

"I Need This"
By C. N. Nevets

There better fuckin' be such a thing as writer's amnesty, because, if not, I'm not going down alone. I'm not too proud to name names and finger accomplices. Yeah, I'm makin' my own point, but it's not because I want to. I just can't afford not to. Y'all might understand, but the Man won't. The Man never does. And when the Man comes to whip me behind the shed, I'm damn well not going to be the only one who can't sit for a week.

When I first saw the contest posting, I figured I'd just send in a story. Free form fiction? Hell, I got through college on free form fiction. I wooed women and broke hearts with free form fiction. I won second damn place in a college writing contest with free form fiction. All I would have to do is bust one of those out, change the copyright date, and toss it in an e-mail. Boom. Consider me applied.

But then I made the biggest mistake a writer can make. I asked my wife about it. And she made the biggest mistake a wife can make. She was supportive. "Oh, you should write something fresh and exciting!" Well damn. That's a lot of work. I mean, yeah, I'm a writer so writing is what I do and all, but I've got bills to pay, and I can't pay bills writing fresh stuff for contests. Not when I have stacks and stacks of stuff that's ready to go.

Got me thinkin', though, and one thing I realized my wife was right about: I can't afford to lose out on this contest. I mean, I've got this job that pays bills, but it's miserable. Just about wanna smash my head in at the end of a work day. Instead I usually just smash my brain cells with Jim Beam Black Label. Same difference in the end. But that's not the point. The point is, I need out, like, yesterday, and this contest is, like, tomorrow – which is pretty much the closest thing to yesterday there is, except today, and today is already out the window.

So what options are there? None. Writing and my job are two dogs whining for food and I don't even have enough to feed one. Gotta shoot at least of them. And it looks like it's gotta be the writing that goes.

But then this came up. This contest. That's a way out. Contests like this? They open doors. They open eyes. They open the pocketbooks of publishers and agents and Hollywood producers. Get yourself through a contest like this and you're a real writer. So this is my chance. My big shot. My path to freedom and the life I want to live.

Write fresh material?

Hell no.

Still don't have time for that.

But the one thing I can do is apply a little pressure. Dance the waltz of diplomacy. Employ the art of gentle persuasion.

Thing is, I'm not a salesman, not really. I tried convincing my kid brother to eat dog food once, but when he wouldn't believe me it was cold stew, I just socked him the nose and shoved the spoon in his mouth. I tried socking your Gmail account in the nose, and all I got was my Hotmail account suspended.

I don't know how to talk myself up either. Last job interview I had, they asked why they should hire me. My wife says I was supposed to talk about my gifts and talents. I think I said something about how I could maybe hook 'em up with my stripper cousin. Whatever. It worked. I drafted up something for this contest where I promised you a ride in my speedboat, but you already know I'm a broke writer so why the crap would you believe I had a speedboat?

So this is a whole other league, and I need to step up my game.

So that's what I did.

I don't know what parts of the country y'all are in, but maybe you heard this news story. There was a girl in Birmingham. Twenty-six, twenty-seven. They found her dead behind a rest area on 59

North. Throat was cut wide open. Left thumb missing. No signs of sexual assault and nothing was missing from her purse. She was a good enough kid, no high risk lifestyle.

I'm not saying anything about that, but can you imagine what kinda guy'd do something like that? It'd be a guy with nothing to lose. Guy who could take a risk 'cause he couldn't lose nothing he didn't mind losing. Guy who had nothing but one last shot to make his life livable. Guy who maybe wanted to do something with his life and was looking at one chance to make it happen. And he couldn't afford to let it slip away.

Scary mother fucker, you know?

That's a lot of guilt for people to live with. I mean, not the guy's guilt. If he's willing to do something like that, he probably isn't gonna feel guilty about it. But the other people. The people who forgot to say they loved that girl before she got killed. The people who meant to help her out but didn't. The people who always thought she seemed like a cool chick but never took the time to say hello.

Or, on the other side, the people who never told the guy they loved him. Or never helped him out. The people who let him turn into this crazy man because they were too hot of their own selves to let him join their game, if you know what I mean.

Those people?

Can't imagine they can sleep at night.

You know how effed up the world is? I bet there's at least six other girls, just like that one. Not dead. But picked out. Six girls in six different cities. At least. Maybe more. Picked out to die, just like that girl in Birmingham. Just waiting for someone to say, "I love you," before they die. Just waiting for their own lives to really start. Just waiting for someone to reach out to some crazy man with a knife and no hope of achieving his dreams on his own. Before that crazy man reaches out to them with his knife.

You're all writers. You know what I'm talking about. That hunger that's inside that never goes away. The monster that feeds on the blood of the innocent. Maybe it's the chores you don't do. Maybe it's the little things you forget to do. Maybe it's important events you lose track of. Maybe it's that you spend more time with your characters than you do with your family. Maybe your monster eats your wife or your baby. Maybe your monster eats your god. Maybe your monster eats your sex. Or maybe your monster eats the life of an innocent girl somewhere, who has no reason to see what's coming.

It's a monster one way or the other.

If there's anything or anyone that sits in judgment over us, it doesn't give a shit if our monster eats our loved one's broken hearts, our family's fractured spirits, our own neglected souls, or some guy's neighbor girl's life. It's all the same. It's all monstrous. So why play around? Why diddle with the little stuff?

I don't want you to take me the wrong way. I'm not saying any of those things are okay or good. None of them are. But since I've gotta make sacrifices, why make it some shitty little grain offering that God's gonna reject anyway? Make it a lamb. Or a girl. Or whatever. The details don't really matter. What matters is, I've gotta do whatever it takes to get to my end point.

My end point is clear.

The way to it is clear.

I'm a writer. I need to get into this anthology.

And I've gotta do whatever it takes to do that. I've gotta make some sacrifices. I've gotta feed my monster.

Of course, it's not entirely up to me. All I can do is make my best guess. It's really up the people in charge. That's you. Never forget that. You are the boss in this situation, not me.

It's like, I remember one time there were a bunch of us who were trying for this promotion at work. We had to prepare portfolios for it. Holy crap, we went crazy over those things. I mean we were spending sixty hours a week just on the portfolios. When our bosses realized how much energy we were

giving to it, they stepped in and set the bar lower. All they had to do was say, "Enough is enough," and all our work to earn their favor just ended.

That's how it works. I only have to sacrifice as much as it takes. You say the word – you set the bar just right – and I can stop.

Just thinking back to those girls. I mean, like I said, I don't know what parts of the country you guys are in. Maybe you don't even know any of the girls. But it's just as likely you do. I mean, they're probably a lot like the girl in Birmingham. Twenty-six, twenty-seven, somewhere in there. Pretty clean living. Do you have a sister? I'm not sure.

Kinda freaky to think about, though, isn't it?

That some crazy man might have marked your sister for death? Or your cousin. Or your girlfriend or wife or daughter. Friend. Co-worker. Neighbor. The nice girl who works at the grocery store. The brilliant girl who works as the mayor's aide. Whoever. It could be any of them. And they're going to die.

And they can't stop it, because it has nothing to do with them.

But dreams are important, and a guy sometimes has to do things to make his dreams happen. That's nobody's fault.

Even so, if someone stepped in. Made the dream possible. Maybe.

I don't blame society for my lack of dreams, though. I blame you. Well, people like you. You're only playing the roles you've been taught to play. The game is submit, be subjected to competition, have your dream crapped on. You've done your share of submitting, competing, and being crapped on. I get that. I know you understand what I'm going through.

But you know what?

You don't have to perpetuate the system. You can fight back. Change can start with one person, and that one person might as well be you.

Fuck I can I lay down the deep shit.

Anyway. Listen. You really have two choices. You can keep the system in place. Maybe I'll get in, maybe I won't. But, let's be honest. We both know that you may keep your artistic integrity, but your moral human nature is never gonna let you rest. Someday, you'll hear the news. You'll hear about another girl. And your heart will understand what your brain just don't wanna accept.

And you won't let yourself get away with it easily.

Your conscience will whip you harder than the Man ever will.

Good thing there's a second choice, right? You can say, "Screw the system," and do what's right by the world. Keep the monster inside me calm and quiet. The hunger never goes away, but you can mute it. You can make it less powerful. Less dangerous. Less deadly.

Trust me, I know how over the top this sounds. You probably think I'm joking around. Exaggerating for the purposes of making a point. I'm making a point alright, but not with words. With actions. Let's face it. The proof is the damn pudding.

I hope you like pudding.



Becky H.

2/17/84

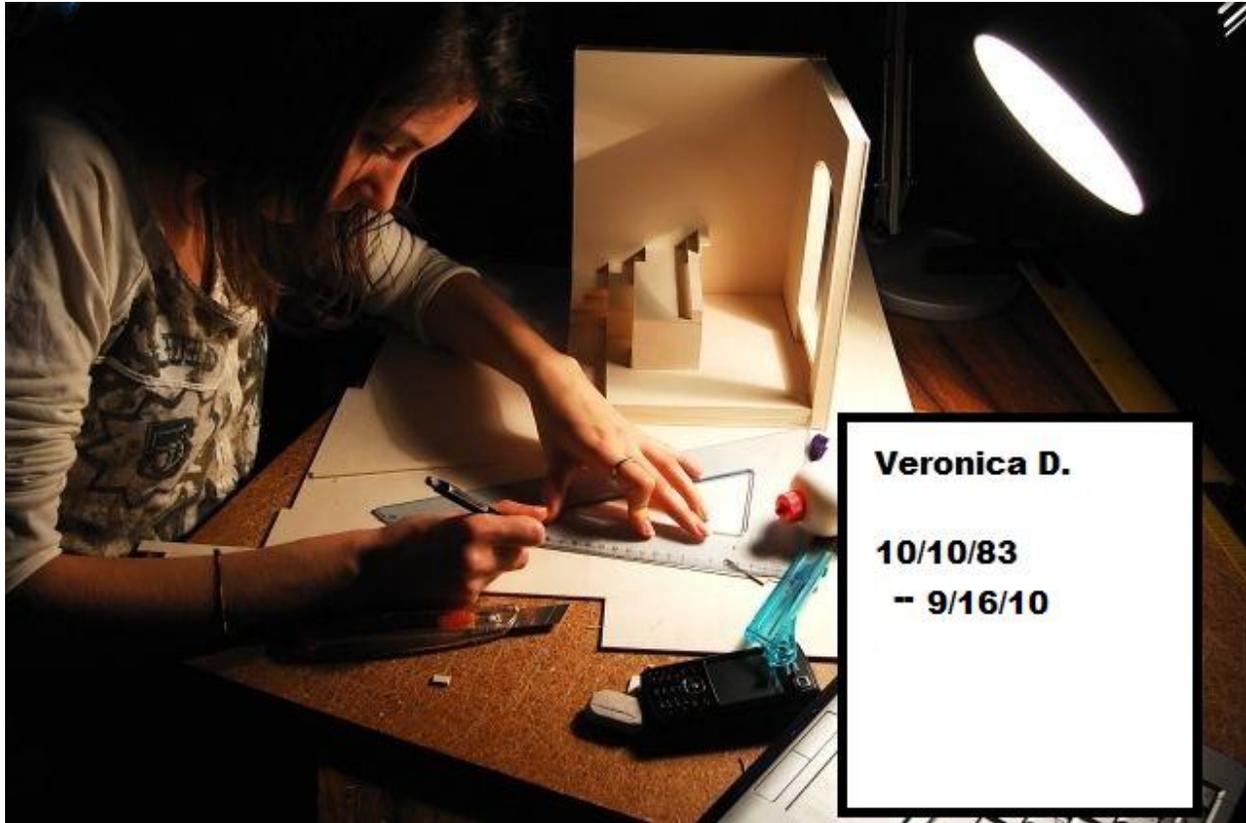
- 9/16/10



Amy W.

4/11/86

- 9/16/10



I'm serious about my writing. Just as serious as you are. I'm willing to take my chances and take my lumps. I'd rather do it the easy way. Can you do it the easy way? Can you ignore the system? Or are you so tied up in the competitive submission world that you were born into that you simply cannot conceive of just taking the simple path? If that's so, I hope you can take your lumps, too.

Because I'm not taking them alone.

Enjoy the contest. Best of luck.

Sleep easy.

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