

THOUGHTAUDIO



PAPERCUT REFLECTIONS

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As I turned the last page of *The Old Man and the Sea*, I began to visualize what I wanted to do when I grew up. I wanted to become a great literary writer. Writing never dawned on me before. It was an epiphany. As I looked up at the classroom ceiling, I saw a florescent circle of light descend dove-like over my head. I immersed myself in the green glow as the purpose of the vision struck me. Its message was clear. Out of the millions upon millions of people who dream of becoming a famous writer, I was “The Chosen One”.

My adorned path elated me. Writing classic novels as the voice of the neo-cataclysmic age was a perfect job. I visualized words gushing from my fountain pen, shining as a bright beacon restructuring cultural values throughout the world. Publishers translate my novels into 75 languages, as millions upon millions sell globally in every bookstore and online outlet imaginable. The world could not get enough.

As I scanned my dream, I saw myself embrace an extravagant lifestyle. There were elegant parties, VIP treatment, and front row seats at Warrior’s games. I saw lavish trips to Paris, London, Barcelona, and San Francisco. Starlets fell in love with me, as paparazzi hounded me for tabloid pictures. Sizzling paramours clung to my arm, as TV executives begged me to star in top-rated TV dramas. Hollywood studios pressed me for cameo movie appearances beside Keanu Reeves, Jake Gyllenhall, Chris Hemsworth, Jennifer Lawrence, and Jonah Hill. Pixar and Disney offered voice-over gigs voicing an animated trombone, an outlandish red Lamborghini, and a cartoon superhero living on a planet with a million skies.

My muse appears to me as a specter as I walk down the Santa Cruz beach, caressing my mind, and warming my heart. She guides me into deeper subject matters of

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grave concern to humanity. The crowds continue to cheer, but the grueling pace took its toll. One winter night, as I readied myself for bed, without warning, my nerves shatter. The urban clatter grew too much for me. Get-well letters flooded my Beverly Hills home. Their weight crushed me into a formless bot. The endless rush on the streets became a prison cell. In an instant, I throw it all away and move to a tropical paradise.



With the help of my agent, I find a peaceful island with palm trees and luscious foliage. I build a three bedroom, two-bath bungalow out of palm leaves and bamboo. I grow a beard and drink hard liquor. I marry a beautiful native princess descended from royalty for over a thousand years. She ensures our bungalow is perfect in every way, while I sit at my desk writing my next novel. The jungle bordering our home provides silage for my work. After writing page upon page for half the day, I trawl the nearby river. I catch bountiful succulent fish. My wife's attendants clean the fresh catch and then toss them onto the open hearth. As the fish sizzles, drums thump in syncopated cadence throughout the grass hut. The local natives dance around the open fire celebrating the animal spirit within the human soul, and ordain me a mind-warrior in their tribe. The next morning the sun beams into my bedroom nudging me awake. For breakfast, my wife prepares a hot cup of Peet's coffee and my favorite homemade chocolate chip cookies with nuts. I go to the mailbox outside our hut and find it filled with royalty checks that roll in week after week.

As my sense of adventure grows I travel and fight in foreign wars on the side of the exploited underdog. **I discover the travails of the working class and their thumb screw exploitation by the world's elite.** I wrote a scathing novel ripping into the core of

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civilization's savage nature from lessons I learn on my adventures during my absence from New York. In a fitting culmination of right over wrong I write a novel depicting everything I witnessed. I win the Nobel Peace Prize in Literature. My fame spreads throughout the world. It becomes apparent that I could not escape celebrity. Fame as a literary icon was inescapable.



I was in the 9th grade when I reassessed my life as a writer. I still had not written anything of substance. It dawned on me that I was unable to write because my mom didn't buy me a journal. No writer can write without a journal. I realized my inability to produce great literary works was *her* fault. After whining for a week, my mom took me to Books Kinokuniya in New York City to buy a journal. With journal in hand, I saw my 7th grade vision as ground zero and 9th grade my "Press the GO Button" year.



When I went to high school, my journal, still empty, sat on my shelf for months. I realized the start-up phase of becoming a writer wasn't quite what I had in mind. It was bumpy and full of obstacles. Distractions inundated my life. In school, I had to learn math, history, and a continuous flow of college-prep courses. Even though I pulled a respectable 2.9 GPA, I didn't have time to write in my journal. Then my friend Chase Beckman III told me to smoke ganja to help get the juices flowing. We smoked behind the gym after school and behind the horse stables near our homes everyday for two weeks. All I did was gain five pounds and stare at a blank computer screen for hours on end. It didn't matter. I liked Chase and we did all kinds of cool things together. Then he moved to a huge mansion in Tribeca. His dad was an investment banker. For some

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reason, his dad hit it big on Wall Street selling derivatives to foreign countries. It had something to do with the prices of houses continuing to rise into infinity.



With Chase gone, I wanted to start a series of flash fiction stories. I speculated Hollywood movie executives would discover my work and start paying me millions of dollars for the movie rights.

Then, from out of nowhere, I became interested in girls, and my writing career derailed once again. Even though I felt ready for some delectable arm candy, the feeling wasn't mutual. Girls didn't like me. They thought I looked like a cross between a nerd and a vegetarian. To solve my problem with girls, I hung out with Roger Daneslocker, the coolest guy in high school. He always had an entourage of girls following him around, and I was sure to tag some of his spillover.

Some of my friends thought hanging out with Roger made me look needy, but I thought it was worth it. Not only did I go to all the cool-kid parties, but I also dated four girls from Roger's spillover. I even kissed one in the 11th grade. Her name was Kristen Vaughnaughten. She was almost cute, and somewhat smart. She was a star athlete and the first string catcher for our girls' varsity softball team. They ranked 11th in the state. It was a big deal around campus. She decided to break up with me after our first kiss. She said I tasted like a Pixie Stix. She explained that she gave up processed sugar as part of her regimen to get a scholarship to a Division I college. I couldn't blame her. She was a good softball catcher, and sugar *is* the bane of processed food.



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As time progressed, I wrote two papers for my English Literature class in my senior year. The best one was on Mark Twain's contribution to American Literature. I wrote how Mark Twain's humor gave birth to FOX News. They weren't my ideas, but my Uncle Dole's. Then again, they weren't his ideas either. Even though my Uncle Dole was an old codger, he didn't say Mark Twain was the cause of Fox News. He said our social degradation was due to all the clowns that disagreed with him. Those clowns caused a counter-reaction among true patriots. That created the need for "fair and balanced" viewpoints, hence, the emergence of Fox News. I wasn't sure who the clowns were, so I added Mark Twain's name, and embellished a few jump cuts to get my paper done on time. My editorial finesse didn't work. I got a D- with a note from my teacher to google Mark Twain's history to get a grip on reality.

In truth, my teacher hit on something. I didn't have a clue about reality. I didn't understand why it was the focal point of adult life. My life up to that point was a random set of swirling events creating a buzzing white noise in my head. I made a mental note to learn about reality when I got old. I thought when I reached 30, reality would start making sense.

The other essay I wrote was on *The Scarlet Letter*. I proposed that Hester Prynne was unfaithful to Roger Chillingworth. My theory stated that she should have named her daughter Rogerella instead of Pearl. I claimed that Hester Prynne was a prostitute on page three of my essay, and the reader should be cautious feeling empathetic toward her.

I didn't think any of those things about Hester Prynne. I thought framing her as a prostitute was ironic. I felt certain I would score extra points for originality. The teacher wanted to give me an F, because for some reason, my paper violated a woman's right to

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choose. She decided that she would give me a C- if I apologized to the class for calling Hester Prynne a prostitute.

I had no problem apologizing. I told the class we live in an age where we must treat all human beings with dignity, and that women were always right because they had the right to choose. My class started clapping. I ended with a joke about a medicine man, a minister, and a prostitute walking into a bar. The class howled.



I finally graduated from high school and was admitted to Columbia University. My dad graduated from there and knew the Admissions Officer. He paid the admissions guy a ton of money under the table to rewrite my high school profile into my official records. The admissions guy gave me a 4.3 GPA with a number of Advanced Placement classes in math and physics. He wrote that I was the first-string quarterback for my championship high school team in the New York area, and that I led the high school debate team to a second place finish in the regional finals. My revised high school record was remarkable, especially when viewed from the nuanced perspective of fraud. However, to be fair, deception was my only path to gain admission to a prestigious university since my real GPA was not that high, and my SAT score were only slightly above average. I wouldn't have gotten in without those bought and paid for embellishments. I thanked my dad for being excessively rich and getting me into Columbia. He smiled as a tear fell from his eyes.

I spent the next six years in college having the time of my life working as a part time bartender at The Heights Bar & Grill serving margaritas to the Ivy Leaguers. I told my dad that I was acing my business management courses and elected Sargent of Arms

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for *The Future Exchange Traders of America*. I mentioned the only problem was the heavy workload, and I would need a few extra semesters to complete my studies. My dad didn't mind. He wanted me to have fun during college. He was happy to pay the extra tuition and housing costs, and even threw in \$5,000 per month spending money. My dad was excited to have me succeed, because he knew after graduating, I would work for his firm and continue the family legacy.

I felt a tinge of guilt knowing I stretched the truth with my dad. I wasn't studying as hard as I should, and bartending took up a lot of my time. I convinced myself that working in a college bar provided me with a kaleidoscope backdrop of life that I could draw upon when I became a famous writer. One thing I was learning about reality is that self-deception is a noteworthy tool, especially when used in tandem with denial.



I finally buckled down and graduated, and quit my bartending job. My dad leased me a penthouse apartment after I told him I needed some time off to clear my head before jumping into his firm. It was beautiful apartment, and his allowance of \$8,500 per month gave me enough free time to begin my lifelong writing dream. After a few days of tortuous word fumbling, I was able to write a few entries in my journal.

I found writing at night was my time of choice. My muse settled into my brain after a few glasses of California cabernet and words began to flow. In fact, as a token of appreciation for my bartending job, I wrote a poem about closing time at the bar.

CLOSING TIME

It's 2 o'clock in the college bar – time for last call

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It's sad looking at the lonely faces failing as they fall

The panicked look of tormented patrons

With contorted arms

Flapping in the wind

Jiving with idiomatic machinations

To find a paramour without trepidations

Their gloomy eyes squirm at the cry "Last Call"

Whimpering as if they lost a shoe at the homecoming game fraternity ball

Turning into dusky worm-eating Cretins

Time to go home I shout

They sob some even pout

Hey, wait a minute you Ivy Leaguers!

Don't forget your all-alone mittens

It was my muse at her finest. She zapped me with rich creative energy that I felt deep inside my bones. As she guided my hand, I wrote her words in my journal as fast as my fingers could type on the keyboard. For those precious moments, I felt the surge of her artistry zing through my words. For some reason, none of my neighbors liked my poem and thought it was too “zany” for their tastes. They were all young lawyers and

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finance people working in Manhattan. I realized I was clanking against the wall of normality.

THEY were no longer I!



After a few months staring at the city lights from my high-ceiled window, my writing slowed to a crawl. I began drinking bottles of cabernet to re-energize my muse, but for some reason, she never materialized. I began to realize that my muse had left me stranded and all alone. One night after a grueling night of despair, I walked around the apartment complex dazed. One of my neighbors recognized me and asked if everything was all right. I told her I was an aspiring writer but my muse had ghosted me. I confided that I find it difficult to get anything down on paper. She giggled and told me I had writer's block, and it's a cinch to fix. She told me to keep writing and my motivation will return. I thanked her and told her I would repay her with dinner sometime.

I ran to my apartment and googled "writer's block". There it was. My rummaged brain calmed down as I read an article explaining that all great writers experienced writer's block. If all great writers experienced this tortuous malaise, at least I was still in the game. Even though I missed my muse, she never came back. I felt abandoned, but knew to survive as a writer I must walk the tangled labyrinth alone.

As good fortune would have it, I ran into the woman who clued me in on writer's block walking in the commons. I told her I owed her a dinner, and for some reason she

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accepted. I took her to Le Bernardin on W 51st Street. We enjoyed a great French seafood dinner and two bottles of wine. We talked through dinner, then for another four hours in my penthouse. She was a beautiful woman and way out of my league, but for some reason we clicked. Over the next few months, we went on hikes, discussed the irrelevancy of material greed, ate sushi in every Japanese restaurant we could find, and laughed until dawn when she stayed overnight. I finally decided to pop the question. She said *YES!* My life as a married man began.



When my wife discovered how rich my dad was, she began positioning herself as the perfect wife for a rich husband. It made me happy. In fact, it made my dad happy, my wife happy, and both mothers happy. I hit a gold mine of happiness. I loved every second of it. When it was time to begin growing a family, I knew I was ready to work in my dad's firm and continue the family legacy.

My wife was thrilled when we moved into a quaint starter mansion in the Upper West Side of the city. My dad gave me a starting salary of \$250,000 a year with a ton of benefits. One immediate benefit was that I didn't have to wear a tie because I represented the younger generation, although I had to buy a slew of expensive suits and accessories to reflect the proper image of my dad's firm. It was a great job, and I enjoyed the people. My wife built a phenomenal home, and our new baby was a bundle of joy. I learned fast at my job and enjoyed being a team player. In return, people treated me with respect, not because they respected me, but because they respected my dad. That was good enough for me.

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In a few years, I was making over a \$1,000,000 a year. I was 28-years old. The only nagging problem I faced was the realization that my writing career was prematurely drawing to a close.



As fate would have, I finally got the chance to write once again when my dad promoted me to Executive Vice President of International Corporate Affairs. It was a prominent position, and I had to start wearing a tie. One of the inadvertent perks that came with the job was loads of free time. When I flew to London, China, Germany, or Greece, the long plane rides and long layovers provided an insane amount of down time. Even though I filled most of my free time watching DVDs from the family media library my mother-in-law gifted us, or reading best selling books from the airport gift shops, I also discovered I had an abundance of free time to start writing again.



On one long non-stop trip to Hong Kong, I started writing a dramatic short story about a strong willed muscle bound protagonist in uniform, pitted against a dastardly antagonist with a thin mustachio draped in a black cape and wearing a top hat. The dastardly dude spent all his time tying up a blonde damsel in distress to railroad tracks. At the last moment, the hero and his horse would appear out of nowhere and save the day. I thought it was an exciting thematic arc.

I wanted to share my excitement, so I emailed it to my wife to get her take on the story. When I called her before boarding the plane home, she told me she read it and then out of the blue started laughing. I told her it wasn't a comedy. Still laughing and snorting

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through her nose, she told me I was writing about the evil Snidely Whiplash and the do-gooder Dudley Do-Right of the Canadian Mounted Police, his horse, his girlfriend Nell, and that it was part of The Rocky and Bullwinkle Show. I grew muddled and agitated. I shouted, “Wait a minute! Are you saying The Rocky and Bullwinkle Show stole my idea?” My wife, still trying to hold back her tears from laughing, told me that last week I rummaged through the DVD collection her mom bought for the baby and packed the DVD of The Rocky and Bullwinkle Show to watch while traveling.

I’m not sure she’s right. Maybe I lifted it, maybe I didn’t, but since I was only two pages into the melodrama, I began to consider the implications surrounding possible copyright infringement problems. I couldn’t risk tarnishing the firm’s image if news of a legal entanglement between The Rocky and Bullwinkle Show and me started hitting the tabloids. Regardless if I won or lost, I had to face reality and stop development immediately.



My misstep into adventure stories gnawed at me for a while. I didn’t like my wife laughing at me, but I knew all famous writers faced disparagement in the beginning of their careers. I decided to wipe the soot of criticism off my suit and shoot for the stars with a dystopian saga I titled *The Alien Wolf Spider*.

It begins when an ordinary Arizona Wolf Spider eats a nefarious chemical substance brought to earth by aliens. The Wolf Spider morphs into an Alien Wolf Spider and falls through a black hole the alien’s created to get back home. Without knowing how to set the gauges correctly, the Alien Wolf Spider spins through a time warp that sends him to the year 2457 A.D. The earth rumbled with pollution. However, the Alien Wolf

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Spider happened to thrive on polluted water, polluted landfills, and polluted air. To top it off, the Alien Wolf Spider excreted clean soil, clean water, and clean air, which began clearing up the world's pollution problem for human beings. The lone spider begins replicating itself into perfectly formed adult Alien Wolf Spiders. The spiders continued replicating until the Alien Wolf Spider became the world's dominant species. With pollution running out, they turned to eating human beings because of all the trans-fat in their bodies. Soon the human population was near extinction except for twenty University of Arizona engineering students holed-up in the Computer Science basement lab.

The students feared that unless they did something drastic the human race would cease to exist. They decided to do what they did best and apply math and engineering to the problem. Working night and day, the students calculated the rate of pollution loss and isolated some statistical anomalies in the Alien Wolf Spider's replication process. After pumping the numbers through the campus high-powered computer, they found a way to disrupt their replication process altogether. Their first reaction was to get venture funding and become a unicorn. Then they soon realized they were the last humans standing, and dreams of becoming millionaires were not in the cards. Their only option left was repopulating the earth with humans. As the number of Alien Wolf Spiders rapidly began to shrink, humans flourished in the newly refurbished earth where clean soil, clean water, and clean air were abundant. Within a few years, the human population hit 22 billion, and the cycle of devastation began once again. The End!



I knew I hit a literary home run and began submitting my manuscript to the publishing elite in New York, London, Paris, Moscow, and San Francisco. I told myself

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that with a flick of my story-telling pen, a quantum leap of literary success was inevitable, along with the stardom I dreamed about in 7th grade. I waited, and waited, and waited. Finally, a letter arrived in the mail.

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To Whom It May Concern,

Thank you for submitting your work to our London Offices. After careful review, we found your work falls into our NOT EVER category of works. To assist you in your journey of writing, our reviewing editor suggested you take a beginner's creative writing course, an elementary level grammar course, and possibly a "get a day job" course that includes resume writing.

Your manuscript is hereby

REJECTED

Signed,

Marlington Wilbridge, Editor-in-Chief

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I started receiving rejection letters by the dozens. It was a tsunami of rejection letters. They never stopped coming. I was baffled. Not one publisher was interested in my work. Over the next few months, my second wave gloom settled over my life. I became oblivious to those around me with my dreams drenched in dismal dysfunctionality. I realized my only option was succumbing to the ebb and flow of life's tides. I decided to allow the natural flow of existence to guide my journey.



My wife noticed my sadness and took pity on me. She felt it was her duty to get me out of the doldrums. She told me to look back on my writing career, and realize I never hit the high-water mark of my dreams and probably never will. Writing was not my talent. She told me to look at my life and accept that that I have a great job, and make an obscene amount of money. She told me that even though I keep failing at the one thing that matters most to me, I have to accept reality. My wife asked me to stop writing altogether and use that energy to focus on the bird in hand. She told me I was 30-years old and should start making reality the main focus in my life, not on silly notions of becoming a world famous writing icon that showed no promise of return. I told her she was right. I would stop writing, and forget about becoming a famed spokesman for our generation. She smiled and gave a kiss on the cheek. I smiled back knowing something she didn't.

I lied!

I began writing my next opus on my flight to Paris. I have high expectations for its success. My working title is *Mind Over Matter / Brain Over Easy*. It's a post-apocalyptic love story that follows a high-end AI robot falling in love with the new girl in

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marketing. They make babies by the dozens, and earth is never the same. It will tug at your heartstrings. Regardless of what my wife said, I smell success this time!

THE END