

Not Today

He stared at the screen and the screen stared back. His fingers hovered over the keys, tingling with the anticipation of translating the veritable epic that was firing across his synapses. He depressed the space bar, indenting the first of what would be countless paragraphs. The cursor flashed against the white page, taunting him, daring him to begin.

Not today, it said, its inaudible voice a tireless, broken record. *Not today. Not today. Not today.*

He closed his eyes. He could see it all so clearly. The hero bursting onto the scene, sharp-tongued sidekick in tow, ready to vanquish evil. The damsel in distress, crying for help from the clutches of the nefarious villain. The moment when all wrongs would be righted, and as the hero disappeared across the horizon, he would finally, graciously, be allowed to type the two words that haunted the darkest recesses of his mind.

"The End."

He opened his eyes and saw his old foe again, gone one moment, there the next. The godforsaken black line threatened to be the death of him.

Not today. Not today. Not today.

Ignoring it, he placed his pinky on the Shift key and typed his first sentence.

"In the beginning..."

He cursed and deleted it. When did this become the Bible? The cursor was practically laughing at him, dancing in place on the page. Its continuous assault took a sickeningly sing-song tone.

Not today. Not today.

He took a steadying breath and tried again. The resulting introduction was awkward, but serviceable. No! No! No! It was garbage. Utter, putrid trash! Finger on the delete key, he watched in abject terror as the cursor moved left, devouring his first paragraph, taking a small piece of him as it went.

Not today.

His stomach growled, drawing him from his fog of self-loathing. It'd been far too long since he'd addressed the physical imperative for food. Admitting momentary defeat, he turned off the computer and rose from his desk, muscles shouting in protest at the sudden call to action.

He nibbled at some rather suspect leftover pizza and flipped on the television, trying to drown out the symphony of failure.

The next day, the cursor was waiting for him. He looked just to the side of it, and set his fingers about their task. Before he knew it, his thought was complete, and, much to his surprise, so was the first paragraph. Not only was it finished, it was good. He shot a victorious smirk at the cursor and pressed the return key, ready for his second step towards the finish line in the self-imposed marathon.

Except that wasn't right. True, no one was making him put his thoughts to the page, but he had to do it; he needed to do it. The scenes played in his mental theater on a constant loop, and if he didn't set them free, there was a very real chance that he would explode.

He marched onwards, the words flowing effortlessly from his fingertips. The first chapter was done, then the second. Nothing could stop him now; food and drink be damned, he was going to finish the thing that day!

And then it stopped.

He let out a brief, uneasy chuckle and stared at his hands, willing them into action. Everything was so plain in his head, but his brain seemed to have severed all ties with his fingers, leaving them sitting upon the keyboard like so many dead worms. It didn't make sense. Only moments ago, his imagination was a gushing fountain, splashing the page with excitement and wonder. Now, not even so much as a trickle could be found. He would've killed for a trickle.

As if on cue, the cursor returned to his field of view. He'd almost forgotten the thing, but there it was, leaping up and down, accentuating his shortcomings.

Not today. Not today.

His cheeks flared as he watched his eternal tormentor. Suddenly, his cell phone sprang to life, emitting an infuriating series of chirps and rattles on his desk. He cursed and flung it across the room. Who dared to interrupt him? Didn't they know what he was doing? How could they intrude upon his sacred duty?

He let out a breath and returned his attention to the screen, rereading his last couple of paragraphs, trying to get himself back into the flow. Despite his best efforts, no words came. With a sigh of resignation, he saved his progress and

moved to close the word processor. The cursor winked at him once more before disappearing.

Not today.

Days passed, turned into weeks, and crept towards the unavoidable evolution into months. Some days, he rose from his desk with a victorious grin. Others, he hobbled away, an empty shell of a man.

It was on one of these lesser days that he sat at his desk, crumpled in defeat. He was so close now. The finish line was in sight, but he might as well have been writing in a foreign tongue. With a sigh, he minimized the word processor and opened his music library, picking a song at random.

He closed his eyes as the tunes floated through the room. A minute into the song, he was ready to admit defeat and leave it for another day, once again ceding victory to the cursor. Then, something magical happened.

He'd heard the song hundreds of times before, but something in the chorus jumped out at him, hiding in plain sight, as if it

had been waiting for just that moment. With a simple progression of chords, the proverbial scales were lifted from his eyes. He saw not only the end, but the exact manner in which he would get there.

He reopened the word processor, heart racing. The cursor blinked at him as always, but this time was different. There was something angry in its voice, something frightened.

Not today. Not today!

Yes today, dammit! His fingers danced across the keyboard, racing to get away from the cloud of self-doubt that had taken residence in his subconscious. His words flew onto the page, no longer threatened by the cursor, but chasing it, forcing it away from his fledgling work.

Hours passed, but he barely noticed. The hero dealt the final blow, casting the villain into oblivion. The damsel sang his praises. The sidekick made a witty remark, and everyone laughed, glad to finally be free of oppression. The hero disappeared over the horizon, and there was only one thing left to do.

He paused, his fingers tingling with anticipation as he depressed the shift key for the last time. He took a breath and painted his final brushstroke.

"The End."

He leaned back in his chair, satisfied. He'd waged a war, and though he had suffered many blows, he'd emerged victorious. The job was far from over, but that didn't matter. He saved his work and stood, breathing easily for the first time in recent memory.

Revisions were made. A few spelling mishaps here, a couple of grammatical errors there, but nothing that would undo him. His work stood on its own, and he was proud. Once he was satisfied that it was as close to perfect as he could make it, he printed it, and with a silent prayer, sent it to the publisher.

The intervening weeks were equal parts ecstasy and terror. He knew that he'd given it his all, and that it was now out of his hands, but that did little to reassure him. Someone else was in charge of his work's fate, and that was almost more than he could bear.

Finally, he received the letter. His fingers were numb as he tore open the envelope, his heart falling, but not surprised to see the form-letter rejection within. It was filled with the usual drivel. "We appreciate your interest", "We're going in another direction", ad nauseum. He'd prepared himself for such a response. In all honesty, he wasn't as disheartened as he'd imagined he'd be.

At the bottom, next to the stamped signature, was a handwritten note.

"You have something good here. Someone will want to publish this. Unfortunately, it just won't work for us. At least, not in today's market."

The similarity of the last sentence with the cursor's unceasing chant wasn't lost on him.

Disappointed, but not defeated, he sat at his desk and opened the word processor. His was an eternal calling, and the next adventure was already forming in his mind. He began typing, and right on cue, the cursor appeared.

Not today.

Maybe not. Maybe not even tomorrow. But someday.

