

THE CARNIVAL

"What's the matter, don't you like carnivals?" asked Luke

"Um yeah, when I was like ten." said Mandy

"Come on, it might be fun." said Dylan

"I don't want to watch a bunch of tweakers and weirdos. That dude had so many piercings, he looked like he belonged in the freak show, not selling tickets for it." she said.

The carnival had come to town and they had all arrived late. They met up with Samantha who clearly did not want to be there either.

"Guys, let's go to the frat house, I hear there's a huge rager there tonight." she said.

"We can get high and drunk anytime, let's give this a go. I went to one a few years ago after I took some shrooms and it was awesome." said Luke.

"Was it the carnival or the shrooms that made it awesome?" asked Mandy

"Little bit of both I guess. Let's just walk around and check it out. You might actually have a good time." said Luke.

"I doubt it, but since we're already here."

The four of them paid twenty dollars each for an unlimited number of rides.

Mandy and Samantha both thought the same thing. This carnival was *icky*.

Populated by people the girls used to have nightmares about when they were younger. Luke and Dylan were both on the wrestling team, but Dylan's first love was football. They would pretty much destroy anyone who looked at them the wrong way. She knew they were taking steroids and their behavior could be rather *unpredictable at times*. She was just waiting for one of these shit bags to start something with them.

They walked around the carnival that was beginning to empty out. It was after ten o'clock and most of the families with children had already decided to call it a night.

The boys found the beer stand and decided to load up.

"Carnival beer is awesome!" said Dylan as he downed an entire beer in seconds.

"Jesus dude, slow down. You got to drive us home." said Mandy.

"I drive better when I'm slightly buzzed." he said as he finished his beer.

"Yeah, I've heard that one before." she said as she took Luke's hand.

The two of them were just hanging out, as the kids would put it. The hanging out consisted of them getting high or drunk together, having sex, then waking up

together and having breakfast before going their separate ways. Tonight was supposed to be their first actual date. Dylan and Sam had hooked up last month as well, but hadn't had much contact since. It was just the nature of the beast. Too many options for young men and women these days. A man or woman will only be as faithful as their options allow them to be.

They wandered aimlessly for the next half hour, watching one booth or ride close down for the evening.

Luke tried his hand at the strongman contest and won naturally. He was like two hundred and thirty pounds and worked out religiously. Mandy loved the idea of being with an alpha male, just not the reality of being with one. This was her first serious relationship. She didn't see anything long term with him, just being fine for right now. She planned on going to Europe next semester and that would be the end of it. She liked Luke, she just knew he could be a handful. She had watched him beat another kid senseless at a frat party for just bumping into him. The poor kid didn't even realize he did it. That was unpleasant. He got suspended and nearly lost his scholarship. It did straighten him out for awhile. His entire existence hinged upon going to the NCAA finals, then onto the Olympics and then becoming an MMA star. Their paths were only crossing for a short while, not running parallel forever.

They had circled the carnival for almost an hour when they came upon this very weird looking building. It was a house of mirrors.

"Hey, let's go inside." said Luke.

"Why? We're probably going find somebody shooting up in there." said Mandy.

"Come on, we haven't even gone on any rides yet." said Luke.

Dylan and Samantha started making out and Mandy pretty much knew how this night was going to turn out. She figured they would just do this, then they would head back to the dorms. Even a seasoned party girl like herself needs a night off every now and then.

An elderly man was standing at the booth. He didn't seem very pleased that he had customers. He wanted to close up for the evening.

"Hey man, you still open?" asked Dylan

"Indeed we are."

"So, how much?"

"No charge. I get a kick out of watching you kids shit yourselves when you go inside."

No one was expecting the old man to come with something like that. It kind of took everyone by surprise.

"There won't be any shitting what so ever. It's just a bunch of mirrors, why would we shit ourselves?" asked Luke.

"It's much more than that. You know.....on second thought, perhaps I shouldn't. The last bunch of kids that went in there actually called 911. That was a fun time."

"Are you serious? Now, I really want to go in." said Dylan

"I don't think so."

"So, you guys just put up this massive building and then turn people away from it? That makes no sense." said Mandy

"This building is alive. I only do what it tells me. It doesn't want you inside." said the old man

"Fine, whatever. Have fun with your house of mirrors."

"No, wait babe. Look, we didn't come all the way out here to enjoy ourselves, pay money and then be turned away because you want to go home and go to bed. That's not how this works. So, if you don't mind, we'll be going in." said Luke

"I must warn you gentleman, this is not like any other house of mirrors you've ever seen. You might not like what you find inside. Mirrors have a nasty way of showing you exactly what is, not what you want it to be." said the old man

"Whatever." said Luke as he grabbed Mandy's hand and pulled her inside.

Dylan grabbed Samantha by the ass and directed her inside the house. It was dark inside, they could barely see. They walked down a hallway until they got to a room filled with mirrors.

"It smells like pee in here." said Samantha.

"Yeah, this place is gross." said Mandy as she was sufficiently creeped out by what she saw.

"Hi, ya'all." said a wiry man wearing broken glasses behind them.

The four of them jumped and turned around.

"Jesus man.....the hell is wrong with you?" asked Dylan.

The man said nothing and walked over to the wall and turned on a lever. Almost immediately, the room was brightly lit and they could see that they were surrounded by several mirrors. The man smiled and then headed towards the exit.

"Wait, where the hell are you going?" asked Luke.

"I just get paid to turn on the lights, not watch you kids scream. I don't want no part of this." he said and disappeared into the darkness.

"This place is fucking weird." said Samantha as she lit up a cigarette.

"So, what the hell are we supposed to do, just look at our reflections? That sounds like fun. I can't believe we missed that frat party for this." said Mandy.

Dylan was the first to go forward.

"Mirror, mirror, on the wall, who's the fairest of them all?" he asked jokingly.

His smile suddenly disappeared and he became mesmerized by the mirror. Everyone gathered around him. They didn't see anything but his reflection. His gaze was intense. It was as if he was watching a slow motion train wreck.

"What the hell is that?" he asked.

"What? I don't see anything."

Dylan said nothing and just continued to stare at the mirror.

"Man.....that's some cool trick. Guess this place isn't such a joke after all." he said.

"Dude, I don't see anything." said Luke.

"Find your own mirror. Some weird shit going on." he said softly.

Luke broke away from the group and walked over to another mirror. In an instant, he saw something in the mirror that just didn't make any sense. He saw this very strange little world. The mirror was more like a window. It was showing Luke another world. A world that was very green and very fake. It looked like the set of a children's movie. He continued to stare at it. He could almost smell the new world, with its grass and trees. He saw people on some kind of train that had no tracks. It as if the entire world was just one giant train set.....only this train didn't have any train tracks.

"What do you see, Luke?" asked Samantha.

"I don't know. It's like the set of a movie or something."

Mandy walked over to him. All she could see was his reflection. She didn't understand what it was the two of them were looking at.

"Holy shit!" said Samantha staring into the mirror.

Mandy walked over to the mirror and started staring. She saw what looked to be some kind of ski lodge in the middle of a snowstorm.

"What do you see, Samantha?"

"I don't know. It's like a bunch of dwarves or something. They're chasing after a guy in this weird car."

"What the hell kind of place is this?" asked Mandy.

"You wanted to get in.....now, you're in." said the old man who took their tickets. Everyone pulled themselves away from the mirrors and looked at him. No one even noticed him.....or asked how he got inside.

"What the hell is this?" asked Luke

"These are not mirrors, no, they are merely windows and doorways to other worlds, right next to us. We can't see them or touch them, but they exist. Our reality is but one of several. Like many channels on one television set." said the old man.

"Yeah, nice trick old man. I gotta hand it to you, I thought this place was a joke. That's pretty cool." said Luke.

"It's no joke, young man. Take my word for it, these worlds are very real. Just as our world is very real to us. You see some of us have fallen into these other worlds and have become trapped inside. You can be thankful they are only windows."

"Dude, come on. We both know there aren't any make believe worlds here. It's a cool trick, I got to give you that, but there isn't anything magical or unusual about them."

"You like to fancy yourself as warrior, do you not? A man of great strength and ability. What you fail to understand is that all true warriors don't fight other warriors.....they are fighting themselves." said the old man

"You seem to know an awful lot about me." said Luke.

"I've been working this ride for a very, very long time. I've noticed things about people over the years. I notice what others try to hide about themselves. Some of these worlds are small. Some are gigantic. I wonder what would happen if you were to step into these worlds. Would you ever come back?"

"Dude, come on. I'm not some hick. This might work on Jo-Bob and Peggy-Sue, but it ain't going to work on us." said Dylan.

"So many worlds out there. The mirrors can't possibly show all of them. They only exist in the darkest corners of your mind."

"Let's get out of here. I'm done with this fucking guy." said Mandy.

As she walked towards the exit, she suddenly realized the doorway had disappeared. She walked around the round room only to discover there was no way out."

"Very funny. Okay, you got us. Now, let us out!" she said getting both scared and angry.

"The only way out is through the mirrors. One entrance and only one exit." said the old man as he stepped in front of them and disappeared into one of the mirrors.

"Holy shit! Tell me that was fake. Luke.....tell me that did not just happen." said Mandy.

"Calm down kids. Show's over. I got to hand it to these guys, they're good. I mean we really underestimated them. This guy must be some kind of professional magician. Cause there ain't no way in hell you can just walk....." Luke was cut off as he stepped into the mirror and disappeared.

"Luke!" said Mandy as she screamed and ran after him. She disappeared right in front of Samantha and Dylan.

The two of them were frozen in fear. Samantha let out a muffled scream. Dylan grabbed her and started running for what he thought was the exit.

"There's no way out of here." Samantha said hysterically.

"There has to be. This is all some kind of weird illusion. It's not real Samantha, you just have to tell yourself it's not real."

"Well, Dylan, it looked pretty fucking real to me!" she said starting to cry.

"Okay.....let's just calm down here. Let's just think our way through this. There's no way they just disappear into a mirror. They have to be here someplace." he said and began looking around the room for some kind of trap door or compartment. He didn't find one.

"Which mirror did that old man go through?"

"I don't remember. I think it was this one."

"Are you sure?"

"No, not really. Dylan, what the hell is going on here? I mean, I'm just a slutty party girl, I'm not cut out for this kind of shit."

"We can't call the cops. They wouldn't believe us anyway. Something tells me the old man is used to dealing with cops. He can probably just talk his way out of it."

"I'll follow you. I think it was this one." she said as she took his hand.

"This isn't real. This can't be real. It's just some kind of trick. Like Luke said, this guy is probably a master magician or illusionist. He's going to just pop out and laugh at us."

"I really wish I could believe that." she said softly.

She took his hand in hers as they walked through the mirror and into the other world.

Luke and Mandy weren't sure if this was real or not. It was as if they were dreaming, but the dream was very real. They weren't stepping on grass, it was more like astro turf. There trees looked fake, the sky looked fake, even the sun looked fake.

"What the hell is this place?" asked Mandy, shaking from fear and shock.

"I don't know. How the hell do we get out of here?" asked Luke.

They continued walking through the fake grass. There were birds in the trees, but they too, looked fake, as if they were just painted on. They made bird sounds, but they too were just decorations. They stopped in front of two very strange looking beams of light running in parallel. As they got near, the beams of light turned into rail road tracks. Suddenly, they were at a train stop. It just seemed to materialize out of nowhere. In the distance, they could see a train materialize and approach them on the tracks. It wasn't a train, but more like a trolley car, kind of like the one you would ride at an amusement park. They could clearly see people sitting on the train, looking comfortable in the seats.

"I guess we're supposed to get on." said Mandy.

They got aboard the strange looking train and sat down next to each other. The other people on the train car didn't even seem to pay any attention to them. Mandy decided it was time to break the ice.

"Excuse me, where are we going?" asked Mandy to the woman sitting next to her?

"I have no idea my dear." she said and went back to reading her magazine. She turned to the other elderly man sitting on the other side of her.

"Excuse me, where is this train taking us?"

"You know Doll, I think God hates me. Then I think about it and it makes absolutely no sense. Why would God care what I do? That would be like a human bearing a grudge against a cockroach." he said smiling and sipping a flask of brandy.

"Well, it has to be going somewhere."

"Why don't you ask the conductor? I'm sure he knows."

Mandy saw the conductor walking past them. Just as she was about to approach him, she felt the train slowing down and quickly come to a stop. She looked off in the distance and was horrified at what she saw. Laying down in the grass was what looked to be a giant clown. It was massive. Just laying motionless in the fake grass while fake looking birds hovered overhead.

"What the hell is this?" asked Luke almost mesmerized by what he was looking at.

"If you don't have a ticket, you're going to have to exit the train."

We see a few people slowly get up and exit the train. Mandy and Luke both realize they don't want to get off the train. It just seem like a good idea with a giant dead clown only a few hundred feet away from them.

"Um, excuse me sit, is there anyway I can get a ticket?" asked Mandy.

"Of course my dear. The price is steep however. It is going to cost you your soul." said the conductor.

"What? I'm not giving you my soul." said Mandy.

"That's what it cost to ride this train. These fine people have been with us for a very, very long time." said the conductor. He pointed to the passengers, who were now just a bunch of rotted corpses.

"Once you buy a ticket for this train, you never get off.....but at least you don't have to deal with that thing out there."

"What thing?"

"Are you going to buy a ticket or not?"

"No."

"Well, then.....if you please?" said the conductor as he led them off the train. He pulled the steps up and back on the train. Mandy and Luke were now standing

with another group of passengers on the platform, unsure of what to do, or where to go.

“What the hell are we supposed to do now?” asked Mandy.

No sooner had she said anything than some kind of strange sounding alarm came on. The giant clown laying in the grass began to flail around wildly. Mandy and Luke saw what looked to be legs, like the kind you would see on a spider emerge from the clown. It's head separated from the rest of it's body as it let out a piercing scream. They saw some kind of giant tongue emerge from the clown's mouth and quickly begin grabbing anything it could. It scooped up one of the passengers who had walked over to have a closer look at the giant clown. The passenger was screaming as the clown quickly sucked the man into it's mouth. It detached itself from the rest of the clown's body and started looking around with these giant eyes poking out on top.

“Holy shit!” said Luke.

“Let's get out of here.” said Mandy as they quickly ran in the other direction away and off the platform.

The rest of the passengers did nothing but take photos and continue to stare at the clown head monster as it quickly approached them. It used it's giant tongue to quickly suck up the remaining people on the train platform. Mandy and Luke were in shock, almost unable to move. This new world was a horrible, nightmarish world, where reality and the laws of physics seemed to go out the window. The clown head monster devoured the remaining passengers and seemed to stop moving.

Luke and Mandy ran as fast as they could through the fake grass and fake forest. The sun was shining brightly in the sky, but neither of them were hot. There was no heat, nor any cold in this world. It was a constant 70 degrees, whether the sun was up or not. This world seemed to have no rhyme or reason to anything it did.

They ran by a sign that read: HAPPYVILLE JUST AHEAD!

“Happyville? I don't even want to know.” he said almost out of breath.

Mandy was breathing heavily. They didn't know if the clown head monster was after them or not.

“What do you want to do?” he asked.

“Fuck it. They can't possibly be any scarier than that monster.” she said,

“You sure about that?”

“We have to get the hell out of this place.” he said,

“No shit. Any ideas how?”

“If we just walked into a mirror and got here, we should be able to leave here by walking out of the same mirror. I remember looking behind us and seeing some

kind of really bright light. I think that is the doorway to this world. We just have to find it.”

“I have no idea where we are. I don’t even know how to get back to where we were.” she said,

“Maybe the nice people in Happyville can help us.” he said.

They walked in silence to the make believe town on the narrow road. Mandy was shaking so badly, she had to concentrate in order to get her feet to move. She wasn’t certain if she were dreaming or not. It was like a dream, but so very real. She closed her eyes several times and tried to wake up, only to find herself right back in the same nightmarish world. After witnessing the clown head monster, she couldn’t wait to see what surprises Happyville had in store.

“I think we’re in hell.” said Luke

“Wouldn’t we have to be dead before we could be in hell?”

“How to you know we aren’t dead?”

“I don’t think I would be this scared if we were dead? I was so terrified earlier, I thought I was going to shit myself. I don’t know where we are. It’s like we’re in someone else’s nightmare and can’t get out.”

“We just stepped into his world, maybe we can step out of it.”

“Maybe, but where? I don’t even know how to get back to where we started.”

“We have to get back on that train. It’s our only way.”

They walked slowly, as if they were stepping into a minefield when they came upon the little village. The houses were immaculate. Well kept and neatly fenced. There were flower gardens and a large fountain in the town square. They walked by the little shops and stores. Everyone waved at them and smiled. It looked like a fairy tale village and in any other setting, it may very well have been, but this was no fairy tale and it most certainly was not going to have a fairy tale ending.

They stopped and tried to talk to a woman who was watering her flowers and baking pies. She waved at them and motioned for them to come over.

“Hi there! It’s been ages since we had any guests. Please, come on inside. I just baked some pies, they’re piping hot and ready to eat.” she said merrily.

Luke and Mandy looked at one another. They didn’t want to go inside, but they had to get some answers and this might be a good place to start. They entered the woman’s little cottage with a white picket fence. She sat them down at the table and brought over some pies.

“It’s so nice to see young people. We know all about your world. Once in a while some of you get through. Welcome to our little hamlet. We call it Happyville, cause it’s the happiest place on Earth. All you have to do is follow the rules.”

“Um, what rules would those be exactly?”

"Well, you have to smile at all times and brush your teeth and say your prayers and never, ever get off the train, otherwise the happy clown will eat you." she said serving each of them a slice of pie.

"Goodness, where are my manners. My name is Patricia Happy. Have you met my son? He works on the train. His name is David Happy."

"Patricia, does everyone in Happyville have the last name of Happy?" asked Mandy

"Of course. What other name would we have?"

"My name is Luke. This is Mandy. Tell, me Patricia, is there any way we could get two tickets tot he train?"

"Of course. I have two tickets right here. She said holding them up. My dear, could you go to the fridge and bring out some milk. It's ice cold. Can't have pie without a nice glass of milk." she said taking off her apron and sitting down at the table with them.

Mandy walked over to the old refrigerator and opened the door. Her heart nearly stopped when she saw a severed human head on a tray. It was rotted and nearly decomposed.

"Please kill me!" the head muttered.

Mandy slammed the fridge door shut. She walked quickly over to Luke.

"Mandy, we certainly appreciate your hospitality, but I think we better be going. We don't want to miss the train.

"Don't you want your pie?" she asked

"No, nope, no thank you. We've got to be on our way." she said yanking Luke out of his chair.

"Now, you're not being very polite. I baked these pies just for you, the very least you can do is eat it." said Patricia. Her entire demeanor suddenly changed. She was no longer the smiling, happy, carefree woman they had known only a minute ago. Her facial expression had now changed.

It was as cold as ice.

"Lady, this place is hell and you're the devil. We just want to get out of this hell hole. Now, if you could please be so kind as to give us those tickets, we'll be on our way." said Mandy, shaking with fear.

"You think I'm the devil?" asked Patricia

"You have a head on a platter in your fridge. You figure it out."

"Oh, that, Goodness sakes, child. He didn't follow the rules. He had dirt behind his ears and he didn't finish his pie. Bad things happen to little sluts like you when you break the rules." said Patrcicia.

"Just give us the tickets, you sick bitch and we'll get out of here." said Mandy

"Now, why on Earth would I do that? You think I'm afraid of the devil? My dear, dear child, you don't understand.....*the devil works for me.*" she said smiling and exposing some rotted teeth.

Luke took a frying pan off the wall and hit Patricia over the head with it. They reached into her pocket and grabbed the tickets, which were literally, shining. She held them in her hands. Luke stepped over her body.

"Let's get out of here. The train station is right in the middle of town. We just have to hope we get on board before she wakes up." said Luke.

"Well then, she can't wake up." said Mandy as she hit her several times with the frying pan.

"There's a head in the fridge?" asked Luke as they ran out the back door.

"Let's just get out of here."

They walked over to the train station. They asked the smiling man behind the counter when the next train was.

"Be about five minutes. Would you like a piece of pie?" he asked

"No thank you." said Mandy.

They stood on the train platform, nervously awaiting the next train. The seconds ticked away and seemed like minutes. Mandy tried to remain composed, as did Luke. He held her hand and gave her a hug.

"We'll get out of this alive. I won't let anyone hurt you." he said

She squeezed his hand. He had done much better under these circumstances than she ever thought anyone like him would do. He might be worth holding onto, after all.

The smoke from the train loomed in the distance. Mandy had to let herself feel a glimmer of hope. She might make it out of this alive after all.

A man dressed up like a police officer on a bicycle pulled up onto the train platform. He was riding a bicycle with a red strobe light on the handlebars. He got off and lowered the kickstand. He spoke to the man behind the counter, then looked at the two of them.

"Oh shit." said Luke.

The man was dressed like an old English "Bobby" from the turn of last century. He calmly walked over to them and took off his hat.

"Good afternoon. Did either of you two know that Mrs. Patricia Happy was killed earlier today? Bashed her head in pretty good. The clown will not be pleased when he hears about this." said the officer.

"I'm sorry to hear." said Luke.

"Do you have tickets?" asked the officer.

"Right here." said Mandy, showing him the glowing tickets.

He seemed genuinely puzzled. He wasn't expecting her to produce two train tickets.

"I see. Well, if you hear anything, be sure to let me know. I'll bet it was her son. He's been breaking a lot of rules lately. He didn't even wipe his feet before he came into the house last night. Got mud, everywhere. If that were my boy, I would have beaten him. I mean, how hard is it to wipe your goddamn feet? I think he might have even stolen some candy from the candy shop last week. I'll get him sooner or later. You can't beat the law forever." he said and walked away.

Luke and Mandy both let out a sigh of relief as they watched the train stop on the platform.

"ALL ABOARD!" shouted the conductor.

Luke and Mandy stepped on the train.

"Wait, I remember you two. Where are your tickets?" he asked.

Mandy reached into her pocket and produced two tickets. The conductor was stunned.

"Oh, I'm sorry. Please, come aboard and make yourself comfortable." he said and moved aside.

Luke and Mandy sat down in the empty seats. The conductor pulled up the steps and the train began moving.

"I know there were people that saw us go into Patricia's house. Why didn't they tell the cop?" asked Mandy

"I don't know. Maybe Happyville isn't so happy after all." said Luke.

"None of this makes any sense. Nothing in this horrible world has any rhyme or reason to it."

"I know. That's why we call it hell." said Luke.

They sat together without making a sound, watching the little make believe world around them, with its make believe trees and fake grass. On the surface, it looked harmless, but the more time you spent here, the more horrific it became. They saw a giant field filled with people nailed to crosses. The crosses seemed to go on forever. She could hear the people screaming in agony. Mandy had to put her hands over her ears. They saw people driving weird little cars, like a clown would be driving in a circus. Everyone waved. Everyone seemed so happy, almost oblivious to the horror that surrounded him. They passed by a field of sunflowers. The train came to a stop on the platform and the conductor threw a man off the train. The giant sunflowers suddenly came to life. They had twisted heads and large mouths. That man was going to be in for a rough time. As they watched the horrific and beautiful scenery around them, it occurred to Mandy that all of this was just too random to be random. There had to be a reason behind it, just like there was a reason no one told the cop about the two of them. She just had no idea what the reasons were. The few remaining passengers got off the train. It was now just the two of them and the conductor.

"Next stop is the end of the line, we don't go any farther."

"Excuse me, what is the end of the line mean for us?"

"It means you have to get off the train. Everyone must get off at the last stop. No exceptions." he said.

"There rules you follow, how do you learn them?" asked Luke

"From your parents and family or friends." said the conductor

"How can you throw these people off the train, knowing they're going to die?" asked Mandy

"Without a ticket, you cannot ride the train. I don't make the rules, I just follow them. Our great clown king makes the rules we all live by. So very many people are on the train without a ticket. Sooner or later, they're going to get caught. The clown sees everything. He knows your sins. In time, you will come to understand him. Everyone does."

"I see." said Mandy

"Is there a town or something at the end of the line?" asked Luke.

"Nope. I don't know what is beyond the last stop. that's above my pay grade." said the conductor.

The train slowed down and came to a halt. Luke and Mandy looked at one another nervously. They stepped off the train and onto the platform. There was no one else on the platform. They were alone. Off in the distance, they could see a massive statue of a clown with his hand stretched into the air. At the very bottom, there was some kind of shining light.

"It's now or never." said Luke.

"Remember what happened the last time we got off the train."

"We better run."

They ran as fast as they could towards the light. They were both out of breath when they reached it. The massive clown statue almost seemed to be looking down at them. There was an old wooden door behind the light.

"Jesus, it can't be this easy." said Luke.

No sooner had he said that, than the constable from earlier and Patricia emerged from behind the statue. Patricia was covered in blood. The constable blew his whistle. Luke and Mandy knew they had to make a break for it. They ran towards the door and tried to open it, but it was locked. The door wouldn't budge.

"I thought you said she was dead." said Luke

"And I thought you told me you hadn't seen her. I guess we both lied to each other." said the constable

Patricia walked up to Mandy. She said nothing as she produced an old skeleton key. She walked over to the door and unlocked it. She even held the door open for them.

"I don't get it. What are you doing?" asked Mandy

"You may go now." said Patricia

"You're just going to let us leave and walk out of here?" asked Luke.

"You may go now." she said again.

Luke and Mandy walked right up to the door. On the other side, they could see nothing but stars.

"What's going to happen if we walk through?"

"You go back to your world.....for now." said Patricia.

"For now? What does that mean?"

"It means that you didn't just stumble into our little world by accident. The clown wanted you here, that's why you here." said the constable.

"We're never coming back here.....not ever." said Mandy.

"Sure dear.....*that's what they all say.*" said Patricia.

Luke took her by the hand as they walked through the doorway. In an instant, he felt as if he were traveling faster than the speed of light, with every single one of his atoms being stretched to its limit. He closed his eyes and tried to scream. Mandy didn't know what was going to happen next, but at least she wouldn't be devoured by the clown head monster.....there was always that.

"What about the other two? Where did they end up?" asked Patricia as she closed the door and locked it.

"I'm not really sure, but it looked very cold." said the constable as he got back on his back and began peddling back towards the train.

Dylan and Samantha had no idea what was happening to them. He just remembers coming to and realizing that he was on a pair of skis, zipping through the snow in the middle of a forest on a mountain. He had done a fair amount of skiing when he was younger, but it had been years since he hit the slopes. He looked around and saw Samantha flying through the snow on her skis. They stopped at the bottom of the hill and took off their goggles.

"I didn't know you could ski." said Dylan.

"You never asked. I'm from Vermont. I was practically born on skis."

They moved slowly through the forest. Dylan wasn't quite sure what was happening to him. It was as if he was in some kind of very, very realistic dream. He could feel the stinging cold on his face and taste the snow. The forest was quiet.....almost a little too quiet. It made him nervous.

"Are we dreaming?" he asked Samantha.

"How could we both be having the exact same dream?"

"How the hell did we get here?" he asked

"Who cares? Let's just have some fun and go with it."

They could see other skiers off in the distance and made their way over to them. The other couple waved them over.

"Hi there." he said

"Hi there yourself." said Parker

"Um.....listen, I know this is going to sound weird, but we have absolutely no idea how we got here. It's like we just materialized here or something. It's terrifying, but awesome at the same time.

"Well, how did any of us get here?" replied Parker

"I'm Dylan, this is Samantha. Have you seen our friends around? Luke and Mandy?"

"No, I sure haven't. Were they with you?"

"Sort of. Where are we?" asked Samantha

"Mount Weaver."

"Where's that?"

"Colorado."

"How the hell did we get to Colorado?"

"Dylan, why don't you just stay with us. We'll take you guys back to the lodge, maybe you can get some help there." said Parker.

"Hi, I'm Candice."

"Oh, sorry. This is my better half. Come on guys, I heard there's a storm about to hit us, we should get moving. You don't want to get caught in a storm out here."

"We'll follow you."

The four of them continued down the hill and through the woods. Dylan had no idea what was happening or why it was happening. It was almost as if they were in a movie about themselves and there was an invisible film crew following their every step.

They saw a couple sitting on some rocks at the end of the trail. The sky had suddenly turned very dark and the air had changed. Dylan had spent enough time in the outdoors to know what that meant. They were a black couple, Jocelyn and David. Jocelyn appeared to be hurt. The four of them stopped and figured they ought to at least offer their assistance.

"Hey guys, everything okay here?" asked Parker.

"No.....I ran into this rock. I've been skiing for ten years and I run right into a rock. I really hurt my leg." she said.

"Did you try to call the ski patrol?"

"There's no service out here. We didn't even take our phones. We're too far out. Man, it looks like it's going to dump on us pretty good."

"Well, can you move?"

"I tried. My ankle is so swollen, I can even get in my ski boot."

The flurries had begun to pick up pace and speed. In a little over an hour, it would be snowing hard. In a few hours, there would be a blizzard warning for the area. If they didn't get back to civilization soon, they were in real trouble.

"there's no way to get a hold of anybody? That's crazy."

"We aren't even on a marked trail. I wanted to be alone and not deal with any newbies on the slopes. That was a big mistake." said Jocelyn

"Guys, we can't stay out here much longer, there's a huge storm about to hit us."

"Jocelyn, what if we carried you down the slope. You can stay between Samantha and I. We'll just go slow down to the lodge. You can just stay on one ski. I've done it before." said Dylan

"Yeah, but the lodge is one the other side of the mountain. It's miles away. I'm not sure we could make it in this snow. There's the old lodge about half a mile from here. I don't know if anyone's there, but it might be our best bet." said Parker.

"I'm sure we can get some help there. If nothing else, at least you get off your ankle." said Parker.

"Okay. I can't believe I made such a rookie mistake."

"I skied over a pond last winter. I fell in. If Candy hadn't been with me, I would have died. We all make mistakes out here." said Parker.

"Look.....I'm not sure how to tell you guys this, but Jocelyn and I have no idea how we got here. I mean I can't remember a damn thing except skiing down this mountain. I don't know hat's happening to us." said David nervously

"Jesus, you too?"

"You mean you guys don't know how you got here either?"

"No.....Samantha and I were at a carnival in Ohio and now we're here. It's pretty fucking weird."

"Parker, how do you know we're at Mount Weaver? I mean do you come here a lot?" asked Dylan

"Look.....we have to be at Mount Weaver. I can't really remember anything either. I'm sure we are at Mount Weaver, it's where we always go to ski. We have to be here, cause if we aren't then.....I'm really going to freak out." he said trying to hide his panic.

"Come on. Let's get going before it starts snowing hard." said Dylan as he helped up Jocelyn.

The six of them limped down the mountain, going slowly. It seemed to take forever. Daylan held Jocelyn as best he could. She was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. He was trying to be cool, but a girl like this could break even a seasoned pro like himself.

Steady as she goes old boy he told himself. He wasn't really sure where he and Samantha stood. They were in that awkward pre-relationship stage where they had sex, but weren't entirely certain what to do afterwards.

The going was tough. The flurries had turned into a steady stream of white, powdery snow that seemed to engulf just about everything. The sun had been shining just over an hour ago and now, they were in the middle of a snowstorm. Dylan wasn't sure if this was normal weather for these mountains, or if this was just part of this strange dream he was having. One that was being shared by everyone else around him. Nothing about it made any sense. As scared as he was, it was also amazing at the same time. It was almost like a video game where you got to control yourself and try to make sense of the strange new world around you.

They all moved in silence through the ever increasing snow. It seemed like an eternity. No one, with the exception of Parker had any idea where they were, or where they were going. Dylan had spent enough time in the great outdoors to know if you make one seemingly minute mistake, it can cost you your life. He was hoping and praying that Mr. Parker was leading them in the right direction. Much to everyone's delight, they saw what looked to be a large chateau at the end of the trail.

"I knew it. It's right where I thought it would be." he said to everyone.

They made their way through the snow and stopped at the stairs. The building was completely dark and there were boards across the windows. They took off their skis and Dylan helped Jocelyn up the steps to the patio. The outdoor furniture was in pieces. Parker tried the main door, only to see that it was locked. David and Parker walked around the building. They were gone for several minutes. The main door opened up as David unlocked it. They had found a window and climbed through. They walked inside the lodge as David closed the door behind them. They tried several light switches, but most of them did nothing. There was power to the main lounge area with a giant fireplace. Dylan could see his breath inside. It didn't seem any warmer inside than it was outside. Jocelyn collapsed on a couch and took off her boot. Her ankle was swollen. There was no way she could go any farther.

David seemed to be interested in just about everything but Jocelyn. He wasn't asking if she was okay, or trying to help her bring the swelling down. Dylan found an old first aid kit and handed it to her. She smiled at him. He had seen the look on enough young ladies to know what it meant. As soon as Jocelyn knew that he and Samantha were just *casual*, things could really heat up. He just hoped David and Samantha wouldn't get in the way of progress.

This was a once in a lifetime type of opportunity. He just couldn't pass it up.

"I think we should get a fire going. I just hope the chimney flue is open." said Parker as he threw several fire logs into the fireplace.

The fire just seemed to materialize out of nowhere. Dylan didn't quite understand how the logs immediately ignited without any starting fluid or kindling. He figured he should just roll with it and thank his blessings.

Within minutes, the massive flame seemed to warm the entire room. Everyone was taking off their ski boots and parkas. They walked around the building and found the kitchen. All of the pantries were filled with protein bars and bottled water.

"Just the basics, but it will do." said David as he opened one of the bars and took a bite.

"This is so weird. I feel like we're all supposed to be here, but I have no idea why. I don't even remember how I got here or who I am. I don't know if any of this is real, or even if I'm real." said Candy as she stripped down to her underwear. Dylan tried not to stare, but it was next to impossible. Samantha immediately gave her a dirty look. She was focusing her negative vibes on the wrong girl. Dylan thought Candy was great, but he had screwed enough women like her. He wanted something different, something like Jocelyn. He figured it was best just to take things slowly and see where they went.

Cause you don't want to drown when testing the waters.

Parker and David returned with the bottles of water and protein bars.

"Dig in, the kitchen's full of them." Parker said

No one bothered to ask why there would be protein bars and bottles of water in an abandoned ski lodge.

That question went above their pay grade.

The main lounge area was now very warm. Jocelyn proceeded to strip down into her underwear. Parker and Dylan tried not to stare, but was almost impossible. Samantha did the same, as did the boys. Everyone was now barely clothed. The mood in the room was tense and very awkward. Dylan didn't want to make a wrong move. He just didn't think it was a good idea to make his move early on. He was going to have to play his hand well if he was going to land Jocelyn. He made small talk with Samantha, who put her hand over his. He didn't want Jocelyn to see it and decided it would be a good time to take a walk.

"Well, what's the plan here?"

"Let's look for a phone. Maybe we can get a hold of somebody. I'd kind of like to check this place out. Maybe there's something in here we can use." said Parker. Dylan didn't like the fact that Parker had assumed a leadership role, but didn't want to make waves, at least not yet. He just couldn't shake the feeling that they were being watched. Everyone had just assumed they were alone in this lodge. He wasn't quite so sure. He could almost feel the eyes on his back.

"Should we split up? This is a very big building, with lots of rooms." asked Parker
"No.....that's what they want us to do. We stay together." said Candy.

Dylan didn't quite know what to make of that. He was hoping to get Jocelyn alone for a few minutes. That could be a game changer. It didn't look like it was going to happen. They went up the staircase to the upper floor and opened some of the doors. The rooms inside were bizarre for lack of a better word. Each roomed resembled more an SM chamber with restraints on the bed and strange decorations all around. There was a gigantic painting of Adolph Hitler completely naked with a giant erection giving the Nazi salute.

"What the hell kind of ski lodge is this?" asked Jocelyn

"I guess people really knew how to party back then." joked Parker.

They opened another door and found it was filled with giant stuffed animals and large crayons. It was unusual and just plain *eerie*.

"Maybe someone bought the place. Maybe it doesn't belong to the lodge anymore." said David

"Who the hell would buy this place?" asked Candy

"Holy shit." said Samantha as she opened another door. The room contained the most unusual train set they had ever seen. The entire room was filled with train tracks and fake towns. The train tracks went in usual directions, all over the walls and on the ceilings. There was a train going in seemingly impossible directions all over the room.

"It says the name of the town is HAPPY VILLE." said Jocelyn.

"Yeah, I'm thinking this is someone's house. None of this stuff should be here." said Parker.

"What if they come back and find us in here?"

"Guess we'll cross that bridge when we get to it. Let's see if we can find a phone or something."

"Dylan, over here." said Samantha.

Right on the top of the stairs, there was an old payphone. Below it, was a giant stack of quarters in a coffee can.

"I've never even used one of these things. I used to see them in movies." said Jocelyn.

Dylan picked up the receiver and could hear a dial tone.

"It's working."

He dialed zero for the operator. It rang a few times, then someone picked up.

"Operator, how may I assist you."

"Hi, my name is Dylan. There are a bunch of us trapped in this old ski lodge at Mount Weaver. Can you send someone to help us. There's a blizzard out there and we can't leave."

"I see. So, who do I call to assist you?"

"The police I guess."

"I have to give them a location. Is there a phone number on the phone?"

"No, it's too old to see. Just tell them we're in the old ski lodge, I'm sure they can figure out the rest." he said

"Okay, you need to call the police, not the operator. I can't help you."

"What? Why not?"

"I'm just the operator. You need to dial 911." said the operator in an almost robotic voice.

"Okay, we'll call 911."

Dylan hung up the phone and called 911, but nothing went through. He tried again and again, but there was nothing but silence. He was now a little unnerved. He was thrown off his game. He hated being thrown off his game. He was the MVP of Team Dylan.

He dialed zero again or the operator.

"Operator?"

"Hi, it's me again. I can't get through to 911. Can you just please call them for us and tell them where we are?"

"You're really beginning to piss me off kid. Stay on hold." she said.

"Jesus, what a bitch." he said under his breath.

"Hello? Are you still there?"

"Yes."

"The police say it's going to be a while before they can send any help out to you. They are experiencing a major blizzard and don't have the units. Keep calm and whatever you do, stay away from Jocelyn.....that girl is nothing but trouble."

said the operator as they hung up.

Dylan was now just a little worried. How in the hell did the operator know he was in this building with Jocelyn.....*unless they really were being watched.*

"What did they say?"

"The operator said the cops don't have any units to send to us."

"So, have the cops call the damn lodge and they can come and get us. The hell is wrong with people?"

"Does anybody know the number for the lodge?"

Everyone in the group shook their heads. It did seem somewhat hard to believe that no one could help them.

"The last time it snowed like this, the lodge closed. There might not be anyone there." said Parker.

Dylan looked out the window. The snow was now coming down in sheets. It was only early afternoon and it was already nearly dark outside.

"Parker.....is there anything around here we could ski to?"

"No.....not really. This lodge was in the middle of nowhere."

"Great, so now we're stuck here." said Candy

"Look, we've got food and water and a fire. It could be worse." said David.

Dylan wasn't looking at their current predicament as a bad thing. He had to fight to keep himself from just grabbing Jocelyn and having his way with her. He had never felt such an animal like attraction to anyone in his life. It was as if she was magnetic, pulling him towards her. He only hoped Samantha wouldn't get upset. She shouldn't, but you just never knew with girls, just how they would react.

The fairer sex could be a tad bit unpredictable in these delicate situations.

"You know what.....it's almost like we're trapped in a teenage slasher movie.

This lodge would be the perfect setting for some deranged killer." said Parker.

Dylan had thought much the same thing. He just didn't say it out loud. They were isolated and alone. The sun was setting and it was snowing so hard, he couldn't see ten feet in front of him.

"We're going to have to spend the night here." said Samantha looking out the snow covered window.

"It's not so bad. We've got plenty of firewood and protein bars." said David.

"Yeah, it could be worse, we could be stuck out there." said Jocelyn

They sat around the fireplace and made small talk. Dylan had to get some answers. He still had no idea how he or Samantha had gotten here. He only remembered staring at the weird looking mirrors at the carnival and now here he was. He knew it was a dicey subject. No one else really seemed to know how they had gotten here either.

"Guys, does anyone remember how they got here?" he asked

Everyone in the room looked uncomfortably at one another. He didn't want to bring it up, but in light of their current predicament, he felt he had to.

"No." said Jocelyn

"I have no idea how I got here either. I can't remember anything except skiing down the mountain. It's like I didn't exist before that moment." said David.

"I know my name is Candy.....but I don't know my last name either. I don't know who I am or where I live." she said.

"I'm sure there's a logical explanation for all of this, I just can't imagine what it would be." said Parker.

"So, none of you remembers anything except skiing on this mountain? Isn't that kind of weird?" asked Dylan

"How about you guys? Do you know who you are?"

"Yeah.....there were four of us in this house of mirrors. I started looking into the mirror and the next thing I know, I'm here, with you guys. It's like we're all having the same dream.....or the same nightmare."

"Dylan, six people can't be having the same dream at the same time."

"We can't? Then how do you explain all of this. You guys are just like characters in a movie, reading from a script. None of you existed before I stepped into the mirror."

"What do you mean you stepped into the mirror?"

"I mean the mirror was like some kind of doorway into this world. It's like a dream world, but it isn't a dream, it's very real."

"So, we just exist so you can have your little dream?" asked Candy

"I know it sounds insane, but I know who I am and where I'm from. I'm from a small town in Ohio. I played football and got a scholarship to Ohio State. My mother's name is June. I live in the dorms. I'm real, you guys aren't."

"Dylan, you're insane. I'm real, so are Candy and David and Jocelyn. We're all real." said Parker.

"Then why can't any of you remember anything about yourselves?"

"I don't know. Maybe we all got amnesia or something."

"Besides, if this is your dream, then why don't you just wake up and end it?" asked David.

"I tried. I know I'm not dreaming, but I also know this world is not real. None of this is actually happening. It's like we're trapped in some kind of a movie."

"Dylan, we're all scared. This is not helping anything." said Parker

"Didn't that lady on the phone say help was on the way? Where the hell are they?" asked Candy

"I don't know, I'm going to try her again. We've been waiting here for hours. If help was coming, they should have been here by now." he said getting up and walking up the stairs to the old payphone."

He picked up the receiver and dialed zero. After a few rings, someone picked up.

"Operator."

"Hi, we're trapped in the old ski lodge at Mount Weaver. We've been trapped here for hours. Can you please call the police or anyone to come and get us?"

"Why can't you call them?"

"Because the only number that seems to be working is when I dial zero and get you. I tried calling 911 and any other number I could think of, but none of them work."

"I'm just the operator Dylan, I'm not in the business of saving lives."

"How did you know my name?"

"It's my business to know people's names. That's why I'm the operator."

"Will you quit fucking around and just get someone out here to help us?"

"Sure, I'll just snap my fingers and make the police come and rescue you. Is that what you want?"

"Is that possible?"

"No."

"You can't just dial 911 and tell the dispatcher where we are? Is that too much to ask from you? You might be saving all of our lives."

"They're very busy, Dylan. They have a lot of other people to save besides you."

"Go fuck yourself." said Dylan as he hung up the phone.

He turned and saw Jocelyn staring at him. She was wearing next to nothing. He had to fight to keep his erection from showing.

"What did they say?" she asked

"We're on our own. Hey.....I know this might be a little awkward, but since this is my dream and all, do think you and I could have sex?"

"What about Samantha.....isn't she your girlfriend?"

"She is not my girlfriend. We're just friends."

"Yeah.....I've heard that one before. Does she know that?"

Dylan took her by the hand and led her into one of the strange room in the hallway. They were naked within seconds and having sex on the floor. It was fast and furious. Dylan was on top of her, pounding away, when he looked up and saw someone staring at him from the hallway. The individual was wearing a mask. He put his fingers over his lips as if to indicate to him to be quiet. He finished so hard, he thought he was going to have a heart attack. He rolled off her and collapsed on the floor.

"That was incredible." he said

"So, what happens now? Do we like get married or something?" she asked

"No....we both go downstairs and act like nothing happened." he said,

"But we just made love."

"Yes, yes we did, but there's no reason to tell anyone about it."

"Okay.....can we do it again?" she asked.

"Maybe later."

"I'm going to try and take a shower. You made big mess."

"Good luck. I'm going downstairs." he said getting dressed.

Everyone seemed pre-occupied and no one even seemed to notice he had rejoined the group. Samantha smiled at him but kept her distance. She had dated too many guys like Dylan in the past to let herself get attached. He was the kind of guy that would have multiple wives and mistresses and somehow always emerge unscathed.

"Dylan, while you were upstairs we were thinking that our best course of action might be to send someone for help." said Parker

"Who would that someone be?"

"The best skier obviously."

"We don't even know where we are. You'd be sending them to a frozen death."

"Maybe, maybe not. It can't snow forever. It has to stop at some point."

"I was in Vail a couple of years ago. It snowed for ten days straight. There's no telling when it will end. Besides, it's not like we're going to starve to death or freeze in here. I say we just wait it out."

"Dylan.....I'm not sure you realize our situation here. Your memory seems to be fine, as is Samantha's. The rest of us aren't so lucky. We need to get help and find out who we are and what happened to us. It's very difficult not to have any idea who you are." said Parker.

"I say we just wait it out. I know it sucks, but going outside is suicide."

"It's preferable to being stuck in here." said Candy.

"You guys wouldn't make it a mile. If you want to kill yourselves, go ahead. I'm not going to stop you."

"This is your dream asshole! You brought us here! Get us out of here!" said Candy angrily.

"I didn't bring you here. Why would I be dreaming about being stuck in here with you? I can think of much better things to think about. I know you're scared, so am I. I just don't think panicking is going to help anyone."

"Dylan.....you did all this. You brought all of us here. You created us. Tell us why we're here." said David.

"Guys....I don't know any more than you do. I told you, we walked through a mirror and now here we are. I know it sounds crazy, but that's what happened." he said getting defensive.

"So, if you walked through a mirror, why can't you walk back through it and leave here?" asked David

"I tried upstairs. All I did was knock the mirror over. This world won't let me leave either."

Dylan didn't say anything about the masked individual he saw upstairs. He knew someone else was in here with them. He didn't think it would help anything.

"Come on Sam, let's take a walk."

The two of them walked into the kitchen, away from the rest of the group. He looked around the corner to make sure no one was following them.

"Sam, we got a problem."

"Yeah, no shit." she said

"No, I mean when I was upstairs, I saw someone. They were wearing a mask."

"What kind of mask?"

"Like the kind a killer would wear. It was creepy as fuck."

"Great. That's just great Dylan. How the hell do we get out of here?"

"I have no idea. We can't leave here, we'll die out there."

"It sounds like we're going to die in here. If this really is some kind of a dream, then we can't die in our dream. We'll just wake up and be right back at that stupid carnival, like none of this ever happened."

"What makes you so sure we can't die in this world? I think we can. I think all of us can. This isn't our dream, it's some one else's dream and we're all stuck in it."

"Where's that black girl? She said she wanted to talk to the operator."

"She said she was going to take a shower."

"What? You left her up there with a killer on the loose? Are you nuts?"

They both ran back into the lounge and up the stairs. They opened several doors, but didn't find anything in the rooms. Dylan also noticed that the rooms were now completely different. They looked like a child's bedroom. The weird S&M stuff was now gone.

"Holy shit." said Samantha as she backed away from the door and put her hand over her mouth.

Dylan ran over and saw a naked Jocelyn impaled on a ski pole. She was fighting for air. She looked at the two of them and tried to speak.

Get out of here while you still can, honkey.....and thanks for the fun.

Her body went limp and her head fell forward. The rest of the group came up behind them. Candy recoiled in fear and David collapsed against the wall.

"Jesus Christ, what the fuck happened in here?" asked Parker

"DYLAN.....WHAT THE HELL HAPPENED?"

"I don't know. I just left her for a few minutes. She said she wanted to take a shower.

"Dylan.....Dylan, listen to me. Look at me! Did you do this?" asked Parker grabbing his shoulders.

"What? No, I did not do this? Are you crazy?"

"If you didn't do this, then who did?"

"There's someone else in here with us. I saw them a little while ago. I didn't want to say anything. I didn't want to scare anyone." said Samantha

"Wait. You saw someone in here and you didn't say anything?"

"You guys were all freaking out. I didn't want to make anything any worse." she said.

"Jocelyn is dead. Clearly we have a maniac on our hands. We have to find them before they find us." said David.

"This place is huge, there's lots of places to hide, we'll never find them."

"So, we just wait for them to kill us?" asked David almost hysterical.

"If we all stay together, there's not much one person can do."

"How do you know it's only one person?"

"I don't. I'm just saying there's safety in numbers."

"Sure Dylan, tell that to everyone who was a victim in a school shooting." said Parker.

"That goddamn operator better listen to us now." said Dylan as he stormed out of the room.

He ran over to the phone and dialed zero.

"Operator."

"Lady, we just had someone in our group murdered in here. Unglue your ass from your chair and dial 911 for us."

"I'm just the operator."

"No, your an idiot. We have a maniac running loose here in this place. We have to get out of here."

"So dial 911."

"We tried, we can't get through."

Parker grabbed the phone out of Dylan's hand.

"Ma'am, we have a very serious, emergency here. We just had a girl in our group murdered one floor above us. We need the police."

"I'm sorry for your loss, but I'm just the operator. I don't make emergency calls."

"JESUS LADY, DIAL NINE ONE FUCKING ONE! IT'S NOT THAT GODDAMN HARD!" he said shouting into the phone.

"Parker, what exactly am I going to tell the police. I don't even know where you are."

"How do you know my name?"

"The same way I know you're not at Mount Weaver." said the operator.

"What? If we aren't at Mount Weaver, then where the hell are we?" asked a shocked Parker

"Over the river and through the woods."

"You talk in circles."

"I'm just stating facts."

"When I get out of here, I'm going to find you and beat your ass into a bloody pulp. I don't care if you are a girl." said Parker gripping the phone cord.

"Well, good thing for me you won't ever get out of there. You're all going to die in there."

Parker slowly hung up the phone. He turned to everyone. The look on his face said enough.

"We're on our own here. There won't be any help coming." he said quietly

"How did the person on the other end know your name?" asked Samantha

"I have no idea. It's just a trick. Let us think we have a lifeline, then just play with us until we realize they don't care if we live or die in here."

"I'm getting out of here. The rest of you can stay if you want. I'm not going to just sit around and wait to be murdered." said David.

The group walked back down the giant staircase to the lounge area in front of the fireplace. It was Candy who first noticed it.

"You've got to be kidding me." she said looking over the furniture.

"What?"

"Where the hell are our skis?"

Dylan and Parker both stopped and began looking around the room.

"I don't believe it. The killer took our skis." said Parker.

"How the hell did he do that and not make any noise? We would have heard him?" asked Candy

"I don't know, but they're gone. So are the boots."

"The hell are we going to do now?" asked Candy.

"We have to find the killer before he finds us." said David.

"Okay.....how do we do that?"

"We split up. No one does anything alone. We always stay in pairs. Candy and I will go in one direction and you three go in another direction? Sound fair?" said Parker

"What do we do if we find him?"

"Well you kill them, obviously." he said.

Dylan walked slowly through the dimly lit building, opening doors and peeking inside. The building looked as if it had been abandoned ages ago. Candy walked with them, not saying a word, trying to make sense of this nightmarish new world she found herself thrust into.

"Candy.....can you remember anything about who you were before today?" asked Dylan

"No.....I'm not even sure my name is Candy. It's a stupid name. Who the hell would name their kid Candy? It's a stripper name." she said.

"This whole situation is too random to just be random. I'm trying to put the pieces of the puzzle together." he said.

"Good luck. Nothing about this goddamn place makes any sense." she said as she opened one of the doors in the lower level.

She immediately recoiled in fear and put her hands over her mouth. Dylan ran over and turned on the light. He had a hard time digesting what his eyes were feeding to his brain.

The room was filled with skeletons wearing ski outfits. Dylan looked at some of them. They had clearly been here for quite some time.

"Who are these people?" he asked

"Maybe they're like us. People who got trapped in this world and couldn't get out." Candy picked up a ski pass on one of the parkas. It read Mount Snow.

"It says we're in Mount Snow.....where ever that is."

"This one says Mount Rose." said Samantha picking it up.

"This one says Telluride.....this doesn't make any sense."

"None of this does. We're going to die in here, aren't we?" asked Candy starting to cry.

"Nobody's dying in here. Not if I have any say in it." said Dylan.

"Yeah, sorry Dylan. I might not have any idea who I am, but I am sure of one thing: none of us are going to make it out of here alive." said Candy looking out the snow covered window.

David and Parker came up empty handed as well. They searched over room and closet in the lodge and didn't find anything. Dylan told them about what they had found in the basement. They all went back downstairs and were shocked to discover all of the bodies were now gone and replaced with stuffed animals in ski suits.

"Somebody has a very messed up sense of humor." said Dylan

"How does one person move all those bodies and replace them in the span of one hour?" asked Dylan

"I guess they worked really fast."

"Yeah, or they had a lot of help. Maybe there's more than just one killer in here." he added.

No one really said much that evening. Everyone was doing their damndest to ignore their impending doom. The snow hadn't let up one bit. The lodge now seemed to be almost buried in snow. The only way anyone could help them was if they used snowmobiles at this point.

Dylan wasn't sure if he slept or not. He closed his eyes and the next thing he knew, it was daylight. He felt rested, but it also felt as if it were just a nap. It was dark out when he went to sleep and now the sun was up. He looked over at Samantha, her eyes were open as well.

"Morning sunshine."

"I don't suppose we have any coffee in here?" she asked.

"Come on, let's go look." he said.

As soon as they were out of sight from the others, Dylan grabbed her and kissed her. She kissed him back and within the span of a minute, they were completely naked and having sex right on the counter.

Dylan was in euphoria. He closed his eyes and for a second, it was almost as if he was out of this horrible dream. Samantha let out a blood curling scream and he spun around and looked at her.

She said nothing and just pointed behind him. Impaled on the door of the giant refrigerator was Candy, wearing her ski suit. There was a ski pole going right through her chest and through the metal door on the fridge.

The two quickly got dressed as the rest of

The group came running into the kitchen. They all stopped in their tracks when they saw Candy.

"That's it man, I'm out of here!" said David. He ran over to the main doors and opened them, only to find the doorway completely buried in snow. All of the windows were now buried in snow. They were trapped, with no place to go.

"How did this happen?" asked Parker

"She must have gotten up in the middle of the night to use the bathroom or something." said Dylan.

Parker walked slowly out to the lounge area. The other three followed him. He looked up and saw a man wearing a ski mask looking down at them from the balcony.

"Did you do this?" shouted Parker

The masked figure slowly nodded.

"I'm going to kill you!" he said and ran towards the stairs.

The killer aimed a crossbow right at Parker as he neared the top of the stair and shot him in the chest. The arrow sent him flying backward and he fell down the stairs. He quickly loaded another arrow and aimed it at David, who dove behind a table, which took the arrow.

Dylan and Samantha hid behind some thick couches. The killer was shooting arrows at them at a frantic pace. Dylan didn't understand how the killer was doing all of this with just one crossbow. David ran towards the window and opened it, falling into a snow drift. The killer stopped shooting and ran back into the hallway.

"It's now or never." said Dylan as he grabbed Samantha's hand.

The two of them ran down the hallway and into one of the offices. He slammed the door shut and locked it. The door was made out of solid oak. Unless the killer had a giant chainsaw, it was going to take him a while to get inside.

The two of them sat down on a sofa. Samantha was sobbing. Dylan grabbed some tissues off the desk and handed them to her.

"This place is fucking horrible. I wish we never went to this damn carnival. Worst fucking decision of my life." she said fighting through the tears.

"I don't think any of us could have seen this coming. This wasn't on anybody's radar."

"He's going to kill us isn't he?"

"I don't know. I think if he wanted to kill us he probably would have done so already." said Dylan.

"Why are we here, Dylan? What the hell is the purpose of this place? Are we in some kind of hell? What if we die and then we just get sent right back to the beginning? What if we can never escape from this place?"

"We'll get out of here. There has to be a way out. We just need to find the right mirror."

Dylan opened the drapes in front of the window, only to see David, completely frozen in front of them. He looked like an ice statue. He quickly closed the drapes and waited for the killer to find them.

He gave Samantha the last of his smokes. He put his hand over hers.

"I think I would lose my mind if you weren't here." she said.

There was a loud knock on the office door. Dylan reached around the desk and grabbed a large letter opener. They watched in horror as the key began to turn and unlock. They watched it fall to the floor.

The door slowly opened and the killer stepped inside the office. He and Dylan were now only a few feet from one another.

"*Ohhhhhh shit.*" said Samantha softly.

"Why are you doing this?" asked Dylan.

The killer said nothing and looked at him.

"Fuck you!" said Dylan as he stuck the letter opener in the killers shoulder.

The killer didn't even flinch. Suddenly, Dylan's shoulder began to scream out in pain.....*like he was being stabbed.* He recoiled and stepped back.

The killer took off his mask. Dylan and Samantha couldn't believe it. The killer looked just like Dylan.....or was Dylan.

"What the hell?" he said softly.

"You killed all of these people.....you murdered them you asshole!"

"No, Dylan.....*you murdered them.*" said the killer.

"The hell are you talking about, I didn't kill anybody, you did!"

"One night, eight years from now. You drive home drunk and pass out. Your car swerves into the other lane and you kill Parker and Candy and David and Jocelyn who are right behind them."

"What?.....No, that's bullshit!"

"No.....that's your future. You kill all of these people.....we kill all of these people. Whether we intend to or not. We cause their deaths."

"No.....no.....you're lying."

"I wish I was. This is your future. Samantha is our wife."

"Okay, wait.....there is no way in hell, I am going to marry this guy. I mean you're cool and all Dylan, but your a mega fuck boy. I wouldn't marry a fuck boy." said Samantha.

The killer said nothing and walked out of the office, closing the door behind him. Dylan sat down next to Samantha. He didn't know what to say.

"I'm really going to marry you?" she asked

"Is this my future. Can I stop it?" he asked.

"Of course, just don't drink eight years from now." she said.

"Jesus.....Jesus." he said looking at the giant mirror in front of them.

"Let's get the hell out of here." he said and took her by the hand.

They walked slowly into the mirror and left the horrible snow filled world behind them. In an instant, they were back in that strange carnival tent, with Luke and Mandy. It took them both a second to realize where they were.

"Dude.....dude!" said Luke as he ran over to Dylan.

"Holy shit.....what the hell happened?" asked Luke

"We were trapped in this horrible world.....you wouldn't believe me if I told you."

"Yeah.....so were we. Let's get the hell out of this place." said Mandy.

"How? There's no door."

The tall man stepped out from behind a curtain. The four of them stopped and stood in front of him.

"Did you enjoy the show?" he asked.

"Let us out of here you son of a bitch." said Luke

"As you wish. I must ask you to look at just one more mirror. Not to worry, this mirror is strickly a window, not a doorway. You can enter a world you're already in." said the old man

"What are you talking about?"

"Would you like to see what happens in less than an hour here in the carnival. I believe you all have a personal stake in it."

The four of them looked at one another. They all wanted to get out of there as fast as they could, but they also knew the old man had plenty of tricks up his sleeve. He wasn't just about to let them walk out of here.....not without consequences.

"You now know there are always consequences for your actions. There are also consequences for inaction. Tell me, how badly do you want to leave this carnival?" he asked

"Very badly.....I've never wanted out of a place so much in my life." said Mandy

"Well, I can open the door and let you go on your way, but there are consequences. If you leave now, some of your friends will die. Some will be hurt so badly, they'll wish they had died. You can stay and help them. The clock is ticking."

"What do you mean, our friends will die?" asked Dylan

The old man turned and pointed to a mirror. We see a bunch of kids and adults getting on a roller coaster. It's the carnival's main attraction.

"That's our sorority." said Samantha.

We watch them zipping and rolling, then we see some bolts come loose and part of the roller coaster collapses sending those in the car hurling down to the ground.

"Holy shit. Can we stop it?"

"You can always try." said the old man

"We have to stop them from getting on that cart.....we have to." said Mandy.

"How much time do we have?"

"Less than an hour. Which door will it be?" said the old man as he pulled back the curtain and revealed two separate wooden doors.

"I'm not going to let my friends die." said Mandy

"We can't let them die. I banged some of those girls." said Dylan.

"So, you are all in agreement?"

All of them nodded their heads. As badly as they wanted this nightmare to end, they just couldn't walk away. They wouldn't be able to live with themselves.

The old man opened the wooden door and they walked through.

The four of them were instantly outside the house of mirrors. Everyone around them seemed oblivious to the horror they were about to experience.

"Come on, the roller coaster is over here." said Dylan as he grabbed Samantha's hand and began to pull on her.

"Wait.....guys.....wait. We got a problem." said Samantha

"What? What's wrong?"

"We have to think about the consequences of our actions. Look, if we just start shouting about the roller coaster collapsing and it does, the cops are going to think we had something to do with it. They aren't going to believe a magic mirror showed us the future. If we don't stop it, we're done. If there's one thing, that house of mirrors taught me it's that all of our actions have consequences. We can't let anyone know it's going to collapse. We have to shut it down some other way. There has to be some kind of electrical connector on it. Maybe we can just unplug it?"

"I don't think it's going to be that simple. No, there's only one way. There's no point in all of you going down for it. I'm the one who is going to spend the rest of their life in prison anyway. It should be me that has to do it."

"Do what? What do you mean spend the rest of your life in prison?" asked Mandy

"Let's just say the mirrors revealed some unpleasant things about my future.....or lack thereof. I'm a dead man walking." said Dylan.

"We have to shut that damn roller coaster down permanently. We don't have a lot of time. I can only think of one way to do it. It won't be pretty.

"What do you have in mind?" asked Mandy.

"You still got that gun in your car?"

"Yeah?"

"You have a gun in your car.....why?" asked Mandy

"In case of emergencies."

"Jesus, Dylan, what are you going to do?"

"I'm going to make sure nobody gets on that damn roller coaster. Don't worry, the gun won't be loaded. I just need you guys to play the part. Make everyone think I'm going to shoot the guy running it."

"Dylan, that's insane."

"You got a better idea? It's either this or we bury all of our friends. We're out of time."

"Damn Dylan, you better not get killed." said Luke.

"Girls, you wait here. We'll be back in a few minutes. How much time do we have?"

"About half an hour." said Samantha.

"It's going to take us fifteen minutes to walk to the car and back." said Luke

Dylan took off his jacket and handed it Samantha.

"I know I'm just a fuck boy, but I really, really like you. I hope you can give me a second chance." he said.

"What am I going to do with you Dylan?" she asked as she kissed him on the lips.

He ran as fast as he could to the car, grabbed the gun, then ran back to the three of them. It took him exactly seven minutes. By the time he got back, he was gasping for air. He put his hands on his knees and tried to regain his composure.

"It's now or never."

The four of them walked up to the roller coaster. Even though it was nearly closing time, the line was still a mile long. They walked past everyone, past the small booth that took tickets. The girl was so busy, she didn't even notice.

"You guys need to really sell this. Make them think I'm crazy."

"You're sure that gun is unloaded, right?"

"It's unloaded." said Dylan. He knew he was throwing his life away. He'd probably never play football again. All he ever wanted to do was play football. Maybe he could be on a prison football team.

"Where you guys going? The line is over there." said a lady waiting for the car to come and pick her up.

Dylan pushed her out of the way and pulled out his gun. He nodded at the three of them and they all went to work. The girls started screaming. Dylan and Luke pretended to be struggling for the gun. Dylan pushed him away and he ran over to the man operating the controls. Dylan stuck the gun in the man's ribs. The man looked nervously at Dylan. He had a small cigar hanging out of his mouth.

"Can I help you, son?"

"Bring all the cars back here, or I shoot you."

"Huh?"

"Bring everyone back here. Who ever assembled this track forgot a few bolts. It's dangerous and unsafe."

"We check it twice a day. It's fine."

"Do it, or you go in the ground." said Dylan.

"Jesus, alright.....just don't shoot me. It's going to take a minute for the cars to slow down and return."

The first car came to a stop and the passengers got out. The second car came in right behind it."

"Turn it off."

The man working the controls shut off the breakers for the motors. No sooner had the cars come to a stop than two deputies ran onto the platform with their weapons drawn.

"Jesus, kid.....just put the gun down before you get killed." said the man working the controls

"I'm a dead man walking. If I die right now. I save the lives of four other people eight years from now. I kill them in a drunk driving accident."

"How do you know that?"

"The mirrors told me."

"Mirrors? You mean the house of mirrors?" Shit kid, I should have known. Just forget what you saw in there. It's all lies. None of it is real. The mirrors lie. They lie all the time and trick us into doing terrible things.....look!" he said and showed Dylan his arm which was badly burned.

"I wish I could believe you."

Dylan ran up onto the platform with his gun drawn. He aimed it right at one of the deputies.

"*Bang!*" he said and made a shooting motion.

The deputies put eight rounds in him, killing him almost instantly when the second round pierced his heart. Samantha let out a scream and ran over to him. Luke held Mandy's hand as she closed Dylan's eyes. There was no more life left in his body.

The three of them never said a word about the mirrors. They only said Dylan went nuts and for some reason thought the roller coaster was going to collapse. It was a pretty open and shut case of suicide by cop. Luke, Mandy and Samantha decided to leave school and join the carnival. They had to know more. They had to get some answers. Luke and Mandy still had no idea what the message was from their experience with the giant clown head monster. It burned right into his soul. He had to know why the mirrors wanted him to see it. Was the old man right? Did the mirrors lie? Why did they let everyone leave?

There had to be answers. The three of them were going to spend the rest of their lives trying to find them.