

The Obsessed Artist

Obsession is not a choice. It is not a hobby or a pastime. It is an inferno licking at the edges of the soul, consuming everything in its path, a siren song that drowns out reason. The greatest artists do not merely create; they devour. They sacrifice, suffer, unravel, and rebuild themselves in pursuit of something just out of reach. To be obsessed is to chase perfection knowing it will forever remain an inch beyond grasp. It is Nina Sayers in *Black Swan*, Alex Dall in *The Novice*, Andrew Neiman in *Whiplash*, Beth Harmon in *The Queen's Gambit*—each of them driven not by talent, but by the singular, unrelenting force of obsession. Talent may provide the seed, but only obsession—unyielding, destructive, intoxicating obsession—forces it to bloom into something extraordinary.

I understand this. I have lived it. I have felt the pulse of obsession in my veins, the weight of its demands pressing on my chest like a phantom lover. Writing is my affliction, my addiction, my abyss. I cannot simply “like” writing. I cannot treat it as an enjoyable pastime or a relaxing outlet. I am either consumed by it or hollow without it. There are nights when I do not sleep, words scraping against the inside of my skull, demanding release. There are days when nothing else matters—where hunger, fatigue, and social obligations dissolve into the background, all drowned beneath the deafening roar of creation. To stop is to suffocate. To pause is to die a little.

And yet, there is something undeniably seductive about this madness. The obsessed artist moves through the world with a different kind of gravity, eyes fixed on something no one else can see. Obsession does not ask for permission; it takes. It isolates, it ravages, it wrecks—but it also elevates. It pulls the artist beyond mediocrity, beyond comfort, beyond sanity, if necessary. Nina does not dance; she *becomes* the Swan Queen. Alex does not merely row; she tears herself apart, body and mind, until she claims victory. Andrew does not want to be good; he wants to be

great, whatever the cost. Beth does not just play chess; she breathes it, consumes it, rearranges reality into sixty-four black-and-white squares. The price? Their sanity. Their relationships. Their bodies.

But here is the paradox: obsession is both a curse and a gift. It is the force that drives artists to brilliance, but it is also the force that unravels them. It whispers seductively that the suffering is worth it, that the sleepless nights and fractured minds are simply proof of devotion. And perhaps they are. When Nina Sayers dances her final, perfect performance, when she whispers “*I was perfect*” before her world fades to black, we understand. Because what is life without obsession? Without a fire that burns so brightly it threatens to consume?

Obsession is often mistaken for passion, but they are not the same. Passion is warm, inviting, exhilarating. Obsession is ruthless, insatiable, cruel. Passion allows for balance; obsession demands surrender. It is not enough to practice. Not enough to improve. The obsessed artist must become their art, losing themselves in it so completely that there is no separation between creator and creation. And for those of us who live with this hunger—who understand the agony and ecstasy of it—there is no other way to exist.

The world romanticizes obsession in hindsight, praising the results while ignoring the wreckage. We admire the genius of Van Gogh but forget the severed ear. We revere Sylvia Plath’s poetry but turn away from the oven. We call Nina’s performance breathtaking but refuse to acknowledge the bleeding toes, the psychosis, the shattered self that made it possible.

Would we still want greatness if we understood the true cost? For me, the answer is yes. Every time. I have lived long enough to know that I am nothing in my soul if not obsessive. I would rather be consumed by creation than live comfortably in mediocrity. Because what is the alternative? To silence the hunger? To settle for something lukewarm and uninspired? No. I

would rather bleed for my art. I would rather ache, rather burn, rather shatter, than be ordinary.

And so I write. Not because I want to, but because I must. Because obsession does not ask—it commands. And I am its willing disciple.