

Life of the Writer

by Jill Chan

I am not a real writer. I just write what comes to me. Expression or a way to stifle it? At any rate, I write for my own pleasure. Which is to say, I write nothing. Or nothing which can be understood as such. Even I can't understand it sometimes.

Like today, I was with a friend. We were talking about writing. And he said, "Am I in your novel? If I am, make me handsome, make me beautiful and irresistible." He said it half-laughing. But I know he was at some point in this serious. Don't we all want to be beautiful in real life? And being beautiful in a novel is a way to compensate for the real.

And even beauty can be made in a novel. As sometimes we cannot in life.

I am a romantic writer, true. But what comes after the romance is what fascinates me. A lover dying is the most beautiful scene I want to write. The most beautiful scene I have yet to write.

Much more if dying from wasted trust or ardour. A passage where a lover dies beautifully to his beloved must be convincing to be successful. Where he doesn't actually die but wants to, for her. But that is a rare passage where the writer doesn't think of herself as a writer but as someone in the scene dying along with her characters.

I was dying once, by mistake. Death is always a mistake. And dying, more so. I was diagnosed with a rare blood disease. They said I could die in a month or in a year. Death is so hurried, so sure of itself. And I was ready to die. But my resignation was put to a standstill when they discovered that the disease was gone. This, after months of worry, of wanting to quicken the end. For if I couldn't live the life I wanted, I might as well stop it.

This was when I stopped work and lay in bed all day, moping about my life cut short by circumstances, by conditions. I was ready to die, in short. But even then, I had hoped to continue, to someday wake up and find myself free. From expectation. The expectation of death.

But when the good news came, I didn't expect it. In fact, I didn't welcome it. To be given a second chance like that, who would not want that?

But I was foolish. I still am. I was ready to die like the characters in a future novel. The potential is greater than the actual. I love that. I love how life is full of promise. And I have none now. I believed I was near death, that frightened me. Now that fear has made me bored with living. The sting of death has become the dull thud of boredom. I don't see it as a triumph, I see it as hope gone wrong.

For if I die, it will be forever. What is preventing me dying tomorrow, or the day after. People die by accident all the time.

Is it then a fear of life which a fear of death has shown me?

I can no longer write. What is the use? I cannot really live in my characters. I cannot really die in them either. Reality has left me floundering. Is it a measure of cowardice? Am I a coward?

I was brave in the face of death. Now I have become nothing in the face of life. What went wrong?

To be shown death too early too long, that has made me give up.

I lied when I said I don't write anymore. I do. But I find nothing there. Not what life wants from me nor what death has revealed to me. Only that success is measured by what gets written. Not by the

number of readers. Being near death has taught me that. For life is lived every day unceremoniously.

Beauty lives. Beautifully.

