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## A Tiny Letter

by Ivor John

The facade still had traces of its Edwardian splendour. The hotel in its time would have provided employment to locals, people who worked as porters, receptionists, waiters. Now the foyer had been converted, with a poorly constructed plasterboard wall into a back office. A mahogany frame with 'Larchwood Hotel' in faded gold lettering, salvaged from another part of the building provided a glass screen, sliding back to allow the office staff, when they were there, to respond to the doorbell crudely mounted to the fibre board counter.

Although always fully occupied, the residents now were not the weekend break people. The financially comfortable retirees, enjoying a break by the seaside. The clientele nowadays were the universal credit claimants, often from Brighton or South London who had no choice but to live here or in similar hotels unless that is, they preferred to be street homeless with the hardships that brought. Others were the abused women, whose behaviour or personality made them unsuitable for refuge accommodation. The dank, poorly lit hallways, the wallpaper still in place from the better days, but peeling and stained, were cluttered with pushchairs and unused childrens' toys.

Room 83 was not the best of the rooms, but neither the worst. The Larchwood was a block back from the seafront, some rooms had a glimpse of the pebbly beach and the waves. But mainly the views were of the residential roads on the outskirts of town, parked cars, rotted out stumps of elm trees, and abandoned mattresses, which people would inexplicably drive here to dump.

I had moved here three months ago. I had been sofa surfing in Brighton, but people get tired of having you there. It had been OK over the summer, a laugh, sleeping on the beach, cider and the brown helping pass the time, endless empty time. I had any amount of time. It hadn't taken long to find Paul.

They say addicts easily spot other users and it is true. I had lost count of how many calls I had made today, 'Hi I'm not about, leave a message'. When I had got through, at last, he had some shit, he'd bring it, he had other punters in the block.

When he arrived an hour or so later, I was clucking. He let me have a £10 bag on credit. He'd add it. He pulled a small ziplock bag with about half a dozen deals out of his back pocket. Each had been carefully folded into neat squares of paper the size of a stamp. I got the works ready, a pin, some citric a lit a tea light and a folded a piece of foil. As I tied a belt round my arm, I watched him unfold the neat little package.

"It looks like your opening a tiny letter," I said.

He laughed, "this is not a letter but my arms about you for a brief moment," he said emptying the brown powder onto the foil.