

I must be having a nightmare. I shouldn't be at the theater. I trip past a pile of boxes and burst into the lobby. The carpet is new. A chandelier the size of a car hangs from the ceiling. I realize with a cold fear that I know that chandelier. It's the one we're using in Phantom of the Opera. Posters line the walls, but the dates are all wrong.

I rush to the ticket booth and shoulder past people until I'm in the front. I stare through the glass, and my voice shakes as I speak.

"When was the last showing of Phantom of the Opera?"

The woman looks up. "May I scan your tickets, ma'am?"

"Can you just tell me when Phantom-"

A bone-chilling cold rushes through me, and I look down to see hands that aren't mine reaching out with two tickets for the Phantom of the Opera. I take a step back as an old woman comes into focus. An old woman who's standing where I just was.

"I don't—" I rush forward, trying to grasp at the woman's hands, but I go straight through. "I'm dreaming, I just need to wake up."

I pinch myself on the arm, but I can't feel it. "Nightmare, it's just a nightmare."

My back hits the wall, and I feel a strange sort of relief that at least something is solid. I turn to see a poster for a musical.

*Phantom of the Opera*

*20th Anniversary Commemorative Showing*

*Starring Original Actors Rudy Anderson and Nora Thatcher*

I'm shaking so bad it's a miracle I'm still on my feet. Twenty years! That can't be true. I step back and right through a ten-year-old boy. He doesn't even look at me, just keeps going as if I don't exist, and maybe I don't.

"You're new here."

I whip around to see a boy with unruly brown hair and hazel eyes looking right at me, not through me, but at me.

"You can see me?" I ask.

He gives a grin. "I see a girl with hair as wild as a bird's nest and the color of flames. I'm Ben."

"I'm Evenlyn." I look around. "Where are we?"

"Dead."

"What?" I misheard him.

"Dead, like you know...died. Ceased to exist. Expired. Perished. Six feet under. Decea-"

I step back. "No, I'm not dead."

"Yeah, you are."

"Not possible. I'm supposed to be working on *this* showing of Phantom of the Opera. I'm on the stage crew because Nora Thatcher took the lead role from me. I'm alive."

"Denial is interesting..."

I shake my head, hair flying into my eyes. "I'm not in a state of denial, I'm being realistic."

"Sure."

I look around frantically. "I mean, this can't be real. It's just a dream."

"Come with me."

For some reason, I follow Ben through the crowds of people, literally through, and to the back. No security stops us; we just waltz in like we're actors. Or like we're invisible. We go up the catwalk, and he leads me to where the chandelier is waiting, ready to drop. A thin board runs from the platform under us to the chandelier. Ben produces a knife and jumps the railing, walking along the thin beam.

"Come on, don't worry about dying."

I hesitate before climbing the railing and balancing on the beam; it can't be more than four inches wide. I could die. No, I won't die because this is just a dream, and everyone knows when you fall in a dream, you just wake up.

Ben rests a hand on the thick rope securing the chandelier to the ceiling. “What do you think would happen if I cut this rope?”

“Just because I can’t die doesn’t mean I like the feeling of potentially dying.”

“You’ll learn, one of these days, that the feeling of death is a friend. Without it, we ghosts would go mad.”

I lunge for him, but he’s already cut the rope, the chandelier plummeting. I sway as time stops. My boots are barely on the board, and then it happens. With Ben’s eyes piercing my soul, I fall to my death.

*It was late at night. I was just getting in my car when I heard someone come behind me. I turned to see Nora’s mother, the head of the theater board, walk through the snow to her sleek Cadillac. I shook my head in frustration before sliding into my own ancient, beat-up Honda Civic. I turned on the engine and put my hands over the heater, trying to banish the numb feeling. Turning up the radio, I pulled onto the road, navigating around the fresh layer of snow.*

*I was just about to turn onto Vine when I heard the scream of tires behind me. Before I knew what was happening, a car slammed into the back of me, sending my car flying into the intersection. I wrestled with the steering wheel, but I couldn’t get it under control, not in those conditions. The light changed and a pickup truck ran the red light, the truck plunging into the side of my car.*

I sit up so fast, Ben jumps back. I’m on the stage next to the chandelier and everyone is...clapping. I look around before pinning the boy with a look. I want to throttle him.

“What was that?” I scream.

He laughs, and I hate him even more for it. “To prove you’re dead. Time moves differently here. I cut a chandelier, and time moves forward to where it actually drops. Could be minutes, could be years.”

I ignore him. “I didn’t wake up.”

Turning his back on me, he walks off to the shadows. “Yeah, because you’re *dead*.”

"I'm dead." The words taste bitter, but something deep inside me says it's true. I get to my feet and stare out at the crowd as the chandelier is slowly pulled back up. "None of you can see me, just like before."

An hour later, I find myself on the roof looking out over a new Murray. Apartment buildings take up most of the area, and the city seems to have grown much larger. I look down at the nearby intersection, State and Vine. A cold shudder took over, and I had to look away, as if something I just couldn't remember had happened there.

Ben looks at me for a long moment, hesitating before softly saying, "You died there, in the car crash."

I pull my jacket closer around me. "How do you know?"

"I've been here for a long time. I was watching that night."

"So, you're dead?"

"Yeah, have been for a long time."

"How'd you die?"

He grimaces and starts gathering snow into a ball. "It was Halloween 1914. I was getting shipped out the next day, and I went to walk the river, just to have one last night of quiet. I saw some kids shove a little girl into the water; they were making fun of her." Ben pauses, as if speaking the words is hard for him. "The water was high, and I jumped in after her. I think she got out, but I don't know for sure."

"You drowned trying to save her?"

"Yeah, pretty heroic story if you ask me."

Without thinking, I blurt out, "I don't know why, but I think Nora had something to do with my death. Just something I feel deep down."

"So what are you going to do about that?" The quickmouthed Ben from earlier is gone; in his place stands someone who knows pain and wants to fix it.

"I could always drop a chandelier on her head."

We both laugh, but the sound is quickly eaten up by the darkness.

"You should watch her tomorrow night. If there's one thing I've learned, it's that to leave this world and move onto the next, you have to let go."

"What good would that do?"

Ben shrugs. "You might find she's not who you think she is."

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I stand on the catwalk, staring down at Nora. I didn't agree with what Ben said about watching, but I couldn't think of anything better to do. It's not like he's even here. Nora comes on stage, her cocky smile already plastered on. I feel a deep pang of jealousy that she gets to grow old while I'm up here, as dead as Edgar Allan Poe. She says something about how grateful she is for this opportunity and about her history in theater. That's it, I can't take this anymore. I took the knife from Ben when he had left it on the stage, and I'm very glad I have it. I walk the thin board to the chandelier.

"Do you remember what I said about time? It'll just skip forward to the drop; it won't hurt Nora in the least." Ben's voice is flat, but not unfeeling.

"I don't care." I grab the rope in my hands and rest the smooth blade against the rope. I start sawing through, slowly, trying to let my thoughts catch up to my actions.

"Nora didn't kill you."

I turn to look at Ben, but it's too late. "What?" The word has just left my mouth when the rope snaps from the weight. I don't slip from the board the time, my fear freezing me perfectly balanced. I watch the chandelier plummet, expecting the scene below me to change to the actual Chandelier drop. But nothing happens.

The chandelier hits a few feet behind Nora, and the screams echo through the theater. She killed me, I nearly killed her.

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I find myself standing in the lobby, staring at the poster of Phantom of the Opera. Someone comes up behind me, and I look to see Nora. Her eyes are vacant, and her footsteps echo in the empty room; everyone was sent home after the chandelier dropped. I don't know how I did it; maybe it was my anger. It was so strong I could've wrestled it into something tangible. Nora pauses in front of the poster and pulls a small photo from her pocket. I look over her shoulder to see a familiar scene. The cast and crew of Phantom of the Opera. Me. We had taken that photo the day I had died.

Nora's voice comes out surprisingly small. "I know that was you, Evelyn, wherever you are. My mother would've hated it, I would've laughed behind her back."

"What?" I know she can't hear me, but that doesn't stop me.

"You know, I hated her too. She always forced me to be number one, even when I just wanted to get something because I worked for it, not because of her power."

"No, that can't be true. You were always so mean."

Nora wipes a stray tear. "I wish I could've fixed our relationship before you know...everything happened. I didn't hate you, Mom just put so much pressure on me. But this wasn't her fault, she didn't mean to hit you, she just lost control of the car."

A warmth spreads through me. "You didn't hate me?"

Nora folds the picture and shoves it back in her pocket before straightening her back. "I won't let them forget you."

She turns and leaves before I can say anything more, not that she'd hear me anyway. Ben comes up behind me. "Look at you, moving on already."

"What?"

"Your hands."

I look down to see my fingers have become translucent, I can see a map of bones and veins clearly. "What's happening?"

"You've forgiven her and yourself. You can leave this world now."

I'm slowly fading at the edges, something pulling me to a new reality. "But what about you?"

"I haven't moved on, I'm still working."

"But you're all alone here."

"Don't worry about me." He gives me a sad smile. "Just make me one promise."

"Anything."

"Don't drop any chandeliers without me."

My vision fades as I whisper my last words in this world. "I promise."