

Compelled Dual: Desert Song

Season One, Episode Four

Vampire Money

Cast:

Barry: Keeper, NPCs and voice of Kaelen

Al: Keeper, NPCs and voice of Damien

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[CAMERA CLICKS, REELS ROLL]

Kaelen: Grandma!

Bridget: ...This is going to be an adventure; I can already tell. What's up, kid?

Kaelen: I have a couple of questions for you!

Bridget: [laughs] Todd! Your firstborn has a couple of questions!

Todd (distantly): Oh, God. Gimme a minute!

Bridget: [scoffs] Predictable... What the hell is that?

Kaelen: It's a digital camera. I got it from school. I'm preserving our family's story for posterity.

Bridget: Yeah? Well, piss off, Spielberg; you can't afford me.

Todd (distantly): Mom!

Bridget: What?! Are you mad? Take it up with my agent! Kaelen, sweetheart, what's this about?

Kaelen: It's a project for Gifted & Talented. We're doing Journalism. She said we have to interview someone in our family, get a good story, and then write about it.

Bridget: Honey, there aren't any good stories in this family.

Kaelen: Well, I've got a grade riding on it, so a good story isn't necessary. Just an interesting one.

Bridget: [sighs] Alright, alright. I'll tell you a story. Turn that damned thing off, though. I hate how I look on-camera.

Kaelen: Okay!

[CAMERA CLICKS, REELS STOP]

[THEME MUSIC PLAYS]

B: Greetings, creatures of the night, and welcome back to Compelled Dual: Desert song. I'm Barry.

A: And I'm... Al? He didn't tell me he was gonna say that.

B: And we are a spooky, *spooky* single-player, co-GMed TTRPG actual-play podcast. I - I know this episode's going up in December, but I'm bitter about Halloween being over, and... it's a horror podcast, babey. It fits.

A: Anyway. Previously, on Compelled Dual: Desert Song.

[RECAP STARTS]

Luke: [sighs] Okay. Plan A was *run*, and that was a disaster, so, onto plan B.

Damien: [scoffs] Okay, I'll bite. What's plan B?

Luke: Hide.

Ellis: I'm in the airport *right now*, you *heinous bitch*.

Kaelen: Hello, Ellis.

Ellis: [mockingly] *Hello, Ellis*. You owe me *nine hundred dollars*, and the time and date of your death is *tomorrow morning*.

Luke: Maybe we should go back to the city. I mean, it's the last place they're gonna expect us to go. And the good thing about Vegas is... that it's a good place to disappear.

Bev: Well, Kaelen O'Connell, as I live and breathe.

Kaelen: Yeah, must be nice.

A: [stifling laughter]

Bev: Well, there's no such thing as a free lunch, but...

A: And then she taps a *Help Wanted* sign on the counter.

Bev: There is such a thing as an employee discount.

Luke: What's your *deal*, anyway? Why are you helping us?
What's the catch?

B: Dahlia, still texting, nods over at you without looking up from her phone, and goes

Dahlia: 'Cuz I wanna see what this little motherfucker does next.

Damien: You are the *weirdest* fucking woman I've ever had the fortune of meeting.

Dahlia: Thank you! Flattery gets you *everywhere*, you know.

A: I - I get in the fucking limousine.

Kaelen: All I know is that I woke up dead in the middle of the desert a few days ago. *All* of the people who *care* about me seem to think that I'm *losing my mind*. And... Damien's alive.

A: Your grandmother stubs her cigarette out in an ashtray on the table.

Bridget: Now we're getting somewhere.

[RECAP ENDS]

A: Alright, since we're not doing end-of-session experience for the interludes - for reasons that I hope are obvious - let's get right to it.

[MOODY GUITAR MUSIC STARTS]

A: Kaelen, we find you sitting at your kitchen table in the late afternoon/early evening, with the ghost of your grandmother. I imagine this is a lot to cope with. What are you doing?

B: Staring into the *fucking abyss*, thank you very much. They just bring a hand up to pinch at the bridge of their nose and sigh deeply.

Kaelen: [frustrated laugh] Oh yeah, now we're getting somewhere. Damien's alive, which apparently is a *refreshing change of pace* for people with this address!

A: Your grandmother - with an infuriating calm, for a dead woman - takes a sip of her tea, puts it down, and signs

Bridget: Go ahead, sweetheart, let it out. We don't have anything *important* to discuss.

Kaelen: I will! I *will* let it out! Thank you! I'm a zombie. A revenant. A *ghoul*. One of the shambling undead! That's enough to make *anybody* have a rough fucking day, alright, but we've gotta *ice* that cake with the fact that I don't remember anything about this place, or the people that used to live here, except for the random flashes of *nightmare visions* that I've been getting; what the fuck is up with *that*?! You know, "Ooga-booga, dead scary lady in the bathtub. But hey, take it easy, Kaelen; you're scaring your family and friends." Oh, I'm *sorry*. Is my *decedent status* inconvenient for people? 'Cuz last time I checked, I was the one that completely checked out for two weeks, and then came back to my whole fucking *life* - undeath - in a shambles because I *lost my job*, and then this morning my *fucking washer* breaks. And I get it, alright, I get that I'm overreacting to common everyday life issues and I should probably be talking to my *psychiatrist* about them instead of a *ghost*, but any port in a storm, okay? So yes, *I will go on*.

A: Your grandma reaches into her pocket, pulls out a pack of ghost cigarettes, lights one, and does not say anything.

B: Kaelen just freezes mid-sign, arms splayed wide apart, big emotions, closes her eyes, shakes out her wrists, and slowly puts her hands back at a more normal position.

Kaelen: I'm fine. I'm cool, I'm fine.

A: The ghost of Bridget O'Connell raises her eyebrows, and then signs.

Bridget: Alright. Got it outta your system?

Kaelen: Yes. I'm normal now.

A: She snorts, and signs

Bridget: You weren't *that* even when you were alive.

Kaelen: So I've been told! Speaking of that... I - I gotta be real with you, Grandma. What the hell is up with our house?

A: She takes a drag off of her cigarette, and then signs

Bridget: My house is... [sighs] How do I put this? Kind of like fly paper for... the *departed*, we'll say.

Kaelen: Oh. Okay, cool, so it was *like this* before I bit the dust? I'm just checking, to make sure that *I'm* not the problem *all* the time.

Bridget: Oh, we were all *around* before, but... You clawing your way back from the great beyond has, uh, given the place a little more *juice* than usual.

B: Kae's eye twitches.

Kaelen: So what you're saying is that I'm the problem *all* the time.

Bridget: I didn't say *that*. The combination of, uh, *this house* and somebody coming back from the dead would've been... a bit of a disaster no matter who it was. It's at least as much *my* fault as it is *yours*, but... My house, my rules. Everybody knows better than to try to fuck with me.

Kaelen: [scoffs] Yeah, sure. Alright, I can do the whole *mutual respect in a shared living space* thing, but if you try to give me a curfew, I *am* calling the Ghostbusters.

Bridget: I think calling in a shared *living space* might be...

Kaelen: Low blow. Anyway, I don't know if you want to have a family meeting about the whole Damien situation, but, given that we know that he's *alive*, and he's no longer in your house, I would like to rectify that situation. I just don't know *how*.

A: She takes another drag off her cigarette, taps it out in the ashtray.

Bridget: One problem with that... Seeing as I couldn't keep him in this house, I can't really... do much *outside* of my jurisdiction.

Kaelen: [chuckles] You don't know what to do.

[MUSIC FADES]

A: Her mouth pinches into a thin line.

Bridget: Not yet, at least.

Kaelen: Cool. Cool. So you're mean *and* useless.

Bridget: *Look*, kid, we're not all walking around being *corporeal* all the time. I'm doing what I can.

A: She gestures around her, at the house generally.

Bridget: I am keeping as much at bay as I am capable of. As you *may* have noticed, there are a couple people in this house that aren't happy with you!

Kaelen: Yeah, I've been wondering what I did to piss off dear old Mom and Dad. You wouldn't happen to have any insight on *that*, would you?

A: Your grandmother's eyes flash like coins, as she takes a sip of her tea, and she gives you a slow smile, puts the cup down, and signs

Bridget: Not everybody's... as *coherent* as I am, we'll say. Like I said: My house, my rules.

Kaelen: Cool. Horrifying. I'm going back to work now!

[EERIE MUSIC STARTS]

A: As you say that, in the wake of this *unsettling* energy that has overtaken your grandmother... You start to feel this, like, *strange*, oppressive energy in the air. It is *kind of* similar to what you were feeling in the bathroom yesterday, but it feels... There's no other way to say it; whatever's in the bathroom is *angry*, whatever you are feeling *now* is nothing but pure, unadulterated *malice*. You start to hear this low -

[LOW, UNSETTLING MURMUR]

A: - unsettling murmur from the backyard. And, as you hear that - your grandmother doesn't have her hearing aids in, presumably *she* can't hear it, but she *whips* around, and you hear a low, animalistic *snarl* tear out of her, and, in the glass of the sliding door, you can only see her eyes, lighting up almost white. She pushes her chair back, and *bangs* twice with her fist on the door, and yells

Bridget [echoing, booming]: *Shut up, Art!*

[MUSIC FADES]

A: That energy drops out of the air, immediately. And then she turns around and gives you a crooked smile. Looks totally normal. Just kind of a nice lady in her late-fifties. She raises her cigarette, almost in a toast, and signs

Bridget: Oh, I should be clearing out, too. Seeing me for too long puts him in... one of his *moods*.

A: She stands up from the table and walks around it, leans down to give you a kiss on top of the head, and then steps back into your field of vision to sign.

Bridget: Have a good night at work. I'd go out through the front door.

A: And then she walks past you into the living room.

B: I'm gonna go look out the back door - I'm not opening it, and I'm checking to make sure it's locked, but I'm just gonna go peek out there and see if I see anything.

A: Nope. You don't see anything. Maybe more bugs out than usual.

B: Yeah, you know, I've already gotten one more life than most people get, at this point. I'm not gonna play with it. I'm gonna go out through the front door.

A: Sitting on the front step, leaned back against the outside wall of the house, is a young man - dark, kind of wavy, curly hair, tilting his head back against the wall. Purple lipstick, like, smeared across the corner of his mouth, like he wiped his mouth and it just left a streak. Holding a bottle of vodka. He looks up as you stand in the doorway, and you see that it is the young man that your friend Frankie identified as the uncle that your brother is named for. And, as he looks up, you see that there is a spreading red stain going down his chest. He raises the bottle at you, smirks, and says

Uncle Damien: Welcome to the trip, babygirl.

A: And disappears.

Kaelen: [exhales] I hate it here, I hate it here, I hate it here, I *hate* it here!

B: I'm going back to the laundromat. I'm gone. The only thing I'm stopping to do is, before I start the car, I'm gonna text Lydia where I am - just so she doesn't come over and find me gone and freak out.

A: Okay! You go to the laundromat. Bev is sitting up at the front, tapping her nails on the countertop. She looks up when you walk in, and gives you a little two-finger salute.

Bev: Did you remember your nametag?

Kaelen: Yes, I remembered my nametag. Can you just give me something to do where I don't have to talk to people? It's shaping up to be a *really weird* day.

Bev: We got a dry cleaning order in the back.

Kaelen: Fine. Give me ten minutes of peace and quiet and a Google search about how dry cleaning machines work, and I shall move the world.

A: She gives you a thumbs-up, jerks that thumb in the direction of a door in the back, and says

Bev: Have at it! And, uh, make sure you hold onto the nametag. It's the only part of the uniform I care about.

B: Kae squints at her, but then goes in the back room. Can I roll something to check the nametag, to see if she has it fucking *bugged* or something? 'Cuz that was *suspicious*.

A: Roll to Investigate A Mystery, I guess.

B: [dice sound] Hoo! 13.

A: On *this*?! [wheeze] I don't think this is technically how the rules work, but, back in episode two when I rolled a 13 on Read A Bad Situation, you let me ask one free question and two off the list, so I think that's just how we're gonna play it. Go ahead.

B: First question: What can it do?

A: It's a metal rectangle. That has your name on it. It has a pin on the back.

B: [laughs] Smartass. Second question: What is being concealed here?

A (laughing): It's a metal rectangle. With your name on it.

B: I'll fucking *kill* you. Third question, my open-ended one: Is there anything about this nametag that has been messed with, or is *weird* in any way?

A: Yeah, sure, um, you look at it very closely, kind of run your fingers over it, tilt it into the light, and it's a *metal rectangle* -

B: [frustrated noise]

A: - that has your name engraved into it!

B: Man, fuck you. I'm gonna Google how to work a dry cleaning machine and start on my job.

A: I'm just gonna point out *you're* the one who wanted to investigate a *nametag*.

B: Because the weird lady was being *weird* about it! There's being unreasonable, and then there's being *cautious*!

A (trying to calm down): Okay, okay, okay. You Google how to work a dry cleaning machine. You start mowing through, uh, a bunch of dry cleaning orders. You are chugging along, getting through your work, and then after *maybe* an hour and a half/two hours, Bev pokes her head in and says

Bev: Uh, there's somebody here to see you...?

Kaelen: I don't *want* to be seen.

A: Bev nods, and then says

Bev: Kaelen, I'm gonna be frank with you. There is a drunk young woman in my laundromat, and she's here to see you. You need to make her leave, somehow.

Kaelen: [sighs] I just want one day, Bev. I want *one day* where absolutely wild shit does not happen to me! Move, okay, I've got it.

A (laughing): Kaelen O'Connell has been resurrected for 48 hours. [wheezes] You walk out of this back room, and, sitting on one of the folding shelves, is Francesca Napolitano. She is wearing yet another weird outfit, but weird in a different way - she's got, like, a Peter Pan-collared crop top, and high-waisted shorts with the two rows of buttons, and what *appear* to be Chucks modified to have heely wheels in them. And her leather jacket is red today.

B: I cannot emphasize this enough, Kaelen *staggers* under the weight of her own exhaustion, up against a washing machine.

A: Frankie stops adjusting her hair - which is in, like, *extravagant* 1920s-ass finger waves - and looks up at you, and waves.

Frankie: Kae, hi! Over here!

Kaelen: Yes, I see you, Francesca Napolitano. Why are you in my workplace?

A: She hops off the shelf and heelys toward you.

Frankie: Well, so, you see, I texted Lydia to figure out where you were and she said you were at work, but then I went to the bookstore and the bookstore was closed. So I asked *what work?* and she said *at the laundromat* and I said, *okay*, and then I came over here.

Kaelen: It is amazing how you were able to say *that much* and not *answer the question I asked you*. But yeah, I - I - I don't work at the bookstore anymore.

Frankie: I gathered that!

A: Instead of stopping herself by popping the wheels back in, she stops herself by grabbing your arm.

Kaelen: [aggravated hum]

Frankie: Sorry!

A: She lets you go, and gives you a big smile, and says

Frankie: So there's a basement show downtown that I *really* wanna go to, but Bailey and Lydia both have work in the morning, and I cannot be trusted unchaperoned.

Kaelen: A - A base... [stammers, sighs] Frankie, are you completely missing the fact that you *walked into my employer* while I am *on the clock* and want me to leave with you?

Frankie: ...I think you'll like the band.

Kaelen: *Oh my God.*

A: [laughs]

Kaelen: [deep breaths]

Frankie: They're local! We have to support local artists.

Kaelen: Okay. I'm gonna say this *really slowly*, to get my message across. I am *working*. I *can't* go with you. How is it that I know that you are the only person in this friend group who does not work to pay your bills?

Frankie: I'm told I have kind of an *aura* of somebody whose dad is in the mob. So. That's probably it.

Kaelen: *Is your dad... in the mob?*

Frankie: I don't have to answer that.

Kaelen: I hate it here, I *hate* it here, I *hate it* here. I can't go with you, Frankie.

A: From behind you, Bev says

Bev: I mean, I'm alright if you go early.

B: Kae doesn't turn around, but just puts up one finger.

Kaelen: Do not encourage this, Beverly!

Bev: That's not what Bev's short for.

Kaelen: [stammers] Alright, out of curiosity, what *is* it short for?

Bev: Beverage. Anyway, I'm okay paying you for less hours. You can go anytime.

B: Kae turns around just enough to side-eye her.

A: Bev waggles her eyebrows at you, and then says

Bev: Go have fun with your friends. *Bye.*

B: Extremely defeated, I'm just gonna reach out one hand for Frankie.

A: Frankie cheers, pops the wheels back out of her shoes, and tows you out the door.

[PENSIVE PIANO MUSIC STARTS]

B: Damien, we pick back up with you where we left you, in the back of a strange limousine with your new vampire bestie. One Dahlia Amari-Castillo-Bennett is sitting on the bench seat across from you, delicately sipping at one of those little mini bottles of champagne and just watching you analytically, like she thinks you're a fascinating little science experiment. Luke Johanssen is sitting beside you... fucking *dissociating*, to be

honest. And, through the rolled-down partition, you can see into the front of this limousine, as the *young teenage girl* driving it is just cursing colorfully at the traffic and swerving between lanes. What... What's going on in your head right now, buddy? What are we doing?

A: I mean, I'm very happy for Dahlia and Luke and their little bottles of champagne, but I am not going to calm down for several hours. I am in full go-go-gadget hypervigilance mode, I am looking out the windows, I am making sure everything's cool, I am trying to calm the fuck down.

B: You do not see any sign of the mounted hunters that were pursuing you back at the hospital. But you don't know how much of that has to do with outrunning them, and how much of it has to do with the fact that you're in the middle of the Las Vegas Strip, right now. It'd be kind of hard to ride a horse here. The traffic is bumper-to-bumper, the sidewalks are crowded with tourists walking up-and-down in front of the different casinos. All sights that you realize, in this moment of quiet vigilance, are *extremely* familiar. You look at the names of these places, flashing neon through the night, the *Bellagio*, the *Venetian*, and you find those names coming back to you. You had forgotten them, but... It's like holes in your memory are being filled in. The girl driving the limousine fixes you with a death glare in the rearview mirror, and just raises one eyebrow.

???: Okay, so, is *anybody* gonna tell me what the *fuck* is going on here?

A: Damien sighs and pinches the bridge of his nose, and says

Damien: [sighs] Look, it's a *really* long story, I *don't* wanna go into it. Suffice to say: Monsters, trying to kill me, and this guy.

A: And then he points at Luke.

[MUSIC FADES]

B: The girl in the driver's seat's expression gets even more bitchy, like, in *only* that way that a 17 year old girl can.

???: Oh, this is fantastic! 'Cuz, you know, I have a calculus test tomorrow, but why would I waste my time studying, or maybe getting a couple hours of sleep? No, no, forget about it! I'm out here driving the getaway car for an episode of *Scooby Doo* gone wrong!

A: Damien is not even looking at her, he's turning to look out the windows again, he says

Damien: Yeah, I'm really sorry that me trying to avoid murder is inconvenient for you.

???: Yeah, it really is, but hey, thanks for acknowledging it. Dahlia, this is all *your* fault!

B: Dahlia, who looks very used to being harangued in such a manner, is just absently filing one of her nails.

Dahlia: Then you should have left me to die, if you were gonna get that pressed about it. Don't worry about her, boys; she's not a vampire yet, so her bark's *definitely* worse than her bite.

A: Damien looks at Dahlia, and then at this girl driving the limo, and then says

Damien: Okay, one: I don't love the use of the word *yet* in that sentence. Uh, two: I'm a middle child, so I hope y'all are gonna forgive me for not getting involved in *whatever this is*.

B: You can practically see, like, that anime lightning bolt going between their eyes, as they stare at each other in their rearview mirror. And, in unison, they both go

??? & **Dahlia:** She's *not* my sister.

B: Dahlia looks away first, and just goes back to filing her nails.

Dahlia: Octavia's more like a, uh, super annoying roommate? Or maybe a pet? You know, like, one of those really yappy little purse dogs that'll sink its teeth into your arm at the slightest provocation?

Damien: What else is a little sister, really?

B: The girl driving the car - Octavia, apparently - just snaps

Octavia: Get *fucked*, Dahlia!

B: And peels off around a corner.

Damien: *Anyway.* Anybody wanna tell me where we're going? Not to sound suspicious of either of you ladies, but, uh. I've been kidnapped before, and... I didn't like it the first time. I assume.

B: Luke breaks out of his stupor long enough to squint at you.

Luke: I thought you said you didn't remember anything.

Damien: I don't. Like I said, it's an assumption.

Luke: ...Okay.

B: Dahlia doesn't even blink at the revelation that you have been kidnapped before, just takes another sip of her mini champagne.

Dahlia: We're going home. Like I said, I've got connections - somebody that could maybe help you out - but we just have to go ask, first.

B: From the front seat, you see Octavia put on the blinker signal, and kind of steal a glance out the wing mirror.

Octavia: Uh, *maybe* we're going home. That Cadillac's been tailing us since we left the hospital.

A: I'd like to roll to Read A Bad Situation.

B: Okey-dokey, do that for me.

A: [dice sound] Hup! 12.

B: Okay. So you get two questions from the list, and one open-ended question.

A: Are there any dangers we haven't noticed?

B: You waste a couple seconds trying to follow Octavia's eyeline into the mirror, but, because of the angle you're sitting at,

it's too hard, so you just turn around and look out the back of the limo. And... Yep. There is a long black classic Cadillac car, that is riding your bumper. The windows in this car are tinted very, very dark - you cannot see in. And if you look off to the side, you see another identical Cadillac, sort of closing in on your flank - like it's trying to kettle your car in, essentially.

A: What's my best way out?

B: [stammers] Well, unless you'd like to hop out of the car and start *running*, and take your chances on foot, I would suggest you buckle up.

A: Okay. And, for my open-ended question, um... [sighs] We've seen that me trying to slow motherfuckers down is not, like, *great*. [laughs]

B: Yeah. Yeah. Friendly word from your Keeper: *you're in the middle of the Las Vegas Strip*. There are so many civilians around.

A: Yeah. Um, can I speed our car up? Like, do I think I could do that, and it would work?

B: [stammers] Let me look at the rules for magic, real quick. So I'm looking at the prescribed effects of Use Magic as a move, and I'm not really seeing anything that is analogous to speeding up the car. If you want, you can try for Big Magic, but when Big Magic goes wrong, it goes wrong *way harder* than regular magic does. So I'll leave that up to you.

A: Okay. Big Magic it is.

B: Okay, cool. So I get to pick a prerequisite for this: I'm going to pick that it will have a specific side effect or danger. So you're gonna roll like you're Using Magic, and, if you beef it, it's *not* gonna be good.

A: Okay. Well, I have +2 to Weird. [dice sound] Uh, nine.

B: Alright. That is a mixed success, so please choose your spell effect and a glitch for me.

A: Uh, I will take one harm, ignore armor.

B: Okay. Tell me how you're casting this spell. What would you like to do?

A: I feel like the effect is similar to, like, cartoon rocket blasters.

B: [startled laugh]

A: Just - He makes a gesture like he's pushing something out in front of him, as he's looking back through the back window, and, just, a *bloom* of fire comes out the back of the limousine. It probably catches this first Caddy, uh, in the front bumper and probably the front wheels.

B: Yeah. Along with, like, a planter box on the sidewalk.

A: I don't give a shit about property damage, my man.

B: Okay! The back of this car lights up like a roman candle, and you lurch forward with a sudden burst of speed. Dahlia spills some of her champagne and curses, Luke grabs for the little handle up above the window. I don't know what it's *actually* called, my mom always just called it the *Jesus handle*. He gets kind of tossed to the side from the momentum, and bangs his head on the window, and goes

Luke: Whoa!

B: And, from the front seat, for the first time, you see Octavia's very sour expression change into a slow, malicious smile.

Octavia: Oh yeah. I can work with this.

B: And she *slams* on the gas.

A: Damien, grimacing as he takes whatever this one harm is, just goes

Damien (pained): [hisses, exhales] Sick. Work with it faster, please.

A: Barry, what's my side effect from this?

B: Uh, namely that it hurts like *hell*. There's this odd feeling that's like the engine of the car is *inside* you; you can feel

pistons rumbling against the insides of your ribs, and your heart is beating all out of whack. You feel almost, like, a *rubber burn*, like you're trying to grab a belt that's rotating rapidly, along the skin of your palms as you press them down to the floorboards of the car. It does not feel good - to the point that you're not really able to process what happens next, other than: there's a lot of screaming, Octavia drives up *onto the sidewalk*, scattering passerby in her wake. She is shouting in absolute unbridled glee, as she does this. One of the Cadillacs is on fire and stalled in the street, but the other one cuts across traffic to follow you. Octavia just fully drives down through a promenade? Like, a foot-traffic-only area with lots of stores. She's driving over curbs, she's Tokyo-drifting this limo around corners - it's like a zero gravity simulation in the back of this thing, like, Luke and Dahlia are just hovering in the air, pretty much. You go screeching out onto some kind of little access road behind a bunch of these stores, where you would assume truck deliveries go in and out, and the magic dies. Octavia looks back-and-forth, checks all the rear view mirrors. And, still with a big smile, goes

Octavia: Okay, that was rad. We lost them. Let's go home.

B: And you just *pass the fuck out*. You're unconscious.

[UNSETTLING MUSIC WITH A HEARTBEAT STARTS]

B: For a moment, you're just floating in that inky softness of unconsciousness. And then... You're not there anymore. You perceive harsh fluorescent light through your closed eyelids, and open them to... the interior of a classroom. You're at a school. Not *your* school, but... A school. Somewhere. And you're bowed forward with your head on the desk, like you've just been sleeping through a lecture. There are other people at the desks around you, all sitting up straight, ramrod posture, staring forward. Directly next to you, you see a girl about your age, with long, matted, mousy-brown hair. Every one of her joints is protruding from malnutrition. She looks like she's starving to death. Her head is facing forward, but her eyes are *locked* on yours, wide and terrified. And, over the *too-loud* hum of these lights overhead, you hear her grate out a whisper between clenched teeth.

???: Damien, *help*.

A: I'm gonna clench my jaw, and then look forward at whatever everyone is facing.

B: It's extremely hard to understand what you see. At the front of this classroom, predictably, there's a whiteboard and a plain metal desk. And standing behind it is... an English teacher. Not any English teacher *you've* ever had, but - you know that one mean English teacher that everybody hates? That *everybody's* had one of? It's like you're staring at the *concept* of that English teacher. It's really hard to make your eyes focus on her, because it's almost like her features keep changing. Her hair is long and gray one second, and then jet-black and pulled up in a severe bun the next. Her eyes keep going back-and-forth between different colors and shapes. But, as she notices you watching her, they go solid, void-like black, and her head tilts slowly to the side.

____ (echoing, distorted): Mr. O'Connell, do you care to summarize the lesson for everybody?

Damien (softly): Um. I - I - I don't... What's...?

A: I'm gonna look around the classroom.

B: You see a room full of people roughly your age, all in a state of severe malnutrition, and neglect, and *abject terror*. You try to look out the windows, and then realize that there's *nothing* outside them. It's not just that it's dark, it's that there's *nothing* outside. And - fast, too fast for you to process, way too fast - there are two hands braced on your desk, in front of you, and this teacher is up in your space, her features still warping and twisting and changing, but those solid black eyes *never* shifting, boring straight into yours.

____ (echoing, distorted): You know I don't take well to inattentive students, Mr. O'Connell. I'm gonna need you to stay after class. We need to discuss your recent absence.

B: And then you wake up in the back of Dahlia's limo, soaked through with cold sweat.

[MUSIC FADES]

A: Kaelen, we find you following your friend Frankie Napolitano into the basement of a club, where there is pounding hard rock music and bright neon lights. She breezes past the bouncer, easily, flashes her ID, gets a little stamp, and she's in. I assume you're going with her, having not reconsidered this whole venture.

B: Bold of you to assume I haven't reconsidered it, but yes, I'm going.

A: You get some weird looks. But then you find yourself in the middle of a crowd. There's a band on stage, just finishing up a set. As you get closer and you hear more of the music, you can tell they're kind of alt-punk, but with a little harder of an edge, if that makes sense. The front man has... *awful*, like, pushed-up - you know the hair. You know the hair! Uh, and he's wearing a big, like, checkered jacket. *Desperately* holding onto the mic and crooning - *beautiful* voice. Like, you want to get closer to the stage to hear better, but Frankie is taking off into the crowd.

Kaelen: Frankie, don't - [upset noise]

B: She just stands there, arms kind of half-raised, looking extremely awkward and like she would rather die than touch *anybody* around her.

A: After a minute, Frankie heelys back through the crowd.

B: *How?!* I've been in the crowd at basement shows, how is she heelying?!

A: Francesca Napolitano has powers beyond the ken of any mortal man.

B: [laughs]

A: Uh, she heelys back through the crowd, and holds out to you, in one hand, an extremely fruity cocktail, with a little curly straw in it.

B: I stare at her, and then pull out my phone and Google, "Can I still get drunk if I am dead?"

A: Frankie sips at her own - equally fruity - cocktail, and then says

Frankie: Look, I know these things make you uncomfortable, but, like, you need to loosen up for a *second*. It's been a really hard week for you.

B: After finding what I'm sure are irrelevant search results, Kae just takes the drink and downs it, and then stares back at Frankie again.

Kaelen: Oh, yes, it's been an extremely difficult week for me. That's why you drug me out to a *crowded social function*. Thank you for your service. It's very selfless.

Frankie: Well. Listen, the crowd's for me, the music's for you.

Kaelen: Keep telling yourself that.

B: They go to the bar.

A: Frankie gives you a two-finger salute [wheeze] and says

Frankie: I'm gonna go post up by an amp, if you need me.

A: And then hee-lys away.

B: Kae walks up to the bar and shouts over the music at the bartender.

Kaelen: Hey, buddy, give me a shot of Skrewball. I've got an experiment I wanna try.

A: The bartender gives you a nod, and pours you a shot, and slides it across the bartop.

Kaelen: Excellent. If my hypothesis is correct, it means I finally get to eat a Reese's Cup. If my hypothesis is incorrect, it means I get to *leave this place*. Everybody wins!

B: I take the shot of peanut butter whiskey. With my peanut allergy. That *might* not be a thing anymore, since I'm dead.

A: First of all, you find that you do not actually *like* the taste of peanut butter that much. It's kind of weird. It's mostly just salty? *But*, more importantly, you are subjected to one of the *weirdest* physical sensations of A) Your undeath and B) You think, probably, your life before.

B: [startled laugh]

A: You have all of the *symptoms* of an allergic reaction, without the feeling of not being able to breathe. Within minutes, you are starting to get hives, and, like, your throat swells up. But you are fully cognizant. Was it worth it?

B: [sighs] Curiosity killed the Kae. Again.

A: [cackles]

B: They look down at their hives and try to cuss, but because their throat is swollen shut, just, a *horrible* rattle comes out.

A: From to the side and slightly behind you, a voice goes

???: Oh my God, are you okay?

B: I think as somebody that had a deadly allergy in life, Kae probably keeps an EpiPen in her purse, and just takes it out, flips the cap off with a flourish, turns around to face the source of the noise, and goes

Kaelen (croaking): No.

B: And just jabs it into her leg.

A: Okay. You turn around, you do this. You look up at the source of this voice, and... You know when someone is *so attractive* that for, like, a second, your brain just turns into TV static?

B: Uh oh.

A: You have *that* reaction. Standing in front of you, going to dig into her own purse, looking concerned, is a person in, like, *maybe* their mid-twenties - a little older than you, but not much. Black, dark-skinned, very pretty braids in - uh, mostly dark, but with, like, a couple pops of blue and purple near her hairline. She's maybe five and a half feet tall, wearing, like, plaid corduroy bell bottoms and a sparkly black halter top, eyes

very big and round as she is digging around in her purse, and then. They stop, and tilt their head a little bit, and go

???: *Huh. I have -*

A: And then she digs in her purse a little bit more.

Kaelen: [gay noise] Um, I - I - [coughs] I mean, uh, no, no, it's - it's all cool. It's fine. It's not like it's gonna kill me! [nervous laughter]

A: They perch themselves on a bar stool next to you, and finally come up with also an EpiPen, and a packet of antihistamines, and then just hold them out to you.

Lola: Are you sure? 'Cuz I can - I have a car outside, I can take you to a hospital. Um, I'm Lola, by the way.

B: I just realized that Kae didn't get to change before they left the laundromat, so they're still in their ratty hoodie and, like, probably still have trash and shit in their hair. And, you know, covered in hives. That's - That's another thing. They just stare at this beautiful, beautiful person like a deer in the headlights.

Kaelen: The only thing the hospital will do for me is give me a VIP tour of the morgue. I'm Kaelen.

A: You watch this person - Lola, apparently - take a closer look at you, kind of leaning forward on the bar stool. This close, you can see that she has glittery highlighter on, and a very pretty dark lipstick. She squints a little bit, and then smiles, and nods, and goes

Lola: Okay. Um... You look really uncomfortable, though.

A: Uh, and then she turns around, with a ruffle of braids, and waves down the bartender, and says

Lola: Hey, can we get an ice water over here? Thanks.

B: I'm looking around *desperately* for Frankie. I can't do this alone, I need a wingman.

A: The bartender comes back over, slides a glass of ice water across the bar top to you, and - Lola, seeing that you're looking around, goes

Lola: Oh, are - are you here with somebody? Should we go...?

Kaelen: Uh... No. No, I'm not with anyone. I mean, I *came here with someone*, but I'm - I'm single. That's not what you were asking, was it?

A: She blinks at you, and then says

Lola: ...No. I mean, always good to know, but, um - it - you seem like... I mean, I know you just did the EpiPen, but you seem like you're having, like, a really bad time?

Kaelen: [laughs] Oh, yeah, I'm actually having a *really* shit time, Lola, thank you for noticing. It's good to feel seen... Oh, it's really not, this is *mortifying*, actually.

B: I drink my water so fast.

Lola: ...Uh huh.

A: She turns back to the bartender again, makes a gesture, and says

Lola: Uh, another water for me, please.

A: And then she looks at you again, and squints, and - I'm gonna roll something for her. [dice sound] Okay. Uh, that'll do. She looks at you like she's trying to figure something out, for a long second, and then puts on a big bright smile, and says

Lola: Okay. Can you walk? Because you're supposed to go to the ER after you use an EpiPen, and I'm gonna be a good Samaritan and drive you there, I just have to get a friend of mine - I don't know where she went.

Kaelen: No hospitals! Uh. Uh, I - you know, I'm fine. I... don't have insurance. That's the truth.

Lola: Um, can I drive you back to your *hotel*, then? I just wanna make sure you get back okay. Uh, you could help me look for my friend, if that would make you feel better

about the situation. You seem like you're a lot taller than I am, and you could kind of see over the crowd.

Kaelen: Uh, no hotels. I'm, unfortunately, a townie. I'll help you find your friend, though. What do they look like?

A: She gestures a couple inches above their head, and goes

Lola: About yea tall, light-skinned, hair up in a puff. Dressed like Barbie.

B: I look for the aforementioned person.

A: You don't see anyone dressed like Barbie in the crowd.

B: Well, that sucks. On that note, do I see Frankie anywhere?

A: Roll +Sharp.

B: [dice sound] 12.

A: [startled noise] Okay. Uh, you do not see Frankie in the crowd.

B: She turns back to Lola, trying very hard to not look worried.

Kaelen: Um, I don't see *your* friend, and also I don't see mine, so...

Lola: Huh. Well, I know Cami wasn't done partying for the night, so she *probably* didn't leave. How about we check the ladies' room?

Kaelen: Yeah. Sure.

A: Lola leads you through this crowd, and, sure enough, outside the ladies' room, sitting on the floor, you see 1) Francesca Napolitano, chatting animatedly with a about 5'10" light-skinned Black girl. Very pointy, like, pixie-like features, hair up in a puff, indeed dressed like Barbie - and proportioned like her, too.

B: I have exceeded my social quota for the day, I am going to let Lola handle this.

A: Lola walks up to - you think you heard her refer to her friend as Cami - and just kind of crosses her arms over her

chest as she looks down at her friend sitting on the floor, and says

Lola: So, Camille.

A: And this girl looks up at her, sheepishly, and goes

Camille: Hiii, Lola.

A: And Lola says

Lola: What, exactly, happened to meeting me at the bar?

Kaelen: I - I - I think I can figure it out. That one's mine. It's probably her fault.

A: Frankie dramatically presses a hand to her chest, and goes

Frankie: Um, *rude*.

Kaelen: No, that was *honest*. What I'm *about* to say to you is *rude*. Can I talk to you for a second?

Frankie: Alright.

A: She attempts to stand up, stumbles a little bit because she's still got the wheels of her heelys out, but then catches herself on the wall, and says

Frankie: I'm good! Let's talk.

B: Kae pulls her around a corner and rattles her a little bit.

Kaelen: I don't have much in the world, Frankie! I'm an amnesiac, remember?! Could you not have *told me*, before you set me loose *alone*, that I have less game than a broken tennis racket?! I am *dying* out here! Again. And do you care? No! You're having drunk girl bonding sessions outside the bathroom and drinking your cosmos, meanwhile you see the bus coming for me and *whoop!*, right under it!

A: Frankie looks between you and Lola, who is talking to her friend, very wide-eyed, and then says

Frankie: You didn't wanna come out tonight! I didn't think you'd be *flirting* with anybody!

Kaelen: Oh, I assure you that what happened was *not* flirting! No matter how bad I wanted it to be! What it was was *painful!* And *humiliating!* And for whatever reason, *Lola* over there seems to want to continue flirting! Maybe she's a sadist, I don't know! But me? I'm over it. I'm done! Just take me out back like Old Yeller!

A: At this point, towing Camille by the wrist, Lola walks over to the two of you and - again, big smile - says

Lola: So, me and Little Miss Five-Shots-Deep back there need to be getting back to the Venetian, um... Since I can't give you a ride, can I at least give you my number, so you can text me and let me know you got home okay?

Kaelen: [awkward sound] Uh, yeah. Yeah, I - I have a cellphone.

B: Kae looks over at Frankie like *Do you see? Do you see what has happened?*

A: Frankie winces, and goes

Frankie: [pained noise]

A: Lola gives you another big smile, and says

Lola: Great, um, here, I have a pen.

A: And then she takes a pen out of her purse and grabs your hand, and just writes a number on it.

Kaelen: [emphatic awkward sound]

A: And, as she's doing that, you hear somebody yell, out in the club floor. And then the fire alarm goes off.

[ORCHESTRAL MUSIC AND FIRE ALARM START]

B: Uh, not that I am ungrateful for the opportunity to remove myself from this cringefest with all possible speed - I *am* gonna look around and try to see what's going on, though.

A: I mean, the fire alarm is going off; people are moving for the exit.

B: Well, yeah, but is there, like, smoke? Or fire or anything?

A: Roll to Read A Bad Situation.

B: [dice sound] Eight.

A: Okay. You get to ask me one question.

B: Are there any dangers we haven't noticed?

A: So, you don't smell smoke. You watch everybody heading for the exit. It seems like there's the possibility of, like, a little bit of a trampling problem by the stairwell, but... Everybody's moving, you don't see any fire. What you *do* see is - one of the side exits, the door is cracked just a little bit, and hanging off of the door handle is a bright green kind of shawl thing. Like a sparkly little wrap, just hanging there.

B: Okay, well, whatever that's relevant to, I get plus one ongoing trying to address it. I'm gonna head out.

[ALARM STOPS]

A: You head out, Frankie, Lola, and Camille are going with you. Everybody just kind of stands outside as the fire department rocks up.

B: Kae - probably a little louder than is socially acceptable, because *alarm sounds bad* and she turned off her hearing aids - looks around and goes

Kaelen: Well! This was a relaxing evening.

A: Frankie flips you off.

[MUSIC FADES]

A: And - you have your hearing aids off, so you don't hear whatever prompts this, but - apparently there's a noise from off in the crowd, because Lola and Camille and Frankie all turn their heads a little bit. Camille and Frankie quickly brush off whatever it was, but you see an inquisitive look go across Lola's face, and her eyes narrow, and then she wipes it away, looks very relaxed, turns back to you, and - I assume you're speech-reading as she says this - she says

Lola: We should get going back to our hotel, uh, it's gonna be a long night. So... Again, just text me so I know you got home okay. Right?

B: Kae gives them a thumbs-up. And then kind of leans out around her to follow her eyeline, and see what she was looking at.

A: There is just a young woman in the crowd, kind of grabbing people's arms, leaning in, asking something, and - like, three people in a row just shake their heads at her and move on.

B: How far away can I speech-read, do you think?

A: I wouldn't think this far away. She's, like, maybe 30/35 feet away through the crowd.

B: Okay. To quote a dear friend of mine, go-go-gadget hypervigilance. Something about this whole thing *stinks*. I'm gonna turn on my hearing aids and go over to where she is, and see if I can scope out the situation a little bit. I don't like that Lola looked concerned about this.

A: Lola and Camille head off through the crowd, and you walk a little closer. A lot of people are chattering, but you get a little closer and this woman is speaking up quite a bit, so you hear her saying

???: Has anybody seen my sister? She was wearing a - a green wrap, about yea high. I have to find her before I go home. Can somebody please...? [sighs]

A: And she looks frustrated, she is just grabbing at people, and they're all just shaking her off. Clearly nobody's seen the sister that she's looking for.

B: [sighs] You said the fire department's already here, right? There's no way I'm getting back in that building to get my hands on the wrap that I saw?

A: Nah. Not unless you stick around for a *while*.

B: See, I know that we should *probably* dip, but, like, I still really don't like this. Is there any way I could get around the outside of the building to try to see where that side exit door spits out?

A: Alright, first I'm gonna have you roll to Act Under Pressure, to not be noticed doing this

B: With my -1 to Cool. Awesome, awesome, awesome. [dice sound] Six. So, um. Let me just mark that experience real quick.

A: Okay. You have not been undetected, but you manage to get around the side of the building and there is a little, like, side exit that lets out into an alleyway. Go ahead and roll to Investigate A Mystery.

B: Good. I'm better at this one.

A: [laughs]

B: [dice sound, disgusted noise] *Eight*. I mean, that's *something*, but still, *God*.

A: Gott damn. Okay. Um, that's one question

B: [sighs] And that was *with* +2 to Sharp. You ever just bomb a meet-cute *so hard* that it impacts your ability to be a paranormal investigator? For my question, I'm going to ask what happened here? And keep in mind I do have The Sight as one of my moves for The Spooky. So if there's anything invisible, especially spirits or magical influences, I can see/interact with it.

[DREAMY SINGING STARTS]

A: Yeah, with that, you round the corner into this alley, there's a kind of a weird, like, heat haze in the air? You're not sure what's up with that, but it's, like, very localized. And right outside of this side door, which is still cracked just a little bit, you see two sets of footprints, one larger with kind of a work boot tread, and one smaller - seems to be in heels - that drags a little bit, in this kind of haze of sand and cigarette ashes and glitter outside of this club door. It's not, like, a thick layer of any of those things, so you can't see super clearly, but you do just see the drag of a high heel a couple times, and then a full footprint, not being dragged anymore, of the same shoe.

[MUSIC FADES]

B: Are these footprints going in a direction that is well lit?

A: Not particularly. They're going further down this alley.

B: And I don't trust like that! I am going to make a note of what I see, just file it away mentally, and then turn back around and go try to find Frankie.

A: Yeah. Frankie is coming at you through the crowd, kind of waving a hand as she heelys toward you.

Frankie: What the fuck are you *doing*?

A: And, following her, is one of the firefighters, looking significantly less, like, fondly amused than Frankie is.

B: Am I about to get into conflict with someone in a position of authority?

A: It seems like.

B: Fuck that, I'm out! I run. Frankie will find me later.

A: You watch Frankie execute a *perfect* turn on her heelys, as she skates after you. And you head out.

B: Okay. Did Frankie, like, bring her car or anything? Or did we just heely to the club?

A: Frankie doesn't drive; I think you caught an Uber.

B: Alright. I would like to Uber back to my house? With Frankie? Or not, she can go home if she wants, it doesn't really matter.

A: Nah, she piles in with you. Uh, Frankie is drunk, and has [wheeze] cultivated an instinct to stick with her friends when she is in a state.

B: Alright, if they get home with no incident, Kae is going to set up a little drunk nest on the couch for Frankie. Like, a little trash can on the floor -

A: [laughs]

B: - lots of blankets, a bottle of water, and a couple ibuprofen, and just get her situated.

A: Yeah. As you do this and haul Frankie's ass into this drunk nest -

[CLICK, REELS START]

A: - you're not there anymore, for just a second. You are sitting on this couch. Your eyes are kind of achy, and... you feel like you've been crying. And Frankie is just, like, bodily wrapped around you, just kind of hugging you to her chest.

[CLICK, REELS STOP]

A: And then you're back. And Frankie - 23 and quite inebriated - is just *actively* crying, just

Frankie: I'm a really bad friend, I'm so sorry.

B: Kae puts another blanket over her, and then turns on the TV to whatever channel has, like, those *awful* late-night infomercials on it. And then just sort of crouches down next to the couch and looks her dead in the eyes.

Kaelen: I know that your heart is in the right place. And that even though you *abandoned* me, and left me to fend for myself when faced with a very, very attractive individual - I - I *bombed* that. Did I tell you that I bombed that, by the way?

Frankie (tearfully): Yeah. You told me. I didn't need you to tell me.

Kaelen: Cool. Alright, you acknowledge that you were *complicit* in what happened, then. It's good to see some accountability. *Even though* you abandoned me, and, you know, subjected me to a *social function* - which, even I, *the amnesiac*, know that I don't like. I get it's 'cuz you wanted to make me happy, and I appreciate that. I... am gonna go upstairs.

A: Frankie sniffles [wheeze] and then says

Frankie: I'll buy you breakfast in the morning, if that makes it better.

Kaelen: I don't need to e- [sighs] You know what, yeah, Frankie, that'd be great. Night night.

Frankie: Night night.

A: And she just sideways collapses into the drunk nest.

B: Before I go upstairs, I am going to make extra sure that the ferrets are *enclosed* in their enclosure, because I do not want to deal with the fallout of middle of the night attempted drunk ferret snuggles.

A: You do have a baby lock on the ferret enclosure. It occurs to you, for the first time, to wonder why that is there. And then you realize, immediately as you are wondering it, that it's for this *exact* situation.

B: Even though nobody's watching, Kae bites down really hard on the inside of their own cheek to keep from smiling fondly, and walks over to Frankie, passed out, and just pats her on the side of the head.

Kaelen: Sleep well, little baby.

B: And then goes upstairs. As soon as they're in their room and have the door shut behind them, they're gonna pull out their phone and send a text to Lola.

A: The number on your hand got a little smudged in the chaos, but it is still readable. What are you texting Lola?

Kaelen (texting): Hi, it's Kaelen. Made it home safe. I think I saw something weird at the club, but can't be sure. Mind giving me a second opinion?

A: A couple minutes pass, as you are settling in in your room for the night. And then you get a text back that reads

Lola (texting): Sure thing. Was planning to check out this coffee place tomorrow anyway. See you there around one?

A: And then a shared address for a coffee place.

B: Kae texts her back - I - I should mention that Kae sends every text message like it is a professional email. Like, capital letters, proper punctuation, everything

Kaelen (texting): Sounds great; see you then! :)

B: Not the emoji, the little colon and parenthesis smiley face.

A: Lola sends back the little, like, smiling jazz hands emoji.

Lola (texting): 🙄

B: Hey, weirdly specific but very important physiological question about me being a zombie: Can I blush?

A: Hm. I think it's funnier if you can, so, yes.

B: Okay, I'm sure that's horrifying to behold given the whole *corpse factor*, but Kae blushes very hard, looks down at her phone, stares up into the middle distance, and - to no one - says

Kaelen: ...Coffee date. Oh my God, do I actually have game? Is this a full circle thing?

A: Thankfully, nothing in the house responds to your question.

Kaelen: And we're even learning what a rhetorical question is! [slow clap] Good job, gang. Hit the showers.

A: You hear the distant sound of running water.

[CLICK, RADIO CHATTER, STATIC]

SPECIAL BROADCAST - 04.16.18

For those just tuning in: Welcome to the Jackalope, America's premier pirate radio station dedicated to exploring the unknown, the unexplained and general weird shit. According to recent listener reports from the bayou, the Creature from the Black Lagoon - no, seriously, the real actual one, not the thing from the old-school horror movies - has been spotted prowling through the swamplands, and has been noted to target many an unsuspecting fan boat in the southern Louisiana area. After follow-up interviews with local residents, we've come to the conclusion that this activity can't be attributed to local spirits and/or mythology, and that these incidents are being caused by post-veil thoughtforms running amuck. We all know that mass human attention has gotten very powerful these last few years, and that the consequences are still unfurling, but...

They pulled a guy off the shore of Lake Pontchartrain in an ooze-cocoon, man, come on! Anyway, here's your friendly neighborhood supernatural enthusiast here at the Jackalope, urging you that if you're going to devote your attention to a movie about a creepy swamp monster, at least make it *The Shape Of Water*. And if *that* particular swamp monster is interested, give him my number. And now, here's Vampire Money by My Chemical Romance.

[STATIC, RADIO CHATTER, CLICK]

B: Damien. You are a little over halfway conscious, sort of half-slumped out of the seat onto the floor of this limo. Distantly, you are able to realize that the engine is idling and the car seems to have stopped moving. And, through your blurry vision, you can see the concerned faces of Luke Johannsen and Dahlia Amari-Castillo-Bennett hovering over you, a little too close. You feel... like you are on the bad end of a kick from one of the Budweiser Clydesdales. Your chest hurts, your head is *screaming*, you can barely breathe. And, jubilantly, way too loud from up in your face, Dahlia perks up and goes

Dahlia: He lives!

Damien: Not if you keep yelling.

A: I'm gonna sit the rest of the way up - if I can without getting way dizzy.

B: The interior of the limo does spin a little bit, but you are able to sit up. You see that you're sitting in a parking garage? The partition's still rolled down, you see Octavia's up in the driver's seat, absentmindedly gnawing on one of her nails, and checking her reflection in the little mirror in the sun visor.

Octavia: [sighs] Okay, cool, so, if we're not gonna have to do body disposal, I'm gonna go park. You guys can go ahead upstairs.

Damien (pained): Cool. Cool, cool.

A: If the limo has stopped spinning, I'm gonna get out.

B: Dahlia and Luke follow you, and the limo takes off down the giant echoing corridor of this parking garage.

A: I am going to *emphatically* take my inhaler. [wheezes]

B: Those good good corticosteroids help you a *little* bit.

A: Yeah, I'm sure it's not fun with my fucked-up heart, though. I'm just gonna press a hand over my chest, nod a couple times, and go

Damien (pained): [hard exhale] Alright. Alright. That was, uh, not a fun one.

B: Luke sort of has his arm looped through yours to help keep you upright, but Dahlia has no such compunctions. She's typing on her phone with one hand, and digging around in that tacky novelty purse of hers with the other.

Dahlia: Alright, boys, let's go.

B: And she takes off towards a big automatic sliding door, at one corner of this parking garage.

A: Okay, yeah, um, if I feel like I can, I'm gonna extricate my arm from Luke's, and then follow her.

B: You emerge into a ritzy, *garish* lobby, that sets off a little ping in your brain that instantly says *casino*. Marble floors, big fancy chandeliers, long check-in desk along the front of the room. And, even though it is the wee hours of the morning, you still hear the sounds of people. There's laughter, and the smell of cigarette smoke, and the artificial jingles of slot machines. Dahlia breezes right through all of this, however, just making a beeline for a cluster of elevators over to the right. She presses a button, hops on, and then sort of braces her arm across the door and waves you in, extravagantly.

A: Yep. I'm going.

B: You've been, uh... mentally and physically off the map since 2012, so you don't really know what an RFID reader looks like, but Dahlia pulls a little plastic card out of her purse, taps it against this little black box on the side of the elevator, that beeps, and the doors close, and you start going up. And up. And up. And up, for what feels like an eternity, before the elevator finally dings, and the doors slide open to reveal a very small... not even a *hallway*, really, it's just, like, an

antechamber - with a single gilded door, directly across from you.

A: Damien is trying to, like, subtly lean against the wall of the elevator, and, before he starts moving, he says

Damien: You know, I'm not gonna lie, this feels a *little* bit like *The Shining*.

B: Dahlia pauses by this door, and turns around to grin at you with those very sharp canine teeth.

Dahlia: Hello, Damien. Come and play with us.

B: And then she pulls a key ring out of her purse - it's got a little black plastic bat on the end - and unlocks the door with a flourish, and steps inside. Are you following?

A: Absolutely.

B: Luke kind of hangs back behind you a little bit, staring through this doorway, and goes

Luke: Yeah, I don't trust this. If I die because of you, I'm haunting your ass forever.

B: And then he follows you in.

[PLUNKING GUITAR MUSIC STARTS]

B: You walk into... an *obscene* display of wealth. Same marble floors that you saw downstairs, really *nice* expensive track lighting on the ceilings, and evidence of... the world's most *eclectic* collector's hobby. Like, it takes you a minute to soak in all of the things that are on display here - it feels like half-house, half-museum. You walk through a *big* open-concept kitchen and dining space, but, along the walls are just shelves upon shelves of... [stammers] It looks like someone just collects *media*. There's vinyl records, and VHS tapes, and DVDs, and cassette tapes, and CDs, and... every possible method of *recording* known to the history of man. You even see one of those, like, old Edison wax cylinder recorders, up on an end table with spindly legs. There's artwork on the walls, but it is *wildly* incongruous. There are medieval tapestries, and what are very clearly original impressionist paintings. There's a Pink

Floyd tour poster that looks like the genuine article, in a little plastic frame. This place basically just looks like a *time machine* exploded all over it. The big high-ceilinged entry hall/kitchen-dining space that you're in narrows into a hallway that you can see widen a little further down, but, from your vantage point, you can see that the far wall of this place is all just floor-to-ceiling windows. And the grand expanse of Las Vegas is splayed out through these windows. You are in a very *nice* penthouse, somewhere on the Strip. You can just tell from the positioning of it. You don't remember much, but - in the midst of this abundance and variety of stuff, you *acutely* remember the feeling of being a lower-middle class kid walking into an upscale department store and wondering *Can I afford to breathe in here?* Dahlia, however, displays an *astounding* lack of regard, in comparison to you. She chucks her purse and her big stompy goth boots that she took off back at the hospital down on the surface of what appears to be an *extremely antique* mahogany dining table, and then abandons you and Luke to go wandering back this hallway into the penthouse beyond.

Dahlia: Anybody home?

A: Okay. I'm going to sit down, like the good chronically ill little boy that I was raised to be. But I feel like if I touch any furniture in here, I will be instantly killed by a sniper. Um, so I'm just gonna - I'm just gonna take a seat on the floor.

B: Dahlia stops at the end of this hallway and pivots around to look at you and Luke. You're sitting on the floor, Luke is *avidly* browsing through this vinyl collection in one of the shelves along the wall. She just raises an eyebrow at both of you and goes

Dahlia: What are you doing...? Come - Come on!

A: I'm going to very hesitantly get to my feet and follow after her, trying *so hard* not to touch anything.

B: This little hallway emerges into... calling it a *living room* seems like kind of a disservice. I think the technical term is "great room" - the ceilings are *super high* in here, and in one corner you see a big antique grand piano, lots of other musical instruments on the wall and the floor surrounding it. In another

corner there's a fully functioning wet bar with very high-end liquor in glass cabinets behind it. There's sort of a hallway that goes down, and into further parts of this penthouse that you can't really see. And then, on the other side of the room, there is a *massive* entertainment center. *The* biggest fucking TV you have ever seen, with top of the line sound system lined up around it. The decor here is very... cluttered and anachronistic. There's mid-century modern furniture pieces mixed with, like, shit that looks like it's literally from the 1800s, mixed with very, like, current big-box furniture store stuff. There are still cases of all these collectibles around the edges of the room, but you also see *lots* and *lots* of what you would call family photos if they didn't obviously span *hundreds* of years. There are, like, strips from mall photo booths and old Polaroids tacked to the wall with push-pins. There are department store photography pictures in cheap plastic frames. There are old black-and-white and even old west sepia-looking photographs. A couple *paintings*. I think you go to look closer at them and then are distracted by a voice from behind you going

???: Oh look, and you brought friends! I'm terribly afraid you've missed supper - there might be some leftovers in the fridge, though.

B: In front of the biggest TV you've ever seen, splayed out across a Victorian fainting couch, you see... objectively the most beautiful man you've ever seen in your life. He's not standing up, but you can tell that he's tall. Middle Eastern dude, curly black hair that's a bit longer on top but kept in a very neat undercut and fade beneath. Really sharp, defined facial features, high cheekbones. He's wearing a crushed velvet smoking jacket and silk pajama pants? He has a wineglass in one hand with something that is dark red and very thick in it. And the biggest TV you've ever seen is replaying old episodes of absolute trash reality TV. It switches over to a commercial break, and the glint from the screen flashes off his eyes - you see that they are the same shade of blood red as Dahlia's. And, as he looks over to smile at the group of you, you see that his canines are also, similarly, very sharp. You register this dude seeing you, going from lighthearted to serious in a second flat as he realizes that you're in bad shape. And he stands up from

the fainting couch - now that he's upright, he's about 6'3"/6'4".

???: Oh, ten thousand sons of a thousand bitches, Dahlia, what did you do?

Damien: Oh, no I - I was like this when she found me. More or less. Is there somewhere I could lay down? 'Cuz I think I'm gonna -

A: And then he kinda reels a little bit and, like, braces himself against a wall. He is still being so, so careful to not get close enough to anything to touch it or break it.

B: The room you're in is very big. This guy, like Dahlia, is very fast. There's a blur from over at this fainting couch, and then you feel two very steady hands holding you up and lowering you into a recliner that just *screams* 1970s. For some reason it feels very comforting. And, as this guy is hovering over you, looking extremely concerned, and Luke is poking around in this forest of musical instruments in one corner of the great room.

[MUSIC FADES]

B: Dahlia scoops up a remote from over on the fainting couch, switches the TV over to a movie channel that is showing absolutely awful horror B movies, and says

Dahlia: Yeah, so, my snack run got... very interesting. Um, Mick: Damien. And... other guy.

B: Luke's head snaps around.

Luke (offended): My name is *Luke*.

B: Dahlia rolls her eyes.

Dahlia: That wasn't me asking. Damien, this is...

B: The guy in the smoking jacket kneels down next to you, and extends his free hand.

Michael: Michael Darcy. Um, can I offer you... something to drink? We've got plenty of -

B: And he swirls the wineglass that's still in his other hand, with that thick red liquid inside.

Damien: Uh, I don't - I can't - I'm not -

B: He looks at you, looks at the wineglass, looks over at Dahlia - who is pulling out a *blood bag* that she apparently *smuggled out of the hospital* and shoving a Capri-sun straw into it - looks back at you, presses a hand to his chest, and goes

Michael: Oh, no! No, no, no. I've been around *far* too long to be reduced to a walking stereotype - and besides, I don't partake for religious reasons, you see? This is a *Cabernet*.

A: Damien nods, slowly. Contemplating the circumstances that have led him to this point. And then says

Damien: Okay. I don't... like wine, but thank you. Is there somewhere I can lay down? Actually, no, is there somewhere I can *take a bath*? I can lay down in the bath, and... I can't afford to clean your furniture.

Michael: Oh yes, of course. Look at me, being a *horrible* host. Uh, up the stairs, second door to the left -

B: He waves his hand off towards a *big* chrome-and-glass spiral staircase that is shooting up from the floor of this great room to, apparently, the second story of this penthouse.

Damien: Cool. Great. Awesome.

A: I'm going to attempt to escape up the stairs. I need to not be around people right now.

B: You escape up the stairs and follow the directions that Michael Darcy gave you, and end up in an *extremely nice* bathroom - it's got, like, one of those big corner tubs with the jacuzzi jets in it. Lined with very, very nice bath products. Are you treating yourself?

A: I am not touching *anything* in this room that does not belong to me. I will use my horrible 3-in-1 from the superstore that will not be named.

B: Okay, I just need to clarify something, here: You've been on the run for, like, two weeks since then. Are you telling me that you made it out of all these safehouses, *in and out of the hospital*, and to this penthouse with a bottle of Head & Shoulders?

A: All the things I own in the world right now are the bottle of Head & Shoulders, my meds, and a packet of hair ties, my dude.

B: [stammers] Alright, fair enough. You take a very nice bath with your very not-nice soap. Do me a quick favor, just roll +Sharp for me - I swear no monsters are coming out of the bathtub drain at you or anything.

A (softly): Fuckin' better not be. [dice sound] Uh, that's a 10.

B: Okay! You are gonna manage to overhear everything you need to overhear, then. So, you finish up this bath, you... I'm guessing, put your dirty clothes back on, which is kind of tragic. And, as you have your hand hovering over the doorknob of this bathroom, you overhear the sound of hushed conversation from the hallway. Dahlia is finishing up a sentence

Dahlia: Well they look like they had, uh, raided a couple Western-wear outlets since the last time anyone saw them in a mythology book, but I'm pretty sure it's the Wild Hunt.

B: And, Damien, that is the first time you have ever heard somebody give a *name* to whatever has been after you. I'm not gonna have you roll for anything, uh, just - true to character, what do you think, realistically, that Damien would know about the Wild Hunt?

A: Honestly, probably not much.

B: Yeah, fair enough. He doesn't strike me as a mythology nerd kid. So, hearing that doesn't really affect *you*. But the worrying thing is that it seems to affect *Michael*. You hear a very long pause in response to what Dahlia just said.

Michael: Do you *realize* what a precarious position you have just placed me in? I work with the *Seelie Court*, Dahlia, the *Seelie Court* - who that *ravenous pack of dogs* is not affiliated with. The *only* thing I can do, here, is step on

toes. Are you aware of precisely how *dangerous* it is to go stepping on toes in this particular arena?

A: Damien is staying as still and as silent as possible.

B: Dahlia scoffs - you can, like, *hear* her eyes rolling.

Dahlia: I thought you didn't *mind* stepping on a few toes if it meant saving somebody from a situation they didn't deserve! That's what you told me. I - Look, if you're gonna be an asshole and I'm on my own with this, *fine*. Just put him up for the night, and *I'll* figure out something to do tomorrow. We just need tonight.

B: Michael sighs, and you hear the sound of a hand running over his mouth.

Michael: [sighs] *Fine*.

B: And then two sets of footsteps disappearing down the hall.

A: So what I have learned from listening in on this conversation is 1) The name of the thing that wants me dead, and 2) That I am not safe here. I'm gonna walk outta the bathroom and back downstairs, and try to pretend nothing's wrong.

B: By the time you get downstairs, Luke has also apparently been off somewhere to take a shower, and has kicked off his shoes, *not* changed back into his dirty clothes; he is now *also* wearing a smoking jacket and a pair of silk pajama pants, splayed out across this recliner and watching whatever awful horror B movie Dahlia turned on the TV.

A: I'm still not feeling awesome, so I am going to very carefully sit down on the couch.

B: He looks over at you and does one of those, like, upwards bro-nods.

Luke: You can uh, ditch the rags, if you feel like it. Dahlia said her dad, or whatever, is letting us stay the night.

B: And from somewhere deep, deep in this penthouse, you hear Dahlia yell

Dahlia: He's not my dad!

A: Damien gives Luke an extremely tight-lipped smile, and says

Damien: I'm good, actually, but, uh... Good to know we're staying the night. That's great.

Luke: Hey man, suit yourself. Well... [groans] I'm beat. Apparently there are a whole mess of guest rooms down that there hallway, so I'm going to get a well-deserved night's rest. I hope you do too, bud.

B: He stands up from the recliner, claps you on the shoulder - kind of condescendingly - and just swaggers down the hall in his smoking jacket. And you are alone in this living room.

A: I didn't put my shoes back on after my bath, uh, for this exact purpose. I'm going to very quietly walk over to the hallway that Luke indicated, and see if it seems like that's where *all* the bedrooms are. Like, I'm gonna take a quick lap of the living room and try to see if there look to be any more down any more hallways, or anything.

B: You did see several doors in the hall upstairs when you went up there to take your bath, so you would assume that there are a couple rooms up there. This little hallway that Luke has just walked down - you do see a door swing shut behind him - has, like, five doors along the walls? There's the one Luke just walked into, a couple nondescript uniform-looking ones, and then one down on the far end where you can hear, like, *thumping* death metal music from inside. And there's a hastily-scrawled sign on there with scotch tape, that just says "*Octavia's room: Keep out!*" You don't see any lights on or anything beneath any of these other doors, though, so apparently it's just you, Luke, and Octavia, down here.

A: I'm going to go into the first room down this hallway - like, the one closest to the living room - and I'm gonna lay down in there for a while. I am pinching myself to keep myself awake, and I'm gonna try and listen up until it sounds like everybody has... retired for the evening.

B: The morning, actually. You are starting to see the first gray ribbons of sunrise creep over the horizon, outside the window of

this guest room. Which, again, like everything else here, is very nicely-appointed; super soft bed. It's *really* hard to not take a nap.

A: If that's the case, I'm going to sit on the floor.

B: You hear the horror movie that Dahlia had put on the TV wind down, and then the TV turn off. You can't hear in, like, *extreme* detail - because the walls here are not thin, and it's a pretty big space to cover - but you *think* you hear her go upstairs? Michael seems to be up and about for quite a bit longer, though. Again, you can't hear details, but you're pretty sure he's having several phone conversations. Like, you'll hear a one-sided conversation for a little bit, and then silence, and then another one-sided conversation, and then silence. But, finally, he also seems to go retire somewhere. You hear a door opening and closing in another part of the apartment. And there is complete silence, except for the surprisingly not-muffled sound of Luke snoring next door, for five/ten minutes.

A: Okay, as soon as it seems like everything's winded down, I'm going to walk back out into the living room and I'm gonna try to leave.

B: The lights in the living room are all off, and you notice that, with the sun coming up, all of these big floor-to-ceiling windows have been extremely securely shaded. There are, like, blackout curtains pulled over each and every one of them, top to bottom. By all appearances, however, you've got a clear path to the front door.

A: I'm out. Fuck this shit, I'm out. Bye-bye.

B: First hurdle you run into, you seem to need a keycard to make the elevator work.

A: I'm going down the stairs.

B: Yeah, it takes a little searching around: This area you're in is pretty small, but it looks like the emergency stairwell has been sort of camouflaged to allow for aesthetics - which probably isn't up to code, but you do find the stairs. So you start down. And down. And *down*. And you're not even sure how close you are to the bottom when there is a *whoosh* sound from

directly over your head, and you get slapped in the face with a wall of coily red hair.

[THOUGHTFUL PIANO MUSIC STARTS]

B: Dahlia is... hanging from her knees from the landing above you, like a bat? Just upside-down, smiling.

Dahlia: Hi, bestie.

Damien: [yells]

A: I *jump*, and probably stumble back and hit the wall.

Dahlia: Stop screaming, it's just me!

A: Damien puts a hand over his chest, staring at her, and goes

Damien: Okay! Tip number one, *don't* sneak up on the guy with the heart condition. If I had made it through the last 21 years of my life and *this* was what gave me a heart attack, I was gonna be so pissed.

B: She raises an eyebrow at you, which looks really weird upside-down, but then braces her hand on the railing of these emergency steps and, like, backflips down so she's standing next to you. It's very Cirque du Soleil. She has changed into pajamas, like, this little matching set of silk shorts and a camisole, with little skulls all over them. But she still has the demonias on. They stomp loudly, as she lands on this step beside you.

Dahlia: Sorry about your shitty heart, or whatever. Where are you going?

Damien: Outside. Uh, I - I was just gonna get some air.

B: You're pretty sure you've never gotten a side-eye that *physically hurts*, before. But this one stings a little bit.

A: I'm gonna roll to Manipulate Someone.

B: Okay, good luck!

A: I'm gonna flash her a winning smile, and say

Damien: I'm really good. You should just go back up to the penthouse.

A: And... [dice sound] hoo! That's an 11.

B: Okay. I'm at a bit of a gameplay and storytelling impasse, here, because: Mechanically, if Dahlia does what you ask her to do, she's gonna mark experience and get +1 forward. But also, if Dahlia does what you want her to do, you're gonna *die*, and the campaign's gonna be over?

A: [laughs]

B: So unless you have a *really good* backup story about how Damien's long-lost twin brother Jamien *also* escaped, uh, the Wild Hunt -

A: [trying so hard not to laugh]

B: - lined up... I'm not sure what I'm supposed to do, here. So what I'm gonna say is Dahlia's just not gonna take that experience or +1 forward. She stares at you, and the other eyebrow raises.

Dahlia: Yeah, sure, I would love to do that. I should be in bed right now. So I'll walk up with you.

[MUSIC FADES]

A: On a scale of 1-10, how able to Use Magic right now do I feel? Given the everything of a couple hours ago?

B: ...Are you gonna set the woman who *saved your fucking life* on fire?

A: No. I'm just asking a question. I'm not planning to set her on fire.

B: See, but the way that you said that makes me think that setting her on fire is not out of the question.

A: I'm not gonna set her on fire! I'm just trying to make a quick exit! As a dear friend once said, I do *like* living.

B: There's nothing mechanically holding you back from doing any magic right now, since Monster Of The Week doesn't have, like,

exhaustion mechanics or anything like that, but Dahlia stands there on the stairs next to you, levels a long, unblinking look at you, and goes

Dahlia: I wish you would.

A: Yeah. Yeah, uh, I feel like shit, I am rocking, like, two harm. [sighs] I - I'm going back upstairs.

B: She stays in step with you the entire way back up - you guys have to take some breaks for breathers on the landings, going up is way harder than going down, and it's a *lot* of flights. On one, she just reaches into the pocket of her pajama pants and pulls out... some kind of palm-sized plastic-straw-looking device with lots of little plastic bats and skulls all over it. Just cranks absolute cotton, and goes

Dahlia: Look, if you've got a death wish, you *really* should have told me *before* I saved your ass, because now I'm invested. I don't know *why* you thought that trying to run off was a good idea, but... maybe trust the person who - again, can't emphasize this enough - *saved your ass* when I say that this is the safest place in the city for you, right now. I know the interior design is so, so ugly, but we don't have anybody under this roof that actively wants you dead. Mokay?

Damien: [laughs] Oh, yeah, it's just a roof *owned by* somebody who's only letting me stay under duress! Because he's more worried about *stepping on toes* than, you know, my *life*. Which: *Fair*. He doesn't know me. *None* of you people know me, I don't know *any* of you. I've known Luke the longest and it's been, what, three weeks?

Dahlia: Yeah, I noticed that. You are *really* one to call people's loyalty and goodwill into question. You've known him the longest, but you, like, *broke the sound barrier* with how fast you hung him out to dry. I only brought him along 'cuz it was what you wanted. I probably would've just had him as a snack, if you disappeared.

Damien: Yeah, well, the person that gave a shit about any of that is *dead*. I am trying to save what's left of my *fucking skin*.

Dahlia: Yeah, and if you could take five seconds to *surgically excise your head from your ass*, maybe you would see that that's what I'm trying to help you do, too. *I'm* trying to be a nice fucking person here, douchebag! And yeah, apparently you overheard a little bit of that conversation that I had with Mick, but I *promise* you, he is the biggest and safest fish to swim behind in this city, okay? Now he'll put on airs, and be dramatic, and complain about what an absolute inconvenience it is that he has to save your worthless ass. But that's what he's done to everybody whose worthless ass he's ever saved. In fact, it's *only* living with him that has made me begin to develop a sort of sympathetic bent for people who remind me a lot of, just, you know, like, a wet kitten in a cardboard box on the side of the street? So maybe instead of absconding out in the middle of the night to get run down by spectral horses in the middle of the Strip, you could go for a *Thank you, Dahlia* or *I appreciate the help, Dahlia*.

A: Uh, I think Damien is sitting on the stairs, so he just kind of leans his head against the railing, and says

Damien: You know, at this point, I think this kind of counts as imprisonment without trial.

Dahlia: Yeah, well, you're not cute or pathetic enough for my patience to have a limitless supply, so slap me in a polyester robe and call me Judge Judy. Get upstairs.

A: Kaelen, we find you outside the coffee house where you are supposed to meet Lola, at the prescribed time. What are you doing?

B: Sitting in the driver's seat of the Cutlass, looking in the rearview mirror and trying to do some positive affirmations. Kae was *acutely* aware of how she looked last night, and thus has tried to zhuzh it up a little bit. No more ratty hoodie and bad hair, she's in, like, a sundress and a cardigan. And just frantically staring at her own reflection, going

Kaelen: You are *normal*. You are... attractive to women. You can talk to them capably. You are worthy of human connection. [sighs] This is gonna be bad.

B: They get out of the car and go inside.

A: You walk in. Lola is sitting at a table in this coffeehouse, with a book open on the table in front of her. She is somehow *more* attractive in the daylight. They are wearing a beret and a fucking peacoat, it is *haunting*. She looks up when the bell over the door jingles, as you walk in, and gives you a quick wave and a smile.

B: Yep. Positive affirmations are out the window, I freeze. I need a minute, I'm gonna go to the counter and get a drink.

Kaelen: Four shots of espresso in a cup, please.

A: The barista looks over at Lola, looks at you, and *wordlessly* makes your four espresso shots in a cup.

Kaelen (pained): Thank you for your service.

A: You get your drink, you walk over to the table, uh, Lola has... *something* with a lot of whipped cream on it, on the table next to her. Grins, as you walk over, and then pulls a notepad up from under the table, and puts it down next to her book.

Kaelen: Hello.

Lola: Hi. Uh, take a seat.

B (braced for impact): I do that.

A: You sit down. Lola looks awkward, for a second, takes a long sip of her drink, and then - very brightly and casually - says

Lola: So. Uh, how long have you been undead?

B: Kaelen pauses with her drink halfway to her mouth, and just does a full Kubrick stare.

Kaelen: That... is a *preposterous* question. With a really complicated answer.

A: Lola gives you almost an embarrassed look, and then says

Lola: I'm sorry if that was really forward, it's just that I... have a bit of a vested interest in all things strange

and supernatural? And I was just hoping I could get some information.

Kaelen: ...And that's why you invited me for coffee. To do a case study. [disappointed chuckle] A *Kae* study.

Lola: That's not the only reason I asked you to meet up with me, if that helps. I was also hoping we could compare notes about what happened at the club, last night.

Kaelen: Yeah, sure. Um. Well, I mean, if you have genuine curiosity... as far as I know, I've been undead for, like, less than 73 hours. It's been... a bit of a wild ride. Don't know why it's happening, don't know how it works, so. Y'know. Not a great primary source. As far as the club, though, uh... Did you hear that girl looking for her sister, last night?

A: Lola perks up, and goes

Lola: Yes, I did! I have, um...

A: And then she flips open her notepad, and pushes it toward you. It is, like, the notes of a full interview.

Kaelen: *Oh.* So you're, like -

B: Kae stops before she can say *insane*.

A: [laughs]

Kaelen: - a really talented journalist, huh?

Lola: Oh, no, this is a hobby - I actually translate freelance, because it's kind of the only thing I can do with an Art History degree right now. The economy, right?

Kaelen: I know nothing about the economy. See, on top of the whole *undead* thing, there's, like, an extra bonus layer of amnesia, so the only thing I know about economics is that I got let go from my job for being dead - is that something I can sue for?

A: Lola takes her notepad back and clicks a really professional-looking pen a couple times. And then poises herself to start writing.

Lola: Undead *and* an amnesiac. Do you think those two things are connected, or are they separate events?

Kaelen: I... haven't given it much thought? I am swiftly learning that I do not do well with the mortifying ordeal of being known. Can we go back to talking about the club? Because I found that girl's sister's wrap hanging off of an open door, and there were some footprints, and it was really weird, and it was *not at all* related to me.

Lola: Yeah, you said in your text you thought you saw something really weird. Um...

A: She writes something on her notepad, flips a page, and then looks at you again, and says

Lola: Can you describe it?

Kaelen: Yeah. Something intensely strange; I thought I saw the prospect of me having a normal conversation with someone. Um.

A: [strangled pig squeal]

Kaelen: Yeah, this side door next to the stage was open before everybody started running out after the fire alarm, there was a green... wrap, shawl thing, kind of hanging there. And then when I walked around the outside of the building, I saw footprints. It looked like somebody in boots, and then somebody in heels that was being... pulled? Or dragged? I - I - I just - I wanted to check in, um, to see if that corroborated with anything you found out, just because... I have, um, a lot of reasons to *not* trust my perception of reality? So...

Lola: Um, okay. Uh, I didn't see any footprints, I wasn't around the side of the building, I just talked to...

A: And then they flip the notepad back to the front page and start reading

Lola: Courtney Hernandez, 26. Uh, she and her sister Chloe, 22, were at the club to see the show. It was... [sighs] a late celebration for Chloe's birthday. Apparently Chloe has a habit of... picking people up, in clubs. Uh, and she

walked off, and then didn't reappear when the alarm went off. When I asked, Courtney said that that yell that we heard before the alarm *could've* been her sister, but she's not sure.

Kaelen: Okay. Um... This is gonna sound really rude, and probably insensitive. You said that you had a vested interest in *the supernatural*. What makes you think that this isn't typical humans being fucking awful? Worse things have happened in Vegas, I don't need *all* my memories to be able to tell you that.

A: Lola actually squirms, a little bit, in her seat. They look extremely uncomfortable. And then she smiles again, and says

Lola: I... have a sort of sense about these things. Look, if it turns out to just be *some douchebag at a club decided to take this girl home*, then... Nothing we do is gonna *hurt* the investigation. And, if I'm right - which I am - then... [sighs] Everyone else is probably gonna be looking in the wrong places.

Kaelen: And this... *sense* you have - is that what told you that I am no longer among the living, or...?

A: She looks you up-and-down, and says

Lola: I mean. Don't take this the wrong way, but you look like a straight-up corpse.

Kaelen: [pained noise] Yeah.

Lola: I mean, my sense of things *helps*. That really wasn't meant to be an insult, I know I come off a little bit blunt sometimes, but I - Y-You're a very *attractive* corpse!

Kaelen: I would like to stop this conversation.

Lola: [relieved exhale] Oh, thank God. Uh, yeah, yeah. We can, um, talk about something else!

A: And then she looks back at her notepad.

Kaelen: Yeah, uh. So before you keep studying me like a new species of insect, would you like to know my favorite movie, or something?

A: This is very obviously one of the most awkward moments in this young person's life. They look up at you like a deer in the headlights, smile, and say

Lola: Please tell me what your favorite movie is.

Kaelen: I don't know. It wasn't *Memento*, though!

A: She lets out a startled laugh, just

Lola: [laughs, sniffs]

A: And then looks *mortified*, and claps a hand over her mouth.

Lola: Please tell me that was a joke and I *didn't*... make this conversation *more* awkward, just now.

Kaelen: Consider my situation, and ask yourself: If I can't laugh about it, what do I have?

A: They take a really long sip of their drink, and then put it down firmly, and say

Lola: Okay. So I was thinking that we could maybe go *back* to the club, now that it's daylight. It'll probably be empty, and we can... poke around a little bit more? See what we can suss out?

Kaelen: I'm sorry, I remember you mentioning something about staying at the Venetian; do you just *go places* and play paranormal Sherlock Holmes? Like, is this what you do on vacation?

Lola: Only if an opportunity presents itself. I was going to a music festival. But now I'm doing this!

Kaelen: You are *fascinating* to me.

A: She *beams*.

Lola: Likewise!

A: And then she stands up, grabs her drink, and shrugs on a messenger bag.

Lola: So, uh, I was thinking we could go... do that now? Poke around, see the sights.

B: Kae sort of bites at the inside of her lip, and stands up.

Kaelen: Yeah, sure. I can turn coffee into investigating a possible supernatural crime scene. It's not gonna *kill* me.

A: They laugh again, just

Lola: [laughs]

B: Kae has another one of those internal *Oh my god, is this working? Do I actually have game?* moments, but decides not to push it, and sort of just runs a hand back through their hair, awkwardly.

Kaelen: Uh, like I said, I'm a townie, so. My muscle memory can probably get us there without having to pay for Uber. My wheels?

A: She smiles.

Lola: Sounds great. Uh, lead the way, Kaelen.

B: A pretty person just said their name, Kae's brain devolves into TV static.

A: Not to continue kicking you when you're down, but I'm gonna invoke one of your Spooky moves and have you roll for a Premonition.

[FOREBODING MUSIC STARTS]

B: Oh no, am I gonna see the future of this date going horribly?

A: [laughs]

B: [dice sound] Uh. That was only a six.

A: Okay. On the upside, you mark experience. On the downside: *On a miss, you get a vision of something bad happening to you and the keeper holds three, to be spent one-for-one as penalties to rolls that you make.* You're not there anymore. But it's...

different, it's different and *strange*, compared to these breaks from the present that you've had a few times before. You are not standing in this coffee shop. You... don't know *where* you are. You are laying on a concrete floor, your head is *pounding*, there's a ringing in your ears. You see blood on the floor in front of you. Up against an equally-concrete wall is, curled up, a young woman - about your age, maybe a little younger, clearly of *some* kind of Latina heritage. Dark hair, wearing a clubbing dress and some high heels. Clutching at her own arms, looking at something that you can't see, wide-eyed. And, in front of her, stands... Lydia Antonov. Her stance square, she reaches up and wipes the back of her hand across her mouth, and then shakes a little bit of blood off of it, and looks down at you; you can see her saying your name, but you can't hear her. And then you're back.

B: Kae, like, sways on her feet - I think she reaches out and grabs Lola's arm, to keep from just keeling over.

Lola: Whoa!

A: Lola reaches out to steady you.

Kaelen: [deep breath] I think that sense you have about these kind of things is... right on the money. Let's go.

[MUSIC FADES]

B: Damien. Dahlia marches you back up these stairs and into the penthouse, back to the guest room that you're supposed to be staying in. My question for you is: *Do* you sleep?

A: I think, despite myself, I do a *little* bit. Uh, just from exhaustion, more than anything else.

B: Yeah, you're *really* tired, and the bed is *really* comfy. You wake up, and the clock on your bedside table tells you that it is mid-afternoon. Not much else about your surroundings has changed, you can still hear Luke sawing logs in the next room over. And your room appears undisturbed. What would you like to do?

A: Well, I am facing a distinct lack of options. So I'm gonna get outta bed and head out into the living room.

B: The living room is not empty and dark, the way it was when you went to bed. Those thick, heavy-duty blackout shades are still pulled down over all the windows, but the lights are on, the TV is on at a low volume in the background. And, curled up on one of the mismatched couches, Dahlia - still in her pajamas - and one Michael Darcy are sitting there, with their heads together, in hushed conversation. They both snap around to look at you when you walk in, and Michael gives you this beatific look, that seems a *little* patronizing.

Michael: Oh, goodness, look at the *state* of you. Breakfast!

Damien: *Not* what you wanna hear from a vampire, the first time they see you in a day.

B: He rolls his eyes and stands up, brushing off the front of his smoking jacket.

Michael: Oh, heavens no. Do we have to go over this again? [scoffs] Look. Vampires eat...?

Damien: I mean. Blood, if all the books that I read in English class are anything to believe

Michael: A vast oversimplification, brought about by that *hack* Stoker. I will never forgive him. The reality's a bit closer to this: Almost every culture has *some* sort of vampire mythos. And through all of those varied mythologies, vampires eat... life essence. Which *can* be blood! It's Dahlia's preferred snack of choice. But the term *life essence* is a little... loosey-goosey. And I prefer to indulge in what I believe is the purest form. After all, what is our life, but all the silly little emotions we spend *so much* time and energy devoted to. How are you feeling?

B: And Damien, you notice that for the first time in weeks you feel, like... *chill*.

A: I actually don't like that at all. In a very chill way, Damien says

Damien: Cool. I understand. Guy's gotta eat. Please don't fuck with my head.

B: Your anxiety instantly comes back, and Mick takes a step back and kind of puts his hands up.

Damien: A-thank you. I may be emotionally disturbed, but these are my emotional disturbances. I hold them close to my chest, like children.

Michael: Fair enough. Sometimes I forget. I'm in the gambling business, you see; typically when I'm feeding off of people's woes and life savings going down the drain, they're paying me to do it. At any rate, Dahlia and I have been burning the midnight oil, and we think we have a solution worked up for you.

A: I'm gonna look back over my shoulder, towards where Luke is still fast asleep, apparently. And then look back at Michael and Dahlia with a big smile, and say

Damien: You'll have to forgive my skepticism, I've been... offered solutions to my little problem, before.

Michael: Oh, of course. If you took us at our word alone, it would make you an idiot. An idiot with powerful connections, but an idiot nonetheless. Unfortunately, I find myself lacking a certain piece of *material* evidence that may be a *bit* more convincing, but...

B: He walks over to one of these many, *many* shelves of various collectibles, and pulls down a little glass-topped wooden case, and brings it over. It is empty, but you can see a velvet cushion inside of it, where *something* once rested. You're not really able to discern a specific shape, or tell what used to be there. But he flips the lid open, and nods down at the empty space.

Michael: I've spent some time making some phone calls, and... Well, there's no way to put this delicately; I've figured out what you are.

A: Damien goes incredibly tense.

B: He notices this, and so does Dahlia. She goes like she's about to open her mouth to ask for clarification, and Michael just puts a hand up - as if to tell her to leave it.

Michael: Dahlia informs me that you're being pursued by the Wild Hunt. And... if the situation is as I understand it, they will never stop hunting you.

A: Damien clenches his fists super hard, and plasters on a *bitter* smile.

Damien: Nice to hear somebody else acknowledge it.

B: Mick's face kind of twists up into something between sympathy and *cringe*.

Michael: Well, if you can't *run* forever, the second best option would be... concealment, yes? I recently had access to an artifact that would render you undetectable to entities such as the Wild Hunt.

Damien: [scoffs] Oh, cool, weird vampire guy has an empty box and promises a McGuffin.

Michael: *Weird vampire guy* presents your first real option you've had since you *broke containment*, but, by all means, take it or leave it.

A: I shut up and sit down.

Michael: There's a good lad.

B: He puts the box back on the shelf and starts slowly pacing back and forth in front of the TV.

Michael: Anyway. I'd had the old thing kicking around on a shelf for a few centuries; I can't decide whether it was *by design* or a cruel twist of fate that I lost it in a bad run of poker about a month ago. Love to help you get it back, but... I'm afraid that won't be possible. You're on your own, kid. Or, well, you and Dahlia and... I'm so sorry, what was the young man's name, again?

Damien: That's. Luke. Uh, get it back from *who*, exactly?

B: Michael looks extremely uncomfortable.

Michael (haltingly): A... fellow collector, like myself. Who just so happens to be an ancient, indescribably powerful, and notoriously crotchety Archfey.

Damien: [laughs] Cool. So I can try to get the McGuffin and put myself *right* in the hands of the people that it's supposed to keep me hidden from? Great.

Michael: [disagreeing noise, stammers] Not *necessarily*. This particular individual is affiliated with the Seelie Court, and there's a lot of political drama that goes on; they're not really the people that *want* you. Extremely dangerous, though! Don't - Don't get that twisted. And I would help you out if I could! It's just that... creatures of the sort of persuasion that we're dealing with, here, are... much more dangerous at night, so this would necessitate a daytime recovery, and... I can't really do that.

Damien: Right. The... vampire th- Wait, you said *Dahlia* was gonna help.

Michael: Well, as long as she keeps up with her SPF regimen, she'll be fine. She's just a baby.

A: I look at Dahlia, quizzically.

B: She's still sipping on her blood bag, and just kind of shrugs like he's telling the truth.

Dahlia: Yeah, I mean, I'm 21.

Damien: ...And *how* long have you been 21?

Dahlia: [slurping noise] Five months.

A: Damien puts his head in his hands.

B: Michael says nothing and does nothing about your dismay, just very brightly goes

Michael: And I'm 547, and when *I* go out in the sun, *this* happens.

B: He pulls back one of those blackout shades over the window, and his *fucking* arm catches fire.

[FLAMENCO GUITAR STARTS]

A: [laughs]

B: He's, like, very calm about it, though. You hear him hiss in pain for, like, a second, and then he just lets the shade go back over the window and shakes his arm off. Kind of bats at it until the flames go out.

Michael: And I heal fast, but... not that fast.

Damien: [stammers] Point... taken? Please don't do that again.

Michael: I felt obligated; I was the one that told you not to just take us at our word.

Damien: [stammers] Yeah. You did. What do you mean you've been around for *centuries*? This shit started in 2012.

B: He looks away from where he's been picking at charred pieces of his smoking jacket and just flicking them onto the floor, and fixes you with a big fanged grin.

Michael: There's been strange and unusual things in the world since time immemorial. We just had the misfortune to think that we had the monopoly on being strange and unusual, until the veil came down. But, you know what they say: Nobody expects the Spanish Inquisition. *I* certainly didn't.

A: I don't even know where to start with this man. Damien stammers for a second, and then settles on

Damien: You're *Spanish*?

Michael: Darling, I hustle Archfey at poker for a *living*. Do you think *Michael Darcy* is my real name?

Damien: I have no further questions that I think you can answer in a satisfactory way.

B: Behind you, you hear a door open, and Luke - very sleepy-eyed - comes shuffling out into the living room, blinking.

Luke: [sniffing] Mm. Somebody making burgers?

Damien: Gross!

B: This apparently immensely powerful and immensely old vampire is looking... more and more exhausted, with every passing second. Just brings both of his hands up in front of his face, one arm still smoking, fingers steepled in front of his mouth.

Michael: [deep breath] Alright. Gentlemen, I am going to lead into this little sales pitch with just a bit of a reality check. All you've been doing for the past several weeks is running for your lives, correct?

Damien: Yeah, at least the last couple weeks.

Michael: Wonderful. I need you to keep that in mind as I ask you the next question.

B: From behind his fingers, you see that pointy-toothed grin stretch out again, and his eyes flash red.

Michael: How do you feel about a casino heist?

[MUSIC FADES]

B: And that's where we're gonna wrap up, this time.

A: I do love to just be playing a *feral cat* that does not know how to be treated with kindness.

B: And I love playing a trembling opossum at the bottom of a garbage can, not understanding why people think it's cute. We'll see what happens next time.

A: On Compelled Dual: Desert Song.

[THEME MUSIC PLAYS]

B: Hey, everybody, Barry here with the postscript, just clearing up a couple of housekeeping things here at the end of the episode. As always, I'm going to go ahead and plug our social media profiles, you can find us on Twitter, Tumblr, and TikTok @CompelledDual. We have lots of other cool stuff going on, however - an official website, an official Spotify profile, stuff like that. You can find all that stuff linked on any of our various social media profiles. If you're interested in supporting the show, we ask that you consider heading over to patreon.com/CompelledDual, where, starting at just \$2 a month,

you can get access to all kinds of cool patron perks, including early access to episodes, access to exclusive playlists and bonus content, and even handwritten letters from your favorite character every month. If you're interested in supporting the show in ways other than pledging to our Patreon, we ask that if you're listening to us on Apple Podcasts or Spotify, that you leave us a rating and a review, since that helps the show get promoted to a wider audience. And, as always, if you like what you're hearing on the show, we ask that you just tell a couple of friends about it. And if they like it, ask them to tell a couple of friends as well. Word-of-mouth advertising is the most powerful tool we have at our disposal. Our next episode will be premiering on Monday, December 26th, 2022. Or, if you are a member of our patreon, you'll be getting early access to that on Sunday, December 25th. Thank y'all so much, and we'll see you next time.