

Liars & Leeches

Episode 3- "Closer Than a Shadow"

Created by Hemlock Creek Productions

Story by Marisa Ewing

Written by KJ Scott

THEME MUSIC BEGINS

NARRATOR

Liars & Leeches: Episode 3- "Closer
Than a Shadow"

THEME MUSIC CONTINUES

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

"Liars & Leeches" is a horror audio drama intended for mature audiences only. It contains sensitive topics, including discussions of gun violence, as well as depictions of domestic violence, stalking, and murder. More specific details about each episode are listed in the show notes. Listener discretion is advised.

THEME MUSIC ENDS

S1- INT./EXT. - TONYA'S HOME AND CAR

SFX: Sounds of Tonya getting ready play in the background.

NARRATOR

Tonya loved the simplicity of her morning routine. Before Tami and Jim died, she'd had a very specific routine to begin each day, but she hadn't kept up with it over the past couple of months. Now, as she started her routine for the first time in a while, she found herself caught between excitement and nervousness. Today was different, after all. Today marked a new day, and Tonya was determined to make it special. Today was her first day back in the office - and back in the city - since she'd moved into Tami and Jim's home. She studied herself in the mirror, smiling a little to encourage herself.

TONYA

(to herself)

Hello gorgeous.

NARRATOR

The routine was simple. A glass of water first thing in the morning.

(MORE)

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

Breathing exercises to help her focus. Skincare, makeup, getting dressed, and then finally the first amazing cup of coffee. Even Natalie knew not to make a loving joke about the morning routine. It was sacred to Tonya. Today, however, didn't go as smoothly as usual - the bathroom was still disorganized and cluttered from the move. She had to search for her moisturizer for a few minutes, and it took nearly double that time to find her lucky lipstick. In between, it felt a bit like she was pretending to be Tonya from before. Despite that, she kept going, not wanting to let her negative feelings hold her back. With every step she completed, she felt more and more like herself.

SFX: Tonya pouring coffee

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

Tonya let herself savor the coffee. She was up earlier than normal, anticipating the longer commute. She prided herself on rarely, if ever, running late. As she sipped her coffee and reflected back on her morning, things felt strange to her. This was the first time she'd gotten ready to go into the office in a long time.

SFX: Melancholy drone

When working from home, she would usually sleep in until the last possible moment. After everything, she still felt like an imposter, pretending to live her own life. Before Tami and Jim's death, she would wake up early and be ready to go long before the start of work. Now, the drive into the city also loomed ahead of her. Part of her worried that she might see The Man on her way in, or that he would follow her to New York.

(MORE)

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

Still, the excitement of getting to see her coworkers in person and to attend her family barbecue the next day was more enticing than her worries, so she tried to put them out of her mind.

SFX: Car starting, pulling out of the driveway

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

Pulling out of the driveway felt like the first hill of a rollercoaster. Tonya was nervous, and exhilarated at the same time. This was what progress looked like. She was going to be able to reach a new normal eventually, even though it would take a lot of work.

SFX: Car radio turned on, light pop music plays

As she drove through Cedar Grove, a sense of joy began to overtake the nerves. The normalcy of it all was thrilling in a strange, mundane way. The radio was on, playing some indie pop song that Tonya found herself nodding along to. The early morning chill was fading into the warmth of a summer day, and she considered rolling down her window to let in some air. She never thought the simple routine of going in to work on a Friday morning would elate her so much, but here she was, celebrating it.

Music continues into next scene

S2- EXT. NYC STREET

SFX: The bustle of the streets of NYC

NARRATOR

Tonya's good mood continued as she found parking not too far from Natalie's apartment. By the time she reached her building, Natalie was already waiting outside, bouncing on the balls of her feet as she scanned the passers-by for Tonya.

(MORE)

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

When Natalie caught sight of
Tonya's approach, her easy grin
warmed Tonya's heart.

NATALIE

(covering her genuine
happiness with a joke)
You look good! The outdoors suit
you. Not that whole Mrs. Havisham
routine.

TONYA

(playing off her,
chuckling)
Ooh, a Dickens reference. And here
I was thinking you just stuck to
obscure sci-fi and Bravo shows.

NATALIE

Those jokes are coming, but I
figured I'd get my best material
out of the way first.
(laugh)
But seriously, I'm glad -

TONYA

(interrupting; tone
friendly)
You don't need to say it. Trust me,
I know. I'm really glad too.
C'mere.

SFX: Tonya hugging Natalie

NATALIE

Ok ok, enough sappy stuff. We're
gonna be late if we don't leave
now.

SFX: Ominous drone, rush hour noises, police radio

NARRATOR

Heading towards the subway station
near Natalie's apartment, the
crowds began to thicken. More
people were rushing to get to work,
and Tonya realized she hadn't
considered the morning rush. Her
stomach twisted slightly as she
followed Natalie down the stairs.

SFX: swiping into subway

(MORE)

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

After swiping her Metrocard, she stood on the platform and watched the crowds swirl around her while Natalie checked her email. Tonya didn't want to disturb her with her worry about the size of the crowd, the people pressing against her from all sides, or her unfounded feeling that the Man had somehow followed her from her sleepy suburb.

TONYA

Busy day, huh?

NATALIE

Eh, not more than usual. Don't tell me you've been gone long enough to forget how the subway gets.

SFX: Frantic drone and heartbeats

NARRATOR

Out of the corner of her eye, Tonya saw what looked like a disturbingly similar silhouette. She quickly looked over, heart pounding. A few feet away, a young woman stood idly waiting, dressed in a long jacket. Tonya mentally kicked herself for panicking. It was so unlikely that The Man would be here, on this particular platform. She had nothing to worry about.

(beat)

Instead, a new worry settled in the back of her mind. There were so many people and so few exits. The bustling crowd covered most of the platform, leaving little space to run. If anything happened...

SFX: Subway car pulling up, doors opening

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

Tonya took a deep breath as they stepped onto the subway car.

SFX: Doors closing

Natalie was filling Tonya in on all the gossip from work, and Tonya forced herself to smile and nod along, even as the press of the crowd made her skin crawl. She comforted herself by saying that they'd be at work soon, and Tonya could relax in the privacy of her office. This was just a small speed bump in what was sure to be a good day. It had to be.

SFX: Muffled subway announcements

S3- INT. TONYA AND NATALIE'S OFFICE

Sound effects: office noise

NATALIE

(Fade in) -and we did move some stuff around. Your office is still the same, but we moved the entertainment desks closer to you. There's also the interns - if you want to meet them just let me know, 'cause two out of three are pretty cool.

TONYA

I feel bad, but I don't remember their names.

NATALIE

Tess, Isabella, and Grace. Tess and Isabella are the cool ones. Grace definitely got the job because her dad has money.

LIZ

(exuberant and loud, but distant)

Tonya!! Oh my god!

NARRATOR

A couple years younger than Tonya and Natalie, Liz still treated every day as if she couldn't believe how lucky she was to be at this job. It was sweet, but overwhelming at times. Tonya smiled as Liz bounded over to them, already talking a mile a minute.

LIZ

Natalie said you'd be here today!
It's so good to see you - virtual
calls are nice, but it's not the
same as seeing you in person, you
know? And boy, did we all miss you.
Are you okay? How was the drive in?
Do you need anything?

NATALIE

(under her breath)
And we're back to business.

TONYA

It's good to see you too Liz. And
no, I don't need anything. The
drive was pretty nice - finally got
some time to listen to some new
music. And unless you moved the
coffee maker, I'm good.

LIZ

(sing-song)
Oh, not only did we move it, but we
got a new one. Here, let me show
you!

TONYA

(to Natalie)
Next time I'm out, tell me where
the coffee maker is first. That's
the most important thing.

NATALIE

(with a smile)
My bad.

LIZ

We got this new espresso machine
that makes like coffee shop quality
stuff here. Which is good, because
I totally spend too much money on
coffee on a regular basis. Oof. But
I can't help it, I love my lattes
Tonya, you understand.

NATALIE

How many have you had today?

LIZ

Ha ha, very funny. I've only had
one... And a half. But it was a
half caff so it doesn't count.

NATALIE

We can tell.

TONYA

(to Liz)

So what have you been writing about Liz? Any new social media platforms I should be aware of?

LIZ

Well, Tiktok's still king, Twitter's still chaotic, and Tumblr might make a comeback but I really hope it doesn't because I made a blog there as a teenager and I'm so sure someone could still find it. Oh my god it was SO embarrassing. I used to write poetry about the crushes I had, and the TV shows I watched, and the crushes I had on the TV show characters that I watched. And my art, Tonya. My art. (continues to talk under the Narrator)

NARRATOR

(coming in over Liz)

Tonya felt herself relax as Liz talked. Gossiping around the coffee maker was a familiar routine, and it grounded her after the subway. She'd been right to think the moment on the platform was just a small cloud in an otherwise wonderful day.

LIZ

...but that's not work appropriate. Marc and I have been talking about doing a deep dive into fandom across platforms since it's still such a big topic! But honestly - whoo- I can save the pitch for a creative brief later! I don't want to overwhelm you right now, you just walked in the door.

TONYA

(mildly overwhelmed by all of that)

Uuuh...yeah! Just send me a pitch and I'll look it over. It sounds good but I want to see more detail in writing before I sign off on it.

LIZ

Great! I'll get you that today!
 (suddenly very serious) It's so
 good to see Tonya, seriously. Let
 me know if you need anything and I
 would be happy to help. (suddenly
 very bubbly again). I'll catch up
 with you later! *gasping* Maybe we
 could do lunch. This new diner
 opened up and their burgers are to
die for. Come by my desk later when
 you're ready for your lunch break
 and we can go. You too Natalie. Ok
 byeeeeeee...

SFX: footsteps walking away.

NATALIE

My God. She could out power the
 Energizer bunny.

TONYA

(chuckling)
 Be nice.

NATALIE

I am being nice! I'm impressed,
 honestly. I'm at the age where I
 can only vaguely remember that kind
 of spark.

TONYA

Nat she's two years younger than
 you.

NATALIE

Yeah, but I still stand by what I
 said.

(beat)

You good?

TONYA

(sighing)

Yeah. I've got a shit load of stuff
 to edit today so I should probably
 get going on that.

NATALIE

Cool. If you need anything -

TONYA

I know, I know. I'll let you know
 if anything comes up. I'll meet you
 at Liz's desk later for lunch, kay?

NATALIE

My treat.

TONYA

We can debate that later.

Sound effect: footsteps, a door opening, closing again

NARRATOR

In the privacy of her own office, Tonya finally exhaled. The room was exactly as it was the last time she saw it, the day she got the call from the police. She walked around the desk, taking in the sight of the neatly organized papers and her calendar still dated from two months before. Tonya was quietly grateful that she didn't have any photos on the desk of Tami and Jim.

(beat)

Turning on her computer, Tonya found a backlog of entertainment articles that needed editing.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

The first piece was a review of a romantic comedy, and as Tonya made her edits she was able to relax as a sense of familiarity washed over her.

TONYA

(reading the subhead)

"This romantic comedy has us ready to believe in love, or at least, how much we love other movies compared to this one."

(she laughs)

Now I want to rewatch When Harry Met Sally.

SFX: Tonya typing

NARRATOR

It was an easy piece, the kind the site used to balance out the harder hitting journalism that kept their lights on. The article didn't require much editing, and within a short while Tonya was done and ready to move onto the next story.

(beat)

(MORE)

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

The next article was simply titled
"Closer Than a Shadow."

TONYA

(reading out loud)

"Originally made popular in the 70s
with slasher POV films such as
Black Christmas and Halloween,
stalker films place us in the eyes
of the killer as he -- and in these
films, it's usually a male
character -- pursues his unknowing
victims..."

SFX: Ominous drone

NARRATOR

Tonya had never been a big fan of
horror movies. Despite watching
most midnight screenings with
Natalie through her fingers, she
wasn't exactly a chicken by any
stretch of the imagination, and
could edit stories and articles
about horror without flinching. And
yet, the more she read this
article, the more unsettled she
became. Her mind wandered to The
Man again. Her therapist had said
anxiety had a way of making you see
danger that feels real, but may not
be real in that moment. Something
told her this wasn't the case. This
Man was out there, and he was
dangerous. She realized that, with
her in the city like this, he could
be around any corner. If he wanted
to find her, it would be easy to
track down where she worked. He
could be waiting outside the
building, or on the elevator, or
maybe he'd followed her from her
home and was currently lurking
around Natalie's apartment.

SFX: Faint sounds of police cars outside

TONYA

(Trying not to panic)

Oh God, okay. Breathe. Just
breathe. It's okay.

NARRATOR

Suddenly Tonya's office seemed too small, and too warm. The clear blue sky out of the window felt like it was turning to the steel gray of a summer storm. Maybe the woman on the subway platform had been an innocent coincidence...but what if it hadn't been? What if it was The Man, trying to trick her? Lure into a false sense of security? Maybe he had followed her. All Tonya knew was that every word of the article was dredging up more and more terror and she couldn't handle it. She wanted to be home, where the four walls that surrounded her were at least familiar. Maybe she would feel better in Natalie's apartment, where she wasn't surrounded by people...and there was a strong lock on the door.

SFX: keys jingling as Tonya picks them up.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

Tonya felt as though she was making a run for it as she grabbed her bag and her keys, including the spare for Natalie's apartment. She couldn't admit to Natalie that she couldn't make it through a full day; just the thought made Tonya feel nauseous.

SFX: Elevator door opening, closing behind Tonya

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

All her positive energy from the morning was gone, replaced by shame and anger. She longed for the days where she could go about her day without panic seeping in and poisoning her thoughts.

TONYA

(to herself)

You're okay. You're going to be okay. Just make it to Nat's apartment and you'll be safe.

SFX: Elevator door opening. Tonya's footsteps as she leaves the building. The hustle and bustle of the street outside.

S3- EXT. ON THE STREET

TONYA (CONT'D)
(frantic)
Taxi! TAXI!

SFX: A cab pulling up and Tonya opening the door.

CAB DRIVER
Hop in, miss. Where to?

TONYA
(winded)
135 Magnolia Street. Please.

CAB DRIVER
Sure thing. (beat) I hope you don't
mind me asking, but are you ok? You
look like someone was chasing you
down or something.

TONYA
(on the edge of
panicking)
Oh no, I'm fine. Just a pretty
stressful work day, that's all.

CAB DRIVER
(not believing Tonya at
all)
Well, if you say so...

NARRATOR
The driver pulled away from the
curb, occasionally sneaking glances
at Tonya trying to breathe in the
back seat. She didn't look out the
window, instead keeping her eyes on
her lap. The radio was on, but it
was a low drone in the background.
For the most part, she had quiet.

CAB DRIVER
And here we are. 135 Magnolia.
That'll be \$22.75.

TONYA
(clearly upset)
Thank you. And keep the change.

Sound effect: cab door opening and closing.

NARRATOR

There was no one around as Tonya all but ran up two flights of stairs to reach Natalie's apartment.

SFX: Tonya opening Natalie's apartment door. Ominous drone.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

She felt like she could take a breath for the first time once the door was locked behind her. Idly, she wondered if she shouldn't have taken a loop, or if she should've tried to throw The Man off her trail. Assuming he was even following her.

(beat)

Tonya tried to focus herself on the familiar sights of Natalie's apartment. The organized clutter on her desk and counters. The mismatched pillows on the sofa. A few wilted ferns in the window near the fire escape.

Music: Soft piano music plays

The essence of her friend was there, and if Natalie herself couldn't be there to soothe her, Tonya would let the signs of her presence calm her down. Tonya poured herself a glass of water and threw herself onto Natalie's plush couch. In the moments that followed, Tonya felt annoyed with herself and how quickly the anxiety and panic overcame her. With a sigh, she turned on the TV and let the sounds of someone else's life wash over her.

S4- INT. NATALIE'S APARTMENT - LATER

SFX: Apatrment door unlocking

TONYA

(defeated/embarrassed)

Hi.

NATALIE

(worried)

Jesus Christ, there you are. You left work!

TONYA

Yeah. I did.

(pause)

Did it look bad?

NATALIE

No, 'cause everyone knows you're going through something right now. People were worried, but no one was mad, if that's what you were thinking.

TONYA

(sighing)

I didn't want to leave.

NATALIE

I know. I wish you would have told me sooner though. I started to worry when you didn't show up for lunch.

TONYA

I had to get out of there. I couldn't just sit there and wait for him to just come in and-

NATALIE

(interrupting her)

Him?

TONYA

The Man I saw. I was reading Jo's article on the stalker in modern horror films and all I could see was his damn trench coat. It was like he was going to step off the elevator, or that he'd be on the subway, or that... I don't know, that he'd pop out from under my desk! I know it's irrational but no one seems to care that this guy is out there and that he's following me!

NATALIE

(sitting next to Tonya)

Hey, hey, it's okay. I care, okay? And your therapist cares too.

TONYA

She thinks it's my imagination.

NATALIE

(pissed)

She actually said that?

TONYA

(sheepish)

Well, not using those exact words.
It was more like...given what's
happened to me, paranoia is to be
expected.

(defensively)

I mean, she's not a bad therapist,
but I know what I saw.

NATALIE

When's the last time you saw this
guy?

TONYA

A couple of weeks ago. I thought I
saw him on the subway too, but it
was someone else.

NATALIE

(thinking out loud)

Okay. Right, if you see this guy
again, I want you to call me.

TONYA

(hopeful)

You believe me?

NATALIE

I think you're seeing something. Do
I think it's a stalker? I'm not
sure. But if something is scaring
you this badly, I'm gonna help.
Maybe it's just your mind playing
tricks on you or maybe there is
some weirdo who's following you.
But we'll figure it out together,
and whatever the solution is, I'll
be there. I promise.

TONYA

(Relieved)

You're the best.

NATALIE

Damn right I am.

(beat)

So, about the barbecue tomorrow...

TONYA

Shit. I... I don't think I can do that. I cannot meltdown like this in front of my parents, they'll flip and want me to move home.

NATALIE

I mean, is that such a bad thing? Being around people that care about you instead of that big house all by yourself?

TONYA

I know they'll mean well, but I really don't want them babying me.

NATALIE

Fair enough.

(beat)

So what are you gonna tell them?

TONYA

Food poisoning probably. No one really questions that one.

NATALIE

I'll let you make the call then. Can I make you some tea?

TONYA

God yes, that sounds amazing.

SFX: phone dialing, ringing. Natalie making tea in the background.

Melancholy music

FRANK

Hello?

TONYA

Hey daddy.

FRANK

(going off her tone of voice)

What's wrong?

TONYA

So, for lunch Natalie and I grabbed something from a food truck and it's not sitting well. I had to leave work early 'cause I thought I was going to be sick. Anyways, I don't think I'll be able to make it tomorrow - you don't want me puking and ruining everyone's day.

FRANK

Aw, sweetheart. We were really looking forward to seeing you.

TONYA

Me too. I just... I just don't feel good.

FRANK

...are you sure it's that?

TONYA

I promise. Seriously, I'm just gonna sleep it off at Natalie's and then drive home tomorrow to rest. I'll be fine.

FRANK

Okay. I love you, baby. Get some rest, and hopefully we'll see you at the next one.

TONYA

Thanks, Dad. I love you too.

NATALIE

(after Tonya has hung up)
So, what do you want to do tonight?

TONYA

Sleep, mostly. Maybe watch some TV. Any ideas for something goofy to watch?

NATALIE

Of course I do! Let me see, there's a new show about people trying to plan weddings in a week which is so stressful but the Bridezillas are spectacular...

TONYA

(laughs)

NARRATOR

Tonya spent the rest of the evening pretending she was fine, and so did Natalie. They didn't talk any more about The Man, or Tonya's grief. They simply acted like everything was the same as it had always been, and the little burst of normalcy was enough to help Tonya find comfort in the familiar.

SFX: Traffic noises

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

The next day, Tonya drove home early in the morning. Most of the traffic was heading into the city, so it was an easy trip. The radio stayed off, and Tonya spent the drive trying to focus on the present. The day was cloudier than yesterday, overcast and gloomy. The weather matched her mood, and Tonya allowed herself to feel badly for just a few minutes. She worried she'd never feel happy again if she let herself succumb to the depths of her feelings, so she tried to only feel them in short bursts rather than fall prey to a longer spiral.

SFX: Turn signal

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

When she finally pulled up to her house, the first thing Tonya noticed was a bouquet of flowers on the front porch.

TONYA

(confused)

What the fuck?

Sound effect: car door closing, footsteps. Ominous drone.

NARRATOR

Drawing closer, she could see the flowers were dead, and rotting. Their sickly sweet stench made Tonya cover her nose.

TONYA
(gagging)
Oh my god, ew.

NARRATOR
A small note was perched among the dead blooms, and Tonya bent down to read it.

TONYA
"Welcome home."

NARRATOR
The handwriting wasn't any she recognized. Tonya stared at the note for a while, hands trembling. This was a warning of some kind. Or a threat. Swallowing past her fear, Tonya grabbed the decaying flowers and hurried to the trash bin at the end of the driveway. She frantically lifted the lid to stuff the flowers inside...then hesitated. She took out her phone, and began to snap pictures; two of the bouquet, and one of the note, which she then slipped into her pocket. With the dead and drying flower stems still clutched in one hand, she texted the photos to Natalie, with a message that said simply,

TONYA
"He's back."

OUTRO MUSIC PLAYS

NARRATOR
Liars & Leeches: Episode 3- "Closer Than a Shadow" starring Ryan Reid as The Narrator, Kendell Byrd as Tonya, Newton "Newt" Schottelkotte as Natalie, Rachel Lepore as Liz, Gerald Hill as Frank, and GM Hakim as the Cab Driver.

"Liars & Leeches" was produced by Hemlock Creek Productions. The story was created by Marisa Ewing and the script written by KJ Scott, with script editing provided by Meg Williams.

(MORE)

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

Dialogue editing, mixing and mastering was done by Marisa Ewing, sound design by Melissa Pons, and music written by Nico Vettese of "We Talk of Dreams." Additional recording assistance provided by Jordan Alexander and Trey Baker of Music City Studios. To learn more about the show, cast, and crew, visit www.hemlockcreekprod.com. That's Hemlock Creek P-R-O-D.com.

Thank you for listening. We will return next week.