

Introduction

Three quick buzzes from another part of the house make Adam jump. Someone's at the door, and they're keen to come in.

He takes a deep breath and shakes his head. He's inherited his dad's cautiousness. But the old man is going to be out at the station all night, so it isn't him ringing.

Drifting from the table he's just arranged the snacks for the night on, Adam pauses by the hall mirror to smooth over his dark blonde hair and straighten the buttons on his shirt. Is it too dressy for a movie night? He hopes she'll like it...and him.

No girl at school has made him feel this way before. Which is saying something because Angela barely seems to know he exists. In her defense though, she's nice to everyone. Maybe tonight they'll be face to face long enough for Adam to finally ask her out. He's still a little surprised she said yes to this.

Taking another deep breath, the young man nervously opens the door. The heavy winds outside make him shiver. It wasn't this cold just before. The visitor nudges the entrance open wider and, handing him a full paper bag, walks in past him. "Well, it's nice to see you too," Adam says sarcastically to the girl who isn't Angela but is headed straight for the snack table.

"Whatever," she tosses back, clasping open a beer. "Don't you ever ask me to do a grocery run for Miss Vegan again. It took forever to find that dumb drink. Pretty sure this is cruelty free too," she adds, shaking her can at Adam.

He sighs. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry. I just really want tonight to be perfect for her." Melissa sends one last glare his way then grabs the TV remote to flip through the movie picks her friend has for the night.

"If you really want to impress Angie, maybe you should get better taste." Adam makes a silly face, and the two break out laughing. All is forgiven.

When a heavy knock comes next, they both face the front door. Without thinking, Adam checks his reflection again. He swings the door open, but it still isn't Angela. At least not at first. An overweight kid greets him with a huge smile. "What's up?! Hoo! Is there outdoor air conditioning tonight or is it just me?" Disappointed but not wanting to be rude, Adam stretches out a hand to return the boy's fist bump.

"Hi Noah."

This is someone else from class. What Adam doesn't understand is what he's doing here. "Hey!!" a light voice calls from behind. "I let slip about your watch party and Noah wanted to come too."

With the other boy now stepping in, Adam peers down the driveway to where Angela is getting something out the back of her new sedan.

Adam spies her younger brother Brandon by the passenger door. He groans on the inside. She really had thought this was a watch 'party'.

"Sorry we can't stay long. Dad's having this party for his promotion."

Adam takes in her long brown hair and blue sweater that matches her eyes. He grins.

"I'm happy for as long as you stay."

Fishing out her purse, she walks his way. "Cool!"

She pauses and glances back.

"You coming or what?" Angela hollers at her brother irritably.

Taking a long drag from the cigarette in his left hand, Brandon waves her off. "Give me a sec."

"Didn't you promise to quit? You know they aren't good for you."

"Okay, mom," her brother answers with an eyeroll and puts it out.

They troop into the house and Adam locks the door.

By the time he gets to the living room, people are already saying hi to each other. Melissa doesn't seem to be leaving now there are new faces.

Adam sighs. The party is pretty much having itself.

"Omigosh!" Angela squeals huddled over the table. She's holding one of the drinks from the paper bag.

"You have coconut soda?!"

The host is at least glad she noticed. He scratches his head shyly.

"Oh. Yeah. It's nothing really."

"It's not nothing. He got them specifically 'cos he knows you like them. I should know; I had to—"

"O-kaay!" Adam interrupts Melissa midway. "Maybe we should start the movie now."

Brandon shrugs, grabbing a regular drink.

"I'm game!" Noah says.

Looking round to see Angela's eyes stuck on him now, Adam snags the remote from his friend and smiles back. The girl he likes pats a space on the sofa beside her.

"You can sit with me."

He's grinning stupidly now.

His finger has just hit play on the comedy horror movie he'd been sure would make their date when the lights go out.

A thunderbolt strikes somewhere nearby.

Everyone in the room starts or screams.

The boys look embarrassed at their reactions when rain pours loudly outside the nearest window.

"Great," Adam mutters under his breath.

The night is not going to plan.

"Lis. Can you help turn on the emergency bulbs?" says the host, staring out the window at his blacked-out street.

Melissa sighs dramatically but gets up. "You shouldn't put guests to work, ya know." Adam rolls his eyes.

Melissa is his best friend. They've known each other since high school when he played football and she wrote for the school's paper. She hardly counts as a guest.

This is the first time in ages Adam has had so many people (willingly) over at his place. If being the son of the town's most recent sheriff cut down his popularity, wanting to be the next cop in the family and acting like it hardly made it better. Adam decides to make the most of things.

"So... What do we do now, guys?" he asks in a cheery voice. Nobody hears him.

"Damn it!" Angela mutters. "The storm's screwed up the signal. How do we check in now?" Her brother shrugs at the part directed at him. Brandon doesn't seem to have many opinions in general. It's a wonder he's doing decent at the college. The host clears his throat and goes to sit beside Angela just as she gets up, pointing her phone at the ceiling for bars.

"Heyy," Adam says comfortingly. "I'm sure your folks can see the weather too. They can't expect you back in this." Brandon scoffs from his corner. "You clearly don't know our dad." Tension swims in the room for a second.

"Um..." Noah starts. "Since we're stuck here anyhow, can't we have fun with it? Board games maybe?" A few heads turn to him but the quiet stays.

"Wow, Noah! That's a great idea," he continues in a high-pitched girl's voice.

Melissa, who now lays on the couch looking put out, giggles at his impression. The laughter calms Angela down. She lets out a deep breath and sits on another of the leather chairs. "He's probably right. Guess I'm overreacting anyway." Glad things are cooling off, Adam exhales. "Nah. You're okay. It'll be fine."

Angela nods.

"So, the games now?" Brandon joins in unexpectedly.

"Sadly...we don't have any board games," Adam answers.

"We could download them on our phones and use multiplayer or something," suggests Angela.

"Okay. That sounds seriously lame."

"Melissa!" Adam whispers fiercely in her direction.

"What? It does."

Angela crosses her arms even though she's still smiling. "Well, what's your bright idea, mistress of all things unlame?"

Melissa sits up. "We've got the dark, and the atmosphere," she says, pointing at the pouring rain outside. "Why not use it? For scary stories."

"That's your brilliant idea?" Adam asks with a raised eyebrow.

"It's not any worse than the cheesy movie you were gonna make us all sit through."

"It wasn't supposed to be for all of you, it..." Seeing Angela's questioning gaze, Adam trails off.

"You know what? Let's do it. Scary stories. All in favor?"

They all agree. Except Brandon.

"I uh...I don't like anything freaky."

"Well then, cover your ears," Melissa fires back. She isn't budging.

Brandon sends her a glare.

"Okay then!" Adam concludes, finally able to take his place next to Angela. "Wanna get us started?"

"Actually, I've got one," says Noah.

Adam looks surprised. "Uh, okay. Go for it then."

"And that's the tomato soup legend. Because the boat's cook lost his hand in the food."

Thunder sounds just outside but this time no one seems remotely scared. If anything, everyone who isn't Noah looks confused.

"So...his hand gets sliced off by the meatgrinder, but he decides to like, tie it up and keep cooking?"

Melissa asks, unconvinced.

"Yeah," Angela backs up. "I know supper had to be ready on time, but does pain disappear when you're really committed?"

The others snicker at this.

Melissa leans back in her seat. "I think you should stick to comedy, dude."

Noah is not enjoying being dug into. Sulking at the jokes around what he's sure was a good folktale, he messes with his glasses and stands up.

"Whatever. Where's the bathroom?"

"Oh, come on," Angela adds, seeing him frown.

He doesn't look at her.

Adam sighs. "First door to your left," he says, nodding at the darkened hallway.

Noah shoots off in that direction just as the host calls from behind, "I can get you one of our smaller flashlights if you want!"

"Got my phone!" the other boy returns grumpily.

A moment after, the rest of the group hears a crash.

"What was that?" Brandon asks slowly.

Melissa shakes her head. "He probably rammed straight into Adam's dad's work desk."

"Yeesh!" answers Angela. In a louder voice, "Hey, Noah. You okay?"

Not hearing anything back, they continue sharing.

Unfortunately for everyone else, Melissa can back her love of horror up with actually chilling stories. "...she gently pulled the squirming string out the hole in her belly; unsure whether she'd see the worms or her own intestines when she looked back down," Melissa says. "Everything in her wanted to scream in agony but she was just as scared of waking the—"

"Raar!!" yells Noah.

The others jump as he suddenly appears from the shadowy hallway. "What the heck!!" Brandon screeches.

Noah laughs. "Should have seen the looks on your faces!"

"Not mine," says Melissa with her arms crossed.

"Where were you anyway?" Angela asks.

"I uh...found these," Noah answers, holding up a big file.

"Whoa, whoa, whoa!!" Adam stands and walks toward him. He looks upset. "That's my dad's work stuff, dummy!"

"Is your dad a paranormal investigator?" asks Noah.

"The heck are you on about?" Adam answers, grabbing the file.

"I mean, the only perp I saw in there was an 'evil entity'."

"Huh?" Melissa quizzes. "Let me see that!"

"Are we forgetting these are confidential??" Adam warns as she comes up to him.

"Come oon. Just a peek," answers Melissa.

"Promise to put it all back in a sec," Angela adds, also getting up.

Adam sighs deeply. "Fine! One second."

"Cool!" says Melissa, swiping it and sifting through documents.

Brandon, who's sitting peering into his phone, glances up. "So, what's it say?"

Melissa looks round. "It's...well, it's kind of bizarre."

She hands the file back to Adam. He's curious now and checks through too.

"Looks like a regular missing persons' report," he says.

Noah clears his throat. "Get to the end bit. The police reports on the case."

Adam does.

"What the...?"

"Well??" Angela asks keenly, looking from Melissa to the two guys.

"Uhh... Locals have been reporting disappearances over the past few months. Couple dozen men and women. Three kids..."

"That's awful!" Angela answers.

"Yeah..." Adam continues. "Except...all the townspeople seem convinced whoever's 'taking' them isn't human."

"Sounds like a nuthouse."

"Melissa!!" Adam calls after her.

"What?" she asks, digging out a handful of chips. "I mean it's sad and all, but the crazy people aren't

exactly helping the investigation.”

“W-what if it's true tho?”

The others stare at Brandon in surprise.

“Huh?” asks Adam.

“Come on, Brandon,” his sister teases.

“Well, why not?” Brandon answers defensively.

“I feel like there'd be more proof if all that stuff were real.”

“Spirits are invisible though. How would there be?”

“How are those claiming to see 'em doing it then?” Adam shrugs.

“Okay,” Noah states nervously, going back to his spot. “Aren't we getting too worked up about this?”

There is silence for a moment, then another thunder strike. If anything, the storm seems to be raging harder by the hour.

“Ugh!” Angela sighs.

“Guess this is about to be a sleepover party,” Melissa quips, checking the time.

“Good thing the holidays have started, I guess,” Noah adds to lighten the mood.

“Yeah.” Angela agrees. “This may be the most fun I'll have all summer.”

Adam asks curiously, “What do y'all usually do?”

Angela shrugs. “We go on a road trip or cruise almost every year.”

“I always wished my family made more money so I could actually go places,” Melissa sighs wistfully.

“Trust me, it's not as cool when your parents are fighting the whole time.”

“That part,” Brandon mumbles.

“Dang. Well, I typically just workout and follow my dad to work all summer.”

“My parents are separated and just kind of pass me around either way,” Noah says in a low voice.

Everyone is quiet for a bit.

“Hey!” Angela chirps. “What if we all went on vacation together?!”

“What? Seriously?”

“I wouldn't mind,” Adam answers dreamily.

“We know,” Melissa teases.

Adam gives her a look.

“Yeah! We could plan it and spend like a week just hanging out.” When no one replies, Angela falters a bit. “It could be somewhere real close.”

“Or not.” Brandon adds.

“I'll look for group travel packs when the signal comes up.”

“Maybe we should go to Connieville,” Melissa jokes.

The others chuckle but Angela is nodding now.

“What if we did?? It's like two, three towns over from the description. And it'd probably be super cheap with people being scared of going there.”

“Are you nuts??!!” Brandon hurls back.

“It could be fun,” Adam muses.

“Yeah, come on. There's no such thing as ghosts,” says Melissa.

"You don't know that."

"Grow up," Angela joins. She beams brightly at the others.

Melissa smirks. "I mean, I'd like to, but there's no way my mom could afford—"

"Nope! Never mind that. I could totally cover like two or three of us if we can make this thing happen,"

Angela comments.

"And I can cover a few meals on the trip too," Adam puts in.

Angela leans over to thread an arm through his. "Noah?" she asks next.

"Uhh. Yeah. Why not? I'm sure my mom won't mind pawning me off to someone new."

Melissa snorts. "Cool of you guys, I guess. I'm in."

"It's settled then!" says Angela. We're going monster hunting while Brandon stays to keep my folks busy."

"What?? No way! I'm coming too!" her brother yells. "They're worse than ghosts!"

"They really are."

"Oh, look! Signal's back!" Noah announces. "Better get booking."

Open Map 1: The Port.



P001

"So, what do you wanna see first?" he asks taking in stalls selling all kinds of seafood.

"I dunno! I'm sure a place like this has tons of history and landmarks. And I hear the beach is decent enough."

"Uh huh."

They start moving down the dock.

Passing a pillar, Adam spots a nail sticking out. It draws attention still being shiny against the rotting old wood around it. Absently, he pulls it out and pockets it.

Mark in Adam's events.

P002

People stare openly as they walk past.

Adam scratches his head, but Melissa has her phone camera out. She squints and ducks at different points to take photos. This makes him feel less uncomfortable.

They pause so Melissa can photograph a huge, red-scaled fish on the table of one fisherman.

Unlike some locals, he doesn't seem to mind them. He flexes his arm muscles holding the butcher knife for a snap. The kids chuckle.

"Thank you," Melissa says in the end.

"Sure! It's been ages since I've seen tourists round here. What brings you two?"

Option 1: Tell him about the ghost kidnappings. P007

Option 2: Say sightseeing. P008

P003

Adam points at something on the ground.

"Look at this."

They both stare down at a damp local newspaper.

Option 1: Read what's on it. P009

Option 2: Keep walking. P010

P004

"Hey!!"

Not knowing anyone there, the pair doesn't turn round till the slurred yelling comes right by them.

"I said, hey you!!"

A visibly drunk man with overalls and wet hair stumbles in front of them.

"Um. Can we help you sir?" asks Melissa.

"I can help you!" he hollers. "I suggest you go back to wherever you came from!"

"Excuse me?" Adam says, shielding his friend.

"Leave!"

"Just try and make us," threatens Adam.

But instead of squaring up, the man seems to have forgotten them and runs after a bird pecking at his catch. They glance at each other in amused shock.

"Weird."

P005

On their path, they come to a small shop.

"How cute is this?" asks Melissa.

The yellow and blue store is the most colorful building around. Three little children are inside buying candy.

"Yeah. It's cool," Adam answers as she takes pictures.

An old soda machine is mounted outside.

"Pfft. I bet normal stores don't even have some of this stuff anymore," Adam says as they walk toward it.

"Right?"

Adam turns to her. "Want one?"

"Uh, sure," says Melissa.

He puts a coin in and picks one, but the can gets stuck on the way down. "Yeesh!"

Make a Strength roll with Adam.

If you succeed, read P012.

If you fail, read P013.

P006

A shaky sewer cover catches Adam's attention.

"Hey, do you think this is where the monsters are?" he jokes. Getting no reply, he looks back "Lis?"

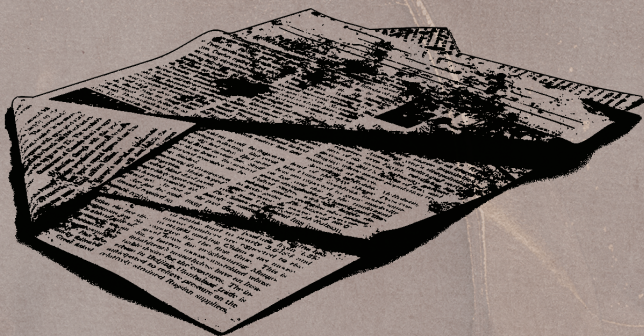
Adam sees her walking off to a corner looking weirdly focused.

"Hmm. Guess we're exploring solo now," he mumbles.

Adam nudges the sewer cover with his left sneaker. There is a slight grinding but it finally opens. He's peering into the blackness when an orange mist suddenly wafts up.

"Woah!!"

He stumbles backward.



P007

"Hell's bells!!" The man leans in.
"Well, you be careful then. I'm something of a searcher myself. If you do see something, be sure to come find old Robbie."

"Would you look at that! We've already made one ghost-hunting contact here."
Melissa rolls her eyes at Adam. "If nothing else, he can recommend good places to eat."

P008

Robbie scoffs. "What a place you've picked for it. Anyhow, enjoy!"

They thank him again and move on.

"What a weird old man," Adam muses.
"I'm pretty sure most here are," answers Melissa. "At least this one was friendly."

P009

Melissa squints. "The Connieville Chronicle, huh?"
Adam reads aloud: "Town curse strains relations with outside world. Deliveries refused, lack of visitors dips businesses into bankruptcy."

"Woah! Things are like, actually bad here! Sucks to think all this is probably caused by some wild animal or serial killer people should be working on catching instead."

Adam shifts and frowns. "Wait. What if it is a killer? Don't you think it's kind of dumb we came here?"

Melissa looks scared as well.

P010

"I guess they litter here," Melissa scoffs.

P011

The entrance to a small garage.

If Adam has event Ψ , Read P020.

P012

Annoyed, Adam bangs on the machine once and the soda falls out.
"Got it!"
He hands it to Melissa and she cracks it open.

Melissa gets +1 in Energy.

P013

Adam bangs on the machine yet nothing happens. He bangs again.

"That's a priceless antique, you dunce!" the store owner yells from inside.

Adam groans. "Sorry, sorry!" he shouts back in.
"I get the feeling we won't be very liked around here," he says to his friend.

She giggles. "Really? What makes you say that?" she teases.

"Just a hunch."
The can finally falls out as they're about to walk away.

Adam gets -1 in Energy.

P014

Melissa follows a steady rustling sound. She can't imagine what's making it.
She walks toward some thin logs of timber in a pile by a wall.

The noise is louder now.

"What the...?"

Melissa reaches out to shift one log and the sound stops. Surprised, she goes to move another, then grasps her hand back quickly and swears.

"Ouch!!"

The culprit, a rat way bigger than she was used to, scurries deeper in.

Melissa gets -1 in Strength.

Now backing away, Melissa pauses at a different kind of brown hidden after the logs.

More careful this time, she pulls the object out.

It's a small, worn teddy bear with a green bowtie.

She looks around for a moment wondering who it belongs to. Finally tucking it under one arm, Melissa walks on.

Mark Ω in Melissa's events.

If you have already read P015 when first researching this paragraph, read P024.

P015

She is looking for Adam further in front when Melissa hears sniffing behind her.

"I told you to pay attention."

"I did!! I think I dropped him when you made me put on my sweater."

A woman in a scarf has come down from the docks with her daughter. They are looking for something.

"My bear!" the little girl wails.

If Melissa has event Ω, Read P025.

P016

"Hey," Melissa says, walking up beside Adam.

"Hey. Get good pictures?" he asks.

"A few. This place is full of rats."

Adam smirks. "Ouch. Getting to know the local wildlife?"

Melissa smacks his arm. "Shut up."

"Are you gonna throw that away?" Adam asks after a second.

Melissa notices that she has a flyer of the town. She has probably picked it up from somewhere.

She walks over to a trashcan and sees only one item at the shallow bottom.

The piece of paper which looks like recently thrown away has just one line of writing on it.

Melissa frowns after reading the words and calls her friend to see too.

Confused, he walks over and checks.

Take care of our 5 new guests the scribble instructs.

"Wait. What the...?" Adam shifts uncomfortably. "You don't think it means... Us, do you?"

"I don't know... Crazy coincidence?"

Adam exhales hard and starts typing on his phone.

"What are you doing?"

"I dunno. Writing down all this crazy stuff. Maybe I'll call and ask dad what he makes of this place tomorrow. "

"Mmmm. Okay."

P017

Melissa spots a rucksack on a dirty bench across from them.

"You don't think that's like... A bomb?"

Adam swallows. "I certainly hope not."

She elbows him. "Go look at it." ...

(Read more)

... "You go look at it!" Adam throws back.

"You're the cop in training."

"And you're a journalist. You should be on scene first."

Melissa put her hands on her hips and huffs. "Fine. Maybe I will."

Adam watches her start walking away before sighing.

"Wait. Come back. I am the cop in training. I'll check," he says, rolling his eyes.

Make a Fear roll with Adam.

If you succeed, read P019.

If you fail, Adam gets -1 in Fear.

P025

Melissa sees a green ribbon in the child's hair and calls out.

"Um, hello?!"

The two glance up at her. Melissa waves the bear. "Know this guy?"

The girl squeals and runs down before her mom can stop her.

Bear in hand, she gives Melissa a grin with missing teeth before sprinting back.

Her mother mouths 'thank you'.

Mark ℘ in Melissa's events.

P019

"Found some keys," Adam calls back, jangling the bunch of them. "Think I'm gonna bring 'em along."

"Why?" asks Melissa as he makes his way back. "What if the owner's walking around trying to remember where they are??"

Adam shrugs. "They should stop dropping their stuff creepily in public places."

"What will you even do with them?" Melissa asks as they stroll down together.

"Well... I mean, I bet it probably opens something around here."

"O-kaay," Melissa comments doubtfully.

Mark ♣ in Adam's events.

P020

They're passing a tiny garage with no shops nearby when Adam suddenly stops.

Adam lifts the keys and inspects them.
"Be right back," he tells his friend.

"What?? What are you do-?? Stop that!! What if they catch us breaking in?" Melissa whispers urgently as Adam tries three in the bundle till one unlocks the door.

"I...don't know. But it feels like we're meant to be following these clues!"

"What clues?!"

Adam slips in when he can fit through the opening. He walks around in the semi-dark. Everywhere is quiet for a moment and Melissa sends a worried glance around. When he comes out, Adam's holding nothing but a small screwdriver.

"That's it?" Melissa asks with an eyebrow up. He shrugs. "Could come in handy."

P021

Adam's phone rings.

"Yeah? Oh, okay. Have you guys left yet? Could you come pick us up then?"

"What'd they say?" Melissa asks when he's done talking.

"Okay. We're meeting the car at the end of the road. The driver's here."

P022

The barrels are stacked with fresh fish in them. It doesn't look like anything important.

P023

Something floats on the water. Adam reaches out and tries to grab it. It is an empty bottle.

"Damn, I think we've wasted our time with this." Adam murmurs.
"Looks like it. Never mind, let's keep going." replies Melissa.

P018

A junction box hangs on the wall, half broken. It looks like its cables have seen better days. The green, red and yellow wires are loose.

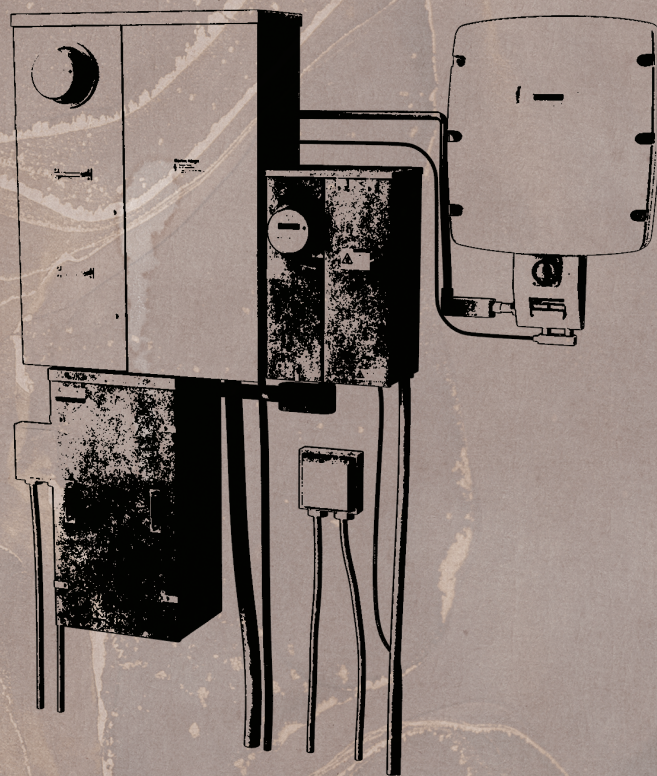
Adam can try to repair the connection.

Make a Strength roll to repair the green wire.
Make a Strength roll to repair the red wire.
Make an Energy roll to repair the yellow wire.

If all rolls succeed, Adam repairs the junction box.

Mark Adam's ⚡ event.

If any of the rolls fail, Adam receives a small electric shock and gets -1 Strength.



P024

"Damn, I remember now, it's that little girl's teddy bear!" exclaims Melissa.

"The truth is, I don't see her around anymore, she's probably gone."