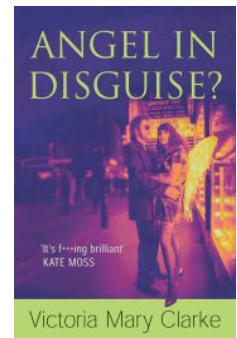


An extract from “Angel in Disguise” by Victoria Clarke

Chapter Sixteen: How I Became A Guru To Millions



The day before I left for Brighton, where the Hoffman Process was due to take place, I ended the relationship with Ronan, utterly confident in the belief that the process would work, and that I would come back without any of the negative thoughts that had caused me to be attracted to someone who was unavailable. I figured that if I came back cured and our relationship was meant to continue, it would, but I would refuse to put up with being unhappy. I also decided to get rid of my flat. I figured that a new start in a new place would give me a chance to think and behave differently. I recycled three bin bags full of clothes, that might well have been nice clothes, or even expensive clothes, but they had negative thoughts and feelings and events associated with them, so they went in the recycling. Even the lovely silk dress that I looked good in, that I had worn for our first date got binned. I was taking no chances, feng shui-wise. I planned to a new life to match my new personality.

At the airport in London, the airline lost my luggage, all my clothes, everything. But instead of being pissed off about it, I took it as a sign from the Omniverse that I was about to get rid of my emotional baggage, as well. Nothing was going to deter me from my new-found optimism.

From London, I took a train south to a place near Brighton, and then a taxi to the retreat centre which was situated on the edge of a cliff. It was raining, and dark, by the time I got to the house, and I was shown into a dining room, where people were congregating. There I was given forms to fill in, and was relieved of my mobile phone. There was to be no communication with the outside world, no reading of newspapers, no watching of telly and no going to the shops, or indeed leaving the grounds, except when given permission to take a walk along the cliff. I

was not even allowed to tell anyone exactly what went on, during the eight days. I suppose I could get away with telling you that there was a lot of screaming and crying and bashing of cushions with baseball bats, (for which you had to wear gloves, in case you got blisters). There was quite a lot of embarrassing stuff, that I wasn't sure I could do, but you were required to commit to doing all of it and to giving it one hundred per cent, even if you hated it, which I did, at times. The other people were an interesting mix, most of whom had much more expensive cars than me, but we weren't allowed to ask anyone what they did for a living, or even their real names. We were all assigned labels, which were things like 'unloved' or 'unwanted' or 'angry'.

Once I had got over the embarrassment of this, and let down my guard a bit, I realised that everyone had exactly the same sorts of insecurities. I also began to notice that the more people revealed things they didn't like about themselves, the more I liked them, and the more I revealed, the more I was liked in return. There was a particularly scary moment when I had to stand in front of everyone and pick out somebody that I had responded negatively to and tell them what I didn't like. The guy I picked was someone I fancied and I had taken offence when he didn't appear to notice me, and this was what I had to confess. Luckily, he admitted to also having fancied me, but another guy wasn't so lucky, when he picked out a girl and said the same thing to her, she said she was freaked out by that.

The label I was given was 'Aloof'. Originally I had been horrified at the thought of having to share a room with two strangers, and had very rudely pinched the pillows off the other beds and hogged all the wardrobe space, as a mark of protest, but by the end of the eight days, I regarded the other two girls as friends, and even caught myself occasionally considering their well-being, instead of just thinking about myself.

The day that the Hoffman Process ended, and I was released back into the community, I was utterly, utterly euphoric. In fact, the way I felt was the exact opposite of the way I had felt when I began this project. Instead of seeing my life stretched out before me as a time of loneliness, depression, tension, tedium and eventually death, I now saw joyful, happy, and exciting possibilities everywhere I looked and the future, as I

contemplated it, was pulsating with disco lights and sparkly stuff. When they gave us back our mobile phones, I did not rush to find out who had called me or who hadn't called me or what I had missed out on. It did not even occur to me to wonder whether Ronan had called. **It was like waking up one morning to discover that you now live at The Ritz, when you have been accustomed to living in a run-down student hostel.** The me that had clung to my old life would have been horrified at the notion of going backwards.

The immediate changes were astounding. On trains and in public places generally, I had always needed some kind of a prop, magazines, newspapers, books, music, something to hide behind and to keep me from getting bored. But on the train back to London, I did not need the crappy magazines to occupy my thoughts, so enamoured was I of the beauty of existence itself. I revelled in simply being there.

The really remarkable change was that I was no longer lonely. And when I was alone, I relished it. For years, for as long as I could remember, I had been terrified of loneliness, and sometimes thought I would die of loneliness. I would wake up in the mornings, remember that I was alone and cry myself back to sleep. I sometimes burst into tears, on my way to the shops, just because I had been reminded of the fact that nobody in the street knew me and that nobody in the street would notice if I went home alone and killed myself.

I had yearned not to be alone, but it was also my choice. While I lived with Shane for most of the time, I had often rented flats of my own to retreat to, because I hated being around other people, when I was depressed. I stayed indoors for days, not answering the phone, or the door bell and if I did have to speak to anyone, I always worked hard to conceal the fact that there was anything wrong. Sometimes, out of desperation, out of an overwhelming need for company, I attached myself to people, invited myself to visit people or went to workshops. But it never made me feel any better, in fact it made me feel worse because I didn't necessarily enjoy the company of the people I attached myself to and I resented the need to be around people I didn't particularly like. I would go to restaurants by myself and feel tangible pain at the sight of other people having dinner with friends or lovers. And I would absolutely

dread the moment when I had to go home and be by myself, but I was often lonely in crowds, at parties, at gigs or even just sitting in a room with Shane . It was a no win situation.

The day I left the Hoffman, I went to London, with the intention of spending two weeks by myself, minding a friend's flat in Soho, while he went away on holidays. Sebastian is a man of rather eccentric taste. He occupied one floor of a Queen Anne house in Soho. The front room was panelled in dark wood, and had dark wood floorboards, an open fire and no furniture, apart from a desk, an easel and a red velvet armchair. The bedroom was also panelled, and had it's own fire place, and the bed was mahogany, covered with red velvet. Above the fire was a collection of perhaps twenty human skulls and beside the bed was a loaded revolver. Beside the doorbell was a neat sign that read 'This is not a Brothel.' An anxious person would have been terrified. But I was no longer an anxious person.

Every morning I woke up alone, but my first thought was not of how lonely and unwanted I was. That thought had been erased. Now I thought about how wonderful I felt, how marvellous it was just to be me and to be alive and to be in Soho, with this Gothic paradise all to myself. It made me ridiculously happy just to walk to the local shop, or to St James's park or just very simply to put one foot in front of the other and go anywhere. I revelled in my clothes, in my hair, in my face. I revelled in the silence, or in Sebastian's CD collection. I revelled in making a cup of tea, or washing the dishes.

Now that I no longer felt desperate for company and resentful that I was being deprived of it, I called friends that I hadn't seen for years and went to dinners and parties with them. There was no longer a feeling of dread that they might change their minds, or have to cancel our arrangements and that I might be left home alone, trying not to cry. And without the fear of being alone, I felt light hearted and happy around people.

Perversely, I also looked forward immensely to my work. I sat alone in Sebastian's velvet armchair and wrote, every day. Interviewing people became more fun. I interviewed Jilly Cooper, and she invited me to her house in Gloucestershire for the weekend, where she served a proper

English Sunday roast and we walked around the countryside in Wellingtons, while she filled me in on all the gossip. Having been a Jilly Cooper fan for years, I found myself in awe of the possibilities for what the rest of my life could be like. I had, it seemed, deleted the limiting beliefs that said that things don't turn out to be any fun, or that said that I was jinxed and that the Omniverse was conspiring to make me miserable and to thwart me. And I had been re-programmed to expect happy times.

When you're serious about change

Hoffman Institute UK

Call us on: +44 (0)1903 88 99 90

This website contains intellectual property including graphics and text protected by international copyright. All Rights Reserved. ©1998 Hoffman Institute International Inc.
URL: <http://www.hoffmaninstitute.co.uk>