

## Prologue –Girl–

"It looks kinda like milk."

Laura's face stretched into a smile. She began to laugh, her teeth peeking from behind her small lips. The town was shrouded in a thick fog that blurred everything into white, as if she were in some sort of magical land. Laura imagined that some clumsy god had carelessly dropped his cup and spilled his morning milk all over the place. The mysterious atmosphere could be a sign that there were fairies or something hiding out there. The thought made Laura's heart tremble with excitement. The eight-year-old girl began to playfully hop and skip along, her skirt fluttering behind her. Slowly and smoothly, the fog flowed and drifted though the air.

"Come on, hurry up! I'm gonna leave you behind!" Laura shouted over and over again, calling out to her companion.

The two of them were here because they were on a journey to find their friends... Only he was fat and a bit thickheaded. Sometimes all he did was mope around and he always seemed to be scowling. But Laura didn't care too much. She could put up with him if it meant seeing her again soon. The person who gave her that letter....

## Chapter One –Beckoning Town-

On the other side of the dirty clouds was a vision of himself. Reflected in the mirror was his own face, stiff and lifeless as a corpse. *Actually, I guess I am dead*, James Sunderland thought. *My heart's as good as dead anyway*. He wasn't filled with a sense of loss, he just felt like his life wasn't worth living anymore. He had become indifferent. Work, free time—none of it really mattered anymore. Even the strong scent of ammonia that permeated the filthy little room couldn't catch James's attention. The dirty urinals caked with a yellow, moss-like substance, the sticky wet floor that soaked into the soles of his shoes—none of it brought a flicker of emotion.

"Mary...could you really be in this town?" he asked the James in the mirror. He had doubts about the incident. Did it really even happen? But...

With his hands on the sides of the wash basin, he peered into the mirror. Despite his attitude, he felt the tiniest spark of hope. He shook his head and brushed the bangs from his face to clear his vision. He knew it was really true because it came in a letter.

He stepped out of the gloomy building and gazed up at the cloud-filled sky. A damp wind brushed James's cheek. Across the parking lot was the vast Toluca Lake, mist dancing on its surface and stretching over the entire scenery.

*In my restless dreams,  
I see that town.*

*Silent Hill.*

*You promised me you'd take me  
there again someday.  
But because of me, you were never able to.*

*Well, I'm alone there now...*

*In our "special place"*  
*Waiting for you...*

There was no doubt that Mary had sent this letter, it was written in her familiar handwriting. Three years ago, he had spent a holiday with her in this small town, and now James was here again. Alone. His car sat in the corner of the small parking lot, engine at rest. Even though it was in perfect working order, it wouldn't be of much use. The highway was the real problem. The tunnel at the far end of the parking lot that led to the town of Silent Hill was blocked off by a sturdy fence and. There was no choice but to go another way.

After retrieving a map of the town from his car, James descended a stairway at the edge of the parking lot. With each downward step, the fog thickened. By the time he reached the lake's shore, his entire field of vision was shrouded in white. More and more James was beginning to feel an unnatural suffocating feeling. However, even in this oppressive atmosphere, his mind was occupied by thoughts of Mary and the letter. He sank into a grave mood, stomping the ground as he continued to walk.

The letter certainly had Mary's name written on it. What a foolish, impossible idea. His brow furrowed and he shook his head in disbelief. It couldn't be true.

Because his wife, Mary, had died three years ago. Because of her illness...

It was such a cruel joke. A joke played to mock James even though he was still heartbroken and grieving. Maybe it was one of his neighbors? Or perhaps it was one of his coworkers? After he lost his wife, James took to drinking and began to conceal his sorrow with outbursts of anger. It affected everyone around him to the point that his coworkers didn't want to put up with his sullen behavior. Just as he pushed everyone away, soon they wanted nothing to do with him as well. For that reason, he could easily see how someone could hold a grudge against him.

Extending along the lake, the end of the path was surrounded by trees and dense fog. Even after just a few yards, he couldn't see the overlook where he had started from. At the head of the valley the mist also hid Toluca Lake's magnificent scenery, but James could care less. He didn't come here to sightsee. As he walked, all he could picture was Mary's face. Even if James still had his doubts about the letter, it, along with the memories of his beloved wife, was what had brought him this far.

It was no wonder then, with these kinds of thoughts in his head, that James found himself wishing for a miracle. Did she really die three years ago? Or had she died and somehow been revived? Perhaps after the funeral, and after the workers and mourners left the grave unattended, Mary woke up and began desperately beating the lid of her coffin? But if that were true, why would she have waited three years to contact him? He considered the possibility that she received brain damage due to asphyxiation and suffered memory loss as a result. The workers would have fled in terror at seeing a supposedly dead person move. Leaving her without any idea of who she was, or what she was doing there—to unsteadily wander off somewhere. Or perhaps, he thought, she could have been kidnapped by some ill-intentioned grave digger...

James ground his teeth in frustration. The noise of the dead leaves scattered along the path crunched louder as he carelessly trampled over them. It was irritating how his imagination kept spewing forth one unpleasant scenario after another, no matter how hard he tried to stop it. In any case, there was one thing he hadn't been able to prove: whether or not Mary was even alive in the first place. Still, James found that he was afraid to find the answer to that question.

*But if she really has been alive this whole time and didn't try to contact me until now, maybe she's been trying to avoid me? What if she ran off and has been living with another man...* Those kinds of thoughts crossed his mind as well. Womens' hearts were so difficult to understand. For a moment, he felt a burning surge of hatred, but it soon drowned in his melancholy mood. More than anything, he just wanted to see Mary again, and more than anything else, he dreaded that meeting. Forcing back his hesitation, James pressed on putting one foot in front of the other like a sleepwalker.

Suddenly, James came to a halt and held his breath. Just in front of him, a human shape appeared in the fog.

*Could it be Mary?*

Naturally, it wasn't James's wife. Looking closer, he found a dark-haired woman standing still and staring pensively at a gravestone. Without even noticing it, James had wandered into a cemetery. Sensing James's presence, the woman let out a gasp of surprise and spun around to face him. He greeted her.

"Sorry, didn't mean to startle you. I'm looking for a town called Silent Hill. Would you mind telling me if I'm going the right way?"

"T-town? You're going to the town?" The woman tilted her head doubtfully, the surprise on her face even greater than when she first noticed James. Though she still had youthful features, dark, heavy circles hung like shadows under her eyes.

"Yeah," James replied.

The woman hesitated for a moment, then answered, "...Yeah. That's the right way. I know it's a bit hard to see...you know, because of the fog, but...there's only one road s-so you can't really get lost."

"Thanks."

"But..."

"What is it?"

"It would be best...if you didn't go any farther."

"Huh?"

"Umm...because...that town is a strange place. I can't really explain it well, but...it's dangerous there."

"Just because of all this fog?"

"W-well...not just that. It just...is."

What was she thinking of that made her words seem so heavy? It didn't look like she was going to say anything else so it seemed pointless to try and get the answer from her. "Got it. I'll be careful."

"Hey, I'm not making this up!" The woman yelled as James was about to walk away. "I came to

this town because I need to find my Mama! I haven't seen her in a long time! And...and t-this town..." Her voice was hysterical.

James wasn't sure what made the woman, who had barely spoken above a whisper, scream like this. Clearly she had some...issues to work out. Then again, the same could be said of James, too. Best not to worry about that for the moment. Not to say that James didn't believe what the woman told him, but if he wanted to see Mary he would just have to keep going despite the danger.

Leaving the troubled woman behind, James passed through the graveyard and found his way back to the path that stretched and wove through the forest by the lake. Again his thoughts turned to Mary. Her letter had said "I'm waiting for you in our 'special place,'" but what did she mean by that? He searched through all the precious buried memories from three years ago.

The two places that stood out the most were the park and the hotel. He remembered how the two of them had spent a great deal of money to book a deluxe suite, and how they ordered extravagant meals from room service. One day, while they were strolling around town, they happened to find the park by the lake. The couple had sat on a bench together watching the boats sail back and forth over the shimmering waters. They ended up staying there all day just enjoying the scenery and each other's company. The question remained: was Mary waiting for him at the park or the hotel?

Before long, the sound of dead leaves crunching underfoot stopped and the dirt forest path gave way to an old asphalt road. The road led to a tunnel that ran under the highway that would have made his journey faster and easier if only it hadn't been closed. James continued along intently as the street curved and followed along a river, finally reaching the town's main street. James pulled out and examined his map. It looked like he was traveling along Sanders Street, which was located at the town's eastern border. If he continued west from here, he should be able to reach the center of town.

James's footsteps echoed ominously as he proceeded down the empty street. In fact...his footsteps were the only sounds he heard. None of the normal noise of a bustling town seemed to be present. Granted, it was a pretty small town, but this kind of unbroken silence just felt unnatural. And with the place covered with this much fog, you'd have a hard time seeing anything if you tried driving through it. It made sense that the schools and businesses would be closed and everyone would be holed up in their homes waiting for the weather to improve. That being the case, his chances of taking a cab were looking slim. James sighed. On the bright side, even if he had to walk, the park was only about a half-hour away. Nevertheless, he still worried about Mary, and hoped that wherever she was, she'd still be there so this whole journey wouldn't be in vain.

When James approached the intersection at Lindsey Street, he caught sight of something disturbing. A large bloodstain ran across the surface of the road as if painted there by a giant brush. James recoiled in shock. Seeing something so closely related to death opened emotional wounds. He stood dumbfounded for a moment, eyes locked on the red stain. From the looks of it, it was still fresh. Clearly a terrible crime had been committed under the cover of the fog, but no matter where he looked...he saw no trace of a victim. *It doesn't look like anyone was taken to a hospital...if that were the case, the police would have had this area blocked off...*

His thoughts were interrupted by the sound of footsteps, like bare feet slapping against the pavement. Looking ahead, James spotted a blurry human figure staggering off into the depths of the fog.

"Hey!"

James began to chase after it. Ever since he lost his wife, he had always been indifferent to the rest of the world, and as much as he wanted to just walk away and forget he ever saw the blood-stained pavement...this was something he just couldn't let go. There's just no way he could bring himself to abandon someone who was probably dying, given the amount of blood the person left behind. This guy's probably some kind of thug who got in a fight and was now wandering around town half-conscious and badly bleeding. And apparently, without his shoes, too...

No matter how much James yelled and called, the fleeing figure would not stop. Maybe the person mistook him for his attacker? Despite the figure's staggering gait, he moved very quickly, and the distance between them grew more with every step. As he fled, a trail of speckled blood was left on the road behind them going north to the end of Lindsey Street, then sharply turning right. The trail then continued in a north eastern direction to Nathan Avenue—the main road that led out of town. James was led to an unpaved road lined on both sides with tangled barbed wire fences, just like a construction site, leading to a half-finished tunnel just like the one he had passed through earlier. Naturally, there wasn't a worker in sight. The figure he had been chasing was nowhere to be found as well.

Suddenly, a loud crash echoed from the tunnel entrance. Though this place was clearly meant to be off limits, the only thing blocking the way was some scrap wood nailed to the tunnel entrance to form a crude barricade, which was easy enough to slip through. On the ground sat a small pocket-sized radio. It probably belonged to one of the construction workers so he could listen to music while he worked, but why did he leave it behind...?

James flicked the ON switch. Instantly, the radio let out a deafening blast of white noise which not only hurt his ears, but seemed to hit a strange nerve as well. At that moment, an unreasonable, but compulsive idea echoed through his mind: *I haven't touched the volume...but the static is getting louder...*

The sound of feet walking over rubble and debris steadily moved closer. Out of the depths of the tunnel emerged a staggering figure. James started to worry as it became clear that this was certainly the thing that led him here...but whatever the "thing" was, it sure as hell wasn't human. The creature's arms seemed to be fused to its body with mottled, rotting flesh, and it completely lacked eyes, a nose, a mouth, and anything that could possibly identify it as a person. It stumbled forward drunkenly while its upper body twitched and writhed in a strange dance. It didn't seem to be injured, so how the heck did it leave a trail of fresh blood? Clearly this wriggling monster wasn't the victim, but the assailant.

His whole body shaking, James began to slowly retreat. Terrified as he was, he was more concerned about letting the thing get anywhere near him. He wanted to escape. He wanted to run away. It would be so easy to just turn around, climb back through the barricade, and run...but he didn't. Turning around, he ripped an old board from the barricade and, full of vigor and rage, prepared to use it as a weapon. Why he had chosen to do such a reckless and stupid thing even he didn't know. He just couldn't stand letting that twisted creature exist anymore. He couldn't leave a dangerous monster to wander around and cause more harm. However, the true reason he hated this thing had nothing to do with any sense of justice. It was disgust.

Gathering up all his strength, James swung the plank, aiming for the writhing monster's head. The creature recoiled, and despite not having a mouth, let out a piercing screech. Again and again he swung the plank until he lost count of how many times he had struck the thing, and his arms became sore and tired. Badly injured, the monster fell to the ground, landing where its arms should have been on the scattered debris. Despite the beating it took, it still twitched and wriggled on the ground. Then finally it grew still.

"Is it dead...?"

Just to be safe, James nudged it with his wooden board. No sign of movement. Now that it was lying on the ground in a pool of blood like this, it looked more like a slimy slug than a human being. Its featureless face was smashed pretty badly, and it was leaking spinal fluid everywhere. There was no doubting it, the horrible creature was finally dead.

"What the hell was that thing?"

No matter how he looked at it, no matter how he tried to rationalize the existence of that monster, nothing made sense. Could it be some kind of crazy screwed-up test subject that escaped from a lab...? He toyed with similar possibilities in his head. He tried as hard as he could to believe them. James shook off the useless guesses and tossed aside the blood-soaked plank. He was about to slip back through the barricade and leave the tunnel when the radio again caught his attention. He regarded it with suspicion. When the creature had come into sight, the radio was blaring white noise, but now that the thing was dead, it had fallen silent.

Suddenly, it began to flicker to life again. James looked around, worried that it was announcing the presence of another monster. But it sounded...different somehow. If he listened carefully, he could just barely make out a woman's voice. James gasped. Mary! That was Mary's voice! Turning around, he grabbed the radio and listened more closely. Mary's voice called to him between bursts of static.

"a.....I'm.....e...Come  
to.....wo.....si.....ments.....hing f.....  
.....why.....id you k.....me.....Jam....."

James held the radio's speaker to his ear, eager to hear more. But his wife's voice faded away, and all he could hear was crackling static. He hit it and turned all the switches, but no matter what he did, the voice said nothing more. Giving up, he put the radio in his jacket pocket, leaving it switched on just in case. Perhaps Mary had made it to the town's radio tower and was trying to get a message to him? Maybe the real purpose of her letter was to get him close enough to town to pick up this signal. But if that were true, then why didn't he get it on his car radio on the way over here? And how come this stupid broken radio was the only thing picking up the signal?

James re-traced his steps until he had made it back to town, then made his way towards the Woodside Apartments building. When Mary had spoken to him through the radio, he thought he could just barely make out the name of the building. However, there was a slight problem. He had no idea where the apartment building was. He had checked his map of Silent Hill, but it wasn't marked anywhere. With any luck, he would run into one of the town's residents soon so he could ask for directions.

James began walking north up Lindsey Street, then went west at Nathan Avenue. Just to the north of Nathan Avenue was one of their "special places," Rosewater Park. Since he wasn't having any luck tracking down the apartment building, he would make his way toward the park for now. Suddenly, James noticed two people emerge from an alley ahead of him. Great. Maybe now he could get some directions.

"Hey, you over there!" He yelled to get their attention and ran over to meet them.

However, he stopped dead in his tracks when a familiar nose came from his jacket pocket. The

radio had crackled to life and was emitting static again. Unfortunately, his voice caught their attention, and the blurry figures turned to face him. As they approached through the fog, it was becoming more and more clear that something was very wrong. As they walked, they twisted and writhed about in a most unnatural way. They were monsters. Exactly the same as the one he'd killed earlier. Did a whole group of these messed-up things escape from a lab somewhere?

Even now, just watching the things thrash in agony brought back the same feelings of hatred and disgust. He wanted to destroy them, smash their heads in just like the other one—anything to end the existence of these awful monsters. James realized suddenly that he had abandoned his weapon, the wooden plank. For a moment, he considered just using his fists, but the thought of actually touching their repulsive flesh sent chills down his spine. More importantly, he had the disadvantage of being outnumbered two to one. Maybe this time it would be best to avoid unnecessary conflict.

Having made up his mind, James turned and ran south before the creatures could stagger any closer. He ran to Katz Street, a road which ran east to west right through the center of town, then he took a detour onto Neely Street. Their jerking movement seemed to slow the monsters down, and with each turn they fell further and further behind until they were swallowed up in the mist. As he ran, James noticed that the further away he was from the pursuing monsters, the softer the radio static became. Could it be...responding to the presence of those creatures? How the heck could a broken radio do something like that? Whatever the reason, if it could help him protect himself, it was definitely worth having around.

However, even though the monsters had fallen behind and were nowhere to be seen, the radio still wasn't completely quiet. He ran straight through the intersection of Martin Street and Katz Street, passing over the crossroad at Neely Street soon after. He just had to keep running forward. He now had his eye on Munson street, because as he crossed Neely Street, he had spotted yet another creature coming at him from the middle of the road.

"What the hell!?" James shouted in disbelief. These things were just wandering around all over the place. Have they taken over the town or something? Now Katz Street seemed to be occupied with the armless creatures as well, leaving him with nowhere left to go. James stood paralyzed with horror and could only stare at the twisted shadows dancing in the fog. Even if he tried running again, there was no way he could make it back to Nathan Avenue. In this moment of desperation, he was reminded of the warning the woman in the graveyard had given him. At the time he certainly didn't take it too seriously, but now...

He should have listened to her. He should have turned around and ran away when he had the chance. Even after encountering the first monster, he should have just left this crazy town. But he couldn't. His desperate search for Mary...he couldn't just give that up. Just the thought of seeing her again, even just once, was enough to make him continue on even now as things were becoming more dangerous. She was the reason why, no matter what, he had to live. Even if it meant risking his life. He couldn't just stand here and die.

"To hell with it then!"

James charged forward, praying that he'd be able to find a gap between the monsters, or that he'd be able to shove one aside and make it past the converging mob. The moment he approached the first twisted body, the fog seemed to change color before his eyes, and his mouth and nose began to burn with an acrid, rotten smell. Having momentarily lost focus, he ran straight into one of the monsters and was sent sprawling in the other direction, hitting the pavement hard. He was suddenly struck with a violent coughing fit and his mouth felt numb, as if he had been injected with anesthesia. It was poison. Now these vile creatures were spewing poison into the air. How the heck could they

spit poison if they didn't have mouths? As another monster stumbled towards him, he looked up to see that its body was split by a cavernous vertical crack running from its neck to its waist—its dark, wet entrails fully visible.

The creature bent backwards as if it was taking a breath from its bizarre second mouth. James had a feeling that it was preparing to spray more of the awful acidic poison, but he wasn't about to stick around to find out. Swinging his leg like an axe, he kicked the monster's legs as hard as he could, knocking it off its feet and leaving it squirming on the pavement. Its lack of arms caused it to thrash about helplessly as it tried to stand upright again. Quickly pulling himself to his feet, James began to kick the creature while it was distracted.

"Just die already!"

His heavy boots easily broke through its soft skin, leaving them covered in sticky red body fluid. The monster shrieked and convulsed with every impact. Twisting around, it began to violently thrash its legs, enabling it to crawl across the ground. At first James thought it was trying to escape, but in one quick movement it twisted around in a u-turn and flung itself straight at him. It was trying to counterattack.

James was beginning to feel quite sick. His whole body was shaking and he was beginning to feel dizzy, no doubt because of the poison. This was bad. If he didn't get away from here soon... he wasn't sure how much longer he'd last. He took a shaky step backwards and his back hit against a chain link fence, causing it to rattle. Wait...could it be a gate? James turned around saw that there was indeed a gate. He pushed it open, hurried to the other side, then flung the gate closed and locked it, putting a chain link wall between him and the writhing monster.

Behind him sat a three-story high wooden apartment building, its old boards and peeling paint showing its age. Next to the entryway was an equally old plate which read:

Woodside Apartments

Chapter Two –Someone's Lurking in the Apartment-

Having successfully escaped to a safe place, for now at least, James sat down on the ground to catch his breath. What would have happened if he hadn't gotten through the fence? The wire mesh seemed to tremble in fear as the fog danced through the heavy air. The monsters seemed to sense that their prey had escaped, and they had all given up and left. There wasn't a wriggling body to be seen anywhere.

Once his heart rate slowed and his cold sweat ceased, James finally got back on his feet. His cheeks still felt a bit numb, but overall he didn't feel as sick as he had earlier. At least he didn't have to worry about dying from poison anymore. He was just worried. Woodside Apartments... What was waiting for him on the other side of that door? At first it just seemed like incredibly good luck that he happened to stumble upon this place, but what if it was Mary's guidance that brought him here...?

Next to the apartment's entryway sat a beat-up old dumpster filled with the accumulated trash of the daily lives of residents. James walked over to it and opened the lid. He pulled out a sheet from a bundle of old newspapers. Before he went inside, he'd need to clean himself up a bit. If Mary really was alive and waiting for him here, he didn't want to meet her with his boots this filthy. With the old newspaper, he wiped up the monster's blood the best he could.



He caught sight of the sensational headline: "MAN COMMITS SUICIDE WITH SPOON!" Curious, James took a closer look at the article. It was printed in what appeared to be a local gossip magazine. He wasn't sure why, but it drew his attention.

*Police announced earlier today that Walter Sullivan, a suspect in the brutal murder of siblings Billy and Miriam Locane in Silent Hill last February, has committed suicide. He was arrested for the murders on the 18<sup>th</sup> of this month and was found dead in his cell on the morning of the 22<sup>nd</sup>. According to the official announcement, Sullivan killed himself by taking the spoon that came with his evening meal and thrusting it into the left front of his neck near the carotid artery. He embedded the spoon at least two inches into his neck, blood pouring from the wound. By the time the guards discovered him, he was already dead. Classmates from Walter Sullivan's hometown of Pleasant River are quoted as saying, "He didn't seem like the kind of guy who would go around killing children. He was always pretty quiet at school, but he was a nice person. I met the guy once, shortly before he was arrested. He said a whole bunch of weird things, 'He's trying to kill me. To punish me. The red demon. That monster. Please forgive me, I did it but...it wasn't me!' ...Now that I think about it, he was kinda crazy."*

As he finished reading, James rubbed his neck. Why was he so fascinated by this? The method of suicide seemed like such a pitiful way to die, but it was just one prisoner. This was a mundane event. Things like this happen all the time. However, the words printed on the page seemed to burn into his mind, and he couldn't stop thinking about them. The red demon...a vague image of such a thing appeared in his head...

He shook his head. Just what does this have to do with Mary? Stupid piece of garbage. Using the crumpled up newspaper page, he continued wiping off his boots until they were reasonably clean, then he approached the apartment building's front door. Its hinges creaked loudly as he pushed the door open and echoed throughout the room as he stepped inside.

It was almost completely dark. Due to the bad weather, there was hardly any natural light inside and none of the electric lights were on. The manager must have shut off the power. After a while, James's eyes grew accustomed to the darkness and he was able to see the narrow room a bit better. To the left was what looked like a back door, and to the right a staircase ascended into the darkness. He cautiously stepped further into the dim room. All the doors in the residential space were locked; none of them budged an inch.

"Hello? Anyone here?"

James knocked loudly on the doors, but there was no reply. It looked like there was no choice but to try the upper floors. James climbed up the stairs and was relieved to find that the door on the second floor landing was unlocked. Upon entering the hallway, he found that it was even darker than before. The entire hallway was almost completely pitch-black as if it were the dead of night, the only tiny shred of light coming from a window on the north side. Looks like this place wasn't blessed with any more sunlight than a building in a crowded city.

"Mary!" James shouted into the darkness. "It's me, James! I got your letter and I came here to meet you!"

Hearing no answer, James began to feel his way down the corridor. One-by-one, he knocked on the doors on the south wall asking at each one, "Come on, open up! I'm looking for a woman named Mary, do you know her?"

Even when he turned and rattled the doorknobs, none of them would open. Why wasn't anyone answering? James was beginning to get frustrated. This place wasn't supposed to be uninhabited—he certainly should have felt signs of life around here somewhere. But he couldn't hear any footsteps anywhere. Woodside Apartments was dead quiet, like it had been abandoned. James continued down the hallway, the wooden floor creaking with every other step. When he came to the eastern-most room, room 205, he was surprised to turn the knob and find it unlocked. He cautiously peeked inside.

"Excuse me?" James said in a low voice. Running out of patience with the lack of replies, he didn't wait very long before he let himself in without permission. The room's overhead lights were turned off, but there was still a single source of illumination. Behind this light stood a human shadow that James took to be the apartment's inhabitant.

"Err, sorry for barging in like this. I'm looking for someone. Have you seen..." James fell silent. As he approached, he saw that there was no use trying to talk to the "person." Wearing only a blouse, skirt, and a cardigan, the figure stared back at him with a blank face. It was just a sewing mannequin. The woman who lives here must work as a seamstress from home. But...something about the clothes the mannequin was wearing seemed to stab at his heart. All at once he realized—those were the same clothes Mary was wearing in the picture of her he carried. Could this mean she was still nearby...? James's hopes soared at the thought.

The light that illuminated the room was a small flashlight attached to a cord hanging from the mannequin like a necklace. James thought over the situation. Maybe the resident was using the mannequin to light the place because of the power outage? It was situated just right to shine over the entire room... But he had no clue why anyone would leave the light on and the door unlocked while she was away. Seeing as the person was away at the moment, James decided to "borrow" her flashlight. He took the light from the mannequin and hung it around his neck. At least now he would have an easier time getting around the apartments. Still, he felt a bit guilty. First trespassing, and now theft? He really didn't have any ill intent—he just wanted to find Mary.

Leaving room 205 behind, he proceeded down the corridor that extended north from the eastern edge of the first hallway. Immediately after he turned the corner, he stopped clean in his tracks. Flickers of static began to emanate from the radio in his coat pocket. The beam of his flashlight fell on what appeared to be a naked figure standing in the middle of the hallway.

Only it didn't seem to have a head. A mannequin...? James thought for a moment that maybe the mannequin from 205 was mad at him for stealing its flashlight and it had chased him out here to take it back. The thought brought a bitter smile to his face. Still, seeing the thing just standing there made him more than a little bit nervous. That and the fact that when the radio made noise, there was likely a monster nearby.

He took a couple wary steps forward to take a closer look at the mannequin. Its body was bent and posed in a manner that seemed almost...coquettish. He first thought that something about its arms was strange, only now he could see that it, in fact, had no arms. At the mannequin's waist, where its torso should have begun, was another pair of legs that were missing feet. These extra limbs were both bent and twisted into unnatural positions. The mannequin had a surreal style, almost in a weird artistic way. But why wasn't it wearing any clothes?

Suddenly, it moved. Twisting around its extra legs, the mannequin's body began to sway back and forth. James's eyes opened wide in terror. This thing was no mannequin. It was another monster. Though it had a different form than the squirming monster from before, he had no doubt that they were related somehow. Oddly enough, he found that being confronted by this grotesque being

didn't bring up the same feelings of hatred and disgust that the other monsters had. Still, if it was half as dangerous as the other ones, he didn't want to stick around.

Leaving the mannequin creature behind, James turned and ran back to the second floor's main hallway. Now that he had a light, he could see another hall branching off of the main corridor and leading north. However, his flashlight also illuminated a figure lying on the floor that wriggled and squirmed in a very familiar manner. These things really were running rampant in this town. First they had infested the streets, now they had spread into the apartment building. At least this explains why no one would answer him. The residents were probably all holed up in their rooms, hiding from the horrible creatures roaming the halls. Or had they all escaped like the person from room 205?

It was becoming clear that the second floor was not a good place to be at the moment. Ducking into the stairwell to his left, he began to trudge toward the third floor. He hesitated for a moment. What would he do if there were monsters on the third floor, too? Would he just try to leave the apartment building? But if he did that, he would also have to consider leaving Silent Hill altogether. He had come this far, the least he could do was keep trying. He opened the door to the third floor hallway just a crack and carefully listened for any signs of monsters roaming around. He couldn't be sure...but everything seemed quiet.

As he opened the door and stepped into the hallway, he saw that most of the living area was blocked off by a metal shutter that divided the corridor. It seemed a bit out of place here. Was it installed as a security measure, or was it put up to keep away the invading monsters? If the other side of those bars was a safe zone, there was a good chance Mary would be there with the other residents. Now that he thought about it, James wished he was over there too—anywhere was safer than here. He tried calling his wife's name through the bars, but there was still no answer. As worried as he was about Mary's safety, there was just no way around the shutter.

Turning around, he saw that the small hallway was lined with two doors that sat side by side. *Might as well check them out. It's not like I have anywhere else to go*, James thought. The door to room 302 wouldn't open, but 301 was unlocked. However, the room was completely empty. No furniture, no nothing. Instead, a lone shopping cart sat abandoned in the middle of the empty darkness. What was something like that doing here? James regarded it a bit suspiciously—after all, it was the last thing he expected to find in this room. He caught sight of something shiny reflecting the beam of his flashlight. Creeping closer, he peered inside the shopping cart.

It was a gun.

James picked it up and examined it. He could hardly believe his luck. Not only was the weapon fully loaded, but a box of spare bullets was sitting close by. A complacent smile came to his face. This was just what he needed. No more running away and hiding every time a monster crossed his path. Stuffing the extra bullets into his coat pocket with the radio, he began to formulate a new plan. *Now that I have a proper weapon, I can keep searching on the second floor.* Clutching the cold handgun, James left room 301.

Retracing his steps through the gloomy hallway, he found his way back to the stairwell door. Before he opened it, he caught sight of something in the blocked off section of the hallway. How had he not noticed this before? Under the beam of his flashlight, he saw a small object lying on the floor just beyond the shutter. It was a key, sitting just close enough that he might be able to grab it if he reached far enough. Maybe it would unlock the shutter? He slid his hand underneath the grate and groped in the darkness to find the key. The tips of his fingers fell on something cold. Stretching out his arm as far as he was able, James tried to pull the key closer. Just a little more...

Suddenly, James felt the presence of another person. Before he could see what was happening, a tennis shoe clad foot came into view and in one magnificent strike kicked the key far across the hall.

“Hey!” His yell turned into a cry of pain as the foot took the opportunity to smash down on his grasping fingers. Fuming with rage, James glared up at the prankster. On the other side of the shutter, he saw the back of an elementary school-aged girl as she fled, her laughter echoing through the hallway.

“Idiot!” She threw one last insult at James before disappearing from sight.

“Hey, get back here!” Even if the girl did hear him shouting, he doubted she was coming back. “Damn...”

James swore under his breath as he pulled his aching hand out from under the metal shutter. What an annoying little brat. But in a way, seeing her was a bit of good news. She was proof that there had to be at least a few people hiding in the blocked-off section of the third floor. The appearance of the girl was enough to keep alive the possibility that Mary was over there as well. Despite the pain in his hand and his anger at the little girl, a smile returned to James’s face. Wasting no more time, he began to make his way back to the second floor.

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A violent screech pierced the heavy silence near the intersecting hallways of the second floor. Though the sound came from the hallway extending north, the cry was muffled slightly as if it had come from the upper floor. The first thought that came to James’s mind was of Mary, but then he recalled the image of the little girl as she ran away. Irritating as she had been, he certainly didn’t hate her enough to hope she would be attacked by a monster. He couldn’t wish that kind of death on anyone.

Rushing in the direction of the screams, James once again came face-to-face with the monster blocking the north hallway. Without hesitation, James aimed his gun at the creature.

“Get the hell outta my way!”

The twisted monster shrieked and recoiled as a shower of bullets pierced its body, dark drops of blood spattering against the walls. At that moment, James felt a rush of exhilaration. There was no need to turn around and flee; he could finally stand his ground and fight back. Though this monster was his enemy and he wouldn’t argue that he wanted it dead, his actions didn’t feel like “murder.” No, it was different. It felt more like he was taking advantage of the situation, like he finally had the upper hand.

Stepping over the creature’s corpse, which now lay un-moving in a pool of blood, James hurried through the hall. His heart sank, however, when the beam of his flashlight fell on yet another shutter blocking his path. Just on the other side, he could see a staircase extending into darkness. That had to be the way to the main part of the third floor... Acting impulsively, James turned and grabbed the doorknob of the room nearest to the shutter. Thankfully, the door was unlocked. He swung the door open and plunged into the room marked 208.

This room was adjacent to room 209, which was located on the other side of the barrier. If he was somehow able to break through the wall that separated the two rooms, he would be able to reach that staircase. That was James's plan anyway. Rushing from the living room into the bedroom, he was able to find the north-most wall. In the middle of the wall sat a large rectangular object. It appeared to be an old grandfather clock. James shoved it out of the way, the clock moving easily over the carpeted floor.

“What the...”

He stared at the wall, dumbfounded. There was a gaping hole in the wall behind the clock. This building...even though it looked nice on the outside—these rooms were falling apart. This must really be low-income housing if the owner had use the clock to cover up the crumbling wall until it could be repaired. Good thing they never got around to it. Now James didn't have to waste his energy busting through the wall.

Emerging back into the hallway, James hurried up the stairs to the third floor. Where did that scream come from? With little other options left, James went about checking every room. Like the first floor, all of the doors seemed to be locked until he reached the door to room 307. James paused, his hand on the doorknob. He could just barely make out sound coming from inside the room. Carefully opening the door, he stepped inside. At first there didn't seem to be anything inside, even though the rustling noise continued. Whatever the commotion was, it was enough to send tremors through the floor.

“Mary....?”

His wife's name came out as barely a whisper as his breath caught in his throat. James stood frozen. By the time he noticed the shadowy movement in the back of the room, there was no time to escape. At that moment, an open closet door caught his eye and he quickly hid inside. He really didn't want to look, but he couldn't help it. Trembling, James peeked through the lattice of the closet door.

In the darkness he could make out the forms of three monsters that seemed to be engaged in some sort of struggle. Two of them were the mannequin-like creatures that he'd encountered in the hallway, but the third was different. It was completely unlike the others. It had the shape of a large man, and appeared to have a huge triangular head that was muddled with dark brown and deep crimson hues. Rust clung to the corroded metal as if it had seen many countless years of wear and damage.

It was a demon. At least, that's what James thought. A red demon... a monster... The words printed in the old newspaper article resurfaced in his mind. Is this the same terror that Walter Sullivan felt when he witnessed this bizarre creature? Certainly this thing had the appropriate appearance to be called a demon. Unlike the other monsters, this creature was clothed in a grimy robe and wore dark knee-high boots.

Much as the mannequins struggled to pull away from his grip, they were overwhelmed by the pyramid monster's strength. With his large muscular arms he was able to break the creatures' spines as easily as if they were helpless children. Now painted in their own blood, the two were casually discarded into a heap on the floor. Neither of them moved. The sight of twisted corpses sent an icy chill down James's spine as cold sweat trickled down his face.

Suddenly, as if sensing his presence, the pyramid creature slowly turned its angular head in the direction of the closet doors. James's heart skipped a beat. He had been so distracted by the

horrible scene playing out in front of him that he hadn't noticed the sputtering bursts of static coming from his radio. He frantically dug in his pocket and switched the radio off. Sitting in the cramped closet completely frozen and not even daring to breath, James silently prayed that the creature hadn't noticed him.

The terrifying silence was broken by heavy footsteps that caused the wooden floors to creak. It was coming towards the closet. James could do nothing but hold his gun at the ready. The sound of ragged metallic breathing came from just outside the door and the tiny space was quickly filled with the stench of rotting flesh. *There's no way I'm going to survive this. There's just no way.* James clutched the gun tighter in his shaking hands. If victory goes to the one who makes the first move...

For a moment, his despair turned to determination. James pulled the trigger, firing blindly in the monster's direction. *Once I run out of bullets, I'm going to die,* he thought bleakly through the ear-splitting shots. What hope did he really have of killing this massively strong monster? If anything, he was just going to make it angry. It would shrug off the bullets like mosquito bites and come smashing through the door any second now. And then James would be next to join the pile of corpses. *I'm going to die. This dusty little closet might as well be my coffin.*

And then the time came. The spray of bullets ceased, and silence fell over the room. James almost thought he could hear the flapping wings of the angel of death coming to take him away... but the silence only continued. There were no footsteps, no breathing, nothing at all. *Is it dead... ? Did I really manage to kill it?* Relying on that vain hope, he peeked through the latticed door. The room appeared empty. He pushed the door open as quietly as he could, barely breathing as he took a better look. The pyramid monster was gone.

Now that he thought about it, while he was loading the creature full of bullets, it had howled as if it was screaming in pain... Maybe it was afraid of the gun and fled? James wasn't fully satisfied with either of these explanations. He just couldn't bring himself to believe in his unlikely victory. It seemed very unlikely that the monster ran away, seeing as the front door was still shut tight. It was like... it just disappeared from the room like smoke. As James sat exhausted on the floor, his eyes fell on the massacred mannequins. A dark red pool spread across the floor underneath their mangled remains. He found that even after his narrow escape from death, he felt no sense of relief.

With a stiff body and uneven gait, James left room 307. *Why... why am I seeing all these messed-up things?* He walked through the dark third floor hallway, his face still pale. He stopped. On the floor at his feet lay a small key. *The one the bratty little girl kicked away.* Sure enough, when he shined his flashlight across the hall he could see the metal screen that had blocked his path before. Where was that girl now? Mary wasn't anywhere on the third floor. There were no people at all. James had come rushing up here like some wannabe hero, only to find the "person" he'd come to save was a couple of dying mannequins.

James climbed down the stairs. He had been distracted by the screams from the third floor before, but now he could at least continue his search. Using the light from his flashlight, he reloaded the handgun using the box of spare bullets. He also remembered to switch the radio back on. Soon he was back where he started: the first floor entry hall. Last time he was here he was under the impression that people still lived here, but now he was almost certain that the building was deserted. At least now he didn't have to worry about getting caught breaking into someone's room.

James immediately noticed that the door to room 101 was slightly ajar, even though it was locked the last time he had checked it. Cautiously, he pushed the door open and looked around inside. It appeared to be empty. However, he was greeted with an unpleasant sight when the flashlight's

beam shined into the small kitchen. It was a corpse. James had almost grown accustomed to the sight of dead monsters... but even with the body badly beaten and the face obscured by shadows, this was clearly a human.

As James stood in shock, he heard a pained moan come from the bathroom door. It sounded like a person... but then again, the mannequin's screams sounded like a person, too. Perhaps it was the monster that killed the resident of this room? There's no way he was going to bust down the bathroom door and find out. He wasn't stupid enough to fall for the same trick twice. Still... this wasn't something he could ignore. Stepping quietly over to the door, James strained his ears and listened for any other sounds coming from inside.

"Shit, shit, shit! I... I..." A male voice murmured.

So it was a person after all. Even if it wasn't Mary, maybe he had some useful information about her. James opened the bathroom door and found a somewhat chubby man kneeling on the floor. Clutching the toilet tightly, he vomited into the bowl until his stomach was empty and he could only cough violently.

"Uhhh, hey there. Are you alright?" James spoke up.

The man looked over his shoulder with his round face. He wore a backwards baseball cap on his head, and he seemed to be a bit younger than James. Terror in his eyes, the man shook his head back and forth. "It wasn't me, I swear!"

"What?"

"I didn't do anything. He was like that when I found him! I just... just..."

"It's okay, just calm down." James crouched beside the man and patted his back reassuringly. It seemed like the man misunderstood his intentions. James didn't quite know the circumstances, but the man was acting defensive as if James was someone here to arrest him. "You don't have to worry, I'm just a tourist. My name's James. James Sunderland. What's your name?"

"Eddie..." the man muttered in the same frightened tone.

"Okay Eddie," James said with a nod. "The... person in the kitchen. Did you know him?"

"N-no! I didn't do anything! I'm no killer!" Again Eddie furiously shook his head.

"Okay, okay, I understand, Eddie. I don't think you killed anyone. You seem to be in shock, and I was a little worried. It was just a question."

"I didn't kill him... I..."

"Of course you didn't. If anything it was probably those monsters—maybe the weird wriggling ones, or the ones that look like mannequins. Maybe even the red pyramid thing."

"A red pyramid thing? I dunno anything 'bout those things. Honest. I did see some weird creature though. Scared the hell outta me, so I ran in the apartment building to hide."

His words filled James with disappointment. After all this time he finally found another person to talk to, and he wasn't even a resident of the apartment building. Even if the chances of getting any

information about Mary were slim, maybe he could get some answers about Silent Hill. “What exactly happened in this town?”

“I don’t know. I don’t know anything. I don’t even live in this town.”

“What? You too?” James shrugged. “Well, then why are you here?”

“Umm... well...” Eddie hesitated. It looked like he didn’t want to talk about it.

“Fine then. But you better hurry up and get out of here. This place isn’t right.”

“Y-yeah... I’ll do that.”

“Be careful, alright?”

“Okay. You too James.” At least Eddie seemed to have calmed down. The fear was gone from his expression, and some color had returned to his pale face as they parted.

After all that, James wasn’t able to find Mary anywhere in the apartment building. However, there was another option. When passing through the courtyard, James had noticed another building adjacent to the Woodside apartments on the west side. Rather than brave the monster-infested Katz Street again, he decided to search for a shortcut. The two buildings were so close, there had to be a way to jump across somehow. Maybe he could find a window in a room on the second floor?

Wasting no time, James climbed to the second floor and advanced to the western end of the hallway. Luckily, the window on the other building looked to be missing altogether. Bracing himself, James jumped across and through the window, landing in a forceful manner and rolling across the floor in the adjacent room.

As soon as he left the room and entered the hallway, James found himself face-to-face with yet another mannequin-like creature. Unsurprisingly, the monsters were running rampant in this building, too. Aiming his gun without fear or hesitation, James opened fire on the mannequin until it fell lifeless to the ground. Again, he felt the satisfaction of defeating another monster. However, James would have to force himself to start avoiding unnecessary conflict in order to conserve ammo. As it was now, the remaining number of spare bullets was distressingly low.

Reaching the end of the second floor hallway, James descended the stairs. In room 109, an unexpected reunion awaited him. The room was mostly empty with a large mirror stretching across one of the walls, not unlike a ballet studio—that, or the person who owned this room was just particularly narcissistic. A woman was lying on the floor in the middle of the mirrored room. Like a child playing with a toy, she held a sharp kitchen knife in her hands which she used to stab the floor with monotonous repetition. The face reflected in the mirror was familiar—it was the woman he’d met at the graveyard. Noticing James’s reflection, the woman spoke.

“Oh, it’s you,” she said listlessly. With her faint voice and vacant gaze, she seemed like a completely different person than the one he’d met before.

“Yeah. Call me James.”

“I’m... Angela. Angela Orosco...”



“Angela, huh? That’s a nice name.” James addressed her in the gentlest way possible. The way Angela stared so intently at the knife as she buried it into the floorboards again and again... She seemed to have ill intentions. “So... what are you doing here?”

“Looking for my Mama.”

“Really? I thought you were leaving town before. Haven’t you found her yet?”

“N-no, I...”

“Did your mother live in this building?”

“I don’t remember...”

“So all you know is that she lived in this town?” *She’s just like me... running around town looking for someone with only the smallest clues to go by...* James felt bitter sympathy for her situation.

“What did you say?” Suddenly, Angela raised her upper body and glared at James with a strange light in her previously empty eyes. “How do you know that!?” She yelled, her expression turning fierce.

“What do you mean?” James asked, puzzled at her response. Angela gripped the knife tighter. That blade was uncomfortably close...

“How did you know that Mama lived in this town?!”

So that was the reason. *Man, I better watch what I say. She really looks like she’d kill me if she got the chance.* Not breathing a word of these thoughts, James replied, “I just thought that since you were looking for her here, that your mother lived here. Anyone could have thought that...”

“Yes... I guess you’re right...” The hostility disappeared from her face and Angela fell back into her lethargic behavior.

“Isn’t that why you’re here?”

“I... I don’t know...”

“Then why come to Silent Hill in the first place?” At James’s question, Angela cast her eyes to the floor.

“Why are you in this town?” Angela avoided the question by asking it right back.

James thought his search for Mary to be somewhat of a private matter, so he answered vaguely, “I’m looking for someone.”

“You find them yet?”

“No.”

“You and me both...”

“Yeah, I guess we’re stuck in the same situation...” James murmured. Suddenly, he found that he could no longer contain his troubling emotions and they all came spilling out. “That’s not all. She, my wife Mary, has been... dead for a while now. But I... I really want to believe that she’s still alive. That she’s living in this town somewhere. I just got this letter from her. If she was really dead, how could she have possibly sent me a letter?!”

“J-James...”

“Sorry. I just... I just needed to tell someone.”

“I hope you find her.”

“Thanks. I hope you can find your mother.” Perhaps some of James’s passion rubbed off on her, because Angela seemed to regain a bit of humanity. She even managed to smile.

“I won’t give up. I’ll look everywhere for her if I have to.” Angela pulled herself to her feet and stood in front of James.

“Let’s go together. I can protect you so you don’t have to carry that around anymore. Besides, that knife doesn’t suit a pretty young lady like you at all.” James spoke cheerfully, gently closing his hands around her fist that held the sharp blade.

“Don’t touch me!” Her hysteric scream pierced his ears. She tore herself away and pointed the knife at him threateningly. However, she quickly regained herself. “I-I’m sorry... it’s okay. I’ll be fine... by myself.”

“But—”

“Why? Are you worried about me? You think I’m going to kill myself?” Angela stared at the gleaming blade as if she was spellbound. “And... m-maybe you’d be right. As long as I have this... it would be... so easy to do...”

Hastily, as if she wanted the thing out of her hand as soon as possible, Angela tossed the knife on top of a shelf. Dashing towards the door, she fled into the hallway. James didn’t follow her. Clearly she had some severe issues dealing with people. To her, it would probably be more frightening to be with another person than to wander the monster-infested halls all alone...

James happened to spot a photograph that had fallen on the floor where Angela had been lying. Someone had shredded it to pieces, though. Looking through the tattered scraps, it appeared to be a picture of a young Angela with her family.

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As room after room turned up empty or locked, James’s confidence began to fade. Did Mary really say something about Woodside Apartments when she spoke through the radio? Already the memory was becoming hazy. Maybe he had misheard her and this was all just a waste of time. Or maybe... the voice wasn’t even Mary’s in the first place. *No, that couldn’t be it!* James refused to think such fearful thoughts. Mary must have been here for a time, but she left before he could find her. Maybe she ran away to escape the monsters.

Whether she had lived in this building or only been here for a moment, James couldn't just sit here and wait. Maybe he should go back to his original plan of finding the "special place" the letter mentioned. Even if it was a fruitless effort... maybe a part of her would still be lingering in that place, even after all this time.

Leaving the building proved to be difficult as almost all the doors were completely jammed shut, including the front entrance. No matter how forcefully he kicked and shoved it, James couldn't get the door to open. He had no choice but to wander around and see if he could find a back door. On the second floor, he came across a door marked "emergency stairs" which, thankfully, was unlocked. He stepped inside onto the pitch-black landing.

Ashen gray water. James blinked in confusion. When he shined his flashlight on the stairs that should have led down... he found a pool of murky gray water that filled the staircase all the way to the second floor. What on earth could have caused water to flood an entire staircase? Maybe the rampaging monsters broke a water pipe? Either way, these stairs were useless now. Discouraged, James turned around to exit back into the hallway. The doorknob wouldn't budge. He was trapped.

A low roar echoed from the far corner of the landing and made James's blood run cold. It was a sound he'd heard not long ago. The color rapidly draining from his face, James frantically kicked the door and tugged on the doorknob in a desperate, but futile, attempt to escape. Reluctantly, he turned around, his legs so weak that he could barely feel the ground beneath his feet. The flashlight's beam exposed a large figure lurking in the darkness. It was the demon he had encountered in room 307. The red demon.

At the creature's feet was the recently killed corpse of an armless monster. Just like the mannequins from before, its body was mangled and broken almost beyond recognition. Having finished dealing with its last victim, the pyramid monster slowly turned to face James. Because of its bizarre head, James had no way to read the creature's expression, but he could easily imagine it smiling gleefully at the arrival of new prey.

As the pyramid head stepped over the slain monster and advanced closer, a sharp, metallic screech filled the small room. Its movements were slow and labored, as if it was carrying something very heavy. When the light reflected off of the large and sinister thing the creature was holding, James could have fallen into a fit of mad laughter on the spot. This was no human he was dealing with. With the ease of an Olympic weightlifter, the monster lifted a large mass of iron. It was holding an absurdly large knife. One blow from that massive blade would surely be enough to slice James completely in half.

Before his eyes, the monster sluggishly lifted the massive weapon above its head with its muscular arms. The knife was so incredibly heavy that even this giant of a monster was having difficulty swinging it. It was then that James found a ray of hope. If there was anyway to win, he would have to try. James was able to beat this thing before. He could do it again.

A harsh clang pierced through the locked room as the sword missed its intended victim and smashed into the concrete wall instead. After narrowly avoiding the attack, James ran behind the monster and opened fire. Even as a spray of bullets penetrated its back, the hulking creature hardly seemed to notice. It didn't even slow down after he'd unloaded the firearm's entire magazine. James fell to his knees in despair, what little hope he had fading away. Even though he still had some remaining ammo in his pocket, it would be utterly useless to reload now. That knife would be slicing through his head before he'd be able to fire off another shot.

Strangely enough, even in this hopeless state, James felt no fear. In fact, it was like his self-preservation instincts had been completely turned off, and all he felt now was peace. In this mentality of self-abandonment, James hung his head, closed his eyes, and silently awaited the cold touch of the executioner's blade. He could hear the sound of small waves, like those at the shore of Toluca Lake. It sounded just like it did years ago when he and Mary had spent that carefree day just watching the lake together.

Was he mishearing things? Having grown impatient with his impending death, James opened his eyes. He wasn't imagining things—the sound of splashing water was coming from the flooded stairs. Rather than taking the easy opportunity to kill James, the pyramid monster was descending down the stairs into the murky water. All he could see of it was its bullet hole-riddled back. Slowly the answer came to him. I... I won? Again...? Though he hadn't been able to kill the creature for good, he had at least hurt it badly enough to force it to retreat once again.

Letting out a huge sigh, James fell to the ground from pure exhaustion. He was quickly losing track of how many times he had narrowly avoided death in just one day. Swirls of blood mixed with dark water as the flooded staircase began to drain with a thunderous roar. Through the murk emerged a previously hidden back door.

The singing voice of a young child drifted through the fog. The back door in the flooded staircase led to an alley at the back of the building that ran toward Nathan Avenue. The cheerful song was mixed with little bursts of innocent laughter.

"It's you!" James couldn't help but raise his voice when he saw the child's familiar face. Seated atop a brick wall was a young girl reading an unfolded piece of paper. "You're that little brat that stomped on my hand back in that hallway!"

The girl blinked in surprise and stared at James for a moment. With a little grin on her face, she said, "I dunno know what you're talking about."

James's expression darkened. Did she really think she could feign ignorance? This was one stubborn little kid. "What are you doing here anyway?" In a town overrun by monsters, it was extremely dangerous for a child to run around alone. Saucy attitude or not, James couldn't help but worry about the girl's safety.

The girl, seemingly uninterested in the conversation, gave an answer that had little to do with the question. "Are you blind or something? Stupid."

"Hey, is that a letter you got there?"

"What's it to you? You never even liked Mary anyway!"

James stood in shock. How did this kid know his wife's name? No, it had to be a coincidence. She could have been talking about anyone named Mary. *But... she said it right to me. Like she knows me or something...*

"Loser." After sticking her tongue out at him and insulting him one last time, the girl slipped over to the other side of the wall.

"Hey, get back here! How do you know Mary?! Tell me where she is!" Beyond the wall he heard the sound of running footsteps growing farther and farther away. James was left staring at a blank brick wall.

### Chapter Three -Doppelganger-

“Welcome to Silent Hill! Silent Hill, a quiet little lakeside resort town. We're happy to have you. Take some time out of your busy schedules and enjoy a nice restful vacation here. Row after row of quaint old houses, a gorgeous mountain landscape, and a lake which shows different sides of its beauty with the passing of the day, from sunrise, to late afternoons, and sunset. Silent Hill will move you and fill you with a feeling of deep peace. I hope your time here will be pleasant and your memories will last forever!”

That cheap little brochure was the reason Mary and James visited Silent Hill all those years ago. Already that trip felt like nothing more than a legend from ancient times, with Mary as the mythical goddess. In those days, his entire life revolved around her, and every day seemed more vivid and radiant than the last. Back in the days when it felt wonderful just to be alive.

It all began at a house party held by a mutual friend. It was an ordinary enough setting for a first encounter, but at the moment when their eyes first met, it was like it set off a second big bang that created an entirely new universe as the setting for their love story. Every day their affection evolved from a blazing passion to a peaceful and stable relationship.

Nevertheless, even the most beautiful love stories are pervaded by tragedy and this story was no different. Fate imposed a harsh ordeal on both of them when Mary fell ill. The pain and suffering they endured during that time still remained with James, slowly eating away at his heart. And as many great civilizations vanish, their love story came to an end. Ever since then, James had been left alone to wander the ruined world with only the memories of that ancient story, desperately searching for the smallest remaining trace of their lost happiness.

“This is the place.” He spotted the gate through the mist. There were two entrances to Rosewater Park, and traveling from the alley behind the apartments had led him to the east entrance.

“Mary...please be here...” James silently prayed without even really knowing why. The odds of his impossible wish coming true were worse than winning the lottery, but still he wished with all his heart for a miracle. He walked through the gloomy park, his footsteps echoing hollowly on the stone walkway. Just like the rest of town, this place seemed to be deserted. Suddenly, a shadowy figure drifted into view. For a split second, James’s heart soared and he rushed towards the figure, only for it to be revealed as a statue atop a pedestal.

*“Patrick Chester, son of Edward.  
He fought and died for the people,  
for liberty and for all of our  
tomorrows.  
His memory lives on,”*

read the plaque underneath the statue depicting a grim-faced soldier. The flutter of expectation gave way to misery as his small hope was dashed. James smiled bitterly, even as a few tears escaped and traveled down his cheeks. *Good thing no can see me through all this fog.* For even one of those monsters to see him in this pitiful state... At the very least he could be consoled by that fact that that he hadn’t come across any more of them yet.

He descended a flight of stone steps until he reached a boardwalk. Beyond the boardwalk's gently curved handrails was an eternal expanse of white nothingness. The pervasive fog had even managed to ruin the view of the lake. James searched through his mind until he came upon the

precious memory of watching the sparkling water with Mary. Those memories were just as vivid as the day they happened, which wasn't a surprise—considering how obsessed he was with Mary back then.

Casting a sidelong glance across the boardwalk, he could almost catch a flickering glimpse of what she looked like on that day. He remembered thinking that even the brilliant sunset reflecting off the lake's surface was impossible to compare to Mary's graceful figure and radiant smiling face. That cherished image of her was displayed in front of him as if from a projector. It was like some trace of her had been carved into this place. James stared, entranced, until the figure of Mary blurred and shifted through the mist. There was something in the way she leaned on the handrail...could it be that this wasn't just an illusion? James couldn't believe his eyes.

"Are you...Mary?" He stared with blank amazement as he took one uncertain step closer. The woman turned around. Her face was unmistakable. That radiant beauty that never left his mind even after all these years.

"Mary...?" the woman asked. "Mary? Who's that? Your girlfriend?" Aside from her hair color, she was the spitting image of Mary. Even her voice was the same. James was staring at her so intently he could have devoured her with his eyes.

"No, my wife. She...passed away. But you...you look just like her." The more he looked, the more he saw the differences between this woman and Mary. The woman was wearing flashy and very revealing clothes, whereas Mary had always preferred plain clothing. Not only that, but if she really was Mary, shouldn't she be just as happy to see him as he was to see her? Also, he couldn't picture Mary glaring at him like this woman was. It wasn't in her modest nature.

"Geez, that's got to be the lamest pick-up line I've ever heard. Unless you really meant it or something. Unfortunately for you, my name's Maria. I'm not your wife, and I'm certainly no ghost either. See?" She grabbed James's hands in hers. It was an enticing gesture, like she was familiar with men. "Aren't I a bit too warm to be a dead person?"

James felt a mild shock at the gentle touch of her fingers. Though he could understand in his head that this was a different person, he shivered as it brought back memories of holding Mary's hand. Without meeting her eyes, he pulled his hands away. "Sorry... I must have the wrong person." He turned his back to her and began to walk away. To leave Maria, his wife's look-alike, behind felt like abandoning the real Mary.

"Hey, where're you going?" Maria's voice chased him down.

"To look for my wife," James said, looking back at her again.

"Eh?" She caught up and walked beside him. "Didn't you say she was dead?"

"Yeah. For three years now. But she sent me a letter. She said that she was waiting for me in Silent Hill at our 'special place.'"

"Are you kidding me? You really got a letter from your dead wife? You sure someone isn't messing with you?"

"It's okay to laugh. I know it sounds silly but...I'd really like to believe that it's true. That Mary really is alive."

“Hmmm...so then this park must be your ‘special place,’ right?”

“I think that’s what she meant.”

“Sorry to say this, but there’s no one here but me. I should know, I’ve been out here for a while. You have any other ideas?” The way she was meddling in his business with her noisy chattering was starting to get on his nerves. This woman was nothing like Mary. And yet...the image of Mary looking over the lake was still fresh in his mind.

“Well, there’s the hotel, too. I forgot its name, though. Lake-something...”

“The Lakeview Hotel?”

“Yeah, that’s the one.”

“Well then, guess we better get going.”

James stopped in his tracks. “You live around here?”

“Nope. But I know this area well enough. Why?”

“You don’t know? There are these weird creatures all over the place and everyone’s gone missing. If you’re so familiar with this place, then tell me, what’s going on in this town? What the heck are those monsters?”

Maria shrugged. “I don’t really know myself. Before I knew it, everyone was gone and I was all alone out here. Anyhow, you’ll want to go this way.” She grabbed James’s arm and began walking. “We can go to the hotel now and you’ll have me to guide you.”

“Wait, why should I let you come with me?”

“Well, you said I looked like your wife, didn’t you? If that’s the case, then would you really leave me here all alone?” Maria asked, displaying a charming smile. Between the low visibility because of the fog and the overall danger of the situation, James wasn’t thrilled at the idea of having to look after a stranger. Especially her. If he was by himself he’d be able to run away if he needed to. Having her around might just slow him down.

Soon after the two left the park, a mannequin-like monster emerged from the fog. It was easily dispatched, but James was forced to use the last of his precious ammo. What would he do if they were surrounded by monsters like he was before?

“Ouch!” Maria complained with a scowling expression. “Hey, be more careful next time! I don’t want to get myself hurt because of you!”

James checked the condition of her injury. Blood oozed from a scrape on her upper arm. “Sorry.” The monster only gave her a scratch, but James still felt the need to apologize. He didn’t particularly dislike Maria, but he didn’t want to listen to her exaggerated complaints. Still, her appearance puzzled him to the point that he didn’t know how to react to anything she said. Especially when she spoke with the same voice as Mary.

In any case, if he wanted to keep Maria safe, he’d have to get a hold of more bullets, and fast. It’s not like he’d just run into an arms dealership in a residential area like this. He looked around,

trying to catch sight of anything through the fog. He noticed a gas station. Upon closer inspection, he found that the building was locked up tight, but there was something else that caught his eye. It appeared that someone abandoned their car here in the middle of refueling, but stranger still was what James found at the front of the vehicle. A long iron pipe had been stabbed through the front hood. There was no doubt that this had happened because of the uproar the monsters had caused. In any case, if he could kill a monster with a wooden board, then a steel pipe would be useful enough as a weapon. James climbed on top of the abandoned car and pulled at the steel rod with all his strength. His efforts were rewarded when the pipe was pulled free.

“Hey, be careful swinging that thing around. You better not hit me by mistake,” Maria said as she tapped her foot impatiently. She had an awfully sharp tongue for someone who claimed they wanted to help.

The pair proceeded west down Nathan Avenue.

“You see that? Over there is the Historical Society.” Maria pointed to the right of the road. It was a small building, befitting this small town. James couldn’t imagine there being anything interesting to see in there. “A little ways ahead there’s a bridge we need to cross, then we’ll turn onto Sandford Street. If we keep following that road, we’ll reach the hotel eventually.”

“How long do you think that’ll take?” The last time he’d visited this town he had a car so the distance to the hotel had seemed like nothing at all.

“We still have a long way to go. It’s all the way on the other side of the lake, after all.”

“That far, huh?” James let out an exasperated sigh. It looked like he’d be stuck with Maria until they reached the hotel. However, it soon became clear that protecting Maria was the least of his problems. In the place where the bridge should have begun, there was a huge gaping hole in the road. The bridge had collapsed. *There’s no way... Could those monsters have caused this, too?* Maybe the bridge had been destroyed in the panic as people were trying to leave the town. Seeing as the other end of this highway was blocked for construction, this would have been their only means of escape.

“What do we do now?” Maria asked, sounding more amused by the situation than anything. *There’s no other way...* Discouraged, James hung his head, completely unable to find a way around this new obstacle. His gaze fell on what appeared to be a body lying in the corner of the road. Was it another dead monster? James crept closer to get a better look and was startled to find yet another human corpse. It was clutching something in its pale hands. Choking back his disgust and crouching next to the body, James pried the object from its cold fingers, taking great care not to touch it any more than he had to. It was a map of Silent Hill.

Map in hand, James scurried away from the rotting corpse and back to where Maria was waiting. Unfolding the paper he found that one point was marked with an “X” in what appeared to be blood.

“That’s the bowling alley,” Maria remarked, peeking at the map over James’s shoulder. “It’s right across the street from that gas station we stopped at.”

“Yeah, but why is it marked? What kind of place is it?”

“It’s just an ordinary bowling alley. It’s not a very popular place so you’ll hardly ever see anyone there.”



“Well, let’s head there then.” They would have to turn around and walk back to town anyway if they wanted to find another way to reach the Lakeview Hotel, so it couldn’t hurt to stop at the bowling alley along the way. If that person on the side of the road had risked his life to hold onto this map, maybe it was the key to solving the mystery of the unusual phenomena in this town. *Maybe, James secretly thought, finding this map is somehow Mary’s way of guiding me?*

After making their way back into town, the two located the “Pete’s Bowl-O-Rama”, the bowling alley underneath the bloody “X.” As James opened the door to step inside, Maria abruptly said, “I’ll just wait out here. You’ll be alright by yourself, won’t you, James?”

“You changed your mind?”

“I hate bowling.”

“Really, or are you just scared? You don’t have to worry. If I come across any monsters in there, I’ll be sure to take care of them. I guess if it really is that dangerous inside, I really would prefer to be alone.”

“Fine by me,” Maria said as she causally leaned against the wall. James stepped into the pitch black room, letting the door fall shut behind him. It seemed like only one set of lights in the entire building were actually working—an amber glow came from further inside. He could make out the voices of two people chattering in the dim light.

“...ou a robber? Didja kill someone?”

“Nah, nothing like that. I’m not that awful of a person.”

“What? But that’s so booooring. Didja get chased by the police?”

“I dunno anything about the cops. I just ran away... ‘cuz I was scared.”

“If someone’s mad at you, why don’t you just say you’re sorry? That always makes things better.”

“That’s no good. No one would ever forgive...someone like me.”

Not only did James recognize both voices, but he easily recognized the face of the younger speaker. It was the girl from earlier! James quickly ran over to where they were sitting, but the girl, probably frightened by the sudden sound of footsteps, ran away and hid in some dark corner of the room. Turning on his flashlight, he scanned up and down the lanes, trying in vain to find her hiding spot.

“Eddie,” James called to the other person. Sitting at a table illuminated by a small camping lantern was Eddie’s portly figure. He was munching on a piece of pizza taken from the box that sat on the table.

“Uhh, and you are?” He asked through a mouthful of food, regarding James questioningly.

“I’m James, remember? We met back at the apartments.”

“Oh yeah, you’re the guy from before.”

“That girl that just ran away, who is she?”

“You from the hospital? Trying to catch Laura?”

“Not exactly. I just need to ask... Laura, was it? I need to ask Laura something.” The light pitter-pattering of footsteps echoed through the space.

“Bye-bye!” came Laura’s mocking voice. James hurriedly searched with the flashlight’s beam, but was still unable to find the girl.

“She must have ran outside. Come on, Eddie, we have to find her!”

“Ehh, maybe later.”

“You’re not going to go after her? Aren’t you her guardian? There’s all kinds of monsters running around out there and you’d rather sit here eating pizza than go make sure she’s safe!?”

“Her guardian? Me and Laura just met by accident on our way to Silent Hill. It’s not like I brought her here or anything.”

“Even then, it’s still your responsibility to look after her.”

“Laura’ll be fine by herself. If I went with her, she’d probably just complain about how I’m getting in her way anyhow.”

“Just forget it!” Infuriated by Eddie’s careless attitude and tired of this pointless argument, James turned and headed back to the entrance. Eddie didn’t seem to find a problem with this, as he simply returned to his leisurely meal. *Go ahead and eat your stupid pizza to your heart’s content. I hope you get eaten by a monster next you fat idiot!*

Maria was still waiting outside. “Maria, did a little girl run though here?”

“Yeah, she went that way. I tried to chase her, but she got away.” Maria pointed to an alley that extended south from Nathan Avenue and continued past the bowling alley. However, as they followed the alley, the two of them came to a dead end. Again the path was blocked by a brick wall and Laura was nowhere in sight.

“She probably got through here and ran on to Carroll Street.” There was a small, cramped gap between two of the buildings, hardly big enough for a child to squeeze though, let alone an adult.

“Is there another way around?”

“Yup. Right that way.” Maria motioned to the door directly behind her. It was the backdoor to one of the buildings, and it looked pretty promising. However...

“It’s no good, we’re locked out.”

“Is that so?” Maria dug in her skirt pocket and produced a key that fit perfectly in the door’s keyhole.

*What a jerk.* Even if Laura would be fine, the idea of Eddie sitting in that empty bowling alley, carelessly and greedily stuffing his face with pizza still irritated James. He just couldn’t understand

how someone could act like that. How could he just ignore the fact that a helpless child was wandering the monster-infested streets of a deserted town all alone?

Even stranger was how Laura seemed ignorant of the danger, like she couldn't see the monsters. *How can she act like there's nothing to be afraid of? I don't think I could do that even if I tried.* Truthfully, he sort of envied Laura in this regard. Envy like an ugly, monstrous dog with a disease-ridden and painful bite. James had courage....only it was more like recklessness. *I really can't stand that kind of weakness. I don't want to go outside. I just want to stay shut-up indoors. Being alone really is the best thing. I don't want anyone else to get hurt...because of me...*

"Here we are, Heaven's Night. I used to work here a while back," Maria said. From the back door they had climbed a set of stairs until they arrived at the inside of a bar. Over by the stage sat a row of seats, most likely for the shows presented here. "I was a dancer, you know."

*Now that made perfect sense*, James thought and nodded in realization. It certainly explained Maria's hairstyle and showy fashion sense. She probably had big dreams of performing in Hollywood or Broadway in some fancy club, but somehow she ended up here in a tiny little bar on the outskirts of town. She really had no hope of appearing as a classy lady hanging around in a place like this.

"You're being awfully quiet. Are you imagining me up on that stage dancing right now?" Maria laughed teasingly at James's silence.

He denied it with a halfhearted and ambiguous reply. The truth was that Maria had guessed absolutely right, but he wasn't thinking about her for the reasons she seemed to be implying. It was more painful than that. The thought of this woman who looked exactly like Mary dancing in such indecent clothing and exposed to men's greedy eyes... It was like seeing Mary herself endure public humiliation. Almost like the inquisitive eyes of a stranger watching her in her sickbed...

In an attempt to escape these gloomy thoughts, James walked over to the front counter. Stepping behind the counter, he searched around on the bottom shelves. As he had hoped, he came across a gun kept for security, an automatic weapon that held fifteen rounds. But with his good fortune came a bit of bad luck; there was no extra ammo to be found. James stuck his new weapon in his belt loop and discarded the gun he had used before.

For a moment, he pondered what to do with the pipe he had went through so much trouble to acquire. He came to the conclusion that it would be best to keep it and rely on it as much as possible for fighting, saving the gun for a dire situation.

"Well, it doesn't look like that girl is hiding in here. I bet she's left at the other side of the building by now," Maria said as she held the front door open, inviting James to follow. The two descended another staircase and reemerged onto the foggy streets. To the north, the road was blocked by more construction. Where else did the girl have to run off to?

"Over there!" Maria shouted, pointing to the south where a small figure swiftly slipped into the mist. Alerted by Maria's voice, the shadow darted to the side, and hurriedly entered the nearest building. Wasting no time, James and Maria chased after the fleeing child until they reached the door she had retreated into. Marked on a plate above the entrance were the words "Brookhaven Hospital." The door had been left ajar, almost like an invitation to step inside.

## **Chapter Four -Patient Records-**

Why would a young child like Laura want to be in a place like this? Brookhaven Hospital was completely devoid of liveliness and dominated by an uneasy stillness. There wasn't a soul to be found anywhere. The lights in the entrance hallway were all switched off, giving the area a dim and hollow atmosphere as if the building had been abandoned for years. Despite this, the halls were immaculately clean and free of dust or debris, like the staff had been working tirelessly to keep the place in pristine condition, and quite recently too.

It was a fairly large hospital with plenty of room for the numerous patients that should have been resting in their beds. Where did everyone go? James began searching through the ward on the first floor with Maria huddled uncomfortably close. He caught the faint scent of Maria's perfume, bringing up guilty recollections of his late wife. Their search came up empty. Laura obviously ducked into the hospital because she knew they were on her trail, so it wasn't likely she would risk hiding on the first floor.

"Let's keep going."

"Okay."

As they climbed the dimly-lit staircase, James began to think. He had been so intent on catching Laura that he hadn't noticed before, but now he couldn't help but wonder: why hasn't Maria asked anything about Laura? She knew he was here to look for Mary, but he hadn't mentioned anything to her about the letter Laura was carrying. And despite this, she unquestioningly followed him on the hunt for the little girl, as if she knew that it was important. Even though she certainly seemed to be a nosy person...this seemed a little much, especially in a dangerous situation like this.

Having reached the second floor, James absent-mindedly took a left when they came to a branching hallway. He stole a quick glance at Maria, who was still clinging nervously to his arm. If he was so worried about her motivations, why didn't he just ask her right now? He tried to form the words, but he kept hesitating, like he was afraid of saying the wrong thing. It was that uncertainty, among other unpleasant emotions swirling in his mind, that always made speaking with Maria so difficult. It was so strange that—

"Look out!" Maria's frantic cry shocked James out of his thoughts. She yanked him backwards, nearly pulling him off his feet as a long object swung through the darkness. The metal pipe that was clearly aimed to bash his brains out made a dull metallic sound as it met the linoleum floor mere inches in front of him. Whoever the attacker was, they meant business. The unknown assailant pulled its metal pipe off the ground and swung it again, but James was prepared this time and blocked the strike with his own pipe. The sharper, ear-piercing clang of metal hitting metal shot through the empty hallway and the force of the impact sent a jolt of pain through James's arms.

"Who are you!?" James shouted through gritted teeth. With their weapons locked together, his opponent was forced to stumble closer, into the flashlight's beam. The attacker had the figure of a human, enough so that it would appear perfectly normal from a distance, but at this close range its true nature was revealed. It was a monster in a white dress, masquerading as a nurse. The proof was its ugly face, swollen beyond recognition, and its gray decomposing skin that gave it the appearance of a walking corpse. The odor it carried was repulsive, like rotting garbage.

The creature's grotesque exterior concealed surprising strength, but its decaying body was still too fragile to fight for long, and it soon fell to the ground.

“Hurry, finish it off!” Maria shouted while standing a safe distance behind James. What a silly thing to say. Of course he planned to kill this monster, and quickly, too, as it was already trying to pull itself back to its feet with its weak arms. *But if that’s true, then why am I so reluctant? It’s just a monster. Something that’s going to kill me if I don’t kill it first. But what if...what if it really isn’t?* Could it really be a normal nurse who was unfortunate enough to catch a disease from an infected patient? And now, driven to a state of madness, she wanders the hospital’s halls, too scared and confused to tell if people are trying to help her or hurt her. And if anything was to be gathered from her appearance, she’s probably suffering immense physical pain as well. If James looked at the situation that way, it almost seemed pitiable.

*Then, at most, it’d be nothing more than a mercy killing, right?* It was as if Maria were shouting words of encouragement, and she knew how conflicted James felt. The nurse was standing again with the rusty pipe still clamped firmly in its gray hand. He steeled himself, swallowing all his feelings of doubt. It has to be painful for anyone that disfigured to live. Monster or human, the best thing would be for it to die. James raised his steel pipe above his head, and swung down with all his might. The nurse’s skull cracked under the crushing force of the blow, and its legs crumpled, sending it sprawling across the floor again. Only this time, it didn’t stand back up.

James stood silently for a moment, staring at the slain monster. Dark blood pooled under its crumpled body, joining the small splatters that had sprinkled across the hall when he had struck it. *I made the right choice...didn’t I?* Even if he could make himself believe that, the whole situation left a bad taste in his mouth. He felt Maria’s hand on his shoulder.

“James...you did what you had to do.” Maria offered words of consolation, once again as if she knew exactly how he was feeling.

While the first floor was devoid of life, the second and third floors were crawling with aggressive nurses as well as more strange mannequin-like creatures. As he stood over the body of yet another blood-stained nurse, a paralyzing thought came to mind. Perhaps, like the insane nurses, all the residents of Silent Hill were infected with the same diabolical virus. It wasn’t too much of a stretch to picture a biological weapon leaking from a secret military base and polluting the town’s water supply. The nurses and mannequins were at least human enough to be recognized as being female. So perhaps the armless monsters used to be men, their bodies having deteriorated after so much time.

If this really was the truth, then it should have made it feel easier to kill them one-by-one. It would be an act of compassion, ending all their suffering. *To think that I’m really “helping” them...that’s a lie. Only an excuse. Like I’m trying to run away from something...but what is it?*

“James, wait up,” Maria said, snatching James’s attention away from his gloomy thoughts. She was beginning to fall behind, and had resorted to a slow trot while still trying to keep up.

He had almost forgotten that Maria was with him, even though he was supposed to be protecting her.

“I’m exhausted.” Maria’s face was pale, and she looked like she was having difficulty breathing. “It’s just a slight cold. I wasn’t feeling great this morning either. I guess I got distracted when I saw that everyone was missing.”

James frowned. He was getting a feeling of déjà vu, bringing back memories that carried sorrow like a curse. This was just like the beginning... When Mary had said it was “just a slight cold”...

“You better rest for a while” Driven by anxiety, he hurriedly searched for a safe place for her to lie down. After stealthily examining the nearby room S03 and finding it to be free of monsters, he invited Maria inside and carefully helped her to the bed. “I’ll go ahead and at least make sure the third floor is secure, then I’ll try to find Laura. I think she knows where Mary is. Are you sure you’ll be okay here by yourself?”

“Yeah,” Maria answered in a faint voice. Before James could turn to leave, she grabbed his hand. “Hey, James... If you...if you find Mary, what will you do then?”

“I don’t know.” James shook his head quietly.

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The seeds of uncertainty were planted, and James began to doubt himself. While passing through an empty office on the first floor, a stack of papers happened to catch his eye. The contents of those papers still weighed heavily on his mind, like corrosion slowly eating away at his thoughts. They were a doctor’s memos on a certain patient.

*“...The potential for this illness exists in all people, and under the right circumstances, any man or woman would be driven, like him, to "the other side."*

*The "other side" perhaps may not be the best way to phrase it. After all, there is no wall between here and there. It lies on the borders where reality and unreality intersect. It is a place both close and distant.*

*Some say it isn't even an illness. I cannot agree with them. I'm a doctor, not a philosopher, or even a psychiatrist.*

*But sometimes I have to ask myself this question. It's true that to us his imaginings are nothing but the inventions of a busy mind. But to him, there simply is no other reality.*

*Furthermore, he is happy there. So why, I ask myself, why in the name of healing him must we drag him painfully into the world of our own reality?”*

It seemed to be more of the doctor’s personal opinion regarding the patient’s mental illness rather than an actual medical diagnosis. Who was the patient these papers referred to? *Could it be talking*

*about...me?* James shuddered, but instantly rejected the idea. *No, that can't be it! But...all the strange things happening in Silent Hill, the vanishing people, the weird monsters, all those things are just too wild for someone to just imagine.* Again, he shook his head in denial. Maybe the reality was just as absurd as the fantasy. After all, Maria, Angela, and Eddie have all seen the monsters too. Even Laura had a letter from Mary. Such a young child couldn't possibly have known Mary for more than three years.

At any rate, he should be searching for Laura right now, not wandering around and sulking. Knowing that that girl could prove Mary's survival dispelled most of his misgivings. After the third floor turned up empty, James decided to check the roof. He was surprised to find that night had fallen without him even noticing. Had he really been searching that long? Actually, the hospital corridors were so dark that standing out here in the dead of night really didn't make much of a difference. Between the fog and the darkness, there wasn't any view to be seen; even the stars were completely obscured. James walked along the rooftop perimeter, shining the flashlight at any place small enough for a little girl to hide. There was no sign of Laura, but he stumbled on what appeared to be a piece of lost property sitting near the guardrail. He picked up the object: a diary. Its cover was tattered and soaked with rain water. On a sudden curious whim, he flipped to the first page. The words were a bit blurred, but still readable.

*"May 9*

*Rain.*

*Stared out the window all day.*

*Peaceful here—nothing to do.*

*Still not allowed to go outside.*

*May 10*

*Still raining.*

*Talked with the doctor a little.*

*Would they have saved me if*

*I didn't have a family to feed?*

*I know I'm pathetic, weak.*

*Not everyone can be strong.*

*May 11*

*Rain again.*

*The meds made me feel sick  
today.*

*If I'm only better when I'm*

*drugged, then who am I, anyway?*

*May 12*

*Rain as usual.*

*I don't want to cause any more  
trouble for anyone, but I'm a  
bother either way.*

*Can it really be such a sin to  
run instead of fight?*

*Some people may say so, but they  
don't have to live in my shoes.*

*It may be selfish, but it's what  
I want.*

*It's too hard like this.*

*It's just too hard....*

*May 13*

*It's clear outside.*

*The doctors told me I've been  
released—that I've got to go  
home.*

*I -----”*

The diary ended there abruptly. It must have belonged to one of the patients. If it happened to be from the same person from the other memo, James's concerns would be wiped away. Clearly the patient had regained their sanity and was discharged from the hospital, meaning it couldn't possibly be James the memo was talking about. But what if...the patient relapsed? What if they forgot the past and fell back into their world of delusion? What if their reality was to endlessly wander an inescapable nightmare?

A loud noise rang through the air, as if to embody James's frustration. It was the grating noise of something metal scraping across the concrete of the rooftop. Like someone was dragging something heavy...and even before James turned around, he knew who it was.

“Come and get me asshole,” James challenged, pulling his treasured gun from his belt. Unlike before, he felt no fear facing the pyramid monster. Though his confidence came from the fact that he was able to repel the monster twice before, the biggest reason was that he now doubted the creature's very existence. There's no way this ridiculous bastard could be real...but could it really just be the product of an insane delusion? Either way, James was soon going to find out. Completely defenseless other than the gun in his hand, he exposed himself before the imposing monster. If it was just a delusion, then that nasty hatchet would be nothing more than a paper mache toy. The hollow blade would pass right through his body without leaving a scratch.

The monster sluggishly lifted its blade, aiming to slice its target in half. James's bravery faltered and he recoiled backwards, only to find a chain-link fence at his back, preventing any chance at escape. The fence's metal frame was rusted and brittle and it began to creak under James's weight. All of a sudden the structure gave way and tipped backwards off the roof, taking James with it. The blade of the monster's massive sword grazed the tip of his nose before he was swallowed by darkness and fog.

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For what seemed like forever, James lay in shock, staring up at the gaping hole in the ceiling. Chunks of debris and dust were scattered about on the floor of the dark room. The roof here must have rotted enough for him to be able to fall right through it. Even after surviving the impressive fall, the pain in his back was the furthest thing from James's mind. The pyramid monster hadn't followed him. Meaning he was safe for a little while longer.

Using the steel pipe as a makeshift cane, James stood up and surveyed the room. He was in the special treatment unit on what appeared to be the third floor. Several doors were lined up on the wall, each leading to a small isolation room for the severely mentally ill patients. James couldn't help but laugh at the irony. The action sent a stab of pain through his back.

Making his way carefully through the hallway, James quietly peeked into room S03. Maria was out like a light. Now that the pyramid monster was wandering around, he worried even more for her



safety. But even if she were able to continue on in her bad state, what would they do if they were to encounter the creature? It would be even more dangerous for her. Leaving the sleeping Maria behind, James stepped away from the room and headed towards the stairs. He hadn't yet explored the basement.

It would have been far easier to get to the basement if he were able to use the elevator. Unfortunately, the one he was able to find was out-of-order, leaving no choice but to find another way. James came across a fire-door that led to an emergency staircase, but it was locked tight. *They must keep the key around here somewhere... maybe somewhere in the offices...* With his body still sore from his earlier fall, he continued to the first floor. A small figure caught his eye. Skirt fluttering, the figure darted across the ward. It was Laura! And she was trying to escape again!

James ran to the hallway where she had fled, but the girl was gone. The corridor directly ahead led to a dead end, and with the fire-door and the elevator both out of service, she had to be hiding close by. Sneaking into the first room in the hall, room C2, he quickly spotted her. "You can quit hiding now. Come on out."

Giggling merrily, the girl's face peeked out from under the bed. "Uh oh, you found me! You're not going to tag me 'it' now, are you?"

Had Laura been running all this time because she thought they were playing tag? Here he was going on a desperate search while this girl treated it like a game. James was running out of energy. "Please, Laura. Don't run away anymore."

"Huh? How do you know my name?"

"Eddie told me."

"That big fat blabbermouth!" Laura cried, her face twisting into a little scowl.

"I want you to tell me how you know Mary. Mary Shepherd Sunderland."

"What's the big deal?"

"Because I have to know," James said sternly.

Laura looked startled by his serious expression. "Are you gonna hit me if I don't tell you?" "No, I'd never do anything like that."

"Mary... was my friend when I had to stay in another hospital."

"What? When was this?"

"Just last year."

"Liar! Last year Mary was already..."

"You're the liar! You won't listen to anything I say anyway!"

Once again, James was met with disappointment. Clearly Laura still wasn't going to tell the whole truth. But what did a little girl like her have to hide? Did something bad happen between her and Mary?

“Anyway, we should get out of here. This isn’t the place for a kid to be running around alone. This whole town is dangerous... I’m surprised you haven’t gotten yourself hurt yet.”

“Why would I get hurt? This town is all calm and boring.”

At least now that he found Laura, he could meet back up with Maria on the third floor.

As soon as they stepped out of the room, Laura said, “Wait, I have to go somewhere.”

“Not now, okay? We can’t get sidetracked.”

“But I forgot something really important! It’s a letter from Mary!”

James stopped in his tracks. He instinctively spun around to face the little girl holding his hand. Trying to get on his good side, Laura showed the sweetest smile she could muster. The effect was ruined when she complained like a spoiled child, “Pleeeeeease? It’s really close!”

The label on the door in front of them read “Treatment room.” This must be where they brought the patients who arrived by ambulance. Rows of beds were lined up on the far wall. The only other feature in the otherwise empty room was a shelf hanging on the wall where a variety of medical equipment and drugs were stored.

“Is this really the right room?”

“Uh-huh. It’s right over there.”

“Where?”

“On that shelf, way in the back.”

James stepped into the treatment room. He had only made it halfway over to the shelf when he was caught off-guard by the sound of the door slamming shut behind him.

“Laura?” He turned around, wondering if anything had happened to her. His question was met with amused laughter from the other side of the door.

“Ha ha, I got you! I can’t believe you were stupid enough to fall for that!”

“What are you doing? Laura, please open the door.” James ran to the door and tugged on the knob, but somehow she had managed to lock it from the outside.

“Why should I? I’m just a little liar. You said it yourself.”

“Come on, open up!”

“If you want me to open the door, why don’t you just ask nicely?”

“Listen Laura, I’m not kidding around! You’re not safe out there, there could be monsters! Please, you can’t just wander around by yourself!”

“You don’t want to ask nicely? You’re sure? I guess I won’t open the door then. You can just stay in there for a while.” A low, menacing roar rumbled from somewhere in the gloom of the treatment room.

“Laura? Laura!” While pounding on the door, James grabbed the light from around his neck and frantically scanned the room. The ceiling. There was something hanging from the ceiling.

“Open the door! Quickly!” No matter how loud he yelled or how hard he pounded, the door would not open. Laura must have gone off somewhere, leaving James trapped in here alone with whatever else was hiding in the shadows. He tried again to catch the creature in the flashlight beam. What he found appeared to be something in a large, dark gray sack. Its movements were sluggish as it lazily made its way closer.

Its form was unlike anything James had ever seen before: a bizarre monster like a pendulum. Its body was a soft and flabby chunk of meat, like a half-digested human, suspended from the ceiling by a metal rectangular frame. It was nothing but a fleshy mass of decaying skin and muscles, melting away to reveal the twisted black intestines underneath. Deformed arms and legs jutted out at odd angles from the wrong places.

From the darkness emerged two more of the repulsive creatures, surrounding James on both sides. Slowly inching closer. Grim as the situation looked, James struggled to keep calm. He just needed to focus on fighting. He just needed to stay alive. It would be impossible to fight them off with the pipe, their bodies were too well protected by the cage-like frames. He would have to use his gun. The thought of using up his precious bullets filled him with dread. He really should be saving them in case pyramid head appeared again, but then again, having extra ammo wouldn't do any good if died now.

James opened fire on the three creatures, making sure to divide his remaining ammo equally. Even being trapped in a dark room surrounded by monsters, the emotion he felt more than fear was his anger towards Laura. He had to get out of here alive, if only to punish that evil little brat. Driven by this immature rage, James's carefully aimed and controlled gunshots turned to wild and almost random firing.

Die, you fucking, piece-of-shit monsters!

As the bullets pierced the ugly lumps of meat, spurts of blood scattered through the air and splattered across James's face. He looked like a demon. All his rage and excitement along with the smell of blood swirled together, and he began to feel dizzy.

*James...*

It was the cold whisper of a female voice. It was so soft that it seemed to be coming from inside his head.

*James...*

His consciousness blurred and faded into darkness.

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James stared vacantly at the side of a concrete wall. What was he doing here? He couldn't remember. All he knew was that he was in a dark place surrounded by walls. He was certain that he'd been in a hospital. How long had he been here? No answer came to mind. Wait... He had been in the treatment room before, fighting those monsters. But something still didn't feel right...

When James opened the door to return to the ward, it was like the world had completely changed. The worn linoleum was peeling from the floor, revealing the bar concrete underneath. The walls were faded, cracked, and dyed red with dried bloodstains. Broken bits and pieces of medical equipment were scattered everywhere, all of it covered in a layer of dust and filth. Brookhaven hospital had fallen to ruin.

James could not even begin to grasp this sudden and jarring change. He could only stand and stare in mute amazement. *This is impossible. Have I gone crazy? Is this some insane nightmare?*

“Maria...” All thoughts of Laura gone from his mind, James began a steady walk to the third floor, almost like something was pulling his soul there. All he clung to as he traversed the darkened halls was one single idea: if he could find Maria, he could find out if this unsettling situation was something only he was seeing. He could ask her if it was all just an illusion. More than anything, he wanted to believe that this wasn’t real.

He swung open the door to room S03 to find the bed empty. The only thing that remained was an empty bottle of pills that rested on the bedside table. Was it from the hospital’s supply, or was it something she had been carrying with her? James’s gaze was fixated on the bottle. He remembered this medicine. It was what Mary had been required to take in large amounts three times a day, back when she became ill. The fading pain in his chest began to ache again. Did Maria have the same disease?

“Maria...where are you?” In James’s mind, Mary and Maria were beginning to overlap. As if Maria was trying to replace Mary. Maybe the last traces of his wife’s existence were no match for the need and concerns of a human being who was still alive...

After wandering and searching for so long that he lost track of time, James found himself in a ground floor storeroom. Large, rusted pieces of equipment had been crammed in the small space like unwanted garbage. The whole place was narrow enough to feel like it was suffocating him. There didn’t seem to be anyone else in here. James’s shoulders sagged with disappointment. Suddenly, he heard a voice calling out his name. It was like...a beautiful sound from heaven. Like the song of an angel, so captivating and breathtaking that it could even wake the dead. Heart lightened, James turned around. There was that lovely face he had been pursuing for so long...

“Mary?”

“I’m Maria!” She glared at him, the annoyance plainly visible on her face.

“Oh, sorry...” James shrank away. “I guess I was just confused... I don’t really know what’s going on right now. Anyway, I’m glad to see you’re still alive. Are you feeling any better?”

“Anyway? What do mean anyway?! Do I really mean that little to you?! I could have died back there. Where the hell were you when I needed you? All you ever talk about is that dead wife of yours. Is that really all that matters to you? Do you even care what happens to me at all?” As the angry questions poured out, Maria looked to be on the verge of tears.

James found himself to be overwhelmed by her furious accusations. “N-no, it’s nothing like that...”

“Then stay with me! Don’t leave me alone again.”

“I understand. I promise I won’t leave your side.”

“Then...it’s okay. I forgive you.” Little by little, Maria’s temper seemed to melt away. Returning to her usual flirty tone, she said, “Did you find Laura?”

“Yeah. But, she ran away again.” The pesky little girl’s prank had given him hell, and he was still bothered by the hospital’s grotesque state. Honestly, he was getting sick of looking at it.

“Well that’s no good. Now we have to chase her down all over again,” Maria said harshly, as if she were scolding James for letting Laura get away. “You know, I’m not sure what it is, but all of a sudden this hospital is giving me a strange vibe. Poor Laura’s probably scared stiff.”

Those words took a burden off of James mind. *So I’m not so crazy after all. If Maria can see these strange things too, then it’s not just a hallucination.*

“Yeah, we should get going,” James nodded vigorously.

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“I wonder where a little kid would want to hide around here. Maybe the basement? We haven’t checked down there yet.”

“I thought the same thing, but there’s no way to get down there. The elevator won’t move, and the door to the staircase is locked, so I don’t see how Laura could be hiding in the basement.”

“Really? I peeked into the basement stairs a little bit ago. I didn’t use a key or anything.”

Maybe whatever had twisted the hospital into its current form had somehow unlocked the fire door as well. If that was the case, then there was only one way for them to go. James and Maria trudged through the decrepit halls towards the basement. Just as Maria had said, the fire door was unlocked. James was positive that this door had been shut tight before, but he kept his mouth shut in an effort to avoid another argument.

On the other side of the emergency door was a damp corridor that was infused with a stale, musty scent. It had a secluded atmosphere that didn’t fit at all into the hospital setting, and it didn’t seem likely that this hall was used for transporting deceased patients. Their footsteps echoed dully through the dark, enclosed space, adding to the air of loneliness. As they rounded a corner, the monotonous sound was interrupted by a startled cry from Maria, “James!”

A sound James had heard many times before was slowly making its way closer. The harsh and unpleasant sound of something heavy scraping across the floor.

“Stay back!” Standing in front of Maria to protect her, James pulled out his gun, prepared for a fight. He knew the gun was a reliable weapon, but after the encounter with the monsters in the treatment room, only three precious bullets remained in the magazine. Thinking quickly, James fired the last three shots at the approaching creature, taking the opportunity to grab Maria by the hand and run as it recoiled in pain.

“Hurry!” As pulled the panicking Maria through the halls, James could only pray that there was an exit waiting for them at the end. If the worst should happen, at least he still had the steep pipe to defend himself with. They dashed through the twisting corridor around what seemed like hundreds of corners until their legs ached and their breath came in ragged, terrified gasps.

The end was in sight: a tall, gray door sat at the end of the hallway, seeming to be impossibly far

away. Was it the entrance to a room? Was it a dead end? James's disappointment dissolved where he saw it was actually an elevator. And the door was sitting wide open, beckoning them to safety. *Come on, please work!* James ran inside and hit the first floor button. It really didn't matter which floor they went to; anywhere was better than here. He found that in his frenzied rush, he was repeatedly slamming the button like he was trying to break it, as if pressing it more would make the doors close faster. He scanned over the panel and pressed the button for opening and closing the doors.

Instantly, the two halves of the door began to slide together. Suddenly it hit him: Maria was still outside the elevator! James hit the door button again in a desperate attempt to stop the doors from completely shutting her out.

"Open damn it!" The elevator lacked safety equipment, so the cold metal doors continued moving closer together, heartlessly ignoring both James's and Maria's pleas.

"James!" Maria begged for help with a bitter cry, having managed to thrust her arm through the gap and into the elevator. Her screams were cut short by the sudden sound of a blade tearing through flesh.

"Maria!"

Her limp arm slipped through the crack, vanished, and the doors clicked shut. As the elevator began to ascend, James sank into the depths of despair.

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"Aww, where'd he go?" Laura muttered with displeasure. James must have left the hospital already. By the time she returned to the treatment room, he was long gone. Even though Laura hated James because of Mary's circumstance, having lost her persistent pursuer left her feeling just a little bit unsatisfied. Tag and hide-and-seek were fun and all, but it was no use if you had no one to play with. For a while, she made a game out of pretending to be a detective, searching through the empty hospital for clues until she finally grew tired.

Even if this was a different hospital than the one she had stayed in, there really wasn't anything to see that she hadn't seen before. The spotless, clean floors and the complex machines and equipment only served to remind her of the long, boring days spent stuck in her hospital bed.

"Hmph. Guess I'll just go back to the bowling alley. I hope that Eddie gave himself a stomachache." A light skip in her step, Laura started towards the exit.

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*Even after all that, I wasn't able to save her...*

Desolate and heartbroken, James crouched on the ground and leaned against the colorless walls of the elevator. The walls were beginning to feel more and more like a cage. Having reached the upper floor, the metal doors had slid open to reveal the pitch-black hallway beyond. It was darkness almost as deep and somber as the one that hung over his own heart. First Mary, and now Maria...

Because they shared the same beautiful features, it was like losing the same woman twice. They slipped away until they remained nothing but a memory, leaving James with twice the grief. An

overwhelming feeling of emptiness that felt the same as death. He wanted nothing more than for this madness to end. Although... What if he was the one going mad? What if everything was turning into a nightmare that he couldn't escape?

With great effort, James finally got back on his feet. He remembered his wife's face, the face of a dead woman. That lovely face was the foundation of his entire being, his reason for living. These feelings of grief and sorrow were only a distraction. Searching for Mary, holding on to the belief that she was alive—those were the only things that mattered now.

James stepped out of the elevator and into the first floor's administrative area. It was the same one he had visited earlier, only, just like the ward he'd walked through after fighting the creatures in the treatment room, this place now had a dirty and ruined appearance. As a result, the door to every office and examination room in the ward was rusted shut and impossible to open. There was only one room that could be entered: the director's office.

If he wanted to find Mary, he'd have find Laura first. Besides their "special place" at the hotel, the girl was the only lead he had left. James peeked inside the director's office. The elegant spines of many well-kept medical books were tightly lined up on a bookshelf. However, there was no sign of Laura. He'd already searched through every accessible room in the hospital without any luck. Did this mean he'd have to wander aimlessly through town until he found her again?

The beam of his flashlight fell on the large desk that sat by the window on the far side of the room. Someone had left a map there. And it was this lone map, laying on top of what would otherwise have been an empty desk, that grabbed James's attention for some reason. It was a map of Silent Hill with a single location marked with an 'X' and a few sentences scrawled in the corner. Did the hospital director write this?

*"He who fears being watched from the abyss,  
will be unable to look into it himself.  
The truth can only be obtained by pressing forward.  
Follow the map.  
You'll find a letter."*

James looked up from the map with a start to see something outside the window. From the corner of his sight, he caught a glimpse of a small shadow. Wasting no time, he dashed out of the office and towards the hospital's main entrance. There was no mistaking it—it had been the figure of a little girl. Laura was leaving the hospital. *Wait! You have to tell me... You have to tell me about Mary!*

Standing in the hospital entrance, James carefully panned across the street with his flashlight. Laura was gone, having slipped away into the midnight blackness under the cover of fog. Did she run left or right? James was unsure, but he made the decision to turn right and began walking south down Carroll Street. Whether Laura went this way or not, his real goal was to reach the spot marked on the director's map. Maybe it was the mention of the so-called "letter" that was making him feel anxious, but he couldn't help but think that whatever it was had to be important.

James studied every twisting turn marked on the map: west down Rendell Street, from Munson Street to Saul Street. North to Neely Street, and east to Sanders Street. James's destination lied somewhere on Lindsey Street. His thoughts turned back to his gun, which he had abandoned in the hospital basement during the tense chase. Not that an empty gun would do him any good now. He still had the steel pipe to rely on though. Holding his only weapon tightly, James proceeded ahead, hoping that he wouldn't have to use it.

Halfway through Saul Street, James came upon a building that blocked the road like an overpass, creating a tunnel he'd need to walk through. The inside was obscured by an even thicker and gloomier darkness. The floor was covered by an iron mesh, similar to the kind used during construction, and there seemed to be nothing solid underneath. James was reluctant to walk across it as nothing about the thin surface looked safe. Looking closer, he thought he could see a vague black shape squirming beneath the chain-link flooring. Was there...a monster down there?

Though it shared their jerking movements, it was different from the armless monsters and the mannequins. Whatever it was, it certainly wasn't something pleasant. *If I sprinted through, maybe I could make it*, James thought. There was no way of knowing how long the tunnel was from here, but wouldn't a creature trapped beneath an iron mesh be unable to attack him? Back in his school days, track and field had been his strong point, and he had been especially good at running short-distances. He had always placed well in races with his classmates. But now that he was an adult, his body was weakened by a definitive lack of exercise. Nevertheless, he had to try.

With a quick chant of "ready, set, go!" James charged into the tunnel. As he ran, the light hanging around his neck jerked side to side violently, making it nearly impossible to see where he was going. He was sprinting at full speed down a pitch-black tunnel with no exit in sight. With every pounding footstep, the chain-link floor rattled and shook. The sound mingled with the white noise blaring from his radio. Underfoot, the shadowy figures of the monsters lied in wait, clinging onto the iron mesh. His intention was to run without distractions, but even against his better judgment, he couldn't help but look down.

The creatures were dangling from the floor by their thick, suction pad-like forearms and they chased James with surprisingly quick and skillful movement. The way their arms flailed about as they followed behind him made it appear as if they were trying to get his attention. Almost as if they had something they wanted to say. *I beg you, listen to me. Please understand...*

From underneath the metal grid, paw-like tentacles emerged and stabbed at James's feet, sending a shock of pain through his body. "Cut it out!" James raised his steel pipe and swatted at the creature's ugly tumor-like arms. There was a small burst of sparks and the metallic clang echoed though the length of the tunnel. However, the metal floor was the only thing he struck, and the undamaged monster barely slowed. Between the metal grid protecting it and its incredible agility, it would be difficult to land a solid blow.

"Ow!" James staggered from a sudden numbing pain in his foot, grabbing onto the tunnel wall to keep from falling. He knew that if he were to fall to the ground it would all be over. They would gnaw at his body with those nasty suckers, and he'd be unable to get up and escape. He would die as the creatures slowly ripped away and devoured his flesh. Though he was losing feeling in his legs, James continued forward. As long as he could still move, escape was the only option.

James rushed madly ahead, desperately beating down any of the monsters' attacking limbs. He raised his voice in what was both a war-cry and a scream of pain with every step. He saw what looked to be a bar located on the corner of Neely Street and Sanders Street. With the radio static signaling the approach of more monsters, James decided to avoid them by slipping inside the building. He managed to exit the tunnel, and burst thorough the front door just as the pain in his legs was becoming unbearable.

Going by the vacant interior, this place had been out of business for some time. There wasn't a single chair, table, booth, or stool to be found... The whole place had an atmosphere of ruin and decay much like the hospital. James fell to the floor, resting his back against the wall covered in



peeling plaster. He shined the flashlight around the room. If there was a monster lurking around, he should have heard it by now, but it wouldn't hurt to take the extra precaution. Apparently, after this bar was closed, it had become a hang-out for the local delinquents—cigarette butts and the remains of marijuana joints littered the floor, and tucked into the corner was a small, ripped up plastic bag that was stuffed with what appeared to be cocaine. Every available surface, from the walls to the windowpanes, was plastered with graffiti and obscenities. Most of the writing was either meaningless nonsense or offensive just for the sake of being offensive. But as he casually scanned over the words, his eyes became nailed to one message:

*If you really want to SEE Mary, you should just DIE. But you might be heading to a different place than MARY, James.*

James stared in stunned silence. There was no way this could be a coincidence... He was gripped by a sudden feeling a nausea, and his head ached like a bell being struck. Breathing became difficult. He felt like he would suffocate if he had to look at those words any longer. The pain in his partially numb legs forgotten, James scrambled to his feet and towards the exit. He stumbled and smacked into the door before forcibly tumbling out onto the street.

He hurried toward Lindsey Street as fast as he could manage in his current state, desperate to put as much distance as possible between him and the bar containing those piercing words. Though he had grabbed the steel pipe without thinking, every last thought of fighting monsters or keeping himself safe had completely vanished from his mind. He didn't care about how defenseless he was, rushing out into the open, he just kept running, eyes firmly fixed on his goal as he wandered through the darkness. The spot indicated on the director's map...was a surprisingly ordinary-looking house. As the map promised, a letter sat on the stairs in front of the entrance.

*Or perhaps you are a fool.  
The truth usually betrays people.  
A part of that abyss is  
in the old society.  
The key to the society  
is in the park.  
At the foot of the praying  
woman, inside of the ground,  
inside of a box.  
My patient buried it there.  
I knew, but I did nothing.  
It made me uneasy to have  
such a thing near.  
I wasn't looking for the truth,  
I was looking for tranquility.  
I also saw that thing.  
I fled, but the museum  
was sealed as well.  
Now no one dares to  
approach that place.  
If you still do not wish to stop,  
James,  
I pray to the Lord to have  
mercy on your eternal soul.*

James read the letter countless times, but none of the words seemed to register, as if he had lost the ability to read them. All he could do was stand and stare blankly with his apathetic expression at the jumble of meaningless sentences.

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Laura waded through the milky white fog. She had high spirits now that she was on her own again. She was in the mood for a picnic. A little earlier she had arrived at the bowling alley only to find it empty. That half-wit Eddie probably wandered off and got lost. However, all the grown-ups seemed to be terribly afraid of something, and she couldn't help but feel the tiniest bit worried herself... No. It'll be okay. She'd told him where she was planning on going, and so maybe they'd run into each other again soon. Laura traveled west down Nathan Avenue with light, care-free steps. She had little trouble—there were no cars or crowds of people to get in her way. It was the ideal pedestrian walkway, and it belonged only to her. She crossed over a bridge—the bridge that would take her one step closer to where Mary was waiting.

### **Chapter Five -To the Deepest depths-**

Just as the letter had promised, a key was buried at the feet of a saint in Rosewater Park. James clutched the old bronze key in his hand as he traveled west down Nathan Avenue to the Silent Hill Historical Society. Where Laura was no longer mattered, now that he had this new clue. If the letter was to be believed, with this key he would be able to solve the mysteries that haunted this bizarre town, as well as uncover the truth regarding Mary.

Just holding the key poured new energy into James's body and mind; he was even able to walk without being bothered by the numbness in his legs. On occasion, a monster would stumble out of the fog and block his path, but they were becoming nothing more than an annoying nuisance. It was only the same armless creatures and mannequins that he had seen and fought so many times before. James didn't even consider them to be real threats anymore. Still, as always, the sight of their twisted and deformed bodies brought the old, familiar feeling of disgust. Every time he beat them to the ground and bashed them with the steel pipe until they finally stopped moving, it made his mind clearer and more focused. He even felt a spark of what could only be described as sadistic pleasure.

Finally, James arrived at the small museum. Stepping past the reception desk in the narrow lobby, he stepped into a display room with walls lined with paintings and photos. Most of them were landscape paintings or aged pictures of Silent Hill from the past. Only one picture seemed out of place.

[Misty day, remains of the Judgment]

It depicted a giant man, drawn into a scene littered with shadows of people skewered on spears.

"It's him..." James whispered. Though the figure was portrayed as a shadow against an ashen gray sky, its distinctive silhouette was unmistakable. It was the red pyramid monster. How could he explain something like this being here...? Other paintings were accompanied by descriptions printed underneath them, but this one had nothing but its title. Not wanting to think about it much, James moved on to the next room.

There were dozens of photos in faded black, white, and sepia tones, all of them wordlessly telling the history of Silent Hill. As he browsed through the images, James was drawn to a photo of a very

familiar building. It looked a bit different from its current form, but it was clearly recognizable as Brookhaven Hospital. He read the caption.

*This hospital was built in response to a great plague that followed a wave of immigration to this area.*

*It was originally little more than a shack, but it gradually grew and grew.*

Next to it hung a picture of the former hospital director. Furthermore, there were several enigmatic photos depicting nothing but a deep hole. He wondered if they were related to the hospital somehow, but it was impossible to tell as the pictures had no written descriptions. Walking deeper into the museum, James met with another striking image.

[Death by Skewering]

*An execution at the prison.  
Death by skewering or strangling.  
To choose this death is the  
prisoner's last taste of freedom.*

Hanging next to it was a photo entitled:

[Toluca Prison Camp]

*Built during the Civil War.  
Later became Toluca Prison.*

Going by these descriptions of past events, that prison must have been a site of extreme cruelty. James had never heard of anything like “death by skewering” being carried out in colonial times. And if a prisoner had the freedom to choose their fate, why would they ever choose that? What would push them to choose to die in such a brutal fashion? The stories these images told was chilling, and was beginning to give the display room an eerie atmosphere.

Eventually, as would be expected in such a small building, James came to a dead end. However, he was puzzled by what he found in the middle of the furthest room. At least now there was an explanation for those photographs of holes.

“What the hell is this...?” Looking into the square opening in the floor, he found nothing but a gaping abyss. Gazing into the bottomless darkness, a thought drifted through James’s mind: *the blackness hiding inside this pit...is like me. It might even be my destiny... It certainly is possible that I’m just holding onto a fantasy world, and surely a person that crazy is capable of believing that there’s nothing wrong with himself at all.*

Any normal person could guess that, but it wasn’t a guarantee. Just like how sometimes you realize that you’re dreaming while you’re still asleep, maybe a madman could see through a delusion while still trapped inside it. The letter from the house on Lindsey Street was proof.

*That letter was clearly addressed to me. Could it be a message from a psychiatrist? Maybe the whispers of doctors trying to cure a deranged patient appeared in the form of that letter. The*

*patient records in the office, the diary pages scattered on the roof, if they really are related to me, what if they were the doctors' attempts to guide me?*

It brought to mind the words scribbled on the map from the hospital director's office.

*“He who fears being watched from the abyss  
will be unable to look into it himself.  
The truth can only be obtained by pressing forward.”*

James stared again into the hole.

*I'll do it. No matter how deep it is, if this is the darkness of the heart...I should see what's waiting at the bottom...*

With these grim but determined thoughts, James threw himself into the pit.

-2-

James was surrounded by a circular brick wall, a pool of shallow water at his feet. It was a well. A rather anticlimactic place to land considering his grand, poetic talk of “the darkness of the heart.” And now, assuming this was in fact a real well and not another illusion, he was trapped with no way to climb back up.

Why the hell did I ever think of doing something this stupid!? But, wait... After jumping down a well this deep, how did I manage to walk away without so much as a bruise? Even now, my legs still feel weak, so how did I manage to land on my feet...?

James searched around the well, tapping the stone walls with the steel pipe. If he could find a passage of some sort, surely it must lead to an exit. At one spot there was a different, much lighter sound. Bashing the spot with the pipe caused bricks to crumble and open a gaping hole into a dark path. It was a waterway, or perhaps a sewer drain. James ventured into the passage, his footsteps splashing through the shallow water as he walked.

A low roar echoed through the path, mingling with the trickling sound of flowing water. It sounds like...one of those armless things. James readied his steel pipe and prepared for a confrontation with the monster hiding around a bend in the canal. As soon as he met his opponent, he struck the first blow directly to its head, sending it tumbling backwards to the ground. The blood from the creature's wound spread through the water, dyeing it red. Not that this was a problem; the water was filthy to begin with, and a little more couldn't possibly make it worse.

Before James could finish it off, the injured creature fled, padding its way through the water as skillfully as a frog. He knew that by letting it live, it would only come back to attack him again later, but James chose not to pursue the monster. With the passage flooded with water, he'd have little chance of catching it anyway. It'd be too dangerous to even try.

Before long, James reached the end of the canal. A dry path extended into a small room, empty except for a door in the ground. It was a normal door, with a regular knob, only the placement was a bit odd. James had to tilt his head at the peculiar sight. It must lead to a basement. He grabbed the door to pull it open and...

Yet another pitch dark space, so deep that the light of his flashlight couldn't reach the bottom. A wry smile spread across James's face. I suppose the darkness of the heart is hidden by many layers...

He jumped in without hesitation.

The drop felt longer the second time. Could it be...that I'm already dead? James was doubtful. How could I survive those falls without injury unless I was a ghost? But...while this place is far from heaven, it's not enough to be considered hell.

Several tables and chairs were neatly lined up in the room, the old wooden furniture covered in thick layers of dust. This was certainly no well. The place looked to be set up for feeding many people like a cafeteria. The flashlight beam fell onto a human figure sitting in a chair with his upper body slouched over the table, and his face lying in a pool of blood. He had been shot through the head with a gun. This doesn't look like the work of a monster...but who else is down here other than me?

"Killin' a person's so easy... You just stick the gun to their head and, pow! Only takes one shot..." said a man crouching on the floor near the corpse as he raised his head to look into the shining light. He had a revolver pressed against his temple in a joking illustration of his own words. It was Eddie.

"You... Did you kill him?" James asked nervously.

Eddie's expression stiffened, and he shook his head, the gun still in his hand. "It wasn't my fault! He made me do it..."

"Please, calm down Eddie. No one's blaming you. Just tell me what happened," James said calmly, aware of the cold sweat beginning to form on his forehead. He has a gun. I have a pipe. If he decided to point that thing at me...well, there's no way I could stop him. So let's not piss off the guy with the gun...

"That guy... He had it coming! I was mindin' my own business, and he just came at me! Besides, he was making fun of me with his eyes! Just like that other one..."

"I see." James gave an approving nod. "But, Eddie, don't you think killing him was a bit much?"

"It's a perfectly good reason!" Eddie launched into a flurry of shouting, trying to block out James's words. "And why the hell not!? Up until now, I let everyone walk all over me, even him and his stupid dog! They all had it coming!" He was enraged beyond consolation, spewing angry words, his gaze full of hatred. James could only stand in silence, afraid of provoking him further.

Suddenly, Eddie's expression softened again, turning into something more like a childish grin. "Just kidding James. Did I scare ya? No, that guy was dead from the start..." He turned his back to James, and took a step towards the exit. "Anyway...I'm going now. See ya."

James didn't stop him. It wasn't every day he was all but held at gunpoint like this, and honestly, he was relieved to see Eddie go.

It was then that a particularly absurd thought came to mind: What if Eddie's just another representation of my own madness? Another me...or another personality? In other words, he might be a bundle of hatred and rage that could lead to suicide or self-injury in the real world... As crazy as the idea was, he had come to the point where he could no longer deny the possibility.

Leaning out of the cafeteria exit, James checked to see if the coast was clear. Shining the flashlight down both ends of the darkened corridor, he found nothing. At least Eddie hadn't decided to wait out here to ambush him. However, ominous voices drifted through the hall—a sure sign that monsters were lurking about.

*Where am I?* Stepping through the door, James found himself in a dirty, decaying corridor. A row or tightly-packed, rusted metal bars lined one of the walls. The space behind the bars was divided into small rooms...or rather, jail cells. It was a prison. James frowned. If he was really meant to be here, why would he end up in a place like this? Could it be because he followed through the same door as the murderous personality Eddie?

The photos of “Toluca Prison” that hung on the walls of the Historical Society resurfaced in his mind. Could those images have inspired reality to take this shape? Either way, how did he even end up here? Considering the path he'd followed from the museum, he should be far below the lake by now.

Several of the cells contained monsters who moaned as they restlessly beat against the metal bars. James averted his eyes. Though he was happy to see the repulsive creatures locked up and out of his way, seeing them like this invoked a tiniest shred of pity. That unpleasant little shred grew until he was no longer able to look at them. However, he wasn't exactly eager to let them out of their cells.

He continued past the cells and down the hallway until he reached another, longer corridor. In the middle of the passage were two doors directly facing each other. One led to a place that looked to be a shower room, while the other opened into a large, hall-like space. The space was empty, save for one towering structure that sat in the middle. James took a closer look. It was a gallows. A segment of rope tied into a loop hung from the very top, dangling almost like an invitation.

Suddenly, James was clutched by dizziness as an apparition appeared before him. Hands tied tightly behind his back, he was standing atop the wooden platform... The jailors, acting in place of a judge, were reading aloud a list of charges. All of the accusations were directed at James.

“You are lying to yourself by fleeing from the truth. Because of this, your sentence is to be put to death!” At those words, the executioner appeared, a giant man wearing a rust-caked, triangular metal helmet. Grabbing the noose, he quickly pulled it around James's neck...

James staggered backwards, waving his arms in front of his face as if to drive away the morbid illusion. Terrifying as the idea was of being executed in a place like this, he was far more disturbed by the realization that as he had stood there with the rope around his neck, something that felt like relief began to settle over him. As if somehow, he were wishing for his own destruction.

“Help me...” escaped from his lips in a choked whisper. “Somebody please...help me....” He called out to the supposed psychiatrist hiding in the safety of the real world. He called out to anyone who would listen.

*If you're really there, looking into the face of your deranged patient, and if I'm really there, too, then please help me. Use medication or whatever you want, I don't care how rough it is. Just...please cure me of this insanity. I don't want to see these things anymore. I want out of this nightmare!*

Holding back this torrent of words was like trying desperately not to be sick. James ran blindly through the heavy darkness, out of the large room, through the hallway, past countless doors, wandering aimlessly and seeking any source of salvation. Before long he found himself in a small standby room for the prison guards. At the heart of the space was a well-stocked armory. While this wasn't exactly the kind of salvation he was looking for, this place was the ideal shelter for a weak heart.

James picked up a hunting rifle and extra ammunition, holding the cold barrel against his cheek. It was more than a weapon, but a symbol of order and control that offered comfort. It helped to ease the terror. James sat in the armory, clutching the rifle like a child holding a blanket, with no intention of going back outside. The idea of staying holed up here, in a safe place surrounded by munitions, was far too reassuring to let go of, yet he knew it wouldn't solve any of his problems.

Maria was dead. He couldn't do anything to save her. Now he was hiding like a coward when he should be out looking for Mary. Nevertheless, he still wanted to stay shut up in this room. If only for a little while longer...

As if looking for a means of escape, James began to read a magazine that lay open on top of a desk, justifying it with the excuse that it might contain some momentarily important message for him. It was a small magazine—most likely a small, local publication.

[Located in the center of Silent Hill is the town's major tourist attraction, Toluca Lake. However, this beautiful, clear lake has another side as well. Though it may sound like the silly folktales or ghost stories that are all too commonly found circulating through old towns like these, this legend is actually true.

On a foggy November day in 1918, the *Little Baroness*, a ship filled with tourists, failed to return to port. A couple hours later, after the fog had cleared, no sign of the ship was anywhere to be found. In fact, the fog that day was so thick that the ship couldn't even be seen as it set off from shore. Because of this, it's impossible to know what became of the vessel, or how it went missing.

An article written by a newspaper reporter at the time simply says, "It probably sunk for some reason." Despite frantic search efforts by the police, not a single piece of the ship was ever recovered. Likewise, the bodies of the crew and the 14 passengers, let alone any survivors, have never been found. While it's certainly not an impossible story, without evidence it's difficult to determine whether or not it's really true.

In 1938, an even stranger incident occurred. Unlike the *Little Baroness*, this ship was found. Or rather, only the ship was found. Not a single soul was found on board. With the vessel completely undamaged, there was no reason for anyone to have jumped overboard. Much like the *Mary Celeste* in 1872 and the *Carroll Deering* in 1921, the passengers vanished as if they were never there. At the time, the prevailing theory was that a mass suicide had been carried out, but this seems highly unlikely considering it was nothing more than a tourist boat.

More recently, another unexplainable event happened only six years ago. In order to verify the truth of the legend surrounding the lake, in an act that was in actuality nothing more than a dare, two students went missing after venturing out onto the lake in a small boat. We've had the good fortune to have met with a young man who is familiar with this incident, being a classmate of the missing high school students. He claims to have been present on the morning the two set off. However, he believes that the boat was capsized.

“Either way, that lake really creeps me out.” He shared with us one of the ghost stories he’d heard about the lake. “People say that if you try to go out on Toluca Lake at midnight, your engine will die and you’ll be stranded until morning.”

Truly, many corpses rest at the bottom of this lake. Their bony hands reach up towards the boats that pass overhead, perhaps reaching for their comrades. It gives a whole new meaning to the townspeople’s invitation to tourists to “Come and visit our beautiful lake.”

“I personally don’t believe in any of it, but...I know that there has to be evidence of some kind that’s yet to be discovered...”]

James closed the magazine. It was just an article from one of those third-rate paranormal gossip publications—the kind that are always going on about UFOs, Bigfoot, the Bermuda triangle, and all kinds of conspiracy theories. What a bunch of nonsense. But still...it made James wonder.

*I really don't think this is a message from a doctor. So does that mean the contents of this article are just another hallucination? Or did events like these really happen in Silent Hill? Anyone with an ounce of common sense would think these stories to be impossible. Boats disappearing from the lake, getting a letter from someone who's supposed to be dead... But if these impossible things turn out to be true...*

James exited the room, filled with new determination. Doubting his own sanity like that was depressing, but necessary. He had no choice but to gamble on that possibility.

In the hallway, almost directly in front of the waiting room, was a hole covered by a heavy iron lid. Another hole that, of course, he’d have to jump into in order to proceed. First one hole, then another, then another, and then yet another... How amusing. James smiled. *Whether this is a product of my delusions or the hidden secrets of Silent Hill, I guess I've got no choice but to see it through till the end...*

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It seemed the deeper James descended into the prison, the more decayed and ruined the surroundings became. Here, the grimy walls were stained in various dark, reddish shades, and the floor was littered with broken glass and other debris. The small space looked like it had been thoroughly destroyed. On the far wall was an elevator, its door sitting wide open. So this place goes deeper still... He didn’t expect something this far underground in the ruins of an old prison to still be working, but it was worth trying.

Once aboard, James pressed a button, and the doors, which turned out to be metal bars rather than standard elevator doors, slid closed. The elevator began to descend. Looking through the bars as the elevator seemed to endlessly fall, he saw a bare stone wall pass by, like the shaft was carved out of bedrock.

He finally arrived at a passageway that looked more like the inside of a building. Compared to previous floors, this place was in good shape. Even the plaster that clung to the walls was intact rather than scattered across the floor in ripped-up pieces. Along the way, the passage branched off into many other directions, each leading to a dead end with stairs leading further down. It was starting to look like a maze. A maze of the mind? Or a maze to bewilder the one who would try to uncover the mysteries of Silent Hill?



James took a careful look down one of the staircases, climbing all the way to the floor below. As he stepped into the hallway, he heard the distinctive sound of metal rattling underfoot, and the solid floor turned into a wire mesh. More troubling were the sounds of the creatures moving underneath the wire. They were the same monsters who attacked him from under the floor in the tunnel on Saul Street. Instinctively, James turned to retreat back up the stairs. He recalled how those things had given him hell when he tried running through the tunnel. Even now, his feet were still sore after that dangerous encounter.

Something was approaching from the depths of the murky passage. Something with footsteps heavy enough to make a violent clash as it walked over the chain-link floor. Against his better judgment, James turned to see the grim, giant figure emerge into the light. It was the red pyramid monster. There was no sound of a knife being dragged across the floor. Instead, the creature wielded a long, thick spear. It was exactly like the painting back in the historical society...

James was trembling with fear. The mere thought of being impaled by that spear filled him with a sweet terror, stronger even than the feelings that still haunted him of hatred and vengeance for Maria's death. Turning around, he dashed back up the stairs and into the hallway, sprinting as fast as his feet could carry him until he reached another set of stairs. The intense dread of the perusing monster was like a torch held to his back, only encouraging him to run faster. James had no idea how far he continued through the labyrinth. He just had to escape, no matter where this path took him. Whether that destination was heaven or hell was something only God knew.

James advanced blindly through the maze. Any monsters foolish enough to stand in his way were blown away with a rifle shot. Before long, the red pyramid monster seemed to have fallen behind, but he didn't stop running. Running down stairs, more stairs, and even longer stairs until he found himself in an unexpected place. It was a room, separated in half by iron bars. On the other side of the bars was a cell. And in that cell, sat a woman.

"Maria!" James could hardly believe his eyes. She was killed by the pyramid monster in the hospital. He saw it. So how could she be sitting in front of him now? "Maria, you really are alive! Aren't you injured? Are you alright?"

"I'm quite alright, thank you," Maria shrugged. "Of course, now I'm stuck in here. But fortunately, I wasn't hurt."

"I'm so glad you're okay. When you couldn't make it to the elevator I...I thought for sure you were dead."

"Elevator? What are you talking about?" Maria tilted her head, a puzzled expression on her face.

James was just as confused as she was. "It wasn't even that long ago. Don't you remember?"

Maria sighed. "James, honey, did something happen to you after we got separated in that long tunnel...? Perhaps you're mistaking me for someone else? You always were so forgetful. I wonder if you remember that time at the hotel..."

Separated? Always were? "Maria, what are you saying?"

"You were sure you packed everything, but you forgot that videotape. I wonder if it's still there...?"

“How do you know about that? That’s...” James was bewildered. Those were memories that belonged only to him and Mary... Surely this was more than just a woman’s intuition at work here.

“I’m not your Mary.”

“Right. You’re Maria...aren’t you?”

“I can be whatever you want me to be. Either way, I’m me. I’m alive. I’m real. See?” Maria’s pale arms reached from between the bars and caressed James’s cheek. Her fingertips were soft, warm, smooth, and like smoke. James was transfixed. “Hey, come and get me. I can’t do anything through these bars, much less talk any sense into you.”

“I’ll be right there. Just stay where you are.” As much as he didn’t want to leave her for even a second, James tore himself away, assuring her again and again that he would come back for her. He left Maria behind and returned to the stairs. There was another entrance to Maria’s cell, but he had no clue how to get to it in this maze. Either way, he’d have to find his way around this place sooner or later. As for breaking down the door and freeing Maria... He’d figure that out when he got there.

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*150 dollars.*

*For 150 dollars a week, I work at my tiresome job, in a place that reeks of sizzling, burning meat. It is a stench as disgusting and bestial as the lust of men. With their broad grins and vulgar laughter, they stare at the waitress’ uniform skirts, their gazes coiling around their legs as if to taste them. The shameless hands of the male customers—no matter how many times I smack them away, they still persist—grabbing at me, stroking the curve of my hips. Before I know it, they’ve changed into the hands of my father and brother...*

*It’s depressing.*

*It makes me so miserable.*

*How many times have I held a knife to my wrists, but hesitated? Stood at the edge of a rooftop, but couldn’t jump? Swallowed a bottle of sleeping pills, only to force them back up again? It’s like buying a mountain of candy and forcing myself to devour it all, eating to spit it back out, and spitting it out to eat more. This endless cycle of bingeing and purging could go on for days.*

*Going outside is so troublesome. Some days I just crawl into bed and never come out. It’s so hard to sleep at night that I’m constantly haunted by drowsiness. Nevertheless, I lie completely still in the uneasy silence, wary of the sound of footsteps approaching the door. Tonight, as I await the*

*abuse I receive every night, my anxiety grows until it turns into crushing despair. I can't endure this kind of panic.*

*I'm too afraid to look in the mirror; too afraid to face that ugly thing that doesn't look like me anymore. I can't do anything. I don't care about anything. I only spend my days trembling and dreading the arrival of the night. Every day is that empty.*

*Eventually, memories started going missing, swept away by the vacant flow of time...but, there is one thing I've learned. While wandering through an unknown town, I discovered that there's someone else living inside me. A person neither man nor woman, who is healthy and energetic, and yet longs for death. I don't know the boundaries anymore. Is that person me? Am I that person? Who was I to begin with?*

*I want to die.*

*I want to die.*

*That is my one and only wish. But it's a wish that's proven difficult to obtain. I want to die, and yet I'm forced to keep living. I don't want to see anyone. Men, women, anyone. Those people who are always meddling with their unwanted kind words.*

*"Keep at it!"*

*"You can do it!"*

*"We'd all miss you so much if you weren't here anymore."*

*It's like touching an open wound. I just can't stomach that friendly, but completely insincere, attitude everyone seems to have. I want to die! Nothing you can say will ever change my mind! For all your consolation, it's not like any of you would willingly take my place. Such irresponsible people, none of you understand me.... Not even Mama...*

*Even the doctor from that far away hospital doesn't understand me. After everything I tried to tell him during the examination, all he did was prescribe more drugs. The side effects were torturous and soon it became too much. I knew that if I got any worse, it'd have to be admitted. What did you want me to do?*

*It's impossible. Everything's impossible. Even back then, I knew none of them could save me. I knew that eventually, I'd be left with no choice. And now I know that there's only one thing I can do. At least that much is still possible.*

*Trying to kill myself, but always meeting with failure...it's all...because of them. I can never forget what my father and brother have done.*

“Stop it! Stop looking at me with your filthy eyes... Don't touch me! No!”

Angela sat up, pulled from her restless sleep by her own screams. She anxiously looked around the room. This place strangely resembled a room from her childhood home, but she was disgusted to find that the walls and floor seemed to be made out of raw meat, dripping with fresh blood. In several places there were holes in the flesh-like walls where something cylindrical was continuously coming in and out. The entire area was filled with a raw, unpleasant smell. Suddenly, she could sense someone creeping closer. Crawling across the floor, panting with wild excitement, an unclothed figure approached her bed...

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A sharp sound tore through the darkness as something flew past James's face, grazing his cheek in the process. Startled, James fell backwards into the shallow water only to see a spear protruding mere inches from where he had been standing. Even in this filthy place that reeked like a sewage ditch, that monster still relentlessly followed him. The red pyramid. From his place on the ground, James fired at the creature with his rifle. With a power incomparable to that of the handgun, he buried bullet after bullet into the monster's thick chest until it too fell into the water. However, it was hardly a fatal injury. Acting as if the bullet wounds were mere scratches, the pyramid monster began slowly dragging itself back to its feet.

“Damn it!” He didn't have time to deal with this monster right now. Maria was waiting for him. He retreated further into the maze, kicking up water as he frantically ran. Jumping onto a ladder that caught his eye, he climbed until he reached the passage at the top. Looking around, he realized he was at the spot where he started from. At least this was a little bit of good luck.

“No! Stop it Daddy, please!” James heard a shriek echoing through the hall. The woman's voice seemed to have come from within a room on the far end of the hallway. Could it be Maria?

Opening the door, James found himself to be in what appeared to be someone's home. The place was staged like a living room. There was even a television in the corner. But aside from the television, everything in the bizarre room was wrapped with squirming flesh. What was a room like this doing far underground? Before he even had time to think, James became aware of the presence of a monster he'd never encountered before. Its figure was made up of what appeared to be two entangled human bodies covering the frame of a bed, its arms and legs extending over the sides and acting as bedposts.

With its makeshift legs it slowly crawled across the floor. Without warning, it rose from its four-legged stance like a bear trying to intimidate an enemy. The creature howled from its two distorted mouths, giving off a warning cry. It drew nearer, its festering flesh quivering, attempting to crush James under the weight of its body. James quickly turned his gun on the monster, firing rapidly with the slide action rifle. The monster fell to the floor, screeching in agony before it grew still.

Angela was crouching in the corner of the room, staring with a blank, expressionless face. James was hardly surprised to see her in such a strange place—after all, he'd run into Eddie down here too. If they really were nothing but products of his delusion, then meeting them anywhere wouldn't be out of the ordinary. Or perhaps they were real people just like James. Pathetic, pitiable people that were trapped, and at the mercy of Silent Hill.

“Are you all right? You're not hurt, are you?” James called over to her.

All at once her expression changed from apathy to rage. She jumped to her feet and began relentlessly kicking the unmoving monster, spurred on by a combination of hatred and sorrow. Just as she seemed to be growing tired, she grabbed the television, raised it over her head, and hurled it onto the monster's corpse.

“Angela, calm down!”

“Don't order me around!” Angela snapped back.

“I'm not trying to order you around.”

“Well then, what do you want? Oh, I see. You're trying to be nice to me, right? I know what you're up to. It's always the same. You're only after one thing!”

“No, it's not like that...”

“You don't have to lie. Go ahead and say it. You could just force me. Beat me up like he always did. You don't care about anyone else anyway, you disgusting pig!”

“Angela...” James took a step closer, placing his hand on her shoulder in an effort to comfort her. However, he was met with a harsh rejection.

“Don't touch me! You make me sick!” She glared at him, her eyes filled with contempt, and her mouth becoming a frosty smile. “Hey James, you said your wife died, didn't you?”

“Yes. She was ill...”

“Oh really? Are you sure you just didn't want her around anymore? I bet you found someone else,” Angela said as she left the room, scornful laughter accompanying her sharp words.

James silently watched as she slipped into the darkness. He was as offended as one would expect after hearing someone insult Mary like that. Still, it seemed like Angela had bad experiences in the past with men. Even if he offered to protect her, she would only refuse.

After Angela departed, James did the same, eager to hurry to Maria. Fortunately, the hallway he entered into was hardly confusing enough to be considered a maze. He checked every door along the way, looking in the rooms for anything that might lead him to Maria's cell. One room appeared to be a morgue, as it held a sizable collection of executed bodies. This prison used to be a POW camp, but though it continued to be in use, the conditions hadn't improved at all.

Continuing onward through a long, narrow hallway, James came upon a metal door. Considering the apparent need for security, this door must lead to a cell. He peeked into the little room from a small window.

"Maria!" James tapped the door gleefully. *Maybe I can break the lock with my rifle...* Such worries became useless as the door turned out to be unlocked. He swung the door open, half expecting a rain of grateful kisses from Maria who'd been trapped in here for so long. But he received no such warm welcome.

"Maria?" Stepping into the cell, James looked around and a troubled frown came to his face. Something wasn't right. A faint odor hung over the room. Was it...blood? Maria was lying on a small bed, her blouse and the mattress both soaked in red. The stain spread across her chest, proof that she had vomited a large amount of blood.

"What the..." James hurried to Maria, kneeling beside her bed.

"Maria! Maria!" Even as he lightly shook her, desperate for any kind of response, it was clear that she was already dead.

"I...I don't understand... How could this have happened...?" Once again, Maria was lost, only this time she was truly dead. Grief hit James like a knife to the heart.

"...Mary." The sight of Maria's familiar, but lifeless face brought the name of his dead wife to his lips. It was just like before. *When Mary died I...I...*

Oppressive memories swirled in his mind. Chaotic, vague, dark memories...

Slowly, James rose to his feet, feeling like little more than the empty husk of a soul. He gazed vacantly over Maria's lifeless body. On closer inspection, he noticed a hole in her chest that looked to be a gunshot wound. This was no accidental death, and she certainly didn't die of illness... But then, who killed Maria? Who would have a reason to shoot her to death?

It didn't take long to reach a conclusion. In fact, it hardly took any thought at all. Besides James, there were only two people wandering through the labyrinth of the old prison: Angela and Eddie. Eddie was the only one with a gun. But was it him? Could he really have done this? *"Killin' a person's so easy..."* Eddie had said it himself, and with that creepy smile on his face too. *"You just stick the gun to their head and, pow!"* Who other than a sick-minded murder would say such a thing? Didn't he also say something before about being chased by the police?

James left the cell to search for Eddie. He wasn't consciously aware of any desire to avenge Maria's death, nor did he harbor any hatred towards Eddie. He just wanted to know why. Why did he kill Maria? Why did the image of Eddie overlap with himself in his mind?

"Where am I?" The hallway let out into a large, open space. The ground underfoot felt like firm soil, but it was unlikely that he had exited the maze to end up outdoors. By shining around the halo of light from his flashlight, he confirmed the presence of four walls enclosing the space. The only

other thing the light could find was a large cluster of stones that rose from the earth. They were all gravestones. The place that awaited him at the end of the twisting labyrinth was a cemetery. Civil War captives, executed prisoners, and countless other people must have been buried in this place. One grave bore a familiar name: "Walter Sullivan," the name that came up in the old newspaper article from the Woodside Apartments' dumpster. James was strangely attracted to it, but for some reason, it made him feel as if someone was groping around inside his head...

As he thought these strange things, James looked around at more of the names carved in stone. He nearly froze in shock when he came across two more familiar names: "Eddie Dombrowski" and "Angela Orosco." At this point, someone still could claim that this was a coincidence. However, there was one more name: "James Sunderland." The three gravestones were accompanied by the gaping holes of three open graves. They sat silently like the mouths of hungry beasts waiting to swallow up the dead... Eddie, Angela, and James.

Maybe this was Eddie's idea of a joke? Surely someone as disturbed as he was would find something morbid like this to be funny. Maybe this was proof of his intentions to kill everyone including himself. Or maybe, he was just having fun harassing everyone. But if either of those ideas were true, why didn't he make up a grave for Maria? Didn't he kill her?

James's grave appeared to be different from the other two. When he shined a light into it, he could see that his hole was quite a bit deeper than the others. Did it lead to another location? Perhaps it led only to the land of the dead... James stepped into his own grave.

The path from the grave led not to another maze, but rather to a straight corridor. Soon James came to a heavy iron door. The second he stepped through the door, his body was enveloped by a sudden chill that turned his breath white. The room was a freezer, illuminated with pale fluorescent lights. James had found the person he was looking for.

"Eddie...what are you doing here?" James called out, holding his rifle casually, but ready to use it at a moment's notice.

"What does it look like?" Eddie grinned. "He was always giving me shit. 'You fat, disgusting piece of shit! You make me sick.' 'Don't you dare show your ugly face around here!'" The look on Eddie's face turned into a dark, twisted smile.

"Maybe he was right. Maybe I am nothing but a fat, disgusting piece of shit. But you know what? It doesn't matter if you're smart, good at sports, pretty or ugly. It's all the same once you're dead. From now on, if anyone makes fun of me...I'll kill them. At least a corpse is more useless than I am..." He was acting even nuttier than he'd been before in the cafeteria.

"Yeah, Eddie. Whatever you say." James nodded compliantly, trying not to anger him. However, this only served to provoke Eddie further.

"I knew it. You, too... You're just like 'em, James."

"Eddie, I didn't mean anything..."

"Don't bother. I understand. You've been laughing at me all along, haven't you? Ever since we first met. I'll kill you James!"

Before Eddie could pull the trigger, James fired his rifle, purposely missing. His threat proved successful, and Eddie turned to flee into an adjacent room. However, James didn't immediately follow him. He was curious about what set Eddie off, but the thing James really wanted to know was whether or not he really killed Maria. Given the situation, he wasn't likely to get a straight answer to either of those questions, especially since Eddie's rage was now centered on him.

If James walked through those doors, there was no doubt that only one of them would walk out alive. Crazy or not, Eddie was still a human being. It wasn't the same as dealing with another monster. But still, where else did he have to go? He couldn't climb up through the hole back into the graveyard. He could only move forward, and meet his destiny to be reunited with Mary. Still a bit unsure, but prepared for the worst, he opened the door.

The room Eddie had escaped into was a spacious, refrigerated warehouse. Many butchered slabs of meat hung throughout the chamber, suspended from the ceiling by frosted hooks.

"Do you know what it does to you, James?" Eddie's voice came from inside the room. He was hiding somewhere.

"When you're hated, picked on, spit on? Do you have any idea how I feel? That's why I ran away after killing the dog. Ran away like a scared little girl. Yeah, I killed that dog. It was fun. Then *he* came after me. I shot him, too. Right in the leg. He cried more than the dog!" A gunshot rang through the warehouse, accompanied by the nearby sound of splattering meat.

Eddie spoke again. "He's gonna have a hard time playing football on what's left of that knee..."

"Cut it out Eddie!" James shouted from his hiding place behind a slab of meat. "What makes you think you can start killing people just because you feel like it!?"

"Don't get all holy on me, James. This town called you too. You and me are the same. We're the kind of scum who can't even face good people!" Two more shots were fired.

"Now let's party!" Eddie shouted in a voice filled with vicious glee. His insane laughter echoed through the warehouse as he began to fire rapidly. The shots seemed to be random, but they were definitely aimed at James. Eddie knew where he was hiding. He truly was trying to kill him.

*Damn it, where is he shooting from?* James was trapped by the flying bullets, with only a shield of meat standing between him and certain death. The slab of meat shook under the shower of bullets until it was ripped from its hook and fell to the floor, leaving James defenseless.

Suddenly, the gunfire ceased. The room fell eerily silent, save for the creaking sounds of swinging meat. This was his chance. His opponent was probably in the middle of reloading. Not wasting another second, James rushed back towards the entrance of the refrigerated warehouse, planning to retreat into the previous room and block the door somehow. He didn't want to stick around long enough to get himself killed, and he knew that he wouldn't be able to shoot a human as unflinchingly as he would a monster.

"Freeze."

James stopped in his tracks at the sound of the commanding voice. While he wasn't paying attention, Eddie had snuck up on him, and was now standing only a few steps away.



“Ha ha, *freeze*. You get it? Cuz we're in a freezer! Man, that's funny,” Eddie said between bouts of childish laughter. “So do you regret making fun of me now? Are you even sorry? How about you get on your knees and beg for your life, just like I always did? Why aren't you apologizing? You should be licking the damn floor and begging for mercy! Aren't you ashamed?” Eddie was sobbing now, tears spilling down his smiling face.

“Die.” He pressed his finger to the trigger.

James counterattacked, reflexively firing his rifle. If he was going to die anyway, at least he could have this one last act of revenge...

A single shot rang through the frozen warehouse. Eddie was the one who should have shot first. However, he collapsed, falling among the droplets of blood that sprayed across the floor.

“Eddie?” James looked down, too stunned to move. *Did I really...shoot him?*

“Damn...that hurts...” Eddie moaned. He was alive, but just barely. “I went and screwed up. You...win I guess...”

James hurried to his side. “Just hold on, okay? I'll get help, I promise!”

“It's no good, James. There's no saving me. Would you just...finish me off? I can't do it myself. All out of bullets...”

“You want me to...you mean you really want to die?”

“What's it matter? We're all good as dead anyway. You saw it, too. Those graves... That's our fate...”

“Is that why you killed Maria?”

“Maria? Who's that? I dunno, but just...kill me already. Hurry...i-it hurts...” Eddie's consciousness was quickly fading, and with it went the pain.

He smiled. He was finally free. He didn't have to run away anymore. What a shitty life his was. All he ever wanted was to eat something delicious, or watch something funny on TV. That's all. But no one would ever just leave him alone.

*Dirty. Disgusting.* He didn't mind that girls wouldn't give him the time of day. *Fat. Stupid. Scum.* It was the constant bullying that he couldn't stand. *Especially him...that bastard from school. All through high school he got his kicks by torturing me any chance he got. Even after graduation, he still wouldn't leave me alone. So I...*

From out of nowhere, a pack of dogs gathered. The large dogs, with saliva-covered fangs bared, surrounded Eddie in his dying moments. The hideous figures ripped at his torn stomach, pulling out his intestines as they snarled ferociously. They were all the same as the dog he killed back in his hometown. He had taken up his father's rifle, shot the man who had caused him so much suffering in the leg, and then killed his pet dog for good measure. And now, here they were. As if they had been here in Silent Hill all along, just waiting to ambush him. One dog became four, still holding a grudge for their unfair death, chasing Eddie wherever he went. From him they appeared, to tear at his flesh and to rip him to pieces. Even now, this late in the game...

“You stupid dog... You come back to bite me now, after all this time...?” Eddie laughed. With a carefree grin lingering on his face, he died.

After witnessing Eddie’s last moments, James stood. He looked down at his hands. They were covered in blood. These hands were drenched in the invisible blood of sin...

“I...killed...a human being...” His body trembled. His mind froze.

“I killed...”

## **Chapter Six -Memories of the Lake's Shore-**

-1-

On the other side of the door leading from the refrigerated warehouse lay the fog-shrouded outside world. Even after descending deeper underground time after time, somehow, he was back at ground level. If this was a delusion, then the world was running on dream physics, so something like this wouldn’t be that strange at all. If this was reality, then something about the strange phenomena in Silent Hill must be distorting the laws of space. Either way, James was relieved to be free from that hellish maze.

But the fact that he had killed another human being remained unchanged. Those memories still lingered—watching Eddie die before his eyes and knowing that it was all his fault.

It was growing brighter outside. He could see that the warehouse was located on the shore of Toluca Lake just off a large dock, most likely used for food transportation. From where he stood, he could even see the Silent Hill Historical Society.

James walked across the pier, the wooden boards creaking underfoot, and his heart feeling unbearably empty. Taking a small rowboat, he set out across the lake.

“Mary...” The name left his lips like a delicate winter breeze. His destination was only faintly visible on the opposite shore: Lakeview Hotel. If only he could fill his head with pleasant memories from that place, maybe it would be enough smother the darkness lurking in his heart. As he continued to row, staring intently through the fog, James couldn’t take his mind off the feeling of his hands gripping the oars. Those hands were stained with blood. Those hideous hands had taken another’s life...

Something splashed against the lake’s surface. Out of the corner of his vision, James could see countless pale hands reaching up from beneath the waves. They surrounded the boat, waiting for the chance to pull it down to the bottom of the lake. “Come here, come here,” they beckoned; an invitation to lure James into the abyss. He tried desperately not to see them, keeping his gaze firmly locked in the direction of the hotel. It was his beacon to guide him away from temptation. James knew that if he were to look away for even a moment, he’d find himself drowning in those dark waters.

The curtain of fog was drawn away, and the magnificent hotel slowly emerged. It shined through the white landscape, illuminated by the light of beautiful memories. James rowed faster.

With its atmosphere as elegant and refined as a noblewoman, the Lakeview Hotel hadn't changed in the slightest. James climbed the stone steps from the dock up to the garden. Scattered throughout the mist-dampened, vivid, green grass were several stone fountains...just like when Mary and James had walked hand in hand through this garden all those years ago. Now James walked toward the entrance alone.

He felt his heart beating out of control in his chest. He was going to meet Mary again soon. Still, he was full of uncertainty. What if she wasn't here either? The fear of the crushing disappointment was already beginning to spoil the mood. With these mixed feelings, he stepped into the entrance hall.

The only thing that greeted James was the beam of his flashlight reflected off of the glittering chandelier. He searched in the farthest, dimmest corners of the hall, but he found no signs of employees or guests. There was nothing but thick darkness. *What's this?* Something caught James's eye for a split second as he shined his flashlight around the room. He looked again. On the wall just inside the entrance was a plate that depicted a map of the hotel. There was a hand-written message on the plate, as well as a circle drawn around room 312.

"Waiting for you."

Though the handwriting seemed familiar, he couldn't say for sure. But the delicate and smooth letters were a typical trait of Mary's style. It had to be a message from her. James was sure of it. Mary really was alive! And she was waiting for him here!

Now that he thought about it, he recalled that 312 was the same room the two of them had stayed in before. James went to the back of the lobby and ran up the stairs to the third floor. He walked along the row of doors. *310...311...312!*

Resisting the urge to rush inside, James took a moment to straighten up. He combed his fingers through his unkempt hair, brushed the dirt and dust off his clothes, and wiped the mud off his shoes with a handkerchief. He couldn't do much with his jacket and pants, as they were worn-out and soaked with sweat from his journey, but at least now he could be a little more presentable when he stood before Mary. With a tightly clenched fist, he hesitantly knocked on the door.

"Mary? It's me, James." He waited in uncomfortable silence. There was no answer. Fearing the worst, he knocked harder. The door remained firmly closed.

"She must have gone out," James said, as if to reassure himself. *Yes, that's it. After all, she probably doesn't even know I'm here right now, so she wouldn't just be sitting around alone in her room waiting.*

After taking a moment to regroup, he went back down the stairs and returned to the lobby. Maybe she left a letter addressed to him at the reception desk. If she would write a message on the map by the front door, then surely she'd leave a letter at the front desk, too. As before, not a single soul was in the darkened lobby. It was almost as if the hotel had been shut down, but it looked far from deserted. There were little signs of recent human activity everywhere. The carpet was spotless. There wasn't so much as a speck of dust anywhere. Even a half-empty cup of coffee sat on a table outside the café.

As he had suspected, there was a memo for James left at the front counter.

“Mr. James Sunderland,  
The videotape you forgot here  
is being kept in the office on  
the 1st floor.”

He supposed it could be instructions from Mary... Perhaps it was something he'd forgotten during his stay years ago—he couldn't think of anything else. There appeared to be an office on the other side of the reception desk. Since no one came when he rang the bell, he'd have to go search for himself. He found the tape sitting on top of a desk. While he had the chance, he also borrowed a key to room 312 from the key box, planning to wait in the room for Mary's return.

As he was returning to the stairs, James thought he could hear a faint melody drifting through the hall. It seemed to be coming from the restaurant on the other side of the lobby.

“A piano?” He listened carefully. Though the player was very unskilled, it was definitely the sound of a piano. James felt a sudden stab of sorrow. Though she wasn't very good, Mary loved to play the piano. Could it be Mary playing right now? Heart beating rapidly, he rushed into the restaurant, only to find a little girl perched on a chair and gleefully poking away at the keys.

It was Laura. Noticing James, Laura looked up from the piano with a pleased smile. “Are you mad? You thought I was Mary, didn't you?”

“Y-yeah...” James was puzzled. Disappointed as he was that it wasn't Mary, he didn't know how to react to this unexpected development.

Laura jumped off of the chair and stood next to James. “Are you here to see Mary too?”

“Is that why you're here, Laura?”

“Where is she? Do you know?”

James froze with a dumbfounded expression. She was asking him where Mary was? Wasn't that the reason why he had been chasing Laura around in the first place? “Wait, you mean you don't know either!?”

Laura shook her head. “Nope. All I know is that she's supposed to be in this town somewhere. But I'm already too tired. My legs are all stiff, and it feels like I've been looking around forever.”

“What makes you think she's in this town?”

“Cuz she said so in her letter.”

“What letter?”

“The one I got from Mary. You wanna see?”

“Of course I do! Please let me read it!”

“Hmm, what should I do?~” she said with a chuckle.

“I'm begging you, please let me see it!”

Laura, taken aback at seeing an adult beg so humbly, finally gave in. Mischievous though she was, she knew when to quit. Jokes and games were fun, but she wouldn't dare take it past the point that would make a grown-up seriously mad at her. She retrieved the letter from her skirt pocket. It was placed inside a snow white envelope with "To Laura" written on it. "It's okay for you to read it, just don't tell Rachel okay?"

"Who's Rachel?"

"She's our nurse. I took it from her locker."

"...So you were in the same hospital as Mary..." James unfolded the stationary.

*My dearest Laura, I'm leaving this  
letter with Rachel to give to you  
after I'm gone.*

*I'm far away now,  
in a quiet, beautiful place.*

*Please forgive me for not saying  
goodbye before I left.*

*Be well, Laura.*

*Don't be too hard on the sisters.*

*And Laura, about James...  
I know you hate him because you  
think he isn't nice to me, but please  
give him a chance.*

*It's true he may be a little surly  
sometimes, and he doesn't laugh  
much, but underneath he's really  
a sweet person.*

*Laura...  
I love you like my very own  
daughter.*

*If things had worked out  
differently, I was hoping to  
adopt you.*

*Happy 8th birthday, Laura.*

*Your friend forever,  
Mary*

Once he finished reading, James asked Laura, "...You're eleven now, aren't you?" Assuming this letter was three years old, that would be the only logical calculation.

Laura replied with a frown. “How rude, treating me like some sorta old lady! I just turned eight last week!”

“It was just a question. Sorry.” So, Mary really was alive...or at least she was alive three years ago. The thought made his eyes sting with warm tears. “But...she doesn’t say anything about Silent Hill in that letter...”

“You really don’t get it?” Laura spoke like a teacher scolding a clumsy student.

“She says she’s in ‘a quiet, beautiful place’ right? Mary talked about Silent hill all the time—she even showed me a bunch of pictures. She always said she wanted to come back, so that’s why she’s gotta be here!”

It was childish reasoning. It was only natural. Though she seemed mature for her age, underneath it all, she was still just a child. To an adult, ‘a quiet, beautiful place’ implied a far different meaning.

“I got another letter. If you saw it, then you’d understand...”

“There’s another one? Where is it?”

“Huh?” Laura frowned as she dug through her pocket.

“...I musta dropped it.”

“Laura?” Was she trying to pull yet another trick?

“Where’d it go!?” Before James could say anything, Laura dashed out of the restaurant, leaving him with the letter addressed to her. James hurriedly tried to chase her, but she had been swallowed by the darkness that filled the hallway.

-3-

*A quiet, beautiful place.* That’s where Mary said she’d be. Honestly speaking, that couldn’t mean any place other than heaven. Laura just turned eight last week. But that was impossible. Mary supposedly died three years ago, but if what Laura said was true, then she had to still be alive. Nothing made sense. Mary’s supposed to be... It’s no use!

It was too confusing to make any sense. James returned to room 312 with heavy footsteps, as if his despair clung to his feet like lead. He refused to acknowledge Mary’s death. If she didn’t die three years ago, why shouldn’t she be alive and well right now? But if she wasn’t, then all his effort would have been for nothing. That can’t be it! James shook his head in an effort to rid himself of those dismal thoughts.

The message on the hotel map was written in Mary’s handwriting. She came here. She didn’t die in the hospital. She became healthy and was discharged. That would fit perfectly with what Laura said! He remembered the videotape in his coat pocket. The tape he’d forgotten that held memories from all those years ago. Maybe there was something more to it... Maybe it held another message from Mary...

Maybe after the incident that had left Silent Hill in its current state, all the hotel staff and guests had to evacuate. In the rush to leave town, Mary might have been forced to leave the tape behind. She

could have recorded over it, as a means to inform James of where they were taking refuge. It was a rational possibility. *That has to be the reason*, James thought, his steps becoming a little lighter.

But there was still one thing that didn't fit: Laura. If all the bizarre phenomena in Silent Hill were real, then how could someone as young as Laura wander around the monster-infested streets without a care in the world? Having reached room 312, James inserted the key into the door. No matter what was true, he'd never know until he watched the tape. It had to hold at least some of the answers.

Room 312 was a deluxe, twin guest room. Although it wasn't quite as fancy as a suite, it was almost more than they could afford on James's salary. Unlike the dim corridors in the rest of the hotel, 312 was brightly lit by the soft light that shone through the fog and poured in through the south-facing windows. When he was here with Mary, this room seemed to overflow with dazzling sunlight, and you could see the glittering surface of Toluca Lake just outside the window. The whole room felt as if it belonged in a dream. Now the muted light made the room feel quiet and somber.

The television was located on the wall by the windows, with an armchair facing it. James slid the videotape into the VCR, and took a seat in the armchair. After a flurry of crackling static, the video began to play. The screen displayed an image of Mary.

"Are you still filming? C'mon..." Mary said as she walked in front of one of the windows in room 312. Her face was lit with a cheerful smile. Sitting down in a nearby chair, she gazed out the window.

"I don't know why, but I just love it here. It's so quiet and peaceful." She turned to look at the camera. "You know what I heard down at the drugstore? They said this whole area used to be a sacred place. I think I can see why." Her expression turned sentimental. "It's a shame we have to leave so soon..." She stood up again.

"Please promise you'll take me here again someday, James..." As she spoke, Mary broke into a fit of violent coughing. Suddenly, the camera flew into disorder, shaking and blurring until the picture went out all together.

With his eyes still glued to the television screen, James realized that he was sobbing. They were not tears of gratitude at seeing an image of his dearly missed wife. They were not tears of comfort or happiness. This flood of tears was like blood spilling from a wounded heart. From an open wound pouring out a black deluge of horrid memories. The images on the screen began to overlap with the images in his mind.

This is their home.

James and Mary's love nest.

The window curtains are closed.

The room is dark.

Mary lies in their bed.

She coughs painfully.

Staring at Mary.

Standing at her bedside...

Reaching for her with trembling hands.

She gasps, a choked noise that barely makes it out of her throat.

Her anguished coughs have stopped.

The only sound is her stifled cries.

Her weak, frail body grows still.  
He carries her lifeless body in his arms...

Buried deep in the armchair, James let out a heartbroken moan. The reality was too much to bear.  
He remembered everything.

He didn't hear the sound of the door opening behind him.

"James?"

He was so buried in grief, he was deaf to the voice calling out to him.

Laura walked into the room. She spoke in a cheerful voice, "James, there you are! When you weren't in the restaurant, I had to look all over the place for you!" She walked over to stand by his side, but when she looked at his face, her expression turned puzzled. "James, why are you crying? Didn't you find Mary?"

"Laura... Mary's not here," James managed to wring out in a low voice. "...Mary's not anywhere in this world anymore."

"What?"

"She's dead."

"No...you're lying!"

"It's the truth..."

"She died...because she was sick?" Laura whispered, tears spilling from her eyes and rolling down her shocked face.

Standing up from the chair, James crouched on one knee and looked Laura in the eye. "No. She's dead because...I killed her."

For a moment, Laura could only stare at James in disbelief. Without warning, she reached her arm back and slapped him across the face.

James made no move to stop her.

"Idiot! Why'd you do something like that!? You killer! Give her back! Give Mary back to me! I knew it! You didn't care about her! I hate you James! I hate you! I hate you!" She added another punch with every word, the force of her fists adding strength to each blow. She spoke in a small, feeble voice, "Mary was...always waiting for you..." Having run out of energy for yelling, she collapsed into uncontrollable sobbing.

James gently put his arms around her. "I'm so sorry... I... Mary... She..."

"Lemme go!" Laura ripped herself away from his embrace. She ran to the open door, glared back at James one last time with eyes filled with tears and hate, and dashed outside, slamming the door behind her.



“Laura... I’m sorry...” he muttered to himself in the empty room. At the very least, he was grateful for the chance to tell her the truth, even if she wouldn’t fully understand. She was just a child. This was just too much pain for her to have to shoulder all at once.

Noise began to blare from the radio in his pocket, but it wasn’t the static that warned of a monster’s approach.

“...The batter swings. The second base runner makes a dash for third...

...According to a report released by the census bureau, during the first half of this year...

...softest skin ever. We guarantee you’ll be satisfied with...”

It was a chaotic storm of mixed voices: a baseball broadcast, a news station, a commercial all playing over each other. Eventually one single voice, the voice of a woman, waded through the turbulence.

“James, where are you?

I’m waiting.

I’ll always be waiting.

Why won’t you come see me?

Do you hate me?

Is that why you don’t want to meet with me?

James... James?

Please hurry.

Are you lost?

I’m right here.

I’m so close.

Hey, James, I want to see you again.

Can you hear me?

James? Hey, James... James... James...”

“That voice is...” James stared at the radio in silent amazement. He could hear her so clearly. It was her voice.

-4-

*I wonder...are they still after me? Even after this long...* Angela thought as she wandered the hotel’s darkened halls. She was always being chased by those repulsive creatures—those ugly figures that

seem to embody the filthy desires of men. They pushed her to the ground and attempted all manner of indecent acts...

The thought of those things made her hair stand on end. But...the things that truly frightened Angela were the ones who pursued her all the way from her hometown. Surely she was a wanted criminal. The police must have been searching for her right now. There was no way she could be arrested...how could she be blamed for killing them? They got exactly what they deserved.

*Mama didn't help me at all. She had to have known. How could she not know what was happening to her own daughter? If she did know, she pretended not to. I only did what I had to do! It was self-defense! I just couldn't stand it anymore! God will forgive me. I won't go to hell—they will. I don't care if they burn for eternity!*

She pictured her father and brother engulfed in flames, screaming in pain, begging for forgiveness they'd never receive... Angela smiled. Her soft laughter echoed through the darkness.

James finally decided to leave room 312, but the world that awaited him outside the door had completely changed. The once opulent hotel was now falling to pieces. The plaster on the walls was cracked and peeling, a fine layer of dust coated the floors, and the ceiling was almost hidden behind a wispy mesh of cobwebs. Even the back garden, which he could barely make out through the grimy windows, was neglected and overgrown. He had only been in the hotel room for a short while...

James descended the stairs and walked through the second floor hallway. He noticed a large figure sluggishly approaching from the back of the hall. At first he thought it could be a four-legged animal of some sort, but as it drew closer he saw that that is was the same type of creature as the one that had attacked Angela in the labyrinth. This was the first time he'd encountered a monster since arriving at the Lakeview Hotel. The sight of the repulsive creature blocking his path made James's temper flare. *Stupid pest! I don't have time to mess with you right now!* If it was anything like the last one, then killing this thing should be easy. It was his amount of ammo that really concerned him. While he still had plenty of bullets in his pocket, he couldn't afford to waste them by shooting randomly like he had up to this point. If only he could take it down with one shot...

A plan quickly formulated in James's mind. He would shoot the monster once. If he got lucky and it died, then there would be nothing to worry about. If the creature lived, it would likely be damaged and weak enough for him to run around it and escape. The unsightly bed-fused monster crawled closer. James crouched down on one knee and carefully aimed the rifle. Relying on the minimal lighting, he set his sights on what he hoped was creature's head and pulled the trigger. It stuttered and let out a horrific wail as the bullet tore through its flesh...

The monster's legs folded underneath it, and it slumped to the floor. However, it still twitched and moved. Stepping around it, James was about to break into a run when he suddenly felt the monster's forearm clamp onto his ankle. A ghastly chill snaked up his spine at the repulsive touch of the cold, slimy hand. His rage and frustration reached a boiling point, and James began to brutally kick the creature in the head with his free leg.

“Get...the hell...offa me!” Flipping around the rifle, he smashed the butt onto the monster's arm again and again. Finally, its claws released, and it lost its grip. It emitted a low moan as its body withered like a balloon losing air. This time it was truly dead.

James slid to the floor, still clutching tightly to the bloody rifle. His breath came in ragged gasps, and his heart was pounding inside his chest. The moment the monster grabbed him...he thought for

sure he was going to die. After a few moments had passed, he forced himself back up onto his unsteady feet and began to hurry forward.

That voice...the voice that came from the radio...

“I’m right here!”

That voice that still echoed in his heart. She was alive. She was somewhere in this hotel.

“...Mary...”

--

“Mary is going to...die? You’re joking....right?”

“I’m very sorry.”

“But you’re a doctor, aren’t you? You’re supposed to help people! Isn’t there something you can do!?”

“Please, calm down. As a doctor, I promise to do everything I can. However, an effective treatment for her conditions has yet to be discovered.

“...How long does she have?”

“It’s difficult to say with certainty. It could be as soon as six months. It could be three years from now. We simply have no way of knowing...”

As he wandered through the decaying halls, that conversation from long ago resurfaced in James’s mind. That was the moment when he’d been condemned to despair—the ending to his happy life. Indeed, it was almost like he had died before his beloved Mary... Trapped in a living death that left him with nothing but a husk of a soul, and a heart that felt nothing but never-ending pain. It only grew worse with each day he had to watch his wife slowly waste away. His frustration swirled like a frigid storm until it swelled into a cold mass of fury...

James’s search for Mary brought him to check each hotel room one by one. He delved into each unattended room and examined it top to bottom—looking into bathrooms, inside closets, and even under beds. The further into the hotel he ventured, the more ravaged his surroundings became. It was like descending ever deeper into the depths of a degenerate mind. The darkness grew thicker as the lamps illuminating the halls began to dim. The air was so heavy that it felt difficult to breathe. It was as if the atmosphere had solidified into a barrier, trying to prevent James from continuing any further.

Far more troubling was the fact that the monsters seemed to be lurking in greater numbers. Their snarling cries echoed from their hiding places, and blended together in a dreadful chorus. The entire hotel had become tinged with madness.

After he’d finished checking all the rooms on the west wing, he returned to the hallway to find that he somehow wandered into the east wing... This sort of bizarre room-shifting was nothing new. The strange phenomena only held his attention for a brief moment, however, as something even stranger occurred—and James stepped out into what appeared to be a basement. The corridor was flooded with murky, waist-deep water. Seeking to escape from the waterlogged maze, James

entered into a spacious bar, passed through the bar's kitchen, then exited into a passage that lead to the hotel's back door.

According to his calculations, he should be going the exact opposite way he came. If he continued through the boiler room and the store room, he'd be able to climb back up to the east wing's ground floor. As he opened the final door, James saw a staircase just like he expected. However, there was something off about the scene before him. Unlike the rest of the basement, there wasn't a drop of water anywhere to be found. Not only was it dry, but the air has suddenly become scorching hot. It was bright enough that his flashlight was rendered useless, almost as if James were standing outside in the midday sun. Stepping over to the landing, he peered up the stairs.

It was a fire. Dancing red tongues of flame licked the walls and ceiling, and slowly spread down the steps. He could make out the shapes of two bodies nailed to the wall, a middle-aged man and a younger man. Though they dangled amidst the flames, their skin was completely free of burns. In fact, it seemed as if the two were still alive. The scene brought to mind the image of sinners being tortured in the flames of hell...

A person was slowly descending the endlessly long staircase, like a messenger coming down from heaven. However, it felt more as if the world had been turned upside-down, once the person emerged from the black abyss. It was Angela. The breeze awakened by the flames whirled her hair around in a way that seemed almost mystical. Her brightly-lit face was filled with excitement, but also tinged with sadness.

"Mama... I finally found you. You're the only one left... Maybe now I can finally be happy..." Angela said as she stepped closer to James.

James involuntarily took a wary step back.

"Why are you running away?" With a gentle, but clearly disturbed smile, Angela reached out and touched James's cheek. Suddenly, she froze. "You're not my mama..." She quickly snatched her hands away, and retreated several steps back, as if she was afraid of him. "James... It's you..." Her face showed embarrassment, but her voice was filled with disappointment and disgust.

"I take it you haven't found your mother yet, have you?" James asked. It felt incredibly strange to be holding a casual conversation while standing amidst a blazing fire, but he wasn't concerned. The far-too-sudden outbreak, the fact that the blaze hadn't spread beyond this room, the fact that neither he nor Angela had been burned...he was beginning to notice how unnatural the whole thing was. This was just another projection of the mind...a vivid illusion masquerading as reality... Angela's delusion.

Her face turning grim, Angela replied. As if she were only talking to herself, she began to pour out all the hatred that had accumulated in her heart. "Mama...you knew, didn't you? The things daddy and brother did to me every night... But you still pretended not to notice..." Finally beginning to understand the extent of Angela's pain, James continued to listen in silence.

"So I...I left to go looking for my Mama...after she left daddy and ran away from home..." Tears began to stream down Angela's face. They weren't tears of longing for her beloved mother. They were bitter tears of frustration. The tears of someone who was left all alone, and who only desired revenge for all her mistreatment.

"I already took care of daddy and my brother too!" she joyfully announced as she sobbed. "I took

care of both of them...with that knife.” She was talking about the knife she left behind in the mirror room in the Woodside Apartments. That was the weapon she used to carry out her crime.

“Angela...I think you need to forgive them. Not just them, but yourself too.”

“You hypocrite! How dare you say something like that!” Angela glared at James so intently that the fire seemed to blaze brighter. “What about you? Will you forgive me? Save me? Will you protect me forever? Will you tell me you love me?”

James couldn’t bring himself to answer. His silence was met with another harsh verbal onslaught.

“See? I knew it... You’re just another person, dragged to this town to rot for their sins. And you think you can lecture me about “forgiveness”? Don’t make me laugh...” Angela turned her back to him and began to climb the stairs. She stopped, as if she suddenly remembered something. She looked over her shoulder and spoke. “I’d like my knife back.”

James stared at Angela, as if he could uncover her true intentions just by looking. He shook his head. “I can’t... I can’t do that. I don’t have it.”

Angela returned his gaze, her eyes filled with suspicion. “Hmph... Are you sure you’re not just keeping it for yourself?”

“No... I would never want to...kill myself...”

At this answer, Angela gave a heavy sigh. James had hoped to read Angela’s thoughts, but it seemed that she had seen right through him instead. She’d seen something James himself wasn’t even aware of...

Angela left, her soft laughter echoing behind her. She was off to find her grave. The flames swelled and raged out of control, the unbearable heat forcing James back into the waterlogged hallway. He fled from the blazing inferno, and from Angela’s harsh words.

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Cautiously prying open the door, James returned to the fire escape only to find that the flames had completely vanished. There wasn’t the tiniest trace of fire damage anywhere—even the two tortured men had disappeared. That was the proof that revealed everything to be only an illusion. But then...did that mean the hotel’s desolate appearance was an illusion too? Nothing but a hollow apparition?

James climbed the rubble-strewn staircase and made his way to the first floor of the east building. Every door that lined the winding hallway was locked. There was only one option: just keep walking until he hit a dead end...

At the end of the corridor was an open door that led to a new hallway, with the difference that this one’s floor and walls were made entirely of chain-link fences. Underneath the floor, numerous monsters restlessly crawled around. With a heart so empty it could no longer feel fear, James calmly strolled down the hallway, shooting down the monsters one by one until he had exhausted the supply of bullets he’d picked up in the basement warehouse.

At the end of the hall sat yet another room. James stood before the door, feeling an unnatural heaviness in the air. It felt as though a strong resistance were coming from the other side of the metal door...as if the room itself did not want to be entered.

“This is...the last stop...” James whispered as he pushed on the door, which opened reluctantly with a heavy, grating noise.

The first floor lobby was spread before his eyes. Only this time, none of the familiar scenery was present. The sofas, the tables, the café—even the front desk were all gone. It was empty and bare, like an excessively large prison cell. The only part of the lobby that remained was the large grand staircase stretching up to the second floor.

At the top of the staircase, James could see a woman. She seemed to be standing upside-down, or rather, hanging upside-down. It looked as if she was about to be crucified. Standing beside her was the executioner, a huge man wielding an equally large spear...the red pyramid creature. James realized with a feeling of utter hopelessness that there was not one, but two monsters, each standing grimly on opposite sides of the landing.

“James!” the woman shouted in a voice desperate with terror. It was Maria, begging for help, pleading for her life which should have ended twice before.

There was nothing he could do. Shaking his head slowly, James spoke in a voice weighed down by grief. “Stop...just...stop it. Stop this endless torture...”

At long last, he finally understood. These abnormalities were neither chaotic nor random... The true reason for the monsters that continued to block his path...it was all according to someone’s will. But...he had known that from the beginning. He just hadn’t allowed himself to admit it. He had been clinging to a single hope: the desire to forget reality. Even if it meant sealing away all those unpleasant memories.

However, James wasn't creating everything by himself. By his own choice, he had allowed the town of Silent Hill to help build up the illusion. The place was an accomplice. That was the reason he'd been invited. Called to this town just like Eddie and Angela. They really were all the same—fellow sinners all trapped in their own self-created nightmares.

“I’m begging you. Just...please stop...” James’s heartfelt appeal was met with an ear-piercing shriek. Maria’s painful cries echoed through the empty lobby as the monsters' spears pierced her body.

“STOP!!” James screamed. Holding his head between his hands, he soon collapsed helplessly to his knees. He saw the monstrous executioners. And before he knew it, they were surrounding him on both sides, waiting to dispose of the next condemned criminal.

“I was weak...” James said softly. “That’s why I wished for your existence.” He turned to the looming monsters. “I needed someone to punish me for my sins...but not anymore.” He shook his head, and more confidence began to creep into his words. “I understand it now... I have to put an end to this myself.”

Grabbing hold of his rifle, he rose to his feet. With the faint smile of someone who has discovered a great truth, James fired at the pyramid monster.

*The armless creatures were created from feelings of “confinement.”*

*The mannequin monsters, their bodies made up of two pairs of legs, were born from "lust."*

*The monsters that crawled beneath the floor originated from a desire to "escape."*

*These things were all produced by my subconscious...from the darkness in my heart. They're all just delusions that this town's strange power made into reality. Well, not a complete reality. I wonder if anyone else could even see these creatures. Maybe it's only those whose inner darkness matches the darkness of Silent Hill who have to face these horrors.*

*And because each person has a different type of evil eating away inside, not everyone would necessarily see the same thing. There's no way of knowing what kind of monsters Eddie had to face...but the bizarre bed monster was most likely created out of Angela's nightmares. Maybe the two of us carry a similar kind of darkness, allowing me to see and even be attacked by the same creature. That would also explain the phantom fire.*

*No wonder Laura always seemed so calm. The reason she can wander through a monster infested town without worrying is because her heart is pure. She holds no darkness so she probably can't see anything other than an empty town.*

*Laura, I'm sorry.*

*I killed the woman I loved.*

*And I took your best friend away from you.*

James continued to fire a hail of bullets at the two monsters. He would settle this himself. He was ready to dispose of the executioners he had created for himself. He shot without pause, giving no thought to how much ammo he was using up.

There was no chance of winning. From the very beginning, James knew that these monsters were impossible to defeat. He had failed to kill this creature so many times before, why should he be able to do so now? But he calmly accepted this fact. What was truly important was that he stand his ground and fight—to fight against his fears and to escape the stigma of a coward. Even if it meant death.

The creatures' movements were slow, almost mechanical, as they relentlessly chased after James. He dodged the thrusts of their spears and took every opportunity he could to try warding them off, striking them with the barrel of his rifle. Since these monsters were products of a delusion, things that existed only in James's mind, then perhaps there was a way to influence their movements. Up until this point, they had grown strong by feeding off of his fear and his weak, dependent attitude. Now that those weaknesses were gone, the pyramid monsters had been reduced to the same level as any of the other monsters. They were vulnerable. However, they still had the advantage of their steel-like muscles and their gargantuan strength. Their bodies shook with the impact of each bullet, but they never slowed.

In the next moment, the battle was over. James had fired his rifle's last bullet. He knew he had more ammo in his pocket, but as the monsters inched ever closer, it became clear that there would be no time to reload. Without noticing it, he had let his pursuers back him into a corner. They walked with such deliberation, they seemed to be moving in slow motion towards the confrontation's inevitable end.

“So this is it...” A bitter smile came to James’s face. He stepped without hesitation into the range of the massive spears, his eyes fixed on their sharpened points.

*Kill me. Come on you bastards, kill me!*

The monsters stopped moving. They turned to each other, each lifting up its own helmet, and each thrust its ferocious spear into the other’s neck. Leaning upon the wooden shafts like support pillars, the creatures fell completely still. James frowned and cautiously inched closer. He slowly reached out his hand and laid it on the closest monster. It was as cold and hard as stone. The pyramid monsters had petrified, and now stood as statues, like monuments to the remains of a nightmare.

At that exact instant, as if in response, the original letter from Mary disappeared from James’s pocket...

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There was no sign of Maria’s body at the top of the grand staircase. He’d expected as much. James passed from the lobby into the entrance hall. Its state had deteriorated even further, charred from a large fire, like black scars running over what had once been such a beautiful hotel. The only available path was through the main front entrance. However, when James opened the door, he saw neither the fog nor the lake, but instead a new hallway that stretched forward. It seemed to go on forever. He could hear a voice. It was Mary’s voice. A sealed memory that had been released, drifting to James’s ears.

“What do you want?”

“You brought me flowers?”

“Oh, they’re *lovely*...did you bring those just to spite me?”

“Get the hell out of here!”

“When I first saw my face in the mirror...I was disgusted. Between the disease and the drugs, I look like a monster...”

“What are you staring at!? Why won’t you just leave?”

“I’m no use to anyone... I’ll be dead soon anyway...”

“Why wait? Maybe it’d be easier if they’d just kill me now. I guess the doctors are making a nice profit off of me. Maybe that’s why they’re keeping me alive.”

“Are you still here, James!? Get out! You hear me? Don’t you *ever* come back here again!”

Her merciless tirade continued. There was a short pause, followed by the sound of a door slamming shut. As she began to weep, Mary spoke in a weak voice.

“...James...wait. Please don’t go. Please don’t leave me. I didn’t mean any of those things.”

“Please...tell me everything will be okay. I don’t want to die. James...help me...”



At the time, Mary had been weakened by her constant struggle against her illness. Because of the medication and the radiation treatment, her shiny hair, her fresh skin, all traces of her past beauty had long gone. By that point, she even began to lose herself as well. The quiet woman who was once so discreet and kind, became bitter and angry.

She would yell abusively, all her words turning into hateful curses that struck him like nails through his chest. It was more than James could bear. It was such a sorry sight, watching her heart turn ugly as she slowly withered away. The beautiful, gentle soul that he had fallen in love with had gone from the world. That's why he...

More retched memories spilled forth. He couldn't stand to watch her suffer. That's why he had to end it with his own hands...

As if reaching the end of a pilgrimage, he came across one final door. When he opened it, a wave of fog spilled into the hallway. On the other side, he could just make out the lake's shore though the haze. He felt an alarming and strange presence. Through the fog lay the true demon that hid in Silent Hill.

A rusty iron staircase extended upwards until it vanished into the white sky. It looked like a fire escape leading to the roof of the hotel. He knew he was meant to climb it. He couldn't care less whether this guidance came from God or the devil.

A woman was waiting for him atop the crumbling roof. He could only see her from behind as she stood at a window, looking down at the world below. She wore her hair the same way his wife did when she was alive.

"Mary...?"

At the sound of James's voice, the woman slowly turned around. Suddenly, she let out a burst of scornful laughter. "Why can't you get your facts straight? Mary's dead remember? You killed her. She's not here anymore."

As he stared at the woman, James smiled a sad, lonely smile. "That's enough."

"What?"

"You can drop the act now."

"What are you talking about?"

"You don't have to pretend to be Mary anymore."

"I'm Maria! If you let me, I'll stay by your side forever. I'll never yell at you, and I'll never be a burden to you. Isn't that what you wanted, James?"

"I remember everything now. You're not Mary. And you're not Maria, either. You never existed from the beginning."

"Liar! I exist! I'm standing right in front of you! I'll be with you forever!" Hatred distorted her face, and anger twisted her body until she had completely transformed into a monster. *Was this another illusion? Or was this Maria's true form...?*

She had the appearance of a human bound within a metal, rectangular, bed-like frame, much like how Mary had been during her illness. She was suspended upside-down, in a manner strongly resembling a crucifixion—yet another thing that brought his wife’s horrible ordeal to mind. Even in this hideous form, her face—Mary’s face—was still young and beautiful, like a flower blooming among the charred wreckage. The monstrous woman spoke in a seductive, yet loving voice.

“James...why don’t you erase all those painful memories? Erase Mary’s face and replace it with me? That was your one desire, right? Forget the unpleasant past...so you can live in the world of your dreams... I’ll never let you have your Mary back!” It was his thoughts of his late wife that had brought the demon Maria into existence.

*Does she plan to kill me now? But wouldn’t that mean that she’d disappear too? Just like the pyramid monsters... Or maybe...maybe she really does exist as her own personality. Maybe she’s so consumed with jealousy and hate that she’d try to kill me out of some kind of demented 'love.'* Maria intended to disappear along with James in a murder-suicide.

James pushed those thoughts aside. The magazine of his rifle contained a grand total of two remaining bullets, which he had loaded shortly after the battle with the two pyramid monsters. However, even though she had changed into a demon—even though she wasn’t really the woman he loved—he couldn’t bring himself to shoot. She had been his guide as they wandered through the town’s streets together. She had been a smiling face to ease his loneliness. Even now, just seeing her Mary-like face healed his heart. James was lost, but he was forced to run and avoid the attacking monster.

The repulsive monster, with a face shining like the Virgin Mary, floated freely through the air, the open rooftop allowing her plenty of space to move. The sharp claws that extended from her fingertips were jagged like dead branches, and the edges of her metal cage were like knives. With these she relentlessly attacked, with the same kind of obsessive fury of a woman madly in love.

But what was it really? Was it love or hate? Was Maria really acting of her own 'free will?' James hesitated as suspicion began to grow in his mind. Technically, he was facing himself, since Maria was born from his subconscious. That would mean Maria was just another form of himself. Her 'love' and her 'jealousy' were just cleverly disguised excuses he had made to deceive himself. Because he was the one who wanted to die, but was also afraid to die, and he needed someone to kill him... It was this vile request that had turned Maria into a demon.

*I’m such a coward that I need someone else to kill me? How pathetic...* James laughed to himself. He stopped running, and turned to face the creature. He lifted his rifle and pointed it at the demon—at Maria. *You’re not Mary. You’re just a twisted illusion that wishes it could be Mary. You were created because I refused to see the truth. That’s why I...I’ll take everything—the precious memories, the painful memories, even all my foolish mistakes—I’ll expose them all. Maria...this is for you. To destroy your distorted form, and bring back the true Mary.* With those thoughts running through his head, James pulled the trigger.

The bullet pierced through her chest, sending a spray of blood dancing through the air. She let out a cry that sounded almost like singing. There was a dull thud as the monster fell to the floor.

“James...” Maria murmured as she lay down helplessly on the floor. “James...” She looked just like Mary did when...

In a mixture of fantasy and memory, James grasped the hand of his bedridden wife. “Mary... I’m so sorry...”

“I forgive you,” Mary said, a gentle smile appearing on her pale face. “I said I wanted to die. I just wanted the pain to end.”

“I didn’t want to see you suffer anymore. That’s why I... No, that’s not the truth!” James shook his head. “You also said you didn’t want to die... The truth is, a part of me hated you. I thought my life would be easier if you were gone...”

“You killed me, and you’re suffering for it. It’s enough, James.” Mary’s eyelids closed. Her last breath escaped as a soft sigh.

James remembered. *That’s right...after I strangled her, I...I lifted her from her bed, and carried her to the car... That was just a few days ago...*

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“Aha!” Laura let out with a delighted exclamation. “I can’t believe I lost it in such a stupid place.”

Laura picked up Mary’s letter, which had been sitting next to the leg of the piano stool the entire time. It must have slid out of her skirt pocket when she was playing earlier. It was one of the two lettered she had stolen from Nurse Rachel’s locker. This one was the one addressed to James; James had run off with the one that was addressed to Laura. No matter where she looked, she hadn’t been able to find where he’d gone.

“That moron! Doesn’t he know you’re not supposed to take things that belong to other people?” Laura said, completely forgetting her own thieving actions.

“James, where did you go?” Though she was still annoyed, she found that she wasn’t angry anymore. When James told her the truth about Mary, she had been completely shocked, but the more she thought about it, the more his confession sounded like something an adult would say to make themselves out as a tragic hero. Her teacher from the orphanage was like that too, especially after Laura had been hospitalized. He was always saying things like, “I truly feel like it’s my fault that the poor girl’s fallen ill... Oh, but it’s so hard for us to manage with so little money. We want to love and care for them all, but, with such a heavy workload, things slip by...”

What Laura couldn’t understand was why a murderer would cry like James did. All the bad guys she saw on TV, and all the mean people she knew in real life, would be happy and smiling after doing something so awful. But James wasn’t like those kinds of people at all.

*James... If you didn’t think Mary was here at the hotel, why did you even come here in the first place?*

*Fine then, I’ll go too! There’s nothing to see around here anyway, and I’m sick of waiting for Eddie to catch up. That slowpoke, I’d bet he’d just keep me waiting here forever!*

Laura left through the hotel’s front entrance. She walked along the lake’s shore, thinking that maybe she’d be able to find Mary.

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“Mary, I’m back.” James smiled. He had left the hotel and backtracked all the way to the parking lot by the highway where she was waiting. She had always been here, waiting for him.

“Sorry, it’s probably pretty cramped in there...” He opened the trunk of his parked car. He lifted Mary’s curled up body and set her in the passenger’s seat. As he climbed into the driver’s seat, he spoke to her. She was silent, resting inside a sleep from which she would never awaken.

“Mary, I remember everything now. The real reason I came to this town. I wonder what I was so afraid of? As if there were anything in this world that could be scarier than losing you...” He started the engine and stepped on the accelerator.

“Now we can finally be together...just the two of us...” Staring blankly ahead at the mist-enshrouded lake, James kept his foot pressed down on the gas pedal. The smile never left his face.

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Resting in a grassy meadow by the lake’s shore, Laura spread out Mary’s letter on the ground in front of her. It was the one addressed to James. She had read it many times before but...whenever she thought of Mary—the woman she loved like a mother and so dearly missed—it brought her a small amount of comfort. So she read the letter again.

*"In my restless dreams,  
I see that town.*

*Silent Hill.*

*You promised me you'd take me there again someday.  
But because of me, you were never able to.*

*Well, I'm alone there now...*

*In our "special place."  
Waiting for you...*

*Waiting for you to  
come to see me.*

*But you never do.*

*And so I wait, wrapped in my  
cocoon of pain and loneliness.*

*I know I've done a terrible  
thing to you. Something you'll  
never forgive me for.*

*I wish I could change  
that, but I can't.*

*I feel so pathetic and ugly  
lying here, waiting for you...*

*Every day I stare up at the cracks  
in the ceiling, and all I can think  
about is how unfair it all is...*

*The doctor came today.  
He told me I could go  
home for a short stay.*

*It's not that I'm getting better.  
It's just that this may be  
my last chance...*

*I think you know what I mean...*

*Even so, I'm glad to be coming  
home. I've missed you terribly.*

*But I'm afraid James.  
I'm afraid you don't really  
want me to come home.*

*Whenever you come see me,  
I can tell how hard it is on you...*

*I don't know if you  
hate me or pity me...  
Or maybe I just disgust you....*

*I'm sorry about that.*

*When I first learned that  
I was going to die, I just  
didn't want to accept it.*

*I was so angry all the time, and I  
struck out at everyone I loved most.  
Especially you, James.*

*That's why I understand  
if you do hate me.*

*But I want you to  
know this, James.*

*I'll always love you.*

*Even though our life together had  
to end like this, I still wouldn't  
trade it for the world. We had  
some wonderful years together.*

*Well, this letter has gone on*

*too long, so I'll say goodbye.*

*I told the nurse to give  
this to you after I'm gone.*

*That means that when you read this,  
I'll already be dead.*

*I can't tell you to remember me,  
but I can't bear for you to  
forget me.*

*These last few years since I  
became ill...I'm so sorry for  
what I did to you, did to us...*

*You've given me so much and  
I haven't been able to return  
a single thing.*

*That's why I want you to live  
for yourself now.  
Do what's best for you, James.*

*James...*

*You made me happy."*

--

*"I love you, Mary."*

As the car began to slowly sink to the bottom of the lake, James pulled his wife close and gently held her. Their wish had finally come true. They would be together. And now they had an eternity