

London, 1874

Boneye Manor loomed over the street like a debutante who'd grown too wealthy and too self-aware. A Gothic silhouette in fog, dripping with gargoyles with eyelash extensions.

It was Christmas Eve. And while a snowstorm raged outside, the Boneye family's annual Christmas Eve Ball roared inside. A Yuletide bacchanalia of overtly religious carols, brandy, and pride-based dance-offs. The candles sparkled. The grand piano tinkled. The fire roared beside the majestic Christmas tree.

Beneath was stocked full of wrapped presents and a suffocating puppy whose box had no air holes.

And yet Miss Bima Boneye, heiress, aesthete, and underrated genius, sat isolated upstairs practicing her favorite hobby:

Feeling Crushed by the Massive Weight of Her Own Privilege.

"Oh, Christmas!" she cried. "You villain! You red and green tyrant! You festive chain of holly around my elegant neck!"

Snow slammed against the window as someone knocked at her door. Her favorite servant, a girl her age named Povertina entered.

"Miss Boneye, are you quite finished swooning?"

"No," Bima said, flinging her arm across her face. "Christmas has wounded me morally, spiritually, and libidinally."

"You look the same as you did ten minutes ago."

"Exactly!" she sobbed. "Tragically misunderstood! You, who work as my servant 14 hours a day for mere pennies, would never have the time nor leisure to contemplate the complexity of my anxiety and depression."

"Very well, miss," Povertina sighed. "What burdens you this time?"

Bima rose, her holiday ballgown a storm of lace.

"Everything! Mother insists I must descend the staircase in my new Christmas gown-- red! Like some ghastly peppermint confection! Father demands I smile benevolently at the orphans we sponsor in order to appear charitable before the newspapers! And everyone keeps telling me, 'sparkle, Bima! Sparkle!'"

She collapsed onto her chaise again. “Sparkle! As if I were a bauble! A trinket! A rubicund ornament on the Christmas tree!”

“Oh, Christmas!” Bima lamented. “Why must everything be cheerful when my soul is clearly *Dickensian* and *complicated*?”

“You are not oppressed by Christmas,” Povertina said. “You are oppressed by your own dramatic instincts.”

“Tis the same thing!”

“Alright, you silly lass. Like the receptionist of St. Trinian's School for Girls always says, you need to get your serotonin levels back in balance.” Povertina pulled out two bags of pills. “Red ones bring you up, blue ones bring you down.”

“Well, I definitely need two of the red.”

And with that, Bima descended the stairs. People gasped and marveled at her beauty and poise. The reds stars kicking in and she felt like she was floating in a pool as warm as a bath.

She kept screaming in horror mid-conversation, mistaking Uncle Bartholomew for a giant, talking Nutcracker! But to be fair, he was dressed like a giant Nutcracker so that’s not fully on her.

Bima, revved up on reds, demanded carols with faster tempos. “Jingle Bells!” “Feliz Navidad!” “All I Want For Christmas is You” by Mariah Carey. Her suitor, Mike Hawk, was captivated. He was also 25 while she was 17, but, most importantly, he was incredibly wealthy.

After her performance, Mike Hawk pulled Bima aside and expressed his intense passion for her in front of everyone at the party by holding her hand. Gasps. Bima’s father’s eyes narrowly protectively. Aunt Flo clutched her pearl necklace.

“Bima, might I think it the most romantic, most befitting, and most rational for me to impulsively propose marriage to you! A Christmas Engagement!” He vamped to the crowd. They cheered! “A Yuletide Proposal!”

More cheers! Aunt Flo began seizing and foaming at the mouth.

Meanwhile, Bima’s amphetamine-riddled mind was racing, her heart was pounding, and her armpits were soaked with sweat.

One might have thought her family would notice her manic behavior, but they were all upper-class people, so they were all off their heads in some way. They just enjoyed Bima's renewed Christmas Sparkle!

Eventually Bima shook her head. "I wish not for a Christmas Proposal. Oh, Christmas! My enemy! No, I wish for a proposal about me. Me alone and nothing else. Me as the subject, predicate, and the object. Alas, I am misunderstood!"

Bima fled the party and locked herself in her bedroom and collapsed on her bay window perch sobbing and staring out at the snowy Christmas night. She couldn't actually muster tears, so she just pretended to sob to create a moment.

After the pills wore off, Bima crashed into a deep slumber. The party died out, the guests left or were allowed to crash in the guest rooms. After all, this family had more money than most people of that era could even comprehend.

In the still of the night, in the cool moonlight, a voice echoed through the room, "Beware, Miss Boneye..."

Bima stirred in her slumber. Then *CRASH!* The window flung open, and fog spilled in. Wind howled, and the dwindling fire roared to life as Bima sat upright in her bed. Something pale and shimmering floated into the room.

It was... A beautiful ghost. Long hair cascading in spectral curls. A tight-laced corset around an eighteen-inch waist. A long train to her gown. Glitter, crystals, and luxurious fabric everywhere. She levitated with perfect posture.

"Greetings," the ghost intoned. "I am the **Ghost of Christmas Excess.**"

Bima straightened. "What a title! Is there a sash?"

"There was," the ghost said. "It was taken by the Ghost of Christmas Take-sy Back-sy during a pageant feud."

"Absolutely fascinating!" Bima whispered.

The ghost floated closer. "You have been chosen, Bima Boneye, chosen to confront the reckless extravagance of your existence!"

"How fun!" Bima said. "Is there an outfit change?"

"There will be *three*," the ghost confirmed.

Bima clapped. "Oh, Christmas! At last, my adversary presents me with challenges that come with accessories!"

The ghost waved her shimmering hand, and instantly Bima was encompassed in sparkling Yuletide magical energy.

“This is kind of painful!”

The Ghost of Christmas Past just laughed maniacally as Bima choked and writhed against the burning agony of magic. After the magical makeover process was complete, Bima fell to her knees gasping for air.

She was wearing a similarly garish, crowded, and kinda draggy replica of the ghosts’ gown. It was a lot, but Bima was pretty enough to pull it off.

“I may hate Christmas, but you’ve got good taste.”

“Indeed,” the ghost said. “Now behold the truth!”

The fog thickened, and they were teleported back in time. Boneye Manor’s ballroom, during Bima’s childhood. bursting with lace and jewels and plum pudding towers bigger than the children.

Everyone glittered. Everyone was cheerful and gay. Everyone was smiling, except young Bima.

“I was so cute.” Adult Bima admitted.

“Mother, father!” Young Bima spoke with such authority. “I ate too much pudding, and my stomach aches. Have the chef arrested immediately!”

“Bima, darling, it’s Christmas!”

“So, you’ll let that villain fatten me up like a Christmas goose? Do you plan to serve me for Christmas Dinner next year, Father? Mother? Do you not care about me? This is abuse against my slender disposition. How dare you stand for it!”

Bima nodded in agreement with her younger self, going to far as to applaud herself when she stood up and knocked over trays of food before storming out of the dining room.

“BEHOLD,” the ghost proclaimed, “the curse of Excess! The weight of Ornamentation! The tyranny of perfect posture!”

“We looked so polished.”

The ghost nodded grimly. “How about this one?”

The scene changed. A group of chimney-sweep children, invited for the annual charity photoshoot, awkwardly clutched oranges as camera shutters flashed. Their faces were pale, cold, and emaciated.

“Oh,” Bima whispered, heart heavy. “They don’t sparkle at all.”

The ghost floated beside her. “No one sparkles when they’re starving, darling.”

Bima’s younger self walked in and commented on how scary poor people look. It made her look... bad. Unkind, even. Bima felt something shift inside her, something emotional, something earnest, something that could only be described as **compassion finally meeting sincerity**.

“I should stop overconsuming, being greedy, and wasting food just so poor people can’t have it.” She said.

And just like that, she was back in her room. The fire was lively while the room was still. She ran to her door, but it was locked or stuck. Bima panicked.

“Somebody help! I’ve been taken captive by an evil ghost! Call a priest! Call the Ghostbusters! But not the 2016 remake!”

The door opened but an early 2010s Tumblr Girl stood in her way.

“I am **the Ghost of Christmas Wokeness**. I’m not like you, and I’m not like other girls because I don’t wear make-up. I like pizza more than salads. I’m not stupid, and I’m not a bimbo for hot guys...”

“What a poor, torturous existence...”

“Are you ready to learn your lesson? Because I have to go be a girl who reads actually good books, ACTUALLY! And be a gamer.”

“No, you can’t!”

The Ghost of Christmas Wokeness waved her hands. Unlike the girly ghosts, her magic wasn’t sparkly and frilly! It didn’t wear vanilla-based perfume, which pseudo-scientifically proven to turn guys on. Her magic wasn’t trashy or slutty like other ghost girl magic; it was like Zelda or Pokémon or something like that.

When the ghost’s much smarter magic dissolved, Bima was wearing a nun’s habit! No sparkles. Her hair was covered, her bosom hidden from view.

“YOU. BITCH.” She seethed at the ghost.

“Indeed,” the ghost said. “Now behold the truth!”

Again, the ghost waved her arms, but instead of dissipating in magical smoke, they just walked into the hallway. Instead of the grand staircase, the ghost led her to... the servant’s staircase.

“This is barbaric.” Bima whispered, barely able to maintain her balance on the narrow. Steep staircase. “Poor people must have small terribly feet.”

“No, Bima, their feet are just like yours, only calloused and tired. Your father built these dangerous stairs because he’s cheap and doesn’t care about his servants tripping and falling, unless they break the China. Remember your first nanny?”

“No.”

“Well, she broke her neck falling down these stairs. At her funeral, your parents hired her daughter to work for them. You see, her violent fall left a mess in their home, so her little girl was indentured into servitude until the mess was cleaned. Then they charged her for the cleaning materials, food, and board. She was trapped here, earning less in wages than they charged her for food and shelter.”

“But what does that have to do with me?”

The Ghost opened the door to the kitchen, where Povertina sat crying over her Christmas dinner: three cannellini beans, the meat left on a pork bone, and the dirt covered pudding Bima knocked over earlier.

“Povertina is someone’s daughter?” She and the Ghost watched Povertina, savoring her meager meal, break down sobbing. “And she has feelings?”

“Mummy, I miss you, and I miss Christmas joy!”

“You see, you take so much for granted. But you also get jealous and destroy things, so no one else can have them.”

“I just thought I was being proactive! But I am definitely going to internalize that lesson this time.”

“Just like bourgeois.”

“Alright! I’m having an emotional moment! Cut it with the Comi bullshit!”

“Fine! Come on, let’s go back. I need to upload my race-swapped Disney princess fanart to Tumblr.”

They walked upstairs and Bima got into her lush, warm bed troubled. Guilt. Is there any pain greater than a privileged person feeling guilty while also not wanting things to change that much? But what could Bima do? She was just a girl...

Despite her racing mind, Bima fell asleep quickly.

When the clock struck three, the cozy fire suddenly went out. Bima huddled over under her covers. It grew so cold, her breath was visible. The chill woke and she gasped upon and seeing The Grim Reaper at the edge of her bed.

“Are you the Ghost of Christmas Scare Tactics?”

The Reaper nodded. A boney finger bid Bima out of bed. She complied, too frightened not to, and the robed figure put a skeletal hand on her shoulder.

They arrived at a snowy, desolate cemetery. Bima looked at The Reaper.

“I’m supposed to have another outfit change,” she said.

The Reaper tapped his scythe on the frozen earth, Bima’s gown transformed. Warm black velvet. Glittering sleeves. Fingerless fishnet gloves. A collar so high it could double as a guillotine. And a black mourning veil.

The Grim Reaper raised a boney finger, pointing straight ahead, and Bima followed. Despite the terrifying situation, Bima couldn’t help but feel glamorous crossing the snowy cemetery. Her gown fluttered in the wind; her veil pressed against her face.

The grave had no elaborate headstone, no marble weeping angel statue. It was a pauper’s grave, a frightening thought on its own. The closer Bima stepped, she lifted her veil and knelt down. Crudely written on a wooden cross was the name Bima Boneye!

“No!” she screamed. “I’m dead? In a pauper’s grave? Where’s my statue in memorium? And why was I buried with my maiden name? What about Mike Hawk?”

She looked at The Grim for answers and gasped.

“Unmarried? Squandered my inheritance? Bad attitude? No, that’s that not possible! Everybody loves me! I’m stylish and beautiful and rich and... spoiled! And selfish! And disharmonious, as well as cruel! I’m realistic and flawed, not a goddess. Oh, Christmas! You have taught me well... Scary Future Ghost, is this my destiny? Is this my path? Have I time to change? To act sweet, get married to secure the bag, and then become a bitch?”

The Ghost nodded. But it raised its scythe and Bima cowered. It flung the blade down and Bima screamed, falling out of her bed and onto the hardwood floor. It was light outside! She was alive! Had it all been a dream?

A knock at the door and Povertina entered. “Happy Christmas, Miss Boneye! Are you feeling better?”

“Oh, Christmas! My salvation, my new friend! Happy Christmas, Povertina! I have a Christmas gift for you!”

“For me, Miss?”

“Yes! For you, loyal and kind Povertina, I give the gift of freedom! You are fired!”

“Fired, miss?”

“Yes! We are not bound by fate. We make choices and shape our own destinies! Be free, Povertina, and go shape your own fate!”

“Please, I need this job! I’ll be on the snowy streets, whoring me body out to a syphilitic clientele for shelter and food! You don’t understand –”

“And I don’t need to! I’m Bima Boneye, and I’ve been changed by the Spirit of Christmas! Mother! Father!”

She ran out of the room as Povertina collapsed, sobbing in despair.

“Mother! Father! My Christmas Sparkle has returned! I’ve made my decision! I love Mike Hawk, and I want to marry him! A Christmas Engagement! A Christmas romance! A Christmas happily ever after!”

After having Povertina escorted her off the property, Bima noticed that her jewelry was missing. Povertina was imprisoned for crimes of theft and locked away in a cold lonely cell. But, in spite of this massive betrayal, Bima’s renewed Christmas Sparkle did not diminish.

She and Mike Hawk were engaged at Christmas Brunch.