

HIGHLIGHT TO SEE CONTENT WARNINGS:

NICHOLAS:

(as the intro plays) At the edge of Gilt City, time stands still but for a moment, and all await the arrival of The Night Post.

[THE FLUORESCENT LIGHTING OF POSTMASTER BEST'S OFFICE HUMS. A PEN CLICKS RHYTHMICALLY. THE OCCASIONAL CREAK OF A CHAIR CAN BE HEARD.]

NICHOLAS:

Hmm...

MILO:

Sooo... do you believe us?

NICHOLAS:

Milo, after everything I've heard, seen, and done in my time as Postmaster – and especially since you arrived – I have very little reason to believe this is just an ill-advised prank.

VAL:

What's your take on this whole ordeal? I suggested just letting nature take its course, but...

CLEMENTINE:

But we all agreed telling you everything was the *moral* thing to do!

VAL:

The last thing having morals did was lose me a hundred bucks.

MILO:

You didn't lose anything – we literally watched the guy drop his wallet!

VAL:

And I lost a chance to pay my electric bill. So who's the real victim here?

NICHOLAS:

(frustrated sigh) I'd say it's me for listening to the three of you bicker. Valencia's thinly-veiled snub aside, I do appreciate that you all came to me with this. I'm thankful I've been able to earn that much respect, at least. Unfortunately, I don't see a rational way out of this predicament.

CLEMENTINE:

You're a postmaster, Nick! Surely you can talk to someone about this.

MILO:

And who would he go to, exactly? Augustine? The city council? They're doing their best to get rid of all of us!

CLEMENTINE:

I know, I know. But the answer can't just be to dump Nick in the middle of the Skelter.

VAL:

He wouldn't make much of a meal, anyway.

MILO:

We're talking about murder, not just tossing a sack of garbage out into the woods! Whatever the Stranger has planned for Nick, it's not going to be painless or merciful.

NICHOLAS:

Again, I'm sitting right here.

VAL:

So what's the plan, boss man?

NICHOLAS:

I thought I was clear – there isn't one. If I've become the target of such a vengeful entity, there seems to be little in the way of recourse.

MILO:

What did you do to make it so angry?

NICHOLAS:

Look, all I know about this particular spirit is what you three have told me. Unless you've left something out, I'm at a loss. Being Postmaster is far from a glamorous or popular position, though we are privy to information about the machinations of the city and beyond that many aren't. But I don't remember ever having interacted with this...Stranger.

CLEMENTINE:

Then, why *you* specifically? There are dozens of postmasters in Gilt City. If the Stranger just wants one out of the way, it would have been a lot easier to target someone that's less involved in all this mess.

NICHOLAS:

Perhaps coincidence. *(pause)* Or perhaps I've been staring down this fate for quite a while.

VAL:

So you think it's us, then? That we're the reason you're on the chopping block?

NICHOLAS:

Had you three not entered into an infernal bargain, you wouldn't be beholden to this request, correct?

CLEMENTINE:

Oh, no... this is all my fault!

MILO:

No, don't put all this on yourself, Clem. If we hadn't made the deal, Block would still be pulling all the strings. We had no way of knowing *this* would be its plan all along.

VAL:

It was gonna rope us in one way or another. We were lost cattle, and the Stranger knew exactly how to corral us.

NICHOLAS:

Rustic analogies aside, I agree with their sentiment. Whether it's fate, coincidence, or a power more foreboding, your unlucky little trio seems to be dogged by the worst wherever you go.

CLEMENTINE:

And so does everyone we care about...

VAL:

Clem...

CLEMENTINE:

I'm fine, Val. I'll... be fine.

VAL:

There's a big difference between "am" and "will be."

MILO:

And I think Nick is the one we should be concerned about right now.

CLEMENTINE:

(sniffs) Milo's right. Sorry, I'm-I'm being a baby. We need to figure out some kind of loophole, or... I don't know – anything!

VAL:

Actually... I think we might have one.

MILO:

Well, spill it. We need something to dam up the waterworks over here.

CLEMENTINE:

(laughs) Okay. Kick a gal while she's down, why don't ya.

VAL:

I don't think we *technically* agreed to throw Nick to the wolves.

NICHOLAS:

So my life is balancing on the thinnest edge of a potential technicality? Not a promising prospect.

VAL:

Just let me finish. I'm the one that agreed to the Stranger's request.

NICHOLAS:

Noted.

VAL:

But only because I think our unfriendly apparition fucked up the negotiation. Either of y'all remember what they said, exactly?

MILO:

All we've done is talk about what was said. We made a deal with the devil, and now our boss is paying for it.

NICHOLAS:

You don't have to keep saying—

CLEMENTINE:

(interrupting) "Will you remove our mutual obstacle and repay your debt?" I think that was right.

VAL:

Bingo. *That's* what we agreed to, not the Stranger's plan.

MILO:

And was that dumb luck, or are you really that observant?

CLEMENTINE:

A mix of both, I'm sure.

VAL:

What of it? This is Nick's way out. And since we got him into this, I *guess* we'll have to be the ones to get him out.

NICHOLAS:

A “mutual obstacle.” (*huffs*) Is that what I am?

MILO:

I mean, maybe at one point...

CLEMENTINE:

You’ve more than proved that you’re not moving against us, Nick. The past is the past.

VAL:

Look, I’m not angling to be the Nicholas Best Fan Club President or anything. But we’re not throwing you to the Skelter beasts just yet.

NICHOLAS:

I certainly appreciate that! (*sighs*) What a mess, Nicholas Best. What a thoroughly unfortunate mess.

MILO:

C’mon, now. Can’t have you slipping into the sinkhole of despair. Let’s put these big heads to use. How do we get Nick out of the picture without... you know, making it permanent.

VAL:

Guess we can rule out a boycott.

NICHOLAS:

Yes. As was rudely discussed earlier, I can’t afford to take the “waste away” route out of this.

CLEMENTINE:

What about a *really* long vacation?

NICHOLAS:

(*laughs*) You are wildly overestimating the benefits of being Postmaster. I’ve barely recouped a fourth of my previously spent vacation hours.

MILO:

The “man” always finds a way to keep us down.

NICHOLAS:

Indeed.

VAL:

What about... nah, nevermind.

MILO:

Don’t be shy now – let’s hear it.

VAL:

It's not about being *shy*. It's... ugh. What about Will? Could she get Nick reassigned or moved around?

CLEMENTINE:

I don't think I heard you right. You want me to ask *Will* to help *Nick*? Literally two of your least favorite people in the world?

VAL:

To be fair, I like Nick *a lot* more than I like Will now.

NICHOLAS:

Hah! What a relief.

MILO:

But it could work, right? If Will can pull some strings and get you a position in Gilt Tower...

NICHOLAS:

(interrupting) I would be no better off. Stepping into the role of Postmaster is as much a "calling" as it is a contractual agreement. And, as you three know all too well, it's impossible to ignore what binds us to the Post.

MILO:

So you can't just resign? Like, go back to being a courier? You'd still be in the Post, so what's the difference?

NICHOLAS:

I'm sure many individuals have had that exact same thought, but I don't personally know of anyone who's ever pulled it off. To be reassigned, you have to meet one of two criteria: die, or anger someone *very* important.

VAL:

Pissing people off is definitely in our wheelhouse.

NICHOLAS:

And yet, there's still no guarantee the city wouldn't see through our facade and make all of us regret it. The influence of the Other is another obvious obstacle; there's no fooling what you don't understand.

CLEMENTINE:

Ugh. Why is everything so difficult?

MILO:

Maybe... Ashley knows something.

NICHOLAS:

How is Ashley, by the way? You haven't spoken much about him in the past few weeks. *(pause)*
I see.

CLEMENTINE:

He hasn't been well.

MILO:

And he's getting worse. But I refuse to go back to the Birdwatchers for anything. All their schemes do is get people hurt.

VAL:

So you think maybe Ashley knows how to... what? Sever someone's connection with the Other?

MILO:

If anyone does that we can trust, I imagine it would be him. Sorry, I guess maybe I should've asked sooner.

CLEMENTINE:

No, no one is blaming you for focusing on your husband's health, Milo.

VAL:

Think about it, though. If he *does* know a way, maybe we can be free of all this.

NICHOLAS:

If it's possible, which I'm rightfully skeptical of, it would likely be at a great cost to something or someone. But all that aside— *(pen clicks)* —why me?

CLEMENTINE:

You said it yourself: it's not you, it's us.

VAL:

Not the first time I've heard that.

MILO:

You're worried that it doesn't actually have anything to do with you, right? That there's something else?

NICHOLAS:

I have been outspoken at times, yes. And I've aided you three recently. An entity aligned with the Other wouldn't look too kindly on that, I'm sure.

VAL:

Wait, wait! I almost forgot. Right before the Stranger took off, they said, “you’ll want to think about what to do with your station.” Why should *we* be worried about that? Wouldn’t someone over at Gilt Tower decide your replacement?

NICHOLAS:

Well, yes. And no. As I said earlier, it’s a calling. It’s quite likely that every station has at least a few individuals “lined up” to take over as Postmaster should the current one die, be reassigned, et cetera. Someone must be responsible for making the final decision, but I can’t honestly say who... or what. I was the sole candidate to step forward when Alexandra disappeared. I would offer to look into it, but it appears my time as the leader of 103 is quickly coming to an end.

CLEMENTINE:

Then, why would the Stranger imply that the decision is on *our* shoulders?

NICHOLAS:

I... (*loud exhale*) don’t have that answer for you, Clementine. And I’ll have you know that not knowing the answer to someone’s question is a big pet peeve of mine.

VAL:

You must be disappointed a lot, then.

NICHOLAS:

Certainly more that I’d like to admit.

MILO:

You know, these mind games are pissing me off. For some reason, the Stranger wants us to do its dirty work. And I’m over it. We agreed to get you out of its way, and that’s what we’ll do. No more, no less. If Ashley and Will can help in some way, then we might have a chance to save you, Nick.

NICHOLAS:

Then be off to it. I need some time alone, if you three don’t mind.

CLEMENTINE:

Are you sure you don’t want to talk? Maybe one-on-one?

NICHOLAS:

(*laughs tiredly*) That won’t be necessary, Clementine. Thankfully, I have a very attentive turtle at home that doesn’t seem to mind my ramblings.

VAL:

(*under her breath*) The turtle? Maybe he’s already lost it.

MILO:

(to Val) Shhh. *(to all)* We'll let you know what we figure out, alright?

NICHOLAS:

Please do. And don't forget, you still have a job to do this evening.

VAL:

Yes, sir. Right away, sir.

CLEMENTINE:

All right. Shoo, shoo. Everybody out! We'll see you tonight, Postmaster Best. *(door shuts)*

NICHOLAS:

Postmaster Best... not for long, it seems. *(pause)* Fly high, pigeons. And stay out of the shadows.

[SCENE CHANGE: BACKGROUND NOISE OF TRAFFIC. DOOR SHUTS.]

MILO:

(startled) What the— Ashley! *(huffs)* Sorry. *(drops keys)* You just scared me. Not used to you being up this early in the afternoon. You okay?

ASHLEY:

I'm not, but you know that already. C'mere. *(brief kiss)* How did your talk with Best go?

MILO:

Um... it was fine. I'll sit down with you in just a second. Want something to drink?

ASHLEY:

If you don't mind. Do we have any...

MILO:

Chamomile tea?

ASHLEY:

(weak chuckle) You know me too well.

MILO:

I'd like to think I do, at least. One minute.

[SPOON CLINKS, WATER POURS INTO MUG.]

MILO:

Here you go, love.

ASHLEY:
Thank you, Milo.

[THE MUG FALLS TO THE FLOOR AND SHATTERS.]

ASHLEY:
Oh... I'm so sorry. I can–

MILO:
(interrupting) No, no. You're okay. I'll get it. *(wiping up mess)* Do you want some more? It'll only take a few minutes.

ASHLEY:
No... I'll be fine. Come sit?

MILO:
How are you feeling?

ASHLEY:
Worse than yesterday, but that's not surprising. So what did you go to Best for? That's the last place *I'd* want to spend my free time.

MILO:
It's a long story.

ASHLEY:
Then I'll sum it up: the apparition that's been harassing the three of you – the Stranger is the name it's taken, I believe – has provided an ultimatum: get Best out of the way, or reap the consequences. And now you, Clementine, and Valencia are scrambling to avoid the worst. Is that all?

MILO:
I... yes. I'm sorry for keeping things from you, but how did you know?

ASHLEY:
Milo, I would never blame you for trying to protect me. As for how... well, there are certain benefits to being tethered to someone who has also been in such close contact with the Other.

MILO:
So you've been... what? Using what little energy you have to make sure I'm not getting into trouble?

ASHLEY:

I've been doing what I can to keep an eye on you, is all. Who else can?

MILO:

I understand. I just wish you would put more energy into feeling more like yourself than worrying about me. I'll be fine, I promise!

ASHLEY:

You make a lot of promises, love. Stretch yourself too thin, and... *(heavy sigh)* Nevermind. Don't let me down, okay?

MILO:

Never! *(page flips)* Hmm? What are— wait. I recognize those.

ASHLEY:

Yes, they're some of the pages you recovered from the wreckage at Agatha's store.

MILO:

Can you actually read them?

ASHLEY:

With some difficulty. But I've gleaned enough information from them that I should be able to help.

MILO:

Help with what?

ASHLEY:

You'd planned to ask me about severing one's connection to the Other, right?

MILO:

Well, yes. But I honestly didn't think you'd know.

ASHLEY:

I didn't, until just before you came home. Whether it was fate or unimaginably good luck, a good portion of what you saved from that cult is information no doubt they would kill for.

MILO:

They've definitely tried, believe me. But... you mean that the answers to all of our problems have just been lying around our townhouse for months?

ASHLEY:

No, they certainly won't answer all of your problems. I think it's best for none of you to know what's in these pages.

MILO:

I don't... I don't get it. Why?

ASHLEY:

This city – and its predecessors – have been terrorized for centuries by those that thought themselves above the laws of nature. And what you saved from the Birdwatchers was the smallest fraction of knowledge that shouldn't be in anyone's hands. So after it's over, I need you to destroy all of it.

MILO:

It'll be a long time before that happens, but maybe then we can–

ASHLEY:

(sighs loudly) No, that's not what I meant, Milo. Before I get too weak, I'm going to help Nicholas. And after that, it's up to you to make sure none of this leaves this house.

MILO:

Stop talking like this is the last time I'll ever see you!

ASHLEY:

(paper rustles) "The single known method to permanently detach oneself from the Otherworld requires one thing: a live sacrifice with an abnormally strong connection to the supernatural."

MILO:

No.

ASHLEY:

This is the–

MILO:

(slams table) No! Don't say "it's the only way," 'cause that's bullshit! I'll *find* another way. I'm not losing you again.

ASHLEY:

(with passion) You already have, Milo! And it's not your fault for trying to rescue me! Look at me – I'm getting weaker every minute I fight to stay here. And I've been fighting so fucking hard. I just can't keep going like this.

MILO:

I know, I know, I know. I wanted you back home with me so bad. Then I found a way to save you, and I thought things would somehow just go back to how they were. But instead all I've done is sentence you to a second death.

ASHLEY:

Not a second death – a first. A proper death. If we don't do this now, the Other will reclaim me and I'll live on until the end of time in torment. Is that what you want?

MILO:

Of course not. But– *(sniffles and begins to cry)*

ASHLEY:

Shhh. It's okay. *(brief pause)* You've made me happier these past years than anything I could have hoped for. You know that, right?

MILO:

(through intermittent sniffing) I do. And you've done the same for me, I... I just thought we'd have a lot longer, ya know?

ASHLEY:

I'd always hoped as much, but time isn't as infinite as we'd like to think.

MILO:

You're right... as always.

ASHLEY:

(chuckles) Not always, but often enough.

MILO:

(sniffs) So... when?

ASHLEY:

Tonight.

MILO:

Tonight? Are you—but... are you serious?

[SLOW, SOMBER PIANO MUSIC RISES IN THE BACKGROUND.]

ASHLEY:

My love, I am in pain.

MILO:

What about Nick? Don't we need him? And Clem and Val haven't even said goodbye!

ASHLEY:

All I need is me. No elaborate ritual this time. I'll surrender whatever lifeforce I have left to the Other in exchange for Best's freedom.

MILO:

You're making it sound so simple. What if it's not enough? You said that you're... well...

ASHLEY:

Half-dead?

MILO:

Don't-don't say that.

ASHLEY:

Then I'll just say this: I'm practically half Other. If I intertwine Best's tether with that half of myself and surrender it... the part of me that's still Ashley Cylix-Wilder will be free. For better or worse, I'm closer to that plane than most will ever be – including you. That gives me the best chance for securing his freedom.

MILO:

And what if this doesn't work, and you throw away our chance to be together for nothing?

ASHLEY:

I just feel it, okay? The Other is almost animalistic – it won't be able to resist us. And when that happens... he and I will be free.

MILO:

Can I... can I stay with you... when you go?

ASHLEY:

I wouldn't have it any other way, handsome. Please, please don't cry. I can't take it.

MILO:

(final snuffle, sighs) I... I can wait.

ASHLEY:

Nap with me?

MILO:

(weak chuckle) Always.

[FOOTSTEPS AND CREAKING OF STAIRS AS THE PAIR ASCEND.]

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 all the lovers that have gone before, and tell them about The Night Post.