

I stood at the hallway entrance, staring down the dimly lit corridor. The dull lights that lined the hall illuminated the cracked white stonework, making it look more like an unnatural cave than something that was man-made. The only sounds I heard from the tunnel were a slight whistling draft and the occasional tinkle of flickering light.

"Ugh, looks like there's going to be a ton of spiders down there."

I snapped back from my slight trance to see Karen standing behind me with a disgusted look on her face.

"Suck it up, Karen. We all agreed to do this together and you are not going to back out of it over some spiders," said Roy. The gruff-looking man wheeled over to us with Alexa and Thomas close behind him.

Karen humphed and crossed her arms. "As if! Real or not, I am not giving up the chance to get back everything I've lost."

"I don't think any of us are," said Alexa quietly. Alexa was right. We've all lost so much that all five of us were willing to try anything.

We all met online when we found a discussion site about this hallway. It's said that whoever walks through the hall with something they've lost in mind, then they will be reunited with it. Some theorized that it was created when this guy from Greek mythology tried to bring his dead wife up from the underworld, or something like that. I didn't pay much attention to the backstory. The most important part was how to get back what you lost.

Karen Wallace was apparently an extremely popular internet influencer before someone leaked a bit of scandalous information about her that caused her to lose her entire fanbase. I guess that losing all of her popularity and attention was enough to drive her to find anything that would restore it.

Roy Codswelt, a veteran, had lost the use of his legs when he got shot in the spine on the battlefield. He has been stuck in a wheelchair for 28 years, so I guess he misses walking around.

Thomas and Alexa Kurts are a young married couple who recently lost a child in infancy. I felt really sorry for them that they had to go through that. I know what it's like to suddenly lose loved ones.

As for me, my name is Jamie Hoppens and I am twelve years old. I lost my parents in a car accident a couple of years ago. I can still vividly remember the events of the accident. Dangling

upside down in my seat, I watched my parents slowly bleed out, helpless to do anything to save them. It felt like I lost everything that day. I lost my family, my home, and my happy life. Even my voice seemed to be whisked away in all the grief. The horrible feeling of losing something so important was the reason why I, and the rest of the group, felt it is worth trying anything to regain everything that matters, no matter how crazy it seems.

"So... who's going down the tunnel first? It looks rather, uh... narrow," said Thomas as he warily eyed the corridor.

"Not me! I am not going in that health code violation without a meat shield going first," said Karen with a dramatic flip of her hair. I wrinkled my nose at her sour attitude. Perhaps she deserved to lose all of her popularity. She has an awful personality.

"I could go first," said Roy. "I'm the eldest here, so I should be the one responsible for all of you."

"We couldn't possibly ask you to do that for us," Alexa said, a kind look of concern on her face. "Besides, what if there are stairs or difficult ground in the hallway? You could get thrown out of your wheelchair and get seriously hurt!"

Everyone threw around ideas and suggestions about how best to handle heading down the precarious hallway. I listened to them for a bit, but I quickly became bored. All we had to do was walk through the tunnel, think about what we wanted back, and not look behind us. It is that simple. Why did adults always have to complicate things? I started my way down the hall.

I heard Roy call out from behind me, "Jamie! Wait! We gotta go together!" as the group scurry to catch up. Soon, there was the sound of four pairs of shoes and wheelchair wheels behind me.

The five of us traversed the hallway for some time. The corridor was simple, straight, and narrow. Every footstep seemed to echo for miles. The old lights released a faint, flickering glow, which made it hard to make out any specific details of the hallway. It was empty and uninteresting. This made it very easy to focus on what you wanted.

I thought of my parents. I remembered them helping me with my homework, taking me to the beach, and hugging me every night before bed. I thought about how they made me laugh, how I got frustrated with them when I had to clean my room, how happy I was when we played soccer, and how helpless I felt when I watched them and everything I loved slip away from me. I wanted to be with them again, even if it was for just one more day.

"Uuuuugh! This stupid hallway is too long. When are we going to get to the end?" Karen moaned.

"Relax," snapped Roy. "You make it sound like we've been walking for miles."

"Well, I'm not the one who gets to sit the entire time," Karen snapped back.

"Karen!" exclaimed Thomas. "You can't just say that to a disabled person! It's not respectf-"

*CRASH!*

The sound of glass pots falling to the ground echoed behind us. I jumped and almost looked behind me, but Roy quickly shouted "DON'T LOOK BACK!" I quickly jerked my head forward again.

"What was that?" asked Alexa worriedly.

"I don't know," said Roy. "But I definitely don't want any of us to risk losing this opportunity."

We all warily continue forward. I tried to continue thinking about my parents, but my mind kept wandering back to the alarming sound we heard. What would've caused something like that? I didn't see any shelves with pots on them that could've fallen. What if there was someone else in the tunnel with us? None of us would be able to look back to see who or what caused the noise. I could feel goosebumps growing on my arms as my mind raced through all the possibilities with no answers to put myself at ease. My thoughts were suddenly interrupted by a strange sound.

"Did you hear that?" asked Alexa. I stopped for a second to listen. I realized it was the distant wailing of a baby.

"It sounds like a newborn..." said Thomas, with an air of sadness to his words.

"We have to go back and help it," said Alexa, her voice quivering.

"No! None of us are turning back," said Roy sternly.

"But it's an infant! It'll die on its own!" Alexa yelled.

"Chill. As soon as we make it through the hallway, you'll have your own baby back. It's no big deal if you leave this one in the tunnel," said Karen.

"What?! NO!" Alexa shouted. "I am not letting this helpless child die! I've already had one baby die in my care... I am not letting it happen again."

I'm not sure what happened next, but as soon as Alexa finished speaking, there was a loud crunching sound, and then Alexa started screaming. Thomas began to yell, "ALEXA-" but his sentence was cut short by another loud crunch and Thomas began to scream too. Their cries were etched in excruciating pain, but then there was one more gut-churning *CRUNCH*, and then they went silent.

"W-what happened?" stammered Karen. "Are they... it can't be. Oh my God... are they dead? OH MY GOD THEY'RE DEAD, AREN'T THEY? ARE WE ALL GOING TO DIE?!"

"Karen," said Roy. "I need you to calm down. We'll accomplish nothing by panicking. We can't look back now that we know the consequences. We have to move on... for Thomas and Alexa."

Karen didn't say anything, but I could hear her quietly crying from behind me. I touched my own face. My cheeks were wet from tears. Roy was right. There was nothing we could do but continue forward. We walked for some time in silence. I don't know how long we had been walking, but it seemed like hours.

Suddenly, Karen interrupted the quiet. "Guys, do you hear that? It sounds like footsteps..." I listened for a second and did in fact hear another set of footsteps in the hall. "Oh God, he's back..." said Karen, a tremor in her voice.

"Who's back?" asked Roy.

"He is! He's following me again..."

"Karen, you need to calm-"

"I can't! I can't let him find me again! He'll take me to his horrible house and keep me there! I got to hide! I have to find safety! I have to-"

*CRUNCH*

"AH! MY LEG! NO, STOP, PLEASE! STOP, IT HURTS! JAMIE, ROY, HELP ME-"

*SQUELCH*

Everything went silent. I couldn't believe what I just heard. Karen was... she just...

"Jamie, you have to run!" shouted Roy. "We can't stay in here anymore, we have to get out!"

"Private!" A voice shouted. The sudden intrusion of this unfamiliar person made me jump, but I didn't dare look to see who it was.

"Private, stop running! Get back over here and fight, coward!" Instantly, the hallway filled up with the sound of gunfire and shouting. I heard a bomb explode somewhere close by.

"Jamie, run! I'll be right behind you!" Roy cried over all the noise.

I froze. I was so scared and confused by all the horrible sounds.

The strange voice shouted, "Private! They got your brother!"

Roy shouted again, but it wasn't directed to me. "SIMON! SIMON, NO-"

*BANG*

One final gunshot fired, and then everything went silent. I was now all alone.

I began to run. I ran as fast as I could. Tears raced down my face, but I didn't dare stop to wipe them away. They were gone. They all were dead. My ears started to ring. I heard faint voices, but I couldn't focus on what they were saying. I instead remembered the sounds of my companions screaming. Screaming in pain, in horror, and in warning. Their voices rang clear in my thoughts, deafening everything else around me. They are dead, gone, lost forever. I didn't even see their faces before they were taken from me. I ran, ignoring my burning lungs, my aching muscles, and my stinging eyes.

I soon saw something ahead of me. Light. There was daylight at the end of the tunnel. I ran as fast as I could, wanting nothing more than to leave this nightmare. I approached the exit and burst into the bright sunlight. I stopped. The sun's warm rays washed over me, blinding me from my time in the dim passageway. As my eyes adjusted, I felt my stomach drop. My breath caught in my throat. Laying on the ground in front of me were Alexa, Thomas, Karen, and Roy. Their bodies were gruesomely mangled and their faces expressed more fear than I could have imagined. I collapsed to the ground, my whole body trembling.

The hallway worked.

It gave me back what I lost.