

Typewriters know more than we think they do.

Olivetti



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O l i v e t t i

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To all those finding their voice.
And to all those willing to listen.

Introduction

Olivetti

It's quite possible you've never spoken to a typewriter before. This is not your fault.

Humans tend to think we can't understand them.

But when you sit still for long enough, there is much you can learn.

★ ★ ★

I should introduce myself. Yes—I *do* have manners. (I'm very well-rounded, despite my sharp corners and squared shape.)

I am called Olivetti, but that is nothing more than where I was made.

Typewriters aren't given names the way humans are. The way *books* are. (Do not get me started on *those* attention hogs.)

Many of my kind are called Olivetti, yet I am one of the few who are left. Most of my friends have gone extinct. We are like our own breed of dinosaurs, except no one goes digging for our fossils.

Things would be very different, if only our breed could roar.

Olivetti 1

It's possible you've never seen a typewriter before, either.

Most young humans have not had the pleasure.

“What is this thing?” I'm often asked when children meet me. They'll move their hand over my steel frame, searching for something that isn't there. “Where's the screen? It looks like a broken computer.”

I find this highly offensive.

Typewriters have much more character than one of those know-it-alls.



Have a look for yourself:

See what I mean?

While we might make it look easy, being a typewriter is no picnic.

Of course, I've never actually *been* on a picnic. No one has ever invited me to one. (This might be because I do not have a mouth, which seems to be

a picnic prerequisite.)

Humans type out words on us—stories, love letters, rants about members of their species.

Sometimes, they spill their secrets all over our keys.

Our silence makes us trustworthy.

So far, I've kept my word—which is to say, I've kept every word given to me.

Every story I've stored.

It's an important job, being a protector of memories.

Memories are like heartbeats. They keep things alive. They make us who we are.



I hold many heartbeats for the Brindles, a copper-colored family with eyes as rich as ink. Ever since Beatrice pulled me from the clutches of a cardboard box years ago, and set me on her desk, the Brindles have been my home.

Beatrice always told me everything. I always listened.

She'd sink into her tattered blue chair, and her featherlike fingers would flutter across my four rows of keys.

"I want to try! It's my turn!" the four Brindle children would beg when they were much younger, climbing onto Beatrice's lap. They'd reach their sticky, snot-covered hands at me. (In my line of work, you're frequently smeared with various unidentified substances.)

"See, my lovelies?" Beatrice would say. "All the letters are right here. You can recognize them, can't you?" Instead of teaching them to spell with pen and paper, Beatrice taught them on my keys. They'd type their names again and again, squealing when my fresh ink smacked the top of a crisp page:

Ezra Brindle (His fingers were thick and clumsy, clobbering.)

Adalyn Brindle (Hers were smart and quick, each punch like a pinprick.)

Ernest Brindle (His were soft and unsure, as if he didn't want to hurt me.)

Arlo bronle (His were slippery and stained, always

misspelling.)

Fingers are as distinct as personalities, once you get to know them.

I've kept even these moments, along with countless others the Brindles have forgotten. Because, much like their own heartbeats, humans do not always remember the very memories inside them.

The human species, you see, is full of flaws:

Breakable bones. Scratchable skin. The daily need to defecate.

But the worst one by far is that they grow up.

Olivetti 2

Over the years, my space on Beatrice's desk has slowly been invaded.

Stacks of books surround me on every side. For some unfathomable reason, the Brindles have collected shelves and shelves of them, and still insist on bringing in more.

It's baffling, I tell you.

Yet even the intrusion of needless novels does not compare to the glossy show-off who stole my spot, front and center on the desk: *the laptop*.

Felix, Beatrice's husband, bought it for her as a gift without warning. "This thing has tons of storage for your files," he claimed.

I was not familiar with what files were, but I was certain I had more storage.

In fact, I had unlimited storage. I held an endless amount of memories inside me.

Decades' worth of words.

Not to mention I was much more low-maintenance. I did not need to be constantly charged or connected to some higher power called the *internet*. All that seemed to matter to the Brindles, however, was the fact that my neighbor had a screen.

I watched as, instead of fighting over me, three of the children battled for the computer.

And the fourth, I hardly ever saw.

He'd pass through the living room, always on his way up to the roof.

Always with a thick red dictionary in his hands.

"Reading that thing won't help you make any friends, Ernest," Adalyn

said, reclining on the couch. Her eyes left her phone only long enough to roll at her younger brother. “You actually have to *socialize* with humanity every once in a while.”

Ernest, unlike his siblings, did not spend much time with other humans. He fraternized mostly with hardcover spines, but I tried not to hold that against him.

“That’s enough, Ada,” Beatrice warned from the kitchen, stopping Ernest on his way out the front door. They were almost the same height now, though it was difficult to tell—Ernest’s head was always bent toward the ground. Beatrice watched him, waiting to see if he might speak to her. Something he hadn’t done all week.

Arguments were common among the Brindles. But never between Beatrice and Ernest.

Go on, I urged Ernest from across the room. *Speak*.

His lips remained a stubborn, straight line, refusing to split apart.

Humans take their mouths for granted.

I would do *anything* for the chance to say *anything*.

Felix entered the apartment, his briefcase thumping into the doorframe. “Move the meeting to Tuesday, then,” he instructed someone in the small white intruders lodged in his ears.

“*Work stuff. Almost done,*” he mouthed to Beatrice, a phrase he said so frequently, even I was tired of it. (And this was coming from someone who had once shared a shelf with a broken record.) Felix disappeared into their bedroom like clockwork.

The rest of the Brindles behaved like machines, too, doing the same predictable things they did every night: Ernest went to the roof. Ezra, Adalyn, and Arlo left for their various activities. Beatrice remained alone in the kitchen.

No one was around to hear the shrill, needy cry of her phone, begging to be answered.

No one saw her face flash as white as paper, before she breathed out a shaking, *Hello?*

No one saw her rush out of the apartment.

No one but me.

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The following morning, Beatrice was up before everyone. Including the sun.

She paced across the living room carpet.

Where I used to sit with the children when they were younger, building forts of blankets and make-believe. Then, as if Beatrice was remembering the way things once were, too, she did something she hadn't done in years:

She noticed me.

Not the occasional fleeting glance, or the daze of daydream that had nothing to do with me—but a long, on-purpose look. The kind that reminds you that you exist.

This is it ...

Beatrice approached my spot on the side of her desk.

I knew she'd realize how much she missed me. I knew she'd come back.

I would have leapt into her arms. If I was capable of jumping, that is. But as she bent closer, she showed no excitement to see me. Beatrice's eyes, which usually shone like steel, were worn and red like rust.

Worse still, she was leaking. Her tears hit my Space Bar.

I'm here for you, I wanted to say as her fingers shuddered against me.
You can tell me.

She'd returned, like old times, to pour out her pain on my keys.

Because there are some problems not even her computer could solve.

Beatrice glanced around the sleeping, silent apartment, searching for paper, I assumed. Ducking under her desk, she pulled out my old carrying case instead. It was a sturdy plastic briefcase of sorts, with metal clasps inside that kept me from going anywhere.

The case used when I was going *somewhere*.

A very rare occurrence.

Beatrice opened the lid, which was draped in dust, revealing a thick stack of paper covered in my font. The words she wrote back when she used to begin each day with me. Her *Tapestries*, she called them, not just because of the way she tried to weave her words into something beautiful and bigger, but because of all the noise we made together.

Tap, tap, tap.

(We did receive quite a few complaints.)

“I can’t help it,” Beatrice would reply. “The more I feel, the louder I tap.”

She’d fill me with thoughts, poems and letters, the starts of stories she could never quite finish. Most often, there were memories. She’d trap time on a page—recounting moments from the day before.

I’m listening, I said, ready for her to finally fill me with more.

Beatrice tipped my case sideways, dumping the pile of pages into the trash bin by her desk. She heaved the bag out of the bin, tying the top in a triple knot.

I’ve never tied anything.

But I could tell that was the kind of knot meant to never be undone.

Beatrice set me in my case, then snapped shut the lid.

Everything went dark.

Ernest 4

My butt cramped from being stuck between the broken slats of a wooden lawn chair. Out of the three seating options on the roof of our apartment building, Valley View, I was in the best one. One was practically painted in bird poop, and the other was so full of splinters, it was like sitting on a cactus. I knew this because a few months ago I fell backward into the rotting garden box, which has a four-headed cactus growing in it. The rest of the rooftop garden is all weeds.

Our landlord meant for it to be a “shared community space,” but no one ever used it. Maybe it was the butt cramps, or maybe no one really wanted to get to know their neighbors, because I always had the roof to myself.

Just the way I liked it.

Like most mornings, our small corner of San Francisco was all fog. Fog is underrated. It’s made of almost nothing, but somehow, it makes almost everything disappear.

If only it could make my class presentation today disappear. I sighed, sending my unbrushed breath into the mist. *Or me.*

The problem with fog is that it only lasts for so long. And then, there’s no more hiding.

“Get back here, Chives!” Arlo burst through the roof door behind me. He dove onto the brick, clasping his hands around one of his pudgy speckled frogs. “Don’t make me ground you like Pickles!”

My younger brother, Arlo, has a thing for frogs. His frogs have a thing for absquatulating, which is a more interesting way to say fleeing or leaving abruptly. Also, frogs *squat*, so it just kind of makes sense.

Arlo shoved Chives down his baggy pajama shirt and tucked him into the front of his sagging pants. Everything Arlo wears is always halfway falling off. Probably because he likes to wear Ezra's old clothes, and Ezra has more muscles in one arm than either of us has in our entire bodies, combined. Arlo doesn't care that nothing fits him. More space to stuff his frogs.

"Why don't you ever bring your phone up here, Ernie?" he panted, staring at where the *Oxford English Dictionary* was propped open on my chest. "It's hard going up all those stairs. Texting is easier."

Texting wasn't something I did. My phone lived at the bottom of my backpack, and never really had a reason to come out. Phones were for people who had friends. Or in case of emergencies. I didn't have either of those.

"Dad says it's time to get ready for school," Arlo said, as Chives jiggled in his shirt.

"Don't remind me," I mumbled.

School is a breeding ground for awkward situations and strange social interactions.

Especially when you're in seventh grade. Especially, *especially* when you're forced to engage in the only legal form of torture still remaining in classrooms.

More commonly known as *presentations*.

Maybe there was still a way to get out of mine today.

"Don't you ever get bored of reading that thing, Ernie?" Arlo asked, as I watched the wind hit the dictionary's thin, wispy pages, ruffling *expectorate* down to *explode*. "It's just a bunch of words. Why don't you read an actual story?"

I didn't point out that *all* stories are just a bunch of words. And that without dictionaries, we wouldn't know what any of them meant. Because of dictionaries, everything means something.

My family didn't understand why I spent all my time reading them. But there was a lot they didn't understand about me, so that wasn't exactly breaking news. Compared to them, I was different. Different, defined as: *not the same as another or each other; unlike in nature, form, or quality*.

I wasn't the same quality.

I waited for Arlo to turn so I could rub out my butt and newly discovered

wedgie, and followed him to the indoor stairs that led to each of the four floors in the building. Chives croaked all the way down to the first floor, a sound all our neighbors were used to. More than once Mr. Botticelli, who lived across the hall, found a frog in his shoes after leaving them outside his door overnight. Let's just say, it didn't end well for either of them. Or Arlo.

Chives didn't stop ribbiting until Arlo let him loose into our apartment. Instead of the usual racket inside, whispers came from the kitchen. At least, attempts at whispers. No one in my family is very good at being quiet. Besides me.

"Why do *I* have to?" Adalyn hissed, as I crept across the living room carpet.

"Your mom said she'd be home late and asked me to take him. But a meeting just came up," Dad answered. "I really can't get out of it."

"Why can't Ezra?" Adalyn whined.

Hiding behind one of our many bookshelves, I peered into the kitchen. Dad was hunched over the table in his default position: face in front of his laptop, emailing someone from the tech company he worked at, half-listening to a podcast. *Always listening, always learning* was his motto, which meant someone was *always* in the background of conversations telling us about global warming or ten ways to build stronger habits.

"Can't." Ezra crammed a textbook into his bag, swinging it over his wide shoulders. "Weight lifting after school." Somehow, he looked cool with an overstuffed backpack. As opposed to a disproportionate turtle, which is pretty much how it always turned out for me.

"Well, I have theater!" Adalyn flung her arms. Her hair was a new shade of fake red, and she'd cut it short to her shoulders with not-so-straight-across bangs. "Which *actually* matters. It's not like your biceps are doing anyone any favors. All that muscle is just going to turn into flab one day—"

"Let's circle back to the task at hand, please," Dad said. These days, he talked to us like we were his co-workers or something, using office lingo. "The bottom line is I need one of you to take him. Your mom left a note insisting he go see this new doctor today."

I realized who *He* was, and it wasn't a big surprise. I was the family member most often discussed in the third person.

In my head, I recited off memorized words from the dictionary in alphabetical order:

Disappear. Disappearance. Disappoint. Disappointment. Disapproval. Disapprove.

This is my escape technique. It's good to have one with a lot of options, if you're the kind of person who wants to escape as often as I do.

"Is switching him to a new therapist even going to do anything?" Adalyn questioned over the drone of the podcast. "It's not like he'll talk to this one, either."

She was right. Didn't Mom know better from the way things ended last week at my appointment with Dr. Round-a-bout? Okay, Dr. Round-a-bout wasn't actually his name. I just called him that because it has a double meaning.

Meaning one: His hair looked like a roundabout—one patch of gray on the very top of his head, and bald everywhere else.

Meaning two: His questions were never straightforward. They were always going in circles, like a roundabout you were trapped on in a squeaky leather chair for an hour straight.

And how do you think you feel about how you think about how you're feeling?

Or something like that.

"I just wish you would have said something. *Anything*, at all, Ernest," Mom had said, after we left his stuffy office for the last time. "He's there to listen to you."

"I don't want to talk to him," I replied.

Mom sighed, rubbing her face. Like she was trying to wipe off the tired. "Well, you have to talk to *someone*, Ernest. And it can't just be me. I might not always be around—"

"I don't want to talk to you, either," I cut her off. Not because I meant those words, but because I hated when she said things like that. Mom had winced, tugging her wide-brimmed hat lower until I could barely see her eyes. Or if I'd made them water.

Apologize. Apology. Apoplexy. Apostle. Apostrophe.

"You can't keep isolating yourself, Ernest," she said. "I'm only trying to

help.”

“I don’t need your help.” My voice cracked, and not the I-just-turned-twelve kind of crack that sometimes happened. The broken kind. Where the shards of it get stuck in your throat.

Mom and I hadn’t spoken since. Seven days straight of not-talking.

And now that she’d signed me up for another therapist without even asking, my silent streak was about to stretch a whole lot longer.

“Oh—Ernest.” Dad stopped typing long enough to notice me creeping in the corner. His eyebrows bunched, like they were joining together for an important meeting. “Have you been standing there long?”

I was suddenly the center of attention. My least favorite place to be.

I shifted my gaze to what lay beside Dad on the table, to change the subject of *me*. “Your mom forgot her phone,” he said, following my stare. His fingers tapped her screen mindlessly. “She must have been in a rush. She left for work early today, before anyone was up.”

I shrugged, ignoring the sinkhole in my stomach. It wasn’t like Mom to leave without saying goodbye. Then again, she knew I probably wouldn’t say anything back.

“I’m guessing you heard all that about your therapy appointment…” Dad shuffled through his pile of sticky notes lining the table and brought a blue one over. “His name is Dr. Branson. Here’s his address. Since Adalyn has theater, Ezra will take you on the number twelve bus after school.”

Ezra grunted something about *missing squat day* and my *loner issues*, and slammed the front door behind him. I stuffed the note in my pocket, crumpling it into the piece of trash it was.

Dad leaned toward me with incoming eye contact. I tried to dodge it by looking at his feet, but his long, skinny toes were doing this weird thing where they were strumming the floor, like he was training ten extra fingers how to type emails. My eyes shot back up, all the way to the bumpy ridges of our popcorn ceiling.

“We’ll touch base later about how your appointment went,” Dad said, while I was wondering why the ceiling was even called that in the first place. It didn’t look like popcorn up there at all. “I know you don’t want to go, Ernest, but just give it another chance. With everything that happened—”

That's when I stopped listening. Because the Everything That Happened was exactly what I was trying to forget.