

The Vigil

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The Vigil

by [Sixteenthdays](#)

Summary

[GRIAN]

This one is... quite old. The statements on these shelves are a complete jumble in terms of organization, but most of them are from the past fifteen years or so, so I'm not sure if Etho put this one here on purpose for some reason or if it's just a mistake. At least it's clearly dated; if I'm reading this right, it was written in 1909, from a traveller who had recently returned from northern Africa.

Statement of unknown, regarding a candlelit monument in the Moroccan desert. Statement originally recorded October 29th, 1909. Statement begins.

Notes

See the end of the work for [notes](#)

Statement:



[Click]

[GRIAN]

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[GRIAN (STATEMENT)]

I know when I'm going to die.

I have so much time left- thirty years, two months, and a day. I'm fortunate. I try to tell myself I'm fortunate. That's time to marry, yet, to have children and raise them. But I know for every one of those hundreds of days I have remaining, the countdown will be there, lingering, in the back of my mind. I could pray for it to be wrong, but I know it would be pointless. I've seen my candle, and it didn't lie.

I was traveling down the western road from Marrakesh, some months ago. My party had left ahead of me, in the early afternoon after the worst of the heat had passed; I'd stayed behind to have a final supper with our hosts before continuing on. I'd planned to meet them in the next city.

My hosts had worried for me, travelling into the night. I'd assured them I'd be fine, but they weren't assuaged. They told me there were strange things along that road at night. I asked if it was anything dangerous, and they said it wasn't, but they didn't sound certain themselves. I told them I couldn't stay any longer, and eventually they let me go, but with firm instructions to not leave the road for any reason, no matter what I saw.

For all their cautions, though, the trip started out relatively normal. I wasn't the only one leaving the city, though most of my fellow travelers were only going to the outskirts or a little further. Eventually, they all fell away, and I was left alone, though it didn't dampen my mood. The evening was pleasantly warm, the heat of midday having long since faded away, and I passed the first several miles in good spirits.

It was well into the night, no one else on the road, when I first saw the lights. They were in the distance, then, just a bright blur well ahead of me. At the time I assumed it was probably a town, and I could perhaps find a short rest there before continuing on. Or maybe it was even the city I was bound for, and I'd arrived sooner than I'd expected.

As I drew closer, though, I couldn't make any more sense of the sight. It was some distance off the main road, with no path leading off to it, and as soon as I realized that, I was wary of approaching, remembering my hosts' warning. However, curiosity and hope for a place to rest a spell won out, and I stepped off the road and started toward that bright cluster of lights.

It was no town, though, that I came upon. Or at least, not one that had been inhabited in a hundred years or more. There were the remnants of low buildings, here and there, overgrown with desert scrub and collapsed into the ground, but not a single sign of life. My thought then was that the town had been built around a river or oasis that had dried up, and the people forced to leave. Now... I'm not sure what I think.

At the center of the dead town was a monument.

It was carved of some pale stone- sandstone, maybe- and decorated with what must have been copper. It jutted straight up into the sky, rising even further than I could make out. There were carvings all up its sides, though I couldn't read them. There were piles of toppled stonework surrounding it, signs that once upon a time an even greater structure had stood there, but now there was nothing left but the single tower, and... the lights.

The ground around the tower was saturated with lights. Candles, all mismatched in color and size. Many were small, no larger than tea lights; others were easily a foot tall. Some rested on ancient

pedestals and broken columns, but many others sat on the ground. They filled the broken streets of the dead town, radiating outwards from the tower, burning bright and fierce. They were uncountable.

I should have left then. I knew that whatever I had found, it was something ancient, and something that should not be disturbed. I've never been a religious man, but I had the same sense about it that I would of a church, or a mosque. Still, though, I couldn't do anything but draw closer, following the trails of light to the base of the monument, mesmerized.

And as I approached, I could see that not all of the candles were lit. There were some, dotted in among the forest of lights, that sat still darkened, wicks unburnt, more around the edges and fewer towards the center. It was clear they hadn't blown out; they'd simply never been lit.

There was a breeze; not a strong one, but present, certainly. And yet none of the candles so much as wavered. I knelt, to take a closer look at the nearest candle, curious to know what made it so resilient. But when I looked at it...

All at once, I was looking *through* the flame, at a life.

It was a shorter candle, and through it I watched a young woman in snapshots: helping to raise her younger siblings, folding dumplings in her mother's kitchen, being swept over in a young man's arms, dying at barely thirty from an illness that had lain dormant. And then I was blinking back to reality, still watching the candle burn, its images imprinted behind my eyes.

I don't remember starting to cry, but when I came back to myself, there were tears running down my cheeks.

Do you understand? They were all lives, all of them.

I could have looked longer. I could have looked through the windows of those flames into hundreds, thousands of ended lives- but in that moment, all I wanted was to run. It wasn't that the monument felt unnatural, but that it was *too* natural. I knew it was a piece of something *fundamental*, something grown from the world, something human eyes were never meant to see.

I stood. I turned to go.

My eyes fell on an unlit candle, standing alone amidst the lights, and before I could tear my eyes away, I saw my death.

I saw it as an outsider, looking in, as I had been an outsider observing that young woman's brief life and early death. I saw myself, older, grimmer, a child lingering at my heels, stepping outside to a thunderous sound, and-

I fled. I had to flee. I didn't want to see anything more. I had already seen far, far too much.

I've tried to banish the image from my mind, but I can't. On some level, I knew from the start it was futile. It will haunt me until it becomes real, until the countdown ends and my candle burns to life, out there in the lonely desert.

There is nothing more to say.

[Click]

[Click]

[GRIAN]

Even though the name on this statement either didn't survive or was never taken down, the date alone, if it's correct, is already quite convincing. If this statement was given in 1909, and the statement-giver's death was prophesied for thirty years after- well. It would match up quite well with the start of the Second World War.

Etho did leave what looks to be some handwritten notes on this statement, which might explain why it was so oddly filed, but honestly I can't make heads or tails of them. Something about... obituaries? And a name? I think it starts with an R... or maybe that's a P.

In any case-

(Knocking)

Yes?

[MUMBO]

Sorry, I'm not interrupting a recording or something, am I?

[GRIAN]

Oh, no problem, I was just finishing with this one. What is it?

[MUMBO]

There's a letter for you from the front desk. Or, er- for 'whoever's got Etho's job now.'

[GRIAN]

Oooh, *gimme-*

[Click]

Supplemental:

[Click]

[SCAR]

I *think* this is the right tape. *Well*, I'm like ninety percent sure. Eighty percent. Within an acceptable margin of error!

But *on* the off chance that this *is* the wrong tape, Grian's had me looking into obituaries and deaths and that sort of thing, especially, and I quote, "stuff that has the letters P and R."

Which is quite rude of him, if you ask me! That's an *incredibly* broad category! He didn't even give me a *timeframe*. And since it's been a week, and *he's* rushing around like a chicken with its head cut off and still insisting I look up like twenty other gruesome things too, I figured I'd just sneak into his office, record a quick update on tape about how I haven't found anything interesting, and then move on to other things.

Things that *don't* give me ideas for new, worse ways to die, ideally.

Actually, maybe I'll go triple verify one of the new statements he's tossed into the fakes pile after looking at it for two seconds max. (*Snickers*) That'll annoy-

(*Door opening*)

[GRIAN]

Scar, what are you doing?

[SCAR]

(*Without missing a beat*) -Ah, Grian, exactly the man I was hoping to see! I was, of course, just updating the record on my search for obituaries beginning with the letters P and or R.

[GRIAN]

And?

[SCAR]

The record says I didn't find anything.

[GRIAN]

Yeah, that's what I thought. I've been thinking, actually... It might make more sense to look for obituary *authors*, not obituary subjects. Just... considering. The, um, information and context.

(*Pause*)

[SCAR]

So what you're saying is I *can't* just abandon this line of research as impossible and go do something easier.

[GRIAN]

Well, since you're *offering*...

[SCAR]

Aw, Grian, *c'mon*...

[Click]

End Notes

my choice of setting for this statement was sort of arbitrary but the thing is i really want to go to morocco someday... i was looking at a bunch of pictures for this fic and. wow its so pretty.

the empires smp propaganda continues. this time i am telling you to [watch pixlriff's series](#) it's one of the shorter ones and the vibes are soooo excellent.

additionally, i now have another series called [from the archives: marginalia](#), for stuff i and my cowriter write that's associated with the au in one way or another but doesn't fit into this main series of statements. so if you want all the good bonus material, make sure to give that series a look as well!

next time we are finally gonna hear about that *other* guy who's been conspicuously missing! or, two of them, actually. :~)!

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