

ARDEN, Episode 3:

“Slick Roads Did It”

By Christopher Dole, Sara Ghaleb, and Emily VanDerWerff

Created by Christopher Dole, Emily VanDerWerff, and Sara Ghaleb

NOTE:

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INTRO

OUTRO

MICHELLE: Hey, this is Michelle Agresti, I play Bea.

TRACEY: And this is Tracey Sayed, I play Brenda. All of us here at Arden would like to thank you so much for listening!

MICHELLE: We're so glad you found our show! What helps more people find our show are your reviews on Apple Podcasts.

TRACEY: The more reviews, the more new listeners we can reach.

MICHELLE: But don't just do it for us. For every new review we get between now and October 31, we will donate a dollar to RAINN, the anti-sexual violence organization.

TRACEY: You can help us find new listeners, help those poor Arden-less souls find us, and help support an organization doing vital work.

MICHELLE: A Win-Win-Win.

ANDY: *This episode of Arden is brought to you by AuralEmoji. AuralEmoji - exactly what it sounds like. A product of Wheyface Industries. The good people.*

(music)

BEA: Last time on: Arden.

BEA: Do you remember where you were, when you found out Julie Capsom was gone?

BRENDA: Are horses pets?

BEA: We can instead do the scholarly, professional look at Ralph and Julie's backstories.

BRENDA: It was 2005. Every American movie was about 9/11.

BEA: Including a wolf orgy!

NATALIE: Julie was dying to go to UCLA.

BEA: The 2006 Halloween party was where Ralph and Julie first collided.

VINCE: She walked away, but she did the look back.

BEA: Julie had problems making friends, but she had no problem finding interested boyfriends.

JULIE: (bleep) corporations! Burn them all down!

BRENDA: We remember that there were two victims here, not one.

BEA: Capsom Case Curse!

ROSALIND: Your case files are messier than your life, but without your charm.

VINCE: You know Ralph, he was... unknowable.

BEA: The question is, did Ralph and Julie actually go on a date.

BRENDA: The answer is, yes.

POINS: I am officially serving you a cease and desist.

(end music)

BEA: Welcome back to a new episode of Arden.

Now, you may be surprised to hear that we're back, after the threat of legal action last episode. But... c'mon, guys. That was on tape. We had permission to air it. Of course we survived. As to how we survived? Well... I have to do this?

BRENDA: Legally, yes.

BEA: I can't believe this was in the contract.

BRENDA: You'd be amazed what was in the contract. And also slightly terrified.

BEA: I'm gonna need to read that contract.

BRENDA: I would strongly advise you not to. There's provisions about that.

BEA: ...Riiiiight.

BRENDA: Well, we were saved by my boss, your hero and mine, the founder of Wheyface Industries, the leader of the good people... Andy Wheyface!

BEA: Yes, the heroic efforts of... just play the tape. Because of course there's a tape. I don't know how there's a tape. Did they wire this whole station -

CLICK-PLAY.

PAMELA: Mr. Pains, surely there's a way we can be reasonable -

POINS: Your house detective threw that out the window when she threatened to sic her billionaire boss on me. Guess what: I work for a rich man too. I know how the game's played, Pamela.

BRENDA: Here's how this game is played, Aaron. My boss is so rich that if he gets in a fight with the universe, he can and will just pay the universe to take a dive.

POINS: That... was that supposed to be a threat, Mr. Bentley? Because a word of advice: have your threats make sense. The Capsom family has the legal ground here to demand the shut-down --

[SOUND EFFECT: DOORS BURSTING OPEN]

ANDY: - All right, where's the monster who made me have to spend time on the freeway! Five minutes! Five minutes of my day on the *freeway!* Do you know how much that cost me? It cost me five minutes of my life! In *traffic* - oh, it's you, Pains. How's your quoits game?

POINS: ...Sir, I can assure you I have never played quoits in my life.

ANDY: Oh, right, that's your cousin. He was telling me all about his lawyer cousin, that must be you, right? Said you were a real piece of - hey, Brenda!

BRENDA: Uh, Mr. Wheyface, when I called your office, I thought they would send your lawyers, not... you.

ANDY: I was in town. So! What's the payoff?

POINS: There's no payoff here, Mr. Wheyface. I have delivered the legal order to stop this little show of yours, and now I have other business --

ANDY: Barbecue sauce!

POINS: Let me explain to you how the law works. The Capsom family -

ANDY: They're gonna stop my pal, Brenda, who's been working on this for the last ten years from finally figuring out what happened to their daughter? That's closure, man. My pal's gonna deliver it - this is her white whale, pal, and she's gonna harpoon it and mount uh, her head on your client's mantel-abra - mantelpiece? Mantelpiece-ish.

POINS: ...The Capsom family views your "pal" Ms. Bentley as a crank who is profiting off the tragic loss of their daughter --

BRENDA: - and said tragic loss hasn't stopped them from selling the life rights to multiple studios. Or using it to pass laws they like.

POINS: That's enough out of you, Ms. Bentley, and I --

ANDY: And you are gonna go back up to their compound and tell them they can stick their lawsuit where the moon don't shine.

BRENDA: That's sun don't shine.

ANDY: Really? Which one is the one hillbillies drink?

PAMELA: That's moonshine.

ANDY: Uh huh. Hah, hillbillies... Anyway, let me tell you how this is gonna go, because we're gonna keep doing the show, and you're going to go in front of a judge, and let me tell you, I own every --

[CLICK-STOP]

BEA: This part we can't play on the air.

BRENDA: Yeah, very strict stipulations - you can't put him on air when he's talking about (bleep), (bleep), or (bleep).

BEA: ...But that's just fried noodles and eggs on a wok. With chili oil.

BRENDA: There was a whole thing with the government of Mongolia. We don't need to get into that.

BEA: I find that strangely believable.

BRENDA: It was quite a weekend. Still can't go near [eeeeeeee noise] without, you know.

BEA: Did you just go "eeeeee" with your mouth just now like someone had censored you?

BRENDA: Yeah, unlike Andy I can't afford the legal fines if I ever talk about... well. The thing I can't talk about unless I can afford the legal fines.

BEA: Do you know why your billionaire boss personally supervises all the ads for this show?

BRENDA: Billionaire is putting it mildly.

BEA: Still. One of the richest men in the world spends his days either recording radio ads or coaching people through radio ads?

BRENDA: It's the personal touch!

BEA: Well, I guess he has his priorities. Uh, so long story short, we survived, the lawsuit was dropped. And now we'll never speak of this again.

BRENDA: Legally, we can't!

[theme song plays]

BEA: *On December 25, 2007, somewhere around 11 pm, Julie Capsom ran her car off the road and into a tree, in the middle of northern California's most desolate stretch of major highway, halfway between Eureka and Crescent City, California. One witness saw her pacing outside her car, but by the time the police arrived, she had vanished. While dogs picked up her scent heading into the trees, it disappeared in the middle of a forest clearing. What happened to Julie that Christmas night? How could someone that well-known vanish, in the United States in the 2000s? And why has this case haunted us ever since? Each week, we'll explore a different part of the story and see if we can't untangle this web and find the answers. Join us, won't you, as we unravel the mystery... on Arden.*

[theme song ends]

BEA: When their classmates said goodbye to Ralph Montgomery and Julie Capsom on Friday December 23rd, 2007, no one thought that it would be the last time they would ever been seen at UCLA. In three days, it would be as though both of them had melted away into thin air. So how did they spend their respective last days? We've heard about Julie's final ride, of course, so let's delve a little into that Friday, and the last time anyone sees Ralph Montgomery.

Winter break was finally starting, and everyone was flocking home for the holidays. While LA isn't exactly a town where you curl up by the fire with hot chocolate and watch the snow fall, it's still a good place to blow off some steam. And by all accounts, Ralph needed to blow off some steam. Once again, Vince Volio.

VINCE: His head was in a pretty dark place by that point, I think. Even at parties, he'd be hangin' out in the corner, y'know? Not really talking to anybody.

BEA: Would you say it seemed like he had something on his mind?

VINCE: No (bleep), Sherlock.

BEA: Well, thank you for the comparison.

VINCE: Look man, if you're trying to set me up to say something questionable about my friend, good (bleep)ing luck. Maybe he just had a feeling he was going to finish the week dead in the trunk of a car.

BEA: Thanks to Ralph's schedule, we have a little sense of what his last day was like - at least, the last day that we know he was alive. That morning, he was apparently late for his final exam for "Climate Change: From Puzzles to Policy," having apparently skipped breakfast - good call -

BRENDA: Good call? Breakfast is the most important meal of the day!

BEA: Unless it's college dining hall breakfast.

BRENDA: Lousy food at your college?

BEA: Everyone has lousy food at their college. Except for my Bowdoin-going brother, and he couldn't stop talking about those damn November lobster dinners. We get it! You're in Maine. (under her breath) I hate Bowdoin. (normal) Anyway. Ralph was late for this class. Joyce Portis, Ralph's professor.

[CLICK-PLAY]

PROFESSOR PORTIS: Ralph had been very enthusiastic about the course, I think - he'd had some difficulty scrounging up the money for some of the field trips we took, but he'd still gone along on every one of them. But the last weeks - I recall him struggling to stay awake, getting a C for the first time. And a couple of days before this, he'd even fallen asleep in class. He seemed troubled.

BEA: So you held him after the exam was done.

PROFESSOR PORTIS: I wanted to sit down with him and hash things out - tell him, enthusiasm only carries you so far if you can't do the work, young man. But it was Christmas, and I was inclined to be lenient. I felt I'd seen this sort of thing before, but we only had a quick chat - I made him promise to come to my office hours after the break, see if we couldn't put a pin in his recent activities. And that was that. I don't recall if I gave him any advice - I do remember wishing him a merry Christmas. And the next time I saw him was on the six-o'clock news.

BRENDA: From Professor Portis' evidence, it certainly seems like Ralph didn't anticipate disappearing that night.

BEA: Or he was just trying to get his teacher off his back. Wouldn't be the first student to do it, after all.

BRENDA: True. C'mon - "I don't recall if I gave him any advice"? We've all had that professor. Seems kind of insufferable.

BEA: Don't call a witness insufferable while we're recording. It's just... tacky.

BRENDA: Just saying. No matter how much you like the subject, we've all had that professor.

BEA: God, you must've been a trip in college.

BRENDA: I had my share of youthly adventures.

BEA: Sure thing, Ferris.

BRENDA: He was in high school.

BEA: So Ralph goes to his Climate Sciences test, gets held back for a bit by his teacher. But despite what Professor Portis thinks, he's not entirely blowing off school work - or, at least, he's appearing to not blow it off. Because we know where he is during that time. Surveillance footage places Ralph at Powell Library on campus for about two hours - roughly between 11 AM and 1 PM.

BRENDA: Yes - in fact, we reviewed the footage as part of the initial investigation.

BEA: And what were your conclusions at the time?

BRENDA: Why, thank you for asking, Casely. Kindness does get you anywhere.

BEA: Everywhere. Do you mess up sayings on purpose just to be annoying?

BRENDA: When the boot fits. The department thought the visit to the library was nothing - just some last-minute cramming.

BEA: But your conclusions were different.

BRENDA: Of course they were. Both of his afternoon classes had essays as their finals for the term, not tests - which, per witnesses like Vince, Ralph had already written. And if he was working on his essay, he didn't sign onto any of the computers at Powell - he just sat in a study room with books.

BEA: What books?

BRENDA: Well, that's where it falls down. Because he doesn't actually take any books out. Whatever he wants, he just copies down the information by hand, alone in the study room, and that's that. But we did find his fingerprints on a book of romance poetry a librarian reshelfed for him.

BEA: Romance as in the era, or --

BRENDA: As in love, Valentine's Day, flowers, boxes of chocolate.

BEA: And I'm assuming that he doesn't have any poetry classes.

BRENDA: You know he doesn't. If there's anyone who knows as much about this case as I do --

BEA: Oh, please. No one, uh... has the perspective on this case you do.

BRENDA:I want to say thanks but also not.

BEA: So his mind's on Julie. Wouldn't be the first time a teenage boy figured some grand romantic gesture like that wins back the girl, which leaves him standing on the dorm lawn in frigid February weather in tights and a Renaissance hat and...

BRENDA: Do go on.

BEA: Was I saying something?

BRENDA: Given that we're recording this, I do in fact have admissible proof that you were, in fact, saying something.

BEA: Let's stay focused, Ms. Bentley.

BRENDA: Well, my theory was that he was trying to use the poetry to get over Julie, but I'd much rather hear your oddly specific story.

BEA: As you said. We're recording.

BRENDA: You're no fun.

BEA: I'd prefer to say I'm learning.

BRENDA: Well, there's a first time for everything.

BEA: Like you ever learn.

BRENDA: I don't need to. Anyway, he's at the library for a couple of hours - and he writes down some stuff - maybe homework, maybe love poetry. Maybe something else entirely. It's possible drug notes were hidden in the library books.

BEA: Drug notes?

BRENDA: Can't rule it out. We definitely found... actually, a lot of stuff hidden in the library. Lotta competition on that campus.

BEA: So that takes us to 1 PM.

BRENDA: And that's lunch! He goes to lunch, goes to his afternoon classes - everyone - even Vince - says he seems troubled, edgy, argumentative --

VINCE: I remember he was really annoyed that they'd made enchiladas.

BRENDA: He didn't like enchiladas?

VINCE: He loved enchiladas!

BRENDA: Moving on. His afternoon classes --

BEA: Attends both. The aforementioned papers in sophomore-level English lit, and sophomore-level biology, but each one has a final lecture before the holiday. His grades, again, descending in both. And that takes us to...

BRENDA: 4 PM.

BEA: And here's where the theories begin. Because we now have a three-hour gap.

BRENDA: Yeah. No one we interviewed has ever been able to fill in where Ralph Montgomery was from approximately 4:10 PM to 7:30 PM on December 22nd, 2006.

BEA: We do know a few things. We do know he didn't go back to his dorm.

BRENDA: Which would've been my guess - 19-year-old tired college boy vanishes for a couple of hours? He's probably taking a nap or otherwise, uh, relaxing.

BEA: Though hopefully not the full 3 hours.

BRENDA: We speculating on this now?

BEA: Nope. Anyway. He doesn't go back to his dorm. He doesn't go to any of his friends' dorms. He doesn't go to the library, or to any building on campus, so far as we know.

BRENDA: He might've driven off-campus, though probably not far - traffic would've been kicking in, it's a Friday night, and the people who are rushing home for Christmas are all trying to get out of town, UCLA's right by Sunset Blvd which would have completely shut down, or it's close to the 405, which would've also shut down.

BEA: But looking at his debit card, you didn't find any evidence that he'd made any purchases during that time, right?

BRENDA: Not even stopping and buying gas.

BEA: There are two working guesses as to what Ralph's doing. Which one do you favor?

BRENDA: I know which one you do - that he's gone to stalk Julie some more.

BEA: It fits with his pattern of behavior.

BRENDA: That we've heard of.

BEA: So now we can't trust what we've heard? What else do we have?

BRENDA: I get it. The pieces are all there for the stalker narrative. But the fact that it was so aggressively pushed - especially by the Capsoms - there was a clear agenda to brand Ralph as a stalker before we knew anything. It just stuck.

BEA: Meanwhile, the police had their own suspect they tried to brand --

BRENDA: We're not talking about that. And that's a... mischaracterization.

BEA: So where do you think he was going? Off to meet the mystery girl you theorized about?

BRENDA: It's a possibility. Or he's gone to meet with someone in the drug trade - his supplier. Or he's just gone to get away from it all for a couple of hours. Think about it - he's known on campus as the guy who got his heart wrecked by an honest-to-God movie star. Pretty embarrassing, right? Then he's about to go home for two weeks and hear all about this relationship and how his grades are terrible, and he's letting the family down - wouldn't you just want to get away from it all for a couple of hours? Find somewhere quiet to park and just... chill out? The point is, we don't know. And the only reason those three hours look significant are because later that night he vanished again - and this time he didn't come back. It's like a coming attraction of the real deal.

BEA: But this time he did come back. Let's let Vince tell the story.

VINCE: We're all supposed to meet at Mark's dorm at 7. Ralph rolls up at 7:30-ish. And y'know what? He'd seemed troubled before - I mean, who goes off about enchiladas like that, but right now? He seemed calm.

BEA: Like he'd been -

VINCE: Nah, Ralph didn't sample his own product. It was, like - natural calm. A before-Julie calm. There were a bunch of last-minute parties on campus. We did the rounds. Ralph - he caught some shit for getting dumped by Julie - but he seemed relaxed about it - more than he'd been before. I just remember - Mark, he's got a whole bottle of Jaeger and is drinking it over the course of the night - madman Mark, and we're in the park and he's about a quarter of the way in telling Ralph to (bleep) every girl he meets that night and call Julie in the middle of it, and Ralph's laughing, you know? Then he goes "How'd I even call Julie? My number's blocked!" And both Mark and he thought that shit was hilarious. We decide Mark needs food - which, lemme tell ya, his stomach overruled us all over my carpet - and we go to the school's late-night cafeteria. And we have chicken fingers and mozzarella sticks, and we just talk for, like, an hour. I mean, Ralph and I talk. Mark - well, it was kind of like talking. Dude's so far gone he can't tell the chicken fingers and mozz sticks apart. And we're all smiling. And it's.... It's really nice.

It's weird, but it's nice to have that as my last memory of Ralph. Talking about [bleep]. Eating cheap junk food. And smiling. And in less than a year both of them were gone. ... I'm sorry I don't remember more. People ask if he said anything important, but it's not like, "Oh, like in a movie, he said this one thing to solve the whole case, man!" Maybe he did, and I just... forgot. But he was there! He was there. And I remember feeling good. And I remember smiling. And that night he had us, and he knew he had us ...I don't have anything else to say.

(music)

BEA: At a little after midnight, Ralph helps Mark onto Vince's couch. Vince is going to look after Mark overnight, while Ralph is supposedly going back to his dorm. But instead --

BRENDA: He stops at an ATM. And he clears out his whole bank account. Now, I don't mean to say he wipes out tens of thousands of dollars - this is not a rich kid, remember. But it's more than walking-around money.

BEA: The ATM camera's footage is grainy. It lasts less than a minute. You've probably seen it. But in it, he seems.... Determined. His jaw is set. His eyes are serious - there's nothing of the smile that Vince describes. To me, this seems like a man on a mission.

BRENDA: Really? To me, he seems troubled.

BEA: But determined or troubled, this is the last time anyone sees Ralph Montgomery. As though those missing three hours earlier that day were a dress rehearsal, he walks away from that ATM and it's like he evaporates into the darkness. He's here... and he's gone. Let's take a short break, and when we come back, we'll take you through whether or not Julie could have killed Ralph, which obviously --

BRENDA: Oh, god.

BEA: What?

BRENDA: You're totally setting us up for a thing where I say yes and you say no simultaneously, and then we shout at each other as we go into break.

BEA: I wasn't setting us up! And the answer's no.

BRENDA: The answer's yes. And why does nobody talk about this? The girl had a torso in her trunk! She's absolutely a suspect!

BEA: She's not a suspect because it's impossible for her --

[BRENDA AND BEA SHOUTING AT EACH OTHER]

PAMELA: Let's take that break we promised, OK? OK.

[ad music]

BEA: Reading. Who has time for it these days? That's why emojis are so popular. Instead of saying: "That's great!" you can send a smiley face, instead of "That's sad!" you can send a frowny face, and instead of "I'm horny!" you can send an eggplant, for some reason - oh, come on, you totally know why. It saves time writing it, and time reading it.

But what if you could do that... with conversations? Introducing AuralEmoji. For a starter pack costing only \$9.99, you can simplify all of your communications. Now, everyone will be able to understand you, and you'll save valuable time! Instead of telling someone you're happy they got married:

[wordless shriek meant to indicate delight; the Wedding March]

If you need to tell someone you're sorry they got fired:

[crowd groaning/sound of distress most resembling that of an unhappy walrus]

If you want bae to come over to Netflix and chill:

[sitcom audience applauds, unzipping pants, multiple bleeps]

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[sexy bass line, muffled voices, radar sounds, boing sounds]

AuralEmoji: A new universal language. Brought to you by Wheyface Industries. The good people.

PAMELA: And we're back. Now... play nice, kiddies. I can only listen to so many AuralEmoji ads in one day.

BEA: Has it been all day?

PAMELA: You know that abyss that stares back at you? *I know what it sounds like.*

BRENDA: ANYWAYS. It is absolutely possible for Julie Capsom to have killed Ralph Montgomery because there are gaps of time where nobody knows where she was.

BEA: It is impossible for Julie Capsom to have killed Ralph Montgomery because there is no way she could have hid the body in her trunk for that long.

BRENDA: It's known she was holed up at the Capsom compound from Friday at 7 pm until Sunday when she takes her final drive, but there are at least three times when she could very well have slipped out.

BEA: But no single witness says she did do that. You know that - you helped take the police statements.

BRENDA: Every witness was a Capsom family member, friend, or employee. And the Capsom party line is Ralph did it. Which, unless you know far more active dismembered torsos than I do, is not possible.

BEA: So how's she hide the body?

BRENDA: If she kills him during the first time - 9 AM on Saturday - she drives out, she hides the body in her car in her private garage.

BEA: Someone would've noticed the smell.

BRENDA: Air-conditioned.

BEA: Who air-conditions a private garage?

BRENDA: Rich people. And she's gone for about two hours. Plenty of time to meet up, do it, and get back.

BEA: So where'd she do it? And why wasn't there any physical evidence?

BRENDA: Maybe she cleans the garage. Or he never leaves the trunk. For what it's worth, I don't think it was during the first time.

BEA: OK. When's the second time?

BRENDA: Fundraising dinner. Gets started at 6. Julie doesn't make an appearance until 9. Witnesses said it looked like she was shaken and had been crying. That gives her three hours, and she's obviously distressed. Like killing an ex distressed?

BEA: But if it's a fundraising dinner, people are coming and going all the time, surely someone would've noticed --

BRENDA: Or she slips out in the crowd.

BEA: So how's she get the body back unnoticed?

BRENDA: Which is why I think it happens overnight on Christmas Eve. Everyone's asleep, she sneaks out, she does it. Because at some point that torso ends up in Julie Capsom's trunk.

BEA: I'm just saying that there are literally hundreds of people on that compound between when Ralph disappears and Julie leaves. How do we not have *one story* that tells us she did leave? And how does *no one notice any evidence that there's a torso in a nearby trunk?*

BRENDA: So then maybe she stops at the *torso store* while drivin' like a bat outta [bleep] on her way out of LA, "Oh, sorry, I'm in a rush, I'll have my ex-boyfriend's torso to go, please -- "

BEA: Or maybe it was planted by someone at one of the parties! Something like that makes more sense than "Oh, I'm just gonna butcher this guy while all my rich friends watch!"

BRENDA: That's not my argument and you know it's not --

BEA: I'm just saying there are flaws!

BRENDA: Oh, like your argument is perfect --

BEA: Like YOUR argument is perfect!

[BEA AND BRENDA SHOUTING AT EACH OTHER]

PAMELA: Y'know what? I think it's time to hear more about... AuralEmoji.

[patriotic brass band plays]

ANDY: AuralEmoji! Liberate yourself from ever needing to read again. AuralEmoji! It's the sound of freedom!

[imitation-eagle screech, gunfire, etc.]

ANDY: AuralEmoji! It's a gas, gas, gas!

[hissing sound]

ANDY: AuralEmoji! Well... there's really no words to describe it. And there shouldn't be.

[huge, beautiful heavenly thrumming sound]

ANDY: AuralEmoji. Brought to you by Wheyface Industries. The Good People.

[car driving sounds; background music on radio]

BRENDA: It was a hot, dry Christmas in Los Angeles the last time anyone saw Julie Capsom alive. Like most Christmases at the Capsom compound, it began rather late in the morning with a rather garish brunch.

BEA: Rosalind, in between taking on Brenda's cases which she really shouldn't be doing because she's not a licensed PI -

ROSALIND: It's no prob. Kinda fun, really.

BEA: - Is driving us along Julie's route up the coast.

ROSALIND: They let me buy a ton of frappuccinos, so I am rarin' and ready to go.

BRENDA: How goes the (bleep) case, Rosalind?

ROSALIND: Well, I was following (bleep) (bleep) and then stopped off at the cafe to get some croissants, where I saw (bleep) (bleep) (bleep) (bleep) and I used the croissants as a (bleep) and, long story short, the police have him now.

[Brief silence]

BRENDA: Damn.

BEA:Why don't we hear from Natalie for a moment?

BEA: Can you tell me about anything more about the Christmas party?

NATALIE: Right. Well, it's a thing that happens every year - or, rather, did. The Capsoms get all of their family and friends there on the compound in Beverly Hills, there's this

huge amazing brunch, just oh my god, ridiculous. Five courses - any kind of food you could want.

BEA: When did you get there?

NATALIE: Around 11-ish. It generally starts at 10, but it really starts at 11. Y'know, California time. Julie's already pretty antsy. Which isn't too much of a shock, I mean, you know what she was like, you know what her parents were like. She was clearly gonna do a jailbreak that afternoon no matter what - I figure we'll get through the brunch, finish opening presents, then light out for Malibu or something.

BRENDA: But then she gets the call, right?

NATALIE: Uh... yeah.

BRENDA: You're not sure?

NATALIE: I think so. Honestly - a lot of that day's a blur, y'know? There's all these people you have to greet. It's just... moments stay with you. Not everything does. I remember getting there. I remember the call - which has to have not been that long after, given when that weirdo reported seeing her and all the other crap. But she was fidgety. Antsy. Then she gets the call, and it's like... bam. She is just outta there.

BRENDA: Did she seem like she was on anything?

NATALIE: No. She wouldn't let her guard down around her parents. Wasn't even touching her champagne. The last time... the last time I saw her, she was jumping into her car, wearing that gorgeous jacket Tyrell had given her, like she was making a break for it. And - can you seem cool and frantic at the same time? Cause... I dunno. She was clearly on about something. She was - she seemed primal. Wild. But still - cool just clung to her. Then she was gone.

I left messages for her. I called about three times. But honestly, it wasn't entirely out of character for her to not get back to me. At least, I didn't think it was at the time. And who can blame her for wanting space?

[car trip sounds, new background music]

BEA: And that's it for Julie Capsom, until Gerald sees her that night.

And so, Julie drives from Beverly Hills to Eureka. As we've already said, that's a hell of a drive. 12 hours if you're pushing it. Julie pushes it all right. She pushes it hard, because on the timeline we've got, Julie manages it in 11 hours.

BRENDA: Spot her that there's no traffic in LA or the Bay Area due to the holiday. It's still a stretch. So the ol' alien hypothesis is looking great.

BEA: Are you going to try to get aliens into every episode?

BRENDA: What do you think she was listening to?

BEA: You mean on the radio?

BRENDA: Unless you think she had a "panicked runaway" mix tape.

BEA: I dunno. Maybe she was listening to me on my radio station. That'd be pretty neat.

BRENDA: Honestly, sounds pretty unlikely.

BEA: Aw, c'mon. Don't be that way.

BRENDA: Hey, I'm just saying.

BEA: You brought it up.

BRENDA: I'm just saying - I'm driving that long, I need to be listening to something or else I start to fall asleep.

[fade out; fade back in to new car trip/music sounds]

BEA: For the record, we're now four hours into the drive. Rosalind, how are you holding up?

ROSALIND: On my third frappuccino, and I feel like I could recite I'm The Very Model of a Modern Major General while doing calculus!

BEA: You're a saint.

ROSALIND: I am the very model of a --

BRENDA: Should we talk about the weather?

BEA: Sure. So let's state, for the record, we're doing this in pretty damn nice weather - clear as the eye can see.

Julie Capsom... was decidedly not.

BRENDA: Yes. By the time she got about six hours out of LA, and still plowing north, she's starting to run into some serious weather conditions. Rain, then snow is coming down - and California roads are not built for water in general, let alone snow.

BEA: The least amount of rain on the road and LA panics at the shocking sight of this mysterious sky-water.

BRENDA: It's actually a real problem. But the roads get slicker than...

BEA: You don't have a line for that?

BRENDA: Not one I can say on the air.

ROSALIND (laughing): It's a dirty line!

BEA: Eyes on the road. You knew we were going to talk about the weather and you didn't prepare a line.

BRENDA: ...Did you want me to?

BEA: No, I'm just surprised.

BRENDA: It's been a long drive.

BEA: But yes, anyway, the roads are getting dangerous. But she just keeps the pedal to the metal.

BRENDA: It's legitimately shocking she makes it as far as she does. Any way you slice it, Julie Capsom was driving into disaster that night. ...Was that profound? I didn't mean it to sound that way, but it kinda sounded profound.

BEA: You want everything you say to sound profound.

BRENDA: It is a life goal.

[sound cut; time has passed; car/music-on-radio sounds]

ROSALIND: What about the blood?

BEA: Hm?

ROSALIND: It's just, everyone talks about the torso, but didn't they find a lot of Julie's blood in the trunk? That's weird, right? Lot of blood.

BRENDA: And only the trunk.

BEA: Yeah. It's pretty weird all right. But let's not forget, she was injured. Probably disoriented.

ROSALIND: Like she opened the trunk specifically to bleed out into. Maybe she just cared about the interior of the car a lot. She's a rich kid, she cares about appearances, she's going through some stuff, maybe she's, I don't know, I can store my blood? But who thinks like that? Do you think like that - I definitely don't think like that, but maybe I should?

BEA: C'mon, eyes on the road. It's just - we've just got someone to meet up there, I don't want to keep him waiting.

[Sound FX: Door opening]

BEA: Hello!

WALLACE: Bea! Good to see you!

BEA: When you think of California, you probably don't think of the towns of Eureka and Crescent City. Popped on the coast at the far northern end of the state, they're both former fishing and logging communities that would feel more at home in the Pacific Northwest than in a state known for white sand beaches.

But when I took a job in Eureka, I quickly came to love it. It's a smaller town -- only around 25,000 people -- filled with people who love their privacy. But, like any good small town, it's got its oddballs and its quirks. Living there felt a little like living in a TV show.

WALLACE: Yep. Yep. It's a little weird living here, but folks look out for each other.

BEA: This is my old boss...

WALLACE: Wallace Wallis.

BEA: Believe it or not, they're spelled differently.

WALLACE: I was The Wave's station manager when Julie Capsom disappeared. Retired now.

BEA: Since Wallace was so invaluable to helping me out when I looked into this case the first time, he agreed to drive with us up to where Julie's car was found.

WALLACE: How long did the drive take you?

BRENDA: Twelve and a half hours. So we made pretty decent time in the end, thanks to our assistant.

WALLACE: The assistant's in the back of the car?

BEA: Yeah, we pulled up, she finished her seventeenth frappuccino, yelled that she could see through time, and then immediately face-planted into the horn. Good kid.

[Sound FX: Car door shutting, feet crunching in gravel]

WALLACE: This is it!

BEA: It's a long stretch of highway, mostly straight, lined on all sides by tall redwoods. We're about an hour north of Eureka, in a section of the coastline where highway 101 flirts with state park land at every turn. Nobody lives out here. There are a couple of vacation cabins, but on Christmas night, nobody would have been in them.

WALLACE: And another half hour or so north is Crescent City.

BEA: Crescent City is basically your last stop before Oregon. It's where you live if you want to be a Californian --

WALLACE: But only a little bit! [He laughs at his joke.]

BEA: In and of itself, Julie's car crashing up here shouldn't be so remarkable. It was foggy, and there was a light mixture of sleet and snow in with the fog.

WALLACE: Yep, yep. It can snow up here.

BEA: She seemed to have simply missed a curve and plowed into a tree. It could happen to anyone in such bad weather.

BRENDA: So where's the cabin?

WALLACE: This way.

[more walking]

WALLACE: We get a fair few people up here just for this, y'know. People like you, trying to solve the mystery. Fans of Julie and her mother. They put up shrines from time to time, someone takes 'em down, not sure who. Maybe the police, maybe park rangers.

BRENDA: What do the locals think?

WALLACE: They don't. You've got a couple of tourist shops in town that sell memorabilia - just copies of Julie's films, the films that were made about her, some cheap cash-in books - didn't you write a book?

BRENDA: For the record, if I did write a book or have written a book, it wouldn't be a cash-in.

WALLACE: All right. There it is.

BEA: Who owns it now?

WALLACE: No idea.

[CLICK-STOP]

BEA: At this point, Brenda climbed up to the cabin, while Wallace and I moved to approximately where Julie's car crashed. It's a small building - one floor, maybe three, four rooms. A little older to be sure, but nice enough if you stock it well. Conveniently positioned with both road and off-road access.

It was locked, and no one was home, but Brenda got up there and confirmed that yes, from where the living-room window was positioned, you could plausibly have seen Julie's car that night, depending on the fog and snow cover.

The problem, however, remains tracks. Certainly, there was no one there by the time police arrived, and there were no tracks leading to or from the cabin's door. It's almost as though someone had wiped it with a broom. As though someone had been prepared and just waiting for Julie Capsom to arrive.

As though that call - and there was indeed a call - I've seen the records that prove it - that call was a signal. But a signal for what?

[sound cut; outdoors again]

BEA: So that's one mysterious witness who may or may not have seen what happened. Let's talk about the one we do know about.

WALLACE: Right. She's seen by one old codger who used to live around here named Gerald Abernathy. Now since it was Christmas night, so far as we know, he's the only person who drove by, but he pulled over to ask if she needed help.

BEA: I should interject here to say that cell phone coverage up here is spotty in 2017, when we're recording this, so you can imagine how it was in 2007.

Gerald's report of Julie's behavior is the first thing that sparks most people's interest in this case. It certainly reached out and grabbed me.

WALLACE: I talked to him shortly after police let him go, and he said she was wild-eyed. He thought she might be drunk, but he couldn't smell anything on her. But when he tried to approach her, she swung on him with a tire iron.

[sound cut; studio background]

BEA: So Gerald leaves her alone. Drives for a phone. That takes a half-hour.

BRENDA: And by then, per Gerald, the skunk-ape has done its work.

BEA: Ah, yes. The skunk-ape.

BRENDA: It's what it sounds like.

BEA: Yup. We'll get to more of Gerald next episode, but there is something very important that we need to tell our listeners now. When we made our plans to come up here, we specifically wanted to reach out to Gerald to hear his account, what's stuck with him over the years. But...

BRENDA: Gerald's vanished. Potentially another victim of the Capsom Case Curse.

BEA: I love saying Capsom Case Curse, don't you?

BRENDA: It does give me a chill.

BEA: So yes. Gerald has vanished. No contact information. No one around here - and everyone at least knew him - knows where he went. It's like he, too, vanished off into the wild blue yonder alongside Julie and Ralph. So if you know where we can find Gerald Abernathy, please contact us as soon as possible.

Anyways, Wallace - God love him - is getting up there, so he opted to wait by the car, while Brenda and I proceeded to the clearing. It's a two-mile walk. Beautiful. Peaceful.

[walking/outdoor sound effects; ominous music]

BEA: So. This is it.

BRENDA: Looks a bit different from the first time I came here. No snow, for one thing.

BEA: Look at that, someone's put a photo of Julie by the tree there. Unlit candle, too. That's nice. Hey, if you put up shrines to Julie, we'd love to hear from you. Contact's on our website, please get in touch. The clearing is... about maybe 300, 400 feet all around? It's just about dusk now. And it's... beautiful. No light pollution. The stars are overhead, shining out at us, in the dark. The deep and lovely dark of night. And... maybe this view, this perfect night... maybe that's the last thing Julie Capsom ever saw.

BRENDA: So, the tracks got to about...

[walking]

BRENDA: ...here.

BEA: So it's the dead of night. Julie is injured, disoriented, punchy after the long drive. Most of us would just stay at the car, you're on the road, you can be found, you can take shelter. But Julie doesn't do that. She staggers off the road --

BRENDA: And she's going fast too. You can tell from how deep the tracks are - it's a power walk at minimum. Probably a jog.

BEA: There's a little blood spatter on the snow, right?

BRENDA: Yes. We get there with the dogs, we're pretty sure we're going to find a body. It's dark as you can imagine. All twisted, gnarled trees at night - the kind of night that makes you believe in a skunk ape.

BEA: And she's making a straight line, too. Whatever she's running from in LA, she has one instinct... get away. And she does. She's frantic. Wild. She would be, wouldn't she?

BRENDA: Hm.

BEA: It's just a thought. Everyone who sees them in their last days described Ralph as troubled and Julie as wild. And I can't help but wonder if - you would know, do you get uniformity of witnesses like that in cases?

BRENDA: Sometimes. They're teenagers. Both real heart-on-the-sleeve types.

BEA: I just can't help but think that we're reading what happened into what happened before, y'know. We expect kids like Ralph to be troubled. We expect starlets like Julie to be wild - people who run away like her to be wild.

BRENDA: Because they were.

BEA: And that's the story everyone expects. It's - it's confirmation bias. But maybe they were something more too. Or something else. I just... we have to be missing something.

BRENDA: Of course we're missing something. Otherwise we'd have the answer.

BEA: Hmph. So... is this about it?

BRENDA: Yeah. She gets to here - and nothing. Two deep tracks - like she's planted here for awhile. A last little bit of blood spatter. And for all we know, two wings unfurled from Julie Capsom's back and she's off into the night sky.

BEA: Or aliens.

BRENDA: Standing out here, you can see why I entertained the notion at least.

[music stops]

BEA: Maybe.

A long, long pause.

BEA (CONT.): Should we head into town?

BRENDA: Yeah. We've seen all we can here for now.

BEA: Just a sec - the picture's fallen over. Let me just put it back up.

BEA: So now we're up here in Eureka. I'd like to thank The Wave for letting us use their recording studio, as we're going to be sticking around for a couple of days to look into the police investigation, and maybe get some answers about that phone call from the cabin.

BRENDA: And it's gonna suuuuuuuck.

BEA: What?

BRENDA: Just... trust me on this. It's gonna suck.

BEA: So there you have it. Both Ralph Montgomery and Julie Capsom are gone. So what happened next? The answer's more complicated than you'd guess. That wraps it up for this episode of --

[door opens]

ANDY: How are my two favorite investigators?

BEA: ...Mr. Wheyface?! How the [bleep] did - what are you doing here?!

ANDY: I just bought this station too! Brenda told me you used to work here, so I figure they must know what they're doing, and -- well, I'm in the entertainment biz now! Hey, Brenda, what's tricks?

BRENDA: I, uh.... Good to see you?

ANDY: No, seriously, what's tricks? I heard people saying that exact phrase today, and did I miss out on some kind of slang?

BEA: ... Right. Well, thanks again for saving our hides --

ANDY: Remember that. You owe me one. [ominous pause] Hahaha! Anyways. You two have given me the bug, frankly, and now I must roam forth, seeking the fabled state of mind that is Hollywood.

BEA: What?

ANDY: Hollywood. Y'know. That mythical land of fame and fortune that we all seek, the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. The oldest folk tale in America - Hollywood! For I have ideas that shall change the face of entertainment as we know it!

BEA: No, Hollywood is an actual place. In Los Angeles.

ANDY: ...No, it isn't.

BEA: It's right by the 101 on Highland? Honestly, it's kind of a lousy place too - literally everywhere around Hollywood is much, much nicer than actual Hollywood.

ANDY: ...Huh. That is valuable information. Well, toodles! I have some calls to make, a plane to catch, possibly someone who knows something about maps to either hire and/or fire.

[door shutting]

BRENDA: ...Yeah, that's going to happen more often than you'd like.

BEA: Wonderful.

BRENDA: He took it well. Better than when I finally proved to him that kookaburras can't fly.

BEA: What do you mean, kookaburras --

BRENDA: Kookaburras. Can't. Fly. It is *very important* that kookaburras cannot fly.

BEA: Right. Of course. How silly of me. Kookaburras can't fly.

BRENDA: Exactly.

BEA: We can talk about this later. So yes - the police investigation, the media frenzy - all this and more on the next episode of Arden.

ANDY: Thank you for listening to Arden. If you haven't bought your starter pack of AuralEmoji yet, you're a [horrendous sound like Cthulhu blowing a raspberry]. Brought to you by Wheyface Industries. The good people.

[Julie's Waltz begins]

CREDITS:

TODD: Arden was created by Todd VanDerWerff, Christopher Dole, and Sara Ghaleb. This week's episode was written by those same three people. Our audio engineer was Elizabeth Aubert. Our editor this week was Linus Edwards. Our cast is:

MICHELLE: Michelle Agresti.

TRACEY: Tracey Sayed.

SHANNON: Shannon Estabrook.

CHARLITA: Charlita Gaston.

BEN: Benjamin Watts.

LINDSAY Z: Lindsay Zana.

ROBERT: Robert Fleet.

LINDSAY S: Lindsay Seim.

GRANT: Grant Patrizio.

JOHN: John Rael.

MIA: Mia Drake.

TODD: The score is by Christopher Hatfield. The logo was by Dylan Farr. If you're enjoying Arden, or even if you're not and you want to drive us from the face of the Internet, there are two ways you can do that. You can rate/review/subscribe to us wherever you found it - Apple Podcasts, Stitcher, etc. etc. You can also look for us on Patreon, you can toss a couple bucks there, that will get you access to special exclusive episodes, other prizes, and all sorts of fun things. Tweet at us, @ArdenPod on Twitter. Our website is ardenpodcast.com. We're also on Facebook, Instagram, Tumblr, you can come and talk to us there if you really want to. As always, our set construction, which we blew at least 35 million on, was by Ben Watts. Come back next week for more adventures in Arden. Thank you, good night.

[Julie's Waltz ends]

[post-script]

BEA: Hi! This is Bea Casely from Arden, a Wheyface Radio program. Do you think you know what happened to Julie Capsom? What about Ralph Montgomery? If you have any theories or questions you'd like to ask me about send us a message through our tip line on our website, or tweet at us at @ArdenPod on twitter. I am doing a Q&A in episode 6, and any theory or question you have about the case, or the show, may be addressed in the show if you send it in before October 10th. Remember, no theory is too outlandish! Not when I have to deal with Brenda all day.

