Episode 08: Ghost in the Rearview Mirror

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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 Jac—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’m’a 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)

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)
Bill-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.