Compelled Dual: Desert Song

Season One, Episode Eight

Everybody Lost Somebody

Cast:

Barry: Keeper, NPCs and voice of Kaelen

Al: Keeper, NPCs and voice of Damien

June 13th, 2007, 2.17 PM.

[CAMERA CLICKS, REELS ROLL]

Kaelen: Day 44. The initial specimen has mostly desiccated due to lack of humidity control in the laboratory environment - but, thanks to recent equipment improvements, the cultures are *thriving*. Sample C has almost completely outgrown the petri dish, and upon further observation...

[DOOR OPENS]

Monica: ...Okay. I don't *really* want to ask. But what the hell?

Kaelen: Ellie's room is next door, Monica.

Monica: I know arcade pizza when I see it, and we haven't gotten *that* since... [disgusted] Oh my *god*. Is that from Rory's birthday party? In *April*?

Kaelen: You and Dad told me that I needed to find ways to occupy myself over summer break.

Monica (condescending): Sweetie. We meant, like, *playing outside*. Not turning your bedroom into the sequel to *Contagion*.

Kaelen: Well, if you're *that* concerned, perhaps you should *leave* and come back with a hazmat suit. Also, *Contagion* was about a virus, not a mold. It's not the same thing.

Monica: [noise of barely-restrained malice] Where the fuck did you get all the flasks and shit?

Kaelen (condescending): I don't *have* any flasks - see, *this* is a *beaker*, and these are *pipettes*, and those are *petri dishes*. All of which I got from school.

Monica: With permission?

Kaelen: ...Define "permission."

Monica: Thought so. *Why*?

Kaelen: I was bored. And, you know, penicillin was derived from a mold. We could be looking at a medical miracle here.

Monica: We're looking at a *health hazard*, and it's going in the *garbage*, where it belongs.

[PLASTIC RUSTLING]

Kaelen: Hey!

[MORE RUSTLING]

Kaelen: [outraged noise] Really?! This isn't even *your* house!

Monica: Maybe not, but it is *my* daughter that you're growing *poison* three feet and a poorly-insulated wall away from. Be pissed. Tell your dad. I don't *care*. Just find *something else* to do with your time that's not so *goddamned weird*.

Kaelen: [frustrated groan, heavy breathing] ...Okay.

[KNOCKING, DOOR OPENS]

Damien: ...Can I come in?

Kaelen (bitterly): Yeah, sure, there's nothing to see here.

Damien: She found the Great Pizza Experiment, huh?

Kaelen: [sighs] I mean, she was right. I should have been more careful. Ellie's like a cockroach, she could probably survive nuclear fallout, but... Mold, plus your asthma...

Damien: *Stop*. I'm fine. Actually, pretty good, given the time of year.

Kaelen: AHA! You see? That *foul* woman probably just set the medical field back 20 years, all for a power play.

Damien (incredulously): ...*Foul*?

Kaelen: *Foul*, I said! Putrid! *Disgusting*. I could have really had something here - if I had had, like, two more weeks with those cultures? I could have won a Nobel Prize, D. A Nobel Prize!

Damien: Kae.

Kaelen: *What*?!

Damien: Well, if I could continue this conversation with my brother, and not the ghost of Edgar Allan Poe - *"That foul woman,"* - come on, man.

Kaelen: Are you really insulting the way that *I* insult Monica? In my own laboratory?

Damien: I'm pretty sure laboratories and bedrooms that have a *Yu-Gi-Oh!* poster on the wall are two circles that do not overlap, and you're *really* making me regret what I'm about to say... I don't think you're weird.

Kaelen (skeptical): Are you *sure*?

Damien: [uncertain noise] Well, you're *weird*, but not in a way that makes *throwing stuff you care about in the garbage* okay. Do you want me to go get it for you? I can sneak into the garage. It'll be right at the top of the big cans.

Kaelen: Nah. The samples are probably already contaminated, anyway. But... Thank you. For understanding. Thanks for *caring*.

Damien: I mean, I'm *definitely* not smart enough to understand, but I'll listen if you want to tell me about it.

Kaelen: Cool! So the thing is, when you culture a mold -

[CAMERA CLICKS, REELS STOP]

[THEME MUSIC PLAYS]

A: Hello, everybody, and welcome back to Compelled Dual: Desert Song. I'm Al.

B: And I'm Barry.

A: And we are a single-player, co-GM'd TTRPG podcast.

B: Previously, on Compelled Dual: Desert Song.

[RECAP STARTS]

Michael: The only thing keeping any of us safe since the veil came down has been that the fae Courts are more interested in their own infighting than the rest of us *peons*. If they're working together for something...

Damien: I mean, I'll leave *tonight* if that's what you're angling for.

Michael: What? No! I have a friend out of state that you can go stay with. Luke and Dahlia, you'll obviously have to go with him.

Ellis: Why do you make it so *fucking hard* to help you with anything?! The whole family thinks you're off the rails - I told you before I went back to school that I was worried about you being here by yourself with nobody to check you, and then you *disappear*, and the next thing I know *this shit* is happening. I -

Kaelen: I *died*!

Dahlia: [inhales sharply] Hey guys? Wild Hunt, ten o'clock.

Damien: Well, we can't take it back now! Just fucking drive!

A: One-by-one, everybody else in this living room falls asleep. And you realize that you cannot join them.

B: Nope. Because Kaelen is dead, and everybody that she cares about is alive. And their lives just keep going on, even after hers has stopped.

Molly: Hi! Molly Hill, nice to meet you.

Damien: Uh. Damien.

Kaelen: ...Damien?

Ellis: What, you're gonna ride up into the high desert with nothing but your *keen powers of observation*?

Kaelen: Better than sitting here and waiting for concrete proof until it's too late!

Ellis: You're undead, Damien's *wanted* for knocking over a fucking *drugstore*, and otherwise we're exactly where we have been for the last five *goddamn* years. So can you take a *fucking second*?!

Kaelen: Lola, uh, so great to see you again.

Lola: I want to help you look for your brother?

Kaelen: At least *someone* does.

[RECAP ENDS]

B: Alright, folks, long time no see. Just a reminder, as we are coming out of an interlude, we do not have any end-of-session experience to cover, so we are just gonna get right into it. On with the show.

[MUSIC CUE]

A: So. Kaelen. We find you in your living room, standing between Lola St. Laurent, who has shown up at your house with a duffel bag - apparently here to help you do some fucking *PI shit* - and your sister, who is standing behind you - looking a little hurt, because you have just said some extremely passive-aggressive shit. And you have just been given irrefutable proof that your brother is alive, but unfortunately, apparently, he's being chased by cops across state lines. Not ideal! What are you doing?

B: Hyperventilating. Kae is just standing there in the doorway between Lola and their sister, looking back-and-forth, big, unhinged smile on their face.

> **Kaelen:** [heavy breaths] *Okay*. Okay, this is good, this is great, this is awesome. Lola, come in!
>
> **Lola:** ...Uh, yeah.

A: Lola comes into the house, still kind of standing awkwardly close to you. She seems aware of the fact that she has walked into a very tense situation, and *you* are a known quantity, whereas Ellie is not.

B: I don't know how wise of a decision *that* is, given that I'm not even a known quantity to *myself*, but, okay. Kae takes a step to the side to let Lola in and very subtly tries to kick her own duffel bag, that she was getting ready to run off into the desert with, under the hall table so it can't be seen.

A: I think I'm gonna have *you* roll to Act Under Pressure to do that subtly and, like, not convey how seriously tense a situation this actually is. And I'm gonna have Lola roll to Investigate A Mystery. You go first.

B (sarcastic): Yay, I love doing this with my -1. [dice noise] Seven!

A: Okay. This is not that serious of a situation, so this is not that serious of a roll. You try to kick your duffel bag under the table, and you kick the leg of the - the hall table, really hard.

> **Kaelen:** [yelps]

A: And I'm gonna have Lola roll to Investigate A Mystery - uh, the thing about Lola St. Laurent is that they have max Sharp. [dice noise]

B (agonized): NO.

A: [CACKLING]

B: Oh no, oh...

A (trying not to laugh): I rolled a - a twelve on the die, I rolled two sixes. And Lola has +3 to Sharp. [laughs] That's a 15.

B: Oh my god, I'm being *perceived* - I *hate* being perceived!

A: Okay. So, I think you've successfully obfuscated the situation a little bit - you managed to kick the duffel bag under the fucking table. So it is not crystal-clear immediately that you were about to charge out into the desert half-cocked. I'm gonna ask *you* some questions off the Investigate A Mystery list -

B: [groans]

A: - and I would really *love* it if you would just tell me how you think Lola has these questions answered by the environment she has just walked into.

B: Is it possible she can be distracted from her questions by watching Kae melt into a puddle of goo on the floor? Because I'm pretty sure that's what's about to happen.

A: How dare you. Lola St. Laurent, once interested, has never been distracted in her *life*.

B: [moans of agony]

A: Okay. First question: *What happened here?* I will remind you that information Lola presumably already has is that she walked into you having a knockdown, dragout screaming match with your sister, for the *second time* that she has witnessed. And, honestly, she might have pulled into the - the little cul-de-sac behind your house at about the same time the cops were leaving. But you don’t know for sure.

B: Well, even if she did pull in at the same time that the cops were leaving, since they're detectives, they probably would have been in an unmarked car, right?

A: I mean, yeah, they *might* have had lights on the dashboard - you don't know if Lola would be able to recognize an unmarked police vehicle.

B: So, environmentally, just in the house, I think what they can see is the fact that Kae and Ellie are screaming at each other, Kae managed to kick the duffel bag under the table but was still dressed to walk out the door - probably had the keys to her motorcycle in her hand - and, because *apparently* things *break* when Kae gets upset, now, there's probably a couple cracked tchotchkes sitting around.

A: You watch Lola kind of look around the room and focus in on the motorcycle keys in your hand. Her second question is: *What was it going to do?*

B: I mean, the shortest version of that answer is *abscond*. Kae's got their motorcycle keys - I think they try to kick at their duffel bag, like, one more time, miss, and kick the table again, but draw attention to the bag nonetheless. I don't know how soon Lola got to the door, but Kae and Ellie weren't exactly being *quiet*, she probably could have heard at least some of the exchange about Ellie not wanting Kae to leave.

A: I think, as far as freeform questions... Lola's just trying to gauge the vibes. I think they're looking between you and Ellie, and kind of glancing at the duffel bag, and the fact that they are between you and the door, and trying to figure out if this situation is about to get *worse*, or if the two of you are going to stop fighting now that there is another person in the house.

B: So their last question is: *Vibe check?*

A: I think the better phrasing would be: *Do these people have shame?*

B: I mean, I don't think anybody's gonna like the answer to that one. I'm sure this is gonna go *just so well* - can I roll to Manipulate Someone to see if I can get Ellie off the offensive?

A: Go ahead.

B: Kae turns back to her sister, and kind of slowly puts both hands up.

Kaelen: Okay, the situation is bad enough as it is, can I just get *one moment* of radical trust?

B: And then I'm gonna roll, with my -1 to Charm! [dice noise] *Five*. Yay, at least I get Experience!

A: Ellie gives you this *look* that I don't even really know how to describe. It's, like, distilled essence of the sentiment "I expected nothing, and I'm still let down." And then her face just completely shutters, closes off. She nods, and says

Ellis: Yeah, fine by me. Whatever.

B: Kaelen looks really hurt for a second, because this is what feels like the millionth time she has asked someone to trust her, and been burned for it. But then they also completely shutter their face, mask any of that emotion, and nod toward the living room at Lola.

Kaelen: Alright, we've got a lot to talk about. Namely that I really appreciate you wanting to help us find Damien, but, apparently, Las Vegas's finest did it for us.

A: Lola blinks, and says

Lola: Uh, as in we have to stage a jailbreak and/or write a congressman, or...?

Kaelen: Uh. No, no - at least, not *yet*, anyway.

B: Kae just slumps down on the couch and puts her head in her hands.

Kaelen: They, uh... caught him on a security camera - very much not dead, might I add! - [hesitant noise] maybe kind of robbing a pharmacy in Barstow, California. With an accomplice. So now the objective is for us to catch up with him before the long arm of the *law* does. My sister and I - you remember Ellis - Ellis, Lola - um, we had a bit of a disagreement on strategy, just as you were showing up.

Lola: ...Huh. Okay.

A: Lola pulls out her phone and starts tapping at it like she's typing something - presumably in a notes app.

> **Lola:** Cool. Uh, so, what's our next move, in that case?

> **Kaelen:** The detectives that showed up right before you came showed us the actual video evidence, but we don't have a copy, yet. I think, if we're not just going to get out there and start following the trail ourselves, then we need to wait to get our hands on the evidence. And bring some more people into this, get some more perspective.

A: Ellie kind of takes over, and says

> **Ellis:** Which I'm gonna work on tomorrow. Uh, they're probably sending the front desk people home any minute, so.

> **Kaelen:** But we appreciate your help, and, if you're willing to wait around until this can all get a bit more productive, you've got a place to stay. Here, give me your bag, I'll show you upstairs.

A: Ellie's eyebrows shoot up, and Lola says

> **Lola:** Oh, that's not necessary - I can get a motel, if that would be... easier.

> **Kaelen:** No, please, God. Lola, we're *Catholic*, I've got enough guilt without having to deal with watching you *spend money* to put yourself in *danger* on my account.

A: Ellie - very sharply - says

> **Ellis:** Well, I hope you're not planning on giving away my room.

> **Kaelen:** I wasn't, but thank you for your *stunning* sense of hospitality, Ellis.

B: Kae just hefts Lola's duffel bag up, heads upstairs, shoulder-checks Ellie super hard on the way by, and puts the bag down on the upstairs landing. Is Ellie gonna let Lola upstairs? Or is she gonna go full Bridge Of Khazad Dum *You-Shall-Not-Pass* on this?

A: The thing about Ellis O'Connell is that she needs to get a good grade in human interaction. I think she is going to step aside.

B: Okay, good. Kae waits for Lola to get up to the top of the stairs, and then kind of takes a couple steps forward, nodding as if they want Lola to follow them.

> **Kaelen:** I will get you set up in two seconds, there's just some security protocol we have to handle first.

A: Lola looks confused for a second, and then - like a bloodhound that has caught a scent - she perks up, and goes

> **Lola:** Oh, is this about the - the *ghost* thing?

> **Kaelen:** Yes. And, unfortunately, this is where what I believe to be the nastiest one lives... Amazing. Even in my own home, I am never free from cis women being a nuisance while I'm trying to piss.

B: Kae swings open the door to the bathroom.

A: Lola gives the upstairs bathroom kind of a wary look, and then looks back at her phone, fingers poised as if she is about to start typing.

> **Lola:** Uh, what specific phenomena have you noticed? Um, objects moving, electrical disturbances, cold spots...?

> **Kaelen:** Uh, well, a lightbulb exploded, scary shit appeared behind me in the mirror, and she tried to drown my sister? Anyway, let me handle this - Hey! This is Lola. She's cool. You try to fuck with her, I'm telling Grandma. Got it?

A: There is no response from the empty bathroom.

B: Kae leans over the threshold enough to look into the mirror, does an *I'm-watching-you* finger gesture at it, and then leans back out and shuts the door.

> **Kaelen:** Okay. You should be good to, like, shower and things, now. If it helps your peace of mind, I'm pretty sure the bedrooms aren't haunted, at least.

A: Lola looks conflicted for a second.

Lola: ...Yeah, that's - that's *probably* for the best. I can't really make observations while I'm asleep, anyway.

Kaelen: ...You're worried about observations and not, you know, getting *Conjuring*-ed in the middle of the night?

Lola: Oh! Do you *have* any haunted dolls, or...?

Kaelen: Not that *I* know of!

Lola: Well then I'm probably not gonna get... *The Conjuring*-ed.

A: She gives you kind of a wry smile, like she's fucking with you.

Lola: I can pretty much handle myself, don't worry.

Kaelen: [stammers] You know what, yeah. Sure. Okay. If you're looking to get your paranormal jollies, my old man dies in the living room at about 3 a.m. every night, my dead uncle hangs out on the front porch, and if you go into the kitchen after dark, my grandma might make you a cup of tea.

A: Lola *immediately* looks back at her phone and starts typing. Meanwhile, from about halfway up the stairs, Ellie says,

Ellis: *What*?

Kaelen: Oh, yeah, Ellie - because you have a habit of never taking anything I say seriously, I never bothered telling you about how Dad was my *sleep paralysis demon* on my first night back among the living. And, uh, I saw Uncle D bleeding out on the porch. Grandma and I had a couple really nice chats. I don't know *what* the hell's going on in the backyard, but that shit ain't fun at all.

A: Ellie stammers for a second, and Lola plasters on a smile, and says

Lola: So, where did you want me to stay?

Kaelen: Uh... I mean, if you want, you can take my room and I can grab one of the spares?

B: Kae, like, opens the door to their room and lets Lola take a peek in there. *That* was probably a bad idea.

A: Lola looks in your room and tactfully does not mention the anime posters or the *Star Wars* memorabilia.

Lola: Uh. Yeah, that works. I-I-I mean, thank you for the hospitality.

Kaelen: It's not really that much hospitality, I don't sleep anymore. But, um, if sleeping next to deadly nightshade is something that you don't really want to do, there's a little more milquetoast accommodations over here across the hall.

B: Kae goes over and opens up the door to their parents' old room.

[MUSIC CUE]

A: As soon as you do that, Ellie says

Ellis: Absolutely not.

B: Kaelen gives her kind of a weird look.

Kaelen: What? I thought you said that you didn't want anybody in *your* room.

A: You turn back to the now-open door to your parents' old room and see your dad sitting on the bed. Little, maybe seven-ish year old Ellie sitting in front of him - he's squinting as he braids her hair. And, like, eight or nine year old Damien is bouncing on the bed to the side. Your dad finishes up Ellie's braid, ties it off, says

Todd: Alright, munchkin, you're good.

A: She hops off the bed, Damien jumps off the side and starts running around after her. And then the little versions of both of them vanish, and you see maybe 12-year-old Ellie leaning

against a wall, visibly red in the face - she looks like she's been crying. And then she vanishes too. Adult 20 year old Ellie says,

> **Ellis:** [humorless chuckle] I don't know, there's lots of, uh, 90s band shirts in the closet. The vibes are, like, *concussive* if you walk in there for the first time.

B: Kae makes a face, but quickly covers it up again and shuts the door.

> **Kaelen:** Alright, Lola, guess you're staying in the Batcave whether you want to or not. It's fine, I'll take the living room. I've been getting really into jigsaw puzzles anyway.

A: Lola looks a little relieved that she does not have to witness a *third confrontation* between you and your sister.

> **Lola:** Sounds good. Um, I've - I've been on the road all day, I'm gonna go change into something more comfortable, uh... Thanks again. I would really like to actually talk about more of the paranormal activity, if you wouldn't mind, um, but - t-shirt, first.

A: And then she whirls around, shuts your bedroom door behind her.

> **Kaelen:** [groans]

B: Kae just scrubs both hands down the sides of their face and sits against the wall, slowly sinking to the floor.

A: There is a pause, and then Ellie finishes walking up the stairs, comes over and kind of squats in front of you, and just - face completely closed off, voice very firm - says

> **Ellis:** Keys.

> **Kaelen:** Excuse me?

A: She holds out a hand, impatiently, and says

> **Ellis:** I can't trust you not to run off and do something stupid. *Give me. Your keys.*

Kaelen: Ellie, this is unnecessary; I already told you we're gonna wait for more information.

Ellis: Yeah, and the *last* time you decided to run off into the desert half-cocked, you waited until I was asleep and snuck out the *fucking window*, Kae. *Keys*.

Kaelen: Ellis, I am a *grown-ass adult*. You do not get to *ground me* and take my keys just because you're uncomfortable with the situation.

Ellis: You're a grown-ass *corpse* who's proven to be a danger to herself. Give me the *fucking keys*, or I'll sit on you.

Kaelen: Come get them!

A: Okay, you wanna do this? She lunges at you. Roll to Kick Some Ass.

B: Okay! I'm not gonna use my fucked up magic zombie powers on my sister, though, so I'm [laughs] rolling this with my +0 to Tough. [dice noise] Two! [cackles] Another Experience for me!

A: Ellie just straight up tackles you onto the carpet.

Kaelen: Oh!

A: Yeah, you end up with your cheek pressed *firmly* into the shag carpet fibers as Ellie grabs your hand and just pries your keys out of your fingers.

B: Kae wiggles around impotently, *definitely* getting carpet burn on her face.

Kaelen: You little shit! I'm gonna get those back - you have to sleep sometime, I don't!

A: Ellie, with the keys in her grasp, pulls away, gives you a tight, victorious smile, and says

Ellis: Yeah, and I lock the door when I do, so good luck!

A: And then she tucks your keys in her pocket.

> **Kaelen:** [growls] You are *so*… [sighs] My keys to the laundromat are on the key ring. Could you just -

A: She pulls the key ring back out, clicks it open, removes the key to your bike and the key to the Cutlass, and then hands it back to you.

> **Kaelen (sarcastic):** *Thank* you, oh *gracious caretaker* who looks out for me because I am *so incapable*.

A: She rolls her eyes, stands up, dusts herself off, and says

> **Ellis:** Have fun telling ghost stories to your new girlfriend. I'm going out.

A: And then she heads back down the stairs.

B: Damien, you wake up after an *extremely* strange night at the Motel Baja Mesa; the little roadside inn that you and Luke and Dahlia stumbled across after the Volkswagen bus gifted to you by Michael Darcy decided to give up and die in the middle of the desert. Your eyes open to sunlight piercing through threadbare curtains, catching the dust motes on the air. The blankets draped over you, plasticine and scratchy in the way that all cheap motel bed linens are. You don't feel like you got much sleep. For whatever reason, you are not rested. But, rested or not, you are awake. What would you like to do?

A: I guess I'm gonna go try and find my friends to make a game plan.

B: Okay. You and Luke and Dahlia are staying in three rooms directly next to each other, 13, 14, and 15. You are in room 13. Are you headed out?

A: If I'm remembering correctly, Dahlia's in 14, so I'm gonna knock on that one first.

B: No answer. If you try the handle, it's locked.

A: OOOkay. Do I hear Luke snoring from behind door 15?

B: You do not.

A: Okay! Then I'm gonna head, uh, to the office area. I remember Molly saying something about continental breakfast.

B: Yes, you do. And, as you arrive in this office area, you notice - sort of for the first time, since you were very tired and preoccupied last night - that there is a big open kind of lobby space off to the side, through an open archway. Lots of rickety tables, mismatched chairs, and a long, garden-variety, shitty motel continental breakfast buffet setup. Whole nine yards: Rubbery bagels, a rusty looking waffle iron, little fun-sized boxes of cereal and milk cartons, yogurt cups in a literal punch bowl full of ice. And, standing behind this breakfast bar is Molly, the girl you met at the front desk last night. Her voluminous red curly hair is pulled up in a low ponytail, and on top of her head she has a little white chef's hat jauntily perched. She is dumping a chafing pan full of just absolutely limp, sad, greasy bacon onto the serving line. But, beyond her, you notice that there are *far* more people staying in this motel than you thought there were. You noticed the other cars in the parking lot when you came in last night, of course, but... your evening was *very* quiet. There were no sounds of opening doors, no footsteps in the hallways, no idle chatter as people made their way back to their rooms. It was *eerily* quiet. But you count 13 people in this room - including Molly, and including, in one table far-flung in a back corner, Luke and Dahlia. Who are sitting with their heads together, hunched over the table.

A: Okay! Uh, I'm completely ignoring the breakfast options and just making a beeline for them.

B: Luke has a full styrofoam plate packed with stale English muffins, the sad bacon I mentioned earlier, and powdered scrambled eggs drenched in hot sauce, in front of him, but Dahlia has only a little metal water bottle that she takes a sip of and puts down - leaving her lips very red - and a phone clutched in her hand, that she tosses down on top of the table in disgust right as you walk up.

Dahlia: See, shit like *this* is why I don't go *anywhere* that doesn't have a solid public transit system.

A: I'm gonna slide into the seat next to her and say

Damien: So, nothing from AAA?

B: She grimaces, fangs flashing at you.

Dahlia: *Ha*. No. I tried to call the 1-800 number from the landline in my room as soon as I woke up, and the phone just. *Didn't work*! So I tried connecting to the motel Wi-Fi but apparently *that's* busted, too - I can't even get the web client to load.

Damien: [hisses] I mean you can try the landline in my room? I picked it up last night and the line was busy, but...

Dahlia: *Okay*, and if all the phones are *busted*, what's our next step?

Damien: I mean, how okay are y'all with the idea of hitchhiking?

B: Luke raises an eyebrow and gestures at you with a plastic fork.

Luke: I'm familiar, but not fond. And, with the Wild Hunt up our asses, I don't think it's a smart choice.

Damien: Well, they can't *see us*, Luke.

Luke: No, they can't. So *I'm* just saying: If I was a horrifying fae bounty hunter after a quarry that I couldn't see, the first thing *I* would do is start greasing the palms of people that *could* see them. We have to assume no one's safe.

Damien: All the more reason to hurry up and get going, and not stay in one place for... fuck knows how long.

B: Dahlia's kind of watching the two of you verbal volley back-and-forth, and, across the table, just slowly raises a hand.

> **Damien:** Yeah, nobody has the talking stick. All ideas welcome.

B: Dahlia starts wringing her hands and sort of picking at her cuticles and her nails - you're coming to realize this is a very familiar nervous gesture for her.

> **Dahlia:** Okay, look, I get that nobody here wants to backtrack, but at this point I think it might be a more productive option to call Mick, instead of trying to wait out whatever this bullshit is with AAA. We can't go back to Vegas, but, if we're able to get a hold of him and tell him we need a rescue mission, he'll mount one.
>
> **Damien:** And then bring whoever's *definitely watching him* down on us.
>
> **Dahlia:** ...Yeah, yeah, that's... fair. We could try to get a hold of Santi, see if he's willing to drive out and pick us up? But that's all a moot point, because none of the *fucking phones* work!
>
> **Damien:** And you still have no cell reception?
>
> **Dahlia:** Zilch! Zero! *Nada*.
>
> **Damien:** Okay, uh... I-I guess we ask management to take a look at the phones, I don't - I don't know what else we can -

B: Luke drops his English muffin down onto the plate and quickly puts one finger up to the tip of his nose.

> **Luke:** Nose goes!

A: Damien grew up with two siblings, he instinctively also puts a finger up to his nose.

B: Dahlia had been fussing with her phone, so by the time she drops it with a clatter and brings a hand up to her nose, it's too late. So she just glares balefully at the two of you.

Dahlia: Oh, *I* see how it is. You expect *me* to be the Karen, you fucking *misogynists*.

Damien: No one said anything about you being a Karen!

B: Luke snorts into his plastic cup of orange juice.

Luke: [snorts] If the lululemon fits.

Damien (irritated): Oh for fuck- I'll do it. It's fine.

A: Damien gets up from the table and starts to walk over to where Molly is behind the breakfast bar - and then stops, turns back around, looks at Luke, and says

Damien: Give me twenty dollars.

B: Luke frowns at you, but digs twenty dollars out of his wallet.

Luke: I mean, I respect the hustle, but *why*?

A: I take the 20 and say

Damien: 'Cause I wanted twenty dollars.

A: And then I turn around and I go talk to Molly.

B: [laughs] The breakfast bar has one of those big, like, conveyor belt toaster ovens - you know the ones I'm talking about? And you walk up to see it looking kind of non-functional, and Molly just pounding on the top of it with her fist, as if that's gonna do something. But, eventually, she looks up, sees you standing there, and breaks out into this big, bright smile.

Molly: Oh! Morning, sunshine! Hope you slept well.

Damien: Uh... y-yeah, fine. Um... I just... I don't mean to bother you, but I just needed to ask about, uh, the phones in our rooms? They don't seem to be working, and apparently the Wi-Fi's out, also.

[MUSIC CUE]

B: She tilts her head at you, and... Her posture is just kind of *strange*. You can't really place it.

> **Molly:** Oh, that's weird. Um... You're in room 13, right? Well, I mean, you're not in room 13 *right now*, obviously, you're standing directly across the breakfast bar from me, but...
>
> **Damien:** Uh, yeah, we're in 13, 14, 15.
>
> **Molly:** Huh. I mean, the phones could be a property-wide thing - come to think of it, I haven't gotten any calls at the front desk the last couple days? But I didn't really dwell too much on it. We're not exactly the Ritz-Carlton, rooms here aren't in super high demand.
>
> **Damien:** Uh, yeah, totally get it, not your fault, I just... we really need to get in contact with AAA, our car broke down on the side of the road, and we need to be, uh... getting to the coast relatively soon, we're on kind of a short turnaround.

B: She starts banging on the toaster oven again, kind of half-engaged in the conversation.

> **Molly:** Oh yeah, I totally get it. It's almost impossible to get your money back for theme park tickets, and that's saying *nothing* about the Airbnbs around Anaheim.

A: Damien tilts his head to the side, and says

> **Damien:** The what?
>
> **Molly:** ...Um. Real estate scam that's holding a knife to the throat of the hotel industry - honestly, if you've never heard of it, don't look it up. We'll all thank you for it. But yeah, I'll get maintenance in to look at the phone lines, we just need you to be out of the room for the rest of the day in case they need to pull the wiring out of the wall or something. And, as far as the internet goes... [sighs] The buzzards could have built a nest in the

satellite again. I'll have to get my taser and go up on the roof to check *that* out. They are *very* territorial.

A: Damien full-body winces at the implication that he is being a nuisance to this person.

Damien (pained): Yeah, sounds good. Thank you. I'm sorry.

B: She looks completely oblivious to your discomfort, still has this big, sunny expression.

Molly: Oh, no worries! All part of the job. Do you want something to eat? I mean, I know the toaster oven's broken, but the waffle iron still works, if you ignore the sparks.

A: Damien full-body flinches, but gives her a very bland, pleasant smile, and says

Damien: Uh, I was actually gonna go hit up a vending machine - I have a *killer* craving for nougat right now, um -

A: And then he hands her the $20 bill that Luke gave him.

Damien: Would you mind breaking this into, like, fives and ones, for me?

B: Molly looks down at this sad little breakfast buffet, and then back up at you, and looks, like, really put-out and *hurt*.

Molly: Uh... Yeah! Probably for the best, anyway - I'm not exactly the best cook in the world.

B: And then she digs around in her pocket and pulls out a little velcro wallet with a shark and "Aquarium Of The Pacific" on it, digs out three fives and five ones and holds them out to you.

Molly: Enjoy your nougat.

Damien (uncomfortable): Uh, thank you.

A: I take my change from her, and then I'm gonna try not to cringe *too* visibly at the fact that I don't like to disappoint people, and I'm gonna turn around, go back to Luke and Dahlia,

explain the situation as I understand it to be, right now, and I'm gonna go hunting for a vending machine, I guess.

B: Okay. Just a little rundown of how the motel is set up, then. As I've mentioned before, it's an L-shaped building - there are, like, two wings of rooms coming off from this central office lobby area. The one that you and Luke and Dahlia are staying in is the longer side of the L. It's not... a stereotypical motel, where the doors to the rooms all open to the outside - there is a hallway. The rooms on one side of each wing have, like, patios that go out facing the parking lot. The rooms that you and Luke and Dahlia are staying in all look into this pool deck that's in the back. Your rooms are about halfway down this wing - you have not gone further down, and you haven't been in the other wing of rooms *at all*. So where would you like to start?

A: I-I guess I'll start in the hallway, like, outside of my room.

B: This hallway is exactly the way you found it last night. It is *dead silent* down this corridor - no sounds of anybody moving in any of the other rooms. There's that odd, disconcerting feeling of being in a hotel hallway, all of the identical doors just seeming to stretch on endlessly even if you *logically* know that it *has* to end somewhere. That unspoken fear in the core of you that you might get lost, even though you're on a straight stretch. As you make your way down to the end of this hallway, you see an emergency exit door that has a housekeeping cart pulled across it, like it's blocking the access - so, *super* not paying attention to *any* safety codes. And, off to your left, there is this little open closet-like concept of a room with dirty terracotta-red tile floors, a big hulking ice machine in one corner, and an *ancient* vending machine directly across from it.

A: Okay! I'm - I'm gonna go up to the vending machine and get myself, like, chips and a drink and a candy bar. I'm avoiding anything with peanuts in it, just out of habit. [sighs] And I'm not looking at any expiration dates, because I don't *trust* like that, but I also don't want to *know*.

B: As you're doing that, you realize that this vending machine is an absolute *smorgasbord* of shit. Like, yes, there are snacks and drinks available in this thing, but you also see, like, single-use plastic razors, and little sample-sized bottles of pain reliever, and condoms, and sanitary products. Like, this is not a nice hotel, it does not have a lobby store, but apparently anything you need to *survive* in here, you can get out of this vending machine. And, as you're looking over this odd assortment of things in the vending machine - behind you, you hear a metallic hum and a rattle as the ice machine turns on, and a metallic clinking as ice cubes start to fall into a hotel-standard ice bucket.

A: If I'm hearing noises behind me, I am *immediately* turning around to look at whatever is causing them.

B: This is the first time you have seen another person, other than yourself, Luke, or Dahlia outside of the lobby area of this motel. This person is standing with their back to you, and, at first, you think it's Molly, because they are very pale and have a head of voluminous curly red hair pulled up in a banana clip on top of their head. But then you realize that this person is a good bit taller than Molly, and *much* skinnier. Hunched over the ice bucket in front of them, and paying you absolutely no mind.

A: Okay. If I can walk out of here without getting any closer to this person, then I'm going to do that, um, if I can't, I'm gonna kind of back as far into a corner as I can, keeping my eyes on this person, and wait for them to leave.

B: Oh, this person's back is fully turned to you. It's like they don't even know you're here. As you slowly back out of this room, into the hallway, you're able to catch a glimpse of this person in profile, rather than from the back, and see... A woman in her early 50s, very pale skin, spray of freckles across her cheeks and down her neck. She looks... hollow. Not just hungry, not just tired. *Empty*. She doesn't even raise her head to look at you, as you move away. Just stares down at the ice bucket in front of her. And, eventually, the sound of ice cubes on metal changes to the sharp skittering sound of the ice cubes hitting

the floor. As you look down and realize that the bucket in her hands is overflowing, and ice is spilling out onto the dirty terracotta-red tiles around you.

A: Okay. Yeah, I think Damien is... *wary* of pretty much everybody, these days, but... he's gonna tentatively step closer and go

> **Damien:** Uh... A-Are you alright?

B: No response. She makes no indication of realizing that you're even there. The ice just keeps falling out of the machine, clattering down into the grate, and further down onto the floor, falling over her hands - her nails are ragged and *bloody*, like she's been *clawing* at something.

A: I-I'm gonna step a little closer, and say

> **Damien:** Ma'am, is - is there anybody I can get for you? Can I...?

B: She finally moves, her head swiveling over to look at you, and there is *nothing* behind her eyes. Pure, glassy emptiness. Her hands don't move away from the ice bucket for a *long* while - there's still just the rumble of the machine and the sound of ice cubes hitting the floor. But then there's a strange *pulse*. It starts under your feet, vibrating up through the tiles. And, whatever it is, it seems to snap her out of whatever *she* was going through. You see her curl the ice bucket into her arms and whip around on one heel, charge back out into the hallway, swinging open one of the myriad identical motel doors, and disappearing behind it.

A: I'm gonna make a note of the number on the door that she just went into, just in case. Her behavior - *to Damien* - I think would spell either serious psychological shit going on or drug problems. Either way, he's not gonna call anybody on her, because it's her business, but... he wants to make a note, just in case something happens.

B: It is room 25, almost exactly across the hall from this little ice machine/vending machine area.

A: Okay, cool. Yeah, I'm gonna... eh, find somewhere to sit down and eat my chips in peace. Hopefully not anywhere with glass in it, since apparently there's fucking earthquakes - I mean, we're on the San Andreas Fault, so, like, *whatever*, but. I d- I don't want to get beaned by a fucking ceiling tile, or whatever.

B: Yeah, you find a secluded corner to eat your chips in, in this place that is not at all worrying or unsettling. Good for you!

A: Kaelen, we find you about a day after we last saw you. You are in the little dining area in your kitchen, sitting on one of the rickety replacement folding chairs. Next to you is Ellie, who is - almost nervously - tapping at a Chromebook that she pulled out of somewhere, she has a USB drive plugged into it, with the surveillance footage that she requested from the police. Lola is also sitting at the table with you, thumbing through a book. Knowing what this is: Who else do you think Kae invited, Barry? [laughs]

B: I think, given the stakes of this situation, that Kaelen is prioritizing competence and effectiveness over everything, and so, has invited Lydia Antonov.

A: That's it?

B: Yes. They are keeping things close to the vest for now, for their own reasons, but... subtlety and competency, that's Lydia in a nutshell.

A: Okay. Lydia is also there - she got in last, obviously, because everybody else was already in the house. So she is sitting closest to the door, kind of idly tapping her foot, and, after a minute, her ADHD gets the best of her and she goes

> **Lydia:** Okay, I was trying to give you a minute, but, uh, why are we here?
>
> **Kaelen:** That's a really existential question that I don't think I'm qualified to unpack.

A: Lydia gives you an extremely unimpressed look, and starts to say something, and Ellie just completely interrupts everything, swivels the Chromebook around, and you see that she has full-screened the surveillance video that she got from the cops.

B: Kae looks kind of put-out.

> **Kaelen:** Well, I had plans for a big reveal and everything, but, yeah. Exhibit A.

A: Ellie gives you a, just, *absolutely venomous* glare, and says

> **Ellis:** Yeah, I'm really sorry that I have bigger priorities than your dramatic sensibilities, Kae.

B: I throw a spoon at her.

A: She catches it. Lydia is leaning across the table to squint at this footage - you can't see it, because the computer is facing away from you, towards Lola and Lydia, but you see the moment that Lydia realizes exactly who she's looking at. Her eyes get really big, and she goes

> **Lydia:** What the *hell*?

> **Kaelen:** Yep. You're looking at *exactly* what you think you're looking at, and you'll have to forgive any smugness on my part - I am still riding the high of sweet, *sweet* vindication. Anyway, I've called you all here to discuss the question of the hour, which is: What the fuck are we gonna do about this?

A: Ellie says

> **Ellis:** I mean, first of all, we have to figure out how the fuck we're breaking this to the rest of the family.

> **Kaelen:** I... don't think it's a good idea for us to break this to the rest of the family.

> **Ellis:** *What* the hell are you talking about? Of course we're gonna tell everybody.

B: Kae brings up a hand and pinches at the bridge of their nose.

Kaelen: [sighs] I just think... that getting too many people involved could make an already complicated situation a *lot* more complicated, and possibly dangerous.

A: Ellie sits up really straight in her chair, and gives you another, just, absolutely *venomous* glare.

Ellis: You are *so* full of shit. Look, Kae, I don't *care* how *bitter* you are that nobody listened to your *hunches* the last couple years. Our brother is alive, so the *other* people that care about him *also* deserve to *know that he's alive*.

Kaelen: Ellie, the *cops* are after him.

Ellis (sarcastic): Yeah, and *that's* never happened before.

Kaelen: Oh, *I'm* sorry. Let me rephrase that: The cops are after him, and, apparently, before *that*, he was in some deep shit that may or may not have gotten me *killed* when I got too close.

B: She sort of waves up and down at her *whole thing*.

Kaelen: Are we just gonna *ignore* the undead elephant in the room? Look, whatever's going on here, I am betting dollars-to-donuts that Uncle Drew, Aunt Lucy, and the cousins are *not* equipped to handle it. Not to be a dick, but I don't want to drag anybody into the line of fire that can't hold their own.

A: There is a long moment where you can *see* on Ellie's face that she is trying to figure out how to argue with you in a way that is compelling. And then she gives up, slumps back in her chair - the picture of a petulant teenager that you know she once was. And Lola clears her throat, and closes the book she's been thumbing through, and says

Lola: Okay, so... what is your plan?

Kaelen: I'm gonna be real with you, Lola. I spent all of last night trying to come up with a more elaborate

presentation, but I'm still kind of stuck on: *We go get him.*

A: There is a moment of silence, and then Lydia pipes up.

Lydia: Okay. *How*?

Kaelen: [stammers] I don't know! Who nominated *me* to be Velma in the Scooby Gang?! I'm not a *solutions* person, okay? I'm the *least* qualified to be that. That's why you're all here!

A: Lola gives you an appraising look, and goes

Lola: Yeah, you're really more of a *Daphne*, if anything.

B: ...Kae's not sure if she's being insulted or flirted with. They just kind of look at Lola and tilt their head.

A: Lola just raises an eyebrow at you. Lydia cuts off *whatever* the two of you are doing with a hand gesture, and goes

Lydia: Okay. Ladies, if we could stay on task. I'm gonna throw out the dumbest solution first, just to get it out of the way: We could always wait for the cops to catch him and go from there.

Kaelen: Okay, we've got the ball rolling, we're brainstorming. Thank you for your input, Lydia. I just have a, um - and I'm not trying to shoot you down! I-I just have a point. We all *did* see him very much robbing the pharmacy, yes? I don't know *what* kind of hell my little brother's been through in the last six years, but... I don't think him going *from* that hell into *being a trans person in the prison industrial complex* is going to, uh... be an improvement?

A: Every single person at this table grimaces, and Lydia says

Lydia: Yeah, agreed, but I had to bring it up. Although, I dunno, we could bust him out of jail - I've always wanted to do a prison break.

Kaelen: That's a thought. Do we have the logistics to go, like, full *Shawshank*, though?

A: This is Ellie's breaking point - she sits back up and kinda smacks a hand on the table, and goes

Ellis: You have *amnesia*! Why the fuck do you remember *this much* about pop culture?! It's *infuriating*.

Kaelen: Ellie, if you hadn't noticed, we're trying to talk about something important, so if you could stop changing the subject...?

B: Under her breath, Kae goes

Kaelen: Marcia, Marcia, *Marcia*.

Ellis: ...You're doing this on purpose to make me mad. And I'm not gonna dignify it!

Kaelen: Do you, like, have *anything* to contribute to the conversation, other than impotent rage over shit that doesn't matter?

A: For *just* a second, Ellie looks really, *really* hurt. And then she swallows it back, nods, and goes

Ellis: Okay. Um. We blow up social media, we put up posters, we... [sighs bitterly] Do all the shit we did the first time, I guess, because it worked *so well* then.

A: She shakes her head again, and looks at the video, and says

Ellis: And we find out who the guy driving the fucking truck is.

B: Kae leans over and fusses with the Chromebook a little bit, backs up the video, and freeze-frames it.

Kaelen: You might actually have something there. Computer, enhance.

Ellis: That's not how *anything* works.

B: Kae grumbles, and just does the thing with the buttons to zoom the screen in. Is it possible to get the tags on this truck in clear view?

A: Can I get you to roll to Investigate A Mystery on, just, the footage as a whole? Um, and I'll have either Lola or Lydia roll to Help Out, you can pick which. I will say: They both have a +1, it's just whoever you think, flavor-wise, would be more helpful.

B: I mean, Lola's... an investigator, of a sort. Th-The *spooky* sort, but, I mean, this whole situation's kind of spooky, it sounds like their bag. Without explaining to Ellie what she's doing, she's just gonna take the Chromebook, slide it down the table to Lola, and hunker down, start playing the footage on repeat.

A: Alright, I'm gonna have Lola roll to Help Out, and then I'm gonna have you roll to Investigate A Mystery. [dice noise]

B: *Wow*.

A (incredulous): That... was *another* 12 on the die for Lola? Um, that's a 13!

B: [laughs] Okay! Uh, so I get +1 on my roll. Which, added to my +2 to Sharp, makes a total of +3. Let's go! [dice noise] Twelve.

A: Okay. Go ahead and ask two questions off the list, and one freeform question.

B: Okay, my first question of the list is: *What sort of creature is it?* I'm gonna turn the computer around to face Lydia and Ellie.

> **Kaelen:** Does this person *look* like any of Damien's friends? I-I'm sorry, I wouldn't know.

A: Ellie hesitates for a second, and then says

> **Ellis:** I-I mean, he didn't *have* a lot of *close* friends. I don't know that I would recognize... anybody.

A: And then Lydia says

> **Lydia:** I can pull out my yearbook? Look through the sophomores...
>
> **Kaelen:** Yeah, go do that. This guy's not ringing any bells for *me*, but we've got to do our due diligence.

B: My second question off the list is: *Where did it go?* I'm going to turn the computer back around to me and Lola and try to screencap the tags on the truck.

A: You watch it through another couple of times, and then Lola holds up a hand and goes

> **Lola:** Wait, wait, stop.

A: And she pauses. You can see *most* of the tags, I think - it's a poorly-lit parking lot, the lighting is not super awesome, it's not that readable, but you can see most of the tag. You can see that you are looking at a Nevada license plate. And, as Lola zooms in, she points to the bumper, and you see that there is a bumper sticker on this truck. You can't read it the entire way through. You can read the first line, which is, "I met Bigfoot."

B: [laughs]

A: And there is, in fact, a Bigfoot silhouette on the bumper sticker. There's more text below that line, but you can't read it. Lola turns, raises her eyebrows at you, and says

> **Lola:** So we've got a partial plate, *and* a distinctive bumper sticker.
>
> **Kaelen:** That we do. Odds are, the cops have already run those plates. We need to catch up if we have any hope of finding him.

B: My freeform question is kind of ambiguous, so I understand if I can't get any real answers from this. It's hardly even a real question. Just, going off my gut: Do I think that this person is responsible for Damien going missing six years ago?

A: That... is a difficult question to answer. I would say, what you can pick up from just watching this video... You watch

Damien get into the truck, seemingly willingly. And, as you watch him turn to look at the security camera, as the video plays again and restarts, and plays again and restarts, he looks... *more* mistrustful of the camera than of the guy driving the truck.

B: Kae pauses the video on the shot of Damien looking up at the camera, and frowns.

> **Kaelen:** Alright, whatever's going on here, I've got a nasty feeling that it's even more complicated than it looks. Anyway, we need to figure out who that truck belongs to. I'm not sure how *that's* gonna work, uh, that's *very* private information, and I don't have a search warrant or the know-how to hack the DMV.

A: Lola looks at this surveillance footage for a long moment, and then turns to you, smiles... the word coming to mind is *deviously*.

> **Lola:** At the risk of sounding like a television cliche... I know a guy.

> **Kaelen:** Goddamn. Maybe *you're* Velma.

A: She kind of tosses her braids behind her shoulder and puts her chin in the air, and says

> **Lola:** I'm better, I got LASIK.

A: And then she winks at you. From down the table, Lydia clears her throat, rolls her eyes, and says

> **Lydia:** *Anyway*, I'll just go get that yearbook, shall I?

A: And stands up and starts heading out the back door. Lola blinks a couple times, and goes

> **Lola:** Uh, yeah, and I-I'll go... call my guy. Uh. AAAnd, break!

A: And she hastily stands up, pulling her phone out of her pocket. And you are left at the table with your sister and this surveillance footage of your brother

B: Kae takes the computer, still freeze-framed on Damien's face, and slides it down to sit next to Ellie.

> **Kaelen:** Well, it's... *a plan*. I hate to admit when you're right, but it's a better idea than hopping on my bike and driving off into the desert again.

A: Ellie snorts. It is *not* an amused sound. You notice that she's kind of twisting her hands in her lap. She doesn't look at you, as she says

> **Ellis:** Would you have bothered to tell me? If I wasn't here when the cops came?

B: Kae goes rigid. She is also not making eye contact, she's just staring at that freeze-frame on the computer. There's this horrible, silent moment where Kaelen realizes that she and Ellie both *know* what the actual answer to that question is. And, much in the way that she's *been* relearning things about herself through the amnesia, the fact *"Oh, I'm kind of a shitty person,"* hits her like a fucking *truck*. But even she's not socially inept enough to just give Ellie that answer candidly, so she just purses her lips and sucks in a deep breath.

> **Kaelen:** Well, you *were* there. And you're in this, now. I don't think it's gonna serve anybody for us to waste time on hypotheticals.

A: Ellie flinches like you have just hit her. And then her face goes extremely blank. She nods. She says

> **Ellis:** Yeah, that's about what I figured. I'm gonna take a walk.

A: And she stands up, turns on her heel, and leaves through the back door.

B: ...Alright, so, Kae's alone right now?

A: Uh, Lola's in the next room on the phone, but, other than that, yeah.

B: They're gonna stand up, shut Ellie's Chromebook, walk into the downstairs half-bath, lock the door behind them... and just stare into the mirror for a second.

A: You see yourself. Disheveled and desperate and dead. You stand at the center of a house that is full of your own ghosts, missing the context of your life, with this *weight* of the realization that, yeah, you *would* have kept your sister in the dark about this, hanging around your neck like an albatross. You are alone with your thoughts, surrounded by the smells of mildew and chemical cleaners.

B: Kaelen just keeps staring at her own reflection. Disheveled and desperate and dead, in a house full of ghosts, and yet surrounded by so much life. So many living, breathing people... who, for the first time, she fully realizes she is letting down. And she just collapses to the floor and sobs.

[MUSIC FADES OUT]

[CLICK, RADIO CHATTER, STATIC]

SPECIAL BROADCAST - 05.01.18

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. Recent reports from listeners in Appalachia have led this reporter to believe that the things that have always been there are still there - just… *more.* A drastic increase in missing persons' reports in the region over the past few years have all been carefully kept out of the news as local police departments are inundated with mysteries they can't solve - as opposed, to, you know. "Normal." Anyway, for anyone hiking the Appalachian trail or simply trying to survive the area in these trying times, it may be comforting to know that survivors of recent close encounters recommend doing exactly what your granny always told you - don't look out the window at night, never whistle outside after dark, drive railroad spikes into the four corners of your property, hang blue bottles in the trees... and if you hear someone call your name in the woods - no, you didn't. Good night. Sleep tight.

Don’t let... whatever it is that still manages to live among mountains *literally older than bones* bite. Also! If you see a deer and it looks weird, *get the fuck out of there*. And now, here’s ***Everybody Lost Somebody*** by Bleachers.

[STATIC, RADIO CHATTER, CLICK]

B: Damien. You're not sure exactly how long it takes you to eat your bag of chips from the vending machine. But, eventually, you are left with only crinkly plastic and crumbs. I think you're, like, sitting in a secluded corner behind where the vending machine area is. You haven't seen anybody come or go through the hallway the entire time you've been enjoying your snack - is enjoying the right word? Probably not. What would you like to do after your chips are gone, buddy?

A: Well. [sing-song] I don't particularly want to be alone in the scary motel! Uh, so I'm gonna go back towards the lobby, where people are. I think the time to be alone and decompress was pretty good - he was not f-feeling super great mentally after whatever *that* was with the ice machine, on top of the shitty couple of weeks he's been having.

B: You make your way back down this hallway that is uncanny in the way that all hotels and motels are, into the sort of office/lobby space at the corner of the L-shape of this building. And... It must have taken you a *long* time to eat those chips, man, because, as you look out the double doors into the parking lot, it is fully *dark* outside.

A: Uh, okay. Um... I think Damien pauses and, like, takes a second to check in with himself. Like... [uncertain noise] he's dissociated before, and he... doesn't have the best health situation, especially now, so like. It is easy to lose time, but that - that's a lot of time.

B: It is in fact a lot of time! And the passage of that time seems made somehow stranger by the fact that... all the people in this lobby that you saw at continental breakfast earlier, are sitting in there in the same arrangement that they were this morning. There's no more breakfast bar, obviously - that has all

been packed up and shoved into a corner - but all of these folks are just sitting here, watching an old box TV playing a rerun of Jeopardy. If you look back into the corner you were in during breakfast, you *do* see Luke and Dahlia sitting at the same table. But there's no food there, now. Dahlia's just sitting there with her little water bottle that is *probably* full of blood. And Luke has since changed clothes? He's in a pair of swim trunks - you have *no* idea how he was able to hold on to a pair of *swim trunks* through all of this - and another of his seemingly inexhaustible supply of loud, patterned Hawaiian-type shirts, with half the buttons undone. They are arguing passionately about one of the questions on Jeopardy, which is in the cryptid category - all you hear is Dahlia loudly going

> **Dahlia:** That is *not* how vampires *work*!

A: Okay, yeah, I'm gonna try and slide through the lobby over to them, without drawing attention to myself.

B: As you go to do that, you feel... *strange*. You were already a little off-kilter, because of the seemingly-lost *several hours* that you spent on your run to get a bag of chips. But something strikes you as *really weird*, here. You cannot put your finger on it directly, but there is *something* about this room that is giving you such an uncanny valley vibe that it causes *physical* discomfort.

A: Okay. I think... Yeah, between that and the fact that I've seen all of these people twice today, I'm gonna - I-I'm still just trying to get over to Luke and Dahlia without drawing attention to myself, but I'm gonna... spy on the other people here, just a little bit. I'm just gonna be nosy! Just a little. I want to roll to Investigate A Mystery, please.

B: You may absolutely do that. Roll +Sharp.

A: M'kay. [dice noise] My dice are fucking *hot* today - uh, that's an 11.

B: Okay! Wow! So you get two questions off the list. Congrats!

A: Okay. My first question is: *What happened here?*

B: Okay, to answer that, I'm gonna give you insights into every table you pass on your way to Luke and Dahlia. The first table you pass is populated by three guys in matching letterman jackets. Two of them Latino - dark hair, dark eyes. One, this, like, milquetoast-looking white dude with light brown hair. The latter of these three is elbowing the first guy in the side, and going

> **Football Bro #1:** Dude, Gabe, you could have told us that your girlfriend couldn't fucking *hang*.

B: "Gabe," apparently, shoves this other guy really hard in the shoulder, and you see his cheeks darken.

> **Gabe:** Bro, she's not my *girlfriend*. I mean, not *yet*. Don't be a dick, she just needed to get some air - she'll be right back.

B: They all look... *extremely too young* to be legally allowed to get a motel room anywhere. At the next table, there is a very pale blonde lady in a power-suit: Big shoulder pads, pencil skirt, kitten heels, the whole nine yards. She has a little plastic stylus in her hand, and is tapping at a device in her hand - *you* probably don't know that it's called a Palm Pilot, but it's a Palm Pilot - and saying, to the equally-stuffy-suited gentleman to her left

> **Businesswoman:** Look, it's *fine*, okay? He has no idea, all we have to do is just say that the conference ran a couple days long, and nobody will be the wiser - Oh, shit!

B: They both turn to look at you.

A: Damien freezes, caught by the gaze of this older businesswoman much like a *rabbit* by the gaze of a *wolf*, and puts both hands up, and says

> **Damien:** Not my business. Just trying to s-scoot by you, there.

B: The woman says *nothing* to you, just regards you as the unpleasant intrusion that you clearly are. But the guy turns to

you with this big, vacant smile - his eyes look like there is not a *thought* going on behind them. Sticks a hand out, and goes

> **Dave:** Hi, I'm Dave.

A: Damien looks down at this guy's hand - does not put his own hand out - nods, smiles, and says

> **Damien:** Yeah. Good for you, champ.

A: And then he just keeps walking.

B: [laughs] Okay! Um, you manage to make your way past what is pretty clearly some kind of *very strange* extramarital affair, and further into this room towards Luke and Dahlia. You pass a table with four people who are just... stereotypical late-00s to early 2010s hipsters. You're, like, trying to come up with a word to describe them, but you have trouble with names - you think you might insult them by comparing them to something called a "Mumford"? It's just, like, an instinct?

A: [strangled laugh]

B: As you move on, you passively absorb this *grown-ass man* in a *newsboy cap* holding a banjo, berating a young lady who has on a pair of suspenders and, like, steampunk goggles perched up on her curly hair like a headband. He's saying something about missing a soundcheck, and she is just pinching at the bridge of her nose and heaving a long-suffering sigh.

> **Steampunk Girl:** [sighs] Look, Jeremy, it's your cousin's *basement*, not the House of Blues. Soundcheck isn't going to take that long, and I'm exhausted. I will go fix the van in the morning. Can we just let it lie for a night?

A: Damien stares directly ahead of him and *keeps walking*.

B: Yeah, they don't acknowledge you, either. You feel a weird surge of relief. The last person you pass is sitting at a table by himself, not really interacting with anybody - just this older dude, Duck Dynasty beard, trucker hat. Not really saying much. Gives off kind of a weird vibe. And, at long last, you *finally* make your way over to Luke and Dahlia's table. They are

still bickering furiously, not even acknowledging that you're there. You have one more question off the list you can ask me.

A: My second question is: *What is being concealed here?*

B: [exhales] Okay, how do I put this? These people are all sharing this communal space, the way they were at continental breakfast, but... there's something about it that doesn't feel communal. Nobody here is actually *watching* the TV, and... not really meaningfully engaging with anybody else outside their own little groups at their tables. You watch the young lady in the steampunk goggles get up to go get a glass of water from a pitcher in the corner, and the guy in the suit sticks out his hand, and goes

> **Dave:** Hi, I'm Dave.

B: And she just fully acts like he doesn't exist. You can't put your finger on it, precisely, but there's something here that is very *off*. It's like all of these people are sharing this space and this time, but they're all... kind of stuck in their own rut, if that makes sense. And then, next to you, there's Luke and Dahlia, who look like they're about to start slap-fighting at any moment now. What would you like to do about that?

A: I'm gonna slide into a seat next to Dahlia, and... I'm just gonna interrupt the argument. This strategy has never *not* worked for me.

> **Damien:** Uh, hey, sorry, I meant to come back earlier, but I got turned around. So. Any updates?

B: Dahlia had been working her way up to an extremely colorful insult in Luke's direction, but stops, raises a finger as if to tell him to wait a minute, and then turns around to face you.

> **Dahlia:** How the hell did you get *turned around*? This place has one floor and two hallways.
>
> **Damien:** Life is just... full of absolutely mystifying occurrences. Anyway, uh, y'all met Dave?

B: From halfway across the room, you hear

Dave: Hi, I'm Dave.

B: And Luke and Dahlia both cringe.

A: Damien raises his eyebrows, and goes

Damien: Yeah, the optimist in me wants to think that Charlotte Pickles over there has him on ketamine consensually.

B: Luke blinks at you very slowly.

Luke: Yeah. I, uh, spent most of my day outside in a sun lounger, and all I can tell you about the guy is he's one of those *speedo at the public pool* type of people. Anyway, remember that conversation you and I had about how you couldn't remember your own mother's name? I'm just wondering why one of the moms from *Rugrats* seems to ring a better bell.

Damien: I don't know, man, I just work here. I didn't even like *Rugrats* as a kid, actually - that's - Anyway, whatever.

B: Dahlia leans over and starts softly thunking her head against a wall.

Dahlia: Okay! So, nobody here has seen Little Miss Sunshine since breakfast this morning. Luke spent the day getting his tan on, you apparently dissociated in front of a vending machine, and I... Hell, I don't even *know* where *my* day went. I'm obviously not the boss of either of you, but, I think that I'm gonna call it a day, go back to my room, and see if the landline situation has been resolved.

Damien: Good call. Uh, has the Wi-Fi turned back on? Um -

A: He holds up both hands and kinda does a jazzhands wiggle to show that they are completely empty.

Damien: I don't exactly have a way to check, myself.

B: Dahlia flashes you the front of her own phone, with the big *no signal* indicator across the top.

Damien (exasperated): Great! Buzzards: 1, Us: 0. Okay, um...

A: He pinches the bridge of his nose.

Damien: Alright, uh... W-We'll see if the phones are working, and then... [sighs] Fuck, yeah, the day did get away from me, I don't... [deep breath] I'm - I'm kind of tired, maybe we can just... see if the phones are working, and then figure out our next step in the morning.

B: Luke stands up and kind of dusts his hands off on the front of his swim trunks.

Luke: I mean, fine by me - we've got cash to stay for as long as we need, but aren't *you* the one that said you didn't want to hang out here too long?

Damien: Yeah, I did. Um, and if we can get in touch with AAA tonight, then... all the better, but... [stammers, sighs] Gotta work with what we got, right?

B: Dahlia also stands up.

Dahlia: Story of our lives!

B: She leans over and raps on the top of the table three times.

Dahlia: Anyway: Knock on wood, the phones are working, and this'll all just be a bad dream come the morning.

Damien: Hear, hear.

A: I think Damien's also gonna lean over and knock on the table a couple of times, and then he turns around and goes back to his room.

B: Okay. You all three walk back down this hallway, key into your respective rooms - yours looks exactly the way that it did this morning, bed still unmade. The door swings shut behind you and you are struck by an odd silence. Given how old this place is, how thin the walls probably are, you *should* be able to hear Dahlia moving around in the next room, but you *can't*. There's just the weary rattle of the window unit air conditioner, the

buzz of the lightbulbs, and... something scratching. *Skittering*. Off to your left.

A: Damien tilts his head, trying to listen to it a little better - trying to maybe figure out what it is - and reaches into his hoodie pocket and wraps his fingers around the Sidhe Shield.

B: It's coming from the wall, and it's getting louder. Scritching turns to scrabbling turns to *clawing* and *thumping*, and you can see drywall dust starting to come down the sides of the wall and into the old carpet.

A: Damien snaps the fingers of his free hand a couple of times down at his side, flames sparking to life on his fingertips and then gone, and then there, and then gone. Like somebody sparking a lighter. And then he brings it up, snaps one more time with finality, and holds a little ball of fire there, and starts to walk towards this sound.

B: It is *so loud*, now. You're *tired* - you already had a headache, your vision's already blurring, you're *exhausted*, and this sound is just making your *teeth* ache. It's like nails on a chalkboard. So intense and so concentrated that you can pinpoint *exactly* where it's coming from. It is right next to the dresser, right at chest-to-eye level - like somebody is *trapped behind the wall* and trying to tear their way out. More plaster dust falls to the carpet - you feel it itching at your throat, making you want to cough, and this sound is getting louder, and louder, and *louder* - you could *swear* that you see a ripple behind the old tacky wallpaper, like something is about to break through. And then there's a knock at your door.

[KNOCKING]

Molly: Housekeeping!

A: Damien jumps and whips around, closes his hand into a fist over the fireball that he had above it, and then... shakes his wrist out, goes

Damien: Uh... Y-Yeah, come in.

B: Next to you, this scratching sound completely stops. It is replaced by the sound of a key turning in a lock and your door swinging open. Molly is standing out in the hallway. She's dragging a big, heavy plastic cart of cleaning supplies behind her, and has on a smart little apron and a little maid's cap perched on top of her curly hair.

> **Molly:** Hi, Damien! I'm really sorry to bother you this late - the housekeeper just called off today, and I've been trying to put out a million fires. Anyway, I was just getting around to turndown service. Uh... Can I come in?
>
> **Damien (with forced cheer):** [ragged breath] Uh. Yeah, sure! No problem.

A: I'm gonna look back at the wall where the sound was coming from?

B: It's just a wall. Faded, nicotine-stained wallpaper that matches the rest of what has previously been described as a very outdated motel room. It's very clean, though. Not so much as a speck of dust on the carpet.

A: Kae, when you manage to pick yourself up off the floor, you walk out into the living space of your house. Lola is still in the living room, phone pressed to her ear, talking animatedly to someone. And Lydia's back - she is sitting at your kitchen table, Ellie's chromebook open on the table in front of her and paused on an image of the face of... the guy whose truck your brother jumped into after *robbing a pharmacy*. Uh, it is blurry and kind of low-res, badly lit, but she is determinedly squinting at it as she flips through the oversized pages of a book bound in fake leather.

B: Kae tries *sooo hard* to be normal. Just paws any remaining tears off of her face, stands up straight, takes a deep breath in before moving in to sit next to Lydia.

A: She startles and looks up at you as you come closer - her mouth is open to say something, but she closes it with a *click* of teeth, and then frowns and says

Lydia: Are you alright?

Kaelen: [sniffles] Never better. Uh, do we have a bead on this motherfucker yet, or no?

A: Lydia hesitates but then shakes her head and turns back to the yearbook, flips a page.

Lydia: [uncertain noise] I'm not really seeing anybody who matches up? It was a shot in the dark anyways - I mean, he looks... older than us, at least.

Kaelen: Yeah, well, could be faculty, could be staff, I dunno. Either way, just flipping through pages and hoping for a miracle isn't a horribly *academic* approach for all this. Do we have a fucking *index* in this thing?

A: You reach for the yearbook and Lydia spreads her hand out across it to pin it to the table and gives you a *look*.

Lydia: Don't snap at me, I'm trying to help.

Kaelen (snappishly): I'm not snapping, give me the book!

A: Lydia's eyebrows shoot up, and - without even seeming to think about it - she says

Lydia: *Down*, girl.

B: Kae stops, blinks, and immediately takes her hand off the yearbook.

A: Lydia relaxes, uh, kind of leans back in her chair, and says

Lydia: *Thank you*.

A: And then she takes her hand off of the yearbook and slides it toward you.

B: Kae takes the yearbook but does not stop watching her.

Kaelen: Okay, I'm... sorry for my tone. Um. I know I asked for your help - I'm *grateful* for your help, Lydia, I've just got a really limited threshold of being able to deal

with shit, right now. So I'd prefer to do it as efficiently as possible. No offense.

B: They're gonna flip back to the back of the yearbook and see if they can find an index - and, if so, find the name *O'Connell* in it.

A: You see three O'Connells in this yearbook. You see Kiera, who is listed under the section for the seniors, and you see Damien listed under sophomores, and Ellie listed under freshmen.

B: Kae kind of frowns down at this index and runs a finger along the three names.

Kaelen: Wait, but Damien was a sophomore, and I'm two years older - where am I?

A: Something flashes across Lydia's face, too fast for you to make out what it is, and she shrugs, kicks her feet up on the nearest chair.

Lydia: Uh, in UNLV by this point.

B: Kaelen blinks, and starts slowly counting on their fingers, trying to add things up.

Lydia: You graduated a year early, genius. And you didn't go to Clark, anyway.

Kaelen: *Why*?

A: Lydia reaches up and scratches at the back of her neck, and then says

Lydia: If I remember correctly, it was something like: Shitty rich grandma said that you were too smart to be in Nevada public schooling with us *plebs*?

Kaelen: Oh god, she sounds awful. Do I have to worry about *her* haunting the house?

Lydia: Well, she's your *mom*'s mom, and unfortunately she's still alive. Although, the next stroke might do her in.

Kaelen: ...Huh.

B: Kae flips open to the pages with Damien on them.

A: Yep, you flip first back to the sophomore section. You kind of concur with Lydia's assessment; you don't see the guy that's in the video in any of the faces on these pages. Your brother's there - 16, grinning like an idiot at the camera. You flip through extracurricular activities. You see a shot of a choir performance. You pause on a full-page spread from a JV volleyball game, where you see Ellie making a couple shots - and in the background, standing on the risers, you see yourself, surly and 18, and 16-year-old Damien, just, cheering for all he's worth, very obviously. You flip to pages on the fall musical, and you see Damien wearing the *stupidest* goddamn costume you've ever seen in your life, with a fussy little cravat - and, out of the corner of your eye, you see 16-year-old Damien pacing in the kitchen, huffing and puffing, going

Damien: Okay, I get that the seniors were gonna get the good parts, but can I just be *mad* for a *second*?

A: You flip a page as he continues

Damien (snarky): Oh, yeah, cast the *fat gay idiot* as LeFou. *Thanks*, Mrs. Whitaker.

A: You flip another page, this - apparition, hallucination, memory, whatever - of your brother disappears. You see him on a couple more pages in the yearbook... mostly in the background of things, uh, never with the same people twice. And then, unceremoniously, with no fanfare at all, he stops showing up in there, too.

B: Kae feels that absence far more deeply than she wants to, and just slams the yearbook shut and shoves it away.

A: Lydia grimaces, opens her mouth, shuts it, and then... very slowly and cautiously reaches over to put a hand on your shoulder.

B: I think it says a *lot* about Kae's mental state that just one touch on her shoulder has her ready to start having a sobbing breakdown again. But she bites that back, and just takes the comfort where she can get it and leans into it.

A: You two sit there for a silent moment. And then, from the living room, you hear Lola say

> **Lola:** Okay, thanks! Uh, see you tomorrow.

A: And then she walks into the kitchen.

B: Cool, they can do whatever they want, Kae's dissociating.

A: Lola pauses, and then visibly decides to just... plow on with it, sits down at the table next to you, and says

> **Lola:** Okay, so I called my... I *guess* he's my friend - my friend Sean. Uh... If everybody's cool with it, I'm probably gonna email him a copy of that surveillance footage. Uh, if not, I can just hit him with the information that we got so far.
>
> **Kaelen:** Uh, yeah, sure, sounds good to me. Um... what is your *guy* gonna do with that surveillance footage?
>
> **Lola:** Oh. You know, just the usual, nothing crazy, um -

A: She's, like, tugging at her earlobe.

> **Lola:** - back-channel into the DMV to track the tags, uh, do a reverse image search on the bumper sticker, see if we can get a match. And, *you know*, [very fast] run the footage through his homemade facial recognition software that he sold to the government ten years ago?
>
> **Kaelen:** Oh. That's, um... Are all of your friends this interesting?
>
> **Lola:** Well, between the ex-government-contractor and the *corpse*, it seems like all my friends in Clark County are!
>
> **Kaelen:** So this guy's a local?

Lola: Uh, yeah, apparently. I didn't know exactly where he lived until we got off the phone, but he wants to meet up tomorrow. Uh, he gave me an address in...

A: She pulls out her phone and taps at it.

Lola: ...Summerlin, apparently?

A: Lydia immediately, *loudly* groans - and so do you, but you don't know why.

Kaelen: [groans] Why am I groaning? Lydia, why am I groaning?

A: Lydia's upper lip curls extravagantly as she says,

Lydia (disgusted): The body remembers. Go get your good Chucks; we're going to see the rich folks.

B: Damien, we pick up right where we left off with you. You are standing in your motel room, a little freaked out, and one Miss Molly Hill is standing out in the hallway with a big cart of cleaning supplies and a little maid hat on. You have invited her in, so she just breezes right past you, pays no mind to how weirded out you are, and starts fixing up your unmade bed.

Molly: So, did you have a good day? I know there's not a lot to explore around here.

A: Damien is still kind of looking at the wall where all the scratching noises were coming from, but he shakes his head, and goes

Damien: Yeah, today was great, um - you - you don't have to do that, I can handle it.

B: She had been fluffing one of your pillows, and freezes with it, kind of deer-in-the-headlights, like she's afraid she might have done something wrong.

Molly: Okay, Damien, I'm gonna be *super real* with you: Social scenarios are really tough for me to navigate, and I asked if I could come in to do turndown service, and you

said yes, but now you don't want me to do turndown service, so I'm getting a lot of mixed signals here.

A: In his mind, Damien shrivels up and turns into a worm and crawls away. But, since that is not possible outside of his own brain,he cringes, and goes

Damien (cringing): [uncomfortable noise] You're right. I - I did do that. Uh. Carry on.

Molly: ...Yeah, okay, thanks.

B: She looks a little bemused, but goes back to making your bed.

A: I desperately need to change the topic of conversation, before I *die*. Damien clears his throat, and goes

Damien (trying to salvage the conversation): So. Uh, the - the buzzards in the satellite dish. What's - What's the status update on that?

Molly: Hm. Bad!

B: She finishes tucking your sheets into place, and kind of reaches up to scratch at the back of her neck.

Molly: The birds are... what my dad would call *"some big sumbitches,"* and they did not seem afraid of my taser, so my plan is to go back up on the roof tonight when they're asleep and attack from behind. Unfortunately, that *does* mean no wifi for the time being - I am *really* sorry, I know that you've got to get the thing with your car fixed, I'm working on it.

Damien: It's totally fine. Don't - Don't worry about it. Uh, t-tomorrow's... fine.

A: Damien is trying not to make it too obvious that that is *extremely not fine*, but I think the whole thing with the weird noises... startled him. Speaking of. He kind of gestures at the wall, and goes

Damien: I also think you've got a problem with... mice? Or...

A: He looks at the wall a little nervously, and goes

> **Damien:** ...a raccoon, maybe?

B: Molly frowns, and goes over to the wall, raps on it in a few places, and sighs defeatedly.

> **Molly:** [sighs] Yeah, that'd be Terry. We've been trying to find him for ages - he chewed a hole in the insulation last year and he's been rogue ever since. If it'll help you sleep any easier, I can bring some traps to put in your room? But they *are* the old-school spring-loaded kind, so you'll need to step carefully if you get up to pee in the middle of the night.
>
> **Damien:** ...Let me get back to you on that, if anything else happens.
>
> **Molly:** Okay, no worries.

B: Molly goes back to her cleaning cart, throws a couple little sample-size shampoo bottles into your bathroom, and then slowly turns back to you, rocking forward-and-back on the balls of her feet.

> **Molly:** Hey, do you want to, like, hang out?

A: Damien pauses, and... doesn't take a step back, but does, like, lean back on his heels, and goes

> **Damien:** ...Why?

B: She looks a little hurt, at that, and just starts wringing her hands.

> **Molly:** You just... look like you could use a friend, is all. And I-I *get* that, you know? Um... I'm surrounded by people, here, but everybody kind of does their own thing, and... It gets lonely. But if that was weird or whatever, I'll go - I'm sure I can find some other stuff to do.

A: Damien's posture immediately softens.

Damien: No, that's not - ...I'm sorry, I'm being, like, *super rude*. [stammers] I've had a rough couple of months, and I'm... kinda tired. Um. [stammers] But - yeah, we can - we can hang out.

Molly: Oh, sick!

B: She just *beams*, and dives into the bottom of her cleaning cart, coming up with a laptop and a fistful of yarn and crochet hooks. She opens up the laptop and fusses around with it for a second, before sitting it down on the dresser next to the TV. And a, like, marine biology documentary starts playing on it. Looking supremely satisfied, Molly sits down on the end of your bed and just starts messing around with the yarn in her hand, beginning to crochet something.

Molly: I had some stuff downloaded from before the internet went out. It's not everybody's cup of tea, but, hey, it's better than public access and watching the same episode of *Jeopardy!* for the millionth time in a row.

A: Damien very slowly steps closer to the bed, and says

Damien: Yeah, I noticed that, like, a *lot* of people were watching *Jeopardy!*, earlier? I-I get that there's not *much* of a town, around here, but is there, like, *nothing* to do in town?

B: She tilts her head to the side, thinking about it for a second.

Molly: Mmm, nope! It’s pretty much *Jeopardy!* Reruns or driving thirty miles to the nearest gas station to get a donut. Why do you think I'm so starved for human companionship?

A: Damien's posture softens a little more, and he goes

Damien: [laughs] Uh, understood. I would *love* to watch this documentary - I’m - I’m - I need to take my meds really quick, I'm gonna do that, but...

A: And then he nods a couple times.

Damien: Yeah. Yeah, we can hang out.

A: Uh, and then he's gonna step away, take his meds for the night, and then... come back and very gingerly settle on the bed next to Molly.

B: You sit there with her in companionable silence, for a time, listening to some old British guy drone on about the social habits of bottlenose dolphins. The yarn in Molly's hands is starting to take form as some kind of little creature, as she continues to crochet. And, without looking up to make eye contact with you, she goes

Molly: You never said what you were gonna do when you got to LA.

A: Damien freezes for a second, and then forces himself to relax.

Damien: D-Didn't I? I guess I didn't. Um... Like you said, theme park tickets are pretty impossible to refund, uh - other than that, I was just gonna... see the sights. Uh, we're - we're going there to visit Dahlia's family, so.

B: She looks up at you with a very strange look on her face. It's this perceptive expression that you can practically *feel* drilling down through all the half-truths you just told. But she doesn't say anything about it, just keeps crocheting and smiling.

Molly: You should go to the aquarium. We went once when I was a kid. It was really, *really* fun, but I don't do well in crowds and... sort of had a bad time, so we had to leave early. I wish I could have stayed to see the penguins.

Damien: Yeah, I'll keep that in mind. Um. Haven't really been in LA for long periods of time before - I mean, I've *gone*, but not long enough that the aquarium would have been worth it. And we had one at home, but it was mostly focused on... sharks and snakes and venomous fish.

B: Oh, you are speaking her language, right now. She totally abandons that *"why are you lying to me"* look and perks right up.

Molly: Aw, man, I *love* sharks. Did you know that sharks have special organs on their faces that allow them to sense electromagnetic fields?

Damien: I don't *think* I knew that, but I do now, so thank you.

Molly: You're welcome. Also, if you flip a shark upside-down, it enters a state called tonic immobility that basically makes it like you're scruffing a cat by the back of the neck. So, if you ever get attacked by a shark, flip it upside-down.

Damien: That works on crocodiles, too.

B: She raises her eyebrows at you, clearly impressed.

Molly: Ah. I see you're a man of culture.

B: And Damien, there is a moment as you're sitting here with this girl where she reminds you *so much* of someone that it *aches*. You just wish you could put your finger on exactly *who* she reminds you of.

Damien: [laughs] Yeah, um...

A: Damien laughs, and then swings his legs up onto the bed and curls up around that raw ache in his chest, and settles in to watch the documentary.

B: As time goes on and you're watching this documentary, you can see out the window on the far side of your room - looking out onto the pool deck - that the nightly pool party has started to convene, apparently. All of the people that were in the lobby at breakfast and watching *Jeopardy!* are now outside. Again, not really interacting with each other outside of the groups you saw them in earlier, sort of stuck in their own ruts. Eventually, you see Luke and Dahlia out there, too. Luke's still got on his swim trunks and unbuttoned shirt, Dahlia has since changed into, like, a high-waisted bikini, and they are apparently still

bickering at each other - you're not sure what's being said, from the other side of the glass, but Dahlia does push him in the pool.

A: Damien snorts fondly, I think almost despite himself.

B: Molly sort of follows your eyeline, gets a look at what you're looking at, and a very sad expression goes across her face.

> **Molly:** Um... If you want to go be with your friends, I'm not going to stop you.

A: Damien shuffles a little bit and then reaches one hand into his hoodie pocket to run his thumb along the edges of the Sidhe Shield, and reaches the other up to fiddle with the, uh, medallion around his neck.

> **Damien (bitterly):** [sighs] Nah, I'm - I'm good. Think I'd, uh, harsh the vibe a little bit.

B: She looks extremely surprised that you are *choosing* to stay here, and then breaks out into another one of those big, bright smiles.

> **Molly:** I get it. I'm not good at being around people, either. But, for what it's worth, you don't harsh *my* vibe. Maybe that's why we get along.

A: Damien snorts, and doesn't look away from the window.

> **Damien:** [scoffs] I used to be a lot... *better* at all this. Or, I don't know, maybe just... better at pretending to be good at it, um [laughs] - Guess the difference didn't really matter to anybody but me, and... I don't even think it matters to *me*, now.

B: Molly ties off whatever little thing she was crocheting and gets up to go stand by the window.

> **Molly:** Well, you've got one up on me. I was *never* good at it. Growing up in the middle of nowhere, stuck in this... gross *roach trap* of a motel - I think all I've ever wanted

was friends. It's hard. People like *us* always want to just *be* with people like them, but. Any time we get the chance, we can't figure out how.

B: Everything's quiet for a moment, and then her eyes get *really big*.

Molly (panicked): Oh *shit*, there's no one behind the bar! Uh, the bartender must have called off, but of course I wouldn't *know* because the *phones* and - Oh, jeez.

A: Damien hops off the bed, takes a couple steps across the room - I think, without even meaning to, he's raising his hands and signing, *"okay, breathe,"* and then he stops, like, mid-sign, and puts them down at his sides very deliberately.

Damien: Okay, uh... Chill out, deep breaths. I mean, do you have a... reserve bartender you could call, or...?

B: She looks over at you, kind of frantic, and waves at the landline sitting on your nightstand.

Molly: Who am I *calling*?! The only way I'm getting anybody here is with a *bat signal*!

A: Damien winces.

Damien: Yeah, you're - you're totally right, I... *forgot*, for a second.

Molly: No, no, you're fine, um, I just... I gotta go.

B: She starts packing up her laptop and grabbing her yarn, throwing it all back onto her cleaning cart.

A: Damien steps back, kind of shuffling nervously from foot to foot. And then, without really looking at her, says,

Damien: Uh... [laughs] I-I don't know how much longer I'm gonna be here, but... w-we could hang out again, later, if you wanted.

B: That nervous look that she's got to her relaxes, and she smiles back at you.

Molly: Yeah, I'd like that. Um. Here, you can have this.

B: She sticks her hand out, and in it is a little crocheted creature.

Molly: It's an anglerfish! See? I even did the little light on its head and everything.

A: Damien reaches out and grabs this anglerfish like he's afraid she's gonna take it back at the last second. And kind of fiddles with it, as he says

Damien: Thanks.

A: He kind of twists the light for a second, and then says

Damien: You know... It's weird, you *really* remind me of somebody.

Molly: Oh, really? Who?

Damien: [laughs] I'm - I'm not totally sure. I'll let you know if I figure it out.

Molly: Okay. Um... Yeah, I've *really* got to go, I'm sorry. I'll see you later, though, alright?

B: She trundles off down the hallway with her cleaning cart, turning the corner by the office. What do you do after she's gone?

A: I stand there, worrying at the stitches on this crochet anglerfish for a long minute. And then I'm gonna go stand by the window that faces the pool deck and just... watch.

B: The pool party carries on uninterrupted. You watch Luke and Dahlia getting into a splash-fight in the shallow end. After a couple seconds, Molly comes running out a side door, frantically pulling her hair up in a ponytail - she has swapped out her little maid's cap for a visor with the motel logo on it. She jumps behind the bar at the far end of the pool deck, starts handing out bottles to people. And you notice something kind of strange. As you look out into the desert *beyond* the pool deck, you can see a couple of those little pinpricks of light that, on

your first night, you thought were distant houses. But you remember Molly saying that there was nothing other than the motel and the burger joint across the street for *30 miles*. And those lights... you could *swear* they are *not* in the same place they were last night. You're squinting out into the darkness, trying to figure out how this could even be possible... and right behind you, almost too soft to perceive, you hear a light scratching at the inside of the wall.

A: Kaelen, we find you headed out to Summerlin, Nevada. You are crowded with Lola, Lydia, and Ellie, into Lola's car - because it's the only nice car among the four of you. It is unfortunately a *very small*, bright purple little sporty thing. You got shotgun, because you are extremely tall, but Lola's really the only person that fits *comfortably* in this car. Lydia is sitting behind you with her knees practically up against her chin, because you had to push the seat so far back, and Ellie is *visibly* trying to make herself smaller, in the rest of the backseat.

B: Kae is desperately trying to quell a stress migraine, just pinching at the bridge of her nose.

> **Kaelen:** Cool roadtrip. Great roadtrip. Are we lost, or is that *honest-to-god* the fourth Whole Foods that we've driven past?

A: Lydia, from behind you, goes

> **Lydia:** No, that's definitely a different Whole Foods. The last one was next to a Panera.
>
> **Kaelen:** I... very much dislike this place.

A: Lola, from the driver's seat, kind of waves a hand vaguely at you, and then puts it back on the wheel, and says

> **Lola:** Look, we'll be in-and-out; Sean's had all night to do whatever research he's gonna do. So, we just have to deal with this for... I don't know, an hour?

Kaelen: Yeah, about that: I've been having some misgivings about *why* exactly we're trusting the guy who sold awful, *awful* technology to the government?

Lola: Because he's reformed?

Kaelen: [doubtful noise] Seems like he's living in pretty good comfort for a defector. God, this place gives me *hives*.

Lola: He was an independent contractor, *most* of the money is not actually from the US government. And, anyway, he owes me a favor.

Kaelen: [dubious noise]

A: From the backseat, Ellie makes an uncomfortable noise, and goes

Ellis: Eh, I guess better somebody that used to work for the government and saw the light than somebody who's still a cop.

Kaelen (sarcastic): Yeah, I *love* when my choices for rescuing my brother are limited between a turd and a turd with plausible deniability.

A: There is a moment of silence, and then Lola says

Lola: I feel like I should clarify that I was exaggerating when I called him my *friend*.

A: You keep driving, the houses get bigger and less architecturally coherent. And you drive up to a big gate, uh, spanning the entire width of a street. The car rolls to a stop, and Lola rolls down her window and starts to lean out. As she's leaning, she's saying

Lola: Anyway, I've never met up with him in person before, but, based on how paranoid he is on the internet, I would say he's done *something* to piss the government off. No sudden movements, I think.

A: And then she punches a code in on a little number pad on a post next to the road. And the gate starts to slide open. And you're not there anymore.

B: When I wished to *leave* the rich suburb, it was *not* like this.

A: You're in the back of the Cutlass. It is... not quite night, outside, but you can see that the sun is going down, distantly. Next to you in the backseat is your brother - he's probably four or five? - idly drawing in a coloring book. You hear the sounds of a much older, like, wrought-iron gate slowly opening. You are sitting behind your mother, who is in the shotgun seat. And, because of your vantage point, you can't see whatever her face does, but you watch her *flinch*. You watch as her hand goes up to fiddle with one of her sleeves - she's wearing a *kind of* nice dress, it's got, like, lace detailing on the sleeves. Very obviously secondhand. Her fingers worry at a half-faded red stain on one of the sleeves. And, in the driver's seat - you watch as your dad grimaces, and then looks over at her, eyebrows drawing together. He reaches out a hand and puts it very gingerly on her knee. There is a beat, as the Cutlass starts moving slowly through this old wrought-iron gate, into the driveway of a very large Mediterranean-style house. You can see, just barely, that your mom's head turns to keep *something* closer to the gate within her eyeline. And she snaps

> **Kendra:** Just look where you're driving, Todd. Please.

A: And then you're back.

B: Kae lurches forward like she's been shocked with a defibrillator, and goes

> **Kaelen (fearful):** Ah! Shitty rich grandparents.

A (laughing): Goddammit! Lola had been starting to drive forward through this gate, but - as you yell “shitty rich grandparents” for seemingly no reason - she startles and immediately slams the brake. You - and everybody else - rock forward in your seat. There’s a pause. And then Lydia, from behind you, says

> **Lydia:** You good?

Kaelen: Yeah, all good. Something about all of this horrible architecture just tripped off my fight-or-flight response. I *hate* this place.

A: Lola grimaces, as if they are just realizing that this might've been a bad call.

Lola: We're only gonna be here for an hour! It's fine! It's - It's just an hour.

A: And then starts driving again.

B: Kae's keeping their head on a *fucking swivel*, looking out for ostentatious yard decorations, or the smell of Chanel No. 5.

A: It seems that the ostentatious yard decorations are not *in vogue* in the community of Summerlin. At least not in this specific gated community. The lawns are all meticulously upkept, in the specific way that people with a lot of money for sprinklers will upkeep lawns in the desert. You see a lot less desertscaping than you're used to... But there aren't any touches of personality, really, in any of these front yards. It's very... *HOA chic* around here. Lola drives you through the streets, takes a couple of turns, and then starts squinting at house numbers and stops, in front of a house that is indistinguishable from all of the other bland, tacky houses on the street.

Kaelen: [uncomfortable noise]

B: Kae gets out of the car and approaches this place *very cautiously*, like it is a nest of venomous pit vipers.

A: Yeah, everybody else also gets out of the car. Lola kind of cringes a little bit as she looks at the house, and then trots up ahead of all of you to the front door and rings the doorbell. Waits a second, as you all catch up. Rings it again. And then, under her breath, says

Lola: [sighs] For *fuck's* sake, Sean.

Kaelen: Oh, this is going well. This is going *super* well.

B: Kae's gonna walk around and, like, start trying to look in windows and stuff, to see if anybody's home - oh my god, this is so suspicious, there's probably a neighborhood watch.

A: Yeah, you start poking around. Lola stays planted *exactly* where she is, and starts, like, gently overturning rocks on the porch, uh, with her foot, to see if any of them are, like, one of the key hiding ones. Uh, Lydia hops off the front stoop and jogs a little to catch up with you. She kind of loops her arm through yours, and arranges her posture so that it looks like you're just taking a walk. Still suspicious, but less so. Um, I would like you to roll to Read A Bad Situation, and I'm gonna have Lydia roll to Help Out. So I'm gonna roll for Lydia, first. [dice noise] That's a six. That's really good. So Lydia marks Experience, and you get no help.

B: It's fine, I have +2 to Sharp. [dice noise] *Wow*. Good thing I have that +2, that's a nine.

A: Okay! On a 7-9 you get precisely one question off the list.

B: *What's my best way in?*, baby.

A: You and Lydia circle around the house, around the garage - which is attached to the main house. And you see that it's a pretty big garage, so it has some windows. They are uncovered. So, from one of them, you can see the back of the garage door - like, the inside of the garage door. You could *probably* break it open, with Telekinesis.

B (uncertain): Uh, yeah, I probably *could*, but that would be *loud*, and... we're kind of behind enemy lines right now, as far as people that'll call the cops on us, so... Kae's gonna make this look as unsuspicious as possible. She looks around to make sure that nobody is outside watching them, and then reaches up to knock on the window, and goes

Kaelen: Hey, Sean, dude, your doorbell's broken again.

B: And then casts Telekinesis on the actual button to open the garage door.

A: Smart move! Uh, roll +Weird.

B: No whammies, no whammies, no whammies, no whammies. [dice noise] Twelve! So, just by default, with Telekinesis, I can move something smaller than a person, I don't have much control, and I can't move it strongly enough to hurt anything. But on a 10+, I get to take 1-Harm and mark two options off the Telekinesis list, so I'm gonna choose to *not* take any Harm, and to keep the power basically under my control since this is kind of a fine... Well, *is* it fine *motor*?

A: Okay. I'll tell you what. You do manage to push the button, and the garage door starts going up. I think - because your Telekinesis is not super refined - you do push it a little *weird*, and the - the actual physical plastic of the button kind of smashes into the side of where it is placed, and cracks. So. There is *some evidence* that something hinky is going on, but it's not evidence that ties specifically to *you*. And it's not, like, *damning*.

B: It is just now striking me that Ellie doesn't know that Kae can move things with her mind, now. But there will be time to talk about that once they're all safely inside - she just looks around at the rest of the group, and goes

> **Kaelen (stiffly):** Come on, guys. He's gonna let us in through the garage.

A: Yeah, everybody else is just as aware as you are that this is an extremely suspicious situation, and you are in the center of, uh, NIMBY territory. So Lola, Ellie, Lydia all rush through the garage door and up to the man door into the house, which is - *thankfully* - unlocked.

B: If I haven't totally broken the garage door opener, I'm gonna put the garage door down.

A: I tell you what, I'm gonna roll a d6; if I get an odd number, the garage door opener is broken, if I get an even, it's not. [dice noise] It's broken.

B: I Telekinesis the door shut. [dice noise] Thirteen! So, same deal as with the opener: I'm gonna choose to take no harm and have a little bit more fine control with it, to make it *look* like it is going down at a normal speed. Kae pushes at the button, realizes that it's not working, curses quietly, and then turns around and does a full, like, *"use the force, Luke"* thing and just slowly pulls this garage door down.

A: Congratulations on your successful B&E. Lola and Lydia are already moving into the house, but Ellie is standing at the man door, just staring at you wide-eyed.

> **Kaelen:** Oh, don't look at me like that. I can move things with my mind, now, okay?! It's probably part of the whole *being dead* thing.

A: She visibly swallows, says nothing, and goes into the house after Lydia and Lola.

B: Kae is also going to move into the house, *very carefully*. She's keeping an eye out for anything, like - home security systems, nanny-cams, anything that could result in legal trouble for the gang.

A: You see a variety of objects that could contain nanny-cams, like plants, bookshelves, various brick-a-brack. As you walk in, Lola yells

> **Lola:** Sean, it's me! Lola! You didn't answer the door, so...

B: What kind of person lives in this house? I'm just interested. Just snooping around, while Lola tries to find this guy.

A: You know how, in movies where there are alien abduction storylines, the heroes will inevitably meet up with a crackpot in a trailer out in the middle of the desert?

B: Oh, wow.

A: Yeah, just imagine that that crackpot from *every single movie* had McMansion money.

B: *Oh*, *wow*. Kae walks across whatever room they're all standing in and nervously pokes at some of the alien memorabilia that I guess is around.

Kaelen: Oh, this guy's got issues, huh? Like. *Issues*.

A: Yeah, you poke at some of the stuff on the walls. The guy at least seems to be very well-traveled? You see a lot of, like, postcards and travel posters, various knick-knacks that look like they are from all over the globe. [haltingly] Most look like they are things that he would have been allowed to *buy*, on his travels. You are going to *assume* that there are not any crimes going on here, until proven otherwise. You notice that there is not a single photo *anywhere* on *any* of these walls that has a human face in it.

Kaelen: [dubious noise]

B: Kae's gonna walk up very close to Lola, and also holler out into the house - quite a bit louder than her.

Kaelen: Uh, Mr. Sean, sir? I promise we are not here to take you back to the mothership, we just have some questions about some footage you were sent.

A: Lola sighs, and looks around, and says

Lola: Okay, I suggest we split up, I don't know where his office is.

Kaelen: I mean, I appreciate the tactical knowledge, but, is there a chance he's just not home?

A: There was a car in the garage, you noticed, and Lola shakes her head and goes

Lola: Sean has... a *lot* of flaws, but he's very busy and usually punctual.

B: Kae freezes, arms akimbo, and frantically looks back-and-forth.

Kaelen: Okay, so he's not *not home*, but he's not answering when we yell for him. So the potential answers, *to me*, are

reading: A) there's a secret lab in a basement somewhere where he can't hear us, or B) something deeply bad is going on here.

A: There is a pause, and then Ellie rolls her eyes and says

Ellis: Or he has *headphones* on, Kae.

B: I'm looking around for, like, a bathroom, or a kitchen sink that I can dig around under.

A: Uh, yeah, there's a bathroom not super far from the garage. The door's open.

B: Kae's gonna put her shirt over her hand and start opening cabinets, looking for a box of, like, rubber gloves.

A: You don't find, like, the big cleaning rubber gloves, but you do find a box of, like, the stretchy plastic-y latex ones - like what you would use for coloring your hair, or, just, if you were touching something kinda gross and germy and you didn't want to get any germs on your hands.

B: Bingo! Takin' that, passin' it around to everybody!

Kaelen: Alright, you can all lecture me on my paranoia *later*, but glove up. If shit gets froggy, it needs to be like we were never here.

A: Everybody does, in fact, glove up. You all head down the hall and into a *big* fucking foyer. It *is* one of the stupid two-story ones with the open space above the staircase. It's gross - the bills for the air conditioning are, like, unfathomable to you. As you all get into this foyer, Lola nods and says

Lola: We'll take downstairs, you two take upstairs?

B: Kae's too busy pulling on her rubber gloves with a *snap* to present any argument.

A: Lydia shrugs, and nods to Ellie, and then to the stairs, and says

Lydia: Alright, follow my lead, Els.

A: And then she just heads up.

B: Yeah, Kaelen's in full-on hypervigilance mode, right now. Before continuing any further into the house with Lola, they're gonna go try to find some kind of, like, cleaning spray, or cleaning wipes, and go wipe off that knick-knack that they just poked. But then they're gonna follow Lola's lead.

A: Yeah, you found Clorox wipes in the same cabinet as the box of gloves, you go and wipe off that knick-knack. As you are moving through the downstairs, you notice that Lola does not seem *comfortable* here - you don't think she's been in this house before. She is poking around in the foyer as you come back from wiping off that knick-knack. She turns over her shoulder to look at you, and says

> **Lola:** So his car keys are still hung up. And...

A: And then she points at a shoe rack right next to the front door.

> **Lola:** No shoes missing.
>
> **Kaelen:** Huh. Okay. Um, I wanna be an optimist, so I'm still hedging my bets on the whole *secret lab in the basement* thing.

A: Lola is starting to look a little nervous, but they give you a very tight smile, and, uh, a little laugh.

> **Lola:** [nervous chuckle] Yeah, that's... That would be on-brand, actually.
>
> **Kaelen:** Yeah, that begs the question: How did you even end up involved with this guy? I wouldn't have pegged you as the type of person to work with [distastefully] the *government*.

A: Lola wrinkles her nose as she leads you into a big open-plan kitchen. It's, like, stupidly large, there's a lot of space between the cabinets and the ceilings - like, cobweb-magnet kind of space - uh, an island that's too big to be useful, double

stoves. You know the type. And Lola looks around at it, kind of distastefully, and says,

> **Lola:** Uh, I'm *not*. Sean was... not in Uncle Sam's, uh, good graces, by the time that I did work for him. He's... *really invested* in his theories, and I'm a pretty good investigator, so. I looked into a couple of things, took some pictures. Turned over some stones.
>
> **Kaelen:** Did you find the aliens, Lola?

A: They give you a sideways look, and a little smirk.

> **Lola:** Anything I may or may not have found is something I'm gonna take to my grave. Sean was worried enough about... Eh. *Suicide by sniper*, we'll say? Delicately.
>
> **Kaelen:** So you *did* find them! Alright, so, is the whole *abduction and probing* process real, or - [stammers] Never mind. This guy clearly lives *very comfortably* for somebody that has the CIA after him.

A: Lola shakes her head with a ruffle of braids. She opens the oversized fridge in this kitchen, and you see that it is full of Tupperware containers - like, *guy who hires a private chef* type of setup. And Lola says

> **Lola:** I'm... *mostly* joking. I found *some* weird stuff, but -

A: And then she shakes her head again, closes the fridge.

> **Lola:** Sean's theory is that if there *wasn't* life out there among the stars *before* - the whole 2012 thing, force of belief - there probably is *now*. My personal opinion is that there's probably some, uh, bodies locked up in Roswell, but I would be *very* surprised if *human belief* stretches to any planets where there aren't *humans*.
>
> **Kaelen:** Oh, that is a *delightful* thought experiment. I would actually love to hear your theories on - [stammers] What are - What are we doing?
>
> **Lola:** [laughs] Anyway, um...

A: And she rounds this island, looking around disinterestedly.

> **Lola:** Like I said: I took some pictures, I asked some questions from... a few people that weren't willing to talk to Sean directly. He owes me *a few* favors, now.

A: She stops by the sink and tilts her head.

> **Lola:** Hey, come look at this.

A: And I would like you to roll to Investigate A Mystery, and I will have Lola roll to Help Out. I'm gonna have Lola make *two* rolls, actually - she's gonna add +1 to both. So... first one. [dice noise] That was a seven, so that's okay. And then, second one. [dice noise] That was a ten! Okay. I'm gonna give *you* that ten for Help Out, so you get a +1 to your roll. And we're just gonna keep the seven for my own ends.

B: Love that! Okay, I'm gonna Investigate A Mystery. [dice noise] Okay. So, fuckin' snake eyes. +2 is four, plus the +1 from Lola is five.

A: Yeah, you walk over to the sink, kind of lean over to see what Lola's looking at. It's just a couple of dishes in the sink. But she tilts her head, and quietly says

> **Lola:** There's *no way* he left the house.

A: And then, from upstairs, you hear

> **Ellis:** [screams]

B: Sprinting. I am *sprinting* towards the source of that scream.

A: Yeah, you're taking off immediately, Lola is on your heels. *Moments* after you hear that scream, you hear Lydia go

> **Lydia:** Oh, *shit*!

B: Kae is just thundering up the stairs going

> **Kaelen:** *Fuuuuck.*

A: Yeah, you get up the stairs and... down a hallway, the right side of this landing - you see that a door down there is open,

Ellie has stumbled back against a wall with a hand over her mouth, and... It's *almost* funny, the way that Lydia is just standing in the doorway, hands on her hips, looking like she is trying to process what she's looking at. You rush down the hall - Lola, again is on your heels. You skid to a stop in this doorway, and all you can see is that the inside of this room has been *absolutely soaked* in blood. And that's where we're gonna end, this time.

B: I knew I wasn't wrong for giving everybody the gloves.

A: [laughs] Foiled again! But we'll see what happens next time -

B: [sighs] On Compelled Dual: Desert Song. God damn it.

[THEME MUSIC PLAYS]

B: Hey, everybody. Barry here with the postscript, just clearing up a couple of housekeeping things at the end of the episode. As usual, I'll start by plugging our social medias: You can find us on Twitter, Tumblr, and TikTok @CompelledDual. We also have other stuff, like an official website, an official Spotify profile where we post playlists for every episode, and, if you're interested in supporting the podcast, you can always head on over to patreon.com/CompelledDual; where, starting at just $2 a month, you can get all kinds of patron perks - like early access to episodes, access to exclusive bonus content and playlists, and whatever other fun things we come up with. And, if you're looking for ways to support the show other than pledging to the Patreon, we just ask that you tell a friend about it. And, if they like it, ask them to tell a friend, too. Word-of-mouth advertising is our most valuable tool that we have. Our release schedule, right now, is kind of wibbly-wobbly. Life comes at you fast, we're doing what we can. But any new episode will always premiere on a Monday, and you will always have ample warning about it via all our social medias. Thank you so much for joining us, and we look forward to seeing you next time.