



Dear NaNoWriMo Writers,

Keep going.

Really, I could stop right there, because that's good advice—in many endeavors, not just writing. But if you're writing an entire novel in a month, I think I should give you more than two words. Truthfully, though, the secret to completing a novel is mostly just a matter of not giving up.

Thomas Edison expressed it more wittily, talking about his inventions: “Genius is one percent inspiration and 99 percent perspiration.” People mostly prefer to focus on the one percent—that flash-of-brilliance idea that came out of nowhere and illuminated everything, the sudden falling-in-love with a thought that made you believe you could write a novel in the first place. Persistence, like perspiration, isn't as fun. It sounds vaguely puritanical. Who wants to hear about the everyday slogging onward that actually makes up writing? (“First I was going to use the word, ‘a,’ but then I changed my mind and said, ‘the’....” Boring! And yet... essential.)

It may be that you have reached the point in your novel where your original idea has lost its luster. You may feel like continuing to write seems about as appealing as removing your fingernails with tweezers. Okay. I understand. I've been there. So, make yourself fall back into love with your own ideas. If you wrote any sort of outline or other plan in the beginning, in your first blush of excitement, go back and re-read it. Absorb the excitement, even if you now want to change some of the details. Or stop the novel—temporarily—and write a love letter to your favorite character in your novel. Or, if you're more in the hate-letter mode, write to your least-favorite character and tell him how terrible he is. Be creative—maybe the letters will even end up in the novel. Why not? Why not veer off in a new direction if the direction you're going isn't working? This is a novel. It's not a nuclear weapon that will blow up in your face if you do anything wrong.

And, anyhow, the point is to write a novel, not to write a novel that's perfect in every way in the very first draft. I don't know anyone who's ever accomplished that. So, allow yourself to write some bad stuff on your way to the fun stuff. Remind yourself that that's what revision is for, to fix the bad stuff. First drafts are supposed to be messy.

There may be a nasty voice whispering in the back of your mind: *This novel is so irredeemably bad that no amount of revision could ever fix it. Give up. You're wasting your time.* Tell that voice to shut up. Even if you are writing the worst novel ever (which would be very hard to do), you are not wasting your time.

I wrote my first novel in college. It earned me English honors, but it embarrassed me. Even with revision, it never became what I wanted. I counted it as a failure. And yet, a few years later, when I began writing what became my first *published* novel, there were dozens of times that I felt a surge of confidence: *Oh, yes, I know how to do this. I've written a novel before. I know how to now.* My first book hadn't been a failure. It had been a stepping stone.

Maybe you are writing something that will become a very, very good book. Maybe you're writing a stepping stone. Probably you can't tell right now—and that's okay. Just don't give up. Keep going. You can do it!

Sincerely,
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