

Encapsulated - Episode 5 of 10

FADE IN:

INT. THE 'PORTAL' HOTEL LOBBY - DAY

MARCUS (36) is helping a HUSBAND and WIFE check out.

MARCUS

Did you enjoy your stay?

WIFE

We did - best vacation I've had in years. How much if we get the deluxe package next time?

MARCUS

It would be \$600 per night.

HUSBAND

Seems a bit steep.

MARCUS

Personally - if I were in your shoes, I don't think you two would benefit much.

WIFE

Is it because we're not 'deluxe' people??

MARCUS

No, sorry I didn't mean that. It's just that - well, take it for what it's worth, you two seem to have adjusted well, to the.. You know. The deluxe package is really for people who haven't.

HUSBAND

Makes sense - it'd be nice, but we don't NEED it.

MARCUS

Exactly. No need to escape if you're not trapped.

INT. COUNSELOR'S OFFICE - DAY

COLIN (35) is listening to his PATIENT, tapping his foot anxiously and trying to mask his impatience.

PATIENT

... and then I wake up, and I pace a lot because I don't want a wall to cut my head off while I'm asleep, and when I'm driving I always freeze up, like I know there isn't gonna be a wall there, because my phone says it's fine and I've driven that way and I know it's been six months, but I'm so so so scared, and I just can see my body getting sliced apart so I stop driving and then everyone starts honking and that makes it worse. You know what I mean?

COLIN

No, actually. I don't know what you mean.

PATIENT

But why not?

COLIN

Because I care about things that actually HAPPENED, not things that MIGHT happen. There MIGHT be more walls that pop up, but you don't know for sure, so why are you worried? I KNOW that I lost my boyfriend - it's not something that MIGHT happen, it DID happen, and you wouldn't believe how obnoxious it is having to listen to people like you, paranoid that your life MIGHT be ruined when mine actually WAS!

PATIENT

I'm so sorry, I didn't think about it Dr. Knight. Dr. Knight? Dr. Knight?

Colin imagined all that. He snaps back into reality.

COLIN

My bad - got a little caught up in your story...  
Yeah, I can definitely relate.

PATIENT

Oh good, I was worried it was just me, and I also  
feel like I'm the only person who lost somebody,  
you know, like everybody else doesn't matter and  
I know that sounds terrible, but I really miss my  
co-workers and most of them were out to lunch and  
I always ate at my desk and on the 20th I-

COLIN

Well, I hate to cut you off, but the hour's up.  
That was a good talk though. You're making a lot  
of great progress.

PATIENT

Phew, sometimes I feel like I just want to press  
myself against the barrier until it kills me but  
then I have these visits to look forward to so I  
really appreciate you being so patient.

COLIN

And I appreciate you BEING the patient.

The man laughs, then breaks down crying and gives Colin a  
hug that lasts much longer than Colin would've liked.

EXT. CITY BLOCK - DAY

A crowd is screaming and panicking, swarming against both  
sides of the barrier. Colin is pressed against it, calling  
it to his boyfriend JUSTIN (36).

COLIN

Justin! Justin!! JUSTIN!!!

EXT. COLIN'S APARTMENT - DAY

Colin is startled by the doorbell. He's snapped out of his flashback into reality. He slowly goes to answer it and is greeted by Esteban.

COLIN

Sorry, I don't have any barriers going through my place, it's the next building over.

ESTEBAN

No, no - I'm trying to get laid.

COLIN

(clearly interested, trying to hide it)  
Well - I mean, I could-

ESTEBAN

Just kidding, gotta break the ice, you know what I'm saying man?

COLIN

Oh. Yeah, good one. You definitely broke it.

ESTEBAN

Hey, that's what I like to hear. Listen, my name's Esteban, and I work at the Portal Hotel downtown - kinda by the city park.

COLIN

Yeah, I know the area.

QUICK FLASHBACK TO COLIN BEING SEPARATED AT THE WALL, SHOUTING FOR JUSTIN. THE CROWD IS IN A FRENZY AROUND THEM, IT LASTS FOR A FEW SECONDS. END FLASHBACK

COLIN

Is it a new place? The portal, hotel, I'm not - it's not ringing any bells.

ESTEBAN

Yeah man. It used to be a Hilton, but then the boss sold it to this startup after the 20th - you know, suddenly nobody's travelling, right?

COLIN

Right.

ESTEBAN

Wrong! That's what makes the Portal so GREAT, is that you get to see the world - you know, not like ACTUALLY see the world, but it's.. It's pretty realistic, you feel me?

COLIN

Yes, yeah, I feel you. In a totally normal way.

ESTEBAN

You're funny - I like that. Most people just tell me to beat it. So we've got two options - we got our regular, and then the deluxe, which gets you a room and everything, PLUS a lot of other cool shit that makes your stay unforGETtable. Here-

(he hands Colin a flyer)

\$200 for a regular, \$600 for the deluxe. And with the deluxe, we stalk your social media.

COLIN

Oh? For...

ESTEBAN

To get to know you man, so that we can make everything just the way you like it - I'm telling you, we go all OUT, people LOVE it. Now we DO need at least two weeks notice if you want the deluxe, just so we can get everything ready, and-

COLIN

I'm out. Sorry, in, I'm IN. Words are the WORST..

INT. THE 'PORTAL' HOTEL LOBBY - DAY

Colin is at the desk; Marcus is helping him check in; there are a few other guests milling about the lobby.

MARCUS

Nice to have you with us, Dr. Knight.

COLIN

Still feels weird being a doctor - you can just call me Colin... Mr. Wright.

MARCUS

Marcus. Yeah, I see what you mean, it is weird having the last name. Eesh.

COLIN

Right?? It's like, people, I'm younger than all of you. My dad is Dr. Knight, not me.

MARCUS

Oh yeah - Northwest Orthopedics right? I assumed there was some connection when I saw you had liked their page. Thought it would be too weird to have two Dr. Knights that weren't related.

COLIN

You guys really did go all out, stalking and all. This isn't gonna be creepy, is it?

MARCUS

Nah, mostly it's just to find the right decor for your room, and your food choices.

COLIN

Ahh. And it's probably pretty expensive to ship everything in, now that I think about it. What did I read, something like a ten day wait on non-essentials, since they're 'low priority'?

MARCUS

You have no idea. We've got connections, but still, feels like I'm pulling teeth every time I call the shipping company.

COLIN

Mm. So that's why you need at least two weeks, that makes sense.

MARCUS

Yep. But it's worth it.

(hands him the key)

I'm surprised other hotel chains are just closing down. I mean, people haven't changed, we still need to escape, right? It's cathartic, having an experience like this.

COLIN

I hear you.

MARCUS

You know, they were actually going to call it the Copa - my idea, sort of a play on words - Cope-a?

COLIN

Nice! That's pretty good actually.

MARCUS

Alas, true art is never appreciated in its time. They worried most people wouldn't get the pun, so we went with the oh-so-generic 'Portal'.

COLIN

Philistines.

MARCUS

In. Deed. Ah, right on time - Esteban!

(Esteban has just walked in)

Room 508 - he goes by Colin.

ESTEBAN

Oh hey, yeah, I remember you! The funny guy!

COLIN

Yep. I'm here to get laid, well, that's what the salesman told me anyways.

MARCUS

Esteban, we've talked about this, you can't say that to strangers!

ESTEBAN

But it works!

MARCUS

That doesn't make it less terrible.

ESTEBAN

(as he walks away with Colin's bag)

But it WORKS!

Marcus and Colin both chuckle as Esteban leaves.

MARCUS

So, your room has a schedule for the day - all optional, you can go to the events if you want, some people like to just stay in their rooms and have a quiet space to process things. But it's entirely up to you.

COLIN

The last thing I need is to be with my thoughts.

MARCUS

Fair enough. If you change your mind, feel like you need a good cry, just put out the 'do not disturb' sign. Otherwise you're all set.

(hands him the key to his room)

Glad to have you here.

INT. COLIN'S HOTEL ROOM - DAY

Colin unpacks his bag and is stunned by the room. Hanging on the wall are horror movie posters; there's a bookshelf next to the bed with a collection of novels; the mini fridge is stocked with all sorts of snacks; and there's a note that says 'No hidden fees - take what you want! :)'

On the bed is a printout of the day's activities. Colin reads through it while he munches on a chocolate bar.

COLIN

I could get VERY used to this..

He scans the brochure, which has a number of activities:

- Wine tasting in Parisian luxury
- Outdoor painting classes along a Venetian canal
- Mini Golf in the forests of Germany

COLIN

Where do they- Hmm.

He looks out the window, which overlooks the entire hotel complex. It's a sprawling area, with several different 'parks' connected by walkways and canals. Each area is designed to look like a different part of the world, and hundreds of guests are taking advantage of the various amusements, food vendors, and scenic walks.

Colin sighs and closes the curtain. He scans the bookshelf and pulls out one book after another, admiring them.

COLIN

I should ask if I can keep them..

Suddenly there's a knock on the door. Colin answers it.

MARCUS

I couldn't stop thinking about you.

COLIN

What are you-?

MARCUS

Hurry, my break ends in fifteen minutes.

COLIN

That- that'll be plenty of time.

He embraces Marcus and they begin making out. Marcus unbuttons his uniform and takes off his shoes, and they quickly make their way to the bed.

MARCUS

Colin?

COLIN

Marcus.

MARCUS

Colin? Are you there?

Colin jolts into reality. He's on the bed, breathing heavily, alone. Somebody's knocking at the door.

MUFFLED VOICE

I'll come back if it's not a good time.

COLIN

No, no, just a second!

(he straightens his hair, takes a deep  
breath, and goes to open the door)

Hi, long time no see.

ESTEBAN

What UP! Everything looking good man?

COLIN

Oh, yes, it's all very - VERY personal.

ESTEBAN

That's what I like to hear. I picked out the posters, you seem like that kinda guy.

COLIN

(glancing at the posters)  
Actually, yeah, pretty close - you guys are good.

ESTEBAN

We try to be as immersive as we can, it's what you pay us for, right?

COLIN

It is - hey, speaking of, when do I actually pay, should I do that today or tomorrow?

ESTEBAN

Dude, your call. Most people wait til they leave, but if you wanna do it now, have at it. Only live once, right?

COLIN

Yeah...

INT. THE 'PORTAL' HOTEL LOBBY - DAY

Colin walks to the reception desk, nervously; Marcus is on duty reading the swimsuit edition of Sports Illustrated.

COLIN

Oh, sorry - I didn't mean to intrude.

MARCUS

No, you're fine. I legitimately just read it for the articles.

COLIN

Oh. Interesting..

MARCUS

I like to think so. What can I do for you?

COLIN

I- I was just wondering if I could pay now, just so I don't forget.

MARCUS

You can indeed. I'm never opposed to taking people's money.

They both laugh. Colin gives him his credit card; Marcus pulls up the reservation, then processes the payment.

COLIN

Hey- do you, would you be... Do you want to go out? With me, tonight, if that's your thing?

MARCUS

Sure. What did you have in mind?

COLIN

I- well, dinner? I haven't thought any farther than that...

MARCUS

Works for me. There's a hole-in-the-wall Mexican place that grows everything locally, one of my favorites, it's about two blocks from here.

COLIN

Yeah. Yeah, that sounds great.

MARCUS

Perfect - my shift ends at 8, meet me down here?

Marcus hands Colin his card and smiles. Colin is speechless - he nods, awkwardly smiles back, then goes up to his room and collapses on the bed, grinning from ear to ear.

INT. BUSY MEXICAN RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Colin and Marcus are munching on tortilla chips; a waiter takes their empty meal plates away.

MARCUS

So, on a scale of 'yes' to 'no', do you lose your mind listening to people's problems all day?

COLIN

10. 100. Yes. AND, I can't tell them that their problems - and I never said this - that their problems are SOOOO exaggerated. It's like, people, just move on, stop worrying.

MARCUS

And yet you keep the job, because...?

COLIN

Because job security? Especially right now.

MARCUS

True true. If you don't mind me asking, have YOU gotten over it? Not to imply you haven't, or that it's bad one way or the other. Or if you don't want to talk about it that's fine.

QUICK FLASHBACK TO COLIN BEING SEPARATED AT THE WALL, SHOUTING FOR JUSTIN. THEIR FACES ARE PRESSED AGAINST THE BARRIER, COLIN IS A WRECK. END FLASHBACK.

COLIN

I'm getting there. I lost.. I lost my partner, and as much as I don't WANT to have fifty flashbacks a day..

MARCUS

That sounds miserable. You used the word partner - how does that make you feel?

They both laugh at Marcus using his 'counselor' voice.

COLIN

But that's the last thing I want to deal with.

MARCUS

(in the mock counselor voice)

On the contrary, Mr. Knight, I suspect it's the one thing that you NEED to deal with.

(they laugh)

You have time, just enjoy tonight.

COLIN

Exactly. Somebody gets it. Not to say YOU can't talk about what happened, I don't want to leave you hanging.

MARCUS

I could make a great innuendo right now, it's almost worth perpetuating the stereotype that we only think about sex. Almost.

(they chuckle)

I was not nearly as traumatized. I worked as a travel agent - surprise, I know - and whereas most people had to deal with confusion and uncertainty and 'where is my life going now', I had an easy answer. So I took a few months off to reset, figure out my priorities.

COLIN

That WOULD make it easier, come to think of it.

MARCUS

It did indeed. Then I heard about the 'Portal' - still the Hilton at the time - and thought I would be the optimal candidate.

COLIN

Optimal, wow. Good thing you're humble.

MARCUS

That's what I keep telling everyone! Nobody seems to get it, it's bizarre...

(they laugh)

So I applied, helped them recreate miniature tourist sites - I had a whole empty office full of reference material - and here we are now. I like my job, I'm good at it. AND I can sleep at night because I'm helping people. A lot of it is amusement, obviously, but we're also giving them the chance to slow down, have some breathing room, try and make sense of everything.

COLIN

So like a counselor, but you don't want to strangle your patients.

MARCUS

(in the mock counselor voice)

That's deeply concerning, clearly symptomatic of childhood trauma. Let's dive into that.

(his phone buzzes twice, he ignores it)

I'm really sorry, it's my boss. I keep telling him that when I say my shift is done at 8, shockingly, that means my WORK is also done at 8.

COLIN

My patients are the same - except with them I have to be free 24/7, which of course makes me hate them more - but again, I never said that.

MARCUS

But you just did. You said 'that'.

COLIN

So you have one of THOSE senses of humor.

MARCUS

And yet I'm on a date, so it must work.

Marcus's phone buzzes on the table again, another message.

COLIN

You can look at it, I'll pretend I have a message too so it's not awkward.

MARCUS

You'd do that for me? Awww.. it'll be quick.

(they both check their phones)

And of course...

COLIN

Trouble in paradise?

MARCUS

That's clever - I really want to use that line the next time a guest complains.. No, apparently we have a big shipment of paper lanterns - Japan - not from Japan, FOR Japan, our version. And we need to unpack them all. So that'll be my night.

(calls the waiter over for the check)

I'm really sorry to bail - are you free this weekend? I know this superb hotel we could stay at, there's a guy who would give us a great deal.

COLIN

(laughs)

That would be a nice perk. Yeah, I'd love you-it, I'd love you to plan it, yikes. Don't you hate when words don't just escape you, but they flat-out revolt?

MARCUS

(in the mock counselor voice)

Do you find these moments.. Revolting?

(they chuckle)

I would love to set it up, no cost - don't argue on that - I'll let you cover the meal, is that a fair trade-off?

COLIN

Sure. Like I said, you can make good money listening to people's problems.

MARCUS

In. Deed.

(the waiter brings back their cards, they thank him and make their way outside)

We can work out the logistics later, again, I feel terrible for ducking out like this.

COLIN

It happens. I'll probably walk around the park, I haven't been out here since the 20th.

MARCUS

They've done a fine job of maintaining it, actually - enjoy yourself. Remember, you're still on vacation!

Marcus gives Colin a farewell hug, lightly kisses him on the cheek, then walks back to the hotel. Colin, on cloud nine, makes his way to the city park.

EXT. CITY PARK - NIGHT

There are a few dozen people spread throughout the park, walking dogs, jogging, strolling, etc.

A section of the invisible barrier runs across the field, with half a dozen giant light poles marking the edge. A game of ultimate frisbee is being played with the barrier as the center line. Colin is amused, then his smile fades.

QUICK FLASHBACK TO HIM BEING SEPARATED AT THE WALL, SHOUTING FOR JUSTIN. COLIN'S CRIES SEEM INSIGNIFICANT IN THE SEA OF PANIC AND DESPAIR. HE'S LOOKING ACROSS THE BARRIER AT JUSTIN, TEARS IN HIS EYES. END FLASHBACK.

Colin snaps back into reality. He pulls out his phone and finds Marcus's number. For a minute, he debates internally whether to send him a message, then types: 'Sorry if I was weird, haven't dated since the 20th. If you need help unboxing lmk.' He hits send and sighs with relief.

INT. THE 'PORTAL' HOTEL LOBBY - NIGHT

Colin is waiting for the elevator. The night-shift desk clerk is helping an older gentleman check in. Colin looks at his phone - no new messages.

Then it happens. He hears Marcus's voice, turns his head, and sees Marcus emerging from the office behind the reception desk. Right behind him is Esteban. Esteban buttons his shirt, Marcus straightens his hair, they kiss for a few seconds, then go their separate ways - Marcus back into the office, Esteban to the elevators.

ESTEBAN

What up Colin! You alright man?

Colin is in a daze. He says nothing to Esteban and goes to the stairwell, the tension building.

FLASHBACK TO THE FRANTIC CROWD

COLIN

Justin!

Colin staggers up the stairs, the world is blurry.

FLASHBACK TO COLIN CRYING OUT

COLIN

Justin!!

Colin stumbles into his room and locks the door.

FLASHBACK TO COLIN CRYING AT THE WALL

COLIN

JUSTIN!!

He and Justin lock eyes for a second. Justin smiles.

JUSTIN

Thank. GOD!

COLIN

What, what do you-

JUSTIN

All the times I tried to break up with you, and THIS is what it took. Fucking insane.

COLIN

Break up with- no, Justin, please - we can still talk, I can't- please don't-

JUSTIN

If you try to call me, I swear I'll kill you.

COLIN

No wait, Justin please don't! Come back! Please come back, I'm sorry, I need you!

It's already too late. Justin turns away from Colin and leaves, a ghost in the crowd. Colin is still pressed against the wall, speechless. The world goes quiet.

END FLASHBACKS

Colin is crying in his hotel room. He gets a text message from Marcus, throws his phone against the wall, and sobs even harder.

INT. THE 'PORTAL' HOTEL LOBBY - DAY

Colin exits the elevator. He walks quickly and tries to avoid eye contact with Marcus, who's helping a WOMAN at the front desk. But something seems off.

MARCUS

Get out! I was a journalist too!

WOMAN

What?? That's so crazy!!

Colin is confused. He sees Esteban on the other side of the room, flirting with two little old ladies.

MARCUS

Did you enjoy your stay Dr. Knight?

Colin stops. He replays scenes in his mind.

- Esteban at his door - "makes your stay unforGETtable."
- Colin shouting Justin's name.
- Colin, talking to Marcus - "The last thing I need is to be with my thoughts."
- Justin - "THIS is what it took. Fucking insane"
- Marcus in the lobby - "It's cathartic, having an experience like this."
- Esteban - "We try to be as immersive as we can, it's what you pay us for, right?"
- Colin throwing his phone against the wall.
- Esteban - "as immersive as we can"
- Colin at the restaurant - "But that's the LAST thing I want to deal with."
- Marcus - "On the contrary, Mr. Knight"
- Justin walking away from the barrier
- Esteban and Marcus making out
- Marcus at the restaurant - "I suspect it's the one thing you NEED to deal with."
- Colin crying in his room.

Colin snaps back into reality one last time.

MARCUS

Dr. Knight? Was it more than you were expecting?

Colin, absorbing the truth, slowly nods his head.

FADE OUT.