



A NAVRITTO STORY

# The Midnight *Line.*

+ NAVRITTO STORIES · THRILLERS & SUSPENSE

# The Midnight Line

Written & illustrated by Navritto.

© 2026 Navritto Solutions Private Limited. All rights reserved. This story and its illustrations are original works and may not be reproduced or redistributed without permission.

First edition, 2026 · Published by Navritto Solutions Private Limited · [navritto.com](https://navritto.com)

CIN U62090HR2026PTC145030

Read online and download more books at [navritto.com/stories](https://navritto.com/stories)

## Chapter One — The 11:59

The fight had no big words in it. That was the worst part.

Later, Asha would try to remember one cruel thing her mother had said — one line sharp enough to explain why a seventeen-year-old was standing at a railway station at midnight with a bag on her back. There wasn't one. There was only a long, tired silence, and then her mother rubbing her eyes and saying, very quietly, "Do what you want, Asha. I'm too tired to stop you."

And underneath the words Asha had heard the thing she had always been most afraid was true — that stopping her was not worth the trouble. That she could go, and the flat would only be quieter, and no one would really mind.

It had not always been like this. But her mother worked nights now, at the hospital, and slept in the day, and the two of them had slowly become two people passing in a doorway, too tired to say much that was not about money, or school, or the tap that would not stop dripping. That evening her mother had come off a double shift grey to the lips, and had still stood at the stove and made the rice the way Asha liked it, and had said, "There's food in the pan." And Asha, full of the fight, had not eaten it. She had heard only the tiredness in her mother's voice, and not the four small words underneath it — the ones it had taken the very last of her mother's strength to say.

So she did what she wanted.

She waited until the flat went dark and her mother's breathing turned slow. She took the money from the tin on the shelf, and her phone charger, and one change of clothes. She opened the front door onto the fog, stepped out into it, and pulled the door shut behind her — softly, because even now, even leaving, she did not want to wake anyone.

No one called her name. No light came on behind her. She stood on the step for a moment and listened — longer than she meant to, long enough that the cold of the fog reached in through her coat — and the flat stayed dark and silent behind the shut door, and she told herself that this was the proof of it. If anyone had wanted her to stay, they would have got up. They would have come to the door. No one came to the door. She hitched the bag onto her shoulder and walked into the fog.

The fog had come up off the river and swallowed the whole town. The streetlamps floated in it like drowned moons. She could not see the end of her own street.

The station was three roads away. She knew the walk with her eyes shut; she had grown up close enough to the line to fall asleep every night to the sound of trains. But the fog made it strange tonight — longer, quieter, wrong. Her own footsteps sounded like a second pair, half a step behind her own, and twice she stopped to listen, and twice there was nothing at all but water dripping off the wires and her heart going too fast.

The last train was the 11:59. After it, nothing until morning. She had checked the time a hundred times on the walk, holding her phone up in the fog, as though the number might change its mind and leave her stranded on the wrong side of the night.

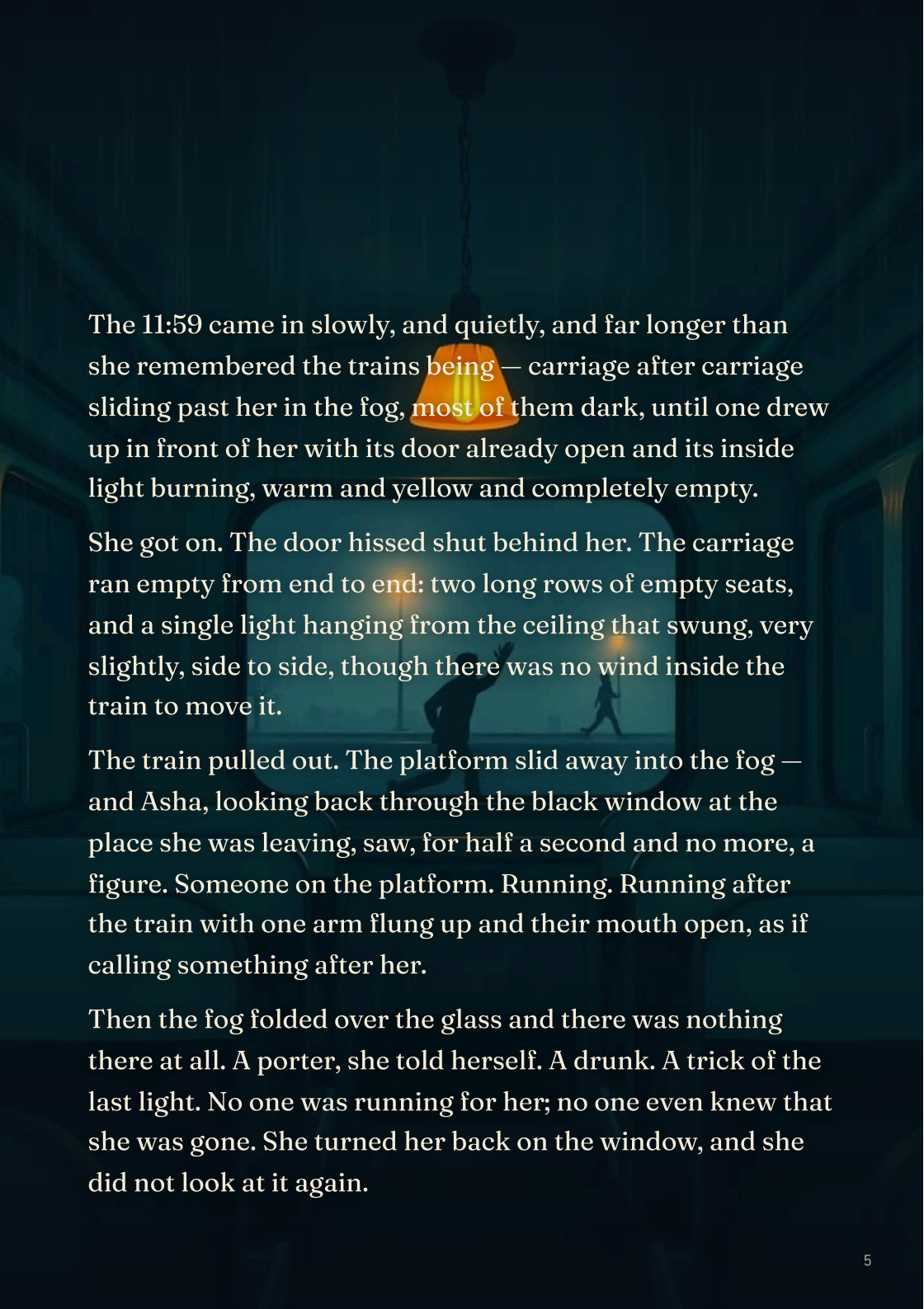
The platform was empty.

One long strip of wet concrete under a single buzzing light, the fog pressing in at both ends so that the world simply stopped, ten steps away, in either direction. Hers were the only footprints on it.

She set her bag down and, because there was no one anywhere to see her do it, she took the bracelet out of her coat pocket. It was a thin silver thing, small enough for the wrist of a child, because she had been a child when her mother clasped it on her — the good year, the year before the night shifts, when her mother still had time to sit on the edge of the bed and talk until Asha fell asleep. She had worn it until it would not close around her wrist anymore. Then she had kept it in a box. And tonight, at the very last minute, she had taken it out of the box and slipped it into her pocket without letting herself ask why.

She held it out over the edge of the platform, over the black gap where the rails were. One small drop, and the last thread would be cut. Open your hand, she told herself. Open your hand and let it fall and be free of all of them.

She could not open her hand. She stood there hating herself for it — and then she pushed the bracelet back down into her pocket and closed her fist tight around it, and that was the exact moment the lights of the train came sliding out of the fog.

The background image shows the interior of a train carriage. A single, warm-toned lamp hangs from the ceiling, casting a soft glow. The carriage appears empty, with rows of seats visible in the distance. The lighting is moody and atmospheric, with deep shadows and highlights from the lamp.

The 11:59 came in slowly, and quietly, and far longer than she remembered the trains being — carriage after carriage sliding past her in the fog, most of them dark, until one drew up in front of her with its door already open and its inside light burning, warm and yellow and completely empty.

She got on. The door hissed shut behind her. The carriage ran empty from end to end: two long rows of empty seats, and a single light hanging from the ceiling that swung, very slightly, side to side, though there was no wind inside the train to move it.

The train pulled out. The platform slid away into the fog — and Asha, looking back through the black window at the place she was leaving, saw, for half a second and no more, a figure. Someone on the platform. Running. Running after the train with one arm flung up and their mouth open, as if calling something after her.

Then the fog folded over the glass and there was nothing there at all. A porter, she told herself. A drunk. A trick of the last light. No one was running for her; no one even knew that she was gone. She turned her back on the window, and she did not look at it again.

## Chapter Two — The Name on the Glass

For a while, the train was almost kind.

It rocked her the way trains do, gently, side to side, the wheels keeping a slow heartbeat under the floor. The cold crept up through the seat, and she moved once — a few rows down, away from a thin draught leaking in around the door at the end — and she drew her knees up, and rested her head against the window, and watched the dark go by.

She did not mean to sleep. She had meant to stay awake the whole way, to watch every station slide past and count them down, and get off in the city and vanish into it before anyone could — she did not finish the thought. The rocking took it gently out of her hands. Her eyes closed.

In the almost-dream she was small again, and her mother was humming somewhere in the next room, and the trains went by the window one after another, and none of them ever stopped, and that was all right, because there was nowhere she had to be and no one she had to leave. Then a wheel shrieked on a curve, and she woke.





The carriage was exactly as empty as before. The single light still swung on its little chain. And on the window beside her, her sleeping breath had fogged the cold glass into a soft grey bloom.

There was writing in it.

Four letters, drawn in the fog by the tip of a finger, from the inside — slow and careful, the way you write a thing you badly want a person to see. A name. Her name. ASHA.

She sat very still and did not touch it.

There were reasons. There were always reasons, if you were sensible, if you looked. She had been asleep against that glass. She could have breathed the fog herself, could have written her own name half-dreaming and forgotten she had done it. People did far stranger things asleep. She almost believed it.

But she had not fogged that patch of glass. Her head had been lower, tucked into the corner; the cloud of her own breath was down there, separate and smaller. This name was written higher up, where a person standing in the aisle would write it. And the letters leaned the wrong way. They leaned toward her — as though they had been drawn by someone on the other side of the window, facing in, from outside a train that was running at sixty miles an hour through the dark.

She scrubbed it away with her sleeve, hard, until the glass squeaked. And in the quiet after that, she understood the other thing that had been wrong since she woke. The train had not stopped. Not once. She knew this line — the first station always came about ten minutes out, a small bright platform with a tea stall she had passed a hundred times. They were long past ten minutes. They were long past any station at all. And the train had never so much as slowed.

That was when she heard the footsteps in the next carriage.

### Chapter Three — The Things She Lost

They were slow. A step, and a pause, and a step. Unhurried, coming down the aisle of the carriage ahead of hers, on the far side of the door at the end.

She held her breath. The footsteps stopped.

She counted her own heartbeats — one, two, three — and let the breath out. The footsteps started again at once, a step and a pause and a step, and stopped again in the very instant she shifted her foot on the floor. As though whoever it was were listening to her, exactly the way she was listening to them.

She knew she should stay small and still in her seat. Instead, something lifted her up and carried her down the aisle to the door, because not knowing had always been worse than knowing, for her, her whole life. She put her face to the little glass window set into the door and looked through, into the next carriage. It was empty. Long and lit and swaying and utterly empty. And on the seat nearest the door, alone in all that emptiness, someone had set down a small blue hair-clip.

A thousand blue hair-clips in the world, she told herself. She slid the door open and went in and picked it up all the same — and it was hers. The small chip out of one leaf, where she had once caught it in a drawer. The exact one.

After that, the train began to hand her back the rest of her lost things. On the next seat along, a coin she had saved from a day at the sea. Further on, a paper star she had folded in a dull class and lost out of a book. A pressed flower, gone brown and paper-thin. And, on a seat by itself, a single milk-tooth she had not seen since she was seven — that she had not known anyone in the world had kept. Each one set out where she was certain to find it. Each one, beyond any doubt, hers.

Someone on this train did not merely know her name. Someone knew her whole small life, piece by piece, and was laying it out in front of her in the dark, one lost thing at a time.

She stood in the aisle with the cold little things gathered in her two hands, and beneath the first fear a second one opened, deeper and much colder. Because a stranger might learn your name. A stranger might follow you onto a train. But no stranger on earth could have these. These had been lost inside her own life — down the backs of drawers, in the pockets of old coats, at the bottoms of school bags. To have gathered them all, you would have had to be there the whole time. You would have had to have been near enough to touch her, for years and years, and she had never once turned around and seen you.

She dragged her phone out with shaking hands. The screen was dead. She held the button down and it woke just far enough to show her the time before it died again — 11:59 — and then it went black and stayed black, however hard she pressed.

11:59. The very minute she had stepped aboard. As if time itself had climbed on with her and then stopped, and left them both here, going nowhere, in the one endless minute before midnight.

There would be a guard. There was always a guard — a conductor, a driver, some tired human being in a uniform who checked the tickets and could be found and made to stop the train and let her off. She went looking for one, carriage by carriage, and in one of them she found the guard's booth, its door standing open.

It was empty. The little fold-down seat was empty; the ticket machine was dark. But when her hand fell on the seat cushion, without her meaning it to, the cushion was warm. The small heater by her feet was warm. A paper cup of tea stood on the ledge with the steam still rising off it in thin curls. Someone had been sitting here a moment ago. Someone had stood up and walked away one breath before she came in — and however many doors she pulled open, she could not find where they had gone.



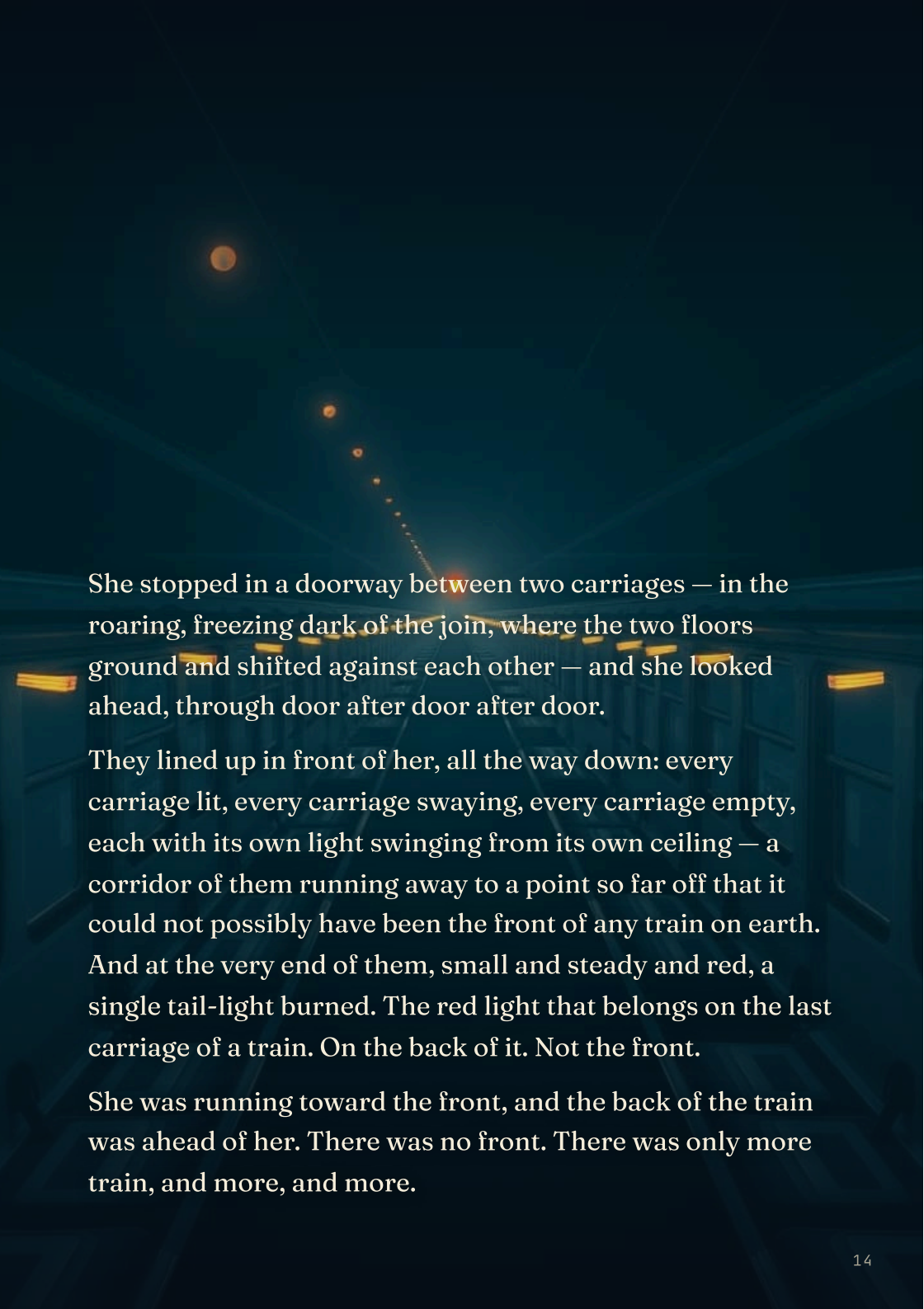


She ran.

She did not decide to run; her body decided for her. Away from the voice, away from the warm and empty booth, forward down the length of the train — because forward was the only direction that was not behind her, and behind her was where the voice was. She shoved through the door into the next carriage, and the cold of the join hit her like water, and she kept going, down the aisle and through the next door, and the next, and the next.

Every carriage was the same. The same two rows of empty seats. The same swinging light. The same fogged black windows with nothing behind them. She ran until her breath tore and a stitch bit into her side and the soles of her shoes went numb on the cold floor, and still there were more of them, opening one after another in front of her, exactly alike, as though she were not running through a train at all but running on the spot inside a single carriage that copied itself the instant she left it.

She was looking for an end. A driver's cab. A locked steel door. A red handle to haul on. She was looking for the front of the train, because every train has a front, and at the front there would be a person with both hands on the controls, and she would beat on the glass until they stopped and let her down onto solid ground. She counted the carriages as she ran through them. Four. Five. Six. There had not been six carriages. She had stood on the platform and watched the whole train come in. It had not been anywhere near this long.



She stopped in a doorway between two carriages — in the roaring, freezing dark of the join, where the two floors ground and shifted against each other — and she looked ahead, through door after door after door.

They lined up in front of her, all the way down: every carriage lit, every carriage swaying, every carriage empty, each with its own light swinging from its own ceiling — a corridor of them running away to a point so far off that it could not possibly have been the front of any train on earth. And at the very end of them, small and steady and red, a single tail-light burned. The red light that belongs on the last carriage of a train. On the back of it. Not the front.

She was running toward the front, and the back of the train was ahead of her. There was no front. There was only more train, and more, and more.



That was when she saw the platform.

It rose up out of the fog on the right-hand side — a dark, shut station, closed for the night: a broken bench, a name-board too fogged to read, and one sodium lamp burning amber over a locked ticket office. The train did not slow for it. It slid past the whole length of the platform and back out into the dark. And Asha, with her face against the glass, felt the floor tilt under her, because she had seen that platform before. The same broken bench. The same single amber lamp. The same locked door.

She had. Some long time ago, half the train back, she had passed that exact platform going the other way. She was certain of it. The train had gone past the same shut station twice — and had not stopped, and no station that anyone could actually get off at had come at all. As though the 11:59 were not travelling to any place. As though it were only travelling, on and on, around and around in the dark, and meant to go on doing so until morning, or forever, with her aboard.

In the black glass she caught her own reflection, laid faintly over the passing dark — a pale, hollow-eyed girl floating along outside the window, keeping level with the train, going nowhere. She lifted her hand, and the reflection lifted its hand. And a thin, terrible thought slid into her: that she did not feel like a girl a train was carrying to a city and a new life. She felt like something the dark had drawn to keep itself company through the night, and would wipe off the glass at dawn — the way she had wiped away her own name.



## Chapter Five — The Turn

She ran the last of the train.

And it did end. Of course it ended; everything ends. She simply had not reached the end of it until now. She went through one more door, and there were no more doors beyond it. The carriage in front of her was the last one, and it was dark — its swinging light had gone out — and the far wall of it was a single sheet of black glass with the red tail-light burning somewhere out behind it. There was nowhere left to go. She had run the entire length of the train that had somehow kept its end ahead of her, and the end was a dead one, and the footsteps were still coming.

She backed into the corner beside the dead black window. She had nothing left. Her phone was dead; her voice had gone somewhere down inside her that she could not reach; her hands shook so badly that she could not have pulled an emergency handle even if there had been one to pull. She pushed her fist into her coat pocket, and it closed — without her telling it to — around the bracelet. The thin silver thread she had not, in the end, been able to let go of. She held on to it as though it might be strong enough to hold on to her.

She could see almost nothing of what stood in it. A shape, in the dark of the doorway. Tall enough to be a grown person. And still, now — the footsteps had stopped at last. Whoever it was stood there in the join between the carriages, in the roaring dark, and did not come any closer. As if it, too, were afraid. As if it were gathering the very last of itself to cross the final distance.

For a long moment she did not move at all. Every part of her that was still an animal wanted only to stay exactly as she was — face to the glass, small, still, eyes squeezed shut — and let whatever it was come, and have it be over. That was the oldest lie fear ever told: that if you did not look at the thing, then the thing could not quite be real; that the dark could not take what you refused to see.

But she was so tired. She was so tired of being afraid of what was behind her. She had spent her whole life, she thought — every slammed door, every long silence, every night she had lain awake listening to the trains go by — afraid of what was behind her, and never once turning to look at it straight. And she understood, now, that there was exactly one thing left in this whole endless night that was still hers to decide. She could keep her face to the dead black window and let it take her from behind, and never see it. Or she could turn around.

So she let go of the window. She unfolded herself out of the corner. She made herself stand up straight, in the dark, with the bracelet closed hard inside her fist — and she turned around to face the thing that had followed her the whole length of the train.



In the carriage beyond the open door, the one working light was still swinging — out, and back, and out — and with each slow swing its warm yellow reached a little further across the join, and touched the shape standing in the doorway. A little. Then more. Then, all at once, all of it.

And Asha saw who it was that had been following her through the dark. And her legs went out from under her.

## Chapter Six — What the Dark Made of Her

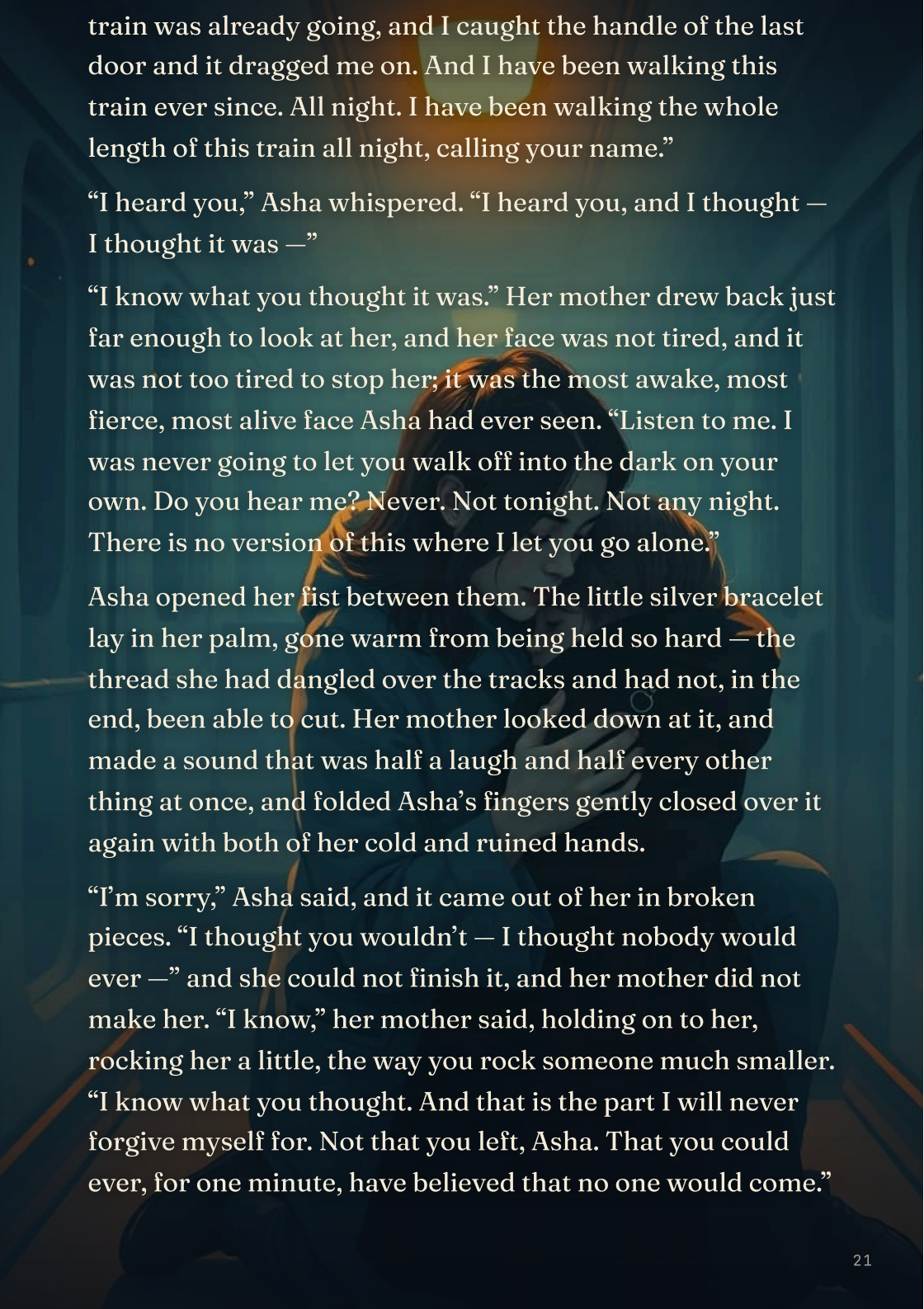
It was her mother.

Soaked to the skin, her hair plastered flat across her face, her coat gone black and heavy with rain, one shoe lost somewhere in the night. She was gripping the frame of the door with both hands because she could no longer hold herself up without it. Her chest heaved, up and down, up and down. She had been trying to say one single word for so many hours that it had worn all the way down to breath.

“Asha,” she said. Only that. “Asha.”

And Asha’s legs gave way beneath her — and her mother crossed the last of the dark carriage in three long strides and caught her before she reached the floor, and the two of them went down together onto the cold ribbed metal, holding on to one another as though the train might try to pull them apart.





train was already going, and I caught the handle of the last door and it dragged me on. And I have been walking this train ever since. All night. I have been walking the whole length of this train all night, calling your name.”

“I heard you,” Asha whispered. “I heard you, and I thought — I thought it was —”

“I know what you thought it was.” Her mother drew back just far enough to look at her, and her face was not tired, and it was not too tired to stop her; it was the most awake, most fierce, most alive face Asha had ever seen. “Listen to me. I was never going to let you walk off into the dark on your own. Do you hear me? Never. Not tonight. Not any night. There is no version of this where I let you go alone.”

Asha opened her fist between them. The little silver bracelet lay in her palm, gone warm from being held so hard — the thread she had dangled over the tracks and had not, in the end, been able to cut. Her mother looked down at it, and made a sound that was half a laugh and half every other thing at once, and folded Asha’s fingers gently closed over it again with both of her cold and ruined hands.

“I’m sorry,” Asha said, and it came out of her in broken pieces. “I thought you wouldn’t — I thought nobody would ever —” and she could not finish it, and her mother did not make her. “I know,” her mother said, holding on to her, rocking her a little, the way you rock someone much smaller. “I know what you thought. And that is the part I will never forgive myself for. Not that you left, Asha. That you could ever, for one minute, have believed that no one would come.”



And there, in the warmth and the safety of her mother's arms, one by one, the ghosts of the night turned quietly back into her mother.

The lost things, set out along the seats — her mother had kept them. All of them. For years. The blue hair-clip and the sea-coin and the paper star and the milk-tooth, saved in a tin at the back of a drawer: the small, secret treasury of a woman who had a hundred good reasons to be too tired to keep anything, and who had kept every last piece of her daughter anyway. She had snatched the tin up off the shelf on her way out of the door, because it was the nearest thing in the flat that was Asha's, and all night, as she searched, she had been setting the pieces down — a trail of a whole childhood, laid out carriage by carriage in the dark.

The name in the fogged glass — her mother, passing a sleeping shape with its head tucked into the corner of a window, not letting herself believe it could truly be Asha, because surely her own daughter would wake if her mother stood right over her and said her name. She had written it there in case. She had walked on.

The footsteps that stopped whenever Asha stopped — a woman at the very end of her strength, halting to listen, straining in the dark for any small sound that her child was still somewhere on the train. The whisper worn thin under the wheels — her name, called out over and over the whole night through, until there was almost no voice left to call it with.

She had walked the whole train once, her mother told her, all the way to the front, where the crew were shut behind a jammed door with the dead signal and there was no girl anywhere; and then she had turned around and walked the whole length of it back again, every carriage, twice over, because she would not let herself believe she had missed her. It was on the second pass, near the tail, that she had heard someone running ahead of her in the dark — and had found, somewhere down inside her spent body, the strength to run too.

There had never been anything in the dark but this. Only her mother, walking the length of the train, refusing to stop looking. Asha had run all night from the one person in all the world who had run all night toward her.

A door opened somewhere back down the train, and a torch-beam came bobbing along the aisle toward them, and a voice — a real one, an ordinary, tired, human voice — said, “Oh, thank god. We’ve been trying to reach you two for an hour.”

It was the guard: a young man in a high-visibility coat, rain still shining on his shoulders, a torch in one hand. He crouched down beside them on the carriage floor. “You’re the mum,” he said gently. “We got the message that you were aboard, looking for a girl. I’m sorry — I’m so sorry we couldn’t get back to you. We’ve been shut in up front with it all night.”

There had been a signal failure up the line, he told them, an hour before midnight — a fault at a set of points, the whole section ahead gone dark and dead. The 11:59 had been held out in the fog, then backed down onto a loop to clear the main line for the engineers, and there it had sat, and crawled, and sat again, for two hours. That was why no station had ever come. That was why the same shut platform had slid past twice. That was why not one of the crew had been able to walk back through the train.

“Your phone go dead?” he asked Asha, nodding at the black slab still frozen in her hand at 11:59, and she nodded, and he nodded back as though that explained a great deal — which, she understood now, it did. “We’re moving again,” he said. “Signal’s green. Two minutes into the terminus. And look — first light.” He pointed his torch, quite uselessly, at the black window. And she saw that he was right. The black had begun, very faintly, at its lowest edge, to turn grey.

## Chapter Seven — First Light

The train came into the terminus slowly, the way it had gone out — the way, Asha thought, that everything true seems to happen, in the end. Slowly.

She felt the brakes take hold, the long low sigh of them, the carriage giving up its speed by inches. Beyond the glass the fog was thinning into a pale grey morning, and shapes began to lift out of it: a water tower, a signal gantry, then the long curved roof of a great station spread over many platforms. The terminus. Real. Arriving. The end of the line that had had no end at all, all night long.

Her mother got to her feet, and drew Asha up with her, and did not let go of her hand. Together they walked down the aisle to the doors — past the rows of empty seats, under the last swinging light — the small silver bracelet safe in Asha's fist, and her mother's grip warm and certain around her other hand.



The doors slid open. The clean cold smell of morning came in to meet them.

And they stepped down onto the platform together, into the grey-gold light — two figures, side by side, where a whole night ago, a whole lifetime ago, on another platform in the fog, one girl had climbed aboard alone.

Asha had been so certain, standing on that first platform in the fog, that no one would come.

She had built a whole night out of that one certainty. A whole train. A whole dark story, with a hunter in it. She had been so sure that no one was coming that she had taken the sound of her own mother's love — her name called out in the dark, her lost things carried through the night, a hand reaching for her one carriage back — and turned every piece of it into something to run from, and had run from it the entire length of a train that would not end.

That was the thing about the dark, she would understand later — much later, telling it at last to someone who mattered. The dark never puts anything there. It only takes the light away, and lets your fear paint the empty wall with whatever it pleases: a stranger, a hunter, a proof that you are not wanted, not looked for, not loved.



And all the while, one carriage back — a step, and a pause, and a step — the truth had been walking toward her through the dark, soaked to the skin and out of breath and calling her name, and it had not once thought of turning around.

Her mother was limping a little on her one bare foot, and shivering in her ruined coat, and she was still the warmest thing on the whole grey platform. They would take the first train home together, later, in the daylight, and Asha would eat the rice cold from the pan and it would be the best thing she had ever tasted. But that was still to come.

The fog was lifting off the rooftops now. Somewhere down the platform a tea stall was rattling up its shutter for the morning. Her mother squeezed her hand, and Asha squeezed back, and the two of them walked off the platform together and out into the ordinary, extraordinary light — which is the only way that anyone, ever, has found their way out of the dark.

✦ THE END

Thank you for reading a Navritto Story. Find  
more illustrated stories — free to read and  
download — at **[navritto.com/stories](https://navritto.com/stories)**.