

## The Landlady

by Mari Syrad Grieves

Edward's mother was a saint. She was a busy, bustling, useful woman, thoughtful to the point of annoyance, did she not know that at the age of 37, he was more than capable of regulating his own temperature without being badgered about taking a coat whenever he left the house. She was a typical old woman, tight greyish white perm, limp saggy jowls, rough sinewy hands, and a lingering musty fragrance, which he sometimes wondered might not partly be a little age-related incontinence.

Edward's mother was a saint and she died that Tuesday whilst attempting to take out a rather excessive roast chicken from the low oven. The rising steam had misted her glasses: discombobulated she took a step to the side only to slip in a droplet of chicken fat that had come from the ginormous tin, and fell, hitting her head on the corner of the melamine topped table. Edward had come down to see what had happened, and when he saw his mother, he was so overcome, that he simply lay down beside her in the pool of blood, surrounded by roast potatoes.

After Agnes, the next-door neighbour, had knocked on the door for her daily catch up with Edward's mother and received no answer, she called the police, certain that something was wrong. Edward had been bundled up in a blanket and was sat awkwardly in Agnes' front lounge as the blue lights took his dead mother away. He stayed until it was dark, about 5 hours he estimated before he got up and left without telling anyone.

Edward had never lived away from home before, always telling himself that his mother would be too lonely and could not be left alone to look after herself. The reality of course being the Edward was the one who was too afraid to venture out on his own, and instead languished in the comfort and ease of being waited on by his mother: the saint.

It later transpired that Edward had never had a mother. Abandoned on the steps of a church at 3 days old, he had been handed from one temporary family to another until he reached 18 at which point, the system washed their hands of him deeming him too odd to be loved. Edward was a greasy and strange individual, never sure what to say, he would interject at unexpected moments, startling those around him. He would also stare at people unaware that this was creepy and off putting and became confused when they left without a word.

Edward had taken up residence in a quiet guesthouse near the church steps upon which he had been abandoned, presumably because his parents had also deemed him too odd to raise. He was the only resident in the building, except his landlady. Edward's landlady was a saint. She was the only person that didn't seem to mind the peculiar presence staring or interrupting or sitting stiffly on the sofa looking at the wall.

In fact, she relished cooking for him, ironing his clothes, reminding him to take a coat in case the evening got chilly. So it was all the more surprising when one day, just as she was taking a beautiful roast chicken out of oven for him, that out of nowhere, he bludgeoned her with a recently polished dress shoe, leaving her to bleed out on the kitchen floor, surrounded by a cascade of roast potatoes.