

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

## Darkness is Cheap

Vera Gajic

“Alice, is everything, ready?” gasped Archibald, in between great gulps of air half of which he certainly swallowed and would come back to taunt him, as he recovered from running up the hill from his modest grocery shop on the high street.

“I think so,” replied Alice looking around the room she’d been cleaning and polishing all day to ensure the place looked worthy of Archie’s great Aunt’s visit. She felt a sense of pride as she surveyed the room and admired how it sparkled and glistened in the mellow evening light, the aroma of beeswax hanging in the air proving her diligent polishing. She could do no more.

“She’ll be here any minute, where is the tea?” said Archie regaining his breath and trying not to shout.

“The tea, ahhhh!” said Alice and ran out of the room to the kitchen. She’d been so caught up in the minutiae of the furniture she’d forgotten to put the tea on. It would take half a day to get the water to boil on the Aga, Archie would never forgive her.

She stuffed the stove with wood and coal to overflowing and set the kettle on the top. Thankfully she had prepared the cakes the day before, an array of the best cakes they could afford, she was particularly proud of the bakewell tart, she carefully piled them out on a fine bone china plate with a pretty doily and brought them to the drawing room, which was now ablaze with the gas lighting and a hundred candles.

“What are you doing Archie, it looks like you are trying to create a scene from the inferno, Aunt Daphne will think she’s gone to hell Archie, older ladies like dim lighting, it hides their wrinkles.”

“No Alice, darkness is cheap, I want Aunt Daphne to know that we are not cheap and we can afford as much light at the next person.”

“But Archie I thought we wanted to borrow some money from her, isn’t that the reason you invited her?”

Alice set down the tower of cakes on the occasional table and blew out a candle on the sideboard.

“No,” said Archie, “I am going to offer her an investment, which is entirely different, if she gives me enough money to expand the shop into a tea room then I can repay her the original loan and the investment quicker, she needs to think we are doing well Alice”

“oh,” said Alice, the confusion showing on her frowning brow just as the doorbell tinkled.

“I’ll get the door Alice, you bring the tea,” but Alice didn’t move, knowing full well the tea was not going to be ready for hours.

“Aunt Daphne, how lovely to see you, you look beatific,” said Archie as he opened the drawing room door for his great aunt.

“Beatific Archie indeed, I have been called many things but never beatific, interesting choice.”

Archie went the colour of puce and could feel the air he’d swallowed earlier travelling noisily around his intestines, this was going to be a painful visit.

“Hello Alice dear, what have we here, so much light, are you doing fine needle work? Even so it is so bright.”

“Hello Aunt Daphne, yes I was indeed, I will blow out some candles, let me take your cloak.”

“Tea, Aunt?” asked Archie, having somewhat recovered himself but only noticed Alice waving at him behind his aunt too late.

“I think I would rather have some sherry,” said his Aunt eyeing up the bakewell tart.