

Bourne
toWrite...
creative writing
workshops

Captain Kangaroo

by Ivor John

The quietness of the room exaggerated the rhythmic sound from the clock. The ordinarily quiet click with each second, clearly audible. Usually a comforting sound she found it annoying as she pushed her face into the scrunched up pillow to try to avoid waking up. Hoping to continue with the shallow sleep she had managed on and off since around midnight. It was hopeless, her thoughts were too fully formed. Reluctantly, she touched the face of her phone, which sprang to illuminated life. Three twenty-three, she observed. Disappointing. Another night of disturbed sleep. It was beginning to affect her, she thought. She was becoming irritable with people. She knew that and tried not to but her anxiety was becoming uncontrollable again.

Having given up completely on sleep, she picked up her phone and looked again at the illuminated screen. Her mobile was always on silent now. It was the only way she could avoid the constant calls and messages. There had been twenty-eight calls since midnight and as many ansaphone messages. She used to listen to them all, but not now, not any longer. Going through them one by one swiping the screen with her thumb to delete them. Every so often she would hear an unintended snippet of conversation if she inadvertently touched 'play' instead of delete. Each time she did so, she felt her heart rate increase rapidly and her breathing moving from her lungs to her throat as she tapped frantically at the screen to silence the unwanted recording and remove its electronic trace.

Reluctantly pulling the duvet aside she sat up on the bed and pulled the blind back a fraction. Just enough to see out into the road outside. Cumberland Avenue was a wide road. The main road into the Town Centre. Well lit, and always busy with traffic. From the small first floor maisonette, she looked up and down the road for a few minutes. Reassured that she couldn't see him anywhere. She could never feel confident though. Before he wanted her to see him. Ringing her doorbell, phoning her constantly. Banging on the door, which she could ignore but on a few occasions, the old woman downstairs had let him into the communal hallway. But, now he would hide, loiter in the shadows and behind the dustbins. Later around the time she needed to leave, he would stand in the Tesco Express across the road, pretending to look at the magazines, until her could follow her to the tube station.

Now she preferred when she could see him. At least she knew where he was. This was worse, she imagined he was always there. Watching her, waiting for an opportunity.

She wrapped herself up in her dressing gown and took a few deep breaths through her vape. Filling the tiny room with vanilla scented cloud. Insufficient to cover up the smell of damp. She picked up her phone again, fifty-seven new text messages. She started to delete them one by one. She rarely read them but did so occasionally. They didn't cause that same anxiety as hearing his voice in a recorded message.

'Julie, please please read this message, a story can only end one of two ways: truthfully or artfully. You get to choose but I will always be here and I choose when it ends. Please phone me xxx'

'What did he mean?' she thought, 'he's talking about endings', her hand shaking as she slid her finger across the message to delete it.