

An Odyssey- Charlotte Richards

For seven months I've walked the everyday walk, past the same buildings and signs, same on the way out and same again home, to my job at Odyssey Bookshop in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. The old run-down red brick building on the corner of 7th Avenue and the main street is owned by an old Greek couple Adonis and Elena.

Snow's falling, my freckled cheeks are frozen cold, red, and blushy. The winter weather of Christmas in Brooklyn had hit hard. A long black puffer jacket, a green beanie, purple scarf, and gloves, I'd lost count of the number of layers. Earphones in with Lover's Carvings by Bilbo blasting, I sink into the atmosphere around me, drowning in the adrenalin of New York City.

Stapled tight to my chest was my new journal, I hold it close whilst running with the bustling stampede of Brooklyn pedestrians. Waiting at the crossing surrounded by street art, bright and juvenile, I see my sanctuary ahead.

It's a small building, an observer looking out to the busy New York hum. It has rickety wooden shutters and a broken sign in bold typewriter letters, "Learn from the wisdom of the wise".

The wind chimes for a doorbell peal, as I open the old crackled red door into another world. As I remove my beanie my hair bounces up into its natural shape. I walk into work, 8:30 sharp as always and flip the closed sign over to open.

I can smell the ink of freshly printed books, overly strong coffee, and damp-smelling books. The faint sound of classical French music coming from the heart of the store. Books are stacked in high, thick towers with a thin path that leads further into the store. No unsold book discarded. The books' pages yellow, rather than white.

Adonis was an old unstable man. As our eyes meet, his eyes, hollowed and light blue objectified by a pair of big round glasses, his bellowing voice shook against the summit of books,

"Ada!"

Ada Torrisi. A weird, tanned, curly-haired 19-year-old Australian girl who hadn't mentally prepared for this cold winter morning.

Elena was Adonis's wife, she poked out from behind the counter. She has an old soul, comforting and warm, wrapped by her crocheted cardigan and dangly earrings.

These two strangers were my only family in the Northern Hemisphere. I tie my apron and twist my curly brown hair into a clip. I don't ever want the world to change because I like the way it is, "but you can't always get what you want".



Boredom didn't have time to set in as two weeks later, my whole life flipped. I was living through a pandemic.

Covid-19 had destroyed Brooklyn. The shops I walk past every day, once having lines of people going down the block are now empty, out of business, all boarded up. Brooklyn is a ghost town.

I walk into work and turn the radio on, extend the antenna and turn up the volume. Adonis and Elena don't get in till later. The radio reads the headlines of Covid cases increasing every day.

Odyssey Bookshop is struggling to keep. Work is slow and the shop is struggling to stay afloat from sinking in Brooklyn rent. We haven't had a single in-store customer in too long.

"Independent bookstores across the country face an immediate, uncertain and difficult future" Government assistance has dried up. This pandemic had impacted small businesses all over and I was experiencing it first-hand.

My phone lights up.

"20% of independent bookshops across the country are in danger of closing"

I felt an increasing sense of panic. This bookshop is already struggling, when will we have to lock up for good.

Adonis creeps through with his loud walking stick, Elena behind him. They look worried. Adonis was limping and sick. He's deteriorating now, getting weak and nearing the end of his life at eighty-seven.

I'm guided through a slim trail between the towers of books, for a conversation I've been dreading for weeks.

"Books aren't groceries or rent. People aren't willing to buy books!"

The bank told them they have to close the bookshop in four weeks and sell the building if they can't make four thousand dollars in the next two weeks. That was impossible.

The conversation was fiery and I felt my cheeks going patchy red from anger. In reality, there was no other solution, this was the last resort. I thought about putting the shop online but people were buying books from Amazon and big corporations for even cheaper and newer. We need people to support small businesses just like ours, but we've tried everything.

They said they would never want 'to let me go'. What if I chose to? Surely Elena couldn't run this place by herself? The story of this little bookshop was about to end - chapter concluding. The binding of the book about to break.



Four weeks later the doors finally closed, its embracing arms released me, the four thousand dollars wasn't possible.

Adonis, Elena, and I were standing outside the old red door, I put the key in the lock and turned it to the right, click, one of my favorite books had come to an end.

I remember that sad, sweet smell, its pages, the bookshop of my youth. I experienced the start of a new chapter to my life in that building and the end of Adonis and Elena's.

Tears were freezing as they ran down my cheeks. Elena and Adonis embraced me with their warm wrinkled bodies, I tried to take this moment in as I knew this was goodbye, maybe not forever but for a

while. I watched them walk away into the foggy distance with the last trolley of books. I didn't know what was going to happen to Adonis and Elena.

Sitting on my suitcase in front of the red door, it's cold and winter is here once again. Snow's falling as I'm waiting for my taxi to take me to the airport. I'm going home.

Looking back at the little red-bricked bookshop on the corner, through the fogged window of the boot of the taxi, I reflect on everything it's endured since I moved here. I've watched the soul of this building collapse and the lives of my closest friends crumble. I never wanted the world to change because I like the way it was.