

**Arden**  
**Episode 212: "A Piece of Work"**  
**By Christopher Dole**

**Series created by Emily VanDerWerff, Christopher Dole, and Sara Ghaleb**

**REGULAR CAST:**

BEA CASELY: Michelle Agresti  
BRENDA BENTLEY: Tracey Sayed  
PAMELA PINK: Charlita Gaston  
ANDY WHEYFACE: Benjamin Watts  
LORENA CHRISTOPHER: Mia Drake  
DANA HAMILL: Libby Woodbridge  
OLIVIA BRECKENRIDGE: Saoirse Ó  
Súilleabháin

**GUEST CAST:**

TRUDY HAMILL: Rebecca Metz  
ROWAN DABROWSKI: Ptolemy Slocum  
ALEXANDRIA "RED" DUTTON: Nelinda  
Palomino  
TERESA HOLLANDAISE: Jennifer Liao  
NASHVILLE OSRIC: Grant Patrizio  
JILL CLAY: Lindsay Seim  
WILLOW DABROWSKI: Julia Selden  
HELEN FAIRFIELD: Katie Wright  
MR. MURDER MAN: Briggon Snow  
MR. MR. MURDER MAN: Mischa Stanton  
SERVER: Lindsay Seim  
MOTHER: Nelinda Palomino  
OLDER MAN: Robert Fleet  
OLDER WOMAN: Jennifer Liao  
ANGRY FRENCH CHEF: Ptolemy Slocum  
FORTINBRAS EXEC: Katie Wright  
GUARD: John Rael  
DOCTOR: Christopher Dole

**CONTENT WARNING: This episode contains gunshots, adult language, adult situations, tense family situations, discussions of gore, discussions of medical abuse, violence, death transphobia, homophobia, misogyny, mental illness, hunting, discussions of grief and the mourning process.**

**GLOSSARY:**

**RED = STUDIO**

**GREEN = FLASHBACK**

**PINK= MONTAGE**

**PURPLE = FIELD AUDIO**

**BLUE = ADVERTISEMENTS**

**BLACK = NOT "RECORDED"**

**ROWAN: My name is Rowan Dabrowski. And it's my job to see if Wheyface Industries will be bringing you Arden Presents: A Town Called Elsinore. [beat] Let's get to work.**

**[click play -- it's the clip from episode 203]**

**DANA: Hard to explain how big it is on the radio, huh? Big and open and... like if you just knew where to look, you'd see something bigger than yourself and get it. Y'know?**

**[end clip -- Bea in the studio]**

**Dana Hamill killed three people. She destroyed a ranch that her family had built generations earlier, one that had withstood winds and rain and snow... but could not withstand her.**

**[music begins to swell -- a truly massive version of the Arden theme]**

**And we are left wondering who Dana truly was, the people who knew her best only able to offer stories meant to explain her, while she lies comatose in a hospital bed. Finally and truly as helpless as she always claimed to be.**

**To lay this tragedy solely at the Dana's feet ignores what makes this nation what it is. This is not a unique story. There are places like this scattered throughout America, places where quiet, lonely lives fester and turn mean. Every town in every county in every state has secrets that grow ever more bitter behind closed doors, and the same was true for this town, a Town Called--**

**[click play, a heavier sound, a tape recorder; a quiet living room, a clock softly ticking]**

**JILL: You need anything, with your tea Rowan? Someone dropped off these ginger cookies--**

**ROWAN: No, thank you. [the sound of cards shuffling] Oh, I should ask. Do you mind?**

**JILL: Do I mind if you... smoke playing cards?**

**ROWAN: [laughs] No. I like to shuffle them as we talk. Keeps my mind clear. Now, we should--**

**JILL: Whatever makes you comfortable. Sorry, I'm not sure what it is you think I can help with?**

ROWAN: My apologies. No one explained that to you! I'm in the final stages of an audit of A Town Called Elsinore, the show the Arden team made about Dana Hamill. I'm in Montana to check their reporting, make sure there are no ethical lapses, dot I's, cross T's. Pamela Pink -- their producer -- she's an old student of mine, --Well, you don't care. [beat] I know this is extraordinarily painful, so I'm not gonna take more than an hour of your time, I promise.

JILL: A Town Called Elsinore. Hm.

ROWAN: Let's get down to business. Please state your name, title, and pronouns into that recorder.

JILL: I'm Jill Clay, she/her. I'm a reporter at the Hatchet Falls Evening Beacon. I cover city hall, the school board, and girls basketball. [beat] Oh, and I edit the jumble.

ROWAN: And... when you feel ready... tell me your relevance to the fire at Hamill Hills.

JILL: I'm... I was Jake Wunder's fiancée. We were getting married in August. We've been together since autumn 2015.

ROWAN: [beat] Did you interact with the Arden crew?

JILL: A couple of times. They seemed nice! I really loved Bea Casely's work. We talked shop a little bit, but I think I was too starstruck. She tried, though. She kept comparing Jake to some fireman she used to date. She also really wanted me to add kimchi to my pickling plans?

ROWAN: Oh yeah. She gave me fifteen jars of pickled okra. They are still in my trunk. [beat] God, I hate okra.

JILL: ...If you'd be willing, that'd be a nice change from all the casseroles everyone keeps bringing. I feel like I've had nothing else since. It's like they're besieging me!

ROWAN: Of course. More than happy to.

JILL: Thanks. *Please* take one of these. I swear they're delicious, I just can't. I don't know what it is about grief that seems to prompt casseroles. [beat] I have to say: I love *Biting Ice*. It's one of the books that made me want to be a journalist.

ROWAN: [pauses in shuffling] That's very kind, thank you.

JILL: The last few pages, when you talk about loss--

ROWAN: Sorry, Ms. Clay. We should get back to the matter at hand. [resumes shuffling]

JILL: I read them at Jake's funeral. Is all I was going to say.

ROWAN: [shuffling stutters, before resuming] Again, that is very kind. [beat] In your conversations with Jake, did you get a sense of the Arden crew doing anything unethical?

JILL: I wouldn't say unethical, no. [cards shuffle] ...Except-- [Rowan knows better than to jump in] Jake called me right before he arrived at the ranch that night to tell me he might not be home until morning. And then he said something like, "Shit! They're here? I told them not to come!"

ROWAN: "They" being the Arden team?

JILL: I guess? [chuckle] Jake always joked about them being a bunch of loose cannons. [beat] Why *were* they there, you know?

ROWAN: I was led to believe they were closest to the scene. And they did get there first.

JILL: Jake had the full Elsinore police force there. All three of them, but still. And he'd called for backup from Hatchet Falls. Even the fire trucks were-- [trails off, sniffing]

ROWAN: I'm sorry. If you have Kleenex somewhere --

JILL: No, no, no. I'm *fine*. [beat] They didn't find a body. I keep thinking the door will open, and he'll just--

ROWAN: Without a body, it's easy for hope to sneak in. Too easy.

JILL: I told myself I wasn't going to date a cop, you know? Reporters and cops... it's bad news.

ROWAN: My mentor said there are no good cops, only slick cops. And don't get played by them.

JILL: My boss said something like that, yeah. But OK, say he actually *was* a good cop. Look where that got him. Charging headfirst into something he didn't understand because it was the right thing to do. [beat] And look where that got me.

ROWAN:[beat] I want to circle back to the Arden crew being at the ranch. Brenda Bentley charged in right after Jake, and I just assumed he asked her to follow him in--

JILL: He wouldn't have asked her to follow. But she did, like all of them did. The Arden people. Inserted themselves where they weren't wanted, but every time you tried to dig them out, they'd wedge themselves in deeper. Did they make all us rural folks look like bumfuck dummies?

ROWAN: They didn't. They really tried to get the place right, I think.

JILL: I keep coming back to something Bea said to me. She wanted to know where "the locals" went, so she could talk to them. Like she didn't realize I was one of the locals, because I had a Kate Spade purse and a \$50 haircut. Like where I'm from is a costume you can just put on. Or a skin you could shed. She was just a tourist.

[a SUDDEN, JARRING BURST of NOISE. We're listening to another podcast]

*MR. MURDER MAN: A murder takes place every sixty seconds. Murder by gun, murder by knife, murder by car, murder by wife! How do you keep track of all this murder? With me, Mr. Murder Man!*

*MR. MR. MURDER MAN: And me, Mr. Mr. Murder Man!*

*MR. MURDER MAN: And today we're continuing our coverage of a real hot one: the Hamill Hills Ranch Fire! [blow up sound effect]*

*MR. MR. MURDER MAN: Some would say that pun was insensitive. I would say, they're intellectually weak and that pun was fire! [they high five]*

*MR. MURDER MAN: You know who doesn't deserve a sweet high five? Arden!*

*MR. MR. MURDER MAN: Oh! Sick Burn!*

ROWAN: Wills?

*MR. MURDER MAN: That's right, we're going there*

ROWAN: Willow, honey -- [Mr. Murder Man fades as Willow takes her headphones off]

WILLOW: Did that go okay? [beat] That good, huh? [beat] I took your advice and went exploring. There's a CVS at that end of the street, and there's a Starbucks at the other end. Really getting a feel for the heartland here.

ROWAN: What are you listening to?

WILLOW: Mr. Murder Man.

ROWAN: Willow... [he trails off] Listen, you can choose the media you consume, but--

WILLOW: Let me guess. *They're* vultures, too.

ROWAN: That woman I just talked to, she lost somebody she loved very much in that fire, and to hear it turned into something so callous and silly and-- [sighs] Also, Mr. Mr. Murder Man's sound effects are weak sauce. The man thinks he's Michael Winslow, but--

WILLOW: Who?

ROWAN: Michael Winslow? The man of 10,000 sound effects? Police Academy? Please tell me- Never mind. Just... these things happened to people, Willow. That's all. They happened to people.

WILLOW: [totally uninterested] Oh, hey, mom sent us this! [hands him phone]

ROWAN: You see that cutting she's holding? *That* is a hundred thousand years old. [beat] The *whole colony* is older than the human civilization itself! It's the oldest living thing in/ the world--

WILLOW: Mom wants to know if you took your pills. /Have you?

ROWAN: Right, right./ It's getting to be that time, isn't it? ...A hundred thousand years. And it still doesn't know how it ends.

[click-play -- these scenes have a different tone; they're obviously recordings]

*BRENDA: I haven't talked about the fire with anyone. The doctor. Pamela knows a bit. That's it.*

*ROWAN: Hold on a second. You haven't talked to Bea?*

*BRENDA: No. And if she wants to hear it, she can just dig up this tape. God knows she will. [deep breath] Wunder and I go in. He'd realized from the video they were in the basement, so he leads the way. When we get down there, a beam's fallen on Dana, knocked her out. I go to lift it. Wunder - he goes straight for Trudy. She's unconscious, zip-tied to her chair.*

*ROWAN: And where was Clyde?*

*BRENDA: ...Somehow still alive. Even with that carving knife in his chest and all the smoke, he's still trying to choke out something. I get the beam off Dana, but Wunder's*

*just sawing away on the ziptie with his stupid little pocketknife. He should've pulled the knife out of Clyde! Not like it would have made a difference to Clyde, but Wunder wouldn't have done it anyway. [beat] It sounds like the whole house is going to fall apart any second. I yell we gotta go. Wunder says he's right behind me. I know he isn't. I hoist Dana over my shoulder and get out of there. It's all sweat and smoke and the house... it sounds like Clyde. Like it's choking too. I keep my head down, focus on one step at a time. And soon enough... I'm on grass. Then I let myself collapse. I guess the house came down pretty soon after that.*

**ROWAN:** ....Why did you go into the fire?

**BRENDA:** What the hell else was I supposed to do?

**[CLICK-PLAY; an auction is taking place in the background. Throughout the scene, we hear an AUCTIONEER taking bids on various pieces of ranching equipment]**

**NASHVILLE:** HEY! [the auctioneer acknowledges him] That little Farmall's real pretty.

**ROWAN:** The... tractor?

**NASHVILLE:** Course it's a tractor. What else you think a Farmall could be! Shit. Bein' outbid. FOUR THOUSAND! [beat] That outta hold 'em off. Now. To answer your initial question, I'm Nashville Osric. Elsinore city councilman. And get outta here with the pronouns crap.

**ROWAN:** I'll take that as an implicit he/him. All of this junk is what was recovered from the fire?

**NASHVILLE:** It's not *junk*. Dan and Clyde's *daddy* drove that tractor.

**ROWAN:** And now somebody else is gonna drive it.

**NASHVILLE:** I saw the old man on that very machine. At Clyde's sixth birthday party. I don't remember much of it. I was just 5, after all. They probably had a cake. It was a long time ago. One thing I *do* remember is Dan beaned me with a baseball. Hard. I must've been bleeding for minutes on end.

**ROWAN:** Jesus. [beat] Did he mean to hit you?

**NASHVILLE:** No idea. But he starts laughing. And then his mom comes outta nowhere and *twists* his ear so hard he shrieks. She drags him inside by that ear. He sobs and screams the whole way. She doesn't say a *word*. Her face - it's just - nothing. Like it's all routine. The old man watches this, sighs. He goes and gets on the Farmall and, well, he

got the hell outta there. Puttering off down the hill, off to check on the cattle or something. Look, if his wife was my wife, well... I get it! [laughs, beat] Clyde brought over some napkins, so I could clean up. It was *his* party, and he brought *me* napkins. [sighs] After their dad left --

ROWAN: That day on the Farmall?

NASHVILLE: No, he finally had enough one day and left for good. [beat] Sorry, the cards --

ROWAN: Oh, yeah. Wanna pick one?

NASHVILLE: Not right now. [a long silence. During the silence, another sale begins] You see that guy opening the bidding over there? He runs a creepy little museum out in Los Angeles about killers. Tried to buy the whole lot beforehand.

ROWAN: Why didn't the town sell?

NASHVILLE: We're not selling souvenirs. Besides, we've had enough of people from Los Angeles coming in here like they own the place.

ROWAN: These items - they're really fixable? That Farmall looked pretty beat up.

NASHVILLE: Shows what you know. Things out here have strong bones. [Rowan shuffles his cards] You've already made up your mind, haven't you? Everyone listened to Dana, but -- she should've been kissing the ground Clyde and Trudy walked on every damn day. They *loved* her.

ROWAN: Oh come on! We're talking about two self-confessed murderers, who--

NASHVILLE: Oh, they didn't do it! They were just telling her what she wanted to hear! Dana was a *mess*. [beat] You know how often the cops hauled her in for drunk and disorderly? And every time, Clyde and Trudy would head to the police station, make excuses. She shoulda gone to prison long ago. Would've done her good. Is *that* in that stupid podcast?

ROWAN: It is not. I will have to check those records.

NASHVILLE: Anybody here in Elsinore who "loved" Dana didn't love her because she knew how to work the land or was a good drinking buddy or anything. No, lots of ranch hands thought they might be the next Mr. Hamill, so to speak.

ROWAN [shuffles his cards]: Well. Not like there's any laws against dating.

NASHVILLE: Don't think you could call what she did *dating*. Not in any decent society. [beat] Especially after that *marriage* of hers-- [he laughs cruelly] Maybe that's what broke her. Finding out who she was married to. Or what.

ROWAN: [not taking the bait] How might I get in touch with Olivia Breckenridge? The numbers the Arden team gave me are all disconnected, and-- well, I thought you might know.

NASHVILLE: Why in the hell would I know how to get in touch with... well, I wouldn't *want* to get in touch! [beat, heavy sigh] It's just not *fair*. Clyde and Trudy were good, *decent* people.

ROWAN: Would you characterize switching her medication --

NASHVILLE: She was a petty little tyrant, just like her father. You don't get that, do you?[beat] If they'd really thought it would hurt her, they wouldn't have done it. It's like... you gotta break a horse before you can ride it, y'know?

ROWAN: Did they ever find Dana's horse, by the way?

NASHVILLE: Chrysanthemum? She's probably dead. [beat] Do I condone what Clyde and Trudy did? No. They should have let the law handle Dana. But... they just wanted to help her. Clyde a Trudy coddled that girl, and they repaid them by cooking them.

**[click-play; the crunch of gravel and ash under foot]**

ROWAN: Day 65 of the Town Called Elsinore audit, Rowan Dabrowski recording. My assistant and I are at the site of the Hamill Hills fire -- It's, uh... it's quite a scene. A few grain bins are still standing. Some trees. But ... yeah.

WILLOW: I know, right? I didn't think it'd be this big. But... it's all just gone. For *miles*. Wild.

ROWAN: It's not wild.

WILLOW: Kind of a cool story, though, right? On the scene journalism?

ROWAN: A "cool story"? What's cool about it? What do you think happened here?

WILLOW: It's not that hard. She found out her mom and uncle had killed her dad and were robbing her, she killed them back. Oldest story in the world, right?

ROWAN: It's not that easy.

WILLOW: Oh, right. Like how your new friend at the auction kept going on about how good Clyde and Trudy were to Dana. Did he forget the part where, I dunno, her mom stole her meds and made her crazy? How would you feel if someone did that to *you*?

ROWAN: [a long silence] She was on her meds when she killed them.

[click-play; a recording]

*ANDY [on radio]: - know things have been rough. You thought things would be different this time, and so did we. You believed in us, and we messed up. Sometimes the only thing to do is own up. So here it is. Wheyface Industries is sorry. I'll say it again. We are so so super sorry about [canned, robotic "Arden profiling a murderer for months"]. Nothing like this will ever happen again. This will be the last you ever hear about [canned, robotic "Arden enabling Dana Hamill to burn down Hamill/ Hills Ranch"]. Wheyface is committed to you, our customers and or our employees, and or the [canned, robotic "American, and Danish"] people! We've shaped up. We're better now and we're on our hands and knees begging for you to come back. We want you back. Please, please come back. This was totally our bad, you guys. [beat; then, as quickly as possible] This ad is not legally an admittance of fault and we bear no actual responsibility for what happened.*

[click-play; a small canoe, paddling]

RED: Hello. Yes. I'm Alexandria Dutton, but everyone calls me "Red" for obvious reasons.

ROWAN (it is obvious): Of course.

RED: I was-- *am* a proud representative for the Fortinbras Corporation. And I use she and they pronouns. I contain multitudes. Tell me, Mr. Dabrowski. What multitudes are you hiding? Or do you settle? Do you settle for *yourself*? Wait. Hold. [beat, a blaring gun] Damn. Missed. [beat] We are in a *pond* in Montana on a *duck hunt*. Rowan's never been on one, can you believe it?

ROWAN: You realize I'm the only one who hears these tapes?

RED: Still, you are missing out. My dog Portia is quite the huntress. [beat, he gets out his cards, but...] Don't you dare get those cards out. [Rowan doesn't] You'll scare off the ducks. I looked into you, Mr. Dabrowski. I know *all about* your debilitating playing card addiction. Weak. Weak!

ROWAN: Be that as it may... I would think you'd want to do everything you could to distance yourself from The Fortinbras Corporation after what Arden uncovered.

RED: Arden has its own axe to grind. You know, Mr. Wheyface himself tried to buy the Hamill Hills ranch. He made me the offer to me the very day the ranch burned down. Perhaps he and Dana were in cahoots. If he can't have it no one can. That type of deal. You know how common petty vengeance is these days!

ROWAN: Why did Mr. Wheyface want to buy the land?

RED: He found out we had a buyer lined up, someone very very famous, and I suppose that sale would have ruined the narrative of his little radio play.

ROWAN: Uh huh. Did your personal relationship with Mr. Wheyface affect you selling the ranch?

RED: Not at all. Once we split, amicably, I put the whole incident from my mind. When I am at work, my heart belongs only to Fortinbras. Sure, when I was with him business ambition, love, and utter loathing mixed into a perfectly delectable erotic cocktail the likes of which I've never felt for another, but it was a fleeting moment. I had forgotten him until you brought it up.

ROWAN: So, you admit there was bias on both sides.

RED: Mr. Dabrowski, I want the truth out there. I want an investigation into the Hamill Hills fire. But I want it done by our heroic boys in blue. Or *real* journalists. Like Mr. Mr. Murder Man.

ROWAN: So you believe the source matters? Because the class action suit-

RED: [fires hunting rifle] Shoot, I almost had one. Anyway, I cannot discuss-

ROWAN: In A Town Called Elsinore, the Arden team alleges that going back years, Fortinbras used conservatorships to get land they wanted by declaring the rightful owner unfit.

RED: You're telling me Dana was fit?! She was a murderer! If anything Arden's involvement proved that some people simply cannot be trusted to-- I mean legally, not everyone is fit. [beat] And this didn't *just happen*. Clyde and Trudy shared with me audio from Dan's own funeral that shows Dana was--

ROWAN: Here's what I know, because your evasions are making me a bit dizzy: Ms. Bentley saw Clyde Hamill at the CVS in Hatchet Falls and noted the pharmacist was real

chummy with him. Sure enough, he'd been paid to replace Dana's meds with a placebo so Dana would be properly erratic. I got that on record already. Dana figured out the pills had been switched weeks beforehand. She was acting erratic to throw off suspicion, but she was, in actual fact, medicated and of sound mind at the time of the fire. The livestream proves that. They looked into you-

RED: I'm only a representative-

ROWAN: -- and they discovered over a dozen cases where rightful owners were removed and *you* brokered the deal. Widening the search, they found a history of similar practices going back decades. Systemic behavior. *Documented*. Either Fortinbras's land agents are the luckiest people in existence, or - [Another shot] That wasn't even at anything, Ms. Dutton.

RED: No, I hit a duck for sure. There are numerous reports on the Hamill Hills fire. Why is Arden the only team of reporters coming up with these accusations? It's funny how far they'll stoop to avoid taking the blame. This isn't publicized, and you can guess why, but Wheyface is footing the bill for Dana's medical treatment. And her legal defense if she ever wakes up. Why wouldn't they wash her hands of her? What are they protecting when they protect Dana Hamill?

ROWAN: That... is interesting.

[rifle shot, dog barks and splashes out of the boat]

RED: Yippee! I simply must check on Portia's catch. [dog barking] I believe we are done here.

ROWAN: Don't think you're out of my crosshairs, Red.

RED: I don't believe anyone is out of your crosshairs, Mr. Dabrowski. [A Splash as Red wades into the water] I'll send you that audio we spoke of! [more splashing, beat, further] And possibly a lovely recipe for duck confit! [beat, even further in the distance] For when you've decided not to setttttllllle! Ah! It's still alive [aggressive quacking takes us out]

[click-play; Rowan is talking on a hotel phone. He's either feeling good or faking it well!]

ROWAN: Pam, everything's going fine. Really. Plus I'm getting that fresh Montana air...

PAMELA: [on phone] That's nice to hear, but your expense reports are becoming... eclectic.

ROWAN(amused): Red Dutton would only open up if she was staring something right in the eye as it died. Her words, not mine. So two passes to Hunting Most Fowl Nature Preserve later--

PAMELA: [slightly alarmed] You're meeting with Red?!

ROWAN: What a card, right? [beat] Look...I'm finding some holes in the thing up here. Nothing we can't patch up, of course, but-- it's not as airtight as I hoped it might be --

PAMELA: That's fine, that's fine -- sorry. I don't mean to come off as defensive. It's just Red--

ROWAN: Is looking after her own neck? Yes, I recall teaching *you* how to spot bias first. Look. You're proud of the show. I get that! It's good! But nothing is so good that it can't be made better, right? I believe that's something you tried to teach me more than a few times.

PAMELA: What can I say, I always was a perfectionist.

ROWAN: Oh. I still haven't been able to get in touch with Olivia Breckenridge. I know she's avoiding press, but in order to settle this whole story up--

PAMELA: Yeah, I'm on it. She won't talk to us, but maybe she'll talk to you.

[click play, a hotel room... a quiet TV in the background, then-- an email notification]

WILLOW: Everything okay? You just jumped out of your skin at getting an email.

ROWAN: The person I met with today sent me something. Not sure I have the stomach to listen.

WILLOW: You want to listen together? [beat] Dad. I listen to Mr. Murder Man. I can handle it.

[silence; mouse double click play]

*TRUDY: -- And he doesn't see it! He just goes right over that bike! Both front and back wheels! Dana is - well, what do you think a little girl is gonna be like when her bike gets run over? She's a mess. So Dan parks and gets out. Gets in real low, looks her right in the eye. Now, most parents would lie to make things better - oh, we can fix it, we can get you a new one. But Dan - he's honest. There's no fixing it. We can't get you a new one right now. He treated her with respect. Dan was like that, I guess. He, uh... he wouldn't give you a beautiful lie. He made you confront the truth, hard as it could be sometimes.*

*...I'm gonna miss that. I'm gonna miss him. We all will, I know. And... well, now Dana's gonna sing one of Dan's favorite hymns.*

*DANA [gets onstage, sets up]: Dad hated hymns. So we're not gonna do that. Been working on something special for the occasion, so here's a Dana Hamill world premiere, comin' at ya from the graveside. I'll see ya when I see ya, Dad.*

*Why are you trying  
To be what you're not?  
You know you're wasting  
Your only shot  
This is your notice  
To adjust!  
'Cause we're all gonna go  
Back to dust*

*All of your worries  
Your struggles and fears  
They'll be forgotten  
In ninety-odd years  
Take time to do  
What you must  
'Cause we're all gonna go back to dust*

*[whistling]  
Your Rexes and Fidoes  
By now are long gone  
Your grampas and grannies  
Have already passed on  
Though it's only quietly  
Discussed  
You know they had to go, OH![click stop]*

**WILLOW: ...Dad? Are you okay?**

**ROWAN [long silence]: I'm... I'm--**

**WILLOW: Okay. Okay. Let's just watch some TV. Let's just-- [and she shuts the laptop and--]**

**[click-play; rooftop sounds; recording]**

*BEA: But... it's fine. Lorena met Teresa. She'd probably say it's fate, and that's all fine. And I've got this, right? It may not exactly be Arden Season 2, but we're still making this thing, and it's going to be great, and it's fine.*

*ROWAN: Yeah. It does sound like it's been a long year. [he's shuffling]*

*BEA: Can I ask you something? Don't take this the wrong way, but does the guilt ever go away? I mean... when you're close to a story like this... is telling it going to be enough?*

*ROWAN: ... you shouldn't have to ask this, you had the Julie Capsom story last year.*

*BEA: I felt like shit then. And I feel like shit now. We'd learned our lessons, right? We were going to be better. [beat] And now, there's a body count. Even if we don't make this, people are still going to ask us about Elsinore. We have to do something. Otherwise... I couldn't even face Brenda in the hospital. I just... couldn't.*

**[click play; the hushed silence of a museum]**

*LORENA: He had his heart broken. Did you know that? Oh, here's the full collection. Have a seat. Take it all in. It's really remarkable what awaits us all in America's small town museums! [they sit; Rowan gets the cards out] You must have seen some of his movies.*

*ROWAN: Gary Cooper? Sure. I love High Noon.*

*LORENA: No, Jerry Cooper. The *much* more substantive talent. He deserved an Oscar for his work as Noah in Two by Two. The young Busby Berkeley choreographed the ground-breaking musical number featuring the drowning heathens. [beat] Are the cards supposed to distract me?*

*ROWAN: Excuse me?*

*LORENA: It's a common interview trick. Employ a distraction so a source will reveal something juicy. In this case, that something juicy might help you shut down A Town Called Elsinore.*

*ROWAN: I haven't decided whether I'm going to shut down--*

*LORENA: You wouldn't be talking to *me* if you weren't thinking you should shut it down. I was there. I met everyone. I'm as close to an impartial observer as you're going to get. But I also have no special knowledge of the case. You would only talk to me if you wanted to know about the Arden team's demeanor. And they seemed fine. I have many*

things I *could* say about Bea Casely, but she cares about doing her job properly. [beat] For a thing I said I wouldn't say much about, I said a lot.

ROWAN: That's OK. Why don't we just sit here for a minute? Tell me about Jerry Cooper.

LORENA: You see those three feathers up there?

ROWAN: Are those peacock feathers?

LORENA: Yes, indeed. He plucked them from a bird on the Paramount lot to give to "Bertie" as a sign of his undying love. The assumption has always been that they were for Elizabeth "Bertie" Copenhagen, a chorus girl who died tragically shortly before Jerry himself lost his life aboard the Hindenburg. I have come to believe that assumption is wrong.

ROWAN: So, what? He didn't die tragically because he died aboard the Hindenburg?

LORENA: One person dying is a story. The more people die, the more it ceases to be a story and becomes a spectacle. Which is to say, *of course* Jerry Cooper died tragically. But we don't remember *his* story, do we? [beat] Picture the Hindenburg in your mind, and you don't see the 36 people who died. You just see a giant blimp collapsing to the ground in flames.

ROWAN: Technically a zeppelin.

LORENA: You do not have to tell *me* the difference between a zeppelin and a blimp. [pause] I assume this artificially long pause is meant to get me to fill the dead space with something I'm reluctant to reveal? Because I won't. [beat] I will tell you that I believe the identity of "Bertie" to be Albert Graff, the composer of Two by Two. He and Jerry took several "golfing weekends" together between 1934 and 1936. [beat] It was rude of you not to ask.

ROWAN: I just assumed you were sitting on a hot scoop.

LORENA: Once people are dead, they are no longer hot scoops. They become data recovery projects for those who care enough to go exploring. [rummaging in bag] Speaking of which--

ROWAN: Ah. I guess I see why data recovery projects made you think of *Biting Ice*.

LORENA: I'm not going to ask you about Antarctica. That is for you to bear. I am going to ask you to sign the book for my girlfriend. She's a big fan.

ROWAN: Of course. [he sighs] You know, I think we're talking about it without talking about it? What happened at Hamill Hills? [Lorena scoffs] Talk about a sad story that became a giant spectacle! And you must know A Town Called Elsinore is meant to reclaim Dana Hamill as a tragic figure, at least a little bit.

LORENA: I do not think Dana Hamill was a villain. I only talked to her one time at any length. I wanted to tell her how touching I found one of her songs. She fixed me with this... smile. [beat] And asked me about Jerry Cooper. She had found out that was why I was here, and as he was a hometown hero, she knew plenty about him. Had even seen a couple of his movies.

ROWAN: If Dana was a movie buff, I'm going to have to advance my theory that Dana was whatever anybody wanted her to be.

LORENA: I think Dana was an amazing performer. She made me think I *mattered*. If you hear Bea tell the story of me coming to Montana, it was about following her around. I was trying to force all of myself into a shape she could better appreciate.

ROWAN: I wish I had a little glass, so I could raise a toast to marriage.

TERESA: [approaching] Well, you were right. They wouldn't let me buy the two-headed calf.

LORENA: I was going to say "Not if you find the right person" in re: love, but Teresa has always had an impeccable sense of how and when to make an entrance.

TERESA: I offered them \$50,000 for it, and they said it's priceless. I said it's a threadbare, well-worn dead cow with two heads, and they would be lucky to have the money.

LORENA: Where are we going to put a two-headed calf?

TERESA: We're going to dismantle it. Humanity has a weakness for taking that which fills us with wonder or terror and placing it on a shelf so we can look at it.

ROWAN: Well, you know what they say: Two heads are better than one.

TERESA: And when I'm through, no one will ever say that again.

LORENA: Sweetheart, Mr. Dabrowski and I are discussing the career of Jerry Cooper, in lieu of discussing the Arden. [beat] So far, I think you'd be quite proud of me.

TERESA: Here are the mistakes the Arden team made, in order: 1.) They took Dana's story at face value. 2.) They put an untrained reporter in charge of the story. 3.) They let personal connection overwhelm good sense.

ROWAN: Good journalism isn't always responsible journalism.

LORENA: And responsible journalism isn't always good journalism. [beat] That's just the same thing, huh? It seemed meaningfully different in my head.

TERESA: I found much nuance to ponder in it, sweetie. We can diagram both versions of that sentence to ponder their subtle differences later before bed. [beat] By the way, I assume Lorena told you that Bea Casely and Brenda Bentley slept together on Good Friday, shortly before--

LORENA: I thought it was none of his--

ROWAN: I'm sorry. Could you repeat that?

[click play, Rowan is on the phone with Pamela]

ROWAN: It is my official recommendation that Arden not go ahead with A Town Called Elsinore.

PAMELA: Look - look, don't kill my show. Maybe you and I can work together to make it better--

ROWAN: That's not my job. I'm not a Band-Aid you stick on something to pretend it's fixed!

PAMELA: Look, if we don't make *something*, everyone is /going to think --

ROWAN: Who cares what everyone thinks? Did you get into this business for the applause? [beat] You remember that old Dance Dance Revolution machine in the student union?

PAMELA: What? Oh my god, come on, that was years ago --

ROWAN: Yeah, but it was still a helluva thing to hear whispered about in the halls. Campus legend. Pamela Pink does a 12-hour marathon on the DDR machine --

PAMELA: I was trying to prove a point.

**ROWAN:** Of course you would throw yourself into something like that over and over again. [beat] How long were you actually on the machine?

**PAMELA:** Oh my god! That wasn't the point. It wasn't about the time. It's about the process. That challenge you can't solve. And that you can train yourself bit by bit to fix the problem. Any problem.

**ROWAN:** Any problem. And did you think you could fix Dana Hamill in post?

**PAMELA:** She doesn't need to be fixed. We're presenting her exactly as we found her. And that's the only way this story is going to mean anything. The only way this story means *anything* is if we tell it honestly. And that means it's going to be ugly. We're going to get too close, and we're going to sympathize with the wrong people, because it's the only way to understand. I don't *think* what we made is what we needed to make. I freakin' *know* it.

**ROWAN:** Yeah... You can't always play the game over and over.

**PAMELA:** Two seasons of second guessing and *bullshit*. We found Julie Capsom. We figured out who killed Dan Hamill. We found out Fortinbras was stealing--

**ROWAN:** --And that was good journalism. This is... messy.

**PAMELA:** The mess! That is what makes it worth telling!

**ROWAN:** Worth telling? Hold, hold on. You gave her *exactly* what she wanted all along: an audience. Congratulations, Pamela. You made Dana Hamill's final revenge.

[click-play; sound of Rowan packing, energetic, almost frantic]

**WILLOW:** Well, this has been a fun summer road trip. Kind of an abrupt ending --

**ROWAN:** You want an apology? I hope you learned a very valuable lesson: that the people you counted on can disappoint you. You're going to need that as an adult.

[alarm goes off, Rowan stops packing, takes a pill, we hear the awkward silence]

**WILLOW:** ...Sorry I forgot to remind you.

**ROWAN:** No, no, Wills, it's fine, it's - this - this wasn't that. Not everything is depression. Sometimes people....This is just me being mad. [the energy goes out of him, he sits down on the bed] You know how many students I've had? And how few retained a damn thing I

said? [beat] I thought Pamela-- [shakes his head] You know, she was the only student to tell me - to my face, in the middle of class - that I was wrong. That I didn't see - what was it? Oh, yeah - "Objectivity is how the most powerful insist they are the most reasonable". And... she was right.

WILLOW: C'mon, you can't expect anyone to always be right.

ROWAN: No. I suppose I can't. [beat] But, hey, you might have a shot at it, right?

WILLOW [good-natured]: I made it to 17 without being wrong. Maybe I can keep it going! [beat] If we wait 'til morning, we get free breakfast. This hotel makes amazing Froot Loops.

ROWAN: You realize they don't make the Fruit Loops--

WILLOW: Dad. Don't mansplain cereal to the resident expert.

ROWAN: ...OK. So, we leave in the morning after getting the amazing homemade Froot Loops. [a knock at the door, Rowan goes to it, and opens it]

OLIVIA: Mr. Dabrowski?

[click play; diner sounds... it's night; rain spatters the windows]

OLIVIA: I'll have the Sunrise Special. Sunny-side up. With soyrizo.

SERVER: Love a breakfast for dinner plan. [beat] You know eggs aren't vegan? And, and soyrizo--? Okay! And for you, sir?

ROWAN: [sets down menu] Sunrise Special. Sunny-side up. And screw it, extra soyrizo.

SERVER: Oh my gosh! You're Rowan *Dabroski*! You look just like your book jacket photo!

ROWAN: [through an irritated smile] Everybody says I look like that guy!

SERVER: Did you know they read a passage from *Biting Ice* at the sheriff's funeral? Did they have to pay you to be able to read it?

ROWAN: They don't. Even if they did, I hope I wouldn't extract royalties from a grieving family.

SERVER: [laughs uneasily] I'll get these orders in for you two! [leaves]

ROWAN: [begins to shuffle] I'm counting on this Sunrise Special being the best thing I've ever eaten. I'm starving.

OLIVIA: Setting your hopes too high always works. [beat] What's with the cards?

ROWAN: Old habit. Ignore it if you can. [beat] All right. I'm going to record the rest of this conversation. I won't use this information anywhere. I'll destroy the tapes once my audit is over. Heck, *you* can destroy this tape...

OLIVIA: You gonna deal me in or keep shuffling?

ROWAN: I'm not much for card games. [beat] I listened to A Town Called Elsinore. It paints a vivid portrait of Dana. I just want to make sure all the details check out.

OLIVIA: What did they say about her?

ROWAN: She was a creature of circumstance. Abusive father. Controlling mother. Conniving stepfather. And *sure* what she did was bad, and *yeah* we shouldn't condone it, but--

OLIVIA: She *was* a creature of circumstance. All of that's true. She grew up never knowing how badly they broke her. And when she figured it out... I mean, not that she *should* have, but...

ROWAN: Yeah. I get it. Listening to the show, I felt like they were circling her and circling her, never quite landing, and then... there's this story in the last episode. Dana's a junior in high school, and there's this school concert. "Broadway Comes to Elsinore." And they pick some other girl to sing "Cabaret," and Dana *cannot* have that. So she... [starts to laugh] she locks the girl in the bathroom, and she goes out on stage. She gets out her guitar, and she just launches into it. She gets a standing ovation, ya' know. That's who she *was*. Always taking center stage.

OLIVIA: She didn't get a standing ovation. [beat] She got suspended. [beat] No, seriously. There's video evidence of this. People booed her. Megan Thomas was a smarmy know-it-all, but people *loved* her. They wanted to hear her sing that song, even though Dana sang it better. [beat] But when Dana sang it, it was a little scary. She was *too* into it.

ROWAN: Okay, they got the details wrong, but that seems to have been a frequent problem. It's kind of... the spirit of the thing. It fits who she was, right?

OLIVIA: Maybe. But it didn't happen. Are you gonna deal me in or what?

ROWAN: I *did* feel like I knew her after listening. [beat] They have her on tape. So much tape. Not just from the livestream. You really get to see all of her sides.

OLIVIA: Right. But you said it yourself. She loved to put on a show.

ROWAN: It's funny. I knew she did it. That's the one thing everyone knows about Dana Hamill. But listening... I really started to hope - like if I could reach out and... rewind time like one of these tapes to just the right moment and [snaps fingers] break the cycle. And she wouldn't do it.

OLIVIA: But she did do it. [beat, a little mad] She's not... she's not a *soundbite*. She was the best friend I ever had. She was dragging me to the bottom of the sea. It can be both.

ROWAN: Fine! Fine, alright, okay. How about this: *you* tell me! Who was Dana Hamill?

OLIVIA: [finally mad] *I don't know*. I thought I did, but-- [beat] Tell me about the cards.

ROWAN: You do *not* give up. I admire it. [a long pause, too long] Okay, fine, fuck it. I'm 26. My friend Clark -- I'd known him since we were 9 -- is heading up this expedition to Antarctica, using period appropriate equipment. Stupid idea. Stupid as shit. But I'm young and dumb, and it'll make a great story. So. A week in, a huge storm kicks up. The absolute worst happens -- people get separated. Clark and I, impossibly, find a cave. We crawl inside. We're huddled together. And we try to talk. We both know... if one of us goes quiet, that's... But *I* have a deck of cards, right? Lucky me. I take out the deck. Think we'll play a little Gin Rummy. And then, I look down and I realize--

OLIVIA: You're wearing gloves.

ROWAN: I'm wearing gloves. So's he. [laugh] We can't play cards! Don't know what the fuck I was thinking. We roar with laughter, and then we start talking. About... just about everything. Then he slows, and then... [beat] I then wrote a book [checkles]. And they made it into a movie, and nobody ever lets me forget about it.

OLIVIA: ...I don't remember any cards in the movie.

ROWAN: Yeah. I never told anyone about it, except for my wife. It was important to me to keep some part of it to myself. Some part of *him*. Like if I didn't share that part then it wasn't exploitative.

OLIVIA: Why write a book at all?

ROWAN: Well, I got home, and everybody was saying Clark was this irresponsible wild child, in over his head. And I knew he wasn't. I thought I could correct the record. But I

over-corrected it. -- He was my best friend. He was my best friend *and* he was an irresponsible wild child, in over his head. It can be both.

[the server arrives...]

SERVER: [puts plates down] Two Sunrise Specials! You both made the right call. And if you want pie later-- [beat, they're not engaging] Well! Let me know if you need anything! [leaves]

ROWAN: I dream about him sometimes still. And then I wake up and shuffle my cards.

OLIVIA: I dream about her, too. Almost every night since my father died. I'm in a castle. Long ago. Dana isn't herself, except she is. I'm... happy I think. Or very, very sad. Or both. And then I'm not in a castle. I'm underwater. Above me stars gleam. Maybe they're flowers? If I can just *touch* them... Every move I make, I drag myself deeper and deeper. [beat] That morning, I woke up to find my father drowned, not me. The dream wasn't a warning. Not about that, at least.

ROWAN: [silence] I *needed* to write about him. I wanted to correct the record about him, but I wanted to correct the record about me, too. I wanted to know I'd... done enough. I had to let go of that grief. It had to come out. Somehow. [beat] Talk about it, Olivia. Into the tape recorder or into your soyrizo. You have to talk about the people you love. *Have* to. [beat] Who is Olivia Breckenridge? [a long pause]

OLIVIA: May I?

ROWAN: Sure. [hands over the cards]

OLIVIA: [starting to shuffle] I-- I'm-- No. Okay. My whole life, I felt more comfortable around women. They made sense to me in some way I couldn't define. Until I could define it. Until I could speak myself into being. Become a phoenix. But a phoenix sets everything on fire. One last thing Dana and I get to have in common. [beat] I wanted to be her. And to be loved by her. And to escape her. Turns out when you're a teenage girl, this is just a thing you do. You meet another girl, and get... sucked back in to her. Cis girls learn to kick against that undertow. But I had no idea. I was caught in a whirlpool, and I didn't know how to swim. I'd leave. I'd get sucked back. I'd leave. I'd... Over and over. [beat] Dana was so... *surprised* when I came out to her, and I think I was a little shocked. I just assumed she could see me all along. But I had to see myself first. Like when you call me "ma'am" or "Ms. Breckenridge" -- that's *you* seeing *me*, right? And you've only known me as Olivia. You only see the person I present to you. But some little part of me, some tiny, tiny voice always insists you're just being polite. I desperately want to believe the reflection you show me. But I always worry that-- [beat] Dana wanted to be the sun. She wanted all of us to bounce her light back onto her. We all had other plans. She didn't

get that. And if I should have taught *her* anything, it was to trust the light she already cast. But she didn't get it. How could she? [beat] I bought the ranch.

ROWAN: /You bought-- [Olivia talks right over him]

OLIVIA: I drove back to Elsinore the night of the fire. 10 hours. And even though they called me and told me about the fire, I had to hope that she might be there. The whole way back I couldn't stop beating myself up. What if I had been there? What if I'd just... stayed put? Not *with* her. But... but... *near* her. On the land. By the bluff. [beat] I got to the ranch just as the sky began to turn purple. The fire trucks were still there. The cops, too. Ranchhands loading up cattle. One ambulance was pulling out, in no hurry. The sun started to come up over all of it, and I should have turned right around and headed home. But I didn't. I stopped and looked, and I saw it all again. She was... a monster. She wanted to destroy *everything*. Even the land. But she had *reset* something. Without meaning to. And I wanted to put something new there. To not reduce it to a land of ashes. Something new. [beat] You must think I'm crazy.

ROWAN: No. [beat] I don't think you're crazy.

OLIVIA: So who was Dana Hamill? The night my father died, she came over. Around midnight was when we figured out Clyde and Trudy were messing with her pills. I say let's go to the police. But Dana gets that sparkle. We've got to *prove* it. If we can prove it, that fixes everything. Now it's 2 am. We're scheming. Laughing. The years have melted off and all the resentment and grief are *gone*. It's just *us*. Finally. [beat] It's 4 am. We've got our perfect, stupid, beautiful plan. I get into bed. She's there. I put my arms around her. She could finally see me. And that... was enough. [beat] She was everything everybody wants to say she was and worse. But I would do anything to live that night over again. [beat] That's Olivia Breckenridge. I loved a girl. I had to leave. She fell apart. I bought her ranch. If I'm going to drown... I may as well face the sea.

ROWAN: [a long, long pause] You gonna deal me in?

OLIVIA: After breakfast.

[At this moment Phoebe Bridgers "I Know the End" begins to play as the camera begins to truck right, past Rowan and Olivia to another booth:]

NASHVILLE: If she can bring those jobs back, more power to her, but she's fighting a losing--

HELEN FAIRFIELD: Ms. Breckenridge bought the ranch fair and square, and she's gonna try to bring those jobs back. Now, I know you might not like this, but--

[Helen fades out as we continue trucking to Booth 3, where an older couple--]

OLDER WOMAN: I think I remember who I went to senior prom with.

OLDER MAN: Yes, you went with Ed Milligan. The twerp!

OLDER WOMAN: No, I went with Stanley Dormand!

OLDER MAN: Agree to disagree! Now, what are you having? I'm going to have the deep fried-

[and on to Booth 4, to a MOTHER and BABY, who is beginning to cry]

MOTHER: Shhh... shhhhhh... hey, do you want everybody in this diner looking at--

[the camera is moving faster, over to--]

SERVER: Hockey puck and make it cry. Oh, and *lots* of ketchup.

ANGRY FRENCH CHEF: Another hamburger?! These Americans!

[the camera now tracks out the door, headed to--]

WILLOW: [on phone] I think he's having a good time, mom. He keeps looking at me and crying, but I think it's, like, normal "dad crying about how his only daughter is growing up" crying.

[and now it's off to--]

TERESA: I know it's sudden. But the second I met you, I knew. I just knew. You were the one I needed there every moment of every day. Lorena Christopher, will you marry me?

LORENA (overjoyed): Yes! Yes. A thousand times, yes.

[people cheer, and the camera moves on to--]

JILL: --and give me strength as I go back to work. And, please, please, please make this house feel a little less empty. [beat] I miss him.

[and we're off to-- RED DUTTON, driving in the rain]

RED: Who *cares* about a scandal? I *bled* for this company. If anyone deserves their job back--

FORTINBRAS EXEC (over speakerphone): Red: This company needs one last thing from you. It's time to disappear. [hangs up]

[and we're now in a place where medical monitors beep]

GUARD: How's the patient today, doctor? Gonna wake up and make a daring escape?

DOCTOR (chuckles): No. No change.

[the camera goes even further away now to-- a crowded bar]

BEA (a little drunk): Pamela! You have to try this Merlot! It's real! Not dehydrated!

ANDY: Drinks are on me tonight. And every night! [beat] Are you all right, Ms. Pink?

PAMELA: Yeah. It's just a show. You know? I'll get over it.

BRENDA: Sorry I'm late. [icy] Bea.

BEA [equally icy]: Well. The gang's all here. Here's to all us fuck-ups.

BRENDA: No - wait. We're not all here. Rosalind's not here

ANDY: ...I don't know if she's coming. [beat] We'll leave a spot open. Just in case.

[and finally on to--]

BRAD: Ta da!

OLIVIA: [amused] A cowboy hat?

BRAD: [over-the-top accent] I'm ready to be on the ranch, baby. Rustle them cattle. [they start to laugh together, and it grows in volume until--]

OLIVIA: I love you. Are we making a mistake?

BRAD: I don't know. [beat] But it's too late to sell.

OLIVIA: Yeah. [beat] Yeah. Shit.

[and the camera exits one last time, going to-- a place where it's still raining... a phone rings]

[When Pamela picks up the phone “I Know the End” fades out. We hear the call from Rowan’s end with the rain]

PAMELA: [on phone] Hello? [beat] I’m having a colossally bad day, and I’m out with friends, so--

ROWAN: I have one question. What did you want A Town Called Elsinore to be?

PAMELA: I wanted it to be honest. That’s all. I hoped we could do justice to Dana Hamill’s story. Not to make her a hero, not to make her a villain. Just to make her *her*. The person we all knew.

ROWAN [after a silence]: You can’t broadcast A Town Called Elsinore as is. But you could make something better. Something that’s not *just* the Dana Hamill story. It’ll be about everybody who knew her. Who survived her. Who mourned her. [beat] And I’d like to help. If you’d let me.

PAMELA: If you don’t think it would compromise your audit, I-- [realizing]... you’re serious.

[The triumphant music from Phoebe Bridgers’ “I Know The End” starts up where it left off]

ROWAN: People died because the truth wasn’t told. I’ve always hoped the truth had a power all its own. The state of the world suggests it doesn’t. But we keep trying to tell it anyway.

PAMELA: It’s all we can do.

ROWAN: Let’s get to work.

[And as the camera pulls away from him, we fade into... end of episode.]