

**Season of Eclipse**  
**by Terry Wolverton**  
**excerpt – 750 words**

The security line in the American Airlines terminal at JFK snaked around several times. The airport was crowded with people taking advantage of the three-day weekend—President’s Day, whatever that meant. Most people could no longer tell you *which* presidents the day was intended to honor. Marielle had gotten to the airport in plenty of time, but she hated waiting in any circumstance, and it was making her cranky.

But everything was irritating her today: In the cab on her way to the airport she’d taken a call from her attorney, Reza; the option on her last novel, *The Time Before the Last Time*, had lapsed and the film company was not going to renew. The PEN America event that had brought her from temperate Los Angeles to New York in the dead of winter had been a listless affair, even though she’d been the keynote speaker; all anyone in her industry could talk about was the death of publishing. Even as she’d gamely delivered her prepared address about “the freedom of speech,” she couldn’t help but wonder, what good was speech if no one was listening anymore? Then, at the dinner, she’d been stuck sitting next to the man who won the Pulitzer for fiction last year, *her* Pulitzer—the first time she’d been nominated, and she deserved to win. But she hadn’t won, and the dance of appearing to be gracious while the winner appeared to be humble had sparked her umbrage anew.

New York in February had never been her idea of a good time, and she was fuming about the frigid, slippery streets and the overheated rooms and the bristly competitiveness that charged the atmosphere whenever writers gathered. Her temples pounded with a hangover

from the previous night; the other thing guaranteed when writers convene was that there would be a lot of drinking.

And she was grumpy too about having succumbed to the charms of a young journalist she'd met in the elevator of her hotel. Araceli? She thought that was it. She'd been flattered to receive the attention of a woman two decades younger than she was. Several mojitos at the reception following her speech had helped convince her that the young woman's declaration that Mariel was her "role model" was not a red flag. Or maybe she *had* known but didn't care; she'd been lonely for a long time.

She'd been too intoxicated to remember much about the sex itself. And afterward, all the young woman really seemed to want from her was to agree to blurb her first novel, coming out next spring.

But worse than all these things, Marielle was currently stuck on chapter seven of the first draft of a new novel.

For Marielle Wing, the blank page was her enemy, its slick white face always taunting her to prove herself anew, a void sneering that no words would come, ever. That her true nature was emptiness.

Despite nine published novels, each garnering praise, or prizes or both, Marielle still found it punishing to eke out a first draft. She hated the not knowing, the clumsy stage of having to wander and flail, the struggle to bring a world into being.

She'd never had children. Though many lesbians did, she'd never wanted to; *this* barrenness she embraced, but she'd frequently likened the first draft process to labor—excruciating, protracted and bloody. It was in subsequent drafts that she became a sculptor of language and ideas, an architect of plot, a weaver of character and theme.

She was trying to pinpoint the real problem of chapter seven at the same time she was checking messages on her iPhone. The security line seemed not to have moved the entire time she'd been standing there. She was only half paying attention when suddenly her body was shoved hard and propelled forward; there was a sound so loud she felt it on her skin, repeating again, again, again. The word "bomb" slowly crawled into her consciousness. Then, fire and smoke and screaming. Some people dropped to the ground; others scrambled.

Once she had a word for it, Marielle grew calm. She had always been someone who became unnaturally composed in a crisis. During the Northridge earthquake in '94, her then-partner Liana had become unhinged as the pitching of the house had jolted them awake at 4:17 a.m. Marielle had wrapped her body around Liana's wiry frame, rolled them off the bed and onto the floor, whispering, "It's okay, it's okay," until the shaking stopped.