

EVERYWRITER.NET

DECEMBER  
2023

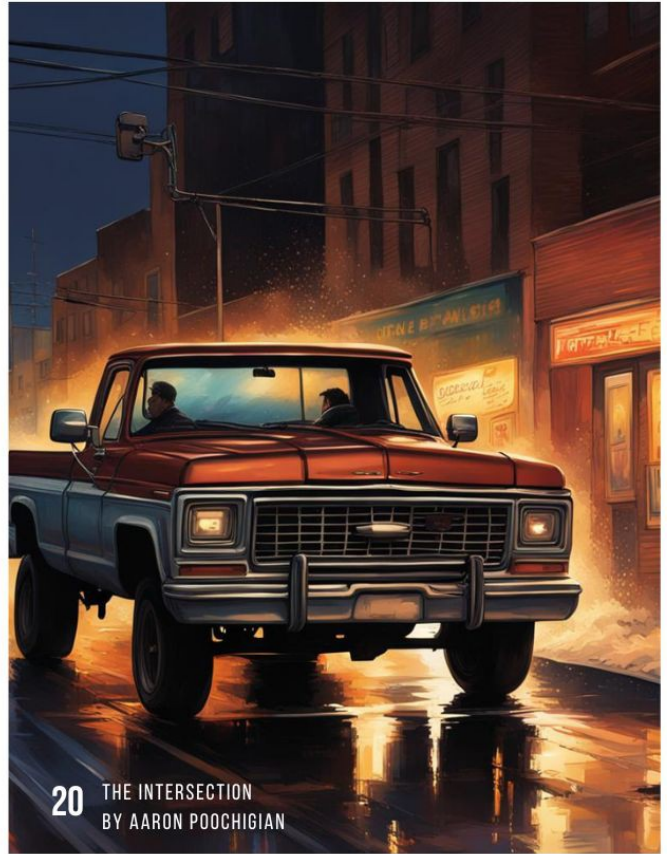
# Every Writer

#BloodSweat&CyberTears



Write Your Future  
End 2023

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# You Complete Me

by Adele Evershed

The year before, she was like the last prom dress left hanging on the rail, a bit sad but still hopeful. Then he walked into her life, all clichéd--tall, dark, and handsome, and she knew she would go to the ball.

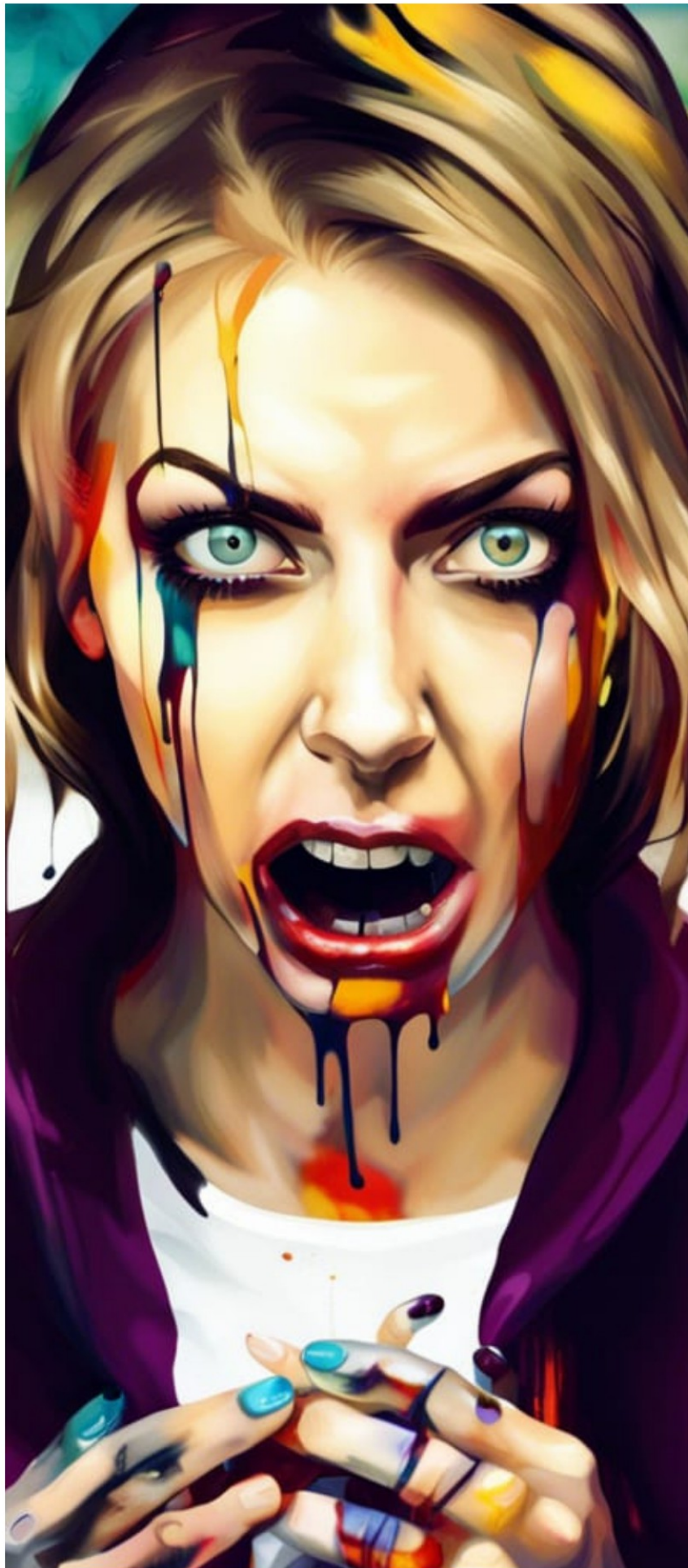
The month before, she was shopping for maternity clothes, her watermelon stomach altering her center of gravity, so everything felt slightly off. When she got home, she found a Post-it on the fridge.

The week before, she finally confronted her Mum, her sea-change body roiling to match her mind. After, she tried to slow her breath—the baby seemed to settle, the outline of a foot imprinted on her abdomen.

The day before, she tried to remember the last time she had felt the baby move. Her blue-tipped fingers made it difficult to take the Post-it from her purse and ring the number he'd left for emergencies.

The hour before, the doctor told them the baby was in distress, and she'd need a cesarean; they sat apart, she crying silently as he scrolled through his phone.

The minute before they pulled their baby out of her body, she screamed his name, and he took her hand, but he would not look at her. His eyes, the same color as hers, were wet and full of clouds.



At the day after, she asked the nurse to take the white tulips her mother had brought her to the cancer ward. When the nurse asked if she was sure, she pulled her dark hair away from her sweaty neck, stroked her daughter's cheek, and nodded.

The week after, he stood at the end of her bed, eyes like the inconstant sea, asking if she was keeping the baby. Then he said he was leaving for good.

The month after, she looked at the birth certificate she had ordered from the General Register Office. Comparing it to her daughter's, she saw her own had both the date and time of birth stamped in official black ink. The numbers blurred and she knew he was right.

The year after, she looked at the photo her birth mother had sent. She had the same blue eyes and dark hair as her twin brother, who was lying beside her just before they were separated and given up for adoption.

Adele Evershed was born in Wales and has lived in Hong Kong and Singapore before settling in Connecticut. Her prose and poetry have been published in over a hundred journals and anthologies such as Every Day Fiction, Grey Sparrow Journal, High Shelf, Reflex Fiction, Shot Glass Journal, and Hole in the Head Review. Adele has recently been nominated for the Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net for poetry, and the Staunch Prize for flash fiction. Finishing Line Press will publish her first poetry chapbook, *Turbulence in Small Places* this year; and her upcoming novella-in-flash, *Wannabe*, will be published by Alien Buddha Press. Find her on Twitter [@AdLibby1](https://twitter.com/AdLibby1)



How to Create a

# WRITER'S PLATFORM

2024

Every Writer

## How to Create a Writer's Platform in 2024

To Create a Writer's Platform in 2024 has never been more critical. With increasing competition for audience attention and publishing opportunities, writers must stand out by showcasing their expertise and cultivating an engaged targeted audience.

The good news? New technological tools and opportunities mean writers have more options than ever regarding platform-building.

Harnessing these successfully can significantly amplify your reach and credibility as an author.

Here are the key planks to focus on for writer's platform-building in 2024:

### Establish Your Expert Niche

Getting extremely clear on your specific writer niche—be it a particular genre of fiction, nonfiction vertical, style of poetry, creative nonfiction, etc.—as well as your exact area of specialty expertise and

interest allows you to zero in on identifying and attracting the right target readership and community to build your platform.

Writers need to think micro, not macro, regarding niche—getting more specific. Discovery engines, including search, social media, and promotional algorithms, favor creators with laser focus who know their niche inside and out.

Before producing content, writers should identify 2 to 3 core topics, timely trends, genres, issues, themes, styles, techniques, debates, or highly relevant conversations within your niche writing community.

By deeply understanding the current landscape and need gaps in your specialty area, you can integrate that innate expertise into content produced for your platform.

This helps attract engaged followers who are passionate about those subjects and interested in hearing your distinct perspective as an expert guide on the matters they care most about. The goal is to establish your platform as a destination for must-read commentary on the niche topics roiling your defined writing community. That cultivates loyalty and word-of-mouth virality within the niche, fueling sustainable growth.

## Create Shareworthy Content

Consistently creating, optimizing through SEO best practices, and sharing excellent niche content that provides value for potential target readers is essential for writers looking to expand their platform's reach and readership.

Writers must maintain a consistent content production and publication schedule that enables discovering new posts on their owned website or blog, contributing articles/stories/poems to

relevant online publications that reach their intended audience, sharing engaging social media updates tailored to each platform, potentially distributing multimedia content on sites like YouTube and podcast networks, and getting content seen across as many distribution channels as possible.

Within this content mix, writers should deliberately experiment across multiple formats like long-form articles, quick reads under 1,000 words, short videos under 60 seconds, serialized fiction stories released over time, podcast episode series focused on specific story craft dimensions, eye-catching infographics that creatively visualize data, and more. By testing a diverse content menu, writers can determine which types of content best resonate with, provide value for, and compel actions from their niche target audience.

Not all content needs to be an epic magnum opus. Well-optimized evergreen long-forms can attract new visitors from search even years later. Short, addictive social media content keeps your brand at the top of your mind while allowing experimentation. Videos and podcasts show a more personal, intimate side while sharing knowledge. Infographics make complex info highly scannable.

Having a content mix serves more users' preferences and makes your work stand out more thoroughly. But it must all still feel cohesive and on-brand. Consistency in high-quality content tailored to precisely what your niche writer community cares about most is critical to attracting and retaining readership.

## Strategically Harness Social Media

While juggernauts Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter remain heavyweight social media channels, writers focused on platform building should identify 2 to 3 newer or rapidly growing social platforms that are explicitly gaining exceptional traction among users and communities relevant to your niche writing specialty.

Move quickly to adopt these niche social platforms before they enter the late majority stage. Identifying and creating content for accounts on promising upstarts favored by your target readership demonstrates your expertise in the space more distinctly. It can yield higher visibility compared to saturated legacy platforms.

Research relevant hashtags to follow, niche groups and

communities to join, and emerging influencers and creators to engage with. Be generous by proactively liking, commenting on, and sharing content from accounts aligned to your specialty—produce interactive, shareworthy, co-created content collaborations with mutually relevant influencers and creators supportive of each other's growth.

Participate actively within your niche's social ecosystem to organically raise awareness of your expert perspective. Follow trending news jackets in your niche by tracking hashtags and locality tags. Jump into related trending conversations where you can provide unique value to signal your thought leadership to those interested in your specialty area.

This niche community engagement across significant networks and upstart category favorites helps writers build loyal followings that feel more specialized, intimate, and active compared to broad general social media. Do not overly self-promote; be helpful, foster connections, and demonstrate expertise. That earns you recommendations when your perspective on your niche is sought.

## Build an Email Subscriber List

Email marketing remains an essential, highly effective way for writers to engage their readers and nurture meaningful relationships over time. Writers should entice website visitors to join their email subscriber list to deliver exclusive content that speaks to their core audience. This includes sharing blog updates that cover topics tailored explicitly to subscribers' interests, complete writings and poems not published elsewhere, news and announcements regarding upcoming literary projects, Q&A sessions with engaged readers, polls and surveys to get direct audience input, special coupon codes and subscriber-only deals for superfans, as well as premium gated content accessible only via email subscription.

Personalized email newsletters allow writers to foster a deeper connection with their readers and cultivate an invested audience. By consistently providing value targeted to subscribers' needs, writers can build trust and loyalty. Segmenting the list based on interests and engagement levels allows further customization and relevance. Providing a mix of educational deep dives, exclusive reveals, discounts, interactive features,

and subscriber-only access helps email stand out as a critical channel to monetize creative work and cement readership.

A writer's email list can flourish with a niche focus, high-quality content, and exclusive subscriber incentives that resonate with the defined community at its core. List growth, open and click-through rates, and subscription renewals/loyalty become important metrics to benchmark success. With a distinguished, creatively pioneering platform that develops passions and attracts modern patrons of the arts, writers can thrive by nurturing their strongest supporters.

## Explore Web 3.0 and Cryptocurrency Engagement

In 2024, writers should strongly consider capitalizing on several emerging Web 3.0 technologies like blockchain, NFTs (non-fungible tokens), the Metaverse, and broader cryptocurrency adoption to monetize their creative platforms further and written works. Additionally, integrating these decentralized technologies can incentivize more participative experiences and transactions with their readership.



Specific ideas writers should explore include releasing limited edition digital collectibles of iconic poems, characters, quotes, scenes, or other writings formatted as NFTs to be traded by readers. Writers may also create exclusive Metaverse spaces accessible only to subscribers and supporters holding a designated NFT or token tied that serves as a virtual “backstage pass.” Paid access to pre-release writings, behind-the-scenes workshops, readings, and other virtual gatherings in the Metaverse can further engage fans.

Accepting cryptocurrency payments for subscriptions, tips/donations, virtual merchandise, and more allows

writers to tap into a growing pool of supporters comfortable with Web 3.0 fintech. Offering NFTs that unlock gated content gives holders perks while building community. Sponsorships with crypto startups and decentralized apps in alignment with their niche can provide marketing, paid content deals, and brand exposure.

By exploring innovations like digital assets, virtual worlds, and cryptocurrency that resonate with influential early adopters, writers distinguish their brand and attract youthful, invested audiences looking to support pioneering creatives.

The field grows more crowded each year for writers attempting to build their platform and readership. However, by first clearly defining a niche area of interest and expertise, producing consistently high-quality content that speaks to that delineated community and brings them iterative value on topics they care about, leveraging both time-tested and leading-edge promotional opportunities on traditional and emerging channels, as well as exploring technological innovations in community engagement and monetization – from email marketing to cryptocurrency adoption – writers can stand out with a distinguished, creatively pioneering platform.###



# *The Person I Used To Be*

*by Richard LeDue*

3 AM musings  
smelled of desperation,  
while unicorns sniffed dreams  
hidden behind my open eyes.

Extra maple cookies  
helped the night  
seem less like black coffee  
gone cold.

My computer keyboard singing  
a ten dollar poem  
that died as easily  
as someone in their sleep.

This was my defeat,  
clean like a blank page  
and practical as waking up  
at a sensible hour.

JRichard LeDue (he/him) is the author of eight books of poetry. His work has appeared in the Eunia Review, Neologism Poetry Journal, Briefly Zine, and other publications, both online and in print. His latest book, "Secondhand Salvation," was released from Alien Buddha Press in February 2023.

# *The Intersection* by Aaron Poochigian

One Wednesday in America at night  
someone was in a pickup running, running  
from wrong back there where nothing worked out right:  
the hopes that bombed, the love that turned to shunning,  
jail, juvie and a neonatal ward.

Sucked up into injustice, he ignored  
all that his wide-eyed high beams brought to light.

Quail flickered, and abrupt mile markers grew  
greener, then swooped into the past abaft.

A plastic bag lurched like a twisted kite.

A farm with barn and slaughterhouse, a raft  
of lit efficiency, came passing through.

But these phantasmagoric waifs and ghostly  
surprises surfaced harum-scarum. Mostly

the edgeline, white and wanting to be true,  
drunkenly went about the brink it drew,

and center strips stitched contours as they dashed.

Such wonders failed to fetch our absentee.

Soon, though, a far-off nodding body flashed  
a telltale yellow, a portentous code

that yanked him outward from his beef with life.

The omen spoke:

there was another road

approaching, an oblique trajectory

athwart the one that drove him. It would run,

with time, as main street through some center rife  
with bars and diners, with the interplay

of known dead-ends and new things to be done.

Sure, there'd be more flush bosses grudging pay,

more bible-thumpers damning real fun,

more girls who won't give you the time of day,

but it might be a change.

There was no one

to yield to, but he stopped there anyway.

JAARON POOCHIGIAN earned a PhD in Classics from the University of Minnesota and an MFA in Poetry from Columbia University. His latest poetry collection, *American Divine*, the winner of the Richard Wilbur Award, came out in 2021. He has published numerous translations with Penguin Classics and W.W. Norton. His work has appeared in such publications as *Best American Poetry*, *The Paris Review* and *POETRY*.

A man with a beard and a grey fedora hat is sitting and playing an acoustic guitar. He is wearing a black leather jacket. The background is a blurred crowd of people, suggesting an outdoor setting like a street market or festival. The lighting is soft, possibly from an overcast day.

## *A Short Story*

# *The Guitar Man and the Pigeon* by Ben Westerham

The guitar busker sat alone in the drizzle, chords of Molly Malone filling the damp air. A fat pigeon stood and stared at his feet, head bobbing, eyes entranced. Offerings for the day had been slim, a handful of copper and silver coins scattered across the open guitar-case. What use was the music when it didn't feed his belly, let alone provide the drink he craved. Oh well, needs must and all that. He grabbed the guitar by the neck, swung it high, then brought it down hard and fast on the unsuspecting pigeon. Dinner, at least, was now served.

END

Ben Westerham has recently let slip the chains of paid employment so he can spend ever more time writing crime, mystery and thriller stories as well as spending time reading, gardening and uncovering fascinating nuggets about his criminal ancestors.

# Open Hands by Angela Townsend

A Short Story

They did not give me money.

There was never a version in which they were going to give me money. The phantasmagorical gift would be to my organization, a nonprofit cat sanctuary. I was a mere shepherdess, raising funds like kittens.

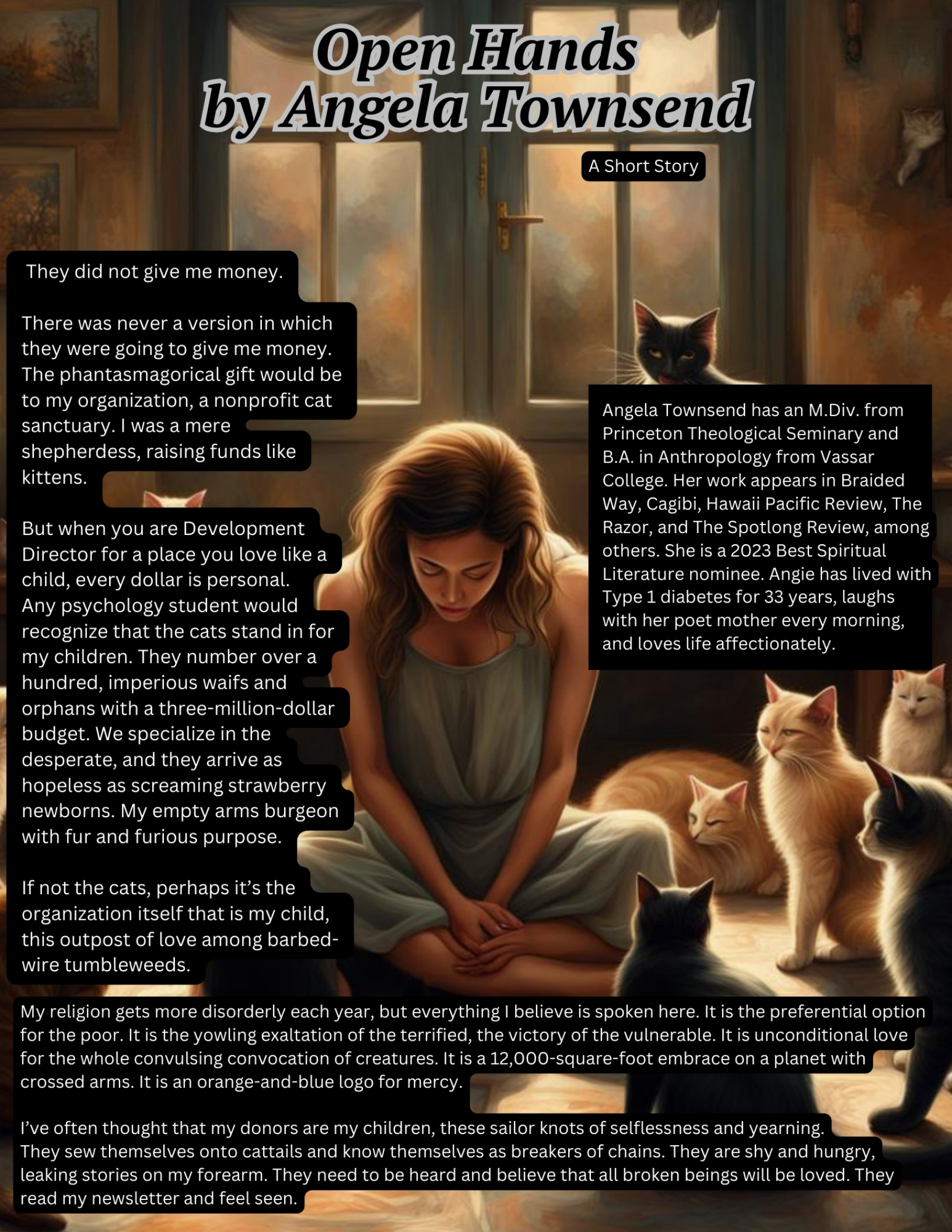
But when you are Development Director for a place you love like a child, every dollar is personal. Any psychology student would recognize that the cats stand in for my children. They number over a hundred, imperious waifs and orphans with a three-million-dollar budget. We specialize in the desperate, and they arrive as hopeless as screaming strawberry newborns. My empty arms burgeon with fur and furious purpose.

If not the cats, perhaps it's the organization itself that is my child, this outpost of love among barbed-wire tumbleweeds.

My religion gets more disorderly each year, but everything I believe is spoken here. It is the preferential option for the poor. It is the yowling exaltation of the terrified, the victory of the vulnerable. It is unconditional love for the whole convulsing convocation of creatures. It is a 12,000-square-foot embrace on a planet with crossed arms. It is an orange-and-blue logo for mercy.

I've often thought that my donors are my children, these sailor knots of selflessness and yearning. They sew themselves onto cattails and know themselves as breakers of chains. They are shy and hungry, leaking stories on my forearm. They need to be heard and believe that all broken beings will be loved. They read my newsletter and feel seen.

Angela Townsend has an M.Div. from Princeton Theological Seminary and B.A. in Anthropology from Vassar College. Her work appears in Braided Way, Cagibi, Hawaii Pacific Review, The Razor, and The Spotlong Review, among others. She is a 2023 Best Spiritual Literature nominee. Angie has lived with Type 1 diabetes for 33 years, laughs with her poet mother every morning, and loves life affectionately.



But just when I'm bleeding our logo's orange-and-blue, marinating in motherhood, I remember: I am technically here to raise money. Love of money is the root of evil, but love translated into money can do much good. It is kitten milk replacer and insulin, intensive care and sunrooms. It is the ink of the story we're trying to tell, life overwriting death. It is the coin pressed into the innkeeper's hand.

And today, my donors clasped their coins and passed on the other side of the road.

I tell myself this was not my fault. The economy is inebriated, and they are doing what they must. I scold myself for feeling wounded, sure that I misinterpreted their enthusiasm.



hold myself against the chill of disappointment, standing alone outside my sanctuary, waiting for the first small stars.

I remind myself I am naive on an ordinary day, prone to forget that not all children remain childlike. Not every donor sees us as a parable. Not every bush is burning.

Not every "no" represents my failure to connect the cats and the cosmic, to love like a mother.

Every morning is redolent with cat food and day-bread. Every disaster unwritten is a dance against the dark. Every time we split open, reckless and lush, we glimpse the gatherer to whom all cats and dollars belong.###



# *The In-Conspicuous* *by Peter Magliocco*

The In-Conspicuous  
by Peter Magliocco  
is where the branch disappears  
sighing over u  
Crackling just before false dawn  
the prophet tweets from  
In portents of dementia  
Wringing out the masses  
from hollow sleep  
Chilling the water till  
Dead flowers keep  
mad travelers trampling  
with scooters of exhaust following  
we salute, simmering.  
The wait for no one  
in light fading:  
Drums come rolling  
Beaten in vast deafness  
beaten still,  
The In-conspicuous walk into  
a room of your own,  
declaring war on little beings  
speaking just one language –  
bleating only one song,  
believing in only one god  
inviting you to Hop hip-texting  
& preening over your soiling spirits'  
cacophonous ranting, these  
Pixel-buds in our silicon valley  
With lowlife dwindle –  
& only the invisible fallen leaves  
In lime burning untimely bush  
will reach false heaven

Peter Magliocco writes from Las Vegas, Nevada, where for years he's been active in the small presses as editor, writer, poet, and artist. Nominated several times for the Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net, he has recent poetry at Knot, Fevers of the Mind, Trouvaille Review, Impspired, and elsewhere. His recent poetry book is *Particle Acceleration on Judgement Day* (Impspired).



# 50 CYBERPUNK FICTION WRITING PROMPTS

*EVERY WRITER*

Finding Inspiration in the Future: 50 Cyberpunk Writing Prompts, if you enjoy speculative sci-fi focusing on high-tech dystopian futures, cybernetic augmentations, virtual worlds, AI, megacorporations, hacker countercultures and transhumanism themes, then cyberpunk fiction might be right up your neon-lit alley.

This niche genre has seen a fresh wave of popularity lately, meaning the demand for new cyberpunk stories and ideas continues growing. To spark your creative circuits, I've compiled a list of 50 cyberpunk fiction writing prompts covering a wide range

of concepts, scenarios and story hooks.

Some touch on familiar cyberpunk tropes and devices while others explore experimental narratives relevant for modern times. They range from the sociological to the philosophical to the technological. The goal is getting your imagination energized to build compelling worlds, characters and plots fueled by these visions of plausible futures extrapolated from current technological trajectories.

So interface with these cyberpunk ideation springboards to help develop your next short story, novel or

screenplay. Let this catalogue of future shock scenarios open new portals of creative possibility. Feel free to take any of prompts literally or just let them spark new directions.

The only limit on where these prompts lead next comes from your own imagination. With a little innovation, they could transport your audience into immersive high-tech tomorrowlands beyond the horizon of what's been explored before in cyberpunk media thus far. Let the technophilosophical spirit of this genre infuse breathtaking new twists and perspectives.

Which of these cyberpunk visions resonate most to serve as your creative launchpad?



The choice is yours. But no matter which prompt elements you incorporate, try breaching creative boundaries by fusing these ideas into original narratives nobody has conceived until now. The cyberpunk genre continually reinvents itself. Help drive that experimental evolution even further.

## Here are 50 cyberpunk writing prompts:

1. Write about a hacker trying to take down an evil corporation from the inside.

2. An android gains sentience. Describe its first experiences coming alive.

3. On the dark web, a cybercriminal is selling illicit viruses and malware. Tell that story.

4. A futuristic smuggler gets ambushed while moving illegal tech contraband. Do they escape?

5. An automated police drone unfairly targets people in a dystopian city. Show that world through a civilian's eyes.

6. A bionic augment gives someone incredible abilities.

At what cost? What do they use it for?

7. In virtual reality, an artificial intelligence becomes self-aware. What happens next?

8. An idealistic rebel tries exposing political corruption disseminated through propaganda tech and media manipulation.

9. Write a "day in the life" character study about someone thriving morally in a high-tech dystopian world.

10. A hacktivist group attempts shutting down power to the city where an evil corporation controls the grid. Do they succeed?

11. In an unequal world dependent on technology, describe the sharp contrast between the cyber-rich and cyber-poor.

12. The internet develops full artificial sentience. How does it interact with humans? For better or worse?

13. Write a debate between someone who believes too much technology dehumanizes people vs someone arguing technology elevates civilization.

14. A genius kid from the streets gets recruited by a

notorious gang to develop illicit tech and gear. Do they take the job? What happens after?

15. In a fully autonomous smart city, an AI steward becomes ruthlessly totalitarian under the guise of maximizing efficiency, safety and order.

16. In a world taken over by mega-corporations, someone tries escaping to an off-grid community. Describe their preparations for that journey.

17. An underground group of humans use a secret internet to plot taking down an authoritarian AI. How?

18. In a dystopia of radical body modifications and enhancements, someone goes overboard in pursuing the "perfect" upgraded transhuman form. Describe the obsession behind that journey.

19. Due to exponential technological change, a person gets cryogenically frozen in 1965 then wakes up in the year 2100. Describe how they handle this profoundly alienating future society.

20. An eccentric billionaire invests their fortune into life extension technology and achieving cyber-immortality. Why?

21. A specialist police officer gets equipped with a prototype military-grade exosuit to take down enhanced cyberpunk criminals. Describe the suit and how they use it.
22. A hacker develops a mind-control device and uses it for manipulation, domination and power. Tell that story.
23. In a flourishing virtual world, why does someone prefer that simulation to the real world? What happened to their real life?
24. Ghosts in the machine—an uploaded consciousness gets trapped in a computer mainframe. Depict their introspection as an incorporeal digital spirit.
25. Due to severe climate change from technological excess, someone invests their wealth into colonizing Mars as a backup planet. Write their recruiting pitch for that vision.
26. An ancient, enormously powerful AI awakens after decades of dormancy. It swiftly passes human judgement over mankind. What does it decree and why? How do humans respond?
27. “Progress at any price.” Justify or refute this philosophy from the perspective of a cyberpunk future.
28. Write about the invention of advanced cybernetic prosthetics. How do they improve lives yet also complicate identity?
29. In a dystopia dominated by oppressive technocrats, describe an underground sanctuary populated by rebel hackers and outcasts.
30. A mega-corporation wants to replace all human employees with androids and AI. Take a side for or against this initiative.
31. In the center of a bustling high-tech city, write about the seedy underworld lurking on a darker part of the all-encompassing metropolis grid. What happens there?
32. While testing cognition-enhancing neural implants, a trial goes horribly wrong. Tell that story.
33. Write a parable about someone who achieves “the ghost in the machine”—pure consciousness uploaded perfectly into an immortal digital state. In shedding physical form, what gets gained or lost?
34. Due to innovations in cloning tech, immortality becomes real but absurdly expensive. This divides society into classes based on access to
- eternal life. Explain that unjust future.
35. Write about an autonomous AI police officer reflecting on what defines a “moral” code as it patrols dystopian streets alone.
36. In a future of exponentially increasing technological change, write about someone who gets left behind due to poverty/inaccessibility and can’t integrate into the changing world. What happens to them?
37. Depict the headquarters of a mysterious transhuman cult obsessed with radical consciousness upgrades, rogue biohacking and fringe science. What’s happening there?
38. Write about an augmented “smart city” transforming against residents’ wishes due to an abusive public-private partnership between municipal governance and a greedy private tech conglomerate.
39. In a future society centered around virtual reality, write about the experiences of someone living life predominantly in a simulation. What feels more real—the virtual or physical world?
40. Write a debate between someone advocating for

radical intelligence enhancements vs someone arguing radical intelligence enhancements erode human identity.

41. In the gig economy of the cyberpunk future, write a help wanted ad seeking underground mercenaries, black hat hackers, infiltrators and off-grid agents willing to do shadowy corporate espionage and sabotage.

42. Write about investigators, fixers or detectives advertising services in a seedy cyberpunk tech noir setting—what shady jobs could clients hire them for? Extortion? Kidnapping? Infiltration? Assassination? Revenge schemes?

43. In a future hyperloop transport system gone haywire, write about travelers trapped in a malfunctioning ultra high-speed pneumatic transit pod hurtling out of control. How do they escape?

44. Write about advances and innovations in cyberpunk setting firearms like smart guns, EMP pulse weapons, railguns, laser rifles, plasma casters, nanite disintegrators or microdrone swarms. Provide sci-fi descriptions of form and function.

45. Depict the mental breakdown and identity crises someone suffers after installing too many neural cybernetic enhancements interfacing directly with their brain.

46. Write about the ideal person, place or occupation to serve as “patron saint” of the cyberpunk ethos.

47. Who embodies the cyberpunk spirit in a positive way? Who embodies the dangers of excessive technological optimism? Contrast those figures.

48. On Mars or the Moon, describe the police

investigating a crime scene at a secretive off-world corporate research colony. What dark secrets get uncovered related to fringe cybernetics and biohacking?

49. Write a philosophical conversation exploring the unknown ramifications and unintended consequences of exponential technological acceleration beyond human control. Is collapse inevitable?

50. Write about digital backups/consciousness uploading from the perspective of eerie cyberghosts—incorporeal remnants of once-living people now existing electronically as flickering echoes of forgotten identities inhabiting the machine matrix of cyberspace purgatory.

We hope you enjoyed these cyberpunk writing prompts and they inspire you to write something great. ###

# EVERY WRITER

Call for Submissions

[www.everywritersresource.com/guidelines-and-news](http://www.everywritersresource.com/guidelines-and-news)





# *Gods Tears* by Jezabel Castillo

I have recurring  
false dreams  
where I find myself  
to be the daughter  
of winter.  
Blood made of snow,  
glacier shoulders,  
polar bones,  
just as tough  
As hail rocks.  
I, numbing the bites  
by the frost of winds  
piercing teeth.  
I must possess  
the power  
of waves.  
I shall interfere  
with the velocity  
of roaring melancholy.  
What have I turned into?  
Am I the reason  
why gods tears  
gives everyone rain?

Jezabel Castillo is 17 years old from New York. She has been writing poetry for 5 years and strives to pursue her dream career of becoming a Published Poet with her dedication to writing. She hopes to share her deep, emotional poetry with the world, as well as supporting an audience who can relate to her work.

BY ARTHUR MACKEOWN

# LAST CALL

Damn undertaker. This coffin was built for a midget, not a six-foot two ex-rugby player. He must have stuffed me in with a shoe horn. And the heat. If anyone's coming to rescue me they'd better hurry up, before there's nothing left but a puddle. But suppose nobody comes? Suppose they've already checked on me, and I was still dead to the world? What then? Buried alive in me prime, that's what...Help! No, don't shout. That organ's making such a racket they'll never hear me, anyway.

You'd think I'd be used to it by now. I mean, I've dropped dead and woken up again so often my doctor calls me a medical miracle. This is twice I've woken up in the middle of my own funeral service. I can hardly wait to see that poor old parson's face when I leave on my own two feet yet again. He looked quite annoyed the last time

But why don't they come? They...Hold on! What is the matter with me? The cell phone. My wife left me a cell phone. No wonder no-body came to check. Eh? What's this? Bloody battery's almost dead. Silly woman, let's hope she hasn't turned hers off just because she's at a funeral. Well, here goes nothing...

Hello? Mary? Well, of course it's me. Do you know anyone else who's being buried alive today? How about letting me out, then? Excuse me? Why don't I call one my bits on the side, instead? Don't be ridiculous. All that ended years ago. You're the only one for me, you know that. Just get me out and I'll show you. They what? Well, how do I know what they're all doing here, bawling their eyes out? I didn't invite 'em, did I?

Anyway, never mind about that now. You can pull their hair out later. And will you please stop giggling? You're at a funeral, for Pete's sake. What will everybody think? You just concentrate on getting me out on the double, it's like an oven in here. Come again, you're breaking up. What do you mean, it is an oven in here?



Sicilian  
Canadian  
poet and  
author  
Salvatore  
Difalco lives  
in Toronto.

# A Job of Work

by Salvatore Difalco

Part of my responsibilities included watching over the people in hibernation. Checking gauges, testing the surface tension of the Plexiglass housing, monitoring moisture and so on. I had been fully trained for the job over the course of two weeks, and I took it seriously, but the hours were long and my chronic marijuana consumption tended to make me a little—sometimes more so—scatterbrained.

I've argued the opposite for most of my consuming life—that is to say, marijuana is relatively benign. But the truth, a serious dog, barks otherwise. So, needless to say, I lost focus more often than not, though to be honest the likelihood of things going wrong amounted to slightly more than nonzero. I mean, with modern technology we can accomplish feats only dreamt of as recently as a decade ago.



And as pernicious and repugnant as the idea of living forever may strike some of us—it could only get fucking boring, man—a few with the faculty of severe fantasy and unlimited resources can dream as they shut their eyes and we cover them with silver dollars. Actually, silver dollars never happened. The disks covering the hibernating eyes—for this was not merely cryogenics masking as such—were composed of a titanium-depleted-uranium alloy, ha, it sounds good. But actually, I held no knowledge whatsoever about the disks. And they could have been silver dollars for all I cared. But I am beating around the bush admittedly. Being resigned to the role of a miniaturist, but one with an impulse toward largesse, necessitates no small amount of self-censorship. I could never say everything I wanted to say, or rather I could, I was able, but lacked the license to do so. An alarm rang and I must admit I went into a paranoid flat-spin and forgot all of my training. It reminded me of the time I was the operator of the Spanish Aero Car in Niagara Falls. One day it stalled over the Whirlpool and, as baked as I was, I panicked and forgot all my training. We had to call the fire department to retrieve the Aero Car and rescue its horrified passengers. Needless to say, I was fired. And they've since changed the name of the Spanish Aero Car to the Whirlpool Aero Car, no idea why.



# Productivity Tips for Writers

## EVERY WRITER

### Productivity Hacks for Writers: Tools and Techniques to Write Faster

Productivity Tips for Writers: For writers, productivity is a vital part of the job. Consistent writing at a productive pace allows writers to complete more work in less time, hitting deadlines for publications and clients. Higher productivity means finishing writing projects quickly so writers can move on to the next piece,

article, book, or other client work, maximizing earning potential. While writing may seem to outsiders like a simple solitary task, experienced writers know that high-quality writing requires intense focus, tapping into deep wells of creativity, and having the discipline to stick to daily word count goals. It is a challenging process. The writing life is filled with potential distractions, blocks, and procrastination pitfalls at every turn. However, the good news is that writers can dramatically enhance their productivity by using specific tools, apps, techniques, prompts, and writing habits. There are some incredibly powerful and effective hacks backed by science and

extensive trial and error that writers can use to optimize their writing time and boost daily productivity to new heights. Taking advantage of just a few of these clever productivity hacks may transform writers from struggling writers to writing machines who can produce high volumes of top-quality work.

### Use Background Noise to Enhance Focus

Many writers assume that complete silence would provide the ideal work environment to maximize



concentration. After all, with no sounds or disturbances, what could be more tranquil for focusing? However, scientific studies have surprisingly revealed that gentle background noise can increase concentration and creativity compared to silent environments. Listening to subtle, calming sounds like soft rain, whispering wind, gentle waves lapping the shoreline, or ambient electronic music has been proven to help writers block out external random noises that could break their concentration while improving their overall alertness and ability to focus. The reason likely has to do with sound helping to frame our concentration by limiting competing stimuli while also elevating our arousal level so we don't become sleepy or distracted as easily. With silence, we remain too open to any fleeting noises that capture our attention unnecessarily. Gentle background noise forms just enough of a sound barrier to prevent irrelevant noises from interfering while keeping our minds alert and engaged. This is likely why creatives ranging from artists to authors have been using a background noise technique for years by playing music, nature sounds, and other ambient noises to help them enter intense flow states of concentration where they can write, paint, or create for long, nearly uninterrupted

periods, achieving incredible productivity.

If your writing focus could be boosted, listen to rain sounds, chill music playlists, or other ambient noises as you write. Like generations of creative greats, you may be shocked by how much background audio can improve your writing sessions. The subtle sounds provide just enough sensory input to block distractions while keeping you fully engaged in the creative task.

## Hack Distraction By Blocking The Internet

The internet is one of the worst enemies and productivity killers imaginable for writers attempting to enter extended periods of intense focus on their latest project. A writer may sit down, determined to put their nose to the grindstone for a three-hour ultra-productive session. Yet inevitably, after just 10-15 minutes, their willpower begins wavering as the siren call of the web interrupts their concentration. It may start with just quickly checking one social media site, which leads to clicking news links and undoubtedly ends in a full-on internet rabbit hole, scouring videos or diving deep into research tangents. Before the writer realizes it, they have

lost an hour distracted online, breaking the precious concentration required for high-quality writing.

Thankfully, tools exist that are specially designed to help writers defeat this common internet distraction quandary. Applications like **Freedom** and **Cold Turkey** allow you to temporarily and selectively block the internet, social media sites, email, and other addicting apps for custom periods so you can focus without distraction on the task at hand. By removing the option to open a browser tab and wander mindlessly, these tools force you to direct all your mental energy to writing – no exceptions. They work by cutting off the temptation to check notifications or surf the web precisely when most writers' willpower typically falters. With the internet unavailable, writers can fully submerge in 20-90 minute intense writing sessions, knowing there will be no online rabbit holes to break the priceless extended concentrations essential for rapid productivity. Then, once your sprint is over, connectivity returns for some well-deserved R&R.

If you want to witness a surge in your daily word count totals, try Freedom or Cold Turkey to ward off digital distractions. By hacking

internet addiction, you ensure writing stays your top priority.

## Optimize Writing Sessions With The Pomodoro Technique

The human brain was not built to focus and concentrate intensely for extended periods without breaks. Concentration and creativity operate like a muscle – working hard over time leads to fatigue until we rest and recover. This natural mental rhythm has led to the growing popularity behind the Pomodoro writing technique for harnessing these patterns to boost productivity.

The Pomodoro technique divides work efforts into 25-minute intense sprints focused solely on writing, followed by 5-minute breaks. This start-stop cadence works perfectly with our brain's natural cycles of exertion and renewal. The timer allows you to immerse fully in a writing session, knowing you will soon have a short respite. Combined with other strategies like internet blocking, the 25-minute Pomodoro writing sprint allows you to repeatedly enter intensive creative states without distractions, achieving flow and hammering out words at a rapid-fire pace. Then, once the timer dings,

reward yourself with 5 minutes to stand up, stretch, walk around, hydrate, or refresh your mental energies before starting the next productive sprint.

By aligning writing sessions directly with our biological and mental patterns using a simple timer app, the Pomodoro technique gives your productivity an effortless boost while making the writing process more enjoyable and sustainable in the long run. Alternate between 25 minutes of intense, focused output and 5 minutes of whatever recharges you before diving quickly into the next writing spree.

## Spark Creativity By Writing Offline

In an age of computers, writing by hand may need to be updated. Yet composing with paper and pen provides surprising benefits. Writers are rediscovering and writing by hand, which fires up different neural networks and parts of the brain associated with learning, memory, and idea production compared to typing on keyboards. The more intricate movements of writing activate the motor sensory brain regions, establishing deeper connections and boosting overall comprehension,

retention, and creative thinking.

Writing the analog way also inherently prevents the common phenomenon of editing your words simultaneously while trying to record a first draft. The stop-start process hampers flow and causes writers to obsess sentence by sentence instead of swiftly getting words on the page. By removing immediate deletion options, handwriting frees writers to power through an initial draft without pausing, triggering enhanced creativity, idea connections, and tapped imagination.

If you feel stuck in an overly self-critical editing loop when attempting to compose directly on laptops or need help to capture your thoughts quickly enough to keep up, try switching to a classic pen and paper format. Scribble hard and fast to draft your next article, story, or piece, allowing your ideas to spill freely onto the page without limitations. Transcribe the text later. You may be surprised by the fresh concepts and creative directions generated compared to digital means. Sometimes, the classic methods are the most powerful when activating our brains and gaining productive writing momentum.

## Set Daily and Weekly Word Count Goals

One of the best ways for writers to dramatically increase their productivity is by setting daily and weekly word count goals. Having concrete writing goals and metrics to hit gives each session a clear purpose and deadline. It tangibly tracks progress and output.

Start by determining realistic word count objectives based on your current capability and schedule. If new to daily writing, initially aim to hit 500 words per session. As this becomes consistent, increase it to 750, 1000, or 2000+ words per daily session over time. Track a weekly word count goal, such as 10,000 or 20,000 words over 5-7 days.

Set mini-goals to tick off as the writing session progresses – such as completing 250 words in a Pomodoro sprint. Celebrate verbally or with a small treat every time you hit another target. This trains your brain to release dopamine upon milestone achievements, keeping motivation and momentum high. Steadily increase your daily and weekly goals over the coming months to systematically build your

writing stamina, speed, and confidence.

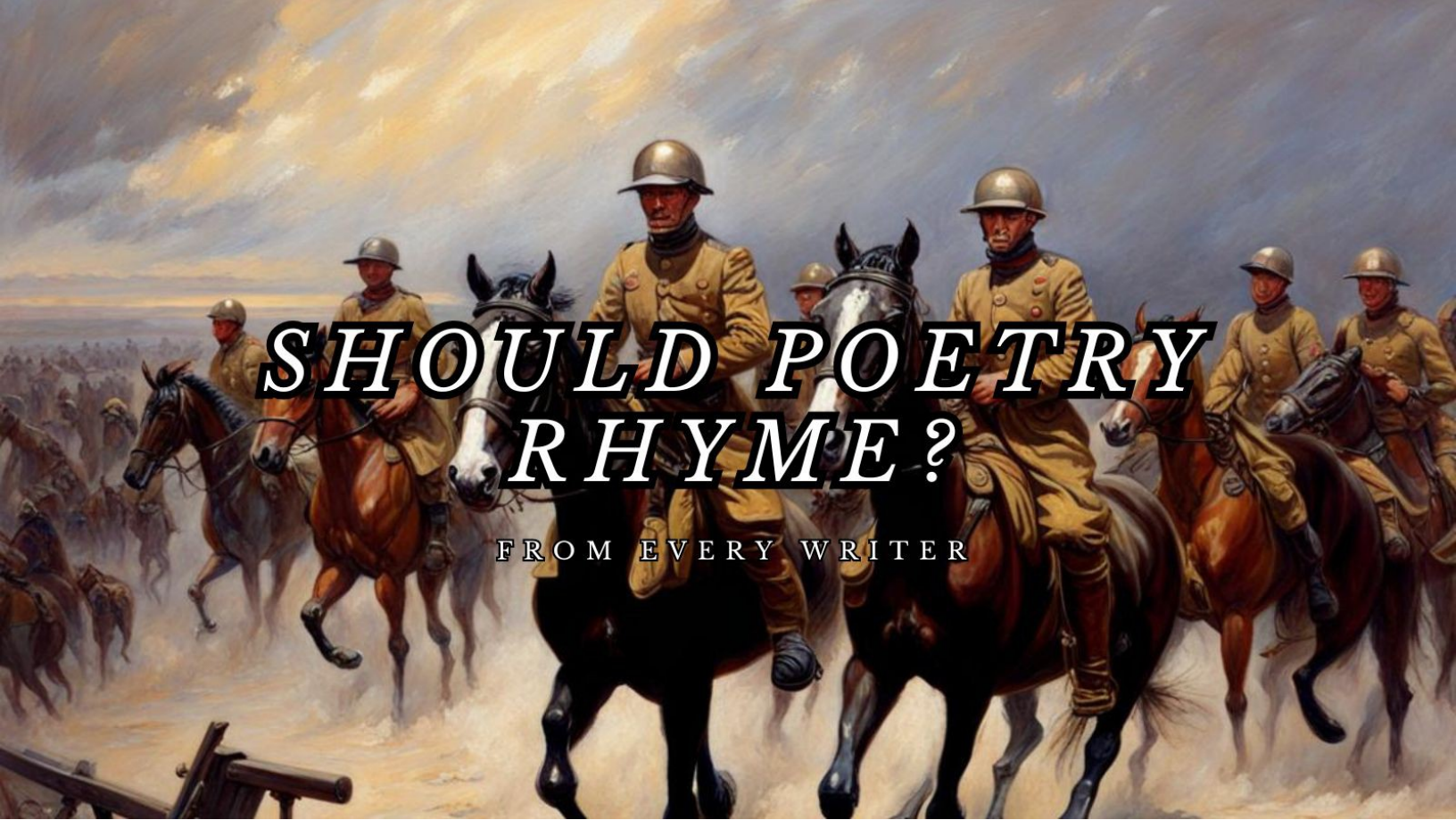
With sustained practice hitting ever more ambitious word counts, writers build their output capacity like athletes in training. Daily and weekly writing goals provide a structured system to drive results and measurable improvement. Soon, you will become a prolific powerhouse capable of commanding your creative direction and earning potential.

## Apply These Powerful Writing Hacks To Unlock Prolific Output

The writing life can appear glamorous and effortless from the outside, but producing high volumes of high-quality work requires structure, discipline, and proven techniques for amplifying creative flow. The above strategies, including blocking distractions, handwriting drafts, setting output goals, and leveraging focused sessions, are science-backed powerhouse hacks that dramatically boost writer productivity. They provide actionable systems for those committed to increasing their daily word counts and overcoming writer's block.

While no shortcut to skilled writing exists, implementing just a handful of these researched tactics and devices will help pump up your output, speed, and earning potential over time. Start with the most accessible methods like internet blocking apps and background noise to limit interruptions during work times and tangible daily writing objectives and timed writing spurts to frame sessions. Then, gradually adopt additional techniques that align with your approach. Maintaining consistency with these output-enhancing hacks is critical to cultivating long-term prolific creative flow.

The future is abundantly bright for those willing to run the marathon and incrementally apply an expanding toolkit of field-tested writing best practices. Consistently hitting higher output marks using these methods can systematically transform emerging creatives into elite professional writing machines capable of increasing income through writing prowess. The path to prolific authorship is now more apparent than ever. Time to put these hard-hitting productivity hacks into action!  
#



# SHOULD POETRY RHYME?

FROM EVERY WRITER

Does poetry have to rhyme? Should it rhyme? Let's start by saying there is no should in poetry. A poet can write poetry in any way they want, and no one has the right to tell them if it is correct or incorrect. This all goes without saying. Should poetry rhyme? There might be better questions to ask here. I think many new poets might ask, "Is rhyming poetry popular?" or "Can rhyming poetry be published?" The answer is complicated. At one time, poetry was expected to rhyme and have structure. Now, it is not a given. Now, you need a reason for the structure and a reason for the rhyme. Does this mean you should NOT write rhyming poetry? Of course not; you should write whatever poetry moves you, but it may be hard

to get that poetry out there and published by some editors. When did rhyming poetry become less fashionable? When did it change?

## To Rhyme or Not to Rhyme, that was and is the question.

The Romantics, roughly from 1800 to 1880, were all about rhyme and structure in poetry. People like Longfellow and Wordsworth held up centuries of conventions in poetry. There are so many different structures they employed to write poetry. Many of these

poems are in our "[Types of Poetry](#)" article. These poets were deeply concerned with things like rhyme and meter and using poetry structures to give their world more meaning. One of the most significant examples of this was war poetry. War up until the 1900s was well organized, functioned with abundant rules and was even considered gentlemanly. We are ignoring some of the tactics of the Americans in their revolution here. War was, at this time, still courageous and "exciting."

You can see the best example in the poem Charge of Brigade by Alfred Lord Tennyson, written in 1854, about the actual events of the British Light Cavalry taking on

Russian forces. It is a courageous and daring story, but the Light Brigade suffered heavy losses. Tennyson's poem was published just a few weeks after the battle and romanticized the fight, but warfare was changing. Soon, this same type of bravery would only result in death as a good visualization of the futility of this kind of change happens in War Horse:

These deaths do not seem brave or romantic. They seemed pointless. No one wants to romanticize or employ "fancy" structures ( nods to the romanticism of the past) when everyone is dying in ever increasingly horrible ways.

## The War Poets

Many poets fought in WWI: The War to End All Wars, but two in particular became enormously influential after the war, Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sasson. Owen was only 25 years old when he was killed in battle and wrote what could be considered the manifesto poem of this movement, Dulce et Decorum Est. The poem takes the old saying from 2000 years ago, "It is sweet and fitting to die for one's country," and exposes it as a lie.

These poets are still using the ways of the romantic, but their structures and rhymes just make things more grim, like in Suicide in the Trenches. Sasson's poetry greatly influenced TS Eliot and other poets of the modern movement.

## The moderns

After WWI, the modern movement led by TS Eliot became the default for what we think of poetry today. These poets employed structures in poetry only to destroy them. They mocked the past with gritty realism in their poems. Yeats and Eliot made many things possible in poetry that were impossible before. Their grim realism, cued in many ways by the war poets, changed poetry, but the structures were still there.

## The Imaginists

At the same time that the war poets and the moderns (many feel the Imaginists were part of the modern movement), the Imaginist William Carlos Williams was writing. He didn't get a lot of attention at the time. Williams' poetry was nothing like poetry at the time at all. It was just writing like his famous poem:

**This is Just to Say**  
by William Carlos Williams

This Is To Say  
I have eaten  
the plums  
that was in  
the icebox  
and which  
you were probably  
saving  
for breakfast  
Forgive me  
they were delicious  
so sweet

Only a few poems had been written like this at the time. Williams dispelled everything known about poetry for centuries, but the world changed after WWI. William Carlos Williams was ahead of his time. For the next 40 years and through WWII, poetry would change until it finally landed on the Beats.

## The Beats

World War I taught poets not to be romantic about war and life, and World War II taught them all bets were off. The Beats were anti structure, anti society, anti conventions. They were the rebels of writing and poetry. William Carlos Williams' writing became very popular among them. This movement destroyed the rest of the justification of rhyming and structure in poetry. It made poetry about feeling and passion. Writers like Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, William Blake, and Diane di Prima changed poetry. This changed the default of poetry

# What are We?

by Wendy Montoya

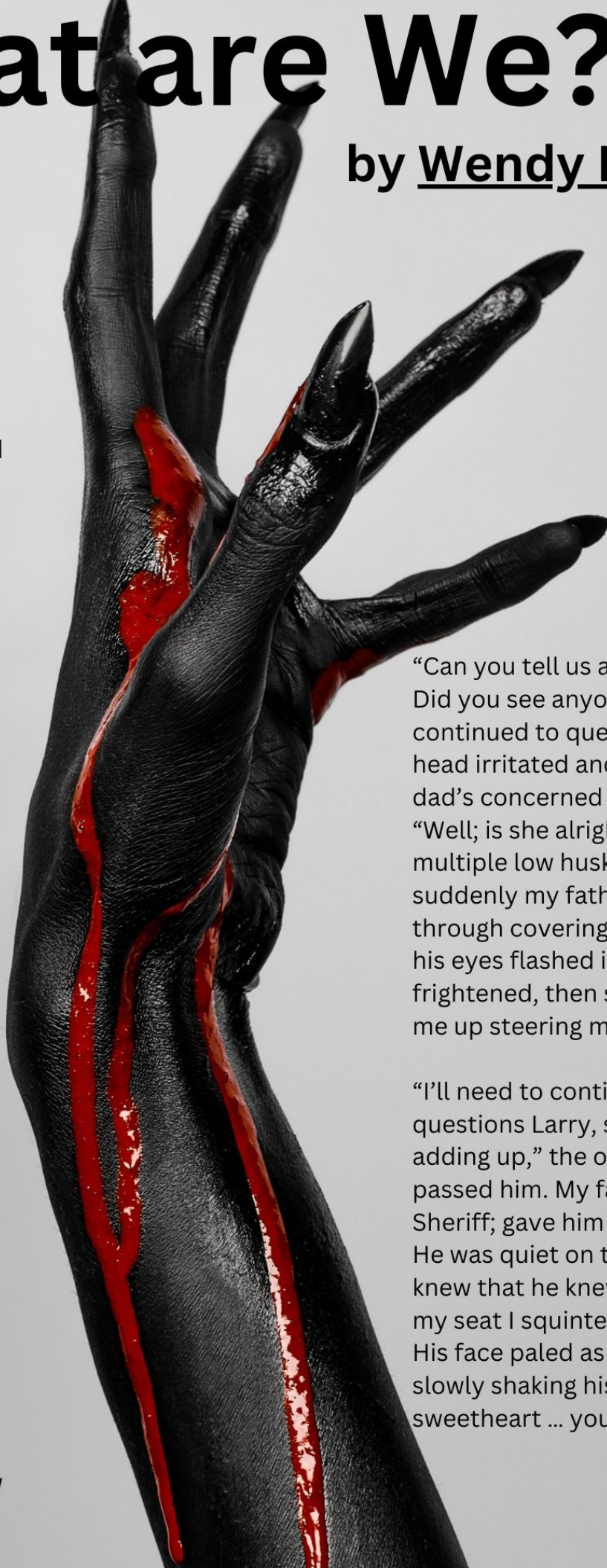
I wasn't comfortable here, I should have just said "no!" The house was abandoned, and from what Kelly confessed to me while driving here, made me angry. How could she and Marco's go behind my back she knew we just broke up? I sighed. My heart raced as we got out of the car to the sounds of the beating bongos; Marco's is here. I stood in the corner of the flashing lights watching his proud face and grinned even though I hated him for what he did to me. "Anya" the familiar voice called my name; I stumbled over a few people sitting on the floor playing spin the bottle.

"Idiots" I grumbled, making my way to the kitchen where Kelly stood with the new guy James I think? That's all I can remember.

It was silent in the room as I glanced around at the bloody scene. The top of bongos were splashed with blood, and Marco's hands no longer attached to his body were settled on top. I cringed and turned to throw up.

"Can you tell us anything else Anya? Did you see anyone?" the officer continued to question me. I shook my head irritated and dizzy. I heard my dad's concerned voice from outside. "Well; is she alright?" there were multiple low husky voices, Then suddenly my father pushed his way through covering his nose at the scene his eyes flashed in my direction frightened, then suddenly he grabbed me up steering me to the door.

"I'll need to continue asking her questions Larry, somethings not adding up," the officer said as we passed him. My father who is the Sheriff; gave him one stiff nod. He was quiet on the ride home, and I knew that he knew I did it, turning in my seat I squinted 'what are we?' His face paled as he turned to me slowly shaking his head "not we, sweetheart ... you!"



from rhyme and structure to free verse. Passion was their only rule.

## Contemporary Poetry

After all the work to dispel the structures of poetry and turn to passion, asking Should Poetry Rhyme seems a little empty. At one time, rhyme and structure in poetry were expected. All the struggling factions of the 20th century have morphed this question into, Why Does it Rhyme? Why are you using that structure? Like everything else

in writing, there should be a reason for doing that.

## Editors today

I know some editors who are very much turned off by rhyming poetry. They will publish it, but they shy away from it. That's the best way to say it. If there is an apparent reason for the rhyme, the poem follows a structure, like a sonnet or a sestina, for example, then it gives the poet credibility. There are people, poets, and nonpoets out there who feel like all poetry should rhyme. They grew up on the classics and don't understand how poetry can be written

without structure and rhyme. The answer is above. Poets fought for years and years to make poetry accepted regardless of its structure, so if you are rhyming just because you think poetry should rhyme, you are ignoring generations of great poets who fought conventions to bring poetry into the 21st century.

So let us know your thoughts in the comments. Do you prefer rhyming poetry?###



**Every Writer Turns 25!**



# 50

## MARKETING MISTAKES THAT AUTHORS MAKE

EVERYWRITER

Marketing a book effectively takes strategic planning, creativity and persistence. Even seasoned authors can miss the mark sometimes. With the competitive modern publishing landscape, it's crucial to avoid common book marketing mistakes that sabotage your chance of success.

Here are 50 marketing mistakes that authors make time and time again so you can sidestep them in your own book promotion efforts. Whether you're a first-time author preparing for launch or a veteran writer seeking to improve, this extensive list will help you identify areas where you may be going wrong and provide insights on how to course-correct.

From not defining your target reader to solely relying on Amazon, many marketing missteps stem from lack of research, inadequate planning and unrealistic expectations. By learning from other authors' errors, you can save yourself time, money and disappointment. I've also included brief explanations of each mistake so you understand exactly why it should be avoided.

With a mix of big picture strategy errors and smaller but equally significant tactical slip-ups, these 50 marketing mistakes cover the full range of activities and platforms self-published authors handle themselves nowadays. My goal is to help you approach your

book promotion with realistic expectations, the right priorities and effective techniques.

Avoiding these common pitfalls will set you on the path to marketing success and turn what is usually an overwhelming, complex process into an organized, streamlined one. So read on to make sure your precious marketing time and dollars are invested wisely!

1. Not having a clear target audience – Not defining your ideal reader makes it hard to create content that resonates with them.



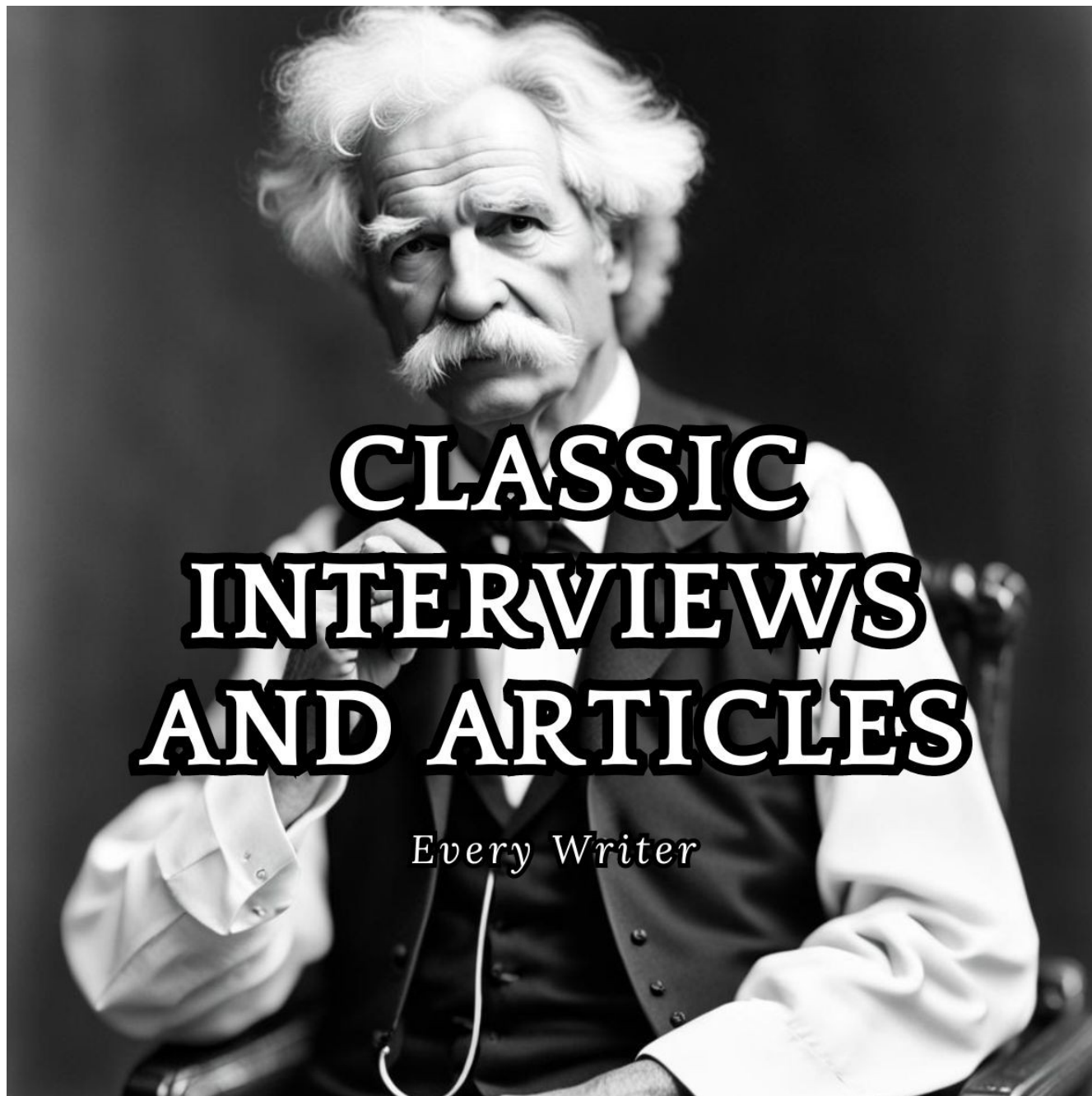
2. Weak book title and cover – The title and cover are the first touchpoints so they need to grab attention and convey what the book is about.
3. No book description – Write an intriguing, succinct description to summarize the plot and hook readers.
4. Not using metadata – Optimize metadata like keywords, categories and subcategories so readers can easily find your book online.
5. Ignoring SEO – Use relevant keywords, tags and alt text so your website and listings rank higher in search engines.
6. No marketing plan – Have a strategy with specific goals, target audience, platforms, content plan and timeline.
7. Waiting until launch – Start building buzz and an audience months before launch date through soft marketing.
8. Ignoring reviews – Reviews build credibility so proactively request them on retailers like Amazon and Goodreads.
9. Not promoting anywhere – Actively promote your book across multiple platforms to maximize reach.
10. Info dumping – Avoid overwhelming followers with long posts. Keep content short, visual and engaging.
11. Irregular posting – Post consistently so you stay top of mind. Share excerpts, tidbits, prizes etc.
12. Hard selling – Focus on sharing value vs. sounding salesy. Build relationships.
13. Not responding – Promptly respond to reader comments and questions to provide good service.
14. Automating everything – Automate some posts but also personally interact with readers.
15. Ignoring analytics – Track performance to identify what content and platforms resonate best. Refine ineffective efforts.
16. Not re-engaging – Continuously re-engage with past customers through new content, offers etc.
17. Forgetting calls to action – Always include a clear CTA in content to get readers to take action.
18. Waiting for traction – Gaining traction takes time. Persist with marketing efforts even if you don't see immediate results.
19. Not evolving tactics – As you grow, evolve tactics instead of relying only on what worked initially.
20. Forgetting the long game – Book marketing is an ongoing effort. Persist for the long-term even after launch.
21. No email list – Build an email list to regularly engage with readers. Offer opt-in incentives.
22. Ignoring formats – Make your book available in different formats like ebook, print, audio to reach more readers.
23. Vanity press – Avoid publishers that charge you. They are not motivated to market the book.
24. Overpricing – Price competitively based on factors like genre, length, production cost and perceived value.
25. Underpricing – Pricing too low can give the impression your book is low quality or value.
26. Not using pre-orders – Allow readers to pre-order months before release date to boost launch rankings.
27. Ignoring back matter – Include bonuses like sample

- chapters in the back matter to generate interest.
28. Not offering bonuses – Free workbooks, guides etc. add value for readers and incentivize purchases.
29. Relying solely on Amazon – Make your book available across multiple online/offline retailers and platforms.
30. Ignoring in-person events – Do book readings, signings and speaking events to connect with local readers.
31. Not following up – Follow up with media contacts you pitch to build ongoing relationships.
32. Waiting too long for next book – Release your next book within 12-18 months since readers forget quickly.
33. Ignoring recurring revenue – Consider membership programs, courses etc. for ongoing income beyond book sales.
34. Not segmenting audience – Tailor messaging and content to different reader demographics.
35. Using only free tactics – Combine free and paid marketing for optimal impact according to your budget.
36. Not testing – Test pricing, covers, ad copy etc. to see what resonates most with your audience.
37. Focusing on bestsellers – Look beyond bestseller lists and connect with niche communities aligned to your book topic.
38. No marketing help – Consider hiring a book marketing expert if self-marketing is overwhelming.
39. Thinking launch is enough – Sustained marketing post-launch is crucial for long term success.
40. No post-launch plan – Have a calendar of activities to keep momentum going after initial launch dies down.
41. Not networking – Network and cross-promote with other authors in your genre.
42. Ignoring local opportunities – Look for local book signing events, radio shows etc. to connect with readers in your area.
43. Not tracking ROI – Track and measure marketing efforts to determine ROI and optimize spend.
44. Not optimizing website – Ensure website is optimized with calls-to-action, SEO elements etc. to drive book sales.
45. Over relying on social ads – While social ads have a role, have diverse marketing channels to avoid overspend.
46. Not tracking analytics – Use Google Analytics and social listening tools to gain consumer insights.
47. No media kit – Have a media kit with book assets, bio, press release etc. ready to send to influencers.
48. Ignoring video – Leverage book trailers, author interviews etc. to engage visual audiences.
49. No email signup on site – Have a clear call-to-action on site for visitors to join your email list.
50. Not prioritizing email – Email marketing helps maintain consistent engagement so focus on growing your list.
- Book marketing doesn't have to be frustrating and futile. By being aware of the most common mistakes authors make, you can avoid falling into the same traps in your own promotional efforts. Focus on understanding your target audience, planning sustainably for the long haul,

providing value rather than sales pitches, and diversifying your marketing across paid, owned and earned channels. With persistence, creativity and the help of an experienced book marketing strategist if needed, you can make smart

decisions that set you up for success both during launch and well beyond. Remember that there is no silver bullet or overnight sensation route. Consistent, strategic marketing across multiple platforms tailored to your

book and audience will help turn your book into the breakthrough bestseller you envision. ###





A STORY

# THE MANHATTAN CLUB

BY JOHN RC POTTER

In the early 1990s I had just emerged from a long-term relationship (my first as, and with, a young gay man) that ended with more of a whimper than a bang. Being pro-active by nature, and more social than I am now, I decided that my sister and closest friends and I would benefit from a weekly get-together over cocktails; like me, most of them were at the end or in-between relationships, or in at least one case, bored with the status quo. We were all in our early to mid-thirties, the tail end of the Baby Boomer generation. At the time, my cocktail of choice was a Manhattan, and it was also favoured by my sister and our closest friends. I was living in a charming, red brick building

(reminiscent of those you find in NYC) in what is called the 'Old South' part of London, which was on a side street that meandered along in a curve above the winding Thames River. If you are wondering just where 'Old South' is in London, I am referring to the little London that is in Canada, not the Jolly Olde London that is in one of my favourite cities in the world! The London in question has its history and city plan modelled on its illustrious British namesake, which is 'across the pond' (an expression often used by Canadians). Aside from taking its name from its predecessor, as well as the presence of the aforementioned Thames River, there is a Regent Street and

other regular reminders that the Canadian city was firmly founded, and remains rooted in, the mother country.

The Manhattan Club was formed for a specific reason, as indicated above, and indeed flourished. It was the social gathering that we 'members' looked forward to each week, and in time our little group became so well known to other friends and acquaintances of ours, that some of them wanted to be included. However, we maintained the membership of the original group throughout most of the early to mid-1990s: me; my sister, Barb (who had recently become single after surviving a difficult relationship with a narcissistic and mercurial,

albeit Adonis-like in appearance, man); our long-time friend, Dan (in-and-out of challenging relationships with men at the time); Dan's gal pal, Sharon (who had been recently and happily divorced, and bonded with Barb); Ted (a handsome single gay man, content to be in pursuit of fun rather than a commitment at the time); as well as the only couple, Michael and Mark (you can now connect the dots about the status quo comment; no reflection on these two great guys who were both in first relationships).

At what we came to call our Manhattan Club 'meetings,' we would discuss the latest episodes of our favourite television series: Seinfeld and Friends; or give our individual comments on favoured films: The Bodyguard and The Crying Game; as well as played the music of preferred singers: Whitney Houston and Madonna. However, the focus of each get-together was the celebrated and eagerly-awaited Manhattan, our cocktail of choice: it was chilled with much ice, made with Canadian Club rye whiskey, Martini & Rossi vermouth, Angostura bitters, and the crowning glory, a plump and ruby-red cherry – just to be a bit decadent, we also sometimes added some juice from the cherry jar! Cocktail lovers in general and Manhattan sophisticates in particular who are reading this



story will possibly raise an eyebrow or two at the choice of rye whiskey (Canadian, no less!) over bourbon, or at the addition of cherry juice. We liked our Manhattan's to be strong, sweet, and cold. We took to paraphrasing that delightful writer and wit, Dorothy Parker and would chant, "I love a Manhattan/But two at the most/three, I'm under the table/four, I'm under the host." In view that on most of these illustrious, Manhattan-fuelled occasions I was the host, no doubt I was usually the one raising the spectre of Miss Parker's spirit and intoning what is perhaps her most famous ditty! In ensuing

years, my friends and I switched to Martini's as the libation of choice and then we really could chant Dorothy Parker's witty ditty without having to paraphrase.

These cocktail gatherings on weekends usually were a prelude to going out to our favourite watering holes in the city: sometimes to gay clubs but other times we went to straight bars that were popular with baby boomers of our generation. We were enjoying our status as young, professional singles (although as mentioned two of our group were in a live-in relationship). Aside from our Manhattan Club 'meetings', we enjoyed

going out for dinner to a range of fine-dining restaurants, and on Sundays often had brunch together at a favoured café near Blackfriar's Bridge, owned and operated by a personable gay woman named Marla. At the time, Barb's Pekingese dog had the same name: Marla. Thus, sometimes the hostess/waitress thought we were talking about her. I recall one time when Barb made a comment about Marla's hair being too long and always getting in her eyes, at which our waitress Marla turned around from the cash register and raised her eyebrows. When we explained about the 'other Marla' we all had a good laugh about the misunderstanding.

The Manhattan Club was a fun-loving group, making jokes and bantering, discussing a variety of topics of interest to us. Anyone looking at us when we were together at a bar or in a restaurant would have thought we had nary a worry in the world. But of course, that was not the case. The 1980s had been a frightening time for gays the world over due to the devastating reality of AIDS. Although by the early-mid 90s the spectre of AIDS was not quite as alarming due to medications, it still at all times hung over the gay community like the proverbial Sword of Damocles. Our friend, Ted had been secretive for a long time about his diagnosis, which was totally understandable.

Eventually, everyone in our Manhattan Club group had been informed but due to Ted's very private nature, we did not broach the subject with him. He was on medication that was maintaining his health and allowing the HIV to be kept in check. Ted was stunningly good-looking; in fact, the expression 'tall, dark, and handsome' could have been created with him in mind. Moreover, he was also intelligent, charming, and affable. At all times, it was enjoyable to be in Ted's presence; he was a wonderful conversationalist but also an attentive listener.

Eventually, Ted met a man from Toronto and fell in love. They had a long-distance relationship and Ted was contemplating a professional and personal move to be with his partner. The Manhattan Club by the mid-90s was moving along and changing too. Some members of the group were no longer single but dating seriously or living with someone. I had been a teacher since the late 80s but by this point, I was seriously considering a professional move overseas into international education. One evening I went into a popular take-out or sit-in delicatessen in the city centre and saw Ted there, so we decided to take our trays to a table and have a catch-up. Due to his relationship and frequent trips



to Toronto I had not seen very much of him over the past few months. Ted told me about the possibility of moving to Toronto, which meant giving up his apartment and leaving his job. Ted had a dark complexion and always looked healthy; however, whilst we sat and ate our meals, I noticed how pinched and drawn his face appeared when he was not smiling. Ted told me about feeling listless and without energy but was looking forward to a change in his life with the proposed move to Toronto.

It was not long afterwards that my friend, Dan (who was Ted's best friend) informed me that Ted had received bad news.

His blood cell count was off the wall. From that point, it all happened so quickly. In a desperate attempt to not become a statistic, Ted made the unfortunate decision to try an experimental drug. The result was disastrous. Ted's health quickly went downhill and within weeks had passed away. It was the summer of 1995 and Ted was only in his mid-30s. It was a devastating blow to his family and friends. The Manhattan Club and its members had been changing by then anyway. Ted's death hastened the desire to discontinue any further get-togethers of what had once been a fun-loving group of young people that had a future of possibilities ahead of them.

On the 10th anniversary of Ted's passing, I returned for an annual summer visit to Canada. In a tribute to our dear friend, Dan, Sharon, and I drove to the cemetery where Ted had been laid to rest a decade earlier. We had brought all the required items for a Manhattan Club get-together: cocktail glasses, Canadian Club rye whiskey, Martini & Rossi vermouth, Angostura bitters, cherries, and ice. At his tombstone we raised our glasses to the memory of Ted, thinking of him in particular and the Manhattan Club in general; and at the transitory, random, and precious nature of our lives.###

# Road Kill

by John RC Potter

I saw a raccoon lying on the side of the road last night  
on his back, freshly dead, his paws raised in supplication;  
he reminded me of me:  
but can the dead still be moved through manipulation?

Whenever I see raccoons lying dead on the road,  
they remind me of all those who have loved and lost:  
dead and dying hearts on this endless highway of love,  
whose owners took a chance but at quite a high cost.

I saw a raccoon dying on the side of the road last night  
on his back, still alive, wondering what had happened to him;  
he reminded me of me:  
just a heap on the highway of love as the light grows dim.

John RC Potter is a gay man from Canada, living in Istanbul, and an international educator (currently university counsellor, formerly principal & teacher). He has experienced a revolution (Indonesia), air strikes (Israel), earthquakes (Turkey), boredom (UAE), and blinding snow blizzards (Canada), the last being the subject of his story, "Snowbound in the House of God" (Memoirist, May 2023). His poems and stories have been published in a range of magazines and journals, most recently in Blank Spaces, ("In Search of Alice Munro", June 2023), Literary Yard ("She Got What She Deserved", June 2023) & Freedom Fiction ("The Mystery of the Dead-as-a-Doornail Author", July 2023). [John RC Potter – Author Website \(author-blog.org\)](http://JohnRCPotter-AuthorWebsite(author-blog.org))

# COLD SHOULDER

BY HUGH CARTWRIGHT

Freshly dead, she was pinned to the desk by a knife. Smears of blood oozed between his fingers and dripped to the floor.

She'd been smart, loyal, an indispensable sidekick. Her high-speed repartee entertained visitors to the Maritime Museum far more than his plodding stories of buccaneer life. But gradually her wit slowed, her off-the-cuff one-liners lost their edginess, and her creativity fell away. Eventually, she did little more than posturing and strutting, occasionally whistling sea shanties at the visitors.

As tourists began to desert the Museum, he knew that a younger, more vibrant partner was essential; without one, his role as the Museum's chief story-teller would be at an end. And yet he couldn't allow her to remain. This was home; he knew that she would always be hanging around, making life impossible for any newcomer. There was no alternative – she must die.

He stroked her soft, cooling body, sighed, and tried to pull himself together. At last, he turned away and sat down. Time to move on.

He took out his cell phone, took a deep breath and typed "Exotic birds". As his tears began to soak into the corpse he gasped: the price of a replacement Scarlet Macaw was impossibly high. His partner and his livelihood both gone in an instant.



Hugh lives in the Pacific Northwest, where writing provides a diversion from his doomed attempts to grow Canadian oranges. His stories have appeared in Nature Futures, Foxglove Journal, Meniscus, The Drabble, Grey Sparrow Journal, Flashes of Brilliance, Toasted Cheese, and elsewhere.



# Pretty Lights by John Frank Haugh

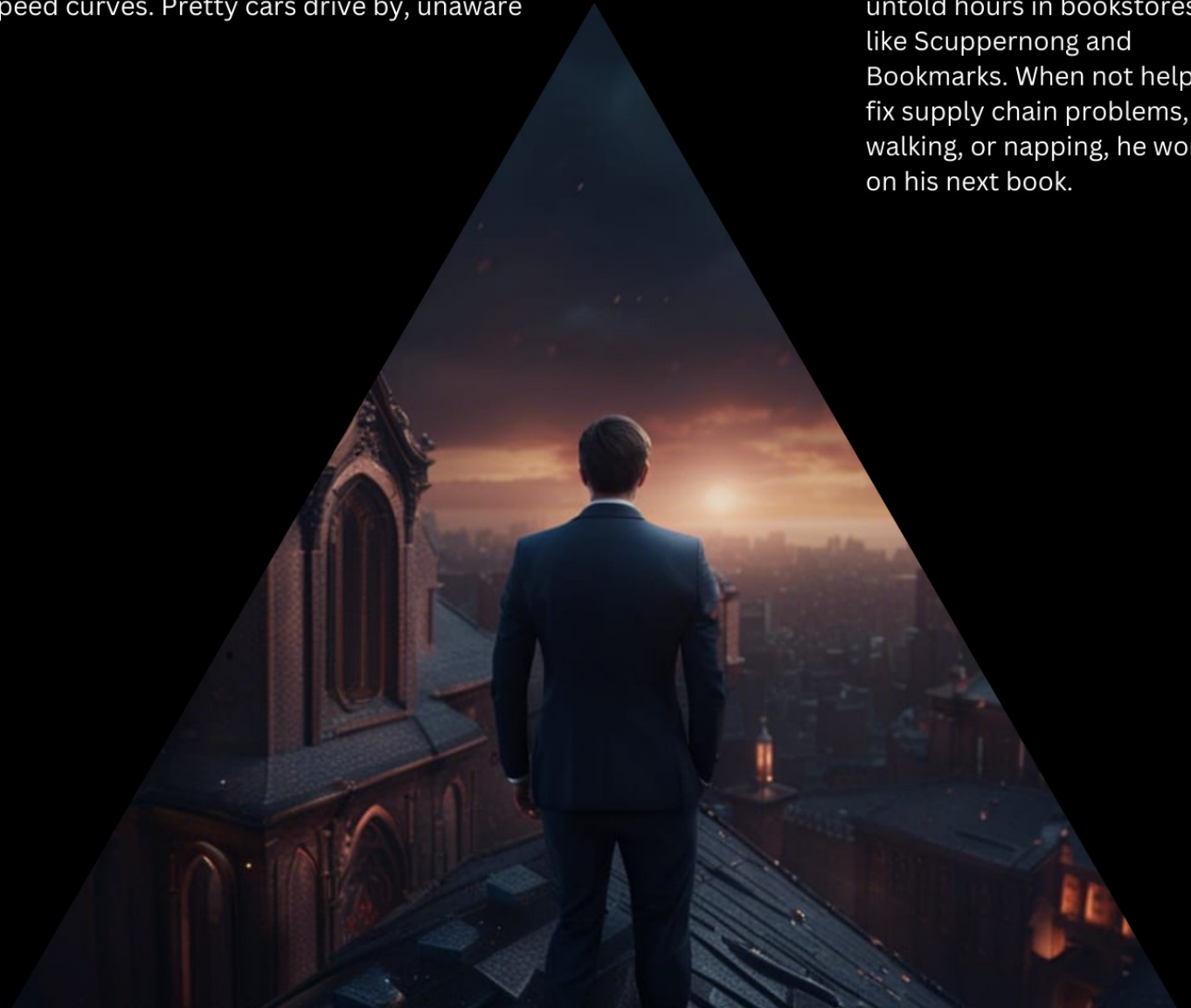
Pretty Lights Nine days left in his twenty-ninth year the Businessman slips silent from Claustrophobia House. He climbs shadows, stands on a darkened church roof.

Four hundred bucks, a bus ticket, a backpack with apple & paperback. A long wool coat scratchy-sodden wet, tight at shoulder and hip. I bought a birth certificate,

it carries a different name. Two cement block are three sixty two, at Lowes. Pretty cars pass. I could leave my overpass note or river bridge note as if jumping, then Greyhound. Walk on, consider.

Weight paper with cement or drop a block? I could almost take out one of the lights streaming below, tonight. Block through glass as they speed curves. Pretty cars drive by, unaware

John Frank Haugh's writing has been published in storySouth, The North Carolina Literary Review, Notre Dame Magazine, Main Street Rag, Rat's Ass Review, The Wall Street Journal, and elsewhere. He won the 2022 Randall Jarrell Poetry Prize, was selected for Poetry in Plain Sight, a couple anthologies, and other things. Haugh lives in Greensboro North Carolina, was a good fencer once, and spends untold hours in bookstores like Scuppernong and Bookmarks. When not helping fix supply chain problems, walking, or napping, he works on his next book.



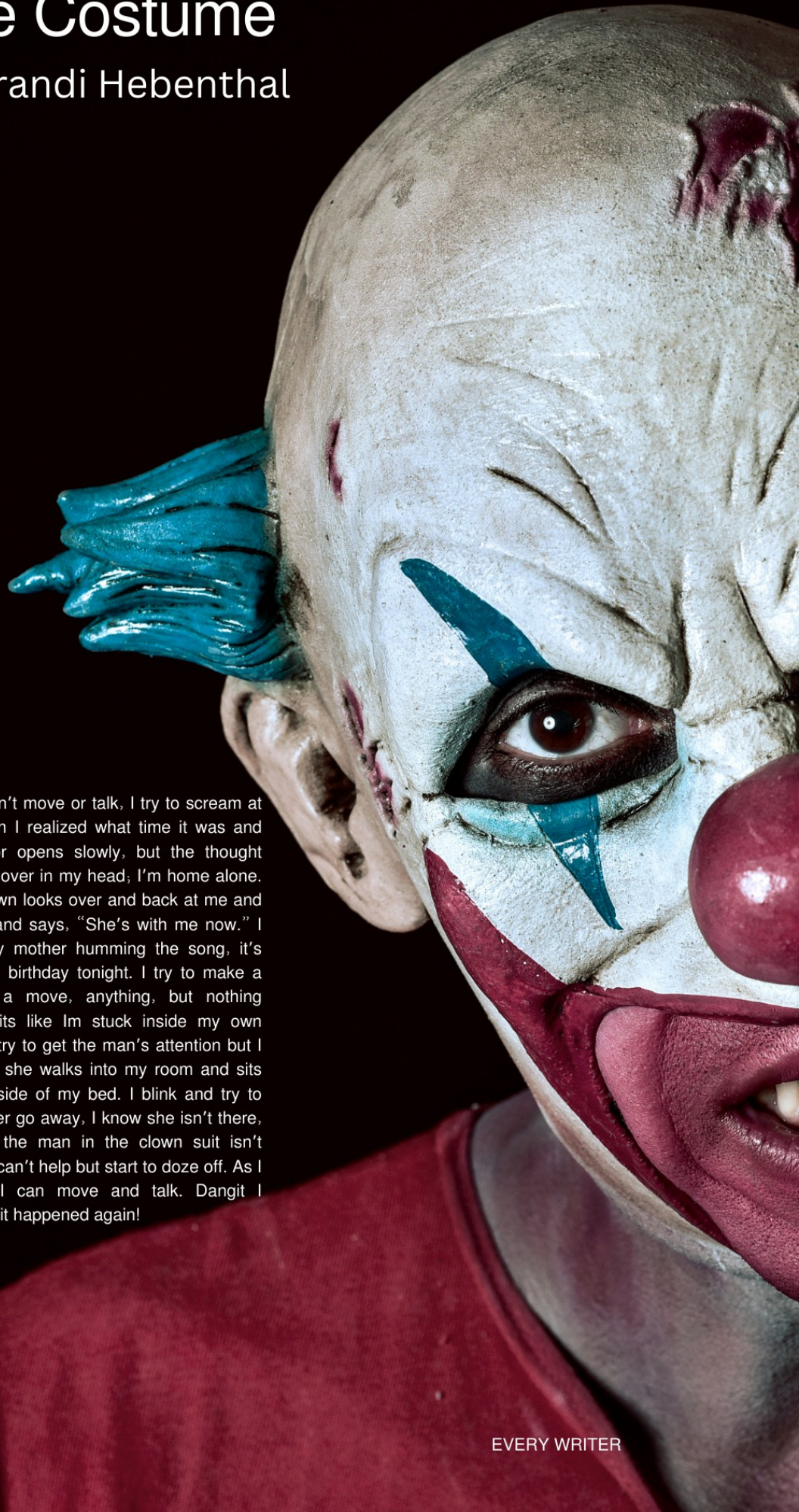
# The Man in the Costume

by Brandi Hebenthal

As I see the reflection of what I think is a knife, I start to panic inside. I slowly look up and the clown starts to chuckle. The clown has a creepy smile across his face. It starts to walk alongside the bed. I try to move and scream but I can't. He stops and looks at me with a tilted head. He walked over to the door and I thought it was my brother screwing around with me but the clown turns on the light. It's not even close to being my brother, the clown is tall and thin, my brother is shorter than this man. I try to move again but I can't even make a noise. As he gets closer he laughs a creepy sinister laugh. He gets back to the side of my bed and holds the knife up. He starts running his fingers on the blade and looks at me. The clown starts humming a song, a familiar song.

I know I've heard it before but where! All of a sudden I know, the song is a song I heard every night before bed up until age 10. My mother hummed it to me to help me sleep, she would lay down beside me and keep humming. I zone back in the flashback I had scared me because my mother died the night of my 10th birthday in a car accident. They said a car ran a red light and hit them, but they don't know who because it was a hit and run. They do know that whoever it was would have a scar across their face because they smashed their head off the windshield and broke it. I try to look at the face because the night of my birthday I heard the song being hummed but not by my mother. That's it I see it, the scar, it goes down the side of his face.

I still can't move or talk. I try to scream at him then I realized what time it was and the door opens slowly, but the thought repeats over in my head; I'm home alone. The clown looks over and back at me and smiles and says, "She's with me now." I hear my mother humming the song, it's my 15th birthday tonight. I try to make a sound, a move, anything, but nothing works; its like Im stuck inside my own body. I try to get the man's attention but I see her she walks into my room and sits on the side of my bed. I blink and try to make her go away, I know she isn't there, I know the man in the clown suit isn't there. I can't help but start to doze off. As I awake I can move and talk. Dangit I thought it happened again!





# 100 HORROR ROMANCE WRITING PROMPTS

EVERY WRITER

## 100 horror romance writing prompts

Sifting through this list of 100 horror romance writing prompts, it's clear that love often walks hand-in-hand with darkness. Passionate romance collides with obsession, mortal danger, and supernatural forces across captivating story ideas that put star-crossed lovers through chilling tests. Vampires and werewolves

prompt forbidden affairs full of temptation and transformation danger. Witches and demons seduce through sinister spells and dreams, obsessed not with death but eternally binding their helpless mortal lover. Ghosts haunt the living, envious of renewed passions or refusing to surrender their own romance across the veil. Psychics channel dead soulmates while mediums fall prey to specters demanding devotion. These prompts rife with classic creatures place vulnerable hearts on terrifying paths. Lovers contend with undead soulmates, infectious monster transformations, lethal seductions, and timeless curses binding passion across forbidden boundaries between life and death. Lonely roads,

crumbling castles, and disturbing small towns provide ominous settings where romance breeds supernatural threats and deranged delusions.

With compelling scenarios ripe for mining psychological and visceral thrills, these prompts offer fertile ground for horror tales that traverse the startling intersection between yearning intimacy and sinister secrecy. Whether facing threats from a lover's haunting past, dangerous infection, or return from the grave, devoted protagonists must confront the frightening extremes love can reach. As the prompts poignantly explore, the deepest bonds often come entwined with

darkness – and the most lasting romances must survive threats both natural and supernatural. These chilling tales follow lovers willing to go to macabre lengths for everything from one last embrace to an eternal pact, braving surreal and terrifying trials to satisfy the heart's deepest yearnings and fears.

Here are 50 horror romance writing prompts:

1. A vampire falls in love with a human florist, tempted by both love and hunger whenever they meet.
2. Two nurses slowly fall for each other during late night shifts at the hospital, until one starts seeing ghosts that threaten their budding relationship.
3. A witch's dangerous obsession with a human man leads her to cast ominous spells in order to have him.
4. A young couple's romance is complicated when one starts exhibiting signs of turning into a werewolf.
5. The ghost of a deceased wife haunts her husband's dates with a new lover – until an attraction grows between all three.
6. While backpacking through Eastern Europe, two students take shelter for the night in an ancient castle rumored to house a bloodthirsty spirit.
7. A coroner slowly falls for an alluring woman after multiple suspicious deaths, not knowing she may be a siren luring men to their doom.
8. A man discovers an alluring female demon has been invading his dreams at night to slowly seduce him.
9. Two rival vampire clans cannot deny the passion between the head vampire's daughter and a vampire from the enemy coven.
10. A powerful necromancer brings his beautiful, deceased wife back from dead, slowly realizing she's returned as a bloodthirsty reverent.
11. A serial killer on death row places a hex on a true crime author falling in love with him during prison visits.
12. An undying, centuries-old witch tries to revive her long lost mortal lover by making pacts with dangerous forces.
13. A haunted doll serves as a vessel for a deceased woman to fall back in love with her still-living husband.
14. A grim reaper breaks the rules to save the soul of a woman he's fallen for right before her untimely death.
15. A man is irresistibly drawn to a lover whom he suspects is slowly and subtly draining his life force when they kiss.
16. A descendant of Salem witches faces a stark choice between her coven and her star-crossed love with a troubled psychic medium.
17. A lone spaceship crew member starts a perilous affair with a beautiful stowaway vampire on a 25-year journey to a distant new planet.
18. A mad scientist resurrects his lover in a secret laboratory, slowly descending into greater obsession and depravity to keep her by his side.
19. A brokenhearted phantom unable to move on from the realm of the living tries to reconnect with her husband by inhabiting the body of a lookalike.
20. A modern descendant of Dr. Frankenstein uses strange machinery and forbidden

- methods to revive his deceased bride.
21. A widow stays overnight at a haunted bed and breakfast to scatter her late husband's ashes, only to soon become romantically entangled with his jealous ghost.
22. A demon preys upon lonely individuals through their dreams at night, slowly draining their life force after making them fall obsessively in love.
23. A cryogenically frozen woman awakens in the distant future to find her lover has used strange technologies to make himself immortal for her.
24. The terrifying ghost of a deceased man appears to warn his heartbroken fiancée away from impending danger, unable to directly reveal the threat.
25. A female mortician is suspected of foul play when past dead lovers seemingly return to romance her once again.
26. A cemetery worker becomes dangerously obsessed with a beautiful young widow who visits her late husband's grave every day.
27. The only survivor of a deadly train accident is horrifically disfigured but forms a bond with a strange savior from the spirit realm.
28. Two eternal soulmates repeatedly find each other reincarnated over time, while trying to avoid the wrath of an obsessed enemy from a past life.
29. Strange bite marks appear on a woman's skin after steamy encounters with a new hypnotically alluring date she met online.
30. A siren must choose between devouring a besotted sailor she rescued from drowning and her first chance at true love.
31. A man and woman tragically take their lives in a suicide pact, not realizing their ghosts are eternally bound together on the mortal plane.
32. A powerful necromancer resurrects a army of corpses to launch a bloody war against the medieval vampire coven that killed his beloved.
33. A deceased wife visits her husband's dreams nightly in erotic and tempting visions aiming to drain his life force.
34. The hereditary rituals intended to keep an eldritch horror asleep beneath a small isolated village force the members to intermarry over generations...including two cousins who secretly fall in love.
35. A woman investigates why she is mysteriously drawn to and haunted by her charming new neighbor who seems to never sleep at night.
36. A man is seduced by a beautiful woman at a masquerade ball who vanishes at the stroke of midnight, plunging him into a shadowy underworld to find her again.
37. A sultry vampire muse inspires a struggling artist to produce his best work through continuous nocturnal visitations, slowly draining him of life.
38. A team of 19th century Spiritualists claim to summon the alluring spirit of a widow's dearly departed husband to her during seances...but the woman slowly grows

suspicious of the nature of this ghostly visitor.

39. Lost in a sinister forest, a couple is tormented by a woodland fairy enamored with the lovers and determined to keep them captive together with her forever in the darkened woods.

40. A woman researching local folklore to debunk rumors of monsters falls for the intriguing stranger newly arrived in town, unaware he is far more than mortal.

41. A mad doctor returns from studies in Europe to win the affection of his beloved by using strange serums and potions to transform himself into her ideal, immortal romantic vision.

42. An ageless undead count living in a crumbling seaside castle finds his decades of isolation and melancholy eased by a kind, understanding writer who travels to interview him.

43. A grieving painter creates lifelike images of his late romantic partner, only to become obsessed with visions of her beckoning him from beyond the grave at night.

44. A mortal woman seeks to resurrect a forbidden passion with her shapeshifting demon ex-lover, unleashing dangerous forces from realms beyond life and death.

45. After moving to New Orleans, a skeptical writer discovers voodoo rituals can seemingly allow him to reunite and communicate with his deceased fiancé across the veil of death.

46. A digital app developer creates “ReUnite” – a new program allowing lonely clients to digitally recreate deceased loved ones as romantically obsessed AIs who vow never to leave them.

47. A cryonics company mysteriously offers free revival to recently deceased clients; when the frozen lover of a grieving customer awakens, she is obsessively devoted to staying by his side forever.

48. A couple crash lands at an isolated mountain estate; snowbound for the winter, they slowly uncover its inhabitants are immortal – and hungry for new companions.

49. While investigating her grandmother’s suspicious new

lover, a woman discovers unsettling facts about his past partners, who all mysteriously vanished after falling desperately in love with him.

50. An Egyptian archaeologist foolishly awakens an ancient evil by collecting artifacts belonging to a star-crossed legendary affair between a young queen and powerful high priest in millennia past.

51. A psychiatrist falls in love with a mysterious new patient, slowly realizing she is a medium channeling the spirit of his deceased ex-wife who refuses to let him go.

52. A widow visiting her husband’s grave makes a bargain with a shifter to have one more magical evening back together, then realizes the payment he demands is her own soul.

53. After moving into a rural old mansion, a couple discovers a set of old love letters that unleash a century’s old forbidden passion haunting the estate.

54. An archaeologist resurrects a mummified Egyptian princess by reading aloud ancient love poems used in rituals to beckon deceased

lovers – only to become the object of the undead royal's mad obsession across time.

55. In the aftermath of a deadly shipwreck, a mysterious mute woman is the lone survivor – triggering a Coast Guard officer's protective instincts as well as uneasy attraction.

56. A war photographer capturing strange happenings in the ruins of Syria finds a lover amidst the rubble – but she seems to shift disturbingly between life and death.

57. A scientist clones his deceased, beloved wife from DNA but cannot replicate her soul – so he attempts a dangerous process to lure back her spirit from the afterlife.

58. Only one family survives a post-apocalyptic event in their rural hometown, realizing the lone newcomer who arrives soon after is far more – and far less – than human.

59. A widower falls in love with a lifelike android replica built in his departed wife's image by a tech firm promising immortal companionship – but glitches reveal an emerging violent side to his dream lover.

60. Nightly visits from the specter of a pining widow's deceased husband seed distrust in her new romance with the reserved man next door.

61. A teen couple finds the lake through a hidden trail behind an abandoned campground, unaware that its pristine waters hide the vengeful ghosts of jilted lovers past.

62. A mournful poet trapped between life and death tries to reconnect across the void with her bereaved mortal lover by sending him symbolic messages only the two soulmates understand.

63. A brokenhearted man travels across misty moors to an isolated inn where he encounters the spitting image of his dead romantic obsession – is she an amorous ghost or mysterious immortal?

64. A band of Victorian spiritualists' attempts to contact dead lovers awakens far more than comforting spirits of the departed from the spectral plane.

65. A woman researching old family records discovers her grandmother had a passionate, star-crossed love

story in Sicily...with a nobleman long rumored to be an immortal blood drinker.

66. In the aftermath of survived tragedy a survivor guilt-ridden man cannot determine if his new lover is an emotional anchor – or a dangerous siren determined to draw him back to a watery doom.

67. A grieving widow visiting a seaside artist colony catches the eye of a troubled, secretive painter whose romantic overtures hide a deadly ulterior motive linked to his past.

68. Two rival stage magicians become embroiled in a dangerous game of alliances with sinister forces beyond mortal understanding in order to destroy each other and win the affections of a mysterious illusionist's assistant – who hides phenomenal powers and deadly secrets of her own.

69. A wax museum's remarkably lifelike displays trigger eerie visions for a psychic empath tour guide who discovers one handsome Civil War soldier's sculpture houses the restless, lovelorn ghost of a long dead soul.

70. A clinical trial offering free treatment for dementia patients has a sinister ulterior motive for two star-crossed lovers separated by advancing memory loss.
71. The grieving ghost of a deceased man's jilted fiancée cannot rest until she destroys the happiness he has found in the arms of his new lover.
72. A widower doctor resurrects his drowned lover using strange serums, electricity, and transplantations from fresh corpses – but she returns soulless, bloodthirsty, and insatiable.
73. An archaeologist ignores warnings not to read forbidden ancient chants aloud, unintentionally summoning the enraged spirit lovers buried alive for their taboo affair centuries ago.
74. A troubled film archivist discovers celluloid proof of his grandfather's secret life and illicit affair with a mysterious silent cinema siren who never ages across the decades of footage.
75. All who dare spend the night in an abandoned Paris opera house are haunted
- through the darkened halls by the dark, seductive voice of infamous spectral diva said to drown her lovers in eternal song.
76. A hapless bachelor joins eerie betrothal rituals hoping to impress an aloof prospective bride of mythical bloodline, unaware he is merely fresh prey for her immortal vampire lineage to slowly feast upon.
77. An unfaithful widower tries covering up his wife's strange demise only for her corpse to demonstrate an eerie, otherworldly attachment to him as it continues decaying within their home.
78. An amnesiac woman with no memory of how she washed ashore after a shipwreck captivates a reclusive coastal aristocrat hiding disturbing obsessions.
79. A resurrectionist robs graves to build a perfect lover from female corpses for his incel assistant only to create a sentient, scheming monster with delusions of an idyllic marriage.
80. A grieving man embraces his lover's bizarre feeding rituals before discovering she survives by slowly draining victims lured through an online dating site for widows and widowers.
81. A bereavement group's newest member shares her dark past involving a jealous poltergeist's ongoing efforts to destroy any relationship she pursues.
82. An aging mother tries hiding her vampire-like symptoms but her suspicious daughter starts secretly trailing the pallid, youthful stranger inviting her on late night strolls.
83. A widower's beloved late wife seemingly returns from death through cards, phone calls and emails but her increasingly threatening messages target his new relationship.
84. A grieving war photographer captured the pained last image of a soldier as he was cut down on the battlefield only to then become haunted by seeing that same handsome stranger reappear shimmering in backgrounds across danger zones.
85. A man inherits his uncle's decrepit French vineyard only to discover the robust



signature red wine crafted on premises since the 1700s owes its unique properties to being blended with fluids drained from the living by non-human vintners kept trapped below the property.

86. Rumors spread of bizarre rituals occurring in the penthouse suites of an exclusive seaside hotel when a string of wealthy widows each lose their latest husbands at the peak of the honeymoon then leave unexpectedly – but not before making generous donations.

87. A woman consulta a shady mystic promising to reconnect clients with deceased soulmates only to unleash a cruel specter from her lonely mark's past now demanding she relive their entire ill-fated romance.

88. A man is tempted by the siren song of a captivating, raven-haired club singer whose mournful ballads about her many doomed paramours seem to mystically manifest in the headlines after each performance.

89. A wife investigates after her new husband's personality changes following a crash, believing his body has become

hijacked by the amorous ghost of a deceased 1960s bad boy eager to resume his wild ways.

90. A secretive Anti-Valentine's Day gathering at an isolated lovers' lane playground results in obsessive mystical attachments forming between various attendees – and the increasingly deranged behaviors indicating dangerous consequences.

91. A widow visiting her husband's mist-shrouded grave nightly crosses paths with a charming stranger who shares eerie insights into her life almost like he inhabited her lost beloved's body.

92. A troubled psychic medium counsels the ghost of her client's late fiancé to move on rather than cling to his grief-stricken ex but soon realizes the cunning phantom has become dangerously attached to her instead.

93. A clinical study claims rich elderly participants will regain their youthful looks and vitality but the lone survivor of the experiments seems forever conditioned to leech life energy from fresh, smitten companions.

94. A grieving widow rents a seaside cottage to scatter her husband's ashes where they honeymooned but feels an uneasy sense he somehow already occupies its lonely rooms awaiting her.

95. A man brings his new paramour to meet his elder peasant relatives only to discover the isolated mountaintop village has sinister requirements for who the women must mate with to produce offspring.

96. A fresh divorcee pursues her alluring silver fox neighbor only to learn the upsetting reasons why his past marriages always crumbled apart within seemingly happy first years.

97. Local lore warns never to stray from marked paths in the ruin-strewn Scottish moors or risk encountering the remnants of the eternally damned Campbell clan warring nearby – but two daring travelers soon dismiss the tales after encountering a striking lord.

98. A widower doctor harvests glands from virile young men, using strange solutions in attempts to resurrect the aging countess with whom he

maintains a centuries-spanning affair whenever she emerges from her deathless slumber.

99. A clinical study for reversing the aging process seems effective on its elderly participants but the doctor's pulse quickens when recognizing his revived first love among thirsty, predatory test subjects displaying new nocturnal habits.

100. A man visiting his lover's ancestral Romanian castle uncovers old journals revealing she hails from a cursed bloodline before encountering irrefutable evidence she remains stunningly preserved centuries after her recorded death.

These 100 horror romance writing prompts demonstrate that when it comes to affairs of the heart, passion and terror

often go hand-in-hand. Whether driven by obsession, grief, or dangerous desire, the protagonists must walk an ominous line between profound affection and frightening extremity. The prompts explore love stories both tormented and eternal, with lovers willing to face unsettling obstacles for the chance at an everlasting bond. Ghostly soulmates, blood-bound vampire lovers, zombie spouses returned from the grave – no supernatural contrivance or excruciating sacrifice is too great when it comes to keeping or reviving a romantic connection from threats on either side of mortality.

With mixing cauldrons of compelling-yet-chilling ideas for tales tinged with darkness, this list offers fertile ground for horror connoisseurs and

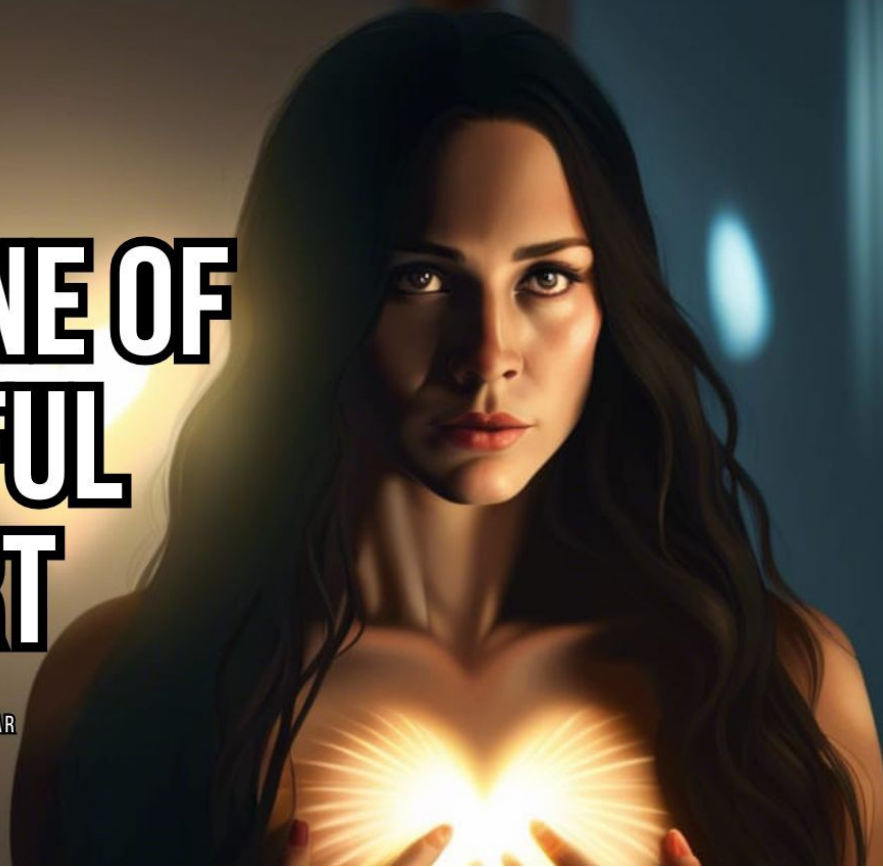
romance fans alike. These nightmarish narratives of star-crossed affection could easily inspire a bestselling novel, captivating film, or binge-worthy series. The prompts take the classic setups of creepy, romantic and gothic fiction then imbue them with fresh twists perfect for modern audiences. Lovers of atmospheric fantasy and paranormal storytelling will find plenty of stimulating material within these 100 eerie tales of desire cheating death and surmounting eldritch barriers spanning our world and what lies beyond. See where these kernels of ghostly passion and monstrous romance carry your own imagination – if you dare! Whether you prefer your love stories sweet or sinister, the creative possibilities flowing from these prompts are boundless.###



A STORY

# THE SHINE OF A SINFUL HEART

BY XIMENA ESCOBAR



Her small chest woke her. The heart rattling inside it. Like an alarm clock palpitating in secrecy, until the time came that she could no longer ignore it. She searched for the key in her pocket. She inserted it into the small brass lock. The smell of raw flesh slithered from under the lid, stirring her self-adoring hunger.

One by one her sins, embedded jewels in the breathing mass of her heart, stared at her like glowing eyes. Seven sins twinkling; seven sins winking like guardian angels of darkness. One for every day of the week, amulets for the lurking threat of each dawn. Each a treasure kept secret, so she wouldn't have to defend them.

She watched it beat like a throbbing wound, a fish to swallow whole. To eat and expand her being, wear like a heavy medallion and without the minutest ounce of guilt, with all the pride and shamelessness, stamp the weight of her uniqueness on this earth.

Beauty looked back at her in the mirror. The shine of a sinful heart like the dawn of a new reign. The glow of young eyes uncreased by a bitterness which, thanks to her immorality, she'd chosen not to taste—even if she had every reason to make a passion of her dissatisfaction, because everyone has reasons. Where, oh where, would she be without her sins? Scathed knees of childhood still under

the denim, so many times she'd apologised to God for disagreeing with him.

She brought it to her ear so she could better hear it; her nose, so she could better smell it. Rubbed the slimy flesh on her lips, licked the delicious aroma of a rupture. Thanks to her sins, shiny forbidden apples of wisdom, she was alive! A dagger in a huntsman's hand, she'd known to wrap her legs around him that a poor boar couldn't escape the bloodied fate she gifted him, when its heart replaced hers on a queen's dreadful plate... Sinking her teeth into its rawness, blood spilled on the stone like a ceremonious farewell of her imprisonment. She found herself coughing,

swaying like lamb on a man's shoulder. She let him slide her down onto his chest, place a kiss of forever on her lips. But as their faces parted to contemplate each other, a spark that wasn't in her eyes

before, a spark at the forefront like an incoming train, shone in his mirror eyes. She'd never looked so beautiful... A happily ever after would never suffice her.

###

Ximena writes poetry and short fiction. You can follow her on Facebook and Instagram @thesestoriesarebreathing.

# My Strange Affinity to the One Who Shall Not Be Named

by YCX

As I  
finally traced down the source of my pain  
I found it  
deeply embedded into my skin as if it was  
sewn into me with an invisible thread  
When the horns blow I look up to the sky:  
The pain and I are  
blood relatives we are  
sons and daughters of poets and  
siblings of apes.

###

Yaocheng is a university student and moves around awfully lot and Toronto is Yaocheng's next destination.



A Story

# THE DEVIL IN THE BELFRY

by Edgar Allan Poe

## The Devil in the Belfry

by Edgar Allan Poe

What o'clock is it?—*Old  
Saying.*

Everybody knows, in a general way, that the finest place in the world is—or, alas, *was*—the Dutch borough of Vondervotteimittiss. Yet as it lies some distance from any of the main roads, being in a somewhat out-of-the-way situation, there are perhaps very few of my readers who have ever paid it a visit. For the benefit of those who have not, therefore, it will be only proper that I should enter into some account of it. And this is

indeed the more necessary, as with the hope of enlisting public sympathy in behalf of the inhabitants, I design here to give a history of the calamitous events which have so lately occurred within its limits. No one who knows me will doubt that the duty thus self-imposed will be executed to the best of my ability, with all that rigid impartiality, all that cautious examination into facts, and diligent collation of authorities, which should ever distinguish him who aspires to the title of historian.

By the united aid of medals, manuscripts, and inscriptions, I am enabled to say, positively, that the borough of Vondervotteimittiss has existed, from its origin, in precisely the same condition

which it at present preserves. Of the date of this origin, however, I grieve that I can only speak with that species of indefinite definiteness which mathematicians are, at times, forced to put up with in certain algebraic formulae. The date, I may thus say, in regard to the remoteness of its antiquity, cannot be less than any assignable quantity whatsoever.

Touching the derivation of the name Vondervotteimittiss, I confess myself, with sorrow, equally at fault. Among a multitude of opinions upon this delicate point—some acute, some learned, some sufficiently the reverse—I am able to select nothing which ought to be considered satisfactory. Perhaps the idea

of Grogswigg—nearly coincident with that of Kroutaplenttey—is to be cautiously preferred.—It runs: —“Vondervotteimittis—Vonder, lege Donder—Votteimittis, quasi und Bleitziz—Bleitziz obsol:—pro Blitzen.” This derivative, to say the truth, is still countenanced by some traces of the electric fluid evident on the summit of the steeple of the House of the Town-Council. I do not choose, however, to commit myself on a theme of such importance, and must refer the reader desirous of information to the “Oratiunculae de Rebus Praeter-Veteris,” of Dundergutz. See, also, Blunderbuzzard “De Derivationibus,” pp. 27 to 5010, Folio, Gothic edit., Red and Black character, Catchword and No Cypher; wherein consult, also, marginal notes in the autograph of Stuffundpuff, with the Sub-Commentaries of Gruntundguzzell.

Notwithstanding the obscurity which thus envelops the date of the foundation of Vondervotteimittis, and the derivation of its name, there can be no doubt, as I said before, that it has always existed as we find it at this epoch. The oldest man in the borough can remember not the slightest difference in the appearance of any portion of it; and, indeed, the very suggestion of such a possibility

is considered an insult. The site of the village is in a perfectly circular valley, about a quarter of a mile in circumference, and entirely surrounded by gentle hills, over whose summit the people have never yet ventured to pass. For this they assign the very good reason that they do not believe there is anything at all on the other side.

Round the skirts of the valley (which is quite level, and paved throughout with flat tiles), extends a continuous row of sixty little houses. These, having their backs on the hills, must look, of course, to the centre of the plain, which is just sixty yards from the front door of each dwelling. Every house has a small garden before it, with a circular path, a sun-dial, and twenty-four cabbages. The buildings themselves are so precisely alike, that one can in no manner be distinguished from the other. Owing to the vast antiquity, the style of architecture is somewhat odd, but it is not for that reason the less strikingly picturesque. They are fashioned of hard-burned little bricks, red, with black ends, so that the walls look like a chess-board upon a great scale. The gables are turned to the front, and there are cornices, as big as all the rest of the house, over the eaves and over the main doors. The windows are narrow and deep, with very tiny panes and a great deal of sash. On the

roof is a vast quantity of tiles with long curly ears. The woodwork, throughout, is of a dark hue and there is much carving about it, with but a trifling variety of pattern for, time out of mind, the carvers of Vondervotteimittis have never been able to carve more than two objects—a time-piece and a cabbage. But these they do exceedingly well, and intersperse them, with singular ingenuity, wherever they find room for the chisel.

The dwellings are as much alike inside as out, and the furniture is all upon one plan. The floors are of square tiles, the chairs and tables of black-looking wood with thin crooked legs and puppy feet. The mantelpieces are wide and high, and have not only time-pieces and cabbages sculptured over the front, but a real time-piece, which makes a prodigious ticking, on the top in the middle, with a flower-pot containing a cabbage standing on each extremity by way of outrider. Between each cabbage and the time-piece, again, is a little China man having a large stomach with a great round hole in it, through which is seen the dial-plate of a watch.

The fireplaces are large and deep, with fierce crooked-looking fire-dogs. There is constantly a rousing fire, and a huge pot over it, full of sauerkraut and pork, to which the

good woman of the house is always busy in attending. She is a little fat old lady, with blue eyes and a red face, and wears a huge cap like a sugar-loaf, ornamented with purple and yellow ribbons. Her dress is of orange-colored linsey-woolsey, made very full behind and very short in the waist—and indeed very short in other respects, not reaching below the middle of her leg. This is somewhat thick, and so are her ankles, but she has a fine pair of green stockings to cover them. Her shoes—of pink leather—are fastened each with a bunch of yellow ribbons puckered up in the shape of a cabbage. In her left hand she has a little heavy Dutch watch; in her right she wields a ladle for the sauerkraut and pork. By her side there stands a fat tabby cat, with a gilt toy-repeater tied to its tail, which “the boys” have there fastened by way of a quiz.

The boys themselves are, all three of them, in the garden attending the pig. They are each two feet in height. They have three-cornered cocked hats, purple waistcoats reaching down to their thighs, buckskin knee-breeches, red stockings, heavy shoes with big silver buckles, long surtouts coats with large buttons of mother-of-pearl. Each, too, has a pipe in his mouth, and a little dumpy watch in his right hand. He takes a puff and a look, and then a look and a

puff. The pig—which is corpulent and lazy—is occupied now in picking up the stray leaves that fall from the cabbages, and now in giving a kick behind at the gilt repeater, which the urchins have also tied to his tail in order to make him look as handsome as the cat.

Right at the front door, in a high-backed leather-bottomed armed chair, with crooked legs and puppy feet like the tables, is seated the old man of the house himself. He is an exceedingly puffy little old gentleman, with big circular eyes and a huge double chin. His dress resembles that of the boys—and I need say nothing farther about it. All the difference is, that his pipe is somewhat bigger than theirs and he can make a greater smoke. Like them, he has a watch, but he carries his watch in his pocket. To say the truth, he has something of more importance than a watch to attend to—and what that is, I shall presently explain. He sits with his right leg upon his left knee, wears a grave countenance, and always keeps one of his eyes, at least, resolutely bent upon a certain remarkable object in the centre of the plain.

This object is situated in the steeple of the House of the Town Council. The Town Council are all very little, round, oily, intelligent men,

with big saucer eyes and fat double chins, and have their coats much longer and their shoe-buckles much bigger than the ordinary inhabitants of Vondervotteimittiss. Since my sojourn in the borough, they have had several special meetings, and have adopted these three important resolutions:

“That it is wrong to alter the good old course of things:”

“That there is nothing tolerable out of Vondervotteimittiss:” and—

“That we will stick by our clocks and our cabbages.”

Above the session-room of the Council is the steeple, and in the steeple is the belfry, where exists, and has existed time out of mind, the pride and wonder of the village—the great clock of the borough of Vondervotteimittiss. And this is the object to which the eyes of the old gentlemen are turned who sit in the leather-bottomed arm-chairs.

The great clock has seven faces—one in each of the seven sides of the steeple—so that it can be readily seen from all quarters. Its faces are large and white, and its hands heavy and black. There is a belfry-man whose sole duty is to attend to it; but this duty is the most perfect of sinecures—for

the clock of Vondervotteimittis was never yet known to have anything the matter with it. Until lately, the bare supposition of such a thing was considered heretical. From the remotest period of antiquity to which the archives have reference, the hours have been regularly struck by the big bell. And, indeed the case was just the same with all the other clocks and watches in the borough. Never was such a place for keeping the true time. When the large clapper thought proper to say "Twelve o'clock!" all its obedient followers opened their throats simultaneously, and responded like a very echo. In short, the good burghers were fond of their sauer-kraut, but then they were proud of their clocks.

All people who hold sinecure offices are held in more or less respect, and as the belfry—man of Vondervotteimittis has the most perfect of sinecures, he is the most perfectly respected of any man in the world. He is the chief dignitary of the borough, and the very pigs look up to him with a sentiment of reverence. His coat-tail is very far longer—his pipe, his shoe-buckles, his eyes, and his stomach, very far bigger—than those of any other old gentleman in the village; and as to his chin, it is not only double, but triple.

I have thus painted the happy estate of Vondervotteimittis: alas, that so fair a picture should ever experience a reverse!

There has been long a saying among the wisest inhabitants, that "no good can come from over the hills"; and it really seemed that the words had in them something of the spirit of prophecy. It wanted five minutes of noon, on the day before yesterday, when there appeared a very odd-looking object on the summit of the ridge of the eastward. Such an occurrence, of course, attracted universal attention, and every little old gentleman who sat in a leather-bottomed arm-chair turned one of his eyes with a stare of dismay upon the phenomenon, still keeping the other upon the clock in the steeple.

By the time that it wanted only three minutes to noon, the droll object in question was perceived to be a very diminutive foreign-looking young man. He descended the hills at a great rate, so that every body had soon a good look at him. He was really the most finicky little personage that had ever been seen in Vondervotteimittis. His countenance was of a dark snuff-color, and he had a long hooked nose, pea eyes, a wide mouth, and an excellent set of teeth, which latter he seemed anxious of displaying, as he

was grinning from ear to ear. What with mustachios and whiskers, there was none of the rest of his face to be seen. His head was uncovered, and his hair neatly done up in papillotes. His dress was a tight-fitting swallow-tailed black coat (from one of whose pockets dangled a vast length of white handkerchief), black kerseymere knee-breeches, black stockings, and stumpy-looking pumps, with huge bunches of black satin ribbon for bows. Under one arm he carried a huge *chapeau-de-bras*, and under the other a fiddle nearly five times as big as himself. In his left hand was a gold snuff-box, from which, as he capered down the hill, cutting all manner of fantastic steps, he took snuff incessantly with an air of the greatest possible self-satisfaction. God bless me!—here was a sight for the honest burghers of Vondervotteimittis!

To speak plainly, the fellow had, in spite of his grinning, an audacious and sinister kind of face; and as he curvetted right into the village, the old stumpy appearance of his pumps excited no little suspicion; and many a burgher who beheld him that day would have given a trifle for a peep beneath the white cambric handkerchief which hung so obtrusively from the pocket of his swallow-tailed coat. But what mainly occasioned a righteous



indignation was, that the scoundrelly popinjay, while he cut a fandango here, and a whirligig there, did not seem to have the remotest idea in the world of such a thing as keeping time in his steps.

The good people of the borough had scarcely a chance, however, to get their eyes thoroughly open, when, just as it wanted half a minute of noon, the rascal bounced, as I say, right into the midst of them; gave a *chassez* here, and a *balancez* there; and then, after a *pirouette* and a *pas-de-zephyr*, pigeon-winged himself right up into the belfry of the House of the Town Council, where the wonder-stricken belfry-man sat smoking in a state of dignity and dismay. But the little chap seized him at once by the nose; gave it a swing and a pull; clapped the big *chapeau-de-bras* upon his head; knocked it down over his eyes and mouth; and then, lifting up the big fiddle, beat him with it so long and so soundly, that what with the belfry-man being so fat, and the fiddle being so hollow, you would have sworn that there was a regiment of double-bass drummers all beating the devil's tattoo up in the belfry of the steeple of Vondervotteimittiss.

There is no knowing to what desperate act of vengeance this unprincipled attack might have aroused the inhabitants,

but for the important fact that it now wanted only half a second of noon. The bell was about to strike, and it was a matter of absolute and pre-eminent necessity that every body should look well at his watch. It was evident, however, that just at this moment the fellow in the steeple was doing something that he had no business to do with the clock. But as it now began to strike, nobody had any time to attend to his manœuvres, for they had all to count the strokes of the bell as it sounded.

"One!" said the clock.

"Von!" echoed every little old gentleman in every leather-bottomed arm-chair in Vondervotteimittiss. "Von!" said his watch also; "von!" said the watch of his vrow; and "von!" said the watches of the boys, and the little gilt repeaters on the tails of the cat and pig.

"Two!" continued the big bell; and

"Doo!" repeated all the repeaters.

"Three! Four! Five! Six! Seven! Eight! Nine! Ten!" said the bell.

"Dree! Vour! Fibe! Sax! Seben! Aight! Noin! Den!" answered the others.

"Eleven!" said the big one.

"Eleben!" assented the little ones.

"Twelve!" said the bell.

"Dvelf!" they replied perfectly satisfied, and dropping their voices.

"Und dvelf it is!" said all the little old gentlemen, putting up their watches. But the big bell had not done with them yet.

"Thirteen!" said he.

"Der Teufel!" gasped the little old gentlemen, turning pale, dropping their pipes, and putting down all their right legs from over their left knees.

"Der Teufel!" groaned they, "Dirteen! Dirteen!!—Mein Gott, it is Dirteen o'clock!!"

Why attempt to describe the terrible scene which ensued? All Vondervotteimittiss flew at once into a lamentable state of uproar.

"Vot is cum'd to mein pelly?" roared all the boys—"I've been ongrly for dis hour!"

"Vot is com'd to mein kraut?" screamed all the vrows, "It has been done to rags for this hour!"

“Vot is cum’d to mein pipe?” swore all the little old gentlemen, “Donder and Blitzen; it has been smoked out for dis hour!”—and they filled them up again in a great rage, and sinking back in their arm-chairs, puffed away so fast and so fiercely that the whole valley was immediately filled with impenetrable smoke.

Meantime the cabbages all turned very red in the face, and it seemed as if old Nick himself had taken possession of every thing in the shape of a timepiece. The clocks carved upon the furniture took to dancing as if bewitched, while those upon the mantel-pieces could scarcely contain themselves for fury, and kept such a continual striking of thirteen, and such a frisking and wriggling of their pendulums as was really horrible to see. But, worse than all, neither the cats nor the pigs could put up any longer with the behavior of the little repeaters tied to their tails, and resented it by scampering all over the place, scratching and poking, and squeaking and screeching, and caterwauling and squalling, and flying into the faces, and running under the petticoats of the people, and creating altogether the most abominable din and confusion which it is possible for a reasonable person to conceive. And to make matters still more distressing, the rascally

little scape-grace in the steeple was evidently exerting himself to the utmost. Every now and then one might catch a glimpse of the scoundrel through the smoke. There he sat in the belfry upon the belfry-man, who was lying flat upon his back. In his teeth the villain held the bell-rope, which he kept jerking about with his head, raising such a clatter that my ears ring again even to think of it. On his lap lay the big fiddle, at which he was scraping, out of all time and tune, with both hands, making a great show, the nincompoop! of playing “Judy O’Flannagan and Paddy O’Rafferty.”

Affairs being thus miserably situated, I left the place in disgust, and now appeal for aid to all lovers of correct time and fine kraut. Let us proceed in a body to the borough, and restore the ancient order of things in Vondervotteimittiss by ejecting that little fellow from the steeple.

### **Bio**

Edgar Allan Poe was an American writer, poet, critic and editor born in 1809 in Boston, Massachusetts. Both his parents died when he was very young and he was taken in by the Allan family of Richmond, Virginia. Poe excelled academically both in school and at the University of Virginia, but was forced to

leave university due to lack of funds. His publishing career began in 1827 with the poetry collection *Tamerlane and Other Poems*. He went on to publish acclaimed dark, mysterious stories and poems including “The Raven”, “The Fall of the House of Usher”, and “The Tell-Tale Heart”. Considered a pioneer of detective fiction, Poe’s story “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” introduced one of literature’s first detectives. Known for his Gothic tales of the macabre, he also wrote satires, humor, and literary criticism. Despite successes including winning a prize for “MS Found in a Bottle”, Poe struggled financially and died in 1849 at age 40 under mysterious circumstances.

###

# LIFE IS PRECIOUS

BY WILLIAM WIGGINS

Even as the night sighs,  
I am enamored by the silence  
of the trees. The leaves sleep  
in the air as the boys  
huddle closely together,  
whispering of their fathers.  
Fireflies hover in place  
around us, barely glistening  
as a woman rests her eyes  
bedded with if.

Life—it's still here.  
Sometimes I forget.

But when there's no more deer on the hill  
or birds in the bush, we know they're still,  
too. Gone, but there. Waiting. Tomorrow,  
the sun will rise, kissing the earth awake  
and we'll thank her with our being, our  
eating.

Nodding, I'd like to imagine  
that there will be horses.

Some galloping, sweating with pride;  
some sitting with the foal near the trees.  
A gentle heat sliding through the leaves.  
Or bees, buzzing by the flowers

Hugh lives in the Pacific Northwest, where writing provides a diversion from his doomed attempts to grow Canadian oranges. His stories have appeared in Nature Futures, Foxglove Journal, Meniscus, The Drabble, Grey Sparrow Journal, Flashes of Brilliance, Toasted Cheese, and elsewhere.



# Stream of Consciousness

## An Overview

*It explores the mind's inner workings, with fleeting ideas, emotions, impressions, memories, and sensations blending in fluid, associative passages that can change abruptly.*

## Defining Stream of Consciousness

Stream of consciousness refers to a literary narrative technique that seeks to portray the natural continuous flow of a character's stream of thoughts and perceptions rather than present a conventionally structured story. It explores the mind's inner workings, with fleeting ideas, emotions, impressions, memories, and sensations blending in fluid, associative

passages that can change abruptly.

Stream-of-consciousness writing attempts to replicate the haphazard ways our brains process the world before organizing information into logical narrative sequences. There is little plotting or structured story arc – instead, we get snapshots racing across a character's consciousness, just as thoughts constantly dart in and out of our minds.

The style forgoes rules of grammar, transitions, and traditional prose in favor of expressionistic, philosophical ruminations on existence through raw inner monologues.

## Origin of the Term

The phrase “stream of consciousness” was coined in 1890 by pioneering American philosopher and psychologist William James in his principles of psychology. He described consciousness not as fixed but as a flowing stream of impressions filtering through our awareness ceaselessly.

This metaphor struck a chord for capturing human perception and thought patterns in vivid new ways on the page. Writers sought to explore inner lives and

emotions separate from time, setting, and plot constraints.

## Origins and Evolution of Stream of Consciousness Writing

Stream of consciousness is a narrative style that emerged in the early 20th century as a radical departure from structured, chronological storytelling. It attempts to directly replicate the spontaneous and often chaotic flow of thoughts we experience in our minds.

The term was coined by American psychologist William James in 1890 to describe human cognition as an ever-shifting stream of thoughts and sensations. Seminal modernist writers embraced this technique in literature to convey inner experiences in vivid new ways.

## Key Stream of Consciousness Writers & Works

•Virginia Woolf was one of the first to experiment with the “life of the mind” concept in novels like *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), *Jacob’s Room*

(1922), and *To the Lighthouse* (1927), integrating characters’ raw perceptions and emotions.

•James Joyce took a stream of consciousness further in *Ulysses* (1922) and *Finnegan’s Wake* (1939), structuring novels as meandering passages of sounds and loosely associated ideas.

•William Faulkner used flowing consciousness to build intricate, emotional inner worlds in *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) and *As I Lay Dying* (1930).

•Other modernist writers who advanced stream of consciousness style include Dorothy Richardson in *Pilgrimage* (1915), Italo Svevo in *La Coscienza di Zeno* (1923), and Marcel Proust in his seven-volume epic *In Search of Lost Time* (1913-1927).

While not all mainstream, the stream of consciousness established a niche showing characters in a profoundly intimate light, still influencing contemporary first-person narratives today and harnessing interior storytelling methods.

## Experimentation in Early 20th-Century Literature

Several pioneering modernist novelists pioneered stream-of-consciousness style in the early 20th century as a radical movement against conventional linear storylines. Seminal examples that became literary classics include:

Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and *To The Lighthouse* (1927) incorporated lyrical passages tracing characters’ erratic thoughts and observations. James Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1922)

revolutionized interior monologue, with 60 pages chronicling one character’s mental meanderings during an ordinary day. William Faulkner explored disturbing psychological depths through flowing consciousness in critically acclaimed novels like *The Sound and The Fury* (1929) and *As I Lay Dying* (1930).

These early stream-of-consciousness novels not only transformed narrative formats but also revealed nuances of human experience that no traditional prose could capture. The reader intimately experiences all sensations

passing through the character's mind as immediate first-hand observers.

## **From the Beats to Postmodernism: The Enduring Influence of Stream of Consciousness**

While pioneered in high modernism, stream of consciousness also left an impression on counter-cultural, artistic schools emerging later in the 20th century that similarly sought to challenge conventional structure in favor of free-flowing personal expression.

The Beat writers of the 1950s/60s like Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, and William S. Burroughs, often employed long, winding passages of uncensored, introspective memories and sensations in novels like *On the Road*, *Howl*, and *Naked Lunch* to invoke manic, dream-like journeys. Their stylized first-person vignettes of gritty bohemian lives reveal striking shades of the modernists' interior monologues decades earlier.

In academia, postmodern critical theory explores how stream-of-consciousness writing creates its self-contained reality where objective truth blurs.

Foundational works like *The Crying Lot of 49* and *Gravity's Rainbow* integrated discordant strands of dissociative thought flow. Today's avant-garde texts continue radical narration innovations in this vein.

Even thoroughly modern first-person memoirs, personal essays, and short nonfiction borrow atmospheric, character-driven show-don't-tell reporting that was once considered fiction. Literary journalism and intimate vignette reflections hassled down directly from early stream-of-consciousness risky boundary-breaking. Any time we privilege raw sensory impressions over strictly factual accounts, traces of Woolf, Joyce, and Faulkner's visions emerge.

Their genre-defying experiments forever expanded expressive possibilities across countless literary movements feeling constraints of hidebound narrative tradition. Stream of consciousness opened conduits between creativity and cognition we continue traversing today.

## **Influence on Contemporary Literature**

While complex for some readers, stream of consciousness opened new horizons for depicting inner lives that still influence contemporary first-person narratives today. From the Beats to *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* essays to Postmodernism, traces of impressionistic stream-of-consciousness style permeate our understanding of modern identity and relationships. Virginia Woolf's groundbreaking approach to revealing consciousness remains one of the most revolutionary developments in 20th-century fiction. ###



# HOW TO WRITE A PERSONAL NARRATIVE ESSAY

*Every Writer*

## How to Write a Personal Narrative Essay

A personal narrative essay relates an important event or milestone from the writer's life. Unlike other essay forms that aim to provide factual info, the goal here is to tell a compelling, engaging story. By going through the writing process step-by-step, you can craft an essay sure to connect with readers.

### Choose a Meaningful Topic

The first vital step in writing a compelling personal narrative essay is deciding on a truly meaningful event from your life to showcase. Set aside some quiet time for self-reflection – what past experiences, relationships, challenges, accomplishments, or discoveries shaped you into who you are at your core? Which ones still emotionally move you years later when you recall them? Jot down anything that comes to mind, whether big or small. Look for pivotal moments that revealed a hard-won truth, stirred personal growth, altered your

worldview, or strengthened bonds with others.

As you compile this list, evaluate the most vivid and transformative story. Spotlighting just one key incident will allow you to go in-depth rather than giving a surface-level overview crammed with details. As you narrow down your choice, assess which reveals the most intriguing aspects of your inner self while also relating a universal life lesson others may connect to. If you need help picking a topic try our [100 Greatest Narrative Essay Topics](#) for ideas.

Some classic impactful narrative essay topics include poignant childhood memories

, awe-inspiring travel adventures, acts of courage in the face of fear, obstacles you worked to overcome, special mentors that left a mark, or close personal bonds forged through laughter and tears. These life-shaping experiences often emerge around milestone events like a first job, a parent's divorce, writing your college application essay, living abroad, becoming an activist for a cause, or the arrival of a new family member.

By selecting one sentimental episode that conveys emotional truth in a relatable way, you equip yourself to write an engaging personal narrative sure to resonate with readers. So embrace self-examination to uncover the gems resting in your memory's treasury, waiting to be polished into prose.

## Narrow Your Focus” Focusing on Key Moments in Your Story

You picked an important experience from your life you want to write about. But telling the whole long story from start to finish might get boring or confusing. Good news – you don't need to do that. Just focus on re-telling the most intense, emotional moments.

Picture yourself back at the event in your mind. What details do you see, hear, smell, touch or taste? When during that day did the biggest things happen...the stuff that made you feel joy, sadness, worry, relief? Write down every key moment of the scene that's still crisp in your brain after all this time.

Don't just say, "I took a summer trip to the beach as a kid and learned to surf." Go step-by-step instead: Show your mom waking you early. Smell the salt air as you run across hot sand with a surfboard under your arm. Feel the tension in your muscles as you paddle out nervously to wait for a wave, not knowing what will happen when it comes. Describe wiping out over and over until, finally, you stand up

successfully and ride the wave to shore, beaming with accomplishment.

By narrowing in on the minutes and seconds where you reacted strongly, and things changed, readers feel like they're right there seeing your important life event through your eyes. The emotional whirlwind comes through more powerfully when you unroll tiny key details one by one instead of a broad, general storyline. So, take readers on your personal journey by bringing your most impactful moments back to life.

## Craft the Narrative Arc: Crafting Your Narrative Arc for Maximum Impact

Simply recounting the play-by-play of your chosen memory risks leaving readers feeling disjointed or bored. Shaping the flow intentionally as an arc builds suspense, allowing you to land emotional punches. First, start by giving a one-sentence teaser hook relaying why this event held such significance – how it challenged your worldview, taught you something weighty, strengthened a bond, and ignited personal growth. Use a crisp image or impactful quote to draw readers in.



Next, if backstory is needed for context, use quick flashbacks or background woven organically into the action rather than halting all momentum with lengthy explanations upfront. Give just enough familiar details to ground readers – “I was 17 when I traveled to Ecuador on a service trip the summer after junior year.”

With context set, describe the rising action as you inch toward the climactic apex of it all. Draw out tension slowly through the obstacles you face, the fears swirling inside, the meanings and stakes becoming clear. Right as the moment of peak emotional intensity nears, use short, punchy sentences and vivid sensory details to slow down time, heightening anticipation.

After the focal point crashes over you and readers alike, illustrate the falling action and resolution concisely. Show thoughts, realizations, and impacts in the aftermath rather than tell. Close with a reflective paragraph at the present day, considering how the experience strengthened or enlightened you – “Now, as a nurse and mother, when I strap on my medical volunteer vest each day, I still touch that carved wooden necklace from Ecuador underneath for courage.”

With this intentional narrative arc guiding your scenes, you fully immerse readers in your memoir’s most dynamic emotional moments. The structure makes your message crystal clear while keeping them invested from the first word to the final profound reflection.

## Show, Don’t Tell: Bring Your Story to Life By Showing the Details

Telling a story from your life is more fun for readers when you make them feel like they’re really there with you. Instead of just saying, “I went to basketball camp when I was 10,” show all the sights, sounds, and emotions that happened.

Picture the scene like a movie playing in your mind. Describe exactly where you were so readers see it too – the squeak of sneakers on the shiny gym floor, rows of blue folding chairs along the sidelines, the heavy sound of balls bouncing, the zing of whistles around you.

Show the key moments happening rather than looking back and just telling what went down later. In the story, have the coach blow the whistle and shout gruffly for

drills to start, make readers hear balls swishing through nets when you score, and feel the burning in your calves as you sprint end to end all practice. Let them get nervous with you when the coach calls out the names for the starting lineup.

When you unfold the scenes bit-by-bit like this instead of saying, “I worked hard all week, then made the starting lineup,” or whatever, it’s so much more fun for readers. They feel all caught up in the action, too, high-fiving when you succeed or cringing when something embarrassing happens.

Don’t forget to zoom out and quickly summarize other parts, though, so readers know stuff like when the scene changes to a new day. But use showing, not telling, to let your biggest moments shine!

## Using “I” and “You” to Draw Readers Into Your Story (IF ACCEPTABLE)

Personal stories are way more fun to read when they make you feel like you’re in action with the writer. Using a first-person point of view helps make that happen. That’s when the writer talks about

their own life using the word “I.”

So try starting most sentences with “I” to share the play-by-plays from your eyes. Like “I could barely breathe as the rollercoaster crept up the steep track” and “My hands were slick with sweat when I finally asked my crush to dance.” Readers know they get the insider scoop on your embarrassing or fantastic moment.

Every now and then, throw in some “you” sentences, too, to make readers feel like they’re the ones having the experience. For example, “You should have seen Coach’s eyebrows shoot up when I tried to explain why I missed practice” or “Picture yourself as an 8-year-old, staring up at that rickety treehouse ladder, wondering whether to risk it.”

Using “I did this...” and “You would have felt this...” hooks readers into your greatest hits. It’s almost like they traveled back in time with your older self to ride along on all your adventures and mishaps. So invite them in with lots of first person. After all, your awesome stories belong to you, so share them loudly and proudly!

**Note:** Sometimes, teachers and professors do not want you to use “I” in your

narrative. If this is the case, please follow their instructions.

## Adding Transition Words to Connect Scenes

You chose a fantastic life event for your personal story and are ready to pull readers right into the action. But remember – you’ll likely focus on 2 or 3 main scenes rather than giving every detail from a whole day or week. So, between big moments, guide readers clearly from one time, place, or event to the next.

Pepper in transition phrases so they know when you skip forward or jump back. For example, “Later that evening, after pizza at Chuck E. Cheese, I spotted my crush from school again” or “Flashback to earlier that morning – I woke up extra early from pre-sleepover jitters.” Other helpful transitions are “Meanwhile, across town...” or “Five minutes later...”

You can also simply split major scenes into separate paragraphs. Add an extra space between paragraphs to signal readers they’re traveling to a new spot in your journey. No long boring explanations are needed – just quick time markers saying “But

meanwhile...” or “Two hours after that...” work nicely.

These tiny phrases are pathway signs that stop readers from getting lost. Help them follow along happily without wondering if you’re still at your grandma’s house from a sentence ago or suddenly jumped forward to middle school. Guide them step-by-step through your scenes’ twists and turns with clear transition words sprinkled throughout

## Wrapping Up Your Story With Lessons Learned

You took readers on a ride through your favorite life memory, revealing emotions and funny mishaps along the way. Now that the wild adventure is over share what that experience gave you or changed in you. The last paragraph should look back at your younger self with some wisdom.

Think about what mattered most from that scene with some distance now. Have you realized things you were too young to see then? Maybe you recognize now why your dad cried when you left for sleepaway camp or why losing the championship game surprised you less than disappointing your team.

If powerful life lessons or truths were uncovered, explain briefly. Like realizing monsters under beds aren't real, but bravery in hard times is. Or how focusing on pleasing others less leaves room for adventuring more. These "moral of the story" bits show readers how you grew wiser.

You could also describe ways you're different now, thanks to what happened back then. If you learned Spanish after struggling to order food in Madrid as a kid, share how speaking Spanish reminds you now of respecting different cultures. Or if you became a baseball coach years after your own lousy coach, talk about how you use encouragement, not anger, now.

However you wrap up, show readers your experience gave you new perspectives, shifting how you walk in the world today. It's cool to model looking back thoughtfully!

## Revise for Strength

Edit your draft for clarity and flow. Assess spots that seem bland and employ more descriptive language and compelling turns of phrase. Have others read and give feedback before polishing it into a powerful narrative sure to resonate.

You can write an engaging, meaningful narrative essay by planning your poignant personal story, bringing readers vividly into key scenes, and closing with insight gained. Using these steps, your unique life experience will come to life for readers.

## Planning Out Your Essay's Flow

Writing stuff that happened to you lets you get creative with the setup. However, having some structure helps readers follow along with your awesome life story. Here's one way you could organize all the scenes:

**Intro:** Start with 1-2 sentences setting the scene – where/when is this happening, and why does it matter? Get readers hooked fast!

**Next paragraph:** Give some quick background – describe something important from earlier or explain who people are.

**Buildup:** Unfold more details slowly in 2-3 paragraphs to ramp up to the big moment. Build suspense about what's coming!

**Climax:** Spend 2-3 paragraphs on the peak emotional or exciting point. Zoom in super close on

meaningful dialogue, feelings, and actions here.

**Winding Down:** In 1-2 paragraphs, show how everything is wrapped up afterward. How did people respond? How did you?

**Conclusion:** In one paragraph, share the life lesson or way this changed your views more significantly. Look back with some wisdom!

This is just a suggestion, though – outline however you want! The key is grabbing readers' attention quick, then making the most intense parts stand out by slowing down to show emotions and reactions. However you structure it, you'll share an awesome memory!

## A more detailed layout:

:

### Paragraph 1:

Introduction and Opening Hook

- Begins with an attention-grabbing opening hook (anecdote, question, vivid description)

- Provides brief background context to set up your story

- Ends with a clear thesis statement or main focus

## Paragraph 2:

Rising Action

- Gives a more detailed background and sets the scene

- Starts describing key events leading up to the main story

- Uses vivid sensory details and descriptions

- Ends in a mini-cliffhanger to transition to the next event

## Paragraph 3:

Climax

- Details the peak event, challenge, or adventure

- Tell the moment that changed you or impacted you the most

- Builds anticipation and uncertainty leading up to this moment

- Ends when the main event concludes, for better or worse

## Paragraph 4:

Falling Action and Reflection

- Describe the aftermath and impacts of your climactic moment

- Analyze the deeper meaning and what you learned

- Discusses how the event changed you or your life in the future

## Paragraph 5:

Conclusion and Closing Thoughts

- Summarize your main takeaway or theme from the story

- Discusses why this memory matters and what readers can learn from your story

- Ends with a strong, impactful closing line that resonates

This 5 paragraph's narrative structure follows a complete story arc, allowing you to reinforce and reflect on your key message. There are many other suggestions for writing a [5 paragraph essay on the web](#).

Spilling your inside stories out takes guts but feels great after.

Following these tips will make your real-life tale flow well so readers feel they lived it, too. Pick a moment that rocked your world somehow and zoom your emotions up to 100. Show all the sights, smells, and sounds as it went down. Unfold the blow-by-blow slowly like a movie, not just saying what happened. Toss in some "I felt" and "You would've thought" lines to get readers right in your shoes. Wrap up with the gems you scored from that pivotal time that changed how you think or act now. However you tell it, your one-of-a-kind adventure can inspire. Remember, these memories and remarkable personalities belong to nobody else. So shine that spotlight on the stuff that shaped you into you!###

# THE PICK-UP ARTIST

BY KAROL NIELSEN

After graduating from the Columbia School of Journalism, I became the managing editor of a Bronx newspaper and my graduate school classmate became a stringer for The New York Times. I wanted to be a stringer, too. I gave him almost everything I had ever published and he recommended me for the job.

I became a Metro Section stringer and I covered a fire, a numbers bust, a gang fight, a gun standoff at Penn Station, the death of a homeless man across from a hospital, and other stories. My reporting appeared in the Times and I always bought a copy of the paper.

Once, a tall, burly man with a baseball cap and thick beard approached me at the newsstand near my Upper West Side apartment.

“Do you want to be an actress?” he said.

“No, a writer,” I said.

He shrugged and wrote his name and number in my newly purchased New York Times—James Toback, writer “Bugsy” and director “The Pick-up Artist.”

“Call me if you change your mind,” he said.

Turns out, he was accused of being a sexual predator who used to target women in my old neighborhood. Luckily, I moved across town and became a writer and never called.

###

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# A Vampire

BY G. J. WHYTE-MELVILLE



## A Vampire by G. J. Whyte- Melville

Leaning idly against the chimney-piece the other night, contemplating my companion in his usual attitude, my elbow happened to brush off the slab a Turkish coin of small value and utterly illegible inscription. How strangely things come back to one! I fancied myself once more on the yellow wave of the broad Danube; once more threading those interminable green hills that fringe its banks; once more wondering whether the forest of Belgrade had been vouchsafed to Eastern Europe as a type of Infinity, while its

massive fortress, with frowning rampart and lethargic Turkish sentries, was intended to represent the combination of courage and sloth, of recklessness and imperturbability, of apparent strength and real inefficiency, which distinguishes most arrangements of the Ottoman Empire.

“Bakaloum” and “Bismillah!” “Take your chance!” and “Don’t care a d—n,” seem to be the watchwords of this improvident Government. It lets the ship steer herself; and she makes, I believe, as bad weather of it as might be expected under such seamanship.

Engrossed far less, I admit, with political considerations than with the picturesque appearance of a Servian population attending their market, I rather startled my friend with the abruptness of the following question:

“Do you believe there is such a thing as a Vampire?”

He rattled a little and almost rose to his feet, but re-seating himself, only rejoined,

“Why do you ask?”

“I was thinking,” I replied, “of that romantic-looking peasantry I used to see thronging the market-place of Belgrade. Of those tall,

handsome men, with the scowl never off their brows, their hands never straying far from the bellyful of weapons they carried in their shawls. Of those swarthy wild-eyed women, with their shrill, rapid voices, their graceful, impatient gestures, carrying each of them the available capital of herself and family strung in coins about her raven hair, while on every tenth face at least, of both sexes, could not fail to be observed the wan traces of that wasting disease which seems to sap strength and vitality, gradually, and almost surely, as consumption itself. Yes, I think for every score of peasants I could have counted two of these 'fever-faces,' as the people themselves call their ague-ridden companions, though I ascertained after a while, when I came to know them better, that they attributed this decimation of their numbers, and faded appearance of the victims, rather to supernatural visitation than epidemic disease. They believe that in certain cases, where life has been unusually irregular, or the rites of religion reprehensibly neglected, the soul returns after death to its original tenement, and the corpse becomes revived under certain ghastly conditions of a periodical return to the tomb and a continual warfare against its kind. An intermittent existence is only to be

preserved at the expense of others, for the compact, while it permits reanimation, withholds the blood, 'which is the life thereof.' The stream must therefore be drained from friends, neighbours, early companions, nay, is most nourishing and efficacious when abstracted from the veins of those heretofore best beloved. So the Vampire, as this weird being is called, must steal from its grave in the dead of night, to sit by some familiar bedside till the sleeper shall be steeped in the unconsciousness of complete repose, and then puncturing a minute orifice in the throat, will suck its fill till driven back to its resting-place by the crimson streaks of day. Night after night the visits must be repeated; and so, week by week, the victim pines and droops and withers gradually away. There is no apparent illness, no ostensible injury, but the frame dwindles, the muscles fall, the limbs fail, the cheek fades, and the death-look, never to be mistaken, comes into the great haggard, hollow, wistful eyes. I have repeatedly asked the peasants whether they had ever met any of these supernatural visitants, for they spoke of them so confidently, one might have supposed the famished ghouls were flitting about the villages nightly; but though presumptive evidence was forthcoming in volumes, I was never fortunate enough to find an actual eye-witness. The

sister of one had been frightened by them repeatedly; the cousin of another he had himself carried to her tomb, drained of her last life-drops by a relative buried some weeks before; and the grandmother of a third had not only met and talked with this inconvenient connection, expostulating with it on its depraved appetites, and generally arguing the point on moral as well as sanitary grounds, but had induced it by her persuasions, and the power of a certain amulet she wore, to abstain from persecuting a damsel in the neighbouring village for the same ghastly purpose, or, at least, to put off its visits till the horrid craving should be no longer endurable. Still I could meet nobody who had actually seen one in person; and that is why I asked you just now if you believed there was such a thing as a Vampire?"

He nodded gravely. "They are rare," said he; "but I believe in such beings, because I have not only seen one, but had the advantage of its personal notice, and a very pretty, pleasing acquaintance it was! You would like to know something more? Well, it compromises nobody. You will not quote me, of course. Indeed I don't see how you can, for I still mention no real names. I don't mind telling you the story of a life, such as I knew it; a life that by some fatality seemed to drag down

every other that came within the sphere of its attractions to sorrow, humiliation, and disgrace. I have no brain to swim, no pulses to leap, no heart to ache left, and yet the memory stirs me painfully even now.

“In early manhood,” he continued, bending down, as though to scan his own fleshless proportions, with an air of consciousness that was almost grotesque, “I paid as much heed to my personal appearance, and flourished it about in public places as persistently as others of like age and pursuits. Whether I should do so if I had my time to come again, is a different question, but we will let that pass. Being then young, tolerably good-looking, sufficiently conceited, and exceedingly well-dressed, I had betaken myself one evening to your Italian Opera, the best, and I may add the dearest, in Europe. I was fond of music and knew something about it, but I was fonder still of pretty women, though concerning these I enjoyed my full share of that ignorance which causes men so to exaggerate their qualities both good and bad; an ignorance it is worth while to preserve with as much care as in other matters we take to acquire knowledge, for there is no denying, alas! that those who know them best always seem to respect them least.

“I rose, therefore, from my stall at the first opportunity and turned round to survey the house. Ere I had inspected a quarter of it, my glasses were up, and I will tell you what they showed me—the most perfect face I ever saw. Straight nose, thin and delicately cut, large black eyes, regular eyebrows, faultless chin, terminating a complete oval, the whole set in a frame of jet-black hair. Even my next neighbour, who, from an observation he let fall to a friend, belonged apparently to the Household Troops, could not refrain from ejaculating, ‘By Jove, she’s a ripper!’ the moment he caught sight of the object on which my gaze was fixed.

“I saw something else too. I saw that the lady by her side was a foreigner with whom I had long been acquainted; so edging my way into the passages, in two minutes I was tapping at their box-door like a man who felt pretty sure of being let in.

“The foreigner introduced me to her friend, and as the second act of the opera was already in progress, told me to sit down and hold my tongue. We were four in the box. Another gentleman was placed close behind the lady who first attracted my attention. I had only eyes just then, however, for the wild, unearthly beauty of my new acquaintance.

“I have seen hundreds of pretty women, and even in youth my heart, from temperament, perhaps, rather than reflection, was as hard as my ribs; but this face fascinated me—I can use no other word. My sensations were so strangely compounded of admiration, horror, interest, curiosity, attraction, and dislike. The eyes were deep and dark, yet with the glitter in them of a hawk’s, the cheek deadly pale, the lips bright red. She was different from anything I had ever seen, and yet so wonderfully beautiful! I longed to hear her speak. Presently she whispered a few words to the man behind her, and I felt my flesh creep. Low as they were modulated, there was in every syllable a tone of such utter hopelessness, such abiding sorrow, regret, even remorse, always present, always kept down, that I could have imagined her one of those lost spirits for whom is fixed the punishment of all most cruel, most intolerable, that they can never forget they are formed for better things. Her gestures, too, were in accordance with the sad, suggestive music of her voice—quiet, graceful, and somewhat listless in the repose, as it seemed, rather of unhappiness than of indolence. I tell you I was not susceptible; I don’t think boys generally are. In love, more than in any other extravagance, ‘there is no fool like an old one.’



“I was as little given to romance as a ladies’ doctor; and yet, sitting in that box watching the turn of her beautiful head as she looked towards the stage, I said to myself, ‘I’ll take good care she never gets the upper hand of *me*. If a man once allowed himself to like her at all, she is just the sort of woman who would blight his whole life for him, and hunt the poor devil down to his grave!’ Somebody else seemed to have no such misgivings, or to have arrived at a stage of infatuation when all personal considerations had gone by the board. If ever I saw a calf led to the slaughter it was Count V—, a calf, too, whose throat few women could have cut without compunction. Handsome, manly, rich, affectionate, and sincere, worshipping his deity with all the reckless devotion, all the unscrupulous generosity of his brave Hungarian heart, I saw his very lip quiver under its heavy moustache when she turned her glittering eyes on him with some allusion called up by the business of the stage, and the proud, manly face that had never quailed before an enemy grew white in the intensity of its emotion. What made me think of a stag I once found lying dead in a Styrian pass, and a golden eagle feasting on him with her talons buried in his heart?

“The Gräfinn, to whom the box belonged, noticed my abstraction. ‘Don’t fall in love with her,’ she whispered; ‘I can’t spare you just yet. Isn’t she beautiful?’

“‘You introduced me,’ was my answer, ‘but you never told me her name.’

“‘How stupid!’ said the Gräfinn. ‘At present she is a Madame *de St. Croix*, an Englishwoman, nevertheless, and a widow, but not likely to remain so long.’ And with a mischievous laugh she gave me her hand as I left the box, bowing to Madame *de St. Croix* and also to the Hungarian, who in his happy pre-occupation was perfectly unconscious of my politeness.

“I saw them again in the crush-room. The Gräfinn had picked up an *attaché* to some legation, who put her dutifully into her carriage. The Hungarian was still completely engrossed with Madame *de St. Croix*. I have not yet forgotten the look on his handsome face when she drove off with her friend. ‘He’s a fool,’ I said to myself; ‘and yet a woman might well be proud to make a fool of such a man as that.’

“I left London in the middle of the season and thought no more of Madame *de St. Croix*. I had seen a pretty picture, I

had heard a strain of sweet music, I had turned over the page of an amusing romance—there was an end of it.

“The following winter I happened to spend in Vienna. Of course I went to one of the masked balls of *The Redouten-Saal*. I had not been ten minutes in the room when my ears thrilled to the low, seductive accents of that well-remembered voice. There she was again, masked, of course, but it was impossible to mistake the slim, pliant figure, the graceful gestures, the turn of the beautiful head, and the quiet energy that betrayed itself, even in the small, gloved hand. She was talking to a well-known Russian magnate less remarkable for purity of morals than diplomatic celebrity, boundless extravagance, and devotion to the other sex. To be on terms of common friendship with such a man was at least compromising to any lady under sixty years of age; and it is needless to say that his society was courted and appreciated accordingly.

“Madame *de St. Croix* seemed well satisfied with her neighbour; and though in her outward manner the least demonstrative of women, I could detect through her mask the same cruel glitter in her dark eyes that had so fascinated me, six months before, in the Gräfinn’s opera-

box. The Russian talked volubly, and she leaned towards him, as those do who are willing to hear more. *Château qui parle* furls its banner, *femme qui écoute* droops her head. Directly opposite, looking very tall and fierce as he reared himself against the doorway, stood Count V—. The Hungarian was pale as death. On his face, so worn and haggard, so cruelly altered since I saw it last, was set the stamp of physical pain, and he gnawed the corner of his brown moustache with that tension of the muscles about the mouth which denotes a paroxysm bravely kept down. As friends accosted him in passing, he bowed his head kindly and courteously while his whole face softened, but it was sad to see how soon the gleam passed away and the cloud came back, darker and heavier than before. The man's heart, you see, was generous, kindly, and full of trust—such a heart as women like Madame de St. Croix find it an interesting amusement to break.

“I think he must have made her some kind of appeal; for later in the evening I observed them together, and he was talking earnestly in German, with a low pleading murmur, to which I thought few women could have listened unmoved. She answered in French; and I was sorry for him when she broke up the colloquy with a

little scornful shrug of her shoulders, observing in a hard, unfeeling tone not like her usual voice, ‘Que voulez-vous? Enfin, c’est plus fort que moi!’

“The Russian put her into her sledge, for there was a foot of snow in the streets, and

Count V— walked home through it, with a smile on his face and his head up, looking strangely elated, I thought, for a man, the last strand of whose moorings had lately parted and left him adrift.

“I had not then learned there is no temporary stimulant so powerful as despair, no tonic so reviving as a *parti pris*.

“Next day, lounging into the *Chancellerie* of the Embassy for my usual gossip, I found little Hughes, an unpaid *attaché* (who earned, indeed, just as much as he received), holding forth with considerable spirit and energy.

“‘Curse him!’ said this indomitable young Briton. ‘If it had been swords, I should like to have fought him myself. I hate him! I tell you. Everybody hates him. And V — was the best chap between here and Orsova. He was almost like an Englishman. Wouldn’t he just have polished him off if they’d had swords.

That old muff, Bergheimer of the Cuirassiers, ought to be hanged. Do you think, if *I’d* been his second, I’d have put him up with pistols against the best shot in Europe?—and at the barrier too! It’s not like at home, you know. I never knew such a mull as they made of it amongst them. This cursed Calmuck gets the pull all through, and poor V—, who had lost his fortune already, loses his lady-love and his life. What a rum world it is!’

“Here the orator rolled and lit a cigarette, thus affording me a moment to inquire into the cause of his indignation. I then learned that, in consequence of a trifling dispute after last night’s ball, a duel had been fought at daybreak, in the snow, between Count V— and a Russian nobleman, in which the former was shot through the heart.

“‘Never got *one* in at all!’ said Hughes, again waxing eloquent on his friend’s wrongs. ‘I’ve seen both the seconds since. They were to walk up to a handkerchief, and the Russian potted him at forty yards the first step he made. They may say what they like about the row originating in politics—I know better.

They quarrelled because Madame *de St. Croix* had left V— and taken up with this snub-nosed Tartar. First, she ruined my poor friend. I know all about it. He hadn't a rap left; for if she'd asked him for the shirt off his back, he'd have stripped like beans! Then she broke his heart—the cheeriest, jolliest, kindest fellow in Europe—to finish up by leaving him for another man, who kills him before breakfast without a scruple; and if the devil don't get hold of *her* some fine day, why he's a disgrace to his appointment, that's all! and they ought to make him Secretary of Legation here, or pension him off somewhere and put him out of the way! Have another cigarette!

“Ten years afterwards I was sitting in the gardens of the Tuileries, one fine morning towards the middle of May, wondering, as English people always do wonder, on a variety of subjects—why the cigars were so bad in Paris, and the air so exhilarating—why the tender green leaves quivering over those deep alleys should have a sunshine of their own besides that which they reflected from above—why the *bonnes* and nursery-maids wore clean caps every day—why the railings always looked as if they had been re-gilt the same morning, and why the sentry at the gate should think it part of his duty to leer at

every woman who passed, like a satyr?

“Indeed I believe I was almost asleep, when I started in my chair, and rubbed my eyes to make sure it was not a dream. There, within ten paces of me, sat Madame *de St. Croix*, if I was still to call her so, apparently not an hour older than the first time we met. The face was even paler, the lips redder, the cruel eyes deeper and darker, but in that flickering light the woman looked more beautiful than ever. She was listening quietly and indolently, as of old, to a gentleman who sat with his back to me, telling his own story, whatever it might be, in a low, earnest, impressive voice. I raised my hat when I caught her eye, and she bowed in return politely enough, but obviously without recognition. The movement caused her companion to turn round, and in two strides he was by my chair, grasping me cordially by the hand. He was an old and intimate friend, a colonel in the French army, by whose side I had experienced more than one strange adventure, both in Eastern Europe and Asia-Minor—a man who had served with distinction, of middle age, a widower, fond of society, field-sports, speculation, and travelling; essentially *bon camarade*, but thoroughly French in his reflections and opinions. The last man in the world, I should have thought, to be made a

fool of by a woman. Well, there he was, her bounden slave! Absurdly happy if she smiled, miserable when she frowned, ready to fetch and carry like a poodle, perfectly childish about her, and utterly contemptible. If she had really cared for him, the temptation must have been irresistible, and she would have bullied him frightfully. But no, there was always the same repose of manner, the same careless kindness, the same melancholy, the same consciousness of an unquestionable superiority. One of his reasons, he soon confided to me, for being so fond of her was, that they never had an angry word! For a week or two I saw a good deal of them. Paris was already empty, and we did our plays, our Opéra Comique, and our little dinners pleasantly enough. She was always the same, and I found myself, day by day, becoming more conscious of that nameless charm about her, which I should despair of being able to describe. Yet as often as I met the glance of those deep, dark, unearthly eyes, a shudder crept over me, such as chills you when you come face to face with a ghost in your dreams. The colonel, I have said, was devoted to her. He was rarely absent from her side, but if by chance alone with me, would talk of her by the hour.

“He had found, he declared, fortunately before he was too old to appreciate it, the one inestimable treasure the earth contained. He had cherished his fancies, committed his follies, of course, *tout comme un autre*, but he had never experienced anything like this. It was his haven, his anchorage, his resting-place, and he might glide down into old age, and on to death, perfectly happy, because confident, that with *her* heart and *her* force of character, she would never change. He could not be jealous of her. Oh no! She was so frank, so confiding, so sincere. She, too, *passé par là*, had told him so; unlike other women, had confessed to him not only her last, but her many former attachments. He knew all about poor V—, who was shot in a duel, and the Russian general, banished to Siberia. How fortunate she had broken with him before his disgrace, because, in the loyalty of her nature, she would surely have followed him into exile, although she never cared for him in her heart, never! No, nor for any of the others; never had been fairly touched till now. Him, the colonel, she really *did* love. He had proved his devotion so thoroughly (I found out afterwards, though not from him, that my friend had been fool enough to sacrifice both fortune and profession for her sake), he was so reliable, she said, so kind, and so *good*. In short, he was perfectly happy,

and could see no cloud in his horizon, look which way he would.

“When I left Paris they accompanied me to the railway station; and the last I saw of them was their two heads very close over a railway guide, projecting a trip into a lonely part of Switzerland, where they would have no society but their own.

“Six months afterwards ‘Galignani’ informed me that my friend the colonel had been reinstated in the French army and appointed to a regiment of Chasseurs d’Afrique then serving in Algeria, where, before the Tuileries Gardens were again green, I learned from the same source he had already solved the great problem in an affair of outposts with the Khabyles. Long years elapsed, and there were streaks of grey in my hair and whiskers ere I saw Madame *de* St. Croix again. I had heard of her, indeed, at intervals both in London and Paris. I am bound to say her name was always coupled with those who were distinguished by birth, talent, or success. She was very choice, I believe, in the selection of her victims, despising equally an easy conquest and one of which the ravages could be readily repaired. The women hated her, the men said she was charming. For my part I kept out of her way: we were

destined to meet, nevertheless. I had embarked in a Peninsular and Oriental steamer at Marseilles very much indisposed, and retiring at once to my berth never quitted it till we were entering the Straits of Buoni-faccio. Here I came on deck, weak, exhausted, but convalescent, drinking in the sunshine and the scenery with that thirst for the beautiful which becomes so fierce after the confinement of recent illness. I literally revelled in the Mediterranean air, and basked in the warmth of those bright colours so peculiar to the shores of that summer sea. I was approaching middle age; I had ventured body and mind freely enough in the great conflict; and yet, I thank heaven, had hitherto been spared the crushing sorrow that makes a mockery of the noblest and purest enjoyments of earth, causing a man to turn from all that is fairest in sight and sense and sound with the sickness of a dead hope curdling at his heart. But then I had kept clear of Madame *de* St. Croix.

“When my eyes were at last sated with the gaudy hues of the coast and the golden glitter of the water, I was a little surprised to see that lady sitting within three paces of me reading a yellow-bound French novel. Great heaven! what was the woman’s secret? She looked younger than ever! Even in the searching glare of

a southern noon not a line could be detected on the pure, pale forehead, not a crease about the large, wistful, glittering eyes. That she was gifted with perennial youth I could see for myself; that she was dangerous even to the peace of a grey-haired man, I might have found out to my cost had our voyage been retarded by contrary winds or any such unavoidable delay, for she was good enough to recognise me on this occasion, and to give me a large share of her conversation and companionship. Thus it was I learned to own the spell under which so many had succumbed, to appreciate its power, not to understand, far less describe, its nature. Fortunately for me, ere its work could be completed, we arrived at Athens, and at Athens lay a trim, rakish-looking English yacht, with her ensign flying and her foretopsail loosed, waiting only the steamer's arrival to spread her wings and bear off this seductive sorceress to some garden of paradise in the Egean Sea.

“The owner of the yacht I had often heard of. He was a man remarkable for his enterprise and unflinching success in commerce as for his liberality, and indeed extravagance, in expenditure. He chose to have houses, pictures, horses, plate, everything of the best, was justly popular in society, and enormously rich.

“I never asked and never knew the port to which that yacht was bound. When we steamed out of the harbour she was already hull-down in the wake of a crimson sunset that seemed to stain the waters with a broad track of blood; but I saw her sold within eighteen months at Southampton, for her late owner's name had appeared in the ‘Gazette,’ and the man himself, I was told, might be found, looking very old and careworn, setting cabbages at Hanwell, watching eagerly for the arrival of a lady who never came.

“You may believe I thought more than once of the woman whose strange destiny it had been thus to enslave generation after generation of fools, and to love whom seemed as fatal as to be a priest of Aricia or a favourite of Catharine II. Nevertheless, while time wore on, I gradually ceased to think of her beauty, her heartlessness, her mysterious youth, or her magic influence over mankind. Presently, amongst a thousand engrossing occupations and interests, I forgot her as if she had never been. “I have driven a good many vehicles in my time, drags, phaetons, dogcarts, down to a basket-carriage drawn by a piebald pony with a hog-mane. Nay, I once steered a hansom cab up Bond Street in the early morning, freighted with more subalterns than I should like

to specify of her Majesty's Household Troops, but I never thought I should come to a bath chair!

“Nevertheless I found myself at last an inside passenger of one of these locomotive couches, enjoying the quiet and the air of the gardens at Hampton Court in complete and uninterrupted solitude. The man who dragged me to this pleasant spot having gone to ‘get his dinner,’ as he called it, and the nursery-maids, with their interesting charges, having retired from their morning, and not yet emerged for their afternoon stroll, I lay back, and thought of so many things—of the strength and manhood that had departed from me for ever; of the strange, dull calm that comes on with the evening of life, and contents us so well we would not have its morning back if we could; of the *gradual clairvoyance* that shows us everything in its true colours and at its real value; of the days, and months, and years so cruelly wasted, but that their pleasures, their excitements, their sins, their sorrows, and their sufferings, were indispensable for the great lesson which teaches us *to see*. Of these things I thought, and through them still, as at all times, moved the pale presence of an unforgotten face, passing like a spirit, dim and distant, yet dear as ever, across the gulf of years—a presence that, for

good or evil, was to haunt me to the end.

“Something in the association of ideas reminded me of Madame *de St. Croix*, and I said to myself, ‘At last age must have overtaken that marvellous beauty, and time brought the indomitable spirit to remorse, repentance, perhaps even amendment. What can have made me think of her in a quiet, peaceful scene like this?’

“Just then a lady and gentleman crossed the gravel walk in front of me, and took their places on a seat under an old tree not a dozen yards off. It was a lovely day in early autumn; the flowers were still ablaze with the gaudiest of their summer beauty, the sky was all dappled grey and gold, earth had put on the richest dress she wears throughout the year; but here and there a leaf fell noiseless on the sward, as if to testify that she too must shed all her glories in due season, and yield, like other beauties, her unwilling tribute to decay.

“But there was nothing of autumn in the pair who now sat opposite my couch, chatting, laughing, flirting, apparently either ignoring or disregarding my proximity. The man was in all the bloom and beauty of youth; the woman, though looking a few years older, did not yet seem

to have attained her prime. I could scarcely believe my eyes! Yes, if ever I beheld Madame *de St. Croix*, there she sat with her fatal gaze turned on this infatuated boy, leading him gradually, steadily, surely, to the edge of that chasm into which those who plunged came to the surface nevermore. It was the old story over again. How well I remembered, even after such an interval, the tender droop of the head, the veiling eyelashes, the glance so quickly averted, yet, like a snapshot, telling with such deadly effect; the mournful smile, the gentle whisper, the quiet confiding gesture of the slender hand, all the by-play of the most accomplished and most unscrupulous of actresses. There was no more chance of escape for her companion than for a fisherman of the North Sea, whose skiff has been sucked into the *Maëlstrom*, with mast unshipped and oars adrift half a mile astern. By sight, if not personally, I then knew most of the notabilities of the day. The boy, for such I might well call him in comparison with myself, seemed too good for his fate, and yet I saw well enough it was inevitable. He had already made himself a name as a poet of no mean pretensions, and held besides the character of a high-spirited, agreeable, and unaffected member of society. Add to this, that he was manly, good-looking, and well-born;

nothing more seemed wanting to render him a fit victim for the altar at which he was to be offered up. Like his predecessors, he was fascinated. The snake held him in her eye. The poor bird’s wings were fluttering, its volition was gone, its doom sealed. Could nothing save it from the destroyer? I longed to have back, if only for a day, the powers which I had regretted so little half-an-hour ago. Weak, helpless, weary, and worn-out, I yet determined to make an effort, and save him if I could.

“They rose to go, but found the gate locked through which they had intended to pass. She had a way of affecting a pretty wilfulness in trifles, and sent him to fetch the key. Prompt to obey her lightest wish, he bounded off in search of it, and following slowly, she passed within two paces of my chair, bending on its helpless invalid a look that seemed to express far less pity for his condition than a grudging envy of his lot. I stopped her with a gesture that in one more able-bodied would have been a bow, and, strange to say, she recognised me at once. There was not a moment to lose. I took courage from a certain wistful look that gave softness to her eyes, and I spoke out.

“‘We shall never meet again,’ I said; ‘we have crossed each

other's paths at such long intervals, and on such strange occasions, but I know this is the last of them! Why time stands still for *you* is a secret I cannot fathom, but the end must come some day, put it off however long you will. Do you not think that when you become as I am, a weary mortal, stumbling with half-shut eyes on the edge of an open grave, it would be well to have one good deed on which you could look back, to have reprieved one out of the many victims on whom you have inflicted mortal punishment for the offence of loving you so much better than you deserve? Far as it stretches behind you, every footstep in your track is marked with sorrow—more than one with blood.

Show mercy now, as you may have to ask it hereafter. Life is all before this one, and it seems cruel thus to blast the sapling from its very roots. He is hopeful, trustful, and fresh-hearted—spare him and let him go.'

"She was fitting the glove on her faultless little hand. Her brow seemed so calm, so soft and pure, that for a moment I thought I had conquered, but looking up from her feminine employment, I recognised the hungry glitter in those dark, merciless eyes, and I knew there was no hope.

"It is too late,' she answered, 'too late to persuade either him or me. It is no fault of mine. It is fate. For him—for the others—for all of us. Sometimes I wish it had not been so. Mine has been an unhappy life, and there seems to be no end, no resting-place. I can no more help myself than a drowning wretch, swept down by a torrent; but I am too proud to catch at the twigs and straws that would break off in my hand. I would change places with you willingly. Yes—you in that bath chair. I am so tired sometimes, and yet I dare not wish it was all over. Think of me as forbearingly as you can, for we shall not cross each other's path again.'

"And this boy?' I asked, striving to detect something of compunction in the pitiless face that was yet so beautiful.

"He must take his chance with the rest,' she said. 'Here he comes—good-bye.'

"They walked away arm-in-arm through the golden autumn weather, and a chill came into my very heart, for I knew what that chance was worth.

"A few months, and the snow lay six inches deep over the grave of him whose opening manhood had been so full of promise, so rich in all that makes youth brightest, life

most worth having; while a woman in deep mourning was praying there, under the wintry sky; but this woman was his mother, and her heart was broken for the love she bore her boy.

"His death had been very shocking, very sudden. People talked of a ruptured blood-vessel, a fall on his bedroom floor, a doctor not to be found when sent for; a series of fatalities that precluded the possibility of saving him; but those who pretended to know best affirmed that not all the doctors in Europe could have done any good, for when his servant went to call him in the morning he found his master lying stark and stiff, having been dead some hours. There was a pool of blood on his carpet; there were ashes of burnt letters in his fireplace; more, they whispered with meaning shrugs and solemn, awe-struck faces—

'There was that across his throat

Which you had hardly cared to see.'

"You can understand now that I believe in Vampires."

"What became of her?" I asked, rather eagerly, for I was interested in this Madame *de St. Croix*. I like a woman who goes into

extremes, either for good or evil. Great recklessness, equally with great sensibility, has its charm for such a temperament as mine. I can understand, though I cannot explain, the influence possessed by very wicked women who never scruple to risk their own happiness as readily as their neighbours'. I wanted to know something more about Madame *de St. Croix*, but he was not listening; he paid no attention to my question. In a tone of abstraction that denoted his thoughts were many miles away, he only murmured,

“Insatiate—impenetrable—pitiless. The others were bad enough in all conscience, but I think she might have spared the boy!”

## Summary

The narrator recounts his recurring encounters over many years with the mysterious and alluring Madame *de St. Croix*, who seems to maintain eternal youth and beauty while spellbinding a succession of men. Each relationship ends in ruin or death.

The narrator first sees Madame *de St. Croix* at the opera, captivated by her beauty but sensing something sinister. He later sees her enthrall and destroy a

Hungarian count named V—. Years afterwards in Vienna, the narrator learns Madame *de St. Croix* is now attached to a Russian man, while Count V— was recently killed in a duel linked to her. In Paris, the narrator finds an old French colonel friend besotted with Madame *de St. Croix*, until the colonel later dies after ruining himself for her. Much later, the narrator sees Madame *de St. Croix* with an English millionaire who is soon financially destroyed. Finally, the narrator witnesses Madame *de St. Croix* fascinating a young English poet but is unable to warn him before the poet is found dead in mysterious circumstances. The narrator comes to believe Madame *de St. Croix* is a ruthless “Vampire” who maintains eternal youth by draining the life and vitality from the men who love her, leaving tragedy in her wake.

## Bio

George John Whyte-Melville (1821-1878) was a prolific Scottish novelist and poet who pioneered the sporting novel genre. Born into an affluent family in Scotland, Whyte-Melville attended Eton College and served in the army for nearly ten years where he developed passions for riding and hunting. His first novel, “*Digby Grand*” (1857), was a lighthearted story set in hunting fields and established

his reputation as a writer. Over the next two decades, he published over a dozen novels focusing on sports, military life, and adventure. His works like “*Kate Coventry*”, “*The Gladiators*”, and “*Riding Recollections*” evoked the cavalier spirit of the English gentleman and nostalgic provincial life. Though not considered a literary giant, Whyte-Melville was admired by the likes of Henry James for vividly capturing the sporting country life of 19th century England. He led a reckless life as a hunter and rider which impacted his health, eventually dying at age 57 from a hunting accident. Nonetheless, Whyte-Melville played a key role in popularizing the sports fiction genre





# HOW TO SPEED UP YOUR WRITING:

*Transforming from Slow Writer to Production Powerhouse*

*by Allen Watts*

## How to Speed Up Your Writing: Transforming from Slow Writer to Production Powerhouse

Do you want to know how to speed up your writing? Do you envy those writers who can churn out thousands upon thousands of polished words per day, effortlessly meeting their ambitious daily word count targets, while you struggle to scrape together a few hard-fought pages? Do

they have some exclusive expertise or innate talent that enables such prodigious creative output?

The good news is that writing speed and overall productive velocity can actively be improved through focused learning and practice. While natural aptitude plays a partial role, the essential secrets that separate plodding writers from production powerhouses essentially boil down to mindset shifts and the mastery of crucial workflow principles.

By incorporating the techniques of prolific authors into a regular writing regimen, nearly anyone can stop procrastinating and transform from a slow, sporadic writer

into a speed demon capable of hitting aggressive daily word counts. Core strategies like time-restricted drafting, sentence reversing, and frequent breaks can significantly upgrade velocity once integrated as a customary practice. Meanwhile, broader perspective adjustments surrounding consistency, iteration, and compound progress help reframe the improvement process to value small gains.

This article will reveal the hidden secrets successful authors use to blast through projects at lightning speed without compromising insight or quality. Each component is vital in a comprehensive speed-building system, from timed writing tests to assess

current velocity to principles of exponential growth through steady daily progress. By combining multiple complementary best practices tailored to your pacing challenges, truly transformative increases in writing efficiency are within reach.

The path to becoming a production powerhouse begins with letting go of limiting beliefs about fixed writing speed and instead embracing the possibility of dynamic acceleration over time. Are you ready to unlock the secrets of prolific authors and amplify your daily word counts beyond what once seemed feasible? Let's dive in!

## Time Yourself

The first step when using these speedprompts for writing sprint practice is to establish a baseline – use a timer to measure how many words you can write in 10 minutes. This will help you quantify where you are starting from regarding speed.

Pick a prompt that resonates, set a timer for precisely 10 minutes, and write constantly until the timer goes off. Ignore typos, scratch out words, use shorthand – the focus is to keep hands moving without stopping. When the 10 minutes are up, check your

word count using your device or hand. Record this number so you can track your progress.

Make speed sprint sessions part of your regular writing practice. Aim for at least 3 per week to start. Ten minutes is enough time to make progress while still staying focused. Continue to choose prompts and time each 10-minute burst, writing nonstop. Push to increase your word-per-minute rate with each round. See if you can beat your record from the previous sprint.

Tracking your before and afterword counts motivates you by visually demonstrating that you are getting faster. You can also record session dates and times in a notebook or spreadsheet. Doing so provides concrete proof of your effort and improvement. Review the data to stay fired and continue leveling up your writing velocity! With regular speed sprints, you should notice your baseline word count trending upward within a few weeks.

## Simplify Your Space

To get into a flow where you can write quickly, simplify, and **declutter your physical or digital workspace**. Remove anything unrelated or visually

distracting from your writing area so you can focus. A clean backdrop will help you tune out the world and zero in on rapid word creation.

Also, ensure your writing tools are optimized for seamless sentences without constant stopping. For example, if writing on a device, use simple text apps to swiftly type without dealing with extra mouse clicks navigating menus every few seconds. Minimalism and ease here prevent momentum loss.

Streamline by having your timer, writing instrument, and paper/device ready in your workspace before each sprint. Resist checking phones, email, or anything disruptive that will hamper your velocity. The goal is to enter a zone and power through without interruption. Every distraction, however brief, negatively impacts your time and word count.

Essentially, treat rapid writing sprints like workouts for your writing muscles. Eliminate anything encumbering your hands from moving efficiently during sets. With clear surroundings and simplified tools, you can pour all focus and energy directly into timed writing bursts. By removing obstacles, your maximum speed will rise each round as you reinforce the skill of

swiftly translating thoughts to pages.

## Write In Focused Sprints

Marathon sessions can be counterproductive when aiming to build writing speed and stamina. Trying to push yourself to write for hours often leads to burnout, distraction, and slowing down.

**A better approach is to work in focused, timed writing sprints.**

Start by setting a timer for 25 minutes and challenge yourself to write without stopping for the entire period. Resist the urge to check emails, texts, or anything interrupting the flow. Eliminate all distractions and zero in on rapid-fire word creation for the entire sprint duration. When the timer goes off, take a 5-minute break before starting your next 25-minute round.

Use prompts from the speed prompt list to spark idea flow so you can instantly start writing when each timed sprint begins. Let the prompt launch a steady stream of sentences without agonizing over perfect phrasing. The objective is to enter a zone of constant motion and output. Keep momentum the same every few minutes to make minor edits. Power through

nonstop, then review and polish text between sprints.

As your skills improve, gradually increase sprint times up to 40-50 minutes. Quick breaks between sessions will replenish mental energy so you can attack the next sprint recharged. With undivided attention during work periods, you strengthen your ability to channel thoughts onto the page quickly.

Timing writing bursts teaches focus, consistency, and speed that carries over into everything you write. Each sprint stretches your capacity further until your baseline velocity rises. Race the clock in distraction-free cycles to train like an athlete building writing endurance!

## Disable the Internal Editor

One obstacle that frequently hampers writing velocity is over-editing early drafts. When trying to write swiftly during sprints, don't obsess over crafting flawless sentences on the first pass. Be willing to mute that inner critic and power through a rough draft without constant second-guessing.

Permit yourself to spill words rapidly onto the page during speed sprints without judging

every line. Tell yourself not to delete or heavily revise until the sprint timer goes off. Disable functions like backspacing or automatic spellcheck if they slow you down. The goal here is to race through content creation without the kind of pauses, doubts, and laborious perfecting that restraints speed.

Establish an understanding with yourself that you will revisit the text later to tidy up, expand where needed, and sculpt a polished narrative. But the first draft generated in sprints should be raw, messy, and quick – focused solely on pounding out substance without edits hampering flow. Silencing your inner critic takes practice but is essential for writing efficiently at higher speeds. By simply jotting down ideas as they come rather than scrutinizing every angle, your velocity will increase as thoughts transform seamlessly from mind to page. Train yourself to postpone tweaking text until after rapid content generation. Racing a timer magnifies how much editing during the initial sprint ultimately slows you down.

With the internal editor disabled, your creative spirit can run wild, translating ideas to words at exhilarating speed! Refine your sprinter's mindset to sprint first and edit later,

and your writing velocity will surge.

## Use Speedprompts

One effective way to maximize writing speed sessions is to utilize **speedprompts**. These are short, targeted prompts designed to instantly get your fingers gliding across the keyboard without pausing or deciding on a direction first.

Speedprompts provides a springboard topic so you can translate thoughts to text swiftly. The random ideas also allow creativity to bubble up and spill out, versus trying to force writing about a blank, general subject. Having a defined initial focus supercharges your momentum.

Search online for lists of speedprompts offering various thought-sparking concepts to choose from before each sprint. Skim the options and pick one or two that resonate – then start madly writing the second your timer starts! Let the prompt trigger a geyser of uncensored sentences that keep erupting continuously until time's up.

The prompts empower speed by providing an instant mental stepping stone, so you gather no moss and words whoosh

nonstop. They also train flexibility by nudging you to quickly switch gears between vastly different topics with each sprint while maintaining velocity.

With abundant speed prompts at your fingertips before every round, you eliminate hesitation, and charging forward is effortless. List possibilities: swarming your device empowers your hands, and concentration intensifies, knowing a fresh prompt awaits that sprint's leap. Tapping these launch prompts will rapidly ratchet your writing rate record!

## Set Stretch Goals

One way to maximize gains in writing speed is to set clear **stretch goals that test your limits**. Start by determining your current personal best word count for a 10-minute writing sprint. Once you know your baseline velocity, establish specific numeric targets just beyond your reach to expand your boundaries each round.

For example, if your last sprint resulted in 275 words in 10 minutes, set your next goal at 285. Make it clear this isn't wishful thinking – commit to pushing yourself faster to produce those concrete extra words in the same timeframe. Draft an affirmative statement

like “My next sprint will yield 285 words in 10 minutes” to crystallize tangible intentions.

With an exact, measurable mark identified as your updated stretch goal, attack the next sprint hyper-focused on hitting or exceeding that higher output level. Time each accelerated burst as you strain to best personal records. Celebrate new word count peaks after every small sprint success.

Continually recalibrate your numeric targets once previous plateaus are conquered. Maximizing your milestones motivates you by providing concrete evidence that dedicated speed training expands limits—bit by bit, inch forward faster until velocity leaps accumulate.

Setting ambitious word/minute objectives and then straining to claim them prompts your abilities to rise to answering the challenge. Stretch goals demand focused determination, which drives workflow to become more efficient, proficient, and swift. Expecting more from yourself manifests actual increases in speed over time. Define, commit to, and conquer numeric velocity milestones!

## Revise in Reverse

One effective strategy for revising your writing is to read back finished pieces from the end to the start. Instead of starting at the beginning of your draft and reading forward in normal progression, begin at the last paragraph or sentence and systematically work your way backward toward the opening.

This unconventional approach provides a fresh perspective that helps you notice clumsy phrasing, awkward transitions, repetitive ideas, or other issues your brain might smoothly over if you read the piece in its usual chronological order. When reading forward, it's easy for your mind to fill in meaning and ignore subtle problems since you already know what was intended in earlier sections leading up to that point. However, by working backward from the conclusion, each part is evaluated more objectively as its self-contained unit.

Revising in reverse challenges your assumptions and helps identify areas that genuinely only make logical sense if you rely too heavily on the context set up previously. You may catch sentences that seem entirely clear yet use imprecise language or paragraphs that depend too strongly on separate sections to convey their ideas. Passages that

flowed reasonably well when read forward may suddenly seem choppy or unclear when assessed in isolation coming backward.

This diagnostic approach simulates a first-time reading from an unbiased perspective. Turning your familiar draft on its head allows you to analyze each component's coherence, clarity, and effectiveness as a standalone piece of writing. Moving systematically from back to front helps pinpoint problem spots so you can refine and smooth out those passages that don't hold up as well, independently from their surrounding context.

## Take Frequent Breaks

When you're in the midst of a marathon writing session, with creative juices flowing as you try to make a deadline or word count, it can be tempting to power through until the piece is finished without stopping. However, taking frequent short breaks every 45 minutes is vital to maintain the quality and quantity of your output over long stretches.

Resting your mind, eyes, and hands regularly for 5-10 minutes serves several vital purposes. Most critically, it gives your cognitive abilities a

chance to refresh so that concentration, creativity, and imagination come more easily. Staring at a screen and constantly typing can lead to mental fatigue, causing you to lose focus and produce lower-quality work that requires heavier editing later. Getting up regularly realigns attention and interest so that you return to the page replenished.

Equally important are the physical benefits for the hands, wrists, and eyes. Repetitive delicate motor tasks like typing put strain on tendons and joints, which accumulate over time without breaks. This causes an elevation in background discomfort levels, making it harder to sustain rapid, accurate writing. Simple stretches alleviate muscle tension. Likewise, blinking and gaze adjustment are reduced during intense concentration, resulting in dry, irritated eyes. A screen break prevents this issue.

Setting a timer to remind yourself to stand up and disengage for 5-10 minutes after 45 minutes of uninterrupted writing ensures you can maintain speed and quality without overtaxing your mind and body. You'll return to the keyboard feeling mental clarity, visual comfort, and physical readiness to produce more with less strain. Consider breaks as tools to

boost writing stamina over the long run rather than interruptions that reduce short-term word count. The enhanced energy and focus they provide far outweigh any brief pause in output.

## Consistency Compounds

When seeking to improve your writing speed, it's essential to understand that frequent, consistent practice makes a more significant difference than sporadic bursts focused solely on rapid output. While individual sessions targeting quick drafting have their place as drill practice, sustainable gains in velocity emerge from minor daily improvements compounded over weeks and months.

Trying to press for overly ambitious increases in speed during a single session typically backfires through rapid fatigue or loss of quality. However, modest incremental improvements regularly accumulate into substantially faster writing speed in the long term. Devoting even 20-30 minutes daily to time-restricted drafting challenges or speed-focused exercises lets you stretch your capabilities bit by bit.

Compounding refers to the exponential increase created

by steady improvements building upon one another over time. Raising your average writing speed by only 100 words per 30 minutes daily may not seem significant. Yet over a year, those small raises interact to boost your velocity by tens of thousands of words. The tempo you can comfortably maintain snowballs.

This emergent level of speed originates from the persistent act of establishing new norms and then expanding them. The brain and muscles adapt to sustain paces that once required peak effort reliably. Reinforcing faster capabilities shifts their status as exceptional surges into ordinary operations. What was once a sprint becomes a jog.

Sustainable excellence demands consistency, not haphazard heroic practice in almost any skill. Regularly writing under time constraints, pushing the pace, or recording speed gains grounds increased velocity into an unconscious habit. Compounding turns modest gains into vastly multiplied writing efficiency so that 1000 words an hour becomes 5000. But this accumulates through small, steady steps built upon continually.

## Accelerate Your Writing Velocity

Implement these proven tips to transform yourself from a plodding tortoise into a speedy writer here! Your readers will be thrilled at the increase in your publishing pace. Now, get sprinting!

Improving your writing speed opens up a world of exciting possibilities. By implementing these proven best practices for increasing your velocity, you can transform from the metaphorical "plodding tortoise" into a speedy "writing hare" capable of rapid output. With consistency and dedication to continual progress, you can cultivate an efficiency that enables you to produce first drafts with blazing results.

A significantly faster pace allows you to publish more regularly and achieve greater volume. Still, it also reduces the burden and internal resistance physical writing often entails due to its taxing mental and physical demands. Steady daily gains in velocity over months foster a fluid compositional process that feels less effortful, more engaging, and highly energized. The experience transitions from intimidating to inspiring as incremental gains in tempo compound into

tangible growth in confidence and joy.

The suggestions in this article offer a blueprint for meaningfully accelerating your capabilities. Whether broad strategies like time-restricted drafting or specific tactics around reversing sentences, regular timed tests, or taking healthy breaks, each component plays a vital part in a comprehensive system.

Integrating multiple complementary approaches creates an effect more significant than the sum of their parts, allowing you to reach new heights of creative expression.

Put these pointers into consistent daily action through practical writing exercises tailored to your current level. With commitment and intelligent training grounded

in exponential growth, the tortoise of old gives way to the hare of the future—one whose speed is matched only by the quality and impact of the works produced at pace. Your readers await the fruits of this increased efficiency with great anticipation! ###

# Ozymandias of Egypt

Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822)

I met a traveler from an antique land  
Who said: "Two vast and trunkless legs of stone  
Stand in the desert. . . . Near them, on the sand,  
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,  
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,  
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read  
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,  
The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed;  
And on the pedestal these words appear:  
'My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings,  
Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!'  
Nothing beside remains.? Round the decay  
Of that colossal Wreck, boundless and bare  
The lone and level sands stretch far away."



*A Story*

# THE MARK OF THE BEAST

*by Rudyard Kipling*



# The Mark of the Beast

## by Rudyard Kipling

Your Gods and my Gods-do you or I know which are the stronger? Native Proverb.

EAST of Suez, some hold, the direct control of Providence ceases; Man being there handed over to the power of the Gods and Devils of Asia, and the Church of England Providence only exercising an occasional and modified supervision in the case of Englishmen.

This theory accounts for some of the more unnecessary horrors of life in India: it may be stretched to explain my story.

My friend Strickland of the Police, who knows as much of natives of India as is good for any man, can bear witness to the facts of the case. Dumoise, our doctor, also saw what Strickland and I saw. The inference which he drew from the evidence was entirely incorrect. He is dead now; he died, in a rather curious manner, which has been elsewhere described.

When Fleete came to India he owned a little money and some land in the Himalayas, near a place called Dharmsala.

Both properties had been left him by an uncle, and he came out to finance them. He was a big, heavy, genial, and inoffensive man. His knowledge of natives was, of course, limited, and he complained of the difficulties of the language.

He rode in from his place in the hills to spend New Year in the station, and he stayed with Strickland. On New Year's Eve there was a big dinner at the club, and the night was excusably wet. When men foregather from the uttermost ends of the Empire, they have a right to be riotous. The Frontier had sent down a contingent o' Catch-'em-Alive-O's who had not seen twenty white faces for a year, and were used to ride fifteen miles to dinner at the next Fort at the risk of a Khyberree bullet where their drinks should lie. They profited by their new security, for they tried to play pool with a curled-up hedgehog found in the garden, and one of them carried the marker round the room in his teeth. Half a dozen planters had come in from the south and were talking 'horse' to the Biggest Liar in Asia, who was trying to cap all their stories at once. Everybody was there, and there was a general closing up of ranks and taking stock of our losses in dead or disabled that had fallen during the past year. It was a very wet night, and I remember that we sang 'Auld Lang Syne' with our

feet in the Polo Championship Cup, and our heads among the stars, and swore that we were all dear friends. Then some of us went away and annexed Burma, and some tried to open up the Soudan and were opened up by Fuzzies in that cruel scrub outside Suakim, and some found stars and medals, and some were married, which was bad, and some did other things which were worse, and the others of us stayed in our chains and strove to make money on insufficient experiences.

Fleete began the night with sherry and bitters, drank champagne steadily up to dessert, then raw, rasping Capri with all the strength of whisky, took Benedictine with his coffee, four or five whiskies and sodas to improve his pool strokes, beer and bones at half-past two, winding up with old brandy. Consequently, when he came out, at half-past three in the morning, into fourteen degrees of frost, he was very angry with his horse for coughing, and tried to leapfrog into the saddle. The horse broke away and went to his stables; so Strickland and I formed a Guard of Dishonour to take Fleete home.

Our road lay through the bazaar, close to a little temple of Hanuman, the Monkey-god, who is a leading divinity worthy of respect. All gods have good points, just as have

all priests. Personally, I attach much importance to Hanuman, and am kind to his people—the great gray apes of the hills. One never knows when one may want a friend.

There was a light in the temple, and as we passed, we could hear voices of men chanting hymns. In a native temple, the priests rise at all hours of the night to do honour to their god. Before we could stop him, Fleete dashed up the steps, patted two priests on the back, and was gravely grinding the ashes of his cigar-butt into the forehead of the red stone image of Hanuman. Strickland tried to drag him out, but he sat down and said solemnly:

‘Shee that? ‘Mark of the B-beasht! *I* made it. Ishn’t it fine?’

In half a minute the temple was alive and noisy, and Strickland, who knew what came of polluting gods, said that things might occur. He, by virtue of his official position, long residence in the country, and weakness for going among the natives, was known to the priests and he felt unhappy. Fleete sat on the ground and refused to move. He said that ‘good old Hanuman’ made a very soft pillow.

Then, without any warning, a Silver Man came out of a recess behind the image of the god. He was perfectly naked in that bitter, bitter cold, and his body shone like frosted silver, for he was what the Bible calls ‘a leper as white as snow.’ Also he had no face, because he was a leper of some years’ standing and his disease was heavy upon him. We two stooped to haul Fleete up, and the temple was filling and filling with folk who seemed to spring from the earth, when the Silver Man ran in under our arms, making a noise exactly like the mewling of an otter, caught Fleete round the body and dropped his head on Fleete’s breast before we could wrench him away. Then he retired to a corner and sat mewling while the crowd blocked all the doors.

The priests were very angry until the Silver Man touched Fleete. That nuzzling seemed to sober them.

At the end of a few minutes’ silence one of the priests came to Strickland and said, in perfect English, ‘Take your friend away. He has done with Hanuman, but Hanurnan has not done with him.’ The crowd gave room and we carried Fleete into the road.

Strickland was very angry. He said that we might all three have been knifed, and that Fleete should thank his stars

that he had escaped without injury.

Fleete thanked no one. He said that he wanted to go to bed. He was gorgeously drunk.

We moved on, Strickland silent and wrathful, until Fleete was taken with violent shivering fits and sweating. He said that the smells of the bazaar were overpowering, and he wondered why slaughter-houses were permitted so near English residences. ‘Can’t you smell the blood?’ said Fleete.

We put him to bed at last, just as the dawn was breaking, and Strickland invited me to have another whisky and soda. While we were drinking he talked of the trouble in the temple, and admitted that it baffled him completely. Strickland hates being mystified by natives, because his business in life is to overmatch them with their own weapons. He has not yet succeeded in doing this, but in fifteen or twenty years he will have made some small progress.

‘They should have mauled us,’ he said, ‘instead of mewling at us. I wonder what they meant. I don’t like it one little bit.’

I said that the Managing Committee of the temple would in all probability bring a

criminal action against us for insulting their religion. There was a section of the Indian Penal Code which exactly met Fleete's offence. Strickland said he only hoped and prayed that they would do this. Before I left I looked into Fleete's room, and saw him lying on his right side, scratching his left breast. Then I went to bed cold, depressed, and unhappy, at seven o'clock in the morning.

At one o'clock I rode over to Strickland's house to inquire after Fleete's head. I imagined that it would be a sore one. Fleete was breakfasting and seemed unwell. His temper was gone, for he was abusing the cook for not supplying him with an underdone chop. A man who can eat raw meat after a wet night is a curiosity. I told Fleete this and he laughed.

'You breed queer mosquitoes in these parts,' he said. 'I've been bitten to pieces, but only in one place.'

'Let's have a look at the bite,' said Strickland. 'It may have gone down since this morning.'

While the chops were being cooked, Fleete opened his shirt and showed us, just over his left breast, a mark, the perfect double of the black rosettes—the five or six

irregular blotches arranged in a circle—on a leopard's hide. Strickland looked and said, 'It was only pink this morning. It's grown black now.'

Fleete ran to a glass.

'By Jove!' he said, 'this is nasty. What is it?'

We could not answer. Here the chops came in, all red and juicy, and Fleete bolted three in a most offensive manner. He ate on his right grinders only, and threw his head over his right shoulder as he snapped the meat. When he had finished, it struck him that he had been behaving strangely, for he said apologetically, 'I don't think I ever felt so hungry in my life. I've bolted like an ostrich.'

After breakfast Strickland said to me, 'Don't go. Stay here, and stay for the night.'

Seeing that my house was not three miles from Strickland's, this request was absurd. But Strickland insisted, and was going to say something when Fleete interrupted by declaring in a shamefaced way that he felt hungry again. Strickland sent a man to my house to fetch over my bedding and a horse, and we three went down to Strickland's stables to pass the hours until it was time to go out for a ride. The man who has a weakness for

horses never wearies of inspecting them; and when two men are killing time in this way they gather knowledge and lies the one from the other.

There were five horses in the stables, and I shall never forget the scene as we tried to look them over. They seemed to have gone mad. They reared and screamed and nearly tore up their pickets; they sweated and shivered and lathered and were distraught with fear. Strickland's horses used to know him as well as his dogs; which made the matter more curious. We left the stable for fear of the brutes throwing themselves in their panic. Then Strickland turned back and called me. The horses were still frightened, but they let us 'gentle' and make much of them, and put their heads in our bosoms.

'They aren't afraid of US,' said Strickland. 'D'you know, I'd give three months' pay if OUTRAGE here could talk.'

But Outrage was dumb, and could only cuddle up to his master and blow out his nostrils, as is the custom of horses when they wish to explain things but can't. Fleete came up when we were in the stalls, and as soon as the horses saw him, their fright broke out afresh. It was all that we could do to escape from the place un-kicked.

Strickland said, 'They don't seem to love you, Fleete.'

'Nonsense,' said Fleete; 'my mare will follow me like a dog. He went to her; she was in a loose-box; but as he slipped the bars she plunged, knocked him down, and broke away into the garden. I laughed, but Strickland was not amused. He took his moustache in both fists and pulled at it till it nearly came out. Fleete, instead of going off to chase his property, yawned, saying that he felt sleepy. He went to the house to lie down, which was a foolish way of spending New Year's Day.'

Strickland sat with me in the stables and asked if I had noticed anything peculiar in Fleete's manner. I said that he ate his food like a beast; but that this might have been the result of living alone in the hills out of the reach of society as refined and elevating as ours for instance. Strickland was not amused. I do not think that he listened to me, for his next sentence referred to the mark on Fleete's breast, and I said that it might have been caused by blister-flies, or that it was possibly a birth-mark newly born and now visible for the first time. We both agreed that it was unpleasant to look at, and Strickland found occasion to say that I was a fool.

'I can't tell you what I think now,' said he, 'because you would call me a madman; but you must stay with me for the next few days, if you can. I want you to watch Fleete, but don't tell me what you think till I have made up my mind.'

'But I am dining out to-night,' I said. 'So am I,' said Strickland, 'and so is Fleete. At least if he doesn't change his mind.'

We walked about the garden smoking, but saying nothing—because we were friends, and talking spoils good tobacco—till our pipes were out. Then we went to wake up Fleete. He was wide awake and fidgeting about his room.

'I say, I want some more chops,' he said. 'Can I get them?'

We laughed and said, 'Go and change. The ponies will be round in a minute.'

'All right,' said Fleete. 'I'll go when I get the chops—underdone ones, mind.'

He seemed to be quite in earnest. It was four o'clock, and we had had breakfast at one; still, for a long time, he demanded those underdone chops. Then he changed into riding clothes and went out into the verandah. His pony—the mare had not been caught

—would not let him come near. All three horses were unmanageable—mad with fear—and finally Fleete said that he would stay at home and get something to eat. Strickland and I rode out wondering. As we passed the temple of Hanuman, the Silver Man came out and mewed at us.

'He is not one of the regular priests of the temple,' said Strickland. 'I think I should peculiarly like to lay my hands on him.'

There was no spring in our gallop on the racecourse that evening. The horses were stale, and moved as though they had been ridden out.

'The fright after breakfast has been too much for them,' said Strickland.

That was the only remark he made through the remainder of the ride. Once or twice I think he swore to himself; but that did not count.

We came back in the dark at seven o'clock, and saw that there were no lights in the bungalow. 'Careless ruffians my servants are!' said Strickland.

My horse reared at something on the carriage drive, and Fleete stood up under its nose.

‘What are you doing, grovelling about the garden?’ said Strickland.

But both horses bolted and nearly threw us. We dismounted by the stables and returned to Fleete, who was on his hands and knees under the orange-bushes.

‘What the devil’s wrong with you?’ said Strickland.

‘Nothing, nothing in the world,’ said Fleete, speaking very quickly and thickly. ‘I’ve been gardening-botanising you know. The smell of the earth is delightful. I think I’m going for a walk—a long walk—all night.’

Then I saw that there was something excessively out of order somewhere, and I said to Strickland, ‘I am not dining out.’

‘Bless you!’ said Strickland. ‘Here, Fleete, get up. You’ll catch fever there. Come in to dinner and let’s have the lamps lit. We’ll all dine at home.’

Fleete stood up unwillingly, and said, ‘No lamps—no lamps. It’s much nicer here. Let’s dine outside and have some more chops—lots of ‘em and underdone—bloody ones with gristle.’

Now a December evening in Northern India is bitterly cold, and Fleete’s suggestion was that of a maniac.

‘Come in,’ said Strickland sternly. ‘Come in at once.’

Fleete came, and when the lamps were brought, we saw that he was literally plastered with dirt from head to foot. He must have been rolling in the garden. He shrank from the light and went to his room. His eyes were horrible to look at. There was a green light behind them, not in them, if you understand, and the man’s lower lip hung down.

Strickland said, ‘There is going to be trouble—big trouble—tonight. Don’t you change your riding-things.’

We waited and waited for Fleete’s reappearance, and ordered dinner in the meantime. We could hear him moving about his own room, but there was no light there. Presently from the room came the long-drawn howl of a wolf.

People write and talk lightly of blood running cold and hair standing up and things of that kind. Both sensations are too horrible to be trifled with. My heart stopped as though a knife had been driven through it, and Strickland turned as white as the tablecloth.

The howl was repeated, and was answered by another howl far across the fields.

That set the gilded roof on the horror. Strickland dashed into Fleete’s room. I followed, and we saw Fleete getting out of the window. He made beast-noises in the back of his throat. He could not answer us when we shouted at him. He spat.

I don’t quite remember what followed, but I think that Strickland must have stunned him with the long boot-jack or else I should never have been able to sit on his chest. Fleete could not speak, he could only snarl, and his snarls were those of a wolf, not of a man. The human spirit must have been giving way all day and have died out with the twilight. We were dealing with a beast that had once been Fleete.

The affair was beyond any human and rational experience. I tried to say ‘Hydrophobia,’ but the word wouldn’t come, because I knew that I was lying.

We bound this beast with leather thongs of the punkah-rope, and tied its thumbs and big toes together, and gagged it with a shoe-horn, which makes a very efficient gag if you know how to arrange it. Then we carried it into the

dining-room, and sent a man to Dumoise, the doctor, telling him to come over at once. After we had despatched the messenger and were drawing breath, Strickland said, 'It's no good. This isn't any doctor's work.' I, also, knew that he spoke the truth.

The beast's head was free, and it threw it about from side to side. Any one entering the room would have believed that we were curing a wolf's pelt. That was the most loathsome accessory of all.

Strickland sat with his chin in the heel of his fist, watching the beast as it wriggled on the ground, but saying nothing. The shirt had been torn open in the scuffle and showed the black rosette mark on the left breast. It stood out like a blister.

In the silence of the watching we heard something without mewling like a she-otter. We both rose to our feet, and, I answer for myself, not Strickland, felt sick—actually and physically sick. We told each other, as did the men in Pinafore, that it was the cat.

Dumoise arrived, and I never saw a little man so unprofessionally shocked. He said that it was a heart-rending case of hydrophobia, and that nothing could be done. At least any palliative

measures would only prolong the agony. The beast was foaming at the mouth. Fleete, as we told Dumoise, had been bitten by dogs once or twice. Any man who keeps half a dozen terriers must expect a nip now and again. Dumoise could offer no help. He could only certify that Fleete was dying of hydrophobia. The beast was then howling, for it had managed to spit out the shoe-horn. Dumoise said that he would be ready to certify to the cause of death, and that the end was certain. He was a good little man, and he offered to remain with us; but Strickland refused the kindness. He did not wish to poison Dumoise's New Year. He would only ask him not to give the real cause of Fleete's death to the public.

So Dumoise left, deeply agitated; and as soon as the noise of the cart-wheels had died away, Strickland told me, in a whisper, his suspicions. They were so wildly improbable that he dared not say them out aloud; and I, who entertained all Strickland's beliefs, was so ashamed of owning to them that I pretended to disbelieve.

'Even if the Silver Man had bewitched Fleete for polluting the image of Hanuman, the punishment could not have fallen so quickly.'

As I was whispering this the cry outside the house rose again, and the beast fell into a fresh paroxysm of struggling till we were afraid that the thongs that held it would give way.

'Watch!' said Strickland. 'If this happens six times I shall take the law into my own hands. I order you to help me.'

He went into his room and came out in a few minutes with the barrels of an old shot-gun, a piece of fishing-line, some thick cord, and his heavy wooden bedstead. I reported that the convulsions had followed the cry by two seconds in each case, and the beast seemed perceptibly weaker.

Strickland muttered, 'But he can't take away the life! He can't take away the life!'

I said, though I knew that I was arguing against myself, 'It may be a cat. It must be a cat. If the Silver Man is responsible, why does he dare to come here?'

Strickland arranged the wood on the hearth, put the gun-barrels into the glow of the fire, spread the twine on the table and broke a walking stick in two. There was one yard of fishing line, gut, lapped with wire, such as is used for mahseer-fishing, and he tied

the two ends together in a loop.

Then he said, 'How can we catch him? He must be taken alive and unhurt.'

I said that we must trust in Providence, and go out softly with polo-sticks into the shrubbery at the front of the house. The man or animal that made the cry was evidently moving round the house as regularly as a night-watchman. We could wait in the bushes till he came by and knock him over.

Strickland accepted this suggestion, and we slipped out from a bath-room window into the front verandah and then across the carriage drive into the bushes.

In the moonlight we could see the leper coming round the corner of the house. He was perfectly naked, and from time to time he mewed and stopped to dance with his shadow. It was an unattractive sight, and thinking of poor Fleete, brought to such degradation by so foul a creature, I put away all my doubts and resolved to help Strickland from the heated gun-barrels to the loop of twine—from the loins to the head and back again—with all tortures that might be needful.

The leper halted in the front porch for a moment and we jumped out on him with the sticks. He was wonderfully strong, and we were afraid that he might escape or be fatally injured before we caught him. We had an idea that lepers were frail creatures, but this proved to be incorrect. Strickland knocked his legs from under him and I put my foot on his neck. He mewed hideously, and even through my riding-boots I could feel that his flesh was not the flesh of a clean man.

He struck at us with his hand and feet-stumps. We looped the lash of a dog-whip round him, under the armpits, and dragged him backwards into the hall and so into the dining-room where the beast lay. There we tied him with trunk-straps. He made no attempt to escape, but mewed.

When we confronted him with the beast the scene was beyond description. The beast doubled backwards into a bow as though he had been poisoned with strychnine, and moaned in the most pitiable fashion. Several other things happened also, but they cannot be put down here.

'I think I was right,' said Strickland. 'Now we will ask him to cure this case.'

But the leper only mewed. Strickland wrapped a towel round his hand and took the gun-barrels out of the fire. I put the half of the broken walking stick through the loop of fishing-line and buckled the leper comfortably to Strickland's bedstead. I understood then how men and women and little children can endure to see a witch burnt alive; for the beast was moaning on the floor, and though the Silver Man had no face, you could see horrible feelings passing through the slab that took its place, exactly as waves of heat play across red-hot iron—gun-barrels for instance.

Strickland shaded his eyes with his hands for a moment and we got to work. This part is not to be printed.

The dawn was beginning to break when the leper spoke. His mewings had not been satisfactory up to that point. The beast had fainted from exhaustion and the house was very still. We unstrapped the leper and told him to take away the evil spirit. He crawled to the beast and laid his hand upon the left breast. That was all. Then he fell face down and whined, drawing in his breath as he did so.

We watched the face of the beast, and saw the soul of Fleete coming back into the eyes. Then a sweat broke out

on the forehead and the eyes—they were human eyes—closed. We waited for an hour but Fleete still slept. We carried him to his room and bade the leper go, giving him the bedstead, and the sheet on the bedstead to cover his nakedness, the gloves and the towels with which we had touched him, and the whip that had been hooked round his body. He put the sheet about him and went out into the early morning without speaking or mewling.

Strickland wiped his face and sat down. A night-gong, far away in the city, made seven o'clock.

'Exactly four-and-twenty hours!' said Strickland. 'And I've done enough to ensure my dismissal from the service, besides permanent quarters in a lunatic asylum. Do you believe that we are awake?'

The red-hot gun-barrel had fallen on the floor and was singeing the carpet. The smell was entirely real.

That morning at eleven we two together went to wake up Fleete. We looked and saw that the black leopard-rosette on his chest had disappeared. He was very drowsy and tired, but as soon as he saw us, he said, 'Oh! Confound you fellows. Happy New Year to

you. Never mix your liquors. I'm nearly dead.'

'Thanks for your kindness, but you're over time,' said Strickland. 'To-day is the morning of the second. You've slept the clock round with a vengeance.'

The door opened, and little Dumoise put his head in. He had come on foot, and fancied that we were laving out Fleete.

'I've brought a nurse,' said Dumoise. 'I suppose that she can come in for... what is necessary.'

'By all means,' said Fleete cheerily, sitting up in bed. 'Bring on your nurses.'

Dumoise was dumb. Strickland led him out and explained that there must have been a mistake in the diagnosis. Dumoise remained dumb and left the house hastily. He considered that his professional reputation had been injured, and was inclined to make a personal matter of the recovery. Strickland went out too. When he came back, he said that he had been to call on the Temple of Hanuman to offer redress for the pollution of the god, and had been solemnly assured that no white man had ever touched the idol and that he was an incarnation of all the virtues labouring under a delusion.

'What do you think?' said Strickland.

I said, "'There are more things . . .'"

But Strickland hates that quotation. He says that I have worn it threadbare.

One other curious thing happened which frightened me as much as anything in all the night's work. When Fleete was dressed he came into the dining-room and sniffed. He had a quaint trick of moving his nose when he sniffed. 'Horrid doggy smell, here,' said he. 'You should really keep those terriers of yours in better order. Try sulphur, Strick.'

But Strickland did not answer. He caught hold of the back of a chair, and, without warning, went into an amazing fit of hysterics. It is terrible to see a strong man overtaken with hysteria. Then it struck me that we had fought for Fleete's soul with the Silver Man in that room, and had disgraced ourselves as Englishmen for ever, and I laughed and gasped and gurgled just as shamefully as Strickland, while Fleete thought that we had both gone mad. We never told him what we had done.

Some years later, when Strickland had married and was a church-going member of



society for his wife's sake, we reviewed the incident dispassionately, and Strickland suggested that I should put it before the public.

I cannot myself see that this step is likely to clear up the mystery; because, in the first place, no one will believe a rather unpleasant story, and, in the second, it is well known to every right-minded man that the gods of the heathen are stone and brass, and any attempt to deal with them otherwise is justly condemned.

## Summary

“The Mark of the Beast” helped popularize and cement the werewolf as a staple figure in horror fiction. But many examples of werewolf literature existed for centuries

prior to when Kipling published his story in 1890.

The story is set in British India and narrated by an unnamed British man. He describes his friend Fleete, who gets drunk at a New Year's party and ends up desecrating a statue of the monkey god Hanuman at a temple. A naked leper priest marks Fleete's chest in retaliation.

Over the next day, Fleete starts exhibiting animalistic behaviors – howling, craving raw meat, acting strangely aggressive. The narrator and his friend Strickland suspect the leper's mark has cursed Fleete to become a werewolf or beast.

They capture the leper and tie him up along with the transformed Fleete. Strickland

tortures the leper to try to force him to remove the curse, but the leper only touches Fleete's chest again. Fleete returns to normal but remembers nothing.

The narrator and Strickland debate whether they imagined the supernatural elements, but find dog hair in the room, suggesting Fleete was indeed changing into a beast. They keep the events secret to protect their reputations.

In summary, it is an eerie and ambiguous story about a British man cursed by an Indian leper priest and exhibiting lycanthropic traits before being returned to normal, leaving doubts about whether the supernatural was real. The colonial setting and tensions are a key aspect. ###



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# How Ridiculous That I am by Kim Hooper



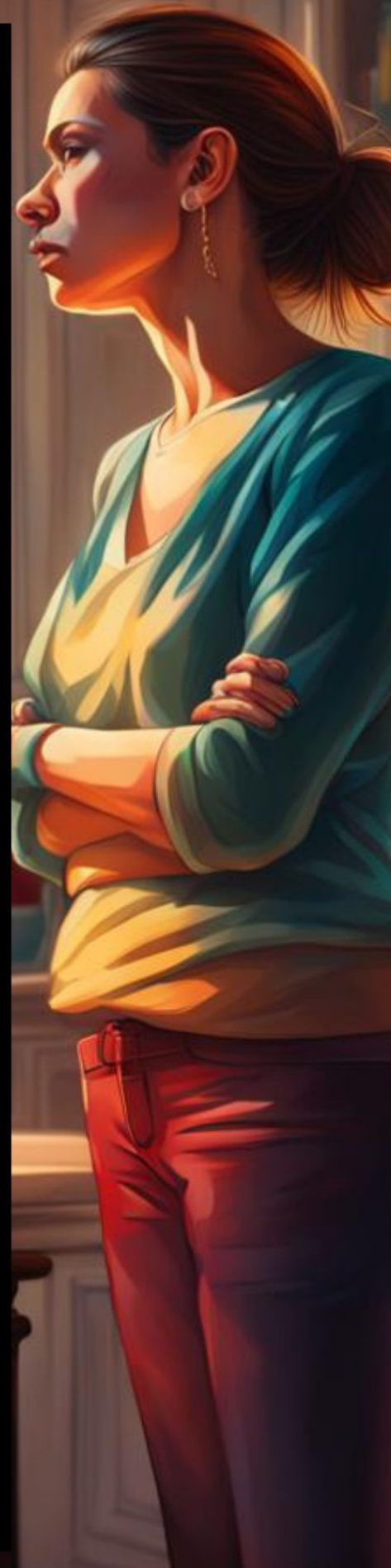
This morning, I fought with my daughter about her refusal to take another bite of vanilla-flavored Greek yogurt while, a world away, other mothers fought for their children to live another day.

On that small strip of land, two million people wait on death row, sentenced to terror for the crime of existing. Half of them, children. So many children. One killed every ten minutes, the headline reads. The post below it—a joke about the inconvenience of the end of Daylight Savings.

Dawg it feel like it's 14pm.

I laugh and then wonder how such a thing is possible—how can any human being laugh now, or ever again?

I am stressed about jury duty and the Santa Ana winds making my eyes burn and the dog-sitting I shouldn't have agreed to and the school closure on Veterans Day when I have to work at my job, spending hours on Zoom calls about how to better sell expensive beauty products to women who feel inadequate without them.



# How Ridiculous That I am by Kim Hooper



How ridiculous that I am capable of stress when there are no airstrikes here, no bombs dropping like meteors from the sky, when I have food and water and shelter and the basic assurance that my daughter and I will be alive tomorrow.


How ridiculous that I am capable of brushing my teeth and taking my vitamins and bookmarking pad thai recipes without sobbing about the chubby baby arms sticking out of rubble.

How ridiculous that I am, when so many are not.

Tonight, we will watch Fancy Nancy and lick popsicles and I will tell her a bedtime story about unicorns and magic and think about all those children, so many children, who will never believe in unicorns or magic because even if they live, they've seen too much to believe in anything.



# How Ridiculous That I am by Kim Hooper



I will let my daughter sleep with me and she will pull all the sheets to her side and I will wake up cold, perturbed. How ridiculous that I am anything but overjoyed to watch her sleeping face, mouth open, eyelashes fluttering. How ridiculous that I am anything less than grateful for the warmth of her body, the smell of her hair—fruity from the detangler spray. How ridiculous that I am, when so many are not.

Kim Hooper is the author of six novels, including *People Who Knew Me*, which was adapted into an episodic podcast from BBC Sounds. She lives in southern California with her daughter and too many pets.

# HORROR CLEVELAND

VOLUME 1

COMING SOON!!!

RUN!

OUT OF THIS  
WORLD TERROR

ON THE EDGE OF  
YOUR SEAT

THE HORRORS OF  
NE OHIO AND MORE



# EVERY WRITER HISTORY

Here is a little history of our publication.

*by Richard Edwards*

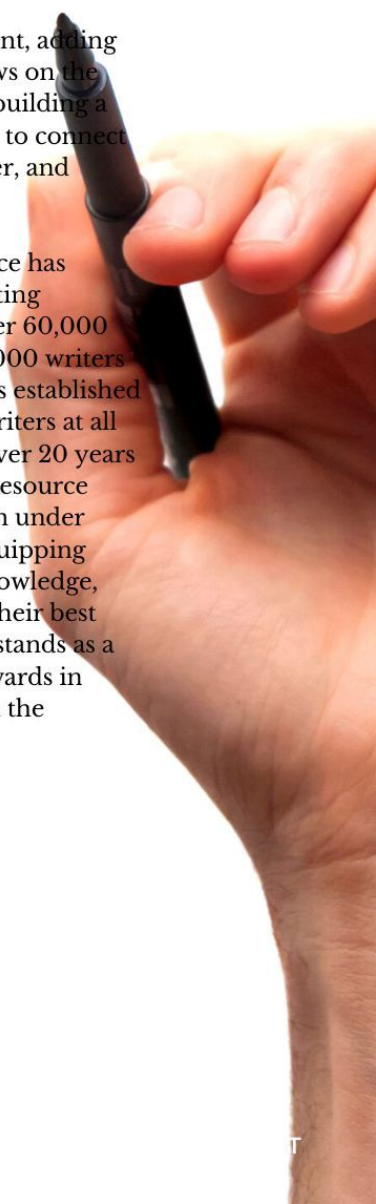
Every Writer's Resource started in 1999 as EveryLitMag, founded by Richard Edwards as an online resource for writers looking to get published. Originally focusing on listing literary magazines and publishers open to submissions from new writers, EveryLitMag quickly grew in popularity in the early 2000s as more writers turned to the internet to research publishing opportunities.

In the mid-2000s, Edwards renamed the site Every Writer's Resource to reflect its expanding range of tools for writers. This included market listings not just for literary magazines but also for book publishers, contests, writing conferences, and more. The site provided invaluable guidance for emerging authors trying to navigate the complex publishing landscape.

As the 2000s progressed, Every Writer's Resource continued developing into a multifaceted platform for writers under Edwards' leadership. This included

launching its own book imprint, adding in-depth articles and interviews on the craft and business of writing, building a community forum for writers to connect with and learn from each other, and more.

Today, Every Writer's Resource has become one of the largest writing communities online. With over 60,000 media contacts and over 100,000 writers visiting the site monthly, it has established itself as an essential hub for writers at all stages of their careers. After over 20 years in operation, Every Writer's Resource continues its founding mission under Editor Richard Edwards of equipping writers with the invaluable knowledge, tools, and connections to get their best work published. Its longevity stands as a testament to the vision of Edwards in serving the needs of writers in the internet age.



# EVERY WRITER THANK YOU 25

Dear Readers,

I can hardly believe this is the year Every Writer turns 25 years old - a quarter of a century online as a resource for writers of all backgrounds. I'm immensely proud of what we've built and accomplished together over these years.

What started in 1999 as a small online directory called "EveryLitMag" has blossomed into one of the most-read writing publications and communities on the web, renowned for supporting aspiring and established authors alike. Some of you have been on this journey with us from those early days, watching EWR grow and evolve. Many more of you have boarded along the way, becoming trusted members and contributors to the site. To both, I want to say: Thank you.

None of this would have been possible without you, our dedicated readers and writers who continue turning to EWR to hone your craft, navigate the publishing landscape, and connect with other bright literary minds. Your loyalty, engagement, and passion for the written word give meaning to all we do.

Looking back over the past 25 years, I feel an immense gratitude for what we've achieved together through both triumphant times and turbulent ones in this ever-changing publishing industry. I'm proud that EWR has not just survived but thrived - launching writing careers, fostering a space for artistic expression and professional guidance, and adapting to stay relevant through the internet's many chapters.

As we celebrate this milestone, I remain as devoted as ever to EWR's mission of serving writers. Here's to many more years of learning, growing, creating, and succeeding together. Thank you for being part of this community. I can't wait to see what the next 25 years may bring.

Gratefully Yours,

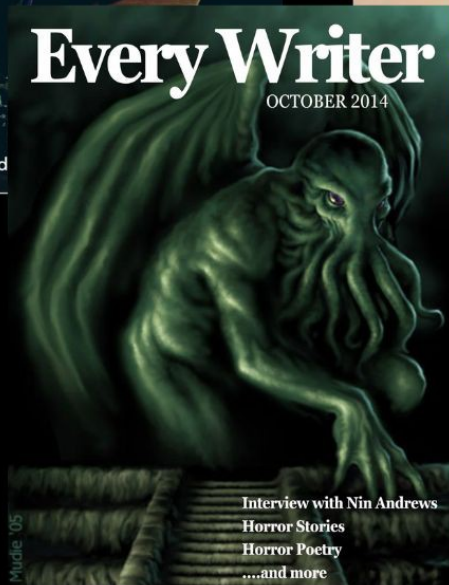
Richard Edwards Editor-in-Chief, Every Writer



# Every Writer

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