

The Writer's Block Recovery Program

By Lana Chiad

I step inside to find my new crowd: three men and two women. The buzz finally diminishes as they know the session is about to start. With all eyes on me, I make my way to the front of the room and set my briefcase down on the desk provided. I take a deep breath and force a smile at the new members.

"Welcome," I greet, "to your first session on how to overcome writer's block. I-" I point to myself "-am too important for you to know my name. How about we all introduce ourselves, yes?" I *know* they're all wearing name tags, but I *need* for there to be sound in the room. The silence is almost deafening.

I look at the first lady in the front row. There sits a bone-thin, frail, old woman who looks as if she hasn't seen sunlight in years. Little hairs cover large portions of her wool sweater and her beige pants have a large hole in between her legs. She's wearing a scarf and mittens even though it's creeping towards a hundred degrees outside.

I gesture for her to stand. She slowly pushes herself up, her spine cracking four times as it straightens.

"Hi," her croak-like voice salutes. "I'm Sally." She points to her sticker nametag. She turns around to face the rest of the ladies and gentlemen around her. "I am in writer's block."

She pulls out a tissue from her beige pants and dabs the inside corners of her eyes. The crowd below applauds at her courage, some reaching to pat her shoulder.

I roll my eyes. "We all know why you're here. Make this faster. You, up."

I point to the second person in the front row sitting in the middle. A gentleman in his midyears stands up looking a bit too dressed up to be in a recovery program. His black slacks and white button-up collared shirt stand out from the rest in its formality.

He clears his throat. "Hi, I'm Jonathon," he introduces. "I'm 38 years old and -"

"Sir, we don't need to know," I interrupt. "Next."

The last on the front row stands. A tall woman with long, curly, fiery red hair and huge '80s glasses wears a conservative yellow sundress that comes up to her chin and down to her ankles. I'm surprised she's allowing the public to see her arms or face.

"Hello," her cheery voice greets. "I'm Samantha."

She sits back down and I applaud. "Short and sweet, I love it! Next."

The first man in the second row doesn't stand. He twitches his face, winking his eye every few seconds and occasionally smiling for no reason. He's beginning to bald on the top of his head. From over here, I notice his tie is on backwards.

"Phil," he mutters before coughing into his fist.

"Alright," I confirm before nodding at the middle man. "Next?"

A young man stands from his seat in between the other lost authors. His *Star Trek* t-shirt is wrinkled and his thick-framed glasses are a tad askew. His hair makes bed-head look neat.

"I'm Sam," and he sits back down.

I nod my head at him as he takes his seat. I look back at the group of men and women who are looking at me. "Okay, so we all know why you're here: you're stuck and you need help. Writing is all about imagination and expressing yourself in not just words but through clever descriptions that paint images into maybe thousands of minds!"

They all look up at the ceiling in wonder. It's as if the heavens are channeling them.

I clear my throat to get their attentions back. "Writing," I continue, "is also about inspiration. What inspires *you*. What inspires you may be different than what inspires someone else. Sometimes, it's what inspires us that makes us suffer writer's block. We may soon become

immune to our inspiration to the point where everything just becomes dull. What may be the problem is that your inspiration is fading away. Now, let's go around the room and share what inspires us." I point to the first frail old lady with mittens, her name tag reminding me her name is Sally. The emotional one. "You first. Everyone listen! Perhaps this will inspire you."

She leans forward to stand up again, but I motion for her to stop. "You can sit. It's okay."

I only say this to keep her from making those disgusting cracking noises.

She nods her head and smiles at me. Aw, as if I really care! She clears her throat and, unless my ears are being too sensitive, it cracks!

"Art," she croaks. "Art inspires me."

I nod my head and look at the rest of the inmates. "See, guys? Art can inspire you." I point to the next man. "What is your inspiration?"

The gentleman named Jonathon stands from his seat. This time, I don't mind. He doesn't make any abnormal sounds when he moves a mere limb. "Porn."

I raise an eyebrow as the other two men in the room chuckle. "Porn?"

"Porn," he confirms before clearing his throat. His face turns red from embarrassment.

I smile sinisterly. I want to add to his misery. "What kind of porn?"

His beady eyes stare at me. "Wh-what kind?"

"Yeah," I lean against the desk behind me and cross my arms. "What kind? Gay? MILF? Lolicon? BDSM?"

He clears his throat once again. "Erm...does it matter?"

"Of course!" I exclaim. "Others in this room might need inspiration, and this *may* be their key to getting their writing career back on track! Now tell us!"

When I thought it had already reached its color limit, his face turns even redder. "...G-gay porn..."

I smirk as the other men trade in their amusement to utter discomfort. Frail Sally is looking off to a corner of the room, completely unaware of our conversation, and Samantha is trying to hide her giggles with her hand.

I point to the chick in the sundress, Samantha. "What inspires you?"

She stands up, running a hand behind the skirt of her dress to make sure it hasn't caught on anything. "Well, sometimes on Sunday mornings, I-"

"Oh! You were doing so well!" I cry. "Please! Cut to the chase! What inspires you, for God's sake?"

"Wait, I thought this was for writer's block," the young lad with the *Star Trek* shirt voices. "Shouldn't it be good that she's telling a-?"

"Oi! Shut your mouth, Spock!" I snap at him before turning my attention back to Sundress Samantha. "Get to the point."

"U-um," Samantha is a little taken back at my forwardness, as she should be. "Petting zoos."

"Petting zoos?" I repeat.

"Petting zoos," she confirms.

I shrug. "Okay. You hear that everyone? Petting zoos. Where you can molest animals and not get banished from society for it. You may find that appealing, Jonathon." Jonathon a.k.a. Mr. Gay Porn buries his head into his hands and no one laughs, so I move on to the next row. I point to the twitching guy. "How do you get inspired to write?"

Twitchy Phil stands up, smiling at me and then frowning. He raises an eyebrow at me and then drops it. "I like..." he bites on his finger and then sniffs it. "I like to grocery shit."

I squint at him. "Grocery...shit? Do you mean 'shop'?"

He grins and shrugs – this time, I think he means it. "Y-yes. Grocery shit."

I nod my head and try my best to keep a straight face. "When you go home tonight," I address the rest of the inmates, "you should try grocery shitting... I mean, grocery shopping." No one laughs with me. "Alright, buddy." I jab a finger at *Star Trek* lover. "Now you can talk. What inspires you?"

Spock stands up. I feel no need to refer to him by his real name, Sam. He probably doesn't even have a girlfriend. "I like to—"

"Watch *Star Trek*?" I suggest for him, looking at my fingernails.

"No," Spock-Sam growls. "I like to watch the rain."

I look up at him. "Well isn't that *romantic*?" I look at the rest of my students. "Watch the rain and masturbate. Again." I look at Mr. Gay Porn. "you may like that."

"I never said I masturbated!" Spock-Sam defends himself. "I just like watching the rain! It's so beautiful. Especially when a drop of rain hits a flower petal and you watch it roll down like a—"

"Wow! Write a poem and slash your wrists!" I exclaim, rolling my eyes. "There you go, you guys. Now, you are inspired!"

Everyone glares at me.

"How can everyone telling what inspires them help our problem?" inquires Mr. Gay Porn. "We still can't write."

I sigh and massage my temples. "Okay guys, I have an idea. We're gonna play a little game." I look around the room to try to find at least one excited face, but everyone looks like I just told them we're going to visit the elderly at a retirement home: uninterested and slightly horrified. "Everyone close your eyes."

I watch as each pair of eyes hides behind their lids. "Good. Now, I'm going to try to get your imagination going, and then I'll randomly call on one of you to tell me what you're picturing or for you to continue the story. Got it?"

A series of nods and "yes"s sound throughout the room. I make sure everyone still has their eyes shut before beginning. "Once upon a time there were two children, John and Jane, who were walking alone in the cemetery in the middle of the night. Sally?"

The elderly woman continues, "The parents were worried, but the children didn't care."

I roll my eyes. "Well obviously. They're *children*. Anyway, so they were walking when suddenly they came across this tombstone. Jonathon, what does the tombstone look like?"

Mr. Gay Porn clears his throat. "A gray, long piece of marble that's rounded at the top—"

Only Mr. Gay Porn could make me choke on air. "Are you seriously describing a marble penis?"

Mr. Gay Porn's face reddens. "NO!"

"Mmhmm," I roll my eyes, not at all believing him. "Anyway, so they see a tombstone that says... Spock, what does the tombstone say?"

The *Star Trek* lover doesn't realize I'm talking to him at first, but then quickly opens his eyes to catch me staring a hole into his forehead. "My name is not Spock."

"Yeah, and I'm not chief of security, Tasha Yar. Quit complaining and pick up the story." I glare at him until he reluctantly closes his eyes, realizing that there really is no way to win with me.

"The tombstone," Spock-Sam imagines, "says the birth and dying date of a man named Colonel Arthur J. G. Picard and—"

"You are *such* a fucking *loser*!" I exclaim, cutting him off. "Jesus!" I have to take deep breaths to calm myself from going over to Spock and beating the living daylights out of him. I sigh and massage my temples once more. "Okay!" I stand up from my seat of the edge of my desk. "Okay, okay, okay. I have a new game to play."

I look around the room and find a packet of paper and a cup of pens. I grab a pinch of paper and a handful of pens and pass them out to the five needy people.

“Okay,” I say. “Okay, this is what we’re going to do. We’re going to write!” Spock-Sam opens his mouth to say something. “Shut the hell up, Spock. We’re going to test our new inspirations. Inspiration is key to everything!”

“What do we write?” Sundress Samantha asks.

“I’ll tell you,” I answer her before thinking of something. “Write about...a cat.”

“A cat?” Spock-Sam repeats.

“Did I stutter? Now write! You have five minutes,” I look back down at my fingernails to occupy me.

Once the fascination with my cuticles becomes as dull as my career, I look at the posters around the room. For the most part, the room is pretty empty with a small window to my right. There are two posters: one is of a bunny in a bowl of spaghetti, and the other is a picture of Snoopy on his typewriter. How fitting. How fucking inspirational.

CRACK!

I jerk my head up to see Grocery-Shitting Phil with his pen poking out of his mouth and blue ink bleeding everywhere.

“Ew,” I mumble before looking back at the poster of the bunny, but then I have to look away before it makes me vomit from adorableness.

“Okay, I don’t know how long it’s been, but times up,” I announce. I jerk my finger to Frail Sally. “You first, but don’t stand.”

She nods her head – her neck cracking twice – and looks down at her sheet of paper – her neck cracking three more times. “There was a cat named Phoebe. She was a tabby cat. She claws were sharp. She ate cat food from her bowl and drank milk from her bowl. She-”

“Okay,” I interrupt her. “Good. Fine. Is this how you normally write?”

“Pretty much,” Frail Sally muses.

“Then there you go! If that’s the case, then why were you here in the first place?” I inquire.

She shrugs, her shoulders cracking twice. “I thought this was cooking class.”

I furrow my eyebrows. “But you said when you told us your name that you were in writer’s... You know what. Never mind. Cooking class is in two weeks.”

“Ohhhh,” Frail Sally croaks. She stands, cracking her spine four times and leaves the room. “Have a good rest of your life,” she calls out to us before slamming the door behind her.

I look at Mr. Gay Porn. “Whatcha got for me?”

He clears his throat and stands up with the piece of paper in hand. “There is a cat with no name. Lost from home, searching for a new home. She wanders from yard to yard-”

“You need to paint a visual first,” I interrupt him. “The cat I’m picturing is different than the cat Spock is picturing which is probably *way* different than the cat you’re writing about.” I look up at Spock-Sam. “For the record, I believe this story takes place on that distant planet called Earth.”

“Fuck you,” I hear Spock-Sam mutter.

“You wish,” I retort.

“Um,” Mr. Gay Porn voices. “I was on to that. It was the following sentence.”

“Fine,” I return to looking at my cuticles.

Mr. Gay Porn continues, “The stray cat has a luscious coat of fur, smooth to the touch. A handful of love under your fingertips. Soft. Warm. Its underside sensitive, the skin soft as my fingertips grazes down to its-”

“Holy no no!” I exclaim. “No! Stop! Please! God, what the hell is the matter with you?”

It's against the law to have sex with an animal."

Mr. Gay Porn shrugs and takes his seat. "Biologically, we're all animals."

I make a face. "So you really did have sex with a stray?"

"No!" he snaps. "It wasn't a stray. I own every fiber of her being."

"Okay! Next!" I say quickly and look at Twitchy Phil. "You...couldn't complete it, could you?"

Twitchy shakes his head. "I got somethin'."

"Hang on, you skipped me!" Sundress Samantha's voice is about as annoying as that damn bird that chirps every morning at six o' clock.

"Alright. Fine." I massage my temples again, this time harder. "Sundress girl. Go."

I hear Sundress Samantha clear her throat. "There was a kitty named Kit Kit. He was fluffier than a fluff ball and was as orange as an orange."

She looks up at me, hopeful, but I shake my head. "You fail. Sit down." She humphs before taking her seat. "Go ahead, Phil."

Twitchy Phil stands up. "There was a cat named Dick." He looks up from his paper and smiles sheepishly. "It was supposed to be Dickson."

I nod my head and then look at Spock-Sam. "Go, Spock."

Glaring at me, Spock-Sam stands up and mumbles, "Fuck you 'til you die," before reading what he's written. "There was a cat named Popcorn. He was a tabby cat who was up to no good. One day, he decides to climb an electrical pole. What he thought was a good idea turned out to be the worst decision ever made. The tabby was electrocuted and its limp body fell to the concrete sidewalk below it, facing yet another death." Spock looks up and grins. "Screw having eight lives."

"You fail at life," I interrupt him. "But that was better than what I've heard so far. Good job, Spock. Way to go where no one has gone before."

"Why do you make fun of me liking *Star Trek* when you clearly know just as much as me?" Spock-Sam demands.

"Because I don't publicly display my nerdy indulgences," I reply. "You can go if you want."

"My pleasure," Spock-Sam stands up to take his leave.

I shout after him, "Might I suggest writing obituaries or become a journalist for a major newspaper. They'd pay good money for that kind of shit."

He nods his head and hesitates at the door. "Thanks," he says quietly before leaving the room.

I raise an eyebrow but shrug it off as I turn to look at my remaining victims. "And then there were three." I reach into my suitcase and swallow four dry ibuprofens.