

THE OLD FORKS INN, EPISODE ONE: DRAINED OF LIGHT

PROLOGUE

FADE UP on the sound of thousands of TREE FROGS. This is not the shrill, timid sound of spring peepers. This is a rhythmic chorus with voices arranged in parts, high voices calling to low and back again, endlessly, on a count of four: *eeek-eeek-eeek-eeek*, EEK-EEK-EEK-EEK.

The FROGS' CHORUS continues as EMILY begins to speak. Emily is 22, with a girlish pitch to her voice that suggests she is a caring, upbeat soul.

Or possibly it suggests that she *was* a caring, upbeat soul. Her exact vital status is uncertain.

EMILY (V.O.)

I used to think they sounded so beautiful. Like a song, almost. Even on the hottest nights I would turn the air conditioning off to listen to them for a while, calling to each other, over and over and over. Some nights I'd even start to fall asleep to them. I'd smile as I was drifting off, telling myself: *isn't it sweet? They're trying to find love. They're hypnotic. It's like those guided meditations I used to do, where you visualize yourself walking down a set of steps? And they form the steps with their voices. They shape the night, and you can walk on the path their cries make into some other place. Some other state of being.*

A pause. We listen to the FROGS' CHORUS for a few beats.

EMILY (V.O.)

They're frogs. Did I tell you that? I didn't know that. At least, I didn't know that before I came here— here, to the Old Forks Inn. There was a lot I didn't know before I came here. So much I wish I didn't know.

(choking up)

And now there's so much I'm never going to know. Oh, God...

She's beginning to CRY, but pulls herself together.

EMILY (V.O.)
 No. No. I have to say this. I have
 to explain. Even if it doesn't make
 sense. Even if nobody can hear me.
 I hope someone can hear me.
 (beat)
 My name is Emily, and this is how I
 disappeared.

The FROGS' CHORUS swells to bursting--a wild cacophony of
 sound--then abruptly CUTS TO SILENCE.

SCENE 1

A door CREAKS OPEN, a bell RINGS as Emily enters the FRONT
 OFFICE of the inn.

EMILY
 (calling)
 Hello? Aunt Gloria?

GLORIA (OFF)
 Just a minute!

EMILY (V.O.)
 Student debt. That's what brought
 me to the Old Forks Inn. I arrived
 there late in the afternoon on a
 Sunday in mid-May, just as the
 shadows were beginning to stretch.
 The week before, I'd graduated from
 Penn State with my bachelor's in
 psychology. I'd been accepted to
 the social work master's program at
 Temple, but I had a little too much
 loan debt--I couldn't take out
 quite enough to pay the tuition. So
 I decided to defer for a year, get
 a job, and pay down my debt by at
 least \$5,000. Then I'd be able to
 finance the M.S.W.

Sound of a HEAVY OBJECT - a wheeled suitcase - DRAGGING
 across the floor. Emily GRUNTS.

EMILY (V.O.)
 Working at the Old Forks was Dad's
 idea. Technically I'd be the
 assistant manager, which sounds
 more fancy than it is. The pay
 wasn't great, but I could live on-
 site and get most of my meals
 comped.

(MORE)

EMILY (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 And getting hired was a sure thing:
 the Old Forks has been in Dad's
 family for almost 40 years now.

A MUSIC STING: 80s synth-pop. This carries over Emily's continuing narration.

EMILY (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 My grandparents, Nick and Alice
 Degli Esposti, came to the Old
 Forks Inn as guests in June 1981.
 They arrived on a Friday, planning
 to spend a long romantic weekend
 celebrating their 25th wedding
 anniversary. They left that Tuesday
 with the deed. They'd fallen in
 love with the place. And you can't
 blame them. Grandma and Grandpa
 were from the Jersey Shore, from
 pre-fab Cape Cod houses in row
 after identical row, hurricanes and
 mosquitoes in the summer,
 nor'easters in the winter,
 obnoxious New Yorkers in all
 seasons and weathers. The Old Forks
 Inn was in the Pocono Mountains: a
 200-year-old house set on 16
 rolling acres surrounded on three
 sides by Pennsylvania forest,
 scarlet leaves in the autumn, white-
 tailed deer on the lawn in the
 spring.
 (beat)
 And in the summer, galaxies of
 fireflies. And the frogs.

The FROGS' CHORUS seeps back onto the soundtrack. The 80s MUSIC warps and starts to fade as the frogs wax louder and louder and louder.

Emily's BREATHING is close by us, rapid and ragged at first as she panics. Then she regains control.

EMILY (V.O.)
 No, no.
 (defiant)
 NO. I told you, it's my time to
 talk. I have to explain. You'll
 have your chance!

The FROGS cut out. The SYNTH-POP fades back up, finding its stride again as Emily recovers the thread of her narration.

EMILY (V.O.) (CONT'D)

There were still New Yorkers everywhere in the Poconos, too. But being in nature seemed to somehow make them a little less obnoxious. "More tractable", Grandpa said. And the Old Forks is in nature. It's in a town called Stillriver, which has a gas station, a high school, and the inn, all carefully tucked among miles of good Pennsylvania forest. Picture the property like a diamond, sort of--the two eastern sides are bordered by Old Stillriver Road on the north and the Stillriver Run, a wide, fast creek, on the south. The two western sides border on the woods--woods that run right up onto a mountain, and on for about three miles until they come to Route 161, and then to the bright lights and big city of Coopersville, population 2,400.

(MUSIC continues.) Background noise of a small CROWD in a restaurant: people CHATTING, clinks of GLASSES and CUTLERY.

EMILY (V.O.)

In the 80s, people from New York and New Jersey loved coming to the Poconos. My grandparents inherited a base of repeat customers, a full-service restaurant, a tiny bar with lovingly maintained 1940s fixtures, a swimming pool and a sledding hill, and all the rest.

(MUSIC continues.) A shift in the background noise to a busy restaurant KITCHEN: knives chopping, a male chef SHOUTING "Order up!", a powerful water-sprayer wringing bright notes from plates as it hoses them down.

EMILY (V.O.) (CONT'D)

They ran the place on a wing and a prayer, doing most of the work themselves, hiring some locals, and drafting in family to fill the gaps during the summer: cousins as cleaners, siblings as sous chefs, and teenage grandchildren, at risk of running with bad crowds back in Bradley Beach or wherever, pitching in everywhere else.

(MORE)

EMILY (V.O.) (CONT'D)
They had a good ten-year run. They
made so many families so happy.
Then the 90s arrived.

The MUSIC fades out. Then comes RHYTHMIC SPLASHING and an OLD
MAN'S BREATHING - a swimmer, steady and slow.

EMILY (V.O.)
In the 90s the cheap flight era
began. Suddenly you could go to the
Bahamas or Disney World for only a
little more money than you'd spend
for a week at the Old Forks. The
repeat business dried up. The
restaurant started to flag. And my
grandparents were old. I don't
remember my first visit to the Old
Forks Inn. I was four months old,
and there's just a picture of me in
the swimming pool with my grandpa.
I don't remember him either. He
died in 1999, when I was two and he
was 79. Grandma went in 2001. The
inn passed to the one family member
who'd stuck by them. The one family
member who'd been there since that
first summer.

GLORIA
Dad? Don't you think that's enough?

There's a PAUSE in the swimming strokes. The old man HUFFS.
The swimming resumes.

GLORIA (CONT'D)
Okay. Guess not.

SWIMMING sounds fade out as Emily continues:

EMILY (V.O.)
Aunt Gloria. She's my Dad's older
half-sister from my grandfather's
first marriage. She's like an old
maid from those Jane Austen novels
they made me read in high school.
And she was now my boss. I remember
standing in the office on that
first day, waiting for her. I
remember looking around at the old
computer and the crocheted lace
curtains and the brochures for
strange Pocono tourist attractions--
visit our candle factory! Check out
the living history farm!

(MORE)

EMILY (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 I remember being suddenly nervous.
 I remember realizing I didn't know
 her very well at all.

Sound of a DOOR OPENING in the present-day office. FOOTSTEPS.

EMILY
 Hey, Aunt Gloria!

GLORIA DEGLI ESPOSTI is 63. Her voice is a little rough-edged from cigarettes and still holds fast to a Noo Joisey accent in spite of her long years in the Poconos. She is plain-spoken, given to sarcasm, with a guarded warmth.

GLORIA
 Hey, kid! You checking in? Come to the back office. The inner sanctum. Want me to get one of those bags?

EMILY
 I got it, no problem.

SCENE 2

The back office. There's an OSCILLATING DESK FAN operating. A CLUNK as Gloria presses the button and sets it to a lower speed.

GLORIA
 Let me find you a chair, sorry.

RUSTLING and BUMPING as Gloria fishes through a closet, finds a folding chair, and sets it up.

EMILY (V.O.)
 She's a small woman, Aunt Gloria. Small, with black wavy hair that stands out from her head, shot through with silver. She has a serious face, with a long, straight nose I don't recognize from anywhere in our shared family. Slate blue eyes like my Dad's, like Grandpa's. But even though she's small, she's not slight. Broad shoulders that face you square on. Legs that are sturdy--you imagine her standing firm against a rising tide, or pushing across the Stillriver Run when it's swollen with rain.

(MORE)

EMILY (V.O.) (CONT'D)
She always wears a blue polo shirt showing the inn's logo, paired with khaki slacks or shorts, depending on the weather, and sensible shoes. On this first day, it was shorts.

GLORIA
Okay! Have a seat. Welcome back to the old homestead.

EMILY
I'm glad to be here!

GLORIA
Oh yeah? I'm glad you are, too. Cheap family labor is a Degli Esposti tradition.

Emily LAUGHS a little nervously.

GLORIA (CONT'D)
Seriously, though, this works out for both of us. You get to save a little money before you go learn to save people from shitty families, I get to save my little old legs from running around this place so much. Your Dad told you we're calling you the assistant manager, right?

EMILY
I won't let it go to my head.

GLORIA
Oh, it'll go to your head, all right-- it'll make you crazy.
(after Emily's laugh)
I didn't write up a formal job description or anything. Mainly because I'll need you to cover all kinds of stuff. A little bit of phones, a little guest relations, a little bit of housekeeping, if we're slammed. What I'm really hoping there'll be time for you to do is help out with the website, and some marketing ideas.

EMILY
What's wrong with the website?

GLORIA

Uh, it doesn't exist? We've been on the booking sites forever but we don't have our own website yet.

EMILY

You're kidding. There have been websites for 25 years, Aunt Gloria!

GLORIA

Yeah, well, I've been old for 25 years, what can I say? Anything you can do with that would be great, even if it's just finding someone to do it who won't rip me off.

(beat)

What else? We got staff, seasonal staff. They come back in a week, to get ready for Memorial Day. Three chambermaids, two groundskeepers. We rent out the restaurant now. It's great. I hated the restaurant, it was so goddamn stressful. The tenant handles pretty much everything except keeping the parking lot plowed in winter.

(beat)

Are you planning to stay all winter? It can get lonely here. People find it hard.

EMILY

"People" find it hard? What about you? Don't you find it hard, being here all alone?

EMILY (V.O.)

And Gloria looks at me in the strangest way. Her face doesn't change, but it's like there's a light shifting behind her eyes, and some part of her retreats into herself. It won't be the last time she looks at me this way. And it won't be the last time I let it happen, when I shouldn't.

GLORIA

Eh, you're not always alone in a place like this. We have regulars.

EMILY

Hunters and skiers?

GLORIA
 Something like that. You wanna see
 your cabin?

EMILY
 I get a cabin? Awesome.

A little RATTLE and JINGLE as Gloria gets the key off a hook.

GLORIA
 Lucky number 13!

EMILY
 Oooh, spooky.

GLORIA
 C'mon, you can tell me about your
 trip.

We hear them rise from the chairs, wrestle the bags through
 the room and out a door. When it SHUTS:

CUT TO:

SCENE 3

The FROGS' CHORUS returns.

EMILY (V.O.)
 The cabin. My cabin. I can see it.
 I don't mean in my mind's eye, I
 mean here, now, where I am standing
 on the lawn. Or positioned on the
 lawn. I'm not sure I "stand"
 anywhere, anymore.

(beat)
 Remember how I told you the Old
 Forks sits on a diamond of land?
 Road and water on one side, forest
 on the other? Cabin 13 sits at the
 eastern point of that diamond, at
 the frontier where the grounds meet
 the forest. It is so shaded by pine
 trees that no grass can grow on the
 ground around it; only moss. No dew
 collects there. If it snows and the
 snow falls without drifting, Cabin
 13 sits in a little hollow of bare,
 frozen ground. It's like the prow
 of a ship. The elements break
 against it, around it, but don't
 affect it much. On that afternoon
 in May, it was beautiful.

(MORE)

EMILY (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Light slanted through the trees, dappling the shingled roof and the rhododendrons flanking the door to one side. It looked like an enchanted cottage. Like you would step out of it, daintily, the way Sleeping Beauty does in the movie, and daintily lift your hand so a dainty little bird could land on it to sing a dainty duet with you.

CROSS-FADE: the FROGS' CHORUS sinks away while Aunt Gloria's VOICE comes up. She's saying the following while Emily's V.O. continues over top of her.

GLORIA (OFF)

This air conditioner is one of the older ones, they can be kind of a pain in the ass. What you do is you make sure you have the thermostat set here, THEN you turn the fan on. If you do it the other way around it'll just blow the air around without cooling. You got the coffee-maker, pretty simple, mini-fridge with not the greatest freezer compartment. Ice cream's fine, but I wouldn't keep meat in there. Wi-fi password is in the drawer with the coffee packets and creamers.

EMILY (V.O.)

It was also the biggest space I'd ever had to myself in my life. A living room with a pull-out sofa, a mini-fridge, a coffee-maker and a really big TV, a bedroom with a huge king-size bed and another big TV, a double closet and a bathroom. Sure, the bathroom didn't have a tub, just a shower. Sure, the carpet was a little dingy and the paint, and sure, the curtains were kind of dated. But it was still something I'd pay through the nose for in Philadelphia. I felt so lucky.

GLORIA (CONT'D)

So you like it?

EMILY

It's awesome, Aunt Gloria, thanks!

GLORIA

Honey, you're legal to drink, you can just call me Gloria. Okay?

EMILY

Got it.

GLORIA

So you're kind of remote out here. Which is good if you want to party, less good if noises worry you. But there's no danger here. This isn't meth country.

(MORE)

GLORIA (CONT'D)

We don't get much excitement other than black bears. If you do hear someone, the state troopers' barracks are less than five minutes away if you call 911. And if you get nervous, you can always come stay with me in the inn.

EMILY

Thanks, Aunt Gloria. Gloria.

GLORIA

I mean it. Don't hesitate. Just come right over if anything makes you anxious. Okay?

EMILY

(uncertainly)

Okay. Sure.

EMILY (V.O.)

And she left me to settle in for the night. I did all the things you do when you move in somewhere new...

Sound of Emily UNZIPPING her bag.

EMILY (V.O.)

I filled up the closet, set out my pictures and my books--that was one problem with the place: no bookshelves. I got online, watched TV, face-timed my best friend Melanie to give her a video tour...

EMILY

So here's the bathroom...

MELANIE (OFF, DISTORTED)

Oh my God, it looks like the *Psycho* bathroom.

EMILY

It does not, you dick.

EMILY (V.O.)

I posted pictures of my cabin to Instagram--hashtag cabin life! I even spent some time doing work: I found that the domain name theoldforksinn.com was free, and I reserved it.

(MORE)

EMILY (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I looked at some other hotels and resorts in the area for ideas about theme weeks and activities and things. I made a list of possibilities to pitch to Gloria in the morning. I made lists of things to buy at Target, looked up where the supermarket is. And finally, before getting into bed, I took a long, long shower. And when I got out of the shower, I heard it for the first time.

We hear the WATER RUNNING, then shutting off. We hear Emily TOWELLING OFF, then SCRUBBING HER TEETH.

She stops short at a SOUND from outside the cabin. It's a WOMAN'S VOICE CALLING, the words indistinct.

EMILY (V.O.)

I heard *her* for the first time.

We hear the FROGS' CHORUS, but subdued. A SCREEN DOOR opens and closes.

EMILY (V.O.)

I went outside. I waited in the dark. I held my breath. I looked out into the forest, where the sound had come from. I saw no lights in the woods--no neighboring houses. But I could see more than I expected. It was as if--it *is* as if--the night doesn't fall here. As if the day ending does not depend on the earth turning away from the sun. Instead, the light drains from things. And in this forest, this darkness, things never drain completely. A residue of light remains. On that night, waiting to hear that voice again, I looked out over the felled trees and shrubs and ridged boulders, in awe at how they were all faintly aglow. I thought of my father, who's a marine biologist, talking about swimming in water full of bioluminescent plants, and thought this must be like that.

(beat)

Of course, most bioluminescent creatures glow to lure in prey.

Then, the WOMAN CALLS again. It is still very far away, still not intelligible, but whatever she's saying clearly has three syllables.

EMILY (V.O.)

It was the sing-song cry of a woman calling a name--a pet's, a child's, a partner's-- I couldn't make it out, but I thought it might end in "El". Daniel, Nathaniel, Gabriel. I couldn't tell.

(beat)

I still don't know the name she calls. But I know hers, now.

The FROGS' CHORUS swells, then

CUT TO:

SCENE 4

A PHONE rings twice, then is answered:

EMILY

Old Forks Inn, this is Emily speaking!

EMILY (V.O.)

The next day, Gloria had me cover the phones in the office while she went upstairs to clean a few of the rooms in the main inn.

EMILY

Yes, I'd be happy to check on that booking for you. Just a second. Can you spell the last name for me? R-O-D-R-I-G-U-E-Z, got it. Looks like it's for the week starting July 21st, three adults, three children?

(beat)

You want it to be *four* kids now.

Okay. Just a second...

As Emily is TYPING, the DOOR opens and closes. We hear GLORIA enter, slightly OUT OF BREATH as she settles into a chair that CREAKS.

EMILY (CONT'D)

Okay, that's three adults, four kids. I've still got you in cabins 9 and 10. All set? Great, great, see you then. Bye!

A BEEP as Emily hangs up.

GLORIA
I wish I was that cheery.

EMILY
No you don't. How's it going upstairs?

GLORIA
Fine, fine. Almost got all the rooms done.

EMILY
Are you sure you don't want me to help? It could go faster. I can bring the phone.

GLORIA
Oh no, no. I want to make sure it's all right up there for you first.

EMILY
"All right up there" for me?

GLORIA
The storage closet. It's a disaster. I've been meaning to reorganize it for a while.

EMILY
I could help with that too.

GLORIA
No, really, it's okay. You're good on the phone. I hate it sometimes.

EMILY
Okay.
(beat)
Oh, I reserved the web address for the inn.

GLORIA
Already?

EMILY
Yeah, last night! It was only 12 bucks. Great, right?

GLORIA
Totally great.

EMILY

I'm going to look at options for building a site and get some prices for you to look at. I also looked at some of our local competitors...

Papers RUSTLE as Emily produces her list.

EMILY (CONT'D)

... and got some ideas for promo events. It's a pretty short list right now. I saw that there's a state university in Stahlburg, and I figured we could reach out to a couple of professors there to come give talks and things. We could have birdwatching experiences, astronomy nights, forest foraging experiences--

GLORIA

These sound reassuringly inexpensive.

EMILY

And sustainable! You could also have people from the theater department do Murder Mystery Weekends. And then I talked to my friend Melanie, like, what would you want to do if you were at a 200-year-old country inn? And she said with zero hesitation: Psychic Night.

(beat)

Not sold on that, one, huh?

GLORIA

I'm just thinking about the regulars. I don't think they'd go for psychics. They'd be unsettled.

EMILY

(crestfallen)

Oh. Okay.

GLORIA

The other ideas are amazing, though. Let's go walk around the place. Might give you more food for thought!

EMILY

That sounds great.

SCENE 5

BIRDSONG. Faint sound of CHILDREN playing, water SPLASHING.

EMILY (V.O.)

So off we went, walking through the lower floors of the inn. The restaurant, the bar, the basement-- where Oscar, the chef, has an actual side of bacon hanging and hundreds of bottles of wine-- and then out onto the grounds. Let me tell you this now: Aunt Gloria is the most amazing gardener. And May shows her creativity. All of the cottages had their own plant themes: Cabin 1 was honeysuckle, Cabin 2 had white roses, Cabin 3 huge bearded irises, Cabin 4 the most incredible lilac bushes, and so on. You could tell she was proud to show off all her work, especially by the pool. One side of the pool fence was close to the road, and she'd planted native grasses all along it, letting them grow tall so they provided a screen for the guests and a haven for every kind of pollinator imaginable: bees, butterflies, even hummingbirds.

The CHILDREN playing in the pool sound closer to us now.

EMILY (V.O.)

She introduced me to some of the guests who were using the pool--an older white couple and the Reginalds, an African-American family of four.

GLORIA

How's it going, folks?

MR. REGINALD

Can't complain. It's a beautiful day!

GLORIA

It sure is. This is my niece, Emily, she's helping out this summer.

EMILY

It's nice to meet you!

EMILY (V.O.)

We walked around the last few cabins. Gloria showed me the storage space under Cabin 11 where I could find cleaning equipment, the push lawnmower, a shop-vac, a few other things.

GLORIA

Oh, before I forget, these are yours.

There's a JINGLING of KEYS.

EMILY

Wow! Keys to the kingdom, huh?

GLORIA

Well, not to my apartment. But yeah, you've got the run of the place now.

A PHONE rings.

GLORIA (CONT'D)

Dammit. Hang on, it's the guy about the fireworks for the 4th of July.

(into the phone)

Hi Craig! What's up?

Gloria continues her half of the conversation, mostly "Uh-huh"s and "yeah"s, while Emily continues.

EMILY (V.O.)

We were standing by the woods while Gloria talked to the fireworks guy. That's when I noticed the treehouse. It's halfway up the big hemlock tree that stands between Cabin 12 and the pool. It's not a fancy treehouse, really. More of a fort, a shoebox-shaped thing with a ladder at one end and a slide at the other. The slide was covered in hemlock needles, and at the top of the slide, peering out of the opening, there was a boy in a white shirt. He was an African-American boy, maybe six or seven years old. The sun was shining in his hair, giving it a reddish tinge.

(MORE)

EMILY (V.O.) (CONT'D)

He had wide, worried eyes in a long face, and a deep cleft in his upper lip on the left side. We looked at one another for a moment, and I half-turned to Aunt Gloria to say something. Then the boy flinched. I understood: he wasn't supposed to be there. I wasn't supposed to see him. And all of a sudden I could imagine him, this boy with this disfigurement being teased or stared at and just wanting a moment of peace. So I smiled at him. I put my finger to my lips as if to say "shhh". He didn't smile back, but he nodded.

GLORIA

Em?

EMILY

Yo! Coming!

EMILY (V.O.)

I glanced back at the treehouse. The boy had vanished. I thought, *The next time I see you, I will be kind to you. I will help you not to look so worried for a little while.* Then I turned and followed Gloria back to the inn.

(beat)

If only I had known.

EPILOGUE

FROGS' CHORUS.

EMILY (V.O.)

Day is coming. I'll have to go back to where we hide. I'm not sure how I go from here to there. It just happens, even though I don't want it to. It's not even on the level of not wanting, really. Just a dull protest in my... nerves? Spirit? Whatever it is that I am here. Whatever it is that we are.

(beat)

"We", I said--the boy is here, too. It's strange to think there was a moment when I wanted so much to see him again.

(MORE)

EMILY (V.O.) (CONT'D)
More than strange: it seems insane.
I see him all day now, in the place
where we hide. In the place where
we wait in silence until the light
has all but drained from these
acres, and the frogs begin to call.
I know you can hear them. I hope
you heard me, too.

The FROGS' CHORUS swells one final time, to frenzied and
unimaginable volumes, then CUTS to silence.

END OF EPISODE ONE