

The Museum of Unnatural Art & Posthumous Curiosities:
A Nonlinear Audio Narrative Exploring Digital Storytelling

By

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Website

<https://katecarter4.wixsite.com/museum>

Abstract

This creative thesis features a fiction podcast that incorporates a nonlinear storyline. Set in an art museum in purgatory, the narrative for each episode allows the user to listen to the episodes in any order, creating a slightly different experience and understanding with each episode combination as the listener explores the main character's mental landscape. Doing so emphasizes the importance of how a story is delivered, reflecting Marshall McLuhan's philosophy that "the medium is the message." A podcast is used due to its inherent intimacy and the relatively untapped potential of interactive radio, as well as my own interest in and enjoyment of the medium. The website serves to host the podcast and enhance the narrative through web design, following in the footsteps of other radio artists and podcasters. By creating this story, this project aims to provide a more immersive experience and to cast a spotlight on the possibilities interactive media offer literature and storytelling.

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Introduction

My initial inspiration for a podcast with a nonlinear narrative spawned from an interest in the intersections between literature and media, particularly as storytelling adapts to flourishing new forms of technology. Fictional stories like *Fleabag*, *The Yellow Wallpaper*, popular heist films like *Ocean's Thirteen*, and interactive storytelling like *Bandersnatch* – which will be discussed further in this paper – were all sources of inspiration for this podcast. These stories, paired with my own fascination with nonfictional events like the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum heist, the concept of an art thief trapped in an art museum as purgatory was equal parts enticing and ironic. I thought it would be a compelling story that would fit the nonlinear podcast format I imagined for this thesis. While initially the plot of the narrative was informed by the format, as the plot came further into fruition, I was able to adapt the format to honor the demands of the story itself.

Finally, this podcast is an homage to the very delicate and human matters involved in mental health, loneliness, and the search for meaning.

Case Studies of Three Fiction Podcasts

As podcasts grow in popularity, audio storytelling is advancing and developing. Modern-day audio stories draw upon past conventions in radio drama, while also making strides through voice acting, natural sounds, and storytelling techniques. While podcasts are an aural experience, they are a distinct medium that differ from audiobooks, TV shows, or a blind experience of the world.

An Emerging Medium

Created in 2003 by Adam Curry and Dave Winer, the podcast built upon previous technologies like blogs, radio, and other forms of digital audio files. Winer created an updated RSS feed that would support audio files, originally calling them audioblogs (Walsh). Often compared to traditional broadcast radio, the similarities between “podcasting and radio (not to mention film and television, music, theater, literature, etc.) make identifying a podcasting “sound” or “style,” or even a distinct podcasting audience or industry, exceedingly difficult” (“Podcasting: A Decade in the Life of a ‘New’ Audio Medium: Introduction” 167). However, podcasting is “more than a method of audio distribution”; it is a unique medium conducive to many different types of stories (166). Since the creation of podcasts, the medium has grown in recognition and popularity. While that popularity has slowed in past years, it has not completely stopped. For almost a decade, “podcasting struggled to break through as a truly ‘mass’ medium,” but after the release of the extremely successful podcast *Serial*, a newfound fervor for the medium was established (165). In 2017, the Infinite Dial estimated that around 112 million people had ever listened to a podcast (Edison Research). Now, the variety of topics and niches available prove to be a major appeal for listeners; the audience has more “control over what is listened to,” while providing “the opportunity to explore topics, formats, durations, and approaches that would not normally find a home on broadcast radio” (Berry 172). For content creators, the appeal lies in the democratic nature of the medium, since “podcasting offered an uncontrolled space where amateurs could compete equally with traditional media” (Berry 172). However, while there are a vast number and genres of podcasts, some scholars are divided on “the extent to which content has been tailored

for the space” (173). Progress is being made to enhance audio stories, but presently, the full potential of the medium is untapped. Because of the newness and undefined parameters of podcasts as a medium, this affects the quality and complexity of the narratives found in fiction podcasts.

Narratives

Podcasting has seen rapid developments and success in its nonfiction genres, such as with *Serial*, shows affiliated with *NPR*, various true crime shows, *The Joe Rogan Experience*, and more. A variety of show formats have proven popular, including the narrative podcast. These shows are story-driven and rely on editing to weave the narration, interview, and music together; however, they generally refer to nonfiction genres (Acunzo). While fiction podcasts draw much structural inspiration from popular nonfiction and narrative podcast formats, the narratives found in fiction podcasts more noticeably show the result of the under-developed nature of the medium. There has recently been an effort to fully utilize this medium; this has led to new podcast narratives and techniques as “rapid growth of this storytelling style is escalated by the recent experimentation in form and genre afforded by podcasting, liberated from broadcast conventions and schedules” (Lindgren 24). The nature of the medium provides many opportunities for content creators to build compelling and distinct narratives.

For the purposes of this paper, the Oxford Dictionary’s definition of narrative will be used: “an account of a series of events, facts, etc., given in order and with the establishing of connections between them” (“narrative, n.”). Further, narrative can be deconstructed into four elements: “situatedness, event sequencing, world

marketing/world disruption, and what it's like" (1). Situatedness is the occasion for telling the story; event sequencing is the tracing of events that led to the situation; world marketing/disruption is the development of setting and any inciting incidents that cause a situation or disrupt the equilibrium of the story's world; and what it's like is the insight and experience of the world of the story (Herman 14). In the following sections, I will analyze how three popular fiction podcasts utilize these four elements in different degrees and ratios, affecting the presentation and complexity of the narrative. For this thesis, I examined the narrative structures, conventions, and devices used in other popular fiction podcasts like *Welcome to Night Vale*, *The Truth*, and *The Walk* to understand how people are telling stories with this medium and to inform my own podcast creation.

Structures, Formats, and Elements

The popular fiction podcast *Welcome to Night Vale* dates back to 2013, and it has garnered a loyal following of the fictional southwestern town Night Vale. Each episode is structured like a radio drama, "a format that was central to radio's 'golden age.'"

Welcome to Night Vale "both revives classic radio and reconstructs it for audiences in the hypermediated world of the twenty-first century" ("Podcasting, *Welcome to Night Vale*, and the Revival of Radio Drama"). This is the basic premise of the show in its entirety: the daily events of Night Vale are narrated by the character Cecil Baldwin, a radio host. The overarching format of the show is divided into episodes containing a variety of smaller story arcs, such as the effects of a mysterious Glow Cloud or the dangers of bloodstones. This podcast draws only slightly from Herman's four elements of narrative; *Welcome to Night Vale's* appeal lies mainly in the quirky and odd happenings in the town, providing insight into "what it's like" in Night Vale through a series of almost

anecdotal news reports (Herman). The use of a limited number of voice actors – or in most episodes, only one voice – allows the show’s creators to avoid unnatural interactions between characters or forced acting that might be uncomfortable as a listener. As a production, *Welcome to Night Vale* is also notable in that it is “an independent podcast succeeding in a space increasingly dominated by professional media producers,” marking the democratic potential and roots of this medium (“Podcasting, *Welcome to Night Vale*, and the Revival of Radio Drama”). Using an established and well-known audio format, *Welcome to Night Vale* is successful in delivering a simple but high quality and entertaining audio experience for the audience.

Like *Welcome to Night Vale*, Radiotopia’s *The Truth* has seen popularity with audiences. Created in 2012, *The Truth* presents anthological stories in worlds that do not overlap. Each episode features a narrative that is a more structured and traditional story arc, usually containing characters, conflict, and resolution. The narratives are necessarily simple, considering each episode ranges from 15 to 30 minutes in length; the stories contain basic conflicts and resolutions, with little character development or world-building. *The Truth* features more interactions between characters – and thus, voice actors. The episodes often feature multiple voices and explore creative delivery and soundscapes. In the episode “Hilly Earth Society,” the entire story unfolds through a series of voicemails; in another episode, the interactions of two characters occur both verbally and with one reading the other’s mind. The creators describe the podcast as “a movie for your ears” as they “take you to unexpected places using only sound” (*The Truth*). Radiotopia’s popular podcast heavily relies on aural elements to convey the

narrative, allowing sound to reveal the story rather than relying on a complex plot or event-sequencing.

Naomi Alderman's *The Walk* is described as an interactive podcast where the listener acts as an avatar for the main character Walker as "storytelling bleeds into the real world," as other characters address the listener as if they are Walker (Shapiro). However, the story is more immersive than interactive, due to the audience's inability to respond and affect the narrative or course of events. The podcast traces the story of Walker's journey and navigation through a dystopian world to complete an unknown mission after a terrorist attack, guided by the character Charlie Fraiser via ear piece. *The Walk* is different from *Welcome to Night Vale* and *The Truth* in that it features a drawn-out story arc as each episode continues the narrative and features recurring characters. Advancing narrative techniques in podcasting, *The Walk* makes use of Herman's "world marketing" and "what it's like" elements of narrative. The world-building and experience of a dystopian Inverness is significantly more developed and advanced than either of the previously discussed podcasts. The natural sounds and background noise used to convey the setting include bombs, static, and gunfire. The voice-acting – while more developed – is still clunky and unnatural at times, and some listeners express frustration at "a total inability to locate oneself within the protagonist" and the silence of the main character for the purpose of an immersive audio story (*The Auditors*). However, despite this, *The Walk* is an indicator that new narrative structures and techniques are being experimented with to create more involved and entertaining podcasts.

These three case studies show the evolution of fiction podcasts as the medium develops as a unique storytelling platform. *Welcome to Night Vale* shows the benefit of

simple formatting, of using elements of previously successful audio formats – the radio drama – and of a single character narrating events connected by the town itself, thus avoiding awkward and unnatural character exchanges. Building on *Welcome to Night Vale*'s simplistic storytelling format, *The Truth* showcases mini-stories with basic story arcs that are explored in each episode, relying on artistic and aural elements rather than complex story structures to advance the narrative. Finally, as the most recent of these three podcasts, *The Walk* showcases the direction fiction podcasts will continue to take in the future; *The Walk*'s more involved storyline is accented with thoughtful world-building and sound. One obstacle in most fiction podcasts is the voice-acting and how to make it sound natural. The awkwardness of character exchanges in current podcasts is usually due to low budgets and inexperience of the “amateurs” creating them (Berry 172). Due to the nature of podcast creation as a beginner's medium, fiction podcasts can often have an artificial sound of character interactions and emotions when compared to traditional or high-budget television and film productions that can hire professional actors; while this may sound unnatural for some listeners, the amateur quality of a podcast can provide a unique opportunity for creators to explore different story structures and narratives.

To advance these simpler narratives, fiction podcasts use a variety of devices and techniques to provide aural interest, such as phone calls, radio transmissions, ear pieces, music, and voicemails. These techniques differentiate podcasts from audiobooks because of an attempt to recreate environments and immerse the audience in the setting of a fiction podcast, while also differing from a blind experience of the world due to the experience and narration of specific events to tell a particular story. The natural sounds,

atmosphere, and spatial sound also contribute to the development of narrative. In an episode of *The Truth* called “Eat Cake,” differences in spatial sound between the taxi and other rooms are noticeable and effective in conveying a change in setting. Another common device is directly addressing the audience by saying “you” and a series of actions that the listener is supposed to do within the setting of the story; this is the foundation of *The Walk*, but *Welcome to Night Vale* and *The Truth* also have episodes that address the listener as podcasts attempt to evolve into a more engaging and eventually interactive medium.

The elements of narrative present in *Welcome to Night Vale*, *The Truth*, and *The Walk* all indicate a progression and development in the storytelling processes in podcasts. Perhaps the biggest appeal of podcasts – the wide variety of topics, styles, and genres – is also its biggest drawback due to its undefined place among other media. The numerous possibilities and avenues available to narratives in fiction podcasts require content creators to continue trying to find the most effective ways to tell audio stories. Additionally, as more research is conducted on podcasts, it will help provide context and understanding to the medium and its narrative capabilities. This potential in the development of fiction podcasts is promising, marking another adaptation of literature and storytelling to new forms of media as the human experience is captured digitally.

Plot

The story of this fiction podcast revolves around Cordelia Vaughn, a famous art thief, who dies and spends her days in purgatory. Specially designed by an entity only known as the Council, her purgatory is an art museum, and its exhibit theme changes every night. With each new theme, there is a new thief who visits the museum to

participate in a contest; the thief attempts to choose the right piece to steal from the museum, thus freeing Cordelia, while also determining whether they themselves go to the Light or the Dark. With only a talking marble statue named Silas as a companion, Cordelia struggles with both her internal and external world.

Nonlinear Narratives

Fiction podcasts are audio experiences that tell a story pertaining to fictional events, people, or places; this story is told in a way that includes the listener more than an audiobook. This project, the *Museum of Unnatural Art & Posthumous Curiosities*, invites the audience into the fictional life and world of Cordelia, situating it in the genre of fiction podcasts. The storyline of the podcast features a nonlinear narrative, in which “events are portrayed out of chronological order, creating a new arrangement of time for dramatic and thematic purposes” (Bolewski 240). Many art forms have incorporated elements of digital media and interactivity, demonstrating the continual strive to find new ways of telling stories. After its 2018 release, *Bandersnatch* caused an online fervor, due to its interactive choose-your-own-adventure style narrative, indicating the next step in user-dependent content. Similarly, audio has its own style of user-dependent content; Spotify has become popular because the app allows listeners to create their own playlists rather than listening to entire albums in order, giving the user an interactive role in the consumption of music. The streaming platform becomes a kind of choose-your-own-adventure style experience, like *Bandersnatch*. Creating this interactive role in the consumption of music is similar to what this thesis will accomplish with the consumption of narrative.

In the context of this podcast, the nonlinearity stems from the fact that the audience can listen to the episodes in any order, resulting in a unique experience for each person. While originally a nonlinear narrative was intended to create different stories from a plot perspective, it evolved into a more character-focused purpose. Doing so shows the audience how Cordelia processes her experience in purgatory and how a concrete sense of time is largely irrelevant to her character arc. Cordelia becomes the lens through which the listener experiences the museum; in turn, the listener's experience of the podcast mirrors Cordelia's life in the museum, showcasing the monotonous, yet still-overwhelming nature of a place or someone's mind. The arbitrary nature of the contest also alludes to the idea that Cordelia can leave at any time; she is more a prisoner of her own mind than of the museum. Like Cordelia, the listener can leave at any time by no longer listening to the podcast, creating the idea that when the listener leaves, Cordelia leaves as well. A nonlinear narrative fosters these timeless and arbitrary distinctions, creating the necessary ecosystem for this story to be told.

Methodology

Planning

Having examined these three popular fiction podcasts, I had a better grasp on elements I specifically wanted to include and avoid in my podcast; for example, due to the low-budget nature of most fiction podcasts, including my own, the voice actors in the show are not professionals in the field, occasionally making lines sound awkward or unnatural to a listener. To avoid this, I involved my voice actors in the process of creating their character so the lines would be delivered more naturally. Inspired by the three case studies and encouraged by my advisor, I embedded natural audio experiences into the

world created in the podcast, resulting in Cordelia's audio tours describing the art throughout the episodes. I also wanted to balance a simplistic format, like in *Welcome to Night Vale*, with thoughtful sound design, like in *The Walk*. This proved to be crucial, as the sonic landscape of an art museum is much sparser than that of the conflict-ridden dystopian world of *The Walk*, while still more involved than the radio-host format of *Welcome to Night Vale*.

Planning took the most time in the process, spanning several months as I explored other media and stories related to this project and developed the storyline of the podcast; Dr. Detweiler and I spent the majority of our meetings discussing the mechanics of the podcast. An unexpected area of planning was the time and energy spent researching art and artist biographies for the episodes; this took a surprising amount of time for each episode.

Writing

If planning was the most time-intensive step in this project, writing was by far the most frustrating, as the story changed course and required a myriad of decisions. The original intent of the nonlinear narrative was to explore different episode combinations in order to create different plot arcs; however, while writing the story, the nonlinearity served a different and unexpected purpose. It offered a colorful new way of exploring a mental landscape burdened by boredom, isolation, and depression in a more character-focused narrative, rather than a plot-focused one.

Beyond the initial idea and layout of individual episodes, translating these ideas into an almost purely dialogue-based format proved frustrating at times, as I could visualize what I wanted to describe but had to find ways of incorporating this via

dialogue and sound. Additionally, initial drafts of the episodes highlighted how difficult writing natural-sounding dialogue can be.

Recording

Once the scripts were written, the lines were recorded; between a Blue Yeti microphone and a Blue Snowball microphone, these USB microphones did the majority of the recording. To record, the microphone is plugged into the computer and selected as the input source for the computer's microphone. From there, lines are able to be recorded in a variety of different editing programs; for this project, I used Adobe Audition to record and edit. Voice actors would read their lines three or more times to account for different inflections, background noises, or shifts in tone.

Editing and Sound Design

In Adobe Audition, I edited each voice actor's lines and arranged them to create the dialogue throughout the episodes. Once I finished all of the dialogue, I layered music and sound effects on top of the conversations. To account for copyright issues and royalties, I used the website Freesound.org for free sound effects and Musorg.org and FreeMusicArchive.org for music. Finding sound effects took longer than expected, as there were many options to sift through.

Website Creation

To host the podcast, I used Wix.com. Although I intended to utilize Wordpress.com, I was limited due to cost and file access. Luckily, I did not have this issue with Wix.com, and I was able to successfully create and upload the episodes. The intuitive drag-and-drop style system Wix.com uses for their sites made creating and designing the website quick and simple.

Result

The outcome of this thesis is six podcast episodes navigating the life-after-death of the main character Cordelia. The episodes can be listened to in any order, creating different aural experiences for each listener. While some aspects of this nonlinearity may initially be confusing to a listener, this itself is part of the experience; the listener participates in Cordelia's confusion, irritation, and boredom at times, connecting the audience to this character. In addition, when talking about herself and her emotions, Cordelia only speaks out of the right speaker, adding a conspiratorial element between her and the audience.

Similarly, the false ending in "Reflections on Life and Art Throughout the Ages" is meant to be ambiguous; the listener should be left wondering whether or not Cordelia managed to escape the museum and, if so, how. This offers multiple interpretations for the project, allowing the listener to mentally interact and wrestle with the piece in order to apply their own experience to the story.

Conclusion

Through the creation and execution of this project, I hope to have accurately synthesized and contributed to the growing exploration and experimentation with fiction podcasts. This thesis has encouraged me to expand how I approach storytelling, by allowing the story the space to change and the confidence to let my own experiences inform my creative process.

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Appendix A

The Duality: Masculinity and Femininity

The dull cacophony of visitors echoes throughout the vast halls of the museum. Individual voices become discernable, commenting on the museum, the beautiful architecture, tonight's exhibit, and the contest. Through this string of random voices, the theme of the exhibit becomes clear: *The Duality: Masculinity and Femininity*. The cavernous rooms are black and white, gold and silver; one room is dedicated to rows and rows of marble statues; another is dedicated to paintings and sketches of male and female figures. Georgia O'Keefe's flowers compete with Van Gogh sunflowers. *David* and *Venus* have a silent stand-off across the black marble floor. Simultaneously modern and antique. White, bright, clean.

Silas, echoing through the gallery: "Attention: The museum will be closing in 15 minutes. Please make your way out of the museum, so the contest can commence on schedule. Again, the museum will be closing in 15 minutes."

The chatter slowly dies away.

Cordelia, to the listener: "There's a certain kind of tiredness that beats all of the others – it's the kind where you can physically feel the sagging in your face and the dark circles pressing into the delicate areas around your eyes and the weight of all of your limbs and the slow droop in posture that you don't notice until you're curled into a vaguely unhuman shape, as if every part of your body wants nothing more than to just sink to the ground – to sink *into* the ground – and it's your unfortunate job to hold everything up, like a puppeteer struggling to get anvils to dance instead of a toy puppet. This tiredness

has the least to do with sleep compared to the other kinds. Every time I heard that announcement and felt the dread of another night creep in, this tiredness that I carried with me seemed to sink a little deeper, to become just a little heavier, as I thought of having to move and interact and be disappointed for yet another night, and I simultaneously hated and felt sorry for the poor puppeteer who had to force my legs to walk downstairs.”

...

Silas: “Well, look who finally – oh, are you okay?”

Cordelia: “What?”

Silas: “You just look... a little tired.”

Cordelia, to the listener: “This part never gets any less irritating.”

Cordelia, to Silas: “Yeah, I’m fine.”

Silas, awkwardly: “Oh, okay.”

Cordelia, to the listener: “He never knows what to say when I’m like this. I guess sometimes not saying anything is better than saying the wrong thing.”

To Silas, Cordelia: “What kind of trickery do they have planned tonight?”

Silas, relieved, talking a little quickly: “Not much actually! The Council isn’t always the most creative bunch – though I mean sometimes they surprise me.”

Cordelia, sadly: “I don’t know, they were pretty creative in designing this system for me. In the worst way possible.”

Silas: “Sorry, I shouldn’t have said that.... Would you like to hear about tonight’s guest?”

Cordelia: “Sure. Sorry.”

Silas: “His name is Arthur, and he was an art collector – very, very wealthy, and he likes to flaunt that. But he eventually encountered some financial trouble, so he turned to art theft... until the authorities caught him attempting a pretty ambitious heist at the Uffizi Gallery in Florence... but he charmed a witness to fudge some of the details which lessened his sentence. He should be here any minute.”

The pair fall silent. A small scratching noise becomes noticeable – a jingling, perhaps – coming from the direction of the door.

Cordelia: “Is he... trying to pick the lock...?”

Silas, confused: “That’s what it sounds like. The doors aren’t even locked though.”

Cordelia, surprised: “Wait what do you mean –”

Suddenly, the door opens easily.

Silas shushes Cordelia.

Cordelia, whispering: “*Silas—*”

A smartly dressed man confidently enters the room, interrupting the conversation.

Cordelia, scoffing: “That’s what you meant by flaunting wealth?”

Arthur: “Well, there’s no need –”

Cordelia: “A tuxedo and a *pinky ring*?”

Silas, cutting off them off: “Hello, and welcome to the museum. I am Silas – marble statue, guardian of this museum, and referee for this contest. This museum is a contained purgatory for its curator. Her soul is tethered here for her past crimes as a world-

renowned art thief. Each night, at 6 o'clock, a contest opens, allowing anyone brave or stupid enough to try to steal from this cursed museum. Succeed, and she is freed; fail, and she remains here. You have until midnight to steal the selected piece of art – the art that was originally stolen by the curator. Do so at your own risk, for your own fate is on the line; the next six hours will determine whether you go to the Light or the Dark. We do not allow food or flash photography in the galleries. Thank you, and enjoy your time at the museum.”

Arthur: “Thank you – Silas, was it? I’m aware of the risks and all that, but I believe you left out which piece of art I’ll be stealing tonight.”

Silas: “Yes.”

Silence.

Arthur: “May I know?”

Silas: “Well, but that’s the whole point.”

Cordelia: “You’re supposed to... figure that out.”

Arthur: “Great. How many pieces are here tonight?”

Silas, a little confused: “Around eight hundred and thirty-two pieces.”

Arthur, incredulous: “*Eight hundred and thirty-two pieces?*”

Cordelia: “That *is* what he said.”

Arthur: “So tonight’s trick is finding out which piece I need to steal.”

Cordelia, as if to a child: “Very good!”

Silas, as if this were obvious: “Yes....”

Arthur, to Cordelia, exasperated: “I believe you’re the curator of this fine museum?”

Cordelia, echoing Silas’s confusion: “Uh huh....”

Arthur, sighing: “Yes, so you know which piece I need to steal.”

Cordelia, sarcastically: “They learn so fast!”

Arthur: “You could save your own soul if you just told me – seeing as I would be *helping* you, but *no*, you’re being a horrible bitch, and I’d tell you to go to hell, but it looks like you’re already there!”

Cordelia, angrily: “How dare you! You can leave my museum if this is how you’re going to act all night. I don’t need any favors from you to save my soul, since you seem to have your work cut out for you with your own.”

Arthur, muttering: “Unbelievable.”

Silas: “Welcome to the museum!”

...

Cordelia: “I’ve always hated how the best people and the worst people really force you to give up your energy and attention – I mean, the best people deserve your energy, but the worst definitely don’t. Yet somehow, they manage to wrangle the life out of you and you struggle against their efforts. Arthur wasn’t a bad person because of his wealth or his pinky ring or even his bad listening skills; no, Arthur was one of those worst people because of his entitlement – he wanted answers and success handed to him on a silver platter.”

The click of footsteps throughout the museum.

Arthur, muttering to himself: “So this is purgatory.... They really do go all out, don’t they....”

Cordelia, entering the room: “You act like you’ve never seen a museum before.”

Arthur: “If you’re not here to help, I could really use some quiet... and a lack of your presence.”

Cordelia, mockingly sympathetic: “Aw cute. But then you’d never figure it out.”

Arthur: “Then why don’t you tell me?”

Cordelia: “Where’s the fun in that?”

Arthur: “You’ll be here for eternity.”

Cordelia: “Mm, probably longer.”

Arthur: “It’ll be mind-numbing.”

Cordelia: “Like this conversation.”

Arthur: “How’d you end up here anyway?”

Cordelia: “I died. And I was a very successful art thief.”

Arthur, drily: “Yes, as you like to keep reminding everyone. But which piece was the final one? The breaking point?”

Cordelia: “I can’t tell you, because it’d be pointless.”

Arthur: “Which one was the most significant for you?”

Cordelia: “Absolutely pointless.”

Silence.

Cordelia: “Ugh, fine. I’ll tell you about a significant heist, but don’t read into it. This heist was *big* – the biggest in heist history. I mean, the last I heard, the FBI was still trying to crack that case. Anyway, I got in easily and undetected – the guards were occupied by some random pranksters wearing cop costumes, unrelated to my heist, so they didn’t notice me. Eventually I figured out no one was watching, and it was easy

from there – a Rembrandt here, a Vermeer there. I wasn't thinking though – I had to slit a few pieces out of the frames because the frames were mounted to the walls, but I regretted that as soon as I did it.”

Arthur: “Was that your style though? Just randomly taking what you wanted?”

Cordelia: “Well... kinda. I just chose whatever I liked or whatever had some value. It varied from heist to heist though. I left the most valuable paintings there, so it didn't destroy the backbone of the museum. I did need that industry to continue, seeing as I got my livelihood, name, and career from stealing from them.”

A beat of silence.

Cordelia: “You didn't know about that heist?”

Arthur: “Nope.”

Cordelia: “I find that hard to believe. Everyone knows about that.”

Arthur, smugly: “The mortal world has moved on a bit since you left it.”

Cordelia: “Thanks for letting me know.”

She walks away.

...

Cordelia: “The most insulting part of Arthur's presence wasn't his slightly more than unpleasant cologne or the little notebook he carried around for show but didn't actually use or his inability to admit his shortcomings or weaknesses or even how he always tried to get the last word. The part that stung was him waving my own insignificance and mortality in my face and watching the sick enjoyment he got out of it. It stung that this

didn't matter to him like it did to me – for him, this was just a detour, like a roadside attraction, or a cheap arcade game that you try to win for 10 minutes until you get bored and leave and forget about it by the time you walk out of the building. It was like he was oblivious to anyone else's emotions unless that emotion was irritation or feeling inferior. So I decided to steer him toward a particularly brutal painting – one where two women stand over a man, one holding him down as the other takes a knife to his neck, spilling his blood on the bed where he lies. Just as a little reminder for Arthur not to get too cocky.”

...

Arthur: “Artemisia Gentileschi's *Judith Beheading Holofernes*? Painted in the 1600s, yes?”

Cordelia: “Okay, so you know some basic art history.”

Arthur: “I dabbled in it, here and there, you know how it is.”

Cordelia: “I mean, yeah I'm living in a museum. I do love this one though.”

Arthur: “Fair.... Artemisia was ahead of her time.”

Cordelia: “She was one of the most esteemed painters in her lifetime, yet she was overshadowed by a rape trial.”

Arthur: “By one of her teachers. Agostino Tassi?”

Cordelia: “Yes! It was awful! There are so many other things to remember her for: of course, for her art, but also because she was the first woman accepted into the Florence Academy of Fine Arts; she married and later divorced a man and became the head of her own house, incredibly free and independent; she had a good friendship with Galileo; she

crafted a paint color so distinct it became known as “Artemisia Gold.” I mean the woman was incredible. But she fell into obscurity because people attributed her work as other men’s work. As for this painting, the story of Judith had been depicted before -- even by her mentor Caravaggio -- but her version showed Judith in a more masculine role, really committing to the beheading, which was brilliant since there’s such a difference in how women portray women versus men portraying women. I stopped at nothing to get this painting. I mean just look at it... It’s so – powerful.”

Arthur: “You...stopped at nothing to get this painting?”

Cordelia, quietly: “Yes.”

Arthur: “That’s a lie.”

Cordelia: “Oh? I think I’d remember stealing it from the *Uffizi Gallery*. Ages before I wound up here.”

Arthur, condescending: “This is Artemisia’s first version, the one from the Capodimonte Museum in Naples. You stole the second version from the Uffizi, not this one. An easy mistake to make.”

Cordelia, smirking: “So the mortal world hasn’t forgotten me.”

After a moment, Arthur: “That was a trick.”

Cordelia, mockingly: “You’re learning so quickly!”

Arthur: “Don’t be so smug. Of course I know your heists.”

Walking away, Cordelia: “Everyone does! Stealing from the Uffizi was an absolute *breeze*. Where’d you get hung up?”

...

Cordelia: “Silas.”

Silas: “Yes?”

Cordelia: “I think he could figure it out.”

Silas: “Are you happy about that?”

Cordelia: “I don’t know.... Part of me would be irritated if he were the one to get me out of here. But even if he’s right, I guess that doesn’t mean I’ll escape.”

Silas: “Yeah, I know. At the end of the tonight’s thieving, his soul must show an improvement in character in order to go to The Light. Any stagnation or worsening of character results in his soul going to The Dark. You need someone to both successfully steal the art and make personal improvement worthy of going to The Light in order for you to be freed from purgatory.”

Cordelia: “Is he making any improvements?”

Silas: “I can’t tell you about his current statistics, but... I can tell you not to get your hopes up.”

Cordelia: “You tell me that every time, Silas!”

She storms away.

Silas, calling after her: “Cordelia! Wait!”

Then quietly and to himself: “I haven’t been wrong about that yet.”

...

Arthur: “Am I getting warmer?”

Cordelia, defensively: “The temperature’s fine.”

Arthur: “No, I meant am I getting closer to the location of the art?”

Curator, irritated: “Oh.”

Arthur: “I’ll ask again. Please just tell me which piece it is.”

Cordelia: “No!”

Arthur: “Is it so unreasonable? What about a hint? A clue? A riddle of some sort?”

Cordelia, exhales, mumbles under her breath: “Oh my gosh....” Then: “Fine. You haven’t seen it. Happy?”

Arthur: “That must narrow it down at least by half though! I have like an hour and a half left.... And not only that, but it also sounds like I’ve never seen this piece before in my life, not just in this museum. Which narrows it down further... Oh you’ve told me everything.”

Cordelia: “No?”

Arthur: “You only think that!”

...

Cordelia: “I can’t say I’m a huge fan of people trying to outsmart me or show off, but I guess no one really enjoys that. What I don’t understand is if we all pretty much collectively hate it, why do we still do it to each other? I mean, even right now, as I despise Arthur’s pitiful attempts to get some sort of upper hand, I’m doing the same thing, despite my hatred of the very act. Sometimes I think being human is just synonymous with being a hypocrite.”

...

Arthur, in a frenzy: “Okay so the Bosch portrays humans in a childlike, innocent way, as we should be – absolutely free, untamed, unbothered by the confines of any idea gender – that seems like something you’d steal in your mortal life – but there’s this Brancusi too – a completely different genre, era, form, what have you – a stark contrast – but you have an eye for sleek design, I can tell, and this just seems so out of place – so different, like they couldn’t quite fit it in but they *had* to because it’s important – because it’s *the* piece....”

Silas: “Wanna place bets?”

Cordelia, sighs, pauses: “My imaginary money’s on the Bosch.”

Silas: “Why?”

Cordelia: “Because he hates me.”

Arthur: “But the Bosch is much more well known, probably much more valuable – older, too – so definitely. Cost doesn’t seem particularly important to you, so maybe not.... The Brancusi encapsulates the duality, the meaning, the underlying truth – also the irony -- which is definitely your style, Cordelia, oh yes, I understand that.”

Cordelia: “Silas, I’m going to lose my mind.”

Silas: “I thought you’d already lost it?”

Cordelia to the listener: “He’s got a point. This has definitely been one of the most taxing nights of thievery, but whether or not that pays off–”

Arthur: “I’VE GOT IT! My final answer! It’s *Princess X* by Constantin Brancusi! I’m sure of it.”

Silas: “There’s no rush – you have some time left. Are you sure you don’t want to use all of the time?”

Arthur: “I’m absolutely sure – I’d bet my life on it. It’s the Brancusi.”

Silas: “Cordelia, do you want to tell him?”

Arthur: “There’s no need!! I know I’m right!”

Cordelia: “It’s *Princess X*.”

Arthur: “*I knew—*”

Silas: “Did you figure this out on your own?”

Arthur: “Of course I did! It was obvious. It matched the overall décor and feel of the room, but as an art collector, I could immediately tell it was out of place; I mean really, a Romanian artist in a room full of Italians? I saw right through it.”

Silas: “Hm... I see.... Arthur, you’re here tonight because of your arrogance, pride, and selfishness. I see that you made improvement over the course of your visit here; however, in the past hour, you’ve actually deteriorated to a worse state than when you first entered the museum. You lied about receiving no assistance, and your greed and pride consume you now as you eagerly await the recognition and prize you crave. For these reasons, on behalf of the Council, you are sentenced to the Dark, for a sentence of approximately eternity in a contract that is binding and never to be terminated. I hope you have enjoyed your visit to this museum.”

Arthur begins to protest but is cut off by the slamming of the front door, as he leaves the museum.

...

Cordelia, her voice shaky with emotion: “I just – I just don’t understand... why I show up and I put in the energy and the effort and how it’s still just not enough. I mean, I could stay locked up in another room and never talk to these idiots, but I do every night because I know... deep down, I just... I do have this hope that I could get out. And with every person that comes through here and leaves every single night, there’s this feeling that they won’t put in the effort or the energy because they just don’t get it. Which is the worst part – I have to deal with the consequences of them not showing up or really trying and yet every night I have this stupid hope that it’ll be better, but I have to watch them give the bare minimum. This tiny little speck of hope that I have... it’s so small but it’s so heavy and I just roll it up my own internal hill and watch it fall back below every time a thief gives the wrong answer. Sisyphus could massage his arms or something, but I don’t know how to help ease the pain of constantly losing and losing and losing that stupid shred of hope.... I don’t even know what I’m trying to say.”

Silas, after a pause: “Were you actually trying though?”

Cordelia, on the verge of tears: “I don’t know! I don’t know if I can try anymore!”

Silas: “Gah, Cordelia, you can’t have it both ways. Are you trying your hardest or not? And does it matter whether you do or not, since it’s always in someone else’s hands?”

Cordelia: “What are you saying?”

Silas: “Nothing. Sorry. Uh... sorry. You’re probably tired and want some rest – it’s been a long night.”

Cordelia: “Yeah, I’m just tired. Night, Silas.”

Appendix B

The Metamorphosis

The dull cacophony of visitors echoes throughout the vast halls of the museum. Individual voices become discernable, commenting on the museum, the beautiful architecture, tonight's exhibit, and the contest. The theme of the exhibit is eventually revealed: *The Metamorphosis Throughout the Ages*.

Cordelia: "When I was six, I performed my first theft: a few bits of broken jewelry from the bottom of a shop display case. It was easy and probably barely a theft – small hands and big innocent eyes were advantageous back then. But it was still an accomplishment, especially for my six-year-old mind. I carried on the trend, until it became a habit, until it became a way of life. My first *heist* however, occurred many years later."

Silas, echoing through the gallery: "Attention: The museum will be closing in 15 minutes. Please make your way out of the museum, so the contest can commence on schedule. Again, the museum will be closing in 15 minutes."

The chatter slowly dies away.

Cordelia: "The theme tonight was *The Metamorphosis* and it was a bit of a surprise when I saw it; the exhibit looked more like an earthly art exhibit in that the walls were white -- a bit bland, honestly – with paintings in simple white and black frames and sculptures resting on plain displays. Some would call it boring. I wondered if the Council and, well, the rest of the world, were starting to give up on me and on the contest. And I didn't really blame them if they had."

...

Silas: “Do you like tonight’s exhibit?”

Cordelia: “I mean... it’s okay.”

Silas: “Too drab for your tastes?”

Cordelia: “Well you don’t have to make me sound so high maintenance. But yes.”

Silas: “It won’t be like this forever; just for tonight.”

Cordelia: “I know, but it feels a little... thoughtless? I don’t know, maybe that’s not the right word. Underdeveloped, maybe?”

Silas: “Cheer up, Cordelia, I’m sure that’s not it. There are an infinite number of nightly exhibits, so not every one will be as grand as the last.”

Sound of a door opening and footsteps – someone enters the room.

Cordelia: “Yeah, I just hope it’s not actually an infinite number.”

Silas: “I understand. Brace yourself though, because I think this will still be a very interesting... er, eventful night.”

Cordelia: “How so?”

Silas: “Well...”

Jacqueline: “Hi, Cordelia.”

Cordelia: “...Jacqueline...?”

Silas: “That’s—”

Cordelia: “My sister.”

Silas clears his throat, caught in the middle of an uncomfortable situation.

Silas: “Well uh... Hello, and welcome to the museum. I am Silas – marble statue, guardian of this museum, and referee for this contest. This museum is a contained purgatory for its curator. Her soul is tethered here for her past crimes as a world-renowned art thief. Each night, at 6 o’clock, a contest opens, allowing anyone brave or stupid enough to try to steal from this cursed museum. Succeed, and she is freed; fail, and she remains here. You have until midnight to steal the selected piece of art – the art that was originally stolen by the curator. Do so at your own risk, for your own fate is on the line; the next six hours will determine whether you go to the Light or the Dark. We do not allow food or flash photography in the galleries. Thank you, and enjoy your time at the museum...”

...

Cordelia: “You’re dead?”

Jacqueline: “I’m here, aren’t I?”

Cordelia: “I haven’t seen you in—”

Jacqueline: “Seventeen years?”

Cordelia: “Well I’ve been a little busy being dead.”

Jacqueline: “Not for seventeen years.”

Cordelia, inhales and exhales heavily, indicating her frustration: “Is this how you’re gonna be all night?”

Jacqueline: “Why’s it always my fault?!”

...

Cordelia: “It’s not every day you find out your sister is dead, and I’m not sure what shocked me most – the fact that she was dead or the fact that she was here. Somehow, I feel like it’s my fault she’s in purgatory with me right now, and based on her reaction, I think she blames me too. If we weren’t already dead, I think one of us would strangle the other by the time the night was over.”

...

Cordelia, fade in: “Yeah and that’s an Octavio Ocampo...”

Cordelia: “How’s Dad? And Stella?”

Jacqueline: “Um well, they got a divorce and sold the house and Stella did *not* take it well at all, because Dad remarried pretty soon afterward. That was a while ago, so things chilled out a little.”

Cordelia: “Ooh.... At least he’s happy?” Quiet.

Jacqueline, a bit bitter: “A lot changed after you left. Even just after you dropped off the face of the earth to be an art thief, but especially after you actually dropped off the face of the earth and died.”

Cordelia: “It’s not my fault I died!”

Jacqueline: “Well it’s not mine either, but I had to deal with it all!”

Cordelia: “What is it, Jacqueline? Is this your resentment? You can leave if you really can’t stand to be near me.”

Jacqueline, sarcastically: “Oh not at all! How could I ever resent my famous globe-trotting, art-stealing sister – all anyone could ever talk about! Yaayyy, Cordelia! You completely abandoned us for what? Some old art and news headlines? What kind of sister does that? What kind of *person* does that?”

Cordelia: “That’s what I wanted – that’s what I wanted my life to be! I couldn’t keep in contact with you guys without putting you in the middle of everything, and if I had done that, you’d resent me for it anyway! So either way, you were destined to hate me! I’m really sorry I’m so disappointing to you, but I had to do what I thought was best at the time!

Jacqueline: “You didn’t have to be an art thief!”

Cordelia: “I wouldn’t have been happy doing anything else though.”

Jaqueline: “You have a weird sense of happiness, Cordelia.”

Cordelia: “Yeah, I guess I do.”

Footsteps as she walks away.

...

Cordelia, irritated, to the listener: “Anyway, enough about her right now. As far as the museum goes, there’s a bit more greenery in the west wing, which is refreshing because I could use some life around this place. I think I’m just going to relax for a while in this little garden courtyard area they’ve set up. There’s also a beautiful Malevich across from it too, so that’ll keep me occupied.”

...

Cordelia: “Jacqueline and I got along really well when we were very young; we also had a step-sister, but it was never quite the same with her. When she was seven and I was ten, I allowed her to join me in my thieving – taking sweet treats from markets, old photographs and curios at the dinner parties of family friends, and several books from various stores. We soon developed an eye for art; we joked it came from our mom, who sketched portraits as a hobby. We were a good team – one of us would keep watch or be a distraction while the other secured the item in question. It was a lot of fun and we were almost inseparable – almost.”

...

Jacqueline: “Hiding?”

Cordelia: “Mmm more like, eagerly anticipating midnight.”

Jacqueline: “Ugh, you’re unbelievable.”

Cordelia: “Aww, and how are you managing without my help?”

Jacqueline: “Just fine. Now I just need to decide whether to present the right piece and free you or to let you rot in here forever.”

Cordelia: “Jacqueline, I’m so proud of you. And I know you’ll go far... I just hope you stay there.”

Jacqueline: “Maybe I should let you rot here forever, alone...”

Cordelia: “Oh good, if I was stuck here with you for eternity, I’d know I wasn’t in purgatory anymore.”

Cordelia immediately starts to apologize for what she’s said, but Jacqueline talks at the same time.

Jacqueline: “I hate you. I’ve hated you for years – for abandoning us – *me* – for putting us in so much trouble, for all of the police interrogations, for all of the news stories, for not being there, for dying –”

Cordelia, quietly: “You’ve hated me for longer than that, Jackie, I know, and it’s okay. I’m sorry for what I said and I’m sorry for not being there and I’m sorry for everything, but most of all, I’m really sorry you’re here tonight, because after this you’re going to walk out of those doors and go *somewhere* for eternity but I don’t have any say in where that is, and I didn’t think me being here forever could get any worse, but if you go somewhere worse than here, then selfishly, I will have a very, very hard time living with that forever.”

Jacqueline, realizing what she’s said: “I didn’t –”

Cordelia: “It’s okay. You don’t owe me anything. Go find the piece, and outshine every other person that’s tried to win here – even me. Just try not to go to hell in the process, okay?”

...

Cordelia: “I soon began to realize the consequences of stealing with my little sister: first, I was too reliant on her, not allowing myself to fully hone my skills as a solo artist.

Second, we were too good of a team, and we both knew it; we could've kept stealing together for a very long time. And I began to realize how much Jacqueline was missing out on. So when I was 15, I began to do more solo excursions; I didn't let her in on the planning behind each theft; I reserved more mundane ones for her; and once, I even let us slip up in a relatively low stakes theft, resulting in a harsh but inconsequential reprimanding from an old shopkeeper. I could sense Jacqueline's displeasure."

...

Silas: "How's she doing?"

Cordelia: "I'm not sure. I'm leaving her some space for the moment."

Silas: "Ah. Well she only has just over an hour and a half left."

Cordelia: "Okay, good."

Silas, kindly: "It seems to me that if this were the last time I would ever see my sister... I might cherish each minute of that time. But I'm also just a statue with no family, so I may have this wrong..."

Cordelia stays silent.

Silas: "I'll leave you to it then...."

...

Cordelia: "Soon afterward, I was always on the run. But before I left home, I packed a bag of clothes, some food to last me through the week, a watch Jacqueline and I had

stolen together, and one of our mom's portraits. Then I left in the middle of the afternoon, while my family was home – it took a while for them to worry, I guess, because by then I was long gone. I was told Jacqueline took it pretty hard.”

...

Cordelia: “Tell me what I’ve been missing. What’s life like now?”

Jacqueline: “Oh... well, Nora had kids, which surprised us—”

Cordelia: “What?! She always said she’d never have any!”

Jacqueline: “I know! That’s why we were all surprised! And Levi and I finally got to travel—”

Cordelia: “You two are still together?”

Jacqueline: “Yeah, we’re married! You knew about that though!”

Cordelia: “Well yeah, I just thought you’d get tired of him!”

Jacqueline, playfully smacks Cordelia’s arm: “Oh my gosh, no, what’s wrong with you!”

Cordelia, laughing: “I’m sorry!”

Jacqueline: “We even moved into a nicer house—”

Cordelia: “You already had a nice house!”

Jacqueline: “Yes, but a *nicer* one! You’d like it – it was old and had big windows that let lots of light in and we put plants everywhere and we even had an island in the kitchen! And Camille started playing piano, and Jonathan went to college for philosophy and political science, but the house felt a little emptier without him there.”

Cordelia: “Aw. Did they get the paintings I left to them?”

Jacqueline: “No.... I didn’t want them to have stolen art.”

Cordelia: “I didn’t even steal those!”

Jacqueline, laughing: “Suurree!”

Pause.

Cordelia, regretfully: “I missed your whole life, Jackie.”

Jacqueline: “Yeah, but it’s okay.”

Cordelia: “No, it’s not.” Pause. “Did the authorities ever find that Degas?”

Jacqueline: “Yes, on a bus in France.”

Cordelia: “Bastards. What a shame.” Pause.

Cordelia: “Ugh, we’ve gotta go. But I wanted to tell you that I don’t blame you for how you feel and also that I’m sorry. Very sorry. I shouldn’t have abandoned you like that. All I know how to do is steal and take, and I thought that by leaving, I’d be giving you a better life than one of sneaking around and being on the run. And it turns out I just took more from you. So I won’t ask for forgiveness or for you to forget it, because I know you can’t. But I hope you don’t hate me forever for it.”

Jacqueline: “Thank you. I’m sorry for what I said earlier. And I understand why you left.”

Cordelia: “Do you want any help with the piece?”

Jacqueline, quickly: “No, I’ve got it.”

Cordelia: “Okay. Let’s go.”

...

Silas: “So, how was your visit to the museum?”

Jacqueline: “Fine. It’s very beautiful here with all of the greenery, so if you can, tell the Council they did an excellent job.”

Cordelia, jokingly, under her breath: “Suck up.”

Silas: “I’ll pass that along. And... it was good to see your sister?”

Jacqueline, with a smile: “Yeah.”

Silas: “Yes. So, which piece have you decided on tonight, Jacqueline?”

Jacqueline: “*Cycle* by M. C. Escher. It captures the theme of the exhibit: the metamorphosis. Of course, Escher was known for his so called ‘transformative prints,’ and I think this is a beautiful example of that. I also know my sister has always had expensive taste, and Escher is definitely famous enough to satisfy that. I lost track of all the investigations and reported thefts attributed to her.”

Cordelia, smugly: “So did the police.”

Silas: “Any further comments?” Pause. “No? Well, there’s no use prolonging it, I suppose. Jacqueline Vaughn, I regret to inform you that *Cycle* is incorrect – therefore you are not the winner of this contest. However, the changes you have made over the course of the night and the improvement of your soul have made you eligible to continue to the Light once you leave the museum. Your sister must remain here though.”

Cordelia breathes a sigh of relief.

Jacqueline: “I’m sorry, Cordelia – I tried –”

Cordelia: “It’s really okay, Jacqueline—”

Jacqueline: “What was the piece, Silas – the right one?”

Silas: “I believe it was an untitled piece by an unknown artist. A portrait sketch located in the upper gallery.”

Silence.

...

Cordelia: “I gave Jacqueline the sketch – our mom’s sketch – before she left. She was pretty quiet – I think lost in thought maybe – as we said our goodbyes. I’m glad she made it to the Light though. And I’m glad I got to see her; this is the maybe the first glimpse of humanity the Council has shown, though I can’t be sure if they intended it that way. I’m trying not to think about how I really won’t ever see her again now – this time for good. Anyway, I think tonight was a success – a wonderful exhibit and a wonderful night and a wonderful sister. Oh, and of course, thank you for visiting the Museum of Unnatural Art and Posthumous Curiosities.”

Appendix C

Apogees of Classic Innovators

The dull cacophony of visitors echoes throughout the vast halls of the museum. Individual voices become discernable, commenting on the museum, the beautiful architecture, tonight's exhibit, and the contest. Through this string of random voices, the theme of the exhibit becomes clear: *Apogees of Classic Innovators*. There is an air of expectation and tension; the rooms are full of regal yet vibrant emerald greens and yellow golds. John Singer Sargent's *Madame X* gazes at Jackson Pollock's *Blue Poles* while Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* stands guard in the center of one of the rooms; the grand staircase – decorated in lavish swirling gold patterns – leads from the welcome desk to the upper galleries. The museum is well-lit – wax candles burn throughout the galleries. **Silas, echoing through the gallery:** “Attention: The museum will be closing in 15 minutes. Please make your way out of the museum, so the contest can commence on schedule. Again, the museum will be closing in 15 minutes.

The chatter slowly dies away.

Cordelia: “Let me begin by saying that because of the complete stupidity of previous thieves, I was feeling a bit discouraged, and to be quite honest, I've completely lost track of time here – if that wasn't obvious already. This contest has been going on for who knows how long; every night, the thief (or so they call themselves) has tried and failed to steal from the museum, which means my soul remains chained here. You'd think that, statistically speaking, after so many nights of this, somebody would have gotten the piece right and freed me, but I guess these squirrels are more blind than I thought. This new exhibit was refreshing though; gone were the traditional white walls of modern art

museums, replaced with lavish greens and golds, oozing regal expectation. There are some pretty high-profile pieces here tonight: art from Pollock to Sargent to Duchamp to Warhol. Tantalizing would be an understatement.”

Footsteps echo as Cordelia approaches Silas.

Silas: “Right on time.”

Cordelia: “I’ve only been doing this for an eternity.”

A short laugh from Silas.

Cordelia: “Did the Council leave any notes about this exhibit? This one’s beautiful.”

Silas: “No... they didn’t leave anything with me, though that isn’t saying much. They do love a good treasure hunt.”

Cordelia: “I think you mean witch hunt.”

Silas: “Eh, technicalities.”

Cordelia: “So, I’m right.”

Silas: “That seems unfair.”

Cordelia: “Well, you’re the one giving up!”

Silas: “That makes two of us then.”

Cordelia, to the listener “A note here: while I do not condone needless jabs or sass at my own expense, this one may be necessary. He’s also not wrong.”

Silas: “Anyway, our thief seems to be running late.”

Cordelia: “Oh, you’re right – it’s almost six-thirty.”

Silas: “I can’t say I’m surprised. Have you explored the galleries?”

Cordelia: “I saw a little bit on my way over here, but I may get a head start since our thief is behind schedule. Don’t have too much fun without me.”

...

Cordelia: “You can take this audio tour in any order and at your own pace. Look for the audio tour icon and number on the information cards beside selected pieces. Enter that number on the keypad, and press the green play button to begin that section of the tour. This pastoral image of a group of females by a body of water is one of Paul Cezanne’s most famous works. *The Bathers* or *The Large Bathers* features serene swirls of blues and greens in a triangular composition that incorporate Cezanne’s anxiety and lack of resolve between the stiff figures and the soft landscape. Serving as a bridge between the Impressionist work of that time and other 20th century art styles like Cubism, Cezanne’s *The Large Bathers* is a testament to his progressive style and –”

Margot enters, interrupting the audio tour. She is a middle-aged woman who has aged extremely gracefully; only the smallest suggestion of crow’s feet indicates her age. Simply dressed, but still stylish and chic, she gives off an air of elegance and confidence.

Margot: “There’s quite a lot of Cezanne in this exhibit – *The Large Bathers*, *The House of the Hanged Man*, *Pyramid of Skulls*.”

Cordelia: “You’re late.”

Margot: “Punctual in my own time.”

Cordelia, chuckles: “Did you talk to Silas?”

Margot: “I did, yes. This sounds like quite the gig you’ve got here, purgatory in an art museum and all that.”

Cordelia: “That’s relative, but I guess it could be worse.”

Margot: “That’s true. I’ve spent the last hundred years or so in a sub-zero ice pit with only a starving three-legged bobcat around as company.”

Cordelia: “Oddly niche. But the Council gave you another chance?”

Margot: “The bobcat was retiring soon, so yes.”

Cordelia: “Well, a very warm welcome to the museum then.”

Margot: “Much warmer, thank you very much.”

Cordelia: “Did you see any of the galleries before you found me?”

Margot: “Some, but not all of it. I haven’t been upstairs yet. Care to join me?”

Cordelia: “I’d be happy to. What landed you in a sub-zero ice pit?”

Margot: “It was either the identity theft or the murder – I’ve never gotten a straight answer to that question.”

Cordelia: “Huh, that’ll do it...”

Cordelia, to the listener: “This was the exact moment I decided she was both a fascinating and terrifying person; basically, she was someone worth listening to.”

Margot: “Anyway, enough about me. How long have you been here?”

Cordelia: “I really don’t know anymore. The days are all jumbling together – sometimes it feels like the first day and others feel like a million and six years into my sentence. It’s really exhausting honestly.”

Margot: “And how are you doing? *Really.*”

Cordelia, a little more emotion: “I don’t think I’m doing well at all.”

Margot, giving Cordelia a hug: “Aw.”

Cordelia: “And that makes it so much harder to be here.”

Margot: “Do you have any idea how you’re going to get out?”

Cordelia: “Not really. I can’t plan an escape or anything; it’s all out of my hands.”

Margot: “Why don’t you just tell the thief which piece to steal?”

Cordelia: “I mean, I’ve tried that and it doesn’t work! They have to make an improvement while here, so it doesn’t do any good – they don’t realize anything about themselves. I don’t understand how people can be so self-involved yet have absolutely no self-awareness.”

Margot: “Hmm I see. Not everyone can be quite like us in that regard. Maybe telling them isn’t the way, but I bet there’s some loophole or flaw in their system, you just have to find it. That three-legged bobcat wasn’t always three-legged. Force them to make a move.”

Cordelia: “How though?”

Margot: “We’ll think of something. We have another 4 hours tonight – I may defrost by then.”

...

Ambience. Footsteps as they explore.

Distantly, Cordelia: “Oh yeah, there was one other time I stole a Hockney and it was an absolute train wreck! I don’t know *how* they didn’t catch me!”

From afar, Margot, laughing a little, incredulous: “Where’d you go wrong?”

Cordelia: “Oh gosh, the whole thing was wrong. I think it was either taking the butter-knife or making Jackie my getaway ride.”

Margot: “Ooh not a getaway ride....”

Cordelia: “I know.”

Margot: “Those look way cooler in movies.”

Cordelia: “Everything does!”

Margot: “The trick is to hide right under their noses until they start looking everywhere else.”

Cordelia, jokingly: “I’ll keep that in mind for my next big heist.”

...

Cordelia, to the listener: “Her name was Margot, and she was an insurance investigator in her life on Earth. She was classy – older than me by several years, but not in a way that seemed frail – and she had this way of making me feel like she knew the plot twist to a movie, but she wouldn’t say anything so that I could still be surprised when the twist came. Margot was very interested in every piece we looked at, but she gave no indication into her thought process for which piece to steal, nor did she ask me for hints, suggestions, or games of “hotter” vs “colder” (though this may be because everything was cold for her). In short, I have absolutely no idea if she will get the piece or not. But that honestly wasn’t the important part for once. She seemed to really see me, which happens every once in a while with these thieves – when I’m lucky – but with her, I felt understood.”

...

Margot: “This one seems a bit out of place, but I suppose that’s how Duchamp intended it – always the rebel. Who designs the exhibits each night?”

Cordelia: “I wish I knew – they do a beautiful job. I’m told it’s the Council, but I doubt they have any sense of style or appreciation for good art. Especially this consistently.”

Margot: “Oh. Maybe there’s more to the story there.”

Cordelia: “Probably. Did you know about the museum before you came here?”

Margot: “Yes, there were whispers of it even before I was sentenced – I think the Council is pretty impressed with this punishment. I thought about it a lot during my time in the ice pit.”

Cordelia, a little surprised: “Oh.”

Margot: “How much more time do we have?”

Cordelia, wryly: “You have another 4 hours. I have eternity.”

Margot: “I don’t know about that.”

...

Silas: “Any progress?”

Cordelia: “I’m honestly not sure how close she is to figuring out the piece, but she’s amazing to talk to. She’s so intelligent – like an intuitive kind of intelligent – and she knows so much about the arts; it’s pretty refreshing and I’m glad to have the company – no offense.”

Silas: “None taken. I wish I had legs so I could walk around the exhibit too, but that’s neither here nor there. Anyway, I won’t keep you; off you go. Two and a half hours left.”

Cordelia: “Thank you, Silas.”

...

Cordelia, to the listener: “Margot had a unique talent of directing the conversation where she wanted it to go; when asked, she’d talk about herself for as long as she wanted, but somehow she’d manage to turn it around again to ask about me. This was nice, in a way, to be asked about, but I sometimes felt like I was just along for the ride.”

...

Margot: “Go ahead and ask it.”

Cordelia: “Ask what?”

Margot: “What you’ve been itching to ask me all night.”

Cordelia: “Well – I don’t know... how did you...?”

Margot: “How’d I die?”

Cordelia: “Yes.”

Margot: “It was a medical accident. I had a surgery that went wrong; the surgeon made some stupid mistake, and that was it for me. It was out of my hands.”

Cordelia, a little surprised: “Oh. I’m sorry. That wasn’t what I expected.”

Margot: “You and me both! And don’t be sorry. I’ve had a long time to get over it. Now, leave me be for this last leg of the contest; I need to make my decision.”

Cordelia: “Okay. If you need anything, let me know. If not, good luck, and I’ll see you at midnight for the verdict.”

Margot: “Thank you, Cordelia. Trust me... and remember what I said about flaws.”

...

Cordelia: “Alfred Henry Maurer’s *Tulips in a Green Vase* showcases the artist’s turn away from the traditional realism that gained the public’s attention and his embrace of fauvism and cubism. Painted in the early 1900’s, *Tulips in a Green Vase* shows Maurer’s usage of bold colors and more abstract forms as he pursued art that was not confined by nature. Some historians argue that this ruined his career; others argue that his pursuit of a different artistic vision was the sign of a true and dedicated artist.”

...

Silas, sounding a bit panicked: “Cordelia—”

Cordelia, excited: “Is she ready??”

Silas: “Oh... she already picked.”

Cordelia: “What?”

Silas, delivering the blow carefully: “Yeah, she picked a while ago.”

Cordelia: “Oh. Well can I tell her “goodbye?”

Silas: “I’m sorry, Cordelia, but – she already left...”

Cordelia: “Oh. Okay. That’s okay.”

Silas: “I’m sorry, Cordelia.”

Cordelia, in a tone that indicates it is not fine: “It’s fine... What piece did she pick?”

Silas: “*Tulips in a Green Vase.*”

Cordelia: “That’s the right piece though.”

Silas: “Yes.”

Cordelia, realizing the bigger implications of this statement, to the listener: “Oh.

Okay.”

Cordelia: “Well, goodnight then.”

Silas: “Goodnight.”

...

Cordelia: “When people leave you for no reason, it’s the kind of experience that you turn over in your head for a very, very long time; you replay every little interaction and try to pinpoint where you messed up. It becomes a question of the self: “How did *I* mess up?” “Why did you have to ruin everything, Cordelia?” “How are you so unlikeable to people?” It’s like there are two you’s: one that interacts with the world, and the other that nitpicks everything the first one does. When people leave, that little voice gets a lot louder and a lot stronger, listing every negative reason under the sun for your supposed failure. The problem is, you’ll never get the real reason; I’ll never know for sure why Margot just left like that. So you just have to go on living with the nitpicking side of you giving you reasons, until you start to accept them – believe them – because you don’t have the real answers, and you never will.”

Appendix D

The Fray of Will

The dull cacophony of visitors echoes throughout the vast halls of the museum. Individual voices become discernable, commenting on the museum, the beautiful architecture, tonight's exhibit, and the contest. The sound of the chatter is at first very distinguishable, but then it travels back, as if the listener is walking through the gallery and farther away from the visitors until reaching Cordelia's living area.

Cordelia, sighing heavily, then quiet: "Showtime."

Footsteps as she walks out to the gallery. The chatter becomes louder again. She opens a large pair of doors, and suddenly the chatter stops.

Cordelia: "Well that's new."

...

Cordelia, away from the gallery, just to the listener: "Welcome to the Museum of Unnatural Art and Posthumous Curiosities. I'm Cordelia, the museum's curator and purgatorial inhabitant. Do you know that feeling when you walk into a room full of people and you can sense that there's one person in the room who you know and wish you didn't – like a former flame or the sister of that guy you stabbed or your middle school best friend who hasn't said a word to you since you two fought over who liked Coldplay more or the guy that you actually stabbed – do you ever walk into that room and, without looking around, immediately know that there is something incredibly wrong, how the air doesn't feel quite right on your skin, like everyone else in the room is

somehow holding their breath and giving you sidelong glances even though they are complete strangers who have no idea about the intense history that connects you and this specific person? Yeah, that feeling? That is what I walked into when I entered the main gallery today – with one exception. Instead of receiving sidelong glances from inconsequential and unknowing strangers, I opened the door to an entire *congregation* staring at me with hungry rat-like gleams in their eyes. Which was not the most comforting welcome.”

Atmosphere change. Back to the gallery.

Footsteps as she walks down the stairs. Awkward silence.

Cordelia: “Hi?”

In one ear, whispering, to the listener, Cordelia: “They’re all just looking at me but not saying anything.”

Cordelia: “Uh... welcome?”

More silence.

Cordelia: “Did you guys steal all of the art already...?”

Whispering again, Cordelia: “They scatter when I move toward them. Like sheep and I’m the sheepdog.”

Cordelia: “Okay, well this has been super fun, but I’m gonna....”

Whispering, Cordelia, to the listener: “Note that this has *not* been fun and also that all of the art is gone. Like missing. Vanished. Not here.”

Footsteps quicken as she walks away.

...

Cordelia, in a hiss-like voice: “*Silas!*”

No response.

Cordelia: “*Silas, why are they here? And what happened to all of the pieces?*”

No response. A dull thud as she nudges the marble statue.

Cordelia, at first offended, then frustrated and panicked: “Are you – (gasps) – *oh no.* Silas! No no *noooo*, they muted you! Or killed you... which must be hard since you’re a statue... oh, I can’t tell.”

To the listener, Cordelia: “And now your only friend in this room full of inconsequential strangers (minus one) has been turned back into a regular, unspeaking statue? Yeah, you know that feeling?”

...

Cordelia: “Alright, at this point, Silas would usually give his spiel about the museum, but since he is a statuesque mute right now, I’ll do the honors. (clears throat dramatically) (in a manner that mimics Silas) *Hello, and welcome to the museum. I am Silas – marble statue, guardian of this museum, and referee for this contest. This museum is a contained purgatory for its curator. Her soul is tethered here for her past crimes as a world-renowned art thief. Each night, at 6 o’clock, a contest opens, allowing anyone brave or stupid enough to try to steal from this cursed museum. Succeed, and she is freed; fail, and she remains here. You have until midnight to steal the selected piece of art – the art that was originally stolen by the curator. Do so at your own risk, for your own fate is on the line; the next six hours will determine whether you go to the Light or the Dark. We do not*

allow food or flash photography in the galleries. Thank you, and enjoy your time at the museum. How'd I do? It should've been a pretty flawless reenactment. For all the things that purgatory should or could be teaching me, I have a profoundly deep appreciation now for the trillions of possible combinations of words and sentences, as well as a profoundly deep disdain for the collective failure to exercise that ability here. The irony of this ever-changing museum is that variety is such a foreign concept within these walls; I feel like if I've heard or seen or done something once, I've heard or seen or done that thing a million times. One time I talked to a thief who boasted about wearing the same outfit everyday – I can't remember his name for the life of me – and how that supposedly freed up his mental energy for making other decisions – spoiler: it didn't help him decide on the right piece to steal – but I found it very interesting. I wondered if it actually helped him or if it was a placebo, and I wondered if I could somehow harness all of this consistency and sameness within the museum walls into some superpower like he apparently had. The short answer is no – I'm absolutely losing my mind because of it. Part of me wonders if you sacrifice mental agility by stripping away those little decisions, but I'm no neuroscientist – I'm just a dead art thief in purgatory with a laughable chance of escape. I guess there's a pretty big difference between monotony in an outfit and monotony of the everyday life.”

...

Cordelia, her voice echoing through the gallery, as is leaning against a column at the top of the staircase: “I'll sit here and wait all night. Longer than that too. Your time here

is limited, and mine is most definitely not, which *you* made sure of, and I know someone here has something to tell me, so let's just save the theatrics and get it over with."

Awkward silence.

Cordelia, to the listener: "The Council always sends the worst people."

Then, Cordelia, scoffing to herself: "These fools."

Leon: "Is that how you greet all of your guests?"

Cordelia, after a slight pause to register the speaker: "Yes, so you're no exception here."

Leon: "Excuse me?"

Cordelia: "Nice to see you, *Councilman*. I think."

Leon: "Oh, spare me, Cordelia. I know you're annoyed."

Cordelia, sarcastically: "Me? Never!"

Leon: "You're being dramatic."

Cordelia, facetiously: "How dare you!"

Leon: "Don't be childish."

Cordelia: "That doesn't sound like me."

Leon: "You're testing my patience!"

Cordelia: "You drew the short straw, huh?"

Leon: "This is nonsense."

Cordelia: "Or did you volunteer to escape from the stuffy Council chambers?"

Leon: "Cordelia!"

Cordelia: "*Leon.*"

A beat.

Cordelia, coldly: “Take a look around, why don’t you? It shouldn’t take long, since *there’s no art to look at.*”

Leon: “Don’t be so bitter, it really dampens the atmosphere in here, and we don’t want the thieves to have a bad experience at the museum now do we, Cordelia?”

Cordelia, angrily: “Oh right, the thieves that are getting such a great opportunity tonight to steal from the museum and have their fate decided for them? Those thieves?”

Leon, mockingly: “Oh, is that what you’re angry about then? That there’s no thief tonight because we took all of your pretty art?”

Cordelia, sarcastically: “Wow, your ability to understand and empathize with other people is absolutely awe-inspiring. You should really put it to good use sometime.”

Leon: “Oh, believe me, I do.”

Cordelia: “I said *good use.*” Then, as she walks away, “Enjoy your look around. You’ll find everything is exactly the same as it was last time you were here and the time before that and the time before that!”

...

Cordelia: “These visits – oh, I’m sorry, *inspections* – happened much more frequently at the beginning of my sentence. The Council sent representatives every week or so to check in and make sure everything was running smoothly – that the exhibits were changing, that the art was fitting, that there was only one correct piece to steal, that the thieves were getting assigned properly to the Light or Dark, that Silas wasn’t malfunctioning, and so on. Eventually, the visits became far less frequent, as things fell

into a “consistent rhythm” – I think that they really just got tired of sending someone to give the same report each time. Imagine that – they got tired of the monotony! Hypocrites. Anyway, Leon was a frequent visitor, so we know how to irritate each other. The Council hasn’t sent anyone in a long time though – a really long time – so I’m not exactly sure why he’s here right now. Part of me hopes they’ve decided to let me out; the other part of me is scared of where they’d put me next. It’s probably just a housekeeping thing, honestly.”

...

Back in the gallery, but to herself, musingly, Cordelia: “Silas, they better not have murdered you.... And that’s weird to say to a marble statue.... How’d you end up like this? I don’t even know anything about you.”

Leon walks up to Cordelia and the very mute Silas.

Leon: “He can’t tell you, of course.”

Cordelia: “Well, I know that. You muted him. And remind me why was that necessary?”

Leon: “I mean he can’t tell you even when he can speak. He doesn’t know.”

Pause

Cordelia: “Go on.”

Leon: “Silas was a mortal.”

Cordelia: “Okay.”

Leon: “And he was a bad one.”

Cordelia: “I’m listening.”

Leon: “A pretty bad one.”

Cordelia: “Uh huh.”

Leon: “He took a lot of pride in knowing everything. In information. Using that information against others.”

Cordelia: “So you’re punishing him for that?”

Leon: “He has to learn. It turns out purgatory is a pretty big place.”

Cordelia: “What?”

Leon: “Oh, you thought you were the only one in purgatory?”

Cordelia, getting more heated as she goes: “You’re all sick. How is he supposed to learn when he doesn’t even remember being a bad person? And who are you to decide where people go or what they do when they get there? To lecture people on being a good person when all you and your white-haired accomplices do is punish and torment other people? In what world does being a bad person make you the best person to judge everyone else?”

Silence.

Leon: “How do you know we’re the bad ones?”

Cordelia: “Are you not?”

Pause.

Cordelia: “*How does that make any sense?*”

Pause.

Leon: “Yes.”

Cordelia: “That wasn’t a yes or no question!”

Leon: “The answer to your earlier question. Yes, I did volunteer to come here.”

Cordelia: “That’s absurd, and you’re dodging the actual question.”

Leon: “It’s true. It’s a taxing job – sorting people, every day and night, nonstop. It gets... *monotonous*, which you may understand.”

Cordelia: “I’m not going to feel sorry for you.”

Leon: “Come on, Cordelia. I’m in my own purgatory. Just because it looks different than yours doesn’t mean it’s not real.”

Cordelia: “Do *not* lecture me on purgatory, and do not try to compare what you do with my existence. You’re not trying to improve yourself or anyone else’s afterlife – that’s not what purgatory is, and your fundamental misunderstanding of that is pretty terrifying considering the position you’re in.”

Leon: “There’s so much you don’t know—”

Cordelia: “I have no doubt about that! Stop acting like you know everything about everyone just because you read a little file about them and decide where they end up!”

Leon: “Oh, is that how you think the Council works?”

Cordelia: “How does it work then, oh all-knowing Councilman?”

Leon: “Ha, nice try.”

Pause.

Cordelia, suddenly very quiet: “Leon, can you kill yourself in purgatory?”

Leon, taken aback: “Why would you ask that?”

Cordelia: “Can you?”

Leon: “You’re being ridiculous.”

Cordelia just stares at him, saying nothing.

Leon: “Some aspects of being human are more immortal than others.”

Cordelia: “What’s that supposed to mean?”

Leon, back to a condescending tone: “Well, that’s not your concern, is it?”

Cordelia: “So in a way, it could happen?”

Leon: “Tsk tsk, Cordelia, that’s beneath you. Maybe we should’ve sent you to the Dark, the way you’re talking!”

Cordelia, frustrated: “Why are you even here?!”

Leon: “To make sure everything is still running smoothly!”

Cordelia: “You’re a hopeless liar.”

Leon: “To bask in your pleasant and welcoming presence then!”

Cordelia: “Well you’ve basked in it long enough! Please leave!”

Pause.

Leon, serious now: “To tell you to be very careful about messing around with our system here.”

Pause. He gives soft chuckle.

Then, mockingly, Leon: “Aww, poor Cordelia. You don’t remember anything from all of these visits so far, do you? Well, let me give you a hint. Nights seventy-three, 408, and 3,562 all contained purgatorial infractions. But you don’t remember those nights because you never pay attention to the details because you’re too selfish to look beyond your own circumstances and *that’s* why you’re here Cordelia and that’s why you’ll stay here forever because you will *never learn*.”

Still nothing from Cordelia.

Leon: “Oh, no witty comeback? Mm, what a shame.... Maybe you can learn. Well, I’ll be going then – it’s looks like you got the message. You’ll be happy to know that Silas

has undergone some mild bug fixes and updates to make sure there's no funny business on his end either. Oh, and Cordelia, as for my harsh words tonight – well I won't apologize, as you'll forget them soon enough! Maybe you should start a little diary! Aw... anyway, ciao, Cordelia. Until next time.”

Footsteps as he walks away. Door opens and shuts as he leaves.

Cordelia, lets out a slow, angry exhale. Slow footsteps as she walks away.

Appendix E

Apertures and the Lens of the Mundane

Cordelia, to the listener: “The thought of having been here for 3,562 nights is almost as unsettling as the thought that I’ll be here for another 3,562 nights.”

Cordelia, frustrated: “This is pointless.”

Silas: “What’s that?”

Cordelia: “This whole process. Purgatory.”

Silas: “You’re just realizing this?”

Cordelia, dejected: “No, I’m just constantly reminded of it.”

Silas, concerned, speaking carefully so as not to make Cordelia angry: “What’s the matter, Cordelia? You seem more troubled than usual.”

Cordelia: “Nothing. It’s fine.”

Silas: “You can talk to me, you know —”

Door flings open and slams shut. Cordelia and Silas both yelp in surprise.

Florence: “Oops! Hiii!”

Cordelia: “What the—”

Silas: “You’re going to break the door!”

Jumbled commotion.

Abrupt pause.

Cordelia, to the listener: “I think it’s important to note that our thief here is wearing a very bold outfit, complete with yellow winged eyeliner, a holographic fanny pack, and, most surprisingly, capris. Sometimes I wonder how long I’ve been dead – if capris are

back in style, it must be ages since I – well, ya know. She’s pulling it off though, I’ll give her that.”

Florence: “I didn’t break the door!”

Silas: “You just can’t go around slamming things like a madwoman!”

Cordelia: “Are you trying to bring capris back?”

Florence: “They’re capris *leggings!*”

Silas: “We can’t have you destroying the museum!”

Cordelia: “Well, hold on Silas, I don’t mind—”

Florence: “You don’t even have arms, so what are you gonna do if I *do* destroy everything?”

Silas, scoffing: “Wow, okay, that’s just too far—”

Florence: “It’s just a fact!”

Silas: “You don’t have to point out facts just to be hurtful!”

Beat.

Cordelia: “Are you guys done yet?”

Florence and Silas, both mumbling/grumbling: “Yeah, I guess.”

Cordelia: “Fantastic. I’m Cordelia, by the way. Congrats on being the person with the most energy and life who’s ever walked through that door.”

Silas: “I mean, they’ve usually just died, so you can’t expect too much....”

Florence: “Give me a break, I just died!”

Cordelia: “*Would you two shut up?!*”

They mumble something along the lines of “yes.”

Cordelia: “Thank you. Okay, Silas, just give her – wait what was your name?”

Florence: “Florence.”

Cordelia: “Ah, okay, give her the run-down of the museum.”

Silas, begrudgingly: “Hello, and welcome to the museum. I am Silas – marble statue, guardian of this museum, and referee for this contest. This museum is a contained purgatory for its curator.”

He continues his speech as Florence and Cordelia converse.

Florence, quietly to Cordelia: “You listen to this every night?!”

Cordelia, chuckling: “Yeah, I think I’ve gotten to the point where I can recite it flawlessly.”

Florence: “Geez.”

Cordelia: “I know.”

Silas, faintly: “Her soul is tethered here for her past crimes as a world-renowned art thief. Each night, at 6 o’clock, a contest opens, allowing anyone brave or stupid enough to try to steal from this cursed museum. Succeed, and she is freed; fail, and she remains here.”

Florence: “Eugh, enough of that. Come on, let’s find all of the ugliest pieces that are somehow considered art.”

Silas, fainter still: “You have until midnight to steal the selected piece of art – the art that was originally stolen by the curator. Do so at your own risk, for your own fate is on the line; the next six hours will determine whether you go to the Light or the Dark. We do not allow food or flash photography in the galleries. Thank you, and enjoy your time at the museum.”

Cordelia: “*Done.*”

Cordelia and Florence run off.

Silas: “Hey!”

...

Cordelia: “I’ve always found introductions and icebreakers to be very tedious; getting to know a person can be a challenge, especially when you can already tell that you’re going to get along very well with this new person. You have this understanding that you’ll be great friends, if you can just jump that hurdle of all the formalities, the “Where are you from?” and the “What do you do?” and so on. Those formalities mean nothing anyway; usually, people don’t even fully answer the question when you ask it the first time. It’s like eating a birthday dinner – you have to slog through the main course and side dishes and maybe a soup and salad, and that’s fine – I mean the food is usually good – but everyone knows that there’s birthday cake at the end, and that’s what you really want to eat – that’s the light at the end of the tunnel of seemingly endless convention. Maybe that’s just me, but I’ve never been a big fan of birthdays anyway. Florence decided she wanted birthday cake for dinner – she bypassed all of the tedious parts and gave the middle finger to those formalities. Not literally, but I’m sure if it was possible, she would.”

...

Fade in.

Florence: “Oh that one’s *hideous*.”

Cordelia: “It’s Andy Warhol!”

Florence: “Yeah, but Andy Warhol is overrated and you know it.”

Cordelia: “Okay, what’d he do to you?”

Florence: “He’s just overrated! Anybody can take bright colors and toss it onto existing images!”

Cordelia: “That’s the point! To make the everyday and the mundane interesting!”

Florence: “But as soon as it’s art, it’s not mundane anymore. I’m still going to look at a can of soup the same way, no matter how many times Andy Warhol puts it on a poster. Does all of this art about the mundane help you find your life – death, whatever – any less mundane?”

Pause as Cordelia considers this.

Cordelia: “Not really.”

Florence: “Therefore, Andy Warhol is overrated. I’m not saying he’s a bad artist, I’m just saying he gets way too much credit. Just because everyone knows his name doesn’t mean they should, and just because his name adds monetary value to a piece doesn’t necessarily mean it’s actually a good piece.”

Cordelia, laughing: “Well okay, I think I see your point.” Pause. The laughter has left her voice. “It is pretty mundane though.”

Florence: “Soup cans?”

Cordelia, smirking: “Oh my gosh, well, yeah, but also being here.”

Florence: “It’s dumb. *They’re* dumb. You don’t deserve to be in here.”

Cordelia: “Why do you say that?”

Florence: “I don’t know. You just don’t seem like that bad of a person.”

Cordelia, to the listener: “I have an inherent skepticism and dislike of people telling me about what I do and don’t deserve. The concept of deserving is so weird to me, because who decides what we deserve? “Deserving” introduces this idea that somehow, someone is keeping points on all of our actions, points that can be totaled and then used to determine what we do or don’t deserve. Maybe the universe is watching, or it’s just the Council, but that seems like an awful lot of work for the Council – I mean to keep track of every single person’s every action? Come on. And anyway, let’s say they are keeping track; does everyone else somehow have access to everyone else’s score and I just don’t know about it? People keeping score on other people just doesn’t make any sense. “Deserving” has the underlying implication of “owing,” and no one owes us anything. If they did, that would be a really terrible and inefficient way of living.”

Cordelia, to Florence: “I dunno about deserving anything.”

Florence: “I mean, what did you do to wind up here?”

Cordelia: “Uhhh I stole a lot of art?”

Florence: “The art, whatever. Come on, there’s gotta be more.”

Cordelia: “I don’t know! The usual stuff that happens when you steal art.”

Florence: “Did you kill anyone?”

Cordelia: “Well he didn’t die—”

Florence: “But you attempted to?!”

Cordelia: “It was an accident – I accidentally stabbed him!”

Florence: “How do you accidentally stab someone?”

Cordelia: “How’d you wind up here then?”

Florence: “Did they *almost* die?”

Cordelia: “*No*, it was a butter knife anyway.”

Florence: “Psh, that barely counts!”

Cordelia, playfully: “Shut up. How about you?”

Florence, laughs: “Tax evasion.”

Cordelia: “No really!”

Florence: “I don’t know! My whole life was one big screw-up, so I don’t know what did it. Maybe it was the tax evasion or atheism or hitting a cat on my way to Target or not loving people enough or profanity or occasionally using drugs – I don’t know. I don’t think there was one big event sealed the deal.”

Cordelia: “None of that sounds terrible though.”

Florence: “But here I am!”

Cordelia: “Maybe you don’t deserve to be in here either.”

Florence: “I thought you didn’t know about deserving things?”

Cordelia laughs: “Well what do I know?”

Florence, dramatically joking: “Eugh, I’m friends with a hypocrite!”

Cordelia laughs.

...

Cordelia, to the listener: “*Sublimated Music* by Philippe Rahm is an immersive experience, combining light and sound to stretch our idea and sense of physical space.

The work features a deconstructed piano melody from a piece by Claude Debussy while spots of light scatter along the floor.”

...

Florence, in awe: “This is definitely the best room.”

Cordelia, smiling: “I knew you’d like it.”

Florence: “I *love* it!”

Shuffling as she lays down on the floor.

Cordelia: “Whatcha doing?”

Florence: “*Experiencing* it. Come on, it’s even better from here.”

Cordelia joins her.

Cordelia: “This is way cooler.”

Pause – a comfortable silence.

Cordelia: “What’s something that you didn’t experience when you were alive that you wish you’d done?”

Florence: “Like a regret?”

Cordelia: “Not necessarily, but maybe. Just something you feel like you missed out on.”

Florence: “Learning to play the bassoon.”

Cordelia: “Pfft no, I’m serious!”

Florence: “No, *I’m* serious! I feel like I did a lot during my life, but I never learned an instrument!”

Cordelia: “*That’s* what you missed out on?!”

Florence, laughs: “Well I can have more than one thing. I didn’t have a wedding, but I actually don’t know how to feel about those. Umm and I never got to have ice cream from an ice cream truck.”

Cordelia, amused: “Why not?”

Florence: “That’s so sketchy!”

Cordelia: “You’re kinda right.”

Florence: “What about you?”

Cordelia: “I never ran a marathon.”

Florence: “Lame. One time I tried and I got bored halfway through so I walked the rest of the way and stood at the finish line until I was the last one.”

Cordelia: “What!”

Florence: “Yeah. But keep going.”

Cordelia: “Uh I never owned any sort of pet – I always wanted a cat, but I’m allergic.”

Florence: “Aww!”

Cordelia: “I never went to a concert, like with a popular artist; classical performances are different and I don’t really think they count in the same way. Not that they’re not important, but it’s different – I mean you know. People don’t jump around and yell and have crazy fun at those like they do at concerts, where you get to let go and be dumb. I never watched *Gone with the Wind*, even though everyone told me it was a classic. I never had my own living room or my own kitchen or my own side table. I never woke up and made breakfast or even coffee for someone else. I didn’t tell anyone that I loved them and mean it. I didn’t do any good for the world.”

Florence: “How do you know?”

Cordelia: “All I did was steal stuff, but it wasn’t for any glorified purpose. I wasn’t Robin Hood. I just did it because I wanted to and because I could.”

Florence: “So? Maybe those artists didn’t want their art in some stuffy museum anyway. Art wasn’t made to be seen by only people that can afford to.”

Cordelia, crying, gives out a quick laugh: “I don’t know that I helped with that though.”

Florence: “Well if I were an artist, I’d be honored to know you stole my painting.”

Cordelia sniffs quietly: “Thanks.”

Florence: “Anytime.”

Cordelia: “I wish it could be anytime.”

Florence: “I know, me too.”

Silence for a moment while Cordelia thinks.

Cordelia, with growing purpose: “Well what if it could be anytime?”

Florence: “What?”

Cordelia: “What if you just stayed here and lived in the museum too? Then I wouldn’t be alone forever, and you wouldn’t have to go to the Light or the Dark.”

Florence: “How would that work?”

Cordelia: “I’m not sure.”

Florence: “Wouldn’t the Council notice?”

Cordelia: “I don’t know. It’s worth a shot though. Sometimes I feel like they forget about me here for a while.”

Florence: “Will they notice if I don’t leave here?”

Cordelia: “I mean, a lot of people die, so one person could probably easily slip through the system.”

Florence, pausing, thinking, then with a shrug: “Okay.”

Cordelia: “Really?”

Florence: “Yeah!”

Cordelia, exhaling in relief: “Thank you.”

...

Silence.

Cordelia breathes quietly.

A slight creak as she turns the handle of a door.

Cordelia, to the listener: “In the moment, doing a horrible thing feels incredibly wrong – you can feel it along your spine and in the very pit of your stomach. In the moment, doing a stupid thing can feel incredibly exhilarating and scary, as your heart beats a little faster and your fingers get tingly and the air hits your lungs more sharply and your vision focuses intensely on what you’re doing. In the moment, trying to escape from purgatory felt like all of these things.”

Cordelia’s slight breathing again.

Florence, from a distance: “What are you doing?”

Cordelia, surprised, gasps. She stumbles for words, then: “I thought you fell asleep.”

Florence, more accusingly now: “What are you doing?”

Cordelia: “I, uh—”

Florence, flatly: “Were you trying to leave.” She doesn’t say it like a question – just a statement of fact.

Cordelia, whispers: “I’m so sorry.”

Florence, after a long pause, sounding angry, sorry, and betrayed: “Yeah. I definitely think they’d notice that.”

Florence grabs her fanny pack from the floor, then sarcastically: “Thanks for the great tour. And thanks for finally answering my question.”

Cordelia: “What question?”

Florence walks toward the door. She turns the handle.

Florence: “About why you’re here.”

She opens the door.

Florence: “You know, I don’t think you’ll ever get out of here. I know you’re frustrated by how everyone else that shows up each night screws it up for you, but I don’t think that matters because you screw it up for yourself anyway. And so the real reason it’s so painful for you to be here is because you have to watch them screw up and get to leave, while you screw up and stay here forever. Have fun doing it alone.”

She walks out the door and slams it shut.

Cordelia’s breathing turns heavier and more emotional. She puts her head in her hands.

Cordelia, to the listener: “And this is what happens in the moment when someone tells you something you know so deeply to be true.”

Appendix F

Reflections on Life and Art through the Ages

Cordelia: “Welcome to the Museum of Unnatural Art and Posthumous Curiosities. We hope you enjoy your visit.”

Cordelia, to the listener: “No one is here tonight. No one came to visit; no tourists, no curious souls, no art enthusiasts. Something was wrong; something was different. Every day, I spend my time confined in the walls of the museum. I mean think about that; when was the last time you went to a museum? How long did you stay? And what did you do? What was your mental state like when you left? Don’t get me wrong – I love art and museums so much I made it a career – but having a place solely dedicated to aesthetic beauty? It’s good for a while, but after a point, you need something tangible and organic. Having the idea of life or love or rebellion or lust through a painting isn’t quite the same as living. So for spending so long in the monotony of it all, this slight change – this small fact that there’s no thief – is monumental.”

Footsteps as Cordelia runs through the museum. She approaches Silas.

Cordelia from afar: “Silas!”

Silas, waits for her to come closer: “Someone’s in a good mood.”

Cordelia: “What’s going on?!”

Silas: “Well I hate to break it to you, but you’re in purgatory and –”

Cordelia: “No, why wasn’t there anyone here tonight? There weren’t any tourists – no one came to see the exhibit. Something feels different.”

Silas: “I’m interested that you think that having no one here was a good sign?”

Cordelia: “Well don’t burst my bubble. Any sign is a good sign at this point!”

Silas: “That’s very optimistic of you – I’m glad to see it.”

Cordelia: “Gah, you’re such a buzz-kill. Who’s coming tonight? I bet they’re famous or rich or something and the Council didn’t want anyone in here to scuff up the floors for our *esteemed* guest—”

Silas: “Well... so that’s just it—”

Cordelia: “— or it’s someone from the Light and they’re trying to impress them—”

Silas: “Cordelia—”

Cordelia: “— Or maybe they’ve come to take me out of here *finally*—”

Silas: “*Cordelia*, listen to me! There’s no one coming tonight.”

Pause.

Cordelia: “What?”

Silas: “The Council didn’t send anyone tonight.”

Cordelia: “So... okay, but what does that mean... for the contest...”

Silas: “I don’t know. That’s all I know for now.”

Cordelia: “That’s all you *know* or all you can *say*?”

Silas: “At this point, the distinction doesn’t really matter.”

Cordelia, still confused and trying not to get frustrated: “Okay. Uhh... so is there anything else you can tell me?”

Silas: “No. In my humble opinion though, it might be good for you to walk around the museum a bit. It should be an enlightening exhibit – *Reflections on Life and Art through the Ages* – sounds pretty good...”

Cordelia, a bit frustrated: “Okay. Thanks.”

...

Cordelia: “Remember that you can take this audio tour in any order and at your own pace. You’re now looking at Pablo Picasso’s famed *Girl Before a Mirror*. One of his most notable pieces, *Girl Before a Mirror* depicts a woman examining her reflection, painted in 1932 during Picasso’s cubist stylistic period. The painting can be interpreted in multiple ways, as the girl examining her daytime self versus her nighttime self; as the girl seeing herself as an old woman; as the girl unable to look past her flaws, representing her self-consciousness.”

Cordelia, to the listener: “If you ask me, this is a defining moment in art; I think it shows much of the true nature of being a woman and what that means for many women – how the mirror can be our worst enemy or show our truest self – how sometimes your reflection feels like a different person. But I think what Picasso really gets right in this piece is the multiplicity of interpretations and how they’re not mutually exclusive from one another; my favorite interpretation is combining all of the interpretations into one big convoluted ball of frustration and self-doubt and angst. The model for the painting was Marie-Therese Walter, a French model and Picasso’s lover. They began their affair when she was 17 and he was 45 – and married. She was his muse, at least for a while, portrayed as blonde and bright in his art. After his wife found out about the affair with Marie-Therese Walter, the marriage fell apart, and his wife left him. Walter was pregnant and gave birth to Picasso’s child, but the two never married; soon after this, he began a relationship with the artist Dora Maar, who he considered his intellectual equal. It makes sense to me that Marie-Therese Walter had such inner turmoil and intense emotional

complexity given her situation, but I find it fascinating that Picasso seemed to tap into that in the painting. Maybe it was unintentional or subconscious, or maybe he was completely aware of her emotional state – we’ll never know. But that’s the beauty of this piece; it captures this woman at war with herself and the world and her circumstances and immortalizes that moment.”

Empty gallery. Cordelia slowly meanders through the rooms.

Cordelia: “There were no distractions tonight, just the art. Which was an interesting change. Art is a sort of distraction, but it’s also a source of grounding, of bringing yourself to the present – if there is such a thing in purgatory – of reminding yourself what it’s like to be human and to live. The art is a wake-up call, but it’s hard to wake up when you’re not even sleeping. Maybe that’s crazy. Either way, tonight put me in a very... different mindset. It was like being on stage – as if you were about to perform a concert – any concert, any sort of performance – dance, music, singing, whatever you want. It was like being on this stage, about to perform this amazing concert—”

Sounds of stage lights coming on, an orchestra playing.

Cordelia: “– the last night of a pretty successful tour so far -- and for whatever reason, no one showed up that night. What would you do? Stand on stage? Perform anyway? Call it a night, and go home? Cry? All of the above? That’s the mindset I was in – a performer in the spotlight with no one in the audience. It was incredibly isolating, but a little bit liberating too. Because for once, I didn’t have an audience. One aspect that makes this so *frustrating* and *boring* and *monotonous* and *painful* for me is how I’m never really alone – and that’s *so* draining. But in all honesty, despite never being alone, I’m constantly lonely. Somehow I’m here, yet I’m not really *here* – it’s hard to engage and be present

when your existence has absolutely no meaning whatsoever. I try to engage and record the audio tours in advance for each exhibit – I mean, what else is there to do here? Whoever the exact architect of this little world of mine is... was an absolute mastermind. The space and the silence and the solitude and the mental confinement and the incredible quiet of the museum are somehow both welcome and unwelcome, familiar and unfamiliar. A person's mind is their one safe place, their one home – and no one can take that away from you. Or so I thought, because nowhere has ever felt so foreign.”

...

Silas: “Did you see the mirror room?”

Cordelia: “Silas, there's gotta be more to the story – what happened tonight?”

Silas: “What do you mean?”

Cordelia: “No I didn't see the mirror room and I just want to know what's going on – I don't think keeping me in the dark is in the terms and conditions of purgatory!”

Silas: “It's not, but I'm not permitted to say much else! The Council has had to review the case of one of the previous thief's visits here and the circumstances of their departure.”

Cordelia: “What?! Which thief?”

Silas: “I don't know!”

Cordelia: “Well, why is that affecting me and all of this?”

Silas, defeated and sounding sorry: “I really don't know, Cordelia.”

Cordelia: “...Will they tell you more?”

Silas: “Probably. They sent that update in the time since you last saw me, so hopefully I’ll receive more information soon.”

Cordelia, sighing: “Okay. Let me know if you find out anything else, I guess.”

Silas: “I’ll try.... Do you like the exhibit so far?”

Cordelia: “Yeah, I really do. There’s a lot to see – it feels a lot bigger than other ones. There’s a really famous Picasso in here that I like.”

Silas: “Which one?”

Cordelia: “*Girl Before a Mirror.*”

Silas: “Ah.”

Cordelia: “It kind of immortalizes Picasso’s lover, especially considering what happens to her.”

Silas: “Like the art gives her life?”

Cordelia: “Yeah, something like that.... Well, I’ll get back to my wandering – I guess I need to go see this mirror room.”

Silas: “Okay. Let me know what you think – I hear it’s supposed to be very thought-provoking.”

...

Cordelia: “‘Our earth is only one polka dot among a million stars in the cosmos.’ These are the words of brilliant Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama [Yay – yoi], who is known for her beautiful Infinity Rooms. You are about to enter one of these rooms – an impressive creation called the *Gleaming Lights of the Souls*. Created in 2008, this is one of Kusama’s

most popular works of art in her “consistent examination of infinity,” as some have called it. Because of its disorienting quality, most exhibits only allow visitors to be in the room for 30 to 60 seconds. When you look to your right, you see the vast expanse of light and dark and nothingness, reflected again and again and again... and to your left – the same. To fully experience the room, this audio tour will be silent for 60 seconds; however, at the beep, please leave the room to avoid any disorienting effects. Enjoy Yayoi Kusama’s *Gleaming Lights of the Souls*.”

Pause.

Cordelia, gasps: “Oh... wow....”

Cordelia, astounded: “This is unlike anything... It goes on forever... There are so many mirrors and little dots of light and the dark... is so dark, despite all of the specks of light. There are a million me’s too....”

Cordelia: “HELLOOOOOO!”

The word bounces and echoes around the room.

Slight patter as Cordelia lightly places her hand/fingers on one of the mirrors.

Cordelia, with a slight chuckle: “There are millions of me. An infinity of me.”

Pause.

Cordelia, quietly confused: “That one isn’t quite in sync with me. She’s moving too slow.”

She lets out a quick breath, shaking her head.

Cordelia: “I really have lost my mind.”

...

Silas: “How was it?”

Cordelia, slightly dazed: “What?”

Silas: “The infinity room.... Do you know how long you were in there?”

Cordelia: “Oh.... I have no idea actually.”

Silas: “What did you do while you were there?”

Cordelia: “I just stood there and stared.”

Silas: “At what?”

Cordelia: “Just... my reflection I guess.”

Silas, disappointed but out of concern: “Cordelia, you knew it caused disorienting effects. Why did you stay there for so long?”

Cordelia: “I don’t know. It was captivating. I thought I would finally see someone.”

Silas: “Who? See who?”

Cordelia: “Nobody.... I’m gonna sit down for a minute.”

Silas, frustrated: “I think that’s a good idea.”

...

Cordelia: “Silas has been the one constant through this whole thing; I know I frustrate and anger and sadden him, but he does the same to me. Sometimes I get so annoyed with his lack of empathy or understanding or how he never tells me anything – maybe that’s a lot to ask from a marble statue. Sometimes when I get too close to feeling like he’s on my side and not the Council’s, there’s always some quick reminder that even my sole

companion here will never be on my side. I'm fully, totally, and completely alone in the world."

...

Cordelia: "You're now looking at Parmigianino's *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror*.

Painted in 1524, it shows a young Parmigianino gazing serenely at the viewer; the perceived curvature mimics a rounded convex mirror, distorting the proportions of the image. Defying the standard linear perspective common at the time, the painting is a mirror into which the viewer sees the artist. Parmigianino created this piece when he was in his early twenties; I stole this piece when I was in my early twenties.... I remember not wanting to steal it. I thought it needed to stay in a museum; it needed the audience. Other pieces are beautiful whether we look at them or not. But the process of viewing, of being seen, of knowing you're being seen – this piece needed that. It couldn't be hidden and snuck around the world in secret – it commanded the audience's attention. I did it anyway though. I don't know why. Perhaps I wanted to take that power – the audience's power – away."

...

Enlarged sense of space – Cordelia is in a cavernous room now. She stands staring, and you can hear her quiet breathing. She takes a few steps into the room. Pause. She walks further. A little more purposeful now. She stops as she comes to the center of the room.

You hear the rustling of fabric as she runs her hand along a large curtain hanging in the middle of the room. Quiet coo of a pigeon.

Cordelia: “*the event of a thread*. By Ann Hamilton.”

Pause. Fabric rustling. She drops her hand to her side. The rustling stops.

Cordelia, to the listener: “Picture a large room – no, larger. A massive white curtain hangs in the center of the room, cutting the space in half. A dozen or so swings face either side of the curtain, hanging motionless, ominous. On one end of the room is a table with crates stacked on top; inside the crates are pigeons. On the other end of the room is another table with a pen and paper and a convex mirror positioned toward the curtain. It’s an odd work – actually, that’s unfair. It’s abstract; it’s not like what we normally see. It’s also incomplete, because it needs people. Visitors are supposed to use the swings, causing the curtain to move and bob up and down, and to listen to other people talking into microphones, transmitting through the gallery.”

Lots of space and time here. Not rushed.

Cordelia, to the listener: “‘No man is an island.’ I always hated that saying. It was like a test – ‘Oh yeah? Watch me.’ I’ve found the saying is true though, and it vexes me to no end – I don’t quite see how it’s true. But no one is completely isolated. Not even your mind is immune to others. And you begin to wonder how much of your mind is your own and how much of your mind is woven with other people, as their presence snakes its way through your thoughts and actions.”

Cordelia, to the listener: “I wanted nothing more than to be an island. So maybe I got my wish here.”

She walks over to the pigeons in their cages. They coo softly.

Cordelia, quietly, in the gallery now: “You guys are better off than I am right now. Or would you each rather be islands?”

Pause – she stares at the birds.

Cordelia, gives an amused sigh: “Don’t look at me like that.”

She lifts the door of each of the cages, allowing all of the birds to fly out.

...

Cordelia, to the listener: “I never minded being alone. I never minded not being close to anyone. I never minded feeling like it was me against the world. I think it made me feel like I was *more* – like I was better than everyone else for it, somehow. It was easier to villainize everyone else than to admit any of my stubbornness or selfishness or desires. All I knew was that I was good at figuring things out and solving the puzzle of each heist, so when I couldn’t ‘solve’ life, I figured that wasn’t a reflection on me, but on life itself.”

...

Cordelia slowly walks through the gallery. Her footsteps eventually stop.

Silas, gently: “Well?”

Cordelia: “It’s perfect.”

Silas: “Good.”

Cordelia: “Have they said anything to you?”

Silas: “Nope. The Council has been quiet tonight, and it’s almost midnight. I guess there’s still time for something from them.”

Cordelia: “I don’t know, I don’t think we’ll hear from them tonight. I’ll be right back though, there’s something I forgot!”

Silas: “Oh okay, well bye then!”

Cordelia runs off.

...

A hammer hits a nail, securing it into a wall. A painting comes off its place on the wall and is gently placed on the floor. An installation is pushed across the floor, and Cordelia grunts with effort. Sounds of moving and rearranging.

Eventually, it stops, and Cordelia wipes her hands together, giving a sigh of satisfaction at her handiwork.

Cordelia, with a smile: “Better. I should’ve been doing this the whole time.”

She walks away, and opens the front door of the museum, walks out, and lets it gently close behind her.