

The Nervous Writer

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The nervous writer looked out at the audience with an emotion close to utter fear, and not for the first time he began to doubt the wisdom of beginning his story with such an obvious plot device as a flashback scene.

Several days ago, the flashback scene had seemed a reasonable idea. Perhaps a tad unoriginal, and a somewhat clichéd start – he of course avoided clichés like the plague – but he felt the subject of the story (Plastic Recycling) and its moral (Efficiency) could not be treated with any degree of frivolity.

Of course, there was the minor problem of how far back the flash actually went. His intention had been to cover the last 2,000 years, and although this was most definitely ‘back’, it did seem somewhat too far for the realistic use of the word ‘flash’. There was also the problem of compressing the fall of the Roman Empire into 1,500 words. A task he found so aggressively challenging, that he gave it up.

Instead, he hit on the brilliant idea of writing a different story. One that would delve into the mysterious life of a man falling in love with his own face, reflected in a grande cappuccino. Sadly, this idea died when he discovered a cappuccino could only show a reflection, if he first sucked off all the foam with a straw. A diligent piece of research that saw him banned from two coffee shops and his own writers group.

Friends suggested a rethink and offered beer as an alternative reflecting surface, adding “we mean of course English beer, you know, the warm stuff with no foam”. But the writer remained stoic and that very night he ceremonially burnt the story. Although as the story had not actually been written, all he burnt was two sheets of blank paper and his fingers.

The writer was now but a short time away from the grand reading day and his sense of panic flowered like a living thing, and his insecurities could be observed by passing satellites. Ideas, as always, were the problem and after an aborted attempt to write an original story on plagiarism – he discovered it had already been done – he retired to his bed to read Byron from under a heavily worried brow.

Then, with a mere 24 hours of flashback remaining, the writer watched an old James Bond film and was inspired to write... A spy story. He called it: The Man with the Golden Thunderball, and in 1,500 words he had his hero travelled through 18 countries and slept with 11 women.

Limited as he was on word count some details of the story remained sparse, but as he had never actually been to any of these countries – or indeed slept with a woman – this was probably for the best. One sleepless night later, his story was completed and spell checked for accuracy - sadly in the wrong language - then

grammar checked to the point where it could only be understood by advanced English Literature students with a preference for unusual syntax.

No matter, he thought. It was done and his flashback had, at last, ended and here he now stood, before the audience, paper in hand. But as his gaze travelled the words before him, he realised with sinking despair that the paper he held did not contain his story, his words of brilliance, his one attempt at literature and glory. Instead of the spy story, he found himself staring at; his Mothers shopping list.

Without the time to think or the courage to walk away, he cleared his throat, and began to read:

6 bananas, 4 Apples,
A kilo of mangos
Some cheese, not strong but mild
Mushrooms, a kilo, make sure they're wild

A pound of prime beef mince
Tinned dog food for Prince
A packet of fresh frozen peas
Some anointment for the back of John's knees

A large loaf, brown
Potatoes, a pound
New green beans in a tin
And don't forget, Tampex for Lyn

The writer stood back
stunned to hear
from the crowd came not boos
but a thunderous cheer

Suddenly the need to rhyme
had become so sublime
and a man waved from afar
just so a woman could throw her bra

Between the cheers and the glee,
a professor appeared impressed as all could see
"You'll win tonight of that decision I'll not falter
and by the way, have you met my daughter."

And then the writer of nerves
Who now spoke only in verse
Remained the hero of the hour
A true spectacle of accidental power

Sad to say this stories end is tragic
The writers' world returning to manic
By the discovery of his mother, held by the cops
For reading pornographic spy stories, in the middle of the shops.

The End