

A quick note - this episode contains quite a few car noises, so if you're driving while you listen to this, please be careful.

TITLES

Believer Theme Music fades in.

NARRATOR
Believer, Episode 8: Fingers.

INT. LARA'S CABIN - MORNING

A sunny morning. Birds chirp.

Lara finishes dressing. She zips up a jacket.

On the floor, Jake stirs. Lara pauses.

JAKE
(in his sleep)
Apples for everyone...

He falls back asleep. Lara exhales.

LARA (V.O.)
For the record, I'm glad nothing happened with Jake. Well, you know, nothing much. Not that I would've been doing anything wrong. I mean, Rose was very clear about things. Not that she...oh, I don't know. It just would've complicated things, I think.

Lara pours herself a glass of water at the sink.

LARA (V.O.)
And to be honest, I still don't really know what Jake's deal was.

Lara gasps.

LARA
The water!

Jake stirs in response.

LARA
No no no, back to sleep...

Jake falls back to snoring.

LARA
Good man.

Jake snores on.

JAKE
(in his sleep)
Skunk Ape...

Lara tip-toes out.

EXT. LARA'S CABIN - CONTINUOUS

Lara walks in the tall grass.

LARA (V.O.)
It was weird leaving SodaPop's leash hanging by the door. No morning walks. No happy dog. Just sneak past the sleeping man on the floor and go about your day.

LARA
Now, where do you think the water comes from?

She take a few more steps and then...

LARA
Aha!

LARA (V.O.)
Okay, well, if mold had taken over Jake's house, then maybe that explained some of his experiences -- the lapses in memory, the odd behavior. But what if there was more? What if there really was something in the water?

She clears aside some grass...and gasps.

LARA
What the...

LARA (V.O.)
Jake had his own water pump. Probably for a well system instead of the city water program -- pretty common in rural areas like this. And growing all around it, under the grass, close to the ground, were these...

LARA
What are those?

LARA (V.O.)
They were like little mushrooms.
Tiny, black, oily-looking lumps with
sickly gray stems and dark caps. At
first I thought they were just
growing around the water pump -- you
know, moist soil and all that -- but
when I looked closely I could see...

LARA
Oh my god.

LARA (V.O.)
There were tiny cracks in the pipe
around every little mushroom. They
were growing inside the water pump.

She pulls out a little baggy and snips some out of the dirt.

LARA (V.O.)
So I took some samples.

Lara straightens up, wipes her hands on her jacket.

LARA
I should see that doctor.

INT. SIMMONS'S LAB - MOMENTS LATER

Machines whir. Simmons shuffles through papers with an
urgent, busy air.

SIMMONS
(to herself)
Now, yes, if you line up the mycelia
at just this angle -- yes! Yes! But
this -- and that -- you've almost got
it, Penelope.

Lara taps on the door and opens it.

LARA
Doctor Simmons? Your assistant
said...

SIMMONS
No entry!

LARA
Oh, sorry, I just --

SIMMONS
This area is restricted. You'll have
to go back to the waiting area,
Miss --

LARA
Campbell. Lara Campbell?

SIMMONS
Lara Campbell. Lara Campbell? Lara
Campbell!

LARA
Uh. Yeah.

SIMMONS
Come in, come in.

LARA
Yeah, um, Camille said that you'd
been trying to...whoa.

SIMMONS
What? Oh, don't mind that. Just doing
a bit of research.

LARA
This is all research? Taped onto the
walls and cabinets and...everything?

SIMMONS
Oh!
(laughs)
It's a bit unorthodox, isn't it? It's
just easier to see this way. I like
to lay it all out, you know, make
sense of it.

Lara steps into the room, distracted.

LARA
Yeah. Can I ask -- what are these
lines?

SIMMONS
You recognize those?

LARA
Maybe. What are they?

SIMMONS
That, my dear, is the mycorrhizal network.

LARA
Myco-what?

SIMMONS
Mycology. Fungus. Fungal networks.

LARA
Like mushrooms?

SIMMONS
Yes! Well, no. Mushrooms are just the bit we see, the reproductive organs. No, no, fungi are so much more than that. They project themselves meters underground, burrowing deep, making connections between nutrients and elements.

LARA
So like tree roots?

SIMMONS
No, no, no. On a DNA level, they have more in common with humans than plants.

LARA
Wait -- really?

SIMMONS
So you can think of them as limbs.

LARA
(realizing)
Fingers. Reaching through the dirt.

SIMMONS
(indifferent)
If you like.

Simmons moves a sheaf of papers aside.

SIMMONS
Here, look.

Lara moves close.

SIMMONS
This. You see this diagram?

LARA

The trees?

SIMMONS

This is a forest. This is what we see when we look at a forest. Different trees, ferns, bushes, plants. Distinct organisms. Yes?

LARA

Sure.

SIMMONS

But underneath, underneath the dirt -- look.

(flips a page)

Everything is connected.

LARA

What do you mean?

SIMMONS

Okay. Trees have roots, right? To survive, trees need to synthesize light from the sun. But they also need to draw water and other nutrients up from the dirt. Hence, roots.

LARA

Right.

SIMMONS

But there are trees who get cut off from their food sources and still manage to thrive. There are even plants that never experience sunlight. And they still live. How?

LARA

I guess they...

SIMMONS

Mycelia! You see, the trees send out roots. But roots only get them so far. Fungus -- fungus fills in the gaps. Each fungus sends out these long strings, these tendrils --

LARA

Lines.

SIMMONS

They have more control over where they place them, how they travel. And if they place themselves next to a tree's roots, they can communicate.

LARA

So they attach themselves? Like parasites?

SIMMONS

Not parasites. Symbiotes. An exchange. The tree secretes glucose. In return, the fungal network carries water, carbon, phosphorus -- whatever the tree needs to survive. And not just that! Information, Lara. There have been cases where one tree develops a disease, and the other trees around it boost their disease resistance in response. They talk to each other. Through the fungal network.

LARA

That's...crazy.

SIMMONS

You see, don't you? We think of the forest as just an area. A collection of trees. Separate things. But no. It's a single organism. The fungus is its central nervous system.

LARA

Every forest is like this?

SIMMONS

This is what it is, Lara. Life. All life. We are all worlds inside of worlds inside of worlds. A body full of organisms full of cells. Do you see it? Do you see?

LARA

Yeah. Yeah, it's, um, interesting.

SIMMONS

Interesting? Interesting?! This is vital. This is the stuff of life itself!

LARA

Yes. Yeah.

SIMMONS

You don't see. None of them can see.

LARA

No, actually, I came here to ask you -- well, I found this weird kind of mushroom inside somebody's water pipes.

SIMMONS

(very excited)

What?! Show me.

LARA

Uh, well, I got a little sample -- hey!

She pulls out the bag. Simmons snatches it away.

SIMMONS

Let me see.

She inspects.

SIMMONS

Oh yes. Oh yes. Let me see, where are the other sample photos...

She rapidly rummages through stacks of paper, sending papers flying.

LARA

Those lines...is that what it actually looks like? The fungus?

SIMMONS

(distracted)

Well, it's an artist's rendering.

LARA

Just like Rose's room.

SIMMONS

Hm?

LARA

Nothing. This fungus -- can it make people sick?

SIMMONS

Why do you think I'm studying this, exactly? For fun? Lara -- can I call you Lara?

LARA

(she's been calling her Lara for like 5 minutes) Uh, yeah.

SIMMONS

Fungal infection is one of the most common types of illness a person can have. That's what yeast infections are.

LARA

Ew. Really?

SIMMONS

Yeast is a fungus. They're everywhere!

LARA

Well, that's...

SIMMONS

Breathe in the spores, consume contaminated food, eat the wrong mushroom...they think fungal-infected wheat could be the cause of the Salem Witch Trials, did you know that?

LARA

I heard something about that.

SIMMONS

Most cause regular respiratory infections, skin inflammation, that kind of thing. But a few -- here.

She rips several pages off the wall and reads.

SIMMONS

Cryptococcus can penetrate the blood-brain barrier and cause confusion, disorientation, sensitivity to light.

LARA

Huh.

SIMMONS

Candida Albicansis, when spread to the brain, causes symptoms remarkably similar to Alzheimer's Disease.

LARA

It can cause memory loss?

SIMMONS

Memory loss, confusion, disorientation, all kinds of mental and neurological symptoms.

LARA

So what kind of fungus did I find?

SIMMONS

Lara. You understand, don't you? Something is infecting this town. Not just the people, though it's getting them too. No. It's everything, Lara. The plants, the animals, the dirt itself. You've seen it, haven't you? There are a few vector sites -- the Boone House, the condemned church, a few spots in the woods. Anyone who comes into contact with them becomes violently ill. Everyone. Except you.

LARA

Yeah. That's weird, right?

Simmons moves closer to Lara.

SIMMONS

I will study this sample. But if we really want to defeat this, we're going to need more. Much more. You understand?

LARA

I can check the rest of the water supply. Maybe a few more of those sites have these mushrooms at them.

SIMMONS

I need a sample from you, Lara. To see the antibodies.

LARA

Oh. Of course.

SIMMONS

So you agree? To a sample?

LARA

Yeah, if you think it'll help.

SIMMONS

I think it's very important, Lara.

LARA

Okay...so do you want to do a cheek swab, or...?

SIMMONS

Let me take some readings first.

She tightens a velcro strap around Lara's arm.

LARA

Oh -- is this for a blood pressure monitor, or...?

SIMMONS

It's all standard, dear.

She straps down the other arm.

LARA

Are you...strapping me to the chair? I don't think I'm comfortable having both arms restrained.

Simmons laughs, a little unhinged.

SIMMONS

Don't be silly!

Simmons forcefully tightens the strap.

LARA

Ow!

SIMMONS

Now, the best method for killing fungus is beta-glucan targeting. The body doesn't produce beta-glucans. So you target what's unique about the fungus itself. In the wild, nitrogen, bleach, that kind of thing is fine, but in the body...now where did I put that...

LARA
Doctor Simmons --

SIMMONS
Here we go! Now, just hold still...

LARA
Whoa, hey, don't you usually use a syringe?

SIMMONS
Oh, yes, but you see, I need so much blood, it just seems more efficient to use the scalpel, don't you think?

LARA
Um, no? Whoa!

Lara scoots the chair quickly back across the floor.

SIMMONS
Oh! Now, you see? I've missed! If I'd known you were squeamish, I would've done your legs. Let's -- try -- again!

They struggle. Simmons lunges at Lara, who pulls back again, strains against the straps, scrapes the chair back and forth.

LARA
No!

SIMMONS
Now it's very important that you -- hold -- still!

Lara screams.

LARA
Somebody help me! Help!

SIMMONS
Oh, dear, she can't hear you. Though now that you mention it, I would be better off getting cerebro-spinal fluid.

LARA
This is now how you do a spinal tap!

Simmons lunges for Lara again. Lara kicks her. Simmons GRUNTS and falls backward. She takes a few breaths, steadies herself.

SIMMONS

You know what? You're right. This is insane.

LARA

Uh-huh.

SIMMONS

I need a much better tool.

Simmons grabs a BONE SAW. Revs it up.

LARA

Why would you even have a bone saw in here? This isn't an operating room!

SIMMONS

(duh)

It's a lab! You need all sorts of things!

She lunges at Lara. Lara struggles, twists, and finally breaks free of one restraint.

LARA

Ha!

SIMMONS

Now if you slip the restraints, this gets so much more complicated.

LARA

Ahhh!

Arm free, Lara deflects Simmons just in time. Simmons trips backward and slams into a counter full of lab equipment.

Lara quickly pulls off the other velcro strap and scrambles to her feet.

SIMMONS

Lara, please, if you'll just sit back down, this could save a lot of people.

LARA

Stay away from me!

The saw whirs. Lara shoves the chair at Simmons, who falls over. Lara races to the door, wrenches it open, and dashes back into --

INT. LARA'S INBOX

VOICEMAIL

At the end of your message, press one.

BEEP!

JAKE

Hey, Lara, it's Jake. Listen, I hope it wasn't too awkward when, uh... well, I hope you got out okay this morning. Anyway, uh, I went back to my house earlier and -- you'll never believe this -- my house is covered in black mold. Must've grown overnight. We're talking all over the walls, absolutely everywhere. Crazy, right? Anyway, I'm gonna stay at my friend Abe's for a while until I can get it taken care of. So if you come back and I'm not there, that's why. But, you know, if you want to you should -- I mean, you can call me. If you need anything. And try to stay out of the main house, okay? There's, like, a lot of mold. Must be something with the rain or something. Okay. Okay, okay. See you around.

VOICEMAIL

End of message.

EXT. BOONE HOUSE - LATER

Lara runs on the sidewalk, breathing hard. She stops to catch her breath.

An AMBULANCE rushes past, siren blaring.

LARA

(out of breath)

An ambulance...? I didn't know they had those out here.

The front door of the BOONE HOUSE opens. TERRI BOONE and SHERIFF TATE emerge, in conversation.

SHERIFF

Well, if anything else comes up,
don't hesitate to call.

TERRI

Thank you, Sheriff Tate. Now if...
(sees Lara)
What the hell?

LARA

Uh...

TERRI

Lara Campbell? Are you kidding me?!

LARA

Terri Boone? How did I get to your
house? God, I swear this town is
like, ten feet wide.

SHERIFF

Is there a problem here, Terri?

TERRI

I'd say so.

LARA

No, listen, I swear I didn't come
here on purpose. I just had to get
away from -- actually, Sheriff, I
really need to talk to you. It's
about the doctor.

Sodapop races out through the still-open front door of the
Boone House.

LARA

Oh, Sodapop! Hey, buddy.

Rose follows after him.

ROSE

Sodapop!
(she stops)
Lara?

LARA

Rose.

ROSE

What are you doing here?

LARA
Okay, so, like I was just explaining,
I was running away from Doctor
Simmons.

SHERIFF
Penelope Simmons?

LARA
She attacked me.

SHERIFF
What?

TERRI
(overlapping)
Oh, come on.

LARA
Listen, this stuff you guys have been
messing with -- it's so dangerous. It
messes with your head. Doctor Simmons
has been experimenting with it and
it's just driving her -- well, if you
come with me, you'll see.

TERRI
Right. Everyone's crazy but you,
right Lara?

LARA
That's not what I said.

SHERIFF
Right, but this -- what did you say
it was?

LARA
It's a kind of fungus. I think.

SHERIFF
And this fungus doesn't affect you?

LARA
No, I seem to have some kind of
immunity.

TERRI
Isn't that convenient? Everyone else
has the problem.

SHERIFF
Sure sounds convenient to me.

LARA

No, listen -- I found mushrooms in the water supply, mold in the house, and Reverend Boone's church --

SHERIFF

So you did trespass at the church? After our conversation the other day?

LARA

Um, that's not really -- that's not what I'm trying to say.

TERRI

You know what? I really cannot deal with you right now.

SHERIFF

Terri, why don't you go back inside. I'll handle this.

TERRI

I want it clear that she's trespassing, Sheriff.

SHERIFF

I know, Terri.

LARA

Wait -- Terri -- Mayor Boone --

TERRI

Just -- get her out of here.

Terri storms back inside. The front door SLAMS behind her.

ROSE

(offended)

A fungus, Lara?

LARA

The symptoms -- everything that's been happening. It's consistent with a toxic fungus outbreak.

ROSE

Why would you think that?

LARA

The doctor and I talked it over.

SHERIFF

The doctor who attacked you.

LARA

Well, I mean, before that.

SHERIFF

Okay. Why don't you come with me, and we'll discuss it further, okay?

LARA

Um...

ROSE

Sheriff, wait.
Lara. I heard you've been to the woods. The Sanctum. You saw the basement.

LARA

Yeah.

ROSE

And you think all of that is fungus.

LARA

Well, if you look at how fungal networks work, then the images you drew...god, how do I explain this?

ROSE

Why do you do this, Lara?

LARA

Do what?

ROSE

You take the things I love -- the things I believe in -- and you make them sound so...small. So stupid.

LARA

That's not what I'm trying to do.

ROSE

This is real, Lara. And it's bigger than you know.

LARA

I know it feels that way, but...

ROSE

Would you stop? I swear to God, every time I try to tell you...it's not all in my head, Lara. It never was.

LARA
I don't mean it like that. Just
because something's in your head
doesn't mean (it's not real.)

ROSE
(overlapping)
Just...enough. Please.

SHERIFF
Alright, Miss Campbell.

LARA
Rose -- wait --

ROSE
Just get her out of here, please.

LARA
If I could just (explain it all --)

SHERIFF
(cuts her off)
That's enough, Miss Campbell. Now I
can give you a ride home or I can
take you down to the Sheriff's
station in The Dalles. Your choice.

LARA
Okay.
(beat, to Rose:)
I'm sorry.

SHERIFF
Come on.

They take a few steps on the grass. SodaPop whines.

ROSE
Lara -- wait.

Lara turns, hopeful.

LARA
Yeah?

ROSE
You should take the dog.

LARA
SodaPop?

He whines again.

ROSE
He shouldn't be here. He needs -- you
need to take him away.

LARA
Are you sure? He seems so happy.

ROSE
I can't...it's better. If he's not
here.

LARA
Rose, if we could just talk...please.

ROSE
Take him back to Portland and...and
I'll call you. Okay? We can talk.

LARA
Okay. Yeah. I guess that's best.

ROSE
It is.

LARA
Um, Sheriff, do you mind if I take
him?

SHERIFF
Fine. Just stick him in the back.

Lara picks up Sodapop. He CRIES loudly.

SHERIFF
Is he going to cry like that the
whole time?

LARA
Um...probably.

SHERIFF
(sighs)
Well, come on then.

ROSE
Goodbye, puppy.

SodaPop whines.

ROSE
I'm sorry. I hope...I hope you
understand someday.

SHERIFF

Let's go, Miss Campbell. I've got other business today, you know.

LARA

Yeah...okay.

She takes a few steps in the grass.

LARA

Goodbye, Rose.

ROSE

Goodbye.

Lara sighs. Sodapop whines. Lara walks away.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - LATER

The SUV drives down a quiet road. In the backseat, SodaPop whines.

LARA

I can't believe you had a dog seat belt back there.

SHERIFF

Well, my wife and I take the Shih Tzu out with us.

LARA

Oh, you have a Shih Tzu? They're cute.

SHERIFF

Wife's idea.

LARA

Right...um, you see what I'm saying about Doctor Simmons, though, right?

SHERIFF

(unconcerned)

I will go see her as soon as I drop you off.

LARA

And the water supply?

SHERIFF

I'll mention it at the next city council meeting.

LARA
(annoyed)
Sure. That'll solve it.

The car suddenly THUMPS over something in the road, then swerves. Tires SQUEAL.

SHERIFF
Shit!

LARA
What was that?

SHERIFF
Hold on!

LARA
Is that a deer?

SHERIFF
It was a possum. I think.

A loud WHUMP as something drops onto the top of the car.

LARA
Is something...falling on us?

SHERIFF
Probably just pine cones.

WHUMP, WHUMP. Muffled ANIMAL CACKLES. The sound of skittering feet.

LARA
There's something on top of the car.

SHERIFF
Could be raccoons. They climb the trees, but I've never seen one drop onto a car --

WHUMP, WHUMP, little feet SCRATCHING. And then suddenly, a loud HISS.

LARA
Oh my god, it's trying to come through the sunroof.

SHERIFF
Close it!

LARA
 (overlapping)
 How do you -- where's the button?

SHERIFF
 (overlapping)
 Little busy here! This road is a
 mess.

LARA
 (overlapping)
 Let me just --

A RACCOON squeals and then falls into the cabin of the car,
 hissing.

Sodapop BARKS frantically.

SHERIFF
 Shit! Oh, shit!

LARA
 Raccoon in the car! Raccoon in the
 car!

The Raccoon HISSES viciously.

LARA
 Ahhh! I think there's something wrong
 with it.

Sodapop BARKS again.

LARA
 Sodapop, no! Leave it.

SHERIFF
 Get it off me! Get it off me!

Lara grabs it. The raccoon SQUEALS.

LARA
 Stop the car!

SHERIFF
 I'm trying, but the breaks...!

LARA
 Okay, come here, you demonic
 little -- ahh!

It hisses again.

Another few THUMPS on the roof.

LARA
Close that sunroof, would you? Let me
get the window --

She rolls down the window, throws out the raccoon with a
grunt.

LARA
There. Jesus, it rolled over and just
started chasing the car --

KA-WHAM! An ELK slams into the side of the car. Lara
screams.

SHERIFF
Where'd that elk come from?

LARA
You have got to stop the car.

SHERIFF
The breaks are out. I'm trying to
slow it down, but --

He honks the horn. Tires squeal. More THUMPS on the roof and
sides of the car.

LARA
Oh my god. Oh my god.

SHERIFF
Come on, come on, come on...

LARA
Look out for that --

BAM! Something slams into the car. It spins out of control.
Tires squeal.

SHERIFF
Hold ooon!

Lara screams.

And CRASHHHHHHHHH! The car crashes into a tree.

And...THUD. Silence from the passengers. A long, sustained
HORN SOUND as Sheriff Tate rests against the wheel.

END OF EPISODE

Thank you for listening to Believer! This episode was written and directed by Julie Saunders. Voice acting by Jason Markoff, Samantha Simmonds Ronceros, Rosa Delgado, Regen Wilson, Julie Saunders, and Archie. Sound design by Chad Ellis and Julie Saunders.

We are just two episodes away from the end of season one, so now is a great time to tell your friends about the show. Maybe you know someone with some travel coming up who might like some spooky listening? I hear this show pairs well with Tunnels, which just published their SERIES FINALE. Tunnels is a serialized audio drama about the mysterious tunnels beneath a small Georgia town, the things that live within them, and the people who want to control them. Find out more at HauntedGriffin.com. That's griffin spelled "g-r-i-f-f-i-n."

This episode was recorded using Zencastr and features music and effects from Epidemic Sound. If you're interested in either of those services, please use our referral link - it's in the show notes or you can find it at BelieverPodcast.com/support. That page also includes information about our Patreon and a link to our Teepublic store, for all the Believer fans in your life. Once again, that's BelieverPodcast.com/support.

The next episode will be out in just a few weeks. Until then, if the temperature suddenly drops, and you feel a chill on the back of your neck that nobody else seems to notice...you've probably been out in the cold for too long. Get into shelter, and wear a scarf next time. Unless it's not cold where you are. Then it might be a ghostly warning to get your iron and thyroid levels tested. Both can make you sensitive to the cold. Thank you, Doctor Ghost.

Bye now.