



(sxc.hu)

Wink

by NICK ROBINSON

Sometimes seclusion can create writer's block instead of cure it, turning the mouse pointer into a pest.

The computer screen was winking at him.

Wink.

Wink.

Wink.

The vertical line, the cursor, marking the insertion point on Microsoft Word, on the blank document he had opened over two hours ago. It was blinking at him. No, not blinking, *winking*. There was only one cursor, of course, so it couldn't possibly blink. It had to wink. He thought that was funny an hour ago when it first occurred to him, but now, another fruitless hour behind him, all humor had been lost, and it only reminded him of how much time he had wasted doing nothing.

Wink.

He arrived yesterday, to spend a weekend alone and away from everything. A weekend at his family cottage, alone on a lake of tranquil, tepid blue, and his thoughts would un-jangle themselves into coherent thoughts and sentences and pages and chapters and books. Well, he hoped they would at least.

He came in late in the evening, and he unloaded his food and clothes and sat on the dock to watch the sunset behind the trees across the lake. It was a magnificent purple and red, and he was sure that it would inspire brilliance ... the next morning. He couldn't come up with any thing



the first night, so he simply popped some popcorn in the microwave and watched the evening news until he couldn't keep his eyes open any longer.

He retired to the bedroom upstairs. The large king bed seemed especially empty when he flipped on the switch. The walls were covered with pictures taken from around the lake, pictures of his smiling wife and smiling kids and smiling dog. And a few of his smiling self as well. He promised aloud to call his family the next day, and he went to bed. And now, here he sat, a belly full of poached eggs and dry white toast and 4 slices of Canadian bacon and 2 glasses of orange juice and one of milk, sitting at his kitchen table, iTunes blaring over the wireless speakers, and...

Wink.

Nothing was coming to him. Nothing good at least. He had several ideas, some halfway decent, but no tangible thoughts were arising from the ashes. His mind had burned out, it seemed. Or perhaps it was still just too early. He needed to clear his mind a little; it was bad to sit and do nothing for extended periods of time. He needed to do some lawn work anyway, and maybe he would think of something while riding the lawnmower or trimming the hedges.

While he was raking up the piles of grass, loving the glorious fresh-cut smell, letting it run through his fingers as it fell into the garbage can, he started thinking of a man. A man he knew as a child, or he could have known. This man lived a normal life, or as normal as they come, with a wife and two kids, a boy and a girl. The boy was about his age, or the age of the main character in the story. He always wrote his stories in the first person. But, now, after having rushed into the house and quickly typing all these words down, he drew a blank again. He only stared at the cursor, and it winked back at him.

Wink.

He spent twenty minutes listening to The Killers on his iPod, staring at the cursor and desperately searching for somewhere to go now. What was so peculiar about this man? Was the man even important? Maybe he could tell a story about the man, and then segue into the actual story, kind of like Cormac McCarthy did in *No Country for Old Men*. And the story about the man could be a metaphor for the whole story. Yea, he liked where this was going. But he still had no idea what the story of the man was, or if it would be any good. All he had was that damn winking cursor, taunting him to come up with something.

He stood up and paced the cabin. He glanced up at the clock in the kitchen, and he thought he could make lunch. He boiled some macaroni noodles and poured in the cheese and made a turkey sandwich with lettuce and mayonnaise. It was good. He ate it on the picnic table on the lawn, not wanting to see the laptop. The sky was a dismal gray, but there were no clouds. It wasn't supposed to rain this weekend, so he wasn't worried.

He took some bread out of the bag when he threw his paper plate out and walked onto the dock. A family of swans was patiently waiting for their tasty snack. One mom, one dad, and four babies. The kids were still partially gray in their feathers, but still adorable. He would have to tell the wife and kids about them when he called. He sat back in front of the laptop screen, but he didn't open his document at first. He browsed his music library for several minutes, trying to find a



good block of artists he could listen to, preferably something that he wouldn't have to pay attention to for a while, so he could concentrate on the writing. He couldn't do anything, let alone write, in absolute silence, and the TV would distract him. He settled on Ben Folds.

Wink.

The dreaded file stared him down, but he would not allow himself to distract again. He would write whatever came to him, and he would review it afterwards. Two hours rolled by effortlessly as Ben Folds was succeeded by Billy Idol and then Billy Joel. Somewhere in the middle of "Scenes from an Italian Restaurant," he stopped. He scrolled back to the top of the three-page document, not remembering anything he had written.

It was crap. Pure dribble. He cut out some passages he thought might be salvageable, and deleted the bulk of it. He was now left with half a page of scattered thoughts and nonsensical connections. And the winking cursor. He saved it, closed the laptop, and went back outside. He sat in a lawn chair, staring aimlessly into space, for the better part of half an hour. It was four o'clock on day two of his three-day weekend. He had written hardly anything. Half of the time he had set aside for writing was gone. And he still had no idea what he was writing. He went for a run, with the thought in mind to settle the matter after dinner.

He loved running on the backcountry roads around their cottage. They were usually dirt, usually without cars, and always full of great scenery. He started at one of his favorite places, a small lagoon a mile from the lake. As he ran past, a loon swooped down on the bank, scattering a pair of bullfrogs that croaked as they splashed down. He ran past a field of sunflowers, a field of corn, a field of wheat, and another field of corn. He waved to a woman rocking on a screened porch, and a yellow Labrador came bounding up a hill as he ran by. He got back to his cottage an hour and a half later, dripping with sweat but completely refreshed. He grilled a couple burgers, chowed down with Michael Jackson playing in the background, and sat in front of the TV, picking his teeth with a toothpick. Then he remembered he had to write still.

Wink.

It was hopeless. He paced the room, went into different rooms, went outside, changed his music, put on the TV, put on a movie, but nothing helped. He climbed into bed at quarter past midnight, groggy and muttering to himself. He dreamed the whole night of one thing: a single, fiery eye, filling his entire field of vision, constantly and methodically winking.

The next morning he opened the computer, but only to play games until he got hungry. He ate some crackers and drank three beers at 11:17. He took his small johnboat out and fished for a while, but only caught seaweed. He swam to an island close to his dock and back, and he did it again, and again. He thought of nothing. He didn't even seem to be in control of his body, just acting on instinct, as if he were sleepwalking. When he climbed onto the dock after the third swim, he heard a chime off in the distance. He thought it was the wind chime that his wife had bought at a garage sale five years ago and then hung next to the front door to their cottage, but the wind was hardly blowing, certainly not hard enough to make the wooden clacker strike the chimes hard enough to hear all the way to the lake. It was his cell phone.



He ran inside to answer it, missing the call from his wife. He dried himself off, and called her back.

"Hey sweetie," he said. "Did you call me for something?"

"Oh, yea, we were just wondering where you were, baby," she returned in a chipper voice that broke through his dead-to-this-world demeanor. "You were supposed to call when you were on the road, and we thought you would be home by now."

"Oh, what time is it?"

"It's about five-ish."

Shit, he thought. "Oh, well, I guess I've been keeping busy, I just lost track of time," he said, trying to convince himself he wasn't lying.

"Oh yea? How much do you think you got?"

Now he had to lie. "Oh, I don't know. I have a lot of ideas floating around up there. I've gotten some of them down, but its more the thinking process. You know how relaxed I get out here. This weekend has been real good for me, babe."

"Oh, that's great. So, when do you think your gonna get home. Your kids miss you."

"Umm, not too much longer I hope. You know, I'm on such a roll right now, it might be late tonight. Are you gonna be okay on your own?"

"I've been okay on my own for the last two days. I don't know how much trouble I'll run into in the next six hours."

She laughed hard into the receiver, and he could feel the warmth of it on the other end. He wanted to pack up and leave now, to go home to his wife, to abandon his dreams of accomplishment. But he needed to get something done, something for the books, so he could not write the weekend off as a waste of time.

"Well, if you're sure ... I love ya babe."

"I love you, too. Hurry home!"

"Yea, yea, will do. Talk to ya later." He hung up.

Wink.

He turned and saw the laptop sitting on the table, mocking him in silence. The Mexican standoff ended quickly, as he pounced on the table, and he quickly began typing. Time didn't mean anything, there was no cabin; he was simply writing, and that's all there was. He wrote a bit, connected a few dots, and read back over his work. Well, it was definitely an improvement, but it needed a lot of fine-tuning. It seemed to still be in the idea stage, and he needed to translate the idea into something coherent and readable. His eyes began to blur, and he tried rubbing them, and he blinked them repeatedly.

Blink.

Blink.

Blink.



He stood up with a start. He thought he was getting tired, he wasn't thinking clearly. He walked over to the stove and turned it on; it was one of those old ranges you had to light with a lighter, and he placed a pot over the flame to boil some water. He went back to the table, and stared at the screen for God-knows how long. He could not write; all he saw was the damned cursor.

Wink.

He woke suddenly feeling an intense heat on the back of his neck. He turned to see flames coming slowly across the wooden floor, moving from the kitchen and the stove and the unused pot of water. He heard a window break somewhere deep in his house, and he stood and ran out the door. His cell phone was somehow in his pocket; he must have put it there after talking to his wife. He pulled it out and dialed the fire department. He pocketed the phone and stood back and stared at his beloved cottage, his family's getaway, going up in flames. All the memories and pictures and good times yet to come. Gone. Sure, they would rebuild, but it wouldn't be the same. All because of some damn writer's block. And some winking cursor.

He debated about going back for the laptop. He could see that the flames had not yet hit the table, and it was close to the door. He could get it. But was it worth it? He still had the ideas in his head, did he need what he had written? There was nothing on the computer he didn't have backed up, except for what he had written this weekend, and so it all came down to those few strained words. He groaned and shuffled towards the door.

As he moved on the doorknob, he stopped. He looked to the right, at a window in the kitchen, and he could see the flames flicker up and down, up and down. They were a bright orange, with a splash of red around the edges. He looked closer, drawn for some unknown reason, but then it dawned on him: the fire was blinking at him. No, not blinking, *winking*.

Wink.

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