

DIRT - AN AUDIO DRAMA  
Chapter 13 Transcript  
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**\*\*Warning\*\***

**This is a complete written transcript of the entire Chapter 13 audio file and is full of spoilers from start to finish. To avoid ruining surprises, read along as you listen—but don't read ahead!**

Link to audio files: <https://www.dirtaudiodrama.com/#listen>

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

A growing crowd of people, who until moments ago worked for me, gather near the elevator staring at me with their mouths open, taking pictures or typing on their phones, as I depart with the two investigators.

(Sound of elevator opening)

(Sound of walking on busy streets in downtown Seattle)

The three of us then cross the street under the Monorail and head towards the Belltown police precinct, only a few blocks from the office. I keep the costume on as we walk outside. As the excitement of the meeting wears off, I realize I haven't eaten since I left Wapato early in the morning. I ask if we can stop for a quick bite on the way. They say they're hungry too after waiting at the office for so long, so...

(Sound of walking into restaurant)

...we decide to talk over a late lunch instead.

JOSEPH:

Okay, this is my treat.

DETECTIVE HAWKINS:

I'm afraid we can't accept that.

JOSEPH:

Oh. Right.

DETECTIVE HAWKINS:

(At counter) Hey Sasha.

PERSON AT COUNTER (SASHA):

Hey Darius. How are you?

DETECTIVE HAWKINS:

I'm good. Another day on the job, you know.

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

While in line...

PERSON TAKING ORDERS (FEMALE):

Yeah, I hear you.

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

...I text with Mel.

DETECTIVE HAWKINS:

(In background) I'll take my usual.

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

She says she'll meet me with my stuff outside the office building when I'm done, so I can Uber home from there.

JOSEPH:

(In background) Yeah, I'll take the same thing he did.

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

I ask how the meeting with Molecular is going...

SASHA:

(In background) That'll be \$13.49.

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

...and she says she isn't in the room but she can hear a lot of clapping. She also thanks me for the things that I said about her.

(Sound of sitting in chairs)

JOSEPH:

How do I look in this thing by the way?

DETECTIVE HAWKINS:

You're giving off a bit of a Tom Hanks in "Castaway" vibe. The part where he's on the island I mean.

JOSEPH:

Mmm. Thanks.

DETECTIVE PETERSON:

By the way, this being an official statement, we'll need to report everything, including your name and exact details of your involvement in the case.

JOSEPH:

Yeah.

DETECTIVE PETERSON:

It, uh, won't take long to reach the press.

JOSEPH:

Well, what's fifteen more minutes of fame, right?

So, how can I help?

DETECTIVE PETERSON:

Well, we know your organization has the traffic footage and has been analyzing it too.

JOSEPH:

Yeah.

DETECTIVE PETERSON:

Have you seen it yourself?

JOSEPH:

Not yet. I've been away from the office all week.

DETECTIVE HAWKINS:

Any particular reason why you've been away?

JOSEPH:

Like I said back in that meeting, just personal reasons.

DETECTIVE PETERSON:

We were hoping you or your firm might have gotten some data from your video analysis that might help us identify the driver. But I guess, now that we know you were the pedestrian who was almost hit, we'd also be interested to know what details about the incident you can provide.

DETECTIVE HAWKINS:

We know the make and model and color from the camera footage and eye witnesses. We also know it was a male driver from people who heard the driver's voice. But we don't have the plates. Any chance you've been able to determine that? Or I guess, do you remember anything from the scene?

JOSEPH:

Yeah. Yeah, it was definitely a dude driving. I remember that part. But to be honest, I didn't see the car. I was pretty lost in thought before it happened. And by the time I heard it, I was diving out of the way. And panicking, because I thought the costume came off. So, sorry, that's all I got.

DETECTIVE HAWKINS:

How about the driver?

JOSEPH:

Same, unfortunately. I remember his voice, though. *He told me that he* had a green light.

DETECTIVE PETERSON:

Yeah, mostly likely just trying to cast blame. That said, I guess now's a good time to remind you to always look both ways before crossing a street. Even if you have a walk signal.

JOSEPH:

Yeah. Lesson learned.

DETECTIVE PETERSON:

Any other details you can remember?

JOSEPH:

No...

DETECTIVE PETERSON:

I think that's it then.

JOSEPH:

Oh. Okay.

DETECTIVE PETERSON:

Would you be okay if we reach out to others at your company for video analysis?

JOSEPH:

Unfortunately it's not for me to decide anymore. But you can ask them.

DETECTIVE PETERSON:

Okay. Here are our cards. Call us if anything else comes to mind.

JOSEPH:

Sure.

DETECTIVE HAWKINS:

There is...one more thing. I'm not sure if your people caught this, but the footage did show what we believe to be a drone in each camera view. It seemed to be tracking you closely, even while you were in the crosswalk. Do you know any reason why someone might be flying a drone over you?

JOSEPH:

(Exhale) I don't.

INVESTIGATOR 1:

Well, like she said, reach out if something jogs your memory.

JOSEPH:

I will.

(Sound of getting out of chair)

JOSEPH:

Ah, before you go, could you tell me what kind of car it was that almost hit me?

DETECTIVE PETERSON:

Sure. It was the same car I had back in high school. Man, I loved that car.

DETECTIVE HAWKINS:

It was a Datsun 280z.

(Fade out all sounds)

(End scene)

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

Mel meets me on the sidewalk outside the office, just as she promised. She has the detector and the bag containing the boxes and the broken drone. Before I step into the Uber that she called for me, she reaches out and gives me a hug. A rare affectionate gesture that belies her steel-clad cool façade.

When I get home, after I shower and toss my clothes into the washing machine, as with box from Wapato, I label and place the contents of the new boxes in my safe, and then label and leave the boxes themselves on the same shelf as the box from Wapato, in my garage.

I answer texts from Motorpool co-workers on my Motorpool smartphone. I type up my Motorpool resignation letter on my Motorpool laptop, and send it to Angela and the Inner 6. My network access is likely to be turned off by IT any moment. Angela will become the new owner of all the messages in my inbox as well as anything I've saved on our servers.

I assume that one day I'll mourn what happened today. That things will sink in, and I'll feel the full stomach-drop plunge of my career having careened right over the edge. For now, my story arc will be reduced to 90-second TV news spots, on repeat in building lobbies and airports. I'll be the punch line of talk-show jokes. Podcasts hosts will have their fun with it for a while. People who didn't know me before will know me now, but only this version of me: a man in a costume, stumbling away from an accident of his own making.

(Fade in sounds of being inside home)

(Sound of writing words on a on sticky note)

JOSEPH:

"I hope your search is going well. If things are getting hard for you, don't despair. Where there is ruin, there is also renewal. Let this place be an example."

(Sound of handling sticky note)

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

I also write down the word Lemminkäinen, on a separate sticky note. A quick Google search on my personal laptop is all I need to discover that Lemminkäinen isn't just a word...

JOSEPH:

Oh.

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

...but a person. Lemminkäinen is one of the heroes of the Kalevala, Finland's ancient national epic. I'm vaguely aware of the Kalevala—mostly that it's massive, and written in verse. I have no idea where to start, so I opt for summaries and sound bites on Wikipedia and other websites, most of which describe Lemminkäinen as young and handsome with long, flowing hair from mythical times. He's a ladies' man, swashbuckling and brave and noble with many magical protections. But he's also arrogant and reckless.

In one particular passage of the Kalevala, Lemminkäinen is killed by the only weapon he has no magical powers to ward off. His body is tossed into the black river of Tuonela, aka the Finnish underworld. Lemminkäinen's mother is alerted to his death by a hairbrush that bleeds, and she

goes in search of her son all throughout heaven and earth. She asks the trees, the path, and the moon for help, but none of them have the answer she seeks. Finally, she asks the sun, which is able to tell her her son's fate.

Lemminkäinen's mother then goes to a blacksmith and asks him to forge for her a giant copper rake. With rake in hand, she travels to the underworld, and uses the rake pull Lemminkäinen's body parts out of the river, one by one. She then sews the parts back together, reassembling them into a complete body. In some versions of the Kalevala, Lemminkäinen is fully restored to life. In others, he isn't.

JOSEPH:

(Laughs) Gnarly. No wonder there are so many Finnish heavy metal bands...

Oh, crap!

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

It suddenly occurs to me that when my work network access get shuts down, my work cell phone service is likely to also. *And* my work phone could get wiped remotely. So, I spend the next couple of hours keying in and installing all of the contacts and apps and other settings I want to keep from my work phone, onto my personal phone.

When I'm done, I send a core group of fifty or so friends, family, and close co-workers a text from my personal phone, letting them know they should reach out to me here from now on.

At first the replies are general, like "Just updated it on my end. Good to hear from you." But soon...

JOSEPH:

(Exhales) Here we go...

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

...I start to get things like...

JOSEPH:

"Just saw the news..."

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

...and...

JOSEPH:

"Our mail room is hiring if you need a job, ha ha..."

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

...and...

JOSEPH:

“Never pictured you in a beard before...”

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

...so I know what happened is getting out.

JOSEPH:

(Exhales)

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

I spend another couple of hours carrying on text conversations that I knew I'd have to have, but that feel awkward nonetheless.

Angela also calls me on my new phone during a break in the dinner party with Molecular, and we have a long chat about all kinds of things. She says the buyout meeting ended up going great, and that my unexpected—and unorthodox—entrance and exit, actually provided the icebreaker they all needed to let their guard down and talk candidly. She tells me that IT needs my laptop and phone, but I can just give them to her if I want, over lunch downtown early next week, rather than heading back in to the office. She leaves it up to me.

In between receiving and answering more texts from more people, I turn my attention to my car, which, as far as I know, is still stranded on the side of the road in Cumberland with two flat tires in Cumberland. I call my insurance company, and they arrange to send out a tow truck right away to have the car hauled to a tire store in Seattle, in the University District, just a couple of miles from my house. It should be ready for me to pick up, with repaired or replaced tires, sometime tomorrow.

(Fade in sounds of being inside Joseph's house)

Before I know it, it's dark outside. I consider doing a treadmill workout or going for a walk around the neighborhood before bed, but my brain and body are fried.

I have a pizza delivered and eat it as I scroll through Twitter. There's an adage in the business world that Friday afternoons are the best time to send out press releases about negative news. Motorpool's PR firm managed a quick, three-paragraph summary of my departure, and I can see copies of it being posted from various industry outlets and influencers that I follow. It makes no reference to the crosswalk incident; it simply cites a parting of ways in the context of the buyout and next phase of the Motorpool and Molecular partnership. But that doesn't stop many in-the-know commenters from having fun by adding additional context to the news and posting Costumed Jaywalker jokes and memes.

JOSEPH:

(Groans)



NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

I look over and notice the Coinmaster still on the floor next to the front door, where I left it when I got home.

(Sound of Joseph walking)

The broken drone is there too.

(Sound of grabbing them, walking, opening door to garage, turning on garage light)

I grab them both and take them into the garage and set them on shelves next to the four boxes.

(Sound of setting items on shelves)

JOSEPH:

Alright.

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

I start to head back in to the house...

JOSEPH:

Oh, wait...

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

...but then I remember that the batteries in the Coinmaster are dead.

(Sound of handling detector)

I find the double As that Antonia gave me, and replace the old ones while I'm thinking of it, so I don't forget to do it later.

JOSEPH:

Okay.

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

Once the new ones in...

(Sound of turning on detector)

...I turn the detector on and check everything, to make sure it's still working.

(Sound of text arriving)

JOSEPH:  
(Exhales) Now who...

(Sound of grabbing phone out of pocket)

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):  
It's Kim, texting that she saw the news. She says she hopes I'm ok.

JOSEPH:  
(Yawns)

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):  
I let her know I'm home safe, but I'm toast and I'll fill her in on stuff in the morning.

(Sound of Joseph walking back into house)

(Sound of detector buzzing still on)

(Sound of garage door closing)

(Fade out all sounds)

(End of scene)

JOSEPH:  
(Gasps)

(Fade in sound of dreamy wind chime noise)

(Sound of being inside a house at nighttime, after bedtime)

(Sound of moving covers and getting out of bed)

(Sound of walking on carpet)

(Sound of creaking open bedroom door)

(Sound of going down wooden stairs)

(Sound of breathing)

(Sound of pushing door open and silence in room)

(Sound stepping in to room)

(Sound of breathing)

(Sound of Coinmaster being turned on)

JOSEPH:  
(Gasps)

(Sound of Coinmaster making repeated pulsing noises)

JOSEPH:  
(Gasps)

(Sound of cuckoo clock chiming)

(Sound of Coinmaster pulses pulsing in time to clock chimes)

(Sound of Coinmaster pulses, cuckoo clock chimes, and dreamy wind noise all getting louder, then suddenly quiet)

MALE VOICE:  
(Filtered or mechanical sounding) Joseph!

JOSEPH:  
(Gasp)

(Sound of Joseph waking up, breathing, out of sorts, rustling in bed)

(Sound of Joseph checking phone)

JOSEPH:  
1:30...

(Sound of Joseph setting phone down)

What is that...

(Sound of Joseph picking up phone and getting out of bed)

(Sound of Joseph walking through house)

(Sound of detector making pulsating noises in distance)

JOSEPH:  
What the...

(Sound of opening garage door and sound of detector pulsating noises louder as door opens)

(Sound of Joseph turning on garage light)

(Sound of entering garage)

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):  
I listen long enough to realize that whatever it's doing, it's doing it in cycles.

I open the recording app on my phone, and when the detector pauses between cycles...

(Sound of smartphone chime)

...I hit record.

JOSEPH:  
Woah.

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):  
The more I listen, the more I understand.

JOSEPH:  
I think I know what this is!

(Fade out all sounds)

(End scene)

(Fade in sound of Joseph outside on his dock; sound of waves lapping on beach)

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):  
Somehow, even after the dream in the middle of the night, then discovering the Coinmaster being weird in the garage, and *still* getting texts from friends and family into the wee hours, I managed to fall back to sleep. And stay that way, until sunrise.

I also managed a treadmill workout first thing this morning. After that, I made a peanut butter and kale smoothie for breakfast, while watching the University of Washington rowing teams practice out beyond my dock, near the Montlake Cut. After a few days out on the road, it feels good to be back into a daily routine at home—even if that routine now doesn't involve thinking as much about work.

Of course, I *am* thinking about work, and what happened. And I did see on the Seattle Times home page this morning a headline about an investigation into an unauthorized floatplane landing in southeast King County.

(Sound of walking back into house)

But I try my best not to watch the news or check social media. Instead, I sit at my desk and take stock of everything that's happened so far.

(Sounds of being at desk, typing on keyboard)

Since receiving the letter in the mail three weeks ago, I've found four boxes buried in the ground, each with notes and objects in them. The first box, from Wapato, contained a small key. The second box, from Pe Ell, contained an old nickel and a note with a capital letter R in it. The third box, from Maryhill, contained an old dime, and its note had a capital letter H. And then the fourth box, from Cumberland, contained an old quarter. And its note came with a capital letter A.

JOSEPH:

(Talking while writing) R... H... A... Well, that's three of the letters in R. A. Hastings...

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

According to the note from Wapato, plus the number of spots mentioned in "The Places I've Been," I have three more boxes to find. But then there's something *after* I find the all the boxes, too.

(Sound of handling note)

JOSEPH:

(Reading note to self) "This is the start of finding things. From here there are six, before the last."

(Sound of folding up note, putting it down)

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

I also know the answer to one of the clues toward the end of the letter. The one that reads, "The year your grandmother and I wed." It's 1943, which is also the code to the gate in Wapato, *and*, as I found out during my dumb argument with Antonia at Daisy's, it's the year that Ernesto entered the United States and settled in the Yakima Valley.

And then there's the tiny key from the box in Wapato. I have no idea what it's supposed to open, but I assume, or hope, it will become clearer as I go.

I also woke up thinking about Lemminkäinen, and how interesting it is that Aimo would choose this moment in the search to introduce me to him, the hero who perished. Maybe Aimo knew or guessed back then that this search would extract some kind of toll.

(Sound of pen tapping on desk)

But how would he know that. How would he know what the stakes are that define my life, today? How would he know I'd even be interested in searching at all? Or that all these boxes would remain unfound by random strangers after all these years? Or that I'd even be alive to do *any* of this? Or that *any* of this would work?

Aimo was either prescient, a good guesser, has a really good executor, or...

JOSEPH:

Or, he's still...

(Sound of tapping pen on desk)

(Laughs)

(Sound of dropping pen)

(Sound of smartphone assistant being engaged)

Play Coinmaster being weird.

(Sound off smartphone disengaging)

(Sound of phone recording of the Coinmaster making pulsing noises)

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

I turn my attention to the phone recording I made overnight in the garage. I count out the number of beats in each segment, then the number of segments in each cycle, before the entire cycle starts over.

JOSEPH:

(Exhales) It has the right pattern.

And it's definitely not morse code. That would be way too cliché anyway...

(Sound of phone ringing)

(Answering phone) Hello?

MAN FROM TIRE SHOP:  
(On phone speaker) Hi, I'm calling for Joseph Elo?

JOSEPH:  
This is Joseph. You must have my car.

MAN FROM TIRE SHOP:  
We sure do. Just want to let you know it'll be ready in about an hour, and you can pick it up any time after that.

JOSEPH:  
Oh that's great to hear. Appreciate the speedy service.

MAN FROM TIRE SHOP:  
Sure! Just one quick thing, it looks like it was marked for towing by the county. It's possible they thought it was abandoned, though I can't imagine anybody abandoning a car like this.

JOSEPH:  
(Chuckles)

MAN FROM TIRE SHOP:  
Anyway...you'll see some orange writing on the window.

JOSEPH:  
Okay.

MAN FROM TIRE SHOP:  
It's a good thing your insurance people got to it first or who knows what impound you'd be visiting to get it back.

JOSEPH:  
(Exhales) Yeah. No doubt.

MAN FROM TIRE SHOP:  
Alright! Well, like I said, should be ready in an hour and you can come get it any time.

JOSEPH:  
Ok great! Thanks again.

MAN FROM TIME SHOP:  
You bet. Bye.

(Sound of phone hanging up)

JOSEPH:

Hmm. if the county found the car and ran the plates...

(Sound of pen tapping)

Then someone, somewhere, knows I was in Cumberland...with flat tires. And that someone might be smart enough to connect that I got a plane ride out of there.

(Sound of text message arriving)

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

It's a text from Carl. It reads...

JOSEPH:

"First all that UFO technology stuff, now you're into dress up too? Hey, no judgement. Come to the coin show tonight. We'll be there. I have a ticket saved for you. And in case you want to stay under cover, I have it saved under the name Ralph." (Laughs) Ralph...

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

The message has no fewer than six exclamation points.

(Sound of smart phone assistant being engaged)

JOSEPH:

Continue playing detector being weird.

(Sound of smartphone assistant disengaging)

(Sound of recording of Coinmaster making pulsing noises)

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

I'll deal with the FAA or EPA or FBI or whoever investigates rogue floatplane landings if I have to. For now, though, I'm not going to worry about it. Because for now, I'm acting on another hunch.

I know from my years of working in digital media, *and* from my programming days back in college, that every letter, number, and symbol on a keyboard or touchscreen has an underlying eight-digit code that defines it, made of a combination of ones and zeroes. In college I had a t-shirt that had nine rows of such code stacked on top of each other that, for those who knew what it meant, spelled out I GIVE HUGS.

As I listen to the recording, I count exactly eight beats of clicks and pulses grouped together in a series—some in the same order and some in a different order—followed by a brief pause, before the next series of eight begins.



(Sound of writing on paper)

I pencil them out. Ones for the clicks, since each series starts with a click, and zeroes for the pulses.

(Sound of typing on keyboard)

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

I then Google the phrase "Binary to text." Right at the top of the search results is a link to a binary to text translator. I click on the link, and on the web page I'm taken to, I type in the first eight-digit series of ones and zeroes into the input field, and get...

(Sound of tapping pencil on desk)

JOSEPH:

Wait. Why didn't that work?

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

I scroll further down the page, and see a conversion chart.

JOSEPH:

Ahh, that's right!

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

And that's when I realize my mistake. I had assumed the first beat in each series would be a one. But in fact, all of the keyboard characters shown in the chart start with a zero.

So, I quickly switch the ones for zeroes and vice-versa in each of the eight-digit codes that I deciphered. I then paste them into the input field and click convert, one at a time.

JOSEPH:

Okay Coinmaster, let's see what you're so hot to tell me.

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

And get...

(Sound of writing on paper)

JOSEPH:

B  
E  
L  
I  
E  
V

(Exhales)

E

*Believe.*

Believe? Why tell me that now? What have I been doing all week?

(Sound of pounding fist on desk)

(Sound of Joseph's phone ringing)

JOSEPH:

Woah.

(Exhales) (Clears throat)

(Answering phone) Antonia.

ANTONIA:

(On phone) Hi.

JOSEPH:

Hey.

ANTONIA:

I saw the news. Are you doing ok?

JOSEPH:

Yeah, I'm...I'm doing ok. Or I was until a minute ago, but I'm better now... What's going on?

ANTONIA:

I was thinking a little more about the drone. Do you still have it?

JOSEPH:

Yeah. It's in the garage. What about it?

ANTONIA:

Well... I was looking more closely at some of ours and I just want to know if... or I guess I'm just curious about where it came from. I know the inventory tag had some information on it. Do you remember what it said?

JOSEPH:

Hmm, I remember part of it, but not everything. Do you want me to go get it? Or I could send you a picture...

ANTONIA:

Yeah, a picture would be fine, next chance you get.

JOSEPH:

Actually, I'll just do it now, while we're talking.

(Sound of walking through house)

ANTONIA:

Okay.

Was yesterday...bad?

JOSEPH:

Uh, it wasn't that bad... I mean, yeah, it was bad. It was kind of all over the place, actually.

ANTONIA:

Yeah. And the police?

JOSEPH:

They just wanted information. According to them, I'm not in any of trouble.

(Sound of opening door to garage and going in garage)

(Sound of turning garage light on)

Okay I'm in the garage. Op, hang on, I'm going to put you on speaker so I can use the phone flashlight to see it better. Can you hear me okay?

ANTONIA:

(On speaker) Yeah. So, if I remember right, the inventory tag was on the underside.

(Sound of Joseph handling drone)

I think it was a white sticker.

JOSEPH:

Yeah, that's what I remember too...

(To self) Where is it...

ANTONIA:

It had a bar code on it...

(Sound of handling drone)

JOSEPH:

Right.

But...

ANTONIA:

What?

JOSEPH:

It's not here.

I mean, it's not on here anywhere now.

NARRATOR (JOSEPH)

I examine the rest of the drone and it's definitely broken in all the same ways as the one that Antonia shot down.

JOSEPH:

Hang on...

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

I shine the flashlight directly onto the spot on the drone where I'm sure the sticker was at.

JOSEPH:

So...there's definitely some residue on here though. It's like when you pull a sticker off of something.

ANTONIA:

That's weird.

JOSEPH:

Yeah.

ANTONIA:

Has anyone else had the drone with them, since you grabbed it?

JOSEPH:

Yeah.

ANTONIA:

I wonder why they'd want the sticker...

JOSEPH:

Yeah, me too.

Hey Antonia, can I call you back? I need to check a couple of things real quick.

ANTONIA:

Sure. Everything okay?

JOSEPH:

Yeah. Yeah, I just need to do a couple of things.

(Groans) I'm sorry... I didn't even ask you how *you're* doing.

ANTONIA:

That's okay. I'm fine.

JOSEPH:

Okay, I'll call you back in just a bit.

ANTONIA:

I'll be around.

JOSEPH:

Okay, bye.

ANTONIA:

Bye.

(Sound of phone hanging up)

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

I've got that bad feeling again. The one I had when I asked for the background check on Salvador, and then when I found out about Kim's association with R. A. Hastings.

(Sound of handling boxes)

I examine each of the jewelry boxes carefully, in order of when I found them. I never questioned their authenticity. Each looks genuinely tattered and worn, and each was found under roots. Each, now that I think about it, except for the last one—in Cumberland. It was buried in sand and easier to get out of the ground.

JOSEPH:  
Hmph.

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):  
I turn the Cumberland box over in my hands, looking on all sides and the lid for anything that might seem off.

When I turn the box over, to examine its base, I notice in one corner a small, faint rectangular area that's just barely different in color from the rest of it, as if something used to be there. I touch it, and it's very slightly sticky.

JOSEPH:  
(Exhales) (Really?)

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):  
Now that I *really* look at the box, it does look old, like the others, but it looks like it could have been *made* to look old. Perhaps a lot older than it really is.

(Sound of opening, closing drawer)

I grab a screwdriver from a nearby drawer and use it to pry the sides and the base apart.

(Sound of box being pulled apart)

I pull away the cloth that lines the sides and the base, but I don't see anything unusual.

I cringe knowing that I may be destroying something very special and sacred to my quest. But now, I can't help myself.

JOSEPH:  
(Exhales) So, the lid...

NARRATOR (JOSEPH)  
I examine both sides of the lid, especially its underside, the side lined with cloth. I shine my phone's flashlight on it, and notice that in one corner, the cloth is attached slightly differently than it is elsewhere. There's a tiny staple holding it in place.

(Sound of drawer opening and closing)

I get a pocket knife out of the same nearby drawer and slip the thin blade under the staple, and pry it out.

(Sound of prying staple out)

After I do, about a half inch of fabric hangs loosely.

JOSEPH:

Hmph.

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

I use the blade to cut open a slightly wider hole, and shine the flashlight inside between the fabric and the inside of the lid. And then I see it: A small white RFID tag, like those used in retail stores to track items, attached to the inside of the lid behind the cloth.

(Sound of tearing cloth)

I tear the rest of the cloth off, and see something else stamped to the inside of the lid. It reads...

JOSEPH:

Ted's Treasure House. Copyright 2019.

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

Ted's Treasure House. The same store that Mel said she got the costumes from.

(Sound of Joseph leaving garage and walking back through house)

(Sound of Joseph sitting at desk and typing on laptop)

I pull up the folder on my personal cloud storage that I downloaded all of the traffic cam footage into. I scan the video file names for their time stamps.

I take a guess and open up a file that is chronologically later in the series. I watch it for several seconds. I see the lunchtime crowd moving in both directions on both sidewalks on either side of Westlake Avenue, and cars and trucks and buses making their way on the road. I see the tiny dot in the sky above the street. But the camera vantage is too far from the crosswalk, so I close it and try the next video file in the folder.

JOSEPH:

Okay...

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

This file is also about two minutes long. The camera is aimed right at the intersection from above and at an angle, probably atop a traffic signal pole. The details alternate between blurry and crisp, but it's similar to the other one.

(Fade in sound of traffic noises, footsteps on sidewalk)

People moving on sidewalks, traffic coming and going.

I spot the red headphones, coming into the frame at about 30 seconds. Then I see myself in my costume start to step into the crosswalk, just as a car approaches. I see myself quickly leap out of the way, rolling on the pavement. I see the red headphones quickly jockey for position among the crowd, as if trying to get close to the scene, but not *too* close. I see the door of the Datsun 280z open, and then close...

(Sound of car speeding away)

...and then the car maneuvers around me and speeds away.

(Sound of crowd gathering and taking pictures on smartphones)

I see people start to gather near the scene, taking out their cameras to capture the moment. I see myself in the crosswalk, reattaching the eyebrow and getting my bearings. I see a person run up to me from within the crowd, standing next to me and asking if I need help.

(Fade out all street sounds)

JOSEPH:

(Inhales/exhales) I really hope I don't see what I think I'm gonna to see next.

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

I stare out the window at Lake Washington beyond my beach. Boats of all sizes and varieties are starting to gather and drop anchor in the small bay outside Husky Stadium, to sailgate for the football game that starts later this afternoon.

(Sound of tapping pen on desk)

(Sound of Joseph exhaling)

(Sound of clicking on video again)

I go back 15 seconds in the video so I can see where in the crowd the person who offered me help came from. They have a blue jacket on, so they're easy to track. They start on the sidewalk, on the right edge of the frame.



(Sound of Joseph clicking mouse)

JOSEPH:  
There.

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):  
I pause the video and zoom in on the frame. It's grainy and heavily pixelated, but I can see the person in the blue jacket is standing next to a woman, whose fashion sense looks eerily familiar.

(Sound of Joseph clicking mouse)

(Fade in sound of busy street)

I advance the video slowly, frame by frame. The woman extends her arm to the person in the blue jacket...

JOSEPH:  
She's handing it to him.

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):  
...and he does the same to her. The person in the blue jacket then runs to my aid. Several seconds later he goes to find my glasses, at my request. It would be easy to miss because it happens so fast, but because I know what I'm looking for, I see a small white object replace the glasses on the pavement, right at the moment he picks up the glasses to bring them to me.

I replay in my head my conversations with Mel in the immediate aftermath of me fleeing the crosswalk and hiding in the bathroom at Roasted.

MEL FROM CHAPTER 2 FOOTAGE:  
I saw what happened. Are you alright?

JOSEPH:  
I saw what happened...

JOSEPH FROM CHAPTER 2 FOOTAGE:  
Mel, can you come to me and help me get back to the office, quietly?

MEL FROM CHAPTER 2 FOOTAGE:  
I'm already on my way.

JOSEPH:  
Yeah, if you were near me the whole time!

JOSEPH FROM CHAPTER 2 FOOTAGE:

Maybe if I get back to work unnoticed, this all goes away. I mean, nobody knows I'm here, right?

MEL FROM CHAPTER 2 FOOTAGE:

I'll be there in five minutes.

JOSEPH:

She didn't...answer the question!

(Sound of throwing pen on desk)

(Sound of breathing)

Unbelievable...

So now what am I supposed to...believe?!?

Is this all a joke?!?

Is any of this for real?!?

(Sound of pounding fist on desk)

What are you up to Mel...

(Sound of Coinmaster making same pulsating sounds from night before)

Oh now, don't you start!

I didn't even switch you on!

(Sound of Joseph violently clearing papers off his desk)

Argh!

(Sound of Joseph breathing)

JOSEPH:

Time to tear this stupid detector open, and find out what's really going on!

(Montage of dialogue from previous chapters)

CARLA:

Well it looks to me like you're trying to hide.

SALVADOR:

Yeah, my mom always said don't trust anybody.

BECKY:

Maybe they'd want to know where *you're* hiding out tonight!

ILA:

Are you ready to get started?

ANTONIA:

Thank you for returning my license, Joseph.

CARL:

That ding-dang detector pulled you.

MARIA:

But...she was married, you know.

KIM:

Stop...being a little prick!

SALVADOR:

Do you have your doubts?

KENJI:

Alright kids, say goodbye to uncle Joseph.

MEL:

I'll handle it.

CARL:

Woah woah woah there buddy.

SALVADOR:

We want to say how sorry we are to hear about your parents.

ANTONIA:

Why is she talking about you having a mustache?

MEL:

You want to take a walk.

(Fade out all sounds)

[End chapter]

[End season 2]

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