

SCENE ONE:

or SPINNING

Briar and Lou's home:

An apartment shared by two students. A little messy. Lived in. Comfy and familiar.

(BRIAR sits on the floor. She has a binder full of school work open in front of her. She is not looking at it. She has both earbuds in. We can't hear what she's listening to; we only see her response to it. A shadow flickers past. She doesn't notice; her eyes are closed. The shadow passes through a few more times. It's curious. Investigative. The shadows are accompanied by a sound specific to them. It could sound like wind against an old building or like a distant coyote or like something altogether unreal. BRIAR can't hear it. LOU enters. Any passing shadows hide from her.)

LOU

Briar. Briar. Briar!

(BRIAR absolutely cannot hear her.)

Briiiaaarrr. Yup.

(LOU sits down on the floor.)

Once upon a time, there was a girl named Briar and she couldn't hear a thing...

(The song ends. BRIAR opens her eyes.)

Boo!

(BRIAR almost jumps out of her skin.)

BRIAR

Jesus! Lou!

(She puts her earbuds away.)

LOU
Sorry.

BRIAR
No, you're not.

LOU
Not even a little bit.

BRIAR
Asshole.

LOU
Would you have preferred it if I interrupted you?

BRIAR (*a little petulant because her friend is right*)
No.

LOU
Yeah. I figured. You've bitten my head off a few too many times
for me to interrupt you when you're...
 (*She waves a hand around.*)
In the zone.

BRIAR
Were you watching me?

LOU
I mean, I was probably here for less than a minute.

BRIAR (*embarrassed*)
Right.

LOU
Did you finish?

BRIAR
What? Oh. Yeah, I just need to do a once-over to make sure there

aren't any stupid spelling mistakes or anything. It's basically done.

LOU

Don't forget to put your name on it.

BRIAR

Oh, yeah—

(She quickly does that now. As she does so:)

Names are important. There. Done. And this is the last assignment of the semester. Finally. I'm so jealous you got done like a full week before me.

LOU

Let's go. I want to get there before the place gets busy.

BRIAR

Oh, right, shit, dinner—you know that I am so, so impressed, right? A fucking 4.0 GPA, I mean, who does that? I mean, actually, genuinely, how do you do that? You're a badass and you should be so proud of yourself.

LOU

Yeah. I am. And I already know you are too. You spent the last semester being my own living alarm clock. You wouldn't do that if you weren't invested. I would have slept through, like, twice as many classes if you hadn't been pulling me out of six hour naps. And I also knew you might still forget about our end-of-semester dinner. Why else would I be here to get you?

BRIAR

Thanks.

LOU

Don't worry about it. One day I'll teach you how time works. Maybe you should try counting the seconds. One. Two. Three. Four.

BRIAR

Shut up. Give me a second to get ready.

LOU

I'm giving you multiple seconds. I'm even counting them so you know they're passing by. Five. Six. Seven.

BRIAR

Fuck off.

(She gets up, trying to make a mental outline of what the steps of getting ready are. She starts absentmindedly picking at her fingertips. LOU bats her hands away from each other and hands her a fidget toy instead.)

LOU

Hey. Don't make yourself bleed before our big dinner. Seriously, chill. You're fine. Take a few minutes. Get ready. I don't mind going ahead.

BRIAR

You're my knight in shining armor.

(LOU winks.)

LOU

Think of it as my repayment for every middle of the night crisis you've willingly suffered through while I'm spiraling. See you there.

(She starts to exit, but pauses.)

Hey—you know—nevermind.

BRIAR

No, what? What? You can say it, whatever it is. It's just me. You can say anything to me.

LOU

I just—you know you don't have to get good grades for me to like you, right?

BRIAR

What? Of course I know that. That's stupid. What are you...

LOU

I just meant—you're proud of me and that's great. I really appreciate that. I do. It makes me feel good to know that. But it makes me feel good because I care about what you think about me because I like you. Fuck. I'm not trying to sound—I feel like I sound condescending. That's not what I mean. I just—you're getting by, Briar! You're doing it. Whatever fight you think you're fighting, you're winning. You should be proud too.

BRIAR

Yeah. Getting by. I'm so proud I'm getting by.

LOU

Hey, I'll see you there, okay?

BRIAR

Yeah.

LOU

Yeah. Thanks for everything, Briar.

(She exits.)

BRIAR

I wish I could be proud of something bigger than just getting by.

(BRIAR takes a second to organize her brain, then starts shuffling her school stuff into a more orderly pile. She pats the pile like it can feel her do it. She finds her coat. While her back is turned, a new door appears. It opens, just slightly ajar. It should not be there. BRIAR puts on her coat, then grabs her keys. A jingling sound accompanies them. Then BRIAR sees the new door. A hand reaches out of the door. It is beckoning. BRIAR looks at it. She hesitates. She

goes to the door. The hand retracts. BRIAR tries to peek at what is on the other side of the door without opening it any further, but she can't see anything. More hesitation.)

Hello? Is there somebody there? Where are you?

(She receives no answer. She puts her hand on the door—hesitates again—then opens it all the way and steps through.)

SCENE TWO:

or GRIM

The empty room:

An empty room. Blank walls and a blank floor. Everything is blank. This room is aggressively understimulating. It's like if minimalism wanted to hurt you.

(BRIAR enters through the door. She looks around at the room curiously. The door closes behind her. A lock clicks audibly. She looks back at the door. She looks at her keys. She starts toward the door, keys outstretched—but before she can try the lock, KEEPER enters. She has a sharp, toothy smile splitting her face in half. She might be a fairy, if such things exist.)

KEEPER

It's good to meet you.

BRIAR

What? Who are you? Where am I?

KEEPER

I am your Keeper and this is your room. Who are you?

BRIAR

My name is Briar.

(KEEPER smiles sharply. She has what she needed.)

KEEPER

Thank you.

BRIAR

For what?

KEEPER

For your name. Names are important. Once you know the name of something, you can learn to control it.

BRIAR

What's your name?

KEEPER

As I said, you may call me Keeper. This will go a lot more easily if you listen to me the first time. I'm here to help you.

(BRIAR is starting to have trouble concentrating on her surroundings. It feels like things are coming in and out of focus.)

BRIAR

I have to go home.

KEEPER

This is your home for the time being.

BRIAR

No, I have to go. I'm meeting my roommate. She's expecting me.

KEEPER

She's expecting you to be late.

BRIAR

What?

KEEPER

You have a habit of being late, don't you, Briar?

BRIAR

I don't...

KEEPER

As I said. I'm here to help you. I can't help you if I don't know what bad habits you've gotten yourself into.

(It's getting very difficult for BRIAR to follow the conversation. Something is itching inside her skull.)

BRIAR

I'm actually not usually late. I'm normally early.

KEEPER

If you remember you have plans at all.

BRIAR

Shut up.

KEEPER

Don't be rude.

BRIAR

You're being rude.

KEEPER

I'm being honest.

(BRIAR tries to go to the door. KEEPER gets between her and the door.)

Not. Yet.

BRIAR

Let me out.

KEEPER

I can't do that, Briar. This door is closed to you. You closed it. So I can't let you out yet. Briar? Are you listening to me?

BRIAR

Why won't you let me out?

KEEPER

It's very simple. Let me explain the rules. When you can follow all the rules, you can leave...

(Her voice fades in and out as she speaks. Words and phrases are disjointed and unintelligible. Potentially done via voiceover.)

Remaining calm. Briar. Calm. The rules. Hands. Still. Hands. Still. Good decisions. Calm. Restraint. I don't want to have to repeat myself. Briar. Respect. Focus. Remember. Pay attention. Pay attention. Briar. Calm. Calm. Accept it. Calm. Don't overreact. Briar. It's all in your head.

(BRIAR is dizzy with confusion. The inside of her skull feels raw and scratched.)

Briar, are you listening to me?

BRIAR

Yes.

KEEPER

Good.

(She checks her wrist as if she has a watch. She does not have a watch.)

Look at the time. I have to check on my other projects.

BRIAR

How do you know what time it...

KEEPER

Welcome to your new home, Briar. I'm sure you will do just fine here. Try to get some sleep. It's late.

BRIAR

How do you know—

(KEEPER exits. BRIAR waits a few moments, then goes to the door and tries to open it. It's locked. She pats her pockets, looking for her keys. They're gone.)

Where the hell did I put my keys?

(She looks around the room. No sign of them. There is nothing she can do. So she sits on the floor. She takes off her coat and rolls it up to use it as a pillow. She tosses. She turns. She can't fall asleep. Eventually she gives up and sits up again. She starts picking at her fingertips a little, idly. Then she gets up and starts pacing around the room, maybe hopping a little as she goes. She feels on edge, empty. While she is facing away, a shadow sneaks in and steals her coat. Eventually BRIAR tires herself out enough that she feels like she can sleep.)

Okay, let's try sleep again.

(She tries to go back to her coat-pillow. But her coat is gone.)

Where...

(She looks around. It is nowhere to be seen.)

Where the hell did you go?