



PROMPT: You're sure that someone keeps tapping you on the shoulder. But when you turn around, there's just empty space.

Revelations

by **Jessica Peters**

The street was empty- just as I preferred it to be on my morning walk. There were no cars screaming down the street, no school buses blocking traffic, no honking from angry commuters. It was just *silent*.

The silence was a comfort to me. The noise of the world had long been a burden that I hated to bear. It accumulated as a tension in my shoulders when it wasn't etching worry lines onto my forehead.

That's not to say I didn't miss certain sounds. Sometimes, I wish I would hear the laugh of a child running after a trinkling ice cream truck or maybe even elevator music. I never would have thought elevators would be so miserable without their music.

The further I walk into town, the thicker the silence gets. The town center wasn't bustling, but I didn't mind. I meander my way into the coffee shop, fix my coffee, and then walk out, all within five minutes. I crossed the street into the park without having to wait for the walk signal.

My mornings had been wonderful since the town changed.

I wouldn't say that the lack of company had made me any less civilized. I hadn't begun a riot or created any anarchies. I still walked on the sidewalk, slowed down in school zones, avoided littering in the park- the world around me had changed, but I hadn't.

I went to work every morning. It was a desk job I had previously grown to hate. I worked to live not lived to work, but suddenly, with so few things left to do in town, I had stumbled upon a rekindled love for my job. With no weekly staff meetings, no break room gossip, and no stolen lunches, I felt like I could truly shine. I was not burdened by the thought of coworking anymore.

I had new focus.

I channeled that new focus into several different things. My garden, for one, had never looked better. Not having to argue with anyone at the nursery left me with the most beautiful roses. I mixed the roses with petunias and the occasional mum. It was a creative outlet I had never had the time to focus on before.

I found myself walking a lot. I was no longer preoccupied with safety or running into neighbors. I could walk and, when I wanted to go home, simply walk in the opposite direction.

It was like my new reality had freed me. I was left with silence and I used it to nurture my thoughts. I had no distractions at my job and it only made my work better. I was more focused than I ever had been and that left me to develop hobbies I never could before. All I had to do to become this bettered version of myself was get rid of people.

If you would have asked me the consequences of such a thing, I could have given you a researched hypothesis of how being alone would change my life. I couldn't have guessed how much better my days would be. I couldn't have told you that I would mature more in a few months than I had in my early twenties as a whole or that I would find a new joy in living.

However, I also couldn't have told you about the other, less predictable, ramifications.

It happens mostly at night. When you live in complete silence during the day, it can be smothering in the dark. It's almost like the actions of the day stop the molasses of silent air from sticking to your lungs, but when you lay down at night, and you're not doing anything, you can't breathe. So, I keep moving and I walk.

Walking at night is no issue. There's no one to worry about and when there's no people, there's no bad part of town. It's just so *dark*. There's streetlights of course, but during the day, you can pretend that the buildings you don't use still have some semblance of life in them. But at night, there's no hiding that, without use, buildings die and haunt the shadows they stand in.

They loom over you and impose their past life on the lone passerby.

It's at night when I'm reminded of the previous tenants of the town. I'll see the glimmer of an eye down the alleyway next to the pharmacy. I'll hear the footsteps of an old man slowly scraping their way into the laundromat. I can feel, physically feel, someone tapping on my shoulder as I pass the cemetery. When I turn around, there's no one there, and I'm left feeling dumb despite no one being around to witness my insanity.

Nighttime is the only time I truly regret my actions.

It's my imagination convincing me that someone tapped me, that makes me realize how much I crave human touch. As time passes, my imagination tricks me more and more and I become that much more unhinged. I never much cared for the pleasantries that came with touch

like the small talk before a hug from an old acquaintance or the introduction before greeting someone new with a handshake. It's at night when I slip a bit further into loneliness that I wonder if stopping by the boutique and borrowing a mannequin to act out these pleasantries wouldn't be the worst idea. I'm the one thriving during the day without people, yet I'm also the one who at night wishes a mannequin could give me the presence I crave on the pillow next to me.

It's these types of ramifications I never could have considered. Sure, I'd be better off during the day, I knew I would be, but I incorrectly assumed that when the lights went out, my brain would stop too.

It's been seven months, two weeks, and four days, since I had created my new reality.

It's been five months since I gave up trying to maintain the town.

It's been four months and three weeks since I gave up trying to maintain my daily routine.

It's been three months and four days since the mannequin became a permanent guest in my home.

It's been two months since I began sleeping anywhere that wasn't my own bed.

It's been a month and a week since I began narrating my every move to give myself something to listen to. I had begun talking to myself long before that.

It has been seven months, two weeks, and four days since my hubris created my new reality that has since become my downfall.

So here I am now. Time continues to slowly drain me of any ounce of sanity that I cling to. The longer I'm alone, the more I feel that I'm not. I hear footsteps making their daily commute and smell the diner cooking burgers and feel people brush past me in the square. I've regressed into some sort of past life that doesn't exist but somehow lives through my fractured reality.

There's nothing left for me to do- not really. So, I finally *stop walking*.

I sit on the bench towards the East entrance of the park in the middle of town. I can smell a hot dog on the grill and hear the whistle of the Little League coach at the ballfield to my right. It feels like summer despite the chill that's really in the air. My hair stands on end as my arms are covered in goosebumps, but all I feel is the warmth of the sun on my face.

I don't deserve to feel, even if it's all in my head. I don't deserve for this nightmare to end either, but in an act of pure selfishness, I can only hope it does.

I flip the cold glinting metal over in my hands. It's solid, heavy when loaded, and it's nice to feel something so steadfast, something that can't be ignored. Who knew, that in my last moments, my deprived consciousness would find comfort even in a gun?

It doesn't require much thought. I've been ready for months, but too much of a coward to truly face the consequences of my actions. So, when I put the gun up to my head, sitting there in the park, with the imaginary summer day blaring on around me, the last thing I expect to feel is a tap on the shoulder.

I press the barrel into my temple. I feel the tap again. I click the safety off. I feel the tap again.

That gives me pause.

I had never felt a tap, an imaginary tap, three times. It's almost as if my brain took "two's a coincidence and three's a pattern" seriously even in my delusions.

So, I stop. I click the safety back on. I pull the barrel from my temple. I place the gun back in my lap.

I take a breath. Inhale and then exhale. Once again for good measure.

I turn around and my heart, it doesn't sink or soar, it deflates. As I turn around and look up to a face that isn't there, I realize I can't even end myself correctly. I can't even end myself without creating a fallacy that stops me in my tracks.

I continue to stare into the nothingness behind the bench I'm sat on, no longer smelling hotdogs or hearing baseball. I'm sat, alone, on a bench in a broken town, with no purpose.

A tear, the first tear I've cried in seven months, two weeks, and four days, rolls down my cheek. I close my eyes as if blocking out the world even mattered at this point.

As a second, third, fourth tear flow down my cheeks, I feel something I haven't felt in what feels like an eternity—*the warmth of another human being*.

My eyes snap open. A hand. A tiny hand. Right in front of my face. Attached to an arm. And that arm's attached to a *little boy*. A little boy that could hide under the empty gaze that expected an adult to be tapping his shoulder.

There stood a little boy, hiding behind the back of the bench, reaching out to wipe my tears.

I had written the world's new Revelations. I had become every horseman to get the world the way I wanted. I was ready to die on that hill I created. Yet, there he stood.

He was not supposed to be here.