

“If I Ever Lose My Faith In You”

By Holly Lisle



Writing a novel is an exercise in faith – faith in self, faith in story, faith in the process of writing.

Self is the rock-bottom core faith that you dare not lose; you must **believe** that you can finish the thing in order to finish it. Writing a story is a tightrope walk, and whether you have the net of an outline or are going netless, you raise the tightrope by one foot for every page you need. I started this walk 1250 feet in the air, and I’ve been inching my way toward the ground ever since. My faith in myself holds steady – I have more than a thousand pages behind me, and I’m a bit less than 250 feet from the ground right now. Not so bad.

Except I looked down, lost my balance, and grabbed onto the rope. Hanging head down heels up, the net was gone and the ground with it. At the moment I have nothing beneath my feet but distant stars and the hard, cold vacuum of space. And in front of me, more of the same. No solid ground at the end, no meadows, no friends, no green grass and safe haven, nothing but the blink of the uncaring stars. That’s as much nothing as you can get.

I’ve lost faith in the story – in the ending I’d outlined that is feeling increasingly hollow every day I fight to add pages and fail to get them. Logic says, “Write the damned pages, you

can revise them later;" Intuition says, "They're the wrong pages. You've lost something and you have to get it back."

I'm a logical soul, but story comes more from the subconscious than the conscious, and Intuition owns the keys to the keyboard. So Logic and I are sitting here, stalled, while Intuition, having pointed out the problem, is utterly refusing to take a hand in its solution and equally refusing to hand over the damned keys, stating that she hid them somewhere behind me.

Which takes me to process. I believe in process. Usually writing the pages is process enough, but in a stall that started showing itself last Wednesday and that has become increasingly vicious, sterner measures are required.

Part of the process of writing a novel is knowing that the beginning mirrors the end, fortells it, ties into it. I'm having to go back to the beginning, not to start over, but to begin the one-pass revision early. I need to relocate the threads I looped out at the the beginning of **Talyn** that I need to be catching and knitting back into the pattern here at the end. I need to be refamiliarizing myself with a story that started so long ago, page-wise, that when I look behind me on my tightrope, I can't see the cliff to which I anchored it.

I'll work my way through the revision, pretending that I've already written the ending, and when I find the place where friggin' Inspiration hid the damned keys to the keyboard, I'll write the ending, print it out, and **then** go back to where I left off the revision and pick **that** up.

This isn't the way I like to work. But every book is different, and the work of writing each book requires a willingness to take a fresh approach, not just to solving problems, but to redefining those problems and creating new solutions. Rote only gets you so far.

I suspect that most writers who get blocked are blocked

because they've lost faith either in themselves or in their stories. If you lose your faith in yourself, it helps to have a backlog of finished projects, no matter how awful, that let you know you **can** reach the end of the current one. If you don't have that, and you don't have a firm hand on process, you can stall out just about forever, clinging to your tightrope over your abyss, maybe close enough to the end that you could jump to the ground, but too afraid to move. The only real solution to loss of faith in self is just to finish the project. Inch forward, upside-down if you have to – eventually your butt will hit the ground and you'll know you're home, even if you can't see it. And finishing one will give you the faith to finish the next one.

If you lose your faith in your story, you have to go back and look at why you chose to start across this particular tightrope. Look to the beginning, not with an eye to rewriting it or throwing it out, but just to find what you loved and what you set out to accomplish.

I don't think too many people lose faith in process. Process is using mechanical means (individual habit, the physical acts of writing or typing, the mental act of reading material previously written, outlining, working in short intervals, working in long intervals, mapping, mind-mapping, etc.) to uncover secrets hidden from the writer by the writer's own subconscious. Process is the physics of writing; without some knowledge of it, you venture into the writing of a novel at your own peril. The more you **know** process, the less you have to **believe** in process – though there are some times, admittedly, when it feels like magic. Process is its own solution, so long as you know it and are willing to do some machining and retrofitting to make it work.

So back to faith. Sting sings, "If I ever lose my faith in you – there'll be nothing left for me to do" He may be right. But his direction isn't particularly helpful, is it?

I think I'd better go with Kenny Loggins on this one. "Where are the dreams that we once had? This is the time to bring them back ... One day we're brave enough to talk with conviction of the heart." (From "Conviction of the Heart")

Or maybe just Billy Joel. "I'm keeping the faith ... oh, oh, oh, oh keeping the faith."

And the picture up at the top? Pile on the left is the part that's done – just finished printing it out. Pile on the right? That's the absolute maximum that remains, to be written, including new interstitial scenes in the early parts of the manuscript, plus the ending. Less than 250 pages total.

Contents © Holly Lisle. <https://hollylisle.com> All Rights Reserved