

Bourne
toWrite...
creative writing
workshops

House to Let

by Janie Reynolds

As I walked,
barefoot,
toes splayed,
eager to claw,
the strong,
cool grass
as mine,
I felt the earth
shake,
quiver,
up through my legs,
into my whole body.

'What's wrong?'
I thought.
But I knew.

So I knelt down,
upon the soft and grassy soil,
stilled,
my body bowing,
and closed my eyes.
I spread out
my fingers wide,
and pushed my hands,
deeply,
into her infinite skin.
Her trembling quickened.

My stomach sickened.

“I know,” I said.

But then,
each blade of grass,
rose up
and slashed my palms.
My blood,
draining from them,
turned the green grass brown.
I felt her drink,
then felt her flinch,
and then recoil,
like a hedgehog,
curling up
into a ball.

I jumped away,
but felt her battleground,
beneath my knees,
cave in,
and there was no more gravity,
nor light.
And I was floating,
kicking the wind,
grasping at blackness,
for something to hold.
My throat swelled up
like a balloon.
My lungs collapsed.
I couldn't breathe.
My head cracked open
and boiling sweat
dripped from my lip
down to my breast.

And then she spoke.
Her breath as warm
as was my blood.

She said,
“Sometimes,
children don't listen,
and must be punished.”

“But I am listening!”
I gasped,
finding no air

at my throat.

“So, listen!”
she said and waited.
I was drawn back,
to the ground again.
To my sweet earth,
beloved home.

“There was a long, long time,”
she said,
“before you were born,
when you had no eyes,
nor ears,
nor flesh.
And all you were was heart.
You were part of the breeze
that blows in the fields
and the scents that waft
from the flowers.
You were the light from the sun,
and the glow of the moon.

“But then,”
she sighed,
in a deep and bellowing breath,
“you pulled away,
grew eyes to see
and ears to hear
and a mouth to speak
and feed.
And with those eyes
you saw what you wanted.
And with those ears
you chased
what you heard.
I let you go.
I let you find
that every thing
you ever dreamt of,
was there.
I let you gorge
on every plant and tree,
until you tired
of all their tastes.
I let you lust
the meat of animals
and spear them roughly
as they grazed

upon the grass.
I let your flesh
find other flesh,
and you bore children
and formed your clan.

And then,
when you were fat,
I let you chop me up,
and you said,
'This is my land
and not your land.'
And you put fences round
that which you said was yours.
You said,
'This is my food
that grows in my field.'
And I watched
as you grew rich
and as your family
grew tired and lazy.
You sold some food
in exchange for protection
and had any hungry soul,
who dared to trespass on your land,
killed.

I watched you learn
the tricks of war,
and how to fight,
build hierarchies,
and always keep yourself
at the top,
and call it class or caste,
or anything you could,
for fear of losing it.
Because you knew
that it was really
not yours at all.

I watched you butcher,
this creation
that you'd forgotten
was you.
I saw you poison
the lungs of your young
with noxious waste.

So sometimes

I'd burst into flames.
Hoping you'd burn enough.
You ever did.
And sometimes
I flooded you.
Hoping you'd drown enough.
But you knew how to swim.
And sometimes
I cracked under pressure.
But you never stopped.

It was when I saw
your children
rise up against you,
leaving their schools
and marching,
wearing masks
to filter the poisoned air,
chanting for a future,
pleading for a chance,
I had to help.
To Protect them
as any true
parent would.

I had to blind you for a while.
I had to restart your hearts.
I had to save the air
and clear the skies,
clean the seas
and stop the cars.
I had to pause
it all.

“Now, will you help me?”
she asked.
“If so, we have a pact.
I will let you live
If you do
exactly as I say.
I will give you a task.
One a day.
I will return the next
to give you another.”

“Of course,” I gasped,
and slowly felt
my chest expand
and the breath of life

return.

“Your first task” she said,
“is to leave your home
to those who need it
more than you.
Don't worry.
It will feel good,” she said.
“I promise.”
And with that,
she was gone.”