

The Mausoleum

It was like any other night this time of the year. The moon hid behind the hazy gray clouds and the darkness began to engulf the backyard, where I was sitting. My friends Jason and Ricky had come over for a sleepover. We watched some scary movies and decided to have a campout outside. We pitched the tent crawled into its confined quarters. The sides bulged and the zipper wouldn't stay closed, since it was obviously a two-man tent. We started to tell scary stories, just about one second before I would have collapsed in sheer boredom. Ricky told this lame story about a house built on burial grounds and the zombies rose from the dead every Halloween. I tried to be a good sport by acting scared, but he could see right through my charade. It was Jason's turn. He started to talk about a haunted house that nobody's ever gotten through alive. He said it was true. He went there, but chickened out before he went in. According to his story, it's set in the old hospital on 13th Street. It costs twenty-five dollars to get in, but you get five back for completing each of the five floors. He said his brother went through and didn't even get past the second floor before taking the chicken exit. He's never been quite the same since. It's supposed to be so scary that you'll be emotionally scarred by what's in there. He mumbled something about snakes and trap doors when he got out, and he still hasn't been able to talk about it. Being the adventurous person I am, I suggested, "Why don't we check it out?"

"Check what out?" It was my older sister, Kristin. Mom told her to check up on us every hour or so since they were out at a party. I'm sixteen, but my parents treat me like I'm four. I hate them.

"Nothing. Go back inside."

"I'll call Mom if you don't tell me." The "I'll tell mom" trick always seemed to work on me.

"Okay, we're going to a haunted house. You can come, I guess."

"I've got nothing better to do...so, whatever, I guess I'll go." She always did this routine where she would pretend she didn't want to do something she really wanted to do. I don't get it.

We got into my car and in about five minutes we arrived at a small opening in a thickly wooded area with a sign saying "KEEP OUT" nailed to a tree. A snaky gravel road squeezed in between the big oak trees. I drove slowly down the road until Jason shouted, "We're here! This is it!"

I got out of the car and surveyed the derelict hospital. I couldn't tell it had been a hospital, since all of the paint had worn off its brick walls and all the windows had been smashed out and replaced with more bricks. In neon-orange spray paint, a sign above the door read: "THE MAUSOLEUM"

"Whoa, this place is creepy," Kristin whispered, "I wonder why nobody's in line." We decided not to tell her.

We made our way to the entrance where we pulled back the black plywood door. The spring slammed it closed right behind us. This was it. There was no turning back now. We moved up to the ticket counter, where a costumed woman gave us a speech on the whole money policy and that we couldn't sue if and when we got injured. I thought, *they're just trying to scare you with that crap. You won't get hurt.* She led us behind a black curtain into a room that was just as dark.

"Let's hold hands so we don't get lost," Ricky said. As much as I didn't like the idea of holding guys' hands, (and my sister's) I thought it was still a good idea. We began bumping into all kinds of things, trying to find our way through the pitch-black labyrinth. Some of the things we bumped into felt soft, unlike your usual wall. The leader, Jason, kept saying "left" and "right" as we made corners. This didn't seem too bad. Jason suddenly said, "Here's the door." As he opened the door, the room lit up. Kristin screamed bloody murder. Instead of walls, the whole time we had been bumping into dead bodies. Not just some dummies: I could tell these were real people. They had all been murdered in some horrible fashion, some with slit throats, others with handprints on their necks, and still others with knives jutting from their chests. They were either tethered to the wall or onto giant pikes protruding from the floor, which were painted in dried blood. Kristin began to sob as she backed up out of the room, her eyes bulging, still in shock from the horror.

"WHERE ARE YOU GOING, MISS?" a raspy voice shouted from behind us. Kristin let out a blood-curdling scream that made my ears ring. The voice belonged to a man, who now had Kristin in a headlock with a thick, hairy arm covered in blood. He let go, shoving her to the ground. Blood stains covered the top of her new white blouse. By this time, she had stopped sobbing and now she was full on bawling.

"Please...please...don't hurt me..." Kristin said between sobs.

"Oh, I wouldn't hurt such a pretty little thing like you," the man said. His costume was that of some sort of zombie-like creature, with rotting green-gray skin, his face painted the same sickly color, and raggedy clothes that looked like they were a few sizes too big for him. He grabbed Kristin again and

began touching her, all up and down her blouse, leaving bloody handprints on her breasts and along her midriff. He began to stroke her brown hair until another voice came from the other room.

"What did I tell you about that?" a woman shrieked. She limped into the room. Her outfit was much like his, except she had an old tattered apron on.

"But honey, it's not what it looks like," I almost laughed. This was obviously some scripted scene between a zombie and his wife. A little comic relief never hurt. Nobody else even cracked a smile.

"Not what it looks like my ass! You're gonna pay this time, you pig!" The wife pulled out a big butcher knife and stabbed him straight in his back. His eyes widened and his mouth gaped as she began to stab him repeatedly. He went limp and Kristin threw him to the ground. He was bleeding real blood, and that was a real knife. But most importantly, he was definitely dead.

"You're next, kids," the wife cackled.

We darted out of the room as fast as we could until we came to an abrupt halt after slamming head-on into a solid brick wall. We stood there, puzzled. The corridor was empty. We began to walk up and down the hall, pushing walls to see if they were doors. I came back to the brick wall and saw a square on the floor, painted in glow in the dark paint.

"Come here, you guys. Look at this." Everyone walked over and looked down at the square.

"Jason, I'll bet this is one of those trap doors your brother was talking about. We need to go through it to go on. It must be stuck," I jumped up and down, trying to get it to open. It didn't budge. Suddenly, the floor dropped out and we all plummeted down a tube into a slide. Since this was the ground level, I didn't know how far down the slide went. Right as I thought that, we landed on a cold stone floor. This appeared to be some kind of dungeon-themed room.

A door behind us slowly creaked open and we whipped around to see what was there. A huge figure loomed in the doorway. All you could hear was a grumble. He had to have weighed at least four hundred pounds, all of it pure muscle. He kept groaning as he picked up a ball-and-chain from the wall and began to swing it over his head. We backed away further and further as he began to swing faster and faster. The ball zoomed by us as we ducked down lower and lower until we were squatting, still moving back. The monster let out a yell and swung the ball at us. It smashed against the wall as dust and fragments of the wall showered over our heads. He swung again with the same results. I saw Ricky out of the corner of my eye start to inch back up the wall as the beast came closer to us. I knew something bad was going to happen when the creature moved his arm down slightly and sent the ball sailing into Ricky's head. Pieces of his skull were scattered across the room as a mist of blood rained down on us. His eyeball landed in my lap and I almost vomited. Again, Kristin shrieked and began her sobbing again. Ricky's limp, decapitated body fell down onto the floor, spilling the remnants of his blood across the dungeon floor. We ducked under the ball and began to run for a door we seemed to have missed to the left of our position. Right as we left the room, the ball crashed into the doorway, breaking off bits of the wall.

The door led to a smaller door and then to a smaller door and on and on until we could barely make it through the opening on our hands and knees. We had to crawl through this narrow passageway for what seemed like hours, crawling through a wet substance, which I was sure was blood. I seemed to have been desensitized to it now, since it didn't bother me. Most likely, I just wanted to get out of this place. We finally came to a dimly lit room with a ladder on one wall. We climbed up the ladder and, at the top, was a small hatch. Reluctantly, I opened it and ascended into the new area. It was a blank room. There was nothing in it except a slot in the wall with a button above it. Without thinking, Jason pressed the button. A voice came over a PA and said, "Congratulations, your party has made it through the first floor of 'The Mausoleum'. You may take your cash from the slot below." Only three \$5 bills were spit out; apparently, they knew about Ricky. We each took one. The voice continued, "If you wish to do so, you may now exit the house."

I began for the door and turned the knob. Nothing happened. I tried again. The door was locked from the other side.

"I guess we don't have any choice but to go on," I said.

I slowly opened the other door and there was a staircase. Not a particularly menacing staircase, just a staircase. We hiked up the stairs, each one creaking under our weight. When we got to the top, there was a curtain. I pulled it aside and jumped back so far I thought I would fall down the stairway. About five feet down was a huge pit of snakes. They were all hissing and crawling through each other. I realized that they weren't actually hissing: they were rattling. The pit was full of rattlesnakes. Jason and Kristin both looked down into the pit. They jumped as well.

"Okay, there's a thin ledge along the outside. We have to walk across that," I deduced.

Slowly, we began to creep along the shelf. I got to the door first and Jason followed close behind. Kristin froze right before she got to the door. We began coaxing her to come to the door.

"C'mon, Kristin, it's okay. You're almost there."

She began to tremble. Her knees locked and a tear rolled down her face. All of a sudden, someone shouted, "Get a move on, girl!" a door opened up from behind Kristin and a masked man launched his forearm out. She shrieked and ducked to the right and avoided the outstretched arm. She precariously sidled the wall, putting her trembling feet one over the other to cross the shelf. Finally, she reached the door and we all ran into the room at once, slamming the crude wooden door behind us. Up ahead was another long corridor. It didn't seem normal.

A sound arose from thin air, a barely-audible hum. We continued walking along, our hands clasped firmly together to avoid getting lost. I was stuck holding Kristin's hand, and despite the malice we had against each other, I felt I could trust her and that she would protect me, even though I was sure I'd have to do the same for her. The hallway went on and on as the sound crescendoed into a ghostly chorus. It eventually filled the room with a dissonant noise that rattled the makeshift plywood walls that constructed the hall. We let go of each other and pressed our hands tightly over their ears to keep out the horrid noise.

And suddenly, it stopped.

I looked around, trying to find the source of the noise. Out of nowhere, wraithlike apparitions descended upon us from all directions. Kristin shrieked and ducked, but Jason and I were too scared to move. The noise started again, but this time, it was more like a screech. Even though I tried my best to drown it out, I was still almost certain my eardrums were about to shatter. We ducked down and exited as quickly as we could. I shut my eyes to try to block out the horrid, grotesque creatures that were surrounding me. Again, the noise stopped as soon as it had started. I slowly opened my eyes and saw a conspicuously nice door in front of us. It was composed of fine cherry, with a polished brass knob and matching deadbolt. I prayed for it to be unlocked, and, upon turning the knob, it opened cleanly without the slightest squeak. Inside, I was barraged by *light*. Simple fluorescent bulbs were enough to blind me in this state. Once I adjusted, I looked around. I couldn't believe my eyes.

"It's...an office..." Jason stated, slowly and with disbelief.

It was doctor's office to be more specific. Several cushioned chairs sat in the corner, with an end table covered in back issues of *One* and *People* sitting between each. A lighted fishtank rested in the back. In front of us, there was a receptionist's desk, with a smiling woman sitting behind it.

"Hi, can I help you?" she beamed.

"What's going on?" I demanded.

"Do you have an appointment?"

"With whom?"

"Well, I assume you're here to see Dr. Folterung, correct?"

"No! I mean, yes. I mean, maybe?"

"Let me see if you are on the list..." She scanned a clipboard sheet. "Your name?"

"Joe Mateo."

"Ah, yes, Mr. Mateo. Dr. Folterung is expecting you."

"He is?"

"Yes."

"What about Kristin Mateo and Jason Cunningham?"

She browses the list. "No, no Kristin Mateo or Jason Cunningham. Go on in, the doctor is ready to see you now."

Apprehensively, I walked back to see Dr. Folterung. Upon opening the door, I saw a long, whitewashed hallway in front of me. I walked quickly down the hall, trying to get this over with. I didn't bother to look to the rooms on my flanks...no telling what was in there. Suddenly, an arm grabbed at me from my left side and pulled me into the room. It was Dr. Folterung. He was not at all menacing; in fact, he seemed rather benevolent. But looks can be deceiving.

"So, deed you get lost, eh?" he asked. He had a very thick German accent.

"Uh, you see, there is some kind of mistake..." I started.

"Nonsense. You set zis appointment vith me, deed you not?"

"No...I have no idea who you are, or what you're doing in a haunted house."

"Haunted house? Vat are you talking about? Zis ees a hospital."

"It used to be...but it's been abandoned for decades..."

"Shut up!" He shouted, losing his accent a bit. "Shut up! You don't know what you're talking about! This is a hospital! Now lay down on the table!"

I hesitated a bit. "NOW!" he shouted.

I hopped up on the bed, and tried to relax as I laid back. It was surprisingly comfortable, even though I was unable to get the tenseness out of my body to enjoy it to any degree. Folterung pulled out a thick leather strap from a small slot in the side of the bed. As he rolled it out, he gave it a quick snap between his hands. He pulled it over me and clicked the buckle at the end into place. It was so tight, I could barely breathe. He strapped down a few more on other various spots around my body. I started to sweat profusely. A small armrest slid out of the side of the bed, to which Folterung strapped my right arm.

He walked over to a cabinet and rummaged around for a bit until he pulled something out. I feared I was hallucinating, perhaps from the lack of oxygen to my brain. But I wasn't. He had a long hypodermic needle in his right hand. I started to scream and fidget, but Folterung put his hand over my mouth and whispered, "You can make this easy, or you can make it hard. The needle can go into your arm and come right back out, or break off inside you and rip it to shreds. It all depends on YOU!" And with that sudden shout, he jabbed the needle down to my arm as though it were a knife, but just as soon as he did, the floor opened up, and I was tipped backward as the table swiftly moved down a ramp.

I tried to hang onto something, but with the straps on, I had nothing to grab for. I squinted my eyes and gritted my teeth, as the ramp got steeper and steeper. As soon as I thought I couldn't take it, the ramp leveled out, and I began to soar up hill. *Please make it to the top*, I pleaded with it.

Sure enough, I burst through double doors to find myself rolling to a stop in the waiting room, with Kristin and Jason running to comfort me. Kristin threw her arms around me as Jason unbuckled the straps.

"Oh my God, are you okay, Joe?" she cried.

"I'm fine...I think," I replied. She helped me up and clung onto me with a death grip.

"Please get us out of here, Joe. I've never been so scared in my life."

"I know, Kristin. Me either. But I can't get us out of here..."

"You've gotta try...you've just gotta..." She started sobbing again.

"May I interrupt?" the receptionist queried. "The next checkpoint room is just outside that door."

She pointed it out with her ballpoint pen.

Kristin let go of me almost instantly and darted for the exit.

"Kristin, wait! I'm coming!" I shouted at her, but it was too late. The double doors had already slammed shut. A few seconds later, she let out her trademark scream. I ran out the doors and looked frantically for her.

"Kristin!" I called out. "Where did you go?"

I took another step, cautiously putting my foot down, but when I did, I landed right on Kristin's stomach. I quickly pulled it off, jumped back and looked down and saw her lying there with a knife jutting out of her chest. Remembering some first aid knowledge, I checked her pulse. Hysterically, I pressed my fingers all over her neck, trying to find her artery. I hit it, and sure enough, there was a pulse. She was still alive. I slowly put my hand on her shoulder and shook her gently.

"Kristin," I said as clearly as possible, "can you hear me?"

Nothing. I tried again.

"Kristin, can you hear me?"

Still nothing.

I shook her violently and shouted, "God dammit, Kristin, wake up! Wake the FUCK up! Don't do this to me!"

"It's hopeless, man," Jason muttered pessimistically.

Just then, Kristin bolted up and screamed at the top of her lungs. She tried desperately to catch her breath as she looked down at her chest. She shrieked again.

"Oh my God! What...happened?" she shouted between tears. "Joe! What should I do?"

"I...I...don't..." I stammered.

"Get this thing OUT OF ME!"

I reached down and gently and grabbed the handle as I attempted to slide it out. Carefully, I pulled it out. It was no bigger than a penknife, but she was still losing some blood.

"Take off your shirt," I told her.

"What?"

"Don't be stupid. Just take it off."

She unbuttoned it while I took my sweatshirt and pressed it against the wound. I took it off for a second so I could estimate the damage. Surprisingly enough, the bleeding had stopped. I gave her my slightly cleaner top shirt to put on and we left the soiled garments on the floor.

"Try to stand up," I said. Jason and I helped her to her feet.

"I think I'm okay..." Kristin walked a few steps, just to make sure. "It just hurts...a lot."

"Did you see who or what did this to you?"

"I was walking along, and it just shot out the wall, like it was on a spring or something..."

Just then, I heard a WHOOSH as a small knife launched out the wall and hit the opposite wall with a thud.

We all ran away to a large door with "STAIRS" written on it in the same neon orange paint that seemed to be very common in the house. It creaked as I opened it and slowly walked in, with Kristin and Jason following closely behind. However, upon closer inspection, there weren't stairs behind the door at all...just a blank room.

"What the hell?" Jason said as he passed me to go further into the room. We searched around, trying to find some secret passageway or something.

"Oh God, I don't think I can go much further...it hurts too much..." Kristin moaned.

"Don't worry..." I told her.

I looked up, and saw what appeared to be remnants of an old wrought-iron spiral staircase that had long since expired.

"I found something!" Jason shouted, enthusiastically. We walked over to see his discovery. He had found a ladder that crawled up the side of the wall, all the way to the top.

"Well, go! What are you waiting for?" I demanded.

Carefully, Jason grabbed onto a rung, and then another. He placed one foot carefully on the bottom rung, then the other. He slowly started to climb to the top. I followed closely behind. I was a few rungs up when I realized Kristin wasn't following us.

"Kristin, what's wrong? C'mon!"

"I...can't."

"Why not?"

"It hurts too much," she said, nursing her wound.

"You have to ignore it and keep climbing, or we'll never get out of here."

Kristin groaned and let out a sigh as she started to climb. The narrow cylindrical room was filled with echoes of our feet pounding against the metal bars of the ladder. I looked up, just to possibly find a bit of salvation. Light leaked out from a door just a few yards ahead. Jason reached it first.

"Be careful," I warned.

"Don't worry," he responded as he turned the doorknob. It opened as a flood of white light rushed toward us. Jason crawled into the opening, with me following close behind. I managed to pull myself up into the room. It was unlike the others in that it was whitewashed and circular, a slightly refreshing change of pace from the rest of the house. I looked back for Kristin, to see her nearing the top of the ladder.

"Joe, help me," she said as I reached out for her hand. She grabbed on to it as I helped pull her up. She let go of my hand quickly as she pushed herself up. Just as she got her feet safely on the ground, she took a step backward to regain her bearings. Her foot slipped off the edge as she tumbled backward, screaming until she was impaled on a metal rod coming up from the old broken staircase. I looked down in horror as I saw her, her head hanging down with blood running out of her mouth, the rod starting to shatter her pelvis. I had to cover my mouth to keep from throwing up. Her hipbones finally gave way and she fell, the two halves of her waist flailing wildly as she hit the ground with a splat.

I stepped back into the room and lost it. "Fuck!" I shouted at the top of my lungs. "Fucking shit! Oh, fucking God, what the fuck just happened?" I glanced back over the edge, just to make sure she hadn't survived.

"Dammit! Why did I have to talk us into going here?"

"It's not your fault...I mean, if you knew we were going to be KILLED, you never would have wanted to go, same with us. I thought it was going to be a good scare, but this place, it's like a horror movie come true. I'm so fucking scared," Jason said, quietly.

"Shit. We're all going to die here. We're all gonna fucking die in the most horrible ways possible. First Ricky, then Kristin, and then us...this house is going to be the death of us all."

What was I supposed to do? My sister, my only sibling, just died in the most horrible way possible, and it's all my fault. I thought about just ending it all right now, and taking my own plunge off the ledge. There's no way I could look my parents or her friends in the face again when I made it out of here.

If I make it out of here, that is.

Jason started to pace around nervously, until a voice called out from a PA speaker:

"Congratulations, your party has completed Floor 2 of 'The Mausoleum.' You may take your cash out from the slot below."

I looked to my left and saw two fives peeking out from a small slot. I ran over to it, took out the bills, ripped them up and threw them out the door. I came back and started punching the speaker with all my might. The metal cover dented in as I bashed it in. My hands started to bleed, but I didn't care.

"Stop it! Stop it, Joe! You're just hurting yourself!" Jason shouted at me.

"Wait..." I said, as it dawned upon me, "This is a checkpoint room. That means there's an exit somewhere in here!"

"I don't see it," replied Jason.

"What? How can you not see it?"

"It's not here, Joe."

"But it has to be!" I start pounding on the walls, trying to find a secret passageway or something. Nothing.

"Maybe we took a wrong turn. Maybe the exit's not in here." I whipped around to exit the room from the way we came, but I saw that there was no door. The door had disappeared.

"What the fuck?" I shouted as I looked back to see that the money slot and the speaker gone as well. Suddenly, the room started to spin. Jason and I were thrown to the ground as it spun faster and faster. I was pushed against the wall as I struggled to regain myself. The room whirled faster and faster. Jason vomited and it all splattered against the wall. The spinning began to slow down as I rolled gradually into the center. After it had come to a stop, I stood up and looked for Jason. He was kneeled over across the room, still vomiting. I heard a screech come from beneath us as the room began to travel downwards at a slow, steady pace.

Jason gasped, wiped off his mouth, and said, "What's going on?"

"I dunno..." I replied, relieved, and hopeful that maybe we'd be getting out of here.

The room descended further and further down until it screeched to a halt. Unexpectedly, a part of the wall toppled and crumbled into dozens of pieces. We reluctantly went through the new opening, to find none other than...

A mausoleum.

The walls were lined with hundreds of ornate doors, every few columns illuminated by antique oil burning lamps. We made our way out the door, gazing in awe at the sheer magnitude of it. The walking space between the two walls was so narrow; no more than two small people could traverse it side-by-side simultaneously. I ran my fingers across the decorative wood as I gazed into the massive expanse above me.

Suddenly, I heard a clicking sound and then a squeak of an old hinge. I looked behind me to see a door standing wide open. I started to pick up my pace, as two more doors opened themselves, then four, then six, then, after that, I lost count as the compartments opened themselves. Jason and I started to run as fast as we could, closing doors as not to hinder us.

As I ran faster and faster and slammed more and more doors shut, something on the bottom of the floor tripped me. I glanced back to see what it was. It was a human arm, heavily decomposed and swarming with maggots. I jumped up as quickly as I could and sprinted down the hall. No end in sight. We were greeted with more and more outstretched limbs as we made our way down the hall. Suddenly, I saw Jason being grabbed by several hands, threatening to pull him apart. I dashed for him and managed to rip the hands off of him, but more and more grasped on. Bodies started to crawl out of their coffins and seized us. I tried fighting them off, but it was no use. Jason and I screamed as the zombies ripped our flesh off and tore into our bodies to feed on our supple innards. The screaming from Jason stopped as I saw the zombies devour his heart and brain. I felt weak as more and more creatures piled on top of me. I tried to scream louder, but I was in over my head in decomposing bodies and my own entrails. A zombie came close to my face and gouged out my eyes with his long fingernails as I slowly passed into death.

