

The Editor

You're a werewolf. You move to Los Angeles. You get a regular job, you meet people at parties, and you go grocery shopping. But you're not happy with your life. Something is missing. Eventually you deduce that if you want to find fulfilment, you have to find something you're extraordinarily good at and make this your job.

After a couple years of trying this or that, you decide to become a writer. This is going to be easy, you think to yourself. All I have to do is type words on a screen. But you quickly learn that struggling writers often participate in "readings," in which they take turns sharing excerpts from their writing, and then "network" afterwards, and talk about their writing. This presents a huge problem for you. You're somewhat insecure about your speaking abilities. It doesn't come naturally. When you're in social situations, you tense up. All your thoughts are trapped in your head. Your mouth, the dam holding the ideas in, can only squeeze out a couple drops at a time.

But you have oceans of water sloshing inside your brain.

But then, you learn about how many of the best writers are social recluses. They write in solitude, and no one knows too much about them, which gives their writing an aura of mystique. I can do that, you think. Not every writer has to speak to hundreds of people in order to succeed. In fact, all I have to do is have an ongoing conversation with myself and record it every day. You start to write regularly.

You stop trying to have an active social life.

You still go to your favorite bookstore. One day, as you're checking out with a mountain of books, a man wearing an expensive looking outfit stops you. He asks why you're reading so many forgotten classics. You tell him that you've started writing, and this is part of your reading list. You're trying to fill in the gaps of your knowledge, you explain. You strike up a conversation. This particular editor does not seem put off but your poor speaking skills: the way you talk too quickly

when you get excited and swallow your words, and that you're far too agreeable because of your anxiety.

The editor asks you to send him everything you've ever written. He tells you that he'd like to "develop" something.

What does that mean? You wonder when he first uses the term. I've already completed several pieces on my own.

But the editor is insistent that you start a new novel, explaining that with his help, you'll ultimately sell the manuscript and get it published. The editor knows all the right people. All you need to do is deliver something that *works*. You decide it's worth the time to begin an entirely new project with this editor. What's one more? You think. The first pieces are never that good anyway. At least, this is what you've been led to believe.

You feel that this editor is a rare pearl, someone who really understands your potential, and that you should do whatever it takes to stay in his good graces.

On your first day of working together, the editor sends you a text with his home address, telling you to bring a notebook and a pen, and nothing else. You comply, showing up to the editor's house on time. The neighborhood streets are permit only. You don't think it's a good idea to ask the editor for a permit on your first day working together.

As soon as you walk into the editor's house, you notice a kennel in the foyer with a pillow inside. The kennel is a little flimsy, sagging on one side. It's as if the editor didn't finish assembling it. The pillow inside is new and clean, with the tag still on. It isn't covered in hairs, or little bite marks or bits of food, the way dog pillows usually end up. How strange, you think. Even the most docile dogs get these kinds of pillows dirty.

The editor invites you to work upstairs without addressing the kennel. You assume it's for his dog. Perhaps the editor just replaced the pillow. You have learned to pay attention to little details like this. That's what it means to be a writer.

You talk for a while about what you want to write about. You conclude that the novel should be a story based closely on your real life. Or at least, the version of your life that you're willing to tell the editor. You obviously don't want the editor to know that you're a werewolf.

On the second day of working together, the editor excuses himself to go to the bathroom, where he stays for an inordinate amount of time. Unable to control yourself, you snoop through his laptop. You struggle through half a page of the editor's incoherent notes. Then you notice a corner of an image, something dragged all the way to the edge of the screen. You click on it. It's a porn video with two werewolves. It's gorier than anything you've ever seen. Part of you is, of course, repulsed. But another side of you, the part of you that looks like the creatures in the video, the part of you that can't speak, that has no place in this room, is aroused.

When the editor finally returns from the bathroom, you can tell by his demeanor that he wanted you to find the video.

As you work together, you wonder about the kennel in the foyer. The video you just saw suggested the editor's desire for the kennel to contain both your bodies at different points. You want this too. But you also don't want this, because if you bite him in this state, he'll turn into the thing that you are. You know that the success of this collaboration is contingent on your ability to stay focused. You don't want to get carried away with other urges. This could be counterproductive.

At the end of the following day, the editor, as usual, ends your "workshop" (as he had begun to call your working sessions), by shooing you out of his office. As you let yourself out of the house, you pause in the foyer. Quietly, making sure not to disturb the editor, you take the pillow out of the kennel and lean it against the wall. Then, you fold the kennel down into a flat metal grid and put it

on the floor next to the pillow. When you return the next day, the kennel is nowhere to be found, and the editor doesn't mention anything. You're relieved. Whatever unspoken desire exists between you, it seems that you both mutually chose the writing over recreating his twisted porn searches.

You also begin to realize that the editor has probably selected you as a collaborator because he sensed the cruelty you're capable of, because this is what he desires, and what looks for in people. He hasn't picked you because of the quality of your efforts. The writing couldn't have been that bad, you reason with yourself, or the editor wouldn't be working so hard. But at the same time, you think, I have to put my best foot forward and really take this seriously, or the editor will lose interest in me.

As if sensing your good will, the editor becomes very encouraging about your progress. He repeatedly explains to you that you simply need to present your reality exactly as you live it. If you transcribe your daily activities, eventually something good and pure will emerge from this exercise.

You develop a ritual. Every morning, you present the editor with the pages you wrote the previous evening, while you're locked away in your house, safely out of the range of, (what else), the moon. Then, you discuss what you've written.

They sound something like this:

I cook my Trader Joe's ravioli *al dente*, but as I eat and watch *Love is Blind*, I realize that you're only supposed cook regular pasta this way. The ravioli fillings need to be fully cooked. When they're only lightly boiled the meat fillings are still hard, like little pellets. I put the ravioli back into boiling water, but now they're soggy. I keep watching *Love is Blind*.

And so on.

Well, you don't really so much discuss the pages. You watch the editor look through the writing, and the editor slightly shifts his facial expressions in order to communicate how he feels about the given selection. During the first couple of weeks, the editor's reactions feel mostly

positive. He often laughs or sighs with pleasure as he reads. Sometimes, he rolls his eyes or squints with a little frown. As the days drag on, the negative reactions become more frequent, and the expressions of joy fewer.

You decide to work even harder. You suggest that you and the editor meet for longer sessions, and the editor reluctantly agrees. Over time, the editor's responses become worse. Some days, he barely even glances at what you wrote. One day, he stops reading entirely and takes a nap while you wait, listening to the sound of the cars driving by through an open window.

The details of your life have become too pedestrian. But you already know this, don't you? You don't want the editor to know your secret, do you? And you're worried that the only interesting thing about you is the thing you're refusing to write about – isn't that right?

What did the editor expect from me, you think, frustrated. He told me to record the **details** of my life. But my life now revolves around this writing, none of the **details** of which are funny or interesting or beautiful, and the spaces not spent writing are getting smaller and smaller. This task has become Sisyphean. Finally, during a workshop with even more pointed yawns from the editor than usual, you grab the papers out of his hands, tear them up dramatically, and yell at him. "What do you fucking want from me?" You scream, angry tears welling up in your eyes. "Why do you hate everything I write? It's your fault! You're the one who told me to write about my life! That's what I'm fucking doing! I'm writing about my fucking life!"

The editor stands up, smiles, and takes your hand in his.

"You are a very special type of person", he says, and of course you know what the editor is alluding to. "In fact", he continues, "you're the *only* kind of person that the publishing houses are interested in. They won't even consider anything else at the moment."

“But”, the editor continues, his tone even and cool, “the challenges associated with people like you are very, very real. What you have to realize is that it is precisely these kinds of difficulties that produce truly excellent writing.”

When the editor looks into your eyes as he says this, you can’t help but believe him.

“The problem is,” the editor says, as he continues to hold your hand, “is that you’re trying a little too hard. I told you to record the things that happen to you every day. But you’re not really following that assignment. I’m noticing too many stylistic flairs in your writing.”

After this conversation, your pages become the coldest imaginable logs of your daily movements.

Wake up.

Drink water from new filter.

Don’t notice the difference between new and old filter.

Brush my teeth.

On the drive to my editor’s house, notice a little toothpaste in the corner of my mouth. Wipe it off.

Etcetera.

You already know how this is going to go.

I’ve reduced my process to the essence of my editor’s wishes, you think. But he grows more disinterested with the outcome the more slavishly I adhere to his words.

At least you don’t feel any pressure to improve your writing. What’s there to improve? It’s become completely mechanical.

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You and your editor perform this dance for a while longer. Eventually, you have an idea: what if you take the kennel out again? You assume the editor has been storing it in his basement. During one of your editor's (now daily) naps, you find it. It's easy to assemble. You're pretty handy. You put the doggy pillow inside, exactly the way it was when you first found it.

The following day the editor seems pleased. He gives your pages a single smile towards the end, the first you've seen in a long time.

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You notice a severed finger perched on the pillow inside the kennel the day after that. You're shocked, and immediately try to feel disgusted. A small detached body part not only doesn't disturb you, it sort of excites you.

As soon as you walk into the editor's office, you notice that one of his fingers is missing. He scratches his bloody stump contently, and tells you that you had a breakthrough the other night. You realize that you're the one who tore the editor's finger off. When you transform into a werewolf, you often don't recall what you do in that state. But that day, as he reads your pages, your editor's expressions are by far the most frustrated they've been. The breakthrough didn't improve the writing itself. Your goal of becoming a successful writer suddenly seem further away than ever.

"You know," the editor says to you at the end of the session, "you're really on your way to doing this. You just need to dismember me completely." A new fear blooms in your chest. If I do this, you think, I will incapacitate him. He won't be able to help me.

You see the editor as your only chance to get published. After he told you that all the other werewolves are *also* trying to get book deals, this now looks like a desperate situation. Perhaps, you

muse, I should get in touch with all the other werewolf writers. We could even start a writer's group. Comparing my work to theirs could help me differentiate myself.

The editor's body becomes more mangled each time you see him. You wonder why the editor, and not you, always emerges with missing body parts. After the first bite, the editor would have turned into a werewolf. He must be a masochistic sort of werewolf, you think. That, or he's a weak and sickly specimen compared to me and keeps losing the fights. You wish you could remember the details of these encounters. They would make for some interesting writing.

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The limbs are gone now. Your editor is now just a torso with a face. But this torso contains a working set of eyes and a mouth, which he uses to groan with boredom as he reads your pages.

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You finally muster up the courage to ask the editor for access to his contacts. You tell him that you'd like to talk to any writers, really, but especially ones who are in the "same boat" as you. His eyes narrow when you say this. You know he understands: you want to talk to other werewolf writers. You don't back down. You tell him that you want feedback from your "peers." The editor rolls his eyes, which are now practically hanging out of their sockets. But he complies.

He gestures to his phone. Sort of a little head nod. You put it in front of him.

All his fingers are gone, it's not as if he could type. "Hey Siri," the editor says to his phone in a weak voice. "Start an email thread, CC promising but as of yet unpublished authors, and write the following message:

Hi all,

I wanted to put my friend in touch with you. He's an emerging writer. I thought it would be a good idea for him to share work with you to get some feedback.

Thanks!"

What an effective email, you think with admiration. It really doesn't seem too thirsty. Just sort of casual and friendly.

After trading pages with several writers on the email, however, you quickly realize everyone is writing the same kind of prose, full of diaristic, mundane details.

Eventually you have no choice but to tear the editor's eyes out. They are the last body part to go. Since he's now effectively rendered unable to perform his editing duties, you hope that your werewolf self will finish the editor off soon. It's cruel to keep him alive if he can't edit. He's an editor. Sure enough, that night, your werewolf self tears his heart out, because the next day, you find the editor's torso on his desk with a hole in his chest. You stare at him for a while, then you go downstairs. You hope that the editor at least enjoyed himself. You replace the bloody pillow in the kennel with a new one.

You try to socialize again. You're still bad at talking, but now, that doesn't stop you. If you can't be a writer, at least you can try and overwhelm everyone with your ocean of babble.