

The Attic Monologues Episode 6 - Caramel & Clove

Trigger Warnings: depressive episode, implied family issues, mention of arson and imprisonment, negative mother/daughter relationship

[CHIME OF A PHONE RECORDER TURNING ON.]

NYX

The Ramblings and Thoughts of One Nyx Ryland, esquire. The date is-
October 13th. Oof. Already. Damn.

[SOUNDS OF MUFFLED PASSING TRAFFIC.]

Lots to do this week. An overdue essay. The logo proposal for Twelfth Night.
Lecture catchup for the last- two weeks. If I watch them on two times speed
that's only, like, two hours of work.

God.

I think I'm- *[LAUGHS- NOT IN A GOOD WAY]* I think I'm losing it a little.
Don't know why I'm surprised. This always happens. You let an inch go and
suddenly it's a landslide, and you're falling over the edge, and the only thing
to break your fall is all the delicate, important things.

[FRUSTRATED/ANGRY] If I could just make it through one goddamn term-

[SILENCE.]

[SOFTLY] I'd like to just be okay for longer than five minutes at a time.

[SILENCE.]

[SOUND OF A KNOCK AT THE DOOR.]

NYX

Yeah?

[CREAKING SOUND OF A DOOR BEING OPENED.]

Oh, hey Bells.

BELLA

Hey, I, uh... I haven't seen you in a while.
I guess now I know why.

NYX

Do you like my depression collection? I'm going for a record.

BELLA

I *would* be very proud of you? Except you have half the mugs in the house in here. Also, every single spoon? I had to eat my ice cream with a fork yesterday, Nyx. *A fork.*

NYX

The effort makes it taste sweeter?

BELLA

You even took my favourite knife.

NYX

You have a favourite knife?

BELLA

And you sleep with one at night, don't judge me.

NYX

I'm not!

BELLA

So... when was the last time you left the house? Have you even left your room this week? I tried knocking last night but you didn't answer.

NYX

Sorry. I was listening to music loud enough to break my eardrums. And I've left my room recently! I went to the library with Sam the other day.

BELLA

That was a week ago.

NYX

Was it?

[A PAUSE.]

Well I've gone to the kitchen to get food?

BELLA

Nyx!!! Even I'm not that bad-

NYX

Debatable-

BELLA

You're going to forget how to walk at this rate. You'll forget what the sun looks like and waste away just like that monologue with the skeleton.

NYX

I thought I was supposed to be the melodramatic one. And I've been *busy*.
With work and stuff. I feel-

[A BEAT.]

I feel outside myself. It's hard to think, y'know? So- stuff is taking me longer than it should... and I'm getting behind.

BELLA

Hm.

[A BEAT, FOLLOWED BY FOOTSTEPS AND RUSTLING CURTAINS.]

NYX

My eyes! Bellaaaaaa!

BELLA

You're not sparkling or going up in flames. A little sunlight won't kill you.

NYX

Debatable.

BELLA

Hm.

[A BEAT. TRAFFIC SOUNDS CONTINUE.]

Right, you're coming with me.

NYX

Where?

BELLA

It's- a surprise.

NYX

I'm not- I'm not sure I have time. I've got this essay on semiotics due Friday, and this marketing proposal for Twelfth Night to get done-

BELLA

We're going to a cafe. For a change of scene, where you can still get stuff done. Compromise. It's not much of a walk, and it's a really nice place to study. Lunch is on me. Bring your laptop, bring five hundred notebooks, bring a monologue to practice, if you want. But you need fresh air, and I need my spoons back, so we're getting out of here for an afternoon, and you don't have a choice.

And if that doesn't get you back in your head, I'll eat my soup with a fork, too.

NYX

Okay, *fine*. You've convinced me. Just gimme a sec-

[CHIME OF A PHONE RECORDER TURNING OFF.]

[CHIME OF A PHONE RECORDER TURNING ON].

[CAFE AMBIANCE- MILK STEAMING, COFFEE GRINDERS GROWLING, QUIET VOICES.]

NYX

And could you get me a-

BELLA

(Laughing) I know your order, Nyxie! Back in a mo!

[A PAUSE.]

NYX

Soooo.

Outside the house again. Can't remember the last time I just- sat, in a coffee shop.

The Caramel and Clove. It's a pretty name.

[A PAUSE.]

I grabbed a monologue on the way out of the door. Not school work, technically, I know. But I chickened out of acting auditions this term, so I've gotta prep for the next ones properly this time.

Anyway, reading calms me down. Gets me out of my head in a *good* way.

[A BEAT.]

(Fondly) This cafe is so Bella.

NYX

Hey!

BELLA

Hey.

NYX

What did you get? No, wait, let me guess, a / black americano.

BELLA

Black americano. (*Laughs*) Of course. And for you- a peppermint mocha with cream, as always. Your order hasn't changed in seven years.

NYX

You're the one who told me coffee might taste good if I put sugar in it, I just took the words to heart. And besides, being predictable makes me a very easy date.

BELLA

(*Laughs, flustered*) Are you going to record a monologue here then?

NYX

Oh, yeah. Here's as good as anywhere. Not really in the mood to write an essay or- god forbid- actually *read* some of my reading list. My walls back home are probably bored of my voice by now, anyway. And this place- it's got *ambiance*, I dunno. Like a liminal space, in a good way.

Did you find it recently?

BELLA

Uh- no.

[A PAUSE.]

I used to come here a lot, as a kid.

After school, my mum- she was busy, y'know, working. She didn't have time- she couldn't pick me up. So Ambrose, he's the owner, he'd come pick me up instead. His parents, like, work with my mum, and my uncle used to babysit *him*, so it was kinda like returning the favour?

[A BEAT.]

Yeah. He'd bring me here to hang out after school for a few hours most evenings. I'd sit up by the bar doing homework, reading. Ambrose would give me free drinks and (*Laughing*) a blueberry muffin, fresh from the oven at exactly 5pm.

I stopped coming as much in secondary school. Because the commute was too far. And because, well- it wasn't really necessary anymore.

NYX

Why?

BELLA

I mean, there was this super distracting and crazy person who sort of kidnapped me. And dragged me around London or to their house after school most days.

NYX

I'm *very* sorry for kidnapping you.

BELLA

No, it was good. Really good. This place is lovely, though, it's not exactly- a conventional place to spend most of your childhood.

NYX

(*Softly*) You never said.

BELLA

You know I don't like talking about it.

NYX

Yeah I do.

BELLA

But I'm glad you didn't ask. It's one of the reasons I liked hanging out. You talk enough for the both of us. Not like you're talking over me! It's just nice, not to have to reach for excuses I don't have or stories I don't want to tell.

NYX

That's what I'm here for! Nyx Ryland, filler of terrible silences and distracter from terrible thoughts.

BELLA

And you do it so well.

NYX

We could start coming here more often, if you like? Seems like you've missed it.

BELLA

I- yeah, I have missed it. I started coming again last year, when we moved to uni. It's been nice catching up on- everything I missed. Ambrose is...

NYX

A good egg?

(Bella laughs.)

BELLA

Sure, he's a good egg.

And I could always do with more excuses to visit.

So anyway. Tell me about the monologue.

NYX

Yes! Okay so, the character's name is *Kathleen Joyner*, a mild tempered housewife in prison for arson.

BELLA

I- huh. I can't wait to find out how that happened.

NYX

Oh, it's so good, you'll love it.

BELLA

I always do.

NYX

The writing is so good, right?

BELLA

I was referring to the performer, actually. The writing's okay.

NYX

Well how am I supposed to perform now when you're being so nice to me?

BELLA

(Laughing) Okay, I'll stop with the compliments.

NYX

I mean, you don't *have* to.

BELLA

Read your monologue, Kathleen.

NYX

Okay, okay.

[BACKGROUND AMBIANCE STOPS.]

NYX as KATHLEEN JOYNER

Oh, hello. Are you here for me?

It's been a long time since I had visitors.

No, please, come in, have a seat. A new face is welcome at any time. It does get so lonely out here, and there's only so many conversations one can have with a whitewash wall before it becomes a little tedious.

I would offer you a drink, or something to eat, but I'm afraid the kitchen facilities here leave rather a lot to be desired.

That was a joke, dear; you're allowed to laugh.

Back home, I was very good at hosting, you know. My house is my prized possession, after all, and one doesn't become a stay-at-home mother for nothing.

Was. It *was* my prized possession, I suppose.

Did you see it? Was there anything left standing?

No? Oh.

It isn't the only precious thing to be lost, at least.

I had this... *gorgeous* cookbook I kept in the kitchen. It was my mother's when she was a child, filled with handwritten recipes gifted to her by *her* mother. Family secrets, finally transcribed as her mind began to drip at the seams.

You can tell which things she baked most by where the book settles when you flick through it. You can see the ring of a tea cup stain from when she used anything at hand to weigh the pages open. The grease spots and chocolate smudges under important phrases, where her small hands, dirty with dough and batter and frosting, pressed against the paper. The spine and seams were lined with flour and sugar granules, which crunched like coarse sand beneath feet with every page turn.

The signs of a cookbook *correctly* used.

When she gave it to me for my seventh birthday, I was so scared. Here, I thought, here is my elder sister. Here is my mother's first child, the vessel she imbued so carefully with every tear and scar. The thing she poured her youngest hopes and fears into. Her soul was trapped between those pages, but only in childlike gasps of laughter and despair and determination. All the highs and lows like snapshots, the monotony strained away.

I buried that book under my bed that very night and promptly refused to touch it again, not for *years*, for fear that I might damage it, and somehow, in turn, destroy something so infinitely more precious than myself.

My mother was a far better baker than I, perhaps due to that fear she unwittingly instilled in me. By the time she attempted to pass her soul onto me she had memorised every line and mark of every page. She would stand still at the kitchen counter, eyes closed, and slide her hands across the worn wooden countertops, as if smoothing out the pages of an invisible book before her. Her lips would move, silent, mouthing words she baked into being a hundred times before.

It was magic. The too-warm air of a fireside in December. Condensation clouding over the glass to keep the cold world away from our sanctuary, her art. The smell of cinnamon and boiling sugar, heady in the air, before she even preheated the oven. The room, the very oxygen, remembered her.

I could sit on my stool at the counter and stare up at that woman forever.
Live on the scent and energy and magic alone.

She was only ever herself when she was baking. Or I'd like to think so, at least. The woman with flour worked into the creases of her smile, moving to the rhythm of some unseen music. I'd like to think that THAT was the real-

ATHRIE

What was that?

[COFFEE SHOP AMBIANCE RETURNS SUDDENLY.]

NYX

(Coughing) Excuse me?

BELLA

Athrie?

ATHRIE

Oh, hey Crow. I didn't see you there.

BELLA

I didn't- see you either! Sorry!

ATHRIE

Well, can't really see anything through this.

[THREE TAPPING SOUNDS.]

NYX

What did you do, rob a library?

ATHRIE

You don't have to rob it if you work there.

BELLA

Uh- Nyx, this is Athrie. They're um- Ambrose's partner. Athrie, this is Nyx.
My roommate.

[A BEAT.]

ATHRIE

Nyx, hm? Feel like I've heard *that* name before.

NYX

Oh? All terrible things, I'm sure.

ATHRIE

Oh, for *sure*. Bella's told us *all* about you.

NYX

She's never mentioned you.

ATHRIE

Hm. Anyway, what was that thing you were reading?

NYX

Oh, this?

[SOUND OF A PAGE FLAPPING.]

It's a monologue. It's from this, like, collection of ancient monologues I found in my attic.

Did you like it?

ATHRIE

Sure. Very, mhm... spooky.

NYX

Did you hear that, Bells? I'm spooky. That might be my best review yet.

BELLA

You don't need the monologues to be spooky.

NYX

Aw, thank you.

ATHRIE

You here to see Ambrose?

BELLA

Uh, no, I- we just wanted to- find a new study space. And where better, right?

ATHRIE

Mm. Where better indeed.

Well, here comes my lighter half. Even if you didn't come to see him. He definitely won't be offended.

AMBROSE

Please tell me you're all getting along. I can't deal with any more dead bodies today.

[SOUND OF A CHAIR SCRAPING BACK.]

BELLA

Ambrose!

ATHRIE

You're so funny, sunshine.

AMBROSE

I do try.

How're you doing, Bella? How's your- family? Crisis averted?

BELLA

Something like that, yeah.

ATHRIE

You'd better tell him in no uncertain terms everything's alright, or he might do something drastic. You should have heard him the other night.

AMBROSE

I seem to recall *you* were the one threatening violence.

ATHRIE

And *I* seem to recall *you* were the one discussing adoption papers.

BELLA

You can't adopt me. I'm nineteen.

AMBROSE

Doesn't mean I can't try.

BELLA

(Hesitantly) Well, it's all okay, I promise. Or it will be.

AMBROSE

You let me know if ever it isn't. We've always got a spare bed for you.

And who's this? No, let me guess. Crazy hair. Sugary coffee.

[FINGERS CLICKING.]

You must be Nyx.

NYX

Uh, yeah? Yeah, that's me! Good to know my reputation precedes me.

AMBROSE

All good things, I promise. Good to hear there's someone in Bella's corner she can rely on.

NYX

Uh, of course.

BELLA

Ambrose-

AMBROSE

We're being embarrassing, aren't we?

ATHRIE

Speak for yourself, sunshine. I'm an absolute delight.

AMBROSE

Yes you are. But the kids probably didn't come here to chat with us, hm?

BELLA

Again, I am actually older than ten.

AMBROSE

Too old for freshly baked blueberry muffins then? I've got some in the oven right now. On the house, for both of you.

BELLA

Thank you.

NYX

Thanks.

ATHRIE

No need to say thank you- you are literally making his day.

AMBROSE

Some people appreciate me.

ATHRIE

Some people get free food.

AMBROSE

I'm sorry, I actually can't hear you over the free hot chocolate on your table?
Or the free lunch we had an hour ago?

ATHRIE

And yet, no blueberry muffin. You must not love me.

[BOTH LAUGH.]

I'll come help in the back, give these kids some time alone.

AMBROSE

If you burn your tongue trying to eat a muffin directly from the oven again, I
won't be sympathetic.

ATHRIE

I still can't feel my tongue from the last time, so it's all good. I can eat as
much hot food as I like.

AMBROSE

That is so not how it works.

ATHRIE

Mm, which of us has actually studied science?

AMBROSE

Which of us has worked in the food industry for over a decade?

NYX

(Whispering) Okay, I'm kind of obsessed with them.

BELLA

Honestly.

AMBROSE

Daylight, I think we have an audience.

ATHRIE

And I think you have customers to see to. And I have muffins to *rescue from the flames*.

AMBROSE

How valiant of you.

Bella, don't be a stranger. Nyx, it was lovely to meet you.

NYX

Are you kidding me? I can't believe Bella's never brought me here before.
It's so- *nice*.

AMBROSE

Probably didn't want the two of us embarrassing her in front of her-flatmate.

NYX

Well, you won't be able to drag me away from this place. It's so perfect for studying.

ATHRIE

Of course it is, I designed it.

AMBROSE

Um, I don't think that's precisely true-

ATHRIE

Well... co-designed it. The fairy lights were Ambrose - I would've had candles.

AMBROSE

I prefer not to risk burning my establishment down on a daily basis.

ATHRIE

Wh- The library hasn't burnt down.

AMBROSE

Yet.

ATHRIE

Oh, and there's that sunny optimism I married you for.

AMBROSE

Anyway. We'll leave you alone now. Athrie will bring muffins out for you in a bit.

ATHRIE

Will I.

AMBROSE

You kids have fun!

ATHRIE

Crow, guard my books with your life.

BELLA

Of course.

[RECEDING FOOTSTEPS.]

NYX

Wow.

BELLA

They're a lot, huh?

NYX

In a good way.

BELLA

Yeah.

NYX

Even though Athrie interrupted my incredibly dramatic monologue.

BELLA

Ah, they do that. They're just- curious.
You could start again, if you'd like?

NYX

Nah, it's okay. I should probably actually get a start on that essay, right?

BELLA

Words I never thought you'd say.

NYX

What can I say, I'm speedrunning some character growth.

BELLA

I wish you all the best with that.

NYX

Oh my god, I left my phone recording this whole time.

BELLA

You're such a disaster.

NYX

Why thank you.

[CHIME OF A PHONE RECORDER BEING TURNED OFF.]

POST-CREDITS SCENE

[CAFE AMBIANCE RETURNS.]

ATHRIE

Here's your muffins, I guess.

NYX

Oh my god, those smell amazing.

ATHRIE

They're alright.

BELLA

How's your tongue?

ATHRIE

It's fine.

NYX

Ow- (*Muffled*) They're really hot.

ATHRIE

Callouses, man. You need to build them up. Start with drinking tea straight from the kettle and work your way up from there.

BELLA

Nyx if you even try that I will ban you from my tea collection.

NYX

You wouldn't!

BELLA

Watch me. You are *such* a baby about getting hurt, imagine what I'd have to live with.

NYX

You're such a spoilsport.

BELLA

Thank me later.

END OF EPISODE 6