

Toy Symphony

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ACT ONE

The writer ROLAND HENNING *finds himself in the consulting room of a therapist,* NINA.

NINA: What I'm interested in is clarity, in a better understanding of whatever we're afraid of—

ROLAND: Yes, uh-huh—

NINA: —what it is that's stopping us doing what it is we want to do—

ROLAND: Uh-huh, yes.

NINA: —identifying thinking or behaviour that is clearly negative, destructive—

ROLAND: Uh-huh, right, clarity, yes.

NINA: —So that we know it better, the fear, the pressure—

ROLAND: Okay look, I can't write. Save a lot of time, straight to it, can't write. That's pretty clear, don't you think?

NINA: Roland, we know you can write. There's a body of work, you have a reputation. But, well, this is interesting, this is what I'm talking about. For some reason, you currently believe, for whatever reason, you *believe* you can't write.

ROLAND: Uh-huh.

NINA: And it's that kind of thinking that might be a good place to start.

Anyone dealing with a creative block can start to look at—

ROLAND: No. No. This isn't writer's... thing, no.

NINA: Writer's...?

ROLAND: You know.

NINA: Writer's...?

ROLAND: I don't have... it's not that. Let's just get that—

NINA: You mean writer's block?

ROLAND: There you are, you see.

NINA: I didn't actually use that term.

ROLAND: Maybe not, not out loud, but it's still there, underneath. See Dr...?

NINA: Nina.

ROLAND: Nina, if this is going to work, if, and I really don't, I'm not sure, really, if there's any point and this isn't you, no, I have the greatest, I'm sure you're terrific, you're the one who's read *The Interpretation of Dreams* or you saw your grandfather naked when you were six and you have devoted your life to understanding the effect that had, I see that, but let me be perfectly clear I do not have writer's...

NINA: Writer's...

ROLAND: I told you.

NINA: Writer's...?

ROLAND: Okay, uh-huh. This is a technique, getting me to admit I have a problem, and then if I admit it then I have it. But I told you. I don't have writer's... block, there I said it.

NINA: Roland, I didn't say—

ROLAND: And I mean writer's... thing, I mean it's such a meaningless term anyway, a Hollywood fiction, a monumental cliché and if that's how you're going to, if you think that's how you're going to whatever it is you intend doing or attempting, by removing this... block, as if, as if there's this there's this river, that comes bubbling up from the deep, way down in the Permian layers, thrusting up through the ancient strata, forced up by the internal forces, pressures, and it spills out, it bursts out into the dazzling light on the slopes of some painfully clear, bright mountainside and runs down this upper slope, this high country all clean and clear and sparkling like a Norsca ad, pure inspiration running over stones, through rapids, until it reaches the tree line. Then, there, it starts to wander through dank forests, spilling over mossy rocks and forming still, deep pools full of incredibly clear-sighted fish and visionary yabbies, carving out ravines all verdurous and gloomy with the slowly forming thoughts, just inklings of works of art. And then our river reaches the edge of the mountain ridge and now it plunges out of this high country, roaring over cliffs, cataracts, thundering over the edge of the falls, down into conscious valleys, deep chasms of impulse and first ideas, flowing on through steep gorges and wild, white water, churning up basic structures. It's violent and dangerous but finally it begins to slow down because it's reached the plains where there's habitation, creative cities full of neo-classical libraries and museums with all the previous works and commentaries and interpretations on show

so they can be admired, where you can find inspiration and study whatever you need to build your own work. And after the city, it flows even more slowly so the happy peasants can draw the water from the river in their intricate, ancient watering devices to nourish the fields where the new works have been sown and where they start to grow. And then, at last, the river reaches the delta and splits into a dozen different tributaries and the mud is incredibly fertile and masterpieces spring up almost without anyone having to do any work and then our weary river winds safely out into the vast ocean, stately, grand, with loud Beethoven playing, out to where Leviathan lives, brooding at the bottom, sending up the simplest, grandest thoughts to keep the ocean busy. And then the sun draws up the water and fat clouds form, thundering with thought so basic it's before thought, chthonic thunderheads. And the clouds drift towards the mountains and get snagged and it rains and the water tumbles down through fissures deep into the earth and it all starts over again and again and again and suddenly. Across our river— bang. Warragamba Dam. And the flow is stopped. It's blocked. By a block, the river is blocked by whatever; impotence, fear of failure, fear of success, fear of death, whatever. And I struggle helplessly with that, until you come along, with the psycho-cavalry and you help me work it through until one day, through persistence and 'I will not be defeated' and 'I am a valuable person' and I don't know, the workings of grace, you fly in like dambusters and drop your bouncing therapeutic bomb and it explodes and the wall collapses and water pours out and floods the towns downstream, and everything gets washed away and cleared away and swept away and new levels of fertile mud are deposited and the river is flowing again. And. I'm saved. Now. If that's how you, if that's what I'm paying a hundred and forty dollars an hour for well... you know. I don't think...

He breaks down.

NINA: Roland, do you need—?

She hands him a box of tissues, he snaps out of it.

ROLAND: I'm fine, I faked that, it's easy to do, been around actors long enough, so breaking down, the sobbing confession or the really sad moment in my past that's caused this isn't going to happen either,