

Today is just a normal day. My only plan was; read a book while I wait for Kayla to come home.

I watched her walk out the door, elated to have the house quiet for once.

I curled up on the couch and continued reading from page 237.

But then the clock struck twelve.

*"I'll be back by twelve at the latest."* She had said.

But she wasn't.

She lied.

And so I waited.

I don't know what time I heard the knock and opened the door, fully prepared to lecture my sister on communication and the reason she has a phone.

But what I found wasn't Kayla.

It was a letter.

It had no return address, no note about it's contents, and there was no sign of who left it there nor who had knocked. Nothing marked the white front but a set of neatly written initials.

My initials.

*G.H.* Grace Harriet.

And that is how I came to be sitting on the couch, with an odd feeling in my gut that had so far prevented me from opening the envelope.

My phone buzzes in my pocket, startling me into dropping the letter. I watch it float to the floor before checking my notifications. And, to my annoyance, it's *not* Kayla answering one of my texts. Just a stupid reminder about needing to update my phone.

Sighing, I pick the envelope off the floor and start to peel back the sealed paper. Very messily.

But what falls out is not a letter as I predicted.

What falls out is a *ticket*.

And suddenly, I start to guess who might have left this on the doorstep. Why would anyone leave me a train ticket?

Kayla would.

She wants me to meet her somewhere.

I think.

Half an hour later, I've walked to the local station and stand waiting.

This better be worth it.

My train arrives and I get on, along with about half a dozen others. I search for my seat and feel someone walking rather close behind me. Already annoyed, I swing around to berate them about personal space.

But no one's there.

I get a few confused looks but suddenly I really don't want to be here.

*Too bad.*

*You're already on, and the train's moving.*

Wait.

When did the train start moving?

I don't know how I didn't notice, but I hate standing on trains so I find my seat and sit.

Someone kicks the back of my seat. I ignore it the first three times, but the fourth does it and I turn around ready to *politely* yell at whoever it is.

But my seat is on the end of the isle.

And *nobody* is there.

I start to freak out internally —when the train stops. Taking a deep breath, I stand, not caring where I get off as long as I *get off*.

But then I freak out even more.

Because not one person occupies the train. And I could have sworn there were several before I turned around.

That's it. I'm done.

I sprint to the doors —and run straight into them when they don't automatically open as they should.

Ok. This is fine. I just went too quick for the sensor to pick up.

But, as I discover a few seconds later, I was not too quick. The doors refuse to open.

Panicking, I run to the next set of doors. That's when I notice my reflection in the windows.

It's not my reflection that unsettles me. It's the fact that I can only see my reflection so clearly because the windows are entirely blacked out. And not black as in painted or tinted.

Black as in nothingness. There is *nothing* outside the train. I can look out the window and see parts of the train further down. But there's no station or railway or anything but the train. Nothing.

I really, *really* don't like this.

Something flickers in the corner of my eye.

It's the light at the end of this carriage.

It sputters for a moment, then goes out. Then the one next to it does the same. And the one after that.

*They're all going out.*

Terror claws its way into my spine, and I turn and run. All the way to the opposite end of the carriage where I bang on the doors. Nothing happens. And when I turn around—

A void. There is only one light left on. And it's flickering above my head.

Dread is currently the only word I can think of to describe my current emotion, and I believe it to be a huge understatement.

Then the final light goes out.

A crashing noise worsens my fear, and as it draws closer I can't help but think—

That I can open my eyes.

And sit up.

And I can understand that I am in my bed. That it was just a dream. That I am safe.

The light peaking from under my curtains is comforting, but the numbers on the clock telling me I'm going to be late for school is anything but.

So, despite my heart still racing from the nightmare and the tiredness weighing down my bones, I get dressed and stumble out of my room.

Kayla waits at the table, and I can see the back of her head as she eats a bowl of cereal, watching Instagram reels.

"I had a weird dream last night," I say absent mindedly, even though she probably isn't listening. "You were in it."

Nothing.

Not even a nod or a *'that's nice'*.

I roll my eyes and pull the toaster down from the cupboard, setting it on the kitchen bench and plugging it in. "Good morning to you too."

She finally decides to answer at that. "Are you sure I was in it?" She asks.

Weird, but ok. "Yes, I'm sure it was *you*. It was my dream, so of course I'm sure."

"I thought I wasn't in it? You know, considering I left, and you went out because you thought I left you that train ticket. I thought the dream started with the *memory* of me rather than me actually participating in the going-ons." There isn't a hint of emotion in any of her words.

*What.*

I turn around, *how does she know about my dream?*

"Because I was in it, silly —well, the memory of me was, but still. I think I'd know if I was in your dream."

I never asked her out loud, and I'm left baffled, staring at the back of her head as she scrolls through videos. And I realize she hasn't once lifted the spoon to her mouth.

"Kayla." My voice shakes.

“Hmm?”

“Turn around.”

She stills. Even the videos stop despite her never moving her finger to pause them.

“*What?*”

“Turn. *Around.*”

She chuckles, and it sounds almost inhumane. Then she turns around, and I really wish she hadn't.

“*What?*” She —*it* tilts its head at me. Its faceless, expressionless head. “Something on my face?”

No. Absolutely nothing. And that's the problem. There's no nose, or eyes, or mouth or ears or anything but blank skin.

And yet It seems to be staring at me. I can feel it. Goosebumps crawl up my arms and I fight the urge to run.

I thought before was a nightmare. I thought I woke up. *Why* is this happening? *What* is happening?

I want to cry, to scream, to vanish. To find the *real* Kayla and hide with her so I know I'll be safe from whatever this is.

“I'm right here.” It says in *her* voice. But It's not. It's not Kayla. If I were to hug this *thing*, I have a feeling It would eat me. Even though it doesn't have a mouth.

“What makes you say that?” It's voice changes then, taking on an edge that says I am well and truly done for.

Then It holds out its hand to me.

And In the center of Its palm, a dark line runs from side to side.

“Of course I have a mouth!” It says this cheerily, but I yelp when the line on its hand *opens* to reveal rows of jagged teeth.

Before I can run, Its arm elongates and its hand-mouth latches onto my arm—

I sit up.

In the middle of... school?

Fourth period, English, room 6B, Friday. And the teacher, Miss Larker, has her hand around my arm. She was trying to wake me.

“Grace, the bell has gone. It's home time, you need to get out of the class room so I can lock it.”

The next day, I still feel off. I didn't sleep —for obvious reasons. But I think I've finally fully accepted it was all just a dream.

Kayla walks past the couch where I lay. “I'm catching up with Emma,” She states without stopping, and I jolt up when she finishes her sentence and walks out the door:

“I’ll be back by twelve at the latest.”