

Sense of desperation

By Holly Lisle

I'm writing with a sense of desperation today – my editor has asked about the book, it needs to be put on the schedule, I need to have it done on time. Never mind getting paid, which is stretching past desperation into the realm of the insane. The books simply must be done by the end of the month, half of which is now gone.

With 20,000 or so words pending, I'm struggling. I've taken a wrong turn, and while I'm confident that this time the mass of the book is solid, the wrong turn has stalled me, and will keep me from progressing until I figure it out. I

I think the problem is with Jake, the protagonist's three-year-old son. And with her. And with the fact that she has to go into danger, but – as written – has no one she can trust to leave him with, so decides to take him into the hot zone with her. I'm pretty sure this is where my subconscious is saying, "Yeah, your parents dragged you into the middle of some serious shit ... but not into a known war zone. Well, at least not intentionally."

Part of this book is exploring parental responsibility, mother-son relationships, being in a position of having nothing left in the world to hang onto but each other. Part of it, again, is digging through my childhood – one of those scabs I can't stop picking. Part of it is exploring love, and whether love transcends death.

And there's another problem with the current version as it stands. With Molly and Seolar, I've edged prematurely away from the driving theme, and the two of them were supposed to carry the theme through to the end on this thing. Yet I've come up with a twist I like better, and I don't want to give that up. So I need to figure out how to hang on to the theme

and to my twist simultaneously. Juggling chainsaws should be so hard.

Anyway, I have a lot of ground to cover today. I quit yesterday with less than 800 words and took the time off to watch the first half of the Ken Burns "Mark Twain" documentary, which made me cry more than once. Twain transcended his own life and limitations to write for the ages. He changed the world. He changed the face of literature. His life mattered in ways so huge it almost defies comprehension; from race relations to America's place in the world to coming of age, we look at things differently because of Twain.

How did he do that? How can I? Yes – that's hubris. I want to change the world, and I want to leave something behind me that matters. Twain said, "My books are water ... but everyone drinks water."

I want to write water.

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