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Plague

The pedestrian warning blinked red. A woman in thin heels tugged her baggy clothed boyfriend in the protective rails of white. A now-extinct bird chirped a warning, informing the few blind in the neighborhood that the light was going to change. Beaten down cars rusted at the side of the roads, sellers and shopkeepers tried to charm their way into the wallets of potential customers. The degrading buildings had garbage decorating their feet, bags hiding the potential memories of those who dropped them carelessly. Ragged gentlemen and ladies held signs between the open market stalls, hoping for a kindness from some of their better off brethren. Old women tugged their impatient grandchildren from stall to stall, looking for decent clothes for their children. Produce wilted in the windows of grimy grocers, as mothers stormed through the aisles with whimpering children. The grime of the neighborhood seemed to grip not only the living, but the buildings and plant-life alike. Crawling up the buildings like watery ivy, grasping onto all those who passed. Pedestrians stepped easily around the grime, having years of living with it to know where to step, like a younger sibling asking for the same things for the hundredth time.

As a newly extinct bird sang the go-ahead, a girl with an unwavering smile stepped into the protective rails. Earphones dangled from her ears, as grocery bags swung-controllably from her hands. A small berth was given to the unwavering smile to allow her passage. Something about he unsettled those who came in close contact with the unwavering smile. She unnerved them all, it might have been her un-breaking smile or the fact she lived on the top floor of one of the most decrepit buildings in a room surrounded by books. The rumors were abounding about the girl from the regulars of the street. She had a glint in her crinkled eyes, one that twinkled a bit too much, she lived alone and did not fear anyone trying to get at her, and overall she was just too nice. They knew of her, the interest that the pimp showed in the unwavering smile, though the pimp did not try to recruit her. The unfortunates of the human hemisphere were the only ones who did not fear her, she was kind to them, giving them amateur medical attention, food, advice, and all with an unwavering smile. She did not see them as unfortunates, with her dazed distracted eyes, she saw potential and good in most of them. There were the few that unwavering smile would avoid, but she would always keep her smile.

She wandered through the streets, easily side-stepping the non-regular shoppers, keeping out of everyone’s way until she reached her building. Climbing the stairs littered with refuse and playing children, she climbed higher and higher until she reached the top floor. Whispers followed her as she climbed, children giggling about the stories they told, she was a princess lost in time, she was waiting for some miracle to take her away, or their favorite, she was an alien and she was trying to phone home. The children were always nice to her, not recognizing the smile for the buffer that they she knew it was. If she was always smiling, she couldn’t be feeling bad feelings, feelings of hurt that always hurt others much worse. Her kryptonite would forever be the negative feelings that plagued her dreams, but she was able to ward off the negative by forever being positive. The homeless, which she referred to as ladies and gentlemen for their kindness and not being completely aware of everything that goes on around her, were the nicest to her. In part because the homeless knew that she would not turn them away if they needed food, sometimes making herself go hungry for the night. The ladies only humored her because the pimp took an interest in the unwavering smile. The pimp never made propositions to the unwavering smile to join her ladies, but she did request the girl provide basic medical attention, using the medical skills that she learned from her brief years at university. The ladies tolerate the unwavering smile, finding her mumblings to herself a little unnerving. They would whisper amongst themselves wondering if there was something wrong with her, she seemed stable, as long as the smile never wavered.

The silence of her floor was boxed in by the noise of the outside, she loved the silence and the drifting noise, wishing that was what went on inside her head, the noise being kept outside. Cars driving, people yelling, children laughing, sellers charming, drifted through the windows and over stairs, but they never became part of the top floor, hindered by the installation of a trap door, littered with books, nonperishable food items, chords and electrical equipment, and the sightless dolls, always watching and waiting. Waiting for the unwavering smile to break so they can come to her rescue. They took pity on the girl, watching her as she tore herself apart with guilt, trying to find the answer to why she was there. Taking the earphones out she placed her cans and boxes of food among the stacks of books that ranged from medical anomalies to occult texts that would hopefully explain the ball of writhing chaos wedged between her stomach and liver. Lounging in the room was the pimp, long black hair draped over a single shoulder as she flipped nonchalantly through one of the various books, her sheer red cocktail dress pooled around her legs, her lips matching the dress. The pimp was just as flashy as her male counterparts, but she was much better organized, earlier that day she had taken over a street from one of those counterparts, he wasn’t no where near happy about it, but he couldn’t do anything. The pimp had a much more extensive network than he could contend with, if he wanted to take her down, he would have to infiltrate her network. For that he would need resources that he did not have access to. Unwavering smile placed her bag on the floor and lifted some books out of a crumbling chair, Someone need medical attention, No, just wanted to talk, Huh, They’re closing in on you, I know, I saw them on the street, Did they follow you, No, I lost them on 3rd street, Well you know what they say about fleeing girls, What, You will need to be able to run in heels to track them down. Unwavering smile laughed, the pimp chuckling along, closing the book she asked, What will you do when they find you, They won’t, they’ve been looking for weeks and haven’t gotten any closer, They will find you, especially when you make food run, I’ll just have to be more careful, I could send my employees to get your food, They’ll mess it up, No they won’t, they wouldn’t dare, They would try and blame it on not understanding the list, They wouldn’t dare. The pimp continued to mutter they wouldn’t dare over and over as she analyzed her girls, she may have to cut a few loose if they were really that untrustworthy.

## Unwavering grabbed the nearest book off the floor, flipping through it she starts from the chapter of Haemolacria, she had not caused anyone to cry tears of blood, but maybe it would give some answers as to why the voices were those of comatose patients that she either knew or met briefly. The girls are beginning to whisper, Someone is always whispering, Agents have been coming and asking questions about a woman that matches your description, It always matches my description, It always does, doesn’t it. The unwavering smile looked up, making sure that the pimp had not heard the slimy voice, it gave her chills, the voice of her almost-rapist forever in her mind, she was trying to be rid of the menace but her books were not forthcoming with the information that she needed. The pimp noticed her stiffening, knowing that it was those voices that only belonged to real people for the unwavering smile, the aftereffects of her existence staining the lives of those who had been too close when her smile wavered, reaching behind her back, the pimp pulled a box from behind and placed it before her, I brought you a present, a thank you for not stealing my employees voices, I would never do that, Still, if you weren’t in control they would be lost to me and limp bodies aren’t what the customers ordered, What will I do with a dog, They’re sad to be therapeutic, it will help, Are you sure. The pimp paused, trying to see if the unwavering smile was indeed talking to her, Yes, I’m sure. Standing she brushed off her skirt, walking through the piles of books she kissed the top of her head, Take care of yourself, I will try to lead them astray. The unwavering smile watched her leave, the pimp was worried about the smile those voices were becoming too real.

## The pimp did not like it, she did not believe that the voices matched any living person, the unwavering smile could only provide one or two names, the others would not give her a name, or so they claimed. When the pimp made it to the bottom of the stairs, she nodded to the men she had stationed there. They were her insurance, there were various groups that were interested in the girl upstairs, and who was she to give up a potential prize that could reward her with vast amounts of money. The rumors she heard were that of this girl stealing the voices of those who threatened her, though she did not have the control to not harm those who were within a half-mile radius. She had only heard reports, never seen it in happen though. She really wanted to see it happen, the rumors had to be false. She needed to make a tip.

## Upstairs, the unwavering smile had tentively moved to the box, she opened it to see a growing great dane within the box. The smile grew bigger as she saw the potential in the puppy, the paws, head and ears were too big, alluding to the progress that would happen over the course of a few weeks. You don’t deserve anything, I’m trying, she answered the slimy voice. Her mind was packed with the voices, those of her attackers, those of innocent pedestrians, and those of friends. She had not done anything to her family, they were not within the half-mile radius when she had felt threatened, but others were. Some had weak voices and were easily pushed to the side by the stronger voices, those of her friends and attackers, but her friends had been getting weaker and weaker, she was running out of time. Maybe this puppy would give her the answer she was looking for. Picking up the wiggling mass of energy, the unwavering smile cleared a corner of books and tried to communicate that this was where he could do his business, the puppy just licked her face in answer. The puppy would forget where the corner was and destroy a discarded book later that night, and the unwavering smile would have to lead the puppy back to the oasis of waste.

## Pulling out some spam, the unwavering smile tried to recollect what information she had gathered so far. Not much, said the tired voice of her almost-forgotten friend, we don’t know much, I know, I will keep looking, I promise to heal you, You never promise me, the slimy voice said, Or me, said the gravely voice of her almost mugger, You never promise us that you will return us, But you are bad, I don’t want to release you on the world, only the good, I want to put the innocents back, How do you know that they are innocent, you don’t know them, the slimy voice was drowning out the other voices, But they have to be, I need to keep the bad in like some box, keeping the bad in while allowing the good to stay outside, You’ll never win. The bickering continued, but the unwavering smile refused to listen to the rest of their bickering as she continued to go through the stolen books. She had acquired all the books from libraries and archives, she needed to study them, and it wasn’t safe for her to be in crowded places. It wasn’t safe for her to stay here, but she had not had an episode in over three years, she hadn’t talked to anyone from back home in over five years, but she kept track of the coma patients. Those that she had forced into the hospital, she repented every time she read the articles. The puppy laid its head on her leg, she absently rubbed her hand over his head as she offered some spam with the other hand. Flipping through the occult book, the unwavering smile lost herself in the research, searching for an answer to her predicament, her plague upon humanity.

## The pimp had searched and found one of the men that had tried to follow the unwavering smile, however she was not expecting to be manhandled for the information. A woman in her position was not to be mishandled, these men knew not of whom they were messing with, but she smiled and bared it. She gave directions to where they would find the woman they were looking for, and they manhandled her once again, forcing her to follow them. To see her betrayal unfold in front of her, the pimp’s smile wavered.

## The unwavering smile stirred from her curled position as a wet nose made its presence known in her ear. Fluttering her hand passed her ear, looking up she noticed the strong smell of urine and saw that one of the discarded books soaked through. She did not shed a tear as the book had already been ruled out as a potential to being a possible answer. She did not want possible answers she wanted true answers. The puppy’s head tilted as the oversized ears heard something from down below, alerting the unwavering smile to what was missing, the drifting noise, there were no cars, there were no people talking loudly, no slow sirens, there was nothing. Scrambling towards the trap door in the floor, the unwavering lifted it up a little to listen to those below, she was suddenly bombarded with screams as the sound of books dropping silenced them one by one. The unwavering smile realized that those looking for her also wanted to remove any trace of her, they had never been this close before, she usually slipped away before they could close their hands upon her throat. The puppy began to yip as his sensitive ears picked up the low pops of death. Allowing the door to drop, the unwavering smile started to scramble for her stuff, she felt her smile falling and she needed to get away. Packing up what food she could along with the money she had begged off others, she picked up the puppy and started for the fire escape. The stolen books would be returned and she would just have to start over again, but she was too late.

## The trap door burst up as bright light blinded the unwavering smile from the fire escape, yells of show us your hands, get on the floor were screamed from the men in masks. Lowering the puppy carefully, the unwavering smile sank to her knees. She was forcing her smile now. It fell a fraction as she noticed a flash of red, I thought we were friends. She did not get an answer as the pimp smile nervously. She was roughly searched, and pushed around, her smile was fighting to be a frown, the bundle of chaos straining to be free of its confines. She clamped down on it, these people did not deserve that fate, they were only following orders. As they finished up, they forced her to stand. They started to lead her away, the puppy whimpering in the corner. She looked back briefly and noticed her earphones sitting forgotten on the chair, getting free of the grasping hands she reached for her earphones. She would be much happier with the earphones and no one would be hurt. The angry men did not see that, and one brought the butt of his gun down hard upon the back of her head, it was enough to release the chaos. The screams now filled the quiet space as their voices were ripped from them, funneling into the already full head. The pimp watched, mesmerized as her drive was stolen and inserted into the girl. She was sad that she was wrong, but fascinated by this plague upon the earth.

## It took the girl five minutes to recover. Opening her eyes, she looked at all the limp bodies, adjusting them into more comfortable positions. She started to pack up more slowly as she prepared to leave. She would call 911 after she left, no use sticking around. Fixing a makeshift leash, she attached it to the puppy that was still whimpering in the corner. The girl was happy to know that animals were spared from the onslaught that was her chaos. Patting him on the head, she led him down the stairs.

Stopping at the entrance that led outside, she fixed her smile and stepped into the swallowing night.