

Since December 1<sup>st</sup>, I've been in edit mode. Sloppy edits, tight edits, spoken edits. Edit. Edit. Edit. Some days I'm editing edits of edits I thought I'd tightened up and could leave in the final draft pile.

It's all part of the process, and while it may not be the most glamorous, or best part of writing, it can still be fun. After all, things can still emerge about characters. For instance, each time I think I've sorted who is who, and what is what, they throw the latest edit at me and scream, "Plot twist!"

That is, until I was bowled over with a migraine from unmentionable places. The "want to crawl in bed and beg the room to stop spinning with medication around the clock" kind of migraine. And boy did I find it frustrating, when I realized I only had a small portion of my manuscript printed out that I could edit. You know, when the room stopped with the ugly horrible non-stop spinning action it seemed bent on.

I spent a lot of that time reading, both physically and listening to audio books. I edited. Wrote, and rewrote. I longed for my deep focus music and to get my edits into the computer before the papers were lost... again. After a loved one caught me attempting such a feat they confiscated my computer and phone to prevent me from further insanity. So, I sat at my desk with a pen and my notebook and carried on writing and editing.

The real problem arose when I needed a thesaurus, which I was pretty sure if it survived the global move it was tucked in a storage unit a few miles from my house. I could always use the online thesauruses, or so I'd convinced myself when we'd allowed the hefty book to be snugly packed away.

So without a single thought that he might be in a video meeting, I intruded into my husband's home office, plopped down on a chair by the window and sat staring out said window while sucking on a peppermint stick.

Finally prying my eyes away from the window I said, "I need a replacement word for slid. I can't end one chapter with it and begin the next with the very same word."

"Give me a minute," my husband said, shuffling three computers, two phones, an oversized mug, and a stack of papers around his desk. "Okay, give me the context."

"Slid, like slid into a room."

He hit a few keys on his computers, leaned onto the arm of his office chair, and then began reading a random slew of words out. I was lost in the knowledge that despite what I was told, the peppermint stick was doing nothing for my migraine but it sure was making my teeth sticky. I didn't really figure I needed to think too hard about the words being spoken. When the right word comes along, it just grabs me. But none of the words were grabbing me. They were all wrong in one fashion or another.

My silence grew as I turned my attention back to the window. I busied myself watching the construction crew across the street attempt to get the HVAC system hooked up. Then I was distracted by a pile of snow in another neighbor's yard, which led my attention to the ditch across the street and wondering if the ice there was thick enough to skate on.

"Did you hear me?"

"Yeah, but the words were all wrong," I said, considering alternative options.

"What now then?"

"Try searching slip," I said, pulling my attention back into the room.

Also a bust, since the top word was slither, and it made me think of villains from other books.

My mind now raced ahead of me, dragging me along for the ride as we considered cruel Ice Queens, Squirrels, and the word slither. My mind raced from one thought to the next: *Would the Ice Queen defeat the Fur Tribe? Why did they buy me that book?. Maybe I should stop worrying about the right word and go read the next chapter. Oh, look a fuzzy little squirrel out there, maybe if I watch how it moves I can come up with a good word! No, he's clearly scampering, jumping, darting, and diving. Far too excitable. Slither, slither, slither..*

"You okay?" my husband asked, his head appearing around the side of one of the monitors.

"Yeah," I said, popping the last bit of the peppermint stick in my mouth and making a mental note to brush my teeth shortly.

"You're awfully quiet."

"Mm, I'm stuck on slither."

"Huh?"

You see the problem with my writer's mind that it's always whirling and clanging away on the path far ahead of me. Always. When trying to sleep I'm often reminding my mind that it's time to be quiet and sleep, not come up with fantastic new story ideas. I have little phrases like, "It's time to sleep now, you're tired." Or "It's time to sleep now, so zip it."

Yet, even in sleep my brain seems to be busy. Maybe it's the questions I write in my small notebook each night. It's supposed to help clear the mind so you can sleep, and help you wake up with the answer. On the other hand, maybe I just have an overactive imagination.

When your mind jumps constantly from one thing to the next and is always in motion, you tend to forget that other people's minds meander. Or stroll, taking their time. Sometimes their minds simply have the gall to dawdle as they walk down the path of life. Unlike my mind, which is always miles ahead and slightly exasperated that people don't understand what I'm talking about.

So I did the only sensible thing I could think of in that moment, I dropped to the floor and slithered across it. Although honestly it probably looked a heck of a lot more like an army crawl. By the time I'd made it to the other side of the office, I reached a terribly weak arm up and gasped, "Want some coffee?"

Once the laughter subsided, I pointed out that slither was simply not going to work. One could not slither into this scene without giving it an entirely different feel and emotion than

I'd intended. Besides, now I had the vision of some fellow army crawling into a hospital room holding a cup of coffee. And besides, wasn't slithering reserved for villains?

"Fine," my husband said, "how about slink then?"

I stared blankly at him, having now retreated back to my seat by the window. I wasn't feeling the word. I wasn't feeling the emotion it evoked, it just wasn't right.

My husband decided to demonstrate how it could work. He marched out of the office, pulling the door closed behind him. I waited and slowly the door opened. A head appeared, it glanced all around, a leg came in, and eventually the rest of him too as he stuck close to the wall as he moved back towards his desk. It was strange and awkward, and probably very slinky like. But it was not right for the scene I was working on.

"No, absolutely not."

"But this is how I enter rooms!" he cried.

"Ahh," I said, "I understand now why the kids always think you're up to no good."

He slumped down into his office chair, "I was just trying to help."

Here's the thing, situations like this are not abnormal in our home. I once stormed into my husband's office, attempting to beat defeat as I snapped, "Okay, watch me, and describe everything I am doing. Then name it, just NAME what I am doing!"

I proceeded to act out what I wanted him to describe: a wry smile, a single eyebrow lifted, and the tipping of my head towards him all while raising my mug up to "clink" cups with some invisible person near me. I repeated this entire act several more times while my husband repeatedly tried to give the whole thing a single name.

None of which I accepted, because they were all wrong. Nothing we named fit what I was trying to convey for the mood I was writing about. He didn't complain though, he just shook his head and closed the door after I'd wandered off and failed to latch it properly.

As I sit, staring out an entirely different window scratching this all down on paper with a pen that's nearly out of ink, my mind moving faster than my hand can keep up with, it gives me pause as I realize just how much crazy my family lives with.

They've helped me name characters, challenged me to add random people, names, places, or ideas to stories. They are quick to ask what I'm jammed on, and shoot out suggestions no matter how bizarre, until an idea strikes and I'm off and running again. That, Dear Readers, is true love.



I've found myself staring out the office window more times than not lately while I wait on the printer to spit out more pages of my manuscript, or while I simply enjoy the small bit of woodland I can see from there.

The neighbor's snow pile melted and was rebuilt and melted yet again. I used to throw the curtain open each morning before beginning a short stretching regime to loosen up my back and declare if it was going to be cold or warm based on that snow pile. To be honest, I rather miss it and would eagerly welcome more snow just to see it rebuilt.

I finished the book about the Ice Queen and the Fur Tribes. I daren't say what happened lest you wish to read it yourself, but I will confess it was a delightful read. My son still refuses to tell me where he heard about it and what inspired him to buy it other than to cagily whisper, "I do have sources you know." I'm not sure who his sources are, because despite every effort to find out, I have failed. But I can tell you that the book is entitled *Sky Song* and is a delightful read or listen.

My migraine faded, eventually, only to return due to weather changes, and excess allergen exposures. My neurologist has a very fancy name for the type of migraines I live with, but to be honest I just refer to them as "blasted headaches", while attempting to stay distracted from the pain and well hydrated.

And I am still swamped with edits. Somedays I wonder if I will ever finish them, and other days I relish in making the needed changes, rewriting weak scenes to strengthen them. Sneaking in little things I wonder if anyone will notice. And, dare I confess, occasionally getting lost in what I wrote until some loud noise outside startles me and I drop my papers and have to sort them all out again.

The Reluctant Author.

