

DIRT - AN AUDIO DRAMA  
Chapter 2 Transcript  
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**\*\*Warning\*\***

**This is a complete written transcript of the entire Chapter 2 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:

Dirt - An Audio Drama is a production of STUDIO5705. Chapter 2.

(Chime sound and strange musical wind followed by sounds of ocean waves and old boat engine)

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

I hear the woman and the man speaking in their strange language. She's cleaning up after breakfast, and he's tending to the boat's noisy engine—a strange engine, with large pipes and valves and wheels, like something out of a history museum. When he's satisfied with the pop and chug of the old Frisco Standard, he gazes out to sea and packs some tobacco in his pipe and lights it, sending aromatic puffs of blue smoke into the moist, marine air.

Several long poles extend over the port and starboard sides of the wooden trawler, with multiple fishing lines running off of each into the gray water. The man and the woman don't seem to notice me, even when I gesture at them. They go about their business: steering the boat, cleaning the salmon they've caught, opening and closing hatches. I observe them doing this for some time until I hear the woman say loudly, to her husband, "Tuola kaukana on pieni vene." She's pointing at something over the bow of the boat. Her husband walks forward to join her, and together they stare at the rolling waves.

Suddenly I'm standing directly behind them, straining to see what they see. And then I notice it. Something small, rising and falling, coming into and out of view with each giant wave crest. The woman turns to me, her eyes meeting mine for the first time, and says in words that I now understand: "There, far off, is a small boat."

I see its shape more clearly. It's flat, like a canoe. The man steers the trawler in its direction, and we strain to keep sight of it. Somehow, I know there's something in the boat that I need to see. Yet with each new sighting, as we rise to the top of the waves, the boat is tinier, and tinier.

We try to keep up with it, but it's drifting away. It seems to be on the edge of the world now, a tiny dot on the horizon. It drops below the line where the water meets the sky. And then, it's gone.

(Soft, dreamy alarm sound rising in background that turns into wake-up alarm, then sounds of Joseph suddenly awake in bed)

(Sound of coughs, stretches)

(Chime indicating smartphone's personal assistant being engaged)

JOSEPH:

Play something to get me going.

(Sound of smartphone being set down on night stand, rhythmic drum beat begins playing from phone speaker)

(Chime indicating smartphone's personal assistant being engaged)

Argh. Connect to speaker...

(Chime indicating smartphone connecting to house speaker, then much fuller rhythmic drum beat)

(Ongoing background sounds of Joseph getting out of bed and getting ready for work, in bathroom and in kitchen)

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

OK, before you point out all the obvious explanations to me about the letter that I showed Kim—like that maybe it had simply been held up in the mail all these years. And that *has actually happened*, by the way. Just the other day I read an article about pieces of mail that were delivered decades after they were sent. One letter in particular was sent by a mother in 1969 to a Brooklyn address, wishing her then 19-year-old daughter a happy birthday. It didn't arrive until 2014, *45 years late*—and long after the mother had passed on. So sure, that kind of thing happens sometimes. Letters get lost in the mail. But in my case, the letter I received from Aimo was sent to my current address—an address I've had for only for *two months*.

So...the next likely explanation: that somebody's messing with me. I mean, yeah, of course this could be it. The thing about the letter though, besides the generic courier typewriter font on the envelope, is that it's handwritten on my grandparents' stationery. That's part of the reason

Kim was so floored. We *all* know that stationary. When I was a kid, I received a *lot* of letters from my grandmother—as did Kim and Eric and everyone else. Vivian would write about the weather, about who had visited recently and what they were up to, which flowers were in bloom on her patio, those kinds of things. The stationery had her and Aimo’s names embossed at the top. I compared the letter I received ten days ago with a few of the letters from Vivian that I’ve kept over the years, and to my eye the stationary is the same. *And* the handwriting is just like Aimo’s, from what I’ve seen in letters that he sent to my parents and others. It even has their red rose embossed at the bottom of the stationery.

(Ongoing sounds of driving to work, pulling into parking garage and riding elevator and exiting elevator)

So, then, the third explanation: that somebody is acting on my grandfather’s behalf. Thirty years later. If Aimo really *did* write the letter and I’m not being pranked, this seems the most likely option—that he wrote it back in the eighties and left instructions with someone to deliver it to me at a specific time. But who would that be? And how would they know me today? And why wait thirty years? And if the someone who’s doing this knows my current address, what else do they know? And what else might they be planning?

My brain won’t let any of this go. Instead of being laser-focused like I usually am on Monday mornings, I walk into my first meeting of the day dreading to know what’s hidden in a small wooden boat, adrift at sea.

(Sounds of chatter in a room before a work meeting)

Angela hands me a brief at the door: two pages of project objectives and audience insights. We’re doing a fast-turn project for a new client. A potentially *huge* new client. I don’t normally get this involved in day-to-day deliverables anymore, but if we kill this, *and* if we don’t kill ourselves with infighting on the team, it should lead to a very nice contract.

Molecular is observing us in action from their Berlin office for the first time today, to evaluate our methodology. So the stakes are doubly high to perform at our best.

(Sound of meeting door closing, meeting getting started)

JOSEPH:

Okay everybody. Grab your seats. Let’s do this.

PROJECT MANAGER:

Is room B ready?

Robert

Checking right now... Bingo.

PROJECT MANAGER:  
Is Molecular patched in?

JOSEPH:  
Looks like...yes.

ROBERT:  
OK we're running.

ILA:  
(In adjoining room, heard via speaker) Are you ready to get started?

TEST SUBJECT (HELEN):  
(Also in adjoining room, heard via speaker) I sure am. What is it I'll be doing exactly?

(Sound of someone in main room laughing at Helen's comment)

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):  
There are four others here in Room A, and through the one-way mirror in front of us I can see Ila, who's our information architect, and the test subject sitting at a small desk in the much brighter adjoining room. Ila has her laptop open, and its screen reflects in her glasses every time she looks at it. On the desk in front of the test subject is a smartphone. Everything that happens on the phone is displayed on the large monitor in *our* room. Robert, who's sitting a couple of desks in front of me, types something into a messaging app on his laptop and Ila acknowledges it.

ILA:  
OK Helen, looks like we're all set. I'm going to hand you this phone...here you go...and I'm going to ask you to accomplish certain tasks today. I'm not going to tell you *how* to accomplish them, that's up to you. There's no time limit and absolutely no pressure. I can answer questions if you need me to, but I'd prefer that you try to work out the solution by yourself. Does that sound ok?

HELEN:  
Sure. Wow, this is a nice phone, definitely better than the old clunker I have. Guess it's time for an upgrade, or update, or...whatever they call it!

ILA:  
(Politely laughs) Yeah.

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):  
The point of the test is to determine the efficacy of our prototype. Specifically, the client asked us to come up with a solution that adds clarity and that reduces the number of steps needed for users to access things on the app. And by extension, to remedy all the one-star ratings and

crushingly bad reviews the app has been getting. Our prototype was built by Ila and a developer, under Angela's supervision.

ILA:

OK, now, what does this first screen feel like to you?

HELEN:

Well, it looks like a home page, basically. Like a summary of all the... (keeps talking but voice becomes unintelligible under narrator)

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

Ila is the youngest person on our team, just a few months out of grad school. We recruited her pretty hard, as did our competition. Aside from her outstanding master's thesis on Emerging Behaviors in Digital Currency, she shows a lot of leadership potential. Angela, our most senior project lead, hasn't taken as kindly to Ila's quickly rising star and fresh ideas. The two have been butting heads over which direction to go in with the prototype, with Ila's solutions thus far winning over the team. So that's mainly why I'm here. To keep the peace. Particularly since Molecular is watching. But it hasn't been easy. Especially with Angela.

ILA:

Okay, now, let's say that the main reason you're using the app is because you need to find the results of a recent lab test.

HELEN:

Lab tests. Those are on the app?

ILA:

Yeah. Well, lab results...

HELEN:

Wow. Well, I see on the home screen there are three buttons. One says My Prescriptions, one says...My Coverage Details... (keeps talking but voice becomes unintelligible under narrator)

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

On the monitor in our room, we see that she selects My Medical History. Angela, who's been still as a statue up to this point, begins writing in her notebook.

ILA:

OK, now, can you describe for me the screen that the app took you to?

HELEN:

Oooooo. Ooooooo! I like this. Everything is presented so...it's simple. It's different than the rest. Did *you* design it this way?

(Sound of pen landing on notebook and frustrated sigh)

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

Without even glancing her way, I can tell Angela has that look on her face.

HELEN:

Should we click and find out if Jane has herpes?

(Sound of sudden laughter among people listening in main meeting room)

ANGELA:

Tell Ila to go back to the home page and ask the subject how she would go about *printing out* her lab results.

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

Two people in front of us turn around, startled by Angela's voice. Robert obediently types a message to Ila. Ila looks at her laptop, then quickly at the window toward us, then back at the laptop.

ILA:

Well, hopefully Jane doesn't have herpes.

(Sound of laughter from people in main meeting room)

But...let's try one more thing. Let's go back to the home screen again. Okay, good. Now, let's say you want to print out the lab results, maybe to share with your spouse or partner. From here in the app, how would you go about doing that?

HELEN:

Well I guess I'd click... (Laughs at self) I keep saying click, don't I? Is it tap? Or press?

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

Ila is typing on her laptop. A moment later, Robert turns to face Angela.

ROBERT:

She says we haven't gotten that far with the prototype yet.

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

Angela raises her eyebrows.

ANGELA:

I thought the prototype was test-ready. I guess it's not. Looks like we'll have to pause until all the bugs can be worked out.

PROJECT MANAGER:

Umm, I don't think that's a bug. Printing isn't part of the testing regimen today—

ANGELA:

We need to be ready to test all scenarios, otherwise we're just wasting company time bringing people in too early.

PROJECT MANAGER:

But—

ANGELA:

Printing is on the list of value-adds we're taking back to the client, correct?

ROBERT:

Yes.

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

We all know where this is going. Angela is going to push for another round of revisions, which means more testing, a missed deadline, probably going over budget, an unexpected conversation with Molecular, and more tension on the team.

So much for making a positive first impression. She's not wrong, but it's not what we need right now.

ANGELA:

I'm sorry Joseph, I was given the impression that we were ready to go. *Clearly*, we are not.

HELEN:

Hmmm, I'm looking....and I don't see a way to print from here.

(Sound of tapping of pen on table)

JOSEPH:

How many more features are we adding?

PROJECT MANAGER:

Nine.

JOSEPH:

And how many more tests scheduled?

PROJECT MANAGER:

Eleven, today and tomorrow.

JOSEPH:

(Exhales) Okay, let's cancel the rest of the tests for today. Printing isn't a deal-breaker, but I agree we should get all the additional features into the prototype and *then* test everything concurrently. And no later than one week from today. I'll handle talking to the client. Everyone clear?

(Sounds of meeting ending and people exiting room)

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

Robert types into his messaging screen and Ila looks up at us through the window again. She can't see me, so it's no use giving her a look of understanding. Instead, I turn to Angela and ask her to be in my office in 10 minutes.

ILA:

OK Helen, that's all we need for today. I really appreciate your time.

HELEN:

Oh that was fast. Is that it? Oh honey, you don't look too happy. Did I pass the test?

ILA:

Oh, you did just fine, Helen. Yes, you passed.

(Meeting background sounds fade out)

\* \*

(Background music)

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

Maybe you were hoping our prototype would be something a little more interesting, like a super-secret, classified tool for the NSA. Or maybe something shadowy, for an under-the-radar tech start-up with reams of non-disclosure agreements. The truth is, we *do* do some of that secret stuff, but most of what we do is pretty routine. Companies hire us when things are broken. We take what they have, and make it better. We apply behavioral science. We test, we iterate, we test some more. If you actually *enjoy* logging in and paying your utility bill—or don't mind getting reminded to take the vitamins that you ordered from a supplements app—that's probably because of us.

I won't recount my whole conversation with Angela except to say I made it clear I thought calling out Ila in front of everyone over such a small detail was petty. I've worked with Angela for a long time and we can be blunt with each other. *She* told *me* that I was favoring Ila, and that *I* really needed to think about what "fair" means. Fair enough. But I reminded Angela that

Ila was intentionally given more responsibility on this project so we could see how she'd respond. I'd hoped that Angela would handle the whole thing better. When she stormed out of my office, it left a pit in my already churning stomach.

(New background music, sounds of being in busy office)

MEL:

You want to take a walk.

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

That's my assistant, Mel. She's...unique. I've had some assistants who were routinely two, or maybe five, steps behind. Mel is different. Mel is usually steps ahead.

MEL:

You seem distracted. Plus, I overheard some of your chat with Angela.

JOSEPH:

Yeah. Not how I planned to spend my morning.

MEL:

I ordered lunch for you. It'll be here in an hour, after you get back.

JOSEPH:

How do you do that?

MEL:

I just ordered it off a website.

JOSEPH:

No, I mean, how do you know what's gonna happen before it happens? It's like you're *future* Mel.

MEL:

Just be careful. Last time you took a walk you had five people stop you for selfies. You're supposed to keep a low profile.

JOSEPH:

It wasn't a PR stunt, I promise.

MEL:

Okay. Well, I've been saving this for the right time. If you're going to take a walk...

(Sound of crinkling plastic)

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

Mel hands me a clear package that I can see right away has round-rimmed sunglasses in it, along with a moustache, beard, and sideburns.

JOSEPH:

An early Halloween gift? You're joking...

MEL:

Do I look like I'm joking?

JOSEPH:

No. Come to think of it, you rarely do.

(Sound of footsteps leaving area, music fading out)

\* \*

(Sound of elevator door opening and riding in elevator, elevator door opening again and walking into parking garage)

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

I take the elevator down to the parking garage. It's easier to exit the building from here without being noticed. I really don't like keeping a low profile, but with my dating life making the news, plus Molecular being super sensitive to media attention that isn't strictly business, our PR department has us on alert. Me, specifically. So much so, that even a casual walk down the street is frowned upon.

(Sound of opening car door and getting inside)

To humor Mel, I stop at my car and use the rearview mirror to put on the sunglasses, mustache, beard, and eyebrows—yep, there are eyebrows too—mostly so I can send her a selfie. But the disguise actually doesn't look as fake as I thought, so I keep it on.

(Sound of opening car door and getting back out, then walking in parking garage)

I leave my car and wave to the parking attendant, who shakes his head at my appearance and gives me an "I don't want to know" look, as I step out of the garage and onto the sidewalk.

(Sounds of walking outside on busy sidewalk with car, bus, and light rail noises all around)

I've lived in this city for most of my life and still, when Seattle goes full summer—and I'm talking blue sky, puffy white clouds, and a scorching 82 degrees—it still surprises me how beautiful it

is. But that was a couple months ago. Today it's a normal October day: light rain and a cool 54 degrees. It'll be like this for most of the next five months.

Our office is located in Belltown, the part of downtown that's changed the most in the last 15 years. What once was a gritty neighborhood of low-rent, dated apartments and storefronts with high crime is now the home of Christian Grey from the *50 Shades* series. Glassy new high-rises tower over crowded eateries and urban dog parks. Busy millennials, thousands of them, many of them tech employees, crowd the surrounding streets during lunch hour with badges clipped to their pockets. A streetcar runs through it all the way down Westlake Avenue, passing biotech firms, stylish home furnishings stores, vegan restaurants, artfully designed food trucks, urban supermarkets, and more.

Belltown is the postcard for Seattle's extreme gentrification. Yet elements of its rough past persist. Heroin needles, for one. And people in need, asking for help on street corners or napping in alcoves and covered entrances to buildings.

And then there's my personal favorite—not because I'm a patron, but because it's basically a giant middle finger to the world around it: an adult emporium, right across the street from where I'm walking, painted bright pink with an equally bright LED sign right out front, located steps away from the beating heart of the Prime delivery empire. With this dumb disguise on that Mel gave me—oh, yeah, I'm still wearing it, and so far, I've stayed anonymous—I guess if ever there *was* a time to pay a visit... now would be it.

(Sound of door opening)

Instead, I get in line at a noodle shop until I remember that Mel ordered me lunch...which makes me remember why I went for a walk in the first place: to clear my mind.

(Sound of door opening again and going back outside onto busy sidewalk and walking some more)

I wish it was working, but all I can think about is the letter. I'm not used to sharing mental or emotional space with things that aren't work, which is probably why I'm no longer sharing a bed with a giant St. Bernard. I thought that watching Super 8 movies over the weekend with Kim, and talking to her about what's going on, would make me feel more at ease, but instead, I'm even more preoccupied.

Speaking of the letter, you're probably wondering what's in it. Why it has me fixating on home movies from decades ago, and dreaming of Aimo's stories. Let's just say the letter has some very specific information in it. Not just information, *instructions*. Things connected to his and my past. And it's unmistakably written in Aimo's voice...almost as if he *did* send it two weeks ago. Things like—

(Sound of car suddenly speeding toward Joseph, then sound of screeching tires and Joseph tumbling onto the pavement)

(Sounds of onlookers gasping and reacting, horns honking, and Joseph moaning)

(Sound of nearby car door opening)

MALE VOICE FROM CAR:

Hey idiot, stay out of the crosswalk! I had a green light! I could have killed you!

JOSEPH:

(Breathing heavily) Sorry... Sorry. I...I wasn't paying attention... I...

(Sound of car door closing and tires screeching as car speeds away)

(Sound of smartphone cameras being used from every direction as Joseph is lying on the pavement)

JOSEPH:

(Breathing heavily, then to himself) Okay... Okay... Mustache...beard... Okay. Eyebrows... *Eyebrows...where—where's the other eyebrow?* Okay, there. Okay, put it back on... (Loud exhale)

(Sound of someone running up to Joseph)

BYSTANDER:

Hey man, are you okay? Did you get hit? Should we call 911?

(Sound of smartphone being dialed)

JOSEPH:

NO! Please, don't. I mean... (groan) I'm not hurt. Thank you though.

(Continued sound of smartphone cameras being used)

(To himself) My glasses...

(To BYSTANDER) Hey, any chance you see my glasses anywhere?

(Sound of footsteps walking away)

(To crowd gathered) Hey, can you... (Clears throat, uses different voice) Can—c—can you *not* take photos? I'm fine. I'm fine...

(Sound of returning footsteps)

BYSTANDER:

OK man. Hey, here are your glasses, they were right over there. Looks like that car got 'em pretty good though. Let me help you get up...

JOSEPH:

(Groan, heavy exhale) Thank you. I—I really appreciate it. I'm just...I'm just gonna get going here. I'm alright.

BYSTANDER:

OK, if you say so. Hey is your mustache ok? It's kind of leaning off to one side now...

JOSEPH:

(Starting to leave) Gotta go. Thanks again!

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

Several drivers are standing next to their cars now, with their doors open, waiting for me to get out of the crosswalk. I *really* hope I was able to get that eyebrow back on before anyone noticed.

I start walking to the other side of the street so I can hide somewhere fast. Then I see something, not far away: a small piece of white plastic. I stoop down and grab it, holding on to the eyebrow to make sure it stays on and quickly cross the street passing through the crowd gathered there and walk up a few blocks.

(Sound of siren approaching scene in distance)

When I'm pretty sure no one's following, I enter a storefront near a construction zone. It's a coffee shop. I ask to use the bathroom.

BARISTA:

Uhh, yeah sure. It's that way.

(Sound of Joseph walking down a hallway, entering bathroom, and locking door)

(Sound of Joseph trying to calm down, pacing around bathroom, then sound of his phone ringing)

JOSEPH:

Mel—

MEL:

I saw what happened. Are you alright?

JOSEPH:

Yeah, yeah, I'm ok. At least I think I am. What do you mean you saw what happened? Aren't you still at the office?

MEL:

You're trending on Twitter.

JOSEPH:

What??

MEL:

Well, not you personally. Hashtag Costumed Jaywalker is trending. This might be the most fun people are having since Man in Tree.

JOSEPH:

Shit!

MEL:

I don't think anyone knows it was you. But people *are* zooming in on the part where you put your eyebrow back on. If I wasn't so worried about you right now, I'd think it was pretty funny myself. Where are you?

JOSEPH:

I'm in the bathroom at... *where am I...* Uh, I'm at... Roasted. On Fourth.

(Frustrated yell)

Mel... Can you come to me? Help me get back to the office, quietly?

MEL:

I'm already on my way.

JOSEPH:

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

MEL:

I'll be there in 5 minutes.

(Sound of phone hanging up, Joseph pacing and being frustrated)

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

I look into the mirror and realize the disguise is still on. I take it off piece by piece, and wrap it all in paper towels and bury them at the bottom of the wastebasket.

What was I thinking? Who wears a goofy-looking costume on a crowded street in the middle of the day for no apparent reason, almost gets hit by a car, and then flees the scene and hides in a bathroom like a scared child? I try to work out in my head the quickest way back to the parking garage. I just need to hunker down here a little longer, unnoticed, and—

(Sound of loud knocking on bathroom door)

(Sound of Joseph panicking)

(More loud knocking on bathroom door)

MAN OUTSIDE BATHROOM:

Hey, you gonna be in there for a while?

JOSEPH:

Uhh, yeah? A little while still?

MAN OUTSIDE BATHROOM:

Man, they really need two bathrooms in this place...

(Sound of man walking away)

(Sound of Joseph being stressed out)

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

I can already see the whole thing getting twisted in the media. The more I'd try to explain that being costumed was just a dumb work joke, the more *I'd* be made into the joke...

JOSEPH:

Where are you Mel?

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

...and the company too. And it would be all my fault.

I reach into my pocket to grab my phone and that's when I feel it.

(Background music begins)

The thing I picked up in the crosswalk. I take it out, and look at it in the dim light of the bathroom—and see that it's a driver's license. I can't make out the small writing so I turn on my phone's flashlight. I freeze.

(Sound of Joseph calling someone on phone)

MEL:

(Answering on phone) I'm out of the building. I'm walking down—

JOSEPH:

Mel. Change of plans.

MEL:

Okay.

JOSEPH:

Can you get my car and meet me here? I don't think there's a mob waiting for me outside. At least, not outside the bathroom door. Just some dude who couldn't hold it and went somewhere else, I think.

MEL:

Alright.

JOSEPH:

I can unlock my car and start it from here. Just tell Asim you're getting it out of the garage for me. He knows you. The keycard's in the console.

MEL:

Okayyy...

JOSEPH:

And Mel, one more thing. Please cancel all my meetings today and tomorrow.

MEL:

Okay...?

JOSEPH:

I need to leave town for a little while.

MEL:

You need to do what?

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

I need to go to Wapato.

END CREDITS:

Dirt - An Audio Drama is presented by STUDIO5705 and is written, directed, and produced by me, Kris Kaiyala. This chapter features the voice talents of Ila Das as Ila, Cindy Siler as Helen, Nicole Michels McDonagh as Angela, Mark Field as Robert, Sara Kaiyala as the project manager and barista, Jessi Brown as Mel, Stephen Matera as the car driver, Mike Grigg as the guy who helped out Joseph in the crosswalk, and Jon Dietrich as the dude who really needed to use the bathroom. I play the part of Joseph.

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