

– The Writer –

The writer steps up on a little stage in a big hall. Rows of chairs. An abstract mural various blues yellows small orange green white dashes. The writer sits down. A mic is clipped on his jacket lapel his not a loud tweed just pale brown and another brown. He reads to us from his new novel. He reads. And he reads. And he reads more. He reads on and on. We the audience look content. Perhaps we turn back into children. Being read to at bedtime. We relax. Start to feel drowsy. Just a little bit drowsy. Today is getting forgotten. Someone is doing something for us. The writer. He reads on and on. Just reading a story out loud. A nice thing to happen. That's what we come for. And the writer is reading and reading. His story goes on and on it's nice listening.

Then the organiser jumps up on the small stage says to the writer and we hear what the organiser says because he leans down to speak to the writer mouth close to the mic on the writer's tweed jacket lapel. The organiser arranged the reading sold the tickets put chairs in rows poured out glasses of red and white wine at the hall entrance paid for the hire of the hall and he says to the writer we are here for a limited time so it would be good to leave enough time for audience questions.

The writer says I'd like to read for a bit longer I haven't read this novel out loud before I'm really enjoying reading.

So the organiser says of course we have the hall for half an hour more and there's book signing to fit in to the time and jumps off the small stage and sits down.

The writer reads on. He reads on so long that the organiser jumps up again to say pretty much the same thing we all hear because of the mic on the writer's tweed jacket lapel and the only real difference is that the organiser sounds more urgent and says less because he knows that the writer knows what it is he is going to say and is saying because he has said the words once already.

The writer reads on. And on. And we are dozing. Children at bedtime being read a story. Children being read to sleep. Children being read towards the start of another day. Another adventure. Good or bad. Then suddenly the writer stops reading. The organiser jumps up on the small stage. He says thank you to the writer and looks at the audience and says we have just a short time for questions and then the writer will kindly sign copies of his books. Any questions?

The audience is silent. I sit at the back of the hall. I know how to fill an awkward moment with words. And to notice when an awkward moment is happening. I know how to be helpful. So I hold up my hand just to make something happen. To set the ball rolling. To wake up the audience. I have nothing particular to ask. That is not the point of my hand going up. The organiser points at me over the heads of the audience and says yes? And I say to the writer why do you enjoy reading aloud so much? And the writer says because I was read to at bedtime as a child by my parents and I always enjoyed hearing a story before going to sleep at night. And then the writer stops and looks at us and says that is not

true. I was never read to as a child. My father now and then read *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer* to me. And I stand up at the back of the audience and say but that is a Christmas song. And the writer says I know but occasionally my father read *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer* out loud to me. Then the organiser says I'm afraid that is all the questions we have time for. Anyone who would like their book signed by the writer come up here please.

So what has happened? Was it that we saw a writer in a magic moment of creativity? The thing that usually happens when a writer is alone. A writer alone in his room. I think so.

Afterwards in the pub a couple at the next table are staring at me as I write this. So I'm stopping now. The man says please excuse us for watching you. Do tell us what are you writing?