

The White Eyes

I thrust my hands deeply into my pockets, nuzzling into my scarf in an attempt to fight the cold breeze biting my cheeks. The sun is making its first appearance, its rays unusually bright. I shield my eyes. No one's here, but me. Strange, considering this is usually morning rush hour. I don't think about it too much. I just want to get to...

"Hi there!"

I replace my scream with a short gasp, as an energetic boy appears next to me. The train is late. And now I have to talk to the local crazy.

"Hello?" he repeats, a hint of disappointment in his voice. In my peripheral, I give him a quick once over and have to double-take. This boy is tall, slim and strikingly handsome, with a perfectly carved jaw line and slight muscle definition along his arms. If it wasn't for his white eyes, he might be quite handsome. I should be more concerned with how little they scare me. Only the tiny dot of a pupil sits in his eyeball. No iris. No other colour. Just white.

At first, I think they're probably contacts, but in the time that he holds my gaze I can't see the faint tell-tale ring which normally identifies them. The milky shade also isn't transparent. It doesn't hint that another colour is concealed underneath. It's opaque.

"Are you waiting for the train?"

His question puzzles me. Why else would I be here?

Why am I here?

I nod. "Good," he says, "We can make friends while we wait."

The boy's intense stare doesn't falter. It's starting to become unnerving. I have nothing to do or say, so I stare back. As we look at each other, I notice more about him. His jet-black hair, porcelain skin and white eyes completely contrast. He looks like a ghost.

Considering it's the middle of December, I can't help but question his outfit choice. He wears a plain black t-shirt and black board-shorts. I glance down at my bundled-up frame and wonder how this boy isn't freezing to death. He must be in his early twenties at least. I can't tell for sure. He's one of those people who could be twelve, but could also be forty.

“You aren’t very chatty, are you?” He speaks up, abruptly. “Don’t worry, friend! I can do the talking!” He grins. His enthusiasm reminds me of a small child. Combine that with the Cheshire cat, always smiling and forever questioned for sanity.

“Who are you?” I ask, finally finding my voice.

Leon seems pleased I’ve decided to interact with him, as he somehow reveals yet more teeth. “Leon.”

“What’s with the crazy contacts?”

“What are contacts?” The grin drops a tad.

“Your eyes.” I feel my cheeks growing warm.

Leon chuckles. “I was given them, same as everyone else.”

He must be on drugs. I must be on drugs. Where am I again?

“Look,” Leon points to a conveniently placed mirror on the wall of the platform. Funny, I’ve never seen that there before.

“Go on,” he shoos me towards it.

I stand in front of the mirror, not knowing why. Then I see it. I have them too. The white eyes.

My chest tightens. I can feel myself hyperventilating, but no air is coming out. I clutch at my throat, then my chest. Where’s my heart beat? No, I’m just panicking. It’s here somewhere. I search my wrist, the side of my neck. Nothing. I put my hand in front of my mouth and exhale as hard as I possibly can. Nothing.

I turn back to Leon. He stands, completely unfazed, with his hands in his pockets. He’s smiling again.

“They suit you.”

“What happened to me? Who are you? Where am I?”

I run at Leon, with a strength I didn't know I possessed, knocking him to the ground. I'm now on top of him, straddling him. My finger nails dig into his shoulders.

"Hey, hey! There's no need for that!" He holds his hands up in surrender. "I'll tell you everything you need to know if you'll just get off of me." I get to my feet.

My eyebrows raise, waiting for the answers I've been promised. If I had a heartbeat, it would be pounding right now. Leon stands, brushing down his crumpled shirt.

He clears his throat. "Welcome," he pauses, his arms outstretched, "to purgatory."

I feel sick.

Leon drops his arms and pouts. He isn't happy with my lack of reaction, so reiterating his point, he mimes jazz hands, as if to say "ta dah".

I don't know how to respond. I got up this morning to get the train to... Where was I getting the train to? I try to summon up some small piece of information that will help. My head hurts from the effort. Nothing.

"Did you hear what I said?" Leon beams. "This is purgatory." He waves his arms around him, with a bit more vigour than last time. "This is the middle place. This is where you," He points at me, "get sorted."

"But I'm not dead."

Leon blinks a couple of times.

"I haven't died."

"We wouldn't be here if you hadn't."

"If I'm dead, then you're dead too?"

Leon shakes his head. "I'm just here to help you along."

"You're an angel?"

He shudders. "I hate that word, 'angel'. It sounds so formal and," he looks down at his outfit, "as you can see, I am not a formal person."

I'm dead? Why don't I remember?

I've never been the religious type and I don't know much about the afterlife. I just assumed that once you die, that's it. Apparently, I was wrong.

Another thought begins to form. Where will I be sorted? I can't say I've been a particularly bad person. But, then again, I wasn't a saint. I didn't give all my money to charity or build a school in a poverty-ridden country. What gets a person into heaven? Are average people permitted? I was a fairly average person when I was alive. And how did I die? Of all my questions, this is the one I turn to Leon.

He thinks for a second, hesitating, before answering. "I guess it wouldn't break too many rules if I just showed you." Leon walks over to the mirror and places his palm flat against the surface. The reflection becomes misty, then clears to reveal a road. I can't quite place where I've seen this before. Trees line either side - a thick forest-like area. A deer is standing between two of the trunks. It's raining heavily, the drops dancing on the tarmac. I can hear it. A faint rumble of thunder echoes.

As I watch, a car comes into the picture. It's a large, silver range rover. The windows are covered in brown dust, which slides off in streaks. I squint my eyes, attempting to see who's in the driver's seat. Their face is blurred.

"Is that me?"

Leon doesn't reply. He holds up his finger, signalling for me to be patient.

The vehicle swerves about, the driver appearing to have very little control. I brace myself because I know what's coming. The road is slick and the driver can't do anything. It's the scene in a film that the audience can predict. I had a predictable ending.

Another car comes into view. It can't avoid the first, whose movements are so sporadic that there's no way to stop the inevitable. I look away.

"I caused that." Tears should be brimming, but they aren't.

Leon removes his hand from the mirror and the road is replaced with our faces. He's no longer smiling.

Before either of us can say anything, I hear a rumble. It gets louder and louder, until I realise the source. A colossal steam train pulls into the station, ballooning clouds of grey smoke. The entire platform is replaced by swirls of darkness. When it clears, I take a better look.

It's larger than any train I've seen before, painted a glossy, deep purple. Four carriages follow the engine. I take a step closer.

The first carriage groans with the weight of its commuters. There are hundreds of them. Every available space is filled with people. They paw at the windows, their mouths moving, but no words coming out.

A young woman in a nurse's uniform begins to pound the glass with her fist – her eyes are terrified but no scream leaves her throat. I run forward and reach out my hand, but Leon grabs my arm before I can touch the window.

"She needs help!" I protest, pulling my body free from him.

"No," Leon frowns. "She doesn't."

I hear footsteps behind me and turn to see an elderly woman about to board the train. She's limping slightly and leaning heavily on her walking stick. She wears a long, white nightgown. A teenage girl follows her, wearing the same dress, but in black. The girl turns to look at Leon, with black, cold eyes. She nods at him briefly, before opening the carriage door and nudging the woman onboard.

"Where is it taking them?"

I'm too busy looking at the woman and girl to notice that Leon is no longer beside me.

He now stands further down the platform. A man is with Leon, towering above him. The man is covered, head-to-toe in tattoos. His t-shirt is torn in several places and is missing a sleeve. His jeans are just as wrecked. He and Leon seem to be exchanging a joke, as the man chuckles. Leon pats the man on the shoulder, before directing him onto the train.

Then he's at my side again.

"Where are they going?" I repeat my earlier question.

“Time to go,” Leon ignores me. He takes me by the hand and we’re suddenly at the end of the platform, standing in front of the last carriage. I steady myself.

“How...” I’m interrupted almost immediately by the deafening whistle.

“Come on.” Leon takes my shoulders and pushes me towards the door.

“But...”

The door slides open and I’m ushered inside.

“It was nice meeting you!” The white-eyed boy gives me a friendly wave as I stand in the entrance to my carriage. He begins to walk away as the doors close, smirking slightly. It almost seems smug.

I turn from him and look into my coach. It’s empty.

The seats are shabby, the purple velvet coverings torn. One bare lightbulb swings from the ceiling, squeaking along to the click-clack of the tracks. Aside from that, there’s no other noise. I can’t hear any people, strange considering the number that was packed into the first carriage.

I sit. I don’t know where I’m going, but I get the sense that I may be here for a while. I look out the window, but it’s too dark to see. That’s when I catch my reflection.

I see my eyes again.

My black eyes.