

The Dreamer

He makes a semi-conscious attempt to roll onto his side, but the aching weight of his bladder soon registers and he retracts the motion, sinking back to his previous state of comfort. His eyes wander with disinterest over his room. Daylight lingers behind the curtains like an unanswered guest.

He drifts into sleep almost as he's closing his eyes. He'd have appreciated that ability earlier in his life, when restful sleep was so elusive. Not now. The action is practised; part of the ritual.

The edges of his vision blur and the room changes, melts away, as he eases himself effortlessly into lucidity. This scene is so familiar now. The walls bend and arch as darkness washes over them, the paint peeling away and revealing the coarse brick beneath. The door hollows out, shifts and expands into the space beyond, becoming the head of a vast tunnel. He sits up, climbs off the bed and it's no longer there, already merging with the now-concrete floor. He's on the platform, *that* platform, looking down onto the tracks as a train rumbles in the distance.

Silhouettes emerge beside him, grow faces and become people. He feels their presence intruding and it is unwelcome. Their features are hideously smudged; vile masks that conceal any emotion or thought. They are disconnected, worthless passengers in his scene.

And then, her.

He smiles, even still. It comforts him to see her again. Awake, he can barely remember her face, but here it's so vivid. So *alive*.

She does not look at him. He doesn't expect her to. He prepares himself, braced for what happens next.

The tears start to well up in her eyes, then it begins. Seeing this is like a stab to his heart. He flinches. She starts to back away, arms clutching herself and trembling. Strangers turn to look with their detached interest.

He steps forward, raising a hand. He starts to plead with her, but he's tried it all. All the words he wished he'd said, and more.

Don't do this. I love you.

"It wasn't your fault."

For a moment, it works. She looks at him, interrupted, seeming to consider his words. As though he's getting through to her. As though she is not yet lost.

The horn sounds, and the magic is broken. He feels the surge of air from the tunnel ripple cruelly through his hair. No matter where he stood, it always reached him. She turns away, starts to step towards the edge and he doesn't need to watch her jump.

He wakes again.

That look, he knows, was a breakthrough, but he remains calm. He is making gradual progress. If she spoke to him, then...

He severs that thought. Whatever he tried in his dreams, she had never spoken to him. There was only the screams which he could no longer bear.

He breathes out. The walls are already fading and transforming, adjusting to his will. His closes his eyes, and the rumbling gets louder again.