

BEFORE THE TONE - EPISODE 13 - “Not To Be Reproduced”

(SFX: The intro music plays. But it is wrong somehow, more echoing, more ominous.)

NARRATOR

Knave Of Hearts presents Before The Tone.

(beat)

Episode 13: Not To Be Reproduced.

(SFX - The intro music continues and finishes with a ‘Bong’.)

(SFX: Sounds of a phone ringing (from the caller’s end). It rings twice before getting the answering machine.)

FIRST VOICEMAIL - SAME NIGHT AS LAST EPISODE

INT - MACK’S APARTMENT - NIGHT

DARIA

(in a recorded message)

Hey. You’ve reached Daria. I’m not at the phone right now, so leave a message after the tone, and I’ll get back to you when I can.

MACK

(coming off of emotional, still teary like she was crying before this but overall calm, starts low, fluctuates. SFX: Music plays, tense and moody.)

(breath, swallows) Hey, Daria. It’s *(melancholy laugh)* It’s Mack. *(sigh)* *(pause)* My stalker, Dandelion, just left a little bit ago. I’m pretty sure that voicemail sent. I’m pretty sure he sent it. And I’m pretty sure *(here come the emotions again)* I’m pretty sure you know him? And I don’t

know what that means. For you, for me, for - any of this? I don't know if you're working for Atlas or *(break)* Eve. Or - one of the other companies, whatever they are. Or - or maybe you're like - Dandelion and do in-between *stuff* *(hit that "t")*. *(breath)* I don't know. I don't know because you have not told me. I don't know because you won't answer my damn calls. And I don't know! Ok? I don't know! I don't know what to do! I just know — I just know that he called you by name, and he knows you. And he *(breath)* knows more than just your name. Because *(laugh)* you'd better believe that I did not believe him, and, and, yeah, maybe it's bad practice to get pissed off at the stalker in your apartment, but I did. And he knows you.

(pause) (take a breath, the music finishes up)

(calmer) But *I* know you too. And you're my sister. I know that you are terrible at sewing because you have negative amounts of patience. I know you can do math in your head faster than I could ever write it out or pull out a calculator. I know that you are probably still mad that I stole your bandana with the stars on it and never gave it back. I know that you can't stay in one place or one job for too long 'cause you get antsy. And you could probably do any job because you're just cool like that. I know you are an abomination that doesn't like Tabasco. I know you once dropped everything and flew across the country when I got in that - accident. And I. Trust. You.

I don't know everything. But I know you. And I trust you. And I *have* to trust you. *(SFX: Music softly returns.)* And I have to trust myself. I'm not ... going crazy or making any of this up. There's weird fucking shit going on, and I have to figure out how to get out of it.

And you are fucking explaining things later, ok? And - fuck it - you're buying me lunch too, ok? Somewhere nice. With a fancy fucking bread basket. Ok? I want — I'm talking French and Italian bread. Fancy stuff. I want olive bread, Daria, olive bread, ok?!

(breath) I am going to try and quit. It — Well, you heard — It sounds like that may not actually go as planned, but I have to try the easiest route before I panic - more. I have the resignation letter typed and printed — I wrote that out - oh gosh - pretty much as soon as Dandelion left and then *(singsong)* paused for my breakdown. *(breath)* And I am going to go and turn it in, I guess.

Wish me luck?

I'll keep you updated. I may ... I'll keep you updated. Love you.

(SFX: Beep. Call ends.)

INTERRUPTION 1

INT - ??? - ???

(SFX: Break-uppy and static-filled to varying degrees. Sharp cut-offs and breaks. Music seems to fall out of synch with itself.)

NES

—don't know where I am. Sometimes, it looks like a building. Like I've been here before, but I ... Maybe I did come here once.

It's hard to keep track. It's hard to keep—

(SFX: Cuts off.)

SECOND VOICEMAIL / CALL - RIGHT AFTER LAST

INT - ATLAS SECURITY ROOM - NIGHT (DANNY)

INT - MACK'S APARTMENT - NIGHT (MACK)

(SFX: Phone ringing from callers end.)

MACK

(imagine she had been about to step out the door)

Hello?

DANNY

(still generally calm but masking nervousness)

Hey, Mack. Are you coming in today? Or ... are you still at Legion?

MACK

I — Yeah, I'm coming in, but - not — I'm going to turn in my letter of resignation, actually.

DANNY

Oh. That's ... Are you sure?

MACK

(HA) Yeah, I'm pretty sure. That place is pretty fucked up, Danny. You should probably quit too.

DANNY

(trying to lighten a bit) I like my job, and you're my favorite coworker. *(pause, considering)* I don't know if quitting is the best idea, Mack. It's ...

MACK

Didn't Buck quit?

DANNY

That is kind of my point.

MACK

What do you mean by that.

DANNY

People don't quit often, and they don't talk about people that do. It's - taboo, you could say. But, you deserve some warning at least. That can't be a ... *(they cut themselves off)*

MACK

(incredulous)

What happened to Buck?

DANNY

He wasn't ... happy with certain policies — projects — that Atlas was working on, so he quit.

(SFX: That strange music that seems to fall out of synch returns.)

MACK

Did they kill him?

DANNY

(edge of amusement but strained)

No, they didn't kill him.

(changing track) Listen, Mack. You are your own person. You can quit if that's what you think is best. But if you want to talk it through first, or if something— If you need anything, I'm here, ok? I'll be around tonight to cover your shift anyway, so drop by.

MACK

(breath. She could argue, try to find out more, but she won't) Thanks, Danny. I'll... Thanks.

DANNY

Right.

(SFX: Beep. Call ends.)

INTERRUPTION 2

INT - ??? - ???

(SFX: Same static-y and broken nature, music.)

NES

I wonder ... I think I got ... lost. I was ... here for something? I - I can't remember.

There are only couches when you don't want to sit down, and the floor is only still when you aren't walking on it. I think. But I can't trust that.

(SFX: Cuts out with a shrill of static.)

THIRD VOICEMAIL - NOT LONG AFTER LAST

EXT - OUTSIDE OF ATLAS - NIGHT

DARIA

(in a recorded message)

Leave a message after the tone, and I'll get back to you when I can.

MACK

(nervous but determined)

Ok. I am going to go into Atlas, march into Eve's office, and hand in my resignation. And it! Is!
Going! To! Be! Fine!

I, uh, probably didn't need to call just yet, but I just — I needed to hype myself up a bit. I'll keep you updated.

(SFX: Beep. Call ends.)

FOURTH VOICEMAIL - SAME NIGHT

INT - ELEVATOR - NIGHT

(SFX: NOTE: Entire voicemail is glitchy and lower quality.)

DARIA

(in a recorded message)

Leave a message after the tone, and I'll get back to you when I can.

MACK

(varying between panicked, drowsy, and confused)

Daria? Can— Can you hear me? I don't ... know if this is going through. It ... Something's - wrong here. I can't—

—The stairs were *bad*. I-I couldn't make it up — or, or was I trying to go down? I-I can't remember. — I couldn't make it without tripping. So I-I-I-I took the ... elevator.

(SFX: Music enters.)

Daria, I don't — Daria, I don't know what floor I'm going to. It's—

—Why is it taking so long? I—

—I can't— I don't know what button to push. Something's wrong. It's—

(SFX: Elevator ding, doors open.)

(MACK lets out a shaky breath.)

(SFX: Beep. Call ends.)

FIFTH VOICEMAIL - SAME NIGHT

INT - EVE'S OFFICE - NIGHT

(SFX: Eve's office has a clock that ticks very slightly incorrectly.)

(SFX: NOTE: Entire voicemail is slightly glitchy. (Less so than in the elevator.))

DARIA

(in a recorded message)

Leave a message after the tone, and I'll get back to you when I can.

MACK

I—

(SFX: Rustling as she slips phone into pocket.)

(SFX: NOTE: Audio should reflect phone being in pocket but still very audible.)

(SFX: Eve enters, opening/closing door; walking with heeled shoes to her side of the desk, sitting. She taps her foot softly slightly out of sync with the incorrect clock.)

EVE

(smiles)

Hello, Mack. How's your evening been?

MACK

(goes to say something, decides against it) I'm here to turn in my resignation.

(SFX: Rustle of paper, she places it down on counter. Beat. Music enters.)

EVE

Hmm.

(SFX: She taps a long nail against the paper a couple times but does not pick it up. The tapping is out of sync as well.)

(SFX: One more uncomfortable beat.)

Well, I'd hate to see you go, Mack. You've been very promising so far, and your work has been good.

INTERRUPTION 3

INT - ??? - ???

(SFX: Same static-y and broken nature.)

NES

—Here for a job? Or, or an interview? It doesn't matter.

It never matters. Not then, not now, now when. When?

It never will matter. Or matters now.

I'm sorry, I'm not making sense. That's hard here.

(SFX: Fades out.)

FIFTH VOICEMAIL CONT.

MACK

Eve, with all *(hm)*. With all due respect, This is not a safe working environment. There are cameras in my apartment that feed to the security room monitors. I am getting the hell out, and I will go to the police as well.

EVE

I am not going to stop you from going, Mack. Do not be ridiculous. Let me pull out the forms, and — You never did get an employee ID, but you can return the temporary one you have.

(SFX: Eve pulls a sheet of paper from the drawer as Mack unclips her ID. Both place their items on the desk, Eve puts a pen down squarely.)

Just fill out the form and sign at the bottom, and you will find yourself no longer gainfully employed by Atlas Consulting.

MACK

Thank you.

(SFX: Mack begins filling out the form.)

(Ironic quality) Will I still get my paycheck for the month?

(SFX: Signs form, places down pen as Eve speaks.)

EVE

(laughs, amused and pleasantly surprised)

I will miss having you around, Mack.

MACK

Right. Well,

(SFX: She gets up. Pauses.)

Is something wrong with your clock?

EVE

(raising an eyebrow)

Is there? You tell me.

MACK

(furrowed brow)

Yeah, there's ... It's not ...

(Her eyes fall on the form she just signed. SFX: The music here could go slightly askew.) I filled that form out in black.

EVE

And now?

MACK

It's blue.

EVE

(eyes positively glittering)

Wasn't it always?

MACK

No, it's — *(SFX: She picks up the pen.)* What? No...

INT - HALLWAY - NIGHT

(SFX: Mack is suddenly a bit to the side, she stumbles out of the room and into the hallway as the door closes.)

(Breathing heavily, trying to level out.)

(SFX: Takes another minute. Pulls phone out of pocket. Note: Phone is no longer in pocket.)

Well, that went... That went. Yeah. Ok. It's - it's done. I'm gonna — I just have to make it out of the building, and it's done. I'll— I'll call Danny later. Let them know I didn't - die mysteriously or something. I just— I'm just gonna keep talking if you don't mind because I'm gonna be honest, getting out of the building is seeming more and more daunting. Plus, bonus: you'll get to hear said mysterious murder! If it happens.

(SFX: She walks down the hallway. Her walking and breathing are uneven, and sometimes, she has to lean against the wall for support.)

Ok, stairs or elevator, which is it gonna be. *(under breath)* Would love your actual input on this. *(normal, nervous, music hisses slightly)* I'll try the stairs.

INTERRUPTION 4

INT - ??? - ???

(SFX: Same static-y and broken nature.)

(SFX: Cuts in mid way through NES nervously laughing, veering on hysterical.)

NES

(shaking head at a funny joke)

I didn't even get the job. Ha!

That isn't funny. That isn't even a joke

Not like the rats. Rats in the capital? Ha! There aren't even rats here.

(SFX: Static takes over and cuts out.)

FIFTH VOICEMAIL CONT.

INT - STAIRWELL - NIGHT

(SFX: She begins to descend the stairs. What would normally sound uneventful sounds intense and difficult. The stairs are not regular in height. She descends slowly and carefully, but they are wrong. The music hisses and whooshes ominously.)

(SFX: MACK sucks in a breath as she misses a step and stumbles down the next few stairs, narrowly avoiding a full tumble. Pause for MACK to breathe wincingly.)

MACK

(Shaken) Stairs were a bad plan. I'll - I'll take the elevator once we get - make it to the next floor.

(SFX: Continued descent. At the landing, she walks to the elevator and pushes the button, it arrives, she enters.)

INT - ELEVATOR - NIGHT

(SFX: Pushes button, elevator dings, doors close.)

MACK

(Mostly reassuring herself) One floor. It'll be fine for one floor.

(SFX: Note: Phone call gets glitchy.)

(SFX: MACK sucks in a startled breath though it is unclear why. The elevator continues, perhaps playing slightly incorrect muzak for longer than it should take to descend one level as the scene continues.)

I — Nope. I am going to close my eyes and ignore everything around me. *(slow, deliberately trying to calm herself down)* It's an elevator. It will take me where I need to be. I - I'm just gonna talk ... about nothing in particular. *(breathing exercises)*. Last week, or - or whenever this was — It's hard to— Uh, I went out for pizza with Pascal, and she was telling me about her book. She's writing a book; it's gonna be really good. It's about this family, but skipping generations, showing similarities, stuff like that. *(slightly less slow)* It's not normally my thing, but she's doing really cool things with it ...

(SFX: Pause, the muzak continues, tinny and echoing. It ticks up in intensity, perhaps overlapping with a different song.)

(The practiced calm is slipping away quickly) I should be on my floor by now. I should be on— I don't know what floor I was going to. I don't— I ...

(SFX: MACK sucks in a breath as the elevator arrives, and she shakily steps out.)

INTERRUPTION 5

INT - ??? - ???

(SFX: Same static-y and broken nature. That other song in the muzak continues into the interruption.)

NES

March is the best month for rats in the capital.

I don't know what that means. I don't even know what month it is. Was. Will be?

(really agitated) I should be on my floor by now. I should be on—I don't even know what floor I was going to. I don't—I ...

March alone, March is the worst month for rats in the capital.

(SFX: Cuts out in mournful static.)

FIFTH VOICEMAIL CONT.

INT - HALLWAY - NIGHT

(SFX: Glitchy-ness continues along with that other song, which is quicker in pace.)

MACK

(catch your breath.)

(afraid) This isn't the floor I wan... I don't know... I don't think I was coming here?

(SFX: While she is speaking, a door opens, and someone walks over.)

I... Wait what's—

(SFX: She pulls the pen out of her pocket.)

DANNY

Mack?

MACK

(Startled, Music pauses) Woah! Danny, you scared the shit out of ... me... Are we on the fourth floor?

DANNY

(concerned)

Yeah, we are. Are you ok? Did ... Did you quit?

MACK

(brow furrowed, looking around the room frantically)

Yeah, yeah I - fucking quit.

DANNY

And are you...?

MACK

(Pleading) Danny, I need you to tell me — What color is this pen?

DANNY

...It's blue.

MACK

(Takes in a breath. Nods.)

Right. Right. Of course it is. Right.

DANNY

... Was it not ... always blue?

MACK

(shaking her head and close to tears)

No, no it wasn't.

DANNY

Ok. I believe you. *(MACK sighs, relieved)* Do you need help ... grounding yourself?

MACK

No, I think I just need to get out of here. Now.

DANNY

Ok. That's ... Do you need—

MACK

—*(crosstalk)* But the elevators won't take me to the exit. I think— I don't—

DANNY

That's fine. That's why we have stairs. Breathe, Mack. I've got you.

(MACK takes a breath.)

MACK

I'm ... gonna need your help with the stairs. I know that sounds stupid, but I can't—

DANNY

Only stupid if you don't ask. Ok to touch you?

MACK

Yeah.

(SFX: She takes their arm. They walk to the stairwell.)

INT - STAIRWELL - NIGHT

(SFX: If the last stairwell adventure was intense, this is more so, ramping up over the course of the scene. Glitchy-ness continues.)

(SFX: Note: This is strenuous and difficult for Mack, which should reflect in speech, but it is a normal set of stairs for Danny. They are only affected insomuch as it is awkward to walk down stairs with someone using you for support. (And Mack is holding onto Danny more so than the railing because they are more stable than the railing).)

(SFX: Awkward and difficult descent for a few seconds and then continuing as dialogue starts. Music enters, tense and with a beat)

MACK

(concentrating, gritted teeth~) Can — Can you — What was the music tonight?

DANNY

(small laugh) It was mostly Crane Wives tonight.

MACK

“Curses”?

DANNY

I am partial to “Never Love an Anchor”, but “Curses” is a classic. I was in a bit of a mood tonight; I even threw in some Oh Hellos.

MACK

Yeah, that is a particular mood, isn't it? I wonder what—

(SFX: She trips, but manages to hold onto Danny.)

DANNY

(concerned) You alright? We can—

MACK

(breathing heavily)

Yeah, just. One second.

(SFX: They remain for a minute.)

Ok. Let's keep going. Sorry.

DANNY

Apology rejected due to uselessness. Do better next time.

MACK

(scoff laugh) My humblest, your ladyship.

DANNY

(joking hmmm) Hmm... Your lordship will accept this apology. For apologizing.

MACK

(scoff laugh)

(Beat.)

DANNY

(Noticing Mack's demeanor, trying to distract her again)

Did you ever start that book I sent you?

MACK

(amused but humorless(?) sigh) I am gonna be honest, I have not.

DANNY

Do you ... plan on starting it?

MACK

If I can ever get out of this hellhole, I'll think about it. *(DANNY: Mm.)* Is the question if you can riddle me with spoilers?

DANNY

Yes, that was the question.

MACK

Riddle away. Spoil me rotten.

DANNY

Right. It's an epistolary novel, so we open with a letter from one Reginald Insolence, purveyor of an excellent name and even more excellent reasons to be murdered.

MACK

Intriguing. I like th—

(SFX: She trips. For real this time. She falls, the phone goes flying and lands further down the stairs and the audio reflects that. Danny is suddenly no longer on the stairwell. The music gets more intense.)

(Long beat.)

(SFX: MACK lets out a pained breath and she gets up.)

MACK

I'm— I—

(afraid) Danny? Are— Where—?

(terrified) Fuck. Danny?!

(SFX: The “Danny?!” echoes.)

(SFX: MACK breathes, afraid for a minute before crawling over to the phone. Audio reflects that.)

I don't... Daria, I don't know what's happening. I should, I should be on the next floor, but I fell, and there's no — There should be elevators here, but, but they're gone. I — *(confused, almost drowsy, but definitely afraid)* I don't know where I am. I need help. I — Do you—

(SFX: Cut off by a hard beep.)

AUTOMATED VOICE

The message box is full. Goodbye.

(SFX: Beep. Call ends.)

(SFX: Cut out.)

(Credits.)

NARRATOR

This episode has featured the voices of Anna Stein as Mack, Emma Johanna Puranen as Daria, Micah Nathan Bradley as Danny, Grace Keller Scotch as the Automated Voice Messaging System, Luis Ernesto Fisher Gonzalez as Nes, and Rebecca Hansson as Eve Cacace. It was written by Anna Stein with script editing by Sarahlily Stein. Sound design and dialogue editing were done by Katharine Seaton. The theme music was composed by Duck Edwards. Featuring score by Arhynn Descy. It was directed by Anna Stein.

This episode includes references to The Statement Of Arden Bloom by the Archivistbot. Link in show notes.

Special thanks to our Indiegogo backers Wren Blackwood, Lucy Mason, and our Monarch and Spacetime tier backers Jacob Stein and Steven Stein as well as to everyone who backed the campaign.

ANNA

Hi, Anna here. I just want to jump in and give extra special thanks to the entire cast and crew for their work bringing this podcast to life. Thanks to the Chaos Agents, Karina Babcock and Andrew Curtis without whom this podcast would never have been possible beyond a one-sentence concept in my notes app To you, I say thank you so much for keeping me writing and giving me feedback early on. Thank you to everyone who auditioned; even if you weren't cast, you helped make this podcast possible too. Thank you to everyone who has listened so far. Thank you, Lucy, for stringboarding and cheering me on while I avoided writing. And finally, thank you so much to my family; this show would be very different without the essential car ride brainstorming sessions.

Thank you all.

NARRATOR

For updates and ominous messaging, follow us on Twitter and Tumblr @ KnaveOfHeartsAD.

The show will return for season 2: At The Tone.

Disclaimer: The fabrics of time are ever-creased. Take care to avoid getting trapped under a fold.

TRAILER - SHELTERWOOD

NICHOLAS

This is a story about the supernatural.

WILLIAM

Shelterwood is the land of dreams. If you want to find something here, you will.

NICHOLAS

This is a story of disappearances and homecomings.

SOLOMON

(phone call or voicemail)

I know your whole world has been turned upside down, but, listen, I was really hoping I could convince you not to go back out there.

NICHOLAS

Investigating the disappearance of my sister, Sadie DeRoso.

MONICA

I've never heard of anyone coming back. Ever.

NICHOLAS

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