

All Year Round, There Is Work To Do 04

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Festival Planning

[[“The Farmers’ Almanac”](#) by Jack de Quidt plays]

Ali: Hello, and welcome to Friends at the Table, an actual play podcast focused on critical worldbuilding, smart characterization, and fun interaction between good friends. Today, I am your host, Alicia Acampora. We are here to play *Grandpa’s Farm*, to continue *Grandpa’s Farm* by Possible Worlds. We are finishing our third year, going into our fourth, but before we do that, we have to play a festival scene [laughs quietly] where there’s a play? There’s a bunch of street stands outside of a play.

Janine: Right! Yes.

Ali: Because it’s the Nievelmarch theater’s—

Janine: “Dog at the Crossroads”.

Ali: Yeah.

Janine: “Dog of the Crossroads”? [Ali laughs quietly] “Dog at the Crossroads”.

Ali: “Dog at the Crossroads”.

Janine: Drunk at the Crossroads. [Ali laughs] Dog in the Vineyard.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Jack: Mm.

Ali: So, this is our fall festival. I'm trying to think, like, would this be— is this a theater that, like, only runs productions once a season? So this is the debut night, so they do, like, a big street fair, like, bunch of vendors come out, there's booths in front of the theater situation once a season? Is it like a...

Jack: Oh, that's a good question. Um... [Ali laughs quietly]

Janine: I could imagine, like, maybe it's sort of just like a general community venue, where it's like, okay, they'll do, like, a concert series, you know?

Ali: Mm.

Janine: Where, like, every Saturday, there's an ensemble that, like, does...like, this Saturday is the Marches of Nievelmarch week, and they just do a bunch of marches or something.

Ali: Mm.

Janine: And then occasionally there'll be, like, a theater group that's like, “Okay, we've been rehearsing this play, and now we're gonna put it on,” and the run'll be for, like, this month or something, and...

Jack: Yeah, the vibe that I have definitely been imagining is the, like, local amateur

theater company inside the, like, venue for— like a community venue for performing arts, right?

Janine: Yeah.

Jack: Where it's like—

Janine: There is an opera house, and this cannot be that. [all laugh]

Jack: It's like, there's like, you know, it's the equivalent of, like, all the high schoolers are putting on a play of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, which is something that has happened in Ann Arbor and I'm very sad we didn't get to go and see, [**Ali:** Aw.] because that would have ruled. But it's that, but it's the book club putting on "Dog at the Crossroads". So I think that, yeah, it's this— it's like a co-production, right? I feel like everybody here is sort of like, "Oh, you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours." The theater company is like, "Well, we can attract people to the theater by inviting venders to work outside," and the venders are like, "Oh, the play will draw crowds that will buy all the stuff."

Ali: Right, yeah. And from what we said before, it seems like Sable and Velvet at least are sort of going to be grouped with their, like, representing...

Jack: Oh, yeah.

Ali: Like, produce, I guess is the best way to say it? Like, I'm sort of here with the alchemist group of venders, and Velvet, I assume you're, like, with...I guess it's your choice. You can either be with, like, the poison lady that you [laughs quietly] have this sort of budding relationship with.

Janine: By "poison lady," you mean the lady that I poison?

Ali: Uh huh, yeah. Well, she has a— she also has an enthusiasm for poison. She's a mushroom lady, I guess.

Janine: Yeah.

Ali: Or there were other crystallers from the last festival that you met, and maybe you could be with them. I don't know if you wanted it to be, like, caves general or crystals general.

Janine: Didn't we all come together?

Ali: Right, yeah. I'm talking about, like—

Janine: So it'd be kind of, like, rude to ditch you.

Ali: No, I'm— well, I was talking about, like, what booths are we working in.

Janine: Oh, sure.

Ali: Because Ern's gonna be performing and practicing and, you know.

Janine: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Um...I might be helping out with mushrooms.

Ali: Okay.

Janine: Like, maybe there's, like, mushroom stew. [laughs quietly] Like a *Minecraft*... [Ali laughs] Wooden bowls, and then you put two mushroom in, and then you make mushroom stew.

Ali: Let's go.

Jack: Oh, I like a mushroom stew.

Ali: There was the, um...there was somebody in New York a little while ago who was doing this, like, community but also, like, living soup.

Jack: Oh, yes! It was Annie Rauwerda's perpetual stew.

Ali: [laughs] Yes. Where not only was it, like, there would always be some stew left over that would be a part of the next brewing, but they were also, like, just accepting things from people in the community to put into this stew?

Jack: [laughs quietly] That's great.

Ali: [laughs] Should it be that sort of thing? Or should it just be, like, it's mushrooms. The mushroom people have the recipe covered.

Janine: Well, I thought, like, if it was, like, everyone— if there's food trucks and stuff like that, that that would be, like, one option, and then there's, like, different ones?

Ali: Okay.

Janine: We kind of— did we do—? We did, like, a potluck one, didn't we? Where it was like, everyone— or did we just talk about it?

Ali: No, we just talked about it.

Janine: Right.

Ali: Because the first one was the showcase one, and then the second one was the, like...

Janine: Oh.

Ali: Yeah, cave party.

Janine: I have a thought.

Ali: Please.

Janine: Because it's a community theater kind of thing, [**Ali:** Uh huh.] what if different groups, like, volunteered to handle concessions or [**Ali:** Oh.] to produce merchandise for the show or whatever? Maybe not volunteer but, like, were recruited by the book club because they, like, have friends or something. [Janine and Ali laugh] Or like, you know, you make a little bit of money selling some soup as, like, refreshments.

Ali: Right. I mean, that's— like, Ern met the book club people at our sort of, like, [**Janine:** Yeah.] farmer event.

Jack: Yeah.

Ali: So it's easy to imagine that each of those people would have those connections to sort of, like, map this out the way that you're saying.

Janine: Mm-hmm.

Ali: So, the mush— [laughs] the mushroom folks are concessions, and then I guess alchemists would be, mm...special effects? [laughs quietly] Advertising? I don't know. [laughs]

Jack: It could be, like, lighting gels. They produce the colored lights for the plays.

Ali: Oh.

Jack: Or they're alchemists, right? Yeah, I was sort of imagining crystals there. The alchemists are...yeah, they make the mysterious scented smoke that wreaths the crossroads. They've made a particular kind of punch, theater punch.

Ali: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

Jack: Alchemy is a kind of bartending. [Ali laughs]

Janine: Mm...

Ali: I love this. Yeah. Yeah, I do— yeah. I think, yeah. So, that's fun. That's fun. Maybe where, like...maybe it's like a thing of, like, helping with the stage and then also there's something we're giving out to the audience. [laughs quietly] I guess I only go to wrestling shows, so I think of, like, oh, this is the moment where, like, one of the wrestlers where you turn off all of the lights and people in the audience put their cell phone [laughs] flashlight up, or like a lighter up traditionally at concerts is also where that would happen.

Jack: Everybody's been given a little candle.

Ali: Uh huh, yeah.

Janine: Wrestling shows should start doing those K-pop wands.

Ali: [laughs] They really should!

Jack: Oh, they should!

Janine: They would make infinite money.

Ali: They should. Yeah. I just remembered a thing, which is really funny. [laughs]

Janine: Are you gonna share with the class, or are you keeping that one to yourself?

Ali: Yeah, I— [laughs] well, because it's just unrelated. I, like, always wanted to bring up the way that K-pop, like, lightsticks are, like, super programmed in PALISADE as, like, a Paint Shop ruining things where it's a bad thing.

Janine: Ooh.

Jack: Ah, it's a hard life. [Ali laughs]

Janine: On the bright side, you've found a second way that Brnine could, like, completely shake the whole system up.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Janine: Is lightsticks that don't let anyone actually express themselves. You just hold it up, and you're part of the light program, and you paid for that privilege.

Ali: That's what that is.

Janine: [laughs quietly] I mean, yeah, it is.

Ali: Ah, I love it. Anyway, so, yeah. Maybe we're doing something like that, where it's like giving out something to the audience for, like, an audience participation type thing. Ern, what are you up to? You're busy.

Jack: [sighs] God, I had to go in. I had to get my makeup done. It's all very exciting, and

there's this real community theater vibe, right? Where it's like, the makeup guy is the guy who runs the used book store who has been, you know, getting into stage makeup, and the stage manager is the woman from the library who is, you know. There's this real vibe of, oh, everybody is sort of...real amateur dramatics hours. But it's going pretty good. There's a real sort of electric excitement in the building. I don't think that the people of the audience have started to take their seats yet, but you know, running through last rehearsals. They wanted to make sure that a song was right. You know, the company had really been struggling with the harmonies on one of the songs, so they've run that a few times.

Janine: Mm, mm-hmm.

Jack: The organist has gotten sick and has been replaced by the organist's brother, who might be better.

Janine: Oh, god. Oh! [Ali laughs]

Jack: So everybody's saying like, "Oh, no, it's such a shame that Billy couldn't be here," and like, but also being like, "Wow, we're so happy to see *you* here, Michael. You can play the organ really well." Yeah, it's very exciting, and I keep coming out, coming out and looking at the festival and kind of checking in with you and being like, "Everybody doing okay? Thumbs up?"

Ali: [laughs] Yeah, I...so, yeah, let's talk about things mechanically for a second, and then let's talk about things...let's jump into the festival the way we've sort of done this, like, round robin describing things before we get into spending points. Hi. So. [laughs] What the festival is, in terms of *Grandpa's Farm*, is an optional sort of game that you can play where you can spend the cumulative progress you've made in a single year to remove cards from your deck to make your progress over the next year better because your cards are better. So, we can go over our year's progress now. Talk about math for a second, because we, you know, we've had some ups and downs this year, I think.

Jack: Ha.

Ali: This is also our third year, so, you know. Yeah, hi. [laughs]

Jack: Okay.

Ali: So, so, so. For Sable Butter's year, I have had a 14 social progress, which is 1 social momentum; a 53 financial progress, which is 5 financial momentum; a 34 in agricultural progress, which is a 3 agricultural momentum; and a 17 in infrastructural progress, which is a 2 infrastructural momentum. The way you get those numbers is you divide by 10 and then round up or down, depending.

Jack: I had a pretty interesting year. I have 33 social progress, which became 3 momentum. I have 25 financial progress, which got rounded up to 3 momentum. I have 32 agricultural progress, which got rounded down to 3 momentum. And I have 17 infrastructural progress, which got rounded up to 2 momentum.

Janine: Do you want to know a fun detail?

Ali: Yeah.

Jack: Yeah.

Janine: Both of you, your scores equal the same number. They both add up to 11.

Ali: Oh!

Jack: Huh. Well, that's nice.

Ali: That is fun.

Janine: Uh huh. Well, depending on your metrics. [all laugh] It's fun for Ern, I think. So, for me, I got a 37 socially, which I rounded up to a 4. Monetarily, I got a 60.

Ali: [quietly] Jesus.

Janine: Which is a straight 6, baby!

Jack: Oh my god.

Janine: Agriculturally, a mere— why did I write 3.4? That's 3.2. It doesn't matter either way, because it rounds down to a 3.

Ali: Mm. [laughs quietly]

Janine: And infrastructurally, I got a 51, which rounds down to a 5.

Jack: Okay. That's a big year for you.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Janine: Oh yeah. Yeah, I got my ducks in a row.

Jack: Yeah.

Janine: And they're marching.

Jack: You got your ducks in a row, and those ducks were three gigantic rabbits. [Janine laughs] Or— yeah, three, right?

Janine: Yeah.

Ali: [laughs quietly] Yeah, so let me just read from the rules real quick, because basically what we're gonna be doing is, as heard in previous episodes, sort of finding a challenge within the event to, you know, make an offer to somebody that will, you know, give us a financial boom. These momentum points sort of represent chances that we have, because it will result in a card pull determining who is higher, and, like, you can pull more times the more number of momentum you have in that category. We can choose two other NPCs that we make up here to take out two cards, and then our third chance to take out a third card has to be with another one of the players. So, any questions before we jump in?

Jack: I don't think so.

Ali: Okay. All right. Okay.

Janine: I don't want to be this person, but did you say “financial boom”?

Ali: [laughs] I might have meant boon, with an N?

Janine: Okay.

Ali: Yeah.

Janine: Maybe. I... [Ali laughs] Financial Boom sounds like an actual, like, move or something, and I was like, “Wait, is this another— is this like, because we’re getting in the end?”

Ali: [laughs] No.

Janine: We’re triggering the Financial Boom mode?

Ali: [laughs] Yeah. “To spend momentum, first describe the positive development you're pursuing and from whom,” is the sentence I was looking for in the book. But yeah, so, I... [laughs quietly]

Festival Day [0:18:40]

Ali: I am a little curious about how we’ve sort of filled our day before the, like, show opening, so to speak? Because we did set up last time that Velvet and Sable had to arrive, like, very early to ride in with Ern.

Janine: Yeah.

Jack: Yes.

Ali: Who has to be there, who had more responsibility than us today. Although, Ern, I'm also curious if you do...if, like, the witches or the farming institute, question mark, has any expectations from you today.

Jack: Oh. That’s a really good question. [Ali laughs] I think that— hmm. So, I have been dealing with this, like, the curse kind of kicked back in in a big way, and my entire farm

kind of turned into, like, a dense jungle with fruit everywhere, too much fruit even for me to sell. So, I think— and I don't want to get away with...the cards meant that I couldn't sell all the fruit that I made, and you know, like, a lot of Ern's supply is just rotting, because he can't manage to sell it in time. But I wonder if Ern is trying to leverage the massive amount of produce on his farm in some way, whether he doesn't have an obligation but he has shown up to the event with, like, three barrels of apples that he's just hoping to donate to somebody, or it's like just a massive excess of stuff that he's trying to get rid of and nobody's prepared to buy, and that might be the extent of my obligation as a farmer, because my real obligation today is as a dramatist.

Ali: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Beautiful. Yeah. [laughs] Stick to your artistic integrity today, Ern.

Jack: Oh, yeah. Very important.

Ali: [laughs] No compromises.

Jack: No. You can't compromise with the theater, and I think this is something that Ern sort of tells you, a little apologetically [Janine laughs] and a little aware that he is completely talking out of his own ass, but kind of, like, enjoying the “I am an amateur dramatics person; the theater might be for me.”

(as **Ern**): You know, you can't make any compromises for your art.

Jack: Tongue firmly in check, wink and a smile as he goes back in to practice the scene with the umbrella. [Ali laughs]

Janine: Have we covered who Ern is playing in this production?

Jack: Yeah, Ern is playing, um...oh my god. Let me see. A character called Alexei. [Ali laughs]

Janine: Right, okay.

Ali: You had— ooh, you had two outfits, right? Pre- and post- “the incident,” question

mark?

Jack: Yes, yes. A couple of years ago Ern had a— went to Halloween as Alexei before the incident, and then at midnight, he changed into Alexei after the incident. [Janine and Ali laugh] So he's reusing these costumes for this.

Janine: Oh, god bless.

Jack: But I think, right now, he's in the "before the incident" costume, you know?

Janine: As one would have to be.

Jack: Yeah, at the beginning of the play. Ern is in his costume way too early. He's just very excited, you know?

Ali: Yeah. And yeah, Velvet, you're— how are you spending your morning out in the town, out and about?

Janine: I think there's probably some, like, food cart setup stuff, but like, once that's done, she's probably gonna leave the actual, like, cooking and stuff to everyone. It's just some, like, get the wagon, put the chocks under the wheels. You know. [Ali laughs] That kind of thing. And then I think she probably just, like, goes for a nice little walk around town, because she...you know, she has— it's not like she's trapped underground, but it's nice to not be underground.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Jack: Yeah.

Janine: Sometimes you just want to get some air, take a meander, do some window shopping, touch grass.

Jack: What time of year is it?

Ali: It's fall.

Jack: Oh, wow, so there's a nice crisp in the air.

Janine: Mm-hmm.

Jack: There's leaves everywhere, but they haven't started to—

Janine: I kind of imagine there's always a nice crisp in the air in this place, even the summer.

Ali: Mm-hmm. [Janine and Ali laugh quietly]

Jack: That's true, yeah.

Janine: But like, sometimes it's crisper than normal.

Ali: Yeah. Are you getting anything specific? Any...?

Janine: Hmm.

Ali: I feel like we have to get one of those, like, random list generators to find out what you're buying. [laughs]

Janine: Oh, I would love that. One second. [Ali laughs] [typing] Random RPG item generator?

Jack: You go to the classic random generator for Nievelmarch: Hammacher Schlemmer dot com. [Ali laughs]

Janine: Ah, that's...hmm.

Jack: No, we should randomly generate. We should.

Janine: Adventure, map, dungeon, dungeon. Is there, like, items? Give me items.

Ali: Yeah, we don't need any dungeons here.

Jack: No.

Janine: [typing] Item. I keep spelling item wrong. Mm, magic items, normal items. I kind of want magic items. Type, rarity. Common. It should be common. She's not rich. Well, she's got money, but she's not fancy like that. Uh...oh, a wondrous item. Okay. [laughs] So, this isn't a proper randomizer; it's just a thing that filters a list down, and then I just scroll to a random thing, and the first thing my eyes fell upon was "talking doll." [Ali laughs]

Jack: Oh my god.

Janine: She buys a talking doll. [Ali laughs]

Jack: Is this doll magical, or is this doll just a talking doll?

Janine: Well, you know, it came off the magical items list, but there's nothing to say that it was in the magical items section of the store that she got it from. I don't know.

Jack: That's true.

Janine: If you don't understand how something works, it's essentially magic.

Jack: Yeah. Yeah, I think that's how it works.

Ali: Mm-hmm. [laughs] We're always getting back here. We're always getting back to creepy dolls.

Janine: I didn't say— *you* said creepy. [Ali and Jack laugh]

Ali: This is true.

Janine: I said talking.

Ali: Yeah, this is true. This is true. That's my bad. And, you know, the magic of Nievelmarch. We spent a lot of time thinking about dolls in Nievelmarch, so there's all types.

Jack: That's true. [Ali laughs]

Janine: What's a pretender doll?

Ali: Huh?

Janine: I have to look up what a pretender doll is.

Ali: Go ahead. Have fun. [Ali and Jack laugh]

Janine: [typing] Antique...

Jack: Report back to us. [Ali laughs] My guess is that a pretender doll is, like, a mimic of a person. It's like a doppelganger doll. That's what I think.

Janine: It's like a set of dolls known as the old pretenders.

Ali: Mm.

Jack: Sure.

Janine: Oh, they're from the 1600s. [Ali laughs] Wow. I just want you to see the picture of this thing's head.

Ali: Please.

Janine: Because you'll know how I got to "wait, I have to know what that is." Please let me just copy an image. Let me just—

Jack: You're gonna put it in the Sangfielle channel? [Ali laughs]

Janine: That's actually a great idea.

Ali: Oh, god.

Janine: In the ol' Sangfielle horror box. Here we go.

Jack: Oh, wow!

Ali: Sure.

Jack: Oh, gosh.

Ali: I love this kind of...

Janine: Get really in on that face.

Ali: Yeah.

Jack: Yeah, sinister but good.

Ali: Uh huh.

Janine: Yeah.

Ali: [laughs] What is this, like, disinterested expression? I'm obsessed with it.

Janine: Yeah, these dolls have amazing faces. [Ali laughs quietly] I'm, like, so...so, here are some that are more plain. I think this is probably a little more close to what we'd actually be looking at here. Their faces? [Ali and Jack laugh]

Jack: Okay, these ones are less, uh, good.

Janine: Their faces.

Jack: These ones are more frightening. Oh my god, there's a horror in this image. There's a horror, and he jumps out if you look at the image for long enough.

Janine: The little clown?

Ali: Uh huh. Yeah, uh huh. [laughs]

Jack: Yeah.

Ali: Janine, can you walk the audience through how to get to these images? [laughs]

Janine: If you just search for, like, "the Old Pretenders dolls," you'll—

Ali: Okay.

Janine: Antique, maybe. You will see all of these.

Jack: You need to be sitting in the middle of your room at midnight. [Ali laughs] Light a candle.

Janine: You know what these— these are so much like, um...you know Pullip dolls and there's, like, related— there's like the related ones? Like Byul and Dal?

Ali: Yeah.

Janine: Byul, I think it is, is, like, really— I'm getting such Byul vibes. [Ali laughs] Or maybe I'm thinking of Dal. Hang on.

Ali: Byul...

Jack: Oh, yeah, I see.

Janine: [typing] Pullip, Byul. Or is it Dal? It might be Dal. It might— uh... [Ali laughs] Okay, yeah, it's Dal, D-A-L. To me, this is a modern successor.

Jack: Oh, yeah, I see this. Absolutely. No, I don't care for this.

Janine: Austin is not—

Ali: Okay.

Janine: Austin is typing, dot dot dot. [all laugh] Austin says, "What's she pretending to be, an old creepy doll?"

Jack: Yeah, pretending really successfully.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Janine: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Jack: So you've bought how many of these?

Janine: Just one, just one.

Ali: Yeah.

Janine: I'm not—

Jack: Okay, just the one.

Janine: I'm not rolling in money.

Ali: Yeah.

Jack: And it talks.

Janine: And it's probably, like, old and kinda junky. It's not, like, fresh and— you know?

Ali: [laughs quietly] Uh huh.

Janine: And it does talk.

Jack: What are you up to, um, Sable?

Ali: Sable. Yeah.

Jack: Yes.

Ali: That's a good question. It's funny. I was listening to myself talking in the last recording and being like, "Oh, they probably leave so early at like 10:00," and I... [Ali and Jack laugh] There are earlier times to have to get up and drive into the city. So, I think that it's like...I'm probably doing a similar thing to Velvet, which is like, just going on a walk. I bet I stop at the Glacier Express and get some sort of, like, warm—

Janine: What do you buy?

Ali: —autismal beverage.

Janine: Auptismal?

Ali: Autumnal. [Ali and Jack laugh]

Jack: Uh, they've actually— it's a new scheme at the Glacier Cafe. It's called Prism Autumn, [Ali laughs] where all the glasses are these beautiful cut glass prisms, [**Janine:** Oh.] and the winter autumnal light, [**Ali:** Yeah.] like, shines through the glasses and makes these rainbows.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Jack: So it is autismal drinks.

Ali: Right. It's, like, a whole thing about, like, how...

Janine: Random coffee drink generator.

Ali: Uh huh.

Janine: Click.

Ali: How the, like, days get shorter, question mark?

Jack: Oh, yeah.

Ali: If that works like this in this universe too? So it's like, oh, you know, if you come in the beginning of the month, the light will shine in a different space in the cafe. Then if you go in the end of the month, it will, like, you know, it's a real thing of, like, different "influencers," quote, unquote, are like... [laughs] I guess you're not taking a picture in this universe. I don't know.

Jack: No, but there's, like, you go out to see the—

Ali: You're getting a portrait painted.

Jack: Yeah! [Ali laughs] Going and getting your portrait painted at the Glacier.

Janine: Hmm.

Ali: And yeah, Sable has much regrets that she does not have time for that. But like, I remember writing a letter of her being like, “Usually when I’m in the city, no one’s here, and that’s really sad,” so I think that it’s a similar thing of her, like, you know, waiting until things are open properly, or even everybody arriving in the city by the time things have opened properly, and she might stop off at her old magazine office to, like, drop off tickets. I think it would be really funny if...

Jack: Oh, yeah.

Ali: [laughs] At some point in the week, Sable went to Ern and was like, “Can you get me, like, eight tickets for all of the other people that I know?” and Ern was like, “I guess?”

Jack: Absolutely. I gotta go and ask Jan, and then Jan hand writes out the little tickets.

Ali: [laughs] And I think that’s also an int— like, I don’t know. I’ve been thinking about how the vibe really is with that, because presumably if Sable is sort of chasing her mentor’s past in that way, other people in the office would have known and had their own opinions on this behavior, right? But I do think that, like, going to the fancy design magazine office to be like, “Here are all of these tickets for the play that the farmer’s association is putting on [Jack and Ali laugh] for, like, the book club,” is sort of like, [unenthused] “Yeah, thanks.”

Jack: Yeah.

Ali: But I—

Jack: Do you think they’re gonna come?

Ali: [laughs] I hope so. I’m sure not everybody does, but they accept the tickets to be nice. But I think it’s also like, “let’s do this for Sable,” because I also was, like, sick this past year, which they all know about. [laughs] Maybe they’re like— the way that Sable keeps treating Ern is the way that they’re maybe treating her. [laughs]

Jack: Just this train of, like, well-meaning but slightly confusedly patronizing care.

Ali: Uh huh, yeah. Mm-hmm. So, that's happening. And, uh, yeah. Are we ready to just jump into it maybe? Are there more details about the play that we want to figure out? Are there other booths we want to call out?

Janine: I did—

Ali: Please. [laughs]

Janine: [sighs] Back when you went to the cafe...

Ali: Uh huh.

Janine: I was looking for, like, I want like a random coffee thing.

Ali: Please.

Janine: Couldn't find a good one. I we need to the new Bing—I apologize—and asked it for help, and it suggested a cup of hot chocolate, half a teaspoon of cinnamon, a quarter teaspoon of cayenne pepper, a quarter teaspoon of chili powder, a quarter teaspoon of nutmeg, [Jack laughs quietly] a quarter teaspoon of ginger, a quarter teaspoon of turmeric, a quarter teaspoon of vanilla extract, whipped cream, and marshmallows, and it is called the Dragon's Breath.

Jack: I don't think that this would be very nice. [Ali laughs]

Janine: No?

Jack: I don't—

Janine: Are you saying that because there's cayenne pepper *and* chili powder?

Jack: I don't—

Janine: And also ginger and turmeric, instead of just, like, letting one of those shine instead of all of them?

Ali: Yeah.

Jack: And it's also, like, a lot of powder goes into that drink. Like, *a lot* of powder goes into that drink.

Janine: Into one cup. Like, one cup, like the measurement one cup, [Ali laughs quietly] and then like, several full teaspoons of powders? Yeah. And then whipped cream and marshmallows.

Jack: Computer doesn't know shit. Yeah, no, that drink is not selling. [all laugh] They're having a real difficulty moving that drink. I mean, I think that the play...why would we preplan this when we can, instead, discover it in a panic?

Ali: Oh, please, yes.

Jack: In 25 minutes.

Ali: Yeah.

Jack: I think that the booths...it's like a street fair outside the theater, right? Or is it in the sort of lobby of the community arts center? What do you think?

Ali: I was thinking of it sort of lining, like, corner to corner of the street that the theater's actually on. So, like, you know, people can just be walking through, or it's a way— you sort of walk through it to get into the theater.

Jack: Yes. Yeah. I think I agree. There are people selling "Dog at the Crossroads" themed candies with, like, a little chocolate dog on a stick that's like a crossroads. There's posters going up. Someone from the local paper is here along with their, like, mousy assistant who has a little pencil and a pad and is, like, sketching people for little interviews at the "Dog at the Crossroads" opening. It's all very exciting. Do we want to start spending momentum points?

Ali: If we're ready to, yeah. It's funny to think how, like, Ern is gonna manage this, but Ern, you know, will have opportunities throughout his day to...

Jack: Yeah, I think... [Ali laughs] My hope is that he'll be fine. My hope is that Ernan

Langerhank will be fine.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Jack: That's emblazoned on a tote bag.

Ali: Yeah, I— yeah, I think—

Jack: For this show. [Ali laughs]

Ali: I'm always hoping this. [Jack and Janine laugh quietly]

Ern's Agricultural Momentum [0:36:33]

Jack: But yeah, I might start by spending some momentum before the play begins, and I would like to spend one of my agricultural progress momentum points, of which I have three, because I would like to get some help with this chaos that is going on in my farm right now. And to this end, I think Ern—midway through, you know, dashing in and out of the theater in a kind of nervous self-propelled excitement—strikes up conversation with somebody who is pruning the autumn roses that climb up the outside of this performing arts center. Does anybody want to be a rose farmer?

Janine: Hmm. Sure.

Jack: Okay.

(as **Ern**): Uh, can I talk to you real quick? You don't have to come down from the ladder. It's okay.

Janine (as **gardener**): All right, get talking.

Janine: Snip snip. Like, pruning.

Jack (as **Ern**): So, my name's Ern, and I'm dressed like a priest. I'm not a priest. I'm an actor. I'm acting in the play this afternoon, actually.

Janine (as **gardener**): Why'd you disclose that? Uh huh?

Jack (as **Ern**): Um, it's so important not to lie about being a priest, and it's, I feel, critical when you are dressed as one for, like, a festival or a play or something like that.

Janine (as **gardener**): It could also implicate you in stuff.

Jack (as **Ern**): Uh, it could implicate you in stuff, absolutely, and maybe sometimes that stuff would be good, but you might also be called upon to do a funeral or something, which you really don't want to do.

Janine (as **gardener**): I meant, like, someone could, like, tell you crimes they did.

Janine: Snip snip.

Jack (as **Ern**): People do that to priests?

Janine (as **gardener**): Yeah.

Jack (as **Ern**): Oh. Damn, okay.

Janine (as **gardener**): That's what they're for, right?

Jack (as **Ern**): I don't know if I would say that that's what priests are for, but I suppose it's part of— look, I don't know. I'm not really a priest. I just play one, play one on the stage. These roses, did they take you long to grow?

Janine (as **gardener**): Yeah, I mean, some of them take a long time. Other ones just kind of happen.

Jack (as **Ern**): [laughs awkwardly] Tell me about it. I have a farm up on the hills, and I recently had a sort of curse-based problem where four years of plants grew in about two and a half hours, so I'm sort of dealing with some kind of plant chaos right now, and, you know, you're there, and you've got the pruning shears. I wondered if there was any sort of advice you could offer for someone who's in a

situation like that.

Janine (as **gardener**): Are you the guy with the hole farm?

Jack (as **Ern**): I'm sorry?

Janine (as **gardener**): Are you the guy with the hole farm?

Jack (as **Ern**): Uh, I own all the farm, yes.

Janine (as **gardener**): Nah, the farm what got the hole.

Jack (as **Ern**): Oh. You—

Janine (as **gardener**): Hole farm.

Jack (as **Ern**): People have been talking about that?

Janine (as **gardener**): [darkly] Oh, yeah. [Ali laughs quietly]

Jack (as **Ern**): Wait, actually, sorry. Can you come down from the ladder? [Ali laughs quietly]

Janine (as **gardener**): [sighs] Do I got— why?

Jack (as **Ern**): Well, I mean, if we bring up the hole, and now I learn that everyone's talking about the hole my farm, I just sort of, I want to, you know—

Janine (as **gardener**): They're already talking about it. It's not— no secrets anymore.

Jack (as **Ern**): Apparently. I just— what do they say about it?

Janine (as **gardener**): I mean, that there's a hole.

Jack (as **Ern**): Well, but all kinds of farms have got holes.

Janine (as **gardener**): Most people fill 'em in, though. Unless they've got water in

'em. Or you're doing some kind of hole farming, but that's, like, a whole other thing.

Janine: Snip snip. [laughs]

Jack (as **Ern**): Yeah.

Ali (as **onlooker**): A hole other thing, heh heh. [Jack and Ali laugh]

Jack: Uh huh? Are you the meat pies salesman next to the thing?

Ali: I'm just someone listening, yeah. [Janine and Ali laugh]

Jack (as **Ern**): Look, she's laughing about it now. I mean, okay. [Janine laughs] I... [sighs] Look. The hole is— okay, I do have a hole. It does go to nowhere, and it does— it has— it is sort of eating the farm. But I can't really address that if it's so covered in trees and brambles and vines and roots, you know?

Janine (as **gardener**): Well, I mean, you know what keeps a hole from eating stuff away? From ground, you know, falling into a hole? Roots. Roots hold stuff, you know? That's why, you know... [laughs quietly] Ground under a rosebush, pretty solid, not gonna...that's not gonna wash away. That stuff's held, you know?

Jack (as **Ern**): [sighs] Look, I think this is kind of beyond my skillset, if I'm honest. I don't have a lot of money, but, you know, maybe some opportunities will be coming my way after the play. Is there any chance you could, you know, take a couple of days out of your week and maybe just...you know, you don't need to get rid of any of the roots, but you could cut a path through the farm, maybe.

Janine (as **gardener**): Uh, [sighs] I'm really— I'm more about shaping than just, like, cutting it away, you know? I like to give form.

Jack (as **Ern**): That would be good. That would be good. You could do that. I just— I just don't think it can stay as it is, and I don't feel super safe going near

the hole when it's like this.

Janine (as **gardener**): Mm, yeah.

Jack (as **Ern**): So...

Janine (as **gardener**): You've gotta be sure of the edge on that hole, and if you're not sure on the edge, then that's gonna be an issue.

Jack: [laughs quietly] Ern, still hearing the sound of that man falling through the hole last time. [Ali and Janine laugh] Do we want to draw a card to see if I have enlisted the help of a rose specialist? Rumormongering rose specialist.

Janine: Yeah. Where's, um...is there, like, a generic deck for me to draw from? I forget how we were doing it. I thought we had, like, an unaltered, like a pure deck.

Ali: Oh, yeah, there should be. I might have hidden it, because we weren't in this phase of the game before, and now let me go to...oh, I'm sorry. [laughs quietly] Uh, hold on. Personalization and display. [sarcastic] Oh, I love it that Roll20 changed a bunch of stuff.

Jack: It's good. They do this on purpose whenever we feel comfortable. [Ali and Janine laugh]

Ali: Uh...show. Is there a gray deck on the bottom there now that you see?

Janine: Yeah.

Ali: Okay.

Jack: Yes.

Ali: That is your challenge deck.

Janine: Challenge deck! I'm pulling from the challenge deck.

Jack: Oh, wait, do I— oh, yes. We both pull from the challenge deck.

Janine: Yeah. What category is this?

Jack: Wait, no. Do I pull from my deck, and Janine pulls from the challenge?

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Jack: This is agricultural.

Janine: Okay.

Jack: Spades. I pull from mine, which is pink?

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Jack: Okay.

Ali: Short version of the rules here is that you want something of the same suit. You want the highest card of the same suit that you're trying to make the progress in. Same suit beats any card of a non-matching suit, and then from there it's just higher card amount.

Jack: So, Janine has pulled an ace of diamonds, **[Ali:** Mm-hmm.] which is out of suit, but this means that if I don't pull a spade, I have lost, right?

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Jack: Because an ace is a very high card, and in fact—

Janine: You have to— I mean, you can re-spend to draw, right? You can—

Jack: Yes.

Ali: Right.

Jack: I have pulled a king of clubs. That's a good card, but it is not beaten by an ace.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Janine: No.

Jack: So I am going to spend another agricultural momentum to draw again. I'm aiming for a spade. [laughs]

Ali: Now you have one more turn.

Jack: Okay, I pulled a nine of hearts. I'm gonna draw one more time, and I pulled a two of clubs.

Ali: No!

Jack: So I have lost my entire agricultural progress help.

Janine: Aw. [Ali laughs]

Jack: And reduced that to nothing. Okay.

Ali (as **onlooker**): You're out on your own here, Ern. [laughs]

Jack (as **Ern**): Hey, look. Go back to selling meat pies. We weren't even talking to you!

Janine: Wow.

Jack (as **Ern**): Sorry, I don't mean to be rude, but I was having a conversation with this person up the ladder.

Ali (as **onlooker**): Well, we all know what happens with that hole.

Jack (as **Ern**): What does— what happens? What do you mean, “we all know what happens with that hole”?

Ali (as **onlooker**): [laughs dismissively] All right, buddy. [Janine laughs quietly]

Jack (as **Ern**): Oh, I—

Janine: The rose person and the vender kind of share a look, like, “eh, we know what happens with that hole.”

Jack (as **Ern**): I just— this isn't what I need before performing. I just, like, a guy comes out and asks for some help. [resigned] That's okay. It's fine. It's fine. [Ali laughs] Maybe people are just— maybe this is how people treat the clergy. I don't know. God!

Janine (as **gardener**): You're not clergy. You just said.

Jack (as **Ern**): I'm making a little joke. I was just making a little joke!

Janine (as **gardener**): Eh, that's funny.

Jack (as **Ern**): God!

Janine (as **gardener**): Okay. Hey, take a rose.

Janine: Clips a rose, tosses it down to you.

Jack (as **Ern**): [sighs] Okay, fine.

Janine (as **gardener**): Buck up. [Jack laughs]

Janine: I do have a name for this person, if we want to ever bring them back.

Jack: Yeah, totally.

Ali: Please.

Janine: Their name is Concertine Haight. [Ali laughs]

Jack: How is Haight spelt?

Janine: H-A-I-G-H-T.

Jack: Doesn't feel good when people just make these claims about the [**Janine:** Hole?]

demon hole on your farm.

Ali: [laughs quietly] You called it a demon hole.

Jack: I didn't—

Ali: Eh...

Janine: Word gets around about stuff like that.

Ali: Yeah.

Jack: And that guy did not come home.

Ali: Uh huh.

Janine: No.

Jack: Okay. Back into the theater. Ern, real cloud of— this is not the right headspace that you need to be in for performing.

Ali: No.

Janine: Mm.

Jack: In fact, Ern's theater book says it's important for an actor to be— to feel ready and comfortable before a performance.

Ali: Wow. Well, I don't know about today for you, Ern.

Jack: There's a real— I wonder if there's a part of this as well is, like, Ern is very much a city person—you know, has come from the city to Nievelmarch—and I wonder if, between the pie salesman and the rose person, whether or not there is this sort of sense of an out-of-towner. I wonder if Ern perceives it, you know? Feels himself being viewed [**Janine:** Yeah.] as the out-of-towner who's arrived and the demon hole is swallowing up the farm.

Ali: Mm-hmm. [laughs sympathetically] Okay. Well, so that's our first failed scene there. Sorry, Ern. Other momentum spends.

Janine: Hmm.

Ali: I'll admit I'm sort of— I'm not— there's not a lot that's coming to mind, because I had such a weird year last year.

Jack: You have an absolute shit ton of financial progress, though. You know, there's, like...

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Jack: I wonder if there is, like, the...an opportunity like the bank manager is here [Ali laughs] or, like, someone who might want to invest or, you know.

Janine: Oh.

Ali: Yeah.

Janine: Interesting.

Jack: Like, all the local luminaries of the town are coming out.

Ali: Yeah.

Velvet's Financial Momentum [0:48:10]

Janine: Oh, I have an idea.

Ali: Yeah?

Janine: Would— mm, okay. You saying “all the local luminaries are coming out” made me think there is maybe someone, like, you know, in the crowd, milling in the lobby before the show starts, who...they would have to have something that, like, really stands out, like a little...like a, like, trilobite hair clip or something, you know? Like, some sort of, like, weird little, like...

Jack: Oh, shit.

Ali: Oh, yeah.

Janine: Fossil thing? Because I want Velvet to spot someone that she could hire potentially to do the archeology stuff for her, so that she's technically not breaking her arrangement by still pursuing that on the side.

Jack: Oh, shit. Yeah. [Ali laughs]

Janine: But she has to, like—

Jack: I would be prepared to be this person.

Ali: Oh.

Janine: There has to be, like a—

Jack: I don't have a—

Janine: Sorry, I was just gonna say, like, it would be like a thought that occurs to her just, like, upon seeing this person, not a thing she would have necessary been, like, scheming about, I think.

Jack: Yeah. Yeah. Um...this woman doesn't have a trilobite hairpin. She has a bag, like a clutch bag, that is made out of a trilobite that has been, like, hollowed out.

Janine: Ugh!

Jack: It's a clutch purse that is like a fossil creature that has been turned into her bag.

Janine: That's ghoulish.

Jack: This woman's name is Anastasia Pritt.

Janine: [laughs] I think sort of Velvet's, like, milling around and notices the bag, and there's a good long moment of, like, across the room kind of, like, eying it, being like, "Is

that what I think it is? Is that just— is it fake? Is it real?” [Jack laughs] And then when she approaches...

(as **Velvet**): Your bag.

Jack (as **Anastasia**): Mm, yes.

Janine (as **Velvet**): Is that real? Is that authentic?

Jack (as **Anastasia**): Oh, it's as real as they come, my friend. I dug it up myself from a little creature that I had specifically researched and knew was active in the area of my dig [**Velvet**: Wow.] 413 million years ago. Now, you might be thinking I researched the type of creature, the species. No, no, no. No, no. I knew that this little fellow was wandering around all that time ago, until one morning he was struck on the head by a rock or something, tumbled to his death, and then he became one of the rocks themselves.

Janine (as **Velvet**): You knew him specifically but not how he died?

Jack (as **Anastasia**): Well, I know how he died, I just— I was being euphemistic.

Janine (as **Velvet**): Oh, okay.

Jack (as **Anastasia**): He was struck on the head by a rock.

Janine (as **Velvet**): Ah. Did you— did you, like, talk to a witch to learn that, or...?

Jack (as **Anastasia**): You got it in one, my friend.

Janine (as **Velvet**): Ah.

Jack (as **Anastasia**): My name is Anastasia Pritt.

Jack: She offers a hand that is covered in, like, these rings, and the rings also have little fossils on them, and she says:

(as **Anastasia**): Not talked to a witch but consulted my own history and

expertise. My name is Anastasia Pritt, and I'm a scrying archeologist. It's a pleasure to meet you.

Janine (as **Velvet**): Oh. Um, yeah, it's a pleasure to meet you. My name is Velvet Lunde.

Jack (as **Anastasia**): Oh, Velvet Lunde. I think your name is familiar to me.

Janine (as **Velvet**): Yeah, I sort of tripped and fell into a bit of a bounty the past few years.

Jack (as **Anastasia**): Oh, yes.

Janine (as **Velvet**): Or the past few seasons of, um...no, years. It's been years. Of fossils and the like. Unfortunately, a lot of of them are tangled up in a property that I'm required to do other things with, and I find myself at sort of an impasse. I want to, obviously, fulfill my contract, but also I hate to think that there's all this fascinating history just under the surface that is sitting there.

Jack (as **Anastasia**): Hmm. It's difficult, isn't it, when one, you know, wants to dig, one is compelled to dig, but is prevented from doing so by their career or by various legal matters.

Janine (as **Velvet**): It is, it is. I don't suppose you're...I mean, are you on a contract with anyone right now? Are you...you got anything going on?

Jack (as **Anastasia**): Are you angling for some work or looking to employ me?

Janine (as **Velvet**): I mean, it seems like you know what you're doing. You'd certainly be better than some Odd Job Boy off the, you know.

Jack (as **Anastasia**): Huh. Well maybe. Maybe. I've met a few Odd Job Boys who are beginning their journey into archeological scrying, but I would say that—

Janine (as **Velvet**): I think they'd make perfectly good assistants, of course.

Jack (as **Anastasia**): Would make perfectly good assistants. Huh. Uh, let me check my copybook.

Jack: And she opens this little trilobite and pulls out a copybook, opens it up. It's just full of, like, loose paper. Some of the paper falls. She picks it up, slots it back into the book again, and I am going to draw a card. You are looking for a high card in what, Janine? In infrastructural?

Janine: Um, I think this is diamonds, to be honest.

Jack: In financial? Yeah.

Janine: I think this is a money thing, yeah. This feels money to me.

Jack: Okay. I have drawn— oohoohoo! A two of diamonds.

Janine: Hmm. Seven of clubs.

Jack: Very easy for you to beat if you draw a diamond, but...

Janine: I have six chances here.

Ali: Ooh.

Janine: So. Right?

Jack: Yeah. Do you really— I mean, those are pretty good odds for you, so do you immediately essentially start putting the screws on Anastasia? Are you like, "Let's sit down and discuss this." [laughs quietly] You know, is this more than just a passing conversation in the bar, where you are this committed to getting it?

Janine: I mean, I think when you approach someone and say, like, "Hey, let's talk for five minutes. Do you want to work for me?" [Janine and Ali laugh] you're in that space. Okay, so, I have a seven of spades. I have an eight of clubs. These are not good. Ten of diamonds. There it is.

Ali: Yeah.

Jack: Wow!

Ali: You did it.

Jack: Wow!

Janine: Hell yeah.

Jack (as **Anastasia**): Tell me, do you have a sample of a fossil or something? I like to know a little of what I'm getting into before I take on a contract like this.

Janine (as **Velvet**): Oh, of course. I always carry a few on me.

Janine: And Velvet, like, sort of pats around her skirt to locate her pocket, because it's, like, kind of a big skirt, so the pocket kind of moves a little bit. It's hard to find sometimes. And finds it; there's a little jingle. She pulls out a key ring with some, like, big old-timey keys on it, but also the key ring itself is like a, uh...oh, I want, like, a cool fossil. [typing] Cool small fossils?

Jack: They're all cool. [Ali laughs quietly]

Janine: Google, what do you got for me? Um, coolest non-dinosaur fossils. Ew. [Ali laughs] That's not good. What the fuck? Parasite-infested ant in amber. No.

Ali: Ugh.

Jack: No.

Janine: Squid murdered mid-meal.

Jack: Oh, that's kind of cool.

Janine: Ancient arachnid brain.

Jack: Oh.

Ali: All right. Oh, the ancient arachnid brain is kinda cool.

Janine: I don't—

Jack: These are pretty metal, honestly.

Janine: Fossilized fish lung.

Ali: Or just, like, an ancient arachnid. Like, if you pulled out, like, a crystalized spider to this lady?

Jack: From 4 million years ago. [laughs quietly]

Ali: Yeah, she might...

Janine: Okay, how about this? Tiny immortal crab.

Ali: [laughs] Wait, but it's immortal!

Jack: [laughs quietly] Yeah.

Janine: I mean, it's dead. I don't know why they're calling it immortal. It's extremely dead. [Ali laughs]

Jack: You sure you want to give a scrying archeologist an immortal crab that you believe to be dead?

Janine: I'm trying to figure out why they call this immortal. [Ali laughs] Missing link between freshwater and saltwater crabs.

Jack: That's not immortal.

Janine: I think they just named it immortal.

Ali: Oh.

Janine: Oh, okay. No. Uh, yeah, they just, like, called it that. Oh, family of spider

mummies. I hate this. Anyway, it's a little crab. It's like a little crab in amber.

Jack: I think she takes it in her hand, and the camera just, like, suddenly smash cuts to Nievelmarch four and a half million years ago. [Ali and Janine laugh] And there's just, like, you know, this is the perspective that Anastasia— I think Anastasia is there, seated on the barstool, holding her little trilobite clutch.

Janine: Mm-hmm.

Jack: Whose legs are now wiggling, because we're now in the time [Ali laughs] when this little guy was alive. And she just, like, looks around, takes in the environment of, you know, Nievelmarch millions and millions of years ago. This is before even it was the ocean that the pirate sailed way back in episode one. [Janine laughs quietly] And then, you know, is suddenly back in the bar with you and is like:

(as **Anastasia**): Yes. Yes, I think— I think this would be a very fruitful endeavor indeed. I'd be very happy to come and work with you.

Janine (as **Velvet**): All right, fantastic. I'll— do you know how to get down? I mean, you probably know how to get to the tunnels.

Jack (as **Anastasia**): [scoffing] Do I know how to get down.

Janine (as **Velvet**): I know, I heard it as I said it. [Ali laughs]

Jack (as **Anastasia**): It's hard for me to be offended. You know, I know how it is when you're looking for— but do I know how to get down. Of course I do.

Janine (as **Velvet**): You know, some people...some people dig shallow, you know what I mean?

Jack (as **Anastasia**): Some people dig shallow, but not us, my friend. Not us.

Janine (as **Velvet**): [laughs] All right, I'll see you first thing Monday?

Jack (as **Anastasia**): That sounds wonderful. Now, enjoy the play.

Janine (as **Velvet**): You too.

Jack (as **Anastasia**): Uh, waiter!

Jack: And she turns around to, like, gesture to the bartender for another drink.

Ali: All right. Congratulations to Velvet. There was a way that we were doing this, which was now I am removing a face diamond from your card, but I think we might have already taken the jack before.

Janine: Probably.

Ali: So, I'm taking out this queen. The reason we're doing it this way is so you have higher [**Janine:** Mm-hmm.] value face cards to beat your festivals. [laughs quietly]

Janine: Yeah.

Ali: But you have less face cards to ruin your [**Jack:** Right.] yearly progress in the letters stage, quote, unquote. So, delete that. Save changes. A new challenge.

Sable's Agricultural Momentum [1:00:05]

Ali: I think, my scene, I'm gonna first pursue agricultural progress, which is my second most valuable score here, which is a 3, and I think— I wonder— I sort of have this image in my head of, like, Velvet sitting down with another woman who, there's this sort of, like, pile of these, like, maybe like cheesecloth or something maybe more opaque than that and sort of putting in these, like, maybe small like puffed blossoms—like if you've seen, like, dried baby's breath or if you think of something maybe the size of like a popcorn kernel but, like, made out of a dried plant material instead of being that tough—that are going to glow later in the night. We spoke about this sort of audience engagement, like, lighting situation, and I think the physicality of having to stuff each of these things into this, like, [**Jack:** Yeah.] little lollipop-sized thing that they are eventually going to hold up and wave at a certain point is really funny. The same sort of, like, posture and, like, particularity of somebody putting, like, wedding favors together. [Jack laughs quietly] I don't know if anyone's ever done that.

Jack: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Ali: [laughs] That sort of thing.

Jack: Gotta put this in here. Gotta move that over there. Move onto the next one.

Ali: [laughs] Yeah.

Janine: Got a little ribbon.

Ali: Uh huh. And I think, like, my intention for this scene at least is for Sable to start growing whatever this plant is, whatever this, like, glowing thing is. But I think that maybe it's instead, like, her sitting down and talking to this, like, alchemist woman and, like, maybe just sort of, like, complaining about her year? Like, I don't know. [Ali and Jack laugh]

Jack: Ah, that's great.

Ali: I guess we can sort of, like, cross that bridge in the scene, if anybody wants to be an alchemist lady fussing with something.

Janine: Can I request that it's...

Ali: Please.

Janine: Can it be multiple? Can it be like a... [sighs] you know, like a circle of, like, middle aged woman kind of thing?

Ali: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Janine: Who are, like, assembly lining stuff? And...

Ali: Uh huh, and one person is, like, cutting squares out of this fabric, and then one person is [Janine: Yeah.] scooping it into the fabric that was just cut, and then the other person is, like, putting down the stick and then tying a little ribbon around the stick so it all stays together.

Janine: Exactly.

Ali: And I think that, [laughs quietly] like, maybe Sable is the one who is, like— has this box of these dried things in front of her and what's essentially like an ice cream scoop, [all laugh] and is doing the thing of, like, picking up a fabric square, scooping it, handing it to the next lady. In that case, you're both welcome to be anyone who you'd like to be at this table.

Jack: I'm going to be, uh...I thought I had a name, but I don't. Oh! Yes. I'm Elena Spackling. [Ali laughs] And my job—

Janine: But what's her last name? [Jack and Ali laugh]

Jack: Uh, Mittens. [Ali and Janine laugh]

Janine: I don't think you're supposed to do that to mittens.

Jack: No. Elena Spackling Mittens. I was— it's my married name. Agh! But, and, you know, ever since I got rid of him, I kept the name though, because it's good for a laugh. I am— so, you're scooping the little thing into the cheesecloths?

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Jack: And I am tying a ribbon around the cheesecloth, like a really beautiful sort of, like, *Kiki's Delivery Service* red ribbon, and passing it onto...looking at you, Janine.

Janine: Um, I'm playing... [sighs] Hell. Hang on. I gotta... [Ali laughs] Oh! I'm playing Tea Kerrie.

Ali: Okay.

Janine: Tea spelled like the drink and then Kerrie spelled K-E-R-R-I-E. Tea Kerrie.

Jack: Great.

Janine: And a thing about her is that all of her lapels are monogrammed T. Kerrie.

Jack: Oh, wow. [Ali laughs]

Janine: Because it's efficient. [Jack laughs] And she is, like, putting the sticks in and, like, tying the ribbon securely. Maybe, like, spraying them with something so it, like holds together, is a little more firm or something.

Ali: Ooh.

Janine: You know, like a— not like a lacquer, but something like that. Starch? [laughs quietly]

Jack: Goop.

Janine: Goop.

Jack (as **Elena**): So, how's it been Sable? You know? I hear you've had quite a year.

Ali (as **Sable**): Oh, yes. Um, you know, it's...there's pros and cons to every day.

Jack (as **Elena**): Isn't that true.

Ali (as **Sable**): Yeah, yeah. You know, it's been three years with me and these cactuses, so, you know, I think I'm sort of getting a handle on it, but I, you know, there's...there's room for improvement!

Janine (as **Tea**): Clouds have been thin this year.

Ali (as **Sable**): Yes. Yeah. I was trying to use some, um...some stabilizers for the steam, you know, the condensation, but it was still sort of difficult. I don't know that the plants held up this summer. So.

Jack (as **Elena**): It's hard. And I don't know really— you know, sort of no real expertise here, so I can't really offer you any advice, [Ali laughs] but it sucks. I don't know anything about clouds.

Janine (as **Tea**): My brother's wife used to— her parents, you know, did the cloud farming thing, and years like this, they used to call them, like, misty years, and it was something about, like, you had to...maybe it was steamy years? You had to, like, breathe in over your soup to get all the food you needed. You had to get all the nutrients, because it was lean, because...? I don't know, I'm kinda losing— I guess I didn't really listen that closely when she told me about this, but she said there were some bad years sometimes.

Ali (as **Sable**): [thoughtfully] Steamy years. Yeah, I think I might have heard that before. I can certainly, you know. Oh, I appreciate your well wishes, but I can take care of myself and, you know.

Jack (as **Elena**): We're not trying to— we just want to be here for you, Sable. You know?

Ali (as **Sable**): Oh, yes, of course.

Jack (as **Elena**): Because I know things have been hard with the magazine too. Are you still working at the magazine?

Ali (as **Sable**): Oh, the magazine. Well, I keep in touch with the girls, of course, but I had to...you can't write and farm, as they say. [laughs] Or at least I say.

Jack (as **Elena**): It's true. Yeah, it's true, unless you're writing one of those, like, award winning sort of pastoral sort of, like, you know, great Nievelmarch novel type things.

Janine (as **Tea**): Slice-of-life, gonzo, kind of...

Jack (as **Elena**): Slice of life gonzo things.

Janine (as **Tea**): Bildungsroman. Yeah. [Sable laughs]

Jack (as **Elena**): Yeah.

Ali (as **Sable**): Well, yeah. I mean, maybe one day! But I'm just trying to get the sort of experience under my feet first, but I—

Jack (as **Elena**): It sucks that you left the magazine! I...I was—

Janine (as **Tea**): Yeah, you were so good! You were so good at that!

Jack (as **Elena**): Your stuff was my favorite— I still have that little clipping from the story about the eggs.

Ali (as **Sable**): [laughs quietly] Oh, the eggs. Oh, from Easter in the 20th...the 20th anniversary of the...the shopping center clock.

Jack (as **Elena**): That's the one.

Ali (as **Sable**): Yeah.

Jack (as **Elena**): Yeah.

Ali (as **Sable**): Oh, the time that they made out of those eggs.

Jack (as **Elena**): And the writing you did about it.

Ali (as **Sable**): I appreciate that. That's very nice of you.

Jack (as **Elena**): I mean, I hate to say it, but if you're having a bad, a steamy year or something, you know, why don't you just— I'm sure that they'd— I'm sure that they'd welcome you back.

Ali (as **Sable**): Oh. Well, yes, yes, of course, but I think that there's— I think— [clears throat] You know, I think that my writing will improve if I stick with it, you know? That's why I went, of course; to sort of, you know, understand something from start to finish.

Jack (as **Elena**): Hmm.

Janine (as **Tea**): Lots of new blood in the writing pit since you were there last, lots

of singles. Lots of attractive singles. [Sable laughs]

Jack (as **Elena**): Lots of attractive singles! It's the magazine with the attractive singles.

Janine (as **Tea**): Don't get that up in the clouds.

Ali (as **Sable**): Yeah.

Jack (as **Elena**): No, you don't. Only things up there are birds and stuff, I think. Again, I don't really know anything about the clouds.

Janine (as **Tea**): Birds mate for life most of the time too, so.

Jack (as **Elena**): Birds mate for life!

Janine (as **Tea**): You can't get in there.

Jack (as **Elena**): Unless they are those loose birds who just sleep around. [Ali laughs quietly]

Janine (as **Tea**): Oh, we don't— they don't— the judges banned them years ago. We don't have them in Nievelmarch anymore.

Jack (as **Elena**): Oh.

Janine (as **Tea**): You didn't hear?

Jack (as **Elena**): Oh, I'm glad to hear. No, I didn't hear.

Janine (as **Tea**): Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Jack (as **Elena**): I don't keep too up to date. Unlike some people, I don't keep too up to date on what the judges are saying.

Janine (as **Tea**): Well, yeah, it's...

Jack: Nudging Sable, rolling my eyes. [Ali laughs]

Janine (as **Tea**): Listen. My little Raphael did all that work in school to get into the courts.

Jack (as **Elena**): And we're all very proud of him.

Janine (as **Tea**): And I just think it's good to stay abreast of not just what your children are doing but what's happening socially and societally, like the birds being banned.

Ali (as **Sable**): Does anybody know where these were grown?

Ali: And I think she just takes a scoop up of the things and plops them back into the hole that they were in.

(as **Sable**): They're so lovely. They're illumination, uh, flora, right? Were they spelled to do that, or do they glow naturally?

Jack (as **Elena**): [thinking] Did they glow naturally? Tea?

Janine (as **Tea**): I mean, probably a little bit of both, right? I mean, I guess I never asked, but they got a bit of a whiff to them, like magically.

Ali (as **Sable**): Mm.

Jack (as **Elena**): Yeah. Kind of like a...

Janine (as **Tea**): Might be enhances it, you know? Some things, like, they only glow at night or whatever.

Jack (as **Elena**): Uh huh, or in a theater.

Janine (as **Tea**): Put a little spell on it, you get a little more oomph out of it.

Jack (as **Elena**): Yeah.

Ali (as **Sable**): Yeah, I wonder if I could get something like this on the farm, you know? A little excitement.

Jack (as **Elena**): A little branch into a little bit of magical excitement. Yeah, maybe. You know?

Janine (as **Tea**): Not as heavy as the cacti, probably.

Jack (as **Elena**): And you could go and ask some witches about it. I hear there's lots of, you know, lots of singles among the witches. [Ali laughs quietly]

Janine (as **Tea**): Attractive single witches. Lots of new blood.

Jack (as **Elena**): Attractive single witches, you know? [Ali laughs]

Janine (as **Tea**): In the witch pit. Just think about it. ["I don't know" sound]
Raphael says hi, by the way.

Ali: [laughs] Okay. So, the way—

Jack (as **Elena**): Are we making her uncomfortable, Tea? Do you think we've made her uncomfortable enough? [Ali laughs]

Janine (as **Tea**): What are you talking about?

Jack (as **Elena**): What do you think?

Janine (as **Tea**): She loves Raphael, remember?

Jack (as **Elena**): She loves Raphael? I remember— she's blushing. [Ali laughs]

Janine (as **Tea**): When they were little? Oh my god. When they were little, and Raphael, you know, gave her that pencil?

Jack (as **Elena**): Yeah, absolutely.

Janine (as **Tea**): It was so cute. It was so darling.

Jack (as **Elena**): Was that the pencil that was from the law courts that had emblazoned on the side, “No true justice other than justice for all”? [Ali laughs]

Janine (as **Tea**): Oh, probably.

Jack (as **Elena**): I still think about that.

Janine (as **Tea**): He stuffed his pockets with those things.

Jack (as **Elena**): Oh, yeah. Yeah. It’s not illegal to steal pencils. [Janine laughs]

Ali: So—

Jack (as **Elena**): You should talk to him, Sable.

Ali: Just a second. Just can I have a second?

Jack (as **Elena**): Sable.

Ali: Can I have a moment?

Jack (as **Elena**): Okay, okay. I think she’s serious. [Ali laughs] I think she’s being serious about it.

Ali: What we have established in this scene is that neither of these characters are a pathway to my challenge. [Janine laughs]

Jack: They’re a pathway to a challenge. [Ali laughs]

Janine: They are well connected.

Ali: Exactly.

Janine: So if you succeed, they can probably say, “Oh, you know what? Actually, my niece [**Ali**: Uh huh.] is really good at all plants in the sky [**Ali**: Yeah.] and knows all about these things.”

Ali: I think—

Janine: “Here’s her number.”

Ali: [laughs] I think what—

Janine: [laughs quietly] She’s attractive and single.

Ali: [laughs] I think we should take this opportunity now to draw the cards to...

Janine: [laughs] Who wants to draw?

Ali: I think maybe—

Janine: Me or Jack, against you?

Ali: Oh, please, yeah. You decide amongst yourselves.

Jack: You should draw, Janine. [Ali laughs]

Janine: All right.

Ali: Okay. And this is agricultural progress, so I am looking for a spade here. I've drawn a five of clubs.

Janine: Five of diamonds. All you gotta do is get a spade.

Ali: Yeah, that’s a—

Janine: Or something higher than a five.

Ali: Yeah, that’s a tie, so I lose that one. Here’s my second draw. That is a two.

Janine: Ooh. [sighs]

Ali: That is a failure. [Janine groans] This is my final draw. And that’s a ten of—!

Janine: There you go! Take it, yeah.

Jack (as **Elena**): You know what?

Jack: And she rustles in her purse. [Janine laughs]

(as **Elena**): You know what this reminds me of?

Ali (as **Sable**): Oh, yes?

Jack (as **Elena**): I was given a card by a witch at the fall festival, because I had been talking about how my onions weren't doing what I need them to do in my yard, and the creatures keep eating them. And so I was chatting to a witch about it at the festival, and she gave me her card, and she says it's good for one safe passage through the Marchmont Mountains. You know, this might be someone who...

Jack: And shen hands over this little card. It's like a little folded piece of paper with the witch's name and address on it, and then a little spinning, like, red arrow on the card that points safely towards wherever this witch is right now. [Ali laughs]

Ali: Okay. One safe—

Janine: I met this witch, and I slipped an AirTag on her. [Jack laughs]

Ali: One protective, yeah, witch-seeking card. Perfect.

Jack: It seeks a specific witch, not just witches.

Ali: [laughs] Yes. Who's just on call to anybody who shows up with this card, I guess.

Jack: If you have the card, yeah, yeah.

Ali: Uh huh.

Jack (as **Elena**): And you can take it, because I hear she's very nice.

Ali (as **Sable**): Oh, how nice of you!

Jack (as **Elena**): You know, you're welcome to it, and I'd love to come and see the clouds at some point, once you can get— I don't want to go up there while they're all thin and misty, but if you can get that sorted, I'd pay you both a visit.

Ali (as **Sable**): Oh, sure. Yes, yes, of course. This is so gracious of you all. I'll have to make it through the mountains before...before the winter, I suppose.

Jack (as **Elena**): Yes, well, I know what I'm getting you for your birthday, and it's gloves!

Ali (as **Sable**): [laughs] Oh, that's so funny. [sighs] Well, thank you. Thank you. I think this is really gonna change my upcoming season, as it were. Listen to me, I'm a real farmer!

Jack (as **Elena**): Yeah. [Ali laughs] Yeah, you tell 'em!

Ali: Perfect. Okay, so I am taking a spade out of my blue deck.

Jack: That's great. Very successful.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Act One [1:17:00]

Ali: Okay, so, we've gone through a full round of momentum here. Do we want to discuss the first act of the Crossroads? Or do we just want to continue with our... [Ali and Jack laugh]

Jack: Yes, of course, the first act of "Dog at the Crossroads", as everybody knows, is comprised of three scenes, and wouldn't you know it, there are three of us. So, I'll go first. "Dog at the Crossroads" begins with a rumble of thunder as a priest has to make a difficult decision in a town that is dealing with a major electrical power outage.

Ali: I think scene two is a sandwich shop on the corner of a busy intersection, and there's three people in there making sandwiches. There's a customer who's laughing

and joking with them. And then the power goes out, [Jack gasps] and there's a, uh...like a car crash outside, because the traffic light goes out as well. Two people get out of their cars and start yelling at each other, and that's scene two.

Janine: Do we have cars? [Ali laughs]

Jack: The play does.

Janine: Okay. Yeah.

Jack: The play absolutely does. The play has an electrical power outage. It's...

Janine: That's— I mean, electrical power predates cars.

Ali: That's true.

Janine: I think.

Jack: That's true, yes.

Ali: Maybe it's—

Jack: No, I love that the play has— I think—

Janine: Yeah, I think that's...

Jack: I love that the play has cars. [Ali laughs]

Janine: I like that too. Because, I mean, it's very easy to imagine a situation where, like, other places have cars, but Nievelmarch is not really a car place. It's hilly and snowy and icy, and like...

Ali: Yeah, uh huh.

Janine: Cars are like an exotic, like... [Ali laughs] I think the third scene...okay, so, we've had— sorry, can we just get, like, a quick recap of—? I forget what Jack's was.

Jack: Yeah. In a thunderstorm, a priest makes a difficult decision in a city where the power keeps going out.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Janine: Okay. We don't know what the decision is?

Jack: No. [laughs quietly]

Janine: Just a decision? Okay. Okay. [Ali laughs]

Jack: Well, it's difficult. He struggles.

Janine: And then the street corner, and there's a car crash when the power goes out. Now I'm thinking about how dramatic structure works.

Ali: Mm. [laughs]

Janine: And I think the power is still sort of juttering on and off, and the...I want something that's, like, better than police officers but, like, some sort of, like, enforcement agency— not agency, like...

Ali: Firefighters?

Janine: Yeah. I want something that would come to help but also be like, "Something bad happened here, and we have to figure out what it was."

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Janine: But probably they are more like...oh, no. What it is is it's just, like, shopkeepers who are just like, "Whoa, that was an accident. We gotta go help out while the—" you know, while waiting for the fire department or whatever to get there. And they go to, like, check the people who were in the crash and, like, try and help them out, and the trunk of the car has popped open, and inside the trunk is a leg.

Jack: Whoa.

Ali: Whoa!

Jack: Whoa! Shit. That's—

Janine: To be clear, the people who are in the car have their legs. It wasn't, like... [Ali and Janine laugh] It wasn't like that.

Jack: God. That's very exciting.

Janine: Scene three closes.

Jack: Scene three closes. The lights go out for the first intermission. This play has two intermissions. [laughs quietly] Which is actually great, because it means that there's more opportunities for people to buy things in the...

Janine: And to discuss their theories.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Jack: And to discuss their theories, and already the theories are buzzing.

Ern's Social Momentum [1:21:44]

Jack: In the dressing room backstage, which is a shared dressing room, because again, this is like a community theater production in a community theater. Let me see. What do I want to spend? Ern is...hmm. [laughs] Ern is talking to some of the other actors in the play, and he is in a bad mood because of his encounter with the rose pruner, Constantine Haight. [Ali laughs quietly]

Janine: Aw.

Jack: And I think I would like to meet two other actors in the play. I'm dressed as a priest, before the incident. What are y'all dressed as?

Janine: Hmm.

Ali: Are we, like, extras, or are we wearing funny outfits because we're outside?

Jack: We're in the dressing room of the—

Janine: Yeah, this is— yeah.

Jack: Oh, no, no. You're not playing Velvet and Sable.

Ali: Oh, duh, duh, duh, duh. Okay, right.

Jack: You're playing just actors.

Ali: Right, right, right, right. Okay.

Janine: I know who I'm dressed as.

Jack: Who are you dressed as?

Janine: The Ferryman. [Jack laughs]

Ali: Wow.

Jack: Oh, shit! Exciting. [Ali and Janine laugh]

Ali: And I'm a mechanic in messy stained overalls with blood on his hands.

Janine: Oh.

Jack: Whoa.

Janine: He's been working on that Diablo PC.

Ali: [laughs] Bleh.

Jack (as **Ern**): Yeah, I think we did good. I think we did good. I think that they like it. Do you think that they're enjoying it?

Janine (as **ferryman**): I think so.

Ali (as **mechanic**): Oh, classic story like this? Yeah.

Jack (as **Ern**): "Dog at the Crossroads"? Everyone—

Janine (as **ferryman**): It's hard to tell, but I think they're buying it. I think they bought the leg effects, that wax leg. I think it really— it made an impact, you know?

Jack (as **Ern**): The wax leg is so good!

Janine (as **ferryman**): So good.

Jack (as **Ern**): The first time I saw the wax leg...

Janine (as **ferryman**): Yeah?

Jack (as **Ern**): Ah! I felt just— it chilled me, right? It chilled me in my marrow.

Ali (as **mechanic**): Yeah, just horrific.

Janine (as **ferryman**): Mm, mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

Jack (as **Ern**): Just horrific. And I mean, you know, I don't know.

Jack: Ern looks at the mechanic and then at the ferryman, and is like,

(as **Ern**): You haven't been on stage yet,

To the Ferryman,

(as **Ern**): But you can really feel— you can feel the audience. I think that they're— I think they're picking up what you're putting down, or what we're putting down, and I think they will pick up what you put down. [Janine laughs quietly]

Janine (as **ferryman**): That's good. I'm glad they're engaging with the material, you know? It's like, that's the reason you do it, you know? You want people to connect on that level in a way that they're just not gonna with the book.

Jack (as **Ern**): And it's hard to...I don't know. I think that's the most important thing in life, right? Is to make that connection?

Jack: I'm spending social progress. I'm trying to get social progress here.

Ali (as **mechanic**): Mm.

Jack (as **Ern**): You know? When you meet someone and you want to make a connection with them? Earlier, I was talking to the rose pruning guy. Did you see that guy outside? Pruning the roses?

Janine (as **ferryman**): Oh, Concertine?

Ali (as **mechanic**): Oh, Concertine.

Jack (as **Ern**): Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. You know Concertine?

Ali (as **mechanic**): Yeah. [laughs quietly]

Janine (as **ferryman**): Yeah, Concertine gets around.

Jack (as **Ern**): He said...he said that there were, like...he said that there were, like, rumors about my farm.

Ali (as **mechanic**): Your farm?

Janine (as **ferryman**): You mean, like, about the hole?

Ali (as **mechanic**): Yeah, the hole. Yeah.

Jack (as **Ern**): People are talking about that?

Janine (as **ferryman**): Eh, it's just a farm hole. Don't— [sighs]

Ali (as **mechanic**): It's not "just" a farm hole.

Janine (as **ferryman**): Those guys are just— listen, but like, rose people, they're

always on the fancy land. They don't know from holes. Like, they just...they're snooty like that.

Ali (as **mechanic**): But we lost someone to that hole, right? Ern? [Janine laughs quietly]

Jack (as **Ern**): Uh, I don't know how comfortable I feel talking about that. [Ali laughs quietly]

Janine (as **ferryman**): Sometimes you lose people in a hole.

Jack (as **Ern**): Yeah, exactly. What she said.

Ali (as **mechanic**): I mean, I don't know how comfortable I feel about, you know, our winter book club not having almond twisties this year because...

Jack: [laughs quietly] Sorry, is this person's name... [Ali laughs] Arlan Twisties?

Ali: [laughs] I—

Janine: Almond twisties?

Ali: What's really funny here is that I said almond twisties as a type of cookie for— and then paused to think of a name, and you thought that was the name, [laughs] so now it is...

Jack: Arlan Twisties.

Ali: Arlan Twisty has fallen in the hole.

(as **mechanic**): And, you know, I think it's gonna be a difficult year without Arn...Arlan. [Janine laughs quietly]

Jack (as **Ern**): [sighs] I don't—

Janine (as **ferryman**): Don't you miss Arn, Ern? [Jack laughs]

Jack (as **Ern**): I don't know— I mean, look, this is Nievelmarch. These things— and we just all have to kind of come to terms with that.

Ali (as **mechanic**): Wait. “This is Nievelmarch”? And what do you know about Nievelmarch?

Jack (as **Ern**): Well— what do you mean, what do I know about Nievelmarch?

Janine (as **ferryman**): Okay, hey now. Hey, now. Hey, now. Hey, now. Let's—

Ali (as **mechanic**): This person's new to this city—

Janine (as **ferryman**): Hey, now.

Ali (as **mechanic**): Is making people fall into holes. It's your hole!

Jack (as **Ern**): You want to get some real blood on your hands?

Janine (as **ferryman**): Ern's been here for years.

Jack (as **Ern**): We can take this outside. [Ali laughs]

Janine (as **ferryman**): Ern's been here for years. Let's everyone settle down here.

Jack (as **Ern**): Would you fight a man dressed as a priest?

Ali (as **mechanic**): If I gotta.

Janine (as **ferryman**): You're not a priest.

Jack (as **Ern**): Okay, yeah, I'm not a priest. I'm dressed as a priest, but I would hope that—

Janine (as **ferryman**): You can't just say you're a priest, because you're gonna get implicated in things.

Jack (as **Ern**): I didn't say— I didn't say I was a priest.

Ali (as **mechanic**): Yeah, you gotta— you should pray for something, let me tell ya.

Jack (as **Ern**): What— like, pray for what? Pray for the hole to go away? That's not possible. That can't happen. The hole is just there, and we have to deal with it, and Arlan Twisties, you know, took the risks, right?

Ali (as **mechanic**): Well, let me tell you something. Are we dealing with it, or are you dealing with it, Ern? Because it, you know, you're gonna have to deal with a lot more than some rose cutter saying that people are talking about it.

Jack (as **Ern**): Well, community is only as strong as the people in it.

Ali (as **mechanic**): Uh huh.

Jack (as **Ern**): You know, in community.

Ali (as **mechanic**): Uh huh.

Jack (as **Ern**): This isn't my responsibility, this hole. I didn't do anything to make it go there, just like Arlan Twisties didn't, you know... [quietly] didn't watch where he was going.

Janine (as **ferryman**): Listen, Ern. You're a good guy. I'm on your side on this. I think we should just drop it, you know?

Jack (as **Ern**): Yeah.

Ali: Do you want to draw a card to see if it gets dropped? [laughs]

Janine: Hang on. Can I propose something?

Ali: Please.

Janine: Ali and I— I think each of us should draw a card, and then whoever wins that

draw, just a single draw...

Jack: Ohohohoho!

Ali: Wow.

Janine: Just a single draw. Whoever wins that draw, that's the one that Ern is drawing against.

Ali: Okay.

Janine: Bit of a house rules situation, maybe a little slanted, but I think it's fun.

Ali: Well, we'd be drawing from the same deck.

Janine: Yes.

Ali: Which is, like... [laughing]

Janine: And also, and also, the thing that Ern draws will determine the outcome, so even if I win, it's still a bomb. But it's— I think there's, you know, you could say that [**Ali:** Okay.] one person comes around or the other person is like, "Well, actually..." you know.

Ali: Sure, okay.

Janine: I think it's fun. I think it's a fun idea

Ali: I'm drawing my card, and I'm putting it near Velvet.

Janine: Eight of spades.

Ali: [laughing] King of clubs.

Janine: King of— okay, so, you— all right, so, yep. So, you're gonna draw another card against Ern. Ern, good luck, buddy.

Jack: And I have— I can draw— uh, this is social. I can draw three here.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Janine: Yeah.

Jack: Up to three.

Ali: A king of...

Jack: Spades.

Ali: Spades.

Jack: That is a tie.

Ali: A tie.

Jack: So I lose.

Ali: [laughing] Yeah, see, this is why...

Jack: Okay.

Janine: Well, my suggestion was that you draw again, Ali.

Jack: Yeah.

Ali: Oh, I draw again? Okay.

Janine: Ali I mean, yeah. Like, the original card draw was just us.

Ali: Okay, and then, now we're— now I'm drawing what Ern is gonna play against.

Janine: Yeah.

Ali: Okay. Which is a three of...

Janine: Spades.

Ali: Spades, which means you win. And also, technically, you would have won against the eight of spades, so if we wanted to do it...

Janine: Yeah. Either way, you would have won.

Jack (as **Ern**): Okay, just drop it, okay? Just drop it. Okay? Nobody talk about the hole anymore. It worked for me for a really long time, nobody talking about the hole. We just— we just all put the play on together. We go home. We don't speak of this again.

Janine (as **ferryman**): Ern—

Jack (as **Ern**): Arlan Twisties doesn't have a— [quietly] doesn't have a family.

Janine (as **ferryman**): Ern.

Jack (as **Ern**): It's fine.

Janine (as **ferryman**): Whoa. Okay. Okay, let's just— [Ali laughs quietly] Ern.

Jack (as **Ern**): Yeah.

Janine (as **ferryman**): Part of the reason people talk about the hole is because, whenever the hole comes up, you get real...peaky. You get real...

Jack (as **Ern**): Wouldn't you?

Janine (as **ferryman**): I would. I'm just saying, mellow out and maybe the hole stuff will go away.

Jack (as **Ern**): People are making all these accusations.

Janine (as **ferryman**): They only make accusations when you get all heated, makes it seem like you have something to hide. You're just a guy who's got a hole on his farm.

Jack (as **Ern**): I don't— it's there!

Janine (as **ferryman**): You're just a guy who's got a hole on his—

Jack (as **Ern**): It's just a hole.

Janine (as **ferryman**): It's just a hole. You know? Normalize the hole. [Ali laughs]

Jack (as **Ern**): I just don't know what to do about it, right?

Janine (as **ferryman**): You gotta live. You gotta live alongside that hole, Ern. You gotta ask for help when you need it, but you gotta live alongside that hole.

Ali (as **mechanic**): You gotta own the hole. You know what I mean?

Janine (as **ferryman**): Or else the hole's gonna own you. Is that what you want?

Ali (as **mechanic**): I think you're trying to skirt the hole a little bit, and I think maybe that's why people are getting upset. Because I hear a lot about that hole, but I don't hear a lot about Arlan, and that's all I'm saying, and we're gonna be on stage in a minute.

Janine (as **ferryman**): Put on your hat. Come on.

Ali: [laughs] Your priest hat.

Jack: Claps me on the shoulder. [laughs] My priest hat.

Janine (as **ferryman**): Oh, yeah, you want to add a little more...a little more chalk dust onto that, just to get it real dusty looking? I think some of it fell off before.

Jack (as **Ern**): Yeah, okay. Okay. I suppose I *have* been in the attic.

Janine: Pat pat pat pat with a big powder puff. [Ali laughs]

Jack: Camera cuts to night, Ern's farm, birds singing, the hole just sitting, black, malevolent, in the dark. [all laugh] Cuts back to the theater. Uh, okay. Time for Act Two of the play, right? And then we'll go into someone else's thing?

Ali: Oh, I thought me and Janine would finish our round, and then we do...

Jack: Oh, yeah, sure. Absolutely.

Ali: Yeah, and then...

Jack: What is— so, I spent, uh...just the one.

Ali: I just removed...

Jack: Yeah. I only spent one [Ali: Yeah.] social progress there. Yeah.

Ali: And I just removed the queen of hearts from your deck, but I don't know that even if you have the two momentum left that you can spend it— you can chase social again?

Jack: No, I think I've sort of used my time.

Ali: Yeah.

Jack: Yeah.

Ali: But anything in these other categories, you can head towards.

Jack: Right, right, right.

Ali: Or one. We will have a third round, and then you can do it then.

Jack: Yeah.

Ali: Janine.

Janine: Wait, don't we get to do...? Sorry, we get to do two, like, normal suit pulls and then one, like, social thing with other people, right?

Ali: One with us.

Janine: Okay.

Ali: Yeah. Uh huh.

Janine: Okay. I was just checking.

Ali: Or I guess, yeah, technically you can get two successes.

Janine: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Ali: So, yeah.

Velvet's Agricultural Momentum [1:33:07]

Janine: Okay. Then, I think, at this intermission point...hmm. I think there is a crystal chandelier. Not, like, a fancy one.

Ali: Ooh.

Janine: Not, like, a really...you know, the opera house has the fancy crystal chandelier. The community theater has, like, it's a nice one. It might have been the one that was, like, in the original opera house that was torn down a hundred years ago and, like, it was small, because the town was barely anything back then, and you know. And it's, like, been refurbished a little bit. Some of the metal doesn't match. Like, the links are slightly different metals. It's not—it was restored, but not with extreme care. But it has these crystal, like...I guess, like, not pendulums, but sort of pendulous shapes, like long sort of shaped crystals that sort of hang down.

Jack: Yeah, like teardrops, crystal teardrops.

Janine: I'm thinking more like the long angular ones. I forget, like, towers? Kind of more obelisk-shaped?

Ali: Mm, hmm.

Janine: But, like, they come to a point at the bottom, so like a really low-poly teardrop or something. [Ali laughs] And I think, as Velvet's, like, out in the lobby or out in the—I don't think it's in the lobby. It's, like, in an area that's off to one side a little bit but still a

public area. There's the chandelier, and it sort of catches her eye.

Jack: Ha!

Janine: And I'm pursuing agriculture here, because I think Velvet, like, reaches up to take one of the crystals and, like, examine it.

Ali: Mm.

Jack: Damn.

Janine: Just, like, unhook it from the thing. And I do kind of wonder if this is...hmm. Is this a card pull just to see if she gets caught? [Ali laughs] Or the tone in which she gets caught.

Ali: I love that.

Jack: Yeah.

Ali: I'm happy with that.

Jack: This is a fortune dice.

Ali: Uh huh.

Janine: Yeah. I mean, like...I think we— I don't remember if we have to have a scene. I feel like we do have to have scenes, but it could just be someone who's like, "Yeah, it's cool, right?"

Jack: Yeah.

Janine: I won't tell if you won't.

Ali: Yeah, I—

Janine: Did the decks get moved around?

Ali: They might have been, because of some weird Roll20 weirdness. I think the challenge deck was the gray one, which is now above yours, or the pink deck—

Janine: No, it's below mine.

Ali: Okay. Well.

Janine: Mine's gold, right?

Ali: Yeah, yours is gold.

Janine: Okay.

Ali: The rules technically say: "During your scene, make a business proposal, ask someone for a favor, or make a wager where if they lose they agree to help you."

Janine: Oh. Ooh, okay. Okay. [Ali laughs] Actually, we can do that, right? She's looking at the chandelier. She is not tall enough to reach it on her own.

Jack: Ha!

Janine: There is a tall person nearby.

Ali: Ohh. [laughs]

Janine: That is the...the thing.

Ali: That is the...you're just gonna ask...

Janine: Now, what is the wager? How does she approach this person? [Ali laughs]
Uh...who wants to play a tall person?

Jack: I would play a tall person on condition that they're one of the vampires that we met last time at the festival.

Ali: Oh, sure.

Janine: [laughs] Sure.

Ali: Jack, I was gonna ask which one of us is taller than the other. [laughs]

Jack: I think...I think I'm a little taller than you.

Ali: I think so too.

Janine: I think that's true.

Jack: It's just a couple of inches.

Ali: It's weird that it's hard to remember, but I think that that's true.

Jack: Back in the old days, when we made every episode sitting in the same room. [Ali and Janine laugh]

Ali: So yeah, I suppose I'm playing a tall vampire, wearing, like, a long evening gown that accentuates my tallness.

Jack: And your vampirism. [Ali laughs] Were these— I'm trying to remember. Were these two— they were, like, siblings, and they were— were they, like, crystal vampires? Or were they alchemy vampires?

Ali: They were crys— they had another crystal farm lot, and...

Jack: [laughs quietly] Oh, right, yes.

Janine: Right.

Ali: I think they offered to come over, because Velvet had had, like, a really good year or a really bad year or something.

Janine: Was this Melinda and John Joe?

Ali: I think so, yes. [laughs]

Jack (as **Melinda**): Well, well, well. Is it Velvet Lunde? So happy to see you here and enjoying the theater! Here I am with my brother.

Ali (as **John**): Hello.

Janine (as **Velvet**): It's so good to see you both! Are you— did you enjoy the first act?

Jack (as **Melinda**): Oh! What do you think— what's your theory?

Janine (as **Velvet**): Hmm. I think— I mean, you know, I've read the book. I didn't really get it. You know, I've heard the adaptation, they're gonna make some changes. They're gonna have some twists. You know, they want to keep it fresh. My guess is they're gonna say that the leg was from a cursed tree, it was like a limb from a tree.

Jack (as **Melinda**): [thoughtfully] Cursed tree.

Ali (as **John**): [thoughtfully] A cursed tree.

Janine (as **Velvet**): And it wasn't even a murder, it was just— it was a thing that happened. That's my guess.

Ali (as **John**): Oh, that's foolish. This book is filled with murders.

Janine (as **Velvet**): Well, okay—

Jack (as **Melinda**): Lousy with murders.

Janine (as **Velvet**): I mean, the core murder. The core— everyone— you know, the central murder is gonna be a non-murder.

Jack (as **Melinda**): [scoffs]

Ali (as **John**): [intrigued] Oh.

Jack (as **Melinda**): I'll only watch a play if there's murder in it. Isn't that so, John

Joe?

Ali (as **John**): [sighs] Oh, it's so exhausting trying to find plays exclusively with murders for this girl. [Janine laughs quietly]

Jack (as **Melinda**): They don't make them like they used to. In the olden days, they were making plays with murders left and right, and at that time, I was delighted. [Ali laughs quietly]

Janine (as **Velvet**): Well, can't you just imagine that, when a character leaves and never reappears in the story, that they got murdered?

Jack (as **Melinda**): [resigned] I suppose I can, but it's not quite the same as the real deal.

Janine (as **Velvet**): [chuckles] Fair enough.

Ali (as **John**): It's the fault of these playwrights for branching out, she always says.

Jack (as **Melinda**): [sighs] You know, that's what I always say. And of course, John Joe won't watch a play that does have a murder in, so it put us in a difficult place for a long time, but we looked past our differences just as we embrace our similarities.

Ali (as **John**): Mm-hmm. Yes, look at me at this murderous play.

Jack (as **Melinda**): I know. He's being very brave. [Ali laughs quietly]

Janine (as **Velvet**): How about a little wager?

Jack (as **Melinda**): Oh, I love to bet! We love to bet.

Ali (as **John**): And just what are you wagering, Velvet Lunde?

Janine (as **Velvet**): Well...

Jack (as **Melinda**): Are you wagering...your life? Nay, I jest. [Ali and Janine laugh]

Janine (as **Velvet**): Well, you see that chandelier?

Jack (as **Melinda**): Hmm.

Ali (as **John**): Oh, gorgeous.

Jack (as **Melinda**): Beautiful.

Janine (as **Velvet**): I would really like one of the crystal pendulums to study, [Melinda gasps] to see if I can learn anything. The clarity of it is so— like, you just don't see clarity like that these days, and I'm just curious if I can get a better understanding of it, but I can't reach it, and also, people would probably notice if I, like, pulled up a chair or something? And I'll bring it back when I'm done. I'm not gonna— I'm not stealing it, I just want to take a look.

Jack (as **Melinda**): This sounds like a favor, not a wager.

Janine (as **Velvet**): Well, if there is something that I could help you get, then if you win, you could...if you win the wager, then you could get that.

Jack: Melinda looks at John Joe, like, ["I don't know" sound], we're vampires.

Janine: I pull out the talking doll. [Ali and Jack laugh]

Jack (as **Melinda**): Well, well, well.

Janine (as **Velvet**): I don't know if this is— there's a quality of it that just, it kind of reminded me of you, actually. It's a funny coincidence. I'm not sure how old it is, but...

Ali (as **John**): So Velvet Lunde has got herself a talking dolly, you say.

Jack (as **Melinda**): Does it speak? Make it speak.

Janine (as **Velvet**): Uh, it tends to speak when it's addressed. You should probably— if you address it.

Jack (as **Melinda**): Doll! Speak!

Janine (as **doll**): [through hands] AH! [Ali laughs]

Jack: Bafflement on the face of the vampire. [Jack and Ali laugh]

Ali: Okay, I just want— let's— I want to take a pause out of the play here to just make sure [**Janine:** Mm-hmm?] we're all on the same page.

Janine: Yes.

Ali: Janine, are you suggesting a wager in which, win or lose, the vampire [**Janine:** No.] siblings get the doll? Okay, no.

Janine: No, not win or lose.

Ali: No, okay.

Janine: That's not how wagers work.

Ali: Yeah, that is.

Janine: No! Win or lose? No, no, no. If I win, they get the crystal for me.

Ali: Uh huh.

Janine: If they win, they get the doll.

Ali: Oh, sure, sure, sure. Okay, okay, okay, okay, okay. Okay, okay. I just wanted to make sure you were offering the doll before we took...

Janine: The thing you're describing is commerce. It's trade. [Ali laughs] That's different.

Ali: Well, I thought it was, like, a challenge you set up to somebody, and if they

succeed, they get the thing that they want, and if they fail, you get the thing that you want.

Janine: [laughs] The challenge is steal a crystal for me. [Ali laughs] I mean, I guess I could have done it that way. It's less fun, though.

Ali: Yeah. I mostly wanted to make sure that you were offering the doll, and I was not gonna have one of the vampires take it without your—

Janine: Yeah, yeah.

Ali: I just wanted to make sure that I knew what you were putting down there, because the thing I was about to say was like...well, it's like a friendly bet that you make with somebody, right? So I thought, like, if that doll— if you can go to the bar, and that doll can order a drink, then I'll get this thing for you [Jack laughs] or, like, something like that?

Janine: No. No, no. [Ali laughs] The wager, I think, is— I think the wager needs to be, like, is your theory closer to the truth or is mine, in terms of where the leg came from.

Ali: Oh.

Jack: Oh, shit.

Janine: Do you— it's a called shot thing. [Ali laughs] It's like, you say a person murdered them. I say a person did not murder them.

Ali: Okay.

Jack: Yeah.

Ali: Is the central murder a murder, yes or no. That's what we're drawing these cards for?

Janine: Yeah.

Ali: Okay.

Janine: Yeah.

Ali: Okay.

Janine: Which does kind of determine an important point about this play, [Ali laughs] but we'll get there in a fun way either way, I think.

Jack: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Ali: [laughs] Okay.

Jack: We're going— we're preempting our own plot here.

Janine: Mm-hmm.

Ali: Yeah. Jack, do you want to draw from the challenge deck here?

Jack: Yeah, okay. That's gray, right? Yes, challenge deck.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Jack: I have drawn a nine!

Janine: Whoa.

Jack: Of diamonds.

Janine: Whoa! We both drew a nine of diamonds.

Ali: You both— that's so scary!

Jack: Wow.

Janine: Talking doll! [laughs]

Jack: Wow.

Ali: That's so scary.

Jack: So, who—

Ali: You're going for agricultural progress here, so this is a tie.

Janine: Yeah, yeah.

Ali: Velvet technically loses.

Janine: And I've only got three shots here.

Ali: But yeah, you have two more draws.

Janine: King of spades.

Ali: That's a winner.

Janine: That's a higher card.

Ali: Yeah, that's a winner.

Janine: Yeah, that's a winner. Okay. Okay. Which means that my theory's gonna be true.

Ali: [laughs] There is...the central murder of "Dogs of the Crossroads" is a fake murder.

Janine: Mm-hmm.

Jack: Oh, man.

Ali: Incredible.

Jack: Melinda's gonna be really disappointed.

Janine: To be clear, I don't know that the tree thing is true. It's just that the central murder is not a murder.

Ali: Uh huh.

Janine: That's the thing I'm hanging my hat on.

Ali: And were you getting agriculture or infrastructural progress here? Agricultural, right?

Janine: Agricultural.

Ali: Okay.

Janine: Yeah, because I'm studying the crystal [**Ali:** Okay.] to learn its secrets.

Jack: Which will be delivered to you at the end of the play.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Janine: Yeah. [laughs]

Jack: I think the vampires are like:

Jack (as **Melinda**): Well, we shall see, won't we? I hope I see some blood.

Ali: Okay, I'm deleting your queen of spades.

Ali (as **John**): Yes, we shall see, won't we? And you, uh...and you may—

Jack (as **Melinda**): Yes, brother? [Ali laughs]

Ali (as **John**): Perhaps the crystal will be yours.

Jack: [laughs] Perhaps the crystal will be yours!

Janine (as **Velvet**): Perhaps. Would you like to say goodbye to the doll?

Ali (as **John**): Oh, yes. Good evening, little one.

Jack (as **Melinda**): I hope you enjoy the play, doll.

Janine (as **doll**): AH! [Ali and Jack laugh]

Sable's Financial Momentum [1:47:05]

Ali: Okay. Okay. Okay. Okay, for my scene...for my scene, I was... [laughs quietly] I think— it's funny, I was also immediately inspired by realizing that the game that, uh...the game states that you can have a wager with somebody, and I think that...

Jack: Oh, yeah.

Ali: I think that [laughs] Sable, in the intermission here...I want it to be something in the, like, spirit of a drinking contest but not something that, uh, fratty, I guess. But, like, basically, I'm gonna go for this financial progress and have it be with another alchemist who has basically agreed that both her—uh, him, them—and Sable are doing, like, a challenge where one of them does it faster than the other or whatever, and if Sable wins, he agrees to only buy produce from her farm.

Jack: Oh, wow. [Ali laughs] Damn, that's a risky wager.

Ali: It really is. Don't agree to—

Janine: Especially on the heels of a bad year.

Ali: Or like, maybe...what's another way to get financial progress that is not that dire for this alchemist? Or this could just be, you know, a person who's Plato at the...

Janine: Is the wager here, like, "if I win, you have to pay me a premium; if you win, I give you a discount"?

Jack: Ooh. [laughs quietly] This is real Nievelmarch business hours here. [Ali and Janine laugh] Okay. It's— the first thing I thought, which it can't be, is it's a ladder climbing contest like the stupid brothers in... [Ali and Jack laugh]

Ali: That's a different city, unfortunately.

Jack: That's a different city.

Ali: Uh huh.

Jack: Uh, let's see.

Ali: I do think there's something fun about it if it's, like, magic or something?

Jack: The first thing I thought is that, like, the elaborate clock on the Nievelmarch church square clock tower has a different character come out of the door at the top of every hour, and you're placing a bet on what the character is, but that's not really something that you're doing. That's more something that you're, like, watching, which is less interesting.

Ali: Oh, but there's a really funny way of doing that, which is that, like, maybe it is...like, Sable and this other alchemist's sort of job for this portion of the evening are that they have to, like, sit up in this, like, little watchtower or whatever or this little balcony to, like, see what time it is to, like, set off a signal for whatever this, like...whatever the spell or, like, trigger or glamor thing [**Jack:** Oh, yeah.] that the alchemists have to do to have it, like, happen during the show. And they're just so bored of being up there at this point—
[laughs]

Jack: Yeah.

Ali: That they've gotten to this place where it's like, if that rabbit comes out of that clock, you are—

Jack: That's so good.

Ali: [laughs] You are paying an extra 20 shills for every pound of cactus that comes off of my farm.

Jack: Right, because this is only the most recent wager. There have been smaller wagers, right? Where it's like, oh, if that woman down there in the hat goes into the butcher's shop instead of goes into the, like, shoe shop in the street, then you owe me a drink during the next intermission or whatever.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Jack: And now we've gotten to the clock is about to strike and the bigger bet is going to happen. [Ali laughs]

Ali (as **Sable**): I'm telling you, I've done...you don't know what I know about that clock.

Jack (as **alchemist**): [dismissively] What do you know about that clock?

Ali (as **Sable**): I know the person who built it.

Jack (as **alchemist**): You know the person who built that clock? Bullshit.

Ali (as **Sable**): I've been inside there, and I've seen the dolls all lined up. There's two rabbits.

Jack (as **alchemist**): So how many dolls have they got?

Ali (as **Sable**): They've got eight, which is a weird number, because it's a clock, but there's the rabbit— no, I'm not gonna tell you. You tell me what animals are in there.

Jack (as **alchemist**): I don't—

Ali (as **Sable**): You just look up every day.

Jack (as **alchemist**): I just, I look up, and sometimes I see— so, you say a rabbit's gonna come out.

Ali (as **Sable**): Uh huh.

Jack (as **alchemist**): And I say absolutely not. Eight animals, I don't believe you. They got 15, 20 animals in there.

Ali (as **Sable**): 20. [snorts] That's how they get you, you know.

Jack (as **alchemist**): No, I'm not gonna get got by this. This is gonna be just so straightfor— ugh! I'm so fucking tired of being up here! Why can't we watch the play? [Ali laughs]

Ali (as **Sable**): I don't know. It's not like they don't have watches.

Jack (as **alchemist**): It's not like they don't have watches down there. There's a little clock in the lobby. I think it's a power thing from the director, really.

Ali (as **Sable**): Ugh.

Jack (as **alchemist**): Ugh.

Ali (as **Sable**): Yeah. Maybe they're upset about the ornaments?

Jack (as **alchemist**): I don't know.

Ali (as **Sable**): We didn't do anything wrong, right?

Jack (as **alchemist**): I think you guys did great. I saw you hanging out with, uh...with your friends earlier. It seemed like it was going really well.

Ali (as **Sable**): Ugh, yeah.

Jack (as **alchemist**): You know, they look good.

Ali (as **Sable**): It was going really well. [sighs]

Jack (as **alchemist**): Was that a bit of a trial?

Ali (as **Sable**): [laughs] I'm never in Nievelmarch, and then I spend my whole day in Nievelmarch getting teased by these old ladies, and now I'm in this frigging balcony! Like I'm not in the clouds enough.

Jack (as **alchemist**): Yeah, I suppose you do spend a lot of time in the air. All right, well...

Jack: And the clock starts striking. [Ali laughs] First, out comes the leader of the parade. This is not the person that we are betting on.

Ali: No.

Jack: We're betting on the main character of the parade.

Ali: Uh huh.

Jack: But it's a little drummer boy who comes out going *pum pa-rum pa-rum* on a little clockwork drum, and he is followed by...draw a card!

Ali: Drawing a card from the blue deck.

Jack: Wait, no. I should draw first. I have drawn an eight of spades.

Ali: And I have drawn a two of clubs. I am looking for an anything of diamonds here, and I have five pulls to do it with.

Jack: Okay.

Ali: So, here's my—

Jack: The clock stops. [Ali and Jack laugh] We both lean forward.

(as **alchemist**): What's it doing?

Ali (as **Sable**): Oh, it's the little drummer boy with the left hand drumstick? The rabbit's definitely coming out.

Ali: That is a king of hearts. That's— oh, that wins!

Jack: Out he comes! He's blowing a little trumpet. [Ali laughs] His little ears are going backwards and forwards.

(as **alchemist**): Ah, god!

Ali (as **Sable**): I told you.

Jack (as **alchemist**): Why did I make this wager? How many rabbits have they got in there? Look, another rabbit's coming out! [Ali laughs] I'm not paying you double for two rabbits. I'm just saying, maybe you...you know, maybe you knew something I didn't.

Ali (as **Sable**): It's eight animals. They have two rabbits, one giraffe, one anteater, one lion. How many— that was four so far. One—

Jack (as **alchemist**): No, that's five. Two rabbits.

Ali (as **Sable**): Two rabbits.

Jack (as **alchemist**): A giraffe. An anteater.

Ali (as **Sable**): A giraffe. An anteater.

Jack (as **alchemist**): A lion.

Ali (as **Sable**): A lion. A pigeon. [Jack laughs quietly]

Janine (as **onlooker**): A goblin.

Ali (as **Sable**): A dove, and a goblin. [laughs]

Jack (as **alchemist**): A goblin is not an animal.

Janine (as **onlooker**): Also, aren't pigeons and doves, like, the...

Ali (as **Sable**): Hey. [Janine laughs]

Jack (as **alchemist**): Yeah, enough talk from the cheap seats! If you wanted to get involved with this, you'd have made a bet. [Ali laughs] I lost enough money today already. Jeez.

Janine (as **onlooker**): She told you she knew. You just didn't believe her. That's

on you.

Jack (as **alchemist**): Yeah, more fool me for listening. I know.

Janine (as **onlooker**): Yeah.

Jack (as **alchemist**): [sighs] Happens every year. Sable and I get into a stupid wager, and she always wins. [Ali laughs quietly]

Ali (as **Sable**): [sighs] Well, with my luck, another year of nothing to buy, huh?

Jack (as **alchemist**): Yeah. Well, I can but hope, Sable. [Ali laughs quietly]

Janine (as **onlooker**): At least this year you didn't spend an hour counting the raisins in your cookies.

Jack (as **alchemist**): [laughs] Yeah, that's true.

Ali (as **Sable**): Those were good cookies.

Jack (as **alchemist**): Those were good cookies. We got to enjoy the cookies. Here, we're just— oh, shit! Shit! Activate the thing! [Ali laughs]

Act Two [1:55:53]

Ali: And Act Two of— I wonder if we should do Act One and Act Two, and because all of our final scenes can only be with each other, it's like the ride home or, like, an afterparty?

Jack: Oh, yeah. It should be an afterparty, right?

Ali: Okay.

Jack: Is this— so this is a two act play, or should we do just...is it a three act play? I don't know.

Ali: [laughs] I think maybe two acts.

Jack: Okay. We gotta wrap this up.

Janine: No, no! It should be three acts.

Ali: No, no, okay.

Janine: I just...mm.

Ali: It should be three acts. [laughs]

Jack: Okay, okay. Act Two. Act Two begins.

Janine: I also do have— I have an idea for a scene that could happen between two and three, and then if we did, like, an afterparty scene and a ride home scene that, like...

Ali: Okay, yeah.

Jack: Oh, we— yeah, we probably could count that.

Janine: We don't necessary have to do them all at once, because, like, we're gonna be in each other's anyways.

Ali: Right. No, I just mean our next phase of, like, momentum spends is only gonna be with each other, so I was wondering if we should, like, end the play and create something more intimate.

Janine: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Ali: But I don't— we can do one more act of momentum and then the third act of "Dog at the Crossroads", because it needs the breath, the breathing room.

Jack: Okay. Act Two begins. The Crossroads. A woman in a long cape is digging.
[pause]

Ali: Wow. That's the whole thing?

Jack: Yeah.

Ali: Okay. [laughs] Okay. Okay. Okay. [clears throat] The next scene is...there's...a...this is the brilliance of "Dog at the Crossroads", right? Because it's a scene of a bunch of boy scouts going— [Jack and Ali laugh] They're going on, like, a field trip to the local police. They're all crowded around— they all get crowded around this window where they see the investigators looking at the leg.

Janine: Ew.

Ali: Horrific. I don't know why those kids are there. [laughs]

Janine: What the fuck?

Ali: Or why it's like a medical examination room with a big window.

Janine: Oh my god.

Ali: But...scene two. The vampires are eating it up. They're laughing so hard, and everyone's like, "Why are they laughing?"

Jack: This is funny to the vampires. [Ali and Janine laugh]

Ali: "Why are they laughing?"

Jack (as **Melinda**): It's just so funny. The boy scouts were not prepared to see a leg.

Ali (as **John**): [hushed] Do you think that leg's fake like Sable said? Or Velvet said?

Jack (as **Melinda**): [whispering] I don't— shh, brother. Shh, brother. The woman with the hat is turning to look at us. [Ali laughs quietly]

Janine: Scene three, I think, is... [laughs] This is— I'm sorry, I'm so on my bullshit when we do Nievelmarch stuff. Scene three is— it starts out with marionettes, like in the corner of the stage, in the back corner, so small you can't really see what they're doing, but you can tell that it's like a little sort of pastiche of the boy scouts and the police

officers and the medical examiner, but it is as if you've zoomed out, because they're, like, little in the distance and marionettes. The Ferryman walks out on stage holding his oar and has a conversation with what seems to be a— the replies are just noise. They're just, like, weird noise.

Jack: Damn.

Janine: The Ferryman is talking to Death.

Jack: Whoa, hell yeah.

Ali: Ooh.

Jack: Oh my god. Whoa, this is quite scary. Act Two is complete.

Ali: [laughs] Does the Death scene have, like, figures...a ghost in it? Which is why I was that mechanic with all that blood on their hands? Or...

Janine: No, it's just, like, the Ferryman of the underworld talking with Death about these, like, kids looking at a leg, and like, damn, society, you know?

Jack: Ha! Yeah. That do be how it is like sometimes. [Janine laughs]

Ali: Yeah, society.

Janine: Society.

Ali: Wow. Second intermission.

Janine: Yeah.

Ali: The first in—

Janine: I— oh.

Ali: Go ahead.

Janine: Go ahead.

Ali: I was gonna say that the first intermission was just drinks, and of course this is your intermission that is now with a meal included.

Janine: Oh.

Ali: Because that's funny. [laughs]

Jack: Yeah, you get your money's worth here in Nievelmarch.

Ali: Dinner and a show, as it were.

Velvet and Ern [2:01:15]

Janine: I think the thing— the scene I want is...is Velvet sneaking backstage with a pot of mushroom stew for the actors to, like, get a little...

Ali: Aw.

Janine: And some mugs. Not bowls, because it's like, you know, they're in a hurry; they gotta, you know. So it's, like, mugs of the mushroom stew for them to drink, and she's, like, handing them out and, like, kind of elbows her way through the crowd to make sure that Ern gets one.

Jack (as **Ern**): Oh my god, thank you. How's it going?

Janine (as **Velvet**): It's great! You're doing great. It's so good. I liked the part when the kid screamed. Not— I mean, because they were good at it.

Jack (as **Ern**): Oh, yeah, no.

Janine (as **Velvet**): It's hard for kids to act.

Jack (as **Ern**): They're doing great. They're doing really good. They're real boy scouts.

Janine (as **Velvet**): Oh, wow.

Jack (as **Ern**): It's kind of amazing. Yeah, it's...

Janine (as **Velvet**): I didn't know we had any of those left.

Jack (as **Ern**): Boy scouts?

Janine (as **Velvet**): Yeah, after...you know.

Jack (as **Ern**): Well, look, you know, it's a new era.

Janine (as **Velvet**): Yeah, I guess. It's just, that avalanche. I guess it was pretty long ago now.

Jack (as **Ern**): Don't— look. Don't— it's fresh in some people's minds. Thank you so much for bringing...

Janine (as **Velvet**): I'm glad they're having fun. Yeah, no, of course. I figured, you know, it was gonna be a while. Even if you ate right before this all started, that's still hours ago.

Jack (as **Ern**): It's hungry work, acting, you know?

Janine (as **Velvet**): Yeah, yeah.

Jack (as **Ern**): You have to pretend to be someone else, and that person might be hungry, and so then you start getting hungry.

Janine (as **Velvet**): Hmm. And then if your stomach growls, the people in the front row know that you're hungry.

Jack (as **Ern**): Yeah, absolutely. There are some plays where, you know, your stomach has to growl, but you don't— you use special effects for that. Did you like the light balls during that scene in the thunderstorm when that woman was digging?

Janine (as **Velvet**): Yeah.

Jack (as **Ern**): I think that Sable was involved with those.

Janine (as **Velvet**): Oh, yeah, I think I saw her at that table with those ladies. I think they were talking her ear off, though.

Jack (as **Ern**): Oh my god. She got caught by the ladies?

Janine (as **Velvet**): She got caught by the ladies.

Jack (as **Ern**): She got caught by the ladies again. It's hard, you know? It's a hard life.

Janine (as **Velvet**): Yeah. I mean, they mean well.

Jack (as **Ern**): They do mean well. They do mean well. [awkwardly] And things got a bit hairy backstage. People talked about the hole, and...but we're moving past it. The show must go on, you know?

Janine (as **Velvet**): That's good. That's good.

Jack (as **Ern**): I...I sort of have to address it, I think.

Janine (as **Velvet**): What?

Jack (as **Ern**): The hole, the hole. Next season, I think I have to do something about it.

Janine (as **Velvet**): Oh. I mean...sure. I mean, I can probably help. Like, I know where...I got a lot of stuff down there. I'm sure I can...I don't know. It's gotta have a bottom. I can't believe it just—

Jack (as **Ern**): I don't even know if it goes down, Velvet.

Janine (as **Velvet**): I can't believe—

Jack (as **Ern**): I mean, it clearly goes down.

Janine (as **Velvet**): It looks so deep from up there that there's no way it stops before it gets to me, but like, does it just go all the way past? Where would it— does it, like, twist? Does it curve somewhere? I don't know. I'm curious.

Jack (as **Ern**): [sighs] Hang on. I need to start getting changed. Do you mind if I just—

Jack: And I go behind a little screen and start putting on my costume for after the incident, and as I'm getting changed, I say:

(as **Ern**): I— you know. I have these dreams where I'm falling with him, and he's still falling.

Janine (as **Velvet**): Oh, that's awful.

Jack (as **Ern**): The man from the theater, and he's, like, he's awake, and, you know, sometimes he gets too tired from the fall and he sleeps for a bit, but I don't sleep. I'm just there watching him asleep, his eyes closed. You know, he's breathing slowly, and he's still falling, the wind in his hair. And he complains about how hungry he is, how he hasn't had anything to eat, and he still falls, and I fall with him, and then I wake up. And I don't— you know, I haven't told anybody this.

Janine (as **Velvet**): Yeah, that's awful. I bet that's not happening, though.

Jack (as **Ern**): Do you think he must have hit the bottom by now?

Janine (as **Velvet**): Maybe he came out the other side.

Jack (as **Ern**): I don't know. I want to believe that. I want to hear you say he came out the other side, but I don't... [sighs] I don't know.

Janine (as **Velvet**): Do you want me to sticky roll the dust off your hat?

Jack (as **Ern**): Yeah, okay. There's a sticky roller in the top drawer.

Janine (as **Velvet**): Got it.

Jack: I come out from behind the thing. Now I'm wearing the costume after the incident.
[Ali laughs]

Janine: Is the incident— I don't know. [laughs] Nevermind. I don't want to actually have that answer. I don't want to— [Ali laughs] I think we're better off without it.

Ali: Uh huh.

Janine (as **Velvet**): I think if you do something about the hole, then maybe you'll at least, like, get closer to some answers, and that might be good for you.

Jack (as **Ern**): Yeah, I hope so. It kind of fucks me up, you know?

Janine (as **Velvet**): Yeah. It's fucked up. [Ali laughs quietly]

Jack (as **Ern**): And I don't meant to, like, burden you with this. I don't know. You brought me some nice soup, and now here I am, telling you about the death dream.

Janine (as **Velvet**): Eh. Lot of bad stuff happens underground.

Jack (as **Ern**): Yeah?

Jack: Um, who's drawing? [Ali laughs]

Janine: Good question. Um...I think this, to me, this feels like a— I already did— did I already do social? No, I did money. I think I'll draw social for this, then. This is like bonding with Ern. That make sense?

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Jack: Oh yeah, totally.

Janine: Okay. Ace of clubs.

Ali: We're looking for hearts here.

Janine: Yeah.

Jack: Yep, but anything other than a heart...I'm drawing from the challenge deck, and I am drawing a nine of spades, which you beat.

Janine: Yeah.

Ali: Oh.

Janine: Which I guess means that, like, you know, Velvet will help kind of— trying to help Ernan with this whole business, you know?

Jack: There's, like, a connection.

Janine: Mm-hmm. They're clearly— I mean, they're very— Ern's losing sleep over this. He is...he's in a pickle, even if things are a little bit on the upturn.

Jack (as **Ern**): All right, let me...I'm pulling myself together. I'm getting ready. I've got stuff to do in the next act.

Janine (as **Velvet**): Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Jack (as **Ern**): Thank you so much for the soup. Do you want me to— let me sign your program.

Janine (as **Velvet**): Oh, thank you! [Ali laughs]

Jack: Big, loopy handwriting, Ernan Langerhank. And then, in force of habit, he draws a little flower, which is like a sarcastic curse signature from when he was back in the city and was just producing plants wherever he went.

Janine (as **Velvet**): Cool. I promise I won't sell it.

Jack (as **Ern**): Oh! [laughs] We could all be so lucky. All right. Okay.

Ali: All right.

Janine: All right.

Ali: I'm deleting the highest heart face card from your deck, Velvet?

Janine: Mm-hmm.

Jack: Mm-hmm.

Ali: Perfect.

Janine: Act Three.

Sable and Velvet [2:08:59]

Ali: Yeah. I have an idea for a social scene here, which can be a quick thing reflecting my [laughs] one card chance. But I kind of have this image of, like, Sable sort of holding this tray of, like, coal essentially? Like, spelled rocks that are, like, heated up that are being used to keep the soup hot or whatever. And it's sort of this moment of, like, she hands this tray to somebody in the kitchen and is sort of waiting a minute to be handed something back, but the person has to go get it or, like, shuffle through replacing them in each of these little containers, that it's just sort of a natural moment of pause, and she sees, like, Velvet, you know, in the kitchen as well just sort of doing something, and she's like:

Ali (as **Sable**): [calling quietly] Velvet! Velvet!

Janine (as **Velvet**): Yeah, what's up?

Ali (as **Sable**): I just had a moment, and I was getting something from my bag, and was that a...was that a Dapper Esther doll in your bag? [Jack laughs quietly]
I didn't want to look through your things; I'm so sorry. I just recognized the face from the...

Janine (as **Velvet**): Oh, I guess so. I didn't know she had a name.

Ali (as **Sable**): [gasps] Oh, oh, oh. You know, the one that you got is in beautiful condition. [Jack laughs quietly] I sort of prefer the Series Three, which had, like, a different eye design. Oh, but she's gorgeous.

Janine (as **Velvet**): Do you want to talk to her? [Ali laughs]

Ali (as **Sable**): Oh, I didn't want to be so forward. She has a working...?

Janine (as **Velvet**): Yeah.

Ali (as **Sable**): She has a working voice box? My goodness.

Janine (as **Velvet**): Whatever made that work I think is still working.

Ali (as **Sable**): Oh, what a treasure.

Janine (as **Velvet**): Near as I can tell.

Ali (as **Sable**): I would love to, yes. Oh. Um, I...is this your first Dapper Esther?

Janine (as **Velvet**): Yeah. Again, I didn't really know what it was. It just kind of interested me.

Ali (as **Sable**): Oh! Oh, Velvet.

Janine (as **Velvet**): It kind of called to me at the shop, you know?

Ali (as **Sable**): [laughs] Yes. Oh, well, of course it spoke to you, but I mean, if you were interested in knowing more about them or getting, like, a pair to go with...yeah. They don't like to be alone. [laughs] I would love to— oh, you should see the ones that I have up at the cloud farm. I brought a pair, of course. And yeah, this is so exciting.

Janine (as **Velvet**): Do they, like, talk to each other?

Ali (as **Sable**): Yes, yes, yes. Oh, yes.

Janine (as **Velvet**): Okay.

Ali (as **Sable**): They learn words. That's how they learn.

Janine (as **Velvet**): Ah. Right. Okay.

Ali (as **Sable**): I could—

Janine: Velvet, like, pulls the doll out of her bag. [Ali laughs] Sort of, like, sits her on her forearm, like kicks her legs up so she's, like, in a sitting position on her arm, because it feels polite.

Ali: Mm-hmm. [laughs]

Ali (as **Sable**): Oh, well, hello.

She says to the doll.

[simultaneously]

someone (as **doll**): MMM!

someone (as **doll**): AAH! [Ali laughs]

Janine: You have to put your hand over your mouth. You have to cup your hands, and then—

Jack: [through cupped hands] AH!

Janine: Yeah. [Ali laughs]

Ali (as **Sable**): Oh, she's pristine! Oh, you really must get a pairing, though. She'll start learning vowels in no time.

Janine (as **Velvet**): She's got that one down. She's doing pretty good at it.

Ali (as **Sable**): Oh, yes, yes. Can you do it again for us, little one?

Jack (as **doll**): AH! [Janine laughs]

Ali (as **Sable**): Beautiful, beautiful. You know, I still have a collection at home. I suppose, if Ern would be up for waiting, I could find another one from home to...to sit with your new investment here. Investment is such a cruel word. Companion.

Janine (as **Velvet**): You think Ern wouldn't like it?

Ali (as **Sable**): No, no, I just mean I would have to go back to my parents' home, of course, where the rest of mine...

Janine (as **Velvet**): Oh, sure.

Ali (as **Sable**): Yes. It's not too far.

Janine (as **Velvet**): Yeah. Um...that might be good. I didn't see any other ones at the store, so I'm not sure where I'd get another one. [Ali laughs quietly]

Ali (as **Sable**): Well, yes, of course.

Ali: I— sure. I... [laughs]

Jack: On the other side of the room, Melinda and John Joe Fell, like, glance at you and glance at the doll and are like, thumbs up.

Ali: It's funny. I thought the card draw here was, like, whether Velvet would even engage on this level, [laughs] but I think whether Velvet would accept Sable's other doll is just as funny.

Janine: Mm...

Ali: [laughs] So I'm gonna...

Janine: I wonder if it's actually whether the doll accepts the other doll.

Ali: Wow.

Jack: No, wait, isn't one of these dolls promised to the vampires?

Ali: No.

Janine: Only if the thing was lost, but we already did— we already pulled for that, and it's...

Jack: Oh, right! Yes, okay.

Janine: Yeah.

Ali: Yeah, we know that Velvet— yeah. We know that Velvet wins. [laughs]

Jack: Yes. Good.

Ali: Okay. I'm ready to draw the card here.

Janine: I mean, I guess Velvet doesn't know that, but like, **[Ali: Right.]** she's pretty confident.

Ali: Uh huh. Okay, I'm drawing my one card, and it has to win. And that's a king of spades, so I'm looking for a heart here, but so long as Janine doesn't get a heart...a four of hearts.

Janine: Yeah.

Ali: [laughing] So I've failed this endeavor.

Janine: Yeah. Do we, like, cut ahead to, like, a week from now?

Ali: Oh, I mean, maybe the doll can react here.

Janine: Oh, sure. Sure.

Ali: [laughs] It's present in the scene and can reject the...

Janine: I think Velvet's like:

(as **Velvet**): What kind? Like, you said there's, like, different kinds, right? Is the one— is it, like, the same as this one, or is it like a different one?

Ali (as **Sable**): Oh, yes. Well, it's a Dapper Esther as well, of course, but it's a series four, I believe. I think it was part of the spring fair collection, and I think that I...oh, I might still have a...yes, I believe I did pick that one up with the optional, um, ball and stick accessory.

Janine: Baseball? Baseball accessory? Do you mean baseball? [Ali and Janine laugh]

Ali: What's the other one? What's loop and stick? Is that what I was thinking of? I was trying to think of—

Janine: Hoop? The hoop and stick? Stick and hoop?

Ali: The hoop and stick. I was thinking of, like, a funny old-timey, like...

Janine: Is it baseball or is it golf? [Ali laughs] Or field hockey. I think the doll starts— you know when you have a windup toy and you crank it the wrong way, and it goes, like, click click click click click click click?

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Janine: It starts making that sound. [Ali laughs]

Jack: Well, that's not good. [Janine laughs] That ain't it.

Janine (as **Velvet**): Is that— is she practicing her consonants, or—? What is that?

Ali (as **Sable**): Oh. Oh, no. No. No, Velvet, I'm so sorry. I should go.

Janine (as **Velvet**): Oh— oh. Is this bad? [Ali laughs quietly]

Ali (as **Sable**): Oh, it's—

Janine (as **Velvet**): Is she sick? Do they get sick?

Ali (as **Sable**): I should go. I should go. I don't think that she's sick, but I should leave immediately. Please, enjoy the rest of your night. I'll see you later.

Janine (as **Velvet**): [confused] Okay.

Ali (as **Sable**): Farewell.

Janine (as **Velvet**): Bye. [Jack and Ali laugh]

Ali: Okay.

Jack: Oh, dear. Okay. Um...right. I am going to try and get financial progress.

Janine: Wait, do you want to do this now, or do you want this to be the closeout for the evening?

Jack: Oh, that's a good point.

Janine: Right? Because we still have Act Three, and then...

Ali: Yeah.

Jack: So we should play Act Three, and then we should...

Ali: Do your scene, I guess? Oh, because you're gonna have, like, a post thing if you want it.

Jack: Right.

Ali: Or we can just end on the play. [laughs]

Janine: Yeah.

Jack: Which is funnier? [Ali laughs]

Janine: Well, if we maintain the order that we've been doing, it puts a bit of pressure on

me, but I think I can probably deliver. [Ali laughs]

Act Three [2:18:32]

Jack: No, you'll be fine, Janine. It's great. [Janine laughs quietly] In fact, I'm gonna tee you up. Act Three begins. The Devil appears.

Janine: That's it? That's...

Jack: Yep.

Janine: Okay. [Ali laughs] Does he do anything?

Jack: Wouldn't you like to know? Look.

Janine: Is it just, like, a mundane scene, but then the Devil just walks onstage and stands there for the duration?

Jack: Oh my god. It's a mundane scene that gets less and less— yes, it's a mundane scene for a lot of it, and then the Devil shows up and just stands there, and the scene gradually grows, you know...

Janine: Just slowly put red filters over the stage lights.

Jack: Just worse and worse and worse. [Ali laughs] Stuff just coming apart. Terrible. God, I would watch a— I think what I'm actually probably describing here is *Twin Peaks*. *Twin Peaks* is probably [Janine laughs] the closest thing of, like, a normal show that the Devil appears in, and then it just gets worse and worse.

Janine: Yeah.

Ali: Yeah, okay. Um...we've... [laughs] We've returned to the intersection of the car crash, and the Devil crosses the crosswalk as the light changes and walks out of the scene, and then... [laughs quietly] Um, another actor comes onto the screen and walks past from stage left and is walking towards the intersection, and then a third actor comes from stage right and pulls out a gun and shoots [Jack gasps, Ali laughs] the

other character on the screen.

Jack: Whoa!

Ali: And then walks off stage again. And then, once the stage is just the one person who got shot, like, a big crowd of shopkeeper type people come out again and are like, [mumbles].

Jack: That's how the song goes. [Ali laughs]

Janine: Scene three. Very tight after scene two. The lights go down, but then they immediately go up. Everyone who's on stage has changed positions very quickly. They are in sort of a...not a chorus line, but they're all facing the audience. They are all in very deliberately placed positions that feel very inorganic, very, like, deliberately placed. They begin to sing an ensemble cast song about the town being torn apart by mistrust and by suspicion, and they're singing about the people they trust and the people they hate and the people they've hurt and the people who have hurt them. And as they sing, the stage, the set rotates on, like, this big thing. There's, like, some people under the stage who are, like, pushing a wheel to get it to turn around. And then, on the other side of this set— you can still hear everyone, but you can't see them. On the other side of this set, there is, like, this sort of steam industrial machine thing, and it's like banging lids on trunks basically. Like, it's a car— it's like a vehicle assembly line, and it just, like, slams the trunk lid on, and one of the— and as it slams one on, the part of this machine, like, lifts up and reveals a skeleton that's missing a leg.

Jack: Whoa!

Ali: Whoa.

Jack: Oh, wow. Crowd goes wild!

Janine: [laughs quietly] Everyone's still singing about how they hate each other.

Jack: After a stunned pause. Okay.

Janine: The very last lyric in the song is, “Dog at the crossroads,” but they draw out “roads.”

Ali: Wow.

Jack: [laughs] Ah, amazing.

Janine: It’s a little bit Simpsons— now that I’m thinking about it, it’s a little bit like the episode of *The Simpsons* where they do a musical version of *Streetcar Named Desire*, [Janine and Jack laugh] but it’s very funny to me nevertheless.

Jack: Yeah, yeah, yeah. No, I think it’s the right vibe. Um...okay.

Janine: Is Ern singing?

Jack: Of course Ern is singing.

Janine: Amazing.

Jack: He’s got tears rolling down his face. You know.

Janine: Is he, like, near the middle of the group, maybe? Like, kind of...

Jack: Yeah, absolutely.

Janine: He’s a major character.

Jack: The Devil isn’t there.

Janine: No.

Jack: Absolutely, Alexei. But no Devil.

Janine: The Devil is the sound of the machinery. That’s the reveal.

Jack: Oh, god.

Ali: Mm.

Janine: Is when the thing turns around, and you see the machinery, it's like, oh, that's the sound when the Ferryman was talking. That's the sound that talked back. We should make this! [Ali and Jack laugh]

Ali: We should.

Jack: We should make "Dog at the Crossroads". [Ali and Janine laugh]

Ern and Velvet [2:24:20]

Jack: Okay, let's see. So, my last scene has to be with one of you two.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Janine: Mm-hmm.

Jack: Okay. Okay, yeah. I would like to go for an infrastructural progress, because I would like to meet Velvet afterwards and say:

(as **Ern**): Okay, I've given it some thought. It was all I was thinking about during that last whole thing. We gotta figure this out. I'm gonna lower a rope down, maybe next week, and I want you to see if you can go to what's below it. You know, it's like you said, it must go— you've got a lot of room down there.

Janine (as **Velvet**): Yeah.

Jack (as **Ern**): I've been thinking it's a bottomless hole. I think that it's just— that's not— that's non-generative thinking.

Janine (as **Velvet**): Put a bell on it.

Jack (as **Ern**): Put a bell on the rope. I'll put a bell on the rope.

Janine (as **Velvet**): Put a bell on the end of a rope. Put one of those little bundles, one of those, like, round— the round light up things. See if you can get one of those, like a leftover one, and put that on the end.

Jack (as **Ern**): Yeah. And I'll need your help, you know? I don't know whether or not you want to dig up to sort of meet it or whether that would be a bad idea.

Janine (as **Velvet**): [hesitant] Mm...

Jack: Let's draw! [Jack and Janine laugh quietly] Okay, I am looking for, uh...

Janine: Clubs, right?

Jack: Clubs, yes.

Janine: I got a five of spades.

Jack: Uh, mine is the pink— mine is the— which one's mine, Ali?

Ali: Pink. Pink deck.

Janine: Yeah.

Jack: Pink. I got an ace of clubs.

Janine: Ooh!

Jack: The best possible result in suit.

Janine: Yeah.

Ali: Oh! Wow.

Janine (as **Velvet**): Okay, so, you lower the rope. Put a light on it.

Jack (as **Ern**): Yeah.

Janine (as **Velvet**): Put a bell on it.

Jack (as **Ern**): Yeah. Yeah.

Janine (as **Velvet**): I'll get the rabbits. The rabbits are really good at picking up on

stuff like that. They'll lead me in the right direction. Maybe I'll have to dig. I don't know what direction I'll have to dig in, but the rabbits will help with that too. We're gonna figure this out.

Jack (as **Ern**): [sighs] Thank you. Thank you. We're gonna figure this out.

Janine (as **Velvet**): Mm-hmm.

Jack (as **Ern**): All right. I have to go out and meet my public.

Janine (as **Velvet**): [laughs] Good job, by the way. It was a fun show.

Jack (as **Ern**): Thank you. It's like, it's heavy subject matter, but I think that there's something in it, you know? You don't come out of the end of it feeling— or at least I don't, and maybe this is just because I've addressed the— or I've decided to address the lurking ever-present horror in my life, but I'm feeling kind of optimistic.

Janine (as **Velvet**): Yeah, good. [laughs quietly] I don't know that that's how most people would leave that experience, but yeah. Good for you, Ern.

Jack (as **Ern**): All right. Cool.

Jack: Um, okay. I spent one momentum here, bringing this down to one. Is there anything else we want to do before we go home or in going home? Is there anything else we want to address before we move into our final season?

Ali: I think that I'm good for now.

Janine: The vampires give me that crystal.

Ali: Uh huh.

Janine: Of course.

Jack: Oh, yes.

Ali: Oh, you just won, so I should actually take this— I'm gonna recall this stuff from your deck and then make sure I take the...that was infrastructural?

Jack: Yes.

Ali: Okay.

Jack (as **Melinda**): Your crystal, Velvet. We snatched it from the chandelier when no one was looking.

Ali (as **John**): Nobody was looking.

Janine (as **Velvet**): Thank you so much.

Jack (as **Melinda**): Not a single soul saw.

Janine (as **Velvet**): Were you disappointed that the murder wasn't a murder? I must know.

Jack (as **Melinda**): Well, of course I was...

Ali (as **John**): Oh.

Jack (as **Melinda**): Obviously, I—

Ali (as **John**): I thought it was tremendous.

Janine (as **Velvet**): It was interesting. It was a kind of murder.

Jack (as **Melinda**): This is what my brother always says. I sign up to see bloodshed, and I am disappointed, and then he claps his little hands in delight.

Ali (as **John**): It was delightful.

Janine (as **Velvet**): It was a murder by progress, mechanization.

Ali (as **John**): And as if there was not violence in the show. Dear sister, you're too

demanding.

Jack (as **Melinda**): A capital-M murder. My name is Melinda, and I am drawn by the capital M that these two words share.

Ali (as **John**): [sighs] Well, you've received a capital-M mystery tonight, my dear.

Jack (as **Melinda**): No mystery at all. No murder was committed. I will go home unhappy. Although, the performances were very good, and your friend did well, and it was a delight to reach up to the chandelier and, unknown by any other patron, snatch the glimmering crystal. [Janine laughs quietly]

Janine (as **Velvet**): Uh, have a good night, you two. [Ali laughs]

Jack: The horrible black leather carriage is waiting outside. The horses stamp and blow steam into the air as the Fel siblings get ready to leave.

Ali: Perfect. And I think, on that note, we are ready to move on to winter of our fourth year.

Jack: Okay.

Janine: Do we have to pick a person?

Ali: Oh, right! We have to decide a friend. We have to decide a friend, and I have to take [**Janine:** Yeah.] the heart— queens? Is that queens? Is that aces?

Janine: The hot queens? What?

Ali: [laughs] I think it's aces that I take out of each person's deck.

Jack: I think that's what we did, yeah.

Ali: Yeah, and set them aside for your friend, and then you write in your next letter how they helped you in a pinch.

Jack: If we use them to cancel out, yeah.

Janine: Uh huh.

Ali: Yes, a face card.

Jack: And we have— should we not have, uh, made a new friend?

Ali: That's what we're— that's what Janine just said. That's what we're doing right now.

Janine: Yeah, that's what we're doing. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Jack: Oh, we're making new friends as well.

Ali: Uh huh.

Jack: Okay. Cool.

Janine: You make new friends but keep the old; one is silver but the other gold?

Jack: Yeah, totally. Yeah. But there's three, so one of them is bronze. [Janine laughs] I was wondering: could my friend be Velvet? After, you know, I was sort of like, "Can you help me this season?" and Velvet was like, "Yeah"? [Ali laughs] Or do you think that I need a new friend?

Ali: Um, I don't have anything against that. I guess it...yeah.

Janine: I mean, I think the idea of— I could be wrong, but I think the design idea of making— of having these friends is that you, like, expand the world a bit, but also, I think our world is fine.

Jack: Oh, yeah.

Janine: You know?

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Janine: I think our world has expanded sufficiently in such a way where, like, yeah, if you wanted to say that, like, "oh, Velvet helped me with this," that's fine by me. I don't

see any reason why not.

Ali: Yeah.

Jack: Yeah.

Ali: I think the only thing that gives me pause is that, like, Velvet is going to have a season of her own?

Jack: That's true.

Ali: But there's nothing that says that she can't spend, like, an afternoon with you or whatever, right?

Janine: Yeah, it could just be, like, Velvet brought me dinner because I was stuck in the yard and didn't have access to any food.

Ali: You know?

Jack: Right, right, right. Yes.

Janine: I screamed into the hole, and Velvet came up with a steak. [Ali laughs] That's plausible. That could happen.

Ali: Yeah. So, I have no objections to it.

Jack: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Okay. So, I'm gonna use Velvet as my friend, and my other previous friends are Melissa Miles, the wood store lady; and Siegbert Planque and Audrey Ruth, book club and amateur dramatics people.

Ali: Perfect.

Janine: Amazing. Love that.

Ali: I received a card to go seek out a witch.

Jack: You did.

Ali: But I never met the witch. Maybe I can just add her...

Janine: It was a card for safe passage, right? So you wouldn't get, like, **[Ali: Right.]** witchmarked?

Jack: Or just mountain murked, honestly.

Janine: Mountain murked.

Ali: Right, lost in the mountains, yeah.

Janine: Yeah, people have been turned into arches in those mountains, so you gotta be careful. [Ali laughs]

Jack: You do. You do have to be careful.

Ali: Jack, give me a witch name.

Jack: Uh, okay. A witch name is, um...uh, Roderique Ashunne.

Janine: Oh.

Jack: Roderique, R-O-D-E-R-I-Q-U-E. Ashunne, A-S-H-U-N-N-E.

Ali: The witch who is supposed to get me access to a new— or I don't know, I guess we can say that I've gotten the...

Janine: You have access to the witch.

Ali: Right. Well, it was for agricultural progress to, like, get a new plant, so I guess I'm handwaving the fact that I have the plant, and I can contact her for help in the upcoming year.

Jack: Additional help.

Ali: Yeah.

Jack: Yeah.

Ali: Who's your friend, Janine?

Janine: Oh, my friend is 100% whatshername, Anastasia Pritt, the archeologist that I hired.

Ali: Oh, duh! [Janine laughs]

Jack: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Ali: Oh, that's so smart, yeah. Gaming.

Jack: She seems like the one.

Janine: And of course, like, she can come up otherwise, but like, if I'm supposed— you know, it's nice to have her also as a tool.

Winter [2:34:29]

Ali: Okay, I believe that that's it. We are now ready to pull. I am going to do a superstitious shuffle of all of our decks. [laughs quietly]

Jack: Okay.

Ali: Any other questions or comments before we move into the next phase of play?

Jack: I don't think so.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Janine: Good luck; have fun.

Ali: I'm gonna try to. All right, let's go.

Jack: Okay. Mine is pink.

Ali: Yeah, I'm blue. Aw!

Jack: Fuck me!

Ali: [laughing] What is happening?

Janine: Spend the card. Spend the card! [Ali groans]

Jack: Okay, so...okay. So, I drew...I'm gonna spend my ace, and I think that what this represents is— oh, I'll talk about it in the letter. But now I just keep drawing, right? As though that didn't show up.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Janine: Yeah. I'm also gonna spend my ace. I feel like spending it right after the festival makes a kind of sense also, of like, this is when those connections are freshest.

Ali: Right, sure. Yeah, I'm wondering if I should spend that.

Janine: Fuck me!

Ali: [laughs sympathetically] Yeah, let me spend mine. Okay, we have drawn our cards. We have all unfortunately spent our aces in the first go around, but that is just the truth of this. I have drawn an eight of hearts, a four of hearts, a five of hearts, a ten of diamonds, a five of diamonds. Somewhere along the way, I got a queen that I canceled out with my ace, and then my final card was a king of spades, meaning that I am writing about my zero infrastructural progress.

Jack: Okay. I got a five of hearts, a— oh, sorry. I got a ten of clubs and a two of clubs. I got a two of spades, a six of spades, and an eight of spades, an eight of diamonds, and a five of hearts. And I drew a king of clubs, meaning that I'm writing about my infrastructural progress. My totals were barely any social progress, minor financial progress—that's a 16—average agricultural progress, and minor infrastructural progress.

Janine: I feel like we should say, though, that, like, for Ern, a 16 in agricultural progress is like, that's good.

Ali: Uh huh.

Janine: You did okay.

Jack: It's pretty good for Ern!

Ali: [laughs] I think we should say, for Ern, too, the first card that you drew was that jack of spades.

Jack: Yes.

Janine: Yeah. Yeah.

Ali: And I almost walked away from my desk, because I can't do this anymore. [all laugh]

Jack: Yes. The first thing that happened was that I did immediately draw a face card, but I was not having that. I had decided that that was not gonna happen.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Janine: Yeah. So, I drew a four of diamonds, a two of spades. Then I drew an ace of spades and played my other ace over it, and then I drew a three of clubs and then an ace of diamonds! Which leaves me with zero hearts, four diamonds, two spades, and five— wait, no. I didn't do that. That's three. Why did I say five?

Ali: Oh.

Janine: I must have read the two as a— I'm tired. [Ali laughs quietly] Hang on. Hang on. Three. Okay. And I'm writing about the diamonds, the money, which is the best of them but not great.

Ali: Ooh! Look at your attitude changing finally. [Janine and Ali laugh]

Janine: Okay. [Janine and Ali laugh]

Ali: This is like, that has been one of my favorite parts of this game is this, like,

accidental characterization of Velvet as someone who keeps addressing her failures.
[Jack laughs quietly]

Janine: You gotta make do with what you got, you know?

Ali: Uh huh, uh huh.

Jack: Okay, let's see.

Ali: Yeah, let's dig into it. And each of us are mentioning our friend.

Janine: Mm-hmm.

Jack: Mm-hmm.

Ali: All right. So, we have written our letters for November. I don't know that I wrote about my infrastructural progress, [laughs] but we're all fine.

Jack: Sometimes I've found that you get to the end of writing the letter, and...

Ali: [laughs] I think to myself, "Now, hang on."

Jack: Wait a second.

Ali: I didn't do anything. There's some stuff about infrastructure here. Anyway, I focused mostly on my friend, which—

Jack: And the good news is that the police won't come [Ali: Yeah...] if we do this slightly...

Ali: Well...

Jack: [laughs quietly] The tabletop police?

Ali: Mm, Tyler—

Jack: Jason Morningstar shows up. [Ali and Jack laugh] Tyler.

Ali: Tyler might find me and be like, “You're not allowed to play any more Possible Worlds games ever again.”

Jack: We can't release this episode if that's the outcome. [Ali laughs] I like that studio's games.

Janine: The important thing to think about is, like, when you are breaking a rule in a tabletop game, to me, is think about why the rule is there.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Janine: In this case, the rule is there so you have a starting point, because otherwise the pressure of, like, “just invent a story” is really crushing for a lot of people. [Ali laughs] It's a way to encourage variety, to offer guidance, to inspire.

Ali: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

Janine: And if you got a letter anyway— if you did a letter anyway, like, you're fine. You know?

Ali: I'm rebelling. I'm rebelling. Anyway, let me... [clears throat]

Dear Miss Ashunne,

Contained with this letter is your shipment containing two crates of cactus juice to refill the pantry for you and yours's brewing needs in the upcoming winter season. I feel the need to apologize properly, here in writing when you can't refuse, for chancing upon you and interrupting your burrow's winter solstice gathering. I'm in your debt for the hospitality you treated me to for making space at your table for your evening's feast. I've been a long way from Nievelmarch's usual celebrations the past few years, and in their absence, your great aunt's acorn tarts and stewed lamb tongue will ignite my holiday spirit for years to come.

If she does ask about my mammals again, do assure her that the rosewater balm she gave me was indeed applied during the most recent waning crescent, and

believe it or not, the little ones do seem to be in better spirits. The gleaming karofill bulbs have been holding up tremendously well for their winter soak, and the color is already starting to lighten. The spring sun hasn't quite come in, but I'm looking forward to bringing them into the sun soon and planting them in the clouds next season.

You're welcome to visit my little sky lifter all you'd like, though I admit my kitchen is not quite so impressive. I can promise you a humble stew and good company, at least.

Thank you,

Miss Butter

Jack: She made a witch friend.

Ali: I went up to the mountains and interrupted a witch party.

Jack: But it went well for you.

Ali: Yeah.

Jack: You are not an archway.

Ali: [laughs] Yeah. They invited me to their table. They bought things from me. I got the new produce from this lady. Yeah.

Jack: Very successful, I think.

Ali: Uh huh. [laughs quietly]

Jack: And it's kind of infrastructural in the sense that, like, you know, it would have been social if you'd gone up there and been like, "The witch is my friend," but instead you've made this kind of, like, semi-business relationship with these people.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Jack: And had a nice meal, you know?

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Jack: Dear sister,

After all the fun of the play, I suppose it comes as no surprise that I returned to my farm—rotting berries underfoot, crowded branches blocking out the sun, wasps crawling drunkenly on fallen apples already rimed with frost—and resolved to leave it immediately for a life in the theater. But Velvet came up from the cave and reminded me of the work that we've got to do, and I unpacked my suitcase and felt all kinds of sheepish. This is not something that I can simply abandon.

The first thing we did was rent a cart from the town and, in a task so overwhelmingly unpleasant that it was almost comical, pitched all the rotten fruit over the fence into it. "Why aren't we feeding this to the hole?" I asked Velvet, and she gave me a Look, so into the cart they went. Then, I borrowed a saw, and we cut back the worst of the branches. Part of me felt bad at cutting back all this growth after years of desperately wanting it, but sister, we barely made a dent. The plants will be fine.

This enabled us to see the full extent of the hole. It has gotten to the point where I don't like to look directly at it. It has grown, eating most of the field beside the house. The pond is gone. It is very cold around it. Velvet got a string, and we measured its circumference. Good to know what you're dealing with. I wrote it down in a little book and did the maths. The hole covers two and a half acres. Then I cried for a bit, and Velvet went back down to the cave.

I have kept a little patch of crabapples which I am selling as winter decorations. Come to Ern's farm. It has been four years. We've got one little patch of crabapples and a hole the size of a churchyard. Still.

Ern

Ali: 2.5 acres is so many.

Jack: You gotta start somewhere! You gotta address the—

Janine: Gotta start somewhere.

Jack: You gotta address the extent of the problem, Ern!

Janine: Mama,

I hope you're doing well. I heard about your catarrh, though there's not much I can do about it out here. If you need any mushrooms or herbs sent back, let me know, and I'll do my best.

I will be honest with you, because information seems to find you like rivers find a lake anyway. Everything's been slow and thin here lately, even the money, but please don't worry overly on my part. I've dipped into my savings just a bit to avoid the belt-tightening I might have had to do otherwise, so your dear girl is still in warm socks and slippers.

With any luck, things will pick up soon. Anastasia tells me it's normal for there to be some hiccups in a transition like this, the transition being between an amateur operation and something a little more professional and formalized. I can hear you bristling, but those are my words and not hers. Admittedly, it's a little painful after such a heartening season, to feel like I'm now just backsliding, but I'm trying to think of all this as an investment in efficiency and prosperity for the rest of the year. Cross your fingers for me, and I'll cross mine for you.

XOXO

Ali: Mm.

Jack: That's sweet. I also want to see Velvet's mum in exactly this same position. [Ali laughs quietly] Velvet's mum now has to run an accidental fossils mine.

Janine: I think I've accidentally been picturing Velvet's mom, I will say, as like the mother in a Beatrix Potter book.

Jack: Yes.

Ali: Oh.

Janine: Probably not an actual rabbit or mouse, obviously, but like, [Ali snorts] you know, in like an apron, dress, soft fabrics.

Jack: Yeah, yeah, yeah. A little bonnet.

Janine: Just like, nondescript round shape. A bonnet. Jemima Puddle-Duck mode.

Jack: God, going Jemima Puddle-Duck mode. [Janine laughs] All the girlies going Jemima Puddle-Duck mode, winter 2023/2024.

Janine: Catch me going Jemima Puddle-Duck mode, yeah.

Jack: Okay. Not the worst opening. I think we've all done all right.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Jack: Velvet less so, but you got to—

Janine: Yeah.

Jack: You know, wrote a nice letter. It's a transitional period. Anastasia was very— you know, you had Anastasia there to explain this is how it goes. [Ali laughs quietly]

Janine: Yeah. Yeah, yeah. She's bolstered my spirits.

Spring [2:47:00]

Ali: Springtime.

Jack: Springtime.

Ali: No more aces. What we get is what we get.

Jack: No, wait. Don't we have the two other friends? Don't the friends stack? Didn't we learn this?

Ali: Oh, did—

Jack: Or am I...

Ali: Oh my god, did we learn this? [laughs] We might have learned this last time, and I might have...

Janine: I feel like that's not true? I feel like what we learned is that, like, you get the one ace, but you can say it's whoever you want or something? I might be wrong, though.

Ali: No, because I think last time we had, like, a season where we all did really bad, and the next season, we were like, "Oh, wait, we could all— we all could have had another..."

Janine: Mm, mm-hmm. Okay, fair. Yeah, all right.

Ali: [reading] "After every fourth season, you make a friend. Name this character if they don't already exist in your game." Okay. "Remove the ace from your deck to reflect your strong bond with this person. You can leave this ace out of your deck, or you can spend a pulled ace to negate one ace or face card per season. Remove an ace from your deck to reflect your strong bond with this person. You can leave this ace out of your deck, or you can spend it— or you can spend a pulled ace to negate one ace or face per season and keep dealing. If you do, explain in that season's letter how your friend helped you out in a pinch. Spent aces are shuffled back into your deck for the next season."

Jack: Because this would also— this also gets this feeling of, like, the longer you've been in the community, the more friends you have...

Janine: Yeah. Yeah.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Jack: The more sort of amount of people you can rely on.

Janine: The way that we've been playing it, I feel like, as you get to the end of the game, there's a...there would be a propensity to reinforce the freshest connections and kind of neglect the oldest ones, except in certain cases.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Janine: Because those fresh connections are things that you're literally making to address current needs, based on the past season and stuff.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Janine: So it makes sense, based on what feels to me like the underlying thesis of this game, to have more.

Jack: But you can only spend on a season, right?

Ali: Right, yeah.

Janine: Yeah.

Ali: And I think we played it the other way last year anyway, so I'm just gonna pull these out, and...

Jack: It's okay. We're just— we're doing themes and variations on this game's rules. [Ali and Janine laugh]

Janine: Actual play, you know? Sometimes you...

Jack: Here on Friends at the Table, we like to show you a— yeah.

Ali: Okay, so now we are gonna draw for our spring season, and we each have...we had three aces each, and now we have two aces each.

Jack: Okay. Cool.

Ali: Whoa.

Janine: You gotta spend, Ern. You gotta spend. [Ali laughs] There we go.

Ali: Wow.

Janine: I'm just playing solitaire down here.

Ali: Oh, man. What is happening? [laughs]

Jack: That was amazing. Holy shit. This is the— Anastasia Pritt has really sort of kicked in here, Janine.

Janine: Yeah.

Jack: You made the smart decision to get an employee, and it really did the work for you. [Janine laughs] Or with you, I suppose. I don't want to badmouth your own work here. Okay, should we read out what we got?

Ali: Sure, yeah. So, I, um...I had a rough one, I think. [laughs quietly] I got a five of hearts and then immediately a king of diamonds that I canceled out with my ace. Then I got a six of hearts, then I got a ten of clubs, and then I got a jack of diamonds, which amounts to minor social progress, [laughs quietly] no financial progress, no agricultural progress, and minor infrastructural progress. And I'll be writing about my zero financial progress.

Jack: I didn't do too badly, for Ern. I drew an eight of diamonds, a seven of diamonds, a nine of hearts, a four of spades, a five of spades, a seven of clubs, a three of clubs. I almost immediately drew a king of hearts and canceled it out with an ace very early on, so my total is minor social progress, average financial progress, minor agricultural progress, and minor infrastructural progress. I am writing about my minor agricultural progress.

Janine: I drew enough cards that I sorted them by suit, so I don't remember the exact order of them.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Janine: But...

Ali: What are these numbers? [laughs]

Janine: I got a...okay, in the clubs column. Actually, no, let's start with spades. Spades: ten of spades, two of spades, eight, nine, six, four of spades, which leads us to a spade total of 39. For hearts, I have a three of hearts and a five of hearts; that is eight. For diamonds, I have a seven, a four, and a two, which brings us to 13. And then, for clubs, I did at one point draw a king of clubs, but I used an ace to get past it and then drew a six, an eight, a three, a seven, and a ten of clubs, bringing me up to 34 before drawing a jack of clubs.

Ali: You're really— you're doing the thing you set out to do right now. You're not... [laughs]

Janine: Yes. Yeah.

Ali: You don't like your assistant particularly very much. You're not really making that much money, but the agricultural and infrastructural progress you are...

Janine: It's coming together.

Jack: It's going swimmingly.

Ali: Yeah.

Janine: You know?

Ali: Yeah.

Janine: It's coming together.

Ali: Delegating your tasks pays off.

Janine: Yeah. It does.

Ali: [laughs] Okay, let's get into these.

Janine: It turns out going alone at a thing you don't know very well is the hardest way to go.

Ali: Okay, so, we have— we just did spring. We're in springtime now. The sun is shining. [laughs] Results are mixed, and my springtime letter reads— which I am writing about my zero financial progress. [clears throat]

Jack: Hmm.

Ali: [laughs quietly]

Attn. Mx. Promwell

To Bank of Nievelmarch Southside Branch:

Disclosed is my request to make a withdrawal from my savings account with the Bank of Nievelmarch, with the intent to have the funds delivered by an Odd Job Boy within the following business week. Contained is my withdrawal request form and the contract signed with Teddy Jr. representing their finance chapter.

Ali: In brackets here, I've written: There is a gap between the page, with more writing on the last one third folded over on the letter. [clears throat]

You found me quite disappointed that Robby von Jr. hadn't invited my ticket and invitation to "Dog at the Crossroads" and thought I'd include good and extremely secret news. I'm happy to report that he brought me a bag of light roast coffee beans from the Glacier and a bouquet of lilies to apologize during our monthly dethawing. Perhaps the rock-solid shield around the mechanic boy's heart is starting to melt away bit by bit as well. Before you raise your pen in response, we

both know I can't afford making frivolous appointments, so I won't entertain the suggestion!!!

Your favorite client,

Miss Butter

Jack: Ohh! And single too! [Ali and Janine laugh] That's what I heard! That's what I've heard! Oh my god. You've written good and extremely secret news, but you know that this is now the conversation between at least six old ladies.

Ali: [laughs quietly] Ohh.

Jack: The bank manager knows. It's great.

Ali: Mm-hmm. [laughs quietly]

Jack: Dear sister,

I think the hole knows that I'm resolved to do something about it. I don't know. Yesterday morning, I woke up, and the edge of it had extended directly below my kitchen window. Perhaps this would have frightened me once. Maybe the thing I feel now is fear. I can't tell. I think I am seized with a kind of grim resolution. I visited Melissa Miles and asked her to bring over as much unused lumber as she could, the stuff that's too splintery or too unpleasant for sale. She showed up, and together we built a kind of fence around the thing, and then, gritting my teeth, started work on a sort of bridge or platform over it. There is no way I will be able to close this thing, I reckon, but being able to get over it, look down into it, maneuver around it robs it of some kind of power.

Great news. [Ali laughs quietly] The crabapple business I got going in winter is going better than I was expecting. I've got a little production line going. In the morning, I go out and cut what's there, and then, in the afternoon, I form them into circular wreaths. The red of the berries and the dark sticks look great together, and the folks in town seem to agree. I never thought of myself as a

florist or decorator, but I suppose I never thought of myself as an actor either. [Ali laughs quietly]

This morning, as I went down into town to sell the wreaths, I noticed—and maybe I'm wrong about this—that the hole had not grown overnight. My kitchen window remains. Perhaps the thing is having second thoughts.

Optimistically (brackets: ha ha ha),

Ern

Janine: Ulna,

My mother sends her regards for the care package you sent. Obviously, I'm so grateful as well. I thought a little hen of the woods would be nice to help perk her up, but I didn't expect you'd go to so much trouble on our behalf. She's been feeling so much better. I think your thoughtfulness did as much for her benefit as the medicines. It's been such an eventful season with Miss Pritt taking over the archeological activity here. Winter wasn't pleasant, but with that past, we've got an established system and have fallen into what feels like a workable routine. She handles the bones, I handle the rocks, and things just work. I say all this because I want you to share some of that credit too. If I'd had to fret about Mother on top of all that, making trips up to forage whatever I could or track down the doctor for advice, I don't think we could have progressed even half as far as we have. I owe you big, and I know you won't let me forget that, but I promise you won't have to.

Velvet

Ali: [touched] Mm.

Jack: That's so sweet. And to think that you were poisoning each other quite recently.
[Ali laughs]

Janine: I don't think she ever poisoned me back. I just poisoned her, because she, like,

dared me to.

Ali: Uh huh, yeah.

Jack: [laughs] And you did.

Ali: Uh huh.

Janine: Yeah.

Jack: Okay.

Ali: Let me get our aces back out. We each have one ace. Oop. Okay. Roll20 is my enemy. [laughs] Okay, there we go.

Jack: That's your tattoo. That's what your tattoo says, right?

Ali: [laughs] Oh, we should all get tattoos that say "Roll20 is my enemy." [Jack and Janine laugh]

Jack: Flash forward 75 years. What the fuck did this mean?

Ali: [laughs] Oh, we'd all know.

Jack: We'd all remember.

Ali: We'd all know.

Jack: Yeah, because we'd be— we'll be making Seasons of Hieron 26. [Ali laughs]

Janine: Yeah.

Jack: The oldest and coolest actual play podcast.

Summer [2:58:47]

Ali: [sighs] Yeah, and with that, we move into Summer, which also has weird connotations with [laughs] the thought of Seasons of Hieron 25.

Jack: Make the summer last forever.

Ali: Uh huh. [sarcastic] Yeah, that's the moral of that story.

Jack: Mm-hmm. [Ali laughs] Well, time to draw.

Ali: Let's go. Oh my god!

Jack: Okay.

Ali: What's going on? [Janine laughs]

Jack: Do I want to— if I spend this ace, I will not be able to spend an ace in my final season.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Jack: So I'm not going to.

Janine: I'm doing it. I'm doing it.

Ali: Yeah, me and Janine sort of have to.

Janine: I'm calling in all my favors.

Ali: Because I would have just been out of ideas if I had another [laughs] summer that was completely...I couldn't do it. I could not. I don't want to.

Janine: It's always— I always, like, almost without fail, pull the card I have the least of anything in. [Ali laughs quietly]

Jack: Yeah.

Janine: As my face.

Jack: It knows.

Janine: Like, it's so silly. It's really weird.

Ali: I love it. Okay, are we ready to read our results?

Jack: Let's do it.

Ali: Okay. So, I immediately drew a queen of hearts.

Jack: Immediately.

Ali: Which was a bummer, so I used my ace, my final friend, Grace Guinness, who was, like, a fertilizer specialist slash bath bomb maker.

Jack: Oh, I think that's Grace Gneiss. I think the—

Ali: Grace Gneiss! Yes. [Ali and Janine laugh]

Jack: Grace Guinness is the beer specialist.

Ali: [laughs] Yeah, that's the person I was making the wagers with in the last festival.

Jack: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Janine: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

Ali: Then, my final results are: I got a 10 in hearts, which is a minor social progress. I got a 15 in diamonds, which is average financial progress. I got a four in spades, which is barely any agricultural progress. And I got a zero in clubs, which is no progress, and I am writing about my zero infrastructural progress.

Jack: I drew an eight of hearts and a ten of hearts and then immediately drew an ace of clubs, and I have decided not to spend my favor, which is my ace of spades, so that I can spend it in my final season kind of closing out the game. This means that I have a total of 18 social progress. That is average progress. [Ali laughs] And I am writing about my infrastructural progress, which is zero.

Ali: Oh no.

Janine: So, I have eight of hearts. I have jack of clubs, which I used my last ace on.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Janine: Nine of diamonds, six of clubs, two of diamonds, ten of hearts, three of diamonds, eight of clubs, five of hearts, and finally, a king of spades. [Ali laughs quietly]
So, I have 23 social, 14 financial, 14 infrastructure, and fucking nothing in the thing I have to write about, which is agricultural. [Ali laughs quietly]

Jack: Great.

Janine: Something—

Ali: Summer.

Janine: This is one of those things where, like, something happened. [laughs quietly]

Ali: Uh huh.

Janine: Something capital-H Happened.

Ali: Yeah, I feel like I'm probably in that same boat too. The summer is always a very eventful time for us, I think.

Janine: Ugh, fuck. I was— I'm googling, like, okay, what are things that can happen to crystals?

Ali: Uh huh.

Janine: And... [sighs] Ali, I do apologize for this, because it's...I don't want it to feel *very* judgmental, but... [Ali laughs] It turned up this article called "Bad Reaction To A Crystal?" question mark, "Why and What to do."

Ali: Wow.

Jack: Battery action?

Janine: "Signs of A Bad Reaction To A Crystal."

Jack: Oh, bad reaction.

Janine: Here are some signs— just, I'll go through this real quick, this list of, like, signs that you're having a bad reaction to a crystal.

Jack: Yeah.

Janine: One: suddenly feeling nausea.

Ali: Okay. [laughs]

Jack: Okay.

Janine: There's no number two on this list. It goes right to number three: [Jack laughs quietly] feeling compelled to remove the crystal.

Jack: Oh.

Janine: Discomfort in one of your chakras, number four. Five: sudden headache around the Third Eye. Six: feeling, quote, “terrible” for no reason. [Jack laughs quietly] Seven: a burning sensation where it touches your skin. Eight: feeling dizzy or ungrounded. Nine: nightmares when sleeping with the crystal.

Ali: Whoa.

Janine: I know what they mean, but also it's funny. [Janine and Ali laugh] Ten: feeling sudden negative emotions, or eleven: feeling a sudden pain in the body.

Jack: Huh.

Janine: I love “feeling compelled to remove the crystal.” [Ali laughs]

Jack: Yeah, I've had enough of this shit. [Ali laughs] Get this—

Janine: Apparently the reasons that might happen is the crystal might contain some negative energy.

Ali: Sure, yeah. Obviously.

Janine: The crystal did some deep healing work.

Ali: Ooh.

Janine: For you, I guess. Or the crystal is not compatible with your energy.

Ali: That could be true.

Jack: Yeah.

Ali: You never know.

Janine: Yeah. Yeah.

Jack: You gotta get a— you gotta try and get a compatible one.

Janine: You gotta. You gotta vibe with the crystal, or why are you even doing it?

Ali: Well, I like the idea of, like, it could have held a deep energy, which is like, if you get, like, a used crystal and it has somebody else's bad vibes in it.

Janine: Oh, interesting, yeah. [Ali laughs]

Jack: Like the horror story of, like, somebody gets a hand transplant, but it was a murderer's hand!

Ali: Right, right.

Jack: Oh, now they go and do murdering!

Ali: Or like the idea of, like, you shouldn't have a ouija board, because it's just, like, inviting evil into your house. Like, someone else's crystal...

Jack: Would you play with a ouija board, Ali?

Ali: Would I play with one? I have. [laughs quietly]

Jack: Whoa, really?

Ali: Yeah.

Janine: Would you do it now, though?

Ali: Probably? [laughs quietly]

Janine: Okay.

Jack: But you're fairly superstitious, right? Or am I misremembering?

Ali: I sort of am, yeah. I grew up in a superstitious household with people who believed in these sorts of things.

Jack: It would scare— I don't really believe in ghosts, but it would scare the shit out of me, I think, to interact with a ouija board. [Ali laughs] Despite not believing in ghosts.

Ali: Uh huh.

Jack: Because I'd be like, [scared] "Well, what if?" Most ghosts are probably nice, though, because most people are— you know, are not— most people are benign, so.

Ali: Right. Oh, that's a good point, yeah. But then—

Jack: You'd think most ghosts would be nice.

Ali: No, because most people—

Jack: Oh, no?

Ali: [laughs] Because the idea is that most people who are benign just sort of move on into the afterlife, but the ghosts are people who, like, have something unresolved, so they're sticking around, which leads to intense emotions or whatever. [Jack groans] But.

Janine: I'm sorry, I fell into a "what to do if your crystal breaks" thing.

Ali: Ooh, okay.

Janine: “If your crystal’s broken in a couple pieces, it’s perfectly fine to give those pieces to someone else.”

Ali: Ooh.

Janine: Thanks, I guess.

Jack: Oh.

Janine: “If your crystal broke itself, it might even be for this exact reason. Like the latest hot gossip around town, your crystal aches to be shared. [Ali gasps] So spread those vibes—better than spreading gossip, right?—and once cleansed, pass that baby out. If the crystal is too far gone and you just can’t fix it, it’s not all over with yet. Give it back to the Earth. Bury them in your garden. Give them back to mother nature. You can also put the pieces in pots and use them as decor.” I like this one. This is nice. “Your plants will love the energy from their new friends. Like plants, crystals have their own subconsciousness.”

Jack: Huh. [Ali laughs]

Janine: “Sometimes your crystal is simply ready to ascend.”

Jack: Huh.

Janine: “There is nothing you can do about this. It feels it has served its purpose, and it’s just done doing its thing. It’s over it and ready to nope the fuck out of here before its next use. Respect that for what it is. If your stone feels dull and lifeless, this is probably why. You know it best, so you will be able to tell if this is the case. With that being said, this is the only time you can no longer use your crystal. Devastating, I know, but all you have left to work with is a crystal corpse. That’ll do you no good.”

Jack: What?!

Ali: [laughs] Wow.

Jack: The way “corpse” just jumps out in that last sentence.

Janine: Corpse.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Jack: It's, yeah.

Janine: It noped the fuck out and became a corpse. That's all.

Ali: Mm-hmm. That's scary.

Jack: Me when I get old and die: I have simply noped the fuck out and become a corpse. [Ali and Janine laugh]

Janine: Ah.

Jack: That's what it'll say on the memorial bench in the park. Okay, let's write about this bad year.

Ali: Okay. This is our...these are the letters for the third, the fall— the summer season of our fourth year. I am writing about my zero infrastructural progress, technically, but I don't think that I did that. Anyway. [clears throat] My letter reads...yeah, I— anyway. [laughs]

Dear Kitten,

This is the first summer up in the sky in my memory where I haven't gotten sick, and without patterns interrupted, I'm beginning to feel the routine like the beat of my heart. Up in the morning in the gap between sunrise and when the clouds break over Nievelmarch, to tend to my patch when the puffs are at their most dense and I can fill in any gaps underdeveloped. Some days, I'm trimming; some days, I'm tilling the fields; and on my longest days, I'm harvesting ripe growth. I've worked out that I have visitors on Fridays now, whether it's one of the Ronstein

associates or someone else.

This month, Miss Gneiss and I walked over each suspension bridge and administered extra iron supplements to whichever karofill bulb looked greenest, to keep them withdrawing too much nutrients and to keep the cactuses from browning. “Each plant communicates,” she always says, “but you need to learn how.” I’m learning what I can, keeping the roots from tangling the clouds, keeping the plants from growing too high in one direction, keeping them all fed and happy.

When the sun curves down back towards the Earth below and I can finally wash my hands and take off my boots, I try to position myself well enough to get a signal for the evening stocking drama and listen while I make myself dinner, but I always fall asleep before the final act. Day in and day out, unfinished stories and more to tend to. I wish I could say it’s getting easier, but maybe it’s not supposed to? Sometimes I think I’m doing this all wrong, that there won’t be an epiphany that’ll give me a reason to move on.

I think about the first time you were upset with me, often still, when I’d interviewed that family of jewelry box makers from southern Bremberg. You said the questions I had asked were unusable—what they thought of MaGuddans’ latest expansion and the season’s tense bracelet fiasco. We filled the pages with photos of their work and workshop, and I remember stewing for days. I think I’d ask the right questions now, at least something about their oaks.

With love,

Sable

Jack: Aw, you have a good year in the sky, and you start thinking about, you know, previous missteps.

Ali: Uh huh.

Jack: How you would grow, think differently.

Ali: Uh huh.

Jack: It's very sweet.

Dear sister,

Too hot. I drink lemonade in my kitchen. I lie next to the hole (brackets: cool), among the red flowers with a wet rag on my forehead. Too hot to do anything. Too hot to sleep. At night, I look through the round window of my bedroom, full moon up in the sky. I close my eyes and imagine walking on its surface: a deep well of coolness and stillness. I drink lemonade in town. I come back to the farm. I lie next to the hole. I go inside and make more wreaths. It's fiddly work, but I don't have to think about it. The crabapples have long passed now, but the townsfolk like the red. I tried with green leaves, but they stopped selling, so I found an alternative red, and I'm making do. Dull work, though, in the heat. Circle after circle after circle. Sometimes I take my materials down to the park and chat with the book group as I work. Flat, heatstroke conversation. "What are you making, Ern?" "You want some lemonade, Ern?" "Where'd you get those flowers, Ern?" [Ali laughs quietly] and so on.

Ern

Janine: To Sonya Audrune

Care of Nievelmarch Department of GeoAgriculture

Hey, sorry, I know you're new and this isn't entirely on you, but why the fuck was I not informed about boring shardworms? [Jack laughs] This feels like it should have been chapter one, section one, page one; but I'm only finding out about them *now*? I'm almost four years on down here. I've been working these rocks until my fingers bleed, and no one told me about this creature that could destroy a four month formation almost overnight? I do wonder if you—or more pointedly, your predecessor—have spent time doing this job yourselves?

Do you really understand what it is to see a chamber of once-pristine pillar quality crystal digested, filled with pockets and pinholes and tubules and tunnels, like old coral on a dead beach? The pattern they leave as they undulate and gnaw their way deeper, that kicks up in the air and makes your lungs ache when you breathe, that gets in your eyes until they're too reddened and weepy to register much more than lights and shapes? I pulled one out, just out of curiosity. Do you know how long it was? Or, I'll be more accurate, how long the portion I was able to extract before it broke off was? **[Jack: Ugh!]** Two feet, Sonya. Two feet long. You will find it enclosed in the second envelope.

What I find especially egregious is the fact that I have been warned on multiple occasions about the other activities I conduct in my lot. These sustain me. The patrons you tut tut and disapprove of? They're the only reason this operation is still standing. It's not because of the preparation which your department provided or failed to provide me, but you still take your cut. Should I just forward my benefactors' checks to you all instead? Would that please you enough to let me do what is necessary to operate down here?

I implore you to update the GeoAg onboarding curriculum. Candidates need to be prepared, not just puffed up.

Miss V. Lunde

Jack: Whoa!

Ali: Wow.

Jack: Fucking get 'em. [Janine laughs] Please find enclosed the snake, or half the snake. [Ali laughs]

Janine: It's a worm. It's a worm.

Ali: Ugh.

Jack: Worm is a kind of snake.

Janine: It's not. Snakes have spines.

Jack: Ugh.

Ali: That's gnarly, though.

Jack: Ugh. [Janine laughs]

Ali: Boy howdy.

Jack: Gross. You have a bad year. That person gets the mail and is like, "Huh, a package. Aah!" [Ali laughs]

Janine: I hope they open the big envelope first.

Ali: [sighs] Yeah. [Jack chuckles] Boy howdy.

Autumn [3:14:23]

Ali: Okay, well. Time to do our fall pull. Onto a new season.

Jack: Our final one.

Ali: Onto a hopefully worm-free season.

Janine: [laughs quietly] Knock on wood. [Ali laughs] Wormwood.

Jack: Gnaw through stone.

Ali: Yeah. We've all spent our aces here, so we're out on our own.

Jack: No! Wait, oh!

Janine: Oh, yeah.

Jack: I haven't!

Janine: Oh, that's true!

Jack: I haven't!

Ali: Oh, that's right. Oh, that's right. That's right. That's right. Let me get your ace...

Jack: [sighs] That was a close one.

Janine: It's not on the board, though.

Ali: When I recall them, the aces go back, even though they're...

Janine: It's a real all or nothing here.

Ali: Yeah, this is our final...this is our final— [sighs] oh my— [laughs quietly]

Jack: Wowee.

Janine: [laughs] Ahh.

Ali: What?! [laughs quietly]

Janine: Funny. I'm not done yet, but funny!

Ali: [groans] Oh no. You have your ace. You have your ace. You have your ace. You have your ace? Okay! [laughs quietly] Our final season is here.

Jack: How's it going in the sky?

Ali: Not very well. Not very well. I have pulled a four of diamonds, a six of hearts, and then an ace of diamonds. [laughter]

Jack: Ha!

Ali: Giving me a barely any social progress, a barely any financial progress, a no agricultural progress, and a no infrastructural progress.

Jack: Okay. I immediately drew a jack of spades, which I overwrote with the ace. I drew a ten of hearts, giving me minor social progress. I drew 20— er, sorry, I drew an eight of

diamonds, a five of diamonds, and a seven of diamonds, giving me above average financial progress. I drew an eight of spades, giving me minor agricultural progress. And I drew no clubs whatsoever. I am writing about my social progress.

Janine: I pulled six of clubs, ten of hearts, five of diamonds, eight of spades, seven of diamonds, ten of clubs, four of diamonds, two of diamonds, ten of diamonds, six of hearts, three of diamonds, nine of clubs.

Jack: Whoo!

Janine: Finally, ace of spades. Which leaves me at 16 social, 31 financial, 8 agricultural, and 25 infrastructural. [Ali laughs]

Jack: Holy crap! You're gonna buy Nievelmarch. [Janine laughs, Jack sighs]

Ali: All right, let's get to these letters. Boy howdy. [laughs] Oh, man. All right. We good to go?

Jack: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Janine: Uh huh.

Ali: All right. Here are our fall year four letters, our final round of letters in this game of *Grandpa's Farm*. I am writing about my four [laughs quietly] in financial progress of this season, and my letter writes:

Dear Charlene,

I'm sorry that I missed you again on my latest trip to Nievelmarch. It's just not fair to ask you to come meet me right when the bank opens up and the Glacier Express hasn't finished baking its first round of apple spice foldovers. The fall festival approaches and with it a guaranteed eight hours of standing on solid earth, where I promise to cross paths with you.

My cloud farm is not glittering yet, unfortunately, but Roddie, the green-thumbbed

witch I was referred to, assures me that it's the correct pace to wait and harvest in winter, which makes sense, since that's when the buds are needed most. In fact, I've already had an arrangement made that the buds will be sent to the park maintenance to be used in floral decorations attached to streetlamps. When you walk through the winter wonderland goblin hide and seek, you'll have me there in spirit even still.

I'm so looking forward to another reunion, another batch of apple cider, and another year's worth of gossip. Your latest piece on the singing glass was brilliant, by the way. You'll need to tell me how you managed to finally take the assignment from Gertrude.

Love,

Sable.

Jack: Aw. It's a shame that you don't, you know, you didn't get to hang out this time, but next time.

Ali: Yeah. You know. The festival.

Jack: Reading the pieces, keeping up to date. The three old ladies are also probably reading the... [Ali laughs]

Dear sister,

After all this time, the money's good. And you know how it's always awkward talking with you about money, so I must mean it when I say it. When I go down into town, I can see my wreaths making a ring on people's doors up and down the streets. Not everywhere—it's not like I'm swimming in it—but it started a little fashion. Everything I grow goes into the wreaths. All the wreaths go down into the town. And the book club's helping me out too, bringing red flowers from their gardens for a little bit of the cut and a free one for their doors. And I've branched out a little: red apples, red flowers, red autumn roses around the circle. Someone

joked that I should sign the invoices like this:

And then there's a red circle.

And I said, "But my name doesn't start with an O," and they said, "Oh, I'm sorry, my mistake. My mistake. It doesn't."

Ern

[Janine and Ali laugh]

Jack: Guys, you ever leave the hole on your farm for too long? [Janine laughs]

Ali: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Jack: Guys, unfortunately, did the clock fill a couple of years ago, and we didn't think it had filled? [Jack and Ali laugh]

Janine: Yeah. Huh.

Jack: This is why Austin says, "This is an eight step clock," and makes it clear to us.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Jack: Ern was just like, "Well, look, we've probably gotta do something about that." Alas.

Janine: Excerpt from a legal document currently archived at Nievelmarch City Hall.

This term-limited permit proposal allows for the use of Nievelmarch Department of GeoAgriculture, henceforth referred to as NDGAG, allotment B38 in commercial operations otherwise considered beyond the exclusive scope of the NDGAG. Therefore, aforementioned operations will from this point forward, until the end of the previously agreed upon term, be co-administered by the NDGAG and by the Nievelmarch Department of Archeological Wisdom and Guardianship, henceforth referred to as NDAWG, [Ali laughs quietly] whose interests will be

represented respectively by Miss Velvet Lunde and Miss Anastasia Pritt.

A note scrawled in the margins simply says:

Bureaucracy! Let's just get back to work. [Ali laughs]

Jack: Hey, you know, you get it in writing.

Ali: Uh huh.

Janine: You get it in writing.

Jack: Get it all set up nicely

Janine: Uh huh. [Ali laughs]

Jack: And, uh, you don't have to worry about feeling bad about this cooperation.

Janine: People get off your fucking back.

Jack: Yeah. Fucking finally.

Janine: You get things back on track, bit by bit.

Ali: Uh huh. Wow.

Jack: Okay. God. Well, what now?

Ali: What now? Well, we've ended each episode with the preparation for a festival, and we're not gonna play this next festival, but we can talk about everybody getting back together if we want?

Janine: I think we should have not a festival but, like, you know how anime— like a series will do, like, a beach episode or a hot springs episode, or like... [Ali laughs] I think we should pick something like that, that's like a little event, and then get either a scene together or, like, a couple individual scenes or something like that.

Ali: Sure.

Jack: I'm up for that.

Janine: That might be fun.

Ali: Yeah. Yeah.

Jack: My proposal is it's autumn, we're ending in autumn, so what if it is the solstice, the winter solstice? Like, the shortest day. Everybody has a big bonfire, hangs out by a bonfire. I mean, it doesn't quite have the beach episode vibes, but it's tough to have a beach episode in winter.

Janine: I mean, festival episode. That's also a trope.

Ali: Right, yeah. Festival episode is a trope, but we've had a lot of— we've done the festival episodes.

Janine: True, yeah.

Jack: We've had a lot of festivals.

Janine: Yeah, that's true.

Ali: [laughs] But it is fall. Is there an equivalent for the winter solstice in fall?

Jack: No. There's two solstices, right?

Janine: Equinox?

Jack: Is that not just the...let's see.

Janine: The autumn equinox? Isn't that a thing?

Ali: Mm...

Janine: Is that when, like, the...

Jack: Autumn—

Janine: When it's, like, equal?

Jack: Yeah, the autumn equinox is the astronomical event that marks the start of autumn.

Janine: Mm.

Jack: It's in September or March, depending on what hemisphere you are in.

Ali: "During the equinox, the Earth's axis and its orbit line up, so both hemispheres get an equal amount of sunlight." Oh, that's kind of fun.

Jack: But unfortunately, we've already had autumn.

Ali: Oh! I get what you mean.

Jack: It's an early autumn festival, and we are now at the end of autumn.

Ali: Sure. Okay, right, right, right. Then why do you change the clocks so far back in...so late in November? Or the beginning of November, I guess.

Jack: I don't know. I guess...yeah, I don't know.

Janine: I mean, it's fake. That's not— that's not—

Ali: [laughs] No, no, I know.

Janine: That's not based on science. That's based on, like, people working in the fields

Ali: Uh huh.

Janine: So they just— you know.

Ali: Uh huh. Well.

Final Party [3:24:00]

Janine: What if this— is this our potluck? Is this finally our everyone brings a thing and puts it in the pot?

Jack: Oh my god.

Ali: Sure.

Jack: Yes, but what if it's just us? That seems cute. [Ali laughs]

Janine: Oh, cute!

Jack: Where it's like, we telescope in from the festival thing, and it's just the three of us.

Janine: Hot pot. A hot pot night.

Jack: And maybe our friends. Maybe we each get to invite someone.

Ali: Oh.

Janine: I love that.

Ali: Yeah, bring the whole crew.

Jack: Where have we— where are we having this hot pot night?

Ali: Well, Ern. [laughs]

Janine: Mm.

Ali: There's a very central location.

Jack: [laughs] Oh, you mean the network of bridges, rafters, and walkways over the abyss?

Janine: Hmm...

Ali: [laughs] I was thinking maybe the house beside it, but...

Jack: The house beside the abyss?

Ali: Uh huh. Maybe—

Jack: I mean, you're welcome to come if you want to come, but...

Ali: If you'd like some time away from the abyss, maybe there's—

Jack: Oh, Ern is not worried about the abyss anymore. Ern's not really thinking about the abyss. [Ali laughs] Why would I need to worry about that? It's okay. I mean...

Ali: Right. Yeah, the whole town is marked with the O, so I'm sure it's fine. [Jack and Ali laugh] Maybe there's, like, a campsite or something we can go to that's, like—

Jack: No, come over! Come hang! [Ali laughs] If you want to.

Ali: I'd be happy to, yeah. I'm open. I'm keeping the floor open in case Janine has...

Janine: Eh. [Ali laughs]

Jack: Ha!

Ali: Abyss it is.

Janine: I live in a cave, you know? Like...

Ali: Yeah. Yeah.

Janine: You can come down in the cave.

Ali: Uh huh.

Jack: Okay. Okay, I have made...I keep thinking about that tweet that's like— I want to make sure I read it right. [typing] This is a tweet by @chunkbardey on Twitter on the sixth of January 2021. They said, "Putting soup in a square tupperware..." dot dot dot

dot dot dot dot. "It's just not right. [Janine laughs] It should be a circle one, which is the shape of soup." So I think Ern is cooking a huge thing of soup, the roundest food.
[laughs quietly]

Ali: Ooh. Okay, yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Jack: And you're welcome to bring stuff to put in the soup, like a kind of perpetual stew type situation, but you're also obviously encouraged and welcome to bring your own dishes. And Ern went down into town and bought some nice plum wine. You know. Got out the fancy tablecloth.

Ali: Nice, nice, yeah. I think that Sable is coming over with Roderique the witch; her best friend, Charlene. I feel like I might as well bring Grace and Robby. [laughs quietly] If we just should have everybody come instead of choosing one friend.

Jack: If we're bringing the gang?

Ali: Uh huh, yeah.

Jack: Yeah.

Ali: Oh, okay. This is even better, because, because, because Sable brings a bottle of wine. Charlene brings a bouquet of flowers. [laughs] Roderique brings, like, some sort of exquisite cheese.

Jack: Oh my god, from the witch goats that live up in the mountains.

Ali: [laughs] Uh huh, yeah.

Jack: Spelled goats.

Ali: Uh huh. It's a cheese that looks very intimidating.

Janine: Mm.

Ali: And is—

Jack: Wait, hmm... [Ali laughs] Hmm. Yes, Ali?

Ali: Is sort of this, like, very firm dark yellow with, like, you know how cheese can have, like, an outside?

Jack: Yes.

Ali: I think it's, like, a really—

Janine: Rind?

Ali: Yeah, like a really dark wax, like a blood-red wax.

Jack: Holy shit.

Ali: And I think it's one of those, like, really good cheese—

Janine: It's a giant Babybel? [Ali laughs]

Jack: Ha!

Janine: A mamabel?

Ali: Yes, a giant but sinister Babybel.

Jack: I think if a saw a giant Babybel, it would be quite sinister. [Ali laughs quietly] Well, let's find out. [typing] Biggest...

Janine: Yeah, I'm also typing.

Jack: Babybel.

Ali: Uh huh. I think it's a little bit more—

Janine: I typed "world's biggest Babybel."

Ali: You're right. Firm and more pungent than your usual Babybel, and I don't know if, like, have you had a cheese that has, like, crystals in it?

Jack: Oh, yeah.

Ali: Like, you bite it, and there's, like, salt?

Jack: Yeah.

Ali: I think it's one of those. I think Robby brings cuts of lamb.

Jack: Ah, nice.

Ali: To put into the stew. And that Grace Gneiss brings, like, a bundle of rosemary.

Jack: This sounds lovely. [Ali laughs]

Janine: Mm-hmm.

Jack: This sounds great. I have invited the book group, so Planque and, um...what are their names? Whoops. It's covered by a card. Siegbert Planque and Audrey Ruth, the two people from the book group are here. Melissa Miles, my old friend from the wood store who runs the wood store is here. I've written down here— oh, Margaret was the witch that gave me the donkey.

Ali: Oh, yeah! We've gotten no donkey updates.

Jack: Uh. Uh oh. [Ali laughs]

Janine: Oh no! [laughs]

Ali: No...

Jack: No, no.

Janine: She said not to put the donkey in the hole.

Jack: No. No, the donkey...

Ali: Yeah, so many people said that.

Janine: She's not gonna show up if you put that donkey in that hole.

Jack: No. I wouldn't have put it in the hole. If the donkey went in the hole, *which it didn't...*

Janine: [skeptical] Mm-hmm?

Jack: That wouldn't have been on Ern. [Ali laughs]

Janine: Is it just a forest donkey now?

Ali: Okay. All right.

Jack: Maybe you can go on AO3 and read a story about [Janine: No.] that guy who fell down the hole, and he put the donkey in the hole, and that way it was a sort of a punishment, a moral punishment.

Janine: Oh.

Jack: [laughing, sarcastic] Because of how, in stories, you have to balance the moral equation.

Ali: [laughs] Uh huh.

Jack: No, no, the donkey's here. The witch is here. The donkey's wearing a wreath on its head. [laughs quietly]

Janine: Aw.

Ali: Aw.

Jack: Oh, my computer died!

Janine: Uh oh.

Ali: Oh.

Jack: No, no, no, the one that I— not the one I'm recording on. My laptop. [laughs quietly] Let me just open up Roll20 on here. Yes. The witch has brought— oh my god, you know what the witch has brought?

Ali: Please.

Janine: What has the witch brought?

Jack: Another kind of sinister cheese. [laughs]

Ali: Yes! [laughs]

Janine: Wow.

Jack: This cheese is— okay, so, you know that some cheeses are wrapped in, like, almost like a netlike cheesecloth?

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Jack: Like, this cheese is wrapped in one of these, except, once it has been put in this sort of netlike cloth, it has been sprayed with a kind of black and gold thing, such that when you pull this netlike cloth off, there is this weaving pattern of black and gold on the rind of this cheese. It is a little scary. [Ali laughs] Melissa Miles has brought wood for the fire, and the book club people have brought [laughs quietly] a charcuterie board—

Ali: [quietly] Yes.

Jack: From a butcher's in town, covered in parchment paper. Just, like, they stopped off at the butcher's and were like, "Can I have one charcuterie board, please?" and the butcher was like, "How many people are going to attend?"

Ali: Oh, right, yeah.

Jack: And then they got the answer.

Ali: Uh huh.

Janine: Okay. Velvet has...hmm. It's difficult to count Velvet's guests. So, it's Velvet and Ulna show up as a couple.

Jack: Aw!

Ali: Yeah.

Janine: Ulna, of course, has a bunch of great mushrooms to put in, and like, some that she says are like, "No, you eat these ones raw," and it's like, they're really good. And then, like, probably some sort of, like, mushroom pate kind of thing. And Anastasia is there. Anastasia has brought a— it's a loaf of bread that she says is made with yeast that was found in a tomb. [Ali laughs quietly]

Jack: Whoa!

Janine: So it's, like, very old. Like, super old yeast bread.

Ali: I was begging that somebody would bring a sinister baguette to go with the sinister cheese. [Jack laughs]

Janine: Yeah. Uh huh.

Ali: [laughs] Thank you.

Janine: And Anastasia, I think, also has like a lizard on a leash with her.

Jack: God.

Ali: Oh, yes.

Jack: Anastasia fucking rules. You know that—

Janine: She just feels like a lizard person to me.

Ali: Wait, do the donkey and the lizard sort of sniff each other like two dogs meeting?

Jack: Yeah. Yeah, they get on great. [Ali laughs]

Janine: Lizards don't sniff. They lick the air, so it does that.

Jack: Yeah.

Ali: Do they have nostrils? Wait.

Jack: They do have nostrils.

Janine: You know like when snakes and stuff stick their tongue out and—

Ali: Oh, that's—

Janine: I mean, I guess some lizards sniff, [Ali laughs quietly] but this lizard is doing the more snakelike thing of like...

Ali: Okay.

Janine: Sticking the tongue out and then you taste the air, and that's how you smell.

Ali: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Okay.

Janine: And also, Velvet has brought the rabbits: Gamble, Gambol, and Captain. [Ali gasps]

Jack: Wow! They're here!

Janine: And they're each wearing little wreaths that they bought— that Velvet bought for them from Ern. [Jack laughs quietly]

Ali: Oh, okay. If everybody's just bringing stuff, I have to bring some of my little mamnets, my little puppet dolls.

Jack: Yeah, yeah, yeah!

Ali: To chop vegetables for you. [laughs]

Janine: Oh, I forgot about the talking doll! I have to bring the talking doll.

Ali: Oh.

Janine: I totally forgot I had a talking doll. The talking doll is riding one of the rabbits.

Ali: Okay, good.

Janine: Like, one of the rabbits...uh, I think Captain has, like, a little rabbit saddle on, and the doll has been tied onto it as, like, a fun gag, like a party gag. [Ali laughs]

Jack: I have to ask. Are the horrible vampire Fel twins here?

Ali: [quietly] Yes.

Janine: I don't think Velvet would have invited them, to be honest. [Jack and Ali laugh]

Jack: And yet, they show up!

Ali: They're work friends.

Janine: Mm...

Ali: [laughs] Yeah.

Jack: No, I don't...I'm not gonna do that to you. [Janine laughs] Ah. They're up in their castle. You know, they're lying in their very normal beds.

Janine: I feel like— I don't want to be— I don't want to be mean to vampires, but I feel like don't invite vampires to a potluck or, like, a hot pot thing. Like, I feel like...

Ali: Oh.

Janine: Either, like— even if they're like, "Yeah, we'll bring something," I don't know. I just— I don't need that. You can keep it.

Jack: Oh, but come on. What if they— they might bring a relic, a vampiric relic.

Ali: Mm.

Janine: To eat?

Jack: They might bring a plus eight vampiric relic. Well, as a gift. I don't know.

Janine: They might bring a pint of blood.

Ali: Yeah.

Jack: Yeah...

Ali: Or you can't put garlic in the stew.

Jack: No.

Janine: Oh my god, yeah. And then, like, what's the point? What's even the point?

Ali: [laughs] What's the point?

Jack: At that point, yeah.

Ali: We have all this good lamb.

Jack: No, they're up there probably, you know, like, lighting a bonfire, dancing naked around a bonfire, sleeping in a coffin. [Ali laughs]

Janine: Uh huh.

Jack: Hanging crosses upside down. The works.

Janine: Yeah.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Janine: Gathering dirt in boxes.

Ali: Uh huh.

Jack: Lightning strikes the top of their castle, and they go, "Delightful." That kind of...

[Ali and Jack laugh]

Janine: “Lightning is the murder of the sky.”

Jack: Ohoho! John Joe hates it, of course. John Joe, very anti— [Janine laughs]

Ali: Mm.

Jack: Well, I don't know. John Joe says he's anti-murder, but I don't know if I believe him. I do picture them living—

Janine: Anti murder, pro manslaughter.

Jack: Yeah, absolutely. Hitting someone with a cart or whatever. [all laugh] That stuff's all good. God! It's just the light out of the window as it gets dark. You know, we can see the people inside sitting around the table, talking. The lights of Nievelmarch down in the valley below. It feels like everybody's kind of pretty established. We've been having bad seasons and good seasons but generally, I think, trending towards established.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Janine: Mm-hmm.

Ali: Especially Velvet with the new... [laughs]

Jack: Like, cooperative mining.

Ali: New contracts, yeah.

Janine: Uh huh.

Jack: Yeah. Ern brings out—

Janine: Sometimes you gotta burn the system. Sometimes you gotta work with the system.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Janine: Situational.

Jack: Brings out a little bottle of bubbly, pops the bubbly. You know, everybody toasts.

Ali: Beautiful.

Jack: Glasses are very round. [Ali laughs]

Janine: Someone accidentally puts soup in one. “Ah, they just seemed so...”

Ali: Bowl-like. [Jack laughs]

Janine: Soup-shaped glasses. I thought...

Jack: The shape soup is. [Ali and Janine laugh]

Ali: Ern—

Jack: Any final—

Ali: [laughs] I was gonna say Ern gets really embarrassed, so people are like, “Oh yeah, let’s— I only want a little bit of soup. Let me drink it out of this glass.” [laughs]

Jack: [laughs] I just want a tiny bit of soup. After a while, everybody has a bit too much plum schnapps, and the book club and Ern start reciting passages from “Dog at the Crossroads”. [Janine and Ali laugh] It’s great. Are there any last images we want to see of these farms? Oh, actually, yeah. What is it like right now in this, like, autumn evening? First up in the sky where you aren’t, and then down in the caves. I want to get, like, an image of these farms without the people on them, you know? Like, the shot of the farm itself.

Janine: Oh, interesting.

Ali: Yeah. Yeah, I guess if it’s...like, the sun is coming in and, like, reflecting on the metal of this giant plane structure thing. Ice is just starting to frost on the edge of the, like... [laughs] the pipes, et cetera. And I think that, like, in Sable’s absence, there are

these sort of, like, low to the ground little puffs of plants that are coming out from this big, like, acre of cloud or whatever we all...who knows how many acres or what.

[laughs] And there are her little mammals, which are these, like, automatic puppet guys who are just sort of, like, walking up and down these, like, bridge structures between one side of the farm to the other.

Jack: It's kind of peaceful.

Ali: Yeah. Going through the motions.

Jack: What about down in the cave?

Janine: Uh...down in the cave, I think things...not perfect, but like, there's two operations down there that are, like, varying degrees of success but still early days, still kind of promising, right? Like, there's, I think, a vibe of promise. I think it's...you know, there's...it's kind of hard to be like, they look integrated. Like, these two very separate, like, you know, farming and then mining—I guess, functionally—things looking integrated, but when you're farming rocks, like, some of your harvesting tools—

Jack: Yeah.

Janine: I think there's probably some overlap, right?

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Janine: I think it's like...it's complicated, and it's easy to imagine that, like, when Velvet's term is up, this is gonna be— someone else is gonna walk in here and be like, "What the fuck?" Like, there's gonna have to be, like, some sort of special resolution down the line.

Jack: The crew that comes in.

Janine: But I think it's just a situation of just like, it's just working. It's just...it's working out. It's running like a well-oiled machine.

Jack: That's great. Little lights of Nievelmarch down in the valley. You can hear, like, from Ern's farm, you can hear a clock start to strike down in the valley, and you know, you know that down there, the little marching band guy is coming out, followed by maybe a rabbit, followed by a giraffe. [all laugh] Yeah, I think the year turns slowly, as it always does in Nievelmarch, as we say goodbye to it for another...another—? I don't know. We'll probably come back to Nievelmarch. I was gonna say say goodbye to it for another year. I don't know when we'll be back.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Jack: We'll probably be back.

Ali: We'll find reason.

Janine: There's always some cute little thing out there that's a good reason to dig in.

Ali: [laughs] But yeah, for tonight, thank you for joining us, everybody. Thank you for supporting us, and this has been *Grandpa's Farm*. [["The Farmers' Almanac"](#) begins playing] Bye!

Janine: Bye!

Jack: Bye!

[song plays out]