



Writer's Block

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THERE'S A LOT to be said for writer's block. It can alleviate RSI, back pain and eye strain. It might be the gateway drug to any number of urgent chores. Your dog might finally get a shampoo. Your carpet might get hoovered to within an inch of its life. That crazy pile of leaves that's reached epic proportions in your yard might finally get composted. If it goes on longer than a day or two you might decide to get another income stream going. Daniel Day-Lewis, when he got fed up with his chosen art form of acting, took a year out to learn how to make shoes from a master cobbler in Florence. I don't know any master cobblers in Florence and am indisputably ham-fisted when it comes to any kind of needlework, shoe-related or otherwise, but I still find this thought incredibly comforting as I slather the umpteenth layer of Pledge onto my coffee table to avoid the screen. The point is...yeah, I don't know what the point is, actually. I'm blocked so I can't for the life of me find a neat maxim at this juncture that sums it all up. And that's fine. Really. By now, I'm fully indoctrinated into the Julia Cameron School of Thinking, as laid out in her seminal handbook *The Artist's Way*, where she states that writer's block needs to be radically reconfigured as a sign that the writer has too many ideas, not too few. When I read that for the first time, whilst wrestling with my first stage play, it wasn't so much a lightbulb moment as the cue for a full-scale *Son et lumière* extravaganza in my head. Of course! Yes, I thought. *I'm not stuck. I've just got more creative options than I could possibly know what to do with. There's a log-jam going on.* The question is...how to ease the log-jam? I now realise the thing to do is a) not panic; b) distract yourself by... well, doing anything other than writing, basically. Chopping veg, picking



up litter, making shoes (unless you're me, for the aforementioned reasons). And then, during your displacement activity of choice, eventually you'll start to get a few inklings coming through, maybe a few lines of dialogue or a random image you need to scribble down. And, as you do so, these ideas may well put forth a few more tendrils that you note down too. If you don't get too militant at this stage about daily word-counts or staggered goals, but go gently then often enough you'll find yourself back typing and tinkering with increasing momentum and before you know it, you're well into a first draft of, well, what may not yet be clear. It might start out as journaling, morph into a gothic novella, moonlight for a time as a kiss-and-tell memoir, and then end up as poetry. But none of that matters right now. The important thing is you're writing again. And the dog shampoo is well and truly back on the shelf.