

2050

The early morning light makes the black streets glow grey.

The air is always a little bit cleaner in the morning, before the city wakes and yawns its ugly mouth, belches its dirty morning breath into the sky.

We trail through, Meri and I. The houses are starting to light up, which is no surprise. We're in a wealthier area, and most of them can still afford the dregs of electricity available, but even here there's little work for a boy like me. Eighteen, strong, and there's not one job left in the whole of Llantrisant left for me. Meri's hair is aflame in the weak light, the only bright thing in a world of dull.

She wanders, sticking her head in the nooks of the winding road, the candlelight of her hair flickering in the shadows as she bends down to drainpipes and gaping bins and pulls out large shards of glass, fishing wire. She threads them along her belt; weapons, hunting gear, pretty talismans that twinkle grubbily against the leather. Our bikes are locked up at the end of the road- there's a slit in the alley where we've jammed them in. In the first days after the global energy crisis was announced, people used to steal anything they could, especially transport, so we still have the thick copper chains around them, just out of habit. There's no risk anymore. People stay inside, plugged into the Internet, into one of the many virtual realities in which they can lose themselves. Meri and I, and a few others, we can't afford it, so we band together in ragtag groups, scattered across the country. Only a few, because most of the people who can't pretend they're in a better world, a better Wales, they don't last long. I think, at the risk of sounding ridiculously pretentious, we survived because we weren't afraid to face what we'd done, instead of burying our heads in the metal and coal that is Welsh ground now.

First the industries soared, gobbled up energy at an alarming rate, and then collapsed, leaving millions destitute and the fossil fuels almost gone. Soon everything folded in, shattered, a smashed plate. The governments found their pockets empty as the steel plants shut and the hungry people raged against the golden doors of Parliament. Inside, things started to sour. There was no money left to fund new research into clean energy, into disease prevention, so we just lay back, hung a "Waiting for the end" sign on our doors and escaped to a pretty pixelated world with the few stores of energy we had left. The rest of us just wandered around trying to find food that didn't taste like soot.

We bike for hours, ostensibly on one such mission, till we get to The Place.

The Place is the only living thing for miles. The only good thing for miles. Nobody comes here. I think they don't like to be reminded of what was, what we threw away.

We throw our bikes against the gate at the front. It used to be a nature park, which is telling. The only nature that survived is the one we made a conscious effort to protect. We walk through the paved car park, empty of vehicles, and jump over the wooden stile, splinters sticking to our shredded jeans. We walk through the broken children's park, bright metal exoskeletons of long ago lifeless animals. We walk and walk and walk until we're so deep in the forest we don't even know our own names, we're just orange and green and brown and violet and red. Colours and flowers and leaves filling up our mouths until we aren't anything

but moving trees, loud where our brothers are quiet. Meri laughs, her mouth so bright and brassy in the emptiness that it feels like a bell, a calling for whatever lurks to come see us, the last lovers of nature in Wales. In the world.

We fall down, breathing too fast. She's covered in leaves, dirt. Small butter coloured petals dot her precariously; her collarbone, one curl of her hair, the curve of her wrist. We don't normally breathe this close, sit this close. They'd think we were in love, they'd think we want a baby, and they'd push us apart, send Meri to another group, deep down in North Wales or even in Cardiff. Cardiff is a hungry beast, a broken beast, the glass hearts of its buildings smoked brown; a decaying core, the rotting crown jewel in our burnt out country.

They don't want any more babies. People had too many, for fun, to mend relationships that couldn't be mended. They made them new instead of helping the abandoned ones. Then there were more and more of us, always wanting more and replacing the green with grey and blue and oil black. Besides, I don't want a baby. I wouldn't want to bring a new generation into our mess. We should just let humans end here, let Wales mend itself. I look at Meri still panting in the leaves. She's the most alive thing in the town, but out here she almost seems dim. Maybe, when it was still around, she would've been described in metaphors of nature. I've read books where they do that. Maybe her lips are the colour of a rose, but I've never seen one.

"This is what they should've done," I say. My face is still turned towards her. Her face is still turned towards the sky. We don't touch. "This is where they went wrong. They should've loved it like we do, but not like we do, because we love it out of its scarcity."

"Gwyrdd, what are you talking about?" Her eyes are closed. I sit up fast, sending leaves scattering up behind me. I look down at her and my mouth starts moving like a waterfall.

"If they'd loved it, if they'd cherished it. Taught about it in schools, taught people to respect it-they would've stopped being so apathetic. The public, I mean, they would've raged against the corporations. If they knew how to love it, they were shown its beauty-they would've found different energy. Cut down on the rampant globalisation. Nature wouldn't be dying if they loved it. That's what I would've done. I would've shown people how to love it. We could have sustained Wales for us, for our children."

"It's not that easy." She sighs, and it sounds like when you put a shell to your ear. Like she's already thought of this, already two steps ahead. "That wouldn't work. People already loved it, loved nature, but they didn't care enough to do anything. It wouldn't do anything."

I lie back down. My voice falls like leaves, softer. She turns her head, more willing to listen when I'm quiet.

"I have books my mother used to read to me. Old books, really old. About the ancient Welsh myths." She raises an eyebrow at me. Her hair is liquid sunbursts, spread out behind her statuesque face. "The people in there treated the earth, the rivers and leaves and flowers as if they were the most important things in the world. They are, I guess. And nature flourished the most with those people. Why didn't we read them those books? Why didn't those stories shake them out of their apathy? Why didn't they realise? They just thought that nothing would happen, or that someone else would make a change."

"They tried, they sent teachers to primary schools to try teach children about nature,"

"Yeah but they were half hearted, they weren't real attempts. They should've told them, simply, not just weakly. Not just primary. Secondary, university- adults. They needed to be told plainly; if we keep going we will die. We will kill all nature. If they'd have been more educated, Wales would still exist like it did before."

She smiles at me, so I know she agrees. "And if we'd have built that tidal power plant in the Severn that would've helped." She cocks her red eyebrow at me because she knows those are my favourite nights, the nights we bike down to the coast when everybody else in our group of survivors is asleep. We lay on the sand-mostly tar by now-feel it stick and pull at the skin of our backs. We trace constellations in the gleaming white-violet eyes of the limited stars not drowning in light pollution and the ever present smog. We watch the pearl of the moon-the only thing so far we haven't ruined-cast silver onto the waves. I scream at the sky then, let my tongue tumble into the ancient local language my mother taught me. Yell how we were too lazy to really implement any other energy mechanism than what we could scrape out of fossils. Cry as the waves wash away the pollution that tints our skin and leave it with something good, something salty and wild. I love her, those nights. Those nights where the darkness rubs away the fact that the Wales we see isn't different from the Wales of 2015, 35 years ago now, or the Wales of 1015, or the Wales of 150. In those nights we become wild druids, fed by salty air and the protectors of nature.

"The tidal power would've saved us. We would've honoured Wales that way. Used what it had given us-my mother told me it was the third most powerful tidal range in the world-and saved the country. Kept it alive without cutting down its lungs. Used it to save itself."

She opens her eyes and they're a screaming white blue. That's the only thing I dislike about Meri. Her eyes are the colour of glass, manufactured plastic. I shrug nonsensically at her. The leaves fan out like thick wings behind my shoulder blades.

"I like to imagine what I would have done, how I would've saved the future generations from a plastic Wales."

"How would you have done it?" Her voice raises up, inquisitive. I raise an eyebrow in question at her. "Imagine its 2015, just as the industries started to close. You've been chosen to lead us to a better future. What would you do?"

"God. What wouldn't I have done?" I breathe in quick, prepare to answer the question I've mulled over so many times in my head. "I'd fill up the research funds for renewable energy. Like I said, use Wales to save itself. Wind turbines, bigger, more efficient ones." I'd been to a farm before, saw the crisp white machines like children's toys. I imagined them singing with the freezing scream of Welsh wind, thrumming with sparks of energy, pumping it clear and pure into our homes. "Or solar! I remember my mother used to get so frustrated because people used to hate solar farms. Used to complain about the way they looked, same with the turbines. She used to live by a solar farm that was built and the residents were up in arms about it. But I would've constructed **palaces** of sun-drinking glass. Told the people that it didn't matter if they didn't like them, if they didn't think they were pretty. I would've shouted, I would've said "do you know what would spoil your view more?" Fields of black scrub grass and oily ponds and crumbling skyscrapers!" Meri laughs again, the peal so beautiful it makes my ribs ache. I do love her, almost as much as I love the trees around us. "I would've pumped up the car tax, the road one- created huge factories for hybrid, battery,

solar cars; created a new industry of world saving, economy rescuing cars that made the air cleaner and the people richer. Or even hydrogen burning cars! I remember Toshiba was looking into those. All the emission they'd produce would be water! Why didn't we fund that? And all the solar farms and steel turbines would breathe life back into the steel industry; we'd need people to construct it all, as well as the researchers to help us develop it. I'd save the economy and the environment at the same time." If I close my eyes, I can see it, the shiny cars and the rich people and, most of all, the glossy sun and the howling wind and the miles and miles of ripe green hills. The abundance of sweet grass and good sage and open flowers. I shake my head to clear of it the wild idealism and continue. "The road tax would slice the air contamination by a lot, make the air cleaner. It would've stopped the pollution sickness, for sure. And that way, we'd keep the steel industry and expand it, while we slowly retired the old coal one. Wales would flourish financially, and do it in a way that'd would keep the land whole for the future. I'd even fund nuclear research, and a lot of it. Imagine, Meri, if they'd had the money, they might have solved fusion. None of this would have ever happened if we'd had fusion in our pockets. Sustainable energy, an abundance of it, all the while bubbling out nothing but hydrogen into the sky. I'd set up national science facilities, teach more of it from a younger age- encourage more kids to get involved in it. We'd send exchange programs all over the world, talk to allied scientists and globally, we may have found an answer." Her mouth trembles, like she's overwhelmed with the idea of cooperation my dream world could birth. "Set up a lot more of the healthier energy plants while phasing out fossil fuels, essentially, is my drift. Oh! And birth control! The sheer extent of our population is caving the world in, draining its blood. And, put a huge emphasis on the sheer excellence of nature and the delicacy of which we should treat it. The children and the teenagers- they knew, they understood how precious it was, but every time they tried to speak out against it, their parents used to call them delusionary, hippies, unrealistic. So I'd educate them as well. Shove the science in their face if I had to." We both giggle at that. Meri's mouth hasn't closed yet, the full swell of her bottom lip just slack of her top one, like she's in complete awe of what I'm saying, but I know for a fact that she's already thought of all of this. "I'd make sure all of them knew how precious this earth is, install that respect, through workshops, seminars. Take them to places like this, try make them understand that if they **didn't** cherish the birdsong, the wolf howl, the insect screech, they'd never hear it again. I'd give corporations less rights than people instead of more, less than nature too. Make sure the government didn't deny the obviousness of climate change and tried to solve it instead." I take her hand now, and I can see that like me, she's dreaming of this fantastic, past place where we're in charge. Her palm is chilled against mine, icy from burying it in the wet leaves. "I'd ban hunting, and cosmetic animal testing. People will never treat animals, or by extension, nature, as something to conserve and respect if the laws prove that we're above them. We wouldn't hunt another man for fun, we wouldn't force drops of dye into a person's eyes. If we taught that respect through our legislature, people would obey and said respect would grow. I'd stop placing money over lives. I'd show people that while shotguns and champagne and private planes are glamorous, dancing among falling leaves and the smell of the clean sea-not of salt and fish, but when you have your head under the water and all you can smell is something more ancient than the cities and wetter than blood-are far more glamorous. I'd finish with the people themselves, last. If I was going to keep Wales alive, keep it bright and wild and heroic for those to come, first, I would read them those old ancient stories. I'd tell the children that we come from some of the strangest, deepest,

strongest blood in the world. Our traditions are bold and grand as the mountains. You are born of a brave place, a good place. We are a place that doesn't back down, even from a monster twice our size. That they should never feel inferior. Fill them up with a confidence long worn away from the Welsh," she nods solemnly. It's so quiet, and Meri's breathing in time with my words. "Then, I'd teach them tolerance. That's the only way we can really survive. We built this world on tearing each other apart, for things we can't control, gender, race, sexuality. I'd rip away all the ugly labels we concocted to make everyone else feel small and ourselves feel big. I'd show them that violence and war, insults and punches, blood and bruises just end up hurting the people that caused them. I'd tell them that we'll only win this fight if we work together. I'd show people that prejudice is the thing that stops us from winning."

When I stop, her face edges over onyx. Bitterness glints over the polyethene of her eyes and turns her lips rusty with blood when she angrily pulls the skin off with her teeth.

"There's no point in talking about it, anyway. It's done. We can't save it now." The anger in her words almost covers the way her mouth trembles with sadness.

"My mother could've saved us all." Meri's eyes are luminous against the lunar scape of her face, and I answer her unasked question. "She died of pollution sickness. She taught me how to love nature, like her father taught her. If everyone was like her, loved nature, respected it, we wouldn't be decaying from the inside out." I imagine her soft hands, showing me how to water the plants, how to scatter food for the birds in our garden so we wouldn't frighten them. I imagine her dying in the hospital, surrounded by people like her who were curdled by the reeking nitrous oxide and carbon monoxide that clung to the city, clung to their lungs. How grey her face was. How she cried because of the lack of birdsong, cried because the birds were all dying like her. "She passed that on, through me." I look down at the leaves that cover my legs, a million shades of mint, sage, olive. "She named me Gwrydd. Green. Green like the forests that she loved so much. Green like the forests we should've saved. Green after the thing she died trying to save. Green for the thing she loved most in the world, and Green after the thing the rest of us should've loved more."