

Writer's Block.

by Andrew Rosdail

© 2011

Last edited: 5/15/16

Dramatis Personae

Ali "Alvin" Miller- female, a writer

Boris Callahan- her captor; speaks with an implacable, maybe inconsistent, accent

Don Juan Casanova- a fictional character; a hero from Miller's best selling series. Has an outrageous accent and wears an elaborate costume.

Martin Colton- a mercenary

Place: A room in an undisclosed location

Scene 1

(LIGHTS UP on a dirty room. ALVIN MILLER is sitting at a desk, typing at an old typewriter. She is sleep-deprived and unkempt. Her clothes would be nice if they weren't crumpled and in need of washing. There is a wastebasket nearby full of crumpled paper. The desk has an ashtray full of cigarette butts, two stacks of paper; one stack has typed words and the other stack is blank. The room also has a stained couch with a newspaper on it. There is a bucket on the far side of the room with a roll of toilet paper set next to it. There are no windows and only one door. ALVIN strikes a key and it gets stuck.)

ALVIN

Shit.

(She frantically tries to fix it, but finds that it's jammed. She nervously looks back at the door as it is unlocked. BORIS CALLAHAN enters. He is a hard-looking man dressed in a shirt, tie, and overcoat.)

ALVIN

Shit.

BORIS

Something the matter?

ALVIN

No! No, nothing's the matter.

BORIS

I thought something was the matter. You know, I sit outside next to the door. All day long I hear tap tap tap. The sound of little hammers with letters etched on them striking paper and making words. Suddenly, I hear nothing. Silence is very noticeable when all you hear all day is tap tap tap, you know?

ALVIN

The machine's jammed.

BORIS

Why is the machine jammed?

ALVIN

I don't know! It's an old machine. Look at it.

(BORIS approaches the desk, looks at the typewriter.)

ALVIN

It's the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Nobody even uses these things—

(BORIS smacks it, causing ALVIN to flinch. He tries to fix it, though without much concern.)

BORIS

Hmm.

ALVIN

The 21<sup>st</sup> Century and you give me a typewriter. A typewriter! Not a laptop or even a word processor, but this antique.

BORIS

Looks broken.

ALVIN

Yeah.

BORIS

That's too bad.

(BORIS reaches into his coat.  
ALVIN flinches.)

ALVIN

No! Wait! Wait! This isn't my fault!

(BORIS takes out a pencil and puts it  
on the desk. ALVIN looks at it and  
then quizzically at BORIS)

BORIS

It's a pencil. You're a writer and you don't recognize a pencil?

ALVIN

I know what a pencil is...

BORIS

...If you know what a pencil is, you know how to use one and you know what it's used for.

ALVIN

You want me to keep writing...

BORIS

...yes...

ALVIN

...with a pencil?

BORIS

Your machine is broken. A pencil will do fine. We have a deadline, yes?

ALVIN

Yes, but...

BORIS

...But what?

ALVIN

My handwriting's not that good. It's pretty terrible.

BORIS

You rely too much on a keyboard. What was it like in the olden days? When the writers wrote by hand with quill and ink. Your poor handwriting; it's a small detail. You have your hands. You have paper and a pencil. You have all the proper tools. You can write.

ALVIN

Okay, but...

BORIS

...Listen. If your chicken scratch is too bad, you'll just translate what we can't read. But first, you finish it, yah?

ALVIN

Well, okay, but, listen. I...

(BORIS sighs and reaches into his coat. This time, he pulls out a gun and presses it to ALVIN's head.)

BORIS

You're getting annoying, Miller.

ALVIN

Oh God.

BORIS

We have a deadline that's getting closer and closer. And you sit here and you dally. You know what happens if we don't get a finished manuscript. *I* know what happens, because I will be the one that *makes* it happen. I think I've been quite clear, so you should know what'll happen...

ALVIN

...Please....

BORIS

...So if you don't want to happen what we both know *will* happen, I suggest you pick up that pencil and start writing. Okay?

ALVIN

Okay...

(ALVIN picks up the pencil. BORIS puts his gun away. ALVIN sighs in relief, pulls the paper from the typewriter, and starts writing where she left off. BORIS picks up the stack of paper with words on it. He thumbs through them.)

BORIS

This it?

ALVIN

Yeah.

BORIS

You didn't add too much since last time.

ALVIN

I know...

BORIS

...We have a deadline.

ALVIN

How can I forget that *we have a deadline?*

BORIS

This isn't much.

ALVIN

With all due respect, Boris. Callahan? Mr. Callahan? Mr. Boris...?

BORIS

...any of those's good...

ALVIN

...books...

BORIS

...except, no, don't call me "Mr. Boris." That's just stupid...

ALVIN

...books take time, they don't...

BORIS

...oh, not *too* much time for you, though, yah? You typically release, what, a book a year? Sometimes two books in a year, I'm told...

ALVIN

...I haven't done a book a year for a while. I haven't written *two* books in a single year in a very long time. You've been misinformed....

BORIS

...but you've done it before. And each one has been a bestseller on the New York Times.

ALVIN

Being a New York Times Bestseller isn't all that hard. Just look at James Patterson.

BORIS

I don't know who that is.

ALVIN

Never mind.



BORIS

Still. “New York Times Bestseller” sounds impressive, yes? It probably sells even more books.

ALVIN

Won’t argue about that.

(BORIS sets the pages down and  
nods.)

ALVIN

So, how much more time do I have left?

BORIS

Less.

ALVIN

Less?

BORIS

Less time than you had before.

ALVIN

Jesus Christ! If I knew how much time...

BORIS

...If you knew how much time you had left, I imagine you’d panic and the quality of the work would suffer. Like a student who puts off his big research paper until the night before its due date.

ALVIN

So...you're saying I don't have a lot of time?

BORIS

Didn't say that. You may have a day, you may have twenty. You may have more, you may have less.

ALVIN

You could give me a *hint*?

BORIS

Let's just say that you have time. What you do with it is up to you.

ALVIN

For Christsake!

BORIS

Enough. Write.

(ALVIN starts writing furiously.)

BORIS

Take your time.

ALVIN

You keep saying we have a deadline and now you're...

BORIS

...I mean with your *writing*. It'll make it easier to read.

ALVIN

But, you said I can always translate, didn't you?

(Beat. ALVIN slows down his writing. BORIS looks over his shoulder.)

BORIS

There. I can read it now. Maybe that's your problem. You think your handwriting is bad, but if you take your time, you have good penmanship. Not great, but good enough. Readable.

(BORIS watches ALVIN write for a moment longer, pats her on the shoulder, and then walks over to the bucket, he looks down and taps it with his foot.)

BORIS

It's empty.

ALVIN

I haven't had to go yet.

BORIS

Good. I just ate. Didn't want to have to clean it.

ALVIN

What about you, Boris? You have to shit in a bucket, too?

BORIS

No. I use a toilet. There's one down the hall. But, perhaps maybe I shouldn't have mentioned it to you.

(ALVIN scoffs. BORIS crosses over to the couch and takes seat. He picks up the newspaper.)

BORIS

Oh, before I forget. I'm going to need your shoelaces.

ALVIN

What?

BORIS

My employers suggest that I confiscate your shoelaces.

ALVIN

What, do they think I'm going to try hanging myself?

BORIS

That's the long and short of it.

ALVIN

So I'm on suicide watch now?

BORIS

Not necessarily, but just in case. If the stress becomes too much.

ALVIN

I don't think it's even possible. You can't hang yourself with shoelaces.

BORIS

People have. That's why they ask me to take yours.

ALVIN

How would I even do it?

BORIS

People can get very creative when they're in a pinch. So, please...

(ALVIN starts to take the shoelaces out of her shoes. BORIS starts to read the paper.)

ALVIN

You know, if I really wanted to, I could find another way. Like using the elastic in my underwear? You want to confiscate that, too?

BORIS

They didn't ask for your underwear, so you can keep that.

(ALVIN scoffs as she takes the shoestrings out of his shoes. When she is finished, she plops them onto the table and looks over at BORIS and watches him for a moment. BORIS notices that ALVIN is watching him.)

BORIS

We really ought to give you some new reading material. I imagine you have this Hagar the Horrible cartoon memorized by now.

ALVIN

Hagar says "I've survived war, plague, poverty, pestilence, floods, earthquakes and dragons, but I've finally met my match. I'm a tough Viking, but I've had enough." Then it shows him leaping in the air and crying "I want to go home!" Turns out, he's going shopping with his wife.

(BORIS reads and chuckles.)

BORIS

Good. How about the Family Circus?

ALVIN

I never read Family Circus.

BORIS

Even when you've got nothing else?

ALVIN

Nope.

(BORIS looks at the comic briefly)

BORIS

We should get you new reading material...

ALVIN

...Reading does help me write.

BORIS

Maybe, maybe not. That sort of thing's not in the budget.

(BORIS reads a little bit longer)

BORIS

Well, you should be happy about one thing. You got a pencil now. And now you can do the word find and crossword. Maybe that'll get your creative juices sloshing around.

ALVIN

Great.

(BORIS tosses the paper aside and lounges on the couch and watches ALVIN for a moment. At last, he stands up, crosses over to ALVIN's desk, picks up the shoelaces and

stuffs them into his pocket. He starts to pick up the typewriter, looks at it, and chuckles softly.)

ALVIN

What?

BORIS

I was just wondering something. You ever think about bashing my head in with this thing? You wait on one side of the door and when I come in...WHAM! You crush my skull?

(Pause.)

ALVIN

I thought about it. I thought about that, or breaking off the leg of this table, or even dumping the bucket on you. Hell, I was just thinking about trying to choke you with my shoestrings. But I always reminded myself of one thing.

BORIS (smirking)

What *one thing*?

ALVIN

You have a gun.

BORIS

Accurate.

ALVIN

So there you go.

BORIS

I'm glad you didn't try. I'm not allowed to shoot you yet, but I *can* rough you up a little if I wanted to. Say if I felt it was necessary. To teach you lesson. You're not a bad guy, Miller, so I'm glad you haven't had to learn a real lesson yet.

(BORIS takes the typewriter and starts to walk over to the door.)

BORIS

I'll leave you to it. I'll be back later, with your dinner.

(He opens the door.)

BORIS

Cigarettes?

(ALVIN nods.)

BORIS

Coffee?

(ALVIN nods.)

BORIS

Anything else?

ALVIN

Yeah. My agent.

(BORIS laughs. Exits. ALVIN continues to write for a moment, drops her pencil, and buries her face in her hands. LIGHTS DOWN.)



Scene 2

(LIGHTS UP. ALVIN is sleeping on the couch. A dramatic fanfare plays and DON JUAN CASANOVA enters the room. He is dressed in a period costume, with a cape and hat. He has a sword at his side.)

DON JUAN

Signor Miller!

(ALVIN raises his head and looks at him groggily. DON JUAN is confused.)

DON JUAN

Signor Miller?

ALVIN

Huh?

DON JUAN

I cry your pardon, but...you *are* Alvin Miller, are you not?

ALVIN

Yes?

DON JUAN

Ah. I see.

ALVIN

And who are you?

DON JUAN

Do you not recognize me?

ALVIN

I...

DON JUAN

...It is I! Don Juan Casanova!

ALVIN

Don Juan Casanova...you mean, *my* Don Juan Casanova?

DON JUAN

Yes, my friend! What other Don Juan Casanova would it possibly be, but *your* Don Juan Casanova? Star of the New York Time Bestselling series *The Incredible Adventures of Don Juan Casanova*. One and the same.

ALVIN

You don't look like Don Juan Casanova.

DON JUAN

Ah! Well, you do not look like an Alvin Miller to me, yet I suppose that is who you are. But no, I do not look like that effeminate actor the studio hired to play Don Juan Casanova. But I *do* look like how *you* thought Don Juan Casanova should look like, do I not?

ALVIN

Not really.

DON JUAN (testily)

Of course I do!

ALVIN

Okay, you do! But I don't get it...

DON JUAN

....Sorry, Signor Miller, but I must admit to a certain degree of confusion here. You *are* Alvin Miller, yes?

ALVIN

Yes?

DON JUAN

See, that I do not understand. I always supposed that Alvin Miller...My creator, Alvin Miller was not quite so...Signor Miller? You are aware you are a woman, Signor Miller?

ALVIN

Uh, yeah?

DON JUAN

Have you...always been a woman?

ALVIN

Yes!

DON JUAN

I see. So this is not a new development?