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Doctor Muffett's Recommendation

by Ivor John

Squinting he tried to read the address which he had previously written down on a till receipt during a telephone conversation. He looked at the shabby, glazed door in front of him. 103b Hannover Mansions, picked out in faded gold lettering on the glass. Scratched away in places but, unlike his own writing, at least still legible. He thought his note said 108. The eight, or three, was not very clear. He took a few steps along the road to see that 108 was Paddy Power Bookmakers, he couldn't see a 108b.

The door, squeezed between an estate agent and a charity shop, could easily have been missed. It gave access to some offices on the first and second floors, over the shops. Pushing the door and finding it unlocked he stepped inside the narrow hallway. He had to step to one side to close the door. Stairs rose from the tight hall, a turn at a mezzanine landing preventing a view up to the first floor. Despite the confined space a bank of mailboxes was fixed to the wall. Badly located, he thought, as the open door blocked access to them. A bundle of unsorted letters, held together with blue rubber bands, was laying on the floor. The postman seemingly unwilling to post the letters into the separate slots. The letters had drawn to his attention the stained and fraying beige nylon runner, which continued out of sight up the bend in the stairs.

He saw on one of the mailboxes, spelled out in Dymo tape, Gillingham Counselling and Psychodynamic Therapy. He thought about when he had last seen Dymo tape, he hadn't realised that you could still buy it. He squeezed toward the mailboxes, so that he could open the door, taking a final draw on a cigarette and threw it to the pavement.

On the first floor landing, there was a notice, printed out on A4 paper, fixed to a small, green baize noticeboard with drawing pins. The top corner was torn and creased over. Presumably the pin having been taken by somebody who couldn't be bothered to provide their own. The notice listed the occupants of the offices on the first floor. Alpha Cleaning Services, Kindly Carers, a couple of seemingly empty offices and in room five the counselling service.

He followed the same beige carpet along the dismal hallway. There were no windows or fresh air, the only light provided pendant lights, turned on pushing on a delayed time switch. They would remain on for about ten seconds after which you were returned to the gloom. They were framed by the sort of old fashioned light shades you could see in charity shops. They looked incongruent other than in an old ladies parlour.

He found the door he was looking for, indicated by another printed out notice fixed with blue tack. It told callers to ring a bell, an ordinary front door chime and then take a seat. Two blue plastic stacking chairs were located outside the door. In the narrow hallway

This was not what he had expected when his GP had suggested a list of counsellors who could help. He had been ruminating on mistakes he had felt he had made throughout his life. Poor judgments and people he imagined he had upset. It had been getting worse. He had found himself becoming upset and irritable and more recently been having panic attacks. His GP had prescribed him paroxetine, but suggested that he should consider cognitive behavioural therapy. The waiting list of NHS treatments was months long, which was why he had suggested a private therapist.

The door was answered before he rang the bell, Mr Corbett presumably having heard him walking towards along the hall. He looked surprisingly cheerful, not in keeping with the environment. Inviting him in to take a seat on a comfortable modern comfortable sofa. A glass and a decanter of water on a small table in front of him. Dr Corbett sat on an office chair but turned it into the room, his back to his large office desk. The office was tidy and modern minimalist, a sort of Habitat style. The counsellor introduced himself, as Alan Corbett, and briefly explained his credentials as a psychodynamic counsellor. Above his desk, beside a large sash window was a framed certificate from the Tavistock clinic.

“Do you prefer Mr Gorman? Should I call you Peter or something else? I shouldn’t make assumptions.”

He acknowledged that Peter was fine.

“Thank you Peter, this is a recommended program of ten forty five minute sessions. As you were referred to me by Dr Muffett it will be fifty three pounds a session. payable in advance. I am happy for you to pay for a few at a time. I know it can be quite expensive. During our phone call, you may remember that I asked you to bring with you your current prescription, a list times and dates when you have experienced panic attacks and what was happening for you at the time. I understand that you have had problems sleeping and have been having florid nocturnal thoughts. I asked you to write down any that you could remember. Have you brought your dream diary with you?”