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THE PHANTOMS

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EXT. EAST LONDON - DAY

THE THAMES. Speed boats throttle up and down. They pass row upon row of glass-and-steel blocks of expensive flats.

Bulbs already burn there, marking the day's beginning for the city's high-achievers. And ample activity goes on nearby.

From 8:00 AM, CONSTRUCTION WORKERS attack the earth, beneath looming cranes.

A LORRY, wedged down a narrow lane by the docks, trigger an aggressive cacophony of traffic horns.

A DOG on a narrowboat barks at a rival, a snarl off.

And then a TUGBOAT chugs loudly past, upriver, low in the water, dragging a barge as if it were a haul of dead meat.

INT. FLAT - DAY

Nondescript modernity. White walls, grey surfaces, new furniture, mid-low ceilings.

LUCY (early 30s) sits at the kitchen island, dressed in tailored clothing fit for a senior city role.

She is strangely nonchalant. She has no phone, no laptop, no newsfeed. She simply holds a cup of coffee.

But her eyes are fixed on the vista beyond the balcony glass, a witness to that chaos beside the river and upon it.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - DAY

A digital alarm-clock pulses 08:05. Andrew (30s) hits the snooze button, an act of defiance.

He wears a shrivelled t-shirt, his hair a mess of sleep. But then the 'executive' drive kicks in. He leaps from the bed.

Through the BATHROOM door, the sound of the shower is accompanied by Andrew's voice, a surprisingly rich tenor.

He hums an upbeat aria from *Le Nozze di Figaro*.

INT. FLAT - DAY

Andrew emerges, a zombie until he gets his coffee. The machine hisses. Then he plonks himself onto the stool.

He sips the hot liquid with a loud, unthinking slurp, directly opposite an agitated Lucy.

Her brow furrows at Andrew. She rises abruptly, her chair scraping against the floor.

She strides to the balcony doors and slides them shut, cutting off the outside noise.

She stares at the view closer now, and her gaze drops to the dark, churning wake left behind the speedboats.

Andrew keeps slurping from his mug. He winces from the bright sunlight as it hits the island, bleary-eyed.

LUCY  
I can't believe they allow it.

ANDREW  
What?

LUCY  
The affront to the senses.

ANDREW  
What?

LUCY  
Can't you hear the noise pollution.  
Wake up.

ANDREW  
We've got double glazing.

LUCY  
It's triple. But the flat still  
smells of concrete.

ANDREW  
I don't know what that smells like.

LUCY  
Chalky, like plastering. And  
there's the awful drilling next  
door, the sirens going off in  
Greenwich, and the general decay of  
Lewisham.

ANDREW  
You wanted to be here.

LUCY  
And on top of it all, there's you  
slurping your coffee like that.

ANDREW  
Like what?

She mimics loud slurping. He laughs it off.

ANDREW (CONT'D)

It's too early for your complaints.  
Look. It's a great view.

LUCY

I know it's a great view. But I  
also can't help noticing the damn  
tourists on the speed boats,  
probably using our flat as a  
backdrop for their silly photos.  
And the barges. They're so gloomy.  
I just hadn't realised.

ANDREW

We live in a city. We've always  
lived in a city.

LUCY

We live by a river. It's supposed  
to be more peaceful. It's  
incredibly annoying when you do  
that.

ANDREW

What?

LUCY

The slurping. Just stop.

Passive-aggressively, Andrew takes the final remains of his  
coffee and slurps it down. It even echoes in here.

Lucy intakes a dry breath.

LUCY (CONT'D)

A, it's vulgar. And B, you lose the  
top notes of the roast by bypassing  
the palate and sipping it. And C,  
it makes me late, because I have to  
stop my entire life just to listen  
to it.

ANDREW

You weren't doing anything. Lucy,  
you were staring at a crane. Do you  
think I need a shave?

Lucy plants a perfunctory kiss on his cheek, then recoils,  
scratches her lips theatrically.

LUCY

You always need a shave. I tell you  
this every day. It's a recurring  
theme.

ANDREW

What is?

LUCY  
Your memory loss.

ANDREW  
OK, I'm shaving.

LUCY  
Yes.

ANDREW  
God, I need another hit of coffee.  
I've got a board meeting at 9:30.  
John moved it forward half an hour  
to show off - some sly, ass-  
licking, early-bird shit show.

LUCY  
Nice. But you need to stop  
swearing, it's-

THWACK. The toaster pops. 2 slices of bread appear,  
distastefully charred, not toasted.

LUCY (CONT'D)  
I keep telling you to fix it. It's  
broken.

ANDREW  
It isn't broken. You knocked the  
dial with your arm. You've done it  
before.

LUCY  
No, the timer is wrong, it isn't  
working! Let's just buy a new one.  
They cost £10. It's hardly an  
expense, where safety is concerned.  
And my sanity.

ANDREW  
Add it to your to-do list.

LUCY  
Our to-do list!

ANDREW  
That one cost £30. I bought it.

Lucy picks up a fragment of toast that escaped the charring.  
She stands by the window, holding it over a small plate,  
discontentedly indeed.

LUCY  
I can't keep looking at those  
cranes. They're vulgar. They've  
been there since we moved in.

ANDREW

They'll be there for years. That's the 'development' part of the prospectus. You knew that when we signed on this place. Just don't look at them.

Andrew hasn't even looked up. He is busy dipping a croissant into a cold dreg of coffee and gobbling it down.

LUCY

I wish we could leave here for a while.

ANDREW

What?

LUCY

Just take a trip. Somewhere random. Without a prospectus.

Andrew laughs, but with concern.

ANDREW

What's gotten into you today? You're-

LUCY

What kind of phrase is that. It's archaic.

ANDREW

What is?

LUCY

What's wrong with 'you' today?

ANDREW

With me? I told you, I've got board. You're acting very off today.

LUCY

Another horrid expression. Very patriarchal.

ANDREW

I've got the board!

LUCY

You told me already!

They cool off. Lucy sorts dishes.

ANDREW

I thought you were happy here. You chose the river, and said the place was vibrant. No, you were worried it would be too quiet.

LUCY

Stop dipping! God! When did you start eating like a slob? Please. I just want to be able to relax before work a little. I have a busy day too. My life needs some calm.

ANDREW

Says the neurotic.

Lucy strides towards the bathroom, heels clicking on the floor, intent on claiming the facilities before Andrew.

INT. EN-SUITE - DAY

Clinical minimalism, 2 small sinks, geometric mirror that reflects back into the neat and tidy bedroom.

Zero ornamentation. Lucy stands brushing her teeth, precisely, but a bit aggressively.

Seconds later, Andrew enters. He takes his place at the twin basin, lathering up for a shave.

Lucy watches his reflection with a hyper-critical eye, her toothbrush pausing.

LUCY

You need more foam. Your skin's too delicate. I've been to a dermatologist-

ANDREW

I told you, the foam irritates me.

LUCY

That's why you're supposed to use more of it. It's a paradox.

ANDREW

What?

LUCY

To prevent the friction, dummy.

ANDREW

What?

LUCY

I can't watch you shave every morning. Physically I-

ANDREW

Why not?

She looks at him - withering incredulity. He stares back, razor hovering, then the penny drops.

ANDREW (CONT'D)

Some girls find it sexy.

LUCY

Not me. What girls? Pippa?

ANDREW

Pippa? No. Why bring her up.

He strokes the underside of his chin, testing the grain. Highly procedural and cautious. Lucy laughs sharply.

LUCY

It would be sexier if you shaved like a man, and not a frightened little girl. You used to be stronger. You-

ANDREW

Because you cancelled the gym membership.

LUCY

You never used it! 'Virgin Active' is too expensive, even for a guilt-trip.

ANDREW

We can afford it. That's why I work so hard. That's why I'm going to get a promotion.

LUCY

Then we can have a bigger apartment. So we can argue across a wider square footage. I'm serious.

ANDREW

(slightly hurt, and thus increasingly defensive)  
At least now we have our own apartment.

LUCY

Your job doesn't pay well enough.

ANDREW

That's why I'm getting a promotion.

Lucy spits and wipes her mouth, she's done.

LUCY

Don't look at me to bridge the gap. My boss just wants my body. He'll never give me a pay rise. He's too insecure about the power dynamic, of course.

ANDREW

Really? But that's not what I was implying.

LUCY

What then?

ANDREW

Nothing. I just think- It's possible to become a senior executive.

LUCY

Me?

ANDREW

You. Soon, I mean.

LUCY

It's not possible. It's essential and very doable. But- But I don't know if I want to.

ANDREW

But you just said you want more money. More things. Bigger things.

LUCY

No. I just think we need a bit more than this. I don't know.

ANDREW

Bit more what?

LUCY

In our relationship. It's not about material things.

Lucy steps into the bedroom and retrieves her overcoat from the immaculate closet.

Andrew follows to the doorway, half-shaved, a streak of white foam clinging to his jaw.

LUCY (CONT'D)

OK. I want 'you' to be more ambitious.

ANDREW

OK.

LUCY

I find it attractive. Used to.  
Still do I-

ANDREW

It's early days for us-

LUCY

It's not! You used to be more  
ambitious, about everything. Soon  
we'll be 40, then 50, just watching  
the world go round, until we drop  
dead.

ANDREW

Calm down. Why are you being so  
dramatic? What pills did you take  
this morning?

LUCY

Nothing, actually. But I wish I had  
taken crack cocaine. It would be an  
experience. There are still far too  
many drug dealers in Greenwich. It  
isn't nearly as gentrified as the  
agent let on.

ANDREW

Nowhere is.

LUCY

Chelsea is.

ANDREW

What? You want to live there?

LUCY

No.

ANDREW

Maybe gentrification 'is' the  
problem. You know Dylan does drugs?

LUCY

What kind of name is Dylan?

ANDREW

The name of the CEO of  
'ApolloCloud'-

Lucy doesn't care. She turns her back on him, slipping into  
her overcoat, and starts for the flat door.

Andrew stops her before she reaches the hallway.

ANDREW (CONT'D)

Don't go to work feeling sour.

LUCY  
I feel fine. Lucid even.

ANDREW  
I want you to be happy. We don't  
need money to be happy, do we?

LUCY  
Just don't worry about me.

Lucy shoves past him.

INT. CORRIDOR - DAY

Heading out the door into the sterile, carpeted corridor. He runs after her.

ANDREW  
Lucy!

LUCY  
(stops abruptly, turns)  
Oh, Andrew.

ANDREW  
What?

LUCY  
I'm not coming back tonight, by the  
way.

ANDREW  
What?

LUCY  
I just need a night off.

ANDREW  
From what? Stop it!

Andrew chases her to the lift doors. The display ticks upwards.

ANDREW (CONT'D)  
You are coming home tonight. Of  
course you-

LUCY  
No, I'm not.

ANDREW  
Where are-

LUCY  
I'm going to my Aunt's.

ANDREW

But you hate her guts!

LUCY

But I haven't seen her, and I owe her a visit.

The lift arrives with a light chime. Lucy steps inside.

ANDREW

So this isn't about us? Lucy?

The metal doors slide shut, cutting off Lucy's face.

ANDREW (CONT'D)

Lucy!

From the inside, Andrew's is severed. Lucy exhales deeply and studies herself in the mirrors.

Back in the corridor, Andrew is almost speechless.

ANDREW (CONT'D)

Entitled bitch.

Then he steps towards the stairwell, considering giving chase.

But he soon hears the final thud of the lift landing at ground-level. It's no use.

He walks over to the corridor window and spots Lucy emerging onto the pavement below. She vanishes swiftly round a corner.

He turns and strolls back inside the quiet flat.

INT. EN-SUITE - DAY

He returns to finish his routine, washing the last of the foam off his face.

Then he leans over the basin and stares into the mirror at his bloodshot eyes, his fatigued appearance strangely blank.

INT. TRAIN CARRIAGE - DAY

Hello purgatory. Grey clothing, headphones, everyone is staring at a screen. No eye contact.

Lucy boards and sways down the aisle of a busy train. She spots a narrow seat available beside SIMON (50s).

He is dressed like a banker, but the persona is fraying, his tie is wonky, collar unbuttoned, and he has a 3-day stubble.

Lucy drops into the seat, but a sudden jolt of the train sends her elbow into the armrest.

Her coffee spills, splattering across Simon's trousers and the newspaper resting on his lap.

LUCY  
Sorry! God, so sorry-

SIMON  
(remarkably unfazed)  
Don't worry. It's not my paper. I never buy papers. I'm too wealthy to care about the news.

He laughs, a rather warped chuckle at his own cynicism. Lucy winces, the hot coffee having splashed her own wrist.

And then she spills a few more drops as she rights the cup.

Simon reaches into his pocket, produces a crisp handkerchief, and calmly dabs the fabric of her trousers.

SIMON (CONT'D)  
Are you OK? Rough morning?

LUCY  
Fine. No different to usual. But I am sorry. I don't normally spill coffee on strangers.

Lucy looks at his face properly for the first time.

There is something unnervingly familiar about his bone structure, as if he could even be an older version of Andrew.

And and the way he watches her like they are intimate mates. She gulps. He just grins freely, charmingly.

LUCY (CONT'D)  
Have we met before?

MAN  
Oh no, I'd remember you. You are more apologetic than most. I respect that. I hazard a guess that you are friendly too, more so than most people on this train.

Lucy glances around. The other commuters are entirely oblivious to her interaction with this quite charming man.

Indeed, Simon defeats his rustic look with appealing eyes and a good figure, it is obvious he wants to court her.

SIMON  
I hope you don't mind me talking with you.  
(MORE)

SIMON (CONT'D)

It's not often I find a woman in this city with an air of mystery about her. You don't mind me saying so?

LUCY

No. I don't mind. It's good to detox from tech. To connect in real life. I've been trying to do that recently.

SIMON

(laughs again)

Real life. Yes. Do you work at a bank? Which one?

LUCY

Lloyds.

SIMON

Of course. They take into account good brains as well as looks. You must be doing well for yourself there.

He almost winks at her, though disarmingly.

SIMON (CONT'D)

I've just come back from the Caribbean. That's why I'm in a good mood. I don't go into the office much anymore. I prefer adventures. I hit my targets, so I've made all the money I need.

'Adventures' rings in Lucy's ears. He is articulating the true fantasy she had wanted to beg Andrew for 20 minutes ago.

SIMON (CONT'D)

Do you take enough holidays? That's my regret, if I could go back, I'd take more time for myself. You don't need that much money to do nice things, on impulse. You must have been somewhere recently - you have that beautiful olive skin. You don't mind me saying so?

LUCY

It's my natural colour. I actually haven't been away in far too long.

MAN

Oh.

LUCY

Does your wife enjoy going away a lot too, then?

Simon exhales. The illusion of his confidence cracks slightly. He opens his mouth, unsure how to answer-

DING-DONG. The automated voice announces LONDON BRIDGE. The train shudders to a halt, the doors hiss open.

EXT. LONDON BRIDGE - DAY

COMMUTERS pour out of the station, rushing to work.

Lucy walks briskly, trying to escape the crowds. Simon follows in her wake, weaving through the chaos with ease.

Up ahead, Lucy spots a figure on the stone balustrade, dangerously close to the edge. A YOUNG STOCKBROKER.

He calmly treads up onto the high ledge. Lucy gasps, her step faltering.

And then the stockbroker simply steps off into the void.

Lucy rushes to the edge, peering over the stone.

She expects a splash, screams. But there is nothing. Just the churning grey water of the Thames. No body. No death knell.

A commuter bumps her shoulder.

COMMUTER  
(entirely oblivious)  
Mind yourself.

Simon catches up to Lucy, still leaning where the young man just stood, speechless. Rubbing her eyes wide awake.

LUCY  
Did you see-

SIMON  
My wife never liked change, so  
we're still together. But-

LUCY  
A man jumped!

SIMON  
He wouldn't be the first.

LUCY  
I must be dreaming.

SIMON  
But we live our own lives. That's  
just how it is.

LUCY  
(staring at the water  
still)  
What are you talking about?

SIMON  
My wife.

LUCY  
So you have an open marriage?

SIMON  
Unofficially, yes. I don't want to  
make you late. But-

LUCY  
I'm always early.

SIMON  
Would you spend the day with me?  
Take some time off?

LUCY  
Today?

SIMON  
Right now, here.

LUCY  
Sorry. Sir, look, I can't-

SIMON  
I hate to think of you slaving away  
in a glass box without a holiday.

LUCY  
We're open plan.

SIMON  
It's a waste of a soul. Don't you  
think?

LUCY  
In another life, maybe.

SIMON  
I understand you're under stress to  
behave accordingly. But just think  
about this. I'm speaking from  
experience, I've seen it over and  
over. You're a beautiful woman. Men  
would die just to spend a weekend  
with you. I'm offering you the  
chance to come away on an  
adventure. You can forget about  
everything. City bustle, dull  
spreadsheets, stupid clients, loud  
cranes. I could take you anywhere.  
(MORE)

SIMON (CONT'D)

We could leave right now. Tell your husband if you have to.

LUCY

Fiancé. Still.

SIMON

Perfect. They're easier to disappoint. You'll be back in a few days. What do you say? Will you come away with me?

Commuters swell around them. Lucy's head is in a spin. She turns to face him, no more flattered, rather irritated.

LUCY

Look, Sir-

SIMON

Simon.

LUCY

I'm Lucy.

SIMON

I knew you were a shining light.

LUCY

You're a nice man, Simon. Honest, charming, in a way I'm sure is sincere. But I can't. I've told you already. I need a promotion. This is my life.

SIMON

Why? You want to be rich?

LUCY

No. I want financial independence. Complete autonomy.

His cool curdles into something closer to desperation.

SIMON

Then there's no mystery in your life. You shouldn't be trapped in an office for the rest of your youth, or any age. Come away with me.

Lucy fed up, marches on. Simon pursues and rises his voice.

SIMON (CONT'D)

Take a chance on me! It could be our fate. I have money to go anywhere with you!

LUCY

No.

SIMON

There's no meaning to any of this!  
You know it's true. You look at  
these people and you know. Life is  
utterly meaningless. Except for  
love. Spontaneity. Romance!

LUCY

No!

Simon stops. He closes his eyes and takes a deep, rattling  
breath.

And then, with sudden agility, he climbs up onto the wide  
stone parapet of the bridge.

Lucy turns back, catching the tail-end of his movement.

LUCY (CONT'D)

What are you doing? No! You're  
crazy!

Simon stands over the precipice, the wind whipping his tie.

SIMON

Say yes.

LUCY

You're crazy! Get down!

SIMON

Say yes, Lucy.

LUCY

No!

Simon leans forward. Gravity takes him.

LUCY (CONT'D)

Don't jump! Oh my God!

He goes over. Falling. Lucy lunges for the wall, too late.

She hears a wet, heavy SMASH.

She peers frantically over the edge. Below, the churning wake  
of a massive TUGBOAT mows directly over the spot.

He is caught underneath the churning industrial blades.  
Pulverised. Drowned.

Lucy screams. It finally breaks the commuters' rhythm.

A WOMAN in a beige trench coat pauses, looking at her with  
mild, polite irritation.

WOMAN

Are you quite alright, dear?

LUCY

(points at the water)

Didn't you see the man jump?! He  
went right over!

WOMAN

What man? There's nobody there. Are  
you unwell?

The woman tuts and walks on. The commuters carry on as  
normal, a relentlessly. Lucy stands frozen by the stone.

Then the horror distils into adrenaline. It surges through  
her veins, swelling her cheeks blood-red.

She turns her back to the river, straightens her overcoat,  
and marches forwards into the rush.

Violently awake for the first time in many years.

END OF SHORT.

*To be continued...*