

**The Music Box Will Play For As Long As You Wind It**

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A Half-Hour Radio Play for  
*The Grayscale*

By Andrew Terrance Kaberline

## TEASER

*Howling of wind and snow in the background.*

THE WHAT

The time, the present. Location, Antarctica. The sound above you, a bird descending from the sky...

*A helicopter whirls and touches down. A door swings open.*

*They talk over the noise.*

MESSNER

WOO! FEELS GOOD TO BE BACK!

CRUZ

UGH! YOU WEREN'T LYING ABOUT THE WIND!

BOYD

YOU'LL GET USED TO IT!

CRUZ

WHAT? WHAT DID HE SAY!?

BOYD

COME ON! WE CAN CHIT CHAT INSIDE!

*The helicopter departs. A door opens and closes, and the howling wind is gone.*

BOYD

Once you get warm I'll show you around.

MESSNER

No need. Been here before.

CRUZ

He likes to brag about it being his second excavation.

MESSNER

Yup. Russ and I dug through a shit ton of ice back five years ago. But I see some things have changed. I was expecting Jones.

BOYD  
No Jones. I'm Boyd.

MESSNER  
What's your specialty?

BOYD  
I don't copy.

CRUZ  
He wants to know your field of study.

BOYD  
I'm armed forces.

CRUZ  
Armed forces?

MESSNER  
What, they bring you in to guard the door from Yetis?

BOYD  
Officially I'm the communications specialist. Private sector pays well.

MESSNER  
Only problem is it's cold as a witch's left tit!

BOYD  
What?

CRUZ  
Don't let him corrupt you. He hasn't matured at all since third grade.

MESSNER  
You say that like it's a bad thing!

BOYD  
Mr. Russell informed me that you all grew up together.

MESSNER  
Uh-oh! What else did he tell you?

BOYD  
Not much. I try not to disturb him. He's been very focused since we arrived last week.

MESSNER

So focused that he can't greet us? Hey Russell, where are you, you sick bastard!?

*MESSNER exits to find RUSSELL.*

BOYD

Sir, you haven't been cleared yet to-

CRUZ

Just let him do his thing. I'm Dr. Cruz.

BOYD

Yes, I read about you in the dossier.

CRUZ

Oh, this is too fun! I've never had a dossier. It's not my usual kind of work.

BOYD

Then how did you get roped in to excavating a dormant drill site on Antarctica?

CRUZ

Russell offered. You know, we used to roam the woods behind our houses, the three of us. They wanted to be Indiana Jones. I wanted to be Gertrude Bell. We always believed that we would really find Atlantis, or the Holy Grail, or The Fountain of Youth! I guess this is kind of the closest I'll get to that nonsense dream.

BOYD

... I wanted to be Luke Skywalker.

CRUZ

And here you are on Hoth. Dreams do come true!

*BOYD and CRUZ laugh. MESSNER returns.*

MESSNER

Is Russell hiding or something?

BOYD

He's at the site. Our thermal monitor there showed odd readings. He wanted to check it out. He was very adamant.

MESSNER

Thermal monitor? Does he think there is something alive under that ice? Shapeshifting Aliens? Wait, has Russell's real first name been Kurt all this time?

CRUZ

This is nothing like *The Thing*

MESSNER

I dunno Cruz. Bunch of scientists like us come to Antarctica and get picked off one by one. It could happen...

CRUZ

Why wait and see? We're going to join Russell at the site. Now.

BOYD

I wouldn't advise that. It will be dark soon.

CRUZ

Too dark to see the aliens?

MESSNER

She's got moxie! Catch you later Boyd!

*The door opens and we hear the howl of wind. Door closes. BOYD sighs, then clicks a walkie talkie.*

BOYD

Boyd to Russell.

RUSSELL

Go ahead.

BOYD

The team has arrived. You were right, they are joining you now.

RUSSELL

Perfect. Keep the walkie handy. Russell, over and out.

*Some light static as our narrator re-emerges.*

THE WHAT

Tonight's heroes, Cruz, Messner, and Russell. Scientists. Explorers. Friends, hoping for the discovery of a lifetime. Tonight they will find just that, for under the ice we are detecting irregular amounts of wonder, on The Grayscale.

**ACT ONE**

*With the howling winds in the background, we hear the crumbling sound of a scientific instrument - almost like a Geiger Counter.*

RUSSELL

Unbelievable...

*For a moment we hear the howling wind grow louder, until everyone is inside the tent.*

MESSNER

Hello? Hello? Someone ordered two frozen scientists?

RUSSELL

Took you long enough.

MESSNER

Gee whiz. No “great to see you, Mess. How’re the kids?”

RUSSELL

It’s great to see you Cruz, how’re the kids?

CRUZ

They’re lovely Russ, thanks for asking!

MESSNER

Just like old times, you two ganging up on me.

CRUZ

Thank you again for the opportunity Russ. It is like old times. It’s nice.

RUSSELL

It is, isn’t it...

MESSNER

What was so important it couldn’t wait until the morning? You know, we’ve been traveling all day, haven’t ate any dinner-

*The Geiger-like counter shoots up again.*

RUSSELL

Shut up for a second would you!

*The counter hits a note - similar to a heart monitor flatline.*

RUSSELL

Extraordinary...

*A click, the device is turned off.*

CRUZ

What was all of that?

RUSSELL

That was the sound of discovery!

MESSNER

That the thermal monitor Boyd told us about?

RUSSELL

In a sense. It reads more than just thermal energy-

CRUZ

What did it discover?

RUSSELL

That evening out- there's been erratic activity for days, but now it's stable.

MESSNER

What's stable?

CRUZ

Yeah, you've gotta help us out here Russ. Why are we here?

RUSSELL

I'm afraid I wasn't quite honest when I invited you. I wasn't dishonest particularly but-

CRUZ

So we're not excavating a drill site?

RUSSELL

No, we ARE doing that. The site is just- it's dormant because the last few teams that tried to use it, all went in and never came out.

MESSNER

What? You made us come all the way to the bottom on the planet to play a joke on us? I don't see it.

RUSSELL

It's true. No one has come back out of that drill site. They go in, under the ice, look around, and vanish. And now it's safe for us to go in!

CRUZ

Why would we go into a dangerous place willingly?

RUSSELL

There's been consistent readings, the middle of the area is hot, pulsing, almost like there is a hot spring. We've sent some optics down there, remote control stuff, it gets too bright to see anything, BUT we've got samples! There's life down there. Bacteria.

MESSNER

So?

RUSSELL

It's not from here. It's all indigenous to Caribbean climates. Don't you see it now? Come on guys!

CRUZ

I'm really trying Russ.

RUSSELL

What was our goal. Since the beginning?

*Pause.*

CRUZ

You don't honestly think-

RUSSELL

You bet your ass I do.

CRUZ

You think that right outside this tent, under that ice, is the Fountain of Youth?

MESSNER

Holy crap, you've lost your mind.

RUSSELL

There's only one way to know for sure. We've gotta go in.

MESSNER

Don't you want to wait til tomorrow, you know, when it's not uninhabitable out here?

RUSSELL

The monitor says we go now. Who knows if mankind will ever get this shot again?

MESSNER

Ok, that's *if* we really did find a fictional mythical fountain and not some place where oil drill guys go to die.

RUSSELL

They're not dead. They just didn't come back. Why would you?

MESSNER

You're not really thinking of doing this, are you Cruz?

RUSSELL

Cruz, trust me. It has to be us. It's meant to be.

*CRUZ sighs. Starts walking.*

CRUZ

I didn't come out here for nothing.

RUSSELL

Yes! Ok, so we've got to start with repelling, then it's mostly walkable...

*They trail off.*

MESSNER

If this is the part where we uncover the aliens, I swear to god. (Out Loud) Wait for me guys!

*The howling wind cross fades against a sound that is more internal, like leaky faucets, a cave.*

CRUZ

Are we going the right way?

RUSSELL

Yes. I'm positive.

MESSNER

How could you know that?

RUSSELL

I've been mapping the thermal readings.

MESSNER

Yeah, but you've got no map.

RUSSELL

I know where we're going. We have to keep going down.

CRUZ

It's getting darker. Were we supposed to start seeing bright lights?

RUSSELL

Soon. Until keep your head lamps on.

*A commotion.*

MESSNER

Ah shit!

CRUZ

What's wrong?

MESSNER

I tripped on something.

CRUZ

You ok?

RUSSELL

He'll live. Let's keep moving.

MESSNER

Have some compassion for your friend why don't you?

RUSSELL

I do. I do. I'm- I'm sorry Mess. I just know that we have a limited window-

MESSNER

And if you would've told me that from the beginning I would've been more prepared, but you didn't, so I don't have the right equipment, and it's a whole thing.

CRUZ

Why didn't you tell us sooner?

MESSNER

He didn't trust us!

RUSSELL

I absolutely trust you. You are the only ones I trust. I thought you'd be the only ones to believe me. But if you don't, you should turn back now.

MESSNER

You know I couldn't turn back even if I wanted. Going back alone would be suicide. I don't know where I am, I'm not equipped, I don't even know what direction we just came from!

CRUZ

Mess! Russ! We're here and we're going to complete our mission. We always do. We always have.

*Pause.*

MESSNER

I'm sorry Russ.

RUSSELL

Don't worry about it. Are you good to go?

MESSNER

Yeah, yeah.

RUSSELL

What did you trip on?

MESSNER

I dunno. Some ice or... wait. It's something man made. What is this?

*The creak of a box opening, then musical metal prongs pluck for a moment, then stop.*

RUSSELL

A music box.

CRUZ

I had one like that when I was a kid, Grandma gave it to me. Family heirloom. Let me see it.

*She winds it. The song plays again.*

MESSNER

How did it get down here?

CRUZ

Hm. It played that same song too.

RUSSELL

Maybe one of the drillers left it behind.

MESSNER

But why would one of those guys bring a music box with him?

CRUZ

Keep playing...

MESSNER

What does that mean?

CRUZ

The inscription, “keep playing.” That’s what it said on my music box. Grandma wanted me to never stop learning or trying or something like that, I can’t remember- She told me if I felt the world getting to me, to just keep winding the music box, and it’d keep playing.

RUSSELL

Why are you telling us this?

CRUZ

This box, it has the same inscription.

MESSNER

That. That sounds bad, but it’s gotta be a common inscription right? Something Grandmas tell their granddaughters?

CRUZ

I’ve never heard it from anyone else before.

MESSNER

Well, there’s no way that is *your* music box.

CRUZ

I’m not sure. It looks the same. The writing...

*A whimsical sound in the distance, like a harp or a stream. A voice or two, faintly.*

MESSNER  
What the hell is that?

RUSSELL  
We're not alone.

MESSNER  
How is that possible?

*The head lamps sputter.*

CRUZ  
The lamps are out!

RUSSELL  
I've got flares.

*Flare sizzles as it is lit.*

MESSNER  
Hello! Who's out there!?

RUSSELL  
Everyone shut up, shut up. Back to back. Now! Quiet. Let's ride this out.

*The music box stills plays.*

RUSSELL  
Turn that off Cruz.

CRUZ  
I can't! You just have to wait until it runs out.

RUSSELL  
Fine! No. Other. Sounds.

*There is a slight whimper/breathing from the group, as the music box fades out.*

## ACT TWO

*From silence, we hear the flare going. The voices of our heroes, unbeknownst to them, have gone up in pitch.*

CRUZ

You think it's safe to move now?

RUSSELL

No way to tell.

MESSNER

How many flares you got left?

RUSSELL

This is it.

MESSNER

I think we should go. Try this again later, or you know, never.

CRUZ

Russ, I think he's right. We're not in the backyard. It's time to stop playing explorer.

RUSSELL

We can't leave.

CRUZ

Russ, we have to.

RUSSELL

No, I. I don't know which direction we came from.

MESSNER

Are you serious? I thought you had a map in your head?

RUSSELL

I did too, but I can't- It's like the memory is gone.

MESSNER

We're dead then? You're telling me we're dead.

RUSSELL

Not quite.

*RUSSELL goes with the walkie talkie.*

RUSSELL

Russ to Boyd. Come in Boyd.

*Static.*

MESSNER

Why didn't you do that earlier?

RUSSELL

Because earlier we were in control.

*The flare dies. The whimsical sound again. Our heroes voices pitch a bit higher.*

MESSNER

Great. Now we're blind and defenseless!

CRUZ

Back to back!

RUSSELL

Russ to Boyd. Come in Boyd.

*BOYD on walkie talkie.*

BOYD

Go ahead!

RUSSELL

Thank god! Boyd, we're in serious trouble. We're about an hour into the site. Specific location is unknown. We need you to come get us. We have no light-

BOYD

How did you get on this channel?

RUSSELL

What? Boyd, It's Russell.

BOYD

I know Russ, and you don't sound anything like him. If you're holding my boys, I will not hesitate to end you.

RUSSELL

The security code is alpha-eight-five-seven-charlie-three.

BOYD

Russ? Why do you sound like that?

RUSSELL

I don't know what you're talking about. It's gotta be on your end. Drop what you're doing and come get us.

BOYD

I'll get there as soon as I can. Hold on guys. Over and out.

*A walkie talkie hiss.*

MESSNER

So, we just wait now?

CRUZ

I don't think there's much else we can do.

RUSSELL

We could keep going for the Fountain.

CRUZ

Without any light?

RUSSELL

What, are you guys scared?

MESSNER

No!

CRUZ

I'm never scared.

RUSSELL

Funny, all I hear is two chickens. I expect better of you, Cruz.

MESSNER

What's that supposed to mean?

RUSSELL

That means you're dead weight and you always have been Mess.

CRUZ

Stop it!

MESSNER

I knew you never liked me. Why even invite me to come along?

RUSSELL

It was the only way to get Cruz.

CRUZ

This is exactly why we grew apart. You two never played nice.

RUSSELL

I just wanted to show you something cool, and you shit all over it! Why don't you guys care about me? You never care!

*Cruz winds the music box.*

CRUZ

Keep playing...keep playing.

RUSSELL

Listen to me!

MESSNER

I don't want to die, not like this. Not with him.

RUSSELL

Then you don't have to. I'm gonna find the Fountain. Let's go Cruz.

CRUZ

I'm not going.

RUSSELL

You're gonna stay here with that baby?

MESSNER

Stop. Picking. On. Me.

*MESSNER begins to cry.*

CRUZ

Don't let him do that to you! (to Russ) What is your problem?

RUSSELL

You treat him like a baby, and he'll act like one! Grow up, stupid!

CRUZ

If you're gonna be a bully, then just go! We don't want you here. I DON'T want you here!

*Pause.*

RUSSELL

Fine. I'm leaving. I never liked you. Either of you.

CRUZ

You suck, you know that!

RUSSELL  
Give me that!

CRUZ  
Hey!

*RUSS grunts and the music box breaks.*

CRUZ  
That was my grandmas. You didn't have to break it.

RUSSELL  
But I wanted to. I hate that box, and I hate you too. So long, losers.

*RUSS walks off deeper into the ice. The voices get higher one last time.*

MESSNER  
I'm sorry I made you come here.

CRUZ  
Shhh, it's ok.

MESSNER  
No it's not! We're in trouble! I got us in trouble!

CRUZ  
Stop crying.

MESSNER  
I want to go home. I want to go home...

CRUZ  
Me too. Shhh.

*CRUZ consoles MESSNER by humming the music box song.*

*This song, and the world, fades out.*

*After a brief silence. The whimsical sound.*

BOYD (O.S.)  
Hello! Anyone there?

*BOYD walks closer.*

BOYD

Holy shit. (to walkie talkie) Boyd to Russ. Come in Russ.

*Just static.*

BOYD

What is that? (to walkie talkie) Boyd to Russ. I don't know if you can hear me, but I've got to be close to you. I found something weird. There's two bodies, infants, can't be more than a year old. There's also, um, an action figure, a Luke Skywalker action figure. I don't know what this means. I'm going to continue on. Please contact me. Over and out.

*The whimsical noise one more time*

BOYD

Who's there, hello? Hello?

*BOYD walks into the distance.*

THE WHAT

Tonight's find, the discovery of a lifetime. An entire lifetime. Further proof that the more things change the more they remain the same. It doesn't take a talented explorer to find that some dreams should remain just that, buried under the surface, or be subject to judgment from The Grayscale.

END