

Name: Bella Price

Work title Selfless

Category: Dramatic Script

Award: Silver Key

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*Black screen.*

NOAH'S DAD (VOICEOVER, OVER-THE-PHONE)

Look, Noah. You've been out a lot. I don't know where you've been, but you're distracted. Admissions are coming up, your essay is not where I want it to be...

1 - INT. NOAH'S CAR - DAY

*Cuts to an obviously new couple in the car. ANA is concerned and a little nervous. NOAH sheepishly steps out of the car. Ana looks up at Noah outside, then sees the SAT PREP FOLDER laying on his back seat.*

NOAH'S DAD (CONT'D)

...we still have a lot to do. I don't want you falling behind and missing out on your future. These kids you're competing with— they're not acting like this. You've gotta-

2 - INT. NOAH'S DINING ROOM - NIGHT

*Wide shot of Noah and his dad sitting at a symmetrical distance at the dining table.*

NOAH

So, uh, there's this girl.

*Some silence.*

NOAH (CONT'D)

Her name's Ana. We've been going out for a couple of weeks. She's a junior.

NOAH'S DAD

(uninterested) What college is she going to?

NOAH

Uhm...I'm not sure...

NOAH'S DAD

Have you told her where you're going?

NOAH

(sheepishly) I'm...sure I've mentioned it. So I know I've been a little preoccupied and I'll change some things, you know, the essay will be done in less than a week, I've already booked my SAT...I just wanted to let you know when you called me earlier, I was on a date.

*Noah, intimidated by his dad's ignorance, begins to speak much faster.*

And if I get back on schedule with the college stuff I just want to reserve my time with her to just her. I don't want to mix up my priorities, you know?

*Closeup on Noah's dad twisting his WEDDING RING. He stops twisting it. Noah has hit a nerve.*

NOAH

I wasn't...talking about mom-

NOAH'S DAD

That's not why she left.

*There's a long silence.*

NOAH'S DAD

(quietly) That's not why she left.

*Noah's dad's PHONE rings a couple of times. He gets up and steps out of the room. Soft piano begins as Noah rubs his forehead in distress. Noah's phone lights up with a text from Ana. Piano begins to transition into a happier note.*

3 - MONTAGE - VARIOUS

*The lighthearted piano continues throughout this montage. Candid chatter of the characters can be slightly heard but not focused on.*

A) EXT. Outside Platform - DAY - Noah helps Ana balance on an elevated platform by the beach.

B) EXT. Beach - DAY - Noah puts a flower in Ana's hair. Ana smiles.

C) EXT. ANA'S BACKYARD - DAY - Noah and Ana lay beside each other on a blanket on the grass and conversate as they gaze in the sky. Noah puts a necklace on Ana.

D) INT. School Hallway - DAY - Ana and Noah walk through the crowded hallway, sharing earbuds.

E) INT. - Homecoming Dance - NIGHT - 360 pan around the couple as Noah spins Ana around

F) INT. - Dark Kitchen lit with refrigerator light - continued 360 pan around the couple as Noah continues to spin Ana around

G) INT. Ana's Room - DAY - Noah teaches Ana to play the guitar.

4 - INT. NOAH'S DINING ROOM - NIGHT

*Wide shot of Noah and his dad sitting across from each other at the dining table again. Noah's dad writes an email on his phone. Noah gets a call from Ana.*

NOAH

(smirking) I have to take this.

*Noah leaves the room. Noah's dad looks up once Noah has left the frame.*

5 - EXT. NOAH'S POOL - NIGHT

*\*"One month later" on-screen.*

*Noah and Ana sit at the poolside laughing together as he teaches her to play the guitar. ORANGE, PURPLE, and PINK LIGHTS illuminate the scene.*

ANA

Noah?

NOAH

Hm?

ANA

Why do you do something with music? You know, make a career out of it?

*Noah's face falls.*

NOAH

It's what my mom wanted. But my dad wants me to become a doctor. His dad was a doctor. So was his dad.

*Ana stares tentatively.*

NOAH (CONT'D)

I wouldn't get any support from my dad. All I've ever wanted was...

ANA

To make music?

NOAH

...his approval.

*Ana saddens. She then furrows her eyebrows.*

ANA

I don't think you're making the right choice.

*Noah looks to her.*

ANA

I think later on you'll resent yourself. Do you really want to risk living the rest of your life wondering "what-if?". I've seen the pressure you're under. But I've also seen this.

*Ana nods to the guitar.*

ANA (CONT'D)

You're incredible, Noah. I don't want you wasting this.

*Noah stares in awe.*

ANA

Sorry if I'm overstepping, I shouldn't-

NOAH

Ana, will you be my girlfriend?

6 - INT. ANA'S BEDROOM - DAY

*Ana is on the phone with Noah, typing on her COMPUTER with her PHONE between her ear and shoulder.*

NOAH

Guess what?

ANA

What?

NOAH

I'm gonna take your advice. I'm gonna take my music more seriously.

*Ana pauses and smiles in amazement.*

ANA

That's awesome!

NOAH

I'm gonna start recording and, and start networking and-

7 - EXT/INT. NOAH'S CAR - DAY

*Noah stands outside of his car on the phone.*

NOAH'S DAD (VOICEOVER, ON-THE-PHONE)

-and you're not going to spend one more minute making music.

*\*One year later\* appears at the bottom of the screen.*

NOAH'S DAD (CONT'D)

If you're spending all this time with your girlfriend, you don't have enough to also make music. You can't have both. It's too much of a risk. You know I just want what's best for you.

*Noah, distressed, ends the call and gets into the car. Ana glances at Noah but casually looks back to her phone, unbothered.*

ANA

It's not worth it. Don't listen to him.

*Noah glances over and shakes his head.*

NOAH

I know I just...it's hard.

*The two sit in silence for a moment. Ana then smiles to herself.*



ANA

You know, the only thing I want you to worry about is our house being obnoxiously cluttered with Grammys. 'Cause that's a real problem if you ask me.

*Ana notices Noah is happy again. He stares at her.*

ANA

What?

NOAH

I just, I really like that idea.

ANA

The Grammys?

NOAH

A future with you.

*A muffled car horn bleeds into the next scene.*

8 - EXT. CITY - NIGHT

*\*"One year later" is displayed on the bottom of the screen. Noah, frustrated, walks away from Ana. She follows him. BLUE and RED LIGHT both illuminate the scene.*

ANA

I just don't know what's gotten into you! You're dull. Agitated. You gave up on music. You can't hold a conversation with me. You forgot our anniversary. You can't even look at me!

*The couple stops.*

ANA

(desperately)

Please, just look at me.

*Noah is still for a moment. He turns around, his eyes tired.*

ANA

I can't recognize you anymore Noah, and it's terrifying me.

NOAH

I did what you said.

*There's a moment of silence.*

NOAH

I tried, so hard...okay?

*Ana interrupts but is cut off.*

NOAH

He wiped it. All of it. The music is gone.

*Ana is taken aback. She recollects herself.*

ANA

Look, I'm sorry I snapped. But, I support you through everything, remember? This doesn't mean the end of music-

*RED LIGHT illuminates Noah's face now.*

NOAH

I don't want it anymore.

*Another moment of silence.*

NOAH

I don't want this anymore. Not music, not you.

*Ana's face falls. She looks away. After moments of regaining strength, she looks at him again, but this time, glaring.*

ANA

You promised.

*Noah ceases to react. His face is apathetic. His eyes are dim. Ana puts her shaky hand to his cheek and mouths "I love you". Noah leans into it for a moment, puts his hand on hers, but moves it down and drops it. He walks backwards as the camera cuts to a wide shot. He moves off-frame.*

9 - INT. ANA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

*Ana stares at Noah's old note written on her mirror across the room: "N + A" with a heart drawn around it. Her face is reflected in the mirror as she cries.*

*The scene ends with an extreme-closeup on Ana's eyes closing to sleep. Black screen.*

10 - INT. NOAH'S BEDROOM - MORNING

*POV-shot: waking up in Noah's room*

ANA (VOICE-OVER)

Noah's room?

*Noah sits up as he scans the room.*

NOAH

Noah?

*Noah clasps his mouth.*

*\*Note: Characters Noah and Ana have swapped bodies. Noah will now be referred to as Ana, and Ana referred to as Noah until they swap again.*

*Noah creeps off the bed and toward the mirror. Right after being startled at his appearance in the mirror, the camera PANS behind Noah's Dad and reveals Noah from the other shoulder. He hands him the FOLDER titled "SAT Prep" and gives him a stern look.*

NOAH'S DAD

You left this in my car for me to notice. You're barely halfway through. I wanted it finished by now. You're grounded.

*Noah's Dad walks past Noah.*

NOAH'S DAD

Don't expect to see Kenzie this weekend.

ANA (VOICEOVER)

Kenzie?

*Noah, frozen in shock, pats for his buzzing phone in his pocket as Ana opens and steps through the front door hurriedly.*

ANA

Give me the phone, Ana.

*A text from "Kenzie Goodman" reading "Good morning <3" appears at the top of Noah's screen. Noah squints and opens it. He is horrified to scroll through weeks of flirty conversations and plans to meet up.*

NOAH

Noah you-you were cheating on me?

*Ana stutters.*

NOAH

You cheated on me.

ANA

It wasn't you, it was the stress, and...

*Noah shakes his head in disbelief.*

NOAH

Don't pretend to care.

11 - INT. NOAH'S DINING ROOM - NIGHT

*Noah and his dad sit across each other at the long dining room table as they eat dinner. Noah judgmentally gazes at his dad who writes an email on his phone. Throughout this scene, Noah possesses the familiar mannerisms and tones of voice of Ana.*

ANA (VOICE-OVER)

So you knew, huh?

*Noah raises his eyebrows and takes a breath.*

NOAH

Why don't you let him do music?

*Noah's dad looks up, confused.*

ANA (VOICE-OVER)

Shoot.

NOAH

I mean me, (stutters) why don't you let me do music?

*A long moment of silence. Noah's dad then puts away his phone.*

NOAH'S DAD

Noah, there is no, what should I say, hustle in music. It's just luck.

*Noah's gaze hardens as his anger increases.*

NOAH'S DAD (CONT'D)

I want the best for you. You need a secure, stable job. And I mean, as a doctor, you'll be more than stable.

NOAH

With all of my respect, dad, this is Noah's decision.

*Noah's dad stares.*

NOAH

If this is what I decide I want, I don't need your support...but it would mean a lot if I had it.

*Noah's dad's phone rings.*

NOAH'S DAD

This is important.

NOAH

Your son's more important.

12 - INT. NOAH'S ROOM - NIGHT

*Noah looks at the study material on his desk. He sees a PEN and a STICKY NOTE. His eyes shift to the GUITAR hung on the wall. He looks back to the pen and sticky note.*

13 - EXT. NOAH'S POOL - NIGHT



*Noah sits down with his guitar. WARM ORANGE and PURPLE lights illuminate the scene. He begins to play, becomes distressed and pauses, but plays again. Solemn guitar music begins to play.*

*The following dialogue is played as audio over the corresponding scenes.*

ANA (VOICEOVER, ON-THE-PHONE)

So I talked to your dad for you.

NOAH (VOICEOVER, ON-THE-PHONE)

Yeah, he actually softened up recently. That means the world to me....Ana, I made a mistake-

14 INT. ANA'S BEDROOM - DAY

*Ana shoots up in her bed as she wakes up in her own body. She nods her head slowly, knowing what she has to do.*

ANA (CONT'D)

But the first thing I did when we swapped back was pack up all of your stuff.

*Montage - Ana puts everything from the relationship in a box.*

15 - EXT. ANA'S BACKYARD - NIGHT

*Ana burns Noah's stuff.*

ANA (CONT'D)

And burn it.

NOAH (CONT'D)

You did?

ANA (CONT'D)

Yeah. It wasn't easy, believe me. But I had to. I can't let myself be with you after what you did.

16 - MONTAGE

A) INT. Noah's Room - MORNING - Noah wakes up, relieved

B) INT. Noah's Bathroom - MORNING - Noah brushes his teeth.

C) INT. Noah's Room - NIGHT - Noah grabs his KEYS and SAT FOLDER but the STICKY NOTE on his guitar catches his eye. It reads "finish what I started".

ANA (CONT'D)

As for you, let's just say I hope you finish what I started.

17 - EXT. NOAH'S BACKYARD - NIGHT

*The lighting is PURPLE. He sits down with the guitar. The SECOND guitar in the song begins to play.*

*Cross-cutting with:*

*A) EXT. ANA'S BACKYARD - NIGHT - Footage of Ana burning his stuff*

*B) Memories of scene 3 and 5, playing in reverse, hazy, with echoing laughter*

*The song ends. Black screen. Audio of Noah sighing and putting the guitar down.*

*"Desire to see everyone eat, just not always at your table." on-screen.*

18 (END CREDIT SCENE) - EXT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

*"One year later" appears on the screen. Noah and a girl sit together at the cafe.*

GIRL

Yeah, I don't know, I mean I would love to just write for a living. I think it's a tough career to become more than just a side job.

NOAH

What have you written?

GIRL

I actually just finished my first novel. I should show you sometime-

NOAH

(interrupting) Okay so you're gonna publish that.

GIRL

(nervously) Uhm, well, I just...my mom might not-

NOAH

You're meeting my dad. Right now. Come on.

*Noah packs up and urges her to come with him.*

GIRL

What? Why?

NOAH

Funny story.

Name: Samuel Dyer

Work title Simulacrum

Category: Dramatic Script

Award: Gold Key

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CHARACTERS:

ROBERT: A playwright; full forename is Frederick Robert; wants to please others through his work.

CARICATURES: Figments representing figures in Robert's narratives; at minimum five actors; emblematic branches of Robert's psyche; their respective delineations are:

FRED: Central character in Robert's second attempt.

RADIO: Fred's car radio.

BOSS: Boss of Fred and the Workers.

WORKERS 1 AND 2: Workers in the office.

FRAN: Fred's love interest.

VOCALIST: Singing, one-off gag within the third attempt.

MOM: Robert's mother; alive in Robert's non-fictional being, yet still a heavy characterization; overacted and critical.

FIGURE: Ominous figure.

CRITIC: A critic from the playwriting competition; another real-fictional characterization.

SETTING: Robert's desk and the fictional space where his attempts come to life; modern-day.

## ATTEMPT ONE

(Lights up on an empty stage. After a moment, a CARICATURE walks out to stand at the center of attention. They sport full black as if ready for an audition. They look out to speak.)

### CARICATURE

Why not to say, "I love you."

(They suddenly embody an angsty moment in a 2000's romcom. They meander as they rant.)

There's no such thing as love. It's all weird chemicals in your brain. A bunch of nonsense you get when you see a hot piece. Everybody's got it. Except for lunatics. Their brains probably don't feel love! My point is love is made up. In your brain, that is. Still, it's gotta be mutual and shit. Y'know? You both gotta commit. You gotta be successful. It's hard. I would know that. You see, love has always been tricky for me. I-

(During CARICATURE's formulaic rambling, lights reveal a desk decorated with a cellphone, a pen, and loose pieces of paper. Some are crumpled. ROBERT, sitting at the desk, is writing CARICATURE's monologue. He wears a brown jacket. Before CARICATURE can finish, ROBERT interrupts like a record scratch ending the music of the moment.)

### ROBERT

I... I haven't... no. This isn't it. This isn't... me.

(ROBERT looks down at a paper. Another trite attempt. He takes it, balls it up, and tosses it away.)

Damnit. Okay.

(ROBERT takes a breath and grabs a new paper.)

Well, Robert, that angsty “love” isn’t going to work this time. You’ve done it before. Too sappy. Find something different. New. Fresh. Smooth. Something that flows. Smooth flow. Like caressing a baby’s head? Or butt. No, gross. Babies need love. Can’t do love. Hm. Oh! Production! Smooth production. The workplace. Factories. Well, not factories. War stories are boring to critics. Overdone. More like offices. The slump of modern work life! The movement, to and from. That’s great!

(ROBERT leans forward and begins to write.)

ATTEMPT TWO

(Lights dim on ROBERT as four CARICATURES enter downstage of ROBERT’s area. They all wear black clothing.)

ROBERT

Okay. Where to begin?

(Noticeably, the CARICATURES transform into FRED, BOSS, and two WORKERS. FRED moves center stage.)

A man. In an office. His name is... Fred.

(FRED waves to the audience.)

There once was a man named Fred. He was born in 1960-something. An overprotective mother. Absent father. On normal days, Fred would wake up for work.

(FRED yawns. He mimics his morning routine.)

Six days a week, Fred worked at W.I.P.E. Corp. A baby wipe company. Not ass wipes meant for men, but baby wipes meant for baby skin. Wait.

(FRED freezes.)

Does "ass" work? I don't want vulgarity. I'm sure maybe it works. It's the office after all. But. Does it?

(A beat.)

Ah, screw it.

(FRED and ROBERT continue.)



Not ass wipes. Baby wipes. The kind for baby asses. After his morning routine, Fred would step into his car and drive to work.

FRED

Off to work! It's a lovely day!

(FRED mimes driving to work.)

ROBERT

Fred wouldn't listen to music on the way. He hated that junk. Instead, Fred would listen to motivational speeches provided by the government's Work Happy, Stay Happy System.

(Fred motions turning on the car's RADIO. It speaks in a gleeful, slightly robotic voice.)

RADIO

Another splendid morning in our town of Greenville! Now off to work you go! Don't forget:  
STAY HAPPY!

FRED

(saluting ritualistically)

Stay happy!

ROBERT

Fred would arrive at work right on time. He'd walk into his office smiling, ready to start a new day selling baby wipes!

(FRED gets out of his imaginary car and strolls to an imaginary entry door as BOSS, WORKER 1, and WORKER 2 frame an office around him. Separated by a gap, the WORKERS squat at invisible cubicles. They type away, while BOSS stands in his room making a phone call.)

On this day, however, something peculiar happened.

(FRED walks behind the gap between the two WORKERS. They notice him and move closer to erase the gap, as if his cubicle were never there.)

Fred noticed that his cubicle was missing.

FRED

Where's my cubicle? I swear it was here. I couldn't have lost it! Oh no!

ROBERT

Fred figured there must be some mistake. He's been working here for years! Fred thought maybe he should talk to Boss to figure this out-

(Suddenly, a blaring siren startles everyone. BOSS hangs up the phone and enters the main office hurriedly. Everyone salutes him.)

BOSS

MEN! Pack your things and evacuate. Post-haste!

(The WORKERS post-hastily start to reach around their cubicles for keepsakes.)

FRED

Why? What's going-

BOSS

No time for questions! The nation's under  
attack!

WORKER 1

By who?

WORKER 2

(correcting)

By *whom*.

FRED

But sir-

BOSS

Didn't you hear me? No time for questions!

FRED

But sir my cubicle is-

BOSS

What about your damn cubicle?!

FRED

It's missing!

BOSS

That's your biggest concern right now? Screw it. You're fired.

(Fired. That word hits hard. The whole office stops dead.)

FRED

Fired?

ROBERT

The boss's words cut through Fred's heart like a knife. All those years and... Fired? Just like that?

(ROBERT overlaps FRED's dialogue. As they speak, a CARICATURE becomes FRAN, the office's receptionist, sitting at her made-up desk.)

FRED AND ROBERT

What am I? An object? Everything I've worked for. Thrown out like trash on garbage day? This is ridiculous. And-

(FRED notices FRAN. ROBERT resumes.)

ROBERT

-what Fred worked hardest for was the relationship he'd cultivated overtly throughout his career. The love of his life.

(FRED flows towards FRAN. The two lock eyes, gazing into each other as if a repeated love at first sight strikes for the thousandth time.)

The receptionist, Fran. She and Fred were inseparable. She was pretty, he was successful. They stuck like glue but never confessed their love.

(FRED and FRAN hold each other.)

Unfortunately, they never would. Now that-

(The scene stops. Lights get brighter on ROBERT.)

Wait. No. What... am I doing? This- this is terrible.

(ROBERT erases everything he has written and every CARICATURE tumbles offstage whimsically.)

C'mon. What happened? That was just. Atrocious. I mean, so disconnected. Horribly jointed. Nearly abhorrent. Similes? Too poetic. Real people don't do that. Real? Just so much... I used the word "work." Too much. And-

(A beat.)

Love. Why is love back? Love's unrelated here! This is- this was supposed to be dystopian. Why did love change the whole... everything?

(ROBERT takes a moment, sighs, and crumples his paper.)

Well, if my mind goes to love-

(ROBERT lights up.)

Maybe I should make the whole thing about love! Not like the first one. Or was it the second? Fifth? Don't know. But. I'll make it all love. Full of love. Trim the edges with love. No obnoxious writing. Nothing introspective. They hate that. Just. Love!

(ROBERT grabs a new paper and picks up his pen, enlivened.)

Pure love. Let's see how this goes.

ATTEMPT THREE

(Lights dim on ROBERT and VOCALIST strides onstage, ready to belt their heart out. They clear their throat before letting out their intense emotion through song.)

VOCALIST

(atonal, screaming)

LOOOOOOOOOOVE-

(Lights come up on ROBERT immediately.)

ROBERT

(cutting off VOCALIST)

Nope. What was I thinking? I don't know a thing. About music.

(ROBERT sighs.)

Apparently, I don't know a thing about love either. That wasn't lovely. At all.

(A smaller beat.)

Well, I think I know. About love. Do I? I don't know. Stop feeling, Robert.

(Another beat.)

Love is just. Hard. To experience. Well, no. To write about, at least. Love is-

(Suddenly, ROBERT's phone rings. The noise is not created by a CARICATURE. As it rings, MOM enters the space where the writing attempts took place. She is a CARICATURE in their classic

black, but also a sassy, purple vest. On the phone, she speaks facing the audience. ROBERT picks up the phone and stands up.)

Hello?

MOM

You done with your play yet?

ROBERT

No, not yet Mom. I- uh. I'm working on-

MOM

Better hurry up. Y'know how soon that deadline is.

ROBERT

I-

MOM

Remember our deal? You give half the prize money to Mama if we win!

ROBERT

But Mom-

MOM



It's what your mother deserves after all she's given you. Owe it from college. This is the third competition she's paid for. You gonna write a successful one this time? Huh? Because you love your Mama?

ROBERT

Mom, I-

MOM

(gasping)

*Frederick Robert!* You don't even love your own mother.

ROBERT

Mom, I didn't- I- I do. Love you.

MOM

Sure, you do. If you really love me, write the damn thing already. Make it a good one. I've been looking at a new ring.

ROBERT

Okay, Mom. I love-

MOM

Byeeee! Go please those critics for Mama! Be successful! Or I won't love you.

(MOM hangs up the phone and struts offstage. ROBERT stutters, then sighs. He puts the phone down and plunks back into his chair. He grabs another paper and his pen but hesitates.)

ROBERT

I-

(ROBERT falls into his desk, head in hands.)

Goddamnit. I can't keep doing this. This stupid cycle of- stupid Robert! Write something worthwhile. A good play. For Mom. For- But. I. I can't think of anything! Nothing.

(Slowly, realization sets in. He comes up.)

Nothing.

(ROBERT smiles.)

Nothing at all!

(ROBERT picks up his pen.)

If I can't do dialogue or music right... I don't need either! I can write nothing! Well, something, but no words. I can be abstract!

(ROBERT brings his head further down to write. Ready to make a great attempt for real this time.)

## ATTEMPT FOUR

(Lights dim on ROBERT's desk. The playing space brightens up again. CARICATURES 1, 2 AND 3, dressed in black, embark onstage. They stay near each other as they tiptoe across the area, looking for something. Someone. After searching everywhere, a loud clap is heard offstage. They turn to face it. The clapper then approaches them from offstage, revealed to be a CARICATURE dressed as FIGURE, wearing a flowing red cloak. FIGURE enters the space valiantly and sibylline, coming up center as CARICATURES circle them. FIGURE ceases. CARICATURES gaze in awe. A clap from FIGURE and the CARICATURES, perturbed, fall to the floor. FIGURE continues its journey towards the audience. CARICATURES look on, exhilarated, horrified, both or neither. FIGURE claps again. It demands the audience's attention. With a gangly hand, FIGURE reaches into a pocket and retrieves a sign. It displays a bold, red letter "F". The intention is "FRED" (Red F). CARICATURES crawl around FIGURE like disturbing human gargoyles. FIGURE raises the Red F into the air holily. One CARICATURE thinks and tries to reciprocate their interpretation.)

CARICATURE 1

A!

(In response, another CARICATURE pipes up.)

CARICATURE 2

R!

(The third CARICATURE gets it.)

CARICATURE 3

T!

(They have spelled "ART." FIGURE looks at them, baffled. It holds the "F" higher to emphasize its meaning. The CARICATURES repeat themselves eagerly.)

CARICATURE 1

A!

CARICATURE 2

R!

CARICATURE 3

T!

(CARICATURES and FIGURE look out to the audience. They have spelled "FART." Lights up on ROBERT, abruptly stopping the display. CARICATURES and FIGURE twirl off. ROBERT slams his palm on the desk.)

ROBERT

No, this is all wrong! Seriously? What are you... "Fart"?! Ridiculous. Resorting back to that goddamn ape brain of yours. Talking about *shit* and- That's not what this is supposed to mean. This-

(A beat.)

What is this supposed to mean?

(ROBERT sinks into his chair.)

There's *supposed* to be no meaning. But you still made one. And don't know it. Goddamnit. You can't write dialogue. You can't write love. Now, even when there's no message, you make one, but it's so horrible that it's basically no message at all. No one loves this. Or you. What's wrong with you?

(A beat.)

An essence with no essence. What a bizarre loop. A cycle you've created for yourself. Critics would hate that. And Mom. Dumbass.

(ROBERT rises from his chair and saunters around the desk.)

God. No words? No love? No theme?

(The phone rings again. ROBERT, anxious, doesn't pick it up yet.)

What now?

(ROBERT picks it up and makes a confrontation.)

No, Mom! I'm not done.

(The voice on the other line is not Mom, but CRITIC instead. CRITIC, a CARICATURE donning black and a golden vest, enters downstage.)

CRITIC

Hello? Is this Fred Rogers?

ROBERT

(confused)

No, this is Fred Robert. Fred Robert-

CRITIC

Oh yes, Fred Robert.

ROBERT

Who's speaking? Dad?

CRITIC

What? No. I'm a critic of the Winners' Institute for Playwriting Excellence.

(ROBERT gasps silently.)

ROBERT

The W.I.P.E.? Really? Well, it's a pleasure to talk with you, sir. I'm-

CRITIC

Robert, it says here that you have yet to submit for our annual playwriting competition for acceptance into the Winners' Association. Is that correct?

(ROBERT stutters.)

ROBERT

Well, yes. I'm-

CRITIC

I'm afraid to inform you, but the submission deadline is approaching. You have until the end of tomorrow.

(An anxious beat.)

Robert?

ROBERT

Yes! Yes. I'm here.

CRITIC

Are you still planning on submitting a piece?

ROBERT

Yes.

CRITIC

Okay, I'll leave you to it! Looking forward to reading it. Maybe we'll love it. Goodbye, Robert.

ROBERT

Good-

(CRITIC mimics a hang up tone offstage. ROBERT shakily places the phone back on the desk.)

A critic. Just called me? Oh Lord. He knows me. He knows my name! I'm on their list. The Critics' list. Well. Not for good reason. For bad reason. Because. I- I don't have-

(ROBERT takes a stressful beat.)

By the end of tomorrow? I have to. Write a play. By tomorrow. I- I haven't even-

(ROBERT grabs the current attempt.)

I don't- This? This isn't even a beginning. It's- nothing! Essentially nothing. Basic. There's no... worth! What do you do? Where do you go from here, Robert? How can you be successful when...

(ROBERT looks at the paper.)

This is shit!



(ROBERT crumples it and throws it ahead of the desk. He hyperventilates while sitting down in front of his desk in an upward fetal position. Like a baby who can't write.)

(tearing up)

Everything here is... shit. I'm- I'm shit.

(ROBERT cries into his arms, letting muffled weeps slip out. He drops his head into his hands. He gazes towards the paper ball on the floor, picks it up, and unravels it. ROBERT dries a tear with it.)

(speaking to the paper)

Where did I go wrong? No words. No love. No meaning. Just like you. We're useless. Overdone. Unfinished. How could anyone love us?

(ROBERT sniffles for a beat.)

Why did I ever write in the first place? I have no value. Nothing for anyone to love. I can't write something unlike me. I'm an appendage. Of me. And the work is just. Me. No one will love us. The critics? They think you're undeserving. Because you're made of me. We're not successful. I wrote you bad. I can't write you good. I never can. So what good is there for a writer who can't write?

(ROBERT pauses. An idea is forming.)

A writer who can't write. But I- I know I can't. So maybe my problem is that I can't write at all. But that doesn't make sense. I can write down words. I know *how* to write. But I... don't know *what* to write.

(ROBERT slowly stands up and travels downstage, pondering.)

ATTEMPT FIVE

(Lights brighten on ROBERT downstage of his desk. There are no CARICATURES. Only ROBERT.)

ROBERT

If I don't know what to write... I could write about not knowing what to write. That could be it.  
To write about not knowing what to write.

(The idea confuses ROBERT, yet he smirks.)

How would that even work? I can't just say "I don't know what to write." There must be more.

(A pause.)

Well. Where to begin?

(ROBERT thinks.)

Well... maybe there's a monologue. About not writing. "Why not to write." It would talk about how writing is inessential to the average. A talented skill only some should attempt. Success is everything, failure is death. Career death, that is.

(As ROBERT brainstorms his opening monologue, he slips off his jacket, revealing he is wearing the same attire CARICATURES do. Then, a CARICATURE, dressed like ROBERT, infiltrates the space upstage of him writing with a notepad and pen.)

And the writer would say "But I'm a writer, and I want to be." But he doesn't know what to write. But he can write. About not knowing what to write. He attempts to write several things, but they don't work out. That's the only play he likes. That he needs. The one about a man not knowing what to write, who's writing about a man not knowing what to write. And it's tedious. And it hurts. But it's true.

(Another CARICATURE enters upstage of the first, writing. Soon after, a third CARICATURE arrives further upstage near ROBERT's desk, also writing.)

But what about other writers? Or critics? What would people think? About my writing? About me?

(All three CARICATURES stop writing and look down towards ROBERT, awaiting his verdict.)

(smiling)

Well. Screw them. This is *my* play.

(ROBERT turns back to write but is surprised by the CARICATURES behind him. Writing him. He gasps.)

It's... I'm... It's me. I'm the play.

(Blackout. End of play.)