

Writers' Block: Losing (and Regaining) Writer's Hunger

By Holly Lisle

At the heart and soul of writing is the desire to write. And your relationship with writing, like all other relationships, can atrophy from the day-to-day wear of disappointment, from lack of support, from lack of feedback, from lack of incentive, from just plain exhaustion, and from a thousand other things. It can be as tough to maintain love in a long-time marriage to writing as it is to keep the love alive in any other relationship. Maybe that sounds improbable (after all, how can writing be both your job and your romance?) but it's true.

And the really silly thing is that the same things that will keep your personal relationships alive will keep your writing alive, too. If too much drudgery and lack of attention have left you and your writing not on speaking terms, here are some strategies for putting the hunger and the passion back in your romance.

▪ **Make dates**

While it probably wouldn't make a lot of sense to take your writing out to dinner or to a movie, it makes perfect sense to make dates with a local writers' group, or with a friend who writes. Give yourself one night every two weeks, or one afternoon a month, where you can give yourself over to the luxury of talking about writing with other people who are equally smitten by this passion of yours. Use these dates as an opportunity to 'get dressed up'—that is, to prepare some writing to take along and show around.

If you don't have a local writers' group and would really like to start one, you can find out how some friends of mine and I

put together a writers' group that made all of us better writers and got some of us published by clicking on the Schrodinger's Petshop Members' Handbook_

- **Bring home flowers**

Well, not really. Bring home books instead. Books about writing, books you wish you had written, books about subjects that interest you but that you know nothing or next to nothing about ... surround yourself with words that inspire you, words that entice you, words that tempt you, words that make your heart beat faster.

Personally, (and I know this sounds about as sexy as unwrapping a mummy), non-fiction books about archeology, anthropology, and ancient cultures and civilizations really float my boat. I get goosebumps just looking at them in bookstores—tomes with titles like **Renaissance Diplomacy, Ancient Inventions, The Handbook of Ancient Greek and Roman Coins, Life in a Medieval Village** ... I renew my romance with the writer in me by reading them, and throwing myself into those long-lost times and places, touching those foreign soils, hearing those forgotten tongues. And when I can feel them in my marrow and in my breath, I find that I'm usually full of excitement about writing again.

- **Listen to what your love is saying**

You've been plugging along on the same novel for five years, doing a chapter a year more or less, writing and rewriting the first five pages, and frankly you're bored stiff with the people who inhabit the book. They lost your attention a long time ago, and have failed to do anything interesting enough in the last couple of years to get it back. But you don't want to be one of those writers who has twenty three-chapter novels stuck in a box under your bed (which is admirable of you, incidentally) so you grit your teeth and refrain from killing of those bores, and swear that you're going to get to the end

of this novel or die.

Well, you just might. Die, that is. Don't let a book kill your writing. Sometimes you have to figure out what it is that you love, and what it is that is keeping you from what you love. You love the writing. Your *passion* is for the act of sitting down and putting words on paper, telling stories, weaving webs.

You do not love the individual book (and, believe me, when you're entangled in the middle of one, I know this is a tough distinction to make). The book is going to be gone from your life sooner or later, and another book will take its place. And another, and another. They will leave you, they won't call, they won't visit. Only the writing will remain, but nurtured, the writing will sustain you, and will grow stronger and more beautiful with the passing of time. Just like your other loved ones.

Kill that five chapter book that's been eating your heart out, and sit down and do a timed writing about the story that's waiting to be born in you right now. About who you want to meet on the page. About the city or the land in which you want your new, wonderful tale to travel. Or (and I know this sounds weird, but it works) do a timed writing in which you ask your writing where it wants to go, and let it tell you in the first person.

• **Wrap yourself in Saran Wrap**

I couldn't resist the image. Sorry. But it is, in a goofy way, applicable. Do something with your writing that you wouldn't normally do, or wouldn't do in public. If you would never consider writing poetry, then write ten poems. If the very idea of erotica makes your ears turn pink and your palms sweat, write the raciest scene your mind can conjure up. If you only write literary fiction, break out and write the climactic scene from a murder mystery or a romance novel. If

murder is already your thing, write a pastoral medieval literary scene.

What you're doing here is, a) having fun by doing something you don't have to expect yourself to be good at, and b) stomping hell out of your internal censor, who will be so shocked by your rebellion that it will shut up for a while and let you write what you want to write. If it starts to nag again while you're making progress, telling you you're no good and that you don't know what you're doing, you can always threaten it with more erotica or sonnets to your refrigerator.

▪ **Go someplace special together**

If you write science fiction or fantasy (or to a lesser degree, mysteries) you already have a ready-made special place where you and your writing can go. The SF/F field is loaded with wonderful conventions. Find ones where more panels are dedicated to writers and books than to role-playing gamers and media fandom—you want to be inspired, and you'll get the most inspiration by meeting the writers, editors, publishers and agents who bring out the sorts of books you want to be doing. The mystery field has, from what I've heard, far fewer conventions, but a much higher percentage that feature writing.

If you aren't writing in either of those two specialties, you can still look into writers conferences put on by state and regional writers' associations. I've served as faculty at one of these, and have attended one other, and I've decided they aren't for me, but they're evidently the thing for a whole lot of other folks.

And don't forget taking along a notebook and pen when you go places you've never been before, (no matter why you're there), to record images that surprise and tantalize you.

▪ **Remember anniversaries**

Keep track of the dates of your successes, no matter how minor they may seem. The day you get up the courage to mail something off for the first time, your first rejection slip, your first personal rejection from an editor, your first acceptance in a non-paying market, your first acceptance in a paying market, your first acceptance in a pro market—all of these count. Put them up in your workspace, and celebrate them as proof that you're working and producing and improving.

▪ **Make plans together**

Plan to do both great things and small things with your writing. Plan to finish a story for a specific market. Plan to complete the first draft of your new book before you celebrate your next birthday. Plan to research agents and publishers. Plan to enter a contest. Plan to compete for a writing grant or a residence at a writer's colony. Write your plans on index cards, along with the date that you planned them. On a second line, write in the date that you want to accomplish this goal (try to find a happy medium between raging optimism and head-in-the-sand conservatism). Leave a third line blank, and fill in the date that you make each of your plans a reality.

You and your writing were in love once. You can be again. I hope these suggestions help you get there.

Special thanks to Becky Shank, who asked the question that inspired this article.

NOTE: If you've found this article helpful, and if you are currently suffering from writer's block, I built a small class to help people overcome it – frequently in just an hour. If you'd like to take a look, it's [How to Beat Writer's Block](#).