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Writing, Rewound

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Writing, Rewound

Rebecca Carlson

The editor gives the book to the writer, a crisp stack of white pages held together with a large, black binder clip and years of hard work.

"Great job!" he says.

The writer takes the book and holds it close. She strokes the cover page absently every few minutes on the subway ride home.

When she gets home she puts the book on her desk, admires it for a moment, then pulls off the binder clip and throws it in a drawer. She ruffles the pages until the stack is slipping across her desk. Then, she places the whole rough pile in the printer out-tray.

The writer watches closely as page after page is sucked into the printer and is wiped blank again.

For a while she ignores her desk. Then, one Saturday she takes a letter out of its treasured place in the top drawer, folds it gently, seals it in an envelope addressed to her, and puts it on top of a stack of mail. It sits there for a while, then the whole stack dwindles and disappears.

She makes phone calls, paces in and out of the room. Writes letters more and more cheerfully.

The calendar above her desk changes pictures, but all her days look the same.

The writer is absorbed by her computer, fingers attached to the keys as she scrolls through her entire manuscript, end to beginning. She erases as she reads, watching words vanish beneath her fingers. Sometimes her hands fly across the keyboard and whole sentences, paragraphs even, disappear at once. Other days she has to drag the stubborn words off the page; hours go by as she frowns, pauses, tries to forget what she was trying to say.

One counterclockwise year later, she reaches the beginning. All that is left is the pristine first page. The cursor flashes in the code of unsaid words.

"Here goes nothing," she says, hands hovering just above the keys.

The house is quiet; the first rays of light illuminate the dust motes dancing across the room. The writer closes Document 1, then sits at her bare, grey-filmed desk for a moment, thinking.

For a moment she almost hears her characters, frantically whispering their stories as the writer leaves the room. She slips into bed, stretching out beneath the mounds of blankets. Her eyes close and she begins to dream, one filled with words that fade into images.

The book disappears into her imagination.