

MIDNIGHT BURGER

Chapter 18: Farmhouse.

By Joe Fisher

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WIND BLOWING IN TALL GRASS. FEET WALKING THOUGH THE GRASS SLOWLY APPROACH.

AVA

Hello?

SHEL

Hi.

AVA

Oh! Shel! Jesus! Fuck!

SHEL

Y'know. It's not my fault that I blend in with most landscapes.

AVA

You're right. I'm sorry. Remind me at some point to put a bell around your neck.

SHEL

So... here we are.

AVA

Yeah.

SHEL

Which is where?

AVA

No idea.

SHEL

On a scale from 1 to "I'm insane now", how weird is this for you?

AVA

It's up there. One second we're in the diner, the next we're... in a field I guess?

SHEL

So what happened?

AVA

No idea.

SHEL

It seemed like you knew something right before we disappeared.

AVA
Yeah, I kind of did, but I wasn't thinking we'd end up wherever we are now.

SHEL
What were you thinking?

AVA
I don't know. I hear Hawaii's nice.

SHEL
What?

AVA
Sorry. I can't see anything through this fog so let's walk in this general direction and I'll tell you a story.

SHEL
Okay.

THEY WALK THROUGH THE FIELD.

AVA
So. A while back I made a friend. This friend is unlike you or me. In fact this friend is probably unlike anything in this universe. It was, I'm guessing, a 4th dimensional being.

SHEL
What does that mean?

AVA
It means. Well, it's hard to explain. It means... here you and I are, we're walking through this field, one step at a time, moment to moment. For this friend of mine, there is no moment to moment. All moments in time happen simultaneously.

SHEL
I don't get it.

AVA
Well, you're not supposed to. And neither am I. We're able to imagine that an entity like that exists but there's no way we can know what that's like because our brains just aren't built that way, we're not meant to understand it. It's like explaining heaven to bears.

SHEL
What is heaven and what's a bear?

AVA

Never mind. It's something far more powerful and far more advanced than you or I.

SHEL

So what does it want with us?

AVA

I don't know. I've been thinking about that a lot. I know it's interested in the diner, like I am. And like me it has no idea what the diner is. So we have a common problem. I'm also guessing that it needs me because I can move through time and it can't. There are these creatures on earth called dogs. A long time ago dogs and humans like me started working together. Dogs are not very smart but they were smart enough to understand that they had that same problem as humans. "Where's the food?" Dogs were better at finding food, humans were better at killing it. So two species, one more advanced than the other, made a deal. In this scenario, we're the dog and it's the human.

SHEL

It saved our asses so I'll be whatever.

LEIF

(in the distance.)
Ava?

AVA

Leif? Come toward the sound of my voice.

LEIF

Oh there you are. Are you guys okay?

AVA

I guess so.

SHEL

We're dogs.

LEIF

Okay.

AVA

Way to hang on to the tape recorder.

LEIF

Yeah just walking through a mysterious field with a tape recorder like it's an episode of Fringe. Why did you have me grab this?

AVA
I don't know. I thought it might come in handy.

SHEL
Is that Gloria? Gloria!

GLORIA
(In the distance.)
Oh thank God. What the fuck is all this shit?

AVA
Its a field, Gloria.

GLORIA
Oh, really. Thanks.

LEIF
Anybody got any ideas where we are?

GLORIA
You tell us, Leif. You're Mr. Universe.

LEIF
All I see is fog.

AVA
Well, we're breathing oxygen, so there's that.

SHEL
You're breathing oxygen.

AVA
Oh right. We're breathing oxygen. Shel's breathing carbon dioxide, so it's earth-like. Wherever it is.

GLORIA
So is this your mysterious friend, Ava?

AVA
I think so.

GLORIA
Beats getting captured, I guess.

SHEL
There's no bacteria in the soil.

AVA
There's not?

SHEL
No. We're in a field of tall grass and there's no bacteria in the soil, that's impossible. You can't grow things in dead soil.

LEIF

Aha. Design flaw. We're in a simulation.

GLORIA

How do you know?

LEIF

Richard Feynman. "If you want to make a simulation of nature, you'd better make it quantum mechanical." All the big stuff's here, grass, dirt, fog, but there's no bacteria, no microbes.

GLORIA

So this is the matrix or something?

LEIF

No, it's not virtual, it's constructed.

AVA

We're in a hamster cage.

GLORIA

OH FUCK. Who had the radio?!

LEIF

Oh shit, I did!

GLORIA

Leif!

SHEL

Oh boy.

LEIF

Hey, I had the radio AND the tape recorder that's not fair!

SHEL

Effie? Zebulon?

AVA

They've got to be around here somewhere, right?

SHEL

Where should we look first, the tall grass or the dense fog?

GLORIA

When we get back we're putting backpack straps on the radio!

ZEBULON

(In the flesh.)

That doesn't sound too comfortable for us.

GLORIA

... Oh my god.

AVA

No way.

LEIF

Holy shit.

SHEL

They're out of the box!

EFFIE

Hi, y'all.

GLORIA

What is happening?

EFFIE

I'm sure I don't know.

LEIF

Look at you guys!

AVA

So THIS is what you guys look like.

SHEL

How do those two bodies fit inside the box?

EFFIE

We're not complaining or nothing but can someone explain what the heck is goin on here?

AVA

Not really.

GLORIA

But we're not complaining either, come here you two.

GLORIA HUGS THEM BOTH.

ZEBULON

Oh! Well.

EFFIE

Careful, I got hair you can muss up now.

GLORIA

I'm so glad I can hug you!

LEIF

I'm getting in there too, come here you guys!

SHEL
What are they doing?

AVA
It's called hugging, I'm not a fan.

LEIF
I've wanted to do this for so long.

SHEL
Ava, what is that?

AVA
Oh shit. Hey guys.

GLORIA
What?

AVA
House.

GLORIA
Where? Whoa.

LEIF
Oh man. Creepy house in the fog?

EFFIE
Lief, there's nothing to be scared of in that house.

LEIF
No, there's an old ghost in there or something.

ZEBULON
Leif, that is our house.

LEIF
Oh. Really? It's nice.

AVA
It made us Effie and Zebulon's farm.

ZEBULON
Appears to be. Though we would never let the grass get this tall.

EFFIE
Absolutely not.

GLORIA
What do we think? Are we supposed to go in?

EFFIE

Well, our host has provided us all this. Let's have a look inside and see if it's also provided us with my Christmas Bandy.

AVA

Party at the Mucklewain's!

DOOR CREAKS OPEN. FEET ON HARDWOOD FLOORS.

EFFIE

Looks like they even cleaned up for us.

LEIF

I can't believe we're walking into your house right now.

AVA

Technically it's not their house.

GLORIA

It's really nice.

ZEBULON

I always said we should have people over more often.

EFFIE

Here's the living room. Y'all have a seat anywhere. Gloria, get those glasses off that tray and give everybody one.

GLORIA

Okay.

EFFIE

I am going to climb up the bookcase here and see just how fixed for company we are.

THE BOOKCASE CREAKS AS EFFIE PUTS ONE FOOT ON THE BOTTOM SHELF.

EFFIE (CONT'D)

Well then.

BOTTLE SCRAPES OFF THE TOP OF THE SHELF.

EFFIE (CONT'D)

Very prepared, as it turns out, who would like a Brandy?

LEIF

Guys, we've been put into a fishbowl by a mysterious entity, should it be cocktail hour right now.

EFFIE

Hush up and hold your glass still, Leif.

LEIF

Okay.

SHEL

So, what percentage of all this was made from a tree?

AVA

Don't bring down the room, Shel.

LEIF

Oh hey, Zebulon, is this your set up?

ZEBULON

Why yes, it is. That's where we broadcast from every evening. There's the microphone there.

LEIF

This is all homemade. Who made this?

ZEBULON

I haven't the slightest idea how it works, all that credit goes to Effie.

LEIF

Effie, this is beautiful.

EFFIE

Well thank you, Leif. It's nothing fancy but we did get by.

LEIF

Is that a copper pan as your ground plane?

EFFIE

Sure is. There's all sorts of household items wrapped up in it. Mason jars, an egg beater.

LEIF

How'd you know how to do all this?

EFFIE

Well, it all started one day when I was looking at our wireless and just thought "What's in there?" I opened up the back of it, come to find there wasn't hardly anything in there at all.

(MORE)

EFFIE (CONT'D)

So if it's a simple thing to listen to the radio, why couldn't it be just as simple to talk into it?

LEIF

Where'd you get the parts from?

EFFIE

The Sears Catalog, of course. There was a whole host of wonders in the Sears Catalog.

LEIF

And you just threw it together?

EFFIE

It took a few trips to the library, but it wasn't too hard to figure. For me it just made sense the way things fit together.

LEIF

Effie. You're an engineer.

EFFIE

Nonsense I am not.

LEIF

You are. "Just knowing how things fit together" that was my whole childhood. See, for you it was the Sears Catalog, for me it was Radio Shack. The stuff up front was all garbage, but you go into the back of the store, it was paradise. Transistors, soldering guns. I felt like anything was possible. I blame my parents. They wouldn't let me have a dog so when I was eight I built a remote control car that automatically followed me everywhere I went. They hated it.

GLORIA

That's amazing, though. Why did they hate it?

LEIF

They hated technology. They ran a food co-op in Northern California, they were back to the land people, everything looked like a nuclear bomb to them. My dad eventually came around, when I was 12 I converted his delivery van to run on vegetable oil. It always smelled like French fries but he loved sticking it to Exxon.

EFFIE

Leif, I wouldn't know how to do any of that.

LEIF

I know. It's not about that though. It talks to you. You understand it, even when you shouldn't.

EFFIE

Well, I suppose I do understand that.

LEIF

Mind if I fire it up?

EFFIE

Go right ahead.

TRANSMITTER CLICKS ON. A LOW HUM AND A FEW STRAY FREQUENCIES.

LEIF

Well hey there everyone out there in fake Arkansas, this is Leif here to answer all your questions about quantum drives, inertia dampeners, and the best way to responsibly store your baseball cards, give us a call.

SHEL

Let me try something, scoot over.

LEIF

Okay.

SHEL

(Doing a Zebulon impression.)
And that was The Super Holy Quartette with "Jesus Really Likes Your Hairdo". I'm Zebulon Mucklewain here with my wife Effie.

LEIF

(Doing an Effie Impression.)
Hi y'all.

SHEL

Effie I was thinking just the other day about Jesus.

LEIF

As we often are, dear.

SHEL

And how Jesus gave his life so that we may be forgiven but then also came back to life three days later which may sound completely contradictory to someone who'd never heard of him before.

EFFIE

Alright, that's enough you two.

LEIF

We're just getting started!

EFFIE

You're done.

ZEBULON

I don't think I sound like that.

GLORIA

Sorry, Zeb I think Shel's got you nailed.

EFFIE

Leif, I was nice enough to show you my contraption and this is how you repay me?

LEIF

Shel started it.

AVA

Hey, did anyone else get hungry when Leif said French Fries?

GLORIA

Ooh, I did. Effie, where's your kitchen, I'll make something.

EFFIE

Oh no you will not, Gloria. You spend all your time in that kitchen, and I will not have you waiting on me in my own house.

GLASS FILLING UP.

EFFIE (CONT'D)

You will sit right here and I'm going to see what's what in this kitchen that is not apparently our kitchen.

GLORIA

I love this restaurant.

EFFIE

Ava, come help me in the kitchen.

AVA

Um, what?

EFFIE

(In the kitchen.)
Come help me in the kitchen.

AVA

But I don't know what happens in there.

EFFIE

(In the kitchen.)
It ain't complicated.

AVA

But I don't like helping.

EFFIE

(In the kitchen.)
Ava, get your over-educated butt in here.

AVA

Okay, but I'm not dicing anything.

ZEBULON

Y'all if you don't mind I'm going to step outside for a bit. I know this place is just a facsimile of our home but I'd like to see just how detailed it might be.

SHEL

I'll come with you, I want to see the rest of it, too.

ZEBULON

Right this way.

DOOR CREAKS OPEN. ZEBULON AND SHEL MAKE THEIR WAY ACROSS THE PROPERTY.

SHEL

Sorry about the impression, I couldn't help myself.

ZEBULON

That's quite alright. Where I'm from we say that imitation is the highest form of flattery.

SHEL

That sounds like something invented by the one being imitated.

ZEBULON

Perhaps, yes.

SHEL

So, what did you do here?

ZEBULON

This is a hog farm. We grew crops a bit, but most of our time was spent raising the hogs. A hog is an animal about yeah high with a funny looking nose.

SHEL

Do I want to know why you raised them?

ZEBULON

You do not.

SHEL

Okay.

ZEBULON

Shel, I want you to know that these trials and tribulations of ours may be quite distracting at times and I hope you don't feel we've become indifferent to your plight. We took you from your home to save you from destruction without thinking much on how we too are quite often on the brink of destruction ourselves. I hope it hasn't been too frightful of an experience.

SHEL

I keep thinking to myself that I should be more frightened. I definitely was on the first day. But then things kept happening and I kept discovering that I could handle it. I keep having these moments where I would think "Hey, this is terrifying and I'm somehow okay." Didn't know I was capable of all that.

ZEBULON

Trials do have their rewards. If nothing else, they show us who we are.

SHEL

No offense, but I still wish none of this had ever happened.

ZEBULON

Of course you do. And we would much rather have set down on your world in a happy and healthy state. We cannot dwell too long on paths unrealized.

SHEL

I was thinking about The Garden of Eden?

ZEBULON

Were you now?

SHEL

Those two people were in paradise, and then something bad happened and they had to strike out into the unknown.

ZEBULON

Not unlike you.

SHEL

It seems to me that all of you are like that. Humans anyway. You seem to remember a time when everything was great, but then something bad happened. And then you spend your whole lives trying to get back to that time when everything was great even though it may be impossible to get back there. But then again, I suppose that describes me too. I'll probably always be looking for my planet even though it's impossible for me to get it back.

ZEBULON

I wonder at times if a longing for that impossible place is necessary for us to go on in the world. That yearning is what keeps us moving forward, gives urgency to a life. There is no man more tragic than one who has achieved all he wishes to achieve. The agony of everything completed.

THE SOUND OF FOUR CLOVEN FEET RUNNING AROUND IN THE MUD.

SHEL

Well, what is that thing?

ZEBULON

That is an old friend.

SHEL

Really?

ZEBULON

I wanted to take this jaunt across the property to put our mysterious host to the test. See if it's friend or foe. I see now it means us no harm. For this is Pansy. A friend of mine from childhood.

SHEL

Is this a hog?

ZEBULON

Yes.

SHEL

It's really cute.

ZEBULON

It is.

SHEL

Now I really don't want to know why you raised them. Can I get in there?

ZEBULON

Of course.

SHEL

Awesome.

ZEBULON

I would even join you but who knows if we've been given a change of clothes in this strange place.

SHEL

Hi... Hi there... what's your deal, tiny thing? Do they talk? Oh Boy! Licking... licking is happening. Is this normal?

ZEBULON

It means she likes you.

PANSY RUNNING IN A CIRCLE.

SHEL

It's running around me in a circle.

ZEBULON

That also means she likes you.

SHEL

Oh hey... whatever I'm standing in is really great.

ZEBULON

Ah, yes. A pig does make for very fertile soil.

SHEL

Do you mind if I stand here for a minute? I'm not going to be able to eat dinner like you guys.

ZEBULON

Of course.

SHEL

It's a shame I can't live here. It seems like a nice home.

ZEBULON

It was for us, for many years.

SHEL

What's that building over there?

ZEBULON

That is the barn. A barn is where one stores things for the winter, it keep them out of the rain and snow.

SHEL

Why is there a "T" on it?

ZEBULON

That is a cross. The barn was once our church.

SHEL

A church is where you do the God things?

ZEBULON

Yes.

SHEL

But it went back to being your barn?

ZEBULON

It did.

SHEL

Did you get a bigger church-place?

ZEBULON

No, ah...

SHEL

Is this one of those moments where I shouldn't be talking about something?

ZEBULON

No, of course not. There was a time when people would come from all around on Sundays to hear Effie and myself do "God things", but that time came to an end.

SHEL

Oh. I'm sorry. What happened?

ZEBULON

To explain that I would have to revisit aspects of my home that I'd rather not revisit. Suffice to say, you feel that you have lost your home and all that makes you who you are. Know that Effie and myself have lost deeply as you have, but we endure. As you shall.

SHEL

Okay. Thanks for showing me your pig.

ZEBULON

You're quite welcome.

SOUNDS OF THE KITCHEN.

EFFIE

Just keep stirring that.

AVA
Is this cooking? This is easy.

EFFIE
That is stirring. That plus everything I'm doing is cooking.

AVA
I've decided this is cooking, I'm a chef now.

EFFIE
Do you even know what your stirring?

AVA
I'm stirring the cooking.

EFFIE
How did you get to your advanced age without knowing how to cook anything?

AVA
My WHAT.

EFFIE
Describe your day to me. How are you still alive?

AVA
You know what my day is, I'm basically around you all the time.

EFFIE
I mean before when you were at that big school of yours.

AVA
Heh. Big school is a funny way to describe a university.

EFFIE
Are you drunk already?

AVA
YOUR drunk already.

EFFIE
Did you have any moments of self-sufficiency in your day or did all your food come from some sort a cafe for the learned?

AVA
I made coffee at home.

EFFIE
Did you?

AVA
No. I went to the coffee shop.

EFFIE
And then midday?

AVA
The salad place.

EFFIE
And in the evening?

AVA
At night I had a long tradition of forgetting to have dinner and then at midnight ordering from the all night Thai place.

EFFIE
That's quite the charmed life you had there.

AVA
I also had to do a phd defense four times in my life, which is no picnic.

EFFIE
Why'd you have to do it four times?

AVA
I did it one time for each phd. Boom.

EFFIE
It's not bragging if I have no idea what that means.

AVA
No, it still is.

EFFIE
Alright. Now at this point we put the cover on this and on that.

AVA
Okay, then what?

EFFIE
Then we get the bottle of sherry from the bottom cupboard and go out on the back porch.

AVA
I love cooking.

SCREEN DOOR OPENS.

EFFIE

Well it looks like whoever's throwing this party has given us a nice afternoon.

AVA

Was the weather actually like this?

EFFIE

Spring was nice until the bugs showed up. Autumn was nice until the wind showed up.

AVA

So... what's it like having arms and legs?

EFFIE

You want to get right into it, huh?

AVA

You want me to just ignore the fact that you are now fully formed right in front of me?

EFFIE

Honestly, it feels about the same.

AVA

How?

EFFIE

Not sure. I couldn't explain it to you. I speak to you through an old radio but that's not how it feels to me. I seem to just fill up whatever space I'm in and it feels no different from where I was before. Though drinking some sherry on the back porch is not a bad touch.

AVA

You know, I seem to recall you speaking quite often on the evils of alcohol.

EFFIE

You have, it's true. But then again I am not Effie Mucklewain now am I? So I imagine I'm allowed to lay the tracks of this train while I'm driving it.

AVA

Are you... still a Christian?

EFFIE

Oh yes. Absolutely. No matter how odd the life of the Mucklewains becomes... I can still feel him out there in the darkness, Ava. In all things. Right now in particular in this sherry. Another?

AVA

Yes.

EFFIE

What about yourself?

AVA

What about me?

EFFIE

You ever feel your faith shaken by the things you see?

AVA

I don't really have one of those.

EFFIE

One of what?

AVA

Faith.

EFFIE

Sure you do. I'm sure there's things you've relied upon that have abandoned you during our misadventures. I imagine there's no courses in those schools of yours that cover anything we've seen today. How do you keep your head on straight?

AVA

It's pretty easy, honestly.

EFFIE

Oh it's easy, is it? We're sitting here in the middle of a fake Arkansas and it's easy?

AVA

Yes.

EFFIE

What's your special secret?

AVA

I don't have a lot of friends.

EFFIE

That's no secret.

AVA

Or I didn't anyway. When I was young I thought it was because there was something wrong with me. When I got older I thought it was because I was smarter than everybody.

(MORE)

AVA (CONT'D)

But the more I studied the cosmos the more I realized it wasn't either of those things. I was just different. I see the world differently. Different from other people. When I was getting my first phd I learned about two things: Fermions and Bosons. I learned that everything in every possible universe is only made up of those two things. Fermions: particles of matter, and Bosons: the forces that influence them. No matter where you go, no matter what you do, everything is just those two things. The world is a lot less scary when you realize that. So, you can attack me with all the galactic empires you want, all I'm going to see are two things. Fermions and Bosons. I'm looking at you right now and that's all I'm seeing. Sorry I guess there's not a lot of room for God in between those two things.

EFFIE

On the contrary, two things that make up the world entire. That sounds like God to me.

ZEBULON

We have returned.

EFFIE

Hey, y'all.

SHEL

I met a pig.

EFFIE

Did you?

ZEBULON

Our mysterious host has provided us with a Pansy.

AVA

How nice.

EFFIE

Let me guess, she ran around you in a circle.

SHEL

She did.

EFFIE

She's a one trick pony, that one.

AVA

I cooked food.

EFFIE

You did not.

ZEBULON

Speaking of, it smells wonderful, dear.

EFFIE

Good, let's head on inside.

SHEL

I already ate.

ZEBULON

Been a while since the last sherry on the back porch.

EFFIE

Turns out it's not unlike riding a bicycle.

ZEBULON

It is an easy rhythm to fall back into, being here.

EFFIE

I believe that creature has latched onto you just a bit, husband.

ZEBULON

Shel is a tree without roots, I imagine they'd latch onto just about anything at the moment.

EFFIE

Understood. Though it's not here those roots should be put down.

ZEBULON

I'm well aware, my dear.

EFFIE

They're not unlike Moses, that one. They've got a whole desert to cross.

ZEBULON

I surmise that Shel is capable of much more than we expect of them.

EFFIE

So you say. Head on in then. Ava, come on now, I think the foods burning.

AVA

But I worked so hard on it!

EFFIE

One last thing though.

AVA

Ah. I knew there was going to be an old timey talking to at some point.

EFFIE

He'll be returning to us, Ava.

AVA

Who? Jesus? Okay, but he's going to have questions. Question 1: why isn't everyone Jewish?

EFFIE

Caspar.

AVA

...

EFFIE

He'll be coming back to us.

AVA

You don't say.

EFFIE

I'm certainly one to repeat myself, but I shant with you. Do try and rustle up a posture of forgiveness if you can.

AVA

People have to deserve forgiveness, don't they?

EFFIE

Forgiveness benefits both parties. We can't live our lives all bound up in things, can we?

AVA

Your request has been logged.

EFFIE

And I thank you.

INSIDE THE HOUSE.

SONG:

LEIF

So there's Urt Doors and Ted Tubes, right? Urt doors are simple and elegant. Can move a body several thousand miles, but there's limits. To move a ship across a galaxy you really need a Ted Tube. The Urts are really great at simple elegance but they don't like doing dirty work, that's how you get Ted Tech.

GLORIA

I just find it hard to believe that nobody else in three galaxies has technology like they do.

LEIF

They would've. That's the part that sucks. Right around the time Europeans were going through the renaissance, all these planets started to establish communication with each other. They didn't have the tech to travel to each other but they all started this massive scientific and cultural exchange. They started working together to find a way to finally meet face to face. But before they had a chance to come up with a solution, everyone started to see a Ted ship looming in orbit, offering a quick solution at a high price. It all went downhill from there.

GLORIA

I hate them so much, Leif.

LEIF

I know, you get used to it.

EFFIE

Foods ready, y'all.

LEIF

Awesome, where do we go?

EFFIE

Oh no, you stay right there.

AVA

Hello, everyone. My name is Ava and I will be your waitress.

LEIF

Shut up.

GLORIA

Somebody check the horizon for four horsemen.

AVA

That's right. You are going to stay seated, and I am going to bring food to you.

LEIF

There's something so wrong about this, but I have to see it happen.

AVA

Here you go, Leif. Enjoy. Also don't get used to it.

ZEBULON

I think we should all commend Ava for doing something that is a very human thing that most people can do.

AVA

No snark, Holy Man. Take this plate.

GLORIA

This looks amazing.

AVA

Um... Gloria before we eat can I talk to you outside?

GLORIA

Oh. Uh, yeah, sure.

AVA

It'll just take a second.

LEIF

Come on, guys. No secrets.

AVA

Eat your food.

FRONT DOOR OPENS AND THEY WALK ONTO THE FRONT PORCH.

GLORIA

What's goin on, Ava?

AVA

Hi.

GLORIA

Hello.

AVA

So... I uh... need a favor.

GLORIA

Really?

AVA

Yes.

GLORIA

Okay.

AVA

I uh... it's hard to explain.

GLORIA

It's hard to explain or you don't want to explain it?

AVA

This place we're in, it's basically a waiting room.

GLORIA

I figured.

AVA

Which means we're going to, y'know, eventually be called into the office.

GLORIA

Right.

AVA

This thing that brought us here, it's going to make contact at some point.

GLORIA

And why hasn't it already?

AVA

My theory is that it's operating pretty far outside it's comfort zone right now. I don't think it exists chronologically. It doesn't experience time. And it experiencing time is just as hard as us not experiencing time. So right now it's working up the courage to cross the auditorium and ask us to dance.

GLORIA

I see.

AVA

It should probably be me that talks to it.

GLORIA

Oh, I agree.

AVA

And um... here's the thing...

GLORIA

You're scared.

AVA

Yes. Thank you for saying it.

GLORIA

You've communicated with this thing before, the "Big Malevolent Thing" right?

AVA

We communicated in vagaries. It shot me through time and showed me things. This may be direct contact.

GLORIA

Yeah, that sounds a little scary.

AVA

See... We create tools because of our limitations. The wheel, the abacus, the computer. Our brains are limited. And they also can work against us. We think our brains are these powerful learning machines, but actually using our brain to learn something is hard and consumes a lot of energy because we have to build new pathways. What a brain actually is, is a huge collection of assumptions. When we see something new we use whatever we know at that time to define what it is. So when we see new things, their actual aspects are obscured by all of our previous assumptions. We work incredibly hard to bring a new thing into our narrowly-defined world instead of broadening the world of our minds. For centuries we thought the sun revolved around the Earth. It took hundreds of years to change peoples minds.

GLORIA

What does any of that have to do with this?

AVA

Studying the universe, and time and space and quantum realities is inherently tragic. Because you essentially still have the brain of a caveman and you're trying to understand things that, in the end, you just may not be built to understand. I've always been worried that one day I'd hit the wall. That the cosmos would finally be outside of my understanding. That I would finally find that I'm a 1989 Tandy 1400 trying to search the internet... that day might be today.

GLORIA

Ava, are you trying to tell me that you're scared of failing?

AVA

I don't fail things, Gloria. Things fail me.

GLORIA

Ava, I hate to break this to you, but in the end you're just a human being.

AVA

Take it back.

GLORIA

I know. It's hard to take. No one's expecting anything of you in there.

AVA

They may not say it...

GLORIA

Ava, are you hurting yourself?

AVA

No.

GLORIA

Are you hurting someone else?

AVA

No.

GLORIA

Then congratulations, you have met all the requirements. We love you, okay?

AVA

Take it back.

GLORIA

We good?

AVA

Yeah.

GLORIA

Okay. Now before we go back in there can we address something?

AVA

Yes.

GLORIA

I was not at all prepared for Effie and Zebulon to be the hot ones.

AVA

Oh my God, thank you saying it.

GLORIA

They look fantastic.

AVA

And they look really cool. They look like an alt-country duo.

GLORIA

I was picturing the couple from American Gothic.

AVA

That's exactly what I've been picturing FOR YEARS.

GLORIA

I've got to up my game. Maybe I should start wearing makeup again.

AVA

Really?

GLORIA

No, don't be ridiculous. Come on, I'm hungry.

FRONT DOOR OPENS.

SHEL

Wait, I don't understand.

LEIF

I'm saying, you have a nervous system, so it's possible.

SHEL

But what's the point?

LEIF

Because it's fun.

GLORIA

What are we talking about?

EFFIE

Leif here is trying to give Shel some brandy.

GLORIA

Leif.

LEIF

I'm just saying, Shel has a nervous system, we have a nervous system, there's no reason why not.

AVA

Shel eats with their feet, dude.

LEIF

Right.

AVA
You want to soak Shel's feet in Brandy?

LEIF
I'm not saying I want to, I'm just saying it's possible.

GLORIA
You're contributing to the delinquency of a minor.

SHEL
Actually I've done the math, turns out I'm older than all of you.

GLORIA
Seriously?

SHEL
Yeah. I live for like a thousand years.

GLORIA
Huh.

AVA
That's too long.

SHEL
How are you guys not depressed all the time with your super short lives?

AVA
That's what the Brandy's for.

LEIF
Well, shit, give this old geezer a drink already.

SHEL
It sounds a little scary, but also I really want to try it.

ZEBULON
Dear are our friends debating the ethics of getting a tree inebriated?

EFFIE
They are.

ZEBULON
That doesn't sound right to me.

EFFIE
Nor to me, Dear, but I'm afraid I must know. Shel, put your feet on this tray.

SHEL
Okay.

CORK COMES OUT OF A BOTTLE.

EFFIE
Alright, we'll start you off slow. Just a couple of
fingers on your toes.

BRANDY SPLASHES ONTO THE TRAY. EVERYBODY WAITS.

SHEL
What's supposed to happen?

AVA
You're supposed to be funnier, especially to
yourself.

SHEL
I don't feel funnier.

AVA
Do you feel like you're going to split off into
more gremlins?

SHEL
What?

GLORIA
Effie, this food is amazing.

AVA
Hey, I stirred.

GLORIA
Great job both of you.

EFFIE
Thank you, Gloria.

GLORIA
You have a coffee can full of bacon fat in your
fridge don't you?

EFFIE
Well what else am I supposed to keep in my fridge?

LEIF
I'm surprised by the refrigerator. I didn't think
those were too common in 1925. Especially all the
way out here.

EFFIE
We have our ways of getting things.

SHEL
I know the Brandy isn't working but I feel like we're slaring something together now. Slaring. Slaring? Sharing... ooooooh, I get it now.

LEIF
Hypothesis proven.

SHEL
Ava, you're right. I'm really funny now.

AVA
You're hilarious.

SHEL
Can you feel how funny I am?

AVA
Yes.

SHEL
How did I get so funny?

AVA
It's a mystery, Shel.

SHEL
Wow... I feel like this is a great moment for all of us, right?

LEIF
Oh yes, it's amazing.

GLORIA
Jesus Christ, you guys.

SHEL
Is everything fuzzy? Like there's a fuzz on it?

AVA
Absolutely.

SHEL
Okay... Why don't you guys do this all the time?

LEIF
The temptation is there, trust me.

SHEL
Where does the Brandy come from, does it come from the same place as the water out of the pipes?

ZEBULON
It is actually a very interesting process-

SHEL

Zebulon, what is God?

ZEBULON

Oh my.

GLORIA

Did Shel skip straight to "intense conversation about spirituality drunk"?

LEIF

In record time.

SHEL

I really want to know, because you talk about it all the time and I'm always like whaaaaaaaaaaaaat?

GLORIA

I think you better just tell them, Zeb, I don't think they're going to let it go.

ZEBULON

I cannot.

GLORIA

What?

LEIF

What?

ZEBULON

I cannot tell you, Shel, what God is.

AVA

Plot twist.

SHEL

But God God God coming out of your mouth all the time God.

ZEBULON

Ah, yes, well... Shel there was once a man named Moses. He was Gods greatest prophet. He ascended a mountain to commune with him directly, the only prophet to ever have that privilege. Moses was desperate to know the true nature of this God that had him besiege the pharaoh with plagues, split the sea in twain and led him deep into the desert. "Oh please, show me your glory" he said. But God refused. "I will make all My goodness pass before you, but a human being may not see Me and live." Which seems quite severe. But the point of God's obfuscation of his nature was to show us our own imperfections.

(MORE)

ZEBULON (CONT'D)

Not one of us has a claim to absolute truth. We view the world through the imperfect lenses we wear throughout our lives. Divine wisdom may reveal itself to us from time to time but in the end only God can know what God is like, for the power of our perception in the end will always have its imperfections.

EFFIE

I like to switch the letters around and ask "What is a dog." If you ask Leif he'd probably say that a dog is loyal, and loving, and a worthwhile companion.

LEIF

I would say that which is totally what I said to my parents.

EFFIE

But now, if Leif were a squirrel he'd have a very different definition of what a dog is, now wouldn't he? Both definitions are true, both are different, and both are colored by the eyes we're looking through.

SHEL

That's really beautiful, you two. I just don't understand why all the people left your church place.

AVA

What?

EFFIE

Zebulon.

ZEBULON

It was said in passing.

GLORIA

Wait, what happened?

LEIF

What do you mean they left?

EFFIE

It's in the distant past now, there's no reason to dwell on it.

GLORIA

Uh, uh-uh. No. What the hell happened, Effie?

EFFIE

I suppose if I said I didn't like talking about it, that wouldn't do much, would it?

LEIF

No. What happened, guys?

ZEBULON

Well... a while back Effie and myself... we had a bit of a falling out with our congregation.

EFFIE

Zebulon, I have no desire to tell this story but if we're going to tell it we should tell it.

ZEBULON

They abandoned us.

LEIF

What the fuck?

ZEBULON

Effie and myself performed a marriage ceremony. A marriage ceremony that was illegal in the eyes of the State of Arkansas.

LEIF

Illegal?

GLORIA

An interracial marriage.

ZEBULON

Yes... Harold was a friend.

EFFIE

To us all.

ZEBULON

To us all. Indeed. Repaired tractors. Had a real way with it. As if communing with a wounded animal.

EFFIE

The whole community depended on Harold.

ZEBULON

They did. Come harvest time a call to Harold was just as desperate as a call to the doctor. A pillar, you'd call him. A pillar of the community. And no one depended on Harold more than the Tucker farm. For there was no man whose tractor was more chronically infirmed than Jim Tucker. And Jim Tucker had a daughter.

EFFIE

Lillian. Lillian was quite a lady. She'd swatted away a couple of marriage proposals at that point and was still living at home with her mother and father. She was twenty five years old and her father was already calling her a spinster. That gives y'all a fairly clear picture of Jim Tucker.

ZEBULON

And so Lillian and Harold spent long afternoons together under that willow tree of theirs. Harold would fix the tractor, and Lillian would bring him lemonade.

EFFIE

Seemed innocent enough. Then we found out later on that Lillian had, the entire time, been deliberately breaking her father's tractor so that Harold would come again and fix it. For which she earned my undying respect.

ZEBULON

They came to us one Saturday morning while her father was in the city, and told us their intentions.

EFFIE

We were concerned.

ZEBULON

Very concerned. With the miscegenation laws Harold could've found himself in jail.

EFFIE

We never told them to stop despite our fears for their safety.

ZEBULON

Instead, Effie had constructed a plan.

EFFIE

I found them a safe place. They'd be allowed to cohabit in Iowa without the law getting involved. Also Iowa ain't nothing but tractors so Harold could get all sorts of work there. But to two folks who'd lived their whole lives in these parts, the state of Iowa may as well have been the other side of the world.

ZEBULON

I remember looking out this window right here while they discussed Effie's proposal. They both seemed quite scared. Afraid to even let go of each other.

EFFIE

They agreed that these parts were no safe haven.
And at the right time they would steal away to that
land of corn up north.

ZEBULON

But they would not go unless we married them in our
church.

EFFIE

Wouldn't be a legal marriage, just promises before
God so we had no right to deny them.

ZEBULON

We did not. And so one morning Lillian snuck away
while her father was in the field. We married them
as the sun rose, and off they went.

EFFIE

And then the next day all godforsaken hell broke
loose.

ZEBULON

I'm unsure how Jim found out the news about his
daughter and our involvement but it was for the
best. I didn't want to spend a lifetime bearing
false witness to the man.

EFFIE

It surprised me how quickly they all turned on us.
Folks said they felt betrayed, that we had borne
away Jim Tucker's daughter without any thought to
the rest of them. They described it like it was a
kidnapping.

ZEBULON

And within a week, we went from a full church to an
empty barn.

GLORIA

That's fucking horrible.

EFFIE

It was. I'll admit for quite some time we didn't
know what to do with ourselves. I couldn't even go
in the barn for the longest time, and this is a
farm, y'all, I need to go in that barn.

ZEBULON

I believe we were in the right. But that was cold
comfort. Too often being in the right requires
acquainting oneself with loneliness. Eventually I
began the process of trying to forgive our former
parishioners.

EFFIE

And I began a rather unexpected process.

ZEBULON

Yes. I come in from the field one day to find this construction you see before you now, and attached to it all, a microphone.

EFFIE

I sat Zebulon in front of that microphone and I said to him "speak".

ZEBULON

And I feel as though I haven't stopped speaking since.

EFFIE

It was strange at first. We didn't know what the heck we were doing or if anyone could hear us. Then after a time it became a blessing to talk into the darkness like that without even caring if anyone heard us.

ZEBULON

God heard us.

EFFIE

That he did... but then, THEN, after months of talking our heads off into that contraption I was witness to a shocking discovery.

ZEBULON

Turns out it wasn't just God that was listening.

EFFIE

I come up on the state road one day and what do I see? A line of cars all parked along the shoulder one after the other. All of our former congregation. And what do they have in their back seat? They had pulled their wireless radios out of their own houses and were listening to Zebulon give a sermon.

LEIF

Son of a bitch.

EFFIE

They had not the courage to show their faces in our church, but they had all pulled their cars up onto a bend in the state road where the reception was the best, listening intently to a man they had apparently branded a traitor.

ZEBULON

Effie was... upset.

EFFIE

Oooh, I was. Hypocrisy such as that really does hit me in my sensitive places, y'all.

GLORIA

So what did you do?

EFFIE

Well, God forgive me, I plotted revenge.

AVA

Now we're talking.

EFFIE

On our next broadcast I made a little announcement. That I had opened up a PO Box in town so that they can contribute to our little church of the airwaves. "Whatever you can spare" I told them, "just send it on in". And oh, the guilty, they did pay.

ZEBULON

I had reservations around taking their money from them.

EFFIE

I did a little bit. But then again we didn't take nothin from them. They sent it to us. And that there, Leif, is why we are the only folks in these parts with a refrigerator. I consider it a reward for our fortitude.

LEIF

I can't believe interracial marriage was still illegal in 1925.

GLORIA

Leif, it wasn't legal nationwide until what? 1967? 68?

LEIF

Shit, really?

GLORIA

How does non-college-educated Gloria know this and you don't?

LEIF

Fuck, I don't know. In my defense I've spent most of my life in space.

AVA

I didn't know it either, and I have no defense.

EFFIE

1968. That's really how long it took?

GLORIA

Yeah.

EFFIE

That is disgraceful.

ZEBULON

A tragedy. As I am sure you can understand now, this return home for us has complicated emotions.

LEIF

Well I salute you guys. It must've been miserable to confront your own community like that.

ZEBULON

No, Leif, we cannot be commended for doing something that should be expected of any individual who has their two feet planted on the Earth.

GLORIA

How did you not hate everyone after that?

ZEBULON

The blame falls also on us, Gloria. This is our community and it's failures are our own. There were demons here to confront that we chose not to see. We were leaders in this community and did not turn to face it's prejudices until they had turned to face us.

EFFIE

The failure was ours as much as it was anyone else's. I was angry with them, disappointed with them but we are not blameless ourselves. Failures such as these are the failure of all of us... but I still kept that refrigerator, I tell you what.

ZEBULON

It led us both to the airwaves at least, that was a blessing. I feel it's where we truly belonged.

SHEL STARTS SNORING.

AVA

Is Shel snoring?

GLORIA

Shel is snoring.

LEIF
What a lightweight.

EFFIE
Poor thing.

LEIF
It's funny, y'know? We all seemed to end up at the diner because we got kicked out. Kicked out of academia, kicked out of the restaurant business, kicked out of Earth. Kicked out of your own damn church.

ZEBULON
We are all refugees. Not unlike Shel. I find that to be deliberate, don't you? As though we're drawn together for a purpose.

EFFIE AND ZEBULON'S RADIO BEGINS BUZZING LOUDLY.

GLORIA
What is that?

LEIF
Not a normal radio sound.

AVA
Shit. Okay.

LEIF
You think it's trying to talk through the radio?

AVA
Seems like it. Leif, can you press record on the tape recorder?

LEIF
Yeah. Got it.

AVA
You guys don't let me get beamed up by a mothership or something okay?

GLORIA
You'll be fine, Ava.

EFFIE
Just press that button there to talk, Ava.

AVA
Okay... hello?

THE VOICE ON THE RADIO
It may be Newark Airport.

LEIF
... Did it say Newark Airport?

AVA
Hello? Can you repeat that?

THE VOICE ON THE RADIO
A friend. Like you I found this place.

AVA
What place? Are you talking about the diner?

THE VOICE ON THE RADIO
I don't have identity like you do. Call me what you like.

LEIF
We're supposed to just make up a name?

GLORIA
The fog is coming back in.

THE VOICE ON THE RADIO
Names are strange. They don't mean anything.

AVA
I'm confused. Why have you brought us here?

THE VOICE ON THE RADIO
I see myself finding this place. Like all of you, through chance and circumstance. I see you. Alone. The tables covered in dust. I see myself not wanting you to be alone. Somewhere else I see a man and a woman. She talks of her grandmother and grandfather. I make them for you. Put their voices in a wooden box. I thought you shouldn't be alone.

AVA
It's talking about Effie and Zebulon. I don't know if it can hear us.

GLORIA
The fog is everywhere now. I think it's happening again, guys.

THE VOICE ON THE RADIO
You too can make people.

AVA
It seems disconnected somehow. What's happening?

THE VOICE ON THE RADIO
I see Ava in a field. She tells a story of dogs and humans. She is right. We need each other.

AVA
It's like it's not talking to us.

A SPATIAL ANOMALY BEGINS MOVING TOWARD THEM AGAIN.

GLORIA
Ava, you need to make something happen right now, I think we're getting kicked out of fake Arkansas.

AVA
Make what happen?

GLORIA
I don't know, but look out the window.

AVA
Fuck, what the fuck is happening?

THE SPATIAL ANOMALY GROWS LOUDER AND LOUDER.

THE VOICE ON THE RADIO
Things need each other. You can see it in the stars. Gravity is not a mindless force, it is an intention. A prayer. Things drawn together.

AVA
I don't understand what you're saying!

GLORIA
Everybody gather around Ava. I'll get Shel.

LEIF
Does it even know we're here?

AVA
It brought us here!

THE VOICE ON THE RADIO
Something is wrong.

SILENCE.

SONG:

LEIF
We're back.

AVA
Fuck!

LEIF
What happened?

EFFIE

(In the radio.)
We're back as well.

SHEL

Hm... what? What happened?

GLORIA

Where are we?

SHEL

I had the weirdest dream.

LEIF

Looks like we're in deep space again.

AVA

What the fuck was the point of any of that? A ten second incoherent conversation?

GLORIA

Maybe the point was just to save us from the Teds, Ava.

AVA

Then why talk to us at all?

GLORIA

I don't know.

SHEL

So we're just floating in space?

LEIF

It happens sometimes. What the fuck is that?

DOOR CHIME.

SHEL

Can he just go out there?

GLORIA

He's fine in the parking lot. Grab the radio, we'll be fine. Ava, come on.

AVA

I'd like to stand here and be mad, please.

GLORIA

Thats fine. Come do it outside though.

AVA

Fine.

DOOR CHIME.

GLORIA
Whoa.

SHEL
That's big.

GLORIA
What is that, Leif?

LEIF
No idea. It's huge though, 100 kilometers long,
easy.

AVA
It looks like wind chimes.

GLORIA
It does look like wind chimes.

LEIF
I'm guessing it's not wind chimes.

ALARM SOUND BEGINS COMING FROM THE RADIO.

GLORIA
Is that coming from the radio? Zebulon, what's that
sound?

ZEBULON
I'm afraid I don't know, Gloria.

SHEL
There's something coming towards us!

LEIF
Where?

SHEL
There!

AVA
That's a very big ship.

LEIF
Fuck.

GLORIA
What is it? Leif?

LEIF
Looks like our mysterious friend didn't save us
after all. That's a Tednaught.

TAPPING ON A MICROPHONE COMING FROM THE RADIO.

TED

(In the radio.)
Attention Midnight Burger. This is the Ted Empire.
Prepare to be boarded and knock off all of your
bullshit!

GLORIA

How is he talking through the radio?

TED

Oh, what's that? Are you curious how I'm talking
through the radio? Because I have an Empire at my
disposal and you guys have FRY BASKETS!

SHEL

Who is that?

LEIF

That's the bad guys.

TED

Hey Leif? Would you like to threaten us with a
purple Nullifier again? Go ahead, Leif. Go nuts.
Another option is to shove it up your ass!

GLORIA

We got dropped right in their fucking lap.

AVA

Uh, there's another ship over there?

LEIF

Where?... Oh shit.

GLORIA

What is THAT thing?

LEIF

It's the Alex P Keaton.

TAPPING ON THE MIC.

LÅFFTRAX

(In the radio.)
Hey everybody, what's going on on this frequency,
is this the party line? What are you guys wearing?

LEIF

It's Låfftrax.

TED

Oh shit.

LÅFFTRAX

What's up Teds? Are you guys trying to take my diner? I don't like it when people take my stuff. I've got an idea, let's shoot at each other!

TED

Jesus Christ, fucking fire everything!

LÅFFTRAX

Fire all of our shit at these dicks!

SOUNDS OF A DEEP SPACE FIRE FIGHT.

GLORIA

Whoa!

LEIF

Everybody get inside!

AVA

Theres one more ship coming in!

LEIF

What now?!

SHEL

It's coming right at us!

LEIF

Wait... Nancy?

THE NANCY SINATRA MAKES A LOUD AND SLOPPY LANDING, SCREECHING ACROSS THE PARKING LOT.

GLORIA

Uh... Leif?

LEIF

That's my ship.

CARGO BAY OPENS. FOOTSTEPS ON THE GANG PLANK.

EVEN OLDER LEIF

You guys open?

ZEBULON

Even Older Leif?

THE EX

Hi guys!

EVERYONE

Aaaaaaah!

CASPAR

What kind of a fucking landing... Oh hey. Hi guys.

GLORIA

...Caspar.

CASPAR

So... what'd I miss?

THE END.