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SHARP SCRATCH

MARTINE BAILEY

*For everyone who struggles to find their place
in a world of cold conformity.*

‘Dark, unfeeling and unloving powers determine human
destiny.’

New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis
by Sigmund Freud

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Personality tests like the one in this book are designed to measure traits, the habitual patterns of behaviour, thought and emotion that seem to make you 'you'. Each chapter is headed by a fictional test question intended to reflect that chapter's theme. I hope you find it entertaining to ask yourself the questions; if you agree with option 'A.' you are identifying with that trait's description written out below it. This is of course not a scientific test: if you agree with a single trait associated with depression or psychopathy, that does not mean you are depressed or a psychopath!

Any credible test would consider the combination and interaction of the different traits you identify with and their measurement on a scale from high to low. The fictional PX60 test in part reflects the thinking back in 1983, whereas today more attention is paid to the demonstration of different traits in a variety of situations – for example, 'I may be aggressive and loud at a football match but quiet and submissive at work'. Similarly, traits can change over time and our differing cultures, learning and life opportunities all contribute to making us unique individuals.

Sadism

Instructions

This is a questionnaire concerning your interests, preferences and feelings about a range of things. There is no time limit.

Be as honest and truthful as you can. Don't give an answer just because it seems to be the right thing to say.

Question 1: If people were more honest, they would admit that torture is interesting.

- A. True
- B. Uncertain
- C. False

High score description (option A.): Cruelty, an intrinsic pleasure in hurting and humiliating others.

My past is confined in a box of steel. Though memories beg for release, I keep them carefully padlocked, deep in the cellar of my mind.

I review an old favourite: The Glen, Salford, 1963. I

watch Christie staring out from the top window of Wilkins Boarding House, one of the largest of a street of shabby villas, mostly divided into mismatched flats. She is waiting for her landlady, keeping vigil over a road that has few cars, no children, no pets. A coalman's horse and cart clops along the cobbles to the next house along. He heaves his sacks up the alley, whistling tunelessly, his eyes white in his sooty face.

Next Mrs Wilkins comes hobbling into sight, her spine bent from a life of drudgery. At the front gate she sets down two weighty shopping bags to get her breath back, admiring her smart painted sign: 'The Wilkins Boarding House – Hot and cold water. Special rates for hospital staff'. Replenished with puff and pride, she disappears up the steps and the front door bangs.

The coalman and his cart disappear. When all is quiet, Christie noiselessly descends to where Mrs Wilkins is brewing tea in the kitchen. The landlady looks up when the door opens. She's a sinewy, nervy woman, faded at sixty, her myopic eyes magnified behind round NHS spectacles.

'Oh, hello. Did they let you off early?'

An excuse is made. Then the suspicious little face peers up from the tea caddy.

'You 'aven't seen me old carpetbag, 'ave you? Last time I seen it I'm sure it were up on the wardrobe. It's got all me important papers and that locked up in it.'

Christie dolefully shakes her head, a parody of innocence.

Just then the kettle starts up like a banshee screaming a warning. The landlady rescues it from the flame, and it quiets to fitful sighs. Her big watery eyes catch sight of the bottle filched from the medicine cupboard.

'Fancy you getting hold of that health tonic from

the hospital for me,' she says, savouring a rare dose of attention. 'Go on. I could do with giving me feet a rest.'

It's quite something, Christie's Treatment Room. There's even a neat wooden sign on the door like a proper clinic. It took time to create it, to arrange the perfect setting for Christie's most private fantasies. Best of all, she arranged to take the unwanted fittings from the abandoned operating theatres when they knocked half the asylum down. She salvaged some real beauties: a rubber anaesthetic mask, and a set of original glass and steel syringes. Her pride and joy is the antique treatment couch. It's hard leather, weighty and strong, with the original straps and buckles still taut and secure.

Mrs Wilkins follows her downstairs and through the Treatment Room door like a pet lamb to the slaughter. Suddenly she spots the wax display of a brain beneath a dome of glass.

'It's a bit funny down here, in't it? All this peculiar equipment you've gone and got hold of.'

Christie gestures to the couch. Mrs Wilkins clambers up, then lies on her back, pulling her skirt down over thick stockings, preserving her pathetic modesty. Christie rolls up the landlady's sleeve and bares her withered arm. The patient needs to be quiet. To relax. To do as she is told. Only when Christie starts to bind her arm with the leather strap does she start twitching.

'Eh, what d'you think you're doing?'

It's too late. The large old-fashioned syringe looms above her. Mrs Wilkins' eyes open so wide, they might pop. The other gloved hand clamps her nose and mouth. When the old bat tries to bite the hand that restrains her,

the needle stabs into scrawny flesh. With the release of the syringe comes the thrill as the lethal dose surges into a vein. The old woman writhes helplessly; her glasses tumble to the floor.

She finally comprehends her fate in wide-eyed horror. The whimpering stops. Pupils shrink to pinpricks. Life ends, snuffed out, as a great black veil falls. The sensation is like nothing else, better than any sexual thrill, this extinction of another person.

On the floor the spectacles lie twisted, the cracked lenses forever dimmed.

Later, Christie returns to the kitchen with the carpetbag. One by one she removes each document and inspects them. It is mostly rubbish, ancient stuff from the war, faded letters, cheap Christmas cards. A bundle of these are shoved into the fire. Placed to one side is the Last Will and Testament of Mrs Ida Wilkins, which leaves her entire estate to The Methodist Mission for Charity in Africa.

By the light of the crackling fire Christie flattens out the will and begins to practise in a crabby, uneducated hand:

'I devise and bequeath to my dear friend the property known as The Wilkins Boarding House . . .'