

MIDNIGHT BURGER

Chapter 9: Solitary, Poor, Nasty, Brutish, and Short.

SONG: SMITH'S SACRED SINGERS, LIFE'S RAILWAY TO HEAVEN.

LEIF

So tell me honestly... what do you think of my cooking?

GLORIA

Ooh, Leif, I don't know. I mean, how honest do we want to get here?

LEIF

Oh, come on!

GLORIA

I'm kidding, I think you're a great cook.

LEIF

Thank you.

GLORIA

For an engineer.

LEIF

Goddamn it.

GLORIA

I don't understand, you're an engineer, why have you been wandering around the universe working as a cook?

LEIF

It's the curse of being an Earthling.

GLORIA

What do you mean?

LEIF

I think I mentioned this before, to most spacefaring civilizations Earth is kind of uh....

GLORIA

The other side of the tracks?

LEIF

Yeah. A lot of star cruisers rolling up their windows as they drive past us, if you know what I mean.

GLORIA

That's hilarious.

LEIF

If you own a spaceship you're not going to trust your Helical Accelerator to the guy whose entire planet is still fueled by setting shit on fire.

GLORIA

But they trust you to cook?

LEIF

That's the hilarious part. No matter where I go, people love Earth food.

GLORIA

They do? Why?

LEIF

Because it's so wildly irresponsible. Think about it, Earth food, it's really bad for you. How much of what's on your food even needs to be there?

GLORIA

But that's how you make it taste good.

LEIF

Which makes sense to you and me, but for most alien races it's this bizarre, foreign concept.

GLORIA

Get the fuck out of here.

LEIF

Some aliens will take vacations on Earth just for the food.

GLORIA

Even though they think it's a dumpster fire? *

LEIF

Correct. *

GLORIA

So is this like when rich people go on vacation and then they would come back and talk about what a mess the whole country was and "oh my God it's so dirty" and then they would say, "But the food was amazing!" *

LEIF

Exactly. That's us. That's Earth. Haven't you ever wondered why there's so many weirdos eating at roadside diners? *

GLORIA

They're aliens?

LEIF

Nine times out of ten.

GLORIA

So I was feeding aliens way before I came here.

LEIF

No doubt about it.

GLORIA

HA!

CASPAR

Hey, guys. What's going on?

GLORIA

Leif was just telling me how we all come from a
dumpster fire.

*
*

CASPAR

It's true, Earth is the bar in Roadhouse before
Patrick Swayze shows up. Where's Ava?

*

GLORIA

Out in the parking lot again.

LEIF

She's been like this for three days now, maybe we
should do something?

GLORIA

How do you think that would go?

CASPAR

We found a dead Russian scientist in the deep
freeze, Leif. It kind of spooked her. Just let her
be spooked.

GLORIA

On the bright side, Effie and Zebulon have been
back to normal for the past few days.

CASPAR

I know, it's been nice. We should get one of those
signs that says "This many days since an accident".

LEIF

Yeah, except ours would say "This many day since
your sentient radio quoted the Egyptian Book of the
Dead, switched personalities, or steered you into a
supermassive black hole."

CASPAR

... That's way too long for a sign, Leif.

GLORIA

Yeah, Leif, that's way too long.

LEIF

I was kidding.

ZEBULON

My friends, we are growing close to our destination, I trust we are prepared.

CASPAR

Prepared as we can be, Zeb.

GLORIA

Hey, Effie, any visions of our destination?

ZEBULON

Ah... yes, well, actually my wife has fallen quite ill and could not join me at this time.

GLORIA

Oh no.

CASPAR

What?

ZEBULON

Yes, she has quite the fever at the moment. She has yet to be freed from it.

LEIF

That sounds serious.

GLORIA

Does she need to see a doctor?

ZEBULON

I'm afraid the nearest doctor is many miles away. It may be unwise in her infirmed state to take her on such a long journey. She's sleeping now, hopefully when she awakes her fever will have broken.

GLORIA

When I was a kid my mom used to give me really spicy soup to sweat it out of me, do you have anything like that?

ZEBULON

I'm afraid we don't indulge in such immoderations.

GLORIA

Oh, the whites.

CASPAR

Let us know when she wakes up, Zeb.

ZEBULON

I will indeed, until then we will have to make do with one Mucklewain, though it does feel strange to be sat in front of the microphone without her.

LEIF

I'm sure she'll be okay.

CASPAR

I'm going to go check on Ava.

SFX: DOOR CHIME.

CASPAR (CONT'D)

Oh, hey.

AVA

Almost time?

CASPAR

Yeah, almost time.

AVA

I'm at my booth.

LEIF

I'm going to go fire up the grill.

CASPAR

How are you?

AVA

Fine. You?

CASPAR

Effie's sick, she has a fever.

AVA

Huh.

CASPAR

That's never happened before.

AVA

Nothing a little prayer won't fix, I'm sure.

CASPAR

Okay. So it's going to be like this?

AVA

Like what?

CASPAR

Nothing. Do you want some coffee?

AVA

I think it's a "skip straight to moonshine" day for me, thanks. You know where to find me.

CASPAR

And you know where to find the moonshine.

ZEBULON

Lord, may our work in the new world be an instrument of your grace...

GLORIA

Here we go.

SFX: BOOM ZIP. POW. THE NEW WORLD APPEARS.

GLORIA (CONT'D)

Okay... this looks... super normal. This looks like Wyoming or something. I've never been to Wyoming. This is how I imagine Wyoming.

CASPAR

Yeah, I imagine Wyoming like this too, although wait, look. See the horizon?

GLORIA

What is that?

CASPAR

It's a glacier wall. Looks like we're in the ice-age-ish.

ZEBULON

I'm am getting a strange sense that we have been to this place before.

CASPAR

We've been to the ice-age before.

ZEBULON

Yes, but this exact place.

CASPAR

Why do you say that?

ZEBULON

It's hard to explain. I believe Leif refers to it as "vibes".

GLORIA

Zebulon, you can't say "vibes", it doesn't sound right.

ZEBULON

Very well, Gloria. Shall I say "perturbations"?

GLORIA

I don't know what it means, so it's way better.

AVA

Someone's coming... oh shit.

CASPAR

Is that who I think it is?

AVA

Yes.

CASPAR

Aw, snails.

ZEBULON

Perhaps it's best that my wife is asleep at this time.

GLORIA

Who's this chick?

CASPAR

Old friend of Ava's.

GLORIA

Really?

CASPAR

She's also the worst.

SFX: DOOR CHIME.

JANE

Well hello there, Midnight Burger!

CASPAR

Welcome back, Jane.

JANE

Did you miss me?

CASPAR

Sure.

JANE

Hello, Doctor.

AVA

Hello, Doctor.

JANE

Oh, hey. You're new.

GLORIA

Hi.

JANE

Help me get this backpack off, would you?

GLORIA

Uh, sure.

JANE

Oooof!

SFX: HUGE BACKPACK HITS THE FLOOR.

JANE (CONT'D)

Oh my God, that's a RELIEF!

CASPAR

What brings us to your neighborhood, Jane. Being chased by a woolly rhino?

JANE

They went extinct about five thousand years ago, Caspar, but thank you so much for playing. Where is my BOYFRIEND!

LEIF

(From the kitchen)
Is that Jane?

JANE

Get out here, you!

LEIF

Holy shit!

JANE

Well HELlo, Sailor.

LEIF

What the hell?!

JANE

Leif, I have been studying in the field for six long years and now MAMA WANTS HER BISCUITS!

LEIF

O...kay!

JANE

Get up on that roof!

LEIF

I'm going!

JANE

Don't make me chase you!

SFX: BACK DOOR CLOSES.

JANE (CONT'D)

Oh, man. Doctor, I am dying to catch up but if I don't go bang one out with Leif I think my whole downstairs may crumble to dust!

AVA

God forbid.

JANE

I'll be back!

AVA

You're disgusting.

JANE

I know! Hey, Talking Radio!

ZEBULON

Uh, yes, hello.

SFX: BACK DOOR CLOSES.

AVA

Hurricane Jane is what we called her.

GLORIA

Friend of yours?

AVA

College roommate.

CASPAR

What is she doing back here?

AVA

What are we doing back here?

GLORIA

Aren't these my questions?

CASPAR

She was Ava's college roommate, she's a what?

AVA
Evolutionary biologist.

CASPAR
Right, whatever that is. We picked her up at one point, once she wrapped her mind around what the diner was she thought she would try and hitch a ride back to the stone age to study what?

AVA
Humans.

CASPAR
Right. She's uh... She's a lot.

GLORIA
I can tell.

CASPAR
She was prepared to snap the tether and just spend the rest of her life studying cave men but now, here we are back again.

GLORIA
And her and Leif?

AVA
Yeah.

GLORIA
Gross.

AVA
Yeah.

GLORIA
Well... at least it's not imminent death, am I right?

AVA
I mean...

CASPAR
Sort of...

GLORIA
Guys, she can't be that bad.

CASPAR
Like I said. She's a lot.

SFX: SMALL TRANSISTOR RADIO PLAYING SLOW JAMS.

JANE

Whooo! Thank God you showed up when you did, I really needed that.

LEIF

My pleasure.

JANE

What's with this little radio? How are you getting a reception?

LEIF

I made it. It's my little secret. Whenever we're on an Earth that has radio stations I have this little pocket radio that captures music and stores it. I listen to it when I'm up here.

JANE

Does the talking radio downstairs know about this?

LEIF

They do not. I love Effie and Zebulon to death but sometimes you just want to hear some music that was made *after* the great depression, know what I mean?

JANE

And you're adorably playing slow-jams on it for your pre-historical hook-up.

LEIF

That I am.

JANE

Oh, Leafy. These six years have been amazing. I've learned so much.

LEIF

Oh yeah? Give me some highlights.

JANE

Ummm... Oh, okay. Remember how I had you make me that isotope tracker?

LEIF

Yeah, how'd it work out?

JANE

Amazing. I was literally able to track food calories as they travelled through their bodies.

LEIF

Sweet, what does that mean?

JANE

Well, your average office worker back home burns about 2500 calories a day, right? Guess how many calories your average hunter-gatherer burns?

LEIF

Um, a crazy amount, ten-thousand.

JANE

Nope. Also 2500 calories.

LEIF

What?

JANE

A hunter-gatherer human burns the exact same amount of calories in a day as an average modern human who works in an office and drives a Prius.

LEIF

How is that possible?

JANE

How is that possible, Leif?

LEIF

You tell me.

JANE

No way to know for sure without a lab. It basically means that the human body, whether it sits at a desk or forages in a field, burns 2500 calories no matter what we do. Which means that modern man, not having to burn calories on chasing down wild game, burns it some other way.

LEIF

Like what?

JANE

My guess? Inflammation, anxiety, auto-immune responses, all of these things are the human body basically putting the pedal to the metal when the car is in park. I guess it spends it there.

LEIF

I think I'd rather spend calories on anxiety than on running away from a saber-toothed tiger.

JANE

Leif, do you know how rare those are? I've been here six years and I never saw one. I saw bison, I saw small critters-

SFX: ROAR OF DISTANT MEGAFUNA.

JANE (CONT'D)

Oh oh oh, AND... I saw those. C'mere.

LEIF

What?

JANE

See? There's a herd of them by that creek.

LEIF

Oh... wow. Those things are huge, what are they?

JANE

Glyptodons.

LEIF

Are they turtles?

JANE

More like huge armadillos.

LEIF

Those are armadillos, they're the size of a car!

JANE

I know, they're so cute, right? Look while you can, they'll all be dead soon.

LEIF

Why? There's not a meteor coming is there?

JANE

No, my sexy friend, the only meteor headed their way is our distant relatives... We're on the brink of it right now. The end of the Younger Dryas. Pretty soon humans will figure out that the glaciers are retreating for the last time and it will be open season on anything that moves. The great Holocene extinction will begin. They'll wipe out their food source, then realize they screwed themselves, then grow bigger brains to figure out how to un-screw themselves, then they'll start keeping animals, and farming. Once they figure that out their brains will shrink again and before you know it... they'll be us.

LEIF

Just like that?

JANE

Just like that. Kind of sad, actually.

LEIF

It's evolution though, right? It's your field of study.

JANE

I guess. You ever wonder if things could be different?

LEIF

How do you mean?

JANE

I don't know... Just different.

LEIF

You know a little while ago I got visited by not one, but two future versions of myself.

JANE

Oh, you did?

LEIF

I did. Since then I have sworn off wondering about how things could be different.

JANE

(Descending the roof ladder.)
That's the problem with you, Leif. You're so laid back you never decide to get weird with it.

LEIF

I get plenty weird with it.

JANE

Come down here, I want to show you something.

LEIF

Okay, sure... uh... Jane? Who are you friends?

JANE

These are my people, Leif. Come down and say hi.

SFX: COFFEE POURING.

AVA

I didn't ask for coffee, I asked for moonshine.

CASPAR

I'm giving you coffee.

ZEBULON

Should it really be acceptable for two unmarried persons to just... go up there and... do such things?

GLORIA

Relax, Zebulon.

ZEBULON

There's not even a roof above them.

GLORIA

C'mon, you and Effie never did it in the back of a pick-up truck?

ZEBULON

We do not have an automobile!

GLORIA

What does an evolutionary biologist do?

AVA

Studies the biological processes of evolution. Natural selection, speciation, all that garbage. She's brilliant in her field, apparently. I'd always see her getting grants and awards.

GLORIA

But wait, if she hitched a ride on Midnight Burger to get back to the ice age, there was no way for her to get back again.

AVA

Right.

CASPAR

She said something about "growing beyond writing papers and working in a lab". Wanting to "Be the science".

AVA

She's nuts.

ZEBULON

Evolution, you say?

GLORIA

Uh oh.

ZEBULON

I have deep concerns about this woman. I read in The Gazette about a whole dust up regarding this evolution business. It all happened right across the river in Tennessee.

CASPAR

Zeb, you've met her before, this is not news.

ZEBULON

Yes, well, sometimes Effie may do a bit of the listening for me as I am so focused on the scripture.

GLORIA

Scopes Monkey Trial!

AVA

... What?

GLORIA

Zeb's talking about the Scopes Money Trial.

ZEBULON

Yes, that was it. It involved a school teacher by the name of Scopes.

GLORIA

Sorry, I get excited when I know things around here.

ZEBULON

Sounded like quite a mess. People came from miles around. I tell you this, I do not know what happens to one's disposition once they cross east of that Mississippi river. Monkey talk.

SFX: BACK DOOR OPENS.

JANE

Well *that* did the trick.

CASPAR

Where's Leif?

JANE

Leif's going to need a moment. I may have sprained something in him. Could I ask someone to make me some sort of food that isn't roasted over a campfire?

CASPAR

Gloria, would you mind?

GLORIA

Yeah, fine.

CASPAR

Thanks.

JANE

Caspar, I don't suppose you've gotten your beer and wine license since last we spoke?

AVA
There's a jug of moonshine under the counter, bring
it over here.

JANE
Moonshine?!

CASPAR
What could possibly go wrong?

JANE
Oh, wow. Where did this come from?

AVA
Harlan, Kentucky. 1934.

JANE
Of course. This place is wild.

CASPAR
So, Jane, any idea why the diner came back here?
Please tell me it's not for whatever just happened
on the roof.

JANE
I know exactly why I'm here.

SFX: JUG SETTING DOWN ON THE TABLE. TWO GLASSES BEING Poured.

JANE (CONT'D)
I'm here to talk to my old colleague.

AVA
I can't be your colleague, we're not in the same
field.

JANE
Is that how that works?

AVA
Yes.

JANE
Okay, fine. I'm here to talk to my old roommate.

AVA
Oh really? And why is that?

JANE
The diner hasn't come for me, Ava. It's come for
you.

AVA
You don't say.

JANE
It's brought you to me, so that I can sit here and say to you... It's time to quit.

AVA
To quit?

JANE
Yes.

AVA
Quit what?

JANE
Science. Research. Notes. The whole shebang. It's time to quit.

AVA
Why would I do that?

JANE
Leif was telling me he got a visitation from a couple of future versions of himself a while back.

AVA
He did.

JANE
Well, consider this a visitation from the past. For six years I have been camping out at the very beginnings of our species. I have glimpsed the origins of us. I am here to tell you, with authority... we fucked it all up.

AVA
We did?

JANE
Yes.

AVA
Who, exactly?

JANE
All of us. Collectively. Like, as a species, we fucked up our species, everything you've been doing is pointless, you should stop, I should stop, everybody should stop.

AVA
Is this an actual conversation we're having or is this one of those conversations where you say things just to get everyone to look at you?

JANE

Fair point, fair point. I definitely do that. And I must say it is intoxicating to talk to people that actually understand the words coming out of my mouth after six years in a land of no complex language. BUT. I am serious. This is serious. You have to quit.

AVA

But I don't want to quit.

JANE

Yes you do. I can see it.

CASPAR

Jane, what the hell are you talking about?

JANE

Sorry. Let me start from the beginning. Six years ago, Midnight Burger dropped me off at the end of the last great Ice Age. Leif had really set me up, I had all kinds of wonderful whizz-bangs and whirly-gigs. I was going to be able to observe early homo-sapiens from afar without them ever knowing I was there. So I did. I found a nice little nomadic tribe of humans making their way across what would one day be central Europe, I think. And as I watched them, over the course of a year, I began to think about Thomas Hobbes. Anyone? Thomas Hobbes?

CASPAR

Who is that?

ZEBULON

I am familiar with the work of Mr. Hobbes.

JANE

What?! The talking radio? So you've actually read something other than the Bible?

ZEBULON

It may surprise you to know that I am quite well read, though I tend to stay with the things that are... my vibe.

GLORIA

(From the kitchen.)
Still no, Zeb.

JANE

Do me a favor. Do you have a copy of "Leviathan"?

ZEBULON

I do.

JANE

Bring it down off the shelf for me, I want you to read a passage. Chapter eight.

ZEBULON

One moment.

GLORIA

Okay, one plate of food that is not a Mastodon or whatever.

JANE

That looks amazing.

GLORIA

What'd I miss?

CASPAR

Jane is apparently here to convince Ava to quit being a scientist.

GLORIA

What? Why?

CASPAR

We're still trying to figure that out.

GLORIA

She's not going to quit being a scientist.

JANE

She really should though.

GLORIA

No she shouldn't. She great at it, you don't quit something you're great at.

JANE

How do you know she's great at it?

GLORIA

Because when she talks about it I have no idea what she's saying. That means she's great at it.

JANE

I know it feels that way to you-

GLORIA

To *me*? Oh, to *me*, it feels that way to *me*, what's that mean?

JANE

No, I'm saying-

GLORIA

You know what, give me that hamburger.

JANE

No, please don't, new girl, I'm so sorry.

GLORIA

My name is Gloria and I don't like what's going on right now. Who are you, lady?

JANE

I'm not trying to upset anyone, I just think this is an important conversation for us to have about Ava's future.

GLORIA

Well, Ava's a big girl, she can take care of herself. But I don't like you, so you don't get a hamburger while you're doing whatever it is you're doing.

JANE

But I'm so hungry.

GLORIA

Oh are you? Are you so hungry, lady who didn't even ask me my name? I'm going to sit here at this counter and eat your hamburger, and I'm watching you. Get on with your nonsense.

ZEBULON

I have returned.

GLORIA

(To Caspar)

Sorry, was that bad customer service?

CASPAR

It was very bad customer service and I am now going to discipline you with this high five.

SFX: HIGH FIVE SOUND.

ZEBULON

Chapter eight.

JANE

So, once upon a time Thomas Hobbes tried to describe the nightmare that life would be if we had no society. Start with the passage "In such condition..."

ZEBULON

In such condition, in such, in such, Ah. Here. "In such condition, there is no place for industry; because the fruit thereof is uncertain: and consequently no culture of the earth; no navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by sea; no commodious building; no instruments of moving, and removing, such things as require much force; no knowledge of the face of the earth; no account of time; no arts; no letters; no society; and which is worst of all, continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man—"

JANE

"-solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short." Ava, I watched these people for six years, and all of those things that Hobbes describes... I saw none of it. These people are happy. They have community, they love each other, they protect each other—

AVA

They check each other for tics.

JANE

They do. They do that, and you know what? It's sweet.

AVA

It's tics, Jane.

CASPAR

Jane, I don't think your argument is landing, what are you getting at here? What does this have to do with Ava?

JANE

It was all a waste. My life's work, Ava's life work, our collective life's work of making the society we live in, it was all a waste. The humans I've been studying, they're happier than us. In some ways healthier than us. They don't shut themselves off from each other, they draw each other close.

AVA

Yeah, I don't want to draw people close.

JANE

Ava, why do we do this? These scientific endeavors, why do we put ourselves through years of school, navigate the bullshit halls of academia? We convince ourselves that it all moves everything forward towards some sort of glorious end, right? It doesn't.

(MORE)

JANE (CONT'D)

Over thousands of years all we've managed to do is make ourselves more miserable, more alone, sicker. Our only achievement through the centuries appears to be the towering mountain of things we have convinced ourselves of.... I know you feel it too. I can see it in your eyes. Did something happen? Something shake your tree a little bit?

AVA

... Let's have another drink.

JANE

Good.

GLORIA

(To Caspar)
This is some bullshit.

CASPAR

(To Gloria)
This is definitely some class A bullshit but I feel like Ava's in kind of a vulnerable place right now, so we should, y'know, knives out.

GLORIA

(To Caspar)
Definitely knives out. Zebulon, knives out.

ZEBULON

I don't know what that means, but I believe I understand the vibe.

GLORIA

... That was better.

CASPAR

Yeah, he's getting better, keep working on it, Zebulon... Jane. We're calling bullshit.

JANE

Okay, then. Come at me, bro.

CASPAR

Jane, here's the thing. You're saying that mankind was at it's purest and happiest when we were hunter-gatherers, right?

JANE

Yes.

CASPAR

And that Ava should quit her scientific endeavors because moving society ever forward has just made us more miserable?

JANE

Also true.

CASPAR

Why change? Things moved forward, we started living in houses, we evolved into a world where somehow corn is in all of our food, we invented baseball. If everything was so perfect, why did we evolve past that?

JANE

Because evolution is bad.

CASPAR

What?

GLORIA

It's literally your life's work.

JANE

Hey, talking radio, what's the greatest trick the devil ever pulled?

ZEBULON

Convincing us he doesn't exist.

JANE

And the greatest trick evolution ever pulled was convincing us that it was good. Well, I shouldn't say good. Evolution isn't good or bad, it's just a force that is completely and totally unconcerned with your happiness. Evolution and progress aren't the same thing. The goal of evolution isn't happiness. Evolution has only one goal: more babies. It will make you do anything it can for you to have more babies. Animal husbandry, complex farming, hierarchical societies, land ownership, colonialism, all of these things led to a cascade of unhappiness and a whole heck of a lot of babies.

GLORIA

And a whole heck of a lot of other things too, right, c'mon.

JANE

Wow, I did not expect an argument *for* colonialism.

GLORIA

Oh, shut up, I'm not arguing for colonialism, I'm arguing for air conditioning, and hospitals, and antibiotics, and gelato.

JANE

This is the question that philosophers have been asking since the modern age. Does all of this progress, all of these modern advancements, do they make us intrinsically happier? You can't truly know unless you were there before the advancements. I was there for six years. The answer is no.

ZEBULON

I agree with her.

GLORIA

Zeb, knives out!

ZEBULON

But her point is well heard. It is not modern advancements that should give us joy but rather the glory of our Lord, and doing good works in his name.

JANE

Look at that, I've got Jesus on my side!

ZEBULON

But I've always thought that your most important words should go last. The last words of the Bible: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Surely the most important part. And the last word in Mr. Habbes writing: short. Their lives were short.

CASPAR

Life span!

JANE

Here we go.

CASPAR

As a straight white male you know one thing about me: I've watched a lot of History Channel. And I know for a fact that the farther back you go, the shorter the life span. Surely a longer life is a good enough reason to evolve.

JANE

Is it?

CASPAR

Yes. A long life is a good thing.

JANE

Is it though?

CASPAR

Jane.

JANE

Okay fine, I'll grant you that. The modern world we're all from *does* seem to afford you a longer life. Congratulations.

CASPAR

Okay, point for us.

JANE

But let me ask you this: How much of that time is yours? This long life of yours, how much of it belongs to you? Odds are your average modern human will spend the majority of their waking hours in an office somewhere or a restaurant working to mostly benefit someone they'll never meet. They'll have a few hours with their loved ones at night and then get a few hours of sleep and then do it all over again the next day. Congratulations on a long life. It doesn't belong to you, it belongs to your boss.

CASPAR

How is that any different from hunting and gathering all day?

JANE

They work twenty hours a week, Caspar. For them, when you're good at your job, it's over sooner. We think that an affluent society is one where you have everything you want, but the real-

AVA

-but the real affluent society is the one that wants less things. Jane this is the same diatribe that you would bombard frat guys with at parties, all we need are red cups full of Natural Lite.

JANE

And the only flaw in my argument back then was lack of evidence. We can't truly know what life was like for early mankind because we weren't there. I was there.

AVA

Then go back to the Planck Institute and make your case.

JANE

And tell them what? I travelled back in time in a magical diner?

GLORIA

You're like a reverse Cassandra? You know the past but no one will believe you?

JANE

Exactly, new girl! She's good, I like her, can I have my hamburger back?

GLORIA

Nope.

AVA

Jane, what do you expect me to do at this point?

JANE

Like I said, the diner didn't come back here for me, it came back here for you.

AVA

Well, that was a stupid thing for it to do.

JANE

I'm not going back home, Ava. I'm staying here. And I think you should come with me.

AVA

What?

CASPAR

(Laughing)

That's the worst idea I've ever heard in my life.

GLORIA

Oh my God, is she serious?

CASPAR

This was your plan all along? This was your big pitch?

ZEBULON

Ava? Outdoors? Forever?

AVA

I'm with you, Zebulon. This is a terrible idea. Jane, what are you thinking?

JANE

You laugh, but I think you'd come to like it.

GLORIA

How come you're a doctor but you're saying the stupidest shit right now?

ZEBULON

I am imagining Ava trying to light a campfire and it is very humorous.

CASPAR

Ava, maybe you should hear her out, you do love being the smartest person in the room and DAMN would you be the smartest person in the room.

ZEBULON

It is funny because cave men are not intelligent!

CASPAR

Aw, Jane. What were you thinking? Did you really think this was going to go your way?

JANE

I thought I'd give it a shot.

GLORIA

... No... No, she couldn't have known. This is... you knew it would play out like this.

CASPAR

What's going on?

GLORIA

She's stalling. Why is she... Caspar, go check the roof.

CASPAR

Oh, shit.

SFX: BACK DOOR CLOSES.

AVA

What's going on?

GLORIA

Where's Leif, Jane?

JANE

... Damn. I thought I could keep you guys going for longer than this.

SFX: BACK DOOR CLOSES.

CASPAR

Leif's gone, Jane, where's Leif?

JANE

I mean, he could be anywhere, maybe he went to buy real estate in The Bay Area while the prices are still low.

GLORIA

Which kitchen knife should I threaten you with right now?

JANE

Oooh, she's feisty, isn't she?

AVA

Jane, what did you do?

JANE

See, Ava, all those times in college when I would go on a rant about the madness of man and the original affluent society, you thought I was just riffing. I meant every word. And now I can actually do something.

CASPAR

How about we skip to the part where the evil mad scientist reveals her plan?

JANE

He really despises a flare for the dramatic doesn't he?

AVA

Jane. Right now.

JANE

Okay, okay. Here's the thing. This tribe of people I've been studying, it's going to be about four thousand more years until they develop a God concept. Right now it's just rudimentary symbology and superstition. But their brains aren't going to essentially change all that much over four thousand years which means that deep in their gray matter is a vacancy. There's a God shaped hole in their life, guys. So I, essentially, filled that hole.

AVA

Holy shit, Jane.

JANE

I'm their God.

CASPAR

What the fuck?

JANE

It was easy. Leif had given me all these great tools before I left. I had a laser torch to make fire, I had this cloaking device on my belt so I could disappear right in front of their eyes. What more do you need?

(MORE)

JANE (CONT'D)

I would appear suddenly, set something on fire, and the disappear! They were terrified! It was hilarious. So their God concept developed real quick, and suddenly I was running the show. They'll do whatever I ask them to... With Leif's help I'm going to remake the world the way it should've been. A simpler one. A happier one.

ZEBULON

This is heresy.

JANE

Oh relax, Padre, you're not the innocent one here. You know it's no coincidence that hierarchical religions arose at the same time as hierarchical societies. "Work hard and you'll be rewarded in the afterlife!" Any of that sound familiar?

CASPAR

We're actually done with the theoretical debate portion of the day, Jane, so eyes on me please. Bring Leif back right now.

JANE

No... No, I can't do that, Caspar. I need him. About a year ago I had everything set up. I was their God, they were building a shrine, it was going well. But I needed to kick it up a notch. I'm really building something here and I need someone with a particular skill set. "What am I to do?" I asked myself. And then suddenly... there was a diner. I could've done this much more seamlessly but when you showed up I knew I only had 12 hours, so I had to improvise. I thought I would come in here and distract you as long as I could while my minions carried Leif back to their village. I thought I'd go for the Hail Mary pass and try and convince Ava to come with me, but who am I kidding? She's still got work to do... You know they're never going to let you back in, Ava. You can come back with all the evidence in the world and you're still going to be the crazy lady they pushed into emeritus status.

GLORIA

Okay, I'm thinking a chair, some rope, and I'll pour hot coffee on her, let's do some Guantanamo shit.

JANE

It's no use, guys. The only thing you can threaten me with is to take me with you. But if you did you'd be leaving Leif all alone on an ancient Earth.

(MORE)

JANE (CONT'D)

And he's such a creature of the modern age, isn't he? And then who do you think my followers will blame when their God abandons them? It's no use, guys. Leif's mine. You may as well let me go so that at least he's not by himself... Besides, who among you can stand against a God?

EFFIE

(From the bedroom)
Zebulon!

GLORIA

Is that Effie?

ZEBULON

My wife has awakened. Let me check on her.

EFFIE

No, I'm here. Give me the microphone! I have returned from my fevered state to a sense of great dread. What sort of nonsense transpires?

CASPAR

Jane is back and she's kidnapped Leif.

JANE

Hi, radio lady!

EFFIE

I have no patience for the likes of you today, Jane. As I passed through the depths of my sickness I was presented with many visions. Dark clouds gather around us, my friends. Enemies both overt and subtle make their way to our shores. Shadowy figures and overwhelming forces. We will need to be ready. But Jane... of all the troubles in my various fevered visions... ain't none of them you. You are a waste of our time and our time's gotten scarce, so will you kindly return Leif to us or will I need to treat you like yesterday's periodicals and line my chicken coop with you?

JANE

I don't even know what that means, look, I'm sure all of you have strong feelings right now but no matter how upset you are, I still have the upper hand. You don't know where Leif is and it's a great big world out there. I'm holding all the cards.

EFFIE

I am not playing cards. I am not playing with you at all. This is your last chance, Jane. Produce Leif or we will have troubles.

CASPAR

(To Gloria)
This is getting ominous.

GLORIA

(To Caspar)
I'm a little scared.

JANE

Leif... is mine. We're going to make a beautiful world together.

EFFIE

So be it, then.

CASPAR

Okay, enough, I'm going to go look for Leif, he can't be far.

GLORIA

I'll come with you.

EFFIE

No.

SFX: FRONT DOOR LOCKS. BACK DOOR LOCKS.

EFFIE (CONT'D)

Everyone stay put.

GLORIA

(To Caspar.)
Did the doors to the diner just lock?

CASPAR

They did, Effie what in the Amityville Horror is happening right now?

EFFIE

Hush up, Caspar. Why is there always someone like you, Jane? One who thinks themselves so big that they can take from the course of creation all its wildness? Do you truly believe that you can shape humanity according to your will?

JANE

Yes. I do. I've been preparing my whole life for it.

EFFIE

Lord forgive you. Such folly. Towers of Babel over and over again. We truly never do learn, do we?

CASPAR

Effie, I know it's upsetting but we really do need to find Leif.

EFFIE

Never you mind Caspar. I shall find him myself...

SFX: SOUND OF A CAMPFIRE AND A VILLAGE.

LEIF

So... you guys do cave paintings at all? I hear those are popular... I tell you what, a lot of artists worry that their work wont make a lasting impression, but the cave paintings... evergreen, you guys. Great stuff... What we eating right now? Is it that armadillo thing? If so, that's impressive, it's covered in armor I don't know how you find the weak spot... The village is nice. I mean, I know it's temporary but it's got a really "homey" feel to it. Feels "lived in" y'know?... How often do you guys move? Probably with the seasons, right? Bet that's a bummer... Hey since Jane's decided to totally mess with the timeline I should really show you guy the wheel. You're gonna love wheels, they really change the game... Y'know, since we're bumping up against a language barrier here, I would like to just admit out loud that I have terrible taste in women. Real bad. Really should take a look at that in the future. If I have one.

EFFIE

(Whispering from inside Leif's pocket radio)
Leif? Leif can you hear me?

LEIF

Effie? How did you know about my radio?

ZEBULON

We have always known about it.

EFFIE

We didn't want to intrude.

ZEBULON

And we did enjoy when you would play the Bay City Rollers.

EFFIE

But that's neither here nor there. We must act quickly.

LEIF

I'm not sure what I can do, these guys are huge and fast and for some reason they're doing whatever Jane tells them to do.

EFFIE

It's because she has used the new-fangled gadgetry you have afforded her to appear to them as a God.

LEIF

She promised me she wouldn't do that.

EFFIE

And are we surprised at this juncture that she deceived you?

LEIF

No, no we're not.

ZEBULON

We must extract you from your captivity before it is too late, Leif.

LEIF

How?

EFFIE

Here is the plan: It gives me no pleasure to say it but I believe we must combat Jane's idolatry with even more idolatry.

LEIF

Yeah... yeah, I hear you.

EFFIE

When Zebulon starts up, just be ready to be impressive.

LEIF

Got it... Be impressive.

SFX: CAMPFIRE FADES

JANE

Mind if I sit?

AVA

Sure, why not?

JANE

So the sentient radio controls things around here? I didn't pick up on that last time.

AVA
That is a very new development. There's been a lot of those lately.

JANE
Any closer to the mysteries of the universe?

AVA
Are you seriously making small talk with me after you kidnapped Leif while pretending to be a primitive Cave God?

JANE
I feel kind of guilty. I feel like I've really discovered something in my field and you may never have a moment like that.

AVA
That's true. But I do comfort myself in that fact that you are out of your fucking mind, and I am not.

JANE
That's fair. I'm right though, Ava. My evil plans aside, I was right about everything I said. Right here, at this point in history, *this* is where we started really hurting ourselves.

AVA
Jane, we're human beings. We all have third-degree black belts in hurting ourselves. No matter how deeply you study human beings, you're never going to be able to make them something they're not.

GLORIA
(To Caspar)
What do you think they're talking about over there?

CASPAR
I don't know. They're probably speaking in some sort of science language.

GLORIA
Probably not even words. It probably sounds like a dial-up modem.

CASPAR
Exactly.

GLORIA
Hey, Caspar?

CASPAR
Yeah?

GLORIA

After we get Leif back, I feel like things are about to get weird.

CASPAR

Yeah. I get that sense.

GLORIA

Don't worry though. When they do I'll take care of it.

CASPAR

Oh yeah? You're going to take care of it?

GLORIA

I've got it handled. But I'm going to ask for a raise.

CASPAR

A raise? In this economy?

GLORIA

You know what else?

CASPAR

What?

GLORIA

This shift is a total catastrophe. But Leif... he got laid.

CASPAR

He did, didn't he?

GLORIA

I've decided I'm going to work on that.

CASPAR

Oh yeah?

GLORIA

Yeah, my last date was with a dying robot, how much worse could it get?

CASPAR

True. You know what I think would work? Bespar-9 in the Megellanic Clouds.

GLORIA

Okay. What's going on there?

CASPAR

The whole planet is covered with one hundred foot tall pine trees.

GLORIA

How does that help me?

CASPAR

It's literally a planet of lumberjacks.

GLORIA

Ooooh. Now were talking. We gotta figure out how to steer this fucking thing.

CASPAR

We really do.

GLORIA

Oh, shit.

CASPAR

What?

GLORIA

We're surrounded by cave men.

CASPAR

We are? Oh shit. What now?

GLORIA

There's Leif!

LEIF

(From outside)

Behold! I am Leif! The God of the talking box! All will love me and despair!

ZEBULON

(From outside)

Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places!

LEIF

Yeah! What he said!

JANE

Ugh. Look at him. Such a hottie.

AVA

Gross.

JANE

Okay, I give up, whoever runs this place, time to unlock the doors and exchange prisoners.

SFX: DOORS UNLOCK.

JANE:

Thank you. Goodbye, Doctor.

AVA

Goodbye, Doctor.

SFX: DOOR CHIME. FEET WALKING ON GRAVEL.

JANE

You make a good God.

LEIF

I was thinking about it on the walk over here, I'd make a pretty good God. No fire or brimstone, just the God of hanging out, right?

JANE

Exactly. Sorry about the mess.

LEIF

Not the biggest mess I've been in.

JANE

Does having you kidnapped maybe count as a romantic gesture at all?

LEIF

To me it does, and that is absolutely the problem with me.

JANE

Goodbye, Leafy.

LEIF

Good luck controlling the world.

SFX: DOOR CHIME.

LEIF (CONT'D)

He is risen!

GLORIA

Leif, if you have a little black book, please burn it.

LEIF

No kidding.

CASPAR

Welcome back, Leif. So if Effie and Zeb were in your radio, where are they now?

ZEBULON

We are now returned to our proper place... though I've no idea how, my dear.

EFFIE

Yes. I am not so certain myself. Y'all I was deep in my sickness for many an hour. I saw things I do not yet understand and understand things that were once obscured to me. I have emerged a changed woman. There is much to discuss, but first I speak with Ava privately. Could you please give us a moment? Ava, can you come here, please?

AVA

Sure.

CASPAR

What is this about?

GLORIA

Caspar, come on.

CASPAR

Okay.

AVA

What's going on?

EFFIE

Ava, while I slept I believe I had a vision of the future. I was flung far forward into time's narrow valley and there I found myself in a jungle. I have never seen a jungle before, I can only imagine from what I have seen in children's books, but I believe it was the jungle. I saw someone there amidst the broad leaves. I believe it was my granddaughter. She had my mother's hair. She had Zebulon's square chin. Her eyes were my own. She looked up to the vast array of stars but I feel as though she was not looking at them. She was listening. Is that possible Ava? For one to listen to the stars?

AVA

Yes, it's called a radio telescope.

EFFIE

I see. So she could be a scientist like you, my granddaughter?

AVA

If she was using a radio telescope that would make her an astronomer, yes. Effie are you... I can't believe I don't know this, do you have children?

ZEBULON

The doctor has told us-

EFFIE

I know what the doctor has told us, Dearest. I know what my visions have told me.

ZEBULON

Oh... Oh my.

EFFIE

Ava, I will need you to be brave now.

AVA

Okay.

EFFIE

I have returned with the notion that there is something in your mind. There is something that you have wanted to do for some time now but you have been afraid to do it for fear of how the others will react. Is that true?

AVA

Yes.

EFFIE

You must do it, Ava. And you must do it now.

AVA

I can't.

EFFIE

You must.

AVA

They'll hate me.

EFFIE

They will forgive you. You must, Ava. I've seen it.

AVA

Goddamn it.

EFFIE

Watch your mouth, now.

AVA

Are you sure?

EFFIE

I have been sent back from the brink of death with nothing but certainty. Give me your hand, my Love.

ZEBULON

Yes, dear. Go on then, Ava.

AVA

Goodbye.

SFX: THE RADIO DIAL BEING TURNED THROUGH WAVE AFTER WAVE OF STATIC.

CASPAR

Ava! Ava Ava, what are you doing?

GLORIA

Ava, stop!

LEIF

Holy shit!

CASPAR

Ava!

LEIF

Oh shit, we're jumping early, everybody hang onto something!

SFX: THE DINER PLUNGES INTO THE CURRENTS OF SPACE-TIME. NOISE AND CHAOS EVENTUALLY LEADS TO SILENCE AND THEN TO A DEEP AND RESSONANT PULSATING AND STATIC FROM THE RADIO.

LEIF (CONT'D)

Everybody okay?

GLORIA

Fine.

CASPAR

Effie? Zebulon?

AVA

I'm sorry.

CASPAR

What did you do?!

AVA

I'm sorry!

CASPAR

Where the hell are we?

GLORIA

We're floating in space again.

CASPAR

Leif, any idea where we are?... Leif?

LEIF

What the hell is that?

CASPAR

What the hell is... holy shit.

GLORIA

That isn't the supermassive black hole again, is it?

LEIF

Nope.

GLORIA

Then what is it?

LEIF

It's a big, malevolent, thing.

GLORIA

That's bigger than the black hole.

LEIF

It's an entire lightyear wide. At least.

GLORIA

Anyone else getting the feeling that it's looking at us?

LEIF

Yeah.

CASPAR

Ava, what the fuck did you do?

AVA

I'm sorry... I'm so sorry...

The End