

I'm Writing

by Brandon Lloyd Massey

Here I sit, figuratively slaving pen to paper, literally striking digits to keys, writing again. It starts: thoughts whirling, attention scattered, my mind is a safe-haven for chaos. Words form, disassemble, mix, remake themselves. They are amorphous structures. Without a recognizable pattern, they mean nothing to me. More and more, incoherent masses of letters scroll through my mind. Ideas struggle to form. Flashes of images flit rapidly in front of my mind's eye. There are fish, mountains, presents, forests, mirrors - a menagerie of meaningless symbols march past. No words appear on the page. My fingers dance over the keyboard. Backspace is depressed immediately thereafter. Discouraged, I complain about technology. No one is listening. There's no one else in the room.

I light a candle and turn off the light. A journal is dredged from the depths of my bottom desk drawer. Pencil resting steadily in hand, vision turns inward and I hunt ideas, stalk them within their own separate plane of existence, the forest of the mind. They jump and juke, evading my mental grasp like dancing deer. Some are will-o-wisps, present but intangible. I don't understand them. My hunt grows more careless. I cease stalking and begin chasing. Desperately, desperately, I run through the disordered maze of my ideas and find myself lost in the midst of cold stone walls. Wind unwarmed by proximity to pleasant thoughts sears my exposed flesh. My hands become numb and pale. This labyrinth seems never ending. Dark thoughts lurk around corners, hiding in shadows. They are bristly and sharp, like nightmarish porcupines. I hear them titter and taunt.

"There's nothing for you here, little boy. The ideas flee from you. They fear your abuse. Ideas want just representation, not to be slapped on paper by a nobody, a no one: you. Ideas fly to talent, flee from hacks." Their laughter is depression implanted on sound waves. It washes over me, soaks into my skin. "Why don't you just go home, now? Run along, little boy."

Available online at <http://fictionaut.com/stories/brandon-lloyd-massey/im-writing>

Copyright © 2010 Brandon Lloyd Massey. All rights reserved.

“They are right.” Despair, an old friend, greets me again. His cloak is the color of a mineshaft at midnight, untouched by the wind whipping through the stony corridors. Raven-skin boots produce no sound as he steps toward me. This personification's voice is loose gravel scraping over concrete. “It's not something you should have trouble understanding. Surely, as an idea, you would shrink from bad writing as well.”

I shrug in response. Paying attention to personifications of abstract ideas only leads to confusion. The only incarnation I lay faith in is Imagination, but it can be confused with its cousin, Insanity. The difference is in presentation. Imagination is indisputably more organized than Insanity, but they are identical entities thereafter. Analogous anomalies, bound by my perceptions, forced into form. These things don't matter. I'm distracting myself, losing focus, fading out of the realm of ideas.

Gathering my attention, I drift back into the realm. The stone is gone, and I stand in a large circular clearing. A fire burns in the center, warming me with feelings of success and happiness. Happy thoughts can only do so much, though. Dreams circle me, laughing and dancing. Ideas are Dreams, dredged from their own (this) plane. They know I have no power in this place. They twirl and twist, steps to a dance choreographed before the beginning of time. I can't compete. However, I know who can. I call out to her. My voice rises with each word, echoing throughout the plane of dreams, Aristotle's explanation for artists' insanity.

“Polyhymnia,
Daughter of Apollo,
Powerful, pressing, potent,
Presence of the divine.
Intrigue, instigate, improve,
Intone my lyrical tribute.

Polyhymnia,
I invoke you, mystical siren.
My words cry out, broken,

Hymns of the forgotten gods.
Take this pitiful wailing,
Make me worthy of presentation.

Polyhymnia,
Favored of the Ever-Living,
Deposit, draw, distribute,
Deliver a dream to me.
Gift, grant, give,
Guise my voice as yours.”

There are no flashes of light. No peals of thunder crack the air. The situation is simply different. The ideas are slower, less agile, or I am blessed with a sudden celerity. Either way, the hunt is easier. The few ideas that do try to flee are easily tracked down and captured. They twist and turn, but these movements are sluggish and ineffective against my newfound abilities.

Most ideas don't run. They seem to understand they are beat. Others are bold enough to leave previous hiding places and wander to me. Sometimes alone, sometimes in groups, my previously unattainable goals file to me. Each seems to follow the next in order. The occasional roamer wanders up out of turn, but I ask them politely to get in line, or wait to the side until I can discern where they belong. Nearly all of them comply. There are some objections, though, grumbles of dissatisfaction. Finally, there they are in a row: squares, circles, goblins, knights, mad scientists, a couple of Cyclops. The line extends beyond site into the trees, but somehow I know whatever Ideas I call out to will come to me. I stand in quiet contemplation, perusing the strange array of creations. A sudden voice interrupts my consideration of a one-winged angel.

“Where do you get off ordering us around like this?” The speaker is a fiery redhead, a stock character. She may be a femme fatale, or perhaps an independent female from some other century. She has her hands placed strategically on her hips. Her head is cocked to one side, eyes burning with that fierce gaze that only a ginger can supply. “What makes you think this is OK?”

“Well, you see, I'm a writer,” I explain. “It's kind of what I do.” This makes all the sense in the world to me, but the redhead's scowl remains.

“So, you think it's alright to come through here and wrangle us up like cattle because ‘you're a writer.’ Well, oh my, aren't you just full of yourself?” Her tone is mocking and full of resentment. I blush, but only from being reprimanded. “What do you think gives you any more right to us than we have to ourselves? Tell me that.”

“Why, writers are entitled to the use of ideas for the express purpose of educating the human race, as are all artists.” The words seem foreign to me even as they escape my mouth and the voice is not my own. It is a melodious sing-song that sounds unnaturally resonant. Polyhymnia's assemblage of knowledge, collected over eons of existence, spills from me. “Those who would create are blessed by the Gods and given free reign over your kind. Dreams inspire, but you are without organization. Mortals find it difficult to interpret you. Artists sort you, give you structure. Your kind and their kind are accomplices in the worlds, spreading knowledge and encouraging thought and interpretation across all planes.”

“So.” The woman draws the word out like it was a full sentence. Cocking her head to one side, she looks me up and down hard. “You decided that artists could do whatever they want to us? And who are you?”

I wait on the muse to answer, but she is silent. My voice, deeper and clumsy tries to explain. “Oh, um, I'm not actually the one that said any of that. I didn't really know. I was kind of having a spat with you guys, and called Polyhymnia, so, uh, I don't really know what to tell you.” I turn in a circle, searching fruitlessly for her. “I mean, she was just here. She was the one that was talking to you just a minute ago. Although, I think I could try and explain what she said to you if you really don't get it.”

The redhead just laughs.

“You know, for a writer, you don't speak that eloquently. I'm supposed to trust myself with you?” Her green eyes bore into me,

seemingly stripping me to my barest intentions. Unnerved, I am without reply.

“Now, Caraighan, be nice.” The words are a surprise. It is an odd feeling, having a divine entity speak through me. Beside the fact that a woman's voice comes forth, I feel my mouth move and hear the words well enough, but there is no conscious effort to say them. The only comparison that comes to mind is a knee-jerk reaction, but that is still different. A reflex test is planned. I know when it is coming. There is no preparation for this pronunciation.

“Oh, but Pea, why should I? Do I have any choice but to bow to this man's every whim? Can't I have some fun for now?” Suddenly, Caraighan sounds less like a disgruntled redhead and more like a pleading child.

“Cara, you are a dream. You can do whatever you please in the time you are free. Hop from fantasy to fantasy. Play in mortals' minds. Dance with the angels in Heaven. Witness the torments of Hell. Explore the farthest reaches of our ever-expanding Universe. Whatever you may desire; all the experiences of every plane are at your fingertips.” The muse pauses here. I don't remember moving, but my arms are reaching skyward, forming a “Y.” My neck is arched back so that the sky is all I see.

This is the first time I have looked up in this plane. The sky is a fantastic aurora borealis. Even the clouds are multi-colored. I can barely focus on the difference between the two. All sorts of creatures fly above me. Some I recognize: gryphon, dragons, and birds of all sorts. Others I have never even imagined. There is a bird with a snake for a head. It swoops under a hippopotamus with tiny angel wings, slowly inching its way across the sky. The grin on the hippo face implies he has no qualms with taking his time. I name him Buddha.

Slowly, my arms fall back to their respective sides. My chin lowers until I meet Caraighan's eyes again. Somewhat disgruntled by the fact that I feel like a puppet, I attempt to speak. I find myself quite unable to. I try to move my arm - the same result. Panic crashes down on me like an avalanche. I struggle to wiggle, speak,

breathe, blink, open my mouth, anything. I am a prisoner in my own body, trapped. I have no power. I have been body-snatched by a muse. What will she do with me? What could she want with me? I am a nobody, a nothing, what-

Peace, writer, peace. I hear her soothing words echo inside my head. *You are not abducted.* My heart ceases its escape attempt from the sturdy prison bars of marrow in my chest. *Take heart, your leave is imminent.*

“Caraighan Crymsen, you know the freedoms you are afforded and your contract with the Gods. Your freedom ends once you are summoned.” One of my own arms is lifted to poke a finger into my chest. “This artist, a writer, calls for you. You will attend him.”

“I could have been a beautiful painting.” Caraighan sighs after a moment and then spreads her arms wide. “Fine, writer, I am yours. Do with me as you please.”

There is a flash of light and my eyes close automatically. When they open, there is only a flickering light in front of me. The candle has melted halfway down its length, and still not a single word written. I set pen to paper, finally, and ideas seem at the ready. I sort them and begin.

“Once upon a time...”

