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Episode 08: Ghost in the Rearview Mirror

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EPISODE 8: Ghost in the Rearview Mirror

Standards of Behavior contains mature language, content, and themes. Please listen with care.

1. INT. DISCIPLINARY HEARING. PAPER rustles. A PEN clicks several times in rapid succession.

HEARING MODERATOR

Okay, Ms. Michaels. We have established your relationship with Ms. Jennings so far – can you speak more specifically to her behavior on the night in question?

CHARLOTTE

Allison? She was fine. I mean, she was at a party, so she might have been drinking. But she seemed otherwise normal to me.

HEARING MODERATOR

"Might have been"? You aren't sure?

CHARLOTTE

I mean, I went to the party with Allison, but I didn't stay with her the whole time.

HEARING MODERATOR

Why not? You spoke at length earlier about your close friendship.

CHARLOTTE

I don't know. What is this, a Jodi Picoult novel? I'm not her keeper. It was a party. We spent a decent amount of time together, yeah, but there were times when we separated, too.

A BEAT.

CHARLOTTE (CON'D)

(Mumbling)

Sorry. Just a little on edge.

HEARING MODERATOR

Are you okay, Ms. Michaels? Is there something bothering you about the party?

CHARLOTTE

(Sighs)

No. The party was fine. It's this-this hearing. It just sucks the life out of you. The party, though, that was normal. It was the last bit of "normal" I had before Jack before the, uh, the bod- well. Before things got turned upside down.

HEARING MODERATOR

Hmm. "Normal," you say. What is normal?

2. FLASHBACK. LOUD MUSIC plays in the background.

CHARLOTTE

(Nearly yelling)

So, are you sure you want to do this?

ALLISON

What? What do you mean am I sure? This was your idea. Or, both of ours. Either way, it wasn't just mine.

CHARLOTTE

Okay, fair - we both decided to confront Jack. But doing it tonight? You're good?

ALLISON

Ah, no, Charlie. I'm not "good." I haven't been for awhile.

CHARLOTTE

(Sighs)

I know, Al. But you get what I mean — are you ready? We can do this. I know we didn't plan for it to be tonight, but it works. I'm four drinks in, you're... well, I don't know how many you've had, but you've always been a lightweight, so I know you're feeling it.

ALLISON

(Laughs nervously)

Yeah. The punch is going down easy tonight.

CHARLOTTE

The punch always goes down easy.

ALLISON

(Sighs)

So, you think now is the time? I haven't seen him at-at all. At least not after we saw him in the yard on the way into Will's place.

CHARLOTTE

Well, we've been here for at least an hour, so it's now or never — any more time to drink punch and you'll have to carry me home. I think I just saw him walk inside—

ALLISON

(In nervous anticipation)

—Oh, God—

CHARLOTTE

(Continuing as if she
hasn't heard)
-so now's when we-

Sounds of BODIES COLLIDING.

CHARLOTTE (CON'D)

Ah! Oh, for fuck's sake.

WILL

(Obviously drunk, calling out)
Roy, turn it up! Oh, sorry, Carrie.
Er, Cory. No, wait - Charlotte.
Sorry, I didn't mean to run into
you. I can grab you a-a napkin-
thing. I'ma go fill up my drink in
the kitchen.

A BEAT as Will notices that Allison is there.

WILL (CON'D)

Oh, hi Allie! I wondered when I
would run into you again. Thanks
for coming, by the way. Did I say
that earlier? Here, I'll fill your
drink up, too.

ALLISON

Er, thanks, Will. Um, are you okay?

WILL

Okay? Hell, yeah! This-this is what
I needed, Allie. A party - what a
goddamn good idea. Here- grab my
arm. We can fill up our drinks
together.

ALLISON

Ah, actually, Will, Charlie and I
were about to go-

CHARLOTTE

It's alright, Allison— Go with Will, and I'll go wipe my shirt off, okay? I'll meet you upstairs in five minutes and we'll— well, I'll just meet you upstairs in five minutes.

ALLISON

(Quietly)

Five minutes? You're sure?

CHARLOTTE

I promise.

FLASHBACK ENDS.

3. The LOUD MUSIC abruptly stops and is replaced by the clicking of a PEN.

CHARLOTTE

(Sighs)

Normal... I don't know. Things made sense, I guess. Or, at least they made more sense than they do now.

HEARING MODERATOR

Yes, well, it is unfortunate that your life has been so disrupted, Ms. Michaels, but it's a university's obligation to investigate the death of a student, especially if other students might have been involved. We have behavioral standards to uphold. You understand, don't you?

A BEAT.

CHARLOTTE

(Quietly)

Yeah, I understand.

HEARING MODERATOR

Good. Now, please describe the party that night in more detail for the record.

CHARLOTTE

What do you mean?

HEARING MODERATOR

You know what I mean, Ms. Michaels.

CHARLOTTE

What, you want me to recite the lyrics to "Baby Got Back" for you? What do you need to know?

HEARING MODERATOR

(Sniffs)

Please just describe your experience, Ms. Michaels. No need for sarcasm. What did you do? With whom did you interact?

CHARLOTTE

Uh, I mean, no one, really. You know that I hung out mostly with Allison, even if we did separate for a second. Other than that, I tend to be a bit of a loner.

A BEAT.

CHARLOTTE (CON'D)

It's the "transfer student complex," I guess.

HEARING MODERATOR

So, you have no recollection of interacting with any other student during the course of the night?

CHARLOTTE

Uh, well, I'm sure I spoke to a few people.

HEARING MODERATOR

I see. Did you know Jack Malvolio,
Ms. Michaels? Did you see him that
evening?

4. FLASHBACK. LOUD MUSIC plays in the background. FOOTSTEPS
approach.

ROY

Yo! Charlotte!

CHARLOTTE

Wha— oh, hey, Roy.

ROY

I just saw Allison leave and
figured I can't leave a lovely lady
like yourself alone. Is this party
a fucking blast, or what? Are you
having fun?

CHARLOTTE

Uh, yeah! Yeah, it's awesome,
thanks, Roy. Listen, I actually
have to go meet All—

SOFI

Hey, guys!

CHARLOTTE

Oh, hey, Sof — look, sorry, I've—

SOFI

What are you guys talking about?
Roy, you bothering my beautiful
roommate?

ROY

(Quickly)

Charlotte was just complimenting my
party-throwing abilities. Mastery,
if you will.

SOFI

Hmmph. Yeah, I'm sure she can talk for hours about the aesthetic of stale beer and questionable decorating choices—

ROY

Questionable? This place looks great! It's all strategic — you know, like, what do they call it? Bok choy.

SOFI

(Groans)

Oh, my God, it's *feng shui*, you idiot. And— oops, sorry, Charlotte, didn't mean to bump into you. Did I tell you earlier how nice you look tonight? That top, uhm, looks really good on you.

ROY

(Groans in exasperation in the background)

SOFI (CON'D)

What? It's really pretty on you, Charlotte. You, uh, you look really pretty in it.

ROY

(Jumping in)

Really pretty. Like, super pretty, which is even better than "really."

CHARLOTTE

Ah, thanks, guys...(Laughs awkwardly) I've actually got a stain on this shirt from earlier, so, I just have to sneak upstairs really fast—

SOFI

Do you need help? I can help you take it off— I mean, ah, for cleaning purposes. Duh.

ROY

Yeah, well, I can stand outside the door while you clean it! I saw that Jack asshole go upstairs earlier, so who knows what could happen—

CHARLOTTE

Roy, what do you know about Jack?

ROY

Not much past the fact that he's a giant fuck. That's pretty much all you need to know.

CHARLOTTE

Did you say you saw him go upstairs?

ROY

Yeah, I generally try to avoid him, but it's hard to miss his giant fucking head even around all these other people—

SOFI

—Roy, can you just chill about him? Let Charlotte enjoy the party—

ROY

—No, I cannot “just chill about him”—

CHARLOTTE

Uh, don't worry about it, Sofi. I'm just gonna go—

BICKERING continues.

ROY

You were there with me earlier, Sofi. You know he was being a complete ass—

SOFI

-Well, yeah, obviously. He's Jack Malvolio. But that doesn't mean we have to let him ruin a perfectly good party-

ROY

-AHA! So you admit it's a good party-

SOFI

-Oh, my God, Roy-

CHARLOTTE (CONT.)

Yeah, so I'll just, uh, catch you guys later. I really, really need to go find Allison. Bye!

FOOTSTEPS are heard as Charlotte walks away, and the sounds of BICKERING and the PARTY MUSIC recede until they disappear.

FLASHBACK ENDS.

5. A PEN clicks rapidly a few times and a CHAIR scoots across the floor.

HEARING MODERATOR

Ms. Michaels? Hello? Did you see Jack Malvolio that night?

CHARLOTTE

What? Oh, no. No, I've never met him, although I had heard of him. I didn't see him that night, either. I didn't even know he was at the party until the next day.

HEARING MODERATOR

Hmm. Okay, thank you.

A PEN scratches across PAPER. The HEARING MODERATOR clears her throat and shuffles PAPERS.

HEARING MODERATOR

Ms. Michaels.

A BEAT.

HEARING MODERATOR (CON'D)

I'd like to turn our attention now to a rather, ah, delicate line of questioning.

CHARLOTTE

(Slowly)

Uhm, okay.

HEARING MODERATOR

I'd like to ask you about why you left your last institution.

CHARLOTTE

(Confused)

I mean, we talked about this earlier. I wasn't happy where I was previously. I don't really see how this is relevant.

HEARING MODERATOR

(Sharply)

Everything is relevant in this kind of investigation.

Hearing Moderator SIGHS.

HEARING MODERATOR (CON'D)

A student has died, Ms. Michaels. It would be remiss for the university to neglect thorough investigation of any student present at the party that night.

CHARLOTTE

(Angrily)

I'm well aware that someone has died. Jesus. I just don't see how my personal life is connected to any of this.

A BEAT.

HEARING MODERATOR

Tell us more about Billy Letterman, Ms. Michaels.

CHARLOTTE

(Quietly, shocked)

Wh-What?

HEARING MODERATOR

Billy Letterman. He was the reason that you transferred from your previous university, correct?

CHARLOTTE

How do you know—

HEARING MODERATOR

A story about a highly successful student who dies tragically from a hit-and-run accident is going to make the newspapers, I'm afraid. His involvement in the school newspaper — and yours — is not a difficult thing to research, especially for an academic institution. You must have known Mr. Letterman fairly well.

CHARLOTTE

I don't want to talk about this.

HEARING MODERATOR

(Kindly)

I'm sorry, Ms. Michaels. I know that this is a sensitive topic, but we need to record your responses. Because you have now been connected in some way to two deaths in a very short amount of time, the university wants to make sure that you receive adequate emotional support if we find it is needed.

CHARLOTTE

Connected to two deaths? I told you, I didn't know Jack -

HEARING MODERATOR

I know you said that. However, you were still present at a party during which a student died. Even if you did not know the student personally, you might still experience feelings of sadness and confusion. And Mr. Letterman was an acquaintance of yours, so, naturally, you would be affected by his death.

A BEAT.

HEARING MODERATOR (CON'D)

Mr. Letterman died last year, didn't he?

CHARLOTTE

(Whispers)

Please. What does this have to do with-

HEARING MODERATOR

These questions aren't meant to be punitive, Ms. Michaels. We are working to uncover the circumstances under which Jack Malvolio died, yes, but we are also monitoring the wellbeing of students who may feel affected by his death.

CHARLOTTE

(Clears her throat)

Bil-Billy and I worked together. I was sad that he passed away, but it was a long time ago, and-and it doesn't have any bearing on this new situation.

HEARING MODERATOR

Mr. Malvolio's death, you mean.

CHARLOTTE

(Breathes deeply)

Yes. Mr.— Jack's death. Jack's and B-Billy's deaths were tragic, but I'm okay.

HEARING MODERATOR

(Sighs)

Then, Ms. Michaels... Why are you crying?

6. CUT TO FLASHBACK.

PHONE VOICE

You have one archived voicemail.
Friday, October 20th. 3:13 AM.

BILLY

(Slightly slurred, speaking slowly,
contemplative)

Hey, Charlie. It's Billy. Your best
friend. Well, I guess you could
have gotten that from the Caller
ID, right? The name, not the best
friend part. Ha.

A BEAT.

BILLY (CON'D)

I don't really know why I'm calling
you. Maybe I'm trying to grab some
of your life, your enthusiasm for
your work. You're probably at home
working on some big story, right?
Right. There's no way you'd be like
me - wandering aimlessly down Grand
Avenue at 3am because you can't
sleep.

A BEAT.

BILLY (CON'D)

It's like my skin is crawling,
Charlie. Like- like, walking around
and moving and thinking is
terrible, but somehow sitting still
is worse, you know? It feels like I
can't breathe. Like I'm suffocating
in my own room- God, I sound crazy,
don't I? You can thank Jack Daniels
for that.

A BEAT.

BILLY (CON'D)

If you're asleep, I'm sorry. I know
it's late. It just seemed like such
a nice night, and I couldn't be in
my apartment any longer. We made
the right choice, right? I can't
tell if I feel sick to my stomach
because of what happened, or
because we have chosen not to do
anything about it. Oh, wait.

Nevermind. It's probably the Jack again.

A BEAT.

BILLY (CON'D)

I'm gonna be fine, right, Charlie?
This here is my requiem, the swan
song for Billy Letterman before he
comes back better than ever. It's
all gonna be okay in the end.
Thanks for helping me today,
Charlie. I just gotta wait it
out. (WHISPERS to himself) Just gotta
wait it out.

WAIT IT OUT repeats and fades while the sound of TRAFFIC
gets louder. The episode ends with a CRASH.