

Finalist - Deathscribe 2012: The Fifth International
Festival of Horror Radio Plays

COMPARING NOTES AT THE END OF THE WORLD

by

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COMPARING NOTES AT THE END OF THE WORLD

SOUND: WIND BLOWS DEAD LEAVES. AN IRON GATE RATTLES IN ITS HINGES.

SOUND: CHURCH BELLS RING; THE SOUND WARPS AND FLUCTUATES. BENEATH THE BELLS IS A WET, HUNGRY SOUND, LIKE A TONGUE ACROSS JAGGED TEETH. THE SOUND IS ABRUPTLY CUT OFF BY--

ANTONIO: Ma'am! Wake up! Ma'am!

LOIS: Did you hear it? Did you hear the bells?

ANTONIO: Lady, calm down. There were no bells.

LOIS: I swear I heard them just now. The church--

ANTONIO: You were asleep. You probably dreamt it.

LOIS: I was asleep?

ANTONIO: Yeah. We ate about an hour ago. Tried to wake you. You were out.

LOIS: I can't believe I was asleep.

ANTONIO: You were dead on your feet when you showed up here. You needed it. We all need it.

LOIS: It's not safe.

ANTONIO: No. But we still need it.

SOUND: FOOTSTEPS APPROACHING.

PHIL: Gomez?

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ANTONIO: She's awake. She dreamed about the church bells.

PHIL: Ma'am. My name is Phil. This here is Antonio.

LOIS: Lois.

PHIL: Nice to meet you, Lois. Mind if I ask what you're doing here?

LOIS: Same as you, I imagine. I needed to see it for myself.

PHIL: The church?

LOIS: It is a church, right?

ANTONIO: No crosses or anything. It doesn't look like any church I've ever seen. It's too... I don't know. Jagged. Or something. But still...

PHIL: Yeah. We call it the church.

LOIS: Have you--

PHIL: Gone inside? No. Tried. The doors are so solid I don't even know if they are doors. It's like a solid wall painted very convincingly to look like big wooden doors.

LOIS: But there is something, right? Inside?

PHIL: We think so. We tried looking in the windows. They're all some kind of thick stained glass.

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ANTONIO: Couldn't see anything definite, but there were shapes, shadows. And they were moving.

PHIL: We don't know what we saw. Could have been anything.

LOIS: It came first, though, right? The church appeared, and then everything else happened.

PHIL: We don't know that either. But... It feels right. When the end of the world started, it started here.

LOIS: The end of the world?

PHIL: For lack of a better term.

LOIS: It didn't really end, though, did it? It just... changed.

ANTONIO: Would have been better if it ended.

SOUND: WINGS FLUTTER.

LOIS: Those things.

PHIL: We're safe from them here.

LOIS: We are? How?

PHIL: I think we're where they want us to be. Those things... They herded us here. Think about it. You got here because you were running from them, right? Every turn you made when you heard them, saw them out of the corner of your eye--

LOIS: Always that way. Just out of sight.

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PHIL: I don't think anybody's really seen them. We hear them. And we almost see them, just enough so our imagination fills in the blanks and scares the shit out of us until we run away. And eventually, we end up here.

LOIS: How long have you been here?

ANTONIO: Couple of days. There have been tons of people here before us. You can tell by all the crap left behind. But you're the first person we've seen since we got here.

LOIS: So now what?

ANTONIO: Now, we're just waiting for whatever happens next. For those doors to open, I guess. God help us.

SOUND: THE AIR WARPS. A DISTANT CHIME, RIPPLING AS IF UNDER WATER. A HOLE RIPS OPEN, AND SOMETHING SQUISHY AND MANY-LEGGED PLOPS OUT AND SCURRIES OFF.

ANTONIO: Huh. A yellow one.

LOIS: I can't believe how used to that I am. That first morning...

PHIL: I was pretty sure I'd gone insane.

ANTONIO: I'm still not sure I haven't. I still remember getting up for work, like usual. Took a shower. And then I was shaving, like I did every morning. And then my reflection cut itself.

LOIS: Your reflection...?

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ANTONIO: Right. In the mirror I cut myself, except... I didn't. I was fine, but my reflection... I, it, he stopped and swore. I heard it, like he was on the other side of a closed window. He leaned in a little and waited to see if it would start bleeding. Just like I would. When it did he swore again, rinsed off his razor and grabbed some toilet paper, and walked out of the room. I haven't seen it since.

LOIS: You don't have a reflection anymore?

ANTONIO: Like I'm a vampire or some bullshit. Sometimes... Sometimes I think I could go in after it. My reflection. Sometimes I'm looking at a mirror, or a puddle, and I see everything around me but I don't see me anywhere, but sometimes I get this feeling like I'm waiting just around the corner in there, just out of sight. Like I could... I could just step through and find me, you know?

PHIL: I don't think that would be a good idea.

ANTONIO: I know. I don't want to, anymore than I want to get inside that church. I just have to, you know? So, obviously, I stopped shaving.

LOIS: I was coming back from walking my dog. My apartment building turned upside down. I was walking up the sidewalk when that first ripple went through. I heard those bells and I stopped and turned, and when I turned back, my building was upside down.

ANTONIO: Like it fell over?

LOIS: No. Like for the building and everything inside it, up became down and down became up. It was a three-flat. I lived on the top floor. I looked right into my window and saw my husband. He walked

right up to the window and looked at me. Upside down. He was standing on the floor, but the floor was where the ceiling should have been. He, um... He tried to climb out a window to get to me, but he... He fell. Up. From my perspective. Maybe he thought I was the one who was upside down. But up he went, and he never stopped.

PHIL: You said you were walking your dog...?

LOIS: Yeah. It changed a week or so later, when the rest of them did. I had to kill it with a shovel. I don't know how a Pomeranian could suddenly have so many teeth.

ANTONIO: You gotta have some idea about what's going on. Come on. You were a physics teacher.

PHIL: Yeah. High school physics. This stuff is way above my pay grade. Have you ever heard the phrase, "Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic"? Arthur C. Clarke?

ANTONIO: Never heard of him.

PHIL: Yes you have. You just didn't know it. These things you see, or you almost see, just in the corner of your eye...

LOIS: They've got wings. I'm pretty sure. That's why it flutters like that.

PHIL: Could be. But why can't we just see them?

LOIS: I don't want to see them. I think there couldn't be anything worse than actually seeing those things.

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PHIL: They were the first thing I noticed, that day. My wife and I were waiting for trains. She takes the Brown Line; I was waiting for the Red. Her train pulled in. She kissed me goodbye and squeezed on. It was rush hour. The doors shut, and I heard that rippling sound. And then I saw them. You know, just there, in the corner of my eye. I turned to see what it was, but there was nothing. Then the train started moving. I looked back, and I saw my wife pressed against the glass of the door. She was screaming. I couldn't hear her. I couldn't hear anything over those chimes, but I could see it in her face. All of their faces. There was something in there, on the train with them. But the train just kept going, and it never stopped.

LOIS: What do you mean, it never stopped?

PHIL: Just that. It's still going. I still see it pass by every now and then. After the first time I camped out on the platform for a week, hoping to see it up close.

LOIS: Did you?

PHIL: Yeah, I saw it. It came through the station, even slowed down like it was going to stop, but it didn't. It just slowed down long enough for me to get a good look. It... taunted me.

LOIS: You're sure it was the same train?

PHIL: I saw her on it. My wife.

LOIS: Was she still alive?

PHIL: Yes.

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LOIS: Well that's good, isn't it? Your wife is still out there. You've got something to fight for. This is good.

PHIL: I saw the train. I saw what was on there with her, what she was trapped with. I saw how it was keeping her alive.

LOIS: But at least you know she's alive.

PHIL: Trust me. It would be better if she wasn't.

ANTONIO: So, "advanced technology"? You think... what? Aliens?

PHIL: Either of you have a better explanation?

LOIS: Isn't it obvious? Look around you. The explanation is God went crazy. That sound you hear, when the ripples happen? The chimes? That's God laughing.

PAUSE.

ANTONIO: Makes as much sense as anything. All I know is, nothing works right anymore. The rules all got changed.

SOUND: WINGS FLUTTER, LOUDER AND CLOSER.

PHIL: Jesus. Did you hear that?

ANTONIO: They're getting really close.

LOIS: You're sure it's safe?

SOUND: WINGS FLUTTERING, FOLLOWED BY A RATTLING HISS.

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PHIL: Oh shit. RUN!

SOUND: MULTIPLE FOOTSTEPS RUNNING. THE FLUTTERING WINGS AND HISSING FADES.

LOIS: (PANTING) Are they gone?

ANTONIO: (PANTING) I think so.

LOIS: Jesus, what was that? I thought--

PHIL: Guys. They did it again.

ANTONIO: What?

PHIL: They herded us. Right up to the front door.

ANTONIO: Oh, shit.

SOUND: PULLING ON A LOCKED DOOR HANDLE.

LOIS: It's still shut tight. Maybe--

PHIL: No. This is where they wanted us. It's where we're supposed to be.

ANTONIO: Come on, let's just--

PHIL: Wait. Listen.

SOUND: QUIET, DISTANT WIND, FOLLOWED BY:

SOUND: CHURCH BELLS RING; THE SOUND WARPS AND FLUCTUATES. BENEATH THE BELLS IS A WET, HUNGRY SOUND, LIKE A TONGUE ACROSS JAGGED TEETH.

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LOIS: Do you hear it? Do you hear it?

ANTONIO: Oh god...

SOUND: A MASSIVE, ANCIENT LOCK TURNS.
HUGE, HEAVY DOORS CREAK OPEN. WINDS
FROM A CAVERNOUS VOID BILLOW.

PHIL: After you.

SOUND: FOOTSTEPS, SLOWLY RECEDING.

SOUND: THE HEAVY DOORS SLAM SHUT. SILENCE.

END