

Demolish Reader Stumbling Blocks Using the Secret of Clarity

"What makes you put a book down," asked Lori Freeland, the speaker at the WGT January meeting.

Several of the over 30 writers attending the meeting gave their reasons, and Freeland explained how we can find those reader stumbling blocks. She said "the most important being clarity. Read the words on the page to see if they paint the picture you see in your head." Her three tips were to write tight, say what you mean and be specific. The list of stumbling blocks to readers are: Questionable Credibility, Unlikeable Characters, Internal Overload, Head-Hopping, Burying Big Moments, Clutter, Unintended Repetition, Toss-able Words, Vague-eries, Pet Words, Contractions, Passive Problems, Annoying Adverbs, Abundant Adjectives, Filter Words, Clichés, Action/Reaction Reversal, and Sentence Span. Lori said, "Does your reader understand your blog, article, chapter, or scene the same way you do? Always read your pages out loud or better yet ask someone to read it out loud to you." Lori is an Author, Editor, Writing Coach, and can be found at lorifreeland.com.



Lori Freeland

KATHRYN MCCLATCHY FLASH FICTION CONTEST

The second-place winner of the 2017 Kathryn McClatchy Flash Fiction Contest, Leah Hinton's "A Dark Fog" is in issue. The third-place winner, by Sabrina Chapman and honorable mention, by Steve McCluer will be published in upcoming issues of the WGT Mentor. You may download on our website, www.wgtonline.org.

UPCOMING EVENTS - Mark your calendars!

March 19 **The Realities of Self-Publishing** – Barbara Wilson, a published picture book writer and illustrator, speaks on the roller-coaster ride of self-publishing.

March 21 **Join Critique Group** on the 3rd Wednesday of each month, and obtain valuable, constructive feedback.

March 24 **WORDfest** offers an all-you-can-meet' literary event with 20 North Texas writers organizations and more than 300 writers together at Tarrant County College's Northeast Campus. www.wordwriters.org

April 19 **Nathan Brown**, our April presenter is an author, singer-songwriter, photographer, and award-winning poet who was the Poet Laureate of Oklahoma for 2013 and 2014.

April 28 **Spring Workshop** – watch for information in your email and follow us on Facebook for more news.

A Dark Fog by Leah Hinton

"Laura okay?" Frank sucks on a Lucky Strike cigarette. His bathrobe hangs open, boxers falling low on his thin frame.

"Don't know. Every time she visits she cries. She tells me how hard the world is, how life isn't the way she thought it'd be." James paces. Grey Carhart pants are tucked into his work-boots, his plaid flannel shirt, out-of-season for such a sunny day. Worry burrowed creases in his forehead and around his eyes. Often mistaken for laugh lines, his are only signs of a life, not a joyous one. Except where Laura is concerned.

"Maybe there's something we could do?" Frank mumbles around the cigarette.

(continued at www.wgtonline.org)

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"The hell you think we're gonna do? None of that stuff's anything I'm good at, anyway. I can fix her car, put a new faucet in her sink, but I don't do tears."

"Laura scares me, Jim."

"I don't know what you've got to be scared of? It isn't like she's going to go on a murderous rampage. It's not like she'd kill you if she did."

"Not like that, you idiot. She scares me because I'm afraid *for* her."

"She's just... sad."

"Seems like she's more than sad. I've been down this road before."

"Oh, that's right. I forgot you were an expert on *my* Laura. She's had a rough few months. She'll get over it."

"You don't know that, Jimmy. Sometimes sad is more. Sometimes sad is..."

"Sometimes sad's what?" Jimmy turns, daring Frank to say more.

"Sometimes sad's more than sad. Sometimes it eats you alive and by the time anyone realizes, it's too late. You're too broken."

"My girl's stronger than that."

"I'm not saying it to offend you."

"Then shut up, Frank," Jimmy spat out.

"I love her, too. Or I've grown to, anyway."

"She doesn't even know you. You barely register in her existence. If she knows you at all, it's just as my neighbor. And it isn't as if you can choose your neighbors in a place like this."

"Luck of the draw then, eh Jimmy?" Frank smiles. "You should be happy she has someone pulling for her, besides just you."

Jimmy sinks in his seat, realization washes over his face. "Sorry, Frankie. You're right. I just wish I could've been there for her, through everything."

"You mean be there for her when you were the cause of her pain?"

"I wasn't the cause of all her pain."

"A big enough chunk. You're the one who went to the store and never came back."

"You know I wouldn't hurt her for the world. If I could undo it, I would. Lord knows."

"You and me both."

"She's been drinking, Frankie. I could tell by the way she stuttered her words yesterday."

"See! She needs to see a shrink or something."

"You mean the gods of this new world who sit you on couches and tell you how to feel. Give you pills and tell you it's all real. Every nightmare? Every dream? And somehow even worse than it seems?"

"It ain't like that, Jimmy."

"Ain't it though? Worried or not there's nothing we can do for her. She's a grown woman. She's in charge of her own life. I can't interfere. It's not my place to...anymore."

"Well, I'm not content to just be a bystander, Jimmy"

"What do you want me to do? I'm in the same boat as you here. Helpless, where she's concerned." Jimmy pauses. The silence is filled with the taps of Frank's cigarette against his leg.

"I wish you'd light that thing already."

"You and me both. I don't have a lighter."

"Of course, you don't." Jimmy paused, eyes landing on some far-away place. "She's so pretty. Even when she cries. There's no face that makes me smile like hers. I wish she knew how much I love her. But there's no way I can tell her. Not now."

"She knows. She wouldn't keep coming back if she didn't. If she thought you didn't love her, she would've walked away. That's the last you would've seen of her."

"I miss her. I miss holding her. I miss the smell of her hair. I hate that things are different."

"I know, Jimmy. Things *are* different. But they're not bad. It could be worse." Frank pauses,

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"Just hear me out. What if she hurts... what if she kills—

"Shut up, Frank. I mean it! She's stronger than that. She's not going to be one of those people."

"What do you mean, one of those people? Knowing my history?" Frank pulls up his sleeve revealing a crooked scar running the length of his forearm.

"One of those weak people, Frankie. One of those selfish, weak people who give up. Like you did, over and over 'til you ran out of lucky breaks."

"It's not a sign of weakness. It's a sign of pain, of being lost, trapped in a dark fog."

"She's not lost, Frank."

Frank's heart hurts for Jimmy. "Do you think she'll come by today?"

"I hope she does. I love to hear her voice. She takes me back to a better time."

Laura follows the path she knows by heart. She meanders off the pavers and through the thick bramble, over a trail her footsteps have worn. A shortcut. She steps wide over stones, finding her spot. She sits in the spring grass, tucking the edges of her skirt under her, the sun high overhead. "Hello? Are you here?" her voice rings softly.

"I'm here, Laura," Jimmy whispers into the breeze.

"I miss you. I've been lonely." Her teardrops fall unchecked. She wipes them away with the back of her hand. "I've got news. I'm seeing someone. A therapist. She thinks there's hope for me yet. Maybe I stand a chance."

"Of course you do, Bunny. I promise. Sunny days ahead."

Laura traces her fingers against cold granite, James Collins 1957-2017. "Why'd you have to die, Daddy?"

"I don't know," Jimmy says, but she never hears.

"Weiss-Cracking"

by Jerry Weiss



*Oh Dear, is my "Romance" window
not my "Slasher" window.*

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