

Bourne
toWrite...
creative writing
workshops

The Accomplice

by Elaine Weddle

Raisa Mendoza stepped awkwardly off the bus in the early evening gloom, she moved stiffly, thanked the driver, and handed him a few small coins as she descended on to the frozen tarmac. Her mother had told her that winter in Hometown was the worst anyone could remember, even the town's old timers couldn't recall the creek freezing over. Every day the sky was white. The wind so cold it made men's bones rattle.

She had been sitting on that bus for 1200 miles and she didn't think much to sitting unless there was sewing to be done or potatoes to peel. She had a sharp pain in her neck from turning her head at an almost acute angle to stare out the window, rarely looking away as the bus moved from the mountains of Montana to the flat lands of Iowa. Although she didn't always like to be alone, even more she didn't like being with people. Months went by when she hadn't uttered a word to another living soul. She knew the grocery delivery boys thought of her as mad and old, a woman whose only companion was an ancient one-eyed dog. She hardly stepped out in daylight, hardly stepped out at all. At night the dog's blind eye would roll under her its eyelid as he dreamt of parks, pavements, and outdoor spaces. Raisa knew that it wasn't good for the animal, but it suited her just fine.

It had been just a couple of weeks before that she'd got a call to tell her that her mother had died. The dog was far too frail to travel she thought, so that was that. When she discovered the following day that the old dog wasn't asleep in its basket but stiff and cold, she was immediately stung by loneliness and grief

She was relieved that the bus station in Hometown was almost completely deserted. She had planned to make it to her mother's house on foot pulling her suitcase with its wonky rubber wheels across the icy sidewalks. She could have avoided the doctor's surgery altogether, but instead she found herself taking that familiar left turn by the bakery. It would be closed of course. The last appointment was 4.30. Dr Magnus Clay had always been very strict about that. His name was on her lips, she couldn't remember the last time she'd said his name out loud. She stood outside looking up at the house in the still cold silence.

Her mother knew of course. She said there was no good wishing things were different. Dr Clay was married and married he would stay. No good will come of this infatuation she had said, no good at all.

Raisa denied it. She fixed a puzzled expression on her face and said she respected him as health care professional and that was all. She told her mother that Dr Clay quietly helped folk that needed it to the next place, making it easy on them with a little more morphine than was strictly necessary. Nobody needed to suffer he'd said, nobody at all. His was a mission of mercy and nobody needed to know.

At the trial, the Reverend condemned him from the pulpit every Sunday for a month and coverage of Dr Clay's tired face featured on Hometown TV in between an advert for pile cream and cat food. There'd been interviews with former patients, Mrs Hansen who had said hanging was too good for him and young Sally Kerridge who fluttered her eyes at the camera before expressing her shock and horror. After all of that, Dr Clay was sent to the state penitentiary for the manslaughter of sixteen people

By now it was dark and the surgery door was bathed in a green hue. A new pharmacy had opened next door with bright neon lights in the window. It made sense thought Raisa, patients always complained about having to go to the other side of town. She smiled to herself. How people loved to complain. Didn't they know that complaining to the doctor's receptionist was a very bad idea. Did they think their secrets were safe with her? Did Reverend Pullen believe she didn't know that his married next-door neighbour had contracted a disease of a personal nature in the same week as him? Did Mrs Hansen think her botched eye lift could be passed off as an infection? Did fifteen-year-old Sally Kerridge think her swollen belly would remain a mysterious food allergy? Well they'd have to watch their step, all of them. They'd called her his accomplice, forced her out of town but she was back now, her mother had seen to that and she wasn't going anywhere. All the townsfolk had to do was utter one wrong word ...