

Bourne
toWrite...
creative writing
workshops

Mr Harcourt

by Zoe Carroll

“Can you hear me? Mr Harcourt. Can you hear me?”

I can hear her, and I can feel her squeezing my hand and shaking me as well. I try to answer her but the words I am trying to say won't form so I decide instead to sit up and open my eyes but find I can do neither. I think I should be frightened but I'm not.

“Is he breathing?” someone shouts. I think it is Mr Jackson the PE teacher and from the rate of the paces I gather he is running towards me. I hadn't expected the people manhandling me. There are people around me now and scuffing feet, but it's the people putting their hands on me that I don't like. My body hurts and there is a hand on my chest, then someone is pushing my chin up and my forehead back and a sharp pain shoots through my right arm.

“We need to roll him into the recovery position and someone ring for an ambulance” It is the confident voice of Mr Jackson, but I can detect a waver in it. I am used to tuning in to the detail of voices. I come to the school every week to listen to children reading. I have been doing it for years and so I consider myself an expert on the matter. My right leg is picked up efficiently and bent and the knee, my left hand flung up beside my head and with a tug I am rolling. It feels like I might fall forward but I stop, it isn't comfortable, and the ground is cold beneath me.

There's a lady's voice, high and panicky “It's ringing, what do I say?” There are murmurs around me about casualty, not breathing, several injuries, maybe breaks, and I hear the word laceration. I wonder whether the children would know to spell it with a C rather than an S, but I suppose it doesn't matter now.

“We need the police as well. This needs to be reported” I don't recognise that voice, but it has an accent that isn't local, not foreign but perhaps from a county further

South than here. I am resigned to what will happen. I had hoped to get away cleanly, but it wasn't to be.

"Is it true then?" Low voices and shuffling come from somewhere past my feet

"Must be. They've done him good, he might not recover. Let's hope so."

"What if it isn't?"

"No smoke without fire."

It didn't take long to get out then, I had only been to see Mrs Wendover, the head teacher, about half an hour ago. I had been asked to get my things and leave the premises pending an investigation, but the jury of the masses has already made up their mind. I am presumed guilty. Guilty of using my position to get too close to children and ask unspeakable things of them. I'd been reported by a parent who said their daughter had made allegations about me. I had protested but she was insistent.

I had been leaving the building when I felt something strike me on the back of the head and then the blows came so fast I couldn't make sense of what was happening. The sickening noise of bones breaking and the searing pain of skin splitting, blood warm on my face, my arms, my legs. I don't know if I fainted or was knocked unconscious but the thud of my head against the ground was the last thing I heard until that woman's voice had brought me closer to consciousness.

The sirens in the distance get louder as they come for me, the ambulance crew and the police together.

Of course, it is true. I had just thought that I would get away with it. I wonder how many others will tell?