

## CENTRE FOR HUMAN COMMUNICATION

63, Abbey Rd., Torquay, Devon. Tel: 0803 211141/2. Directors: Kevin and Venika Kingsland, David Pike. Ancient yoga philosophy and science: June 1-2. Mantra yoga: 15-16th Chakra system. Individual Psychological, Group and Ergonomic Consultancies. Nature Cure and Yoga Therapy, Arts and Crafts Workshop, Sound and Colour Laboratory, Library. All visitors and enquiries welcome.

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## GROWTH GROUPS

Leader: Dina Glouberman. Encounter/Gestalt/Psychodrama weekend workshops. Low prices. Small groups. Details from Dina Glouberman, 29 Pattison Road, N.W.2. Tel: 01-435 8943.

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Ann McPhee

## The Interview

The bus driver did nothing to prevent me from reaching the hospital, but I felt his attitude was not helpful.

*'No, we don't go there,' he said, with a deadpan expression.*

*'Do you go near there?'*

*'Yes.'*

*'How much is it?'*

*'Fivepence.'*

I offered him a five and he stared straight through me.

*'A five, please,'*

*'You don't pay me. Put it in the machine.'*

*'Oh, I see. Will you tell me when we get to the hospital?'*

*'We don't go to the hospital.'*

*'Well, the nearest stop to it.'*

He nodded and turned to face the front of the bus.

After we had travelled a few miles we stopped in a street of council houses. Nobody got on or off the bus. The driver turned and looked at me.

*'This is it.'*

I peered out at the council houses. There was nothing that looked remotely like a hospital.

*'Where?' I asked loth to get off the bus at the wrong place.*

*'You have to walk back along the road, turn right and cross the main road.'*

*'Will I be able to see it then?'*

*'Yes.'*

I alighted, followed his directions, and easily found the main entrance to the hospital. As I was waiting to cross the main road a bus drew up, not far from me. All of the passengers got off the bus and the driver lit a cigarette and started to read his newspaper. Most of the passengers crossed the road and went into the hospital grounds. They looked familiar. I recognised their coats; they had been on the same bus as me. The bus had obviously turned round the next corner and come back along the main road. The hospital was its destination. After his ten-minute rest the driver would return to the city centre and pick up more patients or visitors for the hospital.

Once inside the hospital grounds, I fished out the letter from my bag and read the directions for finding E Block. They were quite straightforward, but E Block was clearly not within sight. I decided that it must be over the horizon and braced myself for the journey.

My appointment was with Mr. Alder. The offices in E Block were all marked but none of them belonged to Mr. Alder. There was nobody in the Enquiries office. I did not want to be late for my appointment, so I went into the Common Room and asked if anybody could tell me where I could find Mr. Alder. There were about eight people in the Common Room and they all jumped up and ran over to look at me. One, a boy aged about thirteen, said, *'I wouldn't go in there with him if I were you, not on my own.'*

A taller girl, aged about twenty, said *'Have you an appointment?'*

*'Yes, at three.'*

*'Well, he's at a meeting at the moment,'* she moved towards the door, *'you'll see wait just there,'* pointing through the glass panel of the door, *'you'll see him come out.'*

*'Thank you.'*

She took the younger ones back to the centre of the room. She seemed to be in control. She seemed young, beautiful and poised. I felt out of place.

Suddenly a door opened and about twenty young, beautiful, poised persons came out of a meeting. They all looked at me very carefully, but continued the conversations they had started in the room. I realised I did not know what Mr. Alder looked like and wondered how I would make my presence known to him.

A tall, healthy-looking young man came towards me and said my name. I smiled and shook his hand, realising at once that he had the gift of making others feel at ease. He took me to an office and started to explain about the job. He had not got very far when the door opened and I heard somebody enter and sit down behind me. He carried on talking as if nothing had happened. I wanted to see who was sitting behind me. He addressed one or two remarks to the person behind me and when she replied I knew that it was a woman, but it would have been impossible to look at her without swivelling right round. Eventually Mr. Alder said, *'This is Mrs. Brown, our social worker. If you work here you will have quite a lot to do with her, so it's as well to meet her now.'*

I turned round and found myself face-to-face with a most startling combination of Raquel Welch, Elizabeth Taylor and the Duchess of Kent, dressed from head to foot in beautiful black leather. She explained her role in the team and how I would be

expected to work with her. Mr. Alder asked me if I wanted to ask her any questions. I wondered how I would ever be able to regard a woman who looked like that as a colleague, but I could not ask her if she was the same as me underneath, so I said no. She left the room and Mr. Alder proceeded with the interview. We had a very interesting discussion about attitudes to illness and methods of treating people. After a long silence I said, *'I was hoping I would be able to look round.'*

He took me to the Common Room and we talked about the activities that took place there. While we were there a very fat, short man, dressed like a farmer, came in and started throwing apples at us. We caught one apple each and then Mr. Alder introduced him as the staff nurse in charge of E Block, Mr. Day. We shook hands and he asked Mr. Alder about one or two things and went out through the French windows. Mr. Alder showed me round the rest of the building, pointing out the beds that had been damaged by fire and the showers that had been damaged by patients. Then he took me back to the office and left me there while he went to look for an application form.

As soon as he had gone I got down on my hands and knees and started feeling the floor feverishly. For the last half-hour I had been looking at Mr. Alder, and anyone else I wanted to see, sideways, because my left contact lens had become dislodged during the interview. People are usually helpful about searching for contact lenses; it is a more effective and less traumatic way of attracting sympathy and attention than any illness I know, yet I felt that I could not really ask my prospective employer to crawl around his own office looking for my contact lens.

Suddenly I thought, *'Supposing they've got observation panels!'* I looked around the room suspiciously. There were no mirrors or panels; still it would not look good if he returned and found me on my hands and knees, so I resigned myself to the loss and stood up.

When he returned with the application form I folded it, placed it in my handbag and started to button up my coat.

*'Don't forget your apple,'* he said.

*'Oh, no.'*

I picked it up and pushed it into my coat pocket with the gesture of a small boy. He took me to the door and waved goodbye, as my mother used to wave when we were going to school.

It was a long walk back to the hospital gates. I kept closing one eye and then the other, to test my sight. The left lens had definitely gone. It was very sad about it, and rather ashamed. It would be the third one in less than six months. My insurance premium would go up. They would say I was accident prone. I am not really accident prone, rather the opposite, but I seem to be unlucky with contact lenses.

At the bus stop the thought occurred to me that the lens might still be in my eye, but in the wrong place. I fished out a mirror. Yes, it was. I wondered whether Mr. Alder had noticed it, or that I was looking at him sideways. I decided to leave the lens where it was for the moment, rather than risk losing it on the pavement.

There was only one other person at the bus stop, a middle-aged to elderly woman. She seemed to be trying to look over my shoulder into the mirror. When I put the mirror away she asked me if I had a fivepence. I opened my purse.

*'No, I'm sorry, I haven't.'*  
*'You'll need one to get on the bus.'*  
*'Won't they accept anything else?'*  
*'No.'*

She smiled a toothless smile. *'I've got lots of shillings,'* she continued, *'there's a shop in the hospital, and every Thursday, when I get my pension, I take it to the shop and they give me shillings.'*

*'That's nice.'*  
*'Would you like a shilling? They won't let you on the bus without one.'*  
*'Well - could you change two shillings?'*

I offered her a two-shilling piece.

*'No, I don't want it,'* she said, *'They won't take them on buses.'*  
*'But you could take it to the shop.'*

She held out her purse: *'Take the rest then.'* I opened her purse and showed her that I was only taking two shillings in exchange for the two-shilling piece. Then I said, *'Will you have enough to come back?'*

*'Oh, yes'* she said, beaming her toothless smile, *'I always have plenty of shillings. They give them to me at the hospital.'*

As I sat on the bus returning to the city centre I reflected that it was the first time I had ever been given an apple at an interview, and I wondered if they were any special significance attached to it, or if they had learned anything about me from the way I had accepted it. It was a very nice apple anyway. It was a nice interview too, really. They were very nice people, but I did not think I would be able to work there. Perhaps I would always be a receiver of apples and shillings.

