



Growing Mistakes

Writing is hard. Getting that first nugget of an idea on to paper is exciting then quickly exhausting. If you're a writer, the process becomes obsessive. You think about scenes whilst cooking tea, you stop mid-walk with the triumph of a fresh solution to a writing dilemma. You basically start living your story. And then that glorious day arrives when you have that story down, the whole thing, and you think, with a sigh of self-congratulations and relief, that you've *done it*.

Ah. But then you re-read it, or you ask some encouraging friend or relative to read it, and then comes the blast of truth: what you've written is a mess. Overloaded with adjectives and adverbs, full of plot lulls and holes. And the whole thing written in third person would be better in first.



So, you systematically begin rewriting, removing a few darlings (though not enough) and working and reworking scenes. Maybe change the character who turned out to have no agency, combining two slightly lacklustre characters into one more dynamic one, adding in an unexpected yet suddenly essential new one. As with my paintings, I'm not precious about my writing. I can be quite cavalier. I horrify my family with how easily I can tear apart a seemingly finished painting because it's not quite right. I take the same approach with my writing, tearing out parts that haven't worked and not worrying too much, trusting my instinct.

Rewrites done. And again, that wonderful sense of completion.

Ah. But another read through, some more trusted opinion and no, of course it isn't finished. More rewrites, on top of the countless hours rewriting the first draft, this time cutting out the sections you'd not long ago added in, taking out a character you'd though would add a fresh dimension but hasn't. Were those first lot of rewrites a waste of valuable writing time? Short answer, no.



When we rewrite, we are polishing, honing the story, clarifying scenes, perfecting dialogue, editing out plot holes. When we rewrite the rewrite, we're doing the same thing but this time (and this is important to remember when you're pressing delete on swathes of polished, unworkable writing) you're *GROWING* your writing.

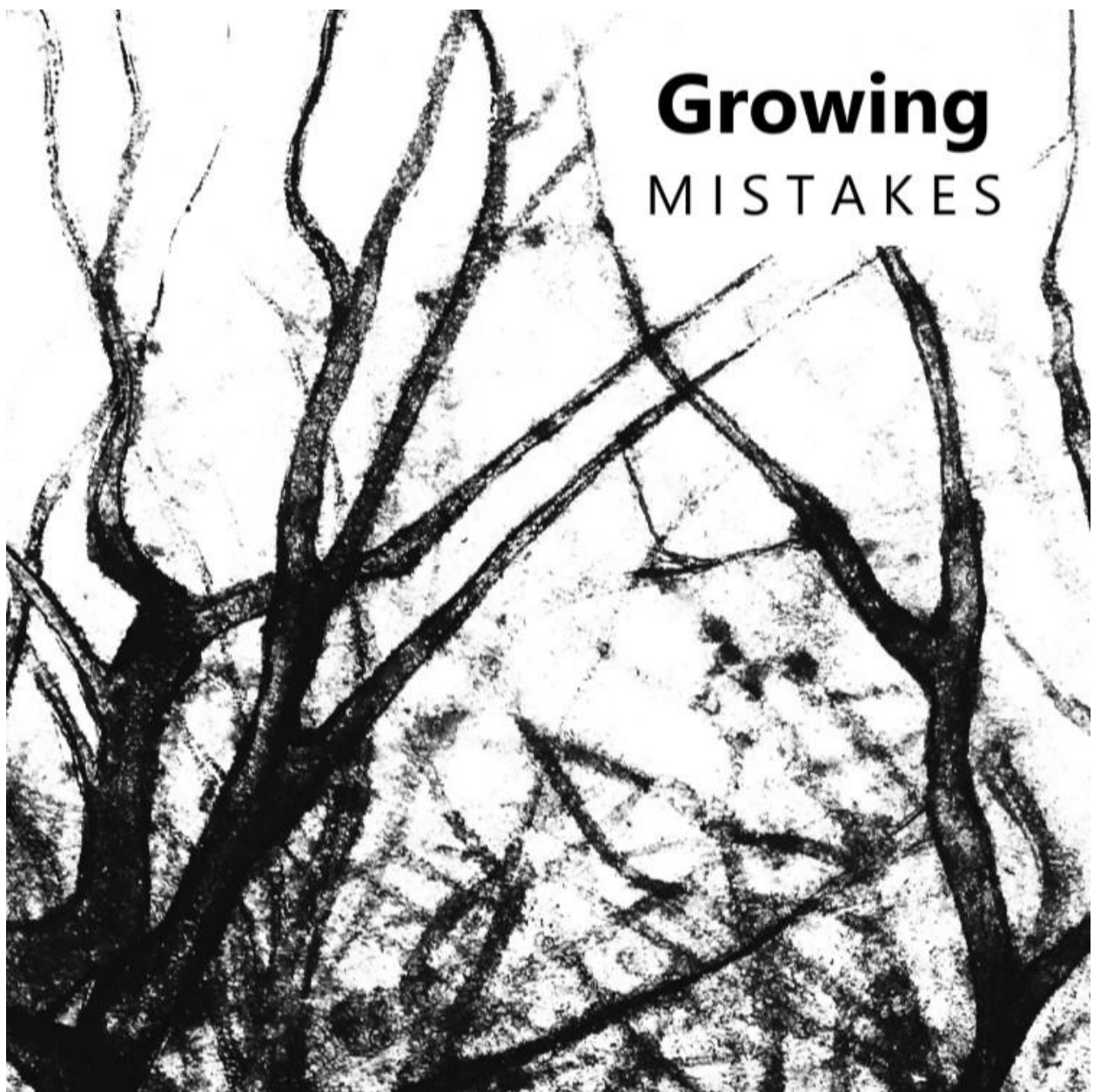
Imagine the first draft as the shoot from the seed of an idea. Second draft, leaves unfurl, third draft, some hard pruning but the shoot grows thicker, stronger, taller. Fourth, fifth, hundredth draft (the number of drafts all depends on how you work – it's not a reflection on how 'good' you are as a writer) your story is a confident, resilient tree.



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You simply can't grow a tree from a seed in one season – however much we'd like to hope we can. Rewrites are the rings inside the trunk of the tree. They become invisible to the reader of your final draft, but they're in there, in your writing, making it strong.

Lots of successful writers tell new writers to be fearless. I think that's especially true when rewriting. Never keep something just because you've spent hours writing and polishing it if it's not working or is no longer relevant to the story. Never mind that you're deleting hours of painstaking work. You've *not* wasted your time. You've spent those hours creating, nurturing, growing the final draft. The final, euphoric, ah.



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