

THE BOOKCASE

by

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Abstract

Last Spring, I wrote a monologue for a creative writing class about a girl standing in front of a bookcase. She pulled down a book--*The Secret of the Old Clock* by Carolyn Keene--and proceeded to tell the audience what that book meant to her. From there, *The Bookcase* was born. For my senior thesis, I wrote a play about the magic of storytelling, the power that stories have to bring people together, and the importance of telling one's own story. I felt that writing a play was a proper culmination of all that I had learned in both my theatre and creative writing degrees. The following pages include a reflection on my process and the goals I set for myself at the beginning and the play itself. Both the reflection and the script are a testament to my growth as a writer and a theatre artist over the course of my thesis project and my college career.

For my senior thesis I decided to write a play about the importance of storytelling. As I had never written a full length play before, I knew that it would prove a challenging endeavor. I set the following three practical goals for myself in order to ensure that I would meet that challenge:

1. Develop a system of approaching writing more like a job rather than a hobby--setting aside a specific time every day to write.
2. Strengthen my rewriting and editing skills.
3. Complete a full length script to have under my belt when I begin approaching publishers about further works.

I set these goals to help prepare myself to go out into the world as a both a writer and a theatre artist, and looking at them now, as I reach the end of my process, I am confident that I have achieved each of these goals. I feel that the challenges I overcame and the knowledge and skills I have gained over the course of the past year have prepared me for the future.

I began this process with interviews. I wanted to discover what storytelling meant to people, why it was so important, and I found that one of the main recurring aspects was representation. When people saw themselves in books or on screen--in video games, even--their lives were changed. They felt connected, seen, and they remembered those stories for the rest of their lives. They returned to those stories for comfort and solace. They shared them with others to find understanding and shared experience. These stories inspired them to tell their own stories. As each interviewee told me about their own, personal experience with storytelling, they were so excited, so delighted, by the invitation to tell their story. I knew, then, that this would be the center of my play. I would focus on how vitally important it is for people to tell their stories, and

to provide the spaces for them to do so. With my central idea secured, I began to focus on the next challenge: actually writing the play.

The first official goal I set for myself was to learn how to approach writing as a career rather than a hobby. I have always said I wanted to be a writer, but no matter how many times I was told, “Write every day,” I never seemed to find time to actually do it. I would go weeks without writing, only to have a random creative burst and write for hours until I lost the spark. This, I knew, was not a sustainable way to write. I was setting myself up to burn out before I even finished the first draft. Thus, at the beginning of my thesis project, I determined that I would write for an hour from 8 a.m. to 9 a.m. every day. Scheduling this helped me to stay focused. It was consistent. It was a priority. When examining my personal productivity, I found that most of the factors that distract me from my responsibilities appear later in the day. Ensuring that I was writing before those factors occurred helped me not only to stick to the schedule, but to make sure that my scheduled time was used productively.

Also, I found that sticking to a one hour time-frame increased my productivity. Even if I was “in the zone,” so to speak, I tried to keep my time to an hour. I found that stopping in the middle of what I was doing made it easier to get back on track the next morning, and, thus, my hours were spent more productively. This isn’t to say that every morning I had a great hour of productive writing. There were certainly days when I sat in front of my laptop and simply couldn’t find the words. When this happened, I turned to free writing. Even if I wasn’t writing the script itself, I was still spending an hour in the world of the play, thinking through the problems I was facing. I think that after graduation I will increase the time I spend writing every day; however, as a student working part time, I found that an hour a day was the perfect amount of time to be productive without overburdening myself.

My second goal revolved around editing. In my creative writing capstone last semester, we discussed how every writer has their own editing style. Due to my struggle with finishing projects, I have very little experience with the editing process. In the past, I developed a habit of “over writing.” I would become stuck on the first twenty pages--writing and re-writing, polishing word by word. I would become so focused on “getting it right,” that I was unable to move forward. At the start of my thesis project, my first advisor, Dr. Derek Davidson, told me, “just get it on the page.” I learned to accept that the first draft would be terrible, and that what was most important was getting something on the page that I could work with. Once I had a draft, I started free-writing again, taking notes from my advisor and thinking through the questions I needed to answer. The next step ended up being the most crucial. I made a new document. I pulled up my first draft and a blank page side by side and started writing all over again. I had drastic structural changes to make from the first draft, and I found that the only way to avoid becoming overwhelmed and confused was to completely rewrite it. For the following drafts, I found that my changes were less structural, and so I didn’t feel the need for a total rewrite. Instead, I made copies for each draft and continued editing from there. For someone who typically has trouble getting past the first twenty pages of draft one, the fact that by the end of this process I had five different drafts is incredibly satisfying to me, and I am very excited to apply this process to other projects in the future.

I knew that my third goal--to complete a full length play--would be my biggest challenge, but I did not anticipate the correct reason this would prove challenging. I set this goal before I fully understood the process of writing a full-length play, and while I *have* written a full length play, I will confess that it is not finished. I do not admit this as a failure. I admit this as evidence of how much I have learned. Until I held my workshop, I didn’t realize just how much hearing

the play out loud would reveal about the story, the writing, and the structure of the play. It not only highlighted aspects that were confusing or needed work, but drew my attention to the aspects of the play that stood out, that were more engaging than others. They surprised me. I was able to look at those moments and, with the help of my advisor, discern the aspects that made them engaging. This information influenced my editing choices moving forward, and I realized just how vital the workshopping process is. For this reason, I do not believe I will consider this play “finished” for quite some time. I want to continue to workshop it, to do readings of it, and hopefully work with a theatre to stage it. There are so many different aspects of theatre that, until the play is actually staged, I cannot accurately gauge its effectiveness--which moments work as intended, and which need further development.

The most unexpected challenge I faced during this process was the difficulty I had adjusting from writing fiction to playwriting. As I mentioned before, I’ve written a few short plays and monologues, but never something as extensive as this. I’ve always enjoyed writing dialogue, so I did not anticipate how difficult the shift between the two styles would be. I found myself struggling to convey necessary information because I focused so much on the dialogue. Much of playwriting, I learned, is allowing the visuals to communicate information. I frequently forgot that I do not need the characters to say things that can be shown on stage. Additionally, I struggled to write stage directions that conveyed information while still allowing room for discovery and interpretation. I learned that it is a fine, but necessary balance, as theatre is a collaborative effort. If you pre-determine every aspect of the play, there is no room for collaboration. This pre-determination also goes against the main theme I wanted to address. *The Bookcase* is about the power of storytelling, the way it brings people together. The more voices that can be added to this work, the stronger the message will be.

I grew more throughout this process than I could have ever anticipated. I had heard writers say that writing consistently is like a muscle. It has to be exercised, but the more you do it, the easier it becomes to sit down and write. Not only did I grow in my ability to write consistently, but I learned a great deal about the process of playwriting specifically. This knowledge has both made me a more well-rounded theatre artist, and revitalized my love for theatre production as a whole.

THE BOOKCASE

Characters:

ELISE

CALLIOPE

DREW

RILEY

ANGIE

BARBARA

VICKIE

MARTIN

SCENE 1

(A spot illuminates CALLIOPE as she stands center stage. Behind her is the Bookcase. It is wooden, Rococo. The frame is topped with a crown carved with an image of a woman holding a scroll. CALLIOPE examines the Bookcase with affection, running her hand along a shelf. Something about her hand catches her eye and she holds it to the light. She speaks to the Bookcase, still examining her hand.)

CALLIOPE: Look at this. Do you see? The edges are fading... Just there... I'd hoped we'd have more time before I began to...

(She drops her hand and looks at the Bookcase)

There *must* be a way. Something we haven't thought of yet. Something...

(A moment. She looks back down at her hands, and then back at the Bookcase)

Will you be able to go on without me?

(The top shelf lights up, revealing a single, bright yellow book. It is very thin.)

CALLIOPE: Who's this? *(She takes the book off the shelf and reads the cover out loud)* Elise...? *(addressing the Bookcase again.)* Where are you sending me? What did you find?

(She opens the book. Blackout.)

SCENE 2

(The interior of an overgrown garden shed. It is late morning. There are two old, broken windows looking out into the woods outside. THE YOUNG GIRL enters behind the shed. We see her through one of the windows. She peers inside.)

THE YOUNG GIRL: Hello?

(Blackout)

YOUNG GIRL: Is anyone in here?

(Lights up. CALLIOPE stands off to the side, and looks around, gathering her surroundings. The Bookcase has appeared between the windows. There are several books lining the shelves. It is pristine and out of place amidst the remains of the shed. THE YOUNG GIRL enters the shed through the window. She wears overalls, ratty shoes, and has a very choppy haircut that looks as though she did it herself. She cannot see CALLIOPE, but she is immediately drawn to the Bookcase. She approaches it and wipes her finger on a shelf. There is no dust.. As THE YOUNG GIRL touches the shelf, we hear the sound of windchimes in the distance. CALLIOPE watches all of this with interest.)

YOUNG GIRL: *(Intrigued)* Huh.

(A book flies off the shelf. The YOUNG GIRL picks it up and peers into the spot it came from, looking to see what might have pushed it. There is nothing there. She looks back at the book, reading the cover.)

YOUNG GIRL: Weird.

CALLIOPE: *(To the Bookcase)* Who is she? Why are we-

YOUNG GIRL: *(Also to the Bookcase)* Do you want me to have this? Do you want me to read it to you?

(She sits down, opens the book, and begins to read. CALLIOPE watches her intently)

YOUNG GIRL: Chapter one.

(The lights fade and spots come up on CALLIOPE and the Bookcase.)

CALLIOPE: This girl... Is she...? I need to see more. *(She looks back down at the book and turns the page.)*

(Blackout)

SCENE 3

(A bar. DREW is behind the counter. CALLIOPE sits at a table, waiting. ELISE enters and approaches her.)

ELISE: Hi, Doctor Z.

CALLIOPE: Elise! Sit. And please, call me Callie.

ELISE: Oh, Ok! I just want to say that I'm really honored that you reached out to me.

CALLIOPE: I haven't even told you why you're here, yet.

ELISE: No, I know, I just mean. I mean you have a lot of students, and it really means a lot to me that you would think of me.

CALLIOPE: Of course.

ELISE: So, um... why am I here? I mean-- what did you want to talk to me about?

CALLIOPE: I just finished grading your final paper--

ELISE: Oh, God--

CALLIOPE: No, no! I wanted to talk to you because it caught my attention. Your subject choice, the Nine Muses... It was... unconventional.

ELISE: Um. I... Thank you?

CALLIOPE: Yes, Yes I mean it as a compliment. I want to offer you an opportunity, Elise, but I have a few more questions first, if that's alright with you.

ELISE: Oh, Yeah, of course!

CALLIOPE: First, tell me about yourself, Elise. What do you do?

ELISE: Oh, I, well I'm sort of... In between jobs right now--

CALLIOPE: Oh, no, I'm sorry, I mean more, what do you like to do? What's your passion?

ELISE: My passion? Um, well I love books, reading. Stories in general. Since I was a kid.

CALLIOPE: Oh, lovely!

ELISE: Yeah, Well so, like, when I was growing up it was just me and my dad, And I mean I love my dad. He's great, but he's not... He's a "man's man." I guess. And so, uh, pretty early on I got this idea in my head that I had to be, like, tough and outdoorsy, and I chopped off all my hair and rolled around in mud. And then one day I found this... Um... Well, I found a copy of *The Secret of the Old Clock*.

CALLIOPE: Nancy Drew.

ELISE: Yeah! So, I mean, the Nancy Drew books aren't perfect, um, but for the most part, Nancy is kind of a... A badass. I mean she's, like, what? Sixteen? But she's constantly outsmarting adults and solving crimes, and she does it all in a dress and heels. I don't know. I guess it was the first time that I saw that someone could wear dresses and still be cool... I mean, I still wore overalls every day, but it kind of opened up a whole world for me! It was like, what else could be cool that I didn't know? And then before I knew it I'd read like fifty Nancy Drew books... and I just... I don't know. I guess Nancy kinda gave me the freedom to, like, figure out who I wanted to be, to be open to... Well to anything, really. Sorry. What was the question again? I'm rambling.

CALLIOPE: You're fine. You were telling me what you liked to do.

ELISE: Oh, right! Yeah, um. Stories. That's why I picked the Muses, actually. I... I feel like stories are like, bridges, you know? Between people? I just... Yeah. I love stories

CALLIOPE: *(Smiling)* Well that's something we certainly have in common... What's next for you, Elise? After you get your degree? What do you see yourself doing?

ELISE: I... Well I... I've been thinking about, um... Publishing, or maybe teaching, I'm not really...

CALLIOPE: You can be honest with me, Elise. It's alright

ELISE: *(With relief)* I have no clue, Dr. Z-- Callie. None at all. I just... Nothing seems right.

CALLIOPE: I see.

ELISE: I just... I get so caught up in like, what if I pick a path and I get halfway down and I realize it's not what I want, and like, what if it's too late to find a new path, or what if I miss the path I was supposed to be on and-- I'm sorry. I'm so sorry that just sort of spilled out, I--

CALLIOPE: It's perfectly fine. And it's--

(CALLIOPE becomes distracted. She looks down at her hands and hides them beneath the table. She tries to center herself, but cannot seem to do so.)

CALLIOPE: I'm so sorry, Elise, could you excuse me for a moment?

(CALLIOPE stands and exits in a hurry, leaving ELISE alone at the table.)

ELISE: *(To herself)* Idiot.

(Lights come up stage right on the Bookcase. Its shelves are dark. There's a hum in the air. And then, the faint sound of windchimes. ELISE sits up, goosebumps on her arms. She recognizes the sensation and turns, seeing the Bookcase.)

ELISE: Here?... Now?

(She nearly trips over herself as she hurries to the bookcase. Its shelves are empty. She checks for dust. There is none. The top shelf lights up, revealing a book. ELISE starts, but doesn't hesitate to take the book down from the shelf.)

ELISE: Drew?

(DREW hears this from the bar and looks up.)

DREW: Yeah?

ELISE: You're Drew?

DREW: Yeah.

ELISE: Hi! I'm- I'm... sorry. I've got to get back to my table in case my professor comes back.

Um... Sorry.

(She walks back to the table)

ELISE: *(To herself)* Not this time. Not right now. I can't.

(She sits for a moment, trying to ignore the book, but she keeps glancing at it. She keeps checking the time and looking back at Drew over her shoulder. After a moment, she gives in and heads back to the bar and sits. DREW looks up at her)

ELISE: Hi.

DREW: Hi.

ELISE: Um. I was in the middle of an... interview I guess? But my professor disappeared a few minutes ago.

DREW: She bailed on you?

ELISE: I guess.

DREW: Shit. That sucks.

ELISE: It uh... It's not the first time it's happened if I'm honest. Interviews are not really my thing. Neither are jobs.

DREW: What do you want to drink? It's on the house.

ELISE: Oh, um... You know what? A martini. I've never had one, but that's what impressive women drink, right? Like in movies? I don't know maybe it'll make me feel better.

DREW: You sure?

ELISE: Yeah!

DREW: Dirty?

ELISE: What?

DREW: Do you want an olive in it?

ELISE: Gross, no. Don't they do, like, lemon?

DREW: Sure thing. *(He goes about making the drink)*

ELISE: *(Looking down at the book in her hands.)* So how long have you been bartending?

DREW: Um... On and off for about five years now? I think? I started when I was in college.

ELISE: *(Genuinely)* Oh wow. So is this what you want to do, like, as a career?

DREW: Yep. I tried the corporate thing, and it uh...*(He laughs and makes a pained face)* I just really enjoy bartending. Can't imagine myself doing anything else. *(He finishes making her drink and places it in front of her)* Here you go.

(She takes a sip and chokes)

ELISE: Jesus Christ!

DREW: I tried to warn you.

ELISE: So all those women in movies are alcoholics? *God* that tastes like perfume.

DREW: Do you want something else? It'll still be on the house.

ELISE: No. The more I drink of this the easier it'll get.

DREW: Fair enough.

ELISE: So... Why bartending? What do you like about it?

DREW: Oh, jeez. Uh- I like experimenting with drinks. Making new things. And I meet a lot of cool people.

ELISE: How'd you get into it?

DREW: Uh, you know. It's kind of a long story. You're the customer. We should be talking about you.

ELISE: Ooh, *(She laughs painfully)* I'd really prefer not to. Honestly I'd much rather listen to you talk and get drunk. *(She takes a sip of her martini and winces.)* Off this one drink apparently. So what's your story?

DREW: I really don't... It's not something I talk about very often.

ELISE: Well, I've got nowhere to go. If you want to.

(A moment. DREW looks at ELISE. Something in him shifts.)

DREW: Alright. Yeah. Um. So basically. Junior year... I was a comp sci major, and uh, I realized I couldn't fucking stand it. But at that point it was too late to change and everything felt... Felt like I'd wasted three years and a ton of money. I started failing in like half my classes, couldn't

get out of bed, that kind of stuff. Had no clue what I wanted to do. I didn't even know what I *liked* to do. Like just for fun. It was like... I don't know. Basically I cut off everyone. Friends, family... I was just... I had this fear of disappointing them, and I don't know I guess I thought that cutting them off was easier. Like, it was easier to be an asshole than a disappointment. And once I started going to the bar... Forget it. Jesus, sorry. That was a lot to unload on you just like that. I don't know why I just--

ELISE: No, No not at all. *I'm* sorry. That you went through that I mean.

DREW: Ah, well. Yeah. Thanks.

ELISE: But, so what happened? How'd you get here?

DREW: It's kind of a weird story... Ok, so one day, something made me get up and go to class. I don't know what was different about that day or me or what, but whatever it was... I get up, and I'm walking down the hall to my class, and here's the thing, this is the first time I've been sober past noon in I don't know how long, and I see this like, free book table? And I'm thinking, 'that's weird,' cause this is the math building, and it just felt really out of place, but I was, like, pulled towards it. And I'm not a reader. It's not my thing, but, I was so drawn to it. No one else even, like, noticed it... But I just stood there looking down at this table. It had a picture carved into it. Like... A woman with a scroll? I think? I don't know. But yeah, uh, after a minute I decided to take a book. Just picked one at random. I went to the bar that night like usual, but I didn't order, I, uh, sat down in the corner and started reading.

ELISE: What was it about?

DREW: Ok, so here's what's crazy. Turns out, it's about this guy who's like, really depressed. Like, should have been unlikeable, self-sabotaging, all that shit. I couldn't put it down. Like, he's going through his life, trying his best, but no matter what he does he always gets it wrong, no matter how hard he tries, and... It was like... that's how it felt--failing out of school. I don't know. I guess it was like it was the first time I saw someone like me portrayed like that. An accurate representation of what I was going through. It gave me a sense of... I don't know. But it was like I wasn't alone, I guess. And I just... I looked up and realized that I was sitting in a bar and I didn't want a drink. I wanted to *talk* to people. For the first time in months.

ELISE: And did you?

DREW: Yeah. I went up to the bartender, ordered some mozzarella sticks so I didn't look like a total asshole, and had a conversation. By the end of the night, I had a job as a barback.

ELISE: Just like that?

DREW: Yeah.

ELISE: That's amazing. And you've been bartending since?

DREW: Uh... no.

ELISE: Wait, so then what happened next?

DREW: Well, so I guess bartending kind of gave me energy again, and I got my grades up, got my degree, and I was like, "Great, now I can go out into the world and get a job with a tech

company!” and I did. And I was making really good money, and I got a nice apartment, moved to a new city, and I fucking *hated* it. Like, I didn’t know anybody, and I just fell right back into it... that isolation, and the drinking... and then eventually I got fired, because, you know...

ELISE: Right.

DREW: I had to move back in with my parents, which was terrible, and they kept asking what my plan was and I didn’t have one, so I went back to the last time I felt happy. Got a job here. It was instant. Like. Being behind the bar again... I don’t know.

ELISE: Wild how letting yourself do the things you like makes you happier, huh?

DREW: Well- Well yeah I mean it’s just... Not a lot of people think like that. My parents hate it. It’s so obvious. I just moved out a few weeks ago, but they’re insisting on having these Sunday dinners. But like, every time they look at me it’s like... I don’t know. They had this idea of my being a software engineer and getting married and giving them grandkids, and I think every time they see me they understand that that life’s not what I want, and It’s that same... They wonder why I don’t want to be around them.

ELISE: That has to be really draining.

DREW: You should hear them when people ask what I’m doing. The way they say “bartending.” It’s just like... I mean, I’m the bar manager, here, right? I make the menu, I supervise the other bartenders, I make good enough money, and I’m getting experience for when I open my own bar. But I just... Every time I see my parents, or I see people I went to school with I go right back to that place. I feel like I gave up.

(ELISE takes a moment to process. She takes a deep breath.)

ELISE: Alright, look, Drew. You love what you do, right?

DREW: Right.

ELISE: You're good at it?

DREW: Yeah.

ELISE: How old are you?

DREW: Twenty six.

ELISE: Twenty six? Do you realize how *young* that is? To have found your calling? To be *doing it*? Drew. You're not a failure. You're not a disappointment. You're ahead of the game! Do you know how many people would kill to be in your shoes? To actually be doing what they want to? What are you talking about, 'gave up'? You didn't give up, you changed paths, which takes a TON of courage!

(DREW doesn't know what to say. He smiles, a bit painfully, and looks down at the bar)

ELISE: Have your parents ever been here?

DREW: God, no.

ELISE: Invite them. Let them see what you do. Let them see how happy you are doing it. You never know. Could change their minds.

(DREW laughs bitterly)

ELISE: And if not, at least you know you tried.

(DREW smiles a little less painfully, and notices she's finished her drink.)

DREW: You want another?

ELISE: Hell no. Actually, I uh... Speaking of jobs. I guess I should follow up with my professor... Try to salvage the interview... That's what people do, right?

DREW: Hey. You got this. And uh. Thanks. I didn't realize how much I needed... Thanks.

ELISE: Any time.

(ELISE stands and walks center stage as she dials CALLIOPE's number. She looks at the Bookcase.)

ELISE: You win again.

(The lights fade until all we see on stage is ELISE and the Bookcase. ELISE looks around bewildered as this happens. Her arm drops to her side, but we hear the phone ringing. We also hear the sound of wind blowing through trees. Leaves blow across the stage.)

ELISE: What just... *(She turns to the Bookcase)* What did you do?!

(CALLIOPE enters. The lights slowly come up and we are back in the shed in the woods.)

CALLIOPE: I'm sorry for disappearing like that. These days it's getting harder and harder to... Well, to stick around for very long.

ELISE: Doctor Z?! What's happening?

CALLIOPE: This must be a tad disorienting. Again, I apologize.

ELISE: What? *What?* I don't-- What are you--How did we-- Where-- *(she looks around)* Hang on... I know this place! How are we here?!

CALLIOPE: We're not. Not really. But the inbetween tends to take familiar forms. To make it easier to comprehend. I had hoped I wouldn't have to bring you here so soon... To overwhelm you with all of this, but well... as I said it's getting harder to stay around. But it's easier here.

ELISE: What are you talking about? What's happening? What are- Who are you?

CALLIOPE: I have been called many different things over the centuries, but in the early days they called me Calliope.

ELISE: Calliope... Like...?

CALLIOPE: The muse.

ELISE: You're not... You're not saying you're...

CALLIOPE: I am

ELISE: But... the muses were just a myth! Just a story!

CALLIOPE: I was under the impression that you know quite well that stories are rarely "just" anything.

ELISE: Well, I- I mean... WHAT? What's happening? Why am I here?

CALLIOPE: (*Gazing at the Bookcase*) You recognize it, yes?

ELISE: I... Yeah. Yes. I've seen it before. A few times

CALLIOPE: A few?

ELISE: It uh... I found it when I was a little girl.

CALLIOPE: In this place.

ELISE: ... Yes. Yes in the shed in the woods. But then I saw it again, when I was in high school. And a couple times in the past few years. And... well, just now...

CALLIOPE: With Drew.

ELISE: Yeah.

CALLIOPE: I created this bookcase, Elise, but I never intended it to... to fixate on someone the way it has on you. You seem to be something of an enigma.

ELISE: What do you mean?

CALLIOPE: When the Bookcase appears to you, what happens? Not the first time. But the following times.

ELISE: I... It gives me a book. With a person's name on it. And I talk to them.

CALLIOPE: Yes?

ELISE: And... Well each person had kind of a similar experience with... With that. *(She points to the symbol on top of the Bookcase. The Woman with the scroll)*. That shows up a lot.

CALLIOPE: The Bookcase takes many forms. Which is why you are so strange to me.

ELISE: What do you mean?

CALLIOPE: Not only has it appeared to you more than once, it appears as it's true form. When you see the Bookcase you see it as that. Not a box or a storage unit, but a Bookcase, as it was originally crafted. Until you, I thought I was the only one who saw its true form.

ELISE: I... I don't understand.

CALLIOPE: Neither did I. Until recently... It seems Elise, that the Bookcase is so drawn to you because you're somewhat of a kindred spirit. When you began reading that story to the bookcase all those years ago, you formed a bond. Something transferred from the Bookcase to you, linking you together. Like an imprint. I wasn't sure if it went both ways, but when you wrote about the Muses I thought--

ELISE: Wait so you've been... Watching me?

CALLIOPE: Nothing so sinister as that. But I've kept an eye on you, yes. The opportunity I spoke of was not a lie. I have something to ask of you. And I desperately hope you will say yes.

ELISE: What is it? What could I do for you?

CALLIOPE: Elise, out of all nine Muses, I am the last remaining. My sisters have... faded. All of them. It seems our tethers to this world are not so immortal as we once believed them to be. Their presence lingers, but... their powers of influence, of incitement, invention have been reduced to mere whispers, floating through dreams. You must understand, we were forces of change, of revolution, and now they are... mist. A low lying fog, seeping into the unconscious minds of those who once begged for our favour. Who built gardens, shrines, statues in our names. Even I am not immune. I who sat beside kings and queens, who guided Homer's tongue

as he spoke of heroes and jealous gods. They called me the chief of the muses, but even I feel the pull of time, the consequence of a world forgetting. I'm afraid, Elise. I'm more afraid than I have ever been before.

ELISE: I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. But I don't know what you need from me. What you think I can do.

CALLIOPE: Elise, I called you a kindred spirit, but it's more than that. You must understand, our intentions are *entirely* aligned. You spoke of feeling purposeless, of wandering. But it is this very feeling of wandering, your love for meeting people, for hearing their stories that *is* your purpose.

ELISE: Please, You're talking in circles. Just tell me what you need from me.

CALLIOPE: I am fading, Elise, but you are human. You are life and blood. A soul with a physical form. I have brought you here today because *You* can save me, Elise. I can offer you a life in which all you'd have to do is what you already love more than anything. With you, I could be tethered to the Earth, anchored. With me, you would be immortal.

ELISE: No... I'm sorry. I'm sorry, but you have the wrong girl. I'm not special, I'm not... magic!

CALLIOPE: But you are, Elise! You have no idea the power you have. I can show you.

ELISE: I wish I could help you, but I don't... I'm just-- What do you mean *with* you? What are you even asking me to do?

(One of the shelves of the Bookcase lights up, Interrupting their conversation. There is a new book. CALLIOPE takes it off the shelf.)

CALLIOPE: It seems the Bookcase has someone it would like you to meet. *(She holds the book out to ELISE.)* Take it. Please.

(ELISE hesitates, but can't help herself. She takes the book, reads the cover,)

ELISE: Riley?

CALLIOPE: Open it. Talk to them. Then come back to me and tell me you are not magic.

(After a moment of hesitation, ELISE opens it. Blackout.)

SCENE 4

(When the lights come back up. ELISE turns around to find herself standing in a coffee shop.

RILEY is sitting at a table looking anxiously out the window. They are a nonbinary twenty-something year-old. The Bookcase stands in the corner. Meanwhile, ELISE is looking down at the book in shock. She does not notice as RILEY quickly stands and gathers their things. They are looking at their phone as they hurry toward the exit only to collide with ELISE.

Both RILEY's things and the book fall to the ground)

RILEY: Shit! You came out of nowhere! Sorry!

ELISE: No, I'm sorry! Oh my God are you ok?

(Together they pick up the scattered things)

RILEY: I'm fine. Are you?

(RILEY hands ELISE the book, They do not notice that their name is printed on the cover.

During the next interaction, RILEY keeps glancing towards the door, growing increasingly anxious.)

ELISE: Yeah. Yeah, I think so. I just... I'm so sorry, could you actually tell me where I am?

RILEY: Uh. Cafe Nero?... Summer Street? Boston?

ELISE: *Boston?*

RILEY: You hit your head?

ELISE: No. I... No I don't think so I was... I was just in... Well I don't really know how to...

RILEY: You're sure you didn't hit your head?

ELISE: Yeah... Are *you* ok? You look terrified.

RILEY: Oh. I... I was supposed to meet someone here, but I, uh, changed my mind, so sorry for running into you. I gotta go before she gets here.

ELISE: Oh! Ok, well um. It was nice to meet you? I'm Elise.

RILEY: Yeah. Riley.

ELISE: Riley?

(RILEY starts to leave, but Elise calls after them.)

ELISE: Who was it? If you don't mind me asking? Who were you supposed to meet?

(RILEY heistates, trying to decide whether to stay and answer or to just leave. They look at

ELISE. A shift.)

RILEY: My sister, but I haven't seen her in three years and I don't know why I'm telling you this. I gotta go.

ELISE: Three years is a really long time.

RILEY: No shit.

ELISE: Look. All I'm saying is it might be worth it to stick around.

RILEY: I doubt it.

ELISE: Why?

RILEY: We didn't leave things on the best terms. Her and my parents. Mostly my parents. *(Their phone buzzes)* She's running late.

ELISE: Trouble on the T? *(She realizes this is a poor attempt at local slang.)*

RILEY: *(Eyeing her)* ... Yeah...

ELISE: So we've got time then!

RILEY: Look. You seem... nice. But I can't do this today.

ELISE: Ok, then why agree to meet in the first place?

RILEY: I... *(They groan and slump into the nearest chair.)* I asked her to meet. I'm getting married. I thought I could... that I'd be able to... It doesn't matter. *(putting their head into their*

hands) I got in this whole fight with my fiance about it and I just... We've never had a fight before and-- I don't know. Maybe she was right. *(They groan in frustration)* I don't even know why I care!

ELISE: ... About... Your fiance?

RILEY: What? No! About my... family. Whether or not they come.

ELISE: Ah. They're not... supportive?

RILEY: Nope.

ELISE: And that's why you haven't seen them.

RILEY: Yep... The last time I saw them was the day I came out.

ELISE: What happened? You had a fight?

RILEY: I wish. They didn't even speak to me. I came out and they didn't say *anything*. They spent the day researching "reparative therapy."

ELISE: Is that...

RILEY: Yup. Fancy new term for conversion therapy. Told me I had two options. Spend the rest of my life pretending to be a straight, cis girl, or get out. *(They look out the window,)* Snowed then too. But way harder than this.

ELISE: Hold on. They kicked you out in the snow?

RILEY: (*They shrug*) I didn't think they were serious. Just thought they needed to clear their heads. And Giana--my sister. I kept waiting for her to say something, but she just sat there. So I went for a walk to, I guess, give them some space? Or something? I didn't pack anything. Just started walking. There wasn't a single thought going through my head. Just static. Autopilot. Everything was numb. My face, toes, brain. And then all of a sudden I was at the gas station buying a gallon of chocolate milk.

ELISE: In a blizzard?

RILEY: Yup. Again. Nothing. Not one coherent thought went through my brain. I still have no clue why. Just some deep, primal need for chocolate milk.

ELISE: I mean... To each their own. What did you do after?

RILEY: Drank it? I guess. I just walked outside and... Oh. Shit. There was this, like, metal rack? Outside? And it was like *filled* with books,

ELISE: Weird.

RILEY: Yeah. One of those free book things I guess, but, I mean, what the hell is Shell doing with that? There wasn't a sign or anything. Just a sticker with a lady holding a scroll. I don't know how I missed it on the way in. It was so out of place.

ELISE: Did you take a book?

RILEY: *Oliver Twist.*

ELISE: Classic.

RILEY: I wish I could tell you why I picked it but-

ELISE: Autopilot?

RILEY: Yup.

ELISE: So where'd you go from there?

RILEY: Nowhere. I didn't have anywhere to go. And I still thought my parents, or G, would come after me. Just sat down. Started drinking my milk, reading my book. They never showed. I sat there for three hours. Miracle I didn't go hypothermic. Probably would've if Sierra hadn't showed up.

ELISE: Sierra?

RILEY: My fiancée. *(They seem to brighten at the mention of Sierra, and they laugh.)* She's insane. Like, she sees, this kid drinking chocolate milk and reading a book in a blizzard and thinks, 'yeah I'm gonna bring that person to my home'? She's... She said it was the book. That *Oliver Twist* convinced her I was worth rescuing. That's all talk, though. She's always doing that

kind of shit. Sticking her neck out for people. She would've brought me home no matter what I was reading.

ELISE: Wow! Talk about a meet cute.

RILEY: (*They laugh*) Yeah. Yeah, she pulled up, got out of the car, asked me what the hell I thought I was doing and if I was trying to die, and I guess I just looked pitiful cause she just kinda melted. Asked me if I had anywhere to go. And I was sitting there and it was cold and wet and tired and I realized that my family wasn't coming and I... I mean I just started crying. Like full on, bawling my eyes out. Which I hate. She told me to get in the car, and I did and she took me to her dorm, put my chocolate milk in the microwave, and then I was drinking hot chocolate and I wasn't alone anymore. She didn't ask me any questions. She just warmed me up and kept me company until I was ready to talk. I never got how alone I was until her. Even before my parents kicked me out. I was alone. And then Sierra was there, and we just sat there reading and drinking hot chocolate. I never wanted to be alone again.

ELISE: That's so sweet.

RILEY: (*They shrug*) She saved me. I mean, she just welcomed me into her world, her friends, her family. They've done so much for me, it's... I always kinda thought it was a weird coincidence. Cause it was kind of like in *Oliver*. He's taken in by these people. They rescue him. And then, turns out they're his real family all along... That's what it was like, becoming a part of their lives. I'd finally found my real family. Like I finally belonged somewhere... (*a moment of realization and then regret*) Ah Shit.

ELISE: What?

RILEY: (*Embarrassed*) I... God. I told you Sierra and I had our first argument last night?... It was... Sierra got really upset about how much I was... About how focused I was on my family not being there, and I thought that... I didn't get why she was taking it so personally. And I said some things that... God. I see where she was coming from now, and I shouldn't have... I should've seen it earlier.

ELISE: Well, that's good though, right? That you understand now. You can go talk to her.

RILEY: Yeah... Yeah but It doesn't change the fact that I want them there... It's not that I'm not grateful for everything because I am. I wasn't lying when I said she saved my life. I just... Not having my... Not having them come to my wedding... I haven't spoken to them in years, but that would make it real. Final.

ELISE: It sounds to me like you need to talk to your sister. And your fiance

RILEY: Yeah. Yeah I do. (*checks the time*) not that I have a choice now. I'll be here any second.

ELISE: You've got this, Riley. You can do it.

RILEY: God. I don't know. I'm not... This isn't my thing. Talking to people. And G...

ELISE: You just told your whole story to a total stranger. I have a feeling it'll be easier to tell your sister.

RILEY: We'll see I guess. I... Thanks for making me stay.

ELISE: No problem.

(ELISE stands and turns to walk away. Blackout.)

SCENE 5

(A spot comes up on ELISE, who stumbles, startled, and looks around. Spots come up on CALLIOPE and the Bookcase.)

CALLIOPE: Well?

ELISE: I feel like I'm gonna pass out.

CALLIOPE: Yes. Traveling with the Bookcase can do that sometimes. It will pass in a moment.

ELISE: I was just--I was just in Boston? I've always wanted to go to Boston. I mean. I would have liked to do some sightseeing but--can it take you anywhere?

(CALLIOPE nods)

CALLIOPE: It's a Bookcase after all.

ELISE: But, wait, ok I still don't understand. Why send me to them? I mean, I get that they needed to talk, but anyone could have done what I just did!

CALLIOPE: And yet they didn't. You did. Riley sat there in obvious distress for quite some time, but it was you who reached out to them.

ELISE: But that doesn't make me magic! You sent me to them. I was *supposed* to talk to them. I'm not...

CALLIOPE: Elise, you are the reason that they will reunite with their sister. You are the reason the rift between Riley and Sierra will heal.

ELISE: I... No, I... they did all that on their own. All I did was let them talk. And stall them.

CALLIOPE: Exactly! Because that is what they needed someone to do. If it hadn't been for you, they never would have done that. They never would have told their story.

ELISE: But you don't know that. You can't know that! And even if that's true, it's just... So what? So they told their story to one person. What difference does that make?

(The Bookcase lights up again. There is another book.)

CALLIOPE: You'll find that, as it can't exactly speak, the Bookcase is rather fond of visual explanations. *(She takes the book and holds it to Elise.)* Here. If Riley was not enough to convince you, then perhaps these two will be.

(With difficulty, Elise holds herself back from taking the book.)

ELISE: You said you're running out of time. Don't waste it on me. I'm not--

CALLIOPE: These people need you. And you need them. Take it.

(ELISE hesitates, but takes the book. She braces herself, and opens it to the front page.

Blackout.)

SCENE 6

(Lights up. BARBARA and ANGIE are sitting at a table playing dominoes outside a cafe. The sun is shining and it's hot. Quite a change from the Boston cold. ELISE looks back down at the Book.)

ELISE: Angie and Barbara Valentine. *(She sees ANGIE and BARBARA, and approaches them.)*

Hi... I, Um...

ANGIE: *(With a Jamaican accent)* Do you need something love?

ELISE: *(Taken by surprise)* Sorry, am I in Jamaica?

ANGIE: *(laughing)* Not quite.

BARBARA: Right accent though.

ANGIE: Still in New Zealand, last time I checked.

ELISE: *(trying to play it off)* Right. Of course. Sorry I'm just a little light headed.

ANGIE: Oh, well, come sit down before you pass out! I'm Angie. This is my sister, Barbara, but we always call her Babs. Do you know how to play dominoes? We need a third. I hate playing with two.

ELISE: I don't, but I'm sure I can pick it up.

(At the same time. BARBARA stops, but ANGIE keeps going as though she didn't notice

BARBARA spoke in the first place.)

BARBARA: So you-

ANGIE: Well, what you do is, you draw seven. Go on. Then when you play, you line the dominoes up and you match end to end. And to win you... You... Oh-

BARBARA: You want to be the first to empty your hand.

ANGIE: Yes!

ELISE: Ok.

(They play as they continue to speak. Feel free to have BARBARA or ANGIE correct ELISE, or explain things further to her.)

ELISE: So you are from Jamaica, though?

ANGIE: *(nodding)* Kingston.

ELISE: Why'd you move to New Zealand?

ANGIE: Well it's a long story

BARBARA: Oh here we go.

ANGIE: You see, I left when I was seventeen. I'd still go back as often as I could, of course, but you know, it's a small island, and I wanted to see the world.

ELISE: Where'd you go?

ANGIE: Oh, let's see. London, Italy, Greece--Oh if you ever get the chance to go to Greece, take it. God, it's a gorgeous country. Now London on the other hand. Ugh. Don't even bother. God, you never see the sun, and it's so *dreary* all the time. Awful.

BARBARA: Now, now.

ANGIE: Anyways, yes, well so I went all over because I worked on a ship.

BARBARA: *(To ELISE)* a cruise line.

ANGIE: God, I miss those days! I must have gained fifteen pounds from the escargot. Do you like escargot?

ELISE: I've never-

ANGIE: You have to try it! I mean it's butter and garlic, so what's not to love, you know? Well anyways, so I worked on the ship, but then they promoted me, which was nice, but you know, they wanted me working behind a desk, and I don't do numbers, I'm much more of a people person. *(She waves her hand dismissively.)*

ELISE: that sounds incredible, though.

BARBARA: *(With a hint of bitterness)* Doesn't it?

ANGIE: It was! I mean, you see cruise ships coming in and out of Jamaica all the time. Not Kingston, of course, but you know, Montego Bay and Ocho Rios, Negril. Those places. And I thought, well why the hell not?

BARBARA: it helped that Daddy drove you off.

ANGIE: Yes, well Daddy was... complicated.

BARBARA: That last fight... God I thought you two would kill each other,

ELISE: What happened?

ANGIE: Well, so, you have to understand, we didn't have anything growing up. And, well, Daddy was always trying some new scheme or other, map making, jewelry sales, Oh, Babs, remember how he would take tourists out on boats so they could party on the ocean. *(to ELISE.)* He was their... What do they say, Babs?

BARBARA: Designated driver?

ANGIE: Yes! So, Yes, things like that. But there was one thing he was damn good at all his life and that was coaching tennis.

BARBARA: He was a lunatic. Scared half his students to death.

ANGIE: But they kept coming back didn't they?

BARBARA: I guess.

ANGIE: Anyways, so Babs and I were numbers one and two in the country. We played in tournaments all over the Caribbean, South America, Florida. But, you know, we only ever saw the hotels and the courts. And when we played, we had to win. And what we won put food on the table.

BARBARA: Didn't matter that I was thirteen years old of course.

ANGIE: (*Brushing over it*) But you know, we had eachother.

BARBARA: Yeah, until you left.

ANGIE: (*As though she didn't hear*) Anyways, we got in a *huge* fight because I didn't want to play this one tournament, (*to BARBARA*) You know the one in the... In the... Oh, God where was it?

BARBARA: In the Caymans.

ANGIE: Right! Right, well we hated it.

BARBARA: No, you hated it because you could never win it. (*To ELISE*) I never had to worry.

ANGIE: I hated it because it was in the middle of Summer and it was always God awful hot and--

BARBARA: (*Scoffs*) Please.

ANGIE: *Anyways*. It was leading up to the tournament, and we spent *hours* on the court every day, and, well, we weren't allowed to let anything distract us from tennis, you know? And God, he was in a mood that day! And, so I was practicing my serve, and I double faulted, you know, I missed two in a row, and, well, he just let me have it. He was going on and on, and I was screaming back at him, I mean the neighbors down the road could hear us! And so Finally, I just looked him in the eye and I said, "That's it. I'm done." and I threw my racket at his feet. Now, you did not *ever* throw your racket on Daddy's court if you wanted to see the light of day. He slapped the shit out of me. And, well, it wasn't the first time, like I said, he had a temper, but still. I was so pissed at him! So I ran away.

ELISE: Where'd you go?

ANGIE: I headed to the docks. I decided I was going to jump on a ship and see where it took me.

ELISE: Where did it take you?

ANGIE: Nowhere that day. See, I was halfway there, and still running, and I got to this one corner, (*To BARBARA*) You know, the one where that man would sell ice cream from his cart, you know the one, babs, the one by the Chinese restaurant, with the bao buns.

BARBARA: The one by the church?

ANGIE: No, no. The Chinese place you loved! We'd go by there when I picked you up from school.

BARBARA: That wasn't me.

ANGIE: Well I would take someone there! It was... It was... Oh, I don't know, but I wasn't going by myself because I don't even like Chinese food. And I'm allergic to snow peas, so half the time I can't eat it anyways, but I love Thai. There's a place just down the road from here that has the best shrimp panang--

BARBARA: Get back to the story, Ange.

ANGIE: Right, yes, and so I got to this corner and I tripped over something and went *flying!* and you know, it didn't matter that I had decided I was done with tennis, I was still checking my wrist and ankles to see if I'd broken anything, to see if I could still play. Habit, you know. And when I stood up, and I turned around and there were these... these... oh, what's the word, Babs?

BARBARA: Crates.

ANGIE: Yes! Yes, these crates, and they were *filled* with books! There must have been fifteen of them. Crates, I mean, and all just stuffed full of books.

BARBARA: (*To ELISE*) Angie has a tendency to embellish the truth.

ANGIE: It's the truth!

BARBARA: Oh, You make shit up all the time, Ange.

ANGIE: They were just sitting there! In the middle of the sidewalk, I swear!

BARBARA: God, you're ridiculous! I never understand why you do this! You're just like Daddy!
Have to be the center of attention all the damn time!

(An angry silence)

ELISE: So um... What did you do next?

ANGIE: *(To ELISE, NOT to BARBARA)* Well, for a while I just stood there in shock, you know.

(BARBARA snorts)

ANGIE: And finally I... Well I um... Yes, well so I reached down and pulled out a book from one of the crates and it was... It was... Oh what is it called?

BARBARA: *(quietly)* *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe.*

ANGIE: Yes! Yes, of course. And I'd never heard of it before, but I looked at it, and something told me to read it. And so I just sat under a street lamp, because, well it was getting dark, you know, and I read that whole book. It's not very long, but you know, I wasn't much of a reader, so

it was a big deal. By the time I was finished, I looked up and the sun was rising. I'd read through the whole night. And, well, I was sitting there, and all I could think was, "Babs would love this."

BARBARA: (*Quietly still. Distracted almost*) Meanwhile I'm back at the house. She's been out reading a book, and I've spent all night at the blunt end of Daddy's temper. And all I could think was, "dear God, she's left me alone with him."

ANGIE: But I came back.

BARBARA: She did.

ANGIE: I went back to the house and I went to her room, and I sat by her bed and said, "Babs, I have to go." and she said--

BARBARA: I know.

ANGIE: And then I told her, "I'll be back for you. Once I have somewhere for us to go." And she said--

BARBARA: Promise?

ANGIE: And then I gave her the book.

BARBARA: ... You know, I still have it.

ANGIE: And after a while, I found a job, and came back for her, and we moved here.

BARBARA: Figured it was far enough away from him. And turned out we have some family here on our mother's side.

ELISE: Do you ever go back?

ANGIE: Oh, of course.

BARBARA: Not until after he died, though.

ANGIE: No... No not until then. *(She places a domino.)* And I win! I have to go to the ladies room. You two deal out round two while I'm gone.

(ANGIE exits)

ELISE: You two've lived some really exciting lives, huh?

(BARBARA looks at ELISE steadily for a moment. A shift.)

BARBARA: You know you have to take everything she says with a grain of salt. The way she talks... God. She thinks she's the hero of some great adventure. But her memory isn't what it used to be, you know?

ELISE: Oh... I see.

BABARA: She's always been like that though. She was always the storyteller. At parties, dinners, to random strangers. But she always tells them like she's the only character. She'll tell you how she took care of me in our childhood? You heard her say we were numbers one and two? Well she says it like that to hide the fact that I was number one. I was the one bringing home prize money. And, you know, she thinks she saved me from Daddy, but she was gone for five years. She left me with that stupid book for five years, and it wasn't like Narnia I can tell you that! They come back and no time has passed, but that didn't happen for me. I lived every second of those five years with no one else. You always hear about people going off on adventures, but no one cares about the people they leave behind when they go. (*She takes a deep breath.*) And now. It's just us again. Everyone else is either dead or... It's just the two of us again. Me taking care of her.

ELISE: That can't be easy.

BARBARA: It's not. Do you have a sister?

ELISE: No.

BARBARA: Count your blessings.

ELISE: Oh, I don't know. I mean, you said you still have that book. You wouldn't've held onto it for so long if it were all bad.

BARBARA: No. I suppose not. It's just exhausting. I'm not exactly young either, you know.

ELISE: But isn't it good that you have each other? I mean, even if it's all you have? At least you have it?

BARBARA: I guess so. But even then... Getting old sucks. Before you know it everyone's... It's just... Her memory is getting worse and I... As much as I hate hearing the same three stories over and over... We come here every day, you know. So she can tell her stories, while she still can. *(She sighs and looks over her shoulder in the direction of the restrooms)* She's been in there a while. I'm going to go check on her. I'll be right back, love.

ELISE: Of course.

(BARBARA leaves to check on ANGIE. ELISE looks around, preparing herself to be transported again. Blackout.)

SCENE 7

(We have returned to the in-between with Elise, Callie and the Bookcase.)

CALLIOPE: Well?

ELISE: Wow! I just... *wow*. I mean... They've been on such a journey... They should write a book!

CALLIOPE: They might, thanks to you. You gave Barbara a spark, a chance to see what it felt like to tell her side. There's no telling where she'll go from there.

ELISE: I mean... I might have helped her a bit, but that doesn't mean I'm--

CALLIOPE: Elise, did Barbara strike you as a particularly forthcoming person? Did she seem like someone who liked to tell strangers about herself?

ELISE: Well no, but-

CALLIOPE: That is your magic, Elise! When you bonded with the Bookcase, some of its power passed to you. You have a gift like no other, not only to find the people who need you, but to free them, to coax their stories into the world, and by doing so, change their lives. Barbara needed someone to hear. She *needed* you to hear her. Even Angie. How long do you think it will be until she can't remember her own story? When they share their lives, they live on in *you*, they know that there is someone out there who will remember them. You are *special*, Elise.

(The lights come up behind the shed to reveal that the back of the stage is lined with bookshelves. It is implied that they extend far beyond the confines of the stage. CALLIOPE looks to these shelves, filled with books as she speaks. ELISE follows her gaze in wonder.)

CALLIOPE: I need you. If I fade, I don't know how much longer the bookcase will last. Everything I have ever worked for will disappear. The storytellers will be without their pens, the voiceless without their champion. Without you, the people who need our help to tell their stories will never be able to do so.

(A moment)

ELISE: What do you need me to do? How do I help you?

CALLIOPE: You help me, Elise, by becoming my conduit.

ELISE: ... What?

CALLIOPE: In order for me to live on, I must merge with someone who can tether me to the physical world. But until now I thought it was impossible. Until you I thought... I didn't believe it could be done.

ELISE: I... I don't even know where to start with that! I-- What will happen to me? If I become your conduit. What will happen to me?

(Another moment)

CALLIOPE: I don't know.

ELISE: You don't know?!

CALLIOPE: Please, understand this... This has never been done before. It's uncharted territory.

ELISE: You're- You're asking me to give up my life to save yours and you don't even know if it'll *work?*

CALLIOPE: I know it is a daunting request, but-

ELISE: Daunting? Are you kidding me? It's insane! You can't expect me to just uproot my life, leave everything behind and possibly give over my autonomy on some experimental idea and for what? So... So you can...

CALLIOPE: So we can go on together, inspiring people to create, to share. To open doors for those whose stories have been hidden away. Stories are the bridges of this world, Elise. You told me so yourself. But those bridges are crumbling. It's up to us to reinforce them.

(as she speaks, the lights fade on the bookcases. ELISE watches them fade until we once again see just ELISE and CALLIOPE and the Bookcase on stage)

CALLIOPE: I'm not trying to imprison you, Elise. You won't be trapped in the in-between, you'll be free.

ELISE: But I won't be me.

CALLIOPE: No.

ELISE: *You'll* be me.

CALLIOPE: We'll be us.

ELISE: I... I don't know... I

CALLIOPE: Elise... Imagine a world without a creative spark. Without someone to inspire artists and writers. Please, think of the people you've met. The stories that shaped, that saved them! Think if those stories had never been written! You don't have to imagine the power these stories have, you have evidence right here! *(Gesturing to the Bookcase)* You can see it. You *must* see it!

(The Bookcase lights up again revealing a new book. The light flickers for a moment and then comes back on. CALLIOPE takes the book down, and frowns at it)

CALLIOPE: I... Elise, I'm not sure how much time we have left, but...

CALLIOPE waits for ELISE to make the first move. We see how badly ELISE wants to open the book, to meet whoever lies within those pages. Finally, reaches out for the book. CALLIOPE hands it to her.

CALLIOPE: Just... Remember what I said. Please.

(ELISE opens the book. Blackout)

SCENE 8

(We are in a park. VICKIE is stretching before a run. She is a black and around 18 years old. Though she has an eating disorder, she should not be made to look stereotypically underweight.

ELISE approaches her.)

ELISE: Hi.

VICKIE: *(Confused and a bit startled)* Um. Hi?

ELISE: I'm Elise.

VICKIE: ... Ok?

(VICKIE stares at her, waiting to see what ELISE wants. ELISE realizes she doesn't have a plan.)

ELISE: I... Um... I like your shoes.

VICKIE: Thanks.

(A moment of silence. They stare at each other.)

VICKIE: Can I help you with something?

ELISE: Sorry I-

VICKIE: Look I don't have a lot of time, and I have to get my run in today, so...

(She begins to stand and gets light headed. She leans on to the bench for support)

ELISE: Are you alright?

VICKIE: I'm fine. I just stood up too fast.

ELISE: If you're light headed, you really shouldn't--

VICKIE: I said I'm fine.

(An awkward pause. ELISE is waiting for the shift, but it doesn't come)

ELISE: Um... Have you seen a bookcase around? Lately?

VICKIE: No.

ELISE: Right, not... Not a bookcase, but... Well something with a picture of a lady holding a scroll?

(VICKIE stops, sighs, and turns back to ELISE)

VICKIE: You mean those boxes?

ELISE: Um. Yes.

VICKIE: Yeah. I've seen them.

ELISE: And... did they have anything in them?

VICKIE: Uh... No? I don't think so. What *are* they anyways? I see them all over the place. Who's leaving them around?

ELISE: I... I don't know. I... Wait, there's never *anything* in them?

VICKIE: I mean I don't pay a whole lot of attention to them. They're just kinda there.

ELISE: Oh... Right. I... I'm sorry. I just. Sorry. You looked like you could use someone to talk to, and I just wanted to say... if you need anyone...

(VICKIE looks at ELISE. Something is about to shift, but VICKIE shakes her head. The sound fades away.)

VICKIE: Look, I don't know you, and I don't know what kind of help you think I need. I'm good.

(VICKIE turns to run away, but has another wave of light-headedness. She stumbles, and ELISE hurries towards her. VICKIE waves off her help.)

VICKIE: I'm fine. I just need some water.

ELISE: Look, I really don't think you should be-

VICKIE: I said I was fine!

ELISE: I can go get you something to eat, like a protein bar or-

VICKIE: No! I'm fine, I-- *(against her will, she starts to cry. It is a tired, and incredibly frustrated kind of crying.)*

ELISE: Oh, god, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to-

VICKIE: Can you just leave me alone? *Shit.* Please go away.

ELISE: I'm really sorry, I just... Is there anyone else I can call, a parent or a friend?

VICKIE: I'm alright, ok? I just didn't have time to eat this morning, and I didn't get a lot of sleep.
But I'm fine!

ELISE: I just don't think it's safe to--

VICKIE: Leave me alone!

(ELISE begins to back away.)

ELISE: I'm sorry. I'm so sorry.

(BLACKOUT)

(We return to the in-between. CALLIOPE stands with her hand on the Bookcase. She is tired, grey, distracted.)

ELISE: What just happened? What the hell, Callie? Why didn't she... Why couldn't I... Are you alright?

(CALLIOPE straightens up and does her best to gather herself)

CALLIOPE: I... I think I will be fine for the moment. Yes.

ELISE: What happened with Vickie? Why couldn't I reach her? Why were the boxes empty?

CALLIOPE: You know the answer. What book has been written for her? Where is her book among the shelves?

ELISE: But she... How am I supposed to help her if I can't... I couldn't connect with her! I tried, but I just... I couldn't... See? I told you, I'm not cut out for this! I can't do it, I can't help you!

CALLIOPE: Please, Elise. Vickie was not ready to tell her story. But don't you see how we must be there when she is? We have the power to--

ELISE: It's too much. It's too much responsibility, I can't do this! It's not me.

(The Bookcase flickers and CALLIOPE collapses to the ground. ELISE rushes to her side. The light on the top shelf steadies. A new book has appeared.)

CALLIOPE: Whatever happens, Elise. Please don't give up. Not on them. And not on yourself.

ELISE: But I...

CALLIOPE: *Please*

(ELISE stands, breathes in deeply, and takes the book from the shelf)

SCENE 8

(Lights up. MARTIN stands in front of a table displaying girls' clothing. He is at a loss, trying to choose between two dresses. He is in his late twenties, British, and he looks like an absolute wreck. He wears rumpled/mismatching business clothes and has not had time to shave the last few days. He notices ELISE.)

MARTIN: Hi, do you work here? *(Realizing she doesn't.)* Shit. Sorry. Sorry about that.

ELISE: Oh, you're fine, um... Maybe I can help you anyways?

MARTIN: Oh, would you? Oh, excellent! Thank you so much. It's my daughter's birthday next week, and I've really been rather shit at them so far. It's--well--you know. Girl's clothing... Do they still wear pink? I can't keep up.

ELISE: *(Examining the dresses)* How old is she?

MARTIN: Turning five.

ELISE: Fun!

MARTIN: That's a word for it.

ELISE: Growing up too fast?

MARTIN: I can't keep up. It's like I blink and a year's gone by. D'you want to see a picture of her?

ELISE: Sure.

MARTIN: *(Pulling out his phone)* Here let me um... oh I love these--this Summer. We went to Madrid.

ELISE: She's beautiful! What's her name?

MARTIN: Alana

ELISE: She has your eyes I think.

MARTIN: *(He seems calmer and keeps looking at the pictures)* Yeah. Though that's about all she got from me, thank God. Got no clue where she came from half the time if I'm honest.

ELISE: She takes after her mom?

MARTIN: . . . *(Suddenly awkward again)* Not so much. She's kinda her own person.

ELISE: Oh... Her mom's... Not in the picture?

MARTIN: *(Confused, looking back at the phone)* What? No, she's-- *(realizing)* Ah... No. Not anymore. She... *(He hesitates, but he looks at ELISE and something shifts. He finds himself*

wanting to open up. He sits on the edge of the display.) She left a few months after Alana was born. It's been the two of us for a long time now.

ELISE: I'm so sorry. I can't even imagine.

MARTIN: Nah, I knew it was coming. I'd find her standing over Alana's cot, just... Like... I dunno. She was gone a long time before she actually left. Sorry. I dunno why I just... Sorry.

ELISE: No, I'm... I didn't mean to pry.

MARTIN: S'alright. And I mean, I'm not looking for sympathy because I got really lucky with Alana. I mean I'm really... I'm rubbish. I'm trying my best and all but... I dunno how I'd survive if she were...

ELISE: Complicated?

MARTIN: yeah.

ELISE: I'm sure you're just being too hard on yourself.

MARTIN: Nah. I mean. well. I don't know. I'm just sort of winging it as I go. I mean, between trying to raise an infant and work. And I mean, London's so damn expensive now, you sneeze and they charge you a pound fifty, so it's not like I could just quit my job, right?

ELISE: *(Not critical. Trying to look on the bright side)* At least you have a job though. That's something to be thankful for, right?

MARTIN: Oh, don't get me wrong, I am. I am. I just don't want to be one of those dads who's working all the time. Absent, I mean. But at the same time, I want to be able to give her whatever she wants, you know? And then I just... I'm sorry. I'm trying to complain less cause... Well cause I want to be more conscious about like... What I'm trying to say is I don't want to be the guy who complains about having to raise his kid, but... I can't deny that it's fucking hard. And my mum, she's offered... When Alana was born she offered to take her. To raise her up in Sheffield. And now that Alana's starting school she keeps... (He puts his head in his hands)

ELISE: Are you ok?

MARTIN: It's just... I feel... I thought I'd figured it out. I had... God it's sounds so fucking stupid. I had a 'secret weapon'. I had this book.

ELISE: a book?

MARTIN: I know. It sounds... Just... Alright, so she was about six months old and she hadn't slept proper in two days. I mean I dunno if you have kids or...?

(ELISE shakes her head, 'No')

Yeah, well, people don't exaggerate when they say kids just never fucking sleep. And It was one of those nights, and I felt like shit. I mean, wits end, losing my mind, and I... I was reaching for the phone to ring my mum and I just thought "Let's try one more thing first ," so I took her for a walk along the South Bank. I dunno why but sometimes it would calm her down, and it's an easy walk from our flat. So yeah, we're walking along, and it's five in the morning, mind, so there's

barely anyone out, and we come across this sort of case. Now, I walked this route nearly every day, and I'd never seen it before, but someone'd put up like a little free library. You've seen those? Like, take a book, leave a book? I dunno why I stopped. I mean I wasn't planning on stopping and usually Alana starts crying the second I do, but something about it... I just felt like it was waiting for us. And there was this book on there that just stood out to me immediately. It was uh... A book of fairytales. You know, like Brothers Grimm and all that. Some I'd never heard of before too and I dunno. I didn't have a book to leave, but... Well there wasn't actually a sign. Just this picture of a lady with a scroll, so I dunno. I took it and we kept walking. But uh...after a while, I gave up hope. I mean, she just wasn't going down. So we went back. The whole way I was just thinking about the book... It was like magic. We got home and I started reading to her and the next thing I knew we were both passed out on the couch. I mean I only got three pages in before we were both snoring. Next few nights I couldn't believe it. I'd start reading to her and she'd just go right to sleep. The book was the key. God but now it just sounds...

ELISE: No, I think that's really sweet!

MARTIN: Thanks.

ELISE: So what's wrong, then? Sick of fairy tales?

MARTIN: *(He laughs a little)* Nah, actually, I love em. When did you last read a fairytale? Like a proper one, one of the originals?

ELISE: I couldn't tell you.

MARTIN: Yeah. That's where I was as well. But I started reading those things, and... They're terrible! I mean not bad, but like filled with really bad stuff. Like, death, poison, curses, and the parents? Don't get me started. Every story, I swear, they're either awful or dead.

ELISE: Yeah, that's true.

MARTIN: Sometimes I swear... Some of those should not be for kids.

ELISE: Ok, so what, then? What's wrong?

MARTIN: She's getting older. And I just... the fairytales aren't gonna cut it for much longer. I'm fucking terrified I've been using them as a crutch and without it I'm gonna fall on my face. Already, I'm out of my depth. She keeps talking about her first day of school coming up and what she's gonna wear. I've been trying to learn how to plait and-- And my mum. She keeps saying how London's no place for a kid, that they shouldn't grow up in the city, and that she'd be better off with them, and I'm starting to think maybe she's right.

(ELISE for once doesn't seem to know what to say)

MARTIN: It's just... I can't help but think... maybe she'd be happier with them. I mean, where they can spend more time with her and... It would be more stable. You know?

(ELISE thinks for a moment before speaking.)

ELISE: The fairytale parents.

MARTIN: Huh?

ELISE: The parents from the fairytales. They're awful, right? But somehow their kids manage to turn out ok, for the most part. They become princesses or princes? They get their happily ever afters? So, you know, you don't have to be perfect for Alana to turn out alright. Like, even if you make mistakes every now and then... You just have to be a better parent than the ones in the stories. And that doesn't seem like a very high bar.

MARTIN: I just want her to have the best life she can. I feel like I keep letting her down and...

ELISE: can I see that picture again?

(MARTIN hands her his phone)

ELISE: you did that braid?

MARTIN: awful, isn't it?

ELISE: I mean, yeah it's pretty terrible. But look at her smile. Does that look like a girl who's disappointed?

MARTIN: *(softening)* Nah... Nah I guess it doesn't.

ELISE: Don't give up, Martin. Not yet.

MARTIN: I... I won't. Thank you... *(He holds up the dresses)* So uh... Which one?

ELISE: You tell me.

MARTIN: *(He looks at them again for a minute before holding one up.)* This one. It'll bring out her eyes. Right?

ELISE: She'll love it.

(Blackout.)

SCENE 10

(The In Between. The Bookcase stands dark. CALLIE is gone.)

ELISE: CALLIOPE? CALLIE?

Silence

(ELISE turns to the Bookcase.)

ELISE: Where is she? Please. Please tell me! Please! I... I still have questions, I still want to... I want to...

(The spot on the Bookcase fades and ELISE is alone on stage.)

ELISE: Wait... wait-- This isn't-- You can't be gone! I was just starting to-- come back! Please! Come back! HOW DO I BRING HER BACK?

(The lights come up on stage. We are back at DREW's bar. He looks up at her.)

DREW: Hey! You're back.

ELISE: I...

DREW: So... Did you get the job?

ELISE: I... I was too late. I think I... It's too late.

DREW: *(He looks at her for a moment.)* Do you want the job?

ELISE: I... *(Finally realizing)* Yeah. I do-- I... I think it's the thing I've always wanted.

DREW: Then take your own advice. This is the job you want? Do it.

ELISE: But I don't even know how to... *(She slowly turns away from DREW as realization dawns on her.)* She said... Bonded. We're bonded. *(Determined)* We're still bonded.

(ELISE closes her eyes and once again, the lights fade. There is a moment as ELISE stands alone on stage.)

ELISE: I'm here. I'm ready. Please.

(Just when it seems that it will not work, we hear very, very faint windchimes. A spot comes up slowly on the Bookcase. While it was always pristine and well kept, it is now weathered, covered in dust.)

ELISE: Help me! How do I bring her back?

(A light flickers on one of the shelves. Two books are revealed. One is CALLIOPE's book. It is very large and very old. The other is ELISE'S. It is smaller, newer. ELISE takes the books from the shelf. The spot on the Bookcase flickers out and once again, ELISE is alone on stage. She opens CALLIOPE's book. Nothing happens. She begins flipping through pages.)

ELISE: I don't know what to do! What am I supposed to do?

(As she is flipping, she accidentally rips one of the pages out of the book. She stops flipping and stares at the page in her hand. She sets the page down and flips back to the front of the book. She tears out the front page, opens her own book, tucks the page inside, and closes the book.)

ELISE: Please.

(Finally, we hear Windchimes. Louder this time, clearer. A spot comes up on CALLIOPE. ELISE looks up. CALLIOPE is disoriented.)

ELISE: Callie?

CALLIOPE: ... Elise?...

ELISE: Did it... Did it work? I don't--

(CALLIOPE looks down at herself. She realizes what ELISE has done.)

CALLIOPE: *(Relief and joy and disbelief)* Thank you.

(They move in sync, examining their hands, arms, feeling their faces. While they are in sync, their movements are still ELISE's mannerisms. She carries herself the same as before, if only perhaps a little taller. After a moment of this, ELISE breaks into a grin. She turns to the Bookcase. The shelves are all lit now, and filled with books)

ELISE: So. Where should we go first?

CURTAIN