

Bourne
toWrite...
creative writing
workshops

HMO

by Ivor John

He tried to read the numbers as he drove slowly looking for number 29. Room 5 so probably one of the large Victorian villas nearer the park. At one point this would have been a salubrious place to live, but not now. A few of the large houses in Southview Avenue had now been converted into self-contained flats. Or HMOS as they were described, houses, of multiple occupancy. The residents, nearly always on benefit, would share kitchens and bathrooms. Landlords, made little effort to maintain the aesthetics of what would have been stylish homes.

He spotted the number, painted on a crudely fixed piece of hardboard, which replaced a broken stained glass panel above the front door. Checking again the number he had written down on his clipboard, this was the address. He could see neighbours looking discreetly from behind their blinds as he parked the patrol car.

The front door wasn't locked. Post, mainly advertising flyers and Amazon boxes, was piled in the dimly lit hallway, a staircase with a carved walnut bannister directly in front. A laminated notice fixed to a green baize noticeboard informed that room 5 was on the second floor, along with the bathroom. Speaking on his radio as he went up the two flights of stairs to the second floor, he said, "echo Delta One Seven, show me in attendance at the cause for concern, Southview Avenue, over."

Hannah looked around her tiny room. A small double divan bed, a wardrobe at the end, but there was not enough space to open the door. Most of the few clothes she had were on the floor anyway. She had few possessions. Anything she had owned of any value had been sold or stolen from her by the few friends who visited who would sell them themselves.

She used to have some pretty things, some jewellery her grandmother had given her, an expensive wristwatch her father had worn. His parents had had his initials engraved on it as a gift on his twenty first birthday. He had only worn it on special occasions. She remembered a trip they had to Bristol Zoo, she must have been seven or eight. He had looked at the watch to see when they needed to go to the dolphin show. It had been such a lovely day, she remembered. Her parents, younger sister all enjoying a carefree holiday. She could not ever remember being so happy. Certainly not for a long time, certainly not now.

She couldn't say when things changed for her or why. When she was fifteen, at a party, one of those teenaged house parties, where permissive parents would go out for the evening trusting their child to be alone with their friends They would play records, dance clumsily and drink alcohol. A boy, older than her, had danced with her. She hadn't really wanted to, but neither did she want to draw attention to herself. Holding her in a way that was difficult for her to avoid, her, he had kissed her, pushing his tongue into her mouth even though she clenched her teeth. Licking around her gums. She had felt sick, and had gagged managing not to vomit. He had led her to the bathroom upstairs, where he had forced his hands down the front of her jeans. They were her new jeans which she had bought just a few days ago at Chelsea Girl, to wear to the party. When she did throw up onto the floor of the bathroom he had left her alone. When she went back down to get her coat she saw him holding another girl, in the corner.

She felt ashamed when she got home. She had never been outgoing, relationships were always difficult for her. But now she didn't want to meet anyone. The few friends she had, stopped bothering with her. She rarely attended her last year at school. They wrote to her parents a couple of times, but she was never academic and the school didn't seem to be too concerned. She would be leaving soon anyway.

When her father had died last year, her mother had changed. They argued all the time. Where once, she had been happy it was now unbearable. She had sofa surfed, for a while until she got the flat on the social, from the Sanctuary Youth Homeless Project.

The door was locked, but the flimsy door was easily kicked open, very little damage.

“Echo delta one seven control, I am going to need an ambulance as soon as possible. I have found her in the room. I think she is still breathing but not awake. Soon as possible please, over.”