

RADIO\$AULT



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In the interest of effected parties, the Federal Army & Navy Surplus in Seattle, Washington, does not employ children.

Time Time Time Time Time For That In-Flight
Entertainment, Suckers.

airplane swoosh.wav

The House Is Rockin' And We're Gonna Need
You To Bother Knockin' This Bee-utiful Friday
Morning.

Freakin' Weekend, Who's Feeling Lucky Out
Here.

slot machine sound, jackpot.wav

Call 555-CASH, That's 555-CASH, Blow A Rasp-
berry And Slap Your Ish, It's Friday And We're
Gonna Play Some 5/4.

Mission: Impossible riff.wav

5/4 Time, Lovely Day To Name Names And Score
Some Swag, Today's Jackpot Prize Is Two—Count
'Em—*Two* Tickets To Danny Brown, With A Bee,
And A Dee, At The WaMu Theater.

I Hear A Knock, Man, If That's A Knock, Let Em
In. Good Neighbor Gives The Sugar.

Lend me some sugar, I am your neighbor.wav

What's Up What's Up, You're In The Cash Stash
On CASH FM, Let The People Know Your Name.

McFly, Anyone Home?

“It’s Donald.”

Donny D, Donatello Does Machines, Pleasure To Have You At The Stash, You Ready For Some 5/4?

“Let’s go, man.”

Hell Yeah, Brother, Let’s Go. If This Is Your First Time Joining Us—First Off, Welcome, You Look Lovely—5/4’s A Simple Game, Hard To Master: We Give You The Category And You Have Five Seconds To Name Those Four Corresponding Things. Where You At, Donald?

“Bothell.”

Corresponding’s A Big Word For The Bothellians, You Got The Rules?

“I’m ready, Jones, hit me.”

Dreamers Dream, Doers Do, Let’s See That Category.

Dum-DumDumDum, Donald, In Five Seconds, Name Four... Things That Start With The Letter... L. Time Starts Now.

ding ding.wav

5!

“Uh... Elevator—”

BZZZZZZZZZZZZZZRT.wav

wtf boom.wav

Did He Just Say Elevator? Get The Hell Out.

Failed!

click

He Said Elevator.

Things That Start With L, Donald Says Elevator.

Can't Say I Don't Get It, Jones.

Why Don't You Call In, Abe, *Then* When I Tell You Give Me Something Starts With *I* You Can Give Me *Eyeball*. Another Caller, Let's Go, We Gotta Get These Tickets The Frak Out Of Here.

Welcome Welcome, Won't You Come In, Tell Us Your Name And Where You're At.

"It's Mark, and I'm on the I-90 right now."

Sorry To Hear That, Mark, Maybe We Can Slide You Some Tickets, Brighten Up That Friday Commute, But First You Gotta Play: Abe, Category Me. Category Mark, I Should Say.

Mark, In Five Seconds, Name Four... Members Of The Wu-Tang Clan. Go!

5!

"RZA, GZA—"

4!

"—Method Man, Inspectah Deck."

cash register sound* *cash register sound* *cash register sound* *cash register sound

Jackpot_priceisright.wav

Flawless Victory From Mark! Mark, Pat Yourself On The Back, You Snagged Yourself Two Tickets To See Danny Brown At The WaMu Theater, Mark, Congratulations.

“Sweet.”

I Just Wanna Give That Guy Props For Naming Inspectah Deck.

Right? Right. No Ghostface, No Raekwon, He Says Inspectah. Mark Ended His Session With A Heelflip.

Thanks For Playing, Seatown, Happy Friday, CASH FM Is Playing Requests All Day, Just Hit Our Line. Oldies, Newies, Mainstream, Deep Cuts, Let's Hear Something Wild. 555-CASH, Standing By. Up Next, The Killers.

1 – THE APARTMENT

You had bought the bag of candy expecting them to be gumdrops, which you like. Not until it was too late did you realize they are spice drops, which do not taste like fruity candy so much as they taste like a 1987 wedding reception. You did not teach yourself to like spice drops until they were the only thing in the apartment that constitutes food.

Water is more important than food, you remember. The human body can go many days without food; one week without water and it's curtains. You google how many days exactly the human body can nebulously [go] without food, as if there's some exact day. ProperHealth.com suggests something like three weeks. You know the American agricultural complex (Big Agriculture?) produces more food than's needed, and it's in fact quite hard to die of starvation 'round these parts, even with no money like you. Soup kitchens exist, along with other things from *Home Alone 2: Lost In New York*, like room service and Joe Pesci.

You eat some spice drops. The bag says each color drop tastes like a different spice. Green is spearmint and black is licorice and yellow is something called sassafras. It's been said, you're sure, that Americans don't fuck with spices like the rest of the world. Chicken Fingers all the way down. To

extend the definition of spice, which is a lot of things, Americans get a few. Mint is a spice, in things like chewing gum and Icebreakers. Cola is flavored with spices ~~and sugar~~ and that's all anyone drinks around here. If there's a conclusion to this, you have forgotten what it was. Also, you remember there's no soup kitchen in *Home Alone 2*. You were thinking of the one homeless character.

One time, and only the one time, you had taken a picture of your very whatever apartment and uploaded it to Reddit, which is to say multiple subreddits. Ones where you could get advice on making the place look better. Enterprising commenters please remember, in drafting your responses, that OP does not have money. Open the windows, they said, natural light boosts mood. Even the dreary Seattle sky cannot go totally ignored. A rug might do you some good, even a Goodwill rug or a rug you may find on the street. Rugs are easier to clean than the premiere rug cleaning services may lead you to believe. Get a plant. Get a plant. Get a plant. Get a plant. Get a plant. Get a plant. Get a plant. Get a plant.

It's easy to keep a place tidy, so they say, but not as easy as shimmying out of your pants and stepping out the leg holes. Your apartment pioneers the valley between aesthetic and gross. You do not have a bedframe, but not in the way that some people don't have a bedframe and it's cool. For them, it's cool because they could have a bedframe and chose not to. They also have better apartments all

around. You do not have a refrigerator in the orthodox sense. What you do have is a mini fridge, powered by an overextended USB cable and released as part of a sweepstakes for *Halo 3: ODST* in 2009. You forget the details from your google search predating this novella, but avid Dr. Pepper customers could mail their box tops in exchange for a wide variety of *Halo 3: ODST*-leaning prizes. Not you, however. 2009 meant you were seven years old and not in the position to buy that much Dr. Pepper or care that much about USB mini-fridges or *Halo 3: ODST*.

You do not have a shower. To say you do not have a shower to keep for yourself, to have and to hold. Old apartments buildings, like yours, thought tenants would be into the idea of sharing bathrooms and showers. College students are one thing. When it comes to adults, which can be anything from twenty-five to six hundred, who knows whose hair is clogging the drain. Only so much can be asked from a sticky note urging tenants to brush their hair before showering. Humans have a natural musk and this is sexy, or at the very least sounds like it should be. Showering is something the *man* wants you doing, *man*. Fuck showers, you say most days. Unless you've been sweating.

You do not have a microwave oven. You do not have a toaster oven. You do not have a toaster and consider that one the most embarrassing of the three. Toasters are ancient. Claw machines have

toasters. Kindergarteners have toasters. Two months ago, you had gone to the Target at University Village in pursuit of a toaster. At the time you felt you deserved just slightly more than a Goodwill toaster. What could such tenured machinery ask of people these days? Coffee makers go for twenty bucks. Yet Target did not deal in twenty dollar toasters, you were woe to discover. The appliance aisle was lined with something called the ToastMaster, made possible by Kickstarter. Featuring Omnitoast technology and smart device compatibility, the ToastMaster is capable of things Charles Perkins Strite could only dream. Adjustable gates allow for things far wider than the feeble slice of white bread (bagels). Poly-rubber compound liners and an adjustable base mean the ToastMaster can be fixed horizontally to function as a panini press. The ToastMaster app notifications replace the traditional metal popping noise, in fact there is no traditional toaster pop. Rather, the ToastMaster's electric pistons gently bring your toast/bagel/grilled cheese/panini to breach. Five year hardware warranty. \$159.99. You did not have that kind of money a two months ago and found the conceit of the ToastMaster stupid anyway.

You do not have a TV. A few weeks ago, you did. Funny thing, time. You had an old eleven-inch CRT with a built-in VCR with a Nintendo GameCube. VHS movies are not a dime a dozen because the Salvation Army store sells them for cheaper

than that. Classic Universal Monsters. 90s Askewniverse which is a dumb name but the movies are alright. The entirety of the *DragonBall Z* Cell Saga, which is the best one. Your GameCube was nothing special, but you were proud to have *SSX 3* and *Crazy Taxi* and *Capcom vs. SNK 2* and *Super Smash Bros. Melee*. Anyway, a friend of a friend offered you two-hundred dollars for the whole lot. TV, the movies, the GameCube. You got him to do \$250 and at that point couldn't say no. Recently, you've been regretting that deal. Nights get quiet and neighbors get loud.

You do not have many friends. Online or offline. Realistically speaking, you had your chances to get friends. High school friends that extend past high school are rare but it's doable, you're sure. College is your best bet but you're not in college. Work friends? Bad move.

Other than that, what's a [you] to do? Bars are for people who have money, don't believe the propaganda. Same with concerts and however one gets invited to parties. Do you remember First grade? You do. Asking kids with cool shirts and *YuGiOh!* cards if they would like to be your friend. You should have been doing that more.

Ring ring ring. Ring ring ring. Wanna get that?

Hello, you say like it's some mystery who's calling. Hasn't been since whatever Caller ID is was invented by whoever.

"Morning, babe."

Happy Birthday, Mr. President.

"Hahaa, yeah, thanks. Should I have waited for you to call me?"

Eh, it's whatever, you say and laugh.

"I'd like to see you today, y'know, hang out in case we're all toast."

ToastMaster?

"My Mom got me one as a present, actually, funny you would say."

Why would we be toast.

"Rainier. Have you seen Twitter?"

No. You have not seen Twitter. What's on Twitter.

"Seismic activity at the mountain or something. Earthquakes, I think. Means it's gonna blow soon, or like that's what the scientists say."

Well, it would suck if the thing blew on your birthday, you say and very seriously think.

"Hahaa, yeah, no shit. No kidding. We should hang out though, I'm at my aunt's right now but I'll be back in the city tonight. Gonna see Caleb, Zoey, Ralph, and Austin and probably Hayden. But I really want you there, too."

You forget one of the names the moment he

says it.

Yeah, that'd be fun, you say. Where?

"Eh, we don't know yet. Beach? We'll figure it out."

Yeah, we'll figure it out.

"You didn't get me anything, did you?"

Oh, I mean, not yet, you say.

"Just because I think I told you not to. Really, really, it's okay. I kinda hate presents, y'know, it's awkward... accepting things. Do you want the ToastMaster?"

Jesus, dude, your birthday's barely started, don't go throwing away the gifts just yet.

"Right, yeah, word, cool, sick. But uh... yeah. See you tonight?"

I'll see you tonight. Love you.

"Hahahaaa, yeah, love you too. Bye."

Bye.

That was your Boyfriend. He makes music.

2 – THE HOROSCOPE

You have a boyfriend. Seriously. Not even in the way you would say that just so someone would leave you alone. A boyfriend that makes *music*, and it's the modern year, so a boyfriend who makes music is to say he is a rapper. Rap is an acronym, you're pretty sure you've heard once, standing for Rhythm and Poetry. Incidentally, the name of his first EP, *Rhythm and Poetry vol. 1*, and damn the guy at that house party who said the name was dumb. Which came first, you wonder: thinking he was cute or thinking the name was smart. *Rhythm and Poetry vol. 1* was released under his first stage name, which was just his regular name. The new name is smarter, which you've told him already. DS.

What does DS mean? Dumb question. What does DMX mean? [google says DMX comes from a drum machine]. What you do know, and what really matters, is that DS is an artist. He creates when the rest of his world and yours chose to be prey. It's producers and consumers out here, and only one of those is the right choice. DS understands. Slowly but carefully he makes you understand. The perfect teacher: his methods are effortless.

Take his song (track) *Domino*, perchance. Or just take the song and forget the whole "perchance"

thing. *Domino* takes no prisoners, thematically. The mind goes to domino as a noun, the seminal ~~toy gambling apparatus game pizza chain funny obelisks Rube Goldberg ingredient~~ collapsing tiles. The plasticity in their metaphor is some other big word. DS' spin is a poignant one. We are all dominoes, see. Accountable for and to each other. It is entirely wrong to say our business effects no one. Imagine you throw yourself off a balcony. Splat on the curb below. Seeing that is gonna ruin someone's day for sure. This exact thought occurs in *Domino's* second verse, though he makes it rhyme.

Rhythm and Poetry vol. 1 has a few more numbers, duh. *Filter Papers*, *Newsflash*, *Second Life*. You had met DS exactly one year ago today, though were not immediately dating. This house, waaaaaay up in Northgate (like the mall) was putting on one of those halcyon-days house shows. You imagine people older than you remember those. To call these concerts would be very, very nice. What's happening here is nonspecific partying while someone plays a guitar. Ultimately fun, but a performer's gotta impress if they want to call their house show performance anything other than a living, breathing radio.

DS did. The first thing you noticed was his shoulders, then the lyrics. Of the three songs of his he performed, every one had a bar (music terminology) about people who text and drive. Yeah. *News-*

flash has a line about how he hopes people who text and drive crash their cars (in such a way that they die/get injured and nobody else, presumably), another song of his—*Pocket*—there's a line or two about people who ironically claim to have their friends back(s) yet text and drive. The sentiment's there. DS is not wrong. Texting and driving is bad. And while it's cute, you find, there's something undeniably dorky about distracted driving callouts in a rap song. Not how many people die, in that genre.

Your boyfriend deserves to be more popular; you think. This is not some rat bastard [bitch?] trick to become famous by proxy. You're sure you would feel the same way were DS not your boyfriend (he is). There's a damn decent brain in his head. Fills up the cranium right flush. Compared to the type getting famous these days (have you SEEN?) DS ought to be doing better than the auto repair thing he's got going on. Listen to a hundred rap songs in a row and you won't hear a peep about distracted driving and its risks.

That would be a good birthday present, you think. The gift of publicity.

But first, you think, horoscope time.

You are a Cancer. Sorry, that's aggressively put. Cancer as in the zodiac sign. Born between June 22nd and July 22nd. And you are *something* rising but forget what. You are loyal, protective, tena-

cious, yet perhaps emotional, timid, other things one of the horoscope sites said. It all sounds correct, however. Like one time this jerkwad blowass at a show called DS “weaponized cringe” which makes zero sense and you said exactly as much before throwing a beer at him and getting scared and leaving. Now that you think about it, this might have been at the same house party in Northgate. Funny.

Cancers season is something powerful. You wager the best things to ever happen in your life happened in Cancer season. Meeting DS, for one. Signing the lease on your apartment that looked better in pictures. *All* of your birthdays. You are powerful and fortified between June 22nd and July 22nd. Very cool of the Zodiac you have the time split between two months, you think. Makes the season feel longer.

Beckystarshower.com is a good horoscope website. Where exactly one collects their horoscope doesn't matter too much, you're pretty sure. For a minute you thought they might be published in the newspaper and checked one at the Caffé Vita in Fremont. Boy was that embarrassing. What's in store for Cancers, Becky?

“Be the lemming, daring Cancer. Where those you admire go, you follow. Reap adjacent and reap utterly. You will surprise yourself, what following will get you. Be the beginner. Learn a new skill and collect the benefits

hundredfold. But be cautious in your explorations, Cancer. For how many people you may synchronize, just as many will drain you. If it rains, don't pack an umbrella. The Earth will water you like a plant and you will find your wilted leaves flex to life."

Huh. Similar to some other days. You wonder why they have to talk like that. Follow people, don't follow bad people, learn something new, get rained on. Rain does sound good right now, but maybe that's the shower calling.

Just as a buffer, a second opinion, you return to the search results and consult a different horoscope website. This one, astrobitch.com, has cute little profile pictures for each of the signs, and you do a fist pump because the Cancer one looks way cooler than the others. Poor Virgos get a messy hair bun and an everything bagel, Cancer has tattoos and a sick leather jacket with a tiger.

"Cancer:

Have you been doing something different with your hair? No but seriously, Cancer, you've been positively shimmering and people have noticed. Some will take this as newfound attraction for you. But remember: the weather is always clearest before a hurricane. Remember to focus but remember to breathe. Today would be a good day to discover some new music or watch an old movie. At the same time, you may

find newfound appreciation in the familiar. That book on your shelf with all the stretch marks could use a little love, hm? (STRETCH MARKS ARE SEXY. REMEMBER BOUNDARIES)

Your Libra and Aquarius peers will soon unfurl like flowers. Pay attention to changing behavior in your friends but remember that every sign has their own unique agenda. Ozymandias posits that great tragedies reinforce unity. Reach out to a friend who may have been recently upset but *remember boundaries*. Today may be a good day to bike to work (HELMET!!!) or take the train. Try putting the screens down, find the natural world work you like a battery. Remember how to open your eyes, most of all. What will you see? We wouldn't dare spoil the surprise, Cancer."

You want to fact check that thing about hurricanes. And who's Ozymandias? A philosopher, probably. You do not go to college.

Comedy works in threes, and the Greeks did not consider comedy a low thing. Apparently Dante is a Comedy, try and work *that* one out. As for website number three, you try to stray from anything looking too Big Astrology. No first page results. Horoscope.com? No chance. Astrology.com? What are you, joking? This is a job for expressdecompress.com. Out of your three attempts, this is the most Wordpress-y of them all. You mean no disre-

spect to Wordpress or its customer base. If you had a website, you're sure Wordpress would be a versatile, user-friendly option with the best customer testimonials on the market. Wordpress: Press to Impress. You think this would be a good slogan and should shoot them an email. Expressdecompress on Wordpress: Press to Impress. Never mind.

"I'm going to be straight with you, dear Cancer: be careful out there. My sister-in-law, also a Cancer, is going through one fuck of a divorce. And they say a chain is only as strong as its weakest link. Here's what I'm prescribing you, to play the doctor:

Pillow fort

Netflix

Do Not Disturb

Microwave popcorn

Hunker down like a storm's coming, because if it's anything like poor Rachael (SIL), it's about to get rough."

Well, *you're* not Rachael, for fuck's sake. And you do not own a TV. Or a Netflix account. Or Microwave popcorn. Off day for expressdecompress.com, but every player has a bad game. You remember they gotta draft, like, a *lot* of these. Twelve a day, seven days a week. The stars must get sore.

Weighing them all against each other, you suppose the confident tone of astrobitch.com would

serve you best. Sure, there's a few contradictory sentences peppered in, but you feel like the astro-bitch.com webmaster is on your side, or whoever they pay to consult the stars and write these things. Heeding their word, you elect to take the train downtown. In fairness, the train is how you get around most of the time, but astrobitch.com has allowed you to do so with purpose.

A lucky anything would do a body good, you think. To counteract the unlucky things you've been picking up as of late. Like the penny you had picked up in Chinatown. As good luck goes, that's a freebie. All day long good luck never lasts as long as you hope it would, and that penny turned out to be a bust anyway. See, one needs to be careful, picking up pennies. Heads up and you're good to go. But tails up, heaven forbid, and your luck goes utterly boink. You were too slow to notice that Chinatown penny was tails up, but you cannot take back picking it up. This was three weeks ago.

... And That Was Jack White...

Speaking Of White, Did Y'all Hear About The Sno Balls?

I Did Not. Sno Balls?

Like The Cake, Yeah. Sno Balls.

Again, I Did Not, No.

Hostess Is... Lemme Check This Article Again—
Yes Folks, Hostess Is Reducing The Iconic Size Of
The Sno Ball. This Is Apparently A Cost-Cutting
Measure.

Reduced To What?

What Has The *Sno Ball* Been Reduced To?

Yeah, How Small Is It. I Don't Have A Sno Ball
Right In Front Of Me. Was Unaware It's Size Was
Something Iconic.

Sources Say The *New* Sno Balls, Hitting Store
Shelves Some Time Third Quarter, Will Be Closer
In Size To A Ding Dong.

That's Small. What Is A Sno Ball?

How Do You Mean? What Is It Made Of?

I Assume It's Cake, It's Hostess, I Just—What
Makes It Snow? The One I'm Looking At Online Is
Pink.

Some Of Them Are Pink, Yes. Sno Ball—It's

Like... You Know The Ding Dong, Cream Filling, Cake Coffin. Sno Ball: Same Principle, Cover It In This Marshmallow Coating, Coconut Sprinkles On Top I'm Pretty Sure.

Ugh, I Hate Coconut, Man.

Y'know, We Have This Coconut Water Around The Station, And I Would Like To Be Uh... Drinking, But Don't Think I've Ever Had A Full Bottle.

Terrible. It's Terrible.

Hold Up, Looks Like We May Have An Urgent Call Here. Uh, Hey Friend, You're On The Air.

"Morning, Abe. Morning Jones. To expand on your Sno Ball descriptor—I believe it was Jones who compared the cream filling's entombment to that of a coffin. We're on the right path, but I believe with regards to the Sno Ball's construction, we would better equate this Committal de la crème to a sarcophagus. To say the cream is laid to rest within a series of layers, each one a process unto itself. Just as the sarcophagus is made up of a body wrap, a sort of central apparatus, followed by an inner coffin and a hard outer coffin—incidentally, what we refer to when we talk about a sarcophagus. In fact, the marshmallow coating and the decorative outer coffin of the sarcophagus—of course the mind defaults to the Egyptian persuasion—both serve as pop-cultural synecdoche. Would you agree, when we think about the Sno Ball anecdotally, it is indeed the marshmallow and only the marshmallow?"

I would be so bold as to claim the coconut shavings are considered less so than the cake or the cream filling.”

We Gotta Get Back To Some Tunes, But We Appreciate The Insight, Friendo.

Wow.

What A Mind.

Did He Say, What Was That, *Synecdoche*?

We Got Some Smart People Bumping Around Town. Coming Right Up Folks, After This Commercial Break, We’re Gonna Hit You With a User Request From *Fifteen* Minutes Ago, That’s *Mama Said Knock You Out*—LL Cool J.

3 – SISTER PRUDENCE

Oh what luck, you sigh. Prudence is in the lobby. If she's here, you may as well get some grocery shopping done.

For a moment she looks scared, having just been slotting her little leaflets into the resident's mail cubbies until one with way less patience than you tells her to fuck off. Given this, she's almost relieved to see you coming down the old, red carpet stairs, even though she must understand by this point you've been taking advantage of her mission, entertaining the whole spiel while she helps you run errands. Maybe she appreciates the audience as much as you her extra set of hands.

"Good morning," Prudence sings while you finger for her to follow you out the front door. You'll have her tail you to the CVS a few blocks south, carry some Diet Coke or something.

You do not have many friends, which is true, but you're decently confident calling Prudence a friend even if you two aren't as chummy as the term would make it sound. In a way, you take advantage of each other. Prudence gets to run her Lat-ter-Day filibuster; you get a couch up the stairs. *Sister* Prudence would be more correct to say (you don't), steadfast in her role as the new, soon-to-open LDS temple's hype (wo)man. Interestingly, she's been selling you on the temple's free food,

which to be honest with yourself doesn't sound too bad. But you have heard Prudence and *her people* don't do caffeine or sugar, gluten, tobacco, et cetera. You heard they call MSG "Devil Powder."

Hey, you ask Prudence while you not so subtly make for CVS, what do you think would be a good gift for an up-and-coming rapper?

She kinda blows out a laugh. "Well, I could never tell you."

Okay. You don't know why it has to be a secret.

I was thinking of pinning up some flyers, you tell her. Maybe a QR code with one of his songs, get his streams up. Would that be good? Would that count as a present?

"I don't think anyone seriously scans those things," Prudence says. "Any one could be a virus."

You go, okay, how about I get T-shirts made? The Salvation Army sells blank tees for one dollar apiece. I get a few, take them to one of those custom printer places—

Prudence cuts you off. "Before you get on with this any longer, understand I cannot in conscience help you propagate this kind of music."

What about under the table?

"No."

If I get you on your lunch break, can you help

me throw up some flyers then?

“No.”

Alright, Sister Prudence (which you call her in a facetious way, not because you’re supposed to) what’s *your* birthday strat?

“Cleaning supplies.”

Cleaning supplies.

“The number one thing all homeowners forget. Dusters, vacuum cleaners, hardwood mops, floor polish. It’s always appreciated but, critically, something that reflects positively on the gift giver. You aren’t just someone who gave a smart gift; you gave a pragmatic gift. Forget words, it’s what you *do*.”

So, I don’t think I can do any of that. Least of all a vacuum.

“My family owns two Dyson V15s,” Prudence thinks you have to know, “which have to be among the highest vacuum strata. You know they call James Dyson the Steve Jobs of industrial design.”

Again, cannot buy a vacuum.

You and Prudence come up to the CVS. A red-clad CVS sales associate sees Prudence and must recognize her because they pretend not to notice her coming in and makes like you do when you see someone from high school. What you need is ten-fold:

1. Gift for DS [tentative]
2. Maybe some Tums because you've been having pains sitting down
3. Nicotine gum
4. Chips, if they have some decent chips
5. Dr. Pepper (you've been thinking about Dr. Pepper all morning and cannot place why)
6. Paper towels or toilet paper. One can do the job of the other
7. Garbage bags?

Now, hold on. Without asking you, Prudence has went and got a shopping cart. The CVS shopping carts are not there to be used. The CVS shopping carts separate the. Separates the. You know. There's an idiom for this. CVS is an express pharmacy. Two hands are all a person should need. Maybe the basket, but just maybe. And here's goes Prudence, loading up this CVS shopping cart with what she calls essentials and saying the temple will cover you for today. Her people are too nice.

She shows you a feather duster, shakes the thing in its box. This is not a birthday present for that rapper boyfriend, mind you. This is a feather duster for you and only you.

Forthwith, you and Prudence carry out several oblong bagfulls of CVS goods, too many to rattle off here. Then again, it's a bit of a walk back home,

so it's not like you literally do not have the time to rattle them off here, but it would be a disrespectful use of time.

Hey, Prudence, you say. Sister Prudence.

"Hm?" She hums, two bags in either hand, two more bags at either elbow, a 12-pack of Dr. Pepper clawed in her fingers.

I'm trying to think of an idiom, you say. I was thinking about it back at the store.

"Wheat from the chaff," she says.

Oh. How did you know—

"The shopping cart, of course. Who could resist the witty introspection?"

Just what are they teaching you at that goodly temple of yours?

"God loves you, and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ died on the cross such that we may be forgiven for our sins when we repent, as was said by the early followers of our Lord Christ when they left Jerusalem for the Americas."

You are partly interested in the Jerusalem to America thing, but only in the scholarly sense. Rather than bring it up with Prudence and have her think she's getting to you, you remember to google it later. Your resulting CVS receipt is so long you've tied it around your head like a bandana.

4 – THE TRAIN

A toast to Prudence, if those people drink. Your new feather duster rules.

With a six-foot telescoping handle and a feather density ratio of 16:4, the Hoomfare xx7 could be doing better than CVS. This is some ultramodern shit, you assume. Hard to imagine feather dusters getting better than this or doing more for your apartment than the HoomFare xx7 is already doing. The years fall away. Drawers, countertops, under the sink, your bedframe, good as new. You're no connoisseur, but the HoomFare xx7 has to be one of the prettier feather dusters on the market. And cleanup is a snap; the feather apparatus literally makes a wonderful snapping noise when you press the dust separation button and send the years of skin cells and eye gunk down your trash bin.

You hike down the dozen or so blocks to the University train station. You will be taking the train exclusively, as was foretold in the horoscope. Which of the three said the thing about the train, you forget. Astrobitch.com? Regardless. And it seems a little goofy, unreasonable, for a person to carry a feather duster onto a train, dusting all the empty chairs and arm rests and hand rails, but you know for sure only someone lacking a portable feather duster would say such things. See, this is the problem with people these days, you think,

dusting the idling subway train. Can't be fucked to do anything nice without getting something back. Probably not since this subway train was built was it ever thoughtfully dusted and given how the busted thing runs these days you have half a mind to think no clown at that claptrap factory team considered the fringe benefit of the act. It's on people like you to do what's right.

The train idles at the University station, longer than what feels like normal. In two minutes you have your selected car dusted clean and get to work on the exterior. Ah, this brilliant silver bullet. With your dusting, you think it possible the train zooms through these tunnels even faster. You remember to google it later: "can dust effect aerodynamics," or maybe: "can dust effect aerodynamics Reddit" so you get a real answer.

It's early. Post work rush, pre-lunch rush (but who's taking the train for lunch) pre rush hour. Before gliding into port, you counted nine heads and one child head. Little Velcro shoes, baseball pants, slightly big rugby shirt, lime green headphones, backpack loaded with many charms. A popular choice for dressing a kid; gotta be top three kid outfits. A nice, folded collar like it's got someone to impress.

The Seattle subway has an interesting way of doing things. Maybe the only train in America, the last since cowboy times, to operate on the honor

system. The convenience of the ORCA card is not in question, especially in an increasingly cashless world. Then again it was envisioned for buses and is having a hell of a time working for trains. The University station has no turnstiles but does have a few ORCA card swiper things. When you first noticed that there was no check in place to ensure anyone was actually paying to get on the train, well, it was all over. You were riding for free.

You do have that nightmare, though. A Fare Enforcement agent hiding undercover on your train car, scanning with infrared Predator vision for any and all freeloading douchebags. It sees you and launches a barbed, projectile taser into your back, paralyzing you instantly. On the way down [this is still in the nightmare] you hit a chair and chip a front tooth, one you don't have the money to have fixed, and that would be the real punishment. Should this happen, you think you would argue, in a way, you paid your fare in samaritanism. Look at this tube shine.

Ding, ding, ding, the train signals its departure. You crush down your duster and stuff it down your backpack. Ah, a shimmering interior. Looks like a job well done. And y'know what? You don't need anyone to know it was you. Circle back to that [do something good without expecting a reward] thing from a few paragraphs ago. Hey, speaking of doing something good, you just noticed the child from the platform board your car without an adult. And now

the train is departing. Samaritan powers, activate. You're sure this was also in the horoscope.

Hey, you say, hey, you say again, waving your hand this time. The kid's music is too loud, so you give the shoulder a light yet firm rap.

"Hello," the kid says, one headphone down.

Where is your mother?

"Mommy works at the college. I was just there."

Oh. Okay. Are you supposed to be on this train?

"My *house* is this way."

Mhmm. And your mommy knows you're going there?

"You're asking a lot of questions here. Is it any business of yours where I'm going? I didn't ask you anything."

Hmm, you say. You're a smart kid.

"My name is Riley and given your interest in me for reasons I cannot imagine, I am *this* many years old."

Riley holds out a hand spread eagle and one finger on the other. Six.

Pretty young to be so articulate, Riley, you say.

"And I'm a boy, FYI. I notice you've been avoiding pronouns in your narration."

You start to ramble, intimidated:

Y'know, when I was your age—maybe a tad older—I also thought I was mature. It's what the adults said. But they say that about every kid. No one shows their kid around saying 'hey, this is Mitch, my son, he's a little baby moron.' No but seriously, I think more kids should be like you, y'know... independent.

"Pardon me if this is some intrusion," Riley says, glancing around, "but why were you cleaning the train?"

Dunno. It felt good?

"Hmm, the ritual of cleaning could be satisfying, I imagine. Now me, I'm a little boy; rolling around in grass, jumping off of swing sets into wood chips, things of that nature. One day I'll change my tune, I'm sure."

Oh, yeah. Catching bugs. Soup can phones. 1930s things.

"Soup can phones," Riley says like a half question. You elaborate:

Yeah, like from the cartoons. Two empty soup cans, you run a bit of string through either one, you can talk to someone on one end like it's a phone.

"I've never seen anything like that, in any cartoon."

Really? Man, I swear that's a cartoon thing.

"In a bygone era, maybe. I can appreciate the

old masters for their technical ability but the animation craft has matured considerably.”

What are they doing in cartoons these days?

“Unpacking trauma.”

It’s rude asking someone a question and not listening to the answer, but the speed of the subway entrances you. New York City, London, Paris, probably Tokyo; their subway systems take Seattle to school. All those cities are what’s called a Grid System but that is not an excuse. If Seattle had decent roads that would be one thing, but you need climbing gear to go from 1st avenue to 2nd. Cleated boots, 32-strand rope, hand chalk, et cetera. You think maybe this bit should’ve ended a sentence earlier.

Riley makes good company, for the six or so minutes it takes to reach downtown. He tells you of the Super Mario series’ further drop into derision. The developers have lost their creative punch. God dammit, they used to hold out their bleeding hearts. Fame made them forget the words of the prophets, as art is concerned. When one plays, say, *Super Mario Bros. 3* (Riley says either the original Nintendo Entertainment System edition or the GameBoy Advance reprint would do) you can feel their hunger. So much to prove. Attempt to spare a look at *Super Mario: Event Horizon* and feel nothing but pity. The artist clings to familiarity. You tell Riley that’s nice. You ask Riley if there’s a girl/boy/

progressive 6 year old he has a crush on and he giggles and says *noooooo*.

Haha, you think he might be lying.

The doors slide open and Riley fixes his backpack. The many charms jingle.

“I’ve enjoyed this,” Riley tells you, “well-intentioned banter with strangers is a wonderful thing, yes. I wish you the best in that—that thing you’re doing.”

Why, thank you, Riley. What thing I’m doing?

“Getting your boyfriend’s music on the radio. Specifically 86.1 CASH FM, who will be taking requests all day as part of their ongoing Easy Friday broadcast. A sweet gesture on your part—one I’m inclined to call fruitless so far as promotion goes. Radio is as disposable as media gets these days. The processed food of music publication, but I’m rambling. Goodbye.”

You never said anything about this. 86.1 CASH FM is not a name you’ve heard since the bygone days of sitting in the back of your parent’s car. More on that later because it looks like Riley is not going to make the train doors in time.

Those two awful butchers knives slide together with fractions of a second for Riley to nonchalantly step onto the platform. You would think, and do think, Riley would have some peripheral feeling about this, a tingle in the back of the neck that

something's closing in, but then again Riley's University-working mommy keeps his haircut short and pampered.

Riley almost makes it. His backpack bounces off the edge of the door, and you let out a sigh. You say, wait! Wait. Riley, you've forgotten something. No dice.

The emergency flashlight-sized metal tube hits the doors perfectly, sandwiched betwixt. the loop keychain tying the thing to his backpack holds for a quarter of a second before Riley jerks forward and the doors force a connection. Clipping off, the tube tumbles and rolls on the train's floor, right to your feet.

Consider yourself curious. The moment for you to try and pry the doors open, call out to Riley and tell him he's lost his backpack trinket, is gone. Maybe it was still there somewhere in that moment you just didn't stand up, but alas. You turn the device in your hands, click a button, and a furiously powerful laser explodes out the business end, blinding your left eye.

... And That Was Genzi... Rest In Peace... Rest In Peace To The Late Great Reprobate From The Evergreen State. Now! This Here Is News To Me—To Me, I Don't Know About Abe Here—But The First Time *Phantom*—*Phantom* Being The First Commercially Released Track From The Late Genzi, From His SoundCloud Days—The First Time That Song Ever Saw Airwaves Was On Our Own Easy Friday. Can You Believe It?

Seriously? Wow. We Don't Capitalize On That Enough.

And Speaking of Death, You Think We're All Dying Tonight?

Dark.

Dark And Backed By Science. Folks, If You Haven't Been Keeping Up With Seismic Goings-On, Good Ol' Mt. Rainier May Be Rediscovering Her Temper Either Today Or This Week, As Recent Observations Are precisely In Line With—

Wai-Wai-Wai-Wait You're—You're Talking Like An Eruption Here?

Yeah.

Like Goodness Gracious Great Balls Of Fire?

woo.wav

Yeah.

Wow. Who's In The Splash Zone?

Well, For Those Of You Joining Us From... Lemme Get The—Right, For Those Of You Tuning In From: Puyallup River, Nisqually River, Ashville, Orting, Tacoma, Enumclaw, And So On... Watch Out. But I'm Guessing You Already Knew That. Residents Living Within A Fifty-Mile Radius Are Under An Evacuation Order... That's As Of Last Night.

So, She's Gonna Blow? That's For Certain, You're Saying?

It's Right Here On The Dirt Sheets.

Where's The Kaboom.wav

Not To Sound All 'Eff You, Got Mine,' About All This, But What's Our Scenario?

Seattle? Ash Rain, For Sure.

Woof, How's *That* On The Skin?

Somewhere Between Hot Stone Massage And Chernobyl, I'd Guess.

Man, We Need Someone On Air Who Remembers Helens. Sorry For Dating Ourselves. I'm An '89 baby. Jones?

'91.

Helens To Us Was An Inherited Memory And A Vial Of Souvenir Dust In a Gift Shop Outside Castle Rock, Sad To Say.

Shame, Too. Wasn't Around For It, But *Prior* To St. Helens Little Episode, That Mountain Was *Quite* The Looker. I've Seen The Pictures.

Come On, Man. It's A Natural Wonder; You're Talking About It Like It's... Jump In, Jones. Help A Guy Finish His Bit.

Kathleen Turner?

St. Helens Is Kathleen Turner? Who?

Dyme, Once Upon A Time.

I Don't Know Who That Is. And Hey Jones, I Think That's A Caller.

Oh, Hey, There You Go. Happy Lunch Break, Caller. If This Is A Request For The Red Hot Chili Peppers, The Answer Is Still No, But If You Got That Helens Story, Drop A Name And Fire Away.

"Hey, Jones, Abe, This is Dennis in Bellevue."

Dennis The Menace, What's Your Year?

"Proud '59 baby."

Baby Boomer, No Wonder He's Calling From Bellevue. Hey, How Many Bathrooms In That Mansion, Dennis?

"You guys kill me. Want that story?"

Eighty, Minus Fifty-Nine, That Makes You...

"I had just turned twenty-one."

1980 Wasn't Your First Beer, Though, I Got That Right? Damn, That Was Still The Pull-Tab Era.

you take one down, pass it around.wav

"Hahaha, it's how we rolled! See, I was damn close. Back then I worked the gas pumps in Centralia—about seventy miles out or so. That close, the ash was down same afternoon. Sheriff has everyone stay indoors; businesses closed as a precaution. We didn't know what that stuff'd do to people, y'know—the lungs. Now you could hear the rumble, sounded a little like wind. I remember being thrilled. Boys at the pump got the day off. Kids were out playing in the ash."

Parents Were Letting Their Kids Play In Ash?
We're Talking About Fresh Volcanic Ash?

"It was the eighties! I had some Tupperware full of ash from the time but knowing me I lost it in a move—but hey! I got a good story about that garbage. Friend of mine also worked the pumps, called him Twitcher. He was an... an enterprising businessman, you see. He goes and collects what must have been a few pounds of that ash with a shop vac from the station. Just like you said, one of you said, he stuffs the ash in jars. That Autumn, he was selling that junk at the fair ten bucks a pop. True story."

Incredible. Enterprising, Like You Said. Shoutout To Twitcher.

“God rest his soul.”

God Rest His Soul?

“Yup. Oxycodone. Awful stuff.”

Thanks For The Story, Dennis, Hey, Why Don't You Take The Helm For This Next Number. What're You Trying To Hear Before We All Go Meet Twitcher?

“Ha! Y'know what, few minutes ago when you two were done playing that garbage, Abe mention some Great Balls of Fire, and well, goodness gracious.”

Reading You Loud And Clear, Dennis. Spinnin' Some Jerry Lee Lewis, T-Minus Twenty Seconds...

This Isn't Irresponsible Of Us, Is It?

How Do You Mean, Jones?

I Mean, It Stands To Reason Ms. Rainier Is Gonna Kill Someone, Yeah?

They Got The Evacuation Order, Man. Sounds Like A Super-Size Not Our Problem.

Word. Abe: Jerry Lee, If You Would.

5 – THE LASER or: THE MONITOR or maybe: THE COFFEE

Prisum, the manufacturer, calls this model The Monitor, and it is the most powerful laser pointer on the market.

Laser pointers have limited utility for normal people. To your knowledge. You mean, what? Star-mapping? For beckystarshower.com, one must come in useful for means of drafting horoscopes or however that's done. Highlighting things on a chalkboard? 1999 called. Making a fool of your cat's object perception? Someone somewhere must consider that a problem, but you'd be lying if you said it was you.

All that poetry said, The Monitor is a lot of fun. The world's most powerful laser pointer promises a lot. Because either it's a lightsaber, or the world's most powerful laser pointer is *going* to disappoint. But The Monitor gets you part of the way there. For one thing, it burns. Legitimately. After giving your left eye a moment to recover (your CVS receipt makes for a good eyepatch) you admire the pinpoint shimmer of the laser on your palm until the dot starts to tingle. And boom, a thin red veneer takes its place a few minutes later. Painful, yet intriguing. You slide off the train and exit somewhere nebulously downtown, looking for somewhere with napkins.

Starbucks will do and does. You pluck a napkin from the overdesigned dispenser (in their infinite vanity, Starbucks has embossed their judgmental mermaid woman down to their napkin dispensers) and hoist it in your fingers like a sail full dressed. Sizzle sizzle, The Monitor burns a hole through the napkin and into the wall of the Starbucks, forcing a teenage barista to ask what you're doing. You try telling them an uncomfortably verbose kindergarten invertedly gifted you the world's strongest laser pointer capable of burning flesh and they do not think this is as cool as you do. They ask you to leave. For their information, you did not wish to support megacorp coffee anyway and will gladly take your business to the moms and the pops.

And the *opacity*. Sacrificing decency, The Monitor fulfills the promise of a laser pointer in the minds of every child. Full, visible trail. You mean concert effects. You mean no, Mr. Bond, I expect you to die. A gaggle of The Monitors could blast arbitrarily across a long dark hallway, guarding the world's largest diamond which you will google later. Finding spots downtown to really test The Monitor quickly becomes an ordeal. Can't point it anywhere without heads turning. You suppose the electric buzzing sound while active doesn't help. Fair enough, and in spite of The Monitor's USB-C charging outlet, a laser pointer packing this echelon of punch would need a lot of power. You take yourself to an alley in Chinatown with a nice brick

wall and point The Monitor square into a brick from a fair twelve inches away. Buzzzzzzzzzzzz, and the device starts to heat in your hands. Fifteen seconds in and the heat becomes something unbearable and you turn it off.

You feel like Iron Man testing out his Iron Man armor for the first time and assume the armor must have a name of its own. If you were Iron Man, who must also have a real name, *you* would name the armor. Maybe after DS. The DS armor. Iron Man armor mark DS. Project DS. And the Monitor would be a quintessential feature of your weapons arsenal. Yes, there would be two The Monitors, one in each wrist. Maybe another two in the feet, you never know. And you would never take it off because your Iron Man armor would have HVAC and be comfy like a bed and yes it would also be a toilet and yes the toilet would have some bidet equivalent. You toss The Monitor in the air and catch it so devilishly. You would design way better Iron Man armor. Fuck Tony Stark, whose name you just remembered.

You may be a wee bit tired.

Coffee sounds good, actually. Black coffee, yes, like the bohemians do. Come on, you're in Beantown, which you actually are not and just have the city names confused (Boston [Chicago?]). With a little digging, you'll find a spot that will not be a café or a shop or a third name you list facetiously,

it will be a spot, and it's old wood chairs on tile floors will be filled with the butts of artists and activists and visionaries. One of them will be sketching, the illustrator, eager and frantic to depict the world they see unspool before them. They will draw you, ahahahahahaha yes. The glimmer in your eye and the CVS receipt around your head paint you the subject. You'll be ordering at the counter so it'd be a side profile, which is good because then you'll have a jawline. There'll be a band, perhaps, a guy with a guitar. A *steel* guitar. There you go. And one of them with long hair in a bun has a fucking banjo, why not. What else is there? Guy writing a novel. Nah, they need outlets, and the bohemian coffee spot is in a building too old for such things except for the ones the baristas will need. Point is he's not there. But there is a poet, because they just need, like, a notepad and a pen. And they're drafting a poem that's like

Cold on my feet

The unbearable feeling

But hot on my face

The campfire

We take the pain with the comfort of friends

Look, it'll be better when they do it. And the coffee will be made with some goofy old espresso machine that screams and sucks, poured into some old cup with chips and there's *no* saucers. And the

bathrooms are just so utterly caked in graffiti and it's all cool. There's no penises, unless some artist has a really cool take on penis doodles, which for the sake of argument this one does. Oh! Oh. And there's a basket on the counter with tampons (and pads) because we gotta look out for each other. What's playing on the radio? In the fantasy it's playing DS but you understand that's not exactly realistic so for now we'll say it's Leonard Cohen.

You've been following the smell of coffee, thinking about all this, and wander inside what's actually just another Starbucks. A barista behind the counter asks you to leave because these Starbucks communicate with each other.

So you keep going. With time to reevaluate your, to be honest with yourself, unreasonable dream coffee spot (in this economy?) you will now settle for something milder. At least let the place be independently owned. Or a co-op. Imagine such a thing. Now, a co-op coffee spot would have maybe free food for whoever needs it, which you sometimes do when Prudence isn't around to buy you snacks and also ask you to welcome Jesus into your heart. Or perhaps a pay it forward program; generous customers can pay for someone else, unknown to them but that's not why they donate, gosh darnit. They have to look out for their fellow ~~Seattlenoids~~ ~~Seattlans~~ ~~Seatownians~~ Seattleites. Are pay-it-forwards tax-deductible? Add it to the google list.

Oh. Hey. Now this spot right here just reeks of independence.

You're somewhere just east of interstate 5. It's already been one fuck of a walk, which you've been saying in place of [one hell of] recently. Heard someone else say it, probably, you poser. Here there's a healthy blend of business and residence. A rare sliver of the city not terrorized by cars, you think, fully aware of the interstate five hundred feet away. And yet the roar of the highway and the dominance of the asphalt over the landscape does give this part of town a word you recently learned to spell. *je ne sais quoi*. See, if you romanticize every type of metropolitan area, you always come out on top. You *love* interstate 5.

Edison's. Edison's Local Roasters, est. 2005. You have no idea what this place is or how it came to occupy what's obviously just a house. This presents two options: one, the owner of Edison's Local Roaster is [presumably named Edison] also lives in this house, in which case local business FTW. Another, grimmer answer is this house was purchased, stripped from the housing market, for the sake of commerce, which certainly sounds bad. You hop up the porch in one go and step inside.

We're getting closer to your ideal coffee spot yet not entirely there. The floor creaks and it smells like beans and there are some funny people inside. 6/10, but workable, and you're tired anyway.

You let the barista make the first move, like always. Behind an L-shaped counter going from the front door to where a dinner table would've been under normal circumstances. Betwixt all type of brewing and baking ~~apparati~~ apparatuses. Looks scrounged, bought secondhand, which is better than custom-built franchise standards, probably.

“Morning.”

It's noon. A coffee shop employee should know this better than anyone.

Morning!

“What can I do for you?”

You check your wallet, which is leather and thrifted from the ground. There's a debit card and a real good spot for a credit card, one day, a sandwich card with three punches, a baseball card that was in the wallet when you found it (Pat Hentgen, anyone?) and forty-four dollars. You had hoped making an act out of checking your cash would entitle you to a bit of charity, but Edison apparently doesn't roll like this. Okay.

Can I get [don't say coffee don't just say coffee]
... what's good here?

“You look like you need a Blackeye.”

[What?!] yeah, I'll do that.

“That it? Need something to eat?”

Like what?

“Got fresh ham and turkey this morning. Can I talk you into a Monte Cristo?”

[no earthly clue what this is] that would be wonderful.

“Can also do you a patty melt, that’s fresh.”

[PATTY MELT] actually, I [PATTY MELT] will do the [PATTY MELT] patty melt, that [PATTY MELT PATTY MELT] would be great.

“Oookay, that’s one Blackeye and a patty melt. \$11.73.”

Christ on a bike. You pay in a tenner and two ones and get back a quarter and two pennies. The barista places the coins on the counter and you scan the pennies. One is heads up, the other’s tails. Rats. Canceled out.

There are two chairs and a table by a window, with a clean view of someone’s house, and you place your backpack on one and sit on the other. Only when your legs burn at rest do you realize how long you’ve already been standing up and walking around. Even at your apartment. If you only knew then, you wouldn’t have spent so much time pacing.

Your patty melt is being prepared in a Toast-Master in the horizontal position. The color scheme is different than the regular ones. Silver and red is

ToastMaster standard, yet this one is candy paint green. You do some googling and find this color was a special edition gifted to Kickstarter backers for pledging \$600 or more and at the same time your phone's battery is something like 17%. You didn't get a very good look.

Your Blackeye is served in a very Goodwill looking ceramic mug with a wide bezel and your patty melt [YEEEEAAAAAHHH] comes on a Pottery Barn plate. You get up to collect your grub and as you're sitting down the barista turns up the radio on the counter. There's some Diazepam-flavored rap song playing, sounds an awful lot like DS' music you think, and the barista mumbles the hook with a finger held half-mast. Soon the song ends and very annoying DJs start talking. You stop paying attention.

Compliments to the chef, this patty melt. The Milane may turn up their noses and return to their newspapers indignantly, to see el espresso debased by such a vulgar sandwich, but they can all go [thing people in Milan do but suggested in a rude tone]. This patty melt is electrifying. It should count itself lucky, being a patty melt. Half the work is already done. This sandwich will never have to work for anything, so fortunate to be born a patty melt. It may empathize with the plight of the panini or the pita, the naan or the shawarma, but it will *never* understand. It is not something learned in the penetrative sense. But the patty melt is gooey and

cheesy and the hamburger juices are just oomph.

“Hey!”

You perk up the way you do when anyone says hey, but the Barista isn’t talking to you. They are on the phone. And quite interestingly, the radio talks back to them.

“Happy Noon O’Clock Friend, You’re On The Air,” the radio DJ says.

“Oh, shit, is it already noon? Ha, thought it was, like, nine,” the barista says, almost perfectly in time with their own voice repeated back to all of Edison’s via the radio, though a half-measure behind.

“Time Flies, No Surprise.”

“Yeah, man, I’m at work right now,” the barista, indeed at work, says.

“Boss Makes A Dollar I Make A Dime So I Call In Requests On Company Time. Where You Working Friend?”

“Oh, my name’s Marco, I’m up at Edison’s right now.”

“The Humble Coffee Jerk Wants To Listen To The Radio. That’s Probably A Tom Waits Song Or Something. Say, Marco, What Can We Spin You For?”

“I think I need to hear some more Genzi.”

“I Think You’re Right Marco. Rest In Peace To Genzi, Absolutely. What Kinda Genzi Do You Need To Hear, And More Importantly Is It Something You Can Play At Work?”

“Give me uh... how about *Lariat*?”

“Lariat Sounds Lovely, My Lovely. Stand By For Lariat.”

“Thanks!”

Their deejaying style is quite obnoxious, you think. In this transcription, you’ve taken the liberty of editing out all their dumb sound effects, even if you marvel at how quickly they can punch in flush-fitting references. A song soon kicks up and the barista [now Marco] cranks the dial.

Marco notices your eye contact and is compelled to socialize. You hate when that happens.

“Dig some Genzi?” He asks.

Dunno who that is, you answer, truthfully.

“Fantastic young artist from around here. I’m sure you picked up, but he’s no longer with us. Saddest thing. His music, though, fantastic.”

How young?

“Oh, like, early twenties. Happened just recently. Ugh. RIP.”

You said he’s from around here, you ask.

“Yeah, yeah. Came up from outta nowhere, forget where exactly he grew up. But he was super local for the longest time, but stations like CASH FM started playing him and his star—”

Really? CASH FM plays local artists?

“You make music?”

No, but... woah, it's just like what Riley said.

“Sorry, who?”

You wolf down the patty melt. Not because you're in a hurry, it's just good. And you slam your Blackeye because now you are actually in a hurry.

6 – FIVE TIMES DS DID SOMETHING CUTE

Betraying the frigid exterior and the eyes that have been called raccoon-like, DS is as sensitive as he and his music is tough. He may often be seen sleeping in the fetal position with his knees tucked up to his chest or tucking in to a bit of the Spice Girls on a June afternoon. Some claim his favorite things in the world are the things that remind him of simpler times, and his music has been known to conjure the same feelings in his dozen of fans (see above. *Domino*). Rather than reinforce the often turgid effigy that is the Rapper, or the facsimile-turgidity that is the White Rapper, let's take a moment to highlight the side of DS the public rarely sees.

1—Your Birthday

You are a Cancer, and it's been said Cancer birthdays are some of the hardest to shop for. This is despite your lack of owning anything useful or fun. If anything, you've made it as easy on people as possible. Valley View Dentists, a family orthodontist from your childhood/brace-wearing days, inexplicably keeps you on their birthday mailing list. Funniest thing. For the past [less than thirty, more than twenty] years, Valley View Dentists' have been sending you a birthday hygiene kit containing two [two!] toothbrushes, a baggie of green plastic flossers, a Listerine breath strips capsule,

and a rubber bracelet. Don't say Valley View Dentist doesn't know what Cancers want.

But this is about DS. Early relationship birthdays tend to be the most overkill, and you're not sure how to feel about this. What this tends to mean is sex (not a present) or a free meal (dubiously a present, though not impossible to pull off). Sometimes you wonder if you're too picky for your own good. You interpret this as understanding your self-worth or good, hard precedence. You're not embarrassed to say DS knocked it out of the park (it is easy to do this in Seattle; ~~Safeco Field~~ ~~T-Mobile Park~~ the baseball stadium was designed such that it is easier to get a homer from right field as compared to other parks).

Some partners would consider a copy of their partners art to be lazy, especially if what they make is of the mass-produced persuasion. This is where DS set himself apart. Your birthday present was seriously his mixtape (Rhythm and Poetry Vol. 1) but specifically his copy. The very first ever printed; as it happens, the sample copy his CD manufacturer had sent to him for free. Just as Herzog dictates. And now this legendary copy of what will be his most celebrated work is yours. Imagine he dies and this very CD appears in a museum wing, like the Nirvana demo tapes. This CD transcends milquetoast birthday gift in this way. DS entrusts you with perhaps the most essential artifact of his artistic career.

2—The night on the town

A date beginning as innocuous as the best of all time [google best date of all time; you're guessing it was a US president or whatever John and Yoko got up to]. It was a Saturday, and you hadn't the funds to reap the weekend pleasures. At the time you were working at a Quiznos that does not exist anymore. You felt DS was out of your league, even if you could stand shoulder to shoulder with him as artists [sandwich artist]. But there he was, shooting you a text asking if you wanted to do something that night. The date rigamarole tires you, sometimes. Go out, do something children do at birthday parties, return to either of two homes, woo-hoo. At its worst, it's a job where you spend money rather than earn. Count on DS to change the narrative.

It began with him picking you up. Walked up to your door, no [I'm outside] text like a murderer would do. And DS was still driving his old car, which was old in both senses, but it was nice. He kept it clean, which he later revealed was something he only started doing once he counted you as a passenger. Adorable. Where he was taking you was a secret, but it was secret in a cute way rather than a distressing way. He drove you all the way to Ballard, where there used to be an outdoor bar. You're sure there are still outdoor bars in Ballard (it's Ballard) but none have that same *Mise-en-scène* as the one DS took you, the one whose name you forget.

In the interest of disclosure, at the time, you were underage. DS wasn't, but only barely so. Your fake ID wasn't getting the mileage it used to, but DS had a plan. It was an outdoor bar, at least partially, and the fence was about waist high. And bar patrons are hardly snitches (they get stitches, don't 'cha know). Once you're inside the bar, no one's checking ID because that's what the guy out front is supposed to do. This outdoor bar was penetrable enough that they had to accept IDs, you remember, but not such that they invested in higher fences. You digress.

This was your first time drinking for *real*. Before then it was whatever was most convenient, or what is called "bottom shelf" by people who drink more than you. MD 20/20 does not taste nearly enough like fruit punch as it would suggest. But DS had you drinking legitimate cocktails, like people who owns boats would. Made with the long spoon and the jig and the fly swatter. You remember a couple of the drinks. One was called an Irish Car bomb and reminded you of the event desserts at a Rainforest Café. Beer (Irish stout) with a shot of whiskey and crème liquor dropped like a fish into a fish tank. You just wanted to watch the drinks congeal but DS and the bartender urged you to slam the whole thing. You still aren't sure which part of this process is supposed to be the bomb.

Then there was something called a Texas Margarita. To you, a margarita is a slushy. To this bar-

tender, a margarita is a full glass of tequila with the suggestion of lime juice. Limey like how seltzer water is a fruit punch sensation. But the last thing you wanted was for DS to think you were lame, and you were hellbent on defying all expectations of a Quiznos sandwich artist.

With all of this achieved, you and DS drove around and listened to music. Some of it was his, bordering on a lot of it, but this type of playlist worked to place his music and others in a context. You had never truly listened to music before; music was what was [on], plain and simple. Chris Cornell had said something about this once; no one listens to music anymore, to say listening to music being the only thing someone is doing is a dead tradition. What made this date work, you think, was that you seriously got to know DS, in an emotionally intimate way. You also remember having to pee a lot.

3—Text Messages

DS has made a habit of sending you uncritical, singular text messages. Like a Twitter timeline between two people. You were confused by this type of text message behavior at the start but getting a better feel for DS as a person recontextualized things. Here is, with no particular theme, an illustrative selection of his text style:

>Pidgeon shit on my car. Pidgeon shit on other cars
2. Cant be mad now

>FL crashes when I add autotune plugin. Taking this as a sign

>walked around with eye gunk 2day. Prolly looked bad lol

>first thing I did 2day was spend 100 dollars (bought shoes)

>dream about u last night. You were bungee jumping

>stomped a pumpkin lmaooo

>watched requiem for a dream it was BAD

>you seen avatar? See avatar

>poison for Kuzco. New song title???

>threw up lol

>The FitnessGram™ Pacer Test is a multistage aerobic capacity test that progressively gets more difficult as it continues. The 20 meter pacer test will begin in 30 seconds. Line up at the start. The running speed starts slowly but gets faster each minute after you hear this signal. [beep] A single lap should be completed each time you hear this sound. [ding] Remember to run in a straight line and run as long as possible. The second time you fail to complete a lap before the sound, your test is over. The test will begin on the word start. On your mark, get ready, start.

>lol remember that?

4—Your Namedrop

DS mentioned you in a song. Not by name, in fact if it were up to you, you think you'd opt out of a literal namedrop anyway. This was on DS' fourth most recent song, titled *Drift'd'it*, wherein keen-eared listeners will notice DS refer to a 'prize in the passenger seat.' The identity of this prize will be no mystery to eventual DS historians down the line. Hearing this line for the first time, your knees went weak. You had thought to maybe call or text DS, confirm if this was really about you and how nice it was to occupy space within his art. In the end, you did not. Better you let the moment be something like a nod between fighter pilots, if they really do that. Should you ever make something—doesn't matter what yet—you hope to return the favor. Be to him like a much nicer version of whatever was going on between 4:44 and *Lemonade*.

5—Gifts at your door

It was eleven o'clock at night, and you had texted DS quite innocuously about how nice Taco Bell would be right about then. Something like forty minutes passed and there was a knock at your door. A DoorDash delivery driver was standing there, two heads taller than you, confirming your name and passing down a Taco Bell bag. Now you know how people fall in love. You texted DS immediately, asking if he had really just sent you Taco Bell for free because you mentioned a craving in pass-

ing. Thing is, apparently, he had fallen asleep immediately after making the order and did not get back to you, so how exactly the food made it to you was a fun, twelve-hour mystery with exactly one suspect.

And that's the list—hardly everything, only the moments you think about a lot. These are listed in no specific order; do not construe this as some top five ranking. But a top five ranking with only these options would look something like this:

Number 5: Text messages

Number 4: Taco Bell

Number 3: Namedrop

Number 2: Birthday

Number 1: Date

You might still switch some of these around. Depends on your mood.

Reminds Me A Lot Of My Dad There... Some
Mötley Crüe. Tell Me, Jones, Do You Have A
Pamela To Your Tommy?

Isn't It Nancy To Your Sid?

They're Both Bad?

Very True. To That End, My Friend, No, There Is
No Pamela In My Life. I Can Give You An Iman,
However.

Whom?

Bowie's Wife. The Model.

You Fashion Yourself A Bowie.

Dress For The Job You Want, Abe. Alright, We
Got A Veritable Gaggle Of Requests Lined Up,
Now, Full Disclosure: Some Of Em We Had To
Omit. As Cool As We Are, If You Can Believe It,
CASH FM Operates Under A Radio Conglomerate.
Compound That With General Radio Obscenity
Laws, And Sometimes We Gotta Be The Lame
Older Sibling. There Are a Few Subject Matters
We Cannot Air, In Fact We've Already Heard
Some Nastiness About Airing Genzi. So Just For
Future Reference, People: No Songs Explicitly
About Sex. Subtlety Is Still Okay, I Mean, 3OH!3
Got Aired. If You Wanna Call That Noise Subtle.
No Songs About Killing People, But Context Is
Key. Shooting The Sheriff, But Not Shooting The

Deputy? Okay. Shooting A Man In Reno Just To Watch Him Die? Okay. Shooting A Man For Gang Affiliation? No-Go. You May Notice A Bit Of The Ol' Racial Bias In There, But That's Not For Us To Say.

Marley'd Hit Good Right About Now.

Easy Friday, Abe, It's Not Our Call. Tell Me Abe, You Heard About This Monty Hall Problem Non-sense?

Hmm... Nope. Not Ringing A Bell, Far As I Can Tell.

My Niece Is—It's All Over TikTok, Man, These Veridical Paradoxes. Remember That Old Game Show From The Fifties-Sixties-Whenever The Heck? *Let's Make A Deal?*

Game Shows Stress Me Out, Brother, I Watch That Stuff Like 'God, *I Know The Answer!*'

Well, I'm Sure They're Designed Like That, Man, It's The Projection Appeal. How Do You Think They Sell All Those Home *Jeopardy!* Games?

For Sure, I Mean, Howie Mandel Offers Me Like... Offers Me Five-Hundred Bucks, I'm Like 'Deal!' But Back To What You Were Saying, Y'know, Veridical Paradoxes.

You've Heard The Stock Quotes, Yeah, "Door Number Two," "A New Car," That's All From This Show, Right?

All Of It? You're Making Me Think *The Price Is Right*.

It's All—These Shows, The Borrow From Each Other. Right, So, *Let's Make A Deal*, Show Works Like This: Contestants Have Prizes To Start, And They Gotta Make Trades In The Hopes Of Securing A Better Prize. Fun Part Is They Don't Know What They're Trading For—The Prizes Are Hidden Behind Curtains.

I'm With You So Far.

Aw, Thanks Man. Sometimes, Y'know, The Disc Jockey Racket, I Can Feel Like I'm Talking To Myself. The Problem Goes Like This: There's Three Curtains In Front Of You. Behind Two, There's Goats. Like Living Goats, That's Not Sixties Slang For Anything. Behind One Of Them, There's A Car. For The Sake Of The Problem, You Want The Car. Follow Me?

Doesn't Need To Be Said, Fred, Give Me A Free Vehicle, Trust I Will Get On That Bad Motor Scooter And Ride.

Motorcycle rev 2.wav

Not Always The Right Move Abe, Remember That Oprah Snafu?

Hm?

'*You Get A Car, You Get A Car,*' Come To Find Out Half The Audience Can't Pay The Taxes On

Their New Wheels? It Was A Whole Thing.

Bet It Was.

It Was! But Yeah Anyway, Anywho, Anyhow, Three Curtains: Two Goats, One Car. What Would You Say The Odds Are Of Picking The Car?

One Third?

Correct, It's One Third. One Out Of Three Chance You Pick The Car. Now! Now. Say You Pick A Curtain At Random, Like The First One. They Pull Back Curtain Three And It's A Goat. At This Point In The Game, The Host Allows You To Either—

Monty Hall, I'm Assuming Is the Host's Name.

Correct Again. Mr. Hall Says 'Alright, You Can Keep With Curtain Numero Uno, Or You Can Switch To Curtain Number Two.' Question Is, Do You Do It?

...Like, Do I Switch Doors?

Curtains, But Yeah.

Why Would I Switch Doors, Jones.

Curtains, Dude, It's Curtains. But The Problem Is, As It Happens, You Have Better Odds Of Picking The Car By Switching Curtains. No Joke. Probability Wise, Curtain Two Has A Two-Thirds Chance Of Being The Car.

I'll Give You Curtains, Jones: Curtains To This Bit, Come On, We Got ABBA To Spin.

Isn't That The Craziest Thing. You'd Think Odds Would Switch To Halves, But That's Not The Case. Given The Rules Of The Game And The Unconscious Value Placed On Switching Doors, You Retain Odds Split Into Thirds While Keeping Just Two Options.

You're *Blowing* My Mind, Man. Say, Why Does This Paradox Have An Answer? It Was My Understanding They Don't Have Those, That's The Fun Part.

Give Me A Break, Muchacho, The Paradoxical Quality Stems From Its Nonsensical Variables And Conclusion.

Oh, Forgive Me. When Did This Show Get So Smart?

Get So Smart? Don't Sell Yourself Short, My Cohort, We Can Be Smart. We Got A Smart Audience.

Can We Take This Call Before It's ABBA Time?

Absolutely, Man.

Skyrocket's In Flight, Good Afternoon Delight, My Friend, You're On The Air.

"Yeah, what's up, hey, remember Rainbow Quiz?"

The Game?

"The game! The one where you'd read out a story about some listener's fucked up date, then another

guy's gotta guess the girl's ethnicity, remember that one?"

get him outta there.wav

click

Anyway, Here's *Waterloo*.

7 – THE SPHERES

They've added more spheres to The Spheres.

Let you elaborate. The Spheres are, quoting their website directly, “... *a result of innovative thinking about the character of a workplace and an extended conversation about what is typically missing from urban offices—a direct link to nature.*” Notice how this means almost nothing. At best, a houseplant ordinance. Amazon office space/employee lounge. No one tries to stop you going in, so you do. After all, you're in dire need of a charger and who would Amazon be to deny you access to the digital grid.

More on those extra spheres. Upon completion, The Spheres were three snug structures, partially overlapping through one another. Should an architect be too lackadaisical in their sphere-envisioning, a building like this could come out looking too Mickey Mouse, and you're no lawyer but you bet Disney would take umbrage with this. You think about it a little more and decide that's something you would've liked to see. A trademark dispute between two monopolies, right in the heart of the city, tumbling block to block like kaiju. Maybe in their weakened state, the beasts could be neutralized.

In an ambitious remodel, The Spheres went from three structures to nineteen, bubbling into the

downtown canopy. It's absolute ~~Disney Land~~ non-denominational themed entertainment in here. Right when you walk in, there's several exotic plants with big frisbee leaves drooping over the concrete walkway, braced with plaques telling you what they are. You're ready to take their word on any of this. The Spheres drops a lot of spit over this; their many, many plants. Not your Mom's arboretum. Flora like this is something Amazon bucks can easily grab for [valued Amazon employees]. One is from Brazil. One is *only* found in Brazil, with the exception of a pet-sized sample wrapped around office space and looked up and down by Jeff Bezos before he said *yup, looks good*. Purple at the roots, it.

What you would love is a charging station, or an unattended wall charger. Amazon's gotta have a few dozens of those kicking around. How else could they help their maverick software engineers continue to kick in doors, work hard but play harder, defy all industry expectations? Lord knows they have fuel to space, up and around The Spheres.

Coffee+, a startup acquired by Amazon in Q3 2019, has a kiosk at the leftmost sphere's first juncture. Founder Magnus Magnusson, YouTube camping personality and caffeine entrepreneur, had partnered with old college friend Peter Kowalski (science major) in what they call Mad Coffee Science. More caffeine per cubic milliliter in a quarter of the repeat brews, as a result of improved caf-

feine integration at the molecular level. Patent-pending. What these gentlemen achieved could be considered a sequel to coffee beans, or indeed a Coffee+. A 12oz cup is eleven dollars. Ten percent off for ID-presenting Amazon employees.

Amazon, amusingly, watered down the brand in their acquisition. Mad Coffee Science used to be Mad F**king Coffee Science, stylized with the censorship asterisks, but PR must have found this slogan too aggressive. Should you find it funny anyway, rest assured you can buy Mad Coffee Science T-shirts and mugs on their website, which you've been scrolling absentmindedly until your phone hit five percent and the screen dimmed automatically. You ask in vain if the Coffee+ lady has a charger that can fit your phone and she directs you to the lounges in sphere fourteen.

On a guess, you make for the stairs on the right before someone awfully official-looking and dreadfully taller than you asks for an ID. Instantly, you are back in High School, and like every other High School confrontation, you lie. You've lost your employee ID. No problem at all, they tell you. They can print you a new one right now.

Name?

[You].

Last Name?

[You (REDACTED)]

Oh, we can fix this right now, they tell you as you get your photo taken against a color-neutral wall. [You] see, Amazon has recently shifted to the more efficient Chick employee categorization system, Chick being the software. In the transition, some employee profiles got lost. What was your department? You say something and forget immediately. All set! Have a productive day, [you] (REDACTED)].

Sphere Fourteen. On the way up (one elevator and eight flights of wood stairs) you pass another interesting demo lab. SolarPlunge, Straight Outta Reno (saw it on an employee's shirt) is an expensive reimagining of something that already exists. Pay attention and this becomes a pattern. Sun therapy is artificial facsimile of natural sunlight. Popular at times of year where visits to the vitamin D spigot are less frequent. LED lightbulbs have been able to do this for a while and even if physical benefits are minimal, the emotional reaction to what *feels* like sunlight are indispensable. It's what a body needs. SolarPlunge takes this axiom and applies cutting-edge OLED technology. Take a sun bath in one of our Pods and experience sunlight experiences all around the world—from the beaches of Cabo to the biting double-edge of Icelandic summers. When the sun doesn't wanna cooperate, SolarPlunge is here. Why not take the plunge? Oh, excuse you, at a point you just started reading SolarPlunge's informational pamphlet. One hour in the Pod is ninety

dollars. Available sunlight experiences right now include Venice Beach, Venice (Italy), and Bangkok. Cancun and Cape Town are listed on their roadmap.

Well, you thought it was interesting. You don't know about anyone else.

Sphere Fourteen. You're sure seasoned Amazon employees have the sphere numbers tucked in their hearts. In one of the less essential arteries, which google says is maybe the pulmonary artery but it's never a good thing to lose one [four percent]. You wander in three laps what you were certain was Sphere fourteen but a busy techie tells you is actually Sphere Eleven, with a scoff. Pardon you. No, in fact, you do not see the biergarten, or the Augmented Reality arcade, or the pickleball court, of course things only found in Sphere Fourteen. You pray a charging station is among them.

Sphere Eleven seems to be a lot of tables and chairs, designed by the pacific northwest's premiere contemporary architect, Sean Paulene-Malthus. The plaque in front of Sphere Eleven's west entrance will tell you all about him. His work notions thusly: where is the natural intersection between standing and sitting? Chairs, naturally occurring in nature, are complete and total happenstance. Among the rarest phenomenon, found only in smooth, wide rocks and uncharacteristically droopy trees. Humans are bipedal, and the sitting position

as modern chairs will posit goes against biological makeup. A crucial point in the digestive system is blocked entirely, sitting down. It would make just as much sense to have our face planted firmly in a saucer of dirt (exfoliating benefits acknowledged). Paulene-Malthus' solution liberates the body of all postural irregularities, orienting the subject comfortably in the event horizon between the standing and sitting position. There are humanitarian benefits to this (quicker response time in emergency situations) as well as productivity. Moderation is essential to healthy living and, on this note, the work of Paulene-Malthus perfects the moderate self.

You try sitting in one of these chairs and slip right out. The seats are fixed at a thirty-three degree angle. You know it's thirty-three because that's what the plaque says. Paulene-Malthus calls this the Golden Angle.

Sphere Fourteen. For real this time. Stairs from Sphere Eleven flush right into Sphere Fourteen, which is for some reason positioned lower. Nearly suspended over 7th Avenue, in fact, a quality it shares with Sphere Seventeen directly and achieved with what you sure hope is a marvel of engineering. And not that you've seen many lavish break rooms in your time (Quiznos had a walk-in freezer with a step stool [good spot for crying] and Texaco had, like, a desk) but The Spheres seemingly has within its bubbly infrastructure the be-all end-all

break facility. Everything that rude guy promised and more. The center lounging district has bean bag chairs the size of sedans and there's a woman face-down in the middle of one like a starfish. Orbiting this solar system of whatever the stuffing is in bean bag chairs (polystyrene [three percent]) are many bar tables with bar stools, the aforementioned biergarten, soundproofed quiet rooms for only the biggest of breaks, a full-suite kitchen, an adult-sized swing set, an Amazon-branded soaking tub whose plaque talks a big game about its PH balance, steam showers, an Amazon pinball machine, designated smoking area, library that on closer inspection is a great many Kindles, what is frighteningly shuttered off and called the Amazon Cuddle Den, butterfly room, rock wall, koi pond with coin-operated feed dispenser, slides, theater, and whatever was around the wall you didn't check lest you need to name more things. All that was on your mind was the charging station.

Painted Amazon Orange, or maybe it's Amazon blue and it's orange for some other reason, the chargers balloon out like some kinda slain, analog hydra, assuming the hydra can indeed be killed when the number of heads becomes too ridiculous. This charging station serves a dual purpose, unintentionally: a mini museum for pocket screens throughout history. There is the contemporary USB -C, older siblings MicroUSB and classic USB, the abominable Lighting cable, the wide-load iPhone

chargers of old, A/V cables(?) Thunderbolt, DisplayPort, Modem Ethernet, HDMI, and these last few aren't even chargers and what they're doing here baffles you. Nonetheless, you're charging. Estimated time as of now: three hours. You reckon you won't have three hours and unplug, giving your phone a blow before trying again. New estimated time: two hours. That's more like it.

Lord knows Amazon has overstimulated you with charging-adjacent activities. What you would *like* to be doing is listening to the radio, maybe get more info on how Easy Friday works. Or talking to DS, which would be nice but would also require your phone. Wouldn't hurt to ask around: these people are supposed to be geniuses.

You wander Sphere Fourteen and find a man at a table. Just a basic table, barstool, browsing his laptop. From your half-second glance all he's doing is looking at a guy paint a model airplane yet when you come around his peripheral vision he closes out of the tab and pulls down his screen.

"Need something?" He says, fast.

Is there a radio around here?

"I dunno let me call 2002 hahaha."

Just thought I'd ask. I'm new here.

"Just thought you'd remember the Sphere Fourteen floor plan from orientation day, hmm? Leave me alone."

Okay, be a dick about it, you don't actually say but certainly think.

You leave the man to what is apparently *super* embarrassing to be caught watching. On the way out you hide behind a concrete pillar wrapped in vines and find The Monitor in your hands. With sniper-like precision, you burn a hole in the man's laptop charger without him noticing. Show 'em.

Neither the bar (kombucha bar!) nor the smoothie station are playing music off of a radio. It's all Alexas, working off a Spotify playlist. Amazon presents BrainFuel, that's the name. Curated by one Alex Maraschino, and no, you don't know who that is nor will you need to. Just knowing that Amazon paid someone money to throw together a Spotify playlist that allegedly "maintains an efficient workplace mindset while exposing employees to a diverse palette of musical styles" is funny enough. What's the last thing *you* got paid to do?

MunchYum: An American Test Kitchen, has a restaurant in the Sphere Ten food court. You are not here for the food and retch at the thought of their Impossible Patty Melt [heresy]. What interests you is their décor. Behind glass cabinets underneath the bar and above the heads of their Artists (line cooks) is a carefully selected who's who of Americana trinkets. The sign from an old gas pump, a Rock 'Em Sock 'Em Robots game, several fraternity beer steins, you think you saw a *Six Mil-*

lion Dollar Man lunchbox, but none of that matters. What matters to you is a Sony Walkman positioned above the leftmost barstool. The two Artists (line cooks) are busy with an overflowing air fry station and leave you unsupervised, a moment you take to open your backpack, pull out your Hoom-Fare xx7 feather duster, flick the telescoping handle to maximum length with one hand, and knock the Walkman down. You do all of this only half-sure these things had radio service and do not have your phone at this exact moment to check. And since you're already here, you give MunchYums's decorations a good wiping down.

Woe. The Sony Walkman does not have radio service. You have stolen their decorative doodad for naught. Try as you do, your duster cannot place the Walkman back on its perch. Makes unfortunate sense; your duster was designed to take away and add nothing but vibrance. With several [exactly seven] attempts, you resign to placing the Walkman on the counter, in such a way that one would think it fell down on its own.

MM Macha, a tea startup, has free samples on the other end of the food court, which you take before sitting down in the vineyard dining hall, defeated. The tea is alarmingly sour. Like candy. Your sampling cup is labeled Sour Kids English. Legally distinct but this doesn't make it good. Someone has sat down next to you and you keep your head down.

“Is that a CVS receipt wrapped around your head?” they wonder. You had forgotten it was there, wot with how thin receipt paper is. You pull the bandana off and leave it on the table.

“I apologize if I’ve embarrassed you. Far from me to play the arbiter of fashion. Now, me? I subscribe to the T-shirt and jeans, adding a windbreaker should the elements insists. Around here? That’s more than often, I’m sure you know.”

Yup, you say.

“Although jeans seem to be a spiritual label, these days. I was palling around the tabletop gambling sphere and noticed a woman—not in the nosey sense—wearing leggings printed so as to resemble blue jeans. It makes you wonder. Now, I would simply wear jeans if I wanted to wear jeans, but I understand there’s a comfort factor to leggings that cannot be found in denim, less so in raw denim if we want to dive into that fascination. If those leggings could talk, they would scream. Their identity is merely an idea in the valley of truth. Do you read Kierkegaard?”

It doesn’t make you wonder.

“Do you mind if I put on some music? It’s a part of my decompression cycle between working periods, but I’m careful with my ears. Earbuds, even over-ear headphones, acclimate us to high decibels too easily. Frog in a boiling pot.”

They turn up the volume on their laptop, tapping their fingers to what is clearly anime music.

“I hope I’m not intruding,” they intrude. “I’m working on my workplace socialization. Coworkers have a way of becoming phantoms, and my E-therapist tells me—you can have this one for free—this has a net-negative effect on how we perceive everyone. What I’m saying is I hope I’m coming off to you...”

Cordial, you heard someone say in a movie.

“Cordial, yes, thank you.”

You don’t know if this is the right word.

“What’s your department?”

Guillotining Bezos.

“Oh? Buddy of mine’s the lead. I’ll tell him to put in a good word for you. We try to get everyone at least once.”

Cool.

“I’m gonna go grab one of those sample cups for myself. The Sour Kids is the first time I’ve ever enjoyed tea, even if I do appreciate the history and ceremony.”

They get up, leaving their laptop unattended. More like a hacker setup, when you finally glance over. Far from the slim Macbooks, this is a thick Acer thing running Linux, hooked to a modular

interface and a portable signal booster. All this person's got running is a YouTube playlist, but you can't help but wonder: can it get radio?

You lean over, a bit of an awkward angle, and pull up google. Ignoring their funny search history, you search CASH FM. Turns out there are multiple CASH FMs and you wonder how radio stations pick names: are they acronyms? Do they have something to do with radio signals? You remember you probably don't have the time to think about this and navigate to the schedule tab. This laptop is connected to a Bluetooth mouse in the southpaw orientation and the sensitivity is absurdly high.

CASH FM has half the week allotted to themes. There's West Side Wednesdays and Blue Mondays. Airwaves go uncensored after ten pm. Thursdays are for an extended talk with resident DJ duo Abe&Jones. It's a name you've seen somewhere before and google it to be sure. Yes. A local brewery has named an IPA after them. Two and a half stars on hopsranker.com, which sounds bad until you notice they rank their beers out of four stars instead of five, which sounds just alright until you notice the four star system is reserved for the normal beers, and beers named after radio personalities are ranked out of eleven stars. As a joke. The Howard Stern IPA got nine stars.

Easy Friday. That's today. Taking all requests, all day. No fine print either. Looks like they'll play

literally anything. In fact, embedded in the Easy Friday tab is a YouTube video compiling the wildest, funniest requests the boys have ever received. You don't click. The laptop's owner is coming back and you close out of the tab.

"Are you a tea drinker?"

You don't answer with more than a shrug. At best, you are currently drinking tea, or a drink with the nerve to call itself tea.

"Physiological benefits to tea, just speaking for myself, border on spiritualist mumbo-jumbo, but the vitamin content is undeniable. On my eventual trip to Japan, I would enjoy a tea ceremony, though I fear the experience will be watered down for tourists such as the traditional spirit of the Luau has been for the native Hawaiians. Do you do much traveling?"

Nope.

"Good. Save a nickel. How much longer is your shift?"

A little under two hours. Waiting for my phone to charge.

"Is that the estimation your phone gave you? *Putain de connerie*, if you'll forgive my French. Amazon's power banks produce at a higher throughput than smartphones are at capacity to communicate. Two hours to charge would be more like fifteen minutes."

... Well then, if you'll excuse me.

You give a half-wave goodbye to this person, subconsciously thank them for the use of their laptop, and notice they are a child. Ten years old, maybe.

Question For The Individual Tuning In: Do You, Like Ninety-Six Percent Of Our Listener Base According To Our Last Census, Have A Penis?

Hold On, Ninety-Six Percent?

Ninety-Six-Point-Two.

Four Percent Of Our Audience Are Women?

Three-Point-Eight Percent.

Right. And That's Probably Including Any They/Them Listeners, Right?

That Was An Option On The Census. It's Zero.

Buzz_6.wav

Actually Zero?

Literally Zero.

Wow. That's... Is That Sad?

Sure.

Darndest Thing. Well If It's Just Us Guys Talking, What Did You Wanna Know About Genitals, Jones?

Word Of Warning, Assuming Rainier Does Indeed Go Up In The Next Week. That Volcanic Ash Plays Zero Games, Especially When It Comes To The Lungs. What Men Ought To Know Is Something Published In Scientific American, June 1889—This Comes From One Of Our Twitter Fol-

lowers. Exposure To Volcanic Ash Comes With An Unfortunate Side Effect For Aspiring Fathers: Impotence.

You Mean Sterilization?

More Like No Response. *Can You Hear Me, Major Tom.*

Ah, I See. Failure To Launch.

Correct.

Major Tom Did Launch, For The Record. It's In The Song.

Also True. True To Both. Word Of Advice, From Us to You: If You've Got The Tools For The Job And You're Planning On Doing Some Eruption Watching, Make Sure You Wear A Respirator, And Layer Your Clothes.

We Might Be Scaring Everyone For Nothing, Y'know.

How Do You Mean, Abe?

Just, Y'know, How Accurate Are Volcano Predictions Anyway?

Word On The Streets Is We're Overdue For A Yellowstone Eruption, Too. And That's A *Super* Volcano.

What, I Didn't Know That.

True Story. Saw It On Twitter. We Know Of Three

Past Eruptions, Allegedly.

How Accurate Can An Average From Three Eruptions Be? Are We Assuming All Volcanoes Have A Schedule?

Man, We Need A Volcano Scientist On The Horn, Something Like That. Clear Up This *Harmful* Misinformation.

Y'know, It'd Be A Shame If The Thing Blows Up At Night.

I Was Just Gonna Say. Give Us Our Cool Pictures, At The Absolute Least.

That's What I'm Saying! I Wanna See Vintage Volcano, Right? Everything Right Out The Top, None Of This Collapsed Wall Nonsense. Big Ka-boom, Mushroom Cloud.

Vintage Air Raid Siren 3.wav

explosion.wav* *explosion.wav* *explosion.wav

Krakatoa.wav

Thar She blows.wav

Vancouver Vancouver This Is It.wav

Aw, Someone's Gonna Be Pissed We Played That.

For What? The Guy Didn't Die, Did He?

He Sure Did. Dr. David Johnston, Johnston Ridge Is Named After Him. Why Do We Have That Sound Bite?

Made It Last Night.

I Am The God Of Hellfire.wav

I'm Gonna Take The Initiative And Apologize.
Ladies—All Three-Point-Eight Percent Of You—
And Gentlemen, Easy Friday Goes Rolling
Along—

Oorah.wav

And We Await Your Dazzling Taste In Music.
Don't Do Anything Just 'Cuz I Told You To, But
Me Personally, It's Feeling For Me Like A Jazzy
Afternoon, How About You, Abe?

Whew, There We Go. In Light Of Recent Tasteless
Jokes Maybe Or Maybe Not Delivered By Me, We
Could Try Something Memorialistic?

Big Word, Also Not A Real Word, But I Will Al-
low It.

Jones, I've Got... Two Persons In The Wings, Who
Do I Take?

Flip A Coin?

Ask And You—... And I Dropped It On The Floor.
First Come First Served?

God's Plan, Stan.

Ding

Afternoon, Goon, Can We Have You Name?

Hi. My name is [you]. You're taking requests to-

day?

Easy Friday, My Friendo From ‘Round The Bendo.
You New In Town?

No I was just checking. Can you play DS for me?
Local artist.

DS? That’s The Name?

Local artist.

Deep Cut.

Can It Be A Deep Cut If It’s A Matter Of Irrelevance? No Disrespect, But That’s Like Calling My Niece’s Christmas Recital A Deep Cut. And I’ve Got That CD.

No, no, he’s released music. Rhythm and Poetry
Vol. 1.

Tell You What, Is DS Streaming Anywhere?

*Spotify, Apple Music, SoundCloud, Tidal,
Bandcamp, Pandora, YouTube Music, Deezer,
iHeartRadio—*

Jones, Real Quick, Can We Play Any Of These?

Can’t Be Worse Than Playing A Man’s Dying Words.

Open Those Wounds, Okay. Do Uh... Look Him Up On Uh—iHeartRadio. And Why Don’t You Get A Download, Avoid Some Potential Buffering.

Would Reflect Poorly On iHeartRadio, I’d Say,

Not Us. Hey, Caller, Any Specific Song In Mind?

Do Domino.

Domino, Yeah, Here It Is. Never Heard Of This Guy, DS. Abe, Should We Be Doing A Sensitivity Check? I Got No Clue What This Guy's About To Say.

DS has a focused, inoffensive style.

Okay, We'll Do It Live.

Do it live.wav

Up Next, Local Artist *DS*.

Hold on, wait, wait, can you play it at a specific time? Can you play it later tonight?

Good Question. No We Cannot. Thanks For Playing Easy Friday—

I just wanna make sure he hears it, it's his birthday today, but I'm not seeing him until tonight—

Dear Caller, We Have No Clue What'll Be Happening Tonight. We Can't Do Reservations. There's Seismic Activity At Mt. Rainier, We Might All Be *Dead* Tonight, Y'know?

Taps.wav

Oh, But *I'm* Being Insensitive. Okay.

Can I call back later? Can I do two? Can you retract this one and let me—

Picky Eaters On The Air Today. One Per Customer, Friend, Don't Let The Door Hit You On The Way Out.

Whip crack 2.mp3

click

Say, Abe, Why'd That Whip Crack Sound So Bad?
Got It Off YouTube.

Weak End To A Weak Call. Well, It's Queued Up,
And I Gotta Hit The John. Ladies And Gentlemen... DS? This Is DS.

8 – THE SIRAN

You sit at the bus stop off Denny park folded like a calzone. Three buses stop by in this time but only one asks if you're trying to get on and you say no. See, your horoscope recommended only taking the train today, which you say but the driver doesn't hear because he's already driving away.

Might as well keep moving, you imagine DS would tell you. He's certainly had his spills, his creative snafus, his bohemian [google synonym for snafu]. In his controversial single *Wedding* (as in he fancies himself married to the music hustle) he accuses his critics and associated haters of being, quote for the sake of education, Potheads. Times are always changing and people are always learning. DS was unaware at the time that this word was considered offensive to the pot smoking community and he would later apologize via Instagram Live, with the addendum that users of medical marijuana need not be hurt anyway because Pothead arguably excludes medicinal necessity. There is an irresponsible implication to the word, but DS surrendered that Pothead is often used as a blanket statement, for the heading of pot regardless of intent or purpose.

Around the time all the bus stoppages felt like wasting people's time, you pull yourself up and amble like a zombie, hard to port. A lot of walking

down slopes, decisively better than upslope but always has a way of feeling perilous. Like if you aren't careful you'll slip and start sliding down the sidewalk uncontrollably, knocking people over in perfect somersaults.

It's an unusual crowd at the piers today, in the way that having two hundred boxes of cheerios in your cabinet would be unusual. The waterfront is almost as touristy as it gets, but even for a Friday this is unreasonable crush. Families and parties appear from a tiered parking lot with camping chairs hooked over their shoulders. It's not even hot and you see kids walking with motorized misting fans and Crocs without socks (when you know someone is serious about Crocs).

You get down to 1st avenue, not for lack of awkward pushes and only the most necessary yet superficial *excuse me*'s. In the direct light of the sun your unwashed hair makes you feel ickier than you think you deserve and you fix the receipt bandana around your head once more. You get stares from people who have a lot of nerve, with their noise cancelling headphones and paper eclipse-viewing glasses. You mean, those won't even *do* anything; that's now what eruptions are like, you're pretty darn sure.

Oh, right, you remember. The eruption. From the radio.

Oh, right, you remember. The radio. You've

spoiled DS' birthday present.

The waterfront's scant sit-down areas have been colonized. Centennial Park and Myrtle Edwards Park, all the way down to Elliot Bay Park (you only assume, not having gone all the way down there). You have never been to the Seafair summer festival because you've never been totally clear on what it is, but Seafair does have a way of coming to you. If you know, you know, and [you] know. And you imagine Seafair turnout has to be something similar to right now; the aforementioned parks and their knife's edge of grass and soil, choked by the steel legs of chairs and low thread count of big, wide beach towels. Bring the kids? Mother nature promises fireworks, all safely viewable from Rest Assured, Washington.

You kid. Truthfully, how people process the inevitability of volcanoes doing the one thing volcanoes do is up to the individual. In the coming months, you're sure you'll hear plenty of stories about people who lived near the mountain and refused to leave because, they'll be damned, the mountain is home. Isn't that sad? And the point of these stories, really, is to agree that yes it is sad. You're no homeowner, but this is all starting to sound absurd. Insurance is one thing; you're just supposed to be ready for the never-determined time the universe will swallow up your home? Humans are a part of nature too, dammit, and homes are like a sub-category of nature at least. Why does the

mountain get to call the shots? Why are you, not a homeowner, upset about this? Did you forget the part about how people are most certainly going to die? Are you being so suddenly hard on yourself as a symptom of guilt, after spoiling your chance at a birthday present for your boyfriend?

“Hey, yo!” You hear behind your head.

WHAT?!

You apologize. You were just thinking about some shit a second ago.

“Right, right, no, I understand. Y’know, the Japanese say we have three faces...”

Cool.

“But, like... I’m freakin’ out, dude, how you been?”

A man who smells like Dr. Bronner’s (eucalyptus) shoves away some people walking in front of him and hugs you way too tight. You have no earthly clue who this is. You can’t even hazard a guess, because you do not and have not been friends with anyone who wears a sports coat or puts stuff in their hair. Certainly not anyone who wears sneakers with a suit or has a beard because they wanted one. Absolutely not anyone named Sepp, which Sepp’s nametag says.

I’ve been good, you say, lying a little. How have you been, you ask, now lying about a different

thing.

“Shit, dude, I feel like—hey, remember that rollercoaster at Disneyland we used to play that game on?”

Uh—

“Like we all take a Fireball, get on, get back in line, take another Fireball, see who can go the longest without spewing? You remember! Carlos got banned from the park after bricking on that kid? Sheesh.”

Oh, right, yeah, Carlos.

“But remember that part on the ride, right at the start? The coaster’s just idling in the loading zone, then boom! It’s just off? Hundred miles an hour, sings right up the first hill? That’s been me. Professor Carter was always comparing fiscals to a rollercoaster track; that’s what’s fucking me up, right?”

He always was, wasn’t he?

“Hey, I gotta introduce you to the other guys, come with me a sec.”

You’re starting to regret playing along. Sepp pulls you through the migrating herd of volcano-watchers, up some stairs and across a perilous road, up to a long string of enterprising vendors extending artificially past the sheltered off space of Pike Place Market. Four different companies are selling chairs, each with their own gimmick.

RDWESGYN Designs, a camping gear outfit established in 2014 by too many people, sells auto-inflating air mattresses weaved in Kevlar, which is just what a customer says before someone in that acronym corrects them and says it's Gore-Tex. FilterMagic is a lady selling instant camera film that automatically applies Instagram-esque filters. There's hardly enough room left in your stomach for new gadgets, however, and you turn your attention to where Sepp's guiding you.

"Boys, boys," Sepp says, snapping his fingers at four other Sepp-looking guys in dress shirts and lanyards. "Remember when I was telling you about Krieg? Small world, amiright?"

Seeing you just makes them go bonkers. One guy grabs the back of his head. What's the incorrect level of excitement one can have for meeting a new person? This feels like the borderline.

"Yeah, boys, this is Krieg," Sepp says, pulling you in and slapping you on the sternum. "Fuck me, you should hear the kind of crazy shit we used to get up to, back in the college days."

Crazy stuff, you say, playing the part of Krieg as best you can.

"Hey, what ever happened to that gal you were seeing Junior year, huh? What was her name, Dominique?"

Oh, yeah, she totally died.

“Woof. Shame. Yeah, you remember Becky? The one with the crystals? I stopped seeing her the summer after graduation, shit got a little too culty for me. And I’m from Cali, you know I know a cult. What are *doing* up here, *dude*?”

I work at The Spheres.

“Well done, Krieg! Me and my guys, we came around The Spheres back when there was still just the eight. Can you tell me anything about them bumping the count up to twenty-five?”

Oh yeah, that’s real.

“Get outta town, hey, no pressure, but me and my team flew up here kinda short notice-like, knowwhatimean? Don’t call it a pitch, but not only do I wanna show you what we’ve been working on, I wanna show Krieg the Amazon employee in case there’s someone on that corporate ladder you can get us in bed with. Come look at this:”

You are not Krieg. You are not certain Krieg is a real first name. Not only can you not imagine yourself looking like this Krieg character, but you also cannot imagine how a Krieg would. Krieg? That’s a six-foot name. That’s a buck-eighty plus name. Now, that, that’s a name that played collegiate sports. Two—no—*three-star* prospect, at *least*. You suppose, yes, someone named Sepp would be rubbing elbows with someone named Krieg.

Sepp is shoving something iPhone-textured and Tamagotchi-shaped in your hands.

“Take a whiff,” he says when he really ought’ve said something else.

The device is dense in your hand, ribbed width-wise like a Maglite. The screen is higher-quality than it needs to be. Small form-factor like this still feels like the domain of the dox matrix and no one’s complained yet. It’s on par with a Gameboy, you’d say. There’s no buttons, but the screen bursts to life as you rub your thumb across the bezel.

“Nothin’ yet, boss!” The big-headed mascot character says, ominously, flashing a thumbs-up. The voice is annoying in just three words, which is astounding.

Who is this?

“Krieg, meet Deffy, your emergency alert-savvy virtual assistant.”

Why did it call me boss?

“Sensitivity manager—that’s Owen. Owen!”

“Sup!” Owen salutes. You salute back.

“Owen felt it best Deffy address the user with something gender-neutral, but optional titles are in our roadmap. It took a few rounds but we found ‘Boss’ was the best option.”

Just that Boss is a little stuffy, you tell him.

Places the relationship between you and Deffy in an odd spot. Like, what, it's my employee?

"Ah, see, I fuckin' love this guy. Krieg always thinks of this shit!" Sepp's got an arm clamped on your shoulder, showing you to the boys again and poking your head.

"We mean Boss in a jovial, friendly tone, but we'll do more field testing," Owen assures you, apparently eager to impress Krieg.

"Krieg helped me buff out the code on *Aliens*? in the 11th fuckin' hour, boys. Launched with naught a bug."

While Sepp goes on about how cool Krieg is, you google what *Aliens?* is. It's an app that tells the user when intelligent, extraterrestrial life is eventually discovered. Push notifications are an option, should you not wanna be a second late to the news. It sounds a little fun, so you give it a download. The moment the app loads, you're blasted with Helvetica Bold text reading **NO**. Period included. Presumably, one day it will read yes.

"We've got Deffy working on an eleven-millisecond delay, our personal record," Sepp tells you, hand on the shoulder again. "We might free up a lil' juice giving it some slack. Under one second is more than enough, wouldn't you say?"

Under one second for what?

"Right! What you've got in your palm, notice

the small form-factor, is the most advanced emergency alert system outside the nervous system of a cat. Working title is Siran. Y’know, like Siren, but we spell it with an A.”

Yeah, I noticed.

“Specifically, Siran: powered by Deffy.”

How is it powered by that thing?

“Deffy is artificial intelligence. Like Siri! Every bit of RAM—save for the screen—is going to location services, updated on the quarter-second for the fastest, most reliable emergency notifications. This bitch gets everything: Amber alerts, Code Adams, earthquake warnings, presidential alerts, excessive heat, icy roads, nuclear missiles inbound, virtually all emergency situations. And here’s something from the roadmap; with personalized user details, we can issue warnings about *other* users within your vicinity. You can receive warning about registered sex offenders, violent felons, all with just a vibration and a chime.”

You tend to fiddle with your hands when someone’s talking too long and accidentally activate the Siran again.

“Nothin’ yet, boss!”

Y’know, the nothin’ *yet* part feels ominous, you add. No one wants to think about emergencies being inevitable.

Sepp bites his lip, shakes you around. “Man, creator brain never turns off, huh? *Love this manic!* Hey, take a look at this—”

Sepp presses a finger to the corner of the Siran’s bezel, holds it there for ten seconds, and the screen transitions to a countdown. T-minus six hours, thirty-three minutes, twenty-four seconds, twenty-three seconds, twenty-two seconds, twenty-one seconds.

“We’ve got Deffy running an estimate on the mountain’s temper tantrum. Just compiling all on-going estimates into something user-friendly.”

“Six hours and change, Boss!”

“No clue how accurate that thing is.”

“Deffy did something creepy last night, during the stress test,” one of Sepp’s boys says.

“No shit?”

“On one of the test units, I was just pushing the power input, y’know, see what kinda charging speeds we could get. The thing screamed at me, dude.”

“Screamed?”

“Yeah, like a coil whine, but I swear it was like a human scream.”

“Sully, not in front of the investors,” Sepp jokes, holding you. “Hey, no pressure,” he adds, elbowing you.

“Krieg,” Sepp goes on, pulling you aside and reaching in his back pocket. “I’m sure you remember that debt I owe you. Still, owe you, I mean.”

Huh? *Oh, yeah, the debt.*

“Glad you could wait until I had some cheese in my icebox, knowwhatimsaying?”

Sepp passes you a wad of cash like it’d be a crime if anyone saw. You’re not made of money; maybe it is. It’d be rude to count it in front of him, even if Krieg may want to make sure he’s getting everything he’s owed. Sorry, Krieg.

“I won’t keep you,” Sepp slaps your back, “but you go ahead and keep that Siran, huh? Founder’s Edition.”

Gosh, thanks, man.

You head on, shaking residual Krieg off your veneer. Would the man be proud of your portrayal? He would be a fool to complain about the physical resemblance; you do look exactly like him, supposedly. It’s been said, going off a google last time you were mistaken for someone, that resemblance lies in the T-zone. From the bridge of the nose up to and across the eyebrows. So Krieg must also be acne prone.

You walk up 1st Avenue. Eh. The crush at the waterfront was a body or two too many for your liking. Plus you’re looking for somewhere to sulk. You haven’t had somewhere empty and peaceful to

sulk for like nine pages. First there was the bus, then the crowd at the piers, the thing with Sepp. What you wouldn't do for some romantic solitude, an empty, album cover street where you can ponder.

What could you do for DS now? Legends played on CASH FM, presumably. Boots on the ground. His song played, sure. Tree falls in the forest. Who's paying due attention to provocative unknown artists at three in the afternoon, you ask? Those hacks at the deejay booth should have known better. DS is a nighttime artist; he's said as much. Probably. You think so. Oh, but to see his face when he hears his own music play on private access. The goal of any artist, to have their work promoted without them needing to spend money or talk to someone. That's the gift, dammit, it's a moment he would share with you! Ugh. Humph. Arg.

Now what are you left with? A feather duster (you find yourself sweeping dust from storefront awnings absent-mindedly), an emergency alert robot, a wad of cash,

"The Monitor, by Prismus Innovations, the world's most powerful handheld laser?"

Yeah, that too. Huh?

"On your belt! I been wanting one of those, but they've been out of stock since Christmas. How'd you get one?"

Oh, uh, a friend gave it to me.

“Cool friend. Hey, stop by the army surplus, if you’re interested in modding that thing. I’ve been itching to try out some homebrew.”

Hmm. Something more advanced than The Monitor. Tisk tisk. We’ll see about that, hardware-savvy child that works at an army surplus.

An army surplus that, awkwardly, happens to sit on the very same 1st Avenue you’re currently sulking up. This kid must be getting back from his lunch break and powerwalks the same direction you, at this moment, regularwalk. You stop in your tracks, giving you and them some slack. Wouldn’t wanna be following anyone, even if the notion of an improved The Monitor very visibly excites you.

Smash cut and you’re in the Federal Army & Navy Surplus (since 1917) on 1st. Maybe with the motion of the door swinging open, you imagine. And the focus shifts from the back of your head to the interior, yes. There’s a name for the technique, you’re sure.

It smells old and looks like death. Flags and uniforms and army greens and army greys (who?!) strangle the aisles. You wonder who the hell regularly shops here. *Oh, pardon me, gotta drop by the surplus and pick up some MREs before they close. Sale on canteens this Sunday, you don’t wanna miss these deals.* They wouldn’t... nah. They wouldn’t sell something someone died in, right?

That can't be legal. Possible tools of death, sure, but proven? No, nothing in here could've seen action. This button-up? A guy who sweat his way through boot camp and got assigned to mop the floors on an aircraft carrier for five years wore this. Oh, this collapsible shovel? Never shoveled a day in its life. That plastic bottle? That's *just* a plastic bottle. Hardly shook by the inhumanity of war, you'd say.

By definition, you suppose, none of this is essential. Why else would they be okay with civilians owning their helmets and field jackets and patches? Is it only stolen valor if you make a thing of it? To be honest with yourself, this all seems very cool. Punks make excellent use of this junk in the name of fashion statement, operative word being ~~fashion~~ statement. DS might like something here. DS might like something here!

How could you be so dense? In *Rhythm and Poetry Vol. 1*'s opening track, *Shalom*, DS delivers the deserves-to-be-iconic line *ain't no army rat / that green is envy*, of course referring to the US military's green presentation and so deliciously equating that to green as the color of envy. Envious of things like oil supply and socialist order, DS has explained to you. Oh, but how cool would it be to punctuate this line in performance, wearing colors he never earned because, like, y'know, fuck it? Fuck earning, right? Earning's for nerds(?). Wait. Hold the phone. Does DS stand for Drill Sergeant?

You'll have to ask later, but just in case it does, you need to get a gift here.

Rather than try and guess, you elect to get up to the front of the line and ask the kid. He's not alone, behind that glass counter filled with shell casings and a puzzling abundance of Purple Hearts. There's an old man, dense in the arms, looks like Pa Ingalls in the face. He chips away at the newspaper. The frontpage is a picture of Rainier, impact font overhead wondering: **Soon?**

You are not buying anything, yet. All you wanna ask is some questions, *what would someone who doesn't like the military like here*, but you uphold the integrity of the line. People exist outside of you, and some of them are trying to buy things.

Standing right in front of you is a boy waiting anxiously. Not unnaturally eloquent like the other children you've been running into today, or maybe he's just humble. He's pacing 'round like little boys do, and in his hands he holds a pair of shoes. Actually, boots. From the sale display by the front door. M-42 "Okinawa Boots." \$39.99 per pair, which sure *sounds* like a good deal.

At this point we're talking about antiques, right? How many antiques are forty dollars, apart from brass lamps and vinyl records and Disneyland mugs and you just realized you meant to say museum artifacts, not antiques.

At this point we're talking about museum arti-

facts, right? ...Forget it, the moment's passed.

And his clothes are worn and old, and he's dirty from head to toe, and you're certainly being catty about an eight-year-old, aren't you? Remember that coat you saw at the Nordstrom last month? The one with all the tears and gaping, textile wounds? Remember how it was nine-hundred dollars? You don't know, this kid could be rich as fuck and this is just the style. And he's buying M42 "Okinawa Boots," for a runway gig you aren't cool enough to have heard about. You've seen busier kids today.

The customer in front of the kid, buying like nineteen MREs, leaves with his like nineteen MREs, packed in a sandwich box provided by the diligent staff. You step ahead in time with the kid, who places the boots on the counter to the annoyance of the child behind the counter.

"Sir I wanna buy these shoes," he says. "for my Mama, please."

"Didn't ask who it was for," the cashier child laughs, in the way one can italicize their very words. "What's your mom want with combat boots?"

"It's eruption eve, and these shoes are just her size."

"Seriously? Do we know that for a fact?" Pa Ingalls face, with the newspaper, asks.

You hold up the Siran in your palm, giving the

screen a tap.

“Six hours, Boss!”

“Six hours?” Pa Ingalls laughs. “I’m off in three!”

“At worst, we’ll be seeing significant ashfall,” the child behind the register says. “The real destruction is along the rivers.

“So you think your mom’s gonna need ash-stompin’ boots?” He asks his customer.

“Daddy says there’s not much time, you see, she’s been sick for quite a while, and I know these shoes will make her smile. I want her to look beautiful; if Mama meets Jesus tonight.”

The cashier child considers this, does a tucked-lip smile like you do when the passenger in your Uber pool should be on a list, and the register chimes.

“Well, tell her she shouldn’t worry,” he says.

He counted pennies for what seemed like years, then the cashier child said “Son, there’s not enough here.”

He searched his pockets frantically, then says “oh I can pay with card.”

The kid leaves with his boots, the front door jingling. You are overwhelmed with Christmas spirit for unclear reasons. Finally it’s your turn.

“Oh, it’s [you]. With The Monitor! Hey, Charlie, they’ve got The Monitor.”

“No shit,” Charles gets up. “I hear those shits can burn through steel.”

You want to correct him but you really don’t know. Being friendly, you hand Charles The Monitor. He points it at the ceiling and guffaws at the unwieldy laser pointing power before him.

“Charlie and I have been talking about changing the output. We both agree that green’s an unsophisticated color for a laser, him and I. Other than that, what can I help you for?”

What would someone who doesn’t like the military like here?

“Oh! Vietnam field jacket. Follow me.”

There does exist an isle labeled as such. \$69.99 apiece. Each one has stray threads poking out from where a patch on the left breast would’ve been. And sizing’s its own nightmare. Two separate measurements for shoulder width and torso length, neither of which you can remember with regards to DS and you literally *just* did his measurements for shoulder width and torso length like a week ago. Literally a week ago. Unbelievable. You pray your own measurements are a good sub, you being as tall as DS and all, but even then you elect to go a half size up.

You must admit, modeling the field jacket in the

mirror, there's something undeniably wicked about it. Somehow, removed from active duty, it shoots the moon and lets slip all patriotism.

"*you talkin' to me?*" The cashier child asks, gruff.

Sorry, didn't mean to offend. I do support the troops, in the humanitarian sense.

"Eh, forget it? So, we saying yes to the dress?"

Uh...

You check the wad of cash Sepp gave you. There's as little as seventy dollars in there, leaving the sum total shy of six-thousand dollars.

Yes.

When you get to the counter, Charles is clutching The Monitor in his fist like a sword. He makes a *pwoosh* noise with his mouth and The Monitor ignites a flush, ruby red. "Gut the lens on a sniper scope," he smiles. "This one's on the house; that was a lot of fun."

This is fine, you think. You weren't married to the green. And the red does afford The Monitor a sinister edge that a laser pointer of its capabilities probably deserves. It *can* actually cut through steel, as Charles demonstrates. "Red is hotter," he explains.

Right.

“Hey, what is all this stuff for anyway?” The cashier child asks.

What’s all what for?

“Your toolbelt, Batman. I see a Hoomfare xx7 feather duster in your beltloop, some sort of emergency alert-a-ma-jig on your pants, the unforeseen laser pointer we’ve been playing with. Are you just the type for gadgets?”

You don’t know how to answer this but do get an urge to dust all the flights helmets displayed above the register.

“Say, thanks,” the cashier child says. “Tell you what, there’s something we’ve been meaning to get rid of, right, and you like someone with a taste for the neat and the nifty.”

He folds up the field jacket and sets it in a box, atop a mountain of fabric. “It’s this,” he says, shaking a corner. “You’ll have more use for it than us.”

Oh, I couldn’t take it for free, if it’s a ~~museum~~ ~~artifact~~ antique or something.

“It’s neither.”

Thanks for the gift.

“Yeah, I hope it’s to your friend’s liking. Birthday present?”

Backup present. It was actually supposed to be his music playing on the radio. CASH FM. They do

this thing on Fridays where they accept—

“Easy Friday!” Charles blurts. “That’s right, I need them playing some Margaritaville! Eh, do I just walk over tonight or do you think I should call...”

... Hold on. Walk over?

“Yeah, walk over. They spin outta Queen Anne, just past the Center.”

And you can go in. Inside the building. And request?

“Do it all the time. It’s how I get my Margaritaville. I could stream, I’m no caveman, it’s just I *prefer* the fidelity of the radio.”

OK thanks I better get going then thanks again for the pile of fabric I’ll figure out what it is later stay safe in case the mountain does the thing bye.

Friends Of The Station, Arnold's Beverage And More Has Asked Us To Forward You, The Listener, Info On Their *End Of Days Sale*. Fear Not, Habit Drinkers And Dishonest Alcoholics: The ABM, Open Since 1979 For Those Of You Playing At Home, Is Not Going Anywhere. For Those Of You Paying Attention, This Is In Fact The Third *End Of Days Sale* Arnold's Has Had In The Past Year. First Was New Year's Eve, Second Was Amidst That Drone Strike Snafu Up In... Kuwait Or Wherever. It Should Be No Surprise To Our Listeners Why Arnold's Is Doing Sale *Numero Tres*.

Wait, Am I Stupid? What's The Reason?

The Mountain—

The Mountain! Okay, Never You Mind, I Am Just Stupid.

Never In Question, Abe.

Okay! Okay, In My Defense—

Right To A Fair Trial, Yes.

Yes, Yes, Right To A Fair Trial... I Have Heard... The Gamut, Of Eruption Scenarios Today. Just Today! Not Even Touching The Weeks' Worth Of Texts From My Mom. That Uh... The Guy We Called Up, Volcano Scientist.

Think He Was Just A Geologist.

Counts! Geologist Told Us We'll Be Fine, Psycho Caller From Index Said The Volcano Won't Kill Us But The Tsunami Will—You Tell Me How *That* Works Out. Intern From The College Said The Ash Would Deplete Our Air Quality To The Point Folks'll Drop Dead On The Streets.

In Fairness, Abe, I Think They Were Referencing A TV Show Or Something.

I Say We Leave Any And All Volcano Speculation To “If It Happens, It Happens.” Know What I Mean?

You Know Me, Abe, I'm A Put Up Or Shut Up Kinda Guy. Let's Not Let Some Big Rock Tell Us—

Shit Or Get Off The Pot.

Huh?

It's What My Grandma Used To Say.

No, Yeah, I Get It.

This Morning I Saw A—Not To Bring Up The Mountain Again But I'm Right About To—This Morning I Saw A Guy Selling T-Shirts. Commemorative Eruption T-Shirts. Picture Of The—The Thing, Fuse Sticking Out The Top. “Grey Friday: I Survived,” On The Bottom.

Grey Friday?

Guess So.

Man, We're In The Wrong Business. Funny T-Shirts Is Where The Real Cheese Is At.

Oh For Sure. I Saw One When We Were Covering Hempfest: "A Friend With Weed Is A Friend Indeed."

My Step-Dad Had One He Bought Out In British Columbia. Moose With Big Antlers And The Text Said "Grow A Pair."

Folks, We Are Taking Any And All Funny T-Shirt Pitches For The Next CASH FM Merch Drop, I've Decided It Right Now.

Hey, Jones, I Think We Forgot To Finish The Arnold's Plug. Speaking Of Merch.

Right! Yeah! Should You Take Arnold Up On His *End Of Days* Deal, Listeners, Be Sure To Grab A Six-Pack Of The CASH FM Abe&Jones IPA. I'm Tellin' Ya, We'd Be Drinking It Right Now If Not For Broadcast Decency Laws.

The FCC Won't Let Me Be, What Else Is New.

What Is The Last Song You Would Wanna Hear Before You Die, Jones?

Free Bird.

Okay, That Was A Little Quick.

What? You Ask, I Answer. It's A Good Answer.

No, It Is, It's Just, Y'know, That's The Sorta Question To Beget Conversation, It Need Not Be An-

swered—

Well What's Yours?

Perfect Day, But That's Not My Point.

Oh, *Perfect Day*, Hey Guys, We Got A Poet In Here.

I Don't Remember Ribbing Your Song, *Free Bird*.

What Can I Say, Abe, I Rib For Your Pleasure.

Okay, I'm Gonna Take This Call If You Don't Mind. Afternoon, You Bountiful Boon, What Can We Call Ya?

"Ah, shit, am I on?"

As On As The Day You Were Born.

"K cool be sure to follow my Instagram, alright, I'm a producer, I'm an artist, the debut album is this Tuesday, be sure to get—"

click

Boo.wav

That's Enough Of That.

We Really Should Have The Intern Screen These.

I Think The Dice Roll's A Part Of The Charm. Say, Who Drops An Album On A *Tuesday*?

Beats Me, Brother. I Don't Think He Got Far Enough To Mention His Instagram Handle.

Oh, Yeah, Right. That Couldn't Have Been The

Guy We Played An Hour Ago, Could It?

No, No, The Voice Is Too High.

Or Some Nothingburger Of An “Artist”—I’m Doing Air Quotes, Guys—

That’ll Show Him.

—Is Getting All His Friends To Astroturf For Him.

Way To Ruin Easy Friday For Everyone Else. This Segment Used To Have Dignity.

Let’s See If This Guy Can’t Save The Day—Hey Hey Hey, You Make Me Happy When Skies Are Grey, Let Us Know Your Name, Friendo.

“Margaritaville!”

Margaritaville Guy! Just In Time, My Slime, A Bit Of The Wastin’ Away Sounds Lovely Right About Now. I’ll Have Jones Hook You Up Right Quick.

Love That Guy.

Number One Customer. There’s A Lesson To Take From Margaritaville Guy, Dear Listeners. Treat The Easy Friday Creed With Respect.

Wish There Was Booze In *My* Blender, I Tell Ya What.

9 – THE NEGOTIATION PHASE

Project Flying Squirrel

INSTRUCTIONS:

- 1. Pull fabric release string. Stand with feet shoulder width apart, arms spread, until fabric becomes taut. Give partial slack.**
- 2. Stand with the wind at your back.**
- 3. Run forward until your speed matches the wind.**
- 4. Perform a forward inversion, stopping when your body becomes parallel with the ground.**
- 5. ~~Pray to God~~**

NOTE: It is customary with unproven equipment that we ask the soldier to pray to God as the final step. However, the engineer responsible for this apparatus has since seen the napalm fields of Bien Hoa and has come to the inconvenient conclusion that no God on this Earth or any other could allow such a thing to happen. Given this development, we are obligated to caution you; what you are currently wearing was not designed by someone whom the Psychologist General would deem “of

sound mind,” and in fact abandoned his platoon as well as the Flying Squirrel project three months before field trials. The Fair Operative Disclosure Act of 1966 requires that we reveal this. As always, operate under the orders of your commanding officer.

OK, so pull this string? Like this?

You look like a microwave burrito. And not a good one. The kind that has you thinking maybe you’ve been too hard on previous microwave burritos.

You sure wish you had more info on what Project Flying Squirrel is, and right now you’re thinking you should have waited until you did before throwing the thing on. Olive green nylon-ish stuff on one side, shiny emergency blanket-ish on the other, Project Flying Squirrel’s Wikipedia page could fit on a napkin. There’s a big fat [citation needed] tacked to the end of every sentence. All six of them. Of the article’s sources, one of them comes from a Vox article and the other comes from a listicle site. “Ten of the craziest Vietnam War inventions,” which also lists Agent Orange, which isn’t technically wrong but you’re starting to feel like this is all very tasteless.

Right out on the street is probably a bad place to test this out, but you’re not so hot on flying period. There’s conjoining fabric from your wrists to your

ankles, along with a triangle between your legs. This isn't revolutionary stuff, in fact you're certain you saw something like this on an episode of Nitro Circus. Rob Dyrdek, or whoever was on that show, rode a skateboard off a cliff then took wing in one of these things before landing on another skateboard. But now that you put it all together you're certain Rob Dyrdek would never have the nerve.

You are not entirely against the idea of flying, only nervous. Of the six sentences on that Wikipedia page, two are dedicated to the thing never working in practice, though its development team chalks this up to jungle humidity. It's actually—no. You got it. You are not trying to fly because there's simply nowhere you need to be flying to. Yes. You are not a pussy, and in fact resent the notion that what constitutes a pussy be up to wingsuit aptitude. Moreover, it's a misogynistic bit of name-calling when, if there's anything sensitive between one's legs, it's a *penis*. Look, you're not gonna fly, okay?

And you don't have to in any case, because you've already walked all the way to the plaza in Queen Anne housing the CASH FM broadcast station. A bit west of the arena, not quite at the houses. You don't know street names. You do not have a car.

86.1 CASH FM is not the only station running out of this building. Five or six floors high, tucked in a cubby of shorter, older buildings. A bizarre

architectural development, and you're decently sure an architect would agree with you. If nothing else, they wouldn't be mean about it, call you wrong, they would just nod their head and say "oh, yeah, for sure," then maybe change the subject.

As far as tall buildings go, it's alone. A spider in a world without birds. Downtown, this would be nothing. Wells Fargo Center would eat this plaza for breakfast. Now, you know the best building is rarely the biggest one, if ever. A lot of people would be very happy with a building of this size, a very average size building to be sure, and besides it's more about making a connection than consistently impressing someone which isn't sustainable as a relationship between building and resident anyway. You realize you were just doing a thing about penises a second ago and choose to end this bit early.

There's a directory outside the front door, arranged something like this:

L – Lobby

F1 – FQC Solutions

F2 – Fifty Blessings Gospel AM / General Lee Automotive Supplies – Call Center

F3 – E-Syndrome Podcast Studio

F4 – ToastMaster Appliances

F5 – Bahij I. Safar, DDS

F6 – 86.1 CASH FM

Hope the elevator works.

The entrance is built like an airlock, with two sets of sliding glass doors. You go from concrete to tile to carpet like that, but not because you feel the terrain under your shoes so much as you keep staring at the floor. You're always looking at the ground in front of you. Who's not stepping on nails? This [you]!

You're stopped in the doorway.

"Excuse me?" The concierge asks, but it's not a question. Gotta be one of the least genuine questions in the book, you think.

I'm looking for CASH FM, you tell them.

"CASH is on air; they are not taking visitors. Do you have an appointment?"

Callous. Would them being on air not cancel out this hypothetical appointment, even if you did have one? You have good reason to be here: a guy at the army surplus said it was alright.

"I can't just let you up; they're on air," they repeat.

Can you give them a message for me?

"If it's about requests, what you're supposed to do is call in to the station yourself."

You think, hmm. Okay. We're being rude?

They're clearly wearing a fake camisole. Like it's obviously just a square of linen stitched against a tank top. The color's real light, there's no way someone wouldn't notice. What is the point of wearing a fake camisole, you wonder. Why don't you wear fake socks while you're at it, just tubes glued to the opening of your shoes. Fake hat! It's actually just a headband with an open top like a Burger King crown. Do they do this in defiance of Big Camisole? Is this a protest? Have you been crossing the picket line [so to say] by not acting against the camisole complex? Are you even thinking of the correct word right now?

"We do not have time for unscheduled visits," they go on, the liar. The liar! "The building closes in an hour."

What do you mean? The station's on twenty-four hours.

"Citywide ordinance. Because of the mountain."

That makes no sense. We aren't close enough.

"In the interest of public safety, but I'm not about to argue this. You're not getting up there tonight."

You're gonna have to fact check this. You unzip your flight suit and reach in, unclipping the Siran from your pants.

"Five hours, Boss!"

“What is that?” The concierge asks.

“You might wanna get somewhere safe, Boss!”

Huh?

“That thing in your hand, what is that?”

Emergency Alert system—

The Siran starts beeping, which is something it does when it’s running out of battery, but you didn’t know that so when it starts going off you drop it.

“Ow!”

“Why is it talking?”

The developers thought it would be more comforting that traditional emergency alerts, you try to explain. The delivery needs some work, in fact I told them it borders on patronizing—

“I’m sorry, but you need to leave.”

Is it the way you’re dressed? Well, you’re sorry for not having a magic kangaroo pocket wot you can stuff all your trinkets and doodads. What, were you gonna carry around a box? So you gotta transport a free flight suit and a not free field jacket. So you put on the flight suit and draped the field jacket on your shoulders. Big whup. The biggest whup feasible. Scientists are baffled by a whup of this heretofore unseen magnitude. Silly you, to forget that wearing too many things at once brands

one a “weirdo” or perhaps a “homeless ‘person’” and thus assumed to be unnecessary or bound to cause trouble. Next time you’ll remember to wear less things at once since respect for your fellow man is apparently dependent on keeping an arbitrary level of sluttiness.

But you do leave.

Things wouldn’t be so grim if you weren’t also in an unknown to you part of town. By now you’ve traveled a big circle from your apartment and now rest somewhere between eight and nine if you were to plot it on a clock. You walk far enough that you can’t see the building anymore. Never let your enemies catch you bleeding.

You sit down against the entrance to a closed hair salon, reevaluating where you are spatially. Should you go north, up Aurora Ave. and a little left you’re pretty sure, you’ll be back home. Rubbing the rough canvas of the field jacket in your fingers, you suppose this would be for the best. There is a present; that’s the unconfutable thing. It’s a little odd. Bound to be closet fodder. But maybe something gifted knowing it will serve the gift recipient no purpose is good, sometimes. Your closet is a part of your house, and the argument could be made that everything in the closet is a decoration of sorts. You’re sure. You think. You don’t know. Forget it.

Climbing down a mountain is the hard part,

same as getting home after running errands. All this junk didn't feel so heavy when you were so wrapped in determination. Now a lot of it is just shit you'll need to find a place for. The field jacket can get folded up and slotted in the creased gift bag you use for everything. It's orange, and thus obviously a *festive* bag. Project Flying Squirrel, the flight suit? That can go on the coat hanger, you have those to spare [2 coat hangers]. The Monitor? Siran? The Hoomfare xx7? Junk drawer, which is actually next to the sink and probably where food is supposed to go. Tomorrow, you'll wear real clothes, carry around serious things. Chapstick. Your cell phone. An army knife [if you had one]. Useful things.

10 – THE SABOTEUR

You had bought the Dr. Pepper expecting it to be Dr. Pepper, and in fact so much earlier in the day you forgot it was actually Prudence who bought it. Not until now do you realize that what you are drinking is Dr. Pepper Cherry, a seasonal offering preferred by the avid Dr. Pepper fans of the internet (The Patients). What exactly Dr. Pepper is supposed to taste like, you couldn't tell the guy from *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire* whose name you can't remember. Really, you can't remember what the show's deal is anyway, or if this is the style of question at all. You're sure it's trivia. And to be fair to yourself, the question of what Dr. Pepper is supposed to be is not an open and shut thing. Twenty-three flavors, that's what the number on the can means. In no particular order, they are cola, cherry, licorice, amaretto almond liqueur, vanilla, blackberry, apricot, caramel, pepper, anise, sarsaparilla, ginger, molasses, lemon, plum, orange, nutmeg, cardamon, allspice, coriander, juniper birch and prickly ash. Looking this up is reassuring because you *knew* you tasted some coriander in there.

You drink some unrefrigerated Dr. Pepper. Mmm. Cherry. Cherry is already one of the flavors on that list but they must have leaned on the flavor lever a touch too long. Good for them. Meanwhile,

you let slip the field jacket and the flight suit, getting the jacket in gift shape. You do not have a birthday card but know DS isn't the type. He's already said no to a present if only in the way that you can be cute getting one anyway.

You do not have a—one second, you're getting a call. Speak of the devil.

“Hey, or, uh, good evening I guess, hahahaa, what's up?”

Hey. Happy birthday, again. Not much. Just got back from some errands. What's up with you?

“I'm chillin'. Fielding all these damn birthday wishes, y'know?”

[You do not know but sometimes wish you did].

“But it's cool, it's, right, it's good to hear. No presents, though, I keep saying.”

So no one got you anything?

“Nah, some people did. Dad got me a hat, Mom got me one of those ToastMaster things—”

Right, you told me.

“I did? Yeah. It's cool, I seen some videos I just haven't tried it yet. Gonna make some uh... you remember those sandwiches we had—”

“Panini.”

“Yeah! Fuck yeah, that’s tight, right on. So are you still up to do something tonight?”

Yeah. What’s the plan.

“I was talking with Zoey and she said Austin and Hayden wanna see the—the eruption. Do you know if that’s for sure happening tonight, because I don’t wanna be posting up if it doesn’t happen.”

Dunno. Is that what everyone else is doing?

“Austin says he and some other guys are on the 520 right now.”

The bridge? Can they do that?

“I dunno but they said they’ve got camping chairs on the bridge. Funny.”

Your birthday, your call. I’ll show up wherever.

“...Do you remember the Halloween party?”

What Halloween party? We didn’t go to a Halloween party.

“Nah, I mean the one I tried having at my place. You remember.”

Oh, right.

“Mhmm, yeah, that one. It was uh... I forget what happened, exactly. I was trying to get some sorta party going at my place, since I had, like, just moved in. Same year as the garbage costumes.”

I remember. We were garbage.

"I was garbage, you were recycling. Remember my roommate was gonna be compost but he had that funeral thing?"

No?

"Yeah, but we had the big tin garbage can we were taking pictures in. The way I remember it is I had invited like my whole friends list, and like everyone cancelled on me. There was this party out in Shoreline everyone went to instead. Like, you were there—not the Shoreline party, I mean my party. And it ended up just being you and me."

Yup.

"Not trying to get sappy on you, hahahaa, I just remember that being cool. Party didn't feel like a total failure."

Can you do something for me?

"Mm?"

What time is it now?

"Like five, I dunno. Hold on, yeah, it's five."

"Four hours, Boss!"

"Heh, the fuck? What was that?"

Doesn't matter. Can you be listening to 86.1 CASH FM at exactly seven?

"The radio? Sure, I guess. What for?"

You'll see. I'll see you tonight. Happy Birthday.

Passions renewed but chair dangerously comfy, you elect to finish your Dr. Pepper. Coriander comes in clutch, moments like these.

Prudence can't mask a laugh as she says "can I ask what you're wearing?"

I need your temple's roof, you tell her.

"Follow me," she says with hardly a second's thought. She must consider this a small victory. At your most self-defeating, you assume her friendship or maybe just toleration of you is in the name of getting you inside the temple. And this *is* getting you inside the temple, no doubt. But just the roof. A dub is a dub. Baby steps.

The temple borders on straight building, with its several floors aided by the hill its built on. Gets one closer to the big man upstairs, you're sure is the reason. You aren't here to get closer *per se*, really you aren't sure what J-dog would make of this move. If it's any consolation to Him, a licensed Eager McBeaver is here to stand witness.

You flap your arms in the wind, getting a feel. You think you've seen wingsuit people do this in videos. There's a gust coming in from the north. Hoist the sails.

“Can I make a suggestion?” Prudence asks, timidly.

She better be quick about it, because you’re already standing on the temple roof’s gold-trimmed edge.

“You won’t have the altitude to make the flight in one go. Aim for the Partible Building, go from there to 300 on Alister, clear the highway, land—”

Have you done this before?

“We flew wingsuits on mission. It’s the easiest way to pass the Chilean wilderness and builds community.”

Prudence, you’re a saint.

“I’m a sister.”

You give Project Flying Squirrel’s instructions one more glance-over. Between that and the Wikipedia page, the only thing this apparatus ever killed was one man’s trust in humanity, nothing real. You look back and return Prudence’s two-finger salute. Then, you’re off.

Open air. You glide like a person in a low altitude gliding apparatus, because this can’t be how a bird feels. Birds have more control than this. Birds can actually fly up; you’re stuck with your pathetic dips. Still, you can’t be ungrateful for the feeling. You’re a myth. Aristotle would quit his job, seeing you. Or take you as proof of something else, *hu-*

mans are relatives of birds. You might have the wrong philosopher mind and truth be told you're only doing a bit right now because this is actually pretty scary.

Prudence's convenient advice pays off. You are losing altitude faster than expected and a nearby roof makes for a cracking place to plop and tumble. The metal collar of the suit scratches your neck and confirms that this thing was supposed to come with a helmet. Then your eyes would be less dry, *and* your skull would be protected from potential and probably inevitable trauma. Not unlike a scary water slide, you're itching to get out flying again, paying no mind to the rooftop bar astonished at your sudden aerial arrival nor their panic at seeing you march to the other side and take off again.

Which you do for the next couple of stops, only running into one other person. A rooftop smoker, who only stops to laugh, seeing you land twenty feet from their romantic moment alone. The boys'll love this story, you bet they're thinking right now. No time to chat, you would say if they said anything to you, as you're only like two or three buildings away from a clear view of the CASH FM building.

You pause, arms on the railing of whatever historic tower you're currently perched on, scoping out your new target. Negotiations have failed; now's the time of shenanigans.

The Monitor hangs off your belt, which you unclip and roll in your hands. One near-drop off the building later, you give the laser a test point on the ground. You lie down on the coarse roof, zooming in and out with the camera on your phone. What you're looking for is shapes. Human shapes. Human disc-jockeying shapes, which you're hoping will look obvious to you despite not totally knowing how radio stations work. In your head, you're thinking of a big desk with some audio equipment and a big wall of vinyl records in the background. And there's a giant window for viewing the radio goings-on in youthful awe. Okay, what you're thinking of is that scene from *Almost Famous*, and that's assuming you're remembering the scene right. Radio stations can't be using vinyl anymore. Least of all on Easy Friday.

The Monitor sings over the street, blocks and blocks with naught a drop in opacity. A nauseatingly pure shot of red light, exploding on the wall of the 6th floor hallway. You draw a circle on the elevator, use the residual light as an outline of the dimly lit interior. One elevator, an adjacent stairwell door, a trash bin, a plant, many poster and laminated show flyers, a big whiteboard full of decaying signatures, and a breaker box. You train The Monitor on the breaker box, just to see. A stress test, if [you] will. Nice of them to leave the thing open. This is hard to do. Magnifying scope [phone] in one hand, The Monitor in the other. Even with

the zoom, you can't make out the labels on each breaker. In fact, you're not sure if just burning the switches will do much of anything. Might as well keep the thing focused for a little longer. What would a few more minutes hurt? Besides, you saw a shadow morph in a distinctly human head type of way.

Say, Jones.

Say, Abe.

Tell Me If This Counts As Lying.

Fib?

Yeah, A Fib.

Will I Like The Cut Of Your Fib, I Think That's
The Real Question.

Friend, We're About To Delineate The Very Utility
Of Fib Itself.

Ooh, Thesis.

I Was—This Was Last Weekend, At Audio Expo.
By The Way, Thank You To All The Listeners
Who Came And Paid Ol' Abe A Visit At The Au-
dio Expo Booth, 'Preciate Ya. Anyway, I'm Talk-
ing To This Guy In Line At The Waterin' Hole—
Dunkin' Donuts—And He Starts Telling Me About
His Kid. Little Guy, Eight Or Nine, Plays Peewee
Baseball. With The Stick Holding The Ball.

Tee Ball?

Yes! Pardon The Brain Fart, jeez. Tee Ball. Thing
Is, And I Didn't Say It To Him, But I Really Didn't
Care About His Kid Or His Tee Ball.

I Mean, Yeah, Those Stories Are Always Boring.
No One'd Disagree With You There.

That's My Thing: Would You Consider That Lying? I'm Giving This Guy The Impression That I Do Care About His Kid's Tee Ball, When I Really Don't.

I Don't Think Anyone Would Call You A Liar For That One, Abe. You Said This Kid Was Eight Or Nine? Ain't That Too old For Tee Ball? I Thought Tee Ball Was For Toddlers.

I Just Been Thinking About It, That's All. We, Everyone, We All go Around Pretending To Care About People's Stories More Than We Really Do. And Y'know, I Bet that Guy Knew, Right? No One's Talking About Their Kid And Thinking Their Spitting Some Kind Of Hemmingway. It's Being Friendly.

Man To Man, That Guy Must've Assumed You Could Relate, Y'know, You Being A Man Of Son-Having Age Yourself.

Ah, Jeez, You And My Mom Would Get Along. And I Know, I'm Just Thinking About How Lying Is A Sort Of Conversational MSG, Right? Throw It In So The Conversation Has That Extra Flavor, It's Not Really Doing Anything.

Someone With Hard Opinions On This, Please Call In. Prompt: Is Lying Okay So Long As It Falls In To That Friendliness Subgenre? Couldn't Have A Society Of Everyone Telling The Truth All The Time.

Ask Snowden.

Who?

One Of The Great Truth-Tellers Of Our Time,
Man, Read The News.

I Spinna Da Records, Abe, I Haven't Read The
Paper Since The Pizza Hut Days.

I Didn't Know You Worked At A Pizza Hut.

I Did.

I Didn't Know Pizza Hut Got The Paper.

It Did, Right By The Front, They Used To Have
Magazine Racks.

Where'd They Have You Stationed?

Wait Staff, My Good Chav, No Way They'd Trust
A Teenager With The Pizza Ovens.

Is It True What They Say About The Salad Bar?

Tread Lightly Where You Talk About The Pizza
Hut Salad Bar, Abe. That's Holy Ground.

Didn't Say It Weren't. My Question Is... Is It True,
What They Say About The Lettuce In The Salad
Bar Being The Same Lettuce From Taco Bell?

...Run That By Me Again?

The Same Restaurant Conglomerate Owns Pizza
Hut As Well As Taco Bell, And The Rumor When
I Was In College Was That The Lettuce Across All
Restaurants Was The Same.

So?

It's True?

No, It's Not True, I'm Asking What That Would Matter. All Lettuce Is The Same Lettuce, Unless I'm Missing Something. Do You Labor Under The Idea That Pizza Hut Is Fine Dining? Because It's Not.

And Hey, Lookie Here, We Got A Caller. Let 'Em In, Jones.

taco bell BONG.wav

Evening, Listener. Can We Trouble You For A Name Before We Fall In Love?

"Evening to you, Jones. This is Richard calling from the 520."

520? The Bridge?

"Sure, I saw folks setting up camp on the shoulder on my way home. Went and got the wife, we're parked waiting for the mountain."

Parked On The Shoulder, You're Saying?

"Sure are. Everyone's doing it."

Goodness, Gracious Me. Well, Let's Hope The PD Doesn't Go And Shut This Party Down, Am I Right?

"Hey, I wanted to weigh in on that whole lying subject y'all had brought up."

Please, Please.

"I get what you're saying about it being lying and that being a bit backwards. Except, I can't lie, no pun intended. Folks have some boring stories around here. The kids make friends, you gotta meet the friends parents, and they'll just go and talk your damn ear off."

They Sure Will, Rodney.

"Richard."

Richard, Exsqueeze Me. Tell Me More About This 520 Block Party, Richard, I Promise You I'm Interested. These Ears Cannot Be Talked Off. Now, Abe, I Don't Know About Abe.

"I know about as much as anyone else. I've lived around here all my life, same as the wife. Thing with the wife, she's upset about any sort of eruption frickin' with the skyline. You know? Ruin all the postcards"

Ladies And Gentlemen, We Would Like To Apologize For The Technical Difficulties Just There. An Extra Special Apology To Our New Friend Richard, So Rudely Cut Off By Our Station's Momentary Loss In Power. Rest Assured, The Problem Has Been Fixed.

Are We At Liberty To Say What The Problem Was?

Don't See Why Not. Transparency And All. I Will Warn You, However: It's Boring.

Breaker Box Got A Little Funky On Us. Wasn't Aware That Was A Thing. In My, Perhaps, *Ignorance*, I Thought Those Things Moved Like A Surge Protector.

Cost Richard His Chance At The Helm. We're Gonna Have To Take Another Call.

Or We Could Pick In Richard's Interest.

He Strikes Me As A Doobie Brothers Guy. Sounded Like My Dad On The Horn, They Were Always His

Well.

Well.

Wanna Tell The Good People Where We Are,
Jones?

I'll Let You Have The Honors.

Friends, Brothers And Sisters, We Are Underneath
Our Desk. Believe It Or Not, Non-Zero Chance We
Are In The Thick Of An Assassination Attempt.

daddy's gonna kill Ralphie.wav

Worry Not, I Have The Soundboard.

Not My Weirdest Attempt To Get Off Work Early,
Funnily Enough.

Riffing All The Way Down, Jones.

I Would Fist Bump You If Not For The Wood
Board Separating Our Sides Of The Desk.

Let Me Elaborate: Not Long After Our Power Out-
age, We Get A Call From Our Lovely Building
Concierge, And She Tells Us There's A Sniper
Scope Trained On Our Window. Saw It Herself.

Yes, Adding To This, A Strange Character Had
Tried To Enter Our Building About Ninety Minutes
Ago, Apparently, While Speaking To A Sort Of
Miniaturized Walkie-Talkie. Words Of The Lovely
Concierge. Should We Say Her Name?

Man, We Don't Chat With Her Enough.

True That. The Voice On The Other End Referred To This Character As "Boss" And, Well, I'm Just Trying To Think Of All The Enemies We May Have Made, Doing Our Humble Radio Show.

Easy Targets. It's About Sending A Message, Me-thinks.

So, What Are You Thinking, Do We Call The Cops?

It'd Be The Smart Thing To Do. Question Is, Do We Go Off Air?

I Think We Should Throw Something On And Army Crawl The Heck Outta Here.

Free Bird?

Mm... Yeah, Let's Jam.

11 – THE BIRTHDAY PRESENT

It's tough work, burning a semicircle around the lock on the CASH FM building's wooden rooftop door. Never say *The Phantom Menace* was a useless watch.

The smart thing to do would've been listening to the station yourself; you would know when precisely those guys had left the room. You sure didn't *see* anyone inside, on your glide over. Man, it sure would've been great if one of the funny trinkets you had collected could double as a weapon. The duster is made for love, not war.

Now would be the second best time to pick which of DS' songs you're gonna play. Assuming they did end up playing Domino, well, you wouldn't wanna subject the CASH FM faithful to a repeat. A station so fringe, reducing themselves to only the hits? They would never, and as acting deejay *you* would never.

The broadcast deck is cleaner than you thought it'd be. As the decades pile on, the ritual of radio play adapts, but all this really means is the consolidation of their tools. Racks of steel who-knows-what choked with knobs and dials becomes a single someone-probably-does. You discover, no, in fact, this station does not have shelves upon shelves of records. Their music is either fed from a custom

software feeding off a memory bank in another room, or that's what you would tell someone regardless. How it all comes together is hardly your concern. You only have eyes for the shimmering computer monitor, thicker and more obviously plastic than the newer models, umbilically hooked to an even older keyboard tattooed with stickers and packing finger-polished keys shining like they fell out of a rock tumbler.

Oh, look at you. So excited to be breaking and entering you already forgot to pick a DS song.

Ampm in the pm is a good sunset number. Highlights DS' preternatural proclivity for setting moods. Now that's a song that transports the listener. They say Western cinema—not to say movies made in the West so much as *cinema al pesto*—are the genre closest to landscape painting. It's the invitation to live in this world, for the duration that you may glance the rendering on the wall. Not unlike DS and his song about going to a gas station. We've all *been* there, ~~dude~~ my friend.

You give DS a search via the computer's music library, which turns up nothing. If these dinosaurs just had, like, an aux cord hookup, this wouldn't be such a chore, you think. You rant to yourself. It only occurs to you now that this is a crime, and time may not be something you have a whole lot of, even now. Come on, aging work computer. Not even a Pandora radio? That one's almost as old as

you.

Oh, shit, here [you] go. The Soundcloud app. Rocking a premium subscription, too. Well [you'll] be. What an utter bitch of a time for you to start getting the nerves. Your fingers shake picking up the headphones. A bead of sweat running from between your shoulder blades and soaking into your lower back is so uncomfortable it's gotta be trying to get a jump out of you. But the thought scares you. Rebel sweat glands. Your own body will not back you up on this, a crime of the most googleable order [sabotage of an authorized radio frequency, radio piracy charge not out of the question].

The things we do in the name of giving someone a good birthday. Firework zoning laws never stopped your uncles.

When you tap play on DS' *ampm in the pm*, the computer pauses. A window pops up. Custom software, preloading the track to eliminate potential buffering issues. You don't know what else it could be but surrender it could be something else. You're willing to be wrong, like more people should.

6:55pm. You swivel in the chair for five minutes, your finger ready on the key topped with a play button sticker. If this doesn't play the song, at least it won't be your fault. Pardon you for thinking the literal, actual play button would play music at this, the music playing place.

Oh, thank god, the song begins. And the sigh

you take as the song really, truly, does start playing in your headphones, presumably across the whole CASH FM frequency, is ruined by an entirely new, naked thought. When the song ends, you will have to talk. You will need to say something important to soften the blow of this intrusion most nonsensical. It couldn't be hard, you think, you tell yourself. It couldn't be hard.

Ampm In The Pm, By Local Artist DS, That's The Song You Just Heard. It's Actually His Birthday Today. Happy Birthday, DS. Given The Uh... Given The Occasion, Excuse Me, We're Going To... Play Another One. Excuse Me If This Was Already Played Today, But It's A Good One. This One Is Called *Domino*.

Once Again, *Domino* By DS. Comparing Us All To Dominoes, I Think There's An Obvious Metaphor—

what do you think the teacher's gonna look like this year.wav

Whoops. Don't Know What That Was. Hit My Elbow On This... This Thing Next To Me. Sorry About That. I'm Sure The Teacher Looks Fine. To Be Honest, Most People Are Attractive, It's Not About Anyone's Potential Or Unpotential... I'm Getting Off Track. How About... Here. DS Often Calls—DS Often *Cites*, Uh, This Guy Asher Roth As One Of His Major Inspirations. So, Here's *Sour Patch Kids* By Asher Roth.

“Two hours, Boss!”

Sorry About That. Do You Remember The Unveiling Of The iPhone? Steve Was Right, You Know. As Much As It Might Pain Us To Give Him That. Products Do Change Everything And If They Don't They Become The Impetus Of What Will. Did The Building Of The Large Hadron Collider Change Everything? I Don't Know; We Don't All Have Large Hadron Colliders In Or Basement. Is It Any Wonder Our Collective Barometer For Advances In Space Flight Is Whenever The Moon Becomes Disneyland?

It's Not Revolutionary Until We Can Buy One At The Mall, Unromantic As That Sounds. We Have Lived A Golden Boon, An Unimaginable Exponential Eruption Of Technological Development, A Thousand Years Of Progress And They Were All Boring. Eons In A Matter Of A Hundred Years And It Seems As Though We Can Barely Invent Something Better Than A Train. But What Is Better Than A Train? Exceeding The Land Speed Of Every Living Thing On Earth? Teleporting? Our Great-Grandchildren Will Find Teleporting As Unsexy And Benign As A Toaster. De-Aging Pills Will Come In Boxes As Disposable As The Packaging For A Toothbrush.

You've Seen Science Fiction In Practice. Captain Kirk Never Needed The Klingon Warchief To Re-

peat What They Said Because Their Mic Wasn't On. The Fantasy Was Never What Could Exist, It Was What Could Work... Now, Hold On A Minute... The Phone Is Ringing. Hmm. Do I Pick Up? Let's, Uh... Okay, Let's Just—

Hello?

“Yes, hello, if you don't mind I wanted to call in and, add to what you were saying about the advancement of consumer products. You sound pretty young, if you don't mind me saying, so let's entertain that your idea of advancement is merely a slice of things. Let us not slip into egotism; the odds of you, of any of us, being born at the total apex of technological achievement, are... well, not odds at all. It's impossible. Barring nuclear war, there's no conceivable way that we would regress in invention or 'material conveniences.' Know what I mean? Everyone will wonder if things can get any better than this. Can special effect verisimilitude possible evolve further than now, will internet searches reach virtually instantaneous speeds, and I could go on but essentially, what we're asking is whether we can chill something to absolute zero.”

I'm Sorry, I'm Supposed To Ask Your Name.

“Rachael!”

Hi, Rachel, Thanks For The Input. Much To Think About.

“But I'll get out of your hair. Much to think about

indeed! Hey, can you play Kate Bush?"

Uh... Yeah, Sure Thing. I'll Load 'Er Up.

Y'know What I Was Just Thinking About Is, Eh, Radio Sure Sounds Like An Outdated Way To Get Music. Compared to Streaming. But Streaming Just Doesn't Have The Same Kick As Radio. I Don't Mean Sound Quality, Just The Fact That Not Everyone Can Get Here. Is This Making Sense? Did You All Like Those DS Songs? Because I've Got A Third Ready, One I Really Like.

No, Better Question. How Do We Feel About The Subway? I Was Just There, Earlier Today. My Horoscope Recommended It, Shoutout To Astro— Maybe I Can't Swear On This. Astro... Expletive. Dot Com. Female Dog. Google Daily Horoscope, It's On Like The Third Page. I Would Not Recommend Astrology Dot Com, They've Given Me A Few Repeats. Heyo, Looks Like We Have A Caller.

...Hello? You're On The Air.

“Subway bread does not legally qualify as bread, on account of its sugar content. Subway's proteins are not halal certified. Subway's tuna, in the UK, did not meet the requirements to be called tuna. Subway's booth seating is awkwardly low to the ground. A Subway employee took a photo of me which I later found on shitcustomerssay.com. Subway's olives come from an olive form notorious for its misandrist hiring practices. Subway sold pizzas once—less said about that the better. Subway fran-

chisees profit sharing is woefully under the bar with regards to industry standards. Subway employees are called Seamen, internally, and that's just weird. Subway runs an employee-only dating service called Sub Secret, with an emphasis on hookups. Subway's motto, the highly-confutable "Eat Fresh," was barred from use in Singapore in 2005 on account of the physiological impossibility of a subway customer successfully doing so at a Subway restaurant. Subway has their capicola, among the most cantankerous of deli meats, shipped frozen in liquid nitrogen. Subway has not updated their interior livery since 2002, and their franchisee upkeep policy does not list regular dusting as one of the employees responsibilities. Where does all that dust go. Yup-a, right in the food. Subway's updating toasting stations pillaged their interior schematics from popular cooking appliance Kickstarter—"

I Was Talking About The Train.

"Oh, the train's just lovely. I love me a train ride."

Me Too. Wanna Pick The Music?

"Runaway Train by Soul Asylum."

That's A Sad Song About Trains, Though.

"The world still waits for a happy train song."

Okay, Guys. Far From Me To Be The Party Ruiner, But I'm Gonna End The Game At This, Our Fifth Request For "*Sandstorm*" By Finnish Techno Project Darude. I Can Surmise You All, Individual Physically But United Spectrally, Found It Funny, But At This Point We Are Stepping Over Other People's Serious Requests. Mmkay? Mmmmmmkay. I'm Going To Take This Call. Trust I Will Hang Up Immediately If They Say *Sandstorm*.

... Hello?

"Hahahahahahahahahahahahahahaha,"

Feel Good?

"Nah, I mean, yeah, I mean not the song, I mean me personally."

Cool. What's Your Name?

"Corey!"

How Are You, Corey.

"I'm nice. Ey, I fuck this that Domino song."

Really? That's Great, That's Awesome.

"We really are like dominoes, uh-huh?"

That's What I'm Saying!

"Yo, I'm not requesting the song, I just wanna say playing that *Sandstorm* shit five times was funny, bro. The regular guys would never do something

like that, man. One time they hung up on my friend Erick because he took too long to think of a song.”

Let’s Try And Be Nice To Them. They’ve Had A Bizarre Work Day.

“And hey, dude, it’s real sick of you to take over the station when there’s a sniper on the loose. Takes balls.”

Sure Thing. I’m Happy To Help. Anyway, This Is *Feel Good Inc.*

Hello, You're On The Air.

"Margaritaville!"

Okay!

Ladies And Gentlemen, I Think I Should Use My Platform To Do Some Good. One Second. Hey. Hey, Deffy?

“One hour, Boss!”

That’s One Hour Until Rainier’s Supposed Eruption. According To Deffy, The AI Inside Siran, A New Emergency Alert Device From... I Never Got The Company Name. Guy Named Sepp Made It. Point Is, You May Or May Not Have One Hour To Get Your Affairs In Order. Who Knows How Bad It’s Gonna Be? Someone More Researched Than Myself, I Just Have The Robot. Actually, Something About Deffy Has Been Bugging Me. Listen To This:

“Ow!”

I Just Burned It A Little With My—My Thing. Do You Think It Felt That? It Always Says Ow. I’m No Robot Builder, Are We To The Point Where They Can Feel Pain? One Wishes It Could Feel More Than One Thing, Because—Oh, A Caller. Hey!

“The only responsible move would be to destroy the device. To live limbless, bodiless, only capable of feeling pain? Even Ellison would shiver.”

Was He A Big Pain Guy?

“Read a book!”

I Am!

I Feel Really Good, Right Now. Hope That's Not Weird To Say. It's Been A... Tactile, Day. You Don't Think About How Many Things Are Automated. It's Good To Get Your Hands On Something Single-Purposed. Sometimes I Worry The Ways I'm Interacting With My World Are Getting Worse, As A Result Of All These AIO Solutions. I'd Ask Steve This, If I Could: Cool As It Is For These Three Revolutionary Devices To Be, In Reality, One Device, Do They Need To Be? Is It Seriously Open And Shut Better For All Our Tools To Only Consolidate Themselves Further And Further Into Black Glass? What We Build, The Things We Do With Our Hands; That's Basically The Only Thing Between Us And The Gibbons. Would It Be Better For A Singular Device To Be The Thing Building Skyscrapers? An All-In-One Interstellar, Aerial, Amphibious Ultra-Car? I'm Going To Be Daring And Argue No. I Think We Want Pilots, And Sailors, And Drivers, And I Think We Want Them All To Be Their Own Thing. Actually, Scratch That, I Forgot There's People Who Own All Three Of Those. Nevermind. Rewind Back To What I Was Saying About Singular Devices, *de-
cided to ask you about giving me a device
now who would all three of those nevermind
their own thing actually scratch that I forgot there
ed to all them and I think we want them all to ed
be doing and argue no I think we want them all to ed*

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Look At What We're Doing Here. How Cool It Was To Hear Our Requests. None Of You Had To Call In. No Billion-Dollar Idea Can Replace This. It Wasn't Close To As Convenient As Pulling Up The Song On Spotify Or SoundMax Or MusicHoopla, But You Had More Fun. Right?

We'll Ask This Next Caller. Evening, You're On Air. How Are You?

"Hey, I've been loving the show, but you might wanna leave. There's squad cars scrambled outside your building. Police radio is saying the sniper is inside the building?"

Ooh. Okay. Yeah. Thanks For The Tip.

It Seems As Though My Time With You Is Up. It's Been Real. Remember To Stream Local Artist DS, Available On All Streaming Services And... I'm Gonna Play Us Out With This Last DS Joint, Actually. Called "*Hullabaloo*." Buh-Bye.

12 - LES DÉNOUEMENT

What do they say about absence? The heart gets fatter?

You have a lot on your mind right now, and a handful of police officers trying to get the studio doors open. Five months of academy sweat; nothing in the face of a chair stuck under the doorknob. You've never seen the standard procedure for getting a door in this position unstuck but hanging around to see what that is would be unwise. The pros don't recommend newbie breakers and enterers fall into this trap, common as it is.

Back on the roof, you unfurl the wingsuit and feel the wind. Unless the professional wingsuiters consider every individual moment you take off and land to be unique flights, this will be your second time taking wing. But you're feeling good. Triumphant, maybe. You know you; you're no savant. If you were destined to die in a wingsuit accident it would have happened the first time.

Midair, confident controlling your flight with one arm and getting out your phone with the other, you think it right you touch base with DS. See what he ended up doing. He picks up on the first ring.

"I tried to call you earlier," he starts.

Oh, yeah, I see.

“What were you doing?”

I was on the air.

“Where are you now?”

I’m on the air.

“God damn, babe, how did you manage all that? Was that your voice, on the radio?”

It was. You were listening?

“I was. Me and everyone else. We’re all in my car: there’s Zoey, Caleb Hayden and—uh—Austin in the back. Ralph couldn’t make it.”

Oh, it was Ralph.

“Huh?”

Nevermind.

“That was really fucking cool.”

Well, Happy Birthday.

“We’re at Madison beach park right now, just parked outside. Got some snacks at Bert’s, we’re just chilling. Waiting to see if the mountain does... whatever. Can you come?”

I’m on my way. Be there in a bit.

“Aight, cool. See ya.”

See ya.

You remember your horoscope said nothing about traveling by wingsuit, but you start to lose

altitude a mile or so from Westlake station, wherein you split the difference.

You wave at the ORCA card swiper and wish it a good evening, continuing down to the platform. In your head, that constant fantasy of five minutes from now, Riley is there. Inexplicably. The idea of returning The Monitor to him after aiding you in your quest feels neat & tidy. Sure, The Monitor you would be giving back to him would be a very different The Monitor, but no one said the fantasy had to be realistic. You do not see Riley on the train.

You get off the uneventful but satisfyingly dustless train ride at the University station, where you will walk the rest of the way to Madison beach park. On the way, you get an Email from Amazon's Payroll Coordinator, only credited as a Nicole. Nicole has noticed that you have not been receiving the backpay you are entitled to as an Amazon employee, despite a glowing report from your project lead. Rest assured, Nicole will be getting you the pay cycles you are owed and deeply apologizes for what must be a logistical screwup. Your Email automatically suggests a few canned responses and you settle on "*Sounds Good!*"

Even the beach is a crush. Seems as though any small sliver of beach or park or bridge with a clear view of the mountain has been commandeered as sesh volcano watching space. PD is swamped, between responding to your break-in and getting all

the campers on the bridge to free up the shoulder. This could never be you, not with a complete guarantee something would happen. Speaking of:

“Ten minutes, Boss!”

We’ll see about that, Deffy, you say. You and your algorithms. Trying to get the Siran back in your back pocket, you miss and it hits the sidewalk.

“Ow!”

Whoops.

In the crowd either setting up camp or trying in vain to start setting up camp, you spot the diet portion of parking space Madison beach park allows its visitors. And there you see him. Daresay your heart skips a beat, as it definitely will every time to see DS in the flesh. He and all the others have turned their parking spot into a campsite, sitting crisscrossed on the hood or landing on the roof, a cracking view of the mountain all the same.

Two people walking behind you say something about the mountain venting earlier today, which one of them corrects that maybe it was just a weird cloud. Wouldn’t be the first time that mistake had been made, even in non-eruption times.

“Seven minutes, Boss!”

Oh, one of them says. Apparently it’s in seven minutes, we better you and I squeeze into a spot. Sure thing, another one of them says, and at this

point you can't take not knowing which of them is saying what and look back to see it is two unaccompanied children. Whatever. You're right by the car.

DS hops off the car and takes you in for a big ol' hug, you think pretending not to notice the gift bag in your hand. Once again he thanks you for the radio thing, says it was really cool, like you fuckin' knew it would be. You get heys and whatsups from Caleb, Zoey, Austin, the oft-forgotten Ralph. Damn shame these good people couldn't get more from you beyond their names and their position as friends of DS, but everyone's number comes up some time. A life as auxiliary characters is not a life wasted, you wouldn't say.

"Four minutes, Boss!"

DS asks what thing in your pocket is, *or* if you're just happy to see him *ahahahaha*, and it makes for a good segue into the day you've had. DS loves the stories about your days and wonders out loud if that Mormon chick shows up. You say yes, in fact, Prudence does have a walk-on role in this story. See, first you had worried about getting a present for him (he opens up the field jacket and calls it kickass) and Prudence was already in the lobby of your apartment, where you and her then went down to CVS and she suggested cleaning supplies but you said no but also said yes to a feather duster for yourself, the Hoomfare xx7 to be precise,

and you took a train downtown because your horoscope suggested doing so where you met an uncomfortably smart and eloquent elementary schooler named Riley who's just better than you, and he lost a backpack trinket getting off the train which you picked up and found out to be The Monitor, the world's most powerful laser pointer in terms of luminescence and average wattage, in fact it's brightness and burning power got you temporarily banned from all Starbucks locations which led you to a place called Edison's—cute little spot up north—and they were playing the radio, 86.1 CASH FM, and you found out today is something they call Easy Friday which is listener requests all and you thought 'aw, man, that would be a killer present for DS' but you couldn't call in right there since your phone was out of battery, and walking back downtown you found yourself at The Spheres—that Amazon thing, long story short you might be an employee now but you did get your phone charged and you did call in but those hacks at the station wouldn't play one of his songs at a specific time or anything and generally spoke of you rudely, which got you depressed and wandering the waterfront until this aggressively polite man in a suit mistook you for a college roommate of his named Krieg or something, and he gave you six-thousand dollars and a prototype Siran—the emergency alert-amajig that keeps talking—

"Two minutes, Boss! You gotta get outta

there!”

—yes, indeed, Deffy, and quickly after that another child who for some reason works the counter at the army surplus on 1st modified The Monitor—y’know, the laser pointer—to have a red scope because they just wanted to do that, and that’s where you got the field jacket (Happy Birthday!) and a tip that listeners can just walk into the building CASH FM airs from and submit a request in person and, reinvigorated, you walked all the way up to Queen Anne only for the front desk person with a faux camisole to tell you no, and feeling very much dejected you sulked all the way back around to your apartment but DS’ phone call reminded you of this present’s urgency, how the stars have aligned for his artist birthday to be on Easy Friday of all days which got your to drag your ass back to the station—well, fly there with the experimental Vietnam-era wingsuit the kid at the army surplus gifted you—with the aid of Prudence’s temple, which found you aiming the Monitor inside the CASH FM building and getting them all to think there was a malicious sniper out for their deejaying heads, and from there you broke inside and took over the airwaves, all things considered you think you did pretty good for your first attempt, got DS’ songs to play for him and the rest of the squad to hear, and when the cops arrived you flew off the roof of the building to rendezvous with DS for the official, real, celebration.

You inhale.

DS tells you that all sounds pretty crazy. You tell him you're pretty tired, actually. Zoey underhands you a Monster, one of the white ones, which you thank her for.

"Thirty seconds, Boss! She's gonna blow!"

Yes, thank you Deffy. You realize Deffy had never spoken out of turn until just recently and suppose that's a feature for supposedly impending events. Caleb suggests that you all get the birthday song going now, and DS in a very cute way tries to suggest that's not necessary. Nonsense, you all tell him. What's a birthday without making the birthdayee momentarily uncomfortable? You and DS hop back on the roof of the car, where room is made, and you strike up the band.

Ready, everyone? One, two, three...

Happy Birthday To You,

Happ—

There's a scream, or several dozen, urges to look up and over, then the herculean shockwave that blows out your ears and fires off every alarm of every car. Trees blow out leaves in stress and the force momentarily raises the water level on the nearby beach. It's only the one, like the worst fireworks malfunction imaginable that triggers every stage of the show at once. They say an entirely "out the top" eruption is preferable in how ensuing la-

hars are minimized, and if it were DS' birthday wish for Rainier to have the most picturesque blowup possible, well, maybe Prudence is right about something. Or Beckystarshower. One of the two unless both believe in the same thing.

What started as screaming, human fragility laid bare in the face of magnificent torrents of nature, becomes joy. For unclear and likely insensitive reasons, there's a round of applause. Families pass off Dad's phones to strangers to get group pictures. The party in the jeep next to you shotgun beers. You suppose, yes, this is an occasion. You and DS and everyone else stand up on the roof, really taking in the sight. He says he likes your wingsuit, the one you forgot you were still wearing. You point at the mountain and laugh, telling him he better make a wish.

I Think We Need To Offer You Good People An Addendum. Now Some Of You May Remember, Not Long Before Abe And I Went Off The Air In The Interest Of Our Safety, I Had Made A Quip That, On Reflection, Could Be Construed As Reality. I Had Said Something Along The Lines Of "... Not The Weirdest Thing I Did To Get Out Of Work." This Had Led Some Of You In The CASH FM Socials To Think This Was All Some Kind Of Stunt.

Correct, And To Be Clear, No, We Are Not Soft Launching A Third Co-Host With Any Sort Of Viral Marketing Voodoo. Successful A Segment As Our Criminal Friend Had, I Believe.

Oh, *Rave Reviews*. What Did You Do On Your Impromptu Break, Abe?

Same As Youis, Louis, Hiked Down To Arnold's And Tucked In To A Six-Pack Of Abe & Jones IPA, On Sale Now.

Let The Good Times Roll. Which I Like To Think We Did, Since It's Getting Late Dear Listeners, I'm Afraid This Instillation Of Easy Friday Must Now Come To A Quite Interesting Close.

aww.wav

Yeah, It's A Bummer, But Not As Bad A Bummer As Playing *Cruel Summer* When We Could Have Been Reporting On That Damn Eruption Live, Huh?

Talk About Poor Timing. Would've Been A Live Radio Segment For The Ages.

Our Second One Today!

No Kidding.

Wow.

What A Day. I'm Pooped. Abe, What Do You Say We Play 'Em Out With Somethin' Upbeat, Hm?

Counter The Horrors Of This Natural Disaster?

It's Our Right—Neigh, Our Duty.

Well Said, Fred, I'm Itching To Finish My Drink. The One We Cannot Drink On Air According To Some Stupid *Laws*. Folks, The Mountain May Be Scary, Literally Losing Her Head, But Try To Be The City You Are And Fret Not. The DOA Recommends Face Masks Outside, Now That Ashfall Has Already Hit Tacoma And Will Soon Have *Us* Dreaming Of A White Christmas Ourselves. Don't Go Letting Your Kids Play In That Stuff, Don't Sell Any. If Weather Permits, Jones And I Will Be Back Here Tomorrow Morning, Same Batman Time, Same Batman Channel. We'll Come To You With Winning Attitudes And Fun Prize-Winning Opportunities In The Cash Stash.

Beefed-Up Security, Too.

Our Poor Budget.

This Is David Bowie. Classic Number Called
“*Heroes.*”

Good Night, And Good Luck.

Radiosault



BRADEN THOMPSON, 2022

