

## On Writing While in a Cocoon

Reader, I have lured you in under almost false pretences – this is really ‘On Writing While Depressed’, part II. Shall we call it a reboot? Let’s. Makes it edgier, hipper. Unless that’s already dated, in which case, honey, pour me a bin bag because I’m too old for all this light-speed changing argot stuff.

So here’s what my life is like while I’m trying to turn myself into a writer. On Monday, I had a truly productive day. Instead of being jealous of friends posting on facebook about how much they’d done in this, the appallingly-dubbed NaNoWriMo\* of November 2017, because I haven’t been able to write for ages, I sat down at my laptop and three chapters of novel no.2 just flowed. Lovely. It felt like a Page had been Turned, almost literally. Tremendous.

But no! For the next day, tender Reader, guess who turned up even less welcome than Alexis soon-to-be Carrington-Colby-Dexter at Blake’s trial? (Youngsters reading this: there was this show called *Dynasty*. It was epic. They’ve rebooted it - ha! - on Netflix. You can watch it next time you do that ‘n’chill.) Yes. That old grande dame, Depression. She’d never really left, of course, just slipped off camera for a quick jab of Botox and a new push-up bra. So the next two days were passed in a horrible miasma of mental anguish, physical exhaustion, and zip zilch big fat cosmic *rien* in terms of words getting tappy-tap-tapped into a manuscript.

In the midst of this I found out I got a Distinction for my Creative Writing MA. Meant nothing. Couldn’t feel pleased. Couldn’t feel anything. Nice timing, Portsmouth exam board! But now I’m biting through the cocoon walls and emerging again – hopefully – it’s good to know I can at least write good stuff. It may not get published. But I can do it. And that’s reassuring.

This evening, I begin to see possibilities again. I begin to find things interesting again. I have a sense that there’s a headspace I want to get back to, a consciousness that I can find and reside in. It’s a tiny rebirth. I find myself thinking ‘oh yes, that’s the thing I found meaningful’, and ‘yes, that’s why I made decision X.’ Suddenly there are recognisable pieces of mental furniture, not just nebulous things lurking just outside my ability to apprehend them in my brainbox.

This is part of what depression is like. It takes you out of your own life into a place you don’t really recognise, except you do, but not quite – it’s like a shadow dimension or a parallel world in which things are the same except all your senses have been removed or downgraded and all you can see is the accomplishing of small tasks that enable you to feel you’ve at least done something with the day, but which rapidly become excluders of everything else, because to try and focus on anything else is too much.

It takes every ounce of effort just to decide what to do, and hang onto that, as opposed to losing yourself in the endless variations and complications of the plan that your fevered mind now starts constructing, hobbling you with more and more and more possibilities until you’re bludgeoned into abstention from everything. Did you know, for instance, that there are 27,000 reasons why beans on toast is a good idea, and 85,000 reasons why it’s not? Oh, it’s true. You end up feeling all Buddhist – the 80,000 thises and the 103,000 thats. But not in a good way. In an Aung San Suu Kyi way.

Time goes funny: it d r a g s and yet it's intense too, your whole consciousness is suffused with the need to force yourself to do the next thing, even if that's just make sure you get washed. Tender reader, I did not get washed on Tuesday. The snare snapped as I was at the gym, and I left for home, dizzy and fighting back tears, and cocooned myself in the bedroom until enough time had passed for me to remember to feed the dog and take him out. Which took all my energy.

So, writing in a cocoon is not something I can actually do. But I find today that I *can* write when I'm emerging from one. And that is something that makes me very pleased.

\*NaNoWriMo = national novel-writing month. Ugh. I have to channel The Crystals to make it through. *I wrote it from an insight and in just a month, NaNoWriMoMo, NaNoWriMo....*