

# Could vs. Should and the Price of Your Dreams

[By Holly Lisle](#)

A friend of mine is going through a crisis of faith right now. Not a religious crisis. A writing one—though from where he's standing, it probably feels much the same. He's written several books and a slough of short stories, and he has prepared them professionally, and he has diligently and tirelessly sent them around in the correct manner. He's done everything right, and he has a growing collection of rejection slips to show for it, and an upcoming publication in what he calls "the smallest paying market in existence."

And he's starting to wonder why he's doing all this; as he points out, he has a great job that he's lucky enough to like, he's happily married, he makes good money and has what he needs in life. He's putting a lot of time into something that is feeling more and more like smacking himself in the forehead with a ballpeen hammer. Repeatedly.

Is he wasting his time? I have no doubt at all that if he sticks with his writing long enough, he'll start selling his work. He's smart and talented and funny, and I think it would be impossible for him to keep writing without those qualities showing in an irresistible combination on the page eventually. Sooner or later, an editor is going to fall in love, and he is going to find a publishing home.

If he is willing to pay the price.

The price?

**Every dream has a price.** You need to know this now, because the price can be enormous, and if you don't know about in advance, you can wake up one day to find that you have paid

with everything you ever loved, and what you have to show for all of that isn't enough.

How much will you have to pay to be a writer? There's no way you can know in advance. How much might you have to pay?

You might have to live in poverty. You might lose your job, your friends or family, your children or your spouse. Your dream might cost you your health. Your happiness. Your life. Perhaps you think I exaggerate, but writers suffer from depression and die of suicide far out of proportion to our numbers. We have high divorce rates, far too many substance abusers, and as a group we are pathetically poor. I'm not saying that if you want to be a writer, you need to run out and get a divorce and take up heavy drinking. Far from it. A strong, stable relationship can get you through some desperate times. And only fools look for inspiration in the bottom of a bottle. What I am saying is that if you pursue your dream, some other parts of your life *will* fall by the wayside. You can't know what those parts will be yet. But if you persist, you will find out.

How much is your dream worth to you?

Could you be a writer? Yes.

*Should you be?*

That is a question that only you can answer ... and you'll have to answer it again every time you pay.

But before you walk away, consider this: If writing is your hunger and your thirst, and if you choose not to follow your dream because you're afraid, you'll pay a price for that, too—you'll pay with the progressive deadening of your soul, as time and your own disillusionment with yourself eat away at who you are. One day you'll wake up and discover that the part of yourself that knew how to dream—and how to fly—has died, and that you are forever after bound to the ground, with only

the memory that you once had wings.

**Every dreamer pays a price. But so does everyone who fears to dream.**

**NOTE:** *Has fear been keeping you from writing?* If this article resonates with you, and you want to meet other writers who share your passion and who are working in a friendly, supportive environment, [come hang out with us and make progress on your writing in my free writing community.](#)

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