

PM Culverhouse

The Winner

Sally had won. She didn't know what she had won but for the first time in her life she was a winner. Sally entered this competition at some Expo she decided to attend on a whim. She sometimes needed to feel a crowd of people around her. It would take her days to recharge, but it was worth that feeling of community.

Sally packed her suitcase with the usual travel paraphernalia. She was told not to bring books. She didn't understand why and didn't question it either. She had won and that all that mattered to her. She put her pets in kennels, gave her sister her the keys to her house so it looked like someone loved it and trundled down the road to the nearest taxi depot.

She arrived at the hotel. Sally was greeted with large cardboard placards, arrows directing people to and from, a crowd control fence, white clad strangers in masks all holding bits and bobs of such-and-such and this-and-that who directed her to the lobby.

Sally was slightly worried now. What had she won? The email she had received had not been great on detail aside for what to pack and to print the email out. She recognised people. They were people from the stalls she spoke with at the Expo. They all were looking slightly anxious as they themselves had suitcases as well. They glanced around. A woman sobbed.

Sally wasn't sure what was happening. A guard asked for the printed email. She gave it to him. She was directed to a booth where she was asked to hand over her belongings and give samples. They asked her questions. They re-asked the same questions. She felt exhausted. They directed her through a different door when the interrogation had finished.

Sally was told to wait. She sat and watched and listened in the corridor she was directed to wait in. It was empty. This overwhelming sense of dread crept over her. A door slammed at the end of the corridor. The swift clacking of shoes came towards her as a white clad person directed her to the door to her right. She was ushered into this makeshift doctor's surgery.

Another white clad figure sat behind the desk. The door was closed. They were calm. They looked at her. Sally was now shaking.

From behind the mask a muffled voice sounded.

Congratulations Sally. You are patient zero.

And then all hell broke loose!