

TAKE A NUMBER

Written by

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EXT. GATEWAY SERVICES - PARKING LOT - MORNING

Gateway Services is the only business left in the decrepit strip.

An extremely long line of antsy PEOPLE stretch across the building's front and around the corner.

An antique, black hearse rambunctiously pulls into the parking lot and up onto the curb, plowing into the waiting line who dart away.

The door opens and a foot steps out, quickly covered by the tail of a ragged, black cloak. His face is hidden by the large hood.

The GRIM REAPER, a gleaming scythe in his hand, sulks to the doors and enters.

INT. GATEWAY SERVICES - WAITING ROOM

Your typical waiting room, similar to the DMV - the floor covered with chairs and sofas and televisions lining the walls, all playing a different program. The room is already packed with GHOULS anxiously waiting.

Four small cubicles line the wall, an elderly ATTENDANT at each of them except for the last, which is occupied by KYLE (26) - a handsome young man. Each are speaking to a ghoul.

GRIM REAPER

Good morning ladies... and Kyle!
New batch!

The Grim Reaper switches on the "open" sign and pushes open the door. The line from inside files in, each taking a number from the pull machine searching for an unoccupied seat.

The Grim Reaper trudges past the cubicles toward the door in the back of the room.

GRIM REAPER (CONT'D)

Hello Phyllis.

PHYLLIS (90) - grey haired and adorned in floral patterns - works in the first cubicle and is speaking with a MONK(85).

PHYLLIS

(to the Grim Reaper)
Good morning!
(to the Monk)
(MORE)

PHYLLIS (CONT'D)
So the rebirthing room is right
down that hallway.

GERDA (97) - her cubicle covered in pictures of cats - helps
a young WOMAN (27).

GRIM REAPER
Gerda.

Gerda ignores him. She and the young woman are bent over a
pamphlet.

GERDA
(to woman)
Because you're agnostic you have a
bunch of different package options.

AGATHA (87) - a short, plump lady covered head to toe in a
green outfit with laces of green in her hair - types madly
away on her computer. The BOY (9) she was assisting, skips
down the hall that Phyllis pointed to earlier.

GRIM REAPER
Hello Aggie.

AGATHA
I told you not to call me that.

She stops typing on her computer.

AGATHA (CONT'D)
Number 9,826!

A DOCTOR (57) - wearing scrubs and a stethoscope - looks down
at the number in his hand. It says "87,032."

A FRANTIC GHOUL (45), trying to pull unbudging hair from his
ghostly head, sits with Kyle.

FRANTIC GHOUL
No, you don't understand. I'm too
young for this! How could I have
known?

KYLE
(trying to calm down the
Frantic Ghoul)
There's nothing to worry about. You
can fill it out here.

Kyle reaches into the filing cabinet and pulls out a stack of
clipped papers. The top sheet says "Last Will and Testament."

FRANTIC GHOUL
 I'm already dead!
 (to self)
 How will my kids survive?

Kyle catches the Grim Reaper trying to sneak past.

KYLE
 Grim! Can you please tell this guy
 that he can file his will here and
 everything will be fine?

The Grim Reaper's shoulders shrug as he lets out a sigh.

GRIM REAPER
 Look, Kyle here's a pro and -

FRANTIC GHOUL
 You're a liar! This won't work-

The Grim Reaper swipes his scythe so fast that the Frantic Ghoul doesn't falter. The entire room has gone silent and stares at the Grim Reaper and Frantic Ghoul.

FRANTIC GHOUL (CONT'D)
 -at all.

The Frantic Ghoul's head rolls into his lap and he yelps.

FRANTIC GHOUL (CONT'D)
 My head. My head! No, no, no, no!

Frantic Ghouls tries to reattach his head, but it just rolls back into his lap.

GRIM REAPER
 Kyle, please be sure to see this
 ghoul's paperwork properly filed
 and then send him down the hall to
 Martha.
 (to Frantic Ghoul)
 She'll fix ya right up.

The Grim Reaper strolls into his office. The door SLAMS!
 shut.

INT. GATEWAY SERVICES - REAPER'S OFFICE

The Grim Reaper hangs up his cloak on a rack by the door, revealing that the Grim Reaper is not in fact a man, but a young woman named CEPH (28). She has long blond hair and wears a white shirt and tie. She turns on an old dial tv.

INT. GATEWAY SERVICES - WAITING ROOM

Restless ghosts move about the room. There are only a few more ghosts in the line from the morning.

AGATHA

Down the hall there's an elevator and you'll hit the "up" button to get to Heaven.

KYLE

Do you have any questions?

PHYLLIS

We don't usually do this, but since you died at the same time I guess we can figure something out. Wait, you're of different beliefs? You'll have to pick one if you want to stay together.

AGATHA

Number 13,854!

KYLE

Number 13,855!

GERDA

Make sure not to forget your coin, Charon gets fussy if you don't have it.

LUCIA (25) - short, black choppy hair and wearing a leather jacket - appears at the entrance in front of the pull machine with a POOF! The sign reads "Take a Number." She takes number 147,842 and finds an empty seat nearby.

INT. GATEWAY SERVICES - REAPER'S OFFICE

Ceph is leaning back in a chair, her feet propped up on the desk. A BMX race plays on the old television. A string of BIKERS (19-25) race on a hilly and muddy track.

BMX ANNOUNCER

This is first for many of these athletes as the venue was changed at short notice due to a fire at Rucker's Stadium.

The bikers huddle closer around the final turn. From the back, a rogue competitor - CONNOR MACINTYRE (22) - appears over the hill, trailing far behind the other bikers.

Gaining, he jerks right, chugging up the slope and soaring over the gap, completely bypassing the turn.

BMX ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)
And there's Connor MacIntyre
stunning not only his competitors
but it looks like the audience as
well!

Connor lands, taking first place, but loses control of his bike. It rapidly shakes and slides into the rail, taking him with it.

Ceph leaps up, throws on her cloak and rushes out into the waiting room.

INT. GATEWAY SERVICES - WAITING ROOM

GRIM REAPER

Out of the way! Out of the way!

Now as the Reaper, he shoves ghouls to the side.

Connor MacIntyre appears at the pull machine with a POOF!.

GRIM REAPER (CONT'D)
(casual)
Hey Connor! If you have your
frequent visitor card, I'll stamp
it for you!

Connor screams, throws his hands in the air, and runs out the door.

The Reaper's shoulders drop and he sulks back toward his office.

GRIM REAPER (CONT'D)
Lucky fool.

INT. AMBULANCE

Sirens blare as the ambulance races down the highway. Connor lays on a stretcher, eyes closed, as EMTs attending to him. His eyes flutter open, frantic. He lets out a LAUGH.

INT. GATEWAY SERVICES - WAITING ROOM

The board behind the desk reads "Now Serving 34,182." Lucia looks down at number 147,842 in her hand.

Each attendant is occupied. A SOLDIER sits opposite Kyle, signing a large stack of papers. After the soldier's signed it, Kyle takes each form, rolls it into a tube and holds it over his shoulder. It vanishes in a puff of smoke.

Lucia pockets her pull tab and storms up to Agatha's desk.

AGATHA

(to CLIENT)

So with the package you've chosen -

LUCIA

This is outrageous. I've been here for two days and my number's not even close.

AGATHA

Excuse me! Can you not see that I am currently helping another guest?

LUCIA

I want to speak to your supervisor.

The room goes silent. GASPS and OOHS are heard.

AGATHA

Oh you do, do you?

Agatha picks up her phone and punches a button.

INT. GATEWAY SERVICES - REAPER'S OFFICE

Ceph's leaned back in her chair eating popcorn. An MMA fight plays on the dial tv. The phone rings. She presses the speaker button.

CEPH

What?

AGATHA (ON PHONE)

You're being requested up front.

CEPH

By who?

INT. GATEWAY SERVICES - WAITING ROOM

Agatha looks Lucia over.

AGATHA

Some punk chick. Seems like one of those million-ennials.

Lucia wrenches the phone out of Agatha's hands.

LUCIA
This is absurd. I want to speak to
you immediately.

The phone line goes dead. Lucia stares at the phone in
disgust.

AGATHA
I'll take that back, now.

Ceph as herself briskly exits the office and stomps up to
Lucia.

CEPH
What can I help you with, ma'am?

LUCIA
I asked for a manager.

CEPH
I am -

Ceph realizes that she's not dressed as the Grim Reaper.

CEPH (CONT'D)
Yes- yes, you did. And he sent me.
What can I help you with?

LUCIA
I've been waiting two days and I'd
like to be helped immediately.

CEPH
Look around. You see all these
ghouls? They're waiting just like
you. What makes you so special?

LUCIA
I have a life to get on with.

CEPH
A life, yeah? You know where you
are right now? You're at the gates.
In passing. You're dead,
sweetheart.

LUCIA
Then I'd like to get on with
whatever's next.

CEPH

Ok, ok. Here's what I can do for you. You can either wait like everybody else, or you can go down that hallway and take the elevator to floor zero. They don't have much of a line in the Underworld. But just know that the Reaper can make your stay for as long as he likes so don't tempt him.

Lucia HUFFS and walks down to the elevator. She enters and pushes button 0. The doors close.

INT. UNDERWORLD

The elevator doors open into a dark crypt with a tinted glass floor. Torches of black fire line the walls of the cave-like room. In the center, a cloaked figure sits in a black, jagged throne carved out of a stalactite.

The elevator doors open. As Lucia steps out a robed figure emerges from the shadows.

FIGURE

(raspy)
Coin, please.

Lucia pats her pockets.

LUCIA

I wasn't given a coin.

FIGURE

No coin, no judgement. To the Fields of Asphodel you go.

LUCIA

The Fields or Aeropostale?

FIGURE

Do not make fun of the name, girl!

HADES

Enough, Charon. Leave the girl alone.

The cloaked figure rises from his throne and steps out of the shadows. LORD HADES (38) is a handsome, dark haired man marked with a scar down his cheek.

HADES (CONT'D)

She obviously does not know what she's doing here.

(to Lucia)

What brings you here? I smell no Greek blood in you.

LUCIA

Fast-faster wait time.

HADES

Yes, that is true. Centuries ago my crypt was overflowing with souls, but now very few find their way down here. So yes, as you put it, faster wait times. Enter immediately into the Fields of Asphodel.

The center of glass floor becomes clear to reveal an island - a dark shade of grey and covered with wispy fog - below.

HADES (CONT'D)

Or face my judgment with a chance to live in pure harmony and bliss.

The glass clears more to show an island to the left of the Fields of Asphodel. It's bright and covered in green trees and sandy beaches.

HADES (CONT'D)

Or be punished eternally for the wrongdoings you chose in your life.

The glass clears all the way and we see a burning red island to the far right. Its ground is scorched and muffled screams attempt to break the glass barrier.

Lucia begins to back track to the elevator.

LUCIA

You know what? You're right. Not a bit of Greek blood in my body. Not sure how I ended up here, but I'll let you know if I change my mind.

She frantically presses the close doors button.

HADES

Come back anytime.

INT. GATEWAY SERVICES - WAITING ROOM

Lucia quickly shuffles past the desk and Ceph to an open seat. All eyes are on her.

CEPH
(smirking)
Welcome back.

LUCIA
Shut up.

Ceph goes back into her office.

INT. GATEWAY SERVICES - MONTAGE

- Ghouls move around Lucia in fast forward throughout the entire montage.
- Agatha and Phyllis hang up a large Valentine's Day banner. Lucia sleeps in her chair.
- Ceph peeks through her office blinds, watching Lucia.
- Lucia wakes up to a box of chocolates at her feet. She kicks them away.
- Gerda and Phyllis take down the Valentine's day banner. Inflatable palm trees and other beach-themed blowups are strewn around the waiting room.
- The numbers on the "Now Serving" board rapidly change.
- Thanksgiving decorations hang from the ceiling.

INT. GATEWAY SERVICES - WAITING ROOM

Lucia is curled into a ball asleep. Kyle walks over and drapes a thick blanket over her. She stirs.

LUCIA
I've been here long enough to know
that ghosts don't get cold.

KYLE
Yeah, I know, but this wasn't my
idea. It's a comfort thing. Feels
like you're alive again.

LUCIA
What's your story?

KYLE

It's not a good one.

LUCIA

You're young, handsome, and nice.
I'm sure you didn't end up here on
purpose.

KYLE

Swallowed a bottle of pills. Ended
up here same as you. My number was
never called. Ceph offered me a job
and I took it. Wasn't about to sit
here and twiddle my thumbs for
eternity or until whenever the
universe thought it was a good time
to let me pass on.

(a beat)

She's not a bad person, Ceph.

LUCIA

Let me guess, this was her idea.

(a beat)

Well, I'm not cold. Thanks but no
thanks.

She hands him the blanket.

KYLE

Really though, she's not a bad
person. She's worth giving a
chance.

INT. GATEWAY SERVICES - WAITING ROOM - LATER

Lucia reads one of the "Life Help" pamphlets off of the
table. Connor MacIntyre slumps into a chair beside her.

LUCIA

Excuse me. Oh, you're that dirt
bike kid. Connor, right?

CONNOR

The one and only. Guess my time's
up.

He shows her his pull tab, number 394,231.

LUCIA

And now the waiting game?

CONNOR

And now the waiting game.

GRIM REAPER (INTERCOM)
 It's come to my attention we have a
 celebrity in our midst! Connor
 MacIntyre, please see Kyle at
 cubicle four!

Connor walks to Kyle. Kyle points in the direction of the hallway and hands Connor a keycard. Connor passes Lucia on his way to the elevator.

LUCIA
 Unbelievable.

INT. GATEWAY SERVICES - WAITING ROOM - WEEKS LATER

Colorful lights hang across the ceiling and a grand evergreen sits in the corner. Soft Christmas music plays. Kyle, Gerda, and Phyllis are all gone, their cubicles dark.

Agatha meets with a young woman (28) in her cubicle. The young woman gets up, they hug, and she walks toward the elevator. The "Now Serving" sign changes from 147,841 to 147,842.

Lucia bounds up to Agatha's cubicle as she's turning off her desk lamp.

LUCIA
 Hi, I'm number 147,842.

AGATHA
 Hours are closed.

LUCIA
 But this is the Underworld. You can't close. What about everyone who's died?

AGATHA
 Underworld stays open. Gateway Services closes for the holidays. See you in two weeks.

Agatha shuffles out the front door. Lucia collapses into her chair.

INT. GATEWAY SERVICES - WAITING ROOM - DAYS LATER

It's A Wonderful Life blares on all the televisions. Lucia's curled in a ball in her chair, trying to block out the noise. Ceph slides out of her office with two mugs of hot cocoa. She offers one to Lucia.

LUCIA
Ghosts don't need to drink.

CEPH
Doesn't mean it doesn't taste good.

Lucia accepts the cocoa and takes a sip.

LUCIA
Thanks.
(a beat)
So what's your story?

CEPH
My story?

LUCIA
Yeah, why are you here. Seems like everyone here has some sort of over dramatic story. Why do you get to live forever shuffling people to the next place?

(pause)
Is it your punishment? Like you were a terrorist and now you have to see everyone else move forward while you're stuck here?

CEPH
First off, no one's stuck here.
Second, I'm here because of my mom.

LUCIA
So your mom sold to the devil!

CEPH
My mom died when I was young.

LUCIA
Oh, I'm sorry.

CEPH
I got in a car crash while on my gap year after college. Gateway Services had an opening and the Grim Reaper offered me the job. Work here for a while and I get to see my mom on the weekends. I took the deal.

LUCIA
So why are you still here?
Shouldn't you be with here on Christmas?

CEPH

I'm actually on my way out, but
wanted to make sure you're okay.

LUCIA

(suddenly cold)

It's Christmas and I'm here. *Here.*

(pause)

I'm dead and alone and here you are
getting to go spend it with
somebody you love. Yeah, I'm grand.