

MIDNIGHT BURGER
CHAPTER 11: ARKANSAS TRAVELLER

An Audio Drama by

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MIDNIGHT BURGER

Chapter 11: Arkansas Traveler.

SFX: THE OCCASIONAL CAR AND TRUCK FROM A SMALL STATE HIGHWAY.
THE SOUND OF A SMALL RADIO SEARCHING FOR A SIGNAL OVER AND
OVER AGAIN.

DRU:

So what?... So what, they'll look at me weird, so what? We're used to it, right?... I'm trying to retrace my steps, I was standing here, I put the batteries in the radio and there it was, then I get home and nothing. But here we are again and still nothing... No, I'm remembering it right. The dial was right there, halfway between AM 1070 and AM 1080... HA! Very funny. No, look, my brain definitely needs to be recalled to the factory for a repair but I can still depend on it for a few things. This is one. So I'm going to... I'm going to sit right here next to this streetlight and have faith in what my brain tells me... radio signals are funny. Sometimes the wind blows them away, sometimes they end up ten miles further from where they're supposed to be. Sometimes they're strong, sometimes their weak. My uncle said he had so many fillings in his teeth that sometimes he picked up a station in Texas that played Tejano music. He'd be tapping his feet sometimes out of nowhere, and he'd say "I can't help it, they're playing Bidi Bidi Bom Bom."... Y'know the Selena song... Yeah, yeah that's it... Why do I always think of something I need as soon as I sit down? That's not just me that does that right? If I'm going to sit here a while I'm going to need a Dr. Pepper and probably something else that's not good for me. Okay, I'm going. I'd ask you if you want anything but you don't exist, so...

SFX: FEET ON GRAVEL, THEN A DOOR OPENING AND A DOOR CHIME.

AVA:

Look. I swear to god this money is real, I know it doesn't look right but you've got to trust me. I... I work for the Department of the Treasury and when we get paid we get the new stuff, okay? The stuff that's not out yet, it's one of the perks of serving our nation... You're just going to stare at me, that's how this is going to work?

DRU:

Bernard, I got her, it's okay. Here.

SFX: CASH REGISTER OPENING AND CLOSING.

AVA:
Thank you.

DRU:
No problem.

AVA:
Here, take this money. In ten years you'll have a thousand dollars.

DRU:
Uh, okay, I-

AVA:
Thanks again!

SFX: DOOR OPENING AND CLOSING. DOOR CHIME.

DRU:
Bernard, do not look at me like that, I have been coming in this store for years and all you have ever done is look at me like I just fell off the back of the crazy truck. That lady obviously needed that bottle of vodka and cigarettes real bad.

SFX: FOOTSTEPS TO THE BACK OF THE STORE.

DRU: (CONT'D)
(Whispering)
What is this money?... Is that... Is that Harriet Tubman? She's not supposed to be on there... she's either a real bad counterfeiter or... or I don't know what... I'm sorry, you think she's a what?... I do not know where you get your ideas.

SFX: FOOTSTEPS TO THE FRONT OF THE STORE.

DRU: (CONT'D)
Bernard how about I buy this Dr. Pepper and these snowballs while you look at me disapprovingly?... I take your silence as agreement.

SFX: CASH REGISTER OPENING AND CLOSING.

DRU: (CONT'D)
You know you're being awfully rude to a woman who's apparently going to have a thousand dollars in ten years. Bye now!

SFX: DOOR OPENING AND DOOR CHIME. A TRUCK RUSHES BY ON THE STATE HIGHWAY.

DRU: (CONT'D)

Well, lookie. There's our new friend smoking and drinking vodka in the parking lot in front of God and everybody... What's her deal, you think?... No, no you're just making assumptions, surely a grown woman can drink and smoke in the parking lot without being considered a floozie. And I'm sorry, "floozie" is that even a word anymore?... I'm going to talk to her... Why? Well, because I should probably spend the day interacting with someone other than a gas n' sip employee who hates me and someone I made up in my head, that's why. You know what Joseph Campbell would call this? The call to adventure. Isn't that nice?

SFX: DRU'S FEET WALKING ON GRAVEL.

DRU: (CONT'D)

You're leaning on my lamp post.

AVA:

Sorry, I didn't know it was reserved.

DRU:

There's plenty of room for both of us.

AVA:

Thanks for saving me in there.

DRU:

No problem. Bernard loves to stand in the way of your day moving from one moment to the next.

AVA:

Cigarette?

DRU:

I will, yes, thank you kindly.

SFX: DR. PEPPER BOTTLE OPENING. BOTTLE POURING ONTO CONCRETE.

DRU: (CONT'D)

I am also going to pour out some of this Dr. Pepper so you can pour some of that vodka into it.

AVA:

Hey, you bought it.

DRU:

I hate to be the caricature of someone living in a small southern town but, you're not from around here, are you?

AVA:
I don't know, where am I?

DRU:
Rogers.

AVA:
Where's Rogers?

DRU:
Ma'am are you saying you don't know what state
you're in either?

AVA:
I've, uh, been traveling a lot. It's all a blur.

DRU:
Rogers, Arkansas.

AVA:
Arkansas, huh? I know a couple of people from
Arkansas.

DRU:
Really?

AVA:
No, not really.

DRU:
What's your deal?

AVA:
My deal?

DRU:
You just tried to buy booze with fake money and now
you're drinking in the parking lot and you don't
know where you are.

AVA:
Maybe don't say it all together like that.

DRU:
Are you having one of those, what do you call them?
Schizophrenic episodes?

AVA:
Yeah, that sounds about right.

DRU:
Am I supposed to ask you what day it is?

AVA:
Hey, what day IS it exactly?

DRU:
It's November 15th.

AVA:
Really? Weird.

DRU:
Why is that weird?

AVA:
Long story. If today is the 15th then yesterday was actually yesterday and that never happens.

DRU:
Ma'am.

AVA:
Ava.

DRU:
Ava, I would be more disturbed by your behavior if it wasn't the most entertaining thing that's happened to me in two years.

AVA:
What happened two years ago?

DRU:
A truck full of Maker's Mark jackknifed on the state road and by the time the police got there, all the Maker's Mark was gone.

AVA:
That's hilarious.

DRU:
That night was one of the wildest nights in the history of Rogers, Arkansas. Turns out you can't be arrested for drunk driving when everyone else in town is also drunk driving, including the sheriff.

AVA:
Glad I could liven things up for you, hey, what's with the radio?

DRU:
Oh, I was looking for a station. I can't find it at home so I thought I'd try where I first heard it.

AVA:
Oh, boy. Let me guess, Effie and Zebulon
Mucklewain's Hour of Power?

DRU:
You've heard it?

AVA:
Oh yeah. Big fan.

DRU:
I can't find it anywhere, what station is it?

AVA:
I don't actually know. But hey, have you been to
the new diner around the corner?

DRU:
Around the corner?

AVA:
I was headed there right now. They get it loud and
clear.

DRU:
I live around the corner, there's no diner around
the corner.

AVA:
I just came from there. And I'M the crazy one?
Look, I've got work to do so I'm heading back
there. You should come by.

SFX: AVA'S FOOTSTEPS WALKING AWAY.

DRU:
There's not a diner around the corner.

AVA:
Guess I'm crazy then.

DRU:
... Do you remember a diner around the corner?... Me
neither, what the heck is she talking about?... We
would've noticed a diner, right? We're not that far
gone are we? Heh. She said to her imaginary friend...
Yes I know we could just walk around the corner and
check... Problem with that is if I walk around the
corner and there's not a diner then we just had a
nice little encounter with a nut, but if there's a
diner there and I didn't even know it, well what
does that say about me?... yes I know what that says
about me, you know what? To hell with it. here we
go.

SFX: FOOTSTEPS ON GRAVEL AND THEN ON CONCRETE.

DRU: (CONT'D)

I'm thinking of a time in high school when I was smoking behind the football field, because that's what cool people do. And from around the corner I started to hear someone say "Are you my baby? Are you my baby girl?" Over and over again, "Are you my baby? Are you my baby girl?" And I was terrified. Because I thought I was in a horror movie all of a sudden. Because, as you know, if you're about to get killed in a horror movie it's right after you do something naughty or illegal. And there I was having just smoked a cigarette at the age of fifteen. But I couldn't help myself, I had to see what was happening around the corner. "Are you my baby? Are you my baby girl?" You know what it was? A parrot. Someone's pet parrot had escaped and was sitting on a phone line saying the same line over and over again. I had scared myself for nothing.

SFX: FOOTSTEPS STOP.

DRU: (CONT'D)

That's not a parrot. That's a diner. What in the world? Was this... Was this here before? No. There's just no way... Yeah, I know I said "call to adventure" but is that usually in the form of a diner that you never noticed before?... Well, here's the problem with that, NOW it's actually good news if this diner was here the whole time and I never noticed because if it wasn't here the entire time then a diner has popped over night and diners don't do that... Yes, it means we have to go in... So... Here we go.

SFX: DOOR CHIME.

SONG:

ZEBULON:

Deep through the midcourse of morning
Is shadowed the base of the mountain;
Under the wings of the stormcloud.
Only the top peak takes light.

I would climb up against shadow,
Leaving the lost past behind me;
I would move up through the darkness,
Breasting each crag till it pass.

I would come out where the rocks
Glow, shameless granite beneath the broad sun.

(MORE)

ZEBULON: (CONT'D)

Till my soul on the summit, set free there,
Breathes naked air, and pure light.

EFFIE:

So y'all, if you're confused and tearing through
the pages of your good book for where the heck my
husband is reading from, go ahead and cease your
search. This is not a passage from the word of the
lord but rather a reading from one of our own
masters, Mr. John Gould Fletcher.

ZEBULON:

Born right here in our home of Arkansas.

EFFIE:

He was born in Little Rock, but he's forgiven for
that.

ZEBULON:

Indeed.

LEIF:

(In the kitchen.)

Welcome to Midnight Burger, have a seat anywhere!

DRU:

Thanks!... Listen to that, they get the show loud and
clear. Look at all this... There's a whole damn diner
here... What do you think, am I so addled that I
didn't notice a diner here or are we witness to a
miracle?... I know, I know, Occam's Razor.

LEIF:

Hey there. Welcome to Midnight Burger. I'm Leif,
how are we doing today?

DRU:

Good. I think. I've lived here all my life and
never saw y'all here.

LEIF:

I know we've got a big neon sign out front but that
hasn't stopped people from missing us in the past.

DRU:

Okay.

LEIF:

Before I forget, let me tell you what our specials
are today.

DRU:

Alright.

LEIF:

We're trying a few new things around here so bear with me. First we have Pollo Encaca...

GLORIA:

(From the kitchen.)
Pollo Encacahuatado.

LEIF:

Yes, that. Chicken with peanut sauce. Then we have Papadzools.

GLORIA:

(From the kitchen.)
Papadzules.

LEIF:

What she said. That's an enchilada dish with eggs that I'm not allowed to call egg-chiladas which is way better name.

GLORIA:

(From the kitchen.)
Leif.

LEIF:

And then finally, Sailboats.

GLORIA:

(From the kitchen.)
Fucking hell, Salbutes.

LEIF:

I was kidding about that one! Deep fried tortilla with chicken and stuff on it, you get it.

DRU:

Um, I'll try that, that sounds real good.

LEIF:

Okay, Salbutes-

GLORIA:

(From the kitchen.)
Thank you.

LEIF:

-It is. You're going to love it. How about for your friend.

DRU:

Huh?

LEIF:
Sir, what can I get for you?

DRU:
Who are you... who are you talking to?

LEIF:
I'm talking to him. Sir, what can... oh is he hearing impaired?

DRU:
Is who hearing impaired?

LEIF:
The... man sitting with you at this booth.

DRU:
I'm alone.

LEIF:
You don't see someone sitting right there?

DRU:
What are you talking about?

LEIF:
Ma'am, how many people are sitting at this booth?

DRU:
One.

LEIF:
Boss!

GLORIA:
(From the kitchen.)
Stop calling me that!

LEIF:
Come out here please.

GLORIA:
(From the kitchen.)
Is this really necessary?

LEIF:
Oh yeah.

GLORIA:
(From the kitchen.)
Jesus.

DRU:
What's happening?

LEIF:
Everything's fine.

GLORIA:
Not once did you call Caspar "Boss".

LEIF:
I'm over correcting to adjust to the change.

GLORIA:
Whatever, what is it?

LEIF:
How many people do you see at this booth?

GLORIA:
Two. Hi guys. What?

LEIF:
Ma'am. Is anyone sitting with you at this booth?

DRU:
No.

GLORIA:
Aw, snails. Sir?

LEIF:
He's not reacting to anything I say.

GLORIA:
Sir?... Okay... Ma'am, everything's going to be fine.
Give us one minute.

SFX: LEIF AND GLORIA ARGUE UNDER THEIR BREATH.

DRU:
... Are you real?

EFFIE:
Uh, Husband, sometimes strange things happen in
Arkansas, isn't that right?

ZEBULON:
Yes, YES, indeed they do my dear. Down by the
Buffalo river is many an abandoned silver town, and
as one passes through you would swear you could
still hear the bustling sounds of the mad rush to
dig one's fortune from the earth even though a pick
has not broken earth there since before the war.

EFFIE:

Precisely, and when these strange things do happen around these hills and hollers, let us take care to NOT PANIC.

ZEBULON:

We should NOT. It's not the Arkansas way.

EFFIE:

Play a bit of music, that's what we like to do.

ZEBULON:

Indeed, how about a little Arkansas Traveller, my dear?

EFFIE:

Nothing that can't fix, hopefully.

SONG: ARKANSAS TRAVELLER.

DRU:

I'm going to go.

LEIF:

Hang on a minute.

DRU:

I forgot I've got a bunch of things to do-

GLORIA:

What's your name?

DRU:

Uh, Drucilla. Everyone calls me Dru.

GLORIA:

We didn't mean to freak you out, Dru. Sorry about that.

DRU:

It's fine, I really need to-

GLORIA:

You're in the right place.

DRU:

Uh, how do you figure?

GLORIA:

I don't know. But trust me.

DRU:

Look, I met a lady at the corner store. She told me to come by but I wasn't expecting whatever this is.

LEIF:
Ava, where are you?

AVA:
(Under her booth.)
I'm under my booth, what's going on out there?

GLORIA:
What is she doing under her booth?

LEIF:
Your friend is here.

AVA:
(Under her booth.)
Oh. hang on.

LEIF:
We're going to get this straightened out.

DRU:
I didn't know there was something to straighten out.

AVA:
Hey. So you decided to stop by. What do you think?

DRU:
Definitely not what I expected.

AVA:
Is it the specials? they're a little weird, right?

GLORIA:
Hey.

DRU:
These two are telling me that there's someone sitting at my booth.

AVA:
There is someone sitting at your booth.

DRU:
Wh... No, no there's not.

AVA:
Hey buddy.

LEIF:
He can't seem to hear us.

AVA:
You can see him too?

GLORIA:

Yep.

AVA:

So we all see someone at the booth.

GLORIA:

Yes.

AVA:

But not you.

DRU:

I don't see a thing, what is everyone talking about?

AVA:

So we can see him, she can't see him, he can't see any of us?

LEIF:

I think so.

AVA:

Well, my scientific opinion is that this is crazy, you guys.

DRU:

Alright, good luck with whatever this is, I'm going to go.

GLORIA:

Effie?

EFFIE:

Drucilla? Might my husband and I have a word?

DRU:

Uhh...

ZEBULON:

Drucilla, have you ever climbed to the top of Pinnacle Mountain?

DRU:

Y-yes.

ZEBULON:

It's quite a majestic view is it not?

DRU:

It is, yes.

ZEBULON:

I feel that I can see to all four corners of bear country when I stand atop it. It behooves us to change our perspective from time to time, to gain new light on the Lord's work. I mention it now because there was one day when I met a man from Colorado, who dwelled at the base of the great Rocky Mountains, and to him my little mountain may as well have been a pile of leaves in his backyard. A mere one-thousand feet up. But you see, when he stood atop my tiny mountain, it was not his home that he looked upon and for me it was. A thing must be known to be appreciated.

EFFIE:

And you've been brought to us today, Drucilla, so that you, like our humble hills, can be appreciated. In what way shall we appreciate you today? My friends seem to think that some sort of apparition sits at your booth with you. Tell me truly, do you not feel it yourself?

DRU:

How is-

GLORIA:

It's okay, Dru. I told you, you're in the right place.

DRU:

I... There's someone that I talk to. Someone who's not there. I've been talking to him since I was a kid. An imaginary friend, I guess. Never shook the habit for some reason. I guess I kind of liked it. And sometimes, every once and a while, he felt real... And then y'all started talking to a man that wasn't there, and...

GLORIA:

Okay. Dru, don't worry. Nothing's on fire, we're not being sucked into a black hole, we've just got a mystery to unravel, okay?

DRU:

A black hole?

GLORIA:

It happens.

LEIF:

He's talking to someone.

AVA:

Oh, shit.

LEIF:
He's talking but I'm not hearing anything. Nobody's hearing anything, right?

GLORIA:
No. He keeps looking down like he's looking at the menu... He's ordering lunch.

LEIF:
Ordering from who?

GLORIA:
Okay, here's what we're doing. Ava, that thing you've been working on, we're going to try it.

AVA:
Cool, guys we're trying the thing.

EFFIE:
Oh dear.

GLORIA:
Leif, have you been salvaging stuff like I told you?

LEIF:
Yeah, I've got a pile of some useful stuff by the dumpster.

GLORIA:
Good, hang tight we might need some sort of doo-dad.

LEIF:
Got it.

GLORIA:
And bring us some coffee.

LEIF:
Okay.

GLORIA:
Dru, let's have a seat.

DRU:
O-okay.

GLORIA:
You know, in the past we've tried to come up with some sort of fun way to talk around what this place is.

(MORE)

GLORIA: (CONT'D)

One time we pretended we were an outpost in outer space, one time we just said we were Canadian. Surprisingly, saying you're Canadian throws a lot of people off the scent.

DRU:

I don't know what you mean.

GLORIA:

My point is, I'm kind of sick of that part, of pretending so I don't freak anyone out. Humans do that too much.

DRU:

Humans?

GLORIA:

So, I'm just going to be straight with you, okay?

DRU:

That would be nice.

GLORIA:

You're in a time-traveling dimension-spanning diner. We weren't here yesterday, we won't be here tomorrow. Every day we're somewhere else. Sometimes it's another planet, sometimes it's another time, sometimes it's right here in... where are we?

DRU:

Rodgers, Arkansas.

GLORIA:

Sometimes it's Rogers, Arkansas.

LEIF:

Here we go.

SFX: TWO COFFEE CUPS ON THE TABLE.

GLORIA:

This is Leif.

LEIF:

Hey there.

GLORIA:

Leif was a brilliant engineer here on Earth, but then he was convinced by an alien race to keep one of his inventions a secret in exchange for a one way ticket into outer space.

LEIF:

It was a huge mistake.

GLORIA:

Thanks, Leif. Sorry, do you need cream?

DRU:

Do you mind if I drink my Dr. Pepper?

GLORIA:

Do you not like coffee?

DRU:

My Dr. Pepper has vodka in it.

GLORIA:

Got it.

SFX: ENTIRE BOTTLE BEING DRAINED.

GLORIA: (CONT'D)

Oh, Okay, all of it. Probably a good idea.

DRU:

Why did the radio just talk to me?

GLORIA:

Right, that was next.

DRU:

I was getting them on my radio. A few days ago I could hear them on my radio but the signal kept going in and out and now I'm here and they're talking to me.

GLORIA:

Okay. Deep breaths. We're still working on an explanation for that. Ava?

AVA:

We're ready.

GLORIA:

Hang on, though. We need an explanation for Effie and Zeb.

AVA:

Oh, okay. So I had a ton of notes on this before they were stolen, but that's a whole other story. Here's the thing. Consciousness as we know it can't be explained by classical physics so there's no real consensus on what means what BUT here's what I'm thinking right now. Usually a complex arrangement of atoms needs to be present for consciousness to manifest itself through waves in synchrony but are the arrangement of atoms necessary-

GLORIA:

I'm gonna shove you back under your table.

AVA:

Sorry. They're alive, but they don't have a physical form like you and I.

GLORIA:

Thank you, Ava. Now, I think that Dru is going to need a refill on that vodka, you know the vodka that I told you to cut back on.

AVA:

Fine, okay.

DRU:

I don't blame her, if I worked here I would be drunk all the time.

GLORIA:

We went through something pretty rough a while back, we're all coping in different ways.

DRU:

What happened?

GLORIA:

Our former boss he... ran into a little trouble.

SFX: BOTTLE ON THE TABLE.

AVA:

Here's the bottle, help yourself. It's time for a show.

DRU:

Time for a what?

AVA:

Okay guys, this is just like last time. Are we ready?

ZEBULON:

I certainly hope so.

EFFIE:

Lord, help us.

AVA:

Okay, close your eyes and focus. The signal we need is out there. Just reach out and grab it.

GLORIA:

(Whispering)

We've done this a few times now, it works pretty well.

DRU:

(Whispering)

You guys keep doing things to make me more comfortable, but it just keeps getting weirder.

GLORIA:

(Whispering)

I know, sorry.

SFX: RADIO CRACKLES WITH STATIC AND THEN LATE NIGHT AM TALK SHOW MUSIC.

AVA:

Here we go.

ZEBULON:

Ladies and gentlemen welcome back, this is Dark Mark coming to you from deep in the deserts of Nevada. Many thanks to our panel from our last segment, "Employees of Area 51", we like to do that every few months, just check in with the Area 51 crowd. Of course, as always, the names were changed for the panel and if you are interested in participating in our next Area 51 panel do leave us a message on the hotline, always interesting stuff there. Okay, coming up soon we've got Dr. Sim Samba, really interesting guy, just published a new book on a fascinating study he's done. According to Dr. Samba we can know the complex thoughts of babies and toddlers by recording the sounds they make and then playing them in reverse. Really interesting stuff, I was listening to some of the recordings before the show and it is hard to argue with this theory, we've got a lot to talk about. But before that we're going to take some calls. Okay, Grand Prairie, Texas, help me out with this name, ma'am.

EFFIE:

(On the phone.)

Plinth.

ZEBULON:

I'm sorry, Plinth?

EFFIE:

Yes, Plinth Marvey.

ZEBULON:

Okay, that's an interesting name, is that Dutch?

EFFIE:

It isn't my birth name, it's a name that was given to me by friends.

ZEBULON:

Your friends gave you that name? That's an unconventional name.

EFFIE:

Yes, it's a name from their language.

ZEBULON:

What language is that?

EFFIE:

It's an extra-dimensional language.

ZEBULON:

I see, an extra-dimensional language, your friends are from another dimension?

EFFIE:

Yes, I have many extra-dimensional friends.

ZEBULON:

And how did you come by them, I imagine it wasn't the usual way. You're not co-workers or something, you didn't meet on the bus.

EFFIE:

Oh, no. Nothing like that. I've had these friends for a very long time.

ZEBULON:

Alright, you've got some extra-dimensional friends and they've given you a name, what's on your mind tonight?

EFFIE:

Well Mark, my friends wanted me to relay a message to you.

ZEBULON:

Okay, so this is a message from another dimension?

EFFIE:

Yes.

ZEBULON:

Okay and what's this message about?

EFFIE:

Palm trees.

ZEBULON:

It's a message about palm trees from a different dimension?

EFFIE:

Correct.

ZEBULON:

Okay, we like palm trees, there's a couple outside the station.

EFFIE:

You know they're not native to North America.

ZEBULON:

I've heard that, yes.

EFFIE:

But they are also not native to this dimension, Mark.

ZEBULON:

Is that right?

EFFIE:

Yes, they are guardians.

ZEBULON:

The palm trees are guardians?

EFFIE:

Yes. They essentially create a vibrational fence around you.

ZEBULON:

A vibrational fence. What does this fence keep out?

EFFIE:

Well, Mark, many many things.

ZEBULON:

Really?

EFFIE:

Yes, for example, my husband and I were living in Fort Worth and the entire time we were there we couldn't go a week without a major appliance going on the fritz.

ZEBULON:

I see, and this was because of the extra dimensional energy?

EFFIE:

We had many unwanted visitors, but you know what, we moved to Grand Prairie and we live on a street lined with palm trees and we have no problems at all.

ZEBULON:

I see, and your friends, your extra dimensional friends, how are they able to get through the palm trees, this vibrational fence you're talking about?

EFFIE:

Well, you see, Mark. These friends I speak of ARE the palm trees. The palm trees speak to me and we have an understanding.

ZEBULON:

I see.

EFFIE:

It all began as a child when I was hit in the face by a remote controlled airplane-

SFX: RADIO STATIC BUZZES.

EFFIE: (CONT'D)

Oh, oh my.

ZEBULON:

Well that was quite something now wasn't it?

EFFIE:

Like being dipped in an ice-cold bath.

GLORIA:

That was very entertaining, guys but how is that helpful at all?

SFX: PENCIL SCRATCHING ON PAPER.

AVA:

Hang on... Hang on... Keep hanging on...

GLORIA:

Do I need to insert a coin?

AVA:

X-rays. Leif?

LEIF:

Yeah?

AVA:

We need x-rays. Can you do x-rays?

LEIF:

I've got an old vacuum tube but I don't have an anode.

AVA:

That's fine.

LEIF:

Are you thinking what I think you're thinking?

AVA:

I think so.

GLORIA:

What's happening?

AVA:

She needs to see him. She's just going to think we're crazy unless she can see him. Oh! A magnet.

LEIF:

A magnet? How strong?

AVA:

Strong. 0.1 Tesla?

LEIF:

Okay. I'll be back.

AVA:

This'll be fun.

GLORIA:

Remember how we had a deal that you would explain what you're doing from now on?

AVA:

Yes, yes, I remember. Okay. Dru, your imaginary friend is real. The reason you can't see him is because he's in a parallel dimension, but one nearly identical to yours. In fact, the only difference in these two dimensions may be the two of you. He lives in this town like you do, does all the same things. Imagine two trains heading the same direction at night, you can see into the windows of the other train, and they're both heading to the same destination.

DRU:
Why can't I see him?

AVA:
Because of your vibrational pattern. You vibrate at the same frequency as everything else in your world, making his world impossible to see.

DRU:
How come you can see him?

AVA:
That one's a bit trickier. I'm guessing that because Leif, Gloria, and myself have been here at the diner long enough, our vibrational pattern has changed a little bit, making us able to see him but not interact with him. If you stayed here long enough you'd probably start seeing him too.

DRU:
Why is he following me around?

AVA:
He's not. He's parallel to you. Imagine your whole life, everything you've done. Now just imagine all those things being done by him instead of you. That's his world.

DRU:
If he's not really there, how come I swear I can feel him sometimes?

AVA:
Everyone's brain is a little different. Everyone has different levels of perception.

DRU:
Is this because of that summer after high school when I did all those special mushrooms?

GLORIA:
Dru, no.

AVA:
Yes.

GLORIA:
What?

AVA:
Hallucinogens can alter your neural pathways, it's completely possible.

LEIF:
Oh, it's possible, baby. Living proof!

SFX: METAL CART ROLLING IN.

LEIF: (CONT'D)
Okay, I've got a vacuum tube, I've got a car battery, I've got a lug wrench, I've got leaded gloves. It's a Dim Sum cart of science.

GLORIA:
What are we doing, Leif?

LEIF:
Everyone should get behind me. I'm going to start hooking this vacuum tube up to a power source and since I don't have an anode, if you're standing in front of me you'll get like, nine types of cancer.

GLORIA:
Whoa.

DRU:
There are that many kinds?

ZEBULON:
Drucilla, do not be alarmed when Leif begins to unveil his various accoutrements, at times they pass human understanding.

EFFIE:
For the longest time we suspected them to be witchcraft.

ZEBULON:
And now a days we are dead certain that they are witchcraft.

EFFIE:
But we've come to terms with such eldritch movements around us.

LEIF:
It's not witchcraft you guys, don't be ridiculous, I'm just sending a heavy cascade of x-rays in the general direction of our mystery man.

DRU:
What's that going to do?

LEIF:
You should be able to see him.

AVA:
Sort of. If it works you'll see a pale image, like a ghost.

GLORIA:
Should I ask why x-rays will do this, or is it something that will make my eyes gloss over?

AVA:
Honestly, it might not work. It's just a hunch.

LEIF:
Okay, here we go. X-ray time.

SFX: VACUUM TUBE BUZZES.

DRU:
I don't see anything.

AVA:
Give it a second for the radiation to collect.

DRU:
I don't think it's working.

GLORIA:
Zebulon, put some Jesus on it.

ZEBULON:
The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow the words of his law.

DRU:
Holy shit, y'all.

AVA:
Is it working?

DRU:
Y'all. Holy shit.

GLORIA:
Sounds like a yes.

DRU:
That's... oh my Lord... there's no way...

GLORIA:
Dru, what's wrong?

DRU:
I, uh, I need a minute, okay?

SFX: DOOR CHIME. SOUND OF A TRUCK BARRELING PAST THE DINER.
DRU'S FEET PACING IN THE PARKING LOT.

DRU: (CONT'D)

Deep breaths, Dru. Deep breaths. It'll be fine... so your day just happens to be as weird as you usually feel. Was it really him?

SFX: DOOR CHIME.

LEIF:

Dru? Hey that was a lot in there. I imagine this whole day has been a lot. There's no real easy way to do it.

DRU:

It's my brother. That's who the man is, it's my little brother... He died when he was six but I can recognize his eyes. They were hard to miss.

LEIF:

Whoa.

DRU:

I mean, all of this is too much and then you put that on top of it all.

LEIF:

You're sure it's him?

DRU:

I'm sure. I mean, of course it's him. Of course it's him I've been talking to this whole time, my whole life talking like a crazy person to nobody, of course it was him I was talking to.

LEIF:

How did he die?

DRU:

A bee sting. Isn't that stupid? My parents didn't know he was allergic, couldn't get him help in time. He was always pretty sickly on top of that.

LEIF:

Wow. Okay. That actually makes a lot of sense.

DRU:

Sense? Leif c'mon. Sense?

LEIF:

Hey, stop pacing for a second. Of course it doesn't make sense. It's a nonsensical day. Sorry.

DRU:

I'm still not even sure that any of this is happening to me and that I actually never left my house this morning and I'm still sitting there on my couch with a screw loose.

LEIF:

Hey, you know what? That's not a bad way to operate right now. I mean, if people took all the time they needed to wrap their mind around this place we'd be gone before they could take a deep breath again. We'll be gone by tomorrow.

DRU:

How is he in there, Leif? How is he sitting at that booth right now?

LEIF:

Here's the best way I've heard it explained. Right now you and I are standing in a parking lot and swirling all around us are radio waves. With that handheld radio of yours you can turn the dial and cruise through the frequencies. One station's classic rock, another is hip hop, another is country. All with different frequencies. Now imagine a different radio. On this radio you turn the dial and on one station, the dinosaurs never went extinct, on another station Leif Erickson never left America and we're all Vikings, on another station Mark David Chapman missed and the Beatles got back together. I like that station. All those things we wish wished would've happened, all the things we insist should've happened, they're all happening right now, as we speak. Just a few frequencies away.

DRU:

That's a very pretty way of putting it.

LEIF:

Actually wasn't me, that was Michio Kaku.

DRU:

Who's that?

LEIF:

Friend of Ava's. But look, none of that matters, you know why?

DRU:

Why?

LEIF:
Because you've gone crazy and this is a
hallucination, right? You've lost your mind and
none of this is real.

DRU:
Right.

LEIF:
So I say we go inside and keep this crazy train a-
rollin'. What do you say?

DRU:
Aw, to hell with it. Let's go.

LEIF:
Now you're talking.

SFX: DOOR CHIME.

LEIF: (CONT'D)
Okay, Ava. What am I doing with this magnet?

AVA:
We're going to make contact!

GLORIA:
Okay, how?

AVA:
We're going to play kick the can!

DRU:
Uh, what now?

AVA:
Hear me out. On Dru's table is this aluminum napkin
holder.

SFX: AVA TAPPING THE NAPKIN HOLDER.

AVA: (CONT'D)
Leif, I want you to fire up the electro-magnet and
zap the napkin holder across the room.

GLORIA:
What's that going to do?

AVA:
We're trying to make contact with another dimension.
It's different from us. The way two different
things make contact is through things they have in
common. So we're going to try basic primordial
forces like gravity or magnetism.

(MORE)

AVA: (CONT'D)
Since Leif can't whip up a gravity cannon, we're going with magnetism.

LEIF:
Who says I can't whip up a gravity cannon?

AVA:
Leif zaps the napkin holder across the room and we HOPE that in HIS dimension, there is ALSO a napkin holder and Lief's magnet, being incredibly strong, pulls his napkin holder across the room AS WELL.

GLORIA:
So in his dimension, he's just sitting there and his napkin holder goes flying across the room.

AVA:
Yes.

GLORIA:
Then what?

AVA:
Then we wait.

GLORIA:
For what?

AVA:
Us.

GLORIA:
We wait for us?

AVA:
Yes. Because in all likelihood in his dimension there is also a Gloria and a Leif and an Ava. Then they have to figure out the next move.

GLORIA:
It's literally kick the can.

AVA:
It's literally kick the can.

DRU:
Y'all know that kick the can isn't just kicking a can around, right?

LEIF:
Let's make a magnet. Dru, as you can see here I've got a big battery, some insulated cables and a wrench. Believe it or not, I'm going to turn this into a magnet.

(MORE)

LEIF: (CONT'D)

Now, I know what you're thinking, you're thinking "Hey, if this is going to be a powerful magnet, why doesn't it have one of those huge comical U shapes like when Wile E Coyote is trying to catch the Road Runner?"

DRU:

Cause it's an electro magnet, Leif. I made one in the 5th grade science fair.

LEIF:

Cool, how strong was it?

DRU:

It could pick up a whole handful of paper clips.

LEIF:

This one can take out your fillings.

DRU:

Ow.

LEIF:

So, Ava you just want me to fire this up and knock the napkin holder off the table, is that the deal?

AVA:

Yes, just enough to get his attention in the other dimension.

LEIF:

Okay. Here we go, connecting battery...

SFX: LOUD BUZZ OF THE ELECTROMAGNET. EVERYTHING METALLIC SHAKING IN THE DINER.

AVA:

Too powerful!

LEIF:

Oh shit.

AVA:

Duck!

SFX: EVERY METALLIC OBJECT IN THE DINER FLYING AT LEIF AND CRASHING INTO VARIOUS WALLS.

EFFIE:

...So when you say it's NOT witchcraft...

AVA:

Leif. I have notes.

LEIF:
Just a miscalculation. Sorry. Looks like it worked
though.

DRU:
It did?

LEIF:
Yeah, he's up and walking around. He's talking to
people. I guess he's talking to us in the other
dimension.

GLORIA:
So now we just wait for another version of us to
figure it out?

AVA:
Yeah. It may take a while.

LEIF:
What do you think I look like in the other
dimension? Do you think I have a goatee?

AVA:
No. I for sure have one though.

GLORIA:
Since it's going to be a while, why don't we all
watch while Leif cleans up the mess he's made?

AVA:
No, we can't touch anything. We have to wait for
them.

GLORIA:
Wait for them to what?

AVA:
Move something around.

GLORIA:
With what?

AVA:
Hopefully the Ava in the other dimension is going
to tell the Leif in the other dimension to make a
magnet that will move OUR napkin holders around.

GLORIA:
This plan is getting very thin.

AVA:
Not as thin as when I stranded us in deep space.

GLORIA:

Too soon, Ava.

LEIF:

Well now what do we do?

DRU:

Y'all, would you mind if I talked to your radio for a bit?

EFFIE:

Of course not, dear.

GLORIA:

Alright, Leif go over to Ava's booth and you two make sure this plan isn't idiotic. I'm going to see if this steamer works. Who wants tamales?

AVA:

Me.

LEIF:

Yes, please.

GLORIA:

Okay.

EFFIE:

Drucilla, you must be in a state.

DRU:

Yeah, you could call it that.

ZEBULON:

You've faired much better than some of our other visitors. Some of them have simply run screaming and never returned.

DRU:

I don't blame them.

EFFIE:

I'm glad you're speaking with us, Drucilla. I have a sense that this mystery figure in our diner is not simply a stranger.

DRU:

No, he's not. Um..

ZEBULON:

Worry not, Drucilla, what can sound outlandish at this juncture?

DRU:

Suppose you're right. It's my brother. I lost him when he was six but that's him for sure. All grown up.

EFFIE:

Well, bless your heart.

DRU:

My little eight-year old self went through some things trying to get used to him being gone. I don't know how to feel about seeing the ghost of him just across the room. I just... is that okay? When people are gone we should respect that shouldn't we? Try to come to terms with it best we can? It's feeling a little... I don't know, unnatural?

ZEBULON:

Drucilla, I imagine this whole day has felt a bit unnatural.

DRU:

Well I am talking to a radio.

EFFIE:

I know how you must feel. It's certainly akin to how my husband and I have felt from time to time. But you see, we were born a long time ago, Drucilla. Back when we were your age, Arkansas wasn't much more than an idea and some lines on a map. Just a mess of farmers and ne'er-do-wells. But through time spent with our friends we've ruminated often on this idea of what is natural and what is not. Even when contemplating ourselves. What they have told you is that every moment of our loved ones lives echoes forever in the firmament. They have told you that everything our friends and family were, weren't, and could have been is alive with us at this moment. Forever. And that may seem strange and unnatural, but my husband and I have a very natural word for it.

ZEBULON:

Eternal life.

DRU:

How come when I go to church it's not as interesting as y'all?

EFFIE:

Well, cause we're real good at it, Drucilla.

GLORIA:

Okay, tamales.

ZEBULON:

Gloria, if you don't mind could we all partake of your tamales here at the counter? I have some things I'd like to say.

GLORIA:

Sure. Up here, guys.

AVA:

But I don't want an old-timey talking to.

GLORIA:

Up here guys.

AVA:

Fine.

GLORIA:

What's up, Zebulon?

ZEBULON:

As you know, I find meaning in all things. Here we are now with Drucilla, who for the first time will reach out to one she's lost. She will attempt to say what has not been said to a loved one.

AVA:

Oh, jeez, I can see this coming from a mile away.

ZEBULON:

And though you may mock me, I think it important that we now address who we have lost. We lost a friend a while back and we have yet to truly address it to each other and to ourselves.

GLORIA:

Zeb, we don't have to do this-

ZEBULON:

One day rolls into another in this place. Every day, somewhere new, a new problem to solve, it is easy to lose oneself in it. We know that Caspar surely did. As Drucilla is now presented with the opportunity to impart words to one whom she thought departed, we should now impart something to our departed.

AVA:

Seriously?

ZEBULON:

Yes. Seriously.

EFFIE:

I'll begin, dear. Caspar, you gave to us the gift of being depended upon. It was as though we came into being because of your need for us. Ava?

AVA:

C'mon.

EFFIE:

Ava.

AVA:

Fine... uh, I'm still mad at you for launching me into space... and I miss making fun of you so... it would be okay if you came back.

GLORIA:

Um... you took me out of my life, somewhere I needed to get out of. But then you put me back into it. I'm in the kitchen again, making the food I like. I didn't know if that would ever happen again.

EFFIE:

Leif?

LEIF:

I'd tell him just... Hang on. We're working on it.

GLORIA:

We are?

SFX: A TEA KETTLE FLIES ACROSS THE ROOM.

DRU:

What was that?

AVA:

Contact!

GLORIA:

That was the tea kettle.

LEIF:

Holy, shit. I can't believe that worked.

EFFIE:

Heads down, y'all, here it comes again!

LEIF:

Whoa!

SFX: KETTLE FLIES ACROSS THE ROOM AGAIN.

DRU:

Can you still see him? What's he doing?

GLORIA:

Where is he?

AVA:

By my booth. It looks like he's got something in his hand.

GLORIA:

He's pointing at the kettle, everybody down!

SFX: KETTLE FLIES ACROSS THE ROOM AGAIN, FROM NOW ON THERE IS THE CONSTANT BACKGROUND OF THE KETTLE OCCASIONALLY FLYING ACROSS THE ROOM.

DRU:

What's he doing?

GLORIA:

And how come his magnet doesn't destroy the entire room, Leif?

LEIF:

I don't know.

AVA:

Uh-oh looks like the Leif in the other dimension is smarter than our Leif!

LEIF:

Shut up! Is he, though?

GLORIA:

Okay, listen, he's only moving the tea kettle around which means we have to do the same which means Leif, you need to figure out why his magnet's better!

LEIF:

I don't know why his magnet's better!

GLORIA:

Ava. The tea kettle's not a coincidence. Figure out why he's moving the kettle around!

AVA:

Okay, Dru, duck down under the counter so we don't get a concussion.

DRU:
Okay.

LEIF:
Think, Leif. Think think think.

AVA:
Okay, did your brother drink a lot of tea?

DRU:
He was six.

AVA:
Right. Did you?

DRU:
I was eight.

AVA:
Did anyone?

DRU:
We were coffee people.

AVA:
Shit.

LEIF:
Ava, he's making a controlled burst not a constant field, how's he doing that?

AVA:
I'm doing my thing, you do your thing.

LEIF:
Okay, okay, if I were me I would... No... no... Hyper-responsive power source though, I don't have...

AVA:
What about the letter T? Think about the letter T.

LEIF:
Oh shit.

DRU:
The letter T?

LEIF:
Really?

AVA:
What if he's kind of typing the letter T over and over again?

LEIF:
That's it.

GLORIA:
Have you got it?

LEIF:
I think so.

GLORIA:
Go!

LEIF:
I'll be right back.

DRU:
Oh my God. My typewriter. I had an old typewriter
and he would type the letter T over and over again
when I wasn't paying attention.

AVA:
Okay. And what would you do?

DRU:
Type the letter M.

AVA:
Gloria, we need something in the room that's
metallic and starts with M. Leif hurry up!

LEIF:
(From the kitchen.)
Working on it!

GLORIA:
M m m m m m m.. There! Mixing bowl! Look out!

AVA:
Duck!

DRU:
Ah!

AVA:
Okay. We're going to talk back. See that mixing
bowl over there?

DRU:
Yes.

AVA:
We're going to move it AS SOON AS LEIF GET HIS SHIT
TOGETHER!

LEIF:
Okay, I'm ready! Dru, take this.

DRU:
What is it?

LEIF:
Point it at the bowl and press the button!

DRU:
Okay!

SFX: ZAP! THEN THE HOLLOW METALLIC SOUND OF THE BOWL HITTING
LEIF IN THE FACE.

LEIF:
OW!

DRU:
Sorry!

AVA:
Nobody move!

SFX: THE BOWL LOUDLY HITS THE FLOOR.

EFFIE:
I know this isn't the time, but y'all looked really
silly just then.

ZEBULON:
It was as though the kitchen had revolted against
you.

DRU:
What are we doing now?

AVA:
We talked, then they talked, then we talked. We're
waiting for their next move.

DRU:
What's he doing now?

LEIF:
Talking to us. The other us.

DRU:
Leif, what is this thing you gave me, it looks like
a magic wand.

LEIF:
It's an Urt Cell.

DRU:
What's that?

LEIF:
It's just a battery, but maybe the best battery ever made. A little copper wire and an iron core and you've got a highly efficient electro-magnet.

DRU:
How long does it last?

LEIF:
A very long time. Longer than you.

DRU:
Is it... Is it from aliens?

LEIF:
Yes. The Urts. It's a planet full of inventors.

DRU:
Really?

LEIF:
Yes. You know that feeling of calm you get when you walk into an Apple Store? Imagine a whole planet of that.

DRU:
That's crazy.

LEIF:
Let me assure you, no matter how weird this day is for you, there are things out there a hundred times weirder.

AVA:
And he's slept with most of them.

LEIF:
Hey.

AVA:
Zing!

GLORIA:
He's on the move.

DRU:
What's he doing?

GLORIA:
Standing by the door.

SFX: DOOR CHIME.

GLORIA: (CONT'D)

He opened the door but he's just standing there.

AVA:

He wants you to follow him.

LEIF:

Let him know you know. Use the thing on the door.

DRU:

O-okay. Using the thing on the door.

SFX: ZAP! DOOR CHIME.

DRU: (CONT'D)

What did he do?

AVA:

He's leaving.

DRU:

What? Why?

GLORIA:

I don't know but he thinks you know.

AVA:

Your typewriter, do you still have it?

DRU:

Yeah, why? Oh! My typewriter!

AVA:

It is made of metal.

DRU:

Oh hell. I have to go! I'm about to get a letter from my brother! Leif, I need to take this thing with me.

LEIF:

I know. Go ahead, just don't point it at any electronics.

DRU:

I...

GLORIA:

Yeah, this is the moment where you don't know what to say and are wondering if this is really happening.

DRU:

It is that moment.

GLORIA:

You don't know what to say because there's nothing to say. And yes, it's really happening.

DRU:

But-

ZEBULON:

Drucilla. We have a suggestion.

EFFIE:

Just call it a miracle, and be thankful.

DRU:

Okay. Okay, thank you all.

GLORIA:

Goodby Dru.

SFX: DOOR CHIME.

GLORIA: (CONT'D)

Guys. Good job.

LEIF:

That was our first one of those without Caspar.

AVA:

We did okay.

GLORIA:

Now we can finally watch while Leif cleans up the diner.

AVA:

Hooray!

ZEBULON:

My friends, I know we may feel a bit incomplete as we are still missing our friend. But he would want us to soldier on as he would.

EFFIE:

Dear, please don't transition into what I think you're about to-

ZEBULON:

And upon the subject of completeness-

EFFIE:

Oh Lord.

ZEBULON:

There is one thing I must do before we depart.

EFFIE:

MUST do?

ZEBULON:

My love we are in our homeland. God only knows when we will have this opportunity again.

EFFIE:

Very well.

GLORIA:

What's happening?

SONG: ARKANSAS STATE SONG BEING SUNG BY CHILDREN.

AVA:

What the hell is this?

EFFIE:

It's the Arkansas State Song being sung by some children and it's...

LEIF:

Creepy. This is creeping me out, Zebulon.

ZEBULON:

Everyone, please respect the sanctity of the song.

LEIF:

It's like the beginning of Nightmare on Elm Street.

GLORIA:

Hey, Ava. Good job today.

AVA:

Thanks.

GLORIA:

What were you doing under your booth?

AVA:

Ever since they took my notes I've been trying to remember them all. It's like a sensory deprivation chamber.

GLORIA:

Okay, sure.

AVA:

So, from time to time I would have to say to Caspar "We have a problem".

GLORIA:

Yeah?

AVA:

We have a problem.

GLORIA:

What is it?

AVA:

We're not traveling through time anymore.

GLORIA:

What do you mean?

AVA:

Yesterday was actually yesterday. And the day before that.

GLORIA:

Couldn't that just be a coincidence?

AVA:

Yeah.

LEIF:

But it's not.

AVA:

It's not.

GLORIA:

What does that mean?

AVA:

We don't know. But our time-traveling dimension-spanning diner is no longer traveling through time or through dimensions.

GLORIA:

Okay. Well I'm not going to freak out about that since I don't know what the hell it means.

AVA:

Good call.

GLORIA:

Can you two put your heads together and figure some shit out please?

LEIF:

Yeah, for sure. We're on it. Ava, come out back, I think I've got the makings for a microwave scanner.

AVA:

Fun.

GLORIA:

... Caspar where the fuck are you?

SFX: SONG FADES REPLACED WITH THE HUM OF A GIANT STARSHIP.

CASPAR:

Hello?... Hello?... Echoooooo... You guys might want to get some soundproofing done, there's a bad echo in here... Some prisoners get coffee. At least in the interrogation phase... FYI... is this one of those "We're trying to break his spirit" things or is this a "We're waiting for the guy with the keys" thing?... Alright fine.

CASPAR

(Singing)

Oh I wish I had someone to love me,
Someone to call me their own...

SONG: THE PRISONER'S SONG BY VERNON DALHART.

THE END