

The Longest Night

I really hate this job.

But I also kinda love it.

For the past two years, I've manned the graveyard shift at **Jimmy's Pump & Go**, which is a gas station off the I65 northbound lanes heading into Chicago. Being Jewish, you'd think I hate working around so much *treif* (i.e., non-kosher) food, but the job pays well, and I don't get hassled that much. However, it's also a job that requires supernatural amounts of caffeine, sarcasm, and a healthy dose of self-loathing. You either embrace the madness or go insane trying to make sense of it all. I chose the former.

I've seen everything. A guy dressed like Abraham Lincoln at 3AM, buying nothing but a single banana and a can of WD-40. A woman wearing hair pins and pajamas, once bought a pack of gum and chewed every piece of it before she left the store. One time, a dude walked in, humming a hymn, paid for his gas entirely in pennies, and walked right back out—didn't buy anything else. He just... left the twenty dollars in pennies on the counter, smiled, and left.

Weird is normal here.

But last night? Last night was something else.

It Started Subtle

It wasn't just one thing. It was like a slow unraveling.

Most nights, the job is a mix of mind-numbing boredom and occasional oddities. I spend hours watching dead-eyed truckers refuel, scrolling through my phone, or half-heartedly wiping down already-clean counters. Between 2 and 4 AM, the world gets too quiet—like the highway forgets it's supposed to exist. Even the bugs outside seem to stop humming. That's the dead zone.

Jeb was the first to set me on edge. An old trucker, he's been coming here longer than I've worked the counter. Every night around midnight, he orders the same thing: a large black coffee, one packet of sugar, a kolache, and then gone. Tonight, he just stood there, staring at the coffee machine like he'd forgotten what it was. His hands twitched at his sides, and his breath came in short, ragged bursts.

"You good, Jeb?" I asked, already knowing the answer.

His head turned too slow, like a puppet on rusted strings. His smile stretched wide, too wide.

"Guess I had too much caffeine already," he rasped.

I forced a chuckle, but my stomach knotted. Something about the way he said it like it wasn't him speaking.

The Shift Gets Weirder

An hour passed. A woman in a fur coat three sizes too big shuffled in next. She smelled like mothballs and rain, and when she spoke, it was like her voice came from somewhere else—too deep, too layered.

"Do you sell... ice?" she asked, like she wasn't sure what the word meant.

"Yeah. Freezers in the back," I said, watching her with growing unease.

She turned, but not like a person turning—like a person turning who'd never done it before. Like she had to think about it. But then it was like she glitched. One second she faced me, the next she was already walking away, no in-between. That messed me up. I had to go back and watch the security tape and she enough, she turned normally. That's about the time I was thinking I either needed a psych evaluation, or a vacation.

I exhaled slowly. *Just another weird one, Jake. You've seen plenty.*

30 minutes later, a father and son came in. Something about them made my skin crawl. They moved too smoothly; their expressions frozen in the same polite smile.

"Good evening," the father said. "It's a very good evening."

"Right," I muttered, ringing up their gas. *Just another weird one. Just another weird one.*

Watching them talk to each other, something clicked.

The same moment the father spoke, the kid's lips moved in perfect sync. Same voice. Same cadence. No delay.

A shiver ran through me.

Outside, the highway was too quiet. Far less traffic than normal. No wind. Even the usual hum of the fluorescent lights seemed distant as if sound itself was being swallowed.

First Jeb. Then the woman in the large fur coat. Now these two. Something was wrong.

The Moment It Changed

3:37 AM.

The old radio behind the counter crackled, picking up static from a station I didn't recognize.

Then, a voice.

"They did not listen, though the signs were clear."

I froze.

The voice was ancient. Weighted. Like something speaking through the airwaves rather than into them.

"They mocked, though the heavens trembled. And now, the hour is here."

I grabbed the dial and turned it, but the static only got louder.

I turned around and noticed that the weirdos from before were back. Together.

The fur coat woman was staring at me from her parked car right in front of the store. The father and son were outside in their car staring into the store.

Jeb was standing next to his rig facing the store. All of them. Unmoving. Watching.

"Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin."

The voice on the radio rang through the station.

"You have been weighed in the balances and found wanting."

The air thickened. The room darkened. I could barely breathe. This was from the Tanakh. Daniel. I knew the story growing up from when we used to go to synagogue.

"The Lord will now come snatch up His saints, and then sudden destruction will befall all those who remain..."

Looking outside, I could see they were now getting out of the cars and walking back toward the store.

I ran.

The Final Stand

I locked myself in the store's supply room, heart pounding. It was the most secure room in the facility that doubled as a safe room and a storm shelter. Outside, strange sounds started emerging like howling and screaming. The walls shook violently, like they were either undergoing a sudden earthquake or something incredibly heavy landed just outside the station. More screaming. More howling. The air grew acrid and for a split second, he thought they might have lit the gas station on fire. Checking the store's cameras via his phone app, he saw no fires or even smoke. He didn't even see the strange customers.

In the background he could still hear the radio playing the sermon loudly.

"The night is far spent, and the day is at hand. The Lord's coming is nigh!"

I squeezed my eyes shut. Please God, don't let any normal customers accidentally stumble into this and get injured. He had already signaled 911 so the cops theoretically would come any minute now if they were close by. Chances are, they weren't.

"God," I whispered, voice shaking. "If you're there, if I'm not too late, help me."

An ear shattering cry pierced the night causing him to cover his ears tightly. On his app, he could see the crowd growing outside of the store. They didn't seem violent, or riotous, but were standing there, swaying together in unison, as if in a trance. They all turned and faced the camera he was seeing through on his app.

This was, by far, the most bizarre moment of my life.

A pause.

Then—

A new sound—a distant rumbling.

At first, I thought it was just the building settling. But then, beneath it, I heard something else screaming.

Not human screams.

Something worse.

The ground shook.

And then—

Sunlight.

The End... Or the Beginning?

Another 20 minutes elapsed before my phone battery died. I was left in the supply room, cut off from the outside world, nothing but my wits and my Slim Jim and Diet Dr. Pepper. After a few hours, I finally mustered the courage to step out of the supply room, blinking against the harsh morning light.

The gas station was empty. The shelves were pristine. No sign of struggle. No warped walls. No sign of Jeb, the woman, the father and son—no sign that anyone had been here at all.

I checked my wall clock. 0735.

The digital calendar beneath the clock read the date.

August 2, 2025.

That date knocked on the door of his memory.

Today was Tisha B'Av. The day of mourning.

He wasn't entirely sure how he remembered that date.

The radio had breaking news interrupting the music that had quietly been playing. He walked closer to the section where the speaker was at. It was the news saying all the people missing were because of the Rapture.

I grabbed a new soda and hopped up on the counter leaning back to change the news channel on the store stereo. I scanned a dozen other radio stations, all of them were now playing the news. Half were saying it was the Rapture, the other half were saying it was aliens.

Walking to the entrance, he looked out at the highway heading north. He could see smoke rising in the distance.

I swallowed, staring at the empty highway.

Dust skated across the asphalt like it had somewhere to be.

Cars sat abandoned, doors ajar, some still idling, like their owners had just... stood up and disappeared. I checked my phone again—no signal. Just the last push alert:

“Remain calm. Shelter in place. Authorities are investigating.”

Yeah, sure they are.

The air felt heavier now, like it knew something I didn't.

In the distance, a low hum vibrated the ground beneath my feet.

Not thunder. Not a plane. Something else.

I wasn't sure which scared me more—

That all those Christians were gone...

Or that the rest of us were still here.