

*“Llamas are kinder creatures than that one.
That one’s got power, and power can be terrifying.”*



A tale from the
Worlds Across the Causeway

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Prologue: What Happened in the Cornfield Last Night

Strange happenings continue to disquiet the small town of Harvest, Okla. Known for their high-quality corn exports and locally world-famous Papier-mâché Museum, the town has reportedly run afoul of unfortunate phenomena over the past year.

The latest incident occurred last night in the cornfield on the west side of town. Joni Evers, town resident and local mechanic, explains what she witnessed:

“Sky was black, what with the clouds rolling in. Things got real dark, real quick. Lightning started flashing, but there wasn’t any thunder to speak of. That’s not overly strange, mind you, sometimes weather’s just right for that, but I found it odd...’auspicious’ my sister would say, but I don’t think she uses the word like the most folk. Anyway, the light show made the cornfield easy to see. It was like an overly fake storm you see in an old horror movie like ‘Attack of the Reapers’. The wind picked up and the stalks started a’swayin something fierce. Suddenly a man, what looked like a man, came strutting out of the field. I couldn’t believe what I was seeing — a man, buttoned up in a suit jacket, with nothing but a skull for a head. He looked my way, tipped his hat — he had a hat, if I didn’t mention — and walked on toward the Dino Station. What was that? What was I doing out by the cornfield? ... You know, now that you mention it, I can’t recall.”

The “skull man,” as Joni referred to him, would play a pivotal role in events that would unfold later that night.

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By Greg Rogers

Edith heard a whisper from the pixels on her computer screen.

“Is the coffee ready yet?” No reply. *Oh, right. It’s just me.*

Edith didn’t understand why a small town like Harvest, Oklahoma needed a boat rental store with the nearest lake a good four-hour drive away. *How’d it all come to this?* Family abandoning you with the vague consolation of small business ownership, she supposed.

“You’ll own your own business, Edith.” “It’s the American Dream, Edith.” *We probably won’t ever see you again, Edith, and that’s the real reason we’re leaving.* They didn’t say that last one, but she knew that was the truth.

The coffee-maker emitted a high-pitched screech, signaling it had finished its task, when the computer screen whispered again. The whisper wasn’t so much sound as it was a feeling. Hairs prickled on the back of Edith’s neck making her skin feel dry and irritated. For a moment, just a moment, she understood the whispers: *I’m coming to town tonight. Rejoice!*

Her sleeping pills had run dry a couple days ago and the insomnia had been working overtime. "Ugh, I've been listening to Reverend McKenzie too much," she said, again to no one, with her hands scrunching her face into what she imagined looked like a cubist painting. *Maybe I should have been a painter*, she thought, holding the pose. *No one tries to pawn failing businesses off on starving artists.*

Sliding off her chair, Edith turned her attention back to what mattered and shuffled toward the coffee-maker. She pulled the pot to the sound of coffee hitting the hot carafe. *Sizzle... sizzle... sizzle*. Slowly, almost sensually, she poured the dark liquid into a mug she'd 'borrowed' from Oz's Diner. "Yeah, baby, that's the stuff."

Outside, the sky shone bright blue without a cloud in sight.

"We could really use some rain," she mumbled to herself as she raised the mug to her lips. A whisper responded: *Don't worry, I'm bringing a big storm with me tonight!*

"Ow!" *Smash!* "Fuck!"

As she had gone to take a sip, her hand had drifted so that the coffee missed her mouth and had dribbled down her neck. She scrambled for the roll of paper towels on the counter, ripping off more than she knew she needed. The coffee had cooled by the time the towels touched her skin. "It's gonna be one of those days, I see." The crunch of broken ceramic drew Edith's gaze to the floor. "Man...I liked that mug." With a heavy sigh she turned to tear more paper towels from the roll and looked out the window.

Outside, chewing the husk of a corn stalk, stood a fluffy, white llama. It took Edith's thoughts a few seconds to catch up before she concluded, "I think I'll close up early today."

She grabbed her coat and left the office without cleaning up the mess on the floor.



Edith pulled up to Oz's Diner in her powder-blue truck and parked in her usual spot. She still needed that coffee.

"Is that a llama?" a grating voice said as Edith shut her driver-side door.

“What’s it look like, Jeb.”

He continued, as usual, failing to pick up on Edith’s frustration. “Where’d you get a llama?”

Edith had no idea where the llama had come from. She’d loaded the animal into the back of her truck before leaving the boat rental, a problem for another time. Harvest had nothing close to a zoo (the nearest one being a three-hour drive away in Oklahoma City), and no one in these parts kept livestock like... llamas (maybe alpacas, but not like the monstrosity in her truck bed).

“You got wax in your ears?”

“I don’t know, Jeb,” Edith said as she b-lined past him for the entrance. “He just showed up at the office.”

“Maybe he wants to rent a boat,” he said with a self-aggrandizing laugh. *No one else laughs at his jokes, so he might as well. I wish he would go away.*

“Didn’t think to ask him, Jeb. But thanks for the advice.”

“I wasn’t being serious—” She cut him off with the jingle of a bell and a closing door.

Oz’s Diner was... fine. You could do a lot better, you could do a lot worse. Locals swore by it: ‘best food in the state!’ But everyone knew they served the coffee burnt, the burgers dry, and the fries just flimsy enough to fail the crisp test, yet not mushy enough to be gross. Edith sat at the counter. *Damn it, I hate these seats. No place to rest your feet.*

“You bring my mug back?”

“I don’t have your mug, Simon.”

“Funny. I distinctly remember you walking out of here with one last Tuesday. When Stacy called to you about it, you ‘didn’t hear’ her, if I recall.”

“I don’t have your mug.”

A pause in the conversation settled as rummaging and hissing from the kitchen filled the silence. “What’ll you have?”

"Coffee first. I'll get back to you after that."

"Coming right up," he said as though the previous conversation had never happened.

Edith buried her face in her hands. *I. Need. Coffee.* The bell on the front door clinked and the sound of footsteps came to rest next to Edith's stool. She swiveled, expecting to go another round with Jeb, but instead found a friendlier face.

"Oh, hey Joni," Edith said with relief.

"What's up, Ede?" Joni hurdled onto the stool next to Edith. "You sell out of boats already?"

"Very funny."

"I'm serious! Why else would the hardworking Edith Boyle be sitting in Oz's at ten in the morning?"

"Joni, please," Edith said folding her head down among her arms on the counter. "I habit een ma coffer yep."

"I'm sorry, what was that?" Joni said playing it up. She leaned in closer with her hand cupped to her ear.

Edith raised her head and shouted, "I haven't even had my coffee yet!" As though summoned by magic, a hot cup of joe slid across the table and came to rest in front of her. Edith's eyes widened: "Coffee!"

Joni dropped the act. "Something happen this morning?"

"Something... yeah," Edith said as she slurped the coffee. "This is the best coffee I've ever had! When did Simon learn how to make coffee?" Edith could feel what she called the 'warm-fuzzies' start to cascade throughout her body.

"Who's the lucky fella?" Joni said, returning to her playful tone.

"What are you talking about?"

"You've got quite the hickey there, playa."

"Oh shut up, I burned myself."

"You burned yourself?" Joni's voice quickly turned to concern. "What happened?"

"That's why I'm here. Spilled coffee this morning."

"You didn't even treat it?"

In a fleeting moment Edith almost shared how her thoughts had returned to her family for the first time in a long while, but then the moment passed.

"See that llama back there." Edith swirled her stool and pointed to creature in her truck bed. "Blame that thing."

"I wondered where you got that."

"Showed up right after I burnt myself."

"So it wasn't the llama's fault. What's really going on?"

The whisper from the computer screen returned, quieting Edith's 'warm-fuzzies':
You didn't tell her about me. This is all about me. I'm coming to take away all your burdens. Rejoice!

"That wasn't my computer screen!" Edith blurted out.

"I'm sorry?"

"Did you hear that?"

"Hear what, Ede?"

"I have to go," Edith said, dashing off her stool.

She was out the door before Joni could respond: "Bitch, pay your bill!" Joni sighed and watched Edith scramble into her truck. She peeled out of the parking lot with the llama in tow, still chewing on its corn husk.

Joni flagged down Simon. "I've got this one again, Simon."

"Got what?"

"Edith's coffee. She ran out again."

"Uh... but I've got her coffee right here," he said holding up an empty mug and a pot full of steaming (most likely burnt) coffee.

“Then what’s that,” Joni said pointing at the half-drunk mug sitting on the counter.

Simon shrugged, “Probably stole it again.”

Joni glared at Simon, “Give it a rest. She’s had a rough time lately.”

“Yeah, yeah... you’re right,” Simon said as he turned his attention to another customer.

Joni looked back out the window at the powder-blue dot growing smaller on the road. Then her focus turned to a red truck parked out front. *Huh*, she thought to herself, *I didn’t see Jeb when I came in. Wonder why his truck is here.*



Regret and uncertainty make for a surprisingly potent cocktail. What first seems like a tiny shadow grows into a ravenous monster, threatening to devour you whole.

Family had meant a lot to Edith growing up, even after her parents divorced. While her relationship with her parents had ebbed and flowed, she’d always felt close to her siblings: two sisters, two brothers. As the middle child (literally), a brother and sister on either side, Edith often felt insulated. On one hand, she’d been able to dissolve into the family. Rarely was she blamed for things that were her fault and she had ample opportunities to learn from her siblings. On the other hand, Edith often felt lost in a storm, as if she were shouting within a gale from which no one could truly hear her.

There were many choices she wished she could take back. Moments of paralyzing uncertainty about what the next day would bring. Accusations not meant. Words uttered, but not understood. The consolation: she’d always stopped herself from getting caught up in the heat of the moment — what kind of life is worth living without a few regrets, after all? For better or worse, at the end of the day she always had her family. Until she didn’t.



Edith’s focus returned to the moment. She had errands to run.

The Post Office was first. Edith always mailed things from the Post Office. For some reason she didn't trust that letters would make it to their destination if she mailed them from home. She always thought about how she should unpack that with a therapist. She always abandoned the notion when she left.

Next, she ducked into Complete Food. Nothing she needed would have to go in the fridge so she wasn't worried about making it home anytime soon.

Pharmacy (that was the store's name) followed next. She picked up her *Zolpidem* prescription and tried not to let her imagination run wild about the judgmental expressions crossing the pharmacist's face. *You try having insomnia*, she thought but didn't say. Next-door to Pharmacy was her favorite used bookshop, Wanderstorm, so she spent time there afterward to take her mind off the expressive pharmacist.

After her time in Wanderstorm, she stopped by one of the town's stranger curiosities — a Blockbuster. She'd heard tales of the chain going out of business a long time ago but, if true, that hadn't affected the store in Harvest.

She wandered the empty aisles. Worry gnawed at her. Would the whisper return and comment on her possible movie selections? It never came.

Did I imagine it? Are the sleeping pills finally getting to me? Maybe I'm a little bit psychic?

Edith peered over the shelf and glared at the single employee sitting at the checkout to see if she could read his mind. *Give me your secrets...*

Her sisters would have found this hilarious.

Nothing. Well, nothing but the uncomfortable expression on the attendant's face once he noticed her. *He'll get over it.*

Edith returned to her mundane task. She considered renting something new, but instead went with a classic: *Attack of the Reapers*. She loved a good, B-tier horror flick.

After checkout, she tucked the video case under her arm and headed out the door. In the back of her truck the llama still stood, chewing away at the same corn husk he'd been gnawing since he appeared this morning.

"You don't have to keep chewing the same husk, you know. I can get you a new one. We're kind of known for corn around here." The llama paused. She found it difficult to read him, eyes hidden beneath tufts of fur. He seemed content. Sure enough, he went back to chewing. *Chomp, chomp, chomp.* "All right, have it your way." Unsure what to do next, she got in her truck and just drove. *Guess I have a llama now?*

The animal had been a point of conversation every place she'd been. The postal worker had been worried Edith was looking to ship the llama, and had launched into a diatribe about the procedures, costs, and regulations for shipping a live animal. He was relieved when Edith had assured him she'd no intention of mailing the creature. Instead, she'd inquired about her mail, just in case something hadn't been delivered to her house. "Nope, nothing else. Sorry, Edith." The usual answer. It was to be expected, but she couldn't stop herself from checking... just in case.

Harv, at Complete Food, had said he'd never seen a llama in person, and that he'd always wished he could have seen Machu Picchu with whole herds of llamas beside. Edith had reminded him he always had time to make the trip, but Harv laughed it off saying his duties in Harvest couldn't be left unattended. Edith had faked a smile at the vague, possibly concerning, answer but moved on.

At Pharmacy, the pharmacist had eyed the llama over Edith's shoulder (when he hadn't been giving her judgy looks about her medication) as if he were worried that at any moment the beast would burst in and contaminate his store. She didn't like the man, but she couldn't get her sleeping pills anywhere else, and so had endured the interaction as she did every month.

At Wanderstorm, folks had kept approaching her, asking where she had found the llama or what she was planning to do with it. She feared a rumor had started that she was looking to sell the boat rental store and start a traveling circus. She hadn't the energy to squash it, though, and left empty-handed, content to have simply browsed the musky aisles.

The Blockbuster attendant had been too worried about the psychic looks she'd been giving him to notice the llama, but she was sure he'd have offered some comment as well had he the chance.

As Edith finished running over the day's events in her mind, the orange and purple glow of the setting sun illuminated the clouds on the horizon. "Damn, where does the time go?"

She glanced down at her gas gauge. "Should stop by the Dino Station on the way home." Across the golden horizon, a darkness crept forward. Edith's brow furrowed. *Is that a storm rolling in?*



Darkness enveloped the evening sky as Edith pulled into the Dino Station. The wind conducted a rustling chorus of corn stalks in the field across the road. Unfazed, the llama stood in the truck bed chomping away on the same corn husk. Edith locked the pump to auto-fill and went inside the convenience store.

"Nice llama," Claire, the middle-aged store attendant, said in greeting.

"Haven't heard that today."

Claire chuckled in reply. A jangle of beads and rings jangled with every move she made. Above the cigarettes behind the counter at which she sat hung a faded tie-dye banner with the trippy image of a stylized eye. Claire continued the conversation. "Sell any boats today?"

"I don't sell boats, I rent them," Edith said scanning the aisles for snacks. "But you knew that already."

"Still don't believe me, huh?"

Edith snatched a bag of Fungo Squares and approached the counter. "I'm just not a big believer in supernatural mumbo-jumbo."

"Witchcraft."

"Yeah, that's what I said." Edith opened the adjoining mini-fridge and yanked out a plastic soft drink bottle.

"Green. Good flavor. One of my favorites." Claire began to ring up the items.

"You think colors have tastes?"

"Oh, I know they do."

"Dope." Edith shuffled her feet and glanced around, though she knew there was nothing to see and no one to look at.

Claire finished ringing the items. "You know, that llama you've got... that ain't no llama."

"What do you mean?" Edith asked, suddenly intrigued.

"Llamas are kinder creatures than that one. That one's got power, and power can be terrifying."

Edith glanced back to the llama in her truck bed, still grinding away at the corn husk, and laughed out loud. "Are you kidding me? That thing? It hasn't done anything but chew on that corn husk all day."

"That's how it manifests," Claire said, expression unchanged. "It'll be four fifty-six."

Amused, Edith shook her head and tossed a five dollar bill onto the counter. "You can keep the change for that one. I like you, Claire."

"I like you too, Edith."

Collecting her green soda and Fungo Squares, Edith leaned into the front door with her shoulder and instantly felt the storm in the air. She dropped the snacks through the open passenger-side window of her truck and looked over at the llama again. There it stood, still chewing.

"Are you manifesting?" Edith asked jokingly.

"You really shouldn't leave your vehicle unattended while fueling."

Edith almost jumped out of her skin and wheeled round. "Shit, Joni! You nearly scared me to death!"

Joni laughed and patted Edith, who had keeled over in relief, on the back. "What's gotten into you today, Ede? You don't normally scare this easy." Joni peered inside Edith's truck and caught sight of the Blockbuster video case. "Attack of the Reapers! Nice!"

Edith straightened up and leaned against her truck. "It's been a day."

"Yeah, I gathered that at Oz's. You okay? I've been worried."

"Yeah, I'm fine. It's... just this stupid llama."

Joni puckered her lips and leaned in toward the llama. "She didn't mean that."

"Why are you here?"

"Why am I at the *Dino Station*? I don't know... dropping off *car* parts: filters, hubcaps, whatnot, for Claire. You know since I'm a *mechanic* and Claire, who runs a *gas station*, one of my *best* customers, needed a restock. It *is* a *convenience* store, after all." A silence fell between the two. The corn stalks rustled in wind. The pair broke out into laughter.

"You're an ass, you know that, right?"

Joni clasped her hands together. "That's why you love me! Takes one to know one."

"True."

The laughter subsided. "And... you know, I might be worried about my friend."

A gust of wind blasted through the gas pumps, forcing Edith and Joni to brace against the truck. Quiet lightning flashed in the black sky.

"I'd better get home, figure out what to do with this one," Edith said gesturing to the llama.

"All right. Call me in the morning?"

Edith hesitated before saying, "Sure thing." She got in her truck and drove away. Joni stood watching for a long moment and shook her head. As she was about to turn away, a figure emerged from the cornfield.

"What the hell?" Joni muttered to herself. "Hello?" she called out. "Hey, you okay over there?"

The figure looked around momentarily until he saw Joni. She froze in weird fascination as she locked gazes with the man from a distance. He tipped his hat toward her, replaced it, and then walked off down the road.



This storm is out of this world!

Edith pressed down on the gas pedal, edging her car above the speed limit (well, *her* speed limit, which usually started about ten miles per hour above the posted number). It was an odd storm. Gusts were frequent and strong, but Edith didn't feel a thickened weight in the air that was usually a telltale sign of a tornado (tornado warnings were a common, even unremarkable, occurrence to the residents of Harvest). Lightning illuminated the clouds, but no thunder followed. It felt all too surreal, a bad omen creeping up in plain sight. Through all of this, the llama remained as stoic as ever.

She came upon Oz's Diner, the parking lot empty (as it should be at this hour) except for a red truck, one that Edith knew belonged to Jeb.

"What the hell is that knucklehead doing here at this hour?" She didn't care much for the guy, but people in Harvest looked out for one another, regardless of how they felt. *Like a family should.* She hated herself for adding that thought, but didn't know how to stop it from bubbling to the surface. She turned into the parking lot and pulled in her usual spot.

"Stay there," she said to the llama as she stepped out of the truck (as if she had any authority over the animal). Dread grew in Edith's gut as she approached Jeb's truck. She cupped her hands over her face and peered through the passenger-side window. The dark interior made details hard to distinguish. *Wish I had a flashlight,* Edith thought. No sooner had the thought crossed her mind, she felt something bump against her foot.

She froze.

Slowly, she looked down — and there, on the ground, lay a flashlight. *That definitely wasn't there before.* She picked it up and examined it: durable, tactical plastic with webbed articulation across the grip. She tested it, turning it on and off by pressing on the butt of the handle (which she found could be kept on by twisting it to lock in place). *I've always wanted a flashlight like this! These are expensive.*

She looked back at the llama in her truck bed. He stood still, no longer chewing, but instead staring at her. "Did you do this?" she called, holding up the flashlight.

All of a sudden, a spear of lightning grew over the horizon... and kept growing. Like a massive world tree, the lightning veined across the sky, brightening the landscape.

Edith noticed a figure walking toward her from the far side of the parking lot. She leaned forward, squinting to see if it was Jeb, before the lightning-tree silently extinguished, concealing the figure. Except for a cone of pale, green light coming from the parking lot's sole light post, the night had fallen into complete darkness.

Now barely able to see her truck, she began to panic. The darkness had somehow become thicker, like a physical substance.

Use the flashlight, you rube! She raised the flashlight above her shoulder in a tightly gripped fist. The light beam traveled barely ten feet before the darkness swallowed it whole.

"Jeb? Is that you?" She knew it wasn't him, but she didn't know what else to do. She swore she'd never actually behave like the characters she scoffed at for acting 'irrationally' in the horror films she loved, yet here she stood.

Boy, if Joni could get a glimpse of me. It'd be nice to hear her laughter about now...

Footsteps emanated from the darkness. *Clomp, clomp, clomp.* A strange man stepped into the pale spotlight. He wore a dapper, tan suit, buttoned-up, with a black porkpie hat that obscured his facial features.

"Who are the hell you?"

"Are you serious?" a sandy voice replied. "It's not my fault you've been ignoring my calls."

The truth dawned on Edith. "Wait, those whispers weren't from the sleeping pills?"

The strange man answered in a cryptic tangent, "There are forces in this universe with a compulsion to seek. The compulsions differ, but they are always constant... persistent... hungry. You are a universe, Edith Andromeda Boyle, though you fail to see even a sliver of this truth. I've come to make a bargain."

"A bargain?"

"Yes, a trade. To relieve you of the burdens that torture you so. It's a fair arrangement. Much fairer than some others would give you, I can assure you."

The man removed his hat and bowed. His graceful pose carried an insufferable pomp. The pale light illuminated his head, which had no hair. In fact... he didn't seem to have much of anything on his head.

That can't be right.

As the man raised his gaze, Edith met the visage of a human skull. His eye sockets, pitch black, seemed to consume the space around them.

"Did you send the llama?"

The skull man cocked his head, "Llama?"

Edith turned to demonstrate the creature in her truck bed, but when she looked, nothing was there... the llama had disappeared! *Now that llama has left me too!*

"Edith," the skull man said, chattering his teeth in disapproval. "Don't you think it's time to stop with all the lies?"

Edith felt exposed. Memories and emotions rose to the surface — images of her family appeared... images she'd spent years trying to smother. She felt numb, suddenly emotionless, yet somehow a tear escaped her eye.

"There it is," the skull man said with graveled satisfaction. "That's what I came to bargain for."

"Who are you?" Edith gasped. She could feel her grip on sanity slipping. Whoever, whatever this *person* was... they were unnatural.

"You don't recognize me?" said the voice of her eldest sister from behind the skull man's teeth. "Why did you chase us away, Edith?"

"I didn't! I didn't mean to..."

"Typical Edith," said the voice of her mother. "Always thinking she's supposed to be the center of attention."

“No! That’s not what I meant!”

The voice of her younger brother continued the barrage. “I trusted you, Edith. We were counting on you.”

“Stop!” A last gasp eked out as she crumpled to the ground. She tried to speak again, but the words caught in her throat. It felt as though she had been dragged to the bottom of a lake, with the pressure of all that water bearing down on her. *I’m going to drown*, she thought and resigned herself to her fate.

And then she looked up.

Edith stood in a field of tall, green grass. A brilliant sea of stars decorated the firmament above. Fireflies danced across the meadow’s surface. Pockets of warm light flashed in and out. The weight of the lake dissipated and Edith felt light... lighter than she had in a long time.

A rustling in the grass behind startled her, but Edith found that she was not afraid (she couldn’t have told you why). Turning, Edith found herself face-to-face with a fluffy, white llama. He stood before her, chomping on his corn husk. *Manifesting*, she thought. Edith closed her eyes and made a wish... and then she opened them.

Instead of the llama, her family now stood before her. Vivid details reached out. Her two sisters smiled — one wore paint-covered overalls, the other a one-size-too-big Yellowstone sweater Edith had coaxed her into buying on their family vacation. Her younger brother towered over the elder, and had his arm draped around the other’s shoulders in affectionate serenity. Her father, with his salt-and-pepper hair, wore round, overly-large glasses. Beside him stood her mother, who stepped toward Edith.

She appeared as vapor, but as she came closer Edith could smell... hot-from-the-oven chocolate chip cookies... freshly cut springtime grass... the fishy sensation of the lake in summertime. When her mother reached her, neither said a word; her mother simply hugged her. Edith felt the ‘warm-fuzzies’ cascade throughout her body. She closed her eyes and took a deep inhale, held for a count of three, and exhaled.

She opened her eyes and found herself back in Oz’s parking lot, where the skull man still stood. He pitched his head at an unnatural angle. “What did you just do?”

Edith said nothing.

Thunder rolled over the small town of Harvest, Oklahoma. Except it wasn't thunder.

A white mass of fluff cut through the darkness from across the road. The skull man turned to face the unknown threat. Edith did not — she knew what it was. A herd of llamas, one-hundred strong, crossed the road and filled the space between Edith and the skull man. The herd encircled him, running faster and faster until they became a blur. The skull man shouted something at Edith over and over, but she could not hear his voice over the thunder of llamas.

Edith closed her eyes and made a final wish.



All anyone could talk about the next day was the herd of llamas that had appeared outside of Oz's Diner. Opinions varied on where they had come from. Edith was an immediate suspect, due to the llama she had toted around the day prior, but the consensus blamed Jeb, who had been found among the flock that morning in nothing but his underwear.

Edith didn't pay the hubbub much attention. She sat back in her chair at the boat rental store and sipped freshly-brewed coffee. A thought dawned on her, and she pulled out her phone. Edith didn't like talking on the phone (she preferred to text), but she made an exception for this. She waited as the ringback tone repeated once, twice, three times... until the other side picked up.

"Hey, Joni!" Edith said. "Wanna come over and watch *Attack of the Reapers* tonight?"