

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

## We Are All Fantasists

Ali Giles

Maria Matthews is shaped like a box and smells of damp wool. I hate the way she stares at me while I'm talking, like she's just wiped me off the bottom of her shoe. I hate her fat stupid face with its fat stupid moles, and the way she has of blinking really fast as if struggling to understand me. The more I talk the more her irritation grows, until it's roaring in my ears and wrapping its hands around my throat, and I grind and stutter to a stop.

"I'm sorry," I say.

"And I'm sorry too. Because this is your final verbal warning, Clare. You can't keep taking time off like this."

She stands up, looking very pleased with herself.

"I have cancer," I say.

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"*Cancer?*" says Neil, and keeps running his hands over his face and shaking his head.

His sister mutters something and pulls a face, but she doesn't look at me.

I know it's wrong, yet the more it twists my guts the more satisfying it is, in a complicated sort of way.

Last weekend, Neil's dad said to him: "She's not much to look at, but she's something to think about if nothing better comes along."

I know this because I was standing around the corner having a cigarette when he said it.

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My mum said that life is not a book, but she was wrong; life is one long book and sometimes that book is full of plot and great characters and sometimes it's not and nobody wants to read it.

What's the difference between reading a good story and being one? Where should imagination stop? Don't we all dream that we'll become famous, or win the lottery, or meet the man of our dreams and be loved? What's wrong with believing in the things we want to *happen*?