

# Bourne toWrite...

creative writing  
workshops

## The Spratts

by Des Holden

Jack shook the newspaper closed. He lay it by his side plate and put the napkin, similarly folded on the side plate. He carried his and Anita's breakfast dishes through to the kitchen, washed them and put them away. Somewhere in the large old house he could hear Anita Hoovering. It was easier and more difficult to keep the hostel clean when they had guests. Young adults made light work of chores but no guests didn't really require much cleaning and tidying. Their closed season ended that weekend, at Easter. Swings and roundabouts he thought.

He put the newspaper by the fireplace. He'd looked through it twice to be sure, but it was the tenth edition in a row with no mention of the disappeared backpacker. They closed the hostel each year straight after autumn half term and although the police had come to ask questions Jack and Anita had been unable to help them with their enquiries. Ten weeks since the story had had any coverage. He called up the stairs to Anita, but she didn't answer. He went outside to finish work on the banisters on the steps from the lane to the Youth Hostel.

When he came back that evening Anita was in the kitchen, singing snatches of Adele. He washed, taking time cleaning his nails. The one pot on the Aga smelled meaty and good, but unlike his name sake he stuck to fish and vegetables. The doctors in the hospital looked like work experience students but the numbers on their tablets were all red. Everyone looked young, he thought, especially the female PC who'd been back twice, with a different photo of Noleen when it arrived from Ireland, and with her colleagues and their spaniels. That was December.

The clear skies outside promised cold so he set a fire in their small lounge with pages from the paper, kindling and a few logs.

He would have liked to keep the editions when the story had featured, but he hadn't kept old papers before and wouldn't start now. He could always get copies from the library in a few months time.

He skimmed globules of fat into a piece of paper towel. Old habits, he thought. Anita, sewing at the table laughed,

“You can have some you know. Meat now and then won't give you a heart attack.”

Jack smiled and kissed her cheek. She swiped at him with her needle and cotton.

“Go and get your mushrooms, then. There's loads in the freezer.”

In the cellar he weaved between home brew paraphernalia, bicycles, canoes, tools and stacks of wood. By the freezer meat drooped lifeless from strings from the rafters. He prodded a paw, or two, and then a small hoof and the meat swayed or spun gently. He took a bag of mushrooms from the freezer and went back upstairs. Anita set aside the square of rabbit fur she was working on. City police he thought, thank God for city police who saw what they expected to see.

Later when they'd both finished their suppers they lifted their plates and licked them, a ritual since they'd married. Jack didn't regret giving up meat but occasionally fantasised about crackling. His wife really was An Eater he thought. Was it a coincidence or design that for ten weeks her mid week diet featured NoLeen.