

The Asylum

By Matthew Bissonnette

The first thing I remembered was feeling an intense headache and the sensation of floating somewhere in some black void. As I became more aware of my surroundings I realized that I was in a small room, bound somehow and unable to move my arms. The floor and walls were soft and plush. I began to struggle in the hopes of freeing my arms but this proved futile. I stopped struggling and came to the realization I had no idea who I was. I couldn't remember...the past was completely blank to me.

I fell to the ground and began to scream. It was not long before my cries were drowned out by the din of the wailing of men. Some voices let out angry shouts, others cried and pleaded; I remember feeling very afraid.

Then beyond the walls of that room I heard the creaking of rusty door hinges and immediately there was ominous silence. Then there was the sound of footsteps which approached slowly and methodically. Lights came on in the room and I realized that I was in a padded cell bound in a straightjacket. On the far side of the room was a door with no windows; it swung open and an older man in a lab coat stood beyond the door. He looked at me then glanced down at a brown file that was in his hand.

He said with a deep voice, "How are you feeling today?"

I looked at him, unable to speak.

The man in the lab coat began to write something down in the file, he muttered, "Patient is non-communicative."

I weakly muttered, "Where am I?"

He stopped writing and glared at me. "You are a patient of the Shimmering Pines Hospital, I am Doctor Striker. You were brought here three days ago. We have kept you sedated since you have been, let's say, not at all cooperative."

"Why am I here?"

He looked at his file. "You were picked up by the police, apparently causing a public disturbance. When they decided you were mentally disturbed, they brought you here."

I felt something unpleasant in my gut. I asked, "I'm in an insane

asylum?”

“We prefer to call it a hospital. Now, there is some information we need to know. Who exactly are you?”

I shook my head. “I don’t know.”

“You don’t even know your name. Can you remember anything?”

I replied, “No.”

Doctor Striker looked at me. “Sometimes when people endure severe trauma they can suffer from complete amnesia. You were found covered with some serious wounds on your arms, they looked like large scratches.”

“What’s going to happen to me?”

Doctor Striker looked at me and smiled in a way that was both reassuring and half-hearted. “If you promise that you will not cause any problems for myself or my staff, you may remain in the general area of the hospital with the other residents. If you test my patience though, you will return to isolation. We will start fresh, but remember, I don’t believe in second chances. Will we have problems?”

“No,” I said, “I won’t be a problem.”

After two members of the hospital staff removed my constraints, one of them led me through the hospital. It was a tour which left me with a feeling of both dread and melancholy. It was an ancient, decrepit building full of windowless hallways with pipes running along the walls and the constant sound of water dripping somewhere.

As he led me through the hallways, he turned to me and asked, “So what’s your name my man?”

He was a young black guy, he seemed to walk in a confident if not an overly flamboyant manner.

“I have no idea.”

“Well I’m Jake Connors, and I would be the coolest cat in this whole joint. You have any problems and you come see me.”

We arrived in the general area of the asylum. It looked much like a regular hospital with a sterile essence to the place. Along the two main halls were doors which led to the patients’ rooms. And the end of each hall was a rec-room, a television and some couches. Between the two halls was the nurses’ station, with a caged front behind which were several nurses. I remember the patients all looking at me as I was led through the halls.

Jake led me into a room. Inside where two hospital beds separated by a curtain. Along the wall was a door. Jake led me to the bed on the left. On it were a pile of clothes, an old sweater, a blue undershirt, and some brown pants. They seemed familiar somehow.

Jake said, "well this will be your crib for awhile. I will leave you to get comfortable. The clothes they found you in are on the bed."

"Who is the other bed for?"

"Oh, that is Willis's bed. Don't worry, he is OK."

Jake left me alone.

I looked down at the clothes and picked up the sweater. I could smell a faint scent of perfume on the fabric. Then somewhere in my mind I could hear a woman say in a soothing voice, 'Merry Christmas.'

Then the wooden door in the wall began to rattle on its hinges. I turned and faced it; it shook slightly then stopped. I cautiously approached the door, then began to slowly twist the knob when the door swung open. Beyond the door was pitch black darkness, not so much an unlit room as a gigantic void; from within its depths came strange noises. A cold wind blew out from the dark expanse before me, it carried a putrid stench which almost made me ill. I slammed the door shut and began to back away from it. Jake, who must of heard the slamming door, rushed into the room.

He looked at me, "What's wrong."

I just looked at the door. Jake, who said nothing, approached the door and opened it. It revealed a rather small lavatory.

He turned to me. "Is there something I should know bro?"

I shook my head. "No, everything is OK."

Jake began to leave when he stopped and his face winched. He said, "man, did you just cut one? It smells bad in here."

Then he left me alone and I just looked at the door for several minutes.

I had changed into the clothes. When I put the pants on I checked the pockets and discovered a ring, a wedding band specifically. Though I didn't remember why I had it, it did trigger a stream of emotions. At first joy, which was followed by a tremendous feeling of grief and loss. I put the ring in the pocket again and then settled into bed for awhile.

I remained there in silence until a young guy in a T-shirt and jeans came into the room; he had uncombed red hair. He seemed wild-eyed and he looked at me; his suspicion was betrayed by his eyes.

He asked, "are you with them?"

"I don't know what you mean," I replied.

"Them," he explained, "the agents of the house of the third moon. They will surely take me away during the next lunar eclipse."

I shook my head. "I'm not with the house of the third moon."

The guy seemed to ease up instantly. He said, "I'm Willis. You are?"

I turned to the window. A steel grate obscured the world outside, but I could see the sun setting beyond the horizon. There was green countryside; in the distance was the skyline of a city. I had no idea where I was.

I looked at Willis. "You probably now know as much about that as I do myself."

Willis started going about the room, searching under things and checking the corners of the room. He kept saying, "where is it."

"Where is what," I asked.

Willis stammered, "the bugs. I know they left them here. They see everything I do."

Willis was making me uneasy so I left my room. I walked down the hallway, as I passed the nurses' station I saw an attractive young nurse. She had shoulder-length raven hair and dark eyes. She noticed me looking at her and smiled then returned to her duties.

I arrived at the rec-room. Several vinyl couches were placed about; there was a ping pong table and an old television. I was alone but for a worn-out looking old man who peacefully watched television; he seemed to take no notice of me. I settled into a couch and watched.

It was a sordid talk show though I barely paid attention. I looked about the room for awhile drifting in and out of the show on TV. I retrieved the ring from my pocket. On close inspection I discovered a phrase had been inscribed on the inside of the ring: "Yours Forever".

I looked at the ring for a moment then slipped it onto my ring finger. Instantly a memory played itself out in my mind.

The inside of a small church; a young man and woman stand at the altar and a priest reads from the bible. The church is empty. The young woman seems radiant and happy, a petite blonde with very pale skin. The man, who I knew was myself, seemed happy yet reserved. They kiss. Then I hear the memories of voices. My voice yelling, telling somebody to run away. Then the momentary image of something horrible, though I could not tell what it was.

When the memory ended the picture on the television began to fade into static. The elderly man had the remote control and he started to flip through the channels until finally he found a channel with a blank screen. A perfect blackness yet something was moving about in the distance. It was not like an image, more like the screen of the television was a pane of glass beyond which was some darkened night.

The elderly man asked rhetorically, "What show is this?"

Then something moved towards us on the other side of the screen. It moved about in the darkness but it seemed to squirm towards us. I could not

see it completely, but I got the sense it was some hideously oversized slug or worm that seemed to have patches which glowed with luminescence.

The old man asked, “is this the animal channel?”

Then it seemed to squeeze up against the screen, it revealed its hideous circular mouth full of rows of needle-like obsidian teeth. It then began to use its body to ram itself into the screen. A crack appeared in the television.

It disappeared when the elderly guy used the remote to shut off the television. But a fracture remained on the television screen. We both looked mutely at the television for awhile.

The dread I felt made my nerves raw; I had woken up in a nightmare, yet this was real as anything could be. This phantasmagoric reality I was imprisoned in was worse then a nightmare though—you wake up from nightmares, how do you wake up from reality?

Later, once night had come, I stood in the bathroom adjacent to my bed. I leaned against the sink and looked into the mirror at the reflection of a slender man who was just over his thirties with copper hair, his face covered with several large scratches. I rinsed my face with soothing cold water then exited from the bathroom.

I got into bed and tried to fall asleep. I kept hoping that I was going to wake up the next day somewhere else. Willis began to babble incoherently, so I used my hands to cover my ears.

I fell asleep.

I sat in the cafeteria the next morning; outside the windows was a gray day as a cold rain drizzled down from the skies. The somber mood outside matched how I felt inside as well. I had had nightmares the night before, horrible inhuman things slithering about, accompanied by the occasional image of the woman who I had seen in the church.

Willis was at my table, he used his hands to search through his breakfast.

Though I questioned the wisdom of engaging him in his paranoid fantasies, I needed to stop thinking about what was happening.

I asked, “what are you looking for?”

He explained, “I think the followers of the third moon are planning to put a pea-sized sphere of uranium in my food so I get cancer.”

“What is the house of the third moon?”

Willis shook his head. “Nobody knows exactly. Everyone calls them something different, no two stories are ever the same. Keepers of secrets,

both good and bad. Holders of the truth and keepers of the lie. They are everywhere and nowhere, can be anything and nothing.”

“Are they human,” I asked.

Willis looked at me and asked an insane question. “Are we human? Are any of us really human or was that just a lie created by the third house?”

I looked at the toast and scrambled eggs on my plate, I had lost my appetite and pushed the plate away.

Willis looked at my plate and asked, “the house of the third moon wouldn’t try to poison you, can I have it?”

“Sure. I don’t feel like eating.”

I found myself in my room later, alone, looking out the window beyond the metal grate which caged me in. I felt like I was on a train going somewhere I didn’t want to go, but a train is on rails and felt like I had no control over what was happening around me. I didn’t know what I was going to do.

The soothing, cheerful voice of a young woman asked, “how are you feeling?”

I turned around and found the attractive young nurse standing at the door.

I told her, “I would say I been better, but I have no clue about anything that happened before yesterday.”

“Yes,” she said smiling, “all the other patients seem to think you are quite mysterious. Quite an enigma you are.”

“I would rather be boring and know who I am.”

“I’m Bethany Rose.”

“Hi Bethany. I’m Mysterious Enigma.”

Bethany giggled at my attempt at humor.

She asked, “what happened in the rec-room yesterday?”

I lied and pretended I didn’t know what she was talking about. “Sorry, I don’t know what you mean.”

“Old Phillip, he is always in front of the television, he was saying a monster was responsible for breaking the TV. He says you were there.”

I returned to the window, watching the rain drizzle down the glass.

“Something happened, I don’t know what.”

“Could I help you somehow?”

I cynically replied, “could you tell me my name? No, didn’t think so.”

Bethany said, “maybe I can help you there.”

I looked at her, she seemed quite genuine. I asked, “what do you mean?”

“My brother works for a newspaper, he is a great investigative journalist. He owes me more than a few favors, and he could help.”

“Why would you want to help me?”

“You seem nice.”

I said, “if you could help me discover who I am, I would be in your debt.”

Bethany smiled, she seemed like a very vibrant person. She said, “I will take the picture they have of you from when you were admitted. I'll give it to my brother tonight.”

“Thanks Bethany.”

She left me alone and I returned to watching the rain.

Some time after noon, I had retreated into the only shower in the place. It was a small room with yellow ceramic tiles and a small shower stall. I sat on a toilet to one side of the room, intending to hide for awhile so I could be alone with my thoughts.

I looked at the wedding band which was still on my finger. It triggered a memory, a woman's voice pleading for someone to wake up. Then my voice screaming the word no. It was followed by crying.

I was startled then by the sound of a metallic ding. I looked down at the circular drain at the bottom of the shower. I almost fell over when the metallic cover to the drain popped loose from its fittings and was thrown up into the air. It landed with a sharp clang.

I stood up and looked towards the drain. I had seen too much and was not eager to investigate. I went to open the door but found that the knob refused to turn. I struggled to open the door.

Then sounds began to bellow up from the drain, strange croaks and gurgling noises. That sickening smell of rotting things wafted up from the drain.

I rested my head against the door and muttered, “it's not real; it is just in your head.”

I slowly looked towards the drain as a slug-like creature, about the size of a large sausage, crawled up from its depths; it slithered across the floor of the shower towards me.

I crushed the slug beneath the heel of my shoe; it let out a small squeal of pain then returned to the drain and disappeared. I managed to open the door and rushed out into the hallway.

Jake approached and asked, “you weren't smoking reefer in there where you?”

I turned to Jake and very seriously said, “something, some large worm

or something crawled out of the drain.”

Jake heartily laughed. “Must have been some good stuff, let me know who you buy from.”

Jake then walked away and I looked into the shower room. I decided to return to my bed.

Later that day I was summoned to Dr. Striker’s office. I waited alone in his ornately decorated office, he must have been a fisherman because there were several trophy fish mounted on the wall. Row after row of obscure medical texts lined both sides of the room. I sat impatiently in a small chair placed in front of a large oak desk.

The door to the office swung open and Doctor Striker came in and sat at his desk. My file was already on his desk and he looked down at it and began to jot something down. He seemed to avoid looking directly at me.

I asked, “what did you want to see me for?”

Doctor Striker let out a sigh and leaned back in his chair. He said, “I was hoping you weren’t going to be a problem, but it seems I misjudged the situation.”

“What is the problem?”

“Phillip Gunny has been in a state of mental distress ever since the episode in the rec-room yesterday; we have him sedated though he keeps talking about some kind of thing in the TV. Would you mind telling me what happened?”

Not wanting to complicate my predicament, I decided to lie.

I said, “he seemed fine yesterday, I don’t know what happened.”

“Jake has informed me that you are acting strangely, like you are afraid of something.”

“Well,” I said, “I am having trouble adjusting, this whole thing is too much to handle.”

“Remember, you are on thin ice and if there is another episode like the rec-room yesterday, you will spend several days in solitary confinement.”

Somehow with the strange events I had become ensnared in, being locked in a small, dark padded room seemed like a terrible thing. So I did my best to reassure the Doctor.

“Sorry Doctor, I will try to behave.”

“See that you do. You may leave.”

I went.

Long after the day and given into night, I lay in bed and looked out

the window as I tried to fall asleep. A thunder storm appeared over the horizon; in the distance I could see faint bursts of lightning. I slowly nodded off and then had an odd dream which troubled me. Though later I could not recall the contents of the dream. It ended when I was awoken unexpectedly from a deep slumber.

I lay in bed, the room was dark but I could hear heavy breathing somewhere in the darkness. Outside a fierce storm raged when a bolt of lightning filled the room with a surreal white light that lasted only momentarily. Willis, his eyes wild with some madness, stood over my bed looking down at me. I rolled over onto my side and turned on the lamp upon my nightstand.

“What the hell do you want Willis,” I asked.

Willis, his eyes cold and oddly empty of any sentiment, looked at me. He said, “they know who you are.”

I grunted and looked away. “I am not in the mood for this.”

Willis told me, “they said I should kill you.”

I sat up in bed, his threat rattled me. I asked, “who says you should kill me?”

“The house of the third moon, they spoke to me in a dream. They said you must be destroyed for you are the key. Only with your death will the door be closed.”

“Willis, the house of the third moon isn’t real.”

I reflected that, with the strange situation in which I had found myself, even the babbling of a madman sounded within the realm of plausibility. Maybe within the deluded mind of this man were answers.

Willis said, “you must be destroyed so that the doors will be closed.”

“Willis,” I asked, “did the house of the third moon tell you who I am?”

“No, they only said that you must be destroyed. They said you are the servant of the devourer, the absolute master of the void.”

“Willis, I don’t know what you think is going on, but it was only a dream. It isn’t real.”

Willis returned to his bed, muttering something under his breath as he walked away. I spent the rest of the night awake, afraid that Willis might attack me in my sleep. I was relieved when the rising sun brushed away the veil of night.

I was alone in the rec-room the next afternoon, sitting on a couch and reading a magazine. I have to admit that I was afraid Willis would appear, though I remained alone until Bethany walked in.

“How are you feeling?”

I looked up from my magazine to see Bethany looking down at me. She seemed to be smiling, and I admit that her presence went some ways towards calming my jangled nerves.

“Hey Bethany,” I said groggily.

“I have some good news.”

“I could use some good news right about now.”

Bethany sat beside me. “I gave your picture to my brother last night, he said you looked familiar.”

“Does he know who I am?”

Bethany shook her head. “No, but he is going to check the news archives for any information. If he discovers anything, he’ll let me know tonight.”

“I appreciate your help.”

Bethany looked at me. “You seem a little nervous. Though I don’t condone such things, you look like you need a cigarette. Maybe it’ll calm your nerves.”

She pulled out a pack of cigarettes and gave me a smoke. When she handed it to me, I felt a sort of tremendous relief and a strong urge to light the cigarette up and inhale deeply.

“Thanks,” I said.

Bethany explained, “you can’t smoke it here though. Go down to the basement, at the end of the long corridor is a room for smoking. Take the stairwell down two floors.”

“What if I try to escape?”

Bethany didn’t seem upset. “Doctor Striker has this place locked up tighter than Fort Knox, so I’m not worried. Anyways, I have to make my rounds, we’ll talk later.”

She left me alone and I looked at the cigarette; I realized that whoever I had been before was a smoker. I got up and quickly proceeded to the basement.

When I exited the stairwell and entered the basement, I felt a little alarmed. I was at one end of a long, poorly lit corridor which branched off into two separate hallways that were completely engulfed in darkness.

I started to walk down the corridor, nervously looking about but realized that I was alone. I walked faster, then looked down at the cigarette in my hand, which triggered a memory. In my mind, a woman’s voice said, ‘You should really quit those things.’

I stopped at the part of the corridor which branched off into a long,

darkened hallway. I looked down the hallway, into the blackness and whatever might have been beyond. A strange sound began to echo from the depths of the blackness, like something making little clicks. A breeze blew out from the darkness carried with it that sickening smell which made my stomach reel. Though I wanted to run, I remained frozen in place.

Then somewhere in the darkness, two glowing red orbs appeared and I immediately felt they were eyes looking at me. I backed up against the wall opposite the hallway, a cold chill ran down my spine.

“No, go away,” I muttered.

Then some horrible monstrosity emerged from the darkness; looking at it froze me with terror and I was unable to run. It looked like a centipede, though it was the size of a large snake, like a python or an anaconda. It scuttled across the ground towards me, its countless legs made clicking noises as it crawled across the linoleum tiles covering the floor.

I remained motionless until it was only a few feet from me. It looked at me with its crimson, glowing eyes though it did not attack. It seemed content to simply watch me. I remained frozen in place, unable to run or move.

Then the thing let out a hiss and disappeared into the darkness from whence it had come. I waited until the clicking noise had completely faded away before I ran in the opposite direction as fast as I could.

In a state of panic, I fled toward the nurses station, intent on getting out of that place. I found Bethany and Doctor Striker talking to each other. I started to bang my fists against the steel cage which surrounded the nurses' station. They both looked at me; Bethany seemed concerned while Doctor Striker stared at me with cold, analytical eyes.

I excitedly demanded, “I have to get out of here.”

Bethany asked, “are you OK?”

Before I could answer, Doctor Striker said, “Go to your room and calm down before you find yourself sedated and in solitary confinement.”

I tried to explain it to them, knowing just how insane it must have sounded.

“Downstairs,” I said, “something is down there. I have got to get out of this building.”

Bethany seemed sympathetic. “What did you see?”

I replied, “an insect, but bigger, much bigger.”

Bethany tried to calm me down. “Everything is OK.”

Doctor Striker was shaking his head as he frowned. “Please nurse, delusions about insects are very common amongst the mentally ill. He can't

tell the difference between reality and his fantasies.”

Doctor Striker seemed to be looking at something behind me. I turned to find Jake slowly approaching.

Doctor Striker said, “you will go into isolation tonight. You may return to your room tomorrow if you have composed yourself.”

Jake nodded. “Relax man, there is nothing to worry about. There is no reason to get all crazy.”

I said firmly, “you are either going to let me out or I’ll break through the damn doors.”

“Jake,” Doctor Striker said, “take this man to his padded cell.”

I looked at Jake. “I don’t want to do this, but try and take me away and so help me...”

Jake raised his hands. “You know me, a real cool cat.”

I had not seen another of the male staff members approach from behind. Before I knew it, he wrestled me to the ground. As I struggled to move, Doctor Striker slowly approached with a syringe and injected it into my neck. Bethany looked down at me.

I said to her, “I’m not crazy.” The drug took effect quickly; I became dizzy and faint.

Then Jake and the man took me away.

That night was long and very strange. The sedative he had given me left me in a semi-conscious state where reality and my thoughts seemed to merge. As I knelt on the floor, a straight-jacket bounding my arms, I began to realize I was not alone in the room. A humanoid shape was standing over me, though since I was in darkness, all I saw was the faint silhouette of a woman.

In an oddly familiar voice, she said, “Help.”

“No,” I replied, “you are not real.”

Her voice became more accusing in its tone. “You abandoned me, you said you would always protect me.”

I fell off balance and my head slammed into the cushioned walls of my prison, I landed on the the floor and started muttering incoherently.

She said, “you have to wake up.”

“How,” I asked.

“Remember.”

I passed out and had a deep, dreamless sleep, which was the first piece of good luck I had since the nightmare began.

I woke up the next morning, with a headache and a pool of drool

beneath my face. I sat up in my cell and realized that Doctor Striker was standing over me. My vision was blurry since the effects of the sedative had not yet worn off.

“Are you ready to return to your room,” he asked.

I nodded. “Yes, it was all in my head, I need to compose myself.”

“There is no room in this institution for slow learners. Another outburst like yesterday and you will spend a week in here.”

Doctor Striker left and two hospital staff led me away.

I found myself wandering aimlessly around the asylum that day, unsure of what was real and what was an illusion. Every time I came upon a door, I could imagine some terrible thing waiting behind it. I finally settled in the rec-room and decided to play ping pong with a patient, a quirky guy who was a complete mute. Though the guy was very good at ping pong and I lost every game.

After about an hour Bethany came into the room; she had some papers in her hands and seemed scared.

Bethany said, “Tom, please leave. I need to be alone with our new patient.”

Tom left the room silently, leaving me alone with Bethany. I couldn’t face her, though I asked, “What do you want Bethany?”

“Colin,” she said, “your name is Colin Jones.”

The moment she said the name I knew she was right, I instinctively knew that I had been called that many times.

Dumbfounded I said, “What do you know about me?”

She handed me the papers. Several old news clippings, I began to read them in order and the story of my past was partly revealed to me.

In the summer of 1993 Colin Jones and his wife Audrey, newlyweds who both had successful careers, had mysteriously vanished one night. By itself two disappearances might not be that uncommon, but the apartment they rented and the shop below it had vanished as well. No debris or wreckage was found, as if the building had ceased to exist. There was a picture of myself and the woman whose image had been haunting me. It was an article from The Citizen, an Ottawa newspaper; the clipping seemed quite old.

I asked Bethany, “what year is it?”

“It is 2006 Colin.”

The picture in the paper could have only been taken a few days ago; I had not aged appreciably. Funny how when one mystery was solved another

presented itself.

“Where are we?”

“We're about thirty minutes outside of Seattle.”

Where had I been for this unaccounted span of time? Why had I not aged? What did it have to do with the odd phenomena which had plagued me? I didn't have any of those answers.

I looked at the picture of Audrey and then for some reason I became intensely dizzy and fell to the ground; before I passed out I could hear Bethany calling my name.

In that unconscious state I saw my entire life play itself out before my eyes, a sequence of images which revealed the life story of Colin Jones to me.

Colin had been born in Ottawa Canada, the only child of two middle class parents. Colin excelled in school and seemed to have a bright future. But as he grew in age he began to have strange, disturbing nightmares: dreams of some existence devoid of light, a hellish place infested with many different disgusting creatures which scurried about in the darkness. As he grew older the dreams became so vivid and frequent that Colin had a nervous break-down. He met his first and only love, a young woman who was in his class in college. For awhile the dreams subsided and they created a life together.

Soon after their wedding night, Colin had the nightmare for the first time in years. Audrey, hearing her husband screaming in his sleep, awoke him from his nightmare. Then everything went insane, for the nightmare seemed to become real. Suddenly the doors of their apartment did not lead to where they were supposed to go, but led to another place. After that the memories became foggy. It ended with the image of Audrey being carried away by some obscure monstrosity.

The last thing revealed to me was the sight of Colin, or myself, wandering out of a derelict building.

I woke up on the floor of the rec-room, Bethany was kneeling beside me and looking into my eyes.

“Are you OK,” she asked.

I weakly said, “you have to get away from me. I have to get out of here.”

“What do you mean Colin.”

Then the horror began and all the unfortunate souls which inhabited that asylum where plunged into the very jaws of madness.

The whole Asylum began to violently shake, it felt like a strong earthquake which started shaking everything in the room. Bethany, now panicked, said, "what is happening?"

I look outside the window. Beyond the pane of glass I could see the sun in the sky. Though it was still early afternoon, a cloak of darkness obscured the light of the sun and soon all I could see through the window was pitch-black oblivion. Just as the shaking ceased the power to the asylum was snuffed out; after several moments though the lights flickered on.

Bethany said, "the emergency generator just kicked in."

I started to get to my feet. "We have to get everybody out of here."

Bethany and I left the rec-room to find most of the patients gathered around the nurses' station. Some were screaming, others crying; while others were oddly silent. Doctor Striker, inside the nurses' station, tried in vain to settle the patients down.

He explained, "we have just had a slight earthquake. There is nothing to worry about."

Willis was among the patients. He yelled, "Where is the sun?"

Bethany turned to me and said, "Wait here, I'll tell him to evacuate the hospital."

She left me alone and made her way through the throng of patients and went into the nurse's station. She whispered something into Dr. Stryker's ear, after which he began to shake his head.

"I will not evacuate the hospital," he said.

Then Doctor Striker left the nurse's station and started walking towards me, Bethany followed. When he passed me I ask him, "Where are you going?"

Doctor Striker replied, "Outside to see what's happening."

Bethany and I followed Doctor Striker through the hospital, down one floor and through a large security door he unlocked. We arrived at the reception area. Beyond the glass doors of the front of the hospital was a darkness blacker than any night I had ever seen.

Bethany pleaded, "Please, don't go out there."

He said, "Listen young lady, there is nothing to be afraid of."

Doctor Striker walked through the glass door as I followed, Bethany remained inside the asylum. Outside we discovered the severity of the situation we had found ourselves.

Outside we did not find the lush countryside which had been there only an hour before. The lights from the asylum pushed back the darkness far enough to reveal a little of our surroundings. The terrain beneath our feet was rocky, gray pitted stone that seemed to be covered with a thick slimy

substance. Before us was a beach upon which crimson waters crashed against the shore. In the distance, in all directions where countless noises made by horrible, inhuman things. And they seemed to be getting closer.

I turned to Doctor Striker. "I think we should go back inside."

Doctor Striker was in shock, I guess his vaunted sanity had been destroyed by the horrible reality around us. He began to walk towards the ocean and fell to his knees on the beach.

I was going to try and get him to follow me back into the hospital when it emerged from the ocean. If indeed we all had been cast into the depths of hell, then right then the devil chose to make an appearance.

A gigantic, serpentine monstrosity which resembled the centipede-like thing I had seen began to raise itself out of the ocean. It towered above us, it was at least as tall as the three-storey asylum.

I yelled, "Doctor, get your ass back in the hospital!"

Doctor Striker, who had always remained so composed, started crying and covered his eyes. Then things emerged from the ocean, things that looked like earwigs the size of dogs. They emerged from the red waters of that ocean in their hundreds; I watched in terror as they began to bite Doctor Striker and drag him into that blasted sea.

I ran towards the asylum and found Bethany waiting in the lobby. She had seen the great abomination emerge from the ocean and she was doing her best to remain calm, though she looked ready to shatter like glass.

Bethany asked, "what are we going to do?"

"Get everyone on the second floor, we'll barricade ourselves in there until we figure out how to escape this place."

"Where are we Colin?"

I knew the answer. "We are in a nightmare. Hopefully there is a way out."

We returned to the second floor. The remaining staff were doing their best to calm the patients, though the fear everyone felt was palpable. Willis, who seemed oddly calm, was speaking to the patients who listened to him with complete attention.

Willis paced about as he talked. "We are surely in hell, for there is no escape for any of you."

Jake saw Bethany and I approach. He walked up to us, and I do admit, he seemed to be keeping his cool.

"Where is Striker?"

Bethany grimly replied, "he is dead."

Jake didn't seem to take her seriously. "You are kidding me, right?"

“No,” I said, “we are not kidding. Listen, we can’t leave the hospital, you really don’t know what’s out there.”

Then from the outside came a deafening squeal, a noise which seemed to shake the very foundations of the asylum. Now everyone, both the staff and patients, seemed to realize the severity and horror of the situation.

Willis stopped his pacing about and he looked directly at me, he pointed his finger at in my direction.

“You,” he accused, “you brought us here.”

I would have denied his accusation, but even I didn’t know if it was true. Maybe this was all my fault, but giving in to guilt and recrimination wasn’t going to help.

“Listen, there is a way out,” I said.

Everyone was looking at me closely. I explained, “wherever we are, I think I was here before and found a way out.”

Willis asked, “do you know the way out?”

Jake started to laugh. “I would say I need to be in the loony bin, but I’m already there.”

The rest of the hospital staff seemed unimpressed, and they started to talk amongst themselves. I was going to say something to Bethany when I heard a familiar clicking noise. I turned towards the stairwell as one of those smaller centipede-things emerged from the door. Before I could warn Bethany it moved towards us with surprising speed. It used its body like a club and knocked us both off our feet. Then it grabbed Bethany’s foot with its large mandibles and started to drag her towards the stairwell.

I yelled, “help!”

Everyone on that floor of the hospital turned and watched one of those things attempted to drag Bethany away; no one tried to do anything. I got up to my feet and realized that there was a fire ax encased in glass on the wall. I used my elbow to smash the glass and grabbed the ax. The centipede-thing had almost succeeded in pulling Bethany into the stairwell when I started to hack away at it. The centipede-thing squealed in pain and disappeared into the stairwell.

I helped Bethany to her feet and she put her arms around me.

“Thanks,” she said in a soft voice.

We walked towards the group; most of them where as pale as ghosts and there was complete silence.

Someone asked, “what are we going to do?”

I said, “is there any other way up to this floor besides the stairwell?”

Jake answered, “No.”

“Listen,” I said, “grab anything you can and barricade that door.”

There was little debate about what was to be done. While the patients retreated to their rooms, the staff and I used furniture from around the hospital to block the door. Then we settled in to wait.

Later that day I was alone in my room, somberly looking out the window. Once I had seen green fields and lush countryside. Now all I could see was the rocky ground which surrounded the asylum. There were thousands of those earwig-things congregating in countless hordes around the hospital. For once I was glad for the steel on the window. It was meant to keep people from getting out; now it would keep those things from getting in.

A familiar voice spoke.

“Colin.”

I turned around and saw Audrey at the door to my room, but she wasn't really there, more like a transparent image rather than a flesh-and-blood person.

I said, “Audrey.”

She frowned. “You must find the door.”

I asked, “What is going on? Where are we?”

“You were born under a alignment of stars which allowed you to open doors, doors that should remain closed. You open gateways to a dark existence devoid of light.”

So it was my fault; my heart sank. I looked at her, “how do I get these people out of here?”

“There is one door back to our existence, you must find it.”

Then she faded away until I was alone again. At that moment Bethany walked into the room.

“Who were you talking to,” she asked.

“No one.”

I don't know how many hours had passed, since in this place there was no day, only an endless night. I was sitting on a couch in the rec-room, Bethany was sleeping beside me.

The lights in the room began to flicker, then fade somewhat. After awhile Jake came into the room; he seemed concerned. He was holding a pair of flashlights.

“What is it Jake?”

“The generator is low on fuel. We will lose all our light if we don't

refill it.”

“Where is the generator?”

“Sorry my man, it's in the basement. I was hoping you would go downstairs with me—we'll be real cautious.”

I slowly got up so as to not wake Bethany then followed Jake to the door which led to the stairwell. We slowly began to take apart the barricade, then made our way into the stairwell.

It was dark inside that stair shaft; as we descended the two floors we were relieved to find that the way was not blocked by those hideous creatures. We opened the door to the basement floor and entered the corridor. Just then the lights went out.

I turned on my flashlight. “This keeps getting better.”

Jake looked down to the far end of the corridor, then tapped me on the shoulder. “Check this out.”

A shaft of light, sunlight, appeared at the end of the corridor. We both started to make our way toward it when I heard the door to the stairwell open behind us, followed by strange noises. I turned and watched in horror as a dozen or so of the earwig creatures emerged from the stairwell.

I yelled, “run to the light.”

Jake had already sprinted down the corridor and I followed, the creatures began to give chase. At the end of the corridor was a door which I was told would lead to a small room for smoking. Jake opened the door: behind it was a bright sunny day and a grassy field. Jake threw himself through the door; I stopped at the door's threshold.

Jake looked at me. “Come on.”

“I'm going back for the rest.”

“You're loco, but good luck.”

“Keep this door open no matter what.”

I turned back towards the corridor. Those oversized insectoid earwig-things had stopped a few feet from me. I slowly approached and they parted, allowing me to pass. I ran down the corridor toward the stairwell; I could hear the clicking sound of the things' feet; they were following me.

I burst into the stairwell and ran up two floors. I stopped at the door which led to the general hospital area. I looked down and watched in horror as hundreds of the things made their way up the stairs. The narrow beam of the flashlight revealed our doom.

I went through the door and knew that I did not have time to rebuild the barricade. I ran towards the rec-room and found Bethany still asleep. I lifted her in my arms, then made my way toward the nurses' station; Bethany awoke but said nothing. I placed her upon the floor of the nurses' station and

closed the door.

I yelled, "everybody, get over here."

The flashlight only revealed a portion of what was happening. Those insect things were already everywhere in the hospital. Screams began to come from distant rooms. I turned and saw Willis slowly approaching me, a knife in his hand.

Willis muttered, "I have to kill you."

He lunged at me and I felt the knife stab deep into my side, I screamed as waves of pain washed over me. I fell to the ground as Willis, seeming triumphant, stood over me gloating. I crawled towards the door to the nurse's station just as one of the insect-creatures knocked Willis over and dragged him away. He did not struggle, and seemed resigned to his fate.

Bethany dragged me into the nurses' station and closed and locked the door. She removed her sweater and pressed it against my wound to stop the bleeding. We huddled together in that steel-caged room for hours as we listened to the staff and residents get dragged away by those things. Often the creatures would try to break through the cage, but were unable. Bethany and I held each other tightly, shivering with horror.

I didn't know how many hours had passed, but finally there was silence again. I got up and used the flashlight to see if those things were gone. The floor appeared to be clear.

I knelt down and whispered, "Come on, we're getting out of here."

She asked, obviously scared, "How?"

"Trust me, we'll be home in a few minutes."

I slowly opened the door and we exited from the nurses' station. I led Bethany to the stairwell and we descended into the basement. The entire building began to shake again. Cracks appeared in the ceiling and chunks of concrete fell down around and between us.

I held Bethany's hand as we ran down the corridor as the building fell apart around us. Something was ripping it to pieces, but the door to a world where there was light was still there. We charged through the door and I turned and closed it; I had just closed the door to an outhouse in the middle of a field.

Bethany looked at me. "Is it over?"

"Yeah, it's over."

Papers across the world had ran the strange story about a hospital that vanished into thin air, Shimmering Pines had become part of common knowledge. When Bethany and I returned to our world, seven years had

passed.

We parted ways, though we kept in contact. She went to live with her family, who were happy but mystified by her return. She wrote me about how she had found Jake, who was also with family. I hoped they would both forget about what we endured.

For myself, these days I never stay in any place too long. The longer I stay somewhere, the more that dark world seems to try and connect with ours. I've been on the move for years with really no purpose.

I'm tired of running. As I write this I'm in a cheap apartment in some city, I couldn't tell you which. I hear strange noises coming from the other side of the front door, familiar noise; noises from that place I twice escaped.

On the table beside my computer are some provisions. A week's worth of food and water, a flashlight and some batteries, a hunting rifle. After I finish this record of the strange and terrible curse that afflicts me, I will make a printout.

Then I will go through that door, and return to that world. I don't know why; maybe Audrey exists there still and we can be together. Mostly, I believe I am the only bridge between these two worlds and I have accepted that this is what fate has planned for me. I will probably never return, and I suppose it would be better if I didn't. I can't imagine how it will end, I will not think about it further.

I will go through that door, into that world, and meet my destiny.