

the Magical History of Knox County

Episode Five

NED: Hello, listeners, and thank you for tuning in to the Magical History of Knox County. As you might have guessed from the fact that the voice greeting you is distinctly higher than usual, Mordecai has taken most of the day off. It's...been a week for the both of us. So, uh, yea this is where we'd usually have some sort of half-assed banter, I guess, but since there's no one here to argue with I guess I'll dive right in. After last week's show, Mordecai decided to do a story on the Sleeping Giant Books and Thrift Shop, a tiny shack of a store somewhere between Gambier and Apple Valley. Here's one of his recordings from that attempt.

Tape starts. Outdoor ambience.

MORDECAI (V/O): The Sleeping Giant could easily be mistaken for a dilapidated barn if you didn't know what you were looking for. The outside is all splintery brown clapboard that used to be painted red, or maybe green, and the sign is so faded I can barely make it out.

Tape stops.

NED: Mordecai had gotten some calls about some strange disappearances around the county Gertrude Lamont, Lila Yarbourd, and Stanley Marchand, all of whom were elderly and lived by themselves, had been reported missing by neighbors who thought they had died. But when police investigated, no bodies were found, though all three had left windows open and each home showed signs of a struggle. Simple case of kidnapping. Maybe. But Mordecai had heard rumors of weirdnesses happening around the Giant, so he went to check it out

Tape starts. A bell rings as Mordecai opens a door. He walks into the store.

MORDECAI (V/O): The inside of the Giant is nothing like what you'd expect. There is stuff packed floor to ceiling, some of it arranged on shelves, but most of it piled up in corners in such a haphazard way that if you moved something, you'd cause an avalanche. One pile extended out from the wall and had an old door laid across the top this served as the counter. An elderly woman sat behind it, her gray hair up in a knot. She wore a long, faded cotton dress and heavy boots.

MORDECAI: Excuse me, but are you... Wendell?

WENDELL: Well, yes. What's the matter with you?

MORDECAI: Oh, I just... I thought I was looking for a man.

WENDELL: Well that's what you get for assuming things, isn't it?

Tape stops.

NED: They went back and forth like this for a while. Eventually, Mordecai got around to asking Wendell about the rumors that the disappearances were connected to the store, and it went just as you would expect.

Tape starts.

WENDELL: Now are you saying that you think I kidnapped a couple of little old ladies and a grayhaired coot and have them hiding down in the basement or something?

MORDECAI: No! I just...well people mentioned you might know something about all that and I wanted to make sure I checked into everything, these are hardly the first disappearances around here...

WENDELL: Now listen here, I know you probably have everyone breathin' down your neck tryin' to figure out what happened to the girl who used to have your job, but I'm tellin' you you're barkin' up the wrong tree. I haven't seen any old people 'cept myself and Karl, who lives

downstairs, and I certainly haven't seen anything that might've done anything nasty to anyone in a long, long time.

MORDECAI: I'm sorry you felt accused.

WENDELL: Don't you think anything of it. Just go on back to your studio and keep lookin'. It'll all come out in the wash someday.

Tape stops.

NED: And that's all there is to it, aside from 15 minutes of blank tape. I thought that was pretty odd, because Mordecai never turns his recorder off, but when I saw him the next day, he was acting even weirder than usual. Here's the studio recording from two days ago.

Tape starts.

NED: Did your tape recorder die? You didn't record anything after Wendell sent you home yesterday.

MORDECAI: I'm sorry.

NED: You don't need to be sorry, it's just unusual for you.

MORDECAI: How are you?

NED: I'm...fine. Are you ok?

MORDECAI: Of course, I'm a reporter.

NED: And that makes you...fine?

MORDECAI: Ned, leave it.

Tape stops.

NED: He acted like that for the rest of the day, which was worrying enough, but when he didn't show up for work the next day, I got really concerned. Since the Sleeping Giant was the last place I could confirm he had been, I decided to go down there myself and see if Wendell knew anything.

Tape starts. Same door and bell from earlier. Ned walks into the shop.

WENDELL: Hi there, Ned. Didn't figure you'd be doing much reporting anymore.

NED (V/O): Abigail had done several stories on Wendell, so she was a familiar face to me. For those who are unfamiliar, Mordecai's description was generous. The store is a literal hovel, filled with anything you could possibly think up.

NED: Well, usually, no, but Mordecai hasn't been to the studio in a few days. This was the last place he went on assignment. Did he mention anything to you?

WENDELL: And why would you think that?

NED: I...I just thought maybe you'd seen something. He was acting really weird after he got back from the interview.

WENDELL: Possible I was a little hard on him, but I didn't much like him. Not very personable, is he?

NED: What are you talking about? Did he say something?

WENDELL: He said a lot of things, came down here all but accusin' me of kidnappin' people. Right disrespectful.

NED: Wendell, he just said that he'd heard that your store is kind of an odd place, he probably just misunderstood what people meant. I'm sure he didn't mean--

A door rattles, then an otherworldly sucking sound. Something falls.

NED: What was that?

WENDELL: Delivery, sounds like.

Wendell walks somewhere. A door opens. She picks something up.

WENDELL: "Sigils, Marks, and Symbols in Aleutian Literature." Huh. Karl oughta get a kick out of that, haven't had any books about earthly places in a while.

NED: Wendell...could you maybe explain what just happened?

WENDELL: What, the cabinet?

NED: Mmhm.

WENDELL: Well, to be honest I didn't really know what I was gettin' into when I took over the Giant. Previous owner had a big tarp hangin' on the wall where the cabinet is now and just said it covered a 'delivery door.' I didn't ask any questions I just thought it was a hole in the wall.

NED: But it wasn't?

WENDELL: I don't really understand it myself. Karl--he's the fella that lives downstairs--told me I'd better not get too close to it, but a'course I did anyway.

NED: What happened?

WENDELL: I moved the tarp back, and the second I did the whole thing got sucked into the weirdest hole I've ever seen didn't seem to have any dimension to it, you know, it just looked...painted on, almost. But it was makin' these sounds, kind of like when you hold a seashell up to your ear. I tried to stick my hand through and my whole body fell in, like the hole came forward to swallow me up. I'm not sure what happened after that, but it eventually spat me back out. I woke up on the floor two months later wearing a sombrero and lederhosen.

NED: Uh...what?

WENDELL: Dunno. But eventually Abigail came down to do a story on me, and between her and Karl and that Abraham Young character, they figured out it was some sort of hole in reality of spacetime or someother--I don't pretend to understand. Basically it drags things out of other realities and spits 'em out here. But it means I don't have to buy any inventory, so I don't mind too much.

NED: I remember this story now. You built the cabinet so it wouldn't just vomit things out into your store.

WENDELL: Right. Well, that was fine for a while, but lately the tear seems to have gone...weird. Like, dark.

NED: Weird how? You told Abigail it was mostly just odd knick knacks and weird little animals. What, you getting llamas with three heads instead of two?

WENDELL: I didn't want to tell your new reporter about all this, but I figure you've got your head on straight. Anyway, you probably remember some of the things Abigail talked about in her story? Talking moose, bumper stickers for political candidates who never ran, a five star review for Space Jam?

NED: Mhm.

WENDELL: Well those are the kinds of things I used to get. Occasionally something real weird would come through and I'd have to throw it back, like that awful giant mushroom with fangs, but mostly I just let it go if it was livin' or sold it if it wasn't.

NED: Well, that explains a lot.

WENDELL: But lately the stuff that's been coming out of there...it's just not right. First, it was a weird little bundle of twigs that had been tied into sort of a dreamcatcher thing. It looked like someone had pulled the veins from an animal to tie all the pieces together. It's on the shelf right over there if you wanna see it.

NED: Jesus!

WENDELL: It looks like one of them things Abraham Young studies--a sigil. So I called him and asked him to take a look.

NED: Did he know what it was?

WENDELL: No, didn't seem to know exactly, but he was really against the idea of throwing it back into the cabinet. Said he wasn't sure what that'd do and not to do anything until he figured it out. So I left it. Still hasn't gotten back to me.

NED: Well that's comforting.

WENDELL: But then came a creepy little doll that looked like a zombie from an old horror movie. It growled when I got too close to it. I caged it and sold it to some greasy guy that lives over on Elm. Prefer not to think what he wanted with such a thing.

NED: Eugh.

WENDELL: Mhm. But it was just weird and unsettling things like that at first, just looked like maybe I'd got hooked up to some dark place or somethin'.

NED: Uhm, excuse me?

WENDELL: Happens. Occasionally you'll get stuff that all seems connected to each other. So after the zombie I got a whole herd of giant vampire bats, a set of voodoo dolls that looked just like Karl and me. And then came the creature Karl saw...

NED: What kind of creature?

WENDELL: I don't wanna talk about that. I won't talk about it, actually. But Karl might. He's the one that saw it, anyway. You can ask him, if ya want. Basement's thataway. Take this book with you and give to him.

A door opens and ned walks downstairs. Pages turning.

NED (V/O): Wendell pointed me down this rickety flight of stairs, lined the whole way down with books on every subject. They almost seemed to move. There was a gentle rustling sound. At the bottom was a tall, spindly man with the longest fingers I've ever seen. He was wearing old-fashioned clothes that were clean but very scruffy-looking, and he was rustling through even more books on shelves that wound their way through a huge basement. It was way too damp for books down there, with a dirt floor and almost no light. This was Karl in his natural habitat.

KARL: Oh, hello! Did Wendell send you?

NED: Yes, she did. She said to give you this book?

KARL: Oh, excellent! Here, give her this on your way out.

NED: This is seventeen cents and a dead moth.

KARL: Yes, I buy books from the cabinet as a form of rent.

NED: Uh...huh. What are you doing down here? Are you an employee?

KARL: No, not really. I'm more of a caretaker. I take all of the books that come through the cabinet and curate them down here. Sort of a rent replacement deal. And who are you? Are you a customer?

NED: No! I'm a..I'm a reporter. From Magical History of Knox County?

KARL: Then why would Wendell send you down here?

NED: To ask you about the thing that came through the cabinet. She said you saw it, but I don't know what she was talking about...

Ned coughs.

NED: God, how can you stay down here with all this dust?

KARL: You get used to it. I've kept the books down here a long, long time. I'm quite the book lover, and these books need me. Spellbooks, occult manuals, tarot guides, all from the tear upstairs. The library would never keep them. They can't be released to the general public since we're not sure what effect they'd have in this universe. So I stay here to catch them and keep them safe.

NED: Is that all you do?

KARL: It's a full time job! Between organizing the books and caring for the worms...

NED: Worms?

KARL: Bookworms. They came through the tear once, too. They eat through the books and thrive on the magical energy stored there. In turn, they memorize what they eat. After a while they started to trust me, and they became very helpful little research assistants.

NED: And so you...feed them?

KARL: Yes, and ensure they don't get exposed to the wrong books. If they got set loose on the public library, for example, they'd likely get very sick. Nothing very nutritious about those awful romance novels they keep in there.

NED: So, you're a worm-censor.

KARL: In a sense, yes. I prefer to think of myself more as a worm nutritionist.

NED: Oh. Well do the worms have anything to say about the cabinet lately? Wendell told me you saw a creature?

KARL: Oh, yes, that. The worms have helped me to suss out what it is I saw, and for quite some time I hoped they were wrong. But they never are.

NED: Listen, buddy, I've had a very weird day and this isn't even supposed to be my job, if someone doesn't start giving me some straight answers here I'm going to jump through the cabinet myself.

KARL: Well you certainly are...impatient, aren't you?

NED: No, I'm tired. What happened, Karl?

KARL: About a month ago, I was up very late after Wendell had gone home, working in the stacks. At maybe two in the morning, I heard a terrible noise. I didn't think much of it initially, as Wendell had started locking the cabinet doors to keep living things from crawling out unsupervised. But then the worms started to get very upset, hiding in the books and such, which is never a good sign.

NED: No?

KARL: No, no. Since they know so much about different parts of timespace, they have a tendency to know when things are dangerous long before any human really understands what's happening. So I went to investigate, but before I got upstairs, the cabinet doors burst open.

NED: What did you do?

KARL: What any reasonable person would do, I ran back downstairs for my gun. I'd never seen something that violent come from the cabinet and I was afraid it might come after me.

NED: Reasonable.

KARL: I sat at the top of the stairs, watching from under the door to get an idea of what I'm up against. It was more silent than I've ever heard anything be like dead air on the radio. Even the worms were totally still. But then I suddenly got the feeling of being in the presence of something much bigger than myself my ears rang, so loudly I thought my eardrums would burst, and my vision got fuzzy like I was going to pass out. It was like my brain was shutting down, and I felt my body tingle and all my hair stand on end.

NED: Are you sure you didn't electrocute yourself?

KARL: Everything was still for a full minute. Then...it slithered out.

NED: Like a snake?

KARL: That's what I thought at first. But then I saw that it was an arm, coal black and scaly, its hand reaching along the floor. Then came another arm, and a head and a body falling out after it. It looked like a corpse that had been half-cremated, but its limbs were so long...more than twice the length they should've been. It lay on the floor for a second, but then it started crawling toward the basement door.

NED: Oh god.

KARL: I started to crawl backward down the stairs as fast as I could, but it got there first...and its long, spindly fingers came under the door and touched my face. I didn't worry about noise after that. I ran to the basement and climbed on top of the bookshelf. The worms were all clustered in a corner near the ceiling. They clearly knew what this thing was. It broke down the door, and I could hear its limbs dragging down the stairs.

It dragged its hand along the shelf until it touched my foot. I looked at it, and it made this horrible noise, like its bones were cracking and its skin was tearing and then its face rearranged itself until it was like looking in a mirror. It opened its mouth, but it couldn't say anything. No words came out, just this wheezy sound like it was being strangled. It seemed to get angry, and it looked like it was going to attack me, but I shot at it and it just ran away.

NED: What did you do?

KARL: Stayed there, until I could be relatively sure it was gone. Then I asked the worms to help me figure out what it was. They showed it to me right away.

NED: They really knew, didn't they?

KARL: Opened right to it in an old field guide. It's a shapeshifter.

NED: I didn't think those were real.

KARL: So you've heard of them?

NED: Only in, like, ghost stories. "And then she woke up and it wasn't her boyfriend!" kind of things.

KARL: Huh... Anyway, they aren't common. At least in our world, they usually aren't.

NED: What are they, then?

KARL: They're the only known physical creature that can take on the exact appearance of another creature, even their voice and tendencies. Occasionally spirits and apparitions can do that, but even then, not as perfectly.

NED: But how do they do that?

KARL: Here.

Books rustle.

KARL: It's their hunting methods. They come through tears like the one in the cabinet, and for the first while, it just finds victims that won't be missed so it can eat right away and build up its strength. But eventually, it finds a victim that it stalks, to learn their mannerisms and some of the phrases they're likely to use.

NED: Well, that's different.

KARL: It gets worse. Once it can imitate that person, it catches them and takes them back to its nest and takes their place, slowly learning the mannerisms of more and more people until it's got a stockpile. Then it carries its victims back to its home through the tear.

NED: How can it use the tear however it wants when Wendell ended up with a sombrero when she tried it?

KARL: Shapeshifters don't seem to be bound by the same rules we are, unfortunately. According to the worms they build permanent nests between the tears, so they obviously have some control over how they travel between them.

NED: So you just let this thing loose on the county without telling anyone? Why didn't you call someone?

KARL: I would have, but I didn't know anything about it yet and it was wearing my face! I didn't want the police out looking for some hideous monster that was impossible to distinguish from myself. Of course, it doesn't act exactly like the person it's mimicking, but it's close enough.

NED: So, would someone be able to tell if their friend had been kidnapped by the shifter?

KARL: Maybe, but it's unlikely. A shapeshifter can say anything it's heard its victim say, but it can't invent phrases, kind of like a mockingbird. That means that it can't go out and interact much with others, so it seems like the victim has suddenly become very depressed or withdrawn. Could easily be mistaken for a foul mood.

NED: But wouldn't people notice if suddenly entire families were missing?

KARL: Of course, but the situation would likely be totally out of hand by then. Shapeshifters are kind of harbingers of chaos. They're great at hiding when no one's looking for them, but not so much when people catch on. So they wait, looking for places where there's already something bad going on. That way their victims are less likely to be missed.

NED: Well, that's just great.

KARL: The shapeshifter can also be a means of clearing the way for greater chaos. When everyone's panicked because they can't trust their friends, their family, have no idea if their kids are safe, if their kids are even really their kids...there's suddenly a surge of negative, terrified energy all throughout the area, yes?

NED: I would think so.

KARL: So, because the ambient energy in a magical area affects the efficacy of magic in that area...

NED: Oh my god.

KARL: Right. After the shifter has gone through a community, finding food for itself and creating this very dark atmosphere...

NED: What, what happens?

KARL: ...I'm not sure. The accounts always stop at that point.

NED: Can you stop it?

KARL: It's hard to say. The negative energy is likely already building, so even if you did, there's likely a bigger problem waiting just around the corner.

Tape stops.

NED (V/O): I left Karl's basement and called Lumily and Divodit.

Phone rings.

LUMILY: Hello?

NED: Hi, Lumily, listen: You know anything about shapeshifters?

LUMILY: Yes, but of course I've never seen one in person. Why do you ask?

NED: I think I might be able to help you with that.

NED (V/O): Lumily and Divodit agreed to let me sleep in the Beastiarium in order to avoid being caught alone with the thing until we figured out how to catch it. As soon as we arrived, though, they decided that they'd sit up with me. I kept my recorder running. Mordecai was clearly rubbing off on me.

Tape starts.

DIVODIT: There! That should take care of it.

LUMILY: Take care of what? You plugged in a tea kettle.

DIVODIT: The lack of tea, obviously. Nadezhda, you want any of this?

NED: No, thanks.

LUMILY: She doesn't drink tea, Divodit. You ask her every time she's here, and she always says no.

DIVODIT: Can't blame me for trying to reform her, can you?

NED: I really don't think you're ever going to convince me to drink hot leaf water.

DIVODIT: Have it your way, then.

LUMILY: So, Ned, how long was Mordecai missing before you realized he was gone?

NED: I dunno. Probably three days.

LUMILY: That's an awfully long time. And you've heard nothing from him since?

NED: No, nothing.

LUMILY: Hm. That's...not promising, you're aware?

NED: Yeah.

DIVODIT: Lumily, don't be ridiculous. Our Mordy's a bright fellow, I'm sure he's doing just fine. Might be a bit lost, is all.

LUMILY: That's a possibility, of course. I just think we should be realistic.

DIVODIT: We are being realistic! We're simply going to have to go looking for him in the morning. Nothing to do now but try and get some rest.

NED: You guys can sleep, I think I'll stay up for a while.

LUMILY: Ned, you really should sleep.

NED: I'll be fine.

DIVODIT: Maybe if you just laid down for a while?

NED: I don't want to go to sleep, guys, it's fine. Someone should stay awake, anyway.

DIVODIT:

Banging on glass. An awful hiss.

NED: What was that?

Glass shatters. His gets louder.

LUMILY: Well, that's different.

Banging on door.

DIVODIT: Definitely different.

Crash! More hissing. Various animal noises.

LUMILY: It's going to be fine. So the thing got into the building, we've had worse.

NED: Mhmm

Hissing, then the shifter attempts to imitate an argopelter.

DIVODIT: Ok, so all we have to do is pay attention to where the animals it imitates are caged, and we should be able to catch it...

Shifter squeaking.

LUMILY

Ok, there's the wasset...

The shifter attempts to imitate human speech.

LUMILY: I don't know what that was.

SHIFTER AS LUMILY: I don't know what that was.

Lumily screams. Crashes and bangs as an altercation begins.

DIVODIT: LUMILY! NED RUN! RUN!

SHIFTER AS DIVODIT: RUN! RUN!

Running and crashes until a door slams and things go quiet.

LUMILY: Is it gone?

DIVODIT: I think so.

LUMILY: Ned? Is that you?

NED: Yeah, it's me.

LUMILY: We should make sure we're all who we say we are.

DIVODIT: No time. It's angry. We need to find Mordecai.

LUMILY: Security questions along the way, then. Everyone in the van.

They climb in the van, start it, and drive.

DIVODIT: So, Lumily, who was the first creature you ever captured?

LUMILY: A wasset.

DIVODIT: Good.

LUMILY: And yours?

DIVODIT: The same wasset, I just accidentally let it go before you caught it.

NED: You two are so weird.

LUMILY: Ned--

DIVODIT: If that is your real name!

LUMILY: Ned, when did you move above the Greek restaurant?

NED: After I dropped out of Bible college.

DIVODIT: Right. So, we're all who we say we are.

The van slows to a stop. The get out. Birds and wind. Footsteps through the woods.

LUMILY: Ok, so we're looking for a nest. It'll have to be big. Keep an eye out for anything unusual.

NED: I'm not a fan of this.

DIVODIT: Oh, Nadezhda, not still afraid of the dark, are you?

NED: No. I'm just not used to playing reporter.

DIVODIT: Well if you keep losing hosts you'll have to, won't you?

NED: That's not funny, Divodit.

LUMILY: Leave her alone.

NED: Thank you.

LUMILY: Though if I'm not mistaken, I'd say she's gotten rather fond of this new one.

DIVODIT: Certainly the impression I'd gotten.

NED: He's fine.

LUMILY: It's okay to have friends, Ned.

NED: I have plenty of friends.

DIVODIT: You haven't gone anywhere but the station and the Beastiarium since Abigail left. And even then, not out to the Beastiarium much.

NED: I've been tired. Not much sleep, lots to do to keep the show running.

DIVODIT: I imagine Mordecai could use someone to hang around with. He's still pretty new here.

NED: Mm.

LUMILY: Ned, we'll find him. You don't need to be worried.

NED: I'm not worried.

LUMILY: Right.

NED: I think I should go back to the van.

DIVODIT: Nadezhda, if you go back to the van, it'll be harder for us to find him.

NED: You're used to this, you'll be fine.

DIVODIT: If you'd had a lead on Abigail, you'd follow it. You owe Mordecai that same respect.

NED: This is totally different.

LUMILY: Is it, or do you just want it to be?

NED: That isn't fair and you know it.

Ned walks forward. Mordecai can just barely be heard.

MORDECAI: Ok, so it's day three, nighttime I think. The creature's gone for now. I can't really tell what's going on, but my recorder is probably going to die soon, so--

Ned pushes a few branches and rocks away. Mordecai can be heard clearly.

NED: MORDECAI!

MORDECAI: And now I'm hallucinating. Ned? Is that you?!

NED: Jesus Christ, what are you doing out here? Oh my god this place is gross. Is this a dead pine tree?

MORDECAI: I think so. It stacked all the branches up around and--

NED: Oh my god those are clothes. Those are bloody clothes.

MORDECAI: Yeah.

NED: And you're tied up with the same thing. Oh god. Wait, are you still recording!?

MORDECAI: I thought I was going to die, Ned, I wanted you to know what happened to me!

LUMILY: Uhm, guys, we should really go before it--

A hiss in the distance.

LUMILY: Gets back.

Tape stops.

NED (V/O): Mordecai was bound hand and foot with some of the other victim's clothing and was so coated in this terrible reddish black fluid that was all over the floor of the nest that I cannot tell you how he had survived. I finally managed to untie him after several minutes of effort, but he could barely stand. Lumily and Divodit helped me get him back to the van. We heard the shapeshifter screech when it got back to its nest, so Lumily and Divodit decided to stay with Mordecai at his house in case it came after him. He gave me this tape that he had recorded in the nest before I came into the studio.

Tape starts.

MORDECAI: I'm not really sure how I got here. It's nighttime, and I'm in some sort of horrible nest thing. It smells like a dead pine tree and the walls aren't very well built, I can feel the wind come through and I can kind of see outside. There's something on top of my foot...if I can just move over a little I can probably see what it--

Mordecai screams.

MORDECAI (CONT'D): Ok, ok, so it is was is? A person. A dead person. That is a dead....person. Ok. It's ok, it's ok....

Tape skips ahead.

MORDECAI (CONT'D): I must have fallen asleep for a while, because I woke up and there was this horrible, charred looking creature in the nest with me. When I woke up it was chewing on the corpse that was on top of my feet. It's gone now but I'm just going to leave the recorder on to try and get its noises on tape.

Tape skips ahead.

MORDECAI (CONT'D): It's been two full days since I've been in this nest. I think I'm going to die here. If I do, Ned, you should probably play this so people know that this thing is loose, today I saw it...change, it started out with its charred crackly looking skin and then out of nowhere it made these horrible noises like its bones were breaking and its skin was tearing and then its body practically rearranged itself until it looked just like me, and it left. I don't know where it went.

Tape stops.

NED (V/O): That's all there is before we found him. Well, listeners, Mordecai said he might come in later today, but since he's not here yet and I'm literally exhausted I think I'm going to call it a day. This has been your Magical History of Knox County. Thanks--

Door opens. Someone walks in.

MORDECAI: Hi, Ned!

NED: Mordecai?

MORDECAI: Ned!

NED: Yes, it's Ned...did you want to close out the show?

MORDECAI: Sure, Ned. This has been the Magical History of Knox County.

NED: So where have you been, Mordecai?

MORDECAI: Around.

NED: That's weird, because Lumily and Divodit said they were coming with you.

Door opens.

SECOND MORDECAI: Hey, Ned, did I miss the show?

FIRST MORDECAI: Ned?

SECOND MORDECAI: Ned, maybe you should come toward the door?

FIRST MORDECAI: Ned, maybe you should come toward the door?

SECOND MORDECAI: Stop that!

FIRST MORDECAI: Stop that!

Both Mordecais talk over each other, yelling at Ned.

NED: WHAT DO YOU WANT ME TO DO? I CAN'T --

Bangs and crashes. A fight in the booth. Cracking and slimy slithering.

NED: DAMMIT! Listeners, you can't see this, but it's escaped into the vents.

MORDECAI: It'll be alright, we just have to contain it. Do the vents go to the outside at all?

NED: Not really. Just down to the basement.

MORDECAI: On it. You call Lumily and Divoditt, they shouldn't be too far away yet.

Slithering in the pipes overhead.

NED: Oh, God.

MORDECAI: Okay. I'm going to the basement. See if you can scare it in that direction.

NED: What will we do when we get it there?

MORDECAI: We'll deal with that when we get to it.

NED: ...if you say so.

Dialing. Ringing. Lumily picks up.

NED: Lumily? Hi, yeah, the shifter is here, yea, we're trying to scare it into the basement yea, just go straight down there when you get here. Okay, thanks.

Basement door opens and closes. Mordecai heads downstairs.

NED: Listeners, I'm just going to do my best to keep you updated on what's going on because that makes me feel better. So, right now, I'm standing in the booth, just...standing in the booth...alone...unarmed...trying to figure out where the shifter is...

Clang! Slimy slither.

NED: I think the shifter is over head...that's fine, I just need to goad it toward the basement...maybe if I just...bang on the pipe with this broom...

CLANG! The slithering stops, then starts up louder. The shifter hisses.

NED: Okay, so maybe if I go toward the basement myself...heeeeeerree, beasty beasty....heeeeeere shifty....

Ned continues to bang on the pipe.

NED: Heeeeeeeeeerre, shifty shifty...

Slithering gets quieter and fades away.

NED: Okay, I think that did it.

Slithering picks back up. Hissing. Rhythmic crashes.

NED: JESUS! Listeners, it's started pushing the vents out of the piping, all of them, it's--

A louder slither, Ned screams.

NED: IT'S TOUCHING MY FACE!

SHIFTER AS NED: IT'S TOUCHING MY FACE!

More slithering.

NED: Listeners, if you don't hear a definitive "all clear" soon...

SHIFTER AS NED: ALL CLEAR.

NED: No! We didn't--Listeners unless you hear me say that we captured it...

SHIFTER AS MORDECAI: LISTENERS, THIS HAS BEEN THE MAGICAL HISTORY OF KNOX COUNTY.

NED: NO! The show isn't over, Mordecai isn't here! MORDECAI!!

SHIFTER AS NED: MORDECAI ISN'T HERE! MORDECAI ISN'T HERE!

NED: MORDECAAAAAIIIIII!

SHIFTER AS ABIGAIL: Ned!

NED: Don't do this to me!

SHIFTER AS ABIGAIL: Ned, don't look for me, I'm ok!

NED: I know it's not you!

SHIFTER AS ABIGAIL: NED! NED!

NED: Listeners, the shifter is in the vent right above my head, it doesn't look anything like Abigail. It's still all black and scaly. It's just mimicking her.

SHIFTER AS ABIGAIL: Ned, I'm ok! Ned!

NED: SHUT UP! SHUT UP!

Ned hits the vents with the broomstick repeatedly.

SHIFTER AS ABIGAIL: Ned, it's me! It's me! Ned, don't!

NED: Stop! I know it isn't you!

SHIFTER AS ABIGAIL: Ned! Ned don't! I trust you! Don't!

NED: STOP! STOP!

SHIFTER AS ABIGAIL: I trust you! You can handle it!

NED: WHY WON'T YOU JUST STOP!

Hiss.

NED: I'LL KILL YOU! I'LL KILL YOU!

Bangs and crashes as Ned attacks the thing until it slithers away.

Ned begins to cry. A door opens.

MORDECAI: Ned?

NED: Mordecai?

MORDECAI: You ok?

NED: Fine. Just fine.

MORDECAI: The shifter put up a real fight.

NED: Yea, sounded like it.

MORDECAI: Are you sure you're ok?

NED: I'll be fine. The shifter just...

MORDECAI: ...What, Ned?

NED: It imitated Abigail.

MORDECAI: Are you sure? Ned, Lumily and Divodit filled me in on most of this, the shifter came through Wendell's cabinet a month ago, it couldn't have taken Abigail.

NED: No, it didn't take her form or anything. It just...sounded like her.

MORDECAI: Ned, that would mean it had to hear her somewhere, and unless she's still in Knox County somewhere and it just happened to not want any food when it heard her...

NED: I mean...I guess you're right, but it was exactly--Mordecai.

MORDECAI: What?

NED: It had to hear her.

MORDECAI: I mean, I guess that'd be how it worked...Ned, what are you doing? Are you playing something?

NED: It had to hear her Mordecai. It could have heard her on the radio when she called in. We taped them.

Tape starts.

ABIGAIL: Ned! Hello? I'm okay, don't worry about me. I'm investigating something really important, it's rea--

Tape stops. Second tape starts.

ABIGAIL: --eally big, and it's going to keep me out of the office for quite some time, I think. You don't need to come looking for me. I'll be back as soon as I can. Nothing's going to happen to me, but even if it does, I trust you to handle everything.

NED: Shit.

MORDECAI: What?

NED: That's exactly what it said, Mordecai. It just said different bits from the calls. It's a tape, Mordecai. The shifter just heard a tape of her. Someone has a tape of Abigail.

MORDECAI: Ned, I really don't understand, I mean, it could've just heard the show playing on someone's radio...

NED: The calls, Mordecai. They all fit together. They make one coherent thought. Someone's been calling us and playing a tape.

MORDECAI: Oh.

NED: She didn't call us.

MORDECAI: Ned, I'm so sorry.

NED: Who would do this? Why would they be near the shifter in the first place?

MORDECAI: I mean, they may not have known they were near it, I didn't realize until it took me...

NED: Jesus Christ.

MORDECAI: Ned, it doesn't have to mean she can't call.

NED: I'm going home, Mordecai. It's been a day. Close out the show.

Theme begins.

MORDECAI: Okay. Well listeners, thanks for tuning in. This has been your Magical History of Knox County.

Rumble. The equipment rattles and the building shakes. The theme jolts into static.

NED: Did you feel that?