

## En Suite

Kim McMahon

She hears him rinsing his mouth exactly three times in the en suite. From her bed, she can see out through the grey drizzled window into the garden where he's cut everything down early for the winter.

He comes into the room, his dressing gown gaping, but before he can say „You know my blood sugar can't cope with a late breakfast“ she says “I'm tired”.

“Well, if you're having one of your days. I'll just get on shall I?” He trots downstairs without waiting for a reply.

She's remembering a time when her morning was like a quiet, open meadow, but the deep tick of his father's mahogany clock intrudes. She watches the clock's spidery gold hand creep around its antique face, and then she knows what must be done. She pulls her clothes on without washing. She drags a dusty leather bag out from under the bed and heaves the clock into it. The clock leaves it oblong shadow behind on the shelf.

In the kitchen, he's wearing a plastic apron and frying bacon.

“Decided to get up, then?” he says over his shoulder.

She grabs her raincoat and walks to the shed at the end of the long garden. The sawdust smell clogs her nostrils – and there hangs the spade, pristine, with its blade sharpened to silver. She takes it down and goes out to stand near the compost heap; she thinks she can hear it making crumbling sounds as the micro-organisms digest.

Here is an empty spot in the border that will do.

The raindrops patter onto her hood as she begins to dig, but the spade bounces off a stone with a clang, jarring her arm. When she lifts the stone out, she finds a thick worm cut into two convulsing pieces. Then the spade hits bramble roots. She kneels in the wet and breaks her nails trying to tear up the tough brown veins but they are attached to a network running through the guts of the garden. Standing, she pounds the spade into the roots until they are severed, and now the blade slices easily through the claggy earth. Sweat itches her scalp. The hole is too small – and she wants it square, so she digs up some grass, and soon it is deep and wide enough.

He's opening the conservatory door, umbrella up and neck out, tortoise-like.

“Have you gone mad?” he shouts, “You're ruining the lawn!”

She hauls the clock out from the bag, lifts it above her head with a grunt and smashes it down into its grave. The wood splinters and a second later there's a tinkling avalanche as the fragile inner workings shatter.

Now, he stands beside her staring into the hole as the cold rain begins to seep through his slippers.