

# Saplings

## - a solarpunk short story

by Liam Lomax

I sat with my knees crossed and my hands clasped. My brow was furled and I was filled with a white rage. My fists were balled. She had listed my false expenses out to my own name. The large moose head was placed above my fireplace mantle, seemingly staring at me judgmentally. This couldn't be happening. I am untouchable, I don't make mistakes. Ever since I was a little kid, I would not tolerate mistakes, and would not tolerate weakness. I needed to be flawless. The IRS was breathing down my neck for years, prying and hoping for a slip-up. "Pat, do you know how many bribes i've paid? Do you understand that not only my hands are bloodied, but my whole company is too? I am under a spot light of the whole world, climate activists throwing rocks through my windows, keying my cars, and they now have proof. THEY HAVE INSURMOUNTABLE EVIDENCE NOW, BECAUSE YOU LISTEN MY FALSE EXPENSES OUT TO ME! I have been hiding income and concealing human rights violations for years. I have broken enough laws for them to put me away forever." I huffed, out of breath from my monologue. "You are a horrible person." Patricia, my secretary said coldly. The folder she held with multicolored bookmarks sticking out was compiled of my various crimes and cruelties. I sat at the dark oak desk, fingers folded. I felt a sting of betrayal, though I know I would do the same.

I waited for a few hours, as the loud sirens of the federal vehicles grew, I walked outside, hands clasped behind my head. The haze of sirens and loud voices filled the air. I was forced into a hydraulic-powered car, the kind that was putting me out of business. I was pissed, to say the least. As I was slowly driven away from my dark mansion, surrounded by a slurry of vans and cars, I slowly faded into the sunset. I looked out my window at the tall glass buildings filled with gardens, and people. The green housing was compacting all things a person could need into one building to reduce car travel, which helped destroy my business. As I approached the county police station, flashing cameras and microphones were shoved up to the car. Indistinguishable murmuring and questioning was the only noise I could hear. I was processed, mugshotted, fingerprinted, and shoved into a containment cell. One thing I remember from that, was a face that I recognized. It was so familiar, but I couldn't tell from where. That's when it struck me; Chris. I remembered how he slashed my tires on my car, one of the last remaining gasoline vehicles. I chuckled to myself seeing that he had suffered in turn for what he did. I felt a feeling of self pity for the next few hours, and a feeling of loathing towards the whole world.

My trial was a mere 2 weeks long. The jury detested me, and I felt the same to them and did not try to hide that fact. The only memory I have of it is not my sentence, or how I felt afterwards, but instead the testimonies. All of them. All of my employees, everyone I knew, my family, my friends, everyone. They all painted me like a *criminal* who was killing the planet. They betrayed my trust. I was so angry at them, but it changed who I would become forever.

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The sleek white train bolted through the wind. It was magnetically powered by a single rail, with many powerful magnets pulling it along, using 0 fossil fuels. It disgusted me, as it among many other similar vehicles were the reason I had to hide my income and pay less tax in the first place. The taxation on oil and fossil fuel companies made me one of the last ones. The prison was named the Wellson Penitentiary, but it was an elegant and pristine dome, full of green life and clear tubes, funneling water throughout. The prisoners called it "Gaia's Vault" due to the aesthetic nature of it. When I arrived I was not placed into a cell, but I was put into a brown uniform, given gloves and a shovel, then shoved through the door by two guards, who then turned around and walked away. There were no guards anywhere, but around 5 prisoners scattered about. There was a large man adorned in tattoos, standing boldly in front of me. I rolled my eyes and sat down on a wooden bench covered in birds, which all flew away as I approached. On my wrist was a watch that read "0." I sat there for hours, as the sun rotated and evening drew. The prison was so large you couldn't even see the edges. I ignored what I was told about my sentence, and what the prison even was. But one thing that confused me was watching this terrifying man sweat and gruel over labor. He would plant trees, move water, and maintain gardens. He did this for many hours and it still confused me.

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It had been 3 days, and I had only eaten berries from the plants. I was finally growing tired, so I asked the man why he was working so hard. "I want to get out of here, thats why." I glanced at him, unsure of what he meant. "For every tree you plant, anything deemed a worthy task, your number goes up by one" he said in a gravelly voice. "What number?" I asked impatiently. He pointed at my wrist and said "your watch." "Our sentences are decided by how many tasks we must complete to leave. There are no cells, no guards, no food. We make everything ourselves, and the dome is a bullet proof glass, only able to be accessed from one entrance, which is locked with magnets, only openable by the warden, who lives inside here with us." he ranted. I rolled my eyes and asked him sarcastically "Wouldn't the prisoners just kill the warden, or each other?" he looked at me and blurted out laughing. I hated people laughing at me. I went over and yelled at him "What are you laughing at?" he smiled and shrugged, casually explaining "well I would hope they wouldn't, i'm the warden." He had a cheesy smile from ear to ear, a kind and happy man. I was very confused. Why was a man like that choosing to do such hard labour. "Look, I once was like you. Money obsessed. I helped ruin the earth, and now I need to pay it back. Once this dome is fully blooming, I will leave, as will you. I looked at him flabbergasted. A lizard scurried over my work boots and the man passed a small gardening shovel to me. "Let's get to work!" he suggested.

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The velvet sky suspended the big orange and yellow gradient sun, there were many clouds in the dome, but not in the sky. The colossal dome stretched high and wide, it was something out of a science fiction novel. It was impressive, to say the least. I panted and

climbed up a green hill, using my shovel to help me up. I climbed to the top and stood next to the old guy. I put my shovel in the ground and wiped my forehead with my jumpsuit collar. I squinted and gazed into the horizon, scanning the whole dome and everything in it, the sun getting in my eyes. Green luscious trees filled the dome that was once entirely de-forested and lifeless. Colourful fauna frolicked around. Howard looked with me, and sighed. It had been so long in here, and I had learned to love it. I learned the intricacies of nature, and how delicate it is. We made green water filters and homes out of the trees we grew, and we created heating out of kinetic generators. It had been a long time, im not sure how long, but it was roughly 5 trees of tallies. We had a greenhouse directly attached to our house, with crops like berries inside of it. Every sunset we left a tally in a dead tree. I was at about 3 full trees myself, but howard had more than 10. He patted my back and said, "I think your sentence is up there." The watch was glowing blue, with the luminescent number "30,023". I was done. My sentence was up. The day I had longed for so long had finally come to fruition. But, I still hesitated as I walked to the exit. I could never repay howard for what he had taught me, nor had I undone what damage I did. I knew what I had to do. I walked out of the building, with no guards in sight. I was not thinking of it as a prison, but a school instead. I entered the very same train, and sat down, waiting for it to take off again. I looked out my window, and saw howard waving, but he was still hard at work. I smiled and looked ahead as the train started to roar, before speeding through the peach sky and into the sun.

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I sat on a gray dusty boulder, with small ingots of limestone inside of it, signing a paper. I was distributing all profits to my employees, and shutting down my company and all operations. I had a lot of paper work, which annoyed me because of all the trees that were wasted. I reached into my pocket and felt the laminated passport. I was on my way to egypt. I was going to help with the Helios Project; a project involved with filling the entire sahara with solar panels, yielding more energy than the world could need, crippling oil companies. The funding required was colossal, but I was one of the very first people on the design crew. It was only possible because of the energy storing cell developed by me and howard. It could store energy from solar panels, and retain an average of 99.8% of it, perfect for transporting, it compressed large amounts of air and energy, normally it would explode, but we perfected safety measures so that whenever it is plugged in, the cooped up energy would be quickly distributed. We were heading towards an even brighter future, I felt a feeling of halcyon. As I finished the paperwork and listened to the birds chirp melodically, I felt so free and so weightless for the first time in a long time. The pine trees were swaying in the oncoming gale. "I know how I felt weak and unimportant, and how I almost killed the planet because of it, so I would work for the rest of my life to fix it." I thought internally. Your own actions, seemingly insignificant as they may be, will ripple into a massively different world, for better or worse. So why not be the sapling that helps the world?

The End

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Bio:

*My main character shows the duality of humans, and how we are all flawed, but can strive to do good and achieve it. I believe that younger generations will be the ones who will save the planet, because we will be here for the longest. It's our job to work together. I am hopeful for a better future. Ever since I was very young I have not understood procrastinating with saving the planet. It is my #1 priority. It's our home, we should treat it as such. We need to change the prison system, and make non-violent prisoners work towards bettering the world; not punishing them. We need to tax oil cars and companies, so that green energy is more profitable. - LL*