

Scene 4: Summer 1959

Thomas enters Emily's office.

THOMAS. (*Big smile on his face. Spring in his step.*) Can you talk for a moment?

EMILY. (*Businesslike.*) Yes?

THOMAS. (*Holding up a piece of paper with a message on it.*) A couple of things. The *Associated Press* is now going through *me* to try to get to you. They still want to talk to you.

EMILY. Tell them no. I am glad you came by. Would you close the door, please?

He does so.

I have been wondering: How is it, do you think, that the *Montgomery Home News* originally got wind of the acquisition of *The Rabbits' Wedding*?

THOMAS. Oh. Well, it's a good question.

EMILY. Yes. Children's literature would not seem to be foremost in the minds of editors there. Yet, they had intimate knowledge of our holdings. Jane has no record of a special request from the local media.

THOMAS. Countless people have access to information about our holdings: Librarians from around the state, the public at large...

EMILY. And you.

THOMAS. Well, sure. And me.

Beat.

And you. And Jane. And the Library Board. The staff—

EMILY. I found it odd that when the story broke in the *Home News*, you had such awareness, such memory, of the title being part of our collection. And you also told me that your family...

EMILY and THOMAS. “Subscribes to the *Montgomery Home News*.”

THOMAS. I see.

EMILY. And that morning after the story appeared, you were unusually late for work. You seemed preoccupied—I would even say “suspicious”—when you came to me with the headline.

Beat.

THOMAS. (*Delicately.*) I was late that morning, if you must know, because I am the sole caregiver of my infirm widower father, whose ailments are multiple. That morning, he soiled himself. And I had to tend to it. Do you require more explanation than that?

Beat.

I’m a private person, Miss Reed. I’m a bookish, peculiar, twenty-eight-year-old man who still lives with his father, out of obligation to him, or maybe out of fear that if I leave that house I will have to face myself and my place in this world. Do you really think that I tipped off the *Home News*? Do you think that I scrawl in a childlike hand words that are odious and ugly to me?

Beat.

Do you know who Juliette Hampton Morgan is?

EMILY. Thomas, I—

THOMAS. Juliette Hampton Morgan was a refined and intelligent Southern lady who worked as reference librarian at the City Library here in Montgomery, not long ago. Like very few white folks in town, she was troubled by the treatment of Negroes on Montgomery buses. So, during the time of Rosa Parks and the boycott, she wrote a letter to the editor that appeared in the *Montgomery Advertiser*—right there in the “Tell It to Old Grandma” column, for all to see, with her name signed to it—praising the efforts of Dr. King and his Montgomery Improvement Association and those who chose taxis and car pools and shoe leather over the bus system. And, oh, what

a little black ink in a Montgomery newspaper—any Montgomery paper—can do to stain a person. She was sneered at, at work. She was spat at, at the bus stop. She was clucked at, at church. At the drugstore, at the butcher, while crossing the street, waiting in line for a movie. Wherever she might've been, the good, white men and women of Montgomery called her all manner of names. And they didn't throw just epithets—they threw bricks. Good Southern bricks from good Southern clay, right clear through the windows of the house that she shared with her mother. One night, she pulled back the lace curtain to find a cross blazing orange on their front lawn. The next day, Miss Juliette Hampton Morgan abruptly quit the City Library. The push of the world was taking a toll on her. Her high blood pressure was higher than usual. That night, at bedtime, the thin-skinned, deep-thinking Miss Morgan took her prescription pills—perhaps one or two extra, for reinforcement—and switched off the lamp. And never woke to see another morning in Montgomery.

Beat.

I know this story by heart because my first job after college was at the City Library, where I was assistant to Miss Juliette Hampton Morgan. I was her witness, Miss Reed. Unable to guide her or protect her—or save her. Her story is my story, too, Miss Reed. But even without me telling it, you should have thought better of me.

EMILY. Thomas—

THOMAS. When you put that children's book on the reserve shelf, it reminded me of her, and it clarified for me what it is we do here. You protect the books, Miss Reed, and I protect you.

She extends her hand.

EMILY. Here, now, Thomas, take my hand and know that I am sorry. Please. I was wrong. I regret the accusation.

THOMAS. No, you don't have to—

They shake hands. She does not let go.

EMILY. I do. I was wrong. And I am sorry. Look at me, please.

He does.