

# Muse Meltdown

By Kimberly Frost

Writing has its emotional ups and downs. Some days, I feel hilarious and brilliant, but sometimes, I have "you call yourself a writer?" moments.

When I began *Barely Bewitched*, I got to around fifteen thousand words and something started to needle me. As the word count rose, so did my discomfort. Finally I had to stop writing to read through what I'd written, which is around the time my worst fears were realized.

"Oh, no," I exclaimed. "I knew it. I told my critique partners that I'm not funny! And what's going on with this pacing?"

I cleared my throat and addressed the characters in the book. "Why are you all just standing around talking? I need to see some action. Preferably some funny action."

They responded, "We're not lifeless. We're just written that way."

"What the hell?! This is mutiny. You guys are supposed to show me the way. Now what am I going to do?"

I contemplated things for a moment and realized that often in a crisis situation, drastic measures have to be taken.

"Is Barnes and Noble open? They have dark roast coffee." I slid my gaze to the clock. "Yes, I only need to break four speed limits to get there in time. Quick, find socks."

Then the Voice of Reason (VOR) asked, "Will a shot of espresso make you witty?"

I yanked on my shoes and said, "Anything's possible."

I hopped in the car, and on the way, I tried to smother the VOR as I slowed down to avoid the notice of a suburban police officer who was waiting idly for crime to happen.

Despite driving the speed limit, I reached B&N in time. I wandered the stacks and plucked Jasper Fforde's *The Eyre Affair* off the shelf. I read bits of it. Not reassuring.

"This guy's freakishly talented. He's clearly sold his soul or something," I mumbled.

"You're not willing to do that, are you?" VOR asked.

"Well..."

I trolled the self-help section, but those books only dealt with little problems like multiple personality disorders and alcohol addiction. I eventually wandered to writing reference and sat staring at the wall. "My muse is missing. This has never happened before," I murmured. "What if she doesn't come back?"

"Buck up," VOR said. "You know that award-winning, multi-published mystery writer whom you consider something of a mentor?"

"Uh huh."

"Remember what she said?"

"What?"

"That she gets lost every book and thinks she'll never be able to finish it."

"Oh yeah."

"Self doubt is normal," VOR said.

"I don't want to be normal. I want to be a genius."

VOR sighed. "You and the rest of the world, honey."

I sat among the books for few minutes, then pulled up my mismatched socks and stood, remembering that the things that are the most difficult to accomplish in life are often the most satisfying. Plus, there was still time for coffee.

For the next few days, I tried to ignore the empty place where the muse usually does gymnastics. I watched movies, read books, and rode around town with the convertible top down. I visited friends and joked and laughed until I had almost come to terms with the possibility that the off-track book might never be salvaged, which is about the time the muse showed back up. She wore a champagne

beige mini-dress, bangle bracelets, and plum suede boots. I didn't ask her about the sombrero or the bag of gold coins in her leather tote. I just gave her a smile and sat down to work.

Now, it's almost two years later, and *Barely Bewitched* is arriving in bookstores across the country, and I am at work on the next book in the Southern Witch series, which is going well. So far, the muse hasn't taken any more vacations, but if she did, I wouldn't panic. Or at least I wouldn't panic right away. :)

I'd try to remember that, when it comes to writing, the hard is what makes it great. And when the going gets tough or the muse gets going, there's always French Roast coffee to fall back on.