

HIGHLIGHT TO SEE CONTENT WARNINGS:

NICHOLAS:

(as the intro plays) At the edge of Gilt City, gators hide their grins beneath dark water, and all await the arrival of the Night Post.

[NOISE OF A BOWLING ALLEY: CHATTER, BALLS ROLLING AND STRIKING PINS.]

VAL:

I know Nick mentioned his bowling league before, but I kind of thought he was messing with us.

[CLOSE BY, A ROLLING BALL AND THE SIGNATURE CLATTER OF A STRIKE.]

MILO:

And he's actually good.

CLEMENTINE:

(dramatic) Nice shot! Is that what people say in bowling, "nice shot"?

MILO:

I think they say, "helluva ball, son."

VAL:

No, they don't. They don't, right?

NICHOLAS:

(slight distance) Y'all! Come join me!

VAL:

"Helluva ball, son."

NICHOLAS:

What?

CLEMENTINE:

You made...y-you did the bowling good.

NICHOLAS:

Thanks for meeting me here. Given what you wanted to discuss, I thought it better not to be at the station.

[SOMEONE ROLLS A GUTTERBALL NEARBY, THEN LETS OUT A LOUD "GODDAMMIT."]

NICHOLAS:

It's loud enough that I don't think we'll be overheard. (*sips drink*)

VAL:

Pretty brave, drinking bowling alley beer.

NICHOLAS:

I wouldn't even call it beer. Just miserable wheat water. But I'm trying to numb this headache.

CLEMENTINE:

I always keep painkillers on hand. Do you need a couple?

NICHOLAS:

I appreciate it, Clementine, but it's—not that kind of headache.

VAL:

I get it. We're the headache.

NICHOLAS:

I didn't say that—

MILO:

Not to sound impatient, but can we—

NICHOLAS:

Yes, yes. You want to talk about the language of the Other.

CLEMENTINE:

We have information that all postmasters know it.

VAL:

Not from the most reliable source, but still.

MILO:

So it *is* connected to the Other?

NICHOLAS:

Isn't everything?

VAL:

Are you admitting you know it?

NICHOLAS:

I'm...familiar with it, yes.

CLEMENTINE:

We thought everything related to the old language was censored or suppressed. How did you learn it?

NICHOLAS:

Not in the conventional way. It's part of being initiated as a postmaster. Have you ever felt— well, it's like a seed, buried unnoticed in the soil of your mind. Until one day, it sprouts, vast and green, and you realize the roots must have been growing for a long time.

VAL:

I think we know what you mean.

CLEMENTINE:

Could anyone learn?

NICHOLAS:

That I don't know. Like you said, the city's forbidden it. There are no guides or dictionaries, and the material is very hard to come by.

MILO:

But you can translate it, right? (*rustling in bag*) What about this?

NICHOLAS:

(*flipping pages*) Where did you get these?

MILO:

They're from a book we found in Agi's shop. She had a knack for finding rare things— banned texts, original manuscripts that no one else even knew existed. I bet we'd have a lot more to go on if she were here.

VAL:

We'd have a lot more if that high-pitched hellion hadn't gotten in the way.

CLEMENTINE:

So, what does it say?

NICHOLAS:

Hmm. It appears to be a...cookbook of some sort.

MILO:

That can't be right. The pages in English were about the Post and the Other.

NICHOLAS:

I don't know about that, but these are all recipes, as far as I can tell. See here? (*paper crinkling*) Numbers and ingredients. And further on, instructions for how to combine them.

VAL:

(*groan*) So this is what, Prime City's Betty Crocker? Useless.

CLEMENTINE:

Does it say what the recipes are for? Are we sure they're meals, or could they be remedies? Rituals, maybe?

NICHOLAS:

Perhaps. I'm not familiar with all of these ingredients, but there are a lot of herbs listed here. I'm not sure it would be possible to replicate these instructions with modern resources.

CLEMENTINE:

Are you thinking of the city's resources, or the Skelter's? If it grew out there before, I bet it still grows there.

VAL:

And you're a para-botanist now?

CLEMENTINE:

Or maybe Milo could grow them—

MILO:

Let's not get ahead of ourselves. We still don't know if this is from a grimoire or *Southern Living*.

NICHOLAS:

If you'll leave the pages with me, I can study them more closely.

MILO:

Thanks, but I don't think so. (*shoving papers into bag*) We were threatened at gunpoint for these, and...they're all that's left of Agi's books.

NICHOLAS:

I would take good care of them—

VAL:

Not that we don't trust you, but—yeah, we really don't trust you.

CLEMENTINE:

Why are you being so forthcoming all of a sudden?

NICHOLAS:

It's not *sudden*. I want to help you, I do, it's just— I don't have the answers you're looking for.

VAL:

Bullshit! The whole time we've been fumbling in the dark with this gibberish, you could have translated it.

NICHOLAS:

And now that I have, it didn't help you, did it?

MILO:

What else do you know about the old language? Besides postmasters, who even speaks it?

NICHOLAS:

No one speaks it. It can't be spoken.

CLEMENTINE:

That...doesn't make any sense.

VAL:

We know it can be spoken. I've heard it.

NICHOLAS:

What you must have heard wasn't the language of the Other. Even the pages you showed me were not the real thing. Prime City used a...a version of it, a simplified dialect that was more accessible to humans. As I understand it, that wasn't even the first derivation. That's why I couldn't make out all of the recipes.

CLEMENTINE:

Then what is the real language? Where does it come from?

NICHOLAS:

I'm not sure how to explain.

VAL:

Try.

NICHOLAS:

There's...a place. A being. A...concept. I don't know, the words aren't really clear. Time is different in this place. To communicate through speech, the listener has to experience time the same way as the speaker, right? So that wouldn't work here. (*Nick's speech grows halting, pained*) The concept requires a degree of separation, a distance. There has to be a third party, an—intermediate. The Skelter was made to...to—

[A BRIEF SCREECH OF STATIC. NICK GROANS AND SLUMPS OVER THE TABLE, UPSETTING HIS PLASTIC CUP.]

CLEMENTINE:
Nicholas! Are you all right?

MILO:
Shit, we need a towel.

VAL:
Did you hear that?

CLEMENTINE:
Here. Some water.

NICHOLAS:
(*gulps*) Thank you. I'm...I think I'm okay.

VAL:
What was that about?

MILO:
Your headache?

NICHOLAS:
Yes. (*pause*) I said before that I don't have the answers you need. And the ones I do have...I can't share with you.

VAL:
For the same reason that we can't leave the Skelter.

CLEMENTINE:
We're sorry for pressuring you all this time. We didn't know that you physically *couldn't* help us.

NICHOLAS:
It's not your fault. I was less helpful than I might have been. I don't know what's coming, and I'd rather not see you all caught up in it, but...I feel responsible for what happened to Ashley. The city and the Other both used him, and I didn't intervene. I don't know what I could have done. Maybe nothing. But I wanted—I *want* to try and make up for it.

MILO:
Really? What happened to the threats to report us, reassign us?

NICHOLAS:

I can't change the way things are. I have to do my job, same as you. But if you find anything else you think is significant, maybe I can translate it, or—

CLEMENTINE:

Actually, there is something. (*paper crinkles*) Can you tell us what this says?

NICHOLAS:

A flyer? It...oh, this is it! The real thing!

VAL:

Don't ask where it came from, 'cause we can't really explain.

NICHOLAS:

Um, it says, "Venerate your loyal messengers. Unmake your lofty towers. Return your dreams to the earth. You are falling toward the end."

MILO:

"Falling toward the end...?"

NICHOLAS:

Or something like that. Most words in this language have at least two meanings. The word for "end" also means "start."

CLEMENTINE:

And yet, it's strangely less cryptic than I expected.

VAL:

Yeah, I think we can guess what "lofty towers" is referring to.

MILO:

What about the rest? What dreams?

NICHOLAS:

(*tired*) I wish I knew.

DISTANT VOICE:

Hey, Knuckles! Nick! Over here!

CLEMENTINE:

Who's that?

NICHOLAS:

They're...from my league.

MILO:

Oh, they're coming over.

VAL:

I guess we'll let you get back to it... "Knuckles." (*all three snickering, footsteps leaving*)

NICHOLAS:

(*to himself*) We should have just met at a park. (*louder*) Howdy, High Roller! How's your score?

[SCENE CHANGE; SHUFFLING OF MANY ENVELOPES AND PARCELS BEING SORTED.]

MILO:

Does Nick sort this much every day?

CLEMENTINE:

It seems like there's been a lot more mail through 103 recently.

VAL:

Which is weird, because some of these letters didn't need to come out this far. Look at this one: from Fourth Street to the Promenade. What's it doing out here?

CLEMENTINE:

Will says Station 1 is a mess right now. The Governor wants changes, but with Alexandra gone, there's no one to keep things organized.

VAL:

Isn't that Ms. Prescott's job now?

MILO:

Speaking of someone else's job, I just hope Nicholas is feeling better tomorrow. I should not be here at seven a.m.

CLEMENTINE:

He *did* get sick trying to help us. The least we can do is pick up the slack.

VAL:

Well, someone needs to pick up the slack at Station 1. This shit is ridiculous. Here's another from Gilt Tower.

[THE RUSTLE OF PAPER BLENDS INTO THE ECHO OF VAL'S INNER VOICE.]

VAL:

(*thought-voice*) I can't help thinking lately about the term "ghostwriter," whether there might not be something telling in the idea of a person who haunts another by becoming their voice.

Sorry, you know how I get – just dive right into the action without a proper exposition. That’s what revision is for, of course, but I don’t have time to workshop this particular piece. Let’s pretend I started with the customary, “Dear Chas, How are you? I am fine.” The trouble is, I’m not fine. I jumped at the chance to write an autobiography for one of Gilt City’s most prominent people, but I wasn’t prepared for what I’d learn about The Governor Themselves.

Every politician has their public face, the handsome exterior and sanitized personality that get them votes. But this is only one side of who they are, one facet of a prism. I’m beginning to suspect that Governor Augustine has many, many angles they don’t show, dark faces of the prism that no one, not even their spouses, has seen illuminated.

It’s widely believed that Emeril Augustine is not their given name, but the Governor has made no such admission, and their origins and life before their political career are largely a mystery. The stories they provided me for the book, about growing up in the poor neighborhood of Old Tom’s Holler and assisting at hedge schools to prepare for university, are consistent with public statements. But there’s something about the way Augustine tells them, with all the right gestures and pauses for effect, that sounds scripted, like they’re fictionalizing their own past. And I should know – I’ve fictionalized history for plenty of other would-be icons. One professional storyteller recognizes another.

None of that is really unusual for a public figure like the Governor. What makes me uneasy is their unwavering, almost forceful commitment to the illusion. Even in private, the mask never slips, the smile never droops. Their conviction is so complete that I almost believe it, even as I take down anecdotes that I know must have originated from a savvy PR agent years ago.

So what *is* true about The Governor Themselves, their inner self? Let’s see. Their energy for politicking is not infinite, and they isolate at the end of each day to recover. They love Daniel, Soniya, and Maeve, perhaps not in the same way, but certainly equally. Connections like that aren’t something you can fake. They possess a strict moral code, even if its specific tenets are not apparent, and they hold themselves to a higher standard than the rest of us. Perhaps most importantly, there is something sharp and impenetrable within Mx. Augustine, something burning in their chest that will never let them rest, that pushes them feverishly toward some long-sought goal. To my query, they say the goal is the betterment of Gilt City, but I feel this splinter in their heart must drive at something deeper.

The Governor’s image team is very strict about what language I can and cannot use in the book, and it’s got me thinking about words and their subtler implications. One of my early chapters was sent back with a correction to remove “driven” as a descriptor for Emeril, and I puzzled over that one for a while before I went back to the dictionary. “Driven” implies that a person is inspired or controlled by something else, that their thirst for achievement or success comes from beyond themselves. In this sense, I believe the word is too apt, too literal for the narrative the Governor wants to promote. Maeve told me privately that Emeril has strange dreams, that they can be

heard conversing late into the night with an unknown interlocutor. Could there be some unseen power guiding the hand that guides our city?

I don't know. I think all this speculation is my too-rational mind trying to form an explanation for what I've seen. Maybe it's my tendency to dramatize, but I keep wondering what kind of person could have dreamt this up, what peculiar soul selected this road. Let me explain. The administration has made much fanfare lately of their plan to power Gilt City with the Skelter's ambient energy, but the actual operation is kept tightly under wraps. The new installations, in the remotest areas of the Skelter, are guarded round-the-clock by Public Works. Even the people whose own backyards were appropriated for the project haven't seen inside the barriers. But I have. And I can't make sense of it.

[VERY GRADUALLY, LOW FREQUENCY PULSING TONES RISE IN THE BACKGROUND, LAYERED WITH ONE FAINT, HIGH NOTE.]

The armatures are shaped like satellite dishes, but made of a kind of fibrous mesh, laid in a honeycomb pattern. The dishes rotate slowly, while the netting pulses with a steady, blue light. When I first entered the compound, I didn't hear anything, but the fillings in my teeth began to ache. The longer I stayed, the more I was aware of a grinding hum that seemed to emanate from all directions. None of the workers wore ear protection, and none I spoke to confessed to hearing the hum.

The facility I visited is in Methuselah's Close, a community known for its unique population of crows that many believe have been touched by the supernatural. Indeed, there were dozens of corvids in the sky and the treetops nearby, though I didn't notice anything unusual about them. One Public Works officer explained that while the facility was surrounded on all sides by a barrier to keep out nosey citizens, it had to be open to the sky in order to siphon energy. Thus, there was no way to keep out the crows, who would occasionally fly into the equipment.

[THE PULSING HUM GROWS LOUDER AND MORE INTENSE.]

The man pointed one out with such a lack of interest that I cannot now fathom. As a crow passed close to one of the dishes, the blue glow brightened and turned white, and somehow it *pulled* the bird into the web. The crow flickered, like a fluorescent bulb, and then it wasn't a crow. It became two, then ten, splicing and melding into a shuddering mass of beak and feather. (*overlapping crow and other bird cries*) In less than an instant, it was a dove, a vulture, a giant, glittering gem that blinked like an eye. (*crackling, shifting sounds*) What was once the bird contorted and shrank, twisting up into itself until it disappeared completely, and the glow dimmed back to blue. (*pulsing softens*) I turned to the officer, speechless, but he wasn't even watching anymore, had wandered off to shoot the breeze with a colleague.

I don't claim to know what any of this means. The Governor's explanation was an alphabet soup of buzzwords and technical terms I'm pretty sure were made up. Opponents of the plan say it's tantamount to strip-mining the atmosphere, but they're unclear on *what* is actually being mined.

Chas, I don't like this. I'm thinking of leaving Gilt City as soon as the book is done. Am I crazy? Am I overreacting? You're the only one I trust to give me an unbiased perspective. I almost want to say "fuck it" and get out now, forget the book and let Augustine's lawyers sue me for the advance. If I'm the ghostwriter behind this—

[THE FRONT DOOR OPENS AND THE BUZZER SOUNDS.]

VAL:
Who the fuck—

MICAH:
(overlapping) Oh! That's quite strident.

CLEMENTINE:
Um, we're sorry, but the station isn't open right now.

MICAH:
Ha, yes, I know. I'm not a customer. I'm with the Governor's Office.

MILO:
(unenthusiastic) How can we help you, uh...?

MICAH:
Micah. I'm Governor Augustine's personal assistant. And tailor. Sometimes counselor. In fact, I'm way too busy for this errand, but the new Liaison to the Night Post is in a meeting with the Governor this morning.

VAL:
Well, since you're so busy, let's just forget about it.

MICAH:
Do you know I had to take three buses to get here? Mx. Augustine's public transport overhaul can't come soon enough, if you ask me.

MILO:
We didn't.

[RUSTLING AND TURNING OF PAGES, PEN CLICKING AS MICAH TAKES OUT A NOTEPAD AND JOTS SOMETHING DOWN.]

MICAH:
"Remind E about pub tran."

CLEMENTINE:

We don't mean to be rude, Micah—

VAL:

I do.

CLEMENTINE:

But we were just about to go home...

MICAH:

I won't take much of your time, and I think you'll be excited to hear why I've come. The Governor's Office is working on a campaign to promote and support our Night Post stations, and we'd like you to be a part of it.

CLEMENTINE:

What kind of campaign?

MICAH:

You know, billboards, events, interviews. "We stand behind our couriers!" That sort of thing. We don't have all the slogans finalized yet.

MILO:

Hold on. Last we heard, the Governor wanted to get rid of the Post. What changed?

MICAH:

Phasing out the Night Post is a goal for the long term, but until the region's wireless networks are in place, we still rely heavily on our mail carriers.

VAL:

So after years of indifference, underfunding, and allowing hateful rhetoric toward pigeons, you want some feel-good advertising to keep everyone quiet at their jobs.

MICAH:

Not at all. This is meant to inspire unity—

VAL:

Well, you picked the wrong bitches—

CLEMENTINE:

I think what Val means is, why us? I'm sure there are more experienced pigeons with better records. Probably more photogenic ones, too.

VAL:

I was gonna take issue with that, but—you're right.

MICAH:

103 isn't the only station we'll be featuring, but it's ideal for several reasons. We want to highlight more rural stations, since they're often the target of unfortunate misconceptions. You all have a brand new building, and the couriers here have displayed remarkable resilience in the face of workplace hazards and equipment shortages.

MILO:

(exhale) Let me see if I have this right. We've had such a shitty time lately that you want to slap our pictures all over the city to tell other pigeons that things aren't so bad?

MICAH:

Again, I think you're slightly misunderstanding the purpose—

CLEMENTINE:

You'll have to find someone else. I don't know what Will told you, but we are not interested.

MICAH:

You mean Liaison Prescott? No, The Governor Themself chose you all for this. It's a wonderful opportunity to make a difference—

VAL:

Pass. But good luck finding anyone who wants to be a poster child for Gilt City's most hated profession.

MILO:

Once you get those slogans figured out, I'm sure they'll fix our cultural problems.

MICAH:

I understand your cynicism, guys, really. The Night Post has not had the backing from our city that it should. But this campaign is the start of changing all that. *(pause, with no response)* All right. All right, well, if you change your minds, just get in touch with me or Ms. Prescott. Either way, I hope you'll show your support at some of the public events we've got coming up.

MILO:

(sarcastic) We'll check our schedules.

VAL:

It's gonna be tough, since, you know, we sleep in the daytime.

MICAH:

Of course. *(pause)* I, uh, see you have coffee. Do you mind if I fill my cup for the road? It's been an early morning for me, heh.

CLEMENTINE:

Val made that, but if you want to take your life in your hands, feel free.

MICAH:

Ha. Thanks.

[MICAH POURS COFFEE AND CAREFULLY SCREWS THE LID BACK ON HIS CUP.]

MICAH:

Well, I've got three buses to catch. I'll be seeing you.

[THE BUZZER RINGS AGAIN AS MICAH LEAVES.]

CLEMENTINE:

That was strange.

VAL:

Yeah. You'd think the Governor's own PA could get better coffee.

CLEMENTINE:

I meant the whole visit. And Augustine himself sent him?

MILO:

It was kind of weird how he stood by the coffee pot, right? Like he didn't want us to see what he was doing.

VAL:

What, like he was pocketing some sugar packets?

[CLATTERING OF CUPS AND UTENSILS AS MILO SEARCHES THE COFFEE AREA.]

MILO:

Uh-huh. A bug.

VAL:

Yeah, this place is a brown recluse motel.

MILO:

No, like a listening device. See?

CLEMENTINE:

I felt something was off. He was here to spy on us.

VAL:

That sneaky bastard.

[A TINY CRUNCH AND ELECTRONIC SCREECH AS MILO CRUSHES THE DEVICE.]

MILO:

A bug seems kind of basic, with all the resources the Governor has at their disposal. We should be careful.

CLEMENTINE:

The only thing I want to be right now is asleep.

VAL:

Seconded. The rest of these letters can wait till tonight.

[VAL PICKS UP A LETTER AND TOSSES IT BACK ONTO THE PILE.]

VAL:

(thought-voice) If I'm the ghostwriter behind this – if I'm the voice that legitimizes the unmaking of our world – I'll never be free of it. My words will haunt this place for as long as the echoes reverberate through the ruins of our mistakes. Unlike Augustine, I don't want that kind of immortality.

Write back soon, Chas. I won't wait long.

Impatient regards,
Buddy Bix.

NICHOLAS:

(as the outro plays) Thank you for joining us on tonight's route. If you'd like to support Station 103, consider joining our Patreon for weekly bonus stories and early episode access. Or check out our Redbubble and Ko-Fi shops for Night Post merch and digital story collections. Send a letter to an overworked assistant, and tell them about The Night Post.