

**STAUNCHER.** This isn't your program anymore. It hasn't been for a long time.

**COLLISTER.** And the school is the worse for it. How many people in your production?

**STAUNCHER.** Twenty-nine.

**COLLISTER.** I'm sure the twenty-nine members of your audience will love it.

**STAUNCHER.** You've never attended one of my plays.

**COLLISTER.** I'm not interested in *conventional* theatre.

**STAUNCHER.** *The Turn of the Screw with Audience Participation?* That's too ordinary for you?

**COLLISTER.** *Narrative-based* drama. *Scripted* entertainment. Your plays are *stories*. My plays were life.

**STAUNCHER.** What was it called again? *Past, Most Past, Keep Dwelling on the Past?*

**COLLISTER.** Make fun of *Past, Present, and Future* all you like. We sold out, and if we'd finished, people would still be talking about it.

**STAUNCHER.** People *are* still talking about it. Flachra.

*(This was a harder blow than STAUNCHER intended.)*

**STAUNCHER.** I'm sorry. That was uncalled for.

**COLLISTER.** It's true. I've never seen one of your shows. That was a favor to you. But I'll be in the front row of this one, holding binoculars.

**GARBIELA.** *(To RUTH, in the library:)* And then Collister stormed out of the room.

**RUTH.** I'm still not adding it up the way you are.

**GARBIELA.** Collister used to be the theatre teacher. Her production of *Past, Present, and Future* is what started the fire. She knows I can hear things from up there and she does not want me anywhere near that theatre. She's hiding something.

**RUTH.** That's a lot of guess.

**GARBIELA.** What's the theoretical way up to the theatre?

**RUTH.** I knew we were getting back to this.

**GARBIELA.** At least tell me why you can't tell me.

**RUTH.** Because it involves me. You know the back stairwell is completely off-limits, right?

**GARBIELA.** Yeah.

**RUTH.** This is confidential.

**GARBIELA.** I'm great with secrets because I love hearing them.

**RUTH.** I'm in the back stairwell twice a day. I'm so claustrophobic that it's medical. Being in the elevator makes me actually pass out. For a while, they hired a paramedic to go with me both ways, but it was costing a fortune so I said let me just take the back stairwell. It takes me thirteen extra minutes to get to school and four extra minutes to leave.

**GARBIELA.** So you could take me with you.

**RUTH.** I'm not allowed past this floor. And the door's just gonna be locked.

**GARBIELA.** But whatever I'm hearing, I bet I can hear it better through the door. Please?

**RUTH.** No.

**GARBIELA.** You scared of some voices?

**RUTH.** No. I'm scared of authority.

**GARBIELA.** The worst that can happen is that a security guard catches us, we get suspended, and bum around downtown for a day or two.

**RUTH.** *(Relenting:)* Don't make any noise.

*(They PUSH open the door. They don't move at all during this section. A character saying the word "Step" equates to them taking one step up.)*

**GARBIELA.** Step step step step step step step. Come on!

**RUTH.** Step. Step step step step.

**GARBIELA AND RUTH.** Step step step step step step step.

**GARBIELA.** *(Big steps:)* St-e-e-e-p St-e-e-e-p St-e-e-e-p St-e-e-e-p St-e-e-e-p St-e-e-e-p St-e-e-e-p St-e-e- e-p St-e-e-e-p.

**RUTH.** *(To catch up:)* St-e-e-e-p St-e-e-e-p St-e-e-e-p.

**GARBIELA.** This is the door?

**RUTH.** Yeah.

*(GARBIELA RATTLES it. Of course it's locked. She KNOCKS on it. She presses her ear to the door.)*

**RUTH.** Now can we go?