

HIGHLIGHT TO SEE CONTENT WARNINGS:

NICHOLAS:

(as the intro plays) At the edge of Gilt City, the sky opens wide to swallow our grief, and all await the arrival of the Night Post.

[INTERIOR OF THE MAIL TRUCK, DRIVING WITH THE WINDOWS UP.]

CLEMENTINE:

Val must be tired. She's barely over the speed limit.

VAL:

Sorry, Clem, were you looking for a bit more danger this morning? I didn't mean to bore you.

[THE ENGINE WHINES AS VAL HITS THE GAS.]

CLEMENTINE:

No, that-that's fine. How you were before was...well, it-it was better.

MILO:

It's probably a good idea to play it safe with the trucks anyway, huh? You know, since Nicholas doesn't want us using them outside of work.

VAL:

Fuck Nick. What's he gonna do, launch an elaborate plan to assassinate us? That's so passe.

CLEMENTINE:

It's not like we could all fit on Daffodil.

MILO:

You're handling that well, by the way. I'm not sure I'd be much of a...horse person.

CLEMENTINE:

I wasn't sure either, but Daff's a sweetie. We're patient with each other. It's not such a bad way to run your route, as long as it's not raining.

MILO:

But does she come with a radio?

[MILO TURNS ON THE RADIO AND FINDS A STATION PLAYING HEAVY ROCK.]

CLEMENTINE:

Thankfully, no.

[THE MUSIC DISTORTS AND BLENDS INTO THE ECHO OF VAL'S INNER VOICE.]

VAL:

(thought-voice) This is harder than I thought it would be, and I have to admit I don't really see the point of it. A woman died last night. A good person. I'd like to call her my friend. We weren't confidantes or anything like that; I've never been very good at getting to know people, and for her part, I think she didn't like letting others too close. But a tragedy like this always makes us feel nearer to someone, doesn't it? I keep thinking about the last time I saw her, barely twenty-four hours ago. She nodded to me on my way out the door, and I nodded back. She was close enough that I could have reached out to grasp her hand.

I didn't, of course--that would have been weird--but now I can't stop opening and closing my fist, staring at my empty palm. Until yesterday, I would have said she was just someone who happened to be part of my everyday life, her line accidentally running parallel to mine. But parallel lines imply some kind of relationship, a significant similarity, don't they? And we were side-by-side for a long time. The fresh emptiness of these axes feels like a yawning wound, the blankness of space a phantom limb.

The thing about lines, they're supposed to continue on through space forever. Human lives don't, obviously. We're more like segments, infinitesimally small on the plane of existence, rushing toward an endpoint that we can't see but we know is pitifully close to where we began. The math is all wrong, though. This shouldn't have happened. Not to blame the mathematicians, but aren't you at least partly responsible? And I know that none of this is what you wanted to hear. I guess I'm just trying to show my work.

MILO:

Oh, up there, past the tacky monument.

CLEMENTINE:

Val? That was our turn. *(pause)* Val?

VAL:

Hm? Oh, sorry. I was...somewhere else, I guess.

[TIRES SCREECH AS VAL MAKES A SUDDEN U-TURN.]

CLEMENTINE:

You could have just turned at the next street!

VAL:

Nah.

[SQUEALING OF BRAKES AND TIRES AS VAL GUNS IT INTO THE PARKING LOT AND THROWS THE TRUCK INTO PARK.]

CLEMENTINE:

Is there something on your mind today, Val? You seem...a little out of it.

VAL:

Because I missed the turn? I've never been here before.

CLEMENTINE:

I didn't mean just that.

[TRUCK DOORS OPEN AND CLOSE. AMBIENT STREET NOISE FILTERS IN.]

MILO:

Oh, cut her some slack. Morning's a rough time for pigeons.

VAL:

And of course this place would only be open in the morning.

MILO:

Let's stop for second coffee after.

[OVERLAPPING FOOTSTEPS ON ASPHALT.]

CLEMENTINE:

It's way bigger than I expected. Why doesn't the city digitize its archives?

MILO:

Supposedly, the Annex is for old administrative files, appendices and uncategorizable documents, stuff like that. But...if that were true, why not just shred it all?

[THEY OPEN THE DOOR INTO A LARGE, OPEN SPACE WHERE THEIR VOICES AND FOOTSTEPS ECHO SLIGHTLY.]

CLEMENTINE:

...and there's no one here.

MILO:

I can't imagine there's much interest in council meeting minutes from 1985.

VAL:

That can only be good for us, right?

CLEMENTINE:

But where do we start? I've never seen this many filing cabinets in my life.

MILO:

Just look for the oldest documents you can find. It would be great if we could find something from an earlier iteration of the Post, but anything from Prime City or shortly after could be useful.

VAL:

I doubt the Strategist keeps anything too damning here, but I'm gonna keep an eye out for her name. Nick's too.

[FOOTSTEPS FADING OUT AS THEY SPLIT UP. FILE CABINETS OPENING AND DOCUMENTS BEING SHUFFLED.]

CLEMENTINE:

It seems like there's some kind of organizing system, but I can't tell what it is.

VAL:

Never mind that, why's it so loud in here?

CLEMENTINE:

Um...

MILO:

What do you mean?

VAL:

(drawer opens) I don't know, just *loud*. Like the pipes are rattling or something. *(flipping through files)* I can't make it out, there's so many--

VAL:

(thought-voice) When someone dies, the survivors have a tendency to say, "they were the best of us." But Maya's death didn't make her the best; more that her place among us is what got her killed. What other end can we expect for such a decorated pigeon and esteemed postmaster? I've heard she was only sixteen when she joined. Supposedly the Post doesn't conscript minors, but I still feel inclined to believe it. By the time I arrived at 103, I got the impression that she'd already seen it all at least twice.

Even before Maya was promoted, everyone at the station deferred to her, and not because of her commanding demeanor. It's because she made us feel like we were doing something important, like our work was honorable and it mattered. She threw her whole self into the work, even though she didn't choose it, even though she might have guessed that the only thing waiting for her at the end was an early grave and a sterile, taxpayer-funded funeral.

Through the years, no matter the chaos and suffering that flourished in the alleyways and the hollers alike, Maya seemed somehow untouchable. I think that's why I'm finding this so hard to accept. She faced the slings and arrows of bigots and beasts on a nightly basis, just like the rest of us, but she never let it get to her. I used to believe that Maya survived because she had a kind of armor, something inside her that was stronger than anything trying to destroy her. I envied that strength. Now I realize that it was a fallacy. No one is untouchable, especially not pigeons. You don't have to let your guard down for the universe to strike you. It's as inevitable as an equation, as infallible as law.

ARCHIVIST:

(distorted at first) Hey! You can't be in here!

[A CABINET DOOR SLAMS SHUT. A PLANT RUSTLES AS VAL DIVES FOR COVER.]

CLEMENTINE:

It's fine, we were just--

ARCHIVIST:

It'll be fine when you put that back where you found it and make like an armadillo on a hot sidewalk.

CLEMENTINE:

Um, I don't...

MILO:

These are public documents. They're supposed to be accessible to anyone.

ARCHIVIST:

And I'm telling you, they ain't. The Annex is off-limits.

MILO:

Then why was the door open?

ARCHIVIST:

If there's a particular file you need, you can fill out a request with the Office of Public Records in Gilt Tower. Takes a few weeks, mind, but--

CLEMENTINE:

Weeks?

ARCHIVIST:

--*but* you can file a request to expedite if you need it sooner.

MILO:

But what if we don't know which file we need? Is there some kind of catalogue of the archive?

ARCHIVIST:

Look, this ain't complicated. I won't repeat myself, so get moving before I expedite the cops here to repeat it for me.

MILO:

But this doesn't make any sense.

CLEMENTINE:

Forget it, Milo. *(sigh)* We're not gonna win this one.

ARCHIVIST:

That means you too, crouching behind the plant.

VAL:

Damn. *(rustling)*

[FOOTSTEPS ON ASPHALT AGAIN AS THEY RETURN TO THE TRUCK.]

VAL:

Well, that was a bust.

MILO:

Who was that person, anyway?

CLEMENTINE:

Hopefully our next stop will go better.

MILO:

The next stop is coffee. We agreed.

CLEMENTINE:

I don't think that's a good idea. You'll destroy your insides.

MILO:

That's my problem, and I accept the risk.

VAL:

(dialogue fading out) Damn right. We shit ourselves to death like men.

[SOUNDS OF A BUSY STREET: PASSING CARS, BIRDS, PEDESTRIANS.]

MILO:

Are you sure this is the right place?

VAL:

This is the return address on his letter. Why?

MILO:

Look, I'm generalizing here, but I don't think crackpot conspiracy theorists usually live in upscale townhouses.

VAL:

If you think he's nuts, why'd you agree to come along?

MILO:

I didn't say / thought that. What little evidence we've found supports his underground station story. I'm just confused as to why he thought asking the government whether there was a conspiracy was a good idea.

CLEMENTINE:

You can ask him yourself. Maybe just don't call him a crackpot to his face.

[CLEMENTINE KNOCKS FIRMLY, AND THE DOOR OPENS ALMOST IMMEDIATELY.]

CLEMENTINE:

Mr. Renfree?

TOBIAS:

Just Tobias, if you don't mind. *(pause)* Well, hurry up, then. Come inside. Can't have my neighbors getting curious.

[THEY ALL FILE INSIDE AND TOBIAS CLOSES THE DOOR. CLASSICAL PIANO MUSIC IS PLAYING IN THE BACKGROUND.]

TOBIAS:

They're a bunch of intolerable gossips, yet somehow they never have anything interesting to share. Here, sit down, sit down. Can I get you anything? There's water in the carafe and tea bags on the sideboard.

CLEMENTINE:

Um, I think we're fine, thank you.

TOBIAS:

Of course, right to business. I understand you've seen my letter. I was worried it would go straight to the circular file and no one would ever read it. May I ask who passed it to you?

MILO:
(*pause*) Val?

VAL:
That, uh--I came across it by chance.

TOBIAS:
And something in it rang true to you, evidently. What do you know of Perender Station?

MILO:
Well, we believe it's part of Gilt City's predecessor, Prime City.

TOBIAS:
That name is familiar. And I suppose it makes sense--Gilt City hasn't been here forever, obviously--but the station couldn't have been older than a hundred years or so. Why would there be so little information available from our recent history?

VAL:
That would be a question for the governor and their cronies.

TOBIAS:
One they're not inclined to answer, it seems. So our homes are built atop the bones of another modern civilization no one wants to remember. But who was living in Perender Station, and why was the train operational?

CLEMENTINE:
We're in the dark here, too. We were hoping you might be able to tell us more about that civilization. We found some letters we think might be in that language you described.

TOBIAS:
(*unfolding paper*) Yes, it certainly looks similar. But if you were hoping I could translate it, I'm afraid that's well beyond my ability. It seems to me that at this point the best course of investigation--

[A PHONE RINGS IN ANOTHER ROOM.]

TOBIAS:
Ah--excuse me for just a moment.

[TOBIAS PASSES THE LETTERS BACK AND QUICKLY LEAVES THE ROOM.]

MILO:
I don't think he knows any more than we do.

VAL:

We knew this was a long shot.

CLEMENTINE:

And these maps...where did he get them? Do you think he'd get chased out of the Annex too?

VAL:

(to herself) Evenid mon lilliver hatchen row...

CLEMENTINE:

What?

VAL:

N-nothing. Just, uh--had those weird words stuck in my head.

VAL:

(thought-voice) The storm was just coming on last night when I finished loading my truck. Dark clouds piled on the horizon, tinged with the last reds of sunset. Wind bent the trees nearly double, and the city flag above the station fluttered so frantically it shook the pole. I could almost feel the electricity building in the air, and a spark jumped from the door handle when I reached for it.

[A VIOLENT, TONAL WIND BLOWS IN THE BACKGROUND, AGITATING A METAL POLE. THE LONG, MOURNFUL HOWL OF A DOG IS FOLLOWED BY A PERSON'S VOICE, NEARLY DROWNED OUT BY THE WIND.]

From out in the Skelter, a dog howled once, long and low, and then was silent. Tommy Lee said that was a bad omen, that it meant a spirit was calling someone home. I responded the way I always do to Keys' proverbs and wives' tales: by humoring him with a nod and putting it out of my mind. My parents were practical people, not the kind to worry over signs and symbols when there's work to be done, and I am the same. Still, he was right this time, wasn't he?

I'd completed maybe half my route when the rain started hammering like buckshot on the roof of the truck, and it fell so thick on the windshield it was like trying to see the road through sausage gravy. I expected an earful from Maya for turning back early, but when I returned, soaked and shivering, to the station, she wasn't there. *(wind fades out)* The lights were on and the doors unlocked, but Station 103 was eerily empty. What in the world would make Maya go out on a night like that? Her desk was bare, save for an empty envelope and her silver letter opener.

I know you told me not to, but I went this morning to the place her truck went off the road. The Public Works agents wouldn't let me get close, but I could see the furrows in the mud and a kind of doorway in the high foliage where a vehicle had created its own passage. From that angle, it was as though she'd driven into the green and out of this plane entirely. A ray, stretching on into

quadrants unknown. Maybe that sounds foolish, but it feels easier to grasp in those terms. An equation isn't malicious or tragic or unpredictable. It just is.

TOBIAS:

(footsteps returning) I-I'm sorry, but I'm afraid you'll all have to leave now.

MILO:

What? Why?

TOBIAS:

Something's come up, and I--I need to go.

CLEMENTINE:

But what about--

TOBIAS:

You have my address, and of course I know where you all work. Perhaps we can continue our correspondence by post. Or perhaps not. For now, I must show you out. Is--is she...?

CLEMENTINE:

She's fine. Come on, Val.

[TOBIAS' FRONT DOOR SHUTS FIRMLY BEHIND THEM. STREET NOISES RETURN.]

MILO:

Well, that was weird. *(pause)* What now?

VAL:

We look somewhere there'll be no one to throw us out.

MILO:

(suspicious) What did you have in mind?

VAL:

Don't look too shocked, but I think we should clock in early.

[SCENE CHANGE: A KEY RATTLES IN A LOCK, AND THE DOOR OPENS. THE BUZZER SOUNDS.]

CLEMENTINE:

I'd like the record to reflect that I'm against this plan.

VAL:

Just do me a favor and unclench, all right? Nick won't get here for hours, and there's no rule that says we can't be here during the day.

CLEMENTINE:

But there has to be a rule against *searching your boss' office*.

VAL:

When we're done here, you can run and tell on us to Will.

CLEMENTINE:

What's that supposed--

MILO:

You two are stressing me out. Can we just focus on getting into the office for now?

VAL:

It's unlocked. (*opens door*) Nick still isn't used to having a door.

[THEY ENTER. PAPERS AND OBJECTS ARE PUSHED AROUND THE DESK.]

MILO:

Speaking of, his old office got dumped in a hole, along with any records he might have had. What are we looking for here?

VAL:

I don't know, uh...orders from the Governor's Office, nightly reports, proof of whatever he's hiding from us.

[OPENING DRAWERS, RUMMAGING THROUGH ITEMS.]

CLEMENTINE:

We don't *know* that he's hiding anything.

VAL:

Don't we? Then what's--

VAL:

(*thought-voice*) That's how I know what I have to write, what I have to do. It's just an equation, a change in state. Protege to successor. Pigeon to postmaster. It's simple, straightforward, but it doesn't feel right. It feels like I'm stealing something I didn't want in the first place, like I snatched the coat off someone's back and it doesn't fit. Only it's my friend's coat, and she died in it.

Do you see what I'm getting at? I'll make it devastatingly plain: fuck the Night Post. Fuck you for doing this to us. I don't know who will read this, if anyone at all, but I wanted you to hear that before you get what you want from me. I wanted to put all this helpless anger on paper, make it mean something, however insignificant, before time and necessity scab it over and leave me numb. I want to remember this feeling, years from now when I'm sitting behind this desk signing conscription letters and there's no one left who knew Maya.

I never want to become complacent, even though I know I likely will. It happens to all of us. Apathy is how we survive an intolerable situation that has no end. It's just part of the equation. So here it is, written without variables: I, Nicholas Aloysius Best, in accordance with Code GCP 1162, accept the position and responsibilities of Postmaster of Station 103, effective immediately and in perpetuity. I will fulfill these duties to the best of my ability and to the exclusion of all else, until such time as the Night Post deems me unfit for service.

Signed,
Still Alive.

MILO:
(impatient) Well? What is it?

VAL:
It...it's a letter Nick wrote, years ago when he became Postmaster. I have no idea why it's here, but...somehow I knew it would be. I heard it.

CLEMENTINE:
What do you mean, you heard it?

VAL:
Lately, I've been hearing these words in my head. Not-not voices, exactly, just other peoples' words in my thoughts. I...think they're letters.

CLEMENTINE:
Hold on. Uh, back up a second. What--

[FAINTLY, FROM OUTSIDE THE OFFICE, THE FRONT DOOR BUZZER RINGS.]

MILO:
(softly) Shh. Did you hear that?

CLEMENTINE:
Am I the only one not hearing things?

MILO:
It-It was the buzzer on the door.

VAL:

Shit. We gotta go.

MILO:

Out the back. Go!

[THEIR HURRIED FOOTSTEPS FADE AWAY. AFTER A MOMENT, ANOTHER SET APPROACHES, SLOWLY AND DELIBERATELY.]

NICHOLAS:

Hmm.

NICHOLAS:

(as the outro plays) Thank you for joining us on tonight's route. You can find the couriers of Station 103 at nightpostpod.com or on Twitter [@nightpostpod](https://twitter.com/nightpostpod). If you're satisfied with your postal service, please rate and review us, or consider supporting us on Patreon. Send a letter to a grumpy archivist and tell them about *The Night Post*.