

# BOO

## **Content Warning: Boo contains themes of suicide.**

Do you want to know what happens when you die? I bet you've heard it all before. The long tunnel, the blinding light, the feeling of inner peace. It's all true. Some people have a guide to help them along. You know, someone spiritual: Jesus, Krishna, one of those guys. For me, it was Graham Norton. I know, right? I don't think he's even dead. But there he was pointing me towards paradise in a felt red jacket with one eyebrow raised like it was all a big joke. What can I say? Death's weird.

Seriously though, it's beautiful that light. It takes a pretty big reason to resist it. Some people stick around. You know: poets, scientists, people who feel like they've still got important stuff to do. But they don't stay for long. Usually, they find a way to pass their little nuggets on, and then they're off after that big, shiny light like happy little moths.

It's not like that for me though. For me, it's love that keeps me here. Are you laughing? Go ahead, laugh it up. It was ridiculous when I was alive, and it's even more ridiculous now that I'm dead. I don't care. I'm in love with Maurice Parker.

I've loved Maurice ever since we did *To Kill a Mockingbird* in year ten. Mrs Wright was getting us all to say which characters we liked in the book. I said that Boo Radley was my favourite, and then, because I'm an idiot, I told the whole class that it was because I felt just like him, like I was him. Then that bitch, Suzie Mellor snorted through her nose like she was trying not to laugh. All her mates joined in of course, right on cue, and then...

"I feel like that too."

It was Maurice and he was looking at me. He wasn't laughing. He wasn't just being kind either, sticking up for the weird pale kid with no mates. No, Maurice meant it, I could tell.

That shut Suzie up, her and all the other emotional fuckwits on the back row, with their identical haircuts and selfie pouts. They all want Maurice. I mean, who wouldn't? But they don't love him. They just like the way he looks. They don't understand what it's like to want to be unseen. Not like Maurice and me.

I still go to school, by the way. Even though I'm dead. Why not? It's not that different from before to be honest. No one talked to me when I was alive either, and at least I'm not worried about getting cornered anymore. It might even be fun soon. I'm thinking about 'appearing' to Suzie Mellor. I'm planning to float towards her through one of the cubicle doors in the girl's toilets with my head lolling to one side and my tongue sticking out. With any luck, she'll piss herself.

I'll have to wait a while though. No one's found my body yet. It's still dangling from a tree in the woods. I bet it looks freaky as hell, like something out of a horror film. It's going to scare the shit out of some poor dog walker soon. Yeah, I know it makes no sense to top myself and then refuse to move on, but what's new? My life never made much sense, so why should my death?

To tell you the truth, I never really thought I'd go through with it. It started off as a kind of daydream. I'd go for long walks through the woods and imagine how bad they'd all feel if I died. After a while planning my death just became a pastime. Something to do. It's good to have a hobby. I told my parents I was going on a school trip, even made some fake permission slips for them to sign. They were too busy to think to question it. Probably glad to be free of me for a few days. Then I packed my school bag with some snacks and my copy of *To kill a mockingbird*, swiped a bit of old rope from Dad's shed, and headed for the woods.

I don't actually remember finding the tree or tying the noose. I guess I must have blanked it. I only remember walking away from Graham Norton after he tried to point me towards his eternal light. And now here I am, wandering around with nothing but my year ten English book and a bag of snacks I can't eat cause I'm a frickin ghost.

At night I go to Maurice's house and watch him sleeping. Yeah, I know it's creepy but what did you expect from a ghost? I'm not going to appear to him, that would just freak him out, but I've started doing little things. I tidy the books on his desk and hang his dressing gown up. I don't think he's noticed anything yet, but tonight I'm going to take it up a notch. I'm leaving him a note.

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It's 2 am, and I'm standing at Maurice's bedside. His breathing is slow. He looks wonderful. What should I write? Something enigmatic that will make him think of me.

"Of course," I whisper.

Maurice turns over in the bed.

I take a loose piece of paper from his desk and write *Boo* on it in thick, black, capital letters. Boo, for Boo Radley. Will he understand? Will he know it's from me? Maybe not. But when they announce my death in school, then he'll wonder.

I balance the note on the books beside his bed. He looks so beautiful, one bare arm above the duvet and his hair spread out on the pillow. Did I tell you he has long hair? Would he feel it if I kissed him? I never kissed a boy when I was alive? Would it feel the same now? Slowly, quietly, I lean over his bed. Holding my breath, I move my face closer to his.

He opens his eyes.

Honestly, I didn't know that boys could scream like that. It hurts my ears. He actually runs into his own door. I watch him bounce off it and land face up on the floor. Then he scrambles to his feet, yanks it open and runs down the hall.

I wonder how I looked? Was I luminous? Did my face glow with ghostly light? I hope so. I didn't mean to appear to him. I'm not quite sure how I did it. But, if I was going to let anyone see me, then I suppose it was always going to be Maurice.

Bad timing though.

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It's morning now and I'm sitting on a bench by the playground. There are some little kids laughing on the swings as their mums push them. They don't see me, of course, but it's kind of nice to see them. They look so happy.

Climbing down the tree outside Maurice's window last night was just the saddest thing. I could hear Boo's parents. They were seriously freaking out. It made me feel bad. I never wanted to be that kind of ghost, the haunting kind. Is this how it always goes for those of us who stay on? Scaring away the people we stayed for?

I've lost everything now: my life, my family and now Maurice. If Graham Norton and his shiny light were to turn up again now then I think I'd just go for it. But I don't think it works like that. Actually, I don't really know how it works. But I know I've blown it with Maurice. I'm always going to creep him out now. He'll probably have nightmares about me. My life was always a joke, and now, after just a few days, my death is too.

I spot a couple of policemen walking through the park. They smile at the mums by the swings who smile back. They're heading towards my bench. I look over my shoulder. There's no one behind me, just an overflowing bin. Why are they coming this way?

They get to my bench and stop. One of them says my name. I'm not sure if it's a question or a statement? It doesn't matter. How the hell does he know I'm here?

I stand up. The policeman puts his hand on my shoulder, and I feel it. How can I feel it? I'm a ghost!

I stare at his hand. He's saying something about Maurice, about my parents and the school.

"You can't touch me," I say, "I'm dead."

The policeman just nods. "Is that so?"

The mums in the playground are looking at me too. How can that be? Am I appearing to everyone now?

The other policeman picks up my bag from the bench and opens it. I don't say anything. He pulls out the contents and sets them down on the park bench in a neat line: my snacks, my phone, my copy of *To Kill a Mockinbird*. Then he pulls out something else.

My knees give way a little and the first policeman's hand tightens on my shoulder. What does it mean? How can it be here? It should be in the woods with my body dangling from it. But it's not. I begin to realise why I never could remember tying that noose. Slowly the policeman uncoils my Dad's old rope.