

A Dance in the Dark

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FADE IN:

INT. RESTAURANT - DAY

A typical diner. Busy lunch hour. At a booth is JO(30), lanky and tall, and CAROLINE(30), blonde and beautiful.

Jo reads a menu while Caroline fiddles with her smart phone.

JO

Do you know what you're getting?

CAROLINE

Mmhmm.

JO

They make these menus too involved now. Look at this, it's got like 50 breakfast plates! Bacon and eggs. Ham and eggs. Bacon, ham, and eggs. It's ridiculous.

CAROLINE

Mmhmm.

JO

Maybe I should just order an omelette, plain, and a chicken salad sandwich on wheat toast.

CAROLINE

Mmhmm.

JO

Caroline, put the phone down! Come on, we never talk anymore!

She rolls her eyes.

CAROLINE

Oh, here we go.

JO

We both work 80 hours a week, I hardly see you and when I do you're always playing on your damn phone there.

She holds it up.

CAROLINE

Universal Galaxy S14...the latest in smart phone technology.

JO
I don't care! What are you even
doing on there?

She shows him the screen; it's got a green radar on it.

CAROLINE
Checking out my new ghost radar
app.

JO
Ghost radar app. You find that
more amusing than talking to me?

CAROLINE
You don't understand, Joey; this
radar is built on special energy to
better detect rogue orbs and
spirits. It's the kind of thing
those guys on Ghost Hunters use.

JO
Really? And how many orbs are in
here right now?

CAROLINE
Well...none.

JO
So you're just looking at an empty
screen then?

CAROLINE
That's correct.

They stare at each other. The phone vibrates.

CAROLINE
Oh! A word!

JO
Word.

CAROLINE
The radar also picks up words
spoken from nearby spirits. We can
then piece together what they're
saying.

JO
And what are they saying?

Caroline smiles and shows him the screen.

CAROLINE
Cheese!

JO
They're saying cheese. Wonderful.

A WAITRESS walks over.

WAITRESS
Have ya'll decided?

CAROLINE
I'll have the western, wheat toast,
glass of OJ please.

JO
I'll have the ham and cheese
omelette please.

WAITRESS
Be right back!

The waitress exits. Caroline points at Jo.

CAROLINE
Cheese! You ordered cheese!

JO
So?

CAROLINE
The radar said cheese! There must
have been some sort of celestial
connection between you and one of
the purgatorial spirits!

JO
Yeah, well, that purgatorial spirit
can make a celestial connection
right up his purgatorial ass.

The phone vibrates. Caroline checks the screen, smile fades.
She turns it around; it says "JO".

JO
Hm. Well, I am your most
frequently contacted person so the
program probably just picked it up.

It vibrates again. The word "NO" appears.

CAROLINE
It said no.

JO

Who said? Look, Carrie, just give this one a rest, alright? Remember Words With Friends? That addiction nearly got you fired!

CAROLINE

This isn't Words With Friends, though. It's called Ghost Radar and it seems to have some sort of interest in you.

JO

Yeah, well, who wouldn't?

Phone vibrates. Caroline checks it, goes pale. She turns it around. The word "DIE" is on it.

Jo goes pale as well.

JO

What the hell...?

He stares at the screen, deep focus, until it's broken up by plates dropped off by the waitress.

WAITRESS

Here ya'll are! Enjoy!

Caroline puts the phone aside. They both sit there in silence for a second.

JO

Remember that Seinfeld episode where Elaine tells that chick that it's a "big coincidence" that Jerry's stolen statue was in her house and the chick goes "there's no such thing as a big coincidence"?

CAROLINE

I remember.

JO

I think this is a big coincidence.

Caroline nods, smiles.

CAROLINE

Yeah. Let's eat.

He smiles, grabs his fork, stabs the omelette, takes a mouthful. Stabs it again, takes some more.

JO
Pretty good.

Stabs it again, raises a portion to his mouth...

JO
AHHHH!

A live five-inch black scorpion dangles off the fork. Its pincers attempt to pierce Jo's skin.

PATRONS watch, also horrified. He drops the fork in horror.

JO
Holy shit!

The waitress runs over, jumps at the sight of the scorpion.

WAITRESS
My word!

JO
What the hell kind of kitchen are you running back there?!

WAITRESS
I am so sorry! Let me get this out of your way! Oh my!

She grabs the plates and exits. Jo sits there in shock. The phone vibrates. Caroline curiously picks it up.

JO
What's it say?

She shows him; "LUCKY". Jo's teeth clatter.

JO
Caroline...

CAROLINE
Wait a minute...there's an orb in the restaurant.

She shows him the radar; a red dot blips.

CAROLINE
It's moving...

Jo watches as the red dot moves closer to the center.

CAROLINE
It's right next to you...

Jo looks at the space next to him.

JO
Aren't orbs light?

CAROLINE
Only in pictures. To the naked eye
they're invisible.

JO
What do we do?

CAROLINE
Try talking to it.

Jo looks at the seat beside him out of the corner of his eye.

JO
What's your name?

The phone vibrates, "ORION".

JO
Orion. That's a nice name. What
is it that you want?

The phone vibrates, "BASEMENT".

JO
You want a basement?

CAROLINE
Wants us in the basement maybe?

JO
There aren't basements in
California.

The phone vibrates, "NOW".

They peer back toward the kitchen, where the waitress and a CHEF yell at each other.

WAITRESS
Where'd it come from then?

CHEF
I pulled it outta my asshole, is
that what you wanna hear?!

They look back at each other.

CAROLINE
Maybe we should just go.

Jo smiles.

JO

Not taking the Ghost Radar
seriously anymore?

CAROLINE

I could just delete it, we leave,
end of story.

JO

Well, I'm borderline interested
now. Let's check it out. I know
deep down you want to.

A smile develops on her face.

CAROLINE

We gotta find the basement first.

The phone vibrates, "EMPLOYEES". They look at it, quizzical.

Caroline peeks around, spots a door in back, EMPLOYEES ONLY.

CAROLINE

Over there.

They get out of their booth and casually walk over to the door. When no one's looking, they enter.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

They enter a deserted corridor with doors on either side. The phone vibrates, "STORAGE". They walk.

JO

You realize this is the most time
we've spent together in months?

CAROLINE

I did. It's nice.

Caroline checks the radar; the red dot is still centered.

They come to a door labeled STORAGE. Jo opens it. A wooden staircase descends into darkness. They start down it.

INT. STORAGE ROOM - DAY

The phone as their only light, they reach the bottom. Boxes and old culinary machines everywhere.

JO
Orion, we're here.

The phone vibrates, "BOOKSHELF".

They walk over to an old plywood bookshelf against the wall.
The phone vibrates again, "MOVE".

JO
Damn it.

CAROLINE
Need a hand?

JO
No, it looks light.

She rolls her eyes, lends a hand anyway. Together they pull it outward revealing a hole in the wall that leads to another room. They step inside.

INT. BASEMENT - DAY

Dirt, darkness, and debris everywhere. This place hasn't been touched in decades.

Caroline shines her phone against the brick wall; black chars go up and down it, signs of a fire.

As she turns around she steps into a giant spider web.

CAROLINE
Ah! Jo!

Jo comes to her aid and wipes the web off, hugs her.

JO
It's alright. You're fine.

CAROLINE
I'm ready to stop playing Ghost Radar now. Can we go?

JO
Not yet. Orion, what now?

Silence. They awkwardly look at the phone. The red dot is still centered.

JO
He's still here, right?

CAROLINE
Yeah, he's right beside us.

The phone vibrates, "DANCE". They're taken aback.

CAROLINE
What the-

JO
Dance? You brought us down here to
dance?

The phone vibrates, "DANCE" again. Jo and Caroline look at each other, take their positions, start a slow dance.

JO
Maybe this is just all somehow
randomly computer generated.
Doesn't make any sense.

Caroline stumbles.

CAROLINE
OW!

JO
Sorry.

CAROLINE
Why didn't you ever learn?

JO
It's embarrassing.

CAROLINE
That's why you learn.

JO
Not like I needed it after our
wedding.

CAROLINE
I would have gone dancing.

JO
Bullshit. You're never home.

Caroline pulls away.

CAROLINE
And you are?! It's always my
fault, isn't it?
(MORE)

CAROLINE (CONT'D)

You work just as many hours as I do
and anytime you're home you say
"oooh I'm too tired to do
anything." I would love to go out
dancing with you. I would always
find time. But you're always so
stubborn about learning or
accepting anything new!

They continue in silence.

JO

I'm sorry. I'm here now, aren't I?

Caroline checks her phone over Jo's shoulder; there's five more orbs on the radar.

CAROLINE

We've got company.

JO

Orion's been pretty quiet.

CAROLINE

Probably doesn't get many visitors down here.

JO

Yeah, one every fifty years.

The phone vibrates, "FIFTY-ONE".

CAROLINE

He says fifty-one.

JO

Was there a fire down here or something?

Phone vibrates, "INFERNO". Vibrates again, "MASSACRE".

CAROLINE

He says inferno. A massacre. I'm thinking this might have been a basement for an apartment building at one point. Maybe a cellar.

Phone vibrates, "ALL". Vibrates again, "FAMILY". Once more, "BURNED".

CAROLINE

He says his whole family died.

Jo stares out into space; that one hit hard.

She checks out the radar again; now there's a couple dozen red dots all over the place.

CAROLINE
They're all here.

JO
What did we do to earn an audience?

Phone vibrates, "LOVE".

CAROLINE
Love. Probably saw us arguing up there. Wanted to give us a scare.

JO
Why? What do they care?

CAROLINE
If you died and were stuck in limbo seeing people like us argue, you'd probably get fed up, too.

The phone vibrates twice. The words read "TIL" and "DEATH".

JO
Vibrating like crazy there.

CAROLINE
Til death. Love til death.

She looks at the radar; it's covered in red dots. Jo steps back to address her.

JO
Sometimes I guess we forget.

CAROLINE
Yeah.

JO
If I learn to dance...would you-

CAROLINE
Of course. And I'll try to be home more often...and to stop playing Words With Friends.

JO
I thought you did.

CAROLINE
I lied. It's an addiction.

They smile. Phone vibrates, "TA".

CAROLINE
I guess we can go.

They pass a wall mirror as they exit. There's a faint reflection of a man, ORION(30s), in the mirror. His clothes are torn, his skin is burned, but he looks content.

INT. RESTAURANT - DAY

They reenter the restaurant, head for the exit. The waitress happily stops them with two plates of food.

WAITRESS
Hey, ya'll! I got ya'll another order - no scorpions!

She grins cheek-to-cheek.

JO
I think you've done enough for us today.

CAROLINE
Plus that one has a spider on it.

They exit the building. The waitress looks at the plate and screams back at the kitchen.

WAITRESS
MARIO!

Jo and Caroline walk through the parking lot hand in hand.

FADE OUT.

THE END