

Well, How About That?

written by Holly

May 1, 2006

By Holly Lisle

Sometime in the middle of 2002, I got an acceptance from Josepha Sherman at Walker Books for a YA titled **Rule, Covenant, and Promise**, a very dark high fantasy young adult series. I was thrilled about the pending sale, because I love YA and had always wanted to write some. (YA is Young Adult, for those not familiar with book jargon.)

My beloved, accepted, not-yet-paid-for series promptly killed Walker's YA line.

So I stuck it on my hard drive and forgot about it. My then-agent was unenthused about YA in general and my YA in particular, and I had other books to write (there are always other books to write), so I got on with my life. And then, in the press of many other novels, I even forgot the YA existed. Several months ago I stumbled across it again in the weblog, and then found the 90 pages I'd actually written on my hard drive. But I did not find the extended outline, the short synopses of ideas for other stories in the series (they're intended to be sequential stand-alones), or any of my worldbuilding. Which meant if I wanted to work on the project, I would have to redo all that work, retrofitting around the ninety existing pages.

I put the YA aside again. Because that was a lot of work, and there were other books to write. There are **always** ... yeah, yeah. Anyway.

You know about the romance/paranormal thing I've been pitching. My agent was not crazy about it. She wanted to know what else I had. You know about Hell Year and The Neverending Proposal, which left me with a dozen fully-fleshed out

proposals and sample chapters that were deemed too smart or too complex for the current women's fiction market. You don't know about the perky fantasy romance thing I came up with that was sort of *Sympathy for the Devil* meets *Bullfinch's Mythology* over lunch at the office.

I tossed two of those to her, but ... well, she wanted to know what else I had.

So I sent her that YA.

And she loved it. Loved, loved it. So did Diana, her assistant.

Problem is, I left myself one monster cliffhanger, and I have no clue what happens next. I don't remember what I'd planned. I don't remember the actual writing of this story. Those ninety pages, the characters, and the adventure fell out of my fingertips with a mind of their own, and while I'm reading the story and refamiliarizing myself with what's there, and falling in love with the characters and the world ... it's like playing that party game where someone else writes a paragraph and ends it with a stumper, and you're the one who has to pick up and write the next paragraph. 2002 me had something in mind for this, but 2006 me has no insight into the mind of that earlier self, and now is going to have to rough it.

So now I'm retrofitting a missing world, an absentee mythology, wayward languages, escapee maps, and an AWOL outline and several synopses. And swearing at the bitch who wrote this stuff and didn't file her damned notes.

That's my day. And probably week.

How's yours?

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Mad Snoopy Dancing Ensues

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Got the massively revised proposal for the MPII series, with all new series overview, 50% rewritten first three chapters of Book I, 100% new story outline, and heavily revised mini-outlines for books II, III, and IV out the door to my agent.

I'm so excited I can't see straight. After a week of painful slogging and even more painful migraines, this morning I woke up to a completely new story for book one. I got up, tossed everything I'd done on the Book I outline, and for hours, sat typing out the new one, sometimes going so fast my fingers couldn't keep up with the words. When I was done, I had goosebumps.

I love this series, and with the rewritten Book I, **STM**, I have to believe it could be one of the coolest series I've had the chance to write. Now I just hope that Robin can put me together with an editor who loves it as much as I do.

God, days like this, writing is entirely too wonderful to be mistaken for work.

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And Still Revising MPII

written by Holly

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The series overview is done. The three mini-outlines (for books two, three, and four) are done. The first seventy pages (three chapters) of book one are done.

I've tossed the 30-page extended outline for the first book, and am now doing a line-per-scene of the candy-bar scenes I want in the finished book. From that, I'll work out a new outline, and an almost completely different story. I liked the ending of the first one. I'll keep that. Clearly, I like the first three chapters. (Now I do, anyway.) Everything else changes.

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And the Slashing Goes On

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I ended up throwing out not just the first scene, but the entire concept of the first scene. Tossed all the new stuff I'd written over the last few days. Gone, all gone, just gone. No more Maddie, Piper, and Jean doing work chat. No job angst – that'll be there, but not as the opener.

Now it's just Bailey up in the tower watching a rumpled,

frazzled guy get out of his black Humvee and walk across the parking lot, and Ardell the Volunteer not using the intercom. Again.

It's cleaner. Quieter. It starts the story with the story. I'll have room for Piper and Maddie and Jean later. Now, though, it's just Bailey, and Cam, and the bad thing that happened over at his place.

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Writing

written by Holly

May 1, 2006

By Holly Lisle

Cutting cutting cutting, editing editing editing, and tons of rewriting. Haven't come up for air in days, and may be a few more days before I do. Still working on the MPII proposal. This has turned in to a total overhaul.

The podcast, the weblog, and everything else that isn't work or homeschooling is shoved way to the backburner; the change in my work hours is wreaking havoc, and I'm having to make progress in the rubble.

But I'm still around.

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Soundtrack for MPII

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This proposal needed music; rather I needed to find my way through some of the complexities to the core. Music is good for that. This is the music that I'll listen to while writing the books, the songtrack for the first story at least, and maybe the other three.

Assuming the project sells. Always have to put that in there.

MPII Soundtrack

Shoot The Moon *Norah Jones* Come Away With Me

Simple Kind of Life *No Doubt* Return Of Saturn

In Your Eyes *Peter Gabriel* So

Hot Night *Laura Branigan* Ghostbusters

Ghost Dance *Cusco* Essential Cusco: The Journey

Sweet Dreams (Are Made Of This) *Eurythmics* Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)

Falling Up *Natasha's Ghost* Shimmer

How You Remind Me *Nickelback* Silver Side Up

I Don't Want to Wait *Paula Cole* This Fire

Credidi *Ars Cantica Consort* Vincenzo Ruffo: Psalms & Chants of Meditation

The Briar And The Rose *Niamh Parsons* And Loose Connections Her Infinite Variety: Celtic Women In Music & Song (Disc 1)

The Unforgiven II *Metallica* ReLoad

Whale & Wasp *Alice In Chains* Jar Of Flies

This Shirt *Mary Chapin Carpenter* Party Doll and Other Favorites

It's All Been Done *Barenaked Ladies* Come On Elieen
An Fharraige *Máire Brennan* The Celtic Circle 2 (Disc 1)
Walking in Memphis *Marc Cohn* Marc Cohn
A Thousand Beautiful Things *Annie Lennox* Bare

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Writing for Myself

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Today I've been working on the MPII proposal, writing for myself. I've scrapped most of the opener that I posted a few days ago, including the line about the salted butter, and have gone for something shorter and tighter that pulls me into the central conflict more quickly.

I'm searching for resonance with my characters, and with the whole of the story. I'm still aiming for humor, of course – I want the entire series to be funny in first read. But I want something to linger afterward, in the back of the mind or as a little shiver down the spine when some corner of the world turns darker than the reader expected.

It's always been my objective to write two stories into every book – the one the conscious mind reads, and the one the subconscious mind keeps. In the books where I was most successful with this – TALYN, SYMPATHY FOR THE DEVIL, VINCALIS THE AGITATOR – I buried those second stories good and deep. Out of thousands of e-mails and letters I've gotten from readers, a mere handful have included the "AHAH! In TALYN (or

SftD, or VtA) you were talking about ..." comments, that tell me my second stories made it all the way to the surface.

Most readers won't look for or find the second stories. That's okay. Maybe I'll manage to raise a question or two that leaves them hungry to go looking for answers on their own. Maybe my stories will slide off of them like water off waterfowl, leaving them untouched.

The fact that a few readers have dug all the way to the bottom of these stories tells me that my incessant search for resonance, for the power of the secret second story, has not been time wasted. I'm satisfied to succeed rarely; all success is rare. If I matter to a few, I don't need to matter to everyone.

The writing is going well today. I'm burying bones, burying them deep, building in a skeleton beneath the flesh that everyone sees. This is what I love, telling two stories at the same time, like knitting reversible cloth that holds one pattern on the front and a second on the back that most people don't even suspect exists. You don't knit a thing like that for show, but just for love.

For me, this is magic. This is why I write.

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Good Writing Day

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Threw out about 2000 old words, wrote about two thousand new words, and finished 8121 total words of revision for the day, though I have been working on it nonstop since I got up this morning. I love what I'm getting, and I'm excited about the way the changes are working.

And just for fun, here's a little snippet, including the way that yesterday's first line has metamorphosed.

On the other side of the closed conference room doors, Bailey Grove heard one of her partners say, "... so we walked into the room, and the client was naked, and painted blue, and lying on the floor. On. A bed. Of butter."

Bailey stopped with one foot still in the air, her hand frozen on its way to the door knob.

No. Simply, no. Not on a Monday. On Monday, the only place butter belonged was on pancakes.

Inside the conference room, it sounded like Piper Hempstead had already gotten started on the weekly case debrief. Or was at least bemoaning her weekend research trip. Bailey could hear Jean Briggs and Maddie Mirabello, her other two Moonlight P.I. partners, in there too.

Time was, a naked blue man on butter would have at least intrigued her. She would have wondered. She would have been ... curious.

I've lost faith, she realized. I've lost hope. We thought the magic was out there, and we were going to find it, and instead all we find is blue paint and butter on the floor.

I could go home. Go back to bed. Go out tomorrow and start looking for a real job, one I didn't have to explain to people. I could give up on this nonsense.

And then Jean asked, "Was the butter salted, or unsalted? And stick, or tub?" and Bailey sighed, and put her hand on the

door knob, and opened the door.

She didn't want to know.

But, at least for a while longer, she had to know.

She lugged her own weekend report in, and plopped down in her chair at the conference table.

Piper nodded to her, but returned immediately to the question at hand. She told Jean, "Unsalted 100% pure butter. He was fanatical about that. Stick. He'd laid the sticks out in a solid circle. With him right in the middle, flat on his back, naked as morning, blue as a field of cornflowers, and slick as a greased pig, with his little Marine at full attention. I thought some of the volunteers were going to die right there. Then he told us that his ghosts only came to him when he performed this bizarre ritual -"

"How did he come up with the ritual?" Jean wanted to know.

"My guess is, too many drugs," Piper said.

That would have been Bailey's guess, too.

"However," Piper continued, "he said the spirits came to him in dreams and told him they yearned for a fleshly consummation with him, and told him this was how they would achieve it."

Bailey sighed. "How is it that he managed to mention none of this while we were interviewing him? How did he ever come across as sane?"

Piper said, "That would be the question, wouldn't it. He wanted us to hurry and set up the cameras and the spectrometer and the infrared so that we wouldn't miss the spirits of the ladies of the evening who had previously inhabited the house when they appeared to him, and, well ... picked up where they'd left off. The volunteers and I grabbed

the gear, turned around, and marched out.”

No one said anything at all for a moment. No one could actually think of anything to say.

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Plugging on the Proposal

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I hit my deadline yesterday. Robin (my agent) and I spent some time on the phone Monday and yesterday (the reason for my mad push was to have things in line for that second conversation.). We worked out what we needed to, and now I have a week to put this proposal together for presentation. I want to take the proposal package up to 25,000 words, cut some of the material that I have, and add new. Sharpen things. These will be fun, sexy, funny books, and I haven't had a chance to do funny since **Sympathy for the Devil** – so I *want* these. A lot.

I like my new first paragraph. I think it does a good job of setting the tone for the series right out of the gate.

“œ... so we walked into the room, and the client was naked, and painted blue, and lying on the floor. On. A bed. Of butter.”

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