

THE TOWER
By Franklin W. Reece

I was driving home from school and on the way, stopped to pick up Mom from work. She was the glue in our family and always the one who set the standards for us to abide by. She constantly was organizing everything. Who did what and when. Once in the car, she started in on me about my chores.

“Did you take out the trash?” She asked.

“No,” I said. “Why do I have to take out the trash all the time?”

“It’s part of your chores. That’s why. Everyone in this family has to pull their own weight.”

Everything after that was a blur, until the gruesome crash. I was conscious through the

whole ordeal, but everything was in slow motion. I heard the glass breaking, steel-on-steel crunching, and in all the chaos, a scream cut off abruptly with a gurgle. Looking to the right, I saw my mom's body all bloody, her clothes torn, and she was hanging out the window. Eventually I freed myself to help her and limped to the other side of the car. As soon as I came to the other side, I stopped, dropped to my knees, and cried, "No, God, no!" Her body was hanging on the door half out of the car and her head severed from her body.

The next thing I remembered was waking up in the hospital. The only thing that ran through my mind was the miniscule argument with Mom. If I had only taken out the trash, maybe none of this would have happened and she would still be here.

Meanwhile, my father, my twin sister, and I moved to the country. Father figured it would be a good change for all of us with all that went on in the past year. I was still having a tough time since my horrible accident that killed my mother over a year earlier. I remembered it as if it was yesterday. That day's events ran repeatedly in my head. Even in my sleep, my dreams reminded me of the tragic event. My nightmares worsened, and I woke up screaming with terrible sweats and shook uncontrollably.

"John, wake up," my father said as he woke me up.

"What's up?" I said groggily. "What's wrong?"

"You were dreaming and screaming, 'No, I didn't mean to.'"

"Oh, another nightmare."

"Is it the same one?"

"Yeah, it has worsened in intensity though."

"Well it is only three in the morning. Try to get some more sleep before school starts."

My dad left the room. Sleep was hard to come by so I sat on the windowsill of my

second-floor bedroom and looked out the window. The moon was full, the stars were bright, and the night sky was lit up bright as day. In the distance, I noticed an old structure that stretched above the treetops. I couldn't quite make it out in the moonlight so I grabbed my binoculars to take a peek. It was a tower from an old castle. Shadows moved around in the candlelight of the room. A woman in a white nightgown came to the window, peered out as if looking for something, threw an object outside, and then looked straight at me. Did she see me? Freaked out I slammed the window shut and jumped into bed.

“WAKE UP,” Julie, my twin sister, screamed into my ear.

“WHAT DO YOU WANT?” I yelled back.

“Get out of bed, you lazy fuck.”

“Go wash your mouth out with soap. I can't believe you talk like that. You have the mouth of a sailor.”

“Just get out of bed and mind your own business. I'll say whatever I want to.”

“Yeah, yeah, yeah. Whatever.”

“You better be ready in fifteen minutes or I'll leave without you.”

Sure enough thirty minutes later she was gone. I went downstairs to see if Dad was still here but he was gone too. Entering the kitchen, the temperature dropped about ten degrees. I continued slowly as the hairs on the back of my neck stood on end. Feeling a presence behind me, I turned quickly thinking someone was there but there was no one. A few seconds passed and the kitchen warmed back up. Then my cell phone rang and startled me. “Hello,” I said.

“Come to meeeeeeee...” a guttural sounding voice came across the phone.

“Who is this?” I said.

CLICK.

The screen of my cell phone turned all white. After a second it changed to black then it vibrated and I dropped it like a hot potato. Scrambling to pick up the pieces, I noticed the clock on the wall. It was late so I hustled to get to school.

Running most of the way I reached the old castle tower that I saw from my window early this morning. I stopped and stared at the old structure. It was dilapidated from hundreds of years of neglect. Part of the stones from the wall had fallen to the ground. I bent down to touch them and there was a clear slimy coating on the stone structure. It left a creepy feeling inside me. It was not what I had expected. I was about to leave and heard a faint whisper call my name, but, when I turned around, no one was there. The hairs on the back of my neck started to rise again. I thought better continue on to school before I was too late. Something pulled at me when I was leaving the castle. A strong strange force told me to go back. But I trudged forward.

When I arrived at school, it was already into the first period. I tried to sneak into the classroom but my sister ratted me out.

“Young man, where have you been?” Ms. Aglesby asked.

“I overslept,” I said.

“Well you need to see the principal after class and explain to him why you were late.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Thanks for nothing, sis,” I whispered to my sister.

“I told you I would leave you,” Julie said. “Maybe next time you’ll heed my warnings and hurry the fuck up.”

“There you go again with that sailor’s mouth of yours. If Mom could hear you now, she would roll over in her grave.”

Next thing I knew Julie jumped up, slapped me in the face, and knocked me off my chair.

The look in her eyes just before she swung at me was a look I'll never forget. Pure evil was in those eyes. She tried to punch me but I ducked. She then tried a backhand swing but I grabbed her wrist. The force flung us both onto the floor with me landing on top of her.

“Hey, what’s going on back there?” Ms. Aglesby inquired. “You two come up here.”

Just as I was getting up, Julie kneed me in the crotch, which sent me tumbling to the floor gasping for air.

As she walked away, I heard the teacher say, “Both of you go to the principal’s office right now.”

Then I passed out.

When I came to, I was in the nurse’s office on the bed. My father and sister were arguing on the other side of the room. Quietly I left the room and started down the hall. Once in the main hallway, I took off running. Needing some time for myself I ran into the woods behind the school. Far enough away, I slowed to a walk. I could see the tower up ahead so I decided to check it out more in depth.

Approaching the tower, I saw a book lying on the ground. The book the woman threw out the tower window earlier this morning. Something was familiar about it. I bent over to pick it up and rain started to fall so I ducked into a tunnel off to the side of the structure. I continued to look through the book and a loud screeching sound like someone dragging their nails across a chalkboard came from inside. I tried to trace where the sound was coming from but all I found was more tunnels.

“Hey John, where are you going?” Julie said as she entered the opening of the tunnel.

“Damn, you scared the shit out of me,” I said.

“Yeah, it smells like it.”

“Ha, ha, very funny.”

“Look John, I am sorry about what happened back at school. I didn’t mean to. Ever since...you know, I have had all this pent-up aggression and no place to displace it. Are you okay?”

“Yeah, I’m fine now. Don’t worry about it. All of us are going through problems since the accident. But you did knee me so hard I thought my junk was going to fall off. Feels like you need a boyfriend to pop that cherry of yours. Then maybe you won’t take all your aggression out on me.”

“Are you offering?”

“Ewe, that’s disgusting. You’re my sister for crying out loud.”

“Just kidding, Bro.”

At that moment the screeching sounded again and deafened my ears which sent chills up and down my spine. “I heard that same sound a few minutes ago. I was gonna find out where it came from. Do you wanna come?”

“Sure, like I have nothing else better to do.”

She was being sarcastic, then all of a sudden a white apparition floated across the intersection at the end of the tunnel and disappeared.

“Did you see that?” I asked.

“Yeah,” Julie replied.

We tried to follow but the further we walked the worse the smell. The tunnel sloped downward until reaching a huge cavern that looked like the dome of a cathedral. Figures were drawn on the dome walls and statues were against them. By this time the smell was horrendous. It smelt like raw sewage baked in the hot summer day. In the cavern was a labyrinth of tunnels.

Rats scurried at our feet, and Julie screamed.

I looked at Julie, and she had terror in her eyes as she was looking behind me.

“What is that?” Julie asked as her voice was cracking, and she pointed in the direction behind me.

I turned around to find a huge snake-like creature slithering in the sewage. It was about six-feet long and approaching us at a steady pace. It stopped and started to rise out of the sewer water. Fear in my eyes, I ran into the labyrinth of tunnels with my sister in tow. The farther we ran in the tunnels the more a mist accumulated. The mist was strange though. It wasn't wet. I stopped and Julie crashed into my backside.

“Why did you stop?” Julie asked.

“Take a look at this,” I said. “This mist doesn't have any texture to it. I wonder what it is.”

“I don't know. But I say we not stick around and find out.”

Just then the mist rushed into one pile in front of us and then formed into a human shape. A medieval-looking warrior with two swords crisscrossed against his chest guarded the entrance of a tunnel that led to the tower. The warrior said in a bellowing voice, “I am the gatekeeper of this castle. For two hundred years—since the fall of the castle the tribunal appointed me to guard against intruders like you. I have protected and served the spirits within these walls and in that time, no one has escaped. *You* have intruded into the sacred portal from which no one returns. Prepare to reach your demise.”

He then took both of his swords from their scabbards and swung them at our heads. With the first swing, we ran as if our asses were on fire.

As we ran there was a trail of a white smoke that floated in the air. It passed us like we

were standing still and all of a sudden stopped at the entrance to a tunnel as if to show us the way. We followed and came upon a locked door. Being the ever creative mind that my sister is, she pulled out a beret from her hair and started picking the lock.

After a few moments of her tinkering, we heard a loud noise like that of a steel chain sliding across a metal surface, then a loud CLINK. The door swung open and a blast of air rushed in that pulled us in and the door slammed shut behind us. I looked around the huge room to find dividers separating the room into sections. A light came on from behind one of them and I saw a silhouette of a woman. But she had no head; it was just the lower body sitting at a table. A few seconds went by and the silhouette picked up something off the table. It was her head, and she placed it on her shoulders.

At this point, Julie was groping to get out. She scurried around the huge room searching for a way out. She did not find one and settled at my side just behind me.

“You dare to interrupt me. What do you want? Why did you not heed the warnings of the warrior outside my door?” she yelled as she brushed back the divider and turned to face us.

We jumped back. Then we stood face to face with the ghost of our mother. She was wearing a white dress, the same I saw from my window. Her eyes were all black, with no whites in them, no pupils, just all black like a deep dark void into the soul. Blood dripped down her neck from the cut around her throat. Two wolves, one on each side, were now next to her. The vicious animals growled and lunged after us. Blood and saliva dripped from their fanged teeth. If it weren't for the chains around them, we would have been their dinner.

“Mom, is that you?” Julie asked as her voice trembled with fear.

“Mom? Who are you calling Mom?” the ghost bellowed, “You had better leave before the warrior comes and takes you away.”

Just then, the medieval warrior pounded on the door. With the force of 100 men, the door exploded off the hinges. A bright flash of lightning accompanied by a loud thundering roar filled the room. The smoke cleared and in the doorway stood a massive hulk of a man.

“Sis, go over to the other door and see where it leads while I keep him busy,” I said.

“Keep him busy? With what?” Julie replied, as she opened the other door.

“I’ll think of something.”

“Come quickly, go through here.”

Behind the other door was a small crawlspace leading downward to some abyss. There was an obstacle in our way though. Skeletal remains were in the crawlspace. Maggots, worms, and bugs crawled through what remained of the flesh and bones. As we tried to move the remains, millions of flies flew into the room and swarmed around Julie and me. My sister quickly vomited from the onslaught of flies and the putrid smell from the remains. I wasn’t far behind; I felt the back of my throat begin to fill with my regurgitated food. The stench from the crawlspace permeated my pores and made me vomit uncontrollably.

Once in the crawlspace, the flies left us alone and attacked the warrior. Holding back my vomit, I cleared the remains and started to crawl through. All of a sudden, something grabbed my shoe. I looked back and it was the warrior trying to pull me back. I struggled to get out of his grip. The force of my escape propelled me into my sister and both of us slid down the crawlspace. It seemed forever until we came to an opening and splashed down in a pool of rat-infested sewage water.

I looked at Julie and she looked back at me with anger. At about that time the tower started to crumble and crash to the ground. A flash of light crashed through the walls of the tower and soared into the night sky and it was gone. The tower collapsed right at our feet.

The rubble settled, the smoke cleared and I heard a faint voice in the distance. I turned around and there was the woman in the white dress again.

“Mom?” I asked.

“Yes, dear,” she said, “it is me. You have released me and it is time for me to go.”

“Don’t go,” Julie said.

“But I must,” Mom said. “You must move on with your life, my children. The accident was just that, an accident. There is no need to dwell on it. Live your life and be happy. And, John, take care of your sister. Both of you look after your father.”

A flash of light into the night sky and she was gone, disappearing in front of our eyes. Julie and I walked home not saying a word. Then when we reached our house, I looked at her and asked, “Should we tell Dad?”

“No way,” Julie said. “He’ll think we’re crazy. Let’s just keep it our little secret.”

“Okay, agreed.”

We never spoke of it again.