

STILL LIVES

EPISODE THREE: THE SECRET

[crackling of fire. Clink of poker chips]

Scientist: Look, I don't mean to rush you...

Soldier: I'm thinking.

Scientist: I know. You have an honest face.

Soldier: Well, maybe that's part of the bluff.

Scientist: I don't think it is.

Soldier: Yeah. I fold.

Scientist: Ooh, fantastic. I had a jack high.

Soldier: I don't get how you're so good at this.

Scientist: Beginner's luck.

Soldier: You're sure you've never played this before?

Scientist: I played six years ago, the last time you tried to teach me.

Soldier: Six years. Jesus.

Scientist: Don't feel too bad. Nothing wrong with being honest.

[shuffling. Dealing.]

Soldier: Ah...So, uh...how's she doing?

Scientist: As I have repeatedly told you--

Soldier: I just wanna know if there are any updates!

Scientist: The Cook is fine.

Soldier: She's fine?

Scientist: She will be fine.

Soldier: Now you're sure it's not—you know, I mean, no chance it's The Illness?

Scientist: What did I say yesterday?

Soldier: I know what you said yesterday, but that was yesterday.

Scientist: Deal another hand.

[cards being shuffled]

Soldier: How do you know? I mean, how can we be sure it's not--

Scientist: Because I know the symptoms of The Illness and I know what's happening to the Cook. I've kept track of her temperature, how often she coughs, the exact details of her headache and where and when and how it hurt. I've checked her throat for spots. I've tested her vision, her pulse, her respiration, and her blood pressure. I've written down everything she's had to eat and drink and made a retroactive list of the past week. If there was anything else I could do, I would've done it. I care about her, too.

Soldier: Okay. I'm sorry.

Scientist: I just need you to trust me. There's nothing to worry about. I'll make sure we do everything we can. I promise.

[door creaks. Footsteps]

Soldier: Hey, Kid. What's going on?

Kid: Not much. Anybody seen the Archivist?

Scientist: Not recently. Did you need something?

Kid: I was supposed to help her shovel snow, but I haven't seen her around. Figured I'd ask. I'll look again.

Soldier: I'm sure she's around here someplace. Probably sulking.

Kid: I haven't seen her in the house.

Soldier: I'll check the Archive.

[a chair sliding across the floor]

Kid: I can go.

Soldier: No. I wanna talk to her.

Kid: Um, cool.

Scientist: Bad time to leave. You had a good hand.

Soldier: Look, We're going back to gin rummy next time. Actually, I'm gonna make a chess set.

[door closes. Piano music. Footsteps in snow and panting. Recorder clicks]

Archivist: Good evening! It's evening, by the way. Not much time has passed since my last entry. I know this is an odd circumstance, and we have every reason to be wary of the Traveler. I am very worried about the Cook, and I would do anything to keep her safe. But with that said, the Traveler is the single greatest source of new information we've encountered in...in...years! A decade! There's no book, no encyclopedia, no nothing that has as much information contained in it as the average person, and more than that, if he's been out in the world since — after everything happened, he's got information no book can give me! I'll let him

go on his way, like everyone says, but I had to bring the recorder out here for an interview. A conversation. Anything. This is exactly the sort of thing that needs to be documented. This is what people will— It started snowing a few hours ago, which is actually good news. It's made this guy pretty easy to track.

I just—

Traveler: Hey!

Archivist: Wha!

[A click as the recorder turns off]

Traveler: Hi! Sorry! I didn't think you'd be--I didn't think I'd see you again. Any of you. It's good to see you!

Archivist: Uh, yeah. You too.

Traveler: Got cold fast, didn't it? I did not expect the snow. I thought I had a few more weeks at least.

Archivist: Yeah, it seems like it comes a little earlier every year.

Traveler: Do you know anything about making a fire?

Archivist: Sort of. It's been a while since I had to make one outside.

Traveler: I could use a hand.

Archivist: Okay. You already have the wood?

Traveler: Um, yeah. Right over here.

Archivist: What do you need help with? Do you have, like, a starter, or tinder?

Traveler: I had a lighter, but I lost it.

Archivist: No kindling or anything?

Traveler: Nope!

Archivist: Cool.

[pieces of wood being picked up]

Archivist: Some of this wood is good. Some of it's pretty waterlogged. We can't use that. I didn't bring much with me...we can just use sticks. It's been a while. I think I've got some twine in one of these pockets...

Traveler: What should I do?

Archivist: We'll need dry leaves, or moss, or something along those lines. See if you can track some down.

Traveler: I'm on it!

[crunching footsteps. Wind blows]

Archivist: Hey, not to pry, but how did you do this in the past?

Traveler: Do what?

Archivist: Start a fire.

Traveler: Oh! I've never done it before.

Archivist: What?

Traveler: Yeah, I just slept in my coat or whatever.

Archivist: Outside.

Traveler: Mostly, yeah. Sometimes I'd find an abandoned place to stay. It wasn't too bad.

Archivist: What about last year, when we had that huge blizzard? You would've been freezing.

Traveler: How much moss and stuff do we need?

Archivist: Not much, just a few handfuls.

Traveler: Ok, cool, I think I've got enough.

Archivist: Just set it down right there. I'll use it in a second.

Traveler: I wasn't out then.

[rubbing of wood together]

Archivist: What?

Traveler: Last winter. I wasn't out here last winter.

Archivist: Where were you?

Traveler: Back home.

Archivist: Where's home? Wait, hold on.

[rubbing stops. Click and whirr of the recorder.]

Archivist: Where's home?

Traveler: Can we...Sorry, Can we keep working on the —

Archivist: Yeah, sure, sorry, what were you saying? Talk towards the recorder, please.

[rubbing of wood]

Traveler: I was at home. On my farm.

Archivist: You have a farm?

Traveler: Yeah. Like yours.

Archivist: But you run it by yourself?

Traveler: No. It's bigger than yours. Twenty-two people.

Archivist: What?

Traveler: You did it!

Archivist: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Uh, twenty-two — twenty-two. Why haven't you mentioned this?

Traveler: No one asked.

Archivist: You didn't think we would want to know!?

Traveler: No?

Archivist: I — okay. For a decade, I thought there were five people left, period, in the world. Then I meet you, so my world expands by twenty percent overnight, and now you're telling me there are twenty-two people out there! Another farm. How far away?

Traveler: I dunno. I left a long time ago, but I didn't go straight to you guys. Maybe a week?

Archivist: We've gotta put this fire out. Just shove snow on it. It'll be fine. We've gotta go.

[sound of snow being moved]

Traveler: Where? Home? We don't have any supplies.

Archivist: No. We're gonna go back to my farm. You're gonna freeze out here if we leave you alone, and we can't leave you alone anyway because we need to get to your farm.

Traveler: They told me not to come back. At your place.

Archivist: I know they did. But they're gonna change their minds.

Traveler: That guy pulled a gun on me.

Archivist: He did. I know. But another farm is — this is big news. They're gonna change their minds. I promise. I'll keep you safe. You can hide in the Archive until I make sure everything's okay, then I'll come get you. It's warm and dry in there.

Traveler: You're sure?

Archivist: Positive.

Traveler: Okay.

[Piano music. A door opens and closes.]

Soldier: There you are!

Archivist: Oh, hello!

Soldier: Kid's been looking everywhere for you. Were you just in the Archive the whole time?

Archivist: No. I just stopped in to check out the roof. Wanted to make sure it was sound in case the snow picks up. I was out getting firewood.

Soldier: Firewood.

Archivist: Yeah.

Soldier: Where is it?

Archivist: I added it to the pile already.

Soldier: That's weird, since the whole pile is covered with snow.

Archivist: Right...

Solder: Where were you?

Archivist: Can we just—

Soldier: Where were you?

Archivist: I went looking for the Traveler, okay? I wanted to say sorry, and I wanted to copy down his journal. And since you chased him away, I—

Soldier: Did you find him?

Archivist: No. I walked around for a few hours and gave up.

Soldier: Well, you should've done that sooner. Kid's been looking for you for hours. Said you were supposed to help bring in water.

Archivist: Ugh, I totally forgot.

Soldier: It's alright. She and the Scientist did it.

Archivist: I'm so sorry.

Soldier: It's alright. Listen, I get why you did it. It's exciting to see someone new, but... we can't take any chances, you know?

Archivist: Yeah. Yeah, I get that.

Soldier: I'm on my way up to the Cook. Gimme a hand?

Archivist: Sure thing.

Archivist: He must have come from somewhere, right?

Soldier: What do you mean?

[a door. Footsteps and the crackling of fire]

Archivist: The Traveler, He didn't seem like he'd just been wandering since it all happened.

Soldier: Well he didn't seem like much at all. Honestly, if you told me he'd been born on our doorstep I'd probably buy it.

Archivist: It's just weird. It's weird to remember how big the world out there is. You know?

Soldier: Sure.

Archivist: I wish we had some way to know what's out there.

Soldier: Maybe we'll get a radio running or something. Who knows. Maybe someone'll get a signal going. I used to have a HAM license.

Archivist: That doesn't shock me.

[door opens]

Soldier: How's it going?

[hacking cough]

Archivist: Oh.

Soldier: I'll grab more water. You wanna grab her the last couple aspirin?

Archivist: Sure thing.

[rattle of a pill bottle]

Archivist: Here you go. Water's on its way. Anything else you need? Blankets, food, a book?

[crackling fire]

Archivist: Gotcha. Here you go.

[fabric rustling. Footsteps. Glasses clink]

Soldier: Got water. And I brought a friend.

Scientist: Looks like the fire's getting low. Can someone grab more wood?

Archivist: Sure thing.

Soldier: I'll get it.

Scientist: You can both go. I think she'd like some rest.

Soldier: Hey, maybe we'll use that stuff you just picked up, huh?

[crackling fire]

Scientist: You're getting worse. I'm sure you know that. I promise I'll make sure you're okay. As okay as you can be. But there's something we need to discuss. You've been hiding something. The Traveler found the machine in the basement of the shed. I know there's no one else here who could've built it. It is yours, isn't it?

[crackling fire]

Scientist: Is it what I think it is? Why? Why would you think that was okay? All the times I've told the Archivist that we needed to focus on things that mattered, all those times we sent the Soldier into town for supplies — and you were wasting time and supplies down in a basement you never mentioned? Listen to me. There is a lie implicit in that machine, Cook, it's the same one the Archivist keeps telling. You know that, don't you? That's why you didn't tell anyone? Things don't get better, Cook. Call it fate, or entropy, or bad luck, but — this — the situation we are in right now — this is all we get. It's a plateau, things have leveled off for a while, but they're still declining and pretending they aren't is just — it's cruel. You're smart, Cook. You know that. No I won't tell anyone. I'm going to scrap it for parts.

[crackling fire]

Scientist: Why shouldn't I? It's another mistake of yours. You've somehow found a way to make things even worse. It's your fault, Cook. The truth isn't cruel. If you don't want to hear it, you shouldn't have done it. Give me a reason—

Cook: Please.

Scientist: Did you —

Cook: Please. I —

Scientist: I'm sorry. No, it's okay. I won't tell them. We need to talk more about this but — I'll keep it safe. Here, you should keep drinking. Fluids —

[coughing. Door creaks]

Scientist: Hello?

Kid: Sorry. How is she?

Scientist: Alright. Getting worse. But it always gets worse before it gets better.

Kid: I saw something outside.

Scientist: What?

Kid: Some footprints. New ones.

Scientist: What made them remarkable?

Kid: There were two sets. Next to each other. And they came out of the woods.

Scientist: Where did they go?

Kid: I couldn't tell. Do you think it's more people?

Scientist: I'll take a look. You don't need to worry.

Kid: Um...Are we safe?

Scientist: Of course. Stay with the Cook. I'll go investigate.

Kid: Oh. Okay.

[piano music. Footsteps in snow].

Archivist: I guess I'm just — what if there are cities out there?

Soldier: Cities?

Archivist: Or towns, even. We've built a good thing here with the five of us, but what if someone's done it bigger? Better?

Soldier: I don't think they have.

Archivist: I read a story once. About this family in Siberia who didn't know World War II ended. They'd been in this little cabin in the woods for generations, so they just assumed it was still happening. I guess, I guess I'm just wondering if we're gonna be like that.

Soldier: I bet they're still alive.

Archivist: What?

Soldier: Family in the woods. I bet they're still alive. Too far out for the virus to spread. If there are towns or cities or whatever out there, I'm not sure it matters much. I wouldn't want to meet them.

Archivist: Really? Not at all? I mean, I get being afraid, but —

Soldier: I'm not being scared. I'm being smart. We let one person in here and look what happened.

Archivist: There's no way to know if that's his fault.

Soldier: Even if it isn't. Everything was stable just a couple days ago and now it's all gone off kilter. We've got a good thing going here. I don't wanna mess it up.

Archivist: I get that. But sometimes a little change can improve things in—

Soldier: Yeah, that's enough of that. Let's just bring this up to the Cook.

[rustling of a tarp. Footsteps and a door opens]

Scientist: Hey. I'd like a word with both of you.

Archivist: What's up?

Scientist: Two things. First, about the Cook.

Soldier: She doesn't look too good.

Scientist: She's getting worse.

Archivist: What do you mean?

Scientist: I'm hoping she'll recover. We'll keep doing all we can. But we should consider the possibility that things may continue to decline. And I have no plan.

Archivist: Does the Kid know?

Scientist: Not yet. We should consider our options. A supply run might help.

Archivist: What? Where to?

Scientist: I'm not sure. We haven't had much luck finding medicine.

Soldier: Pharmacies and stuff were mostly picked over. We'd have to try houses and get lucky. I don't know where I'd even start.

Scientist: We've got some time. But it's something to consider.

Soldier: I don't know how good our odds are. But I could try.

Archivist: The Kid's gonna need new clothes before long. We'd need to make a trip in the spring either way.

Scientist: Speaking of the Kid, she saw something I'd like to ask you about.

Archivist: What?

Scientist: New footprints? Coming from the woods.

Archivist: Yeah. That -- that's me. Sorry, I went looking for--

Scientist: Two sets side by side.

Archivist: What?

Scientist: I assume you went looking for the Traveler. You found him?

Archivist: No, I--I think the Kid just made a mistake. It was just me.

Soldier: Where did the footprints go?

Scientist: She couldn't tell.

Archivist: Seriously, it was just me. Maybe the Kid just saw me going in and out.

Soldier: It wasn't snowing when you left.

Archivist: How do you know when I--

Soldier: Where is he?

Archivist: Don't you trust me?

Soldier: Did you bring him in here?

Archivist: Why would I--

Soldier: The Archive.

Scientist: I think we should talk about this.

Soldier: He's in the Archive.

Archivist: Wait. Look can you just -- can you just give me a second to explain this.

Soldier: There shouldn't be anything to explain.

Scientist: I think we made a pretty clear decision as a group.

Archivist: They pulled a gun. That's not a group decision.

Scientist: We didn't have much time.

[door opens]

Traveler: Woah, hey. Uh, hi.

Soldier: Are you kidding me?

Archivist: Look, I'm sorry, but--

Soldier: You're sorry? You did this! It's been a few hours. Did your whole world view shift in the last half hour or are you sorry you got caught?

Scientist: Let's just talk through this, okay?

Traveler: I can leave. Should I leave?

Archivist: No. I told you I'd handle this.

Soldier: I don't know what's wrong with you.

Archivist: He was gonna freeze.

Soldier: How long did your TV last?

Archivist: What are you talking about?

Soldier: Mine cut out when there was a hundred million people dead. A hundred million.

Archivist: He was gonna die out there.

Soldier: My radio made it to three hundred million before the last batteries died.

Archivist: This isn't-- this isn't the disease that killed everyone.

Soldier: What if it's the one that kills us?

Archivist: It won't be. It won't be.

Soldier: The Cook is gonna die.

Archivist: Jesus, the Kid's gonna hear you, keep your voice down.

Soldier: Well maybe she should know.

Traveler: I can help.

[door opens]

Archivist: Oh, Christ.

Scientist: Kid, you and I should head upstairs.

Kid: No. I heard you arguing. I wanna be here.

Soldier: It's not a good time.

Kid: Yeah, I know it's not a good time. I could hear you yelling from inside. The Cook can hear you.

Traveler: I can help. If anyone needs--

Soldier: Go inside Kid.

Kid: No. I can't be a kid forever. If we're making a decision, I deserve to be a part of it. And if Cook is --

Archivist: The Cook's going to be fine. The Soldier is overreacting.

Kid: Are you sure?

Traveler: Everyone, I can help!

Scientist: Help how?

Traveler: With your friend, the Cook. I don't know anything about The Illness, well her illness, not The Illness, but -- and I promise it wasn't my fault -- but back home, at my farm, we have medicine. We can help.

Scientist: Your farm?

Soldier: A little village out there?

Traveler: It's only twenty-two people.

Soldier: You.

Archivist: I'm sorry.

Soldier: What were you doing? You thought you'd talk me into it and then show me how he'd been here all along?

Archivist: I couldn't leave him out in the cold.

Soldier: We could be dead if the Kid hadn't seen your tracks.

Archivist: Definitely. Years of military training and the last gun on earth are no match for a book about mushrooms.

Scientist: Tell me more about your farm.

Traveler: It's bigger than this one. A little more... industrial? We have more varied jobs, more supplies.

Scientist: How far?

Traveler: About a week. I think. I can't be sure. I mean, I know we have medicine but I don't -- I don't know what your friend has or how to -- I'm not a doctor, so--

Soldier: How do we know it's real?

Kid: What?

Soldier: How do we know it's real? He didn't mention it when he was here earlier. If he had a whole farm, why would he leave it? Maybe he made it up to get back in here.

Archivist: He couldn't even make a fire.

Traveler: I lost my lighter.

Archivist: When I found him in the woods, all the wood he'd collected was damp. And he hadn't gathered tinder or anything. He's gotta be from somewhere or he would have frozen last winter.

Traveler: I thought I had longer before it snowed.

Soldier: It doesn't matter. Doesn't change anything.

Scientist: I think it changes a lot.

Soldier: We're not going there. And he's not staying here. Another farm doesn't change anything.

Scientist: I'm not sure you get to make that decision.

Soldier: We met one other person and everything went to hell. You really think walking through the snow for a week is going to do any good? You trust him to navigate us? We'll wind up frozen and starving in the middle of nowhere. We'll die out there.

Kid: I'll go.

Soldier: What?

Kid: I'll go. If they have medicine, someone has to go. If you won't, I will.

Archivist: I don't know if that's the best idea.

Scientist: I'll be staying here to take care of the Cook. It might be best if you stay with me.

Soldier: What do you mean stay here? Who's leaving?

Archivist: I am.

Traveler: And I guess, I mean, I have to get you there, right?

Soldier: You two are going on a week long hike. Through the snow. Alone.

Archivist: I'd rather not. But, you heard the Kid. If they have medicine, we have to.

Soldier: Don't pretend you're so noble. You didn't know about the medicine when you brought him here. If you did, you would have told us before the Cook got worse. The medicine is convenient for you. You've got your own reasons for going --

Archivist: Does it matter? They can save the Cook, I have to go--

Traveler: We might be able to save the Cook. I'm not a doctor.

Scientist: We know.

Kid: We only need two people to stay, really. We can handle all the chores here for a while at least.

Soldier: You're saying I should go?

Kid: You said it was dangerous. They should have someone to keep them safe.

Archivist: I'd appreciate that. If it's possible.

Soldier: This isn't fair.

Scientist: You don't have to go.

Soldier: Yeah, I do.

Traveler: So, all of us? Us three?

Soldier: I guess.

Archivist: Thank you.

Soldier: It's for the Cook, not you.

Archivist: I know. Thank you.

[piano music. Rustling of supplies. A crow caws]

Scientist: You've got enough food for the trip there, even if it takes a few extra days. But you'd struggle to make it last for the trip back. We'll have to count on you restocking there. The brownish stuff is pemmican. The taste is a little odd, but it's filling and nutritious.

Soldier: Thanks.

Scientist: Got a path set?

Soldier: Sort of.

Traveler: I know where I came from. With some landmarks and stuff I could give an idea of where it was.

Soldier: I'd put it at eighty percent that we're headed the right way.

Scientist: How encouraging.

[footsteps. Rustling]

Archivist: Um, hey, Kid. I've got something for you, before I go.... Check it out!

Kid: Your recorder?

Archivist: I got a second one working. So this is actually your recorder. Here. It's like an early birthday present. I'm thinking some pretty important stuff might happen on the road that I need to record. But, I also know that in the two weeks I'm gone there's no telling what might happen back here. So, that's up to you. Make sure it all gets documented.

Soldier: Two weeks, Kid. Here's hoping I'll see you soon.

Kid: Here's hoping.

Archivist: That's not so bad! We'll be back in no time. You'll be running half the farm too. That's exciting!

Kid: Yeah.

Traveler: We should probably leave soon. If we wait too long we'll add another night to the trip. We're already a little late.

Scientist: There's no harm in a long goodbye.

Kid: It'll be the longest I've ever not seen either of you.

Archivist: Yeah. But, that's kind of exciting, right?

Kid: I guess?

Scientist: I look forward to your safe return.

Archivist: Me too.

Scientist: Kid, I think the Cook could use our help inside.

[footsteps]

Archivist: I'll see ya.

Soldier: Alright, goodbye.

[footsteps]

Traveler: Hey, uh, I just wanted to thank you. For not letting me freeze. You really kind of saved my life. You didn't have to do that.

Archivist: I couldn't just leave you. Plus it seems like you might save the Cook. That seems more than fair. And I'm excited to see your farm.

Traveler: Yeah. Me too.

[piano music. Crackling fire]

Scientist: They just left. They'll be back in two weeks. Optimistically. Three, realistically. And we should consider the worst. I trust the Soldier, though. I think they'll turn back if they can't make it.

[crackling fire]

Scientist: You'll be fine. Three weeks is nothing! We'll keep the room warm, and the Kid's here of course. Not that many chores left to do right now.

[coughing]

Scientist: I'll get you some water. You'll be fine.

[piano outro]