

Doing a Line

A short story by
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Look, I'm sorry, pal, it's the best I can do. For twenty quid you're lucky to get a couple of rhyming couplets. If I wasn't so strapped for cash you might only have got a declarative sentence or maybe a clever use of a transitive verb, but a villanelle? You've got to be kidding. Even the state I'm in I'd be hard pushed to let one go for less than a hundred.

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Yeah, well that's the market. If you don't like it you can go elsewhere to feed your habit, but you won't find better words this side of Bloomsbury - trust me. And poetry's not even my beat. If you ever win on the Not-a-Lottery come and see me again. I'll fix you up with a short story - or, if you win really big, a novella.

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Ha! You can dream. I haven't heard of anyone getting a novel for years. In fact, since Wordhibition came in, I don't think any have been written. Oh yeah, you hear about Write-easies where that kind of thing goes on, but they're always friend of a friend kind of stories. You know, urban myths. Still, even one of those would set you back a cool five or even a grand for a complex one. A novel? You'd be looking at half a mill, easy. But how would you hide it. It's not like it's a piece of doggerel that you can memorise and throw away, whispering to impressionable girls at parties and hoping to rhyme their panties off. A novel would have to be kept on paper. Remember that stuff?

You'd have to find somewhere to keep it, somewhere to hide it. And then you'd have to find the time to read it without anyone seeing it. And how would you keep it to yourself, huh? If it was

really good and juicy? If you got a real kick from it, with the opening surprising and intriguing you and the ending twisted and shocking? If you fell in love with the characters and felt like you knew them?

Huh? How would you stop yourself from confiding in someone that you had a half kilo of the white stuff back at your place and it was an absolute blockbuster that they wouldn't believe?

How many people do you think would have to know about it before word got out and one of the Text Police - one of the Editors - was knocking at your door and asking if you had any poetry or prose in the house? And would sir mind if we just checked for any illegal items of wood-pulp? And could sir follow us down to the station for an imagery-level test?

No. You're not going to see a novel this side of the pearly gates.

Anyway, do you want this quatrain or what, cause the guy behind you looks like he's in the market for a limerick and I need the money.