

Venture to Earth

by

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A place, down within. Underneath us it lies. Inside us it lies. Deep inside the Earth, down through the cracks and crevices of faults and fallacies. There lies a city.

A brighter light warms my shoulders, cool grass tickles my feet as I feel a refreshing breeze. I awaken from my dreaming; a cold bed, my arms and legs slightly warmed by worn, thin sheets. Darkness. I open the shutters. A dim white starts to fade into vision. I start to feel the messages my body's sending me: my head feels heavy and hot, the rest of my body, is okay. I tiredly scrummage my limbs from my bed and arise, feeling the blood rush from my head to the rest of my body. I look in the mirror; a pale face and hollow eyes. I'm well. In the kitchen I see the frustration on my mother's face, as she rummages through our overhead cupboard and checks the rations sheet sitting on the benchtop. She notices my presence and sighs, "Oh, Lazlo, did you sleep well?" she needn't wait for an answer, "We've run out of rations, again. I'll have to head to the council this morning before labour starts."

Both my parents are labourers, like everyone else across the city. Our pods are densely plotted, and on misty mornings, sheets of grey field across the city. Families are always running out of food, as rations are limited, though crops flourish. My father complains about our leader, The Esteemed Enzol Contrary; my father says he's a dictator, which he says means he has too much power. I love my father more than any other man in the world; he used to tell me stories of a land, where the air was lighter, the skies brighter. He told me the only way to get there is up, and you know when you're there because when you look up the sky just keeps going. My mother used to smile and said there's no such place, but I believe him. I guess I only do because I want there to be. I want to escape to this land, above me, whether it exists or not. Although I love my father and my mother, I dread the day I become a labourer. Which is why I hold a secret: I have a plan.

A gate. I'm outside an old, iron gate that looks like it *used* to be secure, but now drops from its hinges. I look at the map. This is it. This is my way out. It's strictly forbidden by Contrary to even touch the boundaries of the city, let alone pass them, which is why there's no need for security. I throw my sack over, then jump. I'm free. A smile disperses across my face, my chest beating. I have to move fast, be miles away before anyone notices I'm gone. I look at the map; lines and scribbles of words.

Escaping won't be easy; I've read the map thoroughly and decoded the messy handwriting. The faint path marked on the map leads through a journey of hidden caves, scaling walls and tireless hours of walking; though I know where this will lead me to. *Get moving Lazlo*, I tell myself, *there's no time to waste*. Now that I'm outside the border, the distinction between night and day is vague. All throughout the city hung lights, powered by the generator; without them our city would be in complete darkness. In the land my father tells of, light comes naturally, from a huge light-bulb in the never-ending sky. It rises and falls, but never runs out of power.

I'm thinking as I'm moving, until my mind returns to the mission, my eyes falling on the map. I've reached the junction; there are a number of paths and openings, one cave leading to the scaling wall, the others, dead ends. I look at the map; it tells that the tunnel to choose lies at the very end of the row. I look to my left and walk up to the tunnel; there's an X.

Suddenly I hear voices and footsteps nearing. I know exactly who they're looking for. I move swiftly past the X and into the cave. I hope it's the right one, because now, there's no going back. As I creep further and further away from where I was, the voices fade, "He wouldn't have gone much further than this, nothing but a dead end... report back to Contrary, tell him there's nothi..." until nothing but mumbles, then the sound of my breathing, remains. I stumble through the cave, every now and then checking my back to see if I'm being followed. Some would say I'm doing this with uncertainty, which I am. Though someone needs to tackle the ambiguity, the doubt. And I feel that there's more out there for everyone than grey, dictatorship. There *is* colour, new beginnings. There *is* a way to freedom, and I'm going to hold the torch. I can feel my new beginning coming; every step and the air tingles against my skin just that bit more.

After,

The answers are out there, you just have to look for them. A brighter light now warms my shoulders, cool grass tickling my feet as I feel a refreshing breeze. I live in the rugged land, a simple life. In the distance there's some sort of city, except the buildings ascend higher than any I've ever seen, jagged and uneven lines against the vast blue. I've thought about going there, there'll be people there, for sure. I wonder what they'll be like. I suddenly feel uneasy and realise. Will this new life be any different? What if I've come all this way, left all I've known behind, for nothing?

I think.

The hope returns to my head. That feeling disappears. I have hope for what comes ahead, the world I'm stepping into, and I think the people there will have hope too.

Inspiration: '*Oriental Aspirations*' by Alia Haider (image and statement)

