

# Three heads are better than one.

By Dante Harker

'It's a bit late to be tidying this place now, don't you think Graham?'

Graham did, but he wasn't about to tell his mother that. Instead he rushed around the flat, doing his best to make the place look presentable.

Graham knew that his actions were a superficial measure. No amount of cushion-plumping would distract from his putrid yellow, nicotine-stained wall. The walls weren't really his fault, more just a by-product of him being a house-bound chain-smoker.

'Don't you think you should do the dishes at least, rather than wasting all this time straightening the cushions?' Graham's mother spoke with her usual accusing tone. These days Graham's mother didn't venture any words that weren't designed to make him feel weak or a failure.

'You're mother's right, Graham,' his father added before he had a chance to respond to his mother's remark. 'What if these new support workers want a cup of tea, they aren't going to drink out of any of those cups?'

'They aren't going into the kitchen; I'll show them in here. And they couldn't have a drink of tea anyway, I'm all out.'

'Oh yes, that's right, your Tesco delivery isn't due until tomorrow is it? God forbid you actually went out and got some shopping for yourself!'

Graham ignored his mum; he didn't want to get into another long debate about why he would only leave his flat under sedation. And, as he didn't get many visitors anyway, having tea and coffee in didn't seem that important. He used to get visitors, for a short time at least, when he had first stopped going out. Back then he had social and care workers, people from the local church and, for a time, he even had a bereavement counsellor. It was just that, over time, they seemed to disappear one by one.

'What did you expect?' Grahams mother snapped after reading his thoughts, 'they all wanted you to get better, you didn't! You mostly just got fatter. Just living off the benefits they heaved your way, as if it was your money.'

'You know they wouldn't let him go back to teaching mother. If they won't let him do a job he enjoyed you can't blame the boy for taking the State's money and staying at home instead.'

Graham gave the cushions another whack, not that he thought that they could get any plumper; he just liked imagining that it was his mother's face every time he smashed his hand down onto the worn valour fabric.

'I'm not well, mum,' Graham said at last, he hadn't wanted to get drawn into the debate, but he knew that his mum never left anything alone, and he didn't want to be having this conversation when the new support workers arrived.

'You're not well? You're not well? Pathetic, that's what you are.' Graham's mother said, the sound of her voice making his head pound. Her words were like a scythe – sharp and rounded so when aimed at his head, they cut and levelled their target. 'And these people arriving' his mother continued 'they're not support workers are they? They're "Befriending Coordinators".'

Graham picked the letter up off the ash stained coffee table. He shook it and read it again. His mother was right; these weren't support workers who were coming to visit him. It seemed that he was being assessed to see if he was suitable to have a Befriender. Not that Graham was sure

what a Befriender was, but he guessed it was a person who was somehow paid to be his “friend”.

‘It is a little sad son’, Graham didn’t like hearing from his father, his mum he could ignore, blank out (sometimes), but his father had always been a voice of reason. He had looked up to him, and his words, though few and far between, still held more power than his mother’s.

Not letting her husband continue, Graham’s mum took a breath and began, ‘it’s more than sad. It’s pitiful. A grown man, well more than a grown man, really, what were you the last time they dragged you to the hospital? 38 stone?’

‘36,’ Graham whispered

‘Either way it’s disgusting, a grown man not able to find his own friends. And worse, you can’t even hide away in your own stench. They are now sending people in to find friends for you, paying someone to come and spend some time in this mess. I hope you’re happy.’

Graham thought about his mother’s last line and wondered when he was last happy. He was certain that he had not been so for the last five years. The accident had taken everything away from him. Before that he must have been happy, though it seemed so long ago now that he couldn’t

be 100% sure. He could remember enjoying teaching; he had qualified at twenty-five, and had taught for ten years before it happened. 'That must have made me happy,' Graham thought.

'They wouldn't have you back would they?' said Graham's mum, adding 'they said you weren't stable enough to work around children, they were afraid you might damage them.'

'That's not what they said at all, and you know it.' Graham stormed across the flat heading for the window. He was desperate for a sight of his guests, hoping that their presence would shut his mother up for a minute.

'They might as well have done though,' she continued, her voice attacking. Graham was angry and on the defensive, his mother could sense a victory.

'I've told you a thousand times before.' This was, in fact, true, or maybe not, Graham thought, maybe it's more than a thousand now.

He repeated, 'I've told you a thousand times before, that wasn't what happened. They said that they thought I wasn't well enough to come back to work. They said that I could in the future, I just needed more time away.'

‘Five years is a long time away,’ his dad said.

‘They’re here!’ Graham screamed out. ‘Now shut up and don’t bother me while the Befrienders are here.’

After they had introduced themselves at the door, Graham showed the two coordinators into the living room. They took a seat on the plumped settee opposite Graham’s specialist, “big man’s” chair and, after opening her bag and taking out a file, the female coordinator said:

‘Ok Graham, we’ve been given your file by your social worker, who would like us to find you a volunteer Befriender. That’s someone who would come and visit you at home each week.’

The coordinator looked down at her file, scanned the paper and continued:

‘It says here that you have a problem with hearing voices, and this all started when your parents were killed in a car accident five years ago.’ She paused, allowing Graham time to take in her words and then added:

‘Don’t worry Graham, we’re here to help.’

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