

MIDNIGHT BURGER

Chapter 37: The Paradise

By

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Midnight Burger

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JEREMIAH AND GLORIA WALK INTO THE THEATER OF THE PARADISE. THROUGHOUT THE EPISODE, MUSIC FAINTLY PLAYS OVERHEAD AND SEEMS TO CHANGE WITH THE MOOD.

JEREMIAH

There she is.

GLORIA

Wow, look at this place.

JEREMIAH

That is several hundred square feet of beaded, aluminized vinyl. It's not a silver screen but those can get a little glossy in my opinion. It's a matte gray finish, not ideal for some films but really gives a nice contrast for black and white movies.

GLORIA

It's beautiful.

JEREMIAH

When I first walked in I said "They don't make them like this anymore..." Didn't know how right I was.

GLORIA

Start at the beginning.

JEREMIAH

Alright then... Act I. Establishing shot: Knoxville, Tennessee. 1981. We see a young man named Jeremiah Franco, 23, rakish good looks (if you don't mind me saying). Jeremiah is on his way to work with a smile on his face. He is clean, he is put together, he is smiling. We see on his shirt he wears a name tag: "Noah and Kaiti's Grocery and Supply, General Manager". He looks far too young to be holding such an important position.

GLORIA

Are you going to do this whole story like this?

JEREMIAH

... Apologies. Old habit... The young man is me. I had decided to skip college. I was a terrible student and my parents had no intention of throwing good money after bad, so it was off to the workforce for me. The go-go 80s had just begun and, I'm ashamed to admit, I was a bit of true believer. Work hard, climb the ladder, get ahead...

(MORE)

JEREMIAH (CONT'D)

For some reason I was applying all of that to working at small, independent grocery store in Knoxville. And within just a few short years I was the general manager. The titular Noah and Kaiti had retired and said enough to Tennessee, they had moved down to Florida and started a weekly newspaper called "The Gabber". "Helping protect democracy in Florida." How's that going, by the way?

GLORIA

Don't ask.

JEREMIAH

So there I was, I was twenty-three years old and was the king of my little corner of the world. Up Next: find a nice lady, have some nice kids, have a nice life... And then one night, I had just closed up shop and there was a knock on the glass. Two young men. Younger than me even. And one of them carried a portable movie projector with him. I thought it was a bit odd, so I unlocked the door and asked if I could help. Kacey Howe and Bryan Barletta were their names. They said that they were making a movie. They had already shot half of it and they had decided to go door to door to local businesses looking for investors to finish the rest of it... I was very confused. Movies? In Knoxville? That's not where people make movies. That happens in Hollywood. But these two young men had taken a few classes at Vanderbilt and they had decided to hell with it. They were going to make a movie... I should've turned them away but, I had to see it. So I invited them inside and we set up in the cereal aisle. They projected what they had shot on all of the white cereal boxes... I'll never forget that. Those ghostly images dancing across the boxes of Corn Flakes... It was a terrible movie. It was about an entire inlet on Puget Sound that had been possessed by an evil spirit. "Lucid Harbor", they called it... It was forty-seven minutes of footage and I was a changed man by the end of it. They had made something. They just decided to make something and then there it was... They left the store that night with every penny in my savings account... But they didn't know anyone in town. They were shooting nearby in LaFollette, trying to make Norris Lake look like Puget Sound and they were going door to door. And guess who knew everyone in town? In a few weeks we had the money they needed, about another month of principle photography and then... it was done. We had made a movie. We took it to a horror film festival in Chicago that Spring.

(MORE)

JEREMIAH (CONT'D)

We screened it in front of a crowd of one hundred and sixty-three people... They hated it so much. By far the worst thing at the festival that year. But I watched the crowd watch the movie... They would laugh to each other, yell at the screen, throw popcorn... When the lights came up, nobody in that theater was a stranger... They all had an experience together. It was like they all knew each other now. By that time the next day we were already working on the next one... And that was the next two decades of my life. I produced fifty-three films altogether. All of them outside the Hollywood system, all of them delightfully bad. "Miss Nixie the Space Princess", "Shadow Rapture", "Mr. Me, Myself and I", "The Madness of Dr. Dr. B", and of course, my personal Laurence of Arabia, "Killer Zamboni".

GLORIA

They all sound amazing.

JEREMIAH

There's a right way to do a bad movie. It's an art in and of itself.

GLORIA

And then?

JEREMIAH

And then... The internet had just begun its slouch toward Bethlehem at the end of the nineties. The world was changing and I began to feel like a bit of a dinosaur. Kids in film school started having more production power on their desktop than I had in an entire warehouse. The world was demanding that I change with the times and after a few years of giving it a try I decided to, very respectfully, say no. The future was not for me and I was ready to just let it go. Watch it sail off into the distance.

GLORIA

... And then, suddenly...

JEREMIAH

... And then suddenly... I thought I had just spent so much time with my head buried in work that I never bothered to notice this place in my neighborhood, but I turned the corner one day and there was, somehow, a mid-century, single-screen, movie theater. Out of idle curiosity I walked in and... I imagine you know the rest.

GLORIA

And when did the rest of your people come along?

JEREMIAH

You know how time works here, I really have no idea. But eventually I was on some planet somewhere and along came Leif. He was looking for a new life, as I'm sure yours was too. He didn't know anything about being a projectionist, but you know how he is with machines. He became handy very quickly.

GLORIA

He does that.

JEREMIAH

And then along came Marguerite and P.J.. Now I had an engineer who could make anything and an astrophysicist who was actually starting to make sense of the place, which I never thought would happen. Others will join us for a while but this is the core group. It's a good group. We've been through a lot together.

GLORIA

Us too.

JEREMIAH

And... credits. That's my story. How about you?

GLORIA

Well... It all started in the middle of a pandemic that had paralyzed the world. A woman named Gloria locked the doors on her taqueria for the last time, and wondered where life would take her next.

JEREMIAH

Aaaaah. Nice opening.

WE MOVE TO THE LOBBY. AVA AND MARGUERITE ARE GOING A MILE A MINUTE.

MARGUERITE

No, that's not right.

AVA

What are you talking about?

MARGUERITE

That's not right, we're eating popcorn right now.

AVA

Meaning?

MARGUERITE

Well, what is cooking?

AVA

Something someone brings to me.

MARGUERITE

It's deliberate cellular degradation. You degrade the cellular integrity for greater nutritional absorption in your body. If it was null entropy you couldn't cook food.

AVA

Huh.

MARGUERITE

So that shifting point of null entropy you found back then? It's a shifting point of something but there's all kinds of entropy going on.

AVA

Caspar is 173 years old.

MARGUERITE

Right, stuff like that is happening. Trust me. The gray hair had been creeping in for years and it has stopped dead in its tracks, I'm not getting any older, which is amazing because, look at me, I'm in my prime.

AVA

And to think I would know all this if I had cooked literally one time in my life.

MARGUERITE

You're such a boon for the Thai food industry though.

POLLY JEAN

Hey there.

MARGUERITE

It's got to be conditional, right?

AVA

With the condition being what?

MARGUERITE

Consciousness.

AVA

Hm.

MARGUERITE

Ava, you remember P.J., right?

POLLY JEAN

Hi, Ava.

AVA

Polly Jean, wife of the Dean.

POLLY JEAN

Oh, God.

AVA

P.J., I've heard of stepping out on your husband but you're the first to step out of space and time on your husband. It's commendable.

POLLY JEAN

Did it have to be the first thing you brought up, Ava?

AVA

So, guys. What the fuck? What happened? What are you doing here?

MARGUERITE

Okay. Well. When last we left our heroine, she had been fired from her lofty university position because she was caught boinking the Dean's wife.

AVA

Heh.

POLLY JEAN

Please don't say boinking.

MARGUERITE

Sorry, for making passionate and meaningful love to the Dean's wife.

POLLY JEAN

Thank you.

MARGUERITE

So I dumped all of my research off on you and suddenly it was just Polly and me.

POLLY JEAN

I had been in a crisis for several years about what to do with my life.

MARGUERITE

Being married to such a tremendous mediocritite will do that to you.

POLLY JEAN

But Marguerite was a little new to having a life crisis, so it was an adjustment period.

MARGUERITE

I mean, there was plenty to do at first, right honey? High five.

POLLY JEAN

No.

MARGUERITE

But seriously, what do you do when you're kicked out of the magical kingdom? I'm sure I could've gotten some random adjunct position in some little corner of nowhere but I couldn't imagine stepping up to the chalkboard again. Get this, I even considered becoming a chemist.

AVA

The horror.

MARGUERITE

I know!

AVA

Lab coats?

MARGUERITE

Goggles?

POLLY JEAN

My husband got all our friends in the divorce and the only person she ever talked to at Cornell was you so it was just us. We were really starting from scratch.

MARGUERITE

But I was very happy.

POLLY JEAN

I was too. But we needed to...

MARGUERITE

Leave the house at some point.

POLLY JEAN

Yes.

MARGUERITE

So we developed a grand plan.

AVA

"Let's go see a movie."

MARGUERITE

Yes. And here we are now.

AVA

The odds of you and I seeing each other again, this way, it's a little concerning to me.

MARGUERITE

Right? But then, if you factor in infinity, then there are infinite Marguerites and infinite Avas, so It's not that huge of a coincidence.

AVA

Because we've met again but...

MARGUERITE

We're not from the same universe.

AVA

Right.

MARGUERITE

But here's something. I think we're neighbors.

AVA

What do you mean?

MARGUERITE

Baby, you came up with a fun name for this, what was it?

POLLY JEAN

Smurfette's closet.

MARGUERITE

Right.

AVA

What?

POLLY JEAN

Remember Smurfette from the Smurfs?

AVA

No.

POLLY JEAN

You don't remember the Smurfs? What were you doing when you were nine years old?

AVA

Graduating from High School.

POLLY JEAN

Well, in the Smurf village Smurfette was the only girl Smurf, everyone else was a boy.

MARGUERITE

Nightmare.

POLLY JEAN

And sometimes she would walk into her little toadstool house and open her closet and she had the same dress over and over again.

MARGUERITE

So the dresses looked identical, but if you looked really close-

AVA

They would all have microscopic differences.

MARGUERITE

Right.

AVA

The number of universes seemingly identical to each other are seemingly infinite.

MARGUERITE

In some universes the only difference is a tree in Macon, Georgia being on the other side of the street. Changes in these universes don't have to be extreme. Your mom was a nightclub singer, right?

AVA

Right.

MARGUERITE

And you still didn't know your dad.

AVA

Yes.

MARGUERITE

And you still write in that stupid Dutch shorthand.

AVA

I do.

MARGUERITE

Right, all that's the same even though we're highly likely from different universes. Oh, AND, the more similar the universe, the closer they are to each other. I think.

(MORE)

MARGUERITE (CONT'D)

You always described it like a string of pearls stretching out to infinity, but do you remember the time I came into your office with all that CMB data?

AVA

You were always coming into my office with CMB data.

MARGUERITE

Right but you were wearing your hair up and you never do that and I was like "are you wearing your hair up?" And you said "shut up." And then took it down.

POLLY JEAN

Um, babe I'm going to go check on everyone in the theater.

MARGUERITE

Okay, baby, I love you so much.

POLLY JEAN

I love you.

MARGUERITE

Where was I?

AVA

The bruise.

MARGUERITE

Yes! I said, "look at this CMB data. What are these inconsistencies?" I called it a bruise on the universe. And you had a theory about it.

AVA

That it was another universe rubbing up against ours.

MARGUERITE

Right. Like a watermelon that grows with only one side facing the sun, the underside is white and not as strong. There are bruises in the cosmic microwave background where our universe touches another. So rather than a string of pearls, it's more like a DNA helix, with each universe riffing on the previous one.

AVA

But that implies a beginning and an ending and the infinite doesn't do that.

MARGUERITE

And this is what always happens. We pick up a thread, we follow it to it's ultimate conclusion and we end up face to face with who? Gottfried Wilhelm goddamn Leibniz again.

AVA

... I've been thinking about him a lot lately.

MARGUERITE

I know you have, my little closet philosopher. Ava, you and I know more than any physicist in history. The nature and journey of the universe? Check. Multiverse theory? Check. We're running out of ways to ask "What is a universe?" Which means eventually we have to face the next question. Not "What is existence?", But...

AVA

"Why is this existence?"

MARGUERITE

Why is there something instead of nothing?

AVA

This is why I hate principles. They can't be proven. Every time Leif brings up the Principle of Fecundity I throw things at him. There's no way to confirm PSR.

MARGUERITE

Not for all the other apes out there, but for you? For me? For all the other infinite Avas and Marguerite's taking a ride on time-traveling, dimension-spanning diners and movie theaters? It's in our reach, Ava. Not just a theory of everything... the meaning of everything.

AVA

... What have you got to drink around here?

MARGUERITE

Ha! Come back to our room, I've got this stuff from Australia. Wasabi Loob Moonshine. You're going to love it.

THE DOOR SWINGS OPEN TO THE PROJECTION ROOM.

PARADISE LEIF

Okay, this is where the magic happens.

LEIF

Nice.

PARADISE LEIF

This is the projection room, obviously, but as you can see I've got about nine projects running right now.

LEIF

You're making a toaster?

PARADISE LEIF

I'm calling it the Resetoaster. It heals burnt toast.

LEIF

It does?

PARADISE LEIF

Theoretically.

WE HEAR THE RIBBITS OF A ROBOTIC FROG.

LEIF

You have a robot frog?

PARADISE LEIF

Oh yeah. Trash Frog! You know how you land on a planet and you want to do some scavenging? This guy jumps into a pile of garbage and sniffs out rare metals. Trash Frog.

LEIF

That's great idea.

PARADISE LEIF

Hey, I've been thinking about bringing the drones back, have you got drones?

LEIF

Oh yeah. Definitely get some. Super useful. I've got flechettes on mine.

PARADISE LEIF

Nice.

LEIF

What is this beauty?

PARADISE LEIF

Oh yeah. That was here when I got here. It's a Brenkert Enarc. It's only 35 millimeter but it's a beast. Cast iron, lights up the film using an arc of electricity instead of a bulb. I thought about making some modifications but-

LEIF

It's too perfect.

PARADISE LEIF

It's too perfect, yeah... So, this is crazy.

LEIF

First time?

PARADISE LEIF

What do you mean?

LEIF

I've been visited by a few versions of myself,
you're the third.

PARADISE LEIF

Whoa. How was that?

LEIF

Confusing.

PARADISE LEIF

How about this time?

LEIF

Still confusing.

PARADISE LEIF

That's fair. Where were you when you hopped on
board?

LEIF

Binbar.

PARADISE LEIF

Binbar? Jesus, that's outer Triangulum, what were
you doing there?

LEIF

You know what I was doing there, I was on the run.

PARADISE LEIF

On the run, from who?

LEIF

From who? Everyone.

PARADISE LEIF

What do you mean?

LEIF

After I bugged out on Låfftrax I was hunted by
basically everyone.

(MORE)

LEIF (CONT'D)

The Teds were trying to find me, then any criminal in The Triad was after me, I had to go pretty deep.

PARADISE LEIF

You left Låfftrrax?

LEIF

Yeah. You didn't?

PARADISE LEIF

Fuck no, I'm not trying to get killed.

LEIF

... When did you show up here?

PARADISE LEIF

It was right after what happened on Axol.

LEIF

... Axol.

PARADISE LEIF

I don't know how it was for you but I took it pretty hard... there were a lot of people on that moon.

LEIF

I remember.

PARADISE LEIF

Anyway, afterwards I was taking it kind of hard and Minsky sent me to Nesso for a while. And after a few days of losing my mind in paradise, I turned the corner and here was this place. I was confused at first. What's an American movie theater doing on Nesso? I was feeling a little nostalgic so I went inside. I watched this old Burt Lancaster movie called uh... Elmer Gantry. Then I stayed for the second showing. Jeremiah and I started talking and... long story short I ended up staying on... I'm guessing it wasn't the same for you.

LEIF

No.

PARADISE LEIF

You stayed on after Axol?

LEIF

Like you said, I wasn't trying to get killed.

PARADISE LEIF

How long did you stay with Låffrrax?

LEIF

Too long... Long enough to where getting killed didn't matter anymore.

PARADISE LEIF

Where did you go?

LEIF

Quilandis.

PARADISE LEIF

The Justine Burbank System?

LEIF

I figured the best place to hide out was a system that even pirates were scared of. It worked for a while, but eventually I got burned and had to bug out. I was hiding on a Truskan ice hauler trying to find my next move. Disguised myself as a cook. We were stopped at Binbar station and that's when I saw the diner.

PARADISE LEIF

Better late than never, I guess.

LEIF

Yeah. It was rough though, I sure could've used a place like this after Axol.

PARADISE LEIF

Well, hey, maybe this'll cheer you up.

PARADISE LEIF OPENS THE STORAGE ROOM.

PARADISE LEIF (CONT'D)

Come in here.

LEIF

Holy shit.

PARADISE LEIF

This is the film library. Rows and rows of it.

LEIF

How many do you have?

PARADISE LEIF

Well, I've got it organized by genre but, get this, it changes over time. Movies show up for a while then they're gone.

LEIF

I haven't heard of half of these. "The Prometheus Crisis?"

PARADISE LEIF

At first I thought they were just B-Movie crap that nobody saw but, check it out.

PARADISE LEIF TAKES A REEL OFF THE RACK.

LEIF

"The Freak."

PARADISE LEIF

Check out the director.

LEIF

Charlie Chaplin?

PARADISE LEIF

On my Earth, Chaplin tried for years to make this movie but it never happened. But here it is. The movies that show up here are from different realities where they actually got made. I've had Jodorowsky's Dune, Arnovsky's Batman, a sequel to Pink Flamingos. Look at this one...

HE GRABS ANOTHER CAN OF FILM.

PARADISE LEIF (CONT'D)

The Matrix, starring Will Smith.

LEIF

Do you have the Eric Stolz "Back to the Future" in here?

PARADISE LEIF

We did for a while. It's as bad as you think. Anything like this happen at your place?

LEIF

Uh, yeah, the walk-in. The food regenerates and changes over time. Or at least it did.

PARADISE LEIF

It did?

LEIF

About 8 months ago we were attacked by something. The diner hasn't worked since.

PARADISE LEIF

Whoa.

LEIF

Yeah.

PARADISE LEIF

Any idea what it was?

LEIF

I think it was a "who" not a "what".

PARADISE LEIF

Seriously? Who has that kind of power?

LEIF

I don't know...

PARADISE LEIF

I'm getting the sense that things are a little heavier over on your side of the street.

LEIF

We've been through some shit, that's for sure.

PARADISE LEIF

Well, obviously that's why we're here, right? To get you out of the mud.

LEIF

I've been trying for months, I've got nothing.

PARADISE LEIF

I know. But hey, there's two of you now. Name for me a problem that can't be fixed by two of us.

LEIF

... Yeah.

PARADISE LEIF

Look, it's not lost on me. You've been stuck on Earth. The thought of that makes my skin crawl. If I were you I would've become a cyber-terrorist months ago. You've showed amazing restraint.

LEIF

Maybe not as much as I should've.

PARADISE LEIF

Regardless. I'm here now AND we've got Marguerite and that other lady. We're going to get you out of here.

LEIF

Okay.

PARADISE LEIF

Okay. Jeremiah wants everyone to watch a movie together. That's his whole thing, "There are no strangers after the credits role." Whatever.

(MORE)

PARADISE LEIF (CONT'D)

Let's fire up a movie for everyone, and you and I can get to work.

LEIF

... It's good to see you, Leif.

PARADISE LEIF

You too, man.

EFFIE

(Down in the theater.)

I'm sitting down here waiting for a movie to start, y'all want to get to it!

LEIF

We're working on it!

ZEBULON

(Down in the theater.)

Leif, I humbly request a film with cowboys or pirates.

LEIF

Fine.

ZEBULON

(Down in the theater.)

Unless a pirate film would hit a bit too close to home, I would understand.

LEIF

I see the pirate jokes have increased precipitously.

ZEBULON

(Down in the theater.)

That's an awfully big word for a pirate.

LEIF

Ha ha.

PARADISE LEIF

What's the deal with the radio?

LEIF

Absolutely no idea.

DOWN IN THE THEATER. CASPAR BRINGS POPCORN.

CASPAR

Okay, I've got popcorn.

EFFIE

Caspar, I'm expecting you to be a gentleman and not eat that popcorn until I've got mine. Zebulon!

ZEBULON

(From the kitchen.)

I am popping the corn dear!

DAVID

I feel like we can start eating this popcorn anytime we want. There's no popcorn rules.

CASPAR

No, I don't see that written anywhere in the etiquette books.

EFFIE

Such a poor role model for you child, do you know that, Caspar?

DAVID

Oh, Effie I'm afraid that ship sailed long ago.

EFFIE

Zebulon!

ZEBULON

(From the kitchen.)

Dear, no amount of urgency will cause a corn to pop faster!

DAVID

So...

CASPAR

So...

DAVID

So a movie theater has appeared.

CASPAR

Yes. Yes and here we are inside it.

DAVID

I thought we had a whole conversation where you told me everything.

CASPAR

This is new to me. I have no idea what's happening. I mean, Ava had theorized in the past that there were other diners and other versions of ourselves out there, but we always assumed it was other diners like ours. This? This is new. I guess there's no reason it has to be a diner.

DAVID

Uh huh. So there's the issue of the world ending outside.

CASPAR

Yes.

DAVID

But we're going to watch a movie?

CASPAR

See, it's at this point in the process the smart people are talking. When the smart people are done talking there's usually a list of action items, that's when we come in.

DAVID

Okay... Time traveling dimension spanning movie theater now.

CASPAR

Yes.

DAVID

It's a little comforting to know that the inner workings of the universe are this ridiculous.

CASPAR

Right?

POLLY JEAN

Hi there.

CASPAR

Hi.

POLLY JEAN

We didn't get a chance to meet outside. I'm Polly.

CASPAR

Hi there, Polly. I'm Caspar, this is David, and that's Effie and Zebulon Mucklewain.

EFFIE

Salutations, Polly, My husband would introduce himself but he is currently vexed by the popping of corn.

ZEBULON

(From the kitchen.)
It is almost ready!

POLLY JEAN

What's the deal with the radio?

CASPAR

You guys don't have something that talks to you around here?

POLLY JEAN

We don't.

CASPAR

Long story short, they're a couple of radio evangelists from the 1920s and they somehow live inside that radio.

POLLY JEAN

Weird.

CASPAR

Yeah, you'd think after 173 years it would stop being weird but, nope. Still weird.

POLLY JEAN

I see.

DAVID

What's your weird thing, do y'all have a weird thing?

POLLY JEAN

Um. Well, it's no talking radio but, do you hear that music overhead?

DAVID

Yeah, what is that?

POLLY JEAN

We have no idea. It's always playing and seems to change with your mood. We have no idea where it comes from.

DAVID

Nice. Have a seat.

POLLY JEAN

Thanks.

CASPAR

So, we're really going to watch a movie right now?

POLLY JEAN

I know, it's weird. It's Jeremiah's whole thing, someone comes in the door, tells their story and we watch a movie.

CASPAR

Interesting.

POLLY JEAN

Unless they're trying to kill us, then Leif usually handles that.

CASPAR

Right, same here.

POLLY JEAN

It was so weird to see two of him.

CASPAR

First time?

DAVID

Polly, let me ask you something. You all live here all the time?

POLLY JEAN

We do.

DAVID

So y'all subsist entirely on popcorn, hot dogs, candy and nachos?

POLLY JEAN

David, if you couldn't die wouldn't you subsist entirely on popcorn, hot dogs, candy, and nachos?

DAVID

An excellent point.

GLORIA

Hey team.

CASPAR

Hey, where have you been?

GLORIA

I was getting the grand tour.

CASPAR

How is it?

GLORIA

It nice. This place used to be a live theater I guess, so there's dressing rooms. Everyone has their own room.

CASPAR

Oh man, that's amazing.

GLORIA

Are the smart people done talking?

CASPAR

No, Ava's backstage somewhere with Marguerite and the council of Leifs is up in the projection booth.

GLORIA

They better come back with something amazing.

CASPAR

I hear you.

AVA

Make way!

CASPAR

Watch the popcorn!

MARGUERITE

I've got Junior Mints, who wants Junior Mints?

CASPAR

Where were you?

AVA

I was at the party backstage, what are all you nerds doing out here?

MARGUERITE

Hey baby.

POLLY JEAN

Hi. Are you eating Junior Mints because you're trying to hide the booze on your breath?

MARGUERITE

No, I'm eating Junior Mints because of how hard I'm going to make out with you during this movie.

POLLY JEAN

Uh huh.

JEREMIAH

Okay, everyone. Hello hello! Well this is really something isn't it? How are we doing up in the booth?

PARADISE LEIF

(From the projection booth.)
Ready to go!

JEREMIAH

Now, I'm sure you can imagine, we've hosted some pretty interesting characters in this theater over the years.

(MORE)

JEREMIAH (CONT'D)

A Viking wanderer named Arwen the Freer, a retired monster hunter named Lolly, a young man named Tallon Lawson who had just begun his career at a promising new company called "Enron"... we didn't have the heart to tell him. But this... this is something new. There's nothing all that special about any of us.

PARADISE LEIF

(From the booth.)
Speak for yourself.

MARGUERITE

Chopped liver over here.

JEREMIAH

Alright, alright, there's nothing all that special about me. But I had begun to think of myself as singular. No one out there knows what I know, has seen the things I'd seen.... But now look. Turns out we have neighbors. And like good neighbors we're going to help them out in a time of need, but first... first we do a thing that is a bit of a tradition here at the Paradise. We watch a movie. We all get together under one roof and have an experience. I hear tell that the world is coming to an end outside, but it's not the first time we've rolled up on a world on the brink of destruction and it won't be the last. We'll need to work as a team and teams need common experiences to bind them together. However, I do know that time is of the essence, so I have picked something nice and short. There was a request from our quite odd friends in the radio for a cowboy film. So I'll take you all back to the b-movie westerns of the 1930s when movies had the gaul to clock in at about 55 minutes. Those were the days... truly a special day here at The Paradise. And so, without further ado... "The Man from Utah" starring John Wayne and Yakima Canutt.. (YACK-ih-muh kuh-NUT)

THE MOVIE BEGINS TO PLAY. WE MOVE TO THE ROOF OF THE DINER.
BOTH LEIFS CLIMB THE LADDER.

LEIF

Okay, here it is.

PARADISE LEIF

Nice. I always wanted to live on the roof.

LEIF

As you can see I've got all kinds of shit up here. Blanket emitters, a command center, I can do CMB scans, wave detection, etcetera, but none of it's been any use because I can't fix something when I don't know what it is or how it works.

PARADISE LEIF

It's got to be something, right?

LEIF

I've been up here for months racking my brain, Ava too.

PARADISE LEIF

And you're sure it was an attack? It wasn't a phenomenon.

LEIF

I think someone tried to sideline us.

PARADISE LEIF

Why?

LEIF

Do you remember a group back in the day called The Sisters?

PARADISE LEIF

The Sisters? Doesn't ring a bell.

LEIF

They weren't a crime ring, they were freedom fighters, I guess.

PARADISE LEIF

When was this?

LEIF

Back in our pirate days.

PARADISE LEIF

No. But I mean, if it was back in the pirate days...

LEIF

We were pretty drunk the whole time.

PARADISE LEIF

Yeah. Also, there's always some kind of Ted resistance group out there and they always get squished, I usually didn't pay attention to them.

LEIF

Right.

PARADISE LEIF

This has something to do with them?

LEIF

They were trying to contact us. They're old friends of Caspar's. Right when they make contact, we get hit.

PARADISE LEIF

Okay, maybe it's related but, if someones has the technology to sideline a place like this, some rebels from The Triad aren't going to be playing on their level. They'd be small potatoes.

LEIF

I guess.

PARADISE LEIF

You have no idea who could've done this?

LEIF

No. But there was this one run-in that Caspar and these Sisters had. They were constantly dodging The Teds but there was this one encounter toward the end. Guns didn't work on them, grenades didn't work. I think they may have had temporal weapons.

PARADISE LEIF

Time displacement?

LEIF

Yeah. They shot a grenade out of the sky and it just vanished like it was never there. Not all that different from what happened to this diner, I'm wondering if they're related... It might have something to do with The Egg.

PARADISE LEIF

... Cryptessia?

LEIF

Yeah.

PARADISE LEIF

That's bad.

LEIF

I know.

PARADISE LEIF

There be dragons, man.

LEIF

I know. But if the dragon is attacking you the warnings don't mean much.

PARADISE LEIF

... Cryptessia.

LEIF

Yeah.

PARADISE LEIF

So you were in a world of shit when we showed up just now.

LEIF

In a lot of ways, yes.

PARADISE LEIF

Alright. Well, let's see what we can do.

WE HEAR THE DISTANT SOUNDS OF THE MUNGO PASSING BY.

PARADISE LEIF (CONT'D)

Oh shit. Mungo.

LEIF

Yeah, it showed up when everything was just kicking off so we've got a random Mungo here now.

PARADISE LEIF

I love those things.

LEIF

Who doesn't love a huge plant-eater?

PARADISE LEIF

Unless they get injured. Then they're terrifying.

LEIF

We'll have to hope for the best on that one. How about I fire up the command center, show you what I've got so far.

PARADISE LEIF

Sounds good.

LEIF FIRES UP THE COMMAND CENTER.

PARADISE LEIF (CONT'D)

So, you seen our girl lately?

LEIF

... BertBert?

PARADISE LEIF

Yeah.

LEIF

Uh... last I saw her she had just won a war against
The Teds.

PARADISE LEIF

Oh yeah. "Empress BertBert". That's a good one.

LEIF

How many times have you run into her?

PARADISE LEIF

Oh, tons of times. There's "Empress BertBert, "I'm
quitting Journalism BertBert", "I'm quitting
journalism again BertBert"... "Recently Divorced
BertBert" can get pretty weird. How about you?

LEIF

Just the once.

PARADISE LEIF

Oh. Wow. Well, get ready, you never really know
what you're getting when you see her... Always nice
though, y'know? It can get so complicated out here
but seeing her always makes it feel simple somehow.
You know what? Maybe that's what we need. A little
simplicity.

LEIF

What do you mean?

PARADISE LEIF

Look at you, man. You're knee deep in like nine
things right now. The sisters, the mystery
assailant, this Earth is going off the rails,
you're grounded. What if we just pretend the
problem is simple?

LEIF

How?

PARADISE LEIF

Let's just call it a Cadillac. Right?

LEIF

A Cadillac.

PARADISE LEIF

If this diner was a Cadillac, it could only be so
many things. Transmission, alternator, carburetor.
Maybe it's one of those.

LEIF

This thing doesn't have a transmission.

PARADISE LEIF

But what's the equivalent of a transmission for a time-traveling, dimension-spanning diner?

LEIF

I don't know.

PARADISE LEIF

Me neither. Let's find out.

BACK IN THE THEATER. WE HEAR "THE MAN FROM UTAH" IN THE BACKGROUND.

EFFIE

I'm having a hard time following this movie, dear, what the heck is happening?

ZEBULON

Well, this man here is John Weston, he's a bit of a saddle tramp and while he was blowing through town he foiled a bank robbery.

EFFIE

Yes, I gathered that part.

ZEBULON

The local sheriff has now deputized him to infiltrate a local rodeo that's up to no good.

EFFIE

I see.

ZEBULON

Also, there appears to be some strange occurrences of the rodeo entrants dying of rattlesnake bites. I suspect foul play.

EFFIE

Ooh, he just jumped right up on that horse, didn't he?

JEREMIAH

That's Yakima Canutt. He did all the stunts for this one. He'd go on to lay the groundwork for Hollywood stuntmen for years to come. He'd teach them how to leap on to horses, how to fall down stairs.

AVA

These are the tallest hats I've ever seen in my life.

MARGUERITE

It's like a meeting of western style Popes.

AVA

This is not a good movie.

MARGUERITE

Oh no. It begins with John Wayne singing on a horse, of course it's not a good movie.

AVA

Why are we watching it?

MARGUERITE

Jeremiah has an attachment to it. See that guy in the back there? He's holding the lasso?

AVA

Yeah.

MARGUERITE

A while back a guy comes in. He's a down on his luck ranch hand. He says that when he was a young man, he was asked to be a background player in a movie but he never had a chance to see it. We of course had it in stock and so we showed it to him. There he is, Bobby Ray Winland, Jr. He felt like he existed a little bit more after seeing it.

AVA

Speaking of things existing, the world is ending outside.

MARGUERITE

Yeah, what are we going to do about it?

AVA

I have a radical idea.

MARGUERITE

Ohh. Let's hear it.

DAVID

So you seem like the odd one out in this group.

POLLY JEAN

I'm glad it shows.

DAVID

I don't mean that in a bad way.

POLLY JEAN

I'm not a movie buff or a science person so, yes, I guess I am the odd one out.

DAVID
How'd you get wrapped up in all this?

POLLY JEAN
Hm. Well, Marguerite was a professor at Cornell and I... I was there too.

DAVID
What did you teach?

POLLY JEAN
Oh, I wasn't a professor.

DAVID
... Okay.

POLLY JEAN
... I was the wife of the dean.

DAVID
Oh my.

POLLY JEAN
Yes.

DAVID
Scandalous.

POLLY JEAN
It really was. I'm not really prone to scandal.

DAVID
I get that.

POLLY JEAN
I didn't realize it at the time but apparently I kept inviting her to parties and functions without knowing I was doing it. That's how I, apparently, "Put the vibe out there."

DAVID
Yeah you did.

POLLY JEAN
After successfully "putting the vibe out there" it was suddenly like I was being hunted by some sort of forest predator. To hear her tell it, I pursued her relentlessly, but I don't think I've ever pursued something relentlessly in my life.

DAVID
It's always the quiet ones.

POLLY JEAN

Yes. Apparently my assortment of cardigan sweaters really brings all the girls to the yard.

DAVID

I have two lesbian grandmothers, you have no idea how true that statement is.

THE FILM COMES TO AN END. THERE IS LIGHT APPLAUSE.

ZEBULON

Well that was really something, wasn't it?

EFFIE

It was something.

ZEBULON

When the lights went out at the saloon and the bandits all try to jump him, but then the lights come up and it turns out he had left the room already? They were just giving themselves a beating, weren't they?

EFFIE

Yes, they were, dear.

JEREMIAH

Alright everyone, I realize that one's not going into the library of congress or anything but it could be much worse.

AVA

Could it?

JEREMIAH

I like films like these though. They were made a long time ago, before anyone really knew how to make a film. None of them had gone to film school and I think it's clear that John Wayne is not a graduate of the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts. They were all making it up as they go along.

MARGUERITE

And here comes the teachable moment.

JEREMIAH

Not unlike all of us. I think both of our groups will admit there is not a manual for the things we do, but that doesn't mean it's not important. All we may have is our instincts, like the merry band that made this film. So with that... Gloria?

GLORIA

It's really great to meet you all. I'm sure you can see we're in a bit of jam outside, but between all of us I know that we can do something to at least fix it a little bit. So, if you wouldn't mind, I'd like us all to head outside and try to make sense of the mess we're in.

AVA

We have an idea, actually.

GLORIA

That's great! Let's go.

THEY ALL BEGIN TO FILE OUT OF THE THEATER.

CASPAR

What's your idea?

AVA

You'll see.

CASPAR

Why can't you just tell me?

AVA

You don't get special treatment.

CASPAR

Is special treatment available? Where is the list of available services?

AVA

Available services? I have no available services, what are your available services?

CASPAR

Uh, bringing you sandwiches, bringing you coffee, bringing you pencils, where do you think your notebooks come from?

AVA

These are all privileges that I've afforded you.

CASPAR

Ah, I see. So I should count myself lucky.

AVA

You do.

CASPAR

David, can you get the radio?

DAVID

Yeah.

MARGUERITE

... What's going on there?

AVA

Where?

MARGUERITE

There.

AVA

What are you talking about?

MARGUERITE

What are *you* talking about?

AVA

Don't be ridiculous.

MARGUERITE

Jesus Christ, lady.

THE DOOR OPENS TO THE OUTSIDE.

PARADISE LEIF

(Calling from the roof of the diner.)

Hey guys!

JEREMIAH

Leif, I see you got started early, I thought we talked about this.

PARADISE LEIF

Sorry, I couldn't help myself! Check it out!

PARADISE LEIF DIRECTS THEM TO THE MUNGO SEVERAL BLOCKS AWAY.

JEREMIAH

... Is that a Mungo?

POLLY JEAN

What's it doing here?

MARGUERITE

Why do you have a Mungo in downtown... where are we?

AVA

Pasadena.

MARGUERITE

Oh really?

AVA

Yes.

MARGUERITE

Memory lane.

AVA

Uh huh.

MARGUERITE

Have you run into Chad?

AVA

Do not speak his name.

BOTH LEIFS COME DOWN TO THE PARKING LOT.

JEREMIAH

Gloria, can you give us a rundown of what's going on?

GLORIA

It's two problems. One: our diner has been out of commission for eight months now. Because of this, this entire universe has gone haywire because of what, Ava?

AVA

An anti-matter imbalance.

DAVID

Just going from Pasadena to Hollywood, I saw a marching band appear out of nowhere, a talking goat, a stampede of Zebras, a thirty second blizzard, a world war one dog fight, Gregorian monks, and a teleporting lawyer.

CASPAR

Talking goat, you didn't tell me about a talking goat.

DAVID

It was on TikTok.

CASPAR

What what?

GLORIA

We thought we were going to be able to weather the storm but then if you look up you'll see... Uh.

JEREMIAH

What am I supposed to be seeing?

GLORIA

Wait...

LEIF

Where did it go?

POLLY JEAN

Where did what go?

ZEBULON

Before we began the cowboy film, there were two moons in the sky.

JEREMIAH

Two moons?

GLORIA

That's when we figured we were doomed, Now I just see one moon.

EFFIE

Maybe the other one's set?

GLORIA

Ava?

MARGUERITE

You know, I usually have to sit here and be right all by myself, it's so nice to share it with you.

AVA

It is nice.

GLORIA

Ava.

AVA

Surprise!

CASPAR

... Okay, you can't just say surprise.

AVA

It's fixed.

GLORIA

What is?

AVA

The universe.

CASPAR

No, it's not.

AVA
Yes it is.

DAVID
There's a big ass Mungo five blocks away, Ava.

AVA
I know.

DAVID
Do you want to see the alerts on my phone? There's crazy shit still happening all over town.

MARGUERITE
Correct, which is why we now unveil our new theory...

AVA
The scratch and dent theory!

MARGUERITE
Imagine the universe is a car. Not a nice car, just a car that gets you from place to place. Like Ava's old Audi stick shift. What was it called?

AVA
She was called *Émilie du Châtelet* and I miss her every day.

MARGUERITE
It was a piece of crap but it got the job done.

AVA
How dare you?

CASPAR
Are you guys having a slumber party or something?

MARGUERITE
One break light was missing, there were dents in the fender, and it always pulled to the left.

AVA
Those were features, not bugs.

MARGUERITE
Ava only took it into the shop when it broke down or wouldn't start.

PARADISE LEIF
So we restarted the universe, but the scratches and dents remain.

AVA

Correct. Scratches and dents like: a Mungo in downtown Pasadena.

GLORIA

So the headline is: The world is not ending.

MARGUERITE

Right.

DAVID

But paragraph three is: Pasadena just has a Mungo now.

MARGUERITE

Also right.

AVA

I had this theory back at the Horizon Motel, but there was no time to confirm it. We don't need to do anything.

PARADISE LEIF

Damn, we saved the world just by showing up. That's my kind of gig.

LEIF

I'm a little disappointed. I had a theory in the back of my head for blowing up the extra moon.

PARADISE LEIF

Nice. Core exciter?

LEIF

Yeah, let it blow itself up.

PARADISE LEIF

I was thinking: spatial distortion right behind the moon. Suck it out into the asteroid belt.

LEIF

Ooh, that sounds fun.

CASPAR

Didn't you tell me there was a city on the moon?

LEIF

I mean, a small one.

PARADISE LEIF

They'd be fine.

JEREMIAH

Leif.

GLORIA
Leif.

LEIF
Sorry.

PARADISE LEIF
Sorry.

AVA
Anyway, crisis number one officially averted.

GLORIA
This is great news you guys.

AVA
You're welcome.

CASPAR
You didn't do anything.

MARGUERITE
We named the theory.

AVA
Names are important.

MARGUERITE
Have you named anything today?

CASPAR
It seems like you kind of just sat there and then
congratulated yourself.

POLLY JEAN
You have no idea how often I feel this way.

MARGUERITE
One of the key aspects of this universe was
suddenly missing, so things started breaking down.
It looks like the Paradise came in like a
transdimensional substitute teacher and plugged the
hole.

CASPAR
Looks like you're going to be okay.

DAVID
I am? There's Zebras in my neighborhood.

CASPAR
Well, y'know, they can round them up. I'm sure it
can get back normal.

DAVID

Normal?

PARADISE LEIF

Sounds like it's party time.

JEREMIAH

Hang on, Leif. Believe it or not, saving the universe is not the only thing on our to do list. Our friends are still stuck here and they've been stuck for eight months. So what we need are some plans of action, does anyone in the brain trust have some things we can try?

LEIF

Nothing so far with us.

AVA

Nothing here.

JEREMIAH

Okay, well, you know how I am about these things. We're here for a reason, so let's not squander it.

AVA

What if we entangled them?

MARGUERITE

The diner and The Paradise?

AVA

I'm currently on an "entanglement between dimensions" thing.

MARGUERITE

That sounds funky.

AVA

Leifs. What if we entangled the diner and the movie theater?

PARADISE LEIF

What would that do?

AVA

No idea.

LEIF

Not enough time. I'm assuming these guys will be taking off in twelve hours like us. We'd need to build a lot and make a lot of computations. Maybe if I still had the Urt processor, but not with what I've got on the roof.

AVA

Crap.

GLORIA

This is good though. Keep talking, let's get everyone inside, I'll make everyone some food that's not popcorn.

PARADISE LEIF

Urt processor?

LEIF

Oh yeah, it was beautiful. I had an Urt quantum processor from 800 years in the relative future.

PARADISE LEIF

Oh man, that sounds beautiful. Fucking Urts, man.

LEIF

Right?

MARGUERITE

Hey.

POLLY JEAN

Hello.

MARGUERITE

Want to come inside and share a milkshake with me?

POLLY JEAN

It's okay, go ahead.

MARGUERITE

What's wrong?

POLLY JEAN

Nothing.

MARGUERITE

Okay. See, there's the "nothing" that means "nothing" and the "nothing" that means "something", I feel like this is the latter.

POLLY JEAN

Seriously, nothing, I'm fine. You should go hang out with Ava, you haven't seen her in a very long time.

MARGUERITE

Come in with me.

POLLY JEAN

It's really okay. There's a lot for you to figure out, you like figuring things out, this is like Christmas morning for you.

MARGUERITE

Polly.

POLLY JEAN

I'm so serious. Nothing bad is happening. I love you. Go inside.

MARGUERITE

I love you too.

POLLY JEAN

Okay.

MARGUERITE

We're going to share a milkshake later if it kills me.

POLLY JEAN

Okay, fine.

GLORIA

Caspar, can you get everyone coffee?

CASPAR

Yeah, sure.

DAVID

You coming in?

POLLY JEAN

I'm fine. I'll keep an eye on things at the theater. I don't think I have much to contribute in there.

DAVID

Neither do I.

POLLY JEAN

It's really fine. Please don't feel the need to include me.

DAVID

Oh, I'm not trying to include you in all that I was hoping we could sit at a booth and talk about people behind their back.

POLLY JEAN

That doesn't sound very nice.

DAVID

It's only mean if they find out about it, Polly.
Come on, the coffee's good.

POLLY JEAN

... okay.

INSIDE THE DINER.

AVA

I would first like to start this meeting by saying that I have allowed you all to sit at my booth with me. Congratulations. Who would like to start it off?

PARADISE LEIF

I'll go first. I'm late to this conversation but I'll start with this: if places like this diner and places like The Paradise are essential functions in any universe, how could one of them stop working? That would be like gravity suddenly not working.

AVA

A universe is filled with things that don't work out. Why should this place be any different?

MARGUERITE

I've observed massive galaxy-sized clouds of hydrogen in multiple universes now. Those clouds were supposed to turn into galaxies, but for whatever reason they just didn't. Something short circuited somehow.

LEIF

I just see that as fuel, though. That's potential energy sitting there, is that really a breakdown of universal function?

MARGUERITE

A cloud of hydrogen is supposed to eventually become something else, why does it just sit there in the void while all the other clouds of hydrogen got busy turning into galaxies? Something broke. Things break.

PARADISE LEIF

But if that cloud of hydrogen sits there it has no effect on the inner workings of the universe. It's non-essential. Your diner failed and the whole system failed.

LEIF

But the whole system didn't fail.

PARADISE LEIF

There's a Mungo in Pasadena, the system failed.

LEIF

But then you showed up.

AVA

Right.

LEIF

As a response to our inability to function, there was a reaction. A reaction from another universe.

MARGUERITE

So what are we talking about? Are we talking about an inter-universal interdependence?

AVA

We've all felt this. There's a moment when we figure something out and we take a step back to think about how cool we are for figuring something out. But when we take that step back we see the lens widening. We see the picture is bigger than we thought.

MARGUERITE

The shores of ignorance.

AVA

The more we know the more we need to know.

LEIF

What do we need to know right now?

AVA

We've been looking at all the universes we travel to as having a firewall up between them. But if we begin to see them as interdependent, as interlaced with each other then that's a bigger picture. It's an ecosystem.

MARGUERITE

But an ecosystem can be one system inside of many systems.

AVA

Yes. System after system getting bigger and bigger. Planets depending on stars depending on galaxies depending on universes. Now universes depending on each other... Do we stop there?

MARGUERITE

We're now looking at these universes coexisting within a frame. What's the frame?

(MORE)

MARGUERITE (CONT'D)

What's beyond the frame? Does every infinite universe exist within something even larger?

PARADISE LEIF

Off-topic alert.

LEIF

Right. Let's focus up. The diner is broken. How do we fix it.

MARGUERITE

... Do you want to do this or should I?

AVA

... We can't fix it.

LEIF

... Why?

AVA

Because there's nothing to fix. Look what happened. The Paradise came along and fixed the problem and now... If there's no problem to fix then there's no diner to fix.

MARGUERITE

Whatever vast system we exist in, fixed itself. And if it fixed itself it means that...

LEIF

That it doesn't need the diner.

AVA

Not anymore.

LEIF

We've been outmoded.

AVA

Yes.

LEIF

Like a public bus from the 70s just sitting in a yard somewhere.

AVA

If the diner could've fixed itself, it would've by now. The Paradise showing up is proof of that... We're done.

LEIF

... Okay... How do we break it to them?

AVA
... I don't know.

OVER AT DAVID AND POLLY'S BOOTH.

CASPAR
Hello there, welcome to Midnight Burger, here is some coffee. Gloria is deep in a taco making frenzy right now, should be out any minute, okay? Cream?

POLLY JEAN
Black is fine.

CASPAR
Okay, holler if you need anything.

POLLY JEAN
... So that's your Dad.

DAVID
Yes.

POLLY JEAN
But you haven't been traveling with them.

DAVID
No, this is all new to me.

POLLY JEAN
How's that been?

DAVID
Well... how was your relationship with your parents?

POLLY JEAN
It was... tentative?

DAVID
I have a lot of friends who don't talk to their parents much because every time they do, their mom or their dad has gone down some conspiracy theory facebook post rabbit hole and they'd rather just think of their parents as the people they were when they were kids, y'know?

POLLY JEAN
Sure.

DAVID
So, in light of that, this was all a pleasant surprise.

POLLY JEAN

That's a good way of looking at it.

DAVID

So... What's up?

POLLY JEAN

What?

DAVID

What's. Up.

POLLY JEAN

... Oh, I see, you're one of those people who like to uh... "Get into it."

DAVID

Who me?

POLLY JEAN

...

DAVID

Come on...

POLLY JEAN

... The woman I love more than anything in the world has spent all day hanging out with a woman she has been obsessed with for years.

DAVID

Obsessed?

POLLY JEAN

Absolutely... She is brilliant, and funny, and mean in all the ways she likes and... The whole thing makes me feel a little bit small.

DAVID

Polly Jean. Look at you. You think you're the consolation prize.

POLLY JEAN

A little bit. Yes. Sort of. I'm glad we were able to show up and prevent your universe from self-destructing and all but, there's a part of me that can't wait for this day to be over.

DAVID

So she's like Ava? A theoretical physicist?

POLLY JEAN

Astrophysicist.

DAVID

Did she love it?

POLLY JEAN

Oh yes. More than anything.

DAVID

And then she met you.

POLLY JEAN

Yes.

DAVID

And she met you and then there was a choice. Keep the career she loves or be with you.

POLLY JEAN

... Yes.

DAVID

What'd she pick?

POLLY JEAN

... I think that's an overly-simplistic way of looking at things.

DAVID

Oh yes. The world is complicated.

POLLY JEAN

The world is complicated.

DAVID

You know, I watch that old man, all day, bring Ava things. Sandwiches and coffee and sharpened pencils. There's a neon sign above his head telling everyone what's going on, but we can't talk about it because it's just too complicated.

POLLY JEAN

Hm. I see that as pretty simple actually.

DAVID

Do tell.

POLLY JEAN

I know Ava a little bit. She basically raised herself. Put herself through school, created her own curriculum for all her degrees. People who grow up like that, completely on their own terms, they end up having a hard time being told what to do. And they have a very hard time letting other people do things for them. Because it implies they can't do it for themselves...

(MORE)

POLLY JEAN (CONT'D)

She allows him to bring her things all day. What your dad doesn't realize is that for Ava, that's the equivalent of wearing a pretty dress and putting on perfume and twirling a parasol. It's pretty simple, they just don't know it.

DAVID

Well then, it sounds to me like it's a situation that they just *think* is complicated but actually it's quite simple. Where have I heard that before?

POLLY JEAN

Okay, that's enough out of you.

IN THE KITCHEN WITH THE MUCKLEWAINS, JEREMIAH, AND GLORIA.

ZEBULON

Now, I do not mean to besmirch the name of Tennessee.

EFFIE

That's what he always says right before he besmirches the name of Tennessee.

ZEBULON

I am simply proud of the way that Arkansas has done right by preserving our folk traditions and agriculture. From our pottery to our rug hooks to our watermelons.

GLORIA

Watermelons?

ZEBULON

Nothing like a Cave City Watermelon, Gloria.

JEREMIAH

I'm a bit partial to my state that created some of the greatest music ever written, myself, though nothing sets the nation on fire like a nice hooked rug.

ZEBULON

I'll have you know I've hooked many a rug that could make a shack look like Versailles.

JEREMIAH

I'm sure you have but I can walk into any joint in the world and hear some music made right there in Memphis.

EFFIE

We've played all sorts of music from Tennessee, dear.

ZEBULON

Well, we've got lots of air time. Have to fill it with something, don't we?

JEREMIAH

Please forgive the Appalacian-Ozark aggression, Gloria, it's been going on for generations.

ZEBULON

Patsy Montana, born right there in Hot Springs, don't tell me about music!

GLORIA

You've got some pretty good knife skills there, Mr. Producer.

JEREMIAH

Thank you. A lot of my life has involved "waiting to hear". You learn to fill the time with whatever you can. Actors go to the gym, producers learn how to cook. Nice to be in a kitchen again.

GLORIA

So all you guys have over there is popcorn and hotdogs?

JEREMIAH

We also have nachos and candy.

GLORIA

Aha.

JEREMIAH

We have to get a little creative. You'd be surprised the amount of things you can cook on a hot dog roller.

GLORIA

... Ever regret it?

JEREMIAH

Oh, the dreaded "R" word.

GLORIA

No?

JEREMIAH

No. No, I don't think I do. I think back to that moment I first walked in the door of the theater. Did I have any idea what I was in for? No, I did not. It was an abduction, in the strictest sense. But then again, when those two young filmmakers knocked on the door of the grocery store, I suppose that was an abduction as well.

(MORE)

JEREMIAH (CONT'D)

Once I saw them I really had no choice. And perhaps that's all life is, just a series of abductions. Being stolen from one life to the next. I suppose I could've refused somehow, but you don't produce movies without knowing your Joseph Campbell. The call to adventure. When the hero refuses the call to adventure they make themselves in need of a hero. I was having none of that. Just ask your evangelists over there. All those prophets and holy men. Very few of them chose it. It happened to them.

EFFIE

That's true enough. Time and again a great divinity will reach down from the clouds and call you up to a new life. First reaction is always "Who me?" "Are they talking about me? Must be another." But it's not for us to decide.

ZEBULON

At times, Effie and myself have felt like a cork in the ocean, haven't we dear? But then, the things we've seen. The places we've been brought to. It's a mysterious alchemy, that. But one that needs no arguing with, I find.

GLORIA

Yeah...

JEREMIAH

... I know what you're thinking. "Is it all over now?" Right?

GLORIA

Yeah, I guess I am.

JEREMIAH

... We don't have to be brought to other worlds, Gloria. We can make them for ourselves.

CASPAR

Hey all.

GLORIA

What's up?

CASPAR

The smart people are officially done talking.

GLORIA

... Okay. Okay let's go.

WE MOVE TO THE PARKING LOT.

MARGUERITE

At the very beginning of this universe and any universe we've been to, something happened. Before even one second had elapsed in this universe, the value of something called the Higgs Field, changed. We don't know why it happened or how. All we know is that when the value of the Higgs Field changed, it made everything in this universe possible. The universe went from a lifeless thing to a boundless explosion of energy. One day, this universe will return to this lifeless thing. Luckily, because we showed up when we did, that day is now far off in the future.

AVA

Things work and then they don't. And the universe moves on. And I'm afraid that's what's happened to the diner. Whatever complicated system we're a part of, it fixed itself. And it did so without the diner. And now it's moved on, leaving us with... with just a diner. I'm sorry. I know we all had-

GLORIA

Ava. You can stop. I know you're just doing this little presentation for me. I appreciate it. But do you know how many times I've had to come to terms with all this being over in the last few months?... This place changed all of us, and I'm grateful for it. But you can all stop having little meetings behind my back about how you're going to break the news to me.

CASPAR

I'm sorry, Gloria.

GLORIA

It's time to get on with what happens next. As for me... I'm staying here. This place is mine now. It feels like mine. And I can't really imagine being somewhere else. It doesn't travel through the cosmos anymore... but it's mine. So, what happens next is really a question for all of you.

JEREMIAH

There's plenty of room at The Paradise if you'd like to hop aboard. Your expertise would be greatly appreciated.

GLORIA

You can also stay here if you want. Hop on a spaceship with Leif. Hell, go to St. Kitts or something, I don't know. Do whatever it is normal people do. But it looks like this is our last stop. So the choice is yours...

(MORE)

GLORIA (CONT'D)

and I'm going to go back to the kitchen because our guests have not had a real meal in a long time. Everybody inside.

DOOR CHIME.

PARADISE LEIF

What are you going to do?

LEIF

I don't know.

PARADISE LEIF

You could totally come with us but I mean...

LEIF

Not really our style.

PARADISE LEIF

Nah.

LEIF

I mean, there's only so many of us out there.

PARADISE LEIF

We've got to spread ourselves around.

LEIF

Exactly.

DAVID

Is she going to be okay?

CASPAR

Yeah, she'll be fine. Just another chapter in the book of life, right?

DAVID

I guess I'm going to have to get used to you being around now.

CASPAR

Oh yes. And I've got some catching up to do, so get ready.

DAVID

Oh, God.

CASPAR

I'm going to be calling you for tech support. You're going to have to bring your boyfriends to meet me. There's going to be slideshows of my trip to the Grand Canyon.

DAVID

Slide shows aren't a thing anymore.

CASPAR

I'm bringing 'em back, David!

DAVID

On second thought, maybe hop on that spaceship.

CASPAR

OW!

KAZI IS BACK IN CASPAR'S HEAD. SHE IS REPEATING THE NUMBERS AGAIN.

DAVID

What's wrong?

CASPAR

Goddamn it.

AVA

Is it happening again?

CASPAR

Yes, I thought she was done.

AVA

I'll get a pencil.

CASPAR

Oh, don't fucking bother. Kazi?! Kazi can you hear me?! I can't fucking help you, alright? You're on your own! I can't do anything. Enough already!

DAVID

What the fuck?

CASPAR

Would you leave me alone? Please?!

AVA

I take it he hasn't gotten to the part of the story where he's hearing voices in his head.

DAVID

Voices?

CASPAR

Just give me a minute, okay?

DAVID

Voices?

AVA
Stop me if you've heard this one before, David...
Three sisters walk into a diner...

INSIDE THE DINER.

MARGUERITE
Hey there.

POLLY JEAN
Hello.

MARGUERITE
I brought you tacos.

POLLY JEAN
Thanks.

MARGUERITE SITS.

MARGUERITE
... Rough news about this place, huh?

POLLY JEAN
Yes. Rough news.

MARGUERITE
I know this hasn't been what we expected, but,
thinking back now, I don't know what I would do
with myself if we weren't shooting through the
cosmos everyday.

POLLY JEAN
Yes, I'm sure it's very rough for them.

MARGUERITE
... What's wrong?

POLLY JEAN
Just ask. Just get it over with.

MARGUERITE
What?

POLLY JEAN
The only time you bring me food is when you're
going to ask me for something.

MARGUERITE
That's not true at all.

POLLY JEAN
You're going to ask Ava to come with us aren't you?

MARGUERITE

... No.

POLLY JEAN

Would you just ask her so I can start getting used to it, please?

MARGUERITE

Getting used to it.

POLLY JEAN

I'll be fine. I will. I just can't stand you talking around it.

MARGUERITE

Where is this coming from?

POLLY JEAN

Where is this coming from? Seriously?

MARGUERITE

Baby, I hadn't seen her in ages, I didn't know if I was ever going to see her again, did you want me to ignore the fact that she showed up?

POLLY JEAN

You're different around her... She brings out a side of you that I just can't bring out. I'd like to but I can't and I've been watching it all day and now I'm going to have to do that every day.

MARGUERITE

I wasn't going to ask her.

POLLY JEAN

Don't change the plan now that I'm upset.

MARGUERITE

I'm not.

POLLY JEAN

I'm sorry that I spent so much of my life being a boring, okay? I was a boring housewife and I have no idea why I did it. I didn't mean to.

MARGUERITE

And now we're on to this topic.

POLLY JEAN

I just... I love that brain of yours so much and I just can't... It's like I can't get your brain to be interested in me.

MARGUERITE

My brain is all kinds of interested in you.

POLLY JEAN

Not that way. Not like when Ava's around.

MARGUERITE

Oh Jesus Christ, you know what? It's like I'm not even here in the argument. I'm right here, P.J., and I'm telling you that I was not going to ask her to come with us.

POLLY JEAN

I know you're thinking about all the work you could do together.

MARGUERITE

Oh goddamn it. I love you so much and also I just want to break a plate over your head. Get up.

POLLY JEAN

What?

MARGUERITE

Get up.

POLLY JEAN

We just sat down.

MARGUERITE

Get up. You think I was going to ask Ava to come with us, that's not what I was going to ask. Come here.

MARGUERITE DRAGS POLLY ACROSS THE DINER.

POLLY JEAN

Where are we going?

MARGUERITE KNOCKS ON THE RADIO LIKE IT'S A DOOR.

MARGUERITE

Hello there? Radio people? Is anybody home?

ZEBULON

Um. Yes, hello?

MARGUERITE

I would like you to marry us.

ZEBULON

You would?

MARGUERITE

There, okay? I was going to ask you to marry me. There are two Baptist ministers in this radio and I know you have a nostalgia thing because your grandfather was a devout baptist, and I, like a scientist, did the math... You're right, I do only bring you food when I'm going to ask you to do something but this was the thing. Marriage. Alright?

POLLY JEAN

You're kidding.

MARGUERITE

I am being so fucking real right now, Polly Jean. Nuptials. Boom. It's happening. Get ready.

POLLY JEAN

Get ready?

JEREMIAH

Is this really happening?

EFFIE

Hold up there, y'all. See, how this is supposed to unfold is: there is a proposal, then acceptance of said proposal and then we move on to the saying of vows. Y'all are skipping a step or two.

MARGUERITE

Fine. Right. Okay... Polly. Please. For the love of God. Marry me before I lose my mind.

ZEBULON

That's... alright that's a bit of an odd one but it does meet the criteria.

EFFIE

And now step two.

PARADISE LEIF

Is this really happening?

POLLY JEAN

... Why do I get the feeling you're doing this as a dare?

MARGUERITE

It is a dare. I'm daring you to marry me. C'mon. What are you, chicken?

POLLY JEAN

I'm not a chicken, you're a chicken.

EFFIE

Now, I'm going to need a little more poetry, y'all, let's really do some work right here. I'm not expecting anyone to be Beaudiliare or nothing but let's put some sauce on it.

MARGUERITE

Fine... You are every universe. You are time and space. I revolve around you, every day. I live inside you. I am, with my very last particle, begging you to marry me. Please, Polly.

EFFIE

Alright, I believe that'll pass muster. Now over to you, Ma'am.

POLLY JEAN

... Yes.

ZEBULON

Oh my! Here we go, dear! Step lively!

THERE IS A FLURRY OF ACTION INSIDE THE RADIO.

EFFIE

What time of year is it? Are we doing spring or summer?

ZEBULON

Spring, dear! Where have I put my Organ collection?

EFFIE

It's under the teapot. We need a witness, Jeremiah, get your Volunteer butt over here and volunteer yourself.

JEREMIAH

My goodness, it's really happening.

EFFIE

Dear, I've got summer and winter but no spring.

ZEBULON

Zounds! I was making revisions, it's in the study beneath Keach's Catechism!

EFFIE

I've told you to put the sermons back when you're done with them.

ZEBULON

A thousand apologies, dear! Here we are, a bit of music, no not that one, where is it, where is it... Aha!

PARADISE LEIF

Where are we having the bachelor party?

MARGUERITE

Can you do it in thirty seconds?

POLLY JEAN

You know, technically I'm not even divorced yet.

MARGUERITE

That just makes it hotter.

EFFIE

Found it. Here it lays. Page one. Let's get a move on.

ZEBULON

And I put down the needle.

ORGAN MUSIC PLAYS.

ZEBULON (CONT'D)

Dearly beloved, we are gathered here today in the presence of God and these witnesses to join these two in holy matrimony.

Marriage is a sacred covenant, instituted by God, and not to be entered into lightly. It is a union of two hearts, two minds, and two spirits, bonded together by love and commitment.

The Bible tells us in Ephesians "Husbands—" oh, now, one moment—

EFFIE

Just cross that part off there, move that part down.

ZEBULON

Yes.

EFFIE

Skip over that business there.

ZEBULON

Yes, good.

EFFIE

Onward.

ZEBULON

Love each other, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her."

As you prepare to make your vows to one another, remember that your marriage should be built on a foundation of faith, trust, and mutual respect.

(MORE)

ZEBULON (CONT'D)

As you journey through life together, there will be times of joy and times of sorrow, times of plenty and times of want.

And now, I ask you to join your right hands and declare your intentions to enter into the covenant of marriage.

EFFIE

Do you, Polly Jean, take Marguerite to be your partner in life. To be the boiler of her grits and the juicer of her lemons.

POLLY JEAN

I beg your pardon?

MARGUERITE

Just say yes.

POLLY JEAN

... Yes.

ZEBULON

And do you, Marguerite, swear to be the protector and keeper of her honor, her sword in the darkness, her unbending mast in the storm.

MARGUERITE

With every fucking fiber of my being.

ZEBULON

Then let it ring forth until the end of time. By the power vested in me by God and the great state of Arkansas. I pronounce thee wed.

LEIF, PARADISE LEIF, AND JEREMIAH ALL CLAP.

JEREMIAH

Congratulations!

PARADISE LEIF

You two are fucking nuts!

MARGUERITE

I know!

JEREMIAH

I'll go tell everyone the news.

ZEBULON

Let's get a time on that, dear.

EFFIE

Bout a minute-forty.

ZEBULON

A new record.

EFFIE

I know we can get it down to under a minute.

ZEBULON

Next time, for certain.

AS THE MUSIC PLAYS WE MOVE TO THE PARKING LOT. DAVID AND CASPAR ARE WAITING FOR EVERYONE.

DAVID

So, you didn't remember them until a few days ago?

CASPAR

Yeah, that's how it works, apparently. I don't directly remember things that happened but things can remind me. And then when I do remember, it all comes at me in a rush, it's really disorienting.

DAVID

A hundred and seventy-three years.

CASPAR

A hundred and seventy-three years.

DAVID

So, there could be all kinds of stories like this locked up in your head and you would never know it.

CASPAR

Yeah. I think this one's a little different, though.

DAVID

Why?

CASPAR

I think I met them early on, when I hadn't been here that long. I thought Effie and Zebulon were in my head. I thought I was insane. I was scared a lot... For the first time I genuinely helped someone. For the first time I felt like there was some purpose to this place, or at least there could be... I think if I hadn't met them, I might not have made it.

DAVID

And now they need your help.

CASPAR

Apparently. But whatever thing they're using to broadcast into my brain, it only goes one way.

(MORE)

CASPAR (CONT'D)

So I can't tell them they're barking up the wrong tree. I'm just an Earthling now. Just a guy who used to work at the DMV. Whatever mess they're in, they're going to have to get themselves out of it.

JEREMIAH EXITS THE DINER WITH EVERYONE ELSE.

GLORIA

Don't miss the train, everyone. Did everyone take some tacos?

JEREMIAH

I think we've got enough tacos to feed a galaxy, Gloria.

GLORIA

Okay, good.

JEREMIAH

It's been amazing to meet you all.

GLORIA

It's been so great. Thanks for stepping in to save the universe.

JEREMIAH

You sure you're going to be okay here?

GLORIA

Yeah. This old girl has taken me everywhere. I can't abandon her now.

JEREMIAH

I know the feeling.

GLORIA

Hey, you two, a little heads up about the wedding next time, I could've made a cake.

MARGUERITE

Sorry, Gloria. I had to move fast before she changed her mind.

AVA

You couldn't have called me in from the parking lot?

MARGUERITE

You hate weddings.

AVA

That's true.

MARGUERITE

... So what's the next step?

AVA

I don't know. I found this place before, I'm sure I can find another one.

CASPAR

You have five pinball machines in there.

POLLY JEAN

We do. Leif is very frustrated by my high score on Earthshaker.

CASPAR

You have Earthshaker?!

POLLY JEAN

We do.

CASPAR

That's the Grapes of Wrath of pinball machines.

POLLY JEAN

It really is beautiful.

CASPAR

I can't believe I could've been playing Earthshaker this whole time.

POLLY JEAN

When California and Nevada split apart-

CASPAR

And it makes a rail for the ball?

POLLY JEAN

Amazing.

CASPAR

Is it one of the censored ones?

POLLY JEAN

No, the girl's voice still says "Bitchin'."

CASPAR

I'm so jealous. I can't believe it.

POLLY JEAN

We have Cactus Canyon, too.

CASPAR

The original or the remake?

POLLY JEAN
The original.

CASPAR
What?!

MARGUERITE
It's nice when they play together.

AVA
Shut it.

MARGUERITE
Baby, let's go, it's our wedding night.

AVA
Remember, you two, I want some grandchildren.

POLLY JEAN
Bye, Ava.

PARADISE LEIF
Here, take these.

LEIF
What are these? Pagers?

PARADISE LEIF
Just on the outside. I'm working on something.

LEIF
What is it?

PARADISE LEIF
I figured out a way to clone the signal of the
Paradise. They work like signal repeaters.

LEIF
Okay, that's cool. Why, though?

PARADISE LEIF
Honestly, I have no idea. I figured out how to make
them and now I'm looking for a good use case, maybe
you can figure something out.

LEIF
Alright, I'll see what I can do.

PARADISE LEIF
Tell BertBert I said hi.

LEIF
Okay, you too.

PARADISE LEIF

... Hey man, I'm sorry, I've got to say something.

LEIF

What's up?

PARADISE LEIF

... This whole thing doesn't seem right to me.

LEIF

How do you mean?

PARADISE LEIF

Marguerite and Ava are saying that your diner got knocked out of commission and now that the multi-verse has bridged the gap, it doesn't need your diner anymore.

LEIF

Essentially.

PARADISE LEIF

Tell me honestly... A diner... a movie theater... do we really think this is how all of existence works?

LEIF

Honestly... no.

PARADISE LEIF

Exactly... Imagine you're in Mesopotamia.

LEIF

Okay.

PARADISE LEIF

You're a farmer. You grow your crops on the banks of the Tigris. You look at that river and you think "Look at this beautiful river. Isn't it great that this river makes my farm so bountiful." But let's say that you, a Mesopotamian farmer, have a little engineer inside you that says "Yes, this river is beautiful, but what if I had canals between my crop rows that the river would feed? The river flows through the canals and then back into the river... What if I could take the natural world and just... give it a little polish, a mod or two. Where's the harm in that?"

LEIF

Sure, yeah.

PARADISE LEIF

And now imagine you're the same type of guy. But this time it's, say, twelve billion years ago. You look up and you see the ebb and flow of existence and you think to yourself: "That's beautiful. But, y'know, what if I helped it out a little bit."

LEIF

You think someone used technology, to "mod" the multiverse?

PARADISE LEIF

Not technology the way you and I think of it. I'm talking about dimensional compression, man. I'm talking about a battleship inside of an atom. I'm talking about a thing that sleeps in particles and then, at the right place, at the right time, the right words are said... It unfolds before you.

LEIF

You think that diner, and that movie theater... that someone made them. That someone built canals in the fabric of space time?

PARADISE LEIF

Every organism changes the environment it lives in. What makes a multiverse so different?... It's just a fucking Cadillac, Leif... Think about it, okay?

LEIF

Yeah. I will. Thanks for the weird pagers.

PARADISE LEIF

Thanks for the tacos.

EVERYONE HAS GONE INSIDE THE PARADISE EXCEPT FOR JEREMIAH.

JEREMIAH

Y'all, it has been an eye-opening day. A beautiful one. I believe in you all, and I know that you'll be able to make it through this time and onward to more adventures. We'll be thinking of you as we criss-cross the sky. And remember, when you really need us, we're always just right around the corner.

GLORIA

Goodbye, Paradise.

JEREMIAH CLOSES THE DOOR.

CASPAR

Well. Here we all are. I am just now realizing that David has had the longest day in the history of mankind.

DAVID

Jesus Christ. It's only been a day.

THEY ALL START LAUGHING.

CASPAR

It's like that moment in Die Hard.

LEIF

Welcome to the party pal!

THE PARADISE STARTS TO SPIN UP. THE DOOR TO THE PARADISE
OPENS AGAIN.

PARADISE LEIF

Shit! Leif!

LEIF

What?

PARADISE LEIF

It's just a fucking Cadillac!

LEIF

Yeah, I heard you.

PARADISE LEIF

When do you need two Cadillacs?

LEIF

What?

THE PARADISE VANISHES.

DAVID

What is he talking about?

GLORIA

Two Cadillacs?

CASPAR

When do you need two Cadillacs?

AVA

You need two Cadillacs when one Cadillac simply
will not do, am I right?

WE HEAR A SOUND IN THE SKY. IT'S A SOUND THAT CASPAR
RECOGNIZES.

GLORIA

What was that?

CASPAR
Mucklewains?

EFFIE
We heard it.

ZEBULON
And I'm afraid we recognize it.

LEIF
What is it?

CASPAR
... It's them.

LEIF
The mystery men?

CASPAR
Yes. Everybody inside right now. Let's go. David
follow me.

THEY RUSH INSIDE THE DINER.

CASPAR (CONT'D)
Mucklewains, tell them what's going on. David, out
back right now.

DAVID
Where are we going?

CASPAR
Right now!

CASPAR AND DAVID HEAD OUT THE BACK DOOR.

EFFIE
Listen up, y'all. These are the mysterious beings
who accosted us way back when.

ZEBULON
You will hear three separate noises and they will
seem to drop right out of the sky.

LEIF
I should get Peter.

EFFIE
There's no need, Leif.

ZEBULON
We saw terrifying weaponry used against them to no
avail.

(MORE)

ZEBULON (CONT'D)

Keep yourselves hidden and perhaps Effie and I may find a way to distract them or redirect their attentions elsewhere.

LEIF

Where did Caspar go?

EFFIE

I imagine he's telling David to get gone.

OUT BACK.

DAVID

You want me to go?

CASPAR

I need you to go, David. These guys are very dangerous, I can't have you here.

DAVID

We should all go, then.

CASPAR

... They're probably looking for me. I tossed a few of them in the deep freeze a long time ago, and I guess me staying put has allowed them to catch up with me. You've got to go.

DAVID

I'm not going to just leave after all this.

CASPAR

David. All that time I was out there looking for you, all those years almost losing my mind, I just needed to know you were okay. Please don't deny me that now.

DAVID

...

CASPAR

Look, either Leif or Ava will think of something or the Mucklewains will do something crazy, we always get out of it somehow. Go home. Stay there. I'll call you as soon as the danger's passed, okay?

DAVID

... Don't fucking get killed after all of this.

CASPAR

Hey. Nobody dies. Go, right now.

BACK IN THE DINER. OUT IN THE PARKING LOT THREE OF THE MYSTERIOUS FIGURES DROP OUT OF THE SKY AND WAIT. CASPAR RE-ENTERS.

GLORIA

Who are they, Leif?

LEIF

No idea.

CASPAR

There they are.

ZEBULON

They've made no movements to come inside.

EFFIE

They're just waiting there.

GLORIA

Did David get out?

CASPAR

Yeah, he's safe.

AVA

So, what now?

MYSTERIOUS BEING

Inside the structure. Make yourselves known.

GLORIA

Oh no, I don't think we'll be making ourselves known.

LEIF

What kind of idiots do they think we are?

MYSTERIOUS BEING

Elect a representative and move them to the structure's exterior.

LEIF

Elect a representative?

EFFIE

That's a new notion of theirs.

CASPAR

Yeah, they didn't do that last time.

GLORIA

Do they just want to talk to us?

AVA

(Laughing.)
Heh. Dummies.

CASPAR

Why are you laughing?

AVA

... They don't know what's going on either.

CASPAR

What do you mean?

AVA

They're trying to get us to tell them.

CASPAR

What are you talking about?

AVA

Hey... uh... You're great.

CASPAR

What?

AVA

Nothing just... you're great.

CASPAR

I'm so confused right now.

AVA

Trust me, okay?

CASPAR

Ava.

AVA PICKS THE RADIO UP FROM THE COUNTER.

AVA

Let's go, Mucklewains.

GLORIA

What is she doing?

EFFIE

Ava, what have you got up your sleeve?

AVA

Just fermions and bosons, Mucklewains.

LEIF

What the fuck!?

AVA EXITS INTO THE PARKING LOT. THE MYSTERIOUS BEINGS WAIT.

AVA

Hi there.

MYSTERIOUS BEING

...

AVA

If you're here for the wedding, I'm afraid you missed it. RSVPing is very important in polite society.

MYSTERIOUS BEING

Are you the elected representative?

AVA

Yes. That's me. I am the leader.

EFFIE

Ava, I sure hope you know what you're doing.

MYSTERIOUS BEING

Expedite to processing.

THEY GRAB AVA.

AVA

Hey, watch the meat hooks there, buddy.

THE MYSTERIOUS BEINGS, AVA, AND THE MUCKLEWAINS ALL DISAPPEAR. THE DOOR TO THE DINER FLINGS OPEN.

LEIF

Oh shit!

GLORIA

They took them!

CASPAR

Ava, goddamnit!

LEIF

Now what? Shit!

CASPAR

Why the fuck did she come out here?

GLORIA

She pretended like she was the leader and they took her.

CASPAR

Why did she do that?

LEIF

We have to assume she had some sort of fucked up plan.

CASPAR

Goddamn her and her fucked up plans.

GLORIA

We cannot afford to be down a physicist and two Mucklewains right now.

LEIF

What the hell are we going to do?

THE "PAGERS" THAT PARADISE LEIF GAVE TO LEIF ALL START BEEPING.

CASPAR

What is that sound?

LEIF

Huh. It's these things Leif gave me.

CASPAR

What are they?

LEIF

Well, he said they're like signal repeaters, they clone the diner's signal. Why are they... Oh shit.

GLORIA

What?

LEIF

You know when you need two Cadillacs?... When one of them has a dead battery.

THE AIR CRACKS AND THE DINER IS FINALLY, ONCE AGAIN, TRAVELING THROUGH SPACETIME.

GLORIA

Oh my God.

LEIF

They gave us a fucking jump start. Like a goddamn Cadillac.

GLORIA

Thank... God.

CASPAR

Okay... we're back up.

GLORIA

Oh no... Caspar... David.

CASPAR

Yeah... he's going to be okay... I'm glad I got to see him again... he's a great guy...

GLORIA

Maybe we can make our way back to him somehow.

CASPAR

Yeah... sure...

LEIF

Hey Gloria.

GLORIA

What?

LEIF

How about you go check the deep freeze?

GLORIA

Oh my God.

THE DEEP FREEZE. GLORIA PUSHES THROUGH THE SNOW.

GLORIA (CONT'D)

Hello!

SLOWLY WE BEGIN TO HEAR THE BARKS OF THE K-POP WOLVES.

GLORIA (CONT'D)

There you are you little fuckers!

THE WOLVES SWARM GLORIA.

GLORIA (CONT'D)

Look at you! Look at all of you! Okay... okay... so much licking! Look at you guys I missed you so much!

GLORIA (CONT'D)

Shit. Okay, okay, listen up, listen up everyone. We're going to have all kinds of time together and it's going to be great, but for now I have to go... because mommy's got to go fuck up some bad guys again, okay?

WE BEGIN TO HEAR THE SOUND OF PUPPIES.

GLORIA (CONT'D)

Wait a minute... wait a minute... Puppies?! What the hell? Goddamn, which one of you is a girl?!

OUTSIDE THE DINER. WE ARE STILL TRAVELING THROUGH SPACETIME.
LEIF, GLORIA, AND CASPAR ALL MAKE THEIR WAY TO THE ROOF.

LEIF

The crew is down to half, we've got an apparent army of oogies on our trail and there are still three sisters out there that apparently need our help. Not good odds.

GLORIA

Well let's get up on the roof and try and come up with a plan.

CASPAR

I really have no idea how to plan around something like this anymore.

GLORIA

We'll think of something... Oh no.

LEIF

Oh shit.

CASPAR

What?

DAVID IS LAYING IN LEIF'S HAMMOCK.

DAVID

The reception sucks out here.

GLORIA

David.

CASPAR

David, what the fuck did you do?

DAVID

So... tell me more about these sisters.

THE END.