

**FAZIO Luíza**

### **The Muse and the Merchant**

I do not trust writers who are whole. Writers who accomplish their writing goals from 9 to 5. Writers who reply to their emails in a timely fashion. Writers who have amazing stories to tell at networking cocktail parties.

Aren't we all supposed to be weird-ass introverts? But because of people like you, I now must learn how to make smart-witted jokes during a meeting with head-hunters who advertise it as an "informal get-together" — AKA a low-key Hunger Games.

In my years as a screenwriter, I found out the hard way that it is not solely our writing that gets us places, but our abilities as social beings and, of course, our competence to read contracts. So after shameful amounts of alcohol, endless paperwork, and marketing strategies to sell yourself as a household name. Where does the Muse seek refuge?

"Mulberry is Mulberry and Peach is Peach. They're not the same at all. Their thoughts, manners, interests, and even the way they look are completely different". In 1981, IWP's patron Hualing Nieh Engle wrote "Mulberry and Peach: Two Women of China," a book in which two distinct women inhabit the same body. Their split personality comes from a place of immigration, exile, and identity. Though I haven't faced those issues myself, I felt immediately drawn to the metaphor.

I do not trust writers who are whole.

The Luíza Fazio™ persona is not the same as the woman who inhabits the quiet and dark woodlands in her mind. The woman who hunts snippets of images, sounds, feelings, and smells with a flickering flashlight, the woman who spends years bringing characters to life. They can do what she never had the courage or means to.

Dream big — then turn it into a career. The most dangerous thing a writer could do.

My dreams turned into stories, that turned into emails, that turned into contracts, that turned into deadlines. The expectations were high: writing for screen is way too expensive to be bad writing. And writer's block is not an option when actors, directors, electricians, PAs, and drivers depend on your script to feed their children. The entire industry is counting on you.

The Merchant can't slip up. He must make do his best to address all the script notes and due dates. And he does all this while keeping intact who got him there in the first place: the Muse.

It's a game of cat and mouse. The Merchant needs the Muse as much as the Muse needs the Merchant. But how can two opposites coexist in a harmonious balance? Just like two babies in the same uterus. They could either take birth healthy twins or one can mysteriously disappear within the womb. The vanishing twin syndrome is not really about a magic trick — but, it's about cannibalism.

---

ICPL and the International Writing Program Panel Series, April 1, 2022

Yasser Abdel Hafez (Egypt); Lueangpiansamut Jidanun (Thailand); Luíza Fazio (Brazil)

For electronic texts, please visit: <http://iwu.uiowa.edu/archives/iowa-city-public-library-presentations>

For video archives, please visit: <https://www.icpl.org/video/series/international-writing-program>

By the time the hardest project I've ever written was over, the Merchant took a well-deserved nap. And the Muse... Where the hell was she? Long-gone. I was forced to face the question I never thought I'd be out of answers for: why do I write?

As I tried to answer it, my phone started buzzing with a call from a producer/lawyer/agent/Merchant. Maybe an airplane-mode hot shower would be my pathway to the light. I stepped into the steaming fountain longing for a fantasy-driven ethereal waterfall — and the heater broke. Cold water. Frozen body. Tears of rage. The screenwriting rule applied to real life: a scene can never end with the same feeling as the start. Why do I write? I have no idea.

As the Muse sought refuge into the unknown, the Merchant was unable to regain consciousness. How could I possibly write in this meaningless state?

Autopilot months go by without an answer until a beep gets me out of my life-crisis thoughts. Another bureaucratic demand? I pray for the divine: I am low-key giving up. Is this really what you want, Universe? I unlock my phone. It is a message from an unknown number. A beat. Goddess, is that you? The machine asks me if I want to proceed, not knowing my entire life is at risk. Albeit fear, I press yes.

A teenage girl from middle-of-nowhere Brazil. For the first time in her life, she saw herself onscreen. She thanks me because my words on paper made her existence real, her dreams real.

Without warning, the Muse sits in the same chair I sit in, faces the same message. Why do I write?

I write to dream.