

The Birth of a Book; The Death of a Dream

written by Holly

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By Holly Lisle

Eleven years. I have been **eleven years** in the writing of **Midnight Rain**, and as I typed the final words in this revision, knowing that this time I had nailed the ending, that I had pulled in the story elements that I've been fighting with, as I sat there with a completed 100,000 word on-spec novel on my hard drive, my hands were shaking and my pulse was racing. I stared at the last line, shivering, thought 'Yes'. Posted my brief notice here, unable to sit still or even type anything longer. Stood up, kicked by a massive adrenaline rush, and started pacing in circles, too tense and elated and strung out on simply having the thing finished to even think. I was inarticulate.

It was one of the most overwhelming, unnerving feelings I've ever experienced – I'd liken it to giving birth, except with a longer gestation and a whole lot less physical trauma. I had this weird urge to run up to strangers and growl "I finished the book, dammit, finished it" while fixing them with the feverish stare of Coleridge's Ancient Mariner; I wanted to tell them my tale of where and how the book was born and what it had been through in the birthing.

And yet I cannot say that I have eleven years worth of book there, and that fact fills me with a sharp and bittersweet pain. No, I haven't worked on this book straight through for all of those years – I have picked at it in pieces between paid projects, scratched notes to myself when waking from dreams in the dead of night, scribbled a concept here and a theme there, and have ripped it to shreds and rebuilt it from

the ground up not once but three times. In my heart, it was a transformative book, and while I can find ghosts of that in this final incarnation, it is not transcendent. Perhaps it cannot be transcendent. Perhaps, no matter how hard we try, we cannot rip perfect books from our hearts and souls and put them on the page. Perfection eludes us, and we are left with something pretty good, and an ache for what might have been.

I can look at it and say with confidence that **Midnight Rain** is a good book. I cannot even hope that it is a great book – I abandoned all hopes of greatness with the realization, a couple of years ago, that I could never satisfy my own requirements. I like the book. Parts of it I love.

But a ghost sits on my shoulder – the ghost of the book that I envisioned, the ghost that is the twin of the book that exists in real and tangible form. The perfect twin died in the instant that I declared the work finished and this book was born and I ceased my pursuit of that shining, unflawed other. It was sacrificed to permit the birth of the imperfect book that is. The ghost of what might have been died at the hands of expediency, and of settling, and of grim reality, and in the end those hands were my hands, and I was a willing and knowing participant in my dream's death.

Not all books are this hard. I did not have such great dreams for other books, and so I did not have so far to fall when I did not achieve them. I think this will be the only book I take eleven years to write, because dreams can grow Olympian in eleven years, but the writer who dreams them remains a mere mortal.

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