

# TRANSCRIPT

## Season 1 Episode 9: Hard Truths

The future of The Wyrd Side hangs in the balance, as Aiden makes an important decision.

### Cast:

Finn Cresswell as Aiden Summers

Alexandra M. Barrow as Katherine Moore

Iain S. P. Bennett as John Martin

### Content Warnings:

Discussion of cults, police, physical violence, emotional manipulation, death, fire, altered mind-state, drowning, death of a child, death of a loved one, childhood trauma, injury (twisted ankle). Mention of ritual murder, blood and gore, alcohol, smoking, victim blaming.

Written and produced by Finn Cresswell and Alexandra M. Barrow.

[www.thewyrdside.com](http://www.thewyrdside.com)

### FEATURED TRAILER: THE ATTIC MONOLOGUES

*The Attic Monologues* is a queer urban fantasy/horror podcast on fate, friends to lovers, meta narratives, and the importance of feathered friends. They can be found on all major podcasting platforms - check out their [website](#), [Apple Podcasts](#), [Twitter](#) and more!

Content warnings can be found in the episode description.

### **INT. THE WYRD SIDE RECORDING STUDIO**

*The soft interior of The Wyrd Side studio, a chair creaks.*

KATHERINE: Welcome back to The Wyrd Side. Thank you for your support throughout this ordeal. Last week, we heard Aiden's recordings, and well... I'm sure you'd much rather hear from Aiden himself.

AIDEN: Hi everyone. I'm back. Safe and... sound. Well... yeah, I guess you could say that.

KATHERINE: If you still don't feel up to it, we don't have to...

AIDEN: No, I'm okay, it's well past time.

KATHERINE: Only if you're sure. *[pause]* It's been a while since we've sat in front of these microphones together. I think that we both needed time and space away from... well, everything.

AIDEN: And I'm sorry for keeping you all in the dark for so long, but to present the clearest, most factually correct story of my time with the Wa- *[he cuts himself off]* the cult, I needed a little while to come to terms with what actually happened. Followed by a police-recommended series of ongoing sessions with a therapist slash cult deprogrammer. So, without further distraction, let's get to it.

### ***THE WYRD SIDE MUSIC***

AIDEN: Alright, here's what I can say after my police briefing. Much of their investigation is ongoing and probably still will be long after this episode comes out. They've been interviewing the members of the cult that were arrested the same day I was rescued, and... well, I am getting ahead of myself already. We should really script these, you know.

KATHERINE: We could, although last time I tried to script things, you said it lacked "organic storytelling flair".

AIDEN: I suppose I was right. Makes a first in a long while I guess. Okay. The cult members are currently being processed, interviewed, and charges brought against them. The murder of Albert Lockton. Kitty, we never even said his full name, we didn't even do him that justice and now he's...

KATHERINE: Aiden...

AIDEN: He was only there because he was talking to us. Saying too much

KATHERINE: Aiden. You can't know that. Not for sure.

AIDEN: He was taken after we spoke to him. They're being charged with his murder, and the murder and kidnapping of at least three other people. The missing people we mentioned a few episodes back, Felicity Dalton, Mathew Cho and Joanna Perry. They were killed in the same way as... all killed by the Watchers and buried in the bog. I've given my statement and I will testify whenever the law needs me to, so hopefully they'll be shut away for life.

KATHERINE: You're sure you didn't see Jane, Lou, whoever she was, during the police raid?

AIDEN: I don't think so, no. It was intense at the end.

KATHERINE: I can only imagine.

*Pause.*

KATHERINE: Shall we go back to where we, the listeners, left you?

AIDEN: Yeah. After Albert was... I woke to the large cloaked figure, The Chainbearer, dragging me back up to the house. It was... curiously human violence... A hand around my throat. No strange magic, just a painfully strong grip. I'm not sure if he was as strong as Lou had claimed he could be but it still hurt like hell. This close I could see the person underneath the cloak. He was a pasty looking man, maybe fifty, sixty years old? Greying hair and a scraggly beard, and Albert's...

*Aiden takes an unsteady breath. Katherine reaches for the recorder to switch it off.*

KATHERINE: Do you need a moment?

AIDEN: No. I have to do this. Albert's... blood was still spattered across his face and cloak. I couldn't breathe properly and I tried to get him to let go but... he dragged me back to the farmhouse and threw me down on the cold stone floor. He was mumbling, muttering that they needed more. That it wasn't enough. That the sacrifice wasn't working and he needed to feed the mire or suffer the most terrible torment. And at that point Lou came in. She talked him down. She said I could be useful to them, that I was working on the books, that I was making progress where none of them had been able to before. That they needed more people in case enemies surfaced again. So, she suggested... *[he trails off]*

KATHERINE: She suggested that she go find someone else to take your place as a sacrifice.

AIDEN: I tried to say something, to protest, but I could still barely breathe. But, yeah. And you know how that ended.

KATHERINE: Badly, for her.

AIDEN: The Chainbearer liked her idea though. He gave me a day to finish one of the books and if I didn't, well I'd be joining the unlucky soul found to replace me anyway. Then he left, without another word. I'm still bruised from where he held my throat.

KATHERINE: *[prompting Aiden]* The recorder?

AIDEN: Ah. When he left, Lou came up to me. I was still lying on the floor where he'd thrown me, this wet feeling pooling on the back of my head. Blood, I guess. She... cradled me and said I was going to be wonderful. That if the Chainbearer had agreed to spare me, then she knew I was destined to succeed. As she held me, I felt myself going in and out of consciousness, teetering between the dull ache of my head and comfort of the dark.

Next thing I knew I was in bed. The windows all boarded up, all the other furniture gone. Lou was sitting on the edge, gripping my recorder in her hands. She'd found it while I was unconscious. It must have fallen out of my pocket as I was being shaken around by the Chainbearer. I tried to convince her it was the key to my translation process, but I wasn't kidding her one bit. She took it. I didn't see her again after that. So, I was kept in the room. Door locked from the outside. Only opened to slide in the same meal of grain porridge, fish and bread that we'd during the rest of our imprisonment, no chance to leave. No sharp objects. Just the light and the stack of books and papers.

And then... Then, the police came. I couldn't actually see what was happening at first. I heard sirens, shouting, someone barking orders. I recognised the sirens as police and I started yelling for help. It all ended pretty quickly after that. An officer broke down the door and helped me out. And, all I really saw of the raid was the last few moments: Dyllan and Rhys on the ground, restrained by four officers, The Chainbearer in a police car. He looked... terrified. And smaller than before. He was clawing to get out, pointing at the bog, screaming something. I was too far away to hear what it was. But... probably something about how doomed we all are now they're not watching the Dragon. At this point... Nevermind.

KATHERINE: Aiden, they're a homicidal cult. These people live in a fantasy world where they can excuse the murder of innocent people to stop a dragon from waking up. There's no dragon. They're just delusional and dangerous.

AIDEN: They believe the same things I do. That I did. *[he lets out a frustrated breath]* I don't know anymore.

KATHERINE: Okay. Let me ask you this. Do you want to kill people to stop a magic dragon?

AIDEN: *[taken off guard]* What?

KATHERINE: Would you sacrifice me to keep your dragon happy?

AIDEN: *[vehemently]* No! Hell no!

KATHERINE: There we go then. You don't believe the same things. You're a good person Aiden.

AIDEN: But I did. Almost. Lou... She told me about their mission, you heard it. It was glorious. We were saving the world. What I believed was important, that my knowledge was actually useful. That I was useful and loved... And that...

KATHERINE: Aiden, you are important, your friends and your family all love you, and your knowledge is useful... to me. *[ruefully]* And I know that's not exactly the same as saving the world, but... This may be hard to hear, but they didn't care about you. They probably would have said whatever you wanted to hear if it let them worm their way into your head. And Lou? She murdered Albert, a defenceless old man who liked to tell stories. She was manipulating you. I don't like to use this word, but she's evil. It's a worry she hasn't been caught yet. She's dangerous and we don't know what she's going to do now the cult's been dealt with.

AIDEN: I don't think she'd see any use in coming back for us.

KATHERINE: She's a murderer. We have a police car sitting outside for a reason. I still think we should move the studio. Twice. Maybe set up a second address?

AIDEN: I don't think we need to go quite that far. But... I guess only time will tell. Did they bring Brian in by the way?

KATHERINE: Oh yes.

AIDEN: Good.

KATHERINE: That I can elaborate on. It was clear he lied about not seeing you. He was caught trying to get on a ferry in Southampton. When the police searched his house they found enough evidence to link him with the disappearances and murders of at least two of the other victims. He was the eyes of the group, pointing them towards people that needed to be "dealt" with. A nasty piece of work. Are you okay to keep going?

AIDEN: I am. I wanted to talk a little about the books that I managed to get through while I was... away.

KATHERINE: The ones they asked you to translate?

AIDEN: It was difficult, I haven't studied these languages since uni, and even then, translation was never my speciality. Especially under pressure. I always had at least one dictionary on me when I was dealing with any texts older than the Enlightenment.

KATHERINE: Did you translate any of them?

AIDEN: Yes and no. Several of the books were more well known legends, written in Old Irish and Welsh, The Tain Bo Cuailnge and The Mabinogion. I didn't translate them, not fully at least, so I'm not sure how different they were in the telling of the tale. But, from what I could make out the names and places seemed similar, from Setanta to the Prince of Dyved.

KATHERINE: And the other books?

AIDEN: Ah, yeah. They weren't the traditional legends. I was slowly building up a lexicon, and was starting to recognise certain names and places, although there was nothing that I found linking them to what I knew about mediaeval history or celtic legend. I couldn't read much more. They were well out of my wheelhouse and I wasn't making any real headway, and now I never will. And honestly, after everything, I am not sure how much I can even remember about them. Oh actually, one more thing about the raid. Talking about the books brought it back. There were two other people at the raid who weren't police.

KATHERINE: Oh? You didn't mention them before.

AIDEN: It was such a jumble, sorry. After I was escorted out of the farmhouse, these two people arrived. They were wearing suits, and were obviously important as the officers gave them plenty of space.

KATHERINE: Suit suits? Smart suits?

AIDEN: Yeah. Proper tailored ones.

KATHERINE: Hmm. Special Branch?

AIDEN: They never said as much. I don't think? It's all a little hazy. The adrenaline I guess.

KATHERINE: You'd just gone through hell, I'll give you a pass. Just to confirm, you didn't have to sign anything that said you couldn't discuss this.

AIDEN: Not that I remember.

KATHERINE: Great. What did they want?

AIDEN: They... asked me some questions. They were very polite. I think.

KATHERINE: Do you remember any of their questions?

AIDEN: I know they were asking about the cult. They asked about the ritual and what happened that night. If I'd said anything, if they'd made me speak any words. They took all the books away with them too.

KATHERINE: Hmm. Building a casefile. You'd already given your statement to the police at this point, right?

AIDEN: No this was as I was sitting in the ambulance, way before my statement. The one thing that I do remember clearly is when it came out that I believed in the paranormal, they were insistent that the ritual and the cult, that everything I had seen or experienced were the delusions of dangerous people. That I was safe now and that the cult had been dealt with.

KATHERINE: Good for them. I'm glad that they could help calm you with that.

AIDEN: It did help, yeah.

AIDEN: I think that's enough detail. I'm safe now and am getting the support I need... Kitty and I have taken the time in between my rescue and this recording to talk through what happened the night I was captured. And we're okay.

KATHERINE: We settled on the fact that the mistakes were mutual. The blame for the fight too.

AIDEN: And so were the apologies.

KATHERINE: Best kept off the record. Lots of crying.

AIDEN: Hey, I'd missed you.

KATHERINE: I missed you too. Well. This fieldwork ended up being more intense than we planned for. Especially for our first proper excursion.

AIDEN: Yeah, reading about murder is nothing like actually seeing it in person and knowing with a bone deep certainty you're next.

KATHERINE: But you made it out alive, that's the main thing.

AIDEN: Alive...

KATHERINE: I can't imagine what it must have been like. Following that thread, I have a question for you.

AIDEN: Yes?

KATHERINE: After all of this, with everything that we've been through, after everything you've been through, should we go back to a desk-based show?

AIDEN: Do you want my answer on record?

KATHERINE: Doesn't have to be.

AIDEN: Hmm. Leave it on. I don't think so. But there are some things I need to process before any final decisions are made.



KATHERINE: Of course. Take all the time you need.

AIDEN: Thanks. My turn for a question....

KATHERINE: Mm?

AIDEN: This John Martin. Who is he? How did he know so much?

KATHERINE: Funny you should ask. As he was key to me finding you, I've been in touch with him.

AIDEN: Oh?

KATHERINE: He's coming down for a chat in a few days. He agreed to dissect what we know about the cult for our listeners, and he wants to talk to you.

AIDEN: Wait, really?

KATHERINE: I know you're gonna get on. But only if you are up for it of course.

AIDEN: Heck yeah I am.

***INT. THE WYRD SIDE RECORDING STUDIO***

*Uncomfortable shuffling of three people crammed into one small room.*

KATHERINE: No, we're not used to-

AIDEN: Your chairs on the, um... on the cable.

JOHN MARTIN: Is it really?

AIDEN: If you could just- Hang on.

JOHN MARTIN: Let me just shuffle round.

KATHERINE: Yeah.

*Skid of a wooden chair and occasional readjustment as they try and make themselves as comfortable as possible.*

KATHERINE: And here we are.

AIDEN: Yup, with the magic of editing, two days skipped as if it was nothing. And joining us is the aforementioned John Martin.

JOHN MARTIN: Hello, glad to be here. *[Bump as he jostles someone]* Oh. My apologies. It's certainly a little intimate in here.

AIDEN: Ah, sorry about that. We don't normally have guests on and this little space was all we could afford on our current income.

KATHERINE: That's on me. I blew through our budget over the last few weeks.

JOHN MARTIN: Oh, don't worry, I've been in smaller spaces with more folk. I was just wondering about the choice of seating. Not often you see a kitchen chair in a recording room. At least in my limited experience.

KATHERINE: If you don't stop critiquing our setup, you can sit on it instead of me. Guest or no.

JOHN MARTIN: Fair enough Ms. Moore. Shall we get the ball rolling then? Aiden.

AIDEN: Mhmm?

JOHN MARTIN: You've already talked me through your experiences with the Watchers of the Buried Dragon, and I believe I can help you get to the bottom of what was going on.

AIDEN: That would be brilliant.

JOHN MARTIN: Excellent. So, after Katherine first got in contact, I had a scour through my library, and had some chats with old contacts...

KATHERINE: Hence you leading me to the dragon and the then hypothetical cult surrounding it.

JOHN MARTIN: Indeed. The more I looked into the Dragon and the local area, the less convinced I was that it was based in anything more than mistaken identity. Properly Boar-ing.

*[pause, Aiden chuckles, but Katherine only rolls her eyes and snorts exasperatedly]* It served as enough inspiration for you to latch onto something. As it did for the people who captured Aiden.

AIDEN: They said their group went back centuries, that they were descended from the original people who watched over the Dragon.

JOHN MARTIN: That is correct, that's what they did believe. As with many cults and sects, if you introduce knowledge as something old, esoteric and a secret kept long hidden, it gains a certain unquestionable mystique. Did you find yourself questioning it Aiden?

AIDEN: Ah... uh, no. Not really. I mean, at first maybe?

JOHN MARTIN: But when they started to initiate you into their secrets, it felt powerful and right.

AIDEN: As hard as it is to admit, yes. I was taken in. Utterly.

JOHN MARTIN: The same as many people every single day. There is no shame in wanting to believe. I've found telling half-truths and lies is so much easier than convincing people of the whole truth. But before you hit out with your doubt Katherine, I was telling you no lies.

KATHERINE: By your own admission, that's not telling the whole truth.

JOHN MARTIN: The information we discussed was enough for you to get to where you most likely needed to go.

KATHERINE: And you knew this, how?

JOHN MARTIN: Would you believe it was your fate, your wyrd?

*[At the same time]*

KATHERINE: No.

AIDEN: Maybe

JOHN MARTIN: Regardless, I knew it was the right way to go. I have a strong gut feeling for these things. It was clear that whatever was going on with the Watch was a bastardisation of a myth, a belief distorted into a cruel facsimile of faith over time. It could be the case that the folktale of the boar, beast, Dragon, was warped across generations of retellings. However, that

certainly does not explain the methods of execution and sacrifice. Those came from a far earlier time.

AIDEN: The Iron Age, right? The fact I was given the same foodstuffs found in the stomachs of multiple prehistoric bog bodies suggests they had to have had other influences.

JOHN MARTIN: Exactly. And if these people had been around for centuries, you would have thought there'd be more bog bodies to be found in the New Forest.

AIDEN: There might be. Lou said that their main home, where her parents died, was attacked several years before. I'd assume that there are hundreds more bodies there. Maybe the bodies of those poor people who disappeared in the 1980s.

JOHN MARTIN: And do you have a location for this home?

AIDEN: No. She never told me. You'd think finding a large manor house that burned down would be easy, surely? It can't be that common.

JOHN MARTIN: One would think. Albert appeared to know more than he let on, and Lou mentioned that the Chainbearers were the Lords of the Manor. But well, which manor? I'm sure Katherine could go through the records of potential gas leak fires-

KATHERINE: I already have.

JOHN MARTIN: And?

KATHERINE: There's nothing. No records of anything, no newspaper articles, no photographs. Nothing.

JOHN MARTIN: Exactly. Now, we know that the Watchers believe in a twisted version of reality. Anyone with any sense knows that there is nothing dark and dangerous sleeping below the New Forest bogs. No risks, bar falling in of course. Did Lou say how old she was, when the fire happened?

AIDEN: Only that she was very young.

JOHN MARTIN: If you tell yourself a lie often enough, it becomes your truth. I've spoken to the police in charge of this investigation and they told me about some of the Watchers' statements.

KATHERINE: They just let you have this information?

JOHN MARTIN: It's quite remarkable what the right connections get you. Though I must mention Katherine, I can honestly say that you did your best, considering your resources.

KATHERINE: Thanks.

JOHN MARTIN: What they told me was that the Chainbearer had another name: Owain. No second name, no birth certificate, no national insurance record or anything official. So, Owain had likely been in the cult all his life, like Lou, but was an adult when the gas leak happened.

AIDEN: Or the attack?

JOHN MARTIN: We can get to that in a moment. Now, after the fire killed many of the high ranking members of the cult, he was the only one who escaped who possessed an approximate knowledge of how to continue their great work. So, he, obviously reluctant -

KATHERINE: Obviously.

JOHN MARTIN: He took on the mantle and all the apparent burdens... and the benefits. Although I can safely say he displays no signs of ageless grace or the strength of many men. Further proof that whatever they believe is complete fiction.

KATHERINE: Not that we really believed any of that in the first place.

AIDEN: So it was just a placebo then? He dragged me by the neck!

JOHN MARTIN: A cruel act of violence. But nothing that can't be chalked up to adrenaline. Owain, however, he believed that he deserved the prowess supposedly given to Chainbearers when they took on the mantle of leadership and clearly, that he had not been gifted that strength must have meant the sacrifices were not working as intended.

AIDEN: I never really understood that bit, the Dragon seemed to grant the Chainbearers power, but the entire Watch... the entire cult, was devoted to locking it away?

JOHN MARTIN: The anger of the Dragon gave the Chainbearers their power. Allegedly. Again, leaps of faith and moving logical goalposts are hallmarks of this kind of belief.

KATHERINE: You know, for someone who styles himself as a mystic, I am starting to actually quite like you.

JOHN MARTIN: I would have thought that me helping you find your friend would be enough for you to like me. But, uh, well. That being said, I do believe in the strange and the wonderful Ms. Moore. I would not be in my current profession if I did not.

AIDEN: About that...

JOHN MARTIN: Ah yes. Mr Summers, your faith is shaken a little it seems. Now, tell me, why do you feel so bad for wanting to help people?

AIDEN: What?

JOHN MARTIN: You said it yourself: you wanted to make a difference. You thought you could change the world for the better.

AIDEN: Yeah, I was so willing to drop everything and join a killer cult who'd just kidnapped me, yeah.

JOHN MARTIN: Not so. The minute you saw the truth of the matter, you realised...

AIDEN: I realised that people who believe the same things as me can kill because of those same bloody beliefs. The same stories.

JOHN MARTIN: Humans hurt and kill each other over stories all the time. That's not unique to people who believe in the paranormal. I would gently suggest sitting with your reasons for believing, truly examining them, and what they mean for you. I'd be surprised if you find the capacity to hurt others for your own power in there.

*Aiden sighs.*

AIDEN: Alright. I will. Could we talk more about the Watchers? The meaning behind the bog bodies is still lost on me.

JOHN MARTIN: Hmm, what are your current theories?

AIDEN: I have more thoughts than theories at this point. Well, the Watchers seemed to use both the act of the murder itself as well as the continued presence of the body in the sacrificial location, the bog, as part of their ritual. But why not use a more contemporary means of killing someone? Contemporary to the time of the legend I mean.

JOHN MARTIN: Being hung, drawn and quartered? Would it carry the same meaning? While both are clearly rituals, the latter was used as a form of punishment.

AIDEN: That's true, I suppose the Watchers didn't see these deaths as punishments, more a donation of strength, necessary to keep the seals from breaking.

JOHN MARTIN: That's not to say the mediaeval world did not have its martyrs; you're quite correct in highlighting that this was a group whose belief system did not match up with its time, either when the boar, or Dragon was killed, or now.

KATHERINE: I should hope not now.

JOHN MARTIN: There are some accounts, by Greek and Roman authors, which should be taken with a healthy dose of scepticism, that mention several Celtic, specifically Gaulish, gods having different favourite methods of sacrifice, from hanging to drowning, to burning. Much of this, and the charges of cannibalism from authors like Pliny, can be chalked up as slander to whip up more xenophobia against these cultures from the "civilised" corners of their world, and to provide ample evidence that they should stamp out these barbaric practices once and for all. That being said, bodies like Lindow Man show that the Celtic peoples did indeed kill in ways very reminiscent of what was being written about them. Sacrificial? Well, the fact that everything about his death and the days before it were carefully controlled and resembles many of the other bog bodies, does tend to favour that argument.

AIDEN: So, it's clear this was an Iron Age ritual practice, how does it link to late mediaeval Hampshire then?

JOHN MARTIN: Guin, badud, loscud.

KATHERINE: Gesundheit.

AIDEN: Wait! Wait, I saw that in some of their books.

JOHN MARTIN: Now that is interesting. I would have loved to go over them. But it seems they are all classed as essential evidence and there is no budging there.

AIDEN: Yeah, the two people in suits took them.

KATHERINE: We think Special Branch.

JOHN MARTIN: Ah, well. In that case, there's no sense crying over spilt milk.

AIDEN: But the phrase, if I'm not mistaken, that's from Irish literature?

JOHN MARTIN: That's right. Wounding, drowning, burning. It's linked with kingly death and sacrifice. A threefold death or a riddle death.

AIDEN: A riddle death?

JOHN MARTIN: These deaths link to prophecies, seemingly impossible conditions for the death of a great king or powerful being. *[he clears his throat]* "Macbeth shall never vanquished be until Great Birnam Wood to high Dunsinane Hill shall come against him" or "none of woman born" shall harm him. That kind of thing. A removal of the certainties of the either and the or. Riddle deaths place the dying in a cognitive liminality, straddling the threads of life and death, here and there. These deaths were meant to connect and resonate with the otherworld. A riddle death is a tool used to explore that ambiguous relationship between the natural and supernatural worlds. We see examples of this in literature well into the medieval period, so it certainly would not have been unknown at the time when the Dragon came into being. If you are interested, I've written a brief paper on it...

AIDEN: I know what I'm reading next. And if the local townspeople were being mauoraded by a particularly aggressive boar and there was no aid from king or clergy...

JOHN MARTIN: Then perhaps folktales might take hold. That is of course assuming this cult did stretch back to the 15th century, and was not just the fanciful concoction of someone using the power of stories and humanity's natural fascination with the supernatural to garner more power for themselves to satisfy whatever sick games they wanted to play.

AIDEN: But, you said there was evidence of riddle death in literature through the medieval period?



JOHN MARTIN: Not in the local area there isn't.

AIDEN: Oh.

JOHN MARTIN: However, there are places in this world, in these isles, places in the New Forest even, where folk memory runs deep and stories live strong. Whether true or not, those stories are closely linked with the land and its people, and that, in itself, is a kind of magic. The Dragon of Bisterne is such a story, I can safely say that this cult was a parasite. An entirely mundane group of people fooled into thinking there was something greater.

AIDEN: *[ruefully]* They sure fooled me.

JOHN MARTIN: But you know now Aiden, and you can put that knowledge to good use going forward. There is always the discussion of why one would ever perform a human sacrifice. But I ask, who needs an excuse?

KATHERINE: I'm sorry?

JOHN MARTIN: Human sacrifice is a mad thing to do. So following that logic, if you do it, then your reasons must be beyond any rational explanation and you're using human sacrifice as a cover for the banal and detestable exercise of power, murder and terror. Now, with that, I really must be getting on, I'm already cutting it fine to get the train. This was just too fascinating a discussion to miss. *[John Martin stands up, awkwardly in the small space]*. Don't lose too much faith, either of you. It would be a shame to forsake all the stories you have yet to explore and I feel the many more you have left to tell.

*Recorder clicks off.*

KATHERINE: That was about it. I think we covered most of what we needed to talk about with him.

AIDEN: Yeah, at some point, I think we need to get back in contact. Perhaps once...

KATHERINE: Once?

AIDEN: I'll figure it out.

**INT. THE WYRD SIDE RECORDING STUDIO**

AIDEN: Okay, back to our New Forest experiences, I think we need some closure.

KATHERINE: [*firmly*] We're not going back.

AIDEN: Ah, no, definitely not. I just mean talking through our findings.

KATHERINE: Good. Well, The Red King investigation's already wrapped up; I know you feel strongly about your encounter.

AIDEN: We both feel, or at least felt, strongly about our encounters.

KATHERINE: I can't help but put two and two together with what we now know about the cult. And for me, that's case closed. That only leaves the Colt Pixie.

AIDEN: Yeah, about that... You listened to my recording.

KATHERINE: I want to believe you, but we've nothing to back it up. And while the last thing that I want to do is invalidate your experiences, you were incredibly stressed.

AIDEN: Stressed or not, I know what I saw.

KATHERINE: Well, linking back to what we were talking about with Mr Martin, I've done a little research of my own. Your food, you said it was similar to what they found in the stomachs of several Iron Age bog bodies?

AIDEN: Yeah, I really should have clocked that way earlier.

KATHERINE: You were literally kidnapped and in the middle of being coerced by a cult. And being forced to eat mouldy grains. [*gently*] Don't beat yourself up. But, I've found some studies on plant microfossils and pollen remains in bog bodies' guts.

AIDEN: Ah, on the quality and type of grains they were eating?

KATHERINE: Mhmm. Now, what do you know about St Anthony's Fire?

AIDEN: The dancing plague?

KATHERINE: Yes.

AIDEN: Sixteenth century.

KATHERINE: And beyond. It was linked with the consumption of Ergot. A fungus that grows on rye, wheat and similar plants. Common symptoms of ergot consumption are hallucinations and distorted perceptions. There were traces of ergot in the stomachs of some bog bodies, but it likely wasn't enough to cause major hallucinations.

AIDEN: What are you getting at?

KATHERINE: I asked the police to have a look at the food you were served, to test it for chemicals and drugs.

AIDEN: Really?

KATHERINE: They kidnapped you. It wouldn't be out of character. The only thing they found were traces of ergot. Now, I'm not saying that you imagined it, but you said yourself the bread tasted mouldy.

AIDEN: I know what I saw Kitty.

KATHERINE: And I believe that you believe it Aiden, and nothing is going to change that. But we can't say anything for sure with a statement like this.

AIDEN: It's just like the Red King all over again.

*Companionable pause.*

KATHERINE: What?

AIDEN: I just... I missed this. I never thought I'd say it, but I actually missed my evidence being torn to shreds.

KATHERINE: *[realising she may have gone too far]* I'm sorry. I didn't mean to -

AIDEN: No, it's fine. Really.

KATHERINE: I'm not saying there's nothing there, and I'm not saying that we didn't encounter something weird, I just mean to say that we can't prove that we saw anything, I don't think going back there again would be good for either us or our listeners.

AIDEN: No, no, you're right. They can make up their own minds about the Colt Pixie. That being said, it was interesting that I encountered it again during my captivity. I really don't think the cult and the Colt Pixie were related at all.

KATHERINE: Mm. That's supported by Albert being okay talking about the Colt Pixie but not about the cult when we first met him.

AIDEN: I guess the Colt Pixie is just another unsolved mystery then. Having said that...

KATHERINE: Mm?

AIDEN: I think... throughout our time in the New Forest we had some pretty convincing first hand encounters, and we managed to get some recordings that I would consider as evidence.

KATHERINE: Very tentatively, but go on.

AIDEN: Well, what if this is what we're meant to do? What if this was what I was meant to do from the start?

KATHERINE: What do you mean?

AIDEN: I think it is time we had a chat about why I'm into all this.

***INT. THE WYRD SIDE RECORDING STUDIO***

KATHERINE: Again, we can do this privately.

AIDEN: No, we should record it.

KATHERINE: Alright, well, if you change your mind later, we can always take this out.

AIDEN: Thanks. *[under his breath]* Where to start? *[To Katherine]* I grew up in South-West Shropshire, in the Clun Valley, pretty idyllic really.

KATHERINE: I didn't know that.

AIDEN: I'm sorry I didn't tell you. I hope you'll understand why soon. Clun Valley, rural rolling hills, millstreams and brooks babbling next to sheep. The whole lot. It was a great childhood for someone who loved to be outside exploring. Now honestly I have always loved a good story, scary or not, about knights and faeries, or Robin Hood, and me and Daniel... We loved acting them out.

KATHERINE: Daniel... Dan?

AIDEN: Yeah...

KATHERINE: Sorry, I'll stop interrupting.

AIDEN: That's okay. So um... So Dan and I were pretty much inseparable, our parents met in one of those pregnancy groups, you know, pairing you up with people who are expecting about the same time as you? They all got on, and... well... so did we, pretty much from birth. Dan was always the more athletic one, he was walking weeks before I was, although I pipped him on the first word. Moon, apparently. So Dan and I went to the same schools and playgroups, and from about five or six onwards we'd make up these immersive and expansive worlds, spend literally days pretending to be heroes and villains, monsters and royalty, only stopping for food and sleep.

KATHERINE: Sounds like your dnd campaigns.

AIDEN: Ah, yeah. And I never grew out of that apparently. We also fought. A lot. Creative differences, sometimes we'd really clash. Get too much for each other. Not see each other for days at a time. Then when we next met up it would be like nothing ever happened, back to creating worlds and living stories as usual. A "tumultuous artistic relationship" my mum called it.

One time, when we were about 8, we were out walking around the local woods just outside Dan's parent's property. They let us roam surprisingly far considering we were that young. We met this group of older kids, maybe six or seven of them. Nice enough I guess, they were just lounging around, doing what teenagers did when away from adults then, drinking, smoking,

swearing, but nothing overly dangerous, to us at least. One of the guys saw us running around in the forest and called us over.

Dan, being the brave one, as usual, just strolled over and demanded why they were on the land of the righteous King Bartholemew, the king who our heroes served in the stories. The older kids laughed, and... to their credit played along a little bit, saying they were travelling through, and could tell us stories of monsters. So, naturally both Dan and I were intrigued. We sat and listened to the kids tell a really, really jumbled up tale. You've heard of Jenny Greenteeth, right?

KATHERINE: Mm. The water spirit?

AIDEN: Mm. So these older kids, they told us about Jenny Greenteeth, about how every once in a while she'd get hungry and would prowl downstream, looking for children to take. It didn't help we were right by the river and when the oldest boy was describing her, someone else splashed a stick in the water, I almost wet myself right there. The teenagers laughed and left. Dan and I ran all the way home. I don't think I slept very well for a good month or two after that. Maybe a year or so passed and I tried to move on from the story, but something about the idea of grasping hands in the cold moonlight kept creeping back in. Dan and I still played together, the same stories, the same worlds, but we were out later and later. So late that Dan actually got grounded for missing dinner two nights in a row. I... I remember that weekend, I'd finished reading my nightly chapter of the Hobbit, and was curled up in bed. Dan had been annoyed at his parents for cutting short our weekend of fun, and me at mine for scolding me for encouraging him to ignore his schoolwork. He was falling behind a little... I heard a tap at my bedroom window. It was Dan. He had climbed up the tree nearest the house and was throwing pebbles. He'd escaped, the noble knight had fought his way through the dungeons and out away from the evil tyrant's castle, and he needed an ally. So, I agreed, I scrambled out of my window and almost immediately fell to the ground. Sprained my ankle. I don't think I screamed, I just went over to him, hobbling and trying not to cry. I... *[he lets out a shaky breath]* Oh okay, this is harder than I thought it would be.

KATHERINE: Do you want to stop?

AIDEN: I'm fine. I just need to get through this. For everyone's sake. My therapist said that closure is important. Sharing my experiences and feelings with people close to me is key. *[he takes a deep breath]* Okay. So, I got across the garden to him and he, he supported me. I took his arm and he helped me through the back gate and down the short path to the wood. It was way past sunset, by the time we got to the same hollow the older kids were lounging in before, it was closer to ten maybe. Enough for the moon to be the only thing lighting our way. We were

chatting as usual, telling each other stories, playing brave heroes out on a quest to cover up how absolutely terrified we were. Or at least how scared I was. Then... when we reached the river, Dan decided it was a good time for a swim. It was early August and the muggy English summer was in full swing, so the cool water didn't sound like such a bad idea. But the stories. I wanted to go back. I was so close to tears when Dan jumped in and beckoned me to follow. My ankle was still hurting so I just hung my feet in the river as Dan splashed back and forth, laughing. I felt something slip by my foot, cold and slimy. I screamed and scrambled back but Dan kept laughing, he said it was a fish. He saw a little fish swim by my foot... I, I closed my eyes for just a second to calm myself down. Dan screamed. It was so hard to open my eyes. When I did I saw a pair of arms around him. Long, green, covered in reeds and moss. The fingers held his mouth open as the arms pulled him down into the water...

KATHERINE: Aiden...

AIDEN: I managed to get some courage and stumble to the edge of the water, crashing in. It was dark and cold. Colder, way, way colder than I remembered when my feet were in it. Something was wrapped around Dan like a snake. He was... he was still screaming. I made it over to him and tried to get whatever was on him, off. I kicked and bit and screamed. I almost passed out when my sprained ankle collided with something... cold and slimy. Next thing I know I was on the bank. Adults all around me. I was holding Dan. There were river grasses and reeds wrapped around him. He wasn't moving. If I'd been braver. If I'd been quicker. If I'd been better at climbing I wouldn't've hurt my ankle and I could have helped. If I was stronger... If I was anything more than a scared, stupid little child, my friend would still be alive. Dan's parents never spoke to me or my parents again. They blamed me for Dan's death. I mean, how could they not? I blame me! It was my fault. Just like Albert. So, yeah, there we go. The mask comes off. I'm chasing after shadows and stories because someone I loved was taken away by something I can't explain. Because if there's even a single chance that it was supernatural, then maybe I can forget the fact it was most likely just weeds trapping Daniel underwater, that I failed to rescue my friend from a calm river. Maybe if I find the truth, then this might not happen to other people.

KATHERINE: Aiden, I am so sorry to hear that.

AIDEN: I... Kitty, I want to go back. Is that bad? Does that make me a bad friend? I want to go back and put this to rest, as best I can. Now, after facing whatever it was in that fog, the cult, and just everything else, I need to go back and find out, one way or another.

KATHERINE: And if we find nothing?

AIDEN: Then I'm done. Wait. We?

KATHERINE: Yes. It goes without question that I'm coming with you.

AIDEN: No, that's not what I mean.

KATHERINE: You can't change my mind.

AIDEN: Thank you. I guess, we have to figure out our next steps then. We have my witness testimony and I can get us back to... to where it happened.

KATHERINE: And you weren't.

AIDEN: What?

KATHERINE: A bad friend. Not back then. Not now. Lets get prepped.

AIDEN: You know what? Yeah. It is going to take some doing, but yeah. Alright, please join us next time, for the final investigation of this season, if not ever, where we look into the legend of Jenny Greenteeth and the testimony of Aiden Summers.



## **THE WYRD SIDE MUSIC**

Hi, Alexandra M. Barrow here, co-creator of The Wyrd Side and voice of Katherine Moore. We're really excited to be featuring a trailer from The Attic Monologues on today's episode. If you enjoyed The Wyrd Side, you may also enjoy this queer urban fantasy/horror podcast. They've just started to release Season 2, so now's the perfect time to catch up. We'll put the links to their socials in the episode description, so please do go check them out. Thank you for listening.

### **The Attic Monologues Season 2 Trailer Transcript**

**Content Warnings:** Description of metaphorical body horror, implied sensory deprivation

[MATCH STRIKES, FLAME CATCHES.]

[PEN SCRATCHING ON PAPER. OMINOUS HUMMING BUILDING.]

#### **THE AUTHOR**

A boy is dragged into the dark. He does not understand the full extent of why this is. He does not understand yet that he is chosen; but he will.

But this is not that story. Stories are like their protagonists - they come and they go and they are interchangeable, mostly.

*You* have been walking in the dark. It is a metaphorical dark, unlike the one that came before you. And yet you have been walking in your dark for so long, that when the light comes you are sure it will break you. It sears your eyes and burns your skin and your very bones feel bleached and torn out under a microscope. And yet it is only the first of many suns, and each will burn brighter than the last.

You think, in the end, you might have preferred the darkness, after all.

[THEME MUSIC FADES IN]

**MORGAN GREENSMITH**

The Attic Monologues is a queer urban fantasy horror podcast featuring metanarratives, friends to lovers, mental health exploration, and far too many sentient trees. Season 2 launches August 30th - catch up on season 1 today!

[THEME MUSIC FADES OUT]

The Wyrd Side will return. If you enjoyed the programme, please help support the podcast by giving us a follow on social media @thewyrdside on Twitter and Instagram, by leaving a review on Spotify or wherever you are listening to this, and sharing it with anyone who might enjoy it! As a small production, this really helps us out.

Thank you all for listening.