

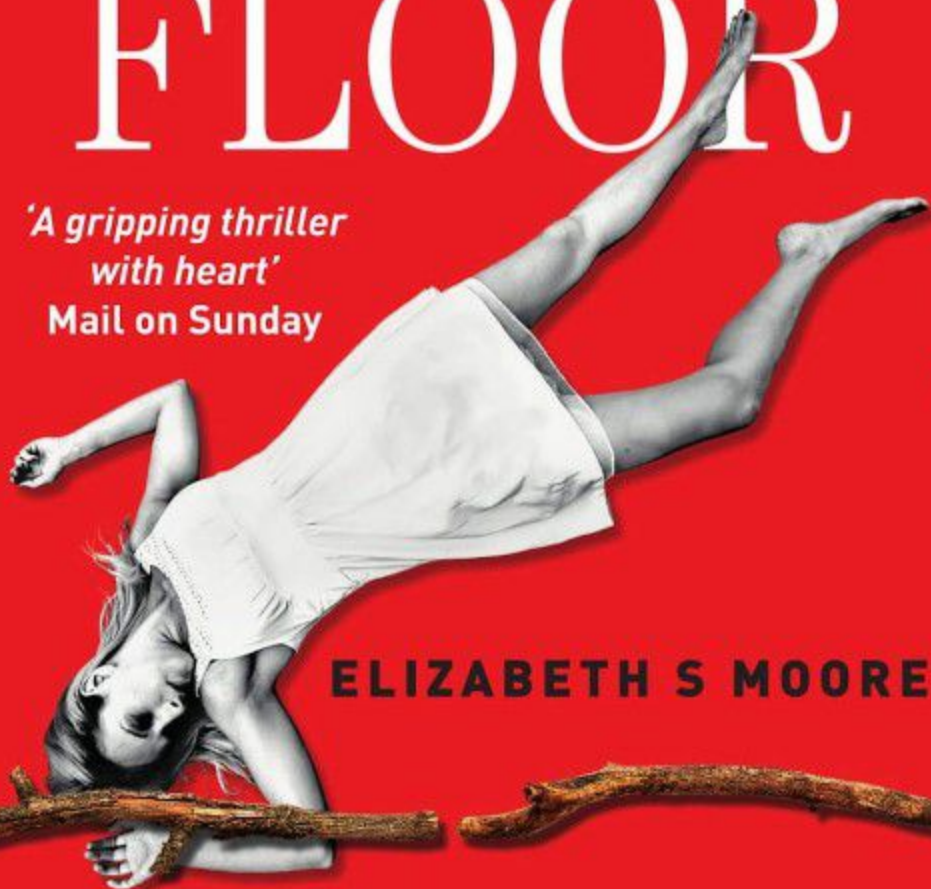


*'A sparkling  
debut' GQ*

# THE MAN ON THE MIDDLE FLOOR

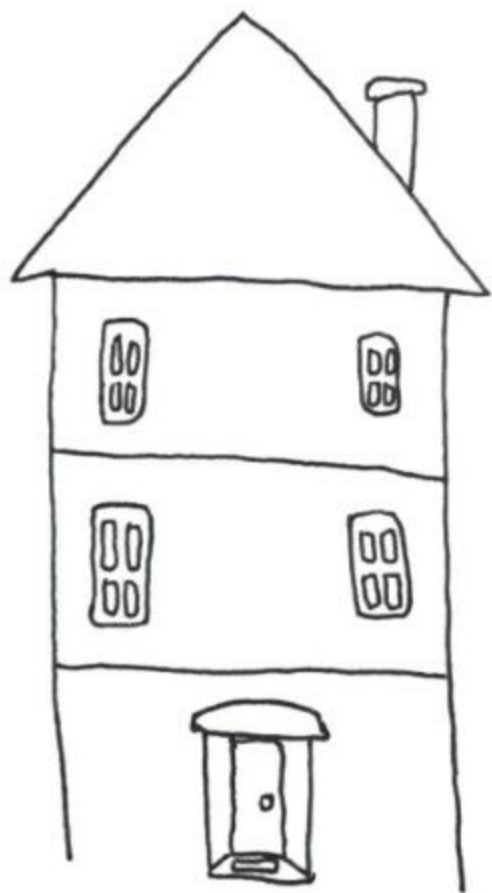
*'A gripping thriller  
with heart'*

Mail on Sunday



**ELIZABETH S MOORE**

# THE MAN ON THE MIDDLE FLOOR



*A book about disconnection*

**THE  
MAN  
ON THE  
MIDDLE  
FLOOR**

ELIZABETH S MOORE



RedDoor

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*To my family:*

*Gerald, Philippa, Cassie, Olivia and Tommy.*

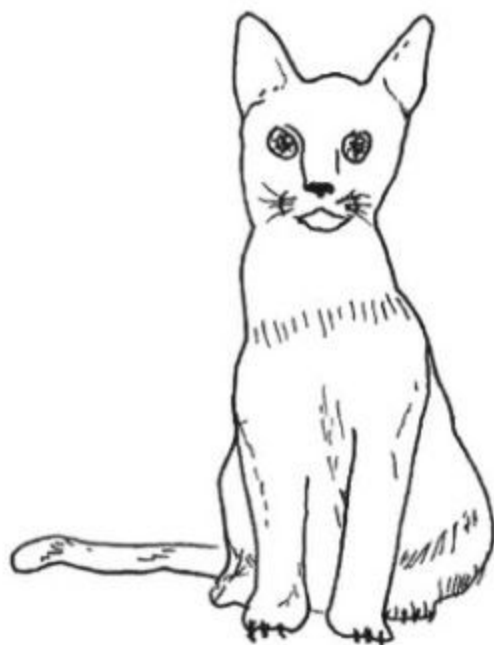
*Thank you for loving me. I love you more.*



*'Life is not a problem to be solved, but a reality to be experienced'*

— Søren Kierkegaard

# Prologue



*'He melts, I think. He goes like a drop of froth. You look at him, and there he is. You look at him again, and there he isn't.'*

— Charles Dickens, *Barnaby Rudge*

Tomorrow, my laundry will come. I know that because it always comes, every week, on a Tuesday. Hanging on the door, no creases. No metal hangers, only wooden. In my cupboard I have seven pairs of beige trousers and I have seven white T-shirts, four white buttoned shirts, ten pairs of socks and ten pairs of underpants. Every week I wear them and then they are all put in the laundry basket and I leave it outside my door to be taken away when the clean ones come back, but my jacket and my coat stay here because they are dark and only go over clean clothes so they only get washed every two weeks, but I have a spare for each of those too. My shoes are in the cupboard. My mother told me you should never wash shoes. I keep them here safe. I

once heard some people on a bus laughing because one of them had a husband who got drunk and urinated into her shoes. In a cupboard. People are disgusting. I get new ones if mine get smelly. I don't want smelly shoes and even if you have three showers your feet have to be on the ground for you to go anywhere and there is nothing you can do about it. The ground is covered with dirt and germs and spit. I shiver right up my back when I think about the stuff on the pavement.

On the back of my door, stuck with Blu Tack right in the middle facing me, I have a list. It's a list of all the things people do if they are functioning normally. I have made it myself by watching other people and by getting advice from my mother and some instructions from my grandpa. I read it before I go out and try to stick to it and if it goes wrong I just get into bed and wait for the next day to come and I make a new start. I used a new pad and very neat writing, all capitals. From the top it says:

WHEN SOMEONE GIVES ME SOMETHING, SAY  
THANK YOU AND SMILE.

WHEN SOMEONE SAYS HELLO TO ME OR ASKS  
ME A QUESTION, REPLY POLITELY AND TRY TO  
MAKE EYE CONTACT OR JUST LOOK NEAR TO  
WHERE THEY ARE.

WASH OFTEN. BE CLEAN, SMELL NICE. WASH MY  
HANDS AND FEET AND PRIVATE PARTS MOST.

MAKE MY BED NEATLY AFTER BREAKFAST.

TAKE SHOES OFF OUTSIDE FLAT AND CARRY  
THEM INSIDE.

SPEND NO LONGER THAN TWO HOURS ON  
THE COMPUTER IN ONE SESSION (OR NO MORE  
THAN FOUR HOURS IN ONE DAY).

EXERCISE WITH MY DUMBBELLS. A HEALTHY  
BODY MAKES A HEALTHY MIND.

## LAY THE TABLE BEFORE I EAT, TO PRACTISE MY TABLE MANNERS.

There are a lot of rules if you want to look like a functioning adult and I need to concentrate on that all the time. It's a BIG responsibility living by yourself and if I want to be independent this is the way I can do that. I hate living in shared accommodation and I can't live with my mother any more, with her watching me, looking worried, and everything dirty and untidy. I like to be alone, and I like to decide what I should do with my days. I will follow all the rules if it makes sure I can live here.

I can communicate on my computer without actually having to meet anyone. I hate meetings, people looking at me, staring at me. It makes me uncomfortable and I feel their eyes turn towards me, and my body reacting in all kinds of ways, sweating or getting excited. I know how I look to other people, and I don't like it one bit. I am white. *Pasty*, my mother calls it, but she likes to be out-

side. *Pasty* means you don't go in the sun enough. I should put that on my list: GO OUTSIDE. I sit down too much and my grandpa says I am three-quarters legs: from my head to my hips I am a dwarf and once he made me stand still and he measured that with his hands, putting germs all over me. When he remembers that day it always makes him laugh. At least I'm not fat. I watched a programme about the fattest man in the world, and I couldn't eat my dinner. *Watch your weight. Keep yourself to yourself.* Those are some of my grandpa's wise words.

Breakfast time, I hate crumbs and crunchy food that can scratch your mouth, so I have the toaster on thirty-five and that is out of a hundred which must make completely black toast which can also give you cancer which I don't want to get. My toast has to be soft and just a little bit pale brown – don't give me hard burnt toast. When I was at home I had hard butter and hard toast and I got thinner and thinner from not putting it in my mouth. I don't have enough spit to make it soft quick enough.

Tidy up the crumbs, wipe the side, don't make the toaster crooked and put the plate on the mat. All done. I sit with my soft butter in front of me, and my glass of water for hydration, eight glasses a day, no drips. Breakfast.

Today is Monday, so tomorrow is Tuesday and the day after that is Wednesday. Wednesday is visit day and my grandpa is coming. He always comes on Wednesdays even when I ask my mother to tell him not to. At least my clothes will be clean and my flat will be tidy so he shouldn't be cross, and I might not have to be corrected. I hate being corrected and even though Grandpa said I should be used to it by now, I'm not, and that is why we have to have it as a secret or I will have to go back and live with my mother for my own good, and Grandpa is trying to help me stay independent. Now that I have my lists and put out my rubbish and have a routine I must nearly not need correcting, but there is always something I need to add, because life is very complicated. *If you don't want to be corrected, then plan*



*ahead*, he says to me, so I always make a plan and today I will go for a long walk, which might make him think I have learned everything now. I think again about adding GO OUTSIDE to the list, but it isn't a list thing. I might just go out and never come in again, or forget how often, or where to go. I like definite things on that list. It could go on my other list, which is stuck with Blu Tack by my bed, but I already have a walk in for today.

I look at it to check.

MONDAY: GO TO GET FRESH MILK AND SHOPPING AND THROW AWAY ALL FOOD OVER ITS SELL-BY DATE. GO TO BANK IN TOTTENHAM COURT ROAD AND COLLECT ALLOWANCE FOR THE WEEK.

TUESDAY MORNING: PUT OUT DIRTY CLOTHES AND TAKE IN CLEAN CLOTHES.

TUESDAY AFTERNOON: GO FOR A WALK IN THE PARK.

WEDNESDAY MORNING: SEE GRANDPA AND  
MAKE PLANS.

WEDNESDAY AFTERNOON: DE-STRESS AND DO  
EXERCISES AND HAVE AN EARLY NIGHT.

THURSDAY: CLEAN THE FLAT, PHONE MY  
MOTHER BEFORE SIX PM.

FRIDAY BUT NOT EVERY FRIDAY: SEE MOTHER.

I start to feel panicky going through my whole week. I like to do my week a day at a time. Today I am going to the bank, because it is Monday. I will make a new plan, but not now.

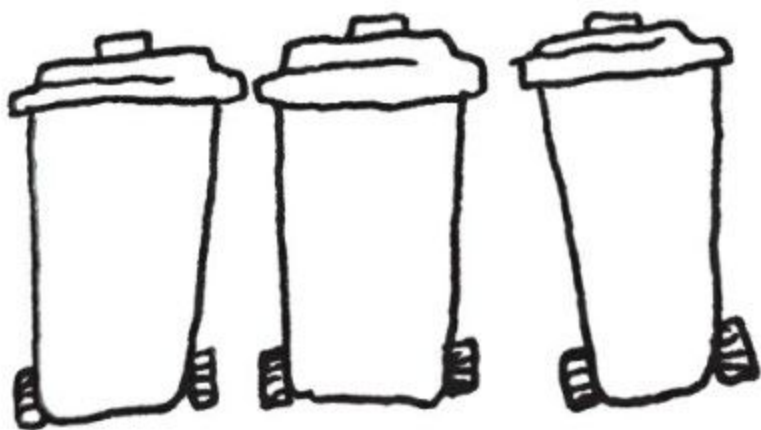
Making conversation is also very important; Grandpa says that you never know when you will need to be ready to answer things, or when things are *spiralling out of control*. Grandpa says they are spiralling more and more in the modern world, which is worrying for him, so that is another reason that he has to correct me, for my own good.

What Grandpa does to teach me how to be tough and strong hurts quite a lot, and the things he is trying to prepare me for might never happen so I would rather he just waited and I could just learn the lessons if I ever need to, not every single visit day on Wednesday just in case, but I can't seem to make him understand and I don't want to be in trouble.

I itch. I rub my arms with each other, as I hate the idea of skin under my nails and I hate the feel of clothes on my skin. It isn't just pasty, it's covered in little red bumps and they make me feel a bit sick; they catch on material and the more I try and rub them off in the shower the more bumpy they get. I should go outside. The fresh air will help... my mother says it will help and it will stop me thinking about Grandpa's visit; I will just go now. City air is not very clean, it has pollution, and the tube is dirty, but I am going to the park tomorrow which will clean my lungs with fresh air.

Grandpa says that a cat would help too, not with the bumpy skin, but I would look responsible, and have company, and all the things that my family talk to me about. Even when I am happy they see a problem to be fixed. I want to be by myself and I can't really see what a cat is going to do to help anything, but Grandpa says you have to try these things to look more in control and I think that if I agree then he might not have to visit any more, I'm not sure but it must be worth getting one just for that. I don't know why people worry but if you want to be independent you have to take everyone's feelings into consideration. That's what my grandpa says.

*Three weeks later ...*



## 1 | Tam

*'Better a sparrow, living or dead, than no  
bird song at all.'*

— Catullus

*Monday morning, early autumn*

As Tam exited the Tube and walked towards the building, his past washed over him in a rush. It rose up from the broken pavement beneath his feet, from the faint smell of bins and urine, and the perpetual rubbish kicking around wet and sorry for itself with no future except getting caught by the wind and forever wrapped around an overlooked bush in a long-untended piece of scrub that had once been a garden.

This had been his beat when he was a newly minted plod, and his hopeful steps must have contributed to the worn out condition of the place. He certainly didn't remember improving it much, or ever finding an inspiring way to better the lot of the sad grey population around him, although he was sure that had once been the intention.

This was the inner city at its most dystopian. Broken window blinds greeted him as he came round the corner and walked up the track leading to his office. It was hardly recognisable these days as a path, but there was a hint in the cracked paving, and the banks of grass that bordered it. In the twenty-three years since he had arrived for his first day at work, the benches and soft expansive grassed areas on either side had been grubbed up, trees cut down and the whole lot replaced with a concrete car park, which stretched away to where the least important members of Her Majesty's Constabulary parked. 'General Parking', it had been named, officially, in a ceremony. Tam smiled

to himself when he remembered the amount of research that had gone into choosing that piece of politically correct branding. Closer to the impressive doorway with its tinted glass and view of the arboretum beyond, the parking spaces were demarcated, with plaques proclaiming 'Commissioner', 'Deputy Commissioner', 'Assistant Commissioner', 'Deputy Assistant Commissioner', and 'Commander'. In General Parking it was each man for himself, much like life, and Tam approved.

He collected his thoughts, scratched his buttock, stretched and yawned. He hadn't become a policeman to pay lip service to a bunch of upwardly mobile public servants intent on congratulating themselves. He had wanted to do something real, something *important*. He couldn't quite remember what it had been, but he was certain of it: he had dreamt of a significant life.

OK, it hadn't panned out. The world seemed to be propelling itself in a direction where celebrity pervaded every profession, even the police force.



The BBC had even screened a series called *Britain's Bravest Cops* recently and he had fallen foul of the powers that be when he hadn't wanted to take part, let alone appear. No one could understand it. Then there was the Pride of Britain awards, with the commissioner giving out prizes to have-a-go heroes. A joke, all of it – he could probably have solved a couple of murders single-handed, or come up with some decent ideas on how the Met should be run, while his colleagues were spending hours on breakfast TV or *The Graham Norton Show*. Victor Meldrew and Tam seemed to be sharing a lot of common ground these days – though who even knew who Victor Meldrew was any more? Even his points of reference were off point. He reckoned he wasn't the only one who thought like this though, whatever the *Guardian* might say. One more dinner handing out gongs and slapping backs, one more commendation, one more piece of paperwork which would be filed and forgotten and he might thump someone. What any of it had to do with solving crime was beyond Tam.

And he had had a lot of time to think about it. Since he had taken a bullet to the leg one afternoon in Peckham ten months ago, he'd done a lot of lying around and had come to a few conclusions. Now, finally he had a chance to talk to the boss, the big boss.

Tam took a deep breath and pressed the silver buzzer for his guv'nor's office. It wasn't his voice that answered, of course; it wasn't the traditional pretty secretary either. It was his male assistant, who had a title that Tam couldn't remember, although he knew it was some acronym. He did remember that the young man in question was unusually well groomed and fragrant – and very close friends with those in positions of power. What the fuck was his name? He couldn't summon it from the depths of his coffee-deprived brain, so he did that drinks party nightmare thing of: 'Hi, Tam here.'

'Hi, Tam, it's Lucas, I'll buzz you up.'

*Lucas*, that was it. Emphasis on the second syllable. He was Portuguese, so in the new hierarchy of the Met he had two things going for him: his sexual orientation which he wore like a weapon, and his nationality. You were in big trouble if you were a born-and-bred heterosexual, white, vaguely middle-class guy on the force these days. No chance of promotion – not that Tam wanted it, there was enough paperwork and glad-handing already. Fuck that.

He walked up the stairs, hoping it would ease the pain in his hip from too many hours in front of the television while he'd been on leave. It didn't. The traditional lino had gone, and the stairs were carpeted tastefully below clean pale grey painted walls with the ubiquitous camera on every floor. God forbid that an accident might take place during the long walk up five floors and no one could see it on a screen. Strange times, when policemen couldn't be trusted not to trip over their own feet. Tam was disorientated by the endless monotone walls. Ele-

phant's Breath – he remembered the bizarre name of the paint from a nightmarish in-house drinks party when the design for the new building had been 'run up the flagpole', and Tam had laughed out loud when the interior designer had announced it. That hadn't gone down well. Everyone else had stood in reverent silence while he guffawed, the only man drinking a beer in a room full of Pinot Grigio and prosecco.

He reached the fifth floor and leant against the wall for a minute to make sure he didn't look out of breath when he finally reached his destination. Although the building went no higher, there was a plaque announcing that this was indeed the fifth floor in front of him and yet another discreet silver buzzer.

'Hi ... Lucas, it's Tam.'

'Did you walk up?'

The guy sounded amused and Tam was immediately angry. His appointment was at 11 a.m. and it was only 10.55; he prided himself on not being late.

‘Yes, I walked—’

He was halfway through the reply when the door buzzer cut him off. He managed to push it open just in time and landed like Alice in Wonderland in the hallway, flustered and disorientated. Swearing under his breath, he smoothed down his hair, checked the front of his shirt for crumbs from the Cornish pasty he had eaten on the Tube, and looked for the right door. It had to be three years since he'd been up here, and the individual offices now led off a central reception; the old wood panelling on the walls was gone, and in a nod to universal equality it was hard to tell where the commissioner's office was. Everyone passing him seemed to be heading somewhere very important, faces down, or on mobile phones; some with headphones in their ears were talking out loud into the air.

Suddenly, there was Lucas, all smiles and solicitousness and soft handshake. ‘How are you Tam? We're all so happy to see you – have you recovered completely now? No pain?’

He talked as quickly as he walked, and Tam found himself breathless outside an anonymous door. A quick knock and they were in, and it became clear what had happened to most of the original offices and the corridor: they were now incorporated into the single biggest workspace that Tam had ever been in, with banks of mahogany joinery, shelving, a desk that looked as if it had been designed by a woodcutter from Africa, and more huge hardback books on shelves than Tam had ever seen outside of a library.

It was a bit like a bad Hollywood film set of an imagined London. Tam stood for a moment, apparently alone, as Lucas scuttled out, until the leather swivel armchair in front of him swung around and away from the huge picture window that had been installed on an entire side of the office. Echoes of James Bond. Tam tried not to laugh.

The commissioner stood up. His uniform gave more than a nod to the Swiss Guard, or the ceremonial, brass-buttoned craziness of Trooping the

Colour. Thinking about it, the longer Tam stayed in the police force, the more the top guys resembled the more decorative, less effective armies of the world. Tam tore his eyes from the yards of white and gold braid and put out his hand.

‘Morning, sir.’

‘No need for any of that, Tam, we’re old mates. Great to see you. Sorry about the kit, we’ve got a mounted event later on the Mall.’

Tam was swept up in an awkward bear hug which involved back-patting, until the commissioner took control and nonchalantly perched himself down on the side of his polished desk, adopting the air of an avuncular uncle, head at a sympathetic angle.

‘So, Tam, how are things?’

‘Well, I feel much better, I’ve had a hell of a lot of physio, and I think my leg is stronger than before the shooting. The tendons have all reattached and I’m ready to go to work. I really feel I can offer some-



thing important. "Authentic police work", I think they called it in the last seminar you sent me on.'

The commissioner laughed, kindly, then reframed his serious but concerned face and continued. 'That's great news, Tam, but how *are* you? *In here?*' He tapped the side of his head and looked at Tam quizzically, as if he was trying to work out the answer to a very complicated problem. It was not a good sign.

'Sir, I'm fine. Honestly. Keen to get back out there.'

The commissioner used an intake of breath to get up from his casually relaxed position on the desk and go round to the other side and sit back in his capacious armchair. Tam began to seriously consider whether he was on *Candid Camera*.

'Take a seat, mate.'

Tam took a breath and began. 'Sir, I really don't want to take up too much of your time. I don't want a promotion or a pay rise, I just want to get on with doing what I joined the force to do. I want to make



the streets safer and society better for all. You put me where you think I'll do the most good and I'll give you a hundred per cent.'

Tam had rehearsed this several times in his head and was disappointed when his boss's reaction was a pained expression of regret and a shake of the head.

'That's the thing, I suppose, Tam – times have changed. You and I came up together and I have a lot of respect for your not wanting to play the game like everyone else. You're your own man and that's a brave path to follow. The problem is, these days, who are you or I to say what society should be? Who are we to claim we know better than anyone else what works? That's the question.'

Tam thought he'd finished and took another breath ready to speak, grasping for a sensible answer to an incomprehensible statement, but, before he could, the commissioner was off again.

'Tam, our model of copper is outmoded; our time has gone. Do you know how often each week I have

representatives in here from every dark corner of the urban sprawl? Last week I had a meeting with an imam from Tooting who was defending the imposition of Sharia law in parts of south London, and I had to listen politely to his request for four more senior Muslim police officers in the area who would look at female abuse through Muslim eyes. Then there was the paedophile rights lawyer who came in with a young man who had yearnings for adolescent blond boys and I was supposed to engage in conversation and be impressed that he didn't act on them. He just wanted "understanding", apparently, and to be "a mouthpiece for his community". It's a fuck-up out there and you just don't fit.'

For a moment Tam thought he had said 'we just don't fit', and then it sank in. He didn't fit. This wasn't going well at all.

'Sir,' he tried, 'we are the Metropolitan Police Force, the line in the sand between good and bad, the defenders of the weak if you like, and if we're not sure of our position then who's going to fill our

role? Are you seriously telling me we're giving up? Chucking in the towel? I don't fucking believe it. There are people in all these new developing areas of our society who need help and regular police assistance, surely. Our legal system hasn't changed. Under our statutes you can't tie your daughter to a bed because she isn't dressed modestly. Surely we can't be in the business of pleasing all the people all the time?'

'Of course we aren't giving up. We're adapting, and you're a valuable tool in that process, Tam. While none of us wants you out there on the street risking your life on a daily basis, we do want you in the plan going forward, part of the solution rather than the problem. We all want that. I want you by my side as a liaison co-ordinator. Outreach, with all your years of experience. I want you talking to the kids in schools whose brains are being poisoned; I want you gathering intelligence, bringing a bit of sanity to the situation.'

'You want me in a *desk job*?'

‘We want you where you will be most valuable, most visible to us and to society. This way you’re not just another bobby on the beat, you’re the guy with the intelligence, literally. Someone I can use as a confidant, a wing man—’

Tam’s feet propelled him to the big door and he struggled to open it before he realised it was on some sort of security buzzer. He nearly kicked it, but squashed his inner adolescent back down, then turned round to look at the man behind the desk whom he’d known since they were both eighteen and full of ideals. He was still talking about the New Society, and didn’t seem to have realised that Tam had moved until he looked up. Surprise and confusion mixed on his face and his speech slowed, until finally he understood the look on Tam’s face and fell silent.

‘Mate, come on, be reasonable.’

Tam stared at him and smiled thinly. He knew he looked furious; he’d never been able to hide his feelings. There was nothing more to say, and he

watched as the commissioner reached down and released the door lock using an invisible button somewhere under the desk. Their eyes met and Tam thought he saw regret, and a bit of a mental shrug on the huge frame of this man whom he had once thought of as a brother in arms. The last image of him, mouth hanging slack and open, buttons taking some strain and the braid that wound round his shoulders puckering, was like a snapshot. Who was it who said we don't remember days, we remember moments? There was nothing for him here.

'Sir, my resignation will be in the post.'

Tam realised as he said it that no one posted anything these days and that it had probably been noted as another anachronism, but he couldn't be fucked. He needed a drink.

He brushed past Lucas and had another embarrassing encounter with a locked door. As it was buzzed open by a now silent receptionist, he was aware that the anger was flowing off him like mist

off a mountain. He tried to slam the door behind him but it didn't slam; it was on a soft-close hinge. Fuck this world and the people who lived in it.

The pavement was drizzled on, just damp enough to make navigating it treacherous, and the Tube station seemed further away now that he was deflated and emotionally drained. What the fuck was he going to do with himself now? His principles were fast evaporating into a panicked vision of standing outside a dodgy nightclub doing security. He probably couldn't even get employed to do that, come to think of it. He'd seen the guys outside his local pub and he was pretty sure he was twenty years too old and three feet too narrow for the job.

Why did he never think things through? They were probably really chuffed to get rid of him. He hadn't negotiated a redundancy payment, he'd insulted his boss, and generally made an exit which must have satisfyingly confirmed their opinion of him.

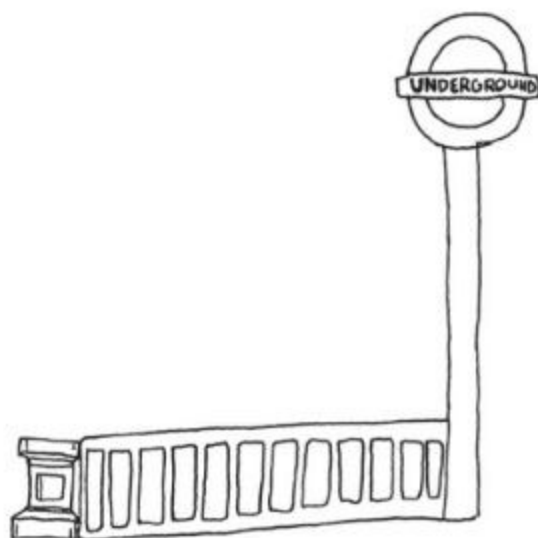
Tam's head dipped forward as he concentrated on avoiding patches of wet horse-chestnut leaves, always the first hint that autumn was on its way, when suddenly his forward momentum was stopped dead. The pavement in front of him was taken up by a tall man, travelling in the same direction as he was, who was blocking his path with a combination of physical presence and flailing arms. Still staring down, all Tam could see in his path were feet, feet which appeared to be dancing across the fucking local authority paving stones deliberately to disrupt his journey home. It was all he needed. He tried to walk around the guy, but he jumped into his path, on tiptoe. He tried the other side and the bloke did the same thing. It was like some weird rehearsal for a modern ballet, and it wasn't improving Tam's mood.

‘What the fuck are you doing, mate? I’m trying to get home. Can you get out of my way?’

He got no response, and looked up to try and make sense of what was happening. A young man



in his twenties, in a neatly done-up coat, belt tied round his middle, combed and parted hair and a nerdish air, was apparently jumping the cracks in the pavement. His feet were moving surprisingly quickly, but as they had to cover a lot of horizontals he wasn't making speedy progress. Tam looked left to see if he could step into the road and get round him that way. Buses and taxis, messenger bikes and cyclists sped along inches from the pavement. He was either going to have to knock the idiot over, or pace himself behind him.



The issues with the locked doors, the weather and the general misery of the day had knocked the



stuffing out of Tam, and he decided he didn't have the energy for a quickstep which would probably culminate in the death of a drunk or a care-in-the-community citizen, or more likely his own demise under the wheels of a bus. He slowed down. It wasn't as if anything was waiting for him at home. What should have taken three minutes took ten, and the stairs down into Tottenham Court Road Tube station looked perilously steep for a tiptoeing line-avoider. Inwardly shrugging, Tam took the parallel staircase, looking round once to see the guy placing two feet on to each step carefully, brushing down the front of his coat at each descent and carrying on to the next one. Mild fascination was washed away by the thought of a single malt and an episode of *Inspector Morse*, although it might be a bit masochistic to watch period detective drama tonight. It might have to be porn and a curry.

Despite his laboured methods of descending a staircase, the bloke from the pavement arrived five minutes later on the same platform, and stood

waiting for a train, alone, by a pillar. When they got on to the train Tam could see him in the next carriage through the glass dividing window, sitting balanced on the edge of a seat with his hands in his lap, then reaching into his pocket for a small clear bottle and applying what looked like sanitising lotion to his fingers, one by one. Tam reminded himself he was no longer a detective, closed his eyes, and mentally counted the stops until he reached Waterloo, changed on to the Jubilee line and dozed all the way to Kilburn. When he emerged from under London's busy crust, the sun was low in the sky and the drizzle had stopped. Although it was only early afternoon, Tam could feel that the warmth in the sun was fading. He knew he should probably pick up some groceries, but he couldn't summon the energy. He walked up the path to his flat, tiredness wrapped round him now, along with an overwhelming sense of anti-climax. The bins on his right were in a straight line and he tried to remember which day the bin men came now; it seemed to change every couple of months.

He opened the door of the house and crossed the hall to pick up his post. As usual the letters for the three people who lived in the flats under this Victorian roof had been meticulously put into piles, biggest letters at the bottom, magazines and catalogues below those, everything squared up. In the hall, above the small table that held the post, someone had put up a clock; Tam remembered the same one being in the first police station he'd ever worked in, white plastic with big numbers, and it felt somehow reassuring, something solid on shifting sands. Below it was a small cork noticeboard, completely devoid of notices. A wave of exhaustion came over him. Thank God his flat was on the ground floor. He put the key in the lock and went inside.

After turning every light on, Tam dropped some ice into a glass and poured from a bottle of Glenfarclas ten-year-old. There wasn't even enough left to cover the ice. That would be the cleaner; she drank like a fish. At least he could dispense with her now

he was out of a job. Tam picked up the phone and rang her number – voicemail. He left a message telling her not to come back, and explained that he'd lost his job ... pay it forward. He needed to relax, though, and the off-licence was only down the road, but 'down the road' seemed like a challenge. He would see if you could order whisky from Hungry Horse later. Today was a fuck-up, it was official. He would watch porn on his phone, in bed. It was one of the few luxuries left to him. He downed the tablespoonful of whisky, chucked his clothes on the floor, pissed into the sink and walked into the bedroom. He pulled the duvet over him, typed 'young, hot and horny' into the search engine and exhaled. The front door slammed and he heard feet going upstairs. Did no one work any more?

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