

[Theme music plays: somber piano and strings over ticking percussion. The music ends on a wailing note. We're in a room, there's a little bit of echo, as if it's mostly empty.]

NOA (Lauren Shippen): (Deep breath) Hey guys, thanks for tuning in with me tonight. I know that I've been vague-posting about this stream a lot lately, and while I appreciate how much you all care about me, there's no need for the wild theories about where I'm going after we sign off. [swishing] I was always planning on telling you what's going on in my life, and why I'm looking at this moment as the end of a chapter. It doesn't mean the book, or the channel in this instance, is over, but it's time for me to take my next steps toward a new version of myself. In order to do that, I'm going to have to go dark for a while, and [beat] you all deserve to know why.

NOA: Do you all remember what you were doing when you found out about The Ghost House? Because I do. We were here, together, a lot of us. I had sort of set that day aside as time off from my various crusades. I was on Twitch playing Animal Crossing, telling you all about that time I accidentally covered my high school crush in an entire plateful of spaghetti and meatballs, when all of a sudden the comments started blowing up. So I stopped decorating my island long enough to click on the link you all were obsessing over, so we could share in whatever that day's madness was together. But I don't think any of us could have been really prepared for what was actually happening. An alien ship landing without incident in the Nevada Desert. From that moment forward, from the second we all saw that first grainy drone footage, to three hours later when I finally signed off for the night—everything else just sort of melted away. I needed to understand where it was from and why it came here.

NOA: My interest, at first, seemed innocuous. Sure, for those first few hours—constantly refreshing every corporate and citizen media site—I kept thinking we'd find out it was just some hoax, some guerrilla marketing campaign meant to promote aluminum-free deodorant, or something like that. By it kept not being debunked, and in the blazing desert sunlight of the following day there was no denying it. It was inarguably real.

NOA: But even up to that point I was still only as surprised as everyone else was, only as obsessed as any normal person would be by this utter paradigm shift.

NOA: But as soon as we actually got to hear the audio? Of all of those poor souls screaming at the agony of being trapped in a prison too small to contain them? And then later as it became clear via the incredible Dr. Harris that these souls were political prisoners? I knew that I would do anything in my power to help them. And lord knows, I've done what I can in the days and months since. We've held charity streams benefitting The Nevada Project, and put together care packages for the lucky few who've been called to populate Red Camp, to become the first integrated people on this planet. We've gotten thousands of signatures on petitions protesting the military's treatment of these folks as second class citizens, and made sure to call and write our elected representatives, demanding they come out with statements advocating for the same.

NOA: What started as ordinary fascination has turned into the most fulfilling pursuit of my life. So when I found out they had re-opened applications for more volunteers, I knew that it was my time to shine.

NOA: (chuckle) Yeah, I guess I kinda buried the lede there, didn't I? Yes, right now, as we speak, I am moments away from officially throwing my hat in the ring for a Second of my own. The paperwork has

been a bit exhausting. And the surveys? (she starts to speak, then changes tack) It was like I was filling out the most bizarrely granular dating profile with how insanely specific some of the questions got. Sure, there's the standard stuff about familial history; how did your parents' parents die and all that. But it went way beyond that, too. They wanted to know what my favorite color was as a toddler. The contents of the best meal I'd ever eaten, and [beat] what kinds of things make my skin crawl. Whether or not I preferred a warm or cold pillow. Cold, by the way. They asked for thirteen different character references: familial, educational, professional, and romantic. They wanted to know my entire dating and sexual history, from my first kiss outside Mr. Owen's classroom in fifth grade to my last partner of three and a half years. Some of this stuff, I get. They want to make sure I'm not making any rash decisions; that I'm not fleeing a bad break up, and that I won't change my mind after it's too late. And they're right to be concerned about that sort of thing, but the hardest question to answer of all, in all my hours of filling out essay after essay on my relative sanity and licorice preferences, was *why*.

NOA: Why am I willing to shed the part of myself that moves through the world as an individual? And, I'll be completely honest with all of you here, it took me a lot of soul searching to find the answer to that one. In some ways it's [sigh] easy to explain—it's the opportunity of a lifetime, the natural conclusion to the kind of radical outreach I've dedicated my life to. But I'd be lying if I said that's the whole story.

NOA: I am the only child of two only children. My grandparents passed away when I was young, so it really was just me, my mom, and my dad. I mean, sure, I had a series of au pairs that I could pretend were aunts or uncles but were really more like my parole officers. Friends from school who I loved like siblings, but who couldn't exactly return that love because they had their own siblings. At the end of the day, I was always alone. And I hated that feeling. I dreamt of nothing more than having a sibling of my own: a person with whom I could share history, trauma, happiness, the unique day-to-day intimacy of family. But instead, I've had to make my way through this world by myself, especially since the way things ended with my parents.

NOA: Now, of course, I have so appreciated the kinship we've all felt with each other. You've shared so much of yourselves with me over the years, that I can't help but consider you all my family. [sigh] But [beat] maybe this is my shot to finally know what the dictionary definition feels like. To have someone to care for, and-and move through the world with unconditional support for one another. It's a radical, scary idea. And who knows? Maybe I'll be bad at it. Maybe [beat] growing up in such a solitary way will make me incapable of (sigh) giving my potential Second the kind of companionship I was always missing. The kind of companionship they deserve, or—(sigh) Or maybe, my Second will have no interest in confiding in me that way. Maybe they'll be from a giant family, and hoping for nothing more than a little bit of peace and quiet.

NOA: But that's the thing about the Nevada Project: being bad at it isn't an option. If I'm lucky enough to get a Second, there's no going back for either of us. And look, I know there are those of you out there that are saying, "Boohoo, look at the constantly virtue-signaling sad little rich girl, she has it soooooo hard." And trust me, you're not thinking anything I haven't thought a million times myself. I know there are plenty of other causes out there affecting humanity that I could be supporting, and this one's not better than any other, but there is one thing about it that's unique: once I've started, there's no going home.

NOA: I can't say that this decision is categorically the right one for me. How could I? I-I can't know the future. But if this is my chance to make a difference, for one single person out there, who is begging to

have the opportunity to take one uninterrupted breath? Then I'm going to grab that bull by the horns, and dive straight into the unknown.

NOA: (sigh) Speaking of which, I'm about ready to take that leap. And I'm going to do it live, on stream, with all of you here watching, so that there's no chance of me backing out now. And afterwards—I'm gonna take a good long break from the internet, and remind myself that it's in The Nevada Project's hands now. I don't know when I'll be back, but hopefully soon. And, hopefully, I'll have a brand new friend for you to meet on the stream with me. [music begins] Take care of yourselves out there. I'll miss you.

[Theme music plays again, then fades for credits:]

VOICEOVER (Jordana Williams): *Give Me Away*, created by Mac Rogers. Written by Bob Raymonda, directed by Jordana Williams, featuring Lauren Shippen. Music by Adam Blau, production manager Katie Kosma, produced and edited by Sean Williams.

[The music ends on that same wailing note.]

END OF EPISODE 2.5