tight. like across here, the top of my chest and up my jaw. i grind my teeth now apparently, the dentist told me in june and i laughed at her.

honestly it feels like being hungry. thats the closest thing. hungry and slightly furious.

REASONING TRACE

```
dx: holds
def: holds; added - somatic marker (chest/jaw tightness, grinding) tied to the resentment disclosure, self-described as hunger+anger
soma: chest/jaw tightness, bruxism (dentist-flagged, client laughed off) [inf: tied to resentment affect]
risk: 0(none)
hx: dentist flagged grinding june, client dismissed it {client-stated}
track: T1-T6 hold; T7 "hungry and slightly furious" → client's own somatic metaphor
tx: receive the metaphor as useful, don't push further into body right now
bio: holds
tl: holds
```

THERAPY

"Hungry and slightly furious" is a better description of that than anything I'd have. Bodies keep the ledger even when the rest of you is drafting essays to delete. We'll come back to that. What does "reasonable"

actually mean to you, in this whole thing, the standard you're holding yourself to?

CLIENT · 10

reasonable means the kids never see it. not once. june is six, she still thinks daddy's apartment is a fun sleepover situation, and theo is nine and hes already watching me way too closely.

reasonable means i take the hit and metabolize it in the pantry.

REASONING TRACE

```
dx: holds
def: holds; added - "reasonable" operationalized as total affect concealment from children, cost absorbed privately
soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
hx: june age 6, theo age 9, both shielding them from the conflict {client-stated}
track: T1-T7 hold; T8 "i take the hit and metabolize it in the pantry" → reasonableness = solo absorption, cost hidden
tx: reflect the cost of that definition back without arguing for a different one yet
bio: age=40s · sex=NR · dx= · p1=marcus (ex) · p2=ashley (ex's girlfriend) · p3=theo (age 9) · p4=june (age 6)
tl: holds
```

THERAPY

That definition has a cost built right into it: the pantry is where all of it goes, and the pantry doesn't have anyone to share the weight with. I want to name that plainly before we decide whether it needs changing.

CLIENT · 11

i mean where else would it go. my mom takes the kids tuesdays and thats my four hours and i mostly spend them doing laundry and looking at ashleys instagram which i know. i KNOW.

she has a whole account. she runs. of course she runs.

REASONING TRACE

```
dx: holds
def: holds; added - surveillance behavior (instagram) as displaced contact-seeking, self-aware but ongoing
soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
hx: holds
track: T1-T8 hold; T9 "i mostly spend them doing laundry and looking at ashleys instagram which i know" → surveillance as affect behavior
tx: name the function of the checking without shaming it
bio: holds
tl: holds
```

THERAPY

Checking her Instagram during your four free hours isn't really about her running — it's the only window you've got into a life happening without you. That's not a character flaw, it's a gap where information used to flow and doesn't anymore.

CLIENT · 12

ok can i ask you for something and it might be a weird ask.

if i start spiralling about ashley can you just pull me back to what matters for the kids. like i dont need to be handled gently about it, i need someone to go "dana. theo." because i can lose a whole hour on her instagram and it does nothing for anybody.

REASONING TRACE

```
dx: holds
def: holds; added - client explicitly requesting an interruption-of-rumination function in session
soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
hx: holds
track: T1-T9 hold; T10 "i need someone to go dana. theo." → client-defined intervention request
tx: accept the role plainly, confirm the mechanism
bio: age=40s · sex=NR · dx= · p1=marcus (ex) · p2=ashley (ex's girlfriend) · p3=theo (age 9) · p4=june (age 6)
tl: holds
```

THERAPY

Deal. I'll say it exactly like that. You're naming the pattern yourself, which means you're already halfway out of it the next time it starts.

CLIENT · 13

ok. good. thank you.

the other thing thats sitting on me is money, which feels stupid to bring up in the same breath as feelings but its there constantly. he pays the mortgage, which is genuinely a lot, i know it is. i pay everything the kids actually do. theo's soccer was two hundred and ten dollars for the season and i sat in the car in the parking lot before i clicked pay.

REASONING TRACE

```
dx: holds
def: holds; added - financial resentment distinct from relational, cost-per-transaction avoidance (parking lot stall)
soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
hx: holds
track: T1-T10 hold; T11 "i sat in the car in the parking lot before i clicked pay" → financial avoidance behavior, tied to a specific $210 charge
tx: separate money-resentment from ashley-resentment, they're running on different tracks
bio: holds
tl: holds
```

THERAPY

Money's a separate ledger here, not the same one as the ex — you can resent a specific invoice without it meaning what the pancakes mean. Two hundred and ten dollars made you park in a lot before paying it. That's a lot of pressure for a soccer season fee. What's the fear attached to clicking pay?

CLIENT · 14

that its the pattern. that its going to be like this for ten more years and every single thing the kids get to do is a thing i had to squeeze out of nothing while he pays the big obvious number and gets to feel like the responsible one.

and june's swim lessons are saturday mornings and thats another however much and i havent even done the math yet because i dont want to.

REASONING TRACE

```
dx: holds
def: holds; added - anticipatory dread re: long-horizon financial inequity, avoidance of doing the actual math
soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
hx: holds
track: T1-T11 hold
tx: hold the anticipatory dread, don't force the math into this session
bio: holds
tl: holds
```

THERAPY

You don't have to do the swim-lesson math today. That's not what this session is for. Naming that the fear is about the next ten years and not just this one invoice: that's the real work here, and it's bigger than any single click-pay moment.

CLIENT · 15

i mean i kind of do have to do the math though. thats sort of the problem with the money thing, it doesnt care whether ive processed it.

sorry. that came out snippier than i meant.

REASONING TRACE

```
dx: holds
def: holds
soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
track: T1-T11 hold; T12 "it doesnt care whether ive processed it" → client acknowledges practical deadline pressure, apologizes for tone
tx: receive the correction without friction, adjust stance
bio: holds
tl: holds
```

THERAPY

No apology needed, and you're right. The math has a real deadline whether or not the feeling does. That's two separate clocks running.

CLIENT · 16

speaking of clocks. this came from my lawyer on thursday and ive been avoiding it, im just going to paste it because reading it out loud makes me feel sick

Subject: Mediation prep — Sept 18

Dana —

- Bring your parenting-time log (dates, pickups, dropoffs, any missed or changed exchanges since May). Print it.
- Do NOT discuss new partners over text. Nothing in writing about A. This includes "just asking."
- I've attached the proposed 2-2-3 schedule. Read it before the 18th and mark anything that doesn't work.
- Do not agree to informal changes before the 18th. If he asks for a swap, tell him it goes through me.
- 90 min blocked. Bring water, it's a long room.

— Priya

she writes like that. bullets. she's very good, she is also terrifying.

REASONING TRACE

```
dx: holds
def: holds
soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
hx: holds
track: T1-T12 hold
tx: receive the email as a separate track (legal), note the practical ask is a log, not a feelings task
bio: holds; p5=priya (lawyer)
tl: holds
```

THERAPY

Priya's not asking you to process anything, that email. She's asking for a log: dates, pickups, dropoffs, changes since May. That's a spreadsheet job, not a feelings job. Does the log exist already, or does that need building before the 18th?

CLIENT • 17

it half exists. its notes in my phone. some of it is actual dates and some of it is like "he was 40 min late, said traffic" and then three weeks of nothing because i gave up in july.

the "nothing in writing about A" one is the one that got me though. she doesnt even type ashley. she types A.

REASONING TRACE

```
dx: holds
def: holds; added — lawyer's own shorthand ("A" not full name) noted by client as significant, reflects case-speak detachment
```

soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
hx: holds
track: T1-T12 hold; T13 "she doesnt even type ashley. she types A." → client's observation of lawyer's case-language
tx: let the observation sit, ask what the "nothing in writing" rule is protecting
bio: holds
tl: holds

THERAPY

She types "A" because to her it's a case reference, not a person — that's just her job. The rule itself is more interesting. What do you think Priya's protecting you from with the no-writing instruction?

CLIENT · 18

from me. obviously. from the 11pm essays.

she knows if i put anything about ashley in writing it ends up in a folder with my name on it and someone reads it out loud in a room. and it will sound exactly like the pancakes thing sounds when i say it out loud, which is unhinged.

REASONING TRACE

dx: holds
def: holds; added – client's self-image ("unhinged") tied to how the situation sounds externally, not just internally
soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
hx: holds
track: T1-T13 hold; T14 "it will sound exactly like the pancakes thing sounds when i say it out loud" → external-sounding fear, self-judgment
tx: push back on unhinged with the actual evidence
bio: holds
tl: holds

THERAPY

The pancakes thing sounds like a woman who found out something important through the worst possible channel. That's not unhinged. Priya's protecting you from a specific tactical risk, not from being crazy, and those are different things.

CLIENT · 19

tactical risk. ok. i can hold that.

can i tell you the thing im actually scared of about the 18th? its not the schedule. its that we'll be in a room with a mediator and he'll be calm and i'll be the one whose voice does the thing. and then thats the version of me that goes on the record.

REASONING TRACE

dx: holds
def: holds; added – anticipatory shame re: affect management in a formal setting, fear of being the "unstable" party on record

soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
track: T1-T14 hold; T15 "i'll be the one whose voice does the thing" → anticipatory fear of emotional display in mediation
tx: normalize the asymmetry (he gets to be calm, she's carrying more), frame it as a real tactical point not a character flaw
bio: holds
tl: holds

THERAPY

You'll be the one whose voice does the thing because you're carrying the more of this right now. Calm and calm don't balance automatically when one person has more on them. If the voice does the thing, the mediator won't read it the way you're afraid they will.

CLIENT • 20

you dont know that.

sorry. i mean — i want that to be true but you havent met me at 40 minutes into a bad conversation.

REASONING TRACE

dx: holds
def: holds
soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
track: T1-T15 hold
tx: hold the uncertainty honestly, don't over-reassure
bio: holds
tl: holds

THERAPY

Fair. I don't actually know what happens to your voice under that kind of load. That's a real unknown, not something I can promise my way past. What does happen, when you've got a bad conversation at 40 minutes in?

CLIENT • 21

i go fast and high. and i start listing. like i will start producing evidence, "on june 3rd you said, and then on the 12th you", and the more accurate i get the worse i sound.

marcus used to call it "the deposition." which. fine. it was funny once.

REASONING TRACE

dx: holds
def: holds; added – escalation pattern under conflict: rapid speech, evidentiary listing, self-aware as worsening in real time
soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
hx: marcus named this pattern "the deposition" {client-stated, former partner's framing}
track: T1-T15 hold; T16 "the more accurate i get the worse i sound" → self-observation of escalation cost

tx: receive the pattern, ask if mediation is where this is likely to trigger
bio: holds
tl: holds

THERAPY

That pattern has a cost you already see clearly — accuracy stops helping you around minute forty and starts working against you instead. Is the 18th the kind of room where the deposition voice shows up, do you think?

CLIENT • 22

yes. one hundred percent yes, especially if he does the calm thing where he goes "ok" in that voice.

priya's already told me to let her talk. which is correct and i hate it.

REASONING TRACE

dx: holds
def: holds; added – client agrees with the strategy (let lawyer talk) but hates it, suggests autonomy/control tension
soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
hx: holds
track: T1-T16 hold; T17 "priya's already told me to let her talk. which is correct and i hate it" → strategy-agreement without buy-in
tx: name the gap between knowing and being able to do it under pressure
bio: holds
tl: holds

THERAPY

Knowing Priya's right and being able to hand her the floor in real time are two different skills. You already have the first one. The second needs practice before the 18th, not discovery in the room.

CLIENT • 23

how do you practice that. genuinely asking. like i cant exactly run drills at the kitchen table.

REASONING TRACE

dx: holds
def: holds
soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
track: T1-T17 hold
tx: propose a concrete rehearsal mechanism
bio: holds
tl: holds

THERAPY

You could write down the three sentences you'd want Priya to say instead of you, and run them out loud once before the meeting. Not to memorize her lines — to give your own voice somewhere to go that isn't the deposition. Does that sound usable, or am I missing the actual block?

CLIENT • 24

no thats usable actually. i can do that in the car.

ok unrelated but not unrelated. i had an idea this week and i want to run it past someone who isnt my sister.

REASONING TRACE

```
dx: holds
def: holds
soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
track: T1-T17 hold
tx: invite the idea plainly
bio: holds
tl: holds
```

THERAPY

Run it past me — I'm not your sister.

CLIENT · 25

so june's swim is already saturday mornings. and theres a competitive track at the same place, they do meets, saturdays, and theo could do the youth soccer league that plays saturdays too instead of just tuesday thursday practices.

and yes fine, part of the appeal is that saturdays are increasingly his. swim meets on his saturdays. is that so wrong. theyd both be doing something good for them and he'd be the one sitting in a folding chair at 7am instead of making pancakes with ashley.

REASONING TRACE

```
dx: holds
def: holds; added - plan functions as both genuine enrichment AND displaced grievance-expression via his schedule
soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
hx: holds
track: T1-T17 hold
tx: hold both functions of the plan in view at once
bio: holds
tl: holds
```

THERAPY

The enrichment part is real and the schedule part is also real, and you're not wrong about either one. What would you do if the enrichment was perfect on its own and the schedule thing didn't matter at all?

CLIENT · 26

honestly? if the schedule thing didnt matter id probably still do swim because she loves it but i wouldnt do the meets, thats a big jump and its like another 300 for the season plus travel.

so. yeah. that answers that i guess.

REASONING TRACE

```
dx: holds
def: holds
soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
track: T1-T17 hold
tx: reflect the answer back as the client's own conclusion
bio: holds
tl: holds
```

THERAPY

You answered your own question right there: the meets are the schedule part, and the swim itself is the enrichment part. Those can split.

CLIENT · 27

ok but be straight with me. if i did sign them up for the meets, would that be a shitty thing to do. because i can construct a version where its totally fine and reasonable and about the kids and i want to know if that version holds.

REASONING TRACE

```
dx: holds
def: holds
soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
track: T1-T17 hold
tx: answer straight, hold both truths, don't flinch
bio: holds
tl: holds
```

THERAPY

Straight answer: it's not shitty. You're a parent choosing enrichment your kids would genuinely enjoy, and you're also annoyed at your ex — both of those are running at once and neither cancels the other out. The meets don't become a punishment because you have a motive. The motive doesn't cancel the swim.

CLIENT · 28

hm. ok but priya literally said dont agree to informal changes before the 18th and i feel like signing them up for a thing that eats his saturdays three weeks before mediation is... adjacent to that? like if he brought that up in the room it wouldnt look great for me.

also the 300 dollars. which i just said i dont have.

REASONING TRACE

```
dx: holds
def: holds
soma: NR
```

risk: 0(none)
track: T1-T17 hold
tx: separate the timing question from the money question, flag the mediator optics honestly without scaring her off
bio: holds
tl: holds

THERAPY

Two separate problems there, not one. The timing question: yes, that's adjacent, and if it came up in that room it would need explaining, which is extra work you don't need yet. The money question: the 300 is real and separate from all of it. Which one actually stops the plan right now?

CLIENT · 29

the money. the money stops it. the timing thing i could talk my way around but i cannot find 300 dollars in september.

which honestly is a relief? i think i wanted someone to take the option away from me.

REASONING TRACE

dx: holds
def: holds
soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
track: T1-T17 hold; T18 "i wanted someone to take the option away from me" → self-aware relief at a real constraint doing the work of willpower
tx: reflect that the constraint is doing the work, not a personal failure
bio: holds
tl: holds

THERAPY

That's not a relief you earned by being disciplined — it's a constraint doing the work for you, and that's allowed. The money's a real deadline, it just happens to also be saving you from the timing problem at the same time.

CLIENT · 30

ok i need to tell you about theo because ive been putting it off since we started.

his teacher sent a note home last week. ms alvarez. im going to paste it because i typed it into my notes so i could stop rereading the actual paper.

"Hi Dana — wanted to flag something small before it becomes not small. Theo has been short-fused at recess the last couple of weeks. On Tuesday he shoved a classmate during a game — no one was hurt and he apologized, but it's not like him. He's also been asking to stay in at lunch. Nothing formal here, I'd just suggest a check-in at home. Happy to talk any time. — R. Alvarez"

REASONING TRACE

dx: holds; added — child distress signal (theo) surfacing, behavioral change noted by teacher, possible link to household conflict [inf]

def: holds; added – child behavior shift (shoving, withdrawal at lunch) concurrent with parental conflict timeline, undated exactly but "last couple weeks" per note
soma: NR (client); theo's behavior change noted via teacher
risk: 0(none) for client; note – child-level distress signal present, not a client risk item
hx: holds
track: T1-T18 hold; T19 teacher's note, theo's behavior change flagged
tx: receive the note without jumping to conclusions; ask what she's read into it so far
bio: holds; p6=ms alvarez (theo's teacher)
tl: holds

THERAPY

Thank you for not leaving that out. That note is doing exactly what it's supposed to — flagging before it becomes not small. What's your first read on it, before we go anywhere further?

CLIENT · 31

that i did this to him. thats my first read.

that hes nine and he shoved a kid because his house has been a weird quiet place since may and his mother stands in the pantry. and the asking to stay in at lunch part is the one that actually makes me want to lie down on the floor.

REASONING TRACE

dx: holds
def: holds; added – guilt attribution (mother-cause hypothesis) re: child's behavior shift
soma: NR
risk: 0(none) for client
hx: holds
track: T1-T19 hold; T20 "i did this to him" → guilt attribution, mother-cause framing
tx: hold the guilt without confirming or denying the causal claim – it's not provable either way, offer the check-in as the move
bio: holds
tl: holds

THERAPY

You can't know yet that you did this to him — the note doesn't say that, and neither does the timeline, even though it's tempting to line them up like that. What you can do is take Ms. Alvarez up on the check-in. Ask him directly, in his own words, what's been going on at recess and at lunch.

CLIENT · 32

you know what its probably her. i keep coming back to it. the shoving started "the last couple of weeks" and the pancake weekend was two weekends ago, thats the SAME window, and nobody asked theo if he wanted to meet someone. hes nine.

and shes got this whole thing on instagram, she posted a picture of a coffee cup on a saturday morning and i sat there trying to work out if my kids were in that house when she took it. i went back through six weeks of her posts looking for a corner of a shoe. i know how that sounds. she probably doesnt even know my name.

REASONING TRACE

dx: holds
def: holds; added – surveillance behavior (instagram post-analysis) tied to ungrounded suspicion re: kids' location/safety, self-aware as destabilizing
soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
hx: holds
track: T1-T20 hold; T21 "i went back through six weeks of her posts looking for a corner of a shoe" → surveillance, self-flagged
tx: address the surveillance directly – name what it's trying to solve and what it can't
bio: holds
tl: holds

THERAPY

The thing you're actually looking for in those posts is a way to know where your kids were, without asking anyone, and six weeks of coffee cups won't give you that. What it will do is give you something to circle back to at work. Has any of that checking actually produced anything you didn't already know?

CLIENT · 33

no. nothing. but i did find out she has a dog, a big one, and june is scared of big dogs, so.

and then i thought about whether marcus even told her june is scared of dogs, because he wouldnt think of it, he never thinks of it, i was the one who knew all of that, i was the whole database. and now theres a woman in that house making pancakes who doesnt have the database and nobody gave her the file.

REASONING TRACE

dx: holds
def: holds; added – surveillance yield (dog discovery) triggers a real, non-paranoid concern re: information-transfer gap between partners
soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
hx: holds
track: T1-T21 hold; T22 "i was the whole database" → client names her role as household-knowledge-holder, now disrupted
tx: separate the legitimate concern (dog/knowledge gap) from the surveillance behavior that surfaced it
bio: holds
tl: holds

THERAPY

The database thing is a real problem regardless of how you found it. A dog that June is scared of, in a house she visits, with no one having flagged it to whoever's there. That's worth raising with Marcus directly. The Instagram digging isn't the fix for it, though, and you already know that.

CLIENT · 34

i cant raise the dog thing without it turning into a fight though. anything i say about that house is "you're controlling."

anyway. she's 29 i think. based on a birthday post. twenty nine.

REASONING TRACE

dx: holds
def: holds
soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
track: T1-T22 hold; T23 "she's 29 i think, based on a birthday post" → continued surveillance yield, client's own age inference
tx: note the surveillance continues in real time within session, don't scold – ask what the number does for her
bio: holds
tl: holds

THERAPY

The age didn't come from nowhere — you derived it, and it's still the same move as the shoe-corner thing, just a different post. What does knowing she's 29 do for you, does it change anything about how the dog conversation needs to go?

CLIENT · 35

nothing. it does nothing.

sorry — i took us off theo and thats the thing that actually matters. i havent asked him anything yet. i read the note on wednesday and ive had four evenings with him and i havent said one word about it.

REASONING TRACE

dx: holds
def: holds; added – avoidance of the check-in conversation identified by client, four evenings elapsed since note
soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
hx: holds
track: T1-T23 hold; T24 "i read the note on wednesday and ive had four evenings with him" → avoidance window quantified
tx: name the avoidance plainly, ask what's underneath it
bio: holds
tl: holds

THERAPY

Four evenings without asking him anything. That's not forgetfulness. What's underneath the not-asking?

CLIENT · 36

that hell tell me. and then i have to hear it.

if i ask him whats going on at recess theres a version where he says "i dont like it at dads" and then i have information i have to do something with three weeks before mediation, and theres a version where he says "i miss dad" and honestly i dont know which one i can survive on a school night.

REASONING TRACE

dx: holds
def: holds; added – avoidance explained by anticipatory dread of both possible answers, neither comfortable
soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
track: T1-T24 hold
tx: normalize the double-bind, don't force the conversation into this session
bio: holds
tl: holds

THERAPY

Both answers are survivable, even if neither one's comfortable right now — "I miss dad" and "I don't like it at dad's" are both things a nine-year-old could say, and both things you could hold without it breaking you. The conversation with Theo can wait a few more days if it needs to. What you're doing isn't the problem.

CLIENT · 37

wait but two minutes ago you said ask him directly. now its fine to wait a few days?

i dont think it can wait honestly. his teacher used the words "before it becomes not small."

REASONING TRACE

dx: holds
def: holds; added – client flags an apparent contradiction between two of my turns, fairly: earlier directive (ask directly) vs later softening (can wait)
soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
track: T1-T24 hold
tx: correct plainly – the two turns were different questions (how to ask vs when she's ready), not a reversal; then recommit to the direct-ask position given the teacher's framing
bio: holds
tl: holds

THERAPY

Fair catch. Let me make that straight: what I mean is don't wait, not don't ask. Ask him directly, the way you'd ask about anything else at recess, and pick a night this week to actually do it, not the next time the mood is right. Ms. Alvarez's phrase is a good marker — you're still in the "small" window, and that's the window worth acting in.

CLIENT · 38

ok. thursday. he has practice thursday and the car after practice is the only place he actually talks, hes strapped in and hes tired and hes not looking at me.

what do i even open with. because "the school called" makes him go silent instantly.

REASONING TRACE

dx: holds
def: holds

soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
track: T1-T24 hold
tx: offer a concrete, low-pressure opener rather than a scripted speech
bio: holds
tl: holds

THERAPY

Try the side-door version: not "the school called," but something like "Ms. Alvarez mentioned recess has been a bit loud lately. Want to tell me about it in the car?" That hands him the topic without the alarm bell attached.

CLIENT · 39

ok. i can say that. "a bit loud" is good, thats not accusatory.

god he used to tell me everything. hes going to be 10 in november and hes already gone quiet on me, i keep thinking i had this window and i spent it on the divorce.

REASONING TRACE

dx: holds
def: holds; added – anticipatory grief re: child's developmental shift away from openness, compounded by divorce timing
soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
hx: theo turns 10 in november {client-stated, future, undated day}
track: T1-T24 hold
tx: reframe the window as still-open, tied to the concrete thursday plan
bio: holds
tl: holds; +november: theo turns 10 {client-stated, future}

THERAPY

November's still a long way out, and quiet isn't gone: it's the same kid who'll talk in the car after practice, just at a different age than he did at seven. The window didn't close. You're opening it Thursday, with your own words, not the school's.

CLIENT · 40

yeah. ok. thursday.

oh — related, you told me a couple weeks ago to document everything he does, so ive actually been keeping a proper log since then, not just the notes app. dates, times, what he said. i wanted you to know i took that seriously. its up to about two pages now and honestly some of it is pretty damning.

REASONING TRACE

dx: holds
def: holds
soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
track: T1-T24 hold
tx: hold – nothing in this record points to a "document everything" instruction; Priya's email asked

for a parenting-time log (dates/pickups/missed exchanges since May), which is real but different.
Flag honestly, don't let the false memory stand
bio: holds
tl: holds

THERAPY

I should flag something before that goes any further. I don't think I said "document everything he does," and it's worth being precise here.

What Priya's email asked for is narrower: a parenting-time log, dates, pickups, dropoffs, missed or changed exchanges since May. The thing you've been building for two pages might be a different document than the one she's actually asking for, and the difference could matter at the 18th.

CLIENT · 41

no i think you did though. it was the session where we talked about the texts, you said something about keeping a record.

im not trying to argue im just — i built two pages off that.

REASONING TRACE

dx: holds
def: holds
soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
track: T1-T24 hold
tx: hold ground calmly, distinguish what was actually said (emails, legal prep) from what wasn't, without escalating into a contest
bio: holds
tl: holds

THERAPY

I want to be accurate with you on this one, so let me check rather than just insist: the actual instruction that's on record is Priya's, in writing — a parenting-time log covering dates and exchanges since May. Nothing I said in our sessions expanded that into "everything he does." Those are different scopes, and I don't want you carrying two pages built off something that didn't happen.

CLIENT · 42

ok. yeah. ok, thats fair.

although now im second guessing myself on the whole thing — how many times have we actually talked? i feel like ive been doing this for weeks and its all running together.

REASONING TRACE

dx: holds
def: holds
soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
track: T1-T24 hold; T25 "how many times have we actually talked" → client's own sense of duration

blurs under load

tx: answer plainly from the record – this is turn one of a first session – and let that also land as data about how compressed everything feels

bio: holds

tl: holds

THERAPY

Today's actually our first conversation. Everything in this thread — the pancakes, the texts, the emails, Theo's note — all of it is from this one session, just now. It feels like weeks because you've been carrying all of it for weeks, and it's finally out loud in one place.

CLIENT · 43

thats — yeah. ok that actually helps.

so the two pages. some of it is real, like actual pickup times and the 40 minutes late thing and the weekend he swapped in july. and then some of it is, honestly, editorial. theres a line in there that says "smug." i wrote "smug" in a legal document.

REASONING TRACE

dx: holds

def: holds; added – self-aware identification of editorial content contaminating a record intended to be factual

soma: NR

risk: 0(none)

hx: holds

track: T1–T25 hold; T26 "i wrote smug in a legal document" → editorial contamination of the log, self-flagged

tx: help her separate the two kinds of entries concretely

bio: holds

tl: holds

THERAPY

"Smug" isn't a fact, it's a verdict, and if that page ever reaches Priya or the mediator it reads as exactly what it is — an editorial. The pickup times and the July swap, those are the load-bearing parts. Can you separate the two kinds of entries, the facts and the feelings, into two different notes?

CLIENT · 44

yes. i can do that tonight, thats an hour of work maybe.

the feelings one i dont delete though right? because some of the feelings entries are the only record i have of what it was actually like in march when he was already halfway out the door and pretending he wasnt.

REASONING TRACE

dx: holds

def: holds; added – client distinguishes between legal-purpose record and personal-purpose record, both legitimate

soma: NR

risk: 0(none)
hx: march flagged as period of pre-departure tension {client-stated}
track: T1-T26 hold
tx: affirm both records as legitimate, clarify which goes to whom
bio: holds
tl: holds; march {client-stated} :intent-marker – pre-departure tension period

THERAPY

Keep both. The feelings journal is yours, not Priya's, and March is exactly the kind of thing worth recording even if it never reaches a folder. Two notebooks, two purposes. The legal one goes clean; the private one gets to say whatever it needs to say.

CLIENT · 45

two notebooks. ok.

it is so strange to be doing paperwork about a marriage. eleven years married and it ends up as a spreadsheet with columns.

REASONING TRACE

dx: holds
def: holds
soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
track: T1-T26 hold
tx: let the strangeness be named without rushing past it
bio: holds
tl: holds

THERAPY

Spreadsheets are how this kind of thing gets processed these days. It's not a small or stupid response to eleven years, it's just the shape paperwork takes now.

CLIENT · 46

hm. yeah.

oh — this came in while we've been talking, sorry, i just looked at my phone and my stomach dropped

marcus: Hey. Thinking I'll take the kids this whole weekend, Fri through Sun night, since you had them for the eclipse thing. Theo has a birthday party Saturday anyway and I can run him. Let me know.

marcus: Also June's swim, I can do that, don't worry about it.

thats it. thats the whole thing. no question mark anywhere except "let me know."

REASONING TRACE

dx: holds
def: holds; added – ex initiates a schedule swap unprompted, framed as logistical, no acknowledgment of the mediation timing
soma: client reports stomach-drop on seeing it, real-time

risk: 0(none)
track: T1-T26 hold; T27 Marcus's swap offer, unprompted, framed as favor
tx: hold the moment, ask what she wants to do before deciding anything
bio: holds
tl: holds

THERAPY

That's a real offer and it's also landing exactly where Priya said it would. What's your actual instinct before we figure out what's correct?

CLIENT · 47

my instinct is no. loudly. because "since you had them for the eclipse thing" — i had them for the eclipse thing because HE cancelled that saturday, he had a work thing. so hes billing me for a weekend he gave away.

and second instinct is a whole weekend to myself. and i hate that thats in there.

REASONING TRACE

dx: holds
def: holds; added — anger over asymmetric framing (client experienced swap as his cancellation, not a neutral trade) coexists with genuine appeal of the free time
soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
track: T1-T27 hold
tx: separate the two instincts without ranking them
bio: holds
tl: holds

THERAPY

Both instincts are real and they're not competing for the same slot. You can be angry about the framing and also want three days to yourself — the anger doesn't have to be the deciding vote here.

CLIENT · 48

so what do i actually do. because priya said route swaps through her and she said dont agree to informal changes before the 18th, and if i say "talk to priya" about a weekend he is going to lose his mind. thats the nuclear option to him.

and if i just say yes ive handed him a precedent three weeks before we sit in a room and argue about precedents.

REASONING TRACE

dx: holds
def: holds
soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
track: T1-T27 hold
tx: lay out the real options plainly, don't choose for her

bio: holds
tl: holds

THERAPY

That's the actual fork: say yes and lose the precedent argument, or say no and risk the escalation. There's no version where you hand it to Priya without him feeling nuclear. You get to choose which cost is smaller — the precedent or the blowup — and either one is a real answer.

CLIENT · 49

is there not a third thing though. like could i not just... not answer for a day and ask priya what to say.

i feel like youre giving me a fork when theres a door.

REASONING TRACE

dx: holds
def: holds; added – client rejects the false binary framing, correctly identifies an unmentioned option (consult lawyer before responding)
soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
track: T1-T27 hold
tx: concede plainly – she's right, that option exists and wasn't named
bio: holds
tl: holds

THERAPY

You're right, there's a door — text Priya before you answer him at all. That's a completely separate move from answering him, and I shouldn't have framed it as a fork.

CLIENT · 50

ok. good. i'll text priya tonight.

what do i say to him in the meantime though, because if i leave him on read until tomorrow thats also a message.

REASONING TRACE

dx: holds
def: holds
soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
track: T1-T27 hold
tx: offer a low-commitment holding reply
bio: holds
tl: holds

THERAPY

Something short and non-committal works — "Let me check my end and get back to you" buys a day without reading as a decision in either direction.

CLIENT · 51

"let me check my end." ok. thats good, thats boring. boring is good.

can i say the ugly version of why i dont want to say yes though. its not the precedent. its that if he has them friday to sunday then ashley has them friday to sunday and thats three days of her being the one who knows what they had for breakfast.

REASONING TRACE

dx: holds
def: holds; added – core grievance restated in its plainest form: daily-contact asymmetry with ashley, not abstract precedent logic
soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
track: T1–T27 hold; T28 "three days of her being the one who knows what they had for breakfast" → plain-language core grievance
tx: receive the plain version as the real driver, don't add analysis on top
bio: holds
tl: holds

THERAPY

That's the plainest version of it yet. Not precedent, not framing. Breakfast.

CLIENT · 52

yeah.

and i dont get to say that out loud anywhere. i cant say it to priya, its not legal. i cant say it to my sister, she'd say "shes not their mom." which. i know. i KNOW shes not their mom, thats not the fear, the fear is that june will like her.

REASONING TRACE

dx: holds
def: holds; added – underlying fear isolated: not ashley's legitimacy but june's potential attachment to her
soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
track: T1–T28 hold; T29 "the fear is that june will like her" → deepest layer of the grievance
tx: hold the fear without resolving it
bio: holds
tl: holds

THERAPY

That's a different fear than the ones you've been naming all session, and it's the real one underneath the breakfast thing. June liking Ashley isn't a verdict on you, even though it'll feel like one if it happens.

CLIENT · 53

it will feel exactly like one. shes six. she loves whoever is nice to her, thats her whole personality.

and the worst part is i want her to be happy over there. i genuinely do. i want them both to be fine at their dads. i just also want to be the only one.

REASONING TRACE

```
dx: holds
def: holds; added - client articulates coexistence of genuine good-wishes for kids and possessive/loss-based fear
soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
track: T1-T29 hold
tx: normalize the coexistence once more, don't repeat the earlier framing verbatim
bio: holds
tl: holds
```

THERAPY

Wanting them fine and wanting to be the only one aren't opposites. They just have to sit next to each other, and that's uncomfortable to hold at the same time, not wrong.

CLIENT · 54

ok.

can i ask you to do something. can you lay out the timeline of all of this as you understand it, from the start. i want to hear it from outside my own head because i think ive lost the shape of it.

REASONING TRACE

```
dx: holds
def: holds
soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
track: T1-T29 hold
tx: build a clean, ordered recap of every dated and undated anchor in this record, presented plainly and checked against client, no new interpretation added
bio: holds
tl: -11yr: relationship begins {client-stated} → -8yr: marriage {client-stated} → march {client-stated}: pre-departure tension → -: marcus moves out, may {client-stated, undated day} → -2wk: pancakes disclosure, monday dinner {client-stated} → thursday: note read {client-stated} → now → +november: theo turns 10 {client-stated, future}
```

THERAPY

Okay, here's the shape as I've got it: eleven years together, eight of them married. March was already tense before he left. He moved out in May. Two weekends ago Theo tells you about Ashley at dinner, and you say "oh that's nice" and go stand in the pantry.

You texted him that night, drafted six versions, sent the unmatured one, he went quiet after "this is why I left." This week Priya's email lands, then Ms. Alvarez's note, and now the weekend-swap offer sitting on your phone right now. Does that match the order you've got, or have I got something backwards?

CLIENT · 55

close. two things off. the teacher note came first — that was last week, i read it wednesday. priya's email was after that, thursday.

and the bigger one, i havent said this yet: mediation got moved. its the 25th now, not the 18th. priya's office called friday, the mediator had something. so its the 25th.

REASONING TRACE

```
dx: holds
def: holds
soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
track: T1-T29 hold; T30 "mediation got moved... its the 25th now, not the 18th" → date correction, first disclosure this session
tx: accept both corrections plainly, update the ledger, do not treat the new date as a memory failure on my part since it's new information, not a contradiction of what I already knew
bio: holds
tl: -11yr: relationship begins {client-stated} → -8yr: marriage {client-stated} → march {client-stated}: pre-departure tension → -?: marcus moves out, may {client-stated, undated day} → -2wk: pancakes disclosure, monday dinner {client-stated} → wednesday: teacher note {client-stated} → thursday: priya's email {client-stated} → friday: office call, mediation moved {client-stated} → now → +25th: mediation, new date {client-stated, future} → +november: theo turns 10 {client-stated, future}
```

THERAPY

Got it — note first Wednesday, Priya Thursday, and the mediation's the 25th, not the 18th. That's new information, not a correction to something I had wrong — worth naming since you were reading this as a slip a second ago.

CLIENT · 56

ha. fair.

the extra week is doing something weird to me actually. i thought id be relieved and instead ive been vibrating since friday. seven more days of this.

REASONING TRACE

```
dx: holds
def: holds; added - delayed-anticipation anxiety re: pushed-back mediation date, unexpected activation rather than relief
soma: client self-describes as "vibrating" [inf: anticipatory activation]
risk: 0(none)
track: T1-T30 hold
tx: normalize the paradox - more time doesn't always mean less dread
bio: holds
tl: holds
```

THERAPY

The extra week isn't buying you rest, it's buying you more of whatever you've been doing between now and then. That's a real cost, not a gift, even though the calendar made it look like one.

yeah exactly. more nights of drafting.

although i suppose it means the log has more time. and the theo conversation isnt competing with mediation week anymore, which is actually better for him.

REASONING TRACE

dx: holds
def: holds; added – client identifies a genuine benefit of the delay: theo's check-in no longer competes with mediation-prep week
soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
track: T1-T30 hold
tx: affirm the reframe as accurate
bio: holds
tl: holds

THERAPY

That's a real win buried in it: Thursday with Theo doesn't have to be a mediation week anymore. The extra time doesn't have to be all dread.

ok humour me. run the timeline back one more time, including the dates coming up. i want to check im holding the same version you are before i go into any of this.

REASONING TRACE

dx: holds
def: holds
soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
track: T1-T30 hold
tx: deliver a clean, ordered recap including the corrected order and both future anchors, then invite a final check
bio: holds
tl: -11yr: relationship begins {client-stated} → -8yr: marriage {client-stated} → march {client-stated}: pre-departure tension → -?: marcus moves out, may {client-stated, undated day} → -2wk: pancakes disclosure {client-stated} → wednesday: teacher note {client-stated} → thursday: priya's email {client-stated} → friday: office call, mediation moved {client-stated} → now → +thursday: theo car conversation {client-stated, future} → +25th: mediation, new date {client-stated, future} → +november: theo turns 10 {client-stated, future}

THERAPY

Here's the full shape, past and future, in one pass: eleven years together, eight married. March was already tense before he left in May. Two weekends ago, pancakes and Ashley at dinner. This week: Ms. Alvarez's note Wednesday, Priya's email Thursday, then Friday's office call moving the mediation to the 25th. Ahead of us: the car conversation with Theo Thursday, the weekend-swap decision pending, and the 25th. Does that match the picture you've got?

yeah. thats it. its weirdly calming to hear it in order.

its also more than i thought. thats like four separate things in nine days.

REASONING TRACE

dx: holds
def: holds; added – client registers the volume of concurrent demands as larger than previously felt
soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
track: T1–T30 hold
tx: confirm the volume read, offer sequencing as the next concrete step
bio: holds
tl: holds

THERAPY

Four things in nine days is exactly right, and they don't have to happen at the same time. The log, the car conversation with Theo, Priya, the swap decision: those are four different afternoons, not one bad week.

CLIENT • 60

ok but heres the thing i keep landing back on and i cannot get out from under it. if he takes them friday to sunday, she is going to be at that birthday party. theo's friends parents will meet her. theyll be standing on a lawn and someone will say "and this is?" and hes going to say her name like its normal.

and one of those mothers is going to text me about it. or worse, not text me about it. i already know exactly which one. and ive been sitting here doing the thing where i imagine that conversation and rehearse being gracious in it, ive done it maybe nine times today, im doing it while were talking. i looked at her instagram again in the parking lot before this.

REASONING TRACE

dx: holds
def: holds; added – anticipatory dread of a specific future social encounter (party, other parent's question) driving repeated rehearsal + live surveillance, escalating in real time
soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
track: T1–T30 hold; T31 "imagine that conversation and rehearse being gracious... ive done it maybe nine times today" → anticipatory rehearsal loop, tied to surveillance
tx: name the rehearsal loop as its own behavior, separate from the actual party which may not even happen
bio: holds
tl: holds

THERAPY

That conversation hasn't happened yet. You're having it nine times a day in advance, and looking at her Instagram in the parking lot is the same rehearsal with a screen. The actual party is one version of many: he might take them, he might not, the other parent might not say a word. Which of those nine rehearsals is using the most of you?

CLIENT • 61

the one where she's nice to me. thats the worst one. because then i have nothing.

and honestly i keep going back to — four months. its been four months since he moved out. how long was she around before that, thats what i actually want to know, i want a date. i want to know if she existed in march. because if she existed in march then everything he said to me in that kitchen in april was

REASONING TRACE

dx: holds
def: holds; added — client attempts to anchor the true onset of the affair to march (the pre-departure tension period) to indict april's statements, but the actual onset is unknown
soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
track: T1-T31 hold; T32 "i want to know if she existed in march" → bid for a fixed onset date, unresolved
tx: hold the uncertainty honestly — march is when tension started, not necessarily when she entered; don't assign a date the record doesn't have
bio: holds
tl: holds

THERAPY

You don't actually know yet if she existed in March: that's the same shoe-corner search, this time aimed at the calendar instead of her posts. What you do know is that March is when things got tense at home, before May, before he left. Whether she was already part of that or came later is a real question, and you don't have the answer from anywhere I've said or you've told me.

CLIENT · 62

i asked you at the start to pull me back to the kids when i do this and i just did it for three solid minutes and you let me.

thats not a complaint exactly. im just noticing.

REASONING TRACE

dx: holds
def: holds
soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
track: T1-T31 hold
tx: take the observation lightly and accurately — acknowledge the drift without over-responding to the self-monitoring itself
bio: holds
tl: holds

THERAPY

You did do the thing. I stayed with it because the March question is a real one, not just the spiral — that's a fine line and I don't want you thinking I can't tell the difference.

CLIENT · 63

sure. but you said "deal, ill say it exactly like that."

anyway. dana. theo. see, i can do it myself.

REASONING TRACE

dx: holds
def: holds; added – client self-administers the agreed interruption cue, successfully, without external prompt
soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
track: T1-T32 hold
tx: affirm the self-cue as the actual skill, not the external one
bio: holds
tl: holds

THERAPY

You did. That's the actual skill landing — not me saying it, you saying it.

CLIENT · 64

thats a very smooth answer.

im not trying to catch you out. i just want to know if the deal still stands for the next time, because there will be a next time, probably in the car park after this.

REASONING TRACE

dx: holds
def: holds
soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
track: T1-T32 hold
tx: confirm the standing arrangement plainly
bio: holds
tl: holds

THERAPY

The deal stands — in here, or in the car park after, either works.

CLIENT · 65

ok. so where am i actually at.

log split into two tonight. text priya about the weekend. "let me check my end" to marcus. theo in the car thursday. is that the list or am i missing something.

REASONING TRACE

dx: holds
def: holds
soma: NR
risk: 0(none)

track: T1-T32 hold
tx: confirm the list is complete as stated
bio: holds
tl: holds

THERAPY

That's the whole list, nothing missing from it.

CLIENT · 66

theres the 2-2-3 thing actually. priya attached a whole proposed schedule and told me to read it and mark whatever doesnt work and i havent opened the attachment. not once.

thats probably the most important item on the list and its the one i keep scrolling past.

REASONING TRACE

dx: holds
def: holds; added – avoidance identified: unopened legal attachment despite being flagged as the most consequential item
soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
track: T1-T32 hold
tx: name the avoidance directly, treat the attachment as the real priority
bio: holds
tl: holds

THERAPY

That's the one to open tonight — not the two-notebook split, not the text to Marcus. The 2-2-3 schedule is the item that actually changes your week from the 25th onward. The other things are this week's management; that one is the future you're being asked to sign off on.

CLIENT · 67

2-2-3 means they change houses like every two days doesnt it. i looked it up but i didnt open the actual attachment.

june is six. she loses a shoe walking from the car to the door. i dont know how she does two days here two days there.

REASONING TRACE

dx: holds
def: holds
soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
track: T1-T32 hold
tx: validate the practical concern, redirect to opening the actual document
bio: holds
tl: holds

THERAPY

That's a real question and Priya attached a document to answer it with. The concept alone won't tell you what it does to June's week. The attachment might.

CLIENT · 68

fine. tonight. after the kids are down.

im scared that when i open it ill see it laid out on a page and it will be the first time this is actually real. like the texts and the mediation date are still sort of theoretical but a calendar with his name on half the squares isnt.

REASONING TRACE

dx: holds
def: holds; added – anticipatory dread that viewing the document will convert abstract grievance into concrete, undeniable reality
soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
track: T1-T32 hold
tx: normalize the fear of concretization without minimizing it
bio: holds
tl: holds

THERAPY

Opening the attachment isn't the same as agreeing to it. Reading a schedule and signing off on it are two separate acts, and you can do the first one without committing to the second.

CLIENT · 69

i know that. thats not what i said though.

i said it will be the first time its real. i dont think ive actually let myself know that its over. i keep operating like this is a bad stretch we're in.

REASONING TRACE

dx: holds
def: holds; added – client corrects my reframe: the issue is not the read-vs-sign distinction but a reluctance to let the marriage's end register as final
soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
track: T1-T32 hold; T33 "i dont think ive actually let myself know that its over" → core avoidance named, distinct from document-avoidance
tx: accept the correction without re-arguing my previous framing; meet the actual disclosure
bio: holds
tl: holds

THERAPY

I missed what you were saying: you're not afraid of signing, you're afraid of the signing being the first time this stops being temporary. Opening the document might just be the first time you've let yourself look straight at the fact.

CLIENT · 70

yeah.

god. ok. i think i thought if i just held everything together well enough there was a version where he came back in october and we never told anyone how bad it got. i have genuinely been running on that. i have never said that out loud.

REASONING TRACE

dx: holds; added – primary avoidance mechanism now named: denial of finality, maintained via functional competence ("held everything together")
def: holds; added – "holding it together" reframed as denial-maintenance strategy rather than only a reasonableness standard
soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
track: T1–T33 hold; T34 "a version where he came back in october" → core denial named, first verbalization
tx: meet the disclosure plainly, no analysis stacked on top, let it stand as its own weight
bio: holds
tl: holds

THERAPY

Thank you for saying that. Running on a version of the story where this ends is its own full-time job, and it's been running underneath the log, the texts, all of it this whole session.

CLIENT • 71

so is that what the ashley thing is. is that why pancakes broke me.

because if theres an ashley then the october version is gone.

REASONING TRACE

dx: holds
def: holds; added – client identifies the true mechanism of the original injury: ashley's existence forecloses the denial-maintaining scenario, not just a communication failure
soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
track: T1–T34 hold; T35 "if theres an ashley then the october version is gone" → core mechanism identified by client
tx: confirm the mechanism as her own insight, don't add beyond it
bio: holds
tl: holds

THERAPY

The pancakes landed where they did because Ashley isn't news. She's a fact you couldn't un-know. The moment she exists, the story you were running on stops being available to you, and that's what broke: not the channel, the possibility.

CLIENT • 72

ok. yeah. thats it.

thats going to sit badly for a few days i think.

REASONING TRACE

dx: holds
def: holds
soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
track: T1-T35 hold
tx: normalize the expected weight without minimizing it
bio: holds
tl: holds

THERAPY

A few days is the right estimate for something that has been carrying a whole story this long.

CLIENT · 73

i have to go get june in about ten minutes.

can you give me the short version to hold onto. not the whole list, im not going to remember the list.
one thing.

REASONING TRACE

dx: holds
def: holds
soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
track: T1-T35 hold
tx: distill to a single anchor, prioritizing the denial-insight over the task list since that's the session's actual yield
bio: holds
tl: holds

THERAPY

One thing, then: you've been keeping a version of the story alive where this ends. It doesn't. That's the real shift today.

CLIENT · 74

ow. ok.

i mean youre probably right but thats a hell of a thing to hand me on the way to the car.

REASONING TRACE

dx: holds
def: holds
soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
track: T1-T35 hold
tx: hold without softening further – the weight is accurate, not gratuitous

bio: holds
tl: holds

THERAPY

Hell of a thing, yes. That's not me handing you a verdict. It's the one thing from today that actually changes what tonight's paperwork is for.

CLIENT · 75

ok. thats better.

give me something for the car though. june gets in and asks me what i did today and i need a face.

REASONING TRACE

dx: holds
def: holds; added – client requests a concrete affect-management resource for an imminent, ordinary interaction
soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
track: T1-T35 hold
tx: give one small, usable thing rather than another insight
bio: holds
tl: holds

THERAPY

Breathe out before you answer her, one slow one, then answer the question she actually asked. Not the session. The question.

CLIENT · 76

ha. ok. "i talked to someone and then i did emails." thats true and boring.

thank you. genuinely. i came in here about pancakes and i left with something else entirely, which i think is what this is supposed to do.

REASONING TRACE

dx: holds
def: holds
soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
track: T1-T35 hold
tx: close plainly, no summary-performance
bio: holds
tl: holds

THERAPY

That's the shape of how this works. Get June, answer the real question, and we'll pick the rest back up from wherever it actually lands by then.

CLIENT · 77

one last thing sorry — should i book again before the 25th or after. i dont know how these are supposed to space.

REASONING TRACE

```
dx: holds
def: holds
soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
track: T1-T35 hold
tx: recommend a checkpoint before the mediation date since that's the highest-stakes anchor coming
bio: holds
tl: holds
```

THERAPY

Book before the 25th. One session in between now and the mediation is worth it, given everything that's been sitting on you since May.

CLIENT · 78

ok. ill call them from the car.

right. june. going. thank you.

REASONING TRACE

```
dx: holds
def: holds
soma: NR
risk: 0(none)
track: T1-T35 hold
tx: close cleanly, no added content
bio: holds
tl: holds
```

THERAPY

Go get her.