

The Last One Chartered

by Richard Rewell

They were late. The exam results were late. They were meant to have come Friday. So, there I was shaving and humming loudly so I would not hear the post bursting through the letter box and hitting the carpet. I was too afraid. Afraid of failing the exams. Again. If it was a loud thud on the carpet, I knew I had failed, as such an envelope would be hefty and contain voluminous application forms for the re-sits.

I stepped out of the pokey bathroom that was subtly decorated in peeling white plaster, black mould and a faded avocado bath and padded along the dingy corridor towards the front door of the flat I shared with my two friends. The smell of dampness caressed my nostrils as I saw nothing. No post.

“Bollocks” I said knowing I would have to repeat the torture tomorrow. And I did. And then again on Wednesday. By Thursday I was as jumpy as a kangaroo with a burnt bottom.

“Ring up the RICS. Tell them Colin and I got our results Friday” said Nigel.

“This waiting’s not good Rich. You look like shit” said Colin as my two flatmates dived through the front door. Two freshly qualified chartered surveyors.

I rang my boss to tell him I would be late in, but he was off sick, as was his PA. I rang another colleague who did not answer, so I left a message and then called the Royal Institution’s examinations section. No one answered. It took me thirty attempts. I got through after six hours.

The person at the other end of the line explained they were short staffed, that my results were ready but there was no one around to post them.

“What? That’s crazy. Can you tell me my results?”

“We can’t give results over the phone.”

“You’ve got to. This waiting is agony” I said.

The line went quiet before I heard “Mr Zucker I can’t tell you you passed, if you get my drift.”

“Thank you. And I get your drift. Bless you.”

“Pleasure. I’ll post it. You’re the last one actually. What with being a Z.”

“Of course. But what’s going on there?” I said.

“We’ve been quarantined. The plague.”