**Theme – Greed | Title - `The Forgotten Land**

* **By Chaitrasree**

**Introduction –** “It is the year 2201, where half of the trees in the world have vanished and people live inside the bubble cities relying on an artificial oxygen system. Among them is a middle-aged reporter who comes across the death of a 104-year-old activist.”

**Story -**

*How easy we move on and how easily we forget the things that have happened, perhaps this is the greatest strength and the most insidious thing of humanity.*

“Dammit!” I cursed at the awful day I had today. I hate my job and everything that comes along with it. I look at the computer sitting alone as usually on my desk, the squared keys of the worn off keyboard that I been dreadfully breaking my knuckles on for the past twenty years.

I pull the chair out of the desk and sat down to type the usual things that I went through the day or for some people it is referred to as the news. It was my boss Rahul’s idea for me to have my own section on our e-news website. Apparently, people like to hear my opinions every day.

My fingers are intertwined under my chin as I contemplate what to put for the headline. As a journalist, it’s difficult to come up with sensational news that would shake people, but let me tell you what’s harder as a journalist with twenty years of experience. It’s writing the same boring piece of news of a never-changing world and coming up with different catchy headlines just to survive in my field of work.

I look at the bright screen. What should I write I thought.

I have the usual two options – The first one, I can write about the idiot who decided to harvest a farm instead of millets and lost all this money because he thought his tomatoes are safe from the sand storm and the second, I can write about 104- year- old activist and his fanatic cult who is hated by everyone. No matter how many times I wrote this fluff, people always paid attention without getting bored. I guess people like to pay attention to things they fear and things they hate.

As I am still trying hard to think of a news bit to write, my mobile rang. I look at the caller id, it was my boss Rahul.

“I will try to come up with a news before the morning, don’t call me at 1 pm,” I said.

“Oh you don’t have to come up with news anymore Pranay, we have the news,” Rahul said.

“Really?”

“Yes, the 104- year-old Narayan had finally died, I guess people curses for his death had finally reached him. I already sent our reporters to cover it live, but I need you to get to the spot and see if you can find something more.” Rahul said and I can sense the urgency laced in his voice, it was understandable, Narayan is a man who is hated by the entire nation and tomorrow morning the headlines will blow up.

I stand up and grab my coat to get out.

“How and where did he die?” I asked as I close my door and jump inside my Duster car.

“Most likely suicide, the old man had jumped from the sixth floor of his apartment, but only the investigation can say whether it’s indeed a suicide or murder.” with that Rahul ended his call, but suddenly I felt a chill down my spine.

Suicide? The stubborn man had committed suicide, I could not fathom the word for few seconds.

I drove my car towards Narayan’s Home and stopped a few yards away from the apartment, the lane drawing up to the entrance of the apartment is filled with the noise of the police cars, flashes of cameras from various news channels and the loud murmurs of curious people.

I push myself through the crowd and reach the yellow do not cross police tape guarded by two burly officers.

“I need to get in, I am a journalist from The NewTime,” I spoke loud enough for the police officers to hear.

“Sorry, until the investigation is over, no news reporters are allowed beyond the tape.” One of the officers replied.

“I am not a reporter,” I ground my teeth at him and turned back to walk away.

I knew this would happen, I should have done my traditional method which is jumping over the wall to get a glimpse of the scene before some officer finds me out and so I did jump the back wall into Naryan apartment only to be caught with bad luck.

“You are jumping walls again,” Abhishek said with a judgemental look.

“Dammit,” I cursed loudly.

“Come inside, you can look at the scene.” He replied and I couldn’t thank him enough. It pays to have a good relationship with someone from the police department and I have known Abhishek since my college days.

I follow Abishek as he leads me up to the place where Narayan’s dead body is lying. I have to tell you that I have seen many on scene dead bodies in my twenty years as a journalist but when I saw Narayan’s dead body there was something different about it, an emotion that I couldn’t convey.

Maybe it is my first time seeing the dead body of a person whose whole life I felt nothing more but a mere vanity affair and now he lays before my eyes as his face is smashed down grotesquely into a mass of red pulp, his arms turned completely backwards while his legs folded up towards his stomach, but his eyes…his eyes had conquered the pain he felt as he died as they lay wide open until one of the officers close them and moved the body into a stretcher.

“Jumped down from his home on the sixth floor with his face down smashing the garden rock, turning it into a bloody pulp,” Abhishek said.

“Is it a suicide?” I asked.

“It is a suicide, he left a note.”

“A note?”

Abhishek showed me his phone that had the picture of Narayan’s suicide note. I read what was written: “*There is no hope anymore, you all deserve to die and it will happen, I am glad mine came first.”*

“What a lunatic till his last breath. It is just like him to curse at everything.” Abhishek said.

“Are you sure it was a suicide? He is the type of man who rather enjoys seeing the fall of our country and prove that he was right.” I said.

I know Narayan all my life, he always protested against the new Safe City developments and is against artificial oxygen.

For people who are living in the 21st century, artificial oxygen might sound weird, but they couldn’t even fathom what the year 2201 which I currently live is like. They will call me a fool if I travel back in time and say half the trees in the world had disappeared along with half of everything – the population, the animal species, the ocean. One might think about how this happened?

I have to say it all began in the late 21st century, the year 2112. The time when Narayan was a 15 year old. On a cool November day that year, many cities are already dead in India due to heavy pollution and lack of clean water. The government then was trying to improve the environment, but the damage was already large enough to even recover. It wasn’t just India, the whole world suffered the same with cities dying because of forest depletion and lack of water. The once billion population of India is now no longer more than 100 million.

At that time people lost all hope for living and just then the first discovery of artificial oxygen had come into the light. It was a major discovery since the successful nuclear energy generation with no leftover radioactive waste. The discovery proved we no longer have to rely solely on trees for the circulation of our respiration system. The system showed that it can create an environment where it can recycle the air breathed out and breathed to infinite time, promising that the system can give the oxygen and clean air support for the next five hundred years without relying on trees and ocean plankton much.

Ever since the discovery is made, governments across the world decreased their funding to provide solutions to save the dying environment and started funding the artificial oxygen project to develop it much further.

By the time I was born which is the year 2159, the cities are built inside a large thick bubble and are called Safe cities with the artificial oxygen system. These cities had everything people wanted, pure air to breathe, food synthesized from artificial soil and hybrid plants that never die and every waste is perfectly recycled with ninety-nine per cent recycling value, which means the waste is returned back the same amount with only a 1 % loss. Thus saying we human beings are safe for the next 500 years the least.

Ever since then the artificial cities are developed, the living expenses also rose high while the environment outside started to deplete further, although the government is saying they are trying their best to bring back the ecosystem to how it was once, people no longer cared as they are happy with their living inside a city of a bubble.

While the city people are rejoicing their lives inside the bubble, outside the bubble sand storms formed every day which are faced by the poor people who cannot afford the safe city and lived in the outskirts which we call as Terrains.

While the people in cities are now happy and supported the government to develop these cities more, Narayan is the only person who protested against the developments, he said it was all a lie that we are safe for the next 500 years and the government should stop developing these cities and spend people taxes on looking solutions to develop environment.

People at first supported Narayan, but for years seeing the failures of the scientists' on experimentation to bring back the ecosystem which is leading to heavy money loss, people slowly inclined their support towards the building of Safe cities.

Narayan still wasn’t hated, a few years later since he established himself as an activist against city developments, he said the government had created a successful plant inside their secret labs, but are hiding it from people to grab their money in name of the city development. At this time I was a journalist and I believed Narayan, but no matter how many times I or anyone investigated, Narayan’s claims turned to be false and people started calling him the liar. He was hated for giving false hopes and he continued to do so till his death.

If you ask my opinion on Narayan, I feel no hatred towards him, his existence itself given me plenty of news to write and brought money for me to live in the city. And as for his claims I don’t care if they are real or false, I just want to survive and die normally.

“It is a suicide, we found no fingerprints and CCTV cameras didn’t catch anyone entering his home either, and the suicide note is his handwriting only,” Abhishek said confidently as I continue to watch the blood left behind.

“No foul play anywhere?” I asked one last time, cause I still can’t believe Narayan committed suicide.

“Well the CCTV didn’t work for five minutes, but we traced other CCTV cameras that working and they are conclusive enough to say no foul play” Abishek still carried the confidence of his judgement, but the CCTV part didn’t settle right with me.

“Ok, I will go now and give facts to Rahul,” I bid goodbye.

I start my car and drove to a twenty-four-hour burger joint in the city.

“Hello, welcome to double joint burger zone. We make our burgers with the healthiest bio flavours that give you a taste of good juicy meat and it’s only 500 rupees!” An excited female robotic voice greeted me as I entered the empty restaurant.

I walked to the digital screen and tapped on a burger pic and placed the order.

I sat down as my burger came on an automatic serving robot which placed my food carefully onto my table. I look at my watch it is three in the morning and suddenly the speakers in the restaurant gave a warning announcement.

“*WARNING! The sand storm is to appear in the next twelve hours lasting for thirty minutes. It is advisable to stay inside the city under the protection of bubble, cancel your trips to the terrain – have a safe year 2201”*

The people in the city don’t care about the warnings, all their life they are aware of those sandstorms and also know nobody isn’t keen on visiting the terrain. They knew the bubble won’t let the storm come in.

The people of terrain who we call the terrain dwellers are one’s who cannot afford the protection of the bubble and to these terrain dwellers this is not just a warning but a forecast to their deaths and only they are aware of the danger and I knew cause I once was the poor dirt lived in a terrain.

I remember my single mother turning on the satellite to get the warnings in our broken apartment home and when they came, we shut and tape every open we saw and prayed for the storm to be over soon before we ran out of air to breathe. While we prayed for our lives, the people of the city lived inside their safe bubble city breathing the clean artificial oxygen – the perfect replacement to nature.

As I ate my burger, I called Rahul and updated him on the death.

“I think there is something wrong with his death,” I start.

“I can understand you, he was hated by everyone in the country, it wouldn’t be surprising if someone killed him,” Rahul said like he didn’t care, which I can understand as nobody cared for Narayan.

“I will inspect the site once the police leave,” I said, as it is the only way I can find proper peace for myself.

“Ah! you and your innate journalist soul. You always dig deeper Pranay, that’s why you are my top employee, go ahead and check the site until you get your heart's content which will confirm you it is suicide only,” Rahul ended the call.

I slept what left of the night in my car at the restaurant parking lot and when the sun came up shining brightly I wash my face and teeth in the washroom of the restaurant.

I drove my car back to Naryan apartment and sneaked into the building without getting caught by the security office which was damn easy as the officer is buried deep into the virtual gaming screen.

I stood outside Narayan’s door and tried to figure the passcode to his house. I was in the house after six attempts. His door password is the first day of his protest.

As I walked into the apartment which now felt eerie, suddenly a stick flew right to my face knocking me to the ground.

“I will kill you, “ a familiar voice of a woman screamed in fear.

“Nidhi?” I said in pain.

“Pranay?” Nidhi gasped in shock and lifted me up.

“What are you doing here?”

“I came to investigate before you came,” She replied and curled her lips tight looking annoyed.

“So you wanted to beat me,” I smiled.

Nidhi is my fellow journalist, who always tries to compete against me for the top position. I am pretty sure she hates me to the guts, but I couldn’t hate her back as I have a crush on her. I mean who cannot like this beautiful woman. She has the sharpest looks and the meanest smile that can seduce can men in the world.

“Ok whatever we find here, I will also get the credit, let’s work together, deal?” she pushed her hand forward in frustration and I shook it completing the agreement.

Narayan’s house is like the mess his life was, his house is the epitome of it. Too many empty cups of instant noodles cluttered around the living room, the kitchen reeking of the fouled smell of unwashed dishes, it is hard to find any clue for me in this pigsty. Although it would seem like hell to be living here, I have to tell his house is much better than mine. It had a living room, a bedroom with an attached bathroom, a kitchen and a study hall.

“His house is antique, there are no virtual gears, no touchpads, no service robots, I feel like I am not living in the year 2201, but 70 years back. No wonder we can easily break in.” Nidhi commented.

“Yet his house is better looking than mine,” I replied with the ting of jealousy attached to my tone.

“Hey be proud of your little house, you brought it with your own money at least, unlike him who made protests with people living in terrain against the Safe city while at the end of the day he also shamelessly lived here, while his terrain cult supporters had to go back to the dust,” Nidhi grunted her teeth in anger, “Just pray that we find something useful in this mess, I’ll go search his bedroom.”

I decided to search the living room and in the next thirty minutes of my search, I found nothing. I wish I could find his computer in this house, unfortunately, the police took them away to investigate.

Since I found nothing in the living room, I decided to inspect his study room, I bet Narayan spent every day of his life in that room. I pulled out his desk draws, there was nothing again.

“I found nothing unusual, what about you?” Nidhi asked as she stepped inside the study room.

“Same here,” I said as I plopped into the window seat tiredly and gestured Nidhi to sit beside me.

“We have to leave the apartment before anyone comes in,” Nidhi said.

“Yeah, I guess it was a suicide after all,” I said.

“What made you think it was a murder, the CCTV camera that has been broken down for 5 minutes.” She smiled at me.

“What is that smile?” I asked curiously.

“Because I figured out what your thought process went by after you heard that?” She smiled proudly again, like a little girl who got an A grade in the whole class.

“What did you figure out?” I asked.

“Okay, even though the CCTV camera which focuses on Narayan’s door didn’t work for 10 minutes coincidentally at the time he fell, there is another second camera in the corridor of this floor which can catch anyone entering the floor, but no one was caught in the camera at that time. So that alone says no one else came into Naryan’s house to kill him, except…” Nidhi stopped.

“Except what?” I said.

“This is the part where I started to think like how would you think,” She admitted, her face was flushed with frustration. Probably due to the fact, she didn’t like admitting that I was useful to her somehow.

“What did you think?” I prodded.

“Well if the second camera which was working didn’t catch anyone entering the floor at the time Narayan died, it means if there is a chance for murder it would be done by people who are already on this floor, cause the second camera only captures the entrance to the floor,” she finished.

“Good thinking, well I already found of that his neighbours are innocent. There are only three more houses on this floor and if the killer is already a resident, your theory would have work, except they all have a solid alibi at that time proving they are not murders,” I concluded.

We both got up from the window seat to get out of the apartment.

“Hey this is hollow,” Nidhi said tapping the window seat.

I tapped the seat and it was indeed hollow, we both lifted the window seat and saw there is a large space beneath it with a box inside.

I pulled the box out and opened it carefully. Inside there are some hard drives. It was so long since I saw one of these, people don’t use them anymore. Everything is online and cloud-based now. Even our virtual screens and mobiles we use don’t have storage spaces, we have our city cloud system inputted in everything and the minute we turn on our devices we are connected to cloud systems.

“What are these?” Nidhi said as she furrowed her eyebrows in confusion.

“They are called hard drives,” I said.

“What is a hard drive? Does it have some info?”

“Yeah it has, but we can only extract the info in the pawnshops of terrain, the city doesn’t have devices that can read these babies anymore,” I excitedly picked up the box.

“I am coming with you to the terrain, see you in your car,” Nidhi said and she walked out of the apartment before I can say no.

I carried the box of hard drives out of the apartment carefully without getting caught. Nidhi is already in the front seat, waiting for me to drive.

I remove the hard drives and throw the box in a dumpster.

“Take these hard drives and put them with my car spare parts, we don’t want the city borders to find these when they inspect the car at the outer gate,” I said handing the hard drives to Nidhi.

Every time a person from the city wants to enter the terrain or a person from the terrain wants to enter the city, their vehicles get scanned and inspected. The government doesn’t want any foreign material that can affect the city.

“Won’t these drives get caught in the scan,” Needhi exclaimed her doubt.

“No, they won’t, you will tell them it is an antique from your grandpa and make sure they won’t inspect it further” I answered.

“Why should I tell them?”

“Because you are beautiful and I am counting on it,” I winked.

“Ahh, I hate you.” She twisted her lips in anger as she continued to give me a death glare till we reached the border.

The border gates get open only thrice a day, morning, afternoon and night. Any more than that would disrupt the artificial environment inside the city.

I pulled my car to a halt as I reached the big metallic gate of the border, along with me there are a few cars and trucks all scheduled for the afternoon gate opening.

My car slowly passed through the giant scanner and I can see Nidhi praying to god already in her tensed eyes. Luckily the scan didn’t pick up anything. Later the physical inspection of the car began.

“What is that black thing?” the security officer asked.

“It is a part of my grandpa’s old TV, it was his favourite device and I keep it as a memory officer, you know for good luck and you know how dangerous the terrain gets.” Nidhi started to flirt and I tried to hold my laughter.

“Yeah, it is dangerous, be safe out there and careful of the sand storms. Is that your boyfriend?’ the officer pointed at me.

“Pssh! he is nothing,” Nidhi brushed me off like I am insignificant, it kinda hurt me a little since I like her, but thanks to her flirting skills we entered to terrain without getting suspected.

I drove up to the pawnshop I know and parked my car.

“How often do you come to terrain?” Nidhi asked.

“Sometimes, not much,” I said.

“I heard you grew up in a terrain, how come you got a life in the city. I heard it is hard for people of terrain to get a life in the Safe city,”

The moment she said that I hesitated to answer and seeing my hesitation she didn’t prod further.

I opened the pawnshop door, “Hey Laila, do you have anything that can read these?” I pulled out the hard drives.

Laila is one of my childhood friends, she runs a pawnshop in the terrain and does scrap work business with metals.

“You found a hard drive, those babies are rare these days. I think I have an old plugin reader and screen to view.” Laila answered.

“And your device is not connected to the city cloud right?” I asked. I don’t want anyone, especially the government to know what I am going to find on this hard drive.

“Do you think there will be something in these hard drives?” Nidhi questioned.

“There has to be, all this life Narayan never trusted the government, if he wants to hide information, it would be on these ancient drives where they can’t track,” I said and handed the drives to Laila which she hooked up to a cord of some old machine.

“Most of these drives have nothing but old videos of Narayan’s childhood,” Laila said as she examined the several files and played one of the videos.

In that video was a young Narayan when he was ten years old, planting a sapling in a garden. Where he is asking some old man if it will survive in the pollution.

“Wish Narayan stayed that innocent,” Nidhi said, her face is filled with astonishment.

“Hey! We terrain people like Narayan,” Laila sneered at Nidhi.

“He is just using the Terrain people, he made money out of your misery, you people are blinded that he is supporting you,” Nidhi exclaimed back.

“At least he is the only person who spoke for us, unlike the government who had abandoned us here,” Laila stood up in anger.

“Stop it you two and what is this file?” I stare at a file named prototype one.

I clicked on the file and an array of documents appeared.

“These are documents from National City Development Board,” Nidhi said. “How did Narayan get these?”

“Such information can only be obtained from someone working in the development board,” I said.

I could not believe what I am seeing in front of my eyes, these documents represent the money flowing for various projects that the City Development board takes every year.

“Look at that, a large amount of money every year is flowing for the same project named “GRDS”, what kind of project is it?” Needhi pointed.

“It’s weird, the artificial oxygen water and food projects should consume a lot of money, but they are all secondary to GRDS,” I exclaimed.

I dialled Abhishek, I want to know the autopsy result because I am damn sure Narayan didn’t commit suicide. I have known Narayan for years and if he held such information, he would try to fight till his last breath.

“What is the autopsy result?” I asked.

“It was ruled and closed as suicide only, but something is weird.” Abhishek sounded perplexed.

“They found traces of him drinking coffee and eating food, and normally when people try to kill themselves they won’t have much appetite. And also Narayan kind of scheduled appointments the next day and weirdest thing is the head police officer is intent on closing this case as soon as possible.” Abhishek whispered.

“You have a friend working in the city development board right? Can you arrange a meeting with him tomorrow?” I said.

“Why did you find something, don’t dig deep Pranay, it seems like something serious is going on, you may get in trouble,” Abhishek warned but as usual I decided not to pay heed.

Nidhi and I thanked Laila for her help. I need to find what this GRDS is and where have I missed the clue in Narayan’s death, cause I am damn sure it is murder now.

“Laila won’t tell what we found today to anyone right?” Nidhi expressed her doubts as we sat in the car to drive back.

“Nidhi, don’t take this the wrong way, but your behaviour towards Laila isn’t good and as a journalist it is disgraceful,” I spoke my mind and Nidhi didn’t speak for a second.

I continued, “Narayan may have made claims and conspiracy theories which have turned out to be false, but it is a fact that he is the only person who reminded us to do something about our dying earth, he is the only person who spoke about the struggles of terrain people and I don’t mind find it wrong he made money on videos where he falsely accused – which I now think they may turn out to be true from what I found on these hard drives.”

“I am sorry,” Nidhi apologized.

“I wrote news on Narayan most of my life as a journalist, his existence gave me money. In a way, we both are the same. He made money writing on conspiracy theories of the government and I made money writing about him. The only difference is he cared for terrain people and I just wanted the money to survive the city life,” I confided what I felt.

We both remained silent till we reached the city. I dropped Nidhi at her home and went back to the office to meet Rahul to give him a report on Naryan’s death although I left the part about the hard drive I found in Narayan’s house.

Later at night, I got a message from Abhishek that his friend from National City Development Board is not interested in meeting me, which was a huge disappointment. I badly wanted to find out what the GRDS project is that is taking millions of rupees every year.

My phone rang an unknown caller id. I look at the time it was 10 pm. Who can be at this time? I picked it up anyway.

“Hello, is this Pranay from Newtimes?” the person's voice quivered slightly.

“Yes, it is him.”

“I have some information for you regarding Narayan. Meet me in an hour, I’ll text you the address.” The phone call ended abruptly before I can say something.

Whoever this person is, he is risking to meet me and I better meet him before he changes his mind.

I saw the address he texted me, it was a place where new building s are getting constructed, a place where there aren’t many security cameras.

I arrived at the place in an hour. In the dim light of a lamppost, I see a tall and lanky guy no more than 17 or 18 years old. I slowly walked towards him and he looked around me, perhaps checking if I came alone or not.

“Hi, may I know your name before we speak?” I said.

“It’s Vinay,” He replied.

“Tell me the information you have,” I said.

“The news about the old man committing suicide it’s not real.”

“Do you have any evidence on that?” I asked.

“No, but I have something which will make you believe that it wasn’t a suicide.” The way he said, it was more like a pleading to hear him out.

“Ok, tell me.”

“My brother used to work in National City Development Board, two days ago he died in a car accident and the police said he was under the influence of alcohol,” Vinay’s voice trembled and his fingers are curled in anger. “My brother never drives when he drinks,”

Vinay paused for a moment.

“A week ago, I found my brother is acting odd, he was nervous and always speaking tensely to someone on the phone. I decided to find who is talking to and when I secretly tapped into his phone, I found he was talking to Narayan. At first, I was shocked that my brother is talking to a person who is hated by many people.

The night he died, he was on his way to meet someone. I overheard him on the phone saying “we should meet tonight, I don’t want to have this with me much longer.”, I should have stopped him from going,” Vinay cried.

“Hey it’s ok Vinay, it’s not your fault.” I consoled him.

After Vinay calmed down, “Why did decide to tell me all of this Vinay?”

“Because nobody is believing me when I told my brother doesn’t drink and drive and I couldn’t mention Narayan’s name because I don’t want people to hate my brother like they hated Narayan. I thought you would be the only person who will believe me at least. My brother always liked reading what you wrote, he said you are a very good journalist.”

“You did a good job Vinay, promise me that you won’t tell anyone what you told me today,”

“Okay, can you catch the guy who killed my brother?”

“Yeah I’ll try, let’s get you home before your parents get worried.”

“My brother is my only family,” it made sense how he was able to meet me at this time of the night.

I took Vinay to his home, but I felt sad that he now has to live alone. But I was glad when he said his aunt would come in a few days to take care of him. Vinay showed me his brothers room and unfortunately, any information I can find is either deleted or torn into pieces.

I sat down in my car and thought several times what did I miss when I investigated Narayan’s death, I checked the CCTV cameras, I even checked the neighbour's and the alibi they have given. No fingerprint or DNA has been found. The scene was clean.

I decided to call Nidhi and ask for her help.

“Can you come to my house,” she said.

“Me a single guy at this time of night?” I teased.

“Shut up Pranay, I tried to get some information on GRDS and I found something interesting, I think you have to take a look.”

I drove my car as fast as I can, I cannot wait to see what she found.

When I knocked on Nidhi’s door, she greeted me in pyjamas.

“Wow, didn’t expect you to see so casual,” I smirked.

“I hope you didn’t expect me to wear a tight pantsuit in my own home,” She glared playfully and I laughed.

“Ok, what did you find about GRDS”

“Here,” Nidhi turns on her laptop and opens a file.

It was documents dated back twenty years, the whole file is about the experiments Safetech Research instate had conducted in developing plants that can improve our dying ecosystem. But they were stopped when the plants couldn’t resist the already changing climate of the earth, so Safetech had decided to concentrate on the Artificial oxygen system and build cities.

One may ask how hard it is to discover a good plant. What about the rest of fifty per cent of trees that are still left? Why can’t you make use of those trees to bring back the environment?

Well, the answer was simple, most of the trees that the earth has now had already been weakened and their genetic structure changed as the climate changed. That’s why scientists are just trying to make sure these trees stay alive, till they make a plant that has a superior set of the genetic pool which can resist the climate today, but also pave the way to bring back mother nature to good and glory.

I examined the experiments articles Safetech had conducted to build the eco plant and the funds that these experiments took resulted in huge amounts.

“Where did you find these articles?” I asked.

“I found them in an old library, most of the records twenty years ago don’t exist in our city internet system anymore, ever since they have updated the system. Today after the encounter with Laila I thought maybe all this time I was wrong about Narayan and it turns out I was.”

“You know the hard drives that we found at Naryan’s house,”

“Yeah, the one that had cashflows of various projects of National City development Board,”

“Narayan got that information from a person who worked at the Board and that person was murdered in disguise of a car accident, but the case was closed as a DUI. All that time when Narayan said secret plants are made, new Safecities shouldn’t be built anymore, he was right.”

Nidhi eyes are filled up with tears. “I was so wrong about Narayan,”

I stood up and wrapped my arms around her “Hey, let’s tell Rahul what we found and tell the world the truth, I think we have enough information,”

“Yes, we better,” Nidhi said.

I wish I could hug her all night, but unfortunately, I am not her boyfriend, so I removed my arms and put them awkwardly into my trouser pockets.

“I will go, let’s meet Rahul tomorrow morning.”

Just as I was walking out the door, Nidhi stopped me by catching my hand.

“You know, after this is over, let’s go to a nice place and have some great food,” She smiled shyly.

Wow! This is the moment I been waiting. Nidhi also has a thing for me. I controlled my emotions, “Yeah sure, let’s go on a date.” I said smiling.

“Okay, see you tomorrow.”| She closed the door and I forgot all my tensions that night.

The next day morning, Nidhi and I went to Rahul’s office and explained everything we found.

“This is huge news Rahul, it can change the world,” Nidhi exclaimed.

“No, our news channel won’t air this.”

“What are you talking about, we have solid evidence to back up. This may not be enough for bringing down Safetech, at least the police can reopen the investigation on Naryan’s death – he was murdered, Rahul. And our news channel can become number one in the ratings, it’s a win-win situation. ” I said frustrated.

“Nidhi can you step out of my office, I need to talk to Pranay alone.” Rahul's voice suddenly changed into a serious tone.

After Nidhi left, Rahul began to speak again “The investigation of Narayan’s death is hurried up and closed for a certain reason. You cannot go against Safetech, we are just people working in a mere news channel. Let’s forget we ever know this.”

I sat in silence, I am surprised at myself for suggesting to be righteous when all my life I just cared about money. I didn’t even realise how my thoughts changed until Rahul had now reminded me.

“What if we don’t have to take down Safecity, what if we give this information to the person who has the power to bring them down,” I said.

“What are you thinking?”

“The Stone Corporation Chairman, Mr Ashok.”

“It is too risky, we can end up in danger” Rahul exclaimed.

“Or we can get the protection and power to tell the world the truth. Every year the population of our country is decreasing despite the safe cities. The trees and oceans are also depleting, I think we owe the risk,”

“Let’s book an appointment to meet Ashok,” Rahul agreed.

The Stone Corporation is the second-largest company in India after Safetech groups. While Safetech earns money from building bubble cities across the nation and creating artificial oxygen systems that supply food and water for the cities, Stone Corporation earns money from investing money into the various businesses across the nation.

Rahul and I decided not to tell disclose the evidence we found to Mr Ashok unless we see him supporting us truly.

“What do the Newtimes channel need me for today?” Ashok, the sixty-year-old man sat down.

“How do you feel about Narayan’s death,” I asked.

“Ohh, the 104-year-old activist right? It’s a shame that he committed suicide.” Ashok answered nonchalantly.

“I think this is a bad idea,” I stood up. What was I thinking asking the Stone Corporation to aid us and back up for the news we want to air.

“Sit down Pranay,” Rahul eyed me to sit down.

“You shouldn’t be impatient young man, isn’t it brilliant that how we find things so easily when they didn’t even see the light of the world,” Ashok said.

“What do you mean?”

“The little piece of documents about Safetech you found in the home of Narayan,”

“How do you know those? You killed him Narayan didn’t you?”

“I didn’t kill him, but I was interested in many years that he would be successful to bring Safetech down. You see, Safetech is number one and Stone Corporations are number two in this country. We both have enough illegal evidence over the other to cut each other’s throat, but that would be just a stupid thing to do”

“What are you trying to say?”

“I need a third party like Narayan to spread the fire just enough for Safetech group to be pulled down, but unfortunately as you know he is a stubborn honest man for me to make him my puppet and it was hard for me to find evidence that can shut down Safetech once and for all,”

“So you want us to be the third party?” I said.

“Yes, to instigate the fire at the right time, so I can burn it all down at once,” Ashok replied.

“I came here today to get the support of the government from your side so that we won’t get interrupted when our news channel speaks about the truth we found, I cannot agree with you.”

“Mr Pranay, it’s foolish to light a match stick to a giant corporation in hopes that you can burn it all down. You cannot win that way.”

“And I don’t want to win this way either.”

“I didn’t speak much today, but I agree with my subordinate. We are going to air the news tonight, it’s up to you if you want to use this opportunity to climb the ladder, but we are going to reveal the possibility of Narayan’s murder and the possibility that he may after all speaking the truth all his life.” Rahul said.

The night came by fast and Nidhi was already directed to arrange the live news as instructed by Rahul.

“Are you ok?” Rahul said to me as he came by.

“I was thinking of what Ashok said on how we can never win alone, but I cannot wait Naryan was killed and the young guy who worked in Safetech was also killed, we should make the world listen to us today,” I said.

“All the best,” Rahul said and went away.

We are taking a big risk today, the evidence we provide in today’s news might suddenly become false by the morning or people who have harboured hatred all these years for Narayan would still not believe us.

“ok, we are going live in ten minutes,” the camera crew shouted as they set up the green screen.

“Ok, play the breaking news visual and Nidhi read out exactly what Pranay wrote, keep your eyes on the teleprompter,” Rahul instructed from the control room.

Nidhi gave a thumbsup.

“How did the interview went with the boy Vinay?”

“We are going to live in five minutes,” the crew announced.

I got a call and it was from Stone Corporation Chairman, Mr Ashok.

“We are going live in five minutes,” I said.

“Then you may as well the truth about his death, instead of announcing the world a possibility of murder.”

“He is murdered, we just don’t have evidence.” I grind my teeth in anger.

“Narayan jumped on his own, nobody killed him but it wasn’t a suicide. He jumped because he didn’t want the evidence he was given by the young employee to fall into wrong hands,”

“I don’t understand,”

“Narayan was chased down by Safetech group, the wanted to kill him and get back the documents that were leaked by their employee, so he hid the documents and jumped from the sixth floor, he just didn’t want to die in Safetech hands. But at the time he jumped, one of my men are already tailing Narayan and they recorded his death.” Ashok ended the call and immediately I received a video clip.

I played the video, it was shot down from the road in front of his apartment and in the video was Narayan jumping down. I gasped but I continued to watch, there was another man caught on the camera. The person who came to kill Narayan but failed.

I immediately told Rahul everything. We hurried to Nidhi and explained it to her.

“The video will definitely open the investigation again,” Rahul said and I nodded in agreeing.

The news went off live and by the time it ended, our telephones rang continuously.

The following week, we were investigated about the evidence by the court and people though remained to think this all false, someone of those haters changed and supported Narayan. The country was divided into two opinions. We talked about how we should build back our ecosystem instead of relying on artificial oxygen, people supported the idea, but we don’t know how long the support will last.

I look at my computer, the squared keys that I been breaking my knuckles on for the past twenty years.

I began to write.

*How easy we move on and how easily we forget the things that have happened, perhaps this is the greatest strength and the most insidious thing of humanity.*

*I always thought Narayan is a person who lived telling tales of conspiracies of never had any proof and eventually he turned to be distasteful. Perhaps, it was my heart that slowly turned distasteful towards hearing the spirit of his brave heart who still had hoped the world will change, humanity will overcome their greed.*

*When one of our own people dying out in the terrains, I breathed the false oxygen and told myself this is the way to live.*

*The generation who fought and face the death of the changing climate had never lost their spirit like Narayan and he was the last of them who left this world leaving behind nothing but this voice was anger chiding at the stupidity of the ears we have turned deaf against his words.*

*We may not change the world suddenly, but at least we shouldn’t forget what it once was. We breathe the air we have today and we remember and try to fight for the world we deserve. Let’s support our reformation of the ecosystem.*

10 years later,

“Wah, the trees have increased to 60% this year and oceans are also recovering positively,” Nidhi read the article.

“Yeah,” I smiled at my wife.

So many things have changed in the past ten years, Safetech group was brought down to number second, it was indeed harder to bring down a powerful company. The stone corporation is number one and have promised to share their projects open and will concentrate more on the ecological development of the earth.

Mr Ashok had tried everything in his power to climb the number one spot, which resulted in him tipping enough money to arrest the people who killed Vinay’s brother and attempted to kill Narayan, which leads to the crash of the Safetech group, but they eventually recovered in five years.

For the last ten years, I wrote articles urging people to save nature again and even though the bubble cities still exist, in few decades we won’t be needing them.

I just hope people don’t forget the beauty of nature and people like Narayan who struggle to save them from the greed of human nature.

The end.