

Writer's Block

By Sabrina Worth

You are exhausted. You run your fingers through your hair, rolling greasy strands between your fingers absent-mindedly. Of course, you don't care. There's no-one to see you, not for weeks now. You must have given up washing your hair ten days ago and hadn't thought about it much since. You rub your eye with your fingertips, nails black with dirt, grease and dead skin. You should have been uncomfortable, any other time you would have been. But... the novel is so close to perfect, so close to finished. It needs all your attention. After all, that's the reason you're in this hotel room.

At the beginning, your solitude had done you good, you had written as if on rocket fuel for weeks. Now, however, it was different. The last few days have been like writing under water after an oil spill. The sentences just won't sit still.

The story has been gnawing at you for months. A betrayal that festered. You told yourself it was fiction- or, perhaps therapy- but it kept circling back. Refusing to be rewritten from the reality and into the fantasy of what you wanted.

You need to rest but closing your lids feels like scraping sandpaper over your eyeballs. At least they aren't itching anymore. When you open them again, your gaze fixes once again on the flashing black marker in the middle of the sentence. Taunting you with its rhythmic insistence. On, on, on. Hypnotising.

His wife let him go. She knew she couldn't stand in his way. Not when she saw the way he kissed her best friend. The other woman's lips tasted like raspberry pie-

Your own lips curl in disgust at your words. It's absurd, an obvious, overused and juvenile metaphor. The words feel fake, as if from stepping away from the memory, you can't find the words to describe it. Aside from the fact that ending your novel on a kiss is less than impressive. And *this* is supposed to be the book that will reinvigorate your career.

If only she had. Let him go, that is. Things might have been so different.

You pinch your nose. It's just a memory. Gone.

And still, the marker flashes.

You scroll up and the draft flies by. The husband, the best friend- the tropes and traps, rewritten and recycled a hundred times. It's... bland. Except the ending. Where the wife lets him go to the other woman. She's supposed to love that he's happy. To watch him kiss her.

So why can't you write it? Why won't she let you?

The room smells. It isn't faint any more, building up on you over hours. Like rotting meat. The now green, soggy and stale food sits next to the hotel room door. It must have been there for... an hour? More? When did you order that?

Your brain is a mess of dead emotions and ignored needs. Things have been confusing for a day or so. You should eat something. Shower. Brush your teeth. You had been getting used to the confusion. Too tired to bother with sleep.

The voice cuts deep like a knife, digging into your very soul like it's looking for something. You're haunted by your own words and actions of months and years gone by. Actions that can never be taken back. Self-hate whispers drip with malice in your ear.

Pathetic. Stupid. Has-been.

The voice used to sound like you. Now, sometimes, it sounds like her. Like she just can't leave you alone. Even now.

You have grown used to it over the last few days. A harsh, callous tone of your own voice. Sometimes it hisses, sometimes shouts so loud it makes you jump in surprise.

Just the solitude, you reason. It'll go away. All in your head. You close your eyes for another deep breath. Picture the words fading away, you tell yourself. Flushing down the sink, like the blood did.

A flash. Her. Screaming at you. Red in the face. Spitting mad. His wife.

Your eyes fly open, standing so quickly the desk chair clatters to the floor behind yourself. Your heart is pounding hard in your chest like it's desperate to escape you too. Just like he was. A hand rests on your chest as you catch sight of yourself in the mirror. Alone. Dishevelled, a poor imitation of your previous self. Even your writing has abandoned you now.

Let the memories go. Let them decay alone in the crevices of your mind. Where they belong.

Slut. Whispers the voice. For the first time, it feels close. So close you swear you can feel the breath on your ear. You flinch away, turning to the empty room as though you were expecting to see someone.

Of course, there's no one there. You rub your eyes once more, dry contact lenses rubbing painfully against your eyelid. God, how long have those been in there? You should take them out.

But the flashing place marker on your screen calls your name.

"After this paragraph," you reason out loud to the empty room, propping the chair back up to sit once more.

Your fingers hover over the keys. Then, thankfully, they begin to move:

Her lips tasted like raspberry pie, making him feel itchy.

Itchy? Fuck these fucking contacts.

You hit backspace with one hand while you rub your eye again.

Her lips tasted like raspberry pie, making him feel a swell of-

Fuck! Both hands fly to your eyes, rubbing more vigorously. Must be a lash caught under the lens. Maybe the lens is broken. You rise, and step closer to the mirror once, there is a lash in the corner of your lower lid.

Closing the gap you bring your filthy nails to the lash, trying to prise it out. But it's stuck there under your lid. You blink. Now that you see it you can *feel* it more too. Like a tension under your lid, like a sty of pressure right there.

Then -

It moves.

Wiggles.

Unmistakably struggling like it has a mind of its own, every motion sending shockwaves through your body. The sensation ripples at your skin, you can feel it in your sinuses like a blocked nose, thrumming. Like it's growing in size, right before your eyes. Something struggling to get out.

A sensation like a popped pustule. It squirms free.

Gasping with repulsion, you double over, your hand flying to your eye as it falls, landing on the floor with a small thud.

An inch long. Thick. Yellow. Maggot. Writhing at your feet.

Panting and panicking, you press closer to the mirror, pulling and pinching your eye to investigate more clearly. But nothing. Nothing but blood vessels, swollen from overuse.

And on the carpet? Nothing. All in your head. Now, you're seeing things.

Insane now, too. Lying cheater, losing your fucking mind. You could swear this time that there's someone in your blind spot, but when you turn, there's no one there. You need to get control of yourself.

You leave the laptop on, too shaken to consider closing the lid. Shower and bed. That's what you need, hot shower, warm bed.

You don't look at the bathroom mirror as you climb into the tub, shedding your clothes as you go. Resting your head on the tiles, you allow the water to run down your head and face, cascading from your nose. Soon, as you hoped, the water washed away any worries and your mind swims back to the flashing place-marker waiting on your desk.

Bitch. The voice echoes this time, can voices in your head echo?

The skin on your hands and legs is going red, the water must be too hot. Turning the tap down with a grating squeak, you wait for the water to cool once again and-

Movement. You swear movement in the tap reflection. A shadow on the shower curtain.

You lift your head as the shadow reaches around the curtain. Gathering the crinkling fabric and dragging it slowly back across the rail until you see it.

Repugnant face. A vicious smile. Maggots dropping like tears from blinkless eyes.

Your heels slip as you lurch away. A squeak of skin on tile. A crack. The world sinks into darkness.

You come to slowly, the water now running cold over your naked, vulnerable body, shivering uncontrollably. Your head pounds, like someone inside is torturing a drum. A pain so vivid you think you might vomit. The vicious, insulting voice is no longer speaking but shouting, screaming insults.

"...Disgusting whore. Waste of space..."

Your body now convulsing from the cold, you pull yourself out of the shower muttering affirmations to block out the abuse reverberating around the room.

"I am strong. I am strong. This is just in my head. They're dead. She's gone. She can't-"

Pulling yourself to the sink, you vomit yellow bile, retching painfully at your stomach.

"Pathetic. How could anyone find you attractive...? Look at yourself. Dirty. Mental-"

Your hands grip so tightly to the sink edge that your knuckles turn white.

"Better off dead, bitch."

"Remember they're gone." you beg yourself. The awful thoughts pounding at you like a stoning.

"Just. Like. Me."

Blood.

Blood dripping into the sink.

One drop. Two.

The voice has stopped.

Silence in the air: beautiful silence.

You thrill in the silence and the weight of your headache is gone. It is as if the silence itself is singing a soft lullaby to you. You feel so light. Relieved. It is all over

But the blood is running in the sink now. Turning her hand over, she finds the source. A gaping, angry, gash three inches long, gaping open on her wrist, spilling blood as if it's overflowing.

A small whisper hushed into the beautiful silence one last time, the breath caressing her cheek like the soft touch of a reunited lover: *"Better. Off. Dead."*

The voice isn't coming from your head, you can see it now. It stares at you from the mirror wearing your own face like a mask. The mask sits plastered to the face beneath, oozing ripped flesh at the edges, ill-fitted and bulging at the eye sockets, maggots emerging writhing from the eyelid, crawling over the fixated, unblinking eyes underneath. The mouth of the mask has been stretched unnaturally outwards into a malefic smile, as if pinned there forever.

Too stunned to stem the flow, you stare in open shock at the blood pouring from your wrists.

And with the last thought, you fall to die on the cold, bathroom floor. Alone in a hotel room, a bloodied razor blade falling from your fingertips.

And still, on the desk, the cursor blinks.