

The Last Stop
by
[redacted]

One Week Challenge, October 2011

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FADE IN:

EXT. OUTSKIRTS OF LONDON - NIGHT

A full moon over a foggy moor. Railroad tracks lead to a dark, sleeping city guarded by the silhouette of Big Ben.

SUPER: London, 1890

A whistle blows, steam hisses, and a train engine chugs into frame, squeals to a stop.

A traincar door slides open O.S. and someone drops to the dirt. A DWARF enters frame (40) dressed in a dusty red velvet coat and top hat. He hobbles using an ornately carved cane.

He stares at the city a moment. Whistles sharply.

Doors slide open down the length of the train and circus folk of all shapes and sizes emerge.

EXT. CIRCUS ENTRANCE - EVENING

Flags and torches mark the entrance to the circus. A crowd of people, mostly in their 40s and 50s, spill into two lines at the admission box.

WILLIAM (23) and BETHANY (21) wait in line, hands clasped, excited and very much in love.

A commotion at the front of the line--

MAN
(yelling)
Get yer hands off me!

Two burly men haul the speaker out of line and drag him away.

MAN
No! I'm sorry! I need to get in! My
wife's in there!

A red top hat bobs after them.

BETHANY
You brought money, right?

William jingles his pocket as the line advances.

EXT. FAIRGROUND - LATER

The main fairground, crowded and noisy, lit by torches and a large bonfire. Barkers yell at the crowd to play their games. Off to one side is

A CAROUSEL

William and Bethany ride in a sleigh drawn by two riderless horses bobbing up and down. Arms around each other.

William lifts his head, stares into the crowd.

A RAILROAD WORKER, colorless, just shades of gray and black, wearing dirty coveralls, sledgehammer draped over one shoulder and a metal lunch pail in the other hand. He trudges straight ahead, not heeding his surroundings.

WILLIAM

Wha--?

William cranes his neck as the carousel rotates and sees--

The worker collides with a man and PASSES THROUGH HIM!

BETHANY

Did you say something?

William looks at her in alarm but her eyes are closed.

WILLIAM

I think I just saw a ghost.

Bethany laughs and squeezes him. He shakes his head, rests it on top of hers.

EXT. HALL OF MIRRORS - LATER

Bethany stares wide-eyed and grinning at a faded wooden sign:
HALL OF MIRRORS

WILLIAM

Sounds kind of boring.

She looks at him like he's nuts.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)

If you really want to--

She squeals and runs up the three steps, disappears around the first warped mirror.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

William chases after--

INT. HALL OF MIRRORS - CONTINUOUS

William passes twisted, grotesque reflections of himself, rounding corner after dimly-lit corner.

WILLIAM

Wait for me!

He rounds another corner and into--

GREAT HALL

An open space, larger than seems possible. Mirrors line the perimeter, each with a slightly different reflection of William. In the center, a HUGE MIRROR with an elaborately carved wooden frame.

WILLIAM

Beth?

He approaches the mirror, but instead of his reflection he sees Bethany!

Turns, but no one's there.

In the mirror, Bethany just stands there, staring blankly.

An ANGEL OF DEATH steps from the shadows behind her, tall and skeletal with black raven wings. It wraps its arms around Bethany, pulls her into a loving, possessive embrace.

WILLIAM

No!

A beat of its wings carries it and Bethany up and out of sight.

William hits the mirror and it explodes!

Shields his eyes--

Looks and sees the dwarf leaning casually on his cane, as if he'd always been there.

DWARF

Mirrors are tricky, aren't they?

William looks frightened, confused.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DWARF (CONT'D)

Always have a flaw or two that
distorts the reflection. You think
you're looking at yourself but what
do you really see?

The dwarf points his cane at a reflection of William, much
younger, much more frightened.

DWARF

An idea. An exaggeration.
Everything you love or hate about
yourself, what you think others
see, even how you feel. An
illusion.

WILLIAM

Who are you?

The dwarf smiles charismatically, offers his hand.

DWARF

Name's Charles. I run this place.

William doesn't shake.

WILLIAM

Where's Bethany?

CHARLES

She's probably wandered off
somewhere.

William bolts for--

THE CORRIDOR

There are no turns, it just goes on and on. William falters,
out of breath.

The corridor stretches endlessly in both directions.

WILLIAM

What the bloody hell is going on
here?

He pries his fingers between two mirrors and YANKS!

The mirror crashes on the ground and he dives through the
curtain into--

INT. SNAKE CHARMER TENT - CONTINUOUS

Smoke-filled with a simple wooden stage, the audience spellbound by the SNAKE CHARMER (21), young, exotic, and beautiful with bare, perfect breasts. An albino boa constrictor snakes around her and a violin wails mournfully.

William bursts from the backstage curtain and stumbles to a stop, bewildered.

The snake charmer slides over to him, arms waving, head and body writhing.

William, transfixed, mouth agape.

She wriggles against him seductively, suggestively, and the crowd hollers.

She faces him, presses against him, her eyes boring into his.

WILLIAM

I--

She presses a finger to his lips and kisses him.

The snake slides from behind her as the violin crescendos. It slides over his shoulder, behind his neck--

William shoves her away. She falls to the stage.

WILLIAM

Get off!

The crowd boos loudly. The snake charmer shoots him a dirty look.

A BLACK ASP slithers out from the curtain, slow and silent across the stage towards William.

William searches the faces of the jeering crowd.

The asp coils to strike--

William spots it and jumps from the stage just as it lashes out, hissing!

He charges through the crowd and out into--

EXT. FAIRGROUND - CONTINUOUS

William skids to a halt in front of Charles.

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CONTINUED:

CHARLES

Hell hath no fury, huh?

WILLIAM

What's going on here?

CHARLES

Cleopatra's a fine woman, don't get me wrong. Those tits have broken many a heart. She sure fancies you, though. Not usually the kissing type.

WILLIAM

I'm married. To Bethany. Where is she?

Charles pulls him down to his level.

CHARLES

Newly wed. Not even consummated yet. It ain't too late.

William shoves him away. Sees a crowd gathering around an outdoor stage and races off to--

WOLFMAN SHOW

A SHOWMAN (48) stands at the front of the stage, tall and lean, with a long, slender stick.

SHOWMAN

Right here, on this very stage, you will see a truly strange sight. Not a man, not an animal, but both! Yes, you heard me right, an abomination of nature!

William fights through the crowd to reach the stage.

SHOWMAN (CONT'D)

Ladies and Gentlemen, I give you...the Wolfman!

The curtain rises to reveal the WOLFMAN, collared and chained, naked but covered in fur including his face. The fur is matted and mangy, and he looks malnourished.

SHOWMAN

These chains are for your protection, folks!
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

SHOWMAN (CONT'D)

The Wolfman has killed children and babies, ripped the throats from men and mothers, even burned a town to the very ground! This is a monster. A menace. A--

WILLIAM

(yelling)

Beth? Are you here?

The showman points his stick at William.

SHOWMAN

Sir! Please refrain from making loud noises or you may raise the beast's ire!

THWACK! The showman strikes the Wolfman.

SHOWMAN (CONT'D)

Down, you filthy dog! Stay back!

The Wolfman cowers and whimpers.

WILLIAM

Hey! Leave him alone!

The showman canes the Wolfman again, harder. The Wolfman yelps.

William vaults onto the stage and grabs for the stick.

WILLIAM

I said stop it!

SHOWMAN

Get back!

They wrestle for the stick.

SHOWMAN

(quietly)

This ain't no run-in, ye bleedin' josses! You wanna Barney, I get the Rum Col.

William wrests the stick away, snaps it over his knee.

The Wolfman suddenly lunges. The chain snaps!

William yells, leaps back--

The Wolfman leaps past him and onto the showman!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

The showman screams! The crowd cheers as blood flies everywhere!

William backs away, sickened, and falls off the stage--

INT. BIG TOP - CONTINUOUS

William lands on a small platform. He peers over the edge.

He's at the ceiling of the Big Top! Far below, clowns cartwheel and juggle in the center ring. The crowd whistles and cheers. An orchestra plays an upbeat, comic tune.

There is no net.

William, shaking, climbs to his feet.

CHARLES (O.S.)

Yoo-hoo!

Charles stands on another platform across the tent, waving. And next to him is Bethany!

WILLIAM

Beth!

CHARLES

Juliette stands at her balcony, awaiting her love! Do you have a sonnet for her, young Romeo?

A taut wire connects the platforms. William tests it.

WILLIAM

I'm coming! Don't move!

He takes a step, balancing precariously.

CHARLES

Use the pole, imbecile! I don't want to scrape you off the ground!

A long pole hangs from beneath the platform. William pulls it up, balances it, and steps onto the wire again.

The music dies, replaced by a drum roll. The clowns stop and point. The crowd grows hushed.

One foot slides forward. The other swings out and onto the wire.

William inches forward slowly, one step at a time, until--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He swings his leg out and the wire quivers and wobbles beneath him!

He jerks and sways, trying to keep his balance. The pole dips sickeningly. The drum beats louder, faster!

He regains his balance and brings his foot up to the wire.

CHARLES

Bravo! Just a bit further, Romeo!

Nearly across, just a couple more feet. He tosses the pole to Charles who catches it deftly.

He takes the last step--

INT. CARAVAN - CONTINUOUS

Darkness. Silence.

An orb glows faintly, getting brighter, until it reveals--

Charles standing on a chair at a small round table, a CRYSTAL BALL glowing beneath his face.

CHARLES

Glad you made it. Please...

He gestures to the empty chair at the table.

WILLIAM

I just want to find Beth. Please.

Charles slides a tarot deck towards William and waits expectantly.

William squeezes his fists into his eyes and rocks in the chair. Reaches out and cuts the deck. Charles lays out three cards.

CHARLES

Do you believe love is blind?

He flips the first card: THE LOVERS

CHARLES (CONT'D)

Two people spend time getting to know each other, but really they're getting to know an idea. Another illusion. What they say about themselves is filtered and dressed up to impress the other.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He flips another card: THE TOWER

CHARLES (CONT'D)

The two strangers decide to marry, thinking they know each other. They pledge their lives before family and God, and all based on the lies they've been told.

WILLIAM

Did Beth put you up to this? Is this a test?

Charles smiles slyly.

CHARLES

Everything is a test.

WILLIAM

What are you telling me? That she's having second thoughts? What does she want from me?

Charles flips the final card: DEATH

CHARLES

Chained by the shackles of marriage, the two strangers learn more about each other than they ever wanted. And you know what? They still don't know who they've shackled up with! Those private thoughts, those deep, dark secrets, and the most despicable acts, those things never come out. They're carried to the grave. So tell me, can you ever truly know someone?

WILLIAM

No.

CHARLES

(surprised)

No?

WILLIAM

You're right, it's not possible. All we can do is trust how we feel. It doesn't matter what makes us love, only that we feel it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

CHARLES

What if your faith is unfounded? If love is what really matters, why do people stop loving each other?

William wrings his hands nervously.

WILLIAM

If love is built on lies then it's undone by the truth. We trust someone with our love and pray there are no hidden truths to be discovered. Or at least that they remain undiscovered.

Charles leans back and slowly claps his hands.

CHARLES

Well said, pal. You deserve to be happy.

WILLIAM

Is that it? Can I see Beth now?

Charles hops off the chair, takes William's hand and leads him to the door.

EXT. OUTSKIRTS OF LONDON - CONTINUOUS

William and Charles stand in the dirt next to the train, hands still clasped.

William searches around but no Bethany. Charles smiles sadly.

CHARLES

You're a good guy, William.

WILLIAM

I don't understand. Where is she?

CHARLES

The truth? She ain't such a good gal.

WILLIAM

What the bloody hell does that mean?

CHARLES

Life's a test, pal. Not everyone passes.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

A bright shaft of light appears next to William. He shields his eyes.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

That's your ticket. Enjoy the show.

Charles boards the train. The whistle blows, steam hisses, and the wheels groan into motion.

WILLIAM

Wait!

Charles pokes his head out. William jogs with the train.

CHARLES

She ain't worth it, fool! Jol,
while you can!

William jumps, grabs hold of a railing, and hauls himself aboard. Charles tries to kick him off.

CHARLES

This ain't your ride!

WILLIAM

I don't care! I'm not leaving
without her!

Bethany steps out of the train car behind them. Her dress is red with blood around three scorched bullet holes.

BETHANY

William?

WILLIAM

Beth!

He hugs her fiercely. The back of his jacket is also stained red around two bullet holes.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)

I thought I'd lost you!

BETHANY

I'm sorry! I shouldn't have
strayed!

Charles shakes his head sadly and leaves them, closing the train car door behind him.