

Ghost Train

By

Diane Meholick

Peter Levinavitch didn't remember dying. But now he wondered if he had done just that because he was no longer in an auditorium. Instead, he was riding on a train and he wasn't alone. Most of the other passengers were elderly, many in hospital gowns. A ten-year-old boy with glasses perched on his nose, wearing pajamas, and head buried in a book sat across the aisle. The seat next to Peter was empty. In fact, it was the only empty seat in the rail car.

He looked down at himself. He wore the blue jeans, Grateful Dead T-shirt, and All Access pass he'd been wearing all day. He'd been plugging in Danny's amp and something had gone dreadfully wrong. He'd seen stars, felt unbearable pain, and then darkness. He looked out the window. Stars lit the night sky and fields rolled past. He wondered where he was.

He looked around at his fellow passengers again. No one spoke. No one looked at him. He stood up and said, "Hey."

The young boy peered at him through his glasses. "Yeah?"

"Where are we going?"

"Buffalo, NY," a voice said behind him.

Peter whirled around. A conductor stood in the aisle, his uniform clean and pressed. "What's in Buffalo?"

"Our last passenger, Mr. Levinavitch."

"How do you know my name?"

The conductor pulled a sheet of paper out of his breast pocket. "Peter Levinavitch, January 1, 2005, electrocuted, Syracuse, NY, assigned to Row 12, seat B."

"Christ," Peter said.

The conductor pulled a pocket watch out of his vest pocket, looked at it and said, "Please sit down, Sir. We're still an hour outside of Buffalo." He stuck the watch back into his pocket.

Peter swallowed hard and sat down. The conductor headed for the door to the next rail car and Peter grabbed his arm. "Wait a minute. Okay, explain this. Am I really dead?"

"Of course you are, Sir."

"Am I going to Heaven? I mean, after Buffalo, is that where we go?"

The conductor frowned. "Everybody goes to their allotted destination, Mr. Levinavitch. I don't know what yours is." He waved his hand at Peter's fellow passengers. "I don't know any of the destinations. That's not my job."

"Then what is your job!" Peter was yelling now. Peter wanted answers.

"Why, I'm the conductor on the ghost train," the conductor said, pulling his arm free of Peter's grip. He moved on, opening the door and exiting the car.

Peter stared after him.

“You know,” the young boy said. “You might as well just settle down and enjoy the ride.”

Peter looked at him. “So what did you die of?”

“Leukemia. Unlike you, though, I had time to prepare.” He held up his book.

“Lucky you,” Peter said. He slouched in his seat. He was really dead. He pulled on his lower lip. Could he possibly be headed for Heaven? He doubted it. After all, he hadn’t always been the nicest guy. Let’s just say he’d crapped on some people and leave it at that. He tugged harder on his lip. Was he going to end up in Hell? His stomach soured at the thought. His grandmother had believed strongly in Hell and had often advised him of just how not to end up there. If only he’d listened.

The train was headed for Buffalo, NY, the city where the only women he’d ever loved still lived. Rebecca—sweet, beautiful, talented, Rebecca—who he’d left behind ten years before. “Stay,” she’d begged him. “Please. I love you.”

But Danny had already been steps ahead of her in the music world and Peter had wanted to be up there with him. So he’d gone with Danny. Rebecca still had her band, he knew. She still played in Buffalo clubs. He wondered if she still loved him. He still loved her.

The train slowly stopped. The conductor reappeared in the car and said, “Mr. Levinavitch, please go retrieve the last passenger”

“Me?”

The conductor nodded.

Peter stood up and walked towards the exit. He felt unreal.

He stepped off the train onto the platform. The old central terminal stood a giant, dark, hulking sentinel before him. Trembling, he walked through the doors into the cavernous terminal. To his surprise, the lights were on inside. The interior was Art Deco with a towering ceiling, stained glass windows, marble floor, brass fixtures and wooden benches. The only person in the terminal was Rebecca. She sat on a bench, hugging herself, dressed in blue jeans and a white, long-sleeved pullover with a Henley collar.

He stood stunned, thinking, *Oh, God, she’s dead too.*

She looked up at him. “Peter?”

He sat down beside her on the bench. He put his arm around her shoulders and kissed her lips. “I’ve missed you.”

“I don’t know how I got here,” she said. She looked around the terminal. “I’m playing at Mohawk Place tonight.”

“Something must have happened, Beck.”

She stared at him, panic in her eyes. “What?”

The train whistle went off outside. It was loud, long, and mournful.

“I don’t know. Think.”

Memory flashed in her eyes. “The van rolled over. On the Thruway, I...”

He stroked her hair. “We’re dead, Beck.”

The train whistle blew again.

She looked towards the doors, frightened.

“Wherever we’re going, that’s our train.” He stood up and held out his hand. “Come on.”

The conductor waited for them on the platform. Peter helped Rebecca into the rail car and guided her to their seats. They sat holding hands. The train started moving again.

“I never stopped loving you,” she said. “Why, Peter, why did you leave me?”

“Because I was stupid.”

A tear slipped from her eye and rolled down her cheek. He brushed it away with his fingers. “Where are we going, Peter? Do you know?”

He drew her close and said, “No. But wherever it is, Beck, I promise, this time I won’t leave you.”