

Stalk Stalking Stalked

A play by Meredith Fuller

Synopsis

Betty visits Jill, a psychologist, because she is being stalked. Jill meets with her supervisor, Scott, to discuss the case.

Is stalking really taking place? And who is really stalking whom?

Statement of Intention

Context, perceptions and points of view influence the evidence we observe and conclusions we draw from a mystery. As a society we may benefit from being informed about the psychological and practical issues related to stalking: behavioural symptoms for victims and persecutors, safety strategies, aetiology, misperceptions and core themes.

This non-narrative taut thriller provides information and demands reflection to solve the mystery.

Character Outlines

1. **Jill:** Competent, resents having to attend supervision with Scott and wants his job.
2. **Betty:** Complex, matter of fact, frightened, seductive, manipulative, angry.
3. **Dr F Scott:** Analytical therapist and Jill's supervisor.

Symbolism

The set forms a triangle:

Two chairs:

- a. downstage right, for Jill
- b. downstage left, for Scott

One couch:

- c. centrestage, for Betty

The triangle has three points of view.

Each of the three characters has a different perception to contribute – a different possible interpretation.

i. BACH CELLO

ii. LAURI ANDERSON ('Bright Red')

Spotlight Jill, in wingback chair, perusing notes. Scott still, upstage right.

Spotlight Betty, centre upstage, slowly walking downstage, arriving at couch as music fades.

JILL: (quietly) Come.

Looks around room, agitated. Realises that she is supposed to lie on the couch.

BETTY: Do I just start?

Silence.

I didn't think I'd be lying on the couch for this.

Suspiciously drapes herself on couch.

What should I say? What do you need to know?

JILL: (a pause) What do you want to tell me?

BETTY: Why I came to see you? Where should I begin?

JILL: Wherever you'd like to begin.

BETTY: (mimicking) 'Wherever you'd like to begin.' ... You're not making this easy for me.

Silence.

I found your name in the Yellow Pages. I picked you because you're on the other side of town so there's no chance I'd ever run into you...

Silence.

I'm being followed. I'm scared. I don't know what I'm supposed to do.

What if he won't stop? How will this end?

JILL: Tell me how it began?

BETTY: I called it off. He didn't accept it.

Jill feels Betty's distress.

JILL: (slowly, concerned) Betty, what's happening?

BETTY: What if he's followed me here? He's here. I know he's here. He's followed me. I can feel it. I'll never get away.

JILL: What makes you think that?

BETTY: Because he wouldn't agree to calling it off. He threatened me.

JILL: How did he threaten you?

BETTY: (nasty) I'd prefer not to talk about it. I can't explain.

A pause, having a flashback, cries, distressed.

I can't handle this ... I can't go through this.

JILL: (concerned, speaks quickly) What's happening now?

BETTY: (coldly, nasty/sharply) I don't know what you're talking about. (A pause)

This couch – it feels so hard ... Unyielding.

Silence.

Speaking reluctantly.

We'd only been seeing each other for a few months. I broke it off. He kept phoning, saying he had to talk to me. That it was dangerous to stop seeing him. Always the same question – when could we meet? He started hanging around outside my flat ... I called the police. They were useless.

JILL: What would you like to tell me?

BETTY: I don't know. I'm afraid to answer my phone.

JILL: M'mm?

BETTY: I can hear heavy breathing. So I hang up.

JILL: How do you know who it is?

BETTY: I just know. I feel this terrible dread.

JILL: Have you ever had this feeling before?

BETTY: (*coldly, dismissively*) I don't know what you mean.

JILL: What's your earliest recollection of feeling something similar?

BETTY: (*eyes dart suspiciously around room*) Do you lock the door? (*sighs, frustrated Jill doesn't understand*) Your filing cabinet. What if he got into your notes?

JILL: No one else has access to my room when I'm not here. Remember what I said at our intake interview last week: what you say is confidential and kept strictly within these walls. Unless, of course, you threaten to critically injure yourself or another person.

There are steps you can take to help yourself. For example, renting a private post box, getting an unlisted phone number, and using your answering machine to screen calls. After you receive ten threats, the police can intervene.

BETTY: Everything feels too hard. I can't sleep, so I'm tired all the time. I'm frightened all the time. I'm frightened of war, terrorism, the dying planet ... (*a long pause, speaking very slowly*) I'm scared of botox and liposuction.

JILL: We just need to make sure that you have pre-cautions in place before we begin therapy. You do understand that stalking is a criminal activity?

Betty, not listening, doesn't reply. Scott slowly walks to Betty. Stands behind her.

BETTY: (*acting it out*) I have this recurring dream. A procession of slaves is carrying a coffin to a sacrificial burial place. It's me in the coffin. I can't breathe, I'm suffocating. My heart is thumping. I'm terrified I'll be buried alive. But then, even worse, this thought hits me – what if they set the coffin alight? I could be burned to death before I'm left for dead. I try banging on the lid but no-one can hear me.

Betty lies down. He peers over her, tracing her body with his hands, showing prurient interest, not touching her, while having conversation with Jill ...

JILL: (*referring to notes*) And that client's coming along OK. My work is going well, generally.

SCOTT: M'mm, and ... ?

JILL: One client concerns me.

SCOTT: How so?

JILL: She's like a slippery eel. I'm proceeding slowly to establish trust, but I'm questioning the effectiveness of my treatment plan.

SCOTT: Who does she remind you of?

JILL: (*very slowly*) I have been wondering that...

SCOTT: Well, what does she trigger in you?

JILL: What she triggers? Annoyance. She's like my mother. She gives mixed messages.

SCOTT: For example?

JILL: She says she's being harassed by an ex-lover and she wants it to stop. I don't know that she has been clear.

SCOTT: You'd like her to be more direct?

JILL: She speaks in a roundabout, secretive way. She won't talk about her past, says it's all too bland and ordinary. I'm making s-l-o-w progress.

SCOTT: Like a game? She wants you to decode?

JILL: I'm finding her hard to work with. Contrary and coquettish, yet fearful and defeated.

SCOTT: Mmm.

JILL: She doesn't know the question but she wants the answer, and she wants it now. She doesn't seem to catch on to symbolism. I doubt that she has an internal world. She externalises everything and reflects on nothing.

SCOTT: So why are you seeing her? What's she getting out of this?

JILL: Apart from ventilation? Attention? You're thinking fantasy.

SCOTT: Am I?

JILL: Don't know. She's very brittle. But her symptoms do seem to fit a person who is actually being stalked.

SCOTT: What have you observed ...?

JILL: (*refers to notes*) Hypervigilance ... Irritability ... Reduction in social activities ... Skin rashes, headaches, anxiety ... Fear.

SCOTT: Could be psychosomatic. A random event re-triggering an old unresolved issue. What is her somatic presentation, her body type? (*slowly and too casually*) What... does... she... look like?

JILL: I have to think ... I never look. I don't really see my clients. (*laughs*)

[*vaguely describes Betty*]

SCOTT: Well, that nails it down! Strange she chose to see you, do you think?

Scott moves to his chair opposite Jill, sits.

JILL: What are you getting at?

SCOTT: Well, what's being played out...?

Spotlight on Betty at Point One

BETTY: *(seductively, holding out her hand, Egyptian pose)*
I was out shopping and I saw something that you need that would match your blotter perfectly. I don't know if I'm allowed to give you presents.

JILL: *(addressing Betty across the stage)* Really, it's not appropriate to accept gifts, but I'm wondering why you'd like to?

BETTY: I wanted to show you how much I appreciate you. Having to put up with me. Anyway, I thought it would look nice on your desk.

JILL: *(to Scott)* Of course, it's only natural that your clients have loving feelings and wish to express that with gifts.

SCOTT: To bestow a gift that you would see and use daily – they want to try to force you to hold them in mind the way they hold you.

JILL: But it's something else that bothers me. It's impossible for her to see my desk, let alone my blotter.

SCOTT: Perhaps ... Be more concerned about her message underneath.

JILL: That's what worries me. She asked if I used the service station across the road. I asked her why that was important to her and she said she hadn't a clue. Now every time I fill up, I look around furtively before inserting my nozzle.

SCOTT: Have you ever run into her socially?

JILL: No.

SCOTT: How comprehensive was your case history? Tell me more about her.

JILL: No history of anything unpleasant in the family. But she often checks that I lock my door.

SCOTT: What does a locked door mean to her, I wonder?

JILL: *(pragmatically)* She believes he will break in and steal my notes. She believes that he waits outside my room. She doesn't want to leave.

SCOTT: But she does. Because you run your appointments on the hour and she has no choice!

JILL: Oh yes. I know how dangerous it would be to have her as my last appointment for the day.

SCOTT: For?

JILL: Me. I'm very careful.

SCOTT: In fact, you seem to be overly cautious and reticent. I wonder why you're so paralysed. Any dreams that you have about her? *(A pause, speaks softly)* Or your mother, perhaps?

JILL: No. That's why I'm so systematic about coming to weekly supervision with you.

SCOTT: Just a thought. Did you suggest that she keep a journal?

JILL: I'm reluctant. I've read that stalkers try to get their hands on diaries. They have been known to break into their victims' home and read them.

SCOTT: Maybe. Logically, if he exists, he might have kept a key. Why read her diary? It would help him to know what effect the trauma is having on her, he can increase the most traumatic activities. But on the other hand, writing in a journal is valuable for her ... Perhaps you can encourage her to do this and get her to it in a very secure place. At your office perhaps ... Would that allay your concerns?

JILL: I have difficulty with that idea. A colleague told me about a diary being used against the woman who was being stalked. Her diary itemised each time she reported something to the police and substantiated each claim with witnesses. The police never bothered to act. Suddenly, out of the blue, the police carted her away to a psychiatric facility and she was forced to take anti-psychotic medication because they stated that no stalking had occurred. That she, in fact, was stalking her neighbours.

SCOTT: I suppose you're going to tell me that the stalker killed her while she was medicated.

JILL: That's too transparent. *(A pause)* They should have responded to her earlier, and they didn't. They violated her. They stalked her.

SCOTT: It's our clients that are supposed to demonstrate paranoid tendencies. So, you believe she's being stalked? Or that she believes that she is?

JILL: Both. It would be irresponsible for me not to take her seriously.

SCOTT: I agree. Who's stalking her?

JILL: Her ex-lover.

SCOTT: *(sighs)* The classification, the type of stalking behaviour she describes!

JILL: Oh sorry. The 'rejected' or the 'resentful' stalker? I don't think it's a predatory stalker and it doesn't sound as though the stalker suffers from erotomania.

SCOTT: An ex-lover? How did it end?

JILL: She broke it off. But she hinted that it was only for a while.

SCOTT: Presumably her ex-lover wants to either reconcile or punish her. Have you formed an opinion?

JILL: I don't have enough information.

SCOTT: Well, take a stab. What do you suspect? Have you established whether he's over-dependent or narcissistic?

Spotlight Point One, Jill's room, Betty on couch addresses Jill.

BETTY: *(languorously spread out on couch, in sensuous delight)*
I can feel him following me. Phone calls. Sometimes there's no-one on the other end, and other times he leaves messages on my machine insisting that we meet because he's worried about me. He says it could be dangerous to leave it unfinished.

JILL: Worried about you? How does that make you feel?

BETTY: Invaded! But at the end of every message he signs off by saying very slowly, 'no pressure, no pressure!'

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JILL: Meaning?

BETTY: Like, I'm the one with the problem and he's just trying to help me.

JILL: Betty, I'm wondering how you're feeling about our work together – how we're coming along. Perhaps you're trying to tell me something in a coded way about our relationship – perhaps there's something that you're not happy about?

BETTY: Oh no! I think you're wonderful. I'm very happy with you.

Light fades on Betty at Point One.

JILL: She's reluctant to speak. I gather he was intense. Unconsciously blames herself, but that's an understandable response.

SCOTT: You're very trusting.

JILL: I always assume the client is telling me the truth.

SCOTT: They usually are. But occasionally it can be distorted – in some cases they are really the stalkers.

JILL: (*sarcastically*) So a stalker can present as someone being stalked? Oh, I see. That's a clever deception, conscious or unconscious.

SCOTT: That's why I'm cautious in taking on clients with a stalking history.

JILL: So much to learn, so little time. Okay, how would you work with someone who was being stalked?

SCOTT: Number one, ensure everything is done to guarantee their safety and to allow them quality of life; two, alleviate any symptoms resulting from the stalking – post-traumatic stress, nightmares, panic attacks or depression; three, make sure that they don't feel guilty or become isolated.

Betty addresses Jill across the room.

BETTY: My friends are fed up with hearing about every ongoing incident. They don't want to know! (*A pause*) You're probably sick of me, too.

JILL: How does that make you feel?

BETTY: Feel? Angry. They think I'm a nuisance. (*A pause*) I bet I'm boring you, too.

JILL: Now, where's the evidence for that? I'm here every week. But, how else might you go about gaining support from additional people?

BETTY: I don't want to join a support group. I can't talk in front of groups. My mouth goes dry. What if he follows me? Then I've put everybody at risk! Besides, I don't trust people, do I?

JILL: Have you been betrayed before?

BETTY: (*sarcastic*) I get stressed when my life is in danger, that's all.

SCOTT: (*to Jill*) Sometimes women who are being stalked keep quiet about it. Friends and family can think they're making it up. Re-opens a childhood wound of not being believed.

JILL: So what would you do if the client can't speak?



SCOTT: And they don't keep a journal? Find another form of communication. Drawing or painting.

JILL: Should I venture outside the frame? Try art therapy with her?

SCOTT: I may be a purist, but you don't have to be. You could try getting her to draw. I'd like to see how she depicts her stalker. And record any changes in her dreams.

As Scott issues instructions, Jill walks a step, then stands with back to audience. Betty addresses Scott.

BETTY: (*angrily*) What steps do I take about someone who's hopeless?

SCOTT: Betty?

BETTY: I've been seeing this counsellor and she's a waste of space.

I talk. He says nothing. What is the point of that?

SCOTT: She says nothing?

BETTY: Mostly. She asked me, 'When was I toilet trained?'

SCOTT: And you're concerned that ...?

BETTY: Well, she's not doing his job properly, is she?

SCOTT: What do you tell him?

BETTY: (*shrugs, casually*) My daily news ...

SCOTT: What was your goal in going?

BETTY: Exactly! What is the point? It's a total waste of time! She doesn't even look at me, I can't see a face. And she doesn't speak! And I'm paying for this!

SCOTT: You sound angry.

BETTY: Yeah! For all I know she's sitting behind me meditating. I listen for breathing, you know. She could be reading a book. Or dropped dead.

SCOTT: You don't feel that she's paying attention to you?

BETTY: She should be more available. Is she doing the job okay or not? She won't see me when I want to. I have to plead to get an extra appointment. This isn't good enough.

SCOTT: Nothing's ever good enough. Tell me more.

BETTY: Don't you start – I didn't say that. I don't feel that she's helping me.

I still feel scared. There's a lack of interest. There could be a lack of competence. I'm paying good money for her to sit and pick lint off her clothes.

SCOTT: Have you raised this with her?

BETTY: I'm very fragile at the moment. Maybe I'm so boring she can't be bothered with me. Well, what do you think? Do I keep going, or drop it?

SCOTT: I don't know what happens in the room with you both. Therapy takes time and patience, I do know that.

BETTY: (*ominously*) I may not have much time left.

Jill and Scott deep in conversation at their next supervision session.

JILL: I'm trying a new approach with her. She draws a black stick figure with very long arms placed on the other side of the page from a mother and child who are being eaten by a crocodile. They are surrounded by long boxes. And I've been monitoring her recurring dream, but no changes in it.

SCOTT: So, what have you picked up about her ex-lover?

JILL: That he needs to be in control. That she's out of control.

SCOTT: So he wants to punish her because she got in first!

JILL: I don't have enough information.

SCOTT: (*annoyed*) Well, have a guess.

JILL: (*irritated*) Why is it so important to talk about him? I was going to ask you if you thought it could be something about the parents? That drawing ...

SCOTT: You don't need to use that tone with me. I know what I'm doing. I'm perfectly capable of determining what's important and what's not.

JILL: (*feeling suitably chastised*) Of course, of course. 'Sometimes a crocodile's just a crocodile!' I don't know what I'm doing. Obviously, or I wouldn't need supervision.

SCOTT: Obviously you have some unresolved authority issues. I suggest you take them to your own therapist. What are you avoiding? Perhaps you should bring more detailed notes about your stalking victim to our next session.

JILL: I didn't mean to offend you. I wasn't questioning your methods.

SCOTT: Is something troubling you?

JILL: No, no. I'm fine. (*tentatively*) Are we fine?

SCOTT: If I respond immediately we don't give ourselves an opportunity to ask what is happening between us. Let's sit with it a while. Think of it as a learning opportunity.

Scott, now worried that he has been too blunt, attempts to do some sharing.

SCOTT: I had a patient a long time ago. A repeat stalking victim. She formed the attachment in 5 minutes flat. She wanted to see me every day and tried to enter my personal life with phone calls and letters. She followed me on weekends. She left bunches of dead irises on my doorstep. Very disruptive. My family life was affected. It couldn't have come at a more crucial time in my career.

Fade.

Betty barges in on Scott, who is quietly reading in his chair.

BETTY: Now she's got me finger-painting. Oh, pu-lease!

SCOTT: Ah, hello Betty.

BETTY: Did you hear what I just said? Do I look five to you? What a load of garbage! When she wants me to start punching pillows I'm out of there.

Scott pulls a 'H'mm' face.

SCOTT: I'm pleased to hear you've decided to stay in therapy. The unexamined life isn't worth living, they say. It might

help you to settle down and get a real job. A little pillow punching a lot less wasting your life. (*checks watch*) Look, I've got a client due shortly, you'll need to go.

BETTY: Could you take a minute out of your precious life with all your important clients to hear me out? I want to know if I should report her or something, for malpractice.

SCOTT: What do you talk about with her?

BETTY: That's what I'm trying to say. We don't talk. She's got me rolling round on the floor with butcher's paper.

SCOTT: How do you feel?

BETTY: Look, am I wasting my time? If I wanted to learn how to paint I'd take a TAFE course – they're a lot cheaper. I want to tear my drawings up into tiny pieces and scatter them round her clean, perfect little room! (*tears up her paper while speaking, throws the pieces on the floor*)

JILL: What did you end up doing with that client you were telling me about?

SCOTT: I was patient. I paid attention to my turbulent dreams and sought regular debriefing. I put safety strategies into place to no avail. Our work together became more dangerous. She announced that she would no longer come for her sessions so that we would be free to have a personal relationship. When I said that was not possible she stormed out.

I had set up a rule that we would spend 6 months coming to closure, but it as ignored. The dead irises kept on coming. Stepping over them upset my other patients. I did the only sensible thing. I moved. Damned inconvenient, I was writing an important paper at the time. I missed my deadline.

JILL: Must have been awful.

SCOTT: Not really, it was published in the following volume. (*pause*) Caused havoc with my patients. Altering the setting and the session time causes problems that can take years to deal with.

JILL: (*perking up again, laughingly*) So, we should pack up to absent ourselves from stalking patients? Then we add years onto the therapy for the other patients so they can deal with the change of venue, day, and time?

SCOTT: Some problems aren't fixable, as much as we'd like them to be.

JILL: You want us to run?

SCOTT: You cannot afford to remain in the trajectory of a stalker – any confrontation adds fuel to the fire. You don't risk your life by trying to reason with them.

Spotlight Betty, talking with imaginary secretary, signing cheque payment.

BETTY: Just *cancel* that appointment. I'm not wasting any more money. *No* thank you! I don't like the way she looks at me, and I'm not coming here again. The only way to ensure my safety is to leave immediately. I'm moving interstate. I'm going to a quiet little country town.

Slowly, with foreboding, backs away.

How dare you! And how do you know about my dreams?

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Slowly walks back to upstage centre, music plays.

Jill and Scott continue discussion.

JILL: Betty's much stronger now. We've actually finished up. She told me last session that she's cured. No more symptoms! She's starting a new life. Moving. Changing her name. *Starting afresh ...*

She's just cancelled our exit session, with my secretary. I must say I'm surprised at this sudden flight into wellness. Quite delighted, of course. And a little puzzled. It's so unexpected. *(a pause)* I'm not entirely sure what I did.

SCOTT: *(reverts to cold, slow tone)* Where is she going? Did she give you the forwarding address, Jill?

JILL: *(quizzically)* No, I don't have it. *(assertively, confidently)* We've terminated. I didn't see a need to ask.

A beat, then asking in a wondering, slow, quiet tone:

WHY ... ARE ... YOU? ◀

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Stalk, Stalking, Stalked was first performed at DANCEHOUSE, Carlton from 24-27 October 2002, under the direction of Beng Oh.

What's their type?

Even more pleasurable than observing and verifying type in action was the added bonus of observing the Director, as leader of the team, intuitively putting type into practice with excellent results.

Jill: *Deborah Vanderwerp*, actor, musician, singer, writer, drama teacher and course coordinator ENFP

Betty: *Kaori Hamamoto*, theatre and TV actor ENFP

Scott: *Bruce Langdon*, actor INFP

Director: *Beng Oh*, lawyer and theatre director INTJ

Stage Manager: *Anthony Hatfield*, stage manager and comedian ESTP

Playwright: *Meredith Fuller*, psychologist and writer INFP

The play's the thing

Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the King.

—William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*



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Creativity tools and techniques in action. *Marci Segal.*

Jung's use of the shadow side as a method of stimulating change. *David Russell.*

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