

Cover Page: Novel Chapter

1. **Novel Title:** The Space Between
2. **Chapter Number:** 1
3. **Main Character:** Ambrose T. Thompson
If this is a middle chapter, please give relevant bio that a reader would have by this point - be brief!
4. **Novel's Genre:** Supernatural Fantasy
I.e., Sci-Fi, Romance, Fantasy, Literary Fiction, etc.
Can be specific (like Sci-Fi - futuristic, or Contemporary Urban Fantasy).
5. **Where in the novel does this chapter fall?** The very beginning
I.e., is it chapter 3 of 20, halfway through, 1/3 through, etc.
6. **Appendix**

The story takes place in a remote, undisclosed location where the recently turned undead go to learn about being what they have become. It serves as a way to explore folklore and myth around these creatures and aspects of death.

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The Space Between
a novel extract by Andrew Green

about 2190 words

Chapter One

The figure was strapped to a chair. His arms and legs were bound by thick leather bonds that pinched tight, billowing the fabric of his shirt and trousers. All that the figure could do was squirm his wiry fingers, arch his neck and jostle his feet. He struggled against the pain that seared through him, trying to find liberty. He pulled back and forth, left and right, up and down. The only movement were his sadly flailing extremities and cursing lips.

The figure's chest heaved and jittered and deep breaths drowned the room. It was dark, save for tiny sconces flickering dismal light, illuminating its corners. He moved his tired eyes

about the darkness. It was empty. The light bounced off the stones giving them the illusion of being wet and cold to the touch. No windows graced the stone cell walls, either. All that sat in that dark room was the figure and the four damp walls. Time seemed not to exist in the cell; no beats of a clock and no daylight to be made out. After a time, the figure stopped wrestling for his freedom, but instead wrestled with his breathing. He eventually found rhythm and dipped his head in sleep.

The figure woke, still strapped to the chair. He did the only thing that he could: he surveyed the room one more time. Opposite to where he sat bound, at the far end of the room, there was a new detail he had not seen before. He knew this room well. This was new. The door stood resolute and strong. Iron bars seemed to criss-cross the wood grain and through a square opening in it, the figure could see more. An outside existed to the room. More flickering light crept in and the same damp walls could be made out. His laugh was barely audible but, as quick as the existence of an outside was made known, a black shape appeared in the window. It was hooded and featureless. It gazed into the room. The figure gazed back.

The door creaked and shook as locks were unbolted and the cell door began to open. It was slow and deliberate with an uneasy calmness that made the strapped figure quake. The heavy

door eased its way aside and in stepped a shadow. The black cloak obfuscated their form and, like the door, moved deliberately, each step seeming a concerted effort. The shadow came close to the strapped man and the door closed by itself, the sound of the locks confirming it shut.

"Thompson, Ambrose T. Male," came a hollow rasp, hollow knocks of teeth accenting the speech. Moment after moment passed and the shadow dropped to a knee and placed a bony hand on the figure's. "Born Eighteenth August, 1988 to a Fumero, Sally and Thompson, Michael Frank. Caesarean. Eight pound, fifteen ounces."

Ambrose wriggled in his straps. The shadow continued.

"First wife: Shank, Caroline. Second: Pink, Ashley."

"Stop!" replied Ambrose, but the cloaked figure seemed to not notice his hollow retort. "Who are you? Where am I?"

"Occupation: insurance broker for Mills & Jefferson though you began writing your notice to enter higher education. Full time."

"Please stop," Ambrose's cheeks wettened.

"Died: Sixth January, 2024..."

"What? What do you mean?" his chest began to heave once more but the shadow continued. "Leave me be. Stop playing these tricks, sir," he stopped.

"Why assume that I am a man, Ambrose?" And at the end of the figure's question, they dropped the smoke-cloak that hid a skeletal form.

Ambrose surveyed the fleshless body from toe to pate, taking in every detail. The bones were dry, the colour of milk when it turns to smell ill. Small cracks and fractures worked across their surface, revealing age and wear. One of the larger ribs was missing with the rest filed into a stump of marrow. Ambrose's eyes roamed upwards. The jaw held missing teeth: incisors and molars creating gaps. His eyes then locked with the figure's sockets, where sight would normally be found, but they were empty spaces of black. The urge to plunge a finger through and into the skull was palpable. Only the bonds stayed forefingers exploring the skull's innards

Yet as the urge began to rise to new heights, the tones of the bones began to shift, and turned paper-white. The fractures closed themselves and the rib grew anew. The hollow spaces upon the jaw filled themselves. Blood began to seep out of the bones and drip onto the floor, but soon the drips became flows, latticing themselves around the bones like ivy. Inside the dripping cage, the ichor coalesced into solid shapes of flesh. This red flesh grew layer by red layer until it became epidermis. The skull now had a female face pink of hue, rouged

lips but eyeless sockets still of black. Deep breaths made her breasts rise and fall. She let her head fall back as copper locks of hair grew, coming to rest upon her shoulders. The hollow sockets soon became full, the blackness turning to pupil-beads, haloed by irises of green and the woman covered herself in the cloak once more.

Ambrose's face contorted, the edges converging into his scrunched nose. As the woman took a tentative step forward, he tried to flinch away but the straps remained resolute in their binding of him. His wild jostling began to rip and tear into his clothes, rubbing and slicing into his bare skin and, through gritted teeth, began to whimper. The rattling and echoing of the chair softened until the snivelling man fell back into slumber.

Ambrose stirred and lolled his head from side to side, as if trying to shake away the remnants of a heavy night of drinking. His eyes creeped open, the light glaring; a stark contrast to before. He was staring straight into the ceiling where painted ivy crept along its surface, intertwining itself with depictions of red grapes and wild boars darting through the tapestry of intricate brush work. Ambrose still remained bound, but now spread eagled and tied to each corner of a bed. He felt

no urge to struggle, instead laying content in the comfort of the bed and the new, lighter surroundings.

He lifted his head to survey the room. The green of the ceiling bled into the wallpaper as the forest scene continued. A full size painted stag stood betwixt the trees staring out as ravens tore into a carcass of one of the wild boards. Along the back wall stood a well varnished set of drawers, a wardrobe and a vanity table with the mirror removed from its stand. He carried his gaze onward across the room and saw a different figure.

"You are awake," spoke an unfamiliar voice. The words were not what he was expecting. It was a male figure, not the woman he had seen morph from bones. He rose from a chair and dragged it along the rug covered floor, bringing it the side of the bed. The man sat down. "We have been watching you slumber."

Ambrose tried to shift away from the person but he was held firmly in place and as he did so, the man leant in close and sniffed. He tried again and again, but he remained frozen in place.

"We smell it on you. Tis faint, but unmistakably there," the man then rose from his seat and leant in closer. The breath was cold and smelled of dust. His skin was pulled taut, stretched across high cheek bones.

"Who are you?" croaked Ambrose through gritted teeth.

"We are like you, though not quite as new."

"Then what am I?"

The man growled under his breath but soon recomposed himself. He extended a pale hand and traced pointed fingernails across Ambrose's neck, letting them linger in two spots.

"Please stop. Leave me be," Ambrose cried.

The man seemed not to hear as he leant in closer, only stopping when the door behind him unlocked. In a blink of Ambrose's eyes, the creeping figure was back across the room at the table and sat upon his chair. The door opened and in stepped a person Ambrose recognised. The woman strode in and stood next to the bed.

"You may leave us," she gestured to the door and the man rose, taking his time to vacate. Once gone, she continued.

"Feeling any better?"

His sobbing answered her. She sighed and untied the bonds securing the wrists and ankles of the man. He sat up and pulled the covers about him. Eventually the crying stopped and he looked at the woman who now sat at the bottom of the bed, slicing into a golden apple.

"Who was that man?"

"Not now. All in good time."

"Then where am I?"

"You're in a bedroom. I thought that a change of scene would calm you down, but it seems the guard I placed on you saw to that not happening."

Ambrose gave her an accusing look and paused before continuing. "What are you?"

"Death."

"Death? As in the Grim Reaper?" a tiny laugh escaped Ambrose, accenting his confused smirk.

"To some."

"I don't want vague answers."

"That is an answer," she retorted. The cloaked woman sliced into the apple again and took another wedge. "To some, I am what is called the Grim Reaper. To others I am Michael and Samael and Azrael, Santa Muerte..." she continued to list names, most unfamiliar to Ambrose's ears. Some sounded Far Eastern in their alien sounds, others reminded him of the Maya and Aztec whilst a few, dotted in betwixt Egyptian Anubis and Greek Charon, he was sure the world never knew existed. Perhaps these, as he now knew as aspects of death, were from a time where man had just learned to speak and contemplate the heavens, existence and the end of it all.

"Then what are you now?"

"One of Odin's maidens but to you, for now, just a friendly face," she smiled, revealing white teeth.

"So that means...?" he choked on his words and panicked breaths arose once again.

"Dead? Yes."

Ambrose slid back down into the soft, red and gold embroidered sheets and stared above into the scene. His eyes fixated upon the grapes. He licked his lips. Silence hung between the two.

"Is this the afterlife, then? Heaven?" called Ambrose who still lay staring into the above, partially covered by duvet.

"No."

"Is there an afterlife?"

"Maybe."

"Maybe? What do you mean by maybe?"

"That there could be an afterlife, but it doesn't concern me."

"Then what does?" Ambrose lifted himself and rested back upon the pillows and stared into the woman's green eyes.

"The place between Life and Death," she retorted, gesturing 'down' with her knife.

"If I'm dead, but also not, I want some clear answers."

"The truth of it all is that Human stories of ghosts, vampires and your zombies are true. Your myths and legends based on facts," the woman paused. "Although the realities of these tales are greatly warped and distorted. They want to keep to

themselves, live their Undead lives; not meddle in the lives of the Living. You were subject to someone drinking from you.”

“Drink from me?” Ambrose’s eyes drifted back and forth. He moved a hand to his neck and rubbed. He paused. Underneath the soft pads of his fingertips he felt two circular marks. “I’ve seen enough films to know that...”

“There you have it. Now come, get up and get changed. I need to deliver you.”

“Deliver me? Wait, you can’t just drop that on me and then rush me off to somewh...” he was cut off.

“I didn’t. You dropped it on yourself. Brought one and one together to make two,” she demonstrated as she brought two slice of apple together. “Best get up and change. You have people to meet.”

“People? What people?”

“Others like you,” she called as she brought out a suit from the wardrobe, hung it on the door’s knob and left, leaving him to change in peace.

He shifted out of the bed and tried to stand. His legs still felt weak, could feel the bonds about him still like a phantom itch. He could feel the warmth rush over him, battering him like waves upon a grounded boat. But with small, infant-like steps he ambled his way to the suit. He shuffled out of his ripped shirt mid stride and, once at the cabinet door, dropped

the trousers from his shaking legs. The suit was nice, clean cut and soft to the touch. Ambrose opened the cabinet and pulled out white shirt and fastened it, leaving his chest on show. As the seconds passed, he felt more strength flow into him making his movements less deliberate and more familiar. He hiked up the trousers, one leg after the other and stuffed his shirt into waistband before fastening. Ambrose tugged the jacket from its hanger and walked to the door.

He left his hand upon the brass doorknob and rubbed its circumference, teasing it. Eventually he grasped it in his pale hand, turned and exited the room.