

Bourne
toWrite...
creative writing
workshops

Afloat

Ali Giles

I'm floating in my little kitchen. Floating. See the dust on top of the cabinets, an old custard jug and a forgotten 2-pack of lightbulbs, speckled and waxy with grease. And through the window Mrs Marsh next door pegging out her washing, totally oblivious. Doesn't she know the world is collapsing?

Below me, Kathy says, "I just thought you should know."

Kathy has never been able to keep her mouth shut. It's surprising, some of the things that fall from her lips; sometimes she surprises herself, and tries to catch it back up, like a greedy kid catching drips in its hand from an ice-cream.

I just thought you should know. A curious little word. *Just.* It permits her to spew information I would be better off not knowing, without any guilt. In fact, there's an almost delicious impartiality to it.

"I just thought you should know."

"I'm just saying."

"I was just trying to help."

"It's just something I overheard."

This grey woman floating with the old, tired face. Sometimes I look in the mirror and can't see past her.

This grey woman who pulls on her dirty old dressing gown as soon as she's home, over her clothes, like a shell. Who cleans her teeth hard enough to make the gums bleed. Who clicks the alarm set three times, just to be sure, and the same for the bathroom light pull, twice for the bedside lamp. It's these little things in life that keep it together. These are the tiny stitches that nobody sees. Together they hold the world in place, and they do not fail her.

The pink mug sits with the blue mug always, handles touching. He won't be back now.

Snip snip go the scissors. Snip snip at the tiny stitches.