

MIDNIGHT BURGER

Chapter 5: Your Ad Here

SONG: SHE'S COMING AROUND THE MOUNTAIN BY HENRY WHITTER

GLORIA

Ava, what are you doing over there?

AVA

Oh, nothing. Just hanging out with my good friends Effie and Zebulon Mucklewain.

ZEBULON

Ava, you seem to be lurking suspiciously close to the radio when you are usually ensconced within your booth.

AVA

Nice change of pace never hurt anyone.

EFFIE

And this has nothing to do with our little outage we had yesterday?

AVA

I'm going to need air-quotes the size of Mr. Snuffleupagus put around the word "outage".

EFFIE

Dear, sometimes she speaks and I don't understand a word she's saying.

ZEBULON

It's a consequence of ladies attending college.

GLORIA

Um, whoa.

AVA

We accidentally changed the station on you guys and the diner stopped working, any insight into that?

EFFIE

I'm sure we don't have any light to shed, but I would like to congratulate you.

AVA

On what?

EFFIE

You've often said that you don't understand how this diner of yours works, and now you've figured it out, it seems.

AVA

I have NOT figured it out.

ZEBULON

Well then my curiosity doth rise. If you say you haven't the foggiest notion how the diner works, well, how then would you know when it is NOT working?

LEIF

(From the kitchen)  
Ha ha, owned, Ava.

AVA

Shut up, Leif.

EFFIE

Dear...

ZEBULON

We'll have to continue this conversation at a later time-

EFFIE

Dear.

ZEBULON

Yes, my love?

EFFIE

Prepare. We are drifting into the nether realms.

ZEBULON

Oh my. Do take heed, my compatriots. The nether realms approach.

LEIF

What's that? Are we in the nether realms?

GLORIA

Jesus. What is this now?

LEIF

Alternate Earth timeline. They call it the nether realms because they're fancy.

GLORIA

Wait, is this going to be like "Sliders"?

LEIF

Oh my God, are you a Sliders fan?

GLORIA

Huge Sliders fan.

LEIF  
Favorite episode, go.

GLORIA  
Um, um, um. Oh! The one where the US is at war with Australia.

LEIF  
That one was dope. Guess mine.

GLORIA  
Ummmm, the one where Rembrandt is Elvis!

LEIF  
Yes! That one was amazing!

AVA  
This isn't over, you two. I am not dropping this.

EFFIE  
Well, come back any time sugar, we open at six.

AVA  
Mleh, mem memeem mememee mugh.

CASPAR  
Okay, how are we all doing?

LEIF  
Quick update-

CASPAR  
Yeah, I heard everything. Ava got owned, headed toward the nether realms.

AVA  
I did not get owned.

CASPAR  
Quantum Leap, far superior to Sliders, by the way.

LEIF  
That's apples and oranges.

CASPAR  
Gloria, alternate timeline Earths can be rough. Try and go with the flow.

GLORIA  
What's so rough about them?

CASPAR

We've been to a bunch of alternate Earths at this point and consistently it is always WAY WORSE than the Earth we're from.

GLORIA

Seriously? That's depressing.

LEIF

Why, how were things going back home?

GLORIA

Um, poorly.

LEIF

Well this one will be worse.

GLORIA

Always?

LEIF

It's weird, it's like the multiverse has generalized anxiety disorder and can't help but imagine all the different ways that shit can go pear-shaped on Earth.

CASPAR

Here we go.

SFX: THE NEW WORLD MATERIALIZES ALL AROUND THEM.

CASPAR (CONT'D)

Gloria, welcome to another Earth. Did we number this one yet?

AVA

This is 72, right?

LEIF

73.

CASPAR

Ooh. Wrong again. It is not your day.

AVA

Don't try and make this a thing. You'll regret it.

LEIF

Let's have a look.

SFX: DOOR CHIME. SOUND OF A BUSTLING CITY. DINER FADES INTO THE BACKGROUND.

GLORIA

Wow.

AVA

That's a lot of billboards.

CASPAR

They're everywhere, it's like Times Square but a whole city.

LEIF

(John Rys-Davies impression.)

Mr. Mallory, this world seems to be very unlike our own.

GLORIA

I'll say, Professor. I better go get into another romantic entanglement since people are still seeing me as the fat kid from Stand by Me.

CASPAR

Ok, guys. Not the whole time with the Sliders references.

AVA

Someone's coming.

CASPAR

Everyone inside and act casual.

SFX: DOOR CHIME.

CASPAR (CONT'D)

Effie, Zebulon, time to act like a radio.

ZEBULON

Let our work commence. We begin today with a reading from the Book of Ezekiel...

SFX: MUSIC.

ZEBULON (CONT'D)

And you, son of man, on the day I take away their stronghold, their joy and glory, the delight of their eyes, their heart's desire, and their sons and daughters as well—on that day a fugitive will come to tell you the news.

SFX: DOOR CHIME.

ZEBULON (CONT'D)

At that time your mouth will be opened; you will speak with him and will no longer be silent.

(MORE)

ZEBULON (CONT'D)

So you will be a sign to them, and they will know that I am the Lord.

GLORIA

Hey there. Welcome to Midnight Burger.

MARY

Thanks.

GLORIA

Here's a menu. Soup of the day is... Damn. Leif, what's the soup?

LEIF

(From the kitchen)  
Gazpacho.

GLORIA

Our soup is... Seriously? Gazpacho?

LEIF

(From the kitchen)  
It's delicious!

GLORIA

Okay our soup today is Gazpacho because who doesn't want to eat cold tomato sauce with a spoon?

LEIF

(From the kitchen)  
I heard that.

GLORIA

Can I get you some coffee?... Ma'am?

MARY

Oh... yes, please.

GLORIA

Coming right up.

CASPAR

Does she have tin foil wrapped around her neck?

GLORIA

That's what it looks like. What's that about?

CASPAR

I don't know. How's your night going?

MARY

Um, fine, thank you.

CASPAR

I'm Caspar. That's Gloria. Leif's back in the kitchen. That's Ava over there, though she probably won't say much as she's still recovering from being wrong about something a few minutes ago.

AVA

Keep digging, Buddy.

MARY

Where are your ads?

CASPAR

I'm sorry?

MARY

You just said several sentences without an ad, are you ad-free, you don't look ad-free. I thought the fees were so high only a select few could afford them. This confused line of questioning is brought to you by Delta. Delta, setting the standard for safer travel.

AVA

Uhhh.

CASPAR

Oh, my.

GLORIA

Okay, here's some coffee. Have you decided on anything, or do you need a few minutes? I'd recommend the BLT, mainly because it's hard to screw up.

MARY

What's going on here? Is this some sort of sting operation? I won't give up my people, no matter what you do, this act of defiance is brought to you by Huggies-

CASPAR

Ma'am, ma'am, ma'am, everything's okay. Nobody's going to hurt you. We don't know what's going on, though, can you explain to us why you're upset?

MARY

No, you first, where are your ads?

CASPAR

We don't know what you mean by that, okay? We're not from around here we're from...

GLORIA

Canada.

CASPAR

Canada. Manitoba, land of...

AVA

Syrup?

CASPAR

Syrup. Land of syrup so we don't know what you're talking about right now.

MARY

Canada? So it's true what they say? There's no mandatory ads in Canada? I thought that was propaganda? This glimmer of hope is brought to you by Doc Martens, now offering free shipping on all orders over 50 dollars.

GLORIA

It's definitely true, what they say about Canada. In fact, to three people who are very certainly from Canada, you sound a little strange right now.

MARY

I'm sure I do. I haven't sounded like myself for several years. But you have to forgive me, I don't have any way of stopping it. This painful admission is brought to you by Twix.

ZEBULON

And that was Insufficient Sweetie by Ukulele Ike. Folks, it occurs to us that there may be some of you out there that are a bit confused as to where you may find yourself.

EFFIE

Indeed. Perhaps you find yourself in a land where folks' words are not their own. Where they are forced to speak in avaricious tongues to appease a sinful overlord.

ZEBULON

And perhaps The Lord has put you in this land to help them escape their oppressors, if you catch my meaning..

CASPAR

(whispering)

Yeah, guys. We got it. Subtle.

MARY

Your radio doesn't have ads either.



CASPAR

Right, it's a... Canadian radio station.

MARY

They don't sound Canadian.

EFFIE

And some of you may be thinking to yourself, what's a couple of Arkansawyers doing way up in Canada? It's a very interesting story.

ZEBULON

It is indeed, Dearest. It began when I was a boy and I had a pet pig named Pansy-

CASPAR

BOY I HOPE THE RADIO PLAYS SOME MUSIC SOON.

ZEBULON

-But that's a story for another time.

EFFIE

Here's The Westerners with Old Rose Waltz.

SONG: OLD ROSE WALTZ BY THE WESTERNERS.

LEIF

Hey, what's going on?

CASPAR

Another thrilling episode of Sliders.

GLORIA

What's your name?

MARY

Mary.

GLORIA

Mary, since we're from Canada. Right, Leif? That's where we're from is Canada?

LEIF

Uh, that's right. Go Raptors.

GLORIA

We really don't understand what's going on. What's with the tin foil around your neck?

MARY

It blocks the GPS signal.

GLORIA

Okay. You know what? Why don't you start from the beginning?

MARY

Of course. To you I must sound like a crazy person. I'll start at the beginning. Our economy had begun to fail. With so many jobs being automated, no one could find something to support themselves. Nobody was safe. Jobs you wouldn't think could be automated suddenly were being done by an algorithm and a robot. I can't remember the last time a human being took my order at a restaurant. With everyone's job being replaced, there were protests. Protests turned to riots. Then the corporations who had replaced the workers unveiled their plan to save the working class: Ad space. You could get a direct payment from a corporation if you agreed to put a billboard on your garage door or on the roof of your car. Any empty space would do, the back of your jacket, the side of your purse. It worked for a while, but soon we discovered that the empty spaces on our homes and clothing weren't enough. People had to take drastic actions. Product-specific tattoos began to fetch a high price. Students were told their college debt would be forgiven if they legally changed their name to Sprite or Boboli Bread Shell. In the end even that wasn't enough.

That's when they began to offer the chips. They're embedded into the back of our neck and weave advertisements directly into our conversations without us being able to control it. Before long the chips became mandatory. The ads are everywhere now, even in the words we say to a loved one.

I need to apologize in advance. After a lengthy explanation like this, I'll probably have to do a 15 second spot.

Sunlight travels 93 million miles to turn our grapes into Sun Maid raisins, and that's all we put in. Grapes and sunshine. Sun Maid raisins, nothing but grapes and sunshine.

CASPAR

Ok... Ava could we talk to you over here real quick?

AVA

Sure. Ava crossing the room is brought to you by Nestle's Quick-

CASPAR

Just get over here please.

LEIF

What's up?

CASPAR

I just wanted to have a quick meeting to confirm that this is the stupidest dystopia we've ever been to.

LEIF

So bad.

GLORIA

Super dumb.

AVA

I mean, the other dystopian Earths that we've been to, the fashion sense is on-point, very interesting eye makeup ideas-

LEIF

The music rips.

AVA

But this? Ads everywhere? It's just depressing.

GLORIA

Yeah, that might've been the most depressing story I've ever heard just now.

EFFIE

(Whispering)

Psst. Y'all. We agree. This place is a stinky bog of a place.

ZEBULON

(Whispering)

Truly a Sodom in need of smiting.

SFX: CAR PULLING UP OUTSIDE. QUICK BLAST OF COP SIRENS.

AVA

Po po.

MARY

Oh, no. They found me. Can you help me?

CASPAR

What's happening?

MARY

The officer outside, he's been looking for me for days. I've managed to avoid him so far but now that's him outside. Can you hide me somewhere? This desperate plea is brought to you by Arby's. Arby's, we have the meats.

CASPAR

Why is he looking for you?

LEIF

We can put her in the walk-in.

GLORIA

Okay, follow me, sweetie.

CASPAR

We're just saying yes to this?

MARY

Thank you so much.

CASPAR

We're not going to ask why she's on the run from the cops? No?

SFX: WALK-IN DOOR. DOOR CHIME.

CASPAR (CONT'D)

Evening, officer.

OFFICER VALVOLUME

Evening, folks. Just opened?

CASPAR

Yes. Our first day, as a matter of fact.

OFFICER VALVOLUME

Welcome to the neighborhood. I'm Officer Valvoline from the local sheriff's office in partnership with Kool Aid. I don't suppose you've seen a woman this evening? Blonde hair? About yea high?

CASPAR

No, we haven't in fact you're our first customer this evening, can I get you a cup of coffee?

OFFICER VALVOLUME

I'm sorry?

CASPAR

A cup of coffee? Our new waitress has been making it lately, it comes out really well.

(MORE)

CASPAR (CONT'D)

I mean, it's still just coffee grounds and water  
but there's something about the way she makes it.  
Can I get you some?

OFFICER VALVOLINE

Sir, where-

AVA

I'm sorry, Officer. My husband's chip has been  
acting up all week. Sometimes it doesn't work until  
I give him a swift smack in the head.

CASPAR

Don't-

SFX: SMACK.

CASPAR (CONT'D)

Ow!... This cup of coffee is brought to you by...  
y'know... SANKA. Sanka, when you don't have a  
coffee machine?

AVA

We're having it replaced tomorrow.

OFFICER VALVOLINE

Thanks for staying on top of that.

AVA

Did you say your name was Officer Valvoline?

OFFICER VALVOLINE

That's right, Ma'am. When I got out of the academy  
I was one of the lucky recipients of the Valvoline  
housing voucher. A simple name change and I was  
entitled to a two bedroom house in lovely Valvoline  
Gardens.

AVA

Sounds lovely.

CASPAR

Sounds viscous.

AVA

How did Mrs. Valvoline feel about that?

OFFICER VALVOLINE

My previous last name was Kołodziejcki.

AVA

Pretty good, then?

GLORIA

Good evening, officer. Can I get you a cup of coffee?

OFFICER VALVOLUME

I'm afraid our precinct has an exclusive deal with Folger's, is it Folger's?

GLORIA

Probably not.

OFFICER VALVOLUME

I'll have to pass. Is this everyone?

CASPAR

Leif? Come out here and advertise something.

LEIF

Hey there, I'm Leif, I'm the cook and I'm brought to you by Land Rover.

OFFICER VALVOLUME

Nice to meet you. Folks, I don't mind telling you that the woman I'm looking for this evening is very dangerous. As you know, ads are life, and this woman and the group she belongs to are attempting to subvert this way of life and send this city and this country into total chaos. The Getty Foundation is proud to support this malevolent warning.

GLORIA

Total chaos sounds bad.

CASPAR

Is she a terrorist or something?

OFFICER VALVOLUME

She most certainly is. She belongs to a group known as Free Ad-Free. They believe it's their human right to be free of advertisements. Her and her compatriots are constantly searching for ways to have their chips removed and deny the community of the valuable revenue that they generate.

CASPAR

How ridiculous.

OFFICER VALVOLUME

Luckily for them, they've been largely unsuccessful. As we all know, removing a chip is very dangerous. There's risk of infection, neurological damage, also it explodes.

AVA  
Whoa, dude.

LEIF  
Explodes?

OFFICER VALVOLUME  
Oh yes. Takes your head clean off if you do it wrong. You know, for security.

CASPAR  
That's an interesting definition of security.

GLORIA  
Also of "terrorism."

OFFICER VALVOLUME  
So it's... what station is this on your radio right now?

CASPAR  
It's uh...

OFFICER VALVOLUME  
It's gone for a full two minutes without advertisements.

ZEBULON  
Aaand that was Brighten the Corner Where You Are by Homer Rodeheaver brought to you by...

EFFIE  
Burma-Shave!

ZEBULON  
Yes!

EFFIE  
No lady likes to snuggle and dine accompanied by a porcupine.

ZEBULON  
Ask your local grocer about Burma-Shave!

OFFICER VALVOLUME  
There we go. So it's imperative that we track these people down. So if you see the woman we're looking for, call 911, wait for the ad to end, and then report what you've seen, okay everyone?

CASPAR  
Sure thing, officer.

LEIF

You got it.

OFFICER VALVOLINE

Great. This friendly visit with threatening undertones is brought to you by Schlage. Trust your home to Schlage.

SFX: DOOR CHIME.

AVA

You guys had a Burma-Shave ad just sitting in your back pocket?

EFFIE

It's the only billboard in Toadsuck.

AVA

Right, Toadsuck. Where you live. Because you're from Arkansas.

EFFIE

You're getting close to fighting words with me, Lady.

ZEBULON

Honey.

CASPAR

Can we get the fugitive out of the walk-in please?

SFX: WALK-IN DOOR.

CASPAR (CONT'D)

Hi there, Mary. Turns out you're public enemy number one.

MARY

I'm so sorry about this. I didn't mean to get anyone in trouble.

AVA

You're a fugitive and you said "hide me," that wasn't going to come down on us at all?

MARY

I wasn't thinking.

LEIF

You have a bomb on your neck. Hard to think clearly.



CASPAR

Yeah, was he serious? That thing on your neck explodes?

MARY

It does. At first we thought it was propaganda to scare us but then, several heads later...

AVA

Ouch.

GLORIA

This message brought to you by "Scanners."

MARY

They've been following me all night. There was a rumor that there was a doctor in this part of town that was removing chips from people so I took the risk and tried to find him. Turns out it was a ruse to lure me out of hiding. I've put you in a terrible position, I should go before I get you into more trouble. It's true what they say, Canadians are very nice. This mournful goodbye is brought to you by Fruit Roll-Ups.

SFX: DOOR CHIME.

GLORIA

Guys, c'mon, is that the best we can do?

CASPAR

What do you want us to do, she's got a bomb in her head?

GLORIA

I feel like we're supposed to help her.

CASPAR

Help her how? SHE HAS A BOMB IN HER HEAD.

GLORIA

Wouldn't a bomb in her head be a clear sign that she needs help?

CASPAR

It's a clear sign she needs help from someone who can remove a bomb from your head.

GLORIA

Maybe Ava could do it.

AVA

This isn't The Hurt Locker, I can't disarm a bomb.

CASPAR

Wow, all this talk about how smart she is.

AVA

How about I disarm your face?

GLORIA

Okay, I don't care how smart or dumb we are, we're going to try and help her.

SFX: DOOR CHIME. CITY NOISE.

GLORIA (CONT'D)

Mary. Hey. Where are you headed now?

MARY

Honestly, I don't know. Don't worry about me, please.

GLORIA

Do they have that show "Sliders" here? It was really popular in uh... Canada.

MARY

I don't think so.

GLORIA

See, it was this show about a group of people who travel to all these different alternate realities. There was an Earth where the Nazis won the war, there was an Earth where scientists were treated like celebrities, an Earth where robots have wiped out all the humans. It was great.

MARY

O..okay.

GLORIA

Thing is, if your world was an episode of Sliders it would really suck. Because honestly, it's boring. There's no Lords of the Wasteland, or killer robots, or aliens. In your dystopia, things just got progressively worse in a really mundane way. And I don't like that. Mainly because... your dystopia is plausible. And I only like to imagine dystopias that can't happen. We can't let you go back out into that. So, can you come inside and see if we can help you?

MARY

You really don't have to.

GLORIA

You were wandering around feeling lost and afraid, you didn't know where to turn and then suddenly there was a diner. Right?

MARY

Yes.

GLORIA

Everyone in there knows that feeling. Come on in.

SFX: DOOR CHIME.

MARY

Hello again.

CASPAR

They say repeat customers are key to a successful business.

GLORIA

Why don't you sit here in this chair, take the tin foil off your neck and lift your hair up. Ava is a scientist and is going to look at that chip in your neck.

MARY

Wait, no. You can't.

GLORIA

Why not?

MARY

As soon as you take the tin foil off my neck they'll be able to receive my signal. They'll be here within minutes.

GLORIA

Well, we'll just have to work fast, won't we, Ava?

AVA

I don't know anything about neck chips.

GLORIA

You're the only scientist in the joint. Have a look.

MARY

Are you sure this is safe?

GLORIA

Totally fine.

LEIF  
Let me have a look.

AVA  
This isn't a patty melt scale situation, Leif.

LEIF  
Just let me see.

MARY  
Okay...

AVA  
Oh, Jeez.

LEIF  
Wow.

CASPAR  
What's it look like?

AVA  
Kinda gross.

LEIF  
It's pretty Cronenburg back here, man.

AVA  
Were they TRYING to make it look like a giant insect had latched onto you?

GLORIA  
How about a little bedside manner, guys.

CASPAR  
Hey, Mary. While they're doing whatever they're doing let's focus on something else.

MARY  
I'd really like that.

CASPAR  
Why were you on the run?

MARY  
It was a stupid idea. I heard there was someone in this part of town that could remove my chip. I was going to have my chip removed and then broadcast a speech. I had a shortwave radio and everything. I was going to talk to people without interruption. Without ads. I wanted to be able to remind people what it was like.

CASPAR

That's not much of a plan.

MARY

I didn't know what else to do. Do you have any idea how terrible it is to say something heartfelt to someone you love and have to follow it up with an ad for Heineken? This mention of an ad for Heineken brought to you by Heineken.

CASPAR

Ava, how's it coming back there?

AVA

It appears to run on some form of electricity.

GLORIA

Ava, come on.

AVA

Guys, scientists have fields of study for a reason. We're not wizards.

LEIF

Are those heat-sinks?

AVA

Are they what?

LEIF

Those two squares right there, they're heat-sinks. That means it can overheat.

AVA

How do you know?

LEIF

I know how to get it off. Mary, I'm sorry for how this question sounds but would you mind if I applied a Crème Brûlée torch to the explosive on the back of your neck?

GLORIA

Hang on.

AVA

What are you talking about?

LEIF

If it has heat-sinks that means it can overheat. If it overheats it will shut down until it cools off. So I can remove it, but only for a few seconds.

CASPAR

How do you know that?

LEIF

Just trust me. The chip comes off, I throw it out in the street before it explodes.

AVA

I am not in support of that.

MARY

No, I have to keep the chip. I have to stand in solidarity with my fellow freedom fighters.

AVA

Ug. Activists are the worst.

MARY

I meant to make the speech and then put the chip back on.

LEIF

Well that complicates things.

GLORIA

The chip is one thing. What about the broadcast she wanted to make?

CASPAR

Do we have to give her the whole package? We can't just take the chip off?

GLORIA

She wants to put it back on.

LEIF

We could maybe do a broadcast from here.

AVA

Oh really? And how are we going to do that?

LEIF

Well, I'd have to take the radio apart.

EFFIE

Uh, come again?

CASPAR

You are absolutely not taking the radio apart.

ZEBULON

I wholeheartedly agree.

CASPAR

Last time we messed with the radio we all almost died.

AVA

How would you do it?

EFFIE

Ava.

LEIF

In an older transistor radio, I might be able to use the local oscillator to transmit a low power AM signal. I MIGHT be able to connect the audio amplifier input to be the speaker instead of the detector diode. The audio output MIGHT power the local oscillator rather than being directly powered by the battery.

AVA

How would you modulate the amplitude?

LEIF

Her voice in the local oscillator hopefully.

AVA

That'd be hard to do without an oscilloscope.

LEIF

Or a circuit map. But radios like that are so old, I could probably just wing it.

AVA

Have we met?

LEIF

I'm Leif.

ZEBULON

I don't believe this is any time to be messing about with forces you don't understand, Leif.

CASPAR

Leif, how do you know all this?

LEIF

I know things.

MARY

Is the radio talking?

GLORIA

Just go with it, Mary.

LEIF

This is all assuming that when I open up the back of the radio that... there's a radio in there.

AVA

I think it's a great idea.

EFFIE

You get behind me, Satan.

ZEBULON

Let us not solve a small problem by creating a larger one.

LEIF

It'd be easy to put it all back together again.

CASPAR

We are absolutely not doing any of that.

EFFIE

Thank you, Caspar.

ZEBULON

Let's not cloud our head with foolish ideas.

MARY

I'm very confused right now.

AVA

Oh come on, you two. We're trying to help someone out. She desperately needs you.

EFFIE

We will not be manipulated by you.

AVA

Well I have to say, I'm surprised. A couple of God-fearing Christians like yourselves and you're refusing to help a refugee from persecution named Mary. Ironies abound.

CASPAR

Ava, you want to dial it back just a little bit?

ZEBULON

No. She's right, though I am loath to admit it. If this radio that we speak through can be of help to this troubled lady in her troubled world then we are obliged to offer assistance. Leif, do what you must.



CASPAR

No no. No no no. No. We're not touching the radio again, not after the black hole.

MARY

After the what?

ZEBULON

Caspar, you must have faith that the Lord has put us on this path.

EFFIE

My husband is right. We must have faith.

AVA

I LOVE the Lord.

LEIF

Hang on, though. If our plan is to remove her chip so she can make a speech into the radio, we still need to do something with her chip. It'll blow if it's off her for... more than five seconds, I'm guessing.

SFX: POLICE SIRENS AND SCREECHING TIRES.

GLORIA

Police are here!

LEIF

We need a solution.

MARY

Everyone, please, I should just turn myself in.

OFFICER VALVOLINE

(On megaphone)

Attention everyone in the building. This is Officer Valvoline with the Sheriff's Department. You are harboring a fugitive. You are hereby ordered to exit the building immediately and submit to questioning. This stern warning is brought to you by Twinkies.

CASPAR

To hell with it, if we're doing this, we're doing this. We need to convince them that we're dangerous so they don't just charge in here.

LEIF

I've got an idea. Ava, where's the moonshine?

AVA

Under the counter.

CASPAR

After we do that, Mary, we're going to remove your chip and we're going to put it on me.

AVA

What?!

CASPAR

We have to do something with it. What do you suggest? Leif, would it work?

LEIF

Yeah.

AVA

He doesn't know!

LEIF

Yeah, it will. The technology is Garbage, it just needs a warm body to latch onto.

MARY

Please, you really don't have to do this.

CASPAR

We're doing it. It's going to be fine. Leif, what are you doing?

LEIF

Everybody clear a path to the door.

SFX: MOLOTOV COCKTAIL BEING LIT.

CASPAR

Leif, is that-

LEIF

Out of the way. OPEN FLAME!

GLORIA

Oh my God!

SFX: DOOR CHIME.

LEIF

This Molotov Cocktail is brought to you by communism!

SFX: BOTTLE SMASHING. FLAMES SPREADING. DOOR CHIME.

LEIF (CONT'D)

Okay, that should do it.

CASPAR

What the hell was that?

LEIF

Fangs out. They think we're crazy now. They probably have to call a SWAT team or something.

CASPAR

Okay, sure. Why not.

LEIF

Speaking of open flame, I'm going to go get my Crème Brûlée torch. Mary, get ready to be ad-free.

MARY

Is all of this really happening right now?

GLORIA

It's totally okay to say you're having a nervous breakdown. Whatever gets you through the next few minutes.

AVA

Caspar, what are you doing? That chip could explode.

CASPAR

Look, I know you're nervous but I need you to do me a favor. If something goes wrong and I don't make it... please try and blame yourself. It'll really take the sting out of getting my head blown off.

AVA

Is this because I'm being mean to Effie and Zebulon?

EFFIE

I sure hope so.

LEIF

(From the kitchen.)  
Caspar, sit right next to Mary. The less time the chip is off a body, the better.

CASPAR

Okay. Hey Mary, how are you holding up?

MARY

Who are you people, and why are you doing this?

CASPAR

We run a diner.

LEIF

Okay, I've got a Crème Brûlée torch and I'm about to get weird with it. Everybody stand back. Effie, Zebulon how about a prayer?

SFX: TORCH LIGHTING UP.

EFFIE

Lord, please guide our friend's hand as he applies an open flame to some sort of strange explody device attached to this woman's head.

ZEBULON

And should the explody device issue forth, we beseech you to carry our friends' souls into your loving embrace.

GLORIA

Guys, please. Positive thinking.

MARY

That's getting really hot.

LEIF

Almost there. Okay it's off.

SFX: BEEPING.

LEIF (CONT'D)

Caspar hold still.

CASPAR

Okay.

LEIF

It's on!

CASPAR

OW! Oh, Jesus Christ that's terrible! Fucking hell, that sucks, motherfucker! This string of expletives brought to you by Hawaiian Airlines. Hawaiian Airlines, Hawaii starts here. Oh, shit.

AVA

I changed my mind, this was a great idea.

MARY

It worked. I'm free. I can feel it. I could talk for an hour without having to advertise anything. I can't remember the last time I felt this way. Leif, thank you so much.

GLORIA

Leif, you're a genius!

CASPAR

Okay, let's celebrate later. Leif set up the radio.

SFX: SCREWDRIVER AT THE BACK OF THE RADIO.

LEIF

Okay. Effie, Zebulon, you guys are going to go dark for a minute, but I swear I'll get you back. That is assuming I don't open up the back of the radio and there's a spatial anomaly in there or something.

EFFIE

We trust you, Leif.

AVA

Anything the two of you would like to say before we open you up? The nature of your existence? How the Diner works?

EFFIE

Oh, I've got something I'd like to say-

CASPAR

We've got enough to worry about without you two fighting with each other, can you please knock it off? This attempt to quell an argument brought to you by Slim Jim, Slim Jim snap into a Slim Jim Jesus Christ this is terrible.

MARY

I'm so sorry. I know exactly how you feel. Question: how is the radio talking, again?

LEIF

I am opening up the radio... Huh. Okay. It looks like a circa 1920s radio on the inside.

ZEBULON

As I'm sure we all expected.

AVA

Let me see... what the hell?

SFX: TIRES SCREECHING TO A HALT.

GLORIA

Uh, guys? I think the SWAT team just got here.

LEIF

That was fast. I probably shouldn't have used the word "communism" when I threw the firebomb. It's one of those words that dives everyone crazy.

OFFICER VALVOLINE

(On megaphone)

Attention Communists. You are now in violation of several state laws as well as the federal Anti-Communist Act. Better dead than red, you pinkos. This display of nationalist pride is brought to you by Stolichnaya Vodka. That was an unfortunate ad placement, not a show of sympathy.

LEIF

Okay guys, I'm going to unplug a few things, but don't worry, we'll be right back.

EFFIE

May the Lord guide your hand, Leif.

GLORIA

The SWAT team is ready to go, what if they charge in here before he's finished?

CASPAR

Tell them we have a bomb.

GLORIA

What?!

CASPAR

And hostages.

GLORIA

Are you serious?

CASPAR

Just do it. This irrational directive brought to you by Reebok. Reebok, seriously? Just do it is right there.

SFX: DOOR CHIME.

GLORIA

We have a bomb! And hostages!

OFFICER VALVOLINE

(On megaphone.)

Bomb threat! Bomb threat! Everyone to safe cover, they're crazy! This panic is brought to you by Cat Chow!

LEIF

Okay. We're good. We're sending out a low AM signal and the speakers are now microphones.

GLORIA

Just like that?

LEIF

Just like that.

GLORIA

And you're sure you can get Zeb and Effie back?

LEIF

Yeah, I just switch everything back.

EFFIE

Or maybe you don't even have to?

ZEBULON

We seem to hear you all just fine!

LEIF

What the hell?

EFFIE

Watch your mouth, Leif.

LEIF

They're speaking out of speakers that aren't speakers anymore.

ZEBULON

Fear not, Leif.

AVA

What in the fucking. World.

EFFIE

Oh, I'm sorry Ava, are you confused by our continued ability to do the Lord's work?

AVA

You know what? You win. None of this makes any sense! I'm going to give my-self up to the police, to hell with it! I'm going to have them slap a chip on me and I'm going to sell Oscar Meyer Weiners or whatever. Where's the moonshine?

MARY

Could someone please explain to me what's going on?

ZEBULON

Mary.

SFX: GOSPEL ORGAN MUSIC.

ZEBULON (CONT'D)

Fear not. You are a just woman in a land where injustice abounds. In your time of crisis the lord has reached out and brought us to you.

EFFIE

Amen.

ZEBULON

As in the book of Matthew, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for a righteous cause, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

EFFIE

Hallelujah.

ZEBULON

Mary. Step forth and speak your truth unto us so that it may reach into the hearts of the troubled masses.

EFFIE

I don't even know if anyone's listening.

ZEBULON

It matters not.

GLORIA

Wait. Hey, Leif, what station are we on?

LEIF

Uh, AM 630.

GLORIA

Hang on.

SFX: DOOR CHIME.

GLORIA (CONT'D)

Hey! We will be broadcasting our demands on AM 630. Listen closely, Capitalist pigs!

SFX: DOOR CHIME.

GLORIA (CONT'D)

Okay, you've got an audience.

ZEBULON

Mary. Fear not. Step forward and speak.

MARY

Okay... Hello. My name is Mary. I... I studied anthropology in school. In Boston. At first I didn't even know why, I just felt like I should. I think I wanted to know... I wanted to know how we got here. How did we go from strange, confused apes to this? It was a question I had always asked myself and was always confused why more people didn't ask it.

(MORE)



MARY (CONT'D)

How do people walk around in their lives and not ask how they got there? I thought it made me weird but my dad said to me "It doesn't make you weird, it makes you an anthropologist."

I... I don't know why I brought that up. I think it's because... That was the first thing I asked my professor my freshman year: "How did we get here?" And I suppose I was expecting an hour-long speech or something but she just said... She just said, "we started living together." And then she gestured to the Boston skyline and said, "And that led to all of this."

The thing is... I don't think this is what we meant to do. All of this. When we huddled together for warmth thousands of years ago I don't think this was where we were trying to get to. I think we meant to do something else. I don't know what we meant to do, but let me ask you something? When you look around, do you see something done right, or something done wrong? I know what that answer is for me. I think you owe it to yourselves to find your answer. You won't hear from me again. But try and think of me from time to time, if you can.

GLORIA

That was lovely, Mary.

ZEBULON

A sermon for the ages, to be sure.

MARY

Leif, thank you so much. But Caspar looks miserable. I think you should put my chip back on.

CASPAR

Mary, if you like I can keep wearing this chip until Leif figures out what to do with it, you can at least have some time without ads being piped into your brain. This selfless offer is brought to you by Clorox Clean-up holy fucking shit I hate this thing.

MARY

It's fine. They'll just put another one on me anyway. That chip and I have been through a lot together.

CASPAR

Okay. Fire it up, Leif.

SFX: TORCH.

LEIF

Here we go.

EFFIE

Ava, I don't think The Lord meant for us to fight, darling.

AVA

I don't like not knowing things.

EFFIE

Don't I know it. But you keep on thinking I've got something I'm not telling you. What makes you think I know any more than you do?

AVA

I suppose that's fair.

SFX: BEEPING.

LEIF

Here we go here we go here we go aaaand ON.

MARY

Ouch.

CASPAR

Oh my God. That was terrible.

GLORIA

Are you sure you want to do this, Mary?

MARY

This is actually the best I've felt in a very long time.

GLORIA

I feel like we could've done more.

MARY

No, you've done so much. Thank you.

LEIF

They're not going to put you in a gulag or something are they?

MARY

The irony is, they need me walking around free... for the ad time.

AVA

That's hilarious.

MARY

You know, I still have no idea what happened here tonight.

GLORIA

Been there.

MARY

I have so many questions, but if I talk longer than a sentence the chip will attach an ad.

CASPAR

We understand.

MARY

Who are you all?

CASPAR

Um... "Be bold and mighty forces will come to your aid", that's the old saying, right? Sometimes mighty forces look pretty fucking weird.

MARY

Thank you. All of you.

ZEBULON

Farewell, Mary.

SFX: DOOR CHIME.

OFFICER VALVOLINE

(On megaphone.)  
She's coming out!

CASPAR

Leif, look at you. You saved the day.

LEIF

Yep, just floating through the cosmos, righting wrongs, just me and my trusty Crème Brûlée torch.

AVA

Where'd you go to school, Leif?

LEIF

What do you mean?

AVA

"Building down a processor"? "Heat-sinks"? Turning a radio into a broadcaster? You didn't pick that up being an intergalactic fry-cook.

LEIF

School of hard knocks, Baby.

AVA

Uh-huh.

GLORIA

We're still surrounded by police, by the way.

LEIF

They're going to lose their shit when we vaporize in a few hours.

CASPAR

Yeah, looks like the rest of this shift is going to be a stand-off with the ad-cops. Hey. Are we still broadcasting?

LEIF

Yeah.

CASPAR

Well then. Effie, Zebulon. Let's give them a radio show. Ad-free.

ZEBULON

Hello and welcome to all who hear my voice. My name is Zebulon Mucklewain here with my wife, Effie.

EFFIE

Hi, y'all.

ZEBULON

We know not if we find you lonely, we know not if we find you afeared. All we know is that we have found you, and we thank The Lord for that.

EFFIE

And if you're a weary soul, don't you worry about a thing, because weary souls are the bread to our butter.

ZEBULON

Remove the oddly-fitted coat of your burdens, lay them down into the stream. Be at peace as they float into the distance.

EFFIE

The Lord hath made you perfect. You just done forgot...

SONG: WERE YOU THERE WHEN THEY CRUCIFIED MY LORD? BY PAUL ROBESON

**THE END**