

(Static fades in. Then cuts.)

Key. Keys. It's all the same thing, right?

(Music fades in)

I mean it's not. Defensiveness aside, I know that. My tongue was tripping all over as I was broadcasting, and that's not the first time this has happened. Look, I know I told you it was a bag of keys, right, but I only took the one. The rest just... Well, I imagine, they're probably still sitting there. Lottie and I abandoned that building some time back. We had no need to mess with them. The short of it is that it only felt right to take the one. But it wasn't even a morality thing. Like minimal damage or inconvenience to a stranger sort of morality. It was an impulse thing. Instinctively, I was obsessed with the one key despite all the others that were in that bag. And in some ways, the reasoning seems simple, I knew that one key was mine, and I had a right to it. That doesn't make sense, but that's the flip side of things.

There's a downside to letting your autopilot kick in: you never entirely know where it's going. I mean, you can't. You don't know the 'why,' but the 'why' is pretty critical. It's the 'why' that gives you reason to be fearful or to be confident. And history is a part of that 'why,' personal or otherwise. And I don't have that.

(Music fades out and new music fades in)

I have a body that just wants to act on its own accord, whether or not my mind is completely on board. And more often than not, it isn't. Especially now.

There's been this urge to run, lately. Like, I need to keep moving, and my body wants to keep going in what is presumably the right direction, but Lottie's illness is acting up. Right now, she can't move. She's been trying, which I think might have made

everything worse. Or just not better, maybe. I don't even know if there is a worse, right now. Obviously, if she dies, well... that's a lot worse than what we're currently dealing with, but that seems to be cheating when it comes to the wild speculation game or whatever I'm playing with myself.

A few other people live in this safe house. More accurately, it's literally their house, I should say. They just let people and go through here. For whatever reason they might have. No questions asked. Except in our case for the obvious one. Why wasn't Lottie in a hospital or under some doctor's care? And maybe our reason, which we are not forthcoming with, isn't a good one. My dad is just one doctor in one field that isn't even the field that Lottie needs. I'd know if it was. Maybe I'm not a doctor, but I've seen plenty of things in the course of co-existing with one. No, this is something else. Something in her blood, I think. Or fear, really.

Lottie always defends me, though, because I think they have figured out I'm the problem. She always says she doesn't want to go, and that's that, but then logic steps in, and how could she not want to go? No one ever wants to be that sick.

Large blotches of discoloration are starting to show on her skin. They might have been developing for a while, but because her skin tone is fairly dark, it might have just been it hard to see. 'Might' because none of us are doctors. So we don't know if this is extra, extra bad or just extra bad. Which if you can't tell is bad either way.

It's not even my--It's not even my paranoia that's keeping her here. Or not just that particular iteration of my paranoia. There's a car that's been sitting outside this safehouse for about as long as we've been here. It got here the day after we did. It doesn't look like anyone's in it. The windows aren't even tinted, so it's-- It's probably just

an ordinary car, and I might be overreacting. But the people who actually live here had never seen it before, and despite never seeing anyone go near it, it seems to move a couple inches every couple days. And sure, you need to run the engine of your car every so often, but... But maybe that's all this is. Except I have seen that exact car before. I've seen that license plate before. I know it.

(Music fades out and new music fades in)

For a while, I thought it was a hallucination. Some little neurological bomb that went off in my head after a certain amount of time without hearing Dad's voice. I don't know. It seemed plausible. A lot of things did that probably shouldn't. But I'm not where I should be, mentally or physically, so all's fair, I guess.

Lucent, I... I should not be broadcasting. At all. I mean, for one, I doubt you're listening. I doubt any neutral party is. If someone is, it might just be whoever is following us. Maybe. Even. (Exhale) Because if Dad did find my equipment then it wouldn't be hard to figure out what I'm doing, right. Or--But no, that-- (Sigh) It would just be easier to come in and grab me. Maybe not at this house but at any number of the other places Lottie and I have been to.

All the same, I know I shouldn't broadcast. Nothing good will come of it, plenty of potential for bad, but I need to sort out my thoughts. And my head is not friendly territory. It's not safe ground. I need to keep moving. And for now, that's more figurative than literal.

I left almost all of the keys in the plastic bag and only took the one I thought I had to. At first. Yes, there was a security door, which was confusing. I thought I was going to need another key from the bag, but nope, it was the same key. I guess it's one of those

locks that can accept a set of certain keys and not one. But as for the rest of the keys, some of them looked too worn to still be relevant. Or maybe the weather got to them prematurely. I don't know. Some did look fine, and there were people living in the other units of the building, so all that can be their problem. I guess. I don't know. Maybe that's rude, but we were just visiting, technically.

(Pause)

I'm worried I'll be interrupted again. By Lottie's condition worsening. But she is stable today. Stable is an accomplishment right now.

(Pause)

That day, we went to the unit, and even before we opened the door, I could smell the dust that had to be waiting for us. I looked to Lottie and told her to wait in the stairwell because... (inhale) Well, this was going to be bad.

(Music fades out and new music fades in)

Not VERY bad because I was pretty sure it was only dust. But bad. Which was assuming no one was in there, and that feels like a pretty big assumption considering how Lottie and I met. But whatever irony was present in the moment was lost on her. So she didn't question me and took a few steps back.

From there, it was fairly straightforward. Key in lock, turn, click. Then hand on doorknob and key in pocket. Turn the knob and fling it open. I jumped back beside the doorway, anticipating at least the wave of dust that did in fact come. But given the nature of dust, that distance was not as helpful as it could have been. I still felt myself swept up in the dust that had accumulated in a initially poorly-kept pre-abandonment

and then abandoned apartment. It had quite the sad history before we showed up, and none of it was working in our favor.

Lottie called out for me, presumably still able to see the relatively calm chaos from where she had chosen to stand. But I did not want to frighten her, so I choked down the cough that was coming up in my throat. Dust isn't a smell that particularly bothers me. It was more the intensity of it than anything. While still pressing my back to the beige wall, I glanced into the room and saw that there were windows, so I thought, 'hey, a solution.' And that's all I thought about for a moment or two as I walked in.

Problem is: I've never been all that good with windows. Especially those old school metal kinds that were meant to survive a potential third World War. I just haven't noticed a consistent rhyme and reasons to those locking mechanisms. Never mind, the metal was almost grainy to the touch. I shivered from disgust, but honestly? That room was technically an upgrade to what we had, so it was worth a shot staying there.

Lottie came up behind me while I was struggling but before I could successfully air the room out. So maybe my best intentions of giving her some better place to rest were actually her undoing. Maybe something was in the air beside dust, and I just didn't catch it, and that's why she's so sick now. But she hadn't been doing all that great beforehand, so... Who knows? Who knows much of anything, really.

(Pause)

I really thought I didn't like being a caregiver, you know? But here I am, falling into that role again. And from the word 'go' too. I hardly knew Lottie when I became so invested in her welfare that I made a 'ride or die' situation for myself. I just knew enough

to know that she was different. Or different in most ways. She still needed me. She still needs me, but with her, I'm more directly screwing up than I ever did with the kids.

(Music fades out and new music starts)

(Sigh) I'm not going to think about them. I can't. I really can't. I'm not going to think about them. Thinking about any of them stings. Thinking about all of them stings, but if my mind focuses on Roslyn, that's a particular knife in the chest. And I hate that I'm so inclined to self-inflicted punishments. Because it means that she's never all that far from my mind.

Hands down, that room was more secure than the house was. So our choice in where to stay was a fairly obvious one. We got most of the dust out, using a cardboard chunk for a dustpan. The window didn't have a screen, so it was not like we had to go back and forth to empty it. Wise or not, we dumped things from the window because it meant we could stay largely invisible from the rest of the people living in that building, and there were people living there. We could hear them at night when Lottie needed to rest. She didn't always rest. It was a pain-issue, one that we could only do so much about. But one night when she was, I couldn't. I got up and decided to... Well, I want to call it investigating, but that's... But that's not what I was doing. That's giving myself too much credit. I walked over to the center of the singular room that composed this apartment and placed my ear against the floor.

I could hear talking. Not arguing, but how I can be sure, considering I couldn't actually make out any words. But the tones weren't aggressive. I could tell that much, which is why I think it was just talking. Talking that-to me--without substance.

That was the first night I actually slept somewhat well in that apartment. Eventually my body relaxed underneath me, and I slept on the floor with my ear pressed downwards, listening to the tones of voices held by people who had modest lives filled with love. There are assumptions abound in that, but you know, there aren't really consequences to something like that. Not in this context.

It was the next day that I noticed the car. So who knows how long it was really there, I guess. I hadn't been sleeping well in quite some time, so my brain function was not as sharp as it could be.

(Pause)

I really don't know if I should describe it here. If someone is listening, then I'm better off letting them think I could be confused and I focused on a different car. That I identified the wrong car. Or maybe they can switch cars, I don't know. I--I'm playing chess with an unknown set of pieces. (Music fades out and new music fades in) That is to say, I don't know what they're playing with nor do I know what I have.

But that car looked too nice to be in a neighborhood like that one. Even on the best of days, even for the best things there, there's a sort of delicacy about them. Like these things were polished, but the polish was watered down to get the last bit out of the jar. It can do something, but it can't take you all the way. Whereas, this car was and has always been pristine.

There was no one in it, but no one was staking it out for a lift or other trouble. No one wanted to even sneak a peek into the trunk to see what they could get when the odds seemed to be that something had to be there. Even if it was just a gym bag, it would be a gym bag worth grabbing. And this indifference spoke to a certain respect

that defied the temptations of desperation, which would then imply that the people around here knew who owned that car. And maybe they didn't like said car owner, but they respected said car owner enough to leave it be.

Or maybe nobody wanted trouble. Any of that makes sense. All of that makes sense. But my gut was telling me that was wrong. The same gut that makes me trip over my words because it assumes my mind has the same understanding of the world, so why bother explaining anything. That same gut right now is telling me to run despite the fact that I would have to do it alone.

I know what my problem is. I'm dwelling in a world I only partly understand. I'm inhabiting a space that seemingly had its rent paid, but I don't know by whom. And for a while, that was quite literal. We stayed in that apartment for another week. No one came by. And no one had been there since... Since I had.

(Extended - Music fades out and new music fades in)

Literal fingerprints look all the same to me. Untrained eye and all that. But figurative fingerprints can be found in unexpected places.

You should know that my penmanship is consistent. Odd but consistent. I learned different types of scripts in school. Cursive and some deviations at a young age to help with fine motor control. That was the educational craze back then. I never found one I liked as a whole so much as I had preferences for each of the letters, so the final result is a combination of the lot. No one could replicate by coordinated randomness. So all those notes on the desk of the studio apartment? Those were written by me. So were the notes in all the books. There wasn't a map, though. That would have been too simple.



As it stands, this whole thing has been one nonstop puzzle that... Well, I... I don't know. I don't know what the pieces are or where to find them. Apparently I'm just supposed to assume that I can. But I do know that there are two things I have to take care of right now. I have to find Lottie some medical attention. I do. She's--She's probably dying right now. And Lucent, I... I have to find out who you were to me.

(Sigh) Wow, that was--Those are horrifying things to say aloud. I really should have given up this broadcasting.

(Static starts. Music cuts. Static fades out).

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