

Mochila Bears the Chrysalis of the World

by

Michael Bettencourt

67 Highwood Terrace #2, Weehawken NJ 07086

201-770-0550 • 347-564-9998 • michaelbettencourt@outlook.com

<http://www.m-bettencourt.com>

Copyright © by Michael Bettencourt

Offered under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike License

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>

DESCRIPTION

Derek and Luz, living “pre-apoc” under the highway, have a chance to recreate the universe, enclosed as it is in a backpack.

CHARACTERS

- LUZ, small and light to carry
- DEREK, strong enough to carry LUZ

MISCELLANEOUS

- Sound effects
- Backpacks

* * * * *

A backpack on the ground, underneath a highway overpass. Night. Reflected light from some streetlamp. Gritty.

LUZ hangs on the back of DEREK. They both stare at the backpack.

SOUND: Overhead, tires hitting a seam in a roadway: thump thump. Then another. Then silence.

They look overhead, then back to the backpack.

DEREK

You have to get off. My lower back—the hinge—can’t—

LUZ dismounts. DEREK straightens up.

LUZ

Your name is Derek.

DEREK

“Derek,” not “derrick”—and you can walk.

LUZ jumps on his back again. DEREK shrugs her off.

DEREK

We need to pay attention.

LUZ

I think we should leave it alone, let it be, walk right past, who knows what evil lurks.

DEREK

I think so, too.

LUZ

C’mon—I was just shitting you! Can’t afford not to.

LUZ runs up to the backpack, goes to open it, but doesn’t. Hovers.

DEREK

Well?

SOUND: A heavy tractor trailer hits the roadway seam: multiple tires. Shaking of the roadway.

SOUND: The sifting of dust. Then silence.

LUZ

You have to open something like this, Derek—you can’t let it go to waste, not these days, not in these ways that we have to live in these days.

DEREK squats down, stares at the backpack.

LUZ

It’s a gift.

DEREK

Luz, be the kind of quiet that lets me think.

DEREK ponders some more.

DEREK

If you see something, say something—that's what we're told by the voice all the time: see something, say something. So I said something.

LUZ

To me.

DEREK

Well, you were on my back, so how could I miss telling you?

LUZ goes to jump on his back again, but DEREK shifts, and LUZ misses him.

DEREK

You got legs—stand on 'em.

Before LUZ can make another assault on DEREK, something happens inside the backpack.

SOUND: A buzzing sound, intermittent, comes from the backpack.

The backpack moves. This brings even LUZ to a halt.

DEREK

See something, say something—always see that pasted on the walls, too. So I saw, and I said something when I saw—this.

LUZ

We can't afford to be choosy, Derek, in our pre-apocalyptic—

DEREK

PA—

LUZ

—condition.

DEREK

Condition—our PA condition.

LUZ

Pre. Apoc. Calyptic.

SOUND: Add in another sound—wheezing or ticking or radiators banging.

LUZ

Hammers of hell.

SOUND: Add in still another sound—it's a noisy backpack.

LUZ and DEREK watch, not sure whether to run or stay—fear or hunger. DEREK indicates for LUZ to get on his back, which she does—just in case.

The bag goes silent, goes still.

LUZ

How did you find this?

DEREK

Picking around—you know, daily grind sort of stuff, the stuff that we have to do.

LUZ

Just there?

DEREK

Just there. Sitting there.

LUZ

If it's going to explode whether we open it or not, then we should open it.

DEREK

What's to lose?

LUZ

Except our lives.

DEREK

So what's to lose, like I said.

LUZ

That's what I meant by what I said.

DEREK

Pre-apocalypse doesn't care for us.

LUZ

Never did, never will.

DEREK

Never could.

LUZ

Free market is just pre-apoc by a different name.

DEREK

Capitalism—snake eating its tail.

SOUND: Now a sweet sound, soothing.

The backpack begins to rise—no need to hide the wires, could even be a stagehand with the backpack hanging on the end of a pole.

LUZ crawls off DEREK's back.

LUZ

Dark matter. That's what it is. Dark matter. Makes up most of the universe. This is dark matter.

DEREK

How do you know that?

LUZ

What else could it?

DEREK ponders this irrefutable logic.

DEREK

You should be more careful about the magazines you steal to read.

LUZ

No one knows what it is.

DEREK

How can no one know that?

LUZ

They know that they don't know, which makes it interesting—to know what you don't know. Dark matter may be at the root of it all.

DEREK

You're suggesting—

LUZ

Isn't it time for something new, isn't this the moment when something new should—

DEREK

Luz—

LUZ

Dark matter—darkness of matter—fills the void and keeps the universe from collapsing in on itself.

DEREK

Luz—won't happen in our lifetimes, short as they are. That bag—can't—

LUZ reaches for the bag, but it's just out of reach. She goes to DEREK, who bends to get her on his back. She touches the backpack but can't grab it, and it rises just past her fingertips. She climbs on DEREK's neck—still not high enough.

SOUND: Backpack sound goes out.

SOUND: Heavy tractor trailer going over the seam with a high blast of an air-horn—blindingly loud.

Suddenly, DEREK moves away, gets LUZ off his back and behind him. LUZ struggles against him. As they struggle, the backpack slowly descends.

LUZ

What're you doing—I almost had it!!

DEREK

It's not right—backpacks don't float.

LUZ

Let me—

DEREK

Stop it! They don't make sounds!

LUZ

Stop—

But it's no good—LUZ can't break out of his grip.

LUZ

You don't know what's in there—could be a whole new—let me go—we got nothing to lose!—that's the gift, we got nothing to lose!—I want what's in there—I want—

DEREK

Stop! It!!

DEREK more or less flings LUZ to the ground. He looks up at the backpack, sees that it's within reach, and pulls at it until it comes loose and falls to the ground.

SOUND: Absurd sound of something like broken dishes.

LUZ crawls to it. She nudges it.

SOUND: Absurd sound, something like a cow mooing.

LUZ nudges it again.

SOUND: Absurd sound, something like a bit of organ grinder music.

LUZ nudges it one more time.

SOUND: Absurd sound, something like a deep sigh.

LUZ

If you broke something—

DEREK

If it's the beginning of the new world, you can't break something like that.

LUZ

I'm just saying—

By now, LUZ is in tears.

SOUND: Three cars in succession over the seam: thump/thump, thump/thump, thump/thump.

LUZ

Just look at us—rags, bones—pick and scavenge—the whole course of evolution—

DEREK

It's not your fault.

LUZ

The earth sweat to put me here, and look at—rice pudding in a diner is of more use than me—sweeter—like a chicken with lips like mine is worth worrying about.

DEREK

I hate it when you—

But LUZ is inconsolable.

DEREK

I've told you, it's the social relations of production that are—

But LUZ won't have any of it.

DEREK

Pre-apocalypse sucks.

DEREK goes to the backpack and unzips it. LUZ stops immediately. They wait.

DEREK reaches inside and pulls out another, but smaller, backpack.

SOUND: Something like a silly little trumpet fanfare.

SOUND: Car thump, but a long car, a limo—like waiting for the other shoe to drop.

LUZ has fixed her eyes on the bag.

LUZ

I remember when—the back days, our better back days.

DEREK

Our social relations of production were much better then.

LUZ

Pre-pre-apocalypse.

DEREK

Rice pudding in a diner. What do we know? The backpack made noises, levitated—

LUZ

Did not explode—

DEREK

You thought about dark matter—

LUZ

Sweet sound it played, then rose—

DEREK

And now this. A birth, like—you know, smaller out of bigger.

LUZ

From one, another.

SOUND: A really loud old-fashioned alarm clock.

SOUND: Then, a heavy-duty thrum, low bass—makes the solar plexus vibrate.

LUZ takes the small backpack and stuffs it under her shirt. Almost immediately, she falls to the ground and thrashes, and as she does, it's clear that she's in labor. DEREK rushes to her, unsure what to do, but it doesn't really matter since LUZ is already giving birth, so DEREK positions himself to catch whatever falls out.

Which turns out to be a clear glass globe. The globe shines in DEREK's hands. LUZ removes the small backpack from under her shirt, then takes the globe from DEREK.

SOUND: Three emergency vehicles speeds over the bridge, with Doppler effect.

LUZ

A new one. A new one.

DEREK
What's so new about it?

LUZ
That it's new, that's what's new.

DEREK
Better?

LUZ
At least new.

DEREK
What good is new if not better?

LUZ
This came from dark matter—the stuff that keeps everything from collapsing.

DEREK
Well, if we come from dark matter, too, why is everything collapsing?

LUZ
Why are you so angry?

DEREK
I'm not angry!

LUZ
You sound angry. You look angry. You smell angry.

DEREK pivots on her, and LUZ protects the globe.

LUZ
Be careful!

DEREK
You're so easy!

DEREK wrestles the globe from LUZ's hands, puts it back into the small backpack, then proceeds to smash the contents of the small backpack. LUZ is devastated.

SOUND: A quick compendium of all the sounds that have come before.

DEREK takes the small backpack and stuffs it into the larger backpack, then flings the backpack away.

DEREK

If it had had food—medicine—a pen and paper, goddamn it—dust from the Gobi desert—

LUZ is in despair.

DEREK

A cat—coupons—salt from the Arabian Sea—who the hell needs another world?—decent water filtration—bio-luminescence—

DEREK stops, breathless. LUZ sobs.

DEREK

We'd just fuck it up, anyways.

LUZ gets up and stalks off. The presence of her absence becomes palpable for DEREK—painful for DEREK.

SOUND: Water dripping. The buzz of the streetlamp. Sift of dust.

LUZ rages back on, carrying the backpack on her back.

DEREK

Hey.

This brings LUZ to a halt.

LUZ

Hey.

DEREK

What's that on your back?

LUZ takes her time to face DEREK.

LUZ

I am never going to jump on your back again. Ever.

DEREK
C'mon, it's not that [bad]—

LUZ
Ever—you hear me?

SOUND: LUZ's line in reverb, echo.

LUZ
I got my own to carry now. I got to carry my own.

DEREK
What in that that's on your back?

LUZ
Your soul.

DEREK
It's all broken glass.

LUZ
Enough said.

DEREK
The dark matter?

LUZ
You only get that once in nine hundred million lifetimes. This pre-apoc is obviously not going to be one of them because someone—

DEREK
Is it heavy?

LUZ
It could be sad.

DEREK is at a loss. He gets onto his hands and knees, hangs his head.

LUZ considers the offer. She takes her time, but she moves toward DEREK. With a slight hesitation to show who is boss, she straddles his back, wraps her arms around his neck.

DEREK stands.

SOUND: A glass harmonica plays.

DEREK

Did I really break it?

LUZ

Let's go try to find something to eat. Soup. Soup would be good.

DEREK eases LUZ off his back.

DEREK

You have to show me. Before we can break bread—well, break soup—together, you have to show me.

LUZ slides off the backpack, opens it and takes out the small backpack. She unzips that one and offers to DEREK.

DEREK reaches in, and what he finds makes him smile.

DEREK

You had me going there. Is that what dark matter feels like?

LUZ

It's cosmic, yes?

DEREK

Astronomical—universal.

A light grows inside the backpack, shining into DEREK's face.

LUZ

And it can't be stopped.

Lights get brighter and brighter until they blind everything and everyone.

SOUND: Something like the last chord on "A Day in the Life" follows the brightening of the lights.

The lights have come to blinding.

SOUND: The thump of cars on the highway but now in the rhythm of a heart-beat:
thump/thump, thump/thump.

And the lights go to black as the heart beats.