

## Men of Word Short Story – Confused

The floorboards beneath Jeremy's feet creaked and groaned with every step. He was stumbling through the darkness, the heavy beat of his heart ringing in his ears. Screams and sobs wound their way through the dark hallways to flood his mind, filling it with nightmares. He drew closer to the door at the end of the hall. His body shook with every passing second. Slowly, he reached his hand towards the cold door knob, gripping it so hard his knuckles soon turned white.

Jeremy drew in a quick breath and forced the door open. Nothing but darkness. He shuffled forward, scanning the room with frightened and expectant eyes. Nothing. The floor boards creaked once again under the pressure of his weight. Dull figures began to appear in the room as his eyes started to adjust. A light flickered behind him, highlighting the twisted and creepy faces of the characters that had begun to surround him.

The figures now loomed above him. Some shrieked. Some screamed. Others giggled. Jeremy was frozen in place, horrified. Chills ran down his spine and beads of cold sweat began to form on his forehead. He couldn't look away from their horrifying faces, frozen in fear. Tears welled in his eyes, and Jeremy collapsed to the floor, curling into a ball as the streams started to flow. He lay there in that cold empty room sobbing quietly for quite some time, until the unnerving figures had returned to the darkness and he was alone once again.

Soon the rivers of tears had run dry. The shouts and crashes that erupted from the hallway forced Jeremy to rise to his feet and push forward to the next doorway before him. A light shone through the bottom of the door, boosting his confidence to some degree.

As he approached the door creaked open gently, perhaps as an invitation to enter for the young boy. Jeremy stepped forward and was immediately startled as the lights above him flickered and cut out abruptly. In a panic, Jeremy turned to the door just as it slammed shut in his face. The small amount of bravery that was previously present had passed just as quickly as it had appeared.

Jeremy wandered aimlessly through the darkness. Water dripped constantly from the ceiling above, catching him by surprise as a drop landed on his head. A music box played by the doorway. The tune was joyful yet eerie. It was completely out of place.

The box played its tune faster and faster. He crept towards it slowly, carefully inspecting the ballerina that danced along with the music. A smile stretched across his face, feeling comforted in the presence of something less dangerous, less scary. He watched it jump and spin in its beautiful tutu. The music played still, growing faster and more dramatic. Jeremy stumbled backwards, horrified by the now blood-stained clothes of the ballerina, snapping back to the reality of the horror he was currently living.

A light tap on his shoulder made him jump and immediately turn cold. Slowly, he turned and met the blood shot eyes of the creature behind him. It stood silently, staring back into Jeremy's eyes with an evil grin plastered on its face. Jeremy had now noticed its huge red nose and ridiculous costume. It was a clown. God, Jeremy hated clowns.

Immediately, he turned and broke into a sprint, barging through the door to the next rooms. Jeremy felt the hot breath of the clown on his neck as it followed him through every doorway, hallway and room. The hallways, similar to the ones Jeremy had been passing through today, held many surprises. People and creatures of all kinds leapt from the shadows, calling to him, reaching out to him.

No matter how fast he ran, the clown was always there, breathing down his neck. Its huge shoes pounded against the floor, shaking the house with every step. Jeremy's lungs started to burn and his legs ached. He wasn't sure he'd last much longer. The thought of that clown catching him was the only thing pushing him onwards.

Jeremy crashed through another door, finding himself surrounded by mirrors. He quickly realized he was in a maze. Desperate to escape the clown, Jeremy continued through the mirror maze, scaring himself with his own sinister reflections and even more so with the reflection of the clown that appeared to be everywhere. Time and time again, Jeremy ran into the mirrors around him, mistaking it for the walkway or exit. The clown was getting closer. He could feel its breath against his skin once again. Jeremy crashed into another mirror. To his surprise, it opened like a door, sending him tumbling out of the maze.

Jeremy leapt to his feet, expecting the clown to snatch him away at any moment. But instead, he found himself surrounded by people. Perfectly normal people. They each busied themselves with their own conversations. Young children walked by, shoving a vast range of snacks into their mouths. Others stood, watching their ice-cream slowly melt in their hands or topple to the dusty ground. Unsurprisingly, this usually resulted in a series of wails and screams from the child.

Music could be faintly heard over the buzz of the large crowds. People of all ages queued for the many rides Jeremy could see. Masses of people shuffled into one jumbled line to ride the Ferris wheel. Children and parents laughed and smiled over at the Dodgem cars. To Jeremy's surprise, a huge line of people stood waiting outside of the house he'd just left.

Jeremy walked out into the blistering sun and joined the queue.