

Bourne
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creative writing
workshops

The Conquer Room

by Stuart Carruthers

Janet hadn't stopped all day.

From early morning until early afternoon the shop was busy. Outside a bitter winter rain washed the occupants of Grace Hill Rd.

Access town the late edition of the Evening Press had just landed. Mr Gabriel frantically sorted the paperboy's bags, while his sister managed the evening rush hour customers. Placing the A3 brown envelope between the sports pages, he put the paper to the side for special delivery.

Without warning the backdoor swung open and in walked Veronica. Apologising, smiling and removing her wet coat all at once, she had changed into her apron before Mr Kane or Janet had time to say a word.

"Tea?"

"Yes please."

"I haven't stopped all day."

"Wait till you see the dress I bought earlier."

"Don't forget the ovens need cleaning tonight, Marcus will be here at ten."

"It fits perfectly with the shoes I got last week, do ya want to see a picture?"

"Mr Kane asked about our money earlier."

"Think I need a hat?"

The clock above the door ticked loudly as the big hand reached north. Finishing off her tea, Janet washed her cup, dried her hands and prepared to leave. Outside the rain was relentless. After a brief chat with Mr Kane, she emerged onto Grace Hill and within seconds was lost amongst the rush hour commuters.

No 78, was sandwiched between the Haberdashery and a Chinese takeaway. Inside the front door the brown carpeted stairs and naked light bulb were not very inviting. At the top of the stairs behind the nondescript door an elderly woman sat alone typing. Her cigarette slowly disintegrating, its owner was too busy to notice.

It was only a ten minute walk to the station, but Janet insured she arrived just as the train pulled onto the platform. Everyone was too busy with their own business to notice the pale-skinned ginger haired woman. Within twenty minutes the train had emptied and as the gentleman opposite stood up to leave, she leaned forward, politely smiled and picked up the evening newspaper on the adjacent seat. The man ignored her.

Craven Hill was the last stop.

The shops either side of the high street were busy with after work shoppers.

Entering the newsagent she smiled as Mr Gabriel placed the newspaper on the counter. They never spoke.

The coffee shop by the bookies was empty. Janet took the front window table. She enjoyed people watching. Across the road envelopes were being filled with photographs and instructions. With perfect timing, as she finished her second cup of coffee, the upstairs light in the office was switched on and the curtains drawn.

Briskly walking between the stationary evening traffic, she removed the key from her pocket and let herself in. The hallway reeked of stale cigarette smoke.

“Your late.”

“No I’m not.”

“Mr Gabriel.”

“Sorry.”

“Mr Gabriel...the paper.”

“O yes...sorry.”

“You need to sharpen up young lady, Maurice won’t tolerate this if I tell him.”

“Please don’t.”

“Your train is due in five minutes, the last carriage by the broken window.”

The rain eased just as Janet walked onto the platform. Slowly walking down to meet the train, she noticed the broken window covered over with plywood.

At that moment a voice from behind, sent a shiver down her spine.