

A cafe, with several tables and a counter. Some of the tables have dirty plates and empty glasses on them. There is a clock on the wall. It reads one minute to twelve.

(In black, there's the sound of a strong cold wind, bells on the cafe's door chime roughly, and the door slams hard against a wall.)

(When the lights come up, the women are frozen. MARY is behind the counter, cleaning dishes at a sink. MARTHA walks towards the counter but she is looking over her shoulder at the cafe's front door, which is open against the wall. From where she stands, FRED is not in her line of sight.)

(FRED sits at a table, writing and consulting books. On his table, there are many novels, philosophical texts, pens, and paper. His empty backpack is on a chair.)

MARTHA

(MARTHA reacts as if she has just heard the door slam open.)

What the fuck?

(MARTHA goes to the door, shuts it, and locks it.)

How did it open? I locked it. Didn't I?

(She turns and, upon seeing FRED, shouts in shock.)

(MARY looks at MARTHA in concern and stops cleaning.)

(FRED does not react to her shout.)

(MARTHA motions to MARY to keep quiet. She creeps quietly towards MARY and the counter, trying not to be noticed by FRED. When she is close to MARY, she speaks in a low voice.)

Mary. Who is that guy? Where did he come from?

MARY

What do you mean, Martha?

MARTHA

What do you mean, what do I mean? Where the hell did he come from? He wasn't there two seconds ago.

MARY

Of course he was.

MARTHA

Of course he was not! He was not there two seconds ago. I turned off the stereo and locked the door because no one was here.

MARY

Martha, of course, he was here. Look. His pint glass is half full of coffee.

MARTHA

He was not! I closed and locked the door. Somehow it opened again. I went back to close it and when I turned around he was there.

MARY

What? Are you saying he appeared out of thin air?

MARTHA

Yes! That's exactly what I'm saying.

MARY

Don't be ridiculous, Martha. You probably didn't notice him. Your mind was showing you what you wanted to see. You know, wishful thinking.

MARTHA

No! He was not there. And he's there now. Are you saying I'm crazy?

MARY

No, of course not. I'm saying you've made a mistake. A perfectly reasonable mistake, after a long tiring shift fueled by one too many double espressos.

MARTHA

I did not! He wasn't there. Now he is. I swear.

MARY

Martha, he had to have been there. It's the only thing that makes any sense.

MARTHA

Did you see him before now?

MARY

To be honest, at this time of night, when I'm cleaning up, I don't pay much attention to the stragglers.

MARTHA

Aha!

MARY

But he seems familiar.

MARTHA

So you do recognize him.

MARY

I wouldn't go that far. This cafe is always filled with guys like that, reading, writing, playing philosopher-poet-king or whatever.

MARTHA

Mary. You are my sister and I love you but I am telling you -- I am promising you -- he was not there.

MARY

Martha. You are my sister and I love you. But this wouldn't be the first time you jumped to a fantastical conclusion based on unlikely premises.

MARTHA

When the hell do I do that?

MARY

Do you remember that time we played with the Ouija board? You even admitted you were the one moving the thingie and you still managed to convince yourself that what it said was true.

MARTHA

Maybe the spirt we had channelled was working though me.

MARY

The spirt we had channeled was your dead gold fish, Mr. Bubbles! Why would he know we were meant to die at midnight?

MARTHA

Ok, fine. But we were eight! This is different! I'm older now. Wiser.

MARY

Martha, my dear. You and I. We will always be eight.

MARTHA

No, Mary. I've grown. We've grown. And I swear he wasn't there a second ago.

MARY

Look, it doesn't matter.

(She checks the clock on the wall. It still indicates one minute to twelve.)

It's almost twelve. We're closing up. Just ask him to leave.

MARTHA

Are you kidding? Me! I'm not going anywhere near him.

MARY

Martha, I'm busy cleaning up. So either you go shoo your ghost or you can run the risk of unsightly dishpan hands.

MARTHA

That's not a fair choice!

MARY

I'm sure it's not the first or only unfair choice you will face in this lifetime.

MARTHA

Fine! God. You always know how to get me to do anything.

MARY

That's what older sisters are here for.

MARTHA

And always with the older sister line! You were born, like, one minute before me.

MARY

Thirty-one minutes to be exact. Besides, when you talk to him, you will probably remember serving him, and all your paranoid worries will disappear. The brain works in mysterious ways, you know.

MARTHA

Yours certainly does not.

MARY

Go!

MARTHA

(MARTHA approaches FRED cautiously.)

(She stands behind him, reluctant to get his attention. Then, she clears her throat quietly. FRED does not react. She tries again, more loudly, he does not react again. Finally, she speaks.)

Hey, buddy. Hello.

FRED

What. Oh. I'm sorry. I was concentrating on something there. Kinda lost in my train of thought.

MARTHA

Well, it's time to board your train and make like a caboose, my friend, and get out of here. We're closing up.

FRED

Closing up? You close at twelve, right? Midnight?

MARTHA

Ah. Yeah. So.

FRED

(He points to the clock on the wall.)

It's one minute to twelve. I've got one minute left. One more minute of coffee and one more minute to finish my thought. Thanks for the head's up, though.

MARTHA

Hey! *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. I love that book. Are you a philosophy major or something?

FRED

Sorry. I really need to get this idea down on paper. Don't worry. I'll be done by midnight. Excuse me.

(MARTHA rejoins MARY at the counter.)

MARY

So. Is he the ghost of Christmas past?

MARTHA

No. But he's a dick. A total dick.

MARY

What do you mean?

MARTHA

He wouldn't leave when I asked him to leave.

MARY

Really?

MARTHA

Yeah. He waved at his glass and said, "I've got one more minute left." What a dick.

MARY

(She checks the clock.)

I guess he has a point. We do close at twelve. Let him finish his coffee.

MARTHA

I hate those kind of guys. You know, who jump to all kinds of conclusions based on a woman's appearance. I bet you he thinks he has me all figured out because I'm a woman working the late shift at a coffee shop and I have a few tattoos. Fuck him. I bet you he would have listened if I was a man.

MARY

Not two seconds ago, you jumped to the conclusion that he was some kind of ghost-demon.

MARTHA

That's different. I've been working hard all night and what the hell has he been doing. Nothing. Reading and writing. That's all. Nothing.

MARY

You have been working hard. I'm not surprised you're a little cranky.

(She drops a damp cloth on the counter.)

Go wipe down some tables for a few minutes and then tell him to leave.

MARTHA

Fine.

(MARTHA wipes down tables, humming and singing, "If I Had

A Million Dollars," by the
Barenaked Ladies.)

(When only FRED's table remains
to be cleaned, she walks up to
him briskly.)

Alright, Nietzsche, time to go. We're closing up.

FRED

Closing up? You close at twelve, right. Midnight?

MARTHA

Ah. Yeah. So.

FRED

(He points to the clock on the
wall.)

It's one minute to twelve. I've got one minute left. One
more minute of coffee and one more minute to finish my
thought. Thanks for the head's up though.

MARTHA

Hey! *L'Etranger*. I love that book. Are you a French major
or something?

FRED

Sorry. I really need to get this idea down on paper. Don't
worry. I'll be done by midnight. Excuse me.

(MARTHA rejoins MARY at the
counter.)

MARY

So. Is he the ghost of Christmas present?

MARTHA

No. But he's a dick. A total dick.

MARY

What do you mean?

MARTHA

He wouldn't leave when I asked him to leave.

MARY

Really?

MARTHA

Yeah. He waved his glass at me and said, "I've got one more minute left."

(MARTHA notices something isn't quite right.)

What a dick?

MARY

(She checks the clock.)

I guess he has a point. We do close at twelve. Let him finish his coffee.

MARTHA

Wow. I just had the strongest *deja vu* ever.

MARY

What do you mean?

MARTHA

You know. The feeling. Like I'm totally sure I already asked him to leave. Like totally sure we already had this conversation. Wow. Trippy.

MARY

You have been working hard. I'm not surprised you're a little out of sorts.

(She drops a damp cloth on the counter.)

Go wipe down some tables for a few minutes and then tell him to leave.

MARTHA

Fine.

(MARTHA wipes down the tables, humming / singing "Paranoid Android" by Radiohead. She

realizes the tables are clean
and damp.)

What the fuck?

(She stares suspiciously at
FRED who is working diligently.
Then, she rejoins MARY at the
counter.)

Mary, Mary, Mary. The tables have been wiped down already.
The tables have already been wiped down. And look!

(She points at the dishes she
cleared on the counter.)

The dishes have already been cleared.

MARY

Really? Who did that? When?

MARTHA

I did! Like two seconds ago. Only I forgot. We both forgot.
We both forgot after I asked that guy to leave. Again. I
asked him before. I'm sure. Only we both forgot. And I'm
sure he wasn't there when I locked the door which
mysteriously blew open and then he was there all of a
sudden. This is really fucking weird, Mary. Really fucking
weird.

MARY

Martha? Have you been smoking again?

MARTHA

No!

MARY

Look. It doesn't matter.

(She checks the clock on the
wall.)

It's almost twelve. We're closing up. Just ask him to
leave.

MARTHA

Are you kidding? Me! I'm not going anywhere near him now.

MARY

Martha, I'm busy cleaning up. So either you go confront your inner -- no, I should say, "your outer demons" -- or you can run the risk of unsightly dishpan hands.

MARTHA

That's not a fair choice!

MARY

I'm sure it's not the only unfair choice you'll face tonight!

MARTHA

Fine! God. You know how to get me to do anything.

MARY

That's what older sisters are here for.

MARTHA

And always with the older sister line! You were born, like, one minute before me.

MARY

Thirty-one minutes to be exact. Besides. When you talk to him, you'll probably remember serving him, and all your paranoid worries will disappear. The brain works in mysterious ways, you know.

MARTHA

Wait a minute. This has happened before too! We've already had this exact same conversation. What the fuck is happening?

MARY

Go!

(MARY returns to cleaning.
MARTHA stares at MARY for a moment, shocked by her reaction. Then, she heads briskly towards FRED.)

MARTHA

Alright, Mr. Camus-can-do, time to go. We're closing up.

FRED

Closing up? You close at twelve, right. Midnight?

MARTHA

(MARTHA resists saying it
again.)

Ah. Yeah. So.

(She is visibly annoyed when it
finally escapes her lips.)

FRED

(He points to the clock on the
wall.)

It's one minute to twelve. I've got one minute left --

MARTHA

Yeah I know. You've got one more minute of coffee and one
more minute to finish your thought. But, hey, you
appreciate the head's up.

(FRED smiles at her.)

Hey! *Waiting For Godot*. I love that play. Are you a theatre
major or something?

FRED

(Still smiling.)

Sorry, I really need to get this idea down on paper. Don't
worry --

MARTHA

Yeah, yeah. You'll be done by midnight. Excuse me.

(MARTHA rejoins MARY at the
counter.)

MARY

So. Is he the ghost of Christmas future?

MARTHA

Possibly. He's still a dick. A total dick.

MARY

What do you mean?

MARTHA

Forget it.

MARY

Martha are you OK?

MARTHA

I think so. I hope so. No. I know so.

MARY

Look. It doesn't matter.

(She checks the clock.)

It's almost twelve. Give that guy a minute to finish his coffee and then tell him to leave.

MARTHA

I can hardly wait.

MARY

What do you mean?

MARTHA

Something is happening here and I don't know what it is. But I'm going to figure it out. Mr. Jones!

MARY

You have been working hard tonight. I'm not surprised your a little off kilter.

(She drops a damp cloth on the counter.)

Go wipe down some tables for a few minutes and then tell him to split.

MARTHA

Actually, I think the floor needs a bit of a sweep.

(MARTHA sweeps the floor, singing / humming "Basketcase" by Green Day. She watches the clock. When she is sure it is not moving, she sneaks up behind FRED. She winds up with the broom, getting ready to clobber him across the back of the head. Then, she looks at MARY cleaning and decides not to strike him. Instead, she pokes him with the end of the broom handle.)

(FRED does not react. She pokes him again. This time he looks up from his work.)

FRED

Did you poke me with the end of a broom handle?

MARTHA

Yes. Who are you? What are you doing here?

FRED

I can't believe you poked me with the end of a broom handle. That's so awesome.

MARTHA

What the hell is happening here? What are you doing here?

FRED

I wish I had seen it. From behind. You must have looked ridiculous.

MARTHA

(She winds up to strike him with the broom.)

I will totally clock you, if you don't start giving me some straight answers.

FRED

What am I saying? Of course, I can. Hold on.

(He picks up a thick, nondescript, and dog-eared book. He flips through it quickly, finds a page, and watches it -- like a laptop monitor -- and then laughs.)

(MARTHA remains poised to swing.)

That's awesome. That's truly awesome. It was probably better to watch it live, as it happened, but, you know, it's still pretty awesome to watch -- even after the fact. Who are you kidding? If you were going to hit me, you would have done it when I wasn't looking.

(MARTHA lowers the broom.)

OK. Good. Now that we've had a chance to get to know each other, let's talk.

MARTHA

Who are you? What's happening?

FRED

Ok, Martha, you have every reason to find this unsettling. I respect that but, please realize, I mean you no harm. In fact, I mean you good. A lot of good.

MARTHA

How do you know my name? What am I saying? Of course, you know my name.

FRED

Exactly. It couldn't be any other way, right?

MARTHA

I guess not.

FRED

Good. I'm glad we agree on something.

MARTHA

Look, buddy. Either you start talking or I tell Mary to get the gun.

FRED

There's no gun, Martha. Not that it would hurt me, even if you had one.

MARTHA

Aha! You are a ghost!

FRED

Not exactly. Sort of. I'm spirit.

MARTHA

Spirit? A spirit? Or spirit?

FRED

Technically both. At this level of abstraction the distinction kind of breaks down.

MARTHA

Right. So you are dead.

FRED

No, I'm alive. But not in your sense of alive. I mean, I'm alive. But I live outside of time.

MARTHA

Ok. I think I've heard enough. I'm going to slowly back away from you, avoiding eye-contact, and talk to Mary. Please stay right there. No need to get up. Thanks.

FRED

Be my guest. You know where to find me.

MARTHA

Excuse me.

(MARTHA rejoins MARY at the counter.)

MARY

So. Is he the ghost of Christmas past?

MARTHA

What did you say?

MARY

What do you mean?

MARTHA

What do you mean, what do I mean?

MARY

Martha are you OK?

MARTHA

Are you OK, Mary?

MARY

Look, it doesn't matter.

(She checks the clock)

It's almost twelve. Give that guy a minute to finish his coffee and then tell him to leave.

MARTHA

Mary! Is this happening? Is this really happening? Come on, snap out of it.

MARY

What do you mean?

MARTHA

I mean, you've already said that to me, like, three times. Isn't it obvious?

MARY

You have been working hard tonight. I'm not surprised your a little out of whack.

(She drops a damp cloth on the counter.)

Go wipe down some tables for a few minutes and then ask him to leave.

MARTHA

Sure thing, Mary. Sure thing.

(She does not take the cloth and walks directly to FRED.)

Ok. What's happening? What's wrong with Mary?

FRED

Nothing is wrong with Mary.

MARTHA

Why does she keep saying the same thing?

FRED

She isn't. That's all you.

MARTHA

What?

FRED

What you're experiencing is a metaphysical expression of your own doubts about me. About what's happening. About what I'm offering you. Truth be told, you've been right here talking to me the whole time

MARTHA

Really?

FRED

Yes. When it was time for you to close the cafe, you approached me and you asked me to leave. I said that I was here to talk to you. You were friendly at first but the whole "I'm spirit that lives outside of time" threw you for a bit of a loop. It's taking time for your brain to adjust. The door slamming open and the repetitions you've been experiencing -- that's your brain adjusting to this new unimagined reality.

MARTHA

Really? I'm can change the world -- what I experience -- with my brain?

FRED

Well, yes and no. You can't change the world itself but you can change your experience of it.

MARTHA

So what does Mary see? What's she experiencing right now?

FRED

That depends on what you decide. What you choose will ultimately determine what she experiences. Either way,

she'll remember a quick friendly chat with a dawdling customer.

MARTHA

Quick? If we've been talking all this time, haven't we been talking for a while now?

FRED

Like I said, I live outside time. So long as we're having this conversation, you're also outside time. Check the clock.

(The clock indicates one minute to twelve.)

Ta-dah! Welcome to my world.

MARTHA

I'm going to sit down. I need a moment. OK?

(She sits.)

Now. Please don't say anything. This is important. Don't say anything. At all.

FRED

OK.

MARTHA

Sssh.

(She sits very still for a very long moment.)

Ok. Now. Explain to me how it is that we're outside time.

FRED

Right. Let me think. Ok. In Catholicism, there is this notion that Mary, the mother of God, had to be free of sin in order to bear Jesus. One problem. All humans are born with original sin. That's why Jesus is born right. So he can grow up and die for our sins -- in particular, original sin. You know, the tree of knowledge and all that. So this is a problem, right? So. What's the theological fix? How do we get a sin-free Mary and mother of God. Eureka! It is decided that Mary is born outside of time -- outside of the

"human time" where original sin occurs -- and, for this reason, she is never stained with that sin. In fact! She is free from all sin. Oh. And she's also full of grace. Just full of it. You know, bursting with it. Hail Mary! And all that jazz. So. Anyways. When she is immaculately conceived -- that is, conceived outside of time -- she is without sin. Later on, she ascends directly into heaven, without dying or any need for further last judgment redemption because she is one hundred per cent sin-free. She is inserted into our time sin-free and then returns to living outside of our time sin-free. Clean and simple. Just like Flynn. Only different.

MARTHA

Really? I always thought Jesus' conception -- you know inside a virgin -- was the Immaculate Conception.

FRED

Common misunderstanding. You wouldn't be the first person to make that mistake. The virgin birth -- totally different piece of dogma.

MARTHA

So. Are you saying you were born outside of time?

FRED

No. But I live outside of time.

MARTHA

Is Mary with you?

FRED

What? No, no, no. That story was only for the purpose of illustration.

MARTHA

Are there more of you? Living outside of time.

FRED

No. Well, yes. Yes and no. There's only ever one of us outside of time at any one time but, over time, there have been heaps of us. And since we all live outside of time, we all kind of live here at the same time but not at the same time. Each of us experiences our time here as an individual but really we're only individual expressions of one continuous, undifferentiated, and timeless mind.

MARTHA

And that's why you're spirit and a spirit -- at the same time.

FRED

Exactly! You're a quick learner.

MARTHA

Sounds vaguely familiar. Like I've read it before.

FRED

That's entirely possible. This stuff slips into human time every now and again. You know, loose lips, incarnations of Krishna, and that sort of thing. Actually, now that I think about it. I'm sure you've read it before.

MARTHA

Really? Why do you say that?

FRED

Trust me. Call it a hunch.

MARTHA

Fair enough. I guess it's a little late in the game for me to stop taking you at your word. Ok, Mr. I-am-spirit-and-a-spirit-who-lives-outside-time, what do you do with yourself out there? You know. How do you keep yourself busy. Outside. Time.

FRED

Ah. Now that's easy to answer. I read, I write, I study.

MARTHA

You study. Marvelous. And what exactly do you study? Outside. Time.

FRED

(He brandishes the nondescript book.)

This.

MARTHA

That. And what exactly is that?

FRED

It's probably easier if you take a look for yourself?

(He offers her the book. She does not take it.)

Go on. It won't hurt you. I promise.

(MARTHA takes the book. She moves through the pages like a flip book. She reacts as if she's looking into a bright light.)

MARTHA

Oh my god. It's beautiful. It's so beautiful.

FRED

Pretty amazing, huh?

MARTHA

Wow. That's quite the understatement. What is it?

FRED

It's everything. From start to finish. From finish to start. The whole history of everything.

MARTHA

Everything.

FRED

Yes! Every detail, every fact, every nuance. Everything. Any question you want answered. Any belief you want to test. It's all there. Everything.

MARTHA

How's that possible?

FRED

It's knowledge. It's absolute knowledge. Perfect, complete, unending knowledge. And when you read it, you'll know how it's possible.

MARTHA

How did you get this? Who gave it to you? Why did he give it to you?

FRED

I have it because someone gave it to me. And she gave it to me because she thought I wanted it. And she thought I wanted it because she was ready to rejoin time.

MARTHA

She? It was a she? Really?

FRED

The book always passes from a woman to a man and a man to a woman. Boy, girl; boy, girl.

MARTHA

Boy, girl; boy, girl.

FRED

That's right.

MARTHA

And you're a boy and I'm a girl.

FRED

Correct.

MARTHA

Oh my god. You're a boy and I'm a girl.

FRED

Still correct.

MARTHA

Oh my god. You're a boy and I'm a girl. You're here to offer me the book. The knowledge. Aren't you?

FRED

Bingo.

MARTHA

Because you think I want it.

FRED

Exactly.

MARTHA

Oh. My. Fucking. God.

FRED

Agreed.

MARTHA

Whoa. Whoa. Whoa.

(She throws the book on the table.)

No agreed. No agreed. I didn't agree to anything. I was -- I was only emoting. I did not agree to anything. I did not agree. No agree! So. Hold your horses. Mister. Hold your horses.

FRED

Sorry. It's only an expression of mine. Relax. You haven't agreed to anything. This isn't like the King's coin or anything. To accept the book, you really have to accept it. Genuinely, fully, completely. There're no tricks here.

MARTHA

Wait a minute! Why do you think I want it? What have I done? Why me?

FRED

Relax. Nothing. Look. It's not that complicated. In the book. There's a list. You're on it. And you're next. I checked your history, your background, your personality. You've got the intellectual curiosity, the active imagination, the wanderlust. So. I thought I'd give you a shot. It's not that big of a deal, really. Everyone faces this choice at some point in their lives. Everyone of us.

MARTHA

Really?

FRED

Yep. Not everyone takes the book but everyone who does is made better off by taking it.

MARTHA

Why? What happens?

FRED

(He brandishes the book again.)

By studying this. By learning this. By knowing this. You come to know yourself.

MARTHA

I already know myself. Don't I?

FRED

There's knowing and there's knowing. You know, but you don't know.

MARTHA

And this book will help me know.

FRED

Not the book so much in itself. The book is a means to an end. Because it contains everything, because it's pure knowledge, it will allow you to know everything, and by learning and knowing that, you will come to know yourself.

MARTHA

Then what happens.

FRED

What?

MARTHA

What happens next? After I know myself.

FRED

Nothing. It's a *fait accompli*.

MARTHA

Something must come after.

FRED

No. Nothing comes after. I mean, there's no fireworks or anything. If that's what you mean. You come to know yourself. You take a moment. Then, you check the list, pass the book onto someone else, and rejoin time somewhere along the stream.

MARTHA

Seems a little anti-climatic.

FRED

Yeah, well, when you get there, it won't seem that way.

MARTHA

So you're there. Now. You know yourself?

FRED

Yes. Yes, I do.

MARTHA

And what's it like?

FRED

What's what like?

MARTHA

Knowing yourself.

FRED

Oh. It's nice.

MARTHA

Nice. That's it. Nice.

FRED

Oh. Well. There's more to it than that. I mean, I'm different but the only real difference is the knowledge I have of myself. And that's pretty different.

MARTHA

I don't get it.

FRED

Ok. Let me think. Ok. It's like this. It's like, if a reflection suddenly realized it wasn't a reflection but was in fact the thing causing the reflection. Everything's still the same but everything's dramatically different. From the shift in perspective.

MARTHA

The same but dramatically different. How's that possible?

FRED

It is. Trust me. And you'll appreciate it when you get there.

MARTHA

And how long does it take? To get there. To know yourself.

FRED

A long time. Although strictly speaking, we can't say a "long time" because I was living outside of time at the time but you know what I'm getting at.

MARTHA

Strictly speaking, no. I don't know what you're getting at. But I will roll with you on this one. OK. It couldn't have been that long. You don't look very old.

FRED

Outside time, there's no aging. I'm exactly the age I was when I accepted the book even though I've already lived forever. And yet, at the same time, I really haven't lived a single extra second.

MARTHA

Wow.

FRED

Wow indeed.

MARTHA

(She sits very still, thinking for a moment about what he has said.)

What's the catch? I mean, you said not everyone accepts the book and what you're saying sounds too good to be true. Not surprisingly. If I understand you properly, you've said I get to drop out of time, live an eternity of self exploration, and then once I've figured out everything I need to figure out, I get to drop back into time like nothing has happened.

FRED

Not exactly.

MARTHA

Not exactly?

FRED

See, you don't get to drop back into time like nothing has happened. You drop back into time somewhere along the

stream -- more or less wherever the next person who takes the book happens to be.

MARTHA

So. My life now, my sister, the cafe, my friends?

FRED

Gone. Forever. For someone who takes the book, this life, your life, the life you're living now and everyone in it. Gone. You can't ever come back.

MARTHA

Why not?

FRED

Well. Practically speaking, because you're replaced by the person who gives you the book. But. Metaphysically speaking, think about it. Even if you could retake your place in history, it won't be you who returns. You're going to be a completely different person after this journey. Your story and your previous story will have diverged. Forever.

MARTHA

Oh.

FRED

But the reward. Well. The reward. It's incomprehensible.

MARTHA

In exchange for my life I think I'd like a reward that's a little more tangible than "incomprehensible."

FRED

Hey. I understand where you're coming from. Honestly, this is the point in the conversation where most people decline the offer.

MARTHA

I'm not the first person you've asked.

FRED

Third time's the charm.

MARTHA

What happens if I say no?

FRED

Nothing. You go back to your life, I carry on down the list, and you'll probably remember this conversation as a kind of dream.

MARTHA

There's no consequence for saying no.

FRED

None whatsoever. Other than the missed opportunity, of course.

MARTHA

If I turn down the book, does that mean I'll never really know myself?

FRED

No. Not necessarily. Some folks figure it out on their own. By other means. Without the book. There's always more than one way to get to every destination.

MARTHA

Right.

(She sits very still, thinking about what he has said.)

And when you were offered the book, when you heard the catch, what did you do?

FRED

I said, yes. I didn't hesitate for a second.

MARTHA

Regrets?

FRED

None. Not even a few.

MARTHA

If it's so good out there, why don't you carry on? Outside time. You know. Forever.

FRED

Good question. I could quite happily be out here forever but I've learned everything I need to know and I'd like to give someone else the chance to do it too.

MARTHA

But if you come back, doesn't that mean you'll die. Age and die.

FRED

Yeah. But I'm cool with that now. Before, no. Now, yes.

MARTHA

Is that because you know there's a heaven? And all that?

FRED

I can't answer that for you. You'll have to decide for yourself. With or without the book.

MARTHA

(She sits very still, thinking about what he has said.)

Can I talk with Mary?

FRED

I can't see any reason why not. Only. I should warn you. Under the circumstances, it's probably best to go about it allegorically.

MARTHA

OK. Sure. Thanks.

(MARTHA rejoins MARY. FRED sits and returns to his writing.)

MARY

So. Is he the ghost of Christmas present?

MARTHA

More like Jacob Marley.

MARY

What do you mean?

MARTHA

Forget it. I need to ask you something.

MARY

Martha are you OK?

MARTHA

Yeah.

MARY

Look. It doesn't matter.

(She checks the clock.)

It's almost twelve. Give that guy a minute to finish his coffee and then tell him to leave.

MARTHA

I will, Mary. I will. But first. Can I ask you something?

MARY

Sure. Of course. What's up?

MARTHA

I've been meaning to ask you something. All night.

MARY

Oh yeah. What's that exactly?

MARTHA

First, I need to explain something. I've been offered a job. A teaching position. In Korea.

MARY

Martha! That's fantastic! Congratulations! I didn't even know you applied.

MARTHA

I applied months ago. When I was in Thailand. I didn't think I would get it.

MARY

We should celebrate! After we finish cleaning up. This is great news!

MARTHA

Yeah. I guess.

MARY

I don't understand, Martha. What's wrong?

MARTHA

Well this is what I need to ask you, Mary. This contract is different than the others. I'll be gone for a long time. A really long time. For years and years even.

MARY

Oh.

MARTHA

And I've been thinking about it, you know. The time apart. So much will happen to me -- to you -- while we're apart. When I get back, I won't be the same person. You won't be the same person. Our timelines. Our histories. Will have diverged.

MARY

Diverged?

MARTHA

Yeah. You know, like, separated.

MARY

I know what the word means, Martha. It's a peculiar word to use.

MARTHA

The word doesn't matter. But the time apart does. Doesn't it worry you? To be apart that long. Aren't you afraid we'll lose each other?

MARY

Don't be silly, Martha. We're sisters. You and I. We'll always be sisters. Nothing can change that.

MARTHA

I'm not so sure.

MARY

Martha! No amount of time apart will change the fact that you and I are sisters.

MARTHA

Ok. You're right. But let's say it meant we could never see each other again. Imagine for a minute -- I don't know -- you were offered a one way trip to the other side of the universe. You can go but you can never return. You'd learn and experience so much -- beyond your wildest dreams -- but you'd be gone forever. Never to return. What would you do?

MARY

I wouldn't go.

MARTHA

You wouldn't go?

MARY

No. Not a chance. I wouldn't even consider it.

MARTHA

Really?

MARY

What could I possibly gain from a one way trip to the other side of the universe. Everything I want and need is right here. In this cafe.

MARTHA

But how can you possibly know that, Mary? You haven't travelled anywhere. In your whole life. All you ever do is run this crappy little cafe.

MARY

Hey now! I love this cafe. You love it too.

MARTHA

But what if there's more to life than this, Mary? No. Not "what if". There is more. I've had a glimpse of it. I've seen it. So much more than all of this.

MARY

More than this? I'm not so sure about that Martha. But even if there is more, I don't need it. I don't even want it. This is what I want. This place, these walls, the beans, the smell of the coffee roasting, the customer's faces -- all of it. It's me. It's who I am. It's who I want to be. I

don't need some magical mystical carpet ride to figure that out.

MARTHA

So why do I, Mary? Why do I always go running off into the horizon? Am I fucked up?

MARY

Of course not, Martha! Your curiosity runs a little farther afield. That's all.

MARTHA

That's all?

MARY

That's all. We're different you and I. But not so different. I find what I want and need in this sandbox. Right here. You want to play in the sandbox over by the stars. And that's OK.

MARTHA

That's OK?

MARY

Yes. That's OK.

MARTHA

Even if I never come back?

MARY

Korea is not that far away, Martha. You'll be back.

MARTHA

Seriously, Mary. Even if I never come back?

MARY

This is ridiculous, Martha. You'll be back. You always come back. Eventually.

MARTHA

Mary. Please. This is important.

MARY

What's got into you, Martha?

MARTHA

Please.

MARY

Ok. I can't believe this. But yes, it's OK. Even if you never come back. I would miss you, with all my heart. But. If the end of the universe is what you need, I'd want you to have it. Even if it meant losing you. Forever.

MARTHA

Thank you, Mary.

MARY

Your welcome. I guess.

MARTHA

Mary, I love you.

MARY

I love you too, Martha.

(She drops a damp cloth on the counter.)

Now. Go wipe down some tables. And then tell our straggler it's time to go home.

MARTHA

(She does not take the cloth and sits at FRED's table.)

Ok, I want it. I want the book. I really want it.

FRED

You won't regret it.

MARTHA

How do you know?

FRED

I've read it, remember. I made the same choice. It wasn't always easy out here but I have no regrets.

MARTHA

So what do I do?

FRED.

I give you the book, you accept the book, and things carry on from there.

MARTHA

What about you?

FRED

I take over where you left off. I reenter the stream, and start swimming again.

MARTHA

And Mary? My friends? My life?

FRED

They won't notice a difference.

MARTHA

Harsh.

FRED

Yeah. Definitely. But the reward is great. I promise you. It's not too late to say no. There's always another person on the list.

MARTHA

You said everyone faces this choice at some point in her life. Did Mary face it? What did she choose?

FRED

Once the book is yours, you can find out for yourself. Oh!

(He indicates all the books,
pens, etc. on the table.)

And don't forget to take all this crap with you. It's yours now. It'll probably confuse the hell out of me when I come to. Are you ready? Yes or no?

MARTHA

Yes.

(FRED tosses the book to her.
She handles it as if it is
fragile.)

FRED

Don't worry. It's been through a lot worse than that. You'll put it through a lot worse than that. OK. Wait. Just a second. Now. You sit down here.

(He directs her to the chair, where his books and papers are laid out.)

OK. Whenever you're ready. Go for it.

MARTHA

What do I do?

FRED

Accept the book. Make it yours.

MARTHA

How? Do I need to say something special?

FRED

That's up to you. Say whatever it takes for you to make the book really yours. That's all that matters.

MARTHA

(She sits still, while she thinks about what he has said.)

I will remember. I will always remember.

(We return to normal time.)

FRED

Hey there. Hello. Excuse me.

MARTHA

What. Oh. I'm sorry. I was concentrating on something there. Kinda lost in my train of thought.

FRED

Well, it's time to board your train and make like a caboose, my friend, and get out of here. We're closing up.

MARTHA

Closing up? You close at twelve, right? Midnight?

FRED

Yeah. So. It's midnight!

(He points to the clock on the wall. It reads midnight.)

MARTHA

Right. I better get going. Then.

FRED

Hey! *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. I love that book! Are you a philosophy major or something?

MARY

Something like that.

FRED

Cool. Anyways. You can let yourself out when you're packed up. Have a great night.

(FRED grabs the broom, exits behind the counter, humming/singing "Time is on My Side" by The Rolling Stones.)

MARTHA

Thanks. You too.

(MARTHA packs up quickly, not looking at MARY. She heads to the front door. The locked door rattles. In her haste, she fumbles with the lock.)

MARY

Oh. Here let me help you. That lock is a pain. I need to lock it behind you anyway.

(MARY crosses to MARTHA, unlocks the door, and holds it open for MARTHA).

Have a great night.

MARTHA

You too. Mary.

MARY

I'm sorry. Do I know you?

MARTHA

I don't know. I really don't know. Wait! Now I do!

(She flips through the nondescript book. She checks to see if MARY was offered the book and to see if she accepted. MARY was offered the book but did not accept it. MARTHA is disappointed, reflects, and then smiles.)

No, Mary, you don't know me. Not now. Not ever. You know this cafe, these walls, this place. You know everything you need to know. You don't need a magical mystical carpet ride to figure yourself out. Like I do.

MARY

I'm sorry. I don't understand.

MARTHA

I know. You can't. And you won't. The thing is, Mary. I can't decide if I envy you or not. But time will tell. Good bye, Mary.

MARY

Good bye.

(Closes and locks the door.)

Curious girl. There seems to be one every night.

(She returns to the counter and considers the dishes.)

Fred! You better not be eating the cookie dough back there! Get out here and finish these dishes.

(She turns and drinks in the cafe, smiling.)

Home sweet home.