Spirit of 76
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First Draft

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ACT ONE

EXT. ABOVE ST. JOHN'S COMMUNITY CLINIC - DAY

We begin with loud WHOOSHING noises as a series of colorful WORMHOLES give way to a tunnel of CLOUDS.

ANGLE ON: The screen SHAKES as we go to a closeup of a metal CAPSULE the size of a muffler falling through the clouds.

Then, a distant shot of the clouds from below. It's sunrise.

The capsule, a small speck on-screen, spins down and out of frame.

MONTAGE - EXT. AROUND NEW MEXICO - DAY

Several morning shots of a small New Mexico town. A "Carter-Mondale in '76" billboard overlooks a highway. A gas station with lines of cars around the block. The large glass window of a deli gleams in the sun as customers walk in and out. A university with a LARGE RETROFITTED WING where a computer lab has recently been installed.

EXT. OUTSIDE ST. JOHN'S COMMUNITY CLINIC - DAY - 1976

We see the clinic, next to a wheat field, from afar. A WHITE PORTAL blinks into existence a few feet above the clinic. A naked MIKE NGYUEN (29, Vietnamese-American) falls out of the portal and lands on the roof of the clinic with a PLOP.

INT. MIKE'S ROOM - DAY - 2026

A webcam feed of Mike sitting at his computer, chatting with someone over video.

MIKE
So, in the 1970s, they built a time machine.

(BEAT)
Yeah, a real one. It's supposed to work.

EXT. ST. JOHN'S COMMUNITY CLINIC ROOF - DAY - 1976

We see Mike, NAKED, from overhead. He is lying on the roof.

MIKE (V.O.)
They have to do so much math just to figure out where to put you when you travel. Everything has to go just right.

MIKE, eyes open but still LYING DOWN, starts looking around for anything that might tell him where he is.

MIKE (V.O.)
They have to make sure you don't end up at the bottom of the ocean or something because of the rotation of the Earth and the expansion of the universe.

ANGLE ON: Mike standing up, his groin just barely out of frame. He looks to his RIGHT, towards the nearby WHEAT FIELD.

MIKE (V.O.)
If the math is off even a little, you die.

FLASH CUT TO:

EXT. OUTSIDE ST. JOHN'S COMMUNITY CLINIC - DAY - 1976

Mike imagines the portal opening up high above the WHEAT FIELD instead. We see him fall to his death and hear a loud SPLAT

FLASH CUT TO:

EXT. OUTSIDE ST. JOHN'S COMMUNITY CLINIC - DAY - 1976

MIKE looks around for a beat before...

EXT. CLOUDS - DAY - 1976

Another SHAKING closeup of the capsule falling through the clouds as MIKE realizes it's missing.

EXT. OUTSIDE ST. JOHN'S COMMUNITY CLINIC - DAY - 1976

MIKE
...Shit!

INT. MIKE'S ROOM - DAY - 2026

MIKE on VIDEO again.

MIKE
So it's like a video recording, but for a whole, like, timeline. Every moment after the machine turned on got recorded. Every action, how the world was, everything. But '76 is as far back as you can go.

An obvious jump cut in the webcam feed.

MIKE (CONT'D)
We couldn't travel back before now because the machine also has, like, an alternator. It builds up this energy, and that's what you use to travel back. And then it stores the energy in a capsule you take with you into the recording so you can travel back.

EXT. ST. JOHN'S COMMUNITY CLINIC ROOF - DAY - 1976

MIKE nervously looks around for the capsule.

MIKE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
So you really need that capsule.

Still rattled, MIKE heads for the door on the roof. It's locked. He SHOULDER-CHECKS it a couple of times before it flies open.

INT. ST. JOHN'S COMMUNITY CLINIC STAIRWELL - DAY - 1976

MIKE peeks over the edge of the stairs. No one's there. He makes a run for the bottom of the stairs.

INT. ST. JOHN'S COMMUNITY CLINIC HALLWAY - DAY - 1976

It's early most of the LIGHTS in the building AREN'T ON yet.

MIKE creeps into the hallway in search of clothes as we hear the next line of V.O. He opens DOORS and PEEKS into any room that isn't locked.

Suddenly, we hear FOOTSTEPS. Surprised, MIKE runs into the

room next room he opens. It's the LAUNDRY.

MIKE (V.O.)
It's weird because the past you travel back to isn't actually the past. It's a whole new version of events that starts from whatever point in the recording you enter.

MIKE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
So you're not changing the present, or future, or whatever, if you change the past. And the recording gets erased when you come back, so nothing you do there matters.

INT. ST. JOHN'S COMMUNITY CLINIC LAUNDRY ROOM - DAY - 1976

MIKE RIFLES through the LAUNDRY hampers and pulls out a set of SCRUBS, but the shirt and pants are different colors. He hesitates a beat before we hear FOOTSTEPS again.

MIKE is putting on the scrubs when ARACELI RODRIGUEZ (32, Latinx) walks in with a bundle of CLOTHES. She recoils with a loud YELP after seeing MIKE pulling up scrub pants, dropping her bundle.

ARACELI
Híjoles de su—who are you!?

INT. MIKE'S ROOM - DAY - PRESENT

MIKE
I'm a pretty decent guy, I think. I guess I don't stand out much. But when they were taking applications to test out the machine, I got the job, like, immediately.

INT. ST. JOHN'S COMMUNITY CLINIC LAUNDRY ROOM - DAY - 1976

MIKE and ARACELI STARE at each other for a beat.

MIKE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Maybe I'm just bad at making connections. Talking to people.

(BEAT)

MIKE (V.O) (CONT'D)
Yes, that's whey I don't have a girlfriend.

ARACELI gives MIKE a look like "well?" and starts picking up CLOTHES. MIKE darts his eyes around for a moment before speaking.

MIKE
I'm... uh, a visitor.

ARACELI, standing up with the BUNDLE in her arms again, dumps it into a nearby HAMPER. She gives him a suspicious look.

MIKE (CONT'D)
A-a patient, I mean.

ARACELI doesn't buy it and continues to STARE.

MIKE
I'm...

MIKE (V.O.)
Yeah, they do have rules about how to talk to people.

INT. MIKE'S ROOM - DAY - 2026

MIKE (CONT'D)
You're not supposed to tell anyone you're a time traveler. No one'd believe you, you'd endanger the whole project, etc. That's where not being white actually helps. You can tell people you're an immigrant.

INT. ST. JOHN'S COMMUNITY CLINIC LAUNDRY ROOM - DAY - 1976

MIKE finally collects himself and starts to remember protocol.

MIKE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Maybe that's why they chose me. 'Cause we're Vietnamese and all.

MIKE
I'm not from around here.

MIKE swallows nervously and tries to look at ARACELI knowingly.

ARACELI gives mike an incredulous "uh-huh" look.

MIKE (V.O)
I mean, you're still gonna have to lie your ass off, but it's a good

start, I guess.

CUT TO:

INT. ST. JOHN'S COMMUNITY CLINIC BREAK ROOM - DAY - 1976

MIKE, holding a STYROFOAM CUP, sits at a table in the corner of the break room, opposite the doorway. ARACELI is getting herself a coffee at the counter.

ANGLE ON: A CALENDAR of 1976 flipped to its JULY PAGE. The top page shows the logo of the clinic, including the name of the city.

MIKE
I didn't come here during the war. I lived in Canada. But after the war, I figured that was a good time to come over.

ARACELI
(puzzled)
Why?

MIKE
Well, there wasn't for me in Canada then, so I just thought I would blend in here, with all the other Asians.

ARACELI
Do you watch the news? Because people around here aren't too happy with you all right now. Vietnamese.
(sitting down)
So tell me, "Mike," why are you here, really? You're not a patient, and nurses don't get dressed in the laundry room.

MIKE
I, uh...

ARACELI
(chiding)
You're bad at lying.

EXT. CLOUDS - DAY - 1976

We see the capsule falling through the clouds again.

INT. ST. JOHN'S COMMUNITY CLINIC BREAK ROOM - DAY - 1976

MIKE
(remembering)
I'm looking for something.

We hold on MIKE as he hesitates to say more.

MIKE (V.O.)
You're definitely not supposed to tell people about the capsule.

MIKE
A... jar.

ARACELI
A jar?

MIKE
My mother's ashes. I lost them on the way here.

ARACELI
(confused)
You lost your mother's ashes on the way to a clinic?
(beat)
We don't treat ashes.

MIKE
It's... a long story. You, uh, you know how you said people aren't happy with us Asians right now?

ARACELI
...Oh.
(beat)
So what, they took your mother's ashes and your clothes? You don't look hurt. You okay? We can—

MIKE
No, no, I'm okay. They just, they thought they'd have a laugh, I guess. But they took the jar and I don't know where it is.

MIKE and ARACELI look around awkwardly for a beat

MIKE
I really loved my mom, you know?

ANGLE ON: ARACELI still glancing around. She know's what's coming but prays MIKE won't ask her.

MIKE
Could you help me out? Just a quick ride, or—

ARACELI
Wish I could, but, you know, these scrubs aren't just for fun.

MIKE
What about after? What if—

MIKE suddenly realizes he has a way to persuade ARACELI

INT. MIKE'S ROOM - DAY - 2026

MIKE
I was looking at lottery records, today. You can't take anything back with you but being rich in the past can't hurt, right?

INT. ST. JOHN'S COMMUNITY CLINIC BREAK ROOM - DAY - 1976

MIKE
I can get you a lot of money.

ARACELI
What, you have it strapped to your birthday suit, or—

MIKE
I work for the lottery. And I know the numbers they're going to call out. I can't win the lottery for legal reasons, but you can.

ARACELI is more intrigued than convinced.

MIKE (CONT'D)
You'd get half the money.
(off her look)
Most! 70-30. But you gotta help me out.

ARACELI doesn't buy any of this, but she kind of just wants to see where this is going.

ARACELI
Maybe.
(off MIKE's look)
Maybe. I get off in a couple hours. There's a gas station down the street.
(reaching into her

pockets)
I have a dollar. Go grab something to eat.

MIKE gets up excitedly and takes the DOLLAR.

ARACELI
(standing up)
Don't talk to anyone. It's not your thing.

MIKE
(laughing sheepishly)
Right, totally. Thank you.

MIKE swings his arms wide to HUG ARACELI, but hesitates and puts his arms down. ARACELI backs away, surprised.

INT. MIKE's ROOM - DAY - 2026

MIKE
Oh yeah, no, I'm freaking out. It's time travel! Like, it's the thing, you know? I don't what's going to happen, but...

EXT. ST. JOHN'S COMMUNITY CLINIC - DAY - 1976

MIKE walks out of the clinic's FRONT ENTRANCE, putting the DOLLAR in the pocket of his scrubs. He looks to his left towards the WHEAT FIELD, then his right, where he spots a GARBAGE TRUCK across the street, near the GAS STATION.

ANGLE ON: A close-up of the GARBAGE TRUCK. It's about to lift the GAS STATION DUMPSTER.

We then pan down slightly and see the CAPSULE atop the DUMPSTER, its unmistakable BRIGHT-BLUE glow shining through its glass exterior.

CUT TO:

MIKE STARES, wide-eyed, at the CAPSULE as it's about to rise along with the DUMPSTER.

MIKE (V.O.)
We'll see how it goes. I'm pretty excited, yeah. Love you mom, bye!

END OF ACT ONE