

An excerpt of 'Catching the Last Tram' by Susan Holt, Chapter Twelve

Willis called out, "Beth, love. This is your stop."

Beth moved into automatic. She put the remains of the pastry into her mouth and it dissolved as she gathered her things together.

Isaac stood to let her out, his eyes playing over her face as she passed him.

She hadn't paid yet. She took out her purse, opened the coin pouch and pulled out a handful of coins. Opening her hand, she found another crusted, ancient coin amongst them.

"Willis, I've got some more funny money. You take it, don't you?" Her voice sounded distant and distracted.

She put the regular coins in the wooden bowl and held out the antique one to Willis. But when she looked up, she found his face had gone chalky white.

"Are you alright? What's wrong?" Beth froze in place, alarmed. He wasn't having a heart attack, was he?

Willis swallowed and nodded. "Yep, I'm fine, love. Just a bit of a sore back." He picked up the change and gave her a ticket. He looked like he was tasting something bitter.

Beth turned to bid her friends farewell and was startled to find Isaac standing right behind her, gazing at her face, as if trying to memorise it.

Shocked by how close he was, she pulled away. "Well, see you tonight, then," she said, and started down the steps.

"Goodbye, Beth." Isaac's voice was solemn and final, and his tone made her look up at him in puzzlement once she'd hit the pavement.

He was deathly pale as he clutched a pole and both he and Willis were gazing at her, their faces drawn.

What is wrong with them?

Glad to be getting out of such an odd situation, Beth waved at them, smiling, trying to lift the mood.

No response.

The door shut and the tram moved away, leaving Beth with a feeling of dread.

What the heck just happened?