

## **Ouija Broads, Alaska's Silent City**

[theme music plays and fades out Me and the Man in the Moon]

**Liz:** You are listening to Ouija Broads, this is Liz.

**Devon:** This is Devon.

**Liz:** Sometimes I get a momentary panic when I start the intro that I'm going to forget my name or say your name.

**Devon:** Oh, my God. do you remember when I used to say your name for my name to catch you?

**Liz:** [in a double entendre sort of voice] Oh, I remember you saying my name. [in normal voice] No, it's like when you were in, in school and people would be calling attendance--

**Devon:** Yeah.

**Liz:** And you'd like be thinking really hard about like, "okay, uh... uh... HERE!" This isn't a high-pressure situation. Why did I get so overwhelmed?

**Devon:** Too eager, Blodgett! Too eager!

**Liz:** [distressed] Oh. Oh. Anxiety. That's what's going on.

**Devon:** Yeah.

**Liz:** This is Ouija Broads, we're back. I also have an Alaska story for you.

**Devon:** Oh, my goodness. Okay!

**Liz:** Yeah! Now, you requested a ghost..

**Devon:** Mm-hmm!

**Liz:** Because even though I gave you a ghost or two in the last one and they scared you--

**Devon:** Too spooky!

**Liz:** You still wanted more ghosts.

**Devon:** [laughing] It's a controlled fear, Liz. This is-- I'm able to take a calculated risk.

**Liz:** Sure.

**Devon:** This is-- It's important to my development.

**Liz:** Okay, I'm glad, yes. We'll keep the sort of circle of trust in the zone of resilience and you can go out and explore and then come back and I'll be here.

**Devon:** Thank you.

**Liz:** If things get too spooky, I'll, I'll get skeptical and just turn into the Tin Man or whatever going, "I do believe in spooks!" Or--

**Devon:** Exactly. Super Cowardly Lion there.

**Liz:** I had such a crush on the Tin Man. He looked better with the metal jaw on though, like, Jack Haley himself was not that good looking.

**Devon:** Oh, I thought you were just in it for the codpiece.

**Liz:** Nice. [sighs] Buns of steel. That's the joke.

**Devon:** Exactly. Well, that's the one from the Todrick Hall, uh... Get Low song.

**Liz:** Okay. All right, so what are some kinds of ghosts we've had on the show?

**Devon:** Oooh!

**Liz:** So we've had some people ghosts--

**Devon:** Oh, I thought you were asking me, and I was ready.

**Liz:** I wanted to shape it, though, so I didn't want you to be like "We've had women and children and whatever."

**Devon:** Yeah.

**Liz:** But we've had ghosts that were people...

**Devon:** Okay.

**Liz:** ...tell me more.

**Devon:** Have we had ghosts yet that are animals?

**Liz:** We have a ghost herd in the Bob.

**Devon:** We did. You're right. That ghost herd that, yeah, that the cowboy saw. Okay, some...

**Liz:** I feel like there's probably ghost animals, right? But I can't remember. Ghost pets?

**Devon:** Ghost pets maybe. I don't know. I'm thinking specifically of like, Rue in the Heceta Head lighthouse, or Mr. Davenport at the Davenport Hotel.

**Liz:** Yeah.

**Devon:** So that's-- that's too specific though, you're thinking of-- oh have we had ghost trains?

**Liz:** Yes, ghost trains. So, trains that run on tracks that are long gone--

**Devon:** Yeah!

**Liz:** --and can pass straight through other trains. So that's interesting, right? Because it's not just that it's a person flying along--

**Devon:** Yeah!

**Liz:** Like Wonder Woman in her invisible jet.

**Devon:** Oh, yeah.

**Liz:** It's an entire ghost train.

**Devon:** Yeah.

**Liz:** On ghost tracks. So, we did do an episode that was called Ghost Town. Ghost Town,--

**Devon:** Mmhmm!

**Liz:** But that was about a ghost town in the sense of... It's abandoned. It's also a town that was full of ghosts.

**Devon:** Yeah.

**Liz:** But today I wanted to tell you about a ghost city.

**Devon:** Oh, no-- wait, like a city that comes and goes?

**Liz:** Yeah.

**Devon:** [indescribable excited noise] It's a city that comes and ghosts?!

Both [laughing]

**Devon:** I just did a Pee-wee Herman laugh, I'm so sorry.

**Liz:** Yeah, it, like-- it stops texting you after a while, it just ghosts you.

**Devon:** It just ghosts you! "It's not you, it's me."

**Liz:** So in The New York Times on October 31st, 1889, and I don't believe this was a weird Halloween [inaudible as Devon says "Okay", probably "prank"] but I'm not sure. The New York Times reports the experience of a traveler whose name is L. B. French. And in Glacier Bay, what French has seen is this: "At about five o'clock in the afternoon of an early July day, we suddenly perceived rising above the glacier over in the direction of Mount Fairweather, what at first appeared to be a thin, misty cloud."

**Liz:** "It soon became clearer and we saw a distinct specter city moving towards us. We could plainly see houses, streets and well-defined trees. Here and there rose tall spires over huge buildings, which appeared to be ancient mosques or cathedrals. It was a large city, one that would include at least a hundred thousand residents. I have seen Milwaukee mirage over Lake Michigan, and this city appeared considerably larger than that. It did not look like a modern city, more like an ancient European city. I noticed particularly the immense height of the spires."

**Liz:** Therefore, I am bringing to you the story of the silent city of Alaska.

**Devon:** Oh, my God. Oh, my God.

**Liz:** Where's your head at so far?

**Devon:** I want you to say it as though you are in a... [sighs] I want you to say it as though you are Tim Curry in Congo and it's "The lost city of Zinj." I want you to--

**Liz:** [laughing] Now I'm just thinking about that terrible full-motion video game.

**Devon:** [laughing]

**Liz:** "SPACE!"

**Devon:** Yes! I am all over the place! So, it's a city that not only appeared to be, y'know, anachronistic, but anachro... graphic? Anachro- whatever it is, where it's not geographically correct either. It was out of place and time.

**Liz:** Out of place and time in the sky. They can't hear it.

**Devon:** Wow!

**Liz:** But they see all these great details of this huge city.

**Devon:** And it moved! So it wasn't like they came upon it. It moved toward them.

**Liz:** Yes, it appeared and moved toward them.

**Devon:** What?!

**Liz:** And at first, they thought it was just mist.

**Devon:** Yeah.

**Liz:** So at this point, three times is a trend? That if I bring you an Alaska story, I feel obligated to bring you some terrible poetry.

**Devon:** [laughing] So you do.

**Liz:** So there's a very strange collection called The Prairie Poems by F. T. Dibbell.

**Devon:** No.

**Liz:** That's from nineteen hundred--

**Devon:** Stupid name.

**Liz:** And he has this very strange story about Horatio Marston and his wife: "And he is a man of Western notion / and hates a greenhorn tenderfoot / as he hates a snake or coyote / as he'd hate a prairie coyote." I'm like-- "you can't rhyme coyote with coyote [pronounced "kai-oat"] or with coyote [pronounced "kai-o-tee] with--"

**Devon:** No.

**Liz:** Or... What. What are you trying to do.

**Devon:** Yeah. What do you-- you don't do that. That's not how it goes.

**Liz:** Yes. But! He says: "Tales so weird can he tell you / that you scarcely would believe them / but you cannot even doubt them / when you see the man and know him. / He has seen the silent city / with its death-white streets and empty / with its towers and domes and minarets / with no sign of life whatever. / Pictured far above the mountain / deserted, silent in the sky--" That goes on for a while and alludes to the fact that other people have seen it...

**Devon:** I'm mad that parts of that rhyme and parts of it don't rhyme.

**Liz:** I know, I know.

**Devon:** Pick one convention and stick with it.

**Liz:** So according to this: "Tell the Indians tales mysterious / how in ancient days a nation / built a city in the far north / which no man has ever reached / nor from whence hath soul returned"-- He flips back and forth between "has" and "hath," depending on how old-timey he's feeling.

**Devon:** Yeah, totally.

**Liz:** "Why this city is deserted / reflected silent in the sky. / No one answers, no one ventures. / Alaska's mystery of the sky." Again, rhyming "sky" with "sky"... C minus.

**Devon:** [muttering] You don't rhyme "sky" with "sky!"

**Liz:** So this is an apparition that was reported multiple times over the decade preceding this New York Times report.

**Devon:** Okay.

**Liz:** Summer is when it would always show up.

**Devon:** Okay.

**Liz:** And it is pretty consistent of, it is this white cityscape with these tall buildings. It is strange. It is silent. You know, other people can see it.

**Devon:** Okay.

**Liz:** It's like, it's-- It's not like one of those things where you call somebody over and they don't get what you're looking at. Other people are like, "Holy shit, that's a city in the sky, what are you talking about?!"

**Devon:** Yeah.

**Liz:** So there's a lot of different theories at the time about what they are seeing. So, what a lot of people want to think is that they're seeing the reflection of a European city or a Russian city.

**Devon:** Yeah.

**Liz:** From miles and miles-- you know, thousands of miles away.

**Devon:** Yeah! Yeah. That it's some kind of strange, uh... Strange atmospheric phenomenon projecting this image, like how you can make a pinhole camera image, but in a room.

**Liz:** Yes.

**Devon:** If you block out all of the windows except for a pinhole of light, it'll project the outside on the opposite wall.

**Liz:** You have nailed it and you are going to be advanced in this, because you understand photography, whereas I don't understand anything about physics. And this is, I think... Or at least the explanation that I read and bought is this is a fata morgana.

**Devon:** Okay?

**Liz:** This is a kind of tremendously advanced mirage.

**Devon:** Okay.

**Liz:** I've seen mirages before in my life, right? Like there's the mirage that you get on like a hot day--

**Devon:** On a hot-- yeah.

**Liz:** When you're driving and you see, basically, the sky refracts onto the road and it looks like there's water, right?

**Devon:** Yes. Yes.

**Liz:** So there's that, where the hot air is above the ground, and then there's the normal air that's just above it and the reflection happens. That's a simple mirage.

**Devon:** Yes.

**Liz:** Then, uh, there's a different kind of mirage that works when you've got the cold ground and hot air.

**Devon:** Oh!

**Liz:** Remember how this always shows up at like the end of June?

**Devon:** Yeah, okay.

**Liz:** And it basically flips it. It does-- it flips the image multiple times and almost becomes like a computer glitch where it takes, like, a slice--

**Devon:** Yeah.



**Liz:** --a horizontal slice of what, what it's reflecting and doubles and triples it, sometimes flips it? And the effect is that it looks like a city, or it looks like a structure--

**Devon:** Ohhhh.

**Liz:** Because it goes out and in at regular intervals and makes these tall columns. So even something like a cliff or a mountain will look like a city or towers and buildings like that.

**Devon:** Cool!

**Liz:** And I've seen, like, seven images where somebody used MS Paint to try to show how you can get basically... The image that you can't-- or the object you actually can't see-- the way that the light rays are getting bounced around by this strange situation. Specifically when the sea is a lot colder, the atmosphere above it, you get this boundary layer that stuff is bouncing off, and then you've got-- The layers above will also form several boundaries.

**Devon:** Yeah.

**Liz:** So you get this very complex mirage because the light's getting sliced and diced all these different ways. So it doesn't look like a ship or a mountain or anything, anymore. It looks something, like something very, very different. There are some areas that are really well known for these mirages. The Straits of Messina are one and the Arctic is another.

**Devon:** Oh!

**Liz:** Because the Arctic has a lot of temperature extremes, a lot of water, a lot of weird things that light can do.

**Devon:** Yeah.

**Liz:** There's this guy named C.W. Thornton, who was one of the first people to summit Mount St. Elias, which was the second highest peak in Alaska.

**Devon:** Okay.

**Liz:** He was, you know, he talked to Popular Science and he said, "Yes, I've seen it. You didn't have to imagine it." Well, let me read exactly what he said. "It required no effort of the

imagination to liken it to a city. It was so distinct that it required faith to believe that it was not really a city."

**Devon:** Oh, cool. It was so convincing. You had to convince yourself that, no, this is mirage.

**Liz:** Yes. "I'm actually not seeing this." A thing I saw-- I looked into it and there's actually a lot of strange mirages that happen in Alaska and the Arctic.

**Devon:** Really. Okay.

**Liz:** They have, let's see, there's the fog ring, which is kind of like a halo. And then they have sun dogs where, like, the sun will reflect off parts of the fog ring. They get the green flash--

**Devon:** Oh, do they?

**Liz:** When the sun is going down, yeah, and I might do a separate episode on that sometime.

**Devon:** I was--

**Liz:** All the legends associated are pretty interesting.

**Devon:** Oh, I was fascinated to learn-- because they mentioned it in Pirates of the Caribbean--

**Liz:** Yeah!

**Devon:** I was fascinated to learn that that was a real thing. Sun dogs are a real thing I see all the time here in Seattle.

**Liz:** Because of all the moisture in the air?

**Devon:** Because of all that moisture in the air, yeah. You get sun dogs a lot.

**Liz:** That makes sense. Is there a superstition around them, or are they just kind of a thing?

**Devon:** Well, I wonder. I hear more superstitions around the moon equivalent, you know.

**Liz:** Yeah.

**Devon:** Because I think the moon brings out more superstitions than, than the sun.

**Liz:** Yeah, that makes sense.

**Devon:** Yeah. I'm just-- I'm always really excited by them because I mean, they look kind of cool. They're like little tiny sky gems.

**Liz:** Yeah, and I always feel very alert when I'm actually paying attention to what's happening in the sky.

**Devon:** Right. Right. "Oh, wait. I actually looked up today. That's awesome. Good job, me. So glad you noticed it."

**Liz:** There's another story which is not explicitly in our territory, but it's so linked to this that I want to talk about it a little bit.

**Liz:** Do it! A bit, which was... In 1906, the American explorer Robert E. Peary was looking through what, to us, is east of here, you know, but it's basically the far northern reaches of Canada.

**Devon:** Okay.

**Liz:** So west of Greenland, but not as far west as we are.

**Devon:** Okay.

**Liz:** He's up there exploring and he sees a vast stretch of land and says, "Aha, I will name this Crocker Land after this guy who gives me money sometimes."

**Devon:** [snorts]

**Liz:** And they fund an expedition a decade later, y'know, go out over the ice pack. Because up here, where they are, it's a bunch of, like, frozen sea.

**Devon:** Yeah.

**Liz:** And actual land is exciting.

**Devon:** Yeah.

**Liz:** And he's like, "Oh, I have actual land."

**Devon:** Yeah.

**Liz:** And so this expedition gets together and goes out to find Crocker Land. And as they're going along-- so it's sponsored by, y'know, among others, the American Museum of Natural History.

**Devon:** Okay.

**Liz:** It takes a while because Crocker stops funding Arctic expeditions and starts giving his money to survivors of the San Francisco earthquake. So, life is interesting like that.

**Devon:** Yeah, weird to think about all this happening in the same time span.

**Liz:** Yes, I kind of like that because it's one of those, like, if fate had turned slightly differently...

**Devon:** Yeah.

**Liz:** This whole thing, this is like the, the Ada Blackjack expedition all over again in terms of, like... How many things have to go wrong before you understand that you're cursed?

**Devon:** Yeah. Yeah. And I'm waiting for this to become a crock-er-shit [ala "crock of shit"]

**Liz:** [laughing] It was a crock-er-shit all along.

**Devon:** I mean, I'm sure it was.

**Liz:** Yes.

**Devon:** Oh, please tell me.

**Liz:** So the expedition leaves in 1913, which is great. They're---

**Devon:** God, didn't you say he found it in 1906?

**Liz:** Yeah. They're a solid year after the Titanic which is great because they promptly run into rocks while trying to avoid an iceberg. But in fairness, the captain was drunk. So--

**Devon:** [laughing]

**Liz:** [laughing] So there may not have been an iceberg at all. I'm not sure.

**Devon:** [laughing]

**Liz:** So they get to a different ship. They land in Greenland and they make a big shed that's going to be like their headquarters. And they start--

**Devon:** Their shed-quarters, you mean.

**Liz:** Their shed-quarters. Their Crocker shed-quarters.

**Devon:** Their Crocker Shit shed-quarters.

**Liz:** [laughing] And they go out and they make their supply caches. And so it's a couple of people from this expedition. They hire some native Inuit folks to travel with them.

**Devon:** Mmkay.

**Liz:** There's this whole interesting, super depressing component where basically... Minik Wallace was a Native Alaskan guy who as a kid, Robert Peary brought to the US?

**Devon:** Okay.

**Liz:** With, like, his whole family and some other adults and, like, everybody except Minik immediately died of tuberculosis.

**Devon:** Oh, no!

**Liz:** Yeah, well, he's, he's with them--

**Devon:** Okay.

**Liz:** Acting as sort of a translator and a guide.

**Devon:** Uh-huh.

**Liz:** So the weather conditions are very bad.

**Devon:** Mmhmm.

**Liz:** They reach a glacier, they climb it, somebody gets frostbite. The temperature's dropping. Sorry, guys. It's like... It's the Arctic. It's the Arctic Ocean.

**Devon:** [laughing]

**Liz:** So they get to the Arctic Ocean, they get on dogsleds.

**Devon:** Oh!

**Liz:** They get on dogsleds because they do have some Inuits there helping them. They're going across the sea ice, which is scary because the sweet spot that they're trying to hit here is "Cold enough that the ice isn't going to collapse under us, but not so cold that our fingers come off."

**Devon:** Oh, God!

**Liz:** And it's tricky! It's a tricky needle to, uh, thread, there.

**Devon:** [laughing]

**Liz:** But fortunately-- so they roll up in July of 1913. In April of 1914, they have finally gone on this expedition and they see on the northwestern horizon a huge island.

**Devon:** Oh!

**Liz:** So it has hills, valleys, snowcapped peaks, extending, as one guy says, "Through at least 120 degrees of the horizon." I don't know what that means, but that sounds big.

**Devon:** That sounds big. That's a lot.

**Liz:** And then there's this Inuit hunter who's with them, who's lived in the area for 20 years, and he says, "Yeah, that's poo-jok." And they're like, "What's that mean?" He's like, "It means mist. It's nothing. That's nothing." And they're like, "Yeah, what do you know?"

**Devon:** [laughing]

**Liz:** And so they press on and he's like, "Okay, like... Your money's good, I guess."

**Devon:** Yeah, I suppose.

**Liz:** So they keep going, even though it's warming up, the sea ice is breaking up... Five days, they go toward this huge island they can see. And finally they've covered 125 miles of sea ice and they're still not on land. And they're like, "Oh, okay, you might have a point about that poo-jok thing, my dude."

**Devon:** "Yeah, you might."

**Liz:** "That one's on us. That one's on us."

**Devon:** Let's recall here that the only reason Roald Amundsen made it to both Poles, he said, was because he fucking listened to the fucking natives who fucking lived in those conditions and did what they said.

**Liz:** Listen to the locals! Always!

**Devon:** Listen to the locals!

**Liz:** Yeah, so what Macmillan, the leader of the expedition, eventually said-- Cuz at least they did turn around--

**Devon:** I mean...

**Liz:** At least they weren't like "Well, we should have been there four days ago and we're not, but let's just keep going."

**Devon:** "Let's press on."

**Liz:** [sighs]

**Devon:** I appreciate a man who can say, "I made a mistake. Sorry, my dude."

**Liz:** Yeah. "This... Never mind. I don't think this will work out." So, he wrote: "The day was exceptionally clear, not a cloud or trace of mist. If land could be seen now was our time. Yes, there it was! It could even be seen without a glass." So like, without binoculars, I assume, or telescope.

**Devon:** Telescope, yeah.

**Liz:** "Extending from southwest true to north-northeast. Our powerful glasses, however, brought out more clearly the dark background, in contrast with a white, the whole resembling hills, valleys and snow-capped peaks to such a degree that had we not been out on the frozen sea for 150 miles, we would have staked our lives upon its reality."

**Devon:** Wow.

**Liz:** "Our judgment then, as now, is that this was a mirage of the sea ice." So thank God they turned around. They-- somebody went, "Okay, I don't care what we can see. I know we can see it. I know we can all see this big island."

**Devon:** Yeah, yeah.

**Liz:** "We're all seeing it, but we're not getting any closer to it, no matter how much we walk. Turn around."

**Devon:** Wow, that'd be so hard though. That'd be so hard.

**Liz:** Yeah, it's-- oh, that would be rough. And you know, they do turn around. There's more adventures that happen. There's some-- So the guy, the whole, the poo-jok guy getting shot probably because, um, one of the explorers wanted to get with his wife or had had his wife as a mistress in the past? And they had a couple of kids together?

**Devon:** Okay.

**Liz:** It's very strange, but long story short, it takes most of them several years to get home and get rescued.

**Devon:** Yeah.

**Liz:** So that's what you get for being a dick.

**Devon:** That's probably what you get.

**Liz:** You can still see this. I found a story from 2012--

**Devon:** Okay.



**Liz:** --where someone's talking about driving on the Alaska Parks Highway and seeing this bizarre thing over Denali, of, like--

**Devon:** Wow.

**Liz:** --rectangular white masses. And he, you know, because it's now, or close to now, instead of one hundred years ago, he says, "As if a bored mythological toddler had used hills like LEGO blocks to craft a crude cityscape."

**Devon:** [laughing] Okay, yeah.

**Liz:** So the connection here is that he knew it was a fata morgana because he'd worked with somebody to cover the Iditarod trail sled-dog race in 2011.

**Devon:** Oh!

**Liz:** And when they were commuting by a small plane between the checkpoints, they noticed near the ghost town of Iditarod that the mountains in the distance looked unusually large, blocky and tall.

**Devon:** Oh, fascinating.

**Liz:** Yeah, yeah.

**Devon:** Fascinating.

**Liz:** It's something like... This is the closest I can get to understanding how it works: it's kind of like holding a mirror underwater.

**Devon:** Oh, okay.

**Liz:** The strange reflections and refractions that you get....

**Devon:** Yeah.

**Liz:** Can make it so that you're seeing something.

**Devon:** Yeah.

**Liz:** I think that's what's so tricky about this, is it's not like a classic Looney Tunes mirage.

**Devon:** Yeah.

**Liz:** You are envisioning something that's not there at all and isn't there anywhere near you. You're seeing something that is plausible--

**Devon:** Yeah.

**Liz:** --to the environment that you're in, it fits in and, like, makes sense.

**Devon:** Yeah.

**Liz:** It's just nowhere near where you are seeing it.

**Devon:** It's just not--

**Liz:** That's so trippy.

**Devon:** Yeah. It's like... I mean, you said Looney Tunes, and I'm thinking of the classic, like, neon flashing sign with an arrow pointing to it.

**Liz:** Yup. Palm trees, water...

**Devon:** Girls, girls, girls! And water, and it's a bar and, yeah. It's so strange to see things where: no, it's not unusual to see a mountain in Alaska. It's not unusual to see a building in Alaska. You only know it's not there because other people have said, "Your eyes are going to play tricks on you here."

**Liz:** Yeah, but here's the part that's extremely extra tricky.

**Devon:** Yeah.

**Liz:** Is, in Peary's journals from when he was out there and supposedly spotted Crocker Land? During the timeframe when he said he did, he didn't write anything about that in his journal.

**Devon:** Oh.

**Liz:** So it may have been, as you said, a crock-er-shit from like, the actual entire beginning.

**Devon:** Yeah.

**Liz:** And he may have sent a bunch of people to almost die, or in some cases get shot--

**Devon:** [starting to laugh]

**Liz:** -- to pursue something that was even more of a mirage than we thought it was.

**Devon:** Yeah. Just a straight-up lie.

**Liz:** Just a lie, yeah. That's just called a lie, sir.

**Devon:** It's not a mirage anymore if you just made it up.

**Liz:** Mirage makes it sound like you have a playful relationship.

**Devon:** [laughing] That's a much nicer way of putting it! Oh, strange... Well, and we've talked before about ghost photos and even about EVP is about how the brain really likes to make sense of things that are almost right, but not quite right. We've talked about this before in interpreting supposed photos of ghosts or even audio EVPs about how the brain really wants to make order out of things that are not quite right, but they're really close. So we want to matrix shapes or sounds into a familiar thing and then our brain can file it away and go, "Cool, I know what that is, moving on."

**Liz:** Yeah, "I can skip some steps now, because I know what bucket that goes in."

**Devon:** Exactly, right? [laughing] "I've seen a mountain before! I got this handled!"

**Liz:** [laughing]

**Devon:** "We're doing great!"

**Liz:** "I know about mountains!"

**Devon:** "I know all about mountains. Now I'm going to go try to classify, I don't know, dangerous fungi. We'll figure out which ones I can eat and which ones I can't."

**Liz:** "Woo!"

**Devon:** And so I wonder if that doesn't happen, too, when you see a mirage that's not, y'know, if it's not a reflection of... Or a projection of a city or a mountain, y'know... I wonder how much of it is just brains going... "I mean, the only other thing I can think of this shape and this size is a mountain. So that's what that is.

**Liz:** Yeah, yeah. So, with those guys who were out looking for Crocker Land, they're looking for an uninhabited island and that's what they see. And for the people who are seeing the silent city, they are told, "Look, I see a city," and they come up and they go, "Look at those tall buildings, look at those towers."

**Devon:** Yeah.

**Liz:** "Look at those bricks." And so they interpret the linear corners and shapes and stuff as buildings.

**Devon:** Yeah.

**Liz:** And they interpret it as a European city or a Russian city.

**Devon:** Right.

**Liz:** So they don't say, "I'm seeing another Alaskan town from my time period reflected. It must be from very far away." Because it doesn't look right. I mean, there's no skyscrapers in Juneau at this time.

**Devon:** Totally. Yeah.

**Liz:** And, so they make sense of it that way, when probably what it was, was a slice of mountain repeated and mirrored and flipped and turned into all this stuff.

**Devon:** Yeah.

**Liz:** And it makes sense as well, then you're like, "Okay, that's why it is white, why it is silent, why there's no people in it--"

**Devon:** I was going to ask that.

**Liz:** Your brain is not putting in little figures moving around--

**Devon:** Okay.

**Liz:** --but it is putting in, it's saying "That's a building," because you know what buildings are.

**Devon:** Yeah. I was going to ask that, like, do they ever report seeing people moving around? Because you didn't mention that in any of your descriptions. So that's even more leading into the idea that, yeah, it's this kind of weird... What did you call it, a morgana - a fata morgana.

**Liz:** Fata morgana, yeah.

**Devon:** Yeah.

**Liz:** Now, in the way of many stories here, there's the general experience... And then somebody tries to make a buck off it, and makes life really confusing.

**Devon:** Okay.

**Liz:** There was this guy named Professor Richard Willoughby. He had a pretty good beard, I gotta say.

**Devon:** I bet he did.

**Liz:** And he was a colorful character. He lived in Juneau, usually, and if tourists would complain of the rain, he would go out in, like, the worst downpour and say, "I have never known it to rain here in thirty years."

**Devon:** Oh, my God.

**Liz:** "It's the driest place on earth!"

**Devon:** Oh, my God. I mean, that's kind of funny.

**Liz:** It's kinda funny.

**Devon:** Yeah. He's being a dick and I kind of like it.

**Liz:** Yeah, like, what's to say? It's the weather - quit your bitchin'.

**Devon:** Quit your bitchin' is right. You moved to Alaska, ya dillweed.

**Liz:** Yeah. Willoughby claims that what he has done after seeing the silent city-- a tongue twister--

**Devon:** Indeed!

**Liz:** --is finally get a picture. He said that he went on many expeditions trying to photograph the picture [sic] and finally he was actually able to do so....

**Devon:** Wow!

**Liz:** And now let's see... When did he actually say he got the picture...? It's not super important because he didn't actually take a picture of anything.

**Devon:** Oh. Butt.

**Liz:** Oh, here we go: June 1888. So it's-- so it appears over the Muir glacier.

**Devon:** Okay.

**Liz:** What he says he sees is, y'know, a great city with tall houses where there's a river and there's tall trees and there's a large edifice with several towers and there's scaffolding around the towers.

**Devon:** Okay?

**Liz:** And what Mr. Willoughby, who later will call himself Professor Willoughby, because why the hell not?

**Devon:** Why not? Who's checking?

**Liz:** You've got a good beard and a good voice? You're entitled to do so. Go for it.

**Devon:** [laughing]

**Liz:** Why not? He basically said every time he would check on it, the building would go further. So like the scaffolding would move and stuff would advance.

**Devon:** [laughing] Oh! Oh, wow.

**Liz:** And according to Professor Willoughby, he sent to San Francisco and got a special camera with very highly sensitized plates so that he could photograph the apparition. And he only did this once successfully, because, of course, it was so insubstantial, he had to do a really, really long exposure.

**Devon:** Okay....

**Liz:** And you can have a copy of this for a mere 75 cents.

**Devon:** Oh!

**Liz:** Yeah. Which at the time is like 21 dollars.

**Devon:** Yeah!

**Liz:** And so he hung onto the negative and made tons and tons and tons of copies of this.

**Devon:** Okay.

**Liz:** Because there were people who were amazed by it and were like, "This guy is amazing. He's such a cool explorer. He's found something incredible." And there's people who were like, "This guy is a ridiculous hoaxster, but this is a cool souvenir. I can show people this and tell them the tale of the silent city." So you can see this photograph because there's a million copies around and there's like different versions of it where, like, sometimes he's cut out some of the sky because, you know, then it fits on a postcard.

**Devon:** Sure, right?

**Liz:** Yeah. [heavy sigh]

**Devon:** Okay, so can I go look this up on my phone while we're talking? Or should I wait?

**Liz:** Yes, you can. Look up the silent city of Alaska and I will reveal the hoax to you for this component. Now people pretty... I mean, I think there were people who immediately were like, "You're full of shit."

**Devon:** Yeah.

**Liz:** "And we know this is because you always are full of shit, and this is no exception."

**Devon:** Yeah.

**Liz:** So what seems to have probably happened? Is that Willoughby, when somebody was leaving Alaska bought some photography equipment and found this plate that was a picture of a city. Specifically, Bristol, England.

**Devon:** Yeah.

**Liz:** And went, "Ah-ha, I can attach this to this apparition that people have been seeing and make money off this." I mean, the odds that somebody from Bristol, England, who could recognize the city from that angle were pretty slim--

**Devon:** Oh, right.

**Liz:** But unfortunately, not none.

**Devon:** [starts to laugh]

**Liz:** He was like, "Yeah, that's the church. That's from like 20 years ago. I remember they were remodeling the church."

**Devon:** Oh, interesting. Okay.

**Liz:** And it didn't help that, uh... So Willoughby comes out with this picture and he actually starts, like, doing some 19th century Photoshop on it to make things look more misty.

**Devon:** Mmhmm.

**Liz:** To make the streets look more ancient and strange and all that kind of stuff. But... It-- that's a pretty good scam as such things go.

**Devon:** Totally!

**Liz:** And this is... Yeah. "Ask the miners who have tarried far away from civilization / they have seen the silent city and have stood in awe and wonder / gazing at its streets so empty, seeing it



glimmer in mid heaven / like a city long deserted." So that's another weird ghost component of this, that it's a--

**Devon:** Yeah

**Liz:** --a silent city that you can see and... at least, according to Willoughby, who was obviously making a lot of this up--

**Devon:** Yeah.

**Liz:** --straight from his own ass.

**Devon:** Oh, yeah, totally.

**Liz:** A lot of this... It, it's changing over time, according to him.

**Devon:** Yeah.

**Liz:** And there's evidence of life, but you don't see the people.

**Devon:** Yeah.

**Liz:** So... spooky, to me. The idea that you could walk through, it's like a dream--

**Devon:** It would be a dream, yeah.

**Liz:** It would be like walking through a place where people should be and you would expect to see them and they're not there. It's a, it's a cursed place, like a Shopko at two a.m., and it's just not right.

**Devon:** [laughing] Just any Shopko.

**Liz:** Yeah. Any Shopko at any time.

**Devon:** Bad Times Shopko is all Shopkos, because they exist in the singularity. I maintain that the creepiest thing you can show me is a place where kids are supposed to be that is devoid of kids. So like, a playground after dark, a school...

**Liz:** Why is it worse when it's kids?

**Devon:** I don't-- I don't know. Maybe it's because I associate that with hyper happiness or hyper innocent...

**Liz:** A ton of activity and noise?

**Devon:** Yeah, and so the absence of that is even more stark. But there's something I wanted to do... You know, that was like my [valley girl voice] "Photography 101!" Kind of, "Oh, this is going to be so deep," was I was going to go take a bunch of photos of playgrounds after dark with available light. Because "Oh, it's so bizarro world and creepy, and doesn't that say something to you?" And really, I, y'know, like... Not only did I get my own head out of my own ass, I was also like, "It's too fucking scary. I'm not going to go do that. Ew!"

**Liz:** It's very creepy.

**Devon:** Creepy!

**Liz:** I don't know... I don't know why it is creepy like that, but it is.

**Devon:** So, definitely creepier for me to see a mirage city devoid of people--

**Liz:** Yeah.

**Devon:** Than a mirage city full of people.

**Liz:** Yeah, that's-- that's upsetting because you're like, I don't... I feel like if I went there, I'd always... If I somehow made it to the silent city, I would perpetually be terrified--

**Devon:** Yeah.

**Liz:** That, that somebody is going to jump out at me.

**Devon:** Yeah.

**Liz:** That I was going to find where they all were. I think that's what it is, is you're like "When I find where you all are, it's not going to be, like... at a surprise party!"

**Devon:** No, no.

**Liz:** "You're watching the New Avengers movie!" It's going to be something terrible, obviously.

**Devon:** Oh, yeah. It's like some Wicker Man shit, where you're all going to a sacrifice and whoops! I'm the sacrifice. Great.

**Liz:** Whoops! And I walked myself right over there.

**Devon:** Yeah.

**Liz:** I will say, Willoughby's commitment to "I used a special magic camera"...

**Devon:** Yeah.

**Liz:** And then when people would actually question him, it was revealed that he didn't even know how to use a regular camera? Is pretty impressive.

**Devon:** Go for it, Willoughby, you dig right in. You dig those heels in deep. **Liz:** . How would he know how to use a special camera? He only knew how to use a magic camera.

**Liz:** Yeah. He knows how to use magic cameras, quit asking him questions, do you want a copy or not?

**Devon:** "I'm sorry, I can't drive your Corolla. I'm used to my Lambo. It handles differently."

**Liz:** [tough guy voice] "I'm only certified for tactical assault vehicles."

**Devon:** [laughing] [in belligerent voice] "I'd show you I could punch you, but my hands are registered as lethal weapons, so it's actually illegal for me to do so, God."

**Liz:** [belligerent voice] "Just-- just, fine!"

**Devon:** "It's fine!"

**Liz:** "Don't worry about it!"

**Devon:** "It's my magic camera. Duh."

**Liz:** "Yeah, it's my magic camera. No, you can't see."

**Devon:** "No you can't-- Can you or can you not see that city? Were can you not see that city. It is right there in front of you, floating."

**Liz:** Yeah. It reminds me of... Crap, what was the thing? Oh! Ape Canyon again.

**Devon:** [affirmative] Mmm!

**Liz:** That there was the person who was looking for the remains of the cabin and I did point out in the episode that that was moving the goalposts a bit because the, the questionable aspect of that story was not whether a cabin existed.

**Devon:** [laughing] Yeah.

**Liz:** And so I feel like he's doing that old trick... I'm sure there's some psychological term for this, where you show people proof of a component of your questionable story that wasn't the questionable component?

**Devon:** Yeah.

**Liz:** And they go along with it.

**Devon:** Yeah.

**Liz:** So he's just like, "Is this or is this not a picture of a weird looking city? Well, case closed."

**Devon:** "Case closed!" Yeah, it's like a saint reliquary, like, "Yeah, I understand that that is actual fabric. I see the scrap of fabric in there. That's not the part I'm debating."

**Liz:** [laughing] Yeah, exactly. "That's not the part I'm wondering about."

**Devon:** Yeah. Yeah. That one? We've got that. Empirical? Done. We'll check that off. Let's go down the list.

**Liz:** Yeah. So according to to him it was a very, very long exposure. And then through a secret process with secret chemicals, he would put the exposed plates for three months in those in daylight.

**Devon:** No.

**Liz:** [laughing] Yup.

**Devon:** No.

**Liz:** You know, like how cameras work!

**Devon:** Like how cameras work! No. I can confidently tell you: that is not how silver gelatin plates work.

**Liz:** No! So this was, let's see -- in Popular Science Monthly, God bless the-- in 1897--

**Devon:** Oh, man.

**Liz:** They're on the case of the silent city and talking about Willoughby and his nonsense, because the, the guy who's writing this has gone to Alaska. He's bought the copies of the print

**Devon:** Of the print, yeah.

**Liz:** He has the story.

**Devon:** Okay.

**Liz:** And he says, "It's hardly necessary to call the attention of the intelligent reader to the absurdities involved in Mr. Willoughby's story and in the photograph which is its financial justification." So, he wraps up with this quote that I positively adore...

**Devon:** Okay?

**Liz:** And I don't know where he originated it because he says he said it elsewhere, but: "Thus it comes about, as I have elsewhere said," says this guy, owning everybody from 1897, "That there is no intellectual craze so absurd as not to have a following among educated men and women. There is no scheme for the renovation of the social order so silly that educated men will not invest their money in it. There is no medical fraud so shameless that educated men will not give it their certificate. There is no nonsense so unscientific that men called educated will not accept it as science."

**Devon:** [laughing] Shots fired!

**Liz:** Ruined everybody's whole career!

**Devon:** Oh my God, "There is no nonsense so..." Can you read me that last bit of it again? That was my favorite.

**Liz:** "There is nonsense so unscientific that men called educated will not accept it as science."  
Yeah, we're just humans. We're just tall monkeys, okay?

**Devon:** Yeah!

**Liz:** Our brains like shortcuts! All the time! We like shortcuts and patterns!

**Devon:** Yeah! Yeah!

**Liz:** Oh, my gosh!

**Devon:** Dude, I have to distract myself every fucking day from the fact that I no longer have a tail to use as an extra hand, so I'm going to accept the existence of ghosts so I feel a little better about that loss. Deal with it.

**Liz:** That's a-- okay, that's a connection I didn't anticipate, but I support you.

**Devon:** Thank you.

**Liz:** I'm just thinking about the whole argument from authority that happens so much with so much pseudoscientific stuff. It's like, look, there's a lot of people. There's a lot of people around!

**Devon:** Yeah.

**Liz:** You're going to find somebody who should know better but doesn't. And if you put them on the record, all of a sudden your shit seems impressive.

**Devon:** Yeah. Oh, yeah. There are very, very many doctors willing to endorse weight loss pills or...

**Liz:** Oh, yeah. No, there's like, a specific phenomenon with medical doctors because the confidence and the shortcut taking that gets beaten into them during medical school?

**Devon:** Yeah.

**Liz:** And I'm allowed to say that because I work for a medical school--

**Devon:** You work for them--

**Liz:** Is... can backfire on them and they end up falling for really basic stuff sometimes because they don't think that they can be tricked.

**Devon:** Yeah.

**Liz:** They don't think they can make a stupid decision.

**Devon:** That arrogance. Yeah.

**Liz:** Yeah. Yeah! You just-- you're like, "I couldn't be tricked. I mean, advertising works on everybody else, but not on me."

**Devon:** As someone who works in marketing--

**Liz:** "Wait a minute!"

**Devon:** I am so freely admitting of, "Jason. Jason, we got to stop there. They say they have the world's best bird feeder." And he's like, "What claim... By whose metric? What?" And I'm like, "I don't-- but the advertising worked. I am so susceptible to it, and I know better. But we're going to go buy that bird feeder, cuz it's the world's best."

**Liz:** Yup. So Willoughby is still commemorated in Juneau. Let me find this...

**Devon:** Wait, they still like him in Juneau? Like, commemorated?

**Liz:** Well, he was sort of like a full-time happy bullshitter, in the way that we love in the Northwest.

**Devon:** Okay.

**Liz:** So he claims to have been the first person to discover gold in Alaska.

**Devon:** No, no, no.

**Liz:** Well, he was involved in the Cassiar Gold Rush, which is why I was texting you about that earlier today.

**Devon:** Oh, okay.

**Liz:** Which is the one that Nellie was, was helpful with.

**Devon:** Yeah, Nellie Cashman.

**Liz:** Nellie Cashman, yeah. He went down to Seattle in 1895... Just started saying stuff. He said stuff like, "I lived in Alaska so long I've never seen a train!" And people are like, "This guy's never seen a train! Wow! Let's write about that!"

**Devon:** [laughing] "Check out the rube!"

**Liz:** He told a woman at one point he was so isolated in Alaska he didn't even know about the Civil War until it was over.

**Devon:** [laughing] Who are you, Brooks from The Shawshank Redemption? "I think I seen a car back in aught-eight once, when I was a boy." Like, what the hell, man?

**Liz:** Yup! So that was his vibe. So he-- In Juneau, there was a, a boardwalk that they built out in 1913-- so he died in Seattle in 1902-- and a boardwalk was built over the high tide line to connect different parts of downtown Juneau to sort of more suburban pass and became a road and it became known as Willoughby Avenue. And now the whole area is known as the Willoughby District.

**Devon:** Oh.

**Liz:** And it has, you know, Juneau's cultural hubs like the State Library, the archives, the museum, the arts and cultural center.

**Devon:** Okay.

**Liz:** And that's wonderful. That, to me, is like... Sometimes showing up is all you need to do in, in life.

**Devon:** It's all you need to do.

**Liz:** Showing up and having a good story, I guess.

**Devon:** [laughing] All these repositories of real information are named after a charlatan, after a huckster, after a total fucking tall tale storyteller.



**Liz:** Yeah. Complete bullshit artist who just said whatever occurred to him. Yeah. Just like, you know, show up in Seattle: "What's that iron horse? Buy me a drink!"

**Devon:** "My goodness! I discovered gold in 1849 before I was born, but that's when it was discovered in Alaska."

**Liz:** Yeah.

**Devon:** [exasperated sigh]

**Liz:** This is another one of those where it's like, there's the legend and then there's the hoax.

**Devon:** Yes.

**Liz:** And then there's the actual thing and then there's the scientific explanation of it. And then there's... I don't know what to make of all of it.

**Devon:** It's a lot of layers.

**Liz:** Yeah, there's a lot of layers.

**Devon:** Yeah.

**Liz:** Like the illusion itself.

**Devon:** Yeah.

**Liz:** I would love to see something like this. I think it would make my eyes hurt, but I would love to see it.

**Devon:** Can you see those-- do you remember the magic eye stuff? Can you see those?

**Liz:** I feel like I got pretty good at that in the 90s, but I haven't tried one for a while.

**Devon:** All right. Well, I just think that you should exercise your eyes by using those. You could get ready to see these mirages.

**Liz:** That's true. That'll be a pretty good move.

**Liz:** Yeah.

**Devon:** Well, we can-- we can do this, Liz. We can make Alaska one of our Ouija Broads road trip stops. We're going to try the Sourtoe cocktail.

**Liz:** [distressed sound]

**Devon:** We're going to do a part of the Iditarod and see some of the haunted things there. We'll go look for mirages and then we'll zip line over bears in Ketchikan.

**Liz:** Well, that part does sound pretty good,

**Devon:** That's the easiest part because that's the only part I've done before.

**Liz:** Nice. Huh. So I do still probably owe you a proper ghost, because although this has ghostly aspects, it's not really a haunting, per se?

**Devon:** You gave me a whole ghost town. I don't know that it could get more ghostly than that.

**Liz:** A Flying Ghost City!

**Devon:** The Flying Dutchman of Villages!

**Liz:** [thoughtful sigh, pause] ...I apparently forgot how to outro us.

**Devon:** [laughs]

**Liz:** I was just like "Yeah!"

**Devon:** "Yeah, that's right! Goodbye!"

**Liz:** "Goodbye!"

**Both:** [laughing]

**Liz:** "See you later!"

**Devon:** "I love you!"

**Devon:** "I love you! Talk to you soon, buddy!"

**Liz:** But when I found that in Strange Tales of Alaska and the Yukon, I went, "Yes, I have to tell Devon about this." I'm glad we've gone back to Alaska. And I, uh, yeah. If people have ever seen a mirage like that? You should come tell us about it on our social media.

**Devon:** You should!

**Liz:** You can come talk to us on the Facebook, Instagram, Twitter sites, we're Ouija Broads on those - and chat with us, or if we are tied up or swamped as we often are, just chat with other people who listen to the show because y'all are interesting and have good taste.

**Devon:** [laughing] Yeah, you do. I do love that folks are willing to just jump right in into other people's conversations on our pages. It's lovely. Lovely.

**Devon:** It helps!

**Liz:** Yeah. We're at [ouijabroads.com](http://ouijabroads.com), if you want to look at our guides, find merchandise, find all the other information that we've thrown on there over the months? Years?

**Devon:** I don't know.

**Liz:** In some ways, we've been doing this show forever, and in some ways, not.

**Liz:** If you want to get access to episodes early, get outtakes and the extended versions, then you should hit up [patreon.com/ouijabroads](http://patreon.com/ouijabroads). And if you haven't done so, it's always helpful to us if you can give us a rating/review and make sure you subscribe to us wherever you get your podcasts so that we show up in your busy life without you having to do anything, because I want to make your life easier, and make it easier for you to listen to our stories.

**Devon:** That's so sweet of you, Liz, because I'm like, "Do that, so the numbers get higher, so my ego gets bigger."

**Liz:** [pause, in incongruous tone] It helps us out.

**Devon:** [laughing]

**Liz:** I just said that because I didn't know what the fuck you said.

**Devon:** You're going to listen to it in play back and it's going to be hilarious.

**Liz:** Oh, this is going to be good.

**Devon:** Yeah.

**Liz:** In the meantime, everyone, until you hear from us again, I would like for you to live weird...

**Devon:** I would like for you to-- aw, shit. I don't want you to die weird. But when the time comes... Liz, do that again! Sorry! I'll do my part again. "Die weird."

**Liz:** [very long pause] And stay weird!

**Devon:** I'm sorry!

**Liz:** I didn't hear a goddamn thing you just said. It was just [imitates audio cutting out in blips]

**Devon:** [imitates it too because she is a lil parakeet]

**Liz:** Thanks for listening, everybody!

**Devon:** Thank you for listening.

[theme song fades in, plays to end]