

Encapsulated - Episode 9 of 10

FADE IN:

INT. SMALL TOWN CAFE - DAY

It's early spring. MARIANA (20) is at a small town diner, where a few hundred people are packed inside, eating lunch and watching TV. It's a news show that features Mariana being interviewed via video chat (previously recorded).

INTERVIEWER (TV)

Mariana, hi! Thanks for joining us!

MARIANA (TV)

Glad to be here!

Everyone in the diner cheers. Mariana is sitting in between her mom and dad, both of whom are beaming with pride.

INTERVIEWER (TV)

Tell me... what inspired you to write 'Encapsulated'? Maybe give some background for viewers that aren't familiar with the book.

MARIANA (TV)

Of course! So, every year, my relatives and aunts and uncles and siblings and parents, we all go to this small town in Oklahoma to celebrate my grandparents' anniversary.

INTERVIEWER (TV)

When you say 'we all', how many people are we talking? 20, 30?

MARIANA (TV)

Try 92. 93 including myself.

INTERVIEWER (TV)

Must be hard finding enough hotel rooms.

MARIANA (TV)

Don't even get me started.

(laughter from the diner)

So, we were all here on the 20th, which happens to be the actual day of the anniversary, and - it was funny, we didn't even realize until later, but none of the barriers hit the town. They went around the town, nobody was split up.

INTERVIEWER (TV)

You were lucky.

MARIANA (TV)

We were blessed, absolutely.

Another cheer erupts from the diner. Mariana is blushing as her mom proudly puts her arms around her.

MARIANA (TV)

And we already knew everyone in town - including us, there are about 600 people, and like I said, we come here every year, so it was just perfect, it felt like we were home.

INTERVIEWER (TV)

And that's where the idea for the book was born, sort of an autobiography for the town.

MARIANA (TV)

Right, yeah, basically I went to everyone in the town and listened, and I captured their stories. And that was the big thing, is that the book was never about me, or even just my family. It's about this town, how it got here, what life was like before the 20th, and how we've all grown closer since then.

INTERVIEWER (TV)

Are you surprised that the book has become a best-seller, even in big cities?

MARIANA (TV)

A little, but, I think it's because people are all the same no matter where you are. We all have the same interests, and dreams. And some of us have big families-

(cheering in the diner)

and some live alone, and some of us are married, and some are single, and religious, and atheist, and it goes on... but we're all we have. I think the barriers really- they really reminded us what's important.

INTERVIEWER (TV)

Couldn't agree more. Now, you said the town has 600 people, including your own clan.

(cheering in the diner)

Did you actually get 600 of their stories in the book? I didn't keep count.

MARIANA (TV)

Lots of them - definitely anyone who *wanted* to be in the book is in it, and even people who wanted their privacy were a huge help in actually writing, and editing, and promoting the book, so everyone's in it somehow.

The hype of the diner, her family's support, the interview - it all becomes a dull roar. As if in slow motion, Mariana isolates herself from the moment and thinks back to a girl sitting quietly in the diner. A brooding teenager wearing all black clothes with dozens of piercings and dark makeup.

In the flashback, Mariana is still with her family. But for an instant, she locks eyes with the girl, who looks back with resignation. It's overwhelming.

EXT. COUNTRY ROADS - DAY

Mariana is driving along dirt roads, past fields covered in melting snow. A few miles to her right, she can see giant poles every 500 feet, marking the edge of the barrier.

There's no music, no radio, no noise except the car rushing along the gravel. At one point she passes an older married couple bumbling along in a dirty pickup truck. They smile and wave, she returns the greeting.

INT. FARMHOUSE - DAY

Mariana knocks at the door. HANK (47) answers.

HANK

Great interview, you've got a gift.

MARIANA

Thanks.. Is Lilith around?

HANK

She, well- she doesn't like to be interrupted, I can ask her, but I wouldn't get your hopes up.

He pulls out his phone and texts her.

MARIANA

I can always come back.

HANK

Yeah, that might be best- oh, hold up, she wants to know if it's about the book.

MARIANA

(laughs)

Surprisingly, no.

HANK

Let's see...

(texting)

You want something to drink? Probably full from lunch I reckon?

MARIANA

I'm good but thanks. And yes, they had quite the buffet put out.

HANK

It's not every day we get to host a celebrity.

(Mariana blushes)

Alright, she says you can come over.

MARIANA

Oh, come over? I thought..

HANK

She was still here? No, hasn't lived here for a few months now.

MARIANA

My bad, I didn't realize-

HANK

Don't sweat it. I'll show you.

(he leads her outside to the front porch)

So you'll take a straight shot north for a few miles, then you'll see her place on the right, it's the only other one before you hit the edge of the barrier. Make sure you stop at the fence though, don't want you hitting the force field.

MARIANA

For sure. Thanks, tell her I'm on my way.

HANK

Will do.

EXT. COUNTRY ROADS - DAY

Mariana is thinking back to the restaurant as she drives along the desolate roads. She thinks of her mother kissing her on the cheek. The diner erupting into applause when the interview ended. The streamers and balloons outside, with her name in big green letters.

She's back in the present. A small, fenced, nondescript house is ahead. She pulls the car into the driveway.

EXT. COUNTRY HOUSE BACK PATIO - DAY

Mariana is sitting on a swinging chair. The sun is setting. LILITH (18) sets a plate of crackers on the table, and sits across from Mariana. Lilith is still sporting a Goth look, but it's subdued, and she looks more spirited and at peace than she did in Mariana's flashback

MARIANA

How long have you been here?

LILITH

You said this wasn't for your book...

MARIANA

It's not, I was just curious.

LILITH

I know. I'm just screwing with you.

(she smiles)

So? What are you here to talk about?

MARIANA

I- I wanted to see how you were doing. I feel like I wasn't, I mean, with the book and everything... I've just had a lot going on lately, and I feel bad that we haven't caught up...

LILITH

No kidding. Glad you could make room in your schedule for the weird girl.

MARIANA

What, no, I didn't-

(Lilith smiles again, Mariana chuckles)

Sorry, it's just... one of those days.

LILITH

I heard.

(there's a pause)

So where do you want me to start?

MARIANA

Start...? I, I really don't... I promise I'm not doing this for the book.

LILITH

I know you're not. This is just as friends. And I get it. Believe me. That's why you wanted to see me, right?

(Mariana sighs and bites her lip)

Tell you what. I'll give my story, and you can just listen, and then you tell me yours. Your actual story, not what you wrote on the 'about the author' page. Which was beyond cliché.

Mariana chuckles with relief, takes a cracker, and tries to relax while Lilith recounts her experiences.

LILITH

Let's see... so the last time you saw me was probably two years ago, the penultimate reunion, that was when I had just started my Goth phase.

MARIANA

I remember, I actually thought you had moved away, you looked so different and... shrouded.

LILITH

(flipping her hair back)

Why thank you! You got over it though, even if your parents thought I was a 'bad influence'. Do they still think that?

MARIANA

I don't know. I haven't brought it up...

LILITH

Fair enough. So otherwise, nothing much happened *that* year, and then last year, you know, *you know...* and that's where my story picks up, and also explains why you haven't seen much of me.

There's a pause. Lilith looks out at the backyard, across the snowy fields. The sky is tinged with orange and red as the sun settles on the horizon. Mariana listens intently.

LILITH

Actually - I'm gonna use a fairy tale motif, because I can. Aren't you excited?

(Mariana giggles)

Me neither. Alright... So, once there was a girl who lived with her dad on a farm. Absolutely no connection to real life whatsoever. And this girl happened to be named Lilith, but again, no connection to real life.

MARIANA

None at all.

LILITH

None at all. So she and her dad live together, and life is fine. Not bad, not great, just mediocre. She isn't keen on the town they live in, too small, but she gets by. And that's life for a while, nothing exciting. Until one day, this disease spreads throughout the kingdom.

MARIANA

Oh?

LILITH

Yeah. It's like a weird cold or something - people get fevers, and headaches, and stomachaches, and coughs, sweats, congestion, they're tired, everything. It's not deadly. But it's random, and it's fast. Like, one day people wake up, and it's all over. Either you have it or you don't, but it seems completely unpredictable. And this is all on March 20th.

(she pauses)

You tracking the metaphor?

MARIANA

Not really...

(Lilith looks at her sarcastically)

Yes I'm tracking, keep going.

LILITH

Just making sure. This is a super complex story you know.

MARIANA

With no connections to reality.

LILITH

Exactly. Anyways... this disease breaks out, and everybody panics. People are going crazy in the streets, people have no idea what caused it, they're rioting, and running scared, and the whole kingdom is a hot mess. But this girl, Lilith, she sees an opportunity.

FLASHBACK: LILITH IS AT HER OLD FARMHOUSE, SCROLLING ON HER PHONE ANXIOUSLY, READING STORIES ABOUT THE BARRIERS POPPING UP AROUND THE WORLD. PRESENT-DAY LILITH IS NARRATING AS THE EVENTS UNFOLD.

LILITH (V.O.)

See, her dad was out in the field when the sickness appears, which meant she didn't have much time until he got home.

FLASHBACK: LILITH RUNS TO THE FRONT OF THE HOUSE, FEELS HER WAY AROUND THE FRONT DRIVEWAY, THEN PICKS AN ARBITRARY SPOT AND MARKS A LINE IN THE DIRT.

LILITH (V.O.)

So... she... she did something that she had done plenty of times before, because she was scared of what would happen if she didn't.

FLASHBACK: LILITH'S FATHER, HANK, IS RUNNING DOWN THE DIRT ROAD. HE'S RELIEVED TO SEE LILITH IN THE DRIVEWAY, BUT SHE APPEARS TO BE STUCK BEHIND THE BARRIER.

LILITH (V.O.)

She faked it. She pretended to be sick. And... and when her father, when he got back to the house, she told him to stay away from her, because she might be contagious.

FLASHBACK: HANK RUNS RIGHT THROUGH THE FAKE BARRIER AND EMBRACES LILITH.

LILITH (V.O.)

But he didn't care. He didn't, he wasn't going to let anything get between them.

FLASHBACK: BOTH HANK AND LILITH PANIC AS THEY REALIZE WHAT JUST HAPPENED. END FLASHBACK.

LILITH (present)

It didn't take long for him to realize that she wasn't sick. Which really messed things up. I mean, it just...

(she pauses)

So, for the next few months, they didn't talk to each other. They didn't want to talk to each other, and it was... it was the first time they had actually... they were finally acting the way they were feeling.

There's a pause. Mariana is looking down at the ground, Lilith is looking past her into the distance.

LILITH

And so, everyone in town kept doing their usual thing, trying to cure the disease, but also getting back to normal.

FLASHBACK: LILITH IS IN THE CAFE, TRYING TO AVOID EYE CONTACT WITH MARIANA.

LILITH (V.O.)

Everyone tried to pretend like nothing had happened. And hardly anybody in town looked sick, or if they did, they hid it well.

FLASHBACK: LILITH AND HANK ARE ON THE FARM, LIVING TWO DIFFERENT LIVES, BARELY ACKNOWLEDGING EACH OTHER.

LILITH (V.O.)

But the girl and her dad, they just didn't talk. They would go weeks without saying anything to each other. And it wasn't, like they weren't even angry with each other, you know? They just - they got it. And unlike everyone else, they didn't pretend like nothing had happened. And it wasn't relieving, and it wasn't depressing, it just was.

END FLASHBACK.

Another pause. Mariana and Lilith are both calm - they linger in the silence, watching the sun set.

LILITH

So, one day, the girl's father tells her he has a surprise for her. And, to be clear, this is where the analogy breaks down a little.

MARIANA

I think I'll manage.

LILITH

We can only hope.

(they both chuckle)

So they walk down the road for about an hour, past the fields, past the snow, and they don't say anything. Surprise, right?

MARIANA

I'm shocked.

LILITH

That's why I said it's a surprise.

BEGIN FLASHBACK: HANK AND LILITH APPROACH HER NEW, SMALLER HOUSE, WHICH LILITH IS CONFUSED BY.

LILITH (V.O.)

And finally, they reach a house, which the girl had never seen before. And her father says that it's all hers.

FLASHBACK: HANK SHOWS LILITH AROUND THE HOUSE, WHICH IS TINY, SPARSE, AND TRANQUIL.

LILITH (V.O.)

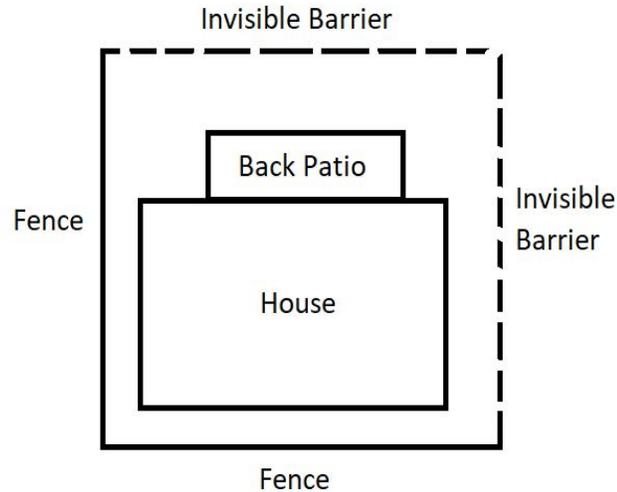
And then he tells her.

(she gets choked up)

He tells her that the house is on the edge of the town, right in the corner. Like, as close to the corner as you can get, as far away from everybody as you can go.

FLASHBACK: HANK SHOWS LILITH THE OUTSIDE OF THE HOUSE. SHE IS SILENT BUT OVERWHELMED AS SHE TRACES THE CORNER OF THE BARRIER WITH HER HAND.

LAYOUT:



END FLASHBACK.

In the present, Lilith is looking out at the barrier contentedly. It takes Mariana a second to realize that the barrier is there - when she does, she goes over to it and walks along the edge.

LILITH

And so she lived there ever since. And her dad gave her space, and didn't expect her to be part of the town, and... and now they talk to each other, and they're honest, and they -

(she chuckles to herself)

They feel like they've got an edge over the rest of the town, like they're in on a secret that nobody else knows.

MARIANA

Which is...?

LILITH

Their relationship is finally real.

Mariana keeps walking the edge. She's particularly fascinated by the corner, where the two barriers meet.

MARIANA

How did the girl's dad find this?

LILITH

Probably with a lot of walking. It's not like they had any surveyors out here.

MARIANA

That's neat.

LILITH

Yeah. He gets it, that's something the girl never noticed, just how much he knows what she's going through, and what she actually needs, not what everyone thinks she needs.

MARIANA

You're lucky.

LILITH

(chuckles)

I'm *blessed*.

(Mariana glances at her, surprised)

Okay, so I watched the interview. I love it out here, don't get me wrong, but it's so damn boring alllll the time.

MARIANA

You just watched it out of boredom? Not because your friend was in it?

LILITH

You should know me well enough by now. Why would I watch it because of my friend?

(they both laugh)

Speaking of...

MARIANA

Oh boy, so now *I* have to tell my life as a fairytale?

LILITH

Or as interpretative dance. I promise I'll judge.

MARIANA

Wow. Now I don't feel bad not talking to you for so long.

(they laugh)

Well... so, once there was a young girl, who had a really, really big family.

LILITH

No connection to real life.

MARIANA

Of course not.

They chuckle again. Mariana is still walking the edge of the barrier. Lilith is relaxing on the porch.

MARIANA

So this girl, her family was big, and poor, and every time there was a storm, it always hit them really hard. And so they would get angry, and complain, and lament-

LILITH

Lament?

MARIANA

Lament, it was bad, so the author used big words to describe how bad it was.

LILITH

The same author that used the word 'bad' twice in the same sentence?

MARIANA

And is a best-seller too. And she has to remind people about it because clearly that sort of title is soooo important to her.

(they laugh)

So this girl, when she was five, her family was in a really bad storm. And while everybody else was arguing and complaining-

LILITH

And lamenting.

MARIANA

And lamenting. While they reacted the same way they always did, and asked why God didn't care about them, and said the world was out to get them, and it wasn't fair... the girl sang a song that she had written. It was about how the storm was beautiful. The clouds, the rain, even the lightning, it was like a piece of art. And she sang about how it made the family closer, and made them stronger, and brought them together.

(pause)

And everyone in the family loved it. They'd never been so happy about a storm before, but they couldn't stop listening to her song, and they learned it, and sang it. And even though nobody in the town would help them, they got by, because of the song the girl had written.

(pause)

So, as you can imagine, this became a tradition, where every time a storm hit, they would turn to the girl. And she would write a new song about how the storm was the best thing to ever happen to them. And they'd sing it, and learn it, and be happy. And even though nobody in the town would help them, they got by, because of each new song the girl would write.

Lilith is captivated by the story as she roams the backyard, Mariana is still pacing along the barrier.

MARIANA

Well, one day there was a big storm. I mean, everyone got hit. Every town in the kingdom was in ruins. And as usual, the little girl wrote a song, and sang it. But this time, she wrote one for the whole town, because the storm was so bad.

(pause)

And.. it changed them. They couldn't stop singing it, they needed it. And suddenly the girl and her family were - they weren't invisible, they weren't poor. They weren't the unfortunate ones that nobody seemed to care about. The people in town actually wanted to help them. So they all worked to rebuild, and make the most of the storm, and be happy about it.

(pause)

And it didn't stop there. Her song spread through the entire kingdom. Soon, every town knew it, and everyone was singing it. The peasants, the king and queen, everyone. They all wanted to hear this song that the girl had written. It brought them all together, and everyone made sure the girl and her family were taken care of.

Longer pause. Mariana is at the corner of her wall; Lilith is next to her. They're both looking into the distance.

MARIANA

And then the girl realized something. Two things, actually, that she'd never felt before.

(pause)

The first was that, for the first time, she knew her family would be okay. They weren't poor. The people in town were taking care of them now.

(pause. Mariana presses her hand slowly against the barrier)

Second, she realized she wasn't a little girl anymore. She had grown up. But she was stuck, because she didn't know what to do. Her whole life, all she had ever done was take care of her family - and now they didn't need her. She was free to do whatever she wanted, but-

(her voice wavers as she fights back tears)
But she didn't know what she wanted.

A few tears run down Mariana's face, Lilith comforts her.

MARIANA

So one day, while her family was celebrating, she just disappeared.

Mariana is sobbing. Lilith puts her arm around her. For a few seconds, there's silence. Then Mariana forces herself through the corner.