

Season 3: Episode 12

"Stories from Before, Part 3"

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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, 2020.

[SCENE TRANSITION]

[DOOR OPENS]

[DOOR CLOSES]

DEVON

Hey. Sorry about that. I'm good to go.

MICAH

How's little... uh... Cat Calloway settling in?

DEVON

[chuckles]

He's good. I, uh... I think Mulder and him are going to have to have an introduction soon.

MICAH

Aw. Mulder will be so happy to have a little friend. He kind of loves everybody.

[awkward silence]

BRENDAN

So, are we going to talk about what I said?

AIMEE

Yeah. We actually already talked about it for a little bit, um, while we were out.

BRENDAN

Oh?

AIMEE

I'm really having a hard time coming to terms with it, but, um... I don't think you're lying.

BRENDAN

I'm not. Obviously, I can't prove it. But I can't think of how all that could have happened unless you weren't... you know. I mean, our house had-

AIMEE

Thin walls.

BRENDAN

Yeah.

AIMEE

Yeah. Micah brought that up. She mentioned how she and I used to cover for you when you snuck out.

BRENDAN

I forgot you did that. Saved me from catching hell from Mom and Dad so many times.

AIMEE

Yeah.

BRENDAN

I also think that you being out of the house in the morning was part of it. I don't think they wanted me to see you at all until they could talk to me.

AIMEE

So, what are we supposed to do now? I mean, really.

BRENDAN

I'm still working that out. I only thought as far as getting here and seeing you. Talking about all this has me feeling... more than a little unsteady.

AIMEE

Is there more that I should know?

BRENDAN

Yes, but-

LUKE

I have something to say. Well. A lot of things. There's a lot I need to explain.

ELIA

[scoffs]

Yeah. No fucking shit.

LUKE

Can we not?

DEVON

Hey. We're not going to. Right, Elia? We're all going to be cool and listen to what everyone has to say?

ELIA

I'm just saying he's got a lot to own up to, you know? He's probably been, um, lying to us- Well, he's been lying to us. Probably been stalking us. Who knows what other shady shit he's been--

DEVON

Stop. Please. Just. Stop. It's not helping anything to keep repeating half the story when the person who can fill us in is right here.

MICAH

El, Devon's right. You know. We do- We need to take a beat. I get that there's a ton to be pissed off about, but... I mean, right now we have more questions than answers.

ELIA

Fine. I won't say shit.

LUKE

So. Um.

[clears throat]

The first thing I need to do is apologize to everyone here. Some of what I have to tell you is going to make me look pretty bad, and I take full responsibility for it. Just know that I truly never intended to, nor would I do, anything to hurt anyone here on purpose.

[silence]

Before I talk about everything related to now, I think I might just need to tell you more about who I am. Elia, Devon. You don't know anything about me. And even then, these three don't know all that much.

ELIA

Right. Yeah. Who's fault is that?

AIMEE

El.

ELIA

Sorry.

LUKE

Brendan, Devon. You know from the conversation we just had. I can catch the three of you up. Um, we talked about how we grew up a little bit. About Brendan playing football, how awesome you are at soccer, Aimee. Mostly we just chatted about basic things. One thing I said about myself is that things were a little rough for me, growing up.

MICAH

I feel like you might have mentioned that your home life wasn't always the greatest, but, you know, you never really went into detail and I didn't want to press you on it.

LUKE

Yeah. Um. Aimee, you met my parents. But just the one time.

MICAH

Didn't the two of you date for almost a year? How could you have only seen them one time?

LUKE

Um...

AIMEE

I guess I never really thought about that until now. They were just never around when we hung out. Um... I did meet them in

passing that one time. We were going to hang out at your house, but when we got there, your mom and dad were home. You introduced me, but then said you were just running in for something and we went to the park. I guess I just never questioned it.

LUKE

Well... I sort of made it that way so you wouldn't.

AIMEE

Why?

LUKE

When I said things weren't good at home, it was more than that. They were awful. And I didn't want anyone to know.

Aw, man. I don't really know where to start. I'm sorry. I'm sure it probably sounds like I'm stalling. Um...

So. I have a sister. Aimee, you never met her.

AIMEE

I didn't even know you had a sister.

LUKE

Well, yeah. She didn't live with us full time.

AIMEE

But I don't even remember seeing pictures of anyone but you at your house. I mean, my memory's not perfect but I think I'd have noticed if there were other-

LUKE

There weren't any. So. You're remembering correctly. My mom had a kid before she met my dad. Her name is Francesca, but I called her Frankie. She's about two years older.

BRENDAN

So she's my age?

LUKE

Yeah. Would have been pretty close.

BRENDAN

Would have?

LUKE

Things... were fine, I guess. In the beginning. My mom told me much later that my dad used to be a great guy and that they really loved each other. But he didn't like that she was still connected to her ex. They had joint custody of my sister, so Frankie would come stay with us sometimes, but spent most of the time at her dad's.

Right before her senior year, her dad had to move out of state and Frankie didn't want to go with him. So my mom had her move in with us to finish out high school. But things were already starting to fall apart by then. My mom and dad were fighting all the time, and pretty much over everything. But when Frankie moved in... I don't know. It just exploded.

Being at home was pretty shitty for both of us. So I spent a lot of time at Tim's. And Frankie? Well, she worked a part time job and spent as little time in the house as possible. I didn't really blame her.

AIMEE

How many times did I come over? How could I have been there and not noticed that someone else lived there?

LUKE

Well, technically the few times you were at my house, she didn't officially live there. She moved in later on, and we had already broken up by then. Anyway, all this is to say... is that shit was bad at home, and I got pretty good at keeping that hidden from everyone.

I spent so much time at Mark's anyway, so it wasn't really that hard. When we were talking earlier, I told Brendan and Devon that Tim and I played on the same baseball teams for a long time. We got to be really good friends after a while. And his parents treated me like a member of the family most of the time. And that sort of took the edge off, you know?

AIMEE

Can we talk about Halloween?

LUKE

Yes. That's what I'm getting to. Sorry I'm all over the place, but it- it all connects. So you all know what happened to me that night.

ELIA

Uh... We know what you told Micah. Is that the truth?

LUKE

Yes. It is.

ELIA

Okay, but... Aimee said-

AIMEE

El.

ELIA

[sighs]

AIMEE

Luke, what you told Micah wasn't accurate. You said that we left you there for three hours and that your friends confirmed that. But that's not true. We were still out in the fields. No one would have left you by yourself in the woods completely. And we weren't even that far away from where you fell asleep.

LUKE

Maybe I misunderstood Tim, then. Because he said y'all left me. Listen. This is how it went for me.

I woke up still drunk and I didn't see anyone around. I couldn't ride my bike, so I started stumbling down the road with it. I thought I heard voices calling my name from far away, and I saw a light in the trees so I walked toward it. But-

AIMEE

Yeah. That was probably us looking for you. We thought we saw you walking in the trees so we were trying to get your attention. The group of us went back toward the graveyard and you weren't there. That's when we started yelling for you.

LUKE

But I had been walking for at least five or ten minutes. You couldn't have seen me if I was that far away. It was pitch black out there.

AIMEE

[sighs]

I'm telling you, we saw you running with your flashlight through the trees and we tried to follow you.

LUKE

Aimee. I'm telling you that you're wrong. I didn't run through the trees. I was on the road. I had my bike, remember? I only walked into the woods a little bit once I heard my name and saw that light.

AIMEE

Okay. I don't fucking get why you're fighting me on this. We saw your flashlight. I mean, maybe your memory of that night isn't as crystal clear as you think it is. It was over 20 years ago, and you were drunk.

LUKE

I didn't have a fucking flashlight. That's what I'm telling you. I was drunk. I was walking my bike on the side of River Road in the fucking dark. Also, it was over 20 years ago, and you were drunk. Maybe it's you who don't remember.

AIMEE

Actually, I wasn't. I didn't drink at all and I was pissed at you for getting wasted because it was fucking stupid. That's why I didn't stay with you when Tim and the rest of your friends wanted to check out the field.

[pause]

LUKE

Doesn't matter. I know what I saw.

AIMEE

Okay. And I'm saying that it probably wasn't—

DEVON

Hey. So.

[clears throat]

I'm going to float something out here. Is it possible that you weren't seeing each other? And that someone else was out there watching everyone? And the flashlight that you both saw belonged to that person?

Aimee. You said you saw someone running through the trees with the light. And Luke said he didn't have one and wasn't in the woods at all. Luke said he heard someone call his name. And, sure, maybe that was you and his friends. But the light he saw, that might have been someone else.

Luke, you said someone spoke to you, right? Someone was there when you turned around. They said something to you.

LUKE

Yeah. They said, "I see you." I- I guess I didn't...

AIMEE

Yeah. I just figured that part was your imagination. But...

MICAH

[quietly]

Where on River Road is the graveyard?

DEVON

Wait. What was that, Micah?

MICAH

Where on River Road is the graveyard?

LUKE

What- What do you mean? Like the address?

MICAH

I... I guess. Yeah.

LUKE

Oh. I have no idea. We just kind of knew where it was by memory. Why?

DEVON

Aimee. Do you have the notes you took on Nolan's case file with you?

AIMEE

Um, yeah I do, actually. Hold on.

[CASE UNZIPS]

AIMEE

The first page has a sort of table of contents. Um... It should tell you what page some of the important stuff is on. What are you looking for?

MICAH

He's looking for the exact location of my dad's accident.

LUKE

Oh, fuck.

ELIA

I mean. It's the same road, which... Yeah, it's coincidental and it's creepy enough. But I- I just-

DEVON

Found it. You have down there that, uh... the accident was on River Road. 208 River Road, or County Road 625.

AIMEE

Yeah. They're the same thing. There are houses on River Road, too, so they have addresses. Um, based on the details of the report, I narrowed it down to the 208 River Road area.

DEVON

Micah, can you grab your laptop?

ELIA

Uh- no- I'll- I'll get it. Micah, you sit.

MICAH

Okay.

[FOOTSTEPS AWAY]

[DOOR OPENS]

BRENDAN

Luke, you're really quiet. You all right?

LUKE

Yeah, I'm... I think... Uh, I think I know where this is going. And I don't like it.

[TYPING ON LAPTOP]

DEVON

Okay, so I pulled up Google maps and they have a street view option for River Road. I put in the address from Nolan's accident. Looking at Aimee's drawing of the diagram that was in the accident report... Jesus. Aimee, these notes are really thorough.

AIMEE

Well, I didn't want to carry around a ton of loose paper with me everywhere. And I didn't want to not have all the information at hand, so...

LUKE

What does it say, Devon?

DEVON

Nolan's accident is right here. Look at the diagram. The notes also say he struck the tree on the north side of the road. So that would mean it's right about here. If I pull back out of the street view and look at the general map... Look. Look what's there.

AIMEE

That- That's the graveyard we were at. I can't believe I didn't think about that.

ELIA

Seriously?

AIMEE

It wasn't well kept back then. All the gravestones were overgrown. I guess it's part of the farm that owns most of the land there now.

DEVON

The graveyard is less than 100 feet from where Nolan-

ELIA

Uh. Fuck- Fucking how?

DEVON

How, what?

ELIA

How is this all happening? I- I don't fucking understand. What... What does Luke's drunken scare in the dark have to do with-

LUKE

I'm not finished.

ELIA

With what?

LUKE

With... the story.

DEVON

Go on, then.

LUKE

I said to Micah that I blew it off after talking to Tim. And I did, sort of. But... Strange things started to happen. Micah, I'm sorry for not telling you this. I'll explain why I didn't in a bit.

BRENDAN

Strange things, like what?

LUKE

At first it was little things. Stuff that didn't mean much or anything at the time. Like, my bike got stolen. And then reappeared, locked up at the school a few days later. Then someone smashed our mailbox. It happened near a big football game with our rival team, so I kind of just chalked it up to high school kids doing stupid shit. But there was other stuff, too.

My mom worked at this bank in Somerville for basically, her whole life. Everyone loved her there. She had a great relationship with her boss and her co-workers. But then out of the blue, her boss fired her. He accused her of stealing. They didn't press charges, though. They just said she was done there. She tried to look for another job, but it took forever for her to find one. Whenever she had an interview, something would always come up. One time she found that all her tires were slashed overnight. Another time, the job called and canceled the interview the day before it was supposed to happen, saying they hired someone else for the position. It was one thing after another. She would get jobs and lose them right after. It made the tension in my house all the worse.

My parents weren't just fighting about their own issues. It was about money, too. Then Frankie moved in with us in August right before my sophomore year and her senior year.

AIMEE

So that's why I never met her.

LUKE

Yeah, like I said. We broke up before that.

AIMEE

Right. Yeah. That summer.

LUKE

So finally, my mom found a job. But my dad hated having Frankie around. My mom's new job had long hours and a pretty shitty commute, so... And she made a lot less money. She didn't make that much to begin with, and making ends meet was difficult. When she was home, she was always exhausted and wanted to hang out with me and Frankie. And my dad just..

My mom couldn't take it anymore, so they separated. And I had to pitch in. Frankie did, too. That's when I quit playing sports, so I could take the after school job and help my mom out with bills.

DEVON

Right. Right. You said that earlier. So how do you think this is connected?

LUKE

One morning I came home from having stayed over at Tim's and Frankie knocked on my door. She told me that the night before she was home alone and she walked by my room. And she saw a man looking in my window. Like, clear as day. Scared the shit out of her. She called the cops, but by the time they got there no one was around. Then a month later, she started getting these weird notes in the mail.

BRENDAN

Notes? What kind of notes?

LUKE

Technically, they didn't come in the mail. They were just left in our mailbox. She said some of them commented on the way she looked. They said she was really pretty. They commented how cute she was because she was short. They kept coming all the way through the fall and even through Christmas. She got one at least every other week. Sometimes more.

But they also warned her not to say anything about seeing him in the window because they could find her easily.

DEVON

Did she ever describe the person she saw in your window?

LUKE

No.

DEVON

Do you think they meant to look in her window instead of yours? Like, maybe he was stalking her and made a mistake?

LUKE

Her room was on the other side of the house, but... maybe? Yeah?

ELIA

Let me guess. She took the notes to the cops but they told her there was just nothing they could do, right?

LUKE

Yeah. She did. They didn't do anything.

BRENDAN

Fucking figures.

LUKE

It wasn't just that, though. Frankie started to... I don't know. She had trouble sleeping. But when she did, she had nightmares. When she was awake she'd see things.

MICAH

Nightmares? Really?

LUKE

She told us she saw a man standing over her bed. Sometimes she'd wake up with scratches on her arms and back and not know where she got them from. She said she heard voices in strange languages at night. But when she went downstairs to see who it was, they stopped.

It got really bad for a while. She was exhausted all the time from all the lost sleep. We took her to a doctor, and they said it was sleep deprivation. And... like, yeah. No shit, you know? My mom really wanted her to see someone about it. But Frankie refused. It was like she was too scared to talk about it, so she just held it in all the time.

My mom tried one more time to get her to see a psychiatrist or a therapist, and Frankie lost it. Started screaming about how she couldn't tell anyone, it was just too dangerous. I told my mom just to leave her alone. So my mom stopped asking after that. She kept a close eye on her, but she didn't want to push it anymore.

AIMEE

So what happened?

LUKE

My mom and I tried to be there for her as much as we could. Mom would bring her food, you know, when Frankie wouldn't come out of her room. Help her get in the shower when she hadn't taken one in a few days. My mom was careful about what to tell the school. I don't remember how she explained her prolonged absence, but she managed to cover it pretty well. I'd bring her homework home for her, and bring her her books and rent movies, you know. Stuff I thought she'd like.

MICAH

How long did that go on for?

LUKE

A couple months. And then, sometime in January she started to come out of it. It was like she was able to take care of herself again.

AIMEE

What changed?

LUKE

We're not sure. One morning she just came out of her bedroom, she said she was feeling a little better. About a week later she went back to school. She even started hanging around with friends again. Mostly at our place, at first. But she'd go over other people's houses, too. Almost everything improved. Her mood, her energy. She started sleeping through the night. We were relieved.

But... Honestly? She was never her old self again. She seemed distracted, spacey. Just, like, super jumpy at times. And that wasn't her at all. Frankie was sharp. She talked fast, laughed loud. She had one of those big personalities. And not in that shitty way people say, you know, to make them feel badly about themselves. She was just great. That was the best thing about her. I looked up to her because I was always more on the quiet side, and, you know, a bit awkward.

You kind of remind me of her sometimes.

AIMEE

Who?

LUKE

Elia.

MICAH

Luke, are you okay?

LUKE

Yeah. Uh...

MICAH

Did something happen to her?

LUKE

The notes stopped in January, the same time when she started to get better. And then in February, she went missing.

MICAH

She what?

LUKE

Frankie had some friends who lived near a lake a few towns over. That February the lake was completely frozen over. They went to hang out there one Saturday night. You know, do some skating and stuff. According to her friends, once it got too dark to see that well and too cold to stay, they went to head out. Frankie told them that... To wait up a little bit because she needed to use the bathroom and she wasn't able to hold it until her friend's house. She said she was going to go in the woods a little... little ways away and right on the edge of the lake. So they waited. But she didn't come back.

Enough time passed that her friends started to worry so they followed her path, but she was just gone. One of them ran back to the house and their parents called 911. People started searching everywhere. Someone found her jacket a bit further away from where she said she was going to go, right next to this huge hole in the ice. They searched around the area for as long as they could, but... you know. There wasn't much they could do because the lake was frozen over. They did send divers in after the thaw, but they never found anything. And eventually, she was presumed dead.

[pause]

They opened an investigation and everyone there was questioned. They questioned my mom and me, too. That's when things got really ugly. Frankie's dad was devastated and furious. My mom was a mess. But because of the way my dad acted leading up to the whole... thing, he was a suspect.

ELIA

Oh, my God.

AIMEE

Was any of this on the news?

LUKE

Yeah. It was.

AIMEE

Because I think I remember hearing about someone going missing, but I didn't recognize the name.

LUKE

We didn't have the same last name. She was Francesca Reyes.

BRENDAN

So what happened to your dad?

LUKE

Eventually he was cleared of any suspicions. He had an alibi and there wasn't any real evidence found near the lake other than her jacket.

BRENDAN

Fuck, Luke. I thought you said you put everything out there? You said you told me everything. Clearly that wasn't true.

LUKE

Well, yeah... I mean, no. I didn't. But maybe I would have if you weren't so evasive. I tried to get you to open up, but you always shut me out. I was honest about Mark, though.

MICAH

How... What about me? Why didn't you ever tell me about her? You know, you- you lost someone so close to you, you- you know that I would understand. I- I told you so much about my dad.

ELIA

You did?

DEVON

Elia. Maybe this isn't the time.

LUKE

I wanted to. I really did. But he made me promise not to tell anyone anything.

DEVON

And who made you promise? Mark?

LUKE

Yeah.

BRENDAN

That son of a bitch.

LUKE

There's a little bit more before I get to the part about Mark.

AIMEE
Go on.

LUKE
We had a funeral. It was awkward and uncomfortable. There were some people from my neighborhood that didn't know our family that showed up. And not because they wanted to pay respects. They sort of treated us like this sideshow. You know, everyone wanted to look at the Tragic Dysfunctional Family. You know. It made high school so awkward. So I just kept to myself. I went to school. Worked. Hung out with Tim. And counted the days until graduation. But my mom kind of became a little obsessed with making sure I had all the proper high school experiences. She wanted me to try to get back on the baseball team, but I didn't want to. So she made me-

AIMEE
Go to Prom. She made you go to Prom.

LUKE
Yeah. Anyway. Through all that, Tim stuck by me. I don't know what I would have done if he wasn't around, or if I didn't have some place other than my own house to go. My mom's grief was just so massive, there wasn't room for my own. I had to figure out how to deal with it somewhere... you know, somewhere else. Somewhere where she couldn't see. Because she needed me.

Things got really tough, I could go hide out at the Schrades. If Mark wasn't working, he'd take Tim and I out places. To the movies, the batting cages. Just places where we could be kids and have fun. It helped a lot. Sometimes I even forgot everything for a little while.

ELIA
Okay. I think I understand now.

AIMEE
What? What do you mean?

ELIA

I uh... I- I understand why you're telling... telling us all this, um, before you tell us about Mark.

LUKE

You do?

ELIA

Yeah. You want us to understand why you trusted him.

LUKE

Mmm. Yeah. Yes.

[SCENE TRANSITION]

[CHOPPING SOUNDS]

[COOKING SOUNDS]

AIMEE

That was kind, Elia, what you did.

ELIA

What? What'd I do?

AIMEE

You told Luke to take a break. He didn't look so great. I think he needed it more than he let on.

ELIA

I... I- I- I didn't do it for him, you know. I- I- I needed a break, too. That story was...

[sigh]

This has been the longest day ever. I- I- I can't believe it's not even 7pm. Like, I- I- I feel like I've been awake for a whole fucking week.

AIMEE

You didn't do it for him? If that's your story. I just want you to know that I think it was kind. Especially since it was for his benefit.

ELIA

I said I didn't...

AIMEE

Okay. Do you want some help?

ELIA

Uh. No. I- I got this. It- It's helping me relax. My brain is spinning.

AIMEE

Yeah. I think Micah's feeling it, too. She's knocked out.

ELIA

Yeah. Um. Where do you think the guys went?

AIMEE

Devon said he was going to take them around the neighborhood for a walk. But it's getting cold out. I'm betting they won't be out for too much longer.

ELIA

Yeah.

AIMEE

I didn't even ask. What are you making? Also, did Micah really have all that stuff in her fridge?

ELIA

[snickers]

No. She's almost as bad as you are. I went upstairs and raided Devon's and, uh... I don't know. I haven't decided yet. I'm... kind of winging it here. I figured onions and garlic are always a good place to start and... It... Yeah. I don't know. It'll come to me.

AIMEE

I'm impressed.

ELIA

I'm glad.

AIMEE

What are you thinking, though?

ELIA

About...What? Your brother? The secret society? His creepy tattoo? Luke's sister? You know, the possibility that someone else was in the woods with both you and Luke that night? And it was basically in the exact same spot as where Nolan crashed his truck, and later died. And also that Micah was there? Um... Whatever Luke hasn't told us about Mark yet? I don't... I... I don't know. About what, Aimee? Which part?

AIMEE

Uh... choose your own adventure?

ELIA

I guess I'm still processing.

AIMEE

Okay, but you must be thinking something.

ELIA

[sighs]

I'm thinking... I'm thinking about Luke.

AIMEE

Yeah? What about him?

ELIA

Honestly? My initial gut reaction is to say he's lying about all of this to garner sympathy. But...

AIMEE

But...

ELIA

But my less stubborn side is telling me to just admit that maybe... Maybe I was wrong about him, and now I feel like a dick.

AIMEE

Yeah. I get it. But try not to beat up on yourself too much. You did have perfectly good reasons to be suspicious, and you were just trying to protect your friends.

ELIA

Yeah, I know. But I should probably still apologize to him, right?

AIMEE

Oh, yeah. No. You definitely need to apologize. You were a dick.

ELIA and AIMEE

[laugh]

ELIA

Okay. I... don't know. It's just... It's so sad. The whole thing with his sister.

AIMEE

I know. I can't believe I never knew about her.

ELIA

It's so complicated, you know? The... The fact that he didn't grow up in the same house with her, and they had so little time to be close, and then they get this chance with her moving in with them, and it's just... I...

[sniffs]

AIMEE

Elia, are you okay?

ELIA

Yeah. Just. Onions, you know?

AIMEE

El.

ELIA

[sniffs]

Why did he have to say that?

AIMEE

Say what?

ELIA

About me, that I reminded him of her.

AIMEE

I don't think he meant anything by it-

ELIA

No. No. I don't either. I just... I don't... I don't know. I don't have the words for it. It just... it hit me. Hard.

AIMEE

Well, it probably made you think about you and your siblings, right? I know you said if anything had happened to any of them-

ELIA

No. No, it's... it's not that. It's not the same, you know. Frankie was older than him. He looked up to her. So... I mean, yeah. Obviously, if anything happened to any of my siblings, I'd be devastated. But what if... I... I guess it just never crossed my mind what they'd go through if anything happened to me.

[pause]

AIMEE

He was quiet when I knew him, too. He always seemed like he was holding so much in. But back then I sort of figured it was just his awkwardness. Now I know he really was. Holding things in, I mean.

ELIA

Yeah. A lot, it seems.

AIMEE

Him being so open with us like he was just now... It makes me wonder if he's feeling guilty or if it's more than that.

ELIA

That's a question for him.

AIMEE

Yeah.

[pause]

ELIA

How did you two meet anyway?

AIMEE

What?

ELIA

Well, you went to different schools and he was, from what I'm gathering, a pretty reserved kid, so... How did he snag the captain of the soccer team?

AIMEE

[chuckles]

Please.

ELIA

I'm just curious. Uh-huh?

AIMEE

Okay. Well, don't laugh.

ELIA

Okay, if that's how you're going to start the story, I'm not making any promises.

AIMEE

Okay, fine. Okay. But let me preface this story by saying, it was the '90s and it was New Jersey.

ELIA
Okay.

AIMEE
We met... at the Bridgewater Commons Mall Food Court.

ELIA
You're lying.

AIMEE
It was a thing back then. What else were we going to do? We'd all go to the mall after school or on the weekends and be mall rats.

ELIA and AIMEE
[chuckle]

AIMEE
We would hang out in front of the movie theater. Walk around looking for boys to talk to. Do a couple laps in the food court for free samples if we didn't have any money.

ELIA
And so... what? You both reached for the same piece of orange chicken on a toothpick? And it was love at first sight?

AIMEE and ELIA
[laugh]

AIMEE
Yeah. You know what? Sure. That's the story.

ELIA
No. No. No. Really, tell me. Tell me, I promise. I promise, no more jokes.

AIMEE
No. Um. Me and a couple girls from the team were just sitting at the food court. I don't know, we got milkshakes or something. And he was with some of his friends, too. Maybe from baseball?

Um. But not Tim. He wasn't there. Um. And his friend started making eyes at my friend, and we joined their table, and then... Yeah.

I was just talking to Luke by default at first, after everyone else paired off. But, um... I started to like him pretty quickly. Not to sound like a teenage rom-com, but he didn't act like he had anything to prove. You know how guys are at that age, especially when we were younger.

ELIA

Well. I mean. Yeah. I was... one of those... boys.

AIMEE

[laughs]

You know what? That does not surprise me. But okay. So then you definitely know. But, yeah. He was just chill and interesting and funny in his own way. Anyway, one of my friends had to be home for something early and we all left to walk her home. The rest of them were just having a little fun, but me and Luke really clicked. So I gave him my number and we started hanging out.

I was def not supposed to give my number to anyone, or to talk to boys, but...

ELIA

Man... Right, though? Like, the things we did as children just walking back and forth from home to the mall. No way of being contacted by our parents. Just gone for hours.

AIMEE

I know, right?

[FOOTSTEPS]

MICAH

[gruff, half-asleep]

Hey. What are you making?

AIMEE

Hey, sleepyhead. How you feeling?

MICAH

Overwhelmed.

ELIA

Yeah. Join the club.

MICAH

So. What are you making?

ELIA

Uh... meatloaf? I guess?

MICAH

Where did you get eggs? And breadcrumbs? And onions and meat? I don't have any of that stuff.

ELIA

Yeah. I know. Devon had them upstairs.

MICAH

Well. Right on. I could eat.

[DOOR OPENS]

[DOOR CLOSES]

AIMEE

Sounds like the guys are back.

ELIA

All right, I just need to get this on the pan. And then it's going to take, like, 45 minutes to cook, so I...

MICAH

I guess we'll see how long the rest of Luke's story takes.

[SCENE TRANSITION]

LUKE

The last thing I'll say about Frankie is that afterwards, things seemed to settle down, I guess. At least for a little while.

DEVON

Little while?

LUKE

A year after Frankie's funeral, I got a note in my mailbox. It said, "Happy anniversary." It didn't click right away but then—

ELIA

Oh, my God. They were... They were talking about her death.

LUKE

Yeah. I think so. No way to prove it, though.

AIMEE

Did anything happen after that?

LUKE

No. I'd just finished high school. Did the stuff my mom wanted me to do, and then kept working after graduation. It was quiet. Kept to myself. Tim went off to college, and I landed a job at a small startup in New York. I didn't last very long, but it set me up for what I'm doing now. And let me help my mom with money, so...

AIMEE

How's your mom now? Are things any better for her?

LUKE

Yeah... Actually. She ended up finding a different job closer to home and things got easier. I still cover some bills for her, though. Saving money for her retirement.

ELIA

Aw, fuck. I'm sorry.

LUKE
What?

ELIA
Goddammit. I'm sorry. I misjudged you and I've been such a dick to you this whole time. And you basically just stood there and took it. You don't really ever fight back, do you? I guess, except maybe that one time at the coffee shop. But I mean it sounded like a threat. It really did. And I don't know. Maybe I just heard you wrong-

LUKE
Uh... Uh. I definitely could have phrased it differently.

ELIA
N- n- n- no. It did... It doesn't matter. Uh. You didn't mean it that way. And- and I know that now. But, Jesus Christ. The story you're telling is so fucking heavy that I feel like such an asshole. And I'm sorry. Okay? I. Am. Sorry.

[pause]

ALL
[laugh]
Wow.

ELIA
What? What? Stop.

DEVON
No, no. This is good. We're all getting on the same page, you know. If we're going to get through this, hatchets will have to be buried.

BRENDAN
I suppose that's true.

AIMEE
I'm getting there.

LUKE

For what it's worth, I much prefer this way of burying a hatchet than what Elia was probably planning.

ELIA

Oh, come on. I mean, you're not wrong, though.

ALL

[chuckle]

AIMEE

I'm proud of you.

ELIA

Anyway, Luke, what were you saying?

LUKE

Yeah, so that brings us mostly up to date. I guess I need to get to the part where—

BRENDAN

Mark comes in.

LUKE

Yeah. Uh. Yeah. So...

ELIA

Take your time.

LUKE

So I said before that Tim and I stayed friends after he went to college. And we did. We definitely weren't as close because we didn't see each other as often, but we kept in touch through email and then eventually through text here and there.

Sometime around the end of 2017, maybe around Christmas time, I got a text from Tim asking if I was okay with him giving Mark my email. I remember being surprised because while I was friends with Tim, after high school I didn't keep up a relationship with Mark at all. But at the time I didn't see any harm in it, so I told Tim to go for it. Mark emailed me early the next year and said that he was hoping to reconnect since Tim mentioned I was still living in the area.

DEVON

Wait. Didn't you tell us...? Or, well... tell Micah that you'd been living in Providence for a few years?

LUKE

Yeah, I did. But that wasn't exactly...

AIMEE

You lied about living here?

ELIA

Just... Guys, give him a minute. I'm- I'm sure he'll get to it.

LUKE

But that wasn't true, and... Yeah. I'll... I'll explain.

At first Mark suggested a phone call, but when I told him I was living in East Brunswick he asked if we could meet for a coffee.

MICAH

Wait. I know you said you would get to this, but please tell me this one thing...

You did eventually move to Providence, right?

LUKE

(hedging)

Ehh... not exactly.

MICAH

You were "commuting" to Rhode Island from East Brunswick to hang out with me?

LUKE

I promise I'll tell you everything.

MICAH

Okay, okay. Sorry.

LUKE

I agreed to the coffee for no other reason than, well, it was Tim's dad... you know? We met up at some place in New Brunswick and it was fine for the most part. He asked about what I'd been up to since high school, if I went to college, what I did for work. Real basic stuff. Nothing he asked was particularly personal, but I remember thinking it felt a little... You know... Like a little interrogation. But I mostly attributed that to him being a cop. They have this sort of leading tone, or maybe it's the pace of it? I don't know. Anyway.

After a bit of that he mentioned that Tim had visited around Halloween that year, and brought his daughter to go trick-or-treating around the neighborhood.

AIMEE

Tim has a daughter?

MICAH

Oh, God.

LUKE

Yeah. Katie. She's probably almost ten now, but this was 2017.

MICAH

I feel like such an asshole.

LUKE

For what?

MICAH

For knocking on Mark's door, and the way Tim had to tell us that Mark died, and... Fuck.

LUKE

You didn't... You didn't know?

DEVON

Does that make it any better?

LUKE

I heard the episode when he called you. He didn't seem like he took it personally.

MICAH

No, I know. I... It's just an added layer of... I don't know. Um. Go on. Sorry.

LUKE

So Mark tells me that they set Katie up in the living room with her Halloween candy, and went out to the porch to have a beer. During the conversation, Tim starts laughing, decides to tell Mark about the Halloween that he swiped a bottle of booze and snuck out.

BRENDAN

The same night...

LUKE

Yep. So he recounts what Tim tells him, which was a version of, "we stole your Jim Beam, hung out in the graveyard, and then Luke got too drunk and scared himself half to death."

When he said that to me, I guess I flinched or something. I hadn't really given that night much thought in a long time, but the moment he brought it up, it came rushing back to me. That night, and everything after, and of course Mark being who he is...

DEVON

He noticed.

LUKE

Yeah. He started asking me questions about the night. I don't know. I just... didn't want to talk about it. So after a few minutes I made an excuse about having to go. I thought that was going to be the end of it. But a few days later, Mark calls me and apologizes for jumping up my ass about it. Said he still wants to talk a bit more. He said he thought what happened to me that night might tie to an old case of his that he was looking into on his own time. He hoped I could help.

I wasn't going to call him back. In fact, I didn't for a really long time. He left me a bunch of voice mails all saying the same thing for a few months. Then in August—

MICAH

When was this? Like, what year? Sorry, I'm just trying to keep this together in my head.

LUKE

August 2018.

MICAH

But that's before we even started the pod—

LUKE

I... I know. I really didn't want to dig all that stuff up again. But I couldn't stop thinking about Frankie, everything she went through. And I wondered if maybe he was telling the truth. What if I knew something that could help someone else? Wouldn't I want someone to help out if they knew anything that could give me answers about Frankie?

So I agreed to talk to him again. I'll spare you the minutiae, but the long and short of it was this: He called me and asked for my help again. And he had me walk through what I remembered from that night. And then he repeated that he was looking into an old case. He asked if I could help him by getting to know someone connected to it.

AIMEE

Getting to know...? What ...?

LUKE

That's how I reacted. It felt so fucked up, and I immediately told him no. I was shocked he even asked me to do something like that. I'm a fucking coder, not a private eye.

I refused, but he kept pressing. He said I could really help with the case and that I was important. I was arguing with him and saying there was no way I would... I would never do something like that. I didn't care if we had a history. And right as I was about to hang up, he blurted out a bunch of information. Kind of like he was making this last-ditch effort to just—

ELIA

To just what? Uh, make you like a fucking accomplice? Like, if you had this information, you were somehow locked in? I don't...

LUKE

Honestly? I don't know why he did it. I never asked. But it was what he said. I went fucking cold.

He said, "Her name is Micah Jones. She lives in Providence." And it isn't even... It didn't matter what he said after that. I don't remember what the follow-up information was. He said your name. And I heard myself agree to help.

MICAH

Why?

LUKE

Because I remember that day with Aimee and you. And you were so scared. I suddenly remembered what you said to me before Aimee came down the stairs. And I couldn't fucking believe I was on the phone with my friend's dad so many years later, and he just threw your name out into the air like that. It was like something clicked in my mind. I just... I couldn't say no.

ELIA

Hmm... Why not?

LUKE

I mean... I could have, technically. I wanted to, and almost did. He told me to sleep on it and that he'd call me in the morning.

MICAH

And?

LUKE

And... the more I thought about it, about my conversation with him, the more I realized that whatever he was looking for, he wasn't going to let it go. He was going to get the information he needed by any means necessary. And if I didn't help him, he'd find someone who would. Someone who maybe didn't even know Micah. Didn't give a shit about her or anyone. Someone ruthless, maybe dangerous. Who knows?

He tried to sound nonchalant about it all, but it's like he forgot that I knew him. That I'd spent years being around him. I could tell that there was more to it than he was leading on, you know? So I did it. I decided to trust him.

I know it's shitty, but I didn't want someone shittier than me doing it. Someone who maybe wouldn't have cared if Micah was safe. And I'm not saying that I should be thanked or anything like that. What I did was terrible. And it was a major violation of your privacy. Trust me, I know I could have approached it in so many different ways. I could have just told you. You know? Told you about Mark, that he was looking into you. Warned you. But he made me promise not to mention anything, and I don't know why, but... I listened.

Either way, I did what I did. And... yeah. It was dumb, but I was scared and I didn't know what else to do at the same time, so...

MICAH

So, how did you find me? Or... how did he find me?

LUKE

I didn't ask. He had a current photograph of you, your address. He knew where you worked, and your general schedule. First time I came to Providence, I actually just drove around and got the lay of the land. I wanted to get to know the city a bit. I wasn't sure what the fuck I was going to say to you, but I knew I would probably have to act like I had some familiarity with the area, or it would be even more suspicious.

It was my second or third time up here when I drove past your house and I saw the three of you leaving, so... Then I followed you.

MICAH

Salem. Was that when you ran into us in Salem?

LUKE

Yeah. I didn't actually expect to talk to you, but I was hoping to get a sense of what you were like. Now, as an adult.

I mean, we really hadn't seen each other for a long time, so I was going to hang back, but then Devon spotted me.

ELIA

Yeah, that's right. He did.

LUKE

Yeah. Again, I'm- I'm no spy. I didn't know what the fuck I was doing. So as soon as he clocked me I knew I just had to come over, so I just like... You know... went for it.

Elia, to be honest, I was terrified of you. It was like you knew I was full of shit or something. The way you asked, "So... Luke. What brings you to Salem?" Fuck, man. Just cut right through me.

ELIA

[laughs]

Yeah. Yeah. I remember that. Um. You said you were visiting buddies or something.

LUKE

Yeah. That was...

ELIA

That was bullshit, right? Yeah.

LUKE

Yeah.

After we exchanged numbers I tried just to, you know, be your friend. I didn't really report back to Mark. The more I got to know you, the way you talked about your dad, I couldn't do it. Then everything just happened so quick. One thing after another. We went on a hike. Then we ran into Devon and Elia at the coffee shop. Had that big argument.

When I said, "If you keep asking questions, you'll be next." Fuck, I know how it sounded, but I meant more than that. Something was going on, and I was trying to say that maybe Mark would start leaning in on you. I was talking to myself, but actually said it out loud. It came out wrong, and you thought I was threatening to hurt you. That's so fucked.

So I kept my distance for a little bit. And then, Micah, you posted that episode. The one where you called him and you went to talk to him. Oh, man. I was fucking furious. Everything he was saying was such bullshit. And he said he was never going to reach out to you directly. Micah he never told me he was the officer at the scene of your dad's accident. I found that out almost at the same time you did. He never told me what case he was working on, but just... I didn't ask. He only said that it was potentially related to what happened to me.

I thought it was some kind of stalking case.

DEVON

Um...

LUKE

The irony isn't lost on me. So I heard him say all that stuff about your dad's accident and I lost it. More importantly, I knew he was lying. First, never talked to your mom. He told me as much later, but it wasn't that. Again, please remember that I know Mark well.

And he said something in that conversation you two had. You were kind of going off about that Ben guy, and Mark's tone shifted when he asked if what happened to you. But you didn't tell him about Duke Island Park. You kept on about the accident. So he went back to trying to convince you that your dad hit a fox. I still can't figure out how or why he chose that animal specifically, but... But, then you said, "He hit me?" And he said, "Do you think he saw you there?" As soon as he said that, I knew he lied to me about what he was actually doing. He was lying even more and he knew about your dad.. You.

So I went after him. Couldn't get a hold of him for a while, but eventually I did. That's the recording I sent to you.

AIMEE

The one of you and Mark arguing? I was there when Micah got that.

DEVON

Me, too.

LUKE

Yeah. Do you remember what he said?

DEVON

He said, "Do you know how dangerous this is?"

LUKE

Yeah. Exactly that.

AIMEE

Luke, I can tell there's more you need to say. But, Brendan, where do you come in?

LUKE

That same day, the day we argued and I recorded it, Mark sent me to Brendan.

AIMEE

You knew Mark, too?

BRENDAN

It's...complicated.

MICAH

I need some air. We're not done here, but I- I- I need to- I need to step away.

ELIA

Yeah. Maybe we should just call it a night.

MICAH

No. I- I just need to catch my breath.

[CELL PHONE BUZZES]

BRENDAN

Go. I'm going to take this. Hello?

[FOOTSTEPS]

[DOORS OPEN AND CLOSE]

DEVON

What time is it? I truly have no idea how long we've been sitting here.

AIMEE

It's late. Whew. I don't think I can drive back home.

ELIA

No way. You're staying. We can... We can all camp out here.

DEVON

You're all welcome to use my sofa bed.

ELIA

Yeah, that's probably a good idea. Um. Luke, what are you and Brendan going to do? Are you staying in the van?

LUKE

No, actually Brendan and I got hotel rooms near the airport. So we're not too far away. We can stay as long as we need to.

DEVON

You really did all this to look out for her?

LUKE

It was a lot of things, but yeah. It was mostly that. I knew I wouldn't hurt her. I didn't know how far Mark was willing to go to find out whatever he was looking for. It was the lesser evil, in a manner of speaking.

[DOOR OPENS]

[DOOR CLOSES]

DEVON

Well... Thank...

MICAH

Okay. Does anyone else have a headache? Or is it just me?

AIMEE

I can feel a migraine charging up.

ELIA

I'll get you guys some ibuprofen. Just hang on a sec.

[FOOTSTEPS]

ELIA

Oh, Jesus. Sorry. I-

BRENDAN

Sorry. No. That was me. I wasn't looking.

AIMEE

Brendan? What's going on?

LUKE

Who called?

BRENDAN

That was the Duluth Police Department. They were calling because they have questions for me.

LUKE

What? Questions about what?

BRENDAN

I guess I'm one of the last calls he made.

DEVON

Who?

BRENDAN

Keith.

DEVON

The ghost hunter meetup guy?

LUKE

Yeah, we talked. Well, Brendan talked to him when we went to check out Devil's Kettle. He told us about something that happened to him a long time ago.

DEVON

The guy you said had someone pull a black bag over his head? We talked about this.

LUKE

Yeah, yeah. Same guy. Brendan, what did the cops want?

BRENDAN

They're looking for a missing person, and wanted to know did I have any information. Keith. Keith is missing. He's been missing for three weeks.

[SCENE TRANSITION]

[OUTRO MUSIC]

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