

## The Inspiration for *One Night Gone* by Tara Laskowski

I have a natural tendency to write short. Short stories have always been the magnets that pull me into writing, the tiny tugs of ideas on a drifting fishing pole. I've written and edited a lot of flash fiction—stories 1,000 words or less—and I like being able to “see” an entire story on only a few pages. Tiny fiction is my forte.

So, there's always been a devil on my shoulder whispering, “You can't write a novel, Tara.” I have friends for whom the novel-writing process is like a slow, pleasurable road trip—they enjoy being in the car and not knowing quite where they'll end up. They relish in it—whereas I've always been the one with motion sickness in the backseat, begging to be let out. Sure, I tried it several times. I have at least two unwieldy novel manuscripts on my hard drive that I spent years of my life crafting, only to abandon because it seemed I could not make them work.

So, the nagging doubt continued—maybe I wasn't built to write long.

Then I had two experiences that got me thinking about a larger story—not only one that I was excited to write, but one that I thought just maybe I *could* write.

The first was a Thanksgiving my family spent at the beach. I've always been fascinated by beach towns in the off-season. The weather was glorious that year, especially for a Pennsylvania gal like me who's used to several feet of snow on the ground in November. But also, I loved how quiet everything seemed. The stores and restaurants, if open at all, were less packed, less hectic. The people seemed kinder, slower, more relaxed. The beach felt like it was all ours, and ours only. We didn't have to share it with anyone.

But within all this beachy quietness was also a sense that something felt off. That in the nothing happening, *anything at all* could happen.

The second experience was when, in a rare bout of spring cleaning, I found one half of an old best friend necklace charm in a box of memory stuff I'd had from childhood. My friend and I had bought them in the second grade, and I realized that I'd lost touch with her completely. I had no idea where she was or what she was doing. How rare that is in this age of social media and Google, where a person's entire history can seemingly be found with a few clicks of the keys.

I've since found her—and we even were able to meet up at one point and spend an hour or two doing a giant info dump about the last fifteen years of our lives. But that eerie feeling never left me. What if I hadn't been able to track her down? What if she'd just disappeared—and no one knew what happened to her? What if that one half of the silly childhood necklace charm was all I had left?

Looking back, I think both of those experiences germinated the seed of what is now *One Night Gone*.

Most writers have their obsessions—the themes and topics they explore again and again in their stories. For me, I like to write about women and friendship and relationships, and the way that we miscommunicate with and misinterpret the people around us, especially the ones we think we are closest to.

I also like writing about the subtle things that creep us out—not axe murderers or zombies as much as a sudden cold breeze in the middle of a hot summer or the flash of movement in the corner when no one's there. I like that unsettling feeling of leaving an object in one place, only to come back later and find it's somewhere else. My birthday is on Halloween; I suppose I've earned my fondness for creepy things—especially houses and dolls.

The spirit of all that stuff—friendships and losing touch, the beach in the off-season, an eerie feeling you can't quite understand the cause of—is still there in my novel, even though what I started out writing has evolved so much over time. More importantly, the journey along the way was actually...fun. I didn't dread sitting down to write. I wanted to know what was going to happen to these women. I began to understand their worlds and get inside their heads. And while I can't lie and say it was an easy process, it was a process that I accomplished bit by bit, day by day, word by word.

And when the manuscript was finally turned in, when my editor emailed me back and said, “I think we're done!” it finally hit me. The thing I worried might never happen had happened.

I was—I am—a novelist.

*Tara Laskowski*

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