

## Formidable: Robin E.W. Creffield

It took me longer than it should to notice. The changes were slight, almost insignificant in isolation, but eventually, inevitably, I came to realise that I'd made a terrible mistake. Athlete's foot is caused by a fungus I can't remember off hand (foot?) which one – I'd have to look it up. Anyway, it finds an opportunity and then it takes hold. At first it's only slightly irritating but like all chronic conditions, the effect becomes acute after a while. Cancer is another analogy I could use but for obvious reasons, I avoid making those comparisons. I don't think she's bright enough to be truly evil. She's just spiteful, in an ill thought out way and despite helpful suggestions from friends about hiring a hitman I can't see a way through.

I scan his face. It betrays no emotion. He has a mole in the corner of his mouth. I used to have one too – made shaving a pain. I had it removed in the end. It was burnt off and although the sizzling sound and the smell of burning flesh wasn't terribly pleasant, it's healed well and I do bleed less when removing what little facial hair I'm capable of growing. I wonder if I should tell him afterwards, or try to drop it into the conversation. Probably not. Maybe it doesn't bother him as much as it does me. Maybe he uses an electric shaver? None of my business really.

He looks at me, impassive. I look up at the ceiling again, trying to gather my thoughts. There's an irregular crack in the paintwork but otherwise it's an uninspirational vista.

The thing is. I feel trapped. In a gilded cage, perhaps, but nonetheless I don't have the freedom I'd like. I need. There's a constant uneasy sensation of being watched. Mostly because I am. Even on the occasions when I'm not up to no good, I'm being observed. It's uncomfortable.

He shifts in his chair. I wonder if it's a Pavlovian response and make a mental note to say it again to see what he does. I take a sip of water but it's more to break the silence than to quench my thirst. I dread going home sometimes, you know? It should be my safe space and it isn't.

Some problems can never be fully resolved.

He shrugs.

He shifts in his chair again. Maybe he has piles?