

MIDNIGHT BURGER

Chapter 26: Brunch

By

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Midnight Burger

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THE SOUND OF THE SHORES OF A LAKE.

AVA  
Leif?

LEIF  
What?

AVA  
Have you seen Caspar?

LEIF  
No.

AVA  
Great.

DOOR CHIME.

WE HEAR THE SOUND OF A MASSIVE SPACECRAFT SLOWLY HOVERING TO THE GROUND.

LEIF  
Goddamnit.

DOOR CHIME. WE MOVE INTO THE DINER.

LEIF (CONT'D)  
We've got another one, Mucklewains.

EFFIE  
Lord, these people just do not stop.

WE HEAR CONTINUOUS KNOCKING ON A DOOR.

LEIF  
(On the other side of the door.)  
Gloria?

GLORIA  
(Sighing.)  
What is it, Leif?

LEIF  
We've got another one.

GLORIA  
Great... Great... Start up the steamer trays  
alright?

LEIF  
Yeah, Ava's out here too.

GLORIA  
What is it, Ava?

AVA  
I can't find Caspar.

GLORIA  
I'm sure he's around.

AVA  
I don't see him anywhere.

GLORIA'S DOOR OPENS.

GLORIA  
He's been going off on his own in between shifts,  
I'm sure he'll be back.

AVA  
I've looked in all his hiding places, I don't see  
him anywhere.

GLORIA  
Ava, I'm sure he'll be back. Relax. How many people  
do we have, Leif?

LEIF  
Looks like a full boat again.

GLORIA  
Great. Let's get it going.

AVA  
I'm going to go check for him one more time.

GLORIA  
Ava, the reason why Caspar is going off on his own  
between shifts is because you won't leave him  
alone.

AVA  
Well, I don't understand that so I'm choosing to  
ignore it.

GLORIA  
Okay. Good luck, then.

WE MOVE OUT INTO THE DINER.

GLORIA (CONT'D)  
Morning, Mucklewains.

EFFIE

Morning to you, Gloria.

ZEBULON

We seem to have yet another ship full of visitors approaching.

GLORIA

Yeah, they don't seem to let up, do they?

ZEBULON

I'm still a bit confused by this ritual.

GLORIA

It's a combination of breakfast and lunch. It started because people wanted to get together either after church or before their hangover wore off.

EFFIE

How do these people get anything done for the rest of the day after dinking fancy champagne in the late morning?

GLORIA

They don't. Effie, do you have any more feelings about where we are?

EFFIE

No, Gloria. It's all the same feelings. We have been put in a place of punishment. Though I hardly see how it's such a punishment.

GLORIA

Trust me, it is. Clementine put us in the ultimate place of punishment for a restaurant: a never ending brunch.

DOOR CHIME. A MASSIVE CROWD MOVES INTO THE DINER.

QUIN

Right this way, everyone. My group, this way, everyone take a seat anywhere. There are booths, tables, and stools here. Please stay away from that booth over there, the one with all the books and things on it, okay? Thank you. Hi, Gloria.

GLORIA

Hey, Quin.

QUIN

Another big group!

GLORIA

It is!

QUIN

I remembered about that one booth this time, did you notice?

GLORIA

I saw, thank you. I'll start bringing out some food soon.

QUIN

Hi, Leif.

LEIF

Hey, Quin. Okay, everyone. Who wants champagne?

ZEBULON

Good morning to all. I'm Zebulon Mucklewain here with my wife, Effie.

EFFIE

Hi, y'all.

ZEBULON

Let us begin this glorious morning with equally glorious noise. Here is the Shannon Quartet with "Christ Arose".

SONG: THE SHANNON QUARTET, "CHRIST AROSE".

QUIN

I love your AI so much. It's got so much personality.

GLORIA

We like it.

QUIN

And where is the music from again?

GLORIA

Earth.

QUIN

Weird. Never heard of it.

(Addressing the crowd.)

Okay, everyone, I hope you're enjoying your Champagne. We're going to have some food and then after that we're going to leave for our first arial tour of this mysterious and wondrous planet.

LIGHT APPLAUSE.

LEIF

Champagne for you, Quin.

QUIN

Ooh. Thank you, Leif.

(Addressing the crowd.)

Everyone, while we're waiting for food, do take a look at the tour information I just sent to your DATs, it has all we've been able to learn about this mysterious uncharted place we find ourselves in.

LEIF

I know Clementine meant this to be a punishment, but at least the people are nice.

EFFIE

Leif, I'm having a hard time getting this into my head. How can this Quin be speaking our language but never have heard of our homeland?

LEIF

It's weird, right? I'm assuming we're pretty far in the relative future right now. In my day, English got adopted across a few galaxies because they liked watching our television so much. I guess we're so far in the future that Earth's been forgotten but our language still survives somehow.

ZEBULON

How could our world in it's entirety be forgotten?

GLORIA

People always forget more than they remember. I guess that can apply to a whole damn planet.

BACK DOOR OPENS.

AVA

He's not by those trees back there, I'm going to go check by the water's edge, I've seen him there a few times.

GLORIA

Ava, you really need to give him some space.

AVA

Really? I should give him just enough space to do something stupid? Are we talking about the same guy?

GLORIA

Ava-

DOOR CHIME.

GLORIA (CONT'D)

Jesus.

LEIF

Just let her burn herself out. Caspar will be back soon and then she'll relax. I mean, she won't relax, she'll keep hounding him, but she'll leave us alone at least.

EFFIE

She's afraid, y'all.

GLORIA

I know.

ZEBULON

And while we're on the subject, Gloria.

GLORIA

I know.

ZEBULON

I feel that we're speaking quite often of the purgatory we find ourselves in and not the reason we've been placed here.

GLORIA

It wouldn't have made sense for us to jump right into it, Zeb.

ZEBULON

I agree, Gloria. Clementine has challenged us as Satan challenged Christ in the desert. The temptations she presented are very real and each should be confronted in our own way.

GLORIA

I don't think Clementine is Satan, Zebulon.

EFFIE

She certainly is not. But neither are any of us Christ.

GLORIA

When Caspar's ready to talk about it, we'll all talk about it, okay?

EFFIE

Understood.

ZEBULON

I believe that's fair.

GLORIA

Okay. Leif, can you come help me make one million scrambled eggs please?

LEIF

Yeah, sure.

ZEBULON

Dear?

EFFIE

Yes, dear.

ZEBULON

I believe it's time.

EFFIE

... I don't approve of this plan, Zebulon.

ZEBULON

And there are parts of myself that do not approve of it either. But our friends are in a bad way, and if there is anything I can do to shake us loose from this particular spider's web then I feel I must.

EFFIE

Very well, Dearest. Go with God and go with my love.

ZEBULON

As I always do.

THE SOUND OF A WHOLE LOT OF SCRAMBLED EGGS BEING MADE.

GLORIA

What do you suppose their fascination is with this planet?

LEIF

If you look out over the bay you can see the ruins of something. There was a big city here a long time ago, but it looks like they have no record of it. People like lost civilizations. They like the mystery. Everyone can come here and drink champagne and be amateur archaeologists; take a tour of the ruins.

GLORIA

I don't get it.



LEIF

Drinking champagne and looking at ruins is basically the entire economy of Greece. Just imagine that on a planetary scale.

GLORIA

What do you think happened to the people who lived here?

LEIF

Could be anything. Plague, war, hell it could've just been the slightest change in their sun's behavior that wiped them out.

GLORIA

And you still have no idea where we are?

LEIF

No. I thought I would try and triangulate our positions using constellations but the cloud cover in this place is constant. I can't get a good look.

GLORIA

...

LEIF

...

GLORIA

We need to have a meeting before the meeting.

LEIF

What do you mean?

GLORIA

Caspar's going to come back at some point and we're all going to have to have a big talk. But I think we need to talk before we talk.

LEIF

Okay. Let's do it.

GLORIA

You've been making plans, haven't you?

LEIF

Maybe. A little bit.

GLORIA

What have you got?

LEIF

Not much. But I know Clementine can't keep us here forever.

GLORIA

How do you know?

LEIF

If she could keep us here forever then she would just keep us here forever. We'd be done. But instead she made us all an offer. Tried to buy us off.

GLORIA

Interesting.

LEIF

I think eventually the diner's going to figure out a way to slither out of this trap she put us in.

GLORIA

She'll just find us again.

LEIF

And the question is: what can we do between the diner escaping and her finding us again?

GLORIA

And what can we do?

LEIF

We can hope that we have enough time to for me to build a quantum computer. I build the computer, fabricate the time crystal and then we can trap her.

GLORIA

And then we're trapped inside the diner with a murderous super-villain.

LEIF

Yeah. I'm working on that, too.

GLORIA

Well, it's thin but it's something.

LEIF

That's what I keep telling myself.

GLORIA

How do you think she's able to do all this? I tried asking Ava but she started saying things that didn't even sound like words.

LEIF

I don't know and I don't care. That's the difference between Ava and me.

(MORE)

LEIF (CONT'D)

A long time ago at the edge of a map there would just be an arrow and some calligraphy saying "Here be Dragons". A guy like me sees that and thinks "Well fuck that, I'm not going over there, there's a dragon over there. The world is big enough." Someone like Ava needs to see the dragon. Warnings are advertisements to her.

GLORIA

Even if it means getting eaten by a dragon?

LEIF

Yeah, even if that.

GLORIA

... Clementine made us an offer, Leif.

LEIF

I know.

GLORIA

I want you to know that I wouldn't judge you if-

LEIF

Gloria. Fuck her offer. Maybe this decision is easier for me than it is for all of you, but I know what my answer is. This place changed me. You, Effie, Zebulon, Caspar, Ava, all the people we've met. I'm different now. And she offers to send me back to before all that happened? Fuck that.

GLORIA

Thank you, Leif.

LEIF

I've been in worse spots than this.

GLORIA

You have?

LEIF

Yeah. We'll be alright.

GLORIA

Okay... then I guess we just wait for Caspar while you keep making plans.

LEIF

Sounds good.

GLORIA

Take this tray of scrambled eggs out there, okay?

LEIF  
Yeah.

LEIF PICKS UP THE TRAY OF SCRAMBLED EGGS.

LEIF (CONT'D)  
... Gloria?

GLORIA  
What?

LEIF  
The radio's gone.

GLORIA  
It is?

LEIF  
Yeah. Hey Quin?

QUIN  
Hey, what's up?

LEIF  
Our radio is gone.

QUIN  
Oh yeah, that guy took it. The one that never  
talks?

GLORIA  
Caspar?

QUIN  
That's it.

LEIF  
Caspar took the radio?

QUIN  
Yes.

GLORIA  
What is he doing?

DOOR CHIME.

AVA  
He's not down by the water, he's not under the  
tree, he's not anywhere. He's gone.

GLORIA  
He can't just vaporize, Ava.

AVA

How do we know that? Maybe he clicked his heels together three times and Clementine whisked him away back to Kansas.

LEIF

I doubt it works that way.

AVA

We don't know how it works.

LEIF

Well wherever he is, he took the radio.

AVA

Why did he take the radio? He's never done that before.

GLORIA

Ava, relax. I'm sure he's around here somewhere.

AVA

Stop saying that.

QUIN

I'm sorry, should I have said something?

AVA

Go sell someone a time share.

QUIN

What's a time share?

GLORIA

Quin, give us a minute, okay?

QUIN

Sure.

AVA

We have to be a united front. Clementine made her little offer and if Caspar takes the offer then the two of you are going to fold like a card table, I know it.

GLORIA

Thanks for the vote of confidence.

AVA

And then it's all over. Then what? Caspar is caving, I can feel it. We have to find him.

LEIF

He may surprise you, Ava.

AVA

That man has never surprised me. He's as predictable as a rom com.

GLORIA

Ava, I know you don't want Caspar to go-

AVA

This isn't about him! It's not about him, it's about everything. He can't cave. It's all over if he caves, it's not about him.

GLORIA

Okay, fine, it's not about him. What do you want us to do?

AVA

I want everyone to agree with me.

GLORIA

No, we're not going to do that.

LEIF

Look, I've known Caspar longer than any of you. He's not a rom com, he can surprise you.

AVA

So that's it? We're just going to wait patiently while the whole thing unravels?

GLORIA

The whole thing is not unravelling.

LEIF

Maybe we should trust him?

AVA

Oh, should we? He loaded me into a tin can and shoved me into deep space, you want me to trust that guy?

GLORIA

Yes.

AVA

No.

LEIF

Ava, how about some empathy?

AVA

No.

LEIF

We can't know what it's like to get an offer like this. It's probably fucked him up pretty bad.

GLORIA

It's fucked me up pretty bad.

AVA

But you're still here and he's not.

LEIF

You want us to form a search party?

AVA

Why did he take the radio?

LEIF

We don't know.

AVA

Took the radio where?

GLORIA

Ava.

AVA

I can't believe you two are just sitting there.

GLORIA

Ava, maybe he took the radio because he wanted to talk to someone who wasn't constantly hounding him. You're upset he's gone? He's gone because of you. Maybe if you relax he'll feel comfortable coming back?

AVA

Don't give me that zen master crap.

GLORIA

Fine, how about this: Go back to your fucking booth and stop annoying the shit out of everyone, you're not helping, you're making it worse.

AVA

... This is a mistake.

GLORIA

Okay.

LEIF

... I've got some arial drones now, you want me to search the area?

GLORIA

No. Us finding him isn't going to change anything. He's going through something and he needs some space.

LEIF

Sometimes you need some space and sometimes you need someone to come find you.

GLORIA

Ava's found him about twenty times now.

LEIF

Sometimes you need the right person to find you.

GLORIA

Well, we don't know where he is anyway.

LEIF

Where would you go?

GLORIA

... Ah. Right... Give me one of the puffy jackets.

THE SOUND OF A SNOWY LANDSCAPE FADES IN. WE HEAR THE SOUND OF A CAMPFIRE AND THE SOUND OF WOLVES PANTING AND PLAYING.

SONG: HYMN TO THE SUN BY MISCHA ELMAN.

ONE OF THE WOLVES IS SNIFFING FURIOUSLY AT CASPAR.

CASPAR

Jung Kook, stop it.

EFFIE

Still hard to believe all this exists right under our noses. You suppose it's always like this or is there a spring time? Ava explained at one point that this land is in an eternal December but the words she used were of the sort that made me want to quickly think about something else... We'll never want for a Christmas tree will we?... We should really do ourselves a favor with Christmas this year, shouldn't we?... Doesn't that sound nice, Caspar?

CASPAR

Effie, I brought you down here with me for some comfort but you've just given me more to worry about.

EFFIE

Zebulon will be along. No need to worry.



CASPAR

Where did he go again?

EFFIE

He has... he has decided to seclude himself in prayer.

CASPAR

Seclude himself in prayer.

EFFIE

That's what I just said.

CASPAR

I don't know what that means.

EFFIE

He's praying, Caspar, he is praying and he's secluded.

CASPAR

Has he ever done this before? I don't remember him ever doing this before.

EFFIE

Well, we've never been stuck in this particular patch of mud before, have we Caspar? Zebulon is convinced that reaching out in prayer is the best way forward.

CASPAR

I don't like it.

EFFIE

And you're so full of good ideas? Can we get back to the matter at hand?

CASPAR

What was the matter at hand?

EFFIE

Christmas.

CASPAR

Right.

EFFIE

We've never had a proper Christmas Day and here we are sitting right on top of a snowy wonderland.

CASPAR

Hard to know when it is.

EFFIE

I suppose. Perhaps, considering our situation, we should choose a day?

CASPAR

Let me know what you decide, I need enough time to shop. You should've had this idea back at the mall.

JUNG KOOK STARTS SNIFFING AGAIN.

CASPAR (CONT'D)

Jung Kook, goddamnit!

GLORIA

(Approaching in the snow.)  
Don't yell at him.

EFFIE

Oh, hey there, Gloria.

GLORIA

He's just trying to get your attention.

CASPAR

He's getting my attention by annoying me.

GLORIA

He doesn't care how he gets your attention. He just wants it. Apologize to Jung Kook.

CASPAR

I'm sorry, Jung Kook.

JUNG KOOK BARKS.

GLORIA

Thank you. You know how to make a camp fire?

CASPAR

Effie had to talk me through it.

EFFIE

City folk.

GLORIA

What's going on down here?

CASPAR

Effie's just now realizing that we never really do Christmas. Oh, and by the way, Zebulon's gone.

GLORIA

What?!

EFFIE

Not to worry, Gloria. Don't let Caspar get you all wound up. Zebulon is just off praying. He feels it may help us in our endeavors.

GLORIA

This is the wrong day for unexpected changes, Effie.

EFFIE

I know that it is, Gloria. But worry not.

GLORIA

He's just off praying?

EFFIE

That, he is.

GLORIA

... Fine.

EFFIE

I have never had this much trouble getting folks to talk about Christmas.

GLORIA

How the hell are we supposed to know what day it is? We can't just pick a Christmas.

CASPAR

This is what I said.

EFFIE

We're just going to pick one. Let's not get bound up in particulars.

GLORIA

Okay but I want us to put on a production of A Christmas Carol, that's my demand.

EFFIE

Oh, well that sounds delightful. I can assure you Zebulon will want to play Mr. Fezziwig. I got dibs on Jacob Marley. I want to rattle some chains around.

CASPAR

Let me guess, I'm supposed to play Scrooge?

GLORIA

No, Ava's playing Scrooge.

EFFIE

Agreed.

CASPAR

Who am I, then?

GLORIA

The Ghost of Christmas past.

CASPAR

... I imagine we could both play that role pretty well right now.

GLORIA

Yeah...

CASPAR

...

GLORIA

... You know, while you were gone, Leif fixed the door.

CASPAR

Really?

GLORIA

Yeah. It no longer takes two days to get back home.

CASPAR

Can't seem to catch a break, can I?

GLORIA

Sorry.

CASPAR

*I'm* sorry. I didn't want to abandon you during the endless brunch but I had to get away from Ava for a second.

GLORIA

I understand.

CASPAR

And I guess you've come down here to get me to stop avoiding the elephant in the room.

GLORIA

No, Caspar, I was doing the same thing. We were both avoiding it. You went and hid somewhere and I buried myself in this endless brunch that's going on up there. We were doing the same thing in different ways.

CASPAR

Does that mean we're done avoiding it?

GLORIA

Yes.

CASPAR

Great... With a wave of my hand I could kill you all. That's what she said.

GLORIA

I have a very clear memory of that moment.

CASPAR

Why this, then? Why did she do this to us?

GLORIA

I don't know.

EFFIE

Because death is not defeat. And she needs to defeat us.

CASPAR

I feel pretty defeated.

EFFIE

Feeling down on yourself isn't defeat, Caspar. This woman is tearing a path through all creation with reckless abandon, but she ain't stupid. Somewhere deep down she knows she's wrong and she's desperate for someone to tell her she isn't. And then here we come, telling her to stop, adding to the doubt she feels. If she were to wave that mighty hand and send us to the great beyond, our voices would still be in her head. The only way to get the voices out is to change our minds. Get us to come over to her side. However... Before I get too far down on that particular path of righteousness, I should say another thing... Zebulon and I love you both very much. We can get to these places in our lives where we feel as though there's no escape. Places we inhabit out of obligation and duty, or fear and anger. We find ourselves trapped because we're afraid of what others will say or how they'll judge us should we leave. A promise should not be a prison, it does a great disservice to yourself and to those you have promised to. It becomes dishonest.

CASPAR

It's important to keep your promises, Effie.

EFFIE

Yes, I... Well, I'm not certain of that, Caspar.

GLORIA

What do you mean?

EFFIE

It depends on the promise, doesn't it? Before his conversion, the Apostle Paul had sworn to persecute christians and drive them from their faith. When the lord appeared to Paul and he experienced his great conversion on that road to Damascus, should he have kept his promise to persecute those he now cared for? Was the promise to be kept then? What I mean to say, to the both of you, is that we do not feel we are owed anything from you. And we wish for you both to travel the path you feel God has intended for you.

GLORIA

We're not taking the deal, Effie.

EFFIE

Oh, thank the Lord. Hoo-wee!

GLORIA

You can relax.

CASPAR

How do you know I'm not taking the deal?

GLORIA

Because you wouldn't. All this moping and hiding you're doing is because you know you won't take the deal... And it really sucks.

CASPAR

It does.

GLORIA

The entire time we've been stuck here I feel like I've been run over by a truck.

CASPAR

The Teds threatened to freeze me in a block of chemical ice but for some reason this was worse. It shouldn't be. I mean, looked at in the right light, Clementine is actually trying to do something nice for us. Something impossibly kind, something anyone would be grateful for. But it doesn't feel that way.

GLORIA

Caspar, what she did was terrible and evil. There's nothing kind about it... It took years before I was over the death of my parents. Years.

(MORE)

GLORIA (CONT'D)

And still to this day, every once in a while I'm back at square one, like I lost them yesterday. I had to read books about it and they were not good books. People try and sell you the stages of grief like it's a video game. Like you're unlocking achievements or something. That's not how it is. One day it's stage three, one day it's stage five. After months at stage five you wake up one morning back at stage one... It's a state of being, not a process. All of that work I had to do to get over it started at one place: acceptance. They were gone and there was nothing I could do about it... She took that away from me. I'm still never going to see my parents again, but in making this offer to us, she made that my fault. She made it my choice. It's a horrible thing to do to someone.

CASPAR

God, that really is true.

GLORIA

Which is why, when we finally catch up to this woman, and we will catch up to this woman... I'm going to punch her right in the boob.

CASPAR

Wow!

GLORIA

You heard me.

CASPAR

Things are getting serious.

GLORIA

That's right. Mark my words.

EFFIE

I support you in your endeavors, Gloria. Let's not tell Zebulon.

GLORIA

...Thank you for being miserable, Caspar.

CASPAR

Why are you thanking me?

GLORIA

Because Leif and Ava sailed through this pretty easily. I'm glad it ruined someone else, too.

CASPAR

Gloria, you know if you want someone to feel miserable with, I am always your huckleberry.

J-HOPE TROTS UP TO CASPAR AND DROPS SOMETHING AT HIS FEET.

CASPAR (CONT'D)

Goddamnit, J-Hope keeps bringing me dead rabbits!

GLORIA

He wants you to make rabbit stew.

CASPAR

I'm not making rabbit stew. J-Hope, I am not making your rabbit stew.

J-HOPE BARKS.

CASPAR (CONT'D)

No. No, I'm not.

J-HOPE BARKS AGAIN.

GLORIA

Give me the rabbit, I'll make the stew. You get back up top and finish brunch service, I need some wolf time, okay?

AVA

(In the distance.)  
Fuck this Narnia bullshit!

GLORIA

Ava?

AVA

Jesus christ, there you are.

GLORIA

What are you doing here?

AVA

What do you think I'm doing here?

CASPAR

Why aren't you wearing a coat?

AVA

Gloria, why don't you tell Caspar why I'm not wearing a coat!

GLORIA

Because I told Leif not to give you one.

AVA

That's right! Because you're conspiring against me!



EFFIE

She is about to turn into a darn ice cube, y'all.

AVA

(Shivering.)

You really think... I'm going to let the laws of thermodynamics... stop me? I am immune to the standard model of physics!

GLORIA

For fuck's sake, give her your coat.

CASPAR

Jesus, Ava, here.

CASPAR PUTS HIS COAT ON AVA.

AVA

I will not be swayed by kindness!

CASPAR

Put the goddamn coat on.

AVA

I suppose you thought you could hide down here, huh? Wrong!

CASPAR

What were you going to come down here and say that you haven't already said?

AVA

Nothing, I was going to continuously beat you over the head with my valid points until you finally agreed with me.

CASPAR

How sweet of you.

AVA

I am holding this project together with my own two now-frostbitten hands and you're off somewhere gazing into your navel!

CASPAR

Okay, look. Gloria needs some wolf time, and this isn't helping, we're walking back up to the diner.

AVA

Wolf time?! People are taking wolf time while we're in the middle of a crisis?

EFFIE

You could use some wolf time, lady.

AVA  
Oh ppppppppppppt.

EFFIE  
Did she just raspberry me?

AVA  
Yes I did!

CASPAR  
Four doctorates, ladies and gentlemen. Come on.

CASPAR AND AVA MAKE THEIR WAY BACK IN THE SNOW.

AVA  
Look. Clementine is obviously trying to use our emotions against us so now's not the time to be making emotional decisions, do you understand that?

CASPAR  
I do understand that Ava, you've explained that to me a million times.

AVA  
This isn't about you, Caspar, this is about all of us.

CASPAR  
I understand that.

AVA  
We've spent all this time working toward something and we can't throw it out the window.

CASPAR  
I understand that too.

AVA  
I know it's difficult but she's trying to force us off the playing field. I don't want off the playing field!

CASPAR  
I'm not taking the deal.

AVA  
You're not?

CASPAR  
No.

AVA  
... You decided this just now?

CASPAR

No, it was about five minutes after she offered.

AVA

... Well then why the fuck have I been chasing you around this whole time?!

CASPAR

Nobody asked you to do that, in fact they told you to stop.

AVA

I have been chasing you around dumping reason after reason on you for why you shouldn't take this deal and you've already decided!

CASPAR

Hey. I don't talk to you when you're ready to talk, I talk when I'm ready to talk. I'm sitting here making a gut-wrenching decision and you keep talking to me about the mission that we're on, with no acknowledgment WHATSOEVER, that I'm doing the emotional equivalent of driving a nail through my hand! I'm sorry if it wasn't great for you.

AVA

... You still could've said something. I've been giving you reason after reason to say no for weeks now.

CASPAR

That just made me angry.

AVA

Why?

CASPAR

Because you had reason after reason about not giving in to people like her, and about the progression of the scientific world, and how close you were to really learning something-

AVA

I am really close to learning something.

CASPAR

I just wanted one of those reasons to be about me. About me not being here anymore. Just one... And then I got angry that I cared, and then embarrassed that I cared... It's embarrassing... Come on, let's keep walking.

THEY KEEP WALKING.

AVA

What made you decide to stay?

CASPAR

... Back when I was talking to my mom she said I would be a good parent. It was weird to hear. But I think she's probably right. I'm a different person now. It's literally been a century. So, it was tempting. Not just because of that but because... 173 years, Ava. It's oppressive, all this time. All those years I was alive, it builds up. I didn't even know. I wasn't even looking at it. Suddenly I turned and there were all those years behind me. It builds up like rust. Deposits at the mouth of a river. We're just not built to hold that much time in us. I'm past my due date. And the temptation is always there to find a nice spot, lay down in the grass. Let the years rush at me. And here's Clementine offering me that, and my son. It was tempting.

I may be worthy of being his dad now. But to get back to him I'd have to... I'd have to screw you over, which would mean I'm not the guy who's worthy of seeing him again. To be the guy I should've been for him, I have to choose to not be around him. Going out of my way to see him again, fucking things up in the process, that would be about me not about him.

She offered me a way to make it all never have happened in the first place... But the thing is, it did happen. And I could ignore all that. Choose whatever reality I want and leave all this behind me.

Or I could not do that. I could just say no. No to what I've done. What people have done to me. What I've been through. The trauma, the heartache, the mistakes, and I could look at it all, all that has built up over years and years and years and I could just say: Enough. Enough of looking back. Enough of taking stock. Enough pain, enough pity, enough of so much of the garbage that we define ourselves with and just point at the horizon and say "That way". Ever forward. These things are all a part of me but I won't live in them or try and rid myself of them. Ever forward. "That way". "There's no turning back the clock" said the man in the Time Machine. I could just do that.

Besides. Gloria says that when we find this woman she is going to punch her right in her titty. And I think we've all, as a family, earned the right to see that.

AVA

Agreed.

CASPAR

I'm standing here, in the middle of this weird place with you. I choose this.

AVA

Thank you.

CASPAR

... So what else is going on? What's new with you? Have you figured everything out yet?

AVA

No and it's really annoying.

CASPAR

Okay. Let me see if I've got the full picture. Damage to the Fabric of Space Time.

AVA

Yes.

CASPAR

Do we have a name for it yet?

AVA

No.

CASPAR

Okay, I'm going to call it schmutz.

AVA

Please don't.

CASPAR

There's schmutz everywhere. It's all over this universe and every universe we travel to.

AVA

Yes.

CASPAR

The schmutz has a tendency to mess things up real bad. Mall zombies, Ashley the Asteroid, stuff like that.

AVA

Correct.

CASPAR

Is this new?

AVA  
What do you mean, "is it new?"

CASPAR  
How long has it been there?

AVA  
I don't know.

CASPAR  
Okay but, a huge asteroid, mall zombies, these things are hard to miss.

AVA  
Yeah.

CASPAR  
You know what I think about sometimes? Gloria. How did she get here?

AVA  
... She answered an ad in craigslist.

CASPAR  
She answered an ad in Craigslist, Ava. What the fuck? I was hunted by an android created by my ex wife from another dimension and that android became one of the best friends I've ever had. Leif got visited by two different versions of himself from the future in the same day... probably listening to this conversation right now is a 4th dimensional being named Chuck.

AVA  
What are you saying?

CASPAR  
I'm saying there's the weird shit and then there's the *weird shit*. And we've been saying it's all the same shit but maybe there a difference between this shit and that shit.

AVA  
You're saying this new thing-

CASPAR  
Schmutz.

AVA  
Has always been here.

CASPAR

Yes. And Clementine, she's just... She's Typhoid Mary. A perfect carrier. Spreading the Schmutz around. Empowered by the Schmutz.

AVA

Goddamnit, Caspar, where did it come from?

CASPAR

I don't know. But I know it's bad stuff and I know the diner loves to chase it around. Maybe that's what we've been doing all along, we just finally have a name for it. Schmutz.

AVA

No, I'm saying no to Schmutz.

CASPAR

It's going to catch on.

OUTSIDE THE DINER.

LEIF

Hey, Quin.

QUIN

Hey, Leif. Everybody's having a great time.

LEIF

That's great.

QUIN

I'm so glad you all opened this place here. Everybody loves Brunch.

LEIF

It's very popular.

QUIN

And this is what people do on, what was the planet you said you were from?

LEIF

Earth.

QUIN

Earth, this is a tradition on Earth?

LEIF

It is.

QUIN

It's so weird, I've never heard of Earth.

LEIF  
That is strange. I mean, some people say the language we're speaking right now came from Earth.

QUIN  
Shut up.

LEIF  
It's true.

QUIN  
That can't be right.

LEIF  
I know. Ridiculous... So nobody knows what this civilization was, huh?

QUIN  
Not a clue. It's hard to find any records. I mean, between you and me, I think they kind of like it that way.

LEIF  
Really?

QUIN  
The mystery is the fun part. I think if we figured it all out people wouldn't come here anymore.

LEIF  
Ah. Loch Ness Monster situation.

QUIN  
What?

LEIF  
Nothing.

QUIN  
You know, it's funny you bring that up because we're doing a special surprise for our little explorers today.

LEIF  
What's that?

QUIN  
Well, they have just recently uncovered a time capsule in this area. It was encased in titanium and has a bunch of information about the planet. We're doing a big presentation on it today. They're sending a script to my DAT right now. I'm performing today!



LEIF

Fun.

ANOTHER SHIP TOUCHES DOWN NEAR THE DINER.

QUIN

Oop. Another tour has arrived. A tour guide's work is never done.

LEIF

Hey, those are nice ships you've got there.

QUIN

They're super nice. Our tourists love to travel in style.

LEIF

What's the power source?

QUIN

Power source? Um... You know I'm not sure. When everything transferred over to Urt Boxes, ships didn't need reactors anymore, but I don't know where the power comes from now. Who knows how anything works these days?

LEIF

Urt Box?

QUIN

Yeah. Everything switched over to Urt Boxes when I was a kid. It changed the whole system. They say it's a new Golden Age.

LEIF

What's an Urt Box?

QUIN

It's a processor. I mean calling it a processor is kind of... Something about entanglement and photons.

LEIF

A quantum computer?

QUIN

I don't think anyone calls them that anymore but yeah, that's what it is.

LEIF

The Urts made a Quantum Computer.

QUIN

Yeah.

LEIF

And, let me guess, it's small enough to carry around.

QUIN

Yeah, it's about the size of your radio.

LEIF

Pretty cool.

QUIN

I've got to get this new group. Are you ready for another brunch wave?

LEIF

Sure.

QUIN

Great. Hey, you should listen to the presentation I'm going to make today, I think it'll be really interesting.

LEIF

Will do.

QUIN

Right this way everyone! We've got a special treat for you called Brunch!

LEIF

... Fucking Urts.

CASPAR

Hey.

LEIF

Hey man.

CASPAR

... Sorry I disappeared on you.

LEIF

It's okay. I can't even imagine what this is like. Are you okay?

CASPAR

I'm okay. Hey, you know what I discovered?

LEIF

What?

CASPAR

This huge body of water we're on the edge of?

LEIF

What about it?

CASPAR

Look at us. You're from California, I spent most of my life in California, and neither of us saw it. Look.

LEIF

... Oh shit.

CASPAR

Do you see it now?

LEIF

That's San Francisco Bay.

CASPAR

It is.

LEIF

We're on Earth.

CASPAR

We've been on a future Earth this whole time.

AVA

What are we looking at?

CASPAR

We're on Earth.

AVA

Are we?

CASPAR

In the future. It's abandoned for some reason.

AVA

Well, we certainly didn't want to stick around did we?

CASPAR

Good point... It's weird that this changes nothing.

AVA

Yeah, we're either trapped here or trapped in some other galactic sock drawer.

LEIF

Actually, I've had a bit of a revelation.

CASPAR

Oh, really?

LEIF

Yeah. Remember that quantum computer I was saying was impossible to build?

CASPAR

Yeah.

LEIF

We are, I'm guessing, a thousand years in the future and every single one of those ships over there has a quantum computer in it.

AVA

... Are we about to do crimes?

LEIF

We are absolutely about to do crimes.

AVA

I love crimes.

LEIF

Do you think Gloria's going to mind?

CASPAR

Gloria's making stew for the K-Pop wolves right now, we don't need to bother her with this.

LEIF

You're right. We don't want her to feel guilt or shame or any of those emotions that normal humans feel.

GLORIA

I'm standing right here.

CASPAR

Oh hey!

AVA

Hi, Gloria.

CASPAR

How are you?

LEIF

How are the wolves?

CASPAR

We were not talking about crimes.

GLORIA

I heard the whole thing you guys.

LEIF

Oh. Look, desperate times, Gloria-

EFFIE

Leif. You go jerk the guts out of one of them contraptions immediately and get us the heck out of this purgatory.

LEIF

Will do.

CASPAR

Do we need to create a distraction?

LEIF

Actually, Quin was telling me she's about to do some sort of big presentation about "what happened to this mysterious planet we're on". Everyone should be focused on that, that's when I'll make my move.

CASPAR

Oh cool, we're going to see how Earth was destroyed. I hate to be old school about this but I'm going to say thermonuclear war, what do we think?

AVA

No. The clowns finally rise up and kill us all.

GLORIA

Kind of glad Zebulon isn't here to see us commit grand theft space auto.

EFFIE

Well, when the cat's away.

LEIF

I'm going to grab some tools. Wish me luck.

CASPAR

Happy larceny!

QUIN

Everyone, gather round, we have a very special presentation for you. Gloria, could we get some of that champagne for the group?

CASPAR

I got it.

QUIN

Thanks, Caspar.

GLORIA

I'm feeling a strong desire to spoil this and tell them exactly where they are.

AVA

No, I want to see how dumb they are.

QUIN

So. Everyone. The big news today is that there has been a HUGE discovery on our mysterious planet that sheds a lot of light on who lived here and what happened to them. And it all starts with a time capsule encased in titanium that was found not far from here.

OOHS AND AHHS FROM THE CROWD.

QUIN (CONT'D)

Yes! Very exciting. This time capsule contained comprehensive notes and even data files with video testimony on them, and today we are going to hear directly from the person who put this capsule in the ground so long ago.

GLORIA

This better not be some survivalist jackass.

QUIN

We can't tell you much about this person but we can tell you that they were referred to as a "businesswoman" and "entrepreneur".

AVA

I knew it, it's Martha Stewart, nothing can kill that woman.

QUIN

So, let's get right to it, shall we? Let me introduce you to... Tamara Oliver.

GLORIA

Wait...

A HOLOGRAPHIC SCREEN ACTIVATES.

TAMARA

Okay. My name Tamara Oliver, and if you're seeing this video it means you've found my capsule. Good, I'm glad. I'm feeling a little stupid putting it together.

CASPAR

It's Tamara.

EFFIE

Is that the young lady from that Shopping Mall?

AVA

Plus about 40 years, yeah.

GLORIA

What is happening?

TAMARA

What I've been telling people is that I want to make these videos as a little retirement project, to leave something for future generations. But that is not my intended audience. What I'm not telling them is that these videos are meant for a very specific audience. I'm talking about my old friends at the diner. If anyone's listening to this, I sure hope it's y'all somehow. Let me start at the beginning...

CASPAR

Oh my God.

GLORIA

So we're in the same timeline as the Mall Zombies right now?

CASPAR

Shopzies.

AVA

A thousand years later, but yeah.

GLORIA

And we're not calling them that.

CASPAR

Didn't you and Leif make a thing where you can tell if we've been to a universe before?

AVA

Yes, but I've been a little busy chasing you around the Moors, Heathcliff.

QUIN

These videos that Tamara made are very comprehensive, and they will all be available on everyone's DAT right after the presentation, but to sum up: Tamara was making these videos specifically for a mysterious group that she constantly refers to as "her friends at the diner." We imagine this is code for something but we're not sure what.

(MORE)

QUIN (CONT'D)

The first several videos document what happened to Tamara after something she refers to as "The Shopzies."

CASPAR

Nice.

GLORIA

Goddamnit.

QUIN

After this incident Tamara went on to be a very successful "businesswoman" using something she called "the secret sauce."

GLORIA

The secret sauce?

AVA

I gave her stock tips from the future.

GLORIA

Ah.

TAMARA

... And so there I was. I was a successful woman. I had money in the bank, I had three houses... not bad for a security guard from Ohio. The thing about getting rich is: you've got some time on your hands. That was new for me. I did some traveling, I worked with charities, shit I even played golf a few times. And then, one day, my rich ass found itself at an art auction. Me. I did NOT fit in. Surrounded by all these fancy people with a paddle in my hand that said number 73... And that's when I saw her. Up on that auction block was a painting of a woman who's face I recognized. And I bet you recognize it too.

QUIN

We have here an image of the painting Tamara is referring to. It's called "Woman with Red Hair," by an artist named Modigliani.

CASPAR

Oh, I definitely recognize that face.

EFFIE

My word, is that Clementine?

GLORIA

It is.



QUIN

Tamara claims that the woman in this painting, that was painted long before she was born, is also a woman she met while she was a guard for something called a "Mall." Tamara became obsessed with this woman, and spent the rest of her life trying to find out more about her. And Tamara believes what she discovered is the secret that we've all been wondering: How did the mysterious civilization of this mysterious planet come to an end? Believe it or not, Tamara believes that the demise of her entire civilization comes down to this woman.

AVA

No way.

QUIN

She calls her "Clementine." Listen as Tamara explains...

TAMARA

I knew she told me her name when I met her but I couldn't put my finger on it. So I was fumbling around in the dark with this for a long time. Luckily someone finally invented Google, but even then I didn't know where to go. The only thing I could search for was "notorious red head" which brought up... well I'm sure you can imagine what it brought up. But then I finally found an old blues song from 1929. It was a song about a small town that had suffered a train derailment, a flood, and a swarm of locusts all in the same year and each disaster coincided with a particular woman coming to town. The name of the song: "Hard Times Clementine."

QUIN

From that point on Tamara describes herself as "going down the rabbit hole." We don't know what that means exactly but we think it means to pass some sort of point of no return, to be consumed by something. Over her lifetime, Tamara assembled a mountain of evidence regarding the person she calls Clementine and, in doing so, documents a planet that is in a constant state of emergency. Today, we've come to call this constant state of emergency "The Polycrisis," a confluence of many events that brings about a civilization's demise, and we've seen several examples of The Polycrisis on many planets throughout history. On your DATs right now just press on "A history of the Polycrisis across the System." On this mysterious planet, the Polycrisis takes on a different form. A planet that was not just unlucky...

(MORE)

QUIN (CONT'D)

in fact you might even say "haunted". Haunted by a beautiful red-headed woman named Clementine. Tamara's research on the mysterious Clementine is exhaustive and spans massive amounts of time. She identifies Clementine in ancient artwork from a place called India, pictures from a riot in a place called Wales... I know it sounds very strange but I have to say, the evidence spanning massive amounts of time that Tamara has assembled is truly impressive. Tamara lays out case study after case study and then finally lands in the present day, where she insists the world has now been completely exhausted by the alleged encounters with Clementine.

TAMARA

I don't even know how to describe this world I'm living in now. It's different than when I last saw you. It's like we just can't seem to catch a break. There's a forest fire in California right now... it's been burning for three years. They can't put it out. A while back, half the population of Indonesia started speaking another language. And nobody knows what the language is. Siberia has started to thaw out and it has released some kind of virus that gives you amnesia. The world's gotten pretty chaotic now, it's getting harder and harder to look into these things. And that's a shame because I was just getting on the trail of my favorite one yet. Something about a man in Jerusalem in the 14th century. A man named Terric of York... I swear to God, I have found evidence of this man, Terric of York, over the last 700 years. Same guy, 700 years... What the hell does that mean, y'all?! Is there another one?! The way people are migrating across the globe now, I may never know, I've lost track of him at this point! But I bet you'll find evidence of a mysterious red head in all of these cases... But I think I'm too tired now to figure it all out. We all are. I think the one that may have done us all in was Ashley.

GLORIA

Oh shit.

CASPAR

Ashley the Asteroid?

TAMARA

Half of the planet couldn't see it, but I could. That thing was huge. Dark skies for three years but only for half of us. What the fuck?

GLORIA

The Zombies and Ashley the Asteroid are in the same timeline?

AVA

Oh my God. It's all in the same timeline.

GLORIA

What do you mean?

QUIN

As I said, we've studied Polycrises on multiple planets. Across the system you can see civilizations that fall because they've been beset upon by multiple forces seemingly out of their control. One aspect that we've observed in a state of Polycrisis is when a civilization reaches a tipping point. "Going down the rabbit hole," as Tamara would say. When a civilization is so degraded by the Polycrisis that they are headed for complete collapse, this fact is often kept a secret from the general populace and only circulated through societal elites and oligarchs. This planet seems to be no different. Luckily for Tamara, she was one of those societal elites because of her status as a venerated "Businesswoman."

TAMARA

A man named Kevin Batten wants of meet with me. He's looking for investors. He says he's got some way of saving the human race, but he wouldn't give me any details. He said he's got the backing of the Pearson family, though, and they're even richer than me so I figure I'll give it a shot. Hope springs eternal, right?... I don't know why I made all of these videos for you all. I met you for one day, forty years ago. But I still hope the message gets to you somehow. You may be the only ones who can do something about it.

QUIN

As you can see around us, whatever the plan was to save the human race, appears to have failed. And, in the end, we have no way of corroborating any of the information Tamara presents to us. But as of right now, she is the sole ambassador of this lost civilization. A civilization haunted by a mysterious woman named Clementine.

THE HOLOGRAPHIC SCREEN DISAPPEARS.

QUIN (CONT'D)

Who wants brunch?

THE GROUP BEGINS TO MOVE INSIDE THE DINER.

GLORIA

Ava?

AVA

I can't believe it.

GLORIA

What?

AVA

She's been zig-zagging through time, trying to figure out what destroyed her civilization. Turns out she's from Earth.

GLORIA

And the thing that destroyed her civilization...

CASPAR

Was her...

EFFIE

In her rush to undo her fate, she sealed it. Thank you, oh Lord, for the poetry.

CASPAR

Okay, hang on.

AVA

I know what you're going to say.

CASPAR

You have told me-

AVA

I know-

CASPAR

You have told me multiple times that this is not how time travel works.

AVA

I know-

CASPAR

"A Michael J. Fox Ass Understanding of Time Travel," I believe you called it.

AVA

I did.

GLORIA

A woman going back in time to try and change her future? That's a pretty Michael J. Fox ass situation.

EFFIE

Who is this Michael?

AVA

She hasn't been able to change her future, though. Because she's still at it.

CASPAR

But the future she lives in was apparently created by her future self in the past.

AVA

Yes.

CASPAR

So, what the fuck's happening there?

AVA

Here's the thing, I have reached a zen-like state regarding Clementine and the fact that nothing she does makes sense.

CASPAR

Congratulations.

AVA

Clementine breaks everything she touches. It's not going to make sense, we can't talk about her like she's following a set of rules. She's... she's just a big ball of wrong.

GLORIA

Well I'm about ready to kick this ball of wrong up onto the roof so nobody can play with it anymore.

CASPAR

Okay one more time for the idiot. Clementine comes from some sort of ruined Earth future.

AVA

Uh huh.

CASPAR

And in that ruined Earth future is somehow given god like powers.

AVA

Yes.

CASPAR

So she uses the godlike powers to go back to try and undo her ruined future.

AVA

Still yes.

CASPAR

And in going back literally becomes the reason why her future is ruined.

AVA

That's right.

CASPAR

I'm just... I'm so mad about all the times that you told me that was impossible.

AVA

Come inside, I want to show you something.

GLORIA

Where's Leif?

LEIF

(On the roof.)  
Gloria!

GLORIA

Oh hey. Are you back already?

LEIF

I thought there would be some sort of highly advanced security system, but this future is a utopia, they don't have crime. I'm literally Wesley Snipes in Demolition Man right now.

GLORIA

So you got the thing?

LEIF

Gloria. Holy shit. This thing is amazing. I've got the arc of the covenant from Indiana Jones up here.

GLORIA

Oh yeah?

LEIF

Oh yeah.

GLORIA

Well, plug it in, it's time to melt some Nazis.

LEIF

On it.

EFFIE

I understood none of those references but they all felt like good news.

LEIF

Oh hey, Gloria?

GLORIA

What?

LEIF

How was the presentation? How did Earth die?

GLORIA

Uh... we have some news. I'll tell you later.

LEIF

Okay. Oh, also...

GLORIA

What?

LEIF

If I get this thing fired up it might be the thing we need to break free of this place, and we've got a whole brunch going on.

GLORIA

Ah. Okay, I'll handle it.

ZEBULON

Gloria. I have returned.

GLORIA

Hey, Zeb. We missed you. How was praying?

ZEBULON

Gloria, would that it were as simple as putting a hammer to a nail.

GLORIA

Well, you came back just in time.

ZEBULON

Did I?

GLORIA

You know what we call this, Mucklewains?

EFFIE

Tell us.

GLORIA  
The comeback trail.

EFFIE  
Hallelujah.

INSIDE THE DINER, AVA LOOKS THROUGH PAPERS AND BOOKS.

CASPAR  
The Teds stole all your notes and yet this booth is still a garbage barge.

AVA  
Shh.

CASPAR  
You're shushing me a lot lately.

AVA FINDS A SINGLE PIECE OF PAPER.

AVA  
Here, look at this.

CASPAR  
What am I looking at?

AVA  
What does it look like you're looking at?

CASPAR  
I would say "math" but it's really just a mess of numbers and letters.

AVA  
That's the universe.

CASPAR  
On this piece of paper?

AVA  
Yes. The basic stuff not the quantum stuff. The standard model. The boring stuff. Inertia, thermodynamics. Every equation on this piece of paper represents an aspect of the universe.

CASPAR  
And every aspect of the universe fits on this one piece of paper?

AVA  
Broadly speaking, yes.



CASPAR

If it all fits on one piece of paper, why do you have so many notes?

AVA

Now look at this piece of paper.

CASPAR

This looks like more of the same.

AVA

This is a printout of a page of code from a computer game.

CASPAR

Which one?

AVA

Zork.

CASPAR

Uh huh... They look very similar.

AVA

They do.

CASPAR

I don't like that they look similar.

AVA

I know. Change one number or letter in that computer code and you are no longer playing Zork. Change one number or letter on the other piece of paper and well...

CASPAR

That's what Clementine is doing.

AVA

Going back to your Typhoid Mary theory: it's what she is doing and also what was done to her.

CASPAR

Done to her by what?

AVA

Exactly. By what?

CASPAR

Hm.... If somebody wrote this computer code on this piece of paper then who wrote-

AVA

Yeah, we don't have time for that right now.

CASPAR  
Okay.

DOOR CHIME.

GLORIA  
Hey, Quin.

QUIN  
Hey, what's up?

GLORIA  
Listen, this is going to seem a little strange but we have a little presentation of our own we'd like to show you.

QUIN  
Really? That's exciting, what is it?

GLORIA  
It's a little traditional thing we like to do on our planet.

QUIN  
What is it?

GLORIA  
I don't want to spoil it. Do you mind if I get everyone outside?

QUIN  
Sure, great. Surprises are fun!

GLORIA  
Aren't they?  
(Addressing the crowd.)  
Attention, everyone. Before we start brunch service can we, real quick, get everyone to come outside? We've got a very special secret to reveal about this strange and mysterious planet.

QUIN  
Oooh, doesn't that sound fun everyone?

GLORIA  
Here we go. Come on, you two.

CASPAR  
What's happening?

DOOR CHIME. WE HEAR THE TOURISTS BEGIN TO EXIT THE DINER.

LEIF  
Gloria, what's going on?

GLORIA

As soon as they're off the parking lot, fire up the Arc of the Covenant and get down here.

LEIF

Okay.

GLORIA

Just right over here, everyone... That's great. So, as you know, my name is Gloria, and this is my place. It's called Midnight Burger. Another name for it is... a diner.

MURMURS IN THE CORWD.

GLORIA (CONT'D)

It may be hard to believe, but we are "the friends at the diner" that Tamara was was talking about.

QUIN

Gloria, what is this?

GLORIA

You're probably going to be wondering about this planet for the rest of your lives. So before we go I just wanted to say a few things. The planet you're standing on is called Earth. We're from there. I know that doesn't make much sense, but it will in a minute. Caspar, introduce yourself.

CASPAR

Uh, I'm Caspar. I'm from Cleveland, Ohio, then Sacramento, California, then all over the western United States. I am a former employee of the Department of Motor Vehicles.

GLORIA

Ava?

AVA

I'm Dr. Ava Maddox, professor emeritus at Ithaca College in New York, and I was born in St. Louis, Missouri.

LEIF

I'm Leif. I'm from Northern California. Youngest ever recipient of a Masters Degree in Aerospace and Computer Engineering from The University of California at Berkley.

ZEBULON

And I'm Zebulon Mucklewain here with my wife Effie.

EFFIE

Hi, y'all.

ZEBULON

And we are from the great state of Arkansas.

GLORIA

I'm Gloria. I'm from Arizona. I run a restaurant with my friends.

QUIN

Gloria what-

GLORIA

I just wanted to introduce ourselves. I imagine you're going to make a bunch of assumptions about our home in the years to come so I just wanted to say... We made mistakes, sure. We had more flaws than pluses. But I recommend you be kind when you judge us. Not because we deserve it, but because someday, far off in the future, someone will be having brunch on top of your bones too. How would you like them to speak of you?

THERE IS A CRACKLE OF ENERGY AND THE DINER IS SPEEDING THROUGH SPACE/TIME.

LEIF

Back in the saddle, Baby!

GLORIA

Okay... Clementine's going to be on our ass real quick. We need to figure out a way to keep her either here or in the parking lot without her turning us into tapioca.

LEIF

You know what? I've got this one.

CASPAR

What?

AVA

You've got this one?

LEIF

Yeah. I've got this one.

GLORIA

What are you talking about?

LEIF

When she shows up, I can keep her busy.

GLORIA

Okay but... not in a sex way, right?

LEIF

Goddamnit, no! I'm serious. I've got some ideas. She shows up, I'll handle it.

GLORIA

... Okay, how much time do you need?

LEIF

Not much. The Urt Box increased my processing speed by about two billion times. I'm supercharged up there.

GLORIA

Okay. Then I guess we just wait.

ZEBULON

Gloria, if I may?

GLORIA

Sure.

ZEBULON

Clementine is a danger to anyone she encounters. I suggest we do not wait for her to realize she's lost us.

GLORIA

What do you want to do? Taunt her?

EFFIE

Oh yes. We do.

ZEBULON

If I cast my voice out, she will hear me. I do not know why.

GLORIA

That's just going to make her more mad.

LEIF

(From the roof.)

No, I want her mad. It's part of the plan.

GLORIA

... This is the most ill-advised shit.

CASPAR

Yes, let's make a series of rational decisions as we're careening through space-time in a diner that has wolves in the deep-freeze and parmesan cheese without spatial permanence.

GLORIA

... Okay. Bait the hook, Mucklewains.

SONG: WHAT A FRIEND WE HAVE IN JESUS.

ZEBULON

Greetings to all who can hear my voice. Let the  
chimes of freedom ring through the the halls of  
every home. Stand firm, then, and do not let  
yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

EFFIE

Hey Clementine! Ppppppppppppppppppppppppppppt.

AVA

Oh sure, *she* can do it.

THE END.