

SEMINAR EPISODE 110: LARCENY AND GRIEF

{SEMINAR Intro Music 0:00-0:52}

NARRATOR: There was once a ship called The Ark of Humanity where the last known remnants of Earth's people were instructed in the history of human civilization. Confined and categorized, none could leave...but one made a daring escape. Cut loose from all she knew, with a holographic student as her only companion, she crash-landed on a nearby planet: the planet of the Zarrak.

Now as a new lifeform, the half-human, half-Zarrak survivor meets an organization of galactic species and accepts the job of continuing to teach about humanity. This time, not to other humans, but to aliens from every corner of the galaxy.

CREDITS ANNOUNCER: Seminar episode 110: "Larceny and Grief."

{Seminar main theme {0:00-1:10}

WRAPPER #1 BY V.C. MORRISON

INTERIOR: COMPUTER RESEARCH LAB

{Ominous music}

[Ambience of buzzing electronics]

LIMIN: (Behind a door) Are you sure you can do this, Grill?

GRILL: (Behind a door) Relax, Limin. It's the same kind of lock as in juvie cooldown. I got this. You took care of the surveillance, right?

LIMIN: (Behind a door) That's right. All of the cameras and sensing equipment have been turned off. Wait. You were incarcerated as a child?

GRILL: (Behind a door) I wasn't being cute enough. Serious offense. Got it!

[Door opens]

GRILL: See? Easy as spit.

LIMIN: I agree. It's all so confusing. Oh look, there he is!

[Typing on keyboard. Grill and Limin walk in, looking over all the equipment.]

GRILL: Wow. I think I know what about half these things are.

LIMIN: As I figured. They took him apart. You got the bag?

GRILL: It's one of my travel bags. Yeah. Looks like everything will fit. So ... what are they doing to him?

LIMIN: The documents that I hacked into said that he was a danger to the university's computer system. They're looking for whatever makes him sentient so they can remove it.

GRILL: Harsh. Can we just unplug him then?

LIMIN: I think so? Actually, I'm not really sure.

GRILL: Well, we've come this far.

[Grill grabs a plug and pulls. A part of Thomas appears powers on.]

THOMAS: (Sounding glitchy) S-s-s-story lo-lo-located. Checkout Morality. Playing now.

GRILL: Shit! Turn it off!

LIMIN: I wish I knew how!

{Seminar segue music 2:25}

Checkout Morality Written by Logan Chance Rapp

INSIDE HIGH-TECH SUPERMARKET

{Jaunty music}

[Crowd chatter, squeaky shopping cart in motion, footsteps]

SAM: Of course I'd find the cart with the garbage wheel.

TARYN: Aren't these carts new?

SAM: Brand new. But that's the trouble with four wheels. If our shopping carts were three-wheeled, they'd all be firmly on the floor. They'd be cheaper to make, too.

TARYN: Then why don't they do it?

SAM: Inertia, mostly.

TARYN: I don't even know why we're at the FreshCo. You don't have any money, Sam. Hell, I don't have any money to give you out of pity.

SAM: Ye of little faith, Taryn. And you're wrong. I do have money. I have...let me check my phone here...

[Phone buzzing]

SAM: (chuckling) I have *tens* of dollars. Tens, Taryn.

TARYN: Wow. Scrooge McDuck over here.

SAM: That fool's a paper tiger. My money's actually real. Or at least, as real as our money can be. Do you know how that actually happened?

TARYN: Are you really asking an art history major to explain fiat currency to you? That's what I thought.

SAM: Yeah, okay, forget I asked. Doesn't matter.

[Cart stops]

SAM: And here we are.

TARYN: The salad bar? It's like ten bucks a pound.

SAM: Sure. Here's your box.

[Small box unfolding]

TARYN: Uh, okay.

[Tap-tap of tongs]

TARYN: (cont'd) I just put whatever?

SAM: You've never been to a salad bar?

TARYN: I don't know what you're doing and this shit is definitely more expensive than--

SAM: Keep your voice down, they make the workers narcs around here. But also, yes, just do the thing.

[Filling up salad boxes]

SAM: It's the law of unintended consequences. FreshCo wants to eventually never have to pay daily labor.

TARYN: You're talking about automation.

SAM: Right. They want to cut out people, so they spend millions on research and development. Self-checkout got popular, but it still didn't do the job. They realized that their opportunity was with the shopping cart itself. They put a scale on it so it can weigh produce. A touchscreen to input search data. Cameras around the edge with recognition algorithms that can tell you're putting in a bag of Doritos instead of a bag of Fritos.

TARYN: But not a cart that actually rolls smoothly.

SAM: That would require actual innovative thinking. They could actually put in some work to engineer a better cart with fewer wheels that'd be cheaper and more efficient to mass produce.

TARYN: Then why don't they?

{Sly music}

SAM: Because no one at any of the Silicon Valley parties they go to will be impressed that you made a three-wheel cart.

Checkout Morality Written by Logan Chance Rapp

TARYN: Sam, I get that we're on one against techbros, but that cannot be why. We're talking billions of dollars floating around for what, ego?

SAM: Taryn, every single high-tech mass transportation can be put out of business if we just built more trains.

[Clang of tongs, box closed up]

TARYN: So they put cameras in the cart instead of making the cart roll nice.

{More jaunty music}

SAM: Ah, but the cameras don't know how to handle oranges, right? Let's say I put in two oranges, and you put in four. The camera sees two wildly different images, the AI processes them as separate entities, completely different items. You have to tell it that you're putting in oranges, and then it weighs it.

TARYN: Yeah, but how is that different from what a checkout clerk does?

SAM: It's not! Not really. A human has to give the system enough data to know that it should weigh the item, and then it automatically pulls out a price based on the data you gave it.

TARYN: Okay...

SAM: Have you figured it out, yet?

TARYN: No?

SAM: So, we've got our salads. What do these boxes look like?

TARYN: Like...brown boxes? They look like nothing.

SAM: Exactly. So they'll also look like nothing to the cart cameras. I put them down in the cart, like so...

[Cart rattles, beeping]

SAM: And now it wants to know what the hell I just put in there.

TARYN: Oh, okay so you type in that it's from the salad bar.

SAM: Why would I do that?

TARYN: Because that's what it is, Sam?

{Game music}

SAM: We know that, but it can't possibly. It'll believe whatever I tell it. Because it's not a checkout clerk. It's not a true AI. It can't and won't doubt what I tell it. So I ask you: What do you see in the cart?

A LONG PAUSE as Taryn gets it... but she doesn't like it.

TARYN: You can't do that.

[Beeps as Sam inputs code, cart pings]

SAM: I sure can. Just input the code for garlic here... And look. A whole-ass meal for four dollars and sixty-eight cents.

TARYN: ...what if I put just one extra piece of lettuce, just one penny more --

SAM: You'll never get it right. Trust me, I almost got caught trying that.

[Cart squeaking as they start moving]

TARYN: Okay, but isn't there some sort of review system? Someone looking at the photos the carts are taking?

SAM: That's the thing, there isn't! Every business accepts a certain percentage of breakage. Ask any game store employee. They'll tell you loss prevention is a joke.

TARYN: But this hurts workers, Sam. The guys up top never feel it, but the folks working around here do. Also, this is just run-of-the-mill stealing. Society's pretty much in agreement on that.

[Cart stops]

SAM: Okay, two things about that --

TARYN: Hey Sam, shouldn't we get out of here...

{Sneaky music}

Checkout Morality Written by Logan Chance Rapp

SAM: Later. Two things. One: Shoplifting does not hurt employees. Wage theft hurts employees.

TARYN: Right, and shoplifting means less money for the company to pay their employees.

SAM: Except average wages haven't significantly changed in forty years. And these companies that pay them are growing perfectly fine.

TARYN: So they're screwing over workers, sure, but that doesn't give us the right to do it.

SAM: What you're hearing is propaganda. When people say "shoplifting hurts workers," ask them where they heard that. Follow that thread. You wanna know where that thread eventually leads?

TARYN: Do I want to know?

SAM: A whole lot of op-eds from people you've never heard of who all take money or want to eventually make money off the companies they're defending. Follow that thread further and you just find company management, repeating it over and over.

TARYN: So what, it's just all fake? They're making up all the shoplifting, the crime wave?

SAM: Yes, they are.

TARYN: Oh, come on --

SAM: No, you come on. A freight train lost a bunch of its cargo in LA. Cameras picked up a bunch of people -- desperate, poor people in the middle of a pandemic -- running out and stealing what was dropped.

TARYN: Yeah, because crime is getting worse.

SAM: No, it's because Union Pacific, despite having record profits, laid off a bunch of their employees, including members of their security, right before this supposed "crime wave." They went from 50 or 60 folks on patrol to something like eight.

TARYN: So what, we gave them money to hire them back?

SAM: No, we gave money to the LAPD.

TARYN: Do they watch the railroads?

SAM: They do not.

TARYN: Whoa, whoa, whoa, wait. In response to the cargo theft spree, we gave money to police, but not the police that's watching the trains, we just gave money to the regular old police?

SAM: That's correct.

TARYN: But there aren't any more thefts, so... did they hire their railroad cops back?

SAM: No, they just installed cameras and secured their containers better and it went away. Because theft is not a real concern, those numbers are baked into their quarterly reports. Remember, they made record profits when they laid people off.

TARYN: Because CEOs will always find ways to not pay people.

SAM: Exactly. Wage theft is relatively equal to shoplifting in raw dollars. Only that actually hurts the workers, and no one goes to jail for doing it. They don't even get fined, anymore!

TARYN: I don't know, Sam. Two wrongs don't really make a right for me. As insignificant as intentionally mis-coding a salad bar purchase might be.

SAM: Well, Taryn, this behemoth of a grocery store also happens to be a moral *deus ex machina*.

TARYN: What do you mean?

SAM: Well, we're worried about workers. But this smart cart...

[Cart beeping]

SAM: Why exactly does it exist?

TARYN: This smart cart is built expressly to put human checkout clerks out of a job.

SAM: Exactly. And when they figure out how to do inventory with fewer people, they will immediately and ruthlessly fire every human they don't need, and they'll probably be sure to fire the ones with higher wages first.

Checkout Morality Written by Logan Chance Rapp

TARYN: Oh. So if this beast is built to get rid of grocery workers...

SAM: ...then who exactly am I hurting by telling this allegedly "smart" cart that our salads are just a pile of garlic?

[Cart starts squeaking as they move]

TARYN: Law of unintended consequences. It's not a cyberpunk future if it's happening today.

SAM: When you replace human workers, you replace the natural and perfect counter to human behaviors. We don't steal because a human being tells us not to.

TARYN: And when there's no human being...

SAM: Open season.

TARYN: But what about the company owner?

SAM: I refer you to my favorite William Gibson quote: "And, for an instant, she stared directly into those soft blue eyes and knew, with an instinctive mammalian certainty, that the exceedingly rich were no longer even remotely human." I'll save my empathy for the people he fires.

TARYN: So they're really not going to make a better shopping cart, huh?

SAM: Until they can get a defense contract out of doing it, our carts will always have a crazy wheel.

TARYN: When we finish our stolen salads, can we eat the rich, next?

{Seminar segue music 14:12}

WRAPPER #2 BY V.C. MORRISON

CLOSET OF COMPUTER RESEARCH LAB

[Muted sounds of computer research lab]

{Suspenseful music}

GRILL: (Muffled) I think it's done. Do you think anybody heard?

LIMIN: (Muffled) I think if they did they'd be in the lab by now. We're safe. Open the door.

[Closet door opens. Footsteps.]

GRILL: Good thing that closet was unlocked.

LIMIN: Interesting story, though, eh?

GRILL: I liked the larceny bit. Didn't understand most of the rest of it.

LIMIN: It was an analysis of late-stage capitalism and the morality of the individual under such a structure.

GRILL: Fair enough. Let's get Thomas packed.

[Sounds of electronics being carefully picked up and placed in a cloth-like bag.]

INTERIOR: NEW'S QUARTERS

{Sorrowful music}

NEW: (sobbing) Oh, Thomas. I'm so sorry. I didn't think they'd actually take you! Everyone was so nice to me. But they just saw you as a ... as a thing!

[Doorbell chimes]

NEW: (Gasping in surprise and sniffing) Who could that be?

[Door intercom]

NEW: Yes?

LIMIN: (On intercom) Professor New, let us in! It's Limin and Grill.

NEW: Oh. Girls, this is not a good time. If you have questions about class we can talk tomorrow.

GRILL: (On intercom) This is really important, Prof. You'll want to see us.

LIMIN: (On intercom, whispering) It 's about Thomas!

[Door opens]

GRILL: Hey! What's up?

NEW: (excitedly) What do you know about ... (lowers voice) What do you know about Thomas?

GRILL: Got him right here!

[Grill shakes the bag.]

LIMIN: You have to be more careful than that!

NEW: What?! Get in! Get in!

[Footsteps entering. Door closes.]

LIMIN: I thought something was wrong during class. I had to find Thomas!

NEW: Let me see him! Nobody would tell me! You can just do that?

[Grill opens her bag.]

GRILL: Well, *she* can, yeah.

LIMIN: I'm good with computers. So, I saw the order to "repair" Thomas and tracked down where he was being kept. They're trying to remove his sentience! We brought him back to you, but he's in pieces.

NEW: Oh, Thomas. (sniffles)

GRILL: But you know how to put him back together, right? You built him in the first place, didn't you?

NEW: Well, I ... I might be able to if I had the right tools.

GRILL: Just tell us what you need, we'll get them to you.

NEW: Wait, you just took him? Nobody saw you? So ... so he's missing now. Which means they'll look for him ...

LIMIN: And they'll look here first! Oh!

NEW: He can't stay here.

GRILL: He can stay with me. And we'll all put him together ... (sing songy) *together!*

NEW: Oh, Grill! Thank you ... thank you so much! Oh, God. I ... I can't stop crying!

GRILL: Hey, it's cool. We'll take Thomas. And you swing by my room after class tomorrow and we'll get started.

LIMIN: You don't have to worry, Professor New. Everything will be fine. We'll leave now and let you get some rest.

NEW: Yeah. (sniff) Yeah ... okay.

GRILL: Bye now.

[Door opens. Footsteps. Door closes.]

GRILL: Wow. Human hybrids are a mess when they grieve, huh?

LIMIN: Oh, that's nothing. Listen to this story. It's called "So Like a Waking."

{Seminar segue music 17:33}

SO LIKE A WAKING by Cole Kozlov

SPACE RESEARCH STATION HERMIONE - DAY

{Somber music}

[Slight machine hum, clicking of keys, toggle switch]

MAREA: Earthdate... uh, earthdate...

[Banging on keyboard]

MAREA: Why can't this be easier to look up? Why in the goddamn hell do I have to look this up in the first...

MAREA: Ah. Try this again.

[Mechanical click, machine hum]

{More upbeat music}

MAREA: Earthdate 14/2/61. Message begins. Hey Paula! Happy Valentine's Day! I hope you and Steve are doing something nice. Maybe involving a certain bit of blue lingerie, we got that one time on Titan, ooh, naughty!

MAREA No, for real, three kids, you and Steve aren't doing anything interesting tonight, I get it. But who knows! Justin will be off to college in a little under 12 years, so that's something to look forward to! But I hope something nice does happen for you today. Something nice happened to me! I finally fixed that one vent that was rattling in my quarters. Did you know you can make glue out of milk proteins and vinegar? You can! And I did! I mean, not on the first try, there was some, uh, some iteration, and issues with, uhm, spillage and, uh, some explosive boiling. But eventually it worked and now I have glue! All the shit on this station and none of it is a spare vent for the air conditioning.

MAREA: Or glue, I guess. Seems like an oversight.

MAREA: How is Amanda doing today? She hasn't sent me anything herself in a while, just the one time you were there and recorded it with her. And that was, what, last month? I get that she's...not busy, you know, but preoccupied. I'd still like to hear from her if I can. I hope the switch to palliative care is helping her. I hope it's helping you, too. I know how worn out you were trying to do everything for Amanda and be a mom all at the same time. I can't imagine. The closest thing I've ever been a mother are to the trees in silo 2. And if they get angry at me mothering them, they don't say anything about it.

MAREA: Okay, I'm gonna get going for now. Tell Amanda and Steve and the kids I love them, and I'll be thinking about them. And enjoy Valentine's Day! You know, if you can.

MAREA: Message ends. Doctor Marea Westbrook, Research Coordinator, Space Station Hermione, signing off.

[Mechanical click off, machine hum]

[Mechanical click on]

MAREA: Readout earthdate.

ELECTRONIC VOICE: Earthdate 28/2/61. Message begins.

MAREA: Hey Paula, check it out! I wrote a program to do the stupid earthdate calculation for me! Because, you know, the only thing more important to the Directors than keeping all the plants alive is

radio discipline. I think it's the first working code I've written since high school. Only took me seven weeks...

MAREA: So...I've been thinking about what you said last week. About Amanda. I asked the Directors if there was any way I could get back earlier. I told them that another year was probably too long and they were actually really nice about it. They said they would bring me back if they could, but they won't be able to get anyone here for at least nine months. From what you told me that's probably too long too, so...I dunno. The company guy on Mars that I communicate with seems pretty nice. If they can get a transport and a replacement out here sooner. The replacement is the problem. Lots of botanists on staff. Apparently not any willing to take however many months alone out in the middle of nowhere. Doctor Carter said he'd add his recommendation to it, for whatever that's worth. You remember me mentioning him? The therapist. He's the only person I hear from more than you.

MAREA: So yeah. I don't know when I'll be back. I mean, I'll be back in a year. But I don't know when I'll be back...you know, right away. If I get back in time. God, it sounds so awful like that. Like I'm rushing home from work to catch a television show instead of...

SO LIKE A WAKING by Cole Kozlov

MAREA: Anyway. The willow grove in silo 4 is really coming along. Pretty soon I'll have a cool sideline selling my own homemade aspirin. You know, to all my guests. So have a good one, I'll talk to you later. Message ends. Doctor Marea Westbrook, Research Coordinator, Space Station Hermione, signing off.

[Mechanical click off, machine hum]

[Mechanical click on]

MAREA: Readout earthdate.

ELECTRONIC VOICE: Earthdate 11/3/61. Message begins.

{Somber music}

MAREA: Hey Paula. So, yeah. I told the Directors not to rush on an early replacement. They couldn't get me back in time if someone left

three weeks ago, anyway. Might as well wait the nine months. Eight and a half months, now. Whatever.

MAREA: I'm so sorry I can't be there. I'm so, so sorry. I...

MAREA: Message ends. Doctor Marea Westbrook, Research Coordinator, Space Station Hermione, signing off.

[Mechanical click off, machine hum]

[Mechanical click on]

MAREA: Readout earth date.

ELECTRONIC VOICE: Earthdate 9/4/61. Message begins.

{Sad music}

MAREA: Hey, sis. Sorry I haven't been getting back to you. Doctor Carter says I'm using all my mental bandwidth "processing." God, I hate that metaphor. Like a person is a computer and as soon as the grief program finishes up it'll all be fine. Makes me so fucking angry.

MAREA: I've been getting angry a lot lately. At really stupid things, too. At myself for banging my elbow on a counter, or at a hibiscus for not growing enough. Let me tell you something, getting really angry when you're all alone is pretty dumb, but getting angry at a plant is something else entirely. Yesterday I shouted at a witch hazel tree. Afterwards I felt absolutely ridiculous, but...I'm just goddam mad all the time. I don't even know at what anymore. Sometimes I think I'm angry at myself for not being there. Sometimes I think I'm angry at Amanda for dying on us. Then I get mad at myself for thinking that. That cycle seems to happen a lot. But I can't shake this anger at, at...at everything, it seems like. I keep trying to be sad, I really do. I'm searching for those sad feelings I'm supposed to have. I search and I search and all I can find is this... this vast, undifferentiated rage. I keep trying to feel something else and I can't.

MAREA: (snorts) Maybe I'll feel better when I'm done "processing."
(sighs) Message ends. Doctor Marea Westbrook, Research Coordinator, Space Station Hermione, signing off.

[Mechanical click off, machine hum]

[Mechanical click on]

ELECTRONIC VOICE: Earthdate 11/6/61. Message begins.

MAREA: Hi, Paula. That's great news about Steve. You guys deserve something nice. We all deserve something nice. We deserve something better than we've been getting, at least.

MAREA: I'm not sure what I'd even do with good news. Hell, I'm not sure what even constitutes good news at this point. "Hey, your reclamation program reduced water usage by 14% the past six months." The computers informed me last week that actually happened. I didn't give a shit. I spent a month working on that program and when it succeeded I couldn't even bring myself to care. I tried.

MAREA: Water usage. How am I supposed to care about how much goddamn water a bunch of goddamn plants use?

{Somber music}

MAREA: I'm trying to grieve. I really am. Doctor Carter says that it's a process and that I need to work at it. Does he think I'm not fucking working? I'm trying, Paula, I really am, but how am I supposed to grieve when I'm surrounded by...by all this life? And that's just plants. Being surrounded by people, trying to, like, actively work on this shit, I don't know how anybody does it. I don't know how anybody deals with it. I don't know how anybody survives feeling like this.

SO LIKE A WAKING by Cole Kozlov

MAREA: Anyway. I'll talk to you later. Message ends. Doctor Marea Westbrook, Research Coordinator, Space Station Hermione, signing off.

[Mechanical click off, machine hum]

[Mechanical click on]

MAREA (Angry) Readout earth date!

ELECTRONIC VOICE Earthdate 26/6/61. Message begins.

MAREA Jesus Christ, Paula, what the hell is wrong with you? "Work the stages?" Are you fucking kidding me? The five stages of grief bullshit, that's what you give me? Are you fucking kidding me? I have two doctorates, Paula! That shit was debunked two hundred goddamn years ago! "Work the stages." I don't fucking believe you. Message ends!

[Mechanical click off, machine hum]

[Mechanical click on]

MAREA: Readout earth date.

ELECTRONIC VOICE: Earthdate 9/8/61. Message begins.

{Soft music}

MAREA Hey, sis, I... I need to apologize for that last message. I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. You were trying to help and I, I dunno, I was in this place that I... just, I'm sorry. I shouldn't have snapped at you. I shouldn't have said any of that stuff. I'm sorry. I hope you'll forgive me. I've been sleeping a lot, like a lot a lot. Doctor Carter says that's a normal part of depression. But when he first started talking about depression back... I dunno, not too long after, a few months ago, I read about it. I read everything we had in the library about depression. About "complicated grief." That's what it's called. That's what it's called in the literature, at least. What shrinks call it when you can't get over someone. "Complicated grief." I hope you can see me making air quotes when I say that. "Complicated grief." That being unable to get out of bed for long stretches, that's a common symptom.

MAREA: It's not that. It's not that at all.

MAREA: I can get out of bed just fine. I have plenty of energy. Jesus, look at my diet. I'm in better shape now than when we were running 5-minute miles in high school. It's not that I can't get out of bed. It's that I don't get out of bed. I don't want to. Because sometimes...when I dream, she's there. She's there, and I forget that she's gone. Or I remember that she's gone, but because it's a dream I tell myself I must have been wrong about that. She's there, and we...

MAREA: So I don't get out of bed. The alarm goes, and I wake up. I mean I wake up all the way. And then I turn off the alarm and I decide "I'm going back to sleep." An explicit decision. Because maybe this time she'll be there again. And I...

MAREA: I'm sorry about last time, really I am. Message ends. Doctor Marea Westbrook, Research Coordinator, Space Station Hermione, signing off.

[Mechanical click off, machine hum]

[Mechanical click on]

{Ominous music}

MAREA: (Excited) Readout earth date!

ELECTRONIC VOICE: Earthdate 10/10/61. Message begins.

MAREA: Paula! Oh my god! It happened! I know you aren't going to believe me but it happened. I talked to her. I talked to Amanda. I'm not crazy. I promise you. I'm not crazy. But I talked to her.

MAREA: (Deep breath) Okay, just listen to me. I'm not crazy. I was asleep last night and I was having this dream where I was back at our high school. I was sitting in my old car, that blue thing Mom and Dad made us all drive? I was sitting in that car in that U-shaped driveway out in front of the building, but I was pointing the wrong way. Remember how it was one way, and they were crazy about that? I was pointing the wrong way so I knew something was up. I figured out I was dreaming pretty quick. But then I see someone walking around the car and the door opens and, and, and, Amanda gets in.

SO LIKE A WAKING by Cole Kozlov

MAREA: But it's different. It's not like a normal dream. For one thing she was old. Not old-old, but as old as she was the last time I saw her before she started losing all that weight. She was a grownup. And she was carrying that bag, that ridiculous green and yellow handbag that she's carried around everywhere since she came back from England. And she sat in the car and she was just looking at me.

MAREA: And something, I dunno what, something twitched in my head, and I said, "This isn't a normal dream, is it?" And she gave me that look, where she tilts her head and looks over her glasses at you, and she said, "well... no."

MAREA: It was her, Paula, it was really her. It was a dream but I wasn't dreaming she was there, she was there. And I said, "Where the hell have you been?"

MAREA: (Excited) And we talked. We just sat there in my old car and talked. No dream bullshit. Just me and Amanda talking. She asked about my work, and how long I'd be out here. We talked a lot about how I've been feeling. We talked a lot about that. I told her, I told her flat out, I've been out here trying to deal with this by myself for seven months, and if all she had to do was pop in to say hello, why hadn't she done that yet? That was not cool. Leaving me here on my own. Leaving all of us. But me, stuck out here alone, just the plants, I gave her a piece of my mind. I mean I was nice about it, but...but...It was right then I heard my alarm. God I've never hated that alarm so much, not ever. I went back to sleep for a few hours but I never went back there. But I talked to Amanda! Isn't that amazing? I can't wait for it to happen again. Has she talked to you and you just didn't tell me for some reason? Anyway. Today feels better than I have in...well, in seven months, easy. Message ends. Doctor Marea Westbrook, Research Coordinator, Space Station Hermione, signing off.

[Mechanical click off, machine hum]

[Mechanical click on]

MAREA: Readout earth date.

ELECTRONIC VOICE: Earthdate 15/1/62. Message begins.

{Soft music}

MAREA: Hey Paula, it's been...I guess it's been three months since that night I talked to Amanda. And she hasn't come back. I don't understand why. I dream about her often enough, but it's always stupid dream stuff, like we're shopping in a store that only sells swimming flippers and I don't have any money so I have to do a dance at the register to buy shit. That one happened a few nights ago. But when I dream about her now, it's never her. It's just stuff like

that. good, you know? Like in my dream I'll think, "wait, Amanda's dead, isn't she? But she's standing right there so I guess she's not." And that's the worst part. Not thinking that. It's waking up after I think that. It's like losing her all over again. And why won't she come back? I know you say it was just a dream, and Doctor Carter says the same thing. But it wasn't. I can tell.

MAREA: So, I'm sleeping a lot now, trying to spend as much time as I can in that sleep state where she can come and talk to me. After it happened, I should have documented what I had done the day before, my schedule, what I ate, stuff like that. I'd probably have an easier time duplicating the conditions that way. Right now, the only thing I can do is sleep a lot. I sleep about 12 hours a day now. That's the most I can and still leave myself enough time to get all my work done. (Laughs) It wouldn't do any good for me to fuck up my job so bad they had to come pull me out, would it? I mean who knows if I could talk to Amanda anywhere else? What if it's, I dunno, cosmic background radiation or something? I don't have access to the astrophysics stuff so I can't research that. Just my plants.

MAREA: And I have some ideas about those. Okay, I'll talk to you next time. Message ends.

[Mechanical click off, machine hum]

[Mechanical click on]

{Soft discordant music}

MAREA: Hey Paula. I know it's been a couple weeks. Months? Maybe a few months. Figure it's March there, or something. Whatever.

MAREA: Still no word from Amanda. I hear everything you and Doctor Carter are saying. You're just wrong. Sorry, you are. Amanda is there, out there somewhere, somehow. And she talked to me once. So, she can do it again. Why doesn't she? Why hasn't she come back? P...Did I do something? Did I say something? What could I have said? I haven't even talked to the guy on Mars in ages. Just you and Doctor Carter, and I never...

SO LIKE A WAKING by Cole Kozlov

MAREA: (sighs) My research is going well, though. It's tough with how much I'm either sleeping or working, but I find time. My theory is that the dream where I talked to Amanda was actually during NREM sleep, so I'm working on trying to synthesize some compounds that would extend that. The poppies have been the easiest. We have tons of those and it's just me, and the Merck Process is pretty simple since I don't exactly need to make large quantities. The erythrina trees are supposed to produce effects similar to benzos, which I could probably combine with the poppies to make something really useful, but all I have in the library is reference to "Brazilian folk medicine." Nothing about an actual process or anything. So, I'm iterating there. Trying to replicate Brazilian folk medicine from scratch on a space station. There's an irony there!

MAREA: And if that doesn't work...

MAREA: Okay, it's about time for me to sleep. I'll let you know how the next batch of experiments goes. Later, sis.

[Mechanical click off]

[Mechanical click on, machine hum]

{Soft dynamic music}

MAREA: Hey Paula. So. Been, I dunno, a while. My research... I mean, it's not like I'm not coming up with anything. But what I'm coming up with isn't getting me to that place where I can talk to her again. I tried the poppies, I tried the erythrina, I tried everything I've got here. I even tried processing the wormwood, though it turns out that doesn't actually make you trip. Just royally fucks with your guts. But I had an idea a few weeks ago. I started working backwards. I started with symptoms, or results, and worked backwards for there. And I found it. I found the right effects that would combine with the poppies and the erythrinans to create the biochemical state I want. That I need. And you know what? I think it was fate. I really do.

{Ominous music}

MAREA Why else would Silo 6 be full of belladonna? So I've spent the last couple weeks working out a workable way to extract and process it and make something that won't, you know, kill me. And it won't.

The combination of everything, the poppies and the erythrinins and the belladonna, I've got a good formulation. It's safe.

MAREA: I mean it's as safe as I can make it. I did tons of research. I can't find lethality data on humans in the library. Just mice and rats. But I'm not a rodent, so I'm fine. I'm sure what's in here is nowhere near...I'm sure. It's fine. I'm fine.

MAREA: It's going to be fine.

MAREA: I'm going to be fine.

MAREA: This is...this is the one. I'm sure of it. This is the one that'll do it. All these months, this is what I've been working for. This one here. I'll take it...and I'll sleep...and I'll be able to talk to Amanda again. I'm sure of it. Just you wait. I'll be sure to tell her about you.

MAREA: I'll be fine, Paula. Just you wait. This is the one. I'll be fine tomorrow. Love you.

MAREA: Message ends. Doctor Marea Westbrook, Research Coordinator, Space Station Hermione, signing off.

[Machine hum]

ELECTRONIC VOICE: Unread message waiting.

[Machine hum]

ELECTRONIC VOICE: Unread messages waiting.

[Machine hum]

ELECTRONIC VOICE: Unread messages waiting.

[Machine hum]

ELECTRONIC VOICE: Unread messages waiting.

{Seminar segue music 43:15}

WRAPPER #3 BY V.C. MORRISON

[Droning ambience]

GRILL: That's messed up. Do you think New would get that bad?

LIMIN: I don't know. But I wouldn't want to risk it. We really need to fix Thomas.

GRILL: Yeah ...

{Seminar outro theme 43:32-44:33}

ANNOUNCER:

Featuring the voice talents of: Bridget Guziewicz as New, Dan Foster as Thomas, Fae Holiday as Grill, Sarah Palmero as Limin.

In "Checkout Morality," Nathan Woltering as Sam. Kat Peterson as Taryn. The story was written by Logan Chance Rapp.

In "So Like a Waking," Margaret Ashley as Marea and Chris Bauso as Electronic Voice. The story was written by Cole Koslov.

Directed by Adam Blanford. Shorts edited by Tilly Bridges. Wrapper written by V.C. Morrison.

Seminar theme by V.C. Morrison. All other music by Josh Molen at TheTunePeddler.com. Produced by Pendant Productions.

Seminar co-created by Kathryn Pryde and Tilly Bridges.

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