

Bourne
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creative writing
workshops

The End of a Losing Streak

a timed exercise

by Grant Mcfarlane

We started later than usual today. Our lockdown routine knocked for only 20 minutes yet accompanied by anxiety. The ever familiar accompaniment to most of my life during lockdown. For once, she never giggled. There was no look of contempt nor even a suggestion of her next move.

I was stunted. Unable to consider the possibility that I had actually silenced her, I remained unflinching, scared to give anything away. I got up and put a shirt and tie on. The red one with the pink scorpion on it. Or perhaps it's a lobster as she always tells me. As it's coiled it is difficult to assess its true identity. I think of it as a scorpion for it echoes something of lashing out, in a way I rarely do. She thinks of it as a lobster, perhaps as she likes to see me boiling in hopeless futility.

"Why did you do that?" as I sit back down her calm tone questions.

Again, I am struck by the lack of attack and respond, "it helps me to concentrate."

"Why does it do that?" the immediate retort.

"It makes me feel like I'm in the office and therefore more responsible, I guess. Something of a respite to this bloody lockdown and being with you 24/7," I unnecessarily spat.

"That's not very nice. I think it looks very dashing and it goes well with your pyjama bottoms," she laughs.

I hadn't thought to notice that in my pithy thrust to gain respect with a professional attire, I had neglected to be aware that I was only half dressed for work. I blame Zoom, the infernal "tool" that fills the majority of my day allows one to neglect upwards of the waist.

I blush, "thank you, erm, it's your move."

I am greeted with a look that has no raised eyebrow, or the suggestion of a smirk, nor yet eyes that sparkle with something about to come. Yet I feel such just the same.

"What is it? What is it?" I stutter in confusion.

"You've won already," her words only now accompanied with that missing smirk.

My knight blocking her king from moving from the grip of my queen appears on the board like a plot twist in an Umberto Eco novel I read without ever really understanding.

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"I don't know, I've been laughing all day."