

Cumulonimbus

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SETTING: An empty stage.

AT RISE: The stage is dark and we hear the sound of a storm.

PROLOGUE

(The sound of howling wind and occasional thunder. Muffled voices can be heard screaming, but we can't understand them. Suddenly the sounds get sucked up and we hear RHI's voice in the dark.)

RHI:

There were so many storms before the one.
Once upon a time she watched them with me.

(Lights come up on RHI sitting center writing in a notebook. The sound of thunder. GEORGIA calls from offstage.)

GEORGIA (off):

Rhi? Where are you?

RHI:

There are a million specific things I could tell you about myself to help you understand this story, but there is only one I can think of now: I was *different*.
And this isn't to say different in a way that means normalcy is in any means...well, normal. I didn't know what *different* really meant.

And to that effect I don't think that most people know what it actually means.
Different is a word we use for people who like to think in a way that doesn't fit into a pre-programmed, *specific* model of what Society is supposed to be.
But those rules are, for lack of a better word, stupid. And I refuse to subscribe to them.

I think my weather obsession started when I was twelve.
I was in seventh grade science class and we were learning about weather and the layers of the atmosphere; we did a whole week on clouds.
And I don't really know why, but I got really excited about it.

I had no prior knowledge of the types of clouds or anything, but for some reason it just clicked and I became obsessed.

I still can name all the different types of clouds from highest to lowest.

Cirrus, cirrocumulus, cirrostratus, altocumulus, altostratus, stratocumulus, nimbostratus, stratus, and cumulus.

The largest ones that can go all the way up to five miles high are, of course my favorite, cumulonimbus.

Those are the ones that cause storms.

(GEORGIA enters in the dim light and stares at her.)

On the day of The Storm I was...young.

I can't remember my exact age. Isn't that funny?

If you had known me then you would have called me a bookworm.

I was always reading and studying, and trying to figure things out that I couldn't understand.

I knew that I could fix this with books, so I did.

It's what mom did.

But mom was gone.

And I didn't understand that as well as I wanted to, so I spent that summer hiding in my room and read and write about it.

It drove Georgia nuts.

(GEORGIA stops her tidying.)

GEORGIA:

Did you hear a word I just said?

RHI:

What?

GEORGIA:

Did you hear what I said?

RHI:

I'm sorry.

GEORGIA:

Dinner's ready. Wash your hands.

(She starts to leave, but thinks of something she needs to say.)

Ok?

RHI:

Ok.

GEORGIA:

(Turning to leave.)

Just - just hurry up, it's getting cold.

(She exits. RHI makes sure that GEORGIA is gone and then pulls a picture out of her notebook and stares at it. The radio crackles to life and gives us an unintelligible weather report. GEORGIA clicks off the radio.)

GEORGIA:

Damn it.

(She rushes in and out of rooms in a panic, grabbing blankets, flashlights, etc. while calling for her sister. RHI enters and watches her.)

Rhi!

RHI:

She turned into Mom when she panicked.

I could hear her "bustling" all the way from the other side of the house.

Times like this is when my full name would come out.

RHI and GEORGIA:

Rhiannon!

RHI:

She knew I hated it, but it meant things were serious.

GEORGIA:

Come down here!

RHI:

I've been here!

GEORGIA:

Take these.

(She thrusts the blankets into RHI's arms.)

Go to the basement.

RHI:

But what's going on?

GEORGIA:

There is a storm, now can you please - ?

RHI:

A tornado?

GEORGIA:

Yes, just -

(RHI drops the blankets and runs off.)

What are you doing!?

RHI:

Hang on!

I ran back upstairs to get *my* essentials: My books and notebooks.

But before I could get to my room I stopped.

Georgia was shouting from downstairs, but I couldn't hear her.

There were spots of rain on the window.

And I walked up and just put my hand on the glass.

(The rain intensifies and then is sucked back out.)

Sorry! Sorry. I'm ready.

(She struggles to juggle the books and the blankets and makes for the basement, unceremoniously dropping them as soon as she's in place. GEORGIA, annoyed, grabs a blanket and makes her own area. RHI does the same on the opposite side of the stage. After a few moments GEORGIA looks up from the book and watches RHI write.)

The basement hadn't been swept in a long time.
I was absorbed in my notebook, but I felt her eyes on me.
There was a long time I just pretended to read, but the words began to blur.
It felt like she stared at me for five hundred years.

It went on like that for a long time.
And so did the silence.
A seemingly endless ping-pong leaving the air heavy with things unsaid.
I don't ever remember looking at the clock, but it was undoubtedly night for hours.
She is the one who finally broke the silence.

GEORGIA:

What's in there? What are you writing?

RHI:

It's research.

GEORGIA:

For what?

RHI:

My journal.

GEORGIA:

You have to research for your journal?

RHI:

It's just - weather patterns, ok?

(GEORGIA stares at her.)

RHI (contd.):

You don't get it.

GEORGIA:

Weather patterns...

RHI:

You don't get it!

GEORGIA:

Honestly no I - I don't.

RHI:

(She never really did.)

GEORGIA:

Why are you so weird about this?

RHI:

It's not weird.

(Looking up.)

It's not weird.

GEORGIA:

That's not what I -

RHI:

Whatever.

(Beat. She goes back to her notes.)

GEORGIA:

Rhi...

RHI:

Never mind.

GEORGIA:

Look, I'm worried about you. Ever since –

RHI:

I can't concentrate.

GEORGIA:

I -

RHI:

Leave me alone!

(GEORGIA sighs. Beat.)

I've gained this uncanny amount of knowledge since that night.
It scares me a little, but really, what do I have to be afraid of?
I wish we didn't have to grieve at the same time.
I wish we could have taken turns.
But I was still a kid. I didn't know.
What was I supposed to do?

George?

(GEORGIA looks at her.)

I'm sorry. I'm so, so, sorry.

And I would hug her.

(They do.)

I'm not sure if I ever really said it.
If I could go back I would have made sure I did.
If I could go back I would have held on longer.
If I could go back I would have tried so much harder to let go.

(They go back to their original positions.)

But all I actually said was 'hey.'

Hey.

She looked up.
I held out my notebook.
She took it. She read.

(Music.)

GEORGIA:

I have recurring dreams about tornados. I've never looked it up in a dream book or anything, like a dream interpretation book. And I don't think it's because I'm stressed all the time, even though I am... I just think it's because I'm a huge fan of natural disasters. I don't like seeing people hurt or anything! It's nothing like that, I swear!

RHI:

It's not!

RHI and GEORGIA:

I just really like weather.

(Beat. RHI nods for her to go on.)

GEORGIA:

I'd like to be lightning.

(RHI acts this out as GEORGIA reads.)

*To swallow the electricity and let it turn me into something new.
And I wouldn't catch on fire because it's been a part of me all along.
And I would be so beautiful -
And I could FLY!
I could leave trails across the sky -
Turn sand to glass
Shatter windows and boards with my energy -
Be feared and admired -
I'd be everything I'm not in real life!*

And everyone who ever doubted me, everyone who ever laughed at me, they'd just stand there in awe of how beautiful and confident and electric I've become. I'd hover above them and look at their faces, watching me fly around with my lightning tail and my bright, crackling glow -

RHI and GEORGIA:

And I'd finally be able to say that I'm happy. That life is good. That I like myself.

(Beat.)

GEORGIA:

*But for now I'm just here...
Fantasizing about weather patterns and dreaming of chasing funnel clouds.
I'll keep hoping and praying for that day when I am, myself, a form of the weather.
As long as there are clouds in the sky, I guess I'll be just fine here on the ground.
But I'll keep on waiting for the day, and I'll never stop hoping for the spark. Because lightning can't start without a spark. And I have a really good feeling that someday...Someday I will have that spark.*

RHI and GEORGIA:

Someday I will be electric.

(Long pause.)

We were silent for a long time. This silence rang, but not in the same way as before. I think this was the moment she was starting to understand me.

Five hundred years went by.
Or at least it felt that way...
Then she looked at me.
She put her hand on top of mine.
She opened her mouth -
And the power went out.

(The lights go out and the sounds of wind and hail increase. She, scrambling finds and turns on a lantern and a flashlight.)

I wish I knew better.
I don't know why I couldn't just stay.

I just remember her screaming at me.

GEORGIA:

Rhi...RHI! Where do you think you're going!?

RHI:

I have to go.

(GEORGIA grabs her arm.)

GEORGIA:

What is wrong with you!? You'll get yourself killed!

RHI:

I don't care, I have to go!

(She wrenches free, but GEORGIA grabs her other arm.)

GEORGIA:

Rhi, no!

RHI:

Georgia, let go! I have - !

GEORGIA:

Just - come on, just stay with me!

RHI:

Georgia - !

GEORGIA:

Please!

RHI:

Let go!

(She wrenches free and exits.)

GEORGIA:

Wait, WAIT! PLEASE! RHI!

(They are outside. The memory is loud - GEORGIA screaming - the storm is nearly on top of them. Music. In slow motion REA is struck by lightning and pulled into the sky. GEORGIA screams. The chaos fades slowly. There is a long moment.)

RHI:

I heard her voice like an echo -

GEORGIA:

Stay with me...Stay with me...Stay with... Stay...

Once upon a time we were uncomplicatedly happy.

(Music slowly creeps up.)

I can still see her.

(GEORGIA sits with her back facing RHI. RHI sits with her back against GEORGIA's.)

And I'm sure she'll be ok, hopefully.
She seems like she's going to be.

GEORGIA:

I will be. Eventually.

RHI:

I really want that.
I didn't think wanting would be a thing I could still feel -

GEORGIA:

Want is deeper than us.

RHI:

Then I was a child; a child who thought that I was doing the right thing.

I didn't know.
I was just in so much pain.

GEORGIA:

You wanted to be the storm.

RHI:

I was always the storm.

GEORGIA:

You were always the storm.

(RHI looks over her shoulder briefly. She stares back ahead, smiling through tears.)

Once upon a time we were children.

GEORGIA:

Those stupid games that only made sense to us.

RHI:

She told me all the secrets of her age. I reminded her of the secrets of mine. I guess... I think I did.

GEORGIA:

You did.

RHI:

I'm pretty sure.

GEORGIA:

I promise.

RHI:

And now I'm beyond time. Beyond memories.

(Beat.)

Once upon a time we were sisters.

GEORGIA:

Well...

RHI:

Even so, we still are.

(Fade to black.)