

DIRT - AN AUDIO DRAMA  
Chapter 16 Transcript  
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**\*\*Warning\*\***

**This is a complete written transcript of the entire Chapter 16 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>

(Fade in sound of being inside car while driving slowly on gravel)

(Sound of stopping car and turning off engine)

(Sound of smartphone assistant engaging)

JOSEPH:  
Where is RA Hastings headquartered?

(Sound of smartphone assistant disengaging)

SMARTPHONE ASSISTANT:  
Which of these do you mean? RA Hastings Incorporated or RA Hastings?

JOSEPH:  
They're not...the same?

(Sound of smartphone assistant tone)

SMARTPHONE ASSISTANT:  
I found these on the Interwebs for you.

JOSEPH:  
(Laughs) Interwebs?

(Sound of knocking on car window)

ANTONIA:  
(From outside car) You coming?

JOSEPH:  
Oh, yep! Sorry...

(Sound of opening and closing car door)

(Sound of Joseph and Antonia walking on gravel together)

JOSEPH:  
Just checking a few things.

(Sound of opening farmhouse door and walking into farmhouse)

SALVADOR:  
It's about time.

ANTONIA:  
(Laughs) Hello Papa.

SALVADOR:  
I'm starving.

JOSEPH:  
Hello Mr. Flores. Hi Mrs. Flores!

MARIA:  
Hello Joey! Okay you know what to do. Go get washed up!

SALVADOR:  
I already did.

MARIA:  
I was talking to those two...

SALVADOR:  
Okay. Hey, hurry up.

JOSEPH:  
(Laughs) You first?

ANTONIA:  
Sure.

(Sound of Antonia walking to bathroom, closing door)

SALVADOR:

Joseph, why didn't you tell us you were the jaywalker guy?

JOSEPH:

(Laughs) Yeah, sorry about that. I guess it didn't seem important at the time.

SALVADOR:

Well, we're sorry to hear about your job. Unless, of course, *you're* not sorry. Because since you're unemployed, I have some things you can help me with here. Like, right away. Starting tomorrow.

JOSEPH:

(Chuckles) Oh, I'm not ready to re-enter the workforce *just* yet...

(Sound of Antonia walking over)

ANTONIA:

All yours.

JOSEPH:

Okay. Be right back.

(Sound of walking to bathroom)

(Sound of being inside bathroom and closing door)

(Sound of turning on water at sink)

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

Before I wash my hands, I look at the web results on my smartphone.

JOSEPH:

RA Hastings Incorporated is an industrial conglomerate based in Stockton, California.

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

I also see that RA Hastings is a retired agricultural tycoon and former lawyer, who lives in Menlo Park, California.

JOSEPH:

Huh. He's still around.

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

I tap the link for RA Hastings the person, and quickly see that in 1965, as a young law school graduate, Roderick Augustus Hastings founded RA Hastings, Inc., at the age of 26. There's a photo of him that looks like it was taken in the eighties or nineties.

JOSEPH:

Woah...

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

Then I see something that makes the hair on the back of my neck stand straight up.

JOSEPH:

RA Hastings was born in the tiny town of Harrah, Washington. That's like...ten minutes from here!

(Sound of knocking on door)

JOSEPH:

Yeah?

SALVADOR:

(From other side of door) Hey! Don't use up all our water in there.

JOSEPH:

Ha, coming...

(Sound of turning off water, drying hands)

(Sound of opening door and walking to table, sitting at table)

MARIA:

I hope stir fry is okay. They were having a sale. I have three more bags in the freezer.

SALVADOR:

(Laughs)

JOSEPH:

Ah, it looks great. Thank you, Mrs. Flores.

MARIA:

You are sooo welcome, Joey. So, I heard you had an exciting week!

ANTONIA:

(Laughs)

JOSEPH:

(Chuckles) I guess that's one way to put it.

SALVADOR:

Tonita here has kept us up to date on everything.

JOSEPH:

Everything?

ANTONIA:

I mean, just the basics, about your job and stuff. Hey, my dad wants to hire you. Did he offer you a job already?

JOSEPH:

(Chuckles) Yeah, about three minutes ago.

ANTONIA:

(Laughs)

SALVADOR:

Yeah, we're taking out the grapes on the west end and planting new ones. Jorge and Mateo will tackle it first thing tomorrow, with another crew joining Tuesday. I decided to give them the weekend off.

MARIA:

Mmm, they already had the weekend off, mi vida.

SALVADOR:

I guess you're right again.

JOSEPH:

(Chuckles)

MARIA:

So Joey, have you found more of those treasure boxes?

JOSEPH:

I have. Three more since I was here.

MARIA:

My goodness. What a strange thing Aimo did for you.

JOSEPH:

Yeah.

SALVADOR:

And you have to find three more, right? Six total?

JOSEPH:

Yeah. That's what the note in the box that I found here on the farm says.

SALVADOR:

Well, I guess you have lots of time to do that now.

JOSEPH:

I guess so. I'm planning to head to Wilson Creek tomorrow.

SALVADOR:

Wilson Creek?

JOSEPH

That's right.

SALVADOR:

Where Ernesto worked for a summer...

JOSEPH:

According to one of Aimo's stories, it's where they met. Back in the late forties.

SALVADOR:

Yeah. Building that dam. Huh.

MARIA:

Oh, here you go, Joey.

JOSEPH:

Oh, thank you.

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

Even though my mind is still consumed by the events of the last couple of days, like: discovering that Aimo's coins are exceptionally valuable; that the detector is apparently completely normal; that the police might question Mel and that *I* am their anonymous source; that Mel might be on to my dumb surveillance attempt; that somebody intentionally punctured my car's tires; that the Inner Six is desperate for me to respond to them about something—which, as far as I'm concerned, can wait until tomorrow; *and* that Antonia *still* doesn't know if her dad is secretly

trying to buy the property next door. Even with all of this, just as with the last time I ate dinner at this table, I feel calmer here.

I listen to updates about all seven of Salvador and Maria's grandchildren. Antonia mentions that one of them has started playing soccer, which at this table, they refer to as *futbol*. I learn that one of the nearby irrigation canals is scheduled to be re-dug and rerouted during the winter. And a new trucking route through the valley is close to being approved by multiple city councils.

Even though these three see each other every day, I'm amazed how it seems like they never run out of things to say to each other—which makes me realize just how much I miss the close interaction of family and conversations about the mundane details of daily life that have nothing to do with quarterly forecasts, picky clients, or high-stakes buyouts.

JOSEPH:

You know, I noticed when we turned onto Kays Road that the old Midway Market is closed. Did that just happen?

SALVADOR:

No, it shut down a little while ago. Uh, maybe a couple years back? Is that right?

MARIA:

Yes, in 2018. It's just been sitting there empty.

JOSEPH:

Yeah, it looked all boarded up.

SALVADOR:

Yeah, I remember you guys used to ride your bikes to the Midway to get those...ice drinks things...?

ANTONIA:

Slushees...

SALVADOR:

Huh?

ANTONIA:

They're called slushees.

SALVADOR:

Oh. Slushees.

ANTONIA:

(Chuckles)

SALVADOR:

I think they're gonna put another strip mall there. Just what we need.

MARIA:

We used to buy feed there sometimes too, when it was on sale. A lot of things like that have changed around here.

JOSEPH:

Yeah, I bet you both have seen a lot of changes here over the years.

MARIA:

Oh yes...

SALVADOR:

Mmm hmm. But you know, I don't think this valley is ever the same one generation to the next. I mean, take this farm.

JOSEPH:

What about it?

SALVADOR:

The land we're on belonged to the Yakama people, going way back, I guess, forever. It still does. But even before we got it, there was a Japanese family here.

JOSEPH:

Here on the farm?

SALVADOR:

Yeah. They were sent away to a camp with all of the other Japanese families.

JOSEPH:

Oh, right. Yeah, I knew a lot of families around Seattle were forced to leave. But it happened here, too?

SALVADOR:

Oh, it did. And afterward, most of them didn't come back. There was bad blood between the Japanese and the white settlers for years. Mostly it was about who had access to the best farms. But of course, it was about other things, too. And then, later on, when the Mexican workers started coming here, there were conflicts too. You still see some of that today. It's a complicated place. Did you know there was a German POW camp here too? Not far from here.

JOSEPH:

No. No, I didn't know that.

SALVADOR:

Yep. Actual German soldiers.

JOSEPH:

Huh. So how much do you know about the Japanese family that had this property? Before Aimo and Ernesto bought it?

SALVADOR:

Mmm, you know...not very much. Do you, Maria?

MARIA:

No. But as you were saying, this whole area west of the river still belongs to the Yakamas. Even though so many different people live and farm here these days.

SALVADOR:

(Clears throat) Yeah. And now we have all the wine people coming here, with their fancy tasting rooms...

ANTONIA:

(Laughs) Those are mostly on the other side of the freeway.

SALVADOR:

Close enough.

JOSEPH:

I guess all that doesn't leave much room for a farm like yours to get bigger.

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

From the corner of my eye, I catch Antonia looking over at me, cautiously.

SALVADOR:

That's true. We've had to make do with the same acreage all these years. But we try to get the most out of what we have.

MARIA:

Mmm.

SALVADOR:

We are very lucky they made good choices at the beginning, with the irrigation and how they laid everything out. They planned this farm really well. And we try to continue with that.

JOSEPH:

You know, I've always been curious about the property up the hill from here. Where you found the tractor.

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

I see Salvador and Maria exchange a glance. And I get the sense that if Antonia could kick me under the table, she would.

JOSEPH:

How is it still undeveloped after all these years?

MARIA:

Oh Joey. There are a lot of stories about that land.

JOSEPH:

Like what?

SALVADOR:

Lots of people have wanted to buy it. But nobody has been able to.

JOSEPH:

Because...

MARIA:

It's held in a land trust, for one.

JOSEPH:

Has that always been the case?

SALVADOR:

Yes, since 1951.

JOSEPH:

Huh. The same year that *this* farm was started.

SALVADOR:

That's right. You remember.

JOSEPH:

I do remember. So, who started the land trust?

SALVADOR:

Mmm it was a generic company name. A non-profit with a local PO box number. It actually

changed hands one time, in the nineteen eighties. But the terms have always remained the same.

JOSEPH:

What do you mean the terms?

SALVADOR:

I just mean nothing really changed, just the trustee.

JOSEPH:

Oh. So, the trustee... Was it...

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

I'm tempted to say RA Hastings out loud, just to see what kind of reaction I'd get. But I stop myself.

JOSEPH:

(Chuckles) Sorry. I don't know why I would even guess who it is.

SALVADOR:

Kind of like how you tried to guess the code for our security gate.

MARIA AND ANTONIA:

(Laugh)

JOSEPH:

(Laugh) Haha.

SALVADOR:

It's probably just an investment group, saving it for something later.

MARIA:

We don't mind that it's empty in a lot of ways. It's good for us to not have another farm so close. It's nice to have the privacy.

JOSEPH:

Yeah. Oh, you said *stories*. So, are there more?

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

Maria and Salvador make eye contact again. Salvador nods knowingly at her.

MARIA:

It's also just...not an easy place to be at.

JOSEPH:

What do you mean? Like it's not easy to get to?

MARIA:

Well...access *is* restricted. It is private property, so we respect that. No, it's...it's more than that.

SALVADOR:

It doesn't feel good up there.

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

I look over again at Antonia. She meets my gaze, but she doesn't say anything.

SALVADOR:

You can feel it, when you cross the property line. It's...different. We keep our fence well-maintained for a reason. We don't want anyone or any of our animals to stray up there.

JOSEPH:

(Scoffs) I don't think I've ever heard of land not *feeling good* before. You mean, like, it's painful?

MARIA:

It's not pain exactly. It's actually very lovely to look at. There's just a difficult feeling near it. Like you should not be there.

SALVADOR:

I think it's cursed!

JOSEPH:

What? *Cursed*? (Laughs) Do you get this feeling too?

ANTONIA:

I do.

JOSEPH:

So, is this just the three of you? Or is this a thing that people know about around here?

SALVADOR:

Some do I suppose. Our workers do for sure. But it's hard for anyone to access the property since we share an easement from Kays Road. And as you know, Joseph, not just anybody can come up our driveway these days.

JOSEPH:

Ha. Has this feeling been around for a long time?

MARIA:

As long as I can remember.

SALVADOR:

Yes.

JOSEPH:

Did Ernesto ever talk about it?

SALVADOR:

He did. Sternly, when I was young. He just said, "That land is not for us."

JOSEPH:

(Scoffs) Not for you... Well, that's interesting...

SALVADOR:

What does that mean?

ANTONIA:

We think that's why the tractor got stuck up there.

JOSEPH:

You mean, the one you restored...

ANTONIA:

Yeah.

JOSEPH:

So, like the property somehow...broke the tractor?

SALVADOR:

The maintenance records on that tractor are *very* detailed. We have all the ledgers from back then. And those Farmalls were *very* reliable, especially when taken care of.

MARIA:

There's a note in the maintenance log from Horacio from...when was it?

ANTONIA:

November, 1952. Horacio was the foreman at the time. He wrote, "Brief drive onto the property and stopped working."

SALVADOR:

When they were up there working on the fence, it just quit. Completely!

ANTONIA:

And there's another note that says, "Agreed to leave in place."

JOSEPH:

But the last time I was here...you said they must have left the tractor there because it wasn't needed anymore.

MARIA:

Yes, that's what we thought.

ANTONIA/MARIA:

But...

ANTONIA:

Oh, sorry, mama.

MARIA:

It's okay Mija, go ahead.

ANTONIA:

Your visit last week made us rethink some things.

SALVADOR:

They weren't the type to just leave something on someone else's property. I mean, that would have been illegal to begin with. Joseph, your surprise visit, which of course wasn't a *complete* surprise since we had that letter all those years... It shook things up for us. And not just you showing up, but you finding that metal detector in the barn? And then that box in the ground. Plus, Antonia here telling us that people might be spying on you now?

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

I look over at Antonia. She meets my gaze again, and holds it.

JOSEPH:

How I *found* the detector... It was just sitting there, practically in plain sight for me to see! So, you're saying you didn't put it there? (Exhales) Well if you didn't... None of this is making any sense!

MARIA:

It's hard for us to understand too, Joey.

SALVADOR:

We've been here a long time, Joseph. Me, my whole life. And Maria nearly as long. Most of the time it's very normal here. And perfect. But there's also been strange things.

ANTONIA:

Now we wonder if “Agreed to leave in place” might have been an agreement between Ernesto and whoever was the trustee back then. Because they *literally* couldn’t move it.

JOSEPH:

Literally couldn’t move it... Why does that distinction suddenly matter?

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

Salvador, Maria, and Antonia all look at each other.

SALVADOR:

It matters because the tractor is stuck up there again.

(End scene)

(Ad break)

(Fade in sound of being inside a truck while driving on gravel road)

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

After hearing that the tractor is stuck up on the property again, I pretty much demand to go see it, right then and there. They seem eager to go as well, so we leave our plates on the table and pile into Salvador’s large four-door pickup truck and drive for a few minutes up the access road towards the edge of the property.

It’s been dark now for hours, and cold. Just as it should be on the first night in November in the chilly interior of Washington state.

As we get closer, from my backseat vantage next to Antonia I can see the truck’s headlights start to reflect off the long, barbed-wire fence that divides the two properties. There’s a double-door gate in the fence that the access road leads to, that looks to be just big enough for a vehicle to pass through when it’s open. And beyond and uphill from the fence, large sagebrush plants are also illuminated by the truck’s bright beams.

(Sound of stopping truck and turning off engine)

JOSEPH:

Why did you drive the tractor back up here?

ANTONIA:

To test a theory.

(Sound of truck door opening)

JOSEPH:  
Right.

(Sound of other truck doors opening and closing)

(Sound of being outside on the farm at night)

(Sound of four people walking on gravel)

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

We each carry flashlights that Maria found for us back at the farmhouse, and Salvador keeps the truck headlights on, to make the entire scene more visible. From up here, there's a broad view of the valley below, and the surrounding hills.

MARIA:

(Rubbing hands) I bet we get some frost tonight.

SALVADOR:

(In Spanish) (Talks to Maria about making sure chicken coop is warm enough for the cold night)

MARIA:

(In Spanish) (Talks to Salvador to let him know she already checked)

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

The rising full moon is still low in the sky.

SALVADOR:

Okay. Gracias Corazon.

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

And hidden behind a huge and glowing cumulus cloud. The restored Farmall A tractor sits maybe twenty feet beyond the closed gate, looking shiny in the light of the headlights with its new paint job.

I can also just barely see that the well-maintained access road becomes much more of a primitive road not far beyond the gate. And farther up, I see the shadowy outline of a wash that begins somewhere higher, up the hill.

(Sound of stopping walking)

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

When we get to the fence gate, there's a palpable feeling of being very small compared to the vast expanse of empty land and starry night sky all around us.

SALVADOR:

So it ran just fine until Antonia drove it to where you see it now. Then it just shut down. We tried everything to get it started. Even had Martín look at it. There's nothing wrong with it!

JOSEPH:

So...how did you manage to retrieve it the *first* time?

SALVADOR:

You mean before we restored it?

JOSEPH:

Yeah.

SALVADOR:

Yeah, it was not easy. First, we had to dig it out because the wash had covered it up over the years. And then we brought a small crane up here to lift it onto a trailer. Then we brought it down to the main shop by the office.

MARIA:

Everyone who was working on that side of the fence couldn't wait to get back over here.

JOSEPH:

Right. Because it's cursed...

SALVADOR:

I think they knew how we feel about it.

JOSEPH:

So, why *did* you try to retrieve it? I mean, if there was an agreement to leave it in place...

ANTONIA:

We got a letter from the current trustee.

JOSEPH:

Oh.

ANTONIA:

Well...my dad did.

JOSEPH:

Mmm hmm.

ANTONIA:

They asked if we would remove the tractor, for environmental and other reasons.

SALVADOR:

That was the first time we ever heard from them.

JOSEPH:

But not the last time.

SALVADOR:

What do you keep mumbling to yourself?

JOSEPH:

Oh, nothing. So, the trustee wanted it removed?

SALVADOR:

They did. Obviously, we have a lot better equipment than they did in the fifties. So, we knew we could get it out this time. Plus, I wanted it on the farm, as a keepsake.

MARIA:

Um, so you *do* admit that you just like looking at it.

ANTONIA:

(Laughs)

SALVADOR:

(Reacts) I guess I do. I mean, look at it.

(Sound of walking on gravel)

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

I step right up to the edge of the fence and stare beyond the tractor. Even though the moon is still obscured by patchy clouds, there's a gray glow to everything.

JOSEPH:

(Breathes in and out)

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

In the distance, I see the horizon line far up the hill. And immediately above it, what looks like a million stars.

I turn back around and see Antonia, Maria, and Salvador silhouetted against the truck's headlights. And in the distance, the lights of the farmhouse and Antonia's house, as well as dozens of other homes and structures lining Kays Road. And even further, the halogen glow of thousands of homes and businesses and highways, spread across the wide valley.

JOSEPH:  
(Chuckles)

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):  
I look at Antonia and smile. And then, I turn and step onto a rock near the fence that is a couple of feet high.

(Sound of Joseph jumping)

(Sound of Joseph landing on ground)

MARIA:  
(Gasps)

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):  
I land on the other side of the fence with ease.

JOSEPH:  
(Chuckles)

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):  
Again, I look up into the vastness of the empty property, surveying what I can.

SALVADOR:  
Joseph. Are you okay?

(Sound of getting phone out of pocket, tapping on phone screen)

JOSEPH:  
Phone seems to work fine over here.

SALVADOR:  
Yeah, I don't recall things like that having any problems over there.

JOSEPH:  
So does the trustee know the tractor is stuck over here again?

SALVADOR:  
Well, this just happened yesterday, so no. We haven't reached out to them yet.

JOSEPH:  
Hmm.

(Sound of walking on gravel)

(Sound of tapping on tractor)

JOSEPH:

So what makes a perfectly good tractor decide to stop running over here? Twice? (Shivers, rubs hands together) (Laughs) (Laughs again)

MARIA:

Joey, are you okay?

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

As Maria says this, the moon comes out from behind its cloud, and the ground and grasses and rocks and sagebrush all over the empty property light up as if covered with silver sawdust, in every direction.

I can make out what looks like a low structure far up in the distance, partially hidden among plants.

JOSEPH:

Woah. (Rubs hands)

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

I shiver again but this time not from the cold. I feel a kind of exhilaration growing in my entire body.

JOSEPH:

(Reacts) (Laughs)

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

I feel like I could run in every direction as far and as fast as I can. Like a bull let loose at a rodeo. Screaming and yelling, like an excited child.

JOSEPH:

Hoo! (Laughs) Oh man!

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

I turn around and try to explain this to the others. But as I do...

JOSEPH:

What the...

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

Something catches my eye in the sky on the opposite side of the valley.

JOSEPH:

Woah, what is *that*?

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

The three of them turn to look as several big, bright circles of light, some of them white and some reddish-orange, move steadily and silently together over a low mountain.

Joseph:

What are those?

(Sound of jumping back over the fence)

(Sound of walking on gravel)

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

The lights briefly hover over the peak of the mountain and appear to pulse or flash. And then, without warning, they spin up into the sky and disappear.

JOSEPH:

Woah.

MARIA:

Yeah, we see those once in a while too. Lots of people here do, and have for a long time.

SALVADOR:

(Laughs) Yep just one more thing to add to the list. Welcome to the Yakima Valley.

(End chapter)