

DIRT - AN AUDIO DRAMA  
Chapter 8 Transcript  
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**\*\*Warning\*\***

**This is a complete written transcript of the entire Chapter 8 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>

(Sound of being in car while driving)

JOSEPH:  
Call Kim.

(Sound of phone dialing)

(Sound of Joseph tapping on steering wheel)

JOSEPH:  
Come on...

(Sound of Kim picking up)

KIM:  
(Noisy background on Kim's end) Hi! Hey, can I call you back in a bit?

JOSEPH:  
Uh, sure. Di...did you get my text earlier?

KIM:  
Ugh, I did, sorry. It's been a day. Still is. Right now, we're heading into a Halloween thing at the elementary school.

JOSEPH:  
Oh. Is it Halloween today?

KIM:  
No, it's this weekend. Every year the school does—*Hey, hang on, one at a time...* Every year the school does a costume event a few days before Halloween. It's kind of a back-to-school

night/meet the teachers/give the kids a sugar rush before bed combo thing. Honestly, I think it might be more for the parents. Right now I'm dressed up as Princess Leia.

JOSEPH:  
Nice.

KIM:  
Cinnamon-bun hair and everythi—*No. Here. Nooo, we're going in HERE. This way! Sorry, got my hands full here.*

JOSEPH:  
(Chuckle) Clearly...

KIM:  
*Hey, it's ok! Dad's parking the car. You can go find your friends as soon as he—*

JOSEPH:  
I found another one.

KIM:  
Wait, what? Hang on, where are you calling me from?

JOSEPH:  
I'm driving away from Pe Ell right now.

KIM:  
Pe Ell... As in the famous tuba fire of 1941, Pe Ell?

JOSEPH:  
Yep. Well, famous in *our* family anyway.

KIM:  
How—

JOSEPH:  
One of the phrases that you sent, from the AI... it's also the title of one Aimo's stories. The Places I've Been. I'd forgotten all about it. You should look it up when you get home. You still have your copy?

KIM:  
I do, somewhere. I've been meaning to dig it up since you—*Okay, shhh, just a minute longer, mom's talking to uncle Joseph.*

(Exhale) So, what was in the box?

JOSEPH:

Another note. And a coin.

KIM:

Woah.

JOSEPH:

Yeah. I haven't read the note yet. I had to get out of there pretty fast to get away from—

("Rup-rup" sound of police siren behind Joseph)

Ah, crap.

KIM:

What...

JOSEPH:

(Exhale) I'm getting pulled over.

KIM:

You're what?

(Sound of car slowing down and pulling over onto shoulder)

JOSEPH:

Someone's pulling me over.

(Sound of car idling and sound of vehicle idling behind Joseph)

I better go. Let me know if you're up late tonight?

KIM:

Sure. Hey, Joseph...

JOSEPH:

Yeah?

KIM:

Be careful who you talk to about this stuff, okay?

JOSEPH:

Right. Gotta go.

(Sound of phone hanging up)

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

The lights from the vehicle parked behind me are so bright I can't see anything in my mirrors except the dark outline of somebody walking up to my door.

(Sound of window going down, faint sound of truck engine idling in background, sound of feet outside shuffling on dirt/gravel)

CARL:

Thought you could get away that easily, did ya?

JOSEPH:

Carl? Carl, what are you doing. You can't just pull people over for no—

(Sound of craning head to look behind car)

(Exhales) What is that, your Fish and Wildlife truck?

CARL:

I had a reason. You were doing 10 over.

JOSEPH:

How did you find me?

CARL:

There aren't many roads back to I-5 from here. Now look—

JOSEPH:

No *you* look, Carl. Us meeting back there was just an accident. You can forget that we ever—

CARL:

I know who you are.

JOSEPH:

You know who I am...

CARL:

It was easy enough to run your plates.

JOSEPH:

Again Carl, you can't just go doing stuff like that without—

CARL:

Like I said, you were trespassing.

JOSEPH:  
(Exhales)

CARL:  
I'm not trying to give you any trouble—

JOSEPH:  
So what else do you know about me?

CARL:  
Well, I know you own a big company and are kind of a big shot. I mean, Google makes that easy enough to see. Wish I could take weekend trips to Bali. Heh, the fishing I could there—

JOSEPH:  
So what, you have my address too?

CARL:  
Uh, Promontory Lane? I don't know Seattle well, but something tells me you probably got a nice view there...

JOSEPH:  
(Disbelief sounds)

CARL:  
Any of that stuff you told me about your grandpa true? Is that *really* why you were here?

JOSEPH:  
Yeah! He taught at that school. A long time ago.

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):  
I see Carl look through the back passenger window, where the Coinmaster is resting on the back seat.

CARL:  
I saw what that thing did. That old Coinmaster *led* you to the spot that you dug up! That ding-dang detector *pulled* you!

JOSEPH:  
I don't know what you mean.

CARL:

Oh come on now, I saw the look on your face when it happened. So tell me, what kind of stuff are you into?

CARL:

UFO technology?

JOSEPH:

Huh?

CARL:

Something from the future, like Terminator? Or Back to the Future, Part 2?

JOSEPH:

Carl.

CARL:

Quantum mechanics? Multiverse?

JOSEPH:

I don't have to answer any of this.

CARL:

I hear they're working on some really wild undercover stuff over at Hanford these days. Let me guess, you're connected to that...

JOSEPH:

*And* I don't have to stay here.

CARL:

Paranormal stuff? You know there are a lot of ghost stories about that old school...

JOSEPH:

I'm leaving now. And don't try to follow me this time, or I'll get my people involved.

CARL:

You know the feds are hiding alien spacecraft, right? Maybe in old missile silos in eastern Washington?

JOSEPH:

Goodnight Carl.

(Sound of window starting to go up)

CARL:

(Raising voice) But wait I—

(Muffled sound as Joseph pulls away) *Maybe I can help you!*

(Sound of car accelerating)

JOSEPH:

(Exhale) Dude!

(Sound of car driving fast to get away)

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

In my rearview mirror I see Carl quickly get back in his truck.

JOSEPH:

Argh!

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

The orange lights on top of his rig come back on. I see his headlights flicker as though he's coming after me.

JOSEPH:

Oh geez.

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

I turn right onto the first road I come to. Then I quickly turn left onto another road, hoping to leave Carl in the dust, or at least, leaving him guessing where I've gone off to.

(Sounds of Joseph in a bit of a panic as he drives)

I wasn't planning to head home anyway, but now that Carl knows where I live—and who knows what else—suddenly everything feels unsafe. I turn down another side road, and then another, driving deeper and deeper into the forest with each random compass change.

After several minutes I pull onto a dirt turnout that looks like the start of a logging road.

(Sound of driving down dirt road)

I drive about a quarter of a mile farther down the dirt road, away from the paved road, and kill the engine and turn off the headlights.

(Sound of parking and turning car off)

(Sound of Joseph breathing, trying to relax)

(Sound of Joseph reaching in to pocket and pull note out)

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

I reach into my pocket and take out the note that was in the box. I use the dim light of my phone screen to read it. It's similar to the one in Wapato—a short, handwritten message on Aimo and Vivian's stationery. This time it simply reads:

JOSEPH:

Joseph. Congratulations. You found another one. Keep searching, Aimo.

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

And then underneath it all...

JOSEPH:

Huh.

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

A giant handwritten capital letter R.

JOSEPH:

R...

R!

What the... What is that supposed to mean?

(Frustrated groan) (Pounds fist on steering wheel)

Ugh! This stupid letter!

(Sound of Joseph breathing)

Let's see where I am...

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

I open up my phone's map app to figure out how to get back to the freeway, and that's when I realize...

JOSEPH:

Of course.



NARRATOR (JOSEPH):  
There's no cell service.

(Sound of Joseph breathing)

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):  
I look around and realize it's completely dark in every direction. No lights. No stars or moon in the overcast night sky. Just inky darkness.

JOSEPH:  
So, since Monday, I've almost gotten killed, become the laughing stock of the internet, bought a secret second phone, hid in a bathroom, skipped out on work, oh, and I started a background check on an old friend...

And, I'm being followed!

(Laughs absurdly) And now I'm lost!

(Sound of Joseph turning around to look in back seat)

(Sound of holding handle of detector)

And then there's you...

What is the deal with you.

(Sound of turning back around in seat, facing forward) Ugh, talk about ghost in the machine...

Geez. What the f...

(Sound of tapping on steering wheel)

Hey...

(Sound of reaching into back seat and turning on detector)

Maybe...

(Sound of turning on car)

You can direct me out of here.

(Sound of turning car around)

(Sound of driving on dirt road back toward paved road)

Okay. Which way should I turn onto the road?

(Sound of stopping at intersection with paved road)

(Sound of turn signal on for several seconds) (Sound of detector noise going quiet)

(Sound of turning off turn signal)

(Sound of turning on turn signal again, but for opposite direction)

JOSEPH:

How about *this* way...

(Sound of metal detector buzzing again)

JOSEPH:

Huh.

(Laughs)

(Sound of Joseph turning onto main road and buzzing sound stays loud for a second then gets quieter again)

(Sound of driving for 5-6 seconds then sound of detector buzzing getting loud again)

(Sound of Joseph pounding steering wheel)

JOSEPH:

Ha!

(Sound of car slowing down, turn signal on, turning down new road, turn signal off, detector buzzing sound getting quieter again)

JOSEPH:

(Laughs) Woah!

(Sound of car accelerating down road)

(Laughs absurdly, madly)

[End scene]

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

In my early 20s when I was visiting Vivian in Portland one time...

(Fade in sound of raging river in background)

...I asked her what the Columbia River was like when she was a child, growing in Yakima. She got a far-away look in her eyes as she recalled trips throughout eastern Washington with her parents and friends. She described a wild, surging river that flowed without restraint through the stark desert landscape. A crashing, whitewater beast—especially in places like Celilo, The Dalles, and Kettle Falls—on a scale unimaginable, whose pulsing whitewater and swirling green currents raged over basalt cliffs and through massive canyons, and could drown out voices a hundred feet from shore.

(Abrupt fade out of river sound)

(Fade in sound of being inside car while driving)

Today's Columbia looks a lot different than the river the ancestors and ancient peoples of this region knew. Fourteen dams, from British Columbia to near the Pacific Ocean, have flooded and tamed its storied currents and salmon runs. But I often think of Vivian's words, and I hear her voice in my head, when I drive along the river, as I am now on Highway 14 heading east, on the Washington side.

It's late now, around midnight. The fast food I ate a couple hours ago is keeping me full. I haven't heard back from Kim, but she clearly had her hands full. I text a bit more with Mel during the drive. She lets me know she'll have a full report tomorrow. And, on a whim, I text Antonia, even though I'm sure she's asleep, just to let her know where I'm at.

(Sound of turn signal, car turning on to new road)

At the junction with Highway 97, I turn south and cross the bridge over the river to the Oregon side to the tiny town of Biggs Junction, which isn't much more than a truckstop on Interstate 84, perched on a rocky bench above the water.

(Sound of parking car)

I book a room at a motel that has seen better days.

(Sound of getting stuff out of car)

But it'll do for tonight.

So, you're probably wondering how I knew to go to Pe Ell, and why I searched near a water faucet.

(Sounds of closing car door and opening and closing motel room door, and getting ready for bed)

(Sound of faint highway noise beyond walls, from trucks on freeway)

The tuba fire story is one we all heard growing up—and one that Aimo *does* recount in more detail in a different story in his collection. As a young and newly married graduate from Central Washington University in 1941, Aimo landed his first job as an educator at the Pe Ell school. He taught music and history to third through sixth graders. On a rare spring day when the weather was cooperating, Aimo ushered his band students outside for a school picture. Yet before the cameraman could snap the photo, Aimo noticed smoke pouring out of the window of the electrical room. He quickly grabbed the tuba from a girl named Winnifred and filled its big bell up with water from the nearby faucet. He ran inside and poured the water on the flames before they could cause any more damage. The students were left outside, bewildered, but before long they heard the familiar bass tones of John Philip Sousa's Manhattan Beach March—a song they had been learning that week. It was Aimo playing the tuba from inside the electrical room, to make sure that the tuba's valves still worked.

Aimo had helped repair the outdoor faucet only days earlier. Had it remained broken, who knows how bad the fire damage might have been. He saved the day on two counts, and was awarded a special commendation by the school district supervisor.

Aimo and Vivian lived in Pe Ell for two years. Of all the places to search there, how did I know to go to right to the old school, and specifically, the faucet?

(Sound of getting in to bed)

For someone who doesn't live on hunches, I seem to be on a hot streak lately.

(Sound of freeway noises and trucks going by outside walls)

I'm hoping the hot streak continues in the morning, not far from here.

(Fade out all sounds)

[End scene]

(Fade in sound of dreamy wind chime noise)

(Sound of Joseph suddenly breathing as if startled awake)

(Sound of woodworking somewhere in distance)

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

I'm in my childhood bedroom. It's dark, except for the nightlight plugged in to the wall near me.

It's well past bedtime, but I'm awake. (Pause) And I'm listening.

(Sounds of more woodworking in distance)

(Sound of moving covers and getting out of bed)

(Sound of walking on carpet)

(Sound of opening bedroom door)

(Sound of walking on carpet)

The lights in the house are still on. I walk softly down the hallway, invading a nighttime world that I know isn't meant for me.

(Sound of slowly walking on wooden stairs)

But right now, the thing I want to see most in the world is in the basement.

(Sound of descending stairs, one at a time)

(Woodworking sounds getting louder)

The thing I want to see most, is right inside this door.

(Sound of shuffling feet on concrete floor right outside door)

All I need to do, is open it.

(Sound of transistor radio turning on)

(Sound of violin playing)

(Sound of cuckoo clock gears turning and starting to chime)

JOSEPH:

(Gasps loudly)

(All noises grow together in volume and suddenly stop)

(Sound of cuckoo clock ticking for 4-5 seconds)

(Sudden sound of truck noises on highway as Joseph wakes up from dream)

(Sound of Joseph rustling bedsheets, blankets)

(Sound of Joseph reaching out and turning off alarm)

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

It's not even 7 yet and both phones have had a busy morning.

(Sound of Joseph checking both phones, coughing, then getting up and starting to get ready)

From inside my room, I peek through an opening in the black-out curtains and scan the rocky, treeless landscape surrounding the motel and nearby gas stations. It's sunny and bright outside. Semitrucks barrel down I-84, and just beyond it, the river is calm in the gorge below.

(Sound of leaving motel room and entering car)

It's Thursday, the day before the meeting with Molecular—one of the most consequential meetings of my career.

(Sound of Joseph turning on car and starting to drive)

And it's barely on my mind.

(Sound of smart phone assistant chime)

JOSEPH:

Call Kim.

(Sound of Joseph's phone dialing someone)

(Sound of being inside car while driving across bridge)

KIM:

(On phone) Hi!

JOSEPH:

Hey. Now still a good time?

KIM:

It is! At least, for the moment. You're going over to Maryhill...

JOSEPH:

Yep.

KIM:

Right. It's a pretty big park. Any idea where to look?

JOSEPH:

I knew you were gonna ask me that.

KIM:

Well?

JOSEPH:

Not yet. I'm hoping something comes to me, when I get there.

KIM:

Who are you and what have you done with my scientist brother?

JOSEPH:

Hey now, there *does* seem to be *some* methodology to all this. I mean, making the connections between the letter and the movies and the stories. Thanks for the help on that by the way.

KIM:

Sure! Even so, I kind of like this new you. Winging it!

JOSEPH:

(Chuckles)

KIM:

So, what about this Carl guy?

JOSEPH:

Yeah. Not sure what to do about that yet.

KIM:

(Chuckles) You're collecting quite a following. A few of the dads wore your costume to the school dress-up thing last night. (Laughs) A couple of them even went with the missing eyebrow. Looks like you're the hot trend for Halloween this year.

JOSEPH:

(Exhales) Seriously?

KIM:

Don't worry, no one pulls it off quite like you though.

JOSEPH:  
Great.

KIM:  
Oh! I found my copy of Aimo's stories last night. The Places I've Been. Who knew. So...are you going in order? I mean, first Pe Ell then Maryhill then—

JOSEPH:  
Woah.

KIM:  
Woah? What's up this time?

JOSEPH:  
It's...Antonia.

(Sound of Joseph turning into parking lot)

KIM:  
Woah.

JOSEPH:  
Yeah.

Hey I'm at the park now. Let me check in again in a bit.

KIM:  
Um, yeah.

(Sound of turning car engine off)

JOSEPH:  
Bye.

(Sound of phone hanging up)

(Sound of Joseph exhaling)

(Sound of Joseph getting out of car and walking over) (Sound of being outside at Maryhill State Park)

(Sound of Antonia in distance opening truck door, getting out of truck, and closing truck door)



NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

Antonia gets out of her white truck and stands next to it. She brushes her long hair back with her hand and adjusts her black sunglasses. She's wearing the same down jacket she had on at the farm.

ANTONIA:

I thought maybe you could use some help.

Well *technically*, my *dad* thought you needed help. He pretty much insisted on it. And since he's also my boss...

(Awkward silence)

You...*did* ask us to help out, remember? And you did say you'd be here today, in your text last night...

JOSEPH:

Sorry. I'm just surprised to see you. You drove down here this morning?

ANTONIA:

Yeah. It's not far.

JOSEPH:

Hmph.

Don't you have...a business to run? Stuff to...I don't know.

ANTONIA:

Don't you?

(Awkward pause)

JOSEPH:

You know I'm not totally sure I know what I'm doing here. Or what I'm *going* to do, for that matter.

ANTONIA:

I guess that makes two of us.

(Awkward silence)

So, do you need help getting anything out of the car, or...

JOSEPH:

I was actually just gonna to walk around for a bit first. It's been a while since I've been here.

ANTONIA:

Oh. I can just wait here in the truck until you need something...

JOSEPH:

(Laughs) No. I mean, you came all this way. Might as well join me?

ANTONIA:

OK then.

(Sound of both of them starting to walk together)

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

We walk from the paved lot onto a wide expanse of mowed grass. The lawn is green, despite months of intense heat. Toward the river, tall, leafy trees grow in groves, especially near the water's edge. Everything else within sight, besides the blue sky and the gray river, is shades of yellow and rust, including the steep rocky hills above us—and the tall cliffs far across the river, on the Oregon side.

We talk about how we were both here at Maryhill for Aimo's memorial, when we were kids, even though neither of us remembers it well—other than it being hot, and windy enough to blow away unsecured lawn chairs and paper plates, and that there were lots of people around. Our families' lives crossed paths many times and at many places throughout the years, but it occurs to me now, as we walk not far from the river, that this is probably the first place that we were ever at together.

(Sound of them walking on grass together)

It's so weird that he's doing all this.

ANTONIA:

You mean Aimo?

JOSEPH:

Yeah.

ANTONIA:

You said "doing," so I was just making sure. You make it sound like he's still around, doing stuff.

JOSEPH:

(Laughs) Yeah.

ANTONIA:

My grandparents are buried near here. Ernesto and Lucila.

JOSEPH:

Oh yeah?

ANTONIA:

They loved to camp and fish here when they were older. They had a little boat that they would put in, at the ramp over there.

They spent most of their lives up on the farm, obviously. But this was kind of like their...*other* place.

JOSEPH:

Huh.

ANTONIA:

They bought plots at the cemetery years before they died. It always feels weird to me that people plan ahead for that sort of thing.

JOSEPH:

(Laughs) Same here.

Antonia:

I mean, I guess kudos to them for being prepared.

JOSEPH:

(Laughs)

Have you been to the cemetery?

ANTONIA:

Just once, a long time ago.

JOSEPH:

Hmph. Where's it at?

ANTONIA:

It's up the hill from here, not far.

(Sound of both of them stopping walking)

JOSEPH:

Want to go up there now?

ANTONIA:

Don't you have stuff to do down here?

JOSEPH:

Yeah. I mean, last night, in Pe Ell, I was pretty sure what to do based on stuff that I know.

(Exhales) But here...

I'm pretty sure Aimo's memorial was at one of these picnic shelters. I was hoping just being here would trigger something. Not the greatest plan, is it.

ANTONIA:

I mean, I guess we could go up there.

JOSEPH:

Okay. Yeah. Let's go. I'd love to see all this from above anyway. It might help put things in perspective.

ANTONIA:

Okay. I'll drive?

JOSEPH:

Sure.

(Sounds of walking again)

You know, when I got to your farm the other day, and got to that security gate... When did you have that put in by the way?

ANTONIA:

About five years ago.

JOSEPH:

Ah. Well, when I got to it, I actually tried some number combinations on the keypad. (Laughs) I don't know why I thought that would work. I mean, I only had a one in 10,000 chance of getting it right...

ANTONIA:

(Laughs)

JOSEPH:

And then that guy came on the phone...

ANTONIA:  
Yeah, that's Hernan.

JOSEPH:  
Hernan, right.

I mean, none of you knew I was coming, so I was already out of sorts. And then when he asked me for a keyword... I fumbled around for a bit and thought for sure I was a goner. But then the only thing that came to mind that wasn't a dumb guess was your middle name.

But I didn't remember until a second ago, that that was your grandmother's name too.

Anyway. Why have keywords, by the way? I mean, if someone doesn't know the code...

ANTONIA:  
I guess you never know who might need to be allowed in. You know, in an emergency or whatever. It's just a failsafe.

JOSEPH:  
Failsafe. Right.

(Fade out background sounds)

(Fade in sound of being inside truck while parking, idling)

(Sound of truck engine being turned off)

JOSEPH:  
A view to die for.

ANTONIA:  
Really?

(Sound of car doors being opened, Antonia and Joseph getting out, door closing)

JOSEPH:  
(Laughs)

(Sounds of walking on soft dirt)

JOSEPH:  
Do you remember where they are?

ANTONIA:  
I don't, I'll have to look around.

(Sound of small metal fence gate opening and closing as they walk through)

(Sound of Joseph's phone ringing)

JOSEPH:  
(Sound of Joseph stopping walking) Ugh, uh, sorry. I need to take this. It's for work. OK if I join you in just a minute?

ANTONIA:  
Sure.

(Sound of Antonia walking away AND sound of Joseph taking a few steps the other direction then answering)

JOSEPH:  
Mel! Hey. What's up.

MEL:  
Quite a bit. You alone?

JOSEPH:  
Yeah.

MEL:  
Okay. For starters, I feel compelled to remind you that the fate of the company depends on how well the meeting with Molecular goes tomorrow.

JOSEPH:  
Yeah, I know.

MEL:  
People are seriously wondering if you're going to show or not.

JOSEPH:  
(Exhales) Yeah.

MEL:  
That doesn't sound promising...

JOSEPH:  
No, no. No, I...obviously I need to be there.

MEL:

(Exhales) You probably haven't checked your work messages yet.

JOSEPH:

I haven't yet, today. I was going to do that in just—

MEL:

Angela's basically taking over. I mean, I'd say she's doing it *respectfully*. Everyone knows you're out for personal reasons and so they're trying not to bug you, her especially. But you know, nothing brings out 'initiative' in people like a perceived leadership gap at a time of crisis.

JOSEPH:

I think they like her.

MEL:

The Germans?

JOSEPH:

Yeah.

Ok, I'll reach out to her—

MEL:

The Inner Six are worried that if you don't show, the whole thing might go down in flames. The feeling is that Molecular values accountability over everything. Don't forget they already have you on that behavior policy.

JOSEPH:

How could I forget?

MEL:

So...the next thing. Turns out we're not the only ones who want the traffic cam footage from Monday. My contact at Lingcod tells me the police are after it now, too.

JOSEPH:

The police?

MEL:

Apparently, the driver behind the car that almost hit you slammed her brakes so hard that she's in the hospital with back pain. That siren you told me you heard as you left the crosswalk and headed for Roasted? That wasn't for you.

JOSEPH:

Crap.

MEL:

And because of the media frenzy, her lawyer is taking advantage of it. (Pause) It'll probably be in the news later. But also, not only are the police obtaining the footage, they're aware that *we* asked for it already. I think our story is holding up, but I'd say we're pretty freaking under the microscope now.

JOSEPH:

(Groans) So wait, does this make Costumed Jaywalker some kind...of fugitive?

MEL:

Well, there is a tiny bit of *good* news, depending on what you're hoping to hear. The check on Salvador Flores came back clean.

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

I look over at Antonia. She's still walking around the cemetery. A gust of wind blows her long black hair in all directions.

JOSEPH:

Well, that's good to hear I guess—

MEL:

But there is some interesting activity on his business.

JOSEPH:

How so?

MEL:

So, Flores Farms LLC recently applied to acquire a large tract of land adjacent to its property. Based on the map I was sent, it looks like it's uphill from the existing farm. About 110 acres, undeveloped. Held in a land trust of some kind.

JOSEPH:

Hmm. That doesn't seem too unusual, a farm looking to expand.

MEL:

Does that name R. A. Hastings mean anything to you?

JOSEPH:

R. A. Hastings... Can't say it does, why?



MEL:

That's the name attached to the land trust.

JOSEPH:

R. A. Hastings...

MEL:

I did a quick search...

JOSEPH:

(Chuckles) Of course you did. Anything?

MEL:

It's probably just a coincidence.

JOSEPH:

What...

MEL:

There's an R. A. Hastings on the board of Memphis Labs.

Isn't that the company your sister works at?

JOSEPH:

You mean is a *partner* at... Yeah. Woah. How are you finding all this out, by the way?

MEL:

Do you really want to know?

JOSEPH:

No. I'm already sorry I dragged you into any of this.

(Exhale) Well crap, that gives me a lot to think about...

MEL:

So... there's one more thing. The person with the red headphones... They were following you in Belltown pretty much from the time you exited the parking garage, at least as far as I can tell, all the way to the crosswalk.

JOSEPH:

That's...troubling.

MEL:

Yeah. Unfortunately, I can't tell if they or anyone else left anything in the street for you to find. The footage at the crosswalk is grainy and there are a lot of people around you. Maybe it came from someone in the car?

JOSEPH:  
Maybe...

MEL:  
But... that's not all.

JOSEPH:  
I was kinda hoping it would be.

MEL:  
Now, this is just MY interpretation of what I'm seeing, but we both know I'm pretty much right about these things. In each of the camera views, there's a small object in the air, and it keeps a steady distance above you. Again, the footage is too grainy to make out much detail. But it's clearly there in all of them.

JOSEPH:  
You think it's a dr—

MEL:  
Joseph, I don't know where you're at or what you're doing, but I'd definitely keep one eye on the sky if I were you.

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):  
I crane my neck upward and gaze into the bright blue ceiling all around me. Out of the corner of my eye, I see Antonia staring back at me, looking puzzled. I wave and smile at her to let her know I'm almost finished.

MEL:  
You still there?

JOSEPH:  
Yeah, sorry. (Exhales) Mel, this is great information. Disturbing for the most part, but great. Thank you. I'll check in again in a bit. How are you holding up?

MEL:  
I'm taking more smoke breaks than usual.

JOSEPH:  
Ugh, sorry about that. Your mom will never know. Your secret's safe with me.

MEL:  
So kind of you.

(Sound of phone hanging up)

(Sound of Joseph walking over to Antonia)

JOSEPH:  
Sorry about that. Any luck?

ANTONIA:  
Yeah, they're right here.

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):  
Two dark headstones stand next to each other in the brown grass, each with names and dates etched into them. They still look new compared to many of the others, some of which look like they could be centuries old.

I see Antonia turn her head away, looking out toward the view of the river gorge below, then up in the air. She seems to be looking for something.

JOSEPH:  
You ok?

(Sound of faint buzzing noise in air)

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):  
Then I hear it too.

JOSEPH:  
Wait, what is what?

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):  
A faint buzzing noise. And then, barely visible against the blue expanse, a tiny black dot.

We both stare up in the air, and then exchange glances. She obviously sees something on my face because she says...

ANTONIA:  
Woah, you look worried.

JOSEPH:  
(Sigh) So... I guess I should tell you. Look, I don't know for sure. But it's possible I'm being followed...

(Sound of Antonia walking away)

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

Without a word, Antonia quickly walks out of the cemetery.

(Sound of Antonia opening and closing gate, then opening truck door)

I can see her looking for something behind her driver's seat.

I look back up and see the black dot hovering high overhead. I use my hand to block the sun, to try to make out any detail.

(Sound of rifle cocking, then firing)

(Sound of gunshot echoing)

(Sound of plastic object crash-landing close to where Joseph is standing)

JOSEPH:

Woah!

(Sound of truck door closing, gate opening/closing, Antonia approaching)

JOSEPH:

How did you...?

ANTONIA:

(Out of breath) We should get out of here, before someone comes looking for it.

(Fade out all sounds)

[End scene]

[End chapter]