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Based on a True Story

Written by Delphine de Vigan

Translated from the French by George Miller

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BASED ON A TRUE STORY

DELPHINE DE VIGAN

Translated from the French by George Miller

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A few months after my last novel came out, I stopped writing. For almost three years, I didn't write a single line. Hackneyed phrases sometimes have to be taken literally: I didn't write a formal letter, a thank-you note, a holiday postcard or a shopping list. Nothing that required any sort of effort or necessitated any concern about form. Not one line, not one word. The sight of a pad, notebook or index card made me feel nauseous.

Over time, the act of writing itself became rare, hesitant and no longer occurred without apprehension. The simple act of holding a pen felt increasingly difficult.

Later, I experienced panic as soon as I opened a Word document.

I would search for the right position, the optimal screen angle. I'd stretch my legs out under the table. And there I'd stay, motionless for hours, staring at the screen.

Later still, my hands would start shaking as soon as I brought them near the keyboard.

I turned down every invitation I received without exception: articles, short stories, prefaces and contributions to edited collections. The mere mention of *writing* in a letter or message was enough to tie my stomach in knots.

I couldn't write any more.

Writing was out.

I now know that various rumours went round my friends, the book world and the social networks. I know people said I'd never write again, that I'd reached the end of something, that bonfires of straw – or paper – always burn out eventually. The man I love imagined it was my relationship with him that had made me lose my drive, or the flaw I needed to feed my work, and consequently thought I'd soon leave him.

When friends, relations and sometimes even journalists ventured questions about my silence, I cited various reasons or obstacles, including tiredness, foreign travel, the pressure that comes with success, or even the completion of a phase of my work. I gave the excuse of too little time, too little focus or too much to do, and got myself out of it with a smile whose fake air of calm didn't fool anyone.

Today I know that all this was just a pretext. None of it counted for anything.

To people who are close to me, I probably sometimes mentioned fear. I don't recall speaking of *terror*, but that's what it was. I can admit it now: writing,

which had been my main activity for so long, which had so profoundly transformed my existence and was so precious to me, terrified me.

The truth is that just when I should have got back down to writing, according to the cycle that alternated fallow periods, incubation and actual writing – virtually a biorhythmic cycle, which I'd experienced for over a decade – just when I was preparing to embark on the book for which I had taken lots of notes and collected a mass of material, I met L.

Today I know that L. is the sole reason for my powerlessness. And that the two years that we were friends almost made me stop writing for ever.