

The CBT Lady

For a few months in, I think, 2009 I would visit, every Monday afternoon, a practitioner of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy. She was a psychologist called Heather who lived in a large house on the edge of Hamstead Garden Suburb. To get there I would cycle to Highgate then along past Kenwood turning right and dropping down the hill just before the Spaniards Inn. On the corner of that junction there was a bus shelter. The few people I saw waiting there as I passed were always black or brown - I thought they were probably domestic workers on their way home after a morning shift. I'd be very surprised if the local residents ever took the bus. It always reminded me of South Africa for some reason - maybe it was because of the light, because my visits took place over the summer months of that year. Or maybe it was just a recognition of political realities.

In the evening when she got back from work Jane would ask "how was CBT Lady?" Not "how are you?" - but that was fine because she *knew* how I was after 28 years of being together. When you have been a couple for a long time you want the other one to tell you stories of the world "outside" what you share, at the end of the day.

"CBT Lady asked me to talk about this or that..." I'd reply "she has a photo of her children on her desk, the chair I sit in is very comfortable..." In turn Jane would tell me about work - about vain, egotistical partners and aggressive, bad-tempered contractors.

Our daughter was pregnant; that was a Big, New Thing both "inside" and "outside". When she told us I cried and we all laughed afterwards because everyone knew I'd be the one to cry. We drank the bottle of quite good champagne Sophie had given me at my 55th birthday party two years previously. I'd told myself I'd put it aside and save it for a really special occasion - something worth celebrating but until that point I'd found it hard to imagine recognising what such a thing might be. What might merit celebration. It wasn't that my life was without excitement or incident - exciting holiday trips, a one-man-show in a Milan gallery, the all-clear for a cancer scare... it sounds strange but, to me, these things didn't seem *sufficiently* life-changing.

I suppose that was why I was visiting CBT Lady every Monday.