

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

## Accompaniment

by Saffron Swansborough

Thrusting it across the table was a nightmare but he did it.

The salt scattered like a white desert. Keith longed to cross it to get to her, but he had no feet with which to march. An amputee with limbs instretched. Their relationship had always been drama and inertia. Now he had to wait.

Val was bitter from the start. It seeped through her. She was impenetrable. Though there was something about her – when they touched she left an unforgettable taste on Keith's senses.

It was others that had brought them together. Brunches, lunches – although never dinner – brickies having a chip butty, the old woman who came in for the Friday haddock special who wore a crochet hat pinned with a thin silver brooch – Cupid's arrow. The writer who left lipstick on the coffee cup while staring out of the window, food untouched, not noticing them exchanging glances across the formica tables. They'd listen mute to the owner's insecurities, which she almost sang as she mopped up, worrying about her mother in Athens.

Keith needed Val to look at him one more time before the door sign was flipped to Closed. There wasn't long left. He glanced up at the clock. 6.58pm. A plaster body of Neptune had been reaching out of the wall since 1998 clutching a trident and Keith thought if a Norse God was going to strike Time, it would probably be any moment now. The salt began to pour off the table like sand in an egg-timer. He hoped the owner wouldn't notice before she closed up. He'd toppled the cellar after she'd wiped down the tables.

He thought back as one does at the end. Keith and Val had worked together for years on and off, often at the same table, although had not always seen eye to eye.

She was empty and had been for some time. He saw past the greasy strands, brown around her neck and the grubby grey fingermarks on her waist. There was a time she'd pushed into him with force. Someone had filled her with drink, too much. She couldn't stand. She'd been mocking his imitation brand name label on his scarlet tunic.

"The trouble with you, is you are too sweet," she'd slurred, droplets of moisture splashing the table, "I need someone earthy, with a bit more salt." He flushed redder than usual. Burning.

He could see past her brown paper thin bravado to the soul inside, which had not



always been a horrible sour; deep within her thick fortress wall there was artesan; the perfect balance to his piquant personality.

Now she was drained and didn't seem to recognise him any more. Alcohol was in her blood and there was nothing he could do about it. That's why he had to knock over the salt. To buy time. But it was too

late. Katerina wailed as she saw the mess, muttered in Greek, threw a handful of salt over her left shoulder. She picked Val up, inspected the dregs inside the empty vinegar bottle and stuck her under her arm as she marched towards the door.

"No, Val, I love you," Keith said to himself as the sign on the café door was turned and the lights flicked off. He heard the weighty thump of glass in a bin. With a final effort, Keith threw himself off the table and smashed onto the floor, glass shattered, ketchup stretching for several metres. As he lost consciousness he knew he would soon meet Val again, in a bin liner at the back of the chippy, the Trident.