



House of Weird
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Wallace

Wallace woke with a start. He could swear someone was ringing the bell. He sat up on his bed and waited in silence. *What?* Nothing. Whoever it was, had given up very quickly and now he was sleepless. He hated when that happened because going back to sleep was always a struggle. So he pondered. A big shot of *geneva* was just what he needed to get himself back in bed.

He squinted at the digital clock on his bedside stand: 02:00 AM. He had been asleep for exactly fifty minutes, although it felt like hours.

The room was completely dark. He stood up and, refusing to turn on the lights so his eyes wouldn't suffer any discomfort, slowly groped for the door, careful not to hit anything hard. The corridor was barely lit by the moonlight coming through a small window at the end, overlooking the huge abandoned garden of his villa. He stopped for a moment, listening to the silence that was creeping in as a monster, ready to attack.

Wallace slipped gingerly to the top of the staircase and began to descend, heading for the kitchen. Suddenly, his stomach grumbled. *Oops!* He rubbed it gently, thinking of the only thing he'd had for dinner: a whole bottle of Johnnie Walker. *So what?* There were definitely no regrets. He had enjoyed every single drop of it.

He kept walking down, but suddenly he felt a pang across his belly and decided that he should get back upstairs immediately where he knew there was a toilet available.

The bathroom door was ajar and Wallace kicked it open, quickly dropping his trousers. As he sat on the john, he sadly realized that he was still dressed. *Damn!* He stood up confused, pulling down his trousers for the second time. Now he felt his bowels ready to expel his body's excess, but the moment he sat down, his trousers were again tied to his waist.

As if by magic, his pants were refusing to be dropped, hampering him from relieving himself. His body began repeating the spasms, getting ready for the act, but Wallace was still desperately trying to get rid of his clothes.

And then it happened.

His clothes came off without any resistance and Wallace felt a sudden relief.

But something was not quite right. Although he sensed his bowels working, the relief was not complete as it always had been.

He remained seated, concentrated, pushing like a pregnant woman in labor. Something was coming out, but not entirely.

He heard some steps outside the bathroom and for a second he panicked. In the rush he had forgotten to lock the door and apparently somebody was coming closer. Maybe someone with an upset stomach. But then reality stroke: *I live alone!*

As odd as it might seem, he stood up quickly, but it was too late. A strange man had just entered the bathroom. A man he had never met. Or, at least, did not remember. *Was he the one ringing the bell?*

They faced each other, but the man didn't seem to bother about the fact that Wallace was naked, taking a dump. He stood there, with a familiar smile. Then he approached the sink and started washing his hands.

Who the hell is he and who opened the door? Wallace sat back on the john and before he could open his mouth in a protest, his bowels contracted and began the once interrupted process of defecation.

This time, it seemed to work. Wallace half opened his legs and looked down inside the pot. To his amazement, he saw a mirror image of his anus, expelling what seemed to be a huge turd.

Completely aghast, Wallace acted on instinct: he grabbed the turd and realized that it was too solid to be just feces. He pulled it hard and almost faltered. The thing came out smoothly on his hands, giving him a sense of void, his heart pounding fast. The relief was almost immediate. He looked at the man, waiting for a dumbfounded reaction that never came. The man was still busy washing his hands, as if nothing unusual were happening.

For the first time in his life, Wallace felt ashamed, feeble and scared. He looked at the thing that had come out of his body and repugnance took over him. The thing in the pot was an eel-like organism covered in blood, writhing as if the new environment were not tolerable. Most terrifying was the fact that its tiny little head had a face that reminded Wallace of himself. It wriggled for some more minutes and then suddenly stopped, apparently dead.

Wallace felt his eyes welling up, confused, and queasy. He wiped himself and notice that he was bleeding. The man in the sink dried his hands and turned to leave the bathroom.

"Are you alright?"

Wallace pulled up his pants, trying to hide the bloodstains. *Who the hell are you?* was all he had in his mind.

"Yeah, I'm fine", the ultimate lie. A stranger had just emerged from nowhere, a literally bloody alien with his face on had sprung from his ass, but he was too dazed to ask questions. What else could he answer?

The man smiled again.

"No, not yet. But you will be... "

He winked and left.

Wallace gave him a smirk and then approached the mirror, studying his face. He looked ashen, defunct, as if the last remnants of life had left his body. He touched his cheeks and noticed that his hands were shaking. He splattered cold water over his face, wishing everything would be all right. Then he went back to the pot, ready to flush down the dirt.

Surprisingly, there was nothing there. The water was clean, as if no one had used it before. No vestiges of anything extraordinary. Just a feeling of disturbance, an altered state of mind.

Completely flustered, Wallace believed there was nothing he could do about it. The bloodstains had vanished like magic and a sudden awareness of impotence came over him. If there was any chance of clearing that up, he feared he had just missed it.

Immediately he dashed to the corridor, after the stranger. Nobody was there. The house seemed to laugh at him, his mind racing in search of anything that made sense. And that was when his bowels grumbled again, this time a little louder. Wallace shuddered, praying for the first time after his father passed away, seven years ago, taking away his will to keep on living. His self-esteem had waned to a point of no return and death was all he had waited, patiently, ignobly.

His whole body shuddered and he sadly realized that, whatever was happening to him was definitely not over.

At least, not until his mind agreed to accept the presage about an infallible death sentence, imposed upon him by no one else, but himself.

The Book of Rules

Everything was going well when Mr. Kingsley was charged with murder. He knew he was innocent, but the hardest part was proving it.

The people in the building started running up and down, trying to separate the ones that seemed guilty enough.

They were set in couples, meaning a man and a woman. And the ones they believed to be innocent were sent to the top of the building.

Each woman took her man and went upstairs happily counting on their innocence.

The last person to go up was Mr. Kingsley, accompanied by the manager.

On their way up, the manager pushed Mr. Kingsley and started screaming. Everyone ran in their direction, curious to know what was going on.

Mr. Kingsley did the only thing that came to his mind: he ran for his life. The manager threw himself on the floor, feigning pain. He wanted people to believe that he had been attacked. Mr. Kingsley felt like crying, but there was no time for tears. He ran upstairs, but tripped on the steps and fell.

From his pocket flew a bunch of paper notes. They were all in different colors and one was blue, exactly like his trousers. Somehow he knew that the murderer was carrying a blue note and he wondered how that one came to sit in his pocket. *I was framed!*

He stood up and started running upstairs. Now he knew he was in real trouble.

On the last floor he entered a long corridor. He sensed that the murderer might have a copy of the key to the first room. So, he carefully put his right hand inside his pocket.

There it was: a small key.

He was afraid and his mind was racing.

Slowly, he put the key in the lock and turned. The door opened easily. He sensed the situation getting worse by the minute. It would be difficult to prove he had nothing to do with it.

He started thinking about the other information he had about the killer: his trousers were supposed to shine when exposed to the light. So he pushed the door open, allowing a beam of light to shine on his legs. The trousers came to life, sparkling like diamonds in the sun.

Mr. Kingsley was really getting worried.

So he closed the door and ran. He needed to leave the building, unnoticed.

At the end of the corridor he turned left, bumping into another door. He took a deep breath and tried the handle. It was not locked. He pushed it and a huge library appeared in front of him. He entered.

The room was teeming with people. They did not seem to notice him and for one short moment Mr. Kingsley believed they would help him to escape. *The police shouldn't find me here.*

He moved through the aisles of books, picking one at random.

When he approached the counter, a beautiful woman smiled and took the book. She scanned it and suddenly an alarm set out echoing through the building. Everyone froze and Mr. Kingsley knew the chase was over.

The woman was looking at him, paralyzed, when the police arrived. Mr. Kingsley raised his hands, pleading innocence. There was nothing else he could do. He believed something good would happen because that is how it was supposed to be. Justice should always prevail.

His face appeared on the monitors and people watched him. His lips were moving, as if in a prayer.

Standing next to the door was a tall, handsome man dressed in white. He was the detective in charge of the whole operation. He approached the clerk and took the book from her hands, observing Mr. Kingsley's face on the monitor.

The detective tried to read Mr. Kingsley's lips, but realized it was not necessary. The man was screaming for everyone to hear. Although loud, he did not make any sense. The words were gibberish and the detective ignored them by opening the book to a marked page.

Mr. Kingsley's meaningless words suddenly became clear. The detective looked scared and knew that those were cryptic clues that should be interpreted through the book. They were also the only chance to prove the man's innocence.

The detective smiled, and before closing the book, he nodded to Mr. Kingsley. He understood the man's suffering.

What he did not understand was that the clues would not be imprinted in the book forever. He was supposed to learn them. And Mr. Kingsley would never be able to make that clear to him.

And then he thought: *Maybe I am not supposed to be saved at all...*

The Cleaning Lady

The girl was browsing a book. A regular book for regular people. Except that she was not regular. But she did not know that yet. Or did she?

The boy was sitting next to her, a hand on his chin, punching recklessly the keys on the board of a broken portable computer and, although she could not make out who he was, the feeling of uneasiness did not seem to bother her. She was concentrated in the text, as if in a trance.

Every time she got excited and said something out loud, an orb-shaped object enfolded in bright blue light shined beside the computer and disappeared into thin air. The boy next to her squinted at the light, his heart pounding fast. He did not move and though the girl had not yet noticed it, the boy kept silent. He decided to investigate the cause of that appearance. He took a deep breath and touched the screen carefully. The orb increased its size and turned red, drawing the girl's attention for the very first time. She stopped reading and looked at the boy. The orb disappeared.

"Keep reading..." the boy said.

The girl did not understand. She stared at the computer, waiting for the orb to shine once more. Nothing happened.

"I said keep reading." The boy went on. "Say something..."

"Why?" The girl was confused. "What do you want me to say?"

The boy sounded impatient.

"Just read the goddam book, will you?"

The girl turned one page and started reading. The orb re-appeared, this time much bigger. She found it strange. She pushed the computer aside and the orb became a colored pyramid. The computer switched on automatically and a series of little windows appeared on the screen. She touched the screen and one of the windows got bigger, showing a cartoon scene.

"Uau! What's that?" she exclaimed. "I thought it was broken..."

The boy was speechless. The girl had no idea what it was, but she felt that the book in her hands was special and that it should be read entirely. It made her very curious and before she decided to dive into the adventure, she felt a sudden fear. She realized that she had already been busy with that book for a long time. It came back to her like a blow.

The boy approached her. He had been driving her crazy and she thought that maybe it would be a wonderful idea to read the book to him. *He will love it!*

But then she switched off the computer immediately and decided that maybe it was too early for the boy. *He would never understand it! No yet.*

She felt like going to the toilet.

The house was being cleaned, so she walked out of the room, going around the house, entering by the kitchen door. The bathroom was free and the moment she opened the door, she saw the huge mess. *Shit!*

There was a long red coat hanging over the pot and whoever had left it there, surely knocked the garbage can, spilling all the dirty paper on the floor. She thought about picking them up, but felt sick. She got very angry and somebody came at the door. It was the boy again.

"What?" she shouted.

"I need to go"

"I gotta go first." She was really annoyed.

The boy seemed impatient.

"So what are you waiting for?"

She thought of asking him to use the other toilet, but she remembered there was only one. This was not her house.

"Who the hell did this mess?" she asked.

"Jee, I gotta go now... "

The girl snapped.

"Just call mom, will you? I'm not gonna clean this shit. And whose coat is this, anyway?"

The boy started crying and the mother appeared at the door.

When she saw the mess, she made no comments. She entered the bathroom and started picking up the garbage. She did not complain. She never did. That was her daily job and it was no use in discussing what was supposed to be done around the house.

The girl felt like asking her mom to be careful. But then she noticed that the mother was always careful. She even had her gloves on.

Oh mom, I missed you so much!!!

The mother went on with the cleaning, as if not noticing that the girl was watching her.

The girl would be able to use the toilet very soon.

As for the boy, he would just have to wait for his turn...

The Actor

None of the actors on the set looked surprised when Neto Stevens walked through the door. The director was standing in the corner, a Styrofoam of scalding coffee in one hand and the script in the other. He was explaining to the cameraman how he wanted the next shot to be done.

Neto felt a little uncomfortable at the beginning, despite the strong feeling that everything would be okay. It was his first time in front of the cameras, although the idea was still bothering him. Nobody had prepared him for that, and now it was too late to back off.

The director finished talking to the cameraman and approached Neto.

"Ready for your scoop?"

Neto scoffed. "What d'you mean?"

The director smiled.

"C'mon, you know why you're here. You're not an actor and still were picked for the best scene in the most secret movie ever made. That asshole must know what he's doing"

Neto did not reply. The asshole in question was the guy he had never met. Besides, no one explained why he was suddenly summoned to star in a film he had no idea why they were making. Everything was odd and the more he asked, the more confusing it became. He felt sucked in an unexpected situation.

The main actor came out of his dressing room. He passed by Neto without acknowledging his or anybody else's presence, as if nothing were more important in the world than himself.

What a suck up! Neto tried to ignore the thug, but found it difficult because the director had made it clear how important it was that the star felt how important his presence in the film was.

Neto named the star *Mr. Cocky*.

The extras took over the street in a rehearsed mess, confusing Neto Stevens, who kept running in the direction of the bridge. Nobody told him when to stop, so he kept going.

The car advanced and the extras screamed. Neto Stevens stopped for a moment and looked back. The car was going to hit him, so he climbed the railings of the bridge and jumped.

The director screamed cut.

He was furious. Everyone fell silent. It was too late. Neto Stevens was gone.

Neto Stevens looked solemn. A strange feeling of *deja vu* floating in the air...

A Tattered Stool

Mary Ann decided that no amount of pain would keep her from doing what she had in mind. She was determined to enter the building, holding her head up high, and get it over with.

She arrived ten minutes earlier, but that obviously did not make any difference, since everyone in the Company had been a number and human quality had always been taken for granted. Furthermore, she had already been fired. So many years of dedication and no recognition at all.

Mary Ann crossed the beautiful lobby and was surprised when she found no one at the reception desk to bid her good morning. She waited for a while, but it soon became clear that nobody would be able to see her.

"Hello... ", she called out, approaching the main door.

No one answered, so she entered.

The whole room was quiet. A few people were talking to each other, apparently with nothing to do.

That's how they spend their time, those losers.

The room was huge, occupied by several tables with high-tech, flat-screen computers which must have cost a fortune, despite the low wages paid to the experts who operated them. She looked around, examining the place.

A spiral staircase was located in the center of the room and after some thinking Mary Ann started climbing it without any reluctance. Some people looked up at her, but did not say a word. They did not seem to understand the reason why things happened in that place. They just stared.

On her way up she passed a fat, smelly, flabby old man who had no idea of who she was. *No wonder!* The man was half naked and the climbing had taken its toll on him. He looked tired, miserable and unhappy. *He'll probably never get to the top. And the worst thing is that he doesn't know that yet.*

Mary Ann kept her pace without looking back. She just wanted to finish what she had come to do, whatever that might be.

When she reached the first floor, Mary Ann met a young man called Peter, who seemed to be waiting for her. Their relationship was purely professional, and still inclined for disappointment.

"I knew you would come." He nodded upward. " It's standing up there, waiting for you"

Mary Ann feigned dissatisfaction.

"Why the hell am I the only one who needs to do this? That fucking dog has nothing to do with me." She had to persuade him of her anger.

Peter seemed to be happily resilient.

"*That* is none of my business, sweetheart. Just get up there and do it." And then he smirked.

Peter was the IT guy and all his computer knowledge had proved useless for the task ahead.

"I could do it myself if it was an Aibo." he said. "You know, the Sony dog? But these real ones are just hopeless. Good luck to you."

Mary Ann grunted and then began inspecting the ladder.

Thirty-six rungs of metal covered by a spotless white piece of cloth. Very odd. But, then, things hardly made any sense in that place.

"Why white?" she demanded, somehow making conversation. "It's gonna get dirty."

Peter looked struck.

"What do you care? You don't even work here anymore."

Mary Ann felt her rage building up. *Because of you, asshole!* She grabbed the bottom of the ladder and began to climb it.

The ladder swerved right and left making her lose her balance.

"What the fuck..." she knew that would happen. *So why do I even try it?*

Everyone who was talking stopped to watch. She fumbled with the ladder for a while and then suddenly stopped. *There has to be another way...*

She climbed back down, ignoring the startled look on Peter's face. He sensed she was up to something, but did not dare to interfere.

Mary Ann walked to the corner of the room where she found a big locker, jam-packed with all sorts of strange objects. She started throwing everything out on the floor, instinctively in search of the only thing that would make her task a little easier.

Peter stood there in silence, wondering if it had been a good idea to drag Mary Ann there and watch her tearing the office apart.

Before the locker was empty, Mary Ann heaved a sigh. And with a big smile on her face, she lifted the so precious object that she was looking for: a small tattered stool, with a hole in the middle.

"What is that?" Peter asked, curiously.

Mary Ann approached him, carrying the stool.

"That's my one and only friend. He helped me all those years that I slaved for this joint. And now he's going to help me one last time."

"How come I never saw it? And what did you use it for?"

"For the only thing that it was made for. To fetch all the stupid dogs that the management brings in here." She nudged him. "Get off my way."

Peter stepped aside, still wondering why they never had taught him how to be more independent.

"Why are you doing this?" he asked.

Mary Ann looked at him, scoffing.

"I have absolutely no idea... I just feel like it's the right thing to do."

She placed the stool next to the ladder. The dog looked at her and started wiggling his tail. *The asshole likes me.*

The fat, smelly man that she had passed on the staircase reached the floor and smiled.

"I've made it!" he sounded pleased.

Mary Ann tried to ignore him. *Well, aren't things different here... ?*

And then, ready for the task ahead, she climbed the stool and spread her arms, keeping her legs apart so that the hole in the middle remained open, and took a deep breath, her eyes closed tight.

The lights went out and a single beam of light emerged from the hole in the stool, hitting the dog and bouncing back at the same time.

The whole room replenished with light and two minutes later darkness fell, not a single sound.

Slowly, Mary Ann opened her eyes and looked around. Everyone was gone. *Shit!*

But then, a smirk appeared on her face. She had not planned it that way, although it made her feel good. And Peter, the main target, would be the only one to blame.

He had never bothered to clean up the locker because that was not his job. And even if he had, he would never realise that the tattered stool had been left behind on purpose, by the only person he despised. He hated dogs, and Mary Ann knew how fond the management was of them. She knew they would call her when they found out the dog was gone mad. They were not engineered to last forever. And Peter was the last person they would entrust to do the job because he was a nerd.

What the management did not know was that Peter was a dog in the manger himself. And Mary Ann had been the only one to realize the case, which had been now set to rest once and for all.

Pool

Claire was standing on the porch, waiting.

Robert seemed very impatient, but could not say a word. She had forbidden him of making any sort of comment in order to keep the conversation as friendly as possible. She wished he had stayed home, but he insisted in coming with her. He was afraid Jack would make a scene and become violent. But she assured him that Jack was not like that. He understood that their relationship was over and the only wise thing to do was to move on to a better one. Robert was smart, intelligent and could provide her with the kind of understanding she was looking for. And Jack agreed.

Robert had been living with her for three months already and Jack had taken it very well. Apparently, too well. She even sensed a little excitement that bothered her for a while, but in the end she realized that her skepticism was turning her into a cynical person. And she resented that. She still believed in love and refused to become bitter. So she stood there, smiling and praying that their last encounter would go as smoothly as she had envisioned. *Just give him the keys and leave with a smile.*

"I'm gonna miss this house..." she sighed.

Robert rolled his eyes, but kept his mouth shut.

In that moment Jack's car stopped in front of the gate and he, to her surprise, got out accompanied by four women. He marched haughtily in her direction and for one split second she believed herself feeling a pang of jealousy. *What the hell...*

Robert grumbled as if realizing that, by insisting in coming with her, he had made the worst decision of his life. Suddenly her rehearsed smile didn't seem so natural. And he noticed it.

"Just give him the keys and let's go", he mumbled trying to be supportive.

Jack approached them.

"Well, there you are. Right on time, as always."

"I never gave you reason to complain during the time we were together. You didn't think I would do it now, did you?" She couldn't take it lying down.

He turned to Robert and smiled. "You must be Robert. It's a pleasure to meet you."

Robert nodded. He seemed a little uncomfortable. He took her arm and pushed her gently.

"Ok, baby, let's get this over with."

Jack gave him a smirk.

"Afraid she might fall in love again in the next few minutes?" He grunted. "Don't worry, she wouldn't have the same luck."

While trying to keep her calm, Claire turned to Robert and gave him a kiss.

"It's ok, honey. Just wait for me in the car, will you?"

Robert pursed his lips and left. He didn't want to interfere. She had assured him that Jack was a decent person. But suddenly, she did not feel so sure about that anymore.

"I am not gonna reason with you, Jack. I've been doing this for years and I'm tired. Just take the *damn* keys and go play with your Barbies."

"Ooh! Are *you* jealous? I never thought I'd see the day." And then he pursed his lips, looking for a joke. "You're still in my heart, don't worry."

"Go to hell!"

Claire shoved the keys into his hands and left.

When she came outside the gate, she looked both ways but could not find Robert. Her head was buzzing and she thought she was going to faint. She strained her eyes trying to focus on the street ahead. It was a little dark and she realized that night was falling. She had to get away from there as soon as possible. But she also needed to find Robert and that was bothering her. *Why would he leave me like this?*

Claire came to a stop at the end of the street, taking stock. *Where the hell am I?*

She was all alone walking a strange neighborhood and everything seemed unusual. She looked back and could not find Jack's house. *This is crazy!* So she kept on walking.

After ten minutes Claire came to a crowded street where people were watching an extremely high crane in movement, its body hidden by a massive wall and although Claire understood it was a construction site, she wondered what they would be building on that place. So she approached it carefully, dodging the bunch of nosy pedestrians.

What Claire saw was nothing she had expected. A huge pool full of people laid across the site. Amazingly, the crane's body was perched inside the space and the people in the pool seemed very relaxed, while playing water polo.

Claire pursed her lips trying to comprehend what was going on. The only thing that made sense had been the encounter she had had with her ex-husband some time ago. She didn't dare set a time frame, since

everything seemed surreal. It could have been yesterday or it could not even have happened. *Who knows?*

While completely absorbed by the scene in front of her, she realized that the people in the pool were not all strangers. In one corner of the pool she saw the four women who had accompanied Jack when he came to the house. And, to her surprise, Jack was in the center, holding the ball.

They did not seem to notice her presence and she did not bother to draw attention to herself.

Slowly she backed off, crossing the street, trying to avoid any more surprises.

Suddenly, people screamed. Claire looked up and she saw the crane suspended in the air, clutching a shark-shaped bomb over everyone's head. People started running and Claire did not flinch. *This is just crazy!* But the crane came crashing down and before she was smashed under that nonsense, she decided to run.

She ran like she had never done in her entire life. People laughed, but she did not stop. She just wanted to get away from the place.

The crane crashed over the pool and she felt her whole body shudder. The noise was deafening and Claire believed that everybody was dead.

Convinced that nothing could be done, she stopped running. The danger had passed and she refused to look back at the commotion. *It's too late! I just wanna go home!*

Claire took a short cut and came to a quiet street. She was walking past an apartment building when she saw a beautiful little girl leaning over a window. She waved and smiled and when the girl waved back, she lost her balance and started falling. Claire screamed, but her voice did not come out. The mother appeared on the window and stretched her arms, catching the girl before she hit the ground. The girl smiled and Claire noticed that she was not afraid. The woman closed the window and disappeared into the room.

Claire took a deep breath. Then she began to walk. And at the end of the street, she turned right. Robert was sitting at the wheel, waiting for her. When she approached him, he smiled.

"That was fast..." he said, looking over his sunglasses.

She looked back and saw Jack's house. It was empty.

"I don't wanna talk about it. It's all in the past. Let's go home"

She opened the door and stepped inside. They kissed.

Five minutes later she was driving home.

There was only one person in the car.

The Colony

Mario knew that he had been fired. Still, he found himself walking around the Company, a little lost, depressed. There was something he was supposed to do and no matter how hard he tried, he couldn't bring himself to remember what.

He walked to the cafeteria, anxious to talk to someone. He was very sure that all his colleagues were planning something and felt like he needed to warn whoever was being framed. Because that was the right thing to do.

Mario found everyone sitting at the table, having lunch. But the moment he entered the room, all the others stood up and left immediately. Only Joan, a beautiful skinny girl with dark skin stayed behind.

She looked in his eyes and said:

"What's the matter with you? You look worried!"

Mario tried to conceal his anxiety behind a smile, but his lips twitched.

"I just feel like something's is not right. And nobody wants to talk to me. I'm scared!"

Joan gave him a smile and touched him kindly on the arm.

"There's nothing to worry about. Come with me." She pulled him gently and they both left the room, arm in arm. They walked to the main floor of the building, which was decorated with balloons, ribbons, streams and lots of confetti all over the floor. All in black and red.

Mario looked around and opened his mouth in astonishment.

"How did they do this so fast? It wasn't here before... "

Joan pushed him softly to the center of the room and people immediately huddled in a big circle, leaving Mario alone in the center.

"Everything is possible... " she said.

Mr. Dodger, the manager, came forward and started applauding and everyone followed suit. Mario muffled his ears with his hands while everyone cheered and laughed, louder and louder. Mario felt embarrassed. He closed his eyes and ran. Strangely enough, nobody stopped him.

Pushing everyone aside, he reached for the door. People followed him unhurriedly, but he managed to get out of the building alone.

It was already dark outside. Mario looked at his watch and remembered that he had left it on his nightstand. He had been late for work and believed he didn't need a constant reminder on his wrist. But

now, he wished he hadn't been such a coward. He needed the notion of time.

The moon was bright and the air was cold. He looked left and right and could not recognize where he was. This is not my work address! So he looked back at the building and a shiver ran through his whole body. There was nothing there. An empty space, brightly lit by the moonlight, occupied the site where the building had once been. This is sick!

He turned quickly and was surprised by a long road before him, surrounded by what seemed a massive desert. He noticed that he was walking completely alone. There were lots of things that he didn't understand, but his instincts told him he was going on the right direction. He started running.

After almost half an hour Mario stopped, gasping. The cold air filled his lungs, making him a little dizzy. He took his bearings and realized he was standing on a fork. Apparently the road on the right led to an outlandish forest and the one on the left, to the city. He could see the tall buildings in the distance and for a moment he felt relieved. So he did what made more sense to him: he turned left.

One hour later he entered the city through the main avenue and was soon engulfed by a huge group of people, talking in different languages. They seemed very excited about something. Huge spotlights lit the place as if the sun had suddenly emerged from nowhere.

Mario approached an old man who was sitting at the curb and crouched next to him.

"Excuse me, sir. Could you please tell me what happened?"

The old man did not reply. He just stood up slowly and walked away. Mario followed him.

"Hey, sir... Excuse me... " But the man kept going.

As they both reached the end of the street, Mario noticed the confusion. A huge bridge appeared in the distance. He looked around, searching for the old man, but he had disappeared in the crowd. Dozens of people - men and women - were hammering, drilling and shouting at each other in a well-choreographed sort of dance. A big team of hard workers entranced by their mission.

Mario had no idea what they were up to. The bridge was a very high and long structure and it seemed to be in perfect condition. Nevertheless, they were very busy working on it.

Mario stood in the middle of the street trying to focus, looking at the commotion under the bridge. Nothing made sense. So he did the first

thing that came to his mind. I gotta move on! He went up to one of the workers and asked for directions.

"You cant' go back, that's for sure." The man responded. "And you can't cross the bridge, either. I don't thing it is safe. Besides, no one here is worried about this big monster, anyways!"

"Any suggestions?" Mario was starting to loose his patience.

"Just sit and wait till we're done."

Mario scoffed. I don't think so! And with that he dashed under the monstrous bridge. Everyone stopped working and looked at him, as if watching a crazy little kid annoying his parent. There was a big explosion behind and he didn't dare looking back. He was sure he was in trouble.

Hell broke loose and people screamed and shouted. Something was happening at the back, but Mario refused to look. He kept running forward while dodging the crowd, and looking up at the roof of the bridge that seemed to come closer every step of the way. His heart was pounding faster and he had no idea what would happen next. The dust was getting darker and his vision was getting blurred. Something really bad was happening and the only one thing in his mind was the beam of light at the end of the street. He needed to get out alive.

As Mario reached the end of the bridge, he climbed a very steep slope. At the top, gasping for air, he finally looked back over the whole construction site. And then he saw the tragedy. The second block of the bridge gave in, smashing everyone under it. Mario felt as if his heart was shrinking, unable to move. The rest crumbled like a sand castle on a windy beach. Slowly, but deadly.

Mario raised his right hand, holding a tiny little box with a screen. He didn't bother where it came from. He just watched the little screen filled with live action of the

destruction being transmitted all over the world. And there was nothing he could do about it. He closed his eyes and dropped the little box in a garbage can. He needed to continue his journey. He took a deep breath and walked away from the mess. Darkness fell and a long walk later he came back at the fork.

I'm walking in circles!

The left road had proved to be a bad idea and although he didn't understand how he returned to the same spot, he was glad he had been given a second chance. So he turned right and, surreptitiously, entered the forest.

Silence was deafening and Mario felt scared. But he also had a feeling that the answer to everything that was happening to him was lurking behind those trees. He had no other choice but to face his lot.

The moon lit up the pathway and Mario walked slowly for a while until he reached a bald space. The misty air was getting colder by the minute and the sound of footsteps behind him broke the silence. He stopped, frozen. His heart was pounding faster, but he dared looking back. And, to his amazement, he saw Joan.

"What are you doing here?" Mario asked, a mixed sense of relief and fear filling his heart. "I think I'm going crazy!"

Joan approached him and touched his face. She smiled.

"No, you're not. You'll be fine."

Mario didn't like the touch of her hand. It was different than before. He backed off.

"What's going on, Joan?"

She smiled again, finally showing her fangs. Mario opened his mouth to scream, but no sound came out. He started running and all the other creatures came out from their hiding places, trying to block his way. He pushed them aside with all his strength and kept running.

"Get him!" Joan's voice echoed in the air. She flew past him and landed a few meters ahead. The others followed suit and for one second Mario believed his life was over. He came to a stop.

The vampires landed beside Joan. It was now clear that she was the head of the Colony. And she was dictating the rules.

"Just relax, Mario." She said smiling. "You have nowhere to go. This is your home now. Welcome to the Colony."

Mario took one step back and clenched his fists.

"Not as long as I live... "

Everybody laughed out loud. Joan approached him and offered her hand.

"My thoughts, exactly... "



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