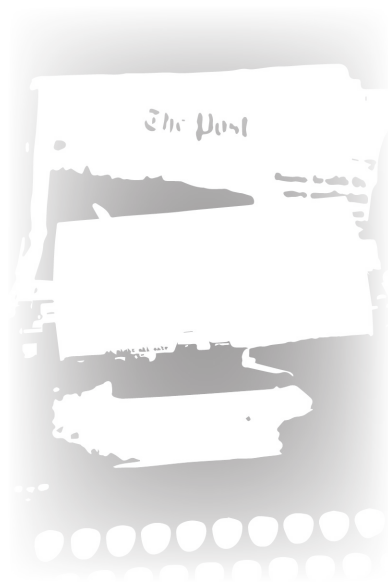


# The First





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for two amplified actors

Stephen F. Lilly



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

## **PERSONAE:**

THE READER –

calm, patient, confident, and deliberate

THE WRITER –

undeterred, focused, and intense

THE AUDIO ENGINEER –

unseen, ensuring that miked sounds are clearly audible  
without feedback or excessive amplification

## MATERIALS:

Comfortable chair

Reading lamp

Hardbound book (postmodern literature preferred)

Paper grocery bag containing:

Box big enough to fit hardbound book

Current newspaper (*New Yorks Times* preferred)

Magazine (*New Yorker* preferred)

Paperback book (mystery novel preferred)

Paper towels

Scissors

Scotch tape

Small blue bin for recycling paper

Tissue paper

Wrapping paper

Condenser Microphone (routed to a speaker, stage right)

Desk chair

A writing desk or table containing:

Ballpoint pen

Blank greeting card with envelope

Desk lamp

Fountain pen

Paper cup filled one-quarter with water

Parchment paper

Postcard

Pencil (no. 2)

Red crayon

Résumé paper (8.5" x 11")

Small tablet or notebook (less than 8.5" x 11")

Typewriter (a small laser printer can substitute)

Condenser Microphone (routed to a speaker, stage left)

## SCENE:

Lights up. Preferably two spots (one stage right, one stage left):

### *Stage right*

THE READER is seated in the comfortable chair with h— legs crossed, reading the hardbound book. The reading lamp situated stage right of and just behind the chair, illuminates the pages. Directly in front of the lamp and within easy reach of THE READER is the laden grocery bag. THE READER's microphone captures page turns as well as the soft scratching sound of THE READER's finger as it traces h— progress.

### *Stage left*

THE WRITER, seated in the desk chair, is 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 situated near the top-right edge of the desk shines on the page. Below the lamp is the paper cup. To the left of the writer, also near the top edge of the desk, is the typewriter. Below this, the crayon and pen rest against a stack containing the postcard, the greeting card, the résumé paper, and the parchment paper. THE WRITER's microphone amplifies all activity occurring at the desk.



## ACT I:

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

Before taking the sheet of paper, THE READER carefully closes the hardbound book and places it in the grocery bag. Immediately after THE READER takes THE WRITER's submission, THE AUDIO ENGINEER mutes THE READER's microphone. THE READER then adjusts the microphone to properly address the audience while THE WRITER takes a small sip of water. When THE READER is ready, THE AUDIO ENGINEER quickly unmutes THE READER's microphone, and THE READER reads aloud the opening line, stopping immediately after "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. Afterwards, THE AUDIO ENGINEER mutes the microphone while THE READER returns it to the original position.

## ACT II:

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.

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 carefully refolds the newspaper and places it in the grocery bag. THE READER then takes THE WRITER's offering. As before, THE AUDIO ENGINEER mutes THE READER's microphone as THE READER adjusts it, and THE READER reads aloud the aforementioned opening into the newly unmuted microphone.

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.

As in the previous act, 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.

### ACT III:

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.

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 READER tosses the paperback back into the grocery bag. THE AUDIO ENGINEER does h— muting, and THE READER adjusts. Then, THE READER reads aloud only “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.

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

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.

## ACT IV:

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.

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, 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. 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 reads aloud, “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 fuss with the microphone one last time.

## ACT V:

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 h— 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.

There is a pause while THE READER reads and rereads the document. Finally, THE READER turns to THE WRITER and asks, “and then?”

Lights out.