

The Last Train

As I opened the letter, a ticket fell out. It danced and twirled in the wind, its gold-rimmed edges flashing in the sunlight. It was so calming, watching the breeze carry it along, and for a moment, it was almost peaceful. But something felt off. The air turned sharp and cold, my skin prickled, and my stomach curled in warning. I slowly bent down to pick it up, trying to keep my pounding heart from exploding out of my chest. My fingers trembled as I held it, the parchment cool to the touch and faintly humming like it was alive. I began to read the fading purple ink, eyes squinting to make out the words.

**Date: 15 July 1925 Departure: Widdershins Junction Passenger: Alice Paterson
Time: 12:00 AM**

I practically swallowed my tongue. Not just because that was my full name printed in flowing script. It was the station that got me. Widdershins Junction. I whipped out my phone and pulled up its Wikipedia page. Widdershins Junction had burned down on 15 July 1925 — exactly 100 years ago tomorrow. It was a rural station buried deep in the forest somewhere in Victoria, decommissioned after a mysterious fire consumed the final train and platform in a single night. Forty-nine people perished. Not one body was recovered. Witnesses said the train vanished into the trees, never reaching its destination.

I woke at 3:06 a.m. to the sound of my heart hammering. When I reached for the lamp, the ticket was no longer on my desk. It was in my hand. I tried to throw it away. It reappeared on my pillow. I tried to burn it. The match wouldn't light. I shredded it into pieces. It reformed, good as new. Everything I did made it shinier, stronger, more indestructible. Then my laptop pinged. One new message. No sender.

Boarding begins at midnight. Widdershins Junction awaits.

I tried again to burn the ticket. This time, the flame sparked. But the second it did, voices started up around me. Whispers. Screams. Laughter. Evil, twisted, gleeful laughter. It echoed inside my skull, like someone had flipped a switch. I dropped the match, shaking. That was the moment I decided to go. I don't know why. Maybe a part of me already knew I wouldn't be able to resist. Maybe I never had a choice. I drove for hours through the countryside, until the road gave way to forest and silence. Fog draped the trees like heavy curtains, and through the mist I saw the platform's crumbling stone, half-swallowed by vines. A rusted iron sign swayed in the breeze: WIDDERSHINS JUNCTION. The huge train stood out amongst the darkness and looked oddly out of place.

The moment my foot touched the first step, the carriage door hissed open. The inside of the train was just as impressive as the outside, with velvet seats and magnificent chandeliers. There were about a dozen other passengers scattered across the train, all

of them hidden in darkness, clutching their tickets. I moved past them, and made my way to the dining carriage, which was elegant but empty, with untouched silverware glinting under low lights.

At the far end, half-hidden behind a velvet curtain, was a door I hadn't noticed. As I stepped closer, it creaked open on its own, the hinges groaning like they hadn't moved in a hundred years. It opened into a long, narrow hall of mirrors. Dozens of me stared back. But something was wrong. In one, I was older. In another, my eyes were missing. One version of me was slumped and lifeless. Others were on fire, burning me to ash. At the very end of the hall, a reflection stepped forward. It was me. Or at least, it looked like me. But her eyes were bottomless and coal-black, flickering like embers. She wore a 1910s school uniform, her hair braided neatly. She held a lit match between her fingers. "You always board," she whispered. "And you always burn." She struck the match. The mirrors shattered around me.

I woke up on the side of the road, with mud in my hair and burn marks on my clothes. I waited for a taxi to pull up, and eventually a driver pulled over. He looked for directions to my building and then asked for my name. "Alice Paterson," I answered. He froze, then told me to get out, with a horrible expression on his face. Walking back to my apartment, I bumped into my neighbour. She screamed. Long and loud, it was the most haunting scream I had ever heard. I edged backwards into my apartment, her yells still ringing in my ears. On my front door was a newspaper cutting, and huge bouquets of flowers. The paper was from the front page, and it had my face on it. That picture was taken last month, at lunch with my family. I read through the story, and I felt my eyes well up with tears. It was about the tragic accident involving a brutal train crash yesterday, in which 49 people died, including me. The cause seemed to be that someone had set the train on fire with a match. There were interviews with my friends and parents, and a service was to take place today in my memory. I knew I wasn't really dead, but I felt it inside. I didn't have the energy to tell the truth, because in a way, I died the moment I found the ticket. Like it had burned my insides, so all that was left was a ghostly body, with no soul, and no purpose.

I exist now between places. Between moments. Between reflections. People pass me in the street and glance away, their eyes sliding off like I'm fog. Sometimes, I see her. The girl in the mirror. With my face. With those black eyes. She always smiles. And in her hand, the match is always lit.