

The Wanna-Be-Author

By Lee Stoddart

Luxuriating in the hot water, the tangerine-scented shower gel he had used as bath foam substitute wasn't really to his taste. But it was all that was on the shelf and it was better than nothing. His mind flitted back to his youth when a lack of bubbles was fixed with a quick squirt of Fairy Liquid and you ended up prune-like and smelling faintly of washed dishes.

As the warmth and suds worked their magic his mind wandered. Sunday evening baths were always a time for contemplation but recently his thoughts had turned darker. He felt he was heading to a self-inflicted mid-life crisis. He knew he had a slightly self-destructive streak despite all his efforts absorbing personal-development CDs. He must have been personally responsible for building a small fortune for Paul McKenna, the high-priest of positive-thinking.

Work was a mounting strain and he no longer enjoyed the interminable travel and stress of the daily grind. Dropping out was becoming more and more attractive as he lay there. He wondered to what degree the extremely hot water was messing with his brain and thought processes.

Miles Davis' *Birth of the Cool* album drifted out from the Bluetooth speaker. The melancholy tones of *Moon Dreams* drove him to thinking about the freedom of the artist even as he considered the massive risk of moving away from a good, stable income that kept his family in pretty good style.

He could almost feel the success that would be his. He would leave the incessant treadmill and use their savings to fund his new career. Within a year he would have penned his novel. A brilliant piece of science-fiction destined to forever change the genre. Hailed as a self-published masterpiece, it would bounce across the Internet gaining fame, downloaded by millions. Within weeks it would be picked up by a regular publisher and then the inevitable film rights, leading to the year's blockbuster. Not only would it be super-successful, but it would also benefit humanity. It would deliver a message that would forever move us away from the precipice of moral and environmental disaster (or whatever the theme ended up being) over which we currently teetered.

This was his regular daydream but today it felt particularly solid: his heat-addled brain traced out an inevitable trajectory where he couldn't fail to be successful. A string of Times best-sellers lay before him.

But how could his dream possibly come to life? Hell, he hadn't written anything fictional since school and he didn't even know where to start. The only recent writing he had done was academic or reports for his mind-numbingly dull work. Certainly nothing remotely creative. But he knew he had a way with words and a sense of humour. Didn't his friends encourage him to give it a try? All right, they meant as a hobby but he was an all-or-nothing kind of guy!

All too soon, the temperature of the water started to make him feel uncomfortable, even a little nauseous. It was the usual pattern. He flicked the cold tap on with his foot and felt the chill of the fresh water creeping up his body. Soon it would be too cold and he would reluctantly climb out,

unresolved questions filling his head. The excitement of feeling the imagined joys of success jostled with facing the crushing reality of the financial risk and the grim fact that if he actually wanted to do something about it he should at least be writing in his spare time. He'd always made the lame excuse he was too busy: work was all encompassing and it didn't leave him any head-space to do anything even remotely creative.

Towelling off, he came to a decision. This time he would write something, even if it was short. Just to see if he could. This time he really would and he'd do it right now.

Downstairs he flicked on the TV and scrolled through the programme planner, finding a pre-recorded *Sherlock* to watch and while away an hour or so. He picked up his iPad. Ideal: he could watch TV and write at the same time. But even before opening his word processing app he became distracted by a game of *Solitaire*. Just one. Maybe one more.

He'd start writing tomorrow.