

The Tower

A pungent stench; one of mould, rot, and filth smothered the ground layer of the Avenue. It was once the soul of the city. Now, its pavement was cracked to the point it started to resemble a cobblestone road: too rough, bumpy, and hazardous to attempt using any automobile on. The seemingly endless row of buildings lined on either side of the road had eroded to the point they creaked remorselessly if the slightest gust leaked into the city, threatening to topple to their complete and irreversible destruction at a moment's notice.

The road in the Avenue was nearly deserted. The cracks in the pavement were vacant. Nimble weeds that should have been sprouting from the crevices blithely were hindered, if not slaughtered by the poisonous, blight ridden soil they were forced to grow from. Shopping carts were strewn about the street, sorrow reminders of the fall from grace the city suffered.

Most of those who remained took shelter underneath the wilting trees lining the median. Others walked by passively - aimlessly. Less commonly, some looted the corpses of those who had drawn their last breath, backs leaning on the termite ridden trees. All of them, dead or alive, were caked with a thick layer of grime left there by the impermeable smog that engulfed the Avenue; a grey, lifeless, toxic blanket. The smog stood so impervious that a husk on one side of the Avenue would not be able to visually witness a tragedy occurring on the other, let alone hear it.

Of all the withering buildings lining the road, one dominated the others. Nearly behind the veil that enshrouded the residents at all times loomed The Tower. It was a colossal building; standing infinitely higher than the rest of the buildings - tall to the point that it had to taper off in diameter at the top as to not topple like a house of cards from a nearby whisper.

The bottom of the tower was similar to the other buildings, the avenue, and the city in general. It stood weakly; whining under the weight of its upper floors at all times, perilously close to crumbling. The walls were ridden with cracks and leaves from plants that perished from lack of maintenance - the leaves coloured a sickly brown.

However, on the upper floors of The Tower, something changed. The cracked outer walls slowly transformed into a structurally complete, unbroken slab. The vines growing from the interior first gained a healthier colour, then their leaves back, and finally stopped growing out the windows altogether at the top. It was in pristine condition.

A few hundred meters away, in the median of the avenue, a young woman leaned on a crippled mahogany tree, its once majestic demeanour a distant and foggy memory. Termites that had fallen off the tree writhed on the woman's frail, saggy skin: set there by months of ebbing nutrition. She shivered with the little energy she had retained as moisture from the dank ground underneath her legs seeped into the soles of her feet.

A man began to materialize in her peripheral vision, striding out of the smog that now encapsulated the woman and the newcomer. As he strolled closer towards the woman's tree, his features began to clear; he was underweight, but not to the point he had hollow cheeks or a chronic lack of energy. A maroon leather jacket rested on his shoulders and beaten jeans hung from his waist. Despite walking directly towards the woman, his eyes were void of emotion - humanity - as if robbed by this twisted world. She smiled weakly in his presence with the assumption he'd stop and help her up. He reached the tree. Then, he kept walking. The woman tried to outstretch her arm to grab him by his ankle but missed.

"Please help me," she whimpered.

The man's footsteps began to dull as he walked closer towards the boundary of her vision, back into the smog.

In a last-ditch effort, she scrounged for her remaining energy.

"Please!"

The high pitched screech of desperation was able to penetrate the thick smog, reverberating around the buildings that lined the avenue. It barreled towards The Tower from every direction, barraging it with a roar amplified and a hundred times multiplied from the same source. The Tower heaved in pain: cracks at the bottom exaggerating and expanding as it did so. Rotten wood and steel glueing the building to its foundation warped, some of it snapping in the process. When the sound finally subsided after what seemed to be an eternity the building was in far worse shape. Though, bizarrely, the top of the tower remained unscathed.

A solitary shopping cart persisted its movement. The cart's stiff wheels brushed over the fractured road, rattling in the process. A man dressed in nothing but rags leaned against the bar at the back in order to give himself a rudimentary crutch. He leaned on the cart, slowly pushing it along the flat, yet the uneven surface of the avenue.

Suddenly, his entire leg was swallowed by the ground underneath him. A shot of pain soared up the man's spine. He yelled in pain and defeat before looking down to reveal his shattered limb trapped inside one of the many crevices that littered the road.

He hadn't even noticed the footsteps from behind him until a voice piped up.

“This looks like quite a precarious situation,” a gruff voice greeted him.

“Yeah. Please, God,” he shuddered, tears welling in his eyes. “Can you help me?”

“If I did, I’m not sure if you’d attack me or not. Besides, recovering from that...” the stranger who stumbled upon the scene pointed dismissively at the demolished leg. “... is virtually impossible in this day and age,” He paused dramatically. “But what I will do,” The gruff man hijacked the shopping cart, wheeling it away from the man in the hole. “is free you from your burden.”

The first man, the one with the broken leg, desperately tried to remove himself from the hole in vain. “Hey, assh*le! Hey! Get back here!” he roared.

The man who now piloted the cart faded from the sight of the trapped man, hopelessly attempting to dislodge himself from the ground.

“Hey!”

His yell barreled onto and off of every wall in the Avenue. With every surface it bounced off, it only got more powerful. Then, it rammed into the tower. The brittle brick that it consisted of cracked and crumbled. Those that didn’t have mortar to hold them in place dislodged and fell multiple stories before shattering on the pavement below. The Tower groaned in pain as it became asymmetrical: structurally diminished to the point it looked like a Jenga tower seconds before toppling. The top remained in perfect condition.

A horrid sound emanated from one of the alleys leading into the Avenue. The walls on both sides were so badly damaged that the buildings they were supporting may have disintegrated

immediately if they needed to support the weight of another needle. Unaware of an approaching hazard, a young boy had strolled into the alley. The frame of a middle-aged woman came into frame. She was crouched over mouldy cardboard, murmuring at the direction of the ground. Ancient runes lined the alleyway, etched there with a crude chisel. The boy tiptoed innocently toward her, asking if she was okay. Her mumbling devolved into shrieks as she stumbled towards the boy. Tripping on the pavement, he begged to be left alone. The woman took this as an opportunity to jump on and beat him remorselessly with a jagged rock. His screams of agony slowly subsided as his blood flooded the pavement, washing the corpses of hundreds of insects into the gutter, never to be seen again. Flattened cardboard and linen cloth - the woman's sleeping gear - began to adopt a maroon red colour from being stained by the runoff blood pumping from the boy's arteries. He gargled one last time before falling quiet. Forever.

The last whimper of life from the boy didn't echo in the avenue before hitting the tower in a million pressure points. Rather, it acted like a bullet, penetrating the air until it hit the tower in a pillar on the third floor.

Finally, The Tower had reached the end of its life.

The supports on the first stories caved in like a toddler's set of styrofoam building blocks. All three materials that held the building up crumbled. The wood splintered. The metal distorted. The brick disintegrated. As the bottom of the tower collapsed, the top tumbled towards the ground as well.

The sea of rubble pierced through the smog: a tidal wave of destruction. The woman under the empty branches of the mahogany tree turned her head towards the soft, growing rumble on her side, unable to see the impending doom that approached. Realizing the sound was hastening and intensifying, she used her remaining energy to push against the tree, using it as a crutch, before falling back towards the mud. She sighed in defeat. The Tower engulfed her.

The windows of the top stories that survived the direct fall onto the median shattered as the tidal wave buried the husk who had ignored the woman under the tree less than a minute prior. He didn't even turn to face his killer before he was swallowed.

The heterogeneous expanse of wood, metal, and stone put the man stuck in the crevice out of his misery, but not before he uttered a cry of defiance. Seconds later, aluminium, of which a shopping cart would have been made from, forged a whine so audible it was clear as day among the overpowering rumbling the sea of destruction radiated.

The buildings that lined either side of the avenue were beginning to receive the ultimate thrust they needed to crumble underneath their weight and flatten onto their foundations. The first ones that were knocked over would push the next down like a line of dominoes. The woman in the alleyway awoke from her catatonic state, averting her stare from the dead boy towards the tsunami of wreckage lurching in her direction. She laughed. Then, she was gone.

When the dust settled, the Avenue was no more. All of the buildings had collapsed, leaving a uniform surface, one of destruction, in every direction. There were no more trees. There were no more people. There was no more life.