

"THE LIVING HALF-LIFE OF HU JUN LI"

By

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FADE IN:

(NOTE: This is written as a second-screen experience, where the audience watches a show on a streaming service and uses their phone to enhance their viewing. They may point the camera at the main screen and it overlays an image on top of where it appears on their mobile device. Blue denotes content only shown on the smartphone or tablet.

The screen will always have a faint blue cast to the image, and all images on it are rendered in monochrome from dark blue to white (unless stated otherwise).

The phone is synced up with the video through allowing the phone to "listen" to the audio (via a free app that serves as the content interface), and the music/SFX cues the app into where the video is so it may sync accordingly. When users tap on documents or objects that are highlighted to examine them, they "collect" these objects in a bank on their app, so that they may go back and look over them later after the episode is through.)

EXT. - NIGHT - SNOWSPINE MOUNTAIN FOREST

Dusk silhouettes jagged ponderosa pines and Douglass firs, stark unlit shapes that climb toothily up into the deepening sky and reach for the smattering of stars beginning to wink out of the blackest blue. They drape and droop with a heavy coat of frost, as though the unwrangled thickets can't decide if the better prey is above them in the sky, or beneath them on a two-tracked wagon trail that stretches into the maw of the forest.

Along this trail clops a stagecoach, dust visible against the dark paint, pulled by two creaking, mechanical horses. It leaves twin lines in the untrodden snow as it passes through.

On the side of the cab is an emblem: WESTERN FRONTIER STEAMRAIL COMPANY.

INT. - NIGHT - STAGECOACH

ADLAI WILLIAMS (mid-40s)— a lemon-faced man with an exceptional moustache dressed in a waistcoat with gold detailing— checks his shiny pocket watch in the dim dregs of light bouncing through the window. It is precisely 6:29pm. He tucks it away in its proper place, now secure in

his knowledge that it is also the proper time, and returns to the telegram in his hand.

The telegram is highlighted in a blue-white glow, and if clicked on a digital version unfolds so the viewer can read it.

It says:

"REQUEST TO HIRE NEW WORKERS TO FILL VACANCIES LEFT BY ACCIDENTS APPROVED STOP YOU ARE BEHIND SCHEDULE STOP DO NOT HESITATE TO TAKE MORE EXTREME MEASURES TO MAKE DEADLINE STOP GHOSTS SABOTAGING EQUIPMENT WILL NOT BE TOLERATED AS EXCUSE ALL UNDEAD ACTIVITY IS TO BE DEALT WITH SWIFTLY STOP

SINCERELY

PARSIMONY ARVIDE III

STEAMRAIL COMMISSIONER"

COACH DRIVER (O.S.)

Now approaching camp, sir!

EXT. - NIGHT - RAILROAD ENCAMPMENT

The stagecoach begins to slow to a trot as it pulls into an area just off that road. It passes by a veritable town made up of threadbare tents, campfires, and people huddled together for warmth. Some of the people don't even have tents. In the center of the tent town is one slightly larger tent, lit from inside by a lantern of some sort; smoke drifts lazily through an opening in the top. Around the edges of camp there are piles of construction materials: lumber and steel track in wheeled carts.

A GIRL (late teens/early 20s) with long dark hair braided in two symmetrical plaits watches the carriage as it stops and turns to glance over her shoulder before jogging off in the direction of town. She's dressed in the dirt-stained clothes of the working class. This is JUN LI.

Adlai's stagecoach halts at the edge of the tents. He steps out, brushes some dirt from his sleeve, and glowers over at the people who watch him as he turns and marches towards a small log cabin on top of a hill overlooking the area. A worker walks the opposite way down the footpath, and as soon as he notices Adlai coming towards him he skitters to one side and stands quietly, formally, as his boss passes.

INT. - NIGHT - MOURNING TENT

There is a young man currently sitting in the large tent, arranging and placing incense before a makeshift wall that, from the back, seems to be little more than propped up planks hammered together and supported with stones. He has a serious face— far too serious for someone so young— and a pair of round glasses slumping low on his nose. His sleeves are rolled up, hair tied back to keep it out of his eyes. This is JUN HAO(late teens/early 20s).

The camera swivels through the smoky air to reveal what Jun Hao is working on: tacked to the wall are a collage of photos, calligraphy of names, news clippings, drawings, even personal items of clothing such as handkerchiefs and hats. Jun Hao picks up a photograph and pins it to the wall, lingering on the family depicted there.

There are a few other workers in the tent who walk in to pay their respects but seem to be finishing their different rituals: lighting candles, leaving flowers, setting offering bowls before the wall. MR. AND MRS. JIMENEZ (mid-40s) pray in front of a news clipping about an accident that took the lives of two young men working on the railroad, and injured a dozen others. *The two young men in the photo stand next to their parents, hands on their shoulders, though the couple don't notice.*

BIG SEAN MCCORMACK(early 30's) leaves a bottle of whiskey in front of a photo of an older man, leathery and weatherworn but tough, who bears a striking resemblance to himself. *He, too, is standing at the memorial board, and reaches down to pick up a spectral bottle of whiskey from where the material one sits.* Sean leaves, and the ghost of his father fades away.

*The viewer may tap on glowing pieces of the Memorial board and look at them closer: reading messages for the dead, examining articles about accidents, looking at objects dear to the departed which have been left in their memory.*

The tent flap opens, though no one appears to enter.

*Jun Li enters when the flap opens. Now that we see her in the company of other ghosts, we can tell that there's something about her that is brighter than the others— her form is more solid. Stronger. The other ghosts turn to*

greet her, and her responding smile is polite, wan. She proceeds over and taps on her brother's shoulder. Her voice stays low so as not to disturb the others in the tent.

JUN LI

Hey, he's back. Just went up to the cabin on the hill.

Jun Hao perks up at the sound of his sister's voice. He steps to a more secluded area behind the memorial wall and draws a sigil in the air that glows purple briefly before he slashes through it with a finger, unzipping the veil between planes and allowing Jun Li to step through. She disappears from the mobile view as it synchronizes to her appearing in the material world. Jun Hao smiles, but it's weak around the edges.

JUN HAO

Welcome back, meimei.

They walk back around to the other side of the wall. He gestures to a small pile of similar clippings and trinkets, all due to be put up on the memorial wall. The other ghosts with mourners in the tent are still there, with their families or friends.

JUN HAO

I'm almost done. Just finishing the last few postings of the week.

JUN LI

I thought there were only five?

JUN HAO

(Shaking his head, fingers rubbing his eyes behind his glasses) I'm afraid not. Two more lost this morning. Cliff winch failure, they couldn't pull them out of the blast range in time.

JUN LI

Of course. That makes... what, fifty three since Mom and Dad--

JUN HAO

Fifty-four.

Jun Li pauses as he begins to pin more to the wall. He works slowly, methodically. She glances back towards the tent flap, looking a bit conflicted about pressing him but decides to push forward.

JUN LI

We should get moving soon.

JUN HAO

I know.

He continues, putting each piece on the wall reverently. Unhurried.

JUN LI

(Grimacing) I just... I want to kill him. I want to kill him so bad I- It scares me a little.

Jun Hao pauses. He sets his work down and turns to her, lifting a hand to rest on her shoulder.

JUN HAO

I... Me too. But... the time will come. I promise. Right now it is my duty to administer these last rites-

JUN LI

(Annoyed) I know you take being the new 'Mr. Death Witch' very seriously but longer we wait, the more time we give Adlai Williams to find us. He's searching, you know. Sent a telegram to the company trying to pin the equipment failures on the two of us. Or, well. On "ghosts"- the nerve-

JUN HAO

He did?

JUN LI

He did. Saw him holding a piece of paper and snuck a peek. He knows someone in the tents is up to something, and it's only a matter of time before he figures out what. We've waited too long, anyway, the people need to see that their guardian hasn't left them while—

A gunshot sounds outside and both of them jump. *Even the ghosts turn to the sound, startled.* The twins share A Look and run out to see what happened.

EXT. - NIGHT - RAILROAD ENCAMPMENT

A crowd holding lanterns and huddled in blankets against the chill fog of their own breath has gathered in the small clearing between the tent town and the road that leads up to the cabin on the hill. Standing on a wooden step above the crowd is Adlai Williams himself— pistol raised into the air. The crowd cowers from his anger and murmurs amongst itself. *Ghosts also form out of the fog and ring the group, watching and listening.*

ADLAI WILLIAMS

(Shouting) Quiet! Quiet!

The crowd settles down. Jun Li and Jun Hao approach the back of the gathering and watch.

ADLAI WILLIAMS

You people... Feh. (He spits on the ground, lowering his gun but not putting it away.) Ladies and Gentlemen, I consider myself a generous man. A patient man. A Gods-fearing man. (He paces his "stage".) And yet, even I find my patience is tried from time to time. Such as tonight, for example: Tonight, after returning from a long and arduous business journey from Ravensbrook, I had hoped to rest my head on my hard-earned bed and get a good night's sleep.

Williams looks down at the gathered people as though they are a captive audience, and not people half-starved and overworked and terrified for what word might drop from his mouth next.

ADLAI WILLIAMS

So I returned to my home and took off my hat and (Voice rising) What did I find there? A broken window, a note, and this.

He turns to his assistant, who throws something festering and humming with flies to the feet of the crowd. It is an arm. The crowd gasps and flies into a flurry of whispers. Jun Li and Jun Hao are speechless, sharing a glance of "Did you do that?" and "I'd never!" in a wordless exchange. They both grimace.

ADLAI WILLIAMS

The arm of one Aaron McCormack. One of you, taken from us all too soon by that horrible accident with the winch. And yet, the note may be the part that you folks are most interested in! For you see, I read this note, this short little note, and I found myself concerned for you. (He feigns heartache.) After all, I know how precious to you your ghostly Guardian Angel is. Yes, I know about it. The one who pretends to keep you safe, who professes to care for you and protect you from mean ol' men like me. (A toothy grin creaks across his face.) Here. Let me read this for you. (He reads the note out loud:)

*"The ghost of the Snowspine Mountains refuses your destruction. Continue and your people will suffer the consequences."*

Alarmed muttering lashes through the crowd. Jun Hao and Jun Li look at each other in disbelief. Jun Li swallows and locks eyes with her brother— she was right, they gave him too much time, and he is now moving against them.

ADLAI WILLIAMS

So you see? The Snowspine "Guardian" is not a guardian at all. It is a creature of

undeath and violence, willing to sacrifice you all if it means stopping the noble expansion of our rail. I implore you, brave men and women of the Steamrail, who have toiled so hard for so long, to think just as long and hard about your so-called 'protector'. You may honor it, but does it honor you?

The twins come to the same conclusion at the same time: they might have to kill Adlai Williams sooner than they thought.

FADE OUT:

TO BE CONTINUED...