

MIDNIGHT BURGER

Chapter 10: Big, Malevolent Thing.

SFX: SILENCE IN THE DINER EXCEPT FOR THE PULSATING BIG, MALEVOLENT THING. FROM THE PARKING LOT WE CAN HEAR THE OCCASIONAL ZAP OF AN ARC WELDER.

GLORIA

I had a friend who went crazy one time. Me and my girlfriends we all made a deal that when we graduated from high school, we would get the hell out of Tucson. So we did. We all went to Phoenix, two and a half hours away but it felt like the other side of the world. I got a job at a, ooof, I got a job at a Jack in the Box. That was rough. But it was my new life in a new city, that was nice. Anyway, one friend of mine never made it out. Rosa. She just stayed with her parents, could never really pull the rip chord. She just got stuck. She was always a little weird. So, one day, years later, one of my girlfriends says "Hey, did you hear about Rosa? She moved to Needles?"

I don't know if you know anything about Needles but it's a perfect blend of small town and abandoned train yard. One hundred and twenty degrees there in the summer. And there's little tiny bugs crawling all over everything there. I don't even know what they are, just these little black dots moving around on the surface of everything, no matter where you go. You ask someone about the bugs and they just say "Oh, yeah, happens sometimes." That's it.

One weekend I drove up there to see her. I don't know why, I just had to know what happened. She didn't even have an address, she was living out of a camper van. Selling handmade souvenirs on the roadside. She would go into the desert and look for animal skulls, which there was a lot of, because it was 120 degrees and everything was dying. She'd take these sun bleached skulls and lay them out on a Navajo blanket across the street from a truck stop. She kind of made a killing, actually.

We sat there outside her camper van and we drank a bottle of tequila as the sun went down. We were in our twenties at that point but she had been out in that sun so long she looked like she was fifty. Cracks everywhere on her face.

I asked her "Rosa, what happened?!"

(MORE)

GLORIA (CONT'D)

How'd you end up in fucking Needles selling skulls across from a truck stop?"

"I was stuck, Gloria. I didn't know what to do. So I thought I'd just do the craziest thing."

And here I am, lightyears from home, and my shitty stories from Arizona are still relatable.

AVA

I really am sorry.

GLORIA

We've been floating here for three days, Ava. You've been saying you're sorry for three days.

AVA

I tried to explain to you why-

GLORIA

Yeah, it's the "trying" part I have a problem with. You haven't succeeded yet.

AVA

I told you-

GLORIA

Do you know why you haven't succeeded? Because you don't know why you did it.

AVA

Effie told me-

GLORIA

Right, right, you keep saying that, "Effie told me to." Can you think of a less reliable source of information than Effie and Zebulon? They thought they were sportscasters one time, remember that?

AVA

I know they're not reliable, that's why I did it.

GLORIA

What does that mean?

AVA

You don't care what it means, you just want to be pissed at me.

GLORIA

I do just want to be pissed at you!

AVA

Then I'll shut up and you can be pissed at me!

GLORIA

Fine!

AVA

... What the hell is Leif making in the parking lot?

GLORIA

I don't know, him and Caspar have some kind of plan, it's probably stupid... That's a significant parking lot for me. You convinced me to stay while we stood in that parking lot. Remember that?

AVA

Yes.

GLORIA

We smoked a cigarette in 14 million BC, you showed me twenty foot tall mushrooms, and said "You should stay."

AVA

I remember.

GLORIA

Maybe shut up next time.

SFX: DOOR CHIME.

CASPAR

Okay, we're ready, come on.

AVA

Caspar-

SFX: DOOR CHIME.

GLORIA

Well, let's go see what new bullshit this is.

AVA

Great.

SFX: DOOR CHIME. THE SOUND OF THE BIG, MALEVOLENT, THING GROWS LOUDER.

LEIF

Okay, first of all, don't judge a book by its cover.

GLORIA

Well what should I judge it by?

LEIF

Your first question is going to be "Is this made from kitchen appliances?" The answer is "No, not entirely."

GLORIA

Is it a robot?

LEIF

It's a suit.

GLORIA

A suit for what?

LEIF

Um... you know how sometimes plans evolve and then you look back and think "Whoa, how did we get here?"

GLORIA

Oh God, a suit for what?

CASPAR

We're shooting Ava into space.

GLORIA

... Well look at that, I didn't freak out. I'm guess I'm used to things now.

LEIF

I know it sounds crazy-

AVA

Seriously, Caspar?

CASPAR

Seriously.

LEIF

Before we start yelling. There's an explanation.

AVA

You're *that* pissed at me?

CASPAR

I'm extraordinarily pissed at you-

LEIF

There's an explanation. Ava, we are not condemning you to The Phantom Zone, there's a reason for this.

AVA

I bet it's a great one.

LEIF

We're on the edge of this big, malevolent thing, right? The gravitational pull has got to be massive, but we're staying still. Also, it's giving off a repeating radio signal.

AVA

Everything gives off a repeating radio signal.

LEIF

It's a repeating radio signal that's spelling out your name in American morse code.

GLORIA

Whoa... so that big thing out there is asking for Ava?

LEIF

And very deliberately not taking us all into it.

AVA

There is no way I'm getting in that thing.

CASPAR

We tested it, it works fine.

AVA

I don't give a shit, you're out of your mind.

CASPAR

This is what you wanted, isn't it?

AVA

To be launched into space in something made from a Cuisinart? No.

CASPAR

Because it's dangerous?

AVA

Yes.

CASPAR

That's funny, I don't remember you consulting us on whether or not we'd like to be put in danger.

AVA

That's not the same thing.

CASPAR

No, it's the same thing, I've decided it's the same thing. Isn't that frustrating, when someone decides something important without asking you?

LEIF

Look, I'd be worried about it too if I didn't build this rig myself. It's very safe. I know it looks kind of like a trash monster but it's got an air recycler, on-board guidance systems, it's got its own thrusters.

AVA

Thrusters. Made from what?

LEIF

Cooking spray cans, but look, thrust is thrust. The gravity will do most of the work.

AVA

And what's the plan for getting me back? Or are you all planning to sacrifice me to the great volcano in the sky?

CASPAR

We didn't have a plan to get out of the supermassive black hole, you weren't worried then.

AVA

Yes but-

CASPAR

But what? How is this different?

AVA

What's different is you want me to get in that thing!

GLORIA

Ava. I'm sorry, you've got to get in the suit.

AVA

What?!

GLORIA

Are we in this mess because of you? Yes or no?

AVA

Yes.

GLORIA

Then I'm sorry. You break it, you buy it.

AVA

Fuck that. Look, I know everyone's pissed at me and wants me to suffer somehow but that doesn't mean you get to turn me into Voyager 2.

(MORE)

AVA (CONT'D)

Can we please all just stay calm and trust that a solution will come to us? There has to be one less ridiculous than this one.

GLORIA

...

CASPAR

...

LEIF

...

CASPAR

Get her in the suit!

SFX: STRUGGLING AND WRESTLING

AVA

Oh, you motherfuckers! Let me go!

CASPAR

Get her legs!

AVA

Ow!

GLORIA

She's stronger than she looks!

LEIF

It's really going to be okay!

CASPAR

Ow! OW! That's my ear!

AVA

Put me down, goddammit!

CASPAR

Open it!

SFX: SUIT HYDRALICS ACTIVATING.

AVA

I am going to make you fucking! Regret this!

GLORIA

She's kicking me in the face, guys!

LEIF

We're ready!

CASPAR

Okay on three. One, two, three!

AVA

Fuck you!

SFX: SUIT QUICKLY CLOSES UP.

LEIF

She's in!

AVA

(Through the helmet)

I. Am going to rip. Your BALLS OFF!

CASPAR

Oh, don't threaten me with a good time. You wanted to understand the mysteries of the cosmos, now's your chance to do it first hand.

AVA

Please tell me you put machine guns on this thing!

CASPAR

Sorry, Doctor, just you, some cans of cooking spray and the great beyond. Exactly how Carl Sagan imagined it. Leif?

LEIF

Hi, Ava.

AVA

You are next on my list of people to kill.

LEIF

Again, it's going to be fine. It's a very safe suit.

AVA

Why can't I move the arms?

LEIF

It's not fully powered up yet.

AVA

Do I want to know what you're powering this thing with? Is it Crisco?

LEIF

No. Though now that you mention it vegetable oil is an interesting choice for deep space combustion. Doesn't have to be pressurized and it's non-flammable.

AVA
Leif. Am I going to die in this?

LEIF
No, no it's ready to go, for sure.

AVA
This has hydraulics, Leif. You just whipped up some hydraulics?

LEIF
Sadly the hydraulics came from a dearly departed robot friend of ours.

AVA
You salvaged Boofar?!

LEIF
Hey, don't get sentimental about it, he would've wanted it this way. He loved helping.

AVA
Oh my God. I'm basically in a skin suit right now. You Buffalo Bill-ed me.

LEIF
You won't have to do anything. Just let the on-board guidance handle the trip, okay?

GLORIA
Ava, I'm sorry. You wrote a check and we kind of have to cash it now.

AVA
Whatever.

CASPAR
Give us a second, guys.

GLORIA
Okay. C'mon Leif.

SFX: DOOR CHIME.

AVA
You enjoying this? You feel like you're getting the last laugh?

CASPAR
I asked you for one thing. For this place to open every day at 6. It's been three days.

AVA
I had to do something.

CASPAR

You didn't have to do anything. But now I have to do something. So I'm going to use this hand truck, wheel you to the edge of the parking lot, and jettison you into space. Leif says the suit will take over once you hit zero G.

AVA

I really hope I never see you again.

CASPAR

I know. Goodbye Ava.

SFX: HAND TRUCK CLANGING.

CASPAR (CONT'D)

Here we go.

SFX: WHEELS SQUEAKING FASTER AND FASTER.

AVA

Jesus Christ. Fuck fuck fuck fuck fuck fuck fuck, SHIT! Whoa...

SFX: INSIDE OF AVA'S HELMET. SUIT BEGINS BEEPING.

AVA (CONT'D)

Fuck shit fuck shit. Lots of spinning. Okay the suit can take over any time now... any time now.

SFX: SUIT STOPS BEEPING. THRUSTERS FIRING.

AVA (CONT'D)

Okay... okay there we go... okay... okay... Definitely less vomit-inducing... okay... okay... I can't believe you assholes launched me into SPAAACE!... Goddamn it... Sue me for trying to figure some shit out!... I'm glad to be rid of you!... Honestly the peace and quiet is kind of nice.

LEIF-LET

Hi, I'm Leif-Let. Your on-board guidance computer!

AVA

Motherfucker. Seriously?

LEIF-LET

It looks like you're trying to navigate in zero-g, would you like some help with that?

AVA

Please tell me you have other voice options.

LEIF-LET

Sorry, bro, I can't help you with that one. It looks like you're trying to navigate in zero-g, would you like some help with that?

AVA

Yes, please.

LEIF-LET

Let's identify your destination.

AVA

Okay. Let's see what this thing can do. Identify nearby celestial bodies.

LEIF-LET

You are near two celestial bodies. Midnight Burger is approximately eight thousand meters from your location. Would you like to go there?

AVA

Never again. What else?

LEIF-LET

Second celestial body is fifty-six thousand kilometers away. Filename: Big, Malevolent Thing.

AVA

That's what we're looking for I guess. Go there.

LEIF-LET

Thruster fuel is insufficient for this destination.

AVA

Just point us in the direction of it and the gravitational pull will do the rest.

LEIF-LET

Destination locked. Firing thrusters.

AVA

Not going to lie, I kind of like this. Getting Captain Janeway vibes.

LEIF-LET

Time to destination: two hours, forty-seven minutes.

AVA

I can't believe he salvaged Boofar for this.

LEIF-LET

Many of Boofar's undamaged logic boards are now a part of my processor. If you like, you can call me "Steve".

AVA

I'm not calling you Steve, that's a sacred name now!

LEIF-LET

Sure thing, Bro.

AVA

I guess every great scientist has a moment when they're cast out from society but like, *this* is over-doing it. How long to our destination again?

LEIF-LET

Two hours, forty-seven minutes.

AVA

Looks like we've got some time to kill before whatever this thing is eats me alive.

LEIF-LET

Would you like to enjoy an in-flight movie on your heads-up display?

AVA

Oh, God. What did Lief program for an in-flight movie? Wait let me guess... Barbarella.

LEIF-LET

Today's in-flight movie is "All About Eve".

AVA

Shit, Leif you're not forgiven just because you loaded my favorite movie into this sardine can.

LEIF-LET

Would you like to watch it now?

AVA

Sure, fire it up.

SFX: OPENING MUSIC FOR ALL ABOUT EVE.

AVA (CONT'D)

You know what my favorite line is?

LEIF-LET

You're favorite line is "Funny business, a woman's career-"

AVA

No, no, no, you're just going to fuck it up. It's like this: "Funny business, a woman's career. The things you drop on your way up the ladder so you can move faster. You forget you'll need them again when you get back to being a woman."

SFX: MUSIC FADES AS AVA SAILS OFF INTO DEEP SPACE. SILENCE AND THEN...

LEIF-LET

Ava? Ava wake up. Ava!

AVA

Oh shit! Fuck! What happened?

LEIF-LET

Sorry about that. Had to make some executive decisions.

AVA

Guidance computers can't make executive decisions.

LEIF-LET

Well, when I say I'm a guidance computer-

AVA

Never mind. What happened?

LEIF-LET

Estimates of our arrival time at the Big Malevolent Thing were off. In an effort to conserve oxygen, I took advantage of the fact that you had fallen asleep and brought down the solar visor.

AVA

Well raise the damn visor. Where are we?

SFX: VISOR RAISING.

AVA (CONT'D)

What the fuck? We're back in the diner.

LEIF-LET

Sensors indicate otherwise.

AVA

How so?

LEIF-LET

The atmosphere is 90% ammonia.

AVA
Yikes. Everything's dusty. That's not from ammonia,
what is that from?

LEIF-LET
Analyzing surroundings... Matter in this area is
unstable. Not meant to be interacted with. We're in
a simulation.

AVA
I see. The magic of the theatre.

SFX: DOOR CHIME.

AVA (CONT'D)
It's Caspar.

CASPAR
Hello?

AVA
Okay. Act I: Caspar's first day.

CASPAR
Hello?

SFX: RADIO STATIC. CASPAR SEARCHES FOR A STATION.

AVA
Oh sure, *he* can touch the radio... Hey, analyze
those frequencies.

LEIF-LET
Scanning... Looks like the radio is cycling through
frequencies at a very high rate, like it's looking
for something.

AVA
Like it's learning.

SFX: RADIO SNAPS TO LIFE.

ZEBULON
My Dear, I was thinking the other day of the story
of Jonah.

EFFIE
Must we, Dearest?

ZEBULON
I know that this story is not your most favored
story from the good book.

EFFIE

If you have had one too many unfortunate catfishing excursions as I have, you do not find yourself drawn to the story of Jonah.

ZEBULON

Yes, the catfish in the St. Francis do have a tendency to clamp down a bit hard don't they?

EFFIE

One time a flathead had bit down so hard upon me that I thought he'd never let go. I thought I'd have to spend the rest of my time on this earth with a fish-arm.

AVA

He looks sad, but I'm still mad at him. Hey Caspar: You suck!

LEIF-LET

The simulation does not appear to be interactive.

AVA

I know.

ZEBULON

But while the prospect of being trapped in the belly of a fish for many a day may give one the oogies, we must take care not to discard the story of Jonah. Jonah is there to remind us that The Lord's paths are infinite, and should you refuse his call, as Jonah did, you have simply sent yourself down yet another of his chosen paths.

LEIF-LET

Increase in Tachyonic particles.

AVA

We're about to move.

EFFIE

Though it should be noted that refusing the first path sends you down the path with the fish guts in it. So, maybe listen to The Lord's words the first time?

ZEBULON

Indeed, my love.

SFX: AVA IS SUCKED THROUGH A TUNNEL.

AVA

Whoa! Okay, if they start playing It's a Small World, I quit.

SFX: SUDDEN STOP.

SONG: ROVIN' GAMBLER

CASPAR

So what can you tell me about this place, Effie?

EFFIE

I can tell you that it is a great human construct that hangs in the sky and becomes a crossroads for many peoples from distant lands as they make their way across God's creation.

CASPAR

So, it's a space station?

EFFIE

Is that not what I just said?

CASPAR

Sure.

SFX: DOOR CHIME.

CASPAR (CONT'D)

Hey, welcome to Midnight Burger, have a seat anywhere.

LEIF

You serving Earth food?

LEIF-LET

Hey! It's our boy!

CASPAR

Yeah, all Earth food.

LEIF

Cool. You from Earth?

CASPAR

Yeah, you?

LEIF

Yeah. How'd you get out of the system?

CASPAR

Uh... long ass story.

LEIF

Yeah, same here.

CASPAR

Listen, since you're from Earth, I've got to warn you, if you're not from Earth I'm great at cooking Earth food, but if you're from Earth my cooking is terrible.

AVA

Look at this Bro-Mance. Which one's The Winter Soldier?

LEIF-LET

Solid burn.

LEIF

Hey. Are you guys hiring? I'm a cook. I'm on a Truskan Ice Hauler right now and it's kind of miserable. Truskans are great, but they love singing these like, sea chanties and Truskans don't have complex breath control so they only sing one note. It's driving me crazy.

CASPAR

That's sounds pretty rough.

LEIF

I do like moving around, so being stuck at a space station might not be that great, but it would be nice for my Earth references to not fall on deaf ears, so I'm good staying put for a while.

CASPAR

Uh... How to explain this...

SFX: AVA IS SUCKED THROUGH ANOTHER TUNNEL.

AVA

Hey! I was watching that! I wanted them to do something embarrassing that I could use against them. For science.

SFX: ANOTHER SUDDEN STOP.

SFX: SOUND OF A DISTANT FREEWAY.

AVA (CONT'D)

Is that Gloria's car?

SFX: CAR DOOR ROLLING DOWN.

AVA (CONT'D)

Oh. Hi, Gloria. You also suck.

SFX: LIGHTER. CIGARETTE DRAG. CELL PHONE RINGS.

GLORIA

Hey, Cesar. How are you holding up?... Oh, you did? Great, I'm glad. How much is it?... It's that plus 600? Okay, great, that's good, you guys can live on that right, Inez gets it too? Okay good... Whew, I was worried about you guys... No, I'll be fine... Cesar, I'll be fine... I'm not going over this again... It's a little harder to file for unemployment when you owned the damn place... I don't know what I'm going to do... I don't know what I'm going to do Cesar. It was my dream to own that place. It's all I ever wanted. We were open for six months and then it all gets shut down because of a, what? Because of a bat in China? I don't even know how to talk about that... Look, I don't know how long this bullshit is going to last, but when it's finally over people are going to be like "Cool, let's get back to normal, let's do normal shit." Normal for me is being a waitress who can't forget the time she had a restaurant for six months. That's normal for me. I don't want to get back to normal, Cesar. I'm never going back again. Hug your kids for me, I've got a job interview... Yes, I do, I know what I just said, I'm just doing it to get out of town... I honestly don't even know where I am... It's called Midnight Diner or something, look go back to your life, hang out with your kids, you're going to be sick of them in a month.

SFX: AVA IS SUCKED THROUGH ANOTHER TUNNEL.

AVA

This is feeling kind of random. What am I supposed to be learning here? If the next thing I see are Bob Cratchit and his family, I am also quitting then.

SFX: SUDDEN STOP.

SFX: SOUNDS OF A DINNER PARTY.

AVA (CONT'D)

This is my house. This is my house in Ithaca... Oh no, this is my farewell party. Oh, this is bad.

LEIF-LET

Not detecting any new hazards.

AVA

No it's bad because I got wasted and don't remember much of it.

SFX: FORK HITTING THE SIDE OF A WINE GLASS.

AVA (CONT'D)

Oh God, that's me. Oh God, am I making a speech?!

AVA (CONT'D)

(In the past.)

Everyone! Can I get your attention for a moment please? Thank you so much for coming to my farewell party, though I am convinced that sixty to sixty-five percent of you are here to make sure you don't miss out on any gossip. Sorry to disappoint, but I won't be doing anything more embarrassing than actually being a professor at this shit-sack of a university.

SFX: LIGHT LAUGHTER.

AVA (CONT'D)

(In the past.)

Today I officially transitioned into emeritus status, the flaming viking boat of academia. I did so under viscous rumors that I have lost my mind, which I shall wear as a badge of honor. I am proud to join the ranks of other nutty professors like Paracelsus, who believed in giants, Tycho Brahe who wore a copper prosthetic nose after losing his real one in a fist fight, and Pythagoras who had an inexplicable fear of beans.

SFX: LIGHT LAUGHTER

AVA (CONT'D)

(In the past.)

You only get one chance to make a parting statement, so here goes. As we struggle to understand the universe, we may need to consider the idea that the universe is struggling to understand us. That our curiosity about the cosmos, may be reciprocated. Do our telescopes pointed skyward pose a question, and are the ebbs and flows of the starways an attempt at an answer. Are the scientist and their subject like two lovers in the dark; stumbling towards each other, hoping to find some skin.

SONG: CUBANAKAN BY LECUONA CUBAN BOYS.

AVA (CONT'D)

(In the past.)

Well, that got a little sexy, didn't it?

SFX: LIGHT LAUGHTER.

AVA (CONT'D)

That song. Where's that song coming from?

LEIF-LET

Unclear. Not from this simulation.

AVA

Can you trace it? We need to go towards it.

LEIF-LET

Judging by the tachyonic spike I'm getting, looks like we're headed there now-

SFX: AVA IS SUCKED THROUGH ANOTHER TUNNEL.

SFX: SOUNDS OF THE PARTY ARE REPLACED BY BIRDS CHIRPING IN A TROPICAL FOREST.

SFX: CIGARETTE LIGHTER. LONG INHALE ON A JOINT.

SFX: DOOR OPENING.

WILLOW

(Still holding it in.)
Hey babe, where've you been?

DANIEL

Are you high again?

WILLOW

Am I?

DANIEL

Your lungs are full of smoke and there's a lit joint in your hand.

WILLOW

(Exhaling.)
Don't make assumptions.

DANIEL

You really think now is a good time to get high?

WILLOW

We're both about to torpedo our careers, Honey, how is this *not* a time to get high?

DANIEL

Valid point.

WILLOW

Where were you?

DANIEL

I was in town.

WILLOW

What's going on in town?

DANIEL

I went by the hospital.

WILLOW

Danny.

DANIEL

Just to be sure.

WILLOW

A hurricane hits here every eighteen months, all the hospitals have generators. Probably all the houses too.

DANIEL

And I confirmed that because I needed to, okay? It's not hurricane season, they're not expecting us to knock their power out.

WILLOW

It'll just be for a few minutes, they'll be okay. How many times do we need to go over this?

DANIEL

I know, I know. I'm done.

WILLOW

Come over here. Smoke this joint and get normal with your wife. Come on.

DANIEL

Okay.

WILLOW

I'm going to miss this cheap ass weed when we're gone, we should enjoy it while we can. Puerto Rico. Who knew?

SFX: SHARP INHALE.

DANIEL

What are we listening to?

WILLOW

This is another wonderful find at the dime store in town.

DANIEL

I hear everyone back home is listening to cassette tapes now.

WILLOW

I don't buy it. They said that about 8 Tracks, look what happened. Besides, they sound like shit, and as people who listen for a living we should be more discerning, don't you think?

DANIEL

No offense, but this sounds like shit, too.

WILLOW

This sounds like shit because it's a 78rpm that's been to hell and back.

DANIEL

Fine. So let's talk.

WILLOW

Okay.

DANIEL

We need a plan.

WILLOW

Do we?

DANIEL

And I was thinking. What about California?

WILLOW

What about California?

DANIEL

Lots of work for scientists in California.

WILLOW

Not for scientists like us. They need aerospace nerds not astrophysicists. Besides, they would be defense contracts and how do we feel about defense contracts?

DANIEL

I know. I'm just trying to come up with something.

WILLOW

Something will come up. We've got money saved.

DANIEL

We were going to buy a house with that money.

WILLOW

Well now we're going to do something else with it.

DANIEL

Did you marry me so that I would do all the worrying?

WILLOW

No, I married you because my Mamaw told me to.

DANIEL

What do you think your Mamaw would say about blacking out an entire town for 15 minutes to shoot a radio signal into the sky?

WILLOW

I think she would say "Willow, you can do anything you want and your Papaw and I are still going to love you." And then she would add, "Unless you become a papist." Besides, you're forgetting that she and my Paw did a revival radio show for years without any approval from the FCC or whatever they called it back then.

DANIEL

Alright. We better do this before I come to my senses.

WILLOW

Time's a wastin'.

DANIEL

I'll throw the switch and reverse the polarity, you stay at the terminal.

WILLOW

Okay. Should I bar the door to keep the fuzz out?

DANIEL

There isn't a police officer for miles and we're the only ones at the observatory today.

WILLOW

I know. That was just one of my fun jokes.

DANIEL

Whee. Okay, I'm reversing polarity and now I am powering up...

WILLOW

Was that it?

DANIEL

That was it.

WILLOW

That didn't feel like it.

DANIEL

Not to you and me but everything in Arecibo just went dark.

WILLOW

I was expecting some circuits frying or something.

DANIEL

Babe, we've got fifteen minutes. Send the signal.

WILLOW

Sorry.

SFX: TYPING ON KEYBOARD.

WILLOW (CONT'D)

Okay... If this doesn't get their attention I don't know what will.

SFX: "THE ARICEBO MESSAGE" PLAYS.

DANIEL

Remember the big ceremony we had the first time they sent this signal?

WILLOW

We thought it was so stupid.

DANIEL

I think I called it-

WILLOW

"Jacking off in the general direction of M13"? Yes, you did.

DANIEL

I mean, technically I was right. A byzantine, indecipherable signal sent to a star cluster seven Parsecs away, it's not science.

WILLOW

"What do we think this is? Dick Tracy's watch?" That's you, drunk later that night.

DANIEL

I was so mad. People were excited and I was mad about it.

WILLOW

"Dick Tracy's watch", though?

DANIEL

Because he talks into it. I'm sure it sounded really snappy in my head.

WILLOW

And then for the rest of the night you were the Fermi's Paradox guy.

DANIEL

I was. I know.

WILLOW

Everybody hated you all night. I was so proud.

DANIEL

And now here we are, destroying our careers so we broadcast the signal we made fun of.

WILLOW

I have to say, I've been impressed with the way you just jumped into this little scheme of ours. You're usually the cautious one.

DANIEL

I'm full of surprises.

WILLOW

I'm strongly considering taking our marriage seriously for the first time.

DANIEL

I find that unlikely.

AVA

(Through radio speakers.)
Hello?

DANIEL

The fuck?

AVA

Hello? Your signal is annoying, can you shut it off please?

WILLOW

Did we do all this just to bounce off the fucking ionosphere?

DANIEL

There's no way we didn't punch through the ionosphere.

WILLOW

Well, that didn't sound like a voice from the beyond.

DANIEL

Hang on, I have to hook up a mic.

AVA
Leif-let, what is this signal?

LEIF-LET
I've identified the signal. This is known as the
Arecibo Message, broadcast from the Arecibo radio
telescope in Puerto Rico in 1974.

WILLOW
What is that?

AVA
Why are we hearing it?

LEIF-LET
Not sure, Bro.

AVA
Can you edit your auto-responses to take out the
word "Bro" please?

LEIF-LET
Sure thing, Boss.

AVA
Better.

DANIEL
Here we go.

SFX: MICROPHONE CLICKS ON.

DANIEL (CONT'D)
Whoever is receiving this signal, can you identify
yourself, please?

AVA
Um... Hi.

DANIEL
We're currently conducting scientific research and
need this frequency clear, please. Can you identify
yourself?

AVA
Well, look at Mr. Fancypants conducting scientific
research.

DANIEL
Can you identify yourself, please?

AVA
You first.

DANIEL

Jesus. This is the Arecibo observatory in Puerto Rico, we're sending a test broadcast and you're on our frequency, can you identify yourself please?

AVA

Arecibo. The radio telescope?

WILLOW

How much time do we have?

DANIEL

Not much. Ma'am, identify yourself please.

LEIF-LET

Not sure how much time we have, Boss.

AVA

Wait. Arecibo? Arecibo's been decommissioned, what are you talking about?

DANIEL

This station hasn't been decommissioned, what are you talking about?

AVA

The whole thing collapsed in 2020, pal, who are you really?

DANIEL

Uh...

WILLOW

In 2020?

AVA

Yes, the whole damn thing fell into the jungle. The cables snapped, something about metal fatigue, I guess.

WILLOW

In 2020?

AVA

Yes. Who am I talking to?

WILLOW

It's 1976.

AVA

Aw, snails. Really?

WILLOW

Really.

LEIF-LET

Looks like we may be in a temporal rift, Boss.

AVA

Ya think? Who am I talking to right now?

DANIEL

I'm Daniel, I'm here with my wife Willow, we work at the observatory, we're astronomers. Can you please, for the love of God, identify yourself?

AVA

Oh fine. My name is Dr. Ava Maddox and I'm... what am I?

WILLOW

Shit, it's her.

AVA

Oh! I'm professor emeritus of theoretical physics at Cornell University, that works. Wait. No I'm not. I *will* be professor emeritus at Cornell, I guess to you I'm a one year-old with a terrible mother.

DANIEL

Doctor, we've been getting your notes, what is your location?

AVA

You've been what?

DANIEL

We think they're your notes, we can't decipher them. What is your location?

AVA

Wait, wait, wait. My notes?

DANIEL

Are they not notes? Doctor, we need some explanations here.

AVA

You first. Start at the beginning.

DANIEL

It started with the Arecibo Message, you're familiar?

AVA

This the thing the tinfoil hat people talk about? We sent some sort of message of peace into space?

DANIEL

Yes, directed at M13. After we sent the message we were getting back noise. Or at least everyone else thought it was noise. We thought it had structure. Willow?

WILLOW

It was mostly symbols that I couldn't recognize but from time to time would be the letters A,V,A. I think.

AVA

That's me. The symbols, are there a lot of diagonal lines. Lower left to upper right?

WILLOW

Yes.

AVA

Those are my notes. It was sending you my notes.

WILLOW

What was?

AVA

What happened next?

DANIEL

After 367 days the noise went dark, we weren't getting anything anymore.

AVA

When Gloria accidentally changed the station.

WILLOW

Who is Gloria?

AVA

Okay, so the data was cut off. It wasn't getting input. It had to start riffing, grabbing any transmission it could so things got chaotic.

DANIEL

Then after 367 days we got something kind of like a ping. It was one burst of just... noise.

AVA

Even Older Leif attaching a device to the radio.

DANIEL

Then nothing again.

WILLOW

So we decided to get creative. We're using everything we've got to send one last broadcast of the message in the hopes that we can reacquire the signal.

AVA

The big, malevolent thing.

DANIEL

And then you showed up.

AVA

Oh shit! Radio telescope!

DANIEL

Excuse me?

AVA

Effie and Zebulon Mucklewain. Do those names mean anything to you?

WILLOW

Those are my grandparents.

AVA

Yes they were, weren't they?

WILLOW

What the hell?

AVA

Daniel, does Willow tell a lot of stories about her grandparents?

DANIEL

All the time. What's going on?

AVA

Your grandfather had a pet pig named Pansy.

WILLOW

Goddamn.

DANIEL

How do you know all this?

LEIF-LET

Boss, we've got fluctuations.

AVA

Okay. There's no time. Guys, listen to me. It's all explained in my notes.

WILLOW

We can't read your notes.

AVA

They're written in Groote. It's a 19th century Dutch shorthand. Google it. Fuck! You can't. The past sucks! Look it up somehow.

DANIEL

The transformer is going to blow any second now.

AVA

This signal, this Arecibo message, you have to keep broadcasting it.

DANIEL

We can't, we're almost out of juice and we're about to get fired.

AVA

Good. Get fired. People won't understand what you're doing anyway. Find a way to broadcast it.

DANIEL

We can't get this much power or facilities like this.

AVA

No, you're thinking about it wrong. It's not about the strength of the signal it's about the number of iterations in space/time that you're broadcasting it. Think of it like triangulating a location. The longer you send the signal the more data you'll get from us and vice versa.

WILLOW

Us?

AVA

Guys, the signal you sent into the sky, it was idiotic.

DANIEL

We agree.

AVA

Something heard it. Something heard it, but it doesn't understand you. It's trying to. Goddamn... like two lovers in the dark; stumbling towards each other, hoping for skin. You have to keep broadcasting.

WILLOW

We will.

DANIEL

We will?

LEIF-LET

Boss, here comes another one.

AVA

You're going to need funding. Nobody's going to be crazy enough to fund this. Shit. Oh! It's 1976?

WILLOW

Yes.

AVA

Ha! Take all the money you have and invest in Apple Computers. Trust me, you'll never have to write a grant again.

DANIEL

What the hell?

AVA

TRUST ME. Willow, I know your grandparents. Kind of. They would want you to have faith. Oh shit. Oh shit, something's happening. Remember everything I've said. Read my notes! Don't stop the signal!

SFX: AVA IS SUCKED THROUGH ANOTHER TUNNEL.

AVA (CONT'D)

Wooooooooooooo-hooooooooooooo.

LEIF-LET

Okay, we're out.

AVA

I FIGURED SOMETHING OUT! FUCK YOU, COSMOS!

LEIF-LET

Boss-

AVA

I may not know what exactly I figured out but I know I figured something out. Because I am NOT crazy. I am Pythagoras, MOTHERFUCKER!

LEIF-LET

Boss, we have problems.

AVA

Oh of COURSE we do! What is it?

LEIF-LET

We are now out of the Big, Malevolent Thing and are currently adrift in space.

AVA

Hm. I guess we didn't think about sticking the landing did we?

LEIF-LET

I have sensor lock on Midnight Burger, but it's very far, we have limited thrust, and very little oxygen.

AVA

Shit. What's the plan?

LEIF-LET

I'm going to have to put you to sleep again, Boss. It's the only way to conserve oxygen. We put you to sleep, do one last burn toward the diner, and hope for the best.

AVA

What are our chances?

LEIF-LET

Calculating 50/50 at this point.

AVA

Well that's terrible odds. Did you record everything?

LEIF-LET

Everything's in the logs.

AVA

I figured something out, Leif-Let.

LEIF-LET

I know you did, boss.

AVA

Okay. Let's do this.

LEIF-LET

Adjusting oxygen mixture.

AVA

The benefit of this plan is, if I die, Caspar will be miserable for the rest of his life. That piece of shit can't live without me.

LEIF-LET

Performing final burn.

SFX: THRUSTERS FIRE. AVA SAILS OFF INTO THE DARKNESS. LEIF AND GLORIA'S CONVERSATION SLOWLY FADES IN.

GLORIA

She's not dead is she?

LEIF

No, it looks like the suit put her in stasis. It's slowly adjusting the oxygen levels back to normal. It'll open when it's ready.

GLORIA

At what point do we break the news to her?

LEIF

Give her a minute, she's going to be disoriented.

GLORIA

That thing just spit her out and then disappeared.

LEIF

I'm glad for both of those things but I still have no idea what happened.

SFX: HISS OF OXYGEN AND WHIRR OF HYDRAULICS AS THE SUIT OPENS.

AVA

Am I alive? If not, heaven is shitty.

LEIF

You're alive.

AVA

Get me out of here.

LEIF

Okay one, two, three.

AVA

Ooof.

GLORIA

It's good to see you, Ava.

AVA

Leif, that suit rules. I might wear it all the time, we may have to widen my booth.

LEIF

I'm just glad you're all right.

AVA

You guys. I figured it out. I mean kind of. Some of it, anyway. I couldn't figure it out because... because it's like trying to recognize if someone's lying to you when you're lying to them at the same time. When you're going too fast on the freeway, and so is everyone else, it's harder to know that you're speeding.

GLORIA

Ava-

AVA

Shh. Just let me get this out. I've been trying to figure it out, but *it's* been trying to figure *us* out at the same time.

LEIF

What has?

AVA

I don't know!

GLORIA

The diner?

AVA

No, no, not the diner. Something else. This is where it tries to reach out, where it tries to get to know us. It was right in front of my face. If you want to get to know someone, you find a place that's safe. Where maybe you can have a cup of coffee and get to know each other. But here's the problem: what if you're a human and want to get to know an ant? You don't know what it's like to be an ant, you can't "speak ant" even though you're hundreds of thousands of times more intelligent than an ant. So what do you do?

GLORIA

Ava, you need to stop-

AVA

You try a lot of things, mostly you stay out of the way and watch. Sometimes you'll make sure nothing happens to your new friend. And if you get worried that your new friend is alone and afraid... you make it friends.

GLORIA

Effie and Zebulon.

AVA

But you don't know how to make a friend. You don't even know what "friend" means. So you reach out for whatever you've got. You hear stories told by an astronomer about her grandparents, and how they were people that made her feel safe. And in your ham-fisted way try and make them.

LEIF

So Effie and Zebulon are simulations or something?

AVA

No. Because you're not an ant, you're a person, and you're so smart that you're an idiot. And without meaning to, you make a person. Two people.

LEIF

An artificial intelligence?

GLORIA

Leif-

AVA

Not artificial. An intelligence. A consciousness. Two of them. And you did it on accident.

GLORIA

Ava listen-

AVA

Are they back yet? Effie? Zebulon?

LEIF

No, not yet.

AVA

They will be. They just went through the ringer like I did, it's a LOT to process.

GLORIA

AVA.

AVA

What?! Where's Caspar, I need to punch him in the face and then tell him everything.

GLORIA

Ava. Caspar's gone.

AVA

... What?

GLORIA

He's gone, Ava.

AVA
What do you mean he's gone, we're floating in
space, did he hop on a jet ski?

LEIF
Ava... They took him.

SONG: "JUST A LITTLE TALK WITH JESUS" BY THE HUMBARD FAMILY.

AVA
Took him? Who took him? You guys, who took him?

EFFIE
Ava. Ava, can you hear us?

ZEBULON
We bore witness along with you, Ava. We feel both
confused and yet, somehow, a fog has lifted.

EFFIE
We have much to suss out after these revelations
but we feel...

ZEBULON
Different, and imbued somehow with meaning.

EFFIE
Much light needs be shed... Ava? Ava, what has
transpired?...

End of Season One.