

VALENCE
SEASON 3, EPISODE 7
“FAMILIAR”
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[[A door handle turns and clicks open. Soft wind chimes tinkle.]]

WIL: Brought to you by Hug House Productions.

WIL (PUBLIC FEED): Before we begin the episode, we want to let you know that VALENCE is participating in the new Partners Program created by Apollo Podcasts! If you'd like to listen to the next TWO episodes of VALENCE Season 3 in advance of their public release, you can purchase access to them now in the Apollo Podcasts app.

WIL (APOLLO FEED): Before we begin the episode, we want to thank you for supporting us and the Apollo Partners Program! Your contributions go directly to the creators to help fund projects like VALENCE so that everyone involved in the production can be paid a fair wage! Here is your Apollo exclusive tip for this episode: write something creative. Whether it's creative nonfiction, creative fiction, some poetry, just for you. Don't share it anywhere. Just keep it. Just for you. That's important! Enjoy the episode.

WIL: VALENCE is a serialized fiction podcast with discussions and depictions of struggles with mental health. You can check our show notes, or the transcripts on valencepod dot com for a full list of content warnings. It's important to take care of yourself — especially here in New Candler.

[Season 3 theme music starts, gentle and driving acoustic guitar that builds, bringing in electric instruments and feeling like the beginning of what you always wanted a road trip to be when you imagined it]

[begin episode]

Scene 1

INT. a new stolen car, Grace behind the wheel and Mahira navigating, early morning. This car has Grace, Mahira, Liam, and Nico; the other car has Flynn, Sarah, and Noel.

Minimal traffic at this hour, quiet road rumble and a rare whoosh of another vehicle passing

GRACE: When is our exit?

LIAM: [Bored] East--

MAHIRA, NICO: [*Imitating a bored Liam*] "East."

MAHIRA: You're just going to stay on this for a while.

GRACE: Yes but when is the *exit*?

MAHIRA: In *two hundred miles and eighty miles*, Grace. I promise I will tell you when we're ten miles out and you can do the thing where you stay in the left anyway and then slingshot us over all the lanes at the last second even though I gave you ample warning.

GRACE: Once. I did that once.

LIAM: [laugh]

GRACE: [the Mom voice. You know the one.] Something funny?

LIAM: Definitely not. I just had a cough. [fakes a cough]

GRACE: Very convincing.

NICO: [groggy] Why are you all morning people? Vamps, you are not a morning people.

LIAM: Ordinarily, no. I think I'm just . . . happy? We have what might be an actual lead on a problem, and it's been a very long time since I felt like we *weren't* five steps behind Reilley. For the moment, at least, it feels like we're only one step behind. It's. It feels promising.

MAHIRA: That's not a bad way of looking at it.

GRACE: I am looking forward to when we are a few steps *ahead*, but yes. Shrinking that gap does feel good.

NICO: [sleepy grumble noises]

LIAM: [laugh]

MAHIRA: Nico, if you want it, I've got cold brew up here. Teddy had a ton in the fridge -- I figured he wouldn't miss what I took.

NICO: *Give.*

MAHIRA: [laugh] Here.

Rustling as Mahira stretches her arm out to the backseat, handing off the large bottle of coffee. Nico takes it and downs a large gulp. Then, a buzzing from their pocket as they receive a text message.

MAHIRA: Who's texting you on your burner? If Sarah were here, she'd probably chuck it out the window.

NICO: [checking the sender] No clue. Just a random -- ah shit.

LIAM: What is it?

GRACE: Do I need to get us off the highway?

NICO: No, it's -- don't worry about it. It's fine.

GRACE: Yes, because I always respond with "ah shit" to things that are fine.

NICO: It's Tomasso. He's just being annoying.

LIAM: Is he calling in the favor you promised

NICO: [cutting him off] No, just lording it over me that he can.

MAHIRA: Doesn't explain how he has your number?

NICO: He doesn't. This message would have popped up on anything with a screen that I was using, or near. Fun little trick we can do.

Camera zoom in

LIAM'S INNER MORGAN: *Fascinating.*

INNER LIAM: Oh, *now* you choose to show up again.

LIAM'S INNER MORGAN: Couldn't help myself. The Salvai family has such interesting ways to use their magic that really shouldn't be possible with our modern understanding of it. And yet, here we are.

MAHIRA: Liam, you good?

LIAM: I -- huh?

MAHIRA: Your face went weird. Suddenly . . . angry, I guess?

NICO: It was her, wasn't it?

LIAM'S INNER MORGAN: She's more observant than I gave her credit for. Good to know.

Camera click

LIAM: Yes.

LIAM'S INNER MORGAN: Suddenly feeling forthcoming with your friends? That's fine. I'm sure it won't make them wary of you at all.

MAHIRA: Right now?

LIAM: Yes.

LIAM: Grace, could you put on some music? *Loud* music?

GRACE: Absolutely.

Grace clicks on the radio, turning the dial until something loud and abrasive comes on. Not far off from Coldplay in vibe and percussion style.

LIAM: Thank you.

Scene 2

INT. the same stolen car, late morning

The same road noise, but much gentler music on the radio now, piano forward, and softer. Mahira is on the phone with Sarah, who is on speaker.

MAHIRA: So wait, where am I telling Grace to go next?

SARAH: [over the phone] Dana said she wanted us to pick a neutral meetup spot -- for our own comfort, according to her. So we could be more sure we weren't walking into a trap or anything.

MAHIRA: [laugh] Sounds like something you might have thought up.

SARAH: Seriously. But yeah, I picked a campground near town. It's the middle of the week, so I figured no scout troops or families, and it doesn't have any surveillance. I'm sending you directions now.

MAHIRA: This would be so much easier with GPS.

SARAH: Yeah, but-

MAHIRA: No, yeah, I get it. It's safer without. [sigh] I'm just in a mood after Nico downed most of the iced coffee.

LIAM: Ugh, agreed. Between the lack of caffeine and the apparent *VIRUS* in my head, I'm downright grumpy. Grumpier than normal, I mean.

FLYNN: [laughing, farther away from the phone]

MAHIRA: Give Nico a dirty look for me.

LIAM: Oh, *gladly*.

NICO: [unimpressed grumbly noises]

SARAH: Just to be on the safe side, when we get there, could you and Nico hang back in the woods? Perimeter checks?

MAHIRA: Are you worried about Dana?

SARAH: More about whoever might tag along without her noticing.

MAHIRA: You got it. See you soon.

SARAH: See you soon.

Scene 3

EXT. a campground with mulch paths/plots for camping, midday

footsteps on mulch, a car pulling up and stopping

GRACE: Is this her?

SARAH: Definitely her car, at least.

FLYNN: You feeling ok?

SARAH: [taken aback] Yes? Why -- oh! We're not on bad terms, me and Dana. She's just-

DANA: SARAH IT'S BEEN AGES YOU LOOK SO DIFFERENT HI!

GRACE: *Oh.*

SARAH: -a lot.

Dana runs to Sarah and grabs her into a hug

DANA: It's been so long since we talked -- I think the last time you still had those blue breakup braids?? -- and *holy shit* seeing your face on the news was wild and sent your dad's stress levels sky high but I talked him down, he's fine now—well, he's fine-ish now c'mon tell me everything.

SARAH: [laugh] You haven't changed a bit.

DANA: [teasing] Well now, that's unfair. I'm a *doctor* now. My diploma's up in the clinic and everything.

SARAH: I'm -- I'm sorry I didn't see you walk.

Liam flashback to Noel talking about college weaving in and out of the mix over Dana and Sarah's conversation

FLASHBACK NOEL: . . . I was taking an intro class as an elective – my major had some mandatory electives, so Morgan and Dad couldn't really dictate what I was taking . . . Dad has always liked me knowing about the arts . . .

DANA: Oh, don't worry about that! What I'm more interested in right now is what brought you out here. I know it wasn't just to say hi.

SARAH: Yeah. We needed -- and it's ok to say no if you don't want to get involved, seriously -- but we were hoping for some . . . magic veterinary help?

DANA: Oh! Oh no, tell me you don't have a hurt pet in the car just waiting while I'm talking to you out here.

FLYNN: No no no, nothing like that. Also hi, I'm Flynn. I -- should we introduce ourselves?

DANA: The news already kinda took care of that for you? But hi! Nice to finally meet you. I'm glad Sarah's got you by her side for all this.
Ok, so if there isn't a sick cat or anything, what kind of help are you needing from me?

LIAM: Noel, could you-

NOEL: Of course. Dana, I'm going to be putting up a barrier of sorts, to prevent any risk of spying, magical or otherwise. Is that alright?

DANA: Yeah sure. Appreciate the heads up.

Noel's version of the Don't Look At Me magic. Beginning with cyber/data bleeps and bloops and ending on a reverberating slam shut sound

LIAM: [to Noel] Thank you.

[to Dana] We believe there is a chance Morgan Reilley has . . . for lack of a better explanation, put some sort of magical virus in me. And we have a friend who may be able to confirm this, or rule it out, but would need to be able to connect to me magically while hundreds of miles away.

DANA: Well damn. That's -- that's pretty fucked up if true. But I'm not seeing where I come into it.

LIAM: Our friend is currently pet-sitting my cat.

DANA: [bursts out laughing] Ok there we go. And you want me to, what, link you two? You and the cat?

NOEL: Is that something you could do?

DANA: [thoughtful hmm] Probably, yeah. I have a patient whose owner asked if I could link them, but the opposite direction. Cats tend to be real stoic, not showing symptoms until it's *bad-bad*, so she wanted a way to know what was up right away.

GRACE: Your clients know you're a muse?

DANA: Yeah? There's a real small-town vibe here. Everybody knows everybody's business sooner or later.

LIAM: And that's not -- that's never caused you problems?

DANA: [shrug noise] Some people were weird about it at first, but now it's a plus for a lot of them. Everybody tries to look after each other using what they've got, and if what I've got is magic, it just makes sense.

INNER LIAM (nice): I . . . can't even picture a life like that. It sounds too good to be true.

FLYNN: That sounds kind of incredible.

DANA: It is! Getting something systemic like community care started can take some doing, but once you've got it established and rolling along? It's really amazing to see.

I don't know that I could go back to a more individual, isolated self care setup . . . or to keeping such a big part of me a secret.

A beat.

DANA: Sorry, I know that's gotta be a sore spot for you all. From what I've heard, New Candler sounds . . . not muse friendly.

LIAM: No need to apologize -- I'm very happy to hear you're in a place that is good to you.

DANA: I hope you get a chance to build something similar for yourself.

SARAH: I might want to pick your brain later for ideas on how to make that happen, if you're up for it?

DANA: Of course! But uh, first, did you want me to do the thing?

LIAM: The -- oh! Yes, please.

GRACE: Will you need anything from us for this?

DANA: Just some of the cat's hair, or a whisker? A photo will work too, if that's all you've got. But beyond that, nah, shouldn't be too complicated. Familiar magic isn't covered in veterinary school, but lucky for you I had a killer mentor.

LIAM: My shirt - let me get it.

Liam goes to the car, opens the trunk, and retrieves a shirt from a backpack. He plucks a couple of orange hairs from the fabric, closes the trunk, and hands it to Dana

LIAM: Is this enough?

DANA: Definitely. And Liam, you may wanna sit down. This is going to feel *real weird*.

Liam sits on the bench of the picnic table. Dana begins the process. Her magic sounds like it's wrapping around Liam, and then muffled, as if it's sunk inside of him.

DANA: You feel ok?

LIAM: I felt . . . Soap. Like she was right here, on my lap.

DANA: Her name is *Soap*?

FLYNN: [laughs] Our reaction exactly.

LIAM: That was her name!

Scene 4

INT. Dana's office, early afternoon.

Flynn and Sarah sit at her desk as Sarah types away on the desktop. Liam sits on the sofa on the opposite side of the room, and Nico paces. Outside, a storm is gradually rolling in. Dana enters the office.

DANA: Hey, are the others not joining us? Not that I know where they'd fit in here, but . . .

FLYNN: They're swapping out cars now. They should be back in a little while. And you're sure it's ok we've taken over your office?

DANA: Totally ok. We take Wednesdays as half days, so it's just you, me, and the office dog. But he's sound asleep.

FLYNN: There's a dog here?

DANA: [laughs] Under the reception desk. I'm telling you now though, unless you've got food, Ice Cream Cone sleeps through everything.

LIAM: And you questioned "Soap" as a pet name.

DANA: Listennnn. You are what you eat, and we found him behind an ice cream shop, and sometimes joke names stick around long enough to become real names!

NICO: No yeah that checks out.

FLYNN: Yell if you need me.

Flynn gets up and leaves the way Dana came, off to pet Ice Cream Cone, a very good boy.

SARAH: Ok, so I've checked and double checked everything, and I've got your system secure enough that I'm ok setting up the call with Sol, if you think you're ready.

DANA: I'm good to go. Liam?

LIAM: Sol knows to expect the call?

SARAH: Yup, they're at their computer.

LIAM: Then yes.

The light, pleasant chime of a video chat connecting

SOL: Hello!

SARAH: Sol, hey, I want to introduce you to my sister.

DANA: Hi! Dana Barnes, she/her. If, uh . . . if you noticed Soap glow earlier, that was me.

SOL: [laugh] I did not, but now I'm sad I missed it! Soledad Marquez, any pronouns. And you can call me Sol.

DANA: Nice to meet you! Before we get down to work, what do you need from me?

SOL: I'll need -- wait, is Liam there?

LIAM: Oh! Hi, yes, coming.

Liam jumps up from the couch and crosses to the desk so he can be seen on the webcam.

NICO: [hushed, to Liam] Hey, do you need me here?

SOL: Was that Nico?

LIAM: [to Sol] Yes, that was-

[to Nico] Come over here, it's always good to have another head when it comes to . . . complicated problems.

SOL: Right now, I think we just need to establish that the link between Liam and Soap is stable enough for my friend to diagnose Liam through her.

LIAM: And that won't hurt her in any way?

SOL: They've assured me there's nothing invasive -- all just scans.

DANA: The link isn't a one-to-one sort of thing, in case that's what you were worried about. If you get hurt or sick, she doesn't get that same injury or illness.

LIAM: Thank you. I -- I had been worried about that.

NICO: So then how are you testing if it works?

DANA: Like this!

Dana taps Liam's forearm with a tiny zap of magic, like a static shock.

LIAM: Ow why??

SOL: Was it the left forearm you hit, near the outside of the elbow?

DANA: Yup!

LIAM: How-?

SOL: Soap lit up at that spot in yellow.

NICO: Well shit.

DANA: Looks like it's working perfectly!

SARAH: The same yellow as-

DANA: As my magic, yup!

SARAH: So in theory, if Reilley *has* left something in Liam's brain, or his -- anywhere, really, it'll show up as her magic color?

SOL: That's the hope, yes.

LIAM: Thank you all. For doing this. It's -- it means a lot to me.

SARAH: Liam, we're happy to do it. You're maybe just a little bit important to us.

SOL: Just a tiny bit.

NICO: Eh, I could take him or leave him.

DANA: Hey, what did I say? Looking out for each other is a hell of a lot easier than all of us looking out for ourselves alone.

SOL: I'm going to let you go now, and I'll reach out to my friend with this. Bye!

The end-of-call bloop. Then, the wind outside kicks up, thrashing the trees outside. Dana stands up

DANA: Oof, it's about to get ugly out there. I'd better go wake up Ice Cream Cone and take him for his walk before the rain hits. I shouldn't be more than ten, fifteen minutes. He's a crunchy old man.

SARAH: [in the baby voice just for pets] Ice Cream Cone.

Dana heads out towards reception.

A beat.

SARAH: We've really been thinking too small, huh?

LIAM: How so?

SARAH: What's our plan after all of this? After we take down Reilley and Halo and we're back home, what then? Do we just *find jobs* and go back to how things were? Act like the way things were is normal and fine?

NICO: Ha, "normal and fine." Deffffffffinitely a real thing that existed ever.

LIAM: I had . . . also been thinking about this. And no, I don't want to go back to that. To having to hope people either didn't find out I had magic or didn't mind enough to cause a scene. That seems. It seems unsustainable.

SARAH: I don't have a solid idea yet of what I want life after all this to look like, but I think it's time we start thinking about it. Getting ideas at least. I don't want to bounce from shitty organization to shitty organization being a hacker for hire for CEOs and governments that don't give a fuck. I-

Sarah cuts herself off as Flynn comes walking down the hallway and into the office.

FLYNN: Everything ok? I couldn't really make out words, but I could hear general tone from the front desk and it sounded kinda stressed.

SARAH: Yeah, we're ok. The link with Soap looks like it's going to work for what we need it to do.

FLYNN: That's great! So then . . .

NICO: Sarah tried planning out past the immediate future. Always a good way to give yourself a headache.

SARAH: Well ex[cuse me for caring]

NICO: [jumping in quickly] A necessary headache! But still. Lotta variables and a lot of them send you down timelines that suck shit. So y'know, headache.

FLYNN: Makes sense. I think we maybe got sucked into only being able to think about right now, and maybe tomorrow. Side effect of having to pick up and run every few days. But I've -- what Dana said got me thinking. Once the Icarus isn't strictly focused on getting stories out there to bring down Big Bads, I don't want to shut it down. I really like this kind of work. And I'm good at it! And I think it's worth keeping it up, but maybe pivoting. Figuring out what the new goals for the blog can be.

LIAM: I'm glad. Both that what you're doing is something fulfilling for you, and that you want to keep it going.

FLYNN: Yeah. I uh -- I was thinking of maybe reaching out to Zoe? Hiring her, if she's into the idea.

LIAM: Oh! That's a wonderful idea!

SARAH: I have a feeling she'll be into it.

I may have to do some thinking to figure out what feels right for me. Figure out what I want to do with what I have to offer.

LIAM: You know, Grace once said you're a natural leader. But I think you could also be an incredible teacher.

SARAH: [laugh] You suggesting I go back to school? Get an education degree?

LIAM: Not unless you wanted to! I just -- you are more than your hacking skills.

SARAH: Huh. That's really sweet of you to say. And I'll keep it in mind for sure.
[laugh] Maybe I'll start a school for hackers.

A beat.

SARAH: *Maybe I'll start a school for hackers.*

FLYNN: Now I'm imagining you as the headmistress of a magical hacking school and it is extremely good. I don't know why you're taller in my mental image—maybe it's just the tophat and the long robes. "Welcome to Sarah's School for Technomuse Fuckery, here to teach you to cancel student loan debt the hard way. Eh, the easy way. Anyway, I'm tall now."

ALL: (Laughing)

SARAH: What's the easiest way to deradicalize people? Get them out of the little rabbit hole funnels before they're even radicalized in the first place! And if I could train up a bunch of newbie hackers, get them on my level -- well. Close to my level. I *am* damn good. But we could find ways to disrupt that process before it gets people in too deep and we could break sites that brainwash people and holy shit, this is something, right?

LIAM: It's absolutely something.

NICO: Sounds like a hell of a plan.

SARAH: It *is*.

[end episode]

WIL: *VALENCE* is a Hug House production. You can find more information at Hug House dot Productions.

WIL: *VALENCE* is created by me, Wil Williams. This episode was written by Katie Youmans, and edited and sound designed by Wil Williams. This episode was directed by Anne Baird and Katie Youmans, transcribed by Katie Youmans, and produced by Anne Baird. The theme music was composed by Travis Reaves.

WIL: This episode was performed by:

- Josh Rubino as Liam Alden and Liam's Inner Voice,
- Naomi McMillan as Morgan Reilley,
- John Westover as Nico Salvai,
- Caleb Del Rio as Flynn Velasco,
- Jordan Cobb as Sarah Harris,
- Katie Chin as Grace Chen,
- Ishani Kanetkar as Mahira Varma,
- Alex Welch as Noel Alden,
- Elena Fernandez Collins as Soledad Marquez,
- and Danielle Shemiah as Dana Harris.

WIL: You can find our full cast list and information on how *you* can support this indie podcast on valencepod dot com.

WIL: Until next time... protect your magic.

WIL: Looking for another great podcast to listen to? We recommend you check out *Internet Hate Machine* from Cool Zone Media. In her new show, host Bridget Todd explains how bad actors use the internet to target and silence marginalized people, especially Black women. Excluding these groups from discourse and desensitizing us to sexist, racist attacks makes us

all less safe—so Bridget is talking with people who have been the targets of coordinated attacks, activists who are fighting back, and experts to help break down the deliberate agenda behind it. Listen to *Internet Hate Machine* wherever you get your podcasts."