



## In which this month is a metaphor for writing.

September 2021

Vol. 234

Hello GentleReader,

Welcome (Almost) to Fall, y'all!

It hardly seems possible, but I've been writing from my new little office for a year now. Though we didn't move in until October, I spent the 6 weeks we owned the house overseeing renovations. I camped in the office with my desk and my computer (and often, the cats) and coordinated the trades working on the house. I acted as my own contractor, which meant a lot of coordination, badgering, compliments, and wandering the house with various sample jugs of paint and foam brushes, trying to see how my choices looked in every light. I'd taken the month off writing, but I did a lot of thinking, planning, and yes, writing on the sly, particularly a short story that will be in an anthology next year.

I even considered whether I wanted to start a side gig flipping houses, though my bestie scoffed at that, knowing full well I could never give up my writing. You see, I am rather addicted to watching people build things. I prefer professionals; I get more pleasure out of seeing a beautiful finished project than watching regular folk struggle and never achieve their goals. There is nothing I enjoy more than a Saturday morning watching Chip and Joanna retrofit a home. You can imagine my joy at their Magnolia network launch. The people they've chosen shows from are wide-ranging, diverse, and so far, incredibly fun to watch. My two favorites right now are Floret - though it's only 4 episodes, watching an extreme introvert (Erin) struggle with finding a way to share her art (growing the most glorious flowers you will ever see) with the world. It is painful, and beautiful, and they smartly do long, quiet shots of the farm that are incredibly zen. The other is Home Work, with Candise and Andy

Meredith renovating an old schoolhouse built in 1907. The aesthetic is full on Victorian; the Meredith are committed to bringing the school back to its roots but in the guise of a family home. Next up is Homegrown, with Jamila Norman, exploring urban farming. It's just a lot of fun to watch other entrepreneurs follow their dreams.

So I said this newsletter's topic was a metaphor for writing. Writing is no different than building. You have to have a plan, a vision, a purpose, and a goal. You have to have the proper supports or the roof will collapse in around you. Your foundation must be thick and sturdy or it will crack and cause all sorts of problems. You can't build a house without the proper planning, just as you can't build a novel without the same.

One of the most common questions I receive concerns where I find inspiration for my stories. I can easily point you to this habit when I answer, because my new book's main character is a designer. If I can't flip houses for real, I can at least have a character who does, right? I'll have more details on when this one is being released soon; in the meantime, I'm well into the new Taylor novel, and I have some very exciting news on the Joss Walker front—I have a new co-writer! My friend [Alisha](#) decided to focus her energies on her own work, which left me looking for a new collaborator for the Jayne Thorne series. I found that person in one [R.L. Perez](#), a brilliant young urban fantasy writer who's kicking it out of the park already. We just finished a short story prequel to [TOMB OF THE QUEEN](#) that will be available on Halloween, and are starting book 2 in the series, [MASTER OF SHADOWS](#).

I don't know if you recall, but I dubbed 2021 the Year of Content. This homonym was designed to both help me settle into a more meaningful life after a tumultuous year, and to help me kick start my creativity again. I'm currently working on 5 projects—the finished standalone (editorial), the Taylor novella (drafting), the Jayne short story (copyedit), the next Jayne book (brainstorming), and germinating the next standalone. Plus, a new series idea that I've been holding on to for several years is trying to get out, and we're kicking off Season 7 of [A WORD ON WORDS](#) with a bang—7 interviews in two weeks. It feels like the days of old, when I had more projects going than I could count. I finally feel like the vagaries of 2019-2020 are behind me. I hope you're having the same resurgence of purpose and creativity in your life, too!

---

## □ Smatterings

**Here are a few articles and podcasts I've found interesting lately.**

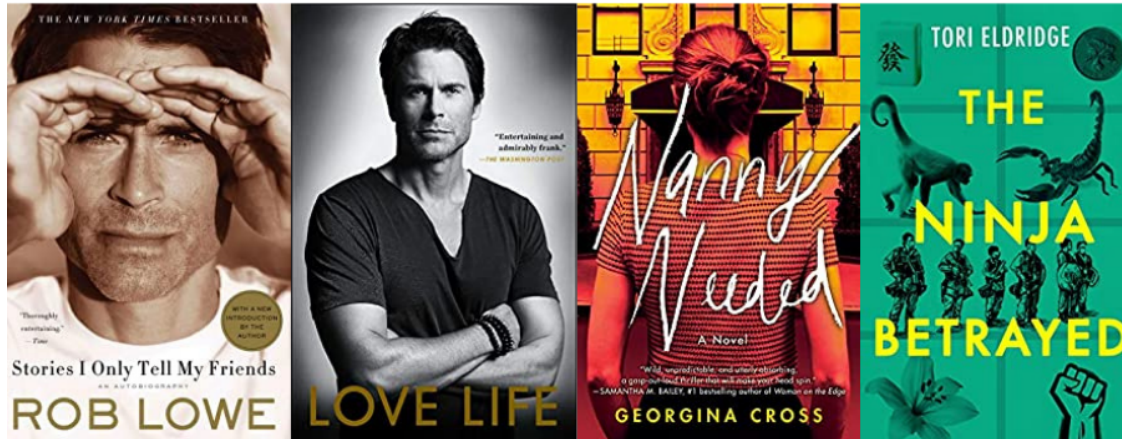
[This expose on Kitchens of the Rich](#) was interesting, though I have to let the designers know that no, not "everyone" is doing this.

[The Girl in the Picture](#) details a search for a lost daughter that unearthed a serial killer. I almost don't want to share because I want to keep this for myself...

[The Roys Summer in Italy](#) – I am a little obsessed with Succession, but I had no idea they were filming in Italy. That brings some interesting echoes of HER DARK LIES to the story, doesn't it?

[This profile of S.A. Crosby](#), whose incredible novel [Razorblade Tears](#) has been winning all the awards this year, is excellent.

## ☐ Read All About It...



### [STORIES I ONLY TELL MY FRIENDS](#) by Rob Lowe

#### [LOVE LIFE](#) by Rob Lowe

I listened to these two autobiographies from one of my favorite actors, and let me tell you, this man drops wisdom as often as he does (hysterical) impressions. There is a lot of gentle observation about striving for success in the arts, which was very meaningful for me, and loving the life you have. Plus, the inside stories about his career trajectory were fascinating. Funny, loving, impactful works.

#### [NANNY NEEDED](#) by Georgina Cross

When I read this book over the summer, I immediately shook my head and told Randy “this is going to be huge.” The premise is simple – a nanny is needed for a rich, reclusive family. But the truth of what lies behind the doors will shock you. A superb novel by a really cool chick – Georgina and I were panel mates at Killer Nashville a couple of weeks ago, and hit it off. Always fun to find friends in this business.

#### [THE NINJA BETRAYED](#) by Tori Eldridge

Tori’s third book in the Lily Wong series is tearing it up with the reviewers right now. I mean, how many current crime fiction novels have real life Ninja’s in them? This book works as a standalone but I highly recommend going to the beginning and reading them all. Also, I’ll be [in conversation with Tori September 18 at 7pm CST from Poisoned Pen Bookstore!](#)

## ☐☐ September Recipe: Spicy Jambalaya



At my brother's request, who received a photo of this lovely dish on our family's nightly *what are you eating for dinner?* Text thread (the fun way we have dinner together like we did growing up despite being spread across the country), I went searching the recipe archives for this, and it was not there! 🐱 So I promised to write it up, and I thought I'd share with y'all, too. I do mine differently than the true version – not a fan of okra, nor green peppers – but the heart of the dish is there.

SOUNDS DELISH!

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

## ☐ Book News

**14 has a new cover!**

**A copycat killer.  
A cold case cracked open.**

Available now



In the ongoing rebranding of the [Taylor Jackson series](#), **14** is up. What do you think?

## □ 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: Angela G! And don't forget to enter for this month's drawing by clicking below!

[I WANT THAT GIFT CARD!](#)

That's all for now! Build something great, do some forest bathing, love one another, and I'll see you next month!

Peace and hugs,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J.T. Ellison', with a long, sweeping flourish extending to the right.



## Are you still here?

Here's a kitten for your troubles!



Did you like this newsletter? Share it with a friend!



### J.T. Ellison

P.O. Box 218453, Nashville  
TN 37221 United States



To ensure delivery add  
[jtellison@jtellison.com](mailto:jtellison@jtellison.com)  
to your address book.

If you no longer wish to receive the newsletter:

[Unsubscribe](#)