

THE HUM OF A TELEVISION...THE NEWS
REPORTS LAYER ON TOP OF EACH OTHER

NEWSCASTER #1: (D-TELEVISION) Reports of violence erupted today in the research facility known as Limetown, located in White County, Tennessee, and home to over 300 residents...

NEWSCASTER #3: (D-TV) Emergency services have gathered to the isolated location as smoke rises from somewhere on the property...

NEWSCASTER #4: (D-TV) Indecipherable 911 call, as smoke rises from somewhere on the property (continues)...

LIA HADDOCK: (V.O.) The first time most people heard about Limetown, was on the night of February 8, 2004.

911 OPERATOR: (D-PHONE) 9-1-1, where is your emergency?

FRANTIC LIMETOWN #1: (D-PH) (garbled, digitally broken speech, screams can be heard in the distance)

911 OPERATOR: (D-PH) Hello?

FRANTIC LIMETOWN #1: (D-PH) Hi! Hello! Can you hear me?

911 OPERATOR: (D-PH) Yes m'am, how may I --

FRANTIC LIMETOWN #1: (D-PH) We need emergency services in Limetown:
ambulances, uh, firemen, police, dammit just send the
whole f*cking army --

911 OPERATOR: (D-PH) Ma'am, ma'am, I'm going to have to ask you to calm
down -- what is your emergency?

FRANTIC LIMETOWN #1: (D-PH) (OFF) CUT IT OFF, CUT IT --

LINE GOES DEAD...

911 OPERATOR: (D-PH) Ma'am? Are you there?

LIA HADDOCK: (V.O.) 17 minutes later, the first responders arrived to the
outside gate, followed shortly thereafter by local station
WVPK, where they uncovered the troubling reality: *no one*
was allowed access into Limetown.

NEWSCASTER #1: (D-TV) Samantha, can you tell us what's going on?

SOUNDS OF SIRENS, FOOT TRAFFIC, ANGRY,
CONFUSED CHATTER...

SAMANTHA: (D-TV) We're standing at the outer security gates of Limetown, and as you can see, there is a large gathering of police officers and firefighters here, but they are not being allowed into the facility.

NEWSCASTER #1: (D-TV) Not being *allowed*? What do you mean not being allowed? Who's not allowing them Samantha?

SAMANTHA: (D-TV) Well, we can't get anyone to speak to us right now, but we can see that there is a sizable security presence on the other side of the fence, and there seems to be an ongoing conversation between the --

POLICE OFFICER: (D-TV) (OFF) PLEASE STEP BACK INTO YOUR VEHICLES
--

SAMANTHA: (D-TV) (OFF) Can someone tell us what's going on?

POLICE OFFICER: (D-TV) (OFF) Get back in your vehicle, NOW.

SAMANTHA: (D-TV) Sorry, we're being told to clear the area now, there seems to be a lot of confusion.

LIA HADDOCK: (V.O.) The reason or reasons for their denied access remains a point of contention. The next morning, there was no visible activity within the community.

HELICOPTER ROTORS...

HELICOPTER PILOT: (D-HEADSET) There is no one on the grounds that I can see, but there does appear to be a large smoldering, uh, bon fire, I would guess. There's one large stake in the ground, hard to make out from here what I'm looking at.

LIA HADDOCK: (V.O.) For the next two days, Limetown was dormant. All attempts at contact failed. And on the morning of February 11th, the security team left their post. Police officers on the scene were prevented--presumably, by their superiors--from stopping the security team for questioning.

THE SOUND OF TWO LARGE PERSONNEL
TRUCKS DRIVING PAST...

SAMANTHA: (D-TV) The security at the front gate is now driving away from the facility -- SIR! SIR! CAN YOU TELL US WHAT IS HAPPEN --

LIA HADDOCK: (V.O.) The gate to Limetown was left open. What the world discovered was the complete disappearance of every man, woman, and child in Limetown. 327 people.

SOUNDS OF EMERGENCY SERVICES WORKING
IN AN AREA. FIRETRUCKS AND POLICE
VEHICLES MOVING IN, OFFICERS CLOSING
DOWN THE AREA.

SAMANTHA: (D-TV) Officer, what can you tell us about the investigation?

POLICE OFFICER: (D-TV) I need you to stay behind the tape, please.

SAMANTHA: (D-TV) Where *is* everyone?

POLICE OFFICER: (D-TV) Don't make me ask again.

FIREMAN: (D-TV) Nobody's here.

SAMANTHA: (D-TV) What do you mean by that?

FIREMAN: (D-TV) Everybody is just... Gone.

THE FIREMAN'S "GONE" DECAYS OVER SEVERAL
SECONDS, THEN SILENCE...

LIA HADDOCK: (V.O.) The story exploded, gaining international attention.

COLLAGE OF VOICES, STARTING WHERE
WRITTEN, AND CONTINUING TO CREATE LAYERS
OF SOUND...

BRITISH NEWS #2: : (D-TV) Our top story from the United States this evening:
Gone! The words of a firefighter on the scene --

SPANISH NEWSCASTER: (D-TV) (SPANISH NEWSCAST)

JAPANESE NEWSCASTER: (D-TV) (JAPANESE NEWSCAST)

GERMAN NEWSCASTER: (D-TV) (GERMAN NEWSCAST)

EYEWITNESS #1: (D-PH) There was a flying saucer a-hovering over it all --

EYEWITNESS #2: (D-PH) All's I'm saying is, they need to check those caves.

RADIO HOST #1: (D-RADIO) They have checked the caves, OK? Enough
with the caves.

TV MINISTER: (D-TV) May God have mercy on the lost souls of Limetown --

THE DIN OF VOICES LOWER...

LIA HADDOCK:

(V.O.) And then, just as suddenly as the story of Limetown landed, it evaporated back into the 24 hour news cycle, swallowed by the first legal same sex marriage in San Francisco, the announcement of successful human-cloning in South Korea, War in Iraq, War in Afghanistan, marriages, scandals, weather, drugs...The story of Limetown became a tragedy among countless other tragedies. A ghost story you can barely remember.

MUSICAL INTERLUDE...

LIA HADDOCK:

(V.O.) My name is Lia Haddock, and I am an investigative reporter with APR. I was 17 years old as the events of Limetown unfolded, and I became somewhat of a Limetown news junkie. In the spirit of full disclosure, it is also a personal story to me, as an uncle on my father's side--- granted, one I only ever heard stories about and never met beyond infancy---Dr. Emil Haddock, is counted as one of the missing. All things considered, it's fair to say that Limetown, and the questions it left in my family, played a large part in why I became a reporter in the first place. The infamous photo of the devastated father collapsed to his knees outside the gates of Limetown--his hands pulling his hair in outrage and confusion--hangs on the wall above my desk. It seems I was always *supposed* to tell the story. So, without any further delay, the following report is the first of a 7--that's right, 7!--part series on Limetown.

Starting with everything we know up to this point, and then quickly moving to the people it most effected, and what it means to them today. Our aim, simply: to remember, to honor, and to attempt to give a voice to the missing through the ones who loved them most and who cannot--who will not--forget them. Please stay tuned.

MUSICAL INTERLUDE...

LIA HADDOCK: (V.O.) What makes the Limetown tragedy unique--what makes it worth a continuing discussion in spite of the collective moving on--is a complete lack of context. In the 10 years since, no one group or individual has taken responsibility, no explanations have been uncovered or given with any credibility, and most tragically, no survivors have been found.

SOUNDS OF CONSTRUCTION, BULLDOZERS,
LARGE TRUCKS BACKING UP, HAMMERING...

LIA HADDOCK: (V.O.) Limetown was established in June of 2002 in an undeveloped region of White County in middle Tennessee. The township was owned by RheaLore, which we now know was a private corporation owned entirely by --

HUNTER GARRETT: (D-PH) Reynaud Bram Villard, or "R.B." Villard, as his father dubbed him for the sake of efficiency.

LIA HADDOCK: (V.O.) That's Hunter Garrett, Mr. Villard's biographer.

HUNTER GARRETT: (D-PH) Hello!

LIA HADDOCK: (V.O.) We'll get back to him in a bit.

TERRY HILKINS: Ground was broken on a corporate campus in the fall of 2002 --

LIA HADDOCK: (V.O.) This is Terry Hilkins.

TERRY HILKINS: I'm a reporter for the Spartan Sentinel in Sparta, Tennessee, and I have been, uh, loosely covering the Limetown story for the last, well, 10 years or so.

LIA HADDOCK (V.O.): And Terry told me that Limetown was originally built to house up to 1000 researchers, and their families.

TERRY HILKINS: --which is estimated to have cost somewhere between 1.7 and 2 billion dollars for the construction alone.

LIA HADDOCK: Whoa.

TERRY HILKINS: Yeah, whoa. And, like I said before, nothing about this construction was secret or hidden--those numbers are public record. There were the necessary permits and forms filled out, as well as the token acknowledgements to the public.

LIA HADDOCK: So what was the publicly stated purpose then?

TERRY HILKINS: Well, that was always a little vague, but I think their PR director---if they bothered to have one---would tell you that their intent was to gain a full understanding of the human brain.

LIA HADDOCK: (BEAT) What? A full understanding of the human brain? What does that mean?

TERRY HILKINS: I have no idea, Lia. None of us did. This was, from the beginning, R. B. Villard's passion play.

LIA HADDOCK: (V.O.) Here's Hunter Garrett again...

HUNTER GARRETT: (D-PH) He privately revealed to his friends that he felt, and this a quote, mind you, that this "could change the destiny of the species." Which explains the confidence he had in his investment.

LIA HADDOCK: Right.

HUNTER GARRETT: (D-PH) And the confidence he had in Oskar Totem. All of which, ultimately, makes him somewhat of a tragic figure.

LIA HADDOCK: He's Don Quixote.

HUNTER GARRETT: (D) Ha! Yes, that's quite right.

LIA HADDOCK: (V.O.) When Villard's relationship with Dr. Oskar Totem started remains unclear, but we do know that Dr. Totem was named the lead researcher of the facility before construction even began. Back to Terry...

TERRY HILKINS: The idea of an actual "town"---that is, a community with restaurants, bars, a hardware store, and even that ridiculous movie theatre, seems to have come from Dr. Totem, who felt he needed the touches of home to get the brightest minds in his field to flock to the, uh, wilds of White County, Tennessee.

LIA HADDOCK: It is rather remote.

TERRY HILKINS: It's not exactly South Beach.

LIA HADDOCK: (laughs) What did his press release say? You have that, right?

TERRY HILKINS: Yeah. (Clears throat). "We want this town to be a place that researchers and their families want to live, a place where work, family, and fun come together for the betterment of the world."

LIA HADDOCK: Wow, so he made it sound like Disneyland or something.

LIA HADDOCK: (V.O.) So, together with Dr. Totem's vision, and R.B. Villard's investment, it was built, and they did in fact come.

Researchers and technicians at every level of the neuroscience field---including my uncle---came from each corner of the globe, most leaving their current jobs, with others even coming out of retirement. There was a "buzz," as it was described to me by those familiar with that initial recruitment, but the cause went undefined to everyone on the outside.

MUSICAL INTERLUDE...

LIA HADDOCK: (V.O.) It should be made clear here that while the greatest mystery surrounding Limetown remains its final days, an almost equally frustrating question surrounds the town's *real* purpose. Why did it require such a massive undertaking? What about this particular research justified the amount of workers Dr. Totem felt was necessary to execute it? Speculation ranges from the basic curing of disease to the almost impossible task of brain mapping---the truth in this circumstance, however, remains uncertain.

CAMERAS CLICKING, A RIBBON CUTTING CEREMONY, POLITE CLAPPING.

LIA HADDOCK: (V.O.) The facility was opened on June 3, 2003. 327 people were housed there--not only those in the neuroscience field and their families, but other personnel to actually run a town. Cooks, janitors, landscapers, plumbers, electricians--

TERRY HILKINS: A lot of people pulled double duty.

LIA HADDOCK: So brain researcher by day, barber by night?

TERRY HILKINS: Well, they'd alternate days, but yes, basically. It was Mayberry, only it was run by some of the smartest people on the planet.

LIA HADDOCK: (V.O.) For a little over 8 months, things---as undefined as those "things" are for our purposes---appear to have run smoothly. Initially, there was mild regional interest in Limetown, but outside of some anonymous chatter in the smaller corners of the internet, things proceeded without any substantial public scrutiny. And then, very suddenly...

FRANTIC LIMETOWN #1: (D) We need emergency services in Limetown: ambulances, uh, firemen, police, dammit just send the f*cking army --

MONTAGE OF EARLIER ARCHIVAL EVENTS...

LIA HADDOCK: (V.O.) In the end, these are the *facts*: 327 men, women, and children have vanished. In the ten years since, not one survivor has been located. In 2007, "Nighttime Primetime," scored an interview with Kyle Wolinski, a contractor who stated he worked on security detail at Limetown.

NIGHTTIME JOURNALIST: (D-TV) So you're saying you have no idea what happened in those 3 days?

KYLE WOLINSKI: (D-TV) We were just told to keep everyone out, and shoot anyone who didn't listen. We rotated shifts at the perimeter barracks, day-shift, night-shift. Uh, that morning, we were just told to leave the gates.

NIGHTTIME JOURNALIST: (D-TV) Was there no security detail in the town itself?

KYLE WOLINSKI: (D-TV) No. Not from our group.

NIGHTTIME JOURNALIST: (D-TV) Who told you to leave then?

KYLE WOLINSKI: (D-TV) I don't know.

NIGHTTIME JOURNALIST: (D-TV) You don't know?

KYLE WOLINSKI: (D-TV) We never knew. A voice on a phone.

NIGHTTIME JOURNALIST: (D-TV) Then how were you paid?

KYLE WOLINSKI: (D-TV) In cash.

LIA HADDOCK: (V.O.) Mr. Wolinski also revealed in the interview that he and his fellow contractors had been held in detention for 18 months at Guantanamo Bay for "questioning," an accusation later confirmed by the State Department. Mr. Wolinski could not be reached for comment for this story. His current whereabouts are unknown.

MUSICAL TRANSITION...

LIA HADDOCK: (V.O.) And then there's the aforementioned "R.B. Villard," the former telecommunications titan and one of Forbes' magazine's most wealthy men on the planet, the man who personally bankrolled the entire Limetown project---the man who should know more than anyone---revealed almost the least when called before congress in May of 2004. Replayed here is the most infamous exchange with Minority Leader Pitney in which an emphatic dodge of a direct question became his last known message to the public.

CONGRESSWOMAN: (D) Mr. Villard, you've yet to provide a single useful piece of information about the purposes of this institution. Are you honestly going to sit here and act like you don't know anything?

HUNDREDS OF CAMERA SHUTTERS CLACKING, A HUSH AS VILLARD BEGINS TO SPEAK.

R.B. VILLARD: (D) Congresswoman, I couldn't expect you to understand the invective and hysteria I've endured over the previous three months—I suppose it's not so different from the vitriol I've endured throughout my entire career. I still believe that, one day, the work of RheaLore will be assigned its rightful place in the annals of history. And you Congresswoman, you and the rest of the inept 108th will go down in the annals of nothing.

GASPS FROM THE ROOM, HUNDREDS OF
CAMERA SHUTTERS CLACKING. BANGING OF A
GAVEL, AUDIENCE MUMBLING..

CONGRESSWOMAN: Mr. Villard, what do you mean still believe?!

CAMERAS, MURMURS, A RUSHED GRAB OF A
MICROPHONE

R.B. VILLARD'S ATTORNEY: My client pleads the fifth with all further testimony.

GASPS AND SHOCK, CAMERA SHUTTERS,
GAVEL INCREASES...

LIA HADDOCK: (V.O.) R.B. Villard could also not be reached for comment, as he has notoriously hidden from public view since the hearing.

MUSICAL INTERLUDE...

LIA HADDOCK: (V.O.) Then there's Dr. Oskar Totem, the relatively young neuroscientist in who R.B. Villard invested. I could find no one to speak on record about his life, but this is what we know... Oskar Totem worked in a private lab based out of Sydney, Australia, before being named the head researcher at Limetown. He has been universally described as "brilliant," but also "volatile" and "difficult to work with." What cannot be denied is his almost childlike optimism.

Played here is a clip from a speech he gave in 2002 to the International Neuroscience Winter Conference in Solden, Austria...

DR. OSKAR TOTEM: ...Because I am an optimist when it comes to my fellow man. I do not think we are as limited, or as powerless as we sometimes feel. We shouldn't look to the stars and feel smaller--we should look to the stars in defiance and be able reveal the power, the magnitude of the uniquely gifted human mind. The HUMAN mind. There is a mystery there we must live in, must thrive in--it is there, in the darkness, where we will find the light that unites us all. Thank you.

AUDIENCE APPLAUSE...

LIA HADDOCK: (V.O.) By all accounts, Dr. Oskar Totem was a remarkable man, revered by some, feared by many, but respected by all within his field. But, as stated earlier, no one would go on record for any part of the story, perhaps out of fear of a potential link of their name to his. Despite his fall from grace, Dr. Totem remains remarkable for another reason: his were the only human remains found in the town on the day of the disappearance---his teeth were recovered from the charred remnants at the base of the stake on the execution site. It is presumed he was burned alive. "Why" is the question no one can answer: the question no one can answer at nearly every turn of Limetown.

MUSICAL INTERLUDE...

LIA HADDOCK: (V.O.) The only meaning of Limetown remains subjective, something each individual must piece together from the chaos, and project back onto its blank canvas. It is a tragedy---like any real tragedy---that forces us to confront our worst fears, and exposes an underlying hope that there is a larger narrative to everything. That there must be meaning at all. The moment it hits you, the same moment you attempt to rebuild again---for better or worse---is where I started when I spoke with families of the victims. While I did have a family member living in Limetown, because of familial disputes and distance, he was never much more than a man who had to be pointed out to me in photographs. So out of respect for their wishes, neither the family members I spoke with, or the victims will be identified in this montage of voices. It is my opinion that their pain and confusion needs no formal introduction.

GRIEVING WOMAN #1: I was standing in my kitchen.

GRIEVING MAN #1: I was in my office, just sitting down with my coffee.

GRIEVING WOMAN #2: My sister called me in my car.

GRIEVING MAN #2: I was sitting right here, where I'm talking to you.

GRIEVING MAN #3: I was at the grocery store--

GRIEVING WOMAN #1: I still see her face everywhere. I don't want to, and then I worry if I don't.

GRIEVING MAN #2: It's like someone just... I don't know, took my arm from me. How do you live without an arm? You keep living, but everything is just that much worse.

GRIEVING WOMAN #3: I've had issues since his disappearance. I can't feel...
(Getting emotional) I'm sorry.

GRIEVING WOMAN #2: That car was hers. It's sitting out back behind the pines. We covered it with a tarp about a year after she was gone. I like to go inside and just sit.

GRIEVING MAN #1: She said, "Dad, I'm scared." That's all. That's the last thing she ever said to me. I am haunted by the ghost of a another present.

GRIEVING WOMAN #3: He told me he was sorry. He didn't say why. I think they knew something. No one can convince me different.

GRIEVING WOMAN #1: I couldn't understand her. Bad reception. My last conversation with my daughter had bad cell reception.

GRIEVING MAN #3: I dream about him. He talks to me. We talk about everything, nothing. He says he's doing well. When I wake up, that's the reason I'll fight to do it all over again. I know one day I'll see him.

LIA HADDOCK: (V.O.) When each family member was asked, "Do you think your loved one is still alive?" there was a surprisingly unanimous response.

ALL GRIEVING FAMILY: (some variation of yes, absolutely, no doubt in my mind.)

LIA HADDOCK: (V.O.) I spoke with now-retired Federal Agent Ron Calhoun -
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RON CALHOUN: (D-PH) (overlapping) Ron Calhoun, and I worked with the Federal Bureau of Investigation during the Limetown incident.

LIA HADDOCK: (V.O.) Ron told me that this sense of optimism shared by the victims was pretty standard in an unresolved case like this.

RON CALHOUN: (D-PH) Yes ma'am. When people don't see a body, and have no reason to think that their loved one has been harmed, it is pretty standard for the grieving party to hold out hope, at least in my experience. As they should, specific to this case.

LIA HADDOCK: You personally believe they are still alive?

RON CALHOUN: (D-PH) Yes ma'am.

LIA HADDOCK: Why do you believe that?

RON CALHOUN: (D-PH) Well, I worked for the FBI for nearly 32 years. And in 32 years time, you can see some pretty troubling things, to put it delicately. You grow a pretty thick skin to most stuff. And I have worked many crime scenes involving disappearances or kidnappings or other events of that nature, but nothing--*nothing*--sticks with me like Limetown. There was *nothing* left behind. We dusted for prints, combed every surface for hairs, fingernails, hell, even some spit somewhere on a toothbrush... (PAUSE) And look, look, we have visual proof that there was a large population on that site February 8, and on February 11, it's like no one ever was.

LIA HADDOCK: What do you make of that?

RON CALHOUN: (D-PH) (PAUSE) That this was purposeful. It was following a plan, and it was done... Masterfully. I have *never* seen anything like it.

LIA HADDOCK: I'm sorry, I don't understand how---how could 327 people be moved under complete surveillance without anyone noticing?

RON CALHOUN: (D-PH) Well, now you've hit my cut-off of understanding.

LIA HADDOCK: No ideas? No theories?

RON CALHOUN: (D-PH) As far as I'm concerned, those yahoos selling plastic alien ships and uh, rapture trinkets out next to Limetown have as good an idea as any. Not a day goes by I don't think of it. Did we miss something? Did we *all* miss something? I don't know. I don't know.

MUSICAL INTERLUDE...

SOUNDS OF TWO PEOPLE -- A MAN AND A WOMAN -- WALKING THROUGH GRASS AND THICKET CONSISTENT WITH A PLACE MAN HAS ABANDONED TO THE WILD.

LIA HADDOCK: (V.O.) My first view of Limetown -- what remains of it -- was on a bright autumn day last October. I was with Terry Hilkins again, this time in the field...

TERRY HILKINS: It's just over the ridge here. You can see the top of the central research facility.

CHATTER CONTINUES AS TERRY AND LIA WALK THROUGH THE BRUSH, VO LAID OVER.

LIA HADDOCK: (V.O.) My first impression of Limetown: that's it?

LIA HADDOCK: Oh, wow, yeah, I see it. It's a lot smaller than I imagined it would be.

TERRY HILKINS: Yeah, that's pretty common for people--camera adds 10 pounds, I think. This electrified, barbed-wire perimeter fence is new--the original perimeter was about a mile back--but otherwise, you take away the decade of unchecked wildlife, and the, uh, youthful vandalism, and you're seeing it. That is Limetown.

LIA HADDOCK: The houses literally all have white picket fences.

TERRY HILKINS: (laughs) Yes. The dream within a dream.

LIA HADDOCK: Can we get closer?

TERRY HILKINS: Oh, absolutely.

FOOTSTEPS GOING FROM THICKET TO ROAD
COVERED IN LEAVES.

LIA HADDOCK: (V.O.) We walked through the abandoned streets towards the central research facility, past the beautiful homes with their fenced in yards now turned against them, past the shops, the restaurants---all of them empty, hollow.

LIA HADDOCK: So where did the name, "Limetown," actually come from?

TERRY HILKINS: Uh, from the caves. All these houses are connected to the caves they are built over for temperature control.

The facility itself is built deep into the earth, presumably using the caves as a way to cheaply keep their massive electronic construct, uh, things from overheating. So, limestone caves, town built sort of into the caves... Of course, the rumors go that the caves might have been used for other reasons, but...

LIA HADDOCK: What other reasons?

TERRY HILKINS: Well, anything you can think of. There's an entire conspiracy theory industry built on the main road a ways back if you're looking for campfire spook stories. They have shirts, tree ornaments---all kinds of stuff. There was actually a problem with people getting lost in the surrounding cave systems because they fancied themselves spelunkers, I guess. They actually had to seal several cave entrances to keep people out.

LIA HADDOCK: (V.O.) The domed research facility is at the far end of town, built directly into the hill, with only its front end visible. It almost feels dynamic, as if the structure is actively crawling from the earth---or being dragged back down into it again. Everything about it says: "Keep. Out."

TERRY HILKINS: Anyway, as you can see, this has been closed down to the public. Well, it was never really open to the public, but now...

TERRY LIFTS A CHAIN FROM A PADLOCKED
DOOR AND DROPS IT AGAIN.

LIA HADDOCK: I have to say, this is a pretty eerie place.

TERRY HILKINS: Well, as soon as this facility could have been boarded up and locked away---it was. The only reason it hasn't been destroyed outright is to give the illusion of hope. Which is to say, you are not alone in feeling spooked.

LIA HADDOCK: Hope is the last thing I feel standing here.

TERRY HILKINS: Yeah, it's not much to look at, that's for sure. You wanna check out one of the houses?

FOOTSTEPS ON LINOLEUM, AS TERRY AND LIA
NOW STAND INSIDE A HOUSE.

LIA HADDOCK: (V.O.) Standing in the one of the homes, I was struck with how normal everything was. Not just furniture arrangement or other aesthetic touches of domesticity, but the overwhelming feeling of being a voyeur in someone else's home while they quickly ran to the grocery store. Photos on the walls, clothes in the closets--even junk mail sitting on the kitchen table.

LIA LIFTS MAIL FROM THE TABLE.

LIA HADDOCK: They got mail?

TERRY HILKINS: Sure, yeah.

LIA HADDOCK: I guess I just assumed they didn't get mail.

TERRY HILKINS: Why do you say that?

LIA HADDOCK: I don't know, it just seems very...

TERRY HILKINS: Against the idea of the entire venture as you know it?

LIA HADDOCK: Yes. Like these people were supposed to be off the grid.

TERRY HILKINS: Right, and nothing says "grid" quite like a Sears catalogue. The mail would come in one very large delivery to the guard shack we walked past by the fence, and then they would distribute it within the town themselves. No one was hiding. That gets lost in time a bit: this town was not hidden from the world. It was built in plain sight, it operated in plain sight. We knew *something* unique was happening, but no one really cared. Not until after, of course. Why would they? It's hard to think about now, but these were real people. *Are* real people. Sorry, I'm an optimist.

SOUNDS OF CONTINUED WALKING THROUGH
THE HOUSE, THE OPENING AND CLOSING OF
CABINET DOORS.

LIA HADDOCK: (V.O.) To say these houses were pristine images of the past would not be accurate, however. Animals and intruders alike had certainly taken their shots before the lockdown of the site. But the most noticeable thing, and the most difficult thing to ignore--

TERRY HILKINS: The smell, right?

LIA HADDOCK: What *is* that?

TERRY HILKINS: It's dry rot. All the living quarter houses have them.

LIA HADDOCK: Is that due to the abandonment, or...

TERRY HILKINS: That's a part of it, yes. But the full answer is actually pretty silly. The designer of this city was given a pretty healthy budget to work with. That meant constructing this town of beautiful, well-built homes, made of the best materials. However, in doing all this--for whatever reason--they forgot to put kick-out flashing on the gutters. A simple oversight. But every time it rained, water would feed right into the walls. Dry rot is a misnomer---it comes from wet conditions and then, if left untreated, spreads like cancer. Contractors refer to it as such.

While the people lived here, I'm sure not many of them noticed. Not enough time to. But over the years since, all these houses have become just riddled with it. These beautiful shrines to the American dream, just rotting from the inside out. All of these brilliant minds, all of these geniuses of industry, you know, the future this, the future that... And they didn't plan for rain.

MUSICAL INTERLUDE...

LIA AND TERRY WALK THROUGH A FIELD...

LIA HADDOCK: (V.O.) When we arrived to the site of the execution, all that remained was the stake buried in the ground, a dark memorial to the madness of that night. Seemingly out of reverence, no plants surround the base. The only reminder of tragedy can be found in the darkened wood of the stake from the flames. Terry remained silent as we got closer, his demeanor changing from tour guide to reverent observer.

LIA HADDOCK: What do you feel standing here?

TERRY HILKINS: I feel... Exactly how I feel about all of this.

LIA HADDOCK: Which is how?

TERRY HILKINS: (PAUSE) Like I've stared at something too long. And I don't know a damn thing.

MUSICAL INTERLUDE...

LIA HADDOCK: (V.O.) And that was supposed to conclude part 1 of my report. Then something happened...

CELL PHONE RINGING...

LIA HADDOCK: Hello? (PAUSE)

TERRY HILKINS: (D-PH) Sorry, my heart is pounding...

LIA HADDOCK: It's OK, just take your time.

TERRY HILKINS: (D-PH) (LONG PAUSE, DEEP BREATHS) I, uh... Whew, how do I start? OK. I have someone you need to talk to.

LIA HADDOCK: What do you mean?

TERRY HILKINS: (D-PH) She's on the other line.

LIA HADDOCK: Who?

TERRY HILKINS: (D-PH) Lia. It's a survivor. She wants to speak to you. And only you. (BEAT) I'm going to put her on now...

LIA HADDOCK: But Terry, I don't understand, why does she want to talk to me? I feel like we should tell someone --

SURVIVOR: (D-PH) NO... (Clears throat) No.

LIA HADDOCK: Excuse me?

SURVIVOR: (D-PH) (exhales deeply) Ms. Haddock. You and I. We are the only ones to speak. No one else. I'm sorry it has to be this way.

LIA HADDOCK: How can I believe you?

SURVIVOR: (D-PH) I'll leave the details with Mr. Hilkins.

LINE GOES DEAD...

LIA HADDOCK: Terry? Is this real?

TERRY HILKINS: (D-PH) (BEAT) Are you still recording?

SILENCE ENDS THE PODCAST...