

Part 1

World War II

Date: September 8th, 1941

The rain comes down fast and hard as my adrenaline spikes and my biplane becomes more and more riddled with enemies' bullets. The engine sputters as I start losing altitude. It also doesn't help that my purveyors have not yet given up on hunting me down. The engine sputters again.

"Nononononono! C'mon Phoenix! Stay with me a little longer!" I implored. The biplane whined in protest but held fast as I kept evading the enemies on my tail. They disappear through the clouds, and for a moment, everything is quiet, with just the sound of Phoenix's engine whining and sputtering along. Then, my world shatters as the cockpit is blasted open. The smoke from Phoenix's engines floods my view, but I manage to find the ejection lever after groping around. I pull it once, twice, three times, each with a sinking feeling that drops faster than my plummeting airplane. I ditched the ejection lever and practically tore up my seat to get to my parachute, only to hold it up and find it torn to pieces from the hailing shrapnel. I throw it down in frustration, and watch as the numbers on my altimeter steadily decrease. I brace myself for impact once. my altimeter reaches 100 feet, and then... nothing.

When I come to my senses, I'm laying down on the cold, wet forest floor. Gentle rain pitter-patters on my face and the wreckage of Phoenix, slowly washing away the soot and grime from my face. I open my eyes to not see fighter planes flying overhead in a dark, smoky gray, polluted sky whilst dropping bombs, but a peaceful, light gray, right after-the-storm sky. I lean up to examine my surroundings closer, but that was all I could do; I gasped as I felt a hot, burning pain in my gut, and I knew what had happened. I closed my eyes, breathing in and out slowly, as I pressed my hand to my stomach. It came away blood-red. I felt my whole body go numb, as I laid back down, groaning. I managed to roll and crawl over to what's left of Phoenix to search for the First Aid kit, but it was in vain; the kit was nowhere to be found.

"Well, I guess this is what I get when I run off to join the Air Force instead of being an accountant like my parents wanted. Are you happy now Mom and Dad?" I said.

"Still worth it," I thought after with a smirk growing across my face.

Then, I thought about my beautiful husband, Jeremy, and my smirk slid right off my face. Oh, I'm going to miss him with a passion! We knew what might happen to me if I joined the Air Force. But we never thought a full World War would happen. Jeremy wanted to pull me out of the military, "It's too dangerous!" he said. I didn't listen.

I countered, "Which is exactly why I need to stay! I need to fight for my country so I can help people!" I promised him I would be okay. But here I am, bleeding to death in the middle of nowhere. We wanted to grow old together, own a little cottage by the seashore. We wanted to have 3 dogs, 2 cats, a hamster and a parakeet. We wanted to have little kids running around,

and eventually see them grow up. For goodness sake, we wanted to be grandparents! We envisioned it so perfectly, but I will never live to see it for myself.

The gentle rain pitter-patters on my face once again as I close my eyes, and the placid sound of gentle waves crashing on the shore fills my ears. I can hear our future already!

...And then I'm gone.

Part 2

The Afterlife

September 15th, 1941

I open my eyes to see not the cottage by the sea that I expected was my afterlife, but rather a movie theater. It was a part of a mall, where I could hear sounds of people hustling and bustling around, but it was subdued, as if somebody turned the volume down to 10%. But what was strangest of all was that the mall was completely deserted, but only as if everybody left a few days ago. The movie theater was the only structure that appeared to still be in business, so naturally, I walked in. Wait, I walked? I looked down, and there was my uniform, fresh, clean, and free of blood and holes from bullets. I lift it up a little bit to examine my skin, and where the bullets were are replaced with faint scars. I can't help but feel amazed as I take it all in.

"Don't worry, you're not the only one to react like that." said a voice behind me.

I whirl around to see a familiar mop of fiery red hair on top of a pale, impish face that at the moment was about 2 inches from my face, and grinning! As he had just given me a mini heart attack, I leap back at least three feet.

"Jeez Louise!! Personal space, man!" I say as I attempt to compose myself.

"Sorry about that, I do it out of habit," he laughed sheepishly. "Anyways, I'm-"

"Wait," I said. I cut him off because something caught my eye. I copied him as I leaned in until I was 2 inches from his face. His face stayed cheerfully jovial as I examined every fiery freckle on it, until I in turn startled him by saying "Aha! Griffin Bartholemew Devon Larkoss the III, what are you doing here?"

"Griffin? Who's Griffin? Also what kind of name is Griffin Bartholemew Devon Larkoss the III? What kind of parents would name three generations of guys that? Seems like a huge mouthful for me. I'm Tyler, and I don't think we've met before... But we have met now, and you've got my name but I haven't gotten yours, soooo... What's your name?" he said.

I sighed and said, "Number One, sorry about that, you just look literally **exactly** like Griffin. I'm Peregrine. Peregrine Everett. It's nice to meet you, I think. Number Two, his parents are

old-fashioned, his dad was a duke and his mom was a successful businesswoman. Number Three, I know right? His name is a lot. ” I say. “What is this place? I mean I know it’s the afterlife, but why a movie theater?” I ask.

“Oh, this old place? Yeah, it’s weird,” he said.

“...Is that it?” I asked.

“Oh! Yeah. I’m not really the person to ask about this weird old place. The people who have the answers are in there.” he shrugged, motioning to the ominous cinema across from us.

Before I can walk into the cinema to get some answers, Tyler says, “Wait, you forgot something!”

I turn around, and he is once again, 2 INCHES away from my face, and grinning!

“Will you STOP doing that!!” I chided. His expression turns sheepish once again as he backs away from me.

“You forgot to get your snacks for the movie! I run the concessions stand.” he says.

“I’m not hungry. Believe it or not, getting my lights scared out twice in a row after dying 10 minutes before by getting shot chalk full of bullets will ruin your appetite. I think I can last an hour or two without eating.” I said.

“You don’t even have an appetite for a toasted cheese sandwich accompanied by creamy tomato soup with a hint of basil and crackers on top?” he said.

I whirled around and said, “How? How did you know?”

“Know what?” he said innocently

“You know what I’m talking about! How did you know this was my favorite food?” I asked as I took the platter from him. “And how’d you make it the way Papa Emilio makes it?” I pondered as I took a bite.

He waved my questions off. “Never mind that! Aren’t you glad you regained your appetite? Besides, you’re going to need to eat!” he said.

I stopped pigging out for a second. “What’s that supposed to mean?” I demanded.

He waved my questions off once again. “And don’t forget to come back later for more!” he cheered jovially, waving me off towards the cinema.

I start walking to the cinema but as I get halfway there, I turn around and say, "Wait, Tyler? Who **are** the people inside the cinema?"

But only after I finished asking my question was when I realized nobody was there anymore. Creepy... I thought nothing of it though. He probably just went to the bathroom.

Part 3

The Afterlife

September 23rd, 1941

I open the door to the cinema and the first thing I see is my face on the big screen! I run up to the front of the cinema just to make sure it's me, and yep, it is! It seems to be a montage of my life, just the highlights. The day I got my first childhood dog, the day I got married to Jeremy, the day I got accepted into ROTC (Reserve Officer's Training Corps) in high school then into the Air Force after college, the day of Papa Emilio's funeral, and other events. I guess I am standing there in bewilderment for quite some time because I hear, "Oi! Some people are trying to watch here!"

I turn around to see who called me but I can't see anything besides silhouetted faces partly illuminated by the glow of the big screen. I called out, "sorry!" to nobody in particular. I sat down in the nearest seat I could find and facepalmed as inconspicuously as possible. Less than 15 seconds in the cinema and I already made a bad impression! Oh well, who cares? I'll apologize again later. The montage fades away, along with the cheesy music accompanying it. The lights quickly blinked on, accompanied with disgruntled mutters and "come on's!" *A short intermission has now commenced. Please return in 30 minutes.* At that, at least 20 people rushed out of the cinema. I hope Tyler isn't too overwhelmed at the concession stand.

"Seriously, don't these people know that we've been sitting in the dark for hours?" Someone chuckled next to me. I turn to see a pair of bright green eyes and a silver sparkling runway dress twinkling at me.

"The name's Kumar, Suzanne. Suzzane Kumar. You're Peregrine Everett and you're new here, unless you changed your name since you've arrived." She let out a hearty laugh with a snort thrown in for good measure.

"Yeah, that's me-Peregrine Everett. I'm guessing the answer to how you know my name is also the answer to all of my other questions about this place. I don't suppose you know the answers to my questions?" I asked.

"I do, but it's tradition to let Evaline answer all of your questions and for us to listen in and offer our own advice.. I shall lead you to her!" she said as she turned on the heels of her 5 inch silver slingback stilettos and flipped her ebony black hair into my face.

We were able to walk about 2 steps with me spitting Suzanne hair out of my mouth before bumping into someone else.

“ Oh! I-I’m so sorry!” stuttered a young 9-10 year old boy with mousy brown hair and... are those knee breeches? He continued to brush off his buttons galore overcoat as he kept apologizing. When he finally tore his eyes away from the ground (with Suzanne’s gentle encouragement), he looked at me and almost fainted from excitement.

“Y-Your P-p-peregrine Everett! Aww, darn it! I promised m-myself I would get y-your n-name right!” He said.

“How do you guys know who I am? I’m not famous or anything. Anyway, you know who I am but I don’t know who you are! What’s your name?” I asked.

He looked as though he would combust from excitement as he took a bow and said, “Wyatt Davis, at your service! O-only if y-you n-need it though. N-not that I-I won’t help y-you if you just w-want me to! Darn it again! I’m b-being a-annoying aren’t I?”

I chuckled and said, “You’re fine Wyatt. It’s a pleasure to meet you!”

I heard him say something under his breath but he scampered away before I could ask him what he said.

“Don’t worry too much about him. Ever since we watched your tape, he has been fawning over you ever since.” Suzanne said.

“What do you mean, watched my tape?” I questioned.

“Ah ah ah, I’m keeping my lips sealed. You’ll find out soon enough,” she teased.

Part 4

The Afterlife

October 27th, 1941

We continued walking up the rows to the back of the cinema but we kept getting delayed because people kept coming up to me and introducing themselves to me, but they already all knew who I was. We finally got to the back of the theater where only a couple of people sat, probably because the back of the theater is the worst possible place to sit in, but that’s just my opinion. Hordes of people were trailing us by the time we arrived, so Suzanne automatically assumed the part of crowd control.

“Alright everyone! You’ll get a good look at her soon enough! NOW STEP BACK!” She commanded with her booming voice. At once the crowd dispersed, quieted down, and gave me my space.

I stood there awkwardly until one of them spoke up.

“You’re Peregrine Everett.” a woman with warm, bright blue eyes under wire-frame glasses said. Her wispy gray hair reached down to her back, and her hands were weathered yet smooth, adorned

“Yes. Yes, I am. I have been reminded that for the past 20 minutes” I sighed, thoroughly exasperated.

She chuckled and said warmly, “I know, it must be very overwhelming for you? And yes, it was a question.”

I shifted uncomfortably and she immediately gestured to the empty seat next to her. I gladly obliged and sat down. Mind you, the crowd of 50-ish people were still watching this whole exchange with much interest.

“The answer is yes. I’m not famous or anything but these guys seem to think I am.” I said as I gave the crowd a pointed look.

“I can explain that. You know the drill everyone! Sit down! Feel free to give her advice but you have to raise your hands and wait for your turn. Understood?” she said.

“Understood Mrs. Evangeline, “ the crowd recited as one.

“I’m guessing you were a teacher?” I guessed.

“As a matter of fact, I was! I taught first graders, ah the charming bunch!” she chuckled. “But that’s a story for another day,” she sighed.

“Anyways, we are finally here and in the moment! Hit me with your questions! Quickly, now! We only have 10 minutes left so you’ll get a crash course!” she clapped.

“Well, What is this place?” I ventured.

“Well it’s the afterlife, and to be more specific, it is a movie theater, as you probably know already,” she chuckled.

“I know but-” I said, but I interrupted myself. I said, “This is probably another question for another day, isn’t it?”

"Right you are dear! Now, don't dawdle! Time's a wastin!" she cried out jovial.

"Alright, why am I famous here?" I asked.

"Ah, this will most likely answer some of your other questions too. Well, to start, we are all you, and you are us." she said. She didn't even have to look up to know how confused my face was.

"A-a-ah, let me explain. You believe in reincarnations right?" she started.

"Well it doesn't matter if you believe in them or not, because we are real. And yes, I said *we*. We are all your reincarnations. Now that that's explained, I can explain what might sound a little creepy to you. We have been watching you for a veeeeeeeeeeeeery long time. Don't worry, we have watched everyone's life here. Like for example, Little Ms. Suzanne here once-" she said, but she was interrupted by guess who? Suzanne!

"Mamaw, do you really have to tell *that* story?" Suzanne pleaded.

"Yes, dear we have to in order to-" Evangaline started, but it was my turn to interrupt.

"Wait wait wait, back up really quickly. Did you Suzanne call you Mamaw? I thought we were all the same person? Why..." I inquired.

"Hold your horses dearie! We are family, even if we are not related. Remember, *the blood of the covenant is thicker than the water of the womb*. I'm sure you understand. Now, back to the story! Anyway, Suzanne was riding down the street in a limo waving to adoring fans, she was a movie star, you know. Then, she stepped out gracefully, waved to the crowd, and... promptly fell flat on her face. I personally think it's because of her heels that-" She said.

Suzanne once again interrupted, "Mamaw, you finished the story, can we please move on?"

"Oh, sorry dearie. But you know what I think about those silly slingback heels! And that dress is much too long and tight! I wouldn't be surprised if that was the real reason why you tripped!" she laughed.

"Now, where were we? Ah of course..." She started, but I only heard details. She pointed out Wyatt, the nervous little kid in the 1800's clothes, that he once called his teacher "Mom" and embarrassed that after school he asked his father to switch schools. We had a good laugh about that one. As she pointed out every single person in the crowd, I heard funny and embarrassing stories ranging from having a chair pulled out from under you to slipping lemonade all over your white pants. I laughed at every single one of those stories until it hit me.

"Evangeline,, since we are listening to all of these stories, does that mean you all saw that time I... and that other time I... Even when I..." I asked. Evangeline nodded to each of my failed questions as I buried my very red face in my hands.

Dearie,” she laughed, “That was the whole point of this! We wanted to know that we have all seen a lot of other embarrassing moments about each other, yo you are fine! Although, I really got a kick out of that one time with Jeremy!”

I lifted my face out of my hands just the tiniest bit and gave her a meek smile as, “please return to your seats, the viewing is about to begin.” blared over the speakers. As everyone obeyed the instructions, I asked Evangeline, “ Are we going to be viewing our next life?” And she gave me a look that said, “You’ll see”

Part 5

The Afterlife

Date: N/A

The movie theater fades to darkness once again, as the screen lights up. On the screen is the grim face of a doctor, saying, “She’s opened her eyes, but she’s not crying. Something’s wrong. We have to get her to the OR.” Everyone in the movie theater lets out a collective gasp, including me. Immediately, the scenery changes as the doctor rushes to the OR and the nurses and midwife try to reassure the panic-stricken parents. The next thing the screen shows is the blinding white light of the operating room, and a mask being slipped over the baby’s nose and mouth. The baby’s eyelids start to droop, and slowly fall shut as the anesthesia kicks in, shrouding the screen with black again. Everyone starts murmuring, discussing what will happen, with some even looking towards the dark hallway expectantly, but I didn’t get to see what happened next because before I could, everything was interrupted by a voice in my head.

I know what that sounds like, and you’re probably thinking, “Peregrine has finally lost her marbles!”, but I’m telling you, it was real! That doesn’t really help my case much, does it? The thing is, it was very muffled and sounded really far away, like someone had put headphones over my ears, started blasting white noise into them to the point where I couldn’t hear myself think, and tried to talk to me from across the room. Keep that in mind when I tell you that what I heard was a very muffled, “Peregrine, you better wake up! It’s been months, and we need you! I know you’re in there, so please...”

I immediately leaned over to Evangeline and whispered, “Did you hear the voice?”

She replied, “Hear what, dear?”

I whisper-shouted, “The voice that said, ‘Peregrine, you better wake up!’”

She looked at me, concerned, and said, “Are you alright dear? I know how hard it is to adjust and-”

I interrupted, “Thanks Evangeline, but I think I’m okay now.”

She gave me one last concerned look and turned back to the screen.

I decided not to tell Evangeline the other things the voice may or may not have said because my very logical brain thought that it would make me seem *less* crazy. By the time I had kind of calmed down about the voice (I still hadn't decided whether it had really happened or not) all the hubbub had stopped as the baby's eyelids fluttered open to see the face of her mother, a beautiful woman with auburn hair and light gray eyes. I was reminded suddenly of the right-after-the-storm-sky I saw right before I died. I shook off the shiver that went down my spine just in time to hear the name the baby was given.

"Emmaline Genevive Simmons is an utterly beautiful name, Mrs. and Mr. Simmons. A beautiful name for a beautiful baby girl," commented one of the nurses. Immediately, everyone in the theater started clapping as Mrs. Simmons looked lovingly at her newborn. I opened my mouth to ask Evangeline, but she had already started to answer my unspoken question.

"It's an informal tradition to applaud when their name is given. Her name truly is beautiful," Evangeline said knowingly. I nodded and eagerly joined the applause. By the time that we had all settled back down, the doctor had come into the room.

"Mr. and Mrs. Simmons, I am terribly sorry to have worried you last night, but the reason why your baby was crying was that her lungs weren't working properly, so we had to get her into surgery to check and fix any abnormalities, and I'm happy to say that she's well on her way to recovery now!" the doctor announced.

Mrs. Simmons sighed with relief and replied, "We can't thank you enough for helping us, Dr. Larisse."

"It's the least I could do during these hard times. Now, be careful out there and stay safe!" Dr. Larisse said, seeing them off.

Part 6

The Afterlife

Date: N/A

After that, Emmaline had a pretty normal childhood; she had a childhood pet (his name was Sammy and he was a golden retriever), she was popular in school, had top marks, did plenty of extracurricular activities, all that good stuff. That was, until horseback riding. 14-year old Emmaline was up on her horse, Juniper, and they had just finished a show jumping run (in which they were outstanding in). So, they went into the stables, but there were some buyers in there too, assessing each of the horses. Unfortunately, one of the buyers had a whip with him, because that's how he preferred to train horses, and Juniper panicked. Her previous owner had deprived her of food, space, and most importantly, used horrible methods using various discipline devices, including a spiked whip, when training Juniper, so, naturally, Juniper got finicky whenever she saw one. Juniper reared up suddenly, and having been caught off guard,

Emmaline was thrown off. The good news is, she protected her head. The bad news is, when she fell, she fell the wrong way. Meaning, she fell on her back and... you'll see.

As we watched Emmaline fall to the ground for which felt like forever, we all sat firmly rooted to our seats, hoping the inevitable wouldn't happen. Then we heard a sickening crack as she landed. We heard someone say, "Get a medic!" right before the screen blacked out from Emmaline falling unconscious.

We still stayed firmly rooted in our seats, all with the same question in our minds, "What happens next?"

And of course, that's when the voices come back to my head. This time, it was a little less fuzzy and muffled, as if the person managing my headphones turned down the white noise a little bit, stepped a bit closer to me, and spoke louder.

"Peregrine, it's me, Lexi. Aliana's here too. We just wanted to say that Mom and Dad... t-they-" the person talking, Lexi, I guess, choked up. Then they began talking again, but this time, it was a different person, so I guess it's Aliana.

"Peregrine, it was a terrorist attack on an airplane to Britain. We... saw it going down in flames from the horizon. We knew they were coming, but we were afraid to find out if that was them. Goodness, I don't know if you can even hear us or not. If you do, we need you to know that Mom and Dad were really, really proud of you for fighting for our country, being a hero and all that. They wanted to protect you from... this, I guess, just like Jeremy did. Speaking of, what he's doing to you is despicable! Just so you know, he's running around with that... (&!*<#) Karen Roplinsky while you're here, in this stupid coma. The next time I see him, I am going to hit him where it hurts. When you wake up, I suggest you change your last name back to Ace, and yes I said when, because you are going to be there when I hit him where it hurts. We'll be back next week. Love you, Peregrine. Wake up soon, okay?" she finished.

By the time she had finished, my tears had dripped from my chin, onto my unfinished grilled cheese sandwich, which I had no more appetite for anymore, because I realized that I'm not dead.

Part 7

The Afterlife
January 19th, 1942

The waterworks start to slow down as I realize that I am still alive, still kicking. I still have another chance to live. Granted, I am in a coma, and quite close to death. On the other hand, that revelation made more questions than answers. Why am I here? Is this a test? Am I dreaming? Are Evangeline and the others even real? How long have I been in a coma? I

shook my head to prevent myself from spiraling into insanity. Let's review the facts. So, apparently, I'm in a coma because of the plane crash, my mom and dad have died due to a terrorist attack, they were actually proud of me, Jeremy is cheating on me with Karen Roplinsky (I saw it coming), and my sisters came all the way from Britain during WORLD WAR II, just to make sure I was doing relatively okay. I think that's it.

Once I start watching the screen again, Dr. Larisse is already giving his diagnosis.

"-she's stable now. Emmaline, when you fell, you broke your spinal cord. We had to rush you into surgery to stabilize you, but we couldn't do anything to help with the paralysis. That means you won't be able to walk anymore. I'm so sorry." he sighed.

At that, Mr. Simmons starts breaking into tears, but Emmaline attempts to comfort him.

"It's okay Father, I still wanted to take up equestrian sports even though I know there will always be risks to everything we do, especially activities such as equestrian sports. On the brighter side, I'm now qualified for wheelchair basketball! Ooh, and I can do splendid tricks!" Emmaline said, imagining all of the possibilities. Instead of comforting him, it made Mr. Simmons sob even more.

"My dear, it's all right, Emmaline will push through this! I swear by the Queen of England, she's stronger than you think!" Mrs. Simmons consoled, as she comforted her husband.

Dr. Larisse gave Emmaline her wheelchair early, so as to help her get more used to it, and soon, they were leaving the hospital. As they left, Mr. Simmons said something, but I couldn't hear what it was because it was interrupted by Griffin saying in my head, "Doctor, you have to wake her up! It's been another 2 years! Didn't you try everything?! What about the defibrillator? You said yourself that she was dead for over 6 minutes, but was revived with the defibrillator!"

"I apologize, but there's nothing else we can do except wait! And if we were to use the defibrillator, that could kill her! She's already alive. We just have to wait." the doctor replied hastily, but Griffin was still going.

By the time Lexi and the doctor had finished with their arguing, Emmaline was already all grown up, almost done with her doctorate degree in college, and taking names and kicking butt in her wheelchair. Also, did I mention that she's Emmaline Genevieve Simmons-Byre now? That's right! She married her high-school sweetheart Maria Byre, and yes, she's gay! She came out to her parents at the age of 16 and is now in the process of adopting a little boy named Brian. The problem is, I missed so much of her life just because of these voices that are arguing for something I'm not a part of! Right? Anyways, despite the great things that have come Emmaline's way, tragedy just **has** to strike again.

When Emmaline and Maria were in their late 20's they both got cancer, but only had enough money to help treat one of them. They had asked for money from relatives, friends, and put in loans from the bank, but that money had to go to the funerals of Emmaline's father and both of Maria's parents. They tried to hold out to see if their conditions would get better, until Maria went into a declining state. Maria's condition became Stage 4 cancer, which meant that the cancer had spread to the other parts of her body. When Emmaline received that news, there wasn't any arguing anymore; the money was going to go to Maria's treatment. A year or so passed by, and Emmaline and Maria started to get better! They both got into the state of Remission, which meant that the symptoms of cancer were going away, which indicates that there might not be anymore cancer in the body anymore. They finally received their test results, and they came back negative! Of course, they would have to come back every 6 months or so to do a check up, but they were in the clear! They started the 45-minute drive home, so elated to tell Brian the good news, and then got hit by a 16-wheeler truck carrying wheelchairs on the intersection of Marylebone Rd. and Mac Farren Pl. Maria died on the scene and Emmaline held out for 24 minutes and 37 seconds in the ambulance but died due to loss of blood. We watched as Emmaline saw the incoming truck, whipped her head over to Maria, and screamed, "GET OUT OF THE CAR **NOW!**"

Maria's reaction time was too slow; she was only able to open the door halfway before the full impact of the 16-wheeler hit her. Then, we watched through Emmaline's eyes as she saw the police officers cover what was left of Maria's body with a white sheet. Then, her eyelids began to close for the last time as paramedics bustled over her, trying to prevent her from joining us in the movie theater. The screen went dark, and then launched straight into: "*Emmaline Genevieve Simmons-Byre: A Memoriam*" with enough cheesy montage music and neon rainbow *everything* to fuel a 5-year-old's birthday party. I fully intended to watch every single bit of the montage, despite the blinding neon colors and cheesy montage music, but I needed to talk to Evangeline.

Part 8

The Afterlife

February 1st, 1942

"Evangeline, I don't think I'm dead," I told her.

"Why, of course you are my dear, otherwise you wouldn't be here!" she chuckled.

"No, Evangeline, I'm not dead. I have been hearing voices in my head, and I know I sound crazy, but you have to trust me! They are real. What I gathered from what they said is that I have been in a coma for at least 3 years on Earth, and I was dead for over 6 minutes but was revived and immediately fell into the coma. Please Evangeline, you have to trust me. I think I'm not supposed to be here. Suzanne said you have all the answers to my questions. Can you please answer them?" I pleaded.

Evangeline seemed to grasp how desperate I was at the moment because she started to listen to me. "Ask away," she said.

"Question Number One: Is this all real, or am I dreaming? Question Number Two: How can I get back to my family? Question Number Three: How can I be hearing my friends and family talk?" I fired away.

"Number 1. This is all real, and this is the afterlife. The life of Emmaline was real, and she really is your reincarnation. I don't know how, but apparently you being dead for 6 minutes counts as being dead. Period. Number 2. I truly don't know how you can get back to your family, and I apologize for that. Number 3. I believe that you can hear those who talk around you because you are alive, to simply put it. You aren't actually dead, but you are conscious, so you can sometimes hear what is going on around you. But we will have to hold on for now, here comes Emmaline," she explained.

As we introduced ourselves to Emmaline and Evangeline answered all of her questions, I couldn't help but think, "What happens next?"

Part 9

The Afterlife

I don't know how long it's been, but I know that the voices are becoming less and less frequent. It may have been days, months, years, decades, I've lost all track of time. Until, one day, during intermission, I hear it loud and clear.

"Pull the plug."

I almost stab myself in the eye with my fork in disbelief. For a moment or two, time stood still for me. Then I started moving.

"Evangeline!" I shout as I run faster than I have ever before.

"They're going to kill me!" I manage after taking a moment to catch my breath.

Evangeline just looks shocked as I collapse into her embrace.

"Evangeline, I need to get back to them," I pleaded. "I've been hanging on a string for who knows how long. Please! Tell me you know how!"

She stared at me, and something seemed to break inside her. After what seemed like an eternity, she was finally able to finally meet my eyes.

"Go find Tyler. He'll know what to do." she finally said.

“Evangeline, do you really think that-” I started, but she cut me off.

“Peregrine, time moves much slower here than on Earth. That’s why when it only felt like a couple of hours here, in reality was months, even years on Earth. That’s why you have to hurry! On Earth, once they pull the plug, your body shuts down slowly, so you probably have at most, a few more Earth hours, which is like a couple minutes so you need to trust me and go!” Evangeline rushed, pushing me out the cinema entrance.

Before I ran over to the concession stand, I turned around and hugged Evangeline as I said, “See you again soon.” Then, I took off like a shot. The crowd was huge as ever, but I had to persevere. I finally made it to the front, much to others’ annoyance, but Tyler had the nerve to scold me!

“Now, now, Peregrine, as much as you like the grilled cheese and tomato soup, you have to wait in the evergrowing mob like all the o-” Tyler started, but I cut him off (I really am on a roll today, huh?) by clamping my hand over his mouth, which was weirdly cold. His mouth, not my hand.

After I shut him up, I looked him in the eye and told him, “Tyler, I’m not dead.”

As soon as the words escaped from my mouth, his eyes widened with fear and surprise. I had already let go of his mouth, so that left it wide open in shock. His expression stayed frozen for so long that I feared my time ran out and that I was already dead. He shook himself out of his trance and employed one of Dad’s choicest swear words as he pulled me behind the counter and into the kitchen.

Then, he announced, “I’m going on break! Serve yourselves!” to the hungry crowd as he dragged me out the back door of the theater and we started running.

“Tyler, where are we going, and is there anyway we can get there faster?” I asked as I huffed and puffed, jogging down the street.

At that, Tyler stopped and face palmed, staring at me like he had just realized something. And apparently he did, because he said, “Gosh Darn it! I am one of the most powerful deities in all of history and I-”

He cut himself off as he looked at me. He just sighed and snapped his fingers. A moment later, I woke up with a start.

Part 10

The real world

“Jeez man! Why didn’t you give me any warni- Augh!” I started as I started to lean up, before I was tackled by two little midgets screaming, “Grandma! You’re alive!”, followed by, “Eric! Neil! She just woke up! As a matter of fact, so did I, so don’t be too rough! I need to call the rest of the family... Hey, don’t do that! Her body’s fragile! You know, being in a coma for 40 something years will do that to you. Now sit tight while I call the rest of the family.” a man’s tired voice said.

I stopped taking my surroundings and calming down Eric and Neil for a moment and asked, “Wait wait wait wait wait wait, how long was I out? Also, who are you? And why does my voice sound so croaky and OH GOODNESS MY WHOLE BODY HURTS!”

“Take it easy! It’s natural for your body to hurt after aging AND laying in bed for over 40 years. Also, I am so sorry I didn’t explain anything to you, you must be so confused. As for your question, you have been out for 46 years, 9 months, 3 weeks and 4 days. I’m Ryan Reyes by the way, and I am your nephew in-law. But we’ll get to more about that later, you should lay down and rest-” he said, but I cut him off (wow, us people just love cutting each other off, don’t we!).

“I survived World War II, barely at that, and I still have a working body and a working mind. Now, can you give me a rundown of the family tree so that I know how many people I get to introduce myself to?” I said, leaning up before crying out in pain.

“See what did I tell you? The fact that you have just been in a bed for that long of a time, added to the fact that you are 60 something-years old, no offense, (none taken!) your body is in a real bad state. So while I give you a rundown of our family tree, you should lie down and just listen.” Ryan instructed.

“Okay, fine. There. Happy?” I said as I layed back down as he launched into our family tree.

He recounted my parents and sisters, and a distant cousin named Elbert that I had never heard of, then he started on all of the nieces, nephews, and even grand-nieces and nephews (I didn’t have any children)! He even drew up the family tree for us to keep track of who we had already gone over! As he went on, I realized how much of life I had really missed.

Ryan must have noticed that I was drifting off, so he said, “We can stop now, if you’d like. It isn’t a couple hours until the whole family gets here, so maybe you should go back to sleep and rest up?”

My eyes widened at the statement as I frantically explained, “No! I can’t go back to sleep! Not yet, not now! Not until I do what I came here to do!”

Ryan seemed to understand, but he asked, “What did you come here to do? You just woke up!”

As he looked at me with confused eyes, I sighed, "I'm sorry, I don't really know how to explain it. And if I did, you would think I was crazy... I need to tell the whole family."

He nodded, and asked, "Well, then, how about I get you up to speed with our generation?"

I almost leaned up in interest but remembered how achy my body was, but I asked nevertheless, "Are Frisbees still popular? I used to throw Frisbees for my dog Angel to fetch before the war started. Speaking of, THE WAR IS OVER, RIGHT??"

Taken aback, Ryan reassured me, "Yes, yes, World War II ended about 3 years after you went into a coma. And for your other question, yes, Frisbees are still around. And they're actually gaining a lot of popularity! So are Atari video game consoles, pet rocks, Jaws, tube socks, Tupperware, Pong, mood rings, Sesame Street, I could go on all day!"

I stared at Ryan, confused. "What is a video game? Also, what is a video? And what the HECK is a pet rock? Is it what it sounds like? Also What is Jaws? And..." I trailed off as Ryan chuckled and replied, "Okay, okay, one question at a time!"

Part 11

The real world

Then we spent the remaining time catching up on the last 30 decades, and by the time the family had slowly trickled in, I had become the intellectual of the century. Soon, everyone began introducing themselves. After all of the introductions, I had met a niece named Emma Ace, who is the daughter of my sister Aliana, and her fiance Edward; Ryan's wife, Paloma who's Emma's sister, and she has a baby on the way too! (Wow that woman probably is the toughest woman I know, raising twin toddlers while 7 months pregnant!) I also met a nephew named Parker, who is Lexi's son; and his girlfriend of 3 years, Lydia; and Parker's sister, Annabelle, who is currently single and interested in enlisting in the army. She reminded me a lot of Suzanne, but more kick-butt (No offense Suzanne!). There were at least 5 little kids running around, and their parent were to busy trying to harness them to even introduce themselves. There was also my aunt Peggy and her husband Steve (paternal); and my aunts and uncle Iviana, Pierna, Josie, Lucille, and Ray (maternal). Last but not least, the reintroduction of an old friend.

"GRIFFFFFFFFFFIIIIIIINNNNNN!! YOU'RE STILL ALIVE!!" I cried, giving him a slap on the back (I ended up hurting myself more).

Griffin laughed, "I think I should be the one who's more surprised, seeing that I'm not on my deathbed..." At that, the room fell quiet as several people glared daggers at him.

"Anyway, Griffin, are you the duke now? Or did you become a war hero?" I joked, wanted to ease the tension that had settled over the room.

“Actually I did both! I became a war hero, then I took over my position as a duke! See?” he said, motioning to his badges and showing me a picture of him in his dress uniform.

“Wow, lucky!” I congratulated. Awkward tension filled the room once again, until Ryan piped up, “Did you know you actually died?”

I physically froze. “I WHAT??” I demanded.

Ryan nonchalantly replied, “Yes, you actually died for 6 minutes and 36 seconds before the paramedics were able to revive you with the defibrillator. You’ve been in a coma ever since.”

Armed with this new piece of information, the realization finally hit me.

“So that’s why... Quick! We need something to write on, no, better yet, we need a computer!” I exclaimed.

Confused but eager to find out what I was up to, Emma, Ryan, Parker, Lydia, and Paloma all set out in search of the hospital’s computer, which left me to introduce myself to the rest of the family, the parents that were running around harnessing their kids were my nephew and niece-in-law Robert and Sherry Pikes, and their little monsters were named Eugene and Donna. Once I had gotten nicely acquainted with them, Emma, Ryan, Parker, Lydia, and Paloma burst into the room carrying a relatively tiny computer with them.

“Wow, Ryan, you weren’t kidding! They really did get smaller over time!” I speculated as Ryan gave a prideful nod.

“Now, what I’m about to tell you needs to be written down on that computer. Every single word of it. You can choose to believe me or not. But it needs to be recorded,” I instructed carefully. “So, who can type the fastest?”

Part 12

The Real World

A couple of hours later, the finishing touches to the story of how I met Jeremy (trust me, it was so cliché), everyone gathered together to say goodbye. They were all asking me if I really had to go, and my answer was, we all eventually have to go, so why should we try to prolong our time when it’s up? I said all my goodbyes until only Griffin was left.

“You really do have to go now, huh?” Griffin sighed.

“You know I do, Griffin. But I feel that I will be seeing you on the other side soon enough,” I said mysteriously.

“...Was that a death threat?” Griffin asked, struggling to hold in his laughter.

“Maybe, but you’ll never know. Muahahaha!” I laughed mischevously.

We sighed, exhausted from laughter and comas and everything in life, ready to go back to sleep. Everyone crowded around me, filling me with a warmth like no other.

The sound of waves crashing on the shore filled my ears once again, as I drifted away into nothingness.

I open my eyes to find myself in a gray field, covered in mist. I look around in confusion asking myself questions. Where is the movie theater? What is this place? Why do I have a bad feeling about all of this? Then, a figure in a black cloak blossomed out of the mist, beckoning to me.

“Come to meeee,” it said in a strange, falsetto voice before muttering, “Argh, that’s not right, how about a lower voice? No, she’ll know it’s me...”

The figure was so absorbed in debating which voice to use that they didn’t realize that they were being army tackled from behind and having their cloak (which was strangely sweaty) torn away from their body.

Instead of the scream I had expected, I got a, “Seriously?? Why do you always have to do that! Now I have to explain to my boss how I could have possibly messed up for THE SECOND TIME IN A ROW!!”

I squinted until I realized it. “Tyler, why are you pretending to be the Grim Reaper?”

Tyler sighed and said, “Look, can you just forget you ever saw me like this?” He waved his hand and the mirage of the field disappeared and we were back at the movie theater.

“Okay, on one condition. You tell me what’s going on,” I negotiated.

“Ah, yes, the negotiator. The thing is, my boss will literally have my head if he found out about this so shush! This is the secret: I **am** the Grim Reaper. Don’t look at me like that! I am! That’s how I was able to return you to the mortal world. But right now, we are here, in the afterlife. Also, I presume you didn’t tell them?” Tyler explained.

“No way! They would think I was a crazy crackpot, if they didn’t already think I was.” I laughed as we walked into the movie theater.

“Dude, you better not tell a single soul though. Not even Evangeline knows.” Tyler threatened.

“Okay, okay I get it! I won’t tell anyone!” I reassured as we went our separate ways. He to the concessions stand, and I to the cinema.

Epilogue

If you are reading this, you probably don’t believe it. But Tyler did me a solid by helping me type it up and getting it sent out into the real world. You probably found it in the fiction section, so I wouldn’t be surprised if you throw it in the dumpster behind the bookshop. But just so you know, I would have never believed this stuff when I was alive, but take it from me, a dead spirit living in the afterlife, this stuff is true. But, people will believe what they want to believe, so, it’s your choice.

*The Life of Peregrine
Everett is now playing in
theaters!*