

**Bourne**  
**toWrite...**  
creative writing  
workshops

## Coalface

by Saffron Swansborough

Set the scene: 1984, a kitchen, empty cupboards  
There's a strike on filling up fridges. Soundtrack  
Is Phil Collins, Against All Odds, a power  
Ballad when what they don't have is any power.  
Radio One is on the stereo, Bruno Brooks

A good ol' Stoke-on-Trent lad from a-hundred  
Square mile coalfield in Staffordshire, England.  
Phil's in mourning, there's just an empty space.  
Donna's boiling the kettle, just enough  
For three cups, she's measured the water out first, so

There's some left over for a flannel wash later  
At the sink to save running the tap 'til the  
Water's warm. Pops teabags in. Waits. Shivers  
In her dressing-gown. Pours. Stirs to bring out  
Plumes of brownness. *Don't think about them bills...*

A slap of aluminium on wood. Puff of paper  
Landing on doormat. Shouting through the window  
Of the tan envelope in capitals,  
FINAL DEMAND, Donna files it under

The fat Phone Book full of numbers. 15  
Months it's been. And 13 days. She carries  
The teas upstairs to a shape in the bed  
Called Gary. Gets half in under the blankets  
To warm her bare feet. Sip. Hot. Blow. Sip. Sip.

Numbers float above her with the steam clouds  
Small numbers, big numbers. In the envelopes  
Are red numbers, *But we can't worry*  
*About them at the moment love*, he'll say  
*'ousekeeper wi' no 'ousekeeping I am*, she'll reply

Empty purse. Promise of strike pay's been dangled  
Like a carrot for months. No carrots, potatoes, meat, bread.  
Borrowing. When will the charity run out? What then?  
Today, Donna is going to do something  
About it. Sip. She's going to tell Gary

Things must change. Gulp. "That's what I've got to face",  
As Phil sings. Piano synth soars. Phil's drumming  
Slows \_ right \_down \_ Allargando.  
Donna's voice steps into the silence, *Gary*,  
*Gaz!* What is it, love? *I been thinkin'?* He

Rolls towards her, his stubble meets the bare

Chested V of her dressing-gown. Eyebrows raise.  
What 'bout? *I been thinkin' 'bout you going back.*  
Gary rolls on his back, closes his eyes  
Steam's rising from his undrunk cup. Condensation

Runs down the window pane. *Look at me, Gary.*  
She strokes his cheek. "Take a look at me now"  
*We can't go on like this.* A tear rolls down  
Donna's face. Tea, tears, sigh, sip. Touch. Eyes open  
He sits up. Swigs his tea, twice. All right, love.

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As Gary cycles down the alley the  
Chanting hits him like a furnace opening  
Dismounts, pulls up the coat collar on his  
Black donkey-jacket. *ALL RIGHT THEN GAZZER?*  
*WHAT YER DOIN'?* Looks straight on: the pit entrance

The crowd's baying now, incandescent, *SCAB SCAB*  
*SCAB SCAB SCAB SCAB SCAB SCAB SCAB SCAB SCAB SCAB*  
Missiles. Piss-filled condoms. Rotted eggs. Rocks?  
Smack in the face. Glass? He stoops down: it's coal.  
Blood. Snot. Tears. He carries on, holding his cheek,

"Take a look at me now." Step. Mouths to feed.  
Step. Lecky to pay. Step. Friends become foes.  
Step. Poverty-tired. Step. Knowing prosperity  
Will feel short-lived when your brothers disown you  
In the dole queue next year. Step, step, step, step

One step over the battle-line. Another.  
Phil's black jacket has grey flecks while Gary's  
PVC panels are streaked with flour. Non-stop  
Neon rain and ceaseless Yorkshire drizzle.  
The howling of a man who's lost it all.

Slowing piano. As the ballad soars  
And fades, the camera pulls away leaving  
A small man in a big frame. The TV  
Audience whoop and applause is faded in  
Girls are draped around Bruno Brooks' shoulders

As he smiles and announces, *Ah poor Phil!*  
*That's another non-mover. Let's take a look*  
*At who's up and who's down. All the numbers.*  
*And who might be clinging on for another week.*