

# Tea and a tale of great love

With the launch of her first book 25-year-old local author Bridget McNulty is living her dreams

COLIN ROOPNARAIN

tgw **sunday**

You are going to love this book. Called *Strange Nervous Laughter*, it's written by 25-year-old Bridget McNulty and published by Oshun Books, a Struik imprint. Born and bred in Durban, McNulty now lives in Cape Town, where she writes for popular magazine *Real Simple*.

Her book reflects her persona – quirky, funny and lighthearted, alive, animated, eccentric, original, kooky, optimistic and clever.

"Only great love will do," announces the crispy handwritten sentence on the inside cover, and once you start, you'll soon discover it is all about love.

Six lovable, but flawed characters populate the pages, all in one of three defined states of love (in love, out of love and inbetween).

They start off alone but, after stumbling around the first few chapters, they end up inevitably intertwined as members of the Tragedy Club.

McNulty's first ever grown-up book (she's written children's stuff before this) had its first-reading at the charming coffee/book/organic food shop, Euforia, in Glenwood, Durban. Her choice of venue and guests reveals dollops about her. The men, slender and handsome, boasted designer stubble. The women wore colourful flowing dresses and chunky jewels, with ciggies protruding from painted lips.

There were green cupcakes on a table (a character in her book only eats green things) next to two bottles of sherry.

A kissing competition was going on when I arrived – the best kiss



● 'I come off as a happy-go-lucky optimist, but why not?' asks Bridget McNulty

won an iPod, and two 2-year-olds were running amok under the table.

McNulty, a skinny woman with an unusual but arty-looking haircut, wrapped in a purple dress, had to clap to get our attention because she had lost her voice.

"I had been so excited about this launch, I just talked away my voice," she explained to me a few days later. We are back at Euforia for the interview. The day is Tuesday, and we order tea – something with which she is

mildly obsessed.

"Tea is a ritual that forces you to slow down," she tells me happily. "You have to take your time and enjoy it. And along the way you get great conversation and you get to meet all sorts of people."

It is this fascination with people

(which she blames on 12 years of Catholic education) that motivated McNulty to write this book.

It started with the dream of being a movie star.

"I always wanted to be one," she says. "I was told I'd have to go to New York and be a waitress and star in a few crappy movies before I got my big break."

"I thought no way. I don't want to have four years of crap to get where I want – I want to love life now."

And so, after studying creative arts and drama at an American college, she began to write. "The first stories I wrote were absolutely awful. Horrible stuff," she says, cringing up her eyes at the memory. "So then I wrote silly stories for kids (*Moopy the Monkey Cow*, *Garret the Runaway Carrot*) which helped me become more confident."

A good thing, as ideas for a novel soon began to rattle around her head.

"You know how writers always talk about writing a book, and how the characters just take over and do their own thing?"

"Well, I never believed that.

Hogwash, I thought.

"But it really happens."

Stealing quirks, habits and traits from her friends, family and boyfriends, McNulty created six distinct characters.

"There's Beth, a cheerful woman who loves too much, too soon. Mdu is a golden child burdened with expectations, who can hear the truth in what people say. Pravesh is an undertaker who finds peace in being around dead people; Aisha lives in her dreams; Meryl has built

up so many walls around her; she practically wears them around her like a corset, and Harry eats only green things, in an attempt to get into the *Guinness Book of Records*.

"There are bits of Bridget in each character," she says.

"A lot of people think I'm Beth, but I've been a different aspect of each of these characters over the years. I'm even attempting to enter the *Guinness Book of Records* – by baking the world's biggest cupcake".

At 25, McNulty has already achieved her dream – having her book published. So what comes next?

"Oh I've got huge goals," she declares, as she eats up the last bit of her chocolate brownie. "I want to do three books, have myself on the cover of *Time*, and go live in Paris – all before I turn 30."

Huge goals indeed. But if you meet her, you'll know they aren't beyond her reach – she's always been extraordinarily lucky. (She's even has a small tattoo of a shooting star on her wrist to remind her of this).

Maybe it's because she's a die-hard optimist.

"A friend read my book and said to me, 'It's really good Bridge, but the cynics won't be happy'.

"And yes, I get that. I come off as this happy-go-lucky optimist – but why not?"

"Life is all about perception – which can change everything. And why not look at the world and see the good things?"

● *Strange Nervous Laughter*, is available at bookstores across the country.

ADVERTISEMENT

FUN COMES NATURALLY AT BREEDEKLOOF OUTDOORS