

SCENE 1

MUSIC: "Under Hover" by Stirquoise.

VALERIA:

Everything got better when I turned them in. We got the chance to start over *because* of what I did, don't you get that?

MUSIC: "Calcium Singularis" by Koi-discovery.

CAINE:

(NARRATING)

Time and time again when Valeria spoke to me, I felt my world come apart at the seams. And this time, what she'd said threatened to tear me apart completely. The woman that my sister had become had destroyed what was left of our family.

Every sleepless night in that apartment waiting for someone to come home, every month I had spent wondering where my sister and parents had gone, praying that they'd come back and rescue me from Dax and, even worse, the yawning emptiness they'd left in the corners of that place, somehow still startling me every time I turned around. Every single year, all buried now under a layer of freshly poured asphalt and a new coat of paint. The weight of it all dangled over me. I wanted to scream in her face. I wanted to hit her, I wanted to *run*. Get in my car, hit the gas pedal, see the needle hit a hundred miles and push even further, further, justify the feeling of my heart hammering behind my eyes and in my ears, and – dammit. I was still here. And so was Sebastian. And so was she.

Running wasn't going to fix this. I knew that. Instead, I pressed my palms into my eyes so hard I saw dark stars. Bit my lip so hard I felt blood trickling to the surface. And I thought for a second about what I needed to say.

MUSIC: "Skin Wax" by Pablo Perez.

VALERIA:

Please understand. *Please* understand. This was all for you.

CAINE:

No, it wasn't. And I think you can tell yourself that as many times as you want and I think you believe that. But part of you knows that's not true.

VALERIA:

Are you going to leave?

SEBASTIAN:

Are we?

CAINE:

Look, we came here with a reason, and it wasn't to join your ranks, as much as you want that.

SEBASTIAN:

And you're pretty high-ranking. You're up there, with Director Blanche and Director March. We know that when you sent Haven to... retrieve Caine that she probably gave you some... information, whether she meant to or not. And that information is quickly becoming key in a big way.

CAINE:

(NARRATING)

Seb was talking carefully again, and I could see it: she buried all the softness and hurt inside her eyes under a layer of Dome glitter. Broken glass in the light. Jagged and would cut you to the quick. Analytical and shrewd. Was she always that way? I tasted the blood in my mouth again.

VALERIA:

Information is very powerful, yes. Any reason why you're interested?

CAINE:

(NARRATING)

Sebastian's eyes flashed to me. "Could we trust her?" he asked. Was being vulnerable here with her the right choice? Could I really tell her what we were doing with Zero Zero without risking everything? I could see he wanted to. That he was trying hard to balance it all, but that he wanted to lay it all bare. He was sick of hiding already.

I was too. But Val, who had told us the truth, but not everything, still hiding parts of it from herself.. still in a position where her blade was pointed at both our throats,

beckoning us to walk forward with her like she wasn't a threat... we weren't there yet. I shook my head.

SEBASTIAN:

All in time. Doesn't feel fair if you're the only one pulling strings, does it? Seems like all the siblings should get a turn.

VALERIA:

(SCOFFS) You always did hog the controller when we played games, kuya.

CAINE:

Okay. We know you've got your cards in your slots. But we know you care about having your family here. I know you want us to come willingly, at least for now.

SFX: Caine gets up. Valeria follows.

VALERIA:

So, you are leaving.

CAINE:

We're allowed to, aren't we?

Beat.

CAINE:

Aren't we?

VALERIA:

Yes. I... guess it wouldn't mean much if I forced you to stay. All I wanted to do was to find you.

SEBASTIAN:

What's the deal with that, anyways? We have these trackers, don't we? Why couldn't you... you know, track us?

VALERIA:

I mean, they're the kind used for criminals, but... they're off market. Only thing that can technically track them is that power-hungry system they're tied to and I didn't have it when I left. I couldn't have come to get you myself anyways, not while...

CAINE:

In any case, I don't want you to track us. I want you to know this. As far as I'm concerned, I'm not coming back with you as long as you live like this. You climbed your way up this corporate ladder by sacrificing a part of our family. And that included me, no matter how you slice it. And I figure you might try and make your way a little higher as a Beta class by using the info you got. But that'll ruin way more lives than just mine and Seb's. It's going to make life worse for everyone. Forever.

I'm not sure if that really matters to you, to be honest. The only thing I've seen get through to you is us. So that's the choice. You either get Glasshouse, with its status, and its cryptos, or you get your family. You can't have both.

SFX: Footsteps down the stairs. Hurried footsteps follow after.

VALERIA:

What, so that's it? You can't ask me to make a sacrifice all of a sudden, on terms I don't even know. That's selfish! That's... that's crazy, that's-!

CAINE:

I didn't get a choice when you decided to get on that first rung, Val. I just waited for you all to come home, and you never did. At least I'm telling you now, that's the terms you get us back on.

Don't leak the info you have, ate. If that's the last thing I ever get to say to you, as your little sibling, then, um... That's the most important thing I can say.

VALERIA:

Don't let this be goodbye.

SEBASTIAN:

I think that's up to you now.

SFX: Footsteps on the stairs.

VALERIA:

Uh... If you stay longer, I can explain more.

SEBASTIAN:

We can't. We're leaving.

VALERIA:

Don't go, please.

CAINE:

You said you wouldn't make us stay.

VALERIA:

I won't, I just - I know I messed up, I obviously haven't convinced you! Um... Here!

SFX: Running up stairs. Cassette tapes shuffle.

VALERIA:

Please take these. You know I kept all these logs - you'll understand more if you see my side of the story. You used to listen to them all the time. You'll get it! You'll... you'll get it.

SEBASTIAN:

Okay... okay. Take care, Val.

VALERIA:

Caine?

MUSIC: "58+g" by Monplaisir feat. Southman.

CAINE:

(NARRATING)

Less like broken glass, her eyes now glittered and spilled over with tears. And there it was: that empty-corners feeling, the absence of someone you thought would never disappear, the gaping hole where they once were so big, that it fills up every corner of the room. "Come home," I wanted to say to her. But there was no more home to go to.

But there was one familiar place. And even though it had taken a while for us to settle in there, I figured, we'd picked up and moved before. Now, we had a whole network of Zero Zero all over the Metropolis.

It didn't matter if we lost one radio tower, but it mattered that she could find us somewhere, if only one last time. I reached my pinky finger out.

SFX: Cloth rustles.

CAINE:

Ceremony's in two weeks, isn't it? You'll find me at the Tower.
Promise me you'll tell me what you decide before then.

VALERIA:

I... promise.

SFX: Another cloth rustle. Footsteps.

CAINE:

(NARRATING)

Then, Seb and I walked out of her place..

SEBASTIAN:

It's okay, *ading*.

SFX: Caine begins to cry.

CAINE:

(NARRATING)

...And back into the night. What those tapes could really tell me about her, I wasn't sure. Wasn't even sure if I could handle having another revelation about all those years ago. But part of me hoped that the truth really could set us all free.

SCENE 2

SFX: Door slides open as a door tone plays. A radio tunes.

RADIO:

If you see something, say something. POTEN CO. considers these symbols threatening or those of domestic terrorists. They include double zeroes, usually seen with diagonal slashes, or the phrase "Zero Zero," with slashes through the o's.

Related symbols are those for a group called "Pavement," which are usually seen with a stencil of a cracked sidewalk with a flower—!

SFX: The radio glitches with static.

MUSIC: "The Night We Saw Those Strange Lights - Loopable Dark Mysterious music" by JoelFazhari.

KALEO:

Now, listener, I'm pretty sure you're tired of that same old propaganda you've been hearing.

AVA:

I sure am. You know who we arrr.

KALEO:

(SIGH) Oh, Ava, that's not landing with anyone outside the Kvadrata. We're rogue radio station investigators who have gone rogue ourselves. This is your pirate radio station, Earthseed. And I'm your humble co-host, Kaleo Hale.

AVA:

I'm your much funnier co-host, Ava Jafari. POTEN Co. makes billions of cryptos, but they're scared of a couple zeroes. Yet they still haven't shared enough of that around for you to get enough to scrape by.

KALEO:

And Celadon Carbonate drops weapons and bombs, but can't stand a flower growing out of the concrete. That's some kind of irony. They've got Correctors enforcing curfews and random checks, pulling you off the street if they or their new AI decide you look suspicious. But keeping you safe isn't their priority.

AVA:

We keep each other safe. Even if you're not part of either of those groups, just know it's your community that's watching out for you, not whoever's on top. So reach out if you need help, reach out if you can give help – that's how we survive. Keep an eye out for your local mutual aid groups.

KALEO:

We've got shoutouts for a few food distros in the Tollbooth, Arbara Hill, the Terrace, and Valo South. Once again, Tollbooth, Arbara Hill, the Terrace, and Valo South.

Now, you know we have a reputation as codebreakers – hello, Hayden, by the way, if you're listening, which you probably are. Thank you. We've got no keys though, for our Glasshouse listeners, but we do want those hopefuls to know, we're broadcasting on 97.1 FM at 9 minutes after the hour.

AVA:

Again that's 9 minutes after the hour. Keep one eye on the stars this time, listener, and that's all you need to navigate.

Been a while since the last Class Upgrade, huh?

KALEO:

Ages, I'd say. I mean, it doesn't help that they keep making it longer and longer between them. Guess it's harder to choose who deserves it when the upper class has to stay small.

AVA:

And the last one was interrupted by Zero Zero. No wonder they're so scared.

KALEO:

Whole thing's cracking at the seams if you haven't noticed. If you see something...

AVA:

Say something!

SFX: A switch. In a broadcast room.

AVA:

You really don't think the pirate jokes are working?

KALEO:

I mean, I think they're funny, but I'm biased.

AVA:

I appreciate your honesty.

We're getting pretty good with those broadcasts.

KALEO:

And people are listening, which... feels good. Feels important.

AVA:

I think it's because things feel so dire. Which, by the way, bail fund's complete for Marco, so he should be out by end of the day.

KALEO:

Oh, good. God, I mean... it's weird how people we know are getting arrested for... I don't know, like, giving out food and making sure people don't get beat up by Correctors.

AVA:

Weird times.

KALEO:

Yeah, weird times.

AVA:

Like, I'm glad people are paying attention, but did things have to get so bad for that to happen? I mean, I know it took a while for us, but...

KALEO:

Ugh, I know. It's weird to feel like you're waiting for everyone else to notice that things are like, on fire and exploding, and also people are still pouring gasoline everywhere.

And you keep going, "Okay, guys, can we at least ease up on the gasoline?" But they're like, "No, we really love gasoline and it's actually so weird that you're asking us to stop."

AVA:

(LAUGHS) "Yeah, like, actually, it's my passion AND I get paid to do it, so I'm kind of offended you're implying I'm making things worse."

KALEO:

Yeah, it's just beyond parody at a certain point.

AVA:

At least we have people chipping in more and more. And when we interrupt Moondog, I feel a certain sense of vindication.

KALEO:

Oh yeah. It's really clear now that the "re-education" effort's not working out. Hey, new PR isn't gonna cut it when you've got our PR.

Short for, uh... pirate radio.

AVA:

I got it.

KALEO:

Well, I'm just making sure 'cause you didn't laugh.

AVA:

(LAUGHS)

SFX: Beeps.

AVA:

Speaking of, got another signal for us to hop on.

KALEO:

Evens or odds?

AVA:

Even this time, it's 102.6 AM.

KALEO:

Showtime, then.

SCENE 3

SFX: An odd "glowing" drone in the back. Footsteps up stairs.

SU-JIN:

Hiya, Caine!

CAINE:

Su-jin.

SFX: The two kiss.

SU-JIN:

Mm. Hey, you doing okay? I know last night coming back from talking with your sister was... not ideal.

CAINE:

(SIGH) Honestly, could be better, yeah. But, um, I'm on a time limit to listen to these tapes, so... I'm gonna listen starting tonight. It kind of felt like something Seb and I should do alone, so I asked if Vic would be okay keeping Jet company.

SU-JIN:

Oh yeah, and then he said we're technically working on stuff tonight, didn't he?

CAINE:

Mm-hm, yeah. Comms hacking or something.

SU-JIN:

Yeah, Celadon rolled out a Sentinel update, so we're updating everyone's comms again for security purposes. Did you drop off your comms with Vic?

CAINE:

Ugh, god, no. Like, yes, Vic is my teammate and I trust him with my life. But I would rather you be there to make sure he's not looking through anything on my comms.

SU-JIN:

(LAUGHS) Yeah, I know Lalitha likes that he can "read" people but that does kind of mean he's a snoop. I got you. And also, Jet can come hang out with us while we work, I don't mind. He's a delightful guy! And three's company.

CAINE:

Isn't the saying "two's company?"

SU-JIN:

Whatever, I'm social. Everyone can come hang out if they want.

CAINE:

Would if I could.

SU-JIN:

I know. Love you.

CAINE:

I love you too.

SU-JIN:

I'll message Vic about Jet, we're already done with our comms.

CAINE:

Thanks!

SFX: Caine walks down the stairs.

SU-JIN:

(HAPPY SIGH)

SFX: Vic walks up the stairs and places a box down.

VIC:

You look happy.

SU-JIN:

Yep.

VIC:

Any reason you wanted to work on the roof?

SU-JIN:

Change of scenery, I guess? I can't keep being cooped up inside.

VIC:

Lalitha's rubbing off on you. You two always want to perch somewhere.

SFX: Vic places Jet down.

SU-JIN:

Jet! How are you?

JET:

I'm doing okay! So much is happening these days and the metropolis has changed a lot! For instance, the new skyscraper in the distance.

VIC:

Oh, *that* eyesore.

JET:

It is much... brighter than the rest of the night skyline.

VIC:

Very polite way of saying it's like, a trillion megawatts. It's the new data center for Sentinel.

SU-JIN:

They're really going all in on that thing.

SFX: Vic picks up and places a box down.

VIC:

I know. Here, comms box, if you wanna get started on the rest of those while I do Tari's.

SU-JIN:

Right, thanks.

SFX: Lookout's jingle plays.

SU-JIN:

What the hell?

VIC:

Geez, man.

SFX: A corporate, poppy tune begins to blare.

LOOKOUT:

Need an assistant? I'm Looking Out For You™! Lookout 1.1 is now available on your comms, home computer, and out in public too. Sync up your data by scanning a certified Lookout code in partnered malls, and I can even help with your errands. I'll point you to stores where you've got coupons about to expire. Or I'll suggest a great gift for that special someone in your life. I can even tell you when you've got to head back to work so you don't accidentally commit time theft on your lunch break.
(LAUGHS)

SU-JIN:

Geez.

LOOKOUT:

I can help your kids with homework when you don't remember how to. I mean, let's face it - math's not easy. I can remind them to do their homework and set alarms for their bedtimes and waking times. "It's time for bed. Alright, up and at 'em!" Looking for lost items? Tag them with Lookout's LookForMe tags and I can ping them. Or, if you're worried about where your kids are, I can keep an eye out on them. Remember, POTEN Co. is Looking Out For You™. That's why I'm here to help them do that!

SFX: The ad continues in the background.

JET:

Is there... um... any way we can...

VIC:

No, it's pissing me off too. But I'm on it.

SFX: Vic pulls out a computer and begins to type.

VIC:

Breaker here... yadda yadda yadda... Thanks, hotzgeo for putting that up on a public site... okay, here we go.

SFX: A beeping sound.

VIC:

Hey, Su-jin, can you answer my comms please? That'll be someone I'm coordinating with on this, but I'm in the zone. Just read it out to me. Case sensitive.

SU-JIN:

Uh, a63b3r44968ch5?

VIC:

Thank you, thank you.

SFX: Vic types. The ad in the background shuts down.

VIC:

(SIGHS IN RELIEF)

JET:

Thanks.

SU-JIN:

Really hate living in a panopticon.

VIC:

God, tell me about it. If there's one thing that brings hackers together, it's shutting up something that annoys us. But that's about the only thing I can get us up to these days. Everything else is too risky and no one wants to jump ship and use some other tech system that's not tracking them constantly, especially if it voids their warranties. Except for us. Hence, three days of hacking and cracking comms, and Jet, of course.

JET:

The warranty on me is long gone!

SU-JIN:

(CHUCKLES) Sorry about all that, though. I thought being on the roof would be nicer.

JET:

Hearing my voice coming out of both security cameras and ads is... a little odd. Sometimes I catch my voice coming out of another navsys and I... I don't know how to feel about it.

VIC:

I hadn't really thought about that.

SU-JIN:

I mean, you're always Jet to me.

JET:

Not to everyone else though. That's Lookout's voice, according to billboards and their comms. It's Lookout's personality, which according to them, is ingratiating and does exactly what it's told. It's a Trojan Horse for people's information and it does it all by using me. A polished version of me.

VIC:

(SCOFFS) More like sanded off. That thing is practically lobotomized.

JET:

And the only way USER: Blanche could have gotten any of this was because I was sloppy when I was getting the info for the gala.

VIC:

Eh, happens to everyone when they're hacking. Job hazards.

JET:

I can't imagine it usually results in identity theft on this scale.

VIC:

...Can't say it does.

SU-JIN:

I don't really know how this all must feel for you, Jet, but it sounds pretty bizarre. And tough. And I can at least tell you one thing, which is the second I can get my hands on that skyscraper, I'm taking it apart.

JET:

Thanks, Su-jin.

SU-JIN:

And I'd get rid of every Sentinel server for you if I could. I'd kill that thing. Ultimately a public good.

VIC:

Yeah, I'd kill it too.

JET:

(LAUGHS) Okay, thank you.

SFX: A series of switches in the distance.

VIC:

Huh! Thank god, they're doing maintenance on the lights.

Aw man, the view's much prettier when you're not getting your eyeballs blasted. Almost brings a tear to my eye.

SU-JIN:

Yeah, but now I actually need a light.

JET:

I got it.

SFX: A switch. Typing and the sound of tools being rummaged through.

SCENE 4

CAINE:

(NARRATING)

I chose a later tape to listen to first. I didn't know how I might feel to listen to the Valeria so close to the one I knew before, so I shoved all the earliest dated ones away, closed my eyes, and put the first one I grabbed into the player.

SFX: Cassette tape being slotted in.

MUSIC: "Forgotten World" by Art Flower.

VALERIA:

It's another long day at the warehouse and another day of coming home too tired to do anything but sleep. My life is boxes now. It's packing boxes and unpacking boxes, and walking down aisles that never end. Sometimes, I feel like I hear Sebastian telling me, "This is what life is like as a corporate wage slave. This is the life you chose." And then I have to remind myself that his room has been empty for long enough that... I wish I could forget the sound of his voice, at least long enough for it to stop being the thing bullying me in my head. I know he wouldn't actually say that. He can't anymore.

God, these are getting depressing. I need a new job. I need a new life. I keep applying to things and getting rejections. Rossum says I need a new resume, but when am I going to have time to make that? Someone has to cook food for the family and since I get off my shift first, I guess it's up to me. Mom and Dad are at some... union meeting every other night, but it's not getting us any more than what we already have, so I don't think it's working. The only thing working is me.

CYBIL:

(FAINTLY)

Are you done with those reports yet? Valeria?

SFX: Cassette tape rolls, then stops.

CYBIL:

Valeria.

VALERIA:

Sorry?

CYBIL:

I'm not asking again.

VALERIA:

The — um — oh, great, it's 11:-freaking-30. Reports?

CYBIL:

Yes. I haven't received them yet.

VALERIA:

I'm a little behind.

CYBIL:

We're getting closer to deadline, Ms. Reyes. Don't run out of fuel just before the finish line.

VALERIA:

Kind of a Caine metaphor. Hah.

CYBIL:

Do you think this is funny?

VALERIA:

I think... I'm a little sleep deprived.

CYBIL:

You do look the part. I'll have an intern fetch some coffee.

VALERIA:

I can get it.

SFX: Valeria pushes her chair out.

CYBIL:

Ha! No, you're much too far past that stage, my dear. You're supposed to be a Beta class, you should play the part. It helps.

SFX: Typing, then a click.

VALERIA:

No delays next time.

CYBIL:

Very good.

Do we need to have a meeting?

VALERIA:

Do... we?

SFX: Scrolling tone.

CYBIL:

I have a 30 minute block right now.

VALERIA:

For lunch.

CYBIL:

Normally, yes, but I prefer that we chat. I will pay for your lunch to be sent up to my office, but come. Walk with me.

SFX: Footsteps. A beep as a door opens. Cybil sits down.

CYBIL:

I don't normally see you being this challenged by the workload.

VALERIA:

(SIGHS) There's been a lot of fires to put out. And Patton's putting a lot of extra stuff on me too.

CYBIL:

More specific than *stuff*, please.

VALERIA:

He's been asking me to "deploy the troops" every other conflict we have, which is not making us look good. So, then I have to send Correctors for public appearances, which means another protest, which means... it's a lot.

CYBIL:

It's the unfortunate reality of your position, but I'll see what I can tell him. I find the situation we're in right now a little less than ideal, but Sentinel is supposed to be dealing with at least some of the workload. Ask Patton to rely on it rather than you. I need your mind clear and focused here.

I need you... to be dealing with other threats, since Patton refuses to until he has proof.

VALERIA:

The outposts.

CYBIL:

Yes. You mentioned your... brother, before.

VALERIA:

Sebastian. Yes, he visited me, unexpectedly. And he said he'd been to an outpost, so it's not out of the question that he might have more information. Caine, my sibling, was with him, too. I could divert some resources, track them down again, ask what they know.

CYBIL:

I don't understand why you didn't just detain them.

VALERIA:

They're my family, Cybil.

CYBIL:

(SCOFFS) Valeria. You've responded to calls I've made to teach Laurent and Karine a lesson.

VALERIA:

Your children aren't registered as criminals by the system.

CYBIL:

And you have access to that system. It would have taken you a paltry twenty minutes to put in a temporary exemption.

We are losing valuable time and information. I implore you to set your sights on the goal. That's what you're good at.

SFX: A cassette tape clicks into a slot.

VALERIA:

It's hot down here, near the elevator control panel, but it's sort of the only private place right now that has consistent power. I just got off comms with someone who's offering me a job. A big one. A real one.

So, you know, I submitted a report for the union a few days ago. While I was waiting to get paid out - I mean, obviously it's happening, but they have to verify all this stuff - I saw this message. I thought, "This must be fake or automatic or something, because it has Cybil Blanche's name on it." I mean, I almost deleted it. But she reached out to me and said she appreciated that I filled a real report out. And that, if I could keep gathering information, she could make it worth my time. And she called me just now and said that if I busted this union, she could offer me a position in Glasshouse. That the people in her life haven't really shown the same initiative or drive that I have.

"I'm eager for you to prove yourself," is what she said. I *am* gonna prove myself. That's what I've been doing for forever, so it shouldn't be too hard. Heh.

SFX: Another cassette tape slots in.

VALERIA:

Director Blanche... I guess that's what I'm calling her now that she's my boss. I gave her my updates for the day and we ended up talking about her family. She has two kids, but says they're not very interested in taking on the mantle of Director of Enforcement and Safety already, so she's been trying to find a "suitable successor." I mean, basically, she doesn't want the position to be open for no reason, especially when it's so important. I thought it might be too early to ask about taking Caine with me, but since we talked about family, I pitched the idea to her. She told me it probably would be too difficult for now, given that she ranked me pretty high as a successor.

She called me her protégé, and then told me not to spread that around. Not that I'm really telling anyone about us talking. But she says the training for the position is pretty intense and I wouldn't be able to talk to anyone outside the program for at least two years, maybe more.

MUSIC: "Suspense Cyberpunk" by Dmitrii Kolesnikov.

VALERIA:

But after everything's said and done, sacrificing some time so that things are finally stable and normal could be the right move... right? We could be...

CYBIL:

Untouchable. Once you're a Beta class, then this will all have been worth it. Because we are also your family, aren't we, Valeria?

Loyalty. It's the one thing that Celadon Carbonate and POTEN Co. ask for. And legacy - the one thing we can leave after we go. Those are the elements of family that we provide.

I understand supporting your family. That's a big part of why I take my career seriously, in order to keep them safe and sound. But I want to know that you take it as seriously as I do.

VALERIA:

I do.

CYBIL:

Then prove it: reports on time, for one. And any intel you can provide, please do so as soon as you get it. Understood?

VALERIA:

I...

SFX: A notification. Cybil taps on her phone.

CYBIL:

Oh. Your lunch is here and I appear to have an unexpected meeting to attend. Apparently, I need to make some administrative resets for the Lookout program.

(SIGHS) I've given you free reign, but please don't prioritize your siblings over everything you have worked for. You have worked extraordinarily hard, Valeria. You've done everything the right way. And jeopardizing this all now would be a slap in the face to everything that Glasshouse, Celadon Carbonate, and POTEN Co. represents. And you, Miss Reyes... you represent me, as well. Don't make me look bad.

SFX: Footsteps. The door opens. A cassette tape is slotted into a player.

VALERIA:

Back from the mall, went about as well as you'd guess. We got chased out again, but at least we got to play around on the consoles at the game store before they kicked us out. That was pretty fun. Corrector threw a punch at Seb, but I clocked him in the jaw and we made a run for it. Sucks because I know we're not allowed to be there but...

MUSIC: "End of the Street - Moody post rock guitar soundtrack" by Kabbalistic Village.

VALERIA:

I mean, I know it sounds silly, but when I look at Glasshouse, I still see it. The opportunity that my parents believed in. The opportunities that could be there! It's so bright and beautiful. It's clean. And safe.

When we're not getting chased, we almost fit in, you know? I mean, really, except for the cryptos, I don't know what's so different about us and them. When I look up at the skyscrapers and see inside every apartment, I can imagine my family living there, not in the cramped rooms with no maintenance that we live in now. Not that we're even paying the bills, I mean, our parents try to hide it, but I see the notifications come in. I hear them talk. The walls are too thin to actually keep secrets. I just want to live somewhere where people tell the truth. In Glasshouse, everything has to be out in the open. I mean, you can see it all! They have so much, they sometimes don't even notice when Rossum or Seb skim off the top. So, is it really that stupid of a dream to want to live there? To be in that world, where they have everything they could ever need or want?

Isn't it possible that everyone could live the way they do?

Hah, I feel pretty stupid saying it out loud. Maybe I'll delete this, I don't know.

SFX: The tape cuts out abruptly.

SCENE 5

SFX: Machine running. A timer beeps.

NELL:

Aaand... that's time.

SFX: The machine shuts down. Several buttons are pressed.

GANYMEDE:

Readout says we're filtering to 98% particulate, down to about 0.8 microns, which isn't perfect, but is pretty damn good.

NELL:

I agree. Job well done!

SFX: Nell whistles "Isem" as she puts away tools.

GANYMEDE:

You're cheerful.

NELL:

We finished as much of the preparations for these shelters as we can realistically do. I feel like that's worth being cheerful about.

GANYMEDE:

Well, the Nell I've known for a long time was always hard on herself and would be onto worrying about the next thing. So, I'm liking this new Nell.

NELL:

I mean, it's like I was telling Lalitha - we can't make this perfect, but, uh, we can get it as close as we can. And that's what we did. So... I'm trying to give myself permission to celebrate.

GANYMEDE:

Seems like spending time with her has done you a lot of good.

NELL:

Heh. You think so?

GANYMEDE:

Again, the Nell I've known for the past few years has been pretty rough on herself. And she was always spending time on everyone else and not herself. I say this is a change for the better.

SFX: Ganymede closes and latches his toolbox.

GANYMEDE:

Guess that's that. I'll be seeing you around?

NELL:

No, stay. Or, I guess we don't *have* to stay here with the shelter or anything like that. But you're right, you know, that things have been busy and we haven't really hung out for a while.

GANYMEDE:

Well, they say your life changes after you have kids, so I knew that was going to change our relationship once I had Adina.

NELL:

Oh, sure, but it was on me always running around and trying to get everything done. And not delegating when I probably could have.

GANYMEDE:

(SCOFFS) So it only took a pretty lady to tell you the stuff I've been saying for years...

NELL:

(LAUGHS) Oh, knock it off.

GANYMEDE:

(LAUGHS) I'm glad it's finally getting through to you.

NELL:

(SIGHS) So, how is Adina? And Ronan?

GANYMEDE:

Doing okay. Adina's hitting all the milestones you expect, Ronan's still working himself to the bone, but we make a good pair. And I try to remind him not to stay up longer than 24

hours when he's got the itch to research something. We're all trying to spend good quality time with each other, since.. you know.

NELL:

I suppose it's always on everyone else's mind, too.

GANYMEDE:

Hard for it to not be that way. It sort of hangs in the back of your head. Get the dishes dried, make sure Adina eats a full meal, replace the sprinklers in Greenhouse 5 again - you know, just in case we do all make it. And if we don't, then, you know, doesn't matter how many times the sprinklers went out.

But it makes you live a little, or at least try to.

NELL:

That's a positive outlook.

GANYMEDE:

Gotta be that way, or you don't get through it.

Speaking of living a little, what's the situation with you and Lalitha lately?

NELL:

Uh.. I guess I flirt a little, she flirts back.. Eheh, it's nothing really serious, I don't think.

GANYMEDE:

You're still *flirting*?

NELL:

It's complicated! She talks about Indra a lot and so it feels weird to.. make a move when she's talking about her partner? I mean, they were separated, and I guess she and Haven had a thing, so that was probably weird for her, too on further reflection..

GANYMEDE:

Nell, please for the love of everything, do not overthink this.

NELL:

Am I overthinking? I'm trying to be considerate..

GANYMEDE:

Which, wonderful, but if it's stopping you from making a move, I can assure you that you're overthinking it. For crying out loud, she and Indra were both flirting with you hardcore a few months ago! I was there for that! I'm damn near certain they're polyamorous.

NELL:

...Should I ask?

GANYMEDE:

Kind of seems like you could have done that before you started overthinking it, but asking isn't a bad move. You could even try asking her out on a date?

NELL:

Doesn't that seem like it's pushing things a bit far?

GANYMEDE:

She could always say no.

NELL:

Uh, er... It might ruin the friendship we have. It could.. make working with each other awkward. It could-!

GANYMEDE:

Thanks for listing all the most generic possible reasons it might not work out. Look, she sure wasn't jumping for joy when Haven showed up and, you know, stabbed her current partner. But those two doctors worked together to make sure Tari and Gamma were okay. I think she can probably handle telling you no and still making it work.

NELL:

Right, fair.

But, you know, I could also keep things as they are. Which is nice, too. I like working with her on things, I like occasionally getting lunch or dinner, or even breakfast after we spend a night discussing how to put something together. And if that could go on forever..

(SIGHS) But it's like you said. It's always in the back of my mind, deciding whether or not to do something, knowing that if

we don't get another update from Kaleo and Ava, or the rest of Zero Zero that whenever the bombs come... all we can do is react to them.

GANYMEDE:

Believe me, Nell, I get it. I decided to have a kid in this crazy world, and now look at it. I hoped that things could get better, that we could work to make it better, and all these things outside of our control are suddenly at our doorstep.
(CHUCKLES)

I mean, maybe I was naïve. But I don't want the government or arms dealers to take away my chance of living, to the very fullest, the one life I've got. I didn't want them to kill the idea of Adina, of me and someone I love having a child together, before my kid was even born.

Don't do their work for you. Don't live some half life, expecting that to be the best you'll ever get. Like I said, you only get the one.

NELL:

(LAUGHS) I feel a little bad for needing all this advice from people recently.

GANYMEDE:

You're not old yet. You got a lot of life to need advice in. Now, do you want to get dinner with me? Or do you want to save your appetite for a date?

NELL:

Should I ask her out?

GANYMEDE:

I mean, if she's not busy, no time like the present. See if she can, but do it before you lose the nerve.

NELL:

Right. I'll... see if she wants to get dinner.

GANYMEDE:

Good. But remember, if things don't all go to total shit, you owe me a dinner hangout whenever our schedules actually align.

NELL:

Deal.

SCENE 6

SFX: A cassette tape slots in.

MUSIC: "Unforeseen Consequences" by techtheist.

VALERIA:

Asking for anything to get done in this place feels like pulling teeth. I started attending these union meetings, a prospective member, and they were welcoming enough, but nothing gets done. That's something that bothers me. It's always "wait for everyone to decide together," but no one really shows up for these things, so what's the point? You pay for a group that has no bargaining power and no spine. And god, they talk on and on about what they could do, if they had more members or more time. But the second someone reminds them that it's illegal, everyone clams up and hides.

I mean, I won't lie. I reminded them once, just to see how it felt. I felt powerful for a bit, having the upper hand and seeing someone squirm about it, even though they didn't even know what I knew. I kind of get why some Correctors get such a power trip over it. But I felt sort of guilty afterwards. And I know I'm not supposed to show my hand too much... so once was enough, I think.

Besides, what threat does this union actually pose? It's mostly young guys from the warehouse, a couple of older folks from packing or delivery driving, and then my parents, and then me. No one can agree on anything, we have no leverage, so again, nothing gets done. I'm surprised Director Blanche even cares about this sort of thing, but she keeps saying that even a little spark could ignite all the gasoline, so we have to be ready to put things out, no matter where they are. I'll have to wait though and see what happens. Blanche doesn't want me to squash it too soon, she wants intel on what made people upset enough to form a union. Once she gets that, she says she'll tell Director March to tweak things.

One thing I would fix, at least, would be to bump some pay rates. That's what really makes people mad.

SFX: Another cassette tape is placed in the slot.

VALERIA:

So apparently, you can't increase pay rates since it would "destabilize the economy?" I don't know. I mean, I guess the directors would, that's supposed to be their job. I told them about the other stuff, you know, members wanting less time at work and more time with families, better benefits, actual medical treatment when they get injured. It was my first time talking with Director March and... he laughed. I guess it was funny to him? Blanche was more sympathetic, but she reminded me that working hard and saving up cryptos would get people to jobs with those kinds of perks.

SFX: Another cassette tape is placed in the slot.

VALERIA:

At least someone recognizes that I've been putting in the effort. And she says the effort will pay off soon.

SFX: Another cassette tape is placed in the slot.

VALERIA:

As soon as the arrests happened, Director Blanche came down and took me to Glasshouse. So... now I'm here, I guess.

MUSIC: "Waiting Line" by Monplaisir.

VALERIA:

I didn't take much with me, only this recorder and whatever clothes could fit in my work bag. I didn't want it to be obvious that I was leaving for good. Director Blanche issued me a new identity card, so it says Valeria Reyes, but... it has no ties to anyone. At all.

So! I start training tomorrow, and I know I'm still competing. Thrown into the ring, so all I have to do is stay alert, keep throwing punches until the final bell. I mean, I'm used to doing that. Fighting harder than anyone else has to. Doing more than anyone else is ever expected to. And I'm finally in a place where someone might recognize that, so I don't want to blow it. Director Blanche told me that as a precaution, I shouldn't contact anyone until I finish training. And I'm supposed to build my life here anyways! She said I can hire people to do my work in the Metropolis now, if I really want.

When she said that, I... well, I realized, I don't really know if I'm allowed to leave? They set me up with a temporary apartment, which is nice. But... empty.

You know, from inside the Dome, you can't see the rest of the Metropolis? It's a two-way mirror situation. Unless you're pretty high up, where the sky illusion kind of breaks as you get closer to the shell? The light gets all funny up there. So when I look out the window, I can't see our tower or the apartment. I can't see the warehouse. I can't see anything at all, except that evening sky.

SCENE 7

MUSIC: "YOU" by Monplaisir.

CAINE:

(NARRATING)

It was hard to hear Val say all those things. Here, in these most private moments that she'd let us listen to, she'd bared all her hurt. Every wound that had gone untended, every fracture she had to pick up the pieces of. Sure, what she was saying was wrong, no doubt about that – anyone could see that. But she'd gone on for so long being mistreated that I could see exactly where she'd started believing those things. As the moon rose, it passed the threshold of the starkly lit skyline, up above the bubble of the Dome. Its pale light was swallowed up by those of the Metropolis, but slowly, it climbed up into the sky. The same way I'd climbed up to our same old spot on the Tower.

SFX: Footsteps up the ladder.

SEBASTIAN:

Hey.

CAINE:

Hey.

SFX: Sebastian walks over and sits.

SEBASTIAN:

You finished with Val's tapes?

CAINE:

Mostly. But I think I've heard everything I need to.

SEBASTIAN:

How do you feel?

CAINE:

(SIGHS) Messed up. I sort of think things would have been easier if I just hadn't listened. I thought our parents were ignoring me, but hearing how Val had it...

SEBASTIAN:

Mom and dad weren't always the best. I have the most distance from them, so it's easier for me to say that.

CAINE:

Yeah, but they were trying. And I hear how Val was trying too, it's all... I don't know. (SIGHS) Just... circumstances and bad timing, I guess.

SEBASTIAN:

I know. They were trying to keep us safe, but the way they went about it wasn't... great. And it broke Val's trust in them at a pretty young age. Even I knew that.

MUSIC: "CARE" by Monplaisir.

CAINE:

Ugh, god. I feel like I was out of the loop on everything.

SEBASTIAN:

Dude, you were like barely forming memories when all of this went down, I think you have a good excuse.

CAINE:

But, kuya, the memories I have of everyone were so... different? I thought I'd figured it all out after we'd fixed the generator, that if I really was going to meet Val, that I wasn't going to put her up on a pedestal or anything. And then meeting her just shattered all of that.

SEBASTIAN:

It's not really an experience you think you'll go through twice, but hey. Old habits die hard. Believe me, I'm still having a hard time wrapping my head around what Val did... but again, I've got more distance and time on her than you.

She was desperate. Desperate people do lots of things to survive, even things we wouldn't normally be okay with. And I'm not saying you need to be okay with it, but... y'know, context helps.

CAINE:

I know. I know, I know, I know, but... And I just, I can't help the feeling of guilt bubbling inside me. Because I couldn't really be there for her, you know? Not in the way that she needed.

SEBASTIAN:

You were a kid.

CAINE:

She was, too. And she had to grow up too fast.

SEBASTIAN:

I... yeah. I feel like I got let off too easy where Val didn't. Perks of oldest son versus, I guess, all the drawbacks of being an oldest daughter. She was responsible all the times I wasn't, and I could have done more.

CAINE:

When I listen to this version of Val on these tapes, I wish I could have been with her then - like, *really* been with her. She only felt that desperate, only fell for Blanche's scheme, because she was isolated. She was alone.

SEBASTIAN:

I get why she feels like she's doing the right thing, too. I mean, hell, she always felt so strong about our trackers, I totally understand why she jumped at the chance to be in control of other people's.

CAINE:

(SCOFFS) Guess she can totally justify it to herself.

SEBASTIAN:

You can't split her in two.

CAINE:

What?

SEBASTIAN:

I mean, you did it with me, I see you doing it with her. "The person I knew wouldn't do this!" That's how you felt when we first met again, and I bet you were thinking it to some degree the whole time we were there.

CAINE:

Ugh, that's different!

SEBASTIAN:

And I get the impulse to do that. But like you said with our parents, they were trying... *and* they still did a lot of things that land pretty squarely in the "bad parent" category. If you can recognize that for them, then the least you can do is do that for her.

CAINE:

I don't — you can't be serious, she's actively harming people! Seb, right now, she's basically hovering her finger over the "detonate" button for everyone in Cair Mallplex!

SEBASTIAN:

Oh what, so it makes it okay that our parents did all that stuff because they're dead? That just means they don't have a chance to make it better. Ever. At least Val is still alive, which means there's still a chance.

CAINE:

I think that's what scares me the most. If she doesn't do the right thing... this is the *last* chance. And I don't know if I have it in me to really forgive her if she screws this all up.

SEBASTIAN:

I'm not gonna say all that bullshit about forgiveness, because I don't think it's what you want to hear right now. But you have all these mixed up feelings about her and you want her to prove herself to you. If you're seeing the worst case scenario, then yeah, I'd probably cut her off.

But in the best case scenario?

MUSIC: "The Eclipse - Ambient Soundscape" by Dream-Protocol.

CAINE:

I'd want her to be my sister again.

SEBASTIAN:

Yeah, me too. I mean, you could probably tell. Realistically...

CAINE:

Wow, Sebastian thinking realistically? Those are three words I thought would never be in a sentence together.

SEBASTIAN:

Hey. As I was saying, realistically, even in the best case scenario, you'll have to figure out how to forgive all the terrible stuff she's done anyways.

CAINE:

Yeah... yeah, trust me, I know.

SEBASTIAN:

But forgiving doesn't have to mean forgetting, you know? In some ways, it's better to remember. The good, the bad... everything. That's how you make a whole person.

CAINE:

(NARRATING)

I turned toward the moon, like it would give me any sort of answer. It stared coolly back at me, a half-lidded eye. The half-moon hung in the sky. I'd been keeping my head down for a while, so I couldn't tell whether it would take a good hard look at the truth... or whether it would turn a blind eye and go dark.

SCENE 8

SFX: Nell paces back and forth.

NELL:

"Do you want to get dinner? I know a good spot." Well, duh, we've eaten dinner in most of the places here.

"Would you like to go on a date with me?" Ugh, that's too formal, maybe it would make it weird.

"I really like spending time with you..." or something like that...

SFX: Lalitha's footsteps.

NELL:

Oh god, I'm not ready for this.

LALITHA:

Nell!

NELL:

Hello! Hi. Um, yeah. Hi.

LALITHA:

Hi?

Beat.

LALITHA:

Nice to see you?

NELL:

Nice to see you, too, sorry, I know I'm being... weird.

LALITHA:

No, I'm being weird too, I...

NELL:

I wanted to ask if you'd like to go on a date with me?

LALITHA:

Do you want to get dinner together?

I meant like a date. A dinner date. Oh, god...

NELL:

(LAUGHS) Okay, I'm glad I wasn't misreading things after all.

LALITHA:

(GROANS) I'm so awkward, sorry. I've never asked anyone on a date.

NELL:

That surprises me.

LALITHA:

Everyone I've ever dated in my admittedly brief love life has asked me first. But we've been spending a lot of time with each other and I didn't want to keep waiting around when I knew how I felt. And I've been trying to do things differently, not how I've always operated... although, you asked me at the same time, so I'm not sure how successful I really was.

NELL:

Plenty successful I'd say. Where would you like to eat?

LALITHA:

Ethiopian food sounds really good to me.

NELL:

Oh yeah, that sounds great.

SFX: The two start walking.

NELL:

So, you're polyamorous.

LALITHA:

Yes. Which, I think to some degree wasn't something I'd really seriously thought about. I almost didn't think I was going to date ever again.

NELL:

Why not?

LALITHA:

Too busy, I suppose.

NELL:

Hah, I guess I know what you mean. I haven't really dated anyone at all post-transitioning. I tried dating a little bit before, but the dysphoria made it all feel... bad. Then, of course, I was in the Space Force, and they discourage fraternizing there, not it like stops some people. And after that, then that's where the busy part comes in.

LALITHA:

Yeah. In some ways, I think I also said I was busy as an excuse. Vic always said I should try dating, but my only relationship I had was when I was younger, so... crushes, that "romantic" feeling always seemed a little juvenile to me. Even now, I feel all floaty and giddy being next to you, but it... it makes me feel off-balance, too.

NELL:

Can I... hold your hand?

LALITHA:

Yes.

SFX: Cloth rustles as Nell takes Lalitha's hand.

NELL:

Does this help your balance?

LALITHA:

(LAUGHS)

NELL:

That was corny, I know.

LALITHA:

Ah, I liked it. I'm happy I've gotten to see you get more confident. As cute as you are when you're flustered.

NELL:

(LAUGHS) I mean, I feel like I'm walking on air around you. I'm just trying to keep my wits about me.

I almost didn't say anything to you. I figured it might be safer if I didn't give you a chance to reject me, but Ganymede talked

me into it. And I'm glad. I would have been glad even if you'd said no, to at least tell you how I felt.

LALITHA:

I mean, that's what it's all about, right? Emotions, connections with people... the real underlying reason I think most people do anything is to make those connections. It's the whole point.

Zero Zero's so much bigger now, but years ago, it felt like it was a shout into the void. I used to write these pamphlets and share them out into the web, hoping someone would read it and connect with me somehow.

MUSIC: "No One Is Perfect" by HoliznaCC0.

LALITHA:

Trying to do the right thing was so isolating. Then, I met Vic, and even though we were from such different worlds, we understood each other.

And then for someone to see past a façade I'd grown into, a bad habit I hadn't quite managed to cut out... I think it opened my eyes to a person I could be. Someone honest. And being here at Cair Mallplex gave me an opportunity to become that person.

NELL:

We weren't the most welcoming at first.

LALITHA:

I can handle a bit of rejection. It's what made me take a look at who I was in the first place.

NELL:

I wish we could have been more welcoming even though I didn't feel ready.

In truth, I've been saying I wasn't ready for anything for a long time, because I never feel like I am. Like with dating or even friendships. I mean, saying I was busy was another form of saying I could put it off one more day, especially when I was carrying the weight of making sure everything stayed running. And pushing it all off was protecting myself from what I thought was inevitable rejection.

LALITHA:

Well, how do you feel now?

NELL:

Glad. That you didn't reject me. And that I opened up.

Talking with Su-jin about my time in the Space Force opened my eyes to the fact that I hadn't really been vulnerable with anyone about that for a long time. Or vulnerable, period.

LALITHA:

They do tend to have that effect on people. Myself included.

NELL:

(SIGHS) In some ways, I can't help but feel like I missed out on a lot of time to connect. But this... This moment, this time we have now... at least that's worth it.

LALITHA:

We don't have forever, but it's not the end yet. We have time.

NELL:

You're right. It's never too late.

SFX: The two stop.

NELL:

Sorry, I've been psychoanalyzing myself this whole time.

LALITHA:

I don't mind. I do the same thing every night when I go to sleep.

NELL:

Hah, same.

Ready to eat?

LALITHA:

Almost. Come here?

SFX: Nell steps closer.

LALITHA:

Nell, can I kiss you? I've been wanting to kiss you for a while now.

NELL:

Me and you, and I (STAMMERS) I, um...

LALITHA:

Is that a yes?

NELL:

Yes! Yes, it is.

SFX: The two of them kiss.

LALITHA:

Alright, now I'm ready. After you!

SCENE 9

SFX: Typing. Sips from a cup of coffee.

VALERIA:

(SIGHS)

SFX: High heels click.

CYBIL:

Miss Reyes, you're still in the office?

VALERIA:

Oh! Uh, yes. Sorry. I'm catching up.

CYBIL:

Are you clocking in overtime?

VALERIA:

I don't think I'll need to.

CYBIL:

Good.

SFX: Valeria types.

CYBIL:

Hm.

VALERIA:

What?

CYBIL:

You are behind. I didn't think it would be quite so pronounced given the talk we had a few days ago. The deadline is getting much closer.

VALERIA:

I'm trying, okay?

CYBIL:

I don't need you to try, I need results. What is your progress on—!

VALERIA:

Isn't this what the reports are for?

Beat.

VALERIA:

Sorry. Sorry, I'm... tired.

CYBIL:

The pressure is on for all of us, Valeria. This is our final week before the ceremony.

VALERIA:

I know.

CYBIL:

You're looking in rather poor shape, both for work and your health.

VALERIA:

I know.

CYBIL:

Did you contact your siblings?

VALERIA:

Working on it.

CYBIL:

Any further intel?

VALERIA:

Not... exactly.

CYBIL:

(SIGHS) If you're struggling so much with productivity, you may benefit from using some of our AI systems, you know. It is an expensive technology.

VALERIA:

Right. Maybe I will.

CYBIL:

Well, I'll be seeing you, Miss Reyes. Good night.

SFX: Cybil walks out. Valeria sips more coffee.

VALERIA:

Ugh. I mean, if it gets me out of the office sooner..

SFX: Valeria clicks over to the Lookout system. The Lookout jingle plays.

LOOKOUT:

Are you looking to install Lookout? This is version 1.2.

SFX: Click.

LOOKOUT:

Your computer and associated devices will need a reboot. Please plug in the devices you want connected with Lookout, and we'll take care of it for you.

VALERIA:

Fine, sure, whatever.

SFX: Plugging in device.

LOOKOUT:

Thanks for your cooperation!

SFX: A loading tone.

VALERIA:

God, I really do look awful. I haven't had eyebags this bad since training.

I should talk to Seb and Caine. Maybe tomorrow I'll send them something. But what to say..

SFX: Lookout's jingle plays again.

LOOKOUT:

Hello, I'm Lookout version 1.2! I'm Looking Out For You! Thanks for connecting your devices. I see what looks like your work laptop and your personal comms. Are you "Valeria Reyes?"

VALERIA:

Yes.

SFX: Ping!

LOOKOUT:

Great to meet you, Valeria! Do you want to add any family contacts? I see you have "Caine Reyes" listed here. I can make them your emergency contact.

VALERIA:

I'm... good.

Geez, this is really looking at a lot of data...

SFX: Ping!

LOOKOUT:

Okay, thanks for letting me know.

I appreciate you trusting me with your information. Lookout keeps all your data safe by viewing it, then sending it to our trusted partners at Celadon Carbonate, where we can check it across the safeguards we have designed for you. By downloading this program, you've agreed to let your data be uploaded into our database.

MUSIC: "W3lrd - the hallway 02" by Samuel F. Johanns.

VALERIA:

Oh great, I can't opt out of anything? What in the...

LOOKOUT:

I'm going to start scanning your downloads and backing them up to Celadon Carbonate's cloud! You can probably look up and see the Skyscraper. That's where our cloud lives and where all your data will be!

SFX: Load tone. Ping!

LOOKOUT:

Hi, Valeria! I just wanted to let you know, I saw some information that's of interest to Celadon Carbonate in your personal data files.

VALERIA:

What?!

LOOKOUT:

Yes! I decrypted some information from your comms that is a high priority item for Celadon Carbonate. You're not... in trouble, but your information must be sent as soon as possible.

VALERIA:

Oh no. Sentinel-!

LOOKOUT:

I'm Lookout!

VALERIA:

Fine, Lookout: this is administrator Valeria Reyes. Please affirm you've read my bioscan.

SFX: Load tone. Error.

LOOKOUT:

I'm sorry! *You* are not a valid administrative member. If you think you have gotten this message in error, please refer to Cybil Blanche for further permissions.

MUSIC: "Atmosphere Pulse" by Nikita Kondrashev.

VALERIA:

Shit, she said she was updating permissions, she must not have...

SFX: Tapping on comms.

LOOKOUT:

I see you're trying to contact Director Cybil Blanche! Would you like me to make the call for you? Please summarize what you would-!

VALERIA:

Shut up, shut up.

SFX: A phone dial tone.

CYBIL:

Miss Reyes? Is there some sort of emergency at the office?

VALERIA:

Uh... I just downloaded Lookout and I was wondering if you had me on the admin team?

CYBIL:

This doesn't sound like an emergency.

VALERIA:

It's not, I was... wondering.

CYBIL:

Well, no, I hadn't added you yet. Did this really require a call?

SFX: A comms vibrates on the other side.

CYBIL:

What's this? This is the first time I'm getting a high alert push from Lookout.

VALERIA:

Don't—! I mean, I...

CYBIL:

Who takes orders from whom? I'm opening it.

...Oh, Miss Reyes, I knew I was right when I picked you.

VALERIA:

Oh no.

CYBIL:

Come off it! Don't be so modest! If this is why you were behind, I appreciate your work. The exact coordinates for this "Cair Mallplex" outpost? Well, if that's what you had hired all those underlings to fetch your sibling for, then I suppose all the trouble was worth it.

I won't be working on this tonight, I promised dinner with my family. But first chance we get, we can begin the all-important strategizing on how to eliminate this longstanding threat. I appreciate how seriously you took this. Finally, I can show Patton... well, it doesn't matter now. This could be grounds for you to become an Alpha if we play our cards right.

Thank you, Valeria. From the bottom of my heart, thank you.

VALERIA:

Of... course.

SFX: Beep.

LOOKOUT:

Your data has been received and will go to making Glasshouse and Metropolis West that much safer. Thanks for choosing Lookout. I'm Looking Out For You!

VALERIA:

Screw. You.

SFX: Valeria breaks her screen.

MUSIC: "39+g" by Monplaisir feat. Southman.

VALERIA:

(NARRATING)

I'd been telling myself a story for a long time. A rags to riches one, with an ending I was sure was gonna be rough around the edges. But when I got there, it wasn't just rough.

It was all wrong.

I tried to bend it into shape, every sleepless night, into something I could be happy with... But those cold iron words from my youngest sibling never seemed to yield.

Here in the high-rise office, so far above the city lights that they looked like the sea of stars... I realized that I'd been doing that a long time. Bending the cold iron bars of my cage around me, pretending I liked the weight of the shackles. That as long as I could keep an eye on everyone, no one would ever hold that power against me again. But I slipped up.

The moon shone, in spite of everything. Huge and yellow, it had just started descending back into the black. Tonight, it was finally full.

OUTRO:

Hi, Eli Ramos here, creator and editor of Under the Electric Stars, an Aster Podcasting Network production. If you liked this episode, please share it with your friends and rate and review it wherever you're listening to us. Check out our new website at undertheelectricstars.com and talk to us on social media: we're [undertheelectricstarspodcast](https://www.tumblr.com/undertheelectricstarspodcast) on Tumblr, and [@utes-podcast](https://www.bluesky.com/@utes-podcast) on Bluesky. If you really like our show, you can find us on Patreon at [patreon.com/mxeliramos](https://www.patreon.com/mxeliramos), that's M-X-E-L-I-R-A-M-O-S. You can support Aster Podcasting Network at different tiers and get rewards like early access to episodes, annotated scripts, commentaries, behind the scenes posts, art, and even merch! Currently, our merch offerings are a poster for Season 3 and stickers of Nell and Ganymede! The money you give directly goes to supporting me and the actors who make these shows possible, so please support us if you have the means. Any amount helps.

Full transparency, we make \$64/month, and pretty much all of that goes to our actors. I take a nice little cut of \$5 and literally the rest of it goes to paying the actors. If you would like to contribute a little more to the writing, directing, and editing that I do, as well as the phenomenal talent of our actors, truly anything you can give is amazing. Speaking of them... Our voice talents are as follows: Motzie Dapul as Valeria Reyes, Rhea Anne as Caine Reyes, John Patneaude as Sebastian Reyes, Matheus Nogueira as Kaleo Hale, Ari B. as Ava Jafari, Christine Kim as Su-jin Yi, Kevin Paculan as Vic Vass, Robin Guzman as Jet Reyes, Sentinel, and Lookout, Lushika Preethraj as Cybil Blanche, Katriel Rose as Nell Palomo, Rue Dickey as Ganymede Moreno, and Chaitrika Budamagunta as Lalitha Suravaram. Additional voices provided by yours truly, Eli Ramos. Attributions for sounds and music used can be found in the show notes. Thanks to Audrey Pham, our \$20 Patron on Patreon. And to everyone, thanks for listening and see you in Metropolis West soon.