

ACT TWO

Walpurgisnacht

The living room, the middle of the night.

A spray of candlelight finds River on the couch, paging through the photo album. Cassidy stands just over her shoulder, unseen, clutching her phone.

In the background, there is a barely perceptible newfound order to the place.

There is a substantial stretch of quiet, before:

CASSIDY: Ew ...

(River startles.)

RIVER: AH! OH MY / GOD!

CASSIDY: Oh my God, chill out! It's just me—

RIVER: Cassidy! How long have you been standing there?

CASSIDY: Like five minutes. Relax. *(Beat)* You and Uncle Frank are in the room Ainsley and I were supposed to be in.

RIVER: I'm ... sorry?

CASSIDY: It's okay but now my family and I have to all share the same bedroom and so uncomfortable on the floor and I can't sleep and so I was texting with my best friend Jessica, who has insomnia, too, but

my parents were like, "The light from your phone is keeping us up!" And they've been getting on my nerves all day, so I was like, "Fine!" and came down here. Where did you get those?

RIVER: Uh—

CASSIDY: It's okay. I've already seen them. I was there when we found them.

RIVER: Oh ... Your Uncle Franz was supposed to throw them away but ... I don't know. It didn't feel right.

CASSIDY *(Referring to River, who is hiding the photo album from her)*: You don't have to be so weird. I already saw them, I told you. You can keep looking. I'm just going to sit here.

(Beat, as River starts looking at the photos again. Cassidy pretends for a moment to be dealing with something on her phone before she starts to peek at the photo album again.)

Rhys says he thinks they're racist. Do you think our grandpa was racist?

RIVER: I didn't really know your grandpa, so I can't say.

CASSIDY: Me neither. It was so weird going through all of his stuff today. I kept being like, "This guy was related to me? Like, what the eff?" *(Beat)* It's probably good you're keeping these though. They might be worth something.

RIVER: Really?

CASSIDY: Yeah. You can sell anything on the internet. My friend Ingrid paid her way through ballet camp selling her dirty socks on Craigslist. *(Unlocks her phone, starts Googling)* Let's find out. What do I search for? *(Googling)* "Antique dead people photos." *(Beat, as something loads)* There's definitely stuff ... Oh, duh— *(Typing)* "African-American people." *(Off River's reaction)* What? That's what they are. *(Beat, something loads)* Who is Emmett Till?

RIVER *(With the photos, rapt)*: I don't know ...

CASSIDY *(Reading something)*: "Lynching"? *(Reads, clicks, something else loads)* OMG— Bingo! Look! There are some on eBay!

(Excitedly, Cassidy tries to show River, but River isn't listening, engulfed as she is in looking. Cassidy swipes through the photos on her own.)

These are so creepy ... And kinda expensive. *(Finds something, shows it to River)* Whoa, look at that little girl in the crowd in this one. She's, like, smiling at us!

RIVER *(Overwhelmed, closing the photo album)*: Okay! Let's stop—

CASSIDY: Why?

RIVER: They're just upsetting and I don't think we should be looking at them anymore.

CASSIDY *(Picking up the photo album to leaf through)*: But I don't feel upset. *(Beat, off River's gaze)* Am I supposed to?

(Beat, in which River studies Cassidy, sympathically.)

RIVER: No. Feel however you feel. It's okay.

CASSIDY: But I don't want to be, like ... *(Experimentally)* an asshole.

RIVER: You are far from an asshole.

(Beat.)

CASSIDY: Where is Uncle Franz?

RIVER: Upstairs. He's actually having trouble sleeping, too, so I'm giving him some space. It's been a big day for him.

CASSIDY: Yeah, it's so crazy he's here. *(Lying)* Why did he disappear from the family again? I always forget.

RIVER *(Suspicious)*: Uh, I don't know ... You should ask your parents.

(Beat.)

CASSIDY: Do you know why Aunt Toni left today?

RIVER *(Shakes her head, then)*: You should ask your parents.

CASSIDY *(A little angry)*: Ugh, why? They never tell me anything, even though the whole point of this trip was to learn about Daddy's family. Meanwhile, all I've learned is that everything is a secret.

RIVER: I'm sorry—

CASSIDY: You should be. Your participation in this conspiracy is stunting my intellectual development. *(Sniffing the candle)* Why are you wasting these candles? Doesn't this lamp work?

(Cassidy turns the lamp on.)

RIVER *(Turns the lamp off)*: Yes, but I prefer candlelight.

CASSIDY: Why?

RIVER: I feel safer with candlelight. It's fire. It's an element of protection.

CASSIDY: Protection from what?

(Beat, as River debates whether or not to have this conversation.)

RIVER: They say, if you hold your breath and keep still and a flame flickers, it's telling you there are spirits present.

(They stare at the candle's flame.)

CASSIDY: Or a draft. Are you trying to tell me you think this house is haunted?

RIVER: I'm just saying. I've felt things since I've been here.

CASSIDY: Spirits? Prove it.

RIVER: Prove I didn't.

CASSIDY: Feelings aren't facts and science is real.

RIVER: Oh, so you think science knows everything.

CASSIDY: Uh, it knows a lot.

RIVER: It doesn't know why we laugh?

CASSIDY: Uh, we laugh because something's funny.

RIVER: Yeah, but why does it come out like a laugh. Why doesn't it come out like a scream or a sigh? Or why does water pour out of our face when we're sad? Why do we dream? Science doesn't have the answers to any of that.

CASSIDY: And you think ghosts are the answers.

RIVER: I think that the universe is full of mysteries that don't necessarily all need solving. And maybe there's a danger in knowing too much. And maybe the purpose of life is to simply marvel at its

mysteries and perhaps, in the beholding, even deeper truths are revealed to us.

CASSIDY: Whatever ...

Ends

hear, because we don't know how to see or hear it? Listen. What if this house is trying to say something to us right now, Cassidy?

(There is a scratching and banging on the door, which startles Cassidy and River. Then the sound of keys being dropped is heard.)

TONI *(From off)*: Shit.

CASSIDY: Aunt Toni?

(The door opens.)

RIVER: Toni! You scared us.

TONI: Good. *(Referring to the order)* What has happened here?

RIVER: Oh! Rachael and I got everything together for the sale tomorrow! You really set us up for success. With everyone pitching in, it only took a few hours.

TONI: Great ...

RIVER: The only room we still have left to clear out is your father's bedroom. Rhys said he wasn't feeling well so we left him alone in there to rest—

(Toni notices Cassidy with the photo album and snatches it away.)

TONI: Cassidy, *what* are you doing with this?!

RIVER *(Confused)*: / Uhhhh—

TONI: You know you are not supposed to be looking at these!

(Beat.)

CASSIDY: PLEASE DON'T TELL MY PARENTS!

RIVER *(Realizing Cassidy lied)*: I'm sorry, I was down here looking at them and she walked in and she told me she'd seen them—

TONI: And what are you doing with them?

RIVER: I was asked to throw them away but it didn't feel right—

CASSIDY: Don't be mad at Aunt River! It's my fault—I just didn't think it was fair that Rhys got to see them and not me! I'm almost an adult—

RIVER: Cassidy actually was being very mature—asking all the right questions. She was using the internet. She even figured out that they might be worth a little money.

(Beat.)

TONI *(Suspicious, handing the photos to Cassidy)*: Cassidy, go put these in my car ...

CASSIDY: Why?

TONI *(Not taking her eyes off River)*: Because your “aunties” need to talk. You're lucky I think you're smarter than your parents do but these are not appropriate for a thirteen year old—I don't care how adult you think you are! Now put these in my car and stay away and then you get your butt to bed—

(Toni raises her keys over her head and presses the car fob, tipsily. A car alarm goes off. It takes a try or two before Toni fixes this and seems to unlock the door. Cassidy takes the photos and exits through the front door.)

RIVER *(Sweetly)*: Did you have a good time?

(Toni begins to give herself a tour of Rachael's handiwork, walking from room to room. River begins to trail her.)

TONI: All right, River, what's your real name?

RIVER: I'm sorry?