

## Endgame finale -

My arm had gone numb.  
The left one.  
Not vital for much in my life, at least not likely for the rest of it.  
The drizzle is about all that's keeping me going.  
I pressed my right hand against a brick wall, rough and slicked with rain.  
I pressed harder.  
Seconds before the cracks formed I could see them. Shards of light perceptible by only me.  
Then the light that anyone could see.  
The wall no longer barred my advance.  
Faces of those within appeared to me, then turned to startle, then I turned them to nothing.  
I didn't hear the shot until it tore through my leg.  
A long time ago I topped letting myself cry out about such things. But my heart seized a little, a gasp still rolled out.  
I removed my weight from my destroyed leg.  
Rubble leapt to me, formed a splint.  
I closed my eyes and imagined the gun that sent the bullet through me. In my mind the gun erupted in the hands of my assailant. So it did.  
I summoned those fragments to me and looked to the faceless corpses at my feet.  
In the corner I saw a body, fully intact.  
I let out a slow breath and put my foot down to test the splint.  
It hurts, but would work.  
The blood-stained metal scraps orbited around me, random debris joined in.  
I walked slowly to the proper body.  
I rolled him on to his back, placed my hand on his face and pushed his eyelids open.  
I looked deep into his hollow, lifeless ice-blue eyes.  
I let out a hiss and watched as murky oil replaced all colors in his eyes.  
"Stand up dead man."  
So he did.  
"You've been a puppet the last couple years, you'll be mine for the next while."  
It was only momentarily unsettling when I started seeing through his eyes in addition to mine.  
I clasped my hands and the chaff wrapped around my marionette.  
The armor-clad dead was ready to walk the streets of Denver, while I would cling to the shadows.

This was my fifth and final year. My growth in power led to the boldness of this raid.  
When this began the storm sent its pawns against me. It turned anyone I loved at me, then anyone who'd cared for me, and when they ran out, anyone who'd known me.  
The storm would have delighted had I been struck down by any of those that marched upon me.  
The storm also wins if I stop caring, if I concede or suicide.  
It didn't work.  
There had been much pain and suffering upon me.  
There was not be a single living person I've known left in this world. I think they'd all died by my hand, but I know that everyone else will die if I lose. I can't fight for those I love, I can only fight for faceless masses.

When it arrived, it tore at the earth around Denver. It plucked planes from the sky surrounding the mile high city.  
Apparently as the storm's 'plan A' failed it decided to impose its will on the isolated city. For years it spoke to them, provided for them.

It educated its citizenry of my evil. It touted its own good. It promised to free them from my evil imprisonment, to empower them in a crusade to free the world from me. Over the years I've come to know the evil. It has shirked all infamy to me. I'm flesh and blood and in times of chaos that is what people seek. The man at the center, that people can understand. The storm was about a month from unleashing Denver upon me. I decided to hit first. I didn't yet know what would follow. If I kill Denver, I'll have undone years of labor. It wouldn't get me closer to winning, it just keeps me alive.

“It is time for my dead knight and I to gut this town.”

So we did.

I had my puppet march down the middle of the road as I lurked to the side. I started discovering things about the man that stood by my will. His name was Mark. After learning that I tried my best to learn nothing more.

It didn't take long for Mark to attract some folk. It was obvious that knowledge of my presence wasn't known. Mark's hand extended, fingers spread, palm down. An orb of black formed in his palm and fell like a heavy rain drop. It disappeared into the ground. Five thin men and two skinny women were instantaneously impaled on obsidian spires which rocketed skyward. The newly deads' tip-toes brushed the street as their legs swayed from breeze and twitching muscle.

Peoples' thoughts spill out jaggedly when the body ceases to provide the energy to the brain to maintain the walls we all erect. Each of them a bursting dam of agony. For a brief moment I could feel every sensation they did before I shut it out.

The oil black clouds parted slightly. Rain ceased. Sunlight flooded down, surrounding me in light, touching this ground for the first time in years.

I shielded my eyes.

The city would soon be upon me, drawn to the light.

I breathed in, the longest I'd ever take.

Then out. I expelled a cloud of my own.

My bubble of darkness centered around Mark. They must think he is me.

It didn't take long for it to begin, it took quite awhile for it to end.

A two hour onslaught.

Bullets tore through Mark's flesh and bone.

I reassembled bone fragments, mended flesh. I reinforced his skin with the steel buried within him.

Attempted heroes leapt from buildings, each detonated far before they could reach the demon they believed was me.

I stood twenty five feet away from my knight, with both our eyes it was nearly impossible to catch Mark off guard.

This was all very taxing.

I tried to ignore cries of pain, lamentations for lost friends, cries for revenge, quoting of scripture, but I couldn't.

My assailants always believed they were in the right. The storm put blinders on them, whispered into their ears. Word of my deeds, both true and not, had spread to them, adding human voices to those screaming for my death.

I foolishly pressed forward.

Mark entered an intersection of downtown Denver. I only had his peripheral vision and that Celica's timing was precise. It didn't enter my field of vision until it entered the intersection. It

never entered Mark's periphery.

With only hundredths of seconds I turned asphalt into a wave to meet the car. I summoned spires of obsidian to tear into the undercarriage. I turned the steering wheel. I slammed the breaks. I eviscerated the driver.

It wasn't enough. The mass had a target.

The Celica's fuel ignited as it lost integrity. The asphalt wave was overcome and chunks reversed path, back towards my knight. Only 120 pounds made it to him, but he became nothing but offal. Fire, metal, gas, street and glass entered the body. I lacked the time to reassemble him. Even if I did he'd only be a fleshy golem. A sub-par Frankenstein's monster. But it wouldn't amount to much, Mark's eyes were ruined.

A brief clamor.

They thought me slain.

I couldn't foster the illusion.

The storm couldn't let me.

It popped my bubble.

Evicted me into light.

It only took one second for me to feel steel again course through me.

I roared.

I rended air, which then loomed frayed and torn leaving no straight line to me.

I knelt and dug my fingers into the street.

One joint deep.

I felt threads of energy, which flowed between all. I strummed. Buildings fell. All but one path blocked. I stayed the strings, then pressed down upon them, adding to them.

A garden of jagged obsidian crescents, spikes, stalagmites rose from the rubble, further obstructing all but my one entrance.

Three more shots were sent my way while I built my defenses, the tattered air fended them off well. Withdrawing my fingers from the ground I couldn't help but marvel at my work.

The glint of novel sunlight on glassy black rocks, the shimmer of the air. Like the thinnest sheer curtains, hung from nowhere. Transparent laundry drying on clotheslines on a summer day.

I experienced my own pain.

Blood stained the lower part of my shirt on my right side. The bullet hadn't punctured any major organs. The sniper had been killed in one of the collapsing buildings.

The men who'd sent the most recent shots at me made their way to the corridor. A few folk tried their luck on the bladed hills of concrete.

I sat down, legs partly extended in front of me. Arms rested on my knees. I closed my eyes. I could hear gunshots. They didn't happen with much frequency.

I discovered that despite all I could do, I couldn't do much with my newest wound. It wouldn't be fatal though.

Eyes opened.

Thousands marched on me. Some still dots. Some quite near.

I cupped my face and everyone fell.

Each of their hearts pierced from within.

They weren't the last wave, but they might as well have been. An hour later all that moved in Denver was shredded air and me.

The storm took away the light it'd granted.

My bleeding subsided and I came to realize something.

The storm can still get what it wants if we keep grinding against each other. Mankind isn't better off with its blood on my hands.

Would I have to kill a new city every couple of years? A state every decade? Two nations before I die? How good could I get at exterminating those well intentioned folk trying to smite me?

If it never manages to end me, age likely still would. I don't know why it came or why it wants us dead. But I know enough.

The storm is bound to me, bound by me. It can strike anyone but me. It can't do anything more than I can.

In that the solution is found.

I must live forever and render myself powerless.

By binding myself I bind us both.

So I did.

The skies began to clear immediately.

A smile couldn't form on my placid face.

Only a few days passed before I was discovered.

Five months later I was put up in a museum.

A plaque at my side read as follows:

Steven Long

Artist: Michael Abernathy

Statue: Basalt

Steven Long was the man who ravaged the Midwest for years, engulfing the world in his darkness. The artist sculpted this piece after felling Steven in commemoration of the lifting of the darkness and in honor of the brave souls who died in Denver.

Michael the sculptor's lies elevated him to a messiah. His cowardice alone overpowered the storm's sway.

I knew this and much more. I thought retaining awareness would make eternity bearable. Most days I second guess that decision.

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