

# FRAGMENTS OF THE FUTURE

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I was never one to accept complete isolation. My cubical was extremely limited that I could barely stretch my legs from one wall to the next. The grey, made of wool uniforms we were given irritated my skin as I walked to the small window. When I tell you how bothersome the view was I say this with all sincerity in my voice. Nairobi was in shambles and complete turmoil. The sky had a severely dark tint to it. It felt like the sun's rays were never to be seen again.

Of course I wouldn't expect to see a bright globe glow on these times we were going through. In the distance I could observe the unlucky few who couldn't make it in here with me – rough looking clothes, smudged all over with dirt. The usual upper-class weren't around to flaunt their high fashion status anymore so the beggars didn't exactly beg. They just sat in despair and awaited their last days. I wouldn't consider myself fortunate, but things weren't as facile as they seemed.

My fingers let out a crisp crack as I walked around the meagre space around me. I completed my normal daily routine as I watched the clock on the wall take its time to tick slowly in a soft, steady pace. I found it ironical. Here I was, keeping time yet I knew very well there

was nowhere I was heading to. If you thought curfews and social distancing were a challenge wait until you're forced to do so in a desperate attempt to save the dwindling population. People hated to admit how most of the ways one could contribute to the society was labour. It felt like capitalism or socialism clashed together and at the same time didn't exist in the way we lived in here. Being downgraded to simple means of living and life as we know it was difficult. Of course I wasn't born yet when things were 'normal' but I gush every time I hear my older sibling speak about them, at least, when I get to see him.

We'd been given a certain amount of time to communicate with our loved ones, most of the time guarded by strict watchmen to see if we're respecting the specific protocols. Sometimes, when were lucky, they set us free for a while. Usually we're not allowed to do so but I genuinely couldn't stop when I was firstly introduced to it by my older brother.

"Listen, Jabari, are you going to let the government take away your only chance at enjoying your youth?" Hamidi told me. That just evoked a sudden rush of adrenaline in me that I hadn't felt before. We wouldn't do much really, most of the time it was wandering around the halls while everyone was asleep and sometimes leaving the facility to see what the outside looked like.

The modern city skyline was not to be seen, most buildings looked dreary and miserable. There was an eerie silence as if we had just come from a war. No pedestrians on the sidewalks were to be seen, modes of transportation seemed to be non-existent because people weren't moving from place to place. With at least fifty percent of our population gone due to the virus, the unaffected ones like me were

kept in here while, unfortunately, the victims were left to fend for themselves outside the high fences keeping us apart.

“You see that over there?” my brother asked as I squinted my eyes in order to see what he was pointing at.

In the distance stood a large tower that seemed to stand out against the rest of the depressing atmosphere. Made of an opaque glass of some sort that shimmered only when a ray of pale light shined through the clouds, it was quite a sight to see. This isn’t my first time seeing the city from this angle but it confused me how I never noticed it before. My brother had a fascinated look on his face as he admired the building from afar. He wasn’t one to express his feelings as much as a normal person should but when he did it was a wonderful sight to see.

“You don’t know how many times I’ve attempted to work there and observe how the vaccine is made. Just the process and role in helping out on curing our country would mean the world to me,” he sighed as he placed his head between his hands.

I glanced at the tower again. That’s where the vaccine was being worked on. With the virus constantly mutating and the need to contain each and every variation of it they needed more men in there to help out, yet for some reason new recruits weren’t let in. I gave him a pat on the back as a form of consolation and stared back at the building. There was something off with it I simply couldn’t put my finger on it. It felt like there was something being hidden from us, the normal people. It’s not new for the government to hide specific things from civilians, they do that all the time, my brother told me so.

That night I stared upon my bland ceiling. My brother told me in a normal African household we’d sometimes share a room with our siblings, we’d eat with our families in one room, and honour our

traditions as they come. A part of me admired those morals that spoke of togetherness and the value of a family.

It's funny how technology not only polluted the atmosphere around us but also the sense of community we had. Oh the stories I've heard of how everybody's eyes were invested on a screen, mindlessly scrolling through it until they needed to be recharged. It seriously confused me why people would rather talk to someone miles away rather than somebody right in front of them.

I turned my head sideways towards the little window. From laying here on my rock hard mattress, I could see the glimmer of the tower my brother was talking about. I always craved adventure but I never expressed it explicitly. I wanted Hamidi to be happy, and I knew nothing else was going to please him except experiencing what was in that tower. There are a bunch of underground tunnels under this facility. Most of the information I know about them I got from listening to the stray discussions in the cafeteria. Apparently you follow a series of lines beneath the ground and you end up anywhere you want in the city. Part of me believes that this is just a myth while the other is curious to find out. I know my brother would appreciate a challenge but it truly would be a reward if we made it to the tower.

The next morning I was determined to know if what I heard about the tunnels were true. We weren't allowed to sit close to each other, we had to be at least two metres apart so this consequently made my task harder. An older woman sat across from me but she was barely offering me a glance. I appreciated people who minded their own business because I never desired to be in the spotlight. I watched her giggle and whisper like a school girl with someone incredibly far from her which for some reason was incredibly ironical to me. She's the one that I heard about the tunnels from. I prayed

inwardly hoping she'd bring the topic up on her own. My prayers were answered because she finally did. I noticed how her voice quieted down as she stared directly into the person she was talking to. One of the hidden talents I possess is lip reading.

"It seemed that most of them were shut down but a few were left untouched," she said.

I smiled to myself because now I at least had a chance of helping out Hamidi in achieving his dream. I have never roamed through these halls on my own. It always felt illegal to walk around without my brother by my side but I needed to be brave. We were venturing into unknown territory and I had to be prepared for anything and everything. My hands felt moist as I knocked on his door. I was so nervous but I believed that this would all be worth it in the long run. Hamidi opened the door with a sleepy grin, surprised to see me there. But before he could even greet me, I grabbed his hand and started dragging him along with me. I could tell he was confused but he didn't ask anything. Usually, I'm the one who'd be following him but today I was in charge and I appreciated how he let me be myself.

Running through the tunnels was a tedious task. The twists and turns followed but countless dead ends almost made me give up but for every sealed corner there were two others available to pass through. I ran my hands through the walls and admired the art on them. It seemed that many people had attempted to leave the facility but from the dry bones and skulls littered all over the tunnel floor – not all of them made it to freedom. It bothered my brother when he saw that I wasn't as disturbed from the scene in front of us, I just kept my eyes straight as we got closer to the tower. I wouldn't know if I had been desensitised from all the gore society had to offer. I've seen how people are treated but I've reached a point where I have had to swallow it up and move on.

We finally made it to the bottom of the tower, it took us approximately two hours to get there. I was exhausted. My brother didn't say a word but I could tell his happiness. I felt proud of myself. For once I had contributed to my brother's happiness. He did his best to keep me safe and I believe I owed him this feeling. I watched him touch the glass doors as if he couldn't believe he was right there and I pushed the door open for him. The halls were empty just like they were in the facility but this time it felt different. The floors were lined with very delicately arranged tiles that seemed to be leading to an endless maze of rooms I could only imagine were filled with colourful tubes and countless chemists dressed in crisp lab coats hurrying to find a cure, the same cure my brother wanted a role in making.

We walked side by side looking at everything but too scared to touch should an alarm go off and we are caught trespassing. I held his hand as we went deeper into the building until we saw a silver elevator right in front of us. We pressed the button and ascended higher in the tower. My tummy had butterflies as I looked outside and saw the facility extremely far away from us. A soft blinking sound signaled we'd reached the highest floor.

The lab we were in had a sharp stinging scent of antiseptic and softly blinking machines in the background that speared their rays through the darkness. My brother turned the lights on and gasped loudly from what he saw. Around us were broad incubators with the most frightening organisms swimming into a sort of clear jelly-like substance. I felt my soul leave my body as I inched closer to one of the tubes and softly tapped on the glass, hoping these things were fast asleep and wouldn't break out and rip us apart.

"It says here that these are test subjects for the vaccines they came up with. Most of them have turned into monstrous beings and I guess that's why I wasn't allowed in here. Most of these people aren't

from the facilities but the lonely streets instead,” Hamidi said and I shook my head in disbelief.

Instead of helping the people who were infected by the virus, these people kidnapped them and experimented on them. I’m pretty sure without their consent. This was heartbreaking. My soul ached for these victims but I knew I had to be strong. These things happen all over our continent and they go unnoticed. We choose to remain in our comfort zones instead of venturing out and helping those who aren’t as fortunate as us.

Hamidi looked back at me with a gloomy face and I could tell he was ready to leave. I know he’s lost faith in humanity and so have I. The mood went from being exciting and adventurous to sad and dreary. His face read disappointment and I could tell he didn’t want to work here anymore. The thought of taking part in inhumane acts in the attempt to save others didn’t justify itself.

I leaned against his shoulder and closed my eyes as we walked back into the elevator, ready to head back home until I heard a distinct tap against a thick layer of glass. I glanced back at Hamidi in silence while I held my breath in anticipation. The elevator doors slid together to meet in the middle but before the final millimetre was covered, a sickly hand blocked the door. They had finally escaped.