Escaping Reality: A Vacation into Fiction

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To my closest friend and first reader, Sarah. You gave me the push I needed to write; thank you.

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Rising Action

Books became my home, and stories became my life. The stories I read helped me through the challenges I faced every day. I’d immerse myself into book pages or the screen as a heroic battle played out. I was in love with it; living a different reality had an appeal to it that I never thought it would have. When my mother was passed out in a drunken haze, and I had to care for my siblings, I’d pass into my own haze, going on adventures that took me far away from reality and into worlds that were far more fantastical and interesting than my own.

         I wanted desperately to escape to them, shutting myself off from the world in hopes that I could play pretend long enough that I would be there and never leave. During the bad years, the ones when I struggled with my mental health, that was one of my best methods of escape.  I was someone else and somewhere else entirely, living a life of wonder and awe. It was what I needed to find hope and light in the world, reminding me of the pleasantries and beauties that existed outside of the realm in which I existed in.

         It became easier and easier to fall into those stories, but eventually, it wasn’t enough. I loved every adventure I went on, but there was a part still missing within me that desperately craved for more. I scoured through my heart and soul, trying to figure out what it was that I yearned for when I eventually found it. I wanted to create stories of my own, to create the same way the authors I read did, and become a god in my own right. Eventually, my own stories took hold of me, shoving away the worlds other people created in favor of the ones that lived within me.

I dreamt for hours of different lands I could go to, blurs of people slowly sharpening into my characters. I started seeing them clearly, my creations coming to life right before my eyes. Music would play over and over again through my earbuds, blocking out the world around me as I created mountains and rivers, castles and sheds, and most importantly, people. Vividly I’d dream of them, imagining how they’d speak and how they’d act. It was a magical experience and one no one could take from me. I was the creator of something grand and beautiful, and that was something life could not take away. It influenced it, making monsters appear in the shadows and unlikely heroes come swooping in, but it was mine, all mine.

I’d start to write all the time. Then I’d use pen and paper, writing out stories with so many grammatical errors that they’d become hard to read later in life. They were always of romance back then. I’d imagine a knight with long flowing hair and a feminine body who’d come and swoop me away from the life I lived. It was my way to be me back then. During a time when I didn’t feel like the real world would accept the love I had to give to others, it was accepted in my own world. A woman loving another woman wasn’t unusual or strange but ordinary and accepted. It made loving myself easier, slowly picking away at the hatred I had initially felt when I realized my attractions.

Some of my other stories weren’t so happy and romantic, however. Their darker undertones reflected the raging storm of emotions that persisted within me. Stories of substance abuse, isolation, and loneliness all crept over the edges of my mind, infecting my tales with their woe. I could hear my classmates in my mind telling me how pathetic I was and how lonely I’d be, and I couldn’t shake it. In those days, I wrote a lot, transferring my consciousness into that of my characters and dealing with those feelings the best way I knew how. It became a lot easier after that to feel peace within myself. The evil that existed outside my words became a lot less scary in a fictional one. Through it, I learned most of my life skills, learning how to cope with and handle different kinds of cruelty and rejection. It was through those stories, the dark ones, that I allowed myself to feel and to be. I was healing through my own words, letting the cruelty thrown at me roll off my back.

One day though, something extraordinary happened. I started to dream of magic and fantasy worlds. Before that, it was all realistic, romances and conflicts all reflecting a world I already knew about. It was a turning point for my writing, changing into something far more fantastical and exciting than it had ever been before. The land around me changed, turning into one of magic. It was all I ever thought about then, my mind constantly spinning with new ideas. There eventually reached a point where I’d been writing and thinking about it so much that I couldn’t remember when these stories didn’t exist. It was unfathomable that I could live a life where I didn’t have them by my side, constantly in the back of my mind and ready to play when the time called for it.

My obsession with writing only grew from there, and eventually, I had page after page of writing in my little notebook about these foreign places that didn’t exist. Sometimes they would be on earth, the landscape vastly different as a new era of living had taken over. The sun and the moon were gods again in that world, lending their power down to the people in return for praise and admiration. Other times I’d get lost in the stars, writing about a planet where a new species of humans roamed, far more violent and rueful than the people here. Or there would be a different universe altogether, existing in a plane far different from ours with abilities to create with the swipe of a hand and zooming through the cosmos.

My head was always in the clouds, something my closest friend Sarah often noticed. Eventually, I knew I had to share my writing with her. I was always nervous about doing it; however, the fear of rejection was always in my mind, whispering that I wasn’t good enough. I tried to shut it down as much as possible, sometimes finding the courage to tell her about it, but I never did. It wasn’t until one day, when I felt particularly good about myself, a day of good writing, that I told her about it.

“You know, Sarah,” I said, “I’ve been doing something lately that I really like doing, and I was wondering if you wanted to see it?”

She looked over at me and blinked, “Sure, what is it?”

The nerves started to kick in at full force, my self-doubts and anxiety making my stomach churn, “I like to write.”

“Really?” she asked excitedly, “Can I see it? That’s really cool!”

There had never been a more incredible feeling than sharing my work with her that day. She looked through it excited and eager, never too shy to compliment me. I was always too embarrassed to respond, mumbling under my breath about how it wasn’t that good, but she didn’t seem to notice. We talked about my stories for hours after that; I told her every detail of what I had been doing and what my stories were all about while she listened intently, enthusiastically nodding along to my words. I’d never felt so seen in my entire life; one of the biggest parts of me shared. I felt so good after that, and I shared it all with Sarah. It broke down a wall I had developed in my mind, keeping people out and away from me for fear that they would see through it and insult me, but that was never the case. For the first time, I doubted if all the parts of myself I hated were really all that bad, and I wrote some of the happiest tales I’d ever written after that.

My writing had already started to take hold of my life, making the bad memories seem far less poignant than they were and the good ones far more important. I latched onto them, creating stories and channeling my emotions, fears, and doubts all into them. Writing became a medicine for me, healing my inner wounds and casting out the toxic thoughts that perverted my mind. I had finally started to feel like myself and found the core of who I was; a writer. All the other careers that I thought I’d wanted all seemingly disappeared; musician, teacher, and astronomer all seemed silly and insignificant in comparison to being a writer after that.

Eventually, I got a laptop, and I’d clumsily type my stories onto it all the way through the middle of high school. I’d write novel-length stories in months, lost deep within my words and worlds. Yet I never felt even a little lost; I knew exactly what I was doing and why I was doing it.  I was at my happiest during those times; writing had overtaken my life and made me happy. I still lived an isolated life, hiding away from other people and keeping my stories close to my chest, but my escape was still mine and gave me hope that I could do something with it. It made me feel like I was destined for something greater and that my life had a more important purpose than I thought it was.

I never thought I’d stop writing; I thought it would last with me forever. Plots became my life, and the theme became my morals. When I’d come home from school, and my mom was drunk, I’d shrug and write. When my younger siblings needed me all day and left me feeling tired and worn down, I found energy in my stories. When someone had been particularly mean to me in school, I’d remember my characters and how they fought and continued on, no matter what happened to them. It took everything in me not to keep at it for hours. It seemed like I’d never lose my passion for it, the fire burning far too large and bright for anything to ever change, but life has a funny way of working out. Eventually, a fire burns itself out, going for far too long and far too bright to possibly continue. It happens to every fire, no matter how much people may try to stop it, and eventually, my fire dimmed, growing smaller and smaller, dimmer and dimmer. Then one day, it was out, and I was left in darkness.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Camille Carter is a student at the University of Illinois at Chicago majoring in English. She is a fiction writer that works in a broad number of genres. She was raised in a large family with seven younger siblings. Her mother’s substance abuse issues greatly affected how she grew up and her outlook on life. She was forced to care for her siblings, taking on hordes of responsibility, and learned to use the power of writing to help her through the challenges she faced in her day-to-day life.