

The Watchman

By Sasha Gabriel

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H.H. Herbert was born in a hurry. Growing up, he didn't have time for friends or idle chatter. In college, he was teased that his middle name must be "Hurry."

He soon decided that his name, Harvey Hinton Herbert was too long to write, so he used his initials and last name.

One ordinary day, H.H. bought his subway ticket for work. He never looked at his ticket – he knew where he was going.

H.H. was a man on the move and he was in a hurry to get there.

Pushing through the crowd, he noticed an old man sitting on the floor. Next to him was a large oil lantern burning with a steady flame and a bowl of matches. Near the lantern was a sign.

AMEN WITH A MATCH

Never saw him before, H.H. thought with disgust. *Probably wants money. They all do.* The thoughts came fast and furious.

Turning away, he was astonished to find himself alone in the loading area.

Did the train come and they all got on except me? Was I so preoccupied with the old man that I missed my train?

Angry for making him late, H.H. was surprised to see the old man looking back at him, watching him.

What right does he have to look at me? Who does he think he is, anyway?

Hearing voices, he turned around to see another group of commuters arriving.

Perfect! This time, I'll board the train and have done with him!

As soon as the thought ended, he felt the thundering silence and saw he was alone again.

"What the hell is going on?" he demanded to no one.

"May I see your ticket?" the voice asked gently.

"What?" He was shocked that the man spoke to him!

"Your ticket."

"Why?" he asked suspiciously.

"I think I may be able to help you."

"I don't need your help! What I need is to get on the damn train!"

Fuming and against his better judgment, H.H. thrust the ticket at him.

Glancing at it, the old man sighs.

"It's been a long time coming," and stands.

"This," pointing to the dirty blanket, "is yours now. You'll be taking my place."

H.H. realized the man was a lunatic.

"What in the hell are you talking about? Take your place? Get away from me or I'll call the police!"

“Look around. There’s no one to call. It’s begun.”

H.H. looked around. They were alone.

“Now look here, who are you?”

The old man points a gnarled finger at the sign.

H.H. looked at the sign by the lantern. Mesmerized, he saw the letters move, rearranging themselves.

I AM THE WATCHMAN

“What... wha...?”

“Once in a generation,” the old man began, smoothing his dirty, torn, three piece suit, “someone is chosen to watch over us all.”

He continued as H.H. opened his mouth, “I didn’t understand either, so listen. You must fulfill the prophecy.

“This is the lantern of hope and goodness. Keep it always lit with these matches. Don’t worry, you’ll never run out.

“In every generation, a special train comes. You’ll know it by the screams that turn your blood cold. When it stops, you must stand and hold your lantern high. They hate the light.

“They’ll scream ever louder because they must go back through the Portal.

“You are now the Watchman. It is your turn.”

He put his hand on his replacement’s shoulder, nodded, their eyes meeting, and shuffled past him.

H.H. turned to ask a question, but he was alone.

Turning around, he suddenly realized he needed to sit down... and wait.

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