

THE WRITER'S GROUP**(A Play)**

Brad is on time, per usual. His girlfriend, Regina, is not. Brad enters the trendy bistro, gets a table, orders a drink, and checks his phone. Nothing new here. Twenty minutes later however he is becoming annoyed. Thirty minutes in, concerned. After forty-five minutes, he has reason to be as an impeccably pressed and well-coiffed concierge approaches his table.

“Brad Kensington?”

“Yes.”

“I have a message for you,” the concierge says and handed him an envelope. Brad thanks him and tears into the crisp white stationery. Linen he notes. He reads it twice before hailing the waiter to retrieve the concierge.

“Is this some kind of a joke?” Brad asks while waving the letter under the confused concierge's nose. “Who gave this to you?”

The concierge frowns. “Bike messenger, I think.”

“Did you get a name? A card?”

“No sir.”

Brad gets up, thrusts his napkin along with a twenty, on the table with an air of disgust and leaves the restaurant.

Cut to the aspiring writer

I'm standing in line at the grocery store when I get a text from Nora. *'It's done.'*

What's done? But before I can speculate further my phone rings.

“You gotta come over,” says an excited Nora.

“Now?”

“Yes and bring your manuscript.”

“But I'm in the middle of--”

“Now.” *Click.* The line goes dead.

What's got her panties in a knot? Did she finally land an agent? *Lucky bitch.*

I belong to the *Mass-ter Plan*, a writer's group twenty minutes north of Boston. Nora, our fearless leader, has assembled a dedicated if not exactly simpatico consortium of writers for a

weekly share-A-thon at a local bookstore where we lay bare our WIPs for critique and encouragement.

There's **The POET**, who writes dreamy, artistic but totally obscure prose. **The NERD**, software engineer by day, superhero wannabe by night, one guess what he writes. **MR. ANGRY** political guy who argues about anything and everything with anyone and everyone. The twins, **PANTSER** and **PLOTTER** who never see eye to eye and will forever remain divided like Mac vs. PC. **POLYANNA**, eternally optimistic who sees the world through rose colored lenses. Me, of course, crafting my women's fiction or chick-lit, a term that's since gone the way of the vampire story, and last but not least is **Nora**, possessing more drive than any of us with dreams of joining the ranks of John Grisham or Tess Gerritsen. She'll stop at nothing to acquire an agent. In fact, she swore to it, at our last meeting, much like Scarlet O'Hara with God as her witness and all.

Oh, I almost forgot. There's one more. **The MUTE**. Smelling faintly of cured meats and with an unpronounceable last name (six consonants in before hitting a vowel) he sits in the back and never shares his work. Heck he barely ever speaks. But he brings homemade wine and baked goods. Despite our differences we all share a common goal, publication, preferably by one of the big five.

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I'm the last to arrive at Nora's. Everyone is gathered in the living room.

"Thank you all for coming," Nora addresses us as if speaking at a Toast Masters luncheon. "I'm sure you're wondering why I called you here." Nora is positively beaming. "I've got an agent."

"Wow."

"That's great."

Congratulations and other well wishes erupting from the group.

I dropped everything for this? I guess I'm a little jealous but really, she couldn't have just sent a text or email?

"Had I known, I would've brought champagne." *Probably. Maybe.*

"In there," Nora says with a nod to the door behind her.

"What's in there?" I ask.

"The agent."

“She’s here?” says the NERD, he sounds as impressed as he is astonished. “This is unprecedented.” Nora giggles and suddenly my stomach is in knots.

“Nora, what’s going on? Why is the agent in the other room?” *Did Nora make good on her promise?*

“Oh, I get it,” says Pollyanna. “She’s hiding until Nora gives the signal, then she’ll jump out and yell surprise.”

“Not exactly,” Nora says, “But she’s here and we are going to take advantage of this opportunity.”

“Well, what are we waiting for? Let’s meet her,” says another member.

“Soon,” Nora replies.

“Don’t yank us around,” says Mr. Angry. “Who is it?”

“Regina Rydell,” Nora announces, triumphant.

“Of Cutter, Loss & Run?” asks the Nerd, his eyes wide. “I love her.”

“Me too, think I could get her autograph?” This, from Pollyanna, and Nora soaks it up like she’s got the prize pig at the state fair.

“I can’t believe she agreed to come,” Plotter says to Pantser who says to Nora, “you must have made one hell of a pitch.”

“In a manner of speaking.”

“What’d ya do? Make her an offer she couldn’t refuse?” Mr. Angry comments in a rather good imitation of the Godfather. Nora titters nervously, hysterically really, and I’m thinking something doesn’t add up.

“What have you done?”

“Nothing much. Just taking the bull by the horns and I really went all out. I even included a ransom note.”

What? “Why would you need a ransom note?”

“Isn’t that protocol when you kidnap someone?” Nora says.

“Have you lost your mind?” I ask with the rest of the group apparently stunned into silence.

“No. Just fed up. I can’t take it anymore.”

“Oh yeah, she’s lost it,” says Mr. Angry.

“Totally,” another member agrees.

“What are you hoping to accomplish? You can't seriously think kidnapping an agent is going to win you representation?”

“Maybe not, but at least I'm finally going to get some feedback on my novel. I want to know why I keep getting rejected. Where did I go wrong?”

“I think it started with the felony,” says the Nerd.

“Hey, what's that music in the background?” the Poet asks.

“Brahms, I think,” answers Plotter.

“It's Tchaikovsky,” says Pantser.

“No Brahms.” An argument between Plotter and Pantser ensues.

“Sounds like Tchaikovsky to me,” says Pantser.

“You're both wrong. It's Beethoven,” Nora says setting them straight.

“Beethoven? I would've gone with Brahms,” says Plotter. As always, she's gotta have the last word.

“What difference does it make what's playing? Can't you see we have bigger problems?” I say feeling like I'd wandered into a bad sitcom.

“Why a lullaby?” the Tchaikovsky fan (aka Pantser) questions.

“Ever hear the phrase, music tames the savage beast?” Nora says.

We all stare at her.

“What are you wearing?” I ask noticing her outfit for the first time.

“A costume.”

“I can see that, but what are you supposed to be?”

“A mummy.”

Nerd approaches, removes his glasses and gets in close. “Is that made out of...are these?” He reaches out to touch the edge of her sleeve. “Paper?”

“Not just any paper,” says the Poet.

“Yes,” Nora says between gritted teeth, “the suit is made of rejection letters. Happy?”

“Wow, it must've taken a thousand rejections to make this suit,” says Pantser.

“289 to be exact,” Nora corrects her.

Someone whistles. “No wonder she's desperate.”

“Oh, come on, that's nothing,” says Pollyanna. “I heard about this one writer who was rejected 1180 times before being published.”

"Who?" says the Poet.

"I don't remember his name."

"So, what's the plan?" asks the Nerd.

"Well, after she's read our manuscripts, I want her professional opinion. On *all* of them."

"Oh, I get it, you plan to torture her," says Plotter.

"If you want to do that, have her read the latest ghost-written celebrity novel," Mr. Angry quips, eliciting a chuckle from the group.

"What do you think prison will be like?" The Poet asks.

"I don't know, and I've got no intention of finding out," I say and head for the door.

"You're not going anywhere," Nora says and pulls a gun.

"You wouldn't dare." Strong words considering I just about crapped my pants.

"Try me."

"Don't worry, it's not a real gun," says the Nerd. "It's got an orange tip." A crestfallen, Nora lowers her weapon.

"Hey, look on the bright side. We'll have plenty of time to write while incarcerated."

Ahhh, Pollyanna. The glass is always half full even if you were the one to drink the Kool aid.

"But the trial will cut into my Nanowrimo time," Pantser laments.

"How exactly did you find the agent? And get her here?" Nerd asks.

"She was at a costume party."

"Halloween was two days ago. How did you know where she'd be?"

"I follow her on Twitter."

Cut to the boyfriend, Brad.

"It wasn't you?" Brad asks Amber, the cute blonde he'd been sleeping with for the last month.

"Of course not. How can you even ask?"

"Sorry, it's just so unexpected. Plus, as the *boyfriend*, I'm the prime suspect."

Amber arches her brow. "Why?"

"Isn't that always the case?"

“I think you’ve read one too many ‘who dun its.’ Besides, Regina has plenty of enemies. Have you seen some of the comments on her blog? Or the tweets? Don’t get me started,” Amber says with a flip of her hair.

“She’s one tough cookie.”

“Is it true she rammed the heel of her stilettos through an editor’s turkey club once?” Amber asks.

“It was an author and she lit his manuscript on fire. In front of him. She’d never do anything to mess up her Manolo Blahniks.

Cut to the kidnappers

“So how do we start?”

“I’ll go first,” Nora says. “But put on these masks. We don’t want her to know who we are...yet.”

“I can’t believe I’m doing this.” Pantser.

“I can’t wait for the feedback.” Plotter.

Nora opens the door and enters. The rest of us crowd around outside holding our collective breath. A scream is heard. A minute later, Nora comes out holding a hand to her face.

“What happened?”

“She bit me!”

A look of fear spreads through the group.

“I don’t think this is going to work,” says the Poet.

“It will,” Nora says, dropping her hand and revealing the angry welt and teeth marks on her right cheek.

“Maybe she’s hungry. We should feed her,” Pollyanna suggests.”

“Yeah, that’s why she bit Nora,” I say with a snort.

“Couldn’t hurt. Got any chocolate?” asks Pantser.

“No, offer her something salty,” says Plotter.

“How about some wine?” the Poet suggests.

“Ooh, that sounds good,” Pollyanna chimes in. “A little brie would make a nice pairing. Got any cheese?”

“Now that you mention it, I’m kind of hungry,” says the Nerd. “Let’s have a snack.”

“What’s wrong with you people? Have you all gone mad?” I ask.

“Still gotta eat,” Mr. Angry says. The Mute nods in agreement. *When the hell did he get here?*

“It will help calm our nerves,” says the Poet.

I storm off in the direction of the kitchen, and the group follows.

“You know,” the Poet says while munching on a cracker topped with cream cheese and strawberry jam, “maybe we’ll get lucky. She could develop Stockholm syndrome.”

“That would be great,” says the Nerd opening the fridge in search of more to eat. Pollyanna just looks confused.

“Hostages can become emotionally attached to their captors. If we could gain her trust, she might cooperate,” Plotter explains to her.

They fix a tray and the Poet offers to bring it to her. Again, we find ourselves huddled outside the door where the agent is imprisoned and like before, there’s a crash, a scream, and the Poet comes out of the room rubbing the back of his neck.

“Carbs,” he says and shrugs. “Got me from behind with the tray.”

“Her hands are free?” Nora says, eyes wide with terror.

“No, she kicked it like Mia Hamm.”

“No wonder she’s so angry. A good piece of coffee cake would curb that sugar deprived rage,” Pollyanna says.

“Who wants to try next?” Mr. Angry asks.

No one speaks up at first until finally, Pantser bravely volunteers. “Perhaps this requires a woman’s touch.”

I don’t bother to remind her that Nora has already sustained a severe bite.

Two minutes later (hey, she’s lasted longer than anyone else so far), Pantser emerges wiping the side of her face with her shirtsleeve. “She spits like a llama. We’re talking Olympic worthy distances. Damn good aim too.”

Cut to Brad and Amber outside the restaurant in his two-seater sports car

Arms crossed, pout in place, Amber asks, “Why bring her to such a nice restaurant if you were just going to break up with her?”

“Thought it would be safer.”

“You were planning to end it with her, right?”

“Of course, babe.”

“What about the note? Are you going to pay the ransom?” Silence. “Brad?”
“I’m thinking.”

Back to the Kidnappers

By dawn the next morning, we sit around the living room feeling as lost as a manuscript in the slush pile. Attempts to win the affections of the agent were about as successful as the campaign for new Coke. The Tribal Council has spoken and by group consensus, the agent is released back into the world.

Angrier than a harassed Sasquatch, Ms. Rydell unleashed her wrath upon us, vowing a fate worse than prison, worse than death even. She threatened to blacklist each of us, promising that we’d never obtain representation and thereby killing our dreams of future publication.

Nora spent the night in jail but the next morning and to everyone’s surprise the agent dropped the charges, redirecting her vengeance at her boyfriend, Brad, instead. Or should I say ex?

Upon learning of his infidelity and that he hadn’t even attempted a rescue, never mind forking over the ransom, she tried to run him down with her car.

As for Nora’s short-term incarceration, she turned it into a novel which ended up on the New York Times best seller list. The Nerd eventually went on to win the Nebula award in science fiction. The Poet ran off to Greece with Pollyanna where they are reportedly and quite happily, shacking up, spending their days basking in the sun and their nights writing and reading sonnets. Mr. Angry is writing for an online men’s magazine. Plotter and Pantser got together and wrote a how-to book on teamwork of all things. As for me, I chalked up the incident as one of the strangest writer’s groups I’ve ever been a part of. It is also the last. My latest sexy vampire romance, which I self-published, has received popular if not critical acclaim and has been optioned for a movie.

Oh, and the Mute. Turns out he thought we were some kind of self-help group, like AA. Since then, he’s opened his own bakery. He has no interest in writing. Never did.

The End