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Backspace**

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BACKSPACE

A DRAMA IN ONE ACT BY
Lindsay Price



Backspace

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Characters

6W+2M+15 Either

The Young Writers (2W+2M)

Fresh, Rook, Fledge, Tyro (2W+2M)

Four writers just starting out.

Fresh & Rook are female, Fledge and Tyro are male.

The Blank Page (W)

The personification of writer's block, the one who fills your head with doubt.

Lady Aid/Lady Charity (2W)

Two Ladies of the Auxiliary who are fascinated by writers, tea, and crochet.

Novata (W)

A representative of the next round of writers just starting out.

Raw Ideas (all)

Amoebic, whispering, clawed figures. Aside from the group there are three specific ideas: **Whisp**, **Germ**, and **Bead**.

The Typewriter (all)

Everyone is involved in the Typewriter scenes, playing different parts of a manual typewriter. See next page for breakdown and part description. The Typewriter represents Fresh's dream so she plays RC, the Commander of the Carriage.

Tea Party Guests, Last Night Party Guests (all)

For a smaller cast: Novata, Lady Aid, Lady Charity, and the Blank Page can come from the All group that plays the Typewriter, the Raw Ideas and the Party Guests. You can also have the other three Young Writers play parts in the Typewriter scenes.

In the “fight” scenes, each character represents a different part of a manual typewriter. When they all work together they become a working machine.

Character	Typewriter Part
RC	Commander of the Carriage (the machine as a whole)
2ND	Carriage Release
F-REN	Feed Ribbon
HAMM	Type Hammer
TB	Type Bar
PEG	Type Guide
SHIFT	Shift Key
CAPS	Caps Key
SPACE	Space Bar
TAB	Tab Key
APOSTRO	Apostrophe Key
A, Y, B, M, J	Individual Letter Keys

I wrote the first draft of this play on a manual typewriter and the experience is what inspired this play. Using a typewriter is a completely different experience than using a computer. The keys are heavy and it's hard to get a rhythm going. If you're not careful, the keys jam and stick.

The act of typing involves hitting a key, which prompts a lever to raise a metal hammer, which has a letter fixed upon it, to strike the feed ribbon which in turn makes an imprint on the page. It's laborious – there are no conveniences that we expect with computers. No spell check, no easy way to erase mistakes, margins must be set manually. Once you get to the end of a line, you have to manually return the carriage before going again. At the same time it's exhilarating to pound across the page. I think it's something every writer should experience at least once. That's what I'm trying to convey in the scenes.

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A special thanks to students at following schools who participated in workshops of this play: Mayfield Secondary, Almaguin Highlands, Ruskin High and Union High.



ONE – How to Catch an Idea

Lights up on a bare stage. A row of soldier-like figures march on upstage. A VOICE keeps time with the march cadence.

VOICE: Left, left, left right left. Left, left, left right left. (continuing)

After forming a line across the back of the stage, they make a sharp turn and start to march downstage. The cadence continues until they reach the edge of the stage where they stop smartly. There is a moment of silence where everyone stands and stares coldly.

And then they transform.

Everyone morphs into clawed, animal, lunging figures. They hiss and whisper. They claw at the air and lunge unexpectedly as they move stage left to form a shape. This is the IDEAS amoeba. Undulating, hissing, clawed hands at all angles. Each IDEA breathes loudly in and out on a whispered hiss. At the end of each breath they whisper an idea fragment. Divide up the following fragments among the IDEAS. The IDEAS speak at the same time (in a syncopated rhythm, not in unison).

IDEAS:

White cloud	Dark night	Blue dress	Save me
Sharp pain	Will you	Heart sore	Green Eye
Red dress	Love love	Universe	White light
Blue sky	Stop her	City street	Everything

The YOUNG WRITERS – FRESH, TYRO, ROOK, and FLEDGE march on and stand stage right. They stare out (not at the IDEAS) focused, but struggling a little. The WRITERS are trying to write, trying to ‘catch’ an IDEA. The IDEAS continue to whisper and hiss underneath the WRITERS.

FRESH: There.

ROOK: Missed.

FLEDGE: Got you.

TYRO: Come on.

FRESH: There.

ROOK: Missed.

FLEDGE: Got you.

TYRO: Come on.

FRESH: There.

ROOK: Got you.

FLEDGE: Got you.

TYRO: There!

The IDEAS inhale in unison, a gasping desperate breath, and physically draw back. They freeze as one of them (GERM) flings herself forward onto the floor.

GERM: I don't know anymore about death. Do I believe in the white light, harp music playing? Or would it be better just to have silence. Forever. I don't –

The RAW IDEAS gasp and reach out trying to pull GERM back. GERM caves in the middle as if punched in the stomach. She flings herself backwards to rejoin the mass.

The RAW IDEAS continue to whisper and undulate. The WRITERS continue to try and 'catch' an IDEA.

FRESH: There.

ROOK: Missed.

FLEDGE: Got you.

TYRO: Come on.

FRESH: There.

ROOK: Missed.

FLEDGE: Got you.

TYRO: Come on.

FRESH: There!

The above process is repeated. The IDEAS take a desperate gasping breath and draw back. This time WHISP is flung forward from the group.

WHISP: Sabrina stood in front of the charred remains of the house. Nothing left but a skeleton. There was no other choice.

The RAW IDEAS gasp and reach out. WHISP caves in the middle as if punched in the stomach. She flings backwards to rejoin the mass.

The IDEAS continue to whisper and undulate. Now the WRITERS also join in, repeating their sentence quietly as the BLANK PAGE comes forward and speaks to the WRITERS. The WRITERS never look at the BLANK PAGE but know she is there.

IDEAS: (*whisper*) White cloud. Dark night. Blue dress. Save me. Sharp pain. Will you. Heart sore. Green eye. Red dress. Love love. Universe. White light. Blue sky. Stop her. City street. Everything.

WRITERS: (*whisper same time as above, syncopated*) There. Missed. Got you. Come on. (*repeat*)

The BLANK PAGE wanders among the WRITERS. The IDEAS and the WRITERS whisper so the audience can hear the BLANK PAGE.

BLANK PAGE: (*same time as above*) You'll never write as well as Stella Bloom. Never. Didn't she go to your school? Didn't she get her first movie deal at 15? You're so behind. Have you even started writing? You're just sitting there. What's the point in starting? The longer you wait, the less likely it's going to be any good. It's probably not going to be any good. Admit it, you're out of ideas. You're out of ammo. It would be better if you never wrote anything ever again.

BLANK PAGE wanders away and now there is a swell as everyone speaks at the same time, growing louder and louder and louder. It becomes a cacophony of noise until ROOK pierces through.

ROOK: There!

Everyone comes to a dead stop, audibly breathing.

BEAD: No!

The IDEAS gasp for air, and BEAD is flung forward to the ground.

BEAD: The secret to the universe is something that only a select few are aware of and even they are unaware of the whole secret lest they die for it.

The IDEAS breathe in. BEAD rises up but she can't get away. She collapses back to the ground. ROOK is now in control.

BEAD: Ah!

ROOK: I got you. I got you!

BEAD: (*fighting, but losing*) The secret to the universe is something only a select few are aware of and even those in the know are only aware of bits and pieces. People have been killed for bits and pieces.

BEAD struggles to rise again, and cannot. She collapses to the ground. During this, the IDEAS slowly, slowly melt into neutral stance, turning away from the audience.

ROOK: Where do you think you're going?

BEAD: (*giving in*) Jonah had trouble with surprise birthday parties and 'don't tell my girlfriend secrets,' so he'd be thankful to know the secret to the universe wasn't on his watch. (*she takes one last look back toward the IDEAS*) But that was about to change. Everything in his life was about to change.

BEAD bows her head to look at the floor. Everyone freezes. The YOUNG WRITERS look out to the audience.

ROOK: I write.

TYRO: Writing is in my blood.

FRESH: I would die if I didn't write.

FLEDGE: My first love is writing.

ROOK: I'm good at it. Always have been, always will.

TYRO: It's what I know how to do. Five generations of writers.

FLEDGE: My second love is writing.

FRESH: I don't know how to do anything else.

TYRO: I've always known I was going to be a writer.

FLEDGE: My loves three through ten are writing.

ROOK: My words will move mountains. Shatter mountains!

FLEDGE: If this doesn't work out, I don't know what I'll do.

ROOK: My words will change lives.

FLEDGE: I will make it work.

FRESH: I write the real word.

TYRO: The only word.

ALL: The words the world is waiting for!

ROOK: *(looking at FRESH)* A typewriter? A typewriter. What are you gonna do with that?

TWO – The Tea Party

The scene changes instantly. Lights come up full. Soft elevator music plays. Everyone becomes guests at a tea party, filling the stage with light tinkly laughter.

Everyone moves as they laugh into tableaux, daintily sipping cups of tea, eating cookies and eavesdropping on the conversations.

ROOK, FRESH and TYRO form a group. FLEDGE is dragged away by a couple of LADIES to the other side of the stage.

FRESH: A little louder, Rook. I don't think everyone heard.

ROOK: A typewriter. A dinosaur. Really.

FRESH: Yes. Really.

TYRO: *(taking a bite of cookie)* This cookie is rock hard.

ROOK: You're kidding. You're kidding, right? This is your idea of humour. You shouldn't spring bad jokes on people, Fresh. It's never been in your nature. You were always the most straightlaced in the sandbox.

TYRO: I think I broke a tooth.

FRESH: It's not a joke. I've already found a place that restores old machines.

ROOK: What are you going to do with a typewriter?

FRESH: Write.

ROOK: Seriously.

FRESH: Bake cookies.

TYRO: Do not, I repeat, do not eat the cookies. They are boulders. They will crush your pancreas. And your car.

FRESH: If they want us to come to these things they should feed us something that won't crush a car.

TYRO: It's tradition.

ROOK: Come on, you love it. We all do. We're the stars in the room. The bright lights.

TYRO: (*opening mouth wide in FRESH's face*) Is my gum bleeding?

FRESH: (*pushing him*) Get away.

TYRO: Where's Nathan? I thought you two were joined at the hip.

FRESH: Didn't feel like hanging out with a bunch of writers. Whiny writers I think he said.

TYRO: We don't whine. We compare war wounds. (*holding up a finger and moaning*) Finger cramp.

ROOK: Everyone wants to hang out with writers. Everyone wants to hear about the fight. (*imitating*) "What's it like on the front lines? I could never be a writer."

TYRO: My grandfather hid in the can once and the ladies still came after him.

ROOK: (*looking around*) None of them could do what we do. None of them will ever write so much as a recipe. So they stand around and watch the stars.

FRESH: Maybe some of us don't want to be stars.

ROOK: Maybe some of us shouldn't be writers at all.

On the other side of the room, FLEDGE is cornered by two LADIES. They each take a loud sip of tea.

LADY AID: (*to FLEDGE*) So, you're a poet.

LADY CHARITY: A poet. Fascinating.

LADY AID: That means you write... (*there is a pause*)

FLEDGE: Poetry?

LADY AID: Fascinating.

LADY CHARITY: We don't often see the likes of you. The ladies like the screenwriters.

LADY AID: Yes. They're more good looking.

FLEDGE: Are they?

LADY CHARITY: And they have more fascinating stories.

LADY AID: Not that we listen, do we Lacey?

LADY CHARITY: Heavens no. Do you rhyme?

FLEDGE: When I talk?

LADY AID: Your poetry. Does it rhyme?

FLEDGE: Oh, no, Not really. That's not the kind of work I do. I feel that poetry should –

LADY CHARITY: Poetry should rhyme, don't you think?

LADY AID: (*leaning into FLEDGE*) May I touch your muscles?

FLEDGE: (*moving back*) What?

LADY AID: That writing arm of yours must be so developed.

FLEDGE: (*a little panic*) Ah...

LADY AID: Oh I'm having you on! I've scared the poor dear.

LADY CHARITY: He looks positively terrified.

The two laugh and take a large slurp of tea.

LADY AID: Still, it must be so exciting to be a writer.

LADY CHARITY: Yes. I could never do it.

LADY AID: No. It seems like such hard work.

LADY CHARITY: Yes. Tiring.

LADY AID: Yes. (*pause*) I do like to crochet though.

LADY CHARITY: Yes! Potholders.

LADY AID: Yes! Potholders are lovely. I made a hat and scarf set last winter. And I didn't follow a pattern.

LADY CHARITY: Now that is exciting! (*to FLEDGE*) Do you crochet?

FLEDGE: Me? Why would I, I'm a writer, I don't...oh! You're having me on...Aren't you? (*he looks at the LADIES, they stare at him*) No. I don't crochet.

FRESH: Looks like Fledge is cornered.

TYRO: His mother thinks he's going to fail. He told her he wanted to write and that's what she said. Doesn't have what it takes to be a writer. Doesn't have the stuff.

ROOK: He doesn't.

FRESH: Some friend you are. Just because your parents busted out champagne doesn't –

ROOK: You don't get it.

TYRO: My sister is in his squad. She says he's not...adapting.

FRESH: We should save him.

ROOK: He's never gonna make it.

FRESH: Don't say that.

ROOK: He can't handle tea. What about you? Out of ideas all ready?

FRESH: (*a little too loud*) Of course not.

ROOK: A typewriter is a gimmick. You can't use the past to save you, Fresh.

A growing alarm sounds and the music fades. A red light flashes. This drops everyone into a neutral pose except for FRESH, who looks around hearing the VOICES with a look of wonder. The VOICES come from all over the stage, without movement.

VOICE: Ocular oscillation recorded.

VOICE: Positions!

VOICE: We are in a zone state.

VOICE: Key jam.

VOICE: Writer in hold.

VOICE: Stay at ready.

VOICE: The fight! *(more VOICES joins in)* The fight! *(more VOICES join in)* The fight!

VOICES: To Victory!

THREE – The First Fight

And now everything moves into full swing. Everyone has a place to go and a job to do, moving swiftly and purposefully – like a battleship preparing for battle. Chairs are brought on and formed in a line.

At the same time, FRESH jumps into action. She sits at a small table and mimes preparing to type on a typewriter, flexing and wiggling her fingers.

PEG runs up to 2ND. She hands him a clipboard.

2ND: Report.

PEG: Fixed positions, sir.

2ND: And?

PEG: Nervous. But ready.

2ND: Good. It means they'll focus. Keep them nervous and ready.

PEG: Yes sir.

PEG takes the clipboard and runs off. F-REN runs up.

F-REN: F-Ren reporting sir.

2ND: What's this?

F-REN: New feed ribbon, sir.

2ND: First mission and we've got rookie ink?

F-REN: I can do it, sir.

2ND: You don't have a choice. All right, you've reported. Don't just stand there, get back to work.

F-REN: Yes sir!

F-REN runs off as TB and HAMM run up.

2ND: Report.

TB: Couple of sticky keys.

2ND: Going to slow us down?

TB: I don't think so sir.

2ND: You think or you know?

TB: I know, sir.

2ND: Good. (to HAMM) Report.

HAMM: Hammers are good to go.

2ND: Slugs clean?

HAMM: I can see my face in them.

2ND: I'm counting on that. Who knows where this will go.

HAMM: We're all ready to get back in the fight, sir.

2ND: Take your positions.

HAMM& TB: Yes sir!

Everyone is now in position, in three rows, representing the rows on a TYPEWRITER keyboard. 2ND stands off to the side beside the TYPEWRITER.

2ND: Q-T on the board! Attention! (*Everyone snaps into place. 2ND turns to look at FRESH.*) All yours, RC. (*she looks back in surprise*) All yours, RC.

FRESH nods. She takes an in-charge stance beside 2ND.

RC: We, this machine, our typewriter, has been inactive for who knows how long. Today, we have been called up. We don't know why. We don't know for how long. (*beat*) And we don't care. Understood?

ALL: Yes sir!

RC: We are here to do a job. Understood?

ALL: Yes sir.

2ND: Every word,

SHIFT: Is another word...

ALL: To victory!

2ND: What are we born for?

ALL: The fight!

2ND: What are we made for?

ALL: The fight!

2ND: What do we long for?

ALL: The fight! The fight! To Victory!

An alarm goes off. Everyone looks sharply to the small table.

SHIFT: The writer is in position. Repeat, in position.

PEG: Here we go.

2ND: Systems ready?

HAMM: Ready.

TB: Ready.

F-REN: Ready.

CAPS: Ocular oscillation recorded.

RC: Steady everyone.

SPACE: Tactile oscillation recorded.

CAPS: 2nd ocular.

TAB: Breath acceleration.

SPACE: Hands in ready. Repeat, hands ready.

TAB: Heart rate regular.

CAPS: 3rd ocular. Rapid ocular.

2ND: Why isn't she starting?

RC: Steady.

SPACE: Hands withdrawn. Repeat, hands withdrawn.

There is a groan of disappointment from the Machine.

2ND: Q-T on the board.

SHIFT: Writer has downgraded to inactive. Writer is inactive.

2ND: Everyone to hold positions?

RC: Stand in active.

2ND: Chief?

RC: You heard me, we stay in ready. We will not back down.

SHIFT: Ready positions. Repeat, ready.

2ND: (*aside*) Sir, it's not good to have everyone on edge. That's when parts break.

RC: Report.

TAB: Breathing regular.

CAPS: Rem unavailable. Her eyes are closed.

2ND: What if she doesn't pull the trigger?

SPACE: Tactile oscillation recorded.

SHIFT: Here we go.

SPACE: Hands at ready. Repeat, hands at ready.

SHIFT: Writer is locked in potion.

F-REN: Here we go...

PEG: Scared?

F-REN: Course not.

2ND: Quiet!

TAB: Heart rate in the zone.

SHIFT: We are in a zone state. Repeat, zone state, we have achieved zone state.

RC: Here we go.

There is a pause, and then the writing begins. The individual words are spoken by different keys but must sound like they are spoken by a single person. Flow is important.

A: Sabrina stood

Y: at the

B: top of the

M: stairs looking

J: down at the –

Everyone lurches forward.

HAMM: Key jam.

RC: Steady. Report.

HAMM: We're good. Just a little tangle.

SHIFT: Going again.

A: Sabrina stood

Y: at the

B: top of the

M: stairs looking

J: down at the

A: party. She gripped

Everyone lurches forward.

HAMM: Key jam.

2ND: She's typing too fast.

SHIFT: Out of zone.

2ND: She's too used to computers. Typewriters aren't the same.

SHIFT: Repeat, out of zone. No zone.

RC: Report.

HAMM: Give us a second.

RC: Stay at ready.

2ND: She doesn't know how to use the machine.

RC: Stay at ready.

CAPS: Ocular oscillation.

TAB: Inhale recorded.

SHIFT: Going again.

A: Sabrina stood

Y: at the

B: top of the

M: stairs looking

J: down at the

A: Oarty. Oarty?

APOSTRO: Great. She can't spell.

SHIFT: Writer downgraded.

APOSTRO: I bet she doesn't know how to use punctuation either.

A: What's an oarty?

TAB: No spell check.

RC: Stay focused.

SHIFT: Going again.

A: Sabrina stood

Y: at the

B: top of the

M: stairs looking

J: down at the

A: party. She gripped

Y: the bankster.

SHIFT: Regressive tracking in progress.

F-REN: (*sharp and crisp*) R-E-T-S-K-N-A-B

SHIFT: Strike out activated. Moving on.

Y: banister with

B: bejewelled

M: fingers.

RC: Report.

CAPS: Ocular oscillation constant.

TAB: Breathing steady. Heart rate constant.

2ND: She better improve her finger position.

SHIFT: Going again.

A: Sabrina stood

Y: at the

B: top of the

M: stairs looking

J: down at the

A: party. She gripped

Y: the banister with

B: bejewelled

M: fingers

J: as the sound of

A: light laughter

Y: wafted up to

B: mingle

M: with her perfume.

SHIFT: We're in the zone. We have achieved zone.

RC: We have text. We've got it.

There is a cheer from the machine.

SHIFT: Writer is in hold. Writer has downgraded.

APOSTRO: It doesn't look very good.

SHIFT: We don't judge.

RC: Words on the page. That's what counts.

2ND: What's the matter with you? Do your job.

APOSTRO: Yes sir. But, what happens now?

The long tail sound of a bomb scorching through the air is heard. Everyone looks up as it approaches. The blast is huge, it fills the air with sound, the lights flicker, everyone on stage is thrown to the ground.

FOUR – The Blank Page

Chaos. What we see and hear on stage looks and sounds like war. Movements include crawling, running, huddling, falling. Some hide behind the chairs. The verbal soundscape includes the following words and phrases jumbled over each other, garbled and repeated.

VERBAL SOUNDSCAPE: *(Everyone picks one to repeat. Syncopated.)*

Fire in the hole! Medic! Go, go, go! Incoming rounds, incoming. Medic! Report. Yes, sir. Stay down! Take cover! Draw their fire! Incoming, incoming! I'm hit! Go, go! Move! Fire in the hole! Incoming! Take cover!

During the above, TYRO and FLEDGE enter. They each take a chair, move downstage and sit, staring out. Once they are in position, everyone freezes and all noise cuts off. During the following, all those onstage should be on the ground, frozen with their heads down.

There is a moment of silence. FLEDGE looks around agitated. Finally he can't hold back.

FLEDGE: Is this what we're supposed to do?

TYRO: Shh.

FLEDGE: Is this the way it's supposed to be?

TYRO: Shh!

FLEDGE: I am shh. I am very very shh. Everything is shh. The front is very quiet. I thought there would be more action. More noise. A noisy front. (*FLEDGE holds up his fingers in a machine gun stance and makes a flurry of gun fire noise*) Bwat-at-at-at-at-at-at-at... (*he slows to a stop as TYRO stares at him*)

TYRO: The action is in your head.

FLEDGE: My head is not working. (*he scratches his head*) My brain is not working.

TYRO: Maybe you should go. Work at home? On your own? That might be good.

FLEDGE: I can't. My mother stares at me. She stands in the kitchen and makes the tap drip just to drive me crazy. She wants to be right there when I fail.

TYRO: So don't write in the kitchen.

FLEDGE: (*with a sigh*) Maybe she's right.

TYRO: Don't say that. Don't give up.

FLEDGE: I just thought it'd be different, you know? When I was a kid, when we were all kids and we talked about doing this? Playing writer in the sandbox. How come no one talks about what it's really like? The quiet. Writers always made this seem so... easy. Exciting. It's not what I thought.

TYRO: It's tradition.

FLEDGE: It's boring. All I do is stare at the blank page. All day long. Mother stares at me, I stare at the blank page, the tap drips. Sometimes she talks to me.

TYRO: Your mother?

FLEDGE: The page. So white and clean, row after row of white nothingness. Blank. Scary.

TYRO: It's not a she. It's a piece of paper.

The BLANK PAGE speaks from offstage. TYRO does not hear this.

BLANK PAGE: Writer... oh writer...

FLEDGE: (*looking around*) If you say so.

TYRO: Of course I do.

The BLANK PAGE enters. TYRO does not see or hear her.

BLANK PAGE: Writer... oh writer...

FLEDGE: Stay away.

BLANK PAGE: (*stopping*) Darling, I'm nowhere near you.

FLEDGE: I know all your tricks.

BLANK PAGE: How resourceful. You must have written so much then since I last came round. Have you? Written much? (*leaning in*) What's the matter?

FLEDGE: (*turning away*) I'm thinking. Stop distracting me.

BLANK PAGE: Sorry. Silence please. Writer at work. Carry on. (*She stares at him. FLEDGE groans.*) Now what?

FLEDGE: You're staring at me.

BLANK PAGE: Yes.

FLEDGE: Could you leave? It would be better if you left.

BLANK PAGE: No.

FLEDGE: But I can't write if you're here.

BLANK PAGE: I know. It's wonderful. I see so many of you young battle scarred writers. Ink stained fingers holding ink stained pages riddled with holes where you've tapped the pen so hard, willing something – anything to come. And nothing does. Row after row. Page after page of white nothingness. And I touch each fevered brow. Wipe away the blood and sweat from your faces. Oh my poor dears, my poor darling dears with nothing to put upon the page. It's all right. (*she places a hand on FLEDGE's shoulder*) You're out of ammo, darling. Put the pen away. You don't need to write. You would feel so much better if you never wrote again. (*she strolls off*)

FLEDGE: (*standing*) No!

TYRO: What's the matter with you?

FLEDGE: Why don't we take a break. Please? Let's go see Fresh. We haven't seen her in ages.

TYRO: That's because she's writing. She's doing her job.

FLEDGE: Please? I just... for old time's sake. For me.

TYRO: (*looking at FLEDGE*) OK. OK. This isn't going anywhere. (*they start to exit*)

FLEDGE: Do you like writing? Being a writer?

TYRO: It's what I am.

FLEDGE: But do you like it?

TYRO: It's expected of me. It's tradition.

FLEDGE: It's a tradition to cook a turkey on Thanksgiving. I like meatloaf.

They exit.

FIVE – The Second Fight

*The growing alarm sounds and the lights flash.
Everyone gets into the TYPEWRITER position.
FRESH paces by the small table. The alarm cuts off.
Everyone stares at FRESH.*

SHIFT: What is she doing?

CAPS: Pacing.

SHIFT: I can see that. What's she doing?

SPACE: Thinking?

CAPS: She's going to wear a hole in that carpet.

APOSTRO: She's a hack.

SHIFT: We don't judge.

APOSTRO: No sense of punctuation. There wasn't one apostrophe on that last page.

TAB: You're in an odd place.

APOSTRO: This is my spot. I am where I've always been.

TAB: For a typewriter. I can see her laptop from here. The keyboards different.

TB: Why would she bring us into active service?

PEG: Good question.

SPACE: If she has a laptop, why use a typewriter?

APOSTRO: She's a hack. We're gonna end up back in the box.

SPACE: Maybe that's a good thing.

F-REN: She's desperate.

PEG: She's creative.

TAB: She's trying to be a better writer.

TB: She should try writing something better.

SHIFT: Q-T on the board. Attention!

Everyone stands at attention as 2ND enters.

2ND: At ease.

CAPS: 2nd on the board.

2ND: What's happening?

SHIFT: Not much, sir.

HAMM: She's pacing.

TAB: She's thinking.

FRESH sits at the table.

SHIFT: Writer is sitting down. Repeat, writer in position.

2ND: Let's see what she does.

SHIFT: Shall I call the Chief?

2ND: Not yet.

SHIFT: Here we go.

A: The pros and cons

Y: of becoming a

B: teacher.

2ND: What's this?

M: Pro Number One.

J: I'm good with kids.

A: Kids like me.

TAB: Oh boy.

Y: Number Two.

B: I could get the summers off

M: and still write.

SPACE: It's a list.

2ND: List?

J: Number three.

CAPS: Pros and cons list, sir.

A: Number three.

Y: I would have regular hours.

B: Regular pay check.

2ND: For one of her characters?

M: Health benefits.

TAB: No sir. For her.

J: Everything would be very regular.

A: Cons.

Y: Number One.

B: I hate kids.

M: Number Two.

J: I hate regular hours.

SHIFT: I'll alert the Chief.

2ND: No.

A: Number Three.

Y: I don't want to be a teacher.

B: I want to fight. I want to be a writer. I want...

F-REN: What do we do?

PEG: What can we do?

M: Nathan wants me to be a teacher.

HAMM: We can't write for him.

J: Nathan wants me to be regular.

A: Nathan wants me to be boring.

Y: This is stupid.

APOSTRO: This is painful.

M: I don't want to be boring.

KEYS: (*KEYS are the letter keys all speaking together*) I don't want to do this!

CAPS: Is she talking to us?

TAB: She's typing her thoughts.

A: Nathan doesn't want me to be a writer.

APOSTRO: This is bad.

TAB: Shut up.

Y: Nathan doesn't want me to be a writer.

APOSTRO: This is very bad.

B: Nathan doesn't want me to be a writer.

SHIFT: Sir, we have to get the Chief.

2ND: No.

SHIFT: Sir!

2ND: And tell him what?

M: What am I doing?

SPACE: We have to get her back on track.

J: What am I doing?

APOSTRO: I don't want to go back in the box.

A: I don't want Nathan to decide for me.

F-REN: I don't want to be inactive.

Y: I don't want Nathan to decide my life for me.

TB: I want to fight.

B: I want to fight.

CAPS: Let us fight.

SPACE: Please sir!

2ND: So what do you propose?

SHIFT: We get the Chief.

HAMM: We could tackle her, grab her finger.

TB: You couldn't.

M: I can't believe

HAMM: Watch me.

J: I wrote that down.

SHIFT: We can't interfere.

TAB: We could jam the keys.

A: I can't believe I put that on paper.

SHIFT: What?

TAB: We could.

SHIFT: We can't interfere.

TAB: Give her a chance to think about what she's doing. She's not thinking.

PEG: I think she's doing too much thinking.

SHIFT: We can't.

SPACE: Why not?

2ND: It's never been done.

TAB: That's different than it can't be done.

2ND: (*pausing before speaking*) All right.

SHIFT: Sir!

2ND: We're going to jam the keys. Everyone hear that?

SHIFT: I want to go on record as being against this.

2ND: So noted. Hamm, you're the lead.

HAMM: Yes sir. On my mark, everyone is going to stick.

J: I don't want Nathan

HAMM: Ready?

Y: To ruin my life.

HAMM: One, two three, stick!

Everyone lurches forward. FRESH jumps back and leans immediately forward again.

M: I don't want Nathan

B: to ruin my life.

HAMM: Again, stick!

Everyone lurches forward. FRESH jumps back.

2ND: Hang on. Everybody hang on.

FRESH: What am I doing? What am I doing?

SHIFT: Writer has downgraded. Writer is in hold.

PEG: Paper is being released. Paper released.

CAPS: She's going to start fresh.

PEG: Fresh piece of paper inserted.

SPACE: Tactile osculation.

CAPS: Ocular oscillation.

TAB: Heart rate steady. She's not giving up. She's not giving up.

2ND: Come on, writer. Come on!

SHIFT: Writer has downgraded.

APOSTRO: She's doing nothing. Again.

SIX – Last Night Party

VOICE: Three cheers for Novata!

There is an instant scene change. Everyone becomes party-goers. Three put NOVATA on their shoulders. The rest raise their fists in the air in a cheer.

ALL: Hip hip hooray! Hip hip hooray! Hip hip hooray! To Victory!

Everyone cheers and applauds as NOVATA is placed down centre stage.



help@theatrefolk.com www.theatrefolk.com

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