

“The Pushback”

My body is still swaying. The solid ground underneath me seems to be moving, I know it's an illusion from the endless hours on the boat. The boat! The people! There's Mafaalani, the Somali who lost his son in the Aegean. And Ahmed from Syria, whose brother died of thirst in Spain. But we're here, on solid ground. The rhythmic crashing of the waves against the rocks is torture. I feel my body being rocked from side to side as the waves are shacking our dingy, I want to grab on to the side, but I'm on solid ground. English ground. We need to go, never mind the exhaustion. I've seen worse, I've been worse. The others are in ecstasy, I see one kissing the ground, another one is lying on his back grinning, the girl from Greece is clutching onto her broken phone. She never let go of it, ever since it dropped into the channel. Walk. Get up. Walk. The rocks are ripping up my feet, the icy wind is cutting through my shirt, and I can barely see through the pouring rain. Just walk. Always walk. I have walked my entire life, ever since the water stopped at home.

When Athens burnt, and the North let it, they blamed us. They blamed the ones who learned how to walk running away from their own droughts. When Amsterdam drowned, we were the ones they kicked out. The ones who had suffered the most. Now, next stop: London. A safe haven? Probably not. But I heard things have changed there. It's a *green city* now, whatever that means. I have never seen a green city, and I have seen many cities. But that's what they do now, they pull up windmills, litter the countryside with solar panels, and slap a bike lane on every corner. A shame they didn't do it earlier. Before the water stopped at home.

There, headlights cutting through the rain, rapidly getting brighter, blinding me, and speeding away. Another car zooms by. I'm off the beach, into the fields, through the wet grass, onto concrete. My pants are stuck to my legs, the jacket is heavy like metal. I think of the kid. He wasn't going to make it anyway, no point in letting him have it.

The glow on the horizon leads the way. A fence, chain-link, barbed wire. To my left I can see a slender figure approaching. It's Mafaalani. In his eyes there's my own resolve, strength and durability. And hidden under the smile: disgust. We help each other across. Behind the fence is a field of solar panels. Behind the hedges, there's a dirt road leading to a town. We need food and water, but we keep walking.

People are passing by us now. No looks, no words, they know us, they know where we're going, and they have seen us a million times. A car racing towards us, England, left side traffic. We change sides. Mafaalani nods at a sign, it points towards London.

“In Europe they're rationing water”, he says, “and here it's falling from the sky”. “Yes”, I answer him, “it's the same everywhere now. It's either not enough or too much.”

A car stops next to us.

There they are: Two skinnies just strolling along without a care in the world.

This afternoon a boat was spotted drifting towards the shore. If there were any survivors, they'd be roaming the sea-side towns by now. I have street duty today, so my job is picking up the pieces.

Each day hundreds cross the channel, some of them even make it to the city. Our community is under threat, if we'd let everybody in, we would drown. They're dangerous, I have seen what they can do. These libtards, these goodie-goodies they hate us for what we do, but if we wouldn't do it, they'd be in for a hell of a surprise. So, somebody needs to keep the streets clean, and it's best to wipe before the dust settles. So that none of these boys could ever lay a finger on my daughter. Or anybody's daughter for that matter.

To keep them safe I do the work I do, and there's still more to do. Some years ago, I would never have imagined The Greens doing what needed to be done, and keeping the borders closed. But then again, I would also never have imagined that I could enjoy meatless steaks, riding a bike, or carless cities. Now, picking up the kid from school is just a few minutes walking. It used to be a twenty-minute car ride, plus the stress of afternoon traffic and the ensuing screaming match with my daughter.

The yard, once only reserved for "the cool kids" from the nearby school smoking in their brakes, now is part of the school. Children of all ages play side by side here and learn playfully about nature and community.

I see my daughter in a fight. She's having at it with a boy who's holding a toy I don't recognize. Not much of community after all. But then of course, the boy's not one of us. His face as dark as a rotten banana peel. But, no, wait. She might have taken his toy just as well. After all she's a feisty one, and a quick study.

As I approach her, she lets go of the boy's hair, and puts on her innocent face. So, she did start it, I chuckle to myself. But I have to keep the appearances, she knows she's going to get praise later, so a scolding now won't hurt her. Just then the teacher approaches, ignoring my daughter's innocent smile, and the crying boy, she extends a hand to me.

"I read all about your exploits in the papers", and adding, obviously trying to draw me into a conversation, "it's clear where your daughter gets her mind, and her looks".

Her compliment makes me stutter, I hate getting them. I am great at giving them but receiving not so much. "Thank you, yes, that was quite the raid. We got almost fifty of them, fine work for just one day.", and to not seem unpolite I add, "It's good to know that our work is appreciated."

"Yes, of course it is.", and looking at the black boy she whispers, "I am really open-minded, you know, but at some point, enough is enough."

"Well, I am glad to know that my daughter is in good hands. But I really must go now, the little one needs to get home, you surely understand.", and, nodding at her reply, I turn around.

We follow the small path leading out of the yard underneath the trees growing on the surrounding houses. I never feel like being in a city when I come here. It feels more like a forest, a home.

As I follow along the path the street used to run; Where years ago cars were parked, there are now onions, cucumber, and potatoes growing; I can hear the kids playing. The surrounding houses used to have such a strange acoustic to them. The sound would bounce from one building to another and sitting on my mother's balcony you would hear music seemingly come from everywhere. Like sitting in a guitar. Now the sound is muffled by the trees, but it's just become more beautiful. So many things have changed, but the teacher reminded me: Some things never change. I think of the two skinnies. It's good they won't be threatening our peaceful way of life anymore.

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