

THE 3:33 A.M. VIGIL

written by

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2nd draft Rewrite

Address
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FADE IN:

INT. DORM ROOM - NIGHT

SOUND of frantic keyboard typing

Empty energy drink cans and crumpled snack wrappers litter a desk. LIAM (20s, gaunt, eyes bloodshot but alert) stares intently at his laptop, lines of code scrolling. He rubs his temples, a groan escaping.

LIAM
(Muttering)
Come on, just... one... more...
hour...

He glances at the digital clock on his phone. 2:47 AM. Another sigh. He closes the laptop with a defeated thud.

INT. DORM ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Liam paces, then stops at the window, pulling back the curtain. The campus is dark and still. He runs a hand through his messy hair.

LIAM
This is ridiculous.

He spots a leash hanging by his door. His gaze softens slightly.

LIAM (CONT'D)
Alright, buddy. Time for our
nightly constitutional.

EXT. COLLEGE CAMPUS - NIGHT

Liam walks, leash in hand, through deserted pathways. A scruffy but sweet TERRIER MIX (named BARNABY) trots happily beside him, sniffing at every bush.

The air is crisp, the only sounds are their footsteps and Barnaby's occasional snuffle. Liam shivers, pulling his hoodie tighter.

He checks his phone again. 3:32 AM. Almost time.

As they round a corner, a pristine WHITE VAN is parked perfectly parallel to the curb, its side door facing the street. No discernible markings. No driver visible. Just... there. Liam frowns, a flicker of recognition in his tired eyes. He's seen this van before. Or one just like it.

LIAM

Weird.

Barnaby tugs at the leash, pulling him forward. Liam shrugs it off, attributing it to his sleep-deprived mind.

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET - NIGHT

Liam and Barnaby are further afield, off campus. Rows of identical houses, quiet and dark. Liam is lost in thought, the rhythmic click of Barnaby's claws on the pavement a soothing constant.

He glances up at a street sign. "Maple Avenue."

Suddenly, he stops dead. Further down the street, under the glow of a flickering streetlight, is another identical white van. Same model, same pristine condition, same position - side door facing the street.

Liam checks his phone. 3:33 AM.

His brow furrows.

LIAM

This isn't just weird anymore. This is... too coincidental.

Barnaby whines, sensing Liam's unease.

LIAM (CONT'D)

(To Barnaby)

You seeing this, buddy? Or am I finally losing it?

EXT. DOWNTOWN STREET - NIGHT

Liam, fueled by a strange mix of dread and morbid curiosity, is now in the deserted downtown area. Skyscrapers loom, their windows dark.

He's moving with a purpose now, Barnaby trotting dutifully beside him, occasionally glancing up at his master.

Liam's phone buzzes. He ignores it. His eyes are scanning.

Then he sees it. On a bustling one-way street, typically packed with traffic, is another white van. Identical. Unmarked. Parked precisely as the others.

He checks his phone. 3:33 AM.

Liam's breath hitches. His insomnia, usually a curse, has just unveiled something truly bizarre. A global phenomenon, playing out under the cover of night.

He looks around, a sense of eerie isolation washing over him despite being in the heart of a city. The vans are everywhere.

INT. DORM ROOM - DAY

Sunlight streams into Liam's dorm, illuminating the continued chaos of his desk. Liam is slumped in his chair, not asleep, but lost in thought, staring blankly at a conspiracy theory subreddit on his laptop. The screen glows with posts about "secret societies," "shadow governments," and blurry photos of... white vans.

Barnaby is curled up on the bed, snoring softly.

Liam scrolls through the posts, a half-eaten bowl of cereal forgotten beside him. His phone rings, startling him. He glances at the caller ID: "CHLOE." He sighs, letting it go to voicemail.

EXT. COLLEGE CAMPUS - DAY

Liam walks across campus, looking even more disheveled than usual. Students buzz around him, oblivious. He clutches a coffee cup, taking frequent, desperate sips.

He spots CHLOE (20s, bright, energetic, a stark contrast to Liam) waiting for him by a campus cafe. She has a concerned look on her face.

CHLOE

Liam! There you are. I was worried.
You missed our stats study group.
Again.

LIAM

(Muttering)
Sorry. Just... a lot going on.

CHLOE

"A lot going on" or "another all-nighter trying to hack into the university's mainframe because you thought the grading system was rigged?"

LIAM WINCES.

LIAM

It's not like that. This is different. This is... vans.

Chloe blinks.

CHLOE

Vans?

LIAM

White vans. Everywhere. At 3:33 AM. Identical.

Chloe stares at him, a mix of concern and amusement in her eyes. She reaches out and feels his forehead.

CHLOE

Liam, are you sleeping at all? You're starting to sound a little... out there.

LIAM

I know how it sounds! But I've seen them. For weeks now, I thought it was just the insomnia making me hallucinate, but they're real. I swear it.

He pulls out his phone, frantically swiping through photos he's taken: blurry, dark shots of the vans on different streets. They're all the same.

Chloe looks at the photos, her expression shifting from amusement to mild unease.

CHLOE

Okay, they are... very similar. But it's probably just a fleet. A delivery company, maybe. Or a very popular model of van.

LIAM

At 3:33 AM? Parked in the exact same way, no matter where I am?

(MORE)

LIAM (CONT'D)
Even downtown? No markings, no
drivers? Come on, Chloe. This isn't
normal.

He looks around at the bustling campus, feeling a growing
sense of isolation.

LIAM (CONT'D)
No one else is seeing this because
no one else is awake.

INT. UNIVERSITY LIBRARY - NIGHT

SOUND of distant sirens

Liam is hunched over a computer terminal, not doing
schoolwork. He's cross-referencing news articles, global
incident reports, and even obscure forums. Chloe sits beside
him, looking skeptical but patient, typing on her own laptop.

CHLOE
So, you're looking for reports of
unmarked white vans at 3:33 AM,
globpally? Liam, even if this was a
thing, what do you think they're
doing? Delivering late-night
cookies?

LIAM
I don't know! That's the terrifying
part. There are no reports.
Nothing. It's like it's happening
in plain sight and no one notices
because it's only when the world is
asleep.

He clicks on a satellite image of a remote stretch of desert.
He zooms in on a tiny, almost imperceptible white speck.

LIAM (CONT'D)
Look. This is from a commercial
satellite image. Taken three months
ago. Guess what time it was taken?

Chloe leans closer, squinting.

CHLOE
No way...

LIAM
3:33 AM UTC. And guess what that
is?

He points to the white speck on the screen. It's too small to be definitive, but the shape is eerily familiar.

LIAM (CONT'D)

A van. Identical.

Chloe sits back, her usual cheeriness replaced by a genuine look of concern.

CHLOE

Okay, that's... weird. Really weird.

Liam nods, his peyes fixed on the screen, a new spark of grim determination in them.

LIAM

It means they're not just local. They're everywhere. And something is happening. Tonight, I'm going to get closer.

Chloe looks at him, then at the image on the screen, a chilling realization dawning on her.

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET - NIGHT

SOUND of distant city hum

Liam and Barnaby are on their nightly walk. Liam is moving with a focused, almost desperate energy, his eyes constantly scanning. Barnaby, ever oblivious, sniffs a lamppost.

As they turn onto a quiet residential street, Liam spots it: the familiar pristine white van, slowly creeping along at barely a walking pace. Its headlights are on, but they don't seem to illuminate anything beyond a few feet in front of it. No driver visible.

Liam pulls out his phone, filming. The van moves past a house, then another, then turns a corner.

LIAM

(Whispering to phone)

Okay, Van 17. Or is it 18 tonight? Same time. Same speed.

He quickly rounds the corner, expecting the van to be gone, but there it is, still pattering along the next block. It's like it's on a never-ending, impossibly slow circuit.

They continue walking. Liam tries a dead end. Sure enough, another van is slowly backing out of it, silent save for the almost imperceptible hum of its engine. He sees another across a field, moving through a distant alleyway. They are everywhere.

Liam's face is a mask of weary intensity. The sheer omnipresence of them is unsettling.

INT. DORM ROOM - NIGHT (A FEW DAYS LATER)

Chloe is sprawled on Liam's bed, scrolling through her phone, while Liam meticulously draws a complex web of lines and dots on a whiteboard, connecting locations. Barnaby is asleep at Chloe's feet. Empty pizza boxes and more energy drink cans litter the room.

CHLOE

Are you sure you don't want to
just, like, take a power nap?
Before the big reveal?

LIAM

No time. Besides, I wouldn't be
able to sleep anyway. Not with...
them.

He points to his whiteboard, covered in red circles and arrows.

LIAM (CONT'D)

Every single major street, every
minor road, every cul-de-sac.
They're all covered. It's a grid. A
slow, silent, moving grid.

Chloe finally sits up, a nervous excitement bubbling beneath her skeptical facade.

CHLOE

Alright, Professor Insomnia. Show
me what you got.

EXT. CITY STREET - NIGHT

Liam, Chloe, and Barnaby walk along a quiet street. The city hums faintly around them. Liam clutches his phone, the screen showing 3:32 AM.

CHLOE

So, you're saying, in less than a
minute...

LIAM

Just wait.

3:33 AM ticks over on Liam's phone.

Suddenly, from the end of the street, a pair of headlights appear. A white van, pristine and unmarked, turns the corner and begins its slow crawl towards them. Its speed is unnervingly precise - maybe five miles per hour, no more, no less.

Chloe's eyes widen.

CHLOE

Oh my god. Liam, that's... that's exactly what you described.

As it passes them, silent and unseeing, Chloe grips Liam's arm.

<CHLOE

There's another one!

She points down a perpendicular street. Another identical van, slowly gliding into view. Then another appears from an alleyway.

Chloe spins around, her jaw dropping. In every direction she looks, in every visible street and road, there's at least one, sometimes two, of the unmarked white vans, all moving at the same impossible crawl. The silent ballet of their nocturnal patrol is truly chilling.

CHLOE

They're everywhere. This is insane.

INT. DORM ROOM - DAY

Liam and Chloe are on their laptops, multiple video calls open on screen. Barnaby naps nearby.

On one call is CHLOE'S SISTER (20s, in Germany), looking confused but nodding.

CHLOE'S SISTER

You know, now that you mention it... I always thought it was the milk delivery or something. But yeah, this white van, always around 3:30 AM. Perfect condition, no logos. It's weird. I've seen it near my apartment.

On another call, LIAM'S UNCLE (50s, in California) scratches his head.

LIAM'S UNCLE

Unmarked white vans? Now that's a blast from the past. For years, always thought it was the paper delivery or some late-night work crew. 3:33 AM, huh? Never really paid attention to the time, but it was always right around when I was letting the cat out.

And then, a grainy video call with CHLOE'S COUSIN (20s, in Poland), speaking rapidly in Polish, while Chloe tries to translate on the fly.

CHLOE

She says... tak, tak! White vans! All the time! She thought they were... "the silent ones." She just saw one this morning, she says, right outside her window...

Liam leans back, a grim satisfaction mixed with profound unease on his face. The confirmation is global.

LIAM

It's not just us. It's not just this city.

He looks at Chloe, the reality of their discovery settling in.

LIAM (CONT'D)

What the hell are they doing?

EXT. ABANDONED WAREHOUSE DISTRICT - NIGHT

The air is thick with a preternatural chill, heavier than before. Barnaby is no longer whimpering; he's rigid, a low, guttural growl vibrating in his chest, fixed on the approaching hum. Liam and Chloe are pressed deeper into the shadows of the crates, their hearts pounding.

3:33 AM.

A white van glides into the district, its headlights cutting feeble swaths through the gloom. But tonight, it doesn't stop in the open. It rolls directly into the deepest shadow, a patch of absolute darkness between two derelict warehouses, where no streetlight reaches.

The low, guttural DRONE begins, vibrating through the ground, making the few remaining glass panes in the warehouse windows rattle.

Then, with an unnerving, synchronized click, the DRIVER'S SIDE DOOR and the PASSENGER SIDE DOOR of the van simultaneously swing open.

From within the inky blackness, two figures emerge. They are EXTREMELY TALL AND THIN, unnaturally so, like stretched shadows given form. Each wears a LONG, GREY TRENCH COAT that seems to absorb the meager ambient light, and a matching FEDORA that casts their heads in deeper anonymity. Their faces are obscured by BLACK SCARVES, and their eyes are hidden behind BLACK GOGGLES that reflect nothing, like twin voids.

They don't walk. They GLIDE, feet unseen beneath the coats, moving with an impossible smoothness, almost as if floating. They drift to the side of the van, positioning themselves like silent sentinels. Their HANDS AND FINGERS ARE ABNORMALLY LONG AND THIN, almost spidery, and they hang loosely at their sides, occasionally twitching with a barely perceptible tremor.

The figures stand absolutely still, facing the van's side door. It's clear: they are the GATEKEEPERS.

One of the figures slowly, deliberately, raises an elongated hand. Its long fingers tap gently on the side of the van, a faint, metallic ping echoing in the silence.

Immediately, with a deafening, BOOMING THUNDERCLAP that shakes the ground like a localized earthquake, the van's back doors begin to SLIDE OPEN.

From the gaping maw, an unearthly, swirling FOG billows out, thick and pearlescent, quickly consuming the van and the figures. Through the churning fog, a chaotic frenzy of different colored STROBE LIGHTS — sickly greens, unnatural purples, jarring blues — pulse erratically, casting grotesque, fleeting shadows onto the warehouse walls.

And then, from the heart of the swirling chaos within the van, several LONG, SHIMMERING TENTACLES erupt. They are impossibly thick, glistening with an unknown viscous substance, and writhe with an agonizing slowness, feeling the air. Their surfaces seem to absorb light, making them appear like undulating voids against the strobing colors. They don't appear to have suction cups, but rather a smooth, almost crystalline texture.

One of the tentacles slowly extends, stretching, growing impossibly long, snaking directly towards a brightly lit apartment building miles away, its target unseen by Liam and Chloe.

The chilling realization hits them: the vans are passageways to a dying dimension, and these creatures are the silent, efficient agents of its survival. Every night, precisely at 3:33 AM, the "fold" between dimensions opens for a short, agonizing window.

The tentacles are sent out to grab people from their homes, their beds, their lives, and switch them out with the beings from the dying world.

Liam watches, paralyzed, as the tentacles disappear into the distance, knowing that somewhere, right now, a life is being irrevocably altered, a swap is taking place. The malevolence isn't just in the van; it's in the cold, unfeeling efficiency of the gatekeepers.

INT. DORM ROOM - DAY

The dorm room is a war room. The whiteboard is a tangle of theories: physics equations, obscure mythological symbols, news clippings of strange phenomena. Liam, fueled by an IV drip of caffeine, paces like a caged animal. Chloe, equally wired, stares at a map of the city, marked with clusters of van sightings. Barnaby, sensing the tension, remains uncharacteristically silent, huddled under Liam's desk.

LIAM

It's too coordinated. Too precise.
3:33 AM isn't just a time, it's a frequency. A ripple in the fabric of space-time that only opens for a few minutes. And they're exploiting it.

CHLOE

But why us? Why are we the ones seeing this?

LIAM

Insomnia, Chloe. We're awake when no one else is. We're in the silence, witnessing the unseen. And now that we've seen, we're... connected.

He taps a news article on his laptop: a missing person report from a quiet residential street, dated two nights ago.

LIAM (CONT'D)

Mrs. Henderson. Lives two blocks from where we saw that van last night. Vanished from her locked apartment. Police baffled. "No signs of forced entry."

Chloe's eyes widen in horror. The implications hit them like a physical blow.

CHLOE

You think... that was her?

LIAM NODS GRIMLY.

LIAM

Or rather, that wasn't her. Whatever came through, it looks exactly the same. Acts the same. But it's not.

He points to a photo of Mrs. Henderson smiling from the article.

LIAM (CONT'D)

How many people have been swapped already? Our friends, our families... the world could be teeming with these... doppelgängers from a dying dimension, and no one would ever know.

A chilling thought solidifies in Liam's mind.

LIAM (CONT'D)

We need to identify a swap in real-time. We need to follow one of those things back to its destination.

Chloe looks at him, her face pale.

CHLOE

Are you insane? We saw those things, Liam. The gatekeepers. The tentacles. Whatever's in those vans... it's beyond us.

LIAM

And let them continue? Let them hollow out our world, person by person? We're the only ones who know. We have to do something.

EXT. CITY STREET - NIGHT

Liam and Chloe, their faces gaunt from sleep deprivation, are parked in Liam's beat-up sedan, several blocks from a quiet residential street.

It's 3:30 AM. Liam holds a pair of military-grade night vision goggles; Chloe clutches a digital recorder. Barnaby is in the back seat, whimpering softly, his body tense.

LIAM

This is the street. The van has
been seen here consistently for the
last three nights.

He gestures to a dark house with a single, faint light in an upstairs window.

LIAM (CONT'D)

That's Mr. Abernathy's place. Lives
alone. Routinely wakes up for a
glass of water at 3:30 AM.

Chloe glances at him, a shiver running down her spine. The precision is terrifying.

The clock on Liam's dashboard ticks over to 3:33 AM.

Suddenly, a white van appears at the end of the street, its headlights cutting feeble swaths through the pre-dawn gloom. It's moving at its customary slow, deliberate crawl.

The van stops directly in front of Mr. Abernathy's house.

The driver's and passenger doors swing open in perfect synchronization. Two tall, thin figures glide out, their grey trench coats and fedoras stark against the dark street.

Their long, spidery fingers twitch as they take their positions beside the van. They are absolutely motionless, like statues carved from shadow.

One of the gatekeepers raises a hand. A soft, metallic ping.

Then, the deafening, BOOMING THUNDERCLAP rocks the car, making the entire street tremble. The windows of nearby houses vibrate violently.

From the now open back of the van, the unearthly, swirling FOG billows out, thick and pearlescent, consuming the figures and the van. Chaotic strobe lights - green, purple, blue - pulse within the fog, casting grotesque, fleeting shadows on the house.

The ground continues to tremble. Then, several long, shimmering tentacles erupt from the swirling fog. They are impossibly thick, glistening, and writhe with an agonizing slowness, extending towards Mr. Abernathy's house. They effortlessly penetrate the walls, unseen, unheard by anyone inside.

Liam and Chloe watch in horrified silence as the tentacles disappear into the house. The low, high-pitched WHINE from the van intensifies. A faint, almost imperceptible second thunderclap, softer than the first, echoes from within the house itself, a sound of wood groaning and foundations shifting.

The tentacles retract, just as slowly, just as gracefully, disappearing back into the swirling fog.

The gatekeepers remain still. The van's back doors begin to slide shut, slowly, silently. Just before they fully close, for a split second, Liam and Chloe catch a glimpse through a break in the fog: a gaunt, skeletal figure, covered in barnacles and algae, eyes wide with a horrifying, dying relief, collapses within the van as the doors seal with a soft, final click.

The van is once again pristine and silent. The gatekeepers glide back into their respective doors. The doors close. The van begins its slow, silent crawl down the street, disappearing around the corner.

Liam and Chloe are breathing heavily, their eyes fixed on Mr. Abernathy's now-silent house. The terrible deed is done. Barnaby whimpers softly, still agitated.

LIAM (CONT'D)
(Whispering, tears in his
eyes)
What do we do now?

Chloe slowly turns from the house, her gaze drifting over the empty street, the darkened windows of the surrounding buildings.

A profound, chilling stillness has settled over the neighborhood. The air feels... different. Thicker, somehow.

CHLOE
(Voice hollow)
We go home. We watch.

She walks slowly back to the car, her movements stiff, almost unnatural. Liam follows, his mind racing, processing the unimaginable horror they'd just witnessed.

He gets into the driver's seat, Chloe into the passenger's. She settles into her seat, a strange, perfect stillness about her.

As Liam starts the engine and pulls away, he glances in the rearview mirror. The street they just left is empty. But then, in the reflection, he sees it.

A fleeting movement in the doorway of Mr. Abernathy's house.

Standing there, perfectly still, is Mr. Abernathy. He's wearing the same pajamas they saw him in, standing exactly as he always does for his pre-dawn glass of water. His face is serene, unlined by age or worry. His eyes, however, are a shade too dark, a fraction too still, reflecting no light, no emotion. And on his face, a faint, almost imperceptible smile plays on his lips. It's not a human smile. It's a smile of perfect, vacant contentment.

Liam's blood runs cold. He snaps his head around to look directly at the house.

It's empty. Just the dark, silent doorway.

He glances back at the rearview mirror. Mr. Abernathy is still there, still smiling that unsettling, alien smile. And now, he's not alone.

In the doorways and windows of the houses up and down the street, shadowy figures are emerging. Neighbors they'd seen for years. The young couple across the street.

The elderly woman with her prize-winning roses. They are all standing, perfectly still, perfectly calm, gazing out into the quiet night. And on each face, in the faint, ambient glow of the city, that same, unsettling, perfectly blank smile begins to spread.

Liam slams on the brakes. The car screeches to a halt.

LIAM

Chloe, what's happening?! Look!

He turns to her, frantic. But Chloe doesn't look. She's staring straight ahead, her face illuminated by the faint glow of the dashboard.

Her eyes, usually so bright and full of life, have gone perfectly still, perfectly dark. The lines of worry, the subtle signs of their shared exhaustion, are smoothing from her face.

And on her lips, slowly, agonizingly, the perfectly blank, content smile begins to form.

Liam stares, horrified. He watches the last flicker of humanity drain from her eyes, replaced by a dark, placid emptiness. He reaches out, trembling, to touch her arm. The skin is cold, impossibly smooth.

<CENTER>CHLOE</CENTER>

(Voice flat, devoid of
emotion)

There's nothing to stop.

She turns her head slowly, her now-dark, emotionless eyes locking onto his. A faint, almost imperceptible hissing sound escapes her lips - not from her, but through her, like air escaping a dying vessel.

Liam recoils, a strangled gasp tearing from his throat. Barnaby, whimpering desperately in the back, scratches at the seats. Liam is alone. Trapped. The horror isn't what's coming. It's what's already here, sitting beside him.

FADE TO BLACK.