

THE PEN IS MIGHTIER

written by
Steven D'Arcangelo

818/679-2144
Darcangelosteve@gmail.com

616 W. Olive Ave.
Monrovia CA 91016

EXT. LOWER MANHATTAN - BRIMSTONE BOOKSTORE - DAY

Excited fans line up by a sign that reads: IN PERSON
TODAY -- E.M. GEOFFRIES, CREATOR OF SWORDMASTER SAM.

EXCITED BOY (O.S.)
I can't wait for the new Swordmaster
Sam book! Sam's my favorite.

INT. BRIMSTONE BOOKSTORE - DAY

The line continues inside with kids toting Swordmaster books
to be autographed. They cosplay as Swordmaster characters.

NERVOUS GIRL (O.S.)
My favorite's Mystic Max 'cause he
can do magic. Can you do magic?

The line ends at a table where sits E.M. GEOFFRIES. French
manicure. Scottish brogue. She's vulnerable, but you
wouldn't know it. Arrogant, and you will.

MONTAGE - E.M. SIGNS ITEMS WHILE PEPPERED WITH QUESTIONS

SNIFFLING CHILD
When you gonna finish the new book?

-- E.M. tries to answer but gets interrupted.

GOTH TEEN
I hope you don't get fired for
missing the deadline, Ms Geoffries.

-- She gnashes her teeth.

HYPER TWEEN
My dad thinks you can't finish
'cause you got writer block.

-- She swallows aspirin.

RUDE KID
Is it true you got writing block?

E.M.
Know what? I can do a bit of magic.

She autographs two books simultaneously with two hands. She
smiles. The kid doesn't.

RUDE KID
Ambidextrous ain't magic. Will the
new book ever be done?

E.M. sighs.

INT. MIDTOWN MANHATTAN - RAY'S OFFICE - EVENING

Adorned in family photos and Swordmaster marketing, the literary office appears understated like its occupant.

RAY WINTHROP sports a loose tie and a blue collar demeanor. A good man, though he could be more assertive.

He aligns Swordmaster art on a vintage paper cutter. His cell rings. Startled, he slices the art badly. He answers.

E.M. (V.O.)
Never again, Ray! You said the
buggers wouldn't harass me.

INT. LOWER MANHATTAN - E.M.'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

E.M. enters her spacious third story brownstone. She's on her cell and carrying Chinese take-out.

INTERCUT - E.M./RAY PHONE CONVERSATION

RAY
The "buggers" made you. If you
can't give them a new book, at
least give them some autographs.

Her walls are covered in all things E.M.: awards, articles, photos with celebs.

E.M.
No more public appearances until
the book's bloody well done.

RAY
Can I finally see some pages?

E.M.
I prefer to unveil them all at
once, thank you very much.

Posters and props from the Swordmaster movies abound. The sword itself, bejeweled and gleaming, hangs above a mantle.

RAY
E.M., it's alright if you're stuck.
It happens to the best of us.

E.M.
Us? I'm the writer, Ray. You're
just the agent.

Ray bristles. He's about to speak his mind but backs down.

RAY
Deliver the manuscript. Please.

E.M.
I will.

RAY
And I'd appreciate you not saying
"I will" like you say when I ask
you to read your fan mail.

A pile of unopened fan mail collects dust on her table.

RAY (CONT'D)
And if you need help with your --

E.M.
I don't have bloody writer's block!

CLICK. She hangs up. Ray sighs. And then he vents by slicing down the paper cutter. SHUNK!

BACK TO E.M.

She calms down. A scrape sound comes from a wooden storm window, shut to the cat on the fire escape scraping to enter.

E.M. strains to open the old heavy window. She props it up with an African rain stick, which rattles. The cat leaps in and rubs up against her.

E.M.
Was your day better than mine?

The cat purrs, then goes to her empty bowl labeled: AGATHA. E.M. feeds Agatha, then goes to her --

FAN MAIL

--from around the world and addressed to: E.M. GEOFFRIES C/O RAY WINTHROP. She reluctantly opens a letter and reads.

E.M.
"Dear E.M. As president of the
Swordmaster Sam fan club, I'd like
you to know that we're all pulling
for you to overcome your block."

E.M. crumples the letter. She opens another, which includes a kid's drawing of Sam. She reads the kid's letter.

E.M.
 "Dear E.N. My school loves..."
 (beat)
 E.N.?

E.M. rips it in half.

She opens a box of homemade sword-shaped cookies. She taps one on the table. It's stale. She tosses it in a trash can full of take-out boxes. Annoyed, she tosses everything.

One package misses the can.

E.M. sighs and picks it up. It's a small parcel labeled "FRAGILE". Curious, she opens it to reveal an ORNATE JEWELRY CASE. She opens the case to reveal a BRACELET.

Metallic and engraved with ancient runes, the bracelet doesn't match her style. She unrolls a HANDWRITTEN SCROLL.

E.M.
 (reads scroll)
 "When words are just beyond your grasp, this bracelet wear and out they'll pour. But put aside when need has passed, else words will flow forevermore."
 (beat)
 Only someone daft wouldn't choose forevermore, mister... misses... ?

She looks for a signature but finds none.

E.M. (CONT'D)
 ...anonymous fan with dire taste in jewelry. Doesn't matter anyway, Agatha, because I don't need it.

Agatha watches her drop the scroll into a trash can. E.M. defiantly marches over to her --

ANTIQUE WRITING DESK

No computer. No typewriter. Just legal pads. Dozens. Split into piles marked: "GREATNESS" and "SOON-TO-BE GREATNESS"

Greatness is comprised of 3 handwritten pads. Soon-to-be Greatness has 30 blank pads.

E.M. opens a new pack of expensive pens. She puts pen to pad and writes... nothing. She sighs.

THE BRACELET

sits in its case. Waiting. E.M. wraps it around her wrist. Agatha hisses at it.

E.M.
Mind your own business.

She returns to her desk, picks up the pen, and waits. Nothing happens. Her hand won't budge. She stares at it...

SAME - LATER

E.M.'s eyes close. She falls asleep sitting up.

Agatha sits on the windowsill. She paws at the rattling rain stick holding up the window. She budes the stick.

It buckles under the weight of the window and hews in half. The window falls shut. SHUNK!

E.M. jolts awake. The cat SHRIEKS into her lap, tail fur sheered by the window.

E.M.
You're lucky to still have your --

Just then she hears a sound. SCRITCH. What's that? SCRATCH. She sees her hand hold the pen. It's writing. *She's writing!*

She drops Agatha, quickly finishes the page, and reads it.

E.M. (CONT'D)
It's not rubbish, Agatha. It's publishable!

Agatha doesn't care. E.M. eagerly begins page two.

SAME - NIGHT

E.M. writes so fast that she can barely change pads to keep up. SCRATCH, SCRITCH. She writes into the night.

SAME - DAY

E.M. writes. The Greatness and Soon-To-Be Greatness piles are now matched in height.

SAME - NIGHT

Her pen runs out of ink. She gets a new one. For the moment she doesn't hold anything, her hand moves erratically.

SAME - DAY

The pack of expensive pens is mostly empty. E.M.'s right hand writes as she eats Chinese food with her left.

EXT. E.M.'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

One window in the building shines bright -- E.M.'s. In silhouette she writes away. SCRITCH SCRATCH.

INT. E.M.'S APARTMENT - LATE NIGHT/EARLY MORNING

On the last page of the last pad, E.M. jots down the magic words: "THE END"

She places it on the tall Greatness pile. The Soon-To-Be Greatness pile has vanished.

She props open the storm window with a piece of wood. A breeze ripples through curtains. She inhales the new day.

As E.M. happily removes the bracelet, she eyes an article on a bulletin board. It includes her photo and the headline: "HOW MANY TALES DOES SHE HAVE LEFT TO TELL?"

She ponders, and then greedily puts the bracelet back on. She dials her cell.

E.M. (INTO PHONE)
Ray, I'm a genius. Let's meet for
lunch. Your treat.

She collapses into bed, her writing hand dangling over the edge. For a moment the bracelet's runes glow.

EXT. LOWER MANHATTAN - GEIBSAN CHINA BISTRO - DAY

A hip busy eatery with sidewalk seating. On a table are the legal pads bound together. E.M. and Ray finish their Moo Goo Gai Pan. A waiter brings champagne and the bill.

RAY
I'll have it transcribed, do my
edit, and it's off to the printers.
Congrats. You beat your deadline.

They clink glasses and drink. He notices her bracelet.

RAY (CONT'D)
That's new. And not at all your
style. Can I see?

She tries to remove the bracelet but it's stuck.

E.M.
It's... a family heirloom. I'm
rather attached.

RAY
No worries. So how'd you finish an
entire novel in one week? Not even
Stephen King can write that fast.
Did you sneak in a ghost writer?

E.M.
Bollocks! Absolutely not.

RAY
Sorry. That was unfair. Look, I'm
ecstatic you beat your writer's blo
-- I'm ecstatic you finished. But
you did it so fast and I'm curious
how. I won't tell anyone.

She glances at the bracelet, wanting to confess. She starts
to speak but gets interrupted by:

SHY BOY (O.S.)
'scuse me, Misses... Miss Jeffees?

E.M. turns to see a SHY BOY with Swordmaster clothes and
book. He's timid but his MOM encourages him.

SHY BOY
Is, um, is it true you write all
the Swordmaster Sam books?

E.M.
Yes. I write them all by myself.

She replies to the boy but it's meant for Ray.

E.M. (CONT'D)
Here, I'll give you my autograph.
So who's your favorite character?

The Boy doesn't answer. He's watching E.M.'s hand, confused.

SHY BOY
Umm, you can stop now.

E.M. follows his gaze to the hand, which signs the book.
Repeatedly. So many times that it rips the jacket cover.

She apologizes. The upset Boy grabs the book. Mom gives E.M.
the evil eye and leaves with her son.

RAY
Great. Another satisfied customer.
Hey, I thought I was paying?

E.M. sees the hand signing the bill. Shocked, she grabs her purse and hurries off. Ray watches, concerned.

INT. E.M.'S APARTMENT - DAY

She enters. Locks door. Pulls hand from pocket. It wriggles.

She tries to remove the bracelet but it tightens around her wrist. The runes glow, causing the hand to auto-write.

She digs through trash for the packaging. She inspects it.

E.M.
No return address. How sodding hard
is that to include?

She pulls out the scroll and skims to the end.

E.M.
"...But put aside when need has
passed, else words will flow
forevermore."

She lowers the scroll. The gravity of her dilemma sinks in.

E.M.
Now I can do magic.

Agatha watches the hand pick up a pen. It writes on the coffee table. E.M. gives it some scrap paper. It fills the first piece. She reads it and looks surprisingly impressed.

E.M. (CONT'D)
It's... publishable.
(beat)
But I'm the writer.

She tries again to remove the bracelet. It constricts like a snake. Runes glow brighter as the hand skittishly writes.

E.M. (CONT'D)
It has to wear off. Right, Agatha?

Agatha stares at the hand, which begins page two.

SAME - NIGHT

Via her laptop computer, E.M. researches Carpal Tunnel, Arthritis, magic spells.

She drinks brandy with her good hand. The cursed hand writes on the last scrap. It writes on the laptop. She goes to --

HER WRITING DESK

E.M. pulls out a pack of new legal pads. Unwraps them.

E.M.

It has to wear off.

SAME - NIGHT

The hand writes so fast that she barely swaps pads in time.

SAME - DAY

The hand writes. E.M. runs out of pads. She uses a napkin.

SAME - NIGHT

Agatha naps. E.M.'s hand inscribes a Swordmaster calendar. Her last pen runs out of ink. She replaces it with a pencil. For the moment she doesn't hold anything, the hand wigs out.

SAME - DAY

A delivery guy delivers E.M.'s Chinese food. She pays by credit. He asks her to sign a receipt. She slams the door.

EXT. E.M.'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

One window in the building shines bright -- E.M.'s. The silhouetted hand scrawls away as she snores.

INT. E.M.'S APARTMENT - LATE NIGHT/EARLY MORNING

On the last page of a Swordmaster coloring book, the hand scribbles. The pencil, worn down to the eraser, crumbles.

She hurls the book atop the crooked Greatness pile. It's comprised of all things E.M. -- awards, articles -- all covered in smudged drivel.

E.M. staggers to the open window. She tries to enjoy fresh air but the hand cramps up. It's covered in blisters, the underside black from smudged ink.

She puts an ice pack on her forearm and enters the --

BEDROOM

She speed dials her cell.

E.M. (INTO PHONE)
 Ray, when you get this message,
 please come over. I... I need help.

She passes out on the bed, knocking over her purse. Contents roll out, including lipstick that bumps a clock -- 2:30 AM.

DISSOLVE TO:

The clock reads 7:50 AM. The lipstick's gone. E.M. awakens. Bloodshot eyes. Frazzled hair. The cat stares.

E.M.
 Agatha, I had a dreadful nightmare.

E.M. notices red stains on the sheets. Also on her clothes. Red's everywhere. Is she bleeding?

Worse. The heinous hand has been writing drivel on the headboard with red lipstick, the tip flattened.

She rips the lipstick away. She runs around scooping up anything that can be used as a writing utensil: eyeliner pencils, hi-lighters, glue sticks, Chapsticks.

KITCHEN

E.M. shoves the utensils into the sink's garbage disposal, flips the switch, and GRIIIIIINDS them up.

She sits at a counter. Agatha leaps onto it. They stare at the schizophrenic hand. It digs its nails into the wood counter to scratch out random letters.

E.M. yells in frustration. She lowers her head to the table. She cries. The cat watches the depraved hand and slashes it.

E.M.
 Agatha!!!!

E.M. hurls Agatha aside. The hand jitters out of control -- like Parkinson's on steroids. It scrapes jagged characters on the walls, tearing wallpaper, cracking fingernails.

E.M. (CONT'D)
 No more! No more!!

E.M. grabs at a block of knives but they're plastic-wrapped. Never used. She opens drawers until she finds silverware.

She whips out a butcher knife. Lays the wicked hand across a cutting board. Raises the knife.

She catches her reflection in the glistening blade.

She can't believe what she's about to do. She instead tries to saw off the bracelet with the knife.

The bracelet embeds itself into her skin, cutting off circulation. Runes pulsate.

The hand grabs the knife!

It rips her clothes and nicks her good hand, but it only wants to write. It carves numbers on the board.

Her good hand clashes with the bad for control of the blade!

She bashes the hand into the windowpane, knocking the knife out the window and to the street below. She returns to --

THE SILVERWARE DRAWER

She finds a butter knife. Rummages. Finds a plastic knife. Rummages. Finds a spork. She slams the drawer shut. Looks around. Her eyes light with an idea.

LIVING ROOM - THE SWORD ABOVE THE MANTLE

She grabs it. Unsheathes it. Lets out a twisted grin.

She sweeps everything off her desk. Lays the vile arm on it. Vile fingers recoil. She raises the sword high. It glints.

E.M.

Pen is mightier than sword, my
arse!

She slices downward. WHAP! The sword hits the arm and snaps in half, inflicting nothing worse than a welt.

She examines the weapon. It's plastic.

E.M. (CONT'D)

Stupid bloody prop!

She chucks it aside. There's a knock at the door.

EXT. E.M.'S APARTMENT - FRONT DOOR

Ray knocks.

RAY

E.M., it's me. I got your message.

INTERCUT - E.M./RAY

E.M. shoves the bad hand into the garbage disposal and flips the switch. Nothing happens. Flips again. Still nothing.

She looks in the disposal -- the blades are jammed by writing utensils. She tries unjamming them.

RAY (CONT'D)

I almost had a heart attack when
you asked for help.

E.M.

Go away.

RAY

Go away? You asked me to come over.

E.M.

Go!

Ray lowers his head, turns to go. He stops. Takes a stand.

RAY

No. Open the door.

Frustrated, E.M. gives up on the utensils.

INT. E.M.'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM

She enters looking for solutions. She's desperate. Wind flutters the curtains. Her eyes spark.

THE OLD STORM WINDOW!

She grapples with the hand but gets it where she wants it -- under the heavy window pane. More door knocking.

RAY (O.S.)

Come on. This is childish.

She pulls the wood support. It's stuck. She pushes. No luck.

Agatha leaps up, sniffs what's going on. E.M. shoos the cat away, bumping the jewelry case to the floor.

EXT. E.M.'S APARTMENT - FRONT DOOR

Ray hears the ceramic case smash.

RAY

What was that?

He looks concerned. He tries the door knob but it's locked.

INT. E.M.'S APARTMENT - WINDOW

The cat shrieks as E.M. flings it out to the fire escape.

E.M.
Get out of my home!

RAY (O.S.)
Is someone in there? You okay?!

E.M. returns to the windowpane. She pulls the wood with her good hand while pushing the window up with the evil hand.

E.M.
I hate you, I hate you...

EXT. E.M.'S APARTMENT - FRONT DOOR

E.M. (O.S.)
...I hate you!

Ray gives up on the knob. He slams into the door.

RAY
Hold on. I'm coming!

INT. E.M.'S APARTMENT - WINDOW

The door shakes from Ray's battering.

E.M. uses both hands to push up the window. It moves. While pushing, she kicks out the wood. The window starts to fall.

She throws the possessed hand underneath, closes her eyes, and braces for impact.

It doesn't come.

She opens her eyes. Sees the window stuck on split wood. She slams herself against the window, trying to free it.

EXT. E.M.'S APARTMENT - FRONT DOOR

Ray slams his body against the door.

INT. E.M.'S APARTMENT - WINDOW

SLAM! SLAM! The window budes. It sheers off the splintered wood and begins its descent.

She sticks the arm underneath. The window crashes down like a guillotine. Her crazed eyes follow.

E.M.
I'm the writer!

SHUUUUNK!!

Glass shatters from impact. Wood blisters. Blood splashes. E.M. falls to the floor.

The door bursts open. Ray runs to her side. She passes out from pain, relief finally upon her.

EXT. E.M.'S APARTMENT - FIRE ESCAPE

Framed through broken glass, Ray cradles E.M. in his arms. A pool of blood radiates outward. He calls 911.

On the fire escape purrs Agatha. She inspects something, paws at it. It's E.M.'s twitching forearm.

The runes dim and the bracelet loosens. The arm dies.

FADE TO:

INT. HOSPITAL - PATIENT'S ROOM - DAY

E.M.'s eyes open. She's in bed, hooked to a beeping heart monitor. Surrounded by fan gifts, Ray edits the manuscript. Her bad arm's under a sheet. He stops her from unveiling it.

RAY
E.M.! Thank God. You lost so much
blood you're lucky to be alive.

She uncovers the arm. It's a stump below the elbow.

RAY (CONT'D)
The doctors tried their best but
couldn't reattach it. I'm so sorry.

She touches the stump, makes sure it's real. A hint of red leaks through bandages. E.M. laughs.

RAY (CONT'D)
Who did this -- A fan? A stalker?

E.M.
I... It doesn't matter. All that
matters is I'm ambidextrous. I can
still write. I'm the writer.

She replies to Ray, but it's meant for the stump.

RAY

Wow. I rehearsed a big pep talk but
you're coping better than expected.

His concern disappears. She wiggles her good hand.

RAY (CONT'D)

Visiting hour's over. I have a
bestseller to publish and you have
another to write. You are a genius.

He takes the manuscript and, on his way out, salutes her.

She smiles and returns the salute with her remaining hand,
which causes her long sleeve to fall and reveal --

THE BRACELET

-- wrapped tautly around her wrist! She loses her smile.

E.M.

Where, where'd this come from?!

RAY

You lost enough today. I couldn't let
you lose an heirloom too.

She's dazed. Speechless. The heart monitor beeps faster.

RAY (CONT'D)

But you don't need it. You don't
need my pep talk. You don't need
anything but you. I get that now.

He exits, closing the door behind him.

E.M. snaps from her daze. She tries removing the bracelet
with her stump. She tries with her teeth.

Runes light up. She freezes. The bracelet slowly constricts.

She sees Ray's pen nearby. She stares at the hand.
Terrified. Waiting for it to come alive.

Waiting... waiting...

CUT TO BLACK

THE END