



Dreams and the Writer

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PICTURE THE SCENE. You've dreamed endlessly about finding a publisher for your first novel. You've spent years researching, writing, editing, all the while doubting you've got what it takes to be a 'proper' writer, but now you're talking to someone who wants to make that dream a reality.

'This is a dream come true,' you say.

And the publisher asks, 'What do you plan to write next?'

We writers are the ultimate dreamers. We invent fantasy worlds, inhabited by characters we've imagined whilst driving, walking, hiding under our desks. We give birth to characters, kill them off, delete anyone who doesn't move the plot forward. But when it comes to fulfilling career dreams, there's rarely a moment for us to sit and enjoy our achievements. There's always a question or comment that'll pop that dream's bubble, that'll ground us in an instant and bring the impermanence of any writerly success into focus. Rejection and that need to keep generating commercial ideas, to keep writing regardless of what's happening in our personal lives, to avoid 'churning' out the same stories in slightly different ways, to not letting negative reviews cover us with fear. The dream-bursting happens at every stage, from numerous gatekeepers, and still we just keep writing.

When I blogged about my fourth novel being optioned for film, one writer emailed me. He felt the need to say that I was making a fool of



myself by putting my news in the public domain. He explained that because so many books get optioned, never actually becoming a film, that there was an unspoken understanding amongst ‘proper’ writers that the achievement wasn’t to be celebrated. In effect, I was being told not to dream, not to feel proud and that industry expectation was for me to not make a fuss. I was to dismiss an ‘insignificant’ film option and to move on to my next project.

The thing missed though was that it wasn’t ‘insignificant’ for *me*. Having my novel optioned offered validation when I still, four novels in, felt like an imposter in an industry where louder voices made me question if I had what it would take to maintain a career.

But I did what he said. I wanted to be a ‘proper’ writer. I deleted the blog and moved on to the next project.

And then the film was funded, and production began, and postproduction happened. Still I remained reserved, grounded, dismissive even, in public. In private I dreamed of one day watching that film.

Last night I did just that. I watched the film of my novel; alone, no eyes on me, no need to alter my expression for fear of upsetting the director or actors. I drank a cup of tea, wore pyjamas and heard the words I’d typed – one day, years ago, not feeling like a ‘proper’ writer – being brought to life on my TV screen. A dream achieved. So far from insignificant.

I guess, today, I’ve finally realised that if it means not dreaming, not hoping, not believing in my stories, then I’m not sure I ever want to be a ‘proper’ writer. Instead, I’ll just keep being a writer who dreams.