

Dear Diary,

I have made a wonderful discovery today. To be successful at anything requires sacrifices: time, energy, patience, *sanity*. Growing up in a world of fantasy, I always knew that I was going to be a writer, and you did too. You have been my most loyal audience, listening to all that I have had to say since day one. You know that I have always been willing to do whatever it takes, albeit I never could have predicted that it would turn out this way. I will not attempt to justify my actions, but just know that they were committed in the name of research. We can never expect to improve without straying from the moral compass and venturing into the unknown; controversy breeds progress. I'm sure the people of Alexandria were not exactly singing Herophilus's praise when he dissected the first human cadaver. Risks must be taken. You must be willing to be hated in order to be loved.

Something I often heard in my creative writing classes when having difficulty writing creatively is "write what you know." But how is one expected to possess the ability to describe, say, death without having died? Imagination, of course, but that is what sets me aside from the rest. I, unlike my cowardly peers, have taken a monumental risk. I, unlike my slothful competition, am willing to go to unimaginable lengths for the sake of my craft. You must be worried, I can tell. What *have* I done? I have always told you everything, sparing no details, but now I am hesitant to share this with you. What will you think of me? I don't even know what I think of myself at the moment. You have always been my most loyal companion, holding my darkest secrets like a titanium vault, and for that, I will confide in you once again—perhaps for the final time.

As you are well aware from my many previous entries, life has not been playing out quite the way I always imagined it would. It's funny how when you're young you feel so invincible and in control of your future, but when the future becomes the present, everything goes to shit. You are informed by your superiors and your colleagues that your work is average—mediocre at best. You are no modern-day Shakespeare, and the piles of rejection letters accumulating in your desk drawer only solidify this. You had never failed at anything before, but then here you are, failing at the one thing you're good at. *Average*. You continue school in hopes of fixing whatever seems to be broken, but find that nothing is changing, only the increasing amount of debt you are in. You are drowning in it. So you drop out of the school of your dreams; the one you believed would hold all the answers, the one where you believed you might finally find love, the one where you believed you might finally find *yourself*. As a child, you filled your library with original stories scribbled, illustrated, and stapled together all on your own, and you were praised for your "wild imagination." As a child, becoming a writer seemed entirely possible—unavoidable, even. As

an adult, you found yourself bullshitting your way through your college courses, sometimes even paying other students to write your essays when you couldn't find the words yourself (some writer you are). As an adult, you found yourself desperately trying to hold onto the future that your "wild imagination" once envisioned for you, but realized that it was not as entirely possible as it once seemed. As an adult, you realized that you are not invincible, nor are you in control of your future. You could not have predicted things would turn out this way, just like you could not have predicted that drunk driver would run your brother off the road only weeks after getting his license. And now, here you are. *You* are the one driving, inebriated by your own desperation and shame. Who are you going to run off the road?

Today I have made a wonderful discovery. I have been trying much too hard for much too long to write about things I have no knowledge concerning. Write what you know. This is a difficult task when you have hardly lived your life. What do I know that's worth writing about—worth *reading* about? Until now, I had nothing to offer the world. But with my new knowledge, I will dig a shallow grave for my failure and sweep those rejection letters beneath the topsoil. They will nourish my blossoming new career as the little critters eat away at them, just as they ate away at me for so many years. And these detritivores will consume other organic matter: plants, animal carcasses, human remains. They burrow and crawl and chew in unmarked graves. I can hear them, can you hear them too?

As you know, I have always had a fascination with the macabre, a connection to the darkness. I love to be disturbed. Plagues, wars, murders, genocide—I lust for the knowledge that others turn their ignorant cheek at. Perhaps I have been desensitized somehow, but the more unsettling, the more captivated I am. Growing up, I'm sure you can recall, I often wondered if there was something wrong with me because of this. Do I suffer from some sort of antisocial personality disorder? How could I? I feel empathy. Sometimes I believe I can feel the pain of others more intensely than they can—is that possible? Either way, I am no sociopath. I am an artist, a genius, an explorer. I am a Spanish conquistador discovering the New World, spreading my wealth of knowledge to those unbeknownst.

Shall I share with you what I have done now? I can see you growing impatient, writhing with anticipation. I am beating around the bush, I admit, but I want to relish this confession.

Have you noticed I changed my pen?

Today, my dearest Diary, I have done something awful. What's even worse is that I do not feel remorseful like I should. Quite the opposite actually. I have been liberated. I feel rejuvenated. I am Ponce de Leon sipping from

the fountain of youth. I must remind you, I did not do this to satisfy some primal urge sequestered within myself all these years. No. It was strictly for research purposes. However, I must concede that I quite enjoyed myself. I have done something awful, but it has brought about a marvelous revelation.

Write what you know.

I visited Gloria Nelson's apartment around midnight. She lived across the hall. Apartment 319. She was smoking a cigarette, hacking up a lung. Again. I couldn't sleep. Again. She was surprised to see me, but allowed me access to her sanctuary nevertheless. She believed we were friends. I was a wolf in sheep's clothing, infiltrating the garden of Eden, seeking the tree of knowledge. I could taste it, both the good and the evil. We sat on the hand-me-down couch with miss-match cushions, talking about nothing. The studio apartment was more reminiscent of a seedy motel than a biblical paradise. The walls were yellowed from years of nicotine poisoning, the shag carpet looked as though it hadn't been vacuumed in ages (it hadn't), and there was a mysterious stain beside the coffee table. Coffee? Vomit? Bong water? Who knows. She had the personal hygiene of a sewer rat, and I'm sure her apartment would've smelled just like one too if it wasn't for the potency of her menthol cigarettes and marijuana. They singed your nose hairs and masked any other possibly present odors. I remember feeling like something was crawling on me sitting on that couch that was most likely found abandoned in an alley, so I offered to make her a drink. I asked her what she wanted. "Surprise me," she said.

I fixed her a dirty martini with two olives and a deadly little twist. When I handed her the drink, she asked me where mine was. "Oh I don't drink," I told her, "but I know you do." She just laughed, so unsuspecting. I took my seat back on the couch, folding my hands in my lap to hide my sweaty palms and trembling fingers. I watched intently as she took her first sip, holding my breath, waiting. Waiting. She continued babbling on about nothing of my interest, like how her sister was getting divorced again because her deadbeat husband number three knocked up the nanny and yada yada yada. When there was finally silence, I knew it had worked.

"Gloria?" I asked and she just smiled at me, an intoxicated, unconscious, unknowing smile. I smiled at her in return and calmly made my way to the kitchen, grabbing a knife from the drawer and returning to my catatonic "friend" on the couch. I took the drink from her hand and set it on the cluttered table. God forbid I be the cause of yet another stain on that horrific shag carpet. You could hide a body in there. I grabbed her hands and pulled her to her feet, guiding her—well, more like dragging her—slowly and clumsily to the bathroom and having her lay in the

tub. She didn't have a single clue about what was going on or what awaited her, and she didn't care. I removed her clothes and set them aside to be placed in her hamper (write what you know).

I paused for a moment, gripping the kitchen knife in my right hand as I tried to calm myself. I was nervous, dreadfully nervous. My heart was pounding in my ears, or maybe it was *her's*. She wasn't dead, not yet, but she didn't move, she didn't speak, she didn't even have her eyes open. She just laid there, lifeless, her breathing shallow and paced. The power I felt in that moment was unlike anything I'd ever felt before. In that moment, I *was* invincible. She was my key, my lamb. She was the sacrifice I had to make—I had no choice (write what you know).

When I plunged the eight inch kitchen blade into the abdomen of Gloria Nelson, I was reborn, as she will be too. I remember the way her eyes shot open, the fear they held as her mouth fell agape, but there was no noise. She simply looked betrayed. In a panic, however, as I had never stabbed anyone before and didn't know whether or not she would scream, I retracted the knife and slammed it into her chest. Repeatedly. I couldn't control it! I was Moses parting the red sea. Are you impressed? I knew you would be, how could I ever have doubted you? You should have seen me, Diary, I was like a goddess. I was a surgeon cracking her sternum, no doubt puncturing one of those cancerous lungs. Her eyes remained open the entire time, and I stared directly into them. I saw the very moment they extinguished. I should have been horrified, but I wasn't. Instead, I was overcome with the curiosity of a child learning what death was for the first time. I thought it would have ended there when her life ended. Gloria Nelson was dead, but I continued to conduct my experiment (write what you know).

I cut open her chest like a frog in a high school biology class. I was Herophilos, she was my cadaver, apartment 319 was our Alexandria. I dislodged one of her rib bones and wrapped it in a hand towel for later. I removed her stagnant heart and held it in my hand. I was reminded of the ancient Egyptians and how they would weigh the heart of the dead during the mummification process. The organ was placed on one side of the scale, a feather on the other. If the two did not balance out, the deceased and their heavy heart would be condemned to an eternity of nonexistence. Gloria's heart most certainly weighed more than a feather. I continued to remove her organs, one by one, placing them into a bucket I had found under the sink beside a mop that was clearly never used, and smothering them with an obscene amount of salt.

I spent the remainder of the night dismembering the corpse and scrubbing every surface of that bathroom with bleach. I opened all the windows to air out the fumes, emptying her ashtrays around the apartment in an attempt to mask the odor of chemicals and metallic blood. I scrubbed my hands raw and added the kitchen knife and martini

glass and shaker to the trash bag full of Gloria Nelson. By three in the morning, I made my way to the basement of the apartment complex, undisturbed and undetected. I tossed her remains into the furnace, convulsing with triumph. Finally, I whittled the rib bone I saved into a narrow point, much like a quill. And with crimson ink, I bleed my confession into your pages. I hope you don't mind.

With her heavy heart and blackened lungs, my neighbor in apartment 319 has faded into oblivion. I have made sure of that. And now, my dearest Diary, I will write what I know—I know so much now! I am no sociopath, there is nothing wrong with me, I am simply allowing myself to be. Humanity by nature is a depraved species, though we love to pretend that is not so. We find excitement in perturbation. That is why we watch horror movies, read thriller novels, jump out of planes. We crave the things that bring us closer to death—it fascinates us, the uncertainty of what awaits us afterwards. Is there an afterlife, or are we all condemned to the same fate as Gloria? Is it predestined or do our actions in life determine where we end up?

Today I have made a wonderful discovery. I enjoy taking life, almost as much as I enjoy creating it on paper. I have decided that I must gain more experience if I am ever going to describe with full accuracy what it is like to kill. I am doing this for those who are aware of their depravity but are still too weak to act upon it. They will soon fathom the intensity, the liberation, the permanence, the *power* of taking a life.

Write what you know.

Read what you don't.