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The Last Target Run

A Short Story
by Jonas Thane

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PREFACE

Thanks for reading one of my stories!

I'll keep this short—I love blending speculative fiction, science fantasy, and the uncanny, and this is just one of many stories and worlds I have planned to share with you.

So thanks for being here at the start of it all.

THE LAST TARGET RUN

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Dawn had barely broke, and Bedford was still quiet.

An unassuming place that rested in the pale hush of dawn. A Midwestern town caught between Cleveland's sprawl and the southern suburbs.

Fourteen miles from downtown, close enough to feel the pull, far enough to keep its own rhythm. The skyline fell away to low-rises and empty lots; old mills and assembly plants rusted beneath cracked pavement.

A sluggish river curled the outskirts, mirroring the last streetlights. Along Rockside, the Bedford Automile stretched—once-busy dealerships now half-empty, signs fading into surrender. At the center, the Viaduct Bridge arced over Tinkers Creek, an iron ribcage weathered by storm and time. Tourists drifted through the historic district, snapping the old clock tower as if time ran differently here.

Beyond that, suburbs sprawled—modest houses, dew-bright lawns, salt-stained driveways, porch lights lingering against the day.

And then—one house in particular. Unremarkable. Unnoticed. A single-story tucked into a cul-de-sac, chain-link softened by hedges, a cracked drive, an old Nissan Rogue in its slot.

Inside, the air felt thick, as if the walls were holding their breath. Beneath a tangle of blankets, a girl stirred—caught between dream and waking.

Two recurring dreams always returned to her.

The first she never spoke of: a tangle of images, sensations, a name she'd always known without ever hearing.

The second was this one. Here, she won. Knowing was a gift, not a weight. She saw things early, placed the right bets, whispered truths that made men wealthy. Her mother never worked again. Her family lived without fear, while there was still life to live. She built. She fixed. She saved.

Then, as always, it faded.

Chloe woke early.

The house was still. Something had begun. Something ominous.

Something was shifting, or ending, or both.

She felt it before she opened her eyes, and the understanding settled deep in her chest: only one dream mattered now.

Her room—caught between childhood and its after—held steady: stuffed animals under a purple blanket with satin edges rubbed smooth; princesses and pop stars on the walls. The faint sweetness of cocoa butter—usually safe—hung heavy. A cluttered dresser. Hair ties. A forgotten doll. Her sister's clear lip gloss. Yesterday's clothes in a heap; unicorn pajamas on top.

Everything looked the same. Something wasn't.

She slipped from bed, shivered at the floor, pulled on leggings and a long-sleeve. Her bonnet lay abandoned; her coils were matted. Fixing it didn't matter today—and her hands moved anyway. Habit. Instinct.

"Never leave the house undone," her mother and sisters had taught her.

She fluffed her coils, fingers finding the roots, lifting, rounding. The small pick waited where it always did. She used it without thinking. Then paused, eyes on the scattered ties.

Her mind drifted—to her mother, her sisters, how they had taught her to twist and smooth and tie, to lay edges and keep the bonnet on through the night. They'd taught her so much. And still, something in her had always remembered, a quiet hum between memory and instinct.

But this time, this family had given more: how to love and share, to speak and listen, to sit in silence and feel another's warmth, to hold and be held. That was what mattered. Not what she carried from before.

What she'd been given here.

She blinked back to the room, gathered her hair into a loose, full puff. Not perfect. Right.

She exhaled, let her hands fall, and stepped into the hallway —into the last morning the world would ever know.

Dim light seeped through windows. Coffee ghosted with last night's candle. Bare feet silent on the cool floor, she moved toward her mother's door and listened—soft breathing, the low hum of the house.

She stepped inside.

The room was dim, curtains drawn to let in only the thinnest sliver of light. It painted everything in blue-gray, stretching shadows delicate and long across the walls.

Her mother slept on her side beneath a heavy blanket, chest rising and falling in a steady rhythm. Chloe stood still. Watching. Memorizing.

The parting of her mother's lips. The faint furrow of her brow. Skin still radiant even in the muted light. The bonnet framing her face, guarding the curls beneath—curls Chloe knew were hers too, strong and coiled tight. The curve of her jaw, the slope of her neck, the small mole above her clavicle.

She had traced it once, years ago, while her mother hummed a tune whose words she couldn't remember anymore.

She inhaled deeply. Cocoa butter. Lavender. Warmth. Familiarity. Home. She would never forget it. She would never forget any of this.

Still, the thought came. Quiet. Remote.

It's a shame.

A shame they won't survive.

Her stomach didn't knot in grief, or even fear. Just acknowledgment. The simple truth of things.

She let it pass, let it fade into the hum of morning. Then she moved—fingers pressing gently into her mother's arm.

"Mom?" she whispered.

Her mother stirred, groggy. "Mmm... yeah?"

"Can I use the iPad?"

A soft assent. “Mm. Sure. It’s in the drawer.”

Chloe exhaled, drew the tablet from the nightstand, its edges warm from the charger. She clutched it close and slipped from the room, silent as a shadow. The weight in her chest pressed deeper.

She needed to map the day. Trace its shape before it unfolded. Be ready when the moment came.

And it was almost time. Again.

She stepped from the hallway—bedrooms and bathrooms behind her—into the house’s heart. Kitchen. Living room.

The living room felt wrong.

The TV still glowed, left on overnight, but silent. No cartoons. No morning talk shows. No coverage of the tragedy. No tally of the dead. No list of names. No futures cut short.

Her mother had tried to protect her from it, flipping channels, muting broadcasts, steering her away. She didn’t know Chloe had already seen it all. Had known it all, long before the world began counting bodies.

But that was family—protecting innocence, even when innocence was only an illusion.

The silence pressed closer. The screen flickered. Cold, gray-blue light stuttered across the walls, bending shadows into wrong shapes.

Something was wrong.

A flicker—barely there. Not static. Not light. A shape. Familiar. Mirror-like.

Gone too fast to see. But not too fast to perceive.

A sound followed—low, distant. A breath.

Her stomach went cold.

So. She wasn't the only Insunment here.

It didn't matter. Maybe next time she'd find another before the end. She let herself imagine it—foolishly, briefly: a gathering of Insunments, pooling what they knew, their resonance, their weight. Turning it toward salvation, maybe even dominion.

She laughed softly, no joy in it.

No. Not this time. Not next. Not ever.

The end will always come.

Nothing could stop it.

The thought dispersed like scattered ashes.

She wandered into the kitchen, bare feet on cool tile. The fridge hummed. Her hand brushed her mother's purse on the countertop. She checked the clock on the screen.

6:54 AM.

Outside, remnants of night still clung. Indigo and violet bruised the horizon. Something shifted beneath it—not sound, not motion. A pressure. A presence. Waiting. Watching.

She exhaled, turned to the window. Bedford lay in ghostly mist, the cul-de-sac still. Beyond, the woods loomed, older than the town, older than names. She had always known that. Always remembered.

And past the treeline, beyond the world's known edges—things waited.

A legion older than trees, soil, breath, stars.

The air smelled damp, rinsed clean but not yet dried. Pine and oak clung to the asphalt. Overhead, indigo light gave way to lavender streaks, the sky shifting pale at its edges.

The morning was beginning.

The end, too.

The cicadas were silent.

A ripple passed through her stomach—small, deep. She reached for the purse, fingers hesitating against the cool leather. The house was too quiet. Even the ticking clock felt muffled, like sound itself had been swallowed whole.

She listened. Nothing but the fridge's hum. The bones of the house settling.

Her tongue pressed against the roof of her mouth, tasting something bitter at the back of her throat—salty, acidic. A pressure curled low in her gut, coiled tight. The air pressed hot and thick against her skin, sticking in her throat.

The purse sat slightly open. Darkness inside. Waiting.

Her stomach bubbled—not hunger, not sickness. Something else. Something waking.

She leaned down, peering into the gap, breath caught. Then—without warning—she plunged her head inside.

Darkness swallowed her face. Her body seized, taut.

A sound tore from her throat. Low. Guttural. Unnatural. A dry heave, echoing inside the bag, rattling the quiet kitchen.

Seconds passed.

It stopped.

She drew her head back, cheeks flushed, breath ragged. Wiped her mouth with the back of her hand. Looked inside. Her face was blank.

As if this were normal.

"It's sleeping," she thought.

Something stirred inside her. Relief. Clarity. A knowing.

She looked into the winter-white puppy's eyes—unsettling, luminous—and saw more than its present. She saw its future. Her future.

Its purpose.

The name surfaced, already waiting.

"Bear," she whispered, steady. "Your name will be Bear. You'll help them."

Her gaze darted around, conspiratorial.

"Sleep well, Bear. The everlasting ending approaches."

The puppy yawned, eyes flashing once under the kitchen light. She smiled. Zipped the purse closed. Let it settle beside her—waiting, like everything else.

She sat at the table, iPad glow washing her face pale. Fingers tapped, swiped. Entered a route. Deleted. Adjusted. Re-entered.

Mapped. Calculated.

It wouldn't change anything. But she did it anyway. The habit of knowing. The ritual of preparation. The illusion of control.

The screen glimmered in her eyes, unreadable. Then she stopped. Closed it. Rose. Got dressed. Returned to the kitchen.

She slung the purse over her shoulder, Bear breathing soft inside. Grabbed the keys.

At the door she paused, glancing at the iPad. Tossed it behind her. Not careful. Not violent. Just final.

It hit the tile with a sharp crack. A spiderweb bloomed across the glass.

She didn't look back.

The iPad generation. Raised by screens. Trained to absorb and discard. To leave broken things behind.

She stepped out.

Errands to run. Places to be. Tastes to savor, one last time.

The air outside was heavy. Stillness pressed down.

She slid into her mother's Nissan Rogue. Certainty in her movements. This wasn't the first time.

And it would never be the last.

The engine caught. The radio whispered soft optimism she didn't believe in. A song—something about peace, something about people. She switched it off.

Put the car in drive.

Pulled away from the house.

And somewhere in the quiet, the song went on—

Imagine all the people...



For the most part, it went smoothly. She only swerved once.

Only clipped one mailbox.

Not her fault.

The shift did it. The slight change.

The sun had barely broken the horizon when she rolled into the Target lot on Bainbridge's edge, where the town blurred into Reminderville off Route 43.

She had choices. Other store locations. She'd measured them.

Macedonia was too busy—traffic, open sightlines.

Beachwood was impossible—guards, stocking crews, too many eyes.

Bainbridge was quiet. Tucked away. Close to her sister's school. She knew its aisles, its shelves. She knew what it carried.

She'd timed it—arrive too early and she'd be caught in the half-light of unopened doors, forced to wait while the building woke.

So she stopped first.

The Starbucks by the strip mall glowed warm. She slid inside, the air steeped in roasted espresso and steamed milk

A child. Alone. Ordering a drink.

They looked at her, of course. The barista's gaze lingered too long. But no one had seen her park. No one had seen the driver's seat sit empty. No one stopped her.

Confidence was currency. Smile, steady voice, folded bills from her mother's stash. That was all it took.

She walked out with a sweating cup in hand, sweet syrup clinging to crushed ice. Just another morning oddity.

Now the Target doors yawned open. Fluorescence. Tile polished to shine.

She stepped inside, Frappuccino nearly gone, straw squeaking against the bottom.

Cameras caught her. People didn't.

At first, she blended. A quiet child slipping into the hum of carts and lists. But eyes always find the edges.

A shopper glanced, frowned. An employee hesitated, cloth pausing against the checkout screen. A second glance, then a shrug.

Some kids wander. Some kids know their way.

She did.

The cart rattled under her small frame, wheels shivering against the floor. She leaned into it, sleeves of her shirt tugged high against the effort, each push deliberate.

She turned into clothing. Plastic and detergent in the air.

Stopped at the coats.

Fingers skimmed the fabrics until they found it—red, puffed, enormous. She tugged it free, slipped it on.

The bulk swallowed her whole. Sleeves hung loose, whispering across the tile like phantom limbs.

She studied the mirror.

The girl staring back was different. Altered. Improved.

A green-tinted bag sat nearby, sheer and pretty. She considered it.

No. She wouldn't need one. Didn't even need the coat. Where she was going, rules waited. Rules about what could pass through—and what could not.

She turned away.

Walked.

The freezer aisle stirred awake at her presence. Glass doors lit in sequence, motion-sensor sparks chasing her down the row.

She stopped at frozen fruit. Frost thick on the glass. Reached. Pulled.

One bag of sour grapes. Then another. Then another.

Twelve in all. She emptied the shelf, stacked them neatly in the cart.

Cold air coiled around her, clinging to the red fabric before fading. She exhaled, a faint mist curling from her lips.

That was it. That was all.

The wheels rattled as she turned, lights blinking dark again in her wake.

She steered toward self-checkout, the red coat a cocoon around her body. Sleeves dragged over the bar, sliding loose again, trailing like a second set of hands.

She tore open a bag.

Dug in.

A frozen sour grape between her teeth—sharp cold, sour tang, the strange candy shell cracking on her tongue.

Her jaw clenched, then released.

Another.

Another.

Her teeth ached, but she didn't stop.

On the way to self-checkout, she drifted past the cards.

A wall of sympathy in pastel shades and muted silvers.

Bereavement—front and center.

Not hidden. Not softened.

Necessary.

Her fingers grazed a navy envelope.

In Loving Memory.

With Deepest Sympathy.

Gone, but never forgotten.

Eight years old, and she knew why.

Too many deaths to ignore.

Families shielding children with closed doors, hushed tones, TV screens flicked dark.

But you can't hide the world shifting.

Even from children.

Especially from the ones who aren't ordinary.

Her gaze snagged on one card—soft blue, letters pressed in gold:

The pain of today will give way to the joy of tomorrow.

She paused.

Then laughed.

A raw, jagged laugh. Loud, sudden, spilling out of her like a break in a dam.

It cracked through the silence, manic and uncontained.

Customers froze mid-step.

She laughed harder. Tears streaking down her face. Breath hitching.

The cart clattered away from her hands as her small body buckled.

She crumpled to the tile, overcome.

The laugh rolled through her in violent bursts. Her arms flailed, sleeves of the red coat whipping and snapping across the floor like they had life of their own.

Wild tendrils. Phantom limbs.

People stared.

A cashier stilled, hand hovering over a barcode.

A woman near gift wrap hugged her basket close, eyes wide, torn between stepping forward or running.

And still, Chloe laughed.

Still, she writhed—like a puppet with its strings cut, limbs jerking in unnatural rhythm.

Until—

Hup.

A hiccup.

Haaah.

A gasp.

The sound sputtered. Slowed.

Her chest heaved. Her own breathing replaced the hysteria.

She lay spread across the tile, sleeves stretched like shed skin.

Then—smooth as anything—she sat up.

She picked up the purse. Slung it over her shoulder.

Stood.

Pushed the cart forward again, breath still uneven, shoulders quivering with leftover spasms.

The red sleeves swung wild. The purse hung heavy.

Inside, Bear slept.

Twelve bags of grapes stacked neat, one already opened.

She ate another as she moved.

By the time she reached self-checkout, her laughter had gone silent.

But Bear stirred.

Its head poked out—fur now patched with orange, eyes inverted, black sclera gleaming, white pupils fixed on everything.

She bent close, whispered.

Bear yawned, blinked in the sterile light, and went back to sleep.

She scanned the coat still wrapped around her, the grapes she'd taken.

Her sleeve slipped forward, almost pressing the button itself.

The machine beeped.

Chloe smiled faintly. Her voice drifted, quoting words she barely understood, words older than she was allowed to be:

"The darkness drops again… and what rough beast, its hour come round at last, slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?"

Another grape.

A slow chew.

Her eyes wandered past aisles, past walls, past the ordinary world.

To what came next.

In another life, it could have been just another Saturday.

But this was the last trip.

Everyone's last trip.



Back at home, Chloe's absence pressed into the walls like weight. Her sister stirred first, frowning at the empty bed.

At first it was annoyance—Chloe always woke early, but never went far. Usually on the couch with the iPad, or humming in her room. But this silence wasn't the usual quiet. It was heavier. The kind that clung.

She knocked on their mother's door.

"Mom? Chloe's gone."

A groggy sigh, rustle of sheets. Their mother surfaced from sleep like someone dragging free of deep water.

"Check the couch."

"I did."

A pause. Slow tension unfurling.

Their mother sat up, blinking hard and looked around the house.

Chloe wasn't in her bed.

Wasn't in the living room.

Wasn't anywhere.

Then she saw it.

The iPad. On the kitchen floor. Shattered.

Spiderweb cracks streaking across the glass.

Her stomach lurched. Not just because it was broken. Chloe never would've left it like that. She was careful. Always careful.

Then another detail. Small. Easy to miss in half-light.

Near the counter. Near the purse that should've been there.

A smear.

Dark. Thin. Streaked across tile.

Not water.

Not milk.

Not juice.

Something else. Half-dried. Viscous. Sheened strangely in the pale morning light.

Her pulse snapped sharp. Panic surged up her throat.

She called Chloe's name. Once. Twice. Louder.

No answer.

She turned toward the window.

The driveway was empty.

The car was gone.

Her breath caught hard in her chest.

The police were called.

Neighbors stirred. Word spread.

Doorbell footage showed Chloe walking out, purse slung across her body, climbing into the SUV.

The car pulling away.

Driven by a girl too small for the wheel.

Driven by a girl who seemed to know how.

Minutes stretched long and unbearable.

Then—the phone rang. Dispatch. They had the car.

Abandoned in a Target lot.

Relief. Anger. Terror. All at once.

She clutched the phone, voice breaking.

“I’m on my way.”

The call ended.

The phone slipped from her hand.

It struck the tile.

A crack loud enough to jolt her daughters in the next room.

They flinched, eyes wide, waiting for her to move.

But she froze instead.

Something shifted in her.

A wrongness. Subtle, but absolute.

The sisters felt it.

Mouths open. Breath caught.

The scream never came.

It was quick.

It was inevitable.

It was the end.

The house stilled.

Morning stretched on.

And soon, the world followed.



The police found her just outside Target.

Calm. Small bags dangling from her arms. A red coat far too large for her frame. Cheeks flushed from the cold. Still chewing frozen sour grapes, one after another, each bite making her jaw clench tight, her fingertips raw from holding the bag.

They didn't rush her.

Didn't grab.

Didn't scold.

"Hey, sweetie," one officer said gently, crouching low. "Your mom's been worried. Let's get you home, alright?"

She nodded once.

Glanced at the sky, her gaze lingering as though testing it.

Another grape.

"The street shifted," she murmured.

The officer blinked. "Shifted?"

Her voice was soft, almost distracted.

"Yeah."

Nothing more.

She let them guide her to the patrol car. The purse pressed against her side. The grapes stacked neatly in the plastic bags. She tugged the red collar higher to her chin, face half-hidden.

It didn't matter what she said.

They would never believe her.

To them, streets stayed still. Skies never changed. The world was permanent. Solid.

And she was only a child.

The kind of child who said strange things under stress.

The kind of child adults dismissed.

She swallowed another grape, eyes unfocused.

They couldn't see it.

They wouldn't.

The TV had gone blank for a reason.

And soon, so would everything else.

A sound filled the car—soft, steady, rising under the hum of the engine.

Her.

The two officers exchanged a quick glance in the mirror, uneasy at the tune carrying from the backseat.

One asked gently, "That the only part of the song you know?"

She paused, lips curling faintly. "Heard it this morning on the radio. Hated it."

Then she went right back to humming, almost brighter now, like she enjoyed the way it unnerved them.

The melody was unmistakable:

Imagine there's no heaven

It's easy if you try

No hell below us

Above us, only sky

Imagine all the people

Livin' for today...



Back at the police station, the strangeness deepened.

Chloe sat quietly in the corner, legs folded, the oversized red coat pooled around her like shed skin. An open Target bag rested in her lap. A few bags of frozen sour grapes. She plucked one, popped it into her mouth, bit down. The sharp crack carried too loud in the still room.

The puppy—ivory fur, orange patches—slept pressed to her thigh. Bear. Her other bags stacked at her feet.

She ate. And watched.

The officers exchanged low whispers. Uneasy glances. A few tried to keep working at their desks, but their movements slowed, distracted by the small figure in the corner who didn't fidget, didn't whimper, didn't cry.

She only ate.

Her eyes fixed on the TV in the corner. The screen flickered —static pulsing faintly, like a heartbeat, like the dying flare of a star.

Of course. The TV had been the first to falter. She had known it would.

She'd always known.

An officer cleared his throat, shifting, stepping forward. "Hey, sweetie," he tried, voice lighter than he felt. "Might wanna slow down with those grapes, huh?"

Instead of slowing, she shifted. Chloe leaned down, dragged one of the crumpled Target bags closer, and poured the half-frozen grapes into it in a neat little avalanche. Then another bag. And another.

Six in all, emptied one by one until a single swollen sack of grapes sat heavy in her lap.

She stuffed the emptied plastic skins into a second bag, smoothed its edges flat, and tucked it beneath the chair with quiet precision. Then she climbed back into the seat, red coat pooling around her, and started eating again—straight from the consolidated bag.

A few officers traded glances. One huffed out a soft chuckle, the kind that wasn't sure if it was laughing *at* or *with* her. Others just watched, the air in the room bending strange around the sound of her chewing.

In the background, phones rang unanswered. Fingers tapped at keyboards, pulling up databases that gave them nothing.

Another officer approached, crouched slightly, forcing a smile. "Can you tell me your mom's name again?"

Chloe looked up, face calm. Still chewing.

"It doesn't matter," she said evenly. "She doesn't matter. Not anymore."

That tone—flat, distant, too certain—set something in his stomach twisting.

The room shifted.

A hush. Heads tilted, like animals scenting the air.

The Target bag sagged heavy in her lap. She reached in, pulled out a single grape, rolled it across her palm, feeling the frost slick against her skin.

"Because they're already gone," she murmured.

A silence stretched too long.

"Gone?" he asked.

She didn't answer right away. Her gaze had drifted past him, past all of them. Somewhere else. Somewhere beyond.

Then she whispered, almost dreamlike—

"Most people forget. They forget the world before this one. They forget the space between silence and breath, the place between waking and the long, endless dream. I didn't. Insunment's don't. Can't."

The officer leaned back without realizing it. His hand brushed the edge of his holster.

She plucked another grape, then another, chewing steadily, her words sliding between the sound of her teeth breaking frost.

"I have flown where the air shimmers like glass. I have swum where the matter hums like a drum, trembling beneath the weight of something vast... unexplainable. Unholy."

The air in the station grew colder. Metallic.

Her small hand plunged into the bag again, fingers scraping the bottom. Then she stopped. Looked at the officers. Looked past them. Smiled.

And without hesitation—she shoved the entire bag into her mouth.

Plastic crumpled, crackled, shrieked against her teeth. Grapes burst in a gush of frost. The officers jolted, one nearly drawing his weapon. Her jaw stretched wide, too wide, unhinging with a wet crack. Her cheeks ballooned, grotesque.

A few grapes tumbled free, bouncing across the floor. The rest vanished into her.

She kept pushing, cramming the bag down, the red-and-white Target logo warping, disappearing between her lips. The plastic handles stretched tight, then dragged past her teeth, slipping into her throat like a snake swallowing something far too large.

The sound of it—wet suction, plastic tearing against flesh—filled the station. Someone gagged. Another officer stumbled back into a desk, knocking over a lamp.

Her throat bulged. Her ribs bowed outward, groaning like wet wood. Frost crawled across her skin in branching veins.

"There are things there," she rasped around the mass, her voice muffled, deeper now, vibrating from somewhere below speech. "Great beasts crowned in flame and bone. Not gods. Not demons. Keepers."

The bag disappeared completely. Her chest swelled grotesquely, her skin translucent and straining, her body convulsing as if filled with something alive.

The sound that came from her wasn't a scream—it was lower, heavier, vibrating through the walls. A resonance. A signal. Windows fractured. Plaster dust rained from the ceiling.

And then—

She swallowed.

All of it.

Plastic and grapes alike.

The sound was wet, strangled, unnatural. A gurgling suction that pulled at the air. For an instant she was monstrous, wrong, swollen with something her body shouldn't contain.

And then—

She was simply a child again. Sitting still.

Calm.

Her breath escaped soft, measured.

And she whispered, almost tender—

"I remember its name..."

Her lips parted.

"...Aztalhün."

The lights didn't just flicker this time.

They died.

Darkness swallowed the station—not the absence of light, but something heavier, denser. Vantablack, pure and depthless, as if the world itself had blinked shut. For a heartbeat, they

thought their eyes had closed. But no one had blinked. They were awake. They were present. And still, the dark held them.

Seconds passed—or more.

When it lifted, when the world returned, Chloe was gone.

All that remained—

A few limp Target bags.

A red coat.

A handful of grapes scattered on the floor, blackened and petrified, fused together like charred stones.

And the small, sleeping thing in the chair.

The officers stood frozen, their faces pale beneath the fluorescent light. Outside, the sirens had stopped. The world itself seemed to have gone mute, air sucked hollow by the absence of what had been there only moments ago.

Someone exhaled sharply. The sound cracked like thunder against silence.

They all stared at the empty space where the girl had been.

Humans don't just vanish.

But she had.

"What the fuck?" someone whispered.

Another step. Hesitant. Eyes darting between one another, then to the chair. Empty.

And then—Bear.

The puppy still lay there. Small, motionless. Seemingly untouched by whatever had just occurred. Its chest rose and fell in steady rhythm, as if it were only napping, innocent, untroubled.

Then, a twitch.

A shiver.

Its lids fluttered. A whimper bled into the air.

Thin and pitiful.

The kind of sound that slipped beneath skin and gnawed from the inside.

The beginning of the everlasting ending.

The harbinger turned fissure.

The fissure births the crack.

The crack frees the legion.

The legion brings it back.

Another whimper.

Then a bark.

Sharp. Wrong.

The officers stiffened. Exchanged looks that begged each other to dismiss it, to call it nerves, imagination, exhaustion.

But then Bear stirred again.

Its body lengthened. Muscles flexed and rolled, skin tightening as though something vast beneath had been restrained too long. The soft, ivory fur shimmered with unnatural sheen.

"Is it... getting bigger?" one officer asked, voice trembling.

He wasn't imagining it.

Within seconds, Bear was no puppy. Its frame swelled broad and brutal, its head heavy, eyes too wide and too aware—black sclera rimmed with stark white pupils, staring through them, into them.

It barked again. Louder. Wrong.

The chair groaned beneath its weight, metal bending. Its paws pressed into the tile, claws dragging furrows through the linoleum. A deep growl rumbled low in its chest—like distant thunder that only grew closer.

No one moved.

No choice mattered.

Stay or flee—the flavor was all that would change.

Bang.

Bang.

Bang.

Gunfire thundered through the room.

The bullets struck clean, lodging square in its chest.

Nothing.

The fur rippled faintly, then sealed. The bullets disappeared as though they had never been.

Bear didn't flinch. Didn't blink.

Didn't care.

"Jesus," someone whispered. "What the hell is that?"

No one answered.

Not their brothers in blue.

Not the savior he called to.

There were no gods here.

Not now.

Only the everlasting ending.

Imagine a place without heaven.

Without hell.

Without countries or hunger or greed.

A place with nothing to kill or die for.

No gods. No men.

Only consciousness.

Only despair.

Only sublime pain.

No imagination necessary.

It was real.

It was here.

Because the air was stagnant.

Wrong.

And, because a harbinger had a dream.

Omen.

And, because Bear was awake.

Fissure.

And growing.

The station shuddered under its swelling mass. The ceiling cracked as its head scraped the panels. The chair splintered, collapsing into twisted metal beneath its weight. The fluorescent lights buzzed and flickered, warping the shadows into long, grotesque shapes.

Bear's breath steamed the air, hot and wet, thick enough to choke on. Its guttural snarl rumbled like tectonic plates shifting.

And then—

It opened its mouth.

Its chest heaved. The growl broke, jagged, into a wet choking sound.

Something rose inside it.

Something forcing its way free.

The noise was squelching, grotesque. A wet suction as if the body were both birthing and vomiting.

Then it came—

A mass slid out.

Hit the floor with a sickening thud.

Dark. Wet. Too organic.

Too familiar.

Too wrong.

Stomachs clenched.

Bear shuddered once. A final, ragged breath spilled from its maw, hot and sharp, before its enormous form collapsed. Limbs slack. Fur still.

Lifeless.

Silence.

The officers shook, weapons raised, useless. Their ears rang from echoes that weren't sound but something deeper.

They should leave.

No one moved.

Then—

A sound.

Soft. Wet.

The mass twitched.

Squelched.

A limb pushed outward.

A stretch.

Another.

It rose.

Two feet.

Two hands.

A body, slowly forming.

Then—walking.

Running.

Lunging.

And the everlasting ending began.

The harbinger turned fissure.

The fissure gave way to the crack.

The crack loosed the legion.

The legion brought Aztalhün back.

Things fell apart.

The center did not hold.

And anarchy loosed itself upon the world.

Before it all disappeared.

Again.

And again.

And again.



THANKS

If you've made it this far, thank you.

Maybe the story hooked you, maybe you just had to know how it ended—either way, I'm grateful.

Stories live by word of mouth.

If you liked this one, the best thing you can do is share it. Send it to a friend. Post it. Recommend it to someone who never reads—especially them.

And if you feel like it, I'd love to hear your thoughts.

Tweet me. Email me. Tell me if you loved it. Tell me if you didn't. Just... say something.

Because stories don't exist in a vacuum.

They live through the people who carry them forward.

As a small thank you, I've included a bonus snippet from *Quite Contrary*—a teaser, sure, but also something I loved.

And had to cut.

Writers call it *killing your darlings*. It sounds brutal because it is.

Some scenes just don't fit the final rhythm—even if they're good.

So we cut. We prune. We let go. Even when it hurts.

That's what this is:

A path that once existed, now paved over.

But this morning (08.17.2025), I had an idea:

What if I started sharing these?

What if every short story came with a lost piece—something that didn't quite make it, or hasn't found its place yet?

This is the first.

The first "cut scene," slipped in like a secret epilogue.

Maybe it'll come from *Quite Contrary*.

Maybe from a novel I've scrapped.

Maybe from something not yet written.

But whatever it is—I believed in it.

And now it's yours.

Novel-only readers won't see these.

They'll get the myth, the meaning, the bones.

But *you*—you'll feel the heartbeat underneath.

You'll know a little more.

www.jonasthane.com

@JThaneThings on X

SNIPPET: QUITE CONTRARY

Wairy's eyes narrowed.

"What about all that death and destruction is funny?"

"Nothing," said the woman with the golden eyes. "And everything. Depends how you look at it.

No, I wasn't responsible for it.

But you called it a calamity, and I found that word... fitting. Would you like to hear a story about the first one?"

Wairy hesitated, then nodded. "Sure."

The woman's gaze turned distant, her voice smooth and steady as she began. It was the kind of voice you lean toward, drawn in by the weight behind the words.

"The word calamity has deep roots. Middle English took it from Old French, which took it from Latin—*calamitas*, meaning disaster.

Ruin.

But long before that, it belonged to a now-extinct tribe, once prominent in what is now called Arkansas. To them, it wasn't just a word. It was a warning. A name. A story."

She paused, as if she could still see them.

"They told of five gods—siblings without parents. In modern tongue, they were called The Five Shining Lights. Each governed an element and shaped the forces of the world.

"The eldest, Wiyaka, was sister of water—tied to rain, music, and life.

Her twin, Kachina, ruled fire—war, destruction, fertility.

The middle sister, Yaona, commanded the wind—storms, seasons, journeys.

The fourth, Manasha, belonged to earth—keeper of harvests and hidden truths."

Her tone softened, reverent.

"And the youngest... was a brother. Nokomis. Unlike his sisters, he had no domain. No element. No power of his own.

But he was loved—deeply.

Protected. Cherished. Their jewel."

The woman turned her face toward the horizon, where sky bled into memory.

"Together, the sisters shaped the world. They made oceans, skies, sunlight. They filled the land with grasses, creatures, song. But their greatest gift—the one crafted just for Nokomis—was humanity.

"They sculpted four women, reflections of themselves. Each with three breasts, like their creators. Then, from one breast of each, they shaped the first four men.

"It was a gift. A way to show him he wasn't alone. Wasn't powerless. That he had something to guide. Something to protect."

Her voice dropped.

"But it broke him.

"For the first time, he didn't feel cherished. He saw himself through their eyes. He felt... lesser. Weak. A mistake. And in that fracture, something inside him stirred."

The pause that followed was long. Heavy.

"He found his element.

Not one—but all.

His domain became everything. And nothing.

He was destruction incarnate.

And his name became Cala'mati."

Her lips barely moved. "In the language of the Five, it meant Everlasting Ending."

A breath caught in Wairy's throat.

"His power was absolute.

The oceans churned.

The skies cracked.

The ground tore.

Fire devoured the land.

His sisters tried to stop him—but he was their culmination. Their ruin, wrapped in their love. And when at last he saw what he'd done..."

She exhaled.

"...he cast himself into the void. Fled to the stars. Left his sisters to rebuild the world he had nearly ended."

Silence thickened around them, as if the air itself remembered.

The woman's voice was almost a whisper now. "The tribe who told this story is gone. But their word endured. *Cala'mati* passed through tongues and centuries—*calamitas*, *calamité*, then finally... *calamity*.

A warning, in every language.

Funny, isn't it? Every word we speak carries the weight of forgotten lives. Forgotten gods. And forgotten monsters."

Wairy's voice was small. "And after the sisters rebuilt the world?"

"They mourned their brother.

But carried on.

Humanity thrived again, though the scars never fully healed."

Wairy's thoughts drifted to Florida.

The calamity.

The violence.

The impossible weight of all that death.

"And the—what happened in Florida?" she asked. "Was that... was that Cala'mati?"

The stunning golden eyed woman tilted her head. Her smile was strange and hollow.

"No," she said.

"That was just a story.

A *myth*."