

MIDNIGHT BURGER

Interlude: Office Hours.

By Joe Fisher

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A TELEPHONE RINGS AND RINGS WHILE WE HEAR PENCIL SCRIBBLING.
FINALLY THE PHONE IS PICKED UP.

AVA

I heard that no one uses land lines anymore, so what's going on here?... Oh, hi... With the Dean?... okay, sure. Yeah, I have that free. I'll see you then. And Sue? You may want to politely remind the Dean that he doesn't like me and that his day will be a lot more pleasant if he doesn't meet with me later today, okay? Of course it won't work, but hope springs eternal. Okay, bye bye.

A KNOCK ON AVA'S DOOR.

AVA

Strongly consider your choices.

DOOR OPENS.

MARGUERITE

Hey doctor, can we talk for two hours about how I think the universe is a hologram?

AVA

Oh fuck you.

MARGUERITE

How are things?

AVA

Since you're not one of my students things are going better.

MARGUERITE

You know there's a whole group of them that gather by the statue after your class.

AVA

How do you know they're mine?

MARGUERITE

The permanent tear-streaks on their faces is a dead giveaway.

AVA

That's not fair. I'm not mean.

MARGUERITE

You're not, but there are no tough guy scientists anymore.

AVA

Were there ever tough guy scientists?

MARGUERITE

Tycho Brahe.

AVA

Ah, Old brass nose, himself. The first and last of the science tough guys.

MARGUERITE

Kepler got his mom acquitted of witchcraft, that's pretty tough.

AVA

That's not the same as losing your nose in a sword fight.

MARGUERITE

Didn't he also have a pet moose?

AVA

Elk, as it turns out. He had a pet elk that died when it fell down the stairs after he had gotten it drunk. He also had a court jester named Jepp, that he insisted was clairvoyant. He was also rich and was the first to observe a supernova. What's a girl to do when she finds out her ideal man died hundreds of years ago?

MARGUERITE

Your children would've been so beautiful.

AVA

So, what are you doing here? Don't you have class right now?

MARGUERITE

Sudden schedule change.

AVA

Good. We can scare away my students together, then. Hey, speaking of sudden, the dean wants to meet with me today all of a sudden.

MARGUERITE

Really?

AVA

Yes. Really looking forward to that. We love each other. Really looking forward to getting stared down by that portrait of Ezra Cornell on his wall.

MARGUERITE

I hate that thing. The eyes follow you.

AVA

So what's going on?

MARGUERITE

I need to... I need to call an emergency meeting of the lady scientists of Cornell University.

AVA

Well, let's see, is everyone here? Oh wait, that's just us.

MARGUERITE

We have a quorum.

AVA

Please proceed.

MARGUERITE

...

AVA

What's wrong?

MARGUERITE

Um... you know that "woman in academia feeling" where you're just waiting for the other shoe to drop?

AVA

Yes.

MARGUERITE

I have uh... been shoe'd.

AVA

Oh God, what's happened?

MARGUERITE

It's a funny story.

AVA

I'm sure it's hilarious.

MARGUERITE

I'm pretty sure your meeting with the dean is about picking up some slack while they find an ad-interim head of astrophysics.

AVA

They're FIRING you?!

MARGUERITE

Yes. Sort of. I don't actually know what they're going to do yet but it's going to be whatever you do when you fire someone with tenure.

AVA

You can't fire someone with tenure.

MARGUERITE

Right but they can nail me shut in a pine box academically speaking. They're going to do whatever they can and they can do a lot.

AVA

On what fucking grounds?

MARGUERITE

I'm sure they'll say something about my lack of publishing. Something like that.

AVA

I've read all of your publishing.

MARGUERITE

You read my drafts.

AVA

Yes. They're great.

MARGUERITE

Thank you, I think so too.

AVA

Then what the hell?

MARGUERITE

There is that pesky step of actually submitting things for review.

AVA

Pesky step.

MARGUERITE

Yes.

AVA

How much have you submitted?

MARGUERITE

Um, I'm going to say none?

AVA
None? None.

MARGUERITE
Roughly.

AVA
Zero is a hard number, you can't say roughly zero.

MARGUERITE
It's zero.

AVA
Oh my God.

MARGUERITE
Yeah.

AVA
Thats fine. Thants fine. Start the process right now. Start the process and when they try to put you in the pine box you just say you're in the process-

MARGUERITE
I've been sleeping with the Dean's wife.

AVA
...

MARGUERITE
...

AVA
You...

MARGUERITE
...

A DRAWER OPENS. A BOTTLE AND TWO GLASSES EMERGE. TWO GLASSES ARE Poured. AVA DRINKS ONE THEN FILLS IT AGAIN.

MARGUERITE (CONT'D)
So-

AVA
I'm going to need you to rewind your story a little bit.

MARGUERITE
Right. Right. Well, we met two years ago at a function-

AVA
Oh no no no. A little further back, please.

MARGUERITE

...

AVA

...

MARGUERITE

So, I'm a lesbian.

AVA

Hi, nice to meet you.

MARGUERITE

I'm a private person.

AVA

I've seen you date men.

MARGUERITE

Nobody's perfect.

AVA

Jesus Christ, Marguerite.

MARGUERITE

I apologize.

AVA

The Dean's wife?!

MARGUERITE

She's actually a lovely person.

AVA

I hope so.

MARGUERITE

I kept getting curiously invited to functions when the other professors weren't. She sent the initial signals.

AVA

Oh you poor thing, you're an innocent victim.

MARGUERITE

I really am, Ava. What should I have done?

AVA

Not sleep with a married person. Also not sleep with the person married to your boss.

MARGUERITE

Marriage doesn't mean anything to me. I'm French.

AVA
You're from Colorado.

MARGUERITE
I mean my ancestors.

AVA
He is going to form a posse and run you out of town.

MARGUERITE
I know.

AVA
He knows everyone in academia.

MARGUERITE
Yes.

AVA
He's going to ruin you.

MARGUERITE
... I know.

AVA
... fuck... well, drink your drink you total stranger to me.

MARGUERITE
Okay.

SHE DRINKS.

MARGUERITE (CONT'D)
Another please.

GLASS BEING POURED.

MARGUERITE (CONT'D)
I'm sorry I didn't tell you.

AVA
We've been working together for seven years.

MARGUERITE
Yes.

AVA
You're right down the hall. You're the only person I don't want to murder.

MARGUERITE

It's an easy thing to miss, we've both had our heads down in our work.

AVA

You've had your head down in something.

MARGUERITE

You never asked either, by the way.

AVA

Yes, because asking a colleague their sexual orientation in an academic setting could never cause any problems.

MARGUERITE

You could've asked leading questions.

AVA

It's not my job to Encyclopedia Brown your sexuality.

MARGUERITE

Fine, okay.

AVA

... I can't believe you didn't publish any of the things I read.

MARGUERITE

I know.

AVA

It's not getting published now.

MARGUERITE

No. But here's the thing... there's a reason why I didn't publish them. It's actually the main reason I'm here.

AVA

What are you talking about?

MARGUERITE OPENS HER BAG AND PUTS SOMETHING BIG DOWN ON AVA'S DESK.

AVA (CONT'D)

What is this?

MARGUERITE

Oh, also. These two flash drives.

PAGES TURNING.

AVA

What is this, I haven't seen any of this.

MARGUERITE

That's the reason I didn't publish. That's what I've really been working on... I haven't been publishing because everything in these notes and those two flash drives disproves everything I would've published. In fact it disproves... it disproves most things, Ava.

AVA

... what are you talking about?

MARGUERITE

It wasn't a Big Bang.

AVA

... keep talking.

MARGUERITE

If you watch the first three acts of Hamlet, it's about a guy who never does anything but loves to talk about doing something. Not a great story. You really need those last two acts.

AVA

Ok.

MARGUERITE

We're in act three of the universe. The beginning of act three even. We think we know the end by looking at the beginning, but it's a more interesting story than that. Who in their right mind would watch the first half of Hamlet and assume he's just going to keep doing the same thing over and over again?

AVA

So then... how does it end?

MARGUERITE

It doesn't. The lights fade. The curtain lowers... and then we do it all again tomorrow for a different audience.

AVA

You've been working on The Big Bounce Theory.

MARGUERITE

Secretly. On my own. Since college. In quiet moments to myself. You know the quiet moments when you're post-coital with the Dean's wife.

AVA
Are you serious about this?

MARGUERITE
Yes. Look I know I'm kind of a goofball most of the time. I forget things, I don't take things seriously that everyone else does. I miss important parties, I don't read enough journals, I hardly ever get my oil changed in my car. I kind of blow off most normal human things. You've seen it happen. But as it turns out there's a reason for that. Because everything in those notes and those flash drives tells me that everything we've been doing is wrong. How do you take your work seriously when you feel that, at its core, it's fundamentally flawed.

AVA
Marguerite, this would change everything.

MARGUERITE
I know.

AVA
If you're right then people have to know about this.

MARGUERITE
They won't.

AVA
What?

MARGUERITE
Don't play dumb with me.

AVA
I'm not.

MARGUERITE
No one's going to listen to me. Maybe 100 years from now someone will find my notes and realize that a nutty professor from Cornell was right all along but it'll just be a footnote. I'll just be another "right after the fact" scientist. It's not enough to be right. People have to believe that you're the kind of person that CAN be right. Nobody thinks that about me. Not even you, look at you, you think I'm crazy.

AVA
No I don't.

MARGUERITE

A little bit.

AVA

Maybe a little bit... you seriously think that the Big Bang didn't happen?

MARGUERITE

No. It happened. It just isn't what we think it is. We're not spiraling towards the total heat death of the universe, we're just halfway through a long and beautiful story. One that will be told over and over again for eternity. Everything in the universe condensed to a single point, and then, boom. The universe is created. Then, after billions of years, it slowly comes back together again and collapses in on itself down to that single point. Then, boom. And we do it all over again.

AVA

And you've proven this.

MARGUERITE

I have for me. I have decided to now leave it on your desk and make it your problem.

AVA

Astrophysics isn't even my field.

MARGUERITE

I know. But I'm not going to give it to one of the fucking idiots down the hall.

AVA

You're just going to leave me with a mess.

MARGUERITE

No. I'm leaving you with something you've been looking for.

AVA

What do you mean?

MARGUERITE

In those notes is a new draft of the universe. In my universe things make sense that didn't make sense before.

AVA

Like what?

MARGUERITE

Like your big secret, Ava. Like, let's say you're a theoretical physicist who keeps telling people that she's discovered a single point of null entropy in the universe. In the current model of the universe a single point of null entropy is impossible. In my model of the universe, it makes complete sense.

AVA

And you still didn't tell me? My world fits perfectly into yours and you said nothing.

MARGUERITE

Remember when I first started here and you hated me?

AVA

Yes.

MARGUERITE

I kept saying, let's go get a drink. I kept saying there's a free concert on the grass let's go check it out. Every time you would move your office I would help you move without you asking and it would really annoy you.

AVA

I remember.

MARGUERITE

Considering these new revelations about me, does all of that maybe make a little more sense now?

AVA

...

MARGUERITE

I tried to convince you a while back that our worlds fit together. But you weren't listening. So I kept it to myself. Maybe a little bit out of spite. And I'm sorry about that, too.

AVA

...

MARGUERITE

I have to go. The Dean's wife is waiting for me on my couch.

AVA

Oh my God.

MARGUERITE

He thinks she's staying at her sister's, but she's not staying at her sister's, sister, she's staying with me.

AVA

Are you out of you're mind?

MARGUERITE

Hey. I'm not going to be a pariah AND single.

AVA

Well... tell her I said hi.

MARGUERITE

I will. So, will you call me when you've gone through all that?

AVA

Yes, I will, but I don't know what to do with it all regardless.

MARGUERITE

Ava. Look around. It's our universe, they just don't know it yet. Call me soon.

AVA

Ok.

DOOR SHUTS. PAGES FLIPPING. AVA PICKS UP THE PHONE.

AVA (CONT'D)

Hey, Sue. Listen I know the Dean needs to meet with **me but I'm afraid we're going to have to do it first thing Monday. I know he'll be upset, but something's come up. It's an emergency. I'm sure he'll get over it... okay.**

AVA HANGS UP. ANOTHER DRINK IS Poured. PAGES FLIPPING. AVA BEGINS TAKING NOTES.

THE END