

(Footsteps start. Birds can periodically be heard in the distance.)

I do love my family. Whether or not I should notwithstanding. And I--And I think the overwhelming urge I have to say that is a problem is and of itself. Or it's really indicative of a larger problem because what am I overcompensating for? I mean, I know what I'm overcompensating for: a very dysfunctional relationship. But for my whole life, I used to think that dysfunctional wasn't bad, so much as it was realistic. Like the sitcom families you saw on TV with all their happy smiles and easily resolved conflicts, that was the problem because of unrealistic expectations. That wasn't real but a marketable commodity no different than the heavily edited snapshots of influencers that we now have social media. And yeah, I felt superior for that enlightenment. For seeing past the curtain, as it were.

But this wasn't Oz. I wasn't Dorothy who really just needed to click my heels together to transport back home but hadn't realized it. I don't need to be told how my magic shoes work, the shoes that I took off of the corpse of a witch my house fell upon, I don't need to be told because I don't have any. So instead I was left wondering how long it takes for that sense of so-called brilliant self-awareness to devolve into cynicism in its purest and most toxic form.

Look I... By the time you get this message, Professor, you'll probably already know how this ends. You'll know if what I'm currently doing was stupid and as an offshoot of that, you'll know whether or not this moment of not so great judgment actually killed me or not. There's a part of me that, yes, is genuinely worried this will be it. But I can't help it. I have to do this. I can hear the mountain calling me. And it didn't

want me to wait until morning. Or I mean, it is morning. I mean... I mean morning in a better sense.

So I'm out here walking, and I know that's a bad idea. This isn't the family's neighborhood. This is an unfamiliar place, and I as a woman with a not so moderate injury know that walking around here at night is a really bad idea. I know that pointing out how empty this road is, even under the best of circumstances, isn't that much of a defense. Yes, folklore might be full of creatures that definitely aren't real. But they're based on some sort of animal that could easily maim or outright eat me. And this resort might be closer than the other one we were at, but it's still too far for me to walk it. I know you're going to worry--despite knowing the outcome--that I'm going to just collapse in pain or exhaustion on the side of this road and fall victim to whatever gets me first. But I can't help it, really.

I was in that hotel room after I sent my last file pacing and pacing. I might have been tired, definitely, but it was in an abstract sense. Like I knew to be tired, but that didn't mean I was tired. It was more like I was restless, desperate to move, specifically in this direction. Being pulled back here. Back to the mountain, which is where I think I am, right now. Or I'm getting closer. The maps I could pull up weren't that great. Our resort wasn't even on it. I just saw a landmark that was close by. I don't even know if the resort I was at is actually a resort, if it meets the classic definition of the resort or if we just ended up crashing at someone's nicer than usual home. We really didn't plan this out. We just came here.

I didn't want to ask, but it was like my grandma and uncle just expected me to know what to do, you know? And that's... That's at the root of so many of our problems:

it's these expectations. We should always just know what's happening, so maybe that is what set me up to make this really stupid decision. I wanted to pretend that I knew what to do. This is what I think I need to do, and so I'm supposed to bulldoze over every.. (stop walking. Rock dragged on pavement) Frick-- Ow, every obstacle. And that was a really big rock. (Pause to start walking) But I'm supposed to bulldoze over everything just like I always got bulldozed over, right.

And that's not right. I can hear you say. Maybe I need to push through things, but not like this, and I never should have been run over. But I was, and you know it. A lot of people have terrible homelives, and you can preach about what should have happened and what we should do in response, but it doesn't change the fact that we are trapped in the consequences of other people's choices. And... Well, maybe we need to set aside theory and focus more on the practicalities of it all

No, I mean... I'm sorry for snapping. That isn't to say this is your fault, though. I just want you to know I was always going to make my terrible choices. With or without your encouragement. With or without your input. You couldn't have stopped me. No one could.

This feels dangerous, sure, but it also feels right. And that's when we all come to reason that 'feeling right' is subjective in a way it shouldn't be. This feels right to me, and I know not to you.

I'm walking by motorcycles now and the little stalls that sell fruit to cars that drive by. Everyone has to make a living. Everyone has to live with themselves and their choices. And I don't think I could live with the choice of staying in the hotel tonight and

waiting for my uncle and grandmother in the morning. Or even just having my uncle drive me to night. I did think about that. Just not the rest of the details.

I never wanted to disappoint you, so if that's what I'm doing, I'm sorry. To you or me, I don't know. But I have to go right now. I have to go out there for myself. I've got my recorder and a cellphone that may or may not work out here. It's a local phone with a prepaid SIM. But it's the signal I'm concerned about. This area is pretty untouched, you know, which might be the point or the proclaimed point of a lack of development. I don't... I don't know.

But I am sorry. I'm so sorry that I'm doing what might be the dumbest thing I could ever do to you. But I hope you can understand that to me, the inverse would be true. Not doing this would be dumb. I know you can't understand that because there's nothing really to understand. But I need to do this, and I think I can do this, okay? I think I can get to where I need to go safely. Hip and all.

I'm not worried about tonight; I'm worried about tomorrow. About the losses that I may need to cut. With you or my family.

If this is the last record of my voice that will ever exist then.. then I wish I had something better to say, but I don't. For now, I'm just walking.

*(Pause. Music fades in)*

The Mountain's Heart is a production of Hugot Podcasting. And this end song comes from the Sounds like an Earful music supply. See you in two weeks.