



What is that word? Keith asks of himself. What is that word?

There with his empty cup of coffee, his neon blue iMac, his horn-rimmed glasses, his blonde crew-cut that's topped his head since his days in the military, Keith cannot for the life of him remember that one word.

He watches the blinking cursor on his illuminated computer screen, but cannot recall the word he wants to use.

What is that word?

There's no real frustration in his disposition, an affable fellow with an optimistic outlook obvious from a face free of worried wrinkles. His military days have long been over and though he may still hold true to the haircut, little else—less his work ethic—show his time spent in battle as young rough and tough kid.

Even at a time of moderate consternation such as this, Keith is able to focus on the positive. Take a philosophical angle on the subject: What a fun trick it is to try to remember a word that you've momentarily forgotten. It's like trying to work out a math problem; your brain left on autopilot as it searches through the dusty stacks of the library in your head.

How does that work? Keith wonders. Just where does your brain 'Go' while on its philological quest?

'Affectionately.' *That's* the word.

How bizarre, considers Keith, that he has as of late been having such trouble with the simplest of words. He can so effortlessly conjure up such words as 'Anthropomorphism' from the depths of his vast unconsciousness and yet not '*Affectionately*'?

Keith considers the other day when he had been speaking with Daniel on the phone and had wanted to tell him that he'd like to repay or return a favor, but could not remember either of those two simple words! He was left stuttering over the phone like a jackass: 'I'd like to...to...to, uh...to do the same for you.' This he said in lieu of 'Return The Favor.'

All right. '*Affectionately*.' Back to the page. *His* page, Keith corrects himself. *His* script, *his* story. On the computer screen, there before him, characters and dialogue of those characters, the very *action* of those characters fill the page.

A quick prayer flitters through his head: 'Thank you, God, for everything. And keep it coming.'

He hadn't really reflected on it before—another reason he now feels glad at having to stop for a moment to remember that word—but what a peculiar feeling it is to know that *this time* what he writes will *for certain* be put up on screen, that *this time* there's nothing but his script and his finishing the script. No obstacles in the way of his vision being realized in theaters all over America, all over the world.

Keith keeps from snickering to himself as he at once takes a cursory glance over the coffee shop, all the people here who will know of his name, who will see on the screen what he now sees in his head. A rush like nothing else, to be sure. The rockets firing off into the mustard sky above Baghdad could never compare to this sensation here and now.

Gotta keep it commercial, gotta remember what Jack had told him when he sold that first story: Keep it commercial, get them their money back. 'Popcorn and caviar,' Jack had said. 'Popcorn and caviar.' Give the audience 'Popcorn and caviar.' The art and the entertainment, the edification and the fun. Accessibility and art. And that's how you end up with a career like Jack's, that's how you endure, that's how you make money at this business.

Keith understands that this is the way of the world now. Jack is right. These pop stars go out there, they sell four million copies of a unit in one day. Whether they can sing or not, that is one *talented* person right there. To sell *four million copies* of *anything* in one day. Sure, that's not necessarily why Keith got into the game, but there's something to be learned from that kind of productivity. *Four million copies*: something Keith might not be able to muster up, but will certainly attempt.

I'll get there, he thinks to himself. Gotta be optimistic and realistic.

Always remember to keep the comedy alive, even in a piece like this. Keith narrows his eyes, trains them on his computer screen. The black, gothic-looking Times New Roman words across the screen. Even in a horror movie such as this, so stark and bleak and dark, gotta have comedy. Never force it, just let it out: let the characters make it happen. Have to remember that comedy comes from great pity and empathy. When you're angry, there's no room or consideration of humor; when you're sad, you're inextricably driven toward humor. The characters in the story are of the latter. He must feel what they're feeling and see the humor that they require to brighten up the darkness that has enveloped them.

Keith recalls the Chaplin quote about comedy being the overstatement of tragedy: 'Yes, the viewer may be impecunious and hungry, but at least he's not eating his own shoe. Now *that's* humor.'

So *many* words and thoughts in Keith's mind.

Enough philosophical yammering; back to the computer. Keith cracks his knuckles, lays his fingertips atop the ivory keyboard and *tappity-tap-tap* his fingers go to produce.

On the computer screen before him, the words flow with smooth celerity, dropping into place as torrential rain:

AMELIA

I'm not ready to give in.

DYLAN

Yet.

She pushes on the metal barrier, as it opens effortlessly.

AMELIA

Ever.

INT. ST. SIMON'S HOSPITAL - ENTRYWAY TO 'SECTION A'

Lights on in this side.

A single, dead decomposing rat on the floor.

Amelia leads the others inside, all hold their noses, Morgan chucks the flare behind him.

AMELIA

OK. We've got about ten hours to get the 'Section A' generator. After that, it'll be impossible to reroute the power to our side.

CHARLOTTE

Auch! The smell's awful!

RICKY

Aw! What is it?

MORGAN

It's like rotten tomatoes or something.

AMELIA

And it's still getting worse!

Not paying attention to where she steps, Dorothy CRUNCHES the dead rat. Guts and black blood flood out of its moist fur.

DOROTHY (*uncaring*)

Sick.

And then, all at once:

MORGAN

Oh, my god.

AMELIA (*whipping around*)

Cover your eyes, Charley!

CHARLOTTE

Amelia?

AMELIA

Now!

Amelia rushes over to her, places her hand over Charlotte's eyes, and guides her across the empty room... that happens to be littered by a few more dead rats...

... then more...

... until we come to find the whole other side of the room completely carpeted by dead rats, all piled up on top of one another, drained of blood, their insides torn out as if something had been gnawing at them and flung them away.

Charlotte shakes, knows something is wrong. Trembling, WHIMPERING, almost to herself:

CHARLOTTE

I'm OK, Amelia. I'm OK. I'm OK.

Amelia lifts Charlotte up off the ground, holds the light-weight girl to her side, and carefully navigates through the rat corpses.

The others follow her.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

The smell's getting worse.

DOROTHY

The heat's on. You guys feel it? The rat flesh is--

MORGAN (*sniffing*)

-- It's not just the rats.

Morgan and the others halt.

CHARLOTTE (*eyes covered*)

What? What is it?

RICKY

Aw, shit!

The floor of rats stretches like an elaborate patchwork leading up to...

... white, purplish pendulous fingers upside-down - belong to a hanging human body hung by its tied ankles. The body is drained of color and blood. Deep bite marks acne its flesh.

And it's not alone.

As the group makes their reluctant way through the rats, they also must now shove past at least ten or so hanging drained bodies. A human meat locker.

The heat of this place causes the bodies - even now - to perspire with slickness.

Some of the bodies are stripped of flesh, mutilated. Appendages have been torn off.

CHARLOTTE

What is it? WHAT IS IT?!

Keith's fingers stop, remain in place, each digit crooked in its own unique manner, barely touching the keys millimeters below their bent tips.

Smacking his lips, Keith tilts his head to the right slightly and ponders his next thought. Where will the characters *go*, exactly? Though he had gone over the outline numerous times, there is no use for it now: the characters had gone off in their own direction some time ago. Keith tightens his left fist, lifts it up to his mouth as though to cough or yawn.

He bends down toward the computer screen, his eyes close to the words. He sees the reflection of himself in the screen, the faint reflection of his reflection in his glasses reflected off of the computer screen.

Keith considers procuring another cup of coffee, but feels strangely compelled to remain in his seat—as uncomfortable as it may be; he in fact takes this respite to bend over the back of the chair, *cracking* his spine and feeling a shock of instant pain followed by quelling relief that runs through his entire back and through his chest—as though getting up will somehow snap him out of the halcyon daydream in which he's found himself, in which he's capable of creating.

That's what I must do, he reminds himself. That's all I must do: *I must create life.*

He types a few more words into the pages before him, he brings a bit more life to the characters who he has sprung up from the barracks of his limitless imagination. A smile grows across his bony face, above the pronounced cleft in his chin as he continues. The writing groove has him, will always have him, will keep him as he types away and feels the adrenaline pumping, that extant sense of freedom and liberation of making whatever he feels valuable or interesting a reality. 'In the act of creation,' he hears in one compartment of his mind as he types and creates with the other 'there is nothing to hold one back. You are boundless and see only the trees and placid meadow before you. Run as fast as you can, take in everything around you: all senses alive and firing on all cylinders.' Whose voice is it? Who has infiltrated his mind? No bother. And still, through all of this, without having to monitor it in the least, the words do flow.

Flying through his mind are many pictures, many lines of dialogue, and the way of the world in his mind's eye. His eyes no longer focus on the screen. Keith drifts off and away. Brown-headed girls are his prey.