

WHEN TOWER ANGELS FALL

by Elizabeth Plant

EPISODE 02 – “THESE NASCENT FLAMES”

(The distorted sound of radio static crackling, energies distorting past and present. A muffled voice rises slowly to the fore...)

VOICE Thank you all – some great work today. Appreciate the attentiveness, I know the curriculum’s still got some getting used to. See you guys tomorrow – hey, don’t forget your masks; remember the smog warning, huh, guys?

(Beat.)

Hikaru! Might I have a word, please?

(The voice echoes into silence, as the sound of two pairs of footsteps rise. Hikaru and Ophelia walk down a metallic hallway toward a heavy door at the end. Heavy rain batters the walls and ceiling.)

OPHELIA *(nervous breathing)*

HIKARU *(reassuring, way too upbeat)* Hey, you’re gonna be fine. You’ve got your pot, right? It’s your safe place – and it’s coming with, and it’s all fine! He’s really lovely, honestly, once you – y’know – uh, get to know him, and all that. Not that he... really likes when people do that, but the electrical room’s really – I mean it’s so – oh! We’re here! Ha! What a world! Okay... okay... *(clears throat)*

(Hikaru knocks on the door and enters without waiting for a response.)

Sol looks round, surrounded by various tools on the floor as he tends to an enormous, rusted boiler. He rises to his feet with a resigned expression, ready for Hikaru’s verbal assault.)

SOL *(sighs)*

HIKARU *(fast, strangely nervous)* Hi – hi, Sol – how’s everything down here? Weather’s bit mad at the mo, huh? Can you hear it? Probably. I mean, you hear everything in this place. Not you, like, specifically, but – y’know – the collective ‘you.’ Plural. All-inclusive. Us. Not you. But also you, because – sorry, forgot what I was – no, I didn’t – sorry – sorry! So, have you –

SOL (weary) Ezra sent her?

HIKARU Yeah. Y-Yeah...

SOL Come in, then.

HIKARU (*uncomfortable, stammering, playing it off*) I – I don't, but – y'know, it's not my fave to – considering the whole – nothing to do with – well... well, uh, after you, Ophelia.

(*Ophelia tentatively enters, clutching her pot for comfort.*)

(*awkward*) I'd best, uh – y'know – yeah – I'll see you at dinner, then. Have fun. Well, not *fun*, but – I mean – you do what you do. Bye! Bye.

(*Beat.*)

(*mortified*) Bye.

(*Hikaru disappears hurriedly back down the hallway.*)

There is a long silence, where both Sol and Ophelia seem to be considering each other. Sol appears not to know what to say, but knows he must say something.)

SOL Stuck with me, are ya?

OPHELIA Mm...

SOL (*faux-casual*) Just so you know, I don't do babysitting. Get enough of that with Ru and the other one, ha...

(*Beat.*)

(*clears throat*) Scared o' this room, I think. Can't say for sure. Cousin died paragliding – flew right into some power lines, like an idiot. Nasty way to go. Ru can't even flick a switch without thinking it'll get 'em.

(*Beat.*)

Maybe shouldn't have said that. Well, not like you'll tell anyone.

OPHELIA (*indignant breath, like a small, involuntary gasp*)

SOL (*apologetic, hasty*) Ah – shouldn't have said that either. Sorry. Not good with words – always sayin' summin' wrong. Usually don't bother. 'Least it's quiet down here. You'll... probably like that.

(*Ophelia considers him a moment and nods.*)

OPHELIA Mm.

(*Sol rummages in a cupboard and retrieves a roll of heavy-duty tape, holds it out for her.*)

SOL *(putting effort into sounding inviting)* Good with wires, your brother said. Any chance you good with tape too? Storm's not good for leaks, and some fried rat's been real persistent tryna bite these down, so we gotta get 'em wrapped, right? Not that I need to explain that to you, huh?

OPHELIA *(soft hum of agreement, a little amused)*

SOL *(faux-casual, slightly amused)* Now I just gotta finish with this damn boiler. Heating's been shot for weeks – not my fault, by the way.

(Ophelia smiles and sits cross-legged on the floor. She places her pot beside her.)

(hasty) Oh, right – uh, got a chair in here, somewhere, if ya want? For your pot, maybe?

(Ophelia shakes her head, stripping the reel of tape noisily.)

OPHELIA *(as if to say no)* Mm mm.

(Sol shrugs and returns to the boiler.)

SOL *(contented sigh)* Really don't waste any words, huh? I like that.

(amused, talking without realising it) All my life, had people runnin' they mouth off, like Usain got 'em challenged. Always got they noise in my head, even now. Got me asking, why's everybody always talking? Y'know? Only so much you need to say. Almost feels I can't feel nothing no more. *(laughs)*

(He jimmies open a hatch and turns on a head torch to look closer.)

(grunt of effort as he pries open the hatch)

(Ophelia continues working, listening with mild interest.)

(conversational, feeling at ease, letting the words flow) Mama was the worst. Always are, right? Always talking 'bout some hair she wanted, how my girlfriend's too white. Asking, "oh, why you wanna go study, boy? You take after your dad, that'll do ya." *(scoffs)* Don't think I could be less like him if I tried. 'Sides, only so much you wanna be like your parents, hey?

(Ophelia looks at him almost sadly, but he doesn't seem to notice. Beat.)

(laughing) Now here I am, mile-a-minute. Probably thinkin I'm a hypocrite. So used to listening, don't know I'm talking. I'm sorry, if... ya want me to be.

(He looks at Ophelia, who shakes her head. He smiles.)

(warm) Okay.

(Switching on a radio, Sol gets to work inside the hatch.)

After a few moments, the radio static fades into music: Erik Satie's 'Gymnopédies I - Lent et Douloureux'.)

OPHELIA *(soft, delighted breath)*

(Recognising it, Ophelia stops working to listen. She reaches over to the radio to turn the volume up. She closes her eyes and sits up.

In this moment, she seems almost serene.)

SOL *(mumbled) Right, let's see what we got...*

OPHELIA *(humming along)*

SOL *(muttering under breath... occasional grunts... whispered encouragement to the boiler as he works on it)*

(Eventually, Sol slams the hatch shut and tosses his tool upon a table nearby, turning to her.)

(triumphant) Ah! Think that should do it. We'll check back in a couple days and...

(Sol catches himself as he sees Ophelia basking in the music. He watches her a while, strangely captivated.)

(warm) You like music, huh?

(Ophelia nods without opening her eyes, smiling.)

OPHELIA *(hum of agreement – warm and content)*

(Sol treads carefully over and sits next to her.)

SOL *(soft grunt and sigh as he sits down)*

(Beat.)

Me too.

(Intro theme crossfades in, as the rain continues. TITLE.)

(Hikaru's room.

Ru sits on the floor, bent double and scribbling feverishly in a notebook, utterly engrossed.)

HIKARU *(soft, mumbling as they write) "And she danced... in... the sunset... Framed him between... her... hands... and said—"*

(A loud knock at the door. Trouble has arrived.)

DECEMBER Whaddaya doing?

HIKARU Ssh!

DECEMBER Whaddaya dooooooing?

HIKARU Sssshhh!

DECEMBER *(amused)* Just asking.

HIKARU *(agitated)* Well, don't! I'm tryna work!

DECEMBER On what?

(Ru ignores her, but Ember doesn't give up this easy.)

(conversational, upbeat, far too invested) There's this bit o' wall upstairs, show it you later. Been watchin' it for, like, two hours. Paint's peelin in this *really weird way*, makes it look like a dick. Well, sort of. Kinda like one o' those diagrams you get in the textbooks? 'Cept, obviously, it's peeling down – not up – so, y'know, sad day for the wall boner. Is that how they work, by the way? When they're done? Is it just one long slow descent into shit, or do they just kinda... *(splat noise)*

(She slams a fist into her palm.)

(giggling) Y'know?

HIKARU *(annoyed, not looking up)* Why would I know?

DECEMBER *(teasing)* I mean, I know you know.

HIKARU *(sighs)* If you want The Talk, go ask Pom.

DECEMBER *(proudly)* Already had it, thank you very much.

HIKARU *(annoyed)* Brilliant. You can go back to the wall now. Take a pen, make your own diagram, go crazy!

DECEMBER Rude.

HIKARU Look – just shut up and let me write!

DECEMBER *(almost whiny)* Ru, come on —

HIKARU *(irritable, pleading)* It's my first chance for days, okay? Been too busy settling Ophelia in, and I – I just wanna get on!

DECEMBER But I'm bored.

(Hikaru again ignores her.)

(*truly irritating*) I said I'm boooooooooooooooooooooooooooooored—

HIKARU (*desperate, incredulous*) Jesus fucking H. Christ! Do you have any idea how annoying you are?!

DECEMBER (*sniggering*) Yeah.

HIKARU You couldn't do this to – I dunno – anyone else?

DECEMBER (*teasing*) Yeah.

HIKARU (*almost pleading*) Why me, Ember? Why always me?

DECEMBER (*matter-of-fact*) 'Cuz Pomegranate would shank me.

HIKARU (*incredulous*) Can't think why!

(*December snatches up the notebook, dancing away from Ru as they try to grab it back.*)

(*snapping, cold*) Hey, give that back – I'm *not* in the mood.

DECEMBER (*interested, teasing*) So you writing that dumb book again?

HIKARU It's not *dumb*.

DECEMBER No-one's ever gonna read it.

HIKARU (*defensive*) You don't know that! 'Sides, you'll read it, won't you?

DECEMBER Do I have to?

HIKARU Yes.

DECEMBER But I don't care.

HIKARU Well, you *should* – it's important.

DECEMBER Not important if no-one reads it.

HIKARU (*angry, flaring*) It's important to me – now GIVE!

(*Hikaru chases Ember down and yanks the book back.*)

Ugh...

(*They wipe off the notebook's cover, as if dirtied by its brief stint in Ember's grasp. Beat.*)

(*firm, irritable, a touch sad*) Books **are** important, okay? Words, stories – they're all we have. They're about all we have that keeps us human anymore. That's what—

DECEMBER (*reciting, sarcastic*) What he used to say – yeah, I know...!

HIKARU (defensive, angry) Yeah, well, 'cuz he was right!

(Beat.)

(catching themselves, awkward) Despite... e-everything...

DECEMBER (agitated sigh, almost evasive)

(Beat.)

HIKARU (sincere, firm, getting caught up in just how much this means to them) But there are just... so many words, so many things to say, right? I mean, don't you think it's amazing? How these weird little symbols that were made up in the sand became the start of so much – like – they can put *anything* you've ever felt onto a piece of paper! And, theoretically, the entire history of *everything* could be put down in book after book after –

(Ember slumps onto Ru's rickety bed, as if rolling her eyes with her whole body.)

DECEMBER (strained) Yeah, but why d'you care? You'll never finish it.

HIKARU (defensive) M-Maybe I won't. Maybe nobody will! But what's happening here is special. If I don't write it down, it's like we did it for nothing.

DECEMBER (disbelieving) But we made it. Like, *dude*, we're alive.

HIKARU (scoffs) Barely. Don't remember the last time I *felt* 'alive.' 'Cause just *being* like this doesn't really mean anything, does it? I need a purpose, like anybody.

(They sink down onto the bed beside Ember.)

(softening, sad) Kinda scarce round here, though. Used to be people, if you think about it. Used to – to get you out of bed – to see them, get through it all together, heh...

(Beat.)

(strained) But most of 'em are gone now. Hardly... feel like moving when you can walk all day and barely find anyone – can't see the point.

DECEMBER (big yikes) Jesus fuck, I came in here for a *laugh*, Ru.

(She crawls from the bed, starting to pace irritably.)

HIKARU (muttering, vaguely amused) Sorry to break it to you, but the real world called and it wants to piss in your fucking eye.

DECEMBER (sarcastic, dry) Uh, yeah, I'm twelve, not an idiot.

HIKARU (amused) Not exactly mutually exclusive...

DECEMBER (offended) Hey!

HIKARU *(weak laugh, turning into a sniff as they wipe their eyes)*

DECEMBER *(deeply uncomfortable)* Ah... God, don't cry – you riding the red wave or what?

HIKARU *(incredulous, annoyed)* Like any of us are healthy enough, Ember! Man... No, it's – not that I'm... *(sniffs)* S'like I just realised again that they really are all...

(Beat. She approaches Ru, pats them on the arm.)

DECEMBER *(understanding, serious, uncomfortable)* It's okay. I forget too, when I'm really tired or... something... I think Bijan's still gonna be in his room and when I go it's like... shit.

HIKARU You got that right... ugh...

(Hikaru wipes their eyes, sniffing again. They're clearly trying not to start crying for real.)

(word vomiting again, sad) S'like some heavy blanket, right? *(clears throat, firmer, with more resolve)* But, if I can write, then I can make people up. Even if I'm only writing about us or Ezra or anyone before, it's like I'm not alone. Like they're still here. So stories are all I've got left.

(Beat.)

DECEMBER *(warm)* And me.

HIKARU *(smiling)* And you. When you're not being a prick.

DECEMBER *(fake-defensive)* 'Scuse you, I'm the funniest one left.

(Hikaru returns their attention to the book.)

Beat.)

(soft, rolling her eyes) I'll read it. You know I will.

HIKARU Thanks...

DECEMBER When you're done.

HIKARU *(amsued)* So, never?

DECEMBER Yeah.

HIKARU *(small sad laugh)* Can't wait.

(They hug Ember.)

DECEMBER *(agitated, grossed out)* Ew – ewww – no touchy.

HIKARU *(amused, firm)* It's either a hug from me or a shank from Pom.

DECEMBER *(fake-desperate)* Shank – shank – shank, please!

HIKARU *(laughing)* Such an ass...

(They let go, but smile nonetheless.)

(thoughtful) Hey... maybe you should try writing your own?

DECEMBER *(confused)* Huh?

HIKARU Your own story.

DECEMBER *(incredulous, amused)* You giving me homework?

HIKARU 'Course not. Just... thought it might be fun! Gives you something to do that isn't *literally* watching paint peel.

(Beat.)

DECEMBER *(frowning, suspicious)* What's it have to be about?

HIKARU Anything. Anything.

(Beat.)

DECEMBER Nah, that's dumb.

HIKARU You're dumb.

DECEMBER *(scoffs, sarcastic)* Clever.

HIKARU Cleverer than you.

DECEMBER You wish.

(Hikaru swivels their book round and points to a word on the page.)

HIKARU *(sighs, amused)* What's that mean then? Huh? Translate, genius.

DECEMBER *(confidence quickly dropping)* Ma...g...namesium – neesius – mag—

HIKARU *(amused)* Case in point. Magnanimous.

DECEMBER *(defensive)* Being a dictionary don't make you smart.

HIKARU No, but it helps. So why don't you try being 'magneesius' for a change and leave me alone to write, since *you're* not gonna.

DECEMBER *(confused)* Because they're not real.

HIKARU Hmm?

DECEMBER You're making people up and I... don't wanna do that because you're not – I don't – I mean, we're right here, aren't we? I'm right... *(scoffs)* Forget it. You're busy.

HIKARU Em...

(December makes for the door.)

Ember!

(December stops. Hikaru rips a few pages from their book and holds them out to her.)

(sincere) I'm telling you, try it. It's because you're important to me I want you to understand. It doesn't even have to be good, but just... write something.

DECEMBER *(hesitant)* I don't want to...

HIKARU I think you do. You were never allowed to at school, right? Well, I wasn't either – but fuck that. The world is shitty but we can make it better, because you're right – we're here, we made it – but *this place* is shitty too so we can dream of where we go next.

DECEMBER There isn't a next.

HIKARU There's *always* a next. It's what we make it.

(They brandish the paper again.)

(soft, teasing) So write, you fuck. If you're angry, fine – be angry. Just *make* something of it. For them.

(Beat.)

December snatches the paper and folds it up, shoves it in a pocket.)

DECEMBER *(stubborn)* Fine. But no Shakespeare or anything, right? Don't expect shit from me.

HIKARU *(amused)* Fine. I preferred Marlowe anyway.

(The rain rises, slowly fades again. Vague hints of windchimes, waves and trees... Then, the hum of many electrical lights.)

The white room. Eden standing, pigeon-toed, in the middle of the glass enclosure; Ksenia and Amos on the other side. Amos takes notes silently, strangely rapt.)

EDEN *(soft, dreamlike, amused)* I was drifting on the sea when I met the Tower Angel. I asked if it was going to kill me. It said, “No, this is just a dream.” So I sank beneath the water... “I’ll take you to the sky, since you like it so much.”

(Beat.)

KSENIA *(patient)* Is that where you are now, Eden?

EDEN *(soft, confused)* Is this the sky?

KSENIA Is it?

(Beat.)

EDEN *(uncertain)* I’m... lying... in a field.

KSENIA *(exhausted, angry)* Oh, not again...

EDEN Beside a kind woman.

KSENIA *(firm)* Emmens.

(Amos lays down his notes, stands.)

AMOS *(hesitant)* Moltenore?

EDEN *(firm, smiling)* She wears white roses in her hair.

KSENIA *(cold)* Issue another flare.

EDEN She holds my hand...

AMOS *(nervous)* Uh... o-of course.

EDEN *(whispered, reverent)* She smells like... honey mint...

AMOS SL-1-7 requesting flare to Bay 16.

TECH#1 Roger.

EDEN *(laughing softly, blissfully)*

KSENIA *(cold)* Full rays.

AMOS F-Full rays, copy.

EDEN *(awed, excited, breathless)* Together we look up at the night, at all the stars. I blink, and all the sky is new... Constellations beyond imagining, more stars than time can hold – some so close they’re massive...!

(A voice crackles over loudspeaker.)

TECH#1 Full rays, ten seconds. Over.

AMOS Confirmed. Molt, ten seconds.

KSENIA (*annoyed*) What've I said about calling me—

EDEN “This is what the universe really looks like,” she tells me.

KSENIA (*hasty*) Fucking – fine – just – visors down.

(The sound of crackling intensifies, static going haywire. A lightbulb bursts somewhere overhead.)

AMOS Y-Yes, ma'am.

KSENIA And eyes shut. Full rays isn't for you to see just yet.

EDEN (*awed, growing anticipation and excitement*) I am a cloud. I am the wind. I am wings made of water as the angel pulls me down by my feet. The surface dances, and I see it – (*sudden, terrible gasp*)

(The great light once again blossoms all over, catching Eden with full force. Her whole body seems to writhe with unimaginable pain.)

(excruciating scream)

(Glass cracking, static wild, bodies shockingly white.)

AMOS (*pained grunt, caught off guard*)

EDEN (*screaming, agonised*) I SEE IT – I SEE – THE LIGHT! IT IS... **HEAVEN!**

KSENIA (*commanding, voice raised*) Rays down. Allow for recharge.

AMOS (*shouting*) Rays down! Rays down in Bay 16!

TECH#1 Rays down – copy.

EDEN (*manic laughter and crying, hard to distinguish, but fading to something more subdued, whispered, fearful*)

(The sounds and light dissipate, leaving Eden crawling shakily across the floor, clawing her way blindly toward the glass.)

(whispered, feverish) Heaven... H-Heaven...

KSENIA Eden.

EDEN An explosion... a t-tumult...

KSENIA (*soft, almost caring*) Eden...

EDEN A thunderclap that... burns my eyes...

AMOS (*concerned*) Eden...?

EDEN *(soft, surprised gasp)*

(She looks up, gazes wide-eyed yet blank at him. Silence.)

(nervous breathing)

KSENIA *(soft, tantalising)* Where are you now, Eden...?

EDEN *(whispered)* I... t-think... maybe, I am dead...

KSENIA And why do you think that?

EDEN I think... maybe... I am an angel now...

(Beat.)

AMOS *(soft)* You are an angel, Eden.

EDEN *(delighted gasp)*

KSENIA *(warning)* Emmens—

AMOS *(whispered)* Wait.

EDEN *(hushed, frowning, piecing together)* Angel... I'm an... He said... he said I was... always... Yes...! Angel...

AMOS Yes...

(She presses herself against the glass, fingers tapping and sliding as she tries to break through.)

EDEN *(delighted, hushed)* You are my angel. My – my guardian – he said I must be one, but you – you're guiding me... leading on—

AMOS Yes.

EDEN I was right... I was... It's you! *(exhilarated breath)*

KSENIA *(hushed, warning)* Emmens, what are you doing?

AMOS *(pushing on, something dark in his tone)* You know what it means to be an angel, don't you?

EDEN *(awed)* Tell me – tell me, I – I want to know – I want to save – save him... Please...!

KSENIA Ask her who.

AMOS *(hasty, hushed)* No.

EDEN It's not too late! Th-the explosion—

KSENIA I said—

AMOS *(firm, hushed)* No. Wait.

(He turns back to Eden, places both his hands on the glass to mirror hers.)

(with a strange intensity, soft yet dark) Angels tell their darkest secret – just once – to earn their wings. You want that, don't you, Eden?

EDEN I... I...

AMOS *(inviting, hushed and slightly dark)* Angels tell their secret to be free of it forever. You understand... we have to hold everyone else's to keep them safe. Don't we?

EDEN *(whispered)* Safe... S-Secrets... I...

AMOS I need your secret, Eden.

EDEN I... I've been... hiding...

KSENIA *(joining in, soft and inviting)* We know you have. We told our secrets *for you*.

AMOS Where have you been hiding...?

(Beat.)

EDEN In the grass... the – the long grass...

AMOS *(firm)* Eden.

EDEN *(nervous, confused)* The woman, she – tried to – for the sky – and – a-and the—

AMOS *(firmer, angry)* Eden.

EDEN *(afraid, stammering)* She wanted to show me the sky, but I – no – I need to find – where is he?

AMOS *(shouting, unhinged)* EDEN!

(He slams his fists against the glass and Eden recoils, staggering backward.)

EDEN *(frightened gasp)*

KSENIA *(commanding)* Emmens! Back up, now!

EDEN *(whispered, terrified)* You're the devil... you're... where is he?

KSENIA *(angry, commanding)* I said back I up – get away from the glass.

AMOS *(rushed)* She can't even see me.

EDEN *(shouting, terrified)* Where is he?!

KSENIA *(rushed, cold)* She still knows you're there, just leave her. That's all we can do is just leave her.

EDEN *(frightened breathing, muttering under breath)* A – A flat – F – E flat – C – D – E – E flat –

AMOS Issue another – isn't that standard? I'm *this close*, Molt—

KSENIA *(cold, angry)* No, Emmens, you are way off by thinking you can take the lead in this on your third fucking week.

EDEN *(panicked)* C – F – D flat – C – no – no, no, no – I can't remember – can't **remember** –

AMOS With respect—

KSENIA *(furious, hushed)* Do not talk back, for fuck's sake – that is the point – silence, Emmens! Silence.

EDEN *(confused, stammering)* Don't, no... you know – Eden, you know how... it...

KSENIA That's what she gets. It's all quiet out of Heaven.

EDEN *(beginning to cry)* He knows how – he – please show me – please... *please...*

KSENIA *(cold, determined)* We'll see what comes of thinking she'll never make it in.

EDEN *(panicked, upset)* He said he would follow... Where is he...?

(Beat.)

KSENIA Turn off the lights. She won't need them.

AMOS *(nervous)* And the recording?

KSENIA Leave it. The higher ups won't deny us that.

EDEN *(crying, frightened)* Please... he's coming...

KSENIA In fact, they usually like to hear it.

EDEN He *promised*...

KSENIA *(cold)* Let's start with a week, shall we?

EDEN *(soft crying)*

(Oscar and Ophelia's room.)

Oscar is alone, standing at the window. He taps on the glass, a wistful expression on his face: 'I miss you' in Morse.

After a time, Pom appears in the doorway.)

OSCAR *(sighs)*

(Pom knocks with a flourish.)

POM Afternoon, good sir.

(Oscar jumps in shock, staggering round to face her.)

OSCAR *(nervous, taken off guard)* Gah – Pom – you – !

POM *(amused)* Ha! Be an Olympian if I could jump like that!

OSCAR S-Sorry, you just – took me by surprise.

POM *(amused, dry)* My bad. Just wanted to get a *tap* in, myself. Can't let you have all the fun.

OSCAR *(uncomfortable)* Oh, I was just... *(clears throat)* Come in, I guess.

POM *(sarcastic, fake flirty)* Ooh, he's a gentleman.

OSCAR Hardly...

(Pom saunters in, hands in her back pockets. She surveys the room quickly. Ophelia is nowhere to be seen.)

POM *(vaguely interested)* Where's baby sis?

OSCAR With Sol, I'd imagine.

POM *(amused)* Should tell her well done, sometime.

OSCAR 'Scuse me?

POM Never seen that prick take to anyone. Figures. Ooh, he's Mr. Strong-Silent for two years – can't even get a look outta him! Soon as Little Mermaid shows up, he's more talk than a horny schoolboy.

(Beat.)

(sniggering) Y'know, the whole 'no voice' thing.

OSCAR *(cold, unamused)* She *does* have one, actually.

(She joins him by the window, looks out the pane. There's a brief silence.)

POM *(sniffs disdainfully)* Not much of a view you were lookin' at, Oz.

OSCAR *(evasive, still cold, uncomfortable)* I don't know. I always quite liked mist. Makes me think of lighthouses... sandcastles...

POM *(small laugh)* Should've said – I got all kinds o' spades in my room!

OSCAR *(dry)* Shame about the lack of sand.

(Beat.)

And you?

POM Me?

OSCAR You don't like the mist?

POM *(unfazed)* Well... I was 'bout four when that movie with the bugs and that was on TV, and I never liked nothin' that wasn't pure sun since. Stephen... somethin' or other.

OSCAR King.

POM That's it.

OSCAR *(dry)* Ending like that, I can see why...

POM *(scoffs)* Don't you just?

(Beat. She moves away from him, slumps onto the makeshift bed. It squeaks loudly from the rusted springs.)

(with a grunt as she sits, conversational) So, how's ya first few weeks been, then?

OSCAR No complaints.

POM *(slightly dramatic)* God, you're dull. This place is falling apart – stinks of fish and oil! – least you can do is dish some dirt and go down with it.

OSCAR I like it here. Means I'm free.

POM S'pose so. Like the people, too?

OSCAR Can't really say no, can I?

POM *(teasing)* Okaaay, now it's exciting. So, who's rubbed you the wrong way?

OSCAR *(evasive)* Nobody. I mean, we're on a rig in the middle of the sea – can't really afford not to like each other.

POM *(amused, slightly flirtatious)* Don't need to be so stiff with me. 'Less you like it like that.

OSCAR (frowning) Like what?

POM (snorts of laughter)

OSCAR What?

POM (sniggering) Nothin'.

OSCAR Mm...

(Pom readjusts on the bed and it squeaks again. She bounces a few seconds, listening to it squeak.)

POM (amused) Y'know this used to be Ginger and Clement's room, and these fucking springs, oh *man*... (laughs) You'd hear them all day, all night – such a waste of two beds in here, I'm tellin' ya!

OSCAR (uncomfortable) Right.

POM (wryly flirtatious) Weird, the things you miss... right?

OSCAR (oblivious) Well, I'm sure you would. From what Ezra tells me, a lot of them were good people.

POM (nodding, slightly off kilter) The **people**... 'course... yeah... (clears throat)

(She stands, leaving the springs to silence again.)

She notices Ophelia's pot tucked beneath the other bed and nods toward it, taking a few steps closer.)

(curious) What does she keep in there, then? First time I seen her without it. Not so sacred after all or something?

(Oscar steps in front of it, readjusts the blanket to cover.)

OSCAR (awkward) Sorry, I don't think that...

POM Ooh... Very mysterious, ain't ya?

OSCAR (firm) It's private, is all.

POM (soft, flirty) I don't mind getting private.

OSCAR Excuse me?

POM Consider it an invitation. Anytime.

(Oscar frowns.)

Beat.)

(agitated, rolling her eyes) Christ, men really don't have two brain cells between 'em...

(She looks him up and down, steps closer.)

(firm) Look, I'll be honest, Ozymandias. I'm not one you typically get on with. Not the kinda girl you expect your mum to like. Been a long time since a new face round here, and I don't trust easy.

(slowly letting out the flirtation) Not gonna lie, didn't like it when you two landed. Been hurt a lot by letting people in. Only a couple I really do *let in*... Seems you're one o' the lucky ones, baby... if ya get me?

(Beat.)

OSCAR *(doesn't get her at all, uncomfortable)* I... I think so.

POM *(soft, flirty)* Hmm?

(Beat.)

OSCAR *(stammering, awkward)* Sorry, you are... very close to me right now.

POM Lucky you. Like I said.

OSCAR Sure. Right. Uh...

(He ducks away from her, runs a hand through his hair. She smirks, loving to watch him squirm.)

(evasive) S-Say I'm the opposite though.

POM *(amused)* Oh, yeah?

OSCAR Trust too much. Like, I – *(clears throat)* I just wanna *believe* people are good.

POM *(grim, jaded)* Ha... Never are, though, eh?

OSCAR I dunno, uh... sometimes they are.

POM *(conversational)* Well, sure. I mean, even Fionn has his redeeming qualities.

OSCAR Such as?

POM *(knowing she's got him)* Ahh, that would be telling! 'Sides, he's not actually a bad person. Ezra just says he is.

OSCAR *(confused)* He... Why?

POM *(conversational)* Well, can't stand him, can he? Think Ezra's maybe jealous.

OSCAR Of Fionn?

POM *(master manipulator at work, playing the unwitting victim)* Toxic man is Ezra. Sure, he acts all nice – loveable idiot, routine, y'know? – but really he's...

Shit, shouldn't have said that – don't even know why I'm – God, I'm sorry, Oz – forget I said it! He won't like it if he knew I was—

OSCAR *(frowning, hasty)* No, of course. I don't want any trouble.

POM *(soft, faux-vulnerable)* Thanks – you're... you're a nice guy, Oscar. Pretty rare, these days.

(Oscar eyes her a moment. Perhaps he's realised she's up to something.)

OSCAR *(faux-conversational)* So that's why you're here? See if I'm worth letting in?

POM *(shrugging, faux-casual)* Maybe. Maybe not.

OSCAR *(cold)* Gonna do this for Fee too?

POM What's it matter? Get to know one, I'll know the other. Besides, you're way better for conversation.

OSCAR *(cold)* Thought you said I was dull a minute ago.

POM *(amused, flirtatious)* Sure that's just the surface. But I'm good at getting deep when it comes to it.

OSCAR Are you, now?

POM *(amused)* In the right company.

OSCAR Alright. Then... gimme your best ice-breaker.

(Pom looks at him a moment, then moves for the door.)

POM *(amused hum)*

OSCAR *(taken aback)* Or just... leave – that's fine, too.

POM *(laughs, dark)* You wanted the 'best.'

(She shuts the door and turns back.)

(hushed, dark, flirtatious) I pride myself on being just that.

OSCAR *(wildly confused and uncomfortable)* You... might've lost me...

(Pom removes her shirt and tosses it to the ground. She begins toward him, eyes intent. Oscar appears absolutely frozen to the spot.)

(stammering, horrified) Oh – oh, God, Pom, I –

POM *(dark)* I told you—

(She pushes him onto the bed. It squeaks menacingly.)

—don't be so stiff.

OSCAR *(terrified, wildly out of his depth)* Look, I – I'm sure you're lovely, and all, but – Pom, we don't know each other, and I don't—

POM Oh, come on – relax —

OSCAR *(struggling)* N-No, no, get off, I don't do this – not with –

POM *(hushed)* Sshh, no talking...

OSCAR Please – please, I don't wanna hurt you –

POM *(amused)* I wish you would...

(Oscar throws her from him and she lands on the floor in a heap, smacking her head.)

(crying out, pained) AGH!

OSCAR *(furious, panting)* STOP!

(He scrabbles to his feet and makes for the door.)

(angry, afraid) Sorry! Sorry, but you – I – I have to go!

(He tears away down the hall, staggering.)

Pom seethes on the floor, punches the ground in frustration.)

POM Fucking SHIT...! *(angry breathing, trying to find her head)*

(She notices Ophelia's pot once more, and snatches away the blankets.)

(angry, muttering) Well, if I can't have you –

(She retrieves the pot, scraping it loudly across the floor.)

Guess you'll have to do, instead...

(The sound of pounding footsteps and static rising and falling, as Oscar races without direction through halls and stairways.)

OSCAR *(panting, nervous, angry)*

(Oscar bursts through a hatch and leaps out onto the roof. The mist is heavy now, and the towers are hidden. Ezra is there, deep in thought.)

(shocked) Ezra! Christ—

EZRA *(taken aback, surprised)* What you doin 'ere?
OSCAR *(hasty, uncomfortable)* I – I just – needed air.
EZRA You alright?
OSCAR I don't know, I – I don't know...!
EZRA Wha' happened?
OSCAR Pom, she—
EZRA *(exasperated)* Ah, Jesus, not you too...
OSCAR *(cold, angry)* Standard welcome, is it?
EZRA *(reassuring)* Got away though, eh? 'Fore she got her claws in.
OSCAR Y-Yeah, barely...

(He shivers.)

(shivering, agitated) God – bloody freezing up here!

(Beat. Ezra removes his jacket and holds it out.)

EZRA *(softer)* 'Ere. Put this on.
OSCAR What 'bout you?
EZRA Been 'ere longer. Used to it.
OSCAR Right. Thank you.

(Oscar hastily puts on the jacket.)

(shivering, panting, trying to calm his breathing)

EZRA *(concerned)* She, uh... She really didn't do anything?
OSCAR *(evasive)* No. N-Not really.
EZRA Only you seem—
OSCAR *(agitated)* Nothing! She didn't get that far, I... Fuck, I think I cracked her skull, though.
EZRA *(raucous)* Ha!
OSCAR *(angry, nervous)* It's not funny – she was – I definitely saw blood. Should I go back?
EZRA *(amused)* Really think she deserves a pity party right now?

OSCAR She's hurt more than me.

EZRA I dunno – that's some proper scratch on your arms.

OSCAR *(surprised)* What? Oh... Christ...

EZRA *(dark, dry)* 'Least it's not ya back. She's a real bleeder, I tell ya.

OSCAR *(dry)* Speaking from experience?

EZRA *(amused, scoffing)* God, no, not mine. Never mine.

OSCAR R-Right...

(Beat. He angles slightly closer to Ezra.)

(uncomfortable) Feel I should probably tell you, she... she's been saying some bad things about you, Ezra. Horrible.

EZRA *(low, cold)* Yeah?

OSCAR *(frowning)* Made out you'd hurt her if I said anything.

EZRA *(low)* Then why you sayin' it?

OSCAR *(sincere)* 'Cause I don't believe her.

EZRA *(disbelieving)* Yeah?

OSCAR She said you were a liar. Only liars say that about someone else.

EZRA Then how'd you know they're not lyin' about that too, eh?

OSCAR *(pressing on, agitated)* She mentioned Fionn. More than mentioned, actually. I mean, what's to say he's not in on it? I only ever see him with her, if I see him at all. Follows him like his little terrier. What if he put her up to this—

EZRA *(dismissive)* You're thinkin' too much.

OSCAR She's what, twenty? Bit young for 'im, isn't she? Impressionable—

EZRA She *is* the impression.

OSCAR Then she's clearly up to something.

EZRA *(evasive)* Tell that to your arms – it's nothin' new, Oz.

OSCAR *(agitated)* Christ, how do you stand it? The conniving, the disrespect—

EZRA *(low, resigned)* 'Ave to, don't I?

OSCAR *(angry)* No! No, you don't. You can stand up for yourself, push back.

EZRA *(muttered)* Dunno how.

OSCAR *(angry,)* What do you mean, you don't know how? You got out, didn't you? You said – you said 'fuck you' to society and saved yourself, when so many didn't. You had guts – you left, Ezra. You did that!

EZRA *(firm)* No, I didn't.

OSCAR What?

EZRA *(cold, hushed, resentful)* I didn't leave. I was... I was gone 'fore all the resurgence shit. Twelve years, or summin. Boat they stole, I stowed away. I ain't plan for shit, ain't stand for anti-government or freedom or *nothing*, I just couldn't take sleepin' at that pier no more. Now 'ere I am... 'leader!' What special growth you 'ave, Ezra... Well fucking done...!

OSCAR *(taken aback, concerned)* How did that... Twelve years? Alone...?

(Beat. Ezra realises he's let enough slip. May as well go all the way.)

EZRA *(sighs, hushed)* Was eighteen. Thereabouts. Thought it was time. Clearly wasn't.

OSCAR *(confused)* To make your own way?

EZRA *(bitter, cold)* Jeez, you lot live in cotton wool, don't ya? Wish it were like that. Wish I coulda made those choices, 'bout uni and a future an' everythin... 'Cept wishes is all dreams, right? An' now we all know dreams is pretend.

(Beat.)

(hesitant, vulnerable) I mean – I – I did have one choice.

(Beat.)

OSCAR *(frowning)* Ezra?

EZRA *(distant, hushed, pushing down emotion)* Said I could have conversion or the street. Watched 'em burn my bed to 'clear the AIDs'. Could see the smoke halfway 'cross the city. Still smell it, sometimes, when the mist's this thick.

(Beat.)

Nice people, my parents.

(Beat.)

OSCAR *(compassionate)* Ezra—

EZRA *(cold)* Wish Pom was right, wish I was a liar. But couldn't lie 'bout who I was no more. 'Least they taught me one thing, though. Can't love what ya don't understand.

(They look at each other.)

Beat.)

(soft, mournful) Was like crawlin' through landmines, thinkin none of 'em would explode. An' they all went off at once.

(Beat.)

OSCAR *(soft)* I know. I know...

(Everything fades as the echoes of Leighton's previous words fade in, this time completely in focus.)

TWO YEARS AGO. A classroom – dull and undecorated, almost as uniform as a cell but for the desks and wide windows.)

LEIGHTON *(warm, jovial, dismissing a class)* Thank you all – some great work today. Appreciate the attentiveness, I know the curriculum's still got some getting used to. See you guys tomorrow – hey, don't forget your masks; remember the smog warning, huh, guys?

(Beat.)

Hikaru! Might I have a word, please?

HIKARU *(apologetic)* Ah, shoot – sorry, Kess – forgot I asked about that extension!

KESSI *(amused)* No worries, man. Tomorrow, yeah? Pier's not going anywhere.

HIKARU *(scoffs)* Don't jinx it, they'll riot there next – and I need my smoke hut **un-**destroyed by mollie cocktails?

KESSI *(teasing)* Touché. Right. Enjoy Leighton.

HIKARU *(disgusted)* Yeah, just 'cuz he's your type...

KESSI Glasses are sexy, you're just a coward.

LEIGHTON *(clears throat, playful)* I can hear you. And yes, yes they are, thank you, Mr. Mitchell.

KESSI *(sucking up, fake-flirty)* Very welcome, sir.

(He makes to exit.)

LEIGHTON *(polite)* Door, please.

KESSI *(whispered, hyped)* Get it, bitch!

HIKARU *(whispered, mortified)* Shut the fuck up!

KESSI *(giggling like an idiot under his breath)*

(Kessi runs from the room, shutting the door behind him.)

LEIGHTON *(clears throat)* So. Hikaru?

HIKARU R-Right. Yes. A word. Which one were you after, sir?

LEIGHTON *(amused)* If one really is all you have for it.

(He opens the door to the store cupboard and ushers them in, clicks on the single lightbulb that crackles faintly overhead. Hikaru locks the door and looks up at him, eagerness in their eyes.)

HIKARU *(hushed, playful)* Well, as store cupboards go, you know I'm always going to go with 'stylish.'

LEIGHTON *(laughs)*

HIKARU *(laughs)* Sorry. The book. Obviously. So, it's... 'in a word'... *real*.

(Beat.)

LEIGHTON *(amused)* Well, it is *fiction*, so of course you'd see it that way.

HIKARU *(passionate, hushed)* In that I – like, I see it every day. Feels like I walk by houses where it's all overgrown or covered in junk, and it's - like I *know* Boo lived there! The outrage, the innocence, the lynch mob, it's... Sir, it's so real.

LEIGHTON So you liked it?

HIKARU Loved it. Made me so sad, but I loved it.

LEIGHTON *(sincere, smiling)* Good. Good, I'm glad. Was always dear to me growing up, so I'm glad. Really.

HIKARU *(small hum of appreciation)*

(Beat.)

(hushed, hopeful) D'you... reckon any mockingbirds survived, sir?

LEIGHTON *(uncomfortable)* Honestly? I... I doubt it. If they did – or do survive – I'd say the smogs getting darker wouldn't do them any kindness. They can't exactly wear masks like we can.

HIKARU *(evasive)* That's what I... thought. Obviously. Y'know. But... *(sighs)* Reading this just...

(Beat.)

(soft, mournful) I miss birds, Mr. Leighton. All the time reading this, I thought I could hear them. Sometimes. A-Almost...

(Beat.)

(embarrassed, stammering) That's dumb of me, right?

LEIGHTON *(sincere)* Not at all.

(Beat.)

HIKARU *(soft)* Atticus said it was a sin to kill a mockingbird.

LEIGHTON Well remembered.

HIKARU *(cold)* But we killed all of them.

(Leighton shifts uncomfortably.)

LEIGHTON *(sighs, sincere)* That's the classics for you. No matter how old they get, still fresh as a papercut, and twice as raw.

HIKARU *(dry, cold)* Pretty big papercut.

LEIGHTON *(trying to lighten the mood)* Here's hoping we don't get one from this.

(He reaches overhead and pops a ceiling tile, scrapes it to the side to reveal a stack of dusty books.)

(soft grunt of effort as he pops the tile)

(He retrieves a book and holds it out to Hikaru.)

(blows the dust off, coughs a little) It's about rabbits.

HIKARU *(taken aback, amused)* Rabbits? What am I, five?

LEIGHTON Well, not *about* rabbits, but they're pretty important.

HIKARU *(frowning)* Then why's the title about mice?

LEIGHTON And men.

HIKARU Gross.

LEIGHTON *(amused)* Yeah, well, we're not all bad.

HIKARU Says the teacher who smuggles contraband lit for his students.

LEIGHTON Can't let real art go to waste. Justice for the mockingbirds, huh?

HIKARU Ouch. Too soon.

LEIGHTON Always will be.

(Beat.)

(softening, sighing a little, reminiscent) Like... I miss them too, right? When I was about your age, they were still discovering new species and it was always so exciting for people. Younger than that, I'd lay out hair from my sister's brush so the magpies could make their own nest instead of pushing eggs from another.

(Beat.)

(mournful, a little cold) They never did. Feels telling, in its own way. Like we should've seen it coming...

HIKARU *(sad snuffle, trying not to get choked up)*

LEIGHTON *(firm)* Hikaru... It's just the way the world is now. There's... no more room for mockingbirds.

HIKARU *(soft)* Wish I were one.

(Beat. They turn away, stuffing the book into their backpack as if to distract themselves.)

(clears throat, evasive) Should fix that ceiling tile better, sir. Saw the janitor looking like he thought he saw something up there. You know they'd trace it back to you like *that*.

LEIGHTON *(firm)* I'd never let that happen. Gotta think about you as much as me, now don't I?

HIKARU *(muttered, bitter)* Least someone does...

(Beat.)

Thanks for the book. Again. I'll get it back by next week.

LEIGHTON I have a feeling you'll finish before then.

HIKARU Maybe. But I've... got something else in the meantime. You'll see.

LEIGHTON Will I?

HIKARU Yes.

(Beat.)

(firm, resolved) And there is still room for mockingbirds.

WHEN TOWER ANGELS FALL // a Nettle Hunt Production © 2023

with the voice talents of

Hikaru – Kezza Chi

December – Kat Whitaker

Sol – Anthony O’Neil Kelly Jr.

Ophelia – Aife

Oscar – Alan Heriberto Tena Fuentes

Pom – Maddi Albregts

Ezra – Alex Cain

Eden – Lauren Tucker

Moltenore – Chelsea Krause

Emmens – David Purkey

Mr. Leighton – Shawn Cadieux

with additional voices by Carrick Inabnett and Olivia Manning

Written and Directed by Elizabeth Plant

Music Composed by David Fesliyan, Kevin Teasley & Synth of Insomnia

Cover Art by Gelatoria

Special thanks to Elliot Somerfield, Ali Hylton, Natasha Zangari and Isi Tucker.

A Nettle Hunt Podcast © 2023