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2012

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## Chapter 1

# Capture the Lion

Once upon a time the lion was one of the most widespread mammals on the planet, second only to humans. It had adapted wisely and made its home across most of Africa, from Western Europe to India, and from Canada down to Peru. In the jungle, the mighty jungle, the lion sleeps tonight. So the song goes. And it's not unusual for a lion to sleep for twenty or so hours at a stretch. Having rested, they hunt, eat, socialise and play. Then it's time to sleep again. The other animals are so jealous of this apparent rockstar lifestyle, but that is the reward for being kings of the jungle.

Between the forest and desert existed a pretty land with tall grasses and a scattering of spikey trees. The evidence of thriving life buzzed all about, whether it be an insect hopping between leaves or an elegant giraffe munching those leaves. At the lowest point of the land was water, a lake. It held within it life. It also gave life to all those that surrounded it, be they on the land, under the land or in the air. On a well trodden plateau a baby lion confidently crouched and lapped at the surface of the lake. Playing was hard work and quenching your thirst always felt great. Satisfied, and with drips hanging from his chin he turned and bounced off into the grasses which towered above him.

Lolling about, under a great black thorn tree was the Pride. A collection of maybe seventeen lions, from the cutest smallest cub, who depended on others for help, to the most powerful chief whose vibrant mane shone in the powerful rays of the sun. Lions certainly knew how to relax. Bellies face up. Legs in the air. Occasional wriggles to scratch an itch. Sometimes chatting. Sometimes playing. But they were not stupid. They were eternally grateful for the land about them, with its food and water, beauty and wonders. They knew not how they, or the world about them had come into being, but they were thankful and ultimately respected the unknown artist.

With each nightfall, came hunger. Time to hunt. Organised and led by the ladies, lions of various sizes set out and silently strolled through the cool landscape until a feast crossed their path. With methods of communication which man does not even understand yet, they inch by inch themselves into an exacting and proven formation, around their prey. Highly regimental and smart, with minimal effort, they strike.

A lion will devour almost any kind of meat, from a mouse to a hippopotamus and have even been known to eat fruit from the trees. Tonight's dinner was a blue wildebeest. Just too slow to realise what was going on, it turned from a raging lion's jaws, to find itself surrounded. Jaws appeared everywhere. Then one crack from a paw and it lay broken. Within minutes the adults had ripped it open and eaten the main organs, for they were most nutritious. Flesh became a tasty main course. Patiently waiting for the adults to finish were the young cubs. They had been paying very close attention to their elders during the hunt, for they knew one day feeding the pride would be their responsibility.

Sitting in his battered old red truck, was Simon. He was waiting in the dusty airport car park for clients to arrive. Two business men from America, so his email said, and they wanted a lion. Simon had grown up here in the savannah, at one with his local habitat. But there was little work here now for those indigenous to the region. Ten years ago a factory had appeared approximately one hundred miles away and subsequently local businesses had vanished one by one as their customers had accepted better paid offers of work in the far away factory. Simon had to choose between moving him and his family to the factory or finding alternative work for himself locally. He knew what he preferred. He saw with horror the affect the factory had on its workers, as they carried out repetitious acts, day in, day out. The light in their eyes was dying; the energy of life was seeping away. So Simon decided to stay put and started a business showing the beauty of the wildlife to tourists from all around the world. Or that's how it started out. Over a short space of time he escalated from chaperoning safari trips, to assisting the hunting of wild animals. Just shooting gazelles to start with, but with tourist pressure and financial incentives this rapidly progressed to big cats and elephants. The tourist liked to feel brave, and some even sent home mounted heads or tusks from the animal as trophies to show their friends. Meanwhile the good money Simon earned paid for the biggest house in the area, his family ate like royalty, and soon they placed about themselves a wide range of luxurious objects which, until then, had only been fabled by visitors from highly industrial lands overseas.

Simon consoled himself with the thought that today was something different from the usual death sentence for his animals. The Lion was not to be killed, rather stunned with a dart, then transported to somewhere within America. Quite where was not decided yet, for the Lion was to be sold to the highest bidder.

Despite the changes to Simon in the past years, he still deep down loved his homeland. He fidgeted with the gear stick and reminded himself again of this fact, and with a little guilt delighted in thoughts of the incredible forests, deserts and savannah. The living things which existed in every nook and cranny. Sometimes he recalled scenes as a boy, when his father would spend time teaching him the way of the land. But those memories were ever less frequent these days as slowly, without making a noise, wealth had become of ever more importance.

The two business men walked out of the airport and paused as the humidity and dust hit. Having made acquaintance with his customers, and packed them into the cab, Simon started the truck. Soon they were chasing along a well worn makeshift track. They

jumped and rocked as the truck collided with potholes, but never slowed down. Time was precious. The sooner they captured and delivered the Lion to its final owner, the quicker they got paid. And they all had bills for cars, houses and boats which were nagging at home.

The sun was quickly fading having exerted a stunning display over the plains. Simon decided upon an area where a lonesome Lion could be found. Usually lions were very sociable creatures, unlike Cheetahs and Pumas, however occasionally a solitary beast could be found wandering about on his own. Simon had occasionally wondered if this type of animal was lonely, or just preferred its own company. Perhaps it needed space to do important thinking. It was not long before he steered the truck off the track and slowed right down, eventually bringing the engine to an awkward stop. The sounds of dusk engulfed them. He securely tied a leg of wildebeest to a nearby tree. It would be enough to attract the interest of any meat eater nearby. Coffee and food were shared out in the cab. They waited with nervous low volume conversation which was sometimes hard to follow.

After twenty minutes or so a distant roar rumbled through the body of the truck. Their prize was near. Simon moved into the back of the truck and signalled the business men to join him. The rifle was already preloaded with stun darts, and sported an expensive night sight device to make the job easier. Simon offered the gun to the first American. Unlike normal customers he rejected the offer with a simple hand gesture. A shake of head from the other American rejected his subsequent offer. He was always prepared to help the paying tourists when it came to actually shooting. Invariably they were poorly coordinated, very excited and lacked experience to successfully fell a creature on their own. So the success of the trip often relied on him pulling the trigger for them. These particular Americans however were not interested in the work required to get their bounty. They just wanted to profit from the end result.

BANG! The dart embedded in the Lions side, exactly as targeted by Simon. Within seconds the great beast became agitated, then drowsy, staring at Simon with silent accusation.

The distant drone of a lorry drifted over the dark humid landscape steadily louder as it homed in on its target. Amongst the thorn trees, illuminated by powerful task lighting, lay the Lion. Seemingly at peace, a drug induced coma. The lorry arrived and the lifting crane erected. With effort from Simon and several hired helpers, the Lion was scooped up into the air by the crane and laid on the bed of the lorry. With a clunk and a click the sides of the lorry bed were raised and a roof connected. The Lion lay sleeping in his newly constructed cage. The American's talked excitedly amongst themselves while Simon and his helpers prepared themselves, without emotion, for the drive back to the airport.



## Chapter 2

# The Zoo

“Another day in paradise” sarcastically thought the Lion. He glanced about the dawning courtyard, but without the vigour he had once exerted. These days he had no reason to do anything with much interest. Small trees, unlike those he was used to at home, were dotted about the courtyard with odd looking symmetry. Two benches sat nearby to accommodate weary or hungry visitors to the zoo.

“Here I sit, same place, same cage, same smell, same noises, same view” Lion affirmed to himself.

“Same food, same time, same faces” his own face looked weary as if exhausted, but running and hunting were but a distant memory. He consoled himself with the knowledge that at least the weather changed and night still became day.

Light from the sun started to stream into his cage, and neighbours started up their noise making for whomever to listen. Lion had never met his neighbours. A fleeting glance sometimes, but the orientation and overgrown divides between cages obscured major visual clues as to their form. But all the animals talked to each other as best they could. They were all in this living hell together. Obviously it was difficult for some species to successfully communicate with others, but with a little creativity they had found enough common ground for basic pleasantries to be exchanged. So, even though the animals could not run and jump and fight or play, at least they could still communicate in some fashion to each other. The common topic of discussion was how unhappy they were.

Lion was severely depressed. He had not realised for quite some time, but ever so slowly he had sunk into what was a living death. Occasionally he lifted his spirits by day dreaming back to his former homeland, where he used to chase antelopes, drink from the cool lake, sleep under the giant thorn tree and when the time was right enjoyed love making with the cute ladies. Then for some reason, one day, he upped and left the Pride, and wandered alone through the wilderness for months and months, trying to find answers to many big questions which persistently swirled around his mind. That’s when he was snared. Men. Trucks. Guns. Planes. Imprisonment. Now here. The memories of home became more distant each time he leant on them, he so missed the Pride. Together

they had worked successfully to produce a healthy and vibrant family. But now, each day, he felt a little more of him die. Sometimes he wished to be taken to the Great Spirit in the sky.

Donald was the Managing Director of the zoo. He had inherited it from his parents, who, once upon a time were worldly famous for their efforts to bring exotic animals within sight of the general public. They had shown dingoes to the Dutch and alligators to the Austrians. The population of each city were delighted with their new form of entertainment.

But Donald was different from his parents. He didn't even like animals. Dirty smelly things that had no purpose apart from to make him money. Donald did like money. It was the key to providing his status in the world. It provided luxurious houses, designer clothes, perfect looking women and sleek cars.

No sooner had his parents both passed away then he set about squeezing the bequeathed zoos in every city of the world. He immediately reduced the running costs to the bare minimum, and then reduced some more. Subsequently the diet for the animals became poor and their coats and feathers started to express the neglect. The zoo staff numbers were dramatically reduced, expensive experts disappeared and cheap unskilled school leavers appeared. Of course, this was not a problem until an animal became ill. Then it was withdrawn from public viewing, until it got better. Without experienced experts on the payroll, poorly animals rarely got better.

Donald liked to shout at his staff. He felt it his right as their boss. They would run around and try to make him happy, but his management directives were derived from shallow thought processes, poor vision and greedy core values, so nothing ever got done very well. Sometimes he shouted at them just for fun. Understandably the zoo staff had no respect for him, and consequently did the bare minimum to get by. In a short space of time this resulted in each zoo losing its shine and consequently paying visitors. The sudden drop in income from ticket sales panicked Donald so he reacted by introducing yet more financial cuts to the zoo budgets, thereby balancing the books.

In this particular zoo, in this particular city, the maintenance budget for the cages had been dramatically stopped by Donald. The head zoo keeper had argued that it was of great importance, but in his wisdom his superior, Donald, had removed it. That was two years ago, and Donald had refused to reinstate it.

"When was the last time a Lion escaped?" joked Donald as he arrogantly ushered the head zookeeper out of this office. Donald smirked to himself having calculated that the savings made by not maintaining cages would pay for his forthcoming weekend at the glamorous races.

As dawn turned to a bright morning, people arrived at the zoo and began strolling about, stopping here and there to view the exhibits.

"Keep up Rebecca"; came a Mothers verbal rein. "We will soon see a Lion".

But Rebecca was only four and, while the animals in cages were sometimes of interest to her, she was much more interested in the doll held firmly in her grip. She caught the stern glance of her Mother and increased her pace a little.

Minutes earlier the zoo staff had finished jet washing the public area of the Lions cage and on departure had raised the partition between the sleeping quarters and the public viewing area. So the Lion ambled through to the front of his world motivated by the gentle rumble inside his belly. Food was waiting for him, the same menu as yesterday, in the same place. On this particular morning the keeper had been in a rush to get ready for opening time and had not closed the cage door to the courtyard properly, the zoo was grossly understaffed, so it was understandable. Sitting every day in the same spot, the Lion recognised small changes. He had nothing better to do. The cage door to the courtyard, which was usually flush with the wire fence, was twisted and strained awkwardly against the frame, like lovers nearing their end. The intrigued Lion made closer inspection and discovered the security bolt was not within its home. With disbelief he realised the door was not secure. Acting on the spur of the moment, with a quiet but powerful blow of his paw, the Lion rattled the door. Another blow and the door lay on the floor adjacent the opening. Astonished, then grinning from ear to ear, and rapidly filling with excitement and enthusiasm, the Lion stepped out into the courtyard.

People screamed and ran randomly in every direction. Similar to Gazelles the Lion thought. Then he chose a direction at random and bounded forward in his new environment. Having quickly surveyed the courtyard he began to run. And running felt so good, cutting through a sea of people, sending waves of screams to the walls on either side. Without being able to see the commotion up ahead, Rebecca's Mother instinctively panicked as she realised something was not right.

"Here Baby, now!" She turned to secure her child's safety in her mind. But the crowd moved unpredictably and it all became quite confusing. The Lion was running around and around the Zoo, cheered on by the other animals. It hadn't hurt anybody; it just was trying to find the way out. And the crowds moved one way, then the other. Screaming and stumbling, running and crouching. Rebecca's Mother's state of mind had reached astronomical proportions of panic. She could not see her daughter. There one minute, gone the next. She repeated her call, getting louder and more strained with each repeat.

"Rebecca! – come here NOW!", "Where are you?"

Rebecca was quite safe. She had stumbled and fell due to the unpredictable movement of the crowd and lay unhurt at the bottom of a grassy embankment amongst low bushes and a small stream. Rebecca opened her eyes. The people commotion up above her was distant now and she stared curiously at an insect which was sitting on a nearby bush. She moved slowly towards it, aware that her speed usually scared off such creatures. She was fascinated by its awkward looking legs and wings which constantly changed colour in the light.

"REBECCA!" came the shrill voice.



Looking down from above was her Mother, who had eventually worked out her daughters disappearing act. She ran down the steep grassy sides to throw her arms around the daughter she had lost momentarily. Lifting her up into her arms she had no time to be concerned with what Rebecca was holding in her hand, the prettiest ring imaginable. She had found it amongst the mulch, next to the insect.

Up above, people were still in commotion, but it was not so intense as before. Apparently the Lion was gone. Whispers through the crowd indicated things were now a little safer, although nobody quite knew his whereabouts. Panic was starting to be replaced by rational thought. The Lion had gone. Long gone. He had leapt fence after fence, dodged the gun and nets released by the young and inexperienced zoo keepers, and now was free.

Within the hour television crews arrived and began to setup outside broadcast facilities. Donald was given the opportunity to explain the day's top story live on air. He looked stern and angry on every television set and the city population watched with disbelief. He told the camera that the Lion had escaped due to staff negligence. A door was not closed properly; correct procedure was all written down in the zoo handbook. Donald assured the camera that he would personally start an immediate investigation to decide who was at fault and what the punishment would be. The reporter asked where the Lion was now and if it was a danger to the people of city. Donald looked angry, almost as if he had forgotten the Lion could be a danger to people of the city.

"It's not my fault" he said with a mix of anger and panic beginning to well around his stern exterior.

"We will do all we can to put the situation right" he boldly assured the reporter. Then he thought of the cost implication of this assurance and felt quite unwell. He stormed off camera.

Several days later, while loading the boot of his car with paperwork, Donald got struck down by a powerful but silent paw.



### Chapter 3

## The City

It was 2045 and the population of the world had become mentally unwell. Many people felt the waves of greed and lies contaminating them, but chose not to act as they believed they were helpless and alone. So the insanity continued to spread, like cancer.

The majority of people in the world lived in cities. Cities which had, for several centuries, attracted people from many miles radius with the offer of steady work and a good standard of living. Once proud and thriving, these cities had in recent times lost their way, and now found themselves in a state of rapid decay.

The rain poured down. Not nice refreshing rain, but rain which gently burnt skin if you hadn't covered up properly. It possessed a green hue which hinted at its acidity. The city buildings on which it fell appeared scorched. For many years the external envelopes had suffered from ever increasing acidic erosion. Today the rain had been falling intensively for about twenty minutes giving the dirty and dark urban scene another lick of depression. And this was daytime. Quite when the rain would end nobody could predict as thick green smog permanently hovered at the roof level of buildings, so citizens never got to see the sky. When they took a breath they could feel acid radiating from inside their lungs, spreading out into their body. Hospitals could not cure the resulting ailments, so people took shallow breaths to try and minimise the damage. Over the years the declining condition of the environment had caught the attention of a handful of concerned scientists and radical groups. The retired citizens also witnessed a change to the environment in which they had grown up. But their opinions did not count for much and gained little exposure by the media. People were too busy working hard to listen.

The streets in this city consisted of buildings of a variety of shapes and sizes, some up to two hundred years old. You could tell the really old buildings as they had character and, paradoxically, were the ones in the best condition. Though tarnished by the biting precipitation, their shape and colour stood confident and strong. New buildings were only designed to last a human lifetime. They were constructed using cheap materials which soon looked tatty and unloved. It was as if funds for new buildings were provided by people with no genuine interest in the city or its citizens. Pride was obviously missing.

As if those acidic dirty streets were not harsh enough, the citizens inflicted yet further pain on each other. Morality had long ago drained away. If you wanted something, just take it, was the common attitude whether it be a managing director or a street thief. So citizens would lie, manipulate and even use force, even against their own family, to get what they wanted. And what they wanted was usually a very shallow materialistic need. So a natural order evolved within society which rewarded deceit rather than honesty. So when an old lady had her purse snatched in the street, nobody stopped to help. Nobody cared. They used to care, but that was several generations back in time. These days it was too much trouble to care as it would most probably result in you suffering physical harm. Guns and knives were epidemic so why take the risk. Keep your head down and keep moving. As the streets had slipped into this dog eat dog world, organised gangs had started to appear. They controlled the street, their way. Taxing businesses, holding up banks, selling illegal drugs, running brothels and controlling all petty street crime. If you were a thief, who tried to operate independently of the gangs, they would find you and force your allegiance to them. Force you to hand over eighty per cent of your weekly quarry. Resistance was futile. It resulted in physical harm, scars to the face, digits removed. You were made an example of, thereby spreading further fear and anxiety amongst the people. Murder was the fastest rising crime according to statistics; life had become a cheap commodity. Not that the police were actively trying to prosecute people for violent crimes because they too were making vast profits from controlling illegal activities on the streets. They competed with the gangs and the taxpayer funded their operation.

So citizens feared the crime on the streets and many stayed indoors, glued to their television. They would certainly never speak to a stranger on the street and discuss the weather! Friendship and family had once been at the core of a healthy society, but now they were nothing more than historical concepts found in old books and films. Everybody was an individual these days, living in a cold world of isolation. For many citizens their only recreation outside of work or the home was shopping, buying things. It made them forget their miserable existence. The city was littered with retail villages throughout. They sported major armed security on the entrance gates to protect customers from the threats of the street. Shopping, be the medicine electronic gadgets, clothes or chocolates, would transform you from unhappy to happy, that was a scientific fact constantly reinforced by television, magazines and the internet. In reality the happiness was short lived, just a buzz which quickly faded until you purchased another dose. Everywhere you looked in the city was advertisements. Electronic billboards discoursing their sermon twenty four seven, be it above a seat on the bus or the side of a sky scraper, bombarding the brains of the city beyond overload. All competing to keep your attention for long enough to seep instructions into your brain and influence future purchasing patterns. The most common instincts preyed upon by advertising related to food, sex, and self-image, core instincts that have been hardwired within our brains since the dawn of time.

Scientists know that every time an advert gets your attention, with proposals to offer something your survival instincts want, it will trigger a reaction in your brain and you will be rewarded with a natural substance known as dopamine. Dopamine makes you feel good. It has been rewarding decision making throughout evolution and has

maintained the chain of life since the dawn of time. As a result of the advert induced dopamine high, you will get a “taste” for the product and will actively pursue it in reality, i.e. purchase the product. You might not actually need the product, you are just chasing a further dopamine high.

So citizens of the city very quickly and unknowingly got themselves addicted to the dopamine reward bursts offered by advertising. Over and over again people watched the adverts, then blindly pursued the reality on their next shopping trip. Usually the products were nothing like what was offered in the advertisements, but people subconsciously just wanted to get high, so they didn't complain. But the detrimental side effects of chasing these adverts were kept firmly out of the media. Cases of eating disorders and sex addiction exploded, and as people were in isolation from one another they could not discuss their problems. A dark anxiety was secretly eating the soul of society.

However the world was not entirely populated by people existing in the dying cities. On a small island in the warm seas, many hundreds of miles to the South of the city, there was a small colony. Only a tiny percentage of the world population lived on the Island, but there they lived, in style. With unspoilt sandy beaches, unremitting blue skies, drinkable rainfall and natural rocky mountains, the Island provided a few people with a beautiful paradise. The crystal clear seas were lapped at by the Island like a kitten taking fresh milk from a saucer. The trees grew straight and strong and displayed vibrant colours throughout the year. But despite the paradise within which they lived, the inhabitants were also, like the city dwellers, very unhappy, though you would not have guessed from their faces. You could see their six bedroom houses and luxurious cars, sleek speedboats and fancy gadgets. You would see big smiles for friends, family and business acquaintances. But you couldn't see the sadness deep down inside their soul unless you knew where to look. Just like the city people, the islanders were actually very isolated from one another, but they had learned to bury this feeling and had been taught to paint a happy, successful and caring façade, for this appearance was deemed correct in their society.

The islanders shared many common values. To obtain as much money as possible was their main objective in life. It superseded everything else, but they would never admit it. To demonstrate their stash it was customary to accumulate many valuable objects for all to see. So they purchased enormous and impractical houses, the most expensive designer clothes with matching jewel encrusted watches, gold chains, the latest luxurious cars and fancy boats within which they cruised around the Island. In the pursuit of these objects they had lost the instinctive connection to friends and family. Even the love they purported to their partners would shatter if tested. And at the drop of a hat they would get very angry and compulsively lie and manipulate to get their own greedy way. They were quite brilliant at lying and manipulation as they had been inadvertently tutored by their expert parents from a young age. They were lost in a fog of lies and wealth obsession so distanced from the reality of the world that they couldn't touch it anymore.

The beautiful Island was the utopian dream. You could swim in the bath like sea or play golf overlooking the beach. Every day was perfect weather wise. Anything that could be

wanted was available, be it exotic fresh food, world class entertainment, high stake casinos or sporting facilities. It also catered for more illegal indulgences such as the highest quality illegal drugs and prostitutes. Big business men demanded such vice. The streets were always clean and you never saw violence. Strict security arrangements controlled who was allowed on the Island. Getting on and off was reportedly impossible without the correct identification passes.

Obviously you had to be a big earner to afford this lifestyle. Most families owned a business in one or more of the world cities. Usually a business that had been handed down from generation to generation within the family. Occasionally new money would arrive on the Island, a self-made person from a city who had successfully built a little business empire. Video conferencing allowed communication with company management teams all around the world, so owners rarely needed to leave the Island. So much of their time was free to do with what they wished. They spent their time eating amazing food, drinking fantastic wine to excess, playing games and being entertained by the world's best stage and sporting performers. But mostly they liked shopping and the Island hosted retail units hawking every imaginable piece of luxury from planet earth and beyond.



## Chapter 4

### Lech

A brush stroked and dabbed across the canvas to produce a smattering of green leaves on the sycamore tree, a central feature of the whole composition. The scene was fictional, though Lech had seen it in his mind for days. Paint brushes and pots were enthusiastically scattered about his desk and floor. His walls displayed a mix of recent experiments and favourite work. Crammed into the same room were his decks, where the vinyl got laid. What had started as a part time money earner for weddings and birthday parties had developed into something a little sexier. He had elevated to a known name on the DJ circuit and could pull a reasonable crowd down at his local nightclub combining old school and contemporary tunes, mixing up funk and jazz, hip hop and soul, to arrive at a unique sound for the punters. Some tunes were so catchy they would fill the dance floor within the first fifteen seconds. Some punters didn't even know the song, but they knew it was funky and rushed to the dance floor to strut their stuff. In the corner of Lech's bedroom, half covered by a coat, was a long forgotten guitar, seemingly in working condition, but covered in a thick dressing of dust.

Lech worked during the day for the Television Corporation. They manufactured a wide range of sleek state of the art televisions for every domestic and commercial need that could be thought of. Having shown loyalty for many years he had risen to the position of manager of the screen manufacturing department. It was a role which never taxed him greatly; he was a technology whiz kid. But his role demanded he had to be on his toes constantly organising and pushing production as he was closely monitored in terms of units produced each month. He found himself always having to demand quicker and quicker production from the workers within his department. Lately he found the targets for production were getting impossible, and that made him frustrated as he wanted to do his job well. Sometimes he felt so stressed trying to keep his boss happy that he would look for work elsewhere. But the wages in the television factory were bearable, and looking for another job was also stressful and hard work, so he lazily stayed where he was.

Lech dressed differently from anyone he knew, he always had since a teenager, a futuristic gangster from the film noir era. All Lech secretly ever wanted from life was to be famous. His heart pounded when he day dreamed of becoming a big star, which he often did. The fame, the girls, the parties! He craved the adulation. He knew in his best moods that he had what was needed to be a world superstar, imagination, creativity, the

looks the style. But Lech had a stubborn, deeply dark low side to him, which held him in check, held him back from the stars. Quite often a horrible voice inside his head told him he was not good enough to achieve his dreams. In his darkest nightmares he would make horrendous mistakes and people would laugh at him. The whole world would laugh at him. He would be ridiculed as a public failure. That grounded the kite like no wind. Fear of failure. With thoughts like those, any positive enthusiasm would dissipate within seconds. Lech flashed a memory of how his father delighted in every single failure he ever made as he grew up, a very angry man.

Lech's phone beeped and snapped him out of his thoughts. It was Lolly, his lady.

**“At work - home late”**; read the message.

Lolly was a head turning lady with the figure of a model and a film stars face. Phenomenally intelligent but lacking so much confidence, she never seemed to concentrate her efforts and drive herself at one particular challenge. Opting just to float around and dabble in life. Her father was an incredibly wealthy and powerful man, the chief of a world bank. In the past he had transformed large world corporations from loss making to record growth and profits. Lolly was not sure how he had achieved this as they rarely talked but she knew everybody respected him, or they faced his anger, and he was capable of a hulk like transformation. Without warning his confident smiles would transform into a rapid fire of sudden sharp and hurtful words. He was potentially a violent killer if you failed to calm him down. At eighteen years of age Lolly bravely decided to move out of her father's luxurious multibillion dollar mansion on the Island. She had finally had enough of his anger and obsession with controlling her. So without a plan she left for the city, a dark dirty place in comparison with the paradise she had grown up in. Since being a teenager, and maybe before, Lolly had suffered illness after illness. Mainly anxiety based illnesses. It made her panic, drink, smoke and sometimes hurt herself. She had developed many addictions, and used them to distract herself from the painful feelings that lived within her. The best distraction for her was cutting. Cutting her arms and legs. Breasts. Anywhere that could be covered up with clothing. The physical pain always made the mental pain go away for a while. So Lolly drifted from man to man, relationship to relationship trying to find the love she never got from her Daddy. She had met Lech at a wedding where he was the DJ. He seemed nice and genuinely cared for her, unlike many of the others who just wanted to use her for sex or have her as eye candy on their arm.

Lech mentally noted another text alert from his phone but he was playing close attention to a little bird he was trying to place in the sycamore tree. In a moment, hours went by. As the painting grew more detailed it absorbed its creator more and more.

Bleep. The phone reminded anyone listening that it had a message to give. Lech picked up the phone and quickly scanned through the message.

**“We are sorry to inform you that, due to a reduction in demand for our Television products, we have found it necessary to make redundancies, of which you are one”**.

Having read the message three times, Lech's disbelief moved aside to make room for shock. Redundancy he thought, that's a new experience for me. Lech had always assumed that by taking a steady job, with average wages and by keeping his owner generally happy, his job was secure. A job for life, but apparently not so. Seventeen years loyalty and for what? His thoughts darted at random, assembling some form of reaction. The top of his list of immediate concerns was money. Or lack of it. He had barely savings to cover his rent for a few months. He knew from reading the papers that employment law had changed many times in the past decade, but he had never read the details as he believed he was safe from such situations. Lech was confidently suspicious that he would receive little or no financial compensation as a reward for his loyalty to the company.

Lech returned concentration to his painting. He wanted to achieve a reasonable state of completion before leaving it for the night.

Bleep. The phone again. Lech was visibly irritated by yet another interruption.

**“Sorry Lech, decided we are not compatible, our relationship is over”.**

Lech read the text message from Lolly over and over again, until he reached a point where he was just staring at the phone screen. The message was completely out of context with his understanding of the world. Bang. He felt like he had just been hit by a train. Was this just a joke in poor taste? He desperately wondered which friends might play such a practical joke. Had he misread the message? He read it again searching for another meaning other than the one he feared. Lolly had just dumped him. Like a sack of rubbish. Elbowed. Finished with. Wherever you are in the world, it always has a name, one which conveys the terminality of the situation, the rejection. Lech felt cold for the first time that evening but he did not reach for his pullover. His mind jumped about like a space ship in an asteroid belt. So many asteroids! A state of chaos was declared.

Lech reached for the bottle on his kitchen shelf and unscrewed the top. Taking a swig he contorted as the strong liquor twisted him. He began to forget, another swig, much bigger this time.

Several hours after the bomb shell messages had started to arrive Lech had taken cover in the Super Ace bar just across town from his apartment. It was a heaving social scene on the weekends, with the funkier music and cheap crazy drinks; it attracted the liveliest crowd and the maddest dancers. But tonight it was quiet. He beckoned the bar girl to him and ordered another of the new Mind Race drinks. The first two had gone down very well, and just as advertised, this particular flavour gave you incredibly positive mind rushes. It contained a refined version of the powder, high flying businessmen back in the early part of the century, used to snort up their nose. But this was clean, legal and dissolved within a sociable drink. It was also a lot more powerful, so whatever you did, you did it in a very organised and confident manner. You became super human. Shame the buzz only lasted twenty minutes or so. Still there was always more behind the bar.



Lech sat on his bar stool for maybe half a day. Drinking, thinking and occasionally talking to whatever soul brushed up alongside him.

“Have you tried the Sex Machine over there?” quizzed the tall bespectacled gentlemen who had joined with Lech. He pointed to a dark passageway leading off behind the dance floor. They had so far discussed current affairs, including the poor economic outlook, and after a briefly negative conversation regarding relationships turned their attention to reality machine technology.

“Sex Machine?” quizzed Lech. “You get to be James Brown or something?” he said wryly chuckling. Lech’s curiosity for what the reality machine could do lifted him from his stool and he strolled off into the darkness. Moments later he was sat inside the machine. As the screen became alert to the coins being fed in, Lech sat back and tried to guess what would happen next. He was requested to make selections from those offered on the screen. He was to design a person, from head to toe.

Gender  
Age  
Height  
Weight  
Colour  
Curves  
Hair  
Clothes

Then the machine asked him to select character traits.

Happy  
Sad  
Aggressive  
Angry  
Adventurous  
Shy

The list went on and on over several screen pages but that was a little too advanced and time consuming for Lech at that moment. He wanted to see what the machine could do. Next step was to design your environment.

Hotel room  
Car  
Cinema  
Park at night  
Park in daytime  
Top of waterfall

Again, page after page of scene options were on offer. To assist impatient customers, the machine allowed you to short cut the time consuming design stages and simply select one of the predesigned programmes. Lech selected this feature and watched the preview.

A series of stunning ladies were paraded on the screen, each one different and oozing sexuality. Lech quietly gasped and had butterflies flitting about in his stomach. He decided to choose the secretary. A stunning slim blonde with long stocking clad legs and enormous breasts. She was formally dressed like a high class secretary in a corporate office.

“One day soon you will be able to select a friend, or a work colleague” commented the gentlemen who had wandered over from the bar and leant against the machine so as to provide guidance if required.

“All the machine will need is a DNA source, such as a strand of hair”.

“All done” said Lech as he made his final selections. A declaration boldly appeared across the screen highlighting that the manufacturer could not be held responsible for any detrimental effect the machine may have on the user. Be it physical or mental. The machine flashed up these warnings and asked for acceptance.

Lech tapped ACCEPT.

**The Sex Machine Experience will begin shortly.....**

The machine began to emit wavering high pitched whirring noises and the top hung entrance door started to close like a DeLorean. The gentleman bid farewell and Lech disappeared from view, enveloped by the steel egg shaped shell.

Highly advanced technology, previously only used by the military, had been the key to creating this machine. It could connect wirelessly, straight into the centre of Lech’s brain, the old brain, from which our modern day masterpieces have evolved. A mechanism in this region naturally rewards us if we obtain sex or food. The reward being a shot of dopamine which makes us feel good. So, quite naturally, we will try and obtain the food, or the sex again, and we will be similarly rewarded. When we look forward to our Sunday dinner, or hope to have sex, we are actually just chasing a dopamine high. Simple genius, an addiction which has ensured the chain of life is maintained on this planet.

The Sex Machine lurched forward, all went hazy, and then moments later Lech found himself in a large stationary cupboard, with the secretary he had selected earlier.

“Jesus, is this real?” Lech said to himself, not expecting the lady to answer. But it did feel real in every way. He could look about him, reach out for objects and pick them up, drop them. It was exactly the same as reality. Lech was so gob smacked with the experience that he had momentarily forgotten why he was there. The secretary walked towards him with a big smile on her face, pausing to gently run her fingers up and down his shirt, and then they were passionately kissing. Lech could feel her warmth, the wetness of her mouth. This was the most incredibly fantastic experience ever thought Lech as they entwined tightly, and rapidly accelerated in rhythmic unison.

Moments later it was all over. Lech was back in the machine awkwardly feeling like he had just had sex with a stunning woman. He was profusely sweating down his back and his mind was a familiar post coitus jumble. Warnings repeated on the screen before the door opened to allow his exit. Lech stumbled out and crashed onto the floor. He had lost his sense of balance a little but was happy and felt loved which compensated. He was quite exhausted to, mentally exhausted. The gentleman who had suggested he tried the machine came to his side and offered assistance back to an empty stool waiting for him by the bar.

“Wow” said Lech, struggling for words. “That was truly amazing”.

But the fantastic memory was already starting to fade, by design. In an hour the memory would be of a very distant conquest.

“Another drink! Another drink!” demanded the quivering Lech and the bargirl came running.



## Chapter 5

# The Vision

Three hours later, in the same bar, on the same bar stool, Lech was still consuming. He and his new friend were locked into buying rounds of drinks, and with each round the potency was escalating. The next chapter landed on the bar in front of them.

“Bubbling green soup with a straw!” commented Lech with inebriated joviality.

“This little number is supposed to make you feel like you’re an alien from another planet”; said his companion.

“Already do” was the slurred reply.

So they sat and greedily slurped from their curly straws. Lech became conscious that his vision was starting to change. The bargirl leaned over in a charming manner and spoke to her most profitable customers of the night.

“Everything ok boys?” she said with a cheeky giggle.

Lech instantaneously jumped with fright and crashed to the floor. A reassuring arm from above lifted him back to his feet. Through Lech’s eyes he had just seen an alien! But the bar girl was a pretty faced teenager. She laughed loudly.

“It’s ok” she said with a reassuring tone.

“It’s just the Little Green Man” she said pointing to his drink.

“Makes you see humans as aliens” she continued with another giggle.

Lech sat still and tried to make sense of it all. He glanced at his new friend who now looked like something that had just landed from another world. That had travelled many light years to reach this bar. He had a fish like face and an array of tentacles dancing in the air about him. Lech reaffirmed to himself that this was purely a drink induced hallucination and that the effect would only last for twenty minutes or so. He relaxed and started to enjoy it, he enjoyed escaping from the real world. From

somewhere deep inside his mind it was suggested to him that he should go and find stronger, longer lasting drugs from the people he knew on the street, illegal deals from dark alley ways. Lech knew where he could get a good deal. He decided to act upon his notion and clumsily dismounted from his stool. His companion became aware of his intention to leave and tried to persuade him otherwise, getting wasted alone is neither fun nor healthy.

“You leaving us then Mr Green Head?” he again questioned Lech with a little disappointment in his tone.

But Lech had missed the question and was already zig zagging in an unsteady fashion towards the exit. The gentleman let him go without further hindrance.

Having scraped along many walls, tripped on a dog and got scared senseless by a young boy begging for money (who looked like a vicious alien), Lech found himself in the Rage bar. On occasion he would DJ here. The alien hallucinations conjured by the green drink were starting to wear off and Lech considered what to consume next. Karen was running the bar tonight, a tall middle aged woman with long dark hair and angular features. She recognised Lech amongst the other customers jostling like animals at the bar, waiting to be served next. Having caught his bleary eye, she loyally shouted a request for his order.

The DJ was playing some old skool funk and punters were jiving around on the illuminated dance floor. Classic funk always pleased the faithful in this place.

“Dance On” requested Lech to Karen without a please or thank you.

This was a new drink which apparently gave you the ability to dance like a superstar. He had seen a crowd in here last week, they were all on it. What a dance spectacle. There were somersaults and cartwheels going on wherever you looked. Lech sipped his Dance On drink, unsure how much he would require in order to overcome his normal shyness for participating on the dance floor. Sizzle sizzle, went the drink on his tongue, and he felt an unnatural energy well up inside him. After nearly five minutes he couldn't stay still any longer and span one hundred and eighty degrees on the spot and strutted off like John Travolta to the middle of the dance floor.

For countless more hours the drinks kept appearing and disappearing. One minute Lech was a dance floor champion, the next a cool headed intellectual conversationalist. After that, a master of seduction, then magician. Each drink temporarily gave him new powers and allowed him to explore another fantasy.

Lech had clocked several girls in the bar that he really fancied. He would love to take one of them home tonight. Lolly had been an important part of his life, and had not long left him, but he was ready to move on, or so the reproductive programming within his brain whispered to him. He pondered a strategy to realise this desire and consequently downed a shot of Super Confidence. One by one the girls he approached rejected him. He didn't realise, but he looked a complete mess having been drinking fantasy drinks all night. They had taken their toll on him but he still felt super confident inside. Their reactions having confused him, he quietly retook his place amongst the small crowd at

the bar and ordered another drink. Suddenly, without receiving or paying for his next drink, Lech speedily left the bar and headed through the miserable drizzling streets, back to the first bar, the Super Ace bar, where he had started the night. He wanted to try out the Sex Machine again. It had made him feel great the first time round, and he had another fantasy to play out. He planned to select several luscious television celebrities and have an all-night party in his bedroom, pounding music and unlimited drink and drugs; he wanted the wildest situation you could ever imagine. Taking twice as long as somebody who knew where they were going should take, Lech stumbled back into Super Ace. His gentleman friend who he had earlier left at the bar was now gone. The bar girl was cleaning up a few tables and smiled warmly at his return.

“Get me The Stud” Lech demanded as she had returned to the back of the bar.

“Feeling horny are we sweetheart?” said the girl with a sparkle in her eye.

Lech smiled as best he could then, having locked the drink into his hand, headed off to the dark passageway where the reality machine stood ominously purring and radiating a series of eye catching flashing lights.

Lech felt rain falling on his face. Then he started to realise he was soaked though. He felt the familiar burning sensation of acid rain all over his body. Slowly he opened his eyes and found himself outside, in a narrow alleyway inelegantly spread out in the gutter. It was broad daylight. He was without recollection as to how he had ended up there. His immediate instinct was to reach for his wallet, and having done so, mildly rejoiced. So he hadn't been robbed, but definitely he had no memory. How had he got here? He pushed his mind but it hurt, confused and jumbled by all types of foreign substances. All he knew was that he had been on a crazy bender. So he lay there, in the gutter, and attempted to collect himself. Distant blurred memories began to appear at random. The drinks. The gentleman. The dancing. The Sex Machine. But the memories were only fragments. Partial dreamlike insights.

Without warning, like somebody had just flicked a switch, all about Lech turned blue. Immediately he dragged himself to his feet. An ethereal shining blue hovered all about him like mist. It emanated great power but without menace. Lech was shocked and confused but relaxed at the same time. Then his mind filled with powerful visual images, so intensive it was almost painful. To start with he could see a city, completely free from pollution; the sky was blue and the trees healthy and strong. The buildings of this city were all beautiful and of fantastically intricate design. Next he saw flashes of street festivals. Smiling people joined together by hands and praising the opportunity that life had given them. He saw doctors, school teachers, shop workers and car makers, in fact all the professions he recognised from the world that Lech already knew. But the obvious difference was that the people looked happy and lovingly conversed. They went about their jobs with vigour. They wanted to make the city as wonderful a place to live as possible, for themselves and all future generations. Money still existed, but emphasis had shifted from individuals being motivated for personal gain of wealth, to individuals wanting to create a fantastically smart and highly spiritual race, living in harmony with the universe about them. The people were motivated with great confidence that this should be the way we live our lives. It made perfectly logical sense to them, and it felt

right deep down inside. They wanted these ideals to be embraced in every city of the world. Furthermore they wanted future generations to take these values and colonise every star in the sky.

Lech's mind raced with a collage of visionary information for maybe five minutes, and then it stopped abruptly. He blinked and the blue haze was gone. But the experience was engraved deeply in his mind.



## Chapter 6

# Depression

Having woken in his bed for a change, several minutes rolled by as Lech thought of many things which were of concern to him. He had no work, girlfriend, even a purpose in life. Deep thoughts for the first few moments of waking. His list went on and on and more trivial the longer he procrastinated, each thought making him feel a little worse. He stopped and strained to recall what day it was, not that it mattered. Last night he had been out partying. In fact every night recently he had been out partying until he had reached a state where he just couldn't remember how he got home. Every morning he woke feeling poisoned and sorry for himself, his physical and mental wellbeing had deteriorated accordingly. Without work to structure his day he did very little to exercise his brilliant mind and it was going unhealthily rusty. Even his DJ skills were on the slide. He noticed a lack of the usual praise for his sets, and bookings were dropping. He would often get out of bed at midday, watch whatever rubbish was on television, or maybe just sit about his place staring out of the window into the mundane street. His zip was gone. His desire to find work had vanished. Nagging bills were a gentle reminder of his responsibilities. The cash was running out, and then what? Lech had started not to care.

Each day, as evening started to descend, Lech's spirit would begin to pick up as he knew that soon he would be venturing into town to drink, get wild and forget. He had discovered a new high to add to his portfolio, gambling. Potentially winning something made all his worries go away, for a while. Living for the moment, without concern for the future. Lech had not consciously realised but he quickly became desensitised to any high, so needed to compensate by cranking it up in intensity. Every night he drank more than the last. Every night he took more drugs than the last. Every night he gambled more than the last. The high he chased was scientifically understood as a dopamine release within his brain. The activity he pursued to achieve it was immaterial. Each day he subconsciously focused his mind energy on thinking up activities for that coming night which would recapture the intensity of his best high. He was addicted to dopamine.

Fast forward many more weeks of undignified binging.



Lech lay in the bath. The clock had just turned to afternoon and his head was swirling. Relentless toxic substances had passed through his body during the preceding weeks and had pushed his natural defences beyond their capabilities. He was getting seriously ill and looked grey and gaunt, sometimes shaking with trapped anxiety. He never really wanted to eat, it was boring, and consequently he had lost maybe twenty per cent of his body weight. His brain was addled; he struggled to remember important things, people's names and how to do simple adding up. He lay in the water motionless, its warmth comforting him like a mother's womb. In the past months he had consumed more alcohol and designer drugs than he had in his whole life up until that point. He only felt normal when high. Not feeling high was to feel weak and ill. He lightly swirled the water with his foot, watching the ripples bounce about the bath. He remembered his past life, the DJing which had now disappeared due to his unreliability, the girlfriends with whom he spent some beautifully intimate and hilarious moments, and the good feeling of working, being part of a team. He remembered his painting; he hadn't painted for so long.

The lifestyle he had now was unsustainable, his soul told him that. He existed within a vicious circle of extreme highs, followed by extremely lows, and always skint without the togetherness to earn money. He had noticed his normal everyday emotions had virtually vanished. It was as if only a finite quantity of emotion existed within his body, and by choosing to make his brain high with chemicals, there was no emotion left for normal functions, like warmly greeting a friend or recognising a stranger's smile in the street. He was heading down fast like an out of control fighter plane; the impact of the ground was not far away. He deserved so much more than this.

So, there and then in the bath, he decided to change. But he had no idea how. All he knew was that he desperately wanted to change. He knew he had to change. He wanted to be the man he knew he was, deep down inside. That person was so different from the face the world saw at the moment. He wanted to show the world his true identity. He wanted to share the amazing abilities he knew he had with the people of the world, to contribute positively to the history of mankind in the Universe.

Later that afternoon Lech walked into a second hand bookshop. He knew of its existence but had never ventured in, having managed to convince himself he would find nothing of interest. He had done lots of reading when he was younger but a lack of discipline and other distractions meant he hadn't opened a book for maybe seven years. So he rummaged around for a while, and left the shop with a bargain, Depression Self Help. It was enjoyably light reading for Lech as his concentration levels were not great and gave some important facts which Lech instantly related to, a summary being;

**Depression is a symptom of a need to change.**

The first page of the book warned that if you wanted to escape the dark clouds of depression you must be prepared to follow a long and tiring path of self-examination. Big changes must be made and you will encounter many set backs on the way. But if you are persistent, eventually you will arrive at the place you dreamt of, and your mind will be the healthiest that it has ever been. Your journey will be rewarded with great happiness. Just by reading the book, Lech realised he was not alone in the world. That

somebody knew the dark feelings he had, which was an incredible relief. He was not alone in the world. He felt great strength draw from the book into his soul.

The following month Lech read more and more books. He concentrated on self-help titles which provided greater detail and proposed techniques for walking the path out of depression. Most days he felt his soul become a little stronger, though every so often he would crash and go out on the town and get wild, but his books informed that this was normal behaviour during recovery. Change is hard and the old person inside you will always fight to survive. But Lech was definitely changing direction for the better. He wanted more from life. He felt he deserved it. Partying constantly was shallow. Who wanted to die having only known a messy stupor? Who wanted to die without reaching their full potential? Being truly satisfied? The more he read the more he realised that he needed to make friends with his past, especially past anger to which he clung. He had to let it go. Not that his anger had been wrong at the time, it definitely had been right. But you have to let it go sometime or it will start to fester in the darkest parts of your mind, spreading toxins into your body. Lech also learned from books that his body was an incredible machine, a product of many millions of years of evolution, and he needed to start looking after that machine for it to function to its full potential. It needed the right nourishment as well as physical and mental exercise, as we are animals, and that is how we are designed to work. Planes don't work well under water, and submarines are disastrous if you try to fly to the moon. Human bodies don't work well if you party every night.

In time Lech found himself cooking amazing meals in his little kitchen. The more he tried the better he got until his dishes were as good as any restaurant he had visited, and at a fraction of the price! He took long walks, through streets and parks, past lakes and over mountains. His body responded positively to the diet and exercise, he started feeling so much better, and this was reinforced by peoples compliments to him. Lech also started to read about other subjects. He had once loved his art, but that had faded away in recent times. He went and found books on all sorts of artists, some he knew, some he didn't and he started to absorb the information therein, laid down by those before him for future generations. He started to paint again. He researched his family history and proudly marked it all out on poster sized paper in a clear structure for everyone to see. It was a remarkable project, with all manner of surprises about the people who had been part of his history, and genetic makeup.

Slowly but surely Lech started to regain his interest in life. Picking up his old hobbies where he had left them. Sometimes there were backward steps in this progress but generally he was on the up. It brought a beautiful happiness to his face. Then one day Lech unexpectedly picked up his old guitar and started strumming. It had lain in the corner of his spare bedroom for many years and was in need of a good clean and tune up, but picking it up was the important act. Lech couldn't play much guitar, just a few basic chords, which now were long forgotten. He had preferred to play his decks and mix vinyl, but suddenly he had a thirst to play guitar properly. He wanted to show off the amazingness of his mind. With twenty minutes practice every day he was soon competent at the basics of guitar playing and shortly after writing his own songs with a passion

Lech's progress continued month after month. Sometimes two steps forward and one step back. Sometimes just two steps back. But he was hungry to become the person he knew he was deep down inside, and that guided him through the tough times.

Not much further into the brightly lit future, Lech was organising his fifth gig. He had assembled a band of musicians who demonstrated delightful synergy. They played soul, jazz and funk and were greatly influenced by the original pioneers from way back in the twentieth century. These old skool vibes were mixed up with the contemporary Electropop sound. Lech had recruited a sax player, trombone, a crazy drummer and was developing a beautifully soulful voice of his own. When these guys jammed, they lost track of time, they were positive and enchanting. Needless to say word spread through the city about this new band and their new sound. Even the radio stations took an interest in Lech's music, and they usually only ever played the same bland songs over and over again between adverts. But Lech, or rather Electrostar as was his stage name, was different.

Lech's smile grew in proportion with his ever improving health of mind and body.



## Chapter 7

# The Island

About two hours flight from the city was the Island. A perfect place. Perfect beaches, perfect weather, perfect views and perfect people. Or rather it appeared perfect from the outside looking in. Every building was beautifully crafted, of unique design and constructed using high quality materials and methods. The buildings were built to stand for thousands of years with minimum maintenance needs. The roads were immaculate and lined with ornate trees and landscaped areas, with flowers designed to make you say wow and feel good about yourself. Food was organically grown, water drawn from the mountain lakes and locks to houses, cars and garden sheds did not exist. Crime did not exist.

Rob was thirty five years of age. His parents had both retired and lived on an enormous estate in the picturesque mountains. They had a private boat and plane and ten servants. They even had gold plated bicycles. Demonstrating their wealth to others was very important to them and owning objects or people was the preferred way. Now his parents had retired, Rob was chief of the family company. He had been for nearly five years now, and the profits were soaring. Despite his inability to successfully complete a business course at the local university, which was staffed by some of the world's leading professors, Rob was making big money every day. This money making machine had been built for him by his parents; the cogs were already in place, so all he had to do was turn them. And as he turned them money spewed out, straight into his pockets. Rob liked nothing better than to spend money. It gave him a buzz. When he was bored of his latest purchase, which was usually quite quickly, he would throw it away, content in the knowledge he could go out and buy something else the next day. Even his girlfriends were treated like objects. He would in effect buy them, and then throw them away when he got bored. His latest girlfriend had tried to keep his interest in her by having variable breast implants. Basically Rob could change the size and shape of her breasts with a remote control unit. Every day they would be a different size and shape, but his interest had already started to wane. Never did Rob read, play a musical instrument or participate in sport. He socialised, but only so he could get what he wanted, be it personal or business. He never did anything for anyone without expecting something in return. He only knew how to take, not give.

When Rob first started working in the family firm he was a rather shy, timid young man, who did not like having to make decisions, especially if it meant it would cause conflict, such as making people redundant, or introducing schemes to make them work harder, as was incessantly demanded by the free market of capitalism. Sometimes he lay awake at night, his conscious talking to him about how he was inflicting undue stress on the workforce. Although he rarely travelled to the city, he did empathise with working class people and the conditions they had to endure. But that was then. He learned quickly to disconnect himself from these emotions. Successful business leadership needed to focus only on the absolutes of growth, cost, value and net profit. Soon he realised that every successful worldwide corporation was led by a board of directors who had removed compassion for human needs from their decision making. A board room had one ultimate objective, to make profit, as much as possible. The wellbeing of people within the organisation was sometimes considered, but only if it was means to increase profit.

Rob had also learned that having a well-designed and quality product was not of great importance to a company. Marketing and advertising could be used to brainwash people who would then go out and blindly buy the product, even if it was rubbish.

So Rob had a range of companies he owned and managed. The most profitable product by far was a latest creation, the Sex Machine. A machine developed by super intelligent professors here at the Island university. It incorporated cutting edge military technology, and allowed wireless connection of a computer directly to a human brain. They had found a way to control people's minds, control their thoughts, dreams and of upmost interest, fantasies. It was possible to make any persons fantasy come true. These fantasies were so real to the mind, indistinguishable from reality, that people got very confused. Several test subjects had suffered mental breakdowns due to the confusion. In the past twelve months Sex Machines had been placed all over the city, in bars and clubs, even sport centres, and had paid for themselves within the first six months. That's the kind of business Rob liked. So now the millions being spent by punters was virtually pure profit.

Taxation was craftily avoided by most business owners on the Island and so the Sex Machine was making Rob very very wealthy to the extent where he had already earmarked a stunning cruise ship to be purchased. The success of the reality machine was due to the people of the city having become addicted. They initially wanted to escape from their desperate environment, and had inadvertently developed a taste for the induced high which was created by a simulation of sex. Or more scientifically, they became addicted to the dopamine that their brain released as a reward for getting a mate. But obviously that mate was an artificial simulation, but the brain didn't know the difference. A human brain, for both male and females, is deeply programmed to mate with as many different partners as possible thereby giving your genes the best chance of survival within the next generation. As a result, the Sex Machine was used over and over again, as punters tried to mate with as many different people as possible, sometimes having twenty virtual partners in a session. Remember, the brain has no off switch as procreation is the number one priority on its agenda. As with every addiction, the brain becomes desensitised and requires greater stimulation to maintain the previous level of high. So punters needed more girls, prettier girls, more outrageous

sexual acts. So the vicious circle of addiction imparted itself on many good souls of the city and subsequently the frequency that the machines got visited soared. Addicts were sexually exhausted. In an hour they were having more mates than past generations would have in an entire lifetime. People started to have mental breakdowns, jobs were lost, and family's started breaking down. Good people lying in the gutters, especially near where a machine was sited. But any complaint against Rob and his machines was quickly brushed aside with scientific reports showing that the machines were completely safe and would not cause any ill effect to users. Of course the reports were written by scientists on the payroll of his company.

Another of Rob's businesses worthy of mention was an outfit named Great Food, which specialised in creating a range of food and selling it to citizens of the city. There was no great nutritional value in the food, and it was manufactured using the cheapest ingredients obtainable. The food contained a high level of sugar and fat, much higher than found in natural foods, but to our brain this is highly desirable. The other core objective of our brain, next to procreation, is to ensure we eat and maintain the chemical requirements of our bodies. If you are ever really hungry, perhaps having starved for a few days, you will know what it feels like to see some food, an immensely powerful instinct. So in past times, when people wandered the world hunting and gathering for food, and never knowing when their next meal would appear, if you found food you would consume as much of it as you could, wasting nothing, unsure of when the next meal time would come. Fat and sugar were the most desirable foodstuffs as they provided energy. This incredible instinct has been majorly responsible for getting the human race this far down the road of evolution. However in modern times, with food within easy reach, the brain still tries to persuade its host to keep eating, even though the reality now is that we do not need to. And each time we eat, the brain rewards us with the good feeling of a dopamine release. So citizens of the city found themselves within a vicious circle of food addiction. They got high every time they ate but found themselves getting fatter and unhealthier. Citizens rarely exercised so most found they did not feel good about themselves. Purchasing "feel good" pills to pick them up a bit became a popular reaction.

With great irony, Rob's other successful business was a health centre chain. They would charge vast amounts of money to take unhealthy people away to a farm in the middle of nowhere and provide a strict regime of exercise and nutritious diet. When the clients went home they felt amazing, and Rob's company was heralded as great company.

The function of government was undertaken from within a circular building which sat in the middle of the Island. Once a week members of the government, who had been elected by all those people over eighteen who lived in the cities or on the Island, would assemble for several hours of discussion about current affairs, law making and other matters. Elections were held every ten years. Democracy had been a core ideal within society for hundreds of years, replacing civil wars that had risen up to overthrow kings and self-elected dictatorships. It was the only fair and decent way of ruling. But not everyone could stand for election as a government minister. If you wanted to propose yourself as a candidate then you had to pay an entrance fee equivalent to the average city dwellers annual income, multiplied by ten thousand. The fee was so stupendously high that no worker from the city could possibly become a candidate. So it came to pass

that government ministers were all wealthy and lived on the Island. They seldom embraced change or the needs of the city dwellers, and any new policies grossly favoured the wants of the minority people on the Island.

In a deep dark underground detention block, so far beneath the islands surface most did not even know of its existence, sat Seoul. He was once a strong minded business man from the city, but for many years he had sat in this cell alone. With little to occupy him, his mind had slowly become inactive and numb. He used to be a lively soul with a thirst for talking and singing, dancing and laughing, which was quite unusual for a person from the city. But now all Seoul knew was this cell. Its boredom. Its coldness. It was not right to be stuck here.

Seoul had been a creative and successful business man who had grown up in a particularly rough district of the city, many many moons ago. He used to possess a spectacular love for those about him, and a driving vision which drew people to him wherever he went. You could not help but like him. He had built from scratch a chain of shops which offered inspiring ideas and top quality products, all at very reasonable prices. But a bland competitor didn't like how hard they had to work to compete with him, so they ran a campaign to discredit him. The television and radio poured untruths out to the people of the city, letting them know what a terrible man Seoul was. Citizens started to believe the television, especially the news, and so the damage was done and his amazing business empire started to crumble. Then one day, while he slept in his bed, the government soldiers came. He suddenly woke up and found himself being blindfolded, gagged and unceremoniously dragged out of his apartment and dropped into the back of a van. After a brief plane and another car journey he arrived somewhere. A building. Staircases down. Eventually his blindfold had been removed and the cell was where he found himself. With its monotonous white walls and grey floor, rarely did he have company.

The government had paranoid suspicions about Seoul. In the early days of his incarceration he was regularly interrogated. As he had resisted giving answers they started to beat him, brutal beatings with iron bars, while his hands were tied behind his back. The interrogations always focused on his associates back in the city. Who did what? At first Seoul had denied all knowledge of these associations as he tried to protect them, but he knew why this knowledge was sought. These animals were trying to build up a picture about a rumoured organisation. A group who were trying to rise up and represent the needs of the city people, they recognised and wanted to break the continuous unhealthy power for decision making that the minority people of the Island had engineered for themselves. They believed the city people deserved a much better quality of life. According to whispers on the street, the organisation was called For the Future Generations. Whispers flew about bars and on street corners but nobody had actually witnessed them in public. They were still underground. But the government and powerful people from the Island were aware of them. They had spies in the city looking out for this very threat to their reign, and recently the spies had reported a sudden welling of support for the group on the streets of the city. A revolutionary vibe was starting to brew. Past information obtained by the spies had implicated Seoul as a highly influential member of the group. And right the spies were to, although he admitted nothing. Having taken Seoul to this cell, the government had swiftly rushed

through a law which permitted his indefinite imprisonment without charge. Having lost their main man, For the Future Generations struggled for months, but they adjusted, restructured, and then planned for the right moment to strike.





## Chapter 8

# Electrostar LIVE

“Five minutes” the stage manager confirmed as he leant into Electrostar’s dressing room. The band sat about the ramshackle room, strewn with bits of old instruments, random items of colourful clothing, makeup cases and spent coffee cups. The room sparkled with nervous excitement. They had taken it in turns to sneak a peek at the crowd and had estimated potentially five hundred people, their biggest crowd yet, by far. Word of mouth was certainly lifting their profile on the live band circuit. People were drawn to their unique sound, with insightful lyrics that observed life, whilst still managing to have fun. Some fans couldn’t help but dance, the tunes were infectious. Others bopped their heads or jigged their hips while loosely chatting to friends. It was a good feeling music that felt part of the family.

“Ladies, Gentleman” the voice of the stage manager escaped from the giant speakers and signalled the start of the nights live entertainment. The audience adjusted themselves accordingly.

“We are delighted to have here at the Crunch Bar tonight”.

“An up and coming band, quickly gathering acclaim”.

“Please welcome, Electrostar”.

Warm welcoming applause filled the air as the stage was taken to by musicians. A drummer. Guitarists. A saxophonist. They quickly found their instruments about the stage and became reacquainted within nanoseconds. A call from the drummer. Bang. They were jamming, laid back and funky. No sooner had they established a groove, Lech quietly appeared at the bar entrance door and then strutted through the audience towards the stage, sporting a fine dark suit and matching fedora. Many people did not even realise who this was but naturally parted to accommodate his positive direction. As he reached the steps to the stage, a guitar was thrust into his outstretched hand. In one fluid motion the strap went over his head to securely rest on his shoulder and he span one eighty degrees to face the crowd. Hands automatically rose in anticipation. He fired off a mouth-watering riff which soaked joy into the faces which looked upon him. They

responded with greater applause. Lech confidently moved up the steps without looking where to place his feet. He was on the stage with his team. The train was about to leave the station and the passengers quickly applauded themselves on having purchased a ticket.

Two hours later, the gig having finished to rapturous applause, Lech strolled into the bar and ordered a complimentary juice drink. Many people about him braved to come over and lay praise for his performance. He knew it had gone well. It just felt so right. He lapped up the praise about him and drew strength from the fresh confidence that now lined him. He had never been so popular. On stage was the headline act for the evening, and they were screaming, literally. The band was producing a heavily distorted dirty metallic sound which matched the painful screams emanating from the lead vocalist. The vibe reminded Lech of the real world in the city, just outside those big entrance doors. Dark, dirty and unloving, but the crowd loved it.

Into the bar strolled Lech's band, fresh from the dressing room. Having spent a few seconds experiencing the noise blistering from the stage they elected to move to a quieter area of the bar, a chance to talk and discuss whatever was important. Despite various conversations igniting, Lech was drawn to the large television screen mounted on the wall, a news report. Lech rarely bothered with the news. Many rumours floated around on the streets about how the news on television and radio is basically controlled by the government, and that it is used to get the people of the city to think how they want them to think. This particular news story reported on a gathering of people who were demonstrating against the government. It got Lech's attention because demonstrating against the government never happened. He had heard of such demonstrations from way back in history, before he was born. Back then people were always demonstrating, demanding better health care, working conditions, even the right to work. And sometimes Lech had watched films where demonstrations had become quite angry, and the people started fighting with the police, quite ugly stuff, fire and blood. Then for some reason the history books record that approximately one hundred years ago people became more and more unsociable and were unwilling to make collaborative effort. Demonstrations for the good of the masses started to fade out. Quite why this happened was never exactly understood but it was suspected to have begun with the invention of the television which tricked you into thinking you didn't need to make effort to go out and talk to people. It stimulated you and you had to do nothing in return. Then, once it had your undivided attention, the television began to suggest you needed "things" and that you couldn't be happy without them. "Things" that must be purchased. But of course this was a lie and these advertisements were paid for by the factory owners who just wanted greater sales. Buying "things" became the backbone of the capitalist system. People worked incredibly hard making things in the factories, and then spent their free time buying things which they didn't really need to be happy. The people had stopped thinking for themselves and had started to rely on the television to know what was right and what was wrong. So when the government started to make further changes which would detrimentally affect them and their life in the city, the majority of people just accepted it without a murmur. Television told them to. Having realised what they could get away with, the government made change after change, squeezing the working people to the point where they worked so hard that their health and family started to fall to pieces. The government cut budgets for the city and

soon the roads, hospitals, libraries and schools started to fall to pieces through a lack of care. The money saved by cutting these budgets was then used to construct grand buildings, parks and luxurious facilities for the people who lived on the Island.

Lech studied the television as the demonstration story unfolded before his eyes. Suddenly scuffles broke out, people were fighting against the police using placards as weapons. Events such as these were new to Lech, and the others in the bar who were all now paying the screen undivided attention. Listening to the news reporter, it was disclosed that the crowd were campaigning for the release of a man. A man who had been taken against his will from the city years ago. The placards accused the government of having falsely imprisoned him. He was a man named Seoul, a highly respected and successful business man. The news reporter continued that Seoul was actually a dangerous criminal and member of the terrorist organisation known as For the Future Generations. Recently the media had broadcasted several reports regarding this illegal group of people, all damning reports proposing them as nothing more than common criminals. Apparently they wanted anarchy to rule the world so they went about causing disruption and endangering people's lives. Recently a new law had been passed by the government which made it illegal to be part of, help, or know anybody who was a member of For the Future Generations organisation. The law permitted the use of torture to extract information should you be suspected of having some connection to the group.

"Terrible isn't it" said a new voice to Lech.

"Those people on the screen just want to make a better life for everyone, but the police are beating them to shit on the orders of those bastards from the Island".

Lech turned to face this voice with intriguing attitude. Before him stood a very pretty petite lady.

"And you know," she said, pausing to glance at the screen again.

"Those police live here in the city. They have to put up with the same terrible environmental conditions as we do. And here we are today, fighting each other". She gently shook her head with disbelief.

"I've heard very little about For the Future Generations" responded Lech; sensing she would be able to enlighten him more. Half hoping he could get acquainted with this smouldering beauty a little more. Her deep soulful eyes had already begun to hypnotise him.

"They are a small band of people who want to make the world a better place" she said in a matter of fact way.

"They want to end this bullshit rule by the richest people and bring power back to the masses"

“Our city is crumbling; it’s polluted and dying” her head gently shook again, this time with sadness.

“The majority of people within this city are isolated from each other. They either work like crazy in a factory or are sat at home watching television being spoon fed lies. For many, shopping forms the only glimmer of finding some temporary happiness, unless you want to go out every night and get wrecked”.

“Buying things has become the only pursuit for many. It’s so shallow. It’s an insult to our astonishingly creative minds”. She looked back at the screen.

Lech had fallen in love with her passion, consideration and responsibility. She was a fighter, a very attractive quality, and rare.

“So more than six billion people live on a rock, spinning through space at an incredible pace, hypnotised by a destructive man made illusion and so isolated they can do nothing to snap out of it”; Lech poetically summarised.

“Very nicely put” she said offering her hand. “I’m Katie by the way and I loved your set earlier”.

Bang! The television showed the one and only city news station on fire, apparently a bomb by the anarchic group, For the Future Generations. Things were intensifying down on the street, more police began to arrive and then a helicopter. Unexpectedly the news channel was suddenly interrupted to cover the days sport and weather. The demonstration received no further coverage that evening.

By daybreak the street commotion had died down. The fires were out, but scorch marks remained on the adjacent buildings and tarmac road surface. Cleaning teams were frantically removing evidence that the riot had ever happened. But many of the citizens of the city had seen it with their very own eyes, and they had spread the news like wild fire. Feelings were running high. Despite the brainwashing attempted by the television news channel, the people knew instinctively deep down that something was not right. For the Future Generations was not a terrorist group or anarchists. The people were stirring as they always do when revolution is waking.

In the following weeks Lech met up with Katie several times for drinks and walks, which always involved intellectual discussion of some sort or another. He delighted in the way she got heated when discussing issues which obviously meant so much to her. She was without doubt a rebel with a cause. She awakened feelings in his heart, feelings he had long forgotten, but were flooding back. She was invigorating.

“Come meet some of my friends” said the text she sent him a few days later.



## Chapter 9

# The Meeting

Lech was late for a date. He walked speedily down the street, weaving through the people who ambled without any evident hunger for a destination. From distant memory the place he was looking for was about five minutes away, tucked down a small side street, he had been there a few times in the past. It was not the most eye catching place, and had no neon signs or fancy machines to play, a simple old school “pub” where sometimes live entertainment would be laid on. Katie’s instructions had been to turn left at the Chicken Chicken store, and then head down the alleyway until you reach a crossroads. Then turn left. Do not go straight on she had emphatically warned. You will end up in a mess if you go straight on. Then maybe two minutes later you will come across The Glass House.

Sure enough Katie’s instructions were accurate. As Lech drew closer to the pub he began having flash backs from his previous visits, though he couldn’t remember when or with whom he had last visited. Maybe that was due to him being completely wasted at the time. As Lech paused before pushing open the entrance door his name was called from behind, a familiar voice, he melted whenever he was in her presence.

“Hello” Katie said in a warm and glad to see you manner. She gave a welcoming peck on the cheek and momentarily held him, then pulled away and looked him straight in the eye. Deep thinking and considerate eyes. Having exchanged sufficient pleasantries they elected to enter the pub. As Katie removed her ankle length trench coat Lech could see that she was dressed a little different than usual. When they had previously met she had worn drab grey and unimaginative clothes, much like everybody else in the city. But tonight she was radically different. Her style reminded him of the 1970’s, when the magical glam rock era was parading through fashion. Lech was a big fan of David Bowie, and Katie would not have looked out of place on a Bowie album cover. Cool and cute, paisley swirls danced on her. Lech loved the way she dressed tonight; he proudly stood next to her. Being bowled over by the presence of another person was quite a forgotten sensation for Lech. He felt an intense natural energy rushing through his body like no drug he had ever consumed. He could rarely stop thinking about her for a few seconds. Extra concentration was required to keep up with the conversation.

The bar contained a light scattering of people. Some sipping drinks alone, others in small groups pursuing quiet conversation. Lech ordered two glasses of fresh juice from the bar, a mix of tropical fruits. They sipped their drinks in unison. The juice was freshly squeezed and sent tingles through their bodies. Katie asked about his day, and what he had been up to since they last had met. She enthused about his music and found great pleasure discussing the band and the crazy characters within it. They were all talented in so many different ways. Lech told her about new songs they were penning and the latest gigs which had been confirmed. The word on the street was that they were cool and the next big thing, so they were asked to perform more and more. Katie had been a promising piano player once upon a time but distractions in life meant her potential had not been realised, but she promised Lech and herself one day that she would return to it.

The entrance door opened and three men walked in, all wearing similar style clothes to Katie. Lech was intrigued. Colourful flowing trench coats and hair dyed. The apparent leader of the pack had bright red hair, the others orange and bright yellow respectively. Katie caught their eye and each acknowledged her in turn with a subtle hand gesture. So this must be the friends I am here to meet thought Lech, what a colourful bunch. They certainly stood out from the blandness of the crowd, and sported various styles of facial hair and piercings to nose and ears, with chunky silver rings on their fingers. Katie introduced each of them to Lech in reverse order of importance. Warm smiles and serious handshakes opened the relationship.

“So you are Lech” reaffirmed Conan the red haired one.

“Katie tells us you have quite a band rising up at the moment”. Lech nodded and politely thanked them for the implied compliment.

“It’s good to be out and about” continued Conan, “many folk just stay home and plug themselves into the television, that’s a fate worse than death. Such an insult to the life you have been given”. Lech wholeheartedly agreed.

They continued to chat about music and venues, past legends and best concerts of all time. Conan steered the conversation, his companions occasionally chipping in with valued comments. Sometimes the three men discussed things between themselves in whispers. Lech strained for clues but failed.

The meeting became more relaxed as the conversation rolled on and they realised they had much in common. Music definitely had the power to unite people. Then a few intellectual topics aired. Why did men go to war? The majority of people, no matter what colour, nationality or religion, just wanted to have a quiet life, working and looking after their friends and family. Only a very small fraction of the world population had the authority to start war and for some reason the majority of people accepted their instruction. Perhaps people of the world needed to meet with each other to realise how similar we all are. Lech suggested a gigantic annual music festival with a vast range bands to see and activities to experience. Strangers of the world would get the opportunity to meet and realise their similarities. Life would be different if we all got to meet face to face.

“Perhaps warmongers should also attend the festival; it might bring them back into the real world” joked Conan with a dash of seriousness in his tone.

And so the conversation moved along to the recent disturbances in the city. Citizens fighting with the police, demanding back the incarcerated man they called Seoul. Katie’s friends seemed to know a lot about this subject and were very passionate and afforded Lech much more detailed information than was provided by the media. Apparently Seoul had been a city dweller just like them, a very astute man, who had created a very successful chain of shops. He had not inherited any of his empire; it was built by him from scratch. He was good at business, sold good quality things that people really needed, at a reasonable price. He had no need to advertise as word of mouth brought him evermore custom. He always took profit and either used it to improve the world or it was reinvested back into the business. Normally, when a business person was successful and got rich they would turn their back on their city origins and join the minority people living on the Island, where the air was clean and the lifestyle luxurious. But Seoul had decided not to follow this normal pattern of behaviour. Instead he concentrated on enlarging his chain, constantly improving the quality and value for money of his products, delicious foods and fantastic natural drinks, clothes with individuality and incredible books. His stores got busier and busier. People appreciated the good value and loved the alternative products not normally found within the bland high street.

Then one day a man from the Island, named Suckall, who owned a worldwide chain of stores which competed directly with Seoul, decided that enough was enough. He was noticeably losing trade to Seoul’s ever popular chain. Suckall’s products were expensive and poor quality and he relied on constant advertising to obtain sales. So Suckall started a campaign of negative advertising and began broadcasting untrue news stories, smearing the good name of Seoul and his products. Suckall had a friend who controlled the media so it was quite a simple exercise. The good reputation of Seoul’s empire was quickly destroyed and sales plummeted. Suckall even managed to get the media to run stories purporting that Seoul was a bad man who beat his wife, abused drugs and drink, and cared little for anyone but himself. Nothing was further from the truth, but all the media outlets refused to let Seoul air his side of the story. Funnily enough, one person owned all the television, newspaper and radio stations, and that person lived on the Island, next door to Suckall. They conspired often for material gain, and destroying Seoul’s self-built impressive empire was just one of a long line of evil collaborations. They laughed together at how powerful they were.

The idea of capitalism is that people get the best quality and value for money as a free market rewards the smartest and best organised entrepreneurs. But the reality of this situation is that a few super rich people own everything, preventing competition, and permitting poor quality products and high prices. Once Seoul’s empire had been reduced to tatters by the media lies, Suckall lowered the quality of his own products even further and ramped up the prices as there was no longer any competition. Suckall was interested in one thing, making as much money for himself as possible. He had absolutely no concern for anybody’s welfare but his own.

The conversation rushed like a fast river, and Lech found himself juggling with new facts and beliefs. He recognised an energy growing inside of him. He wanted to do something about this injustice. He wanted to fight for his people, the people of this city who deserved more than the current deal. He had enjoyed this evening with his new friends, and the delectable Katie. He had learned much. The night drew to a close and the new friends exited the pub and went their separate ways, all stimulated and thinking. Lech's brain was so active he had momentarily forgotten about his growing attraction to Katie. At precisely that moment of thought his phone beeped. It was a message from Katie.

**You enjoyed tonight?**

He certainly had and replied same.

In the following weeks, Lech met with Katie and his new friends several times. Occasionally other characters would appear who also dressed alternatively to the norm, always with a strong attitude for righting wrong.

“That’s quite a group of friends you have” Lech said to Katie as they sat on a bench in a park munching on sandwiches and sipping coffee one afternoon.

“They like you” she replied.

“We have much in common” she continued.

Lech was not sure if she had meant her and him or the group as a whole. He hoped both were simultaneously meant.

“We need your help Lech” Katie continued, then paused.

“You are getting a great following behind your band”. She knew his music writing recently had been profoundly influenced by conversation with these new friends, to rise up and demand justice. Electrostar music was responsible for a new and massively popular feeling amongst the youngsters in the city. Other bands were taking notice and copying the trend but Lech remained at the cutting edge.

“We need you to help us Lech” she repeated.

Lech pondered, constructing his sentence. He had a burning question.

“Who is WE” he asked

Katie paused, then proudly declared, “For the Future Generations”

Lech was silent, but he had had an inkling. This new group of friends seemed very organised and knew their facts in great detail. Their passion was raging. Lech smiled and Katie smiled back. Oh how he adored her, but this situation, here and now, was about For the Future Generations. If there was a chance to get closer with Katie it



would have to wait for the moment. Maybe he should talk to her about his feelings, but he didn't want to scare her out of his life.

For The Future Generations, Katie explained, was a secret group of about thirty similar minded people. They were all fed up with the poor deal that people of the city were getting. They were angry that a minority of people lived in luxury on the Island, and in the main they had been rewarded this prize due to inheritance or by unfairly manipulating the people of the city with advertising lies and businesses which preyed on human instincts. The city and the world desperately needed to be rebalanced, creating a smart society as a base for the future. Food sources needed to be wholesome and energy sources sustainable and non-polluting. High quality health care for all was a necessity and people needed to be encouraged to maintain a healthy lifestyle. Advertising and businesses which were socially useless would be outlawed. People would be provided with easily available and high quality education facilities and encouraged to embark on such courses to better themselves and consequently society. Instead of mindless television entertainment, the people of the city would be encouraged and assisted to be creative and express themselves, be it art or film or sport or conversation. Social events would be heavily endorsed by the government, bringing people out of their little apartments to celebrate together the many wondrous things about the world and life. In essence the inherent needs of all the people needed to be satisfied.

Capitalism would remain, but a true market place needed to be instilled and sharply policed, where entrepreneurs competed and were rewarded if they provided the best organisation and quality products. For society's sake, measures would be taken so that money would be downgraded in importance. Money is a fantastic measuring concept but it was recognised that obsessive pursuit of its gain always caused major problems for society, so For the Future Generations wanted to make a few dramatic changes. Firstly, all inheritance would be taxed at one hundred per cent, so everybody at birth is financially equal. Society would strive to provide for its children the best nourishment, education and health care as was humanly possible. Once state education was complete they would enter the adult world and self-determine their future. Teachers would become one of the most prestigious and best paid professions and the education system would be designed to teach the children mathematics, languages and science as well as social interaction and all about the wonderful world they lived in. Self-confidence, the most important factor to help people grow, would be instilled from the earliest age and great energy would be focused on developing individuals so their personal strengths would be realised for the benefit of all.

To avoid obsession with money the system would be greatly simplified. Individually owned businesses at a local level would be encouraged so they would become a stakeholder in their local environment. All bank accounts, be it personal or business would be transparent. That is, you can look at anybody's bank account; see how much money they have, where it comes from, and where it goes. It would be like walking around naked, and would focus citizens on what is really important in life. People would treat each other as equals without pretence, and crucially this scheme would remove the secrecy, lying and manipulation so prevalent in today's world. This open system would be policed by some of the best minds that society could produce and they would be paid handsomely for keeping society free from harmful obsessive greed, a cancerous disease.

The final core value of For the Future Generations would be that people would work and plan to the best of their ability to make the world as good a place as possible for all, and especially for all the future generations.

“It’s easy to think we are the only generation ever to live this life on this planet, but there are trillions of unborn citizens to think and care for, and this is not happening at the moment, which is of upmost concern”. Katie was tirelessly animated with all she had voiced in the past twenty minutes.

It was a lot for Lech to absorb, but it was an exciting prospect, a radical change to the world, to work hard and to the best you can for your race. That was a beautiful concept. Then he remembered how For the Future Generations was portrayed by the media as a gang of dangerous anarchists. Nothing further than the truth he thought. Those that control the cities of the world and live off ill-gotten gains have much to lose if these radical ideas ever blossomed into government.

“So we need you to help spread the word” Katie said returning to the opening of the conversation.

“We need you to get our vision out there” she followed.

“We have no access to the general media; it’s all controlled by the government”. Lech nodded in agreement.

“And there’s something else” Katie announced. Lech found more anticipation.

“We are planning to find Seoul” she paused, “and bring him home”.

“We have a plan and a team ready to carry out the mission, and we want you to be part of it, you have much to offer us”.

Lech sat on the bench with a colossal amount of new information to digest. But he was not fazed by it; rather he felt evermore strength growing inside him, a formidable strength that only grows when you have a healthy objective in life. Katie smiled at him in the sweetest manner and they decided to walk some more around the park.



## Chapter 10

# The Rescue

Lech arrived at the street corner just before the agreed time. He was not sure who or how many people were also meant to be meeting here so he was a little anxious. The night was dark and sinister shadows cast across shop doorways. For a moment Lech was alone, then the mighty Conan arrived. He was also dressed in black, just as Lech had been instructed. They greeted each other warmly as they were now considerably close friends and both had much to say at the secret meetings held by For the Future Generations.

Then Rake arrived, a tall and thin man with long natural blonde hair, a man of many talents by all accounts. He too wore black, including a hat to hold and cover his bright hair.

“Just one more to come”; said Conan, keeping regular checks on his watch and the street about them.

Several minutes later the fourth member arrived, Rebecca. Lech had never met her before. He gleaned sultry dark features and enchanting eyes, despite a woolly hat pulled firmly down over her eye brows. She smiled at him. Wow, thought Lech privately, this organisation is full of lovely ladies. Then he thought about Katie and why she was not part of this mission. In the past months he had grown fond of her, but things had not progressed to the greater intimacy he had hoped for. He had day dreamed about her many times, but something's are just not meant to be.

Rebecca assumed control of the group immediately as she had no time to waste. Having outlined the mission steps each member confirmed to her, their leader, that they understood.

“I will provide greater detail as we travel” said Rebecca with quiet authority.

“The truck will be here any minute”.

As they sat in the back of the truck, having found the best perch possible in the darkness, Rebecca explained that they were heading for a small village on the coast, and

that it was approximately a four hour road trip. Once there, they would find a small fishing boat waiting for them.

The gentle vibration of the truck lulled Lech into minor relaxation, his mind drifted off to many places, but periodically he reminded himself where and who he was with. How life had changed. Here he was in the back of a truck, with an outlawed underground group, embarking on a mission to the Island to find, and bring back to the city, an imprisoned man he did not even know. His thoughts were broken by Rebecca, shining a torch in his face. She introduced herself again to him and formally offered her hand to shake. He savoured the softness of her hand and gently shook it smiling, making eye contact as best as possible. She had been busy organising. Talking to the truck driver about the route. Confirming with Conan various technical details. She was obviously a very well organised person who left nothing to chance. The mission was of incredible importance to her.

Rebecca was a doctor at the city hospital. She specialised in helping children with cancer, a common occurrence here in the grossly polluted city. About five years ago she had become a member of For the Future Generations, having been recruited by healthcare colleagues. Several members of the group were from the same hospital, motivated to join by their daily exposure to symptoms of the poor quality of life within the city. The food and water was contaminated, the smog and rain full of dangerous chemical discharges from the factories. Two years ago Rebecca had become the leader of For the Future Generations. She was smart, acutely organised and passionately cared for people. Though not a violent person, she accepted that sometimes measured aggressive action was necessary to bring about change for the better of all. Lech delighted in her passion. Even in her black clothes and woolly hat, she radiated beauty. They talked about Lech's music and the positive influence it was having on the youth of the city.

After a good few hours the truck started bumping down minor roads and Lech thought they must be getting closer to the coast. Conan confirmed this to him; he could now smell the sea air which was invigorating in comparison to the retched gas at home. Shortly thereafter they disembarked from the rear of the truck and found themselves in pitch black. No street lights. No houses or other vehicles. Even the moon was hiding behind dark drawn out clouds. The flash of a single torch light guided the party down a gravel pathway to a small timber jetty. The moon peeked out a little and Lech witnessed the outline of several small fishing boats bobbing about, harnessed to the jetty.

Soon they were aboard, and leaving the harbour. The engine purred confidently as they headed out into the dark and foreboding sea. Rake was in charge of the boat. The Captain. His nautical experience was the reason he was selected for this mission. He knew the sea and the dangers it could conjure up at a moment's notice. The boat trip took just over an hour and Rebecca efficiently used the time to ensure her team knew exactly what they were to do. They came ashore on the Island with the benefit of noble moonlight, a very quiet beach which quickly turned from sand to shrubs and trees. As the four headed up the beach, Rebecca pulled a self-drawn map from her pocket and used the torch to open it so it faced her. Pausing for a few seconds she produced a compass

and quickly checked her bearings. She had never been to the Island before so was relying on intelligence gathered by others, and instinct.

“This way”; she whispered with authority, directing the team to a small concrete building which stood where the beach collided with a small and apparently brand new road.

The concrete building housed an electronic device which constantly scanned for any activity from this point onwards to the nearest town. The resulting data was fed back to a central intelligence computer on the Island. Of concern was its ability to detect people, so this device needed to be disabled to prevent the mission coming to an abrupt end. This was Lech’s calling. He was an electronics whizz kid who had learned much from his time conducting research and development in the television factory. His experience had been quadrupled by his own experiments at home; he used to tinker with artificial intelligence and often hacked into prestigious security systems. Although most of his knowledge had been gained when he was young, and now was a little rusty, Lech was confident he could deal with this surveillance device. Conan was also confident in his abilities, which is why he had proposed that the organisation recruit Lech.

The residents of the Island had built a state of the art military hardware system to protect from attack by the outside world. If the system identified a threat it had the capability of releasing an armada of robots to extinguish it, robots that could travel across all terrain, robots that could fly. In the past, several renegade groups had attempted to invade the Island, but had been thwarted by this system. The robots were fierce and programmed to kill rather than make arrests. The people of the Island were confidently above the law so prosecution for murder, or denying human rights was not a consideration. Conan carefully broke open the entrance door to the building with a metal jemmy he had been keeping by his side from the outset of the evening. Inside a seemingly brand new machine whirred with flashing lights and the occasional bleep.

“Here she is” said Conan, introducing Lech to the machine.

“She’s all yours”

“You have ten minutes Lech” added Rebecca, affectionately touching his arm. She knew the system could only be disabled for a period of up to thirty minutes, so once Lech had succeeded, the clock was ticking.

He got to work and produced a laptop from his bag and started to tap the keyboard while the other three kept a tentative guard, watching shadows. Lech ummed and arred a little. Things were not quite as straight forward as he had expected, but things never are. The system was encrypting passwords in a different manner to that in which he had been led to believe, but it was not a crisis. He thought hard for a few seconds, conscious of his time constraints. Then he assembled a logical plan of action in his head. He started tapping the keyboard in bursts of purpose. Two minutes later a smile spread over his face. He had successfully hacked into the machine and disabled the surveillance system. With a few further taps he was done.

“System disabled” Lech proudly announced to Rebecca and the team.

The three congratulated him with touch and smiling eyes, then Rebecca focused them all on the next stage of the mission.

The four dark figures walked swiftly through woods to the outskirts of the town, occasionally stumbling on sticks and stones due to the limited light. Once they could go no further without being bathed in street light they stopped as they were not dressed for the occasion. All four stripped to their underwear and put on a prepared set of clothes neatly folded and placed in their rucksacks. Clothes which were to blend them in with the natives.

“Urgh” uttered Conan as he started to put on a shirt he would not normally be seen dead in.

Rake responded to the whining Conan with a reserved chuckle.

“Suits you” he said with an appropriate hint of sarcasm.

So the four, all dressed in expensive but bland clothes, headed into the town. They quietly exchanged observations regarding the cleanliness and newness of everything. The roads and buildings were apparently brand new. No litter, no grime. Grass lawns acutely manicured.

“I like this place. I might move here” suggested Rake with more subtle sarcasm added to warm his companions.

Rebecca knew they must move swiftly, quietly and decisively in this built up area. Dithering could potentially alert the local inhabitants to something not being right. So they strolled with confidence, giving the appearance of a group of friends. Conan and Rebecca arm in arm, to which Lech experienced a few pangs of jealousy. Then for a few seconds his mind filled with thoughts of Katie. Little did Lech know but he would never see her again. She had relocated far across the world, to find more people just like him, to recruit smart and strong minds for the organisation. She was some kind of revolution angel.

“Here” said Rebecca and they all paused outside an enormous circular building set in the middle of a square. Rebecca found a secluded place and consulted the map. This was the right place. A set of double entrance doors blocked their path. If Lech had done his homework correctly these doors would open once he inserted a security card which he had made at home. No more glitches he hoped as time was precious. The card ran through the reader and gave a piercing screech. A red light flashed adjacent the wall mounted reading machine.

“Damn” said Lech with great frustration.

He tried again. Same result. The alarm was incessant and echoed about the square. Lech’s companions grew tense. The third failed attempt with his security card was

enough. Conan stepped forward and took three kicks at the meeting style of the doors. On the third strike his almighty boot buckled them. The lock no longer served any purpose. Two more powerful kicks and the doors opened sufficiently to allow entry. The alarm seemed to scream louder and louder as the four invaders clambered through the broken doors with great urgency.

“Follow me” shouted Rebecca, her voice urgent and commanding.

They passed a reception desk manned by a smartly dressed young lady who just stared in shock having witnessed a very different entrance to her building than she normally experienced. The alarm inside the building was ear splitting and broadcasted from ceiling mounted units every ten metres or so. Rebecca led her team down a flight of stairs, then another, a quick look at the map, then down more stairs. Finally having reached the basement they ran along passageways, all of which were the same colour and appearance. It would be easy to get lost here she thought to herself and carefully made mental notes in preparation for their exit.

Eventually they reached a dead end, in front of them a door. A big heavy looking door you would expect to see on a bank vault.

“This is it!” cried Rebecca and turned to Lech.

“Do your best” she instructed and smiled with him, conscious that they were no longer under cover, the irritating alarms signalling the mission had increased exponentially in danger level. Lech took another device from his pocket. This too had been constructed at home. Once the device was connected to the centre of the door he pushed a small button on its front panel. The device beeped, emitted a range of coloured flashes and then produced garbled white noise. After thirty seconds or so they were treated to a pleasant sound which was similar to a door bell, a sound to which Lech rejoiced by punching the air.

“Unlocked” he confirmed back to Rebecca.

The team shuffled backwards to give Conan room. He gripped and rotated the locking wheel in an anticlockwise direction. Once it would turn no more he pulled, and the heavy door slowly opened towards them. There inside was a very confused man, standing only 5’ tall, with bedraggled hair and poor complexion. He looked like he hadn’t smiled for a very long time, his eyes empty of passion.

Rebecca stepped past Conan and introduced herself to the man. Then turning to her loyal team she announced the stranger as Seoul, the past leader of For the Future Generations, who had been held captive on the Island for many years. They all quickly introduced themselves, a little in awe and also shock at the smallness and bad condition the man was in.

“But now we must go, we have much to do still, and the alarm bells are ringing” explained Rebecca breaking up the introductions.

Having negotiated her team through the maze of corridors and staircases, Rebecca followed them out through the ground floor entrance doors. The alarm was still screaming and inquisitive people were gathering in clumps about the square but thankfully none appeared to be of a threat. So now numbering five, they ran out of the square. Conan having adopted the role of Seoul's guardian, keeping him where he could see him at all times. As they retraced their steps they soon found themselves back at the woods and then into the darkness, this time running and stumbling more often due to their pace. Seoul stumbled twice. He was weak from lack of exercise and fresh air. Each time he fell Conan lifted him back to his feet and reassured him that everything would be alright. As they left the woods and passed the concrete building which they had earlier entered, a whirring noise appeared in the air. It was dark so they could not see what was generating the noise. But it was a definite mechanical sound. The five scrambled through the trees and shrubs and ran down the beach to their stationed fishing boat. Rake arrived first and immediately leapt aboard and started flicking switches and turning knobs. The engine roared into life as the last of the party clambered aboard. They turned and then slowly gained speed as they headed once more out into the darkness of the sea. This time the moon illuminated them and the path ahead. It was now a cloudless sky but the beauty and greatness of the universe was not apparent to the five as adrenalin pumped through their veins.

The mechanical whir which hovered in the air above them was louder now and it had become visible. A metallic shape was flying above them, a robot. It was probably tracking their position and relaying information back to the security centre on the Island. Then from the east another robot arrived, positioning itself alongside the other, they whirred together. The moon bounced beams of light off their metallic skins. The boat was now at full speed, but their destination remained a long way away, a distant speck on the horizon. Conan lifted the lid of a box tucked away in the fish storage compartment and drew out a phaser gun. It was much bigger than the equipment a gangster would use on the streets of the city. This piece of kit was stolen from the military and Lech guessed it would have quite a kick.

Zzap. The phaser unleashed a torrent of light upwards and instantly a fireball consumed one of the flying robots. Seconds later it crashed into the sea and the flames were extinguished as it sank.

"Nice one" said Rebecca with an exhausted smile.

Then from several directions, more robots appeared, all hovering at a similar height. The whirring noise started to become sickening and grave worry spread through the crew.

Zzzzap. A blue stream of light dropped from one of the robots and hit the rear of the boat, shaking it violently. The damage caused was masked by a mixture of flames and smoke. Then another explosion, this time at the front of the boat.

"We can't take much more of this" cried Rake as he struggled to counteract the effect the laser strikes were having on their intended course.



Conan released another bolt from his phaser. Another good shot. A similar explosion to the first, illuminating the boat and another robot crashed into the sea. The explosion had lit up maybe seven or eight robots that were now flying above them. Conan unleashed a torrent of shots with supreme accuracy but the situation was becoming desperate. Rebecca calculated they were not going to survive this onslaught, so she whispered to Conan. Seconds later yet another explosion hit the boat, the penultimate. It was not built for such punishment and its structural members started to fail. The dark cold waters of the sea beckoned the team and Rebecca feared for the worst. Conan took aim and blasted relentlessly into the air, taking out several robots and then he handed the phaser to Rake who continued the defensive action.

Moments after Conan had leapt with Seoul into the sea, the boat broke in two. Virtually straight down the middle, within a few minutes it was gone, beneath the waves. Rebecca, Lech and Rake had waited until it was apparent that the vessel was about to sink, then followed Conan and Seoul into the menacing sea. It was horrendously cold and the waves were unforgiving. They all knew that this was potentially the end for them. Weariness spread through their bodies and the cold numbed them of feelings and thought.

Lech awoke with daylight about him. He was beyond cold and not sure if he was dead or not, his vision was blurred and he could not move his limbs. Suddenly he was lifted by a powerful force, and seconds later dropped onto a soft surface. Sand thought Lech, I must be alive, and he was, barely. As his eyes began to focus he recognised Conan. He tried to talk but was unable to.

“It’s ok Lech, your safe now” reassured Conan who was also standing over Seoul.

This tiny and insignificant sandy bay had a cave from which staggered Rebecca. She walked towards them with desperate sadness in her eyes.

“We lost Rake” she quietly explained, fighting back tears for the good of the mission. He’s lying over there. The cold claimed him. Lech was barely able to remember what had happened the night before, but the news of Rake’s death shook him into life.

“A true hero” Rebecca continued “and he will be remembered so”.

“And the robots?” Lech recalled the ferocious onslaught to which they had been subjected.

“They destroyed the boat, but were unable to distinguish us from the waves” Rebecca replied.

“The people of the Island did not have as good a security system as they thought” she continued expressing a little comfort.

“We were saved by the waves?” questioned Lech rhetorically. Then he saddened as his thoughts returned to Rake, lying nearby.

“Yes” said Rebecca, affectionately placing a hand on Lech. “The waves saved us”.

With great effort Lech, Rebecca, Conan and the almost dead looking Seoul got to their feet and with exhausted sadness and all the love they could muster, bid farewell to Rake. They had no time to bury him. The presence of his corpse would hopefully suggest to the government forces that they had all died in the sea. Rake would be helping the cause of For the Future Generations even after his death. The four ambled up the beach towards a natural pathway, knowing they must go into hiding quickly. The government forces would soon be emphatically searching for them having had the Island security compromised in such a way, and with Seoul potentially free, the residents of the Island would be in great fear of the consequences.



## Chapter 11

# The Future

Twelve months passed and a very different Seoul stood proud on a platform built within the city square. He was addressing twenty thousand people or more. It had been a long time since the city had witnessed such an event. Seoul was now physically and mentally robust and radiated immense power with a delicate beauty. His speech lifted the crowd with ease. He used words to lovingly caress the heart of every single person, whilst invigorating them to the core. They wanted to work for him in return. He was the first born leader they had ever witnessed and it was intoxicating.

Seoul's voice boomed from the speakers and soaked into the crowd. He warned them that they must stand strong and be true to each other if they were to reach the promised land of freedom, health and equality. Rapturous approval raced from the crowd back to the platform.

The people of the city had gathered here today under the banner of For the Future Generations. The organisation was still officially classified as illegal, and the government had done its best to discredit them publicly at every opportunity during the past months, but their rising support was overwhelming. Sometimes opposition demonstrations turned ugly, and the police used indiscriminate and vicious aggression against man, woman and child in an effort to contain the crowd and its feelings. But slowly it dawned on the government that changes would be necessary if they were to maintain their grip on power. So hospitals and other public facilities within the city unexpectedly got additional money spent on them. It improved their external appearance immediately, but nothing more than that. It was a token gesture exerting minimal effort and expenditure. Simultaneously, the government stepped up efforts to infiltrate any organisations which they felt were a threat to them. They tried to turn the supporters of change against themselves with lies and clever manipulation. The television lies were relentless, planting incriminating evidence and trying to jail good people, but the citizens recognised what the government was doing, they were growing wise alongside their new spiritual leader and would not be misled. They sought truth with tenacity. And so the government released yet more funds. Greater investment was made, the staffing and equipping of hospitals and schools dramatically increased and efforts began to reduce pollution within the city. But the people knew the government actions were only motivated by a desire to hold onto power and maintain their lavish

lifestyles on the Island. With ever growing numbers attending demonstration rallies the people had voted with their feet for Seoul to be their leader. Word of mouth had educated them that he was a good man, a man of the people, a man with a vision, and they were very angry that he had been held prisoner for many years on the Island.

As the months went by Seoul's power grew more so every day, and the people of the city started to shake off their depression. Grey despondency began to fade, and vibrant colour replaced it. Children talked excitedly in the street and in every nook and cranny the green shoots of spring started to appear. Seoul had concisely summarised and publicised the meaning of For the Future Generations. He constantly demanded that an immediate election should be held so the people could self-determine their future. The residents on the Island found this greatly troubling, for past elections, though democratic, only involved candidates with similar intentions. So each newly elected government had not been much different from the last one. There were never any major changes that people witnessed, and the government ministers always remained comfortably wealthy and resided on the Island. They had little knowledge or care for the conditions and suffering of the people from the city with all its social and environmental problems. Eventually, nearly two years after Seoul had returned, the government reluctantly agreed to hold new elections. Ever greater demonstrations coupled with factory strikes had persuaded them, they had to please the people or they would potentially lose everything.

So the elections were organised and a date set, the people felt good. They had for the first time collectively bargained and had achieved something they felt proud of. However the rich people of the Island were busy planning to rig the election. They expected Seoul to obtain a landslide victory unless they acted, so when election time came they fraudulently altered votes in their favour. The final result was a shock. A candidate from the Island had somehow won, just. Many recounts were carried out but the result was upheld. This was not unexpected to Seoul. He had anticipated acts of desperation, and so had cleverly instructed secret filming of the elections. The rigging of votes was exposed and shame thrown at the existing government. The elections were immediately rerun, and finally resulted in satisfaction. It was quite some time since Seoul had been washed up on a beach half dead, but he had finally got the official peoples vote and he was inaugurated as president. It was a glorious time for the people and they danced and partied for days. They felt a new dawn had arrived and were very willing to do the work to make the world a better place for all, a smart world where people were made to feel confident and loved. They would be educated and return the investment with hard work. They so wanted to be healthy and happy. Seoul assembled the smartest and fairest minds he could find and commenced government as president and leader of, the now legal, For the Future Generations party.

The character of a society stems from the style of leadership at the top, and anybody arriving from outer space during Seoul's reign as president would have thought what an amazing race humans are. With great energy they had suddenly decided to clean up their city, educate everybody, build strong communities and learn how to live healthily. The people of the Island, now dejected and without power, were not punished for their past selfish and manipulative ways but were openly invited to be part of the revolution of which many genuinely accepted and contributed with great effect. They learned that

material goods and hoarded wealth were not the ingredients to make them truly happy, so together Seoul's people set about building a fantastic new environment for them all to live within.

Lech sat back in his comfortable chair, he was writing another song. He never stopped these days, his creativity knew no bounds. A book also lay in draft form on his desk, ready for sending to a publisher for their comment. It was all about how people of the world had united to make a much better place for everyone to live, its title being Smart Evolution. Lech's phone beeped.

### **Meet me for lunch?**

The text was from Rebecca. After the dramatic adventure they had shared, culminating in the rescue of Seoul, they had both gone back to their original roles in life. Seoul's music had exploded across the youth scene of the city, promoting positivity and love. He regularly played venues throughout the city and many new bands had appeared which followed his unique style. Rebecca had returned to the city hospital and continued with her treatment of children. She was joyful at the extra funds the hospital was now receiving. New research programmes had commenced recently and she looked forward to a day, not too far in the future, when cancer would be eradicated, for she believed it to be wholly preventable once this dirty polluted city had been cleaned up.

Lech and Rebecca met for lunch by the old clock tower in the square. The square these days was full of shining independent shops and fancy pavement restaurants. Buskers filled the air with happy music and citizens strolled with smiles. The square pulsed with energy. Rebecca and Lech smiled and kissed on the lips. For a few seconds they stood motionless, intensely locked within each other's soul. As they broke eye contact and moved towards their favourite restaurant, fingers delicately entwined. Lech felt the ring on Rebecca's finger, where he had placed it on their wedding day several months back. A stunning diamond protected by green emeralds. Energy between them sizzled as they walked, words being rather insignificant.

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