**The Ghost of Humanity**

**BY**[**KENNY STONEMAN**](https://www.imagecurve.com/author/kennys/)

**Part One**

Jeremy Plott’s death was not what he had expected. This wasn’t wholly unusual, since very few people truly want to die and, while many people have an idea of what the afterlife is, only a select few truly *believe*.

None of this really matters, because nearly no one is right. What matters is that after the Greyhound’s rear tires finished what the front ones had started, Jeremy found himself standing by the roadside.  The problem was that he also found himself mangled and spread across the highway as though someone had knocked open a piñata that, rather than candy, had been filled with little human bits instead.  One chunk (an arm?) had been impaled by a small cactus on the roadside.

This didn’t entirely surprise him, because Jeremy was well aware that you can’t get hit by a two ton bus going seventy miles an hour and expect to stay in one piece.  What surprised him was the fact that he was still, if not alive, at the very least *aware*.

There had been no bright light, unless the bus’s high beams counted.  He couldn’t see any flames to speak of.  The only people around were some of the Greyhound’s passengers, who had disembarked in order to inspect the carnage dotting the dark highway, despite the loud protests of the driver, and none of them seemed to possess a halo or horns.  After a quick check, Jeremy determined that he didn’t have them, either.

Jeremy had never been particularly religious. His parents had been the typical American lukewarm Christians who went to church on Easter and Christmas and owned a bible which remained in pristine condition over the years due to no one ever picking it up, let alone reading it.  Aside from that, Jeremy’s theological expertise was limited to an ex-girlfriend who had proclaimed herself to be Wiccan; he had never thought much of her beliefs, however, because all of the books she read had authors with names like Fall Wolfmoon and Silver Oakwood, which he considered to be obvious pseudonyms designed to mask the author’s identity in case anyone ever got angry after realizing that a “love potion” consisting of tree bark, pine sap, river water, and various minerals didn’t do anything aside from make one’s digestive tract sound like a tractor trailer that hadn’t been serviced since 1963.

So, after taking stock of his surroundings and seeing no pearly gates, fiery pits, gods, goddesses, or any other supernatural accoutrements, Jeremy had exhausted his knowledge on the afterlife and decided that he’d probably figure it out eventually.  After all, if there was anything he had, it was time.

After coming to this conclusion, he heard the voice. Rather, he realized that he had been hearing the voice all along and was only now noticing that it was there, much like when he had been watching TV and his mother had to say his name repeatedly in a steadily increasing volume in order to get his attention.  The voice hadn’t gotten louder; the other distractions had simply been taken away.

Jeremy listened very carefully. It sounded exactly like the voice possessed by every ATM and GPS device he had ever used – British, female, vaguely attractive, and as otherwise generic as it is possible for a voice to be.  After a while, he found that it seemed to be on a loop, repeating its message endlessly.

What it said was, “Thank you for choosing eternity.  If you find that you have any questions, please understand that due to the high quantity of inquiries as to the nature of existence, the universe, and the human soul, your query may never, in fact, be answered.  Feel free to speak your questions aloud.  No one will hear you, but many people find this conducive to the critical thinking process.  We hope you enjoy your stay.”

This should have bothered Jeremy, but he found himself rather unaffected by the voice’s bleak message.  He had never really expected any answers after death or even any sort of situation where he would be available to *receive* said answers, had they been given. Despite being faced with what would appear to be a bland eternity, he simply didn’t have the energy to care.  A mediocre life leading to a mediocre afterlife – it seemed fitting, if nothing else.

Jeremy forced himself to stop listening to the voice.  It was still there, like the noise refrigerators make that has become an essential part of modern life, but he chose to focus on other things.  He was becoming aware of the fact that he no longer had traditional senses; he could see, smell, and hear, after a fashion, but taste and touch seemed to be beyond his current state of existence.  Looking down, there was a distinct lack of feet and torso – only some dirt and a small shrub of some sort.  It stood to reason that, no longer having a body, he no longer had body parts, either.  Despite this, he decided to reach what he still thought of as his right hand toward the shrub.  Absolutely nothing happened.

Giving what would have been a sigh if he still had a chest, Jeremy attempted to put one theoretical foot in front of the other.  This resulted in moving about one foot forward.  Concentrating, he tried taking a large “step” toward the bus that had ended his life as he knew it.  The landscape blurred and when he looked around, he saw trees, which his previous location had distinctly lacked.

After a time of contemplation, Jeremy understood that, no longer having a body, the standard physical laws no longer applied to him.  However, because there were limitations to what he could now do, he assumed that there must be other laws to replace them.  While this certainly sparked his curiosity, he was in no hurry to discover exactly what these laws might be.  After all, little things like gravity or friction could easily kill a human; who knew what could kill a ghost?

**Part Two**

For lack of anything better to do, he “stepped” back in to his apartment.  It took a couple of tries, which involved winding up halfway through a brick wall, standing about fifty feet above an Egyptian pyramid, and one rather awkward incident in a women’s locker room somewhere in Scandinavia, but he got there eventually. Everything was just as he had left it, from the appropriately coffee-stained coffee table to the pizza boxes on the kitchen counter. Staying here held no real appeal, though; he hadn’t even liked it much while he was alive. Upon seeing his much cherished Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles clock hanging crookedly on the wall, Jeremy suddenly recalled that, according to various social networking websites, a friend of his was hosting a party that very evening. He had never been a real partier, but he had also never been dead, either. After taking one last look around his old apartment, he left.

Jeremy hadn’t seen this particular friend in years, but had bumped into him online a few months ago and added him to all of his “friend lists.”  Rob Wellington had never exactly been going places, physically or metaphorically, so he guessed that the best place to look for this party was Rob’s parents’ house. Having gotten better at using his new method of transportation, Jeremy arrived in only three tries and hardly wound up inside any solid objects at all.

Upon “stepping” into the Wellington household, he beheld the expected scene: drunk college kids jerking wildly in approximate time to music that seemed to consist solely of bass and, occasionally, screaming. Good old Rob. After wandering through the house for a bit, Jeremy stopped bothering to move around people.  Yes, it felt slightly invasive to go through them, but they couldn’t seem to tell, and the place was packed wall to wall with people – *not* going through anyone would be a nearly impossible task.

Finding Rob himself wasn’t difficult.  As usual, he was attempting to impress girls eight years younger than him with, as he put it, “my mad boozing skillz,” which mostly consisted of his nearly dropping bottles of alcohol while flinging their contents almost everywhere but the intended red plastic cups that have become an icon of underage drinkers everywhere. Of course, the girls were entirely entranced by his display, possibly due to the effects of drugs, but most likely due to the fact that they were around eighteen years old and, therefore, complete morons when in the presence of alcohol.

After watching Rob’s performance with increasing dismay, Jeremy decided to attempt making contact.  Using all of his will, he focused on moving one of the many magnets on the refrigerator, as had been done in every poltergeist movie he’d ever seen.

Nothing happened.

Dejected, he stared at his target intently, hoping to gain Rob’s attention by giving him that indescribable feeling of being watched.  If anything, this was even more of a failure, because Rob finished his show and left the room after about five minutes.  Desperate, Jeremy did the metaphysical version of jumping up and down and screaming at the top of his lungs. This resulted in absolutely nothing, aside from wishing he could breathe heavily and make an angry face.

Frustrated and still alone, Jeremy left the Wellington residence. He returned to his apartment out of sheer habit, so upset that he couldn’t interact with the world around him that he didn’t even notice when it only took one attempt to “step” there.  After calming down, he tried to decide what to do next.  However, since “do” generally involves physical interaction of some sort, he narrowed it down to “go” and “see”.

In an effort to keep himself occupied, Jeremy travelled to every monument, museum, and natural wonder that he could think of.  Because he no longer had a pesky brain to hinder his memory, the list was pretty extensive.

It took him two days.  Apparently, the world was not as big as he had once thought.

The voice hadn’t lied when it told him that he would have no one to talk to.  Not only was he unable to interact with the living, but when he desperately tried to find other souls, there were none to be found.  It had only been two weeks, and he was rapidly running out of things to do.  Did this happen to everyone?  An eternity of loneliness and boredom hardly seemed to fit into any grand plan for humanity that Jeremy could fathom.

But maybe that’s it.  Maybe humanity doesn’t have a purpose at all.  Perhaps there really *is* a higher power, but it doesn’t care about some highly evolved apes.  With this new perspective, Jeremy could understand that perfectly; from the outside looking in, humanity was a big joke, and not even a very funny one.  In its hubris, the human race as a whole had consistently failed to realize its own insignificance.  After all, what put a human above a cat or a sea urchin?  What, for that matter, made beings consisting of organic matter so much more important than, say, a rock?  Maybe the secret of life was that *life didn’t matter*.

With that thought, Jeremy was no more.  There was no sound or fuss; he simply ceased to exist.  It could have been that the brief afterlife he had experienced was a lesson in humility or, perhaps, a prank understood only by the deity that had designed it. Whatever the purpose of this misadventure, the results were same: another soul was no longer in existence.

Contrary to what people might think, the universe noticed; it simply didn’t care.