

MIDNIGHT BURGER

Interlude: How They Sleep at Night

By Joe Fisher

MIDNIGHT BURGER

Interlude: How They Sleep at Night.

SFX: OUTSIDE THE DINER, THE SOUND OF SPACE-TIME FLYING BY.

SHEL

Hello?

GLORIA

Oh, hey. How are you feeling?

SHEL

Pretty weird. These lamps aren't the same thing as the sun.

GLORIA

I know. But we'll have to make do for a while.

SHEL

I know.

GLORIA

Also, if we show up somewhere and it's night time, or if we're not on a planet at all, you're probably going to have to spend some time under the lamps. You'll be okay. Leif and Ava did the math.

SHEL

Why does Ava have something on her face?

AVA

It's a night mask and that means we're quiet.

GLORIA

She sleeps in her booth.

AVA

I theoretically sleep in my booth. It requires much more silence.

GLORIA

Shel, we're kind of on a learning curve here. We're all human so we know what to expect from each other. Do you sleep?

SHEL

Yes. I was sleeping just now. I'm sure it's different from whatever you all do. When I sleep I develop another layer of my body, is that what you do?

GLORIA

No, another layer?

SHEL
Yes. Is that weird?

AVA
Like a tree?

SHEL
Yeah, sort of.

GLORIA
So, while you were asleep on that counter you got another layer of skin?

SHEL
Not skin exactly. There's just more me here. I'm a small fraction taller now than I was when I went to sleep.

GLORIA
That's interesting.

AVA
Oh, that reminds me. Shel, come here.

SHEL
What's up?

AVA
What does that say?

SHEL
"What is life? By Erwin Schrödinger."

AVA
Huh. So you absorb written and verbal language.

SHEL
I guess so. What is this?

AVA
A book. You should read it.

SHEL
Okay. What's it made of?

AVA
Don't ask.

GLORIA
Shel let me show you everything, you my be here a while. There's a truck stop shower in the bathroom, do you shower?

SHEL

Like, with water falling on you?

GLORIA

Yeah.

SHEL

It sounds nice, but there's a new layer of me every day, so.

GLORIA

That's actually super convenient.

SHEL

Maybe I will sometimes though, just for fun. To feel like I'm outside.

GLORIA

Yeah, okay.

SHEL

So Ava, you sleep here?

AVA

Yes, and no one else ever.

SHEL

And where... where do the box people sleep?

GLORIA

Oh Effie and Zebulon are already asleep. They sleep in their bed.

SHEL

They sleep in...

GLORIA

Come out back.

SFX: BACK DOOR OPENING.

SHEL

Uh... okay...

SFX: THE FLOW OF SPACE TIME GROWS LOUDER. BACK DOOR CLOSING.

GLORIA

So this is the back. There's the dumpster where we throw the garbage, don't ask me where it goes. And up here...

SFX: RATTLING OF A LADDER.

GLORIA (CONT'D)

...Is where Leif sleeps. Come say hi.

SHEL

Up there?

GLORIA

Yeah, come on.

SHEL

Gloria...

GLORIA

Yeah... I hear you. Watching the stars whip past you when you're used to them sitting still is pretty weird. But, I used to get motion sickness in the car and I got used to this. So you'll be fine. Come on.

SFX: CLIMBING LADDER.

SHEL

Everything's fine. Everything's fine. Everything's fine.

GLORIA

Hey, Leif.

LEIF

Hey. Oh, hey Shel, how're you doing?

SHEL

That depends, do I have to let go of this ladder?

GLORIA

Yes.

SHEL

Okay. Feeling not great.

LEIF

Here, have a seat.

SFX: FOLDING CHAIR.

SHEL

Thanks.

GLORIA

I'm showing Shel where everyone sleeps.

LEIF

Well, this is it. Welcome to Chez Leif. I sleep in that hammock over there. That's my work bench and you are currently sitting in the living room.

SHEL

It's nice. And also terrifying.

GLORIA

What are you working on, Leif?

LEIF

Ava wants to try and detect gravity waves for some reason so I'm trying to make a laser interferometer the size of a shoe box.

GLORIA

How big are they usually?

LEIF

The size of an observatory.

SHEL

Leif, I don't understand. How can you possibly sleep under all this? It's not terrifying?

LEIF

Oh, no. No way. I spent most of my life out here. It's funny, any given universe, no matter how much is in it, it's still mostly nothing. Light-years and light-years of nothing and yet for me? Feels like home.

GLORIA

So, Shel, Leif is a good person to talk to if you need some kind of thing.

SHEL

A thing?

GLORIA

Yeah. If you find yourself saying "you know what would be great, a thing that does this." Then you should talk to Leif. Like this laser thermometer he's making for Ava.

LEIF

I'm a thing maker.

SHEL

Nutrients.

LEIF

Come again?

SHEL

Nutrients. Just like there may not be a sun wherever we end up, the ground may be... whatever this stuff is that you guys walk on.

LEIF

Right. Because you don't eat.

SHEL

I'm still not exactly clear on what eating is, but I'm starting to get a sense of it and I have to say, real disturbing, guys.

LEIF

I hear you. If I didn't know what eating was and I saw someone eating I would be like "Dude, what are you doing with your face?"

SHEL

Exactly, thank you.

LEIF

So how do you absorb nutrients?

SHEL

My feet.

LEIF

Crazy. So you're kind of plant adjacent.

SHEL

Sure.

LEIF

Cool cool cool cool. You know what, let's not overcomplicate it: socks.

GLORIA

Socks?

LEIF

Yeah. I'll whip up a batch of liquid fertilizer, you soak the socks in the liquid, then wear them at night. Boom.

SHEL

So, they're things I wear on my feet?

LEIF

Yes. I'm assuming you need the usual stuff. Phosphorus, nitrogen, potassium?

SHEL

If that works for a plant that you know, it'll probably work for me.

LEIF

Excellent. Now we just need a catchy name. Footilizer?

GLORIA

We can work on the name later, Leif.

LEIF

Sure.

GLORIA

We can go back down now, Shel.

SHEL

Oh good. Thank you.

SFX: CLIMBING DOWN LADDER.

LEIF

Hey Gloria, can we talk for a minute?

GLORIA

About what?

LEIF

About the fact that you want to go to war with The Teds?

GLORIA

Oh, that. No, we can't.

LEIF

Gloria.

GLORIA

Remember how you said you had a problem dipping your toe in the water and never fully committing to something?

LEIF

Yeah.

GLORIA

I don't have that problem. Get some sleep, Leif. Big day tomorrow.

SFX: CLIMBING DOWN LADDER.

SHEL

I'm never going to have to sleep up there, am I?

GLORIA

No, you're fine.

SHEL

Great.

SFX: BACK DOOR OPENING.

GLORIA

Come this way, I'll show you where to find me if it's late. This is the kitchen.

SHEL

Did something just move?

GLORIA

It's the Parmesan, don't worry about it.

SFX: DOOR OPENING.

GLORIA (CONT'D)

This is where I sleep.

SHEL

It's tiny but, I like it.

GLORIA

I figure this was probably the managers room. You'd use it for bookkeeping and stuff. But when you don't charge for the food, nobody gets paid, and you don't have to deal with vendors, there's not much to do so they put a bed in here. It used to be Caspar's then he gave it to me.

SHEL

Where did he sleep?

GLORIA

Behind the counter. Though he never really slept much.

SHEL

What's all this stuff?

GLORIA

I'm a bit of a souvenir person. This is something called a buffalo nickel from 1934, this is a feather from a prehistoric turkey. This here is called a Thegroni Mourning Braid. This is a picture of all of us. This was on a planet called Neeso, apparently booze cruises exist on other planets.

SHEL

So that's Caspar?

GLORIA

Yeah, that's him.

SHEL

And who was he?

GLORIA

He hired me. He's gone now. God knows where.

SHEL

And what's that a picture of?

GLORIA

Oh, that's Caesar. He's my old sous-chef, that's kind of like family. Those are his one-million kids. They kind of adopted me as their weird aunt.

SHEL

I bet they miss you.

GLORIA

Well, it depends. By the time I make it back to Earth it may be five minutes before I left. Then they wouldn't miss me at all.

SHEL

I don't understand.

GLORIA

Never mind. Long story. Anyway, if you ever need me at night, here's where I'll be.

SHEL

Okay. I think I need to get back under those lights.

GLORIA

Good idea.

SHEL

Thank you for all this. I'm still really scared but... I'm not alone anymore and that's certainly an improvement.

GLORIA

I agree.

SHEL

Good night.

GLORIA

Night.

SHEL

Hey... I get really big.

GLORIA

You do?

SHEL

Yeah. That extra layer I add every night, it just keeps happening.

GLORIA

Uh, how fast does it happen?

SHEL

Really slowly. Don't worry.

GLORIA

Ok. How big do you get?

SHEL

About ten times the size I am now.

GLORIA

Wow. Okay.

SHEL

I heard Leif calling me an "Ent" but I don't know what that means.

GLORIA

Oh, God.

SHEL

Anyway, I just wanted to say... maybe I can protect you from something someday.

GLORIA

Sure. That sounds great. We could use some muscle around here. All we've got is brains.

SHEL

Okay. Goodnight, Gloria.

GLORIA

Goodnight.

SFX: DOOR CLOSING.

AVA

Can everyone stop moving around, please?

SHEL

Sorry... Leif's making me socks.

AVA
What a guy.

SHEL
...

AVA
...

SHEL
Reading is interesting.

AVA
Isn't it?

SHEL
Do you have any more of it?

AVA
...Yes.

SHEL
Could I-

AVA
Here. Read this out load to me. Bertrand Russell
always puts me to sleep.

SHEL
Okay. Start at the first thing?

AVA
Yes. The first thing.

SHEL
Okay, um... Metaphysics, or the attempt to conceive
the world as a whole by means of thought, has been
developed, from the first, by the union and
conflict of two very different human impulses, the
one urging men towards mysticism, the other urging
them towards science. Some men have achieved
greatness through one of these impulses alone,
others through the other alone: in Hume, for
example, the scientific impulse reigns quite
unchecked, while in Blake a strong hostility to
science co-exists with profound mystic insight. But
the greatest men who have been philosophers have
felt the need both of science and of mysticism: the
attempt to harmonize the two was what made their
life, and what always must, for all its arduous
uncertainty, make philosophy, to some minds, a
greater thing than either science or religion.

END.