

The Rabbit Hole

It's 1996 in St. Petersburg, Florida, senior year for Dante and Virgil, best friends since their freshman year of high school. United by heavy metal and a burning hunger for liberation out from the grip of suburban existence. Tonight, traveling to witness the legendary Pantera unleash their raw power on the stage in Daytona, a temporary escape from the confines of their sheltered lives. It is a crusade of sorts, a break from their parents picturesque suburban dream and a glimpse into something they have long inspired to become one day.

"Man, can you believe it? We're finally gonna see fuckin Pantera!" Virgil shouts, his eyes widened with excitement as Dante continues speeding down the dark highway in his old, rusty Dodge.

"Bro, it's gonna be crazy! I can't believe, in a few hours, we'll be right there in the fucking mosh pit," Dante replied, gripping the steering wheel tightly. "What do you think they are going to open with? Probably something from 'the Great Southern Trend Kill, Hopefully the play '5 Minutes Alone! That's all I care about!" Speakers rattling the windows as Dante turns up the volume of his favorite song playing out of a disc man attached to an adapter that looked like a cassette with a wire coming from it.

The road stretches over hazy fog that hangs idly onto the bodies of water below as they cross into the central part of Florida. The exceedingly oxidized, cloudy headlights are enough to cut through the endless expanse of the night. Closer to the city, landscapes begin to change as trees gave way to streetlights and buildings, as the sounds of crickets and frogs are drowned by the loud horns, and screeching tires. Faint pitches from the occasional ambulance sirens coming and going in the distance. Dante and Virgil begin to feel the energy pulsating. Dante pulls the Dodge into a crowded gravel lot, just a few blocks from the venue. They shut off the truck and headed toward the bright lights, with the demonic growls from Phil Anselmo and rapturous melodic solos from Dimebag already rehearsing in their heads.

Fueled by the rush of their arrival, Virgil, suggests a metal bar nestled among the row of vibrant clubs. But Dante, ever the opportunist, spies a couple of statuesque blondes and a raven haired beauty, provocatively clad in short skirts and high heels. "Let's follow them, over there!" Dante exclaims, his grip tightening on Virgil's arm as they sprint after the centerfolds.

Turning the corner, they find themselves face-to-face with three stunning vixens, illuminated beneath a strobing streetlight. The rhythmic flashes of their movements was creating a fascinating slow-motion ballet. The synchronization of their steps captivate Dante and Virgil's hormonal minds. The three women seem to glide like spiders with their long legs and vivacious curves. The black haired woman speaks up first.

"Hey there, boys," purring lustily. "Looking for fun?"

The "f" seemed to be more breathy than the other words. Dante and Virgil exchanging looks, curiosity mixed with caution.

"Ah, 'a good time,' you say? Well, that depends on your definition, Baby. If you're ready to dance with the devil in the pale moonlight, then let's party." Dante said, nudging Virgil.

She is probably only five foot three but with the heels she is almost as tall as Virgil. She has legs that stretch, tightened muscles around her knees and striations up the sides of her outer thighs. Her calves, perfectly smooth and heart shaped, two juicy ribeyes flexing with each step. Her breast flowing with her movements, and jiggle as she speaks.

"Who are you Jack Nicholson?" She giggles, acknowledging her understanding of where the quote came from. "Your friend seems like he might be intimidated by our kind of fun, hahahaha,"

the laughter rattled Virgil's chest.

"Fuck these bitches. Let's just smoke this joint on the way and find a good spot," Virgil pleaded with his best friend.

Just as Dante was about to comply with Virgil, the black haired bazooka chested beauty pulls out the biggest joint the two boys had ever seen and proceeded to theatrically deep throat it, slowly gliding it back out of her mouth kissing the tip, while staring into Dante's eyes.

"I think you should fffuck. These. Bitches," her raspy voice really emphasizing the "f" again, "don't think you'll enjoy?"; holding the joint out to the boys. "My name is Claire. Let's get high and have some fun, then you can go see your show."

Before they begin to follow the sexy ladies, Dante grabs Virgil's arm. "Don't leave me, Virgil. You know I can't be alone," Dante whispered into his ear. Virgil nodded reassuringly, as he always did. Virgil was not merely a best friend; he was a vigilant protector. In return, Dante lent his charm to help Virgil gain the attention from the girls. Virgil, tall and awkward, possessed a ferocity that surfaced only when provoked. His anger was a force of nature—lethal and unrestrained. Dante had been the target of ridicule for his fear of the dark and his parents being poor throughout middle school, until the first day of their freshman year. On that day, Virgil had slammed a Danny Helton through a tile wall, an act that silenced this tormentors and cemented their bond. Together, they swam the treacherous waters of adolescence, and high school, each providing what the other lacked.

Dante often sought to understand the mystery that was Virgil. In moments of calm, Virgil was introspective, his awkwardness hiding a sharp intellect and a deep emotion. Yet, when the situation calls for it, he can unleash a storm of violence that leaves no doubt as to his capability for destruction. This duality both fascinated and reassured Dante; he knew that no matter the circumstance, Virgil would stand by him, a shield against the world's cruelties. Despite his own fears and insecurities, Dante brought a lightness to Virgil's life. His wit and charm were a counterbalance to Virgil's brooding nature. Dante can talk his way out of almost any situation, a skill that often diffused potential conflicts before they escalated. When words failed, however, Virgil's mere presence is enough to dissuade most troublemakers.

Their nights were spent in a variety of pursuits, from smoking weed & listening to metal to quiet evenings smoking weed, discussing metal and their dreams for the future. Dante would excite Virgil with tales of romantic conquests, while Virgil, in his measured way, would outline his plans for a life that transcended their small town's limitations. They were bound by a shared understanding that, whatever path they chose, it would be together.

Continuing down the alley behind the three ladies, the boys eyes are glued to the bouncing meat beneath those tight nylon skirts. The towering buildings saturated with the neglect of a forgotten era, the windows obscured by weathered boards, likely housing vile rats and poisonous snakes. Virgil was terrified of snakes; recurring nightmares of those slithering creatures had haunted him for as long as he could remember. In a defiant gesture to overcome his fear, he had a cobra tattooed on his forearm—a secret known only to him and Dante, who understood it to be both a symbol of strength and a mark of vulnerability. The streets around these decaying structures were eerily reminiscent of Virgil's nightmares. Snakes launching from the darkness with poisonous fangs piercing his eyes, over and over. There were no signs of danger, except for the occasional rustle in the wind. Cold silence as if the very soul of the city had fled, leaving behind only its hollowness. Virgil's eyes darted nervously, searching for any sign of movement, any hint of the serpents that plague his dreams. Dante, ever perceptive, notices the tension in Virgil's stance. Placing a reassuring hand on his friend's shoulder, he whispers, "There aren't any snakes, dude. They don't fuck around in the cities, think about your snake. That big ol Kentucky white snake."

Virgil nods giggling, but his grip tightens around the handle of the knife concealed in his jacket. The cobra on his forearm seems to writhe with each anxious heartbeat, a constant reminder of the

fear he couldn't conquer. It was a emblem, both a badge of courage and a symbol of his deepest fear.

Their walk through the dirty urban landscape was a test of endurance against the physical decay, as well as the psychological terrors that hide in the darkness. Virgil's fear of snakes is more than a mere phobia; it is a manifestation of all his doubts and insecurities. The tattoo was his way of confronting those demons, a permanent mark against the tyranny of his own mind. In their silent pact, Dante provides the emotional support that allows Virgil to face his fears head-on.

Each step, a drift further from the known world, spiraling through a timeless whirlwind. The seductive women keep the boys' minds clouded with the intoxicating scent of fruity weed and floral perfumes. They are descending into madness unperceived as they followed the swaying hips of those sexual figures into the eerie silence.

They arrive at a dilapidated theater, its shattered windows, walls covered with layers of graffiti—forgotten signatures of rebellion. A massive neon sign flashing sporadically, casting an electric glow that pierces the night sky, absent of the usual city light pollution. The sign's erratic hum vibrates, rattling the loose tubes that read : “ The Rabbit Hole” with a downward spiral that leads towards the large old wooden door.

The trio of women push open the heavy, splintered door. The pungent stench of sweat and smoke flow out into the crisp night air. The boys hesitate for a moment, caught between apprehension and exhilaration, before stepping into the smoky foyer. The desolate alley, now bathed in the neon radiance, illuminates their faces, showcasing the shit-eating grins. The women, with an art of practiced seduction, lead them into the foyer of the theater. Once majestic columns now standing cracked and weary, their grandeur long overshadowed. The walls, peeling and stained. Torn velvet ropes hang limply, and the remnants of old posters cling desperately to their frames. The flashing neon from outside struggles to penetrate the gloom, casting sporadic, ghostly shadows that flash along the walls. The boys can barely make out their surroundings. The women move with a purpose, their heels clicking against the cracked marble floor, leading the boys deeper into the heart of the forgotten cinema.

The foyer opens up into a vast, cavernous space with rows of decaying seats stretching out like a skeletal audience, bearing silent witness to the unfolding spectacle. The stage, now lay dormant, a relic in a sea of darkness. Here, in this forsaken place, the walls of reality seem to crumble, and the night held infinite possibilities. The boys, their minds awash with adrenaline and anticipation, stand at the gates of an adventure that would etch itself indelibly into their memories. Inside, everyone looks unfamiliar, their features obscured by the dense smoke. The atmosphere had been crop dusted with a strange a danger.

"Welcome to the Rabbit Hole," Claire says with her crooked smile. "Let's play."

The boys follow without hesitation. The theater, now—a raw, unfiltered ambiance that both repels and attracts. Dante and Virgil are no strangers to the filth of society, but this feels different. It is as if they have crossed into another dimension, where the rules they knew no longer apply. The women move with every gesture a calculated seduction. The boys are drawn in, their senses overwhelmed by the sights, sounds, and smells of this new reality. The foyer leads them to a incandescent lit hallway, where distant strains of an off-key piano seem to fade in and out. The smoke so thick they can hardly see, as they venture on into the hall.

"Let the games begin," the woman whispered, her voice barely audible over the bass.

It was a path into the unknown, a dance with the devil, and they were more than willing to play their part. The boys kept downing drinks while being led to a corner where a group of kids were passing around a massive joint. Eyes black, they were crazed zombies chewing up handfuls of tiny white pills and devouring mushrooms like candy, bouncing and bobbing to the bass of the beat. The music was loud, throbbing through their veins and pulsating their brains. Dante and Virgil took a

few healthy puffs, the smoke filling their lungs and clouding their minds. This is some strong weed, not like the bullshit they get in St. Pete, Dante thought.

"Dude, this is fucking insane!" Dante yelled as he took a long pull from the joint, coughing on exhalation.

As the night crept on, reality and illusion became unclear. The unfamiliar faces began to twist and contort into little pigs, the room tilting and swaying. Dante felt a creeping sense of unease while Virgil, with his hand in a cute girl's unzipped pants, was lost in euphoria. Deep laughter waved through Dante's head.

"Man, this is wild!" Dante mumbled, his voice barely detectable over the packed venue. Virgil's eyes were solid black with a lifeless blank stare, gazing into Dante with his mouth stretching open. Heavy drops of coagulated black tar hung from his mouth.

"Yeah, we should... probably... probably... get going soon. You seeing these... these little fuckin' pigs? We... don't... want to miss... the Dimebag," Dante slurred, his voice sluggish, staggering against the wall. A strong sensation, a flush of warm water, washed over him. The burst of endorphins was like heroin exploding in his veins. Virgil's black eyes watched as he collapsed to the floor.

Crusted eyes struggling to open, his mind trying to make its way back from the blackness of unconsciousness. The concert, an errant memory lost in a sea of darkness. Everything went black after they followed those women into that goddamned bar. Instinctively, his hand moves toward his face, only to recoil in horror as cold scales brush against his wrist. A sudden jolt, snapping his eyes open wide, gasping for breath as the hellish reality around him comes into focus. Terror seizes his heart. Virgil finds himself ensnared in a pit full of vipers and cobras. Their glimmering scales shimmering in the light, pale yellow predator eyes piercing his soul. The writhing mass of hissing, fanged serpents move erratically, surrounding him completely. In that nightmarish moment, Virgil's deepest fear is realized in a manner more horrifying than he could have ever imagined. The snakes' movements are chaotic yet deliberate, an ensemble orchestrated by satan himself. The sound of their hiss fill the small cold room, a chorus that reverberates in his ears, drowning out all rational thought. His body is paralyzed with fear, each breath a laborious effort as the serpents close in, their eyes reflecting his own terror back at him. Virgil frantically searches the pit for any means of escape, but finds nothing. The walls are high and slick, offering no handholds or footholds. The realization that he is truly trapped begins to sink in, bringing with it a wave of panic that threatens to overwhelm him. He can feel the cold, smooth scales of the snakes brushing against his skin, their forked tongues flicking out to taste him. In that moment of sheer terror, time seems to stand still. Virgil, searching for a way out, a way to survive. But the more he struggles, the tighter the grip of fear becomes. His vision blurred, the edges of his consciousness fraying as the weight of his predicament presses down on him. Then, as if from some distant, detached part of his mind, a thought emerges, he has to remain calm. The snakes, sensing his fear, only grow more aggressive. He forces himself to take slow, measured breaths, trying to steady his pounding heart. The serpents continue to slither around him, but he focuses on the rhythm of his breathing, willing himself to stay composed. The vipers' eyes continue to taunt Virgil with a predatory intensity. He recalls snippets of survival stories, fragments of advice on dealing with serpents. "Stay still," he remembers reading in his dad's National Geographic. "Most snakes will not attack unless provoked." He willed himself to remain motionless, fighting the instinct to thrash about and scream.

The snakes, sensing the change in his demeanor, seem to hesitate. Their movements became less erratic, their hisses less frantic. It was as if they are waiting, watching to see what he would do next. Virgil's eyes dart around the pit, searching for anything he can use to his advantage. The walls are smooth and featureless, offering no means of escape. The floor, however, is littered with debris—

broken glass, bits of metal. Slowly, ever so slowly, Virgil begins to inch his hand toward a shard of glass lying nearby. He moves with the utmost caution, aware that any sudden movement could provoke the serpents into striking. His fingers brush against the jagged edge of the glass, and he feels a surge of hope. Carefully, he grasped the shard and brings it closer to his body, shielding it from the snakes' view. He does not know how he will use the glass, only that he needs to have it. It was a small comfort, a tangible piece of control in an uncontrollable situation. With the shard hidden in his hand, Virgil returns his focus to the snakes. They were still watching him, their eyes fixed on him. Minutes pass, each one feeling like an eternity. Virgil's muscles aching from holding his position, but he does not dare to move. The snakes, too, seem to grow weary of the standoff. Their movements becoming slower, more lethargic. Virgil takes this as a sign that they are losing interest in him. He knows he has to act soon, before his strength fades completely. Summoning every ounce of courage, he begins to formulate a plan. The shard of glass in his hand is not just a weapon but a tool for survival. He needs to create a distraction, something that will draw the snakes' attention away from him. His eyes search the debris-ridden floor once more, settling on a rusted tin can a few feet away. It is a long shot, but it is all he has. Slowly, he extends his free hand, inching toward the can. The serpents remain mostly motionless, their eyes still fixed on him, but their attentiveness is less. With painstaking slowness, Virgil nudges the can towards the edge of the pit. He feels the cold sweat trickle down his back, his muscles straining from the effort to remain still and controlled. Finally, after what felt like hours, the can teeters on the edge of a small depression in the ground. One final nudge sends it rolling, clattering loudly against the uneven surfaces.

The effect is immediate. The snakes' heads snap toward the sound, their bodies coiling in response to the unexpected noise. Seizing the moment, Virgil pushes himself up, moving as fast and silently as possible. He sees a narrow, shadowed crevice in the wall of the pit, partially obscured by the shit all over the floor. It is small, but it should be large enough for him to squeeze through.

Heart pounding, he moves toward the crevice, each step slowly calculated and deliberate. The serpents, still distracted by the can, do not immediately notice his movement. Virgil reaches the wall and begins to edge his way into the narrow opening. The rough stone scrapes against his skin, bloodying his elbows he pushes forward, driven by the urge to escape. As he wedges himself deeper into the crevice, snakes behind him grow more frantic, their hiss rising in a cadence. They notice his absence and are beginning to search for him. Forcing the panic to dull, focusing on the task at hand. He twists his body, inching through the tight space, every movement a gamble between survival and insanity. Suddenly, a small hole in the wall catches his attention. A rustling sound emanated from a baseball-sized hole. Silence, then a slight rustling again. Holding his breath trying to be as quiet and still as possible inches his ear closer to the hole. Without warning, a copperhead lunges from the void, sinking its fangs into his ear. The pain is instantaneous and excruciating. Before he can react, another serpent strikes from the opposite side, biting his cheek causing his head to bounce off the tunnel walls in reflex. His scream echos through the confined space. Virgil's worst nightmare has materialized. Snakes now assaulting him from all directions, biting his face, eyeballs, mouth and neck with relentless fury. Hundreds of bites nip at his motionless body. His face swollen and lumpy with huge boils, oozing fluids and puss. Blood mixing with venom, his vision blurs, and the cold touch of death begins to creep over him. He feels his strength fleeting, his will to fight fading under the onslaught. The small, dark tunnel wraps around him, choking him with a damp decay. Each twist and turn of the passageway led him deeper into the bowels of the forgotten theater, the darkness swallowing him. Buried beneath the layers of pain and snake bites, Virgil's swollen shut eyes struggle to open, knowing that giving up means a slow agonizing death.

Sharp pains throbbing in his temples, his lips cracked and dried unable to swallow. As he is wakes up

outside the Rabbit Hole. The early morning light is blinding, his head pounding, body aching. He looks around, but no sign of Virgil.

"Virgil? Dude, where are you?" Dante calls out, his voice hoarse and throat singed.

There was no answer, only the silence of the empty street. Panic sets in as Dante realizes they had missed the concert. He stands to his feet, his mind flooded with a thousand questions. Where is Virgil? What had happened last night? Realizing he is alone, his breath is short and laborious, hyperventilation. He begins searching frantically for his friend, his only shield in the world. He drops to his knees, tears streaming down his face, not seeing a single soul anywhere in the streets. Dante's heart sinks as he makes his way back to his Dodge. The streets are eerily quiet, missing the usual hustle of the city. He drives around, his sense of unease growing stronger with each passing moment. Although it had to still be the early hours of the morning, he hasn't noticed any other cars on the road or people on the sidewalks. He looks through the streets and alleyways of Daytona, howling Virgil's name until his vocal cords bled. Hours dragged on, the search revealing nothing but emptiness. Finally, Dante's search comes to an abrupt halt at the edge of the world, waves crashing into the sand. He opens the creaking door, collapsing from the truck, lying on the ground as he cries to the sky. Confusion clouds his mind, perhaps still the lingering effects of those little white pills and that high-octane cannabis still pumping around in his veins. He grapples with the nightmare unfolding before him. He makes the agonizing decision to turn back toward home with out Virgil, clinging to the hope he will already be there.

When he arrives at his house, he finds an empty shell. The door squealed on its hinges as he pushes it open, the familiar scent of home, now replaced with an unsettling, sterile stillness.

"Mom? Dad?" Dante calls out, his voice cracking. He checks each room, his heart pounding harder with every empty space. The kitchen, the living room, even his parents' bedroom—all deserted. Sweat pouring from his skin.

"Where the fuck is everybody?" he mutters, running a hand through his hair. He grabs the phone from the wall, miserably dialing his grandmother's number. It rings and rings, but no one answers. He tries his neighbor's number next, but the result is the same: just an endless, hollow ringing. Dante feels mounting panic. Ignited by his fear of being alone, he frantically runs outside, desperate to find a shred of human presence in this dead zone. Realization that Virgil was still missing hit him when he arrived at Virgil's Dads house completely gone. Just an empty lot where his trailer used to sit. The once-familiar neighborhood now resembles a haunted wasteland, frozen in time. Abandoned cars litter driveways like forgotten relics, the doors hanging open slightly, welcoming him into their desolation. Not a single whisper of life in this emptiness. He wanders the streets, calling out names, hoping for any response. The echo of his voice is the only reply, bouncing off the empty windows of silent houses. He starts replaying the events of the previous night, trying to piece together the fragmented memories.

As the sky begins to darken with dusk, Dante finds himself back at his house, utterly exhausted. He sinks onto the front steps, head in his hands, feeling the weight of his isolation hanging down on him. The world has become a strange, unrecognizable place, and he has no idea how to understand it.

Determined to find answers, Dante decides to check the local news. He runs back inside, flips on the television, and watches as static fills the screen. No news anchor, no emergency broadcast, just the relentless hiss of white noise. He switches the channels frantically, hoping for any sign of life, but finds nothing.

Defeated, Dante collapses onto his bed he has to find Virgil. He has to understand what has happened. But for now, all he can do is close his eyes and hope that, somehow, the nightmare would end. Sleep eludes him. Every time he closes his eyes, images of Virgil's black eyes and the eerie, empty streets haunt his thoughts. He tosses and turns, sweat soaking through his sheets.

When Dante wakes, the sun is high in the sky, casting harsh light through his bedroom window. He rubs his eyes, the events of the previous night feeling like a distant dream. The emptiness of his house and the silence that deafens him confirmed that his nightmare is very real. He forces himself to eat something, though the food tastes like ash in his mouth. The anxiety in his stomach makes every bite feel like a chore. He washes it down with water, which hardly quenches his thirst. Setting the empty glass on the counter, he sits and thinks for a few moments in the silence of his misery.

Dante grabs his backpack and fills it with essentials: a flashlight, some bottled water, a few snacks, and a knife. He needs to be prepared for whatever he may encounter. Slinging the pack over his shoulder, he steps out into the glaring sunlight, determined to find his friend. He retraces his steps from the night before last, hoping to find any clue about Virgil's whereabouts. As he wanders back to the city, he observes the stillness that continued to pervade every corner. Shops, offices, and homes all stood abandoned, as if their occupants had vanished in an instant. The entire drive back to Daytona, nothing not even a bird in the sky. Dante pulls back into the same parking lot as the other night.

Walking down the vacant streets screaming Virgil's name Dante continues to hold hope he will find his friend. Dante's heart skips a few beats when he sees some movement down a side street. He sprints towards it, calling out, "Hey? Is anyone there?"

He finds himself face-to-face with a stray Doberman rummaging through a pile of trash. The dog looks up, its eyes reflecting the same confusion and fear that Dante feels. He lets out a sigh, extending a hand to the animal, which cautiously approaches and sniffs his fingers.

"Hey, buddy," Dante murmurs, giving the dog a gentle pat. "Looks like it's just us, huh?"

The dog lunges at Dante in a instant change of emotion, loudly barking, causing Dante to fall backwards. As Dante braced for the pain of the impact squeezing his eyes closed. Feeling nothing, not even the heat from the dog's mouth. After a moment or two he opens his eyes to see there was no dog standing before him. His mind was an adversary now, plotting to destroy him with fear and anxiety. Hours pass, the sun begins its descent watching the jagged shadows crossing the empty streets.

He finds a small park with a bench under a tree, he sits and tries to make sense of everything. His mind goes back to before the concert, to the moments before everything went blank. He remembers—nothing.

"Where is everyone?" Dante's shaken cry tore through the stillness, a raw outpouring of fear and torment that feels heavy in the stagnant humidity. His voice cracks with the weight of his loneliness, the realization as he stands alone in a world that seems to have forgotten him entirely. Suddenly, a distant muffled sound brakes the silence. It is faint, but it is there—a low, rhythmic hum, growing louder. Dante's pulse quickens. He stands up, straining to identify the source. The hum turns into a rumble, and then into the unmistakable roar of an engine. A vehicle is approaching. Dante runs towards the sound, hope and fear bellowing inside his eyes. He reaches the main road, he sees a glossy, red corvette convertible speeding towards him. He waves his arms frantically shouting. The convertible skids to a halt in front of him, and the driver's window rolls down. Dante's eyes widened in recognition. It's Claire, the main woman who had seduced them the other night, her face framed by gorgeous flowing, black hair, a playful smile painted in bright red on her lips.

"Hey there, pussy-boy," she calls out, her voice smooth and enticing. "Need a ride?"

Laughing with a hint of understanding, Dante hesitated, caught off guard and still reeling from the confusion. The woman's smile grew wider, more inviting, as she waved for him to come closer. The closer he got, the less control he felt. She had spellbinding deep brown eyes that seemed to lure him into a submissive state.

"I'll take you to your friend, Dante," she said.

As the sun dipped below the horizon, Dante's initial panic began to settle, and he managed to

clear his mind for a brief moment amidst the horror. The evil sexual demon was driving them back to the start of it all—the Rabbit Hole. Hopefully within its murky depths, the answers he needs will finally show themselves. Haunted by memories of the night while wrestling with a couple smoldering roaches burning his yellowed and brown stained fingers. He becomes a hydrant of adrenaline and desperation on his reckless fight against the unknown . The city has become an unknown arena, its once-familiar streets now a maze of uncertainty and desolation. Claire drives him through alleyways, speeding in excess hitting trash bags, sending them flying over the hood and windshield. Guiding him directly towards a daunting silhouette against the creeping twilight. She pulls upfront and winks at him before she opens the door to exit the glossy red corvette convertible.

Pushing through the door, he is met with a reek of stale smoke and decay, an assault at his senses. The interior of the building, a familiar yet twisted dream of memories long past, a reoccurring nightmare. Deeper into the center of the structure, a tremor of fear ripples through his body. "Virgil?" Dante calls out, his voice scratched and harsh . "Are you here?"

The gorgeous woman he had been trailing begins to hunch forward, jerking back upright. He watches in horror as her luscious black hair turns into a greasy gray rats nest. The transformation is a grotesque, perverse spectacle unfolding before his eyes. She isn't "hot" anymore. Her body withers, and her scandalous dress slips off onto the molded floor, revealing skin that is now scarred and sagging. She is changing into a revolting creature, something straight out of a nightmare. Rigid and wrinkled, with dark red blotches all over her sagging flesh, she resembles a diseased animal awaiting euthanasia. Her breasts, which moments earlier had been firm and sparkling with glitter, now drooping, loose flaps of cracked flesh. Her once-beautiful lips are now dead and a sickly pale blue, a gross contrast to the vibrant woman she had been just moments ago. Her eyes, which had once sparkled with a seductive display, now stare vacantly, clouded and lifeless. The graceful movements that had once captivated him are replaced by jerky, unnatural motions, as if her joints are rusted and her muscles are failing. Her nails, once manicured and painted, are now cracked and yellow, curling at the tips.

"Looking for your boyfriend?" she croaks, her cold blue lips spewing trails of brown and yellow foam from the corners of her dry-rotted mouth. The sound of her voice is a cruel parody of the sultry tone she had used before. Dante recoils, his stomach churning with revulsion. This isn't the woman he followed; this is a monster, a caricature of the beauty he had been drawn to. He falls backward, trying to comprehend the nightmare before him. The very world around him is distorting in response to this abomination. The creature takes a step toward him, her movements slow and deliberate, each one filled with a sinister intent.

"Don't you recognize me, Dante?" she hisses. "We had such a good time last night. Don't you remember?"

He shakes his head, his heart pounding in his chest. "What the fuck are you?" he managed to stammer, his voice barely above a whisper.

She laughs, a harsh, grating sound that echos through the empty hallway. "I'm what happens when you see the truth," she said, her eyes locking onto his with her voice deepening to a demonic octave. "And the truth is, Dante, you're in way over your fucking head."

He needs to get out of there, to find Virgil, as he turns to flee, the creature's laughter follows him, the nightmare was far from over, and the answers he needs are hidden in the depths of this grotesque reality.

"Where the fuck is he? What happened to everyone?" Dante demanded, his fear giving way to anger.

"They're here. Everywhere..... but nowhere you can see," she replies cryptically. "You see, everyone who enters the Rabbit Hole is forced to confront their deepest fears. Yours, it seems, is being left alone."

Dante's heart stopping as the weight of her words sink in. "What do you mean? Where is Virgil? Where is everyone?" He screams.

"Your friend is terrified in his own hell just beyond your reach. All the others, they are trapped in their own nightmares, just like you."

Desperation grips at Dante's throat. "How do I find him? How do I get out of this?"

The woman smiled, a cruel, knowing smile. "You must face your feerrrrrrr." The "r" growling out as she trailed off.

The room spins around him. Dante's worst fear is being alone, abandoned, left to fend for himself in a world with out a connection. It is a fear that has haunted him since childhood, a shadow that never quite left his side.

"But how? How do I face it?" he asks, his voice barely above a whisper.

"Embrace it, you BITCH," the woman snaps back, her voice echoing in the emptiness. "Only by diving headfirst can you become free."

The spinning intensifies, faster and faster, as the old, cackling entity fades into blackness. The sound of crashing waves fill his ears. He finds himself right in front of the pier.

Dante sucks in a lungful of air, his heart hammering against his ribcage. With a decisive exhale, he shuts his eyes tight. A whirlwind of memories tear through his mind, each one a jab of abandonment, insignificance, and neglect. Instead of shying away, he welcomes the fear, embracing it. The deranged cackle of the old hag reverberates like shards of broken glass in his ears, he locks his eyes on the end of the pier, bathed in the moonlit monochrome. Rushing down the wooden planks, sweat soaking his shirt clinging against his skin. Halting at the edge, the emptiness beneath him gaping, he hesitates in a moment of paralyzing uncertainty, he feels a clarity cut through the dense fog of his horror. Without a second thought, he leaps off the edge. As he falls, the cold darkness that had once terrorized him begins to recede, unveiling ghostly silhouettes of figures adrift. These are the lost souls, those demons he embraced, and now they have no power over him.

He plunges into the icy water, the shocking his senses awake. The waves crashing around him, but he feels a strange calmness settle within. The fear that had once gripped his heart is now a distant memory, it no longer holds sway over his soul. Breaking the surface, he gasps for air, the night sky stretching endlessly above him. He swims toward the shore. As he drags himself onto the sand, he looks back at the pier, now a mere silhouette against the horizon fading and blurring out of focus. Figures began to appear in the ether watching him, their forms flickering like candle flames in the wind.

His eyes pry open to a crowded room, each one reflecting their own fear and disorientation back at him. It is the foyer of the theatre. He is back inside the Rabbit Hole. Now there are people, some he recognized from the other night, or was it last night? Next to him, slumping against the wall, was Virgil. Dante shaking him gently. "Virgil! Wake up, man! We gotta get the fuck outta here!"

Virgil's eyes fluttering open. "Dante? Is that you? What happened?"

"It's a long story bro, but we need to get the fuck out. Now," Dante urged, helping his friend to his feet.

"Fuck! Shit, man! My face!" Virgil squalls, grabbing frantically at his face and neck. "They are fucking biting at me, they are springing out of the walls sinking their fangs into my goddamn face!" Virgil sobs uncontrollably.

"It's cool, buddy, there's nothing here. Look around, we're safe. Now, let's go!" Dante implores his companion. "I'm pretty sure we were just hallucinating. Tripping. Real fuckin hard."

Together, they make their way out of the Rabbit Hole, the clutches of their terrors slowly loosening with each painstaking step. The moonlight creates a painting of a nightmare.

"I feel awful, man," Virgil's hands shake as he grasps the corroded handle of the truck, a chilling sense of euphoria creeping in. "I still feel like I'm high, dude. Are you sure I'm not bit?"

"You're fine, man. I reckon it was all in our heads. Let's just get out of here!" Dante voice deepens as he begins laughing hysterically, echoing in Virgil's ears as he edges closer to the door, pushing the latch with his thumb. The door creaks open, unleashing a evil cascade of serpents that slither in erratic motions towards his feet, snapping viciously at him. In that moment of terror, Virgil's eyes shoot up to meet Dante's contorted face, his features deranged, twisted into a soulless shell. His mouth hangs down loosely, gaped with black tar dripping off his bottom lip. His eyes, completely black, piercing into Virgil's soul.