

IT WAS A NIGHT

PART FOUR

'H.H.H.'

Written by

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OVER BLACK.

Muffled voices. Strange noises like that of shrill, whistling wind. Shifting, human-like shadows.

Ding-a-ling!

INT. AUNTY RUTH'S PIE SHOP. EVENING.

AUSTIN (23, Australian) is asleep at a booth in the corner, his face pressed firmly into the book in front of him. Scattered around his head are two (empty) cups of tea. Slowly he cracks an eye open, surreptitiously taking in his surroundings.

Sharing the space with him is a group of strangers, none of whom are paying him any attention. A woman knitting (DOROTHY, 74, a sweetened New York accent), a man drinking coffee (CARMEN, 41, speaks with a noticeable baritone Alabaman accent), two girls eating pie (NADIRA, 24, Australian and ANNA, 25, Australian) and a waiter playing on his phone (LUCIFER, 21, a Michigander).

The diner around him is decorated from the furthest corner to the last floor tile in tinsel, paper snow and a number of kitsch Christmas decorations. Overhead Christmas music is playing through hidden speakers.

Austin closes his eyes and falls back asleep.

OVER BLACK.

Muffled voices that now sound almost familiar. The sound of the register. Shifting shadows that are starting to look more and more human.

Ding-a-ling!

FLASHBACK #1

INT. AUNTY RUTH'S PIE SHOP. LATE AFTERNOON.

Austin is stepping through the door to Aunty Ruth's, brushing the snow from his jacket. The diner isn't very full, the occasional customer scattered here and there between the red booths. Over by the register stand two employees, Lucifer and JENNIFER (21, a Michigander), who appear to be quietly joking around with one another.

Austin scouts out a table tucked away in the corner, relinquishing his well-loved backpack to the seat next to him. Intrigued, he allows his eyes to sweep the room, taking everything in, including Lucifer as he approaches the booth.

LUCIFER

Afternoon. Anything I can get you started with tuhday?

AUSTIN

Ummm...

(fumbles for menu)

Something warm, maybe a tea?

LUCIFER

Any particular type?

AUSTIN

English Breakfast?

LUCIFER

You don't sound so shure.

AUSTIN

No, no, I'm sure.

(noting Lucifer's nametag)

Lucifer!

Lucifer raises an eyebrow at Austin.

LUCIFER

(tired)

Yeah, like the Devil.

AUSTIN

Oh, well not always actually. Did you know that Lucifer only became a name for the Devil once it was absorbed into Christianity? Originally he was connected to Venus through the Greeks and the Romans.

Lucifer looks politely impressed.

LUCIFER

I did not.

AUSTIN

It's quite fascinating really.

(on Lucifer's expression)

But perhaps some other time?

Lucifer smiles knowingly.

LUCIFER
So, one English Breakfast.

AUSTIN
Yes, please.

Lucifer leaves and, once more alone, Austin returns to his people watching.

Aunty Ruth's is filled mostly with locals and the odd truck driver passing through. Nearby Austin's booth sits a man who looks like a FARMER (a Michigander), eating a hearty slice of Bumpy Cake and engaging in very loud conversation with his neighbour (TRUCK DRIVER).

FARMER
Lookit.
(gesturing outside)
Snow up to your eyeballs. I'm
telling you, we're in for a big
one.

TRUCK DRIVER
(looking out window in
disbelief)
Weather reports didn't say anything
of the kind though.

FARMER
They ain't oracles!

TRUCK DRIVER
Hmmm. I dunno.

FARMER
Where you off to anyways?

TRUCK DRIVER
Upper Peninsula.

FARMER
Ah, The UP...

Austin tunes out the nearby conversation, turning his attention to the gently falling snow. He doesn't look as disbelieving as the Truck Driver, in fact he appears almost apprehensive.

LATER

The snowstorm has started.

Up by the register a group of elderly women are awaiting their takeaways, chatting animatedly among themselves as Austin takes a long sip from his own (second) cup of tea.

DOROTHY (O.S.)

Hi, honey.

Austin, lost in his own world, looks up to discover Dorothy has materialised by his booth with a large, warm smile. Slung on her arm is a large bag full of what appears to be a half-completed knitting project. Yellow yarn is spilling out the sides.

AUSTIN

Oh, hello.

Dorothy's smile widens upon noting his accent and polite nervousness.

DOROTHY

You're not from around here are you? Australia?

AUSTIN

No. I mean, yes. Yes to Australia.

DOROTHY

Must be quite the weather change for you then, honey?

AUSTIN

Truly.

Over by the register Lucifer returns, handing over a number of steaming Christmas takeaway cups to the group of elderly women. One by one they file out the door, visible through the window as they surge through the snow towards a large bus.

DOROTHY

So, what you hanging around here for?

(studying Austin's attire)

You wanna be moving on, chickadee.
You don't want to get caught out on a night like this.

Austin shifts around in his seat and pulls his backpack closer to his side, unsettled by Dorothy's concentrated attention.

AUSTIN

Oh, that's very kind of you, but I'm waiting for someone.

DOROTHY

Oh?

AUSTIN

Yes. It's for my work you see, and
if that requires me to stay here
all night, then so be it!

Austin laughs a little nervously, Dorothy politely joining him.

DOROTHY

That's quite the dedication.

Austin keeps his mouth shut, choosing to simply nod in agreement as movement over by the register draws Dorothy's attention.

Together, Austin and Dorothy watch as Lucifer produces his phone, stretching out across the front counter with a large sigh. Seconds later, the loud beeping of his game starts competing with the overhead Christmas music.

DOROTHY (CONT'D)

That's it's own sort of dedication,
I suppose.

AUSTIN

Haha. Very true.

DOROTHY

(turning back to Austin)

Well, if you're set on staying, I
feel I ought to wish you good luck
as opposed to good afternoon.

AUSTIN

Only if you allow me to return the
sentiment.

Austin and Dorothy exchange final smiles before Dorothy moves on, her knitting needles clicking with every step.

As Dorothy retires to her own booth, Austin turns to face the snowstorm outside. The white and greys of late afternoon coercing the interior of Aunty Ruth's to radiate a comforting yellow warmth. Smothering a yawn with his sleeve, Austin slowly reaches into his backpack, returning with a battered looking leather book. Cracking a page open, Austin begins to read the messy notes within.

OVER BLACK.

Muffled voices filter through the dark and shifting shadows that move around with recognisable gaits. The gentle thud of footsteps turn into a rhythmic *click-click-click...*

INT. AUNTY RUTH'S PIE SHOP. NIGHT.

Austin, groggy from sleep, slowly wakes up, looking around for the source of the clicking noise. The only person in the room with him is Dorothy, deeply engaged in her knitting which is evidently the source of the noise. She is accompanied by a poppy Christmas song that is forcing its way past the mass amounts of tinsel covering the overhead speakers.

Surveying the rest of the diner, Austin notes the snowstorm outside his booth's window that is now in full effect. Stretching, he pushes up from his table and shuffles sleepily towards the toilets. On his way he passes a table covered in four different slices of pie.

INT. BOY'S BATHROOM. AUNTY RUTH'S PIE SHOP. CONTINUOUS.

Austin is washing his hands, his fingers turning red under the cold water. Looking into the mirror in front of him Austin finishes and is about to leave when something dark and solid darts past him, the blur of movement caught in the reflection. Austin whips around just as fast to face the dark, empty bathroom.

AUSTIN

Hello?

No reply or movement prompts Austin to cautiously approach the nearest stall. First psyching himself up by rubbing his hands together, Austin slams the stall door open.

Nothing.

Unsettled, Austin shakes a little and rubs at his goosebumped arms. Continuing down the line, Austin checks every stall, each one as empty as the first one, until he reaches the door. Looking around the bathroom one last time, Austin curls his fingers into the tell-tale horned gesture known for warding off evil.

BAM!

A flurry of snow hits the tiny window nestled up high on the far wall as the howling wind picks up outside. Austin cocks his head in curiosity before shivering and leaving the room.

Over by the sink a thick layer of ice has consumed the taps and mirrors, the letter A scratched jaggedly into the ice.

INT. AUNTY RUTH'S PIE SHOP. CONTINUOUS.

Upon exiting the bathroom, Austin notices that two girls have claimed the booth with the pie.

AUSTIN
Evening.

NADIRA
Hi there.

ANNA
Hello.

Continuing on without another word, Austin returns to his table, picking up the book he had been previously sleeping on. As he flips through the pages, it's apparent the book is more of a personal notebook full of sketches, photos, research notes and assorted article clippings. Producing a pencil from his backpack, Austin begins to write in the book:

CLOSE-UP <AUSTIN'S NOTES>

Surrounded by various indecipherable scribbles and pictures of strange patterns left in snowy fields, Austin pens the following sentence: ELEMENTAL REACTION TO INTERFERENCE. CORPOREAL?

Pausing in his notetaking Austin fishes his phone from his backpack, quickly discovering he is without service. Unphased, Austin returns to his notes and adds something onto the end of his previous sentence before closing the book.

Suddenly looking up, Austin counts the currently visible inhabitants of the diner.

AUSTIN
(under his breath, barely
audible)
One, two, three.

Satisfied, pulling his notebook back towards him Austin resumes his sleeping position and closes his eyes.

OVER BLACK.

The strange noises are back, like that of a wild wind attempting speech. Through the darkness something is whispering:

STRANGE VOICE

Austin...

Ding-a-ling-bbbbbrrriinnngg!

INT. AUNTY RUTH'S PIE SHOP. NIGHT.

Austin's phone is ringing, very suddenly and very loudly, startling everyone in the local vicinity, not least Austin who very much jumps out of his skin.

On the other side of the room Dorothy drops her knitting, and the two girls jump at each other, which elicits something incoherent but undoubtedly colourful from the one with the red hair.

Brrriiiinnngg!

A little dazed, Austin just stares at his phone, watching it as it jumps up and down on the table in search of attention.

Brrriiiinnngg!

In Austin's peripheral vision three sets of very alert eyes are clearly visible.

ANNA (O.S.)

Hey.

Slowly, Austin looks up towards the girl who spoke.

ANNA (CONT'D)

I think you better answer that.

Looking back down at his phone, Austin considers briefly before reaching forwards and accepting the call.

AUSTIN

Hello?

No reply.

All that's audible is something that sounds like heavy breathing mixed in with the whistling wind from outside. Austin presses his ear closer to the phone as it slowly becomes apparent that whoever, or whatever, has called is trying to say something.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)
Sorry, I didn't quite catch that.
What did you say?

CLOSE-UP (AUSTIN'S EAR THAT ISN'T LISTENING TO THE PHONE)

The shadow of a face, of a silent, moving mouth pressed close to Austin causes the hair on his neck to stand up as the shadow whispers directly into his ear:

STRANGE VOICE
Nighty night.

Austin spins around like a supercharged spinning top, but no one is there. Behind him, Dorothy (who had resumed her knitting), Anna and Nadira all jump in shock at his sudden action.

And then all the lights go out and the Christmas music cuts out.

OVER BLACK.

The sound of a door being pulled open and then slamming shut. Two sets of running feet growing louder as they emerge into the main dining space.

LUCIFER
Fuck.

CARMEN
Language.

Outside the snowstorm can be heard in it's never-ending rage, and through all the commotion, the gentle *click-click-click* of a pair of knitting needles.

INT. AUNTY RUTH'S PIE SHOP. CONTINUOUS.

Suddenly, the lights blaze back to life, brighter than they should, leaving everyone blinded. As the group attempt to blink their eyes back into focus the impression of a girl appears. Like a shadow or an insubstantial outline in the air, there's no proof of the girls existence in the nearby window's reflection or shadows cast upon the floor.

As the group slowly discovers that they are not alone, everyone's reaction is different. Anna looks ready to throw hands while Nadira stands nervously behind her.

Carmen has assumed some sort of fighting stance and next to him Lucifer looks absolutely petrified as he attempts to mirror Carmen's actions. Still sitting in her booth, Dorothy looks mildly calm as she surveys the scene, still knitting. And Austin, who has risen from his seat to step towards the shadow, looks absurdly happy.

AUSTIN

Yes!

CARMEN

Pardon?

Austin, turning to face his audience.

AUSTIN

This. This is what I've been waiting in this insanity for.

ANNA

Wanna add a little more onto that explanation there, buddy?

Austin's enthusiasm falters slightly as he takes in the scared and fighting-ready faces before him.

AUSTIN

Well, can't you see? This, she, is a ghost! A real live spectral phenomenon!

Dorothy is the only one who looks like she believes Austin while the rest of the group appear mightily confused as he approaches them to explain. Behind Austin, the GHOST GIRL continues to hover mid-air, slowly becoming more solid, a blinding white light filling the air around her.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)

I came to America to study Hauntings, like this one. A sort of research trip. Apparently this is are semi-regular occurrence.

CARMEN

What do you mean by that?

LUCIFER

Yeah, you're not making any sense, man.

AUSTIN

(excited)

I mean this storm, this girl,
they're tied together. That's why
all of this is happening!

On Austin's explanation, Carmen and Lucifer look even less
pleased with the situation before them.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)

Look, there's nothing to worry
about. I know how to get rid of
her, here...

Austin retrieves his backpack and notebook, returning to the
group who have now assembled protectively near Dorothy's
booth (the only one who has remained sitting). Nadira has
actually sat next down to Dorothy to provide reassurance.

Kneeling down on the ground, Austin upends his backpack,
spilling all sorts of abnormal items across the floor. Broken
glass, carved bone, weathered stone fruit pips, etc. In
response to Austin's actions a strong wind suddenly picks up,
the booths all along the far wall ripping and spewing their
foam into the air as if attacked by an invisible, knife-
wielding psycho. Even the windowpanes are shaking in their
frames and the outside the world is completely hidden, the
furiously falling snow acting as a curtain upon the disaster
within.

Still hovering mid-air, the Ghost Girl begins to slowly rise
higher, hurling Austin's empty teacups at him as he crouches
upon the ground. One smashes at his foot and a large shard
slice's his cheek. Behind Austin, Lucifer has jumped behind
Carmen, who has thrown his arms up as protection and Anna has
leapt in front of Nadira and Dorothy.

CARMEN

Do something, kid!

NADIRA

(to Dorothy)

It's going to be okay, we'll look
after you.

DOROTHY

(still furiously knitting)

That's very kind of you, dear.

LUCIFER

Why me!

ANNA

Fuck's sake, stop her!

Austin removes his hand from his face, finding his fingers red. The sight seems to shock him into action.

AUSTIN
Okay. Okay! Lucifer, get me a knife.

LUCIFER
What!?

AUSTIN
A knife! And sharp!

Without further objection Lucifer bolts to the kitchen, dodging the flying tinsel that attempts to strangle him.

CARMEN
What are you wanting with a knife, now?

Anna comes over to join Carmen, holding her hands up to her face for protection.

ANNA
Yeah, I'm with big man, here.

AUSTIN
Look, I know what I'm doing, this is my job. Don't panic, alright.

Anna and Carmen look unconvinced as Austin turns away from them and begins to draw strange markings on the ground with charcoal from his backpack. Anna returns to stand by Nadira as Lucifer comes running back with a knife for Austin, a second one held tightly in his own hand.

CARMEN
You shouldn't run with knives.

NADIRA
Why do you get a knife?

LUCIFER
My diner.

ANNA
What are you hoping to do? You going to stab a ghost?

LUCIFER
Ha. Ha.

As Anna and Lucifer stand off against one another, Dorothy's knitting needles come to a halt.

Before Austin, the Ghost Girl is still floating in her own personal storm, a piercing animalistic scream beginning to grow and emit from deep within her. Sugar packets, plastic spoons, tinsel, napkins, plates and paper snowflakes are flying around the room, relentlessly pelting the group.

AUSTIN

Wow! She's even stronger than I thought.

LUCIFER

Now is not the time!

AUSTIN

Sorry.

Crouched over his summoning circle, knife hovering just about his outstretched palm, Austin studies the creature before him. As the Ghost Girl levels her glowing eyes at him he raises his hand, opening his mouth to prepare to enact his incantation when suddenly.

DOROTHY (O.S.)

That's really not necessary, dear.

All heads turn to find Dorothy, knitting cast aside and facing them calmly.

THE END OF PART FOUR...