

DON'T LET THEM SEE YOU BURN

Part One: A Motel That Burned Seventeen Years Ago

F4F Cosmic Horror ASMR Roleplay [Eldritch Girlfriend] [Phoenix Listener] [Established Relationship] [Protective Speaker] [On the Run] [Memory Loss] [Time Loops] [Government Conspiracy] [Cosmic Horror]

Speaker: Vesper, an eldritch being

Listener: A female Phoenix being formerly designated CINDER-ONE and Vesper's established partner

Additional Voice: Ione through an altered cassette and a second Vesper beyond the motel door

Performance: Vesper is protective, cynical, and intimate, but increasingly frightened as the recording proves that her own memory may be unreliable. Ione's recorded voice should be layered, slowed slightly, and pitched subtly

[SFX: Heavy rain, distant thunder, an old air conditioner rattles]

[SFX: A key scrapes in the lock, the door shuts hard, four locks secure in rapid succession]

[Vesper breathes harder than she wants the Listener to notice, a paper bag tucked beneath her arm]

Vesper: "Don't get up. No... sunheart, I mean it. Stay exactly where you are."

[Pause]

Vesper: "I'm fine."

[Pause; her voice softens immediately]

Vesper: "I'm fine enough. Let me check the room first."

[SFX: A paper bag lands on the table, footsteps cross the carpet, doors open and close]

Vesper: "Bathroom is empty. The connecting door still opens onto a brick wall. Good. There are six cars in the parking lot, none of which exist after 2009, and the ice machine is still making that awful grinding noise. Also good."

[She pauses near the mirror]

Vesper: "Our reflections are moving when we move. More or less. I'll accept it."

[SFX: A fingertip taps the mirror; a low, almost inaudible whisper recoils behind the glass]

Vesper: "You can stop holding the lamp like a weapon now. Yes, I saw you. No, I am not laughing at you. I would never laugh at the ancient immortal avatar of death and resurrection for attempting to defend herself with a motel lamp shaped like a ceramic fish."

[A small, tired laugh]

Vesper: "Put it down before you pull your stitches."

[SFX: The mattress shifts, wet fabric falls to the floor]

Vesper: "There you are."

[Close, whispered]

Vesper: "My beautiful girl. Let me see you."

[The Listener reaches for her]

Vesper: "Wait. My clothes are soaked. Oh. All right."

[SFX: Wet fabric shifts, the echo beneath Vesper's voice fades]

Vesper: "Mm. Keep your hand there. At my throat. Please. You always make the horrors fade from my mind."

[A quiet kiss against the Listener's forehead]

[SFX: A faint hiss of steam]

Vesper: "Still too hot. Don't apologize. Just breathe with me. In."

[Slow breath]

Vesper: “Hold it behind your ribs. Not in your lungs, just beneath that, where your fire is... And out.”

[SFX: The faint crackle of flame diminishes]

Vesper: “Again. In. Hold. Out. Good girl. There. The wallpaper has stopped smoking. Our security deposit lives to see another night.”

[A pause]

Vesper: “Yes, that was a joke. No, this motel does not have a security deposit. It doesn’t have an owner. He died in the fire. Technically, he died before the fire. Then during it. Then three days afterward in a hospital that was demolished nine years before he was admitted. The county stopped trying to reconcile the paperwork. That is why Room Six is safe.”

[Quieter]

Vesper: “Or why it was safe.”

[The Listener notices something on her]

Vesper: “Don’t. It’s not my blood.”

[Pause]

Vesper: “Most of it isn’t my blood. I had to take a slightly less scenic route home. Two Eclipse Medical Services vans were parked beside the pharmacy. No lights, no plates, engines running. Their people were inside asking the pharmacist whether any customers had purchased silver sulfadiazine, burn dressings, or refrigerated saline. Apparently subtlety is no longer part of Directorate training. I waited until they separated. One of them is sleeping in the stockroom. The other is having a prolonged philosophical disagreement with the concept of a staircase. Both will live.”

[Pause]

Vesper: “Probably. You disapprove. Darling, one of them had a photograph of you clipped inside her jacket. Not a surveillance photograph. One taken while you were unconscious beneath Kalymos Labs. She had written asset responds to cranial affection beneath it.”

[Vesper's voice turns cold, briefly doubled]

Vesper: “She is fortunate that staircases are all I gave her.”

[The Listener touches Vesper again, the echo beneath Vesper’s voice settles]

Vesper: “I know. I know, my flame. I’m here. And I brought what we need.”

[SFX: Medical supplies are placed on the bedside table]

Vesper: “Saline. Dressings. Sutures. Three kinds of painkiller, because human medicine remains insultingly imprecise. A chocolate bar which you are going to eat whether or not you claim to be hungry. And these.”

[SFX: A small metal case clicks open]

Vesper: “Ceramic forceps. No metal. No mirrored surfaces. Nothing the splinter can speak through.”

[Pause]

Vesper: “Yes. I said splinter. That is why the wound hasn’t closed. No, don’t look down yet. Look at me.”

[Vesper sits beside her]

Vesper: “When the retrieval team fired at us beneath the overpass, one of their rounds broke against your side. I thought it was only a suppressor capsule. It wasn’t. There is a piece of blackglass between your ribs. Small. Smaller than my smallest fingernail. But it has been drinking every spark your body sends toward the wound. If it stays there, you won’t heal. If you flare while I remove it, the glass may open a line directly to whichever observation room it was cut from. So I need you cool. I need you still. And I need you to trust me.”

[The Listener answers without hesitation]

Vesper: “Don’t say it that quickly.”

[Her breath catches around a pained laugh]

Vesper: “You should make me work for it occasionally.”

[SFX: A sterile packet tears]

[Vesper cleans her hands]

Vesper: “Lie back. That’s it. Let me move your shirt. May I?”

[Pause]

Vesper: “Thank you.”

[SFX: Fabric shifts carefully, a faint bed of embers stirs]

Vesper: “Easy. I can see it. Your feathers are trying to come through around the wound. Poor things. No, don’t pull them back completely. Let them rest against my wrist.”

[SFX: A soft crackle]

[Vesper exhales]

Vesper: “There you are. You know, before I met you, I thought warmth was simply one of matter’s less interesting symptoms. Stars were warm. Blood was warm. Newly forming worlds were warm. It all seemed very vulgar. Then you put your wings around me at the reservoir. And now I steal blankets from abandoned motels because my girlfriend complains that I feel like a corpse.”

[The Listener objects]

Vesper: “You said beautiful corpse. Yes. Forgive me for omitting the compliment.”

[SFX: A saline bottle opens and liquid pours]

Vesper: “This may sting.”

[SFX: The Listener’s fire snaps sharply]

Vesper: “Shh, shh, shh. I know. Hand at my throat. That’s right. Squeeze if you need to. Not hard enough to decapitate me, preferably. It would only inconvenience us both.”

Vesper: “There. I can see the edge now. It doesn’t reflect this room.”

[Her tone changes]

Vesper: “It reflects a surgical theater. White walls. Six people in masks. An observation window. They’re standing perfectly still. Waiting.”

[Very softly]

Vesper: “One of them just turned her head toward me.”

[Vesper covers the splinter]

Vesper: “No. Stay cool. They cannot see us unless you give the connection light. Listen to the rain. Listen to my voice. There is no surgical theater. There are no white walls. There is only this hideous carpet, that flickering lamp, and me touching you with extremely cold hands.”

[The Listener takes her hand]

Vesper: “Yes. Only me.”

[SFX: Ceramic forceps scrape softly against the case]

Vesper: “I’m going in. Three breaths. On the third, I pull. One.”

[Breath]

Vesper: “Two.”

[Breath]

[SFX: The fire crackles higher]

Vesper: “Look at me. Three.”

[SFX: A wet crystalline click, then fire erupts with the roar of enormous wings]

Vesper: “Mine.”

[SFX: The fire collapses beneath Vesper’s whisper and settles into a low crackle]

Vesper: “I’ve got it. I’ve got it, sunheart. It’s out.”

[SFX: The splinter falls into the case, the lid shuts, something taps inside]

Vesper: “Do not listen to that.”

[SFX: The case answers with two taps]

Vesper: “Especially do not answer it.”

[Vesper quickly dresses the wound, her composure is fraying beneath her tenderness]

Vesper: “The bleeding is slowing. Your skin is closing now. Another breath. Good. That’s my girl.”

Vesper: “Finished. You did beautifully.”

[The Listener pulls her closer]

Vesper: “Careful-”

[A kiss; Vesper melts into it, startled, then quietly reciprocates]

Vesper: “Mm. That is a deeply unfair way to interrupt a medical professional.”

[Another smaller kiss]

Vesper: “Again, then.”

[A soft kiss]

Vesper: “There. Treatment concluded.”

[They remain close]

[SFX: The rain grows heavier]

Vesper: “Don’t fall asleep yet. I know you’re tired. I know. But there is something we have to discuss.”

[The Listener notices the object in the bag]

Vesper: “You always know when I’m hiding something. No, not always. If you always knew, you would have thrown me out after Prague.”

[Pause]

Vesper: “There was a Prague.”

[Longer pause]

Vesper: “Oh.”

[Vesper goes very still]

Vesper: “You don’t remember Prague.”

[The Listener tries]

Vesper: “Don’t force it. No, that headache means the edges have sealed. Pushing only makes your mind invent something to fill the space. Look at me. How many times have you died since we escaped the facility?”

[The Listener answers]

Vesper: “Seven.”

[A painful silence]

Vesper: “You remember seven. There have been eight.”

[The Listener protests]

Vesper: “I am sure. I remember what no longer happened. That is what I am. The first time was beneath Kalymos Labs. They stopped your heart while I was still inside the glass. You woke up in the ambulance and burned the restraints away. The second was at the farmhouse. The third was the bridge. The fourth was a gas station outside a town that now has no name. The fifth time, they caught me first. The sixth—”

[She stops]

Vesper: “The sixth doesn’t matter.”

[The Listener insists]

Vesper: “You asked me to do it.”

[A hush falls beneath the rain]

Vesper: “They had a suppression collar around your throat. An Umbra was reading activation phrases from a black card, and every time she reached the final line, you looked at me as if I were someone you had been ordered to burn. You begged me not to let them finish. So I put my hand inside your chest and closed it around your spark...”

[Her voice breaks almost imperceptibly]

Vesper: “You died with your forehead against mine. When you rose, the collar had never been manufactured. The Umbra had been dead for twelve years. We were standing in an empty field, and you asked why I was crying. That was Prague. Not the city. The word. It was what you told me to say if you ever woke without one of our lives.”

[The Listener quietly repeats it]

Vesper: “Yes. Prague.”

[Vesper touches her face]

Vesper: “The seventh time was the motel in Nevada. The eighth was three nights ago beneath the overpass.”

[The Listener believes she survived]

Vesper: “You didn’t. For eleven seconds, every flame in your body went black. Then the rain rose from the pavement and returned to the clouds. The bullet climbed out of your heart. Our car repaired itself around us. You opened your eyes before the world finished deciding which direction time moved. And you smiled at me. You remembered my name. You remembered this face. You remembered that you loved me. I was so relieved that I didn’t ask what the fire took instead.”

[She swallows]

Vesper: “Now we know.”

[The Listener tries to reassure her]

Vesper: “No. Don’t promise you will never forget me. You cannot command the price of resurrection any more than I can command what follows me out of an erased world. Promise me something you can control. Promise me you will not die again.”

[The Listener cannot promise that]

Vesper: “Of course. Of course you can’t. Heroes and martyrs. Both intolerable. Somehow I chose a woman determined to be both.”

[The Listener touches her cheek]

Vesper: “What?”

[Pause]

Vesper: “No. You rescued me first. Breaking your restraints was merely an escape. Coming back for the monster in the next room was a decision.”

[Softly]

Vesper: “You made me a person by treating me like one.”

[The Listener asks what happens if she forgets]

Vesper: “If you forget me...”

[Vesper takes time before answering]

Vesper: “I will tell you the truth. I will tell you that my name is Vesper. That I live in the little gaps reality leaves when it changes its mind. That you once mistook my hand for a shadow and held it anyway. I will tell you that you hate burnt coffee, love thunderstorms, and pretend not to preen when I call your wings beautiful. Then I will step back. And if you want me, I will earn you again. I will never use what you have forgotten as a chain.”

[A gentle kiss to her knuckles]

Vesper: “Even if it destroys me.”

[The Listener responds firmly]

Vesper: “Yes, yes. You would simply seduce me again first. I know.”

[A genuine little laugh]

Vesper: “Such confidence from a woman currently losing a fight with a chocolate bar wrapper.”

[SFX: Wrapper crinkling]

Vesper: “Here. Eat. That was not a suggestion.”

[The Listener takes a bite]

Vesper: “Good. Now tell me something. At the reservoir, when you put your wings around me, what did I say?”

[The Listener answers]

[A very slight pause]

Vesper: “Yes. Exactly that.”

[Vesper is lying]

Vesper: “I said you were showing off.”

[The Listener apparently remembers that much]

Vesper: “Mhm. And you said I was jealous. Then I kissed you to prove you wrong.”

[Pause]

Vesper: “That logic made sense at the time.”

[The Listener asks what she got wrong]

Vesper: “Nothing.”

[Too quickly]

Vesper: “You got nothing wrong.”

[A moment of tension, then Vesper reaches for the paper bag]

Vesper: “This is what I was hiding.”

[SFX: A cassette recorder creaks on the bed, one reel turns by itself]

Vesper: “I took it from the second Eclipse operative. She had it inside a lead-lined case handcuffed to her wrist. No digital components. No transmitter. No catalogue number in any Directorate index I remember. Only this.”

[Vesper traces a label]

Vesper: “‘IONE. INTERVIEW FOURTEEN. DO NOT DUPLICATE.’”

[The Listener reacts to the name]

Vesper: “Yes. My sister.”

[A long silence]

Vesper: “Do not look at me like that. We are not going back for her.”

[The Listener objects]

Vesper: “No. Absolutely not. Blackglass is moving entire retrieval units through days that never occurred. Their agents remember orders they have not received yet. Yesterday I killed a woman who had a scar I won’t give her until tomorrow. That isn’t technology. That is Ione. They are using her to fold the hunt around us. If we approach that facility, every road will lead inside it. Every door will become an observation room door. Every decision we make will be another corridor she can bend back toward herself.”

[The Listener indicates Ione helped them escape]

Vesper: “You don’t know that.”

[Pause]

Vesper: “Neither do I...”

[More quietly]

Vesper: “But when I reached your cell, the door was open. Not unlocked. It had never possessed a lock. The frame had been built without one, although I remembered watching a technician seal it twelve minutes earlier. And the camera feed...”

[She hesitates]

Vesper: “There was a woman standing behind us on the recording. Tall. Barefoot. Wearing the face of someone the researcher loved. She leaned toward the camera and said, ‘Run, little bird.’ Then she looked directly at me. She smiled. I haven’t seen Ione smile since before this universe learned to cool.”

[The Listener asks why Vesper hasn’t played the tape]

Vesper: “Because my sister does not send messages. She creates circumstances in which you discover you have already obeyed her.”

[Vesper picks up the recorder]

Vesper: “Before we listen, there are rules. If you hear your own voice, even if it sounds frightened, do not answer it. If the tape describes this room, do not look where it tells you to look. If it says my name three times, stop the machine. And if the rain stops...”

[SFX: The rain stops abruptly while the air conditioner continues rattling]

[Whispered]

Vesper: “Do not move.”

[SFX: A single drop of water falls inside the room]

Vesper: “I haven’t pressed play.”

[SFX: The cassette reels begin turning, tape hiss crawls into the silence]

Vesper: “Stay close to me.”

[SFX: The recorder clicks, distant breathing and a muffled question emerge through the tape hiss]

Vesper: “This isn’t how it started before.”

[On the tape, Ione's layered voice speaks]

Ione (recorded): “My sister never existed.”

[SFX: The tape clicks off]

[Flatly]

Vesper: "Charming."

[The Listener reaches for the recorder]

Vesper: "No, wait..."

[The Listener touches the recorder]

[SFX: Fire whispers over plastic and the tape rewinds violently]

Vesper: "Take your hand away."

[SFX: The recorder clicks on, the same breathing and muffled question repeat]

Ione (recorded): "My sister is listening."

[SFX: The air conditioner dies, many voices inhale behind the walls]

Vesper: "Turn it off."

[The Listener hesitates]

Vesper: "Sunheart, turn it-"

Ione (recorded): "Vesper."

[Vesper freezes]

Ione (recorded): "If you are hearing this, they still do not understand what you are. They believe you hide inside abandoned timelines. You do not. They become abandoned because you are there."

Vesper: "That's one. She said my name once."

[The Listener reaches for Vesper]

Vesper: "I'm all right. Keep listening."

Ione (recorded): "You have died eight times, little fire. You remember seven. My sister remembers nine."

Vesper: "No."

[The Listener looks at her]

Vesper: "She's lying. There were eight. I would remember."

Ione (recorded): "Ask her what happened in the stairwell."

Vesper: "Turn it off."

[The Listener asks]

Vesper: "There was no stairwell."

Ione (recorded): "Ask her why she came home wearing someone else's blood."

Vesper: "I told you what happened."

Ione (recorded): "Ask her which version of Vesper entered Room Six tonight."

[SFX: A deep impact shakes the motel wall and the bathroom mirror cracks]

Vesper: "Enough."

[SFX: Vesper strikes the stop button and tears open the battery compartment]

[The compartment is empty]

[SFX: The reels continue turning]

Vesper: "There are no batteries. Of course there are no batteries."

Ione (recorded): "Do not let her die again."

[The Listener's fire gutters]

Ione (recorded): "The next time she rises, she will not remember loving you."

Vesper: "Stop."

Ione (recorded): "Vesper."

Vesper: "Twice."

[Vesper grabs the recorder]

[SFX: Its casing creaks and deforms beneath her fingers]

Ione (recorded): "Bring her to me."

Vesper: "Don't say it again."

Ione (recorded): "I found the door."

[SFX: The tape stops]

[Silence]

[SFX: The rain resumes all at once]

Vesper: “No.”

[The Listener speaks through gesture or expression]

Vesper: “No, she said she found the door. Not a door. There is a difference with Ione. A door is an object. The door is a decision reality has already made.”

[The Listener wants to help her]

Vesper: “And what if this is how she makes us come? What if there is no facility outside that recording? What if every room, every researcher, every alarm, every terrified little human in a Blackglass uniform exists because my sister wanted someone to study?”

[A Pause, this is nearer the truth than Vesper knows]

Vesper: “Ione does not get captured. She permits a cage to occur around her until the cage mistakes permission for strength.”

[The Listener insists that permission can be withdrawn]

Vesper: “Yes. Permission can be withdrawn. That is what frightens me.”

[SFX: The stolen Directorate radio in the bag crackles to life]

Vesper: “No. I removed the power cell from that too.”

[A clipped dispatcher remains unintelligible except for ‘Cinder,’ ‘Afterthought,’ ‘Palisade,’ and ‘Umbra authorization’]

Vesper: “They know.”

[Vesper grabs the radio and listens]

Vesper: “They’re not searching the highway anymore. Umbra Kess has issued retroactive clearance for the Palisade property.”

[The Listener asks what that means]

Vesper: “It means Blackglass has received authorization yesterday to enter a place they did not discover until now. It means we have perhaps three minutes.”

[SFX: Supplies are hurried into the bag and the locks rattle]

Vesper: “Can you stand? Slowly. No flame. Not even a spark.”

[The Listener rises, unsteady, vesper catches her]

Vesper: “I’ve got you. Put your arm around me. There.”

[SFX: Tires hiss across the wet parking lot, several car doors open in unison]

Vesper: “Too fast. She placed them closer this time.”

[Vesper looks toward the door, calculating]

Vesper: “We cannot use the parking lot. We cannot use the bathroom window. The connecting door opens into a wall, and if I remove the wall, whatever has been whispering inside it will come with us.”

[SFX: A faint cluster of whispers answers from behind the brick]

Vesper: “Yes. I heard them too. That leaves one route. You are going to dislike it.”

[The Listener gives her a look]

Vesper: “You dislike most of my routes. You simply become nostalgic for them after seeing the alternatives.”

[SFX: Footsteps splash outside]

[Flashlights sweep across the curtained window]

Vesper: “I can push Room Six deeper into the omission that holds it. For a few minutes, we will exist entirely inside the eight missing minutes of the fire report. Blackglass won’t be able to enter unless someone outside remembers the missing time correctly. Unfortunately, neither will we be able to leave. And there are things in those eight minutes that were never given the opportunity to finish happening.”

[The Listener reaches for Vesper’s hand]

Vesper: “Yes. Stay with me. Whatever you hear, remember that unfinished things cannot hurt you unless you help them reach an ending. Do not complete their sentences. Do not answer questions. And if you see me anywhere except where you are touching me...”

[Close whisper]

Vesper: “Burn the other one.”

[The Listener asks what if she burns the wrong one]

Vesper: “Then I will be unbearably smug when I crawl back out of your shadow.”

[A Pause; vesper cups her face]

Vesper: “Listen to me. If the tape told the truth, if there was a ninth death and I lost it, then something has changed me too. You cannot trust my memory simply because it is better than yours. So we trust what we can touch. Your hand in mine. My forehead against yours. This moment. Not the one before it. Not the one Ione wants after it. This one.”

[Their foreheads touch; vesper breathes with the Listener]

Vesper: “I love you. Not because a recording says I did. Not because we survived enough times to make it inevitable. I love you now. Whatever the next world remembers, this one was true.”

[The Listener answers]

Vesper: “Good. Hold on to me, my flame.”

[Vesper whispers in a language resembling speech played backward]

[SFX: The motel room groans as the rain slows to distinct drops]

[SFX: The air conditioner rattles in reverse, voices emerge inside the walls]

[Vesper’s voice doubles, then triples around the Listener]

Vesper: “Don’t let go. I am still the voice beneath the others.”

[SFX: Distant fire crackles and a man screams backward]

Vesper: “Eyes on me. Not the window.”

[A human shape passes outside the curtains while walking upside down]

Vesper: “Not the bathroom.”

[SFX: A whisper forms the Listener’s name inside the broken mirror]

Vesper: “And whatever is standing behind me...”

[SFX: A wet footstep lands directly behind Vesper]

Vesper: “...it has not finished arriving. Do not give it the courtesy of being afraid.”

[Vesper continues whispering]

[SFX: The unfinished presence recedes with a disappointed exhale]

Vesper: “There. Room Six is gone.”

[SFX: Distant boots pound outside, a fist strikes the vanished door]

Vesper: “They can’t enter.”

[Vesper exhales shakily]

Vesper: “We have time. Not much, but-”

[SFX: Three gentle knocks on the motel door from inside the omission]

[Silence]

Vesper: “That is impossible.”

[SFX: Three more knocks in the same rhythm]

Vesper: “Get behind me.”

[The Listener refuses]

Vesper: “Beside me, then. But stay cold.”

[SFX: One slow footstep, followed by a dry unnatural unfolding sound]

Vesper: “Who is there?”

[Vesper’s breathing comes from the other side of the door]

Vesper beyond the door: “Don’t open it.”

[The Vesper inside the room stops breathing]

Vesper beyond the door: “Please. I know you can hear me.”

[Her voice outside is exhausted, badly hurt, and unmistakably genuine]

Vesper beyond the door: “I’m the one who survived the next version.”

[SFX: The cassette recorder clicks on by itself]