

The City That Breathes

My dad says the world almost ended once. Not because of any war, but because humans forgot how to care. Now, the city I live in is what came after Earth was healed; Greenhaven.

I'm Luca, 17, from Greenhaven District 3; what people used to call *Toronto*. The tall, looming buildings that once scraped the sky with glass and steel are now covered in vines and solar leaves. Office buildings are now used as compact farms. The air smells of mint and greenery; a far cry from the smoke my dad told me used to cloud Toronto all the time.

My dad used to work as an environmental engineer. Years ago, he got injured while doing a routine inspection of a wind turbine platform in the lake. He can't climb like he used to, but he still works at the Energy Hall, designing safer systems and monitoring other engineers.

Mom says he's still saving the world, but from behind a desk this time.

Morning In Greenhaven

The city of Greenhaven wakes with the sound of electric cargo bikes gliding across magnetized tracks (one of dad's team's inventions), water flowing through new aquaponic channels, and the humming of composters next to every home.

Mom is by the solar oven when I come downstairs.

"Morning," she says. "It's your turn to take out the compost." I groan.

"I get to hang out with dirt again, huh?"

Mom looks up from the green pancakes she's making. "That 'dirt'? It's what's feeding us."

I grab two of the pancakes, made with duckweed flour, and tuck them into a biodegradable wrapper.

"Make sure to also take the microgreens to the Nguyens," Mom says.

My family's part of the Green Table Alliance; a group of like-minded neighbours who trade what they produce. The Patels charge batteries using solar panels, the Zhangs keep rooftop chickens, the Nguyens grow strawberries and apples, and we grow duckweed, lettuce, and parsley. Using this system, everything circulates, and nothing is wasted.

Hopping on my cargo bike, my eyes burn as the sun begins to shine. Some kids are playing around with drones that launch wildflower pods into every bit of empty soil. As I pass the old subway entrance, I glance at a mural on the entrance. A tree upheld by pairs of glowing hands. Underneath, someone's written: "We fix what we broke; TOGETHER."

The Skyfarm

I ride to the Willow Ridge Skyfarm: a greenhouse, garden, and aquaponics system. Everything here uses hydroelectricity to function. It's one of the reasons I chose to work here.

"Morning, Luca!" calls the manager, Jay, waving a soil tester. "Level 3 sensors are acting up again."

I get off the bike, more than a little shaken. I came up with a system that measures pH and water flow to the plants. Level 1 is neutral, and Level 5 is beyond the point of repair. Level 3 is much worse than usual.

"Got it," I say, taking the tester from him.

As I walk to the greenhouses, the smell of wet soil hits my nostrils. I plunge the tester into the soil. Yellow. pH is dropping worse. Jay frowns.

"Might be the filters. Could you check the tanks upstairs?"

I climb to the upper glass dome. The irrigation monitor flashes red. Lake Output: 40%. I groan. Only 40% of water that was supposed to be heading to the Skyfarm was actually being delivered to the plants. That explained the low pH. The only issue with Jay's system could be with the turbines. The same turbines that Dad once worked on.

Storm At The Docks

By the time I reach the docks, rain is pouring. The weather report never predicted rain today. I head for a building, pushing open the door that reads: "TECHNICIANS ONLY". Inside, I see Arlo, one of my Dad's old friends. He's hunched over a computer.

Seeing me, he turns. "The turbine's synchronization's off. You know what that means. One's broken."

I shudder. The whole of Greenhaven could lose power by nightfall if the problem wasn't fixed.

Without a word, I head to a closet opposite the monitor. Inside, there's a kinetic dive suit; Dad's. The name **E. Rivera** is stitched on the sleeve. Arlo turns to me.

"What do you think you're doing?"

I look back at him. "Greenhaven can't lose power. The only way to fix it is to get down there and see what's going on." Arlo looks at me with a look of defeat.

"Stubbornness is clearly in your blood. Fine. If you need any help, I'll have a drone ready."

Arlo sits in the chair, facing the monitor. "The storm isn't going to clear up anytime soon. Are you sure you want to go down there? This storm's just like the one your father had to face a couple of years back."

I nod. “Besides, Dad was climbing the turbines; above sea level. I’m going to fix the turbines that are now underwater after the Energy Hall voted that it would be safer. It should be much easier.”

Arlo shakes his head. “I don’t see any way of stopping you. Don’t be a hero.”

“I’m not. Just doing my part.” I say, even though butterflies have sprouted in my stomach.

Beneath The Lake

As I jump in, equipped with a headset, tethers to the drones above me, and an oxygen tank, I realize what I just did. The frigid waters envelop me, and I can see the turbines below me. As I sink deeper into the water, I see what’s going on. One of the turbines is broken, and it’s affecting the other, interlocked turbines. I shove a thick piece of metal into the turbines to stop them from rotating.

“Arlo! Unit 9B is completely fractured!” I say. “I’m sending a stronger repair drone, but the current’s pretty strong; I’m sending help your way.”

I wait for about 5 minutes before a drone, accompanied by 2 other divers, shows up. Together, we hold the turbine in place as the drone temporarily fills the missing piece with carbon foam. My arms ache, my lungs ache, but eventually, I get the message that the drone is finished.

“Good job, Luca! It should be safe to remove the piece of metal from the turbines. While the turbines stopped, the backup generators have been powering Greenhaven. There isn’t much juice left, and the turbines should be ready.”

I turn to the other two divers and nod. Using a small drone as a magnet, we pull the piece of metal out.

With a rumble, the waters begin pulling at the turbines, and they begin spinning furiously. The hum vibrates through the water; Greenhaven’s lifeline. The heart of the city.

The Return

When I return, the storm’s still raging. I walk down the road, going to Arlo’s monitoring building. He hands me a towel and keys.

“Closet’s upstairs.”

After I change, Arlo’s waiting.

“That was impressive.”

“It was nothing.” I remind him. “I’m not a hero, remember?”

“It’s time to head home,” said Arlo.

In an electric bus, sitting next to a large box of microgreens marked **NGUYEN’S**, I chow down on cold duckweed pancakes. I would have to deliver the Nguyens their

microgreens tomorrow. As I ride home, I take the time to admire the outside world. The streets glow orange because of the lightning reflecting off the puddles. I also admire the bus. It's one of the latest models. Air conditioning, fully covered, made with renewable materials, and it's fully electric.

When I get off the bus, my mother's standing outside, drenched but smiling.
"Did you really repair the turbines that power the town?"

I shake my head. "Temporarily." She pulls me into a hug so tight I can barely breathe.

The Seeds We Plant

A few weeks later, the Light Harvest Festival fills the streets with lanterns utilizing glowing algae jars. It celebrated the functioning of the power grid, and it always took place on the first Sunday of October. Solar speakers blare around Main Street. Dad's there too, leaning on his cane and grinning after I told him about what had happened. Since the divorce, I haven't gotten to see him much. He holds out a young tree wrapped in a compost pad.

"Hybrid poplar. Cleans the air faster than a filter ever could. I thought you might like to plant it."

We kneel by a lakebed and push the roots into the soft soil together: Mom, Dad, and me.

"For what comes next," I say. Dad nods.

"For what keeps growing."

As the sun dips, the former skyscrapers light up gold. The city hums. The wind sings. For the first time, I don't just hear it breathing. I'm part of the breath.