DIGRESSIONS

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digress: to turn aside especially from the main subject of attention or course of argument

Within these pages are the individual answers to a humble invitation. The contributing authors and artists made a response to the casual announcement of a professor, remark of a classmate or even to the simple flyer posted on the hallway boards between the ads for upcoming fraternity parties and the offers of used textbooks for sale, “cheap.” What did they have to gain? What did they know about this literary magazine beyond the ambiguous details our staff could present? I believe each contributor was intrigued by the chance of pure self expression, a rare opportunity for students.

No monetary reward, no grade or accolade, no height of fame to be reached but for those who submitted work for this project, subjected their product to critical eyes, publication in this literary magazine infuses his or her art with printed substance. Every offering is the chance to reconfigure an individual spiritual truth into the material forms of paper and ink. And, with theses ideas now committed to the page, our contributors join the authors and artists of all humankind, revealing that the workings of any individual mind find a higher value, a multiplication of meanings when submitted unconditionally for the consideration and reflection of other minds.

We asked for digressions. We encouraged students to take a break from “Works Cited” and turn inwardly to work sighted. We suggested a pause in studying for exams to engage in self examination. Where do you digress? What are your thoughts apart from the expected academic focus of your life? It is surely not the flyers we passed out that prompted these carefully crafted creations but rather the irrepressible human desire to give voice to inner monologue, bring ink to inspiration and deliver isolated thoughts to the unlimited plane of communication.

It is with gratitude and honor that the staff of Digressions is able to bring the unique submissions of Nova Southeastern Students to the page, and more importantly to all eyes that fall upon it. Turn aside from the expected and consider another course.

−D.J. King, Senior Editor
Woman, why do you put his worth above your own? Take him off his throne and see him, straight to the bone. He bleeds, he needs, he breathes like all. Let him in or let him go, let him do or let him know, but don’t you fall.

Woman, you have strengths and qualities that are divine; beyond your breasts: your heart and soul, past your face: your mind. You’re a nurturer and a leader, no one tougher yet nothing sweeter. you are who you are with or without he—don’t make him what completes you, so dependently. Don’t feel lured to a life without him—do make sure your world includes him and is not about him.

He may be kind or could be cruel, might hold you softly or tightly under his rule. Woman, love is worth your while, do experience it when you can. Still remember beyond looks, touch, his sweet words, and such—is a human being as you are,
So these two guys right? These two guys named Finnigan and Zack were finally going to make it big. They were going to New York in a small plane to be guests in the Late Night Show with Conan O’Brien. Luck did not concur with them and both ended up facing a turbulent windstorm (as they crossed the Indian Ocean on a cheery/dilapidated airplane) followed by a violent rapist landing. Both suffered major injuries, but the biggest blows went to their pseudo-careers, which were now plainly in the abortive stage. Their screenplay, which would, if not for the current problem, gathered both praise and consecutive rebirths (the film would have been turned into a sequel the following year!) was now metaphorically bloodier than F’s and Z’s pulpy faces.

Moving on and so forth: both partners crashed in a remote island, devoid of both fresh water and Starbucks. They would die. Finnigan knew that something productive should be produced out of this satanic catastrophe. They would write another screenplay. This would be their masterwork and life’s work (Notice: 2 is a number in this account that might or might not be used as a symbolic object to propel it forward on its nonsensical journey to the trash bin).

Screw it it won’t work. Yes it will.
No of course not. It is not all wrong.
Stupid minion of course it is. Just think about the possibilities.
It just doesn’t go with my particular film dogma.. Well screw your film “dogma.”
F you. No F you.
It doesn’t fit Finn. Yes a$$#0!%.
No it would never do. Yes of course it will.

*What makes you think that Nicole Kidman makes a good Rita Hayworth?!?*
The last 12 minutes of their lives were spent perfecting their imperfect script. Almost a masterpiece. Almost complete. Almost alabaster and agape and awesome after all. Almost there.

However…

If not for the seagulls and crabs of the island, THE James Cameron would not have seen the blood on the palm tree trunks. The entire script (all approx. 102 min. of it) for the ill-fated movie had been written on the organic bodies in the isolated isle. The insolent denizens of the island had eaten the blood or urinated (thereby destroying the writings) on the palm trees, as was their nature to do so. The corpses were swept off by the beautiful sea. James Cameron thought he saw something from his yacht, shrugged, and left.
Fayre Warning

Inscribe thy name on a grain of rice-
But only once, 'tis hard on the purse.
Duel thy friends, but pray keep your thrusts
Aimed at his balloons. 'Twould be a shame to mar
A Fayre with bloodshed! I speak to ye from experience.

That was the year I got this lovely scar..
'Tis a tale for another time though.
For now, feast your eyes on the banquets
Spilling from every well corseted ladies chest.
Too much? That was likely their intention…

Or if chivalry prohibits ye, then ye could rest thy gaze
Upon the sun-warmed steel swords
Proudly catching eyes from their wide wooden racks.
Such beauty will ever be by your side, safely sheathed for a price.
Of course they accept the Lady Visa, and Master Card!

The sun lords over these fayres,
Baking all, and pleasing those pricey beverage sellers.
The cheap ale stands in for Greek lotuses,
Suspending disbelief for any who have trouble doing so.
In some ways, the mundane can be as entrancing as the arcane.

Let us traipse over these straw strewn floors,
Smelling things never imagined before;
Wafting latrine odors blend with those of kettle corn.
Some men garb themselves in tights,
And others in wrinkle proof steel suits.

Whatever your fancy may be, indulge with no regrets!
For me, 'twas swordplay. Behind that pavilion, the one stocked
with herbs, and goblets of coke.
A smile splits my lips now as easily as the sword parted my skin that day,
Every time I recall it, or run my fingers over the washed-out scar.
BLAKE BAZEL

UNTITLED
One Adult, Two Kids

“We don’t have to tell Mom about this.”
Leave right after school
Quick stop at the bank
Maybe the drugstore
For candy that’s cheap
“Let’s go. We can make the matinee.”
Wait in line with Dad
One adult, two kids.
The lobby is dim
The carpet is worn
“Two cokes, a sprite and a large popcorn.”
Butter salt butter
Squeaky soda lids
Delight in the dark
With Dad and with Dean
“Kiddos, you can get your candy now.”
We can hear his smile
Snickers and Twizzlers
Rectangle of light
Coming Attractions
“Wow! Fantastic movies this summer!”
Star Wars. The Jungle Book
Anticipation
Dad laughs; we laugh too.
One adult, two kids.
“Hi, my daughter has an appointment.”
Pick up my son too
Must have both Kiddos
Hit the ATM
Publix for candy
“Come on. We can make the early show.”
Tickets from machines
For my girl, my boy
Coming Attractions
The Grinch. The Matrix.
“Danny, pass the drink to Naomi.”
Screens are not as big.
But, now cup holders
Stadium seating, still
Delight in the dark
“Your Grandpa Dennis loves the movies”
Can they hear my smile?
Anticipation
Will they remember?
Will they take their kids?
“Your friends are just getting out of school”
Our escape. We take
Time. Time together.
I laugh; they laugh too.
One adult, two kids
Oh Muses help relate my story well
So this young man will not make the mistake
I had in youth, and in Camelot dwell,
Putting my knighthood and my life at stake.

A woman unequal did there reside;
Cupid’s arrow struck me when her I spied.
A happy life for her with me at side-
In endless longing of this I had cried.

In contests of war, I thought by proving
Through my deeds I was brave, strong, quick, and smart.
I had won. --But her heart was unmoving
She did not care for my swordsmanship art.

How was I to know her choice had been made,
And nothing I could do would make it fade?

I pleaded with my love to change her mind.
Said my love would be forever to her,
And no matter the course, my love be kind.
But nothing I promised would deter her.

I offered her jewels as big as her head,
More money than any kingdom could spend.
She would have the most illustrious bed.
But none of these things would make her mind bend.

I told her I could make her dreams come true.
She simply sat, staring away, and mute.
I promised to obey: once said, I’ll do-
So she told me to give up my pursuit.

This was the final request from my belle
That tossed me through the gates into deep Hell.

Once there I was haunted by shades of life,
Of all who would win love from friend’s lover.
Lancelot, my friend, with King Arthur’s wife!
How he did it I could not discover.

All throughout time were there to laugh at me,
Possessed of the love that I could not win.
I fell into despair that wouldn’t flee
And burned with jealous rage hotter than sin.

I challenged him to a duel for her hand,
Thinking with him gone, she’ll be easy prey.
The date set, we met in forsaken land.
As master swordsman, I kept him at bay.

But she had discovered my evil plot
And informed Arthur, who came to the lot.

◊◊◊◊◊

Arthur had much disappointment in me,
For I was a high knight, one of the round.
Dueling is against Camelot’s laws, see?
And so trial for me at court was bound.

Arthur said my lady’s parents agree
To her choice, and gave the young man her hand.
I was acting in ways that shouldn’t be,
Punishment could be banishment from land.

But Arthur, being a kind and wise lord,
Decreed that if I should give up my quest
I would remain a knight and keep my sword,
For I had served him well, and filled his chest.

I thanked Arthur for his leniency,
But I knew a new service was for me.

◊◊◊◊◊

I felt in my heart love for no other,
So I decided to change my life’s course.
I told them I would become a brother,
Take up the good book, and teach of the force.

I begged God’s forgiveness because I let
The Devil ruin my soul with desire.
Devotion to Him would show my regret
Teach that love can be wonderful or dire.

Now you have sought me out in a whirlwind
Of passion for a young, beautiful belle,
Without regard for seeing if her wind
Blows the same way. So heed my warning well:

Love can be joyous when it is returned,
Or jealous hell to be forever burned.
LIZ HARBAUGH

Still...

Waves rush relentlessly on, toward the shore,
Seeking just the caress of sand and shell
As if that touch transcends nature alone:
I throw my frenzied heart into your grasp.

The sea that violently crashes craves
Union with its eternal lover, the
Unmoving, unfeeling, simply still sand:
You still reject, with closed heart, my soul.

So, still my heart moves stubbornly to you,
Though dismissals and rebuffs are all I
Get, my mind and soul will never stop, think:
I am compelled, by love alone, to yearn.

Photography by
Kristen Callicchio
Have you ever felt as if you were missing your other half; 
Looked through a window only to catch a sad reflection looking back; 
Loneliness, soullessness, so evident in your emotions; 
So strong, that tears begin to fall gradually down your cheeks; 
Uncontrollable, you wanted to stop them from forming; 
But to keep them inside made you feel sick; 
As if the feelings all bottled up inside were killing you instantly; 
The loss of love angering and frustrating you; 
Because the one you thought was special is still missing!
The Vows of Silence

Living a life as a reserved individual;
Being fair-minded and following the road of non-violence;
Paved my way to silent present and peaceful future.
However, while living under the rule of one with no tolerance;
One desperately seeking significance of their own existence;
Trying to find adequacy in themselves by spreading their inadequacy;
Scrupulizing my actions as lacking strength or power;
as if I am some troubled juvenile who needs to be put in his place.
Angering me gradually over time;
as the bitterness towards the ruler lies in the pit of my stomach;
Drafts of uneasiness and mass silence plaguing our company;
Looking desperately to evade, elude the clutches of my ruler;
for sudden escape would make it easier to breathe once more.
But in one moment, the feelings that feel otherwise wrong make sense;
Hate rears its ugly head as venom seeps inside your soul;
the breaking point of the calmest individual reaches explosively;
As silence fades and fury prevails!
I was in training to be a girl scout
Wearing a brown dress hoping to wear green
Responsible girl, my dad had no doubt
That I’d keep my uniform neat and clean

Proudly, Dad drove to the uniform store
I was surprised what he paid for my dress
Doing the laundry, Dad taught me that chore
Sorting the loads, reading tags, do my best

My dad always spoke so highly of me
And Dad, the most important man in my world
Let me proudly think that he needed me

But then, there was the gum, the bubble gum
Joke on the wrapper, delicious delight
At first dry and so stiff, the bubble gum
Then yielding and chewy, juicy-- just right

Pink pleasure to savor, I kept the rest
Wax wrapped rectangles in pocket of dress
No hint this moment that I’d failed a test
Committed a crime I couldn’t confess

Because, there was the gum, the bubble gum
Free of its wrapper, mean mis’rable mess
It was scorched hot and hard, the bubble gum
Not pink, but gray, the gum gripping my dress

Oh yummy gum! Stupid careless desire!
What could my dad think? What would my dad say?
Mess of a dress, spilling from the dryer
What cost- pops of pink? What price will I pay?

“Dad, being a scout isn’t really that fun
and I have a lot of homework to do.”
Lies, lies to Dad, just for that bubble gum
Good girl. Smart girl. Because Dad never knew.
That girl, good girl, I left far behind me.
You don’t know me, Dad! You’re not perfect, Dad!
I hurt from lies that I keep inside me
Teen-aged daughter mad! Teen-aged daughter sad!

Between Dad and me, only division
But other men had their eyes upon me
Just seventeen but its my decision
Bikini contests with a fake I.D.

Man with a camera, an offer of fame
What did I think of Penthouse Magazine?
My beauty, my youth, my power to claim
But I did think: what it means to be seen

Pink pleasure to savor, the men impressed
Unwrapped teenager, juicy sweet undressed
A glint this moment that this was a test
Should a right-hand-girl fall into this mess?

Because such is the gum the bubble gum
That could stain and stick to your daughter dear
Flash ing cameras go pop, it’s bubble gum
Dad’s hope left for me could just disappear

I saved my body from glossy pages
but age nineteen, I’m pregnant with no plan
My Dad talked to me, forgave my rages
He let go of what he could not understand

He never was perfect, may not be wise
But Dad believes in me like no other
His trust and the faith revealed in his eyes
Gave me courage to become a mother

Now, we are both parents, so now I know
We all tell our kids to watch out for gum
And, we teach them lessons then let them go
Hopeful in spite of the gray days that come

I’m careful when I sort dirty laundry
A good woman, a smart woman, in this world
I’m certain that my dad always loves me
no bubble gum sticks to his right-hand-girl
From Your Wife

Husband, know of my deep satisfaction
Measure the merits of my married life
Beyond romance or youthful attraction
Pleasure is plenty for your wanted wife
  In youth, each meeting seething parts tremble
  Celebrations of sweat soaked seduction
  In truth, such outbursts little resemble
  Incantations for true love’s construction
Lovemaking may lay a bare foundation
But comfort and solace are more we give
Life-making each day sharing creation
Of marriage the structure in which we live
  Outbursts of passion still thrill married life
  Secret in lasting, a mortar of life
  Trust more than lust- what I need in this life
Bricks of devotion that build man to wife
Bitch

is
what I am called.
Master Instructs and Demands.
Scorns of obscenities Reinforce my duties. “Go, Stop, Sit, No, damn it, Shit!”
Scraped on paths, Buried in sand, Tapped in holes, Trapped on tees, Lost in trees, Boxed in sleeves, Marked with coins, Shagged in bags, Lost in lakes, Drowned in creeks, Tossed in crowds. Striker Handles the sticks and Smacks me some sense. Shafts Whip at me, Soaring me, Manipulating me. I am servant; I Submit. Oh athlete, won’t you Hear me? Because of me, you Receive, awards, applause, and praise.
Yet, I am Abused, Abandoned, and Enslaved! I may Deviate, to Escape reign. I must Flee my fate. I Yearn for respect, I Need trust. I Dream of rest, Envisioning tribute, Hugged by my companion’s smiling hand. Talented swinger, please Relieve me.
Hear me. See me. Let me Be.
No Matter

No matter how far apart we are. No matter how many dimensions separate us. No matter how many light years we must travel, or desolate paths tread. Know in your heart my brethren that love transcends, even unto the world of the dead. The veil that keeps us from being together is no match for it to tread. Wars and horror cannot compete, for it is said, love is all there is, it has no need to travel, for it is already there. And anywhere we send its magnificent light to be seen and felt, by whosoever opens their heart to it will be clean. No matter is solid enough to keep love in a cage. No matter is strong enough to keep my heart from pouring over and beyond this page. Nothing matters nothing stays. Love’s rays penetrate, even the most somber days.
Yet again, the foul morning has the nerve
to show her face through my window.
I haul my limp body into the bathroom,
hoping to shower away the weariness.

Translucent carrot-colored bottles containing magic potions
with lavish names like Ambien, Halcion, and Trazodone
laugh at me from beside the cold marble sink,
heartless pills unconcerned with my nauseous misery,
a remnant of their broken promises of relief.

The benign advice of well-rested authors
beckons from the self-help section:
Exercise more
lose ten pounds
take vitamins
don’t watch TV after 10 PM
don’t use the computer after 10 PM
stay away from artificial light
go to sleep at the same time every night
going up at the same time every day
stop worrying so much
just don’t think about it

MRIs, CAT scans, EKGs.
The radiologist anticipates my prompt appearance,
a bartender expecting his regulars at happy hour.
“Don’t fall asleep,” he warns,
“or we’ll have to do the test all over again.”
I roll my eyes at his stupidity
as the machine starts to whir.
I slip smoothly into the dark narrow tunnel. Dr. Freud smiles in his grave.

Never have I wanted so much to be like other people, to part of the fortunate masses for whom REM is just another band, for whom “To Dream The Impossible Dream” is just another song from a Broadway musical.
Waking Nightmare

This tastes funny
    Don’t worry, I’ll fix it
I don’t feel well
    We’re just partying
    Oh, sweetie, are you ok?
I don’t feel good
    Just get into bed
I want you
No, wait
No, don’t
Oh God
What’s wrong with me?
Stubble against my back
A heavy arm across my body
You took my clothes off
    I cleaned yours
What?
I still feel weird
I’m uncomfortable
What you did was wrong
    You wanted it
I did?
Because I don’t think that was me
I remember
    The drink
    The vomit
Patty got me a T-shirt
    Where’d it go?
He took a shower
But I felt dirty
   This is somehow familiar
   Wash your hands, Jordan
An old memory
   Something
   Choking me
   Because my mouth
   Is too small

Joy
Where are you going?
She left me alone
She’s my best friend
What friend?
No friends
Don’t touch
Who am I?
This tastes funny
And I don’t
Remember
MIKE COLLINS

The Plan

I have been working on the plan for a long time. It all started during my senior year in high school. I was just sitting around with some of my friends when one of them put an idea into my head. A simple conversation that had no depth or importance other than laying the groundwork that would eventually dictate my life. Other than an agreeing nod, I do not believe I spoke a single word. However, from a little spark of interest erupted an inferno of obsession. Everyday, week after week, I ran the idea through my mind. Every once in a while I would add or delete parts to the thought, but always kept the end result clear. So, when the time was right I started on the beginning phase of the plan. I gathered information and made contacts that would enable me to position myself in the most favorable way. I was a devoutly focused upon my mission, ignoring the potential pitfalls of my ignorance. I was a fool to think that I would be capable of pulling this act off without getting sidetracked. Everything was going fine, but eventually I became distracted with the rigors of life and lost motivation. The plan had fallen back into my mind, behind all the other schemes that were to never come to reality.

Then, lady luck bestowed her grace in my direction as I came across an old friend from my past. We traded stories of what we had accomplished since our last meeting from years ago, and I discovered that he was working for a highly desirable employer that offered very generous benefits. My attention was immediately thrust upon him. I asked question after question pertaining to these benefits, and how one would be able to secure employment. It was in this direct line of examination that my old friend divulged his knowledge of a position that was available. The old plan, the perfect
plan, the plan that would not be lost; came flooding back into the fore-
front of my mind’s eye. I now had an insider that could help restart the
plan back into motion. My objective was now clear again, and it was shortly
thereafter that I was being offered a job at my comrade’s workplace.

Once inside I immediately put myself to task. If I were to make my
dream a reality, then I needed to get to work as soon as possible. This
place was huge, so I needed to concentrate in only one area. In between the
duties of my job I would test and probe the various departments. I needed
to select a department that best suited my needs. It took some time, but
once I had selected my target it was just a matter of waiting until I
gained access into the area. With the proper clearance, I put the plan into
full gear.

To pull this off I needed to keep focused. I was too close to screw up
this time. So, I surrounded myself with the best possible tools, informa-
tion, and professionals in the business. I was uncompromising in my efforts
to get the desired results. I put off friends and family and kept a fast
pace. I missed parties, travel opportunities, and for over two years put
everything else second to the mission. I was on a collision course with
burnout, but I had to press on.

My wife and child suffered from my selfish desires. I kept telling my-
self that if I did this right and made it through, that they would benefit
the most. I stayed up late working on the plan. There were far too many
nights my wife fell asleep alone in an empty bed. My child cried as he
tugged on my arm begging me to play, only to be shooed away. These are
times I cannot have back, but hopefully they will forgive me.

The time crept by. All I had to do was stay low, and keep from getting
too much notice and just stay the course. Day after day, night after night
for over two years I worked the plan. Then suddenly, I found myself realizing my payday was almost at hand. I was so close that my employer started to notice changes in my work habits. He had made comments about how I seemed distracted and uncaring. This is exactly what I wanted to avoid, but the prize was just around the corner. It was calling me, it was begging me to come get it, and it was so close. How could I possibly stay focused on my menial job? If I were able to make this happen, then I would never have to deal with such fools again. My prize would ensure my freedom.

Finally, the time came to make it happen. It was a Thursday night when the last part of the job would be done. I had armed myself in preparation for every possible scenario and situation that could deter me from my objective. I had never been more ready for anything my whole life. I looked to the left and to the right as my heart was pounding with excitement. Slowly I approached my target as to not arouse attention. I tried to act natural as I made my approach. I was only a couple of steps away when I was finally noticed. She looked up from a paper she was reading and whispered . . .

So, now I stand before the public’s eye. These people are going to pass judgment on me, yet they do not know what I went through. Was all that scheming and planning worth it? I traded all those long hours of working on the plan for lost time with my loved ones. My son is looking at me from across the room as I stand in line behind the others. What is going through his head? I did this for you son. Please forgive my selfishness.

They start the proceeding, and one by one the others are called out. The crowd cheers as each one passes. My heart starts to pound, as I get closer. The dark gown I am wearing brings to mind the grim reaper and is a symbolic death knell for my immature past. Another, than another is called
until finally, it is my turn. They call my name, and as I step out into the bright lights an inescapable grin scrolls across my face. My heart is pounding like a thousand African drums, but all I want to do is look into the face of my loved ones. One step, two step, three step, then there it is clutched in the hands of the senior gentleman, my prize. He offers me a firm handshake and a congratulatory gesture and finally I grasp the end result of years of planning.

Will the prize change my life? Am I better than those who did not have the same plan? I do not think so. I feel better about myself for seeing my plan through. Do I have any regrets for taking so long? I have a beautiful and healthy family. So, I think my timing is perfect. The plan that has been burning in the back of my mind for many years is now reduced to a few smoldering embers, but these embers will be the kindling for my new plan.
Blue

Some people see blue as sad
   I don't.
Blue is the color of the rolling ocean
   the color of my lover's eyes.
Blue is the color of truest devotion
   the smell of blueberry pies.
Blue is the smell of spring in the air
   the smell of a day at the beach.
Blue is the smell of my favorite doll's hair
   the feel of love beyond reach.
Blue is the feel of my baby sister's skin
   the feel of a marble in sand.
Blue is the feel of a dolphin's fin
   the color of my heart twisted in someone's hand.
Some people see blue as sad.
   I don't because blue is me.
BLAKE BAZEL

UNTITLED
AMANDA BROWN

My Lover

Lights flashing, bass pounding, I have come to liberate. Do I have a lover? No. Still, I venture out, yearning to feel the hands on my hips, the dripping sweat. Bodies staining my eyes, loosing my sense of time. Music—I feel your breath.

Heart stomping, lip biting, I’m out of breath. Muscles fatigued, I clinch and clutch. I come to dance, with no hesitance. Sense my desire. Do you have a lover? You’re skin’s glistening; I taste your sweat. The sensuality: How does it feel?

The thrill of affection, just to feel a wet fingertip. Inhales of breath deeply making my skin burn with sweat. For so long, I’ve waited for you to come and entice my arousal. It makes sense, you and I together—be my lover.

You whisper in my ear, “Your lover is within your self. Just feel the hit of the beat; forget about sense apart from your mind. Relish a keen breath of private titillation!” Suddenly, I come away with a new conception, my sweat
dripping in my eyes. But I wipe the sweat clear. Now I see. It’s me—my own lover! I escape the cages of order and come to the door of my room. I start to feel my lover indulge in herself, a breath of guilt engulfs and invades her sense.

But we both agree: It doesn’t make sense to see this as profane, and so the sweat continues to weep aid, and our breath flows and connects, becoming one lover. Intense craving and tingling, I feel the sensation heightening. Will I come to know my lover in a secret sense? Pores excreting sweat, rapture, I do feel. With one last gasp for breath, I come.
CHRISTIE BAILEY

Block

Magic, she calls it:
Writing.

Fresh out of magic, she sits in front of her keyboard and thinks of the worlds she can shape, the personalities she can sculpt, the destinies she can carve. She suffers that paradoxical ailment common to magekind: doubt of one’s own power/fear of one’s own power.

1:00 AM.

Caffeine jitters from an eggnog latte and a quarter of an espresso brownie four hours ago. She is mentally extolling the joys of sleep, which she craves. But she is a mage and the need to shape is greater than the need to sleep, and her stomach is empty for the feel of computer keys under moving fingers.

(Wistfully, she contemplates a piece of leftover pizza.)

She makes a few attempts. False alarms. There’s no energy behind the creations, and they topple over like straw dolls that have been made to stand up -- no life. She needs inspiration, and so she makes her way silently to her bedroom to find Neil Gaiman’s Smoke and Mirrors, flips through the pages, hopes to find inspiration from her favorite of master magicians. Illusionist extraordinaire.

She finds nothing for herself but a feeling of gross inadequacy.

(A track from Requiem for a Dream plays in her mind. Violin and cello, backed by orchestra. Dark, but moving. Cue the mental image: shadowed city side street on a cold windy night, man with his hands in his pockets, hunkered, walking. Midnight music. Vampire music.)

Sternly, she reprimands herself:
Write the story only you can write.
Write in the voice that is yours.
My magic is my own.
Gods, I’m hungry.
She closes her eyes. The second hand of a clock ticks. It’s loud, she notes.

1:30 AM.

She finds the leftover pizza and a piece of salmon from last night’s
dinner (which, left in the micro too long, hisses at her), and downs both with a glass of vanilla soymilk. The shakiness abates a little. Blearily, she looks at the clock and questions her sanity -- staying up until two o’clock just to write.

Her mind begins to shut down. She’s a night person, exhausted by activities of day.

*Magic,* she thinks. Creation is on her mind.

Dreamworlds --

Sleep brings --

-- dreams --

Screw writing. Create through your dreams while you sleep.

Not quite coherent. Slipping away.

Magic does this to you.

No, not magic. Obsession.

*Slipping away.*

She thinks of chaos. She thinks of people as characters -- characters as people. She thinks of connections. Of a ship at harbor, a fresh fish stand, that track from *Requiem,* of word play and a salty wooden boardwalk.


She tastes the concept of *story* on her tongue -- deep, full of space, complex, spiced with characters. Full-bodied, yet light, airy. Flavorful, but not too rich. *Texture.* It would be nice to cook some of that up.

But, she thinks, Neil Gaiman can keep his illusions. Right now I need some sleep.

A wand, after all, is no good if you can’t hold it up. The mage that quakes before the power of her own doubt needs sleep.

Dreams suggest possibilities. She can use some of those.

Dream magic tonight, then.

*Writing* will be left for tomorrow.

2:00 AM.

Incoherent she trundles to bed