



**It's not just  
any milk,  
it's filtered  
to make  
it purer.**

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**B**EFORE I went into therapy 18 months ago, I dismissed the idea of a 'talking cure' as a waste of time and money: something for weak, self-indulgent losers. Apart from those who'd suffered a major traumatic event, I thought it was for people — troubled celebrities mainly — who just wanted to moan about their weight/self-esteem/alcohol/cocaine problem, while blaming their overly critical mother and/or emotionally absent father.

My attitude probably had something to do with my sister Louise and our mutual friend Katy, who both work in the Priory clinics. They have a psychobabble explanation for just about everything.

Their analysis of me was less than flattering. Around six years ago, on a night out to celebrate Louise's upcoming wedding, I burst into the restaurant, an hour late, with a gushing apology and a rosy glow on my face.

I'd been having fun — lots of it — with my lovely new boyfriend. It was the first time in six years that I'd managed to sustain a relationship for more than half a dozen dates, and I was feeling euphoric.

But I was brought quickly back to earth when they launched their verbal assault. Could I be any more selfish? How special did I think I was? Did I not realise I was really consumed with anger and jealousy? Did I not realise that my constant tardiness indicated passive-aggression and an overdeveloped sense of self-importance combined with massively low self-esteem?

'I just lost track of time,' I said. 'I'm not angry or jealous. Or passive-whatever. Or lacking self-esteem. I was just having fun. I thought you'd be happy for me.'

Their conclusion was that I was 'deep in denial', and they seemed to derive pleasure out of sabotaging my happiness. They suggested therapy. I scoffed. I needed therapy like the proverbial fish needs a bicycle. I thought they required help far more than I did.

But four years later, around my 35th birthday, I was forced to reconsider.

On the outside, there was still nothing wrong with me: I wasn't an alcoholic, drug addict or anorexic. My childhood wasn't misery memoir material: I hadn't been abused or neglected. I had a dream job as a journalist with a Sunday broadsheet, friends, close family and perfect health.

**U**NDERNEATH the cheery facade, though, all was not well. I was back on Prozac, having been diagnosed with depression earlier in my life. I was on the verge of quitting my job, even though I didn't have another, simply because I felt I wasn't good enough at it.

I'd missed three flights for work in ten days, and narrowly escaped losing my driving licence for repeated speeding offences. I was crying so much I began to think I might dehydrate.

And although I'd always regarded adultery as a sin almost as heinous as murder, I was clinging on to the remnants of a relationship with a married man. I went crazy when I heard he'd moved on to someone new, and was thoroughly ashamed of my behaviour.

Many of my friends were settling down, and though part of me longed for an honest, intimate relationship, I seemed

**by Lorna  
Martin**

incapable of forming one. At first I relied on my trusted arsenal of self-soothing strategies. I counted my blessings; I pulled my socks up; I immersed myself in work; I tried new hobbies; I detoxed; I went swimming; I challenged negative thoughts and replaced them with positive ones.

I thought about remarkable people I'd met who'd suffered unimaginable losses but found strength to carry on. I thought about my gran, who raised nine children in a Glasgow tenement. And I felt even more weak and guilty.

What was *wrong* with me? I wasn't happy, fulfilled or content. I felt inadequate. I had commitment issues. It all seemed pathetically trivial and inconsequential when I compared myself to them.

Eventually, however, I became scared of the way I was feeling, so I put my reservations to one side, took out a bank loan, found myself a therapist and embarked on the strangest journey of my life.

On first meeting Dr J, I thought she was crazy. Her sessions, despite costing £50 a go, didn't tell me what was wrong. Nor could she promise to make me happy. Initially, she was just like the Hollywood caricature of a shrink: she said little and looked at me with an unreadable expression on her face.

I'd thought she'd be a bit of a hippy type, but she seemed more like a head teacher. In fact, on first impressions she was like a grimmer Helen Mirren in her portrayal of The Queen.

The sessions took place in a dimly-lit room at her home. For the first two months, I sat across from her; but at the start of the third month, when I realised I hadn't told her anything I hadn't spoken about before, I decided to lie on the couch, which felt even more bizarre.

But over the months, the therapist made more observations and challenged me much more. At times I hated her; at others I felt an overwhelming affection towards her. Each session was different and unpredictable.

Some were sad and I cried for 50 minutes. Some were boring. Others enjoyable. Some uncomfortable. Despite the fact that two were ridiculously early in the morning, I never dreaded them. For a

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**New perspective: After therapy, Lorna Martin finds herself a much more tolerant person**

PICTURE: MURDO MACLEOD

# Can therapy solve all your problems, or is it an industry preying on your insecurities? Lorna dismissed it as hokum... until SHE climbed on the couch

while, my therapist seemed keen to focus on anger and envy. I was having none of it. I told her repeatedly that I regarded such emotions as ugly, pointless and destructive.

But the kind of therapy I was having — psychoanalysis — has a bizarre way of stripping you of self-deception and forcing you to look at yourself from a completely different perspective.

One day we'd been talking about family matters. I'd told her all about baby Lewis — or King Lewis as we affectionately called my sister's baby — who was 18 months old at the time. The absurd idea was raised that I might have some feelings of jealousy towards him and my sister for making my parents the happiest, proudest people on the planet.

I was appalled and, not for the first time, considered quitting our sessions. A 35-year-old woman jealous of an infant I loved more than anything? It was the most ridiculous and offensive thing I'd ever heard.

**L**ATER that evening, I called my mum (who was at my sister's for dinner). I asked if she'd read a piece I'd written. She said she'd 'skimmed it'.

Then she moved on: 'Have you heard Lewis say nose?' I hadn't. 'Have you heard him say "Love you"?' Have you seen him do eye, nose, cheeky, cheeky chin? Do you know if you say one, two, he says "freeee". He's a very clever little boy, you know.'

I then spoke to my dad, a previously emotionally reticent man, who had changed beyond recognition since the arrival of his first grandchild. 'All well?' he asked — but before I could reply, there was applause and squeals of delight in the background.

I thought, perhaps, that the little miracle had just recited the alphabet backwards or said 'Love you, granny and granda' in Latin. But no. Bursting with pride, my dad revealed that Lewis had just put his empty yoghurt carton in the bin. All by himself. My dad sounded close to tears.

I poured myself a large glass of wine, then lay down on my living room floor. 'You are a strong, confident, independent woman,' I told myself. 'You are not jealous of a toddler. Or his mother.' But reality slowly dawned.

The image I'd long held of myself was gradually disappearing. I was capable of feeling anger, envy and resentment. And that was only the tip of the iceberg.

I'd always thought I was more in touch with my emotions than most, especially for a cynical Scot. In fact, it was turning out that I was anaesthetised from them. Beneath the facade, I learned, I was very insecure.

My sense of self-worth depended on the approval and opinion of others, including my parents. I realised that, although I was 35, I behaved in many ways like a little girl, always trying to please others, still looking for uncon-

ditional, exclusive love and with a child-like fear of rejection.

The self-sufficiency and independence I prided myself on masked an acute fear of intimacy.

Striving for the elusive perfection was a flimsy way of deluding myself into feeling superior. What I'd thought was love — true, deep, passionate love — was far removed from the reality. On reflection, I think I was so incapable of dealing with difficult emotions that I ran away from them. I screwed up relationships or got involved in dysfunctional ones; I kept friends at a distance; I quit jobs regularly and I set myself pointless challenges.

Like many women in their 30s, I'd spent years piling immense pressure on myself as I struggled for 'success',

happiness, contentment. But it was only when I took this bizarre trip inside my own head that I began to really understand that nothing — no achievement, no job, no man, no material possession, no amount of positive thinking, no skinny body, no child — will bring happiness if your inner life is in turmoil and you don't have your own approval.

What you have on the outside has little to do with how you feel inside. Gradually, though, I was bringing all these insecurities into the open.

There was a bit of me that wanted to challenge myths and taboos about both therapy and infidelity. I thought I could reveal a little bit of myself and, in the process, hopefully help other people by writing about it.

I realised that these repressed feelings that I had — around anger, jealousy, sibling rivalry, competitiveness, dependency — were not unique to me but were universal — and all perfectly healthy and normal.

But I do think I was a bit naive and impulsive. Therapy forces you to explore all aspects of your motivation, especially the hidden elements. I discovered that there was part of me that actually found it easier to have a relationship with a large anonymous audience — my readers — than an intimate relationship with one individual.

And there was the uncomfortable realisation that writing and having a fragile ego are quite closely connected.

People have asked whether suppressed anger about the married guy

I'd been involved with sparked my journey of self-analysis as some sort of revenge. This was never my motivation. When I wrote about my experiences, his identity was always protected. I was never shaming anyone other than myself.

If he'd been a hypocritical politician spouting family values, then perhaps I'd feel differently. But I realised that infidelity is far more common than we acknowledge. I'm not suggesting it's OK: I'm just saying it happens. A lot. And I thought it was better to admit that, and explore the reasons why.

Having previously experienced the agony of being betrayed by a guy who cheated on me, then being the 'other woman', I felt I could write about experiences that many people go through. I also wanted to raise the idea that depression may be a bit more complex than a chemical problem requiring a chemical solution.

**S**O AM I cured now? Not quite. There is no cure for the human condition. But I feel much better equipped to deal with the conflicts, difficulties and losses that are an unavoidable part of life. I also realise the importance of not ignoring emotions.

I'm aware that some people have negative experiences in therapy, and that there are some bad therapists out there. For me, though, it was hugely beneficial. It was an honest, intimate and challenging relationship from which I learned a great deal.

As a result, I feel lighter. It seems as if the weight of the world has been lifted off my shoulders. I feel (and I know this will sound corny) that I have made peace with myself.

Today, I am honest with myself about how I feel, and I'm much more realistic in my expectations of myself, of others, and of life generally.

Before I went into therapy, I think I was, quietly, quite a judgmental and intolerant person. I now realise that there is no such thing as a perfect, infallible human being. We are all flawed and imperfect, and capable of making mistakes.

In the past, I noticed other people's weaknesses — but had a blind spot for my own. But when you take a long, hard look at yourself, flaws and all, I think it makes you a much more tolerant, accepting and forgiving person. Of yourself and others.

I went into therapy lamenting the fact that I had neither a man, nor a mortgage. Nor even a cat. I came out with something worth so much more — a true sense of who I really am, and, even more crucially, my own acceptance and approval.

I'm still not on the property ladder: am currently single and don't have a pet. But somehow these things no longer seem so important.

■ *Woman On The Verge Of A Nervous Breakdown: Life, Love And Talking It Through*, by Lorna Martin, published by John Murray on April 3 (rrp £14.99).