



Source: George Jahn, 'UN nuclear agency halts aid to a defiant Tehran', AP in *The Age online*, 11/02/07.

Tags: [home](#), [shape-shifting](#), [workplace](#)
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Elizabeth drove underground trains for a living. She felt at home there, hurtling through the dark. The noise and the smell were part of her. She liked the deepest tunnels the most, the deeper the better. She sometimes imagined a special place, like an amusement park ride that had been made especially for her, which was just an endless system of tunnels, far, far deeper down than hers, where you could drive at top speed for as long as you liked without stopping.

When she wasn't in the tunnels she always felt like she was waiting to go back in. Her life above ground was quiet and still. She went through the motions of existence and didn't consider herself to be unhappy. She sometimes sat looking out of her kitchen window, faintly wondering if she should be worried about herself. She realised that she had been single for longer than most of her friends, but this completely failed to bother her. She wondered if that in itself was a problem. These thoughts were dim and indistinct, though, and once she was back underground she forgot about the whole concept entirely.

It was around February when she began to feel unwell. It started with sudden attacks of intense tiredness. They were short and abrupt, and didn't seem to correspond to how much she'd worked or slept beforehand. The rest of the time she felt completely normal.

Then at some point she began to have hallucinations during these attacks of fatigue. Seeing things in the tunnels was not so unusual, and many of her colleagues had stories of their own. Otherwise straightforward and honest people claimed to have seen phantom schoolboys, long-dead workmen, and even the ghost of a whole train during their shifts. But Elizabeth preferred not to discuss what she had seen. She struggled to put it into words, even to herself. It was exactly the same each time. A smallish, contained area of some sort of thick grey mist or smoke, but more compact and solid, floating, slowly descending towards the ground. This didn't really come close to describing it, but it was the best she could do. She decided to take some of the annual leave she was due.

Once she was off work the whole thing seemed a bit ridiculous. She longed to be back in the tunnels, and regretted having booked so long off. She couldn't concentrate on anything substantial. Reading books and watching films was useless, and the city was in the grip of a terrible blizzard which meant she was pretty much confined to the house.

She lay in bed with the TV on quietly in the corner of her bedroom. Through her window she watched the snow fall, barely visible against the white sky. A strange light illuminated the room and everything was quiet. She spent the day drifting in and out of sleep. A TV programme about a woman who survived being trapped under snow

for two days merged into her dreams. Sometimes Elizabeth was the buried woman, sometimes she was watching her, and sometimes she was herself in bed.

Later on in the evening she got up. She drank a glass of water in the kitchen and as she gulped it down it occurred to her that somebody had been in the house while she was asleep. She couldn't say why but she was sure. She walked around, studying the rooms for evidence but nothing was changed. She checked the door but it was still locked. There was nobody here now, but she knew there had been. Part of her was terrified, part of her was exhilarated, and part of her was completely unmoved. She could not separate the twines of those feelings so she just stood there blankly. She realised that she had sunk her hand all the way to the bottom of a plant pot full of soil.

She went back to bed and back into sleep.

At some point during the night Elizabeth opened her eyes and saw it floating above her near the ceiling. The thing from the tunnels. She felt no fear. She was lying on her back. It began to slowly move downwards and she dreamily lifted her legs and arms up in the air. It rested softly on her hands and feet. It was made of some incredibly dense gas, almost solid, and somehow both weightless and heavy at the same time. It was slowly rotating in the air, and she gently moved her arms and legs in response to its movement. It had intelligence, of that she was certain.

She knew it from the tunnels, and then it came to her that she had known it before that too, when she was a child. She suddenly remembered it all like yesterday, how she had first seen it in the caves near where she had lived, and how when she told her parents about it, they dismissed her story as one of the many visible strains between the young Elizabeth and reality. They had moved soon after and for over thirty years she had forgotten about it. Tears trickled down her cheeks onto her pillow as she looked up into it.

Gradually it began to descend further, as if gravity was slowly taking its toll. Her hands and feet began to slide through it, and she carefully tried to propel it back upwards. But it was no use, its slow descent was unstoppable and eventually she gave up trying. Bit by bit it got closer to the bed and enveloped more and more of her body. She let it fall. It passed through her. At that point she lost consciousness and when she came to the thing had gone. She felt as if something impossibly precious had been lost or taken from her, and she couldn't understand why, or how. She cried and cried until the sun came up.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Edwin Rostron.