

Blank

by Roberto C. Alamino

I look at the empty paper. I am trying to come up with some idea. Anything. Just before I sat down and opened my laptop I had many, but none of them comes to my mind now. What happened with those aliens from strange worlds that inhabited my mind some moments ago? I try to think about them, but they do not look that interesting now. Nothing in them is different enough to be worth describing. I think about their worlds. I can imagine their bright colours and complex shapes. Why not describe it? I could describe their lives, their architecture, their laws. But who is interested in plain, cold, lifeless descriptions? Maybe one or two paragraphs of them. More than that, only encyclopaedias, or RPG books. I have lots of descriptions on my mind. Empty places, though. No story.

When I write 'no story', I mean 'no story worth telling'. Stories must be interesting. They must be about something. Something another person wants to read. That is one of the principles of writing. What am I saying? I have learned that on a Star Trek DVD. Why should it be that way after all? I try hard to think about interesting stories, but I can only think about the usual ones. The hero's journey. The impossible love. And many others that were told over and over again, with different clothes. By Homer, by Shakespeare, by George Lucas. But I don't really want to rewrite those stories. I could do it in my own way, but that would not be new. I want something original. A story that was never told before. Does it exist at all? Maybe all the stories have been already told and I am just wasting my time. Maybe I am fooling myself in thinking that I could find a new one.

I stop typing. My mind is blank. Not really blank, but full of things which are not worth writing. Full of things nobody will be interested in. Am I repeating myself? Maybe. But only because I am sure nobody want to hear my stories. How do I know it? I don't. It is only a guess. And I keep guessing on. I should stop, because guessing just gets me distracted. Distraction is a curious thing. It starts with a simple thought. Then you think about a slight variation of that thought. The chain of thoughts keep growing and follow strange and tortuous paths. Like a long river that passes through different lands. Ice mountains, forests, deserts and then the sea. What was I thinking about anyway? Yes. I remember now. About writing. Would I be able to make a living of writing? I don't think so. How can someone make a living of writing without any interesting thing to write? What are the interesting themes anyway? People like love, heroes... Here I am again. The same stories.

Then I think about the great writers. Instants ago I was thinking about Homer and Shakespeare. They had different styles, of course. Some of the great writers started their own new style. Maybe I should try that. Start a new style of writing. But I have no idea about what to do differently. I have the feeling that everything was already tried. Already invented. I'm drifting again. Why can't I concentrate? No story. No character. Nothing in my laptop but a blank screen with a blinking cursor on it. It's like a ticking clock. I look at the right bottom corner of the screen and I indeed find a clock. Twenty minutes have passed and my screen is still blank. Blinking. Wait, I could try alliterations. No. Too old fashioned. I'm not writing musics.

Someone once told me that a writer should write about his experiences. Another person told me that you could only write if you had enough experiences. You don't need to describe them literally. You can dress them in a different way. I try to think about it. What are my experiences? No, I don't have anything worth sharing. No inspirational story. Things had not been very inspiring lately. No tale of success. What about a problem? Suffering? Does anyone really wants to read about it? Sometimes. I guess I should have had more experiences. It's too late now. Not for everything, but surely for many things. If I had been braver, maybe I would have more stories now. Maybe a story about a lone trip around the world. I guess there are too many of them already. Bill Bryson is better than me on that anyway. Maybe I can write about the adventures I didn't have! But do I really want to write about it? No. I don't. I want to write, but I do not know about what. I guess I simply want to write. To type. Maybe just because it's relaxing. Although I'm getting anxious

already.

How difficult is to come up with an original idea? Maybe I should just forget about it and write whatever comes to mind. But then, that would be more like a diary. I could write a diary, but nobody would be interest in reading it. Then I think again: What am I doing? Am I writing because I like or because I want people to read it? Both? Am I sure? I should just stop thinking about how popular the story would be and simply write it. But what good would come from it? Maybe what I really want is to be appreciated. But there's more than that. I would like to write a story that would please myself if I was reading it. The problem is that none of my ideas please me at the moment. Otherwise I would be writing them. And even if they did, why would other people share my taste? In fact, I usually have a different taste from everyone else. That doesn't make me very popular. Socially, I mean. But upon thinking again, also artistically. Is my writing too boring? Well, not if I don't write anything. Then, it's not even boring. It's void. Non-existent. Damn. I lost focus once again.

I look at the window. Sometimes it helps. Let's start all over again. I don't need to clear my mind, it's already empty. So I breath deeply. I try to relax. Let me think about my favourite stories. I like ghost stories. I don't believe in them, but I do enjoy reading them. How can I write about something I don't believe in? Come on. That's just the definition of fiction. Refocus. Ghost stories. A good ghost story should be mysterious, unpredictable, scaring, tense. I don't have that kind of story in my mind. Will I ever be able to write a scaring story? If I do not even try, I will certainly not. That is what art is about, isn't it? Provoking people's feelings. That is a good objective. Let me think about what feeling I can provoke. I keep looking at the screen. My fingers are hovering over the keyboard. Once in a while, I type a letter. Then a word. Then I delete both. I think about a nice title. I come up with many, but no story attached to them. What about that feeling I wanted to provoke? I lost it. I start to doubt my skill. Do I have any? Does anyone has ever read my stories? I don't know. Maybe my mother. I guess that doesn't count.

That's quite frustrating. I guess I do have stories, but they are not good. I try to think about variations of them. They use to be very childish, so I could try to make them more... mature. I could introduce some sex, some violence, some swearing. That would not make them mature. They would not be for children for sure, but probably only teenagers would read them. I would like to be more elegant. Real people do swear, but not after every sentence. Real people do sex. Real people, unfortunately, are violent. But that doesn't make it interesting. It would be easy to provoke feeling by writing about those things. But, again, that's not what I want. I still don't know what I want. Even in life. That's a different story though. One I decided not to write about some moments ago, if I can remember correctly.

Writer's block. Yes, that's my excuse for not having anything to write. The problem is, I don't believe it. And that makes me more nervous. More anxious. I'll have some coffee. Caffeine helps the brain, some say. Me? I just like the taste. I like it sweet. I start to shake my legs. That's another sign that I'm anxious. Now that I am thinking about it, I am also afraid. I said I had stories not worth writing, but maybe I am just afraid that people will say they are not worth reading. I am afraid of the critics. I need compliments. Always needed. What's the point of keeping doing something if you don't do it well? And how could you know if you did it well except for people's compliments? That's called lack of confidence. Some people just write without worrying about what other people will say. They usually are the ones who succeed. So, I should write something. Anything! I should stop planning and just write. Too much planning never helps. Someone once said that willing is not enough, you must do. Some say it was Bruce Lee, but I heard it attributed to others. How I would like to write something that people would quote afterwards! Can I? Will I ever be able to do that? If I cannot even type a word without erasing it, how would that ever be possible?

I coming back from a break. A two-hours break. I thought that inspiration would come if I started to think about other things. That's a technique as well. Whenever you spend too much time on a problem, try to forget it. The answer many times comes naturally when your thoughts are elsewhere. Not for me. I thought about reading a book, but that would only remind me that I cannot

write even a short story. The TV didn't help me as well. Oh, there were good films indeed. Good stories. The kind I cannot create. It made me envious. I think I lost my confidence. That sounds familiar... I guess I'm thinking in circles. Another deep breath. Typing. Erasing. What if I indeed do not have any talent? I never thought about doing anything else. Well, I thought, but I can't imagine spending time and money to learn any other thing. There are many things I like, but I could live without any of them. Not without writing. I can imagine myself in a future where I gave up writing. I can imagine myself being angry just for reading a journal article. Angry with anything that would remind me of writing. Of literature. Of stories. I cannot give up. I never give up. It's not me. But nothing comes to my mind!

The time is passing and the day is ending. It's late at night already. I look at the clock on my screen once more. A couple of minutes and this day will be over. The day will be over and my screen is still blank. Maybe I could write another person's story. What about my father? My mother? My brother? My closest friend? I can mix them up. Create a story of stories. Am I robbing their stories? No, I am only getting inspiration from their lives. I wish I could write something like *The Lord of the Rings*. Or like *Harry Potter*. Something full of imagination. I can imagine worlds. Creatures. Legends. But they are static. They are stages without the actors. Or with actors that don't move. Or bad actors. Why not? I could write a book of descriptions. Even that is not original. It's called dictionary. Have I thought about that already? I guess I'm thinking in circles again. How do my computer science friends call it? Oh, yes. Recursive.

What if I look at my previous stories? None of them were published. Why? Because I thought about them as childish. Or boring. Or without a central theme. They wouldn't make anyone cry. People would laugh though, as they would find the stories too ridiculous. Many of them are unfinished, because at some point I thought they were not worth finishing. What if I sew them together? Yes, great idea. Take many stories without a central theme and glue them together. Another bad idea. Of that type of idea it seems I am full.

Now I browse the internet. To look for ideas. It's full of them. So many ideas, in fact, that I feel even worse. So many creative blogs. So many e-books. Everyone can write. Well, maybe not everyone but many people. I'm seeing it. I have just read a wonderful short story. Beautifully written. A truly original one. So simple. That's talent. I do not have talent. Thinking about it now, I never had. Had I ever finished a book? No. Mozart composed when he was four. I'm not so sure that's true, but it hurts. Deep. I've been in front of this computer for a whole day and nothing interesting came out of my mind. Everything is silence around me. There is no one awake. I am worried about the future. I will never be a good writer. I wish I was a good writer. My head aches. My heart aches. I'm about to cry. I'm happy there's no one awake to hear it. Happy? Wrong choice of word. A good writer would be able to choose a better one. More dramatic, or more poetic. I can't. I can't do this anymore. I never could actually. I will never be read. I will die without realising anything. I will pass through this world and live nothing behind. I will not contribute with anything. A single story. Maybe I should just write a stupid ending for my stories and publish them the way they are. My hand is shaking and I cannot control it. I punch the wall. Too much noise. I punch my leg. As expected, it doesn't help.

I am exhausted. I did nothing, but I am exhausted. Day after day. When I was younger I used to think that everything would be alright one day. The day should have arrived by now. I should be able to write good stories. I am not a child anymore, but I still write like one. Yesterday is gone now. Yesterday is gone now? Is that a sentence a professional writer would write. Maybe that's my contribution to the world. They would quote me. Yesterday is gone now. And then I start to laugh. Slowly I give up. I cannot think anymore. If I wasn't able to write until now, I will probably not be able at all. Reluctantly, with a feeling of defeat, I turn down the computer. I go to my bed. It's right by my side. I keep looking at the computer. The screen is black now. But it's also blank. I will try again. Tomorrow.