

Nature is Always the Key

The line was taking forever. Harry had been waiting for thirty minutes already, and he was starting to run out of things to talk about with his friend Mike.

"Coupons, please," drawled the man for the one thousandth time. Harry yawned, just wanting to be free from this never-ending queue.

"I'm talking to you!" grunted the man at the stand, obviously getting annoyed. Harry jumped; he was at the front of the line, and he didn't even realize it!

"Sorry, sorry," murmured Harry, handing over his coupons.

The man at the stand gave Harry his food for the week, and Mike followed suit. They ambled to the park, overlooking the clear blue ocean. The boys made an unlikely pair. Harry's quick and lean body matched his careful mind, while Mike bounced along beside him like a golden retriever. As the birds wheeled overhead, Harry bit into his unappetizing blue food cube. The cube was made to have all of the essential vitamins in one package. Not the most flavorful, but it worked. As Harry swallowed his bland lump of fuel, he could hear the incessant droning sound of the sand batteries distributing power to all the homes and the waves crashing over the water turbines. It was a familiar repetitive sound, and Harry let out a forlorn sigh.

He couldn't believe that his city was built on an old oil rig, outfitted with everything that its residents could possibly need. About eighty years ago, the world had gotten more dangerous and deadly, with global warming reaching critical levels. Harry's schoolroom history books said that people had banded together and planted miles upon miles of trees that tried to clean the foul air. Harry supposed that hadn't worked as this oil rig was a backup plan that had been put into place to make sure that if the land got too toxic, humanity would still have a home. And somehow this backup plan had become Harry's reality. He stood up to stretch his legs. Suddenly, as he was about to say goodbye to his friend, an alarm went off.

"What the heck is that?" yelled Mike. "It sounds like the grinding of metal!" Instantaneously, a sound like a scream ripped through the air as a hunk of rusting metal fell into the sea. Harry and Mike ran to the water turbines as a second alarm started to blare, sending red lights flashing everywhere! One of the support pillars that connected the rig to the seabed had a chunk missing from the side of it!

"I can't believe it's falling apart more quickly now," gasped Mike, falling onto one of the park's benches.

"When did they think putting a city on an old oil rig was a good idea?" asked Mike. "It's old; of course, it's going to break."

"This place is falling apart, just like what happened in the past when the cities collapsed under the strain of the earth." Harry jumped at the realization. "This is the last straw!" exploded Harry.

"Just last week I saw Mr. Steffin's house sprout a crack right through the middle! He's staying with my neighbour until his house can get fixed."

"I'm fed up with this; we should go to city hall and ask them about this mess," said Mike.

"I don't know Mike; this seems like a long shot," protested Harry.

"I guess you're right, but this is our home at stake. What have we got to lose?" shrugged Mike.

The boys took off, running to the city hall, an old office building once used for the rig's human resources department. Doors were set into a drab exterior. Harry and Mike went through and gazed at the musty, stale interior of the room with its peeling vinyl floor. The information desk was manned by a woman in a faded black suit, typing over a holoprojector.

Excuse me," asked Harry, "my friend and I have a few questions for you."

"Certainly, what can I do for you?" said the woman with an obviously fake smile (upon further inspection, they learned that her name was Linda from her name tag).

"We were wondering when everything's going to get fixed or whether there's no supplies left," questioned Mike.

"It has been a while since we saw any homes get fixed," said Harry, backing up Mike.

"I understand your concern, boys," smiled Linda, "but don't worry, we have everything under control. New supplies will come shortly."

"Ok, thanks for your time," Harry said, fearing deep down that wasn't the case. The friends walked back to the park (which was starting to become more like a home base now) and sat on a bench.

"I don't think that they are telling the truth," said Mike.

"No, really? I never realized," said Harry sarcastically.

"I know, right?" said Mike obliviously.

"We should go to the communications tower. It's the best way to get some answers," suggested Harry. "I know we're not allowed, but we kids need to take more responsibility for this mess."

The communications tower was a chunky tower covered with solar panels, shining the light of the sun on the decaying city below it. This highlighted the need for action. Would they save the city, or was it too late?

Harry and Mike climbed up a long flight of stairs to get to the top of the tower. There was a sturdy door at the top, and the boys waited until a guard walked out of the room. Harry and Mike were able to just slip in before it slammed shut. They turned around and began to investigate the communications tower. Holograms danced around the room, displaying data

about the weather, sea, air, and most importantly, communications with the mainland. Harry and Mike started to poke around, but a security guard saw them and began to come over. "Hey, you!" yelled the guard. "What are you doing here?"

"Um...nothing?" lied Mike, "We were just finding answers."

"You're coming with me," snarled the guard.

Two weeks later, after a stern telling-off, Harry and Mike went back to the park to chat about all that had happened.

"Well, that was exciting," exclaimed Mike.

"We got put to hard labor work for two weeks," groaned Harry. "Not exciting."

"Well, it wasn't surprising," said Mike. "We did break into a building so..."

"I guess you're right, it wasn't that surprising," pointed out Harry.

"I saw something when we were at the communications' tower," claimed Mike. "I saw on one of the holograms that connection was lost with the mainland decades ago."

"You only told me this now?!" yelled Harry.

"There wasn't any other time that I could talk to you; we were both busy with community service!" said Mike, quite sheepish from being confronted. "What should we do now?"

"I have a plan, but it's quite risky," admitted Harry. "It's a long shot."

"It may be the only shot we have," said Mike. "Let's hear it!"

One day later, Harry and Mike stood up upon one of the tops of a wind turbine, looking out over the mass of people below them. It was market day, and vendors were selling their wares to the community. The perfect place to spark hope in the population. Mike had stayed up all night setting up speakers around the square, ready for the announcement.

"Everybody, can I have your attention, please?" spoke Harry from his perch. "We are all in danger. Every one of us has been lied to by our mayor."

"It's true!" yelled Mike. "This oil rig is falling into the sea, and the government doesn't have plans to save it!"

The crowd, which had swollen with Harry's powerful words, began to murmur.

Was this true? How did they know? How did they get up there?

“We have a plan to save us all,” said Harry. “We have a plan to gather all the scrap metal around the city and build a boat that uses renewable energy to get us to the mainland. We don’t know what dangers lurk ahead, but it would be madness to stay on the oil rig any longer and pretend this is not happening.”

Government officials tried to get the people to calm down, but the people were angry. It was futile to get them to reason with the government. It was time to take their future into their own hands.

After much hard work, spanning over many long weeks, the boats were finished and had been at sea for a month. Harry and Mike huddled together on one of the boats, leading a convoy to the mainland. It had been rough going since they had started, but if their calculations were correct, they would see land any time now.

“Land ahoy!” yelled someone from the front of the boat.

Harry and Mike were the first people to step onto the sandy beach and see the trees towering overhead.

“We made it!” shouted Harry, wrapping his arms around Mike in pure happiness. The boys gazed in awe at all the different shades of green that overlapped each other in pure harmony. As more people stumbled off the boats, they were amazed at all the lush plant life that surrounded them.

Harry and Mike led their ragtag group of people along a lush path through the forest. After a couple of hours, they saw in the distance what looked to be a settlement of some sort, with plants growing on every building. A variety of flowers bloomed over one of the doors set into the living, green, breathing buildings. They seemed to almost float as they were set onto stilts, which kept them from disrupting the forest floor. Vertical farms hung from the trees, providing food for the villagers.

A girl came out of the undergrowth and said, “Hey, can I help you?”

“Yes. Yes, you can,” smiled Harry. “We have journeyed from a decaying metal city that had no future.”

“My people can help; welcome to our home!” exclaimed the girl. “As you can see, nature is the key. It will always find its way.”

As the girl led them through green avenues into her eco-village, she took them past a repair garage, explaining that everything in the village was reused and that nothing was wasted. Even the clothes she wore used recycled fibers, interwoven with kinetic energy batteries that powered her personal temperature regulator. Mike, sweating in the humid air, couldn’t wait to try this new invention!

That evening, as Harry tucked into a delicious feast full of vibrant colors and flavors, he reflected on all that had happened in the past months. It had been a big risk leaving the oil rig and the safety of his known world. However, he had known instinctively that things couldn't have continued the way they were, even if some people had wanted to deny that their home was in peril. Sometimes, he mused, all it takes is the courage to stand up for change.