



# HACKTORIA

## THE KILLER CLOWN



# Chapter 1: The Watcher

Melany Parker loved October in Berkeley. The way the morning fog rolled in from the bay, how the maple trees along her street turned brilliant shades of orange and red, and the excited buzz of Halloween preparations everywhere she went.

At twenty-three, she was too old for trick-or-treating but not too old for the thrill of the season.

She stepped out of her apartment in Northwest Berkeley, adjusting her scarf against the morning chill. The golden California sunlight was just beginning to burn away the fog as she locked her door and headed toward the coffee shop where she worked part-time while finishing her master's degree in environmental science.

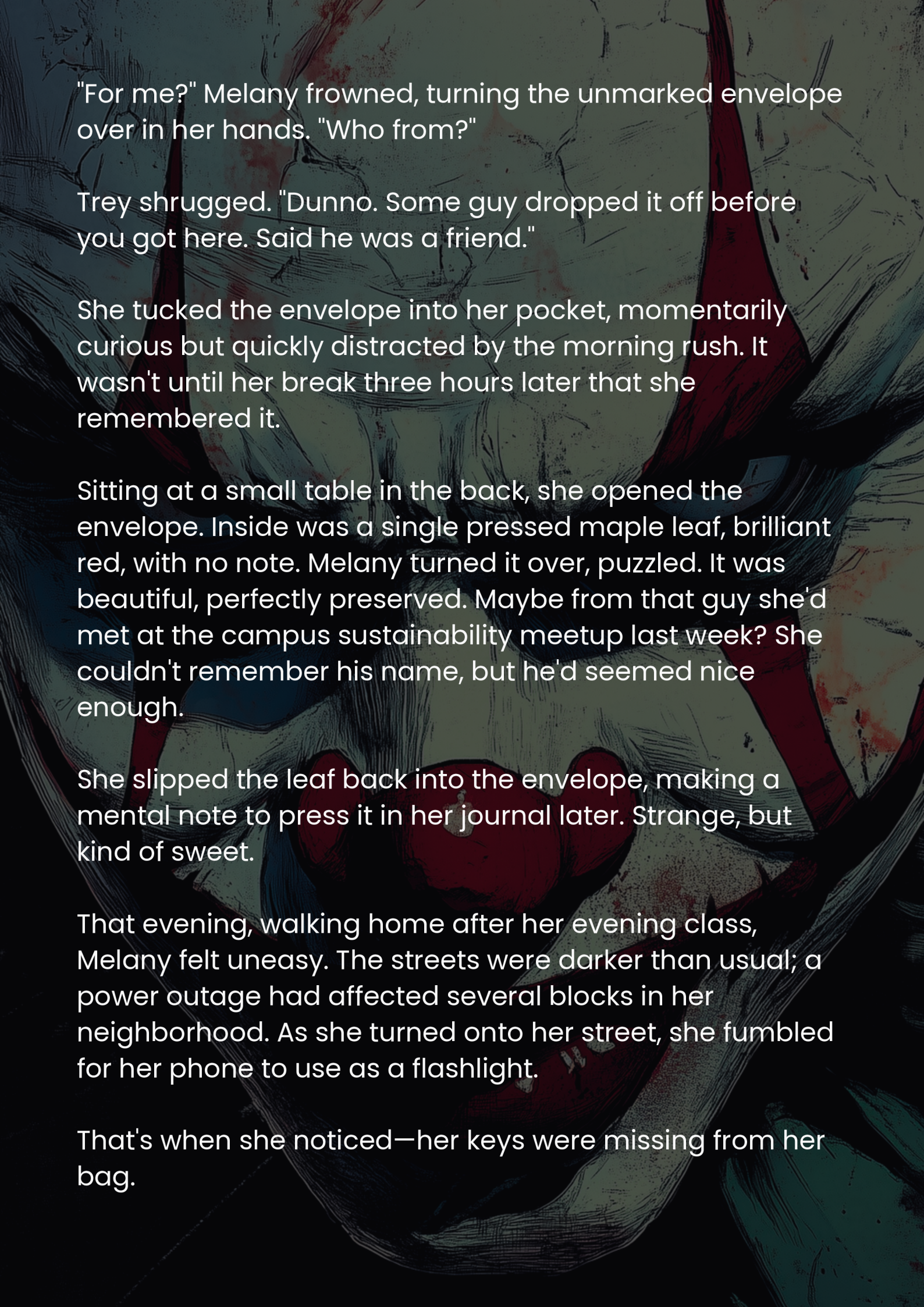
"Morning, Mel!" called Mrs. Abernathy from across the street, walking her corgi. "Beautiful day, isn't it?"

Melany waved and smiled. "Perfect! Have a good one!" She didn't notice the figure watching from a parked car half a block away, or how the same car had been there yesterday, and the day before.

The coffee shop was busier than usual. Melany tied her apron with practiced efficiency, nodding to her coworker Trey as she took her position behind the counter.

"Someone left something for you," Trey said, sliding a small envelope across the counter.





"For me?" Melany frowned, turning the unmarked envelope over in her hands. "Who from?"

Trey shrugged. "Dunno. Some guy dropped it off before you got here. Said he was a friend."

She tucked the envelope into her pocket, momentarily curious but quickly distracted by the morning rush. It wasn't until her break three hours later that she remembered it.

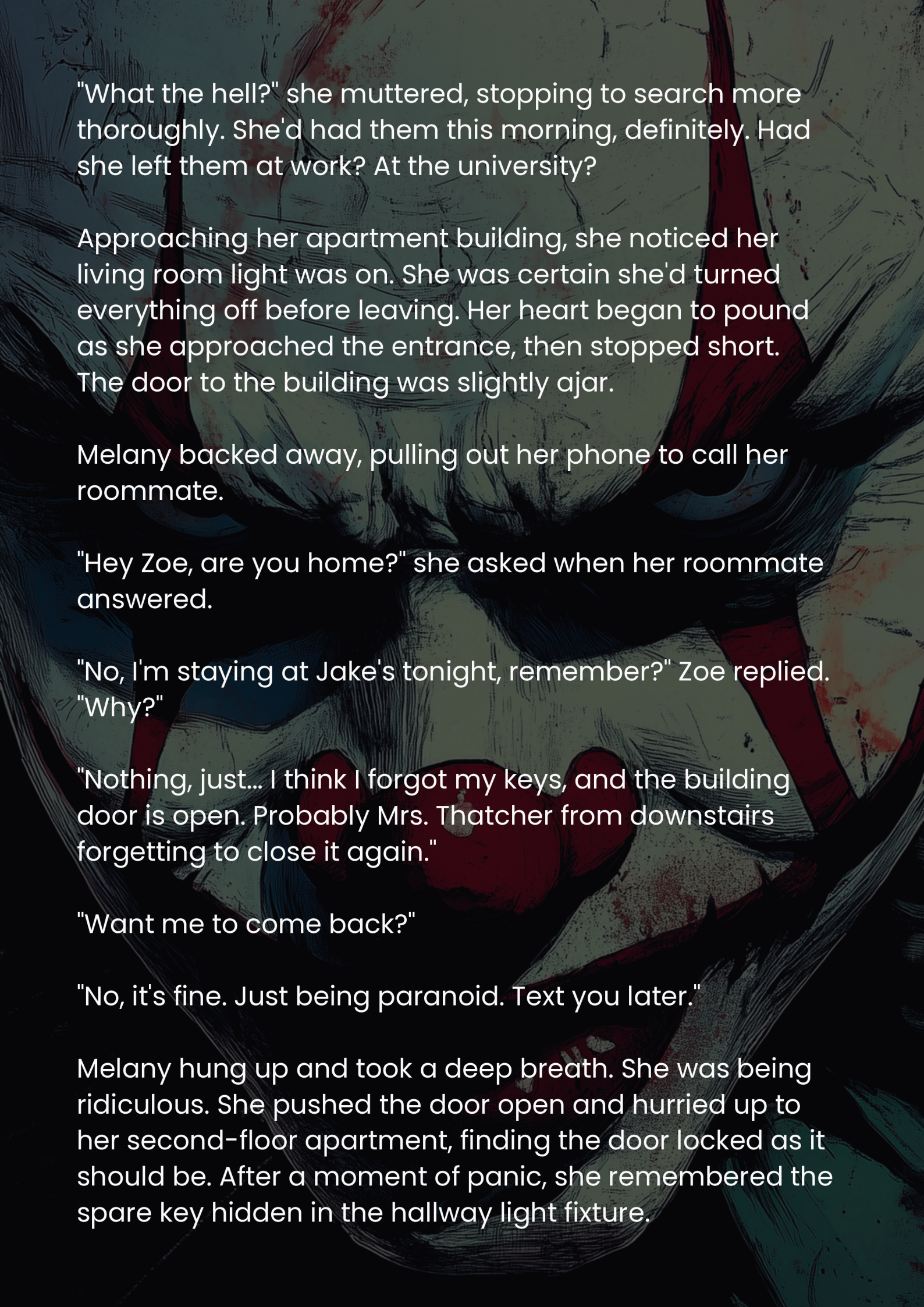
Sitting at a small table in the back, she opened the envelope. Inside was a single pressed maple leaf, brilliant red, with no note. Melany turned it over, puzzled. It was beautiful, perfectly preserved. Maybe from that guy she'd met at the campus sustainability meetup last week? She couldn't remember his name, but he'd seemed nice enough.

She slipped the leaf back into the envelope, making a mental note to press it in her journal later. Strange, but kind of sweet.

That evening, walking home after her evening class, Melany felt uneasy. The streets were darker than usual; a power outage had affected several blocks in her neighborhood. As she turned onto her street, she fumbled for her phone to use as a flashlight.

That's when she noticed—her keys were missing from her bag.





"What the hell?" she muttered, stopping to search more thoroughly. She'd had them this morning, definitely. Had she left them at work? At the university?

Approaching her apartment building, she noticed her living room light was on. She was certain she'd turned everything off before leaving. Her heart began to pound as she approached the entrance, then stopped short. The door to the building was slightly ajar.

Melany backed away, pulling out her phone to call her roommate.

"Hey Zoe, are you home?" she asked when her roommate answered.

"No, I'm staying at Jake's tonight, remember?" Zoe replied. "Why?"

"Nothing, just... I think I forgot my keys, and the building door is open. Probably Mrs. Thatcher from downstairs forgetting to close it again."

"Want me to come back?"

"No, it's fine. Just being paranoid. Text you later."

Melany hung up and took a deep breath. She was being ridiculous. She pushed the door open and hurried up to her second-floor apartment, finding the door locked as it should be. After a moment of panic, she remembered the spare key hidden in the hallway light fixture.





Once inside, everything looked normal. Her laptop was still on the desk, TV still mounted on the wall. Nothing seemed disturbed or missing.

Except—

On her kitchen counter sat a bright orange flyer she'd never seen before. "CIRCUS OF FRIGHTS," it proclaimed in garish letters.

"ONE NIGHT ONLY—HALLOWEEN THRILLS AT GOLDEN GATE PARK."

Melany's hands trembled as she picked it up. She was certain it hadn't been there when she left. She checked the windows—all locked. She checked the door again—no signs of forced entry.

Yet someone had been here. Someone had her keys. Across the street, in the shadow of a large oak tree, a figure watched Melany's window intently. Seeing her silhouette move past the blinds, a gloved hand carefully placed her house keys in a zippered pocket. The other hand held a small notebook, where meticulous notes detailed her schedule, her habits, her patterns.

A soft chuckle escaped painted lips as the figure melted back into the darkness. Everything was going according to plan.



## Chapter 2: The Painted Face

The basement was cool and dark, just the way he liked it. Only a single light illuminated the vanity mirror, casting long shadows across the concrete walls. He sat with perfect posture, breathing steadily through his nose as he applied the white cream to his face with careful, practiced strokes.

First, the foundation. Pure white, obliterating any trace of humanity beneath.

Next, the smile. Bright red greasepaint applied with a delicate brush, extending far beyond his natural lips into an exaggerated upward curve. A smile that never reached his eyes.

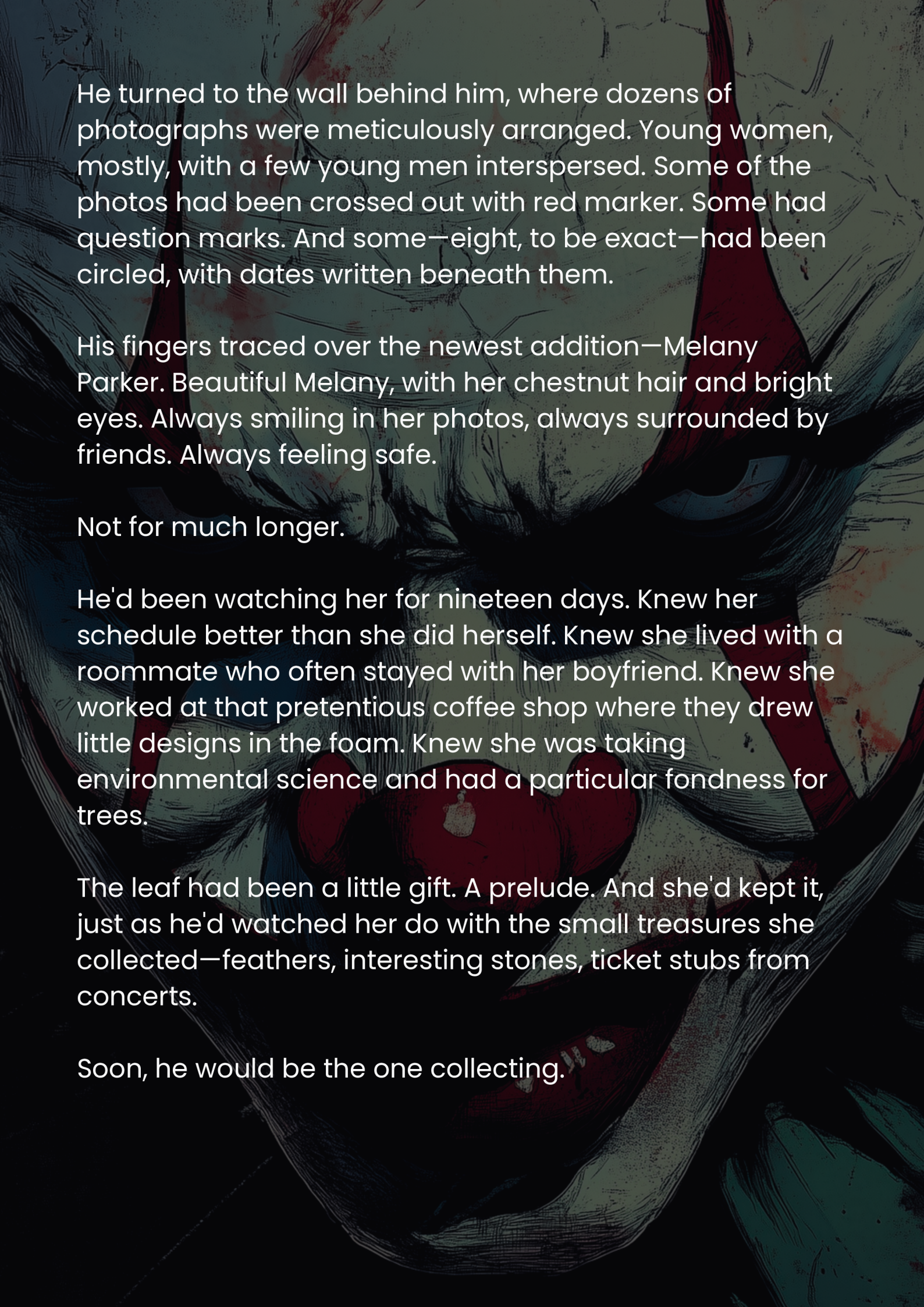
Then, the eyes themselves. Black triangles above and below, creating the illusion of perpetual delight, regardless of the horror happening behind them.

Finally, the blue stars on each cheek and the matching blue that accentuated his brows, rising dramatically toward his temples.

He leaned back, admiring his transformation. No longer a man—now a character, a nightmare, an icon. The clown smiled at his reflection.

"Almost showtime," he whispered, his voice surprisingly gentle.





He turned to the wall behind him, where dozens of photographs were meticulously arranged. Young women, mostly, with a few young men interspersed. Some of the photos had been crossed out with red marker. Some had question marks. And some—eight, to be exact—had been circled, with dates written beneath them.

His fingers traced over the newest addition—Melany Parker. Beautiful Melany, with her chestnut hair and bright eyes. Always smiling in her photos, always surrounded by friends. Always feeling safe.

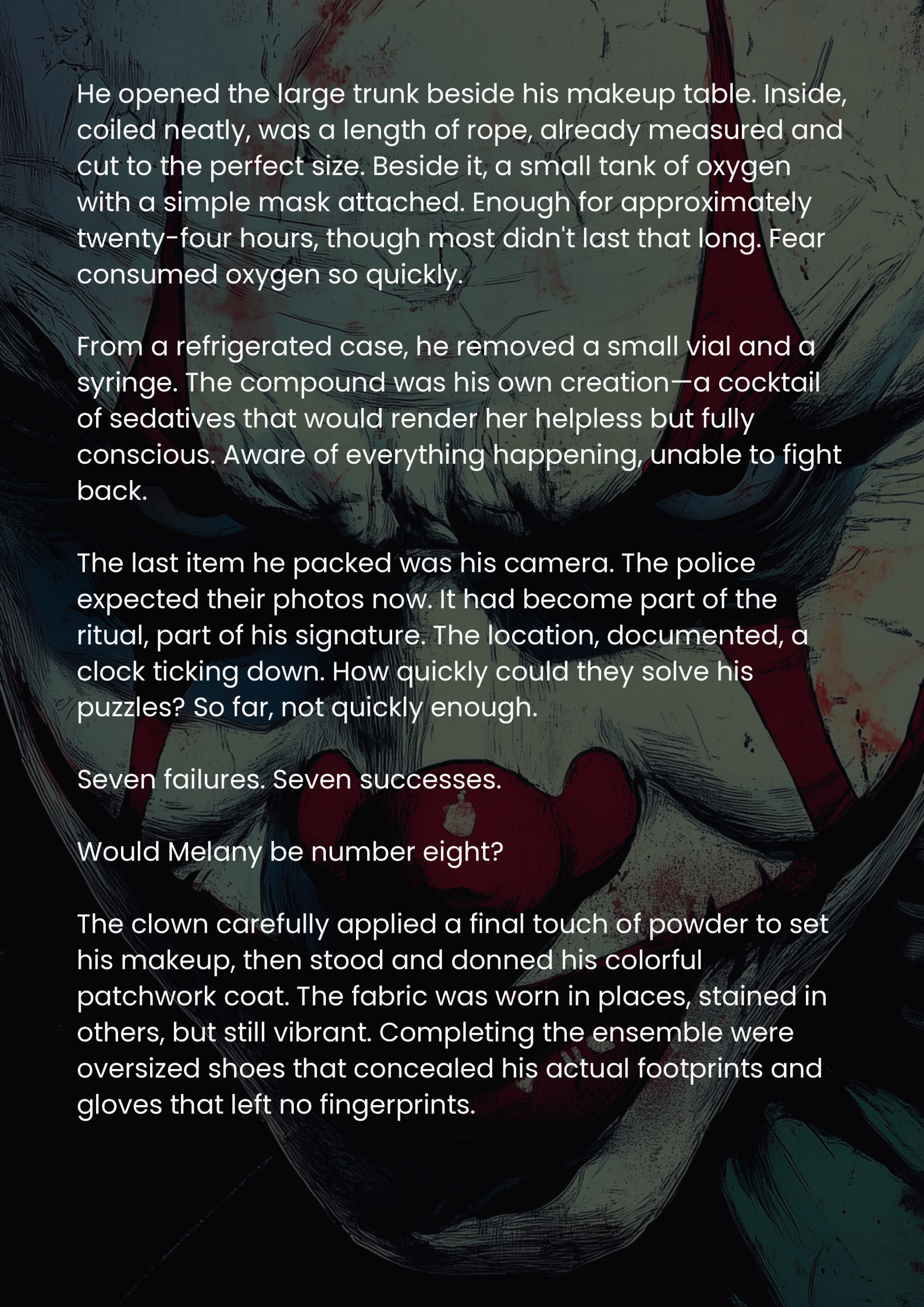
Not for much longer.

He'd been watching her for nineteen days. Knew her schedule better than she did herself. Knew she lived with a roommate who often stayed with her boyfriend. Knew she worked at that pretentious coffee shop where they drew little designs in the foam. Knew she was taking environmental science and had a particular fondness for trees.

The leaf had been a little gift. A prelude. And she'd kept it, just as he'd watched her do with the small treasures she collected—feathers, interesting stones, ticket stubs from concerts.

Soon, he would be the one collecting.





He opened the large trunk beside his makeup table. Inside, coiled neatly, was a length of rope, already measured and cut to the perfect size. Beside it, a small tank of oxygen with a simple mask attached. Enough for approximately twenty-four hours, though most didn't last that long. Fear consumed oxygen so quickly.

From a refrigerated case, he removed a small vial and a syringe. The compound was his own creation—a cocktail of sedatives that would render her helpless but fully conscious. Aware of everything happening, unable to fight back.

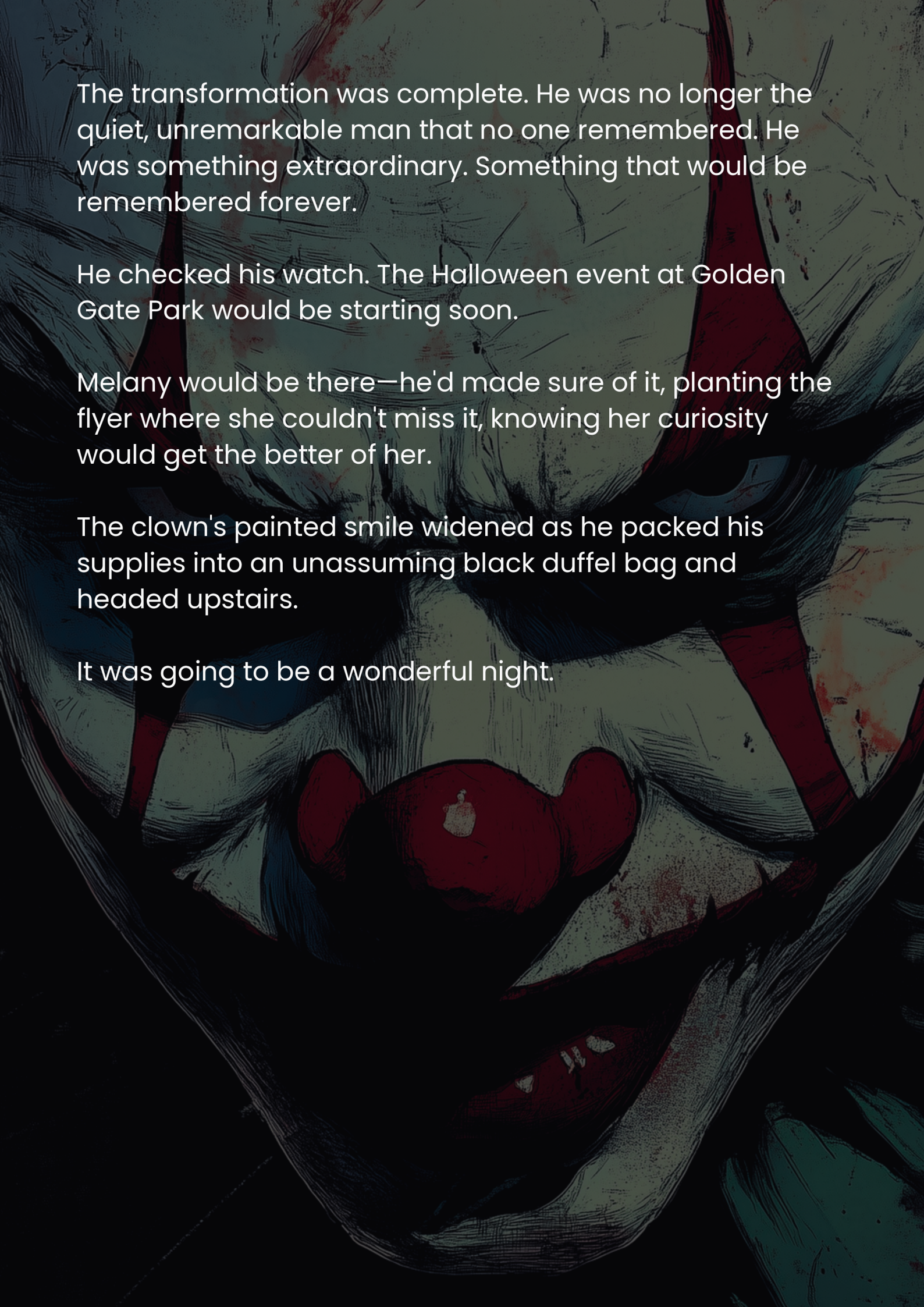
The last item he packed was his camera. The police expected their photos now. It had become part of the ritual, part of his signature. The location, documented, a clock ticking down. How quickly could they solve his puzzles? So far, not quickly enough.

Seven failures. Seven successes.

Would Melany be number eight?

The clown carefully applied a final touch of powder to set his makeup, then stood and donned his colorful patchwork coat. The fabric was worn in places, stained in others, but still vibrant. Completing the ensemble were oversized shoes that concealed his actual footprints and gloves that left no fingerprints.





The transformation was complete. He was no longer the quiet, unremarkable man that no one remembered. He was something extraordinary. Something that would be remembered forever.

He checked his watch. The Halloween event at Golden Gate Park would be starting soon.

Melany would be there—he'd made sure of it, planting the flyer where she couldn't miss it, knowing her curiosity would get the better of her.

The clown's painted smile widened as he packed his supplies into an unassuming black duffel bag and headed upstairs.

It was going to be a wonderful night.



## Chapter 3: Buried Dreams

Melany hadn't planned on going to the Halloween event. After finding the mysterious flyer in her apartment, she'd called the police, but they'd been dismissive. No signs of forced entry, nothing stolen, and a flyer for a public event hardly constituted an emergency. The officer suggested she change her locks and be more careful about securing her doors.

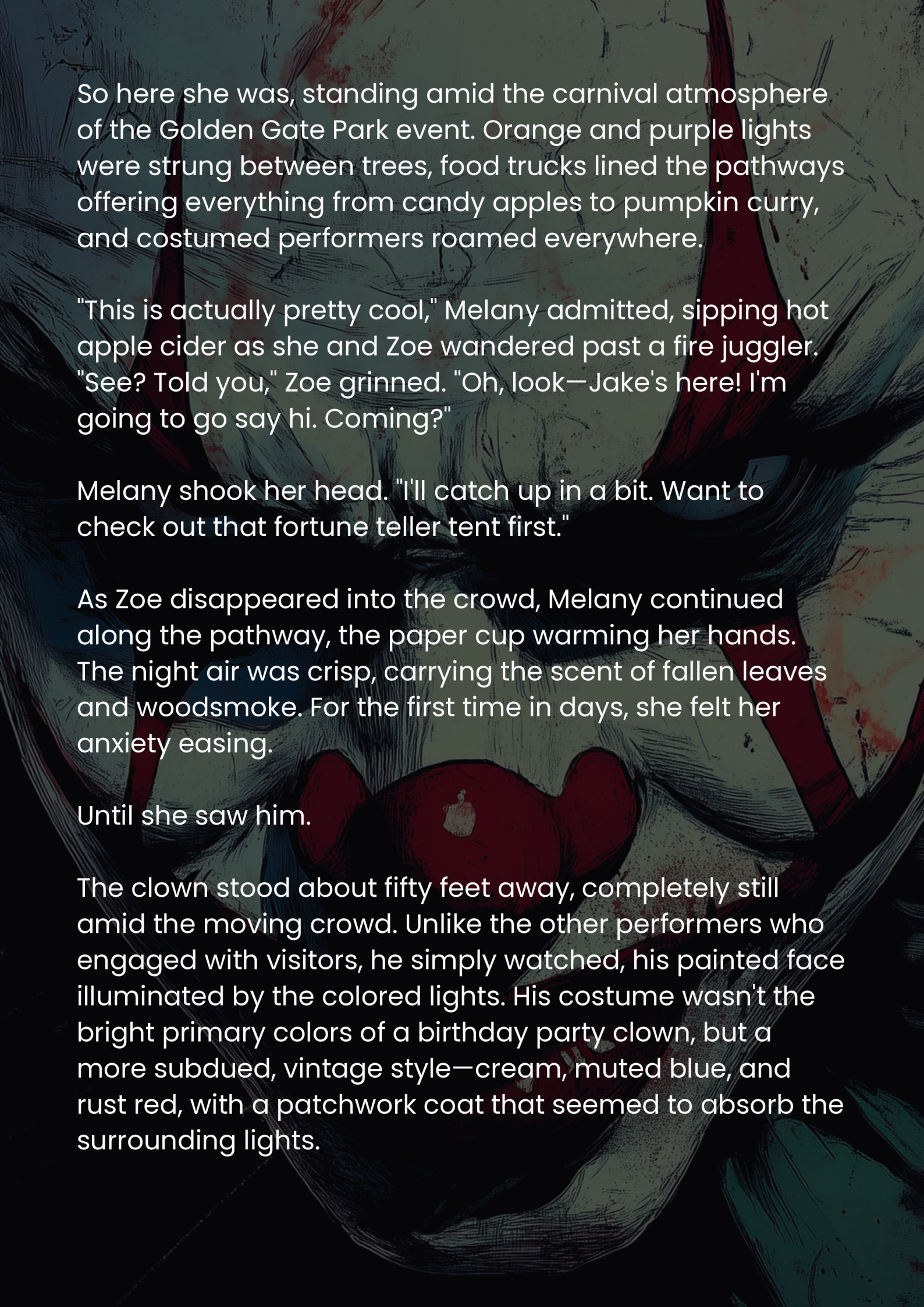
Which is exactly what she did, calling a locksmith first thing the next morning. She'd even stayed with a friend for two nights, just to be safe.

But something about the flyer kept drawing her attention. The event sounded interesting—a one-night Halloween carnival in Golden Gate Park, with performers, food, and attractions. According to the park's official website, it was legitimate, sponsored by a local arts coalition.

Maybe going to a public place with hundreds of other people was exactly what she needed to shake this feeling of being watched. Besides, Zoe had finally agreed to come along, promising to bring Jake and some other friends. "You can't let some random flyer freak you out," Zoe had insisted.

"It was probably just marketing—they might have slipped it under everyone's door in the building."





So here she was, standing amid the carnival atmosphere of the Golden Gate Park event. Orange and purple lights were strung between trees, food trucks lined the pathways offering everything from candy apples to pumpkin curry, and costumed performers roamed everywhere.

"This is actually pretty cool," Melany admitted, sipping hot apple cider as she and Zoe wandered past a fire juggler. "See? Told you," Zoe grinned. "Oh, look—Jake's here! I'm going to go say hi. Coming?"

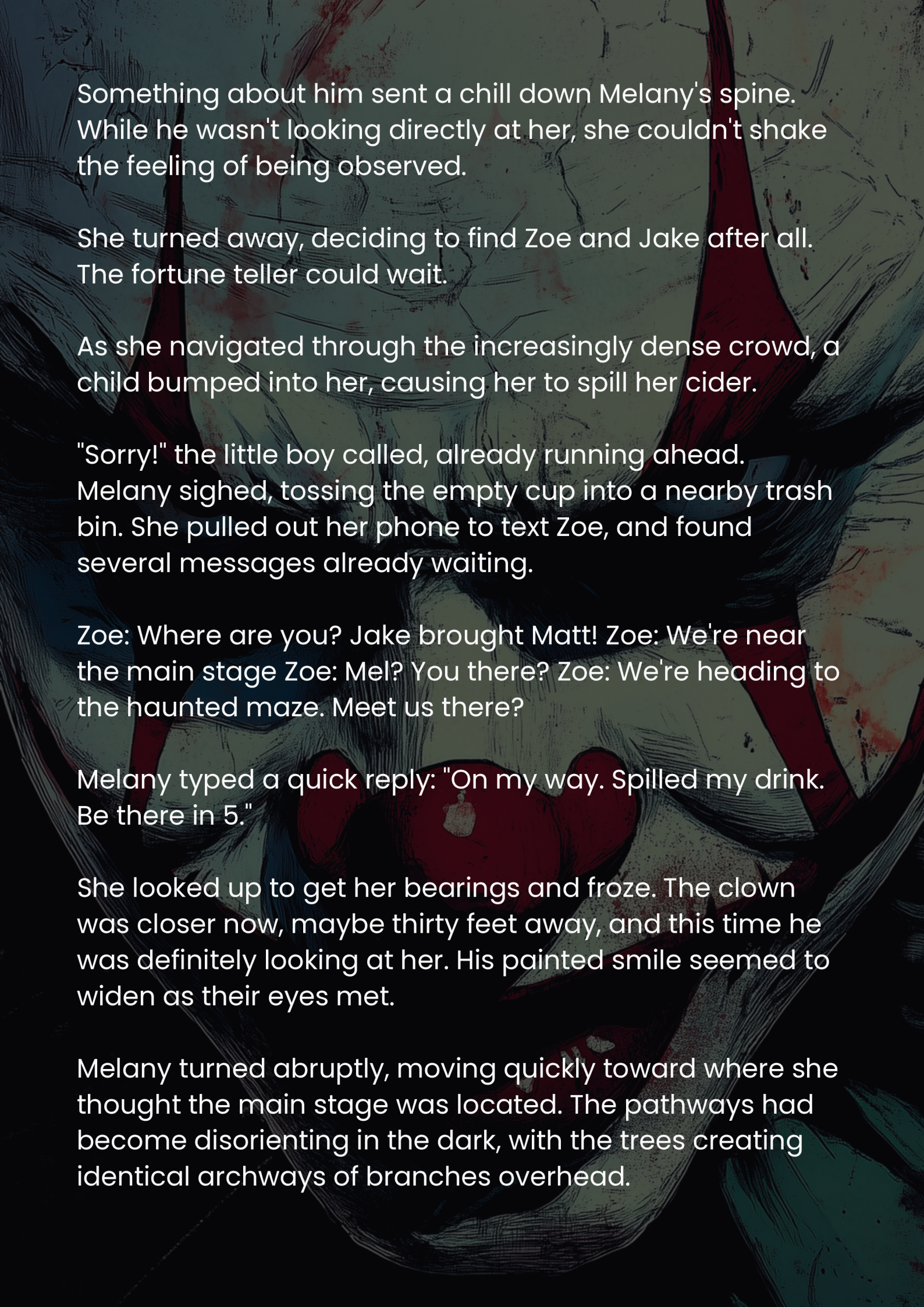
Melany shook her head. "I'll catch up in a bit. Want to check out that fortune teller tent first."

As Zoe disappeared into the crowd, Melany continued along the pathway, the paper cup warming her hands. The night air was crisp, carrying the scent of fallen leaves and woodsmoke. For the first time in days, she felt her anxiety easing.

Until she saw him.

The clown stood about fifty feet away, completely still amid the moving crowd. Unlike the other performers who engaged with visitors, he simply watched, his painted face illuminated by the colored lights. His costume wasn't the bright primary colors of a birthday party clown, but a more subdued, vintage style—cream, muted blue, and rust red, with a patchwork coat that seemed to absorb the surrounding lights.





Something about him sent a chill down Melany's spine. While he wasn't looking directly at her, she couldn't shake the feeling of being observed.

She turned away, deciding to find Zoe and Jake after all. The fortune teller could wait.

As she navigated through the increasingly dense crowd, a child bumped into her, causing her to spill her cider.

"Sorry!" the little boy called, already running ahead. Melany sighed, tossing the empty cup into a nearby trash bin. She pulled out her phone to text Zoe, and found several messages already waiting.

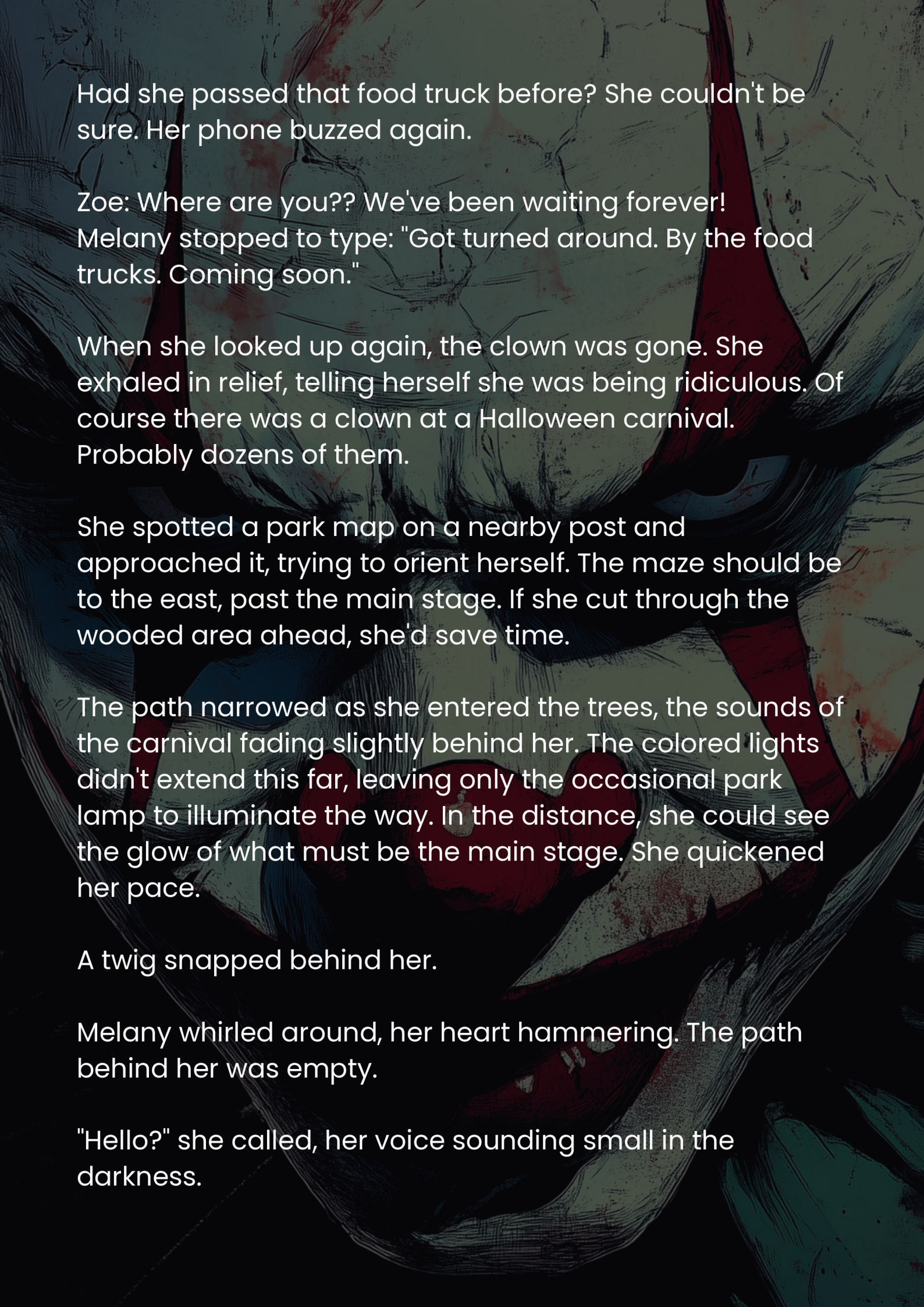
Zoe: Where are you? Jake brought Matt! Zoe: We're near the main stage Zoe: Mel? You there? Zoe: We're heading to the haunted maze. Meet us there?

Melany typed a quick reply: "On my way. Spilled my drink. Be there in 5."

She looked up to get her bearings and froze. The clown was closer now, maybe thirty feet away, and this time he was definitely looking at her. His painted smile seemed to widen as their eyes met.

Melany turned abruptly, moving quickly toward where she thought the main stage was located. The pathways had become disorienting in the dark, with the trees creating identical archways of branches overhead.





Had she passed that food truck before? She couldn't be sure. Her phone buzzed again.

Zoe: Where are you?? We've been waiting forever!  
Melany stopped to type: "Got turned around. By the food trucks. Coming soon."

When she looked up again, the clown was gone. She exhaled in relief, telling herself she was being ridiculous. Of course there was a clown at a Halloween carnival. Probably dozens of them.

She spotted a park map on a nearby post and approached it, trying to orient herself. The maze should be to the east, past the main stage. If she cut through the wooded area ahead, she'd save time.

The path narrowed as she entered the trees, the sounds of the carnival fading slightly behind her. The colored lights didn't extend this far, leaving only the occasional park lamp to illuminate the way. In the distance, she could see the glow of what must be the main stage. She quickened her pace.

A twig snapped behind her.

Melany whirled around, her heart hammering. The path behind her was empty.

"Hello?" she called, her voice sounding small in the darkness.





No response.

She turned to continue walking and found her path blocked.

The clown stood directly in front of her, silent and still. Up close, his makeup was more disturbing—not the bright, cheerful face of a children's entertainer, but something older, more sinister. The painted smile extended too far, the eyes sunken and dark. He smelled of greasepaint and something medicinal.

"Excuse me," Melany managed, her mouth dry. She moved to step around him.

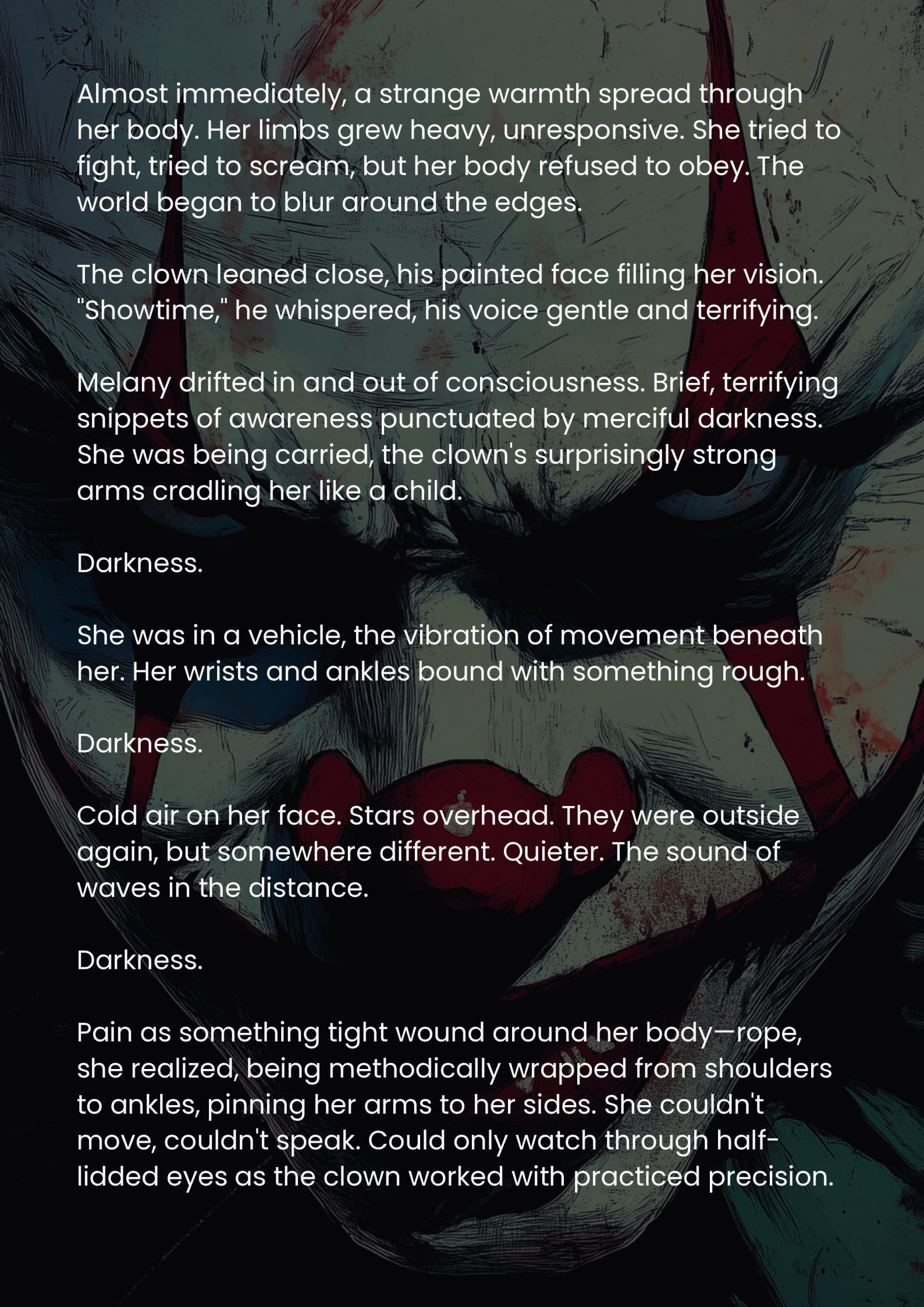
The clown matched her movement, blocking her path again. From inside his patchwork coat, he produced a single red maple leaf—identical to the one she'd received at the coffee shop.

"That was you?" she whispered, backing away. "You were in my apartment?"

The clown's head tilted slightly, the painted smile unchanging. Then, with surprising speed, he lunged forward.

Melany turned to run, but her foot caught on an exposed root, sending her sprawling onto the path. Before she could scream, a gloved hand clamped over her mouth, and she felt a sharp prick in her neck.





Almost immediately, a strange warmth spread through her body. Her limbs grew heavy, unresponsive. She tried to fight, tried to scream, but her body refused to obey. The world began to blur around the edges.

The clown leaned close, his painted face filling her vision. "Showtime," he whispered, his voice gentle and terrifying.

Melany drifted in and out of consciousness. Brief, terrifying snippets of awareness punctuated by merciful darkness. She was being carried, the clown's surprisingly strong arms cradling her like a child.

Darkness.

She was in a vehicle, the vibration of movement beneath her. Her wrists and ankles bound with something rough.

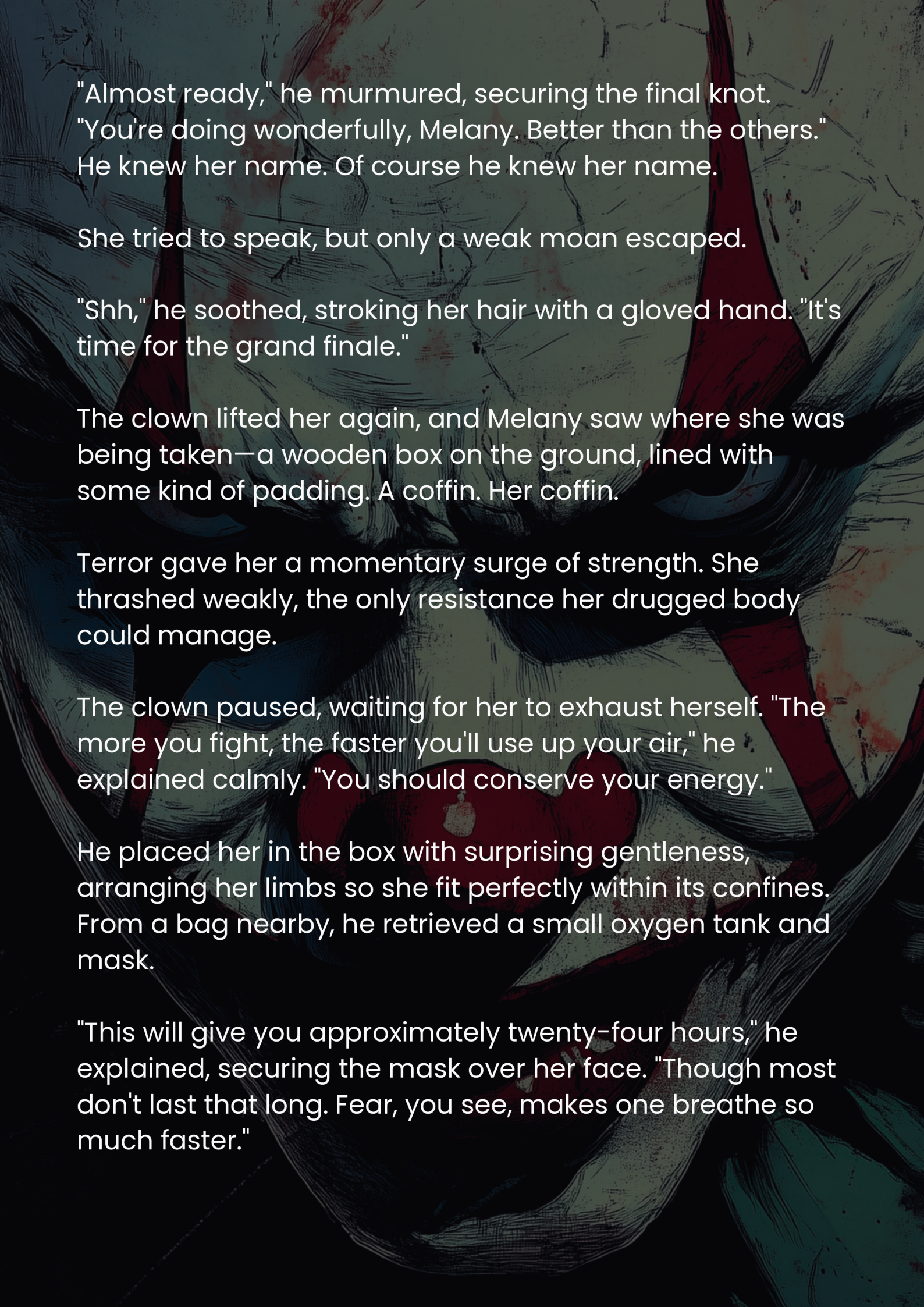
Darkness.

Cold air on her face. Stars overhead. They were outside again, but somewhere different. Quieter. The sound of waves in the distance.

Darkness.

Pain as something tight wound around her body—rope, she realized, being methodically wrapped from shoulders to ankles, pinning her arms to her sides. She couldn't move, couldn't speak. Could only watch through half-lidded eyes as the clown worked with practiced precision.





"Almost ready," he murmured, securing the final knot.  
"You're doing wonderfully, Melany. Better than the others."  
He knew her name. Of course he knew her name.

She tried to speak, but only a weak moan escaped.

"Shh," he soothed, stroking her hair with a gloved hand. "It's time for the grand finale."

The clown lifted her again, and Melany saw where she was being taken—a wooden box on the ground, lined with some kind of padding. A coffin. Her coffin.

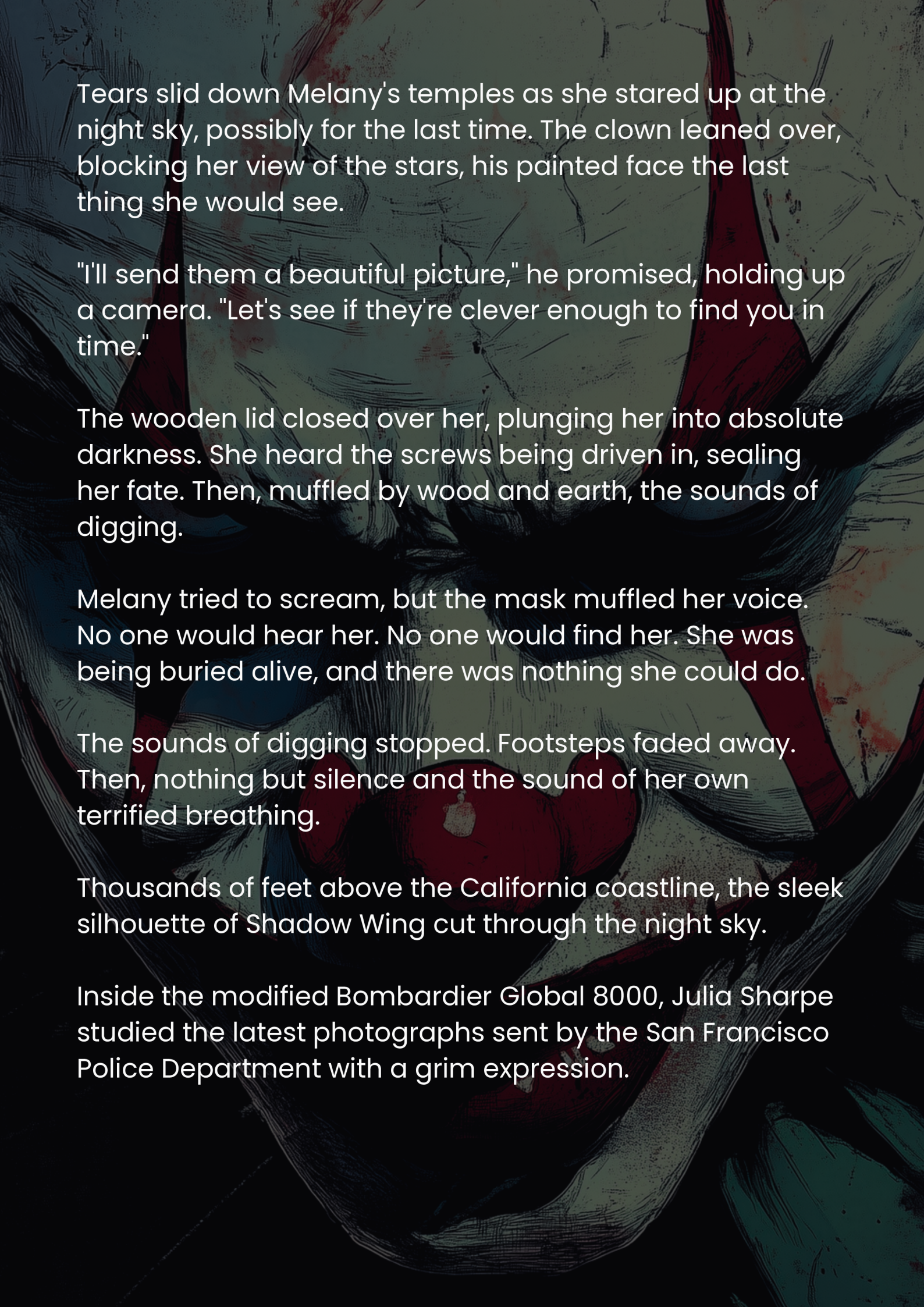
Terror gave her a momentary surge of strength. She thrashed weakly, the only resistance her drugged body could manage.

The clown paused, waiting for her to exhaust herself. "The more you fight, the faster you'll use up your air," he explained calmly. "You should conserve your energy."

He placed her in the box with surprising gentleness, arranging her limbs so she fit perfectly within its confines. From a bag nearby, he retrieved a small oxygen tank and mask.

"This will give you approximately twenty-four hours," he explained, securing the mask over her face. "Though most don't last that long. Fear, you see, makes one breathe so much faster."





Tears slid down Melany's temples as she stared up at the night sky, possibly for the last time. The clown leaned over, blocking her view of the stars, his painted face the last thing she would see.

"I'll send them a beautiful picture," he promised, holding up a camera. "Let's see if they're clever enough to find you in time."

The wooden lid closed over her, plunging her into absolute darkness. She heard the screws being driven in, sealing her fate. Then, muffled by wood and earth, the sounds of digging.

Melany tried to scream, but the mask muffled her voice. No one would hear her. No one would find her. She was being buried alive, and there was nothing she could do.

The sounds of digging stopped. Footsteps faded away. Then, nothing but silence and the sound of her own terrified breathing.

Thousands of feet above the California coastline, the sleek silhouette of Shadow Wing cut through the night sky.

Inside the modified Bombardier Global 8000, Julia Sharpe studied the latest photographs sent by the San Francisco Police Department with a grim expression.





"How long?" she asked, not looking up from the images.

Dimitri Zechev checked his tablet. "The photo was sent to SFPD approximately forty-three minutes ago. Local authorities have been searching, but—"

"But they've failed seven times already," Julia finished for him. She turned to where Fox Meyer and James Brown were reviewing case files. "You were both in San Francisco recently. Any insights?"

Fox shook his head. "Nothing that connected to this at the time, but in retrospect..." He hesitated. "We may have seen him, Julia. Three nights ago, near Berkeley."

"We didn't think anything of it," James added. "A figure in a colorful coat. Could have been anyone."

"We'll deal with that later," Julia said firmly. "Right now, we need to focus on finding this girl."

Gabriel Adams, leader of the BTRU, approached from the forward cabin. "My team is ready to deploy the moment we have a location. Wheels down in San Francisco in seventeen minutes."

"Special Agent," Julia said, her voice calm but urgent as she laid the case file on the desk.

"I have a contract for you."



# Briefing

Greetings, Special Agent.

We have a very urgent case on our hands. The San Francisco Police Department is working on a true horror case this October. There is an actual killer clown roaming the streets of the greater San Francisco area.

The killer is dressed as a clown and strikes at night, mostly targeting women and younger men. The victims are drugged and bound tightly with a long rope, stretching all the way around the body. After this, the killer attaches an oxygen tank to the victim and puts them inside a coffin sized box.

The victim is then buried alive and a picture is taken of the location, which is then sent to the police. With the amount of oxygen in the tank, victims usually last about 24 hours. Though with the panic setting in, some die within 6 hours. A few others suffered a heart attack from the panic.

San Francisco Police Department received a new picture from the clown. This time we have reason to believe the victim is Melany Parker, a 23 year old woman from Northwest Berkeley.

Your assignment is simple, find the location of the picture.

As always, Special Agent, the contract is yours, if you choose to accept.



## Materials

killer-clown-materials.png

## Answer Instruction

Use the answer to unlock the flagfile, this will reward you with your badge.

Use the name of the park + name of the path,

Example: local-park-name-dirty-mud-path

## Flagfile

Be advised, the flagfile is an encrypted ZIP. Make sure your OS supports the ZIP format. Ensure the password contains no hidden characters or formatting.

PS: Don't forget to claim your Coins and XP, by posting your card in the #card-brag channel in Discord.

<https://discord.hacktoria.com>

## Write-Up

There is an attached file called a write-up, this will give you the answer in case you get stuck.

## Acknowledgements

This challenge was made by Frank Diepmaat.