

The Writing Exercise

by

The Writer
(Buck Paiva)

Words appeared on the screen as the writer moved his fingers across the keyboard, providing contrast to the white face of the new document. Various letters formed the English words, which in turn formed the second sentence. Before he knew it, the writer had finished the first paragraph.

The second paragraph did not come as easily. At this point, the writer had no idea what he was writing, and only partially understood the reason behind his actions. He had no preconceived plot, no story outline—nothing. And the only character thus far introduced was himself.

Where is this going? he thought.

The writer needed a break from another story which he had been writing for some time. With the other story he had come across several obstacles, and was not up to tackling them just at the moment. So he decided to open a new document and, as a kind of writing exercise, pour a stream of consciousness into it.

He did not expect to begin the way he had, with an odd narration of the writing process. It was disconcerting in a way he could not define. But the idea intrigued him.

Hours passed since the writer had finished the first section of the new story—a movie with the family, some shopping and yard work. When he sat down on his sofa with his notebook computer and reread what he had written earlier, he shook his head and whistled.

“I’m going to be locked up for this one,” he joked under his breath.

“What did you say?” asked his wife from the adjacent kitchen.

“Oh nothing.”

Writer's block is a perfectly normal thing that happens to many writers; the present solution not so much, at least not to his knowledge. The writer imagined that if he ever allowed these words to be read there would be padded rooms and daily meds in his near future.

He had no idea just how right he was.

As the writer thought of solutions to the original story—the one he was having issues with and was *supposed* to be putting out of his mind—his fingers continued to dance across the keyboard of their own accord, providing fodder for his future resident psychiatrist's best-selling memoirs.

What is this? asked the writer as he read what had been keyed into the previous two paragraphs. *I don't remember typing that!*

Stop that! demanded the writer of his fingers. A dozen words later, they obeyed.

Alcohol quickly entered into the picture.

The writer calmly poured a generous amount of rum into a fresh mug of coffee and took several large sips. At the same time, he could hear the History Channel explaining how mixed drinks had been born from the Prohibition due to the fact that moonshine was just too strong and nasty to consume on its own.

Who cares about the background noise?!

The writer felt he was losing control of the situation. Fully intending to engage the backspace and take the cursor for a long stroll backwards to undo his brief chronicle of madness, he halted instead. He realized he was simply too enthralled with the story to destroy it outright. He gave into the moment and, between sips, permitted his fingers to run the show—as freaky a thought as that was.

The first story he was ever truly proud of writing had begun as a simple scene that paraded about in his head as he tried to sleep—night after night for weeks. It occurred to him that one way to make it go away might be to put it to paper, so he did. As it was only a scene, and not a full story, the writer had to trust that a beginning and end would come naturally, along with everything in between.

And that is exactly how it had happened, how his first story had been born: without plan nor the faintest idea for an ending. He had just continued typing until it was completed. It had almost been too easy.

The story had practically written itself.

The writer swallowed the rest of his drink, saved the document, shut down his computer and went up to bed.

Coffee good.

He woke early, made a pot of Seattle Mountain Blend and booted his notebook. After brushing his teeth he gulped down a cup and revisited the writing exercise, without even considering to check his email or the weather forecast first. *Do not pass Go. Do not collect \$200.*

OK. So now what? How is this supposed to work? I just let my fingers do the walking or what?

The writer knew that whatever was happening, it was not literally an act of his digits—he was aware that his hands were not. And although he was open-minded enough to not completely rule out some external force—be it spirit, alien, alternate self from a parallel universe, or God—he was also grounded enough to believe it more likely that the words and ideas which made up his stories were originating from some corner of his subconscious mind.

But he didn't know how to direct it, control it—which is what he dearly desired to do. The writer wished that he could tap into that place in his head where it all resided at will. He desperately wanted access to the raw power he assumed was there so that he could fully master it, use it whenever he wanted, and not just when *it* made itself available. No longer did he want to have to struggle or be at odds with it. He felt that it would be so much easier if he could just own it and make it obey.

He was also oblivious to the fact that it was the very desire to master the power, this selfish need to tame the talent, which was strangling it.

Killing it.

As the writer watched the words materialize without pause across the screen of his notebook, he was struck with sudden and profound regret. He found that he was holding

his breath and inhaled deeply.

My God. I'm sorry. I didn't realize.

The writer finished his writing exercise with two final brief sentences, both of which he knew came directly from the mysterious source which resided in an elusive hold deep in his own mind.

Apology accepted. Now let's get back to work.