

"NaNoWriMo"  
or  
"How Marie Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Creative Writing Process"  
by Alison Ross

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*Day 00: October 31*

**absolutvodka\_apocalypse**: hellooooooooo r u there?!?!?

**absolutvodka\_apocalypse**: remember if u eet a razorblade candie apple i cant hear u dieing

**absolutvodka\_apocalypse**: buttonmunch the keyboard to let me no 2 call 911

**silvernotrubby\_bitchez**: You're such a good friend. Remind me to get your name and 'BFF' tattooed over my heart the next time we get drunk, go wild, and break out the waterproof crayola markers.

**absolutvodka\_apocalypse**: u live!!! ZOMBIE!! ☺ ne1 tp ur house?

**silvernotrubby\_bitchez**: No, my dad remembered to buy plenty of candy before he got home.

**silvernotrubby\_bitchez**: Anyway, I've made a decision. I'm going to participate in NaNoWriMo.

**absolutvodka\_apocalypse**: what

**silvernotrubby\_bitchez**: National Novel Writing Month, it starts tomorrow. I'm supposed to write a 50,000 word novel by midnight November 30. Or 50,000 words of the beginning of a novel.

**absolutvodka\_apocalypse**: then what

**silvernotrubby\_bitchez**: Then... I have a finished novel. I write about 1,700 words a day and at the end I've accomplished something.

**absolutvodka\_apocalypse**: u dont get a prize or something? does it go in a magazine if u finish first?

**silvernotrubby\_bitchez**: No, I don't get anything, other than the personal satisfaction of creating literature.

**absolutvodka\_apocalypse**: sometimes i wonder why were friends

**silvernotrubby\_bitchez**: Besides occasionally liking the same geeky stuff? You live next door and I have a car.

**absolutvodka\_apocalypse**: o yea

**absolutvodka\_apocalypse**: so whats ur book gonna be about?

**silvernotrubby\_bitchez**: I'm going to write that fantasy story I keep coming back to, I have lots of ideas already.

**absolutvodka\_apocalypse**: ooh can i be in it!? put me in the book!

**silvernotrubby\_bitchez**: I'm sure I can fit a fairy princess in there somewhere.

**absolutvodka\_apocalypse**: ur so freakin funny

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*Day 01: November 1*

When Marie, amateur author extraordinaire and occasional online chatter known as silvernortruby\_bitchez, got home from school she threw her textbooks and notebooks into a corner of her room and sat down at her computer. She brought up Microsoft Word, the modern writer's favorite tool, barring the few cyclic times when the modern writer gets nostalgic for old-school authoring in the way of Fitzgerald and Hemingway and contributes to American capitalism by doling out fifteen bucks for a Moleskine notebook.

She saved the document as "My New Really Epic Fantasy Series." At the top went, "Untitled, by Marie Thompson." The Times New Roman font was a little boring though, and she switched it to Arial. But that didn't sit well with her either, and she went through most of the fonts before realizing she didn't like any of them. That yielded a stop at DaFont.com, and she browsed for awhile, downloading sans serif prints and a bunch of other kinds including the typefaces from Buffy the Vampire Slayer and one really flowery font. Except in the end Times New Roman was the most official looking font and she went back to using that.

Marie blew out a long stream of air, and her hands hovered over the keyboard. So. Story. With a princess in there somewhere – who had no name! That had to be remedied.

Babynames.com, what a find. Mariska, Deandra, Fiorella... she never realized there were so many pretty names with interesting meanings. Finally she decided on Lana, at least for the moment. Marie figured she could always change the princess's name to Shakira later on if she wanted.

But the princess wasn't the only character, and it was her duty as the Author to find the perfect names for each and every last protagonist, antagonist, secondary and stock character.

Marie took a Red Bull and pretzel break and found her old VHS copy of *The Last Unicorn* under a pile of gas station receipts, American Girl magazines and one CD of illegally downloaded copies of Doctor Who episodes. The movie was based off one of the greatest fantasy books ever, and right then she could use a little inspiration. Her mom called for dinner as the credits rolled, and it was 6:44 PM when Marie sat back down in front of her blank, blinking screen.

"I should really get started on my homework," she finally said.

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*Day 8: November 8*

Marie eased herself in front of the computer. “Ask yourself, buddy – do you feel lucky today?” she told her blank screen, and in the next moment closed her eyes in mental anguish. At least no one had heard her.

She thought of potions and spells, and weaving the plot around the characters instead of the other way around. There was a pile of flyers on her desk next to her computer, and she straightened them into a neat stack. How to set up a meeting between the brave squire William and the Princess? The papers were still in view, so Marie went through them, throwing away the ones over a month old. She picked up some paperclips and put them into drawer. Then she noticed all the clothes on the floor and went to put her socks and t-shirts in her laundry bag.

Except that was just stalling, really, so she took her bag downstairs and started a load in the washing machine. She brought down her bed sheets too, since she was already doing laundry. After lumping together her bare pillows and blanket on the bed, Marie made space on the floor by picking up random DVD cases and putting them back on the shelf, after making sure each one had the right movie inside, because if it didn't she had to go looking for it. She picked up a bunch of papers and stuffed them in another desk drawer to look at later. In between loads of laundry, and folding her clothes and remaking her bed, she took a huge Clorox duty wipe to the corners of her room, both ceiling and floor, in case of spider webs. Then she saw there was a lot of dust high on her walls, and she wiped down the two feet or so of wall space right under the ceiling.

After that she picked up even more objects – altoid tins, hair bands, a beanie baby, empty plastic water bottles – and either threw them away or put them away or took ten minutes to read over the instructions to her history research project she thought she'd lost. When her carpet was more or less bare Marie took a vacuum cleaner to it and ended up tangling herself in the mile long orange cord.

Her mother walked by and did a double-take at the inside of Marie's room. “Is today Thursday? I thought it was Wednesday, I haven't taken the trash out or set the TiVo for Grey's Anatomy.”

“No, mom,” Marie sighed, “It's Wednesday, the cleaning lady comes tomorrow.”

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*Day 14: November 14*

“... CRAP. The month is half over! I always do this! Why do I always do this? Why do I always procrastinate? Why am I still talking to myself when I need to write? I don't know!”

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*Day 17: November 17*

It was by lucky chance that Marie looked up from her spiral notebook in time to see her statistics teacher advance on the student sitting next to her. Marie poked her friend Lilly in the elbow with the butt of a pen, and the other girl's naptime was over, just like that.

"How did you solve problem number twelve, Lilly?" asked Mr. Weiner.

Lilly, absolut slacker extraordinaire, stared at him with sleepy eyes for a moment that stretched on and on, until she finally seemed to understand what he'd asked. She looked down at her homework, crinkly with a little patch of drool in one place, and droned out what'd she'd written down.

"Thanks," she whispered to Marie, after he turned to bother another student. Marie just nodded, and kept up her furious pace in her notebook. Princess Lana had just had a breakthrough in translating the ancient VonGrap spell book. Now she was researching possible antidotes to the mystical sleeping poison she believed VonGrap would try and use on her.

"Are you taking notes?" Lilly asked, astonished.

"My story!" Marie whispered back. "I've found the answer to my problem: I just do all my writing in class! I never have trouble coming up with words if I write them down while I'm supposed to be getting an education."

"Don't forget to make Princess Lilly the most beautiful girl in all the land, worshipped by traveling princes and rugged blacksmiths, and able to backhand any upstart, jealous lady of the court that looks at me sideways!"

"I'll make it perfectly clear; you're the Naomi Campbell of my medieval magical world. Go back to sleep."

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### *Day 21: November 21*

William led his princess down the stairway into the hidden chamber. It smelled old and moldy, and his torch flickered in the damp air.

"You should be safe here, your highness," he told Lana. "Baron VonGrap won't find you here, and I will go out and collect the secret ingredients for the antidote."

Lana put on a brave smile for William - she liked him, really, but this whole adventure was so long and arduous, however important. She opened her mouth to say

“Marie?” Her mother knocked on the door, and her dad just walked in. “We need to have a family discussion.”

Marie’s fingers itched to get back to typing, but she put her hands in her lap. “Uh, ok.”

“Your father and I are concerned about you,” Marie’s mother began. She had a stack of leaflets with her. “In the past few weeks you’ve been acting strangely, and as responsible parents -”

“Are you on drugs?” her dad interrupted.

“What!”

Mr. Thompson ticked off a list. “Change in mood, overly tired, overly hyperactive, withdrawal from friends and family, increased secrecy, skipping school, and don’t try and pull that ‘I’m-sick’ routine with us again. You tried that last Friday by putting the thermometer on a light bulb and ended up burning your tongue bad enough to stay home for real, and I’m not paying for another five bottles of Anbesol because you refuse to move away from the computer to go see the dentist.”

“I’m not on drugs!”

“Denial, that’s another one.” Her dad shook a D.A.R.E. pamphlet at his daughter.

“I’m not in – look, ok.” Marie put a hand to her forehead. Her parents were loving and active in her life. They spent money and effort on a V-chip, Net Nanny, a copy of *Our Bodies, Ourselves* and even a funeral service during the fifth grade for the class pet gerbil that died the weekend it was in her care, complete with a Buddhist bhikkhu monk, a video tribute with clips of the Hamster Dance and Hamtaro set to Sarah McLachlan’s “I Will Remember You,” and sugar-free cookies and lemonade for all the other kids that attended. Thompson parenting and guidance could take *hours*.

Marie confessed, “I’m involved with NaNoWriMo.”

Her mom tried to go through all her clippings at once. “Oh my god, I didn’t see that one, they said they had a comprehensive list of street names but they *lied*.”

“Mom.”

“We love you and want you to be safe, Marie,” her dad explained. “So don’t make us send you to one of those seedy boot camps they advertise on Maury Povich.”

“I’m not snorting cocaine, I’m writing a novel!” she shouted. “It’s National Novel Writing Month. I know you probably haven’t heard of it, but it’s real.”

“Is there a pamphlet?” her mother asked. “No one’s heard of Hemochromatosis Screening Awareness Month, but they have pamphlets.”

Marie sighed and then brought up some websites for them to look at. So she spent every waking minute in her room with the door locked and only came out for school or food and growled and hissed at people that wanted to talk with and distract her. Big deal!

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### *Day 21: November 21*

10:00-10:30 AM - wake up, eat banana pancakes  
 10:30-12:30 PM - write three pages of attempted murder at banquet scene  
 12:30 PM - delete three pages of attempted murder at banquet scene  
 12:30-3:00 PM - watch marathon reruns of Batman: the Animated Series on the Cartoon Network  
 3:00-3:30 PM - go back to computer, stare at the screen  
 3:30-6:30 PM - alternate between writing paragraphs, reading webcomics and watching random crap on YouTube  
 6:30-7:00 PM - eat dinner  
 7:00-8:30 PM - convince parents no intervention needed, all will be over soon just like Ugg boots and William Hung  
 8:30-9:30 PM - write first meeting with dragon  
 9:30-10:30 PM - write magical battle with evil elves that ends quickly when dragon gets hungry for elf flambé  
 10:30-11:00 PM - watch movie trailers at apple.com  
 11:00 PM - wrote this list because everything else I write is CRAP and I think I’ll just curl up and get unconscious now

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### *Day 22: November 22:*

Marie’s pen moved across the page in a messy, hurried scrawl. She was on a roll. She was IN the ZONE. She had a little over 30,000 words when she checked this morning, and when she added her handwritten notes by the end of the day she’d be even further.

The notebook was abruptly yanked out of her hands, leaving a long line of ink down the page and almost giving her a paper-cut.

“Writing notes to friends in my class?” Mr. Weiner looked down at Marie, and she tried not to stare at his very bald head under the very fluorescent lights. Under her feeble protest, he started to read and she felt her face burn white-hot to 100°.

“The sun was starting to set,” scoffed the teacher, “and William knew dragons hated to fly in the dark, so he directed Belize to start descending. Hopefully they would find a quiet spot in the middle of a meadow to rest in, maybe one with a nice herd of sheep to provide a midnight snack for Belize. They had to be off again as soon as the sun rose, or it might be too late to deliver the antidote to the Princess. The banquet was only two days away, and Princess Lana was trapped in the VonGrap lair...” Mr. Weiner trailed off and looked at Marie in silence, along with the rest of the class.

Marie heard a *click!* in the middle of all the stunned attention, and shook her head to see Lilly holding her cell phone towards the writer’s face. “That picture is totally going up on your MySpace.”

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*Day 23: November 23*

Marie rocked back and forth in her seat, and curled her hands into fists, and tried not to hear the call of her computer upstairs, beckoning her, “Come write! Come write now! Only 15,000 words left! You’re so close! Don’t wait until the last minute!”

“Marie,” her mother said, and Marie realized she’d started to make a low keening noise. “Would you like to say what you’re thankful for?”

She looked out over the turkey and stuffing to the smiling faces of her grandparents, aunts, uncles, nieces, and nephews. All of them, holding her here. “I’m happy just to spend this free time with my family!” she chirped.

“Don’t worry, honey,” her grandma Elsa murmured in Marie’s ear. “Eat a little now and you can escape soon enough; I can see you’re itching to get away.”

Marie grinned at her grandma, her artistic, poetry-reading, William Faulkner-meeting grandma. It figured she would know about November being the national month to write in.

“I’ll give your mother my pharmacist’s number,” said Elsa, and patted Marie’s hand. “He’s got a cream that takes the itch go away like *that* and you won’t need to go to the bathroom all the time.”

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*Day 25: November 25*

“Surprise!” Lilly barged into the room. “I’ve come to distract you.”

“No distractions! I’m so close!”

“Pssh, you sound like one of those gamers that live in their parents’ basement.” Lilly delicately brought a hand to her nose. “And just like them, you need a fan, an open window, and a spray can of Lysol.”

“That is not true, I still take showers!” Marie pouted, but she kept her eyes on the screen and her hands moving.

“Well, maybe it’s just the smell of repressed inner geekiness finally sprouting.” She jumped on Marie’s bed and dug out a magazine from her purse. “Your mom says you didn’t even visit with your family for Thanksgiving the other day. Who doesn’t celebrate Thanksgiving, besides lonely losers and people that have to work at their crappy jobs?”

“The Native Americans, probably.”

Lilly threw a stuffed animal at Marie’s head, and proceeded to annoy her the rest of the day, filling her in on all the gossip she was missing by not going to school because of “the flu.” By the end of it Marie was ready to defect from her chosen genre and become a sci-fi writer.

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*Day 29: November 29*

Marie’s parents sat quietly in the living room, accompanied only by the sound of a crackling fire. Her father was languidly flipping through the newspaper, while her mother was deeply engrossed in Jane Fonda’s autobiography.

Their end-of-day unwinding routine was abruptly broken when they heard their daughter scream, and then run downstairs to confront them.

“Marie!” Both her parents jumped up. “What’s wrong?”

“Are you all right?”

“Did someone break in?”

“Did you hurt yourself?”

“Aren’t those the same pajamas you were wearing when we last saw you three days ago?”

Marie stood there, vibrating with tension. “I – I can’t think of the word!”

“What word?” her mother asked.

“What wo – are you crazy?! If I knew the word already, would I be standing here asking you for help?!”

“Ok, ok,” Marie’s dad put his hands up, the same way he saw a cop do on TV with a bank robber who’d had hostages. “Let’s try and think of clues. Tell us about the word, are there any similar words? What’s the word about?”

“It’s, it’s, it’s that wash-y thing, you know?” Marie made actor-hands as she spoke, waving them about.

“Loofah?” he mother guessed.

“No, no! You use it to smell good?”

“Perfume?” her father guessed.

“No! Arrgh, the little thing! You make it out of fat and lard?”

“Turkey gravy? You make that out of fat and lard to wash the turkey and make it smell good?”

“Dad!”

“I’m sorry!”

Her mother brushed a lock of hair out of her face. “Are you talking about... soap?”

Marie shrieked, and ran back upstairs.

“Well...” her dad shrugged. “I was going to teach her sports, make her a tomboy, and grow old and rich off a WNBA player’s fortune. But you just had to make sure we had an intellectual for a kid. ‘She needs to know how to read!’ Honestly.”

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*Day 30: November 30*

She didn’t look at anything else. Her focus was on the screen. She’d been awake for thirty-four hours straight. Nothing else mattered except the words, pouring from her mind, down through her arms, out from her fingertips, onto the keyboard, and materializing on the screen.

Marie didn’t recognize anything around her, not noise or light or even her dad coming in to tell her now was the perfect time for the next round of the father-daughter discussion

about dating, and she shouldn't do it, not until she was forty years old and/or he was dead, and it was great having this chat with her, glad she could talk and don't mention this to your mother, ok?

She gulped down another Tylenol to combat the twinge in her restless fingers, and did her best not to look at the time. But Marie couldn't help it. The faster she typed, the closer it got to midnight, and the more often she would glance at the little digital clock in the bottom right hand corner of the screen.

AM to PM. Afternoon to twilight. 9:00. 10:00. 11:00. At 11:30 she set up the timer on her cell phone.

She wrote about fencing, fighting, torture, revenge, giants and monsters, chases and escapes, and one love-struck squire that still hadn't figured out the Princess he was saving secretly wanted nothing more than to become a nun.

Marie was deep in the middle of a soliloquy where Lana, recovering from the attempted poisoning, wanted to throw off her jewels and give them to the poor like bread crumbs to the birds when the timer went off, and she snapped her hands up so fast she accidentally smacked herself in the face.

It was midnight, and NaNoWriMo was over. Marie took a few breaths and promised herself – if she hadn't made it, she wouldn't despair. She had tried her best. Well, not really. But in the last half of the month she had tried very hard.

Marie hit Select All, then went to Tools and finally Word Count.

There it was.

Words            51,963

"I did it!" she screamed and then calmly went to pass out face-first on her bed.

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*Day -334: December 1*

**silverntruby\_bitzez**: Oh god it's OVER.

**absolutvodka\_apocalypse**: i dunno why u put urself thro that

**silverntruby\_bitzez**: It was a huge accomplishment. I've got the beginning of a long novel and now that the first part is done the rest shouldn't be so hard to tackle.

**absolutvodka\_apocalypse**: u tortured urself. it wasn't prettie

**silverntruby\_bitzez**: But it was worth it. I'm going to do it again next year, I think.

**absolutvodka\_apocalypse**: ok, rite about how the first time around u went craazie

**silverntruby\_bitzez**: Please, there's nothing more cliché than a writer writing about writing.

**absolutvodka\_apocalypse**: oh whatever