



Thwarted Vacations, Burnout, and Moments of Bliss

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Dear ones,

I'm currently outside on the porch, enjoying a few moments of peace. I'm starting to be able to breathe for the first time in a few weeks. The sun is out whilst the rain pours down: The devil is beating his wife, as my grandmother used to say. Such an odd idiom. Interestingly, it's supposed to be a predominately southern expression, but my grandmother was from Philly, so...

We're just home from vacation, which involves a total reset—getting the computers back up and running, tending to the garden, filling the feeders, grocery shopping—easing back into our lives, our schedules, our habits. I normally do this slowly, over the course of a few days, but I'm even slower than usual today, because we didn't have a vacation, not really.

We launched [MASTER OF SHADOWS](#) (□), and while launches are invariably full of excitement and drama, they are also draining. But as many of you know, while we were gone, Jameson the tiny thriller kitten had a brush with death. Because of meds and allergies and stress, we usually take the cats with us if we're going to be gone for more than a week, and thank God we did this time, or else this would be a very different missive.

Jamie started throwing up the day after we arrived, something that happens from time to time, and is normally nothing to worry about. But this felt... wrong. Odd. Too frequent. Like she'd eaten something and gotten it lodged inside, as she has twice before. I was concerned enough that I didn't want to wait until Monday when the vet opened, and it's a good thing I didn't—long story short, she had an intestinal torsion, something which is rare in cats, and almost always fatal. The ER vet did a heroic job of saving her, though she had to remove a foot of small intestine, and warned Jameson probably wouldn't survive the surgery, much less recover....and, let's just say the possible complications were long, varied, and horrible. But my tough little girl survived the first few hours, and we picked her up from the ER and took her to my parents' vet, who took over after surgery and spent a week giving fluids and antibiotics and love—never underestimate how much love can heal—sending

James home with us at night to be in familiar-ish surroundings. There was zero sleep, and anxiety so off the charts I'm pretty sure I'm in a full-blown adrenal fatigue meltdown right now, but we kept at it, minute by minute, then hour by hour, then day by day.

Jameson is a fighter. Here we are, two weeks later, home, safe, and she's getting back to herself. I feel incredibly grateful we had the means to care for her, the help of excellent, committed doctors, and the belief in her indomitable spirit. We had several talks over the first few days, she and I. I told her if it was too much, she didn't have to hold on. But she did. She wasn't ready. Her time wasn't up. Our little purry girl is still with us.

Jordan doesn't seem as thrilled as we are—she thought she was an only child and seemed pretty good with that. 🤔

This was meant to be a working vacation, and I did write whilst my patient slept. The next novel is underway, and has a new theme song, Peter Murphy's CUTS YOU UP. The story might be a little darker than initially planned LOL... I also did a final edit on a short story, LOUCHE 49, that's appearing in an anthology, INFINITY, in early 2023.

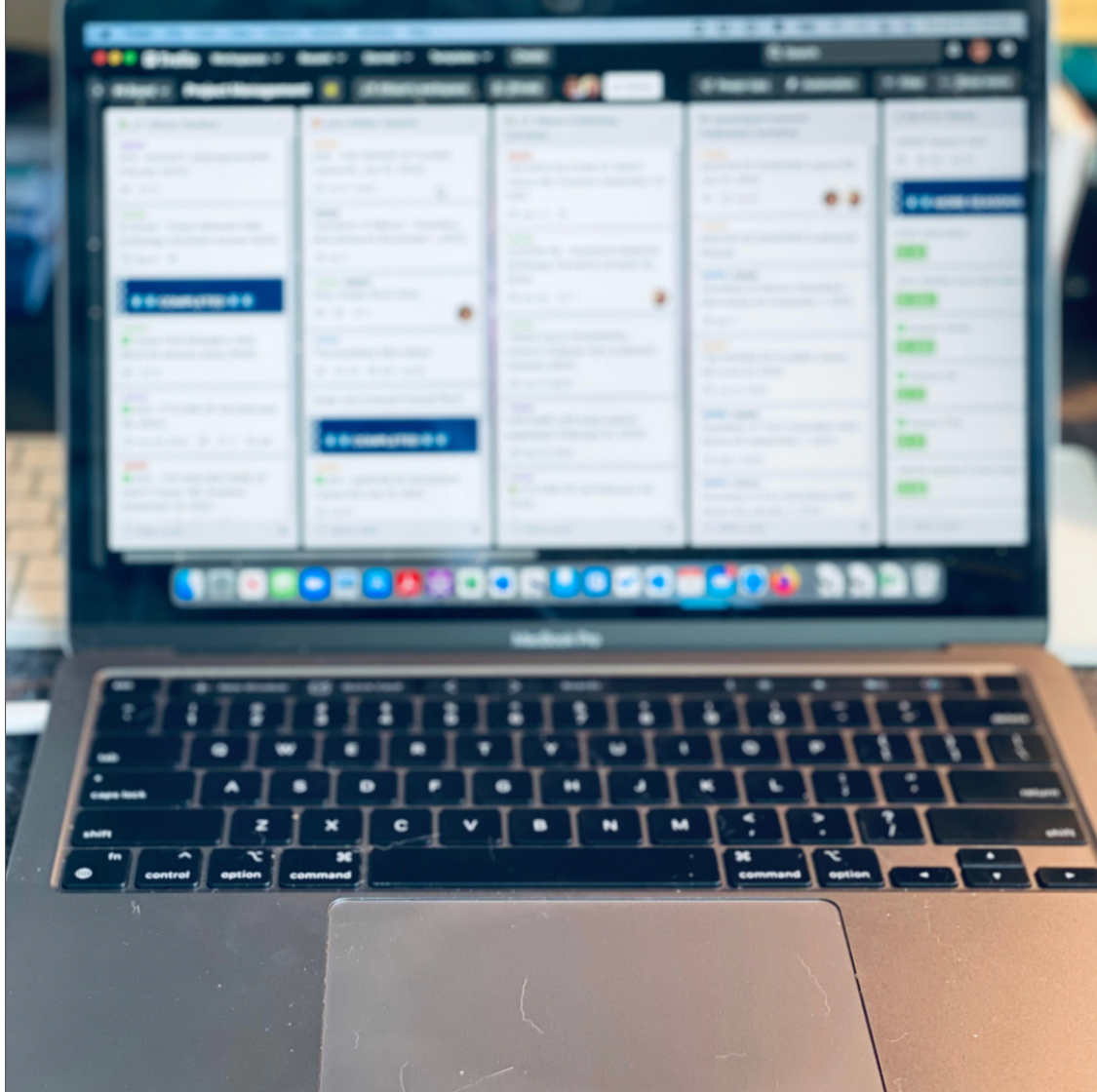
But man, it's good to be home, to have autumn—and work—stretching out before me. I have a few trips planned, but for the most part, I am getting back to the schedule: write in the mornings, read in the afternoons, with workouts interspersed. I don't know how long things will stay calm; I do seem to live an exciting life. But I'm going to take advantage as I can.

👩 Ask Me Anything

dahl1104 asked an excellent question a couple of months ago: How do you do it all without burning out?

The truth is, I *do* burn out! Like most authors, I've had times when I had to stop and step back from my creative work for months at a time, usually when personal stuff got in the way. But burnout is different. It's that terrible existential dread that builds up and makes my anxiety shoot to the moon. And the only way I know to deal with it is by making a hundred to-do lists, staring at my calendar, which is very self-soothing, and then doing the work (whilst also complaining loudly to anyone who will listen that I have too much on my plate.)

That said, this year, I have been trying to do 20 percent less. As Mr. Newport points out, we are encouraged to work work work, be busy busy busy, give it our all, 110 percent—which also means we're so over-committed that nothing gets its fair shake. If we take away 20 percent, that gives us some margin. Some room to breathe. I have help, a great personal assistant who handles the things that stress me out the most, and I plan, extensively. Here's a photo of my Trello board, which is how I do project management.



You can see I have a lot of projects going at once. But I also have them timed out so they (hopefully) don't all need the same kind of attention at once. I was trained from the beginning of my career when I was releasing two books a year how to be writing a book, editing a book, and releasing a book all at once. And I cowrote with Catherine for years while also writing my own books, so I've been juggling multiple projects for a long time. In doing that, I learned how to balance my time, how to pick my battles, how long it normally takes me to do things. The one aspect of writing I have no control over is how quickly I write a book—some are fast, some take forever. The rest, though, I know. I have a solid idea of how long revision takes, copyediting, PR. By applying that to my planning, I have a good idea of what's going to happen when, and so long as I have a plan, I'm good.

When the plan falls apart? That's when I start burning out. So I step back, get offline, take a social sabbatical, add in more reading time and more time for fresh air, enforce my no screens rules, and it generally resolves itself.

□ Poll

Last month's poll was so fun...Y'all's favorite cover was [IT'S ONE OF US](#), closely followed by [HER DARK LIES](#). I must agree! Let's do another fun one this month...

What's your favorite kind of thriller?

International Intrigue

Slow Burn Mystery

Locked Room Classic

Domestic Suspense

Gothic All The Way

Unreliable Narrator

📖 Book News



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☐ This Month's Reads



I did read a few good books while I was gone—Elle Grawl’s debut [ONE OF THOSE FACES](#), Margot Hunt’s [LOVELY GIRLS](#), Lisa Unger’s [SECLUDED CABIN SLEEPS SIX](#), and got my hands on Catherine Coulter’s newest, [RECKONING](#).

We also watched a few podcasts from my fave, Cal Newport, and watched THE TERMINAL LIST, which was great but committed a storytelling cardinal sin—interrupting incredibly exciting action sequences with flashbacks. It’s advice I give newbie writers—don’t interrupt yourself, let the scene flow—and while I get exactly why they did it, it was overused. Have I mentioned we really enjoyed SPIDERHEAD? Chris Hemsworth dancing to Bryan Ferry is stuck in my head; I really loved the whole soundtrack. We’re looking for new shows to binge... suggestions are always welcome.

☐☐ August Recipe: Almond Flour Chocolate Cake



ALMOND FLOUR CHOCOLATE CAKE

We celebrated Mr. Ellison's birthday with a requested [chocolate on chocolate cake](#). This was a new to me recipe, but it was delicious. I made some adjustments, as always.

SOUNDS DELISH!

You can find all of my recipes [here](#), on the bright and shiny new Recipes website. And if you want some wine to go with the meals, [The Wine Vixen](#) has you covered.

☐ Contest

Every month, I draw a name from those of you who open the newsletter and send that lovely person a \$30 gift card to the bookstore of their choice. It's my way of saying thanks for being here. Congrats to last month's winner: Stephanie W!

And don't forget to enter this month's drawing below!

I WANT THAT GIFT CARD!

This has gone on long enough. Y'all have a fabulous last few weeks of summer, and I'll see you in September!

Peace and hugs,

J.T. Ellison



Are you still here?

Here's a kitten for your troubles!



And more... For my west coast friends, my buddy Mel runs a great [rescue program](#) for kittens with developmental and medical issues. She has a few kitties who really need a home. [Check her out](#) to see if you can give these fur babies some help!

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