

MIDNIGHT BURGER

Chapter 33: Everybody Down

By

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Midnight Burger

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IN THE SILENCE WE HEAR A VOICE.

LIBUZA

Once upon a time there were three sisters: A healer, a warrior, and a seer. Their father had died, his enemies all around.

The seer looked, and she saw a great city. A city that shined. Whose light could be seen by anyone who looked. A city that had not been built. They would build it themselves.

But the fertile ground on which the city would grow, was in a land too far away...

Then the seer saw a man. The man would travel in an impossible ship. A ship that could go anywhere, but could not be steered.

But the seer could see where the ship would go next. The three sisters boarded the ship and traveled a long way. And just as the seer foretold, it brought them to the far off land where they would build the city in her visions.

They left the man and his impossible ship and began their work...

But there was something that the seer could not see...

It was a dark place. A place where light dies.

She could not see this place. But it could see her.

A dark army issued forth from this place, and sought to undo the great work of the three sisters. Constantly under attack, the seer had another vision.

... That the strange man in the impossible ship must return...

... This is the story I was told...

A TEA KETTLE'S WHISTLE FADES IN. THE KETTLE IS REMOVED FROM THE BURNER. WE ARE IN THE MUCKLEWAIN'S FARMHOUSE. IT IS LATE AT NIGHT AND EFFIE IS MAKING TEA.

ZEBULON

Another sleepless night?

EFFIE

I appreciate you having a sleepless night right along with me, dear, but there's no need.

ZEBULON

One of the pitfalls of sharing a life. You share in the joy but also share in, well, night's such as this... you've been having bad feelings again?

EFFIE

Nothing new about that, I've had them before... It's different this time.

ZEBULON

How so?

EFFIE

My visions in the past have been like looking at something from far off. Like it's on the other side of the field and I can just make it out. Like seeing a deer move out of the woods.

ZEBULON

And how does it feel this time?

EFFIE

... Like it's looking back at me.

ZEBULON

... Perhaps we should fire up the radio? Check in on our friends, make sure everything's right in the world.

EFFIE

They're all asleep, as we should be.

ZEBULON

Just to check.

EFFIE

... I suppose it couldn't hurt, make yourself some tea.

EFFIE CROSSES TO THE RADIO AND FIRES IT UP. WE HEAR THE WHINE OF TRANSISTORS AND THE BUZZ OF ELECTRICITY.

EFFIE (CONT'D)

Hey there, y'all. Anybody up at this ungodly hour? Caspar? Ava?... Gloria? Leif?... Nothing.

ZEBULON

Worth a try.

EFFIE

This is ridiculous, what am I even doing?

ZEBULON

Nothing wrong with checking in.

EFFIE

... I feel as though all that time we spent chasing around Clementine nearly ended us.

ZEBULON

That it did, but as is always the case, it has made us stronger.

EFFIE

I'm just a bit jumpy, is all.

ZEBULON

... How about some pancakes?

EFFIE

Pancakes?

ZEBULON

Yes.

EFFIE

Dear, it's two in the morning.

ZEBULON

And?

EFFIE

Are you turning my sleeplessness into an excuse to eat pancakes?

ZEBULON

I may be.

EFFIE

Are these pancakes of yours going to fix my sleeplessness?

ZEBULON

They may. And if they do not, at least we've had some pancakes.

EFFIE

Your point is well heard. Go on, off to the kitchen with you.

ZEBULON

Off I go.

ZEBULON (CONT'D)

(From the kitchen.)

In peace I will both lie down and sleep-

EFFIE

For you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety.

Yes, I know it. There is the word and there is the world, dear...

ZEBULON

(From the kitchen.)

I was reading the other day that the ancient Egyptians used lettuce juice to aid them in sleep.

EFFIE

I'm sorry, they used what?

ZEBULON

(From the kitchen.)

Lettuce juice.

EFFIE

Zebulon, if you come out into this living room with the juice of a head of lettuce-

ZEBULON

(From the kitchen.)

I think I know better than to do that, dear... how does one even juice a head of lettuce?

EFFIE

Let's leave that as a mystery of the ancient world, shall we?

ZEBULON

(From the kitchen.)

Agreed.

EFFIE FIRES UP THE RADIO AGAIN.

EFFIE

Caspar?... Ava?... What am I doing?

SHE SHUTS OFF THE RADIO AGAIN. AFTER A MOMENT, WE HEAR A SOUND FAR OFF. FOR A BRIEF MOMENT, EVERYTHING IN THE HOUSE SHAKES.

EFFIE (CONT'D)

Zebulon.

ZEBULON

I felt it as well... Perhaps a storm?

EFFIE

No... Not a storm...

THE SOUND OF THE DINER TRAVELING SLOWLY FADES IN. WE BEGIN TO HEAR A FAINT VOICE.

KAZI

(In Caspar's head.)

3... 1... 4... 1... 9... 2... 6... 3... 8... 9...
7... 9... 3... 2... 3... 8... 4... 6... 2... 6...

CASPAR

OW! Fuck!

KAZI

(In Caspar's head.)

4... 3... 3... 8... 3... 2... 7... 9... 0... 2...
8... 8... 4... 1... 9... 7... 1... 6... 9... 3...
9... 9... 3... 7... 1... 0...

THE NUMBERS CONTINUE OVER AND OVER AGAIN AS CASPAR TRIES TO WAKE UP AVA.

CASPAR

Ava... Ava!

AVA

No.

CASPAR

Ava wake up.

AVA

No.

CASPAR

Ava!

AVA

What?!

CASPAR

Do you hear that?

AVA

Hear what?

CASPAR

Numbers.

AVA
Numbers?

CASPAR
Yes.

AVA
What are you talking about?

CASPAR
Numbers over and over again.

AVA
I'm not hearing anything. What are you talking about?

CASPAR
... You're not hearing anything?

AVA
No... Caspar what's going on?

CASPAR
... I woke up because it felt like I had a nail in my head and I was hearing numbers.

AVA
... Ok...

CASPAR
You're not hearing anything?

AVA
No... What... What are the numbers?

CASPAR
I don't know.

AVA
Are you hearing them right now?

CASPAR
Yes.

AVA
... Tell me the numbers.

CASPAR
Um... 9... 2... 6... 3... 8... 9... 7... 9... 3...
2...

AVA
...

CASPAR
... What is happening to me?

AVA
Listen. You're fine.

CASPAR
There's a voice in my head, Ava.

AVA
Caspar. Definitely not the weirdest thing you've encountered.

CASPAR
Those things were on the outside of me.

AVA
Keep telling me the numbers.

CASPAR
Uh... 7... 9... 3... 2... 3... 8... 4... 6... 2...
6... What if I can't make it stop?

AVA
Caspar. Listen to me. That's not going to happen.

CASPAR
How do you know?

AVA
Because I won't let it happen. Keep telling me the numbers.

CASPAR
8... 3... 2... 7... 9... 0... 2... 8... 8... 4...

AVA
You're doing great.

LEIF BURSTS THROUGH THE BACK DOOR.

LEIF
INCOMING!!

AVA
What?!

LEIF
INCOMING, EVERYBODY DOWN!!

A WAVE OF ENERGY HITS THE DINER AND WE GO SPINNING OFF INTO SPACE/TIME. SILENCE. WE SLOWLY BEGIN TO HEAR THE SOUND OF A CITY BUS DRIVING DOWN A CITY STREET. A PHONE STARTS VIBRATING.

DAVID

What's up?... Well where do you think I am, I'm on the bus. My third bus, which is ridiculous... Yeah I've heard of cars, I hear they're popular... He is? What is he selling?... Uh huh... You know what the problem is? People assume I don't have a car in Los Angeles County because I can't afford one. Because of that large assumption do you know how many people I have coming to me like "My cousin is selling his car, my grandmother died and we're getting rid of her car, have you heard of this new website that gives you a car whenever you need it?" I get this non-stop... Uh huh... Yes... Yes, it's true, I am sitting here on my third bus in the last hour, heading into Pasadena and that is the choice I have made... Because... Would you listen to me damn it?... Nobody gets to tell me to own a car if I don't want to. My feet, my brain, my wallet, my phone, my headphones. Every day, me versus Los Angeles, armed with all that, okay?... This is not me being anything, this is me saying no. People should say that more often. I am the Pope of the Church of Nope... Well, I'm surprised you asked because you've heard this from me about eighty-six times... It's been going fine... Yeah, we have breakfast on Saturday, I make fun of him, we argue, I go home, we do it again next week... We argue about whatever... I never need to talk afterward, that's probably why I keep doing it... Uh huh... well I'd love to but I'm busy planning the party that I throw at the end of the year. Yeah, see I have a lot of money saved at the end of the year because I don't have a car. I'd offer you an invitation but it's only accessible by bus. Uh huh... This is my stop I've gotta go.

THE BUS LURCHES TO A STOP AND THE DOORS SWING OPEN. DAVID WALKS OFF THE BUS AS HE SAYS GOODBYE TO THE DRIVER.

DAVID (CONT'D)

Ernesto, you have a good day.

THE DOORS CLOSE ON THE BUS AND IT PULLS AWAY FROM THE CURB.

DAVID (CONT'D)

Pasadena. The city on the hill...

WE HEAR SMALL MECHANICAL WHEELS OF AN AUTOMATED DELIVERY DRONE DRIVING DOWN THE SIDEWALK.

DRONE

Delicious food, coming through... Delicious food, coming through... Delicious food, coming through...

DAVID

The fuck...

DRONE

Delicious food, coming through... Delicious food,
coming through... Delicious food, coming through...

DAVID

Hell no.

DAVID WALKS INTO MIDNIGHT BURGER.

CASPAR

Hey there.

DAVID

What the hell did I just see outside?

CASPAR

What?

DAVID

It was a robot with "delicious food".

CASPAR

Oh yeah, I've been seeing those. They deliver food,
they can get into elevators and everything.

DAVID

I have opinions.

CASPAR

Well, that's unlike you.

DAVID

So the cost of having some kid walk a delivery up
to the the ninth floor of a bank was just too much?
Somebody had to innovate that?

CASPAR

Well, businesses don't start in America because
someone has a good idea, they start because it's an
idea that enough rich people can be hornswoggled
into investing in.

DAVID

What is that word you just used with me?

CASPAR

Hornswoggled?

DAVID

You feel comfortable using that word in this
modern age?

CASPAR

It's a perfectly acceptable word.

DAVID

It's a perfectly acceptable word for a Kentucky senator in 1836.

CASPAR

I'm bringing it back.

DAVID

You'll fail in your endeavors.

CASPAR

I'm used to that.

DAVID

...

CASPAR

So how are you?

DAVID

I had yet another person try and sell me a car.

CASPAR

A lot of people like cars.

DAVID

I don't like cars.

CASPAR

A lot of people like them, where would people be without a back seat to throw garbage into?

DAVID

...What do you drive?

CASPAR

Me? Why would I drive when I have robots to deliver food to me every day?

DAVID

I'm serious.

CASPAR

So am I. I spend most of my time here and I live, y'know, in the area.

DAVID

You know, I did not see you as someone who would wind up in the food service industry.

CASPAR

It's almost like it chose me.

DAVID

Customer service does not seem like a strong suit of yours.

CASPAR

What are you talking about? I spent years honing my customer service skills at a venerated establishment known as the Department of Motor Vehicles.

DAVID

That's not customer service, that's triage.

CASPAR

They're oh so similar, though.

DAVID

... So this is really it, huh? You own a restaurant in Pasadena, this is your life?

CASPAR

I'm part owner of a restaurant, but yes, this is my life.

DAVID

And you really think a greasy spoon like this is going to survive in one of the richest towns in California.

CASPAR

It's been several months now, we seem to be doing fine.

DAVID

All these years, I did not expect this.

CASPAR

What did you expect?

DAVID

I don't know. Living in a van.

CASPAR

Ouch.

DAVID

Sorry. I always thought mom was the one keeping you civilized.

CASPAR

Well, that's a little bit true. I guess it's funny, where people end up. Look at you, every Saturday you take three busses across Los Angeles just to go argue with yours estranged father.

DAVID

I don't come here just to argue with you. The food's also good. Gloria, how're you doing?

GLORIA APPROACHES THE TABLE.

GLORIA

Hey David, I've got huevos rancheros for you, I stopped taking your order and just bring it now, that's okay right?

DAVID

It's all I need.

GLORIA

And I have oatmeal and fruit for Caspar.

CASPAR

Thank you.

DAVID

Oh, what the hell is that?

CASPAR

It's oatmeal.

DAVID

Gloria?

GLORIA

Don't ask. Coffee?

DAVID

Please... Look at that bowl of whiteness.

CASPAR

What's wrong with oatmeal?

DAVID

A lot.

CASPAR

It's very popular with Quakers.

DAVID

You're not a Quaker.

CASPAR

Yeah, but do you ever feel like they know something that you don't?

DAVID

No.

CASPAR

I decided to change my food habits.

DAVID

You've made a terrible choice.

CASPAR

See, the thing is, I used to be immortal.

DAVID

Oh really?

CASPAR

Yes. And then suddenly I wasn't, so I figured I should switch to oatmeal.

DAVID

You're a deeply strange person.

CASPAR

Why do you talk like that about the Quakers? They're a society of friends.

DAVID

Uh huh...

CASPAR

... So how is the, uh, the graffiti business?

DAVID

Well, for the third time it's not graffiti and for the third time, it's not a business.

CASPAR

How is the street art going?

DAVID

It's good, I've got a new piece up.

CASPAR

Oh yeah? Where?

DAVID

Don't worry about it.

CASPAR

Okay.

DAVID

Explain the radio to me.

CASPAR

What do you mean?

DAVID

There's an old radio next to the cash register, I'm assuming there's a story.

CASPAR

Oh... It uh... stopped working about eight months ago, but we have a sentimental attachment to it.

DAVID

How old is it?

CASPAR

1925, I think.

DAVID

You should get it repaired.

CASPAR

I'm sure there's some way to repair it but... It's more complicated than it looks.

DAVID

Where is everybody? Where's Ava?

CASPAR

Leif and Ava are currently in a meeting.

WE MOVE TO THE ROOF. DOWN BELOW WE HEAR THE SOUND OF ANOTHER DELIVERY DRONE.

DRONE

Delicious food, coming through... Delicious food, coming through... Delicious food, coming through...

AVA

What fresh hell?... Okay the sooner we start this the sooner it's over... Leif.

LEIF

Hang on.

AVA

What are you watching?

LEIF

Local news, have you been seeing this guy?

AVA
What are you talking about?

LEIF
It's been happening for three days now. Some guy steals a Tesla, leads the Police on a wild goose chase through the city until the battery runs out, then he escapes. This is his third day and his third Tesla, this guy's my hero.

AVA
Leif, neither of us want to do this, can we do this?

LEIF
Yeah, fine. Okay.

AVA
I now call to order the nine millionth meeting of the Committee to Figure out What the Hell Happened to the Diner AKA the Committee to Figure Out What the Fuck is Happening AKA The Committee to Get us the Hell Off This Rock That Hates Us as Much as We Hate It.

LEIF
That last one's a little wordy.

AVA
But appropriate.

LEIF
Where did we leave off?

AVA
We've abandoned the "Who did this to us?" Issue, right?

LEIF
Insufficient data.

AVA
And we've abandoned the "Malevolent Force vs Natural Phenomena" issue?

LEIF
Also insufficient data.

AVA
And we've arrived at "Why here? Why now?"

LEIF
Yes.

AVA

To sum up: We have been stranded here for 8 months on an Earth that bears a striking resemblance to our own.

LEIF

Confirmed.

AVA

We all had counterparts on this Earth. We have now confirmed that they have all vanished without a trace.

LEIF

Presumably taking off on a diner of their own.

AVA

With the exception of this Earth's Leif.

LEIF

Who has been gone since 1994, just like I was.

AVA

You, me, and Gloria have all declined to interact with anyone we may know on this planet. Caspar agreed to be our test case, by logging into his Facebook page, wherein there was a message from his son.

LEIF

After making fun of him for having a Facebook page, we arrived here.

AVA

Yes. Why here, why now?

LEIF

The chances of us being stranded in this particular spot randomly are non-zero but very remote.

AVA

But here we are. Pasadena, California, 2025.

LEIF

A place that several of us have some kind of connection to.

AVA

I used to work here. You visited here for a job interview, Caspar's son is nearby in Los Angeles, no connections that we know of for Gloria.

LEIF
We're here for some sort of reason. But whatever it is, it's not business as usual.

AVA
No. Because we are grounded.

LEIF
And the Mucklewains.

AVA
The Mucklewains have gone dark since we've been here.

LEIF
...

AVA
...

LEIF
So we're back to the message again.

AVA
Once again we are back at the message. Right before we were hit by this mysterious force, Caspar was hearing a voice in his head. The voice was just saying numbers. We've looked at these numbers, and they don't mean anything.

LEIF
The message could've been incomplete.

AVA
Yes. At this point we're assuming that it is. Which means that we're waiting for more data.

LEIF
But that brings me back around to it being a malevolent force that attacked us.

AVA
Why again?

LEIF
Caspar starts getting a message and then we're attacked.

AVA
But look around. This isn't an attack. If you wanted to attack us, if you wanted to strand us somewhere, where would it be?

LEIF

Bootes Void?

AVA

Exactly. Bootes Void is what? Sixty megaparsecs of nothing? If you wanted to get rid of someone and you could put them anywhere, you'd put them there. Not Pasadena, California.

LEIF

I'd prefer Boote's Void, frankly.

AVA

It's 330 million light years across, Leif.

LEIF

At least I'd know why I was there.

AVA

You need to get over your Earth hatred. We don't know how long we're going to be here.

LEIF

I'm fine. There's only one of us that I'm actually worried about.

BACK DOWN IN THE DINER, GLORIA OPENS THE DEEP FREEZE AND WALKS IN.

GLORIA

Goddamnit.

CASPAR

It's still just a deep freeze, Gloria.

GLORIA

I know.

CASPAR

... It just depresses you, you should probably stop coming in here.

GLORIA

I'm running a restaurant, Caspar, I need to come in here sometimes.

CASPAR

Then let me know, and whatever it is, I'll get it out for you.

GLORIA

...

CASPAR

...

GLORIA

... I hope they're okay.

CASPAR

The wolves got along fine without you for a long time, I'm sure they can fend for themselves.

GLORIA

What if I made them dependent on me?

CASPAR

Gloria, you made them deer stew every once and a while, you weren't a zookeeper.

GLORIA

... What if they made me dependent on them?

CASPAR

You survived for a long time without them, too.

GLORIA

... Why is this happening?

CASPAR

I don't know. But there's two very smart people on the roof trying to figure that out. Which is good because you and I are definitely not going to figure it out ourselves.

GLORIA

... I hate this.

CASPAR

I know.

GLORIA

The wolves are gone, The Mucklewains are gone.

CASPAR

Let's not say "gone". They're not here right now, but Leif and Ava are working on it.

GLORIA

They've been working on it for eight months.

CASPAR

Compared to the age of the universe, that's not much at all.

GLORIA

I was given something great and it was suddenly taken away from me.

CASPAR

I know.

GLORIA

I don't respond well to that, Caspar.

CASPAR

Nobody does.

GLORIA

Me, especially.

CASPAR

I know.

GLORIA

... I'm having to argue with food vendors again. I thought I was done with that. I spent yesterday afternoon in a half english, half Spanish argument with somebody named Flaco, because Flaco wasn't getting me the tortillas I ordered. "Mami, you're called Midnight Burger, what you need so many tortillas for anyway?"... Asshole.

CASPAR

... Look, why don't I cover the floor for a while? Stay in the kitchen and I'll cover the tables.

GLORIA

I'm fine covering the tables.

CASPAR

I know you are but you have to put on your waiter-face when you do, and I know you hate that.

GLORIA

David's here, though.

CASPAR

I know he is, but seeing me wait tables will give him an opportunity to make fun of me, which he really thrives on.

GLORIA

Okay.

CASPAR

Okay.

GLORIA

Hey, listen. I know I sit here miserable in the deep freeze but please don't take that personally. I know how great the past few weeks have been for you.

CASPAR

Yeah.

GLORIA

It's really great that you can connect with your son again.

CASPAR

He's not my son.

GLORIA

You really need to stop saying that.

CASPAR

He's not my son, Gloria. This Earth belongs to some other Caspar and he's out there somewhere. That's the dad he's looking for. I'm just... I don't know what I'm doing, honestly. It's just nice to see him okay.

GLORIA

Can you just be sure and enjoy it on my behalf? It'll help me to know that something good is happening in the middle of all this bullshit.

CASPAR

I can do that, sure.

GLORIA

... I never thought I'd say this but... I'd really love to hear some old-timey music from an old record player right now.

CASPAR

Me too. But don't worry. They're out there, somewhere, lookin' for ya'.

DAVID

(Outside the deep freeze.)
Good morning, Doctor.

CASPAR

Okay, David's about to start talking to Ava, which can only be bad news for me, I'm going to get back out there.

GLORIA

Okay.

WE MOVE TO AVA'S BOOTH.

DAVID

I've eaten my breakfast and I have come to your booth for another physics lesson.

AVA

I'm a professional scientist, David, I don't know how I feel about giving these lessons away for free.

DAVID

That's fine, what do you charge?

AVA

Oh I'm far too expensive for you, David.

DAVID

It looks like you could use the work, aren't scientists supposed to be in a lab?

AVA

A lab? How dare you?

DAVID

So you just sit here and write in these books all day?

AVA

Yes.

DAVID

What for?

AVA

Because Gloria hates it when I write on the walls.

DAVID

What are you writing? Let me see.

AVA

Okay...

DAVID

... Oh... Oh, I don't like this at all.

AVA

What, you can't read it?

DAVID

You can?

AVA

Of course I can, David. I'm a physicist.

DAVID

Physicists don't speak English?

AVA

Not really, no.

DAVID

I'd like to put that to the test. Physics lesson, please.

AVA

The Fine-Tuned Universe, David.

DAVID

What is that?

AVA

Back at the beginning of the 20th century, this guy Lawrence Henderson wrote a book. And in this book he said "Hey, isn't it weird that Earth seems so perfectly suited for life?" Which was a very smart thing to say, especially for a chemist. Then, a few years later some physicists started saying "Hey, it's not just Earth, the whole freaking universe seems to be set up in a way that's perfect for things like Earth to happen."

DAVID

If that's true, how come so many things in the universe can kill me?

AVA

Well, that's a facile argument, David. How come so many things can't? You are, my friend, a big pile of atoms.

DAVID

Is that physics trash talk?

AVA

No, David. You literally are. You're a big pile of atoms and inside those atoms are protons and neutrons. Those protons and neutrons don't really give a shit about each other, they don't like hanging out but they're bound together. They're bound together by something called the strong nuclear force. A mysterious force that holds atoms together. If this force were just a little bit stronger? The universe would have no hydrogen, and if the universe has no hydrogen, then none of this happens.

DAVID

None of what happens?

AVA
Anything... so... why?

DAVID
I don't know.

AVA
Me neither. So, because I don't know, I write in that book. The answer is on one of these blank pages, I just don't know which one.

LEIF SITS DOWN.

LEIF
I'm bored. What's happening down here?

AVA
I'm giving David a physics lesson.

LEIF
Cool. Want an engineering lesson?

AVA
Nobody wants an engineering lesson.

LEIF
God forbid he learn something useful.

AVA
We already know how to use a wrench, so...

LEIF
Do you see that, David? Do you see the disrespect? Did you know in Europe there's an X-Ray Free-Electron Laser Facility. I'm sure it was built by the research scientists there, I'm sure no engineers were involved.

AVA
Yes, and I'm sure that without the scientists working there it would be a really bad sculpture.

LEIF
I mean, I've seen the schematics on that place, I already know it's a bad sculpture, you know how I know that? I'm an engineer.

DAVID
How on God's green Earth did my father become friends with you two?

LEIF
I don't know what you mean.

AVA
I know what you mean.

THERE'S AN ALERT ON DAVID'S PHONE.

DAVID
Hang on... Lord.

LEIF
What's up?

DAVID
Nothing.

AVA
That was an alert on your phone and an exasperated
sigh, David. What news?

DAVID
Whenever I come here, this friend of mine from work
always checks up on me.

LEIF
Checks up on you?

DAVID
He thinks I'm due for some sort of strange
emotional moment because I've been meeting with the
old man.

AVA
Are you due for a strange emotional moment, David?

LEIF
Are you practicing self care?

AVA
Are you focusing on gratitude?

LEIF
Are you setting goals and priorities?

AVA
Are you staying connected?

DAVID
Don't National-Public-Radio me. I'm fine.

AVA
Who is this guy?

DAVID
A friend from work.

LEIF
Hm... A significant friend from work, David?

DAVID
A friend from work.

AVA
Seems like more than a friend if he's checking up on you emotionally.

DAVID
I don't know why he does this. It's weird.

AVA
Hm.

LEIF
Hm.

DAVID
What?

LEIF
You have a friend of no significance who is checking up your emotional well-being?

DAVID
Yes.

AVA
That's weird.

DAVID
I know, I just said that.

AVA
Suspect.

LEIF
Very suspect.

AVA
Let me ask you this: Have you ever been to a party with this alleged friend of yours?

DAVID
With a group of people, sure.

AVA
I see. And the day after the party did he talk about the party as if the two of you had gone there together?

LEIF
Ignoring the fact you arrived with a group of people.

AVA
All he talks about is how the two of you went to a party and had a great time.

DAVID
... That may have happened.

LEIF
Hm.

AVA
Hm.

DAVID
What is happening?

LEIF
He's trying to sideload a relationship.

DAVID
I'm sorry, what?

LEIF
Install software from an unlicensed third party.

AVA
He checks up on you like a boyfriend, recounts stories from last night like he's your boyfriend.

LEIF
He's hoping you're going to wake up one morning to him making waffles and you're not even going to notice that he's moved in.

DAVID
... People really behave this way?

LEIF
Oh yes.

AVA
Happened to me. One time a guy brought his espresso machine over and didn't even say anything.

LEIF
You woke up one morning and he had just put his espresso machine in your kitchen?

AVA
Yes.

DAVID

What did you do?

AVA

I threw it out the window.

DAVID

You threw a man's espresso machine out the window?

AVA

Well, it was in my house, so technically it was mine.

DAVID

That's not how that works.

AVA

That's what the police kept saying to me, but I think they were wrong.

LEIF

The point is, it's an insidious incrementalism, you're a frog being boiled in water right now.

ANOTHER ALERT ON DAVID'S PHONE.

LEIF (CONT'D)

Is that him again? I bet that's him again.

AVA

Do something extreme, tell him to give you five thousand dollars.

DAVID

Tesla bandit strikes again! Have y'all been following this guy?

LEIF

I'm obsessed with this guy, what's happening?

DAVID

Today it was Santa Monica and Culver City. They lost him for a second, then they found the Tesla abandoned on Lincoln.

LEIF

This guy gives me hope for the future.

DAVID

I'm betting if he does it again tomorrow, Tesla's got to make a statement.

LEIF

Ooh, that's statement's going to be a hot mess.

DAVID

It's going to be something like "Just think of all the Teslas that *aren't* being stolen right now."

AVA

Is it really that easy to steal a Tesla?

LEIF

That's the thing, it would take a little more savvy than your average car thief. I'm thinking he's got a Jack in the Box.

DAVID

What is that?

LEIF

He's probably got a homebrewed kit that fits in a backpack. He gets inside the car with a scanner then plugs in the box. Systems are all his after that. Pretty impressive.

DAVID

You think he's an engineer?

LEIF

I don't know if he's an engineer, I know he's *definitely* not a theoretical physicist.

AVA

There it is. Why don't you go change something's oil, Johnny Wingnuts?

LEIF

I would but we have more pressing issues.

DAVID

What's that?

LEIF

We need to cheer up Gloria.

DAVID

What's wrong with Gloria?

LEIF

She's uh... homesick.

DAVID

Where's she from?

LEIF

She's homesick for Arizona.

DAVID
Arizona? Arizona's terrible.

AVA
You've been to Arizona?

DAVID
Arizona's terrible, why would I go to a terrible place?

CASPAR
Afternoon all. How are we doing over here? Who needs more coffee?

AVA
Did you make it?

CASPAR
I did not.

AVA
Then yes.

DAVID
What are you doing?

CASPAR
I'm helping out Gloria.

DAVID
That can't be good for business.

CASPAR
This is what it's like running a small business, Kiddo, sometimes it's all hands on deck.

DAVID
Is this because she's homesick?

CASPAR
What do you mean?

DAVID
They say Gloria's depressed.

CASPAR
Oh they do, do they?

DAVID
Yeah.

CASPAR
So we're just sharing Gloria's private business now? Is that what we're doing?

LEIF

Relax.

DAVID

They're just concerned about their friend.

CASPAR

Oh are they? If that's the case then why am I the only one actually helping the friend they are concerned about?

AVA

We're big picture people, Caspar. We're focused on the big picture.

CASPAR

How come this big picture of yours always involves you two sitting here and me actually doing something?

LEIF

Oh really?

DAVID

Yeah, not interested in whatever this is about, I'm going to go talk to Gloria.

DAVID EXITS TO THE KITCHEN.

CASPAR

... I'm trying to maintain a relationship with him while also trying to not tell him anything, it's a very delicate balance.

LEIF

I just told him she was homesick.

CASPAR

Homesick for where? The icy planet that used to be in our deep freeze?

LEIF

Of course not.

CASPAR

No, but now he's going to talk to Gloria about what's going on.

LEIF

So?

CASPAR

Look, I know you two think that anyone without an advanced degree is a fucking idiot, but you have no idea the strength of that kid's bullshit detector. I haven't been able to bullshit with him since he was three years old.

LEIF

What's he going to find out? It's not like we have ghosts in the radio anymore. There's no wolves in the deep freeze. It's just a fucking diner now.

CASPAR

In what world do a rogue theoretical physicist, a space pirate, a taquera, and a DMV worker all hang out?

AVA

I don't know, but the punchline to that joke is hilarious.

CASPAR

He thinks it's weird, which I can't blame him for, and now because he thinks it's weird he's going to keep digging and digging until he finds out the truth. You don't have any idea who you're dealing with.

LEIF

You haven't seen him for years, Caspar, maybe you don't know him either.

CASPAR

Oh, fuck you, Leif.

AVA

Hey.

LEIF

I'm just saying, he's probably grown up a little, don't you think?

CASPAR

Yes. That just means he's gotten better at it.

LEIF

And I say again, what's he going to dig up? There's nothing here for him to find anymore.

CASPAR

And I hate to bring up an awkward subject, but it might stay that way. Okay? Our ride on the dimensional party bus may have inexplicably come to an end and we may never know why.

(MORE)

CASPAR (CONT'D)

Which means we all have to do the unthinkable:
think about tomorrow.

LEIF

...

AVA

...

CASPAR

Sorry to bring up a sore subject.

LEIF

It's not a sore subject but it's a subject that's
different for all of us.

CASPAR

What does that mean?

LEIF

You like it here. We've all been talking about how
this is a crisis but you like it here. You found
your son, Caspar.

CASPAR

He's not my son.

LEIF

Well that's not how you're acting. You like it
here, and I hate it here. Not to bring up a sore
subject.

CASPAR

What are you saying?

LEIF

I'm saying I left this planet years ago. For a lot
of reasons. I'm stuck here and I don't like being
stuck here.

CASPAR

What are you saying?

LEIF

You want me to think about tomorrow? You want me to
think about this in the long term? Long term for me
is not settling in to the sunny mountains of
Pasadena, California. Long term for me is making a
few calls and hitching a ride off this shithole.

CASPAR

Really.

LEIF

Really.

CASPAR

Well you can fuck off to the Crab Nebula then, Buck Rogers-

AVA

Caspar-

CASPAR

No, you go ahead. I'm sorry things are a little difficult for you around here so you can do what you always do when things get a little difficult. Leave. Again.

AVA

Hey. Both of you stop it. You're both being assholes and that's my job.

CASPAR

I've got tables.

CASPAR WALKS AWAY.

AVA

... Leif are you being serious?

LEIF

I need to make us some new cash cards. I'll be on the roof.

WE MOVE TO THE KITCHEN. GLORIA IS COOKING AT THE GRILL.

DAVID

How long have you been doing this?

GLORIA

What? Cooking?

DAVID

Have you always worked in a restaurant?

GLORIA

Pretty much. My first job was a Jack in the Box, I guess that's a restaurant.

DAVID

That's a restaurant. I like their tacos.

GLORIA

... David, I have several sharp objects in this kitchen and you're going to tell me that you like the Jack in the Box tacos?

DAVID

I hate to be like that but... one in the morning?
Two tacos for two dollars?

GLORIA

Let's not go around calling things tacos just
because they're shaped like tacos okay?

DAVID

How did working at Jack in the Box make you want to
commit your life to making food?

GLORIA

Revenge, David. Every plate of food I make is a
fuck you to my years at Jack in the Box.

DAVID

Years?

GLORIA

Oh yeah. Then they offered me a manager position
and I was just... they made the offer and I had a
terrifying vision of what my life was going to be.
So I quit and I started working in kitchens. I
didn't really know what I was doing at first but I
did have that one essential skill that every food
service worker needs.

DAVID

Knife skills?

GLORIA

I spoke Spanish. What about you? What do you do
again?

DAVID

I'm a street artist, Gloria.

GLORIA

Yes, but what do you do in the day time?

DAVID

I work at the city archives.

GLORIA

What goes on there?

DAVID

Old records. All kinds of shit going back to the
1800s. It's boring as hell.

GLORIA

It sounds kind of interesting, it sounds like
there's a lot of history there.

DAVID

Oh, there is, for sure, but nobody wants to see that. They usually need records for a piece of real estate or whatever. So I sit there all day and get records for people when they come in.

GLORIA

And at night you deface public property.

DAVID

That's right.

GLORIA

Do you like your co-workers?

DAVID

When I deface public property?

GLORIA

David.

DAVID

They're alright. How do you like your co-workers?

GLORIA

My co-workers are infinitely fascinating. They're also pretty great. We've been through a lot together.

DAVID

I'm still trying to figure out how you all came to own a restaurant together. A physicist, an engineer, you, and then the old man.

GLORIA

Weird, right? Um... it just kind of happened.

DAVID

How did it just kind of happen?

GLORIA

Um... there was a storm.

DAVID

A storm?

GLORIA

There was a storm one time and we all took shelter here at this place.

DAVID

A storm.

GLORIA

Yes. We got to know each other, stayed in touch and eventually we got the wild idea to go into business together.

DAVID

A storm.

GLORIA

Yes.

DAVID

In Pasadena, California.

GLORIA

Yes.

DAVID

Known for its torrential downpours.

GLORIA

I know, it sounds strange, but stranger things have happened.

DAVID

But you're from Arizona.

GLORIA

I am.

DAVID

What were you doing up here?

GLORIA

... Hm?

DAVID

What were you doing up here?

GLORIA

Right, Uh, I love oranges.

DAVID

There hasn't been an orange grove in Pasadena for about a hundred years.

GLORIA

So you can imagine my disappointment.

DAVID

Um-hm.

GLORIA

David, look, that's life. You kind of get thrown together with people and sometimes you're not sure how.

DAVID

Okay.

GLORIA

It is weird though, you're not wrong. They all have some kind of connection to this place. Ava used to work here, Leif almost worked here, Caspar found you here. Not so much for me, though, I don't have a connection to here at all.

DAVID

Maybe you do and you just don't know it.

GLORIA

Yeah sure, maybe.

DAVID

You know what?

DAVID TEARS A DINER TICKET OUT OF A TICKET BOOK.

DAVID (CONT'D)

I can check for you. Write down your name, date of birth, mom's name her date of birth, whatever you can think of. I'll go look it up at the city archives.

GLORIA

I doubt you're going to find anything, David.

DAVID

Just for fun, you never know.

GLORIA

That's really okay.

DAVID

Gloria, come on, you'd be doing me a favor, I'm sitting there all day finding old land maps for real estate developers. Help me out.

GLORIA

Uh... okay. Give me the pen.

CASPAR SITS DOWN AT AVA'S BOOTH.

CASPAR

Hi.

AVA
I thought you had tables.

CASPAR
I'm taking a break.

AVA
You should apologize to Leif.

CASPAR
Leif should apologize to me.

AVA
Both are true, how about you kick it off?

CASPAR
Can we talk about something else please?

AVA
What?

CASPAR
I don't know, literally anything else?

AVA
Literally anything?

CASPAR
Yes.

AVA
Okay.

AVA PUTS A DIFFERENT NOTEBOOK IN FRONT OF HER.

AVA (CONT'D)
Let's talk about your brain.

CASPAR
My brain?

AVA
Yes.

CASPAR
Well, I'm sure there are no insults for me hiding
in this conversation.

AVA
Oh, they're hiding in every conversation,
Schmoopie.

CASPAR
Fine, what about my brain?

AVA

When we're at the diner, at least when it worked, time didn't pass for us. I kept calling it null entropy. But I'm curious how our brains work in that environment. If time doesn't pass, how are we creating new memories?

CASPAR

Isn't this more of a neurology question, that's not your field.

AVA

I do what I want. We've established now that you were here for over a hundred years before Leif showed up.

CASPAR

Apparently.

AVA

Right. Apparently. You say apparently because Ex told you how old you were and you didn't know it. You don't remember those years. It wasn't until Leif showed up that you began to remember things because having someone there caused your memory to work differently, right?

CASPAR

I guess, sure. But I remember some things.

AVA

What do you mean?

CASPAR

Well... for example, I remember that one time John Updike walked in the door.

AVA

John Updike.

CASPAR

Yeah.

AVA

Classic American writer John Updike came into the diner.

CASPAR

Yes, and he was an asshole.

AVA

He was?

CASPAR

I distinctly remember saying "You're an asshole, John Updike."

AVA

How do you remember that and not the other hundred or so years.

CASPAR

Well, I had the John Updike memory because a couple of years ago someone came into the diner and they were reading Rabbit Run. Rabbit Run by John Updike, and then I had the memory.

AVA

So things can sort of jog your memory?

CASPAR

Apparently. Wait. Do you have an entire notebook devoted to my brain?

AVA

Yes.

CASPAR

Seriously?

AVA

Yes.

CASPAR

Can I read it please?

AVA

Sure, go ahead.

CASPAR

... It's written in that fucked up shorthand you write in, isn't it?

AVA

Yes. But go ahead and read it.

CASPAR

Like right now, what are you writing right now?

AVA

I'm writing words that you are welcome to read.

CASPAR

But I can't read those words.

AVA

Well if you're not willing to do the work, Caspar.

CASPAR

Okay, leaving now.

CASPAR GET UP, WE HEAR THE DOOR CHIME.

FRAN

Ava?

AVA

... Hi.

FRAN

Oh my God, how have you been?

AVA

... I've been fine... How have you been?

FRAN

You can't tell me you don't recognize me, you haven't been gone for that long.

AVA

Of course I recognize you... You.

FRAN

Fran Phelps. I gave you your first tour of the JPL campus. I'm in the HR department. You insisted on calling me Frelp?

AVA

Right... how could I forget. Frelp.

FRAN

How have you been?

AVA

Great. Just great.

FRAN

Are you here a lot? I've been meaning to check this place out.

AVA

I'm here quite a bit.

FRAN

Great. Hey, you're set to come back soon, right?

AVA

Back soon?

FRAN

Yes. I'm not snooping, I promise. I processed your leave of absence paperwork.

AVA
Leave of absence.

FRAN
Yes.

AVA
From... where?

FRAN
Oh God. I know what you mean. I was on maternity leave a couple of years ago, when I got back I did NOT know what I was doing.

AVA
Uh huh... What is happening?

FRAN
You're set to come back in a month, I think, right? I've got a list on my desk of everyone on leave. The JPL Missing in Action list we call it. It's a joke, we know you're not missing. You're number three on the list, there's Dr. Glass from astrodynamics, Brad Menear from military acquisitions, and then you from special projects.

AVA
Special Projects.

FRAN
Yes.

AVA
Is where I work.

FRAN
You do.

AVA
At Jet Propulsion Laboratory.

FRAN
Yes, Ava.

AVA
Where I *currently* work.

FRAN
I mean, I work in HR, I'm pretty sure I know who works there.

AVA
Of course you do. Of course that's where I work... I work at Jet Propulsion Laboratory... still.

FRAN

You are such a kook, I swear. I think you said something about going to New Brunswick.

AVA

Really?

FRAN

How was it?

AVA

... Eventful.

FRAN

I have to say, you don't look too happy to be coming back, do you need an extension? People do it all the time, just give us a call and I can tack on an extra month for you. Do you need an extension?

AVA

I have no idea.

FRAN

Okay, well, just shoot us an email if you do.

AVA

Ah yes, Email. My old nemesis.

FRAN

Hey...
(Lowering her voice.)
What are you doing tonight?

AVA

(Lowering her voice.)
Crying probably.

FRAN

Don't spread this around but... we've started up the fight club again.

AVA

Oh no.

FRAN

Yes! And I think we've got it figured out so we won't get busted by security this time.

AVA

You're in the HR department?

FRAN

You should totally come, people have been asking about you, they miss your sense of humor.

AVA
I miss it too.

FRAN
Anyway, GREAT to see you. Maybe I'll see you tonight?

AVA
Well space and time are infinite so there's a non-zero chance of everything.

FRAN
Great! Bye.

AVA
Bye...

LEIF
Hey. Who was that?

AVA
I have terrible news.

LEIF
What's up?

AVA
... I have a job.

LEIF
What do you mean?

AVA
From what I can tell, the Ava of this Earth still works at Jet Propulsion Laboratory.

LEIF
Really?

AVA
This is terrible.

LEIF
Aren't they wondering where you are?

AVA
I've been on a leave of absence. I'm coming back in a month... to work... at a job.

LEIF
Ooof.

AVA
Ooof, Leif. A thousand times ooof.

LEIF

What does a theoretical physicist even do at a rocket company?

AVA

Billionaire-funded think tank on the Alcubierre Drive. (al-koo-B(ee)YEH-ree)

LEIF

How's that coming?

AVA

I don't know, Leif. I've been taking a leave of absence from the job I've never been to.

LEIF

What are you going to do?

AVA

I don't know. It's a think tank so it's not like I have to do anything.

LEIF

You're not going to start going to work are you?

AVA

Leif, I don't know.

LEIF

You. Working?

AVA

I know.

LEIF

I hate it here.

AVA

Yeah, Leif, your little spat with Caspar made that clear. Can you guys knock that off, by the way?

LEIF

We'll be fine. Here, new cash card.

AVA

Ah. Perfect. I will buy something expensive and that will make the pain go away.

LEIF

Should be good for about a month, then I'll get everybody new ones.

AVA

Is this a good idea?

LEIF

What?

AVA

Bank fraud? We're supposed to be keeping a low profile.

LEIF

Remember that time I made a computer virus that would unravel an entire intergalactic empire if I used it?

AVA

Yes.

LEIF

Pretty sure I can handle Wells Fargo.

AVA

... Are you sure you're okay?

LEIF

I'm fine. I'll be on the roof.

AVA

Hey.

LEIF

What?

AVA

What are you doing tonight?

LEIF

Fuck, I don't know... why?

AVA

Wanna try and get me fired?

WE MOVE TO THE PARKING LOT.

GLORIA

David, we should make this quick, I don't like leaving Caspar in the kitchen for too long.

DAVID

So I hear you need some cheering up.

GLORIA

You've heard that, have you?

DAVID

And while everyone in this joint likes to say all I do at night is deface public property, I will continue to insist that I am an artist. My canvas is the city, and through my canvas I am a purveyor of joy.

GLORIA

The family resemblance is rearing its ugly head, David.

DAVID

It all started for me a few years ago. On the street I found packet of name tags. They said "hello my name is" and left a blank space. Out of boredom I started writing all kinds of random shit in that blank space: "Smelga Snoronowitz," "Sherbet Aggressive," "FeedMahFish." Just nonsense. And then I'd peel away the back and stick them to lamp posts, crosswalks, whatever. It was a small thing in a big world, but I liked it. They became little acknowledgments of my existence. I discovered something. See here's what it is to be an artist, Gloria: You take the world in. You filter it through your mind. You live in it. And you become an artist when you respond. When you talk back to the world you live in. And once I started I couldn't stop. And once I couldn't stop, everything got bigger and bigger. Stickers lead to wheat paste, wheat paste led to stencils, you know what I mean?

GLORIA

Sure.

DAVID

I was looking to up my game. Get a bigger canvas. Make a statement. And then, last week, it all came together, when I looked across the street from your restaurant and saw an abandoned billboard above the street.

GLORIA

... No.

DAVID

Check it out.

GLORIA

... David.

DAVID

Pretty great, right?

GLORIA
Oh my God.

DAVID
Art.

GLORIA
How did you get up there?

DAVID
Don't worry about it.

GLORIA
... It's hilarious.

DAVID
Thank you.

DOOR CHIME.

CASPAR
Hey Gloria, how do I know when this chicken is done?... What are we looking at?

GLORIA
Art, apparently.

CASPAR
What do you mean?

DAVID
I thought I'd try and cheer up Gloria by showing her my newest piece.

CASPAR
Where?

GLORIA
Up there.

CASPAR
Up there?

GLORIA
Up there.

CASPAR
... How did you get up there?

DAVID
Don't worry about it.

CASPAR
... This is art?

DAVID
Yes.

CASPAR
Says who?

DAVID
Me.

CASPAR
You?

DAVID
Yes.

CASPAR
Okay... "Your Dog Hates Their Clothes."

DAVID
That's right.

CASPAR
Art.

DAVID
Yes.

GLORIA
Excellent work, David.

DAVID
Thank you, Gloria.

GLORIA
You're right, I guess I did need cheering up.

DAVID
Anytime.

GLORIA
Give me the spatula, I'm going back inside.

CASPAR
Here.

DOOR CHIME.

CASPAR (CONT'D)
So you can just goof around in public and call it
art?

DAVID
Correct.

CASPAR

That's it?

DAVID

I don't know if you heard, but there's a guy over on the west side that keeps stealing Teslas. He steals the car, drives it around all day, evading the cops, and then abandons the car. He's been doing it for three days now. He may be the greatest artist of my generation.

CASPAR

I see. So I really don't get art, do I?

DAVID

You do not.

CASPAR

Cool... Please don't steal cars.

DAVID

I don't drive.

CASPAR

Good.

DAVID

Which reminds me, my bus is coming soon. I'm going to get out of here.

CASPAR

Okay. I can't believe you just got up there and did that.

DAVID

Had to. A blank space is an affront to culture.

CASPAR

Sure... So, next week?

DAVID

Well, my newest piece is here. I have to come check on it.

CASPAR

Right, of course. Please don't get arrested.

DAVID

Uh huh.

CASPAR

David.

DAVID

Yeah.

CASPAR

It's really great.

DAVID

I know.

DAVID WALKS AWAY. WE MOVE TO THE INSIDE OF A TESLA ON THE WEST SIDE OF LOS ANGELES. WE HEAR SEVERAL POLICE CARS SPEED BY, SIRENS BLARING.

EFFIE

Hoowee them police are out in force now.

ZEBULON

I believe I'm beginning to understand the various environments of this dashboard, dear.

EFFIE

What'cha got?

ZEBULON

These vehicles have indeed come a long way since the Chrysler Six. Here there seems to be a mode in which brief written missives can be sent back and forth between familiars.

EFFIE

Anything in there about a diner showing up out of nowhere?

ZEBULON

I read here a message... (*pronouncing it Eweup*) "U up?"

EFFIE

The heck is that supposed to mean?

ZEBULON

I'm unsure. Spelled u, u, p.

EFFIE

That's shorthand for "You up?" Dear.

ZEBULON

Ah. Up for what, I wonder? It's followed by a photograph- oh my!

EFFIE

Zebulon?

ZEBULON

That's indelicate. I am going to extricate myself from this place.

EFFIE

We should get movin' soon. Any ideas where today's route should be?

ZEBULON

I seem to be able to see a list of places the owner has travelled to... they seem to be very fond of the juice of a fruit known as a "Jamba".

EFFIE

Never heard of it.

ZEBULON

For such a fancy automobile they appear to never go anywhere of import. A circular path from a gymnasium of some sort, then off to procure this "Jamba Juice". Over and over again every day, perhaps they are some sort of circus strong man?

EFFIE

Zebulon is there anything of use over there?

ZEBULON

Ah, here we are, the map. We've learned so far to stay away from the line labeled "Four hundred and five."

EFFIE

Any of those roads with numbers are just trouble waiting to happen, stick with the ones that have a name.

ZEBULON

We're both wandering in the dark, dear. Shall I close my eyes and point?

EFFIE

Best to let the lord guide us.

ZEBULON

Very well. There appears to be an area called "Bell Gardens" that sounds nice.

EFFIE

Good enough. Where am I going?

ZEBULON

Go straight for a time and then hang a right onto "Cintenela" (*Sin-TEN-a-luh.*)

EFFIE

Let's hit it. Quick prayer, dear.

ZEBULON

Lord, we know not why you graced us with automobiles that have the ability to drive themselves, but for the moment we will see it as you clearing the way so that we may be reunited with our friends. We are undeserving of your grace, and we are thankful.

EFFIE

And, Lord, anytime you want to mark Zebulon's map with a big old "X" you go ahead and do that.

ZEBULON

That would be quite helpful, Lord, yes.

EFFIE

Amen.

THEIR TESLA MOVES ONTO THE ROAD AND SPEEDS AWAY. WE BEGIN TO HEAR ELECTRONIC MUSIC AND A SMALL CROWD.

FRAN

Are we live? Okay...
(Her voice becomes amplified.)
Okay, we are live people!

APPLAUSE FROM THE SMALL CROWD.

FRAN (CONT'D)

Hello to our friends around the world, welcome once again to the newly-rebooted "JPL Fight Club"! I can see people tuning in from all over the globe, hello there, MIT, hello there, Tata (TAH-tah) Institute. Ooh, we've got some new people, okay, hello Manglerfish, Fireball XL-5 I love your username. This is for the new people, if you try and record your screen in any way, we can tell and you will be kicked. What's the first rule of Fight Club? You know the drill. Is everybody ready to fuck it up?

CROWD CHEERS.

FRAN (CONT'D)

Alright, once again for the new people, this is JPL fight club where we embrace the only reliable motivation for scientific innovation: fucking up your enemy. Bad ideas have to start somewhere, people, and we are proud to say that many of them have started right here at JPL Fight Club.

(MORE)

FRAN (CONT'D)

Two engineers will come forward with two drones and those drones will do battle in the Pasadena Pummeldome! First up tonight, our reigning champion, undefeated after 22 straight victories, it's "Fresh Squeezed!"

WE HEAR THE SOUND OF MOTORIZED TREADS MAKING THEIR WAY INTO THE PASESDENA PUMMELDOME.

FRAN (CONT'D)

Fresh Squeezed leaves a trail of dead bots in its wake. An up-cycled bomb disposal droid, Fresh Squeezed has transitioned from preventing destruction to unleashing destruction. Equipped with all-terrain treads, if the flame thrower doesn't get you, the spinning blades sure will, and god help you if you lose mobility, you will be trapped in the Fresh Squeezed Bot Juicer! Two pneumatic plates that will slowly turn your bot into a Borg Cube. And we've just learned today that Fresh Squeezed is now equipped with speech synthesis!

FRESH SQUEEZED

I crush your bot! I steal your wife!

FRAN

Fresh Squeezed is 22 wins deep into Fight Club and shows no sign of stopping. But who will challenge this unstoppable juggernaut?! As you JPL Fight Club veterans know, if it's your first night at Fight Club, you have to fight. Who is our unlucky challenger this evening? Believe it or not, it is famed theoretical physicist Dr. Ava Maddox. Ava, how are you doing tonight?

AVA

I'm feeling great. Really excited to do illegal shit on the internet.

FRAN

Ava, I have to ask, what's a theoretical physicist doing at Fight Club tonight? You're not known for creating things, you're known for doing whatever the hell it is theoretical physicists do.

AVA

That's right. Sometimes as a scientist you have to put on your big boy pants and set aside childish things. But every once and a while it's nice to slum it with a bunch of quote unquote scientists who can't seem to evolve past making things that blow up other things.

(MORE)

AVA (CONT'D)

Which is why I've brought my associate with me to help me with the technical side.

FRAN

I see, and what's your name?

LEIF

Uh... Chut.

FRAN

Chut.

LEIF

Brimble. Chut Brimble.

FRAN

Okay, not a made up name at all. And let's see what you're going into the Pasadena Pummeldome with.

AVA

It's right here.

FRAN

Okay... okay it's... it's very small.

AVA

Yes.

FRAN

Okay. Uh, what do you call it?

AVA

Peter.

FRAN

... Peter.

AVA

Peter!

FRAN

Uh, okay, and what is this little guy packing? What are the specs on this thing, Chut?

LEIF

None of your goddamn business-

AVA

We don't want to ruin the surprise. Suffice to say, Peter is eighteen inches of scientific fury and we're here tonight to make all engineers pee pee in their panties.

FRAN

Okay, if you say so. Let's get Peter in the ring.
 (Under her breath.)
 Ava, are you sure about this? That thing's going to
 get creamed.

AVA

Fran, you can't start an underground robot fight
 club in the basement of a government contractor and
 then start talking about "playing it safe." Commit
 to the bit, lady.

FRAN

Okay, if you say so. Here we go! Our first match of
 the night. Fresh Squeezed vs.... Peter. Let's count
 them down, five, four, three, two, one!

A BUZZER SOUNDS. AND FRESH SQUEEZED BEGINS TO MOVE ALONG THE
 FLOOR.

FRESH SQUEEZED

Prepare to get juiced!

FRAN

Stand back, everyone, Fresh Squeezed is making its
 first move.

AVA

Are we going to make our first move?

LEIF

Sure, why not?

PETER ACTIVATES AND SUDDENLY STARTS RUNNING ACROSS THE FLOOR
 AT FULL SPEED.

FRAN

Oh wow. Looks like Peter's got some speed.

PETER SUDDENLY STARTS CUTTING INTO FRESH SQUEEZED WITH A
 POWERFUL LASER.

FRAN (CONT'D)

Holy shit!

PETER BEGINS RUNNING AROUND FRESH SQUEEZED, TOO FAST TO BE
 CAUGHT, CONSTANTLY SLICING UP FRESH SQUEEZED WITH ITS LASER.

FRAN (CONT'D)

Okay uh... wow, that's... okay, it looks like Peter
 has a laser... and it's... okay Fresh Squeezed has
 now lost it's flame thrower, it's been cut off by
 the laser, WHOA!

(MORE)

FRAN (CONT'D)

There goes the spinning blades, Peter is literally cutting Fresh Squeezed to pieces with a SURPRISINGLY powerful laser. I'm not sure how... uh... has anybody seen anything like this before? I've never seen a laser do that...

FRESH SQUEEZED IS NOW LYING IN PIECES ON THE GROUND. EVERYONE IS QUIET.

FRAN (CONT'D)

Uhh... Well... what was once Fresh Squeezed is now lying in pieces on the ground... So I guess that means... Peter wins?
(Under he breath.)
Ava, what the fuck?

AVA

What? Were we not supposed to win?

LEIF

Can I have the mic please?

LEIF SNATCHES THE MIC FROM HER. MIC FEEDBACK.

LEIF (CONT'D)

Attention, engineers in this room and all those watching around the world: would you get it together, please? You idiots are out here making better bombs, more efficient crowd control, and the most energy inefficient rockets imaginable. What are you doing?... You're supposed to be blowing people's minds, not catering to their boring fantasies. I'm embarrassed to be around you. Where's that crazy idea you had in college? The one they said would never work? All of you, quit your jobs immediately and go do that thing. It's not our job to perpetuate the world—it's our job to move it, sometimes kicking and screaming, FORWARD. You gaggle of fuckheads!... Chut Brimble out!

LEIF DROPS THE MIC.

FRAN

What the fuck?

AVA

... So is there a trophy or anything?

WE MOVE TO NIGHT TIME IN THE DINER PARKING LOT. WE HEAR THE DOOR CHIME.

GLORIA

Hey. What are you doing out here?

CASPAR

I strongly objected to them going out tonight.

GLORIA

So you're waiting out here like a worried dad.

CASPAR

This is the longest excursion anyone's taken since we've been stuck here.

GLORIA

I think they'll be fine, Caspar. I don't think we're going anywhere.

CASPAR

Yeah, yeah I know...

WE HEAR THE SOUND OF COYOTES UP IN THE HILLS.

GLORIA

... Are those coyotes?

CASPAR

Yeah. LA's like that, you can be in the middle of a big sprawling city and then suddenly there's a coyote or a gray fox. It's an ecotone, the transition between two biomes, there's the Angeles National Forest over there, and then the coast over there and we're in-between so you get this weird biological confusion, coyotes from one side, seagulls from the other.

GLORIA

... I'm going to be okay.

CASPAR

What?

GLORIA

David was trying to cheer me up today. I imagine he got that from you guys.

CASPAR

Ah. He's kind of a busy body, that one.

GLORIA

I told him you three all have a weird connection to this place but I don't, and now he's going to try and find information on me in the city archives.

CASPAR

Why would he find anything there?

GLORIA

He wouldn't, but now he's got my name and date of birth and some family history and he's going to get to work... It's the thought that counts.

CASPAR LAUGHS.

GLORIA (CONT'D)

What?

CASPAR

... I don't know your last name.

GLORIA

... I don't know yours either.

CASPAR

What the fuck?

GLORIA

Right? Do you know Leif's?

CASPAR

No.

GLORIA

Seriously?

CASPAR

No. What the hell?

GLORIA

I can't believe it.

CASPAR

I guess we... I mean, when you're the only human beings in a given situation, I guess you don't really need a last name.

GLORIA

I guess.

CASPAR

This is fucking ridiculous. How totally dysfunctional.

GLORIA

Well, it's not like you had me fill out a job application.

CASPAR

Jesus, can you imagine a job application for this place?

GLORIA

In the emergency contact section you just put
"Earth".

CASPAR

"I see here you have previous experience at Jack in
the Box, that's great because you do need
experience handling strange otherworldly substances
here at Midnight Burger."

GLORIA

Remember when you asked me if I had any experience
with dark matter?

CASPAR

And you were like, "Mole Sauce?"

GLORIA

... Well... We may be stranded in a place where
there are a lot more Leifs and Caspars and Glorias
than we're used to so...

CASPAR

Okay. Sure. Lay it on me.

GLORIA

Gloria Juana Belén Gutiérrez de Mendoza.

CASPAR

Wow.

GLORIA

Yours?

CASPAR

Scott.

GLORIA LAUGHS.

CASPAR (CONT'D)

What?

GLORIA

Nothing.

CASPAR

That's my name.

GLORIA

I know. It's great.

CASPAR

It's not great, it's boring. It's not fair that you
literally have a Lorca poem for a name.

GLORIA

That's true, it's good... So now we know.

CASPAR

Here we are. Just a couple of human beings with last names living in the ecotone.

GLORIA

In-between two worlds.

CASPAR

... Yeah.

A CAR PULLS UP TO THE DINER.

CASPAR (CONT'D)

Here they are.

AVA AND LEIF GET OUT OF THE CAR. LEIF IS DRUNK.

LEIF

Thank you, Farad!

AVA

Hello.

LEIF

You did a great job at driving Farad, thank you!

THE CAR STARTS TO DRIVE AWAY.

CASPAR

What's going on?

AVA

Leif's a little drunk.

LEIF

(Calling after the car.)
Farad I'm tipping you one thousand dollars! But that's okay because money isn't real. It's just an idea somebody had one time and now because of that guy's idea you have to turn your car into a taxi cab!

GLORIA

Where did you guys go?

AVA

Well...

LEIF

Peter, head up to the roof and disassemble yourself. Good job tonight.

EIGHTEEN INCH PETER JUMPS TO THE GROUND AND RUNS TO THE BACK OF THE DINER.

CASPAR

What that fuck is that thing?

AVA

That's Peter.

CASPAR

What?

LEIF

Caspar. You're pretty drunk right now.

CASPAR

That's actually you.

LEIF

I'm projecting.

CASPAR

Okay.

LEIF

I'm sorry I was an asshole earlier.

CASPAR

I'm sorry *I* was an asshole earlier.

LEIF

I used to live in space!

CASPAR

I know.

LEIF

I hate it here!

CASPAR

I know.

LEIF

I used to live in space.

CASPAR

Yes.

LEIF

And now I live in Pasadena.

CASPAR

I'm sorry.

LEIF
Pasadena is not space.

CASPAR
It is not.

LEIF
I'm really sorry.

CASPAR
Me too.

LEIF
We're going to figure this out, Gloria!

GLORIA
Okay, Leif.

LEIF
I may need to build a spaceship on the roof.

GLORIA
Sounds great.

LEIF
For therapy.

GLORIA
That's a lot of therapy, but okay.

LEIF
I'm going to sleep.

CASPAR
Goodnight... What the hell did you guys do?

AVA
We went to a fight club.

GLORIA
You what?

AVA
It's okay.

CASPAR
How is that okay?

AVA
It's okay because we won. Duh.

UP ON THE ROOF. LEIF IS COMING UP THE LADDER.

LEIF

I am a rovin' gambler...
I roam from town to town...

LEIF TURNS ON THE COMMAND CENTER.

LEIF (CONT'D)

Whenever I meet with a deck of cards,
I lay... my money... down...

LEIF (CONT'D)

Wait a minute... Wait... volume, volume.

WE HEAR A LOCAL NEWS FEED COMING THROUGH THE COMMAND CENTER.

ANCHOR

Shocking developments right now in the Tesla Bandit story, as you can see from our live eye-in-the-sky chopper, police are currently in pursuit of the infamous Tesla bandit. But if you look at these images here you can see something unbelievable... when police knocked out the driver side window to try and force a crash it was revealed that the car is actually unmanned. You can see it now speeding down Venice boulevard with literally no one in the driver's seat...

LEIF

Hang on... Hang on this is important... this is important... GUYS!

CASPAR

(Down on the ground.)
What?

LEIF

GET UP HERE RIGHT NOW!

CASPAR

Uh, okay.

LEIF

Alright... alright what do I do... okay... can I crack Tesla's global system? Sure, sure I can. I can get into the car right?

CASPAR

(Coming up the ladder.)
Leif what's going on?

LEIF

The Tesla Bandit is a driverless car!

CASPAR

Okay. Weird.

GLORIA

What's going on?

LEIF

The guy who's been stealing Teslas! It's not a guy
it's... look!

GLORIA

... There's no driver.

AVA

I feel like that's a design flaw.

LEIF

There's no driver! For three days now a Tesla
without a driver has been joy riding around Los
Angeles... But it's not joy riding at all... it's
looking for something.

AVA

Oh shit.

CASPAR

No way.

LEIF

Yes, way!

GLORIA

It's them.

LEIF

It's them!

GLORIA

What can you do?!

LEIF

I can get through to the dashboard system, I just
need to hack Tesla.

GLORIA

Okay, but Leif, be honest, are you too drunk to
hack right now?

LEIF

It's okay, I hack with my third eye. And my third
eye is open...

WE HEAR SIRENS AND MOVE TO INSIDE THE MUCKLEWAINS' TESLA.
EFFIE IS SPEEDING THROUGH THE CITY STREETS PURSUED BY THE
POLICE.

EFFIE

(Yelling at the police.)
Y'all think you can stop me by putting out my
window? I love a nice breeze!!

ZEBULON

Dear, I think our lack of a physical body between
us will only compound our problems!

EFFIE

How do you figure?

ZEBULON

There is no longer a human life within for them to
preserve!

WE HEAR A SHOTGUN BLAST.

EFFIE

What in heck?!

ZEBULON

Are we being fired upon!?

EFFIE

One of them flat foots has got himself a scatter
gun and he's trying to put out my tires.

ZEBULON

I would prefer to not be fired upon, dear!

EFFIE

Hike up your britches, I'm takin' a hard right!

THE TIRES SQUEAL.

ZEBULON

I do not like the hard rights, dear.

EFFIE

Worry not, husband. As soon as I find us another
one of these fancy automobiles we'll jump inside
that one and start fresh in the morning.

LEIF

(Coming through the dashboard.)
Mucklewains!

ZEBULON

Leif?!

EFFIE

Hot damn! Is that you, Leif?

LEIF

What the hell is happening?!

EFFIE

Well in case you ain't noticed, we've be looking around for you all!

LEIF

How the hell did you get inside a Tesla, how the hell did you end up in Los Angeles!?

ZEBULON

Leif, we are unclear how anyone ended up anywhere, perhaps this is a question for another time?!

EFFIE

Leif, get into one of those machines of yours and tell us how to make our way to your location!

LEIF

Okay, I'm seeing you on GPS. But you're on the west side and you need to get to Pasadena, that's quite a trek to make with the police on your trail. Are you sure you can make it?

EFFIE

We've come too far to quit now, Leif. I've got two co-pilots and one of em's Jesus!

LEIF

God DAMN I missed you guys! Okay, you're on Venice and you're going the wrong way.

EFFIE

Hang onto your breakfast, husband, we're gonna whup around!

THE TIRES SCREECH AS EFFIE DOES A "TOKYO DRIFT" IN THE MIDDLE OF VENICE BLVD.

ZEBULON

AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHHHH-

WE MOVE BACK TO THE QUIET STREETS OF PASADENA. EVERYONE WAITS IN THE PARKING LOT.

GLORIA

Which way are they coming from?

LEIF

That way. I said we'd be in the parking lot trying to flag them down.

CASPAR

How many police cars are following them?

LEIF

They've basically got the entire LAPD chasing them down right now, it's going to be messy.

AVA

What are they going to do, put them in handcuffs?

LEIF

Here they come.

THE TESLA COMES SCREECHING AROUND A CORNER FOLLOWED BY SEVERAL POLICE CARS.

GLORIA

Okay, everybody wave!

THE TESLA SPEEDS RIGHT PAST THEM, FOLLOWED BY ALL OF THE POLICE CARS.

CASPAR

Did they not see us?

AVA

It's a pretty big sign.

DOWN THE ROAD THE TESLA CRASHES AND FLIPS OVER SEVERAL TIMES.

GLORIA

Oh shit!

LEIF

That's not good.

AVA

Uh... I hope they fastened their seatbelts?

LEIF

They'll be fine, we just need to figure out how to get them out of there.

WE HEAR ANOTHER DRONE TRAVELING DOWN THE SIDEWALK.

DRONE

Delicious food, coming through... Delicious food, coming through... Delicious food, coming through...

LEIF

Hang on.

DRONE

Del... icious... food... coming... through...

EFFIE

(Inside the drone.)
Well hi, y'all.

GLORIA

Effie!

ZEBULON

(Inside the drone.)
I much prefer this speed.

GLORIA

You guys, where have you been?

EFFIE

Oh we have quite a tale to tell, Gloria.

ZEBULON

We've been all over the land inhabiting all sorts
of things in this modern world.

EFFIE

It weren't until recently we discovered that
someone had made the foolish choice to make a mess
of cars that can drive themselves, then we really
started covering some ground.

LEIF

Alright, finally some fucking progress.

EFFIE

Leif, do you mind telling me who in the heck has
decided to get on my bad side with all this mess?

LEIF

I actually have no idea, but something tells me
that's all about to turn around.

GLORIA

So you two have just been hopping from gadget to
gadget this entire time?

EFFIE

Gloria, I would love to tell y'all the entire saga
but we have not been here for months and I am sure
the house is a mess, c'mon husband let's get out of
this contraption.

ZEBULON

I'll do the sweeping.

THE DRONE BEGINS TO HEAD INSIDE.

ZEBULON (CONT'D)

There appears to be something within this vehicle called "Moo Goo Gai Pan" which I believe is a food?

DOOR CHIME.

AVA

Do you think Gloria's going to be offended if I steal that take out from the Muckledrone?

CASPAR

No, I'm sure it's fine.

AVA

What's wrong?

CASPAR

Nothing.

AVA

... Nothing?

CASPAR

No... nothing.

AVA

Okay. C'mon.

CASPAR

Okay.

CASPAR HEARS A HIGH-PITCHED RINGING IN HIS EARS.

CASPAR (CONT'D)

OW FUCK!

AVA

What?

CASPAR

Shit!

AVA

What is it?

KAZI

(In Caspar's head.)

3... 4... 5... 9... 2... 6... 5... 3... 5... 8...
9... 7... 9... 3... 2... 3... 8... 4... 6... 2...

(MORE)

KAZI (CONT'D)

6... 4... 3... 3... 8... 3... 2... 7... 9... 5...
0... 2... 8... 8... 4... 9... 7...

AVA

Oh shit. Is it happening again?

CASPAR

It's happening again, go get your notebook.

AVA

Okay, I'll be right back.

KAZI

(In Caspar's head.)

3... 4... 5... 9... 2... 6... 5... 3... 5... 8...
9... 7... 9... 3... 2... 3... 8... 4... 6... 2...

CASPAR

What the fuck are you doing to me?

TETA

(In Caspar's head.)

What are you doing? There's no way this is going to work.

KAZI

(In Caspar's head.)

I don't see you coming up with any ideas.

TETA

(In Caspar's head.)

You're seriously categorizing this as an idea? It's nonsense.

CASPAR

Wait...

KAZI

(In Caspar's head.)

You may be shocked to find that some ideas don't involve shooting people or blowing them up.

TETA

(In Caspar's head.)

Yes, I know. They're called bad ideas.

CASPAR

Wait...

KAZI

(In Caspar's head.)

You heard what Libuza said. You heard the story she was told.

TETA

(In Caspar's head.)

Fuck they're coming back. Shut it off-

EVERYTHING IS SILENT EXCEPT FOR THE COYOTES IN THE HILLS.
DOOR CHIME.

AVA

Okay, I'm back. Go...

CASPAR

...

AVA

Caspar?

CASPAR

I know that voice.

AVA

What?

CASPAR

I know that voice.

AVA

What do you mean?

CASPAR

... All those years I was here alone... I wasn't
alone the whole time.

THE END.