

Bourne
toWrite...
creative writing
workshops

The Landlady

by Ros Jones

Grace Leong stared at her PC screen. The little black line blinked encouraging her to write something. She sat and watched it, her mind blank.

Earlier she watched from the window of the coffee bar as he'd crossed the road toward her. Their eyes met, but she didn't favour him with a friendly smile. Instead, he flinched at her cold hard stare. She saw him gulp, pleased that she made him feel uncomfortable. Small change she smirked. She had practised what she was going to say in the bedroom mirror over and over again getting the words perfect. But now looking at his sad, hunched, pathetic body, she wondered why she'd bothered. He was a shell of a man. No more dangerous in the bright morning sunshine than a sheet of tissue paper ripped from the hands of a child. She stood as he approached her, a slight awkwardness in his gait. Holding out his hand he gestured to sit. But she couldn't bring herself to do so. His presence breathed fear into her stomach. It leapt up her throat tearing the flesh away from the structure leaving a burning hole in its place. She tried to swallow it away, but it persisted like a hungry dog.

'I'd rather not.' She heard herself say. 'I will keep this brief, I don't want to spend any more time with you than necessary in fact I'm beginning to wonder if this was a good idea.' He looked crestfallen, a naughty schoolboy being admonished. His body, she noticed, seemed to shrivel to even smaller proportions right in front of her eyes. 'You will collect your belongings from your room and leave my guest house before I return from lunch. If you don't, I will inform the police of your actions and press charges. Your choice?'

He stood mouth gaping wide at her demand. She collected her belongings from the chair and left him looking like a fish flopped on its side in the bottom of a rotting boat gulping air to stay alive. A futile endeavour. It was only a matter of time before it slowed and died.

Back at her computer, Grace began to write. Slowly at first. But then allowing her fingers to gather pace as the memories of that night came flooding to the front of her mind. She would keep a record of events, she told herself. For the police, if she ever wanted to change her mind. She wouldn't allow anyone again to take advantage of her goodwill. She closed the lid and wiped the dust that had found its way onto the smooth metal surface with the palm of her hand. She stopped realising the action was symbolic. A metaphor for her life. She would wipe the grime that had attached itself to her surface dulling the shine. She would not be defined by this. Feeling reclaimed, she picked up her bag, checked her face in the mirror and walked out into the late evening sunshine.