

EPISODE ONE  
BORN UNDER A BAD SIGN

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River: "Hello? Hello? Okay, microphone is on...we are recording. *(pause)*

Before I talk about Harmony, I want to talk about Richey Edwards. Richey started out as a roadie with the Manic Street Preachers, one of my all-time favourite bands. He was one of the few to achieve that rare rock and roll dream of transitioning from road crew to official band member. More than that, he became their main lyricist and a sort of mad captain of their little ship. Although he wasn't the greatest musician – apparently he mimed playing his guitar at some of their early gigs – he was a grand visionary for the band; their mission, their aesthetic, their direction.

He also struggled with depression, like a lot of great artists. Once, in an interview, a journalist asked him 'if he was really serious about his art.' He responded by taking a razor blade and carving the words '4 real' into his arm. In 1995, just before the band was about to embark on a US tour, he started behaving erratically, withdrawing large amounts of money, then his car was found left by the side of the road, he was declared missing and was never found again. There were initial sightings in India, Spain, the Canary islands, even to this day people claim to have spotted him in some distant, exotic corner of the world, but none of these sightings have ever been confirmed. The Manics kept going as a three piece, they're still making great albums.

People have already been comparing Harmony's story to Richey's 'a troubled musician, disappearing without a trace' blah blah blah...but I can promise you, Harmony's story will not be the same as Richie's, for a million different reasons. Most importantly, she is the heart and soul of Empyrean Empires, we can't

replace her, we can't go on without her. And wherever she is, I know that she will make her way back home to us, safe.

I know what a lot of you are thinking hearing this, and yes I am all too aware that with missing persons cases, if they aren't found in the first couple of days the chances become infinitesimally small, and it's been over six weeks now. Some of you may be sitting there listening to this thinking, 'that poor fool can't accept the fact that his sister's dead', but I have proof that she's still alive, and I'm really excited to share it with you.

We'll get to that soon. I know a lot of the enthusiasm has dropped off over the last couple of weeks, someone's been taking down all the missing posters I put around town. And when I try and bring it up at council meetings there's this weird, awkward coughing and then someone always changes the subject. I know they mean well, but it makes me so angry! Ullara is supposed to be the kind of community where we look after each other, no matter what, like a family. I guess even your family lets you down sometimes, and that's why I'm so grateful to all of you listening for your help.

I want to especially thank all of you who've donated to the Help Find Harmony fund. We've raised over \$7000, which is amazing! I'm using a small portion of that money to pay for this website and hosting, and I paid Harmony's medical bills, and most of her debts to...the various people she owed money to. They are not the kind of people whom you want to owe money, as I'm sure you can imagine. You'd be surprised how much the miscellaneous costs add up as well, being in a remote area means I am spending way more than I would like on petrol as I drive all over the state chasing leads and, well, I won't bore you with the details. But please know that your help is appreciate and tell your friends about these broadcasts and the Help Find Harmony project. When we finally bring her home we'll play a big free concert with the band you'll all be invited and it'll be amazing!

*Pause. Inhale*

I've thought a lot about what I should say first; whether we should talk about her disappearing, or the drugs, or her... we called them her 'little reveries' but that's not the medical term of course. And of course there's all that ridiculous,

crazy propaganda that people talk about Ullara. I've heard everything from UFO sightings to human trafficking to it being a mini narco-state. It's weird what people say about small towns. I can promise you that none of it's true.

So, ah, to begin: One of Harmony's favourite books is *Alice in Wonderland*, you probably all know that's where we got the last album title 'Of Cabbages and Kings.' There's this famous bit where the king says 'begin at the beginning, go on till you come to the end: then stop.'

I suppose we'll do that. Harmony didn't—doesn't, like talking about her childhood much. You might have noticed that whenever we get asked about our childhood in interviews she says the exact, and I mean EXACT same phrase — 'Our childhood was pleasantly prosaic and beautifully banal.' Even in interviews she's always so damn poetic. You can see why she writes most of the lyrics. But there's a reason why she never speaks candidly about our childhood—

### *Phone rings*

Sorry. I'll just get rid of this. Okay, so, the beginning. 'It was the best of times it was the bratwurst of times.' Harmony made that joke about a million times when we were on tour in Germany last year. I started insisting that we avoid restaurants where they served bratwurst, not an easy task in Germany.

Our parents were workaholics. They founded a real estate company in their 20s, just after they got married. And no, I'm not going to say which one, obviously, but I'm sure you can figure it out if you really feel like digging. Harmony and I were born a couple of years later, a very unexpected turn of events as they say. Our parents' busy schedule really did not allow time for a child, let alone two. They basically outsourced our care to a rotating cadre of nannies. I had six different people I referred to as 'mum' when I was a little kid.

When they were home we could only periodically see their faces because they were always glued to a computer screen. Direct eye contact felt like a sort of special treat, I thought of it the same way that same kids thought about Sunday night pizza.

Our house wasn't so much a home as an office that happened to have a couple of kids wandering around. Harmony never seemed to care. She liked our nannies, especially Patricia. Patricia was from Brazil and she taught Harmony

how to play guitar. I wanted her to teach me too but I also wanted to do something different than her so I told my parents I wanted piano lessons. They were happy to have another activity to keep me occupied and away from them and their computers.

Music was an escape for us, it was like magic. Writing songs was like casting spells. I once heard Alan Moore talking about we use the same word 'spell' to discuss the act of creating words and creating magic. That's what writing songs felt like; we'd make something new that didn't used to exist.

Actually...you know what? Maybe this is a bit self-indulgent but I can play you something. I've got a bunch of those ancient recordings hiding on my hard drive somewhere...ah! Maybe this one.

*Plays song.*

Wow. I'd forgotten this existed.

*Listens, hums along.*

Well, there's a little sample of our juvenilia. Sorry if that's a bit self-indulgent.

*Stops the recording, tears up.*

It still gets me, hearing her music, imagining her fingers on the strings. I can't even listen to our album anymore. It's like having her in the room. Like a ghost in the stereo. Huh, that might actually be a good album title. If we ever get to make another album.

*Pauses. Wipes tears.*

Shit. Where was I? Oh yeah. It was the breast of times...um, best of times. Hrm. I wonder if that was a Freudian slip.

*Laughs awkwardly.*

When we were around fourteen we started messing around with drugs, like most teenagers. Ecstasy was okay, but it just made me really sleepy. What we really liked were mushrooms. It seemed to make more sense, taking something that had come from the earth rather than being made in a lab. The first time we took mushrooms, I felt like the curtain of reality was pulled back so we could stare into the blazing heart of the cosmos.

We made our way through the typical list of drug-related literary masterworks; *Confessions of an Opium Eater*, *Junky*, *The Doors of Perception*. We especially loved that one, it took its title from that William Blake quote: 'If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, Infinite.' And that was definitely what it felt like for us. We were gone for aeons at a time, I remember Harm said it felt like 'swimming through stars' and yeah, that's where we got the first EP title.

We used to get blitzed maybe two or three times a week. We called ourselves pyschonauts, which was unbelievably pretentious for a couple of adolescents who hadn't even figured out how to navigate basic human relationships, let alone the innermost secrets of the universe. After a while the weekend trips weren't enough, school had started to seem like a waste of time anyway. It's hard to see the value in simultaneous equations or stumbling through French lessons when you spend half your time communing with the cosmos, so we started skipping school. We'd hang out with these two pretty creepy dudes, Ollie and Murph. They got the stuff for us which was the only reason why we tolerated their company. We used to use the code 'fairy floss' on the phone, which we thought was clever but I can see now was clearly idiotic. Anyone with half a brain who overheard a fifteen-year-old on the phone asking for 'the usual amount' of fairy floss would conclude they were talking about drugs.

Ollie and Murph were always trying it on with Harm, it was completely gross. One day she went and tripped with them and 'forgot' to tell me she was going. When she came home I was so angry, I ran into the hallway ready to unleash a tantrum but then I saw her face and I just deflated. I asked her what happened and she said, 'nothing' in this tiny, timid voice. She was always the loudest person in the room. I used to say she didn't so much have conversations as announce her opinions via megaphone. But she was so quiet, she looked so small. I asked her again 'what happened?' and she said 'Nothing! Fucking nothing just leave

me alone stop following around all the goddamn time. We don't have to spend every fucking minute together, I'm my own person!

I know a lot of twins go through a rift like this in their teens, when they're trying to figure out their identity. I just didn't think it would happen with us. She started avoiding me, locking herself in her room. Then one day I was out in the garden reading and she walked past me like I wasn't even there. I thought she was just being rude, so I threw my book at her because I was a petulant little brat, but I missed because I was also a terrible shot. She didn't seem to even notice the fluttering pages and the thump of the book landing behind her.

She walked through the garden towards the back fence. I remember she wasn't wearing shoes which was weird because she had this insane idea that her feet were really ugly so she tried to keep them covered up all the time. Even when we went to the beach she'd wear shoes and only take them off the instant she wanted to go swimming. She'd rip them off and run straight into the ocean.

So she opened the gate and the hinges shrieked and I called out to her but she didn't turn around. I ran after her but she'd already crossed the street an instant before the lights changed and there was now a steady stream of traffic flowing in front of me. I watched her disappear around a corner, bare feet treading on filthy ground. We lived in a nice neighbourhood and all but there was still often glass and stuff around the place, so I was obviously pretty worried. The lights finally changed and I ran after her.

I turned the corner and ran down the street where I'd seen her walk. It was this ugly, utterly mundane street that could have been any one of a million boring monoculture suburban streets anywhere in the country. Coffee Club, newsagent, pharmacy, bottle shop, blah blah blah. All of them chainstores, completely devoid of charm and personality. I pressed my face into each of the windows, looking for her. It was almost closing time on a Tuesday, so there weren't a lot of people around. Finally I found her in the newsagent, standing in the magazine aisle.

She was looking at the magazines, and when I say looking at the magazines I don't mean she had one in her hands and she was flipping through it, I mean she was just standing there, arms hanging limp by her side staring vacantly at issues of *Guns and Ammo* and *Trucker's Weekly*. The shop clerk was eyeing her suspiciously.

I stood there staring at her for a moment, waiting for her to see me and react but she just stood there like she was in a trance. I called out, nothing. I grabbed her by the shoulder and she jolted, then turned to me and said, “Hi.”

I said, “Harmony! What the fuck are you doing?” the clerk yelled something about watching our language and reminding us that we were on camera, I ignored him.

“Have you come to take me to the beach?” she asked, she sounded stoned out of her mind.

“What are you talking about? Where are your damn shoes? Let’s just go home okay?” I grabbed her by the wrist and started to lead her away but she pulled away from me and said,

“Don’t touch me!”

The clerk yelled at us to get out of the store, I told Harmony we had to go home and she said,

“I’m not going home with — “and then she just stopped and this glassy look passed over her eyes and she said, “River?” Like she’d only just noticed me. “Why did you bring us here?”

“I came to get you, you crazy freak!”

She nodded and then pressed her hand against her head like she had a headache and said, “I’m tired, can you take me home?”

That was the first time she had ‘one of her little reveries’ as we came to call them. The medical term is fugue state. And yes, I know you’ve all seen the video. I have to say, there were some pretty hurtful comments on there. I guess in the digital era it doesn’t always occur to us that people featured in the videos might actually read the comments, but Harm did, and she was upset. Really upset. She cancelled a bunch of interviews the next day, our manager was seriously pissed.

I don’t know. I just think it sucks that you can look at someone having a serious medical or psychological problem and make fun of them. I mean, I don’t know who shot that video, or uploaded it, but it really upset Harmony. I’ve had it taken down a few times, but it’s like the goddamn hydra. Every time one copy gets taken down another two get uploaded.

She had a lot of reveries during our teens, before we ran away to Ullara, and then they seemed to just go away for a while once we got here. It wasn’t until the album came out and things got hectic with touring that it all started again.

I'll talk more about that later. I want to try and bring you all up to speed with how we came to Ullara first, and then we'll jump back to the present.

About a year after her first reverie, Harmony decided it'd be a good idea to

—

*Phone rings*

Damn it. I think have to get this. I'll try to make it quick. Hang on. Hello? Hi Gideon!

*Gideon's voice, muffled and indecipherable.*

Thank you! Thank you!

*Gideon's voice, muffled and indecipherable.*

Well, it was an honour. No, I consider it my duty. We can't allow those kinds of suppressive lies to propagate and prosper. I don't deserve to—

*Gideon's voice, muffled and indecipherable.*

I'm actually just in the middle of something right now, would it be alright if we did it later?

*Gideon's voice, muffled and indecipherable.*

Ah, okay. I understand, that sounds urgent. Of course I'll be right over. Yes, I'm complete, thank you. Love and light.

*Hangs up.*

Well, looks like I might have to cut this a little short. Sorry, I know we haven't even got to talking about theories of how Harmony might've gone missing, but I'll quickly leave you with this: Like I mentioned, I have proof that Harmony is still

alive. Yesterday afternoon I received an anonymous email with her photo! There wasn't any text or title, just a blurry black and white picture of Harmony with a weird haircut, wearing dark glasses. I don't know who it's from or why they want to remain anonymous, maybe it was one of you!

But I know that she's alive, she's safe. She's out there and I'm going to find her, we're going to find her! I'm so, so happy! I have to quickly bur—ah, take care of this important little task and I'll upload another recording as soon as I can. Keep any information you flowing, and of course your donations are greatly appreciated! Love and light.

## EPISODE 2 IF TROUBLE WAS MONEY

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River: Hi! Sorry it took me so long to get to this second upload. We have a situation come up that took a few days to deal with. There's been an absolute deluge of kind messages and donations in the last couple of days, and of course plenty of people wanting to know about the new information I found out about Harmony!

I am going to get to that, but I want to pick up where we left off last time. We'd just been talking about Harmony's first 'reverie', right? After it happened Harmony begged me not to tell mum and dad, we figured it was probably just a result of too many mushrooms, and she promised to cut down. I don't know that cutting back from three sessions a week to two was much of a cut back, but it didn't happen again for a couple of months.

Just before her second episode Harmony and I 'borrowed' Dad's merc. We were both high, and in our idiotic stoned teenage logic we decided that I should be the one to drive because I was slightly less high than Harmony.

I thought I was fine to drive, but the barricade I clipped obviously disagreed with me. We pulled the car into the driveway and waited anxiously for mum and dad to come home from their networking dinner.

When they walked in the door and we told them, Dad's face lit up like a rescue flare. It was weird, he'd treated me like an inconvenient chore he had to attend to at irregular intervals for so long and all of a sudden he had all of his attention focused on me. All of his rage, fury, disappointment. He screamed so much that the veins in his neck popped out like a wrestlers'. He screamed so much he went hoarse, it was such bullshit, he had insanely comprehensive insurance and I said I'd pay for the excess, so it didn't even cost him any money to have it repaired.

At one point he pulled back his hand and there was this moment where the two of us were looking at each other and everything was so silent and still. I could see in his eyes that he wanted to hit me. In my head I was almost daring him to, it would give me an excuse to get the courage to do what I'm been hoping to do for the last year or so. Eventually his hand dropped to his side and he said "You're fucking grounded for the rest of the year." I slumped off to my room and cried.

Harmony had her next little reverie not too long after. She'd been out at a party, I'd been at home grounded, and I got a call from Lena who told me that Harm was supposed to be sharing a cab with her but she'd just disappeared. I messaged a few of our friends but none of them knew where she was. I was pacing up and down in my room wondering if I should tell mum and dad when I got a text from Jeremy saying that he'd seen Harmony in a 7-11 staring vacantly at the fridge. He'd asked her if she was okay and she'd told him she was fine but didn't seem to know who she was. I snuck out the window, caught a cab and

picked her up.

Things were quiet for a little while. The calm before the storm, as they say. Harmony was going out a lot, hanging out with people I didn't know. I was staying in, writing songs, getting secretly stoned in my bedroom and pretending like I had a perpetual cold so I had an excuse to avoid the dinner table.

Then one night our parents were out late at a conference and Harmony had her friend Ellie over. They hung out in her room listening to Erykah Badu at ear-splitting volume and giggling like idiots. Mum and Dad were set to be out until after eleven at least, so when dad's car shrieked into the driveway at about nine thirty I was confused but didn't think anything of it. Dad stormed in the door with a massive wine stain covering the front of his shirt, he looked furious. I watched in horror as he stormed up the stairs, slammed on her bedroom door. I listened as the music stopped, there were frantic sounds of commotion and the sound of the door being rattled.

He had a key for her room, I heard the jangling of his keychain followed by a pair of hysterical screams. The rest of the evening was a nightmarish blur. I hadn't even known that Harmony was into girls. We weren't talking much at the time. After mum and dad found out, they lost it. They were very old school in their regards to attitudes on sexual behaviour. It also hadn't helped that Harmony had left a pile of drug paraphernalia lying around the room.

The next day they sat us down and told us that they were sending us to St. Drogo's in Sydney — a strictly puritanical boarding school. My, sorry our parents, weren't even religious, but their ideal moral code would probably be something like 'all of the heinously strict attitudes towards sex, drugs, enjoyment and personal freedom of the catholic church without all the religious mumbo jumbo'. St Drogo's seemed like the closest they'd get to that ideal.

We were told we would finish out the week at school and then be on a plane on Sunday. On Monday, we didn't speak to anyone else, but Harmony decided to sit with me, even if it was in silence. She avoided Ellie, obviously. On Tuesday Jeremy insisted on talking to me and I spilled my guts, told him about the whole thing. He said we should run away. He'd been to Ullara last summer to see his brother's band play at the Orpheus Festival there. We'd always wanted to go, whenever people talked about it they got this hazy look on their eyes, like when someone's just fallen in love or is remembering a really great sandwich.

As I'm sure most of you know, Ullara holds two big festivals every year, the Revolution Festival in the Summer and the Evolution festival in the Winter. Because they're massive, week long festivals that host almost 150 000 people the whole town is basically built on this one enterprise. The rest of the year things are very quiet and the population is tiny. There's the retreat, the recording studio a primary school, the library and a couple of cafes, but most people commute to Maleny for basic services like doctors, groceries etc.

The rumours we'd heard about Ullara seemed too good to be true; everyone there was an artist or an art-lover of some kind. Drugs were cheap and easily obtainable, famous musicians strolled down the streets to get a meal at friendly little hippy cafes in between recording sessions. It was right in the middle of the mountains surrounded by rainforest and a crystal clear river. It sounded like paradise. And yes, we heard about all the crazy shit I mentioned earlier. People said if you went there you'd get abducted by human traffickers if you were lucky and aliens if you weren't, that everyone there was 'swimming in the same shallow gene pool' as they say, that the entire town was more or less a front for a large scale drug operation, and of course the really, really strange rumours about occult practices and human sacrifices and that kinda trash. It's embarrassing the rubbish some people will believe.

Jeremy said his brother would be staying there for a couple of weeks helping to set up the Eurydice festival and he could help us find a tent to crash in and maybe some cheap cash in hand labour around the festival site. Plus, we could make some good connections and maybe find a way to play on one of the smaller stages if we were lucky.

Can you imagine how incredible that sounded to a couple of fledgling teenage musicians? The whole concept seemed utopian. We figured we were already in as much trouble as we could be in any case, we might as well go for broke.

We talked about it for a couple of days, called Jeremy's brother and confirmed that there'd be a place for us to pitch a tent and then got packing.

We left on Thursday night, we had to wait until our parents were asleep, we took a backpack and a rolling luggage bag each, and took turns carrying Harmony's guitar. Because we left so late we couldn't get a direct bus to Ullara, so we'd arranged to stay in Maleny for the night and make the last half hour leg

of the journey after breakfast the next day.

The bus smelled like piss and wet dogs. There were only six or seven other people on board, and they all looked like life had chewed them up and spat them back out again a couple of dozen times over. This creepy bearded guy stared at Harmony the entire two-hour trip. I made sure to sit on the aisle side, we slept in shifts to make sure no one went through our stuff. We got to the shitty hotel in Maleny about three in the morning. It was a ten-minute walk from the bus station, the streets were quiet except for the occasional barking dog and transport truck.

Our room at the Maleny Budget Inn was gross. The beds were uncomfortable, there was a distinct scent of cheap cleaning chemicals and cheaper cigarettes. Someone next door was inexplicably watching some cop show at a ridiculous volume at one in the morning. It was all screeching sirens and shrieking tyres. We lay there on our hole-ridden sheets atop mattresses that were basically just steel spikes with a thin material covering on top.

I started crying, telling Harmony that we'd made a mistake, that we should just go home and face the music. We only had one year left of high school anyway. Maybe boarding school wouldn't be that bad. She curled up next to me and told me it was going to be alright. We lay there until the sun came up, then grabbed our bags, found a greasy 24-hour truck stop and ate pancakes and drank hot brown water that the waitress mistakenly referred to as coffee, then took the first bus to Ullara.

The rest is history I guess. Ullara really was the paradise we hoped it would be. It was like it only attracted the kindest, most interesting people in the world. Sleeping in a tent was fun, it was like a permanent holiday. We spent daytime helping move equipment around and set up food stalls and night time talking to the other festival team, smoking joints, playing guitar, jamming, singing.

We were offered an afternoon gig on one of the small stages. We played to a crowd of a dozen people and intermittent, hesitant applause, but we felt like rock stars. That first week was one of the best of my entire life, dancing, jamming, surrounded by the best souls on earth. If you've been to the festival, you'll know what I'm talking about. They don't call it 'hippie heaven' for nothing. It's part Burning Man, part Woodford Folk festival and just a touch of Edinburgh fringe. Massive in scale, utterly epic in its splendor and execution. Festivals like

this should stand alongside the silicon transistor, the Eiffel tower or Penicillin as evidence of humanity's most remarkable achievements.

We felt a little low after the festival ended, the town seemed so empty. Although we didn't meet Gideon and the inner circle until a while later, we made friends quickly, especially Harmony. She took a job as receptionist at Seventh Cycle studios, where we ended up recording the album, I started working at the library. It was bliss, being surrounded by books. I learnt more sitting and reading at the desk than I ever did in school. And of course along with the musicians Ullara attracts more than its fair share of writers.

Orson Cartwright based the library in *Shakespeare's Orison* on our library, he used to come and holiday here and always stopped by if he was short on reading material. Everyone knows that the town in that story is based on Ullara, although obviously he made it all a lot more sinister, for cheap dramatic effect I think. People have asked me if the librarian in that story is supposed to be me. I'll admit that there are a few similarities, but of course if you've read that book you'll know that the librarian turns out to be a strange and deluded soul with touches of psychosis, so I don't think so! Plus the librarian in that book wears glasses, and I wear contacts.

Great mercy, I just realised I've been yammering on for almost half an hour now! I'm going to start wrapping things up soon. Before I go over the current theories of how Harmony went missing and where she might be now, I want to share something very special and personal with you. When she first disappeared, I had all kinds of lecherous journalists trying to get me to share dark secrets about Harmony — her sex life, drugs, asking weird questions about devil worship and then even weirder questions about her boyfriend and Gideon and some of the other folks in Ullara. It made me sick. But I do want to share something with you, directly, the people who've donated to the campaign, who love Harmony's music, who really care.

I'm going to read the message that she sent me, along with that one blurry photo.

*Pause.*

Dearest River,

I have been afraid for the longest time. Remember when we climbed out of your parent's Merc after you crashed it into that barricade and we were so high that it just seemed hilarious? We stared at it and laughed and laughed even though at the back of our addled brains we knew that we'd done something terrible, that we might have even died, but our brains were wrapped in this warm narcotic haze.

Even as time stretched and bubbled and danced around us. I knew that there was a moment, which in some ways already existed, that was waiting for us to reach it in the near future. And in that moment, bad things would happen. We would be in trouble, maybe even end up in juvie or having to repay all of the repair costs, which must've been thousands at least.

I feel like the last ten years have been a blissful, enduring bubble.

*Stops and sniffs back tears.*

But that has come to an end, as I always knew it would. I can't tell you where I am, because it might put us both in danger, but I promise you that, for the moment—

*Phone rings*

Oh shit! I have to get this. I'm going to cut the recording, and start it again in a minute. This could be big news.

*CUT.*

*RESTART.*

Um. Alright. I'm not sure if this is something I should share with the wider world or not. But I feel like those of you who are listening to this are part of my family now, my real family, the one I choose. I just got a call from Harmony's doctor.

She—she’s pregnant. About two months along when the doctor spoke to her, which would make her maybe five months pregnant now...I’ll have to update all the missing notices to tell people to look for a pregnant woman. Holy shit, I’m going to be an uncle! I’d better wrap this up. I have a lot to think about. Let me read you the last part of the letter and then sign off:

I’m okay. There are some things we need to talk about when it’s safe to see you again, but for the moment know that I’m alright and have faith that we’ll see each other again soon.

Love and light.

Harmony

So that’s it. I know she’s alive, or at least she was when she sent that email a few weeks ago, and she’s pregnant! I’ve written back to her of course, many times, but there’s been no answer. She might be worried about her digital trail, that’s probably smart.

Now, there are all kinds of crazy conspiracy theories around her disappearance out there and I beg you, please don’t pay any attention to them! If you have any genuine leads then please send them to me but wild-eyed delusions aren’t going to help anyone. Here are my theories:

1 She got in trouble with a dealer. It’s no secret that she was taking a bunch of stuff, it’s pretty easy to get your hands on when you’re touring even as a mid-level band, and she was never good with money.

2 She has a stalker. A lot of people fall in love with Harmony, even though she wasn’t ‘Beyonce’ famous, or even ‘Michelle Williams’ famous, she had a lot of admirers, and a lot of lovers. People started sending her some pretty weird gifts; she got a stuffed otter, a jar filled with belly button lint, and even a mosaic of her own face made out of coloured macaroni.

3 She had another spell of reverie, another fugue state and she wondered off somewhere. Fugue states sometimes also induce amnesia, and they usually worsen under stress. The last year and a half has been amazing but also incredibly stressful, lots of touring, little sleep, too many drugs, I was worried that it would take its toll but she insisted on never slowing down. Usually they only last a short time but they can sometimes be more protracted. After Agatha Christie's husband left her she entered a fugue state that lasted for eleven days.

Of course, it could be something else I haven't thought of. Harmony kept a lot of secrets, even from me. I don't doubt that I could be missing something important, which is why I need all of you, my family, to help me.

I'm going to post a picture of the letter to [HelpFindHarmony.com](http://HelpFindHarmony.com), and if you've seen her or have any information about her please post it there or email it to me at [helpfindharmony@gmail.com](mailto:helpfindharmony@gmail.com) Sadly, there's been a lot of vile and suppressive discussion on the message boards lately, so I've had to ban a lot of comments. Please don't link to that video of her, and please report any abuse. I want this to be a safe place for us to share together.

I'll post another recording soon. Thanks for listening. Love and light.

EPISODE 3  
THE THINGS THAT I USED TO DO

*Government agent voice: The following audio record forms part of the department's ongoing investigation into the actions of Eugene Kirkley aka Gideon Vermello and his operations in the town of Ullara. This record is classed as highly confidential under legislation 27b/6. Testimonies recorded here have not yet been officially corroborated by secondary or tertiary sources and are thus to be treated as unverified at this stage.*

*Car door opening, closing. Engine starts. For just a second we hear a guided meditation CD playing through the stereo*

*Gideon: "There will always be dissenters, but they are not enemies, but rather lost children—"*

River: Hrm. Maybe not the most pleasant driving soundtrack. Perhaps we should just enjoy the sounds of the road. Well my friends, and I feel like I can call you my friends, my family even. I want to start by thanking all of you for the flood, the deluge of support over the last couple of days. Of course, along with the flood of love there was a tiny trickle of...unkind sentiment, but I'm going to choose to ignore those people who continue to spread venom and focus on the good folks who are helping to find my sister.

I know a lot of you were surprised - hang on

*Winds window down*

River: Morning Maryanne! How's the life?

Maryanne: The life is good, River, the life is good. Where you headed?

River: Just rolling on down to Amos' for a chat, then I'm going to head to the shops to pick up some supplies. You need anything?'

Maryanne: Nah, I'm complete, but thanks for asking. You coming to meditation this evening?

River: Does the pope like weird hats?

Maryanne: See you then, River. Stay outta trouble.

*Winds window up*

River: Ha ha, Maryanne's great. Anyway, where was I? Oh yeah. So there's been a lot of people sending me messages, but no one who claims to have actually seen Harmony, well, no one I believe anyway. I know a lot of you were surprised about the pregnancy, and so was I! Everyone's been asking me, who the father is, of course. The truth is I don't know. There are a few possibilities because, ah, Harmony's a loving person, and she shared that love with a lot of people.

But today I want to have a chat with her, well, she didn't like the word 'boyfriend', but the person whom she loved the most - uh - the most frequently. His name's Amos, he lives...just a couple of blocks from here and...hang on a sec.

*Sound of drums and chanting.*

Sorry about that, just a little pedestrian traffic. So Amos lives in this great little block of huts we like to call smurftown, because they're all painted red. I mean, I know smurfs are blue, but, you know. It's an inside joke.

*Sounds of car parking, feet walking, door bell.*

River: Amos? Hey! Amos!

Amos: (distant) hold up, I'm coming.

*Sound of door opening*

River: Hey man, how's it going?

Amos: I'm good, I'm good. Great to see you. Come on in, the place is kind of a mess. I've been pulling pretty long hours at the restaurant so...

River: What the hell is this thing?

Amos: Fancy waffle maker. Take my advice, save your money and just go for a middle of the range, there's honestly not much difference. Have a seat, you want coffee?

River: Sure.

*Clinking mugs. Slurping.*

*Pause.*

Amos: River, do you mind if we clear the air here for a moment?

River: Sure.

Amos: You recording this?

River: *(pause)*. Yes.

Amos: Okay, well, first of all. You've got to TELL people when you're recording them. I'm pretty sure that's the law, and I'm VERY sure it's common courtesy.

River: ...I'm sorry...

Amos: Don't be sorry, just don't do it again. I'm not sure what you're doing with this website and recordings is going to work, but of course I want to try and do whatever we can do to help find Harm. It's just I'd prefer to have the first part of this chat just between us.

River: I really think it would be helpful for everyone out there...

Amos: Everyone out there wasn't Harmony's boyfriend, okay, I was. I know they loved her in the, you know, *cosmic* sense. But I loved...I love her. Me. So, I'm happy to say a couple of things for you to put up on the website, but only if you delete everything we've just said, and stop recording for a few minutes.

River: But—

Amos: Look man, if you'd rather not do this then—

River: No, okay. It's fine. I'll turn it off.

*Fumbles with phone, pretends to turn it off.*

River: Alright, it's just you and me.

Amos: Right.

*Clinking of coffee cup on table.*

Amos: River, I know you're not that fond of me.

River: No, that's not —

Amos: Come on man, let's not fuck around here. It's fine. I get it. I'm not the best guy on earth. Hell, I'm not the best guy in this room. And you're protective of Harmony, I respect that. But I want you to know, you should have come to me first before broadcasting that shit about her being pregnant. *Pause.* Do you understand me?

River: But...we don't even know if it's yours...

*Coffee mug smashes*

Amos: No we don't but maybe it would be nice to fucking *assume* that it was her actual boyfriend who got her pregnant rather than all those shitbags she shared a bed with while she was on tour, don't you think?

*Pause*

River: You don't own her.

Amos: You goddamned right I don't and neither do you and neither do all those freaks who spend their time posting messages on your little website.

River: They're helping! The police have been useless!

Amos: (*calmer, slightly resigned*) Yeah well I agree with you there. The police around here...it's like the Bjelke-Petersen police state era never ended. Bunch of fucking dogs. Especially Lewis.

River: Maybe we shouldn't talk about him.

Amos: You going to interview him too?

River: No.

Amos: Are you lying to me?

River: I wouldn't lie to you, Amos.

Amos: Okay, fine. And I'm sorry about yelling. The pregnancy it's...I mean it's *huge*. I might be a *dad*, that's a lot to deal with. And I might not be the dad, I'm not sure if that's better or worse. Either way I want to help find her. I'm not sure that what you're doing is going to actually help, but I guess...we might as well try right?

River: Right.

Amos: Alright then. So... I suppose you can turn the mic back on.

River: Look, if you're not comfortable we don't have to—

Amos: No, it's fine.

River: Okay, well only if you're sure.

*Fumbles with mic*

River: Where do you want to start?

Amos: I think we should talk about the night she went missing.

River: Sure, but maybe start a couple of weeks before that? Just to give us some background?

Amos: *(Pause, clears throat)* Alright. Well, when she came back from the tour she was a whirlwind, just manic. Some days she wouldn't get out of bed, others she'd stay up all night dancing and drinking, with or without me. She'd stay at mine maybe two or three nights a week, the rest she'd stay at her place or with friends or not sleep at all.

She was taking a lot of drugs, and just mixing them in all the worst ways, uppers, downers, heroin, LSD. No one can take that kinda input, not even someone like Harm. So she was flipping between wired and tired all the time; grumpy one minute, ecstatic the next, then she'd walk into a room and forget why she was there. Then about a week before she left, she had another one of her spells.

River: She what?

Amos: She said you two called them her 'reveries'. She was so embarrassed about that video of the last one that she made me promise not to tell anyone, not even you.

River: What happened, did she wander off?

Amos: I found her by the creek, out the back here. It was the middle of the night and she was singing, well, screeching, at the top of her lungs, this weird, warbling song that just wouldn't end. I stood there just watching and listening for maybe ten minutes, her voice was piercing in the late night quiet. I was worried about 'waking' her, if that's the right term. They say it's dangerous to wake a sleepwalker.

River: That's not true.

Amos: Huh?

River: There's nothing unsafe about waking a sleepwalker. It's a myth.

Amos: Okay, well, whatever. I didn't know that. So I stood there watching for a while and finally I went over and put my arms around her, partly because I wanted to comfort her and partly, because, you know...

River: You wanted to restrain her?

Amos: She always wears so much crazy jewellery. I was worried she'd start flailing around and take out one of my eyes with some crazing fucking - ah - sorry. Can I swear?

River: You can say whatever you want.

Amos: Right, okay. Well, I felt bad doing it after what had happened with that video, but I decided to record her. I wasn't going to show it to anyone except maybe her or her doctor, just to keep a record of what was going on.

River: Can I see it?

*Pause*

Amos: I don't want to put it on the internet, not after what happened. She was humiliated.

River: What if we watch it together and sort of describe what's happening? I can always edit it out later?

Amos: I don't know...

River: It might be important. It might even be the thing that brings her back.

Amos: Alright. Fine, but as long as you promise me you'll edit it out later if I change my mind.

River: I promise.

*Shuffling, clearing sounds. Computer booting up.*

Amos: Just gotta find where I stored it. Okay here we go.

*Video starts to play. Sounds of crickets, river etc.*

Amos: It's pretty hard to make out, there wasn't much moonlight.

*Sound of crunching feet, Harmony is humming.*

Amos (on recording): Harm? You okay.

*Harmony continues humming. Crunching feet, whispering.*

River: What were you whispering? I can't see here, the camera's pointed at the ground.

Amos: Yeah, I've got my arms around her and my phone in my hand. I think I was just whispering 'calm down, it's me, relax, or something like that.' And you can see...here. Okay so I pull back and...

*Pause*

River: Wow...

Amos: Exactly.

River: It's like she's hypnotised.

*Harmony starts to sing something indecipherable.*

Amos: I've got to tell you, that song? Pretty creepy.

Amos (on recording): Harm, why don't you come back inside?

Harmony (on recording): mumbles something unintelligible.

Amos (OR): Just come back inside Harm, it's late.

Harmony (OR): (yawns) I'm so sleepy! It's cold out here.

Amos: It's like she's waking up.

River: Yeah, that's what I've always said. It's always that same glazed over expression, and then this weird process of 'waking up' to the world around her.

Amos (OR): Harmony, what happened?

Harmony (OR): Let's just talk about it in the morning. Can you put that camera away? I can't believe you'd film me after that fucking video went viral.

Amos (OR): I'm sorry, I thought maybe it would be important in case you forgot what happened?

Harmony (OR): Well, I don't want to talk about it right now. Let's just go to sleep. Turn it

off.

*Pause*

River: What happened in the morning?

Amos: She couldn't remember it, when asked her to try she just shut me down and stormed off. I think she was embarrassed about the video still. If I ever find the fucker that posted it I'm going to...

*River coughs loudly, hinting at the fact that Amos is being recorded.*

Amos: ah, well I will have some...stern words with them.

*Pause*

River: Has she tried to contact you?

Amos: You know I'd tell you if she had.

River: Would you?

Amos: Yes! Come on man, you can trust me on that at least.

*Pause. Amos' phone rings.*

Amos: Sorry, I gotta take this. I've been chasing this supplier for weeks. Hello? Yeah, gimme 20kgs to start and we'll see where we go from there. Dunno, what do you suggest? Yeah? Alright, I guess that sounds good...

*Sound of rustling papers. Phone camera shutter.*

Amos: Hey river, what are you doing?

River: Just looking at this beer coaster, I didn't know you'd been to Jamaica?

Amos: I haven't, my brother got it for me as a souvenir, can you leave my shit alone over there? Sorry about that, so yeah I need you to get it to me by Friday at the latest. No I'm NOT fucking paying for expedited delivery because it's your goddamn job to get me shit on time

and if you can't I can always give Mckillen's a ring. We've been working together for years, but I'm more than happy to burn that bridge if you're going to start dicking me around.

*more camera shutter sounds.*

Amos: Alright. No, look, don't take it personal. It's just business. Alright. Alright, we're complete. Talk soon. Later. *Pause.* Sorry about that, you'll just edit all this out right?

River: Yeah, of course.

Amos: Cool. So where were we?

River: We were working up to the night when she went missing.

Amos: Right. So after that little spell she was actually pretty calm and quiet for a few nights. We stayed in, read, cooked, watched TV. We'd never really shared much down time. We both work weird hours, she's away on tour so much that most of our time together was going out, hanging out in crowds of people. It was nice, spending quiet time together. It felt stable, permanent. Harmony hadn't ever been one to be tied down, neither had I for that matter, but we started throwing around the idea of being exclusive, which was a big deal for both of us. The day that she went missing she left early, I woke up to find her getting dressed. She smiled at me and said she was going for a walk. I waited an hour, two. Sometimes her 'walks' could be more like vision quests in that she'd be gone for fucking hours, so I didn't worry at first but by sunset I was freaking out.

River: What time did you report her missing?

Amos: We've gone over this.

River: Yeah, I know but it's for *them*. A lot of crimes get solved by the wider populace now. Like, there was this case in NYC a couple of years back where the police released footage of a woman being attacked in a subway station and viewers identified him the next day, he was charged with robbery and assault. Meanwhile, there are seven police officers in a 50km radius, but there are thousands and thousands of people across the nation who are going to listen to this. So yes, I think it might work. Please tell us everything, don't leave anything out.

Amos: *sighs, aggravated.* I reported her missing at 7pm, I remember it was seven because we were supposed to be heading over to Micah's for dinner at that time, and instead I was freaking the fuck out and calling the cops, hoping that dickhead wouldn't answer the phone.

River: You're going to need to clarify for...them.

Amos: Great mercy, this is weird. Okay, well it's no secret that a certain officer and I don't get along too well. I won't name names, but like you said there's only seven damn cops in the area and the one I'm referring to starts with 'Lew' and ends in 'is'. And no I am sure as hell not going into the origins and particulars of our disagreements. Anyway, I dial the police office at 7pm and one of the others picks up, some guy called Kneebone, which I remember because it's a fucking ridiculous name. I tell him that my girlfriend's gone missing and then he asks for her name, age, address, description. Her name's barely out of my mouth when I hear this snigger that makes me want to reach through the phone and wring his goddamn throat.

I said, 'something FUNNY officer?' and he says 'sorry, it's just well, Harmony's something of a, let's say 'free spirit', although some others might use a less flattering term. 'Some others might deserve to have their faces rearranged.' 'Settle down sir,' he says in that fucking weaseling little voice. I told him; 'I don't think it's unreasonable for an officer of the law to speak about citizens with a basic degree of respect. 'Alright, alright, no need to get all PC. Let's get on with it.' So give him Harmony's details, I basically HEAR him smirking the whole fucking time. Clearly he's not taking this seriously, and honestly I hope someone senior in the police force hears this and takes his badge and shoves it down his throat for the way he talked about her.

River: Can we try and stick to the facts?

Amos: I AM sticking to the facts! The fact is that those police officers are a pack of cunts...tables. After I spoke to the police I called you again to see if she'd turned up, and of course she hadn't. When she still hadn't come home two days later I called again and this time they took me a little more seriously. I know you and a few other people had already called them by then so it'd been moved up the priority rank a little bit from their busy schedule of taking bribes from drug dealers. When I spoke to—

*Sounds of brick breaking glass, screeching tyres.*

Amos: What the fuck?

*Sounds of stepping over crunching glass.*

River: What the hell is that?

Amos: Just a brick. Didn't catch the number plate, fucking cowards.

River: You made someone angry recently?

Amos: No more than usual? Hang on, there's something written on this.

River: What's it say?

Amos: 'Murderer', spelt with an 'a' and four 'r's. So I guess we're not exactly dealing with an evil genius here.

*Camera shutter sound.*

Amos: What the hell are you doing?

River: Taking a photo, I'll upload it to the website.

Amos: River! This is my personal life, not a fucking reality show that you're directing. You'd better cut these last couple of minutes, in fact I want you to send me a copy of the edited interview for me to approve before you upload it.

*Pause.*

Amos: promise me or I don't give you permission for anything.

River: Fine. So what do you think it means?

Amos: It means that someone is going to get their face kicked in, once I can figure out who it was. Ah, make sure—

River: Yeah yeah I'll cut it from the upload. You don't have to keep reminding me.

Amos: Well, I guess I have to spend my afternoon getting quotes for fucking glass repair now. Sorry, I'm going to have to cut this short.

River: That's okay, I think I've got what I need. Thanks for helping me out.

Amos: No worries. Can you turn that thing off now?

River: Yeah

*Fumbling sounds*

Amos: River, you realise that there's a chance that she might never come back, right?

River: What do you mean, she's alive!

Amos: Well, yeah, I certainly hope that's true, but you need to accept the fact that she might—

River: *Harmony's coming back.*

Amos: I mean, she probably will but—

River: You're being suppressive!

Amos: Hey! Do NOT call me suppressive.

River: I don't want you affecting me with suppressive energy!

Amos: River, get a fucking hold of yourself! I'm just trying to be realistic. And listen, again, I'm sorry about lashing out before. You SHOULD have told me first, but really, I probably owe you.

River: What for?

Amos: Well, you realise I was initially the lead suspect right?

River: You never told me that.

Amos: Not exactly the kind of thing I want to broadcast, it's not like I had motive or intent, but I was the last one to see her, Lewis hates me, and I'm the boyfriend. You know what they say, 'it's always the boyfriend.' I was getting hammered with hate mail for a while there. I had to redirect all my mail to a PO box, stop checking my email. Things have died down a bit, but I still get the odd bit of vitriol, as you can see from the fucking broken glass all over the place. Just because the police have dropped their investigation doesn't mean they've appeased the pitchfork-waving lynch mobs. Hopefully now that you've found evidence that suggests she's still alive this shit will finally stop happening. So...I guess it's time for me to figure out how to move on.

River: Why does everyone keep saying that?

Amos: What?

River: 'Move on?' Moving on is what you do when your goldfish dies.

Amos: Well, in my family we just swapped it for a new goldfish and the kids are none the wiser. I was sixteen before I realised that it was weird to that little Goldy was supposedly the same age as me.

River: That's not what I'm talking about. Everyone's still talking about her like she's dead, even though I've shown everyone proof that she's still alive.

Amos: Well, proof is maybe a strong word.

River: What?

Amos: Like I said, no one's happier than me that she's been declared missing rather than dead, but all you have is one blurry photo of a pregnant woman in sunglasses who looks vaguely like Harmony with a cheap cut 'n' colour.

River: SHE'S NOT DEAD!

Amos: I really, really hope that's true. But we have to be realistic, there's the possibility that she is, or that she's alive and she doesn't necessarily—

River: SHE IS ALIVE AND SHE IS COMING HOME! *Pause* I have to go now.

Amos: Come on man, don't be like that. She—

*Storms out, door slams.*

*Car starts, tyres screech.*

River: My friends, I'm glad I have you as my eyes and ears. You can see what I'm up against. But... love conquers all odds. Now that you've heard this...you have a few more pieces of the puzzle. Keep that information coming. Together we can find her. I'm going to head home and upload this, and then tomorrow I'm going to Maleny to talk to officer Lewis.

Love and light.

EPISODE FOUR  
POLICE AND THIEVES

*Government agent voice: The following audio record forms part of the department's ongoing investigation into the actions of Eugene Kirkley aka Gideon Vermello and his operations in the town of Ullara. This record is classed as highly confidential under legislation 27b/6. Testimonies recorded here have not yet been officially corroborated by secondary or tertiary sources and are thus to be treated as unverified at this stage.*

*Kettle boils. Pouring water, teaspoon stirring*

River: Hi everyone. I want to start today by explaining something to you about these recordings that I think has been misunderstood. A lot of you wrote to me and said you thought it was dishonest, the way I uploaded that unedited recording of Amos after he specifically told me not to, and I understand that. I know that those of you who have been helping me search for Harmony; listening, writing, sending your thoughts and prayers, are good people, and I hope that someday I get to meet each and every one of you in person. And I know that good people often dislike...well, let's call them extreme measures. Wait, that sounds too militant, unusual procedures? No, that sounds a little 'human centipede'...you might not approve of methods of investigation that aren't 100% 'by the book'.

*In the background, barely discernible, the sound of harmony singing on a demo track.*

Unfortunately, what we have here is a very unusual case, so the usual methods are going to be hugely insufficient. Every investigative journalist knows how to pose as a relative

or fake business person or government official to bluff their way into wherever they need to get into. Now, I'm not any kind of journalist, but I respect the fact that sometimes they have to bend the rules a bit to get to the bottom of a good story.

Like, think about scientists. I don't know if you've heard that story about Isaac Newton? Not the apple thing, the other one. He wanted to study the way that light interacted with the optics of human vision, he took a bodkin needle and inserted it behind his eyeball and applied pressure. It made him see circles, apparently. Please don't try that at home.

Again, I'm not a scientist, but I am an artist, and what artists and scientist have in common is that they search for the beauty in truth and the truth in beauty. I hope you understand that I want to bring my sister home and I would do anything to make that happen, I'm sure you'd do the same thing for your family.

A few of you have been asking if I've heard anything else from Harmony, and whether I know if she's heard these recordings. So far the answer is no, but of course I'll let you know the second that happens. Thank you to everyone who's donated so far, either directly or to the ongoing patreon fund, it really means the world to me. I received some advice from Empyreanempirefan777 that I should save a portion of the money for legal fees in case I get into any trouble, and I will be doing that, but promise to donate all the money to a worthwhile charity once Harmony is home and everything is back to...well, not normal, but we're all reunited. Ullara's a small town, and an absence like this, it's like there's a gaping Harmony-shaped hole in our little community.

Today, as I mentioned, I'm going to be interviewing officer Tyson Lewis. He has an...important connection to Harmony, and while I can't say that he's been falling over himself to help find her, he's been much better than the rest of the police force, who are pretty open with their dislike of us here in Ullara. I think they see us as backwards, pot-smoking hippies. Amos mentioned how there's parts of the country where it feels like the Bjeleke-Petersen era police state never ended, and there's certainly times where that feels true.

Lewis is...well he's no saint, but at least he's got some shred of integrity. To be honest I'm not sure why Harmony bothered wasting time with him, but then again I never understood most of her romantic choices. He talks like he learned to speak from reading Shakespeare and listening to Crocodile Dundee.

*Pause. Taps table.*

Alright. That's it for now. See you when we get there.

*Mic off.*

*Mic on, fumbling, car door opens and closes. Feet walking into the police station, clipping across floors.*

Kneebone: Well if it isn't Ullara's favourite son, what brings you here this morning sunshine? You got a new theory? Maybe your sister was turned into a frog and needs a prince to rescue her? Or perhaps it was just a garden variety rapturing?

River: *(stiffly)* I don't want to talk to you. I have an appointment with Officer Lewis.

Kneebone: Of course you bloody do. Well, you know where to find 'im. Don't let me keep you from your busy schedule. I've got actual police business to get on with.

River: Is that what you call browsing porn during work hours and accidentally retweeting pictures of dead-eyed women performing unspeakable acts with vegetables from the official police twitter account?

Kneebone: *There's no proof that was me!* There's six other blokes who work here! And, ah, we were probably hacked. Bloody nerds with nothing better to do.

River: Sure. Hacked. That's what they all say. *(Walks away. Quietly into the mic)* I fucking hate that guy.

*Knocking.*

Lewis: River. How are you? Not causing my officers undue grief I trust?

River: Didn't say anything that wasn't true. It's not illegal to tell the truth is it?

Lewis: Well, that's fundamentally contingent on the manner in which you define and furthermore connote your definition of 'illegal'. Also, the far more problematic term 'truth.' But no matter, it's all H2O off a Mallard's spinal region as far as I'm concerned. Just stay out of his way, would you? I'm talking to you today as a favour, remember?

River: I don't consider it a 'favour' for you to do your foresworn, tax-payer funded duty.

Lewis: Christ on stilts, don't give me that high and mighty claptrap, you know full well I've allocated exponentially more time to Harmony's case than I should have. And somehow I fucken' doubt you're making titanic contributions to the nation's taxation system, by the way. *Pause.* You're not recording this are you?

River: No, of course not.

Lewis: Alright, well, just to be clear, if you're lying to me you are committing a criminal offence, and would incur further charges if you then broadcast the aforementioned recording. Plus, not to place too fine a point on it, it would be fucken' rude.

River: I promise.

Lewis: Right-o then, well, let's get down to brass tic-tacs. I'm going to be fully fucken' direct with you, Riv, I am displeased, no, *thoroughly incensed*, that you failed to share Harmony's epistle with me as a matter of urgency.

River: *Epistle?*

Lewis: No need to mock a gentlemen for his perfectly fucken' reasonable predilection for employing the vast vocabulary of the English language to its full and formidable effect. Honestly, sometimes I feel like I get fucken' crucified for displaying knowledge of words extant outside of Soap opera monologues in this bloody town. You know Kneebone told me the other day he hadn't read a book since high school? HIGH SCHOOL! And he dropped out in *year ten* for fuck's sake!

These are the gormless ignoramuses I have to— sorry. Forget I said that. It's been a long week. To return to the matter at hand, that *email* was evidence vital to Harmony's ongoing inquiry, and you should have sent it to me the minute you received it. I should NOT have been made aware of it via a fwded email from my cousin Barry, who is part-time conspiracy theorist and full-time half-wit. I would've ignored it, assuming to be some more shit about the global reptilian agenda if he hadn't put Harmony's name in the heading.

And there she is, by all accounts corporeal, conscious and cognisant! Honestly the rivers of shit I have to wade through each week in this fucken' posting, this Thursday gone I had someone call me to lodge a formal complaint against a wild sheep they'd elected to name Larry, a fucken' sheep! And finally, some real police work, related to someone to whom I have an actual and genuine lov—ah, care for their livelihood.

River: Because you were fucking her.

Lewis: There's no need to be crude about it. It was a...casual amorous association. Nothing dishonest or morally lacking about it.

River: Amos might disagree with you there.

Lewis: I could give a flying fuck. It's no great secret that dickhead's as popular as a

rattlesnake in a lucky dip round here, even if he's well-loved with you folks down the hill. And I'd wager there's a copious quantity of fabulation in every tale he's ever told you. I know he was Harmony's...primary choice of night-time companion. But the stories she told me about him...

River: Like what?

*Pause.*

Lewis: We'd better not stray too far from the path here, let's get back to—

River: What did she say about him?

Lewis: *Sighs.* Alright, I'll tell you one solitary anecdote by way of explanation, but then I want nothing but complete and total compliance from you, understood? (*clears throat*) So, one night Harm and I were having dinner and she knocks over the wine bottle, it's all over the table like blood at a red wedding, there's this fucken' implausible quantity of fermented grape juice deluging out of this tiny receptacle. So I jump up and grab a couple of tea towels and come back and she's just watching it drip onto the floor with this weird look on her face.

I ask her what's up, and politely hint at the fact that I wouldn't be wildly adverse to her assisting me in cleaning up the mess that she's made and she looks at me and said. 'I did exactly the same thing when I had dinner with someone else last week. And he made me clean it up too.'

Now, we had a somewhat unspoken rule that neither of us would explicitly mention our other lovers— not that I have much to report in that department, truth be told —

so I was slightly irritated that she'd broken this particular convention, but I chose to take the high road, handed her a tea towel and then started mopping up the wine. She just sat there, watching me, then quietly added 'he told me to clean it up with my tongue.' *Pause.* So you can see, he sounds like a particularly twisted character—

River: I mean, I don't feel exactly great about saying this...but couldn't it just have been some weird...fetish thing? S & M or whatever?

Lewis: (*hissing*) I want to be thoroughly and comprehensively clear that I have absolutely no interest in discussing the details of Harmony's sex life with you or anyone else.

River: Okay, right, me neither, but I mean she's my sister so, you know 1 gross and 2 bleaaaaargh! but it might not necessarily mean that—

Lewis: That kind of behaviour indicates an abusive, controlling relationship, and had she wished to press charges she would have been well within her rights—

River: But...she wasn't MADE to do anything? Are you sure you're not just reading this wrong because of your relationship—

Lewis: My integrity as an officer of the law is beyond reproach! I have served for eleven years without a single complaint made against me, an almost impossible accomplishment in this corner of the world I don't mind telling you, I am not so petty as to let my personal affiliations interfere with —

River: Alright, I get it. Maybe we should move on.

*Pause.*

Lewis: Agreed. So, the email.

River: Epistle.

Lewis: You are skating on remarkably fucken' fragile solidified water here.

River: Sorry, the email. Look, I should have told you earlier. I guess I was hoping to sort of...crowdsource her rescue.

Lewis: Yes, citizen detectives. What a great idea. Why don't we just hand out pepper spray and handcuffs to everyone with an internet connection and too much spare time and wait for the vanquished criminals to come barreling in!

River: It's worked before! There was this case in New York where the police released footage of a woman being attacked in a subway station. Viewers identified him the very next day and —

Lewis: Right, but we're a pretty fucken' long way from New York. What's more, you'd be ill advised to ignore cases with converse outcomes. Like how after the Boston bombing, the FBI asked people to submit any information that might help them find a suspect. After a rapid deluge of mostly false and misleading info, a digital lynch mob on Reddit identified some 'possible suspects' and published their names and photos. Guess how many of them were actually guilty?

River: I'm assuming you're going to say none?

Lewis: You assume correctly. What's more, one of the accused – a student at Brown university – was identified as the 'lead suspect', he was eventually found dead from suspected suicide thought to have taken place a few weeks earlier, but his family endured a tirade of hate for a little while until both his body and the actual suspect were located. I'm sure you'll understand why I'm wary of online witch-hunts.

River: Okay, but this isn't a 'digital lynch mob'! It's a community of people who *care* about Harmony and want to see her brought home safe and sound. Nevertheless, I see your point and I'm sorry I didn't come to the 'professionals' –

Lewis: I assume you're cognisant of the fact that your apology loses all meaning when you put 'professionals' in air quotes like that?

River: Sorry, I should've come to the *professionals* first. That's on me. Was your forensic team able to get a location or IP address from the email?

Lewis: Forensic team? IP address? Don't make me fucken' chortle and/or guffaw. You've seen what I'm dealing with here. Kneebone doesn't even know how to use twitter without inadvertently causing a PR catastrophe and those other jokers barely know how to type. Bloody Sandersen the other day searched 'where can I find the nearest brothel' in his fucken' FACEBOOK STATUS. Stupid git doesn't even demonstrate a functional comprehension of google. Or basic common sense. He deleted it pretty quick but I took a screenshot just in case I need to embarrass him into actually doing his fucken' job at some point down the line. So, to answer your question, no our 'forensic team' has about as much chance as tracking down an IP address as a drunk galah has of solving Beale's cypher.

River: *(pause)* What's Beale's cypher?

Lewis: *Groans* The world's most famous and longstanding cryptographic conundrum? Honestly, I would give my left nut for the chance to have an intellectually stimulating conversation once every half-dozen solar laps.

River: No need to act all superior. Can't you send the file through to Brisbane or somewhere?

Lewis: I've tried that already. Big city snobs don't want nothin' to do with us, they said

they've had plenty of actual crimes to solve without bothering in the affairs of a bunch of sheepshaggers. Plus, they said that the photo doesn't even necessarily prove it's her. It's fairly blurry, her face is obfuscated by her sunglasses, to be honest I think it's a fair point. I'm not entirely convinced what you have here is actual proof of life.

River: Why does everyone keep saying that?

Lewis: Well, everyone probably keeps saying that because it continues to be a plausible line of inquiry. I'm just trying to be the Scully to your Mulder here. Do you have any other verifiable evidence you want me to add to the case file?

River: I've had hundreds of reports of sightings on the website from people—

Lewis: *(coughs)* I want to be thoroughly certain that you heard my utterance of the word 'verifiable', because it really is of paramount importance. If I chased after every lead from every nutbar who posted to our official police Facebook page I'd be investigating bunyips and werewolves my entire life. I need proof, not hearsay. So, do you have any EVIDENCE that meets that criteria? *Pause.* Well?

River: ...no.

Lewis: Hey, come on Riv, don't get all Johann von Goethe on me.

River: Who?

Lewis: Goethe, author of the seminal gothic-romantic bildungsroman novel *the Sorrows of Young Werther*? Ah, fucken' forget it. Don't be so sulky. I'm not ruling out the possibility that she's still alive, you know I want that to be true. We weren't in love or anything but...well, she's the kind of person who shakes your world like a snow globe, and my life hasn't been the same since she irrevocably altered it. *Sighs. Pause.* Jesus, look at me getting all sentimental. My point being I honestly care about finding her. And I want to help you, but I want to do so in a thorough and professional capacity, and that means being rational and realistic. Now I've sent the photo around to all the missing persons departments in a 100km radius. So far no leads, but sometimes they can be a little slow to respond. Little known fact: missing persons cases take up 14% of police time, more than—

River: Murder or burglary, yes, yes, you've told me before.

Lewis: Alright, well forgive me for trying to impart a little apropos statistical information,

I'd hate to burden your artistic sensibilities with facts and fucken' figures. *(sighs)* River, the first time you sat your scrawny behind in that chair you were a quiet, carbuncular kid with a haircut that I assumed had been performed by a drunk chimpanzee. I asked you about the incident at The Golden Dragon and you told me –

River: I really don't think we need to take the slow bus to nostalgia town. *(pause)* You know, sometimes I wonder what Harmony sees in you.

Lewis *(laughs)* Not half as often as I do, I promise you that! *Pause.* Look, I don't mean to be spiteful, but I feel it would be remiss of me not to bring these to your attention.

*Draw opens, closes.*

Lewis: Here is a complete summary of offences filed against you by your beloved 'townsfolk', we've got illegal postering...

River: Those were wanted posters!

Lewis: Noise complaints...

River: It's a town of goddamn musicians, every third building is a rehearsal room, pub or recording studio!

Lewis: ...and 'illegal disposal of municipal property. *Pause.* Nothing to say for that one?

River: Those falsehoods didn't belong in our library.

Lewis: That's not for you to say. The key word here is 'municipal', it's not your personal—

River: I've been working there for years! And the council all agrees that...

Lewis: Your local council does not override state jurisdiction which clearly states that publicly funded libraries are required to stock materials that are requested by —

River: I don't want those *supressive lies* in my library! I'm not on trial here!

Lewis: No, you're not, but mostly because I've personally seen to it that this complaint hasn't been actioned. But if it happens again, I don't really think I can justify obfuscation of a

legitimate complaint, regardless of your personal beliefs, if you work in a state funded facility you have an obligation to—

River: I have to go now.

Lewis: WAIT! Sit down. (Pause). There's one more thing I need to talk to you about. And I need you to give me your word that it doesn't leave this room.

River: Alright?

Lewis: Recent police intelligence suggests—

River: Police intelligence? Isn't that an—

Lewis: (*speaking over him*) If you're about to say 'oxymoron' then I will beat you until you are as dumb as an ox, y'moron. This is serious. A few days ago we received a tipoff that a sizeable quantity of serious firearms were transported through this area. My somewhat selfish hope is that they were bound for parts unknown and well outside of my jurisdiction, but on the odd chance that they're still within spitting distance, and if that's the case then—

River: That sounds pretty worrying!

Lewis: 'Pretty worrying' is an understatement of titanic proportions. Gun laws are pretty strict in this country, usually the only people who can get their hands on assault rifles are bikies and serious organized criminals.

River: I mean, are you sure they weren't just wealthy recreational hunters who wanted something black market to show off to their buddies?

Lewis: If you want to hunt, you get a hunting rifle. Assault rifles, as the name implies, have an entirely different purpose. I mean, Jesus, we've got a couple of shotguns gathering dust in a locker that we bust out every six months or so, usually to help some geriatric farmer put down a sickly animal, but nothing that racks up against this kind of firepower. Suffice to say that if munitions of this caliber were deployed in this area we'd all basically have to bunker down and wait a couple of hours for a tactical team to arrive from Brisbane.

River: That's horrifying!

Lewis: Bloody oath. So I need you to promise that if you hear any of your redshirt pals

talking about this—

River: (firmly) Don't call us that. And we'd never tolerate guns in Ullara. Not for a second.

Lewis: Well, look, I know that but I'm really stretched for leads here. People like you River, they trust you. So I'm hoping that maybe there might be some chance, however slender, that you can bring me something to work with.

River: I'll contact you if I have more information. Make sure you do the same.

*Stands up.*

Lewis: River! Wait. *Pause.* Listen, one last thing...and I'm asking this not as a cop but as a, well, perhaps 'friend' is a bridge too far, but as a friendly acquaintance, if we can't find Harmony, or even if, assuming she's actually alive and doesn't want to be found, can you promise me you'll move on? I know we're not friends or anything, but you're a decent bloke, if a little weird, and you deserve your own life. Find yourself a nice girl, settle down, pop out a couple of rugrats. Or do the opposite, run off and see the world or something! Take it from me, you don't want to spend your whole life chained to a tiny town in the middle of nowhere.

River: *Snorts.* Thanks for the advice.

*Gets up, walks out quickly.*

Knee bone: Something got your panties in a twist, River?

River: Fuck off Kneebone.

*Car door opens, slams shut. River breathes heavily, cries, slams his hand on the dashboard, swears. Car starts, drives away.*

*Fade out.*

*Mic on.*

*Harmony's voice is playing in the background.*

River: Some of you might be wondering why I'd choose to keep that part of the recording on this upload. I guess...I'm probably wondering the same thing myself. Ultimately it's

because of what I said before. I have an obligation to find the truth in beauty and the beauty in truth, even if it means exposing things about myself that I'm not proud of, although I don't think there's any shame in keeping that fucking *bullshit* out of my library. (*Angry sigh*). Maybe I shouldn't have been so rude to Lewis, he's alright, as far as folks from up the hill go.

Harmony (OR): Okay, what do you think about the second verse? Is it too long? And I'm not sure about rhyming 'together' and 'forever.' That's kind of done to death, you know, like 'desire' and 'fire?' Maybe we need some strings or maybe brass, or even a choir! Something to give it some lift when it hits the key change?

River: I'm listening to our outtakes from the last album recording sessions. At least I have plenty of this stuff to listen to. I remember a friend telling that when their grandma died all they had was photos and her voicemail message; no video, no sound as a record of her. They kept calling her so they could listen to her say that she couldn't come to the phone right now. I thought that was the saddest thing I'd ever heard.

*Sigh. Pause.*

I think...I think maybe I might take a small break from searching. Maybe a couple of days, just to put myself back together. You can keep sending me messages but I might be a little slow on the replies.

Sometimes I think you're all that keeps me going, your myriad, unknowable faces. A thousand tiny candles in a sea of darkness.

Love and light.

EPISODE FIVE  
CROSS ROAD BLUES

*Government agent voice: The following audio record forms part of the department's ongoing investigation into the actions of Eugene Kirkley aka Gideon Vermello and his operations in the town of Ullara. This record is classed as highly confidential under legislation 27b/6. Testimonies recorded here have not yet been officially corroborated by secondary or tertiary sources and are thus to be treated as unverified at this stage.*

*Sounds of clinking glass, shuffling of misc. Debris. Six Cold Feet blaring in the background.*

*River is obviously drunk.*

River: Hi. *Pause.* It's almost becoming a habit for me to start these things with an apology or a thank you isn't it? Today, I think we need a little of both. Forgive me father, it's been a week since my last...transgression and all that. Wait, wait...it's just getting to the good bit...

*Listens to song, turns it up a bit louder.*

Ah man, people just don't write like this anymore, so much fucking...soul, you know? It's like the record was printed with actual blood tapped from his veins. Can I tell you...one of my favourite bits of music history? I mean...we all know the story about Led Zeppelin and, you know, that mud shark, and everyone goes on about those mythic years that Bowie spent with Iggy Pop in Berlin, but I mean, for me? There's Orpheus and Eurydice...and then there's Robert Johnson.

*Creaking of chair, inhales.*

Johnson and Leroy Carr – the guy who wrote this song - came up around the same time, and they both died within a couple of years of each other. Carr was just 30, he was an alcoholic, the tragic fate of tons of those old blues guys, Johnson died a couple of years later,

joining the 27 club. Same age I am now...

*Drinks. Sings along for a minute.*

Okay, right, so Lyndon Johnson - ha! - Fuck, sorry. ROBERT JOHNSON, when he first started playing? He was terrible, like, your seven-year-old-niece-learning-to-play-the-recorder terrible. And OH FUCK! I just had the BEST IDEA! There's a recording of Harmony telling this exact story, she always told it better than me, she always did everything better than me...um um um, let's see I remember...it was on the tail end of a take of Sins and Supplications, we'd tried a take with a hurdy-gurdy, which is the world's coolest instrument, but it just, you know, made the sound a little cluttered...

*Sounds of various skipped recordings conversations.*

Okay...here, I'll let Harmony tell this.

Harmony (OR): Hey! Bitches, snitches and kids without riches! Pay attention, the Talent is speaking!

*Various groans and 'boos'*

Harmony (OR): Gazza's going on a bottle-o run, do we want burritos? The correct answer is yes. Yes? Yes? Yes? Cool, okay Gazza make that six burritos, River's no dairy, I'm no meat, Summer's no meat or dairy, and Micah's no sex, but not by choice. And allllllllllllso a couple of grams of the usual, if it's no bother.

*Various laughs and protests*

Harmony (OR): alright, alright, we've been working hard, if you can call this work, and it's officially tools down, relaxo time. Now, half an hour ago, when I was a little busy being a musical genius, Micah asked me who Robert Johnson was, and instead of doing the logical thing and beating him over the head with my guitar for having the AUDACITY to call himself a musician who hasn't even fucking heard of the father of modern music, I decided to take the high ground and wait until break time to impart on you all the Great and Glorious Tale of Robert Johnson and his Infernal Bargain. Rivvy, I know you've heard this one before. No spoilers.

*(Harmony punctuates her speech with a tambourine and other percussive instruments)*

Okay, so, in the beginning was the dude, and the dude would become God, but for the moment, sorrow did he impart upon the ears of his audience! And Lo! When his hands did

strum upon his six-string, there was gnashing of teeth and like, a ton of wailing and shit. People would be all like 'oh Robert, you are going to send my ears to an early grave!' Thus did Robert supplicate for a tranquil place to develop his craft—

River: That's not how you use the word 'supplicate'...

Harm: Riv! Shut it, I'm pontificating over here!

*Laughs*

Harm: Sheesh, *anyways*. So long did Robert search, until at last he did strike upon the, uh, realisation that dead men call no cops, and thus he made of the cemeteries a practice hall. Long past the devil's hour would he play, and this is significant for reasons which will soon become elucidated. Robert spending a shitload of time in the realm of the dead leading the superstitious townsfolk to believe that he was involved in —

*Burps, laughs*

Harmony: Excuse me, in dark dealings, and shit. And lo! Some folk did sayeth that young Robert had sold his very soul to the first of the fallen, known as the morningstar, he who was once the highest in heaven's host before his vainglory did —

River: okay okay okay we get it he made a deal with the devil.

Harmony: Indeed! Young Robert did meet with Lucifer at the crossroads upon the midnight hour, when all the coolest shit doth transpire. The devil plucked Robert's guitar from his blustering hands, tuned it, played his infernal song, and returned it to the man who would become a legend. Thus had Robert agreed to trade his immortal soul for the gift of genius in his hands and voice. And lo! He did thereafter take the stage in front of initially frowning masses, whose faces did change from pretty fucking unimpressed, to being all like, 'holy shit, this guy is GOOD!' Better then good, he was the great bard of his age, and his name would become sung unto the heavens by all who would take music as their trade, except for the occasional fucking ignorant bass player who should quite frankly be ashamed of himself.

*Laughs*

Harmony: And lo!

River: Stop saying 'And lo!'

*Sound of something being thrown at him.*

River: Hey!

Harmony: And lo! Young Robert's glory was as brief as it was glorious, for as Faust had known before him, deals with the devil rarely goeth smooth...eth.

Micah: Who's Faust?

Harmony: Seriously dude, you are fucking fired. I can't keep company with someone who lacks a basic understanding of myth and history.

*Laughs*

Harmony: Okay, so anyways, for a time Robert was much loved, in both the artistic and carnal sense. The lucky SOB would have no need of hotel bookings, for invariably some harlot would become enamoured of his voice and sweet guitar skills, and take him unto her bed, where they would perform the act that was in that age known by the term 'the horizontal pogo', 'making whoopee' and other such lame euphemisms. And thus did Robert beget many children, who themselves begat many children, which would prove to be a right motherfucking nightmare once the royalty cheques started coming in. But Robert's joy and prolific procreation was brief, for as many dudes had done before and would do after, he sought the love of a married woman, which was not fucking cool by anyone's account. For this transgression was he given whiskey which had, like, some kinda poison in it. Legend has it that the great Sonny Boy Williamson, fellow bluesman whose talents were also great although not supernaturally so, knocked the, um, tainted juice—

*Laughs*

Micah: We are officially changing the name of the album to tainted juice!

Harmony: Knocked the tainted juice from his hand and was all like 'dude, don't drink that shit it's fucking poisoned.' Robert, being either a badass or a moron depending on your personal interpretation, did reply: 'Don't ever knock a bottle out of my hand.' And did promptly take a second bottle of (*giggles*) tainted juice and place it to his lips and — big fucking surprise — it killed him. Of course, others would say that he just died of syphilis on account of being a big ol' slut, but surely this ending is the inferior one owing to both its

mundanity and lack of Sonny Boy Williamson involvement. Now, Robert has not one, not TWO but THREE different graves, you may protest dear listener, your senses may urge you to deny the truth of this story, but as surely as the wind bends the trees—

River: Hang on, when did you switch from Chaucer to Edger Allen Poe?

Harmony: Whatever! I'm spinning this here yarn. So, ah in conclusion. Robert Johnson was awesome, Micah is fired for not knowing who he is and I can only hope and pray that we make music half as wonderful, but manage to avoid a similarly tragic fate and early death. I guess what I'm saying is...no one get syphilius, okay?

*Laughs.*

River: I'd forgotten that last bit. *Pause.* There's a kind of tragic magic to it now I guess. Why do we always have this idea that the great artists have to have early, catastrophic endings. We can't all be expected to choke on our vomit or get shot by a fan or die in a plane crash.

Summer: I want to die a fat old lady smoking blunts on the deck of my yacht, drinking tainted juice.

*Laughs*

*End of recording.*

*Drinks.*

River: I realise I still haven't got to either a thank you or an apology. So first off, again, thank you to everyone who's been donating. If you haven't yet, I'd really appreciate any pennies you can send my way, especially since...and this brings us to the apology. I might be needing to use that money for legal fees sooner than expected. Lewis heard the little recording I made last week and, well, he didn't take too kindly to it. Apparently his colleagues didn't like what he had to say about them 'off the record' and he's had to put in for a transfer. That fine he mentioned for my little transgression at the library has suddenly become a top priority. So I need to spend a little over a grand to cover that.

I'm going to have to borrow some of the Save Harmony fund money to pay for it, but I'll pay it back I promise! That money is for Harmony, not me. It's just I've had a lot of time off work lately because I've spent every waking minute searching for her, so my funds are pretty low. I've got a royalty cheque due in a couple of months...but I'm going to be skint until then.

Anyway, you're not here to listen to me whine about my money problems like every fucking musician since the dawn of time.

Alright, now that I've got my bitching and moaning out of the way...I have some big news. I have a lead. An important one. I managed to finally get in touch with Gazza, who was one of the techs at Seventh Cycle studios, he's been on tour in Europe with the Molotov Cocktail Waitresses and only just found time to reply to my ten million messages. While we were recording the album, Gazza would source us all our instruments and...other requirements. You heard him briefly on the recording there.

When Harmony started requesting specific items that he couldn't get or couldn't get in the quantities she wanted, he agreed to let her meet with his suppliers directly. We all told her this was a terrible idea of course, but she was never one to let other people tell her what to do. I got through to the main guy, who's name I'm absolutely not going to mention here, for obvious reasons, and he's agreed to meet with me tomorrow afternoon. This, as they say in the detective business, is a lead. I'm signing out now, see you tomorrow.

*Mic off.*

*Mic on.*

*Sounds of car parking, handbrake. Kills the engine.*

River: *(Whispering)* Alright, I'm here...and...to be honest I'm ready to piss myself. This is not...well not the kind of place you'd want to visit by choice I'll say that much.

I've got an image of my location on google maps sitting on my computer at home set to auto-upload if I do nothing within the next two hours. So if...something happens to me, well, at least I'll be easier to find than Harmony right? Ha ha. Alright here goes nothing. Just in case this is my last recording. I want to say thank you, and please keep looking for Harm. Tell her I love her. Pause. Nervous muttering. Okay. Fuck. Fuck. Here goes nothing.

*Car door opens, footsteps*

Dick: You River?

River: Yeah.

Jane: Alright, arms up. Gotta pat you down. I'm going to need to take your phone.

River: No! I need it.

Dick: What you going to need to 'live tweet' your chat with the boss? Instagram the office décor? Get a grip. I promise we'll take good care of it. Leave it on the table there.

*(Pause, continues in a hugely offensive 'deaf voice')* I'm sorry, are you fucking deaf? Do you need me to write it down for you?

Jane: Shut the fuck up Richard, there's no need to be an asshole. River, put the phone down and quit wasting our time. Also, I should let you know that the boss is only seeing you because he's a fan of your band. But you should keep your fucking eyes down, ask your questions, keep them brief, and get outta there. You got five minutes. Plus, he hasn't had lunch yet, and he's moody when he's hungry. So, you know, don't try joking around or anything. Oh, and protip? Compliment his outfit. He's pretty vain, might butter him up a bit.

River: Okay. Right. Uh, thanks for the advice. I appreciate it.

Jane: It's not a favour. I just don't feel like cleaning up anyone's blood today. That shit really stains. I'm sick of going to the dry-cleaners three times a week.

River: ...got it.

*Door opens.*

Blake: River, take a seat.

*Door closes.*

*Conversation continues, muffled and barely audible.*

Jane: Dude, seriously, that 'deaf voice' thing is not okay.

Dick: I was just fucking around, don't get your panties in a twist. When did you get so PC?

Jane: You know my niece is deaf right?

Dick...really? Which one?

Jane: Elizabeth. She's got a cochlear implant and the little punks at her school pull the same shit you just did all the time. And she's a little badass so she usually knocks the snot outta them like I should do to you.

Dick: Shit, I'm sorry. I, ah, I'm sure she's a great kid.

*Sounds of yelling from inside.*

Jane: Damn-fucking right she is. You know what she said to me the other day? She goes, 'Having hearing aids is good, because when people say mean things about you, you can turn them off.' I like that idea, you know. It's like linguistic invincibility.

Dick: But you can't see language anyway?

Jane: INVINCIBILITY, not INVISIBILITY.

Dick: Oh, right. I get it.

*Something smashes, more yelling*

Dick: Uh oh, sounds like someone's going to need to cry him a river. *(Chuckles)* Get it? Because his name is—

Jane: *(Groans)* Yeah, yeah I got it.

Dick: Did you like my line about the live tweeting and instagramming? I'm trying to work more digital references into my material, trying to connect with the millennials you know? Modern audiences—

Jane: Dude, this is exactly why we never come to your open mic gigs.

Dick: Hey! Fuck you! I'd like to see you get up in front of a crowd of fucking strangers and try and make 'em laugh. It takes guts to do that! You know most people's greatest fear is public speaking?

*More yelling smashing, sounds of River pleading*

Jane: Yeah well, that's because most people have never had their teeth pulled out with pliers or bamboo shoved underneath their fingernail, which is a shame really. Might give people some fucken' perspective. My oldest? He's always whining that our internet connection is too slow, complaining about how 'he can't be expected to live like this'. I tell him there's plenty of kids in the world who can't even get clean water and three square meals and he just says 'well I could probably learn more about them if you'd start paying for a decent

data package.'

Dick: (*grunts*) Jesus fucking Christ! I used to have to shoplift my porno from a store and risk getting arrested, meanwhile these kids beam that shit from outer space from the comfort of their bedroom and they complain it's not *fast* enough! This is exactly why I never had kids.

Jane: You never had kids because you could never find a girl stupid enough to let you get her pregnant.

Dick: Yeah, well your mum offered but I told her I didn't want to go into anywhere that you'd come out of.

*Screaming, pleading, smashing.*

Jane: Really, a 'your momma' joke? This is exactly why you can't book gigs anywhere except steakhouses and hippie festivals.

Dick: Why you always gotta shit on my dreams? Just because you lack vision. You ever done anything except this fucking protection work? When you were a kid and people asked you 'whaddya wanna do when you grow up' did you say 'I wanna break kneecaps for fucking arseholes who only manage to build criminal empires because the cops are clueless gits who—'

*Sound of breaking glass, screaming. Kicks, pleas, swearing and curses.*

*Door slams. Quiet whimpering.*

Jane: FUH-KING HELL KID! What did you say to him?

*River murmurs something inaudible*

Dick: You're lucky he didn't kill you. You shoulda never come here. Now I gotta clean up glass AND blood! Do you know how hard it is to find a decent glass repair service in this neck of the woods? Here, take your phone and get the fuck outta here before I kill you myself.

*River, murmuring, crying. Staggers back to the car, stomping on glass.  
Car door opens. Car starts. Screeching tyres. Car driving at full speed.*

*River panting, spitting blood. Slowly, he begins to laugh maniacally.*

River: You know...(spits) ugh...christ. The others used to always...ugh...make fun of me because I'd never been in a fight. If only they could see me now!

*Screeching tyres. Honking horns.*

River: YEAH, FUCK YOU! Lady, if you knew the day I'd just had!

*Hums to himself, groans.*

River: Well? I guess you must be pretty eager to find out what went on in there right? Sitting on the edge of your seat, or bed, or wherever you're listening to this? Here goes: After Harmony disappeared, she got in contact because she heard that...ol mate...provided 'relocation services.' New ID, passports, fake birth certificates, credit histories, even plastic surgery. Although I'm not sure that investing in black market plastic surgery is such a good idea...

Once she decided to disappear, she called him up, squared up her debt, and then asked to be 'relocated.' He wouldn't give me her new name, just her location. Said even that was stretching his professional boundaries, and that it could damage his reputation. But he said because she'd told him specifically that I was allowed to contact her, it would be okay. As long as I told no one else, and so, I'm afraid, that means even you, my candles in the dark. For Harmony's safety I might just keep this secret to myself, but...I FOUND HER! I FUCKING FOUND HER!

*Whoops and hollers, bangs dashboard excitedly, then screams*

River: Shit. I think my wrist might be broken. UGH. *Giggles.* Now, I know what you must be thinking, if that all went so fine and dandy, if Mr X was so happy to share all that info, how did River end up all 'Rocky V' over here? Well, I maaaaaay have overstepped somewhat. I was halfway out the door, when he said 'we're not done here.'

Apparently, Harmony had only paid the first half of her relocation fee, the other half being payable on delivery or whatever. But once the guy in charge of her transport drove out of the parking lot with her in the passenger seat they never saw him or the money he was supposed to come back with again. Not surprising really, Harmony has a way of convincing people to do things they don't want to do, even things that might get them killed.

So now apparently I'm held accountable for the money she owes, which, well, I mean the fine stung pretty bad, but it's chump change compared to this. I've got to get it to him by the

end of the week...which, I guess is just extra motivation to find my dear little sis hahaha!

*Giggles.*

I'm just trying to figure out, in this version of the story, am I Orpheus or Eurydice?

*Pause.*

I'm going to go home, bathe myself in ice and betadine and sleep for sixteen hours. But tomorrow? Tomorrow I'm going to see my sister.

EPISODE SIX  
ME AND THE DEVIL BLUES

*Government agent voice: The following audio record forms part of the department's ongoing investigation into the actions of Eugene Kirkley aka Gideon Vermello and his operations in the town of Ullara. This record is classed as highly confidential under legislation 27b/6. Testimonies recorded here have not yet been officially corroborated by secondary or tertiary sources and are thus to be treated as unverified at this stage.*

*Late night sounds, owls etc.*

*Computer boots up.*

River: Good evening, or, ah, I guess I should say morning. It's...3.33am. The Devil's hour. Kinda funny, because we were just talking about that today...or yesterday I guess.

I slept for a couple of hours, but then, I don't know. Weird dreams. About...home. I feel liminal. *(Yawns)* I thought about just starting the drive early, but it could be dangerous if I'm tired. It'll take me three hours to get there. UGH. Need coffee. God. I'll start this recording again when I'm awake and on the road.

*Mic off.*

*Mic on.*

*Sound of things being thrown into the boot, doors opening and closing.*

River: So, the key ingredients for a good road trip are:

- 1 good tunes, got that covered, obviously
- 2 good snacks. Little light on those, will have to stop at a 7-11
- 3 good company.

*Pause.*

I mean, I guess I'll have some pretty great company on the way back, but for right now I'm all alone. Maybe I'll pick up a hitch-hiker? Hopefully one who isn't an axe murderer. Why is it always *axe* murderers? I mean, the axe is such a prominent, unconcealable weapon. Surely plenty more people are killed by knives or guns or poison? Also, why do we say 'axe murderer' but not 'knife murderer'?

*Starts engine.*

Sorry, getting a little morbid.

*Music plays, old school blues or maybe borrowed from friends*

*Drives.*

So. If I had to describe my feelings, I'd saaaaay...'first day at school mixed with last day on earth with a side of best gig we've ever played and a dollop of that time when Kieran O'Malley locked me in a shipping trunk at the back of our old school theatre.' Man, what a dickhead. You know last year he came to one of our shows and told us he was our BIGGEST FAN? Weird the way these things turn out. Back in high school, if I had half a chance I would've, well...I had some pretty dark thoughts back then. I wasn't always the happy, well-adjusted character I am now. I can't remember if I've already—

*Phone rings.*

River: Oh. *Shit*. Shit. Shit. Shit. (*Answers*) Hey Aurealia, how's the kitchen renovation going?

Aurealia: River, love, don't try and feather the duck with me.

River: ummm...I actually don't know what that means.

Aurealia: Don't get cute! This is serious!

River: Okay, look, I'm not trying to be cute. It's just I honestly don't know what that expression means, aren't ducks feathered already?

Aurealia: Just shut up! I got here this morning, at 10am, and I found Abraham out here, eating a sandwich. He'd been waiting for the library to open for AN HOUR! Why aren't you here?

River: I'm sorry Aurealia, my sister...

Aurealia: River, darlin', you know, I mean you *really* know, that we are all hurting for you. We loved Harmony like one of our kids, but we've got a library to run, you've used up all of your holiday pay, all of your sick pay, I've given you a couple of days unpaid leave but if you keep this up I'll HAVE to fire you. It won't even be up to me, council has strict rules about this kinda thing.

River: No one cares about that library more than me, you know that, but we're talking about my sister! She's alive!

Aurealia: I know that... you believe that. And I mean, hope is important. When Peter was sick, it didn't matter how many doctor's told me he wouldn't live out the year I kept praying and hoping he'd live to see a hundred, but I buried him the next month all the same. Hope raises spirits, sweetheart, it doesn't raise bodies.

River: She's alive Aurealia.

Aurealia: Well, I hope that's true. But either way, love, if you don't come in to work tomorrow, you'll have to find work elsewhere.

River: This is BULLSHIT!

Aurelia: (*sighs*) I told you, it's not up to me. I can't keep covering for you. Especially not after your little bibliographic bonfire you held in the storage room.

River: Those books and magazines and newspapers told suppressive LIES about our community! I'll talk to Gideon myself!

Aurelia: You know Gideon doesn't have jurisdiction over government property. He's important, not omnipotent.

River: They'll listen to him! He'll explain everything!

Aurelia: You can't keep throwing all your problems at his feet River, he has his supplications to complete, not to mention dealing with the recent...delivery.

River: *(pause)* Aurelia, does it worry you, the delivery?

Aurelia: *(pause, speaking stiffly)* I'm not sure that we should talk about this on the phone.

River: It's just, it seems to go against the principles on which Ullara was founded? Peace, goodwill towards all sentient beings—

Aurelia: *(unsure)* Gideon hasn't made his plans known to us yet, but I'm sure that there will be wisdom in his decision.

River: But how can any good come from the tools of destruction?

Aurelia: River, I didn't call you to discuss philosophy, we need to sort out whether or not I can keep your position at the library, or if I need to give it to someone else.

River: *(angrily)* Fine, I don't care. I'm finding Harmony and then you'll all see I was right. You're going to feel pretty guilty, Aurelia, when I come back with her!

Aurelia: Sweetheart, I hope you're right. I really do. *(Sighs)* Listen, when you and Harmony first came to town, I could tell you both had a light in you. I think of you as family...River, you know we all care about you, right? The council, all of us, we're worried that you might need help.

River: I do need help! I need help finding my sister!

Aurelia: River, I think you know that's not what I meant.

River: I have to go.

Aurealia: Alright, alright, but be careful, please? Love and light.

River: Love and light.

*Hangs up.*

*Robert Johnson comes back on. River turns it up.*

River: I know she means well, but it really pisses me off that people treat me like, like they think I'm unhinged, or irrational. If it was their family, they'd stop at nothing! Isn't it irrational to be 'calm' and 'sensible' when there's a situation this serious? *(Pause)*. It's not her fault I guess, she doesn't know what I know.

*Sings along to the stereo*

River: I'm going to turn the mic off again, for a little while. I need to think.

*Mic off.*

*Mic on.*

River: I've been driving about five hours now, getting pretty close to...where I need to be. *(Pause)*. It's a strange experience, driving through this part of the world. Out here the road's just one big black flat snake slithering through a thousand acres of infinite nothingness. Sand and sky in every direction. Last place on earth you want to break down, that's for sure.

Satnav: In 500m take the exit onto...

River: Whoops! Better turn that off. Don't want it giving away my location... some of you listening might have never been to Australia. You probably picture a bunch of weird animals hopping around the place. But driving around this country, this state specifically, there's this incredible sense of desolation and beauty. You've got ancient

rainforests straddling pristine beaches, the world's largest reef structure, incomprehensibly vast deserts, Queensland alone is seven times the size of England. On a drive like this, crossing mountains and desert and forests, you feel like the landscape is your mother and your executioner, depending on its mood. The sky is this blazing, brilliant blue, and come night-time? There'll be stars from here until eternity.

You know that whole thing about stars, about how many of them are actually dead, and by the time their light reaches our eyes they're collapsed into black holes or nothingness or whatever? Sometimes I think that art, or maybe even these recordings, works the same way. You have this echo of yourself that reaches out into the future, and long after you're gone it's lingering, even though you're dead and buried. That's kind of sad, and kind of beautiful.

*(Pause)* I remember when Bowie died, me and Harmony listened to every single one of his albums, back to back. Took us three full days to get through them all, starting right at the beginning, with his first single when he was going by 'Davie Jones & The King Bees' then working our way through Space Oddity, Ziggy Stardust, Station to Station, Hours, The Next Day...right on through to Blackstar, that strange, beautiful self-requiem. It was almost like he wasn't dead. Like we could exist in his echo forever. That's what's special about art, it's a sort of heathen immortality, an afterlife without the need for religion.

*Pause. Rumbling thunder.*

Oh! I just saw a flash of lightning way out on the horizon. Magic. You should see the storms when they roll through here. The air has this thick, electric taste to it, and the clouds rumble in fast, like an armada of warships cutting across the blue sea, in the really big storms the clouds aren't black, they're electric green, and you can see lightning dance across the sky. Easy to see why people thought that storms were battling gods, once upon a time.

When I was a kid...well, look, I know I haven't always painted the kindest picture of my mother, but I do have this one memory...It was pouring rain, and I was maybe six years old. I was terrified, and she came into my room and told me this story about a boy who lived in the clouds. His name was Alaka and he paddled through the sky on a boat.

He would catch birds and cook them in a tiny metal stove and look down on the earth far below at the people running around on the ground. He dreamed of flying down to visit them, but his parents, who had raised him on a ship that sailed the

endless ocean, told him that their family had an ancient curse that forbade them from ever setting foot on land. The curse was so ancient that no one could remember exactly what would happen if the archaic rule was broken, only that the consequences would be dire. For dozens of generations his ancestors had been forced to choose between sea and sky, his parents had chosen sea, and when he came of age he chose the sky.

For a while it thrilled him to soar above the earth, to gaze into the eyes of eagles as they flew alongside him, but eventually, he became lonely, and he longed to feel the earth press against his feet. One night, during a storm that sent lightning cracking through the sky, he decided that he couldn't wait any longer. He pushed his little boat down towards the mountains, and just as—

*Phone rings.*

River: Huh. Unknown caller.

*Rings.*

*Rings.*

River: *(clears throat)*...hello?

Computer Disguised Voice: You need to stop looking for Harmony.

River: Who is this?

CDV: That's not important. Leave her alone, or you'll regret it.

River: Are you threatening me?

CDV: I'm not *threading* you but—

River: Did you just say I'm not *threading* you?

CDV: It was a typo, shut up dill-brain.

River: ...Harmony?

*Pause*

River: Harmony that has to be you, no one else in the world would use a text to voice program to actually type the word 'dill-brain'.

Harmony: *(sighs)* ...fuck.

*River whoops excitedly.*

River: I *knew* it! I knew you were alive! Everyone said I should just give up but I KNEW that you were okay! I knew that you would come home.

Harmony: *(confused)* Well, yeah, of course you knew I was okay? But River, I can't come home, you understand that right?

River: *(hurt)* ...why?

Harmony: *(laughs)* Christ on a canoe, where to start? I got sick of wearing red every fucking day for one thing.

River: Harmony, Ullara is where you belong.

Harmony: Riv, please, we've been over this. You know I love you, but you don't get to tell me where I belong. I've been listening to your broadcasts, You shouldn't have gone to...the place you went to last time. He could've killed you. Making recordings like that, broadcasting them to the world, surely you must realise that's not a good — Oh fuck, you aren't recording this are you?

*Pause.*

River: Well....

Harmony: River, PLEASE don't put this on air. Someone is going to seriously hurt you. And I don't want it to be me.

River: Okay, okay, fine.

Harmony: River, I don't believe you. If you don't stop recording, *right now*, I promise that you will never find me. You know I can always tell when you're lying.

River: Okay. I'm turning it off.

*Mic off*

*Mic on*

*Sounds of the road, engine, sighing.*

River: Alright, well, that...didn't go exactly as I planned. At all. The important thing, obviously, is that Harmony is alive. And safe, for the moment at least. But we had a...well, my mum used to call them 'disagreements.'

She's told me I can only come visit her ONLY if I promise to stop doing these recordings and close the Find Harmony campaign, which, of course I will! If she's home safe! So, I guess, I guess this could be the end? I'm so excited to have her home. And I'm so proud of what we've built together, maybe...maybe we could use this community to help..find lost children or...take care of old people, or like...I don't know, just be a force for good in the world! Gideon is always saying 'as the mouth sayeth, so shall the hand do', but I think a lot of us get stuck on the prayers and meditations.

I mean, think of the good we could do! We could- FUCK!

*Swerves to avoid kangaroo, screeching tyres, shrieking brakes.*

*Thumps against wheel, pants.*

*Unbuckles belt, door open sound.*

River: *(gasping for air)* Great mercy. Great sweet mercy!

*Sirens, cop car.*

River:...oh fuck...fucking fuckity fuck fuck! Not now...

*Cop car pulls over, sounds of door opening and closing. Footsteps.*

Cop: You alright mate?

River: Yeah, I ah, I just had to swerve to avoid a kangaroo.

Cop: Ah, yeah those bouncing bastards kill more people than cancer round here. Of course, it probably didn't help that you were travelling well over the speed limit. It's the highway mate, not the fucking autobahn.

River: My apologies, I was distracted. I promise it won't—

Cop: *(talking over him)* Those kind of speeds can be the difference between a hospital visit and a funeral, QLD state law dictates that —

River: Officer, I understand, really, please just give me the ticket and—

Cop: Is that a recording app on your phone?

River: Yes.

Cop: Turn it off please.

River: *(fumbles and picks it up)* I have a legal right to record—

Cop: TURN. IT. OFF!

River: Well, with all due respect, you can't ask me to...

Cop: *(snarkily)* 'With all due respect', if you don't fucking turn that shit off right now you are going to wish you had. You seem to be perspiring heavily, you got something to hide, redshirt?

River: No!

Cop: I know your type, you're never too far from some kind of mind bending-substance. What am I going to find if I open your glovebox?

River: You do not have my permission to—

Cop: If I decide there's a good chance I'll find illegal substances then I don't fucking need permission to enter your vehicle. I'm a cop not a Mormon.

*Glovebox opens*

Cop: Well, this just got interesting. Mic off, hands behind your back.

River: I respectfully decline.

Cop (*laughs*): It's an order not a fucking DINNER invitation. Give me your phone, hands behind your back NOW.

*Sounds of scuffle, yelling, Mic being dropped. Protest.*

*Mic turns off.*

*Mic on.*

River: Well, they finally gave me my phone back. Suffice to say that...I have not had the best night's sleep. Rural jails are pretty lonely and quiet, although I suppose that's something to be thankful for. A guy like me wouldn't last ten seconds if I had to share a cell with some meth-head bikie.

I guess...the outside world still has a pretty unenlightened view of marijuana use. I mean, it's legal in half the states in America, Portugal, but we're still dragging our feet here like a bunch of idiots. Not that an officer of the law would want to hear it. For someone who spends their time supposedly upholding the law they sure seem to lack a nuanced understanding of its motivations and complexities.

Ahh, I should stop complaining. I can't expect the rest of the world to be the divine little utopia that Ullara is. I—

Cop: River...Sundancer? Is that your real name?

River: Yes.

Cop: (*under his breath*) Christ almighty, that explains a few things. Well, I've had a chat to the sarge and he says that if you can pay the \$150 speeding fine on the spot, he's feelin' generous enough to let the charges of being a rude prick to an officer slide, which is pretty fuckin' generous, by my estimation.

River: And what about the drug charges?

Cop: What drug charges?

River: You arrested me when you found a bunch of leaves in my car, because apparently the laws of man are above the laws of nature.

Cop: Listen *Sundancer*, Jesus that's almost a slur in and of itself, if you didn't see any drugs then I didn't either, and it'll make both of our days a little bit brighter, sound good?

River: Uh-huh. Well, if that's the way you play it, clearly the law is a fairly arbitrary force around—

Cop: Look, I honestly cannot wait to get you out of here, I've had enough pontificating to last me a Westeros winter—

River: Was that a *Game of Thrones* reference?

Cop: What, a country cop isn't allowed to enjoy high-quality storytelling?

River: I have no words...

Cop: Thank Christ for that. Anyways, so if you can pay the damn fine, you can go.

River: ...what if I can't?

Cop: You don't have \$150? You can't call a friend? Beg, borrow, steal?

River: Did you actually just suggest I *steal* to pay my fine?

Cop: It's an expression.

River: So is 'the only good cop is a de—

Cop: I'm going to strongly advise you don't finish that sentence, find someone who is unfortunate enough to call you a friend, pay the fine and get the fuck out of here.

River: My phone barely has reception out here, can I use your landline?

Cop: There on the desk, would you like tea and biscuits to go with it? No? I'll be out front, just knock if you need me, your highness.

*Slams door.*

*River sighs, scrolls through his phone. Dials.*

*Grandma's voice is barely audible*

River: Hi...Grandma? How are you? Yes, I know it has been a long time! ...Yeah, I'm sorry I couldn't make it down for the funeral. We were on tour in New Zealand and...well of COURSE he meant a lot to me and...I'm sorry! Listen, grandma, I'm in trouble I need...yes, I'm still looking for her, I've found her and that's why I need your—

*Inaudible yelling.*

River: ...that's not fair!

*Dial tone.*

*River cries and curls up against the bunk, sings softly to himself. Sobs.*

River: Oh! Shit! I'm such an idiot!

*Dials number*

River: Hey. It's me. I need to ask a favour.

*Fade out.*

*Fade in.*

*In the room next door we hear someone talking to the cop.*

*Door opens.*

Harmony: Chin-up, buttercup.

River: Harmony!

*Hugs, laughs, hysterical whooping.*

Cop: Keep it down in there would you!

River: I missed you!

Harmony: Of course you did, who wouldn't?

River: There's that famous humility.

Harmony: I'm as humble as I am patient, and we both know that's no compliment.  
River, sweetheart, you look...not well. Have you been sleeping?

River: Sure...once a week, just like the doctor ordered.

Harmony: That isn't funny...god, you've lost so much weight.

River: Food is overrated.

Harmony: It's good to see you, you sweet little lunatic. Even though I feel like slapping you after all your nonsense the last few weeks, I just can't hit a face that sad and gaunt.

River: That was my plan all along. Cheaper than a forcefield.

*Hugs her, cries.*

River: Why did you leave me?

Harmony: River, you *know* why...

*Pause.*

Harmony: Come on periwinkle, let's get you out of here. You owe me \$155 bucks by the way.

River: I thought the fine was \$150?

Harmony: Oh right, and I suppose the petrol just pays for itself does it?

River: God, you are so stingy. Can we eat, I'm hungry?

Harmony: In a few, you cockatoo.

*River laughs, sniffs.*

River: What's the time, dear friend of mine?

Harmony: Half past three, my chimpanzee.

River: Adventures, travels, what sweet joys shall we unravel?

Harmony: In the afternoon, my little prune.

River: And what of smiles, what of laughter?

Together: A touch past midnight, and not a moment after.

*Mic off.*

EPISODE SEVEN  
SIX COLD FEET

*Government agent voice: The following audio record forms part of the department's ongoing investigation into the actions of Eugene Kirkley aka Gideon Vermello and his operations in the town of Ullara. This record is classed as highly confidential under legislation 27b/6. Testimonies recorded here have not yet been officially corroborated by secondary or tertiary sources and are thus to be treated as unverified at this stage.*

*Door opens, keys thrown on table.*

Harmony: We don't open for another couple of hours, so we should be alone for a little while. And you're definitely going to edit out anything that could potentially identify our location right?

River: Of course.

Harmony:...okay. Well, this is it. It ain't much, but it's got a certain *je ne sais quoi*.

River: It's got a certain 'eau de toilette' I think you mean.

Harmony: Yeah, yeah, it ain't the Tivoli. Big deal, no need to bring out the snark. But they have some good bands play here, and they pay in cash, which is helpful, obviously, given my situation. It's crazy how hard it is to avoid banks these days.

River: Does anyone you work with know who you are?

*Beer/soda being opened, caps falling on the table. Cheers.*

Harmony: I think Marie suspects, but she's never said anything outright. It's amazing how much a cut, colour and new pair of glasses can do. I'm trying to dress differently too.

River: I noticed, I don't think I've ever seen you wear a blazer before.

Harmony: (sings in a Bob Dylan voice) Yeah, well, the times they are a changeling.

River: That's funny.

Harmony: It is isn't it?

River: Same old Harmony brand humility.

Harmony: Riv, would you mind...not calling me that?

*Pause.*

River: But it's your—

Harmony: Yeah...well, it is and it ain't. You know, I really didn't anticipate how much effort it would take to be someone else. This is pretty embarrassing, but before I did my disappearing act, I did all this research. Movies, books, podcasts—

River: You did disappearing homework? You are such a nerd.

Harmony: I know, but it's like Beyoncé said, who run the world? Nerds.

River: I thought that was girls?

Harmony: Well, I'm a girl nerd, so I guess I'm doubling down. Anyway, yeah I researched the hell out of it. I mean people research getting the right mortgage deal right? And, you know, that's important but choosing the wrong one won't get you actually and literally killed, unlike the situation I'm dealing with here. There was this one podcast called Missing, it's all about the art of disappearing, did you know that missing persons cases make up 14% of police work?

River: Yeah, I think I've heard that mentioned.

Harmony: But even after all the stats and figures and stories of people going crazy with the burden of having to carry a secret around, it still seemed like it would be fun, like playing dress ups all the time, like Bowie shifting from Ziggy Stardust to Aladdin Sane. And we've already done it once, although that time was different because of, well, in a place like Ullara it's easy to remake yourself. Expected even. But the truth is that taking on a new identity out here in the real world—

River: This isn't the 'real world', this is the Grand Illusion. The real world is Ullara.

Harmony: *(Sighs, frustrated)* Yeah, okay, well whatever. Taking on a new identity OUT HERE, it's so constantly draining. It's like...you know when you were in primary school and they'd do school photos and you'd have to pull this big, cheesy smile for the photographer and they'd take foreveeeeeer to take the damn photo. So your cheeks start to ache and you shuffle and you feel uncomfortable...imagine trying to maintain that facade every waking moment. It's exhausting.

River: What name are you using? Can you write it down or something?

Harmony: I don't think that's a good idea.

River: Please? Just whisper it in my ear.

*Harmony whispers something inaudible.*

River: Huh. That makes a weird kind of sense. There's a sort of irony to it I guess.

Harmony: It's only ironic in the sense of Alanis Morissette's multi-platinum hit single, which is to say, not at all.

*(Pause, they drink, River taps the table)*

River: Thanks for the beer. And the bail money.

Harmony: You're welcome, but...

River: What?

Harmony: I don't want to lie, I am going to need you to pay that money back. Cash is pretty tight at the moment, moving was not a cheap exercise, as I'm sure you know from what ol' mate woulda told you, judging from those bruises you've got decorating your face.

River: He's going to need to get the rest of that money, Harm.

Harmony: (shocked and confused) What are you— River are you serious? I already gave you that money! Did you not give it to him? Fucking hell Riv he could KILL you!

River: What do you mean you gave me the money?

Harmony: I told you in the email! I transferred it your bank account, please don't tell me you spent it!

River: (*confused, fragile*) I don't know what you're talking about.

(*Pause*)

Harmony: River, shit, maybe you're even further gone than I thought...

River: (*defensive*) I'm FINE! You're the one who isn't making sense.

Harmony: Well...in any case, you can tell him, or I guess he'll figure it out if he listens to this, Warren's not coming back. He's left the country, I won't say where. But he's done with the underworld. He saved up enough to just go live on a bungalow on a beach somewhere unpronounceable.

River: You weren't tempted to do the same?

Harmony: Aren't we all? But no, I didn't need to be somewhere distant from society. I've been running from real life since before I finished puberty. I need to be a normie. Steady job. Tax returns, maybe join a book club, start hosting tupperware parties, all that bollocks.

River: Harmony...

Harmony: Don't call me that. I'm sick of hearing that stupid hippie name. Harmony Sundancer, Christ on a pogo stick it sounds like a SoCal yoga instructor who's takes her morning soy lattes with a light sprinkling of LSD.

River: It's a good name. It's YOUR name.

Harmony: Not anymore.

(*Pause*)

(*At the same time*) River: I –      Harmony: What—

River: Why did you leave?

Harmony: You ever hear of Rasanath Das?

River: No, no, we are not doing the whole 'divert the question via a vaguely allegorical anecdote.' Just give me a straight answer.

Harmony: Answers aren't always straight. Question response paradigms exist on a spectrum.

River: Stop being cute, this is serious! I've been searching for you, hardly ever sleeping, the whole town's been—

Harmony: But this isn't about me is it River?

River: ...what?

Harmony: I'm the one who left, but you're the one who needs to be looking for answers. None of this is about me. *You're* the one who needs to find the wizard at the end of the yellow brick road.

River: You're not making any sense.

Harmony: (*sighs, irritated*) I have to pee.

River: Okay, well that bit makes sense but I'm not exactly a huge fan of your timing here.

Harmony: I have to go pee and in that time I want you to think, VERY SERIOUSLY, if you're ready to get into this, I mean properly drag all the skeletons out of the closet and drag them kicking and screaming into the light. If we're going to do this, I don't want euphemisms, kid gloves, cotton wool, training wheels or bumper bars. We are going to rip out the pulsing heart of this problem

and probe it while it bleeds all over our hands.

River: Okay.

*Harmony stands up, walks away.*

*River hums to himself. Sound of something being opened, drops of liquid.  
River stands up.*

River: Oh shit, a for real JUKEBOX! Sweet baby cheeses.

*Flicks through selection.*

River: Stone roses, Rolling Stones, Fly and the Family Stone. Good to see they have the various stones covered, Laura Marling, Lauryn Hill, Leonard Cohen...huh.

*Selects song, loads. Six Cold Feet starts playing.*

*Harmony comes back.*

Harmony: Goddamn dude, do you ever get sick of this song?

River: No more than I get sick of breathing or eating.

*They sing together.*

Harmony: Well, I've missed singing with you, that's for sure. But we can also see why we don't put you on lead vocals.

River: Yeah, yeah, I know I'm the George Harrison of our band.

Harmony: Same old River brand humility. Okay, well, have you made your decision, are you ready to perform the autopsy?

River: 'Autopsy' implies that something's died.

Harmony: Well, metaphorically speaking that's true. I can't be Harmony anymore. She's dead, well and truly. *Pause*. Alright, let's do this then. Step one; give me your phone.

River: What?

Harmony: Give me your phone.

River: Why?

*Harmony grabs at it from his pocket. Sounds of shuffling mic*

River: Hey!

Harmony: Still using the same passcode? Ah yes, indeed you are. So. Let's take a look at your inbox...and here...is...the message I sent you. Read it.

*River reads the actual letter out loud to himself, only portions of it are audible.*

Harmony: See anything strange?

River: Did...someone hack my email?

Harmony: River, I think you know that's not what happened here.

River: I don't understand...

Harmony: I know, but hopefully it has you asking the right questions. Can you see why I can't give you a straight answer? Let's try and unpack things a little bit more. I'll answer your earlier question. Why did I leave? *Taps bottle on the table*. Well, I mean, obviously the kid coming along shook things up a little bit. It's all

very well and good living this life of excess, revelry and indulgence as a single, unattached woman but throwing a kid into that mix—

River: You wouldn't be the first musician to juggle art and motherhood.

Harmony: River, you know it's not just about that. Don't you get sick of wearing fucking red every day?

River: Red is the colour of passion—

Harmony: The colour of blood, the colour of vigour, the colour of courage, yes, I can recite the mantra as well as you, but isn't that the problem? Having mantras for colours? Chromatic Choruses? The principles of truth and harmony, the pillars of self-reflection, the doctrines of harmonious wayfaring. I mean, do you know how liberating it is being able to just wake up and eat breakfast, brush your teeth and go about your day without having to do a bunch of fucking prayers and chanting?

River: Gideon says that—

Harmony: Fuck that asshole.

River: *(inhales sharply)* You shouldn't talk about him that way!

Harmony: *(takes a deep breath)* River, we need to rip this band-aid off. The guy's a fucking creep. I put up with his bullshit for a long time because Ullara is a hippie muso's dream, the cure for banality, the remedy for reality, but the side effects have become worse than the symptoms. And that original philosophy that drew us there, it's been fouled, corrupted.

River: What do you mean?

Harmony: The 'special delivery' that came to Ullara?

River: I was...upset about that too.

Harmony: Upset? *Upset?* 'Upset' is how you feel when your best friend is late for dinner. 'Upset' is how you feel when the new Beach House album gets a delayed release. Having those...things in our community? It's the end of everything we hoped we'd ever find there.

River: I agree. It was a mistake, a serious mistake, but all of the great leaders throughout history have made errors. Gideon is wise, enlightened, but he isn't infallible, but as a community we can heal—

Harmony: River, sometimes you can cure the infection and sometimes you're left with no option but to cut off the limb.

River: Are you really suggesting that Ullara is beyond saving? That Gideon can't—

Harmony: *(sucks in air, taps table)* A few weeks before I left, Gideon called me into his office, after evening meditation. I was exhausted from that East Coast tour with Consider the Lobster—

River: That was a great tour, Karen called me other week, she—

Harmony: River, let me finish. I told Gideon I just wanted to go home and sleep but he insisted it was important. So I go into his office and we sit down on that fancy antique leather couch of his, leather couch in country Queensland, what a fucking joke. It's surprising there aren't bits of human skin attached to it from when people's sweaty stuck has been glued to its surface.

Anyway, he sits me down and he offers me coffee, tea, wine, I really wasn't in the mood. I told him to cut the shit and get on with it. You should've seen his face. That kind of anger, you only see it on the face of a man who isn't used to being disagreed with. He was like a spoilt child being denied a biscuit.

River: I'm sure you're just overreacting.

Harmony: Don't fucking tell me how I was feeling. You've seen him when he's angry, does he seem wise and enlightened then? With his veins popping out of his skull and that look in his eyes that just screams the fact that he's capable of—

River: (*wavering*) H-he would never bring harm to another sentient being, it's one of the trinity of Holy—

Harmony: Holy foundational mandates, yes I know. And he speaks those words convincingly, but that 'special delivery', do you really think that holds true to the principle of 'bringing no harm to any sentient being?'

River: I was upse—*furious* about that decision but I am sure Gideon—

Harmony: Stop taking his side! You haven't even heard the end of the story. So this flash of anger sweeps across his face, but then it's gone, and he was back to his usual serene, sedated self. He sighed, as though he pitied me and he sat down and gently stroked my hair. I took his hand gently, and moved it away, and I said to him 'Gideon, I haven't had a decent night's sleep in three weeks. Tell me what you have to tell me or let me go but if you touch me again I will break your hand.'

River: I can't believe you spoke to him like that!

Harmony: GodDAMN it River, do you hear yourself? He's not a god, he's just a man! An entitled, arrogant man with a horde of deluded isolationist acolytes who are— fuck, let me finish the damn story okay? So he says to me that they've

all been missing me while I'm on tour and that I've been neglecting my duties to the community and I was like 'yeah well, how am I supposed to help harvest crops and milk cows when I'm in fucking Newcastle' and he smiled and said, 'you're right of course, forgive me' in the kind of tone that indicated he didn't actually think he'd said anything wrong.

He reached his hand out and it hovered above my thigh, I inhaled and tensed, and his hand retracted. He smiled again and said, 'You've been a valued part of our community for a long time now, do you like living here?'

And I said, of course I did, although in my head I was thinking I'd started liking it a lot less in the last five minutes.

*Drinks. Taps table.*

Harmony: You want another beer?

River: *(choking tears, through gritted teeth)* finish the story.

Harmony: *(sighs)* okay, so he says to me 'Recently, I have convened an inner circle of the council, there are so many ins and outs to running a unique community such as ours, and some of these are best dealt with away from prying eyes. I told him that the democratic, hierarchy-free structure of Ullara was what drew me to it in the first place and he smiled like he was talking to a five-year-old who'd just asked why do puppies have to grow up into dogs and said 'of course, and that's not something we want to detract from, it's just that a few senior members are interested in running aspects of the community that others might not take an active interest in. I was wondering if you'd like to take a seat at the table. I said, 'Hang on, weren't you just saying I didn't do enough, now you want me to do MORE?' He smiled and by this point I wanted to slap that fucking smile right off his face and said this would be a special position, when I was away I could communicate via phone or email, and when I was here I would take part of special 'private meditations, both in groups and sometimes just one on one.'

We kind of just looked at each other for about ten seconds, I know that doesn't sound like a long time, but I mean ten ACTUAL seconds of silence. You know how rare that is in conversation? And I said to him, 'I'm not interested,'

then stood up to leave. He gives me that not-angry-just-disappointed pout and says, 'Harmony, my little starling, it is no secret that you have been joyous and giving with the pleasures of your body, which is a beautiful thing. Here we all strive to avoid the constrained views of sexuality that many outsiders hold, manacled by their false constructions of monogamy and fidelity. It has been such a joy, to see you from a child into a young woman who is proud and confident, who gives freely of herself. I know you might need a little more time to think about my offer, why don't you just meet with me, here, or at my home, sometime soon and we can continue our conversation in a private, intimate setting. Does that sound reasonable?'

I got up, slammed the door, and promised myself I never wanted to see that fucking creep again.

*Pause*

River: I don't understand, isn't it an honour to be invited into the inner circle? And if you didn't want to do it, why not just say no?

Harmony: (*furious*) Are you FUCKING kidding me? River, did you listen to a single word I said? He asked me to have sex with him and when I said no, he basically said 'well, you're a big slut, you might as well add me to the notches on your bed.'

River: He never once said the words 'bed, slut or sex.'

Harmony: Oh come ON! If I said to you 'get that money to me tomorrow OR ELSE I wouldn't have ACTUALLY made a threat but it's pretty fucking obviously implied.

River: I think you misunderstood him, I'm sure if you just came back we could—

Harmony: River, you can't be serious?

*Starts crying. River comforts her*

River: Harmony, it's okay! We're together again, everything's going to be alright! Whatever you're sad about, we can fix it, I promise!

Harmony: River, you know I love you like a brother—

River: What do you mean 'like' a brother?

Harmony: You haven't just drunk the Koolaid, you've fucking *mainlined* it. It was fun, for a long time, playing Swiss Family Robinson with guitars, running away to join the circus, whatever, but I'm going to have a kid. I don't want to raise a child with a bunch of redshirted isolationists following some honey-voiced demagogue.

The 'reveries' were getting worse too. It was the stress of knowing I was pregnant, thinking about settling down, lack of sleep, everything. Then after what Gideon said to me I really lost it, I heard Amos telling you all about it. I didn't want to end up spaced out in the middle of some highway in my nightgown getting taken up by the grill of a Mack truck.

I asked you before if you'd heard of Rasanth Das? He was this Wall St lawyer who had this epiphany after the Global recession that his entire industry was this superficial, deceitful sort of 21<sup>st</sup> century snake oil. He quit and became a religious monk, teaching mediation. He left one world for another. I want to do the same thing, in reverse. I mean, not Wall St exactly, but the conventional life. A life more ordinary.

River, I'd love to help you too. I could get you a job here at the bar if you wanted? Help you find your own place? I know someone here who can get you a new ID...

River: (*unsure*) Why would I want to leave paradise?

Harmony: Paradise only exists up here River. 'The mind is its own place, and in itself can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven.'

River: Don't quote Milton at me. I'm not going to become an *apostate*.

Harmony: If you come and join me, I can help you. But if you go back to Ullara, I have to be honest. I'll probably never see you again. *Pause*. It might even force me to move cities again, because I'd be worried that someone would take advantage of your kind and trusting nature and convince you to tell them where I am. I'd have to find another identity, another job, another look, and I'm only just getting used to the glasses, bob and blazers.

River: Yeah, you are definitely rocking that look.

Harmony: Thanks. River, we're still young, we've got entire lives we can live yet. Let's start again. Ullara can be just a chapter, an intro track to the album of our lives.

River: You know I can't leave.

Harmony: You can do anything you want to, but you have to want it first.

River: Well then, I don't want to leave.

Harmony: Okay, well. I respect your honesty. I respect a lot about you. You're kind, giving, thoughtful. But I also think you're damaged Riv, I'm telling you this because I love you. You need help, professional help. Doesn't have to be a headshrinker, but for the love of God not a redshirt. If you're not going to stay here, promise me you'll do that, at least?

River: I'm not the one who needs help. You are.

Harmony: I'm sorry you feel that way.

River: I'm sorry you are that way. *Pause*. That sounded cruel, I apologise. If this is really the last time I'm going to see you, do you mind if I say goodbye to

him or her?

Harmony: What? Oh, you mean...okay! Yeah, sure. And it's a 'him.'

River: I'm going to be an uncle!

Harmony: *(sad, slightly defeated)* Yeah...sure. An uncle. Here, you might even feel a kick if you're lucky.

*River whispers something inaudible into her belly. They hug.*

Harmony: In a few, you cockatoo.

*River laughs, sniffs.*

River: What's the time, dear friend of mine?

Harmony: Half past three, my chimpanzee.

River: Adventures, travels, what sweet joys shall we unravel?

Harmony: In the afternoon, my little prune.

River: And what of smiles, what of laughter?

Together: A touch past midnight, and not a moment after.

Harmony: Goodbye River.

River: Goodbye sister.

Harmony: *(Faintly)* Don't call me that.

*He starts to walk away, we hear a moan and then a fall.*

Harmony: River? Riv? H-help?

River: Are you okay? Hey! Wake up! Wake up!

*Harmony murmurs something frantic and unintelligible, then passes out.*

River: Harmony!

*Mic off.*

EPISODE EIGHT  
HIGHWAY BLUES

*Government agent voice: The following audio record forms part of the department's ongoing investigation into the actions of Eugene Kirkley aka Gideon Vermello and his operations in the town of Ullara. This record is classed as highly confidential under legislation 27b/6. Testimonies recorded here have not yet been officially corroborated by secondary or tertiary sources and are thus to be treated as unverified at this stage.*

Gideon (on recording): Recently, my beloved, we have once more fallen victim to the suppressive lies of the outside world. Terrible falsehoods about sexual perversions, and even weapons have—

*Car sounds. River turns down the recording.*

River: Harmony's okay. I know that's probably your first question. She's fine. She's had a bit of a health scare, probably something to do with the baby. I'm taking her back to Ullara so she can see a doctor and be with people who will help to look after her. *Pause*. I have to tell you, seeing my sister again, after all this time? It...wasn't quite what I expected. I mean, I was excited and everything, but she's changed, I'm worried about her. And some of what she said was hurtful, even *heretical*. It's always the ones you love the most who can do the most damage. Like that Ben Harper song says, 'the stones from my enemies, these wounds will mend but I will not survive the roses from my friends.' *Pause*.

Urg...roadkill. We just passed a dead kangaroo on the side of the road there. Poor thing. You know, a long time ago there were giant kangaroos in Australia? Giant kangaroos, giant platypuses, wombats the size of hippos. As if the modern wildlife wasn't weird enough. Imagine a nation with super-sized versions of all these bizarre animals running around everywhere.

There's this apocryphal story — that's one of Harm's favourite words, apocryphal— we wanted to call the first EP *Apocryphal Agonies* but the record company said they didn't want people reaching for a dictionary every time they saw a pop-up ad for one of our songs. Fucking vampires. Ah, sorry, I'm going off on a tangent again, where was I? Ah yeah, so there's this apocryphal story that when Captain Cook 'discovered' Australia, apparently you can claim to have discovered something even though it has been inhabited for tens of thousands

of years, he pointed at a kangaroo and said 'what's that' and an aboriginal man replied 'kangaroo', which was supposedly word that meant 'I don't know.' Weird that this story caught on, and kind of ironic that a myth about a misunderstanding is in itself a misunderstanding. Sometimes I think humans are geared for that.

We're storytellers, at our heart. As much as we pretend to be logical, rational, we all know that people will react more strongly to a single anecdote told by a close friend than piles of data relating to a population of millions. We like stories, faces, personal connections more than the truth. The truth is like an optional condiment that may or may not accompany the cut-price buffet of our lives.

*Pause. Harmony murmurs something indecipherable.*

While Harmony's sleeping, I thought I'd share with you another story from our childhood. It's...a little more intense than what I've told you so far. I guess that's a language and concept warning, you know if you have kids around or whatever. That's what a conventional broadcaster would say isn't it? Then again, fuck, maybe they should listen to this more than anyone else. I don't know, you figure it out.

We were fourteen, it was summer. We had six weeks of holidays between school terms and it was a hazy, languid time spent swimming in chlorine and probably urine soaked public pools and escaping into the cool, air-conditioned comfort of the cinema with little or no regard for what blockbuster drivel was actually playing on the screen.

I don't know if it was neurochemicals or hormones or what...I mean, I know there's no easy answer for these things right? But as much as things were objectively pretty good at that time— resolutely emotionally unavailable parents notwithstanding— I felt like hell. I felt like the colour had been drained out of the world. Everything felt grey, mono, food tasted like plastic.

Even playing music didn't give me any kind of release. I'd hit the keys on the piano like they were controls on an operational panel that would inject endorphins and serotonin into my brain but nothing happened. I spent days in bed, not listening to music, not watching TV, not reading, just staring at the ceiling. I felt like a cardboard cutout of myself, like someone had taken the thing

that made me 'me' and secretly removed it, leaving behind a shallow husk.

One night, not out of any sense of drama or crying for help or teenage angst or anything like that, I decided to kill myself. Maybe that's not even the right word. I didn't want to die. I just wanted to...stop existing. It wasn't like I wanted to destroy myself out of a sense of agony, it was more like I just wanted to hit the off switch for a movie I'd lost interest in. If I could've entered some kind of cryonic chamber instead I probably would've done that. Apparently that's actually an option these days.

You can pay some insane amount of money to have your body put on ice, or for a discount fee, you can undergo 'neurosuspension' where they just take care of your severed head, assuming that they can regrow the rest of your body with future technology. That's putting a lot of faith in a corporation, I mean, I know there are breweries that have been in constant business for hundreds of years, but they're definitely the outliers. Imagine investing your frozen head with a business that closes up shop and just chucks your bodily-unencumbered brain into a landfill somewhere?

So, cryonics not being a viable option for a mentally unstable fourteen-year-old I decided to take what complete sociopaths refer to as 'the easy way out.' I didn't want any pomp or ceremony. I didn't write a note or put on Nick Cave or light any candles. Harmony was out with whatever neanderthal she was not-exactly dating at the time. I put a bunch of roses I stole from the neighbours' garden on her bed, as a sort of silent goodbye.

I remember putting a lot of thought into the method that would cause the least amount of hassle and cleaning for my family. I decided the bath was the best option, any mess would drain neatly away. I ran the taps, got undressed, folded my clothes neatly and placed them next to the sink.

I remember giggling a little manically at the fact that I'd bothered to do this when I normally just threw my clothes all over the floor, much to the annoyance of my parents. I've always liked scalding hot water in a bath, I was a little selfish I guess. Our bathroom didn't have an extractor fan and so it would get pretty mouldy on the ceiling.

*Harmony murmurs indecipherably.*

By the time the bath was full, the mirror was completely fogged up. I couldn't make out my reflection, just a blurry, stained-glass silhouette, which was appropriate because that's sort of how I felt. I got into the bath and closed my eyes. I felt weirdly calm. Maybe calm isn't the right word, distant, dissociated. Like I was watching this scene happening to someone else. I'd borrowed Harmony's scissors, they were sitting next to the bath.

That was the one thing I felt guilty about. She loved those scissors, it was really weird. She'd just discovered David Bowie and she was super into imitating the cut-up technique that he and William Burroughs used. The rest of us were hopeless with stationary, mum and dad bought new staplers and scissors and sticky tape every couple of weeks because these things would always disappear into the ether in our incapable hands. Harmony kept her scissors in her dresser drawer and never let them leave the room.

I knew they'd be sharp, I didn't want any half measures. I lay in the bath for a minute and stared at them. Everything felt quiet, slow. Time seemed to dilate, like the bath was some kind of ark outside of the normal time stream. I looked at my distorted reflection in the blade of the scissors for a while, then finally reached for them.

The nanosecond before my skin touched steel I heard an angry knock on the door. 'River, you fucking asshole! Did you take my scissors? Are you trying to do a DIY haircut again because as I recall that little adventure wasn't exactly a success story last time.' She'd come home early, her date must've said something to piss her off enough to storm out on him, which wasn't a surprise given the lunkheads she hung out with. I listened to her voice and I sat there, still and silent. I had this idea that if I said nothing she'd just go away.

She knocked again and called my name, and then I watched as the knob started to turn. I was usually so meticulous about making sure the bathroom door was locked, ever since our cousin had accidentally walked in on me on the toilet a couple of years earlier. I couldn't believe I'd overlooked it. The door seemed to take months to open. I couldn't move. She yelled 'I don't fucking care if you're naked, dill-brain I want my fucking scissors!' She entered the bathroom, her presence shattering the fragile illusion of the bathroom as a time-immune ark.

She looked at me, and I watched her face flicker from angry to confused to

terrified like it was one of those flipbooks they use to teach autistic kids how to interpret facial expressions. We stared at each other in silence for a while, and then finally she spoke. I'll never forget what—

Harmony: *mrphhfff?*

River: Harmony? Harmony! Are you okay?

Harmony: *(mumbling and disoriented)* shmupple fink supple or sumfing?

River: Sorry? I think you're still pretty out of it. Maybe take a minute. Here, have some water.

*Gulps down water.*

Harmony: Ach. So thirsty. Mouth feels like...hot sand place.

River: Desert?

Harmony: Mmm-hmm. That thing. Holy fuck balls on toast my head is...it's filled with tiny elves smashing it with...like mallets, and the elves are all meth heads...and they're blasting speed metal, and also dancing in clogs and having a fireworks...ensemble. Wait, that's not the right word. Also there's a gravitron in there or something. Ah, seeing stars...

River: Take it easy! You scared me back there!

Harmony: Hrm? Back where?

River: In the bar.

Harmony: We were in a bar? Don't remember. Head like cake. Or...pudding. Puddinghead.

River: Oookay, I think you might still be a little disoriented.

Harmony: You got any panic dolls?

River: Panic dolls?

Harmony: Sorry, no, I mean PANDA DOLLS.

*River laughs*

Harmony: 'snot fucking funny Ronald!

River: (*tersely*) That's not my name.

Harmony: Huh? Course it is. How come, don't even know, yer own name you...oh, right sorry. RIVER. Anyway. Do you have any PANADOL?

River: Ah, that makes a little more sense. Sorry, I don't have any in the car.

Harmony: Can we stop and get some? My head feels like elves with hammers and...wait, did I say that bit already?

River: Yes.

Harmony: Oh. Well, can we stop and get some? At a...petrol thing?

River: Petrol station?

Harmony: Yeah, one of those guys.

River: We'll be home soon. I have plenty of stuff there.

Harmony: M'okay. *Pause.* Waitassecc. Ron, which—

River: That's not my name.

Harmony: Sorry, *River*. Which home are you talking about?

River: *Home*, where I can take care of you. Help you get better. I'll call Dr. Brindle as soon as we get back there and I'll get you into bed.

Harmony: (*a little more clear-headed now, anger waking her up*) Dr...Brindle? In Ullara? Oh...fuck fuck fuck fuck! NO, River, NO! I don't want to be in Ullara and I don't want to see 'Dr' Brindle! I want an actual doctor in an actual hospital with the fucking...heart listening rope thing around the neck, you know, a stethoscope! And an actual degree from an actual university not some fucking reiki naturopath crystal healer!

River: Dr Brindle IS a real doctor! He's practised all over the world!

Harmony: He's practiced pseudomedicine in half a dozen hippie communes and island resorts where no one really cares about checking medical degrees. I've got a fucking BABY inside me River! I can't fuck around with some idiot who wants to give me homerpathic remedies. I mean, homosexual remedies, I MEAN fuck...homeopathic remedies. Ah, god, my mouth feels like it's filled with cotton on balls. Cotton WOOL balls. And my arms feel like they're made of spaghetti. I can barely even move my hands. Fuck, fuck, River, get me to a fucking REAL hospital!

River: I'm going to take care of you I promise! You'll be safe. I did my research really thoroughly, the side effects are really minimal and there's nothing that'll hurt the baby.

*Pause.*

Harmony: Side effects to what? Oh god...River, what...did you do this? Did

you fucking slip me a mickey?

River: It's okay, I promise! And you should start to relax again now, it should've kicked in already. It's the best thing for you. You should be careful not to stress, stress is the worst thing for babies! Why don't you have some more water?

Harmony: Why? Wait, the bottle of water, was that...with the...I meant my mouth-hole and the um...when I dranked that? It was...because...we're made of water...I'm water...

River: Shhh...shhh...it's okay.

Harmony: *(murmurs something indecipherable, passes out.)*

River: Poor thing. We'll be home soon, Harmony. You'll be safe. I'll keep you and the baby safe. I won't let anyone hurt you. *Pause.* I know what a lot of you are thinking. Well, first of all, you're probably thinking I'm insane for recording this, for broadcasting it. But, once upon a time, people journaled their innermost thoughts and reflections, pens scratching on paper chronicling fears, neuroses, fondest hopes, darkest desires. You can walk into just about any library in the world and read the thoughts of a 14-year old-girl named Anne Frank, Virginia Woolf or Kurt Cobain any time you want.

Playing in a band, I guess you get used to broadcasting your fears and feelings, it's just that usually you have a drumbeat behind you. I know the other thing you're thinking; that I'm crazy, that I'm unhinged.

*Pause.*

I heard this interview once with a base jumper, you know, those people who climb to the top of mountains and jump off and then pull the chute at the last possible moment? Someone called him crazy and he said 'what I do isn't crazy, I'm trying to enjoy life. Sitting in traffic for two hours each day to go to a job you hate to buy shit you don't need? THAT'S crazy.' Insanity, like beauty, is in the

eye of the beholder. Let me ask you this; is there anything you wouldn't do to save your family, the people you love?

What if someone you loved became a drug addict, started to rob houses to get drug money, or spent all their pay every week on horse racing, or was in an abusive relationship where they kept saying 'it's okay, he's promised me he'll stop'? They might SAY that they're fine, that they don't want your help, they might even believe it.

But would it be responsible of you to just leave them alone, no matter how much they protested? *Pause.* When Harmony found me in that bath, I remember telling her; 'It's okay. This is what I really want. You don't have to try and save me. I love you, let me say goodbye.' *Pause.* She walked over, grabbed the scissors and sat down next to the bath and glared at me. After a while she finally said 'I don't fucking care what you want. You don't get to just check out on me like that. You don't get to give up before you've even started becoming the person you're going to be. And you definitely don't get to use my scissors ever again.'

So this is me taking away the scissors. I'm going to wait to upload these recordings until...everything's finished. Until I can be totally sure that she's safe.

*Pulls into driveway, parks.*

River: We're home.

## EPISODE NINE

### NOBODY KNOWS YOU WHEN YOU'RE DOWN AND OUT

*Government agent voice: The following audio record forms part of the department's ongoing investigation into the actions of Eugene Kirkley aka Gideon Vermello and his operations in the town of Ullara. This record is classed as highly confidential under legislation 27b/6. Testimonies recorded here have not yet been officially corroborated by secondary or tertiary sources and are thus*

*to be treated as unverified at this stage.*

*Shuffling chair, kicking feet.*

Harmony: Um...power on. Mac power up. Go-go gadget laptop! Green light go-go. Oh! Fuck, it's on! Hahaha! (*Whoops of joy, coughing*). I am a genius! ...she said lying on the floor gaffer taped to a chair. Yeah, I tried to get a little Liam Neeson and ended up just falling over, which I imagine is what happens to most ordinary humans when they try and act like Liam Neeson. If you can call what he does acting. (*Sigh*) Wanna hear something funny? A few months ago a friend of mine shared this Youtube video called 'how to escape from gaffer tape restraints.' And she wrote hysterically in all caps SUPER IMPORTANT! PLEASE READ! MIGHT SAVE YOUR LIFE ONE DAY!

And I thought to myself, who the fuck is ever going to need to escape from gaffer tape restraints besides Liam Neeson, so I didn't watch the video and then wasted forty minutes scrolling through pictures of people's breakfasts and babies. God fucking damn it. Maybe I can try and chew my way...mph...mph...ACK! God! That tastes like the sticky underpants of a Korean sex doll.

Ahhhh...so. I should probably, you know, narrate what's going on here. Let's see. I'm in our old studio Seventh Cycle. I guess Riv brought me here because it's soundproof, although he says its because its a 'safe, familiar place where I'll feel comfortable.'

Wanna hear a funny story? Our producer, Andy, made this whole song and dance about how he loved using voice command on his computers because he could operate them while he fiddled with guitar pedals or tweaked amp settings or whatever. We made sooooo much fun of him because it almost *never* worked. He'd be like 'start recording' and it'd start toggling screen settings or something. Once he said 'play sample' and it brought up this video of some extremely graphic porno video that I only glimpsed but I'm pretty sure involved someone wearing a dinosaur costume. He tripped over a bunch of cables to run and turn it off. Fuck that was funny.

Ah, so the moral of the story is that I guess I was able to turn this piece of shit on by yelling at it, much like my ex boyfriend, ha! BUT for some reason it's not

hooked up to the internet and lord only knows my tech skills aren't amazing at the best of times let alone when I'm face down on the floor with my hands gaffer taped so instead of making an emergency...Skype call or something I'm currently recording a very engaging video of the studio wall while I narrate this little monologue off camera. It's like a fucking French art film. (*Frank accent*) ah ze physical absence of ze female narrator, zis is a metaphor for the neo-capitalist patriarchy. (*Giggles maniacally*).

Ah fuckstains on mars. I wish someone else was here to appreciate my comedic genius. Also to untie me. (*Pause*). Alright so, if you're watching this, whoever you are, I guess you're wondering why I'm not more scared right now? I guess...well, you'd have to know Ronald, sorry, River like I do. He's an idiot, but a loveable idiot and, well, I always knew he was weird but I thought he was 'Frank Zappa weird' not 'Nick Nolte weird.' But he's definitely *not* Phil Spector weird is what I'm saying.

I know that he's...well, let's not beat around the bush he's fucking kidnapped me hasn't he? But he's not going to kill me, that's not how this song ends. That said, I am worried he'll tell Gideon, and Gideon...Gideon is something else altogether.

You know how film villains tend to be either bloodlusty, furious psychopaths or cool, calm, gentlemanly types who shoot their victims and then nonchalantly flick the blood off their lapels. That's not Gideon.

I mean, he's the worst kind of evil, because he doesn't think he's anything but purest good. There's nothing on this earth as dangerous as a man who believes in his own infallible righteousness. When we went on our first world tour, and I was starting to have my doubts about Ullara and the community there, our tour manager played me this recording of the end of Jonestown. It's called the Jonestown death tape. It's right there on the wikipedia page for anyone to download, although they store it in ogg format, which is a little weird if you ask me given that WAV or mp3 seems like a more universal format choice but, ah, sorry, that's probably not important right now. So in this recording, Jim knows it's all going to end. They've just shot a fucking CONGRESSMAN so the FBI

is about to swoop in and fuck shit up, because what the hell else is going to happen after you kill a senator?

So he gathers everyone together, and he tells them, well, we tried our best. But it's time to call it in, let's all drink the poisoned koolaid and saunter off into that good night. And so, I'm sure you hear that and think, was there a riot? Did people run and scream? No, they have this calm, sincere discussion and he isn't angry or commanding, he's pleading, imploring, resigned. But he still convinced a few hundred people to kill themselves and their young children. Monsters don't always roar, sometimes all they need to do is whisper.

Jim Jones was able to convince a horde of people to do anything he'd wanted, even kill themselves because, like all these cult leaders, he preyed on the weak and downtrodden. People who'd been kicked around, victimised by the system. Most of the Jonestown devotees were black folks who'd been beaten, spat on, discarded by the shitty society they'd lived in. Along comes this white guy who treats them not only with respect, but with what he calls love, and of course they run to it like a bee to honey. If you've had a lifetime of nothing but ruthless kicks to the stomach, a gentle slap feels like a reprieve in comparison.

And that's Gideon's whole MO, he finds these lost souls, most people in Ullara are former addicts or sex workers or victims of abuse, and then he takes them under his wing. Gives them everything that society has failed to. Hell, most of the people here would've ended up dead, homeless or in prison if they hadn't come here, and that's not just an indictment of Ullara, it's an indictment of our whole fucking system, that a batshit crazy CULT (although of course no one around here is allowed to call it that) provides better care than a wealthy western democracy!

When Gideon speaks, every other word out of his mouth is either praise or an apology. He makes you feel guilty for disagreeing with him. For a long time I thought of him as this sweet, wise old uncle. But...You know what? I don't want to spend this time yammering on about that creep. If the cops find this and I'm...not around. Just fucking leave River alone and go after Gideon okay?

Riv: this parts just for you. I want to tell you what happened, how we got here. Our origin story. People always say; there are two sides to every story, but that's bullshit. There are as many sides to a story as there are storytellers. I've heard your account of our journey to Ullara change and change over the years,

and I've never had the heart to correct you. But if we can't remember where we're from...

River - Ronald, here's the cold, hard, ugly truth. You were a spoiled fucking brat, just like me. Your mum was emotionally distant, it's true. She was classically cold middle class WASP. She forgot your birthday a couple of times, she was callous but they weren't cruel. River, she worked insane hours to send you to a fancy private school because they wanted you to have the best life you could have because she'd grown up with almost nothing. She raised you on her own and had almost no social life. She did everything for you, she was about as warm and emotionally available as liquid nitrogen, but she clearly loved you. I mean you drove her fucking merc into a river and she yelled at you and grounded you, but that was it!

Remember when Chris clipped a pole with his dad's crappy old Ford and he had to take a second job over summer to pay for the paint repair even though it was already covered in scratches that his dad had given it? THAT was some bullshit. You got off lightly in comparison Hell, it would've been weird if she *hadn't* yelled at you.

And my Dad? Well, okay, she was no saint. But being a single parent isn't easy. Do I wish he'd spent a little more time at home having American sitcom family style banter over home-cooked meals? Well, yeah, fucking obviously, but so what? Riv our parents were flawed, but that comes with being human. You and I aren't exactly glowing examples of moral perfection, just FYI. We'd always said we were like brother and sister, but I think it was only once we got here that the delusion that we were actually blood relatives started to calcify. I-

*Car sounds. Door opens. Noise outside studio.*

Hello? HELLO! HEY! HEY! I'M HERE I'M MOTHERFUCKING HERE! OPEN THE DOOR YOU DIPSHIT!

Musician's voice: *(muffled)* Andy, you in here? Sorry, just forgot my jacket. See you Monday, say hi to Starla for me!

*Door closes. Car drives off.*

Harmony: NO! COME BACK! COME BACK! *(Pause, tears)* Well, I guess that means we'll return to our regularly scheduled program. *(Pause)* River, when we decided to run away, after my dad caught us dropping acid and we were both grounded...I thought it would be an adventure. A sort of temporary holiday from reality.

When you suggested we change our names, pretend like we were brother and sister, it made sense. It was just part of the game, right? No different to when we pretended to be batman and robin or queens and princesses when we were kids. Plus I always thought Hellia was a stupid name anyway. And Ronald? Well, I mean, no offence to your parents but what the fuck were they thinking?

I honestly thought we'd both come crawling back with our tails between our legs a couple of days later. But Ullara...well, look it's definitely a hippie muso's paradise. And I'm so happy, for the most part, about the last few years. I mean, we started a band, got to tour the world, that is the actual and literal dream.

But Ullara isn't a utopia, it's a diorama. Little people acting out dreams and stories inside fragile cardboard walls. I remember the first time we got on a plane to go tour New Zealand, watching the earth drop away beneath us, flying over that vast desert for hours, speeding away from our strange and isolated island nation at the ends of the earth at a thousand kilometres an hour, and a part of me felt guilty for leaving that place that had become a part of me. It was like cutting off my own hand. But then when we played in Auckland, Wellington, that fucking train wreck of a gig in Christchurch and that supernaturally fun show in Dunedin? I realised just how tiny our little world was. When we came home I found that even the things I used to enjoy, like the bee keeping ceremony, seemed like pompous, culty bullshit. I mean, sure, you've got to tend the beehive, but I don't think we were doing those little guys any favours with our chanting and incantations, you know?

I know that there's a chance you'll walk back through that studio door pretty. Maleny's a 40 min return trip and you left to go the pharmacy...maybe ten minutes ago. Sorry I lied to you about needing sodium pentothal for the baby, pretty clever ruse though right? I'm sure by now the pharmacist has informed you that sodium pentothal is truth serum, and not available over the counter. It was the first drug I could think of, I only realised that's what it was after you'd

left. I think I saw it in some spy movie. Does the fact that I unconsciously told you to go and get truth serum make it a Freudian joke? (*Groucho marx voice*) A Freudian slip is when you say one thing but mean 'a mother'. I guess you might walk in here soon, see this recording, and just delete it off the computer and then...well, we'll all live happily ever after I assume, right? Ha.

*Pause.*

Remember when you came over that afternoon, we'd decided to spend the afternoon writing songs but I'd got the dates mixed up and thought you were coming around the next day. God, that fucking summer was brutal. The air felt like soup. I remember we saw *Wedding Crashers* three times in a month and we both *hate* Owen Wilson, but movie tickets were pretty cheap for students and it was one of the only ways to escape the sun that seemed intent on trying to burn the flesh right off our bones.

It wasn't long after...what happened with Ollie and Murph. Ugh. I nearly puked in my mouth saying those names. Fucking creeps. You know Murph's married with SIX kids these days? I looked him up on Facebook once, can't say why. I thought about sending an anonymous message to his pearly-toothed, bleach-blonde wife. I wrote the thing out three times, finger hovering over the enter key, but I ended up just deleting it. (*Pause.*) Anyway, after...that happened, I decided to kill myself. Well, not kill myself, just cut myself. I guess it was really just all teenage melodrama.

I borrowed my dad's really good scissors, the ones he used for cutting fabric. He used to go on and on about how they were ONLY to be used for fabric blah blah blah. I took them into the bath, lit a bunch of candles like a total emo drama queen and listened to Blonde Redhead's *Misery is a Butterfly*. God, such a GOOD album but so damn depressing.

*(Pause).*

I don't know. I guess I just wanted to distract myself from myself. Really I should've been cutting Ollie and Murph, but they were rudely unavailable. I sat in the water, looked at my pale skin beneath the rippling surface. I pricked my finger first and I watched that one red drop fall and fall and fall. It seemed to take forever, like time was a sheet of rubber being pulled and stretched. When it finally hit the water that little sanguine drop slowly dispersed through the water. Funny how the word sanguine means both 'blood-red' and 'optimistic'.

I watched the blood travel and weave through the water, like a red cloud, until it reached my skin. A second drop hit and joined the first. I held the scissors so they hovered above my wrist, and then you banged on the door.

“Harmony? Did you forget we had practise today?” I sat there and said nothing. It was like in that moment I could see all the different futures that could possibly transpire unfolding in streams in front of me, one where I ended my life, one where I threw down the scissors and went on with the day as normal, where I became a famous musician, a hopeless stoner, an eternal student, an office drone, a lab assistant. I sat and watched all the streams of alternate futures flowing out in front of me as the candles flickered and your knocking on the door echoed around the bathroom.

“Harmony? Are you okay?”

I waited a long time, neither of us said anything. I watched the flickering candlelight flicker around the walls. Finally I said; “Ron, can you come in and help me? I’m in the bath.”

I remember your shy, nervous little voice when you said, “You aren’t naked, are you?” I thought that was the funniest thing. Why would I be in the bath and not be naked? *(Pause)* You never once looked at me sexually did you, Ron? When we reached our teens and guys seemed to forget I had a face and just talk to my tits all the time, I found talking to you such a welcome relief. But after a while it kind of confused me. I never really figured out what your deal is in regards to love and attraction. I mean, we’ve been friends, family really, for such a long time and you’ve never once told me about any of your lovers as long as I’ve known you. I don’t even know if you like boys or girls or something in between. Isn’t that crazy?

Finally, you opened the door and your little eyes went wide open and you ran over and ripped the scissors out of my hand and you hugged me and you said nothing, which was the perfect thing to say. You didn’t judge me or shame me or force me to make promises. You just took the scissors away and held me. That’s who you are, who you’ve always been. Even after all this weird, crazy, redshirt chanting bullshit that we’ve fallen into in the last few years. I know you’ll always look after me. *(Laughs)* She said lying on a floor gaffer taped to a chair.

When I sent you that email with the picture telling you that everything was

fine and not to worry about me, to stop looking, I told you that if you ever wanted to get away from Ullara I'd help you, and then I heard that first broadcast and I realised how far gone you were. That you were so entrenched in your delusion that you just edited out the parts of the message that conflicted with the fantasy you'd created. When I showed it to you again in the bar, you still didn't process it, couldn't understand how that information could be there when you'd convinced yourself it wasn't.

Marie, who I work with at the bar, told me she used to work in a nursing home, and a lot of the patients had Alzheimer's. They told the staff that if the patients mistook you for their daughter or wife or whatever to just run with it, to say 'yes dear' and nod along because trying to bring them back to reality was hopeless and it would just distress them. I hope you're not so far gone that you won't be able to come back to reality someday. Maybe even have a normal life, get married, start a, I don't know, organically sourced paleo cafe or some bullshit.

Then other days I wonder if you'll end up in a prison cell, somewhere minimum security alongside white collar dudes who are in for tax fraud or insider trading. If you'll be there composing melodies in your head, do they let people have instruments in minimum security? I don't know. Maybe you'd even like prison. You seem to have no problem with uniforms and taking orders. *(Pause)*. God, this studio smells like armpits. That's the problem with hermetic soundproofing, tends to lock in the smell as well. Would it kill Gazza to put a couple of fucking air fresheners in here?

Ronald if, *when*, I get out of here, I'm sorry to say this, but you'll never, ever see me again. I love you, but you know how the saying goes, if you love someone, set them free and also run away and get a new haircut and a fake identity in a secret location.

I really hope you make it out of this little redshirted diorama one of these days. I'm sorry, I'm really sorry, I've given up on being the one to save you. You were there to take the scissors from me, and I wish I could do the same. But you can't save someone who doesn't want to be saved. Also? If I have to listen to one more goddamn drum circle or full moon chant I am going to go on a legit rampage...she said lying on the floor gaffer taped to a chair...God, this joke just gets funnier each time. I wonder if someday I'll chat about this with some talk

show host who nods with feigned empathy while they—

*Pause, cries. Sounds of car parking, door opening.*

Harmony: River? Hey, do you think you could help me up I—

*Studio door opens. Pause.*

Harmony: River?

*Footsteps. Harmony whimpers, yelps.*

Gideon: Harmony, my lost little bird. How we've missed you!

Harmony: Don't. Touch. Me.

Gideon: *(sighs)* Harmony, it wounds me that you think I'd do anything to harm you.

Harmony: Why don't you step a little closer and we'll see what else I can do to wound you.

Gideon: Please, allow me to help you up at least.

*Sound of grunting, chair being put up.*

Gideon: There, is that better? Would you like some water? I have some food as well, nothing fancy I'm afraid. Just some nuts and dried fruit—

Harmony: I'm on a water free diet at the moment. I think I have an allergy. Every time I drink it I seem to pass out and wake up in captivity.

Gideon: I thought you might say that. Look, I brought a sealed bottle, even though, as you know, I detest the commercialism of bottle water and its impact

on the environment.

Harmony: Yes, you're a real saint that way, although you're a little more morally flexible on illegal arms storage and sexual misconduct. *(begrudgingly)* Okay. Fine. Gimmie the damn water. *(Drinks)*

Gideon: Better?

Harmony: You really get off on that don't you? Playing nurse to the wounded little lamb?

Gideon: *(sighs)* What can I do to convince you that all I want is to aid the cause of peace and tranquility?

Harmony: Well, let's see, off the top of my head...get rid of the assault rifles, stop cajoling underage girls to have sex with you, quit brainwashing impressionable lost souls—

Gideon: I am sorry that you continue to harbour these malicious delusions. But not even these lies will tarnish the love I have for you. I— is that camera on?

Harmony: What camera?

Gideon: Hrm...

Harmony: *(panicking)* It's fine I don't think it's recording, just leave it, I—

Gideon: I think it'd be best if we continued this conversation in private, don't you?

Harmony: No, leave it, don't turn it off, DON'T-

*Recording ends.*

EPISODE TEN  
I PUT A SPELL ON YOU

*Government agent voice: The following audio record forms part of the department's ongoing investigation into the actions of Eugene Kirkley aka Gideon Vermello and his operations in the town of Ullara. This record is classed as highly confidential under legislation 27b/6. Testimonies recorded here have not yet been officially corroborated by secondary or tertiary sources and are thus to be treated as unverified at this stage.*

*Car radio playing, sound of engine, indicator.*

River: When we were ten, River and I snuck into our parents' cupboard and found the place where they'd hidden our Christmas presents. They'd gotten me a toy suction cup bow and arrow and Harmony a Walkman. Ha! Remember those? We carefully pulled them out and opened the packaging in a way that we hoped wouldn't be noticeable when we put them back inside.

We sat around for about an hour, Harmony listening to the Cure's *Disintegration* – goddamn what an album – and me shooting the little arrows, retrieving them, shooting them again. The guilt of opening our presents early and the fear of getting caught was so overwhelming that it completely overrode any joy we had from using them. So we decided to put them back in the packaging, I even restapled the plastic shielding back on, and we crept into their

room.

Just as I was sliding the boxes back into their hiding place at the back of the cupboard I heard the car pull into the driveway, they were home from work earlier than usual. I was so freaked out that I lost my balance and slipped off the stepladder. As we hear them come in the doorway, Harmony grabbed at me but then she started to fall as well, so we're both yelping and 'ssshing' frantically as we heard the footsteps coming up the stairs.

We got up and tried to make the bolt back to our room but ended up almost colliding with our parents, step-ladder in hand. Dad asked us, "what the hell are you doing with that step-ladder?" Fair question, by any account,

and I said, "Um...we were just changing the lightbulb. It was broken." We ran into our room and slammed the door and waited for the angry knock but nothing happened. After about ten minutes we realised, by some miracle, that we'd gotten away with it. We high-fived and laughed about it for hours. On Christmas day we feigned surprise at our parents and thought we'd completely fooled them.

A few Christmases later, when we were in our early teens, we were sitting around the dinner table and dad says, "Remember that year when you snuck in to our room to look at your presents and you told us that you'd been changing the lightbulb?" and he and mum laughed so hard they went red in the face. I went red in the face for an entirely different reason and said,

"I really thought we'd gotten away with that one, why didn't you tell us you knew?"

They shrugged and Mum said they thought it was funnier to let us believe we'd gotten away with it. That was when I first really understood that there are layers to every lie. There's what you believe is true, what you the other person actually believes is true, and then what you believe that THEY believe is true. And that's not even talking about actual, empirical truth which, if it even exists, is a whole other thing altogether.

So, all the lies that are told about Ullara, that we're Satanists, that we're a cult, that we're drug runners, that we want to secede to be our own state, that we stacked the vote on the council elections by busing in homeless people in exchange for a few meals, all of these lies take on a life of their own. They become wild animals, and those animals breed and have mongrel offspring.

The truth about Ullara, the truth that I am trying to protect, some would argue by somewhat...excessive measures, is that it's much more ordinary than that. We're a group of people who have rejected the materialistic, money-obsessed society that, I mean, isn't exactly a roaring success by anyone's measure. Suicide rates, depression, obesity, growing divide between rich and poor, racism, misogyny, locking up and torturing refugees, destroying the environment — these are all status quo in our rich, privileged society. And yet here in Ullara WE'RE the weird ones? Because we want to reject that and embrace a life where we can care for each other? Where we can be can all be one big, caring family?

Some of those books and newspapers I burn—disposed of, called Gideon everything from monster to demagogue to cult leader to 'the new Jim Jones.' God, don't papers love that one, the new Hitler, the new Kanye, the new swine flu.

I— hold on a sec—

*Honks horn.*

River: Hey Maryanne!

So, my sister's back home. And she's told me lies as well, some of which I believed, some of which she knows I didn't and some of which I want to believe but can't. When I got to the pharmacy and asked for sodium pentothal, they looked at me like I was crazy. Not the first time that's happened. Some folks around here, they see the red clothing, and they start making assumptions. I grabbed some codeine and got out of there pretty quick. I guess it was Harmony's idea of a joke. A lotta people would argue that this isn't exactly the best time for humour, but Harmony was never one to follow social protocols.

*(Pause)* We're at the end of this journey, this journey that, well I guess you all have been the audience? Or maybe more of a Greek chorus, going by some of the comments on the message board! *River! That way lieth danger! Etc!* No, it's fine, I know even those of you who doubted I'd ever find Harmony agony were coming from a place of love. I'm not sure what's going to happen next, but I think this is the end of this chapter. I'm just about to pull into the driveway at

seventh circle studios I'm going to sign off, say goodbye, and whatever, happens next. I think this next part is just for my family here in Ullara. I don't know what the future holds, nor does any of us I guess, but I want to say sincerely, thank you, love and light and—

Is that Gideon's car? Why is he—

*Parks car, turns off ignition, closes door. Runs inside, panting. Murmurs to himself. Opens studio door. Pause.*

*Sound of guitar being picked up*

River: What are you doing?

Harmony: River, he's doing exactly what it looks like he's doing. Listen to me. Look at what is happening. Trust ME. Okay? This is the man you've been dedicating your life to. This man. I'm here, fucking gaffer taped to a chair and look at him. There is only one way to read this situation.

*Sounds of belt being buckled.*

Gideon: River, my son. What a joyful reunion! I think you can put that down, don't you? I was just adjusting my belt, I've started putting on a little extra weight, and I guess I'm too stubborn to accept I need to move up a notch! You can put that guitar down we don't need to—

*Sound of tape being removed, gun being cocked.*

Gideon: River, you knew of hidden weapons in this studio and you didn't tell me? You know we don't allow instruments of violence in—

Harmony: You have a fucking arsenal in the council attic Gideon. It's the kind of collection that'd give Ted Nugent a boner.

Gideon: Put the gun down, my son. Come, let us commune together in peace.

Harmony: River LOOK AT HIM! Fucking shoot this creep and let me go. You can do this.

*River makes whimpering, confused noises.*

Gideon: It pains me to hear you think so little of me beloved Harmony, my dearest daughter. River, put it down, let's talk about this calmly.

Harmony: Don't call me your daughter. Especially not after unbuckling your belt in front of me.

Gideon: I think you're being a little hysterical my dear, you know I would never do anything to hurt you. I think your time away has given you a dark view of the world. Our family is not so vile and lecherous as the suppressive outsiders we—

River: Stop. Talking.

*Pause.*

River: S-step away from her!

Gideon: River, my child, surely you don't think—

Harmony: Do it River, you know he deserves it!

Gideon: She's been tainted by the outside world River, she's not one of us anymore. She wants to sow the seeds of disharmony.

Harmony: Disharmony? Really, you want to rephrase that one by any chance?

Gideon: Her soul has been sullied by the temptations and vices of the impure and ignorant. We can save her River, but she needs our help. You've brought her back to us, let's help her reach redemption together.

Harmony: River, he doesn't care about you or me, he just wants a bunch of cloying little lambs to eat up his mountains of bullshit. He's not a prophet, he's a deluded megalomaniac with—

Gideon (at the same time): Together we can restore her faith in our loving community, return her to the path of righteousness—

River: SHUT UP! SHUT UP, both of you...stop talking! (*Heavy breathing*)

*Pause. Sounds of equipment being shuffled. Scissors cutting gaffer tape.*

Gideon: River, I—

*Harmony slaps him, spits in his face.*

Harmony: Don't fucking talk to my brother. You keep that forked tongue locked between your teeth or I will rip your eyes out and feed them to the crows. I will cut off your hands and—

River: Harmony. Remember when you took the scissors away from me?

Harmony: When I...took them away from you? Don't you mean—

River: You saved me. You've always been a better, purer, smarter person than me.

Harmony: Well, I think we both know one of those isn't true.

River: Here. Take this.

Harmony: The scissors or the gun?

River: The scissors. I want to give them to you. You can do whatever you want with them. It's not up to me to tell you what to do. It never has been. I'm sorry I tried to save—to control you. You don't belong here anymore.

Harmony: I get that you're trying to be symbolic and all, but shouldn't we—

River: Please just take them and go.

Harmony: Okay. If that's what you want. One thing though. Gideon, gimme your keys.

Gideon: I don't think—

Harmony: You've got a dozen other cars you fucking megalomaniac, asking everyone else to give up their worldly possessions while you get around in luxury cars like you're a Top Gear host. Gimme the damn keys, you're lucky that's all I'm going to take.

Gideon: River, tell her she's being foolish.

River: *(nervously)* Give her the keys Gideon.

Gideon: No.

River: *(more commanding)* Give. Her. The. Keys.

*Pause. Sound of keys being tossed.*

Harmony: You realise that if I leave now, I'm never coming back right? And

that I have to disappear again, permanently. You'll never see me again.

River: Yes. I know. *(Pause)* Will you do one thing? Will you send me a photo of my nephew?

Harmony: *(pause, sigh)* Okay. But unmarked post, no return address. I can't run risk of being found again. You understand, right?

River: Yes. Goodbye sis. Love and ligh—

Harmony: Don't say the second bit. I don't want to end on a weird cult mantra. Let's just stick to love. I love you Ron.

River: I love you too. Goodbye, Harmon—goodbye, Hellia.

Harmony: In a few, you cockatoo.

*Pause*

Gideon: I think we can put that down now, don't you?

*Sound of gun being placed down.*

Gideon: River, I'm very sorry that you've been deceived as to our situation here. I'm afraid I can't be held responsible for the council's reaction to threatening one of the community with—

River: I read an article recently about a man, a musician like me, who had a brain infection—

Gideon: Exactly! The council is like a brain and we cannot threaten its operations with diseases of disunity and —

River: That's not what I meant. He had a brain infection that left him with a

very unusual case of amnesia. His memory lasted only a few seconds. In addition, he'd also forgotten his past, his stories, his memories. He was constantly confused, bewildered, afraid—

Gideon: And this is what each of us feels, lost in the wilderness of the outside world with—

River: I'M. NOT. FINISHED. This man, his name was Clive, he felt as though he was constantly gaining consciousness for the very first time. In a sense, it was as though he was dying every few seconds. Can you imagine that? Every few seconds. Forgetting. Remembering. Forgetting. Remembering. He began to keep a journal. At 2.10 he would write: 'finally awake!' Then at 2.12 'This time really awake', then at 2.15 'This time finally awake for certain.' After a while he would read over the previous entries and started adding '2.30, awake for the very first time, despite my previous claims.' He was constantly dying, constantly being reborn.

Over the last few months, I've felt like Clive. I lose my faith in Ullara, and then it comes flooding back, then it slips, and regains footing. I am constantly gaining awareness of myself. But I realise it's not Ullara that I doubt. It never has been.

Gideon: I've never claimed to be perfect.

River: Harmony is right about you. You're a megalomaniac. A lost, vile, lecherous man.

Gideon: You do NOT—

River: You tell everyone that this is a place of bliss and love and kindness, but you keep secrets, silence dissenters, perform...unspeakable acts with the women. And even little girls.

Gideon: I can assure you that—

River: *I haven't finished.* When I came here, you tricked me into harming people. Bad people, people who no doubt deserved to be punished, but maybe also people who could have found redemption. I was a CHILD. A misguided, spoiled little brat, but you made me into a monster. You told us when we arrived that Ullara was a community founded on the principles of truth, forgiveness and love. You told us that people would come us in droves, that we would be a beacon of light unto which the good people of the nation would flock, but our numbers have only dwindled.

You asked me to hide these guns, these tools of death in this studio, in the library, to take places of learning and creation and joy and make them into a warehouse for instruments of violence. While you pile up your collection of cars and hidden weapons and your harem of women, the rest of us live in the dirt and suffer scorn and ridicule, you've heard how they talk about us in the outside world—

Gideon: You cannot listen to that slander—

River: *Do not* interrupt me. You have poured poison on the seeds of paradise you once sowed here. You aren't fit to sit at the head of the council.

Gideon: You shall NOT SPEAK TO ME LIKE THAT OR I WILL—

*River holds up his phone.*

River: Careful what you say...

Gideon: Have you been recording this?

River: Yes. Along with everything else. I don't need to raise a gun to your head Gideon. I have records of the long litany of your crimes. You are going to resign

from the council and had control over to me or I am going to call my good friend at the police station and hand him a detailed list of your transgressions.

Gideon: You're no leader. You're a lost, foolish, naive little brat.

River: That's true, I have been. And I want to thank you for removing the scales from my eyes. You're lucky I didn't shoot you as soon as I walked in the door and saw you...saw you...

*(Strikes Gideon, he screams and sobs)*

River: You gave up caring about the principles on which this community was built years ago. *I* never did. I believe we can create a better world. I believe that we can gather kindred spirits who are dedicated to caring for the earth and each other. I don't believe you are the man to lead them.

Gideon: You're no leader. You're a spineless, sniveling whelp. They'll never listen to you. And you've been no innocent, if you turn those documents over to the police you'll be incriminated, same as me. You wouldn't last a week in prison. A worm like you would be broken and crushed as soon as you walked through the door.

River: That's probably true. But I have the courage to suffer for my convictions. Do you? *(Pause)*. When I came here, you were everything to me. Father, god, prophet, messiah. My own father was distant and cruel, you were loving and kind.

My father was concerned with wealth and property, you cared only for love and community. Now I see that my father was just more honest with his flaws. He was kind enough to be candid about his vices. You aren't honest, or brave, or wise. You're just a silver-tongued old man with a lust for power and wealth. You're no better than the capitalist hordes you rail against. You're worse. You're the wolf of Wall St in sheep's clothing.

Gideon: If you turn me over to the police than everything we've built here,

EVERYTHING will crumble to dust. We have built a heaven on earth. You want to burn it to the ground.

River: Maybe. Maybe it will all fall apart. But I'd rather see the ship sink than have you as its captain. You know in all the old myths about redemption, Sodom and Gomorrah, Orpheus and Eurydice, it's always looking back that dooms the hero. The hero that doesn't quite believe enough to make it to the end without glancing furtively back—

Gideon: You're not a hero River, you're an idealistic fool.

River: Exactly. I'm no hero, which is why I am not going to ever look back. I believe, absolutely, in creating a brighter world, starting here in Ullara. I will do anything to make that happen.

*Pause. Gideon grunts and leaps for the gun, we hear the sounds of struggle, something smashing, then a gunshot, panting. Body slumps to the floor.*

River: I guess...I guess I won't be uploading this last recording. Perhaps I'll keep it as a sort of...audio diary. But even though none of you will ever hear this, I feel like I should still say goodbye. Properly this time. I owe you that much.

I want you to know, that there is a home here for you in Ullara. A sanctuary. I want you to know, that if you are hungry, we will share our harvests with you. If you are lonely, we will give our love. If you have been wounded—

Gideon: argghhhhh! Help me, please...

River: SHUT UP!

*Sounds of gaffer tape being shoved over his mouth, muffled protests.*

River: If you have been wounded, we can heal together. For now, my family. I must say goodbye. Love and light.

*Puts on Six Cold Feet and sings along as Gideon struggles in the background*

*Mic off.*