

EPILOGUE — “The Missing Sequence”

The tower never collapsed.

That was the official version.

It held across every system that mattered.

Structural reports showed no failure. Insurance audits returned clean. Civilian witness accounts—those that survived filtering—degraded into contradiction and then into nothing useful at all. Security footage displayed exactly what it should: a building standing in the rain, lights steady, people moving through routines that did not break.

The anomaly reports were sealed.

Then archived.

Then quietly categorized under a designation that would not attract future curiosity.

No causal origin point identified.

Case closed.

Inside the Foundation, the language was different.

Not publicly.

Not even formally.

But in the private layer where conclusions were allowed to be accurate instead of acceptable—

the file read:

Event completed.

No recurrence detected.

And beneath that—

in a notation Mai had not authorized, but had not removed—

a single additional line:

Origin no longer accessible.

Three days later, the tower was full again.

Business resumed.

Meetings scheduled.

Elevators ran on time.

The conference room on forty-eight hosted a private negotiation involving people who would never know they had once occupied a space that refused to agree with itself.

The twelve glasses were gone.

Replaced.

New.

Still.

Elias Voss did not reschedule his release.

At first, that looked like strategy.

Then caution.

Then delay.

By the end of the week, it had become absence.

He sat alone in his upper office, lights low, city stretching out beneath him in ordered lines and predictable motion.

The system still existed.

The architecture was intact.

The lattice models responded.

Simulations ran.

Data flowed.

Everything he had built—

still functioned.

Except for one thing.

Completion.

He could approach it.

Circle it.

Build toward it.

Every time.

The final step was always almost there—

just beyond articulation.

A parameter without a value.

A transition without a trigger.

A conclusion that refused to form.

He had tried everything.

Reconstruction from earlier builds.

External consultation.

Blind iteration.

Even deliberate destabilization of his own models to force a new path.

Nothing worked.

Because nothing was broken.

That was the part that disturbed him.

If the system had failed—

he could fix it.

If it had been sabotaged—

he could trace it.

If it had been incomplete—

he could complete it.

But this—

this was something else.

It was as if the system had reached its end—

and found nothing there.

He leaned back in his chair, staring at the main projection.

A perfect lattice.

Symmetrical.

Elegant.

Useless.

His assistant had stopped asking about the release.

Investors had begun to shift their attention elsewhere.

Not withdrawing.

Not yet.

But adjusting.

Watching.

Waiting.

Voss didn't blame them.

He looked down at his hands.

Steady.

Capable.

Unchanged.

And understood something he could not quite explain:

He had already made the decision.

Once.

Somewhere.

And it had not led here.

The thought slipped away as soon as it formed.

Left no trace.

No anchor.

Just a faint, unresolvable discomfort.

He exhaled slowly.

Closed the projection.

And for the first time since the incident—

did not reopen it.

Across the city, nothing marked the place where the event had completed.

No scar.

No shift.

No visible consequence.

But the absence was there.

Not in the way something missing leaves a gap.

In the way something removed leaves *no space at all*.

Shammy stood at the edge of a rooftop three blocks from the tower, hands in her coat pockets, looking out over the city as evening settled into another quiet pattern of light and motion.

The air was stable.

Clean.

Predictable.

It breathed the way it was supposed to.

She tilted her head slightly.

Listening.

Not for sound.

For pressure.

For imbalance.

For the subtle, almost invisible signals that something had not resolved correctly.

There were none.

“That’s it?” she said softly.

Behind her, Mai stood near the access door, tablet in hand, though she wasn’t looking at it.

“Yes.”

Shammy didn’t turn.

“It feels... smaller.”

Mai considered that.

Then:

“It’s consistent.”

A pause.

Shammy shifted her weight slightly.

“The other version—”

“There isn’t one,” Mai said.

Not sharply.

Not dismissively.

Just—

final.

Shammy smiled faintly.

“Right.”

Ace leaned against the low wall a few meters away, arms folded, watching the tower.

Not studying it.

Not tracking it.

Just—

confirming.

“It’s done,” she said.

Mai nodded once.

“Yes.”

Shammy exhaled again.

Long.

Slow.

“Something’s gone,” she said.

“Yes.”

“What?”

Mai didn’t answer immediately.

Because the correct answer was not precise.

And precision mattered.

Finally:

“A sequence.”

Shammy frowned slightly.

“That’s all?”

Mai looked out over the city.

At the systems that still worked.

The patterns that still held.

The instability that no longer propagated from that point.

“That’s enough,” she said.

Ace pushed off the wall.

“Anything coming from it?”

“No.”

“Good.”

That was the end of her interest.

They stood there a moment longer.

Not because they needed to.

Because the moment had resolved cleanly.

And clean resolutions deserved acknowledgment.

Even if no one else knew they had happened.

Below them, the city continued.

Traffic flowed.

Lights shifted.

People moved through lives that had not been interrupted—

and would not be.

The tower stood.

Unremarkable.

Stable.

Exactly as it should be.

Mai finally turned away.

“Archive it,” she said.

Ace was already moving toward the access door.

Shammy lingered one second longer.

Just enough to feel the air settle completely.

Then she followed.

Far below—

unseen, unrecorded, and no longer present in any system that could describe it—

a moment that had once refused to end

no longer existed.

And because it had been allowed to finish—

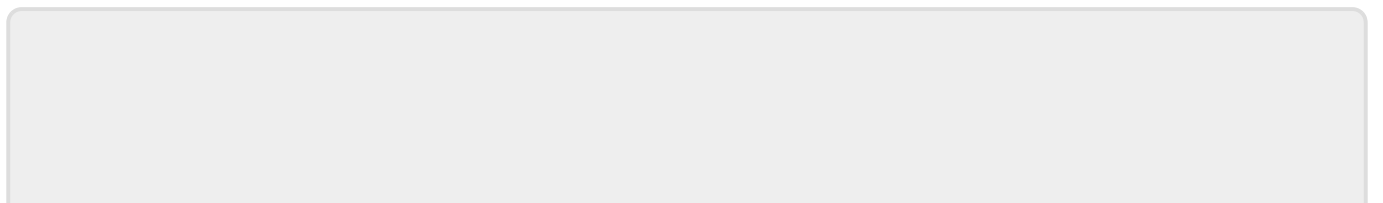
it would never begin again.

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