

enhanced by Arabella Tedder

It is impossible for the 05:55 train from Cambridge to London King's Cross to be late, and every morning Dana Wilson looks pityingly out the window at the wheelchair-bound man who always manages to just miss it. On this particular day, the prim woman who has already stepped onto the train watches him wheel onto the platform, face red and sweating, and sniffs as he calls out for her to hold the doors. Of course, there is no way for her to do this, and she knows this and the man knows this and Dana knows this—there can be no way that any passenger can be allowed to delay the train—and yet, Dana thinks, the smartly-dressed woman could have at least called out and apologised. Instead, face as pin-straight as her hair, the woman reaches up for the handle above her with what is very recognisably the newest of Edison Technology's enhanced arms, and turns away, the state-of-the-art diamond wiring glinting noticeably under the cool white lighting running through the carriage. At 05:55, and not a second later, the engines drone into action and the train zips out of the station. Dana casts a glance over the carriage and sees all the usual occupants: the person whose redheaded children's glassy eyes show that the bracelets they wear must be from Edison's Keep-Quiet range; the elderly man sat by the doors who gains a new attachment every few months or so, as his hips and knees and ears and eyes give out; and the police officer stationed by the doors between every carriage, his unblinking red eye scanning each person for any anomalies. Today there is a new boy sat across from her, fifteen and clearly fresh from high school. The skin around the tools that have replaced his hands is puckered and red raw - he must be heading for a job in construction. His smooth temples indicate he doesn't have the same memory enhancer that blinks blue at Dana's own, and she doubts he left school with many

qualifications. He scratches at the skin just above his enhancements and winces. *No pain relief add-ons* Dana thinks, and winces with him.

‘Excuse me, love,’ a feeble voice comes from beside her and Dana tears her eyes away from the boy to see a woman, around eighty years old, peering up at her, ‘Would you mind letting me know when we get to Royston station, please? My eyes aren’t what they used to be, and they never seem to announce the stations over the speakers anymore.’ Dana looks for the tell-tale signs of Edison Optical Enhancers (slightly whiter sclera, slightly duller iris, and a small pinprick of light in the centre of the pupil) and sees nothing.

‘You should get yourself some EOE’s,’ says the elderly man by the doors, ‘Changed my life, they did. Couldn’t see a thing ‘cause of the cataracts and they fixed me right up. Can see better than I ever could. Edison’s a bloody miracle man!’ The woman next to Dana nods at the man and smiles a smile that doesn’t reach her eyes.

‘I’m afraid a nurse’s wages don’t quite cover those fancy Edison gadgets,’ she says, ‘and there’s not too long until I retire now, I’m not sure I need to be able to see that much!’ Her laugh is hollow and quiet, and Dana places her hand on the woman’s arm.

‘I’ll let you know when we get to Royston station, and I can help you off if you need it.’

‘Oh thank you, dear, that would be so helpful!’ The woman looks at Dana, smiling (she feels something uncomfortable settle in the pit of her stomach).

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Dana arrives at work by 06:25, just in time for her 06:30 start. When she gets to her desk, there is an email waiting for her from her boss: *Need a quick chat. See me in my office in ten minutes.* Iris, who sits across from her, looks up momentarily before her eyes dart back down to her screen, her quick typing unbroken. (The churning in Dana's stomach intensifies) She checks her hair and makeup in the mirror on her desk, before going to make a coffee to bring in for her boss. Mr Yates is the director of Edison Tech's Joint Enhancing Division, and ten minutes later, she is in his office, carrying a steaming coffee cup. 'For you, sir,' she says, placing it on the desk.

'Thank you, Dana. Now, please, take a seat.' She does, and he leans forward, casting a genially empty gaze over silver hands clasped in front of him, Edison Tech's sharp logo engraved on his thumbs. 'You've been at this company for five years now, Dana, and you're a really great worker, you know that? Only one infraction when you missed work for that nasty operation - now that is a real achievement. You should be proud!'

'Thank you, sir.' She smiles (her stomach lurches).

'But times are changing Dana, you know that, and I know that. And I respect you, you know I respect you, so I'm going to be straight with you: it's no longer enough for you to be working with non-Enhanced fingers. You're a secretary, it's your job to type, and you know it's bad for the company's image if our employees aren't Enhanced too.'

'Sir, I don't really have the money for-' Mr Yates cuts her off, raising his hand.

'Now, I respect that you might be in a bit of a tricky financial situation' he continues, 'but surely you have some savings set aside for new Enhancements?'

Dana opens her mouth to protest; Mr Yates cuts her off, ‘ Your colleague, Iris, dipped into the money she was saving for a deposit on a flat, and was Enhanced over the weekend - such dedication! Maybe you could ask your parents for a loan.’ He smiles, his cold, white teeth glinting like the stones on his watch and the memory enhancer at his temple. The roiling in the pit in Dana’s stomach sharpens.

‘Mr Yates, sir, my parents died last year in the Grantchester factory accident.’

‘Ah yes, nasty business, couldn’t have seen it coming,’ he flashes her icy white teeth, ‘Well, think over it this week, and hopefully you’ll make the right decision for your career.’

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Dana walks out of the toilet cubicle, legs shaking, and rinses her mouth out at the sink. *Breathe in... and out... In... and out...* An ashen face stares back out at her in the mirror.

‘Morning Dana,’ Iris brushes past her and heads into one of the cubicles. Dana rubs her eyes, smudging the already fading mascara around them. *I’ve been working for Edison Tech since I graduated university. What other option do I have?* She fingers the silver ring on her right hand, feeling the cool metal pressing into her flesh. Maybe they wouldn’t be too bad...

The cubicle door behind her opens. Dana flings the ring off in surprise and it clatters into the sink. Iris is standing there, looking even worse than Dana, and trying to avoid her eyes. Dana looks down at Iris’ hands (they are shaking) and the feeling in her stomach returns like a knife to the gut.

The boy on the train that morning had the typical arms of someone trying to get a job in a factory or on a building site, new and red and raw, but the pain and the swelling usually settles down after six months, even without pain medication (impossible to buy on the wages of those workers). Dana remembers when her parents both had an enhancing operation, the upper half of their arms puckered and crusting around the tools that replaced their hands, so much red skin it had looked like they had been burned.

Unlike the usual red swelling after an enhancement operation, Iris's hands are black. Cracks run deep in her skin, too many cracks for so early in the healing process. As she twitches, scratching absentmindedly at her palms, small flakes of ash-like skin drift to the floor. The cold metal *things* have no sleek Edison Tech logo emblazoned on them, and they are not quite shiny enough to be any product that Edison would sell. Something pale yellow oozes out from beneath where they are screwed into what used to be her fingers, and congeals in the blackened skin like blood. But it is not blood, because there is none left in her hands.

Iris's hands are rotting.