

Among the Stacks

Prelude

“All Singing ‘Caution’ in Chorus”

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Content warnings:

- Conflict disagreement
 - Implied threat
 - Implied loss of bodily autonomy
 - Being hunted
 - Shattering glass
 - Vocal distortion
 - Static repetition
 - Screaming
 - Isolation
 - Fear of death
- &
- Distress calls

(A SOFT, MELODIC, ALMOST HAUNTING PIANO TUNE PLAYS FOR ABOUT TEN SECONDS.)

(AN OLD-FASHIONED PHONE RINGS. ONCE, TWICE, AND THEN IS PICKED UP.)

BLAISE

The sun rises on a cold winter's morn.

ENDO

But the noonday rain drives pilgrims for shelter.

BLAISE

Good. Any news? I'm getting tired waiting here.

ENDO

We've found a door, a fixed one.

BLAISE

Where?

ENDO

You're not going to like this..

BLAISE

(WITH MORE FORCE.) Where?

ENDO

At the bottom of the Marianas Trench.*(A DISCORDANT, METALLIC BOOM.)* One of our probes picked it up this morning.

(AS THEY CONTINUE TALKING, THE METALLIC BOOM ECHOES, AND SOUNDS LIKE THE CREAKING METAL OF A SUBMARINE. THEN IT FADES INTO MUSIC, WHICH HAS A COSMIC AND CELESTIAL SENSE TO IT.)

BLAISE

(HE SIGHS.) That's not going to work.

ENDO

Isn't it better than on the surface of Io? You wanted a fixed door. Any of the other doors here move around too unpredictably to stake out with any degree of accuracy. So far it's this or deep space travel. Those are the only fixed doors in our solar system that we know of. We've *no* way presently of getting outside the solar system to look, and we sure haven't cracked getting to other dimensions on our own yet, unless someone's been real quiet on that front. If you want to get to the Library, then this is your best bet.

BLAISE

(HE SIGHS.) Fine. Then what do we have to do?

ENDO

Luckily, having the president of the Weller Foundation in our pocket has some benefits. I can set them to building a specially designed submersible craft to-

BLAISE

Whatever it is, just get it done. Don't ring me until you've got actual results.

ENDO

Mmm. But that might be years from now, sir.

BLAISE

We failed in our mission once before, millenia ago. If it takes years so we can make up for our great shame, then so be it. In absentia lucis, Tenebrae vincunt.

ENDO

In absentia lucis, Tenebrae vincunt.

(BLAISE PUTS THE PHONE DOWN WITH A CLICK.)

(SUSPENSEFUL MUSIC BEGINS TO PLAY, BUILDS, AND CUTS OFF TO THE RING OF A MODERN PHONE.)

(WITH A BEEP, MARK PICKS UP CLAUDE'S CALL.)

MARK

Oh, hello love, wasn't expecting to hear from you so soon, is something wrong?

CLAUDE

Yeah, no, of course not, love. Just letting you know a man stopped by earlier.

MARK

A man? *(PLAYFULLY)* Not cheating on me, are you?

CLAUDE

Oh stop it, you. No, he said he was an old friend of yours.

MARK

An old friend?

CLAUDE

Yeah.

MARK

Did he say where from?

CLAUDE

No, not exactly. He said to just tell you that 'a hound might lose the trail for a while, but never the scent'. He was very serious that I tell you those exact words, which I thought was pretty weird, but he said you two went a long way back.

(A BEAT OF TENSE SILENCE. MARK CANNOT FORM WORDS.)

CLAUDE (CONT'D):

(SLIGHTLY CONCERNED) Mark, honey, you there?

MARK

(QUIETLY) Yes, yes, I uh- *(CLEARS THROAT)* Yes, I'm here.

(URGENTLY) Claude, I want you to listen to me very carefully, this is important. Can you describe him for me, the man that dropped by earlier?

CLAUDE

Him? Oh yeah he was- *(SHE PAUSES, CONFUSION COLORING HER WORDS.)*

I could have sworn- He had long ha- No, that's not right. I'm sure his eyes were green. No blue. Or were they brown? *(TRIES TO PASS IT OFF WITH A LAUGH)* Y'know, dear, I can't remember what he looked like. *(DISCORDANT DISTORTION AND SUSPENSEFUL, HAUNTING MUSIC BEGINS TO RISE.)* It's like I can picture it in my head, but then when I go to describe it, it disappears. That's quite odd, isn't it? Normally I'm pretty good on the memory front.

MARK

(MUTTERED) Shit.

CLAUDE

What's wrong, Mark? Who was he?

MARK

Listen to me. Don't leave the house until I get back. I'm on my way now, I should only be about twenty minutes if the buses are running on time. I'll explain everything then, I promise.

CLAUDE

No, you don't get to do this. If you're in trouble, tell me, love, please. That's what we swore on our wedding day. You don't get to play the mysterious card and just tell me to sit here and wait for you to come home. Now, tell me what's wrong.

MARK

(DEFEATED SIGH) I didn't think I'd ever have to tell you this, Claude. That man isn't *(THE SUSPENSEFUL SOUNDS FADE.)* human. Neither am I.

CLAUDE

I'm not sure I'm following you, Mark.

MARK

I- *(grunt)* why is this so hard? I'm not a person, I'm a story. An idea, really. I wasn't so much born as dreamed up by someone. I was a book on a shelf, somewhere.

CLAUDE

Like a library?

MARK

Hah, no, I wish it was the Library. No, think of this more like a-a private collection. One day, the owner of the collection left my story open for too long and I woke up to the world. *(Soft, beautiful synth music begins to play.)* For so long, all I'd known was the confines of my own story, and this new world of possibilities? Well, I fell in love with it. I tore myself from the pages of my book and ran. I've been running ever since. Yes, I've been terrified, but I've so many incredible things, things you wouldn't believe. And I met you, Claude. Out of everything I've seen and done, in all my years, I'm so glad running away gave me the chance to meet you, my love. That thing that showed up at the house earlier works for the man I escaped from. Honestly, after this long, I'd thought he had given up. *(The music fades.)* They want to take me back to that place, Claude. They want to take me away from you. And I won't let that happen.

CLAUDE

That's... a *lot* to process, love. I'm not even sure I believe half of what you just said-

MARK

I know it's a lot, but, please, just trust me, okay? I'll be home soon, and I can prove everything, I swear, okay, just find somewhere to hide in the house and-

(GLASS SHATTERS, AND THERE ARE THE SOUNDS OF LIGHT THUDS.)

(CLAUDE SHRIEKS.)

(WHEN MARK SPEAKS AGAIN, HIS VOICE SOUNDS FURTHER AWAY, AS IF THE PHONE HAS BEEN DROPPED.)

MARK

Claude, honey, what's wrong? Claude, are you there? Claude?
Claude?

(SUSPENSEFUL MUSIC BEGINS TO PLAY, BUILDS, AND CUTS OFF. RADIO STATIC PLAYS FOR A FEW MOMENTS, AND THEN: THE BEEP OF A RADIO BEING ENGAGED, GENERAL RADIO SHAKINESS, LIKE IT'S A POOR CONNECTION OVER AN OLD CB-RADIO OR SIMILAR. TEXT WRITTEN IN BRACKETS IS DISTORTED.)

PILOT

Hello? This is Captain [Guiding-star, Daughter of the Deep] of the ship [Sunhopper] sending out a distress signal. Our closest star is Morose EV-659. We sustained an unknown systems failure which disabled all the ship's onboard functions. The engines have lost all power and won't restart. Life support systems are inoperable, and the systems that regulated our aquaponics lab have been overwritten. We've been like this for sixteen hours now, by my reckoning. My crew and I are using up whatever air we still have from the air tanks on our suits, and we're living off of whatever food is still usable from our store. But once the food and oxygen run out, we're toast. Please, if anyone can hear this, we need to get our cargo safely to its destination, and will pay handsomely for its safe delivery. *(The Captain's voice begins to fade, and get further and further away.)* Please send help. I'm not sure how much longer we can last. *(shaking voice.)* I don't want to die.

Hello? This is Captain [Guiding-star, Daughter of the Deep] of the ship [Sunhopper] sending out a distress signal. Our closest star is Morose EV-659. We sustained an unknown systems failure which-

(STATIC, AND A DISCORDANT, ECHOING SOUND AS THE CAPTAIN'S VOICE FADES FOR GOOD.)

X. LIBRIS

Change begets change. One action can have so many unforeseen consequences. A great working was done against the Library, laying out the path of destruction for an ancient evil. An attack of this kind cannot be free of consequence. Even now, the

worlds feel the effects of the attack, and as they struggle to realign themselves, the consequences spread. They are coming for them, the stories. Ancient orders awaken to try and set right the evils of their past. Rogue stories are being hunted down outside the worlds of story. Calls for help go unanswered in the empty dark. We are balanced on the edge of a knife, and to fall on either side is to fall to fire and chaos. Something must be done to fix this. Someone must set this right.

(A SOFT, CONTEMPLATIVE THEME PLAYS. THERE'S AN AIRY, HAUNTEDNESS TO IT, SORT OF REMINISCENT OF A CREEPY MUSIC BOX.)

NIGEL

"Among the Stacks" is an upcoming narrative anthology podcast set in an infinite library outside of space and time, containing every instance of every story across every world, featuring stories written by and starring some of your favorite podcasters, authors, and actors. The title of today's teaser, "All Singing 'Caution' in Chorus" was taken from the novel "Network Effect" by Martha Wells. It was written by Nigel McKeon, it was directed by Alex Kingsley, it starred the voices of Tom Chaney as Blaise, Pentoll as Endo, Floris "Swiftly" Bordewijik as Mark, Lauren Seward-Munday as Claude, Melissa Bowens as The Pilot, and Eira Major as X Libris. It was edited by Linwood with music by Linwood and Alex Schwartz. You can find more information about the show in this feed or on our Twitter @AmongStacks or on our Tumblr, @amongthestackspodcast. Until then, stay tuned, stay listening, and *sapere aude*.

(The speaker stops speaking, and the music comes to an end.)