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Rebecca Galardo: The following podcast may contain swear words.
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Hi, I'm Rebecca Galardo, the host of "Alone In A Room With Invisible People". I'm here with author and teacher Holly Lisle and today's topic is The Inner Critic. So, before we get to the actual topic of today's podcast though, we kinda want to talk about what we're currently working on, so Holly, what are you working on right now?

Holly Lisle: Okay, at the moment I'm working on lesson six of *How To Write Short Stories*, the course was running really long and I gotta tell you this lesson's running really, really long. But this is an important one, this is how to write to a theme, how to write for anthologies, how to make your own anthologies if you're wanting to do it to promote your work independently and it's turning into a really fun lesson. And in fiction, okay, last week, *Viper's Nest*, which is number five in the Longview series, next to last one, went live and I also got some new editions of some of my old stuff out; *Fire in the Mist*, *Mind of the Magic*, *Bones of the Past*, all three got a brand new edition with a lot of clean up and bug fixes and new...

RG: New covers.

HL: Afterwards, new covers and new afterwards and, yeah, so new ISBNs, the whole thing because I changed enough that I actually had to do that. Okay, so what about you?

RG: *Viper's Nest*, that's the Cadence Drake world, right?

HL: Right, that's Cadence Drake, *Settled Space*. When it's done, the entire six story series is essentially volume three of the Cadence Drake, *Settled Space* thing, but it's told from the point of view of everybody who isn't Cady. So, it's like everything that's going on in *Settled Space* after *War Paint* and before *The Wishbone Conspiracy*.

RG: Oh nice, okay, so that was one thing that I didn't know, that it's in between her different stuff. It's a world going on behind the scenes of her world.

HL: But she's in this episode, she's in *Viper's Nest* and she is going to be the starting scene in the next one, which I don't have titled yet, but which I'm kind of tentatively thinking about calling *The Owner's Tale*.

RG: [laughs] I love the owner. I've been following that series; I'm enjoying it a lot.

HL: [laughs] Okay, so what are you working on?

RG: I am currently working on - so I had a book that I finished on the sixth of July, I sent it off to you and Matt, for the content edits and I've got it back and I have it in the hands of a beta reader, who is a romance nut; that's actually part of the things that we bonded over when we were younger. So, she is a romance nut, she's going through it and I have asked her a question or two and she told me to 'shutty' so [laughs] I am staying out of her way until she is finished with the book.

What I'm working on right now though is I'm actually taking your short story course, because even though I have written a whole bunch of short stories and even indie published them and they've sold and the customers have been happy with what they paid for, you know I gave them more value than they paid, which is something I learned from you. But this is - something that I wanted to mention too, is that I never feel like I'm ever going to be at the point where I don't need to learn anymore. So, I felt like I wanted to know different ways of going through and different ways of thinking, I guess, through stories, through plotting, through all this different stuff. So, I'm taking your courses and I'm on lesson three now. I'm not spending that much time on them, so I did a lesson a

day up until yesterday, so I'm on lesson three and these stories are part of the same world as the romance novel.

So, the romance novel is in a setting called Wandalucia and I want to take some of the little characters that are kind of mentioned in there and bring them into their own stories. So, I am really loving the way that the How To Write Short Stories is working because already, I've found some stuff making the list that you tell people to make in there. I am just overjoyed at how different and weird my stories are gonna be because my subconscious, my muse, is incredibly happy with this, with where I am, with the neat little things that you find inside your brain and then you find ways to put them in the stories.

HL: Oh god I love that.

RG: Yes. Yeah and it's amazing because your muse - it picks up different things, like I've got three stories, three different characters, three completely different women to write stories on and it picked out specific things for those women that would fit them best. So, the way your brain works is just incredible.

HL: Yeah, it really is, which kind of takes us back to our topic of the day...

RG: Ah yes, perfect segue, or segment, or - yeah, I don't know how to say that, I don't remember what it is - but you did it perfectly.

So, our topic today is The Inner Critic. So why don't you define the inner critic for us.

HL: Okay, the inner critic gets a bad rap and sometimes deservedly so. Your brain has two separate creative elements; it has your muse, which is your right brain and it has your inner critic, which is your left brain. And these two parts of you connect through what's called the corpus callosum, they talk to each other a little bit but not very well and you have - when you learn how to tap into it - this amazing ability to just pull ideas out of seemingly nowhere and turn them into fiction. And then you have this ability, that you are very well aware of, to bring in your inner critic - your 'you' - and have that part of yourself look at what you have written and say okay, this is good, this is bad. The problem people have with their inner critics is there that the vast majority of them have not learned how to switch between right brain tasks and left brain tasks, so their inner critic is also trying to create fiction and this is a recipe for, just, disaster. [Laughs].

This is, oh god, this is the worst thing you can do to your creativity, is turn your left brain lose in that initial phase where you are coming to grips with the story ideas and the concepts and your right brain needs to be treated with this delicacy and this tenderness that your left brain just does not have. Your left brain is kind of a dick [laughs] and this is true for all of us in that we have this part of us that protects us and that keeps us safe and that makes sure that we do not make fools of ourselves in public and that's the left brain and the right brain is this six year old kid, who is exuberant and full of life and not afraid to try anything and will jump off the side of a barn holding an umbrella to try to fly. And for those of us who used to spend a lot of our time trying to fly, your right brain can really get your hurt if you're not careful.

But these two elements can be connected, you can learn how to work back and forth between the two of them, and when you do that you stop having a problem with your inner critic.
So...

RG: So, you're saying it's kind of like a skill that you can learn to master?

HL: It is absolutely a skill that you can learn to master. It takes a little bit of time, it takes some thinking exercises, it's one of the things that I cover in a number of classes. It's one of the things that I actually include in the free flash fiction class. I always sneak up

on this in the exercises, in the worksheets and stuff that I give, I never say "okay well this is where you're going to be using your left brain, now this is where you're going to be using your right brain". Because that tips them off and you want to keep them mixed up.

So I just put together worksheets in which I ask questions and the different parts of your brain will answer them differently and as you start shifting back and forth and doing these tasks, you start bringing your two brains together and having them work together without them getting in each other's way. But, that's not - it took me a while, it took me a - oh boy - when I first started, first off when I first started, I really sucked [laughs].

RG: [laughs] Yeah, we'll have to have a podcast episode on just how you started and why and everything.

HL RG Yeah, yeah. But I did not discover the role of my left brain until seven years in, at the point where I learned how to do a revision for the first time and I had been struggling back and forth and writing stories and killing editors. I would get these things saying "oh dear god, no more" [laughs]. Actually, they were real letters back then, but you would get these editorial requests to never send them anything else...

RG: Oh my god.

HL: Because you were so horrible.

RG: Now talk about some stick with it attitude, is that you got these horribly depressing letters from editors and you just kept going.

RG: Oh, I did, I saved the damn things, I put them in a big ass shoebox and I saved them all. By the time I actually sold my first thing, which was two sonnets, believe it or not, so a science fiction magazine. One a dirty sonnet about a sexbot and the other one about a hard drive crash and they were both done in beautiful Shakespearean, perfectly rhythmmed, perfectly set out sonnet format and those were my first two sales. And those were created with almost no help from my inner critic, because I had - by that time - discovered how to keep that bastard in check.

RG: Okay, so it's more like... Would you define it as more, like, a skill that you learn and can continue - like riding a bike, you might get a little rusty but you can hop back on and it doesn't take long - or would you describe it like exercising and building muscles and if you quit for a long time, then you're gonna have to redo everything over again.

RG: No, this is bicycle. This is pure bicycle.

RG: Okay. Awesome.

HL: Once your right brain and your left brain can start talking together, then your right brain never shuts up. So that's a different episode too.

RG: Okay, so, we've got - how does your inner critic, why does it do what it does? You said that it's about protecting you?

HL: It sees danger, it tells you to stay safe, it tells you to be kind of invisible, it tells you to be careful. Your right brain is going 'climb that tree, leap off of that swing set, go down the sliding board standing on your feet'. This, by the way, was my very first incident of getting in trouble with my kindergarten teacher wherein I decided I was going to do the equivalent of snowboarding down the sliding board, standing up, on my shoes and I did it and it was awesome, it was so cool. And she grabbed me and took me in and I had to talk to the principal [laughs].

RG: [laughs]

HL: Because apparently they didn't want us trying to kill ourselves at school. And she was pretty sure that's what I was doing.

RG: Well plus the fact that you were doing that and then other kids are going to say "oh my god, that's so cool" and they might not be as well coordinated as you were and, you know, then, you know, injuries [laughs].

HL: Yes, that too, I was a bad influence.

RG: So basically when you are looking at your writing, the right brain is saying 'I'm gonna do all these fanciful things with my work, I'm gonna do this, I'm gonna do that' and then your left brain is saying 'well you can't write for shit, this is not done well, this is... you're using too many commas, not enough commas, what is that word even doing in there?' that sort of thing.

HL: Yeah, that's exactly it. But not only that, your right brain is the one who wants to write. Your right brain is this creative drive that you have inside you that is just desperate to be fed and sitting in a room with invisible people is how you feed this. But your left brain is going 'no that's crazy talk, noooo, noooo. We need a safe job, we need a secure job, we need to know that there's a retirement plan and whatever those thingies are called when you save up money' - you can tell who doesn't have one...

RG: 401K [laughs].

HL: [laughs] That's the one. Yeah, no I'm still on that sliding board, standing up down the sliding board now.

RG: So how in general - like how do you shut it up when you need to shut it up?

HL: First you have to acknowledge that it's there, you have to give it the respect that it deserves, because the thing that your inner critic is going to do, is when you have written your first draft and you have it done, your inner critic is going to be able to go through - if you respect it, if you treat it with kindness, if you're not calling it names in the back of your mind - and it is going to be able to pull out for you the areas where you missed what you were trying to do. It is going to be able - well you've just gone through this process, why don't you explain a little bit about going through your first real serious revision?

RG: Oh man, that is - it was insane. I told you this before but it's like taking your How To Revise Your Novel course is like the best and the worst torture that you could ever spend money on.

HL: [laughs]

RG: That needs to be the slogan for that course.

HL: Best. Torture. Ever.

RG: Yeah. I have - okay, so I've written before, I've edited before, I've done, stuff in the past and I've got a bunch of three day novels I've written, I've got a whole bunch of NaNoWriMo novels, I've got regular novels that I've written, I've done a whole lot of writing. This is the first time that I have ever fully revised something from a finished first draft to the end and I thought I had trouble with an inner critic when I was writing the book, you know, and I thought that was bad. Because it would tell you 'oh this scene sucks, oh there's no chemistry there, oh this character is whiny and stupid and repeats itself' and that's just writing. When you go into revising and you go over your book ten million times and you go through these courses - we're gonna have to do an entire

episode on How To Revise Your Novel, on that course because it's an incredible course. Especially for the fact that if you're taking it for the first time, you are basically, you think you're lost in this fog where you can only see maybe, like, a foot or two ahead of you and you think that you're curving, you think that you're going up and down mountains, you think that you're going in tunnels and making lefts and rights and walking around in circles, but by the time you finish it you're, basically, you have this overhead bird's eye view and you see that it was a straight path all along.

So it's fascinating but your inner critic the entire time is telling you 'this is awful, this is stupid, you should quit, just stop and start the entire book over again' and this is the second time I've tried to go through the How To Revise Your Novel because the first time was with Glass House, which I - is shelved for a little while. And I still remember thinking all of this, how horrible your writing is, you're never - and having an author for a mom has been both beneficial and also a little bit detrimental, because when you grow up reading all of your mom's books, when you have, some of your favorite novels are your mom's books. Talyn is one of my favorite books ever written - and I love these books so much that when you start writing yourself there's that extra pressure, like 'I'm never gonna be my mom, I'm never gonna be as good as that, I'm not gonna have the same type of stories'.

Because it's funny for somebody who loves horror films and action and suspense and stuff like that, my favorite thing to write is romance and I can't stand most romance movies because of the women. So, it's like I also have that going against me because a lot of people don't like romance. So, all of this stuff is in my inner critic brain and having to tell yourself just keep going, just keep pushing forward, just - it is like this dance. This dance with land mines.

HL: [laughs] Yeah.

RG: That's what it feels like working with the inner critic and I cannot believe, it is the hardest thing that I have ever had to do in my life. I went to college for a short while, thinking that I needed to do that, I've worked out extensively to lose a whole lot of weight before, I've done so many things that were difficult - nothing has been this difficult. Not including tragedies, personal tragedies, but nothing has been as difficult as the How To Revise Your Novel course and nothing has been as fulfilling as finishing it, as having gone through every single lesson and doing every single thing there was that I could and really learning to work with the inner critic. But I'm definitely not a pro at it.

And I love that we're broaching this topic because I know there's more thing that I can learn and it's just - it can be overwhelming. It can cause you to procrastinate, it can cause you to, when you go up to your book and you sit down in front of it again, you're so - you feel like 'of this wretched frickin thing again' you know? Even though there's so much good in there. So that's why I was wondering, how do you get it to shut up, how do you get it to - would you know when you need to shut it up and when you need to listen?

HL: If you're in first draft, you need to have it shut up. That's just - you have to develop this working relationship with the two halves of yourselves; with your creative self and with your critical self and while you are doing first draft, you have to acknowledge that the inner critic is there because it will show up from time to time and it will comment on your work. And you have to say look, you know, I am in the middle of first draft right now, I know this is not perfect, and you have to give yourself permission to suck. And that is the hardest thing to do. You have to say "yes, I acknowledge that right this minute I am writing first draft and all first draft is shit." That's the rule, it is. It is. And you will have some amazing stuff come out of the middle of your first draft, when you cut lose, when you let go of your determination to get it perfect on page the first time. You just tell yourself "all first draft is shit."

If you are not a fan of the wick tango tongue, you can say "is poo" or...

RG: I like poop. It's poop, I like that word. Poop is a funny word.

HL: But you - people hurt themselves by demanding that their first drafts be perfect.

RG: So, let me ask you a question about that you, what about revising as you go?

HL: Oh god. *Oh god*, don't do that. Because you will never get passed the first part, because no matter how long you revise, until you have finished writing the story, you don't know the story you're writing. I have *never* written the ending that I anticipated on a book - not once. Not once. Now there have been a couple of times where I've come kind of close, sorta, but no. The whole time you are writing first draft, your right brain is collaborating with every piece of your life you have ever lived so pull in weird stuff that you didn't know was back there. It has this treasure trove of everything you have been through in your entire life and that stuff is just shoved in the back of your mind sitting there, waiting and your right brain knows it's there and it will pull stuff out and change the shape of it and change the feel of it and throw it into your story. And until you have gotten all the way to the end, you don't know the story you're telling. You know the story you think you're telling...

RG: Yeah...

HL: And you know the story that is going to be what you don't write when you're done, because it's like this first run through for your right brain where it is getting all of these different pieces out onto the page and then you are bringing them to life in the revision. But until you get all of that stuff out there, your left brain doesn't know what your right brain has stored. These are different areas to the brain, they don't talk well to each other, they don't necessarily get along well. There's really cool stuff on split brain experimentation that's been done, but we're not gonna get into that right now.

RG: Basically, so it sounds like revision is - from everything we've discussed so far - it sounds like revising as you go along is your left brain, your inner critic, basically trying to take control...

HL: Mmmhmm [in agreement]

RG: And it also sounds detrimental because, if you are writing this stuff - like you say in your revision course too - is that you don't know where this is gonna go. So, you could a; potentially be revising shit that you're gonna cut anyway, or b; you could be stifling your muse, your right brain. You could be stifling it, trying to pigeon hole it into this kind of stiff, awkward book, story path and you'll never know how good or how deep or how meaningful a lot of written could be, because you're basically letting your left brain boss your right brain around.

HL: Yeah, that's exactly it. And I know that when you went back through and when I read your book, I could see all of this stuff that you had put in there that you had pulled from your own life. And I know you didn't put that in there on purpose.

RG: No, a lot of it I didn't, like there's a scene where the main character is massaging the love interest - and this is just one small, even mention - and she's talking about how - you know he's like 'how did you learn how to do this' and she's like 'oh my mom used to have, you know neck tightness' or something like that and massaging it. When I wrote that scene, I had no idea that - I did not remember the fact that you used to have neck and shoulder problems and I would massage your back for you. I didn't remember that until I was going through the revision and I was like 'holy crap, look at that'. And that's just one tiny little piece.

HL: Yeah, that's - and your brain is throwing that stuff out. If you let it, if you give yourself permission, in your first draft to write shit, then you will write the best writing you have ever done. Because your right brain doesn't right shit. Your right brain is the part of you

that comes up with all of this amazing stuff it has put together and learned from everything you have ever lived through. Your left brain is entirely capable of writing shit, but your inner critic is very good for spotting shit [laughs] and fixing it.

RG: Okay, so, for the first draft we try to keep the left brain out...

HL: When it shows up. The it shows up on the page and you realize it and you say 'oh god, I need to go back and change that' - don't. You just say 'okay, no, I'm gonna leave it just as it is on the page, inner critic, left brain, editor, thank you. Your turn is next'. And you just - you can acknowledge this as formally or as informally as you want, but you acknowledge it. You say 'okay, this is a later part of the process I'm doing now, it's not time for that process yet, you'll get your turn'.

RG: That is literally - what you just said - the last part of it, you'll get your turn, is what I had to tell myself every single day, several times while I was writing. Because I did get through about 50,000 words in 19 days, I wrote the entire first draft in 19 days and that is what I had to tell my inner critic all the time. Because it would tell me that 'this is crap' and my thing is I went to school - film school - when I was 23 or 24 and I had originally always wanted to be a film writer or film director and stuff when I was younger. So, my thing is I would either tell it 'you'll get your turn' or 'I'll fix it in post' [laughs]. That is like, literally, that's the one thing that you - it's funny because it's the opposite in film, like you never want to say 'I'll fix it in post' but with writing, I'll fix it in post [laughs].

HL: Yes, yes. That is how you get your best work; is you stay out of your own way and that is a very hard skill to learn.

RG: But you can do it.

HL: Oh god, it's totally learnable and the more you learn to do it, the more you start connecting with this other part of your brain that has been silenced for so long. Most people just completely crush their right brains, man. They just, they don't take anything from them, they don't do anything the right brain wants to do and that's this poor little trapped six year old stuck inside your head who wants to play and do amazing things and chase butterflies and have fun. And the vast majority of people never let it...

RG: But you can bring it back out, it's never a permanent death for the right brain.

HL: No, it does not...

RG: Okay.

HL: It does not die; anybody *anybody* can do this. You can do this if you want to, it just takes a little work.

RG: So, here's another question, something that - and I had seen this on the questions on your Patreon page as well - is basically, what do you tell... Basically it's that feeling of the inner critic telling you to quit, telling you 'you're not good enough'. When it becomes overwhelming, how do you get over that? How do you get passed the inner critic telling you to quit?

HL: That was, this has been a number of years ago for me, this doesn't happen anymore for me, so this is something that as you write enough, does go away. But initially, it was a big deal, oh god initially [laughs]... I wrote my first novel and this novel was never published, it was Hearts and Stitches, it was a romance between a nurse and an architect and it was *bad*. It was very very bad. But I wrote it, I did the whole thing, I finished it up on vacation where I was writing 12 pages a day just to get the thing done. I sent it off, I went through, and I did what I thought was revision, which is you go in, you

find words, you put better words in and you send it off. And that is not revision, that is *not* revision, that is nothing like revision.

It took me seven years after that book to learn how to do revision, but I did that and I got a single page - a typed single space full page letter from an editor telling me what I had done wrong and rejecting the novel. I was a total noob living out in the sticks and I knew nothing about what it meant to get a single spaced typed full page edit revision type letter from an editor. If I had taken...

RG: Verses the form letter [laughs].

HL: Verses the form letter which everybody got, and everybody gets. I didn't know how close I was and, you know, I don't know how I got that close because I sure didn't get that close again for another seven years. But - after that I was crushed. I was crushed. I cried and everything I started writing - I decided I was gonna write short stories and I wrote them and I sent them out and they'd come back and the editors were kind of supporting my theory that I really sucked. Because I would get things like - no, no more - and I... Yes, please, thank you for your time, nooooo... And just a little check box in the thing there that's 'we're not accepting any further submissions at this time', you know which then I think 'please jump in a hole and die' [laughs]...

RG: [laughs]

HL: It was miserable, and I had more than 100 of those things in this shoebox by the time I finally sold something which was those two sonnets. But it was just - I need to do this and I have leverage on myself, not because I wanted so much to be a writer. I told myself it doesn't matter how much I suck, it doesn't matter how bad I am at this, I have to do it anyway, because the only way I'm ever gonna be able to stay at home with my kids is if I do that. So, you know, I can't tell you what your leverage needs to be...

RG: Okay...

HL: But you have to know why you want to write.

RG: So, this is about motivating yourself.

HL: Yeah.

RG: This is - basically getting over the inner critic, is about getting leverage on yourself and your dreams and pushing passed the awkward stages and the horrible writing and just...

HL: Yeah and the fear.

RG: Yeah.

HL: And the fear, it is enormously scary to send your work to somebody who reads that for a living. That is an absolutely terrifying step to take. And to understand that 99.99 something per cent of everything that goes out - everything - from everyone comes back with a rejection slip and most of those rejection slips are form; that's terrifying. It is so hard to do. And to get passed that and to get passed it more than a hundred times before anybody says yes, you have to know why you wanna do this and you really have to want to do it.

RG: Okay, so yeah, I guess that's one of the best kind of answers is - it's also scary because you have to motivate yourself, you have to, like you said, get leverage on yourself, know why you want this. So, with that as well, you're looking at - like you said -

dozens to hundreds of form letter rejections so you're not gonna know where you're going wrong either. I know at a time you had writer's group...

HL: Which helps...

RG: That's - yeah - and now, this is gonna sound like a plug, it's not a plug - you have free forums for people.

HL: Yeah, anybody can join. Anybody is a serious writer, if you really wanna do this. If you just wanna talk about writing, you are not gonna enjoy the forums. But if you are actually sitting there with butt in chair getting pages done, then these are your people and they are nice, good people and they get kicked out if they're not, so... [laughs]. So, we have a very, very strict terms of service in what you can and cannot say to other people, because...

RG: And how you critique and stuff like that too.

HL: Yeah and how you crit and just that you have to be kind and basically if you're willing to be kind and if you're willing to be helpful, these are your people. Yeah, if you're looking to lord your skills over somebody else, you are not gonna like us [laughs].

RG: No. No, I remember one of the NaNoWriMos around here, when we first moved her basically, I wanted to do NaNoWriMo, I wanted to meet some other writers and stuff and I remember, down in South Florida it was the same thing - I tried to find writers in my areas and there are so many writers, especially in South Florida, and you get together for these writer's groups where you're sitting in a coffee house with your laptops and your writing and I was so eager and so happy. But you would have maybe a couple of people that were interested in writing and rest of them just wanted to talk, wanted to 'oh hey if you need some help on your writing, I'm really good at revisions, I'm really good at it critiquing, I'm really good at seeing where other people go wrong' - you wanna stay away from people like that.

HL: Yes.

RG: And one of the best things that I have ever - I'm not a forum person at all. I'm not crazy about forums, I'm not crazy about putting up a whole bunch of my stuff or reading other people's stuff. When it comes to the forums at Holly's Writing Classes, they're amazing. You go through, you see other people and, again I'm using *How To Revise Your Novel* as my knowledge, but people post their questions. If they don't understand something about a lesson then they'll post their questions, they'll be like 'okay I don't get this' and everybody floods in to help, 'well this is how I saw this lesson' or 'this is how I took this' and I posted a question and I had 3 or 4 people come in and say 'yes, oh my god, I had the same problem, please somebody help' and people would help. And I've noticed it's the same way with the open discussion and people can ask you questions too, they just go in there and they write *For Holly* and as soon as you see it pretty much - and you do forums every day and you go in and you check on things.

So, I cannot express how amazing it is when you are getting rejection letters and you don't know what is wrong and you've been submitting and submitting, and nobody wants your work. It can feel like you don't know where to turn, you don't know what's wrong. With form letters they don't tell you there's too much exposition, or there's not enough character, I have no idea who these people are, it's so flat. When you take your work to a forum where it's protected and you can even post 'I'm looking for some people to help me figure out what's wrong with my writing', people will volunteer and you can put your stuff up there and then you've got this whole world of people who are incredible and they wanna help.

HL: Yeah and it's just this, sort of, they help you, you help them.

RG: Yeah.

HL: Yeah and it works. It works.

RG: That's how I found out that I wanted to take - I think it was your Motivation Course, no no no, not the motivation one, the Writer's Block course - because I was talking to somebody in open discussion and I don't remember what it was exactly, but I was basically just saying... Because I don't personally believe in writer's block, I know other do, I don't judge people that do, but I know that it's all a mental thing. It's all you with your brain. So, I don't believe that writer's block...

HL: Unless you're on antidepressants.

RG: Yes. Yeah, well stimulants I can - that's a completely different idea, that's definitely a topic we'll have to cover. But I think when it's just you, sometimes your life gets in the way, sometimes your brain gets in the way. Those are how we define writer's block a lot of the time. And somebody told me in there - it might have been you and it might've been Kat or somebody else - that just said 'well you should take the Writer's Block course to kinda see' and it never would've dawned on me, even though it should have, because I wasn't facing exactly that situation, but just that one suggestion in a free forum completely fixed so much. And I've found with the Writer's Block that it's lessons that have stuck in my head and that I use all of the time.

HL: Cool.

RG: Yeah, so let me take a look at some of the questions we had on your Patreon page, because I know you posted for people to kinda ask something.

Okay, this is an interesting one. Basically, she's talking about her inner critic is telling her that she's written herself into a hole that she'll never get out of. So, it's basically that idea of your brain creating a problem that you think you can't solve. So how would you go about that?

HL: Okay. First off, there is no hole that you can dig that you cannot dig stairs back out of. Sometimes all you have to do is drop back to the last point where your book was working and you cut out a section or you set it aside, you put it in its own little file, and you move around it. But generally, if possible, you want to leave all your words in first draft in place, as they are, unchanged so then you can either... You ask yourself a question and I am huge on asking yourself questions, it is how I have figured out everything that has ever gone wrong in my stories, how I have figured out how to get out of it.

Okay, so, you are sitting there and you have dug yourself into a hole. So, you say 'okay, now, I'm in a hole, how do I get out? Well I make the hole deeper. How can I make this even worse for my character while a; bringing in another new character, or b; bringing back something that I wrote earlier and adding that as a complications or, c; changing what I think is happening in here and saying okay how is this not what it looks like? How am I not really in this hole, it looks like a hole, it looks like I'm trapped, but what am I missing?' and then you start answering that question. And when you answer that question, a couple of really big things happen. First of all, your story gets twistier, it gets more complex, it gets more complex, it gets deeper, it starts adding tensions and conflict and the next thing that happens is you figure out a way to dig yourself out of the hole.

RG: It is one of the most empowering things, when you're asking your subconscious these questions that you're saying, when you're asking yourself 'okay, how do I get out of this? How do I fix this?' and you ask the right questions and you get the answers; it is

one of the most amazing things. When your brain comes up with their answer to solve that problem you created.

HL: Yeah, the question for 'how do I fix this?' is rarely how do I fix this.

RG: Yeah [laughs].

HL: It's usually...

RG: No. In fact, that's more of a left brain question that's going to block that right brain.

HL: Right, right. The right brain question is 'how can I make this so much worse?' [laughs]

RG: Yeah [laughs]. Nice.

HL: [laughs] Evil laugh.

RG: So, it's all about asking questions and you have to - sometimes it can take a while, you have to ask a decent amount of questions.

HL: Right. You can run up a lot of words trying to answer a question and getting the wrong way. I have an inner critic story about that, as a matter of fact, which is the worst thing my inner critic ever did to me and it did it twice while I was on deadline and it caused me - *on deadline* - to throw away 60,000 words, twice.

RG: [laughs] oh my god...

HL: On a novel that ran, I think 100-110,000 words. So, I threw away 120,000 words of a 110,000 word novel.

RG: It left you in a deficit [laughs].

HL: It did, well yes, there was a bunch of stuff. But I was just hawling ass on the deadline and it was tight. This was for the book that was to be titled *Closer Than Chaos* and it turned out being *Gods Old and Dark*. No, it didn't, it was the one before that.

RG: It was the other way around.

HL: Yeah.

RG: Right?

HL: No, *Close To Chaos* was a title I swore I would never use chaos in a title again - *The Wreck of Heaven*.

RG: [laughs].

HL: Yes.

RG: *Wreck of Heaven*, that's right, that's right.

HL: Yes, the *Wreck of Heaven*. And because it was saying - well first of all I did let my muse run a little amuck and this red headed chick showed up sitting on a bench next to one of my heroes and they were feeding the ducks and all of a sudden she turns to him and asks him this - or says to him 'just be careful' and leaves a package on the bench and walks away. My skin - I mean the hairs of my arms rose, and my skin, just goosebumped and I stared at this and I went 'oh my god this is the coolest thing' she's a

secret agent for someone. Now, this is in a book that had no secret agents, that was kind of an urban fantasy with a carefully built world that was very very specifically set in a small town and all of a sudden I'm bringing in a woman who turns into the FBI and then she turns into this horrible, horrible slut and then she turns into [laughs] - and she just totally derailed the book. And I probably could have figured out a way to save it, but at that point I had not yet really integrated the asking questions thing. So, I went back to the first place she showed up and I threw out 60,000 words.

RG: Oh my goodness.

HL: Started back in, said okay I got this this time. And I'm writing along and the story's going pretty well and these two - my heroine, my protagonist's dead parents showed up in her house as ghosts at the dinner table. And I went 'wow that's cool, how did that happen?' - no, no, wrong answer. But my muse as so desperate for words right then that I just ran with it and I got 60,000 words of the story that included ghosts in this very carefully developed world that did not include ghosts, in this. And my inner critic said - and again, had not yet integrated the questions, didn't know that you can fix this if you just ask a better questions - so I took out another 60,000 words and started over for the third time and this time had a tight index card outline which - that might have been the point that at which I invented the index card outline, I'm not sure. But I made it through that third time and I hit the deadline in spite of everything, in spite of throwing away more book than I kept. But oh... holy crap. So your inner critic, if your inner critic is turned loose and you don't know how to prevent it from the slash and burn method, your inner critic can do some very very bad things to your scheduling and your sanity.

RG: Not very many people would've been able to make that deadline. You see movies all the time with writers that are having writer's block or something like that and they're missing their deadlines over and over and over again. Like *Stranger Than Fiction*, a *fantastic* film and she's just so over her deadline, so yeah, I can see how - the thing was she didn't have kids to feed, she didn't have the worry of going homeless, you know, and your thing was - if I don't get this by deadline we're not gonna get paid, we're not gonna eat.

HL: Yeah.

RG: And we might be on the street [laughs]. So that's a big motivator.

HL: [laughs].

RG: So, did you have any funny, any kinda funny story before we wrap this up about what your muse - or, not your muse, but your inner critic - might've done to you.

HL: Yes. Yes. Actually, with my very first novel, *Fire in the Mist*.

RG: Oh good, okay, we can wrap it up on lighter not then [laughs].

HL: Yes. Oh god yes, because this one is pretty good. I was - I had gotten my whole first draft done and was reading through it and, by this time I had figured out - to some extent - what became my final process for revision. And my right brain looked at the flying horses and said, 'that's too easy' and I went 'no no, they had to build the flying horses in the - this is what'...

RG: You mean your left brain looked at the flying horses?

HL: Yes, my left brain said 'that's too easy'...

RG: Oh okay.

HL: Yes. Left brain critic said 'no, no, the horses, that's very nice, we like the flying horses but it's too easy'. Alright, how could I make it harder? And then I started running through the logical part of my brain, well how do horses work. Horses, you know, they need a lot of oxygen, they run, they have a very specific kind of gait, a canter, a gallop, a trot and their legs have to move in specific ways in order to keep them moving forward, it's very tricky to stay on a horse. I used to have a horse, had two actually, and it's very very tricky to stay on the back of a horse when it's shifting gaits, if you're not prepared for it, if you're riding bareback, it can just - bad things can happen and you can land on your butt and I did it a bunch of times. One of my very best scars... Anyway...

RG: Yeah, I've seen people ride sidesaddle and that just scares the shit outta me.

HL: Yeah. Yeah. So, these are flying horses but they're still horses, so how do they land? They don't have a gait for landing. There is no flying horse landing gait. Oh, this is gonna be fun.

RG: [laughs]

HL: And I have them land and landing on a flying horse is a nightmare. It's a horrible, horrible experience in which you're not sure if the horse is gonna catch his feet or not, because this is not how he's designed to work. And then there was the scene with the cat. There was a cat in there, his name was Flynn, and he was looking at a candle and all of a sudden, I realized 'oh my god, what if he had hands'. And so...

RG: Every cat owner's nightmare on the planet [laughs].

HL: Yes! What if the little bugger had hands? Because my right brain was saying, again, 'cat, you're not using him, you're not using him for anything, he's just sitting there, why is he in the book if he's not doing something he can't be in the book'.

RG: You mean your left brain.

HL: Left brain, this was left brain, sorry. Yeah, this was my inner critic going 'no, no. You do not have characters in a book if they're not there for a reason. What's his reason?' Well he was the ***bolt mage's*** experiment and she got tired of opening the door for him to let him out so he wouldn't poop on the floor.

RG: [laughs]

HL: So, being very clever but not too bright, she gave him hands. And it turns out he loved matches and learned how to use them. So, he became a fire bug cat and then there were some - yeah, he became one of the heroes of the book - and his progeny ended up in a couple of later stories.

RG: When you read that book, you get the idea, 'cause all cats have different personalities, but most cat owners have had or known of ones that are kind of, you know, sassy, like Thea, she's very sassy. Then you get ones that are like Jeeves and they are little criminal masterminds, they love to sit there and kinda stalk on you, they've gotten that attitude - now they might also be loving - but they're also slightly evil. So [laughs]...

HL: [laughs]

RG: You get one of those and I have the feeling that Flynn is very much like Jeeves with hands and that thought just terrifies me [laughs]...

HL: [laughs]

RG: So, that is definitely a case of left brain - when you kind of need to listen to it...

HL: Yes!

RG: Which I think is also very brilliant.

HL: Yes, your left brain will find places where your story is weak and, if you are at that proper point in your story, and you have said 'okay, left brain, it's your turn, come on, come in and show me where I can be better' and your left brain will say 'okay well, you have a character in there that's not doing anything right now and sure it's just a cat, but if it's not doing anything, why is it in there?' Your left brain will feed you the things that you need if you're willing to listen and if you're willing to do the massive amounts of work it takes to fix, at least initially, it's much easier.

I know you just ground through that first revision, but every single one you do after this will be easier than that one. I'm not saying they'll be easy.

RG: Yeah, it looks like, especially when you do bigger, more complicated books, they're not gonna be easier, easier, but it's - the process will be more routine. And I know nothing about writing is routine which is one of the best things about this career that you're looking at, but I do - that was one of the things that helped me get through as well, knowing that next time I won't have this question of 'why am I doing this'.

HL: Right.

RG: I know that everything I do, there is a reason for it and it leads to a much, much better book.

HL: Right. One more thing I want to add on that, though, is that your next revision is going to be easier too, because you learn seven million things that you did this time that you made as mistakes, that you won't do next time.

RG: Oh yes. Oh yes.

HL: So, just by process of attrition, you can weed a lot of problems out of your work that you will never have to deal with again. You'll make new ones and the new ones will drive you nuts, but...

RG: Yeah, but a lot of those things, you're absolutely right. Because when you're going through revision, you're like 'why did I do this?' and I can also see one good thing from having done *Glass House* first and having not finished that revision, is when I started writing *Leaving Wandalucia*, when I started writing that book, I already had things in mind from an unfinished revision that I did, that I was not gonna make the same mistakes. And there are some little thing that you're gonna still put in there because when your right brain takes over and you're in the flow, you're just... oh my god so much stuff.

HL: Some stuff just happens.

RG: But I - for just example, all of these characters that you create and just start putting in and then you realize they have no purpose or, you know, that's a nice little story, let's save him for a different story, I only had one of those characters in this book and I had like 20 or 30 in *Glass House*. It's just amazing how much of a difference a single revision can make on your mindset. So, every time you revise, you'll just get better and better and better and I love that.

So, looking at everything that we've discussed, kind of give us a wrap up and then give us some actionable items that we can take to - maybe if we're working on something now and we're having inner critic problems.

HL: Okay. Just kind of as a wrap up, your inner critic is not your enemy, it's not the enemy of your writing, it's just that you need to give it a time and a place. Because you have to connect with your inner passionate, crazy, wild, take risks, goofy, six year old inner self, who will give you the most amazing fiction you can write. And *then* you bring in the adult, the one of you who can see where problems are, and you have to learn how to train your inner critic to be kind. This is essential training and you can learn it, but to get there it takes some time, it takes some effort and it takes acknowledging, that - okay, yes you are my inner critic and yes there are probably problems with this and yes, I know I am writing bad stuff. It's okay, I'm allowed to write bad stuff - that's what this part of the process is for.

Okay, so my take away on that is just, when your inner critic is involved, relax and breathe. It has an important job, it'll be okay, relax and breathe, let it go. You will have a chance to go back and fix things later. Next, acknowledge that when you're creating, you promise your inner critic that it will get its turn. It will, you are not gonna send this stuff out, raw unfinished first draft. It gets to go through and help you look brilliant. And then third, you follow through; when you're done, you give the book, the story - whatever it is you're writing - at least a week where you walk away, where you don't look at it, where you don't touch it, were it just slips away from your mind and you go do another story or something else. But after a week, you bring in your inner critic and you let your inner critic read it and you listen to what it says.

RG: Okay, that's awesome. We can always cover the topic again if we get an overabundance of questions, any specifics or anything like that, but I do love that take away, especially the point where you're telling it 'you'll get your shot, you are a necessary part of this whole sequence of events and you will have complete control at one point or another, down the line' and that thing I said earlier, fix it in post. That's basically what you're saying...

HL: Yes.

RG: That has been our episode, our very first episode and it was on the inner critic. If you have *any* questions at all, we have a myriad of places where you can pop in and ask them.

HL: It would be really helpful if they just picked one, so that we can scan...

RG: Yeah, I'm just saying that there's Twitter, we've got our Twitter, but let's go over that real quick. It's best if you went to our blog and found the episode, which again it's gonna be the very first episode, we're gonna have the title Inner Critic, it's very easy to find. The blog, you can basically go to AloneinaRoomwithInvisiblePeople.com or AlonewithInvisiblePeople.com or even AIARWIP.com it's a very simple page, it's just gonna pretty much be the blog, it's got some links on there, but find out first episode and go ahead and type in some questions, let us know, or if you've to some feedback, if something that we have said here has helped you, if you feel less alone, anything like that - just let us know how you feel.

HL: Yeah and if you love what we're doing, rate us, let us know.

RG: Yeah, absolutely, definitely. If you can go ahead and give us a rating, especially on iTunes so that more people can find us and more people can listen to what we're going on about and you can help us create a community of people that really do love the podcast and love the idea of everything that we're discussing, that would be great.

Again, we have all the socials; we're on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. You can look up Alone in a Room with Invisible People or you can look AIARWIP. You can always email at rebecca@alonewithinvisiblepeople.com and go ahead and find us and, like Holly had mentioned, she's got a free course; it's a flash fiction course. It is available at HollysWritingClasses.com .

HL: I will put the link on the show notes, when we get the show up, I will just include the link so that - along with some other things that you guys might like.

RG: Exactly, we'll make it a little bit easier and put all of this in the show notes too. That has been today's episode - Inner Critic. And anything else you wanna say, Holly?

HL: No, other than thank you for listening, for sticking it out with us. We ran a little over what we were planning on, but I think it's okay.

RG: Yeah, that's okay [laughs].

HL: Anticipate that might happen from time to time [laughs].

RG: Yeah, we do tend to get a little bit chatty and sometimes we get sidetracked, but again, this is just something that we do anyway, so it's wonderful to have you guys along and we will see you in the next episode. Have a great time writing.

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