

The Truth and the Clock Tower

“It’s haunted.” The clock tower.

At least that’s what they say.

The large narrow building, like an unmoving giant in deep sleep. Its winding staircase spiraling down to the bottom. And there, you’ll see a big giant lock that separates the outside world from what’s inside.

The security man is the only one who goes up the tower to rewind the clock every sunrise. After what happened, only he now has the key to the stairs. Everything’s different. But, the people around me don’t seem to notice. Anymore.

Breakfastia, that was what the restaurant was called. It was ten blocks from my apartment and three blocks away from the clock tower. I was jogging there for a quick breakfast on my way to school.

The streets of my home city always seemed so puny under the shadow of the unmoving giant. And the clock was always a constant reminder that we were running late. That somehow, we were *wasting time*.

Just as I approached the tower on my jog, I spotted a hooded figure in the distance. Although his steps were slow and calculated, there was determination in the way he walked.

Unable to stop myself, I called out, “Hey! What are you doing?”

But my words had no effect on him whatsoever. In fact, it felt as if my words had been blown away in the wind, unimportant.

The person kept on walking. His arms swaying back and forth to an unknown rhythm. And as if I was in some sort of trance, I followed him. Our steps were both slow and precise. Like we were one, like my entire body was screaming something wasn’t right. I followed him straight through the barren streets and to the staircase.

Still paying no attention to my presence, he began to climb the staircase, two steps at a time. The "stable" staircase, more like a rocking chair, shifting under his weight. I wasn't as brave as him. I skidded to a stop and looked up. The flight of steps seemed more and more intimidating the more I stared at them, and I found myself backing away. The fear I had felt had destroyed my earlier desire to follow the guy.

As his footsteps faded away, I could still hear the echoes bounce back and forth in the enclosed space. Even when it died down, there was still a constant rattling in my ear. Up, and up the staircase he went. Back, and back, I went. There was a thread connecting me to this moment, but the thread was still loose. It still gave me a chance to run away. And so I did.

It wasn't until after I was a sufficient distance away that I realized everything had turned dull gray. As I regained my senses, the colors came rushing back.

Out of my peripheral vision, I saw a man sitting at a table in front of the bakery. His mouth opens and he takes a huge bite of the toast. *Crack*. The noise came from the toast. Or did it? Somehow, I had heard a sound from behind me, but I ignored it. No one else seemed to have heard the sound.

Now, without hesitation, I stepped into the bustling streets, away from the clock tower. I left the thread, now cut, behind me.

A few days later, I spotted the newspaper my father enjoyed to read every Sunday. And oftentimes, I would read it after him. Holding a glass of water, I peered over to see the headline. And at that moment, my heart stopped.

**Sam Hutchens Found Dead At The Clocktower, Witnesses Still Being
Questioned, Cause of Death Still Unknown**

His name was Sam. It was his picture on the front page. I blinked a few times to clear the dizziness from my head. It was him. The same person I was too afraid to follow up the winding stairs to the top of the tower.

And suddenly a swarm of what-ifs filled my mind. What if I had continued up the stairs? What if had talked him out of the jumping? But there was no if in this scenario, only the constant replaying of his footsteps up the flights of steps. The echo and the rattle that repeated over and over again. A sound I could now never replace. I imagined him laying there. Lifeless. Dead by the impact.

Maybe it was better this way, that I didn't have to see the light go out of his eyes before he even died.

That same day, I went to take a walk outside. The sun was about to set and the streetlights had already turned on. I said nothing as I took one step after another. There was nothing to say.

I walked to the clocktower and stood there. Allowing its shadow to swallow me whole. The journalists and police had cleared the area already I assumed, but that didn't matter. What mattered was this very moment and the unsettling feeling that continue to rack my brain. And there I stood. Alone.

So, no, I do not believe the place is haunted. After all, I climb the stairs every day and sit there, two levels below the top floor.

I had grown accustomed to bringing the newspaper up with me. The man who unlocks the big lock is used to me going up the flight of steps two at a time. And he doesn't seem to mind that I find a way up there without unlocking the door at the bottom. Now, we are the only two who know what's up there. People don't seem to care about what happened that day or why I always sit two floors below the top floor of the clock tower. But I know why. And the next time, I'd be ready.

Because the truth, my friend, is more difficult to find than you think.

Jamie.