A Traveler's Path: An Original Play

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A TRAVELER'S PATH

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A Traveler's Path; An Original Play
A Senior Honors Thesis Project by Deborah Saad

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Date

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SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

SCENE ONE
Spokane Airport, memory of London Airport

SCENE TWO
Spokane airport, scary London memory, Scotland memory

SCENE THREE
[All are memories to follow until end] Scotland phone call with her dad, letter to Alissa

SCENE FOUR
Conversation with Rachel about article

SCENE FIVE
Working on article

SCENE SIX
Parents write, Karen writes back about Loch Ness

SCENE SEVEN
First journal entry, while on a train to Italy

SCENE EIGHT
Arrives in Italy, meets Louise and Celia

SCENE NINE
Conversation with Louise, receives package from Rachel

SCENE TEN
Journal entry about Celia

SCENE ELEVEN
Celia talks about colors and stitching, Karen writes to Rachel

SCENE TWELVE
Celia remembers Austria, describes to Karen and Louise

SCENE THIRTEEN
Phone call to Alissa

SCENE FOURTEEN
Back into the present, Spokane airport, Karen calls Rachel and her dad
CAST OF CHARACTERS

KAREN, 23, college graduate
ALAN, 58, her father
MARIE, 57, her mother
THE MAN
RACHEL, mid-sixties, rents a room to KAREN in Inverness, Scotland
ALISSA, 23, friend of KAREN
LOUISE, 28, caretaker to CELIA
CELIA, early 80’s, a woman of Tuscany

Setting: The stage does not need realism, only the use of chairs, tables, phones, other properties as described in the text. The use of lighting will help delineate past from present. The airport chairs in which Karen starts can remain visible to help indicate whether the action is memory or present. The play takes place sometime in the 1990’s.
SCENE ONE

(The airport, Spokane. KAREN, 23, enters wearing a midsize packer's backpack, a sweatshirt tied around her waist. She sees two empty chairs, walks over easily, and sits in one, placing her backpack in the chair next to her. She looks around.)

KAREN

Yeah, airports don't feel the same as train stations — people in airports don't seem to have the same kind of patience for travel time. Every person that has walked by me today acted like they were racing to be the first one to hit baggage claim and stand and wait, or else they had mis-planned their layover time and so were on the concourse marathon now. Geez. I almost want to keep on traveling. But I suppose I should call home.

(KAREN begins looking for change in the front pocket of her bag and finds a couple postcards instead.)

Shoot, I was gonna mail these in London. (She turns them over.) I hope they can read this. Maybe with a magnifying glass. Man, so different from my first postcards. Who did I write to first? (Thinking.) Hmm, it must've been Alissa. I think that's right, I called my parents first, and then wrote a couple postcards. Seems like a million years ago, waking mom and dad up...

(KAREN stands and walks to a pay phone. The lights mostly fade on the airport chairs. She picks up the phone and dials a series of numbers. Opposite her, KAREN's mother, MARIE, and father, ALAN, sleepily enter wearing pajamas. ALAN picks up the phone after it rings. MARIE sits in a chair by the phone table.)

ALAN

Hello? (Pause.) Hello?

KAREN

Yeah, hi dad. It's me, Karen.

ALAN

Karen? Who's that?

KAREN

Thanks, it's only been about twenty hours. You forget me so soon.

ALAN

Yeah, well I gotta tease ya. So you made it, huh?
KAREN
Yep, just fine. Bag is with me, no trauma. Airport’s busy, but better than if it were a weekend, I’m sure.

MARIE
(Overlapping KAREN’s last line.) She made it safely?

ALAN
(To MARIE) Yes, she’s fine, arrived safely.

What?

ALAN
Oh, nothing, just talking to your mother. She wants to know who this weirdo is on the phone here.

MARIE
Well, I know who you are Alan.

KAREN
(Overlapping with MARIE’s line.) Tell her she should recognize you by now, dad.

ALAN
(Laughing.) Boy, you two sure have timing. Even across an ocean. What hope do I have against that? (All are amused.)

You know you like it.

ALAN
Alright, alright. It’s good to be teased. And I’m glad you got there safely.

KAREN
Yes, I’m fine. And I have a map that should get me to the hotel. I do appreciate you guys setting that up for me, cause you really didn’t have to.

ALAN
I know we didn’t have to, but it gives us a chance to feel like we’re there with you, or at least helping out. You’re still just my tall three-year-old, even if you are done with college now.
KAREN
Aw, dad. I thought I was still only two. I aged!

ALAN
Yes, of course. But you still can’t drive alone at night.

Yeah, right.

MARIE
(Overlapping.) Ok. My turn now. (ALAN hands her the phone.) Hi hon, how are you?

KAREN
Just fine, thanks. All’s well under the smog, er, fog today here, how about there?

Pretty nice, actually, when there was daylight. Now it’s rather late at night, but not too warm at least.

KAREN
Yeah, quite a way to wake up, I suppose. A crazy phone call from across the Atlantic. Hope you don’t mind.

MARIE
No, we’re glad to hear from you. I was getting worried about if you’d made it.

KAREN
Mother, you know my flight wasn’t even supposed to land until now. I mean, I called you as soon as I landed, and got out of customs. London is pretty specific about people entering.

MARIE
Oh yes, I know. I’m not saying I’m upset at all. I appreciate you calling us.

But you’re still wishing I had called earlier.

MARIE
No no, I understand that you called as soon as you could. (Silence.) Karen, I’m not upset.

KAREN
Yeah, I know. I’m sorry I’m short, it’s just been a long flight, and all I want to do is sleep, but it’s 10:30 in the morning here, so the day is just beginning.
MARIE
Well, can you check into the hotel yet?

KAREN
I have to find it first, mom. I just got here.

MARIE
I know. (Pause. She sighs.) I miss-

KAREN
(Not hearing MARIE as she overlaps her.) Well I should go, okay?

MARIE
Yeah, okay. We’re glad you made it, I hope you find the hotel okay. And just please remember to call each week, okay?

KAREN
(Oblivious to the fact that she has upset her mom.) Gotcha. I’ll be fine, and yes, I’ll keep you informed.

ALAN
Tell her not to go walking alone at night, especially in big cities. (MARIE nods.)

MARIE
Your father wants me to remind you to seek out a handsome stranger to escort you after dark. (ALAN is bemused.)

KAREN
Sure, I believe you. Tell him I’ve got them all lined up and ready to go.

MARIE
(Watching ALAN.) I think he’s telling me I get to sleep on the couch...Hmmm. (Back to KAREN.) Anyway, take care of yourself, and be safe.

KAREN
I’ll do my best.

ALAN
(Shouting a bit.) Bye! G’bye!

MARIE
Bye from me, too. We love you!
KAREN
Love you guys, too. I'll call in a few days...Bye!
(All hang up. ALAN and MARIE exit as KAREN situates herself on a bench near the phone. She has been holding some postcards. She now begins writing, reading aloud as she does so.)

Hi Alissa! I made it across the ocean, and it's great. Wish you were here. You know, when I get back, it'll be great. We'll find a place – you, me, Jimmy, maybe even Jeff, too, if you two promise to behave nice. I know you guys will, you're so good together. Anyway, hope you are well. Later, Karen. (The lights fade.)
SCENE TWO

(The lights come up to reveal KAREN, again seated on the airport chair next to her backpack. She is looking at the postcards.)

KAREN

Yeah, so short and sweet. I don’t think I told anybody much at the beginning. Not till after I’d been in Scotland for a while. (KAREN suddenly begins looking through her pack again, to find her journal.) Did I even write it in the journal?

(She withdraws a small notebook with several loose pages stuffed into the front. She flips through the first several pages, skimming.)

No, it’s not here. Didn’t start journaling till way later. Hmm. (KAREN digs up a pen and begins writing, reading out loud what she writes.) So I thought I’d write about what happened in London, since I didn’t write to anyone about it, and never quite got to putting it in here, either. (KAREN writes carefully, choosing how to present her story.) I had spent the two nights in the hotel from Mom and Dad, and so I checked out, figuring I’d stay in a hostel for a bit. I planned to go on to Scotland the next day, I just wanted to explore London for one more day. Unfortunately, it was a thick fog day, not great for sightseeing. There were no real lines to the buildings or streets, just fuzzy hints as to where things should be. I walked to Trafalgar Square, to see the lions my friend told me about. They were so big. I felt like I was in the Chronicles of Narnia, looking at Asland. But the fog had caused moisture to collect on the bronze, and it looked like the lions were crying. It was an eerie feeling, multiplied by when I looked around and saw absolutely nothing but suspended gray cloud. There was no one there who I could tell about the gentle lions, or ask if they saw the lions’ tears, too. (Pause.) I stood there for a little while and when I finally decided to sit down, I heard someone walking nearby. It was the first thing that was close, even though I knew the cars and buses were composing the low drone to my left. The footsteps clicked along to the right, and they stopped just in front of me, I swear. I looked into the murky curtain but saw nothing. Just heard him...

(KAREN sets her journal aside as she leans forward, drawn into the memory. The voice of THE MAN is heard, but he is not visible on stage.)

THE MAN

Hello.

KAREN

(Looking for the voice.) Hello? Is someone there?

Yes. (Pause.)

THE MAN
I can’t see you.

THE MAN

I know. But I’ve seen you.

KAREN

What do you mean, you’ve seen me? (She is beginning to be more afraid.)

THE MAN

I’ve seen you. Before. I see you now.

KAREN

(KAREN whirls around in her seat, thinking he is behind her.) Where are you? What do you want?

THE MAN

I’m right here, watching. And what do I want? That depends on what you have.

KAREN

I haven’t got anything. I’m just here to sit.

THE MAN

You gave something to the hotel today, didn’t you?

KAREN

(KAREN looks around again, searching.) I don’t know what you’re talking about. (KAREN reaches over slowly and picks up her journal, still holding herself rigid as though she is looking for THE MAN. She begins writing and reading aloud.)

All I could think of was an old Ducktales episode about Jack the Tripper, a spoof of something much more frightening. And I saw the headlines for my home newspaper: “Frustrated graduate runs from home only to be absorbed into London Fog.” I wasn’t sure where he was, but my guess was that he was not in the middle of the street, so I held both my backpack straps with an iron grip and tried to dodge quietly but quickly to where the car noises were.

THE MAN

Ah, ah, ah. Where are you off to?
KAREN
(Still writing.) I just didn’t stop. I was at a half jog, half limp with my pack in only one hand, and I just went away from Asland and this voice of malice into the closet of fog ahead.

THE MAN
Aren’t you going the wrong way? (With a sneer, but heard from farther away.)

KAREN
Luckily I didn’t become road fodder. I saw the sign for the tube just before I walked straight into it and down a deep dark stairway. I hadn’t done all that much underground riding yet, just followed the big signs to touristy points. So the rainbow of bowline knots that greeted me on the wall map was disheartening. I knew Kings Cross was the station with trains to Scotland, so I just tried to head for it. (Pause, she closes her eyes, remembering. Writing again.) I didn’t put my pack on because I wanted to be able to keep an eye on it. So when I joined the sardine party on the train, I could barely wedge myself and my pack in between all of the coat laden, fog weary commuters. It still amazes me how we all stay standing when the train lurches to start or to halt. (KAREN sighs, writing more carefully now.) I didn’t even realize it till after he’d started. There were so many people, I just thought it was the motion of the train, causing someone’s briefcase behind me to bump into me. But then I realized the rhythm of the train didn’t match. And the man behind me wasn’t carrying a briefcase. (Silence.) I just felt so alone and so helpless. All the other people on the train were staring out into their own voids, their knuckles nearly as white as mine, clutching bags, purses, belongings. But no one else was screaming inside like me. I tumbled out at the next stop. When I turned, I watched the doors close on a hundred glass eyes looking out the windows at nowhere, and the train pulled away. (Pause.) When I did make it to the Kings Cross Station, I was too close to crying to ask anyone about the nearest hostel. I crawled into a corner and cried fog onto my pack until sleep came. (KAREN stops writing and looks away, watching airport traffic around her.) Yeah, not much else to say there, I guess. (KAREN sighs and looks back to her bag. She smiles a little.) But then came Scotland. Inverness. And the fog was a little different there. (She laughs.) I must’ve looked ridiculous the day I showed up on Rachel’s doorstep, my backpack in tow.

(Lights fade on where KAREN was sitting as she rises and moves to where the lights are coming up to reveal RACHEL, a gentle woman in her mid sixties, who wears comfortable at-home clothing. RACHEL is setting out a plate on a small kitchen table. KAREN approaches the door wearing her pack and rings the bell. RACHEL goes to the door and opens it.)

KAREN
Hi there.
Hello.

How are you today?

Fine, thank you.

Good, good. I, um. My name is Karen. The tourist bureau, or rather, the woman at the desk there, she sent me. I'm, I'm looking for somewhere to stay for a while, and she said she thought you might have a room open.

Really, do you know her name? The woman at the desk?

Um, I don't remember actually.

Okay, that's fine. Must be Addy. Oh, and my name is Rachel. So, what is it that you need? A room for a night, or a week?

Actually, I was hoping for a little longer. See, I am travelling for a while, and I was hoping to stay here, and find some work, and stay a month or so.

A month is just fine. I'll have the room open all summer, if you wanted.

Oh, I don't know that I would be able to stay that long.

Alright, not an issue right now. Would you like to see the room and see if it would work for you?

Yes, that'd be great. (Karen steps forward as Rachel speaks.)

Please, come in. (Gesturing.) You can set your bag here if you like.
KAREN

Oh, sure. (She sets it down with a thud.)

RACHEL

A wee bit heavy, isn’t it?

KAREN

Oh yeah.

RACHEL

(Smiling.) Here, you can look, it’s right through that door. I’ll just be in the kitchen. It’s right over here.

KAREN

Thanks.

(KAREN looks through the doorway, trying to see what it will be like to stay there. RACHEL meanwhile has gotten out a second plate for the table. KAREN turns back and seeing the two plates, steps hesitantly into the kitchen.)

I think it’ll be fine. It’ll be great.

RACHEL

Good, good. Would you like some breakfast?

KAREN

Oh, I don’t want to put you out. I can go into downtown for some food.

Not at all. Come, have a seat.

RACHEL

KAREN

Thanks.

RACHEL

I keep breakfast pretty simple here. Rolls and some jam, generally. If you’d like something more-

KAREN

Oh, I could eat anything right now.
RACHEL

Ahh.

KAREN

I mean, it sounds great.

RACHEL

(Smiling, she retrieves a few small rolls and sets them on the table.) So where are you from originally?

KAREN

Spokane, Washington, in the States. It’s called the Lilac City, and it is just gorgeous in May. That’s when the Bloomsday festival happens.

RACHEL

The lilacs certainly are beautiful, aren’t they?

KAREN

Yes, they smell just incredible, even if they’ve started wilting. I wish they lived longer in a vase, but they don’t last much more than a day, generally.

RACHEL

Yes, it is too bad. But that’s why you enjoy them wherever you find them. (Pause.) So is it mountainous there? Or am I thinking of the wrong area?

KAREN

Well, we can get to Mt. Rainier pretty easily, but I wouldn’t call Spokane mountainous. Definitely not Kansas flat, though, thank goodness. And we get more rain.

RACHEL

Rain I can understand. Why else would Scotland be so green?

KAREN

It is great countryside. I liked to watch the landscape roll by when I was on the train up here. I kept wanting to point out all the little houses I saw, the way they sat so contentedly on the hills, but there was no one there to tell...Anyway, I like the green. It’s really vibrant, feels alive.

RACHEL

Alive, good word. The river is always flowing, always keeping the lifeblood going here. Have you seen the loch yet?
KAREN
No, I’ve only been here three days. I’ve been walking around the town, mostly. Just exploring, and sitting by the river.

RACHEL
Well, first couple days, why not? Where did you stay the last two nights?

KAREN
At a mistake. A creepy hostel on the edge of the housing rows.

RACHEL
Hmm, two nights?

KAREN
It was cheaper to stay two nights, if you declared it right away. I didn’t have time to look around when I arrived, and didn’t want to waste it last night. So I just checked out early today, and all’s well, since now here I am with breakfast and a nice place to stay. And conversation to boot.

RACHEL
(Smiling.) Are you finished with school?

KAREN
Yes, quite done, actually. And I have been saving to travel, cause I didn’t go far enough from home while I was in college. I didn’t think I would be able to do much, but I wanted to get away. And then I got some inheritance from a great aunt, so I used that to get here, and I’m slowly working through whatever I can see on the money I have.

Gracious, that’s determined.

RACHEL

KAREN
Well, I just didn’t want to stick around and watch people get stuck. I wanted to stay in motion, and go see and do and start off a little differently than just the generic temp job to pay rent. I mean, what’s the point of that? If we are just going into the world to start a job we’re gonna be stuck in, why go be miserable now if we can avoid it for a while?

Surely, if a job is misery.

RACHEL

KAREN
Isn’t that what it usually turns into?
RACHEL

Depends, I guess. I suppose, if –

KAREN

I just haven’t seen many happy people in the workplace. Sorry, sorry. I interrupted you. What were you saying?

RACHEL

Oh, it just depends on how you see the job. But I think we can leave misery behind, and just take on eating, what do you say?

KAREN

Sounds good. (They pick up their rolls as the lights fade.)
SCENE THREE

(KAREN is seated on one of RACHEL’s kitchen chairs, on the phone with her dad. ALAN is opposite her on stage, sitting by the phone.)

KAREN
Yeah, it’s really neat here now. The letter I sent earlier is a little off, comparatively.

ALAN
That’s good. It was sort of sad to read about hazy hostels.

KAREN
Yeah, but now life is better. And I didn’t even tell you the sweet part of the deal.

ALAN
What do you mean? More than having a cozy room in a kind woman’s house who often shares her meals with you?

KAREN
Yes, more. I didn’t think it could be better, but yesterday, she caught me on my way downtown, and said that it has been so neat to have someone to share meals with, that she couldn’t see the reason for paying the boarding price she published with the tourist office. So she said if I would be willing to help her out in the house with some work, we could alter the price a bit.

ALAN
And did you accept?

KAREN
You bet. I am gonna basically clean the place once a week, and buy groceries every other time or so, since it works better when we each cook for two instead of cooking singly just for ourselves.

ALAN
That’s it?

KAREN
That’s it.

ALAN
You must be a great entertainer at mealtimes for her to offer that.
KAREN
No, I think she’s just missing her kids.

ALAN

Kids?

KAREN
Yeah, I thought I told you.

ALAN

Nope.

KAREN
Ok, well, she has two kids, a girl and a boy, both off in the world, one’s married. She said they’re both real busy with work and stuff, so she doesn’t get to see them much. I think one lives in Aberdeen, the other, I’m not sure. And her husband, Jonathon, is away on business basically all summer. He’s retiring from the company he runs, so he’s off with the new people, making sure it all comes together, people know who other people are, etc. etc.

ALAN

Wow.

KAREN
Pretty good set up I found here.

ALAN
I should say so. Your mother will be happy that you’re not bouncing all over for a while. And speaking of that, how long will you be there?

KAREN
Well, I was gonna stay for a month. It might be a little over, now, cause I found a job a few days ago.

ALAN
A job? You really didn’t tell me anything yet.

KAREN
I was getting there.

ALAN
Okay, go ahead.
KAREN
It’s at a pizza parlor, and it’s pretty fun. With the summer tourist influx, they were willing to hire me on, so long as I can keep up with the lunch rush. So far so good.

ALAN
I’m glad. That should give you a different taste of the place, hmm?

KAREN
Sure, dad. You are impressively funny for it being nearly midnight there.

ALAN
The night owl in me is coming back to life.

KAREN
Uh oh, I should warn mom. Or not. Anyway, I gotta let you go, so I can finish up some stuff before work.

ALAN
Okay, sounds fair. Take good care of yourself, beautiful.

KAREN
I will, thanks dad. Have a good night’s sleep, okay?

I’ll try.

ALAN

KAREN
And say hi to mom, too.

ALAN

KAREN
Will do. Talk to you in a week?

ALAN

KAREN
Yep. Bye!

(KAREN hangs up the phone and moves some postcards and a letter over nearer to her. ALAN hangs up the phone and exits, lights fading on that section of the stage. KAREN is reading over the postcards and letter.)

Now, before I go serve piles of pizza, let’s see about serving postcards. Huhh. Why didn’t I finish this one? (Turning the postcard over.) Oh, it’s of Big Ben. Shoot, what can I tell them? (Writing.) “Big Ben is taller than I imagined, but I was disappointed not to see Peter Pan on the minute hand. Just listened to the bells chime the hour. Loud, and
lots of echoes. Hope you are well! –Karen.” Good deal, another postcard down.

(Looking at some others.) These are all from London, yikes. Funny, I addressed them, now they just need some fluff. I’ll do those later, and blame the delay on Air Mail. (She puts down the postcards and picks up the letter. Skims over it.) Hmm. (Writing.) “More adventures in the next letter. I want to mail this today. Can’t wait to hear from you, just use the address on the envelope. Love to you! –Karen.” (KAREN folds and seals the letter, and begins writing an address.) To Alissa...far away in the states...from me, in the highlands of Scotland. Alright. Stamps applied, and off they go.

(KAREN stands and “exits” the house to a mail slot, where she carefully slips the letter into the slot, into ALISSA’s hands on the other side. KAREN then exits. ALISSA carefully opens the letter and sits down to read it. As the glass shop is described, refracted bits of light play upon the stage behind ALISSA, tiny sounds may be heard, as those of gentle glass, or the Aurora Borealis.)

ALISSA:

“Dear Alissa. Hello friend! I am now up in Inverness, Scotland, and having a wondrous time. I live with a woman named Rachel, and she and I get along great. We eat together most evenings, and it’s nice to share stories, about work that day, about things we’ve done, places we’ve been. Rachel is originally from Austria. She said she left when she was a kid, and she’s never been back. Not sure why, really. We kinda got off the topic. Anyway, I like the town here – I wander after work sometimes, and there is this fantastic shop on the main drag. It’s a glassblower’s shop, and looking in the windows, as the sunshine trickles in and around all these amazing little creations – it just feels like a fairy land of crystal bits of sunlight. I walked into the shop the first time as though I was on an icy lake when spring thaw has already started, and I’m just waiting to hear the cracking beneath my feet. The owner was demonstrating something to a young kid. I stood there till he had finished the piece, a tiny little dragon whose tail was made by the simplest of motions of the man’s hand. I swear it looked like he was playing with boiled sugar, it was so smooth and fluid, yet untouchably hot. After the kid and parent had left, I told him how fascinated I was. He asked if he could help me find something, but I just said I was looking. Watching. We talked a bit, then I had to leave to get back for dinner.

Well, I went back the next day, and watched again. It’s so amazing the way this clear liquid, this clean and sometimes colored fluid becomes so many shapes, angles, and finally, totally solid but intensely fragile. Just watching as the bright little lights in the cases reflect in the figurines, the way rainbows come shooting out in fantastic colors. And the eyes, Alissa, the little animals’ eyes; they are just black dots it seems, but I swear that little point of light bouncing off the center of the dragon’s eye was just filled with knowledge. And there’s no way I’d ever learn what that dragon knew already. (Pause. ALISSA looks up above her, seeing the colors of the glass in her mind. She continues reading.) Go figure, I went back the next day, and the next. So as it stands now, I go after work and help him clean up the shop, he shows me how glass is handled, little tricks, like
how to swirl the colored glass in to make it look like marble, and we talk. To think, I hadn’t planned on staying here past midnight after the first night in that hostel. Oh, hey, I didn’t tell you about that. I need to get to bed — was going to go to sleep long ago, but I just had to write to you about Duncan and his glass. I’ll just have to tell you the hostel story later. And I have to say that when I do get back, probably post Christmas, I am really looking forward to finding a place for all of us. It’ll be awesome. I gotta go, so I’ll finish up later. More adventures in the next letter. I want to mail this today. Can’t wait to hear from you, just use the address on the envelope. Love to you! —Karen.” Oh wow. I want to see these things, too! God, you go so many places, and here I am, same old, same old. Sigh. Oh well. (She flips envelope over.) So, an address, huh? Well, I think I’ll just have to write you now, and find you some story to tell. Hmm, what shall I tell you, that work is work? That I miss random two AM phone calls about pizza and beer? Perhaps that I have found possibility for a great change in my life? (ALISSA is somber now.) No, not that yet. (Searching for pen and paper, she begins composing the letter out loud.) Yeah, I think the pizza is a safe bet. And let’s see, I have been enjoying being in the world, working and feeling I play the role of an active citizen in the good old U.S. of A.

(As ALISSA continues imagining the letter as she will write it, the lights fade on her and reveal
KAREN at the small table in her room at
RACHEL’s, reading the letter ALISSA eventually sent. It is evening, KAREN is in her pajamas.)

KAREN

(Laughing as she reads silently.) Pizza at 2 AM? That didn’t happen that often. It was cheese-bread more than pizza. Working, lots, uh huh. Oh, my. “Working to the point that I feel I am a contributing, tax paying citizen who is certainly not going to be able to fill out an ‘EZ’ form for the kind and generous government this April.” Sheesh, they got you Alissa! (Reading again.) Hmm. I’m glad. “Your letters take me away, and it feels so good to see the world through your words, and know that you are there, smelling the trees and flowers, and walking the roads that are older than our country is. God, I wish I was there with you. Sending you my love. —Alissa.” Yeah, girl, I miss you too. Should write back. (KAREN moves to get some paper, then stops.) But I almost feel like I’m getting stuck here, too. Just working, doing the daily duties. I came over here so I wouldn’t be stuck doing the same thing every day. So does that mean you’re stuck? Or is it me?

(KAREN sighs as she slowly folds ALISSA’s letter back up, sets it on the table, and just sits, staring. The lights fade.)
SCENE FOUR

(RACHEL and KAREN are seated comfortably at the kitchen table, having tea at the end of the day to wind down.)

KAREN

So, what was life like today in the land of the local newspaper? Great ground breaking news?

RACHEL

Not too much. Had a good time by the river, though, watching the little ducks play in the current.

KAREN

Yeah?

RACHEL

Mmhmm. Sort of nice to watch how they can choose to float and go along with it, or just work that extra bit harder to go upstream instead. (Pause.) Makes you think about where you let the current take you.

KAREN

(Confused.) Editorial?

RACHEL

You think so? (Earnest.) I just thought it’d make a good story.

KAREN

Well, sure. It could have opinion, too.

RACHEL

Most stories do, inherently.

KAREN

I guess.

RACHEL

Do you like to write?

KAREN

Yeah. Lately just lots of postcards.
RACHEL
Okay, that’s writing. Anything extended beyond that?

KAREN
I wrote stuff in school of course. (With sarcasm.) I have written several research papers, a few analytical pieces, and some exegetical essays. (Back to normal.) Yes, I did whatever was required to fill class requirements.

RACHEL
Well that is a rather good start.

KAREN
Why do you ask?

RACHEL
Oh, I just wondered if you were interested in writing something for the paper.

KAREN
What would I write?

RACHEL
I don’t know, an opinion? A story? A poem?

KAREN
You almost had me before you mentioned poetry. Not a strong point.

RACHEL
Okay, no poetry. How about a story? Tell us about what you’ve done in the last three months or so. (KAREN looks up at RACHEL, surprised.) Sure, why not? The people here are always curious, and some of them know you now. Duncan does, the whole staff at the pizza parlor, Addy.

KAREN
I suppose. But what do I have to say that would be interesting to them?

RACHEL
I don’t know, what do you want to say?

KAREN
(Shrugs shoulders.) Guess I could come up with something, and if it’s good, you can print it. If not, I use it as fodder for more postcards.
RACHEL

Fair enough. But don’t you be quick to judge what’s good enough or not. That is up to me, I’m the editor here.

KAREN

And reporter, writer, occasionally photographer...

RACHEL

That happens with understaffed businesses. I do what I can.

KAREN

I know, just giving you a hard time.

RACHEL

(Smiling.) Well then. I’m off to bed. Sleep well.

Thanks, you too!

KAREN

Goodnight.

RACHEL

G’nite. (RACHEL exits.) A story.

KAREN

Hmm. (KAREN sits back in her chair to ponder as the lights fade.)
SCENE FIVE

(KAREN is seated writing. It is after midnight, that same evening. She has been writing her article, and has papers scattered around. She is writing and scratching out things.)

KAREN
Blah blah. (Reading over what she has written.) I’m writing a travel log. “Got to Europe in early June, saw London…” Grrr. (She scratches out some things.) I want to tell them what it’s like. (Writing.) “I arrived to Inverness expecting a happy little small town, and the first nights I was here were spent in a hazy hostel of confused travelers, who thought they were in Amsterdam and pot plants were the standard house plant.” (Scratching it out.) I can’t do that, they probably read this. They’ll come after me and spike my pizza or something. Oh, man, this is hard. I just wanna tell them what it’s like to travel to somewhere totally foreign. (Writing again.) “People all know that I am not from around here and so I usually get treated special, they’re extra nice.” Yeah, they’ll like that. “As a traveler, I can be touristy and take pictures when most other people wouldn’t, and it’s like people don’t mind so much. They just figure I don’t know what’s going on. Since I’m not from around here, I usually don’t.” Okay, here we go. “I try to send postcards to people at home in the States, just to show them where I have been. I can describe whatever monument I see in front of me, and it doesn’t take much thought, and then as long as I’m willing to sacrifice the postage, then I have fulfilled my obligation. Obligation of course because everybody always says ‘Ooh, send me a postcard while you’re there.’” Alright. I can do this. (KAREN continues writing as the lights fade.)
SCENE SIX

(ALAN and MARIE are in their living room in the afternoon. MARIE holds a letter to KAREN.)

ALAN
Did you tell her that the leaves are turning in some places?

MARIE
Yes, I mentioned that it is changing seasons, and I wanted to say that things don’t feel right when they are changing and she isn’t here. But I didn’t.

ALAN
Aren’t you making this harder?

MARIE
Isn’t it hard already, her not being here? She’s so far away.

ALAN
Yes, it is hard. I’m sorry Marie. (MARIE looks away, upset.) We have to let her do this, go far away for a while. It was a blessing enough to have her in college so close. Imagine if she had chosen an East coast school, been gone for the last four years except maybe summer.

MARIE
I know, I’m glad she was near. But that doesn’t make it any easier now to have the house so quiet and empty.

ALAN
Yes, it’s quiet, empty maybe. But Karen won’t live here with us the rest of her life. She may not even live nearby. She talked about only coming back here to pick up some stuff on the way to somewhere else, if you recall.

MARIE
Yes, yes I do recall. And I told her she didn’t need to just run off somewhere. We could work out something here. We stopped having curfews when she was home, and I know we could work out adapting things so she had her freedom here.

ALAN
Marie, listen a minute to what you said. So she could have her freedom here. Here is not free for her. We’re her parents, and that will never change. I don’t honestly think there is a way to create a freedom for her here. Not under the same roof.
MARIE

But can't we try?

ALAN
That isn't even something we can answer. If Karen were willing to try when she returns, fine, we'll all try. But right now, we need to let her be over there, let her feel the distance so that she has her freedom there. And -

MARIE
She's already been there all summer, isn't that enough?

ALAN
Obviously, it isn't, or she would be coming home.

MARIE
I know, I know. But. Oh, geez. Just - (Sighs.)

ALAN
(Pause.) I know. I miss her too. And I worry too. I have nightmares of what happens. And when I wake up with them, I just ask God to send an extra angel over there to keep her safe. We just have to know and believe that God is walking with her.

I know, Alan. I'm trying.

ALAN
Alright. Anything else we can do with the letter?

MARIE
Pray it arrives safely.

(Saying this, she stands and slides it into a mail slot, where KAREN retrieves the letter with a smile, sits in a chair, and begins reading. The lights fade on her parents.)

KAREN
Alright, I got some mail. Let's see here, news from the home front. (She reads silently.) Hmm, "Went downtown...visited the Hastings' store. And there on the wall..." No way. "There on the wall was a postcard you sent of London. Jill was so proud of it, she showed it to us and said she was absolutely delighted to receive it. She even said that some people have asked her about it, and she tells them that she has a young friend who is seeing the world for her, and showing it to her in postcards." Wow! (Going back to the letter.) Changing seasons, huh? Yep, mom, it's doing that here, too. And it brings change, that's certain. Hmm. (KAREN puts aside the letter she has received and begins
writing one back to them.) “Hey there parents! Wanted to keep you informed of doings over here. Am leaving soon, so I finally did it. I took the trip to Loch Ness. Rachel actually took me there, as a personal tour guide. We left early on Tuesday morning, so we would miss most of the tourists who come up for the weekend.

(KAREN stands now, continuing to narrate as RACHEL joins her. They make the motions of walking about the lake, looking at the water.)

It was the most beautiful day, with the sunlight smooth across the green as we rode out there on the tour bus. When we got there, we left the tour group and walked on the shore.

RACHEL

Isn’t it just gorgeous?

KAREN

Fantastic. It feels like we’re floating through the world, moving so softly.

RACHEL

The world is always moving, Karen. It is just that here you can be still enough to feel it.

KAREN

(Pause.) I didn’t imagine it would be so big. I guess I just pictured a little lake with a monster thrashing around in the middle of it.

RACHEL

That would have to be a small monster. This way, she can splash around, she can hide in the middle, or creep along the edges, and all the fanatics can’t see her or touch her.

KAREN

You speak of the monster as if you know it.

RACHEL

I think I do know her. (Pause.) There have been a lot of monsters in my life, Karen, and she is the one who reminds me that even monsters have a purpose.

KAREN

I never pictured monsters as peaceful and splashing. I mean, there’s Godzilla, the Fly…

RACHEL

But you haven’t met her, have you?

KAREN

True enough.
RACHEL
I come here whenever I get a free day, just to watch the fog come in, and hear the sound of her little feet playing in the water.

KAREN
Well, it's too bad that the fog doesn't seem to want to visit today. The sunshine is just wonderful.

RACHEL
The fog will come.

KAREN
You really think so?

RACHEL
I do. (Pause.) It is sort of like an arrangement I have with God. There are just some days when I come out here, and I need a hug, and God gives me the fog, to hold me tight.

KAREN
But fog is cold, and gray, and sad.

RACHEL
Not to me. Fog is the best hug I can get from the world. It goes around me, and in me, I breathe its warmth, and the moisture settles inside of my body and calms me.

KAREN
(Confused.) Each to her own, I suppose. Oh, should we jump back on the bus to get to the castle?

RACHEL
Yes, the bus will take us all the way around the loch. But we don't have to stick to the same bus. We can go to the castle now, and then stay as long as we like really. The last bus doesn't come through for quite a while.

KAREN
I thought we had to go back on the bus we came in on.

RACHEL
Yes, as a tourist. But as a visitor, from one home to another, we can stay. (KAREN is unconvinced.) Don't worry, I'll talk to the driver. Come on, let's go see some stonework.

(As they walk, KAREN again narrates what happens, as though writing the letter still to her parents.)
KAREN
We took the bus around the lake, and the bright sunlight played across the surface of the water. I was sure that Rachel's fog wouldn't come. The only clouds around were high, white, and only an occasional gray rolling one swept by. We did go with the group through the castle, just to get the history to it. Then we stood outside, and let the bus leave.

RACHEL
Let's sit here, and listen for the fog.

KAREN
Listen? (Both sit on floor.)

RACHEL
Yes, you'll see what I mean.

KAREN
Alright. (Turning.) We sat there for a pretty long while, but it didn't seem like any time had passed us. And then I realized that the sparkle on the water had changed. I looked out over the water and was amazed. (Turning.) Rachel, do you—

(Rachel smiles.) Yes.

KAREN
It's coming. The fog is coming. It is rolling, like it's made of millions of ball bearings working as one, so smoothly gliding forward across the water. The sun, it's still up there, and it doesn't destroy the fog, it lights it, the sunlight trickles through and cascades over only parts of the lake, leaving others in darkness. It seems that the sun knows its path, and is gently caressing the water's surface. Now, the fog. The lake is almost gone from sight. (Both sit in silence for a moment.)

RACHEL
Now, Karen, listen. (Karen leans forward to hear.) No, don't try to hear, just listen. (Karen sits back slowly, watching Rachel's face as her eyes close and a smile just happily resides there. Karen makes as if to speak, but stops and instead leans back again to gaze out at the lake.)

KAREN
And then, I heard something I will never forget. I don't even know if I can describe it. We were there at the shore, alone with the fog, breathing moisture. And it was not silent
or muffled, but it was clear and vivid, as though the sound lived inside of the fog. Can you imagine the sound of soap bubbles settling on the surface of the water, only the bubbles are made of glass? There was a gentle falling sound, but splashing, too, as though something had decided to play with the bubbles. And playing with glass bubbles should be full of shattering breaking noise, but the sound here was gentle. No broken bubbles, just a sound like trickling vines, tossing glass pebbles around, having them land in the calm puddle of the lake. I have no idea how long we sat and listened. Eventually, Rachel simply said my name. (KAREN turns to RACHEL as she hears her name.)

RACHEL

Karen, are you ready?

KAREN

Yes, I – Look at the hills! The sun’s coming back, and they’re turning green again.

RACHEL

(Smiling.) Shall we?

KAREN

Okay.

(Both stand. RACHEL walks offstage, and KAREN walks back to the chair, sitting back down to write on the letter to her parents, as if she were now finishing it.)

“We took the last bus back, no troubles. (KAREN pauses a moment, looking over the letter.) That is one of the better adventures I’ve had, I must admit. (Writing a new paragraph.) Well, I hope you got to enjoy the lake, or at least imagine it as I tried to describe it to you. I wish you could have heard... But maybe some day. Anyway, I leave here soon, like I said, and I’m headed south. Rachel gave me the name of an old teacher of hers, who lives in Northern Italy; I plan to go visit her. I’ll keep you posted. Oh, before I forget, you can still send stuff here to Rachel’s. I’m going to come back here before leaving Europe. And if I do stay with Rachel’s friend, she can send stuff to me there. Otherwise, we’ll be in touch, so one way or the other, I’ll get what you send. I love you a lot. Take care of yourselves, I mean it. Until next time then, Karen.

(KAREN folds up the letter, sets it aside, and smiles as she relaxes into the chair, seeing the fog around her again, and she just listens. The lights fade.)
SCENE SEVEN

(Lights come up to reveal KAREN sitting on a train, watching the scenery go by swiftly, she is facing backwards to the train’s direction. She is looking at a white sheet of paper, and listening to headphones with her tape walkman. After a moment, she shifts the headphones to around her neck and begins to write.)

KAREN

Dear mom and dad. I had mentioned earlier on that I was hoping you would keep my letters and postcards, as a record of where I’d been. Sort of a journal. And now for some reason I’m just thinking of keeping a journal with me. But I couldn’t seem to start writing something without writing to someone. So I will write it as though I’m telling you guys. I’m on a train through central France, headed toward Lyon, change there and go into Northern Italy to hop buses to a dinky town in Tuscany. Rachel’s friend is there. Haven’t gotten a hold of her yet, but Rachel sent a letter ahead of me, as far as I know. I will find her, though, don’t worry. (KAREN looks up, laughs a little at herself, continues writing.) What am I saying, don’t worry? I guess I took into the letter writing little too seriously. I’m not worried, I don’t tell you everything anyway. (Testing herself, writing.) Like when I was in Paris, and this gorgeous young man talked to me and we had baguettes, and he bought me coffee. Who knows what you’d do if you knew?

(KAREN is pleased at her freedom. She gazes outward for a moment, and is trying to see what they have passed in the train.)

Pretty strange, to be sitting backwards. Whatever I see out the window has already gone by and is old news to the rest of the train. Kinda sad. Makes me wonder if I remember to look at what’s already passed by. Seems like I usually forget to. (She looks out the window again, her pen idle in her hand. The lights fade.)
SCENE EIGHT

(In an apartment building in Tuscany, it is evening. KAREN wears her backpack, and is bundled to the autumn chill. She waits by a door. LOUISE, a young woman age 28, opens the door.)

LOUISE

Si?

KAREN

Yes, hi, I – . My name is Karen, and I am looking for Celia, uh– (She is trying to remember Celia’s last name.)

LOUISE

(Seeing that KAREN does not speak any Italian, she speaks in English.)
She’s in, but can I ask why you want to see her?

KAREN

Oh, I’m glad you speak English. Yeah, sorry, this is probably really strange. I’ve been in Scotland for a few months, living with Rachel Finton. Rachel gave me Celia’s name to come and visit. Rachel said she sent a letter…

LOUISE

Wait, a Rachel sent you? And your name is Karen?

Yes.

KAREN

LOUISE

Then the package is, ok. Hmm. Rachel, she didn’t tell you very much about Signora Celia.

KAREN

Well, she hasn’t heard from her in a long while, but she said –

LOUISE

How long?

KAREN

I’m not sure. Rachel just told me that Celia was her teacher when she was a kid, in Austria, and they kept in touch, and–
LOUISE
Here, why don’t you come inside, and we can talk a bit. (LOUISE steps aside for KAREN to enter. LOUISE closes the door.) Please, you can set your bag down here.

KAREN
Thank you. (Gently sets the bag down.)

LOUISE
So do you know much about Signora Celia?

KAREN
That she was Rachel’s teacher when Rachel was a kid, before she left Austria.

LOUISE
Do you know why Rachel left Austria?

KAREN
Rachel just said she and her family left and sorta scattered to Scotland.

Hmm.

LOUISE
Rachel said that Celia has always welcomed guests, and that they still kept in touch, for a really long time, up until, I don’t know, not that long ago. Why, didn’t she get the letter?

LOUISE
Well, yes, the letter came here, but I don’t think she remembers Rachel.

Why not?

KAREN

LOUISE
She hasn’t – (She is interrupted by CELIA calling from within.)

CELIA
Louisa, Louisa, C’è una persona qui?

Si, una visita dagli Stati Uniti.

LOUISE

CELIA
Si? Bene, bene. Avanti, venga qui.
LOUISE

(To KAREN.) She hasn’t remembered anyone outside of town for several months. Not even a year now since things started to be strange, and she knows less and less that time has even passed. (KAREN is stunned.) Just this afternoon, we had someone come by to drop off a package. She has no recollection of it.

KAREN

Oh.

LOUISE

Would you like to talk to her? She is still a wonderful woman, very sweet. And sometimes, they say some names will trigger things. And she does speak fairly good English. (KAREN is confused.) She and I speak Italian because it’s easier for her, and I like to practice mine – it’s part of why I came here. Come in, so she can meet you.

(LOUISE leads KAREN into an inner room, where CELIA is seated in a comfortable chair next to a small fireplace. CELIA is in her early 80’s, and is dressed carefully. She watches them enter with a disconnected but contented look.)

Signora, posso presentarle la signorina Karen. Parla solo inglese. (CELIA nods, prepares her mind.) She has come a long way to see you.

KAREN

Hi there.

CELIA

Come over here, let me say hello. (KAREN approaches her.) Sì, sì. Hello, how do you do?

KAREN

Fine thank you, and you?

CELIA

I’m sorry?

KAREN

(Thrown.) Uh, how are you?

CELIA

Oh, I feel good, grazie bella. Would you like to sit?

KAREN

(Looking to LOUISE. LOUISE nods.) Thank you.
CELIA

Prego. Louisa, are you going to join us?

LOUISE

Si, Signora. I'll sit right over here. (LOUISE sits, facing the fireplace.)

CELIA

Si, si, una buona sorpresa. I do enjoy the fire, so, Louisa. Ma non posso sedermi là. (Gestures to the seat nearer the fire.)

LOUISE

Yes, that's why I put your chair there, so you could be warm, but not too warm.

CELIA

Yes, grazie bella. (CELIA looks over to KAREN. Looks to LOUISE, pointing at KAREN.) Oh, Chi è quella ragazza? (KAREN is speechless.) Louisa –

LOUISE

That's Karen, she came to see you.

CELIA

Oh, how wonderful.

(CELIA looks to KAREN, waiting for her to speak. KAREN looks helplessly at LOUISE.)

LOUISE

Why don't you tell la Signora where you were visiting, and who you met there.

KAREN

Um, yes, I – I was just going to tell you about Scotland.

CELIA

Ah, Scotland, bene, what a beautiful place. So far to travel, I do not think I will be able to go. I must keep things in order here, no?

KAREN

Yes, of course.

CELIA

Go on, dear. Tell us about Scotland.
KAREN

Yes. Scotland. I was there visiting, to see the countryside. I stayed with a woman there, her name is Rachel.

(KEARN waits and leans in a bit to see if CELIA has remembered. A silence as both wait on the other.)

LOUISE

Yes, Karen? Go on.

KAREN

(Disappointed, she leans back again.) Yeah, so. Her name is Rachel, and she let me live in her house for the summer.

CELIA

Molto bene. We have una camera, a room here, as well. I cleaned it just today, because I knew you would come.

LOUISE

That was a good idea Signora. Why don’t I take Karen there now, so she can settle in?

CELIA

Si, Louisa, I will watch the fire.

LOUISE

(Standing.) Thank you Signora. I’ll be right back. (KAREN rises and follows LOUISE to the front hall again.)

KAREN

Rachel said they wrote to each other.

LOUISE

I know, I don’t think Rachel would have known. I have been trying to contact Signora’s friends, but there is a lot of work to be done here, and I know I haven’t gotten to everyone.

But, why doesn’t she remember?

LOUISE

It has all happened rather suddenly.

KAREN

What happened rather suddenly?
LOUISE
Alzheimer’s. It’s a disease of memory. (KAREN nods, troubled.) Come, I’ll take you to the empty room, we can talk again in the morning.

KAREN
No, I can go find a hotel or a hostel in town. Maybe there is a hostel.

LOUISE
No, no, I won’t hear of it. And we may be lucky, Signora may remember you in the morning.

KAREN
But she didn’t even remember me tonight, in the span of thirty seconds!

LOUISE
Sometimes are worse than others. One moment, she may be talking about childhood, and the next she may forget where she just set down her coffee cup.

So what should I do?

KAREN

LOUISE
You have been on trains and buses all day, right?

(Nodding.) Mm hmm.

KAREN

LOUISE
Alright, then why don’t you come this way and you can sleep here, we’ll talk again in the morning. Do you want to bring your bag along?

Yeah, I can get it.

KAREN

LOUISE
Follow me. (LOUISE leads KAREN to her room as the lights fade.)
SCENE NINE

(It is morning in CELIA's apartment. KAREN sits at the table as LOUISE prepares rolls and jam.)

LOUISE

Where are you from?

KAREN

Washington state.

LOUISE

(LOUISE sits at the table with KAREN.) Did you grow up there?

KAREN

Yeah. (Pause.) It's a beautiful place.

LOUISE

I imagine. Must be different than the rolling slopes we have here.

KAREN

Mm hmm, it has a lot more brown to it, and Mt. Rainier is there. But Rainier is no Swiss or Italian Alp.

LOUISE

Oh, that's just fine. There are enough Alps here.

KAREN

So where are you from, Louise?

LOUISE

Ohio, actually. Went to college, studied languages and sociology, spent some time working in Columbus at an elder hostel, then eventually decided I wanted to put my language learnings to use.

KAREN

So you picked up and came over here?

LOUISE

Not quite that freely. I came over to stay with my cousin, she lives in town here.

KAREN

So how did you come to live with Celia?
LOUISE

So funny to hear you just say her name-

KAREN

Is that wrong?

LOUISE

Well, since she is our elder, or senior, we call her Signora, out of respect for her age.

KAREN

Oh, I hope I didn’t offend her.

LOUISE

No, I don’t think you ever called her by her name last night. But no worries. You asked me about living with Signora Celia.

KAREN

Yeah.

LOUISE

It was sort of by chance, sort of by organized request. See, everybody in town basically knows each other. So I was the new stranger for a while, and then slowly started knowing people. One of the people I got to know was Signora Celia. I would run into her at the bakery, or elsewhere, and she was always so sweet to me. But then in the last several months, she wasn’t the same. When I ran into her, she would be distracted, and not sure of herself or who I was. Then we all noticed that she wasn’t coming around so often. So her neighbors started checking on her, and she was more and more disconnected, remembering less. My cousin knows the neighbors really well, and between all of us, we decided it would be safer to have someone around, spending time with Signora Celia. I was more than glad to take up the opportunity.

KAREN

So you just stay here all day?

LOUISE

Generally, yes, but I do still work downtown at a ristorante. So when I am there, the neighbors trade off staying with Signora, so she doesn’t have to be alone.

KAREN

Is it dangerous for her to be alone?

LOUISE

Not really. She is not very active, other than cleaning things, rearranging. She does not try to cook things at all, so that is better for her.
KAREN
If she's able to remember where things are, and clean, then she should remember other things, right? I mean, all the people I've ever heard about with Alzheimer's just sit and look out windows. Celia seems to remember some stuff.

LOUISE
Yes, sometimes, she will make comments, or reference things she's done, like teaching a lesson, or telling the children to bundle up. She often tells the children to listen carefully, that it's really important they learn everything they can, and hear what she is saying so they can tell the world. She loved teaching, I guess. She only taught in Austria for a couple years, then left there around when the war was happening, and returned to Italy. (Pause.) Sometimes she'll be talking about the kids, and it makes pretty good sense. It seems that she's telling a lesson, but then she'll say something about fixing lunch in the kitchen before the next lesson.

KAREN
As if she were combining school with living here in the apartment.

LOUISE
Something like that. When people from town come to visit, they talk to her and tell stories. She simply listens, thanking them at the end for a story she can't remember once it's over.

It seems so sad.

KAREN

LOUISE
It is, but that can't be the only feeling you have about it, or else you will sink into a state where you only live in what you remember, and today will pass you by faster than it does her. (KAREN is silent.) You don't need to stay in the house today, you can look around the town. You should explore a little. It is only gonna get colder than what it is today, so you should look now while you can.

KAREN
I should just go back north.

LOUISE
Oh, no, don't do that. There is much to see here, and we've only just begun our conversation. It's been a long time since I have gotten to talk to someone my age bracket, and from the States to boot.
KAREN

But Celia doesn’t know me, and I need to tell Rachel, and I don’t want to just live here like a, a vagabond.

LOUISE

Karen, you’re hardly a vagabond, we won’t refuse a modest rent payment. (LOUISE smiles, KAREN joins her slowly.) You can write a letter to Rachel, it will be better coming from you anyway. And just because Celia didn’t know the name Rachel last night is no reason to give up. Besides, Rachel thinks you are here, she has already sent you something.

(KAREN looks up.) What?

LOUISE

Yes, you remember I mentioned the package yesterday?

KAREN

Not really, I was a little exhausted.

LOUISE

Well, it was addressed to you, in care of Signora Celia. And since I had gotten the letter from her a couple days ago saying you would be coming, I figured I would hold onto it in case you did show up. I haven’t had the chance yet to write back to Rachel. It’s there in the hall.

(KAREN jumps up to retrieve it. She picks it up off the table and returns to the kitchen, staring at the small box in her hands.)

Go ahead and open it, see what’s inside.

(KAREN opens the box. Inside she finds a note from RACHEL, a box of Scottish shortbread cookies, and a long letter from ALISSA.)

Mmm, tasty. Those are pretty good cookies. Don’t see them much here, not with pasticcerias just down the street.

KAREN

How cool, Alissa wrote.

(KAREN sets aside the envelope from ALISSA and unfolds RACHEL’s note. As she reads silently, we hear RACHEL’s voice. LOUISE waits patiently.)
RACHEL
Dearest Karen. Hello to you, I hope you have arrived safely. I wonder whether you made it before this did; the letter from Alissa arrived just yesterday. It’s been about two weeks since you left. Gracious. Two weeks. So regardless, now I intend to send this today. How was Paris? You will have to tell me of your adventures. I hope you enjoy the shortbread cookies; I thought you might be missing them. How is Celia? Give her my love, will you? She gave me so much. I feel I should have told you more about her, but I’m sure she has already painted beautiful pictures of how she taught us reading and writing. She always loved to tell us stories in class, she would describe every detail, the texture of the colors. I think of her when I listen to Nessie in the fog. Well, I do want to get this mailed off, so I leave you with wishes of much joy, and tasty cookies. Love to you, Rachel.

KAREN
(KAREN looks up from the note, saddened.) She says to give Celia her love. And she wonders whether Celia has told me any stories yet.

LOUISE
(Pause.) I’m sorry Karen. Can I get anything for you?

KAREN
No, no. I think I’d just like to go to my room, sit for a bit.

LOUISE
That’s just fine. Signora Celia may be up and about soon, but don’t worry about her. If she does come by the room, just explain you are visiting, be honest, and she may stay, or she may go. I don’t work today, so I will be around. Let me know if you need anything, okay? (KAREN is sitting quite still at the table, holding RACHEL’s note.) Karen? Karen.

(KLooking up.) Hmm?

LOUISE
There are rolls here for breakfast. We’ll have a larger meal later, unless you’re hungry now?

KAREN
Thanks, I’ll be fine.

LOUISE
Alright, just take it easy today, and read your letter there.
KAREN
Yeah, I think I will. (KAREN picks up the box and its contents and stands.)

LOUISE
I'll see you later, Karen.

KAREN
Oh, yes. Thank you Louise. I –

LOUISE
Yes, it's fine. Go on.

KAREN
Yeah.

This should at least brighten the day a little. (Reading from the first page.) “Hi Karen! How is my traveling friend? I hope all is well. I really want to talk to you in person, but I don’t know how to reach you except by letter, so here goes nothing. I have some sad news, about the possibility of us finding an apartment and a few more roommates… (ALISSA’s voice is heard as KAREN now reads silently.)

ALISSA
I think it would be so cool to live together, have a crazy house with three or four of us, and just enjoy the lilacs as they come around every year. But I won’t be around this spring. I won’t even be around for the snowfall this year. I have been offered a position in Santa Fe, and I am going to take it. I told them I needed at least one month to get myself together, and they gave me a week or so beyond that request to find housing. But the way you were talking, it sounds like you won’t be back before Christmas. So I guess that means I won’t see you for a while. It makes me really sad, Karen, to not know when I am going to see you again. It has always been so easy to talk to you, from crazy days in high school, to sporadic calling card phone calls during college. And now, it feels like I am getting pried from my rock. But I need to go. And not to mention it’s been hard on Jeff and I. He wants to stay with me, but he doesn’t think now is right for him to leave. It has been really tough, and I want him to come with me, yet I can’t just ask him to uproot. But I know this is where I need to go. So I am going. I hope that of all people, you will understand. I am not willing to lose this friendship. Please don’t be angry Karen…
KAREN

Don't be angry? Don't be angry? What the hell else am I supposed to feel? Sure, a little excited that life is working out great for you Alissa, but is it really that great? Leaving behind all the possibilities we planned? And you and Jeff on the rocks now? Somehow, I don't see positive change occurring. Dammit Alissa. Why are you doing this to me? (Pause.) And why today? Why not never? I would rather just not know. (So saying, she takes the letter and crumples it in one palm, tossing it to the side.) And I thought I was alone before. (KAREN is crying, hugging her knees to her chest as the lights fade.)
SCENE TEN

(KAREN is seated at a small table in her room in CELIA’s apartment. It is late evening.)

KAREN

So I am trying a journal again. I don’t know what else to do. I need to write to Rachel, tell her that the box got here, thank her for the cookies, and tell her about Celia. But I look at the paper, and I can’t write anything. I started a letter to my parents, and got as far as hello. So I’m back to here. (Pause.) And now, I am stuck here, too. (Sighing, she sets down her pencil. Now she simply talks.) It is so tough to come up with something to write down. I just want to explain what it feels like, to greet this woman in the morning, and have her say “Buongiorno. Come sta?” every day, followed by a switch to English after I answer her. And every day, she says, “Oh, how nice of you to visit, tell me your name dear.” It is just, grrr! (Pause. She looks up.) You know, God, I just want to have her remember me, once, just once. Then at least maybe I could say to Rachel, that yes, Celia spoke to me. How can I say she speaks to me if she has no earthly clue who I am only ten seconds after meeting me? (She looks back to the desk, sighing.) I need to write to Rachel. But how can I tell her? (The lights fade on KAREN, staring at the paper on the desk.)
SCENE ELEVEN

(In the main room of CELIA’s apartment. CELIA sits by the fire, as before. She watches as KAREN sorts through papers from her bag, organizing letters she’s received, separating them from her journal entries.)

CELIA
So many things, there. You can keep them in order, yes?

KAREN
(Surprised.) Hmm? Oh, yeah, I just put them in order by the date.

The date?

CELIA
Yes, these are letters people have written to me, while I have been over here.

KAREN
Ahh, si, I thought it, uh, it was just bills. Little Louisa cleans up the bills.

Yes, she is really nice.

How do you know Louisa?

KAREN
I met her here, about a week ago.

CELIA
Ah, bene, bene.

KAREN
Yeah.

(Silence. KAREN begins putting the letters neatly into her stationary bag. CELIA is staring at the colors on the bag. KAREN follows her gaze.)

Would you like to see it?
CELIA

Oh, may I?

KAREN

Sure.

CELIA

(CELIA reaches out gingerly to take the bag. She touches the fabric tenderly.) So bright. So many colors. I once could see very well how to make the rows of colors so close together. Did you make this?

KAREN

No, I got it at a craft sale at my college.

CELIA

Si, si. It is very beautiful. The lines are so mmm, straight. It looks as a flower does, i colori so mmm, I do not know the English. (CELIA looks up, searching for the word.) I remember making fine things, the colors and the needle such good friends.

(CELIA sits, quietly, KAREN waits. After a moment or two, CELIA looks again at the bag in her hands, only now she is troubled at why she is holding it.)

Cos’è questa?

KAREN

(She is brought back all too swiftly as she reaches for the bag.) It is a bag, I keep my letters in it.

CELIA

Oh, buon’ idea. A nice place for letters.

KAREN

Excuse me, Cel-, Signora Celia. I think I’m going to go rest a bit.

CELIA

Ah, good. I will be here until it is dinner. You will call me, no?

KAREN

Of course. Si.

(KAREN walks away, to her room. KAREN sits at the table in silence for a long minute before picking up pen and paper. Through the end of the scene, CELIA sits and watches the chair across from her,
looking sometimes to the fire, then away again.
KAREN reads aloud as she writes.)

"Dear Rachel. Sorry it's taken me so long to write. Things've been a little up in the air. I stayed in Paris about a week, and took my time getting here, to Signora Celia's. I did get the box, it arrived the same day I did. Thank you, very much. The cookies were good. (Pause. KAREN looks back toward where CELIA is sitting quietly.) There have been some exciting things with Celia. As of a couple days ago, she no longer addresses me in Italian first; she remembers that I only speak English. How can I tell you this? Celia just told me a little something about sewing, that she used to be able to stitch colors tightly. She did not tell me as if it were a normal story, the kind I think you remember her telling. In fact, I don't think Celia remembers telling me anything. Celia developed Alzheimer's almost a year ago... (The lights fade as KAREN continues writing.)
SCENE TWELVE

(It is evening, in the main room. LOUISE is sitting to the side, crocheting a tablecloth. CELIA sits in her usual chair, KAREN sits across from her. KAREN is writing in her journal notebook. CELIA stands, walks slowly over to the chair opposite the fire and sits. KAREN AND LOUISE exchange glances. LOUISE shrugs. All resume silent activities, until the fire pops loudly, once. CELIA jumps, as if woken from sleep.)

CELIA

Correte, Correte! Sbrigatevi! Correte! (KAREN looks to LOUISE, questioning.)

LOUISE

(Slowly, unsettled.) She said to hide, and to hurry.

KAREN

Hide from what?

LOUISE

(To Celia.) Ma da che?

CELIA

Ma dai soldati. Devo nasconderli ma dai soldati.

LOUISE

She said she has to hide them from the soldiers.

KAREN

Who? (Turning to CELIA.) Who, Celia? (CELIA shifts, confused a little.) Signora?

CELIA

I bambini. (Shaking head.) The children. I wanted the children to be safe. (KAREN and LOUISE are silent.) I soldati, essi- they wanted the children. To sort them, like a farmer. Good egg, bad egg. Good egg, bad egg. Yellow star, no star. Yellow star, no star.

Some for the box cars, some go home.

(CELIA makes the motions of separating two sides with her hands. Pause. She is still again, holding her hands out, palms down.)

I told them to be quiet, state zitti, but they were afraid of the dark.
KAREN

What happened?

CELIA

They were in the back of the closet, in the boxes. The closet was the only place I could think of, where no one would find them. They, they all came every day. So dangerous, but they came. To me. To learn. (CELIA is wide-eyed now, tense and leaning toward the fire.)

KAREN

(Gently.) Did the children stay quiet?

CELIA

Si, si. Yes. The soldiers, they opened the closet door, but they could see nothing but boxes, with the books on top.

KAREN

And the soldiers, did they leave?

CELIA

Si, they left. They left and we left. The children left. I left. We never went back.

KAREN

(Near tears.) Where did the children go, Celia?

CELIA

Far away. Far, ever so far. Stephen, and Jacob, Rebekah and Elizabeth, Rachel and Nathan-

KAREN

Where are they now, do you know?

CELIA

One by one, they told me. Through families and secrets, and one by one, I lost them.

KAREN

(She is crying.) Rachel. Did you lose Rachel?

CELIA

Ah, bella, Rachel, she was such a nice girl, always my sunshine smile for when storms would come. She made it so far North. And then, her own children... There were pictures, somewhere, but the mist took them away. But no, it can't have been so long,
KAREN
Signora Celia. Rachel has children, she named her daughter Celia, for you.

CElia
(CELIA turns and looks at KAREN, really seeing her for the first time.) You know my little Rachel?

KAREN
She sent me to you because she loves you.

CElia
Rachel – Rachel? (CElia slowly sits back in her chair.)

(KAREN leans toward her, searching her face. She does not want to say her name, but she is losing her.)

KAREN
Celia? (Pause.) Celia?

CElia
The fire needs more wood.

KAREN
Signora, do you hear me?

(CElia looks back to KAREN, no longer registering. CELIA smiles her contented little sad smile.)

CElia
Hello, dear. How do you do?

KAREN
(Bowing her head.) At least I told you. Somewhere in there, somewhere, you know.

CElia
Would you put a log on, please? (LOUISE has not moved.)

KAREN
Yes, Celia. I'll put a log on. (KAREN goes to the fireplace. As the log catches, it flames up and crackles a bit.)

CElia
You walk like her, my Rachel.
KAREN
(Turning swiftly and kneeling at CELIA's feet.) What?

CELIA
You remind me of Rachel. So quick. She moved like a cascata, a waterfall across the classroom, running in and out, completely free. But she could be still, too, as una calma piscina, a pool, listening and absorbing everything I said. (Pause.) She's grown up now somewhere. (CELIA looks into KAREN's face.) But she's happy, I know. Because you look happy. You are both happy. Felici e libera. (CELIA stares back into the fire as KAREN looks down at the rug.) The fire is much better, now, grazie, bella. But I think I will move, fa troppo caldo, so warm over here. (CELIA moves back to her usual chair.)

KAREN
Celia --. (Sighs.) I think it's almost bedtime, so why don't you gather your things, ok?

CELIA
Yes, what a good idea. I certainly will. Never too much order, not when you've so many things to keep right. Yes, yes, so many things. Tante cose.

(CELIA stares forward again as KAREN sits slowly back into her chair. LOUISE looks at her crocheting, lost in thought.)

So many things. (The lights fade.)
SCENE THIRTEEN

(Lights come up to reveal ALISSA seated in a single chair near the phone in her apartment. Opposite her, KAREN enters, bundled, standing in front of an orange phone and looking for something in her pocket – it is night. She finds the flimsy red phone card and inserts it into the telephone. The phone by ALISSA rings, she picks up.)

ALISSA

Hello?

KAREN

Hi Alissa, it's me, –

ALISSA

Hello?

KAREN

It's Karen. This phone has a dela--

ALISSA

(Cutting her off.) What? Is this you for real? I can hardly hear you:

KAREN

I know, there is a delay. (Slight pause.)

ALISSA

Oh, a delay. Well how incredible to pick up the phone and have it be you!!! My goodness, how are you?! (She is titillated, hand to forehead in disbelief, and standing and sitting in astonishment.)

KAREN

(Now leaving a slight pause before each person speaks, to account for the delay.) I'm doing good. I'm here in Italy, in Tuscany, and the scenery is incredible. I look at the way the hills roll and I can picture what it was like with water everywhere, carving out patterns in the earth.

ALISSA

Awesome. (Pause.) Hey, have– (ALISSA stops as she hears the end of KAREN's sentence.)
KAREN
I got your letter.

ALISSA
What? I was talking, I missed what you said.

KAREN
I said I got your letter. (ALISSA sits slowly.) I got it a while ago, actually. Rachel forwarded it to me.

ALISSA
I see. So...

KAREN
I should’ve called before. I’m probably cutting it pretty close at this point. When do you leave?

ALISSA
Next Tuesday. Karen, I wish I could’ve told you in person, but-

KAREN
I know, there was no way. But I just wanted to apologize to you.

ALISSA
For what?

KAREN
For the anger. (ALISSA is silent, waiting.) I was so angry when I read the letter, Alissa. And I hated that you were going to leave, and I was hurt that you were choosing to leave me, and Jeff. And I crumpled the letter. (Pause.) I crumpled it up because it was the only thing I could do to you.

ALISSA
Karen, I’m not trying to hurt you.

KAREN
I know. And that’s why I called. Thank God you were still there, so I could tell you that I am not angry anymore, and that I am happy you have a chance to go and explore. And I am not willing to give up this friendship either, no matter how many miles the letters have to cross.

ALISSA
I’m so glad. I’m so very happy that we’ll still have this friendship to hold, no matter what other hurricanes life flings at us.
KAREN
Definitely. I look forward to coming to visit you.

ALISSA
Me too. Say, when are you coming home anyway?

KAREN
Soon. I'm leaving Italy within a few days, since I delivered my message.

ALISSA
What message? What are you supposed to be doing in Italy? The last I heard you were in Scotland.

KAREN
Wow, I hadn't realized how long it's been. I'll have to update you when my phone card is somewhere above a thousand lira.

ALISSA
I will wait with bated breath to hear the tales...

KAREN
Not if you're moving out, you won't.

ALISSA
True. Well it was so good to talk to you!

KAREN
Dittos, I'm really glad that you were there to answer the phone. Take care of yourself, okay? And travel safely!

ALISSA
I will. You be safe travelling, too!! Talk to you later!

God bless, Alissa! G'bye!

KAREN

ALISSA
Bye!

(Both hang up as the lights fade.)
SCENE FOURTEEN

(KAREN has returned to her airport chairs with her backpack. She is holding her journal in her hand again.)

KAREN

I wrote to Rachel about what Signora Celia remembered. And I told Rachel that Celia heard me, and even if for a second, she knew who Rachel was, and how much love Rachel had for her.

(KAREN begins to put her journal away and encounters a small box. She smiles and opens it carefully.)

And I’m so glad I went back through Scotland. I can’t believe I ever considered otherwise. (Inside the box is a small glass dragon resting in a blue glass pool.) The little Inverness monster who I didn’t think would survive the trip. My first solo creation, swimming in a blue glass lake, with your little dragon wings, and your little glass eyes. Duncan was right, the glass helps create itself. (She is turning the dragon around, looking carefully.) Yes, you were good inspiration for writing that second article. Of course, so was Rachel’s article about her ducks.

(Smiling, KAREN retrieves and unfolds a piece of paper from the dragon’s box. She reads some from the paper silently, then aloud.)

“The littlest duck fought and fought to make it upstream to meet the others, but never could stay with them, paddling back and forth, swimming ahead, swimming behind. And finally, the little duck realized that when it let go and went with the river, which sometimes flowed and sometimes paused in eddies, that somewhere down the river, it would swim sometimes with the other ducks, or sometimes alone in the stillness. Either way, there is no real reason to fight being a duck in the river. Some birds never get the chance to swim.”

(Smiling, KAREN stands and walks to a telephone with her journal. She dials a series of numbers, reading RACHEL’s from the journal, and waits. Lights reveal RACHEL, opposite, picking up as the phone rings.)

HELLO?

Hi, Rachel?
Karen, is this you?

RACHEL

Yep it’s me, I’m back in Washington.

KAREN

Oh I’m so glad you made it there safely.

RACHEL

Me too.

KAREN

You know, I think your article will be a fine addition to the paper this week. I liked the bit about needing to look backwards in a train, that if nothing were behind us, it would mean we’ve never gone anywhere. (Pause. KAREN is smiling.) Thanks for writing it, Karen.

KAREN

Thanks for encouraging me to. I really want to thank you, Rachel, from way down. You were so good to me.

RACHEL

Well, it was nice to have someone to talk to, and someone around to be nice to. You’ve traveled a long way, Karen.

KAREN

Yeah, and now I just have to get home.

RACHEL

Then why don’t you do that, and I will talk to you again later. I look forward to exchanging letters, too.

KAREN

Definitely. Take care of yourself, Rachel.

RACHEL

I will, you too Karen. Goodbye!

KAREN

Bye!

(RACHEL hangs up, and the lights fade on her. KAREN stands a moment before picking up the phone again. This time the ringing comes from the
phone at her parents’ house. Lights reveal ALAN walking to the phone. He picks up.)

ALAN

Hello?

KAREN

Hey, dad, it’s me, Karen.

ALAN

Karen, you sound so clear, where are you?

KAREN

Spokane airport.

ALAN

But you’re not scheduled to land there until tonight.

KAREN

Yeah, well there’s a story to go with why I’m here now. How about I tell you in the car? On the way home.

ALAN

That’s just fine with me.

KAREN

Cool. Thanks dad. I’ll see you soon, at the baggage claim doors, ok? Easier car access.

ALAN

Ok. And we can pick up some food on the way back if you want.

KAREN

Let’s start by going home.

ALAN

Alright. Your mother and I will be there soon.

KAREN

Oh, hey. Tell mom that she needs to take a day off next week.

ALAN

Why’s that?
KAREN
So she and I can look around the city at apartments.

ALAN
The city? You mean around Spokane? Not some tiny East Coast city a million miles away?

KAREN
Yes, dad. Spokane. (Pause.) I want to see the lilacs turn, and watch the fog on Mt. Rainier. At least for one more spring.

I think she’ll be glad to hear that.

ALAN
Yeah. (Pause.) I love you dad.

KAREN
I love you too. Bye!

ALAN
G’bye! (ALAN hangs up, KAREN hangs up, and smiles as the lights fade.)

THE END