

The Novelist

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Furious Fiction October 2019

- Must be set in a bookshop or library. Must include 6 of the following words: broken, music, around, mechanical, smelt, grubby, game, coffee, beige, hands, twelve, letters, backpack, nameless, cowboy, operate, cupid, train, pungent, untouched.

Bill McInness relaxed as he entered the library. It was like another world. At home, Bill was a failure. Here, he was surrounded by possibility. Each volume helped him believe his dream.

Today was day 31 of Bill's 'author's leave'. One month gone. Five left. And never had he felt so hopeless.

Today, something had snapped. Instead of forcing himself to stay at his desk under the pretence of working, Bill admitted he was broken. At twelve o'clock, he stuffed a notebook in his backpack and headed outside.

He'd wandered with his eyes down, berating himself for his useless dreams. Pathetic. Hopeless. Stupid. Why think an accountant could write a novel?

It wasn't until he walked inside that Bill realised he'd reached the library. The calm, focused atmosphere was at odds with his mind. Maybe, just maybe, he'd browse for inspiration, then treat himself to coffee.

Bill had long believed he'd be one of the successful few. Even as a child, he knew he had a bestseller inside him. It was part of his DNA, just waiting for the right moment. He'd write a thriller, full of twists to keep readers enthralled. Scenes drifted through his dreams, begging to be written.

Bill planned his leave with an accountant's precision. A new desk. An ergonomic keyboard. Special notebooks. Pens in multiple colours. Mechanical pencils. A set of reference books. He'd assumed the words would flow easily. In six months, he'd have a solid draft and a publishing deal.

But he hadn't factored for writer's block. For 31 days, he'd followed the same routine. Gentle music in the background. A timed writing exercise to get started. Bum on seat. Hands hovering over the keyboard. A blank screen, ready for the words to flow. The flashing cursor making fun of his failure.

Bill gazed at the novels. So many words, waiting to be read. So many published authors. He paused at the 'M's, imagining where his book would sit. What authors would keep him company? McCarthy, McCourt, McCullough, McEwan – a few big names there.

McInnes.

McInnes? How can that be? Bill laughed at his stupidity. It was McInnes all right: William McInnes. They might almost share a name, but that was all. *That* William McInnes was published. Multiple times. Famous. Successful.

Bill flicked through McInnes's book, hoping it might spark something inside him. A little card fell to the floor. It was small and square, with the words *Inspired to Write* staring up at him. Could this be a message from McInnes to McInness?

On the back was a comment:

Does your first draft seem like nothing more than a muddle of words? Terrific! You can edit muddles. You can't edit nothing.

It was like a cloud lifted in Bill's mind. He'd been doing it wrong! He needed to write a muddle. Any words, to figure out the story.

Bill tucked the card into his pocket, sat down at an empty table, and started to write.