

BAGGAGE

by Olivia Kridle

For my love of true crime, and for my parents (who I would never kill and owe everything to).

May 1999. Apartment in Boston, Massachusetts. Light rain and wind outside on an overcast afternoon.

Lights up on a cramped bedroom. Center stage sits a queen-sized bed, pillows sit haphazardly on it and there is some dull-colored comforter laying on top of the mattress. Two suitcases sit open on both sides of the bed. Clothes are strewn about. On the right of the bed is a nightstand with the lamp on, emitting a dim orange light. Stage right, a closet door is open and a light glows from the closet. Upstage center left is the bedroom door, currently closed. On the door is a poster of a Monet painting. WILL, a man in his early twenties, is onstage, hastily packing clothes into his suitcase on the stage left side of the bed. He checks his watch and picks up some folded sheets of paper and slides them against the wall of his suitcase as he continues to pack.

CAROLINE. *(offstage)* Do you think I'll need a heavy jacket?

WILL. I'm not sure, but it does get pretty cold.

CAROLINE. *(offstage)* Okay.

A brief moment of silence before CAROLINE, a woman also in her early twenties, enters, clothes in hand, and approaches her suitcase on stage right.

CAROLINE. Slow down, why're you in such a rush? We're not leaving for a few hours.

WILL. *(attempts to laugh)* I know, I'm just—excited! I can't wait to get away. It's going to be so nice, we're gonna have such a good time.

CAROLINE. *(smiles)* I'm excited, too. *(pulling a dress from the stack of clothes)* What about this dress? Or do you think it'll be too cold to wear a dress?

WILL. *(looking at her with a smile)* Bring it. You'll find somewhere to where it. *(beat)* That's my favorite dress on you.

CAROLINE. I know it is.

WILL. Oh, yeah?

CAROLINE. Yeah.

WILL grabs CAROLINE and they kiss passionately for a moment. They lay back on the bed as best they can, accommodating the suitcases and clothes strewn about. They continue laying for the next part, side by side, looking at the ceiling. CAROLINE touches the dress as it lays nearby her.

CAROLINE. ...

WILL. ...

CAROLINE. ...

CAROLINE grabs the dress and holds it up.

CAROLINE. Do you remember the first time I wore this?

WILL. At that party, the one where you slipped and fell. And then I had to carry you outside and get you ice for you 'cause you hit your head. But they didn't have ice, so we just used cold beer bottles.

CAROLINE. *(laughs)* Good memory. God, that was so embarrassing. *(pause)* You know I still have a little scar from it.

WILL. Really? Where?

CAROLINE. *(lifting her leg and searching)* Riiiiight there. See it?

WILL sits up and holds her leg to get a better look.

WILL. I didn't even know you had scratched yourself.

CAROLINE. Yeah, I didn't know until the next day. I had a little blood trail down my leg. So gross.

WILL. You're such a baby about that stuff.

CAROLINE. *(jokingly offended)* I am not.

WILL. *(poking fun)* Yeah, you kinda are.

CAROLINE sticks her tongue out at WILL. WILL, still holding CAROLINE'S leg, starts to squeeze her calf. It tickles her, making her squirm and laugh. She jumps around and he won't let up. They're both laughing.

CAROLINE. *(overlapping)* Oh my god! Stop! It tickles! No! Stop!

WILL. *(overlapping)* Sorry, what was that? "It feels good"? Ok, I'll keep going then!

CAROLINE sits up, shaking her leg around, trying to get out of WILL's clutches, but before she can get away, WILL kisses her again, more nonchalantly and lovingly. After a moment, CAROLINE breaks the kiss. They look at one another, content.

CAROLINE. So, what did you plan for us to do while we're there?

WILL. Well, I have a couple ideas, but we can do whatever you want. You're the one that's always wanted to go.

CAROLINE. But, I want to hear what you planned. You've been so excited about it. *(pause)* Pleeeeease?

WILL. Alright, alright. There's a lot of things we can see. We can do all the touristy things and go see the Tower of London and the palace and the Abbey. Or we can go to the countryside and see Stonehenge. But, we can do anything you want. I want this trip to be for you, you know...to get your mind off things. It's not like anyone's gonna stop you.

WILL begins packing again, but watches her as he continues to pack. She is sitting quietly, something is clearly weighing heavily on her mind. WILL hesitates, then sits next to her, putting his arms around her in an attempt to comfort her.

WILL. Care?

CAROLINE. ...

WILL. ...

CAROLINE. This—what you've planned—is so wonderful. But I feel like I should stay here...

WILL. Why?

CAROLINE. It's just—I don't think it's a good idea.

WILL. Why wouldn't it be?

CAROLINE. People would think it's weird for me to just leave on vacation out of nowhere.

WILL. It's not out of nowhere, you need time away to process everything. People will get that.

You're their daughter, you're the closest one to it.

CAROLINE. I am "processing it". It's just a lot to handle.

WILL. Exactly. It's not going to do any good for you to stay here right now. There's nothing here for us—you. Sorry.

CAROLINE. But what if we hear news about what happened, about who did it? What if the police need us? I don't know if it's a good idea to be leaving the country right now. I just think it's better if—

WILL. It's been three weeks and the police are still investigating. Nothing new has come out yet.

I'm sure a couple weeks away isn't going to do too much harm. It's not like they need us—

CAROLINE. But I need to be here! I need to hear it first. I don't want to be hearing it from some news channel or over the phone or something.

WILL. Whoa whoa, why are you getting so freaking out right now? You were so excited—

CAROLINE (*composing herself*) They're my parents, Will. And they were killed by some—some monster. So I'm sorry for thinking I want to stay here and get some answers firsthand. I just think it's a little ridiculous if you really expect me to just shake this off and go have a super fun vacation and act like nothing is happening.

WILL. Nothing good is going to come out of staying here. You need a distraction for now.

And...when we come back, then you can wrap yourself up in this again.

CAROLINE. I'm already in it!

WILL. I know that.

CAROLINE. (*exasperated*) No, you don't! (*breath*) The police called a couple days ago. They said there might be new evidence, maybe even DNA. And so--so I just don't think it's a good idea to just leave town if there's about to be a break in the case.

WILL. Oh...

CAROLINE. Yeah--I wanted to tell you, but you've been so excited.

WILL. Did they say when you're supposed to hear?

CAROLINE. They said they weren't sure yet, it could still be a few days, maybe even a week.

WILL. Well, we could still go...

CAROLINE. Will, seriously? I just said--

WILL. All I'm saying is that this is the only thing we've been looking forward to, and why would we just stay here and be sad when we can get out of here for a couple weeks like we planned and take a break from all of this.

CAROLINE. I can't do that. I need to stay.

WILL. I don't want everything I've been planning to go to waste. I want to go on this trip, and I want to go with you.

CAROLINE. Well, I'm not going.

WILL. Caroline...

CAROLINE. I'm. Not. Going.

WILL. *(relenting)* Fine. I'm still going to go.

CAROLINE. *(quietly incredulous)* Are you serious?

WILL. I don't know what you want me to say!

CAROLINE. I want you to stay with me and help me through this! I don't want to be by myself here.

WILL. *(pause, thinking)* I wouldn't even be gone long. Maybe it'll be better--you'll be able to give your full attention to the investigation.

CAROLINE. Please, Will. Don't go. I need you here with me.

WILL. *(pause, thinking before giving up)* Okay. I know. I understand. I can't imagine what this is like. I'm sorry. I'm here for you. I love you.

They sit in silence for a moment as WILL holds CAROLINE. Then, he rises from the bed and picks up his suitcase, placing it on the bed in his spot. He opens it, and begins removing clothes from it. CAROLINE has composed herself and looks up at him from her seated position.

CAROLINE. *(quietly)* Thank you.

WILL. *(forlorn, but genuine)* Of course.

WILL picks up the clothes he's put on the bed and turns to carry them to his closet, offstage left. CAROLINE stands, preparing herself to unpack. She goes to shut WILL's suitcase and put it on the floor; but before she does, she spots the folded papers in his suitcase. Curious, she opens them and begins to read. She realizes what they are.

CAROLINE. *(calling offstage to WILL)* Hey, Will? Why do you have these?

WILL. *(offstage)* Have what?

CAROLINE. These letters?

It is quiet. WILL reenters the room. He looks at CAROLINE and the papers in her hand.

WILL. *(smoothly)* You wrote them to me. Why wouldn't I keep them?

CAROLINE. But why would you pack them? *(WILL is trying to find words.)* You've read these ones, right?

WILL. Yeah, of course I have. I've read all of your letters.

CAROLINE. So you know what these ones say.

WILL. Yeah, I—

CAROLINE. *(upset, reading from the letters)* "Today, my mother said that if something terrible ever happened to them, she knew I would become a worthless adventurer."

CAROLINE looks at WILL. He looks back at her, waiting.

WILL. *(pause)* I don't see the problem.

CAROLINE. Really? *(looking for another passage)* "We can either wait till we graduate and then leave them behind or we can get rid of them soon."

CAROLINE looks up at WILL. He is reactionless. She continues searching for another line to read.

CAROLINE. "Could there be a way to control my parents, like hypnotism or voodoo, to get them to die? My obsession with the idea of them dying seems to be causing problems between them and I..."

They look at each other in silence.

CAROLINE. *(impatiently)* Why do you have these in your suitcase? Of all the letters I've written you, why would you keep these ones with you?

WILL. Care, I can explain.

CAROLINE. *(scoffs)* Yeah? Please do.

WILL. I...uh...

CAROLINE. *(pause)* Why, Will?

WILL. I...I thought it would be cathartic, for you to read them. I was thinking when we were away, we could have a night where you read these letters—we could read them together—and then maybe it would make you feel better—less...guilty—I don't know. And then after we had read them, you could tear them up, burn them, just destroy them. I thought that it'd maybe give you closure or something.

CAROLINE. Why couldn't you just say that when I asked why you had them?

WILL. Really? I mean, look at how you're reacting right now.

CAROLINE. Like a human being?

WILL. I was trying to gauge how you'd respond.

CAROLINE. Like I'm some experiment? And what, you didn't expect this?

WILL. No. You've been so quiet, so sad. I didn't expect you to get so upset about it. But, I see now I was wrong.

CAROLINE. Yeah. You were. You really thought me reading all of these things I've written about my parents would make me feel better?

WILL. I thought, maybe—

CAROLINE. It wouldn't.

WILL. How do you know?

CAROLINE. I just do! Because it doesn't make me feel better having read them just now.

WILL. They were your words. I didn't know how you were feeling. I didn't know if you felt guilty or something.

CAROLINE. Then why didn't you just ask!

WILL. Well, I thought the change of location would maybe distance you from—

CAROLINE. What the fuck were you thinking, Will.

WILL. I'm sorry, Care. I really didn't think you'd get this worked up about it.

CAROLINE. No?

WILL. No. I wouldn't have packed them if I thought they wouldn't have helped you.

CAROLINE. Well, if you think getting rid of them would help me so much, why don't we just do it right now?

CAROLINE goes to tear the letters, but WILL grabs her wrists and stops her.

CAROLINE. What are you doing?

WILL. Stop.

CAROLINE. Let go of me, Will. *(no release)* Will, let go.

WILL. Stop.

CAROLINE. Get off.

WILL. No.

CAROLINE. What is happening?

WILL. I'll let go if you stop.

CAROLINE. What—

WILL. Give me the fucking letters NOW, Caroline.

CAROLINE. You're scaring me, Will. *(pause, no release)* Stop it. You're hurting me.

WILL. Please. Just give me the letters.

CAROLINE lets the letters slip out of her hands. WILL releases her quickly and picks up the pages, smoothing them out a bit before folding them neatly and pocketing them carefully.

CAROLINE. Why are those suddenly so important to you? You were excited for me to burn them a minute ago.

WILL. I just think now isn't the right time to do it.

CAROLINE. Why not?

WILL. Because you're upset! You're not in the right headspace for closure.

CAROLINE. "Right headspace"? What kind of bullshit is that?

WILL. I just mean you shouldn't get rid of this stuff just because you're mad. You have to let it impact you.

CAROLINE. Why are you acting like some therapist? Like you can just read my mind?

WILL. Because I know you.

CAROLINE. Well, you know what? It has "impacted me"! It's made me feel gross and angry. So why not tear them up? Maybe it'll make me feel better afterwards and then you can be right!

WILL. That doesn't have anything to do with this.

CAROLINE. Oh, yeah?

WILL. Yes. It doesn't.

CAROLINE. I'm not so sure.

WILL. *(pent-up frustration)* God, you're just like your mom sometimes. You know that, right?

CAROLINE. *(taken aback)* What does that mean?

WILL. Nothing.

CAROLINE. No. What? I wanna hear it.

WILL. It means you both always have to blow things up and make them bigger than they are. Not everyone has to have a hidden agenda all the time.

CAROLINE. Wow.

WILL. Oh, come on, Care. I didn't mean it to be mean. You know that.

CAROLINE. Do I?

WILL. You both just overreact and let everything get to you.

CAROLINE. ...

WILL. ...

CAROLINE. Where do you get off thinking that you can say something like that about me? And my mom! She's fucking dead, Will. Someone stabbed her to death. You don't get to say shit like that about her. That's my mom!

WILL. How much of a mom was she to you, really?

CAROLINE. *(pause)* What?

WILL. You told me so many stories about growing up, about how controlling she was and how you hated being around her—

CAROLINE. She's still my mom, Will. Just because I said those things and felt that way doesn't mean I didn't love her.

WILL. I know, but—

CAROLINE. You're being insensitive. You don't understand how hard this is.

WILL. *(frustrated)* Well—well, what about your dad?

CAROLINE. What about him?

WILL. You were always saying that he was rough with you, especially when you did something wrong—

CAROLINE. He just wanted me to do well. He was in the army, it makes sense—

WILL. It's not an excuse for him to hit you, Caroline. *(WILL is now boiling in anger.)* Nobody should be allowed to lay a hand on you or think they can control you. This is your life.

CAROLINE. I know that—

WILL. You shouldn't be hurting so much over these people.

CAROLINE. My parents.

WILL. I know that. But does it matter who it is? If someone treats you like shit, you shouldn't let them.

CAROLINE. They weren't shitty to me. They were just being parents, Will. They made mistakes and weren't always nice all the time, but they're my parents.

WILL. My parents never hit me. Never laid a hand on me. It's bullshit that you think that the shit they put you through is them just being parents. It's abuse.

CAROLINE. *(trying to process)* What is happening right now?

WILL. I'm just saying that them being your parents is not an excuse to accept cruelty.

CAROLINE. You're being ridiculous. It wasn't cruelty—

WILL. Am I? You told me once that your dad slapped you and locked you in your room all day for getting a C on an exam—

CAROLINE. And I never got a C again!

WILL. That's not the point. You told me your mom once burned you with her cigarette because you snuck out of the house to hang out with your friends.

CAROLINE. Ok, you're right, that one isn't good, but—

WILL. And a month ago, you came home crying to me after seeing them because they told you they weren't paying for you to be "some poor writer" and they had taken your story from your hands and ripped it to shreds in front of you and then threw it in your face. Remember how heartbroken you were? And how you stayed up all night crying and telling me you were going to get away from them as soon as you had the chance? *(pause)* How can you just accept it? These people didn't care at all about you or your wellbeing. They just used you as a trophy. Like if they had a daughter that lived up to their standards and whatever they wanted her to, they'd have something to show for themselves.

CAROLINE. Just stop it, would you? You're the one that's being cruel.

WILL. I'm just trying to tell you that you deserve to be treated better. You deserve to be treated kindly and with respect and you should get to live your own life.

CAROLINE. I know that.

WILL. So why would you defend these people?

CAROLINE. "These people" are my parents, Will. They're not some fucking strangers I met on the street.

WILL. Well, they may as well be!

CAROLINE. Well, they didn't deserve to die! Maybe they were awful and there were times that I hated them, but I don't think—

WILL. Enough. I don't wanna talk about this anymore. We clearly don't see eye-to-eye on this.

CAROLINE. What? So you think my parents *deserved* to be murdered?

WILL. No.

CAROLINE. Tell me the truth, Will. *(pause)* Say it.

WILL. I don't know. Maybe.

CAROLINE. Maybe?

WILL. *(caving and scrambling)* I mean, you'd talk about how terrible they were and how sad you were to have them as parents. You said you didn't care if they weren't around. You said that you couldn't wait to move away and not have to think about them anymore. You said that you felt like they were suffocating you and that they were controlling and mean—

CAROLINE. I didn't want them to be killed though!

WILL. Well, I thought you did!

CAROLINE. ...

WILL. ...

CAROLINE...

WILL. ...

CAROLINE. ...

WILL. ...

CAROLINE. What?

WILL. ...

CAROLINE. ...

WILL. ...

CAROLINE. (*realization*) Will...

CAROLINE looks at WILL in horror.

CAROLINE. Oh my God. No. Was it—it was you? You're the one?

WILL. We need to go.

CAROLINE. You did this?

WILL. Caroline.

CAROLINE. (*overlapping*) How could you do this?

WILL. (*overlapping*) I wasn't going to let them hurt you anymore.

CAROLINE. (*overlapping*) It can't be you.

WILL. (*overlapping*) They were killing you.

CAROLINE. (*overlapping*) When did you even—

WILL. (*overlapping*) I did it for you.

CAROLINE. (*overlapping*) I don't understand how you could—

WILL. Because I love you!

CAROLINE. ...

WILL. ...

CAROLINE. You—you're a murderer.

WILL. (*pause*) No. I—I thought it was what you wanted.

CAROLINE. ...

WILL. ...

CAROLINE. What the FUCK gave you that idea?

WILL. (*scrambling*) You were so unhappy, they were killing you, I just—I thought—

CAROLINE. (*quietly*) Oh my God. So, what? You just thought you'd —

WILL. It wasn't my plan in the beginning—

CAROLINE. But it was your plan at some point?

WILL. (*frustrated*) No, just listen to me—I didn't mean to do it at first. I didn't want to.

CAROLINE. Oh, so what? You just accidentally killed them then?

WILL. (*exasperated*) Yes! I mean, sort of. I went over to your parents' house to talk to them and they just wouldn't let me say anything. And, I don't know—I don't know, they told me they didn't want us to be together and they were trying to force me to leave. I just got so angry and I thought about everything you told me and I just lost it.

CAROLINE. ...

WILL. You're better off without them.

CAROLINE. So you murdered them. (*pause*) That wasn't your decision to make, Will. Why did you think that you get to decide if they live or die? You don't know them.

WILL. You weren't living. They weren't supporting you in something that really mattered to you.

CAROLINE. A lot of parents don't support their kid's choices. I was just frustrated. I just wanted you to listen to me. (*pause*) They were going to change their minds about it.

WILL. How do you know that?

CAROLINE. Because that's how parents are. They're strict and hard, but they want their kids to be happy.

WILL. You weren't happy with them around, though!

CAROLINE. Well now I don't even have the chance to see if I could be!

WILL. ...

CAROLINE. ...

WILL. ...

CAROLINE. I was fine. I was handling it.

WILL. That's not the same thing.

CAROLINE. *(pause, thinking)* When did you decide to do this?

WILL. ...That night, when you came home crying.

CAROLINE. So you did plan it.

WILL. ...

CAROLINE. God.

WILL. ...

CAROLINE. What were you even going to talk to them about?

WILL. ...

CAROLINE. ...

WILL. This is what you told me to do.

CAROLINE. I NEVER told you to do this. Why would I actually want something like this to happen?

WILL. Then why would you write the letters and—and everything you told me— *(clarifying his thoughts)* You wrote me these letters talking about how you wished your parents were dead, what was I fucking supposed to think?

CAROLINE. Oh my god, the letters didn't mean anything! I was just saying things!

WILL. *(matter-of-factly)* I did what you wanted.

CAROLINE. I can't believe you did this. You're actually insane! *(pause)* You took my parents from me. I don't have anyone.

WILL. You have me.

CAROLINE. No. Don't fucking say that to me.

WILL. I...

CAROLINE. ...

WILL. I was going to tell you about all of this when we got there, I swear.

CAROLINE. *(her heart slowly breaking as she pieces this all together)* And, what? You didn't think I'd be mad if you took me on a romantic getaway? You thought you could just take me away and everything would be fine?

WILL. ...I guess, I don't know. I thought you would just be happier.

CAROLINE. *(mulling over the word)* Happier.

WILL. I can't change it now, Care. I'm sorry. I thought I was doing what was right for you.

CAROLINE. ...

WILL. ...

CAROLINE. I know.

CAROLINE takes a last look at him, then turns to leave. WILL grabs her arm. CAROLINE tries to get free.

CAROLINE. Let GO, Will.

WILL. Please don't go. Stay with me. Or—or go with me.

CAROLINE. I can't. I won't.

WILL. Yes, you can. I love you. You don't have to worry.

CAROLINE. I can't—*(correcting herself)* I'm not going with you. Fucking let go of me, Will!
(further struggle) Let go of me!

They struggle for a moment before CAROLINE manages to break free and runs towards the bedroom door.

WILL. *(desperate, last attempt)* I have the letters, remember?

CAROLINE freezes as she realizes what he's said.

CAROLINE. What about them?

WILL. I mean, you say a lot of things in them.

WILL takes a letter from his pocket and unfolds it to read.

WILL. *(reading)* "I keep thinking of ideas, trying to come up with a plan. They live far out of town, no one would know if they were gone for a while..."

WILL looks at CAROLINE, as if daring her to move or fight.

CAROLINE. ...

WILL. ...

CAROLINE. ...

WILL. ...

CAROLINE. *(struggling for words)* You wouldn't really—

WILL. The police don't have anyone for it yet.

CAROLINE. You can't honestly believe that the police would—

WILL. You're the one who'd have the motive here, Care. Not me. They don't have any other evidence. This would be a big break for them.

CAROLINE. You said...you said you did this for me, but you'd really—

WILL. I won't have to if you come with me.

CAROLINE. *(pause)* Why would you do this?

WILL. Because I need you, Care. I'm sorry it has to be this way, I really am. You know now, so I need you to trust me on this. *(pause)* You love me, don't you? I did this because I love you. You have to know that. I need you to know that. I really do love you. So, come with me.

CAROLINE is falling for it. She's nearly under WILL's spell, but then she realizes it may be a trick.

CAROLINE. *(pause, searching)* I—I have to leave. I need to get out of here. I can't look at you—I can't be near you right now.

CAROLINE exits quickly through the bedroom door. WILL tries to go after her, but he freezes. A realization washes over him and he puts the suitcase on his bed and begins putting clothes hastily back into it. He realizes what he's doing, that there's no escape, and he gives up, sinking onto the bed. After a few moments, CAROLINE comes back to the door and stands in the doorway, phone in hand. CAROLINE looks at WILL; he does not see her. She slowly makes her way back into the room until she stands beside him where he's sitting.

CAROLINE. Please tell me this isn't true.

WILL. ...

CAROLINE. ...

WILL. ...

WILL turns to look at her and nods. He scoots over on the bed to allow her to sit down. CAROLINE falls carefully into the spot, unable to hold herself up. The couple look at each other for a moment. WILL reaches for CAROLINE's hand. CAROLINE puts the phone into WILL's lap.

CAROLINE. Please...for me.

WILL looks at the phone and back at CAROLINE. Lights down.