



Dear Writing Friend,

How are you doing? Come up with anything yet? Choices are a challenge; writing is a bombardment of ideas, so often overwhelming. In the interest of prolonged pep, I thought I would share with you an idea that simplifies the process for me.

Think of anything you write as a piece of fruit. Yes, a lovely ripe peach, in fact, the perfect one of summer. Reading is like that, biting into something so delicious that you might hope you never come to the end of it. But writing is not like that. Reading is like eating, but writing is like planting the stone that bears the fruit that others eat. And so the pit is where we as writers begin, and we try to build a peach around it.

The stone of the fruit is the thing you want to say, or the theme, the main idea. For one novel I wrote, *Vive la Paris*, what I wanted to say was, “it’s hard to be your brother’s keeper.” For *Diary of a Fairy Godmother*, it was that “you have the power make your own wishes come true.” For *Sahara Special*, maybe it was “things can change.” Each of these simple thoughts was the pit, the stone, the seed of a book. Then as I wrote, or built the fruit around the pit, I had to make sure that the flesh matched the seed that had been planted. You can’t build a grapefruit around an avocado pit. You can’t grow a banana from an apple seed. (Much as I have tried.) Everything in the story has to build around this seed, or it doesn’t fit. It’s easy to get caught up in the clever names of characters, or long descriptive passages, or flights of fancy, and then suddenly realize that the narrative doesn’t flow. If your story starts to fall apart or feels overly ambitious, stop and think: does the latest decision serve the theme? If it doesn’t, congratulations! Take it out and save it somewhere else. You have another seed and a head start on a novel for another day.

I suggest that in a few words, write out what you ultimately want to convey to your reader on a giant sign or a tiny post-it note. This big idea will help you know how to start and end. As you create, look at it, remind yourself; keep what you want to share with the world solid inside the pit of you and your story, then bury it deep in the voices of your characters and in their adventures. Build around and around it, but as you work, never lose track of the idea at the core of the fruits of your labors. The mark of great writing is that after consumption, it leaves the reader with a seed that they can plant in their own way.

Happy gardening writing,
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