

Season 3: Episode 10

"Stories from Before, Part 1"

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how it ends



NETWORK INTRO
Rusty Quill Presents...

STEPHANIE [Voiceover]

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[INTRO MUSIC FADE IN]

MICAH [Voiceover]

That feeling when you hear someone call your name and you turn, but no one's there, and shiver runs down your spine. When something moves just out of vision and it sets in. The sense that someone, or something is watching you. Do you know that feeling? Good. It means you're paying attention.

I'm Micah Jones. My friends and I started this podcast to explore my dreams and nightmares and to help me finally deal with my dad's death, even after all this time. Instead, we stumbled onto something much darker, something we were never meant to find out. My dreams aren't just dreams. They're memories. Warnings. I should have paid closer attention. And my dad? He's at the center of it all.

The How it Ends Podcast is no longer releasing in real time. We can't. It isn't safe. But if you're just finding us, start at the beginning. Thank you for listening.

[INTRO MUSIC FADE OUT]

INTRO

The events that are about to unfold occurred between March 20 and March 23.

[SCENE TRANSITION]

BRENDAN

I've been to a lot of places but I've never made it to Boston.
Your neighborhood is—

AIMEE

—Why would you? I was here. You were avoiding me, right?

BRENDAN

It's not like that, Aimee. Please.

AIMEE

Yeah. So you've said.

BRENDAN

We've been walking around here for over two hours and you seemed fine. Why you getting shitty with me now?

AIMEE

Getting shitty with you?

[scoffs]

If only. Would you like me to? I think you'll see I'm not as easy to mess with as when I was a kid.

BRENDAN

I can see that. And you're right. I'm sorry. I don't have the right to say that to you. I'm... It's just that—

AIMEE

—It's what? Please. Explain it to me.

[pause]

BRENDAN

Nah. I'll stop there. I'm sorry.

AIMEE

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Anyway. We're here.

BRENDAN
We're where?

AIMEE
My place. It's across the street.

BRENDAN
Where? I thought we came down this way to get coffee at Starbucks? Everything around here looks like office buildings and restaurants.

AIMEE
Nope. That's it, over there. Come on.

[FOOTSTEPS]

BRENDAN
This is where you live?

AIMEE
Yeah.

BRENDAN
Fancy.

AIMEE
So? Is that a problem?

BRENDAN
No. I'm just surprised. Luke did say Elia made a big deal about your kitchen on the podcast, but—

AIMEE
—You don't listen.

BRENDAN
Not often. No.

AIMEE
Figures.

BRENDAN
It's hard to listen to your voice.

[pause]

DOORMAN
Hello, Miss Perry.

AIMEE
Hey, Gary.

[ELEVATOR DOORS OPEN]

BRENDAN
You've done real well for yourself, Goose. This place is really nice.

AIMEE
Please don't call me that.

BRENDAN
Sorry. Sorry. Force of habit.

[ELEVATOR DOORS DING]

[ELEVATOR DOORS SHUT]

AIMEE
Anyway. Uh. Yeah. I guess I have. You know, I'm in a pretty lucrative field and I work really hard. I love what I do. I have great relationships with my patients, and... And I landed in a really great-

BRENDAN
-No, no, no. I'm not judging. I'm just happy for you.

AIMEE
Yeah. Well. Just be happy that they fixed this elevator. It's been out of service for a while, and hoofing it up to my apartment is a pain in the ass.

BRENDAN

[chuckles]

What? Because I can't go up stairs?

[ELEVATOR DOORS DING]

[ELEVATOR DOORS OPEN]

AIMEE

It's been a long time since you were a football star, Hollywood.

[FOOTSTEPS]

[APARTMENT DOOR OPENS]

[FOOTSTEPS]

BRENDAN

[whistles through his teeth]

[APARTMENT DOOR SHUTS]

BRENDAN

This place is gorgeous. I mean, damn, Aimee. The kitchen is nicer than the one in Mom and Dad's house.

AIMEE

Yeah, yeah. You and Elia can find a way to steal the stove when I move out.

BRENDAN

What? You're leaving this place? Seriously?

AIMEE

Well, I'm thinking about it.

BRENDAN

Why? If I lived here, you couldn't pay me enough to leave the house, let alone move.

AIMEE

[chuckles]

Um. Honestly? I'm just ready for a change. I've been here for a really long time. Through my senior year of undergrad, my residency. Plus, I think I like Providence better than Boston. It feels more like home, but only in the good ways. You know?

BRENDAN

You lived here during undergrad?

AIMEE

Yeah. I mean, you had my address. You sent mail here.

BRENDAN

I did, but it's not like I knew what your apartment looked like.

AIMEE

How did you get my address anyway?

BRENDAN

Hmm. I'm resourceful.

AIMEE

Oh...kay. Do you want a drink or something?

BRENDAN

Sure. What do you have?

[REFRIGERATOR OPENS]

AIMEE

Um... Gin. Or... Water.

BRENDAN

Water's good.

[REFRIGERATOR CLOSSES]

[FOOTSTEPS]

BRENDAN

So how did you afford this place in undergrad?

AIMEE

I mean, I knew I was going into a field where I would make decent money, so... I snagged this place when I could. And the rent wasn't as high as it is now.

BRENDAN

Sure, but... It still wasn't cheap. You swung this as a student and an intern?

AIMEE

Mom and Dad co-signed the lease and helped me out for the first couple of years.

BRENDAN

Mom and Dad?

AIMEE

Yeah. Why are you being weird about it? You know, Elia and Micah and Devon have all been here and didn't make a big deal. Why does it matter to you?

BRENDAN

Right. Nope. You're right. I'm sorry, it's... It's been different for me. I did settle for a while, but nowhere like this. Mostly I've just kept moving from place to place. Now I live in a van most of the time. And I've been pretty isolated except for traveling with Luke, so I guess my social skills are a little rough as well. I didn't mean anything by it. It's really a great place. Again. I'm just happy for you.

[pause]

Well, what else should I know about your life, Goose? You still play soccer?

AIMEE

[laughs]

[sighs]

Mom always hated it when you called me that.

BRENDAN

[chuckles]

Yeah. I actually remember the day you asked everyone to start calling you Aimee. You were, like, five or six. Mom was so verklempt.

AIMEE

[chuckles]

Yeah. I actually did try going by Amelia once I started working, but... I gave it up recently. Didn't feel right.

BRENDAN

You see them a lot? Mom and Dad?

AIMEE

[sighs]

When I must.

BRENDAN

Must, huh?

AIMEE

It's... a lot. You know how Mom can be. She wants people to know how much better she thinks we are than everyone without actually saying it. By the time I was a senior in high school, I was the center of her world. My failures reflected poorly on her and Dad, and my successes weren't my own. Once I became a doctor? Forget it. I just couldn't take it anymore. So, now it's just a holiday here and there, and the occasional weekend each summer so Mom can parade me around at the Club to all her friends.

BRENDAN

Yikes.

AIMEE

Yeah. It is what it is, you know? They get phone calls now.

[pause]

BRENDAN

I'm sorry. That must have been... It shouldn't have... I should have...

AIMEE

Been there?

BRENDAN

Yeah.

AIMEE

Yeah. You should have.

[FOOTSTEPS]

[REFRIGERATOR OPENS]

BRENDAN

You know what? I'll take one, too. If you don't mind.

AIMEE

Already making it.

[ICE TINKLES IN A GLASS]

BRENDAN

So. Yeah. Um.

[DRINKS BEING POURED]

BRENDAN

One thing I did hear on the podcast was the hike you and Micah went on.

AIMEE

Oh, the one where I almost took an arrow to the chest? Yes. Great time. Beautiful hike.

BRENDAN

[chuckles]

That's the one. Did you ever figure out what happened?

AIMEE

Nope. I'm chalking it up to some hunter making a huge mistake and then just booking it when they heard Micah screaming. Anything else is really too much to think about.

BRENDAN

Sure. That's fair. I'm just glad you're okay.

AIMEE

Me, too.

BRENDAN

I brought it up because I heard you say that you make donations to the National Park Service every year on Nolan's birthday.

AIMEE

Yeah, I do.

BRENDAN

You're a good person, Goose.

AIMEE

Well, I've had my shitty moments, but yeah. I try.

BRENDAN

Describe "shitty moments."

AIMEE

Hmm. Just the standard stuff. Not being as patient with friends as I should have been. Or flaky from time to time.

BRENDAN

Friends, as in... Micah?

AIMEE

Well. Maybe.

BRENDAN

You drifted apart. It happens. It wasn't all your fault. I don't think it's anyone's fault really.

AIMEE

Yeah. I- I- I know. I just feel-

BRENDAN

-No. No. Like. You're being too hard on yourself. You were a teenager. Everyone's a nightmare when they're 13.

AIMEE

Yeah. That's true. But...

BRENDAN

No. So. What I'm saying is, you have always been good. Great, even. If anything, Mom and Dad tried to get in the way of that, but that was never going to happen. You were never going to be like them. You were always exactly who you are right now.

AIMEE

And... How do you know who I am? You've been gone for, like, a third of my life.

BRENDAN

Because I know you. You care deeply for people. You show up. That's you.

AIMEE

Thank you.

[sighs]

You know, Micah and I talked about you when we were on that hike. If you heard the other stuff, there's no way you could have missed that part of the conversation.

BRENDAN

Yeah. I caught it.

AIMEE

So then you know she asked me about the night you left.

BRENDAN

Yeah. I remember.

AIMEE

And?

BRENDAN

And?

AIMEE

You're serious? We're not going to talk about it?

BRENDAN

That's not what I said.

AIMEE

Well, you're not really saying anything.

BRENDAN

I—

AIMEE

—You fucking left me there, Brendan.

BRENDAN

Aimee.

AIMEE

No. You knew how they were, Mom and Dad. You told me you were going to stay at a friend's house near school. You didn't fucking tell me you were never coming back. You left me there with them. You just—

BRENDAN

—Goose. There's a lot... you don't know. I promise. I wasn't trying to leave you—

AIMEE

—I don't know anything. And I didn't know anything then, either. Only that you disappeared into the fucking night and I never saw you again. 20 fucking years, Brendan. It's been more than 20 years. You were my best friend. Micah and I were already drifting away, and then you left. And I had no one.

BRENDAN

I know. But I promise, I didn't leave because I didn't care about you. I left because—

[GLASS BREAKING]

AIMEE

—I don't fucking care anymore.

[pause]

BRENDAN

Goose. You have every right to be angry with me. To hate me, even.

AIMEE

I don't hate you.

BRENDAN

I know how I left was shitty. Especially for you. I'm sorry. I should have led with that.

AIMEE

Well, tell me now. Tell me what happened. What was that argument about? Why was it so bad that it kept you away all this time?

BRENDAN

I'm going to tell you. I just can't right now.

AIMEE

Are you fucking kidding me?

BRENDAN

Listen. I'm not dragging this out just for fun. I'm going to tell you everything, but I really think it will be easier if I tell everyone at once. It's... about more than just you and me.

AIMEE

Well... how...?

BRENDAN

Trust me. I get it. I know what I'm doing is frustrating. But please, let's just have this one day for us. For you and me. Before...

AIMEE

Before what?

BRENDAN

Before I blow up everything we know about our parents. Maybe Micah's dad, too.

[SCENE TRANSITION]

MICAH

So... did it go...well yesterday?

AIMEE

I don't know if I'd go that far, but it wasn't a complete disaster, I guess. So, better than expected.

MICAH

He didn't tell you why he left?

AIMEE

Nope. It kept me up all night. He said he wanted to tell "everyone at the same time." Which, honestly? Seems like bullshit. I'm the one he owes an explanation, but he insisted.

DEVON

Man, that sounds brutal, Aimee. Well, I got a pot of coffee on. Do you want a cup?

AIMEE

No, I'm good. But thank you. I grabbed a latte on my way here.

DEVON

Sure.

[DOORBELL RINGS]

[FOOTSTEPS]

[DOOR OPENS]

LUKE

Hey, folks.

BRENDAN

Hey, everyone.

MICAH

Hey, guys. Come on in.

LUKE

Beer, anyone?

ELIA

It's 10:00 am.

LUKE

Nice to see you again, Elia.

[BEER CRACKS OPEN]

LUKE

Aimee? Micah? Devon?

AIMEE MICAH DEVON

[together]

No, thanks.

I think I'm okay.

I'm good.

DEVON
Coffee.

[pause]

[DEVON SIPS COFFEE]

BRENDAN
So... do you—

AIMEE
Oh, my God. Just get to it, Brendan. I'm about to fucking
explode.

BRENDAN
Okay.

[pause]

Everything I'm going to say is going to sound made up. Please,
just let me get it all out there first, and then I'll try to
answer your questions as best I can.

[pause]

Goose. Do you remember my birthday during sophomore year of
college?

AIMEE
Maybe?

BRENDAN
It was the birthday before I—

AIMEE
—Before you left. Right.

BRENDAN
You remember anything?

AIMEE
Um... I don't know. I don't think so.

BRENDAN

Mom made a huge deal about it? I was at Rutgers, so, you know, close by. But Mom wanted me to come home for the whole weekend and blow off my Monday classes.

She said that she wanted to throw a big party with all my friends during the day and do a family dinner at night.

I didn't want to. But we got into an argument about it on the phone.

AIMEE

Hmm. Maybe I remember this. Uh... kind of?

BRENDAN

I told her that I didn't really care about birthdays and that I was confused why she did all of a sudden. It wasn't like we did anything beyond awkward family dinners for any other birthday. Me saying that really pissed her off, though.

I even said that I was turning 20, not 21. It wasn't like that age had any real meaning. Not to me anyways.

AIMEE

I vaguely remember hearing her talk to Dad about it. Maybe something about being so disappointed that you were being so difficult about coming home. I think Dad was angry.

BRENDAN

Yeah. He was. I thought she'd let it go, but then Dad called and told me I'd better show up or there would be consequences.

MICAH

That's fucking weird. Your family never cared about birthdays. My mom always felt bad because Aimee never really got anything special, so my mom would go get her than whale cake from Carvel? The one—

AIMEE

—Fudgie the Whale!

MICAH

[laughs]

Yeah. That's... Yeah. That one. And- and- then she would always like, get you, like, a couple of nice gifts, too. You know? Things that you talked about and that you wanted. An Easy Bake Ovens or Barbie dolls. I mean, I think my mom really kind of enjoyed it, honestly. Because I wasn't really like a Barbie kind of kid.

AIMEE

Yeah. She did. I loved her for that. You always made me presents, too. Remember when you made me that Book of Flowers?

MICAH

Wow. I actually forgot about that.

AIMEE

I didn't. I still have it.

DEVON

Cool. What kind of book was it?

AIMEE

Well, somehow without me knowing, Micah picked like a flower or a leaf from a plant everywhere we went together for over a year. Some of them were from places she went on her own, too. And she pressed them all into this really beautiful notebook, and wrote what each plant was, and added little sketches of them. Noted where she found it, and whether we were together or not. It was really...

DEVON

Aww.

MICAH

The most super dorky, I know.

AIMEE

No, not at all. I just didn't fully grasp how much it meant until way later. Sometime during grad school, I opened a box I had in storage and I- I found the book in there. I remember thinking that I never fully appreciated it or... maybe even understood... I mean, you made that for me when we were in elementary school. It really isn't the gift of a typical 11-year-old, you know?

MICAH

Yeah. Sure.

ELIA

Hang on. Back up. You've never had a birthday party? Like, ever?

AIMEE

Not really. No.

ELIA

Okay, well. I think I'm going to have to do something about that-

BRENDAN

-As precious as this exchange is, can we just table it? I'm not trying to be an asshole, I promise.

DEVON

Sure. Go ahead.

BRENDAN

So when Dad called, he had that tone. You know how he was.

AIMEE

How he is. He hasn't changed much. He's got that whole, "man of few words" thing going on.

MICAH

Yeah. It's true. I... always thought your dad was a little scary.

DEVON

But... didn't you say your families spent a lot of time together?

MICAH

Yeah. Uh... They did. I mean, our moms got along fine enough, I mean. And Gail was always nice to me. Sort of. Whatever "nice" for Gail is.

[pause]

Simon... Simon just wasn't around much. But when he was, he just had an air about him. Like, he wasn't very warm, you know?

ELIA

Okay, but what about your dads? Like, did they get along?

MICAH

Well, my dad-

BRENDAN

-Her dad was like the Mayor. He could talk to anyone.

DEVON

But did they like each other?

AIMEE

Well, I never noticed anything off between them. But, for one, I was a kid. And two, if I had to bet, Nolan was just being cordial.

LUKE

I actually remember him being kind of intimidating, too.

ELIA

Oh. Forgot you were here.

LUKE

When I came to pick you up for prom, he was there. I think he said two words to me.

MICAH

I forgot you two went to prom together.

ELIA

Did you forget? Or did Luke conveniently not tell you? Or did he maybe lie—

LUKE

—Fucking hell, Elia.

DEVON

Guys. Come on.

MICAH

[nervous laugh]

Okay, this is— This is a lot. This is a lot.

BRENDAN

What is?

MICAH

I don't know. Just fucking all of it. Um... all right, so... I'm standing in my living room with my childhood best friend that I just, you know... I recently reconnected with after not seeing her since I was a teenager. But, you know, she's here now because she had some life-altering information about my dead dad.

And you, her middle ex-boyfriend that I met once, on a day that I barely remember... Except, maybe I was kidnapped the same day?

And then her long-lost brother, who disappeared for 20 years, only to show up unexpectedly with said ex-boyfriend, claiming to have some wild fucking story that all of us need to know to explain why he left her to fend for herself with your... with their weird, fucked up parents.

And now, we're talking about the ghosts of birthday parties past and now the two of you went to prom together.

[nervous laugh]

Yeah. I... I'm sorry. But it's a lot.

DEVON

Yeah. So. Maybe we should just let Brendan finish telling his story then, huh?

AIMEE

Yeah. Go ahead.

MICAH

Right.

BRENDAN

Dad called. There was something in his voice that made it clear I didn't have a choice. I'm not sure why I didn't push back. I could have said yes and hung up the phone and just not gone. But I didn't.

Anyway, I got there on the Friday afternoon just before my birthday. Mom was in full party planner mode. She had elaborate decorations all over the house and backyard. People bringing in tables and shit. A fucking caterer was setting up.

ELIA

A caterer?

BRENDAN

I didn't understand it either. When I tried to ask her about it she told me to stay out of her way until the party.

Not wanting to start an argument, Aimee, I went and found you and convinced you to walk uptown with me. We went to the hot rod show and got Italian ice at Rita's. Do you remember?

AIMEE

Nope.

BRENDAN

I think we ran into some of your friends from the soccer team? We walked down Main Street, stopped at the softball field on Park Ave to hang out for a bit, then walked home. When we got back, the house was quiet. Mom and Dad were already upstairs. None of this is ringing a bell?

AIMEE

Um... we did stuff like that all the time.

BRENDAN

Sure, but I feel like you should remember a huge party happening at our house.

ELIA

I'm sorry. I don't understand what's happening here. You said that your family didn't celebrate any birthdays and then your mom decides she's going to throw you this massive party all of a sudden? And Aimee clearly doesn't remember it. Which, okay, fine. That's weird, but... What does this have to do with why you left Aimee all alone? Can you just get to the point already?

AIMEE

El. It's okay.

BRENDAN

No, she's right. It sounds like I'm stalling. I promise. It's related. I'm trying to give you the whole story, and it's only going to get weirder from here.

So the next day, we were told the party would start at noon and end at 7:00. Then we'd go to dinner at some fancy restaurant that belonged to one of dad's clients.

Mom made us get dressed up. I had to wear this old dark brown suit of Dad's that didn't fit right. And you wore—

AIMEE

—A dress. Mom made me wear a dress, right? I don't know why, but I just remembered that part.

BRENDAN

Yes. But it was more like an evening gown. It was this deep brassy gold color that went to the floor.

ELIA

Oh...kay. You're right, this is getting weirder.

AIMEE

It had a... a high neck and full sleeves. Picturing it now kind of gives me a Flowers in the Attic vibe.

BRENDAN

It made you look old. Sorry. Old-fashioned, I mean. Mom did something weird with your hair, too.

AIMEE

Did she put it up?

BRENDAN

Yeah. It was styled like Judy Garland in the movie you always made me watch around Thanksgiving.

AIMEE

Meet Me in St. Louis. Huh.

DEVON

Did your family have parties like this any other time? I mean, Aimee's mentioned that your parents belonged to a country club. But were you used to going to formal events like that?

AIMEE

Sort of. But nothing like he's describing.

BRENDAN

Yeah, we went to holiday parties and stuff at Dad's golf club sometimes. But this was different. And please remember, we're all dressed up in suits and evening gowns and the party was in the middle of the day.

Guests started showing up and everyone else was dressed in formalwear, too. That's when I realized something was really off.

DEVON

Off? Yeah, I got to say, the idea of something being off has way, way left the station now, so...

BRENDAN

I know, but... My parents told me it was a birthday party for me. But none of my friends were there. No one from college, no one I was even really friends with. There were guys I played football with in high school, girls from my graduating class, but I didn't really know any of them.

And they were all there with their parents. Everyone else was from town. Like, people from our neighborhood, people mom knew from work. Dad's colleagues.

LUKE

Micah, your family wasn't invited?

MICAH

No. Aimee and I weren't really talking at that point.

ELIA

Wait. Luke, you don't know this story already? I thought you two have been traveling together?

LUKE

We have. But no I don't. Brendan refused to tell me much of anything.

[pause]

BRENDAN

I had no idea why any of those people would show up for any party at our house, let alone my birthday.

And the weirdest part was that as the day went on nobody talked to me. They mostly talked to my parents, and I even remember one guy saying "Congratulations" to my dad.

ELIA

Congratulations for what?

BRENDAN

Right before 7:00, Dad gets up and gives this toast. "To my son, the Perry name rests with you. Happy Birthday. Vitriol."

ELIA

What the fuck?

BRENDAN

All of the guests lifted their glass and toasted but didn't say anything.

DEVON

No one said, "Cheers," or "Happy Birthday"? Nothing?

BRENDAN

No. They toasted in silence. Sipped their drinks. And then began to file out. Within fifteen minutes, everyone was gone. Mom came over and told us to get ready to leave because we were heading out to dinner.

ELIA

I'm sorry, this cannot be real, but like... This sounds like the biggest line of bullshit I've ever heard.

DEVON

Yeah. Not going to lie. I'm definitely with Elia on this.

BRENDAN

Listen. I- I told you from the beginning, I know how this sounds, but it's 100% true.

[pause]

So we leave and Mom and Dad seem sort of like their normal selves. Dad didn't talk, and mom was rambling about how beautiful the party was and how incredible the restaurant was going to be, and... she said it was on this big, private estate.

MICAH

Do you remember where it was?

BRENDAN

Uh, I remember heading up 22, so... maybe Warren? Or somewhere over there.

MICAH

Ah, yeah. Super rich. Like, fuck-you money.

BRENDAN

Dinner was going fine, but... I don't know. I just got angry. I started asking Mom what the hell was going on. Why the whole day even happened, why none of my friends were invited.

And Dad lost it. He slammed his hand down on the table and told me to shut my mouth. He signaled to the server who came over really quickly and Dad whispered something to him. Then he stood up and said we were leaving. The drive home was completely silent.

[pause]

Once we got home dad went into his office and shut the door. Mom told us to change our clothes and have tea with her before she headed upstairs for the night.

[deep breath]

The next thing I know, a bag is pulled over my face and I'm dragged out of bed.

AIMEE

[strangled noise]

LUKE

What? What... What do you mean, "someone put a bag over your head"? Isn't that what happened to that guy you talked to in the...?

AIMEE

What the fuck, Brendan?

[pause]

BRENDAN

I slid off my bed and slammed onto the floor. My head hit the floorboards and frigging bounced.

It hurt a lot, but it didn't knock me out.

I heard movement around me, like shuffling. Then I felt hands on my ankles and someone grabbed my wrists and began to shove my arms into a coat or something. I didn't know what it was. Then they tied my hands together.

All I could do was yell.

I screamed for Mom and Dad.

I screamed for you, too, Aimee.

[pause]

Nobody came.

I tried to fight them off but when I went to swing at them, my arms were weak. It's like they were made of lead. Someone hooked their forearms under my armpits and dragged me out of the room. I felt another person lift my feet and then the two of them carried me down the stairs. I think that's when I passed out.

When I woke, I was sitting upright in this high-backed chair. My hands weren't bound anymore, but I still couldn't make myself stand up. There was a buzzing in the room. Voices coming from all around me. That's when I heard it.

DEVON

Heard what?

BRENDAN

Dad's voice.

AIMEE

No. No. You're fucking making this up. I can't believe you. I can't believe you would do this, that you'd come up with this fucked up story.

MICAH

Aimee. Just... Come... Aimee, come here.

AIMEE

You're fucking lying.

MICAH

Aimee.

BRENDAN

Aimee. I'm not. Please. Listen to me. There's more. I'm not lying.

MICAH

Brendan. Stop.

BRENDAN

Micah, she has to hear this. And so do you. Please.

DEVON

Enough! That's enough. This is too much. We all need a minute. Just give us a fucking minute.

[SCENE TRANSITION]

BRENDAN

I need to tell you the rest.

ELIA

Can you please...? Like, tell me that you can see she's a fucking mess right now. Like, you see this, right?

BRENDAN

Yes, Elia. I can. But that doesn't change the fact that she needs to hear this. And you do too, Micah. I was trying to tell you before. This has everything to do with you, too.

MICAH

Uh... You know, um... I'm a little at a loss. I don't see how any of it has anything to do with me. And jury's out on whether or not I believe you anyway.

BRENDAN

Why would I make it up?

ELIA

Uh, to make yourself feel better about being a shitty brother?

BRENDAN

So you think this is making me feel better? Seriously?

[pause]

LUKE

Why didn't you tell me about this? You had so many opportunities. And what about after you met up with Keith? That would have been the clearest signal that you could have opened up about it. It's basically the same story.

DEVON

Wait a second. Who's Keith?

BRENDAN

No, it isn't. That dude decided to scare himself by walking in the woods in the middle of the night.

Yeah, sure. What he said sounds a bit like what I just told everyone, but I'm saying my fucking father was there. My parents knew. I would like to think that's a bit different.

DEVON

Again, who is Keith?

LUKE

We stopped in Devil's Kettle, Minnesota because Brendan said it was on his list.

ELIA

Wait, what list?

LUKE

When we were traveling I signed up for a Duluth ghost meetup group and started posting in a forum. Most of the time Brendan and I—

BRENDAN

Time out. We're getting ahead of ourselves, here.

DEVON

Are we? Sounds like you're holding back a lot of information.

BRENDAN

Am I? Or have I just been trying to tell you all my story, and you keep interrupting?

[pause]

DEVON

Fine. Go ahead.

BRENDAN

Aimee. I swear to you, Dad was in the room. When I started to come to, I realized the bag was still over my head. I heard a few other voices, but I only recognized Dad's. Someone removed the bag. And I could see that I was tied to the chair.

AIMEE

Brendan...

BRENDAN

Aimee. Please.

Dad and two other people are standing in front of me in robes. They were black and hooded. I tried to get my bearings, but we were in a windowless room. A basement or something, maybe. It was cold and damp and there were candles on the wall, but only enough to make the room dimly lit. I couldn't see any exits.

From what I could see, the only furniture was the chair I was sitting in and a small podium acting like an altar. One of the robed figures was behind it and looking at me. Everyone but Dad was wearing a mask.

MICAH

What did you just say?

BRENDAN

Please let me get through this.

[long breath]

I was still groggy from hitting my head. And Dad started speaking to me but I couldn't understand what he was saying. Then he walked over the chair and untied me. I tried to get up but I still couldn't move. I looked up and tried to yell, but nothing came out. It was like when you wake up during a nightmare and you're going to scream and you try and try but you can't. And Dad just looked at me, blank expression on his face.

Then the ceremony started.

DEVON

Ceremony?

BRENDAN

The Seething. That's what they called it.

AIMEE

Who?

BRENDAN

The Seething was an initiation. At first it was just the two people and Dad, but then I heard a door open from somewhere behind the podium and the room began to fill in. Dozens of people in hooded robes came to stand behind Dad. And one of them then stood next to Dad, just slightly behind him.

When they removed their hood, I saw Mom. She looked like a stranger, Aimee. Her expression was cold, colder than I had ever seen it. And she just stared at me.

AIMEE

This can't be real.

BRENDAN

It is.

The leader then pulled a massive book from inside the podium. He flipped to a page and read out Mom and Dad's names, along with many family names going back decades. Then they recited something to me in Latin and made me repeat it.

He said the words, "morte," "sanguine." I remember them because I'd heard them before. It means death and blood. But I didn't understand the rest.

They poured this muddy liquid into a glass and made me an offer. I was promised the world. Anything I could want, my wildest dreams. Success, fortune... The sole condition is that when you are called upon, you answer. If you refuse, there would be grave consequences.

DEVON

Well, what... What could they ask you for?

BRENDAN

Anything. They made that very clear.

AIMEE

Mom and Dad are involved in this? How could I not know?

BRENDAN

I didn't know either. Not until that night. The person standing at the podium told me to decide.

AIMEE

What did you do?

BRENDAN

What could I do? I was terrified, Aimee. I was terrified that Dad was right there, staring daggers at me. And Mom, the way she looked... I didn't know what to do. I said, "Yes."

I... It came out more raspy, like a whisper. But I still managed to say it.

I thought that maybe if I agreed, I could just get out of there. I'd talk to them later. But when I said "yes", they dumped the liquid onto the floor and then someone came out from behind my chair and grabbed my right arm. They lifted it and tied my hand to the back of the chair.

Another robed figure sat down next to me, and told me to hold still. They wore masks with this strange symbol on it, and it obscured most of their face. I could see their eyes, though.

MICAH

[inhales sharply]

BRENDAN

I realized they were holding a tattoo needle. I heard it click and then they started working. I tried to move, tried to yell for Dad again. My body was still locked in place, and Dad just told me to relax. That it wouldn't take long. He said he was proud of me.

So I just sat there. When they were done, all those chanted some short phrase three times. Then they silently walked out of the room. Mom and Dad walked over to me.

Aimee, they looked so happy. They said we'd talk more about everything soon, but for now my work was done. Mom handed me this small gold cup and told me to drink. I didn't know what else to do, so I listened.

I woke up the next morning in my own bed.

[pause]

At first I thought it was the world's most vivid nightmare, coupled with this... a horrible hangover. I was so out of it, and my body just felt strange. But then I felt the stinging pain under my arm. I jumped out of bed, nearly falling over in the process just raced straight to the mirror.

There it was. The tattoo.

DEVON

Of what?

BRENDAN

It was a short phrase, written in a language I couldn't read so I didn't even know what it meant.

ELIA

But you must know now, right? Like, your parents told you?

BRENDAN

No. They didn't. They said they would in time. They forbade me to look it up.

ELIA

You really never Googled it?

BRENDAN

Of course I fucking Googled it.

MICAH

What does it say?

BRENDAN

Da vita tua. De spiritus et sanguinem. Vide aurum. Ad Terram. Occidere quid manet. I'm probably butchering the pronunciation.

MICAH

What does it mean, though?

BRENDAN

It's Latin. From what I could find, it loosely translates to, "Give your life. Of spirit and blood. See gold. Return to Earth. Kill what remains."

MICAH

What the fuck-

LUKE

Why does that sound so familiar?

DEVON

You recognize that phrase?

LUKE

I don't know. Maybe. I feel like I've heard something like that before, but... it's not coming to me.

AIMEE

Show it to me.

BRENDAN

What?

AIMEE

I said show it to me. The tattoo.

BRENDAN

Really? Right here?

AIMEE

Yes. You said it was under your arm, not on your ass. Show us. Now! Otherwise, there's no way I'm believing any of this.

BRENDAN

All right.

[SOUND OF SWEATER COMING OFF]

BRENDAN

There.

[pause]

DEVON

I don't know what to say.

ELIA

For once, neither do I.

BRENDAN

I'm going to put my shirt back on now.

LUKE

I still don't understand why you didn't tell me about this. I thought we were working together. I mean, I knew it was awkward at first, but I really thought you could trust me.

ELIA

[pointed sigh]

LUKE

Not now, Elia. Please. You could have told me, Brendan.

BRENDAN

I've never told anyone, ever. But I need to say, there was one moment that I thought you knew more than you were letting on.

LUKE

What? How?

BRENDAN

When we heard the end of the podcast episode, and you were adamant about coming back here? And I wasn't so sure? I thought you knew.

LUKE

Why then?

BRENDAN

Because Micah said she remembered people wearing masks. As soon as she said that, you bugged out. You said it was time. That we had to come back now. I figured it was because of the masks.

MICAH

Yeah. About the fucking masks.

LUKE

No. Definitely not. It was because of how she sounded. She was in the dark for so long, and that's a hell of a thing to remember. We'd been on the road for so long and I was tired of staying away, it seemed like the right time.

AIMEE

You didn't want to come back?

LUKE

No, that's not what I meant.

AIMEE

You just said that you weren't sure about coming back, and that Luke was the one pushing for it. So what does it mean, then?

LUKE

He wanted to wait until we had more information. We had a bit, but he thought we could get more. We were heading to the Pine Barrens—

AIMEE

—No. Brendan, it sounds like you didn't—

BRENDAN

—Aimee. I did. I was scared, too. I'm not going to lie to you. Coming back means more than just owning up to ghosting you. It meant putting everything I'm telling you now out there, too. Maybe acting on it. It's a lot. But please, don't think it was because I was happier staying away.

AIMEE

What happened after you woke up? Why didn't you come tell me?

BRENDAN

When I came downstairs, you were already gone. You went to hang out with some friends. I guess it was sort of late in the day. Mom was waiting for me in the kitchen, and she was beaming. She made this big breakfast. I tried to ask her questions, but she would just brush me off and told me that Dad would explain.

Little while later, Dad called me into his office and shut and locked the door behind me.

He explained that I was now part of something special. That my life would be whatever I made of it. It wasn't just about being rich or famous. It was deeper than that. It meant that I could do almost anything, go anywhere. He said I'd already felt the benefits of our family's legacy and devotion to the organization. That's what he called it.

AIMEE

How? What did he mean?

BRENDAN

My scholarship, for one. He wouldn't tell me anything beyond that. He said, "All would unfold in time." I guess that's their custom.

ELIA

Their custom?

BRENDAN

Yeah, when you're initiated you're only given pieces to the puzzle over a long period of time. You're not told much of anything. You just begin to benefit. He said things would just "happen" for me. If I wanted it, I'd have it.

So I asked the obvious question. If we had access to this kind of power or wealth, why did we live in Somerville? Why not New York? Or some other big city? Why do we live in a suburb with a regular house?

ELIA

Uh... yeah. That was about to be my next question.

BRENDAN

He said that having wealth doesn't always translate to displaying wealth. And some things were best kept quiet. And then he said that things weren't always as they seemed. I kept asking questions. I asked about the ceremony. That fucking tattoo. I asked if it was just some secret society, why did joining have to be so goddamn terrifying. He said it was ritual and not to question it. The old ways are just that: old.

I tried to ask what kind of favors would I have to do. Who else was involved in this... organization? But no matter what I asked, he refused to answer. He said, "All in time." For now I was to continue school as planned and speak of this to no one.

AIMEE

Not even me?

BRENDAN

Especially not you. I asked if you knew about this, and he went rigid. I was never to tell you. You would be told when "it was appropriate." I asked when that would be and he just started screaming at me to leave his office. And that was it.

And that was enough for me. I was so freaked out, I ran upstairs, got some stuff and went back to school. Do you remember me not being there when you got back?

AIMEE

No. Just the little bit I mentioned earlier. And even that is fuzzy.

BRENDAN

So a couple weeks after that I'd almost convinced myself that I would be able to forget it. Uh, but then just before Thanksgiving Dad called and said there was going to be another initiation on December 24th.

After our family Christmas Eve dinner, I would show up at an address. I'd be blindfolded and brought to another location. There, I would get dressed and perform my role in The Seething. He told me I was the person responsible for keeping the initiate still during his tattoo.

ELIA

[to herself]

Absolutely not.

BRENDAN

Everything that happened that night just came flooding back, and this time I couldn't let it go. I felt that fear, the confusion. There was no way I was going to help them do that to someone else, but I didn't know what to do.

AIMEE

The fight was right before Christmas.

BRENDAN

Yeah. We were having dinner and I was terrified. I knew what I was supposed to do, but I couldn't.

AIMEE

You said you were done with school, football, everything. You said you were done with all of it.

BRENDAN

I did.

AIMEE

They sent me upstairs, but I could hear Dad yelling.

BRENDAN

At first they tried to plead with me to get me to change my mind. They were still outraged but it was more out of shock, I think.

Mom kept saying, "Do you know what this means?" And honestly, I didn't. And I didn't care either.

AIMEE

I heard her say that. I snuck out of my room to the stairs to listen.

BRENDAN

I remember.

When that didn't work, Dad became someone I'd never seen before. He always had a temper. But this was something else. He screamed at me but I didn't respond. I just sat there. And then he did something that still makes me shiver when I think about it...

[pause]

All of a sudden he went completely calm. He looked at Mom and said, "It's in the office." She just stood up and went in there. Like she was in some kind of trance. Something about that rang alarm bells through my head. I bolted.

AIMEE

You ran out the front door and you looked at me with this expression. I didn't understand. But I saw you in your room late that night... You were packing a bag. You told me to go back to bed.

[pause]

That's the night you left.

BRENDAN

Yeah. It is.

AIMEE

Why?

BRENDAN

What? Why did I leave? Did you hear everything I just said?

AIMEE

No. Why don't I remember any of this? The party? Dinner at that restaurant? Having tea with Mom? You not being home the next day? Why don't I remember it?

BRENDAN

I think they made you forget.

[SCENE TRANSITION]

[OUTRO MUSIC]

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