



when the words come

commentary by eboni rafus

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I've been told that I have a way with words.

I must admit I have a literary—if not dramatic—flair. I document my life through journals. I express my feelings with poetry. Every story I share becomes a theatrical scene, complete with stage directions. Even my eMails are overly descriptive. I can't casually mention that I went on a date. Instead, I feel compelled to tell you exactly how I wore my hair, what my date's cologne smelled like, and the precise number of butterflies overtaking my stomach as I awaited the end-of-night kiss.

Yet, there are times when I *can't* write. My powers of observation are weakened, my senses numbed, my vocabulary elusory. Expressing an emotion...communicating meaning...offering up a satisfactory description of anything at all...these basic tasks suddenly feel nothing short of impossible.

I put pen to paper and wait. I sit at my computer and wait. I lay on my bed, stare at the dreamcatcher above me, and pray for words. I take a walk—dodging baby strollers and dogs that strain against their leashes, picking delicate dandelion spores—and wish for words. Nothing. It's as if they're rebelling against me, the right ones refusing to come, and I feel abandoned.

Other times, the phrases just flow out of me. The impetus might be a play or a movie or a particularly overwhelming piece of art. Quite often, I'm inspired by the writings of others. More commonly, some personal event quickens my muse and, without warning, the sky opens; words fall like rain. I have to scramble to get them all on paper. The ending of a short story I've been working on, for weeks, suddenly feels obvious. A single word fastened to a sentence transforms it into lyric verse. Barely eating, not sleeping, I write and write and write. When I *do* doze off, I dream *more* words and wake up scribbling down pieces of faintly emergent clauses.

The words come, and they're good.

I don't understand why it's this way...why, at times, I struggle to write and, at other times, seem to expend no effort. I've tried to pin down whatever infused me so that I can recreate the stimulation on cue, if needed...I've tried to catch the rhythm between drought and flood, but there's no pattern.

I guess there's a reason that writing is considered an art and not a science.

So, now, I write when I can and I stop when I'm done. Then, I wait patiently for the words to come again. I've learned to enjoy when they do, and not panic when they don't. I know, by now, that they always return. I realize that being a writer doesn't mean you must write all the time; being a writer means you *want* to write all the time. And when it's time to write, you do.

Of course, it doesn't hurt to have a way with words.

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