

THE FIRST

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An Amplified Play in One Act

by

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*Dedicated to Madeleine in  
celebration of November 16, 2014.*

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## Cast of Characters

<u>The Reader:</u>	Calm, patient, confident, and deliberate
<u>The Writer:</u>	Undeterred, focused, and intense
<u>The Audio Engineer:</u>	Unseen, ensuring that miked sounds are clearly audible without feedback or excessive amplification

## Setting

Just Stage Right of Center: A comfortable chair with a reading lamp situated stage right of and just behind the chair. Directly in front of the lamp and within easy reach of the chair is a paper grocery bag containing: a hardbound book (postmodern literature preferred), a box big enough to fit the hardbound book, a current newspaper (*New Yorks Times* preferred), a magazine (*New Yorker* preferred), a paperback book (mystery novel preferred), paper towels, scissors, scotch tape, a small blue bin for recycling paper, tissue paper, and wrapping paper. There is also a condenser microphone (routed to a speaker, far stage right) situated to capture page turns and other soft paper sounds.

Just Stage Left of Center: A writing desk with chair. A writing lamp is situated near the top-right edge of the desk. Below the lamp is a paper cup filled one-quarter with water. On the left side of the desk, also near the top edge of the desk, is a typewriter. Below this, a red crayon, pencil (no. 2), fountain pen, and ballpoint pen rest against a stack containing a postcard, a blank greeting card with envelope, a sheet of résumé paper, a sheet of parchment paper, and a small tablet or notebook. There is also a condenser microphone (routed to a speaker, far stage left) situated to capture all activity at the desk.

AT RISE:

One spotlight illuminates THE READER, seated in the comfortable chair with h- legs crossed, reading the hardbound book. The reading lamp is on, illuminating the pages. THE READER's microphone captures page turns as well as the soft scratching sound of THE READER's finger as it traces h- progress. Another spotlight illuminates THE WRITER, seated in the desk chair, hunched over the table frantically writing on the tablet in pencil. The opening line begins, "'Twas night and distant thunder rumbled..." but everything thereafter is improvised. The writing lamp shines on the page.

THE WRITER

(THE WRITER finishes a page in h- notebook, tears it off, and hands it to THE READER.)

THE READER

(Before taking the sheet of paper, THE READER carefully closes the hardbound book and places it in the grocery bag.)

THE AUDIO ENGINEER

(Immediately after THE READER takes THE WRITER's submission, THE AUDIO ENGINEER mutes THE READER's microphone.)

THE READER and THE WRITER  
 (THE READER then adjusts  
 the microphone to  
 properly address the  
 audience while THE  
 WRITER takes a small sip  
 of water.)

THE AUDIO ENGINEER  
 (When THE READER is  
 ready, THE AUDIO  
 ENGINEER quickly unmutes  
 THE READER's microphone)

THE READER  
 (reading)  
 'Twas night and distant thunder rumbled...  
 (THE READER looks at THE  
 WRITER skeptically and,  
 while shaking h- head in  
 disapproval, slowly  
 crumples the page into a  
 ball in front of the  
 microphone. When the  
 ball is as compact as  
 possible, THE READER  
 tosses it nonchalantly  
 off somewhere far stage  
 right.)

THE AUDIO ENGINEER and THE READER  
 (THE AUDIO ENGINEER  
 mutes the microphone  
 while THE READER returns  
 it to the original  
 position.)

THE READER  
 (THE READER takes the  
 newspaper from the

grocery bag. The microphone captures the sound of THE READER unfolding the paper, opening to an inner page, and then shaking the paper into position—as one does. After this, the only sound captured by THE READER's microphone is the occasional rustle and page turn.)

THE WRITER  
(Meanwhile, THE WRITER takes the typewriter and positions it in front of h—self. The résumé paper is fed into the machine and THE WRITER begins to type, “From time immemorial...” Once again, THE WRITER improvises around this opening with h—microphone capturing every clack and ding. After a paragraph, THE WRITER rips the sheet out of the typewriter and hands it to THE READER.)

THE READER  
(THE READER carefully refolds the newspaper and places it in the grocery bag. THE READER then takes THE WRITER's

offering.)

THE AUDIO ENGINEER and THE READER  
 (As before, THE AUDIO  
 ENGINEER mutes THE  
 READER's microphone as  
 THE READER adjusts it.)

THE READER

(reading)

From time immemorial...

(THE READER looks up and  
 rolls h- eyes, and while  
 sighing slowly,  
 carefully tears the page  
 into long thin strips,  
 again in front of the  
 microphone. Each strip,  
 once torn free, floats  
 to the ground.)

ALL

(As before, THE AUDIO  
 ENGINEER mutes THE  
 READER's microphone  
 while THE READER resets.  
 THE WRITER also resets,  
 returning the typewriter  
 to the top-left edge of  
 the desk, but h-  
 microphone is left  
 unmuted.)

THE READER

(THE READER takes the  
 paperback from the  
 grocery bag. THE READER  
 thumbs through the  
 pages, occasionally  
 stopping to examine a

section of the book more closely. The microphone captures every detail.)

THE WRITER  
(Meanwhile, THE WRITER takes the postcard, addresses it to THE READER and begins to write with the ballpoint pen, "Dear reader..." THE WRITER improvises the rest of h- message with the microphone dutifully amplifying the dull rubbing of the pen. After a sentence or two, THE WRITER hands the postcard to THE READER.)

THE AUDIO ENGINEER and THE READER  
(THE READER tosses the paperback back into the grocery bag. THE AUDIO ENGINEER does h- muting, and THE READER adjusts.)

THE READER  
(reading)  
Dear reader...  
(THE READER looks up and closes h- eyes, pausing for a moment. THE READER then pulls the scissors from the paper bag and proceeds to cut the postcard into tiny bits. After returning the scissors to the bag, THE READER calmly brushes

any remain debris from  
h- lap.)

THE AUDIO ENGINEER and THE READER  
(Once again, THE READER  
and THE AUDIO ENGINEER  
work together to  
reposition the  
microphone.)

THE WRITER and THE READER  
(THE WRITER, looking  
dejected, starts to turn  
away from THE READER and  
accidentally knocks over  
the cup, spilling the  
remaining water over the  
top of the desk. THE  
WRITER freezes in panic  
while THE READER calmly  
takes the paper towels  
from the grocery bag,  
tears off enough to mop  
up the water, and hands  
them to THE WRITER. THE  
WRITER nods in gratitude  
and mops up h- mess.)

THE READER  
(THE READER takes the  
hardbound book, the box,  
the scotch tape, the  
tissue paper, and the  
scissors from the  
grocery bag, and begins  
to package and giftwrap  
the book as one would  
any present. The  
microphone captures this  
entire process.)

## THE WRITER

(Meanwhile, THE WRITER finishes drying h- desk, and then, taking up the greeting card and crayon, THE WRITER draws. The drawing contains both images and words. Most of the content is improvised by THE WRITER, but the front cover contains the phrase "It is a truth..." prominently displayed.)

## THE READER and THE WRITER

(THE READER, upon finishing the gift, taps THE WRITER on the shoulder, interrupting h- drawing. THE WRITER hurriedly stuffs the card into the envelope, and the two exchange: gift for greeting card.)

## ALL

(THE AUDIO ENGINEER does what is needed as THE READER prepares the microphone. THE WRITER, gingerly holding the gift, eagerly waits for a reaction to h- card.)

## THE READER

(reading)

It is a truth.

(THE READER raises h-eyebrows suspiciously. THE READER then pulls the recycling bin from the paper bag, folds the card and envelope into a small square, and recycles them.)

THE AUDIO ENGINEER and THE READER  
(THE AUDIO ENGINEER and THE READER fuss with the microphone one last time.)

THE WRITER and THE READER  
(THE WRITER, shrugs and tears into h- present, tossing debris left and right while THE READER takes the magazine from the grocery bag. THE READER's microphone listens as THE READER pages through the magazine, pausing here and there to scan a story or chuckle at a cartoon. THE WRITER finally gets to the book and carefully reads from the beginning. As with THE READER before, the sound of page turns and THE WRITER's finger tracing the text are amplified. This continues a bit before THE READER carefully rolls h- magazine into a

long tube and swats THE WRITER on the bicep. THE WRITER takes the hint, carefully sets the book off to the side, and begins writing on the parchment paper with the fountain pen; the words are entirely his own. THE READER returns to the magazine. Once THE WRITER has written enough, the tract is carefully handed to THE READER, who drops the magazine over the right side of the chair and examines the writing on the parchment.

THE READER  
(There is a pause while THE READER reads and rereads the document. Finally, THE READER turns to THE WRITER, asking)

And then?

(BLACKOUT)