

## Prologue

*Trapped: have (something, typically a part of the body) held tightly by something so that it cannot be freed.*

*Imprisoned: put or keep in prison or a place like a prison.*

*Spirit: the non-physical part of a person manifested as an apparition after their death; a ghost.*

## Endless

I remember his cold hands grasping my bare shoulders. I'd heard the clatter-clatter of metal hitting metal growing ever closer. A scream had risen in my throat, but before I could make a sound he'd pushed me. His whole body had slammed against mine and I was flung forward.

It was unusual how I hadn't felt a thing after that. The icy fingers that pulled me towards my demise had left me numb. There was nothing I could have done. His hold had been too tight to have struggled. I'd become limp, like a ragdoll, as I flew – up, up, up into the air, then crashing down, like my shoes were made of concrete.

“Suicide,” they'd said. Now I'm trapped in this endless tunnel, like a prisoner when I'm the victim. I imagine I'll leave, if they ever find out the truth. But I overheard them talking, “Two weeks, then we close the case.” I thought my family would've figured it out, my brother at least. We were so close. He, above anyone, should know I would never have ended my own life.

Now the only thing I can do is wait. As I watch commuters come and go, I've begun to recognise some. There's a middle-aged man, who catches the two o'clock tube, wearing a cowboy hat and boots for no apparent reason. He doesn't seem to care what the dreary stream of businessmen and women think.

There's a woman who's always one of the first people on the platform in the morning. Her hair is forever scraped back into a tight bun. I worry it may be so tight some days that her head will pop. Her trouser suit suggests she works in an office, but I could be wrong. She carries a briefcase, which adds to my conclusion.

One of the pastimes I use is listening to conversations. As expected, most are pretty average: “What's for dinner?”, “Did you see the news last night?”, and “The economy is in shambles these days!” That last one came from a young girl, maybe 7 or 8. She was clearly trying to show off in front of the suits around her. The girl's mother had smiled and patted her daughters head.

So far, my favourite conversation to listen to is one between two posh boys. Both are maybe in their early-twenties and always dressed impeccably. I value their interactions the most. The day I kicked the bucket, so to speak, was the day I became 18 forever. Listening to these two, and hearing about their lives, gives me an insight into what I'll miss. I hear about the parties, the relationships, the drama and the latest trends. I'll miss all of these moments because of one awful human being, who decided that Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> October was the day he would push a stranger in front of a train.

I'm running out of time. One week is almost up and the police still believe I jumped. Since it happened, I haven't seen the man who did it, and I still have no idea what his motives were.

The station had been unusually quiet when I arrived that morning. I remember feeling the breeze rush down the tunnel when my train whizzed past, just as I reached the bottom step. If it hadn't been for my lateness, I may still be alive.

He must have crept up behind me. He must have been waiting for the exact moment when the impact would have the most effect. I neither heard, nor saw him coming. It was only after that I looked down to face him. I don't know how the passengers, the few that there were, didn't notice. He simply stood on the platform, watching as the poor driver slammed on the brakes – screeching to a halt.

I could've sworn his eyes flickered up at me for just a second. They were as near to black as you could get, making them look hollow. If I'd been human, a chill would've run down my spine. I had my eyes fixed on him, as he turned, walked up the steps and vanished onto the streets of London. The police arrived soon after.

The worst part had been seeing my family. They were called by a gentle looking policeman, with a sympathetic smile and a rounded belly. He looked like the sort of man who would make a lovely uncle. A paramedic had found my phone in my satchel. Amazingly it had survived the impact, unlike me of course. My father had held my mother in his arms, as heavy sobs shook her small frame. Dad still wore his scrubs. It hadn't been long after my parents that my brother, Jonathan, came rushing down the steps, fighting his way through the crowd of onlookers.

Jonathan's fists had clenched together and his eyes swam with tears. "This can't be real," I'd heard him say, "Vi wouldn't do this." His brow furrowed and dad had pulled his remaining child into a tight hug.

After that, I'd drifted away. The situation below became tedious. My family grew more desperate and the police grew more confused. There were no witnesses, only the driver who saw my limp frame fly towards his window.

I still can't understand how nobody saw the ominous figure, who stepped quietly away from the scene of the crime. Sometimes I wish I could yell. "It wasn't me!" I want to scream, "I know who did it!" If I could just reach out and touch one person, make them see what really happened.

This, I figure, is impossible. All the stories, all the movies, have taught me that. However, I never believed in ghosts until I became one. Maybe there are certain truths to the things we called 'made-up'.

My brother appears at the station at exactly the same time every day, bringing fresh roses. I think if I could just make him aware of me, I'll be satisfied. Each time I watch Jonathan lay the bunch at the foot of the steps, I feel a gut-wrenching wave of sorrow.

I don't blame myself because there was nothing I could've done. However, now I feel useless. I think I'm trapped in this never-ending tunnel because I'm not allowed to move on.

It's Thursday afternoon, a week and one day since the accident. I shouldn't call it that, 'the accident', because it wasn't. Maybe 'murder' is a better term? Or is that too harsh? I'll call it 'my death', so as not to confuse the issue.

When a train stops at the station, I like to sit on the roof. It's only for a matter of seconds, then the train will shoot off and I'm left floating mid-air, legs crossed.

The moment I sit on the 3 o'clock train, I see *him*. *He* came back. At first, it doesn't register in my head who *he* is. There are so many commuters that, after a while, they all look the same. However, as the roof rushes from under me and the platform has cleared a little, I really see *him*.

The man who ended my life sits coolly on a bench, reading a newspaper, as if he's just another businessman on his journey to whatever office it is he works at. I drift a little closer. I'm just close enough that I'm hovering in front of him. Now that I am within touching distance, I can take a better look.

The man's clothes are simple. He wears a black suit, a white shirt and a black tie. There isn't a single mark on the suit. Brand new and pitch black.

His skin almost matches the shirt. He's so pale, almost translucent. Perhaps his face looks so ghostly because his eyes are so dark. I'd caught a glimpse of those eyes once before. They're opaque, like oil or coal. The pupils are barely visible.

"Are you going to stand there staring, or are you going to take a seat?" At first, I thought I imagined the echoing voice. It isn't until his emotionless eyes look up from the newspaper to meet mine that I realise he'd spoken. I back away. He folds his paper neatly into four and stands. "Don't be afraid."

My lips can't seem to find the words to respond. Even if they could, I wouldn't know what to say.

"I know you must have a lot of questions. I promise, they'll all be answered in due course." His voice is monotone, no emotion.

All I manage to stutter is, "Why?"

The man chuckles, but he doesn't sound amused. "You could ask me a million questions and all you say is 'why?'."

He laughs again, a soulless sound, and takes two steps in my direction. "We haven't been formally introduced." He holds out a hand. "My name is..." Just as the words were about to leave his lips, a train rushes past. It sends me flying into the air. *Déjà vu*.

When I regain balance, my eyes go to the bench.

He'd gone.

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The station clock reads 5:30pm, meaning it's been nearly three hours since my brief encounter with the man with tunnels for eyes. I replay the encounter over and over. I'm so deep in thought that I don't even notice the train stop below my feet. It only registers when I hear the metal bars screech.

I look down at the platform – a glimmer of hope that he'll be there. It takes me a moment of scanning, and then I spot him. He stands amongst the crowd of frenzied commuters. To the untrained eye, he looks normal, just another businessman. I guess that's the point of his outfit choice.

As if he can sense I'm looking at him, his eyes flick upwards to meet mine. He raises a hand and gestures with a finger, beckoning towards him. I oblige, too frightened to object. His lips hint at a smile.

The crowds scurry onto the train. Only the man, a couple of straggling commuters and I remain.

"I'm sorry for the interruption earlier." His tone is polite, and less deadpan than previously. "I feel as though I must explain myself." He pauses, as if waiting for an answer. When I say nothing, he continues.

"My name is Uriel. I was assigned to you to help you fulfil your destiny."

He clearly sees I'm struggling to process this, as he continues, "I control the lives of humans from birth until death and then I simply cut the thread."

None of this make sense.

"Why was my 'thread' cut?"

"It was simply your time to go."

The unfairness of the whole situation is what confuses me most. If this 'angel' has power over death, surely he can choose to prevent life ending prematurely?

Noticing my bewilderment growing, Uriel places a hand on my shoulder. "I know it's a lot to take in. You must have many questions. Unfortunately, I'm not allowed to answer them. Your destiny was to die at the time that you did. I cannot change that."

Before I can say anything else, the next train arrives at the station and Uriel has vanished.

I feel empty. My mind swims with this new information. Instead of my usual routine of balancing on the train roof, I sit on the closest bench. The platform is crowded, but I don't notice. Angels and ghosts – it's all true.

There's one thing I still want answered – why can't I leave the tunnel? I've tried to follow the train out. I even attempted to walk up the steps onto the streets of London. Each time, I was knocked back. It is as if there's a glass wall that blocks my path.

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It's Sunday night and I haven't seen Uriel since our encounter Thursday. Only three days before the police give up and assume I took my own life. Jonathan has stopped visiting, which I'm oddly glad of. It became increasingly more painful for me to see him every day.

I have an inkling that Uriel had a hand in this. If he can control destiny, or fate, then maybe he decided it was time for my brother to move on. It's definitely for the best.

I've almost given up hope of ever seeing my angel again. The tunnel is endless and I don't think I'll ever get out. If I'm here for eternity, I think I'll go insane – can that happen to ghosts?

Nights at the station have become tedious. There are barely any passengers and trains are scarce. I find myself patrolling one side of the wall to the other, like a pacing tiger. I'm restless. I just want this to end. Seeing the same scene every single day for what's felt like a century is boring.

~

Monday morning arrives and I'm sitting on the bench. The two posh boys stand a short distance from me, engrossed in gossip. Apparently, the one boy had a fight with his girlfriend because she'd slept with someone – I didn't catch who. I find myself wondering, if I were alive would I be involved in similar dramas? Maybe these situations only happen with rich kids at lavish parties. Unnecessary drama didn't interest me when I was alive. Now, however, I can't get enough of it.

Just as the boy's conversation reaches the peak of excitement, Uriel clears his throat. He sits, one leg crossed over the other, to my right on the bench. I flinch at his proximity.

"Sorry, did I startle you?" He stares straight ahead, but smiles a fraction. His gaze flickers to the boys. "So this is how you pass the time? Listening to..."

I cut him off before he's able to finish. "When am I getting out?"

Uriel turns to face me. His brow furrows. "Getting out?"

"When will I 'move on', or go to heaven, or whatever the next step is?" My voice gets louder as my desperation for answers grows. "I've been here for almost two weeks. Nothing has changed! I can't do this forever, please."

"You seem to be under the wrong impression, my dear. I fear you're picturing a white cloud to come down and take you towards the bright light."

Gulping back what would have been tears, I say, "What will happen to me?"

"This is your home for now. Where you are is somewhat of a waiting room. Some call it purgatory. You'll wait here until the powers that be decide where you shall spend eternity."

"How long will I have to wait?"

Uriel stands. He tugs at the hem of his jacket, as if uncomfortable to deliver a response. "I only end the lives, Miss Green. I don't decide where they go after that. My job here is done." I attempt to protest, but he holds up a hand. "I wish you the best of luck. Be patient. It's been a pleasure."

~

As promised, Uriel never returned. I'm now certain that this tunnel is truly endless. I actually believed I was getting out, moving on to a better place. As time passes, that seems increasingly unlikely. I've screamed for help so many times, knowing no one can hear.

Frustration is what has driven me senseless. Not only that, but I've watched it happen to others. Sixteen or so years on the same platform and someone's bound to jump.

First it was the man in the cowboy hat. I guessed from the heavy coats of those surrounding him that it had been winter outside. Maybe he couldn't take the whispers anymore. It wasn't his 'fate' to live on.

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It's Monday. The date flashes across the pixelated screen: 6<sup>th</sup> October. I'm waiting for the 8 am train so that I can perch. I can hear its clattering wheels before I see it. My eyes flicker to the platform, just in time to spot a man in a black suit approaching the edge. A tight knot forms in my gut and recognition sweeps over me. I allow my gaze to follow the direction of Uriel's movement. Just ahead of him stands a boy, maybe 17 or 18. The train is approaching fast. If I don't act now, Uriel will be gone and I'll continue to be imprisoned for God knows how long.

Without even thinking, I rush towards him. My arms are outstretched. Nobody was there to save me, but I can save this boy.

It was too late. Uriel sees me coming. Our eyes meet for a fraction of a second. He smiles, a cold hard smile. I hear the impact of the boy's body. I close my eyes.

~

I sit on my cloud, picking at it like candyfloss. Uriel scolds me. He says I shouldn't damage them. I respond with a scathing look. From here, I can watch the sun rise and set. It's like the watercolour paintings Jonathan did in his spare time.

Everything here gleams white. I can't say I've made friends, because everyone keeps to themselves. There are very few interactions, but this seems to be the norm. We're not lonely. We're happy.

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I curl up in my rocky cave. The walls seem to be closing in on me and the heat is stifling. It's like I'm trapped in an oven. Through the mouth, all I see is burning – whether it's fire or lava, I'm not sure. My ears ring from the shrieks and animalistic cries. I have no idea what's making those noises, and I have a strong feeling that I don't want to find out. I haven't seen any people like me. In fact, I haven't seen anyone. I am terrified to move from this spot.

~

## Epilogue

Grief is for the living, not the dead. What happens to us after we leave our bodies is a mystery, despite what they may say. We cannot know whether we are "in a better place" until it happens. Even then, we can never be completely sure.