

Underground Part 1

Cell Phone Voicemail

To listen to your messages, press one

[cellphone beep]

Alphonse

[voicemail starts]

(agitated)

Vin - Vanessa, I know you don't pick up, but I can't text you anymore.

They're watching me a lot more recently.

Aunt Juliet.

She asked how you *were*.

And she used your new name. Not your old one.

I tried to play it off.

Pauline and Uncle Nick have been wandering away from the house farther and father.

I think it's time I make a break for it.

I'll call you when I hit Portland.

I'm sorry.

[click]

*[PHONE Dialing
Ring.]*

Vanessa

[whisper it a bit]

Come on, Alphonse. Pick up. Pick up.

Alphonse

This is Al, you know what to do.

Vanessa

(upset. worried)

Al... I ...

[bit louder]

Fuck.

*[HANGS UP
Knock on the door frame]*

Kieron

[positive and even tempered]
Baby, is everything okay?

Vanessa

[lying]

Yeah, babe. I...my brother called from home.

Kieron

[trying to put a positive spin on it]

That's good, right?

He's calling now? That's an improvement from the infrequent texts.

Vanessa

[sighs, trying to put on a brave face]

Yeah, yeah. You want to get breakfast?

I'd like to get some crepes.

***WITCHEVER PATH PRESENTS
PART ONE OF UNDERGROUND***

[Busy outside cafe]

Kieron

[ending a long, exciting story about work]

The app uses an algorithm to weigh a stock's potential growth versus the company's ties to certain politics, environmental impact, and treatment of workers. Then it ranks the stock by how closely aligns to the user's ethics. It's so cool, and we're already seeing interest from an investor back east.

Vanessa

[distracted, looking at her phone]

That's pretty cool.

Kieron

[a little annoyed he isn't being paid attention to]

Yeah, I have an old friend from MIT who's new A.I. company is taking off, and one of his investors apparently wants to target millennials who want to invest, but not get their hands dirty.

Vanessa

Mhm.

Kieron

[slight humor, annoyed]

So I'm going to take a flight out there with the guys,
Maybe seduce the investor's wife,
and then blackmail her for the money.

Vanessa

[still looking at the phone]

Oh, cool. You should.

Kieron

[calm, trying to not escalate, but annoyed]

Babe, what's going on? Are you all right?

Vanessa

[thoughtful, like pulling teeth, but true]

No. It's my brother, Al. I'm worried about him.

Kieron

Did he tell you what's going on?

Vanessa

[back to lying, but trying to be convincing]

I don't know, he's a mixed man in a redneck town in Maine.
He's lonely and afraid to move on, like I did.

Kieron

But he's reaching out, right? Maybe we can get him some help.

Vanessa

Al isn't going to do therapy.

Kieron

[feeling supportive]

Well, if there's anything we can do, even if it's flying him out, we should.
I'd love to meet your brother, at least.

Vanessa

[pausing, feeling the weight of the truth on her]

I don't know. I'm torn on it.

Kieron

I feel it's almost a no-brainer.

Family's important, babe.

Vanessa

Family can kill you if you let them.

Kieron

[being sensitive]

But he accepts you for who you are, right?

Vanessa

I'll just wait for him to call back.
Are you going to eat your strawberries?

Kieron

Nah, here you go.
I have to get going anyway.
You want to go out tonight after work?

Vanessa

I have plans with Shelly tonight. Girls night out.

[music,bathroom]

Alphonse

This is Al, you know what to do.

Vanessa

[stammering]

Al - I (sigh). Just. Goddamn. Goddamn it.

Shelly

[coming up to the mirror, seeing her best friend]

What'd Kieron do now?

Vanessa

[composing herself]

Hey, mama.
No, It's not Kieron. It's ... somebody from a long time ago.

Shelly

[being supportive]

Who?

Vanessa

Alphonse, my brother. He left me a voicemail message a week ago. I haven't heard from him since. He decided to leave, like I did.

Shelly

[relieved to hear someone else is escaping hell]

Good for him. It's so scary to make that step.
But from what you told me, this has been a long time coming.
He's following your lead.

Vanessa

[annoyed, but a little ashamed about it.]

It's not that simple. Al's the last one of us up there.
Since Mom and Dad died, he's been keeping the place going, watching after our aunts and uncles. Family's all that mattered to our folks. So Al, wanting to finally leave...
Something must be wrong.

Shelly

[trying to understand]

So, why don't you call them? Maybe they can let you in on what's going on?

Vanessa

I can't talk to them. Reaching out is a bad idea.

Shelly

My parents are like that, too. I get it. But my little sister, Maria, if I was worried about her, I would bite the bullet and call.

Vanessa

It's a bit more complicated than that, Shell. And they don't have a phone.
Al was the only one with a phone up there.

Shelly

Can you call neighbors to check in?

Vanessa

No. That's not going to help anything.

Shelly

[feeling the stonewalling of suggestions]

So, what are you going to do?

Vanessa

Try calling again.
After that, I don't know.

Shelly

I respect your privacy, hon. We all have our own pain, and I get it. But you're my best friend out here, girl. And I'm ready to listen or just be with you. You're stuck with me.

Vanessa

Thanks, friend. I just, I want to tell you so much, I do. I just.

Shelly

I know. And I believe you.
We all have our crosses to bear, Nessa.
Now let's get out of this bathroom and back to the floor.

Vanessa

All right...let's do it.

[music transition and then an uber drive]

Uber Driver

Vanessa?

Vanessa

[Tired]
Thank you, yes.

Uber Driver

Cool, let's get you home.

Vanessa

Thanks, I appreciate it.

[dials phone]

[phone rings]

Vanessa

[quiet]

Come on, come on.

[phone picks up]

[Coughing]

Vanessa

[confused]

Al? Al are you okay?

VOICE

Vin?

Vanessa

Who is this?

Voice

It's Herb, Vin.

Vanessa

What... Who is this?

Voice

[garbled]

Come home, Vin.

Come home.

[phone drop]

Vanessa

Jesus!

Driver

You all right, miss?

[Dramatic Stinger]

Kieron

[Trying to reassure her]

Are you sure you heard, right?

Someone calling themselves Herb answered his phone and told you to come home.

Vanessa

No, my older brother Herb was on the phone.
He was telling me to come home.

Kieron

I thought that Alphonse was the only brother you had left.
Didn't Herb run away?

Vanessa

No, he didn't. And Al was the only one I had left.
I mean Billy is out there, too, doing god knows what, but Al kept in contact.

Kieron

Then how could it be Herb?
Could it be Al's drunk or sick?

Vanessa

I have to go back home.
Al needs me.

Kieron

Do you want to call the cops?

Vanessa

[elevated voice, close to shouting]

No.

[calmer]

I'm sorry, no. I'm just really scared.
I think. I think have to go back to find him.

Kieron

[Feeling concern, but supportive]

Then we're going to go.
Hand me my bag, babe.
We'll catch a morning flight.

Vanessa

[feeling the weight of her secrets]

Sweetheart, I can't ask you to go.

It's too risky.

You're my world.

But this is my past. And the life you gave me, the things I have seen and had to do.

I'm not that person. I'm literally not that person anymore.

Kieron

If I'm your world, and you need to go. I need to go with you.
But what do you mean 'the things you saw or did?'

[pausing, Vanessa stammers and stops a lot, getting him a little more emotive]

Baby, what things?

Vanessa

You aren't going to believe them.

Kieron

Try me.

Vanessa

My aunt Pauline, she killed Herb when I was eleven.

It was after dinner at the house.

He...we were playing in the old sitting room.

I was chasing him through the house, and he'd get just out of reach and then slap the top of my head. He was so tall already, and his reach made this game so frustrating.

Aunt Pauline's old chaise stood alone in that room, its body draped in canvas to keep dust and ceiling chips from falling on it. I got in my first slap, right across Herb's face, and then I stepped up onto the chaise and hopped over it, leaving it between me and him.

He leapt up onto it and it broke. The whole thing was old, it shattered into a thousand pieces, the dust on the floor filling the room in a cloud. And then there was silence. The other boys ran out of the house a second later, and Herb and I were frozen in place.

I remember hearing the basement stairs creaking as she bounded up them.

Herb then told me to go, to run.

I did. I made it to the back door as Aunt Pauline came out of the basement with a roar. He started screaming, I heard him beg. I wanted to run in and stop her. I wanted to and my legs started to move, but I ran in the other direction. I ran away from the house.

Kieron

Oh god.

Vanessa

We ran over to the trailer we lived in, about five hundred feet away. I could hear her screaming in the house. My dad got us inside and then locked the door.

Aunt Pauline was on a tear. She was outside, slamming her fists into the trailer, demanding that he bring the rest of us out to answer for breaking her last, good piece of furniture. Dad loaded his shotgun, and told our oldest brother, James, to get the rifle out of the rack and be ready.

She threw a brick through the window. But then we heard uncle Alfred pleading with her to calm down. He kept telling her to stop what she was doing. But I remember watching her shouting at him and pointing at the trailer.

And I remember Uncle Nick and Juliet appearing outside and that's when I hid under the table, Al holding onto Billy and me. I heard them fighting and remember the trailer shaking as they threw each other into the side. Finally, I heard a high-pitched scream and then there was silence.

They knocked on the trailer door a few minutes later. Uncle Nick told Dad to get my brother's bicycle for them. They would toss it onto one of the logging roads a few miles away and we'd report him missing the next day.

And when the cops came... we had to.. We had to -- we lied. We just lied and he was gone. He was under their house
[breaks into crying]

Kieron

[surprised, trying to console her]

Vanessa, oh my god. Come here. Come here.

[shushing and gentle]

It's all right. I've got you. I've got you.

Whatever you want to do next.

We'll face this together.

Vanessa

[sniffles, calming down]

I love you, baby.

And I know what to do next.

Choices are:

Call Shelly, have them come along.

Go with Kieron

Go Alone