Unblocked

A Short Story

By Maryanne Peters

Vincent Page wrote “High Flies the Hawk”. You may have heard of it. It sold well. It sold well enough to earn a retainer for his second book. There is always the assumption that every writer has a second book in them if their first is any good at all. But where does that assumption come from?

For Vincent staring at a blank page every morning it seemed not only to be an unfair assumption, but a destructive one. The very notion that the second book was there in his head or in his fingertips seemed to create unbearable pressure. If the words were there, why did they not come out?

The crazy thing was that he had put forward his pitch. It was a different from “Hawk” but the publisher loved it. A heavy advance payment had been made. Expectations were high, but that seemed to make it even harder.

“Writer’s Block” sounds like toy to be cast aside, but it is a wall. Worse than that a high dam filled to soil behind, so that even breaking through it yields nothing. All manner of stimuli, or thoughtless meditation, or walks along the beach, were doing nothing. How is a blockage like that to be removed?

It was one afternoon in mid-spring when there was a knock on his door that mercifully pulled Vincent away from his empty screen. He opened the door and there stood a tall and handsome looking man dressed in jeans with a college sweater over a pressed shirt, carrying a small suitcase.

“Hello, my name is Anton Robinson,” said the man, thrusting his hand forward. “Your publisher has sent me around to talk to you.”

“If you are looking for the return of the retainer you need to read the contract,” snapped Vincent. After another day of wordless frustration, he was short in temper.

“No, you misunderstand – I am here to help. May I come in.”

Vincent hesitated for a moment. He was frustrated, and that is an emotion not easily shared. But here was something different, somebody new, so he stood aside to let the stranger enter.

“I understand that progress has been slow,” said Anton, but Vincent knew that it was non-existent. “The idea is that we talk and try to find a way through any obstructions.”

Vincent shrugged his shoulders. He was thinking that he should try anything. He said – “Sure. Why not. I was thinking about coffee? Shall I put some on?”

“Good idea’, said Anton. He looked around the room to find a chair without books or papers on it. He had to clear a place on the sofa before he could sit.

“I understand that for your second book it will be a sequel of sorts but from the woman’s perspective,” Anton called out while Vincent was in the kitchen area.

It was the one thing that Vincent was sure of. He had contemplated throwing that in the bin too, but it was the single thing he clung on to. “Yes,” he called back.

“The publisher loves that,” said Anton. “There was a strong female readership for “Hawk”, but if you are to write this in the first person as you did for your first novel then perhaps you have yet to find your female voice?”

“What do you mean?” Vincent had returned to the room. The coffee machine gurgled in the distance. "How are you going to help me see things from a woman's perspective? you're a guy too".

“Yes, I am that,” said Anton. “But I have brought something with me that might help. In fact, I am sure that it will help, if I can persuade you to take part in something experimental?”

Vincent had returned with two mugs of coffee. He suddenly felt that he could not even take a sip from his mug. So much coffee and still he was tired. It was as if the search for words was the most strenuous thing that he had ever done. What was this man’s solution.

“I’ll try anything,” he said. “I mean, I am willing to find stimulation where I can.”

Anton had put a box on the table, and he motioned Vincent to open it. Vincent glanced quizzically towards the stranger, but he had already warmed to him by the time they both held a mug of coffee. He put his down and flicked open the box.

“Is this a dress?” asked Vincent, pulling it out to confirm that it was. It was pink and stretchy, with bare shoulders and a short hem – maybe mid thigh. “It feels slightly damp?”

“You don’t have to wear it,” said Anton. “But it is such a small thing to do. Even if it as just a vague chance of helping you to channel a female vide, it might be worth trying?”

“Can I wear it over the top of my clothes?”

“No. It has to touch the skin. You should be naked. Don’t worry. I am not interested in seeing another man naked. Change in your room if you like.” It seemed as if Anton had already made the assumption that Vincent would put it on. He was ready to wait. He leaned back and sipped his coffee gently.

“Fuck it. Why not?” said Vincent. He took the dress and the box to his bedroom at the back of the small cottage, and stripped off his clothes. He had a moment of doubt as he stood there in his underpants. Surely they could stay on? His genitals might be visible? But naked means naked. Off they came. The dress went over his head and he pulled it down

Vincent had never worn a dress before. Why would he have? It was surprisingly comfortable. It seemed to be tight but not constricting, and padded to give him a feminine shape. There was no sign of anything disturbing the front below the waist, which might have disappointed him, yet it didn’t.

He returned to the living room and walked around to stand in front of his strange visitor.

“What now,” said Vincent. He could not help but return Anton’s smile. It was after all, a ridiculous scene – a man in a pink dress, his sparse beard unshaven and his hairy legs and arms on full display, standing in front of somebody he did not know at all.

“You need a feminine name,” said Anton. “The dress is helping, but a female voice needs a female speaker. Give her a name. Vicky perhaps?”

“Her name is Zara,” said Vincent. It was not the character name. He corrected himself – “No. My name is Zara.”

“Hello Zara,” said Anton. “The dress is a great fit. It is a simple cut but feminine. How does it make you feel?”

“Disgustingly hairy,” said Zara. It was her voice. Vincent had no problem with body hair. From somewhere inside him a new voice had emerged, and with it seemed to come a flood of thoughts. Foremost was the questions – who is this man? Why did I let him into my house? I am a woman alone and I need to be more cautious. Am I being manipulated? Do I like being manipulated? Do I find his relaxed self-assuredness attractive?

“You do have nice legs,” said Anton with a cheeky smile. “Just a little furry.”

“I can fix that,” said Zara. “Just give me a minute. Help yourself to some more coffee.”

Zara found the bathroom. It was a man’s bathroom. There was nothing that a woman could use beyond the razor, and a new disposable blade was needed, and some water in the sink with legs over the bath. Then the forearms. It all seemed to be necessary. The purpose was to see the world through a woman’s eyes, and those eyes are just a small part of a woman’s body.

She found herself thinking again about the man in the living room as she admired her work and the smooth tracks she was making through the growth that now seemed so dirty. He said his name was Anton, but was that really his name? It was a European name – exotic somehow. But Robinson – common and American. His mother could be French. Her name might be Monique. She had met Anton’s father while he was picking grapes on her father’s small vineyard. It was love, but her father disliked Americans. But the vineyard was in trouble and the father of Monique’s lover was interested in French wine of that very region, and he was rich.

As Zara toweled her legs she wondered – where did this come from? Here was a story. Here were four characters already well defined but taking full form with each interaction. This was not the novel that Vincent had sat down to write, but then … there was no novel.

Zara looked in the mirror over the sink and saw Vincent framed in it. He looked pathetic. He was unshaven and that made him look dirty. She selected another razor. But most of all he looked confused and blank. Here was a man who was empty. He did only have one story in him, and now that was gone, he was finished.

The beard was gone now. The bedraggled hair was pulled back to help Zara see a new face to replace his. Blank in its own way in the way that a canvas awaits splashes of brightly colored paint. But not empty. The eyes were alive – wider than Vincent’s had ever been, and full of thoughts and dreams.

Zara stepped out into the living room. Anton was standing in the kitchen. He appeared to be making himself at home. But she only cast him a glance, and perhaps a gesture to confirm that he was free to do as he liked. He was looking at the desk top and the screen and keyboard. She rushed to it, she sat and started typing.

The keyboard clattered and text appeared. Zara barely had time to sit back. The story was flowing and she was like a cork in a river, just bobbing along with a flow many times greater than she was.

Then suddenly she stopped. It was not her. The flow stopped just as it had started, as if the cork was cast onto a rock. The story required a conversation between the young lovers. She had nothing to say.

She turned to Anton who had returned to the sofa and had picked up a book Vincent had been reading – “Classic French Vineyards”.

“How do I look,” said Zara to Anton. “What do I look like?”

“In need of a more feminine look, I think,” said Anton. “But it is still early in the afternoon so maybe we can arrange something for you. I have shoes that will match what you are wearing.” He was holding up something else from the box on the coffee table. Wedge sandals decorated with polished stones, that just happened to be a perfect fit for Zara’s larger than average feet.

Anton drove a Maserati and he drove it fast. Somehow as Zara sat in the passenger seat she felt like she had never felt before. It seemed as if she had placed her life in the hands of somebody she barely knew and who was only a foot or two away from death. Of course, all passengers do that, but only now did she understand it. Zara was fragile and trusting, and he was powerful and in control. She had no problem with this disparity in position. It was her choice.

He pulled up outside a beauty salon. It was not far from the cottage on the beach, but she had never noticed it. Why would she?

“Let me arrange this,” said Anton. “I will pay. I will charge it up to the publisher. I think we are making progress – don’t you?”

She waited while he spoke with the lady in charge. She was looking across at Zara with some disdain. Zara reached up to push away some hair. It was long, unwashed and greasy. She felt like an animal, a wild hog perhaps, who had strayed into the backstage at a beauty pageant. She had to stop herself from running for the door.

“Zara, is it?” the lady said. “Now let’s see what we can do to make you as pretty as a picture, Sweetheart.”

Zara surrendered herself by lying back in a chair where her hair could be washed and her face treated with something powerful. If she had any doubts then they would need to take a back seat to all the other thoughts flooding through her mid at the same time. Thoughts about the story that was rapidly taking shape in her brain, including detail like the color of the geraniums in the pots outside the window of the old farmhouse at the center of the vineyard.

“Your friend Anton has suggested that you have an inner cleansing at the same time,” the lady in charge of the salon said. “It is a service that we do offer. Some people say that it is a transformative experience.”

“Sure. Whatever,” said Zara. She had taken the small gap once her hair was in curlers to scribble down a few ideas, as she as becoming increasingly concerned that they might disappear, being shoved aside by so many other things.

It was only when the warm oily liquid was injected up her anus that she fully understood what “inner cleansing” was, and by then it was almost done.

The finishing touch was eyelash extensions and a little makeup. The curlers were taken out and her hair was brushed until it shone and bounced.

“How do you feel,” said Anton, reappearing to join Zara in viewing the new woman in the mirror.

“Like a woman,” she said. “I know how it feels to be vulnerable and yet powerful at the same time.”

“And how about that story?”

“I need to get to work. Can you drive me home?”

“Better than that,” said Anton. “While you have been turned into a literary goddess, I have been back to the cottage to start preparing dinner for both, provided that I am invited, that is?”

“Of course, you should share the meal you have made,” she said. “But I am not sure that I will be good company. I have so much in my head I think I will be typing through the night.”

“I am here to help you,” he said. “My job is to unblock.” He had produced a platinum credit card and he was paying the salon.

He drove her back to the cottage while she admired herself in the vanity mirror. She had been given a small bag of cosmetics but she suddenly dreaded returning to a house largely devoid of all things feminine. She now understood the importance of knowing her own voice. For this book it was definitely female. For “Hawk” it had not been. But there was a book that seemed to be the essence of Vincent. After that was written it was as if the essence had been spilt and could never be returned to the vessel it came from.

It seemed that Vincent was an empty bottle. Zara was overflowing. She shook her curls and smiled. The scenery sped past her window. There was a man at the wheel – she could see his strong hairy backed hands and wondered what it might be like to feel those on her body.

She rushed past him as he held the door, turning on the lamp in the adding evening light to find her keyboard and make it sing.

He laughed. It seemed to bring a warmth to the room to add to the smells coming from the oven.

Her fingers seemed to dance across the keyboard. Her nails were as short as they had been but were now shaped and painted, and her hands softened – somehow it made everything easier, as if softer flesh made the fingers lighter and quicker.

The story flowed. There seemed no end in sight. Where was it headed? It was a love story, and the passions were rising. Was it too early for the expression of their love to be turned physical. He was strong and eager, and she was too. What would it be like? She was forced to stop.

The silence drew Anton to her side.

“It is a sex scene,” she said. “I am skirting around it, but it will happen. He will take her. She will submit to him. I am just a little uncertain.”

“How can you write about sex as a woman if you've never had the experience yourself?” he said. “Why don’t you come with me. Let me show you something.” He held out his hand. It was the strong hard that had held the steering wheel. Again she trusted it – she trusted him. Everything he said would work was working.

He led her to the bedroom. He lifted the pink dress from her body. It seemed as if the body that had been in contact with the dress was softer and smoother than the parts that she had shaved herself, or the parts that had been stripped then emolliated at the salon. She had no idea that the moisture she felt in the dress was strong female hormones that even within a day were working their magic.

"Just lie back and feel the womanhood flooding in,” he said.

She was unblocked.

The End

Erin’s seed: “The publisher of a blocked writer sends somebody around - a great big handsome guy who has been sent "to help you see things from a woman's perspective".