

'Every child is like a blank piece of paper, whereupon every passer-by leaves their mark.'

Ancient Chinese Proverb

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EDITOR'S NOTE

When I first read the manuscript of this book I was intrigued and also enthralled.

I have spent a lifetime studying and following the habits of successful people and, in the process, I have read hundreds of self-help and personal development books, and edited a good few too. This book is simply different from the others I have read!

I liked the concept of having characters in the book, even though it is not a novel – I found them easy to engage with and also found myself relating them to people I knew – myself even.

What I like most is its honesty. Yes, the tips for 'success' are in the book but you have to look for them. So too are the reasons that people 'fail.'

None of these are in your face – you just have to read the book carefully.

What I also liked a lot was the gradual introduction, however subtle, of a gradual leaning of the main character, Guy, towards a more spiritual path and also his realisation that nutrition was all important.

In Russell's words – "If you don't eat and drink well then you will never think or do well."

I hope you get as much out of it as I did, even if that is just to work out who and what are the most important things to you in your life.

Bob Young

DEDICATION

I dedicate this book to the hopes, dreams and expectations that you and I, we, all had as young children.

One thing is for sure – we all get dealt a hand of cards to go through life with and it is how we play that hand of cards that matters most. I marvel most of all at those people who were dealt with a weak hand yet a determination to make the very best of their lives.

I also dedicate this book to any one of you who is not sure of who you really are as a person, not sure what is truly most important to you and not totally sure about what you want out of the rest of your life or how to achieve it.

I hope this book makes you stop and think about those things and, if that is all you take from it, then it will have been worth writing if it causes you to do that.

Russell Webb

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PART ONE

“Reasonable people adapt themselves to the world, whereas unreasonable people adapt the world to themselves. Therefore all progress depends upon unreasonable people”

George Bernard Shaw

SETTING THE SCENE

Why is it that some mornings you wake up feeling like Death warmed up and other mornings you feel positively vibrant? There are probably many answers to that, but it does make you stop and wonder why do Saturdays, Sundays, Bank Holidays and actual holidays feel different to `work' days for most people?

Anyway, this morning I am totally full of beans, which, I have to admit, is not always the case. It is one of those things that tend to go with being bi-polar and one of those things that I have simply learned to live with. Why today more than some other days? Because later today I am packing my rucksack, complete with this with strange thing called a tent, and driving down to middle England to go to an awesome music festival. Because today I am writing this introduction and, before I leave the house, I will press the `go' button and it will be instantly available on Amazon and other places. What I find truly remarkable is that virtually anybody in our virtual existence can write a book and that the whole world can potentially buy it within minutes of its release. You can even read it straightaway if you have a Kindle. And, given some four weeks from now, you will be able to listen to the full version as an audio book; available from our own site and from Audible. It simply does not need to be in a shop anymore.

A lot has changed since Apollo 11 landed on the moon, with far less computing power than the most basic of mobile phones. I wonder what the future will look like for our children?

Actually, it worries me. It worries me because, for all the accessibility to the whole world via Facebook and other social media, we are `unlearning' how to communicate on a face to

face basis. We are losing our social skills and becoming unsociable. And, if there is one thing only that I have learned in my life it would be that human beings need to talk, face to face, and they also need to be listened to – to open up to someone. It is one of the underlying messages of this book. Another underlying message is that – you are not just what and who you think you are. I believe that you are a composite of ‘what you eat, drink, think and do.’ If you don’t eat and drink well then you will never think and do well.

Anyway, back to the plot. Well there is no actual plot in this book. It is not a novel, yet it is written anecdotally and does have characters in it. Most of them are real people whose names I have changed, except for the two Princes – Harry and William, who I met several times socially – upfront and personal. They are real, and, meeting them, however strange the circumstances, was a high point in my life. It made me want to stick two fingers up at all the teachers and other people who said I was worthless and would never make anything of my life. If you are not extremely careful then that is what will happen! It is known as the Pygmalion effect and can easily affect us all.

There is one other person whose name I have not changed. His name is Denis Blacow (deceased). Yet there are still many like him out there and they have to be brought to justice. A similar thing may have happened to you or, worse still, it may happen to one of your own children. Some scars never totally heal!

So, how does this book work and what can you draw out of it and maybe use in some way to make a little bit more of a difference in your own life, and, maybe even better, make a difference in someone else’s life?

Well, you can skim read it and some of it may sink in or you can take your time to read it and engage with the characters, relating them to your own life or people you may know. But let me give you the gist of it. There is a wide range of characters who mostly have three things in common. Firstly, like so many people, they have not been able to work out who they really are, what is most important to them in their lives, and what they want from the rest of their lives. People who are trapped by their inability to make a meaningful decision in their lives and who go through life with their `music' still inside them – whatever that music is.

Secondly, again like many people, possibly you, they believe that everybody around them feels `okay' about their lives and that it is just them who is a bit weird. Thirdly – I will come to that in a second or two.

There is some mainstream psychology in this book and also plenty of applied psychology, personal development, self-help or whatever label you want to stick on it. For that reason I included a glossary of terms at the back. The main difference with this book is that it not only gives you the pointers to being `successful' but, possibly much more importantly, it highlights the many reasons that so many people, having read Anthony Robbins, Stephen Covey et al, never achieve the dream of the promised land they tell you is so easily achievable.

Oh, and yes, my own life is loosely mixed up in here, because that is what nearly every author does with their first book. It is a cathartic experience that I would highly recommend to everyone – even if you never do anything with it. Which leads me on to the third thing that most of us have in common – and I reiterate from earlier - everybody needs someone to whom they can really talk to – somebody they can really open up to and somebody who will just listen, without being judgemental.

Too many people go through their whole lives with their deep inner thoughts still inside them. It need not be that way.

So, if you are reading this book now I am setting off to Lubstock in ten minutes. Lubstock is where the narrative begins. There is one big difference between this year and last year – the fruits of a resolve. This book is one of those fruits – something I made a decision to do. The other one is that I am 62 pounds lighter and have lost my beer belly. It took some doing. It took some willpower. Most importantly though it was the result of making a hard and fast decision and then acting on it.

On a slightly sad note I have to inform you that one of the characters - `Martha', passed away last week. On a much more upbeat note, she at least spent the final years of her life doing something purposeful, finally shook off the shackles of her past and looked forward to waking up in the morning. It is never too late!

"Most people go to their graves with their music still inside them"

Benjamin Disraeli

THE FESTIVAL

Lubstock, England, United Kingdom, July 2011: Somewhere in the leafy green countryside, on a hot and sultry Friday evening.

“What the hell am I doing here?” I asked myself. I did not know a soul, except for Alex and Helen McPhail, who had invited me in the first place, and I felt extremely out of place.

Furthermore, I did not normally `do' camping – five star hotels were more my thing. But then, the cloth needed tailoring according to the available finances. As with so many people, mine had taken a gargantuan dive since the recession and the small matter of a divorce – the legal fees were as bad as the actual settlement.

Anyway, at least it had been a glorious summer's day so far, and it was undoubtedly good to escape from the purgatory of a small rural town and all the negative influences that congregated there. It was no different to the many small rural communities around the country – indeed anywhere. It simply sapped the life out of most aspiration.

Well, it soon became obvious that the other five hundred guests at what turned out to be an amazing boutique festival also did not often `do' camping and that instantly created a kindred spirit in all of us, in a funny kind of way. It was a little like an annual pilgrimage for many of them. It was also quite fun to see that I was not the only person unable to erect a tent.

By Sunday morning, when it was time to pack up and drive back to the sticks, I knew why I had attended the festival. It held everything I missed in my life, great bands, great people to mix with and be inspired by, mental and social stimulation and to set the perfect scene, stunning views stretching from the lake in front of us to the surrounding forests and the lush golden wheat fields behind us. I really did not want to leave and almost had a tear in my eye when I did.

For a few days I had again known normality – sanity. Not that I was abnormal or insane in the first place. Well, no more than the next person, but that is a different story and one that I would like to tell you.

The drive back home set my head racing. I was driving north, back to an empty house and almost everybody else seemed to be driving back down south, mainly to London. That was where I belonged, where I was most happy in my life. Apart from being able to see my four sons occasionally, my few remaining family members and a couple of close friends, this was not the direction in which I wanted to be heading.

It was anathema to me. A golfing friend once described the many provincial backwaters of the English sticks and many of the people who lived there, as ‘the killers of all ambition.’ It was not just the town I currently lived in - it could just as easily have been a small town anywhere in the world, from Australia to the USA. The mentality was simply different!

I could not believe that the next festival, twelve months wait away, was the only exciting event in my life that I had to look forward to, except the sporadic access I had been granted to my sons from my second marriage.

I wondered how I could last another year in the stagnant claustrophobia of the small market town to which I was now heading and in which, for the near future, I would be trapped. I could not. Something simply had to change and that had to start with me.

I thought about my favourite poster from my old London offices – ***'The definition of insanity is doing the same things day in and day out yet expecting different results!'*** How true that was.

I resolved to do many things differently on my journey home and even took a different route back, just to break a pattern of what I saw as normality.

'By this time next year things will look different. I will apply all of the lessons I have learned and change things.' I thought. 'This time next year I will bring my two oldest sons from my second marriage. They will just love the whole thing – so many new and exciting experiences for two adventurous boys of eight and six. It will also give me some real quality time with them. They would just revel in the whole event, as did the other fifty or so kids that had gone this year. It was a real family affair, in more ways than one – just a thoroughly great space to be in.'

I really think that we all need to be in great spaces, both physically, in our heads and in our hearts and in our souls, to enjoy life to our true potential and to find inner contentment. There seem to be one hell of a lot of people who are not!

Lubstock England, United Kingdom, July 2012

It threw it down with rain all the way down the A1. My eldest son drove - on L-plates, which rather added to the fun - if you are an adrenaline junkie. I had upgraded our tickets the day before to three adults, as my middle two sons were not allowed to come after all. All I can say is this - my heart goes out to any parent who does not get to see their children enough, through parental separation, work reasons, whatever. They are only so young once in their lifetimes and we can't turn the clocks back to recapture their youthfulness and free spirits.

Anyway, the theme for the year was 'Mad Dogs and Englishmen'. Well, after the wettest two months since records began you had to be stark raving bonkers, barking mad and have a screw loose to even think about braving any festival in the United Kingdom. But I was not going to miss this for anything. I had even bought a new pop up tent so that I did not have to go through the complexities and potential embarrassment of having to deal with an amateur attempt to put up the wayward tent in the pouring rain. I was a sorry sight last year until a few obliging locals plied me with some strange, homemade alcoholic liquid and aided me with my errant tent.

And then, out of the blue, or, literally, grey, the sun did shine. At least it stayed dry for long enough to get into the spirit of things and this year it was so well organised that even when it did rain again there were plenty of covered areas.

I had learned my lesson the previous year, when I had peaked on Friday and wasted a large part of Saturday asleep and seriously hung over. I went back to my pop up housing before midnight and decided to listen to the remaining bands from there. I found that I needed a little space. I often did. I had since I was a child. I wished that I could have performed some of the songs that I had written in the past – one in particular called 'Hideaway.'

Despite the rain falling quite heavily, it was still a good place to be. Sometimes we all just need a little space to be alone where we can allow our minds to wander and reflect, just as much as we all need someone to talk to now and again. Well, not just talk to - I mean someone to really open our heart to. Of the many things I have learned in my life, one thing had recently become uppermost in my understanding of my fellow human beings - most people seem to go through their lives putting up a front to some degree or other and never letting anyone else know who they really are and what they truly feel inside of them.

For so many different reasons, mainly cultural, we simply tend to keep things to ourselves and portray a different image to the outside world. We see it as a survival mechanism, where, in truth, it is causing havoc with our minds to the point of self-destruction. Yet, to open up to someone also opens up a plethora of potentially scary possibilities – the fear of rejection being just one of them. Instead, many people revert to the time honoured tradition of stoicism - that big boys– or for that matter, girls- don't cry.

I thought to myself that this was an old fashioned and stupid concept. Does anyone, I pondered, ever get to know the real self? Do we talk to each other enough anymore? Did we ever?'

My thoughts moved on. How quickly had a year passed? Too damned quickly! How quickly was the next one going to pass? It would accelerate. How quickly was the next one after that going to pass? Faster than the last! What was I going to do about it?'

Plenty. I had already made that decision last year - in fact, several of them. I was making good progress too.

I drifted in and out of sleep for hours and hours, aware of the rain beating down on the tent, aware of the fact that these types of 'pop up' tents do not actually accommodate a six foot four bloke and that they were not designed or intended to repel anything other than a light shower. Neither was my sleeping bag.

I really did not mind that much – I had coped with much worse than that in my Army days. I was just happy to be away from market town rurality and be in a place where I felt socially alive again. It was great to have my son Jake and his mate Jim with me and I hoped that some of this positivity might rub off on them. They too had more potential

inside them than they could currently achieve living in rural mediocrity – a place where sixty eight per cent of the inhabitants were sixty or over.

Do not get me wrong, there were plenty of nice people up there and far worse places to live, just not for me. I had both a career and a social ambition left inside me that the town simply could not provide. I needed something to achieve in my life. Boundaries to push and goals to achieve again. In small towns, by and large, all the `bright young things' leave for a larger city and are replaced by much older people who had come to downsize. Or sit in God's waiting room! It left a massive void of mental stimulation and was more than capable of sapping the energy from anything!

Saturday morning

When I finally woke, I could feel the heat of the sun on the tent. After the previous twenty-four hours of rain, this felt like all of my Christmases had come at once. My boots were soaking wet so I simply rolled up my jeans to knee height and plodded barefoot through the warm mud and wet grass all day long. It actually felt fantastic; like free foot reflexology, and Lubstock was thankfully glass free.

As if we were old friends from last year, I made a lot of new friends that day; people who all seemed to be doing something worthwhile in their lives, even though it was a slightly eclectic mix of people - from a few heads of listed companies to up and coming poets, from the people in the healing tent to a few minor celebs. I just fed off their energy – they were going somewhere purposeful in their lives.

At one stage, I found myself sitting on one of the straw bales in front of the stage and realising how much I needed to be amongst people like this on a day-to-day basis. If I go back home to the negative influences around me, I thought to myself, it will suck me right back in again – It takes a strong spirit to soar freely against a headwind of negative mental and social opposition.

I needed good things going into my mind, good influences. Good for me at any rate. To me it was the first golden rule of achieving any kind of success – mix with the right people and you will eventually learn from them and their habits, blend right in, and become one of them. Of course, this also works in reverse.

I thought about all of the personal development and self-help books I had devoured over the years and some of the audio books I had written and narrated. There was good stuff in all of them, useful bits that you could apply to your life, but in my heart of hearts I knew that if you did just one thing and one thing only – surround yourself with the right influences, and the right people- then the rest will fall into place.

Well, providing, of course, that you had climbed Maslow's tree to a sufficient height and that your basic human needs of survival, food, shelter, warmth, and love and belonging, were being met. I recalled something that Mark Victor Hansen once said – "I wanted to become a millionaire so I started hanging out with millionaires. Then I became one. So I then started hanging out with multi-millionaires."

And something else I had heard along the way - who we become is a mixture of the people we hang out with and the books that we read. And, from one of the many seminars I had been to, I learned that I would never hang out with somebody I did not want to be.

I just knew that I needed to get away from the dream stealers back home and get myself packed off once again to London. Somehow. But how could I leave my boys?

Now there was the trap. The trap that I knew so many people faced in their lives – needing to make a decision about one important life changing event that was also going to have a major negative impact on another part of their lives and probably somebody else's – yet not being able to do so. I was mentally stuck between a rock and a hard place - a state of Cognitive Dissonance.

I looked around me at all the happy smiling people and wondered if their lives were all in perfect balance. Did none of them have conflicts of values in their lives? Were they all deliriously happy with every element of their existence – in the perfect relationship, with the perfect sex life? Did they all look at themselves in a mirror and like what they saw? Were they all their perfect size and weight? Were their careers and 'life-plans' on track?

Did none of them have 'issues' in their lives and were none of them carrying any emotional baggage which affected them and those around them? Did not one single person have any kind of personality disorder? Did they all like themselves? Did they like their appearance, their weight, their character? Were they all happy, totally at peace with themselves, or at least content with their lot?

Maybe they were. Maybe none of them had ever experienced depression or anxiety, or any other debilitating conditions. Maybe they were the only five hundred people on the planet who were not fed up with at least one aspect of their lives. On the surface, you would never know. But then you never do.

"Dad, you look miles away, and tired!"

My son had come to join me.

"I was just trying to work a few things out in my head."

"Here, have this Red Bull", he said, "It will clear your head and keep you going."

I ended up having bucket loads of them, occasionally laced with a bit of vodka and they really did keep me going. I even ended up dancing on the bales right at the front of the stage at one point. Music was a part of my past and in my soul and it always liberated me. I missed my old recording studio, called the Slaughterhouse, with its star filled days. I recalled the three weeks of mayhem when Shaun Ryder, Bez and the remainder of the Happy Mondays, came to record their first gold album with me. I had never seen so many Class A drugs in one place!

I think it was about four in the morning when I retired from the log fire by the poet's tent. I was absolutely wired. The DJ music was still playing quietly in the background as I drifted off into an extremely deep slumber.

It was the weirdest night's sleep imaginable. I dreamed in colour. It was as if I was reliving my whole life, yet rehearsing the future at the same time. I was back in London for much of it, but I was more of an onlooker. Like so many people's dreams, it was a mixture of fact, fantasy and role-playing. Most, it was a convoluted distortion of the truth, but, most bizarrely, it seemed as though there were two of me. Sometimes I was called Guy, and in this role I was what people saw of me on the outside, yet it was not always the true me. Sometimes I was called James, who often bore more resemblance to the real me. Sometimes they were together in conversation like some alter ego with the same face. That was well weird. It was like I was being my own therapist. There was plenty of weirdness in my dream – I knew nearly all of the people in it, yet they also had different names, except for Prince Harry and Prince William, like they were some kind of Royalty.

It was most surreal. It was not a nightmare, simply one of those dreams that seem to make sense but then make no sense at all. I think a lot of people can relate to those kind of dreams.

I kept waking up, trying to shake this dream off, but I was trapped in it. Every time I drifted back off to sleep, I was there again, but in a different scene. On many occasions there seemed to be a narrator, telling my story in the third person – some of it true and some of it a strange distortion.

There was also a wonderful woman in my dreams. If only she were real. Every time I drifted back off to sleep, I hoped she would be there again. I have never thought we are meant to go through life without experiencing true love for someone and to feel that it is reciprocated. That was temporarily absent in my life, yet hope sprang eternal.

In one of my waking moments, I can remember thinking, just as I had last year, that this time next year I would like to have a partner in my life again. It all seems a bit empty without that special person in your life - someone to hold hands with, someone to cuddle up to on a night-time, some to have great conversation with – to talk to them – to listen to them - just somebody to share life with. It is just not as easy to meet someone nowadays – why else are the internet dating sites growing and expanding by the day?

It must have been six or seven in the morning when I finally hit a solid sleep again. I remember thinking to myself that everybody in the world could benefit from simply having someone to talk to. I remembered my dreams so vividly that I could easily spill them out onto paper.

SOMEWHERE OUT THERE

The waves on Bondi crashed down so close to the shoreline to Jo and Suzie that they had to move back up the beach by some twenty yards. They had been there for over an hour, watching the colossal breakers, just talking about their lives: their dreams, their hopes, their aspirations, and also their frustrations. They were sisters in enviable harmony with each other.

Yet, despite that, they were not totally open with each other. Some things they just kept to themselves, as people do. As many people feel the need to do. Maybe for fear of not wanting to let others down, maybe in fear of being scoffed at or rejected if they told one another what was really going on inside their heads. What neither of them realised was that, around the globe, virtually everyone did the very same thing - they had mastered the art of 'front' and very few people were being totally honest with those around them, let alone with themselves.

The deep red fireball of the sun was sinking below the horizon creating a spectacular sunset. They both sat in silence for a while, gazing out to sea. Without knowing it, they both had the same thought on their minds.

They had been in Australia for some time now and they both loved life down under, but they recognised one problem. They missed their mum and dad, Frances and Peter, who were both back in the UK. It had been a tough decision to make to live so far away from them but there was just so much career opportunity and the climate had been an appealing factor too.

They were both in their late twenties and full of hope, expectation, and drive - for them everything seemed possible. Jo had been there for three years and was rapidly rising up through the ranks of the quirky communications media organisation she had joined as a sales executive. Suzie had been happily pursuing her own musical career in London, married but not blissfully so.

Then, one day, about a year ago, Suzie had discovered her husband had been having an affair. This was bad enough but the fact he was sleeping with one of her, questionably, best friends meant the immediate end to the marriage. She threw him out and faced life on her own with not just a little sadness, hurt, anger, and regret.

She told few people about the real reason for the break up – after all, she felt a level of betrayal that she was not prepared to share with just anyone. But one evening, on the phone to Jo, she confided in her. She insisted she make the break and join her and she had booked a one-way ticket the very next day. The two of them had recognised that, often, the status quo was just not acceptable, and that sometimes you simply have to do something different with your life.

She recognised that you just have to make a new start and move on to the next phase. She had done what most humans fail miserably to do – make a real decision and attempt to change her life in a positive way. She could see that so many people were

trapped in their unhappiness, full of indecision and regret, simply going through the motions but never being bold enough to make the change. That was not going to be her lot in life.

It was just after four in the morning in Maharashtra, India. As the same sun continued its perpetual and endless journey started to peak over the distant horizon, gently illuminating the hills and trees in the distance and gradually taking the chill off the air, Rajiv sat on the makeshift veranda outside the little hut in that was his home. He had always been an optimist and a damned hard worker, but recently, like so many of his friends and neighbours, they had simply not been able to get a fair and reasonable price for their cotton. Many blamed it on GM crops, but blame was not of interest to Rajiv. Survival, however, was.

He had been a cotton farmer all of his life, as were most people in this area. It had never been an easy life but at least he had been able to support his wife and three children in the past. Now, though, things were very different. Many of his friends had taken their own lives over the last few years. Things must have been pretty bad for that to happen. Maybe he should have followed his brother Prash to the United Kingdom all those years ago. He wondered what life was like over there.

Rajiv did not understand the concept or symptoms of clinical depression, but he felt so desperately low that day that he wondered if suicide should be an option. He tried to pull himself together quickly, attempting to banish that thought. "Do something to take your mind off it", he said to himself. "Do something different for a change."

He went to his barn to gather up his tools. He looked around him. These tools had been his life, but what was the point anymore if he could not even sell his cotton? He saw the length of rope, neatly rolled up and hanging off a hook. At that moment, it became clear to him why so many of his fellow farmers had opted for that way out of a crisis.

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One and a half thousand miles to the North, in a beautiful, unspoiled valley cradled in the peaks of the Himalayas, lived the Hunza tribe. A small race, just 30,000 strong, cocooned high up in the peaks just beneath the roof of the world, shielded by their ice, rock and screened from the merciless march of civilisation.

The Hunza valley awakes in spring, casting off its winter cape of white and robing itself in emeralds and golds as the spring flowers bloom. Summer ripens into more verdant greens and russets as the year unfurls and the harvests bloom into peach and apricot trees laden with fruit: a staple crop and foundation of their wellbeing. In this land, to achieve a hundred years of vigorous health is not a noteworthy event.

Here are a people untouched by the ills that mankind's progress along the road from cave to city brings. They live in blissful ignorance of the depression that such a journey brings and, in fact, know little or nothing of any ailment or disease.

A basic and rural people, they are far from being the product of legend and tale: magicians and mystics dwelling in a mythical utopia and harbouring a sorceress-queen, forever guarding a fountain of eternal life. However, their true, natural and unfettered lifestyle brings to them a glimpse of the holy grail for which the western world strives: happiness, vitality and longevity.

In Battersea, just before six in the morning, Frances woke up and made herself a super-strong coffee. Separated from her husband in middle age, she felt quite empty inside. She was just going through the motions. There seemed to be no real purpose in her life without Jo and Susie around. They were almost as far away as they could be, in Australia. God, she loved them so much. She knew it was best for them but, like so many parents, deep in her heart she wished they were still young and living at home.

This is just all about money now, she thought. An existence and not much more. Where did it all go wrong? This is not the way she had expected her life to turn out at all. This was not the way her life script was meant to read. Not the way she had hoped and dreamed it would be.

She made a mental note to call Guy later. He was the only person she could ever open up to in the slightest and she also enjoyed his company immensely

Fifteen minutes later, in Charing Cross, Martha woke in her cramped bed in her damp and dingy flat. The arthritis was bad again in her shoulder and she had only managed fitful sleep. It had been like this for the last couple of years. She lay there thinking. In fact, she would spend the rest of the morning lying there, as she often did. Nowadays she felt that there was nothing to even get up for. She had no real purpose and she felt very alone in the world.

She had been on her own for thirty-five years, since that useless bastard of a husband of hers, Bob, had died. She had never loved him of course, or the husband before who had left her for that slut of an actress, but at least Bob had been around, at least there had been another human being to interact with. Better the devil you know than the demon of loneliness, she thought.

At one stage, on the way back from a much needed ablution, she had stopped and stared out of the window to observe 'the others' - normal people with more normal lives, on their way to work. She had worked all her life in a London bar and she missed it.

At half-six in The City, London, Richard strolled through the park on the way to the tube station, as he had done for four years now, on his way into the hustle and bustle of 'city'

life. He had recently started to see a therapist called Guy, and had started to see the world in a slightly different light.

He played his usual game to pass the time, counting how many people he would pass who had been sleeping rough the previous night. This morning was a record - twenty-two. Most of them were still in doorways, asleep, He could not help but notice one very young girl, no older than sixteen, sitting huddled up in a flimsy sleeping bag, with tears streaming down her face.

He stopped, although this was out of character for him. It occurred to him that if you just keep walking you could kind of ignore the problem and make it disappear from your mind. That is what he normally did. In fact that is what most people did.

But for the first time in his life he stopped, opened his wallet, and took twenty pounds out. He walked up to her and put the note in her hand.

“Buy yourself some food, love, and please make a phone call to...” He paused, he did not know who she should call. He felt quite awkward. If she had someone to call, she would probably not be sleeping rough in the first place. Surely there must be some organisation that people in these circumstances can go to, he thought.

“Please, just call someone who can help you”, he said, embarrassed at his hopelessness to help and give constructive advice to this young girl. “It’s dangerous for a young girl like you out here. Maybe you could find a Citizens Advice Bureau? Or the police?”

“Thanks mister. Yeah, I will. Thanks, thanks again”, she said, but he knew she did not believe anyone was there who would care for her

“What is your name?” he asked.

“Joanna”, she replied a little cautiously. Her instincts were probably to be suspicious of any man showing interest in her. What awful things had happened to her to be so alone and afraid at such a young age?

“Take care of yourself Joanna”, he said helplessly

“Yeah. Sure. Thanks, mister.”

Richard had to hurry now as he was going to be late for work. Even a small break like that had interrupted his meticulous routine. Time was of the essence in his world. His working life was dictated by schedules and time frames and any little variation caused problems.

He got on the tube and actually found a seat for a change. How he hated this part of city living where nobody spoke to each other. He looked through the carriage. Young affluent men and women like him off to The Money. Working class people – the cleaners, shelf stackers, road sweepers, hospital workers, coming back from night shifts

or going on to their second jobs to try to keep their family fed and dry. And nobody talked to anyone else, almost as if they were scared to. Everybody seemed so wrapped up in their own lives and their own thoughts. If it were not so sad, it would have been comical.

It's an absurd existence, he realised, when people are so tired, so self-obsessed, so suspicious, so uncaring that they spend such a significant part of their days in close proximity to - yet isolated from - the other fellow members of their species. It is a mad world where a simple act of kindness - stopping to talk to a lost child for a couple of minutes - created such panic in him about lost opportunities at work.

The train rattled towards his work place and filled up with other self-obsessed commuters. No one caught anyone's eye. No one spoke. There was nothing unusual in this but his mind was in turmoil today. What was happening to him? He was usually so focussed, so switched on, so together, and yet here he was feeling uncertain and unhappy. Why on Earth should he feel like this when to all intents and purposes, he had it all?

He decided to distract himself from this random thinking and read an interesting article in his paper that had caught his eye as he skimmed through it. It did not make great reading and it did not help. Not in the way he was expecting it to, at least.

.....In the UK, 3.9 million children live in poverty. Many do not have access to warm winter clothing, nutritious food, decent housing, or education. 150,000 Indian farmers have committed suicide in the last two years. A child dies every four seconds in East Africa. Twenty-one thousand, six-hundred every day.

Richard did the figures in his head. My God, he thought, that is nearly eight million every year! He kept skimming the paper, looking for some good, uplifting news, and found out that millionaires still cash their Family Allowance every week. Depression and anxiety has increased ten-fold in forty years and will affect at least one in four people every year. He read on. Two-thirds of all visits to a doctor are linked to stress or depression. No bloody wonder, he thought. The article went on - Major depression is the 4th most disabling condition in the world, and the second most in the developed world. At the current rate of increase, it will be the second most disabling condition in the world by 2020, behind heart disease. And then - Suicide is the third largest contributor to premature mortality after heart disease and cancer.

Further on in the article - there are more children living on the streets of London now than in Dickens' time. Malaria could be cured in Africa for what it costs the British state to fund the monarchy.

He spotted another article that looked quite highbrow but it really caught his interest. It was all about personality disorders and how widespread they truly were. He skimmed them briefly: paranoid, schizoid, schizotypal, and antisocial, borderline, histrionic, narcissistic, avoidant, dependent, obsessive-compulsive and NOS.

Each one had the associated character traits listed next to it. They read like a who's who of everyone he knew. One in particular caught his eye.

Narcissistic Personality Disorder. Individuals with this Cluster B Personality Disorder have an excessive sense of how important they are. They demand and expect to be admired and praised by others and are limited in their capacity to appreciate others' perspectives.

I know a few of those, he thought. He read on... a pervasive pattern of grandiosity (in fantasy or behaviour), need for admiration, and lack of empathy, beginning by early adulthood and present in a variety of contexts, as indicated by five (or more) of the following:

- Has a grandiose sense of self-importance (e.g., exaggerates achievements and talents, expects to be recognized as superior without commensurate achievements).
- Is preoccupied with fantasies of unlimited success, power, brilliance, beauty, or ideal love.
- Believes that he or she is special and unique and can only be understood by, or should associate with, other special or high-status people (or institutions).
- Requires excessive admiration.
- Has a sense of entitlement, i.e. unreasonable expectations of especially favourable treatment or automatic compliance with his or her expectations.
- is interpersonally exploitative, i.e. takes advantage of others to achieve his or her own ends.
- Lacks empathy: is unwilling to recognize or identify with the feelings and needs of others.
- is often envious of others or believes that others are envious of him or her.
- Shows arrogant, haughty behaviours or attitudes.

"Christ on a bike" he said it out loud, unintentionally. And then, in his head 'I work with people like this! I live with someone like this!' There was a list of character traits to determine whether anyone had a potential personality disorder. It was nothing short of astonishing. He got to number thirty and then, it was his stop.

He was nearly half an hour late for work. He was late because he had walked slowly and had taken more time than usual to notice things that were going on around him. He had stopped to play a new game. There were hundreds of thousands of people within a quarter of a mile of him, swarming out of the tube stations and off the buses, hurrying on their ways to work. He tried guessing what they did for a living. He wondered if they were happy.

More importantly, he wondered why he suddenly wondered if they were happy. Without consciously knowing it he had begun to think in a different way.

At ten to seven, somewhere in Chad, Tansi looked down at her daughter Sadia, nestled in her arms, looking feeble and frail. Her lips were cracked and dry and her eyes seemed to bulge out of her head. Not again, she thought, not a third child who is going to die in my arms. Did nobody care? It felt that way to her.

At eight o'clock, millions of people in London were travelling to work. On the tube, on a bus, in a cab, in the car, on foot and by bicycle. Most of them were wrapped up in their own thoughts. In fact, like most people, they would spend 75% of their journey engaged in self-talk. These were the types of questions that were flying around in their heads:

- "Why do I feel so shit (today)?"
- "How long do I have to do this for?"
- "How long before I can leave work today?"
- "How long before the weekend?"
- "How long before my next holiday?"
- "Where can I get more money from?"
- "When can I retire?"
- "Will I ever have total control over my life?"
- "Will I ever have the freedom to do what I want, when I want?"
- "How do I tell my partner / spouse that they simply don't make me happy?"
- "Why is my partner so uncaring?"
- "What do I have to do to find a partner, a soul mate?"
- "Why do I feel lonely?"
- "Am I ugly? Am I attractive?"
- "What do other people think about me?"
- "Why do I feel down right now?"
- "Am I the only person who thinks like this?"
- "Am I a good parent?"
- "How will my children turn out?"
- "Will my children have happy lives?"
- "Will they live up to my hopes for of them?"
- "I know I am overweight but right now I am hungry-what would I like to eat?"
- "How do I keep this diet going? Am I the only person who can't lose weight?"
- "Who am I and what do I really want out of this life?"

Others were in full-on beat-themselves-up mode:

- "Why did I make that mistake?"
- "Why did I not work harder at my relationship?"
- "Where did my career go wrong?"
- "How did I lose x, y, z?"
- "Why did I...?"
- "Why can't I...?"

Most people though, were failing miserably at asking themselves any empowering questions at all. Questions like:

- “What and who are the most important things in my life, now and for the rest of it, and what am I going to do about it? ”

Most people on the planet never stop and work out this one crucial thing. Yet, not taking the time to work this out creates the single largest cause of mental paralysis there is! It causes depression, anxiety and a whole raft of other debilitating conditions. It is the single biggest killer of happiness.

Most people actually simply needed to find someone to talk to, fully and openly – someone to whom they could just lay out their lives to and pour out all of their thoughts to. Someone who will accept them for who they are, warts-and-all, and who will not judge or criticise them. Someone who could even offer a little guidance and support.

Those lucky enough to be able to afford counselling or therapy might stumble upon the answer to these most important questions. But who do people turn to when they simply cannot afford that luxury?

THE HIGH LIFE

Guy waved at the concierge as he drove the shiny black Porsche convertible into the entrance of the underground car park beneath the offices of his fast-expanding mini-empire. Today, he thought, was going to be a fabulous day, despite the fact that things were not going so well on the home front.

He told himself every morning that today was going to be a fabulous day and, often, it was. It was just a simple, positive thinking, self-fulfilling prophesy that he had used for 20 years and yet it was a rare attribute. So many people he met seemed to have to haul themselves out of bed and bemoan the day ahead, heads spinning with negative, doom-laden thoughts and the absolute unshakable certainty that their day was going to be awful. Guess what? It normally was.

He parked the Porsche in the bay marked 'Reserved' (he did not like titles like Chairman), slipped the Ray Bans off his forehead and put them into the glove compartment, briefly looked at himself in the mirror, and smiled.

When he was younger Guy used to practise his smile, especially when he felt a little low – it lifted him in those moments. It eventually just became a natural part of who he was. It brought him great dividends as people were endeared to him - that and his natural boyish charm. It was something he had worked hard on to both lift his own spirits and never to show weakness in front of others. It even carried him through his moments of mild depression. It did not work quite so well when he hit the really low points, but it helped.

That smile, and the other parts of his character he had worked on, as a result of the many self-help and personal growth books he had read, was part of what had taken him through life moderately successfully - it was part of the reason he was where he was, surrounded by the success and the wealth of West London.

On the face of it, Guy was a real people person and he did have an innate knack of understanding others, almost an intuition, as to how they thought, how they felt, whether that was good or bad, happy or sad, what they feared, and what they needed and desired. He had a remarkable ability to get into the minds of other people. It was something he had started to learn as quite a young boy and then he had gone on to study it in great depth.

He also instinctively knew how to make people feel good and the two things combined gave him a big advantage in his dealings with people. From ordering a pint of bitter from a bored skinny girl in a bar to negotiating a million pound deal with a sharp Chief Executive, or a dyed-in-the-wool College Principal, he could make people like him.

It had certainly not always been that way for him for sure, indeed far from it, but he had learned. He had learned that nobody really liked a moaner but everybody liked a great positive attitude. In fact he had silently studied the traits that both successful and

likeable people had. He picked the bits that he liked and made them part of him, in his own way.

He also worked out how, even if he was a little low, he could smarten his attitude up and show a positive face well – despite what he truly felt inside. It was a simple thing to learn, he always used to think. It is a state of mind and it is in the body language. Stand tall, be proud of your height (he was six three and a bit so his height was important), make eye contact, and hold it with everyone you meet. In a formal environment shake hands firmly but not crushingly, but, most important of all, smile. Smile with genuine interest and real warmth.

As he had grown a little older and money had started to come, he had acquired the physical trappings of wealth too and that seriously helped with many of the residual self-esteem issues that had stuck around since childhood. The hand-stitched shirts, the designer jackets and chinos - rarely suits, as he favoured elegantly casual as his mode of dress - the Italian handmade shoes and nice touches such as silk socks. In addition, of course there was the ultimate trapping for him, his Porsche.

It was the only car he had ever badly wanted, not a Lamborghini or a Ferrari. He had even had photographs on his bedroom wall when he was younger. He had always dreamed of such a car, and that dream had intensified one wet night in the early nineties on a hard shoulder of the M1 near Nottingham, standing in the freezing rain waiting for the AA to come and patch up his mortally wounded Saab. There had been three Porsches parked outside the hotel where the network-marketing seminar had taken place that he had just been to. One day, he had told himself, one day one of those will be mine.

It was just about the first thing he'd bought three months after arriving from the sticks with his new wife, less than three grand in the bank, a couple of credit cards and a vague idea of what he was going to do with the next few years of his life. His spoken word personal and business development audios were selling well but not well enough to sustain a nice lifestyle in London.

He needed to believe he would be touched by the energy and drive of early 21st century London, where money could be made simply by wanting it badly enough and by following a few of the basic success principles that he had both read about and had also written about. And so that day had come and it had come relatively quickly. Cynics would say he had lucked out, finding the gap in the market that he had done, but Guy believed that in life you make your own luck. He certainly chose to believe that, fervently.

He pressed the remote and the roof gradually closed, the windows went up and the doors locked.

Guy bounded up the internal stairs two at a time. He felt so good that day. He felt so full of energy he could burst. Indeed he did burst into reception through the internal door and cried at a shocked woman:

"Good morning to you and how are you, fair Janice?" Fair Janice, who seconds before, had been shocked Janice, despite the fact that Guy performed this trick most mornings, replied, "All the better for seeing you Guy." He smiled at her. "You always know how to make a man feel good."

He carried on towards his office, which was at the end of an open plan modern room, all smoked glass and polished beech. The walls had an eclectic mix of expensive modern art that Guy had bought in from a small Chinese village, just out of Shenzhen, that he'd visited a couple of years back, and some pieces from exclusive local galleries. There were also quirky motivational posters hanging on the walls.

It was early and only a couple members of the team were in. He always made a point of speaking to everyone briefly, sometimes with a minimalistic use of words rather than a variety of more ethnic handshakes and always a big warm smile. Virtually always well-meant and always well received, he knew that everybody liked to be recognised - given an emotional stroke - it makes them feel better. Then he would stride off to his inner sanctum, close the door, coffee in hand, and begin his daily ritual. His favourite part of this was the opening of his Holy Book, the accessing of his diary that Polly, his personal assistant left waiting for him each and every day.

And it was a physical diary. Yes, he backed up his day's activities on his computer and synced it to his phone, but he kept a maroon leather bound desk diary and this was what he referred to now, and every morning.

Polly was the High Priestess of the diary and she knew the rules. No more than four consultations on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, each up to an hour and a half long and they were to take place in his consulting rooms in an exclusive building just a five minute stroll from this office.

Guy practiced as a therapist at the same time as overseeing his training empire. Why? Well, it was where his heart lay, in truth. It was where he had started out, it was what he had started to do when he first came south, before the realisation of where the real money lay. He'd left Yorkshire with a small but reasonably prosperous business under his belt providing CDs and audio tapes (how quaint) to the world's emotionally and spiritually needy, as well as those who wanted to learn how to sell more effectively, communicate better and generally enhance their careers. Some of it was pure plagiarism and some of it was very innovative.

He was mid-table in the UK league of self-help gurus. He also had a three book deal with a small London publishing house run by his friend Jennifer. But he was caught in something of a vicious circle. He was making money but it was time consuming writing and narrating them and keeping him from developing the real expertise that face-to-face consultation demanded, and keeping him from breaking new ground and writing about it.

He also did the occasional corporate speaking gig talking about creativity and personal development to a bunch of city boys more concerned with getting back to their desks to

do dollars and deals and contribute to their obscene annual bonuses. For Guy, this was not exactly fulfilling even if he could pocket a grand for a morning's work. No, within days of moving into a cramped flat with his then beloved wife, he had sussed it out.

He'd move the business online....get on the dotcom train, develop a web based training business offering self-development courses in book and booklet format as well as through downloads for the more technologically minded customers (the internet as we know it now was relatively new when he'd first headed south). Money flew in and training course CDs (now becoming quaint themselves) and tapes (even quaint) flew out. He struggled to keep up and quickly had to take on some office and warehouse premises and some temporary staff to do picking and packing.

Within four months he had a deposit on a family house in Fulham and when he moved in he bought the Porsche to grace the parking space outside. (You have to be a multi-millionaire to have a garage where he lived. Even the fabulous four storey Nichol's Lion terraced houses had to suffer on street parking.)

Then things got really interesting. Prime Minister Blair's famous invocation 'Education, education, education' did not just result just in every eighteen year old going to university when they should have been training as plumbers. No, tens of millions of pounds were pumped into inner city colleges too, and those colleges had a desperate need to find ways of spending their new found budgets. Find ways to engage with learners as they were crap marketers. Sure, there were a few privately owned training businesses out there run by tired ex-lecturers with nylon shirts and worn suits, lacking in dress sense and imagination but there were few visionary companies talking to the colleges to help them find students in any real volume. It was a closed shop though and the real private sector was frowned upon and was seen as profiteering. A filthy word.

Guy did not take no for an answer. He went out, pressed the flesh, smiled, talked, smiled some more, bought lunch, bought dinner, and smiled. By the end of the first year he had contracts with six inner city colleges and a business turning over some 3 million quid. He had cash in his designer pockets.

Money for old rope. But not very challenging.

He had achieved goal one, which was the car, and was also on the pathway to becoming independently wealthy. Of course, he had a healthy mortgage, and he was leasing the car, and the new four-by-four sports car that he'd bought as a birthday present for his wife Carole-Anne. He was starting to use the growing collection of credit cards for diving holidays in Egypt, skiing in Aspen and Val D'Isere as well as the safari holidays in South Africa, beach hut life in the Maldives - but, what the hell, the money was pouring in.

Something was missing though. Guy had a real thirst for knowledge, especially about what made people tick. That was his true passion. He knew he was not a good managing director in the true sense of the word. He was not a details man. He was instinctive, creative and he had an ability to see things that others did not.

He didn't do detail - facts and figures, nor employment contracts, but he could read and understand the P&L and his forecasting model, and he knew full well what a good balance sheet looked like. No, he did the big vision stuff; he saw the future and the future involved Guy charming the birds off the trees under the bluest of blue skies, wherever he could. He was genuine with it though.

So an M.D was recruited and Guy became chairman, freeing up his time to turn his hand to something he had always wanted to do - consultations with real people, face-to-face, understanding their problems (he called them challenges), empathising with their pain or concerns, and helping them come to terms with whatever they needed to come to terms with. And people said he was damned good at it. He had a great way of helping people see and feel differently about parts of their lives – past, current and future.

Oh, and Guy being a little adventurous in business, he decided to charge an obscene amount of money for his services and had purposely attracted a client list extracted from Who's Who. He had rock stars, film stars, a racing driver, the odd celebrity chef, and even a lesser member of Royalty, as clients. Some of them were just plain wealthy but all of them had at least one thing guaranteed - total privacy. He was often quite astonished at what people would not discuss with their friends, family or loved one. To some degree or other all of his clients were putting up a front. He often wondered if it was not just his clients.

All had been going well until Carole-Anne, his lovely wife, ten years his junior, became pregnant in the early autumn of his second London year. Something changed. Carole-Anne seemed to withdraw a little and started suggesting that London was not the place to bring up young children. This was a bit of a blow to Guy. He could not imagine life anywhere else for quite some time.

Guy did whatever he could and enjoyed the shopping trips for top of the range Emmaljunga prams and attended all of the pre-natal gatherings, but it sometimes seemed as though nothing he could do was right anymore. He used to make all the other mothers laugh at the various pre-birth gatherings yet Carole-Anne would scold him after they got out and tell him to take it more seriously. So, there were stresses and strains on the marriage, he recognised. She missed the direct support of her parents and he was just so damn busy during the pregnancy it was no wonder that sometimes she felt neglected by him.

Nevertheless, by the following May he was the proud father of William. The birth of William was a life changing event for Guy in so many different ways and was to prove to be a catalyst for a lot more change than he had bargained for.

Truth be known, Guy had not really considered having any more children but the instant William was born he loved him more than life itself.

Will was a strong lad who grew quickly and whose smile could also melt an iceberg at 200 feet by the time he was 6 months old.

This was not Guy's first experience of parenthood. He had felt that way once before when Joe, from his first marriage, had been born. When Guy was young, too young, and certainly too immature, he had been involved with a girl called Alison in Yorkshire who became pregnant. They were not properly in love the way they should have been but the sex had been awesome and a man was meant to do right by a girl and so, one wet Monday they'd got married in a registry office, smiled for the camera and kissed in front of their cheering handful of friends, pretending outwardly that this was a great love story, knowing inwardly that it was no such thing.

Joe had been born seven months later and that had a big impact on his life. He was a beautiful child too, but then most parents see their kids that way. He stayed loyal to his young wife for the first three years of Joe's life, loved his boy truly, and tried to love his wife deeply, but it was never going to be.

Guy was messy and Alison was obsessively tidy— a recipe for disaster if ever there was one. Guy was outgoing and confident and Alison was not. Guy was ambitious and Alison was not. She was a real home maker and would have been happy with a terraced house that had been built a hundred years ago for workers in the local mill. She was content with summer trips to a B&B on the Yorkshire coast, a beat-up car and a hefty mortgage that might be cleared before one of them died of boredom.

Guy was not. He wanted adventure. His four years in the Army had given him a taste of what life could be like. Adventure did not describe his current domestic circumstances, locked away in a miserable damp winter and a wife he no longer wanted to go home to and had ceased to fancy.

The recording studio, which he quirkily named The Slaughterhouse, with its small underground nightclub that he had recently blagged the finance to buy, kept him very busy and he had started to come home very late to avoid her nagging. Worse than that, she would also often shoot him down for having ideas above his station and he had resented that. He felt as though he had more inside him, something he had to do with his life. He could not quite explain it but it burned inside him.

The final straw for them both was the insistent pull of change between them. She needed a stable man, a nine-to fiver, one who would fit within the remit of her life's script, one with everyday expectations of life. He needed a goer, a lady with flair and ambition - freedom and dash in her soul. He needed someone who was not stuck in their ways and one who constantly revised and modified her life plan— or, better still, one with a `plan that matched his. Ultimately their lives on paper would, as a couple, tear them in two. Just as so many other mismatched couples would experience.

There was no explosive separation. He was not caught in bed with a barmaid and his wife had not attacked him with a kitchen knife. The marriage just imploded under the weight of boredom and disinterest and they parted. Well, not totally true. In the final weeks of their marriage, unbeknown to each other, they had both fallen into the clutches of extra marital sexual activity. She told him first, but he could hardly complain. There was no finger pointing. No point.

However, the break up affected him more than he had expected. Guy was still relatively young and he did what he thought was the best he could at the time and juggled between his career aspirations and his desire to spend time with his son, Joe.

He even fought over the coming months as best as he could to put things back on track, desperate to keep the family unit together, desperate to make sure Joe did not grow up feeling rejected as he had done. But it was not to be.

And so, life moved on and Guy did his best Hugh Hefner impression for a year or so. As a recording studio/nightclub owner, lots of single - and some married - girls were very available and he rarely passed up an opportunity to take advantage of what was on offer. It was simply a distraction.

However, his Lothario lifestyle did not bring him happiness. It just helped him ignore the unhappiness.

Life was never quite the same after the split up. Joe had suddenly become the central focus of his life. He started neglecting work to be able to spend more and more time with him. He could not wait to pick him up to spend the day with him and hated dropping him back at Alison's again.

Years later Guy would sing the praises of Alison from the highest rooftop. She never, ever, ever denied him contact with Joe from the word go. She was a complex girl in many ways but she never used Joe as a weapon and Guy was deeply grateful for that – he saw too many couples doing just that with their kids.

It was in that period that Guy had watched a documentary about separated parents and how fifty per cent of all fathers never saw their kids again after two years of separation. 'How bad was that?' he had thought at the time. 'How could anyone ever abandon one of their own?'

The answer was not an obvious one. Often, it was the woman who put up barriers and used the children as tools to get back at their ex's. Lawyers regularly and cynically turned a bad situation into a war of attrition in order to max out on their fees. More profound was the fact that many dads could often not deal with the pain of the pickup and drop off routine and made the misguided decision that it would be better for the kids if they simply were not around.

Most people have certain memories that are indelibly imprinted in their minds and one of Guy's was dropping Joe back off at Alison's one teatime, not long after the break up, and before he had a spare room for him. Joe did not want to go in. Guy did not want him to go in either.

"Stay with you Daddy, stay with you", Joe had said in the simple English that two-and-a-half year-olds use.

"Stay with YOU, Daddy". Joe emphasised the `you'.

Guy's heart was in bits and he could have absconded with him there and then. But, you cannot do that kind of thing, even though some parents do...

So, Guy picked him up and carried him into the house.

It took some time to calm him down and it really took some effort to keep some modicum of self-control. Eventually, he made his exit. He needed to. He walked to the car, head held a bit low, and was about to get in when he turned around to the house front.

There must be so many fathers or mothers in this world who have lived through the next scene, or a similar one. Joe was in the window in uncontrollable floods of tears, clawing and scratching at the glass, waving, mouthing words that Guy would never really know. But the message was simple:

'Daddy, don't go. Do not leave me. What is going on? Why are you doing this? I love you! I need you...'

'I love you too my son, my child, my baby. Like nothing I have ever loved on this Earth....' he thought.

He drove off, not far, and parked up. He dissolved into tears and sobbed uncontrollably. Everything he had secretly vowed to avoid making happen since he was a young child was now happening to his own son. The only time he had ever wept as much was as a seven year old and even now, he remembered the two incidents as if they were twin events.

Now, here is a thing: when you fatally wound a crucial organ in the physical body of a human being they will die. But, when you fatally wound a person's soul a part of their being dies inside them, yet the body still lives on. Many people go to their graves with such wounds still inside them, unless they get some help.

That was ten years previously and often time is the only healer. Now, in principle, he had the whole set: the lifestyle, the money, the beautiful loving wife and another gorgeous son. Better still, Joe had come down to London to live with them too. And he had a large American training business about to offer serious money for his company. After the first forty years of his life which, he was the first to admit, did contain some periods where he hadn't always fulfilled his potential and sank into chaos, he was right on track and achieving the moderate greatness and success that he had always known he was capable of.

Guy re-arranged his life around William and went home at lunchtime (something he had never done before) and he even stopped going for a quick beer on the way home from work. He wanted to see William and be a real family man. Yet Carole-Anne was not her usual self – possibly suffering from post natal depression, she was becoming increasingly confrontational and Joe's presence seemed to upset the family equilibrium even more. She was badly missing support from her parents and aunty and uncle. Unrest had started to become the norm in the household.

Yet, as many marriages and relationships do, they battled on, with a two-month separation thrown in for good luck and with the resulting conjugal make up resulting in a further pregnancy. And so, two years to the very day of William's arrival, Henry, resembling his mother rather more in refined facial features and a tendency to infant reticence, was born. This happened in Yorkshire, as part of Carole-Anne's reconciliation deal was that she had insisted on the purchase of a second home back there so that she could live independently from, yet still have the 'on tap' support of, her family during frequent weekend trips.

The truth was that she never really fully moved back to London. Rather than go up to Yorkshire for the weekend it had slowly become the case that she would come down to London for an extended weekend with the boys. During one of those trips she became pregnant again and presented Guy with his third son.

The next nine months took their toll on Guy. He would finish work on Friday, take his staff from the training business for a drink or two, and then get up at two in the morning and drive up to Yorkshire. Come the early hours of Monday mornings he would drive back down to London and when his fourth boy, Alfie, was born he started to have serious doubts about whether he might have to give up everything in London. What was the point in having three young boys if he hardly saw them and was so drained of energy when he did? He made a reluctant decision to sell his training business to free up more time.

So, back to the present. Guy looked out of the office window and he saw the river. A couple of working boats passed by, and on the far bank there were yet more new offices and flats being thrown up. To the left he could just make out where the houseboats bobbed gently on the current. He could just pick out the industrial towers of Battersea power station. London reminded him increasingly of an Asian city like Singapore, with shining new buildings and malls being built to soak up the wealth of the successful.

Of course, he recognised poverty too and poverty was as apparent in West London as it was in New Delhi or Bangkok. But he believed in the trickle-down effect of great wealth and took pride in the fact that his own efforts were helping create jobs for less fortunate people. Indeed he had just become friends with John Bird, the founder of The Big Issue and they had agreed on a plan to facilitate some back to work training for some of his homeless people. It gave him a great sense of satisfaction to be able to offer a leg up to those less fortunate— He felt, in that moment, as if it was part of his duty in life.

His remaining staff arrived over the course of the next half an hour or so and as they did so they waved at Guy through the full height glass partition. They were, in return, greeted by a big smile and a wave. At five past nine he went out and touched base with them, chatted to them briefly, joking about their hangovers, and debauched weekends. At quarter past nine he was back at his lap top. He dealt with his emails, made contact with a couple of college directors who he felt convinced would soon switch to his training offer and he made a list of the things he wanted to achieve this week.

He was an avid list-writer. It was the only way he could be efficient, ticking things off when they were either done or delegated. He was also a setter of clear and achievable goals, daily, weekly, monthly, and longer term. Whether selling cars or running a multi-million pound business Guy believed in setting himself what he called stretch goals. This was one of the major keys to his success.

He admitted to himself that he was somewhat treading water that morning waiting for the clock to reach 10.45 so that he could leave his desk, take the short walk to his consulting rooms and meet his most intriguing client, James, again.

He had been seeing James for a while now. Initially they had found each other socially in a bar round the corner that Guy frequented. Carole-Anne had been away on another extended trip to Yorkshire with the boys and he was in no hurry to go home. He got talking with James, and as they did, a number of coincidences in both their lives came out. They were the same age. They came from roughly the same part of the country, obscure towns in Yorkshire that no one, but no one, in fashionable West London would have heard of unless they had happened to have picked up a holiday house near there at a knock-down price or knew someone who had. They had both been packed off to (albeit different) boarding schools at a ridiculously early age and both could not wait to escape their harsh regimes as soon as they could. Ironically both chose new harsh regimes by signing up at seventeen to join the army, neither of them having the patience to take `A'Levels and go to Sandhurst.

Over a few beers, both men discovered just how complementary they were to each other in their thoughts and actions. They just had so much in common. When James found out about the two totally different sides to Guy's life he became very interested in his counselling services.

"You know what mate?" he said after the fourth beer. "I'm going to book a session. The older I get the more I realise that I am increasingly fucked up. Perhaps you can help."

Guy was a little concerned that having socialised with James even this much would compromise the practitioner-patient relationship. But he agreed and gave James his card. They had another couple of beers each, shook hands and parted; both a little worse for wear.

Guy had woken the next day feeling the effects of too much beer. He was not getting any younger and he knew his ability to cope with the aftermath of a night out was diminishing, but what the hell - James had been great company. He reckoned the counselling gig was just the Fullers bitter talking. As he sat outside, gazing at the small Koi Carp in his bijou pond (space was at a premium in London), the phone rang.

Well, well, it was James.

He had a rare cancellation in two days' time so he scheduled him in there and then. That was maybe six months ago and Guy had met with James regularly since then, excluding holidays or sickness, not just on the therapy couch but also often over a drink.

James fascinated him and James was fascinated by Guy. James was without doubt his most interesting and his favourite client. They had both suffered a lot of emotional pain in their respective childhoods and had both developed a determination to succeed for very similar reasons.

Guy's first session with him was what the Army would call Standard Pack Drill, a routine, a pre-requisite and something that any good practitioner, mentor, analyst or therapist would always do and that was to establish just exactly what he hoped to achieve or gain out of coming to see him. It was the foundation stone of the profession.

What he told Guy, during the course of their second session was without doubt a breach of the Official Secrets Act that both he and Guy had once signed. Such was the trust between the two of them. But, quite clearly, some of the things James had been asked to do in his short time in the Intelligence Corps had quite badly affected him.

ON HER MAJESTY'S SERVICE

It was thirty years earlier, and James had slept terribly; in fact it felt to him that he not slept a wink all night. He was soaked to the bone and he was aware that he was actually shivering, which was crazy considering the time of year. It was surprisingly cold for July and, under any normal circumstances, he would have crawled out of bed, made a cup of strong coffee, and had his first cigarette of the day. Frustratingly, that was not possible on this occasion.

He was also bursting to relieve his bladder and had to do something about that bloody quickly. He quietly fumbled around in his Bergen and eventually found the plastic bottle that would provide the source of his relief. Taking great care to make as little noise as possible, he emptied the contents of his bladder into the bottle and screwed the top back on. He would empty it later.

It was still dark and the rain was drizzling as it had done constantly for nearly three days. Had this been any normal exercise he would have been resentful and utterly regretting the whole thing. But it certainly was not a normal exercise.

He listened carefully to see if anyone else was awake but heard nothing. He could not even see Robert, who he knew would be only ten or fifteen yards away from him on his two hour shift on watch. Robert was ex-SAS and he was the obvious choice as their team leader, simply a cut above the rest and hard as nails to boot. He was a man of few words and not a man to be messed around with.

James wanted to at least stretch his legs, but knew that it would simply make too much noise. Darkness was the secret enemy, as it was actually the easiest time to be spotted and found.

He crawled back into his sleeping bag and tried to sleep again, as it was going to be at least another two hours before any hint of daybreak. At least this was their last night like this and, whatever the outcome, life was going to change beyond all recognition in approximately six hours' time.

He did eventually fall into a deep sleep again. The next thing he was aware of was being dug in the ribs quite harshly and a hand was clamped over his mouth to stop him making any excess noise.

The day had broken and the rain had stopped, which was a merciful thing in its own right. He could even see a little light steam coming off his camouflage jacket. He became instantly aware of his own smell and longed for that coffee, the cigarette, and a long, long shower. Yet, his adrenal glands were working overtime and the morning light had brought with it the event that they had been waiting here in the undergrowth three days for. Never mind months of planning.

They were all up and awake, all six of them, yet there was no jovial banter around a warm camp fire, and no coffee. Instead there was a nervous atmosphere of almost total silence.

Robert gesticulated to them to strip and clean their weapons. This had become second nature to them all by then and they could do it blindfold, but to do it quietly was defying the laws of physics - the working parts always clicked back into place. So, this was carried out virtually blindfold, taking apart and assembling again inside their sleeping bags.

Cleaning and oiling was done in the open as they had to lift their barrels skywards to sight through them and make sure the rifling was pure and unobstructed. That was the bit inside the barrel that curled round and gave the bullet a curling trajectory. There were always things that could go wrong with weapons but there was no excuse for a dirty, un-oiled gun.

All they could really do then was to wait. The waiting dragged on and on and it was made particularly tense by the lack of any conversation.

Eventually, Robert gave them all the five minute warning signal and James physically felt another big release from his adrenals. He also felt the sudden need to empty the contents of his colon.

The first vehicle of the huge motorcade appeared in the distance, some three hundred meters away, which was as close as they had dared to get.

This was the moment they had rehearsed for so long. This was going to be the last day on Earth for this particular member of the Royal Family. They did not question why.

Weapons off safety and ready to fire. They were all highly skilled marksmen but this was not going to be easy as the distance was a serious challenge. They had backup in the form of two hand held anti-tank weapons but they really did not want to have to deploy them as it would have instantly given their position away.

And there she was, in full view, in her specially adapted Army vehicle that would protect her against so many things except her need to be seen to wave to the on looking crowd. Yes, there was Queen Elizabeth the Second and they were about to assassinate her.

Martin and James exchanged glances. Martin was a hard son-of-a-bitch and not a lot of emotion showed in his quite gnarled face. James was visibly a little nervous, yet steely. This was a job and it had to be done.

The carrying strap of James' 7.62 was tightly around his left hand, weapon pulled hard into his shoulder blade to minimise any movement whatsoever. She was still approximately 250 yards away and the slightest movement of the rifle would send a bullet yards off target at that range.

Martin's job was to shoot the tyres, a mere millisecond after both Robert and Paddy shot the Queen. Why two assassins? In case one missed. It should have given them both a second chance.

James had her in the cross hairs of his telescopic sights. Still too far.

Robert's role was to count them down and orchestrate the signal to fire at exactly the right time and to help them get the hell out of there as quickly as possible afterwards. The RV point was nearly half a mile away and it was going to be a mad dash, which they had possibly a fifty-fifty chance of making still alive. The alternative was death or being captured.

Still too soon.

James concentrated on his breathing, trying to keep it slow and even. At the point of firing you have to hold your breath to minimise even the any last fraction of bodily movement.

At the point of receiving his first signal he was unaware of Martin or anything else around him. He was in that all important zone.

Any moment now.

His finger took up the slight amount of slack and he squeezed just that fraction harder. It was like slow motion. He had the Queen clearly in the middle of his sights and he was milliseconds away from shooting her in the head.

Then came the explosions followed by the CS gas.

Thirty or forty yards ahead, right in the line of sight, another explosion went off, and there was smoke everywhere. Then more explosions, behind them. Lots of shouting.

"Abort and head for the RV point", shouted Robert.

A grenade went off as little as twenty yards away, and then there was a blinding pain in James's head.

And that is all he remembered, until he woke up, freezing cold, stark naked, blindfolded, gagged and aware of the most irritating noise imaginable in the background. He later found out that it was what is known as white noise. It is designed to deprive prisoners of any spatial awareness and totally disorient them. It was also pitch black in the room where he was being held.

Just four hours of this was enough to drive the sanest of people mad. And, James could not even move. He was shackled to a very low high backed chair, which, in turn, was bolted to the floor.

After eight hours of this he wanted out. At that point he thought that his mind was shot. Yet somewhere deep down inside he had once developed a steely resolve. His thoughts were taken back to his first day at Public School, as a thirteen year old.

“You’re the new boy, eh? You are fighting Phnutt after tea!”

It seemed like the whole school had gathered in the locker rooms and the noise of all the other boys was unbearable, like a cage fight. Phnutt appeared and James’ heart started racing even faster, as he realised why this guy was called Phnutt. His nose was squashed into the recess of his nasal cavity. He looked part bulldog, part gorilla and was not a pretty site. James nearly shat himself.

And then, he did what he was advised to do, by the very same people who had actually organised the whole sordid debacle, and he tried to hit Phnutt first. He missed and Phnutt then quickly pinned him to the floor and, as the blows rained down on him, James gave up the last vestiges of any real hope for a normal life.

Some while later, battered and bruised, he had sobbed his heart out, alone, and very alone. Yet at that point he had hardened.

Nobody is ever going to do this to me again. I hate you all and whatever you throw at me I will deal with it.

The memory of that quickly disappeared.

Did he imagine it or was there someone else in the room all of a sudden?

Nothing for a while, but he was sure there was another presence in the room.

Christ Almighty, he thought, there is someone behind me for sure.

James urinated and the hot and wet liquid trickled down his legs. Not for the first time though over the last twelve hours or so. The previous two occasions had been through necessity. This was through sheer fear.

Then suddenly his mask was yanked off his face and his gag forcefully ripped off... It was excruciatingly painful and must have been some kind of duct tape.

And then there was light! A bright piercing light shining down at him from what was probably a desk, although his vision was so impaired he could not make much else out.

Then came the voice from behind the light. The voice was conveying a message - the offer of release from those surroundings, in exchange for information.

James heard himself talking, the sound of his own voice reverberating in his own skull. It sounded strange unreal - surreal...

“Name, rank and serial number?”

Just like in all the films. But he had actually been trained to do it in reverse.

“Serial number, rank and name.”

And so began the interrogation. Short bursts of questioning followed by long periods of ensuing darkness and noise.

Light, questions, offers of food if he gave the requested information, darkness, noise, light, noise, light. No sleep-total sensory deprivation.

More white noise. He thought that that bloody noise would live with him forever.

He tried to distract himself with his thoughts. He alternated between wild fantasies, hopes and dreams for his future and memories from the past. The discomfort and disorientation fused both sets of mind ramblings into one blurry mess and he realised he could not continue for much longer.

There comes a point for every human being at which they cannot take any more. James finally realised that he was in the shit, proverbially and literally. This was degrading to say the least and he realised that there was no way out of this.

He found out later that he lasted thirty six and a half hours.

Does that sound like a long time or a short time? Well, it was not the best and not the worst. In fact most people cracked within six hours, some lasted a full day and only ten per cent lasted more than thirty hours.

James was kept in solitary confinement but he was allowed to wash, shave, eat, put clothes on and feel half human again. He was not allowed to sleep, because he had to be de-briefed first.

You see, it had not been for real. It was only a test, if a scarily realistic and truly terrifying one.

Yes, he did have the Queen in his sights for real, but the bullets had been blanks.

Yes, the deprivation and interrogation were real and yes, he had crapped himself, literally and metaphorically. But, he was a member of Her Majesty's Armed Forces, in the Intelligence Corps, and this was a joint escape and evasion style of exercise with the SAS. The first and last one he volunteered for.

He often wondered if he really had had it in him to pull the trigger, given a target that was a genuine threat. Could he behave like an automaton, just because he was ordered to do so.

The stark truth was – yes .

A MIXED BAG

Guy had a broad assortment of clients.

There were good ones, bad ones, interesting ones, amusing ones, new ones, sometimes even scary ones. In fact he had one real live gangster who came to see him regularly. His name was Jack and it was a little like having Tony Soprano in the room - interesting but pretty scary.

He knew that James was coming first thing and his diary told him that he then had Martha, Richard and, ah yes, an appointment with his doctor, Frances, at five. He was not going to her surgery though. She was coming to him, as she did every week.

By and large Guy preferred his female clients. Men tended to be far more stoic and macho about their `challenges' where women, more often than not, were keen to open up straight away.

The session with James was, as always, unusual. Sometimes Guy wondered who was the therapist and who was the client. James had never really opened up much since their first few sessions. In fact, he was there for the company as much as anything else. One day, when he was fully ready, there were other things that James would like to have the courage to discuss. Guy never charged him.

However, after James had left this time, Guy realised that something was actually very wrong in James' life at that time. James was incredibly good at subterfuge, papering over the cracks and laughing about them. Like so many people he put up an incredibly good front – as often happens. This time, however, he spotted a hint of sadness in him that he had not previously witnessed. Their relationship was that of friends and Guy never felt that he could properly open James up. That had really been James' request too.

Guy was actually annoyed with himself because he had crossed the line between friend and client. He actually felt that he had no right to delve. Yet he sensed that things were about to change. Friend or client, Guy hated people feeling any pain or suffering. It was as if he felt their pain himself. This feeling, this oversensitivity, had started when he was just six in the school playground one day.

He had watched four horrible little boys harassing and teasing a young girl. Eventually, they popped her balloon and she was distraught about it, tears streaming down her eyes. In that instant Guy felt as bad as she did and burst into tears himself. Since that day Guy was aware that he was deeply in touch with both his own and other people's emotions.

He switched his thoughts to his next client. Martha was far from his usual type of client and, as he waited for her, he thought back to how they had first met just a few weeks ago. For a start, Martha was old – very old, nearly 90, and she was poor and so he did

not charge her for the sessions they had together. Why? Well, Martha had come into his life in a strange, serendipitous manner.

Carole-Anne had stormed off with the boys back to Yorkshire early one week following a momentous row about Guy's drinking and his need to have time to himself. His instinct had been to go straight to the pub after work and have more than just one or two drinks in order to forget his problems. But almost to prove her wrong and certainly to prove to himself he could take or leave alcohol, he had decided, instead, to try to straighten his head with a long walk along the Embankment.

Outside a block of housing association flats, he had seen her, sitting on a bench looking at the sky and crying silently. Now this was London – you just do not intrude on people's privacy or indeed grief – he knew the rules. Up north some kindly person in this situation would immediately enquire what was wrong and how they could help. Down here, especially in wealthy Chelsea, such behaviour was considered to be verging on madness.

So he had passed by initially, but it troubled him that he had done so. Martha looked so frail and sad and someone so elderly should not be out on a pavement on her own, alone, crying. Something made him turn back and he joined her on the bench.

"Is there anything I can help you with?" he had asked gently.

"You can stop me being lonely", she replied. "I haven't spoken to a living soul for weeks", she said. "Bless you for stopping."

So, they had chatted. She told him about the bar just around the corner, a place that she had recently started to go and simply stare at for a while before going to sit down by the Thames. The bar was where she had spent so much of her life. She had started there in the last years of the Second World War.

She was young and attractive and the underground joint, reputedly the inspiration for Dickens' Fagin's den, served soldiers and Lords, prostitutes, black marketers and politicians. She was the star waitress with a cheeky smile and ready wit and just enough cleavage and thigh to be the right side of respectable, although it was a close run thing.

In the twilight years of its existence, as it had become a bit of a tourist trap, Martha could no longer pull a decent pint or open the bottles of wine so she simply waited on tables, chatting to the clientele and collecting glasses. She was as much a part of the place as the smoked-stained, barrel-vaulted, ceilings. She was much loved and part of the reason its regular clientele went there.

She had been there forty years. She met both husbands there. It was her life, her purpose, her reason to get up in a morning. Everybody needs a reason to get out of bed in the morning.

And then things changed. The bar was bought by budding entrepreneurs, one of whom had some tenuous sort of connection with Royalty, and the new owners wanted a change of emphasis. Retro-trendy was what they were aiming for, whatever that meant, but there was no part for Martha in their plans. So, she was politely asked to retire. That was harsh, and thoughtless.

It was the worst day of her life. She felt her lifeblood ebbing away as she left the bar for the last time and headed back to the loneliness of her flat. They had taken away her purpose in life. That had been fifteen years ago and she had not been back since. The truth was the bar was the only thing in her life that reminded her of love and belonging in her life. Everybody needs that.

Eventually, Guy persuaded her to take the plunge, knowing that it could help her with a little bit of closure, and they walked into the bar together, with a little goading. She was astonished at how much it had changed and how much they charged for drinks. "Daylight robbery", she had said.

Time passed quickly and he realised he had really enjoyed the distraction. He had learnt so much from her about life in the war, the austerity of the fifties and the craziness of sixties London. He listened carefully as she told him about the one true love of her life. It had been six months before the end of the war in Europe and one evening he was there. He was a Free French pilot on leave. He had piercing eyes and windswept hair and she fell for him immediately. It was the voice, the accent, the way he held and smoked his Gauloise. The smell of them could still reduce her to tears. She knew he probably had a girl in every town, but at the end of the evening when he asked her if he could walk her home, she was powerless to resist. He kissed her good night like the perfect gentleman.

She was hook, line and sinker, infatuated.

In Martha's words - two nights later he was screwing her up against a tree in Embankment Gardens with the sky alight with Ack-Ack guns trying to bring down Doodlebugs. It was pure dangerous passion and she could not have cared less if a bomb had fallen on her then and there as long as she died in the arms of her airman.

She reached orgasm for the first time in her life, wrapped around him, engulfed in strange yet delightful new feelings and she wanted to laugh and cry and scream and die, all in the same moment. And then he had whispered to her the only words of French she ever learned yet could always remember, "La petite mort."

He was gone a fortnight later, posted to Norfolk, and she thought she would never hear from him again. But, he wrote. He almost begged her to join him but she did not trust her instincts. She did not have the courage to at least try.

The last seventy years of her life were spent in mourning for a love lost and regretting her inability to make a decision that could have totally altered her life.

Guy arranged to see her in his practise at least once per week. He just fitted her in wherever he could.

And here she was today, smiling as she entered his office. She has dressed up for him, he thought, and there was a little well applied make up. She looked years younger than she had before and he knew that was simply because she had someone to talk to. She told him what she had been up to, which was not a lot, and then she started to talk about her years at the bar. She was still angry at how she had been dismissed.

He said little, knowing there was not much he could say to assuage her anger, recognising that in this situation his role was simply to listen. He did suggest that forgiveness was a powerful tool for getting over anger, but did not press the point. He sowed the seed.

And then she talked to him about Arzhur, her wartime lover from Breton. She described the instant attraction and how that led her to the Embankment Gardens, and the exquisite love making that had never been bettered.

And she started to cry, cry for the lost years, for the disappointments, for letting go the one man she had truly loved.

“But it was wartime”, Guy said. “He had to go. You couldn’t have stopped him leaving.”

“No”, she said. “But he wrote to me after the war. He wanted to see me again. He told me he’d thought of no-one else but me.”

“And why didn’t you agree to see him?” Guy asked.

She smiled. “I had already got engaged to my first husband. I could not let him down. But I spent every day of my long life wishing I had.”

And there the session ended.

He had kept Richard waiting so he did not have his usual reflection time.

Richard was a city boy, and seemingly a very, very successful one. Guy never pried into how much any client earned but one suspected he was one of those, even at just thirty-two, who was on the receiving end of a seven figure bonus every year. That was big bucks.

On the face of it you could not wish for a better start in life. He was born the son of landed gentry and wanted for nothing as he grew up. Six foot three, an athlete’s figure and handsome to boot. A fine job, a gorgeous girlfriend, a splendid four storey Nichols Lion house in Fulham, a two thousand acre country retreat an hour out of London, which would all be his one day. Confident, eloquent, erudite, charming, dashing even.

But Richard also had a serious cocaine habit, something that was almost endemic in The City. It was a way of keeping going for many. Between four and five in the morning

alarms rang all over London to signal the start of a new day and desks all over the currency and commodity markets were fired up into life, fuelled by the energy of coke. Rather an ironic homonym for the birthplace of the industrial revolution.

Desks in these markets had to be manned from six or seven onwards. By the time Richard and thousands like him finished work they were ready for a drink. Often they were ready to simply go home and vegetate but London life does not work like that. There was always someone to meet, someone's little get together, visiting foreign bankers to entertain, free tickets to a premier, a cocktail party, a friend's art gallery opening, you name it and there was always one of them going on.

Richard and others like him found the only survival mechanism available was a simple piece of folded white paper with a gram of white powder in it that provided an instant lift. Normally it contained a 'Henry'- aptly named after a certain Monarch of the Realm, as it is an eighth of an ounce or three and a half grams. Fifty quid for a gram and one fifty for a 'Henry.'

One line of coke and Richard would be mentally fighting fit again and much more inclined to be sociable, for maybe an hour, at best. That was the problem - it just did not last long before the effect started to wear off and another infusion of energy was needed. For many, this became the start of a vicious cycle as they could keep going until the small hours of the morning, somehow hauling them out of bed to get to work, but then needing the drug to keep going for the rest of the day and that evening's event.

Guy had recently read a very interesting fact. There was more cocaine consumed during a weekday in London than there was on a weekend day! The same weekday users often simply did not need it on a weekend. It was merely a survival tool.

Unfortunately, Richard used it day in and day out.

Yet, strangely, that was not why Richard came to see him. That was really just as well because addictions were not Guy's strong point. He would go so far as to say they were actually his weak point, being somewhat of a 'Type A' personality himself. Guy had also been known to use emotional props on occasions.

No, Richard had an underlying problem to sort out and his girlfriend, Claudia, refused to become his fiancé until he dealt with it. Having said that, he had never asked her. But, he had a serious issue with being able to express his emotions to the people that mattered - notably her, in this case.

"Do you love her? "

"Yes. Sure."

"Do you truly love her, want to make babies and spend the rest of your life with her, forsaking all others and all else?"

"Why not? It is a practical and functional arrangement."

“Can you properly express your feelings to her?”

“No.”

There was the rub. He was okay with that, but his girlfriend Claudia was not. She felt that he was emotionally closed, cold even. In some ways he was.

Well, he thought he was and it worked for him in its own way. Guy came across this so often.

Now, in Guy’s experience, nine times out of ten he would revert to one simple thing as a starting point:

“Show me the child and I will show you the adult.”

Richard’s behaviour in adult life, like most people’s on this planet, was formed by his childhood events, and his childhood dreams. Childhood, in Guy’s world, occurred between birth and continued up to any event that makes that person an adult, if they are ever lucky enough for that to happen, and for many of his clients it simply did not. In theory he thought, it should happen at eighteen, but for some it was earlier and for others it has still never occurred. They are simply children in adult clothing!

As a simple onlooker you would say that Richard’s childhood and early teens were as picture perfect as it got; captain of the cricket and rugby teams at prep school, head boy, excellent scholar, and wealthy parents - a seemingly enviable upbringing.

When he was back at home from boarding school he would always bring friends with him as his mother and father were often not around, and that was fine because the boys could run riot. They would never have known about them smoking pot and many of the other things they got up to.

When he did see his mother he called her ‘Mother’. Not Mum, or Mummy but ‘Mother’. He had thought that to be the norm.

When he saw his father he called him ‘Sir’.

‘Sir!’ Now what sort of a going on was that? Had he been a budding young lieutenant at Sandhurst and met his general of a father in the mess or in front of other soldiers or officers then fine-that is Military protocol, but this kid had been indoctrinated to call his father ‘Sir’ from birth, and, his father was not a bloody general!

‘Sir’ and ‘Mother’ had life all neatly mapped out for Richard. They gave him everything he needed to prepare him for an exalted and dazzling career. Everything he could have wished for. Except for affection.

After a while, Richard had recognised this and Guy and he were working on that together, with gradual demonstrable signs of success. It is not always easy to prise the child back out when it has gone underground somewhere, deep in the sub-conscious...

And this was what they worked on for the hour or so, exploring Richard's issues with his parents – why and how it had affected his ability to show his true emotions or affection to those close to him, let alone to those in the wider world.

After Richard had left, Guy found himself thinking about what a huge effect parents had on the emotional outcomes of their children. As if 'growing up' was not fraught with enough challenges for many children. It was actually a real pet subject for him and had been the very first spoken word audio that he had written and narrated. It went a long way towards explaining what a massive impact childhood has on people's lives.

After a while he checked his emails and then it was time for Frances.

Frances was, as always, late and this was the reason why Guy always arranged to see her at the end of the day and preferably on her day off or at least when she had no afternoon surgery.

He got on extremely well with Frances, even though she was quite an impenetrable character. Her upbringing had been totally unlike Richard's in most ways. She had had a very stable childhood, although not from a family awash with money. In fact, her parents had taken in lodgers in the house to help pay the way. More importantly though, she and her sister grew up with real affection from their parents - real love. Both parents were still alive too, but ageing rapidly, which was a cause for concern.

Frances was a highly accomplished, and an extremely well thought of doctor, who had always had a longer list of patients than the other partners in the practise. She was forward thinking in her approach to medicine and was very supportive of all complimentary treatments.

Yet, she too was unhappy. Lost, even.

Getting Frances to open up was like trying to prise an oyster open with your fingers, and sometimes – unlike with the majority of his female clientele - Guy would do more talking than she did. It was just the way it was - almost as if she did not really want any counselling but just needed someone to have a bit of banter with. But a bloodhound follows a scent by instinct-

“Show me the child and I will show you the adult.”

Frances bucked the trend. She had been a happy kid and Guy could find no hidden traumas as he would so often in others, but it did not stop him looking.

Childhood events? Seemingly nothing untoward there.

Childhood dreams? What did she want out of life as an adult? What did she expect? What did she dream of or hope for? Was there a purpose in her life? Had there ever been one? Was it still there? How did her 'script' look now and for the future?

This is when they eventually hit a nerve. Not a big 'ouch' but definitely a swerve point on the straight line to the perfect outcome. Frances had never really thought about the whole of her life in front of her, just the bit up till about ten years ago. She had been driven to be a good doctor and to make a difference where she could. She had also been driven to create a happy family environment for her children - even though her first marriage had broken up she had always retained an extremely good relationship with her daughters. But they were grown up and gone and doing their own thing in life. Worse still, they were both in Australia.

Guy began to think that this had left a serious void in Frances's life, as if her purpose had been fulfilled and there was not much left for her apart from talking to and seeing her kids whenever she could. Guy felt quite sure that this was a correct conclusion in his own mind as he had studied 'purpose' quite a lot. Viktor Frankl's book, Man's Search for Meaning, was his bible for that and a fascinating read.

They had to find some new purpose for Frances – create a new 'script'. Something to make her want to jump out of bed in the morning. This was proving to be easier said than done.

There were other issues too, professional ones that she felt very strongly about and discussed at length. She had become totally disillusioned with the way that the medical profession was treated, how she and other doctors had to time their appointments down to the last minute as if every patient were the same. New budgeting restrictions affected the health care she could offer and it seemed to her that the pharmaceutical companies dominated and dictated virtually every aspect of the day-to-day life of doctors.

The more Frances told Guy about this particular issue the more indignant Guy too started to feel. Through Frances he discovered one of the starkest truths about those big faceless conglomerates:

In her opinion pharmaceutical companies have no interest whatsoever (read financial gain) in discovering cheap cures for any disease or illness. They make their stakeholders happy and wealthy by providing expensive medications that ease symptoms and prolong life - providing they are taken day in and day out for ever.

They'd even discussed how there were possibly extremely secure vaults, deep down in the bowels of a variety of these companies, where simple and cheap discoveries that could change certain aspects of medicine forever lie buried away. Conspiracy theories? Well, when health care is driven by big business and the need to generate profit nothing could surprise either of them.

They talked for a while about incidence of certain diseases and lifestyles in different parts of the world. Guy had an interest in 'the alkaline lifestyle' and he had studied the Hunza tribe in northern most Pakistan, who seemingly had never even heard of cancer and were reported to live until well over a hundred, without ever swallowing a pill from a

chemist. Whatever he did he made sure that he drank at least three litres of alkaline water every day.

Anyway, this was an on-going topic of conversation between them and Guy knew it must have been incredibly hard for Frances to come to terms with a profession that she loved, being so damaged by fiscal forces.

Then, Guy discovered something else. Not only was Frances at odds with her beliefs and values professionally but she was also truly stuck between a rock and a hard place, emotionally, in her home life. She had conflicting values about what was important to her as many people do.

This was one of Guy's big things that he believed in and tried to get his clients to work out. He knew that there are few worse places to be in life than at a crossroad of values. He perceived it as akin to standing on a landmine and knowing you have done it. If you take the weight off your left leg to jump right then you are going to lose that leg at best, and conversely if you choose to jump left then you will lose your right leg, at best. Whichever option you choose-you lose.

When that state exists in someone's mind, as Guy saw time and time again, day in and day out, a kind of emotional paralysis pervades. It is far worse than learned helplessness that is taught in core psychology (where young infants/children eventually learn that it is a waste of time crying for attention if it is never forthcoming). It is 'damned if I do and damned if I don't'. It makes people feel as if they are banging their head against a brick wall.

Guy knew this was, without doubt, the hardest thing of all to help anybody with.

In Frances's case she was becoming increasingly unsettled in London and wanted to move back to Devon to a small practise with fewer patients, to be nearer to her parents. She deeply wanted to downshift and to upsize a little; have an acre of garden and keep some chickens and maybe even a goat or a llama. She wanted to look out onto green fields, and to breathe in the country air.

She was starting to hate every day she spent in London. Her values had changed entirely as very often happens to people at a certain age or career point.

The conflict for her was that Michael, her partner of the last ten years, would not move down with her. He was ten years younger and had a blossoming career organising events for big corporates, and he was about to be offered a partnership in the company. His kids from his first marriage were also now working in London and he was resolute that he had to stay in the city.

Most of the time they had a good relationship, despite the stresses and strains, and it seemed senseless, heart-breaking even, to consider being apart or even separated permanently. She had been hanging on and on and on, becoming silently more and more unhappy and unsettled. She valued her relationship with Michael.

This kind of conflict of values creates a serious internal mental warfare for anyone and is one of the most difficult things to help people make a decision on. Guy knew each individual must make it for themselves. Finding and highlighting the problem and then putting it out on the table was his job, but advice on complex emotional issues was forbidden territory.

And, just to make things even worse for her, another part of her was saying that maybe she really did not want to be in Devon at all. Maybe she would rather move to Australia to be with her two daughters.

It was one of those appointments that just simply finished early. There was nothing more to talk about and there was no point continuing. So Guy invited Frances for a drink.

On the few occasions he had done this Frances had always declined and, true to form she did so again. Frances liked a drink, possibly too many of them, but she simply did not like pubs. Common with many doctors, they rarely socialised outside of their profession unless they had complete anonymity or were with people who respected that fact that they really did not want to hear about someone's illness outside of the surgery. In fact, being a doctor is a very isolated profession and many doctors become extremely insular and actually rather anti-social.

Where Frances was not given to socialise anywhere where she might bump into a patient, Guy was the opposite. He was a pub animal. He was weaned on pubs, sitting in the pub car park with a pint of shandy with his brother and sister till they were old enough to be taken in (about fourteen years old). Just seeing his parents going out to the pub on an evening, and hearing about nightclubs made him crave it as he grew up. It all sounded so glamorous, especially in the late sixties and early seventies.

THE SO BAR

It was the end of a very long day and Guy needed to relax. He had driven the Porsche to his home in Sands End and then walked the quarter of a mile to his place of sanctuary, the So Bar, his local, which was quietly nestled away in one of the back streets, and it was the discovery of the century for Guy.

With Carole-Anne being away so much Guy had begun to spend an increasing amount of time in the So Bar and enjoyed the anonymity of it, despite some of its more than illustrious guests. Nobody there knew what he really did for a profession and that was the way it suited him. As far as anyone was concerned he had a small training business helping unemployed people get qualifications to then find work.

Sands End had been quite a rough and rundown area but properties were being gobbled up by all the 'Sloane's' who could not stretch to the full Chelsea thing or did not want to live in Canary Wharf. In the few years Guy had been there he had seen a doubling of prices and the presence of the So Bar must have helped.

Marco and a few undisclosed business partners had turned an old run down dive of a bar into a very chic little gastro pub, which was effortlessly trendy with its marble and chrome, beech wood floor, antique pine tables, an eclectic mix of soft sofas and a sound system that played cool trance music regardless of the time of day. The bar staff were young and friendly, the guys handsome and the girls pretty and there was Marcus the manager, an Afro-Caribbean with short cropped bleached blond hair, an incongruous look at best, that he managed to pull off.

He succeeded in this because he was charming and he just knew how to make anyone feel welcome and good about themselves. It is the little things in life that often make all the difference, Guy knew. Having read 'How to Win Friends and Influence People' Marcus' skill could be summarised in one line. 'It is very hard NOT to like someone who makes you feel good and very easy to NOT like someone who does not make you feel good!'

Guy loved the place to bits because it was tucked away in the middle of nowhere yet its patrons were from all walks of life-a superb microcosm of London life. It had retained quite a few of its old regulars, good honest, hard-working people and a range of interesting other clients.

By and large it just had a really good balance about it. He could go and sit on his own, and often did, without feeling awkward, or, if he felt particularly sociable he would park himself at one of the large tables and people would always come and join him.

The So Bar was the kind of place where you could drink on your own if that is what you wanted or quickly engage in conversation with someone at the bar.

It certainly had some unusual locals. There were a couple of brushed-up, though scruffy looking guys, who were always in there drinking premium lager and alternating

their consumption with frequent visits outside for a quick cigarette under the guise of having to take a call or have a chat with some local ne'er do wells. Guy remembered that someone had pointed them out once as small time dealers - weed and speed merchants that every pub has.

Then there were a couple of seemingly down and out louches, shady characters of questionable morality who obviously had an interesting story to tell. They were quite well dressed in a slightly Bohemian way and both spoke Queen's English. Guy had often wondered how they could afford to drink so constantly and regularly before he was told that these guys had made a lot of money in the 80s through a record label they owned. The money was still not a problem even at their prodigious rate of cigarette and alcohol consumption.

There was city money in there too, lots of it, flashy young guys, barely out of school, dressed in sharp suits and sporting estuary accents, drinking heavily and flirting with the girls behind the bar. They spent a lot of money. They would start on rounds of lager, interspersed with shots and the more they drank the louder they became with their stories of wealth created and bonuses paid.

There was a pattern. One would boast about some transaction and he would be alpha male for a moment. In response to this one of his mates would feel momentarily inferior and his response was simple – to show off through spending. So to celebrate the deal of the day, he would order a couple of bottles of bubbly, not the house champers at a mere 40 quid but the Grand Cru at a ton twenty. Two bottles would appear in the ice bucket and the guy's Platinum card would be handed over.

And so it went on all evening, the boys bragging and braying loudly, increasingly irritating the other customers but tolerated by the management because of their spending.

Then there were the Sloane Pony girls who could not yet afford Sloane Square itself. Well, actually some of them could, thanks to somewhat vulgar inheritances, but in most cases Daddy would only cough up three hundred thousand pounds or so and Sand's End was loudly proclaimed to be the up and coming, hippest, trendiest London location. There were lots of pretty twenty-and-a-bit girls who were something in PR, and their boyfriends - strong jawed guys with Guildford stock broker accents working in banking, recruitment or property.

And then there were the Princes of the Realm - William and Harry.

Guy had, on several occasions, experienced the company of the two princes. He had been standing at one of the urinals one evening and turned round to face the future king and his ginger haired younger brother waiting to deposit their blue blooded urine. Marco, who was once Prince Charles' equerry, was with them, acting as the security guy, as such, and Guy, bold as brass, had simply nodded, smiled and exchanged friendly urinal banter with them- "Hi Marco, hi guys. How you doing?" He did not really know what else to say to them.

Guy received two different responses. William, with his totally endearing cheesy grin, smiled and said "Good thanks, you?" whereas Harry cast him a sheepish look and nodded meekly. Guy had one of those intuition moments and sensed a real pain in Harry and would have loved to be able to talk to him about it.

He returned to his seat to just think about things that were on his mind and to 'people watch.' People watching was a pastime Guy enjoyed immensely and also excelled at. He would sit at a quiet table or stand at the bar and guess people's stories. Sometimes he would then engage them in conversation and invariably the assumptions he had made were found to be true. He could spot an unhappy person. He could identify first dates or illicit lovers as easily as read the wine list. It really was a gift he had.

Tonight he had intended just to be here to think as he had had something of an exhausting day. He was also becoming increasingly unhappy about not seeing his children enough and needed to work that one out in his head. Life was a bit empty without them. He too had a conflict of values looming large on his horizon.

He took a sip of his pint but was immediately distracted by the couple sitting at a table in the corner. They were in their late thirties. The man went for the drinks and brought them to their table. They were quite obviously a couple yet they did not seem at ease with each other. Nothing new there then, Guy thought. She was talking for England and he was sitting there quite obviously struggling to stay tuned and pay attention. How many times had Guy seen this scenario? Too many to mention. How many times had he been in this exact situation? Too many to mention!

Well, the guy was getting agitated and shuffling around in his chair, trying to steal a glance around the pub to see who else was there (a territory thing) and she just kept talking. Guy predicted that it would soon be time for the toilet trick.

Yes, there we go, he thought, the man stood up to go to the toilet. She sat there fuming because she had been in mid flow and actually did not like being left on her own in a crowded bar.

Now, the next thing was clever. When he re-appeared the fellow was seemingly engrossed in a meaningful conversation on his mobile. He gesticulated to his partner that he was going to have to go outside to finish the call as it was too noisy in the bar. Keeping the performance going he paced back and forth outside as if his business was in grave jeopardy, occasionally casting a glance over to his partner to see how much of this he was going to get away with.

Not much more in this case it appeared. She was quite visibly getting annoyed and, whoever it was he was talking to, it could not be more important than talking to her.

The man sensed this too and gave the two minute finger wave routine. That gave him probably just enough time to concoct some elaborate story about what had been so important.

Another couple sat down right next to Guy, much younger, and he was temporarily distracted. Ah, they were all loved up. Bon voyage - hope it is a good one, thought Guy to himself.

He needed another drink so he eyed up the best place to stand at the bar.

Then his attention was drawn back to the previous couple. Five feet away the interrogation was in full swing and it was only going one way. But which one of them would walk out first?

She did.

The man looked relieved, although somewhat apprehensive. This was only a temporary reprieve and he well knew it. Either the phone was going to ring any time soon or he was going to have to have to face the music later. And so, in time-honoured tradition, he stood up, walked up to the bar right next to Guy, ordered a pint of Fullers Pride and a large Laphroaig single malt whisky and quite obviously decided he was going to tough it out, with the help of plenty of alcohol.

The Polish girl behind the bar placed his whisky next to Guy's on the bar top. Guy favoured a single malt Talisker to chase his beer down with.

"Trouble at t'mill?" Guy asked, exaggerating his Yorkshire accent for what he hoped was mild comic effect.

"Don't even go there mate", the man said, taking a deep swig of beer "Anyway, how did you know?" he asked curiously.

"Got the tee-shirt, mate", replied Guy.

"Can't live with them and can't live without them eh?" said the man.

"They probably say the same about us", said Guy smiling.

They chatted a bit more, about women mainly, after the man introduced himself as Paul. He finished his pint and then his whisky and called over the pretty barmaid. He ordered another round and insisted on buying Guy a drink. As the barmaid went to get the order Paul winked at Guy and lecherously said, "Fuck me, she could make an old man very happy."

Guy then had him sussed. Paul was a serial philanderer. He could not stop himself. The woman he had just parted from was his long suffering wife. Guy surmised as much and a little bit of subtle questioning got Paul to reveal more.

He used this pub to meet his mistress who was 10 years his junior. "Quite a hand full, mate", said Paul. "Blond. In property. I am mad about her. The wife sussed something was up and turned up here out of the blue. Just managed to call Rosie and put her off."

“Your life seems quite stressful,” said Guy.

“You’re telling me mate,” said Paul.

“Can I ask you - does all this make you happy?” asked Guy.

“Happy? What the fuck’s happy?” said Paul.

Guy knew where this conversation was going and he made a decision to finish his drink quite quickly and went home. He needed space rather than conversation and Paul was the sort who would come and join him if he went to sit down alone. An early exit was called for.

Walking back, Guy was thinking about what he’d just witnessed, and about the different needs of men and women in relationships. Some years ago he had read John Gray’s seminal and bestselling book *Men are from Mars, Women from Venus* and the older he got the more he believed that it held some deep truths. Gray stated that men had a deep seated need to escape into their virtual caves. That, to Guy, like many men, was space on his own, peace and quiet time to reflect on things. Carole-Anne had always struggled with this - she felt understandably excluded. This type of difference, between man and woman, was never going to make relationships an easy affair. He remembered, from the book, that the most frequently expressed complaint women have about men is that men simply don’t listen. Either the man completely ignores her issues that she’s concerned about or he listens for a short while, assesses what is troubling her, and then offers a solution. However, she doesn’t necessarily want a solution –she wants to kick the issue around a bit more and just talk about for a while. He’s then confused and angry that she can’t accept that he has cracked the problem.

This was absolutely what happened almost daily with him and Carole-Anne when they were together - no matter how many times she told him that he wasn’t listening, he didn’t get it and kept repeating the same behaviour - she wanted empathy, when he thought she wanted solutions. And this was a constant theme he heard from woman and men when counselling them through relationship issues. Along with the fact that the most frequently expressed complaint men have about women is that women are always trying to change them.

Guy knew that he was not easy to live with- he accepted that. He liked a beer and sometimes some weed, and he very much needed his own company on occasions. He could turn on the charm in important meetings and then come home and simply want his space. He had tried to explain this to Carole-Anne before they had married- he had wanted her to know what she was taking on. But at the time she had only seen his good features, and he hers. But he did realise that if they were to stay together he had

to try to just listen, to be more interested in the things that she wanted to talk about. They had to stay together, for the kids if nothing else.

The house felt eerily quiet, as it often did nowadays, and he could not settle. He poured himself an extremely generous scotch and went for a bath in the outdoor hot tub. Guy felt low, as he was prone to on occasions, although he never let anyone else see it.

It struck him that, actually, he was not at all happy and it had been brought home to him recently that he was not impervious to the challenges that many of his clients faced. It was the world over he thought as he lay in the warm water; too many lonely people, too much unhappiness, too many couples not understanding each other. Too many couples not giving each other what they really needed. Guy recognised that he needed what everyone needs – love- and he could not see where in his case that love was going to come from. He knew that there was an increasing distance developing between him and Carole-Anne - it was as if, having had children together they were now in danger of drifting in totally different directions when they should have been getting closer.

He knew they were both at fault. Her parents always doted on her as if she were still a young child, which made it so easy for her to run to them when things were not going well in the marriage. They were nice people and just wanted to help – to be good parents and good grandparents. But sometimes they were too nice, instead of letting him and Carole-Anne sort their own differences out.

Guy knew that he was also far from perfect and not easy to live with and he resolved to try to find a better balance between work and family life. He still loved her, and he believed the marriage to be worth fighting for. He knew she'd loved him in the early days – even though she was not great at expressing it. He had to find a way to pull them together again.

He tried to snap himself out of his melancholic mood. He went inside to watch a movie on his disgracefully expensive plasma screen and tried to put his negative thoughts out of his head. Later, sleep eluded him for what seemed like hours. And, as he tossed and turned and tried to shut his mind down, he realised how desperately lonely he really felt. Worse still, he was lonely from within a relationship! He knew that many other people felt the same way...

He tried self-hypnosis and then deep meditation, both of which normally worked but not this time. His mind was too busy to do either and so he settled for resting. His mind wandered...

He recalled his meeting with James and, just as meeting Paul had been depressing, so seeing James had been enlightening. Most people would describe James as an outgoing, charming, and successful businessman who occasionally fell in the brown stuff but usually came out smelling of roses.

He had a strong character, a man you would notice, a man who appeared ever confident, yet deep down, as he gradually revealed to Guy after several sessions he was deeply insecure. Guy reflected that he found this to be the case with many of his clients. It was part of the survival mechanism of modern man - what you see on the outside is rarely what you get on the inside. He knew that most people walking this planet are putting up a front.

James was mildly bi-polar. The medical term used to be 'manic depressive' but that had all the wrong connotations with it, as it suggested sufferers were permanently and pathologically depressed. The condition is a cycling of the body's bio-chemical system between mania, a somewhat euphoric state of mind where many things seem possible, including the impossible, followed by a corresponding low period. The cycle time can range from hours to days, weeks or months.

Guy empathised. He empathised greatly, because what very few people knew about him was that he too suffered from being bi-polar. As too, he often reminded himself, did Sir Winston Churchill, Marie Curie, Albert Einstein, and Abraham Lincoln. In fact, the list was long, illustrious, and quite enlightening. He thought of it as the genius disease as it surely was both a blessing and a curse.

When Guy first started researching his own condition he was quite astonished at the list of people who suffered from bi-polarity: Robbie Williams, Russell Brand, Frank Bruno, Richard Dreyfus, Ray Davies, Mel Gibson, Ernest Hemingway, Florence Nightingale, Sinead O'Connor, Ozzy Osbourne, Nina Simone, Virginia Woolf, Vincent Van Gogh, Edgar Allan Poe, Axl Rose and Brian Wilson. The list went on and on.

Then there was the inimitable, most talented, most extraordinary of bi-polar sufferers of current times, Guy's own idol, the erudite and wildean Stephen Fry .

It almost went with the territory of greatness, Guy believed.

He had asked James at one stage if he had any recollection as to when he may have started to get bi-polar symptoms and how he felt at the time. James had recalled it vividly and described it as a horrible sinking feeling that came out of the blue one day when he was twenty-three. He said it was like someone had injected him with something that made his whole body start to feel like lead and that he had suddenly felt quite helpless and forlorn.

Guy knew this made sense as the condition normally does start between the ages of eighteen and twenty four. It had for him too.

It is very easy to diagnose, if you know what you are looking for, and the medical cop out is to treat it with medication. Alcohol and drugs, legal and illegal, are highly favoured by bi-polar sufferers as a way of dulling the low periods but also as a way of increasing the high periods. The great challenge for them is that the residual side effect of both is to create more depression. This becomes a vicious cycle. It is a difficult disorder to suffer from.

Well, perhaps, he thought, 'suffered' was the wrong word. You had, after all, to take the rough with the smooth. His creativity, his drive, his energy came as a result of the condition. Without it he was probably nothing. With it he had great times and periodically terrible times.

So, in James he saw a mirror. That was why he felt so closely bonded with him, and, at the moment, slightly worried about him.

He wondered who he was seeing tomorrow? He knew that he had a new client coming and that his diary was full, because it usually was. He also had a sneaking suspicion that Vanessa was in his diary too and he had to admit that was exciting. He found her very attractive indeed, and he felt a strong connection with her. But he would never cross that divide professionally. Also he believed in marital monogamy. And yet, recently, when things in the bedroom had become rather staid, he found himself attracted to other women. He missed regular love making, one of the fundamental basics that, as Maslow illustrated, most human beings have been proven to need. His need had always been high – maybe too high- and that too had caused problems between him and Carole-Anne as it did for many couples.

Still sleep eluded him for a long time and, as he lay there tossing and turning, he reminded himself that the grass was rarely greener. He concentrated his thoughts on Carole-Anne and the boys. He thought about her good points and about how nice it was when they were a proper family together. He knew that he was going to have to make a big decision in his life – one that would save his marriage and keep his family unit intact.

He had to decide what was truly most important to him in his life. In that moment he knew.

THE SEEDS OF CHANGE

Guy dropped down into his leather executive chair, set his coffee on the desk and opened his diary. He hoped upon hope that it was going to be an easy day and over in a flash. He was physically and emotionally exhausted and had hardly slept a wink all night.

First up, a Mr G. Chandler, followed by Celia, which was less than good, as she was definitely barking bloody mad and he felt ill equipped to deal with her challenges in life. In fact, Celia had prompted him to delve into the realms of clinical psychology and, most specifically, personality disorders..

Then Lucinda and last thing, Charlotte. No Vanessa.

Gerry was a new client and new clients were rare because Guy had a long waiting list. He turned out to be another very much larger than life figure, not stature wise, although he had obviously been in very good shape at some stage. No, he was Mr. Energy Ball. When he talked about new ideas one became carried away with his enthusiasm, asking questions like 'Where do I put pen to paper to invest.?' So, after an hour and a half Guy did not have the first idea why he had come to see him, although he gleaned a lot of information about him.

He had become a millionaire at twenty five, without Daddy's money and any start-up capital at all. His lifestyle seemed enviable to the average person. He had a steady girlfriend and plenty of lovers on the side, which he apparently accessed as needed. That turned out to be a lot.

Time flew by quickly with Gerry. It was now time to wrap up this first session and Guy had not said that much. That was fine but Guy did need to achieve something. He had to ask the question. "What do you hope to get out of coming to see me?"

And then, quite remarkably, Gerry's whole demeanour changed. He avoided Guy's gaze and turned to stare out of the window, not appearing to be looking at anything in particular - in fact his eyes seemed to have glazed over. He went very quiet and, from Guy's view of him, his eyes seemed to be filling up with tears.

Suddenly he stood up, shaking himself off in a 'big boys don't cry' manner.

"Can I come and see you again?"

That little moment had passed. He was Gerry again - the all singing, all dancing, all action superhero.

They pencilled in a time a week later and that was that - gone in a flash. Actually, some sixth sense told Guy that he would not see Gerry again in a week's time. His life seemed too hectic and chaotic to be able to keep appointments.

Celia next. It took Guy all of his gift, and then some more, just to pull her away from chasing her own tail for a few moments in any session. He was beginning to realise that she needed more than just a talking cure. She needed medication.

Many of his clients were on Prozac, Venlafaxine, Citalopram or the like - basic mood stabilisers/anti-depressants, and that was par for the course. A third of the country was on them and perhaps another third should be. All hail the pharmaceutical companies who have pushed these so successfully, along with mass prescription for statins for anyone over forty who was at all at risk of atherosclerosis? Fill your boots oh great Glaxo!

Finally, Celia's session came to an end. He had come to the conclusion that she was probably suffering from Histrionic Personality Disorder. She was crestfallen when he told her that he was going to refer her to a clinical psychologist friend of his. Sometimes it was the only option.

Quarter to three and Guy felt shattered.

Fifteen minutes until Lucinda.

Lucinda was a plum-tongued brat. A Chelsea girl, who had never really done an honest day's work in her life and, to be frank, he wished that he did not have to go through an hour and a half of her whining and her totally unrealistic expectation of life. Guy did not even know why she bothered coming because she never listened to a word he said, not that he got much chance to contribute anything. She came to see Guy ostensibly to help her with her temper, which was getting worse, and she would pace round and round the room, ranting and raving about her boyfriend, her parents, and her friends. She was acting like a spoilt child, which of course, she had been. Guy realised, of course, that she still was.

Another one to move on - he thought to himself, and, in the moment he realised that he was becoming fussy. He would rather have seen Martha and listen to her stories of the London blitz and her French airman and take no money for it than have to listen to Lucinda rambling on.

"I am changing," he thought to himself as his mind uncharacteristically drifted away from his work.

Guy needed to zone in a bit, as he was not listening carefully, but then he did not really need to. Bad tempered people nearly always had the same underlying cause.

"Sit down please, Lucinda." She obliged.

"I am sorry to tell you that I cannot help you with your problem with your temper anymore." It came across to her that she was being dumped.

Well, she was. She visibly slumped down into her chair.

"I will however try and help you with your anger."

"What do you mean by my anger?" Lucinda reposted, quite indignantly.

Guy explained.

"Lucinda, a temper is an outburst, an effect and not a cause. It is the mere eruption of flame from deep within the bowels of a volcano of anger."

He could see that he had lost her.

"Your anger is the cause of your temper and so, there is really no such thing as a bad tempered person - just an angry person. What are you angry about?"

"I am not angry about anything," she said, angrily, and realised she was. She looked like she wanted to pick something up and hurl it at the wall.

Guy knew that anger normally follows hurt so he tried a different tack. "Okay, Lucinda, let me ask you a different question. What are you hurting about?"

Guy noticed her eyes move off up and to her left as she went into recall mode. He observed her whole body language change. Her eyes narrowed and she stiffened.

"I don't want to talk about it", she said, aggressively.

"Don't want to or can't?"

"Don't want to, can't, don't care, want to change the subject." She actually looked like she was part of a Monty Python sketch and was about to physically explode into a hundred little pieces.

"Fine", Guy said. "What is going to make you angry later today, or tomorrow?"

Lucinda duly obliged with her eye clues and looked up and right.

"Most things," she said.

He really had to think on his feet here. Guy knew that anger tends to come from two sources: hurt from the past or hurt in the moment, or where something offends a person's life script as to how they think others should behave. Some people have a very loose life script and tend to go with the flow quite readily, and, by and large, they do not tend to get angry very easily. Other people have super tight life scripts about everything and can fly off the handle whenever the slightest thing or behaviour does not fit that script. A better way of looking at a super tight script would be-strongly self-opinionated.

Lucinda had this totally fixed set of beliefs in her script about practically everything and everyone, the way they should behave, the way people should treat her, the way

children should be brought up - you name it and she had an opinion about it. Guy knew somebody else who was, sadly, very much like this.

“Did you spend a lot of time on your own when you were young, Lucinda?”

“Yes”

“Did you have a lot of dolls?”

“Yes”

“Did you talk to them a lot?”

“Yes”

“Did you get angry with them?”

“Yes”

“Have you still got them?”

“Yes”

“Good. I do not think we can do much more today, but I would like you to bring your dolls with you next time you come. Polly will call you to arrange your next appointment.”

Another fifteen minute breather, but he was quite looking forward to seeing Charlotte and then he was done for the day.

Now Charlotte was an actress of some notoriety and destined for greatness. She was not the stunning Liz Hurley type, more like Kate Blanchett. She had this aura about her and you would never suspect that she was anything other than a confident, happy and well balanced person.

But then, who really is those things?

Like so many others, Charlotte was all front. Again, she had not had the happiest of childhoods and, from a very early age, she used to hide away from people and fantasise about becoming a ballet dancer. A little like Richard, her mother had been as hard as nails and totally incapable of showing any physical love. She would scold her and lock her away in a dark cupboard under the stairs if she did not obey her mother's every command.

Her father had left the marital home when she was just seven, and she had never come to terms with it. She did not blame him, but she missed him terribly. Again, on the outside she seemed well balanced, but, on the inside, she was still hurting and she kept getting into relationships with men who were rescuers, so to speak. Then she sub-consciously sabotaged all of her relationships, as many people do.

Charlotte was delightfully honest whenever she came to see Guy and she enjoyed having someone to open up to. Everybody on the planet needs someone to open up to, but few ever get the chance. As Guy had observed before, men are particularly bad at it and often go through their entire lives with a stoic front. They can't open up to other men because men simply don't admit weakness to their friends, even to their best buddies, and opening up to a woman would come across as unthinkably weak.

Yet Guy had a surprising and somewhat worrying fact at his fingertips. He had once learned that as children boys, by and large, are more emotionally receptive than girls right up until the age of four. Only when the parental and peer pressure of big boys don't cry and 'only sissies do that' enters their lives do they start to close off their emotional fronts.

At least women do tend to talk to other women, or at least some of them do. Though Martha could not talk to anyone, it seemed, except Guy .

That day they time-lined. Time-lining was Guy's favourite way of helping someone to look at past and future events in a more dynamic and useful way. All of his clients were given a copy of his two CDs called 'Choices' and 'A Journey In Time' and many used them to great success. It enabled them to work on themselves at home, and, if nothing else, they were sublimely relaxing.

Well, Charlotte was out for the count and he had to literally prise her off the couch. She struggled to open her eyes afterwards and wanted to curl up into a ball and sleep. He took Charlotte through to a little chill-out room he had created a while ago when he realised that some clients wanted time on their own before going back out into the hustle and bustle of full on London life again. In fact, he encouraged it, because it allowed time for things to sink in. Throwing someone straight back out onto the street was like giving them a slap on the face and telling them to get on with 'normal' life again. He felt that it was one of the great failures of traditional counselling or therapy.

The room had dimmed lights, soft music and a super comfy sofa that clients could switch off from the world and find a little inner peace. Everybody needed that now and again in his opinion. More importantly, he instinctively knew that, for any therapy or auto-suggestion to be truly effective, the new neuron connections in the brain needed time to settle in and re-enforce themselves.

Guy was constantly looking to come up with new ideas like this. He kept very up to date with applied psychology such as Neuro-Linguistic Programming, which he had qualified in years before. He was also a great fan of Richard Bandler, one of the two godfathers of NLP. His other great influence was Milton H Erickson, who was largely self-taught and who, in turn, had heavily influenced Bandler and his NLP co-founder, John Grinder.

He also had deep admiration for a few of the early pioneers of traditional psychology such as Abraham Maslow, Eric Berne, Piaget, Carl Jung and Thomas Harris, and even a few concepts from Freud, such as the 'pain and pleasure' syndrome.

A subject he himself knew he must shortly address was the fact that he must go to his family, back to Yorkshire and the small market town of Nasefield and try to sort things out.

Next weekend, he thought to himself. He would leave Thursday night and stay till the small hours of Tuesday morning and try to make some sense of it all and see if he could put their lives back on track. This weekend he was staying in London as his brother John was flying in to London on the back end of a relationship break up. He wanted to be there for him and give him some brotherly support. He had booked a table in the So Bar, for the Saturday, to watch the English thrash the French (so he hoped) in the Six Nations rugby.

Another thing was bothering him too. He had sensed something about James that was unsettling him. He was actually worried about him and the more he thought about it the more he knew he had to act. He sensed that he was in real turmoil. It was almost as if it was his own turmoil. Maybe it was?

Guy went straight home that day.

He went to the cupboard in the utility room at the back of the house. He delved into an empty box that used to contain dishwasher tablets and pulled out a bag of skunk. It had been there for months, untouched from when a friend had left it there. Tonight he wanted to do one thing and one thing only. He wanted to get totally and utterly stoned – to escape.

He succeeded. And with that, in rushed all of the thoughts that had been swirling around in his head, good, bad, ugly and indifferent. Money without love was almost worthless. The good life of London was also worthless if he was not seeing his children enough. He felt the tears well up in his eyes but pushed them back. Big boys don't cry.

He fell asleep on the couch as he often did when Carole-Anne was absent. The marital bed was a lonely place when she was not there and, far worse, it was sometimes a lonely place when she was.

He woke at six in the morning exhausted. He'd slept only fitfully which is the best he hoped for these days.

He knew he'd not sleep again now.

The house was eerily silent. He went upstairs and saw the boys' bedrooms empty. Their toys were still spread out on the floor, un-played with for what seemed like an age. That did his mood no good at all. He looked in Carole-Anne's wardrobe and it was practically bare. Downstairs the pictures the boys had created at the expensive kindergarten some months ago were affixed to kitchen surfaces. No new pictures had been added for ages.

And then the downer really began, partly due to the effect of the spliff but also because he could read the signals.

She's gone from here he thought. She's gone for good.

He made a stupidly strong coffee and he smoked a cigarette in the kitchen. There was no point obeying the no smoking indoors rule when there was no one to enforce it and no one for it to hurt.

Guy felt lower than he had done for a long time.

However, the master of front would shortly disguise this mood and in precisely 75 minutes he'd appear in the office and inspire his team. He always did. It didn't matter what black moods affected him; in the main he simply discarded and ignored them during his the 9-5 routine. Customers, colleagues and most friends would be amazed to learn that Guy – confident, clever, charming Guy – could hurt so much inside. But then, who ever really knows truly what is going on inside somebody else's head?

His mind was wandering and he realised it. He knew that the time was coming where he needed to put his own life in order - he needed to sort his own life out.

Physician, heal thyself, he thought. It would not be the only time in his life that thought would occur.....

Easier said than done. Yes there was a lot he could do himself and he had taught himself so much over the years. He loved reading and studying and then putting it into practice. He loved writing and narrating his audio books. He also knew though, that sometimes you simply have to talk to someone else. Even therapists need an outlet for their own emotions.

He found himself thinking back to where his fascination with applied psychology had all began.

He'd tired of the Army after a while, the relentless pointless activity and the inability to use one's initiative or indeed intellect. It had taught him a lot but he'd grown out of it very quickly and he had bought himself out. He put the money on the table and said goodbye. Somehow, he had become a car salesman, selling to NATO forces. This wasn't showroom territory - it was brutal and somewhat manic. He'd sit in a car outside the NAAFI in Hameln (Hamelin, of Pied Piper fame) as did all the other salesmen.

This one day his tyre was flat and he was feeling well and truly down because he knew that one of the other sales guys had done it whilst he was inside having a pee. Thankfully, there had been a foot pump in the boot so, aware of some sniggering in the background, he duly re-inflated the tyre.

Suddenly, there was the screeching of a train's emergency brakes. The train stopped, quite obviously not at its destination, and it started backing up. Something was quite obviously wrong so Guy walked over to find out what. What he saw horrified him. A pretty girl who had walked past him not five minutes earlier was lying on the railway track with her head half sliced off. She had quite obviously committed suicide.

He had had no experience of suicide before and it really threw him. Why would anyone be that unhappy, that fucked up, to want to do that? He left the scene quite quickly but was still in a mild state of shock as he sat in the NAAFI having some lunch.

When he came out the tyre was flat again.

At twenty three he was a lot younger than the rest of the salesmen there, as green as they came, unsure of himself and feeling downright intimidated to the point that his first instinct was to pack up and drive home. He was feeling pretty bloody miserable at this point. He went back to the car and could easily have wept. 'I don't like all this grown up shit' he thought 'and I have not got a clue how I am going to survive financially in this big bad cruel world.'

'Grow up.' Came a voice in his head

'Don't want to.'

'You have to.'

'Shit'

So, he composed himself, pumped the tyre up again, remembered many of the things he had learned in the Army, found some inner steel and resolved to stay.

Finally, a young Corporal opened the passenger side door of the car and asked for the price of the car Guy was in, which was a Vauxhall Chevette (possibly the ugliest car on the planet). He gave him all the details, brochures, prices etcetera and naively thought that he would actually make his very first sale.

Things were suddenly looking up again. Only then they weren't as the Chrysler military sales bloke intercepted his beloved, most treasured potential first customer, got him sitting in his big plush mobile office and, within half an hour emerged with him, clutching all the necessary paperwork for the car that had just been sold, and walked him past all of the other salesmen, and waved him goodbye.

Guy was pissed off and worried again about where the next money was going to come from.

Go home, stay? Go home, stay?

"Don't be an arsehole", his inner voice told him. "Learn, watch, observe."

That was possibly the best thought he could ever have had in his quest for success. In later life it would turn out to be the best advice he could give anyone else on that similar quest. It led to him learning the single greatest secret of all for those who were on that particular pathway with their lives.

The Chrysler guy was the only one who actually stood outside, where the other seven or eight sales guys, Guy included, were all sitting inside their cosy cars, with the engines running and the heating on. So, in an incisive moment, Guy put his coat on and stood outside of the car.

He watched Mr Chrysler say hello to everyone that walked past. Guy then started saying hello to everyone that walked past. Mr Chrysler managed to draw some of them into conversation. So did Guy. Mr Chrysler got two passers-by into his luxury office. Guy was jealously in awe. He had no luxury travelling office.

He did get someone who asked when he would be there next, so he loaded him with information and then, with the inner smugness of someone who had just learned a valuable lesson he walked him past all the other salesmen and bade him farewell.

At five it was dark and all the others had packed up and gone home. There was just Guy and Mr Chrysler left. It was like half an hour of Mexican standoff but in the freezing cold. Then, to Guy's surprise, Mr Chrysler started walking over to him.

"This man is God. This man is a bastard. He is old and wise. This man is a threat! His heart was racing with pure fear. His feral brain was racing. Should he stay and fight or just take flight? He stood his ground and it turned out to be a pivotal moment in his life.

"Tony" the man said with a marked cockney accent.

"Guy, please to meet you."

"Fancy a quick coffee in my office?"

"Err, why not?" Guy said

"Son, I don't do this for many people ever and especially the opposition, but you got balls for sticking today out. So, if you are interested, I am prepared to teach you a few things."

Sounds bloody good to me, Guy thought to himself.

"Right, rule number one is this: never, ever, ever mix with fucking losers. Mix with winners. You see those other tossers earlier, sat in their cars all day long waiting and hoping for a deal? Frickin' losers, all of them. Most of them won't even still be here in a few months-they will give up and be replaced by more losers."

He was blunt to the point of, well, bluntness, and his use of the English language was smattered very liberally, even gratuitously, with the F word, BUT, the more he talked the more sense he made.

As they were leaving he gave Guy an audio tape.

"Listen to it and give it back to me next week."

He put it in the cassette player on the way home just as he was passing the statue of the Pied Piper. He remembered it clearly to this day. It was some American, called Lee Du Boys, creating analogies about a fictitious salesman called 'Hungry Henry'. He played it from start to finish and it became the beginning of a lifelong interest in the psychology of selling, in fact all types of applied, practical, day to day psychology.

He gave it back to Tony the following week who then lent him the other five from the set. Guy devoured the whole series within two weeks and went looking for more authors to read or listen to.

Did it work for him?

Oh yes. In month two he sold lots of cars, earned the modern day equivalent of £20,000 and broke a long standing company record. He was feeling good and never really looked back from there. Suddenly he was living the good life. He became the Sales Manager at twenty four and trained the new, and the old, people. He was Top Gun for a few years until the day came when he very foolishly spent the night with a group of first class losers.

What happened?

They gave him an LSD tablet and, foolishly, he took it.

That part of his journey, that 'trip' was a big mistake and another big lesson learned.

'Mix with winners and become one. Mix with losers and become one!'

WARM PEOPLE, COLD CALLS

Guy's day had started rather uneventfully. Certainly, there had been the usual high octane stuff around the office. He urged the sales team on with a mixture of pranks and gentle piss taking. They liked the craic, he told himself. They were used to the banter, the leg pulling and the silliness and he was there to chide them on in his charming, larger than life manner.

He was a good motivator and he had a passionate belief that everybody could achieve way more than average if they had the mental tools to work with: good thoughts, clear goals, a strong sense of self-belief, good communication skills and strong motivation – motives, if you like - to take action. He taught his staff these things and revelled in seeing some of them turn it into results.

Most of the morning he forgot his druggy hangover, his dry mouth and, most soul-sapping of all, his fear of the empty house that he would be returning to that evening.

Polly rang. Normally Guy would not have seen any clients on that afternoon, but he had decided, in the case of these two, to make allowances.

Carole-Anne had rung him a couple of times but he'd been in meetings and so couldn't take her calls. When he returned the calls, she didn't answer. Given that the odds were she could not be doing anything so important in Yorkshire that would mean she could not answer the phone, he concluded she was playing silly buggers.

He left a message the first time he got her voicemail and tried to sound affectionate and loving as if the emptiness of the last few months had never happened. When he tried again an hour or so later and just picked up to voicemail again, he didn't feel up to leaving a message.

At lunchtime he took a stroll along the river, looking at the house boats and the luxury flats springing up everywhere, trying to catch the contagion of success and have it displace this mood of despair. It wasn't really working for him. He was heading back to the office when his phone rang in his pocket. His instinct was to hope it was Carole-Anne, and that instinct surprised him a little. He took the phone out and didn't recognise the number.

"Guy here", he said, with a big smile on his face. He always smiled when he spoke on the phone as he was convinced the smile would reach the caller through his voice. In one of those snap milliseconds of self-awareness, where the synapses in his brain could instantly rewire themselves, he amazed himself that he could turn the depression off like a tap when dealing with other people.

"Jennifer Alred", said the voice at the other.

"Jennifer! How great to hear from you! How the hell are you?" said Guy, genuinely pleased at the call. "Long time no hear."

“Oh, you know”, came the voice at the other end, “You know me. Leaping from frying pan to fire and back again.”

Jennifer had published a couple of books with Guy a few years ago. They’d done reasonably well until Jennifer’s business had hit trouble. Well, the truth was that everyone’s business in publishing hit trouble at that time. They’d run out of stock of the books, and Jennifer hadn’t had the cash to reprint them and she had subsequently disappeared from Guy’s life for a while. So too had the royalty cheques, but that was no big deal for Guy.

She was always fun to be around and Guy loved her company. But they were like chalk and cheese. Guy was upbeat, positive and seemingly full of confidence. If there had been a self-deprecatory Olympics, Jennifer would have been a gold medal winning legend - the Victoria Pendleton of inwardly-mobile disparagement. At one of their previous meetings she had confided to Guy, after a bottle or so of Pouilly Fume had been consumed, that she never succeeded in anything in life - but also she never exactly failed – a kind of business purgatory.

But, she was one of the good guys/gals. Very likeable and she had a good heart. She could be very kind and incredibly generous and she was very, very amusing – almost in the Victoria Wood or Sarah Silverman class - when on a roll. Sure she drank too much – she had admitted that herself, but there were far worse drugs than alcohol as Guy himself well knew to his erstwhile cost.

Jennifer was asking Guy to dinner that evening and Guy accepted readily.

He began to look forward to it already.

But now he needed to hurry. He had a board meeting to chair and then get over to the practise and he was just leaving it all a bit tight.

Sod’s Law; as he was pacing briskly back to the office Carole-Anne rang. He would have to call her after the Board Meeting.

He didn’t pick up.

Carole-Anne rang again.

Guy texted back to say he would call when he was free.

Carole-Anne rang again.

Guy was getting annoyed, but just in case something awful had happened to one of the boys, he answered his mobile.

She wanted to discuss booking a holiday – they’d discussed this a few months ago.

“Thank God for that”, he said, “I thought it was something important.”

Cold, deathly silence.

To Carole-Anne it was. When they'd last been together they had discussed trying to get away together, somewhere with a good crèche for the children so that the two of them could spend quality time together. It had been entirely the wrong thing to say under the circumstances. He was now close to the meeting venue, one of the boardrooms at Matrix Studios on Peterborough Road. Checking his watch he said "Carole-Anne, I'm really sorry, but can we do this later? I have a meeting to go to. I know the holiday's important, but I do have to go."

"No", she said coldly. "We will finish this now. You never have time to talk to me."

"But, you are asking me to decide now on something I don't have all the facts on. It would be much better to talk about this after my meeting, surely darling", he replied, trying, he thought to be conciliatory.

"You never want to discuss things that are important to me. All you care about is the business. The boys and I may as well not exist to you....." He knew she was unhappy, he could tell from her voice, but he couldn't deal with this now. He thought about the `Mars' thing -he knew he should listen and let her talk – but he wanted, as usual, to find a solution while she just wanted to talk. But he just didn't have time right now..

"Listen," he said eventually, "I have to go now, as the meeting is starting in two minutes. I will call you later."

"You will not," she said threateningly. "This is more important than your precious meeting."

It wasn't, he wanted to say. This is just about a holiday - which was not a matter of life or death.

"Call you later, darling, after the meeting and I am sure we can sort this." He had to put the phone down.

She rang back.

Guy ignored it.

She rang again.

He ignored it.

She rang back.

He picked up, getting more than a little angry. "Carole-Anne, I have to go. I cannot do this now. I am late and I cannot keep them waiting. Sorry."

With that he switched the phone off.

Five minutes into the meeting, and he had just dispensed with the formalities of introductions and was about to present a case for a substantial sum of funding to, among others, two College principals and one junior Government Minister.

There was a knock on the door. A secretary said, "Sorry Guy, but your wife would like you to call her as soon as possible. She says it is urgent."

Guy put on a pretence to his audience and made his apologies and left the room to phone her. He would have appeared to be insensitive had he not done so.

She was apoplectic with rage. How dare he switch the phone off on her?

Guy, fuming at that point, summarily terminated the call, and asked the young lady at reception to not disturb the meeting again at any cost.

Un-bloody believable, he thought.

After the meeting he simply had no desire to have another shouting match on the phone so he decided to leave it switched off.

Suddenly, the thought of an evening with Jennifer became even more appealing. Yes, she could talk for England, but she could listen too. Whatever Jennifer threw at him emotionally, he could take. But, he thought, she can listen to some of my issues for a change, too. He realised it was time to unburden himself to someone. He needed to unload and resolve some of his own stuff and Jennifer was destined to be the catalyst.

Before that, however, he had the afternoon's two impromptu sessions.

As it turned out, he had just one impromptu session. Gerry cancelled his appointment. Well, that's not exactly true as he never even showed up and Guy felt a strange kind of smug vindication, although he had to say he was just a little disappointed. He sensed that Gerry had something to teach him, although he had no idea what. It was just a hunch, one of his intuitive feelings. In fact, Guy never saw him again in his practice. Though he did see him again.

With more than just a little time to spare he checked out availability and prices for his favourite last minute escape - the "Four Seasons Hotel" in Egypt. He had got his PADI master scuba diver certificate last time he went and really fancied pushing himself further still this next time. He would check it out and talk to Carole-Anne about it. Perhaps a brilliant holiday could help salvage their marriage, he thought. They always had enjoyed good holidays in their early married life. Even though it would be great to get away with the children too, maybe they needed that time alone together. This was all getting a bit too fraught.

He switched the phone on and tried to ring her but her phone was engaged. He wondered if between them they could save this marriage. They were just sometimes so seemingly incompatible, with different needs and different 'scripts'. Yet, despite everything, he loved her immensely but he felt as though she sometimes gave nothing

back. Nothing that he needed anyway. Again he questioned whether he was giving her what she needed.

And therein lies the rub. Everybody needs something different out of life and from their partner. Mars and Venus, he thought again. Some people need a certain touchiness. Some people need to express themselves with words. Others needed a certain way of being looked at. Some needed gifts to feel loved. The list is quite exhaustive.

It was becoming more and more obvious that so many couples were hindered by not being able to give their partner what they truly needed on a basic emotional level – mainly because it never really got discussed. It ruined so many relationships.

Guy's mind switched back to business.

"Polly, ring James would you and tell him he can come as soon as he wants," he asked politely.

Guy had something he needed to do before James came, but it would not take long. He lay on the floor and did one hundred sit ups. In the process of doing them he reminded himself of as many good things in his life as possible.

"Look at what I have," he thought, "and not what I'm without."

One - a child is dying every four seconds somewhere in the world. I am lucky.

Two - I have four beautiful, healthy children.

Three - I am in rude good health.

Four - I have all my limbs

Five...

And so it went on...until he reached one hundred, - "for things to change I have to change."

He bounced back up from the floor and congratulated himself from breaking the cycle of wallowing in self-pity. He felt positively good – well, certainly better.

He decided that he was going to try something very different with James today.

At the beginning of the session they had simultaneously gone to shake hands, as they always did. But Guy behaved differently.

"Hello, my friend, good to see you again. I want to do something different with you today, if you are prepared to just trust me, relax and go with it?"

"Ok" said James and started to loosen his handshake. But Guy held on to his hand in a strong grip and this threw James, as Guy intended. Then Guy began to loosen his grip

yet James became aware of a more gentle touch of the thumb and a lingering drawing away of the little finger.

He was confused. Then Guy's middle finger gently brushed James's palm. The pressure then changed from his thumb to his little finger, then the middle finger and then back to the thumb. Guy said something but James was already almost in a trance and, without James really noticing, Guy gave James' hand a slight upward push and then a slight downwards push. It was a variation on the classic Ericksonian handshake induction.

James heard Guy's voice, but not his words. It was as if they were coming from a distance.

Guy spoke. "James, I know there are many things you maybe don't want me to know about, that you don't want to tell me and maybe don't want to discuss so today let us discuss the things you are willing to talk about - all of them, if you wish."

Guy mused, as he always did when he put someone into trance. And, because he had subconsciously given James the option to say whatever he wanted, and he did.

It turned out that James was suffering from a series of traumatic events that started when just seven years old.

He had been no brighter than any other kid but he was certainly not stupid either. Like all children, what he had wished for most of all was to have unconditional love from his Mum and Dad and to feel that he was growing up in a stable environment.

Unfortunately, like so many children in the late 20th and early 21st Century, this was just not to be. In his heart he had known that something was very wrong with his life. He did not feel `normal` at all.

His mother and father were constantly shouting at each other. He remembered clearly the day his mother threw some fresh eggs at his Dad and his Dad retaliating by throwing the frying pan across the kitchen.

He felt confused, and wondered why the most precious people in his life were at war with one another.

And, like so many kids in this world, whose parents unleashed what seemed like their mutual hatred, so openly, he went to sleep at night feeling confused. Deep down, or not even that deep down, it was hurting. Children can't handle that – they just need to feel safe and loved. They actually ask for precious little more than that. And that need never goes away, throughout their whole lives. Even as adults.

Show me the adult and I will show you the child, thought Guy.

The end of James' world happened soon after that. His mother and father split up.

They were far from being a wealthy family but his Dad wanted him to have a good education. So, at the ripe age of seven, James was dropped off at a prep-school in the wilds of Yorkshire, where he was destined to spend the majority of the next six years of his life.

He waved goodbye, with tears welling up in his eyes, and the headmaster led him off to his dormitory, telling him not to be so stupid and that it was time to grow up.

His dormitory was to be his home for the next few months until the end of term. To him, it was the end of his life as he had known it. He felt desperately abandoned. He also knew that he would never ever live with his mum and dad and be part of a real family again.

Well, some kids adapt and some don't. James categorically did not. He wet his bed till he was eleven, every night without fail. He was segregated at one stage and put in a room all on his own as a punishment. There was plenty of punishment at that school. Canings, beatings, six of the best with a metal-plated hairbrush, heads banged together by the headmaster: this was the norm at most boarding schools. It was the swinging sixties and swinging the cane and many other forms of corporal punishment were still rife then.

And that was just the teachers. The seniors and prefects doled out their own punishments too. It was their payback time for what had happened to them. The rites of passage!

There were a few saving graces. His younger brother, came to join him a year or so later. In a somewhat selfish way this made life more tolerable as it meant that it was not just him that had been cast out and ostracised, not the only pariah in his family, and that he at least now had someone to talk to.

James was fortunately a reasonably good sportsman. Not a world-beater but better than average at most indoor and outdoor sports. It was a welcome distraction from class time. So was chess, which he became very good at.

Anyone who has ever been to an English public school will tell you that, by and large, sports kept you sane. What they don't tell you is that Darwinian rules of natural selection are more prevalent in private schools, compared with the state education system. They tended to be places where a blind eye was turned to the punishments and even sufferings that were inflicted upon these kids by their peers and the older boys.

By and large, the teachers were okay kind of people. Some of them seemed hard and the odd one or two felt like father or mother figures.

And then, for James, there had been Denis, the science teacher. He was salvation. He took a lot of interest in James and a select few other boys.

Denis was quite a touchy-feely type of teacher and he just seemed like a surrogate parent or family member.

He always paid attention to the other pupils after class and prep time had finished and he was a shining light in the lives of a few children who had felt particularly abandoned by their parents.

James remembered that he and the others used to go down to the carpentry workshop two or three nights per week to restore a motorised go-kart. It seemed to take forever, but when it was finally built they then went to the playing fields and experienced the thrill of speed. This was one of the most awesome experiences of his young life and instilled a great desire in him to experience fast and dangerous things in the future. Like so many kids, events like this were destined to shape their lives.

This desire for thrills never left him and, as his life progressed, he sought more and more experiences that were similar. He didn't realise it but his need to push at all of life's boundaries was instilled in him at this unhappy time.

During term time all the boarders would have half term for a week or so and they also got `leave out` weekends. The vast majority of children went home to their parents, where James and his brother often went to stay with other families. It was just the way it was for them.

One halfterm, when James was eleven, they had another option. Denis had offered to take them, and their sister Ellie, up to the Lake District. It had seemed like a good idea at the time.

When the half term break came and they arrived at Lake Windermere it was quite late. His brother John, ever the practical one, erected a tent to sleep in while there were two double berths in the caravan to accommodate James, Denis and his sister Margaret.

Everyone was asleep quite soon. Not James though, as he had never been a good sleeper. It also felt a bit strange to him that he was in a small bed with a school teacher, but he rationalised it as perfectly innocent. He trusted this man and he had no reason to do otherwise.

James could smell Denis, who was a smoker, beside him. He also had a distinctive body odour. James began to feel uncomfortable at this strange situation and although he was turned away in the opposite direction he just knew that Denis was not asleep. Without any particular reason, he sensed that something in his life was going to change forever.

Denis shuffled around a little, and then he coughed quite loudly. James could have sworn that he heard Denis spitting, but why would he want to do that?

What occurred next was simply too horrific for James to try to put into words. Denis made his move.

James was rigid with fright, suspense, fear, a sense of trepidation, a sense of wonder even. He was going to be one of the chosen ones. He had no real concept of what that might mean. Denis moved James onto his stomach and spread his legs. James just obliged, as he didn't know what else to do. He certainly did not want to offend or upset his mentor. It was all over in a moment. Denis had slipped his penis between James legs, and after a short while he had already rolled off again.

James was mortified. He dared not move. He had no idea how long he remained like that. The next thing he remembered was being outside the caravan, wiping some horrible sticky stuff off the inside of his legs. He felt confused and dirty. He cried quietly, so as not to wake his brother up. He wanted to run away but he could not – he had nowhere to run to - and eventually crept back in to the caravan, terrified that it would happen again.

Guy could see that James was visibly disturbed by the recollection and he felt that he had gone far enough with this session. He counted him back out and he slowly opened his eyes.

Guy put a hand on his shoulder and softly said - "How are you feeling?"

"Drained", James replied.

"How much do you remember about what you said?"

"I think that I just relived every last detail!"

"It is totally up to you if you would like to talk any more about it right now or at another time?"

Guy used this technique, a double bind, a lot.

"I would rather leave it till another time, if that's okay", James said.

They talked for a little while about non-related things, but this was a different James all of a sudden. He was very quiet and quite visibly upset. Good sense dictated an end to the session, but Guy also felt that James was a little vulnerable and exposed and that they should continue in a different environment. He suggested a coffee in the Conrad Hotel in Chelsea Harbour, which was a nice easy walk away and also on the way to his meeting place with Jennifer.

James agreed.

They did not speak much on the way there, as somehow it would have seemed trivial to engage in small talk. In fact, there was only one exchange of words all the way there.

"Funny old world", said James, somewhat dolefully.

"Yes, it sure is a funny old world", Guy replied.

There is just too bloody much of this out there Guy raged to himself. Children being sexually abused and never daring to say a word to anyone and never bringing the perpetrators to justice. Most of them never dared to even tell their parents - often from fear of not being believed. Even worse, it was often the parent or a relative who was the abuser.

It was busier than usual in the Conrad but they found a table outside on the veranda, overlooking the yachts and the Seafarers. Next to the lock was the Belvedere, where `no-show` Gerry lived. No wonder each apartment cost two million pounds upwards - total privacy and views of the Thames to the front and Chelsea Harbour to the rear.

By the time the coffees had arrived James was back to his old self, ebullient and a little frivolous. Guy did not have to say anything to break the ice.

“So, you might have gathered that I did not enjoy school very much”, he said.

“I can imagine. What did you do before you joined the Army?”

“I bailed out and went plucking turkeys for a year and a half, got pissed regularly, lost my virginity and shagged anything and everything that came my way.”

He laughed out loud and told Guy about forty year old Sue, a married woman, as old as his own mother. They never had anywhere to go so it was always `knee tremblers` against some wall and even in the ladies toilets one time. There was the time that they got caught in flagrante delicto and were both thrown out of the club they were in. Sue's husband was outside waiting for them both and he was not a happy man!

James excused himself, still chuckling, and went to the toilet.

Guy wondered how James had gone from leaving school with precious few qualifications, and plucking turkeys for a living, to someone who had obviously achieved a decent lifestyle. In some ways it did not surprise him because one of the things he had learned over the years was that many successful people had had quite traumatic childhoods. He was just keen to know more of James' story.

James had an even bigger grin on his face when he returned.

“Guess who I have just had a pee with? David Beckham, Ryan Giggs, Paul Scholes and two other Manchester United players!” Apparently this was where they stayed for some of their London away games. That's why it was busier than usual.

“You a Man U fan?” Guy asked.

“Sadly not” came the reply. I was born in Leeds and have supported Leeds United all my life. Can't win them all eh?”

“True mate, true” said Guy. Then “So, tell me, what happened after the turkey phase?”

“That was when I joined the Army. The Intelligence Corps,” he said. “Isn’t that an oxymoron?”

“What, Army Intelligence? Yeah, very funny, mate!”

Guy could see that James was quite proud of his military achievements. He had been only one of six, from sixty four starters, who finished a rigorous and punishing training regime that was designed to make them drop out. He had every right to be proud. They had had a Scots Guards Regimental Sergeant Major and a young SAS officer as their Basic Training Officer.

Guy recalled his own military training and knew that they put you through hell.

James talked about his first posting to Rheindahlen in Germany. He recalled it fondly, with a glint of mischief in his eyes.

James was usually very well spoken, and was potential officer material himself but he also had an ability to put on appropriate accents.

“I was in bloody ‘eaven”, he began, in faux Yorkshire. “There was lots of cheap booze, cheap fags, bars and clubs on site, plenty of wedge in those days for a lad my age, and, most of all there was wall to wall willing girls and women! Short women, tall women, slim women and lots of rather fat women. Army women, RAF women, British civilian women, German women, Belgian and Dutch women. There were blond women, coloured women, straight women, lesbians, young women my age and none over about 30.”

“So can I conclude from that that there were a quite a lot of women...?” said Guy with a smile

“Your leetle grey cells do not fail you, Monsieur Poirot”, said James.

He talked about women as if he had been on a two year mission to have sex with every available girl in Germany. It turned out that he even kept a record.

“My best ever was three in one day, but I never got three in one bed. That’s a regret of mine,” he said smiling.

Guy’s intrigue got the better of him and he had to ask him how many girls he had actually slept with.

“One hundred and sixty three,” was the rapid response.

He asked “Did you enjoy it all? I mean, did having so many women make you happy?”

James shuffled in his chair.

“No,” He replied after a brief pause.

"In what way?" Guy asked

Guy noticed a sudden and distinct change in James' demeanour. His eyes looked away in to the middle distance, as if trying to recall it all, and he seemed a little introspective.

After a while he said, "Not much of it - no if the truth be told. I used to throw most of them out of bed. Couldn't wait for them to go after I had come."

"Why do you think that was?" asked Guy. Shit, he thought, he sounded like his analyst and had wanted to avoid that.

James took quite some time to answer.

"I think that I was just trying to prove to myself that I was not gay..."

That was a real show stopper!

He looked straight at Guy and said, "Aren't you going to ask me?"

Before Guy could say anything, James went on. "Let me answer it for you. No I was not and am not, but I was really not sure back then. There were other things that happened away at school too and they served to make me question my sexual identity. Looking back on everything now I understand why I might have felt like that."

"Another time maybe?"

"Maybe"

Guy did not think that this subject was closed yet and nor did he think that even now James had inner closure on his schoolboy experience. If anything it was out in the open and now the real work needed to happen. He would rather have picked this back up in a proper session than discuss it here in public.

Just then Gerry appeared. The same Gerry that had missed his appointment. Guy supposed that he should not have been that surprised as he only lived forty yards away.

He walked over to them, hand held over his eyes in mock shame and a sheepish grin on his face. Charming bastard, he pulled it off perfectly.

"Doc, I am so sorry. I got held up and my phone was dead. I was going to call...",

Gerry turned to James.

"Hi James, good to see you again", he said after a moment, shaking James's hand

"You too Gerry."

Well, well, well his two most enigmatic clients were acquainted.

Gerry sat down with them and proceeded to dominate the conversation, albeit in an amusing way. James bade his farewell after ten minutes and Guy was lumbered with Gerry, who, for all his effervescent charm, could wear a bit thin after a while.

“Do you do house visits Doc?” he asked.

“Very rarely and I am not a doctor, Gerry”, he said. “Guy will do just fine.”

“Would you make an exception in my case? I tend to be a little agoraphobic and sometimes simply can’t leave the apartment.”

Not that Guy totally believed him, but he agreed to see him at home. Truth be known, he was actually quite interested in going into the Belvedere as all the apartments were owned by extremely rich and famous people. He’d fantasised about being a celebrity himself – maybe an actor or rock star and he did enjoy mixing with London celebrities.

He arranged for Gerry to call Polly to make an appointment, said his goodbyes and grabbed a black cab to go and meet Jennifer. Dull it would not be.

They met in a place Jennifer had been frequenting for years. Its name ‘Chablis’, and the exterior shutters and pictures of iconic French scenes painted on the glass were almost too clichéd to be authentic. But it was so typically French that it had no place in this side street off Charing Cross Road. Typically French, though, it was and it was run by a gruff stubble-chinned Gaul called Pierre who shook the hand of every customer as they came in.

It was gloomy inside with individual wooden tables each with a spluttering candle lighting up a minute area on the not so spotlessly clean surfaces. French jazz, interchanged with traditional accordion bal musette for the matinee customers, seemed to be on a loop on the rather tinny sound system and Guy swore he’d heard the same music the last time he’d been here with Jennifer, about two years ago. And it did boast two original though rather small Lautrecs and some sketches by Gauguin, which were reputed to be genuine.

This place was not the So Bar and so wasn’t to Guy’s usual tastes. The clientele were more middle aged and obvious heavy drinkers. It was, however, busy and at first he could not spot Jennifer. Then he spied her, back to a corner with a bottle of Chablis on the table and a large glass of the same raised to her lips.

She stood up as Guy greeted her by taking both hands and kissing her on the cheeks, French style. “It’s been a long time”, said Guy, with a smile. “Too long.”

Jennifer was intelligent and urbane on the outside but prone to returning to her northern roots, especially when upset or drunk. She spoke in her working life, in character, as if she were a Guildford stock broker’s daughter and Guy had teased her about this many times before, but her heart, she claimed, lay with the people of the north.

There were a heap of contradictions around Jennifer. She loved the English language in the style of great literature and yet swore constantly, in the company of those she knew. She loved her husband who she'd been faithful to for 25 years and yet she flirted outrageously with any man who'd let her. She sounded upper middle class and yet voted Labour all her life.

Jennifer sighed. "Oui", she said, following Guy's greeting with a Gallic shrug - her mouth just beginning to shape the Lancashire vowels that the wine was now allowing to slip in. "Far too long Guy."

"You're looking great!" he said, although thinking to himself - actually you look tired and anxious and not a little ill. She used to be a very good looking woman but the excessive make up could not disguise the fact that her face was not aging well.

Jennifer poured a large glass of wine for Guy, emptying the bottle and without hesitating ordered another in seemingly perfect French. "So, how's it going?" she asked Guy.

And Guy told her. Well, he gave her the edited highlights. The business success, the kids and the situation with his wife.

"Oh how is the lovely Carole-Anne?" asked Jennifer. "And how's your best man? Asking after me?"

Jennifer had attended the wedding all those years back and, a little to Guy's embarrassment, had liberally oiled herself with the free-flowing wine and flirted with his best man for most of the evening. His best man's wife had eventually lost patience at the effect this exotic woman from London was having on her man and there had been something of a scene - "Silly boy," said Jennifer, and they both smiled.

The new bottle appeared and they both clinked their glasses. Jennifer said 'Santé,' Guy 'Cheers'.

"So", said Guy "I've told you my news - what about you?"

"Guy, you have no idea what shit I've been through since last we met. Life is supposed to get easier as we head into our twilight years but it truly,utterly, totally doesn't and anyone that says otherwise is a lying bastard, frankly."

"Right - go on then, tell me", said Guy, realising that perhaps he'd been invited to provide an audience this evening for the latest instalment in Jennifer's soap opera life.

She told her story.

Just under a year ago her mother had died and, grief stricken, her father had followed on a couple of months later. At the time, her publishing business was looking for investment. Because of her family issues she'd taken her eye off the ball- she admitted that. An investment group had put a lot of their money into the company on the proviso that their chairman's son had a seat on Jennifer's board.

“I let the cuckoo into the nest, Guy. Absolute fucking idiot. Him and me both. Him: pampered Oxbridge type, clever as hell, messed up and amoral. Me, an idiot for having anything to do with him!”

Jennifer took a packet of Gitanes out of her purse, slid one from the box and bent to light it from the bottled candle before Pierre, accosting her in plain Gallic terms, told that she could no longer smoke inside. “Christ I keep forgetting the health fascists in this bloody country,” she said, putting the pack away.

“Anyway”, she said, irritably running her finger around the rim of her glass in lieu of handling her cigarette. “I digress. Nub of it all is that he starts us down the road of publishing shit for the masses with the great expectations that we’ll sell a million copies of one of them. Guess what? We haven’t and we’re nearly broke. His daddy is planning something and I don’t know what it is.”

“Are they possibly waiting for it to fall over, buy the assets for a song and then resurrect it?” Guy enquired.

“Probably. I bet there’s another bloody son hidden away in the basement of the baronial hall they call home and they’re plotting to steal my little business away from me as a new toy for him to play with. Fuck.”

She finished the glass and Guy followed suit. He realised there was not going to be too much food forthcoming at this dinner.

Another swig.

“So what are you going to? Do you need help?” asked Guy.

“What can I do? Just wait to be shafted. Isn’t that what happens to all good people?”

Guy smiled. “I’ve known you long enough to know that you won’t wait for that. I am sure you still have a trick or two up your sleeve.”

Jennifer laughed, somewhat ironically.

“Come on there must be something you can do to stop this guy, surely?” added Guy
“You can’t just give up?”

“Yes, but what?” said Jennifer plaintively, stumbling over her words now that the drink was beginning to take a firmer grasp of her enunciation. He’d not seen her this pissed before, he thought. She’s in a bad way and relying on booze big time – never a good idea he thought, thinking about his own current consumption. “Those bastards seem between them to hold most of the cards.” Here she paused as the realisation began to soak in.

They stepped – or in Jennifer’s case wobbled on her heels - out onto the pavement and lit up the previously censured Gitanes.

"I'm sorry to hear your troubles," said Guy.

"No, I'm sorry," said Jennifer. "I didn't invite you here just for you to hear how terrible things in my world are. Well, most things are at least, anyway."

"Most of them?", said Guy.

"I'm in love." She stated, plainly, if a little drunkenly. "I'm having an affair and I don't know what to do. I felt that you were the only one I could talk to." He believed that, and felt a little sorry for her. They saw each other infrequently, but the longevity of their friendship and the closeness that they sometimes shared meant that they had confided in each other often in the past.

"Does Tom know?" said Guy.

"Nobody does. Been going on about six months. She's fifteen years younger than me, Guy. I've fallen in love with a girl! Me! How the fuck did that happen? What do I do Guy?"

"Do you still love Tom?" said Guy, still trying to take in what he had just heard.

"Yes," came the reply though its intonation intimated that the form of love had changed. "Well, no, actually. Yes! I do love Tom. Never in the way that this is though. The constant longing. The desire. Christ the passion – Tom and I never had that. We just met, married and sank into virtually immediate middle age. But Gillian! Jesus, Gillian makes me feel alive.

He took a long pull on his Gitanes. Lots of thoughts raced around his mind – none of them prejudiced or biased in any way. He knew a lot of people who had turned to same sex relationships and were very happy - relieved almost. In fact, that made three people in the last few weeks. One of his own clients – Charles, was about to make that personal breakthrough. He felt sure of it. Before he spoke, he wondered how many other people simply lacked the courage to stand up and be counted. 'Here I am, for what I am. I can't be bothered to pretend anymore'. Not just about their sexuality but about many facets of their lives.

Guy was not quite sure what to say to Jennifer though.

"How can I help you Jen?"

Jennifer perked up. "You're upbeat, Guy, and resourceful, and always see the glass half-full whereas I always see the bottle not only utterly empty but already crushed and in the recycling bin. I wanted your take. I mean – I am lost. If Gillian asked me, I'd give everything up for her tomorrow. Everything. And yet – how do I know I'm not being used. Could she really love an old bird like me? Oh Christ, I don't know what to think."

Guy put his arm around her and kissed her cheek. "You're a fine looking old bird to me", he said. They both laughed.

The best advice I can give you right now is to just go with the flow for a while and don't make any rash decisions. I am not best placed with advice on affairs of the heart right now Jennifer", said Guy, "the truth is that my garden is not exactly full of roses at this moment in time, and I am quickly learning that no one's is. The more I look around and the more people I talk to them, the more I realise that there are not many so called normal people out there leading blissfully `normal' lives. It is really rather sad. So, I'm maybe the last person to advise you."

They went back into the bar, talked a little more and ordered yet another bottle of wine. Jennifer went on "Since we are talking of normality I just remembered something. You know when my parents died? Well, as the only child, I had to clear out the house. I'm a practical girl so things, possessions, don't mean so much. Some people get all silly over things. Not me. Sure there are pictures and ornaments that I kept and cherished because they're either items of beauty in their own right or they remind me of my childhood."

She took a deep drink. So did Guy. He was now beginning to feel the effects of so much wine on an empty stomach quite badly.

"I found their love letters, two boxes of them from when they'd been apart in the war. Unbelievable. Actually I wanted to publish them as the language was exquisite, but by that time my hands were tied. However, one letter struck me. Dad was trying to get home on leave – he was in the navy – and one weekend when they'd been expecting to be together he couldn't get transport home. He'd written a card and all it said on it was 'SNAFU – much love Tom."

Jennifer looked close to tears and drained her glass.

"I didn't know what it stood for." she said, bypassing Guy and emptying the remains of the bottle into her own glass "I thought it might be private code between them or stand for something intimate like sealed with a loving kiss- SWALK. Well, I forgot about it until a week or so ago when it came back into my head. I Googled it and it had two meanings. The first was – *a totally confusing, chaotic, messy situation* and the second was an acronym standing for *Situation Normal All Fucked Up*.

Guy laughed, and remembered hearing the word back in his Army days. And then, in that instant, the whole thing just hit Guy square in the face. He was unable to contain himself - "That's it!" he exclaimed. "What a great word; everybody – the whole fucking wide world - is living in a state of SNAFU."

And with that, he ordered another bottle.

Guy did not remember getting home.

HAIR OF THE DOG

Guy woke up lying on the living room carpet, one of the kids' teddies tucked under his chin. Through the nauseating gag of stale wine and tobacco tar he could smell that child scent and it instantly brought home to him how much he missed his boys, and with that awakening he was instantly caught up in the unhappiness of what he was possibly losing. It hit him like a wave.

He sat up and looked around. Well, there was no ashtray and no glass nearby so he'd not succumbed to a glass of scotch or a spliff in his drunkenness. That was probably a good thing. His head was still spinning from the previous night.

He checked the time - just gone 7a.m. He dragged himself to the bathroom, then into the shower and tried to focus on the day ahead. Then, like a ghost ship appearing from the fog, he remembered the full horror of last night.

He had tried to get hold of Carole-Anne several times during the evening after he had left Jennifer, but got no reply. Sometime around one in the morning she finally picked up the phone. He'd been standing outside some bar or other in the West End, and was swaying a little when she answered. She sounded as if she was rather drunk herself, but worse than that he could have sworn he heard a giggling girl and, at least one male voice in the background.

"There is somebody else there with you, isn't there?" he said.

Then, very out of character, she shouted angrily, almost venomously, at him. "You're pissed and paranoid!" she said. "We will talk in the morning. I am going to bed."

"Who with?" Guy heard himself saying, a cheap gibe.

"How dare you!" she had screamed. "You're drunk."

"And you are a slut."

He remembered the silence and the fleeting thought passed through his head that this confrontation was probably not best had at two in the morning from a pavement in the west end of London after drinking his own body weight in Burgundy...

Now, in the cold light of day, the more he wondered if he'd been unreasonable. After all he had been out for dinner with a woman and that was totally innocent.

He was devastated at the realisation that he had either maybe gone too far to repair the damage or that his initial instinct had been right.

Either way it was not good. Not good at all.

He had a real sinking feeling inside him – deep in his stomach, and his mind was racing all over the place. His emotions were running amok. There was fear, anger, hurt, guilt, sorrow, hope, you name it.

It was the feeling in his stomach though that worried him most though. The thought that Carole-Anne had slept with another man was churning him up inside. He was dreading talking to her and wanted to put it off for as long as possible. Yet, he also wanted to know.

‘Today is not going to be a good day’ he thought to himself.

Somehow he had to get through the rest of this day. The mere thought of any more alcohol made him feel sick. But John had probably landed already at Heathrow and he had a table booked at the So Bar for them both and they were being joined by James and his friend Giles. He recalled mentioning the day to Jennifer too but it had probably not registered. Jennifer could wear a bit thin and her ingrained cynicism was the last thing Guy needed right now.

Then the phone rang. It was Carole-Anne.

“You were drunk last night!” she began. “Disgustingly so.”

‘Pot calling the kettle black’, he thought as he remembered her shouting at him for accusing her of having somebody with her. It was simply out of character for her.

“So, were you, obviously”, he said. “No doubt you were out clubbing pretending you’re twenty-something and doing your dancing on the bar top routine. Who came back with you?”

“Only Susie,” she said, circumventing the question. “She was locked out so she came back here and went straight to bed.”

Too much information, and she’s protesting too much, thought Guy. Instinct had not failed him the night before, nor was it doing so now. With more than just a little coaxing, she admitted that Jed, the married man Susie had been seeing, had come back too. Oh, and a friend of his, Martin, who Guy knew a little, had just popped in for five minutes to use the toilet.

He knew Jed was quite a bit of a wild card and that Martin was a philanderer and serial womaniser. He did not need to know much more. He did not want to know much more. He needed time to think. He needed to assimilate the information. All the evidence pointed to the fact that that he had been cuckolded in his own house.

He fell silent on the phone, and noticed the strong physical feelings in his gut and in his heart - really heavy feelings of despair, sadness and hurt. He could not talk at all-he was simply mortified.

He told her that he was going to switch the phone off and leave it off for twenty four hours.

He switched the phone off. He needed time to think. Maybe it was the wrong thing to do but it was all he felt capable of.

He was floored, beside himself, distraught. Despite everything he still loved her and this was the worst feeling in the world. Anyone who thinks or knows that their partner has slept with someone else would understand this feeling.

He went and sat outside and stared into the fishpond for a while. He felt something welling up inside him and then it all came out – first the little tears in his eyes and then, as if the floodgates just opened without warning, he sobbed. He sobbed his heart out till there was nothing left but emptiness inside him.

After a while he pulled himself together. That's it, he thought, the end of my marriage! It did not feel good at all.

Now he needed an escape for the day and that was already pre-arranged. He would much rather have been on his own or find someone who could just cuddle him and love and utter comforting words like “there, there, it will all work out – you will be just fine.”

Despite the hangover, and despite the fact that Guy had never been a daytime drinker, he now needed a drink. He knew that he had no commitments until Monday morning. He gave himself permission to go on a huge bender.

He walked into the So Bar at eleven fifteen and left fourteen hours later. He was going to have to `front' better than ever that day- hide his feelings away from the world - if not from himself too! He put himself into `I don't give a fuck' type of mood and decided to just block Carole-Anne out of his mind – run away from reality, as many people often do. It was the only way he could deal with it.

All the tables were laid out differently to normal and three extra plasma screens had been set up. It was the start of the Six Nations rugby.

Fresh oysters were out on the bar top and it would have simply been rude not to have had a few and chase them down with a couple of tequila slammers. Giles was already there and he never needed any encouragement. Then, much to his surprise, James appeared too, an hour earlier than expected. Bollocks.

Guy instantly regretted inviting him, as he was not in the right space to have to keep his guard up. For all that they were becoming good friends, Guy was not of a mind to put up a front today. Giles was simply a mate, and John, when he would eventually arrive, was a brother, but it was different with James. They had a professional relationship and if Guy showed weakness that would compromise it forever.

Well, Guy thought, only one thing for it - test his mettle and ply him with drinks.

James willingly obliged. It turned out that he was on an escape mission too. Nothing like a few drinks to warm the belly and loosen the tongue.

All was not well at home for James, either. He and his wife were at odds with each other too over virtually every aspect of their lives. However, rather than spend the next few hours bemoaning the incompatibility of man and woman and the problems women caused in men's lives they opted for the 'who needs women anyway' routine and all the derogatory, frankly sexist, things they could come up with. "Life's a bitch and then you marry one," said James and that set the tone of the day.

Of course they never discussed the problems that men might cause women! They were more than happy to leave that to the womenfolk themselves. Maybe it went something like 'all men are bastards and then you marry one!'

The bar was filling up rapidly so they placed their orders for full English breakfast and beers and commandeered their seats for the game. The rest of the day became increasingly surreal.

They were just finishing breakfast when James seemed to get a little restless. "Err, Guy, you never told me that Prince Harry has a double that comes in here. Great look alike."

"Where?" Guy asked.

"Just there, at the bar."

Guy looked over briefly and then at Giles quizzically, who, in turn, gesticulated behind him subtly with his head. Guy looked around, "James, it is Harry - and his older brother is about six feet away from you, but please don't stare mate," said Guy.

"Fuck me sideways," said James. "Got any more tricks up your sleeve mate? First it is David Beckham and now the Windsor boys."

Whatever your stature is in life there are not many people who ever get up that close and personal to the two Princes of the realm, so James was enthralled.

"Do you think I should apologise?" said James.

"What for?"

"Trying to shoot their grandmother!"

"I wouldn't bother if I were you," said Guy laughing. He went on, "Listen mate, the great thing is that they feel safe and comfortable enough to be in here. It is just an unwritten rule for sensible people to respect that and leave them alone. Lord knows they don't get much chance now, never mind when they get older. A fact that was totally lost on my probably ex-wife, Carole-Anne, a few months ago."

“Ex-wife?” enquired Giles

“Probably ex,.....and it is a long story,” said Guy.

“What happened a few months ago?” enquired James.

“It was Carole-Anne’s birthday and we had a table booked for a nice romantic dinner. Then we had a row over something stupid and she refused to come out. So I came in here to escape.”

“Anyway, I saw Harry at the end of the bar, on his own, smoking a tab, and actually looking a bit lonely and timid. So, I rang Carole-Anne, asked her to reconsider and mentioned the blue-blooded presence. Well, she was here in a flash, all sweetness and light again. ‘One golden rule,’ I said to her, ‘please just respect their privacy.’

‘Of course I will,’ Carole-Anne had said, somewhat affronted.

Guy took a swig of beer and went on. “Half an hour later, Carole-Anne made her excuses to go to the ladies. Five minutes after that I spotted her talking to Prince Harry, and, I have to say, they seemed quite at ease.”

“What the hell did she say to him”, asked James?

“Turns out that they both shared the same birthday so it was something along the lines of - ‘Hi, happy birthday, it is mine too today.’ Anyway, it made her day and I was awarded with her intimate company that night. I did not find out till the next day that she had also been chatting to William too.”

The game had begun and the noise in the bar increased but Guy found himself not fully watching the rugby. There were some wonderful things about Carole-Anne, he thought, but she always saved her best for other people. Not for him. Too late now, he thought, put it out of your mind. He really did think it was over and he had already started to anaesthetise the whole feeling. Temporarily.

Back to the moment. John had arrived, after being slightly delayed and he was getting stuck into a few ‘catch me up’ beers. Indeed, the beer was starting to flow well and Guy was able to eventually take his mind totally away from domestic matters. The day was working out just fine, much better than expected; the company was good, the rugby was not going England’s way, but all in all it was a great way to escape. For a while.

His day got much better when Vanessa and a friend arrived. He supposed he should not have been surprised at this, as he knew from her records that she had recently moved into a new flat around the corner. She looked stunning. He tried to push these thoughts out of his mind. “She is a client and I am still married, with children,” he told himself.

“It probably does not matter anymore,” he thought, although he was aware that somewhere inside he still held some glimmer of hope.

Vanessa had not seen Guy yet and he was about to go and say hello when she picked up her drink and went to sit down with a guy who was sitting at a table on his own. Guy was surprised that his immediate reaction to this event was to feel jealous. "Oh well," he thought to himself "better all round that she has a partner."

But, he found himself continually glancing over towards her. Sexual attraction is a strange thing, he thought, sitting there watching England lose, hearing the howls of discontent from the guys around him and feeling the effects of the alcohol. He felt attracted to Vanessa in the same way that he had initially felt towards Carole-Anne. He knew – just knew – that he could fall for this woman, in a different life. 'What different life' he thought. 'Maybe the different life that has probably just started.'

It turned out that she had seen him.

At the end of the game, which England lost, John went for another round of drinks and Guy was just chatting with James when he got a tap on the shoulder. It was Vanessa.

He got that strange feeling in his stomach again, but slightly different to earlier on.

She sat down next to him and seemed really excited to see him there. Conversation with her was easy and more than just a little exciting. She was a beautiful woman, but she also had a slightly devilish sense of humour.

After about ten minutes she asked how long they were all staying there for.

They told her that they had their sleeping bags with them in case they could not find their way home. She laughed.

"Could I come and join you in about half an hour?" she asked,

That seemed like a stunning idea to Guy, but then he remembered the mystery man that she was with. If you don't ask then you don't know, he thought, so he simply asked if her companion would be joining them.

Her companion was in fact a record company head of A and R she told him, and he was going as soon as they had wrapped up a few details about a very promising band that she was managing. She had very high hopes for the band and she just knew that if she could get this guy to one of their gigs then he would sign them and that would be the first act that she represented as a freelance. This would be exceptionally good news in many ways.

Now, Vanessa could rival Jennifer and drink most men under the table and by mid-evening John had left, jetlagged and outrageously drunk, and she had seen Giles off, who had slunk off for some sleep, after he had knocked everyone's drinks over at the table next to them. Fortunately not the Princes', as their seats were now occupied by another crowd. They had obviously gone somewhere else or were upstairs before the press found them, as they invariably did.

James had done a disappearing act and Guy and Vanessa were left on their own.

At one stage he remembered Vanessa saying that she was going to Kent in the early afternoon the next day to do a sponsored parachute jump and informed him that he was welcome to do it with her if he wanted. He told her that he had done it before in the Army many years previously, and that his main chute had failed resulting in a near death accident, hanging from a tree with a broken leg, and that it was really not his cup of tea anymore.

They drank and talked for hours and he felt wonderfully comfortable with her. His gut feeling was that she was also soft and tactile. She used his name often, unlike Carole-Anne, and this was important to him. She seemed to see him as an equal and not a father figure.

Then the friend that she had come in with stumbled over, with some bloke that she had obviously just met, and needed escorting back to Vanessa's flat. "Would you like my mobile number in case you have a change of heart?" she said.

"I'd love your number Vanessa", he said, "but, trust me; I will not be joining you. I will happily see you home though if you would like?"

"I would like."

Neither of them quite remembered how it happened but they ended up holding hands as they walked her home, and it felt good. Yet it also felt like a betrayal to Carole-Anne, irrespective of what she might have done. Holding hands with Carole-Anne was the biggest 'togetherness' thing they ever had and to do it with someone else seemed as bad as having sex with someone else. At the door he kissed her on the cheek to say goodbye.

She asked Guy if he would like to come in.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END AND THE END OF THE BEGINNING

Guy's head was all over the place again the next day. Sadness, sorrow, worry, fear, guilt, dread, the full gamut of feeling pretty horrible about life. He really struggled to concentrate on anything at all and was dreading seeing any of his clients on Tuesday. He knew that he could not carry on like this. At least he could stay away from the office the next day.

As he had been drinking his coffee he had been staring at his mobile, not wanting to switch it back on but knowing he would have to face the music. He lit a cigarette, and again noticed that it was starting to become a habit again, and took the plunge.

Seventeen missed calls from Carole-Anne, three voice messages and one text. The text was from Vanessa, thanking him for a wonderful night and asking whether he would like to come round for dinner on Tuesday night. He had totally mixed feelings about that.

Almost instantly Carole-Anne rang, and he let it ring. That proved to be yet another costly mistake.

Carole-Anne rang again.

Carole-Anne rang again.

Guy picked up and the call lasted over an hour. She was fuming, shouting and screaming down the phone. Why had he switched the phone off? Where had he been? Who had he been with? Did he get drunk? Did he take any cocaine? Did he not love her anymore? How could he think she's been with someone else? Had he seen Louise? Louise was a mutual friend, who, Carole-Anne was convinced, had designs on Guy.

He stopped her there. "No, I did not see Louise. I spent the day watching rugby with John and a few mates.

"I don't believe you. I am going to call her."

Then she said coolly and calmly, "And if you are lying to me the house will be empty when you get back, and you will never see your children again"

She continued "So, where were you, really and why did you not call?"

"I was in the So Bar."

"For all that time? You are lying. Where were you and why did you turn your phone off?"

"You know damned well why. Anyway, what do you think I have been doing, having wild orgies in the hot tub?"

“It would not surprise me.”

“I can’t really see that it would matter to you anyway,” he said somewhat petulantly, he thought to himself. He could have asked her about Martin’s presence in his house – but he really didn’t want to go there. Maybe he could just blank it out of his mind. Maybe there was nothing to blank out. He could only hope.

“Carole-Anne, I will come up as soon as I can and stay for a while. We need to sort this out one way or another. I have to say right now that it does not feel as though we have much hope.”

Silence. A very long awkward silence.

Carole-Anne spoke, but now it was a different Carole-Anne. This was suddenly the Carole-Anne he had fallen in love with. The kind and caring Carole-Anne, not the vitriolic, bitter woman that she had become of late. He knew that she had the ability to put on the baby voice, and turn on the charm but there was usually a longer period of transition.

He had learned to deal with that over the years, as best he could. This was her – one minute screaming at him, the next soft, persuasive and gentle. He knew many relationships were similar. Guy had recently become well versed in personality disorders and knew that Carole-Anne showed many of the traits of both the narcissistic and the histrionic. He also knew that maybe half the population suffered from one or the other, so it was not anything that was out of the so called ordinary. He also knew, from transactional analysis, that she fluctuated between acting like a child and acting like an adult.

He dealt with most things, as people do in relationships, but he had never learned to live with the fact that she did not, could not and would not call him Guy. It was always pet names. The reality is that she saw him as almost a parent, It had troubled him greatly over the years.

Not that he was perfect – far from it. He knew he could be hell to live with, sociable down at the pub with the booze flowing, charming strangers, the centre of attention – and then wanting his own space when he got home. That, he knew, must be difficult to deal with. Not that anyone was perfect. In his opinion, ninety nine per cent of the population showed some or many traits of a variety of personality disorders. He suffered from his bi-polarity and he suffered from the need to have time on his own, space. He had very recently discovered something else about himself and that this, amongst other things, was a trait that is not easy to live with.

Who is easy to live with, he thought.

He realised that his mind had been wandering and had not been fully listening to her.

“Let’s stop this. I am going to come down. We need to sort this out,” she said softly, caringly, sweetly even.

“No, Carole-Anne, I will come up to you”,

“When?”

“Wednesday, Carole-Anne. I’m sorry but that’s the best I can do. I have a business to run and it pays for our lifestyle .”

“Promise?”

“Promise.”

And in that moment Guy’s heart softened again. Maybe there was some hope, but not if he stayed down in London. Also in that moment he decided that he would at least take an extended break from London. It felt good to make that decision – making decisions always did. He had a chance to fight for his family unit, irrespective of what may have happened the previous Friday evening. Maybe he could put it behind him.

A little while later, whilst he was showering, and contemplating just how quickly life can change and how to get through the next few days, he heard the phone ring. No doubt it was Carole-Anne again, as precious few people actually had Guy’s private number.

Dried, dressed and feeling somewhat better, he checked the phone. It was James who had called, and he had left a voice message asking Guy to call him as soon as he could. He sounded distraught.

Guy called him back and they arranged to have a quick coffee in the Conrad in the morning. There were things he simply had to sort out today and he needed his own space to do it in. No pub, no booze. He also wanted to chat with his brother John before he left.

John was a rock, who saw things in a very black and white manner. They chatted for a while before he left. His advice – “get a grip and work out what is most important to you in your life!”

The next day he met James. He looked ashen as if he hadn’t slept for days. He said in a dull tone, “Caroline left me yesterday. Her bloody parents interfered as usual and moved her out. She said that we both wanted different things out of life and that our relationship was simply never going to work.”

“Anything to do with Saturday?” asked Guy.

“Final nail in the coffin for her. I ducked out of her dinner party with her friends.”

“Ouch!?”

“Yes, but she knew I was never going to be there. It was five of her girl-friends and I knew they’d just want to chat about girly stuff and drink too much Pinot Grigiot. I don’t know why she wanted me there. I didn’t have a problem with her friends being there – I

just didn't want to be there myself. So we would have argued and fallen out anyway. Sometimes you are damned if you do and damned if you don't."

Only one thought sprung to Guy's mind: "Is this a temporary blip do you think?"

"One blip too many", replied James. "I just don't know how much more men are supposed to do nowadays. Women expect us to cook, help clean, be perfect parents, be romantic....and then they seem to resent any little bit of freedom we want."

"What about the kids?" Guy enquired.

"Don't even go there. She says I can only see them if she or one of her parents supervises me."

"Why on Earth would she do that?"

"Apparently I'm an unfit and irresponsible father!"

"Listen James" said Guy, "I really feel for you and I am sure it does not help but, if it makes you feel any better, Carole-Anne and I are in trouble too. I am sure it can be resolved."

Guy told him about the Carole-Anne situation and how it had become a catalyst for him to take a bit of time out to discover what was important to him in his life. It did not feel appropriate to mention that his young boys, along with Joe, were just that - the most important thing in his life. No point rubbing in it.

They chatted a while longer. James asked about Vanessa and Guy told him what had happened.

When they eventually walked out together they agreed to be at the end of a phone for each other if either of them needed someone to talk to. James was destined to be a real friend for life – as if he always had been. They had formed a bond with one another – almost each other's alter ego.

The rest of Guy's day simply dragged. He would rather have gone straight up to Yorkshire, but he had things to arrange so that he could make it an extended stay. At one stage he spoke to William and Henry on the phone, which always cheered him up. Carole-Anne's tone brought him back down again. She seemed distant. Another change. That worried him.

Monday was a flurry of activity getting things organised and at least it kept his mind off things.

Tuesday - last day in London for a while, and his day was very much 'same old same old.' Different faces yet similar problems -there was rarely anything new and he could pretty much function on auto-pilot. He did genuinely care about most of his clients as

they were people with challenges in their lives. They were all unhappy in some way and they all needed someone to talk to.

He had not become blasé about it but it was nearly always a case of either addressing an underlying issue from their childhoods, dealing with conflicting values, trying to re-align unhealthy beliefs and self-beliefs, dealing with emotional upset or loss, working with prior traumatic events, helping people to come to terms with a life-crossroads, and make decisions, thereby freeing them from emotional paralysis. He knew that a good counsellor seldom offered advice yet prompted people to come up with their own solutions. He knew that life was about thoughts and emotions and how someone orders those thoughts and emotions was the key to everything. Right now he had a lot of work to do with his own thoughts and emotions.

He knew that some of his clients would be lost without him but he was becoming more and more certain that he needed to do something more purposeful and be around his boys more. He was paid a lot of money for what he did and he would like to think that he was good at it. He was good because he was a flawed human being himself.

He was good because he was what a clinical psychologist would call a Highly Sensitive Person– an HSP. HSP's are extremely intuitive, very in touch with both their own emotions and those of others. HSP's also needed a lot of time out in their own personal space – their caves, and right now he needed time out. Time to put his world right again.

Time to decide what was important to him in his life. Guy knew only too well that this one thing was probably the greatest mistake that most human beings around the globe make – failure to take time out to work out just who they really are and then act upon it – to make decisions. Not just career decisions, but also family and relationship decisions.

After he had said goodbye to his last client, Dee, a particularly shy and gentle lady, he went to have a chat with Polly. Polly was simply a delightful person and she adored Guy, despite his sometimes annoying ways. He always made her feel special and never treated her like an employee. She saw his gift with people, she saw his flaws, she saw his hunger for new information and she saw how his patients felt about him. She saw how good he was with his children whenever they came to London with Carole-Anne.

He had told her at her interview that he was a bi-polar sufferer and she often marvelled at his ability to still function when he was quite obviously down and on the wrong end of the cycle. She had also glanced through a book she had ordered for him, called *The Highly Sensitive Person*, written by Elaine Aron, and she understood his need for 'space' and knew that was why he liked dimly lit rooms. She took an educated guess that HSPs are more affected by unhappy childhoods than others, and read that twenty per cent of all human beings have the condition. She wondered which of his clients and which of her friends had this condition. She had already read a couple of articles on personality disorders and now, she too had begun to wonder if anyone was 'normal'.

Polly was quite relieved when Guy sat with her and explained that he wanted to go up to Yorkshire for a while. He asked her to cancel everybody for a two week period. She wondered if that would give him enough time. He seemed burned out and he wore the effects of excess alcohol on his face.

She did wonder why he specifically asked her not to call Vanessa, but then she had also noticed that he seemed to really come alive whenever he saw her. She liked Vanessa a lot, even from the small exchanges they would have as she came and went from appointments. A woman like that would have suited Guy, she thought.

Guy pecked her on the cheek as he left and she wondered how long it would really be before he came back.

What neither she, nor Guy, knew was that he was not coming back for a very long while.

He left the office in a far better frame of mind, feeling that somewhat euphoric 'release' that people experience when they finally resolve to make a firm decision about something vital.

He rang Vanessa to tell her he was going up to Yorkshire at short notice. He could not make dinner that evening as planned as he had to pack and sort some things out with Terry, his MD, and brief him on a few clients that he would have to take over from him. He offered to pick Vanessa up from around the corner and drop her in town in his mini-cab on the way to the station the next day. He was in no mood to drive on this occasion and had opted for the train. It would give him time to think and anyway he could use his son Joe's car when he was up there.

He had an early night, alcohol free, and got up early. The mini cab picked Vanessa up. It was all rather awkward, but they chatted on the way, neither of them referring to the real issue that they wanted to discuss. But he had been planning this moment and what he needed to say carefully, and it went down better than he could have hoped for, in some ways. In some ways, much worse.

They got to Wardour Street and Guy jumped out with Vanessa.

"Vanessa" he started, intending to verbalise his feelings for her, and then he just reached for her and gave her a big hug. It was one of those moments you see in weepy movies, no words, just a hug, a movement away, the staring into each other's eyes and then a meek "Take care of yourself." He'd had the speech ready for her, how he had felt really alive when they were together the other day, that she excited him, that he could imagine a future with her if he wasn't married, but somehow none of that was needed.

He realised he didn't know this woman, not properly, and there was perhaps a danger he was imagining a life with her simply because he was so vulnerable in his marriage. He knew that many people harboured similar feelings to this and he tried to brush it all off as some foolish romantic notion.

Guy jumped back into the mini cab and it drove off.

Vanessa waved goodbye to Guy and wondered if she would ever see him again. Her heart sank and her eyes welled up with tears that slowly trickled down her face as she stood, almost paralysed, watching for a last glimpse of the taxi as it weaved its way towards Kings Cross. And then she could taste the bitter saltiness as the tears ran over her nose and onto her lips.

She had not felt this way about a man for fifteen years and she was visibly distressed. She knew that she was being a little stupid and that Guy had given her no cause to believe that anything would ever come of it. She had simply fallen for him hook, line and sinker, the very first time they met. And Saturday had been such a wonderful evening.

“I can’t deal with this again,” she thought to herself. “I just can’t.”

She could not think straight. This man had changed her life for her out of all proportion and now he was gone, just as quickly as he had really come into it.

Now Guy was on a train back to Yorkshire and she wondered if she would ever even see him again. She understood that he had to go and that his children came first, above and beyond everything else. She knew that his marriage was far from perfect and that he missed a certain softness that she knew his wife could not give him. She knew that she could. She wondered how his journey would go.

“Funny how life twists and turns when you least expect it”, Guy thought to himself as the fields sped by his window on the train. Little did he realise how this journey would eventually culminate.

He found a speck of dirt on the window and played his usual game of lining the dot up with things in his view that took his fancy. He must have appeared to be a total eccentric to any onlooker as he always closed one eye and his head would bob up and down slowly as his `target’ moved.

The further he got away from London the less he thought about Vanessa and the more he looked forwards to seeing his children. He actually started to wonder if he might be able to salvage his marriage. Did he want to?

He had to, for the sake of the children, if nothing else.

Carole-Anne met him at Knaughton station, and that feeling was immediately re-enforced the minute he saw his three sons on the platform. William and Henry came running up to him shouting “Daddy, Daddy, Daddy” and both jumped into his arms. Why on earth would he want to ever go back to London? This was the only thing that truly mattered to him.

PART TWO

"When shall we three meet again in thunder, lightning, or in rain? When the hurlyburly 's done,
When the battle 's lost and won". –

(Macbeth - Act I, Scene I).