

“Why Not Be A Writer?”

A 45-minute comic drama for radio

by Neil Craigie Harrison

Characters

Ian McAllister: At 55 Ian has taken early retirement from English teaching to become a writer of gritty, realist fiction set in his home city of Glasgow.

Fiona McAllister: Married to Ian. At 54, also retiring, from a career as head of community Education, with plans to concentrate on her stained glass.

Lionel Stevens: A failing literary agent from Bloomsbury.

Poppy Stevens: A director working in subsidised theatre. Married to Lionel. Her work has also been thin on the ground lately.

Lucy Stevens: Their 19-year-old English-undergraduate daughter.

Tony Philkins: A serious, middle-aged script guru.

Mhari: Features Editor for a national newspaper.

Jim: An English teacher in Ian's old school, married to Mhari.

Sam Hunt: An American hustler.

F/X: MURMURS OF A SMALL INDOOR GATHERING.

FIONA: Quiet, everybody! He's coming up the path!

F/X: A KEY IN THE DOOR. THE DOOR OPENS.

FIONA: Surprise!

IAN: What the – ?

F/X: HOOTERS GO OFF. CHEERS FILL THE ROOM.

IAN (with humour): My God, what a fright you gave me!

FIONA: Calm down, Dear. Jim's got something to say.

JIM: Well, Ian. Just to say, congratulations from all the staff and pupils at Gartfield Secondary. And, eh, we'd just like to wish you the happiest of retirements and whatever you decide to do with your time, we hope you find much pleasure, satisfaction and success. We've clubbed together and – Ian, it's not much but we thought it would be something that you'd like.

F/X: CHEERS FILL THE ROOM.

IAN: You shouldn't have bothered...

F/X: THE OPENING OF A PARCEL.

IAN: Ah! Very nice...

VOICE: Speech!

F/X: GLASSES CLINKING. CRIES OF "SPEECH!".

IAN: Well, Jim, thank you. I'd just like to say, you've been a great Deputy Head of the English Department, and I hope you enjoy stepping into my shoes. I'd like to thank the rest of the staff – many who are here tonight, I know!

F/X: CHEERS AND WHOOPS GO UP.

IAN: Well, what can I say? It's been a magnificent thirty-five years. And I'm very much looking forward to my retirement with Fiona, who is also, next month, retiring as Area Supervisor of Gartfield Community Education Department.

F/X: MORE CHEERS.

IAN: Thank you very much for the whisky decanter and glasses. We'll soon be sipping this twenty-five-year-old malt when we relocate to our dream cottage in Helensburgh. Thank you all.

F/X: MORE CHEERS AND A ROUND OF APPLAUSE.

FIONA: Talking of relocation, let's all move into the living room...

F/X: A SMALL GATHERING IN FULL SWING

IAN (a bit drunk): ...I've got the first novel finished... letters are going out as we speak. Agents... publishers... the whole gamut. It's an epic, set on the Clyde, called *Men of Steel*. And it's about that generation of men who built this city. With their bare hands. These men were heroic. When they discovered they were being played for a fool by their employers, they didn't just stand and take it. They stood up for themselves. They didn't let anyone walk over them. And that's what the novel's all about.

JIM: Well, that sounds... really interesting, Ian...

IAN: Jim, the question I've asked myself is 'Do I stand back and watch all the Ian McEwans and all the Ian Rankins of this world take all the glory. Or is another Ian to be added to that list of writers? Namely, Ian McAllister.'

JIM: Ian, don't build yourself up for disappointment.

IAN: But look! For nearly forty years, I've been a highly successful English teacher. Why wouldn't I find success as a writer? If anyone had the experience of life and the written word, then *surely...*

JIM: Thing is, Ian, you've got to be realistic about these things. I mean, chances are ... I mean, these publishers get hundreds of manuscripts a week and they can only put out a handful a year. Now, with *journalism...*

IAN: Journalism!

MHARI: Well, remember, I'm always looking for articles for the Herald. That piece you did on the decline of the state comprehensive got a lot of mail...

IAN: Mhari, you cut out all my lyricism!

MHARI: I just had to rein it in a little bit...

IAN: My God, woman, you pruned it back to its bare bones! Anyway, I've got my sights set on higher things. A broader canvas, a more... panoramic...

FIONA: Are you alright for a drink, Ian?

IAN: ...I wouldn't say no to another one...

F/X: TEA POURING. TOAST BEING BUTTERED.

IAN: I wouldn't pay too much attention to some of these letters, Fiona. Some of these editors are fresh out of university. They don't have the experience of ... You know, they wouldn't understand men of my father's generation. When men were men. When they built the world with their bare hands.

FIONA: How's your head, dear?

IAN: I'm not *too* hung over. I mean, these young graduates wouldn't know one end of a ship from the other!

FIONA: I suppose that's true...

IAN: They wouldn't know a rivet if knocked them on the head!

FIONA: Well they're too engrossed in their iPods or iPlayers or whatever you call them.

F/X: A LETTER LIFTED FROM THE TABLE.

IAN: I was expecting this response, to be honest with you. I'm just casting my net wide. But, eh, it's the bigger publishers that are still to come.

FIONA: Well, fingers crossed.

IAN: I must say, Jim was rather negative last night...

FIONA: Oh?

IAN: Thing is, I know for a fact that he's got some god-awful sci-fi saga that he's been working on for years. How Mhari puts up with him, I just do not know!

F/X: HEAVY KEYBOARD TYPING.

IAN: *"To Fisher House Publications. Please find the enclosed novel, Men of Steel, a novel about gallant shipyard workers who did not give up in the face of adversity. It is a novel of heightened realism that looks life in the eye and tells it how it is. I am sure you will enjoy reading it and look forward to your reply. Yours sincerely, Ian McAllister, writer."*

FEMALE EDITOR: *"Dear Mr McAllister, thank you for your submission. Unfortunately it does not fit in with our list. Many thanks and best wishes, Lilly Gattling, Fisher House Publications."*

IAN: *"Dear Conway Books, Men of Steel is a hard-hitting saga about the dying days of shipbuilding on the Clyde. Men who lived by the motto: 'What doesn't break me makes me strong.' I hope you enjoy reading it, Ian McAllister, writer."*

COLD FEMALE VOICE: *"Dear Sir or Madam: Please forgive this form letter. We receive an enormous amount of unsolicited material and are unable to respond to each personally. We have considered your material carefully and, unfortunately, could not see a market for it. Yours sincerely, Gaia Spriggs, Submissions, Conway Books"*

IAN: *"To Richman Paperbacks. What you are about to read is no ordinary novel. It is a love letter to shipyard workers and their struggle for dignity. I am sure you will enjoy reading it and look forward to your – "*

COLD MALE VOICE *“Dear Mr McAllister, thank you for submitting your novel, Men Of Steel. After careful consideration, I regret that we cannot take your project forward at this time. Thank you for thinking of Richman Paperbacks. Dan Zapel, Editorial Assistant.”*

IAN: *“To Melody Summers, Manila Books – ”*

FEMALE VOICE: *“Dear Mr McAllister. Many thanks for approaching Manila Books. Unfortunately your submission was not felt to be suitable for our current publishing programme. Melody Summers, Editorial Assistant, Manila Books .”*

MALE VOICE: *“Unfortunately, we are unable to consider handling it for you. Nick Beard, Unicorn Worldwide.”*

FEMALE VOICE: *“Unfortunately we are no longer accepting unsolicited submissions. Ola French, Eldridge Parker & Co”*

IAN (new determination): *“To Felix Whoople, Literary Agents. Sir, may I presume to introduce myself. My name is Ian McAllister, writer, as yet unpublished, of muscular, realistic fiction, largely set in my home town of Glasgow. I have finished one novel and very much hope to add to that body of work in the coming years. I sometime feel I’m a vast reservoir of words, just waiting to burst forth into the world. Regards, Ian McAllister.”*

FEMALE AGENT: *“Thank you for giving The Felix Whoople Agency the chance to consider your work. The current demands of my client list means I am unable to take on further work. I wish you the best of luck in finding an agent (if you haven’t already). Xavia Hicks.”*

IAN: Xavia Hicks! Why do these people have such stupid names!

IAN: *“To Lionel Stevens, Literary Agent. Dear Mr Stevens, I note your office is in Bloomsbury, home of many great writers of the past. I myself am steeped in the English language, having been a teacher of English for nigh-on thirty-five years...”*

F/X: SCRIPTS BEING THROWN INTO A CARDBOARD BOX.

POPPY: Lionel! Do you want this fax machine or will I just leave it?

LIONEL: Better bring it. I might need it.

F/X: FAX MACHINE UNPLUGGED AND BOXED.

LIONEL (cont.) God, this is so depressing!

POPPY: It's okay, love. Working from home won't be so bad. In fact, there are lots of positives.

LIONEL: Yeah. Like it doesn't cost anything!

POPPY: Come on, let's go. I'll phone Lucy and get her to help us at the other end.

F/X: SUBURBAN STREET AMBIENCE.

LUCY (exhausted): God, this is so heavy! How much more of this stuff is there?

POPPY: Lionel, what have you brought all these scripts for?

LIONEL: I thought I might find a diamond in the rough.

POPPY: Ha! The only way this lot'll get published is if they paid a vanity press!

LUCY: Why didn't you just sling them in a skip?

F/X: A TELEVISION IN THE BACKGROUND.

LIONEL: Look, if I transfer that £5,000 balance to my – no, wait a minute, that's maxed out too... Oh God!

POPPY: Don't worry. Things'll be alright. Things'll pick up. The important thing to remember is we'll get through this. This is not an end for us; it's a change. I can get out of the theatre and maybe get into film and you can...

LIONEL: What?

POPPY: I don't know, get some clients who aren't in subsidised theatre.

LIONEL: ...I've been thinking about what you said this afternoon?

POPPY: What did I say?

LIONEL: About those manuscripts... the only way they'd get published...

POPPY: ...What are you saying?

LIONEL: Look, we *need* the money...

POPPY: You're not saying *we'd* be the vanity press?

LIONEL: ...But you wouldn't have to *tell* them that. Not initially... I've been thinking about it: these people will get tired of rejection and eventually *pay* someone to publish their book – so why not us?

POPPY: Oh, I don't know...

LIONEL: Do you want to have a look at our credit card statements? Do you want to try and re-mortgage the house again? Or borrow some *more* money from your parents?

F/X: A SCRIPT PULLED FROM AN ENVELOPE.

POPPY: ... “*The Guest House* a stage play by James Gray.”

LIONEL: No good. It's got to be a novel.

F/X: ANOTHER SCRIPT PULLED FROM AN ENVELOPE.

POPPY: What have you got?

LIONEL: A TV drama.

F/X: A SCRIPT THROWN ON A TABLE. ANOTHER
PULLED FROM AN ENVELOPE.

POPPY (reading): “*Men of Steel* a novel by Ian MacAllister.”

LIONEL: Oh, I remember that one... he's an ex-English teacher, I think.

POPPY: What's it like?

LIONEL: It's just like all the other first-time novels from ex-English teachers. But he's a typical retiree with a wad of cash to spend.

POPPY: Sounds perfect.

F/X: TYPING AT A DESKTOP COMPUTER.

LIONEL: *"Dear Mr MacAllister, Your novel, Men of Steel really...*

POPPY: *"Struck a chord with me."*

LIONEL: *"Struck a chord with me. I wonder if you would be free to meet up next week..?"*

F/X: LETTER RUSTLING IN HAND.

IAN (reading letter): *"...Sorry it's short notice, but I really want to get moving on this one. Yours, Lionel Stevens, Literary Agent."*

FIONA: Oh, Ian, that's marvellous!

IAN: Ho, ho, ho! What did I tell you, Fiona! There's the vindication, in black and white: Lionel Stevens, Literary Agent.

FIONA: Oh my God! This calls for a celebration...

IAN: Let's not get over excited. Let's just invite a couple of people round. Maybe Jim and, eh, whatdoyoucaller...

FIONA: Mhari.

IAN: Mhari, and have a couple of drinks.

F/X: SPIRITS Poured INTO A GLASS FILLED WITH
ICE.

IAN: As I was saying to Fiona earlier, I'm not getting over excited. Obviously, he's interested. He knows what he's talking about. He recognises a good book when he sees one. Incidentally, how's the sci-fi novel coming along, Jim?

JIM: What do you know about him?

FIONA (indignant): What do you mean?

IAN: Only that he's been a reputable agent for 25 years. That's all.

MHARI: That's grand, Ian. Soon you'll be flouncing 'round the book festivals with Jim Naughtie and who-have-you.

IAN: Let's not get too carried away, Mhari. But what I'll do is hop on a train and... get the measure of the man...

F/X: A HAND PATS A MANUSCRIPT THREE TIMES.

LIONEL: Ian, I've read a lot in my time. An awful lot of books. And I think I've acquired an instinct. I know when I'm reading something special.

IAN: Oh, that's great of you – that's very nice of you to –

LIONEL: No, I mean it.

IAN: I'm glad you like it.

LIONEL: I love it. It's not liking it, I love it – it's wonderful, so what I – what this meeting is about is just that I know, obviously, you will be inundated by publishers, other agents, other, ah...

IAN: Well, yes, there has been – well, I'm not saying it's been overwhelming, but there's been... a response.

LIONEL: Well, that's what I thought, naturally, and to be completely up front with you, that's why I wanted to have this meeting as soon as possible. Because I want to be the first to snap this up.

IAN: Well, that's very, very good of you to say...

LIONEL: Ian, where did this novel come from? I mean, the life of the shipyard just oozes off the page –

IAN: My father worked in the shipyards for, eh – all his life. When I grew up, all the talk in the house was about the ships, whether it was from my father, my uncles... these were heroic men, Lionel. Men with that inner fire. My father, was, eh, an amazing man. And he is the central character in the book, actually.

LIONEL: Well I was gripped by it, I must say. I've had twenty-five years experience. And I know *Men of Steel*'ll see print.

IAN: Oh, that's great to hear...

LIONEL: But there a minor problem. It's just a small thing. Before it's put in front of a publisher, it needs to be polished.

IAN: That's fine. I can do that.

LIONEL: No, what I'm saying is, I think it needs a fresh eye. From a professional editor.

IAN: Oh... right...

LIONEL: Don't feel bad about it – it's standard stuff. If you had seen your namesake Ian Rankin's first offering before the editors got to work on it, I think you'll have been quite surprised. Now, it could cost quite a bit. But we get what we pay for. And, with a bit of luck, I can get this to the best book doctor in the business. This'll be the smartest £2,000 you've ever spent.

IAN: ...Two... That's quite a... Are you sure – ?

F/X: A MOBILE PHONE RINGS

LIONEL: Damn! Excuse me a minute... Hello?

POPPY (D): Hi, Lionel, it's me.

LIONEL: Hello... Francesca! Good to hear from you. Look, could you make this quick – I'm in a important meeting... (Pause) Oh, great! That's super news... (Pause) It *is* a very clean manuscript isn't it? That was gone over with a fine tooth comb... *exactly*, that's what I think too...

POPPY (D): You're laying it on a bit thick there, dear. Okay, pretend I've just quoted you a figure.

LIONEL: That's great! I love round figures! You know, I *thought* you'd like this one. When I read it, I thought, "this'll be perfect for Francesca".

POPPY (D): Pretend I've said "I'll mail you a contract through the post".

LIONEL: I look forward to that. Listen, I'll call you back later and we can fix up a time to iron out the contract, okay?

POPPY(D): Okay, dear. (Laughing and whispering) It feels really weird phoning you from the conservatory!

LIONEL: Okay, bye, Francesca.

POPPY (D): Bye, you old trout.

LIONEL (to IAN): Sorry about that.

IAN: No, no – it sounded good news.

LIONEL: Yeah, that was Francesca Hall from Magnolia Books. She's just accepted a novel from another of my clients, Brian Freeland. He's new but you're going to hear a lot about him. It's his first book, an eco-thriller... Now, that's a case in point. When I read *Flashpoint Earth* I knew it was good, but I knew it needed the professional eye before I submitted it.

IAN (decided): Okay, I see what you're saying. If this is what it takes...

LIONEL: Just email me the manuscript and I'll get moving on that for you.

F/X: SHEETS OF PAPER PICKED UP FROM TABLE.

LIONEL (cont.): Now, I've draw up a standard contract for representation. I don't charge reading fees for anything you submit to me. Watch out for anyone who does: they're not proper agents.

IAN: Okay...

LIONEL: Now, under this, you would be liable for the routine business expenses associated with submitting manuscripts to publishers: the photocopying, mailing, telephoning and whatnot.

F/X: SHEETS OF PAPER IN HAND.

IAN: This clause here... 'business overheads'...

LIONEL: That's just travel and entertainment. For example, to sell your work, I may have to have lunch with an editor.

IAN: ...right...

LIONEL: Between you and me, Ian, that's where all the deals are made.

F/X: RESTAURANT AMBIENCE WITH QUITE MUSIC.

LIONEL: Mmm! That fish is delicious!

POPPY: Yeah, it really goes with the wine.

LIONEL: God, it's been a long time. Cheers, Ian! And thanks for paying the mortgage!

POPPY: Ha-ha! Shhh! Anyway, as I was saying, I'll use my middle name and my maiden name and I'll set up a virtual office in the business district; you know, basically buying a posh address from a mailbox company, where they take your calls and forward your post, and all that sort of thing. We'll get Lucy to edit the book down to an acceptable length – it's about time she earned her keep. Then we'll print up a hundred copies, cheap as you like and sell them back to him at a profit.

LIONEL: God, I never thought you were so scheming!

POPPY: Neither did I! It's a whole new side of me coming out. I was thinking, the easiest people to con would be fantasy novelists. I mean, most of them are *living* in a complete fantasy! They're more likely to take the bait.

LIONEL: Trouble is though, most of them are broke. That's why retired professionals are prime fodder. Consider this revenge for having to read all those turgid novels from ex-headmasters. We suffer from them once when we're at school, and they think they have a God-given right to make us suffer again!

POPPY: You're right! Let's order another bottle of wine.

F/X: HIP-HOP MUSIC PLAYS IN A SMALL ROOM.

POPPY: Well, if you want money for a new pair of shoes, you've got to work for it, young lady.

LUCY: Young lady! What are you calling me *that* for?

POPPY: From now on, things are going to be different around here.

LIONEL: All we want you to do is cut out a third of the novel, and the fifty pound's yours.

LUCY: Why don't *you* do it?

LIONEL: Well, because I've *just* got enough money to pay you, so I don't have to.

LUCY: Oh, *I* get it!

LIONEL: And put together a one-page summary of it so you mum doesn't have to read the damn thing.

POPPY: You can put you English degree to some use.

LUCY (suspicious): What's it about, anyway?

LIONEL: It's about men who work in a shipyard.

LUCY: Oh, God!

F/X: IAN'S ECHOING VOICE.

IAN (with passion): *"McCafferty allowed his eye to travel the length of the ship's hull. She's a beauty, he thought to himself. But little did she know she owed her life to the white-hot welding work of three men: Wee Davie McLean, big Tam Forsyth and McCafferty himself. Through a process of mysterious alchemy, they had breathed life into sheets of metal and given her a soul. Big Tam was no good with words, but Wee Davie spoke for all three when he lay a hand on her stern and said. 'Tak care, Darlin'. For where you go, we go too'. Soon she would slip from her moorings and slide into the great ocean itself."*

LUCY (passionless): *"McCafferty looked at the ship's hull and thought 'Soon she'll slip from her moorings and slide into the ocean.'" Full stop.*

F/X: A TELEVISION PLAYS IN THE BACKGROUND.

LUCY: God, what a boring lot of drivel that was! I *hate* shipbuilding, I *hate* the Clyde and I *hate* men talking about rivets!

POPPY: I know, darling, but we've all got to do things we don't like in this world.

LUCY: He thinks he's writing gritty, realistic fiction, but he's obviously idealising these men all out of proportion!

POPPY: I know, darling, but let's not tell *him* that.

LUCY: Why not? *Someone* should.

POPPY: Look, there's your money – and there'll be a lot more of where *that's* coming from.

LUCY: It's only £50 and it took me all day! For goodness sake!

F/X: A LARGE LETTER IS OPENED.

IAN: Ah! It's my manuscript. Certainly a lot lighter.

FIONA: What's the letter?

IAN (reading): "*I want to submit this to the majors; if I can interest two of them, which I'm sure I can, I can set up a bidding war. Warmest regards, Lionel.*" A bidding war! Three words that are music to my ears!

FIONA: Ooh! My husband the writer!

F/X: TYPING ON A LAPTOP.

POPPY: *“I adore the muscular prose, the shipbuilding back-drop with it’s tough men and its passion, but we have a similar book...”*
What will we call the similar book?

LIONEL: How about *A Bucket of Rivets*?

POPPY: Ha! *“...we have a similar book, A Bucket of Rivets, that we’ve slated for the fall. I’m very sorry, Lionel, and I eagerly look forward to your next submission. Yours, Francesca Hall, Magnolia Books.”*
Ian’s going to be very disappointed.

F/X: A MOBILE TELEPHONE LINE.

LIONEL (D): Look, Ian, the only way to deal with this is not to wait for the replies from all the other major publishers I’ve submitted to but to take a left-field strategy.

IAN: I’m listening...

LIONEL: There’s a new publishing company, Dickens & McLean, that I’ve heard good things about through the grapevine.

IAN: Sounds interesting...

LIONEL: Apparently, the editor’s about to make a big splash. If we move quickly, we can have our book on the marketplace before *Bucket of Rivets*.

IAN: This sounds like a wise move!

LIONEL: Do you want me to submit?

IAN: I certainly do, sir! I mean, I have my reservations about the edit, but, fair enough, maybe it was a bit flabby and now it's trimmed down to a punching weight.

LIONEL: Exactly. As you say, trimmed down to a punching weight. Yeah. Exactly. I think she's going to love it.

F/X: THE OPENING OF A LETTER.

IAN: It's from Dickens & McLean.

FIONA: What does it say?

IAN: *"I think Men of Steel has great merit, deserving of first-rate publishing and promotion."*

FIONA: Oh my God!

IAN: "Jane Rowlands, Chief Editor."

F/X: OUTDOOR CAFE AMBIENCE.

POPPY: Ian! Very pleased to meet you. Excuse meeting here, but I'm on the hoof, today. A lot going on.

IAN: That's fine.

POPPY: Did you have a good journey down?

IAN: Very good. My wife and I flew business class.

POPPY: Well, after all, this is business! Now, listen, Ian: what the book world needs is new voices. And I see your voice as being one of those... new voices.

IAN: Well, that's very good of you –

POPPY: The book's an amazing read. It's... a story that needs to be told, actually. That's what I think about it. I gave it to my daughter and said "You have *got* to read this." And she just *loved* it!

IAN: That's music to my ears. You know, my *own* daughter... No, that's great!

POPPY: You know, what struck me about it was the authenticity of the voice...

IAN: Well, I'm glad that came over.

POPPY: Just the way that the men spoke to each other. Amazing!

IAN: Men of those ilk are a dying breed. A dying breed.

F/X: _____ THE RINGING OF A MOBILE PHONE.

POPPY: Jane Rowlands...

LIONEL: Hi, Poppy. It's me.

POPPY: Oh, hi... Olly.

LIONEL: Just thought I'd call with some phony business talk about changing one of your book covers so that Walmart will accept it.

POPPY: That's no problem. You were right to call me about it. I don't want to argue with Walmart. We can accommodate their wishes. Pull the cover, get Leo to design a new one. Get it done for Monday even if you have to pay him double. We're not losing sales over this. Okay, Olly. Good work. Bye. (To IAN) Sorry about that.

IAN (impressed): That's okay...

POPPY: Ian, I've got to be upfront with you: I'm bound by a board of directors. And I have to wait till Friday to see if they want to publish.

IAN: ...Oh... right... I see...

F/X: A TICKING CLOCK IN A QUITE ROOM.

FIONA: Look, Ian, if they say no, then don't take it to heart. There are lots of other publishers.

IAN: Yeah, but it's just that I've got to get it out pretty quick. If this other book –

FIONA: The rivets book.

IAN: Yeah, if that comes out first –

F/X: THE PHONE RINGS ONCE AND IS PICKED UP

FIONA: Hello?

POPPY: Hello, can I speak to Ian McAllister please? It's Jane Rowlands from Dickens & McLean.

FIONA: Just a minute, please. (Whispering to IAN) It's her!

IAN: ...Hello?

POPPY: *Ian*, it's Jane. How *are* you?

IAN: I'm fine, yes...

POPPY: Amazing. Look, I've got good news and I've got bad news.

IAN: ...Okay...

POPPY: What do you want first?

IAN: Well, I'll take the good news.

POPPY: Okay, the board have agreed to publish your book.

IAN: Oh, that's great!

POPPY: Congratulations.

IAN: But, I'm a bit wary here... what's the bad news?

POPPY: Well, we can only offer you an advance of £2,000.

IAN: ...Oh. No, that's fine!

POPPY: Are you sure? I know it's a pittance, but, think of it this way: it's an advance against royalties anyhow.

IAN: Exactly...

IAN: Lionel Stevens, this is Jane Rowlands from Dickens & McLean...

LIONEL: Very pleased to meet you.

POPPY: Now, you're Ian's agent, aren't you?

LIONEL: I am. I, ah, worked in Bloomsbury for many years, but now I work from home.

POPPY: And where's home?

LIONEL: Oh – Islington.

POPPY: Oh! Snap! Anyway, down to business. The board want to publish, but they're asking for a small author contribution to go towards the cost of production and publicity.

IAN: Oh... That doesn't sound too promising.

POPPY: The book has great literary merit – the whole board is agreed that. But, there's a risk. It could be the publication isn't timely, the market isn't quite right, another book with the same theme hits the shelves at exactly the same time – a whole host of factors.

IAN: What sort of figure are we talking about?

POPPY: First print run for an average middle grade début? Five to seven thousand copies. But this isn't average. I would want a print run of at least ten thousand. And all that would cost you would be five thousand.

IAN: Five thousand pounds?

POPPY: Well, remember, once you take off your advance, you're only putting up £3,000. Our outlay will be around £20,000, initially, so –

IAN: I really don't know...

LIONEL: The royalties that start coming in will pay that off pretty quickly.

POPPY: I've just got to say, Ian, I really love your suit and your hat. That look would be fantastic for the book-jacket.

IAN: ...Well, that's nice of you to –

POPPY: But listen, I don't want an answer right now. I want you to go away and think about it.

F/X: IAN & LIONEL WALK IN A BUSY STREET.

IAN: I must say, Lionel, I didn't expect *this*...

LIONEL: Realistically, Ian, this is the way things are going for first-time writers... But don't worry. I'll phone her and try to talk her down a bit. It might take a while and I might have to turn on the old Lionel charm. Meanwhile, you go back to the hotel and I'll call you later.

F/X: WINE BAR AMBIENCE.

LIONEL: Well, so far so good.

POPPY: Yeah?

LIONEL: I sent him back to his hotel. I told him I'd call you.

POPPY: Well?

LIONEL: Well what?

POPPY: Call me.

LIONEL: Oh. Right. Prr-prr. Prr-prr.

POPPY (as if answering): Hello, Dickens & McLean?

LIONEL: Hello, can I speak to Jane Rowlands, please?

POPPY: Speaking.

LIONEL: Oh, right, I'm calling about your recent meeting with a client of mine, Ian whatchamacallim...

POPPY: Oh, yes. I'd very much like to publish his novel, *Men of Whaddayoumacallit*.

LIONEL: Mmm. That's what he told me. He also told me you want him to contribute £3000 towards publication.

POPPY: Yeah, but you can talk me down and gain more of his trust. We'll get the other 500 from him later.

LIONEL: Okay, dear. £2,500 it is.

POPPY: Oh dear...

LIONEL: What is it?

POPPY: I'm feeling a bit guilty about Ian.

LIONEL: Oh, come on, he's an insufferable bore and he deserves it.

POPPY: Yeah, you're right. Do you want another drink?

LIONEL: As long as Ian's paying!

F/X: VERY QUIET HOTEL ROOM. A WHISKY GLASS IS SWIRLED, THE ICE CLINKING.

IAN: ...Well, you know, there are a lot of details to iron out in the contract. And Lionel's still negotiating with Jane.

FIONA: ... What, about royalties and things like that?

IAN (sipping): ...That *sort* of thing, yes... they also want me to –

F/X: THE PHONE RINGS AND IS PICKED UP.

FIONA: Hello? Just a moment... (To IAN) It's your agent!

IAN: Hello?

LIONEL (D): Ian. Great news: I've managed to wangle the contribution down to £2500. My goodness, that Rowlands woman is one tough cookie! That was three hours of haggling. I wouldn't like to tussle with *her* on a regular basis. But my knowledge of contracts is as good as it gets and I gave her a run for her money. We've got to go with this!

IAN: ...Do you think?

LIONEL (D): Definitely. I managed to get a great royalty rate!

IAN: Oh, that's brilliant.

FIONA (whispering): Sounds good, Ian!

LIONEL (D): So, Mr. Writer, are you ready to rock 'n' roll?

IAN: ...yes. Why not? Let's go with it.

LIONEL (D): Soon you'll be holding your first novel in your hands.

F/X: A LARGE CARDBOARD BOX IS OPENED, STICKY
TAPE PULLED OFF AND A BOOK PULLED OUT
FROM AMOUNG STRAW PACKAGING.

FIONA: Oh, Ian, it's so exciting!

IAN: Hot off the press!

FIONA: Wait there, I'm going to take a photograph.

IAN: "*Men of Steel* by Ian McAllister." There's the proof, Fiona!
There is the proof!

FIONA: Hold still...

F/X: THE SOUND OF A CAMERA CLICK OR TWO.

IAN: I've been meaning to ask...

FIONA: Mm-hm?

IAN: I wonder if you can help me prepare... for any interviews I might have to do...

FIONA: Ah-huh?

IAN: Like with – oh, I don't know – Jim Naughtie, for instance...

FIONA: Oh! Okay...

IAN: I thought we might do a sort of role-play... where you're Jim Naughtie and I'm me.

FIONA: That's a good idea. (Pause) Do you want to do it *now*?

IAN: No time like the present, as they say. Just imagine the book's been published and I'm on a whirlwind tour of the arts programmes and whatnot.

FIONA: Okay. You ready?

IAN: Fire away.

FIONA: Right... Welcome to *Book Talk* with me, Jim Naughtie. I'm with the writer –

IAN: Try and do the voice a bit, just to get me in the mood.

FIONA: Okay, sorry. (Adopting her best Jim Naughtie voice) Welcome to *Book Talk* with me, Jim Naughtie. I'm with the writer, Ian MacAllister, who has just published his debut novel, *Men of Steel*, to great acclaim.

IAN: This is good.

FIONA: Welcome to the programme, Ian.

IAN: Thank you for having me, Jim. And I'd just like to say, I've been a huge fan of yours for years. I love your reading skill and your ability to detect a great work.

FIONA: Well, in you case, Ian, the book is magnificent.

IAN: Thank you, Jim.

FIONA: I loved the characters, I loved the shipyard setting and I loved the authentic voice and all of that sort of thing.

IAN: It's nice to hear you say that.

FIONA: But I especially loved the subtext of the neglected child.

IAN (after a short silence): ...Sorry?

FIONA: I'm saying, what I loved especially was the way that you expressed the way that the... extreme machismo of the shipyard culture had... hugely detrimental effects on the upbringing of the child in the book... and by extension, a whole generation of children for whom physical chastisement was an accepted cultural norm.

IAN: You're way off there, Fiona.

FIONA: Jim.

IAN: Jim. You're talking nonsense.

FIONA: Well, the child in the book seems to be somewhat affected by the neglectful relationship with the father. His own natural bent towards writing... to art... to all human culture are ridiculed. It's not stated explicitly, but it's there nonetheless.

IAN: I don't know what you're talking about. That was just the way things were done in those days. It was the accepted way to bring up children. Admittedly, my father took it a bit further than perhaps other... Look, Fiona, I'm *glad* he hit me! I probably *deserved* it! He probably knocked some bloody *sense* into me!

FIONA (after a pause): Eh, the... the authentic dialogue really comes across. Did you use any special technique to capture that?

(THERE IS NO RESPONSE FROM IAN)

FIONA (cont.): Ian?

IAN: Oh, sorry... I think that's covered the main points. I feel... ready to... face the, eh... I think I'm going to go for a wee lie down...

FIONA: ...Okay... You *look* a bit tired...

F/X: A PHONE RINGS AND IS ANSWERED.

POPPY (D): Hello?

IAN: Oh, glad I got you at last, Jane. It's Ian. Ian McAllister. I was just wondering... How are the sales going?

POPPY (D): We're blasting the US, but, unfortunately, they're not much interested in shipbuilding on the Clyde.

IAN: Right...

POPPY (D): Maybe the book is more of a Scottish thing. That's why I'm mailing 500 copies to Scottish book dealers. It's costing me a fortune, but I know it'll pay off. You know, you should get yourself out and about among the small bookshops, the independent retailers.

IAN: ...I don't know...

POPPY (D): You've got to get out there, Ian! You've got to *sell* yourself! Maybe set up a few local book signings. That's how the word-of-mouth starts.

IAN: But how would I go about setting up something like that?

POPPY (D): Leave it to me. That's what I'm for. You just get yourself along. You can buy 100 discount copies of the book for £500. And if you sold them at £9.95, you could make a clear profit of £500.

IAN: ...Well, I suppose that's... Okay, send me 200 copies.

POPPY (D): I'm proud of you, Ian.

F/X: A QUITE BOOKSHOP. A TILL IS OPERATED IN THE
BACKGROUND.

JIM (quietly): Where do you want these books, Ian?

IAN (ditto): Just put them on the end of the table with the others.

F/X: THE THUMP OF A BOX OF BOOKS ON A TABLE.

FIONA (ditto): It's very nice of you and Jim to help out, Mhari. We really appreciate it.

MHARI (ditto): Don't be silly! You know how I feel about new writers.

FIONA (whispering): It's hard to believe you're going to be signing your books! I feel quite nervous. Do you think many will come?

IAN: Fiona, if you write them, they will come.

MHARI: I've brought a spare pen, just in case your one runs out.

IAN: That's great. All we have to do now is wait...

F/X: FADE DOWN THE BOOKSHOP AMBIENCE. HOLD A DEAD SILENCE FOR AS LONG AS POSSIBLE BEFORE BRINGING UP THE AMBIENCE AGAIN. LIKE BEFORE, A TILL IS OPERATED IN THE BACKGROUND AND WE HEAR CHANGE BEING GIVEN.

FIONA (whispering): This is just embarrassing.

JIM: Ian, how does anyone know you've even got a book out?

MHARI: That's what I was thinking! And who handles distribution for Dickens & McLean? I went to Waterstones on Monday and I couldn't find *one* of their books.

IAN (quietly): It's a new publisher, Mhari.

JIM: You know, when you do an internet search on "Jane Rowlands" and "Dickens & McLean" you get no hits at all. None.

FIONA: Ian. Come on. Let's pack up the books and go home.

IAN (sighing): Oh, dear...

F/X: AN ECHOING PHONELINE.

IAN: ...and then I tried to sell the books back to Dickens & McLean, but they have a no returns policy.

LIONEL (D): I commiserate, Ian. But these things happen. I think we've both been royally duped by Jane Rowlands. You know, in my thirty years of being an agent, this is only the second time this has happened. The first was when I was handling Sven Hassell. Luckily, he rose above it and put it down to experience. I think what you should do is forget all about Dickens & McLean. Take a leaf out of your own book and remember the motto from *Men of Steel*: What doesn't break me makes me strong.

IAN: I can't believe she would *do* that...

LIONEL (D): You know, it's kind of been at the back of my mind all along. This is an epic, almost cinematic story. It's a *film*, Ian! And films are always crying out for a good story. And you are a storyteller, Ian. It's in your DNA.

IAN: Well, I suppose...

LIONEL (D): And I've not been lazy! I've been touting the manuscript to film companies, with some good feedback. From Fox *and* Universal!

IAN: ...really? What have they been saying?

LIONEL (D): *“...a stirring tale... could see this on the big screen... all the ingredients of a powerful drama...”*

IAN: But how would I go about..? It’s a novel...

LIONEL (D): Well, when you think about it, you’re most of the way there: the story’s already done, the dialogue’s there. All you have to do is translate the book visually. And I know just the person who can help you: Tony Philkins – one of the greatest screen-writing gurus in the whole industry.

IAN: ...Philkins...?

LIONEL (D): He runs a three-week residential screenplay course in Cornwall. It’s around £5,000, but Tony’s the best. And you know what? I’ve got his phone number.

F/X: VEGETABLES BEING CHOPPED ON A BOARD.

FIONA: A thousand pounds? That’s a lot of money.

IAN: Lionel really recommends him. And I can see his point: the story’s crying out for that... epic treatment. I mean, so far, it’s got interest from Universal and Fox.

FIONA: Well, if you’re sure... What’s his name, again..?

F/X: ANNOYING AIR EXTRACTION SYSTEM.

TONY: Welcome, everyone. My name’s Tony Philkins, and what you are about to undergo is an industry-approved course in the craft of screen-writing.

TONY (cont.): Along the way, we'll make an incisive scene-by-scene analysis of *Private Benjamin*, perhaps the greatest screen comedy of the twentieth century. Now, straight off, does anyone here know what development frameworks are?

F/X: APART FROM THE EXTRACTION SYSTEM, THERE IS TOTAL SILENCE.

TONY (cont.): No. I thought not. Development frameworks are the most important facet of your journey from original idea to finished screenplay... We'll also explore neo-narrative structures. That's what film essentially is. It's intrinsically bound up in this idea of neo-narrative structures. And we'll be talking a lot about them as the weeks go on. If there's anything I want you to take away from this course, it is neo-narrative structures.

F/X: CRACKLING TELEPHONE LINE.

FIONA: What's he like?

IAN (D): Well, he's serious, bearded – he looks like he knows what he's talking about.

FIONA: Well, that sounds good...

IAN (D): I'm not sure how, eh, practical, ah... well, he knows what he's talking about, clearly... he's, eh, very intellectually gifted in the, you know, the theoretics of film and what-have-you, but I'm not sure how practical he's being...

F/X: ANNOYING AIR EXTRACTION SYSTEM.

TONY: Now, a script is like an architect's blue-print. It's a set of instructions that a team of people interpret and then, collaboratively, synergetically, holistically, they recombine these interpretations into a three-dimensional structure, which we call film. Now, what I want you to do is look again at your script and pinpoint where in the story your chief protagonist realises the neo-narrative structure of his dilemma.

F/X: CRACKLING TELEPHONE LINE.

IAN (D): I can't take much more of this.

FIONA: Are you not going to stay for the last week?

IAN (D): Fiona, it's just a load of nonsense.

FIONA: Could you not ask for your money back?

IAN (D): I don't think that's an option.

FIONA: And have you told him you're leaving?

IAN (D): Fiona, the man's in a world of his own. To be quite honest, I don't think he would realise I wasn't there any more. Look, I'm going to call Lionel...

F/X:

TINNY TELEPHONE LINE.

LIONEL (D): Well, that surprises me, Ian. That really, really surprises me, because, in the past, when I've sent people along, the reports have been glowing. Because there isn't a thing about film that Tony doesn't know. But it could just be that he's not the man for you.

IAN: To be honest with you Lionel, I think he was just hawering.

LIONEL (D): Well, that's a shame, Ian. A real shame. But, listen, you've got a screenplay.

IAN: Of sorts.

LIONEL (D): Look, swing round and we'll talk.

IAN: Well, I don't know, Lionel, I'm thinking of jacking the whole thing in.

LIONEL (D): Oh, you can't do that! *Men of Steel!* Why don't you get the train into London?

IAN: I think I'm just going to go home.

LIONEL (D): Ian! Come on! Where's that Glasgow spirit when you need it? Look, I've been holding something back. It was going to be a surprise for you once you'd finished the course: I've set up a meeting with a commercial company in L.A. – in Hollywood, and they have access to film insiders: producers, directors, expert consultants. What they specialize in is putting people together. Matching talents. Creating contacts. Why don't you fly out there and get things moving? I can then re-contact Fox and Universal and let them know they've got competition.

IAN: Oh, I don't know. To be quite honest with you, eh...

LIONEL (D): Lionel.

IAN: Yeah, Lionel, to be quite honest with you, I've been spending money like water recently. And it's out of the retirement fund for the cottage. And I haven't told Fiona.

LIONEL (D): Ian. Listen to me. You are 95% of the way there. All you need now is that final push.

IAN: I don't know.

LIONEL (D): And you're there. Look, I've been in this situation many times before. I could list you names of writers who were about to throw in the towel at the eleventh hour. But look, I understand. Maybe you've not got that... inner fire that writers needs to succeed...

GRAMS: 'MINT JULEP' BY ETTA BAKER.

LIONEL: Do you think he'll take the bait?

POPPY: He wouldn't want to believe that it was his lack of fighting spirit that made him fail. And he's already forked out for Tony's screenplay workshop: if he packs it all in now, that's money down the drain.

LIONEL: You know what the funny thing is: Tony isn't aware that he's involved in a scam. Almost all of his students come from agents who get ten percent of his fee. But Tony thinks that it's his natural talent and genius that keeps the students rolling in!

POPPY: He's an idiot. He's almost worse than Ian. It seems to me, the whole world is full of delusional fools. There must be thousand's of English teachers who can string paragraphs together, that can tell a half-decent story... and secretly harbour the dream that one day their talents are going to be discovered. And that's just the English teachers. There's also the media studies lecturers with their screenplays, the English graduates with their literary novels, the kitchen-table poets with their first collections. The list goes on and on. This is only the beginning. Of pure profit for you and me.

LIONEL: You know, sitting up in bed drinking wine on a weekday night has come to be one of life's great pleasures.

POPPY: You deserve it. Can I top you up?

LIONEL: That would be nice.

F/X: WINE POURED INTO A GLASS.

LIONEL: Oh, I've just thought: are we going to have to pay to get all Ian's books pulped?

POPPY: Oh, Lionel, you don't get it! I only *told* Ian we were going to print 10,000 copies. But I only actually got a couple of hundred, on print-on-demand, knowing that's all he could afford to buy. I'm only *pretending* to pulp them.

LIONEL: You are so devious.

POPPY: I'm pulping them now – in my imagination. We could send him a bill, of course, but I've got another idea.

LIONEL: I'm all ears.

POPPY: I've worked out Ian knows *nothing* about e-books or technology. I'm going to tell him it will only be £500 to turn *Men of Steel* into an e-book and then get another £500 out of him by selling him marketing tools: a primer on how to promote yourself on the internet. Something I downloaded for free last night.

LIONEL: I'm worried, though... Is Ian that gullible?

SAM (New York hustler): Ian, Ian, Ian. Come in! Hey, *Men of Steel!* What a screenplay! Goddamnit! Ian, you are a *writer!*

IAN: Well, that's very nice of you to say so...

SAM: Sam. Sam Hunt. Okay, the workshop falls into three segments over three days. Day One: question-and-answer session with myself, where I cover *every* aspect of screenplay submission, from presentation to pitch. Tomorrow you'll watch the filming of an episode of *LA Cops* and then an exclusive one-on-one with a top industry insider – who, as we speak, is yet to be confirmed. But, recent insiders have included Martin Scorsese, Steven Spielberg and William Shatner, no less. Ian, you're gonna find this is the wisest six thousand dollars you've ever spent.

IAN: Well, here's hoping.

SAM: Ian, the truth is there are only a handful of people who can set the wheels in motion. You can waste your goddam time sending out scripts here there and everywhere, but they'll remain unread. We'll put your writing in the hands of someone who knows what a screenplay is all about.

IAN: Well, that is very good news, because, ah, I've had a bit of a rough ride so far, but, eh, if all ends well then it'll be worth it.

SAM: Exactly! I believe you first wrote this as a novel?

IAN: That's correct.

SAM: Well, when your film gets made, those novels are going to be flying off the goddam shelf!

IAN: Oh! I never really thought of it that way...

SAM: Of course. I mean, whoever heard of *No Country For Old Men* before the Coens got their hands on it?

IAN: I suppose that's right. Well, I must say, you've got me feeling rather optimistic.

SAM: *That's* the way to go! So let's get started. Incidentally, have you ever pitched a movie before..?

F/X: A CONFUSED DREAMY ECHO THROUGHOUT
THE FOLLOWING SCENE.

IAN (pitching): The screenplay is about the strong men of the Clyde. Hardy. Heroic. Men's men.

CONFUSED PRODUCER: So what did they do, these guys?

IAN: It was *their* house. *Their* rules.

HARSH VOICE: Shut up and get to your bed!

IAN: But Dad!

F/X: A U.S. PHONE STARTS TO RING.

HARSH VOICE: What the hell kind of telephone's that?

IAN: It's American. I'm in America.

FIONA: Ian! You've got to do the interview!

IAN: I'm too tired...

FIONA: Tell them what the book's all about.

IAN: Do I have to, Dad?

HARSH VOICE: I said get to your bed or you'll feel the back of my hand!

F/X: THE WEIRD ECHO STOPS. THE PHONE STILL
RINGS AND IS ANSWERED.

IAN (groggy): ...hello...?

SAM (D): Hey, Ian, it's Sam.

IAN: Oh, hello, Sam...

SAM: So, what did you make of the filming yesterday?

IAN: Well, it was... interesting, certainly, but I'm not sure how much
it –

SAM: Now, Ian, the good news: I cannot believe who we've managed
to get for your one-on-one session!

IAN: ...who is it?

SAM: Just get over to The Westpoint Hotel on Claremont Street as soon as possible with a copy of *Men of Steel*. Gotta go. Bye.

F/X: THE LINE GOES DEAD. IAN'S PHONE PUT
DOWN.

F/X: A KNOCK ON A DOOR.

SAM: Hey, Ian, come in! I want you to meet someone very important in this town, someone very special who knows all about screenplays. Ian MacAllister, please meet screen-writing guru Tony Philkins.

IAN: WHAT!?

TONY: Hi, there, pleased to meet you.

IAN: But you know me!

TONY: Sorry...?

IAN: I was on your course, ya idiot!

F/X: A PLANE LANDING.

SCOTTISH PILOT: “We’re now approaching Glasgow airport, where we will experience a bit of turbulence. Will you please fasten your seatbelts for the landing.”

F/X: KEY IN THE DOOR.

FIONA: Ian!

IAN: Fiona...

FIONA: So, how did it go, Mr Hollywood screenwriter?

IAN: Fiona, I've got something I've been meaning to tell you...

FIONA: What is it?

IAN: It's about the publishing deal... the Dickens & McLean thing...

FIONA: ...What...?

IAN: They asked me... well, they asked me... for a contribution...

FIONA: What do you mean, a contribution...?

IAN: Well, you know, they said they'd put up most of the money if I put up, you know, twenty-five per cent...

FIONA: How... Ian! How much did...?

IAN: Well, total publication costs were twenty grand, or whatever, you know, and I put up five.

FIONA: Five thousand pounds?

IAN: And it's not just that, it's the course as well.

FIONA: Oh, Ian!

IAN: That was another five

FIONA: But you said it was *one*!

IAN: It's because it was a residential thing: vegetarian meals and all that rubbish.

FIONA: That's ten thous – that's our cottage money.

IAN: I know, I know. And there's another six for the American course, plus the flight to Los Angeles, the hotel bills and Lionel's extortionate expenses, but, look, I'll do some part-time teaching. I'm sure the academy will take me back...

FIONA: But look, you've still got Lionel. He could get you other –

IAN: Fiona! Lionel's obviously in on the whole thing, isn't he? I worked it all out on the plane home. He obviously knows Jane. And the pair of them obviously know Tony Philkins. They're all in it together. He must have fallen on hard times, moved out of his Bloomsbury address. It's all been a con, right from the first meeting to the New York fiasco. Do you know who the industry insider turned out to be?

FIONA: Who?

IAN: Tony flippin' Philkins, that's who!

FIONA: ...How...? How's that?

IAN: *Because they're all in it together!* Lionel'll get 10% of anyone he sends to Tony. And probably 10% of the money Jane Rowlands wangled out of me. Either that or they're all in bed together and split it three ways – I don't know. What I *do* know is I've been conned!

FIONA: That is outrageous! That is despicable behaviour! Ian, we've got to go to the authorities and –

IAN: No, Fiona, Fiona, come on, I've been a mug. Besides, they probably haven't done anything illegal. Dickens & McLean did what they said in the contract.

FIONA: That reminds me: they sent a letter...

F/X: A LETTER BEING OPENED.

FIONA: What is it?

IAN: ...It's a royalty statement... for £27.35.

FIONA: Well you must be selling!

IAN: It'll be for the books that I bought from myself.

FIONA: ...Oh...

IAN: For the book signing. This has been a disaster from start to finish.

FIONA: Well, at least there's been *some* good news.

IAN: What's that?

FIONA: Jim got his sci-fi novel published.

IAN: What!

FIONA: I've invited him and Mhari around for drinks.

F/X: A CRACKLING FIRE IN A GARDEN. A HEAVY
HARDBACK IS THROWN ONTO IN.

IAN: A part of me knew all along, but I didn't want to believe it. I suppose lots of people fantasize about being a novelist. Being interviewed by that guy with the specs on BBC 4.

JIM: It seems a bit of a waste... burning your novels...

IAN: Ach, it was no good anyway. My father wasn't a hero. He was a violent alcoholic.

JIM: Oh, Ian....

IAN (very emotional): Come to think of it, when I was growing up, the man barely spoke to me. He ignored me all year and then he would shout at me on holiday because I couldn't paddle a canoe.

JIM: Sounds like *my* dad...

IAN: *That's* the book I should have written! I've been such an idiot...

JIM: You haven't.

IAN: I have and I'm sorry. And congratulations are due to you, Jim. I always said you had it in you. Well done.

JIM: Ach... Well, when you got yours published I thought, why not? Send it out and test the water.

F/X: THREE DULL THUDS AS THREE MORE BOOKS
ARE THROWN ON THE FIRE.

JIM: Many books are you burning?

IAN: Two hundred. Talk about a bonfire of the vanities! And that's not all that's going on the fire. I'll be back in a minute.

F/X: FOOTSTEPS STRIDING THROUGH OVER-GROWN GRASS.

FIONA (calling): Oh, Ian! You're not burning the Panama hat!

IAN: Just try and stop me.

MHARI (calling): You could hand it into a charity shop!

IAN: Stand back, Jim.

F/X: A BLAST OF BLAZING FLAME. THEN SEVERAL DRINKS ARE Poured.

FIONA: Ice for you, Jim?

JIM: Please.

MHARI: So, Ian, are you going to keep writing?

IAN: I don't know, Mhari. It seems a bit stupid now!

MHARI: Oh, you shouldn't let them put you off! You *know* I'm always looking for good articles. And I'm sure a little expose of Dickens & McLean would make pretty interesting reading...

JIM: It would make a great article, Ian.

IAN: ...aye... I suppose it would!

MHARI: Of *course* it would. These people are predators. They throw some bait, hook their prey, reel them in and take them for everything they've got.

IAN: But do you think I'm up to it. I mean...

MHARI: Ian! The pieces you wrote for me got a *huge* response from the readers. And publishers scamming their clients is a *great* story!

FIONA: Ian, they need to be stopped!

IAN: You're right! I'm going to do it! I mean, right now they could be fleecing some other mug....

F/X: WINE BAR AMBIENCE.

LIONEL: You know, Tony, I've always thought it a scandal that the publishers have never put out your work.

TONY: Yeah?

LIONEL: Okay, a 900-page analysis of *Private Benjamin* might be on the hefty side, but just think of all the screenplay students throughout the world who are just dying to dip into the font of your knowledge.

TONY: Well, when you put it like that...

LIONEL: Of course, it does need a professional polish...

END