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Go Your Own Way

by Ivor John

I had been going to see Adrienne for several months now. Every other Tuesday afternoon. It had to be Tuesday as I could get the afternoon off. Neither was it a day when I would have the children. I had missed a couple when something had come up at work. When I had first started, I had been surprised that she saw me in her living room, filled with her personal things. Ornaments which presumably she had chosen, or perhaps her husband had. Although judging by the photographs of him, framed on the walls and on the mantelpiece, playing rugby, holding large fish and in one, being theatrically handed a scroll of parchment. His degree I suppose, I could not picture him choosing terracotta busts or abstractly decorated vases, now filled with flamboyant peonies in vivid reds and pinks. He was an accountant, she had told me. Generally she didn't tell me any personal information. I thought they would probably advise her to claim the cost of flowers against professional expenses.

Adrienne was an attractive woman in her mid forties. I knew this wasn't her only job, I had seen her at the town hall when I had gone there once to pay a parking ticket. On that occasion I remembered she had been more soberly dressed in smart trousers, which went the jacket she was wearing, it had a woven badge of the county coat of arms on the pocket and the scarf in county colours. Whenever I saw her for their appointments she would wear floral print dresses. With her long auburn hair, she reminded me of Stevie Nicks. '...you can go your own way'.

When we had started these sessions, Pauline had asked me to move out of the house. Asked to leave the home we had shared for thirteen years, to leave our two children Joel and Kirsty. She must have already been suspicious, when my phone buzzed during dinner. Schoolboy error, I had turned it to silent, but had forgotten that it was on vibrate. Had we been talking or had the television been on, it would have gone unheard. But eating in silence, even the silent buzzing screamed across the table. She had asked me, as casually as she could, inviting me to offer an innocent explanation for somebody contacting me at this time.

I knew exactly who was texting me but I fell into the trap of making up an explanation, telling her it would be Paul, there had been a problem reconciling some accounts earlier and he was probably still working on them.

“Shouldn’t you call him back?” she asked.

But we both knew who the text had really been from. My reddening face and body language left no doubt. I contemplated calling Paul with a theatrical one-sided conversation, hoping he would play along. But I realised it was hopeless. My performance was only making things worse. I tried to think how I could delete the text, in case Pauline demanded to see it. She didn’t of course. A short while later, I was putting essentials in my sports bag and checking in to the nearby travel lodge.

I had tried to phone Pauline, numerous times, but she had clearly blocked my number. I texted Julie, in reply to her text, to tell her I was unexpectedly free that evening after all. She didn’t reply.

A few days later, I could barely concentrate on anything, I was arguing with everyone at work. Having become acutely aware of the fragility of my mental health and increasing anxiety, I had contacted Adrienne. Her approach to relationship counselling, she explained was ‘holistic’ and drew on Gestalt theory. She explains, as I sat in her lounge, looking at her family photographs ‘Peter, in times of crisis, we must all decide, again, who we love’.