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CHARACTERS

MEREDITH CHERRY, 17

JIM RAINEY, 18

TIME

The autumn of the year 1954.

SETTING

A sofa in the living room of a brick house at 405 Armitage Avenue in Armitage, a small town in eastern Ohio.

MEREDITH and JIM are sitting on the sofa, facing downstage toward an invisible black-and-white television set. They are watching in the dark, with just the ghostly television light upon them. Muted sounds of an old horror movie on the invisible television set from time to time. What they are watching is a very old, early thirties horror movie. MEREDITH is cuddled under JIM's arm. It's late at night. She's babysitting. She's eating a peach.

MEREDITH: Isn't this a great movie?

JIM: Are you kidding? This is the stupidest thing I've ever seen in my life. The people who aren't playing zombies are so bad they're more like zombies than the people playing zombies.

MEREDITH: It's remarkable how potent cheap music can be.

JIM: What?

MEREDITH: Noel Coward said that on the radio. He means that sometimes something that isn't actually made very well can still give you a lot of pleasure by creating a really powerful atmosphere you can get lost in.

JIM: I don't want to get lost. I want to watch something that makes sense, like football. Do you have to eat that damned peach? It's dripping all over the place. We've got popcorn and you're eating a peach.

MEREDITH: I was hungry for peaches. I've been getting all kinds of weird cravings lately. And sometimes I can smell bacon frying when nobody is cooking bacon. And also I've been hearing these radio broadcasts in my head. I mean, not real ones. It's like, there's this special frequency and I'm the only one tuned to it, and I can

hear these voices and sounds and this music. It's just like murmuring in the background all the time, and sometimes somebody turns it up, and I can hear parts of it really clearly, and then it gets all garbled again.

JIM: What is it? Like Mars communicating with you? Is the mother ship calling you home?

MEREDITH: I don't think it's from Mars. I don't know where it's from. And I've been having a lot of nightmares, really disturbing ones, and I wake up in the middle of the night all sweaty and shaking so I go downstairs and open the refrigerator in the dark, because I like to see the light streaming out of the refrigerator into the darkness, like a picture of God in my old Bible storybook.

JIM: So you've been hearing voices and smelling bacon and you think God lives in your refrigerator?

MEREDITH: No, silly. Not just my refrigerator. Everybody's refrigerator. I mean, if God is everywhere, then he's in the refrigerator, right?

JIM: You think he's in the toilet, too?

MEREDITH: I think everywhere means everywhere. If you believe that sort of thing. I don't know if I do or not. But I keep getting this feeling there's things going on all around me that I don't quite understand. It's like I'm a radio and my reception isn't good enough to draw in everything that's zapping through the air, so I just get these fragments of dialogue, sudden bursts of revelation, like listening to the radio late at night. Which I do sometimes when I can't sleep and go downstairs and have an onion and anchovy sandwich at three in the morning, and maybe I don't want to go back to sleep, because I've been dreaming that rats are eating the baby or something. And also I keep losing everything. I lost my keys. I lost my driver's license. I lost the cat. Except that came back. I lost my virginity in the back seat of your Chevy during *The Creature from the Black Lagoon* at the drive-in. That's not coming back. Some things you can find again and some things, once you lose them, they're gone forever. And that's a long time. As we learn from popular songs on the radio. Also, I believe in ghosts.

JIM: There aren't any ghosts. That's almost as stupid as zombies.

MEREDITH: Well, it's not like Caspar the Friendly Ghost or people wearing sheets like in Three Stooges movies or anything like that. I

mean I can feel these presences all around me. Like watching us.

JIM: Were they watching what we just did on the sofa?

MEREDITH: God, I hope not. Don't you ever get the feeling there's all kinds of presences around you, watching you?

JIM: No.

MEREDITH: You know why I liked you at first? Because you were so quiet. I figured that meant you were deep. But it turned out you just didn't have anything to say.

JIM: I've got plenty to say. I just don't feel like yapping all the time like you. Do they have any more beer?

MEREDITH: We can't drink all of Mr. Palestrina's beer. I'm the babysitter. I can't get drunk.

JIM: But you can screw me on the sofa.

MEREDITH: Oh, God, we shouldn't have done that. What if Ben came down and saw us? What if he heard something and came down the steps and was looking at us from the doorway while it was happening?

JIM: Then he's a pervert.

MEREDITH: He's not a pervert. He's a little boy.

JIM: He's weird.

MEREDITH: He's not weird. Well, he's a little bit weird. But I like it. He's a lot nicer to me than you are.

JIM: He just wants to see you naked.

MEREDITH: He's five years old.

JIM: I've seen the way that kid looks at you in your swimsuit. Trust me, he wants to see you naked.

MEREDITH: But you like children, right?

JIM: No, I don't. They're a pain in the ass.

MEREDITH: You wouldn't like to have children some day?

JIM: Nope.

MEREDITH: But you would, if we got married.

JIM: I don't want to get married.

MEREDITH: You mean right now, or ever? You don't want to be

alone for the rest of your life.

JIM: I'm not alone. You're here. Well, part of you is here. Most of you is usually someplace else, listening to the damned radio in your head.

MEREDITH: I'm not someplace else. Except sometimes I can almost remember being someplace else. Somebody else. Like before I was born.

JIM: What a bunch of crap that is.

MEREDITH: It's not crap. Ben told me he can almost remember being somebody else, in a previous life.

JIM: Ben is nuts, and so are you. You are the weirdest girl in this whole town. And this is a pretty weird town.

MEREDITH: I think you'd be good with children, if you had one. I mean, if we got married and had one.

JIM: If we got married and had a kid, I'd step in front of the nearest locomotive.

MEREDITH: You don't mean that.

JIM: How do you know what I mean?

MEREDITH: It could happen, you know. Girls do get pregnant. And then what can you do?

JIM: Hop on the next boxcar to Fresno.

MEREDITH: You wouldn't do that.

JIM: I'd rather be dead. Like those zombies in this stupid movie.

Pause. Sound of the movie.

MEREDITH: Do you think zombies eat babies?

JIM: I don't know what zombies eat. I got to go. Me and Cletis are going hunting tomorrow.

MEREDITH: I don't understand how you can take pleasure from killing things.

JIM: It's human nature. Kill or be killed. Law of the Jungle. Ask the voices you hear on the radio in your head. They'll tell you.

MEREDITH: I don't like killing things. *Pause.* Some people get rid of their babies before they're born. But I would never do that. I'd rather die.

JIM: *Getting up and starting to go.* Okay. See you later.

MEREDITH: *Trying to pull him back.* Wait. Don't you want to see the end of the movie?

JIM: I know the end of the movie. They kill the zombies. That's the end of the movie.

MEREDITH: Poor zombies. I feel sorry for them.

JIM: You feel sorry for zombies?

MEREDITH: Zombies are people, too.

JIM: You feel sorry for everything. You feel sorry for the chicken while you're eating it. You even felt sorry for the damned Creature from the Black Lagoon. All the time we were doing it in the back seat you were crying.

MEREDITH: Well, he was lonely.

JIM: He was a monster.

MEREDITH: He was just different. It's not a crime to be different. Or at least it shouldn't be.

JIM: Great. That's your perfect mate. Something with flippers and gills. You can have babies with him. Little frog-face babies. I hope you'll be very happy together.

MEREDITH: I want to tell you something.

JIM: Tell me later.

MEREDITH: I could be dead later.

JIM: Then you can come back as a zombie and tell me while you're eating the baby.

He goes. Pause.

MEREDITH: Yeah. Thanks a lot, Jim. You're a great listener. You're going to make a wonderful father some day.

Pause. She sits down, looks at the movie.

Watch out, zombies. They're coming to get you. I wonder if zombies hear voices in their heads. I bet they do. They always look like they're listening to something we can't hear. Maybe it's better to be dead. Or live at the bottom of a lagoon.

Pause. Faint sound of the movie. She's listening to something else.

What? Speak up. I can almost make it out. Like somebody is trying

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to tell me something. What are you trying to tell me? What should I do? Tell me what to do. Please tell me what to do.

Sound of a faint screaming from inside the television set. The light fades on her and goes out.

END OF PLAY

Plays for Middle Schools
