

FWA (Fiction Writers Anonymous)

by Brian Michael Barbeito

Sebastian and Janice had been a natural match. They sought to deny this at first because a recovery assistance program was not a place to forge intimate relationships. It worked out wonderfully in Hollywood, but Hollywood, as everyone knew, was just a facade. So try as they might and try as they may, they could not feign coolness when it came to their mutual attraction. The fact that it was springtime, as cliché as cliché could be, did not help matters.

They ended up at coffee after almost every meeting. Coffee had been served during the meetings, and their extra doses fueled long conversations. Since carrying writing tools and paper was prohibited, they could never properly exchange numbers. They tried to do it orally, but he kept forgetting her digits and the same was true on her side.

Fiction Writers Anonymous was an open program and anyone was free to attend. If you were over eighteen and had a writing problem, you were welcome. It was plain and simple. For youth, there were referrals provided to other, more age-appropriate programs. It didn't really matter, because people had common sense, but the protocol creators wanted to watch themselves because there were writers of erotica and horror stories that sometimes showed up.

A segment of the folks walked in off of the streets, the ones that were having trouble going cold turkey. Sebastian was one of those. Others, like Janice, had attended twenty-one day programs and even three month programs but still needed support and sponsors.

Sebastian and Janice tried to talk about other things but mostly ended up at the topic of their addiction. Janice, after mention of the weather or some minor irritation at work, would introduce the elephant in the room.

"How have you been doing with it this week? Tell me true Seb. Tell me true cause you seem extra quiet in meetings sometimes. C'mon tell me true."

"Fine. Well, fine lots but sometimes not so fine. I think I can do this though. I threw out some extra pens I found, and have burned all my notepads. I was in a store and saw stacks of paper on sale. I started to freak on the inside. Like a panic attack you know? Heart palpitations, dizziness, racing thoughts, all of that ugliness. There was even a bin of pencils. I talked myself through it. Sort of like a quick cognitive therapy. I also called my sponsor. And you?"

"I am doing well enough, but it's a struggle. I take it in stride the best I can. This all started lightly. I was just writing some journals and a couple poems here and there. Before I knew it I had hundreds of journals and had written poems on every type of receipt, card, or writable surface. I was writing parts of dialogue on my kitchen walls. After I quit my job, lost the house, and missed several family functions in order to write, they held an intervention. They say you have to want to become healthy again for yourself or it won't work. This is true I guess. But I tell ya true Seb, a big part of this is that I have to do it for them."

"Good for you Janice. There is nothing wrong there that I can see. More coffee?"

The talks went like that, and eventually Janice made it out of the life. She got her two year chip and then moved to Phoenix, securing employment as a seamstress. She volunteered as a writing addictions counselor part-time with the idea to give back. Once a month, at the local FWA, she gave a talk, one that shared her road to recovery. This was not one of the steps, but something she felt right about doing.

Sebastian, however, had been lying the entire time. He lied to himself about the gravity of his addiction. He lied to his friends and family. He lied to Janice right through their brief and intense relationship. He had tried, and had meant well. There was in fact a significant part of him that wanted to get straight, but his writing had become through the years not only an emotional addiction but

also something closely resembling a physical, cellular, or biological one. Though sick with it, he became sicker without it. After failing at numerous programs, he gave up trying and wrote around the clock.

A few people here and there sought to contact him but all that fizzled out in time. On one writing run, alone, hungry, his mind disheveled and his spirit unhinged as a human spirit could be, he reached the end. A small crack in a part of his frontal lobe broke into a wider chasm and there was basically an earthquake in his brain. Sebastian's head hit his desk and stayed there while the rest of him collapsed in his chair. Somehow in the brief episode a box of H2 pencils, new and naive orphans, were freed from their case and scattered about and across cheap laminate below.

The landlord found him a few days later. Besides boxes and shelves of writings, there were found five hundred packages of unopened paper, two hundred and fifty unopened pens, seven dozen packages of pencils, and fifty unused notebooks. Everything was donated to charity and though not many read it, Sebastian's obituary, written by his own hand just months before, requested that anyone able and wishing to do so could send donations on his behalf to the local FWA.

