Bourne toWrite...
creative writing workshops

The Changing

by Jane Hill

Every day after a shower or strip wash—depending on how late I'd arisen from my bed—I looked at myself in my dressing-table mirror to repeat my daily affirmations.

'I HATE MY JOB. I HATE MY JOB. I HATE MY JOB. I AM AMAZING. I WILL GET A NEW JOB. TODAY I WILL WALK INTO MY NEW JOB.'

That was my usual chant.

Straight out of art college, I was offered a position, supposedly as a salesperson—more of a dogsbody—selling beautiful china and glassware. The place itself was beautiful: dark blue, matt-painted walls, with spotlights and wall lights illuminating the displays. All the objets d'art glittered in the light, telling you to buy them, promising they'd look exactly like this in your home...

The two women, Miss Critch and Mrs Whetstone, had formed a team. One would voice exactly what the other was thinking, and they both had the sort of forbidding Victorian bosoms that made looking down their noses at you all the more imposing.

They'd mutually decided to hate me, gave me all the dusting and hoovering jobs, and never allowed me near any would-be customers. Oh, they were pleasant enough for my first few days, while they showed me around, reverently describing each individual object.

A few weeks went past—I wouldn't say amicably—then I was asked to retrieve a glass vase from the stockroom for a customer's special order.

Of course it broke.

In slow motion, I watched it fall from its shelf, and as I awkwardly leapt to save it, I twisted my knee. The crash brought the two ladies rushing to what I imagined would be my aid.

Obviously not! Miss Critch, purple with rage, was screaming at me, while Mrs Whetstone clutched a dustpan and brush to sweep up the damage.

I sat on the floor in agony, trying not to cry. Miss Critch snarled at me to get myself together, get my things together and, altogether, get out of her sight and never, EVER come back.

I grabbed my coat and bag from the office and hurried past the waiting customer, then sank onto a public bench nearby.

That was that, then.

Once I felt recovered, I hobbled down the street to my most favouritest shop.

'Don't s'pose you've got any jobs?' I asked the crazy-looking manageress.

She looked me up and down—I have to say that, for a former art student, my attire was relatively respectable—and said, 'Actually, we are looking for someone. Let me call Richard. He may be able to see you now…'

There was a clippety-clip of footsteps down the stairs at the side of the store, and a relatively respectable, smiling chap came towards me.

'I think we know you… You're in here most days… We need someone almost immediately… How are you fixed for starting tomorrow?'

Taken by surprise, I answered in the affirmative, so Richard called the crazy-looking manageress over and told her I could start in the morning at 8.30 to be shown around.

I was so happy. I smiled and grinned at everyone who boarded my bus home. Mum commented on my early return, but I skipped past her and up the stairs.

My devil had long been caged; now he came out roaring, and it was gonna be GOOD!

I dug about in the bathroom cabinet to find my hair bleach. I followed the instructions and sat on the edge of the bath, keeping an eye on the time. My stepfather knocked, concerned at how long the door had been locked.

After an hour, I rinsed out the goop and strode into my bedroom. I pulled my tartan trousers and my 'Destroy' shirt from the back of my wardrobe, together with a sturdy pair of black monkey boots.

In my dressing-table drawer were a thick black eyeliner pencil and the brightest crimson lipstick—MAC; I'd treated myself—so I knelt in front of the mirror to paint my face.

Twenty minutes later, I donned my clothes and boots, then stood back to admire the vision before me. This was it! My turning point! No longer attached to a can of polish or a vacuum cleaner.

Here I am.

I'm a fuckin' punk, an' I don't caaaaaaaaaaare…

My relief was instantaneous, and I hurried downstairs to where my parents were watching telly. They both looked up at me and, almost in unison, said…

'You're not going out like that, are you?'