



Best Advice

Kate Worsley

HE STOOD IN HIS DOORWAY, smiling down at me. The July sun shone through his carefully combed hair to reveal his scalp. He raised his hand to shade his eyes, and I couldn't see his expression.

This was our local man of letters. He is cultured and exceedingly well-travelled, sociable and successful. It had taken me a long time to own up to anyone that I was writing a novel, but especially to him. Once I had, however, he more than fulfilled his reputation as the most approachable, benign, patient, generous, encouraging and open-minded of men.

And so on this summer afternoon I'd waltzed up to his door, thinking to reward him with my news. I'd finished, finally finished, my first novel. I knew in my heart it was done. It was ready to go.

I took the news to him the way a cat brings you a mouse, a dog a bone. And he nodded, and smiled, and shaded his eyes. And after he'd congratulated me, and I'd preened and thrilled a bit more, he said:

'You know, this is as good as it gets.'

He didn't actually reach out and touch me, he's not that sort of fellow, but his words acted as a steadying hand on my shoulder.

He took me inside, out of the dazzling light into the cool of his sitting room and he sat me down and made me a mug of tea. He explained, as my skin cooled, that everything else from now on — the agent, the publisher,



the deal, the reviews, the readers, the prizes, none of it will be as thrilling as this moment. As satisfying. This is the zenith of all writing, when the writing is done. The rest has nothing to do with writing.

He broke it to me, very gently and kindly, this tall, handsome, elegant man with the mellifluous voice and the charming manner. Older now, moving down a gear perhaps, his many successes further behind him than he might care to admit. Unforgivably, in my deflation, I suspected him of envy. But he has turned out to be absolutely right.

I think of him every time I find myself envying another writer's extended research trip, their coveted residency, outrageous publishing deal or prestigious award, their social media profile, super soaraway successful podcast, their glowing reviews and loyal tribe of readers.

Or even their sheer ability to keep producing, let alone publishing, novels. Because as I left, he added: 'There's no thrill like finishing your first, you see. The rest just aren't the same.'