

~ The Terrarium ~

Accompanying Project Narrative



~Prologue~

An Architecture in the Context of Time,

The light ocean spray sparkled playfully as it showered the boy. The sound of each wave crashing against the cliff face far below brought with it an excited anticipation of this colourful cascade. As the fine mist caressed his face, the young Mason² giggled with glee, tasting the salty brine on his lips.

‘Not too close to the edge Philip’ Mother Mason would tone each time he wandered towards the source. She watched from a tartan rug spread across the thick, green grass. Doc Martin boots laid to one side, her pale feet soaked up the sun while the hair on the side of her head that wasn’t shaved surfed on the breeze.

Mother Mason had always been a free-spirited sort, never fussing or wagging her finger in disapproval. She didn’t even hold young Mason’s hand as they ambled back towards the town of Maryport where their small, inherited house and adjoining flower shop waited. She and Mason were doing better than most single-parent families of the 80’s. Apart from a solitary and uninvolved Aunt, Mason and his mother were alone in the world, and free to do as they pleased.

The pair ventured out to Maryport’s surrounding fields and coastline often, the cliffs being a favourite haunt. Mother Mason would teach her son about the local flora and fauna wherever they visited.³ She spoke of how each plant and insect held it’s own special place in the local ecology, and how none could survive without the others.

‘Like you and me Mummy?’ young Mason would ask.

The Mason household, like the flower shop, was full of plants collected and displayed with great attention to detail. Each venture into the wild came with new and precious souvenirs; a cone that when held to his ear transported young Mason back to the beach, a handful of dandelion clocks scattering seeds across their garden on his breath, a plastic beaker containing an entire microcosm of plant and insect life.

‘Keep it going for your children’s children’ was Mother Mason’s mantra. And she wasn’t just talking flowers and bugs. The woman carried the weight of the world itself on her shoulders. While neighbouring families consumed and discarded, the Mason’s were never wasteful. ‘It’s up to you and I Philip’, she would say, ‘we have to show them how it’s done.’

As long as Mother Mason was in charge, young Mason always knew that Maryport would be alive and green.

Notes;

¹ ‘...history exists as an object observed by theoretical historiography... Having Identified the characteristics of the entity’s being (time) conceptualizes them in categories.’ M. Heidegger, *The Concept of Time*. p.2.

² The name ‘Mason’ appears in J.G. Ballard’s short Story *Now Wakes the Sea*. J.G. Ballard, *Short Stories Volume 1*. p.641.

³ Maryport’s coastline is categorised as a Site of Special Scientific Interest. *Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) notified under Section 28 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981*. (http://www.english-nature.org.uk/citation/citation_photo/1005855.pdf)

~Chapter One~

The Dissolving Shoreline of Maryport

It started with the ocean. The sound of the waves beating rhythmically deep down against the Maryport cliffs again. Mason threw back the covers and wandered through the dark corridors that led towards the shop front. Rubbing his eyes and dragging his fingers tiredly through his rough stubble, Mason was guided only by the steady cymbal crashes of the breaking water, guided through the overgrown forest of plants to the store entrance.

The shop bell rang as Mason stepped out into the cool night and beheld the new shoreline that was fast approaching the shop front. The sea no longer lapped at Maryport beach. Instead, icy water now flooded the neighbouring shop entrances and stretched down Senhouse Street, swallowing first floor windows and rooftops as it deepened and darkened. The foreboding shadow of the Mound loomed in the distance, emerging from the deep to claim its place as one of the few remaining parts of Maryport above water.⁴

The cold liquid washing over Mason's toes compelled him to wade out into the alien marine landscape, in turn engulfing his thighs, waist and shoulders, until he was swimming above the amber ghosts of streetlights. The smell of sea salt air reminded him of long-gone afternoons playing in the surf with Mother Mason, her skinny jeans rolled up to her knees.

As he drew closer to the Mound, Mason peered beneath the black surface of the water at the gloomy graveyard of Maryport below, still and lifeless save for a few potted garden plants drifting past on the current, ebbing towards their inevitable destruction.

Mason clawed chunks of earth from the Mound as he scrambled out of the water and up the muddy slope towards its pinnacle. Breathless and dirty, he turned to survey what remained of his home town. It hadn't taken long for Mother Mason's beloved flower shop to be engulfed by the relentless water. Mason used a few of the taller buildings that still jutted out of the surging swell as landmarks, and attempted to estimate how far the coastline had travelled from its original position.

He fell to his knees, exhausted, dumbfounded. His town and surrounding ecosystem obliterated within a matter of minutes. Mother Mason's tireless conservation had amounted to nothing. Her precious collection, amassed over years, now hung dead in the water that used to be called Maryport.

Mason woke with a start, sat up and threw the cold, sweat soaked sheets off the bed. He waited for his heart to stop pounding and wondered how many times he'd had the dream now. It had been so long, he couldn't remember the last time he'd dreamt of anything else. His trembling hands reached for his cigarettes and fumbled to work the lighter.^{5&6}

'There's something in it' he whispered into the dark, 'I know there is.'

He had no idea what, but something was heading for Maryport. Mason was sure of it. Something insidious and corrosive. Something that would change everything.⁷

Notes;

⁴The 'flooding nightmare' is a concept derived from *Now Wakes the Sea* - used as a motivating force for the creation of the vertical landscape. J.G. Ballard, *Short Stories Volume 1*. p.641.

⁵The problem of coastal erosion in Maryport is highlighted in 'Shoreline Management Plan 2 - Appendices'; http://mycoastline.org/documents/Appendix%20C%20-%20C.4%20S_St%20Bees%20Head%20to%20Grune%20Point.pdf

⁶Further historical geomorphology information sourced from; <http://www.allerdale.gov.uk/downloads>

⁷The Impact of Tidal Barrages as discussed by R. Morris CEnv FIEEM, *Tidal Energy Barrages*. <http://www.bacoastal.co.uk>

~Chapter Two~

Ecological Collections of Scientific Interest

Mason whistled, beckoning Duggy⁸ to his side. The dark-haired cocker spaniel reared his head from the hole he'd begun to excavate and bounded along the coastline towards his master. Originally purchased as a companion for the ailing Mother Mason, Duggy had passed hands to Mason when his Mother's increasingly erratic and obsessive behaviour had become unmanageable.

Mason patted Duggy's head and looked out to sea, the familiar sound of the waves meeting the sea defences.

Mason recalled the final days that his mother had spent in the family home. The shop front had become an impassable jungle of overgrown foliage, long ago forsaken by customers. Mother Mason's tireless conservation, however, showed no signs of abating. Mason had slowly begun to realise his Mother's hobby had developed into something more sinister and compulsive. He knew drastic action was required the night she went missing after dark, only to be found leaning over the precipice of the Maryport cliffs, straining to reach a rare plant specimen that lay just out of reach.

Mason turned and started back towards the town. As he walked he picked out the care home where Mother Mason had resided and lived out the last remaining years of her life. With her gone, it was nothing but another Maryport landmark that had sunk beneath the waves of his dark dream.

In his hand, Mason carried a bucket housing his own collection of local plant life samples. The difference between himself and his mother, Mason thought, was that he could stop whenever he wanted. Or at least, he hoped so.⁹

Duggy clawed excitedly at the flower shop entrance as Mason fumbled for the keys and shouldered the stiff door open. He had cleared the shop floor and archived most of Mother Mason's clutter away, but the shop was still only doing intermittent business. It was enough to keep him going for the time being, but not forever.

Mason shuffled through to the back of the shop and heaved a large sash window open. He ducked through onto the steps of the old iron fire escape that lay outside. The stairway now housed much of Mason's expanded plant collection. It snaked up the house's exterior like a huge, leafy vine.

Mason gingerly manoeuvred to one of the few remaining clear spaces on the stairway and carefully deposited his latest finds. He leaned out over the edge and tilted his neck to contemplate the upwardly sprawling mass in its entirety.¹⁰ From the window, Duggy sniffed at the plants he could reach and met his Master's gaze with a sadness in his eyes.

'You're right Duggy' Mason sighed, 'we're running out of space.' Duggy's tail wagged in agreement.

Notes;

⁸ The dog's name is inspired by Douglas "Duggy" Clark MM (born 1891 in Ellenborough, Cumberland, died 1951) was an English rugby league footballer, wrestler and World War I veteran; [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Douglas_Clark_\(rugby_league\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Douglas_Clark_(rugby_league))

⁹ One of the early parametres of the character was an obsessive compulsive personality disorder. It was decided that this should not take centre stage within the story, but still becomes relevant in part; Information Sourced; www.ocdonline.com

¹⁰ Jonathan Drori, Why We're Storing Billions of Seeds; Lecture for 'TED'. http://www.ted.com/talks/jonathan_drori_why_we_re_storing_billions_of_seeds.html

('Terrarium'; A small enclosure or closed container in which selected living plants and sometimes small land animals, such as turtles and lizards, are kept and observed. <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/terrarium>)

~Chapter Three~

The Vertical Landscape - A Framework for Lifespans

‘You want it where?!’ The foreman raised his eyebrows with genuine surprise and concern.

‘Just like the plans say’ Mason reassured, ‘up there.’ They stood in a car park near Maryport docks from which Mason pointed to the summit of a small mound. Atop this mound sat an old sandstone ruin looking out onto the ocean.

The foreman scratched his head with a pencil and sucked on his bottom lip. It wasn’t every day someone asked you to build a ‘vertical landscape’¹¹ on top of an old pile of stones. A nice change of pace from two-up, two-downs, but still!

‘Okay mate, you’re paying for it.’

Mason had anticipated such antagonism, but it was true, he was paying for it. The old house and adjoining shop had been sold. Mason hadn’t gotten the price he was after, but the sale combined with his personal savings and a sizeable inheritance from his distant Aunt – her will named ‘next of kin’, all of which remained Mason – ensured there was enough to commission the construction of the tower.

As the workers began to organise themselves nearby, Mason looked down at Duggy who was panting mindlessly at his feet. Their lives were about to change more radically than either of them could ever have imagined.

There was little left for Mason in Maryport these days. At the tail end of his twenties, most of Mason’s friends had either moved away permanently or just fallen out of touch. Most were starting families of their own and were well established in their chosen careers. Meanwhile, the flower shop continued to flounder and Mason found himself alone and depressed more and more often. He knew things had hit rock bottom when he finally turned to alcohol.

With years of AA meetings, sleepless nights and soul searching behind him, Mason had finally reached the point where he felt sane and focused again. He considered the task ahead of him and realised for the first time in a long while that he was excited about something. He had no idea how he was going to do it, but he was determined to save every plant and insect he could from the fate they had suffered in his cataclysmic nightmare. He would build his ecological ark.¹²

Notes;

¹¹ Verticality in this instance is used as a physical reference point, an intensive linear marker and a prominent object on the landscape. The building is private - it performs no public function - but rather acts as a social/ political and moral monument.

¹² Gurevitch, Scheiner, Fox, *The Ecology of Plants*, pp.1-13. Chapter 1 ‘The Science of Plant Ecology’

~Chapter Four~

Dwelling & Rituals of Mason

Mason entered the first level of the tower and glanced over the first few plates he had already filled with his existing plant collection from Mother Mason's florist shop. He arrived at his living quarters where Duggy bounded towards him, barking excitedly.

Above them, the remaining levels of the tower were still being constructed. Until they were ready, the workmen had built Mason a rudimentary wooden hut containing a bedroom, kitchen and bathroom. For the time being, the hut would provide shelter during the winter months which Mason had planned out meticulously along with the other seasons.¹³

Winter meant hibernation and maintenance. No new plants would be growing, but he could make short rounds of his collection to prevent any frost damage. Spring would bring with it the collection of newly budding samples and the notation in his journal of all the natural changes occurring around him. Summer was for basking on the open terrarium platforms, soaking up the sun alongside his plants and bathing in the nearby sea. And finally, Autumn would arrive, the natural time for harvest of his food stores and stocking up for the winter once more.¹⁴

Mason entered the hut, undressed and slipped into his old dressing gown. Opening his journal, Mason began to plot the overall scheme of his ark's ecology. Before adding more plants and insects, he was determined to organise and maximize the potential of his existing collection.

He could see the overall plan for his terrarium in his mind's eye. Level after level of plant life would interconnect to provide homes to a wide range of insects and create the perfect, sustainable habitat. While maintaining this, he would experiment with different methods of farming and cultivation to enhance the tower's productivity.

All the while, Mason would safely stow away any samples of particular importance in a specially constructed 'core'. This would house only the most precious and valuable specimens that warranted preserving for future generations.

Mason sat over his journal long into the night, just as he would the following evening, and the evening after that. Once the first level of the terrarium was organised he would take Duggy out into the hills and continue to search for new specimens. It felt good to have a plan, for once in his life.

Notes;

¹³ '...the recollection of moments of confined, simple, shut-in are experiences of heart warming space, of a space that does not seek to be extended'. Gaston Bachelard on the sensory perception of small spaces revisited in daydreams and memories as intimate and protective entities. G. Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, p.10. This notion becomes enforced when Mason inhabits the small cave like spaces within the wall.

¹⁴ Living seasonally was inspired by, and extended from, ideas presented in S. Unwin, *Analysing Architecture*, p. 27, in which he discusses 'architecture as an identification of place'. This project then becomes 'architecture as an identification of time'.

~Chapter Five~

The Infiltration of Nature

Mason trudged through the fields just outside Maryport while Duggy padded by his side. The dog's youthful spark had been replaced by frequent rests. This familiar journey was one of the few the poor animal could manage anymore.

Mason had previously shared these fields with his classmates and Science teacher during his days at Netherhall Secondary School. The Science outings were always his favourite. He and his teacher, Mr. McAndrews – 'Mac' to his star pupil – got along well. While his friends lagged behind to smoke cigarettes, Mason was at Mac's side, collecting every seed of botanical knowledge that was on offer. If Mason had known his father, he would have wanted him to be like Mac. The relationship was short-lived, however, ending along with Mason's high school career.

As they reached the first Maryport town houses, Mason lent down to clip on Duggy's lead, though he doubted Duggy had the energy run off. They continued, a bucket of specimens in one hand, Duggy's lead in the other, through the streets littered with discarded wrappers and lined with overflowing council bins.

It had never bothered him before, but since beginning his sparse tower existence, Mason's patience for the wantonly wasteful society around him had waned. Before living in the terrarium, Mason had known as little about recycling and living a green existence as anyone else, but it had taken hardly any time to learn. And if he could learn, anyone could.¹⁵

Mason visualised the tasks that lay stretched out into the remainder of the day. His mornings were dedicated to rambling and collecting specimens, but the afternoons were set aside for the maintenance tasks necessary to sustain his solitary existence. And the terrarium required more attention with each year that passed.

The crops needed watering, the bee hive he had installed was full of honey and the tower's plant filled levels were in dire need of pruning. All these tasks needed seeing to, along with the emptying of his rainwater containers and the always pleasant (always pungent) task of putting his waste to good use. He would also have to go out and fish for his supper.¹⁶

In the evening, with Duggy snoozing at his feet, Mason would open his journal to note the day's findings and how they would fit into the overall scheme of the terrarium. A challenge, considering the first level was almost full. Mason's days were busier than they had ever been, but they would seem a lot emptier when Duggy was gone.

Notes;

¹⁵ Ideas of Autonomy stem from R. & B. Vale's *New Autonomous House*, to enforce the idea that the key protagonist, Mason, is both philosophically 'cut-off' and to ensure that his efforts to protect the ecology/ environment are focused.

¹⁶ Elements of farming information, particularly harvest cycles, crop types and required environments/ actions sourced from; A. Titchmarsh, *The Kitchen Gardener*.

¹⁷ 'Every Seven Years you Change' is a theoretical idea that beyond cell renewal in seven year cycles, the emotional, physical and mental attitude of human beings also evolve to the point of change every seven years also. Sourced; <http://dreamhawk.com/body-and-mind/every-seven-years-you-change/>

~Chapter Six~

Evolution of Life & Expanding Interests

Climbing the terrarium step by exhausting step, Mason passed the level that he used to call home. Over the last few years, his collection of plants and insects had grown to the extent that a relocation was necessary. Accordingly, Mason had moved to the middle of the tower¹⁸, taking his few personal possessions with him. The extended climb was almost more than his aging body could stand, especially after a day of coastal rambling. The tiring thought that he might have to repeat the process in another few years was certainly not one he wished to entertain at this precise moment.

Mason arrived at his new seasonal living quarters and collapsed into his seat, letting out a long sigh. His main living area was now built into the terrarium wall but, imitating his hut on the tower's lower levels, he had constructed a number of crude 'labs', each varied to suit his many research tasks.¹⁹

The lab in which he currently sat was kitted out for environmental study. The changing seasons seemed to be effecting the tower's ecology, causing his plants to grow rapidly and spread to all corners of the terrarium.²⁰

Mason had planned to carry out tests all afternoon, but instead found himself staring into space and nostalgically thumbing the frayed remains of Duggy's old lead. He had held onto it for sentimental reasons after the dog had passed away and didn't normally pay much attention to it. But today he felt a maudlin surge of unease.

How melancholy, he thought. How very unlike him. Mason wished he had someone to call on, some old friend or distant relative, but there was no one. Duggy and Mother Mason were dead, his friends and acquaintances were non-existent and his Father had never been around to start with. He knew the path he had chosen would be a lonely one, but the years since Duggy's death had been especially hard.

Slipping his spectacles over his ears and gathering his papers into order, Mason persevered to continue his ecological research – there was a whole new level to plot out and fill with specimens – but after a futile attempt at concentration, Mason slumped back in his chair and began to cry. He had never felt so alone.

The hot tears rolled off Mason's cheeks, splashing down on his grand plans. Far below, the ever advancing ocean waves continued to edge towards the base of the tower. The coastline seemed to be receding almost day-by-day. Soon it would be non-existent, much like Mason's contact with the outside world.

Notes;

¹⁸The idea that each level of the Terrarium would vary according to required uses is inspired by the 1909 theorem that describes the ideal performance of the skyscraper discussed in R. Koolhaas, *Delirious New York*, pp. 82-84. 'The use of each platform can never be known in advance of its construction. Villas may go up and collapse, other facilities may replace them, but that will not replace the frame work' (p. 85).

¹⁹R. Kronenburg, *Flexible Architecture; Architecture that Responds to Change*.

²⁰'Beauty in Decay' is the title of a book by Urbex - An urban exploration forum. Historic machines and buildings which have become corroded and decayed hold a certain fascination to some. In this case the terrarium is beginning to show some signs of wear and tear.

~Chapter Seven~

Saturation of the Landscape

The sun sent broken beams dancing across the sleeping man's white-bearded face. Mason stirred, blinking hard and lifting his frail arms to cover his dazzled eyes. With great effort, he sat up and gazed down upon his withered body. He had lost weight rapidly over the last few years.

Mason's maintenance rituals had become completely dormant. He was simply too old, and too tired, to keep up with the watering, pruning, collecting and preserving. His few possessions lay discarded across the many abandoned living areas throughout the tower, leaving the latest incarnation in which he lay almost bare.

The evidence of his inactivity was all around him. The terrarium had blossomed of its own accord, covered from top to bottom with flourishing plant life, both inside and out. Leaves sprouted from every available crevice. The sea had gulped down most of the earth surrounding the tower, driving the coastline inwards and leaving the tower shining like some kind of vertical paradise on its own little island in the ocean.

Although he was pleased to have created a working ecosystem made up of plants and insects now largely lost to the area that was once Maryport, Mason's real pride was the large catalogue of items were securely hidden away in the core.

Mason struggled to his feet and began the arduous task of dressing himself. He was older now than Mother Mason had been when she passed away. It was a strange feeling indeed, he thought, to be older than one's mother.

Mason hadn't left the tower for years now. He hadn't needed to. Not since his own crops had proven adequate sustenance. It had been a long time, in fact, since he had been further than a few storeys down from the floor on which he now resided. Mason decided he would visit the earth one last time.

Steadying himself against the wall, Mason began to descend through the tower, edging down the terrarium staircase. Far above him, the cries of a mating pair of falcons echoed through the tower's levels. They had moved in a few years ago, treating the tower as a substitute for their more traditional cliff face nesting grounds. No doubt their old spot had eroded over time and crumbled off into the sea below.

As he worked his way through the branches and vines that crowded the stairs, Mason was delighted to be greeted by all manner of natural constructs. An aviary on one level, a collection of decaying research huts on another, all cultivated by himself originally, but now grasped and sustained by nature alone. Each level he descended through reminded him of how much he had achieved.²¹

A great sense of fulfilment grew inside Mason. No grand orchestral swells or standing ovations, just the quiet contentment of a life's work completed and a dream achieved. He would rest when he reached the ground.²²

Notes;

²¹B. Rudofsky, *Architecture Without Architects*. Discusses early cultural monuments created which celebrate a purity through rudimentary building techniques and direct social and/ or functional requirements, as opposed to a preoccupation with 'taught' architectural principles.

²²Inspired by; *La Maison en Petits Cubes*, Kunio Katō. A short animated film in which a man lives his life on sequential levels of his home, which he builds as sea levels rise. The conclusion of this story is the man swimming down through his home revisiting all the past levels which are now submerged and reliving past memories. Source; <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0V9BYAZP3yU&feature=related>

~Chapter Eight~

The Lost Ruin in the Sea

The sea was rough as usual, washing against the base of the terrarium that now met the water directly like an ankle paddling on the shore.²³ The vast sky was overcast in a single, thick blanket of grey, interrupted only by the hazy, glowing orb of the sun. Its light burned through the gloom and cast an eerie shimmer on the water, which in turn tinted Mason's tower with an otherworldly luminescence.

Although the core of the structure stood strong, decades of erosion and abuse from the wind and waves had stripped away much of the terrarium's aesthetic charm.²⁴ Large portions of its outer shell had now crumbled away, but Mason's creation still allowed the plants and animals that had made a new home there to thrive.

Far off in the distance, from what used to be the outskirts of Maryport, young Sue Adams threw her picture window open, raised her binoculars to her eyes and peered through the fog to watch the scene, entranced. The terrarium had been a constant fixture in her ten years of life so far, often looming through the mist like some sea bound ghost.²⁵

'Susie?' Her Mother called from downstairs. 'Are you alright up there?'

'Yes Mum!'

Sue's Mother worried about her sitting up in her room all alone. She would often knock on the door to regale Sue with tales of her misspent youth, out playing every day, scraping her knees and getting into all sorts of mischief. Sue just wasn't like that. Her room was her sanctuary, a haven where she could be interested in what she loved and not be bothered by anyone else.

Her bedroom was filled with all manner of scientific paraphernalia; plant postcards stuck to the wall, books on insects, a microscope she had gotten for her birthday. The room summed her up completely. Even the sea tower her room looked out onto felt like part of her identity.

The girl felt entirely connected to the mysterious tower. Where had it come from? Her Mother and Father had given her the vaguest of details – something about a crazy man with too much money – but Sue preferred to think a decadent, Grecian sea God had built it. A tower for his subjects to scale and give him worship as he rose from the water below.

She had asked her Father if they could visit the tower someday, but he had replied that it was far too dangerous. 'No one's been out there for a very, very long time Susie' he had said, 'it could be falling apart for all we know.'

She would get to the 'ruin in the sea'²⁵ one day. Sue was determined it would be she who unearthed the mysterious tower's treasures.

Notes;

²³ Rising sea level information sourced from; <http://flood.firetree.net/> and enforced by Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's report; http://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar4/syr/ar4_syr_spm.pdf

²⁴ One important aspect of the project (derived in part from 'Beauty in Decay') was the ephemeral nature of certain objects and artifacts. A reading of the building across time is proposed through an understanding of how long materials themselves may last.

²⁵ The imagery of the decaying tower is inspired by the renderings in the book, *The World Tomorrow: Scenarios of Global Catastrophe* by Yannick Monget.

~Chapter Nine~

Scientific Inhabitation & the Decanting Process

Dr. Sue Adams held onto her hat as the cruiser sliced through waves, carrying her colleagues and herself towards the lonely tower in the ocean. As the boat drew near, the tower seemed to grow taller above them. It looked about ready to crumble, but something held it fast. Perhaps the network of trees that had burrowed through the tower's interior to poke their leaf strewn branches out into the open air. The tower was still the mysterious green sentinel that had stood alone in the ocean of her childhood.²⁶

The captain pulled the huge ship up against the side of the terrarium, allowing Sue and her team to step out onto one of the platforms. They got to work immediately, unloading sealed specimen boxes specially designed to house delicate items of plant life. They had also brought with them a few portable habitats for any unusual animals they came across. A preliminary visit to the tower a few months back had confirmed Sue's suspicions that a larger scale reconnaissance effort was required.

The mission was planned down to the most minute detail. The building's core was to be completely cleared out and archived chronologically. The remaining specimens in the building were to be sampled and stored on the ship. The team had specific instructions, however, to box up anything that was unidentifiable onsite. There were also some interesting instances of evolution she was keen to document.²⁷

Sue and her team scuttled off into the tower like a colony of ants searching for food to please their queen. What they would return with would provide the beginnings of new food stocks and medicines, both of which were in short supply back on the mainland.

On breaking through the core's worn brick wall and peering inside, the team were greeted with an unanticipated spectacle; an intimidating number of intricately hung seed-like containers. Each pod contained carefully preserved information on the ecology that had once thrived on the lost coastline. Sue and her team scaled the core's limits and painstakingly lowered each container to the boat below. They would be broken open, and the contents studied later.

Sue felt the adrenaline pumping through her body and savoured it. She had restlessly anticipated unearthing the contents of the core, but her secret hope of unmasking the mysterious man responsible for this place was a door from her past she longed to close.

Notes;

²⁶ Scientific, ecological & archaeological discovery inspired by explorations described in E. O. Wilson's *The Future of Life*. Chapter one, 'To the Ends of the Earth', explaining details of research expeditions to locations (such as Borneo and Antarctica) to study ecosystems which been closed and unspoiled for millennia.

²⁷ The idea that nature would thrive without man is highlighted in the documentary *Life After People*, and reinforced by remote abandoned areas of pre-existing infrastructure such as Pripyat, The town devastated by the Chernobyl disaster, where nature has taken hold of the city and thrived.

~Chapter Ten~

Living Ornament & Technological Decay ²⁸

Back in the family home, Sue was staring through her old bedroom window at the giant tower again. Her Father had passed away a few years back, but her Mother was still here, still fussing after Sue like she was ten years old. She could have stayed in a hotel while she carried out her business with the tower, but Sue knew her mother would never forgive her if she ever found out her daughter had been nearby without visiting. Anyway, no hotel for miles could match this view.

During their decanting of the tower, several of Sue's teammates had noted aspects of interest in the terrarium itself. The remnants of rudimentary technology and outdated building techniques had justified further investigation. The site was like a living museum of some forgotten age.

It had been difficult to convince her employers at such short notice but Sue had made it a priority to request a complete archeological survey of the tower with special attention to details of historical significance. It might be possible, she thought, to piece together parts of the decaying structure and theoretically surmise the building's other unusual artefacts.

While Sue's team had removed what items they could from the tower, although it seemed structurally sound for the time being, it would not stand forever. Some of the walls were already turning to dust as Sue's team had moved through the tower.²⁹

She flinched as a wave struck the side of the terrarium, causing a large chunk of one side to break off and crash into the ocean with an impact so loud Sue heard the distant rumble from where she sat. The follow-up team were scheduled to visit the tower tomorrow morning. Sue had left the entire day free to watch from her window through her old binoculars.

'That's lunch ready Susie!'

Her mother hollering up at her, just like old times. Being home was a bittersweet experience. Sue enjoyed the nostalgia of her old room, and visiting her aging but independent mother. But the whole scenario highlighted her decision to forego having a family of her own in order to pursue her dream. There was a short window of opportunity left, she thought, but Sue knew in her heart it would never come to pass. She was watching the closest thing she would ever have to a legacy through her binoculars.

Notes;

²⁸ The original iteration of this chapter was inspired by some of the work of students at the Bartlett (UCL, London) who continue to examine the parameters of ornament, and protocell architecture, under the guidance of Neil Spiller. This then later became informed by some of the work of Louis Sullivan, particularly the drawings (observed online) from *An Architectural System of Ornament*. To some extent both of these inspired the original technological ambition.

²⁹ "Architecture needs mechanisms that allow it to become connected to culture. It achieves this by continually capturing the forces that shape society as material(s) to work with." F. Moussavi, *The Function of Ornament*. Heightening the rationale of technological decay & living ornament in the context of the project.

~Epilogue~

The Autonomous Island

The tower stood defiant against the brooding sky. The wind began to pick up and the wet, groping waves gradually reached upwards to begin battering the terrarium's foundation. Black storm clouds rallied around the building and hurled thunderous taunts at it for daring to reach up into their sky.

With a terrible flash and a deafening clap, the storm roused itself into violent action, flinging itself at the terrarium with all the might of a thousand battleships firing in unison. The tower swayed back and forth, whipping the remaining plants within it in all directions. Crashing against the tower's exterior, the sea began to tear away chunks of stonework, dragging bricks away like well cooked flesh from a bone. Piece after piece of the tower hurtled down into the water and sank to the bottomless depths.

After nearly five centuries of standing strong, the terrarium fought proudly, but eventually succumbed to the overpowering might of the ocean. In its final spectacular moments, the bottom level of Mason's terrarium buckled, sending the rest of the tower straight down, crumpling in upon itself like a soda can under a child's stamping foot.

It was an eventuality Mason had planned intentionally. Back when Maryport still existed, had the tower unexpectedly plunged towards the ground, no harm would come to any of the surrounding buildings or people. To the townsfolk of the time, the terrarium's passing would have been nothing more than a light dusting of debris.

Now, of course, no one was around for miles. Even Dr. Sue Adams's family home had been derelict for many decades before it slipped off the eroding coastline and into the sea.

The raging storm carried off most of the plants and animals that were catapulted from or killed within the tower as it fell. Mason's terrarium piled on top of itself to leave a heap of rubble that sat just above sea level to form a strange man made island.

When the sea levelled and the sun revealed itself once more, the smallest bud of hope began to sprout from the crest of the artificial atoll. Through the writhing morass of junk, a single green shoot climbed upwards towards the sun's life-giving rays. With the years that passed, more exploring shoots followed the initial adventurous stem. Mason's terrarium had some life left in it yet.³⁰

Notes;

³⁰ A metaphorical proposition for the reuse of component parts in experimental ways and the overriding requirement for the recycling of building materials generally.

"In the end, our society will be defined not only by what we create, but by what we refuse to destroy"

John C. Sawhill (1936-2000),
president, The Nature Conservancy, 1990 - 2000.