

THE RECLAMATION

Walking through the silent city, I am almost on a different planet. Like a warped mirror reflecting reality, this place feels familiar, but strange. I know this is my city, my town, but there is one issue: it's abandoned. It's as if everyone dropped everything they were doing and left. It's as if I'm walking through a town that has been neglected and unused for decades, letting Mother Nature wrap her hands around it and take back what was rightfully hers. As my feet slap the pavement echoing off the walls of the empty buildings around me, I gape in silent disbelief at all that has changed. The grass has worked its fingers through the cracks in the pavement, and trees grow out of windows. Everything suggests all of this has happened over decades of rot, rust, and rejuvenation. But I know all too well that's not true.

Walking through beautiful Washington, D.C., I followed everyone down into the metro. As I sat down, I protectively placed my bag between my legs. I didn't want it getting stolen or broken, as it was carrying something that could--and would--forever change the world. I thought about my prototype and how I was about to share it with hundreds of scientists in just a few hours. Bobbing my knee up and down, waiting for my stop, I didn't know if I should be excited, nervous, or both. It turns out neither: I should have been terrified.

I stare at the door of my apartment. It looks just like the rest of them: overgrown and old. Like a snake, a gnarly old vine has slithered its way through the handle. Tree roots have slid under the cracks of my door, invading my home. Nature has spared no one, and my house--like the rest of the city--has been taken over. I started to shove open the door, but pause. Going through represents accepting that this whole thing is real, and I can't bear the thought of facing that. Not now. Instead I bound up the steps to the roof and run to the edge.

Looking over the green city, I see the epicenter of the explosion and contemplate what has taken place. I hardly remember the accident, but judging by where I woke up it was clear what had happened. As I was demonstrating my machine designed to speed up and increase plant growth, something must have gone wrong. In the explosion that followed, my machine must have sent out a blast, causing all plant life in the surrounding area to grow at an alarming rate. Something must have hit my head, because by the time I woke up, days had passed, I was covered in vines, and everyone was gone. They must not have been able to find me, seeing as I was covered in leafy vines. At least that's what I hope--it's also possible no one cared enough to help me. I can hardly blame them. Who knows how far this spread, how many people's lives I've ruined. Then a thought shoots through my mind, like a needle stabbed through my arm, sending an idea coursing through my veins. I whip around and race down the steps, barging through my apartment door looking for supplies, a plan already forming in my mind.

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