

The world is getting crowded.

It's all people pushing against people, pushing through people, ramming into walls of both Their world and ours. Our buildings — our entire *world* — superimposed over theirs, and every time one of Them dies our population grows, a new Not-Body squeezed into one of the spaces no longer left.

It helps that we don't have oceans.

Zadie likes to, in order to find somewhere no one else goes, sit on the roof of her old apartment building, watching her grandchildren — still living the same life she once did — chase around greasy-fingered toddlers on the stoop below. Sometimes Bec, her youngest grandchild, smokes pot or drinks from a brown bottle in the alley. Sometimes Bec and her boyfriend, intentionally nameless, take off their clothes and roll around on the garbage-littered ground, and Zadie turns away to pretend she doesn't see.

But ghosts know all, and anything she thinks, she sees.

And then there's Taylor, who spends each day on bruised knees, trying in vain to grab Their worms, Their water, Their copper coins, trying so hard just for something real.

Taylor's been dead five years.

I've been dead 100.

I don't keep track of how long I've been dead; there's really no reason to. We don't sleep, or age, or feel how much time has passed. I know when Their sun sets and rises, and I know that our light never changes. We never have any.

Heather comes up to me, soft hand pressed against my leg. My dress tore long ago, minutes before I died, and her fingers give a sense of a tickle. I turn my attention downward, where the small child I befriended in some recent year is whispering the idea of Charlotte Dumont, unofficial registrar of anyone who died in London in 1916, coming towards us. I feel that idea too, her tightly pulled black hair making her face strict. She died in a fire, and the white hot scars covered almost every part of her body.

"Eleanore," she sang. "You have been dead a century now, is that not grand?"

And that was how I learned of my age in this world, although I could have known any time I wanted.

I spent that next month as far from London as possible, in Belize and India and the middle of the South Pacific Ocean. Heather had known where I was, and considered joining me, but there was a toy store in Chicago that she loved to watch move.

Sometimes I ignore everything else, jostled back and forth by passerby in Times Square — a popular haunt amongst both the living and the dead — and play through my death, over and over and over. I see flashes of dark and flashes of light, feel the air compressed out of my lungs

and splinters slid roughly into my arms. And then I think I see the blood dripping down me again and cry out. No one does anything because everyone knows, and it happens to them, too.

Elisabeth is someone who used to be great in her life, but is much less since she died. I know this because I used to watch her, was a witness to her death. She had stood on a rooftop ledge, daring her friends to come closer. Her laugh cut off as her heel caught the edge, and her spirit rolled out of her as each bone broke on the cement ground. I had caught the girl's hand, whispered to her of the new world she inhabited, and drifted away.

I spent a month in Burma, willing Them to consume raw ngapi, then returned to the States, where I found Heather trying to hold the hand of Elisabeth's spirit, who looked more dead than me.

I'd been dead for a century, and this month-old teenager was a rotting ball of grey while one could still imagine the pink in my cheeks.

Heather turned her attention towards me, doe eyes more helpless than I'd ever seen them, small body looking large against the dissipating cloud beside her.

It took a lot for me to communicate at that point, my notions of physicality mostly forgotten. And yet I lowered myself as to face Elisabeth, opened my ghost of a mouth, and said: "I've forgotten life. You should too."

The poor girl screamed.

She became more when she screamed, as if screaming brought her back from the dead. The fuzziness surrounding her cleared away, like I've been told it feels to wear glasses for the first time.

It was a rather pointed scream, quite clearly intentional, quite clearly designed to say something.

Heather touched my arm, and then suddenly I knew.

"Elisabeth," I conjured out of myself, "please stand up."

She raised herself from the bench, and I did too.

"Elisabeth," I pulled from the depths of my soul, "please follow me."

And she did.

I went to Reykjavik, and Paris, then to Acapulco and toured Afghanistan. I watched her face in suburban towns and wild cities, rural homelands and her old house.

I took her to London, where Heather stayed close beside me as we neared the place of my death.

"Elisabeth," I said, "please remember life."

She blinked. She remembered.

She cried.

I wasn't sure if I had ever seen a ghost cry, but Heather reminded me that I had. It is the most pitiful of sights. A grey mess lets more grey out of their eyes, turning even more grey with every passing second. It looks like their insides spilling out, and puddles on the floor.

I thought, Are you crying because you miss life or are you crying because you're glad it's gone?

Neither, she thought. I'm crying because it was on purpose.

I could feel Heather telling me what I already knew, and I could feel Elisabeth's despair, remembering the way her laugh cut off mid-tremble, the mask finally falling off.

I could feel my age pressing into me, and I fell into my death once again. Light flashed and darkness snapped and lungs compressed and splinters slashed, and Elisabeth screamed.

She could almost see the blood, too.

I could actually see the blood.

For a century I'd been hearing tales of ghosts who died, who were around one moment and gone the next. I'd heard stories of ghosts who separated into their component parts of smoke and mirage and dust, and were suddenly there no more. I'd been told accounts of ghosts gone missing, and yarns had been woven of a World After This. I had even known ghosts who after a while I hadn't known anymore, and hadn't known where they were.

But I had always thought it to be just that: a tale. A story of what the souls who hated death wished, but never knew.

But in that instant, that instant when I saw red and Elisabeth screamed herself into solidity and Heather's doe eyes disappeared, I discovered my own account.

I was almost living, and this world was much less crowded.