

LINO ALEXANDER ZEDDIES

Utopia

2048

Journey into
a regenerative
future



Inspiration for transformation

Imagine you wake up in a future where the great social-ecological transformation has succeeded, democracy is flourishing, peace and prosperity prevail, the economy is oriented toward the common good, and the climate crisis has been averted successfully. How would this new world look like?

Utopia 2048 takes two „time travelers“ through the cities, businesses and institutions of such an inspiring society. In the course of their journey, they experience democracy innovations in a greened Berlin, they visit regenerative agriculture and a free school in the Brandenburg countryside, they visit the UN Tower in Singapore, a progressive university in Malmö and much more. Along the way, they learn how numerous internal and external developments have guided the great transformation.

»The dialogues are so lively and the changes described so imaginative that it's a lot of fun and also encouraging to read Utopia 2048.«

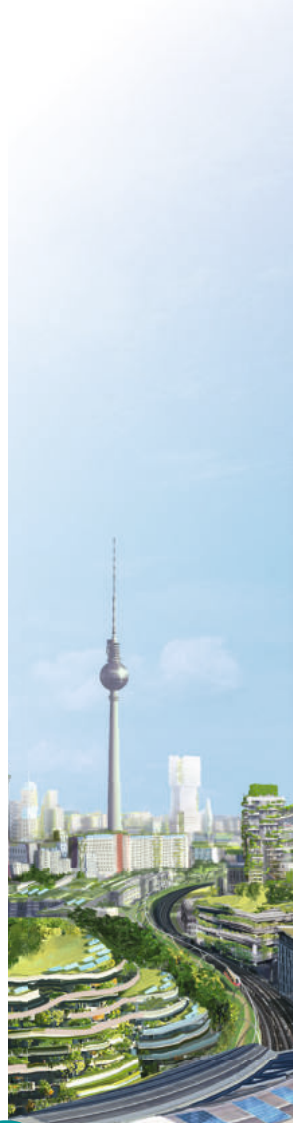
UTE SCHEUB, author and journalist

»Lino Zeddies is the Thomas Morus of the 21st century. In masterful form, he has succeeded in piecing together the mosaic of the future. The utopia described is so convincing that it must become reality.«

CHRISTIAN FELBER, initiator of the Economy for the Common Good

»In times that are almost flooded with negative news, reading ›Utopia 2048‹ is like a single inner sigh of relief.«

MIRIAM SCHEIBE, Foundation FuturZwei



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Utopia 2048

Journey into a regenerative future

by

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Imprint

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Lino Alexander Zeddies, born in Hannover in 1990, is an economist, organizational developer and utopian author for a more beautiful world.

After graduating from high school, he moved to Berlin to study economics. Frustrated by the dogmas and unworldly models prevailing there, he became involved in the *Netzwerk Plurale Ökonomik e.V.* (*Network for Pluralist Economics*) for new economic thinking and in *Monetative e.V.* and in the *International Movement for Monetary Reform* which both pioneer monetary and financial system reform.

Afterwards, he worked as a coach, as a non-medical practitioner for psychotherapy, and as an organizational consultant, where he dealt intensively with inner change and progressive forms of collaboration. While dealing with the numerous small and large solutions for the creation of a more beautiful world, the idea for this book came about. Together with some friends he is currently founding the organization “Reinventing Society - Center for Real Utopias”, whose goal it is to inspire people and organizations with positive visions of the future and to support the journey of transformation with innovative methods, empowering guidance and utopian spaces of experience. More information about projects and offers can be found on:

www.realutopien.de/en.

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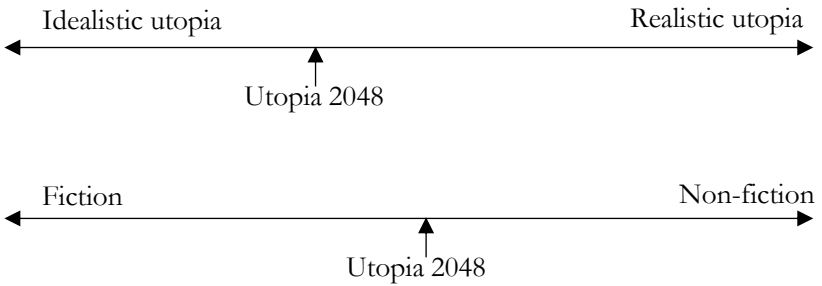
Acknowledgement

For all those who long for a more beautiful world.



Open utopia: *A utopian vision for society that does not see itself as a perfect and final blueprint, but rather as a preliminary proposal for a better world that is in the process of constant refinement and has the primary goal of providing inspiration, bringing new perspectives and inviting the exchange of ideas.*

“Utopia 2048” is conceived as an open utopia.



Further information and links to the ideas in the book can be found at: www.utopia2048.com

Prologue

"The more beautiful world my heart knows is possible is a world with a lot more pleasure: a lot more touch, a lot more lovemaking, a lot more hugging, a lot more deep gazing into each other's eyes, a lot more fresh-ground tortillas and just-harvested tomatoes still warm from the sun, a lot more singing, a lot more dancing, a lot more timelessness, a lot more beauty in the built environment, a lot more pristine views, a lot more water fresh from the spring."

Charles Eisenstein

"This morning, on June 17th 2048, the German President formally opened the Heroes market on the Berlin Exhibition Grounds. The Heroes market has had a lasting impact on German and European social entrepreneurship and this year celebrated its 37th anniversary. As every year, the Heroes market took place directly after the IBF."

Lena intervened: "What is the IBF?"

"The IBF is the International Bicycle Fair," the computer replied.

"Okay. More news, please."

Lena sat on an armchair in her room and stared at a large screen that almost completely filled one of the walls. She could communicate with the computer by voice command. Via the computer, she had access to the so-called *Central Knowledge Base*, a comprehensive global database into which the accumulated knowledge of mankind was fed. She had just decided to display the news from last week.

The computer produced images of various people and buildings: "The Federal Ministry of Economics announced today that it will open one hundred and twenty more vocation offices within the next three years. The vocation offices are intended to provide better support to all people in Germany in discovering their abilities and talents and finding their personal vocation."

Mosaics with various in-depth information appeared on the screen.

"Please tell me more about vocation offices," Lena said.

"Vocation offices support people with consultations and coaching in recognizing and developing their own interests, abilities and talents and

thus finding their personal vocation. Vocation offices have emerged from the former job centers, which focused on getting unemployed people into paid employment as quickly as possible. However, these institutions were criticized because financial and psychological pressure was often applied to force people into unwanted jobs. Vocation offices, on the other hand, only offer seminars and positive support from trained coaches, using a variety of methods to identify individual preferences and inclinations. The first vocation office was opened as a pioneering project in Nauen in 2038. After a trial period..."

Lena interrupted the voice. "Thank you, that's enough. Other news, please."

"The European Defense Minister has decided to send a part of the European army to Iraq for a humanitarian mission. The soldiers will help defuse landmines that have been washed to the surface by the heavy flooding of recent weeks". The video showed pictures of flooded Iraqi villages, of soldiers in blue uniforms boarding a plane, and of turtle-like robots with long lever arms. "The mines are mostly from the third Gulf War and have already claimed several lives in recent days."

The screen then stopped and split into several sections: The situation in Iraq; The European Army; The Third Gulf War; The Defense Secretary's speech; Other News. The mosaics were accompanied by pictures and preview videos.

"Go on," Lena said.

"This morning, the Chancellor initiated the International Day of Yoga. Together with hundreds of other yoga enthusiasts, she performed various yoga exercises in front of the German parliament and concluded with a sun salutation." On display was the picture of a smiling elderly woman with her arms stretched upwards joined by numerous other people doing the same pose.

Lena smiled.

The computer continued: "Many schools, companies and public institutions participated in the holiday with their corresponding courses and programs. The Minister of Health called for more widespread practice of yoga and meditation at the workplace."

A young man with Asian facial features was shown saying: "The

physical and psychological benefits of regular yoga and meditation practice have been scientifically proven. Above all, these approaches are excellently suited as remedies against stress and high mental strain, and also increase general life satisfaction. However, German companies have a lot of catching up to do in terms of providing appropriate programs for their employees."

Lena shook her head in disbelief. "More news please. What's happening internationally?"

"At a meeting in Dakar, the French President met with the heads of state of several African countries to celebrate the successful settlement of French compensation payments for the colonial occupation of the past. France paid a total of 650 billion euros to the states of the former French colonies over the last fifteen years as symbolic compensation for French crimes during the colonial occupation. The President of Senegal, who hosted the meeting, welcomed the new era of relations based on equality and mutual respect. France had continued to exert massive political influence up until 2030; it even controlled the monetary policy of some African countries. It was only after the WFTO's announcement of a global debt repayment year in 2032 that there was a shift in practice and..."

"What is the WFTO?" Lena interrupted the computer.

"The WFTO is the World Fair Trade Organization. The WFTO evolved from the WTO, the World Trade Organization and..."

"Okay, thanks," Lena said with a smile. "What else?"

"The Holy State of Christ is sinking into civil war. According to Mexican intelligence, there has been serious armed conflict in the last few days." A video of people dressed in white Ku Klux Klan-like robes waving assault rifles appeared on the screen. "According to the UN, there is a shortage of food and medical supplies among the population. The U.S. and Mexico have offered humanitarian assistance and relief supplies. However, the aid has been refused by most regions of the area."

Lena raised an eyebrow. "More information..." Then she shook her head and said, "No, never mind. More international news, please."

"The UN General Secretariat has announced in its latest annual report

that the HPGs, the Healthy Planet Goals, have been satisfactorily achieved by 148 of the 205 UN member states. The South American confederation of states in particular was praised for its comprehensive forest restoration programs. Also, the regeneration of the Australian Great Barrier Reef, which to many researchers appears to be a miracle, is also a major milestone. The world as a whole is on the right track, but much remains to be done, the report said. In particular, the cleaning of the oceans is more time-consuming and cost-intensive than estimated. The Japanese Environment Minister has already convened an international meeting in Kyoto to explore the way forward."

Day 1 - Awakening

When Lena opened her eyes for the first time after what felt like a really long time, she found herself on a bed in a small room. The bright light blinded her. She blinked and closed her watering eyes.

Lena felt dazed and weak, yet she slowly opened her eyes once more and looked around. The bed was placed in front of a floor-to-ceiling window through which bright sunlight shone. Suddenly, she noticed a small white drone hovering at her side. Startled and worried, she looked around and tried to orient herself.

Where was she? What had happened? She sensed fear rising, which she quickly fought back.

“Good morning Lena”, a soft female voice echoed from the drone. “You can relax. You are safe and healthy. Everything is fine.”

She was so confused. What was that drone?

Her eyelids were heavy and she felt extremely exhausted. She shut her eyes for another moment and surrendered to the darkness.

Lena took a deep breath. Then slowly her memories and her sense of orientation started coming back. She began to tremble, overwhelmed with relief and excitement, all at once.

The coma sleep had worked!

The drone seemed to register her excitement: "You can relax, Lena. Everything is fine. In a moment the warden will come to greet you."

She tried to trust the voice and to relax. Once more she looked around carefully. The walls were painted in a warm ochre tone, some plants were climbing the walls or hanging from the ceiling. Gradually, her eyes got used to the light. Through the windows she could see a large lake, and behind it a forest, glowing in the sun.

It was a nice place to wake up in.

The sound of an opening door, shook her from her thoughts. A tall, rather young man entered. He stopped and looked at her expectantly.

“Hi, Lena!” he said. “My name is Damian. I'll be taking care of you for the next few days.”

He hesitated for a moment as he stroked his black hair. Then he took another step towards her and smiled, “Welcome to 2048!”

Day 2 – Hope

Lena looked into the mirror. Straight, shoulder-length hair, framed her striking face. She leaned closer to the mirror and grabbed a single strand of gray. She looked like she was in her late thirties, though she was considerably older than that by now.

Only yesterday, she had woken up totally dazed. But her spirits returned surprisingly quickly. Today, she felt fine being back on her feet. Processing thoughts also got easier. But she still did not know what to think about her situation.

Damian said that the world in which she had awakened was beautiful, that much had changed for the better. He joked that it might even be the best of all possible worlds. Only time would tell whether this was really true.

Damian was responsible for her psychological and social care for the next few days. His deep gaze and calm demeanor reminded her of her brother. She found him quite likeable.

She had slept through most of the previous day and spent her waking hours mainly with medical tests and in the neurostimulator. The neurostimulator was a kind of whole-body suit that was coupled to her nerve endings and brain waves. Damian called it his wonder machine. The device could not only stimulate her nervous system and muscles, but upon wearing a special headset, she could also play in and move through virtual realities. The tight suit supported her muscles like an exoskeleton, allowing her to perform, with very little effort, movements which her body was still too weak to make on its own. The device was suspended from a fixed mount so that she could walk in it without moving from that spot. A similar neurostimulator had probably kept her nervous and muscular systems fit during the coma, and in recent weeks had begun to prepare her body for waking up again. However, Damian had warned her that intensive use of it sometimes led to experiencing side effects. In the following weeks, she should not be surprised about experiencing dizziness, involuntary muscle twitches and unusually intense dreams.

As of today, Lena's speech was more coherent again, so a video call with her old friend Katharina, who she had chosen as her confidant and

proxy during her coma trip, was scheduled.

There was a knock at the door and Damian came in. "Katharina is calling."

He presented her with a large tablet screen where Katharina's image appeared. Lena's friend's face exhibited a furrowed brow and her hair was graying. At first Lena found it a bit spooky to see her friend so aged. She moved her hand to the display to answer the call and hesitated at the last moment. She looked at Damian. "I don't think I can do this yet. I just need some more time."

He nodded understandingly. "I can well imagine that none of this is easy, Lena. But are you sure? She's your best friend, isn't she? I think it'll do you good to talk to her, and she's waited so long to see you again."

Lena stalled. She closed her eyes for a moment, took a deep breath and tapped on Accept.

Katharina's face appeared and she looked up. "Lena! My God, I've waited ages for this moment!" She was radiant and her eyes began to sparkle. Lena was also relieved. They both burst out laughing.

Damian winked at Lena and quietly left the room. Meanwhile, Lena made herself comfortable on a chair by the window.

"I'm so sorry I wasn't there when you woke up. But I live in Singapore now and my daughter-in-law is expecting a child at any moment. That's why I had to stay here."

"Your daughter-in-law?" Lena was speechless. "You're going to be a grandmother?"

Katharina nodded.

"Oh God!" Lena shook her head in laughter. "So now I have a grandma in my circle of friends."

"If you sing up to be the Sleeping Beauty, you should be prepared for anything," Katharina replied with a broad grin

"Touché. So, who's the grandpa? Are you still with Hannes?"

Katharina snorted. "With Hannes?" She shook her head. "No." She thought for a moment. "It's been twenty-seven years since we split up."

Lena smiled. "That's a relief. Although, as a grandpa he would probably fit the bill."

"Probably. My husband's name is Khalish. We met in Berlin."

"Beautiful name."

Katharina nodded. Then her face turned serious. "My goodness, how are you?"

Lena was silent for a moment. "I don't know. It feels strange to suddenly wake up in a new era. I'm afraid it was a bad decision." She fell silent again. "But at least it worked and I'm still alive." Katharina nodded sympathetically.

Lena gave her friend a quizzical look. Then she broke the silence. "And now you've moved to Singapore?"

"Yes, we moved here shortly after our son was born."

"Wow!" Lena shook her head in disbelief. "Seems like I've slept through a lot."

Katharina turned to the side and, with a giggle, presented a small coconut, from which she took a big gulp through a thin straw. "My Khalish brought it to me earlier." She closed her eyes for a moment of exaggerated joy. "The small pleasures of life."

"Why Singapore?", asked Lena.

"Khalish wanted to go back to his home country and I got a job here as a manager at an eco-hotel. It's a nice place called Green Garden." She smiled. "The name says it all. There's even a pond in the lobby. I teach Tai Chi and Kundalini yoga there every day."

"Sounds great!" Lena looked at her friend and also smiled. "It's really good to see you!"

Katharina nodded affectionately. "I've missed you... all these years."

"Yeah... I'm sorry I was gone for so long."

"You missed a lot, Lena. There's so much to talk about."

Lena looked past the screen, out the window and over the lake. A few ducks were swimming around. "It seems as though the world has continued to turn... but without me."

Katharina looked thoughtfully into the distance. "I remember how dark and hopeless our world once seemed to you. Climate change, the refugees, the extinction of species. Those were crazy times. We were headed straight for the edge, and still pumping the gas pedal."

"Yes. And this madness was sold to us as progress", Lena made a grim face. "What's the world like now? Damian hasn't told me too much yet."

Katharina took another sip from her coconut and cocked her head thoughtfully. "Where should I start?" She looked deep into Lena's eyes. "Many things have indeed changed for the better. Some even talk about a new age for mankind. It looks like anthropogenic climate change has been stopped for now. The oceans are recovering and the extinction of species caused by humanity has receded. But getting there has been quite a turbulent ride. There were very dark days with many casualties. But in the end, we managed to turn things around."

"I found it to be a turbulent ride when I was still here. What happened?"

Katharina became more somber: "Large parts of the poles and most of the glaciers in the Alps have melted. Due to the correspondingly higher sea level, some coastal cities like Jakarta and New York had to be partially evacuated. There were storms, droughts and famines in the continental South and corresponding flows of refugees to Europe. This almost tore our society apart. " She took a deep breath and went on: "A nuclear reactor in China exploded. There was a third Gulf War in the Middle East."

"Holy shit."

"Yes." She smiled. "But, North and South Korea have reunited. Democracy is experiencing a renaissance, and most regions of the world have actually managed to have great socio-ecological change. On several occasions, humanity was on the brink of extinction, but it seems that in the end life always finds a way out."

Lena looked at her friend curiously. She felt a cautious hope rising in her chest that maybe everything would finally be okay.

Katharina looked affectionately into her eyes. "The world has changed a lot, Lena. But I think you'll like it."



Lena sat in a lovely small garden, which was surrounded by the building complex. A few rose bushes and trees huddled around it. She sat down

on a wooden bench in front of a small pond and watched the aimless leaps of a few frogs waiting for flying insects at the edge of the water. A small frog actually caught a full-grown dragonfly. He seemed a bit overwhelmed by the size of his catch. Lena had to smile. While she watched the activity thoughtlessly, Damian came to her with a man she didn't know.

"Hey Lena, I brought you someone."

The man stretched out his hand. "Jannis Wagner."

Lena took his hand. "Pleased to meet you Mr. Wagner!" She calculated he was in his late 40s. He had a strikingly alert look.

Jannis looked at Damian with an amused expression on his face. "I was told that people address each other less formally nowadays." He looked at Lena again. "So just call me Jannis."

"Jannis is a professor of economics," Damian explained. "He woke up here yesterday, too. I thought it'd be a good idea if you two could talk about your experiences." He smiled. "From time traveler to time traveler."

Lena pointed to the pond. "It's beautiful here," she said. "I must admit I was a bit afraid about waking up. I had feared that the climate catastrophe might have turned the planet into a vast desert."

Damian smiled again. "At least this piece of earth seems to have been spared then." He pointed to the building. "I have a few things to do now so I'll leave you two alone. See you later." He winked at them and leisurely strolled through the garden back to the building.

Jannis watched him leave and then glanced at Lena wrinkling his forehead. "Were you serious about the climate catastrophe?"

Lena nodded. "Of course."

Jannis looked at her in surprise. "Well, I wasn't that pessimistic. The human spirit of invention had until then defied every challenge. Isn't the history of our civilization a continuous ascent? Thirty more years of progress surely have produced more technological innovations. I am extremely curious to discover the fruits of this growth in the coming weeks."

"Are you serious?" Lena was stupefied. "I'd be very surprised if more growth had led us out of the climate catastrophe. The dogma of growth

and neo-liberalism were exactly what led us to the abyss.“

Jannis raised his eyebrows in irritation. "Why did you even start this journey if you had the certainty that the world was going down the drain?"

Lena smiled bitterly. "My calculation was that the world would either end in one of the many crises anyway and I wouldn't miss anything, or that somehow the big change would succeed and, in that case, I preferred not to wake up until the whole thing was done."

"Well. Sure, there were a few crises and a little more environmental protection would not have harmed the world, but on the whole, I think we were doing fine."

Lena answered in a rage: "Honestly, who is *we* and what is *fine*? Maybe the middle class in Germany was doing well, but what about the rest of the world? It made me sick to know that somewhere in Afghanistan children were starving to death on the streets while we were driving around in SUVs. And in the Mediterranean, rubber boats full of refugees with the hope of a better life in Europe drowned at sea, while on the other side we were indifferent to their suffering, only worried about 5G network coverage." Her cheeks were flushed. "It was all so sick."

Jannis sighed. "Of course, there were some problems in the world. But one shouldn't only see the negative aspects. Compared to the past, economic growth had created immeasurable wealth for most people. That's not something to belittle. If you hadn't, even secretly, believed in progress, you wouldn't have gone into a coma."

Lena's mouth curled up into a bloodless line. "If you liked capitalism so much, why are you even here?"

"Professional curiosity," said Jannis with a smile. "As an economist, I wanted to know where the world was going. It was also to be expected that progress would further enhance the quality of life and that it was, therefore, simply rational to travel into the future."

"Seriously?"

He paused for a moment. "Well... On top of that, I had a rather unpleasant breakup a few years before that. I didn't have much to hold on to."

"Uh-huh. How could that have come about, one might wonder."

Jannis made a face and wanted to answer something, but changed his mind and went over to the pond. They fell silent for a moment. Then he turned to her again. "How about you? Was it easy for you to just leave your family and everything behind?"

She looked down and whispered, "I don't have a family anymore."

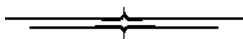
"Oh. I'm sorry."

For a while they watched, in embarrassed silence, the croaking frogs jumping on the water lilies. It was mating season and a few frog couples had already started what looked like amphibious love-making.

Finally, Jannis spoke up again: "Perhaps we should let our differences of opinion rest for the time being. Who knows which turn society has taken. To be honest, some things seem a little strange to me."

Lena walked past him and crouched down. She lifted a small stick from the ground and pushed a bee, floating helplessly in the water, onto a lily pad. The bee straightened up and smoothed its wings.

Lena got up on her feet and with a smirk said: "All right. Let's see who's the last man - or woman! - standing."



Lena, Jannis and Damian sat at a richly set table for dinner. Bread, colorful spreads, carrot salad, tomatoes, grapes and stuffed olives were served.

"Cheers for the wonders of modern medicine!" Damian raised a glass and smiled at them. "Enjoy your meal! I suppose you're bursting with questions. How about we start by you guys guessing the state of the world today? That could be fun."

"It's difficult to make predictions," said Jannis. "Especially when it concerns the future."

Damian laughed. "Mark Twain, right?"

Jannis nodded. "But, yes, why not? I like your suggestion!"

"Please, go ahead then!" Lena burst out. "As an economist, you

shouldn't miss any chance to make bad predictions.” She sneered at him. Jannis ignored her and frowned thoughtfully for a moment: “I assume that the world population has stabilized at nine to ten billion people.”

“Not bad. 8.7 billion, to be exact.”

Jannis nodded contentedly. Then a grin formed on his face. “Germany also became football world champion again.”

Damian raised his thumb. With a mouth full of carrot salad, he mumbled: “Correct! Twice, even.”

“Yes!” cheered Jannis raising his fist.

“Seriously?” Said Lena as she rolled her eyes. “We're talking about the great developments of mankind and the second most important thing you can think of is football?”

Jannis ignored her again and continued: “Otherwise, mankind is better off than ever. The economy has switched to green growth to palliate the climate crisis. There are probably large machines pumping CO2 into the ground and more efficient solar technology. Technical progress and new inventions have done the rest. So, there's much more prosperity as well. My guess is an average global economic growth rate of 1.5 percent.” He looked at Damian with anticipation.

Damian swayed his head somewhat indecisively. “Most countries have transitioned to a post-growth economy. Further growth would have brought the planet to the brink of collapse. In terms of Gross Domestic Product, Germany's even shrank at times.” He tapped a device on his wrist, and it rolled out a display showing the economic performance of various European countries. It showed slow flattening growth for most countries until the 2020s and irregular fluctuations thereafter. “Material growth only occurred in the regions that needed to catch up: Africa, India and South America to some extent. But the end of growth did not harm the good life, quite the contrary.”

“Ha! So much for green growth.” Triumphant, Lena threw an olive in her mouth. “If you'd look at the world other than from an economist's ivory tower, you would have realized earlier that capitalism couldn't be painted green.”

“All right, Miss Know-it-all. You leftists are always good at criticizing, but viable alternative solutions are usually missing from your spiel. What

are your predictions?" Immediately after that, he picked-up a purple vegetable spread. He looked skeptical as he smelled it and then promptly shoved it away.

Lena stretched out her chin. "Neoliberal capitalism has been abolished!" Jannis shook his head mockingly. "What exactly is that supposed to mean?"

"Well, that we're no longer controlled by big corporations and banks. All companies are now state owned or belong to small community-run cooperatives. The rich have been expropriated and exploitative imperialism has been defeated." She nodded as if to convince herself, and then solemnly proclaimed: "And money has been abolished, too." Jannis had turned to the carrot salad and stopped with the fork in front of his mouth. He glanced at Damian with a desperate look.

Damian was grinning.

"Come on, tell me!" begged Lena impatiently. "Am I right?"

"The financial system was fundamentally reformed and there was a lot of redistribution. But money was not abolished. By the way, the euro still exists, at least in Northern Europe."

"Ha!" cried Jannis. "Why would money be abolished! It's like getting rid of the internet. Such nonsense!"

Lena looked at him angrily.

Damian continued: "But the economy and the companies are much more democratic now. The current economic system in Germany is known as a solidary market economy."

"A free market economy! I told you." Jannis nodded contentedly. "Then as now, the ideal system."

Damian intervened: "Your definitions of capitalism and market economy seem to me to be somewhat misconstrued. In any case, the system of your time would not necessarily be called a free market economy nowadays."

"What do you mean?", Jannis looked at him surprised.

"A free market economy is already a contradiction in itself!" Lena yelled.

"The system of your time was more of a power economy rather than a market economy. Most corporations made profits at the expense of the general public and barely paid any taxes. Hordes of lobbyists helped

write the laws. Free trade agreements and technocrats undermined democracy and the banks were allowed to create money. For most people this was not a fair and free system.”

“Neoliberal financial capitalism”, Lena shouted with a full mouth. “I told you!”

Damian shrugged his shoulders. “In any case, we now have a solidary, democratic and free market economy worthy of the name.”

“Meaning?” Asked Jannis skeptically.

Damian was looking for the right words. “The economy serves the dignified development of all people and creatures. Participation and grassroots democracy permeate all social structures and companies. Freedom and solidarity with all beings are the guiding principles.”

“Sounds great!” Lena cried out.

“Yes.” Damian nodded and then hesitated briefly. “A lot has changed in the last thirty years. There has been fundamental reform of democracy, business, money and schools. But I don't think words can do it justice. You have to see it for yourselves. In the next few days, I will therefore, show you the world of today as best I can. Then you can form your own opinion. Tomorrow, if you'd like, we can start with a walk in the surrounding landscape.”



After dinner Damian made a small announcement: “You can imagine that your ID cards are a little outdated by now. To make sure that everything is in order and that you can vote and so on, you still have to register officially and have your IDs updated.”

“That means tomorrow we go to a local registration office?”, asked Lena.

“No. I ordered a public agency drone earlier.”

“A public agency drone... So, we don't have to go anywhere, but instead just register with a drone?” Asked Lena in bewilderment.

“Right.”

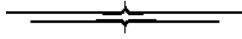
“No annoying numbers and queues!”, exclaimed Lena happily.

Damian laughed. “Are you ready to do this right now?”

Jannis shrugged. “Why not? What’s done, is done.”

Lena nodded in agreement, too.

Damian looked at his watch. “Then I’m going to pick up the drone now. It should already be waiting downstairs. Let’s meet in Lena’s room right away. We’ll have more peace and quiet there.” Jannis and Lena nodded and Damian left the dining room.



A little while later, Damian entered Lena’s room with a flying white drone in tow; the other two were already waiting there. The device hovered behind him at shoulder height. It had the eye of the camera on the front, with the words “Civil Services drone Jochen 517” marked on it.

Damian pointed to the writing: “That’s the name of this drone. Use it to address it and communicate with it.”

“Hello Jochen 517!” Jannis called bluntly.

“Good evening. What can I do for you?” replied a gentle male voice from the machine.

“Just a moment,” Damian said with a grin. Then he turned to Lena and Jannis. “From what I could tell, you both still had IDs without biometric data. Now, there’s an electronic ID system in the EU that’s based on scanned irises and fingerprints. Do you agree to have this data collected from you?”

Lena looked skeptical. “I am fundamentally cautious about the state storing sensitive private data.”

“From the experience of the era you came from, I can understand that. But current privacy laws are excellent. No one can use your data without your consent. Everything is on the encrypted blockchain database.” He shrugged. “But you don’t have to agree to this under any circumstances. Basically, you can just get up-to-date physical IDs. They’re still available.

Shopping and travel are just a little bit more complicated.”

“Well I agree with the scan,” said Jannis.

“Okay, very good. Then let's start with you. You, Lena, can still think it over.”

Damian turned to the drone: “Hello Jochen 517! We would like to register a German citizen electronically and update his identity card.”

“With pleasure,” Jochen 517 replied. “Please identify yourself first.”

“I am Damian Elfassi-Freudberg, ID scan approved.” He looked into the drone's camera and held his palm outstretched next to his face.

“Identification confirmed as Damian Elfassi-Freudberg. Who do you want to register?”

“Jannis Wagner.” Damian took two plastic identity cards out of his pocket and held Jannis's identity card in front of the drone: “Jannis Wagner was in an artificial coma for several years and has, therefore, an outdated identity card and is not yet registered electronically.”

“Okay.” The drone turned to Jannis. “Jannis Wagner, you have obsolete ID documents and wish to update them and register electronically, correct?”

“Yes, that's correct!”, said Jannis.

“Is this information of yours correct?” A small screen popped up from the drone and showed: date and place of birth, names of parents, height and an address in Mannheim.

Jannis looked at the screen with utmost concentration. “Yes, except for the address.”

“Jannis currently lives in the Saalen-Klinikum here on site, Waldpfad 8,” Damian helped. “As soon as a new address is available, Jannis will update his record.”

“Okay.” The new address came up on the screen. “Jannis, do you agree to have an iris and fingerprint scan done and have it entered into the state blockchain database?”

“Yes.”

“Please look into the camera and put your right palm next to your face.” Somewhat awkwardly, Jannis performed as requested. “Thank you. Scan successful. I confirm that your biometric data is unique and

has not yet been stored in any national database. The photo comparison of your ID document with your face is positive. To complete the process, I still need a person with official clearance to confirm your identity.”

“I’ll take care of that,” Damian said. “I confirm that this person is the said Jannis Wagner.”

“Thank you. Your registration is now successful, Jannis! You are now registered in the electronic database as a German citizen of the European Union. Here is your new identity card.” It buzzed softly and from the side of the drone on a small arm appeared a blue card. Jannis grabbed it.

“Impressive!”, said Jannis as he looked at his new identity card. “That was easy.”

“Do Civil Services and other authorities still have human employees?”, asked Lena suspiciously.

“Most of it is fully automated,” Damian replied. “But if you prefer to talk to a human being, you can do that too. The drone can connect you to someone from the agency via a camera.”

“And what about old people who don't want or can't talk to drones?”, asked Lena.

“If they find the process too complicated, they can still make an appointment at a registration office.”

“But why make things complicated when you can make them simple?”, said Jannis. “It seems as though the predictions of digitalization have come true. I assume that most jobs have now been replaced by computers.”

“At least most of the monotonous and boring ones,” Damian said with a smile. Then he turned to Lena: “Shall we continue with you?”

“Oh, what the hell. Those afraid of digitalization should not travel into the future. Jochen 517, please register me and create a new ID card for me, too.”

The drone took its cue and started working again. Three minutes later Lena held her new ID in her hands as well.

“The official procedures ordered have been completed,” announced Jochen 517. “Is there anything else I can do for you?”

Damian got an idea and his eyes lit up. “We can take this opportunity to register you two as World citizens of Earthland.”

“Citizens of Earthland?” The two looked at Damian in wonder.

“There’s a kind of world government now. You can volunteer to officially become a citizen of Earthland, with the rights and responsibilities that go with it. It’s still a very fresh, but exciting new concept!”

Lena frowned. “I think we should find out a bit more about that before we dive in headfirst!”

“Yeah, sorry, you're absolutely right. We shouldn't rush into anything. I can tell you more about that later.” He turned to the drone. “Thank you, Jochen 517! That's all for today.”

He opened the window and Jochen 517 flew away.

Jannis gazed after the drone with a smile. “Off to new horizons!”

Day 3 - Nature

They strolled through a quiet street with neat half-timbered houses and spacious front yards full of flowers and fruit trees. There were remarkably many people outside, of whom Damian seemed to know most. Also, some children rushed past them.

„It's beautiful here!“ Lena called. That morning for the first time in a long time she felt light around her heart.

„Yes, and that in the deepest area of Brandenburg.“ Damian grinned. „The countryside here is lovely. That's why I moved here.“

„What is your profession actually?“, asked Jannis. „How did you get your job as a guide for travelers from the past?“

„I studied social sciences and history and wrote my thesis on path dependencies of social change. I also sit on some committees of the state government of Berlin. From time to time I give seminars at the University for Sustainable Development in Eberswalde. When I heard from a friend about the job as a guide for coma sleepers, I became curious. I am also very curious to get to know your view of the world. I hope for a kind of reality check for some of my analyses.“

„Interesting!“, said Jannis.

A huge flock of geese passed over them and Lena stopped for a moment in awe. „Wow! I don't think I've ever seen so many geese at once. There must be hundreds of them!“

Damian nodded happily. „Thanks to the sustainable restructuring of agriculture, many more insects and birds are on the move again. I'm still young, but even compared to my childhood the change is enormous. Just 20 years ago you rarely saw a bee.“

„I once read that the first settlers in North America described flocks of birds so gigantic that the sky darkened from them,“ Lena said thoughtfully. „Perhaps it will be like that again sometime.“

Damian nodded. „Let us hope so!“

They went on and Lena spoke up again. „I'm surprised that I'm so fit again.“

„Much like me,“ confirmed Jannis and turned to Damian: „The wonders of modern medicine?“

Damian nodded. „Your awakening of your bodies was initiated and prepared weeks ago. The awakening of your consciousness was only the last step. Besides, we have eliminated a few health ailments in recent years. You are now physically in the best of health.“ He looked at Jannis with a grin and held a big belly with his hands. „That could not necessarily have been said before.“

„A man without a belly is a cripple,“ Jannis replied with a serious face. Lena laughed out loud.

They reached a generous round place. In the middle of it, surrounded by colorful tulips, stood the stone statue of a kneeling woman with braided hair. She planted a tree and looked wistfully at the sky.

„This is the plaza of hope,“ Damian said solemnly.

„Who is that woman?“ Jannis pulled his eyebrows together. „She looks familiar somehow.“

„This is Greta Thunberg. She was UN Secretary General during the crucial years.“

„Oh, wow!“ Lena felt goose bumps on her arms. „Then I guess the Fridays for Future protests finally succeeded.“

She took a few steps towards the statue and discovered a marble plaque embedded in the ground in front of it: „*We will never stop fighting. We will never stop fighting for this planet, for ourselves, for our future and for the future of our children and grandchildren.*“ - Greta Thunberg, April 19, 2019.

They stayed there for a while and let the atmosphere take effect. Then Damian nodded at them to move on, they crossed the square and continued along the road.

As they passed a parked car, Jannis turned to Damian: „Do cars drive autonomously these days?“

Damian nodded. „For some time now.“

„And how are the engines running?“

„Electric.“

„The fuel cell has not prevailed?“

„No, not with cars. But as far as I know, fuel cells are often used in rail transport and ships.“

„And how do you charge up the cars?“

„There are charging stations everywhere. The modern flash batteries

can be fully charged within a few minutes.“

They went on and reached a magnificent building with beautifully decorated windows and doors. Lena pointed to it. „What is this building?“

„This is our new town hall. The pride of our small town. Originally, this was an ugly concrete block. But a few years ago, it was rebuilt and some sculptors and creative people took their fancy to it.“ He laughed. „Since its completion, our mayoress has grown ten centimeters taller with pride.“

Lena looked appreciatively at the scenes of community, playing children and animals that adorned the façade. „It's nice that aesthetics obviously played a big role in this construction. It was seldom like that in the past.“

„Wasn't there even a style called Brutalism?“, asked Damian with a grin.

„Yes. Sometimes I had the feeling that architecture was getting uglier and uglier. Only concrete, glass and steel facades everywhere.“

„If it's all about money, there's no room for beauty,“ Damian said. „This is finally different now.“

They turned to walk on and passed a small board next to the entrance gate. As they approached, it turned out to be a screen, which showed the activities of the week. Jannis examined the list:

Monday: 9:00 Kundalini Yoga; 14:00 Thinkers' Club; 18:00 Chess Club; 20:00 Improvisational Theatre.

Tuesday: 10:00 Mayoress's Open House; 15:00 Mantra Singing; 18:00 Board Games; 20:00 Youth Council Meeting.

Wednesday: 11:00 Friends of Nature get-together 15:00 Three-generation meeting; 19:00 Billiard Wednesday.

„That's quite a broad offer,“ he remarked.

„Yes. There are a lot of activities to promote community-building and to involve people politically.“

They went on and finally Damian pointed to a small collection of buildings in the distance. „Back there lives Helge, a good friend of mine. He is a farmer and runs a beautiful farm together with a few others. If you like, we can stop by there. Then you can get an impression of

modern farming.“

Jannis and Lena agreed and so they crossed the road towards the farm. A driveway led along a small stone wall to the courtyard entrance. As they approached the half-timbered main house, they heard someone cursing. Damian grinned. „This is Helge. You can usually hear him from far away.“

They turned around the corner of the main building. Lush blackberry bushes sprouted there, from which the base of a small stepladder peeked out.

„Damn blackberries!“ they heard someone curse from inside the thick bushes.

„Hello Helge!“ Damian called out.

It rustled for a moment and then a sturdy, maybe fifty-year-old man jumped out of the hedge. Half-long brown hair blew around his sun-tanned face. Broadly grinning he stepped towards Damian, patted his hands which were speckled with blackberry juice on his trousers and hugged Damian with a firm embrace. „Damian, my good man! Good to see you!“

„I see you're back to your favorite pastime, fighting with the blackberries.“

„Those damn thorns.“ He looked at his bruised hands and stared menacingly at the bushes. „Someday I'll burn you down and put a pigsty here! To hell with the family tradition!“ He shook himself once. Then he turned to Damian's company and his face lit up again. „Whom have you brought here?“

„These are Lena and Jannis.“

„Oh, those two coma-sleepers you told me about.“ Helge's piercing gaze wandered curiously over the two of them.

„Ex-coma-sleeper,“ Damian corrected him.

They shook hands.

„I thought I'd show them your farm to give them some insight into where the food comes from these days,“ Damian said.

Helge looked at them seriously. „I see. So, you want to try some flour moth burgers from my insect farm.“

Lena's facial features slipped away. Helge laughed resoundingly.

„Helge!“ Damian rebuked and playfully threatened him with his index finger. „Stop this nonsense!“

Helge grinned and winked at them. „Don't worry. There are quite a few insects here. But I only grow fruits and vegetables. Would you like to take a tour of the wonderful world of permaculture farming?“ He made a theatrical gesture and looked at them expectantly. Jannis and Lena nodded.

„Come on, then!“

He led them between two tool sheds into his field. A green paradise shone there. Dense rows of apple and cherry trees, beans, raspberries, lush lettuce heads and various other plants stretched out in front of them. Bees buzzed, butterflies soared through the air, and a few chickens and geese scurried between the colorful rows of plants. Lena stopped in amazement. „Wow, I am impressed! This variety is overwhelming.“

Helge smiled with great pride. „More beautiful than monocultures, right?“

Jannis eyed some caterpillars hanging from an apple tree. „You had a point with insect breeding.“

„That's right. Since I do without chemicals and artificial fertilizers, the insects feel very comfortable here. As long as the ecosystem is in balance and no species takes over and becomes a plague, that's not a problem at all. Only every now and then I have to tweak some things. Last year, for example, there were a lot of slugs crawling around and eating our salads. Since slugs are often an indicator that the soil is too compacted, I paid even more attention to the build-up of organic material in the soil. And lo and behold, with the improvement of the soil the snail plague disappeared as well.“ He leaned forward and raised his index finger. „The trick is to always cover the ground with mulch. To me, bare soil is like an open wound.“

„And this method is called permaculture?“ asked Jannis.

„Right.“ Helge nodded. „Permaculture is based on natural ecosystems and tries to imitate them as much as possible. You work with nature, not against her.“ He pointed with his arms to the field. „This may look like a wild garden at first glance, but it is a highly thought-out and precisely designed ecosystem. The chickens eat insects, fertilize the soil and

distribute nutrients. Trees, bushes, perennial and annual vegetables cooperate with each other.“

„But don't plants compete for water and nutrients in such a dense space?“, asked Jannis astonished.

„Not necessarily. The decisive factor is the diversity and intelligent integration of plants and animals. Many of the beds here are designed to create symbioses between the plants. All the plants are tightly connected to each other via microorganisms in the soil, support each other via their roots in absorbing water and nutrients, provide each other with shade or protect each other in frosty conditions. Garlic next to strawberries helps against diseases and fungal infestation. Tomatoes like basil. The trick for farmers is to become part of this system.“

„And this represents modern agriculture?“, asked Jannis skeptically.

„Exactly“, said Helge and approached a row of bushes, picked some raspberries and handed them to them. Lena let a berry melt on her tongue and closed her eyes. „Mmmh, they are delicious! Much better than the stuff from the supermarket.“

„That's why it's not a dead mass product. Every fruit is lovingly grown by me.“

„Helge also talks to his trees,“ Damian whispered to them in a low voice.

„Of course, I do. And for these highly stimulating conversations they thank me with rich gifts.“ He bowed before an apple tree. Lena had to laugh.

Then Helge turned again to the newcomers: „What did you do before? Professionally.“

„I worked at Bread for the World. My field of work was human rights and refugee policy,“ said Lena.

„How nice, an activist!“ Helge exclaimed happily. Then he turned to Jannis. „And you?“

„I am a professor of economics, most recently at the Mannheim Institute.“

„Oh.“ Helge pulled her eyebrows together and kept quiet. There was an awkward silence. Jannis looked angry.

Lena's eyes wandered around and got stuck on a small tree with little

orange fruits hanging from it. „Are those oranges?“

„Yes“, said Helge. „Due to global warming, some more robust varieties are now growing here in Brandenburg. But they don't feel quite at home here. That's why I only have these two trees.“

„Oranges in Brandenburg. I can't believe it.“ Lena shook her head. „Then avocados probably grow in Bavaria now.“

„No, it didn't turn out that badly,“ Helge said. „But it could have been,“ he added seriously.

„Do you need to water much?“ asked Jannis.

„No. Only during extreme drought. Good soil is like a sponge and can store a lot of water. And the perennial bushes and trees make the groundwater available for the annual plants. But we have made provisions for emergencies.“ He pointed to a small pond at the foot of a hill where two ducks were cleaning their plumage. „There, for example, we have dug a so-called water retention basin. I once visited an agricultural project in Portugal and learned about it from them.“

„Water retention basin?“, asked Jannis.

„Yeah, that's what they call it. During heavy rainfall, you analyze where exactly the water collects and where it flows down on elevated ground. Then you try to find a place where you can stop the outflow of the water with the least possible effort and thus dam it up. In this way you invite the water to stay and over time a small pond is created. The idea goes back to the Austrian Sepp Holzer.“

„Very interesting“, Lena looked impressed.

„Yes. In the long run, it can even raise the groundwater level slightly. In the south of Portugal and Spain, where there are still rather nasty droughts, such basins are now very common.“

Jannis raised his voice: „Such gardens in harmony with nature are all very well. But you can't feed the whole world with these gimmicks. Do you also cultivate real fields?“

„If by real fields you mean the monocultures of earlier times, then perhaps you should first read a book on the basics of ecology,“ Helge said to him with a snapping voice.

Damian intervened calmly: „Fields with monocultures are indeed hardly existing anymore. They are simply too sensitive to pests and

weather fluctuations. In recent decades, a number of plagues have swept over our earth. This has brought the old agricultural industry to its knees and helped new approaches to flourish. In the truest sense of the word.“

Jannis crossed his arms. „I must admit that this garden looks impressive. But at the end of the day dinner must be on the table and the global food supply must be provided. How does that fit together?“

Helge looked at him seriously. „Believe it or not. Gardens like this one are extremely productive. By now, permaculture farms are the backbone of food production. Compared to the monocultures of your time, they usually produce many times the yield per unit area. Completely without any fertilizer or pesticides.“

Damian nodded. „Helge is right. Of course, productivity varies greatly from region to region, but you can see for yourself the amount of food that is growing here.“ He pointed to the fields. „Harvesting takes place all year round. But many fields are still exhausted by decades of monoculture. It takes time for the soil to recover. This farm is also still regenerating.“

Helge raised a finger. „Also, you can't underestimate the amount of brainpower involved in designing such fields. This garden is the result of years of planning and care. But the fruits and yields we harvest today are enormous. It just takes more human labor to cultivate it.“

He clapped his hands and they went on and reached a small pigpen on the side of the property. Two hairy pigs were chewing on exposed roots there and looked up with interest as the visitors approached.

„These are Erna and Che Guevara,“ Helge said solemnly. One of the pigs grunted at him. „Che says, the revolution needs you“, Helge translated and looked at them seriously. „Especially you, Jannis.“

Jannis shook his head with an annoyed look. Lena had to giggle. She pulled herself together laboriously and looked at Helge with a grin. „The pigs seem to be doing quite well. That's nice. Are they allowed to live here just like that or are they going to be slaughtered sometime?“

„The two,“ Helge pointed to the pigs, „are free citizens. They are therapeutic pigs, too. My wife is a child psychologist and calls them her co-workers.“

„Erna and Che are great,“ Damian threw in. „All the kids in town love

them. I can assure you, Lena, they will never be slaughtered. Otherwise there will be a dwarf uprising here.“

„Once Che dies, there will be a formal funeral ceremony. With cannons and fanfares,“ Helge solemnly declared.

„This is how I imagined it!“ called Lena with a grin. Then her eyes fell on a couple of chickens that were walking by.” And what about all the other animals running around here? Has veganism finally caught on in society?“

„I'm afraid I'll have to disappoint you. My wife and I are vegan, but some people couldn't give up eating meat.“

Lena looked disappointed and Damian added: „The animal protection laws are now very strict and factory farming no longer exists though. In addition, meat is very expensive and has therefore become a rare luxury food.“

Helge led them a few meters further through the field, where they passed a small stream. The water glittered in the sun. „These watercourses have appeared in recent years. It's as if the earth has given water as thanks for the regeneration of its soil. My father was still a conventional farmer and has drained the soil quite a bit over the decades. The healing of the earth from the injuries of that time is not complete, yet. But the land becomes more fertile every year.“

They heard someone calling and from the yard came a woman with some waving children.

Helge looked up. „Ah, these are schoolchildren. They are doing a little project here.“

„A project?“, asked Lena.

„Some of the pupils have plant beds that they cultivate themselves in order to learn how to garden,“ Helge replied. „They are back there by the trees. If you feel like it, go and see them. I would like to finish my fight with the blackberries anyway. If you have any questions, Damian can certainly help you.“

Damian nodded approvingly and Helge stomped away after a short nod.

„Interesting guy,“ Lena said with a smile, looking after him.



„Helge is a special guy. But I like him very much“, Damian said.

Jannis was silent.

Damian pointed to the children, who had meanwhile gone to a group of trees. „Well, let's take a look at them.“

Two boys and three girls stood around a small plant bed that had been laid out at the foot of a tree. The children were perhaps eight years old, only one of the girls was taller and seemed a little older.

„Hello, young gardeners,“ Damian called out to the children. „A really nice day for gardening, isn't it? „ The children greeted him joyfully with handshakes and gathered around them curiously.

„I'm showing my visitors Helge's courtyard and garden right now. Would you like to explain what you're doing here?“

A girl pointed to small beds on other trees. „We've planted little nests around the trees and are tending them now.“

„What are you planting?“ Lena asked.

„I have three different kinds of lentils and lots of blueberries,“ said one girl with a colorful striped t-shirt proudly.

„And I have peas and medicinal herbs for my mom,“ called a boy with red hair and pale skin.

„We have expert gardeners here. Eilon harvested a huge zucchini this year.“ The older girl pointed to the other boy, who smiled shyly.

The older girl spoke again: „I am also explaining how the fungal network of the trees is related to the fertility of the vegetable plants. We have done a little experiment here with several nests at different locations.“

The little boy with the red hair jumped up. „It's super interesting! The trees talk to each other and the mushrooms in the ground are like an internet.“

The older girl nodded. „For example, when a plant goes into seed formation, it begins to dry out and sends out a signal via its roots that it is now no longer absorbing water. The microorganisms in the soil then send this signal to many neighboring plants and they also start to absorb less water and dry out. To prevent this from happening, we always make sure that we prune the plants in the beds before they start to form seeds. In this way we give the whole system the signal to absorb water and to

renew itself.“

„Interesting!“, exclaimed Lena fascinated.

„Who are you folks? I haven't seen you before,“ asked the girl with the lentils.

„These two are time travelers,“ Damian announced mysteriously. „They came to us from the past in 2020 and now they want to know our world.“

„How old are you?“ asked the little girl.

„I am ...“, Lena faltered, thought for a moment and then smiled, „...63 years old.“

The girl looked somewhat irritated and looked at her older companion in search of help.

Lena helped her out: „I have slept very, very deeply for a very long time. In these years I have grown older, but my body has remained young.“

The girl's face lit up. „Ah, I see. My mother sometimes gets beauty sleep in the afternoon too.“

Lena smiled amusedly.

The redheaded boy raised his arm. „When I grow up, I also want to travel through time. Then I'll be two hundred years old and will look like fifteen. People will be amazed.“

The shy boy looked at Jannis carefully. „And how old are you?“

„I must be 76,“ he said soberly. „Where's your teacher?“

The children looked a little surprised and the older girl took over again: „I am responsible for the group right now.“

Damian explained: „It is common practice for older children to be involved in the education of the younger ones and to take on responsibility at an early age.“

„And where is the rest of the class?“

„There are no traditional classes at this local school. The children learn self-determined and mainly by means of practical projects.“

Now it was Jannis who looked surprised.

Damian winked at the older girl. „Well, let's not hold up your schooling any longer.“

So, they said goodbye to the children and Damian led them back to the farm building. On the way Lena picked some yellow mini tomatoes which she shared with them. At the building they stayed with a small stone group under a chestnut tree. A flock of sparrows had made themselves comfortable in the tree and wild chirping surrounded them. Lena watched the scene curiously. „There are so many more birds around. Now I realize how much that was missing before.“

Damian nodded. „In permaculture gardens, the birds feel very comfortable. Some of the schoolchildren used to count them. On this property alone, they discovered thirty-seven different species in one day.“

„Impressive!“ Lena looked thoughtfully at the tree and then across the garden. „It seems that sustainability used to be about reducing our damage. But when I see this garden, it's no longer about reducing damage, but about bringing beauty and life back into the world.“

„Yes,“ Damian said. „I sometimes have a picture in my mind of a man walking across a withered landscape, with plants sprouting from his footprints. I believe that is the mission of our time. To regenerate the earth and heal the damage of the past.“

„You mean that the ecological footprint is thus not harmful but positive?“, asked Lena.

Damian nodded.

„Interesting! The ecological footprint used to be negative by its definition. I never considered the possibility of seeing it as something positive.“ She shook her head in fascination.

„How many people work in agriculture today?“, asked Jannis. „Helge has just said that it is very labor-intensive.“

„Here in the countryside, a relatively large number of people are in fact involved in agriculture in some way. Not too many like Helge full-time, but you help out once or twice a week. Depending on the season, sometimes more, sometimes less.“

„That sounds to me a bit like a regression to the times of the past,“ said Jannis skeptically.

„I don't think so. Many people enjoy it very much to be out in nature and to grow their own food. It is also a good balance to mental work.“

Sure, gardening can be really exhausting, but especially young people enjoy working in nature to let off steam.“

Lena laughed. „Agriculture - the modern gym!“

„That's one way to look at it. Gardening is also very varied and versatile work.“

„No asparagus poking from dawn to dusk? „, Lena asked amusedly.

„No. And for the most strenuous work in planting and harvesting, drones and small robots can be employed. Helge does not think much of them, though. He wants everything to be as natural as possible.“

„That doesn't surprise me,“ growled Jannis.

Silently they lingered a while under the chestnut tree.

„Shall we move on? „ Damian finally asked. Lena and Jannis nodded.

They walked along a paved road through the small town where they passed pretty villas and spacious gardens. Many people were in their front gardens or talking to people from the neighborhood on the street.

„By the way, Helge's farm runs as a community-supported agriculture,“ said Damian. „Have you ever heard of that?“

„Yes!“ called Lena, „A friend of mine once took part in a CSA.“

„Can someone please fill me in on what you're talking about?“, asked Jannis.

„In community-supported agriculture you pay an agreed monthly contribution and receive a share of everything that is harvested. The risks and yields are thus taken jointly by several participants in a CSA“, explained Lena.

Damian nodded. „Also, it is usual to help out in the fields from time to time. But normally that's not mandatory and depending on your preference you can get involved more or less often.“

„Are you involved in Helge's CSA, too?“, asked Lena.

„Yes. Last week we were cherry picking, and afterwards we made jam. That jam was on your bread this morning.“

„Ah, that was really tasty! With vanilla, right?“, asked Lena.

„Well recognized.“

They reached a somewhat wildly built, three-storey building with a colorful painted facade. A lively hustle and bustle prevailed on the

property. People sat on benches in front of the entrance, two men did acrobatic exercises on the lawn, and on a roof terrace a woman painted on a large canvas.

„What is this?“, Lena pointed to the building.

„This is the co-hub Colorwild. A kind of coworking space for creative people, handicraft enthusiasts and self-employed people. There are studios, workshop rooms and a cinema. This is the center of the local creative scene and events take place there almost every day.“

Lena seemed impressed. „Looks pretty cool!“

Jannis also nodded. „Probably very clever to set up such coworking spaces in the countryside,“ said Jannis. „That should create some jobs.“

„Most villages and small towns have similar facilities for their creative communities. Otherwise, rural life would probably be much lonelier for many. The Colorwild crew is around for over twenty years now.“

They moved on and Lena turned to Jannis: „Tell me, when did you actually start your coma sleep, Jannis?“

„On the third of November 2019,“ he replied. „At 2:30 p.m. to be exact. And you?“ „He looked at her.

„A little later, April seventh 2020. Over 25 years ago...“ She looked down thoughtfully. Then she looked up again as if an interesting thought had occurred to her. „Uh, that means you slept through the Corona Pandemic, didn't you?“

„The Corona Pandemic?“ Jannis looked at her confused.

Lena nodded. „That was completely crazy. In China, a new type of virus was discovered at the end of 2019, the so-called Corona virus. It spread from there all over the world at breakneck speed. First it put China into a state of emergency. Whole cities were quarantined. In Europe, this was observed skeptically for a few weeks and then, at a stroke, we became an epicenter of the pandemic, too.“

„That sounds terrible!“, said Jannis bewildered.

„Indeed. Those weren't nice times.“ Lena looked at him seriously. „To slow down the spreading of the virus, many countries eventually declared a state of emergency and imposed curfews. Most borders were closed and almost all international passenger traffic was suspended.“

„Curfews?“ called Jannis stunned. „This can't be true.“

„Unfortunately, yes. Everyone was dumbfounded by the rush of events. For a few weeks, it got crazier every day. Suddenly there were people running around with breathing masks. I remember how it was said that closing the schools was not an option and the next day it was announced that the schools would be closed next.“ Lena shook her head.

„Schools were closed?“ Jannis seemed increasingly confused.

„Not just the schools. Europe has been hit hard. All public life was shut down and everything but supermarkets were closed down for a while.“

„Holy shit!“ Jannis called out.

„Oh, yes!“ Lena nodded seriously. „Those were crazy times. The authorities and politicians were hopelessly overwhelmed.“

„And how did it all end?“, asked Jannis.

„At some point, it got too crazy for me. I was in the high-risk group because I have diabetes and...“

Damian interrupted her grinning: „Ha! Don't forget the wonders of modern medicine.“ He winked at her.

She smiled. „Oh, yes. That's right. Anyway, I was in the risk group and I was estimated to have a ten percent risk of death from an infection. The prospect of therefore spending several months in isolation in my apartment did not appeal to me too much. So shortly before Easter 2020 I decided to start my coma sleep. I just had enough of all the crises,“ said Lena and turned to Damian. „By then there were already tens of thousands of dead in the world. But what happened next?“

Damian shrugged his shoulders. „I guess mankind got off with a slap on the wrist. The drastic measures to contain the virus eventually took hold and slowed its spread. Relatively quickly effective drugs were found which reduced the death rate significantly. From then on, the restrictions on public life were eased somewhat. At some point, a vaccine was developed. Then life returned to normal. But the economy was hit pretty hard.“

Jannis shook her head. „Maybe it wasn't so bad that I slept through it all.“

„You can certainly say that,“ said Lena and pulled a face. „The

quarantine was no fun at all.“

Jannis looked at Damian. „How did all this affect the economy?“

„Not too well.“ Damian made a grimace. „Many companies were brought to their knees and had to turn to the state for help. German politics then saved the day by unleashing a huge stimulus package. Billions were pumped into the economy, short-time work was extended and at some point, helicopter money was distributed when the administrations were hopelessly overburdened and could no longer afford individual case checks. Of course, the large corporate banks also fell into crisis again within a very short time and were rescued. The ECB bought up everything. One can say that Germany had successfully muddled through.“ He smiled.

Lena pulled a face. „As usual.“

Jannis shook his head. He still seemed stunned. „How long did it go on?“

Damian pondered for a moment. „The complete shutdown of the economy did not last that long. I was just a kid then, but I think it was only for about two months. The quarantine mode was replaced relatively quickly by targeted isolation of risk groups and carefully considered precautions in everyday life. Weighing up the economic damage and the social follow-up costs against the health risks has been reasonably successful.“

„That sounds really disturbing.“ Jannis still shook his head in disbelief. For a while they walked down the street in silence.

Then Damian took up the conversation again: „The Corona crisis also created the breeding ground for many positive changes. It became obvious that the global economic system was much more fragile than many would have thought possible. This showed that there was a need for more resilience through decentralization, local supply chains and a dismantling of unrestricted globalization. The Corona crisis has reshuffled the cards and many progressive ideas have taken off. As far as I know, the first basic income was tested during this period, for example.“

Lena nodded. „Back then, a friend of mine said that the Corona virus had come to put things right. Mankind had simply become too fast and

needed a break.“

Damian nodded. „By the way, my sister is a so-called Corona Boomer,“ he said with a smile. „During the curfews my parents had found a particularly nice way to pass the time. They were not the only ones. Nine months after the Corona eruption, there was quite a birth boom.“

„Really?“, asked Lena with a grin.

„I guess people had time again to do things that were otherwise neglected. The deceleration and the time off from the hamster wheel of career generally led many people to refocus on the really important things. My father said that it was during the Corona crisis that he had to think about whether the food supply could become a problem. He had never had to ask himself this question in his life until then. I can imagine that such an experience changes one's perspective.“

„I can imagine that too,“ Lena said thoughtfully. „Despite all the bad news from the world, I was also very touched to read about the many gestures of solidarity. I remember reports of countless spontaneous neighborhood helpers, volunteer harvesters, equipment donations from companies, and even landlords who voluntarily waived their rent payments.“

„Yes, the crisis has brought a wave of solidarity across the whole society,“ Damian said nodding. „Nature has also breathed a sigh of relief. Generally, the Corona crisis has brought about great changes, especially in China. Some children in the Chinese cities probably saw a blue sky for the first time in their lives during the shutdown. Accordingly, there was a loud call for better air and more sustainability. This caused the Chinese leadership to change its course. The original communist ideology had already been completely eroded by then, so the party leadership decided that a new guiding star was needed for China. Nature conservation and sustainability were therefore chosen as the new paradigm.“

Jannis raised one eyebrow. „Nature conservation and sustainability? In China? Seriously?“

Damian shrugged his shoulders. „In any case, this is a very good way to justify political power institutions and the restriction of individual freedoms.“

„China has switched to eco-fascism? „, Lena asked irritated.

„Eco fascism is a very strong word, but tendencies of it can certainly be observed in China. The human rights situation in China is still not necessarily the best. But at least nature is better off there now than before.“

Jannis shook his head. „It’s miraculous, what a small virus can do.“
Shortly afterwards they passed a shop. *Soli-Market* stood at the entrance.

Lena pointed to it. „What is a Soli-Market?“

„This is a co-op supermarket. You can buy food and various consumer goods there.“

Jannis looked surprised. „Is it cooperatively operated?“

„Yes. To shop here, you have to become a member and then do some work in the store from time to time. In return, you can not only buy quite cheaply, but you can also put your own goods on the shelves.“

Jannis and Lena looked at him curiously.

„I will just show you. Come on.“

He led them to the front door, held his index finger to a small box and looked into a camera. Then the glass door slid to the side and revealed a medium-sized store. Colorful rows of food were lined up.

„The majority of the local farmers bring their produce here. Through cooperation with cooperatives and companies from other regions, there is also a basic stock of goods from other countries. As I said, you can also offer your own products here. If you are a beekeeper, for example, you can put your honey on the shelf here and tell the computer the price you want. The income from the sales is automatically credited to your account. You only pay a small rent for the shelf.“

„Are such cooperative supermarkets very common by now?“, asked Jannis.

„In the countryside, they are quite common. Less so in the cities, where larger supermarkets prevail. Here in our village there is a bigger shop and twice a week there is a weekly farmers market in front of the town hall square.“

They walked through one of the corridors. Only two other customers were currently in the shop who obviously knew Damian and greeted him. Lena curiously looked at some of the products. All sorts of apples,

salads and tomatoes and many other tempting fruits and vegetables were on display.

Lena picked out a broccoli and looked at Damian with dismay. „It's wrapped in plastic. That still has not stopped?“

Damian smiled: „This is not plastic, it's organic material.“ He took a closer look at the packaging. „I think this one's made of cellulose. Fully compostable. You can throw it in the woods and after a month, there's nothing left. The vegetables stay fresh for longer though if they are packaged with this.“

Lena's face lit up. „All right. Then I am reassured.,, She curiously glanced at the wrapped broccoli in her hand.

„But you shouldn't throw it into the woods anyway,“ Damian said with a grin.

„Thank you for that valuable advice!“ she replied mockingly, putting the broccoli back on the shelf.

„Are there no organic products here?“ Jannis turned to Damian.

„The question is wrong. The correct question would be: Are there any products here that are not organic?“

„Then why aren't they marked as organic?“

„Because all food in Germany is by now organic anyway.“

„This is now required by law?“

„Yes. All food in the EU must meet high ecological criteria.“

„And this could be enforced against the agricultural lobby and the farmers' associations?“, Lena asked in surprise.

„Not against the farmers, but with them. Harvest failures and droughts caused by the advance of climate change had hit most of them quite hard. As a result, more and more farmers realized that things could not go on like this and that sustainable agriculture is the only agriculture with a future on this planet.“

Lena agreed: „That makes sense. Most small farmers didn't benefit from the old system anyway, only the big agricultural companies. A friend of mine had married a farmer. She told me that he spent more time in front of a computer analyzing EU agricultural subsidies than in the field. I thought that was crazy.“

„Subsidies usually lead to economic disruption,“ explained Jannis.

„The problem are the politicians that are hijacked by interest groups.“

„Yes, that's right,“ said Lena. „But I have the impression that very often these interest groups are backed by some dedicated economists.“

Damian grinned and kept silent.

They went a few steps further and reached a black box with a transparent windows and metal arms inside. Lena pointed at it. „What is that?“

„This is a 3D printer,“ Damian explained. „All you need for everyday life can be printed here. There are tons of designs and blueprints online.“

„Awesome!“, exclaimed Lena enthusiastically and stepped closer to the printer. „Those machines existed in our time already, but I've never seen one in action.“

„Well, I guess I should show it to you then.“ Damian stepped up to the device and tapped on a button. A large display lit up. With a nasal voice Damian turned to his companions again: „What would you like? Earrings for Madame? A fine fountain pen for the gentleman? Or just a cup with the inscription „I love 2048“ as a souvenir for this special day?“

Lena looked excited. „I'd like the cup and...“ she thought for a moment, „and a Fabergé egg!“

„Very well, mademoiselle.“ Damian laughed and wiped around the display. He showed Lena a selection of Fabergé eggs, from which she chose a light blue one, decorated with precious gold. Then the machine started to rumble and the metal arms started to first print the cup and then the egg layer by layer. After a short time, the machine was finished. It beeped triumphantly and a flap opened through which Damian took out the two objects. He placed the egg in Lena's right hand and the cup in her left. Then he bowed. „The noble egg gives Madame a royal air. Does Your Majesty require a scepter and crown, too?“

„No, that should do it.“ She waved her hand. „Dismissed, please.“

Jannis interrupted the two: „That went impressively fast. Is it now common practice to produce household goods here by yourself instead of importing them from China, for example?“

„Yes, it is. This is not only extremely convenient, but also saves transport costs and protects the environment. It also means you can print out spare parts very cheaply and easily. By the way, all devices

nowadays have to be designed so that they are easy to repair.“

„Finally!“ called Lena, „I hated having to throw away a whole washing machine because of a tiny broken component. It was always cheaper to buy everything new than to repair it. That was such madness!“

„Fifteen years ago, there was a large-scale campaign: Reduce, Reuse, Recycle. Since then, the legal warranty has been raised to five years and for all products, construction plans and spare parts must be made freely available on the Internet. This puts a stop on the planned obsolescence.“

„Planned obsolescence?“ asked Jannis.

„Well, the planned wear and tear of products,“ Lena scolded. „That your mobile phone gets increasingly slower over time, the battery is not replaceable or the printer suddenly breaks down after the guarantee period has expired. Of course, this kept consumption going and put money into the pockets of the corporations.“

„Well, just because your printer happens to break after the guarantee period has expired, I wouldn't assume bad intentions behind that right away,“ Jannis said. „Complex technical devices are simply fragile. But it certainly wasn't planned that the parts would break down at a certain deadline.“

„Maybe not at a certain deadline, but often a short life span was built in quite deliberately,“ Damian said. „There was a landmark legal battle in the 20s. An employee of a large electronics company had published internal strategy papers and construction plans of the company as a whistleblower. These proved that the company Capson-Packard had actually programmed into the software of its printers that some devices report a faulty print head after the warranty period had expired, even though everything was still fine. This case led to class action suits for damages, which ended up in the European Court of Justice. The Court examined the matter meticulously and found that the plaintiffs were right. In the end, Capson-Packard had to pay massive compensation claims and went into insolvency. As a result, several other companies had to pay compensations too.“

„And since then there are less products produced for the garbage dump?“ Lena asked hopefully.

„As I said, short-lived products simply do not pay off anymore, simply

because of the legal guarantee. My parents are often joking about all the trash products they used to have in the old times. So, something must have changed fundamentally.“

Jannis had Lena pass him the Fabergé egg. „What material is it made of?“

„There are different materials depending on the object and settings.“ He looked at the display. „The egg is made of sugarcane polyethylene and zinc was used for the ornaments. The cup is made of a corn-based plastic. All of that is of natural origin and largely biodegradable.“

„Is crude oil still used for plastics at all?“, asked Jannis.

„Most unsustainable chemicals are banned or at least strictly regulated. I could have used other, less sustainable materials for printing, but then it would have been much more expensive.“

Jannis followed up: „What did the whole thing cost?“

Damian looked again at the display of the device. „The cup cost me €4.78 and the egg cost €6.15. The cost of materials and energy for the printer is quite low, but you pay the disposal or recycling fees in advance and of course various taxes.“

„How did consumer price inflation develop?“, asked Jannis. „Otherwise, it is difficult to assess how these prices compare with our old times.“

„Good point.“ Damian tapped his bracelet and then presented a little graphic *consumer price inflation 2000-2048*.

Jannis looked at the display with a concentrated look. „Some swings in the 2020s, but inflation has been remarkably low and stable over the last decade. The central bankers seem to have done a good job.“

„What does that mean?“, asked Lena.

Jannis turned to her: „Prices have approximately doubled compared to 2019.“

„Yes.“ Damian nodded approvingly.

„How much is the sales tax now?“, asked Jannis.

„35 percent.“

„That's quite high.“ Jannis looked surprised.

„Yes. But then there's no income tax anymore.“

„No more income tax!“, Jannis rubbed his chin. „Very interesting! I think I'd like to ask you a few questions about the present tax system!”

„A fantastic subject for a conversation without me,“ Lena intervened.

„All right. „ Jannis shrugged, then turned back to Damian, „What about the copyright? Do you pay any fees to the designers of the blueprints?“

„No, everything is free for private use. But you can pay a voluntary appreciation to the designers. This is also common practice.“ He pointed again to the display of the device. „The cup was designed by WolfWhite22_mampf. Here I could now choose to pay him a little appreciation.“ Lena looked curiously over his shoulder.

Jannis looked slightly disturbed. „Hold on. Copyright and patents no longer exist?“

„Unfortunately, it didn't get that far, but at least private individuals in the EU don't have to worry about such things any more. For companies it's still relevant though. Generally, there has been a great deal of rethinking about the concept of intellectual property in recent years.“

„So, downloading music and movies on the Internet is no longer illegal?“, Lena asked hopefully.

„Yes, it's all freely available. But even there, you are invited to pay an appreciation fee.“

„Very cool!“, said Lena. „I once got busted for watching an illegal stream of the Matrix on the Internet. It cost me 2000€ and got me into a lot of trouble with a soulless lawyer who earned a golden nose with it.“

Jannis wrinkled his eyebrows. „I find it ethically questionable when intellectual property is not protected. Whoever invents and develops something is entitled to the yields. People shouldn't just snatch others' outputs.“

„There are other ways to look at that,“ Damian interjected. „We all stand on the shoulders of giants. Every innovation is built on countless preliminary works and insights from others. Why should anyone be financially rewarded for being the last link in the long chain from which some invention finally emerges?“

„Property is theft!“ Lena called.

Jannis shook his head. „But what incentives are left then to do research

for instance?“

„Why shouldn't there be any incentives for research anymore?“ Damian asked confused.

„Because without patents, it's much harder to make financial profit from inventions.“

„I would think that it would be very problematic, if profit is the only incentive for research. Besides, universities are not dependent on profit at all and thanks to the basic income there are plenty of hobbyists who make their findings freely available on the Internet.“

„I had already wondered whether there is now an unconditional basic income,“ said Jannis. „That would be answered then. But you said that there are still patents for companies?“

„Yes, patents still exist for companies in the EU. However, numerous restrictions on patent protection have also been installed there. For example, if a pharmaceutical company holds a patent on a drug, it must produce it at a fair price or the patent loses its validity. So, speculating with patents is no longer an option. But a few countries have abolished all forms of intellectual property, for example Spain and China.“

„The Chinese have never given a damn about that,“ Jannis said grumpily.

„From today's perspective, I guess you'd have to call them visionary then.“ Damian said with a grin.

He took a bowl of raspberries and a bar of chocolate, then led his companion towards the exit.

„There are no cash registers. How does the payment work?“, asked Jannis.

„You have to do it by yourself. You simply put all your purchases in the basket here and then a computer scans the products and their weights and calculates the total price. It is automatically debited from my account. So, there is no need for a cashier and the supermarket can be open around the clock. Those who have sleepless nights can even go shopping at night.“

„And who checks that you put everything in the basket?“, asked Jannis. „If there's nobody else in the shop, you could just take goods away, couldn't you?“

„Sure, you could, but why would you do that?“ Damian looked at him somewhat impatiently.

„I don't know? Maybe because you don't have money or you're stingy.“

„If a person is so poor that she cannot afford to eat, or feels psychologically so poor that he or she can't pay for the services of others, then we have a social problem. This could probably not be solved with cash registers and controls.“

„Not solved, but at least then others will no longer suffer from that too,“ Jannis said

„You forget the costs for that control. When I look at the expenses for police, justice, prisons and private security companies in your time, I wonder if it wouldn't have been cheaper to just give the money to the needy so that they don't need to get into crime out of desperation. Besides, there are certain admission requirements for the cooperative. You need a person of trust who is already a member and vouches for you.“

Jannis waved away. „Well, if this all works...“

After Damian had paid at the cash desk, they left the shop and stepped out into the street.

„I'm getting hungry.“ Damian rubbed his stomach. „How about you folks?“

Lena and Jannis nodded in agreement.

„I packed us some sandwiches this morning. If you like, we can go to the lake and have a little picnic there. There's a very nice spot by the water.“



They came to the edge of a small wooded area. While walking, Lena turned to Damian: „You said that in the last decades nature has regenerated in many places around the world and that climate change has been prevented. How the hell was that actually accomplished?“

„It was a long and rocky road.“ Damian sighed. „By the mid-twenties

things had gotten pretty bad. Natural disasters were becoming more and more violent all over the world. One heat record followed another. In Germany, 45° was once measured in Munich. In that year there were even serious problems with the water supply in some German cities. Hurricanes, forest fires and droughts raged all over the world. At some point it became clear to even the last of us that climate change is not a fantasy and that a great many people will die if we don't change course.“

Jannis and Lena looked down. „When hope dies, action begins,“ whispered Lena.

In the meantime, they had turned onto a small forest path. There were several anthills along the way.

„That's how you can sum it up. There were increasingly fierce protests among the population. In some countries there were climate rebellions. A left-wing climate alliance even successfully put itself in power in Brazil.“

„Fascinating,“ Jannis looked surprised, „and the military didn't stop that?“

„Even the generals realized at some point that something had to change.“

„So, at some point, politics actually changed?“ Lena asked, picking up a chestnut tree from the ground.

Damian nodded. „It went in several waves. Some radical reforms came as a great surprise. Probably this can be explained by the fact that at some point the critical mass needed for change was reached.“

„Yes, I read something about that once,“ said Jannis. „Before a critical mass is reached, almost nothing happens. But eventually the change comes faster and faster until a certain point is passed and the system topples over.“

„Yep. At that point, suddenly a lot becomes possible. In the first wave at the beginning of the twenties there were sharp tax increases on heating oil and petrol. The car-free Sunday was introduced. There were more environmental regulations for agriculture and subsidies for the development of regenerative technologies. Flights and meat became much more expensive.“

„Sounds reasonable,“ said Lena and threw her chestnut away. A

squirrel scurried above them through the branches.

„Yes, but that was far from enough. Many of the measures sounded great at first, but they were not far-reaching enough and were full of exceptions for big business. Then came the big bang and that really stirred up the political arena again.“

„The Big Bang?“ Jannis frowned.

„The great financial crisis of the early twenties.“

„Oh.“

By now they had reached the lake and were heading for a mighty, gnarled oak tree.

Damian pointed to a large root sticking out of the ground near the shore. „This is my favorite place.“ He sat down on the wood and invited them to join him. Then he pulled out his backpack and presented some sandwiches, a raspberry bowl and a chocolate bar. While Lena took hold of the chocolate and Jannis looked critically at the sandwiches, Damian continued: „The twenties were turbulent times. After major political upheavals, there was a second wave of climate policy. Same as during the financial crises of 2008 when politicians suddenly released billions to save the banks, billions were suddenly available for ecological restructuring. Huge solar power lines were built and many new forests were created in the EU. All coal-fired power stations were shut down. Good coal is coal that stays in the ground, they said.“

„Keep it in the ground,“ Lena whispered.

„In addition, the CO₂ and methane tax in the EU has been drastically increased.“

„Very good.“ Jannis face lit up. „I have always believed that a CO₂ tax is one of the most effective instruments to employ market processes for climate protection. The instrument has often been wrongly criticized, but the problem was that the price was too low.“

„Yes, that was an important step. But even that was not enough. Above all it needed more global cooperation. Unfortunately, sea levels had to rise before people got that together.“

„A lot?“ asked Lena.

„Too much for some coastal towns. New York has been evacuated. The Maldives has sunk. Amsterdam became a kind of Venice 2.0. But

as these disasters unfolded, at least the last politician woke up. So, it came to the Tripoli agreement in the early thirties. That was the milestone for global climate protection.“ Damian threw some raspberries in his mouth. „They agreed on an internationally coordinated resource tax. This was used to fund global reforestation programs. Many new nature reserves were declared. By 2055, a quarter of the world's land and half of its oceans will be protected.“

„Sounds fantastic!“ Lena called.

„Incidentally, most of the Amazon rainforest is now also protected from human cultivation. There is the Attenborough Reserve, named after the famous documentary filmmaker.“

„Doesn't it create problems for the global food supply if such large areas are lost to agriculture?“ asked Jannis irritated.

„No, why? There's really enough land on earth. If one assumes a predominantly animal-based diet and throws away half of all food, society naturally faces certain problems with food production. But with a local, seasonal and predominantly plant-based diet, sufficient food production is really not a problem. There are studies concluding that we could easily feed fifty billion people in this way.“

Lena looked at him curiously. „How did such important international agreements become possible? In the past, the United Nations was so terribly powerless and most countries just wanted to push their national interests. They couldn't even manage to coordinate the taxation of international corporations in a meaningful way.“

„It's been a long way. Above all, the USA had to lose its supremacy in the world before an international community worthy of the name could emerge. But that's a long story. I can tell you more about it in the next few days.“

„And all these environmental reforms have been enough to turn the tide?“ asked Lena.

„At least a final melting of the polar ice caps was prevented. From 2027 onwards, the Earth Overshoot Day, the day in the year on which we already exceed the Earth's annual capacities, has moved back again for the first time. Since 2042 there has not been an Earth Overshoot Day. Since then, humanity officially no longer lives beyond its means.“ He

made a triumphant gesture.

„It's tragic that people apparently only come to their senses when it's almost too late,“ said Lena, looking thoughtfully into the distance.

Damian breathed out audibly. „Yes. Or too late.“

„What do you mean?“ Lena looked at him confused.

He looked down sadly. „We were able to save and regenerate a lot. But for some species, the turning point came too late.“ He looked down.

„About a fifth of all animal species that populated this planet a hundred years ago are extinct.“

Lena opened her eyes. „A fifth?!“

„Yes.“ He was silent for a moment. „With some species it seemed as if they had given up hope and decided to leave this planet. Even in zoos, the animals could no longer be induced to reproduce. The last polar bear died ten years ago. And mountain gorillas will never again roam the mountain forests of the Congo.“

„Fuck“, Lena was visibly hit. „I once volunteered in the Congo and on a safari saw some mountain gorillas in wildlife. These are such incredibly powerful animals.“ A tear ran down her face.

Damian put a hand on her shoulder to comfort her. For a while they were silent and looked at the lake. The wind sent small waves across the water in which the sun was glistening.

After a moment, Jannis broke the silence: „How is the energy supply working by now? Have there been any interesting technical breakthroughs?“

Damian took back his hand from Lena and turned to Jannis. „At first there was a lot of hope in solar panels and wind power. Of course, they became more and more effective and cheaper. But eventually it became clear that we cannot plaster all landscapes with solar plants and windmills. Furthermore, the consumption of resources for the production of the plants is quite significant. Reluctantly, it had to be admitted that a reduction in absolute energy consumption was inevitable.“

„What about nuclear power?“ asked Jannis.

Damian shook his head. „The last active reactors are in Bangladesh, scheduled to shut down next year. The price of nuclear power is simply

too high.“ He looked at her seriously. „There was a tragic accident in China in the late 20s. After that they got the message.“ He looked more positive again. „The days of nuclear power are now over. But the first operational fusion reactor has been running for a few years now, producing cheap and clean energy. Soon there will be no good reason to burn even the smallest bit of oil or coal.“

„Fantastic!“ called Jannis. „This is a great breakthrough. Full of potential! But very unfortunate that it took so long. If only this technology had been made operational a few decades earlier.“

„I don't know if that would really have been a good thing,“ Damian said thoughtfully. „I mean, what was the first thing people used the discovery of nuclear power for?“

„Hiroshima and Nagasaki,“ whispered Lena.

„Exactly. If states had managed to harness nuclear fusion in your time, they would probably have blown each other up with that much energy.“

„And that's different now?“ asked Lena. „Are there no more wars?“

„No,“ Damian said. „There are still some unstable countries and conflicts, but the time for war between nations is over.“

„At last.“ Lena closed her eyes and breathed in deeply.

They ate their sandwiches in silence. It was pleasantly quiet, only a mild wind played with the leaves of the trees. Peace was in the air.

„It's so good to be in nature,“ Lena said. „I used to take far too little time for that.“

Damian nodded understandingly. „It seems to me that people in the past have forgotten that they are part of nature. But without our connection to the trees, to the birds and to the earth we are incomplete.“

„What do you mean?“ asked Jannis skeptically.

„I don't believe that this planet is just a big ball of water, rocks and chemicals on which a few elements have randomly assembled into clever cells.“ Damian pointed to the nature around them. „Rather, the earth is a living organism. The forests are its lungs, the wetlands and steppes its skin, the animals its eyes and ears. Just as a cell in your body not only stands on its own, but is at the same time part of the human being, so we humans are part of this larger organism, the earth. This view, the so-called Gaia hypothesis, has also become more and more accepted in

ecology in recent years.“

Jannis was silent and bit silently into his sandwich.

Lena paused with her meal. „I like this view. We are all part of Mother Earth.“

„It's interesting, by the way, that you use the expression Mother Earth,“ Damian said. „The cultural historian Charles Eisenstein once wrote that this view is part of the problem.“

„What do you mean?“ Lena asked confusedly.

„Well, in a mother-child relationship, the mother gives her unconditional love and cares for the child as best she can, and the child lets herself be nurtured by her. Similarly, the earth has given us humans all its resources and gifts, which we have happily taken without giving anything in return. But at some point, her powers came to an end and she was exhausted.“

„Hm.“ Lena bit her lip. „Yes, I guess that's true. So what kind of new relationship does it need?“

„Of lovers.“

Jannis looked skeptically. „Of lovers? We're supposed to fall in love with the earth?“ He pointed to the brown earth at his feet. „I find that technically difficult.“

Damian continued unperturbed. „In a love affair there is a give and take, a mutual nurturing. That's what the last decades have been about. It was time for us humans to grow up and learn to treat the earth as our lover and to take responsibility for this relationship.“

„I am touched by what you say.“ Lena looked at the lake. „But how does it work? I usually feel quite cut off from nature. How do you build a love relationship with the earth?“

Damian thought for a moment and smiled. „Erich Fromm once said that love is an activity. If we want to connect with the earth, we have to make time for it. We must connect with the mountains and the lakes, listen to the songs of the blackbirds and feel with the weeping willow.“

Lena let the words sink in for a moment. Then she got a new thought. „I was once in Yosemite National Park as a teenager on a school exchange in the USA. It was incredibly beautiful there. There was something sacred about the place. I think that's where I felt love for

nature.“

Jannis stood up. „I'm thinking of indulging my love affair with the lake and going for a swim. The water looks excellent and I feel like a little cooling off.“

„Good plan, go ahead. You need a towel or something?“ Damian asked.

„Thanks, I'm fine.“ Jannis stepped to the water, took off his shirt and shoes and trousers. Then he took off his underpants and went naked into the water. With a little jump he slid into the lake and after a few strong strokes he had swum out a good distance.

„There the professor simply goes skinny dipping.“ Lena shook her head in amusement. „I would not have expected that he is so easy-going.“

Damian grinned. Then he looked at Lena. „Have you ever heard of deep ecology?“

Lena shook her head.

„This is a nature philosophy and also a set of methods to heal the relationship with nature. For example, by working through normally suppressed feelings like anger and sadness in a safe environment.“

„What does that look like, exactly?“

„If you like, I can show you an exercise.“ He looked at her questioningly.

„Alright.“

„Okay! Let's take a minute to tune in and relax first.“

While sitting he straightened his back, put his hands in his lap and closed his eyes. Lena did the same. Turned inwards, she noticed the pleasant peace of the place, a warm feeling of well-being in her stomach, smelled the forest air and enjoyed the beauty of the moment.

When she opened her eyes again after a while, Damian was already looking at her curiously. „Good. I will now speak a sentence and you are invited to let it enter your mind and then complete it. Just speak from the heart without thinking too much. Whatever comes is right. Okay?“

She nodded.

He took another deep breath and continued: „When I see what has been done to nature, it breaks my heart that...“

Lena's features hardened. Then she opened her mouth: „...that we were cutting down ancient forests for palm oil. ...that we mistreat and kill animals.” Pain was written all over her face. „...that we empty the seas and turn them into dead graves.“ She stopped and then began to sob. Damian looked at her with compassion. „Hmmm. It's good to feel that pain once in a while. Don't fight the grief, just let it flow through you and breathe. Trust your body.“

Silent tears ran down Lena's cheeks from her closed eyes.

Another wave of sadness came over Lena. Her body shook slightly. She felt a deep pain and also a pressure falling from her.

After a few minutes her tears dried up and Lena opened her eyes again. Her face was serious, but visibly more relaxed. „Uh. That was intense. But now I feel lighter and somehow deeper.“ She shook her head and looked at him. „I think that was very good. Thank you. Really.“

Damian nodded. „When you suppress your grief, you cut something off from yourself. Feeling the pain also reconnects us to the object of grief, in your case to nature. Giving space to the feelings can therefore be very healing.“

„Yes, I can feel that. I feel much more open and connected to everything around me now. It's beautiful.“

They remained silent for a moment. Then Lena turned to Damian: „And that was called deep ecology?“

„Yes, at least one facet of it. Deep ecology comprises various methods and exercises. Among them many rituals and meditations to strengthen and appreciate our connection to nature.“

„And such methods have become commonplace?“

Damian nodded. „In my youth, it was quite trendy to engage with that. It was almost chic to go to the weekly climate-trauma group.“

They heard noises from the lake. Jannis approached the shore. He waded ashore where he briefly brushed the water off his skin and put on his clothes.

„How's the water, captain?“ Damian asked.

„Excellent.“ Jannis was radiant. The swimming had obviously done him good. He was surrounded by an inner calm.

They sat down together on the shore for a while and looked silently at

the lake.

Finally, Damian cleared his throat. „What do you think about taking a trip to Berlin tomorrow?“

„That sounds like an excellent plan,“ said Jannis and Lena nodded excitedly.



Lena is standing in a large clearing. Hard chunks of burnt earth bore into the soles of her bare feet. Charred branches lie scattered around. At the edge of the clearing, withered bushes and dead, thick stumps testify that proud trees once stood here.

Lena stares at the charred floor, her face is a petrified mask. Aimlessly she takes a few steps. Then she notices the silence. No bird, no rustling leaves, no wind can be heard. She is alone in this ash-grey world, nothing lives, nothing talks to her. Everything is dead. Even her body seems strange to her in this dried-up wasteland, like a metal shell she carries around with her.

She loses herself in the barren emptiness, not knowing how much time has passed when she hears a sound. A slight hum rolls in from a distance. She looks at the horizon and discovers a flying dot approaching. The humming gets louder and reveals a plane cutting through the sky. She stares up.

The machine is approaching rapidly. When it finally flies over Lena at low altitude with deafening noise, a loud hiss sounds and a dark cloud descends from the fuselage. Lena moves her head to look after the airplane, which moves away over the dead land, leaving her behind. Then she puts her head deep into the neck and looks up into the sky above her, from where the dark cloud slowly falls down on her. Something small and black hits her on the cheek. She holds her hands protectively over her head as more and more small soft pieces rain down on her. She looks down and sees what it is: Insects.

More beetles, ants, bees and caterpillars fall down. They cover the ground more and more densely and remain lying there motionless. No bumblebee comes back up humming, no beetle marches away. Like the forest, the insects are also without life. Silently Lena takes note of all this. Only cold emptiness is in her.

Finally, the insect rain comes to a halt and again the dead silence spreads.

Lena takes a few steps. The crunch of the insect carpet under her feet breaks the silence. She continues walking silently for a long time. More machine than human, she marches across the burned land.

After a long time when she raises her gaze for the next time, she sees white bars sticking out of the ground in front of her. They are ivory tusks that form a small oval circle. She approaches the circle and sees someone lying in its middle. She steps even closer, staring ahead until she realizes that it is her dead brother. He lies there with a rope around his neck. Just as she found him then.

A blow hits her body. The sudden force of the pain is so overwhelming that her armor finally bursts. She howls and sinks to her knees with a bloodcurdling wail.

Bitterly she whimpers with grief. Now it is as if the pain accumulated over the years breaks over her. Scenes of her life rise up. Her childhood in the grey ugliness of the big city. Alone and lost sitting in the playground. Standing in the cemetery, her father's black coffin sliding into the grave, then her mother's coffin. Finally, how she found her brother.

A tear runs from her cheek and falls to the ground. The splashing sound resounds loudly in her ears.

As if Pandora's box had been opened with this tear, all the images of collective madness that have burned themselves into her soul now burst forth. Begging children in the streets of Manila, burning forests, dirty pigs in narrow fattening pens, bursting icebergs, sinking boats full of refugees. The gate of sorrow has been opened and all the pain of the world is now upon her. All the collective suffering from war, hunger and flight, all the acts of destruction against nature, all the violations of the beauty and dignity of life.

She had never been able to feel this. Had closed up, had her heart closed up. But now all that grief bursts out of her like a long-dammed river. Opens her up. Cleanses her.

An ever-increasing stream of tears descends on her flaccid face. She sits in the middle of the withered wasteland for a long time, finally surrendering to her grief, softening.

Then she sees that to her surprise the earth is moving at her feet. Where her tears have fallen, a green shoot tentatively pierces through the crust of the scorched earth. Lena stares at the tender plant. The young life awakens something new, something lost in her. Hope. It seems that her tears falling to the ground give the shoot further strength. As if in fast motion, it stretches up and slowly unfolds its life force.

Her grief thus rolling healingly to earth nourishes new, green life. And just as the roots of the plant are connected to the earth, she feels a new connection with the world growing, no longer feeling completely cut off and lost. Color comes back into the world.

More seedlings sprout from the ground in front of Lena and form a small rustling bed that slowly expands and reclaims the land. The plants develop crackling into small ferns, tulips and wild roses. The first seedling, however, grows into a willow tree, which strives upwards in the middle of the green carpet. Full of love, Lena looks at the branches of the young tree, feels connected with the rustling leaves in the wind, can feel the soil around its deep roots.

Then she hears a gentle humming. But when she turns around this time, it's not a plane she sees. Like a flying carpet, the insects have risen and are flying away in all

directions. Two huge green butterflies flutter out of the billowing scenery towards Lena and finally settle on her shoulders. Instantly a comforting warmth rises in her. Her face and body relax. At last she is open again. After years of darkness, light shines into her heart. She feels lighter and more alive. Feels connection and peace with the world.

A bird flutters along and sings its song, bees hum, leaves rustle in the wind. Nature is so beautiful, so pure.

When Lena turns her gaze to the ground once more, a web of thick roots covers her feet as if she were a tree too.

Day 4 - Berlin

Lena, Jannis and Damian sat in a compact blue electric car that Damian had booked for them this morning. Damian sat in the driver's seat, but there was no steering wheel.

„Do most cars now drive autonomously?“ asked Jannis.

Damian nodded. „Almost all. In some countries, human-operated cars are even banned.“

Jannis looked perplexed. „Banned?“

„Yes. Human drivers are considered a security risk,“ Damian explained soberly.

The car glided smoothly and quietly through the landscape. They saw a large lake in the middle of the green fields. Lena looked thoughtful out of the window. She felt lighter and clearer that morning. She had told Damian at breakfast about her unusual dream and he had again pointed out the side effects of the neurostimulator. This had calmed her down. But he also found the content of her dream very interesting. He had said that the dream was probably her brain processing the intense experiences of the last few days. However, he had been surprised that her deceased brother had appeared in the dream.

„How long will it take us to Berlin?“ asked Jannis.

„It's happening pretty fast.“ Damian tapped a control panel on the front of the dashboard and said, „Hey, car, how long before we get to Berlin?“

Instantly a friendly computer voice answered. „If you take the next train in Brandenburg an der Havel, you will reach Berlin in approximately 37 minutes.“

„That's fast,“ said Lena, impressed.

Jannis turned to Damian. „Can I ask the car something?“

„Sure.“

„Car, how high is the proportion of autonomous cars in Germany?“

Again, the voice answered immediately: „The share is 67 percent.“

Lena get in: „Car, tell us a joke.“

„I have good news and bad news for you,“ the doctor says to his patient.

Well, let's hear the good news first, says the patient.

We will name the disease after you! the doctor replies.“

General amusement broke out in the car.

They had a few more jokes told until they reached the outskirts of Brandenburg an der Havel.

„We'll arrive soon,“ Damian announced.

„What time does our train leave?“, asked Lena.

„We're flexible. Trains leave every 10 minutes.“

„That's common. Has this become such an important route?“

„No. But since the trains run autonomously and no longer need drivers, the railway has increased the rate considerably.“

Their car drove into the station parking lot and stopped right in front of the entrance to the station.

„You have reached your destination, the train station Brandenburg an der Havel“, said the computer voice. „I hope you had a pleasant journey. I wish you a nice day.“ With a short beep, the doors opened.

„Bye,“ called Lena. „And thanks for the jokes!“

Damian smiled amusedly at Lena's farewell from the car and led them into the station.

As promised, they did not have to wait too long at the track until a streamlined train with a long nose came in.

„This looks really futuristic!“ Jannis looked at the train in amazement.

„Yeah, that's a Regio Hawk. Third generation, if I'm not mistaken.“

„Then I guess there were some updates. How fast do the trains run now?“

„Good question.“ Damian tapped on his bracelet. „This one can speed up to 200 miles per hour, but the ICE's are way faster. „He looked at his display again. „A concept train passed the 300 mph mark four years ago. The regular ICE's go up to 400 kilometers per hour. A few years ago, a new record was set on the Berlin-Munich route. Now you can do it in three hours.“

„Wow!“ called Jannis. „Back in the days, four hours was just a fresh record for that route.“

They boarded the train and entered a spacious compartment in which they chose three seats.

Lena put her arms on the backrests and stretched herself happily. „These chairs are really comfortable!“

„Yes, there is also a relaxation compartment with massage chairs and couches. Very pleasant if you want to take a nap.“

„You are kidding me!“ Lena looked excited. „Can I see that?“

„Sure. There's a dynamic utilization system. You have to reserve a seat in advance. „He tapped a button on his chair and a large hologram display appeared in front of his face. He wiped it a few times and then showed her a miniature view of the train with the different compartments and areas. „This is the on-board restaurant. Here is the games room with virtual reality glasses and here is the relaxation lounge. Looks like the massage chairs are all occupied at the moment. I'll put you on the waiting list.“ He typed twice on the display and then held up his thumb with a grin. „Reserved.“

Then he pressed the button on the side of his chair again, which caused the display to fade out.

„Seems like rail travel now includes full entertainment.“ Lena was radiant. „I like it.“

„Travelling by train is a fine thing. In recent years, the railways have tried a number of things to increase their attractiveness. There were even dating trains once.“ He made a weird face. „But they were more of a flop.“

Lena grinned and imitated a deep voice „I am Klaus and I am going to Gelsenkirchen. Where are you going, pretty lady?“

Damian laughed and answered in a high pitched voice: „I am Tina and I am also going to Gelsenkirchen. What a coincidence, we should have children together.“

„Strange, that it didn't work out!“ called Lena and shook herself with laughter.

Jannis had listened to them amused. „Sounds like rail travel is quite in vogue. How about air travel?“

„I've heard that in your time you could fly to Rome for twenty euros at times, is that true?“ asked Damian.

Jannis nodded.

„Well, those days are over. Flying has become quite expensive. But

there are airships and hydrogen-powered airplanes now. You have to adapt to the weather a little. But if you're flexible, they offer a very good alternative for medium-haul flights.“

„And long distance?“ asked Lena. „How do you travel that?“

„Of course you can still fly, but it's just very expensive. So you only fly if you have a really good reason. Otherwise there are cruise ships and big sailing ships with which you can cross the Atlantic. As a teenager, for example, I went to Costa Rica on a small sailing ship. That was a cool project, the so-called coaching boat. We were a small group of young people on the ship and used the trip for group processes and personal development.“ He smiled happily.

„That sounds amazing!“ said Lena.

Damian's armrest vibrated briefly and in front of his face the message *massage chair available* appeared in bright light.

„That was quick,“ Damian announced to Lena. „Your armchair is down the hall in compartment five, armchair three.“

„Is the handling easy?“

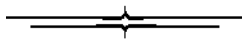
„Sure, it's all very intuitive.“

„And how long can I stay there, and does it cost anything?“

„The system is pretty smart. Each passenger has 10 free minutes. Unless someone else gets on the waiting list, you can stay longer for free. But if you stay despite other waiting passengers, it costs twenty-five cents a minute.“

„All right, I'm off.“ Lena got up from her chair and hurried down the aisle.

Jannis looked at Damian with a smile and shook his head. „Massage chairs on the train. Who would have expected that?“



After a journey of less than twenty minutes, Damian, Jannis and a deeply relaxed Lena reached the Berlin main station. After getting off, Damian

took them up a few escalators through several levels of the station. Not much had changed. Only most of the names of the shops in the station seemed unknown to the two time travelers: „Fruitcake & Freshness“, „Jays Dumplings“ and a shop with the strange name „Funaná“ caught Lena's eye, which seemed to offer plants and flowers.

„The Unicorn Drugstore?“ Lena pointed to a store with a wildly decorated entrance.

„This was an extremely hip Berlin start-up in my day. They really kicked some ass. They have built up a Europe-wide drugstore chain. It's a funny organization, that's for sure. Constantly doing creative-political actions. The company is in so-called responsible ownership and the employees and interested customers make all decisions.“

„That's awesome.“ Lena shook her head in amusement.

Damian still looked intently at his bracelet. „Interesting,“ he whispered. It's where the term fairstainable comes from.“

„Fairstainable? What is that?“ Jannis asked.

„Fair and sustainable. That means produced and traded fairly and sustainably.“

„I see.“ said Jannis with limited enthusiasm.

As they approached the station exit, Damian stopped. „Would you like some ice cream? I treat you.“

Lena smiled broadly. „I'm always in for ice cream.“

Jannis also nodded. So Damian led them to a small shop right next to the exit with the inscription *Antonia Italiana*. In the shop window all kinds of colorful ice cream varieties were presented. One scoop cost two euros fifty. According to a chalkboard, everything was almond milk-based.

„It's quite cheap,“ Lena said. „I would have expected ice cream to cost thirteen euros or more per scoop by now.“

Damian pointed to the exotic selection. „What do you want?“

After some back and forth, they ordered chia mango for Lena, raspberry curuba for Damian and classic chocolate for Jannis. A smiling woman handed them the ice cream in green waffles. Then Damian held his bracelet under a protruding scanner. Shortly afterwards, a small green light flashed up on the machine.

„Did you just pay with that bracelet?“ Lena asked.

„Yes.“

„That was easy. Don't you have to enter a PIN?“

„Not here. I've set it so that I don't need confirmation for payments up to fifty euros. For higher amounts there is a retina check. But this only takes a few seconds longer.“

„What about cash? Has that been abolished?“ asked Jannis.

„No. Although not many people pay cash anymore, there has always been great political resistance to abolish cash completely due to privacy protection and skepticism about too much digitalization. Cash is printed freedom, they said.“

„Yes, probably not entirely unjustified,“ announced Jannis.

„There are also little cards that can be charged with money. With these you can pay anonymously in a digital way.“

Licking their ice cream, they left the hustle and bustle of the station and stepped onto the station forecourt in the direction of the Spree river.

On the square, a crowd of Spaniards ran after a guide who was holding up a SpongeBob doll on a stick. Shaking his head, Jannis pointed to the man. „Seriously? That nonsense still exists?“

Damian smiled. „The most significant cultural achievements of humankind are timeless. Beethoven's Ninth, Goethe's Faust and of course SpongeBob.“

Lena laughed. Then she suddenly stopped. „Something's different.“ She listened for a moment. „It's so quiet here, despite all the people.“

Damian rubbed his chin thoughtfully. „Hmm, maybe it was louder in your time because of all the cars here?“

Lena wanted to answer something, but Jannis interrupted them. „Is that the Charité hospital over there?“ He pointed to a green tower not too far away. But the green didn't seem to be from paint, but from a dense plant growth on the façade of the building.

„Yes, that's the Charité. A wonderful place for health.“

„For health?“ Jannis smirked at him. „I thought they treat the sick there.“

„Well, of course that happens, too. But I guess it makes a big difference whether you just cure diseases or strive for health.“

„What do you mean?“ asked Lena now.

„If I as a doctor only cure symptoms of illness and someone comes to me with high blood pressure, for example, then maybe I just give the person a pill and the matter is done for me. On the other hand, when I am striving for health, I look at the whole person, not just the symptom. Then I check: Is the person satisfied with life as a whole or is something weighing on her? How does he or she eat? How does he deal with stress? Are there chronic tensions? Does she sleep well? Then I might recognize that someone is at their professional limit and compensates for the stress by eating excessively fatty food. I notice that although a pill lowers blood pressure, it does not create balance and health. Today, medicine is trying to achieve real health.“

Jannis had raised an eyebrow. „That sounds less like a hospital than a psychiatry.“

„I suppose you could say that there is a less sharp divide between these. Body and psyche are inseparable. From today's point of view, society of your time used to focus far too much on symptoms instead of causes, on illness instead of health, and on the individual instead of the entirety of the surrounding and the interdependencies with society. But it seems to me that this is a complex topic and we are making a big fuss about it. Let's move on for now and take it up again later.“

Licking their ice cream they went on and entered a small bridge that led across the Spree river. Lena looked briefly down into the river. The water was very clear. She could see a shoal of fish passing by and on the sides of the river she could even see the sandy bottom. She wanted to make a remark about it, but the two men had already gone on and reached the other bank. Damian looked back at her and when she had caught up, he pointed to an imposing building. Hanging gardens overgrew a multi-storey building. „This here on the left in the Spreebogen Park is the new Citizens' Forum.“

„Looks impressive,“ said Lena. „What does Citizens' Forum mean?“

„Many charities and non-profit organizations and associations reside here. They can hold events in the building very cheaply. But above all, the sortition based citizens' assemblies meet here.“

„Sortition-based citizens' assemblies“ Jannis looked a little disturbed. „Are the politicians chosen by ballot now?“

„No, not the politicians.“ Damian grinned. „Not yet! The citizens' assemblies only supplement the elected parliament. In difficult matters, between one hundred or two hundred people are drawn by ballot to deliberate and decide. The whole thing typically takes place over several weekends. During this time, the citizens familiarize themselves with the topic, talk to experts and, above all, exchange views with each other. Most citizens feel responsible for getting involved to the best of their ability and usually the citizens' assemblies produce really good proposals.“

Jannis squinted his eyes. „This sounds familiar. I think I've read something about it before.“

„The basic idea for this comes from the ancient Greeks. But it wasn't until the European democratic crisis in the twenties that the whole thing was rediscovered.“

„That sounds really interesting, but I can't quite picture it yet. Can you give us an example?“ asked Lena, licking the last bit of her ice cream.

„Sure. A few years ago, I myself was drawn for a citizens' assembly on the future of the Berlin Zoo. So I can report first hand.“ He looked around and finally pointed to a wooden bench overlooking the Spree. „Shall we sit here by the water for a while?“

After they sat down on the bench, Damian shoved the rest of his ice cream cone in his mouth and continued: „Well, the zoo. Animal welfare activists had been demanding for some time that animals should not be displayed for entertainment and that the zoo should be closed. The zoo fell in public opinion as a result. A stricter animal protection law was also added. But on the other hand many families saw themselves robbed of their tigers and the zoo simply belonged to the history of the city.“

„I can well imagine,“ said Lena. „Angry citizens on both sides.“

„Exactly. The fronts were completely deadlocked. So it was finally decided to commission a citizens' assembly to decide whether the zoo should close.“

„Exciting! And what was the result?“

„We met for several weeks and were informed by various experts. Zoo employees described their view, animal welfare activists a different one, city politicians informed us about budgets and legal requirements. The

discussions were very intensive.“ He took a break and looked at her. „In the end, in a sense, both sides got their way. Our proposal was not to close the zoo, but to fundamentally rebuild it and turn it into an adventure petting zoo with a climbing park. Only animals that are used to interaction with humans and can live well in limited space should live there. For example sheep, goats, pigs and ponies. We also considered the zoo aquarium with insects and fish to be largely unproblematic. But penguins, tigers and monkeys simply have no place in Berlin. They should therefore be brought back to their home countries and released in nature reserves again.“

Jannis looked skeptically. „But now it sounds more like you were mainly following the zoo opponents.“

„No, I don't think so. After all, the zoo didn't have to close down, and besides, we proposed to integrate the animals in a new form: as lifelike holograms. Our idea, which was also implemented, by the way, was to create a virtual tropical jungle landscape in which you can see cats of prey, monkeys and elephants in action through a sophisticated hologram show. For example when the young animals play, hunt through the undergrowth or make love. Thanks to modern technology this looks really lifelike. Instead of watching apathetic animals eating and sleeping in tiny enclosures, you can now experience the exotic animals in their full strength and this without having to exploit the animals for us.“

„Impressive! And that's what the city really did?“ asked Lena.

„In the end, yes. Citizens' assemblies don't usually have direct decision-making powers. In our case, the proposal was submitted to a Berlin-wide referendum and was approved by an eighty-four percent majority. In the end, the zoo management was on our side as well. As always with good solutions, the different sides were integrated. There is such a great saying, I have it hanging over my desk at home: It's not either or but both and more.“

„Very interesting!“ said Lena. Jannis also seemed impressed. His gaze wandered into the distance, he seemed thoughtful. Meanwhile a horde of cyclists rode past them. Among them were also two cargo bikes.

„It was really fascinating for me to be there and experience the diversity of perspectives,“ Damian continued. „I myself was originally clearly in favor of closing the zoo, but the exchange with the other citizens and

with the zoo staff made me realize that the whole thing was more complicated than I thought. It felt really good to have a say in it. It was democracy in its best sense. Many of the participants felt the same. You feel the responsibility and want to prove yourself worthy of it.“

„That sounds almost too good to be true,“ Lena said happily. Then her face became a bit skeptical. „But aren't a hundred or two hundred very little to decide on such important things?“

„Only at first sight,“ Damian replied. „Statistically speaking, this is actually enough to reflect the average opinion quite well. In addition, the selection can be adjusted so that aspects such as age structure, gender and place of residence correspond to the national average.“

„Okay. What else did citizens' assemblies decide?“ Lena wanted to know.

„Lots of things!“ Damian thought for a moment. „There has been a major ecological agriculture reform, a financial transaction tax, school reform. The highlight was probably the introduction of the Unconditional Basic Income.“ He nodded thoughtfully. „The proposal had already been successfully brought into the public debate by an alliance of non-governmental organizations, and the details regarding financing, amount and concrete implementation were decided by a citizens' assembly. This created additional legitimacy because most citizens trust the proposals from their peers. These are not just any politicians up there, but people like me and you. When the proposal on the basic income that had been worked out was finally put to a referendum and we as a people then empowered ourselves to financial freedom, that was a very significant day. Incidentally, the date of the vote was declared a holiday, the *day of relief*.“

Lena was beaming over both ears. „Wow!“

„Yes. But we weren't the pioneers in this. Sweden, the Netherlands and Iceland came a few years before us. so it was already proven that the basic income works.“

„And how is it financed?“ asked Jannis. „That always seemed to me to be the big sticking point.“

„Yes, the big financing question... In the end, a way was found through reforms of the tax system and the financial markets. But that's another

big topic. Let's go to the parliament building first and get back to that topic later.“

They rose and strolled the rest of the way past the venerable Swiss embassy. Interestingly, colorful graffiti art covered the controversial concrete block that had been attached to the original manor house building. Among the art was the image of a woman in a red dress kissing a robot. The striking style was familiar to Lena. „Is this from Banksy?“ she asked.

Damian nodded.

„That's awesome!“ Lena called.

Jannis smiled and pointed to the graffiti. „Was the graffiti also decided by a citizens' assembly or was it a Swiss referendum after all?“

„As far as I know, this was just the decision of the Swiss ambassador,“ Damian replied with a grin.

They passed the high columns of imposing government office buildings and finally stood in front of the German Reichstag. Numerous visitors streamed in and out of the mighty entrance. Above it, the inscription *To the German People* was engraved in large letters.

„Welcome to the heart of German democracy!“ Damian announced with a welcoming gesture.

„The building is so open. Where are the security gates for the visitors?“ asked Jannis.

„These have been removed. There are no more security checks now. Nowadays the motto is trust and openness.“

„Seriously!“ Lena opened her eyes widely. „But what about attacks by terrorists?“

Damian beckoned „Since the world learned that violence cannot be fought with violence, things have become safer and easier.“

Lena kept her mouth open.

„Let's go inside first,“ said Damian and led them towards the big staircase. As they walked through the main entrance, Lena said thoughtfully: „It feels quite strange to just walk in here like this is my living room.“

Damian looked at her piercingly. „But this is your living room, Lena. It's all our living room. It even says so on the front: *To the German people*.

So why shouldn't you be allowed to just walk in here?“

Lena got goose bumps. What he said felt so right.

Together with a crowd of tourists they took an elevator to the dome deck. While they climbed up the winding stairs to the glass dome, they had a fantastic view over the city.

„What are those two towers back there?“ Lena pointed to two elevations near Alexanderplatz.

„These are the United Nations Towers.“

Lena looked positively surprised. „Oh, they have a permanent representation in Berlin now?“

„Yes. The government often coordinates with the UN and other nations. There is a particularly intensive exchange of views on climate policy, trade and foreign policy.“

„Does Germany now have a permanent role in the UN Security Council or why?“

„UN Security Council? What was that again?“ asked Damian, narrowing his eyes thoughtfully.

„This was a body of the five most powerful countries in the world, which had a kind of veto right over resolutions,“ Jannis explained.

„Oh, right. That doesn't exist anymore for a while now,“ Damian said. „But such UN representations do exist in most countries. It is common in politics to have an intensive exchange with the international community.“

Lena seemed to be very pleased with this answer and went on. Finally they reached the top of the dome and looked at the panorama of Berlin. At first glance, not much had changed on the skyline. But many buildings and roofs were conspicuously green. In addition, a surprising number of cyclists were riding around and futuristic little yellow capsules were rolling on some streets.

Absorbed in her thoughts, Lena looked at the buildings along the Spree. It was a long time since she had last stood up here.

Jannis discovered a few flying objects between the houses. „Are those drones?“

„Yes. Those are probably delivery drones,“ Damian replied. „They bring parcels and shopping goods. There is now a fairly sophisticated

system of autonomous vehicles that transport goods around the city. The drones are then responsible for the last few meters and deliver everything to the front door. When delivery is to be made can be set to the minute.“

„Interesting. Then a lot of jobs must have been lost.“

„Yes, a real blessing,“ Damian said.

„A blessing?“ repeated Jannis in surprise. „In our time, one might have thought otherwise.“

Damian shrugged his shoulders.

Jannis rubbed his chin. „You've just told us about the citizens' assembly. Has anything else changed in the political system?“

„There is now a Ministry of Democracy and Community“

„Wow. That sounds momentous.“ Lena appreciatively moved the corners of her mouth. „And what happens there?“

„The Ministry is responsible firstly for the further development of democratic structures and secondly for strengthening social cohesion and civil society. Having a constitution and formal democratic structures is one thing, but filling them with life and continuously advancing them is another. The ministry therefore funds research programs on innovations in democracy, conducts experiments at the municipal level, studies the political systems in other countries and is also involved in democratic education.“

„Sounds great. It's weird, actually, that such a ministry didn't exist in our times.“

„Yes, I agree. It seems that people thought that with the introduction of elections and parliaments, the establishment of a democracy was complete. But of course the world is becoming more and more complex. In order for democracy to keep pace with this development, democratic institutions continually need to adapt and develop. For example, in addition to the executive, judicial and legislative branches, there is now a fourth state power: the monetary authority.“

„The monetary authority?“ asked Lena surprised. „What's that?“

„The monetary authority is responsible for providing society with the right amount of money. This institution is similar to the central banks in the past, but in addition it holds the monopoly on the creation of digital

money.“

Lena looked at him questioningly and he continued. „In your time, the state, or rather the central bank, had the sole monopoly to produce coins and paper money, but most of the money no longer had any physical form, but was stored in digital accounts. This money that you had in your bank account was created by private banks though when they granted loans. This was a completely absurd state of affairs that created financial crises on a regular basis.“

„I don't understand a thing,“ said Lena.

„Nowadays, it's very simple. The monetary authority alone creates all the money. Whether it's in the form of metal, paper or digital accounts. These are just different aggregate states of money, so to speak.“

„And that wasn't the case before?“ asked Lena.

„No“, said Jannis and Damian at the same time.

Jannis took over. „In our days, the deposits in your bank account were just promises of the bank for cash. You were therefore entitled to a claim that the bank would pay you cash at the ATM. But those deposits were just a promise, not official money.“

Lena still looked skeptical and Damian helped: „Let's try an example. Suppose I buy your bike for two hundred euros. Instead of paying cash directly, I'll tell you that I only owe you the money for now and pay you cash as soon as you ask for it. Then you have a kind of credit on me. This promise of mine isn't real money, is it?“ Lena shook her head and Damian continued. „In the same way, a bank deposit was just a promise of real cash money. And just as I could theoretically have issued a promissory note saying I owe you two hundred euros, the banks could create new bank deposits with a click.“

„Okay, I see.“

„In that example, sooner or later you would probably demand that I pay off my debts. But the trick with the banks was that their promises were treated as if they were real money. In our example, it would be as if you could pay in the supermarket with my promissory note and the supermarket would use it to pay its employees and so on. Then I would never really have to honor my debt. In the same way, the banks in the past never had to pay off most of their debts with real cash money.“

Lena nodded. „I think I'm beginning to understand.“

„Yeah, crazy, right? The banks also had much less cash in their bank vaults than they owed to their customers for their deposits which were as I said claims for cash. The corresponding ratio of cash reserves to cash claims was often only around two to five percent. This is why there was also the problem of bank runs in crises. As soon as people lost confidence and tried to withdraw their money en masse, the banks got into trouble very quickly. If then the state did not intervene to save them, the entire financial system collapsed.“

„And that was legal?“ Lena looked incredulous.

„Legally it was a grey zone. Neither explicitly allowed, nor forbidden. One can maybe speak of customary law,“ Damian explained. „This power to create money was, of course, a huge privilege for the banks, and an army of their lobbyists fought to ensure that this system remained in place for a long time.“

„Well. You don't have to be that critical about it.“ Jannis looked serious. „Money has always been credit, and the banks' creation of money enables a dynamic economy, innovation and jobs.“

Damian looked at him with great surprise. „Are you serious? Was that the usual narrative?“

„Not a narrative!“ Jannis said angrily. „That was the analysis of most leading economists.“

Damian shrugged his shoulders with an amused look. „Yeah that explains a lot.“ Then he went on: „The new system with the monetary authority has certainly proven itself though. The benefits of making all money a public good are huge. Banks can now go bankrupt without affecting the rest of the economy. The entire financial system has been greatly simplified and deregulated. By the way, there have been no financial crises since the money reform. The national debt has been massively reduced. Income distribution is much better. Sustainable policies can be financed, there is no longer a compulsion to grow and in general there is finally more money for the important and beautiful things. The money reform, in conjunction with a number of other reforms, has put many things right.“

„If it all works out so well with the sovereign money system, that's

great," said Jannis. „I would not have thought that though.“

Lena lifted a finger cautiously and said in a low voice: „Can someone explain to me what sovereign money means?“

Damian nodded. „If you now have a deposit with digital euros, then this is no longer a promise of debt from a bank, but your own digital money. Sovereign money. And this sovereign money is produced solely by the monetary authority. Depending on the needs of the economy, sometimes more, sometimes less.“

„Okay, I think I understand that reasonably enough now. But I really thought that it had already worked the way you just described the system as it works now. That the Central Bank was making all the money.“

Damian shook his head. „No. In the past, as I said, the state and the central bank only had the monopoly on cash, whereas electronic deposits were created by banks out of thin air.“

Lena had to digest that for a moment and kept silent. They looked at the panorama of Berlin together for a moment and then started to descend from the dome again.

„Has the political system changed in more ways in the last 30 years?“ asked Jannis.

„For a few years now we have the right to vote from fourteen and compulsory voting from eighteen. „There are also...“

Jannis interrupted him: „Wait, did you say compulsory voting?“

„Yes. It's hard to talk about democracy when only half the citizens vote. So it was decided that everyone has to vote. At the same time there were some technical innovations, so that voting from home became possible.“

„And what happens if someone doesn't vote?“

„Zack.“ Damian drove by his throat with the flat of his hand and grinned. „I'm kidding. There's a small fine. Not dramatically high, but incentive enough to vote.“

„And did that have any particular effect?“ asked Lena.

„Yes.“ Damian grinned. „In the first mandatory election, the satirical party *The Party* came into Parliament with...“ He tapped his bracelet briefly and then continued, „with 6.3 percent of the vote. They've already done a bit of a job to stir up the parliament. The compulsory

voting was quite controversial for a while, but people have got used to it by now. It's really not too much to tick the box every few years.“

Jannis turned to Damian: „What has become of the parties? How are people voting these days?“

Damian was typing on his bracelet again. Thereupon a display went out and presented a table: The results of the 2045 general election:

- *Democratic Renewal*: 35%
- *Christian democratic union (CDU)*: 17%
- *PNGS*: 16%
- *The Left*: 10%
- *Digital freedom*: 7%
- *Liberals (FDP)*: 6%
- *The Party*: 6%
- *Other*: 3%

„The party *The Party* still seems to be on the road to success,“ said Lena with a smile. „Things have shifted a bit. What is Democratic Renewal and PNGS?“

„PNGS is the party for nature conservation, common good and solidarity. It emerged from the Greens. After internal quarrels in that party, PNGS split-off. Later though, they reunited under the new banner of PNGS.“

Jannis grinned maliciously. „Oh yes, the Greens and their quarrels.“

„And what is Democratic Renewal?“ Lena looked curious.

„The party has historically emerged from the alliance for the constitutional referendum.“

„Constitutional referendum?“ asked Lena.

„Long story. As far as I know, there's an information room at the exit. We might as well take a look there.“

„And what does Democratic Renewal stand for?“ asked Jannis.

„For some fresh air in politics. The party does not stand for certain contents, but for a better political process, in which people exchange ideas and listen to each other much more constructively. For a democratic renewal. They have also pushed for the establishment of the Ministry for Democracy and Community. Some call it a metaparty.“

„Wow! That was really overdue it seems. They seem to be very successful.“

„Yes. Most citizens are tired of ideological battles between narcissistic politicians. To be honest, the differences between the parties aren't all that great anyway. Of course there are different thematic priorities, but all of them want to be fundamentally sustainable, social and liberal.“

Jannis looked irritated. „What happened to the SPD?“

„SPD?“ Damian looked at him questioningly.

„The Social Democrats. The Socialistic Party of Germany.“

Damian looked at him in surprise for a moment. Then he had to grin. „Just kidding. Never having heard of the SPD has become a running gag.“

„Seriously, what happened to the SPD?“ asked Jannis.

„The SPD is now a small party. At the last election they won 1.4 percent or so. They have been going downhill for the last couple of decades. Lack of vision, no connection to their base... Historians are still arguing about the exact reasons. There are even conspiracy theories according to which cunning conservative henchmen infiltrated the SPD and then sabotaged it from within. But that's probably a bit far-fetched,“ said Damian with a grin.

„Oh,“ said Jannis. He obviously had to digest that first.

„Were you a comrade?“ Damian looked at him curiously and Jannis nodded.

„Always good for a surprise, our Jannis!“ called Lena happily. Then she turned to Damian. „And what about the AfD? The right-wing extremists?“

„Gone. After the big bang, they had a good run again, but when the Democratic Renewal took over and implemented effective social reforms, people stopped blaming immigrants. In addition, there were a few internal scandals in the AfD. At the beginning of the 30s, the party finally fell apart and disbanded.“

„Well, at least it's gone, too“, said Lena and looked at Jannis encouragingly.

In the meantime they had arrived at the entrance of the dome deck and went in the direction of the elevator. They passed an open room marked

The History of the German Constitutional Elections. Damian pointed at it. „You might want to take a look at this.“

They entered the room. On the walls hung large photographs with long explanatory texts and on the side were brown leather armchairs, next to which were conspicuously large black glasses.

Damian pointed to the glasses. „These are virtual reality goggles. With them you can watch a short movie of some historical scenes from the turbulent period after the Big Bang. In some scenes you can even look around freely. It's called immersive video.“

„Exciting!“ Lena made big eyes. She sat down on one of the armchairs and picked up the glasses next to her. Damian came up to her. „It's very easy to use. Just slip the glasses on and press start here on the side.“

While Jannis also chose an armchair and looked around the room, Lena put on her glasses so that her field of vision was completely covered.

The screen showed the Reichstag with numerous demonstrators in front of it. The words „2024: Germany at the turning point: from crisis to constitution“ were displayed in the middle of the screen. Underneath it a red button flashed: „Please press start“.

Lena tapped her finger on the control panel on the side of the frame. Then the start image faded out and a news speaker appeared in her field of vision. „Good evening ladies and gentlemen! This morning, Deutsche Commerz filed for bankruptcy. Recently, Deutsche Commerz had come under increasing pressure due to the publications of the Euroleaks. The fines announced yesterday for the tax evasion and money-laundering operations that had become public were now its downfall. At present, the bank's management is in negotiations with the Ministry of Finance about the future of the institute. After the bank insolvencies in Italy and Great Britain, these developments mark another major European bank that is experiencing payment difficulties. The Chancellor and the Finance Minister say that savers need not worry. Their assets are safe and guaranteed by the state deposit guarantee scheme.“ In the background, a small video of two serious looking politicians appeared in front of a row of television microphones.

Cut. Shown are scenes of the Frankfurt banking landscape. Then a scene of excited stock market traders with a hectic journalist in front of them appears: „After the insolvency of Deutsche Commerz last

Thursday, the financial markets are seriously disturbed. Today the DAX suffered a seven percent fall and interest rates on the interbank market continue to shoot up. Experts speak of a loss of confidence among banks. The ECB has announced a reduction of the key interest rate by fifteen basis points to minus two percent.“

Cut. Several people in dark suits sit on a podium behind a long, black table with a serious look. A large banner in the background announces „Federal Ministry of Finance - press conference“. A slim middle-aged woman speaks into a table microphone. „After careful consideration and intensive negotiations, the Ministry of Finance has decided to provide guarantees in the amount of fifteen billion euros for Deutsche Commerz.“ Agitated voices resound from the audience, the woman seems slightly insecure and speaks louder to make herself heard. „We believe that this sum is sufficient to stabilize the bank and prevent damage to creditors and other banks. The Ministry of Finance will continue to do everything it can to stabilize the financial markets and strengthen the German economy.“

Someone yells, „Fraudster!“ and a paint bag just misses the woman and bursts in a red explosion on the wall behind her. Security guards sprint to the podium.

Cut. This time another news speaker: „It seems that all of Europe is now gripped by a banking crisis. Numerous financial institutions are suffering from payment difficulties and have already taken out emergency loans from the European Central Bank. The ECB has announced that it will do everything necessary to maintain the stability of the financial system.“

Cut. Lena finds herself in the middle of a large demonstration in front of the Reichstag. This time her view is three-dimensional and she can look around freely. She is surrounded by a colorful crowd. Most of them are looking towards a podium made of wooden planks on which an elderly man with short hair is standing, calling into a megaphone with hectic gestures and a trembling voice: „Once again we are at the outbreak of a financial crisis, once again the banking system is pulling us down into the abyss, and once again politicians are throwing billions down the banks' throats. We must not allow that to happen. „He raises a fist to the sky „Down with the system!“ The answer echoes from the

crowd: „Down with the system!“ The picture fades.

Cut. A reporter stands in front of the smashed windows of the branch of a Deutsche Commerz. „Many citizens are angry at the banks. Scenes of violence like this are mounting. Yesterday an angry mob beat up two Postbank employees, who were then taken to hospital. The propensity to violence is increasing alarmingly. The Federal Ministry of the Interior recommends people to stay at home in the next few days. Meanwhile, more and more civil society organizations are calling on the government to resign.“

Cut. Lena finds herself in the front row of a demonstration march. All around her angry looking people with colorful signs and banners: „Politics for the people!“ „Stop the greed!“ „Environmental protection instead of bank bailouts.“ Lena recognizes the Potsdamer Platz, they march north towards the parliament building and pass a burnt-out car wreck. A police helicopter circles loudly over them. The demonstration passes the Holocaust memorial and heads for a police barrier on the corner of the American embassy. There a dense line of heavily armored police officers with batons and shields are waiting. The crowd shouts angry slogans and pushes forward unchecked. A loudspeaker announcement sounds from a police car: „Stop this illegal gathering immediately. If you do not comply with this order, we will use force to break up the demonstration if necessary.“

Someone throws a burning bottle at the policemen and it shatters from one of the plastic shields. Several stones also fly and the policemen duck behind their shields. A water cannon comes from the side street. Things are about to escalate. The visual experience is so real that Lena feels alarmed and her pulse accelerates. She looks to the side. Next to her, a man with a black mask runs beside her and lights an object in his hand from which dense blue smoke shoots out. A smoke grenade. They continue to move towards the roadblock and are only a few meters away. One of the policemen in front of her lifts a can of pepper spray and fires a jet directly in their direction. Lena flinches and the picture fades.

Cut. Again the newsreader: „For more than a week now, the demonstrations and riots in Germany have been continuing. In today's riots in Berlin, three demonstrators and one police officer were killed. There were also serious riots in Hamburg and Düsseldorf. Curfews have

been imposed in Berlin and Hamburg. The Federal Minister of the Interior has announced that the police presence in major German cities will be increased in order to restore public order, and is considering the deployment of the German army in the interior.“

Cut. An old man sits at a noble, wooden desk and looks resolutely into the camera. Behind him, a flag of the German federal eagle is flying. „Dear fellow citizens, I won't try to sugarcoat this: turbulent times lie ahead. The financial system is in crisis and the government faces the mammoth task of navigating us through this storm and averting worse disruptions for the economy. Many people are angry that such a crisis is repeating after the great banking crisis more than 10 years ago. There has been a failure to regulate the financial system properly and the time will come to work through these mistakes. But for now, we must look ahead and stick together. The violence of recent weeks against police, government officials and fellow citizens must be condemned. I therefore call for calm and peace as a matter of urgency.“

Cut. A middle-aged woman with long blonde hair stands on a podium, with colorful logos of civil society organizations all over the podium. „The renewed outbreak of a financial crisis has exposed the instability and injustice of the ruling system. The elites in politics and business have failed. A new beginning is needed if we are to overcome the collective crisis of our society and respond appropriately to climate change. We need a comprehensive democratization of our society and our economy. We, the Alliance for a new Constitution, with numerous civil society organizations behind us, therefore call on the German people today to vote on a new constitution in a public referendum. The current German Basic Law expressly provides for such a constitutional referendum by the citizens. Today is the day to seize this opportunity. We propose to include referendums and citizens' assemblies as direct-democratic elements in the new constitution, thereby bringing our social order up to date.“ The woman takes a deep breath and looks up at the sky. „Like a phoenix, we can rise from the ashes of the old system and raise our society to new splendor. Let us take back our power and build an even more beautiful country. Let us use this historic moment for a democratic renewal!“ Tremendous cheers are rising.

Lena presses pause and pushes her VR glasses off her head. She takes

a deep breath, shakes herself and then looks at Damian piercingly. „Holy shit! Such intense events!“

Damian nods seriously. „The last decades weren't a pony ride.“

„But I can't keep up. What's this about a constitutional referendum? We already had a constitution with the Basic Law.“

„In principle, yes, but due to the special German history there was a special feature. After the Second World War, the Basic Law was only conceived as a temporary arrangement instead of a proper constitution until the unification of Germany. For this reason, the last article in the Basic Law explicitly allowed the possibility that the German people might at some point adopt a new constitution, thus replacing the Basic Law. Just a moment.“ He fiddles with his bracelet and then reads out: „Basic Law, Article 146: This Basic Law, which will apply to the entire German people after the completion of the unity and freedom of Germany, loses its validity on the day a constitution comes into force which has been freely decided by the German people.“

„My God! This is the ultimate back door!“

„Ingenious, right?“

Lena nods thoughtfully. „I'm beginning to understand. And when society slipped into the financial crisis and the old system sank into a crisis of legitimacy, a few clever people seized the opportunity.“

„Exactly. This was the moment that some had been waiting for a long time. Maybe just continue watching the video.“

Lena lets this information sink for a moment, then puts on the VR glasses again and taps on „Next“.

Again, a newsreader appears: „A broad alliance of civil society organizations today called for people to vote in the constitutional elections using a smartphone app. The aim is to replace the Basic Law with a new constitution that will make referendums and citizens' assemblies possible. Chancellor Robert-Friedrich Hamerz, however, has sharply criticized the call. He called for anarchy and undermined proven democratic institutions.“

Cut. Lena stands in a crowd on the big street in Berlins Tiergarten park. She sees the big victory column in the parks middle. The golden angel on its top glitters in the sunlight. In front of Lena stands the blonde

woman from the Alliance for a new Constitution in an open truck. With a trembling voice she speaks into a microphone: „Today is a holiday for democracy. An overwhelming majority of 74 percent of citizens voted FOR the proposed new German constitution. We demand the immediate acceptance of this decision by the state institutions and the resignation of the Federal Government in order to clear the way for new elections.“ Such tremendous applause and cheering breaks out that Lena gets the impression that the trees in the Tiergarten park are swaying from it.

Cut. Together with thousands of people Lena finds herself right in front of the metal fence of the chancellery. There is great unrest. A man tries to climb over the fence and is pushed back with batons by a row of hooded policemen on the other side. Acrid smoke is drifting into the crowd from somewhere. „WE VOTED! AWAY WITH YOU!“ the crowd roars again and again. A police helicopter circles above them with a roar. The atmosphere is heated and aggressive. The police officers seem nervous. Lena looks into the exposed eyes of one of the officers behind the fence. What she sees is naked fear. More people push against the fence and try to climb it. One man makes it over and is wrestled to the ground by three policemen and beaten with truncheons. From the Chancellor's Office building, a police reinforcements squad comes running with machine guns at the ready. The whole setting is a single powder keg.

Lena hears a different, softer sound in all the noise. She looks around and sees several young girls standing there with closed eyes and singing. Because of the great noise, Lena can't recognize the song at first, but she sees other people like the girls, closing their eyes and singing along. The chorus of voices swells and the melody seems familiar to her. When she finally recognizes John Lennon's song, she gets goose bumps.

*»Imagine all the people
Living life in peace
You, you may say I'm a dreamer
But I'm not the only one
I hope someday you will join us
And the world will be as one«*

As more and more people join in and the singing gets louder and louder, the events around them come to a standstill. Some look curious and confused. Near them a small group appears, in the middle of which a man waves a large white flag. The others also wave small white cloths and wear white armbands. The newcomers mingle with the demonstrators while more and more voices pick up the peace song. A young woman with glasses also comes to Lena. Her T-shirt has a green logo showing the earth, people and trees, and underneath it the writing „Earthland“.

„Hello“, the woman turns to two men dressed in black and hooded next to Lena. „I would like to ask you to remain peaceful. I know you're angry, and I completely understand. But if we blindly give in to our pent-up anger we will lose the upper hand. We are completely in the right, the whole public knows that. But we're not going to win by force. Please remain calm and trust in the power of non-violent resistance.“

„But all this is useless,“ calls one of them with a red face. „They should get to eat their own medicine.“

„I understand you're upset. I'm as angry as you are. But the cops over there and the politicians just play out their roles in the old system and the credibility of that is crumbling. I think we are close to a breakthrough. We just have to wait and see and keep up the pressure. Then we will win.“

„But if we take the chancellorship now and kick out the old guard, then we've already won.“

„Are you sure this will work? Look at those cops over there. Even if we get through this, there will be blood on the way to the Chancellery. But I don't want a bloody revolution. If we want to build a new world, we have to live it from the beginning. Gandhi said there is no way to peace - peace is the way.“

The man seems less determined. „You're right, but it's such bullshit! I'm sick of these power games and how we citizens get fucked.“

„I can well understand that. I'd like to help you channel your anger. Okay?“

„What do you have in mind?“ he asks irritably.

„An anger release method. For that, it would be good to go somewhere quieter.“ She points towards the zoo. „Would you mind to come along?“ The two demonstrators look indecisive, but then allow themselves to be led away by her.

In the meantime, more of the newcomers have mixed with the demonstrators, waving white flags and joining in the Imagine song. Lena looks over to the Chancellery fence. No one tries to climb over the fence anymore and the police officers seem more relaxed, even if confused. Some of the newcomers seem to talk to policemen through the fence.

„What's happening?“ mumbles a man next to Lena.

Cut. Again the news speaker: „After the initial outbreaks of violence, last week's demonstrations in support of the new constitution have remained peaceful. More and more organizations and prominent public figures are joining the Alliance for a new Constitution and demanding the resignation of the federal government. Many trade unions have called for a general strike and paralyzed large parts of industry and commerce. Parts of the police and fire departments have also joined the protests.“ Meanwhile, various pictures appear in the background showing demonstrations in front of Cologne Cathedral, in Munich city center and on Hamburg's Stephansplatz.

Cut. Lena finds herself in front of a large building and discovers the inscription „Bundesministerium der Wirtschaft“. At the entrance of the building a big earth ring is piled up. Numerous people run to it with buckets and sacks and add more earth. Others are bringing big stones or use wheelbarrows to add more earth to the ring. A few policemen try to stop the hustle and bustle, but they are overwhelmed with the task and outnumbered. A small boy climbs onto the earth ring and puts a large sunflower on top of the wall. Lena looks around and discovers another entrance to the Ministry, which is similarly enclosed. „If they won't let us in, then they shouldn't come out either,“ shouts an older woman next to Lena cheerfully.

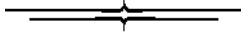
Cut. Lena's view shows a bird's eye view over the big square in front of the parliament building at dusk. A chain of humans surrounds the building and people swing to the melody of a choir singing. Lena looks around. Also, entrances to the other government buildings and the Chancellery are covered with huge heaps of earth. There are even some

little trees planted on top of them and shining candles.

Cut. Chancellor Robert-Friedrich Hamerz at the high desk of the Reichstag plenary hall: „My dear fellow citizens. These are extraordinary times.“ He pauses for a moment and lets the words sink in. It is completely silent in the hall. „Extraordinary times sometimes call for extraordinary measures. On the initiative of the Alliance for a new Constitution, the German people last week voted for a new constitution. This process is explicitly provided for by the Basic Law. The Federal Government therefore recognizes this choice of the German citizens and the new constitution.“ He looks seriously into the camera and waits for the raging applause that follows his announcement. „At the same time it must be admitted that this government was not always up to the great challenges of our time. It is therefore time for some fresh air in politics. To clear the way for new elections, I have submitted my resignation request to the Federal President. This request has just been accepted. This government is thus dissolved. It has been an honor to have served as Chancellor during this historic time.“ He takes another break and looks thoughtfully into the camera. „We live in special times. The financial and climate crises have fundamentally shaken the foundations of our previous social order. Many people are insecure.“ He raises his voice. „But at the same time, every crisis is an opportunity. An opportunity for the new. In these times, may we move forward with courage and vision. May we be guided by solidarity, freedom and justice. Let us hope for the best for our country, our future and all the people of the world.“ As the applause swells, the picture is fading.

Next, Lena finds herself amidst cheering people in front of the Brandenburg Gate. A demonstrator and a police woman hug each other next to her. Tears shimmer in the woman's eyes. Cheering songs and honking horns permeate the atmosphere. A cork pops nearby. Someone cheers to her. There is dancing and laughter. Lena is reminded of scenes from the fall of the Berlin wall, which she only knows from documentaries. What an incredible atmosphere, she thinks.

Then her VR-vision slowly turns black.



They climbed down the steps of the Reichstag building.

„I can't believe what has happened!“ Lena still seemed stunned. „That's really mind-blowing!“

„Yes, mind-blowing is the right word,“ Jannis said amusedly. „So now we have a new constitution.“ He shook his head in disbelief.

„Shall we sit down for a moment?“ Damian pointed to the steps at her feet. Lena and Jannis nodded and the three of them sank down the big steps of the Reichstag stairs.

At the bottom of the stairs a woman stood on a small step and with a large net pulled huge soap bubbles from a small tub in front of her into the air. A group of children jumped wildly around in front of her and chased after the glittering balls.

Lena watched the scene with a smile for a moment, then her gaze wandered thoughtfully to the large lawn in front of them, the so called Square of the Republic. Young families were having picnics there, a few teenagers were tossing frisbees around and tourists were taking pictures.

Then Damian tore her from her thoughts. „The constitutional change was a very interesting social turning point. I was unfortunately still a child at that time and didn't understand most of it. But my grandparents said it was like a second reunion for them.“

Jannis nodded. „I can well imagine that.“

„How did it all get organized so fast with this constitutional referendum?“ asked Lena. „You can't just pull something like that out of the ground.“

„That's right. As far as I know, some clever minds had been preparing for this moment for years, forging alliances, setting up an appropriate infrastructure and just waiting for the right time. When the crisis came, a broad alliance of environmental organizations, trade unions, the church and many more joined forces to call for a primary election.“

„That's crazy.“ Lena shook her head again.

A soap bubble had strayed to them. As it flew past him, Jannis crushed

it expressionlessly with his outstretched index finger.

For a while they digested the experiences and observed the summer activities on the Square of the Republic. Then Lena straightened up, clapped in her hands and looked at Damian expectantly. „What do we do next?“

„Are you hungry?“ he asked. „I know a very good Taiwanese restaurant not far from here.“

Jannis and Lena nodded and then Damian led them to a nearby bus stop. When they arrived there, a small green bus was already pulling in. They did not see a driver at the wheel, the bus seemed to drive autonomously.

When they got in, Lena turned to Damian: „What about tickets?“

„No need for tickets. All public transport in Berlin is free.“

„Fantastic! I love Berlins public transport“, Lena's eyes lit up. „Since when is that?“

Damian thought for a moment. „Whew, it's been a while. Maybe twenty years or so. Berlin was one of the first German cities to introduce free public transport. It's like that almost everywhere now.“

„That's awesome!“

Jannis also seemed pleased. „What happened to the big yellow double-decker buses in Berlin?“

„I'm afraid they no longer exist. With autonomously driving vehicles, it is more practical to operate two small buses instead of a large one for a higher frequency of travel. So these small green buses now predominate. You never have to wait more than five minutes for one.“

Then „Next stop: Friedrichstraße“, was already ringing out of the bus speakers and they got off.

There was a lot of activity on the Friedrichstraße. Numerous pedestrians and tourists walked around or sat in front of cafés and restaurants. Lena looked around in wonder at the crossroads full of bicycles and a few buses. „Why aren't there any cars on the road here? Are only bicycles and buses allowed on Friedrichstraße?“

„Not only on Friedrichstraße“, Damian looked at her happily. „Private cars are generally no longer allowed in Berlin.“

„No longer allowed?“ called Jannis in bewilderment.

„Yes. The city belongs to the people again.“

„That’s amazing!” Lena called. „I love that!“

Jannis seemed rather skeptical. „How did it come about?“

„That developed gradually,“ Damian replied and led them towards the Spree river. For being in the center of Berlin, it was pleasantly quiet. Even the passers-by seemed more relaxed in general.

„It started with ever better conditions for cyclists and pedestrians. At the same time, the environmental protection requirements for cars became more stringent. Then came the free local transport. Car-free Sundays were introduced. Then also car-free Saturdays. Next one was only allowed to drive in the city with expensive licenses or special permits. A good ten years ago the logical next step was taken.“

„Very good!“ Lena was still enthusiastic. „It makes me think of a scene from a book I once read: *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy*. Aliens land on Earth and wonder what the dominant life form on the planet might be. At first they think it’s the cars, because everything is primarily built to suit them.“

Damian laughed out loud. „Yes, I know that book. I read it in school. The answer is forty-two!“ Lena and Damian exchanged conspiratorial looks. Jannis frowned uncomprehendingly and looked around.

They had reached a lovingly laid out square on the Spree, which was decorated with colorful flower beds and a fountain. Some solar-powered boats were sailing around on the water. At an adjacent small farmers market with colorful stalls there was lively activity.

Jannis walked to the bank of the Spree, where two boys were feeding some swans. „Are those people swimming over there?“ he asked Damian.

„Yes. There’s a bathing island over there, too.“

Jannis smiled. „Then the water must be really clean.“

„Do you feel like going for a swim again?“ Damian winked at him.



„Let's have something to eat first,“ said Jannis grinning.

„Okay.“ Damian pointed to the building complex on their side. „That's where the place I mentioned is.“

They followed him to a small restaurant called *Sun Moon Lake*. Damian stepped to the entrance and held the door open for them. Inside, a small stream of water splashed through the simple but very lovingly decorated restaurant. The walls and the ceiling were covered with climbing plants and on the sides hung artistic works of Chinese calligraphy and landscape drawings.

They sat down at a round table by the window.

„Berlin has become so much more beautiful.“ said Lena excitedly. „Everything is greener and quieter and the people somehow also seem more satisfied and relaxed. Probably because the cars are gone.“

Jannis looked unenthusiastic. „I see the benefits of fewer cars and less traffic on the roads. But isn't it rather patronizing when private cars are simply banned? What about individual freedom?“

Lena raised her chin. „I don't think it's a gain of individual freedom to pollute the environment and make noise with SUVs. Especially not when there is free local transport as a practical alternative that benefits all citizens equally.“

„In principle I get what you mean, Jannis“, Damian said. „That was really not an easy decision for the city politicians. But anything else simply didn't make sense any more. Firstly, public transport has a clear advantage in terms of energy consumption and climate protection. Secondly, the many parking spaces that were saved freed up an extremely large amount of public space. And thirdly, a good public transport network is on average even faster.“

„Oh yes“, Lena encouraged him. „Standing in Berlin city traffic jam was really not an effective way to get around,“ she said amusedly.

„The environmental protection argument may apply to cars with combustion engines, but no longer to electric cars. They are much more climate-neutral for now,“ Jannis replied

„You can't say that.“ Damian shook his head. „It seems pretty absurd today that in your time the public really believed that electric cars could save the climate. Just producing and maintaining the many batteries

consumes an incredible amount of resources. Besides, the electricity has to come from somewhere, when the cars drive around millions of times a day. And most of them were just standing around.” He scratched his head. „Wasn't there even a subsidy for buying new cars once? The eco-bonus or so?“

Jannis breathed out audibly. „Well, yes, but it was clear to most people that subsidizing people for wrecking their old functioning cars was environmental nonsense.“

„No, no. I'm not talking about the wrecking premium.“ Damian was typing on his bracelet. „I'm talking about the eco-bonus to promote electric cars. It came just before the Big Bang, during your coma sleep.“

Lena touched her forehead. „Oh God, so that nonsense happened again?“

„Yes. That was thanks to the car companies' lobby groups.“ Damian pointed to the menus on the table. „But shall we order some food first? I'm really hungry.“

Jannis and Lena nodded.

„If you like, I can order a nice collection of dishes and we share it.“

The other two agreed and Damian called the Asian waiter. To the surprise of his companions, he placed the order in fluent Chinese.

„Where did you learn that?“ asked Jannis.

„At school,“ Damian explained as if it were the most normal thing in the world and picked up the thread of the conversation again. „But sustainability is just one explanation for the car ban. The other is the technological progress in terms of autonomous driving. This has changed a lot, too.“

„In what way?“ asked Jannis.

„Several things come together. Autonomous cars are simply safer to drive, so driving yourself has become more and more of a safety risk for others and socially more and more ostracized. But if you can't drive yourself anymore, the four-hundred horsepower Porsche gets much less attractive.“

„Then the Porsche drivers were probably not very enthusiastic about autonomous driving, were they?“ asked Lena.

„Probably. But speeders can now let off steam in virtual reality

simulators," Damian said.

Jannis looked skeptical. „This sounds a bit too much like Father State wanting to protect its minor citizens from themselves.“

„I don't think so!“ Lena intervened. „If you want to risk your own life by speeding, that's fine with me, but you shouldn't risk the lives of others.“

Meanwhile Jannis had crossed his arms in front of his chest.

Damian nodded. „And that's not all. Autonomous cars made it possible to use them as flexible taxis instead of leaving them parked somewhere for ninety-five percent of their lives. But if you already have autonomous taxis anyway, you can also convert them into buses.“

„That's right!“ Lena said affirmatively.

„In any case, hardly anyone today wants to bring cars back into the cities. This is also a question of the quality of life in the cities. A car-free city is simply so much better to live in. Less noise, better air, more space for pedestrians and walkers. *Cities for people instead of cars* was a popular political slogan.“

„This sounds like the debate over the smoking ban in restaurants.“ Lena thoughtfully propped her chin on her hand. „That was also very controversial once. In the end, when the law came, even the smokers themselves admitted that pubs were much more pleasant if smoking was no longer allowed.“

Jannis looked brooding. „And what do you do if you have to transport something big or want to go somewhere without a bus connection?“

„No problem. For goods you can order a delivery taxi. These are the little yellow capsules. They drive autonomously.“

„Does this mean that there are no more private cars in Germany?“ asked Lena.

„No, I'm afraid we're not quite there yet. Private cars are still allowed in most rural areas and on federal and state roads. You saw some yesterday. And some cities have not yet banned private car traffic, Munich for example.“

„Not yet?“ asked Jannis with a sober voice.

Damian looked at him and shrugged. „Progress is unstoppable.“

Lena poked Jannis on the shoulder and grinned. „Who would have

thought that one day progress would mean fewer cars.“

The waiter came up with a steaming tray. He served dumplings, seaweed salad, fried eggplant with potatoes, vegetable soup, glazed silk tofu and of course rice. Lena's mouth watered. Damian handed out the cutlery and threw himself on the food. Jannis carefully put some dumplings on his plate and looked at Damian. „What has become of the car industry?“

„The car companies had to downsize, of course. But buses, taxis and of course the many drones are still being built. VW is one of the largest drone manufacturers worldwide.“ He smiled. „In the meantime, it might be appropriate to change VW's name to VD. Not Volkswagen but Volksdrone.“

Jannis had to smile. He bit into a dumpling and looked more serious again. „You've told me several times now about jobs that have been disposed. Didn't that lead to problems?“

„No, why? It's good when dreary assembly line work and monotonous activities are automated by robots and drones. Then people can pursue more enjoyable activities.“

Jannis seemed irritated. „But good work doesn't fall from the sky!“

Damian had to laugh a minute. „There are always enough tasks in society. You can plant beautiful gardens, create art, beautify cities, repair things and spend endless hours with children.“

Jannis shook his head slightly annoyed. „But you can't easily retrain a car mechanic to become a kindergarten teacher.“

„Why not? Those who are not up to it go to the vocation offices for advice and coaching. There are so many opportunities to make a meaningful contribution to society. „Incidentally, today we are talking about professions, not work. Work sounds so difficult and unpleasant.“

Lena jumped in between, grinning: „I once heard a lecture by a professor, Frithjof Bergmann, who said that work is like a mild illness.“

Damian laughed out loud and Jannis couldn't help but grin. But he quickly caught himself again and looked at Damian questioningly. „What's the statistical unemployment rate now?“

Damian smiled. „I think unemployment is a really weird concept. But okay, let's see.“ He glanced intently at his bracelet. Then he shook his

head. „It seems that unemployment statistics have not been collected since 2038. There are all kinds of statistics about hours worked in different industries, about income distribution and how people spend their time. But there are no current unemployment statistics.” He looked at his machine and suddenly he started to grin. „The reason given here is that there was no longer a meaningful definition for the concept of unemployment.“

Jannis looked at him bewildered. „But that's a central economic statistic. You can't just stop collecting unemployment statistics.“

Damian frowned. „Honestly, to this day I don't understand that it was such a big problem in your time to provide people with meaningful occupations. I think you simply put too much emphasis on the market when paying for work. But many meaningful activities cannot be paid for by the market.“

Lena nodded. „Yes, that's right. That's why there used to be these absurd armies of involuntarily unemployed and at the same time far too few staff in schools and hospitals.“

Damian pondered for a moment. „Ultimately, it's all a matter of social distribution. The Basic Income solved that dilemma.“

„But financing a basic income is even more of a challenge when so many jobs are lost,“ Jannis said with a furrowed brow.

„Why? It is much cheaper to wind down obsolete industries and provide the laid-off workers with the basic income than to save entire industries with public money to keep people with superfluous or even harmful jobs in occupational therapy.“

With a slight indignation in her voice, Lena added: „Moreover, it eats away at people's souls to serve their lifetime in bullshit jobs that do not create any social value.“

Jannis shrugged. „Alright, the basic income solves the unemployment problem. But what kind of work,“ he faltered briefly, „pardon, professions, are there still and what do people do with their free time? I used to give a course on labor market economics, so I'm very interested in that.“

„Okay, I'll look it up for you.” Damian quickly tapped on his bracelet, then pulled out the display and turned it over to Jannis. It showed

statistics on employment by industry and occupation with 2020 comparisons.

„As you can see, more people are once again working in agriculture and forestry, almost five percent, but many of them part-time. Apart from that, most people in the service sector are employed in education, care and counselling, and many are also employed in the arts. However, it is common to have several professions and hobbies, so the figures are not fully comparable. Of course, many also have a voluntary position and are active in associations or neighborhood help centers.“

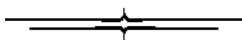
„And what professions in particular have fallen away?“

Damian was typing on his bracelet computer again. „Professions and industries with major job losses in recent decades are drivers, everything in logistics, tax accountants, bankers and financial consultants, a lot in industry, military, administration...“

„And what do you do with those who do not want to work?“

Damian laughed. „Well, working is one of those things.“ He had a big grin on his face. „But everybody wants to do something useful. But those who really have no drive at all are usually physically or mentally ill and there are counselling and therapy services for that.“ He typed on his display. „Besides, it is very motivating not to do the same thing all the time and to practice several different professions next to each other. In most companies, it is therefore unusual to work more than twenty hours a week. Especially with the many creative professions, it's easier to come up with new ideas anyway if you have a little variety in your everyday life and don't sit in the same office every day.“

In the meantime they had eaten up and the waiter was already clearing the dishes. When he had disappeared again, Damian turned to his two companions: „Shall we move on? If you feel like it, we can take a little bike ride. By the way, all the rental bikes in Berlin also belong to the public transport service and are free of charge.“



They cycled with yellow bicycles through downtown Berlin southwards. The streets were full of cyclists and walkers. Only occasionally did a green bus or a taxi capsule pass them.

„Really great that the roads are so clear. I feel a bit like I'm riding in the Critical Mass,“ cried Lena.

„Critical Mass?“ Damian asked next to her.

„Don't they exist anymore? This was a self-organized cyclist demonstration to reclaim the roads. In Germany, there was a law according to which fifteen people upwards were considered as a closed association. Therefore, during the Critical Mass bike demonstrations only the front riders had to wait at red lights, but the rest behind them were allowed to ignore them so that the association would not be separated.“ Lena grinned. „With several thousand cyclists the car traffic was paralyzed quite a bit. It was great fun.“

„Aaah, I see. I think I encountered one of those Critical Mass events in Ankara when I was travelling there.“

„Quite possibly. The Critical Mass Demos existed worldwide. In Berlin, in my time, they were even held monthly. There were usually thousands of bicyclists. Many of them with really weirdly pimped bicycles. Some had huge horns, skeleton byriders or colorful rim lights.“ Lena stretched out her arms sideways as if she were flying. „Woohooo! Critical Mass is now normal. I love Berlin!“

Jannis caught up with them. „Is there no outdoor advertising anymore? Somehow I see much fewer billboards everywhere. The facades seem almost empty.“

„Yes, that's right. This was also implemented after a citizens' assembly. After the climate emergency was declared, it was decided that continuous promotion of consumption was not compatible with a sustainable lifestyle. Other cities had already tried it out successfully. Now only information about events is allowed.“

„Remarkable. The city seems really different. So uncommercial.“ Jannis looked around attentively. „How pleasant.“

„I like it, too!“ said Lena. „I was in Lyon once. It was the same there. Only then do you realize how stressful it is to be yelled at all the time by those screaming ads.“

As they passed an intersection, Lena happily pointed to the blue signposted entrance of a subway station. „Rosa Parks Street“? Happy that the renaming was finally done.“

Damian frowned. „Renaming? What was the name of the station in your day?“

Lena made a wrinkled face. „Moor’s Street.“

Damian tore open his eyes in astonishment. „Moor’s Street? Seriously? Still in the '20s?“

„Yes. A small salute to our colonial heritage.“ Lena shook her head.

Damian said: „When I was a child, the EU at some point proclaimed a year of coming to terms with many of its members colonial heritage. Outdated laws were reformed, problematic monuments and symbols were removed and events were organized to heal old wounds between cultures and create new connections. It is quite possible that the street was renamed in the same year.“

They passed the checkpoint Charlie and Damian drove onto a small driveway with a gradient, which led to a cycle path high above the road. The route ran along Rudi-Dutschke-Straße towards the east. There was a lot of traffic on the four-lane bicycle track.

Jannis caught up with Damian. „This bike highway is interesting. It didn't exist here in our time. Are there many of them?“

„At least they're getting more and more. As a cyclist, you can get through the city really quickly and don't need to worry about pedestrians or traffic lights.“

They continued cycling silently in the direction of Kottbusser Tor and finally reached Moritzplatz, where the bicycle highway ended. There Damian told them to stop. „If you feel like it, we can walk around here for a while. The area is quite nice.“

Lena looked at Moritzplatz and enjoyed the sight of several Hollywood swings and loungers in which people sunbathed.

They parked their bikes at the roadside and walked on. Lena inspected the many small shops and restaurants. „The SO36 still exists!“ she shouted enthusiastically and pointed to a building full of graffiti art.

It seemed that most roads there had been cleared of all motorized traffic. In some places large flower beds had been planted instead. There

were also all kinds of playgrounds, sports courts and benches. Many people populated the streets.

Lena looked around in amazement. „It's wonderful how much space has been freed up by all those cars. How absurd that in our time everyone was talking about scarce building land in Berlin, but nobody brought parking spaces into the debate. They must have eaten up a lot of space.“

„Nobody is wrong. I read something about it recently“, Jannis remarked. Then he smiled. „Or not so recently. Just thirty years ago. In any case, just over eight percent of urban space in Berlin used to be parking lots.“

„Wow!“, Lena marveled. „Without that constant engine noise, it's much more pleasant to be out and about in the city. It's only now due to the striking contrast that I realize how stressful it.“

„I must also admit that I really like the peace and quiet,“ said Jannis. „I almost feel as if I am in the countryside. In spite of all the people who travel around here.“

„Yeah, it's really nice, isn't it? When I was a little kid, I still used to experience the noise of cars. There was always this base level of noise. But especially in recent years, there has been a growing awareness of noise pollution. Did you know that such constant noise causes tremendous stress, makes people ill and even increases selfish behavior?“

„That could explain a lot,“ said Lena.

They reached the Kottbuser Tor, where a street festival was held. All kinds of stalls offered delicacies and handicrafts and a live band played light jazz music. As they strolled past the stalls at the festival, Lena noticed that many of the visitors were dressed in green and carried plants and flowers with them. Many of the stalls were also conspicuously decorated with nature symbols and decorated with rampant plants.

At one corner, a woman in a red dress distributed colorful flyers to the passing visitors. When Lena took one from her, the woman shone at her. „You have beautiful eyes.“

„Oh, thanks!“ Lena replied smiling. The woman looked after her and when Lena looked back curiously, she winked at her.

Jannis had also been given one of the flyers and looked curiously at the small leaflet.

„What's this festival?“ he asked.

„Today is Earth Regeneration Day,“ Damian replied. „This is a rather young festival. Nine years ago, mankind officially stopped living beyond its means and exploiting the planet. Since then, we have only used up as many of the Earth's resources as are naturally regenerated. To celebrate this day, trees are planted all over the world and together we green the city or make excursions into nature with the family.“

„Awesome!“ called Lena.

For a while they stood at the stage and listened to the live music. The current song was an interesting mixture of electronic music and soft melodic singing. Some of the audience danced to it strikingly expressive in front of the stage. Afterwards the band played a rock song and then an English ballad about the beauty of nature. Lena was very moved by it.

When this song was over, the singer stepped to the front of the stage. „It is a great honor to play here today. Some of us have been involved in the Fridays for Future protests since we were teenagers. That was a long time ago, a lot has happened since. I remember how hopeless we were sometimes.“ He looked around the table and his teammates nodded thoughtfully. Then he continued: „But hope dies last and it makes us very happy that humanity has made it after all. Finally we can bring children into this wonderful world without a bad conscience.“ His female colleague with wild dreadlocks shouted in between: „Who also no longer have to skip school to save the planet from their parents.“

The audience laughed.

The singer took over again. „Anyway, we wish you a wonderful day at this festival. And remember to plant some trees to make this city even more beautiful.“ Then he smiled, made the rocker salute with his index and little finger. The rest of the band followed his lead. The audience laughed and the show seemed to be over for the time being.

They moved on and strolled between the stands. Damian stopped at a stall with seed bombs and bought three earthy balls in a transparent package.

„These are for you.“ He passed one each to Lena and Jannis.

„Thank you,“ Jannis said somewhat awkwardly and put the ball in his pocket.

Shortly afterwards they left the street festival behind them. Jannis pointed to a big tree at the side of the street. „Is that an apple tree?“

Damian nodded.

„Is it usual to plant fruit trees in the city?“

„Yes. It wasn't usual before?“

Jannis shook his head.

„That's strange. It makes so much sense to grow the fruits where the consumers live.“

„And who owns those apples?“ Lena looked curiously at Damian. „Or is everyone allowed to harvest them?“

„In principle, anyone can pick them, but neighborhood associations usually take care of the care and harvesting of the trees.“

„Sounds great!“ said Lena. „Is generally more food grown inside the city?“

„Sure. New buildings usually have roof gardens with vegetable perennials and bee boxes. Also, most parks and public streets have community gardens like that one over there.“ He pointed to a cluster of wooden boxes in the front yard of a building.

Jannis looked skeptically. „That's a nice thing! But is that really more than gimmickry in terms of the city's food supply?“

„Of course you can't feed a big city with it alone, but I wouldn't dismiss it as a gimmick either.“ Damian was typing on his bracelet. „In Berlin, inner-city food cultivation now accounts for 19 percent of the food supply, and rising. Some cities are already much further along.“ He showed comparative statistics. Leipzig led the way with thirty-one percent, followed by Stuttgart with twenty-seven percent, Hamburg had thirteen percent and Frankfurt came last with four percent.

„Not bad. In fact, this is much more than I would have thought possible,“ said Jannis appreciatively.

Meanwhile they walked along the subway line towards the Görlitzer Park station.

Lena turned to Damian. „I've noticed that so far I haven't seen any

branches of the big corporate chains here in Berlin, like Starbucks, McDonald's and so on. Don't they exist anymore?“

Damian scratched his head. „The names sound familiar, but I wouldn't know that they exist in Berlin. In general, there aren't that many big chains anymore. The state prefers many small family businesses over large corporations. That's why most companies choose being a socially responsible company as their legal form.“

„Socially responsible company?“ asked Jannis. „I don't think this legal form existed in our time.“

„Oh, well, socially responsible companies belong not only to the investors, but also to the employees and customers. Profits must primarily be used for the social purpose of the company, payouts to investors are severely limited and all relevant social, ecological and democratic key figures must be made public in a common good balance sheet. This orientation towards meaning rather than profit alone is rewarded by the state through lower taxation.“

„Interesting. A couple of my students once started a small social enterprise to make sustainable diapers. The search for a suitable legal form really gave them a headache back then. I can imagine that such a new legal form would make things a lot easier for small social enterprises.“

„Yeah, I guess so. The right framework makes things easier. By the way, the Spanish constitution has made the common good economy the basis of all economic activities for a few years now.“

„That's not that Austrian's bullshit... Felber or something?“ Jannis looked skeptical.

„Christian Felber. Yes, exactly from this guy.“ Damian smiled. „However, I don't find it so stupid to balance companies not only according to profit, but also according to ecological and ethical criteria.“

„And that's what the Spanish put into their Constitution?“ Jannis looked terrified. „That must be overregulating their economy. It's overburdening businesses with far too much red tape. The Spaniards will lose even more competitiveness.“

„To me, the common good economy doesn't seem all that bureaucratic. After all, it makes a lot of sense to measure external effects

directly at the producer, to make them transparent and to link the right results with positive incentives.“

Lena hooked in. „Sorry I'm not coming along again. What is the common good economy again?“

Damian turned to her. „The idea behind the common good economy is that a purely financial assessment of corporate success is insufficient and that a more holistic view is needed. This is why a common good balance sheet for companies has been developed, in which human dignity, solidarity, sustainability, co-decision-making and transparency are taken into account in addition to the classic financial indicators. In doing so, all reference groups of the company such as employees, customers, suppliers and the social environment are taken into account. Let me show you the current common good matrix.“

He unfolded the display on his wristband and showed them a table with the different balancing criteria of the common good matrix 14.2.

Lena eyed them curiously. „Interesting! That's quite comprehensive, what is all measured there.“

Damian nodded. „Measuring alone is often a first step to uncover potential for improvement and to stimulate change. In addition, the state promotes companies with a good common good record through tax breaks and preferential treatment in the award of public contracts.“

„And who establishes these criteria?“

„The criteria are developed democratically and evolve year after year with new practical experiences.“

„But these accounting rules must be extremely complex and expensive, especially for small companies.“

„For small businesses there are significantly simplified rules. The larger the company, the more extensive the obligations. In Germany, too, there are more and more cities and countries that give preference and tax benefits to companies with a good common good balance in public procurement and business development. But so far, all this is still on a voluntary basis.“

Jannis still seemed skeptical. „How well or how badly does the common good economy function in Spain?“

„Overall very good,“ Damian replied. „At the municipal level and in a

few cities, it was successfully implemented some time ago, and for a few years now, the common good economy has been mandatory for all companies in the country. It was enshrined in the constitution through a referendum. In this respect, one can probably assume that most Spaniards support the system.“

„All right, then. If it works in Spain, that's fine with me.“

Damian nodded. „By the way, Spain became the Estados Unidos de Espana.“

„The United States of Spain?“ Lena looked at him with big eyes.

„Yes. During the Big Bang, Spain withdrew from the euro. Some would also say - flew.“ He smiled. „In all the political confusion, some city states and regions split off.“

Jannis nodded affirmatively. „There have been corresponding efforts for independence for quite some time. It was probably only a matter of time.“

„Possibly. But the situation has calmed down again and a few years ago the regions reunited to form the United States of Spain.“

Jannis shook his head. „They just don't know what they want, the Spanish.“

Damian shrugged his shoulders. „Anyway, a new start can do wonders. The corrupt royal house was thrown out and the political institutions were completely renewed. The country is flourishing now.“

„It seems, many things have really changed for the better.“ Lena beamed at them. „The economy of the common good, cars gone, democracy updated. It's great! More and more I get the feeling that I'm finally living in the world of my dreams.“ She did a little dance of joy with her arms and torso.

They continued walking until an entrance opened up in front of them: Görlitzer Park.

Small groups of young people stood on the lawns. Numerous families with children sat on spread out blankets and one group threw a frisbee around. Some street performers also populated the park: a woman made huge soap bubbles and an older man sang gooey songs to the music of his guitar.

„Where did all those dealers go?“ asked Lena.

„Dealers?“ Damian seemed surprised.

„Yes. This place used to be full of them. „They were selling drugs on every fucking corner. You couldn't even walk from one end of the park to the other without getting approached at least five times.“

„Interesting. That must have been a while ago.“

Jannis interfered in the conversation. „If it's not like that anymore, I suppose a lot of drugs have been legalized by now. Am I right?“

„Yes. Almost everything has been legalized and decriminalized. The Netherlands had led the way. Marijuana was first legalized in Germany and then, little by little, more and more. Now you can buy mostly anything in a pharmacy.“

„Wow,“ Lena said in surprise. „So? How's society doing with that?“

„Very good overall. Contrary to some fears, this did not result in total chaos, but rather in much more calm. First of all, some criminal organizations have been drained. Secondly, the drugs are produced in a way that makes them less addictive. And thirdly, there are fewer drug-related deaths due to the state-certified high quality. However, you need some kind of driver's license to acquire the stuff.“

„Driver's license?“ asked Lena.

Damian nodded. „You have to take a theory test about the dangers and side effects. And you need a certificate from a psychologist stating that you are in sufficiently good psychological condition. Sometimes you are only allowed certain drugs. For instance, if you have schizophrenic tendencies, you must stay away from magic mushrooms.“

Damian took a small blanket from his backpack and spread it out on the lawn. „Make yourself comfortable.“

Lena sat down on the blanket, waited until the other two had also sat down and then continued: „How has legalization affected consumption? Do more or less people try drugs?“

„Overall, more people are trying psychedelics for once. But the hard and highly addictive drugs are hardly ever used anymore. I once heard that the remaining consumers are addicts from the time before legalization.“

„Really?“ Jannis laid his head curiously to one side. „In principle, I thought legalization was the lesser of two evils, but I certainly expected

more use in total.“

„Why is that?“ Damian asked.

„For example, there was an interesting study in which mice were given a switch in the cage that allowed them to shoot dopamine directly into their brains via a cannula. At some point the mice just sat at the switch and didn't even eat or drink until they died. I think this experiment is a good demonstration of the dangers of drugs.“

„Yes. I heard about the study,“ Damian said. „But there was another experiment. Same experimental setup with the dopamine switch, but with one crucial difference. Instead of being put in a small desolate cage, the mice were placed in a large enclosure with a variety of stimuli and walking possibilities and with other mice. The result was completely different and the mice showed disinterest in the switch.“

„Oh really?“ Jannis raised his eyebrows in surprise. „I haven't heard about that one.“

„I find that result very plausible. When life has little to offer, drugs are a way out. You don't become a junkie though if you grow up in nurturing relationships and are happy with your life. Therefore, the best remedy against drug abuse is to support people in their lives and strengthen social cohesion.“

„Yes, that makes sense,“ Lena said bitterly. „But in the past it seems that people preferred to fight the dealers and the addicts instead of tackling the real causes.“

Jannis frowned thoughtfully. „I've also not seen homeless people on the streets yet. Has that problem also been solved?“

Damian nodded. „No one should have to live on the streets and beg involuntarily in such a rich country. Many people have ended up homeless in the past because their difficult personal circumstances were not recognized and they were left alone. It is no longer tolerated by society today that it comes to this point.“

Lena raised an eyebrow. „What does not tolerate mean?“

„The measures include several approaches. There is addiction help, psychological care, social housing and self-help groups. Everyone is entitled to free psychological support if he or she is in a difficult phase of life. But actually it starts much earlier with a good school system and

the support of the parents. The basic income of course does its part to protect people from financial hardship.“

„That sounds great. But how do you finance all this?“ asked Jannis.
„You have to be able to afford it first.“

Damian shook his head. „I'd rather say we can't afford to let people fall into crime, broken families, disability and so on. That's where it gets really expensive.“

Jannis was defeated by this and remained silent. He looked around thoughtfully.

„What's that back there between the trees?“ Lena pointed to a cluster of birch trees with something stretched between them.

„These are hammocks.“

„Hammocks? And whose are they?“

„They belong to the city. They're public. Anyone can enjoy them. Very pleasant for a little afternoon power nap.“

„No really? Public hammocks. I've never seen that before.“ She shook her head and grinned. „Now that really speaks for this society.“

Jannis raised his finger. „I guess after they legalized marijuana, the hippies declared public hammocks the next political goal. Right, Damian?“ Damian nodded and everyone laughed heartily.

Lena came back to breath and said. „But seriously. A little nap in a hammock would suit me just fine. I'm going to have a close look at it, okay?“

The two men nodded and Lena walked to the group of trees.

On the way, a man walking in her direction caught her gaze . After he had passed her, she heard a "Hey!" from behind. When she turned around, she saw that he had stopped and was looking at her curiously.

"Hey!" he repeated with a smile. He had shoulder length brown hair, short stubble and was quite powerfully built. "I just saw you and thought, you have a really great vibe!"

"Oh... thanks." She smiled at him.

"Something inside me told me to approach you." He grinned.

A short pause arose, during which Lena didn't know what to say. "It seems that way to me, too," she finally said, laughing shyly.

"I find you really attractive and would like to meet you." He beamed at her. „Maybe I'll just give you my number.“ He rummaged in his trouser

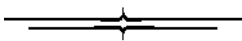
pocket and handed her a business card, which Lena accepted with a smile.

"If you ever feel like getting in touch, I'd love to hear from you. But if not, that's fine. Then I hope my compliment could at least sweeten your day a little." He winked at her.

"Uh, yeah thanks!" She suddenly didn't know quite where to put her hands.

"I have an appointment in a minute and have to go. So maybe see you sometime and otherwise I hope you enjoy this beautiful day!" He lightly touched her arm as a farewell gesture and walked away. Over his shoulder he gave her one last look, leaving a delighted Lena behind.

She went to the group of trees, dropped into a yellow-green patterned hammock and had to sort herself out.



Jannis turned to Damian: „What has actually become of the European Union? The euro still seems to exist.“

„The EU has gone through some changes. The Big Bang in particular has stirred things up. In its aftermath, there were a lot of riots and a nationwide general strike in France for a few weeks until the government resigned. All in all similar to what we had in Germany, only a little more turbulent.“ With a grin he added: „The country is already a little more revolution-proof than we are. Apart from that, Italy and Greece have left the euro and reintroduced the drachma and lira. And that worked out quite well.“

Jannis pulled a face. „Really?“

„Yes, when the two countries withdrew from the euro, fears were high that this would seal the end of the EU. But in retrospect, it has to be said that the misconstruction of the euro and the systemic imbalances it created were the real problem. In tackling this, a renaissance of the European Community was made possible.“

„That means the euro has been reformed?“

„Yes, automatic equilibrating mechanisms for trade imbalances have

been introduced within the euro area. If a country now structurally exports more than it imports, there are penalties for this.“

„And Germany supported this?“

Damian nodded.

„I guess then we don't export as much now.“ Jannis seemed disappointed.

„No. That doesn't make sense in the long run.“

„Why?“ Jannis frowned. „Exports are first of all an expression of economic strength.“

„Economic strength or not. It simply makes more sense in the long run to consume one's own goods or to enjoy more leisure time collectively than to ship goods to other countries and thus let them pile up huge mountains of debt that will eventually collapse.“

Jannis looked skeptically and picked at a small branch he had discovered in the grass. Then he looked up: „Were there also fundamental reforms in the political structures of the EU?“

„Yes. There was the manifesto for a democratic Europe. It made the European institutions more democratic and much more transparent. Finally, the lobbyists were chased out of Parliament.“ Damian typed on his bracelet and looked at a chart. „In 2031, that was... Incidentally, we are currently considering dividing the EU into regions rather than countries. Because of their size, France and Germany have always been too dominant. At the same time, there are bodies in which each country sends a delegate, so that micro-states have a disproportionately high say there. For this reason, the countries of the EU are to be divided into cultural regions of similar size. This would facilitate the balance of political power. Smaller units are also more agile and stable. The South American confederation of states is considered a positive example in this regard and the EU is now trying to catch up“.

„I see. I suppose Germany will then also be divided into several regions?“

„Yes. It probably boils down to a quadripartition in Northern Germany, Central Germany, Bavaria with Baden-Württemberg and the East.“

„The Bavarians would certainly welcome more independence.“ Jannis

grinned. „But I wonder if it's a good idea to split off the East again.“

Damian smiled and looked at his bracelet again. „There is also a European army. The idea was that a common army would be cheaper than if each EU member state has its own military.“

„A European army?“ asked Jannis. „Interesting. The NATO should be pleased to have a stronger European partner.“

Damian shook his head. „The NATO no longer exists. Also, the European army is purely a protective army and does not undertake any foreign missions.“

„And what does the USA say?“ asked Jannis astonished.

Damian waved him off. „Believe me, the United States have very different problems. But the international situation has calmed down considerably.“

Jannis looked at him with a confused look. Then he shrugged his shoulders, let himself sink backwards onto the blanket and looked into the blue sky. They were silent for a while.

Finally Lena came back from her hammock excursion. She yawned and stretched. „I love hammocks.“

Jannis straightened up again and looked at her amused. She sat down next to him on the blanket where there was still some space left and looked at Damian. „Tell me, Damian, I just had another question about the citizens' assemblies. You said that the citizens' assemblies are not authorized to make decisions on their own. So, are there still referendums on their proposals?“

„No, not always. That depends on whether the Citizens' assembly is convened by a referendum or directly by politicians. But often the government accepts the proposals voluntarily anyway and then a referendum is unnecessary. Otherwise, the government usually makes a counter-proposal and then a referendum is held between the two. At the state level, however, the regulations are quite different in detail.“

„And at the federal level?“ asked Jannis.

„At federal level, all proposals concerning constitutional amendments must be approved by referendum. For others, it depends on various factors. There are also planning cells, by the way. These are like light versions of citizens' assemblies with only twenty-five people elected.

They are convened for smaller issues.“

Lena nodded. „Okay. I see.“

„How does the decision-making work within the citizens' assemblies and planning cells?“ Jannis looked at Damian with concentration. „From the committees at my university, I know these terribly long discussions that lead nowhere. And there were only seven of us. With the best will in the world, I can't imagine how it could work with fifty or a hundred people in such a short time. Especially when they don't even know each other.“

„Oh, yes. I know what you're talking about.“ Damian pulled a face. „I've been through groups like this before. But group processes don't have to be so unproductive. I can say from my own experience that good decision-making processes, competent facilitation and the right framework and conditions can make it much more effective. Do you know Art of Hosting, for example?“

Jannis shook his head and Lena squinted her eyes. „I think I've heard about it. Don't they do World Cafés, Open Spaces and stuff like that?“

„Yes, among other things. Art of Hosting is an attitude for conversations and group processes and also a collection of very powerful methods and tools. Citizens' assemblies follow the Art of Hosting guidelines and work mainly in small groups with professional moderation. They pay great attention to constructive and friendly interaction and to ensuring that all participants have the opportunity to get involved and to consider the different needs. By now, there have been so many citizens' assemblies that some best practices emerged as well.“

„Sounds like we needed some Art of Hosting expert at my university,“ whispered Jannis.

Lena nodded in agreement. „I have also wondered in the past why mediation and conflict coaching are not employed in politics and within parties. In coalition negotiations, for example, that would make so much sense. Is that common by now?“

Damian looked surprised. „Yeah, of course! I thought it had always been like that.“

„No. The way politicians dealt with each other was mostly like in a bad

behaved kindergarten.“

Damian shook his head. „Oh, God. That must have been horrible. I learned the basics of facilitation and all sorts of decision-making tools like systemic consensus in school. That probably wasn't on your syllabus either, was it?“

Jannis denied and Lena shook her head as well. „The first time I explicitly learned something on moderation techniques was in the university. But what is Systemic Consensus?“

„This is a decision-making process for groups. It allows a group to decide very quickly on several proposals at once. The procedure is extremely practical. Let me explain using a concrete example. Suppose we want to go to a restaurant later and there are several options. We could a) eat sushi, b) go to the Egyptian c) eat Indian food or d) get pizza from an Italian restaurant. Instead of simply voting, each of us awards zero to ten resistance points for each suggestion. Zero resistance means you can live very well with this option. However, zero resistance can mean that you are even enthusiastic about the proposal, but it can also simply mean that there is no resistance at all. Ten points of resistance, on the other hand, show that you cannot live with the option at all. Apart from that, everything else there is everything else on the spectrum from zero to ten. Finally, the numbers are added up and the option with the lowest number of resistance points is selected.“ He looked at them expectantly. „Shall we try this out?“

Both nodded.

„Okay.“ Damian lifted a small stick from the ground and carved a table into the earth with it. In it, he wrote down the restaurant options and their three names.

„So let's go over the options. Usually you have a pretty clear sense of your right number of resistance points. Just trust your intuition. We can use our fingers for indicating the number.“ He smiled. „There are practically 10 of them.“

He looked around again. „I'm going to count to three, and then you're going to lift your fingers according to your points of resistance, okay?“

Both nodded.

„So let us begin! What do you think about sushi? One. Two. Three.“

Jannis showed five fingers, Lena one and Damian himself three.

„Nine points of resistance,“ he noted and carved the number into his table on the floor. „How about b) Egyptian food?“

That resulted in thirteen points. Next, Indian scored five points of resistance and Pizza seven. Damian looked again at the table and announced: „We have a winner! Indian food today!“ With a theatrical gesture, he raised a fist to the sky. „Hurrah for Gandhi, Goa and the Ganges!“ Then he looked at them with a grin and declared, „All successful decisions must be properly celebrated.“

Lena applauded enthusiastically.

Jannis smiled. „Interesting procedure.“

„Of course, this was only a trivial decision, but the method works just as well and quickly for more important topics and also with many more participants. At the citizens' assemblies on the zoo, which I told you about earlier, we used it quite often to vote on interim proposals and ideas. If we had had to discuss this in each case, the loudest would probably have prevailed and everything would have taken much, much longer.“

„Sounds impressive.“ Jannis nodded thoughtfully. „With several options, the only other way I knew what to do with them is to give them sympathy points. But your method seems to me to be much more differentiated.“

„Yes. Systemic consensus is extremely practical. Perhaps it didn't exist in your time?“ He was tapping his display and looking up again. „In fact, it was first brought to the public in 2005. No wonder you didn't know it yet. Are you familiar with the consent method? Because the two complement each other well.“

„I know consensus,“ said Lena.

Damian shook his head. „Not consensus, but consent. But I think we've had enough of one tool for today. I'll explain the consent procedure another time. But believe me, decision tools like this can make a huge difference. If I see groups still deciding by majority vote or consensus, I go insane. It's usually simply terribly ineffective and unnecessarily conflict-ridden.“

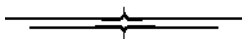
Lena frowned. „Consensus too?“

Damian moved his head somewhat indecisively. „Well. Provided there is a very strong foundation of trust in the group, sufficient time for the decision-making process and a well thought-out framework, consensus can also work well. However, these conditions are rarely all in place and decisions by consent usually leads to the same result without presupposing all that.“

Lena nodded thoughtfully.

Then their attention turned to the sky, where a drone had just passed by. She pointed to it. „Isn't it annoying when drones like that keep flying over you?“

„You get used to it. In addition, deliveries are usually only made in the morning between 8 and 10 a.m. and in the evening between 7 and 9 p.m. Outside these times, only for urgent deliveries such as medication. That might be the case with the drone up there. These rule also applies to all delivery vehicles.“



A gentle breeze swept across the Tempelhof field while they rode around it between numerous joggers and inline skaters on another set of yellow BVG bicycles. To their sides, family barbecues, stretching yoga groups and concentrated kite flyers populated the field. Even a few sheep and goats grazed on a marked out area.

What a wonderful moment, thought Lena and deeply breathed in the summer air.

„It's really good that the field is still preserved and has not been cultivated,“ she shouted against the wind.

Damian nodded. „The field is sacred to the Berliners. By the way, there is now a similar place where Tegel Airport used to be.“

„Is the BER airport now completed?“ asked Jannis.

„Almost! Next year the opening is scheduled to take place.“

„Oh God,“ called Jannis distraught and grabbed his head. „What a tragedy.“

Damian laughed out loud. „Just kidding. It was finally finished five years ago.“

Jannis grinned at him and pedaled hard to overtake him on the former runway of the airport. The atmosphere was fantastic. In the sky they could admire colorful kites and the sun was shining while a pleasant wind cooled the skin.

Silently, they rode across the field for a while, enjoying the moment and digesting the experiences of the day. Lena remembered the seed bomb in her bag. Driving with one hand, she pulled the ball out of her pocket and threw it in a high arc onto the meadow next to her. Damian grinned at her and did the same. Jannis shrugged his shoulders and then threw his ball after hers.

Finally Jannis pointed to the old airport building in the distance. „Are those airships over there?“

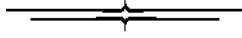
Damian nodded. „Tempelhof Airport has reopened for airship flights. Since airships can climb vertically, a small airfield is sufficient. There is also no noise pollution. There was therefore little resistance from the Berlin population to reopen a part of the field for airship flights.“

Lena stuck her thumb out. „That's what I call Tempelhof Airport 2.0.“
„The Tempelhofer Feld is back in operation with airships,“ Jannis shook his head. „Who would have thought that?“

After a while Lena saw something shimmering in the distance and finally recognized the outline of a lake that had obviously been dug up. Lena pointed to it. „Is that a swimming pond?“

„A swimming pond would be nice here too, but that one's just for the animals and birds. If you wanted to create a bathing lake here that would cope with the onslaught of Berliners, you would probably have to dig up the whole field. In addition, the decision was made to use the field primarily as a natural oasis and retreat for animals and insects. Therefore, there are many different natural areas and also protection zones that one should not enter. Thanks to them, there is an incredible biodiversity here.“

They drove around the field for one more lap, watched a group of creative people marching across the tarmac in shrill robes and on big stilts, and finally made their way back to Berlin's main station.



Jannis looked thoughtfully out of the window of the train. They had just left the outskirts of Berlin behind them. Lena had closed her eyes and Damian was typing on his bracelet.

After a while they were torn from their daydream by an angry child's voice. A young father came along with his obviously very angry daughter. Lena caught only scraps of words, but it seemed to be about an unfairly small piece of chocolate. She smiled amused and turned to Damian. „I was just thinking about the video for the constitutional referendum. I found the moment very interesting, when there was a riot in front of the chancellor's office and then these people de-escalated the situation.“

He nodded and she went on. „I was in Hamburg in the summer of 2017 at the big demonstrations for the G20 summit. I think that's when something similar would have been needed.“

„G20?“ Damian asked.

„This was an association of the twenty most influential states to discuss and decide on global issues.“

He nodded as if he remembered. „Yeah, sure. I've heard about that before.“

„During the demonstrations at that time there were really violent clashes with the police. In the end, the whole public debate revolved solely around the violence of the demonstrators and whether the tough police action was legitimate. But the actual concern of the demonstration, namely the criticism of the G20 summit, was barely an issue any more. That was really frustrating. I remember how angry I was in the demonstration. There was a real hatred in me against the police and the politicians. So I can empathize very well with the angry demonstrators in the video.“ Audibly, she exhaled. „But how do you handle this anger?“ She paused and looked at him questioningly. „I am realizing more and more that this raw rage achieves little good, but I often feel at the mercy of my feelings.“

Damian looked at her with understanding. „Yes, dealing constructively with anger is no easy matter.” He laughed. „That's why I took an anger workshop once!“

„Anger workshop?” Lena asked in surprise and narrowed her eyes.

„Yes. You may not notice it anymore, but as a teenager I carried around a lot of anger with me. I was in a traditional school with rigid rules and frontal teaching and hated it. I also had many conflicts with my parents. Good people at heart, but very classical values. They used to have a big SUV, new kitsch furniture every year and we always flew somewhere exotic during the holidays. Sometimes they still complain about the climate protection laws and wish for the good old days to come back. Maybe you can imagine it.“

Lena nodded understandingly.

„Back then, I withdrew a lot into virtual realities on the computer and was generally not in a very good mood. At sixteen I had my first girlfriend. She was from a hippie family where they talked openly about their feelings. So she knew a lot about that. A few times when we had an argument, I went really mad. So at some point, she gave me a choice: Either I go to an anger workshop and deal with my rage, or our relationship is over.“ He smiled. „So I reluctantly went to the anger workshop.“

„And how was that?“ Lena looked at him with big eyes.

„Very, very interesting. Of course I was quite skeptical at first about what the whole thing was about. But I quickly realized that the two workshop leaders really had it in them and finally opened up.“

„How can I imagine the workshop? What did you do?“

„There were different exercises: Tug of War, pillow smashing, and so on. But the most intense was the so-called lying rage.“

„Lying rage?“

„Yes. You lie down on the floor and all your arms and legs are fixed by one person each. So several people lie around you and press you to the floor. This way, you are held completely. Then you are invited to really go into the anger energy and to try to free yourself.“ He paused and looked at her seriously. „I roared and I romped like a lion. But since I was held by so many people, nothing could happen.“

Lena looked at him in an unsettled way. „Phew. That sounds a bit psycho. I don't know if I could do that. Just being held like that seems extremely unpleasant to me.“

„Of course, a lot can come up. To let go of all control for once and to express your anger uninhibitedly is a pretty intense experience. But there are also very different and milder anger exercises.“

Jannis meanwhile seemed to be a bit indecisive whether he should get involved in the conversation, but listened attentively.

Damian continued: „All in all, the workshop was one of the most powerful experiences of my life and changed a lot of things for the better for me. Since then I can express my opinion much more easily and clearly. Interestingly, since then I also get sick much less often.“

Lena frowned. „But doesn't it make it easier to get angry when the gate of anger is opened?“

„No, on the contrary. You can think of it more like a boiler. Every time we suppress anger, the pressure in the boiler increases. Through such anger exercises, we can let off steam and thus reduce the risk of exploding. But releasing pressure is just one thing. The other is to learn how to find a constructive expression for anger. Of course, we also got a lot of advice for this in the workshop.“

„What is a constructive expression of anger?“

Damian thought for a moment. „The workshop talked about the old map of anger and the new map of anger. According to the old map, anger is destructive, immature, dangerous, childish, relationship-jeopardizing and so on. In a way, these are the shadows of an immature and destructive expression of anger.“

„Yes, those terms fit my view pretty well to be honest,“ she said cautiously. „So what is the new map?“

„According to the new map, consciously directed and well-dosed anger gives clarity and helps you to set limits, overcome obstacles and change situations that no longer serve you. Anger gives you the energy to break out of unhealthy situations, to stand by yourself and to say no.“

Jannis laughed. „I was just thinking of a quote: *Reason opposes evil the more effectively when anger ministers at its side.*“

Damian grinned broadly. „Such lovely words.“

Lena looked skeptical. „That sounds all very well, but I don't know. That view of anger is a bit too optimistic in my opinion.“

„Well. Anger is just a tool. Just as a knife can be used to slice a carrot or to stab someone. The more constructive your relationship to anger is, the earlier and less charged you will address things that bother you. You don't wait until you explode, but feel much earlier that something is wrong. If you then have the methods at hand to constructively introduce your needs in order to change the situation, there usually doesn't have to be a big fight.“ He took a deep breath. „I would go almost as far as to say that a society with a constructive and intense relationship to anger is a society without violence and war.“

Lena shrugged. „In the past, society certainly didn't deal well with anger. Maybe there's something to it.“

„In any case, many children are now learning at school how to deal with anger better, and this is proving very effective.“

Lena looked thoughtfully out of the window. „Maybe I should attend an anger workshop someday, too.“

„I can highly recommend it to everyone,“ said Damian, took a few granola bars from his backpack and distributed them. For a while they chewed silently on their bars.

Then Damian spoke again: „By the way, a few years ago there were some very interesting public actions on anger. In London, there was a group that regularly held anger trials in front of the buildings of some large corporations.“

„Anger trials?“ asked Jannis skeptically.

„Hold on.“ Damian fiddled on his bracelet and then pulled out the screen where a video was playing.

You could see the entrance to a large building. The camera moved upwards and revealed an impressive bank tower made of glass and steel. The image went back down to a group standing in front of the building and looking at the entrance.

Two people stepped forward and laid a large white banner on the floor. „Shame on you“ was written on it. Other people covered the entrance area with yellow and black barrier tape with the inscription „Crime-Scene“.

Then groups of three brought themselves into position, in which one person was hooked on the arms by two others. For a while, those held in this way stared with a determined, serious look at the entrance area of the bank.

Lena was about to ask Damian what it all meant when suddenly someone struck a big gong in the video. Instantly the people who were being held began to roar and rage. A big man screamed the loudest: „YOU THIEVES! I KNOW ALL YOUR CRIMES! SHAME ON YOU!“ He was raging like an angry bull and the two people at his side were obviously having trouble holding him back. The voices of the others were barely audible in the great noise. Only now and then could angry words like „FUCK OFF!“ or „BLOODY BASTARDS!“ be heard.

The whole event created a surreal atmosphere. There was an incredible energy in the air. Passers-by stopped and watched the action in astonishment. What a spectacle, Lena thought. Two security men stormed out of the building and suddenly stopped in front of the raging groups. They seemed hopelessly overwhelmed by the situation.

Then suddenly the gong sounded again and the whole thing stopped as suddenly as it had started. For a while the groups of three stopped. Breathing heavily, the angry people continued to stare at the building. Then the gong sounded again and the groups separated.

Then the video was over.

Jannis looked slightly horrified.

„Awesome!“ Lena said with beaming eyes.

„Yeah, right?“ Damian smiled at her. „For a while, the group regularly held similar actions in front of the headquarters of several large corporations and banks. It was copied all over the world. Once, the Electronics giant Pineapple was severely criticized after a scandal about working conditions at its suppliers in Asia. There were then corresponding anger trials in front of numerous Pineapple stores all over the world. The hashtag for this was #Ragingpineapple. Of course, this was widely covered in the media and caused massive damage to the company.“

„I can imagine! I think if I were to work there, it would also intimidate me quite a bit.“

After a moment of silence Jannis cleared his throat. „Damian, I am still wondering about what you said earlier about jobs. I was just thinking about an essay by the famous economist John Maynard Keynes that I read a few years ago. It was called *Economic Opportunities for Our Grandchildren*. He published that article in the 1930s and he made two forecasts. Firstly, that GDP would continue to grow and secondly, that working hours would continue to decrease and that the 15-hour week would soon be introduced. His estimates of the gross domestic product were impressively precise, but the reductions in working hours had not occurred in our time.” He smiled. „It seems that old Keynes was right after all.“

Damian nodded and wanted to answer something, but Lena beat him to it. „I never really understood why we all went into these crazy work mills. Everyone around me was overworked and I myself had already had a burnout. That was complete madness! In my circle of acquaintances, many people didn't even have the time to spend their well-earned income at all.“ She shook her head. „An old university friend of mine was a consultant at McKinsey and bought luxury furniture and a designer kitchen, even though he was never at home. That was such bullshit!“

Damian shrugged his shoulders. „It seems to me that the Protestant work ethic has had a long impact. Whoever works and achieves a lot will be redeemed - people have lived in this spirit for centuries. But I believe that this performance orientation cannot be explained so well by behavior on the individual level alone. The whole economy used to be geared towards growth, and of course that didn't fit too well with putting your feet up and living frugally into the day.“

„And how has that changed now?“ asked Lena and put her head aside curiously.

„Above all, the reforms of the monetary system were crucial in putting an end to the pressure to grow. This made it possible to trim many other norms and laws to more sustainability and the most efficient use of raw materials and energy without a rebound effect. I would even go so far as to say that ecological reforms, the basic income and countless other political and cultural reforms could only really take effect on the basis of monetary reform.“

„I don't get that.“ Lena looked at him confused. „Why did the monetary system create a growth compulsion?“

Jannis crossed his arms.

„Hm, that's another big topic.“ Damian took a deep breath. „As I told you before, in the old days, most of the money was created by the banks. So money and debt were two sides of the same coin. If you had \$1000 in your account, then there was somebody else with \$1000 in debt which created that money in the first place. But let's start with a simplified example. Let's assume that our train compartment with about forty people here is a small economy and I am the bank. In year zero, I create all the money by giving each person in the compartment a loan of 100 Damian dollars. So in total there are about 4000 Damian dollars. With this money, everyone can do business and sell goods and services to each other.“ He pointed to different people on the train. „He might be selling sandwiches over there and she might be a psychotherapist. You, Lena might be...“ He paused briefly and she helped him: „An astronaut.“

He smiled. „Exactly. It was on the tip of my tongue.“ Then he looked at Jannis. „And you might be...“ Lena interrupted him again. „A dachshund breeder. Jannis would be a dachshund breeder.“

Jannis looked at her with an icy cold look. Then he turned to Damian. „What are you getting at?“

Damian continued: „One year later, as a bank, I want to have repaid all loans plus five percent interest. But where shall the interest come from? After all, there are only 100 Damian dollars in circulation per person and not 105. Therefore, in purely arithmetical terms there is just too little money to pay back the loan plus interest. Everyone can work as hard as they want. Even if Jannis breeds like a madman and you, Lena, fly around the moon a hundred times, there would still be too little money for everyone. So the economically weakest go bankrupt, people lose their jobs, houses are seized. It's a tragedy for society as a whole.“

Lena listened intently. „Okay, I see. There's not enough money. And what do you do?“

„The problem can be solved if in year one everyone takes out an even larger loan, for example 150 Damian dollars per person, or if at least one person gets heavily indebted, for example for a factory construction, and thus additional money is put into circulation. Then the debts from the

previous period can be repaid and the game can continue without bankruptcies and recession.” He took a deep breath. „In year two, of course, we are faced with the same problem and need even more growth, though.“

„Uh-huh. So you mean that in the past we were regularly faced with the choice of either growing and getting even more into debt collectively or staggering into crisis?“

„Exactly. Plague or cholera.“

Jannis had listened attentively and was now interfering. „Well, that's a simplistic example, of course. I would be very careful to transfer this one to one to reality.“

„Of course, the real situation was even more complicated. More players, more complex money flows, state intervention and, in some cases, the interest income of the banks was spent back into circulation. But I would still say that the basic mechanism of the compulsion to grow in the former monetary system can be understood quite well with this example.“

„And with this sovereign monetary reform, that's now been fixed?“ asked Lena.

„Yes. With sovereign money, the money is finally no longer created by the banks as an interest-bearing loan, but instead is put into circulation by the monetary authority without any debts. This allows money to flow into the economy without anyone taking out a loan. The link between money and debt is thus broken. The economy can then still grow, but it no longer needs to.“

Jannis shook his head discontentedly. „As I said before, if the sovereign money works out, that's all well and good. But I don't consider the former money system so inflexible. Even in the example with the train compartment, you could simply increase the money supply without necessarily having to produce more goods and without exploiting the environment.“

Damian looked at him seriously. „In theory, yes. That would also make a lot of sense. But in practice it doesn't happen because the banks want to maximize their returns and therefore only grant loans and thus create money if they expect innovation and growth. Alternatively, of course,

the state could simply increase its spending and thus bring money into circulation. Public debt is not a problem at all if the state is financed by its own central bank. But in purely practical terms, such direct public financing used to be prohibited by law and high levels of public debt were discredited by the public.“

Lena listened intently. Jannis was silent.

Damian continued: „In the previous system, most reforms to curb environmental exploitation and economic growth were therefore doomed to failure, because this contradicted the growth logic of the monetary system.“

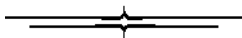
Lena looked thoughtfully out of the window at the passing landscapes. „Unbelievable. No one has ever explained that to me before.“

A loudspeaker announcement sounded. Soon they would reach Brandenburg an der Havel.

„Damn it! Now I've missed my visit to the spa. The train is just too damn fast.“ Lena hit her hand on the table with an artificially annoyed look.

„Very good! That's what I call a well-dosed burst of anger.“ Damian looked at her with amusement. „You've expressed your regret at missing the spa experience very adequately. Now you feel better and we got informed about your inner life without any collateral damage.“

„Well-dosed? I would like to smash the table to bits!“ Lena raised her fists laughing. Then even Jannis had to grin and raised his hands playfully defensive.



Lena stands in the center of the crater of a huge volcano. At the edge of the small plateau on which she is standing, red-hot lava is blazing. She doesn't know why she is in this place and looks around confused. Restlessness rises within her.

Then it hisses out of the smoking embers in front of her and a big dark cloud of smoke comes out. She recoils as a few familiar figures step out of it onto the plateau. Her heart begins to beat violently. She recognizes her former gym teacher in sweatpants and with a whistle around his neck, a chubby politician biting with relish into a greasy bockwurst, her former boss looking down on her with a contemptuous look and her tall ex-boyfriend typing on his cell phone with a gloating grin.

She begins to tremble and recedes backwards. The despising pack seems to expect nothing else. The sports teacher shakes his head, her boss stares at her and rubs her hands and the politician nods sarcastically. It seems to her that the figures are getting even bigger. They keep coming towards her and form a semicircle around her. They whisper and point at her with spurning gestures. Lena feels small and worthless, completely at the mercy of her tormentors. Trembling and broken, she stands there.

The pack continues to press towards her with angry, spiteful looks, so that Lena steps back a few more steps until the ground under her back shoe gives way with a hissing sound. She notices with horror that she has reached the edge of the plateau. There is only lava behind her. She cannot flee.

Again it hisses loudly behind her and Lena feels splashes of boiling embers burning through her sweater into her back. Filled with pain, she screams out. Then she feels a new, unknown power rise up with her scream. It is rage. How dare they stand against her with all their deceit and unkindness?! How dare they humiliate and expose her? So cornered, a fire alights within her that wants to rebel against her enemies, wants to burn them up.

A growl comes out of Lenas throat. She takes another deep breath, charges herself with rage. Then she pushes herself off the ground and storms towards her enemies with her head lowered. For a moment they seem to be perplexed. Her ex looks up in surprise from his smartphone and her former boss's handbag slips from her arm. But as Lena roars forward, the characters cleverly avoid her. Her ex floats back, always leaving a frustrating distance between her and himself and continues to look down on her with contempt. This only makes her more angry and she races past him towards her gym teacher. That one grins at her as he prances away, amused and trills on his whistle. They play with her as if she was an angry bull. She looks for a new target and catches the obese politician, who grins and holds out his sausage like bait. When she strikes at him, he dissolves. She slips and tears her hands and arms bloody.

Undeterred, she rides up again, feeling furious. The politician appears behind her and laughs. She lets herself be provoked like this for a while, storms from one side of the plateau to the other, falls for the evil game. Her boss watches the goings-on with folded arms and shakes her head scornfully.

Finally, Lena breaks down humiliated and beaten in the middle of the plateau panting. Her heart overturns, her lungs burn, her clothes hang dirty and torn from her body. Just before giving up and submitting to her adversaries, admitting her weakness and inferiority, she hears a gentle flutter and looks up. Two big red butterflies fly up and settle on her shoulders.

Overpowered by intense emotion, she closes her eyes. In addition to the rage, she now also feels clarity rising within her. She sucks air deep into her lungs and feels strength and pride glowing in her chest. There is a will not to submit, not to lose herself again, not to give up her power to others. She feels something heavy in her right hand and to her surprise she discovers a big golden sword. She straightens up and raises her chin. She is ready for the next round.

The figures stand around her. Determined, Lena looks them in the eye. She raises her sword and takes a step forward. „NO!“ she shouts, „NO!“. Startled, the politician drops his sausage. Her former boss dodges her gaze and fingers nervously on her nails.

Now she turns to her ex. „YOU DO NOT DESERVE ME! I go MY way! WITHOUT YOU!“. He raises his hands in a calming manner, nods frantically and retreats. He becomes smaller and smaller until there is only a little boy left.

Next it's her gym teacher's turn. „NOBODY SHOULD LISTEN TO YOUR STUPID TALK.“ He tries to blow into his whistle, but only a soft, squeaky sound comes out, and he seems completely unsettled. She continues: „YOU WILL NEVER EMBARASS ME AGAIN!“ Now he too is staggering backwards to the edge of the plateau.

Then Lena hits on her former boss. „YOU DON'T HAVE ANY POWER OVER ME EITHER! I will NOT live in your little work cell!“ Her boss points ruefully at the politician as if he were the real culprit.

When Lena turns to the politician, he suddenly has a pimple on his face and a red rash on his neck. She approaches him energetically, tears the sausage from his hand and throws it into the fiery embers in a high arc. With his mouth open, he looks helplessly at the sausage and then trots after it with hanging shoulders and disappears into the lava as if he were descending a staircase.

Then Lena looks up into the sky, raises her sword and screams out all her rage and strength in a long, deep scream. As if hit by a wave of energy, her remaining adversaries tumble back and fall into the red embers. It smokes and hisses until the last of them has sunk.

Lena stands alone again on the plateau. She feels bigger than ever before and feels the power of her pulsating heart in her chest.

Day 5 - Singapore

“Wow. What is that building?” Lena pointed to an impressive tower spiraling into the sky in the distance. Massive trees grew out of the side of the glass facade. Flocks of birds circled around the building.

“That’s the United Nations Tower,” Katharina replied. They were standing on the pier in front of the Marina Bay Sands Hotel, looking at the Singapore skyline. At least Katharina was standing there. Lena, on the other hand, was actually in the neurostimulator suit in Brandenburg. However, the device was coupled with a robotic humanoid in Singapore, which thus gave her a body with eyes and ear. This allowed her to move freely in Singapore and talk to her friend as if she were there herself. In addition, Katharina had special contact lenses implanted, which replaced the humanoid with Lena’s face on her retina. All facial expressions that Lena made in the neurostimulator were transmitted in real time. Katharina could thus look at her friend Lena as if she were standing next to her in flesh and bone. Long-distance travel had never been so easy.

“The UN moved its headquarters from Washington here to Singapore a few years ago,” Katharina continued. “The World Parliament also meets here.”

“The World Parliament?” asked Lena.

“Yes.” Katharina nodded with satisfaction. “The UN has become quite important in the last twenty years. National governments and laws alone were no longer able to deal with the international financial system and global corporations. Many of the global challenges can only be solved globally.”

“Oh yeah. I know that problem.”

“The UN has therefore been given more and more powers. To ensure that this additional power is legitimate, a world parliament is elected every few years.”

“That’s great news!” exclaimed Lena enthusiastically.

“We could walk over and go to the observation deck. Would you like to? We’ll have a fantastic view of the city from there, and there’s a very nice little park up there. «

Lena nodded and they walked along the pier toward the United Nations Tower.

“What enabled the formation of the World Parliament? In the past, most countries did not want to give up any of their sovereignty to the international community. Especially the countries in the UN Security Council have certainly lost influence. In the past the U.S. didn’t even

recognize the International Criminal Court.”

“Yes, that's true. But with the U.S. fall from power, new times have dawned.”

“With the United States fall from power? What happened?”

“Probably what happens to every empire sooner or later: Disintegration.” Katharina looked serious. “In the early twenties, the United States started the third Gulf War. It was about oil, of course.”

“Oh, no.” Lena shook her head in dismay.

“The war was pretty messy and, of course, very expensive. So when, amid a flurry of political scandals, the Big Bang - the great financial crisis of 2024 - came along, the country fell apart.” She looked at her friend seriously.

“What does fell apart mean?”

“In the crisis, the dollar collapsed and thus lost its status as international reserve currency. As a result, the power of the United States collapsed like a house of cards. The Republicans and the Democrats were by then so at odds that the government was incapable of counteracting in regard to the events in any way. In the turmoil, a successful impeachment complaint was filed and the president was removed from office. The U.S. then slid into a severe recession and economic crisis. The country descended into chaos.”

“Uh. That sounds bad.”

“Yes, pretty bad. There were riots in many cities. In Los Angeles, chaos broke out. The police and administration were hopelessly overwhelmed and hardly able to act. Parts of the city went up in flames. In the U.S. South, right-wing groups tried to take political control.”

“Gosh! How did that turn out?”

“Texas has seceded.”

Lena shook her head slightly amused. “They've always wanted to do their own thing, I guess.”

Katharina continued, “And in the southeastern United States, the Holy State of Christ was proclaimed.” She screwed up her face. “A totally backwards region. Tea Party goes Nation. The worst form of arch-conservative and racist agitators. Not much to do with Christianity anymore. Not too big an area, but full of guns and trigger-happy nationalists.”

Lena screwed up her face. “That sounds bad.”

“Indeed.”

For a while they walked on in silence. In the meantime, they had left the pier and were walking through the city center toward the United

Nations Tower. In Singapore, too, the streets seemed to be free of car traffic and were full of people, cycle rickshaws and buses. Despite the bustle, the streets were conspicuously clean and Lena spotted a drone that seemed to pick up trash from the ground.

“This virtual travel is really amazing. If I didn't know I was in a neurostimulator, I'd hardly realize I wasn't really here.” Lena smiled. “Well, and that red overlay *simulation* above my field of view reminds me, of course.”

“Yes. Virtual travel is fantastic. The only thing you can't do with it is eat, and sometimes smells aren't rendered quite right, but it's very handy.”

Lena nodded. “In the past, I could theoretically look at all the places in the world via the Internet and Google Maps, but the experience is much more interesting in such an immersive way. Most of all, I like that I can actively influence the world around me.” She poked her friend in the shoulder with a laugh.

“Before I moved here to Singapore and was still living in Berlin, Khalish and I had a long-distance relationship for a few years. During that time, these virtual trips were a blessing for us.” She paused meaningfully. “However, there are certain technical limitations in regard to human interaction.”

“Oh.” Lena giggled. “I see. No virtual sex meetups?”

“At least not with the usual neurostimulators. But as you can imagine, the great demand has of course produced a corresponding supply. The so-called neurosexulators. These are special neurostimulators and special humanoids with the right...” she hesitated for a moment, “equipment.”

“Oh, come on.” Lena's eyes flashed curiously. “Have you tried it out?”

Katharina shook her head with a grin. “Khalish wasn't completely averse to it, but it feels too weird to me.”

Lena laughed. “Yes, that sounds a bit strange. After all, one doesn't need to try out everything.”

By now they had reached the Tower and Katharina pointed to it. “Shall we go up?”

“Absolutely!”

The building welcomed them with a pleasantly cool climate. A mighty tree was enthroned in the center of the huge entrance hall. From its branches, hanging roots had grown into several dozen trunks supporting the massive tree. Colorful canaries perched among the leaves, chirping happily. At the base of the tree flowed a small stream of water that

originated on one of the building walls and ran from there through the whole hall.

Katharina pointed to the tree. "This banyan tree symbolizes the strength of the community. Just as numerous trunks support this tree, it is the diversity of nations that forms a strong world community."

Lena looked at the banyan thoughtfully. "What a beautiful symbol. And anyone can just walk in here?"

"Yes. A few years ago there were extensive security checks. But eventually it was decided to abandon those and trust that people would recognize the venerability of this building and the global community."

"Do terrorists know that, too?" asked Lena skeptically.

"Terrorism is no longer a serious problem. Moreover, it is absurd to try to solve the problem of terrorist attacks with security controls. It seems to me that in the past there was too much symptomatic thinking and far too little investigation into the real causes of things."

"What do you mean?"

"Basically, it's quite simple. If we don't harm other people, then they have no reason to harm us. After all, terrorists aren't just evil or enjoy blowing themselves up." Katharina's cheeks were slightly flushed. The topic seemed important to her. "Usually terrorism has a history of violence, exploitation, and neocolonialism. When countries stopped exploiting each other but started cooperating and when the worst poverty ended, terrorism became a thing of the past."

Lena had nothing to say to that. She nodded thoughtfully and remained silent.

As they walked toward the elevator, Lena noticed that the marble floor at their feet was covered with the flags of the nations of the world. As they waited in front of the elevator with a small queue, Lena looked for the flag of Germany. But before she found it, the elevator doors opened. They boarded it and within seconds were shot up to the top of the building.

A dense forest awaited them out on the deck, in which exotic plants were sprouting. Lena felt more like she was in the wilderness than on a skyscraper. They walked to a railing at the edge of the building and looked out over the Singapore skyline.

"What a view!" whispered Lena as the wind whistled through her hair. Below them, the city appeared like a symbiosis of high-tech and jungle. Maglev trains rode around between tropical trees. Large bushes sprouted from impressive steel buildings and climbing plants grew around the facades of the houses everywhere.

Lena smiled at her friend. "So this city is your new home?"

Katharina nodded. "The pulse of the world. I don't think in any other place modernity and nature meet as fruitfully as here. I love this city."

"I can understand why. It would be worth moving here just for this view." Lena looked at the panorama with fascination. "Berlin has already become so green, but Singapore looks like a jungle from above!"

"Yes, the city government has imposed some strict requirements in this regard. All new buildings must compensate for at least one hundred and twenty percent of the sealed soil with green spaces on the building. That's sustainability today. Environmental damage is not just compensated for, but it's overcompensated for!"

For a while, they silently contemplated the panorama of Singapore.

Lena took a few steps to another corner of the building deck and from there caught sight of the *Marina Bay Sands* building complex she knew well, the city's landmark. Next to the three connected towers, a new, fourth skyscraper rose into the sky. Behind the Marina Bay Sands was still a green forest dotted with futuristic art objects.

Lena looked thoughtfully into the distance and then turned to her friend. "I'm still thinking about what you said about the disintegration of the US. If the U.S. lost its military supremacy, then surely a huge power vacuum was created. How was that filled? Surely China and Russia had ambitions?"

"They probably had, but some wise statesmen and stateswomen seized the moment and initiated relevant UN and Security Council reforms. India, in particular, took a positive leadership role. The motto was that never again should a single state be allowed to achieve such supremacy and that there must be a united effort for peace, demilitarization and disarmament."

"And that worked out?"

"It wasn't easy, of course, but there was a lot at stake. Some of the politicians really put their backs into it."

"And what happened to NATO?"

"NATO has been disbanded."

"Just disbanded?"

"Yes, but something new replaced it." She looked at her friend from the side. "After all, the idea of a defense alliance is not bad in principle, even if NATO regularly overstepped that boundary." She shook her head. "In the EU, therefore, a European army was built, and internationally, the Global Alliance for Eternal Peace was created." As she said this, she made a meaningful gesture with her arms.



“The Global Alliance for Eternal Peace,” Lena repeated. “That sounds ambitious.”

Katharina nodded with satisfaction. “Rightly so. The Alliance is a peace alliance worthy of the name. Members pledge to respect the decisions of the World Parliament, to disarm, and to promote peace, democracy and human rights. In return, they receive military assistance from all other Alliance members in the event of an attack by a foreign country. In addition, all members will cease all trade relations with the aggressor. That alone can generate sufficient pressure for retreat.”

“And there are a lot of countries in this alliance?”

“Yes, the vast majority. Even Russia has joined and has massively disarmed.”

“Has there ever been a corresponding defense case?”

“There was once an incident in Yemen. It became known that Saudi Arabia had been funneling special military forces into the country to instigate social unrest and destabilize the political leadership there. When that leaked out to the public, the defense case kicked in and almost all Global Alliance members immediately stopped trading with Saudi Arabia and offered military support to Yemen. Within a week, people in Saudi Arabia were on the barricades because of supply shortages in supermarkets and stores. The political leadership then very quickly apologized officially to Yemen and even approved compensation payments. Otherwise, their own regime would probably have been toppled.” She took a deep breath. “Since then, no country has dared to do anything similar.”

Lena sighed. “I’m really glad to hear that. It sounds like this is a very different world than the one I know.”

“Politics used to be incredibly short-sighted.” Katharina nodded sadly. “But we’re all in the same boat, and no country can prosper in the long run at the expense of other countries. Through peace though, everyone wins.”

“Yes, that’s right. I’m thinking of all the things that can be afforded only due to the reduced military spending!”

“By the way, there is another very exciting project to unite humanity called Earthland. The idea is that the earth should belong to all people and that ownership of land and resources should therefore be collectivized. To make that happen step by step, anyone can register electronically on the Earthland platform as a World Citizen, transfer their own land ownership to the platform, and thus support this development.”

Lena raised an eyebrow. "Tell me more."

"It's a very clever system. The goal is that at some point there will be no more private land ownership and instead all income from land leases will go into a global fund. This money will be distributed equally to all World Citizens."

"So when a farmer in Europe pays rent for his field, the money flows into the fund and moves on to a merchant in Kenya?"

"Exactly. Relatively speaking, about one-nine-billionth to the merchant and the rest correspondingly to all the other people."

"Sounds remarkable. But that requires that private land ownership is given up first. How does that work?"

"That's where it gets interesting. The idea is that everyone has to register as an Earthland World Citizen in order to receive a share of the distribution and, in return, commit to transferring their own land ownership to the platform. However, if you want to, you can still get all income from that lands use until the end of your life, or you can use the land yourself for free. It's designed for the long term."

"And there are a lot of people doing that?"

"Yes, in some cases even entire states. Some member countries of the South American Confederation have a similar system in place for a few years already and have transferred their state land ownership to the platform. Here in Singapore, this is currently being discussed in parliament, too. Already more than ninety percent of the land in Singapore is state-owned anyway. And especially in poorer countries, the incentives for people to participate in the system are great because the financial payouts are potentially high and the land value in their own country is rather low. In addition, there is now a certain social pressure. Among the public, participation is part of good manners. Some stores offer discounts and benefits to Earthland World Citizens. Many people therefore give their property to the platform, and with part of the proceeds, the platform buys up more land."

"...until one day the whole world belongs to all of us." Lena shook her head in bewilderment. "And how will that be technically implemented?"

"You must register electronically and need three existing Earthland World Citizens to vouch for you. Afterwards, you'll have to log in monthly for your payouts to prove you're still alive. The platform uses its own cryptocurrency, the Earthland Coin, or ELC."

"And how is the whole thing managed? Such a landholding can't be managed by a computer program, after all."

"There's a sophisticated Liquid Democracy system for that, too. Do

you know how Liquid Democracy works?”

“Phew, didn't the Pirate Party develop that?”

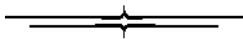
“Yes, they had done a lot of work on it at the time. Liquid democracy is a mixture of representative and direct democracy. You can decide for yourself to what extent you make decisions yourself or delegate your voting rights to people of trust. These, in turn, can further delegate their mandate until the votes accumulate to the people with the greatest expertise and foresight. In this process, there are different areas of responsibility for which votes are taken.”

“Are you registered with Earthland yourself?”

“Yes. It feels good to be part of it. Registration is straightforward, and you get a free banking account and remittance every month. If you're interested to join, I can vouch for you.”

“I'll think about it,” Lena said thoughtfully.

Katharina nodded in the direction of the elevator. “Shall we move on? If you want, we can walk to the Little India district. It's really worth seeing, and if you want to, we can stop by the Eco-Hotel where I work.”



The neighborhood of Little India was bustling with activity. Colorful garlands of pennants waved over the street, men sold fruit and coconuts, playing children ran around. There was a seductive smell of curry and exotic food.

A bicycle rickshaw overtook the two women. On the back wall of the bicycle cab hung an advertising sign “Awaken the warrior in you - initiation journeys for men”. Next to the text was an image of a muscular man carrying a large sword. A lion lay at his feet.

Lena laughed and pointed at the sign. “My bullshit detector sounds the alarm.”

Katharina looked at her in surprise. “Why?”

“Didn't you see the sign Awaken the warrior in you. It's ridiculous.”

“Yes, I saw that, but I don't actually think it's that ridiculous. What bothers you about it?”

“What bothers me? The sexist shit. How do I become a strong man, dominate the world and oppress women? That reeks of patriarchy.”

Katharina put her head to one side. “I understand what you mean, but I don’t view such seminars so negatively. Sure, there’s some bullshit in the field, but I can well imagine that such experiences can be very empowering for some men.”

“Empowering?” Lena contorted her face in annoyance. “Why should toxic masculinity be empowered for god’s sake?”

Katharina stopped and looked at her piercingly. “Lena, I know that feminism means a lot to you and how much emotional charge there is in the corresponding injustices. I also know very well how it used to be in the twenties with all the challenging gender debates and our feminist struggles. But times have changed. The battle of the sexes is over. You can finally be a woman without having to submit and please anyone, and a man can be a man without being ashamed of it.”

Lena folded her arms. “Are the classic gender categories still not outdated?”

Katharina grinned. “There are multiple gender identities, but of course the great classics of man and woman are still there.”

“All right, I can live with that.”

“But I think in the past, the sexes were pitted against each other far too often until everyone was completely confused about how to be a man or a woman or what else you perceived yourself.”

“Upsetting the foundations of traditional gender roles may not have been such a bad thing.”

“Totally agreed. But for all the breaking up of the old, there also needs to be a better new vision, and that sometimes came short in the feminist movement in the past.”

Lena still looked skeptical.

Katharina took one deep breath as if to center herself and looked at Lena. “I know only too well how difficult it often was to be a woman in the past. Constantly you’re reduced to your looks. Equal work but unequal pay. Some perverts grabbed your butt on the bus. Usually, women were only allowed to enter the management floors of companies as secretaries, cleaning ladies or prostitutes. It has often been damn painful to be a woman.”

“Yes, exactly! And in Germany, compared to some other countries we had it even pretty damn good.”

“You name it. But men didn’t have an easy lot in the past either. In the many wars, it was mainly men who died. In the prisons, it was mainly men who sat in jail. Suicide was mainly committed by men. As a man, you should not show emotion, you should not ask for help, and you

should not show weakness. While we women had to struggle with rape, discrimination, and disturbing body ideals, men had their own burdens: Violence, emotional emptiness, and loneliness.”

Lena was silent and looked sadly at the ground. “All right. The men didn't always have it easy either. But neither did we women, and that was very often because of the men.” She shook her head thoughtfully. “Such a tragedy. So many traumatized people.”

Katharina nodded. “Yes. But what used to be considered masculinity just wasn't a mature form of masculine energy, but the behavior of little hurt boys. Basically, patriarchy wasn't even the right term. More appropriate would be paisiarchy, the rule of the boys. The many despots in the past - Putin, Erdogan, Trump, Orban and all of them - didn't behave like adult, responsible men, but like little boys.”

Lena grinned. “You've got a point there.” She had to laugh out loud. “I'm just imagining Trump as a little boy in the Oval Office throwing a tantrum because little Putin stole his building blocks.”

Katharina continued. “I believe that if we as women want to unleash our full power, we need strong men by our side and vice versa. The well-being of women and that of men are inextricably intertwined. Role models should always be critically reflected upon. In the past, many things were toxic. But destroying patriarchy is not enough. To bring about profound change, it takes healing of all wounds, it takes empowerment and affirmation for all gender identities, and it takes clear visions that inspire a longing for change and transformation.”

Lena looked touched and Katharina continued: “By the way, some people now call this attitude post-feminism. But basically feminism has been an ongoing development process and corresponding views existed thirty years ago.”

Lena had to grin. “Post-feminism? Oh my goodness. Is there actually any political movement of which there is no post-movement?”

Katharina smirked. “Probably not.”

“And what does current feminism stand for?”

“Whereas in the past it was primarily about exposing injustices and power structures and deconstructing a lot of things - which was very important. Now it's primarily about putting things back together in a better way, designing positive role models and empowering all people in their identity. The both/and perspective. Both for sexual minorities, and for heterosexual relationships. Both for allowing women to be dominant entrepreneurs, soulful mothers, or playful girls, and for allowing men to be soft hipsters, introverted nerds, or tough guys.”

“That sounds nice.”

“Yes, it is.” Katharina smiled. “And it's much more fun to work with men than against them. By the way, my husband Khalish once did a seminar on masculinity. He spent ten days in the forest with ten other men. The seminar was called “The Way of the Superior Man” or something like that. When he came back, he was really changed. He felt ten centimeters taller, had a more powerful look, and at the same time was much more open and empathetic.”

“I have to admit, that sounds fascinating.”

They passed several meticulously decorated temples in bright colors. In front of one of the temples, a woman was lighting several candles. Another seemed to be praying and had her hands folded in front of her forehead.

Lena stopped, fascinated, and looked at the scenery. Then they turned to move on, and Lena picked up the thread of the conversation again: “Do many people attend seminars like this now?”

Katharina nodded. “At least in my circle of acquaintances. My brother is currently thinking about doing an initiation ritual with his son soon, together with other fathers and sons. I myself regularly hold a women's circle with some friends. We exchange ideas about the topics that occupy our minds and we make beautiful rituals together. That is very encouraging. Of course, there is a lot of nonsense and overblown esoteric stuff in the scene, but for many people such groups can provide strength and clarity.”

“All right. You've convinced me.” Lena raised her hand as if for an oath. “I solemnly vow not to make any more jokes about men's seminars.”

Katharina laughed. “Wonderful. We must celebrate this moment.” She walked over to a market stall and pointed to a large coconut. The vendor chopped off a corner of the coconut with a small hatchet, slid a short stalk into the opening, and handed it to her. Katharina paid by briefly holding a bracelet, like the one Damian had, against the man's bracelet. Then she turned back to Lena. “I'm afraid your humanoid doesn't support virtual food or liquid intake, but you're welcome to take a whiff.” She then stuck her tongue out at her friend and took a deep gulp from the coconut.

“Thanks, you're too good to me! Just be careful that my strong humanoid arm doesn't throw your coconut right onto the roof over there from overflowing gratitude.”

Katharina laughed. Then she looked at Lena piercingly. “It's really nice

to spend time with you again. I've missed you terribly all these years.”

“Yes.” Lena looked embarrassed. “Sorry that... that I was gone so long. But I just couldn't take it anymore.”

“It's okay.” Katharina patted her shoulder and they walked on.

Lena marveled at what was happening on the street; life was raging everywhere. They passed another exotic temple, in front of which a group of women dressed in white were performing a religious ceremony, and a school, in front of which colorfully dressed children were frolicking. In a tree in front of it, a couple of monkeys were sitting and were being fed by two little girls.

Katharina pointed to the school building. “By the way, children are nowadays supported in school to find a healthy way of dealing with the topics of gender, identity and sexuality. At least here in Singapore. It's no comparison to our sex education in the past. My son, for example, had a class called sexuality, love and relationships in school. In it, he learned how to set boundaries, communicate effectively, and deal with conflict in relationships constructively.”

“Seriously?”

“Yes. Great, isn't it? When I compare this to sex ed when I was in school, it's a huge improvement.” She giggled. “I remember our bio teacher embarrassingly telling us about different STDs and then we had to put a condom over a banana.”

Lena laughed out loud. “We did that with test tubes and I broke mine.” She grabbed her head, laughing. “I guess that was a bad omen already.”

“Yes, yes, Lena and the men. A difficult undertaking.”

Lena nodded with a grin. Then she became more serious again. “But tell me, isn't it a bit controversial when such personal topics are taught in school? Of course, it's really good for children to be educated at an early age about these things, but on the other hand, the idea of the state interfering in these topics makes me a bit nervous.” Lena looked skeptical.

“Well, if some dictator were to tell me how to love and communicate, I would certainly have big problems with that. But we have a much more democratic society by now. Countless parents, teachers and experts from the fields of psychology, politics and sociology are discussing how the school subject of love and relationships should be designed. We are shaping society for ourselves. There is no longer the state imposing something on us from above, as there used to be. Moreover, in every society, ideas and values about love, relationships, and sexuality are taught all the time anyway. We have to bear this responsibility, no matter

if we want to or not. The question is whether we let the whole thing happen unconsciously and accidentally. Then the children form their ideas and values through Disney, Hollywood or some messed up rappers as they often did in the past. Or do we consciously shape the whole thing in a reflective process.”

Lena tilted her head indecisively. “Yeah, maybe you're right. I remember when I met my first boyfriend in high school and my parents wanted to have a conversation with me about contraception. It made them incredibly uncomfortable.”

Katharina made an embarrassed face. “Most people were so tense and insecure about these things.”

“But you're right. It probably would have saved me a lot of trouble if I'd been taught a few things back in school. I had to learn most of it the hard way on my own.”

“Yes, I felt the same way. Yet love and relationships are such an extraordinarily important topic for living together happily. They are the foundation for peace in the world! It's absurd that in the past, many people were left to their own devices to learn how to deal with them. It was such a struggle. Today, society is much more advanced in this regard and this is bearing fruits. I regularly admire how confident my son is in his relationships and how he stands up for himself. Young people today are much more equipped in regard to these things than we used to be.”

“Us old folks,” laughed Lena. “Oh God, it's funny to be one of the old ones. But at least my age doesn't show on me, thanks to the coma sleep.” She nudged Katharina playfully on the shoulder.

“Thank you for that kind reminder.” Katharina pointed to a building in front of them. “Here, by the way, is the Eco-Hotel where I work.” They stood in front of a green overgrown, multi-story structure. “Green Garden Eco-Hotel” was emblazoned in large letters on the building. A fountain splashed in front of the entrance, in which a few crows were bathing.

They went to the entrance and entered the foyer through a swinging door. There was a decidedly pleasant atmosphere there. The tasteful furnishings were mostly made of wood. Red fabric sofas and inviting armchairs stood around and the walls were painted in muted green and orange. Lena felt as if she were in a spacious living room.

Katharina greeted two people at the reception desk with a warm hug and then led Lena to a couch overlooking a small pond in front of a rocky wall. Plants grew everywhere in the room, as if one were outside in nature and not in a building.

“This is astonishingly beautiful!” exclaimed Lena. She patted the green tendrils of an exotic plant beside her. “I think this is the nicest hotel I've ever been in. If the working conditions here are half as wonderful as the outward appearance, you must be really lucky with your job.” She beamed at her friend.

“Yes, I am very satisfied here. We are a fantastic team and the hotel is organized sociocratically. That means everything is self-organized and all employees can basically have a say in everything.”

“Awesome! And you teach sports classes here?”

“Among other things.” Katharina smiled. “I do different things. Since we organize ourselves into flexible roles, I don't have a classic fixed job, but can take responsibility for different tasks. Depending on what I feel like doing, I was originally hired because someone was needed for the sports and wellness classes, but sometimes I help in the kitchen or at the reception desk, or contribute to the interior design.”

“Sounds really good!”

Katharina nodded. “We have a lot of freedom as employees. For example, I can take as much vacation as I want as long as I take care that my areas of responsibility are dealt with.”

She raised a pointing finger. “We even decide on salaries together.”

“Wow!” Lena frowned. “How does that work?”

“Once a year, we meet with the whole team and talk about current developments at the hotel, challenges and what's going on. We look at the financial situation together and decide on salary adjustments. Everyone can make suggestions. We not only look at the performance of individuals, but also at their needs. So those who have children usually get a little more income.”

“That sounds great. Do you have such a strong union or how was that accomplished?”

Katharina laughed. “A union... no. A company as democratic and self-organized as ours doesn't need a union.”

Lena seemed confused by the answer. “Who actually owns the hotel?”

“Our legal form is called social enterprise. This means that the company belongs equally to the employees, the customers and the investors. The financiers thus have only one voice alongside the many others. This is now a very common form of enterprise in Singapore.”

“This is getting better and better! So the monarchist economic structures of the past have been overcome?” asked Lena expectantly.

“Yes, I guess that's one way to put it. At least democratic principles have now extended to most companies.”

“I already know which hotel I'm going to look for on my next vacation.” Lena smiled. “But are you even part of a hotel chain?”

Katharina moved her head somewhat indecisively. “Not a classic chain, but we are connected with many similar eco-hotels. Large corporate chains are not as common as they used to be. People put more emphasis on personal contact and local roots of companies these days.”

“Interesting! What about the big hotel platforms? Expedia, Booking.com, Airbnb and so on. Do they still exist or how do people usually book accommodation these days?”

“No, they don't exist anymore. The big platform companies have all been replaced by cooperative alternatives and collaborative platforms where the many small businesses pull the strings.”

Lena nodded her head appreciatively. “How was that accomplished and how were the former big corporates knocked off the throne?”

“That is a pretty interesting story. It actually started in Berlin with OurSports. That was a small platform that started as a collaborative-social alternative to the Urban Sports Club at the time. The idea was that in this platform, the small sports clubs and yoga studios, and also their clientele, would collectively decide how prices and usage models should be structured in their favor. A sophisticated decision-making model was developed for this purpose. A supervisory board was drawn by ballot from all operators and the clientele, and a variant of liquid democracy with online voting was used for the most important decisions.”

“And that worked well?”

“Yes, that became quite a successful model. I was one of the first to participate. Many people in Berlin liked the idea that their participation fees really benefited the yoga studio next door and not an anonymous corporation owned by some banks and funds. Therefore, relatively quickly many people joined in. Once a critical mass was reached, many sports clubs canceled their contracts with the other sports platforms, and thus the pull to shift became greater and greater.”

“And this model has been copied for other platforms?”

Katharina nodded. “OurSports was so successful that a short time later, similar platforms for hotels, accommodations and cabs emerged: OurHotels, Ourbnb and OurDrive. The platforms even support each other. The model went around the world and quickly created a new infrastructure where the many small businesses can flourish.”

“That’s awesome!” said Lena with a smile. “I can hardly believe what a great world I woke up into.”

Katharina winked at her friend. “Welcome to the future.”

“What about Amazon?”

“Also vanished. For Amazon it took a bit longer to make the switch, but now there is an offshoot inspired by OurSports for shopping. It's called OurShop. Not to be confused with TheShop, the Chinese version, by the way.” Katharina grimaced.

“And Facebook?”

“Oh God!” Katharina laughed and shook her head. “No, thankfully that's history too.”

Lena held up an outstretched thumb with a grin. “There's a Like for that.”

Then she thoughtfully stroked a large leaf hanging down to her from a plant next to the sofa. “It sounds like most of the big corporations and corporate chains of the past don't exist anymore. Is that really so?”

“Yes. Most large corporations have been replaced by social alternatives. Many international corporations struggled with this as fair trade and fair taxation became more prevalent. I think the reason that there used to be so many large corporate chains, was in considerable part due to complicated tax tricks so that the big corporations could shift their revenues to where they didn't have to pay taxes. Under those circumstances, how could a small owner-operated coffee shop that always dutifully paid its taxes compete with Starbucks?”

Lena nodded and Katharina continued: “Since these practices were put to a halt and public policies support small, social enterprises instead of large corporations, the business world has become more colorful and diverse. Of course, there are still some very large companies - for some products, that just makes sense - but most things can be produced most efficiently from huge networks of numerous closely linked small businesses.”

“And how was this restructuring possible? Surely the corporations didn't give up their power so easily.”

“A lot of things came together.” Katharina thoughtfully raised several fingers for enumeration. “New, progressive legal forms for businesses, better democratic institutions, anti-lobbying laws, new political trends... The Butterfly Economy movement was an important contribution.”

“The Butterfly Economy?” asked Lena skeptically.

Katharina laughed. “Yes. That came out of France, *Economie Papillon*. A big social movement to strengthen the new economy. You know the butterfly metamorphosis as a symbol of social change?”

Lena shook her head.

“That's a really nice metaphor. Listen: A butterfly caterpillar eats and

eats until it is fully grown. During pupation, some interesting processes take place. So-called imago cells are formed in the butterfly pupa. They carry the blueprint of the butterfly, but for the time being they are in the minority and compete with the old caterpillar cells. But the imago cells get more and more numerous, begin to build network and exchange nutrients, and clump together. This gives them new strength. From then on, they multiply faster and faster until they finally take control of the system until finally a butterfly hatches from the cocoon.”

Lena's eyes brightened. “I see. The caterpillar is like the old capitalist system that eats and eats. And the activists are the imago cells.”

“Exactly. The caterpillar consumes its environment, whereas the butterfly lives in symbiosis with the plants. And much like the imago cells, all the players in the new economy are weak on their own and need networks and cooperation to unfold their power.”

“Mmmmh. A nice picture.”

Katharina nodded. “The Butterfly Economy movement, aimed precisely at this mutual empowerment of change agents.”

“And how was that accomplished?”

“First, comprehensive Internet platforms for networking were established. Second, numerous events and collaborations were organized. Third, social technologies such as sociocracy, Dragon Dreaming, and Theory U were disseminated. But the core was the international campaign *Stop Feeding the Caterpillar!* That was very powerful.”

Lena laughed. “That sounds fun. My imagination is already kicking in.”

“Let me show you something.” Katharina started a video on her bracelet: It showed a simple but lovingly animated caterpillar eating its way through the leaves of a small tree. The caterpillar grew thicker and larger until it finally chewed up the entire tree. As the caterpillar ate more and more and grew, the image slowly zoomed out. The caterpillar devoured the entire forest, then large cities and huge swaths of land. Finally, it could be seen huge on the blue globe, which it also began to devour. A voice sounded: “The current economic system has exploited our resources. It's time for a collective evolution into a butterfly and to begin a symbiotic relationship with our environment.”

Right then, the caterpillar pupated and shortly thereafter transformed into a colorful butterfly. He flew around pollinating all kinds of flowers and delighted some deer and rabbits with its beauty.

“This change needs your help! Your daily decisions determine whether you feed the caterpillar or the butterfly. How and where do you spend

your money? Where are your savings invested? What business do you give your energy and creativity to? How do you spend your time?"

Colorful images were blended in, demonstrating the different possibilities: large supermarket chains next to small colorful market stalls; a large flat screen TV next to a group singing around a campfire; monoculture-agriculture next to colorful fields full of birds and insects; a fat SUV next to a whistling cyclist; a businesswoman frantically running in a hamster wheel next to a contented gardener.

Then appeared in large letters: *Stop feeding the caterpillar!* Around the text stinking cars drove around piles of waste. *Become part of the butterfly economy!* This text was surrounded by colorful sunflowers, small market stalls and solar panels.

Then the video was over.

"Funny," Lena grinned. "It actually makes me want to join in right away."

"Yes, many people felt that way. There are many more videos on specific topics. There is always a very clear comparison of caterpillar and butterfly economics. All clips are pleasantly short and crisp. There were also regular campaigns on collective switching days to make the switch easier."

"Collective switching days?"

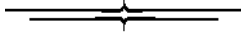
"Well, with some products, like social networks, everyone wants to use the system that everyone else is using. So it's difficult to switch on your own when everyone else is sticking with the old thing. That problem has been circumvented with common switching days, where hundreds of thousands switch to a more sustainable or otherwise better provider at the same time."

Lena smirked. "I see. It's no fun being the only butterfly in a caterpillar society."

"Exactly. Of course, it is sometimes difficult to draw the line between what is already butterfly economics and what is still caterpillar economics. But that reflection is precisely the first step toward the right direction."

Lena looked at her curiously. "Would you say that Singapore, for example, has now become a butterfly economy?"

"For the most part, yes. Some processes are still stuck in pupation and a few old caterpillars roam the land." She beamed and raised her arms as if they were wings. "But there's a fair amount of fluttering going on."



“Next stop: Elephant Park,” it sounded from the speakers of the maglev train. They got off on an elevated platform and walked down a staircase that led directly to the park's entrance.

“The park was opened only two years ago,” Katharina explained. “Singapore's president had it built in honor of Thai elephant activist Lek Chailert's 85th birthday and donated it to her animal welfare organization. I've been meaning to go and see the park for quite a while, but haven't gotten around to do it yet. Really nice to go with you now.”

At the entrance, two large elephants made of light marble with raised trunks formed a large portal. Amazed, the two women passed through and walked along a gravel path to a set of simple bamboo huts that served as a reception.

After registering there, they were escorted to another cabin along with a dozen other park guests. Inside, a short hologram film was shown about the history of the park and some rules of conduct. When the clip ended, a bearded Asian man stood in front of the group.

“Hello, I'm Cheng,” he announced in English. “I am your tour guide today. Welcome to Elephant Park! It is my honor to guide you through the park today and introduce my dear elephants. Ever since I was a little boy, I have admired the grace of elephants. It's wonderful for me to spend so much time with the animals here at the park, and I hope my enthusiasm can infect you.”

Cheng led the group onto the grounds of the park, where a vast, hilly terrain stretched out before them. Numerous elephants stood around in groups or individually. Lena also spotted some dogs, cows and sheep populating the park. Cheng led her to two large elephants under a tall tree. “These two here are Nuno and Maria. They are brother and sister and have been through a lot in their lives. They were first used in illegal logging operations in Malaysia and later trained for a circus. Fifteen years ago they were bought up by another elephant park and now they can live their last years here in freedom.”

Lena looked at the two massive animals. The larger one had a large scar on its hip. Both had hay and plant debris lying on their heads. “Why do they put these plants on their heads?” she asked.

Cheng laughed. “Elephants want to look beautiful, too.”

He led them on and they passed a couple of cows. “Here in the park there are not only elephants, but all kinds of animals that don't have a home,” he explained. “They get asylum with us. Usually all the animals get along very well.”

Then they reached a small wooden shelter where some park employees in rubber boots were waiting.

“It's almost feeding time,” a woman announced. “If you feel like it, you're welcome to help.”

A distant trumpet sounded and Lena saw a small herd of elephants trotting in their direction. Among them was an elephant cub, which bravely plodded ahead. Cheng pointed to the calf and turned to the group. “This is Sabtu. He was born here in the park. Sabtu is very playful and sometimes he enjoys scaring our guests. But you don't have to worry. It's just a game for him and he's completely harmless.”

Meanwhile, a few of the park employees had brought in large baskets of lettuce heads, fruits and watermelons with a wheelbarrow. Another group of visitors had joined them in the meantime, and the park employee called out loudly, “We're going to start the feeding now. You are all invited to help. It's best to watch us do it first, and then grab some of the food and hold it out to the animals.”

After a moment of watching, Lena took a green apple and held it out to an elephant with her flat hand. The animal looked at her with a curious look, took the apple with its trunk and shoved it into its mouth, where it disappeared with a smacking sound. Then he looked at her expectantly. Next time she held out several apples and bananas with both hands. He ate them in no time, too. Grinning, Lena approached the elephant and patted his enormous leg with her hand. Although she was not there with her real body, but only with the humanoid, the technology transmitted the sensory impression of the leathery elephant skin to her neurostimulator in a way that felt surprisingly real to her. She was deeply impressed. Curious, she looked to Katharina, who was holding out pieces of a juicy watermelon to Sabtu, the elephant calf. Cheng stood beside her with his hands on his hips. “As I'm sure you can well imagine, the animals eat quite a lot,” he announced loudly. “They need about two hundred kilos of food per day.”

“Two hundred kilos?” marveled Lena, then laughed. “I guess they haven't heard of therapeutic fasting!”

After feeding, Cheng led them further to a watercourse where a few elephants were bathing. The animals sucked water into their trunks and splashed it over their backs.

“If you like, you can take a bucket from up there and help the animals wash themselves.”

Two young men from their group grabbed buckets and used them to scoop water from the river and splash it onto the elephant standing closest to them. The animal obviously enjoyed the cool water and wiggled its ears contentedly.

While the group was blissfully admiring the large creatures, the elephant boy Sabtu suddenly rushed in from the side. Wildly it sprinted through the water, so that fountains shot up at its side. The two men tried to jump for cover from the splashing water, but it was too late. The rest of the group of visitors laughed heartily. One of the men looked down at his soaked T-shirt in annoyance at first, but then he had to laugh too and grabbed one of the buckets, splashing a load of water after the elephant boy who was running away.

“I never thought elephant calves were so playful. He's like an excited little dog.“ Lena beamed at her friend. „It was a great idea of yours to come here.”

In the meantime, the elephant cub was racing madly through the river again, but the two men had meanwhile made their way to safety and were wringing out their T-shirts on the river bank, laughing.

The group stood by the water for a while and watched the elephants' activities. There was something deeply beautiful and peaceful about the scene. Lena got goosebumps. “It's incredibly beautiful to be here. This park is so much better than any zoo I've seen.”

Katharina nodded. “I also find it very moving to meet the elephants here in their full power.” She pursed her mouth wistfully. “And not as exhibits for our entertainment.”

Lena looked thoughtfully at the elephants. “Yes, that sums it up. It used to break my heart how people used to treat animals so lovelessly. This is how the relationship between humans and animals should be. At eye level, joyful and appreciative.”

“I saw an interview a few months ago with Lek Chailert, the founder of these parks,” Katharina said. “She has spent her whole life working for the welfare of elephants. An incredibly inspiring woman. With these parks, she's proven what's possible when a person puts her energy into loving other beings.”

Finally, Cheng announced the lunch break and took them to a two-story building. Inside, a generous buffet was arranged. All the food was vegan and looked delicious. Lena, however, to her pity, could not partake of the meal. Virtual eating was not possible with her humanoid.

Katharina filled herself a large plate though and together they went to a raised terrace. There they sat down at a wooden bench overlooking the large park.

A family was sitting at the next table, talking loudly about their visit to the park in a broad American accent.

Lena looked at her friend, who was putting a large fork full of fried noodles into her mouth. "Tell me, Katharina, how did things progress with the USA?"

Katharina chewed on her noodles, swallowed them and smiled thoughtfully. "There were some interesting events. When a young woman from the Democratic party became president, there was a great ray of hope. Carla Villaverde. I think she was still in her early thirties by then and a classic figure of hope. Very charismatic, big ambitions and moving speeches. She tried to turn the tide and reunite the country."

"So she reintegrated Texas and the Holy State?"

"No." Katharina shook her head. "I guess she decided she'd better leave those areas to their own devices."

"What did she do then?"

Katharina put her head to the side thoughtfully. "She tried to set things right in the fracturing country and pushed through major reforms. Under her leadership, the tax system was reformed, income and wealth were massively redistributed, and the health and welfare systems were fundamentally overhauled. She also pushed a Green New Deal that actually deserves the name. Large sums went into restoring national parks and beautifying inner cities. Public transportation, which had been disastrous until then, was expanded, and so on. For a while, things really took off and the country experienced a spirit of optimism in large parts."

"Sounds good."

"Yes. Very good. And that was just the beginning. Her greatest merit were her symbolic gestures of forgiveness. She started with the Native Americans." Katharina thoughtfully brushed a strand of hair from her face. "Have you ever heard of the Trail of Tears?"

Lena narrowed her eyes. "No. I don't think so."

"The Trail of Tears refers to the routes that Native North Americans had to take after being expelled by settlers from their ancestral lands to a barren territory. In a major speech, President Carla Villaverde officially apologized for the expulsion and the many crimes committed against the Native Americans and asked for forgiveness. Until then, the American leadership had refused to do so. In a symbolic act of state, Carla Villaverde travelled along some of these routes and even walked

on foot in parts. In doing so, she made history.”

“Sounds great,” Lena said delightedly. “That was really overdue.”

Katharina nodded. “Do you want to see the speech?”

“Absolutely!”

“You should be able to start videos from the Central Knowledge Base through voice commands.”

Lena tapped her forehead, activating the voice commands. “Computer, show me the video of Carla Villaverde's speech to Native Americans.” Instantly, a video window popped up in her field of vision:

On a wooden podium in front of a vast, barren landscape stood a relatively young woman with distinctive features and a determined look. She made a meaningful gesture with her arm. “Dark times are behind us. Great challenges lie ahead. We can only overcome these trials as a united nation and as a united humanity. More than ever, we need reconciliation and peace. But reconciliation and peace require the healing of old wounds.” She took a deep breath and looked into the distance. “Though it hurts, it is time to come to terms with the shadows of our countries past. It's time to acknowledge the darker parts of our history and ask for forgiveness.”

Deep determination and passion were written on her face. It was obvious that these words were not a calculated political gesture, but genuine and meaningful to her.

“Two hundred years ago, the Indian Removal Act was signed. Settlers at the time wanted the fertile Native American lands for themselves and forced the Muskogee, Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw and Seminole tribes to cede their ancestral lands. Given the military superiority of the settlers, the families of these tribes had to pack up all their belongings and leave the lands of their grandfathers and grandmothers, their ancestors and their traditions. In month-long marches over hundreds of miles, many of them perished. Unspeakable suffering struck these families two hundred years ago. Their sacred land was stolen from them. Their traditions were violated. Their pride was broken.”

She paused. With shining eyes, her gaze roamed over the crowd. Her face spoke of sadness, but also of great strength and majesty.

“The Indian Removal Act was wrong. While preaching the American dream of freedom, we trampled on the dignity and freedom of these people. Our nation incurred great guilt at that time. Two hundred years have passed without that guilt being acknowledged. But today, as president of the United States, I want to ask for forgiveness.”

The camera zoomed out to show five tribal leaders standing at her side

on the platform. The three men and two women wore traditional, feather-adorned robes made of heavy skins. President Carla Villaverde stepped up to them, placed her right hand on her heart and knelt before them with her head bowed. The tribal leaders were silent, one of the women finally had a silent tear running down her cheek.

Lena was deeply touched. How long must these women and men have been waiting for this moment? What collective pain must have burdened their hearts? How meaningful it must be to finally be seen?

A man with an enormous feather headdress looked into the distance over the kneeling president as if he could not bear to look at her. Hardness was written on his face. It seemed as if he was fighting an inner battle.

Although everyone on the podium stood motionless and still, it seemed as if something momentous was in motion. A battle was raging in the hearts of these people. It seemed as if two hundred years of humiliation, guilt and hurt were being relived. A sea of emotions ran through their faces: pain, hatred, sorrow, joy, fear, and more pain.

Then it was over. The facial features of the man with the feathered headdress slowly softened. He raised his head and nodded.

Then one of the men approached the kneeling president and put his hand on her head. She raised her head and looked him in the eye. They looked at each other and finally he gestured her to stand up. Slowly she rose. She continued to hold her right hand to her heart and looked sadly at the chiefs one by one. After a while, one of the women approached her and took her in her arms. They held each other for a while and now tears were flowing from one of the chiefs as well.

Finally, President Villaverde broke away from the embrace, took a deep breath, and slowly strode back to her standing desk. She nodded to the side and from there a secretary came and handed her a large black folder and a fountain pen. For a long moment she looked silently at the audience.

Then she began to speak: "Only actions give power to our words. I will now sign the Indian Restitution Act. This will create new nature reserves in the regions of the original territories of the displaced tribes as reparations for the past. In these areas, the tribes will have autonomy and freedom. In addition, comprehensive compensation for the sufferings of the past will be authorized to the relatives of these tribes. Money cannot undo the mistakes of the past, but it shall be a symbol of reparation. May today signify the beginning of a new chapter in U.S. history."

She took the pen and signed the document. The audience broke into thunderous applause. Suddenly the energy on the podium changed, as if something heavy had moved away. One of the chief woman took another by the hands, beaming with joy. One of the men laughed as if liberated joy was bursting from him. Another began to dance on the stage. Carla Villaverde, meanwhile, remained standing at her lectern as if she had to hold onto it, while tears ran down her face.

For a while longer, the video showed the stage. Then it faded away.

Lena looked at her friend in silence and wiped a tear from her face. She was at a loss for words.

Katharina smiled empathetically. "Powerful, huh?"

Lena nodded. "Indeed. What a woman!" She laughed. "I'm a fan already."

"Yes, me too. After that speech she even participated in a three-day peace ritual with the tribes."

"Wow. And the Native American tribes are actually living back in their original territories now?"

Katharina looked serious again. "For the most part, yes. But unfortunately, the whole thing didn't go as smoothly as planned. There was fierce opposition from parts of the population. But that wasn't the real problem. Some of the proposed reservations border on the territory of the seceded Holy State. There, of course, they refused to recognize the Act and to reconcile with infidel Indians, let alone cede territory to them."

"Oh no!" Lena grabbed her head.

"Yes. But the Indian Restitution Act was only Carla Villaverde's first strike. There was another kneeling in Hanoi. That, too, was a milestone in the American reappraisal of the Vietnam War, and it made waves throughout Asia."

"Impressive!"

Katharina nodded thoughtfully.

"But you make me think it all didn't end well."

Katharina looked thoughtfully past Lena into the park. "Whom the gods love die young. Carla Villaverde became a star all over the world. But then, on the wave of her success, it seems she went too far."

"What does that mean?"

"I mean the military," Katharina said meaningfully. "She took on the military-industrial complex. There was a famous speech about that, too." She faltered. "Let's watch that together, too." Katharina tapped her wristband. A display rolled up and played a video:

This time President Carla Villaverde stood at a standing desk in front of the white obelisk of the Washington Monument. A huge crowd had gathered in front of her. The faces looked expectantly in her direction.

The president looked serious. "When I was a little girl, I grew up in a neighborhood full of violence and poverty. Enemy gangs controlled the streets. The police had given up control of the neighborhood. But my parents were poor immigrants from Mexico and we couldn't afford another place to live. One day, a young man was gunned down by a gang right outside our front door. My father rushed out of the house to save him from bleeding to death. But when the paramedics arrived, all my father was holding was a dead body in his arms."

She was silent for a moment. Pain and determination stood in her features. "I will never forget that scene. I learned that it takes decades to create a mature human being, but only seconds to kill him. That day, I vowed to work for a world without violence." She took a deep breath and looked thoughtfully at the crowd. "It has not been easy to maintain my ideals throughout my political career. Often I had to make frustrating compromises. Often I've had to sacrifice big ambitions for small successes." Again she paused and looked thoughtfully into the crowd.

Then her gaze strengthened and she continued, "But today I do not stand before you to compromise and achieve small successes. Because today I dream the dream of peace. And the dream of peace demands my full devotion." She looked wistfully at the sky. "I dream the dream of the desperate little girl who can no longer stand the violence at her doorstep and longs for a world of peace. I dream of a world without war and murder. I dream of a world without fear and hatred."

Lena got goose bumps. She knew this dream.

"As President of the United States of America, I stand before you today to launch a new foreign policy for our country. Despite massive austerity measures in recent years, we currently still have soldiers stationed in 127 countries around the world." She made a wide gesture with her left arm. "In 127 countries! What is our army doing in so many countries? Why are these soldiers there? Are our soldiers bringing peace and democracy to the world?" She shook her head. "What would you think of Iraqi soldiers patrolling our cities? What would you say if German warplanes flew over our heads? How would you feel if Turkish nuclear warheads were stationed in our country?"

She paused and let the words sink in. "Yes, sometimes soldiers can help establish order and end civil wars. But shouldn't we better leave such peace missions to the UN's blue helmets?"

She looked sadly. “We, the United States of America, are the most powerful country in the world. But our power has come at a price. Over the past decades, we have started countless wars to secure our influence. We fought wars for oil, wars for money, and wars for political power. In South America, we instigated political coups against democratically elected government leaders. And in the Middle East, we fought wars for oil. In Africa, we have helped brutal dictators into power in exchange for resources and influence. It hurts to speak these words, but my conscience leaves me no choice.” She paused for thoughtful moment.

“We reap what we sow. We have the most school rampages in the world. One in five people in our country takes antidepressants. One percent of our population is in prison, the highest rate in the world. Racism and sexism are rampant. The level of inequality in our country is alarming. This suffering and violence in our cities reflects the violence we are doing to the world. To finally achieve peace in our streets, the politics of violence and war must stop. It is time to change our role in the world.”

She lifted a white folder from her desk. “I have just signed a decree to withdraw all American soldiers from other countries in this world within the next months. This world doesn't need more soldiers. This world needs teachers, doctors and ecologists. This world needs trust, love and peace.

From today on, let our country take a new path. Let us melt down the guns and missiles and build bicycles out of them. Let us not build expensive military bases, but wonderful schools where our children can develop into responsible human beings. Let us boldly exemplify the values of democracy, freedom and peace. Let's together make this nation shine again.

It is not easy to leave familiar paths. As president of this country, I can show the way. But we have to walk it together. This requires the effort of all of us. Therefore, I would like to invite you to join me in my dream of peace and, as a united nation, to walk this path to a more beautiful world. In the past, this country has led the way to democracy and justice. May we once again become a role model to the world. May our children grow up in a future filled with peace and freedom.” She placed her hand on her heart and bowed to the audience. “Thank you!”

A little girl next to her began singing the American national anthem.

Katharina tapped the bracelet and paused the video.

“Wow!” Lena shook her head, overwhelmed.

Katharina nodded thoughtfully. “Hard times create strong people.

Shortly thereafter, the president embarked on a tour to several Middle Eastern countries where the U.S. had intervened militarily in the past: Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria. The trip went down in history as the *voyage of forgiveness*." Then Katharina's features hardened. "But that was too much good, I'm afraid."

"What do you mean?"

"What had to happen happened. That, what happened to all American freedom fighters." Katharina formed a gun with her hand. "Bang."

Lena's eyes snapped open in shock. "She was shot?"

Katharina nodded bitterly. "Basically, it was surprising that it didn't happen much sooner. Too many powerful people in the military-industrial complex felt their power was threatened by Villaverde."

"How did it happen?"

"At an event at a school, she was gunned down by a man claiming to be a teacher at the school. Why the security service failed and how the gun got through the security checks was not clarified. In any case, Carla Villaverde was seriously wounded and later succumbed to her injuries."

"Damn!" murmured Lena.

"This was followed by another coup attempt by the military. Some generals even tried to occupy the White House."

"What happened then? Surely the population must have risen up?"

"Yes. The country finally broke up because of this incident. Civil war broke out in some states and after that the country finally sank into chaos. Some draw parallels with the fall of Rome." She laughed bitterly. "But at least one thing took place, too. In the Northwest, California, Washington and Oregon seceded and formed the state of Ecotopia."

"Ecotopia?" Repeated Lena. "I like the name already."

"I thought so. In Ecotopia, people are trying to actualize an ecologically sustainable life in harmony with nature. However, the region has largely closed itself off from the world, and not too much from there leaks out to the rest of the world. However, a few years ago an investigative journalist's report went public describing his experiences there. It all sounds very interesting. They seem to take sustainability very serious." She frowned. "However, there are also quite unconventional medical treatments and somewhat archaic rituals." She looked at Lena mysteriously. "You should read the travelogue from Ecotopia sometime. You'd like it."

"Okay, I'll keep that in mind. What is the situation in the USA today? It seems that the name USA doesn't even fit anymore. United no more."

Katharina nodded. "But in recent years, things have been getting better

again for the United States. That's largely thanks to a lot of international peacekeeping missions and development cooperation projects. But I can tell you, when at times Mexican leaders complained about all the American refugees, it was pretty absurd."

"How things can change." Lena looked thoughtfully into the distance. "Why do the great freedom fighters always have to fall victim to assassinations? Why not the bloody dictators instead. Did you know that Hitler survived forty-two assassinations? Forty-two! Why the hell does a Hitler survive forty-two assassinations, but Gandhi and Martin Luther King die?"

"Yes. It is a tragedy. Yet none of these sacrifices were in vain. Nor was the death of Carla Villaverde. Her words and actions have moved people all over the world and inspired many policies in other countries. People have put pressure on the governments in their countries to do the same and to initiate policies of peace. As a result, there has been a massive disarmament. Moreover, Villaverde's speeches of apology made huge waves. At times, a veritable wave of forgiveness went around the world. Japan apologized to the Chinese for the Nanjing massacres. Colombia and also Brazil have asked for forgiveness from their indigenous peoples. France has made amends to its former African colonies. It all really sparked something. In the end, Carla Villaverde has brought new glory to the international community."

"It's tragic that she didn't live to see it. But it's nice to see what one person can do sometimes."

"Yes. Sometimes the impossible becomes tangible."

They were silent for a moment, looking at the elephants in the park.

"Has Germany also joined in this wave of forgiveness?"

Katharina nodded. "Germany apologized to Greece for the way it handled things after the great financial crisis. And Germany finally stopped exporting weapons to the world."

"Finally. That was overdue." She mimicked a biting voice. "We've learned from history and we're not into wars anymore. But exporting a few guns is okay, right? If others shoot themselves with them, it's not our fault." She rolled her eyes.

Katharina smiled sadly. "That was really a drama back then. But better late than never. Germany even launched a billion-dollar program to buy up and melt down firearms around the world."

"That sounds great. At the same time, it's incredibly stupid though, to first produce all these weapons and ship them all over the world, only to buy them up again and melt them down. Couldn't Germany have

realized this a little earlier? What kind of madness is this?"

"Well. As Einstein said, two things are infinite, the universe and human stupidity, but I'm not quite sure about the universe yet."



They were back in Katharina's apartment and had made themselves comfortable on the balcony overlooking the city. Birds perched in the green building façade around them, chirping happily.

"What a day. Or rather, what days." Lena shook her head in disbelief. "My God, that was a lot of impressions. Sometimes I feel like I'm in a dream."

Katharina turned her face to her and smiled at her.

Lena continued thoughtfully. "I can hardly believe how much more beautiful the world has become. It's almost too good to be true." She turned her head to her friend. "What strikes me, though, is that there used to be so many activists and NGOs working for positive change, but somehow, despite all their efforts, everything just kept getting crazier. I don't understand it. How the hell did all these changes become possible all at once?"

"As soon as you left, things worked out better." Katharina nudged her.

"Well, thanks a lot." Lena grimaced and then had to laugh. "I was afraid, too, that it was me."

Katharina looked out over the city. "I guess a lot of things came together. In the end, it's probably fair to say that humanity made the necessary evolutionary leap at some point and then everything got easier."

"Evolutionary leap? What do you mean?"

Katharina thought for a moment. "Have you heard of Spiral Dynamics?"

Lena shook her head and looked questioningly. "No. What is it?"

"Spiral Dynamics is a model that describes the evolution of human consciousness and society. I find it very helpful in understanding major societal changes. Shall I summarize it for you?"

Lena nodded. "Please."

"Okay. So, the model describes different stages of development. Each

gets a different color. Orange describes the classic capitalist world. In this stage, everything is focused on innovation, competition, rational thinking, success and material things. Orange has produced great progress and incredible technologies compared to the stages before it. But the society is like a cold machine where people function like its gears and society is quite separated and loveless.”

Lena listened to her attentively and nodded. Katharina continued. “The next level is green and can be understood as a counter-movement of the hippies and the activists for environmental protection. The focus moves to community and equality. Nature, spirituality and feelings get a big emphasis.”

Lena smiled. “Green sounds good.”

“Yes, green is an important advance. But green has many blind spots, too. Green can be very dogmatic, moralizing and potentially ineffective. Typical are discussion groups where, yes, everyone gets heard but the group does not come to any conclusion. In green there are also often shadows, which do their mischief from the unconscious. People carry around deep unresolved hurts and anger. They demonstrate for peace while they throw bottles at the police. Power is usually seen as fundamentally evil, and as a result, people often keep themselves and each other down.”

Lena screwed up her face. “Sounds familiar.”

“Society used to be stuck between orange and green, like a tug of war. In that eternal opposition something constructive rarely came out.”

“Okay. Then what? Is there a next stage?”

“Oh yeah. Next come yellow and turquoise. That's where the two opposite poles of orange and green are integrated. It's no longer thought in terms of either-or, but in terms of both-and. The perspective becomes holistic. People think systemically, see the big picture. Organizations become self-organized, living organisms. This unfolds real power. Instead of getting lost in discussions of principles, the focus moves to effective leverage points for change. Capitalism is no longer fought against, but transcended peacefully, effectively and inexorably.”

“And you mean that the leap into these higher stages of development brought the great changes?”

Katharina nodded. “Yes. The change has also been reflected in the NGOs and in the change movements. Representative of green were the classic environmental movements and many of the NGOs. These have brought important issues and injustices to the attention of society, but that has mainly been done with enemy images and shaming. Everything

was an uphill battle. Also, the corresponding big NGOs often became huge bureaucracies themselves with a lot of internal conflicts and shadows.”

“Yes, that describes my old working environment very well. Now, though, I'm very excited to hear what comes next.”

“The next stage of evolution is represented by movements like Transition Town, Alive, or Earthland.”

“I've heard of Transition Town before, but I haven't heard of the other two.”

“Possibly they didn't exist before your coma sleep.” Katharina shrugged. “In any case, organizations of this new stage focused on decentralized self-organization and collective leadership, making them very agile and powerful. The focus shifted to inspiring stories and ideas for a more beautiful world, rather than getting bogged down in fighting the old system. Think global, act local. Use creative actions that are fun. The appearance was radically non-violent and maintained constructive communication to the old system. And most importantly, people began to integrate their feelings and shadows and establish a regenerative culture.”

“Interesting. I think I'm getting an idea of what that kind of activism looks like. I imagine that it can develop significantly more strength. But what made such a leap in development possible in the first place?”

“A lot of things came together. On the one hand, every generation naturally stands on the shoulders of its ancestors. In many ways, we both had it much better than our parents. Not to mention our grandparents, who still lived through World War II and all its tragedies. The better the basic needs are met, the more importance is given to intangible needs such as meaning, community and freedom. The better these needs are fulfilled the better a person can develop, the broader and more open the perspective becomes. This makes it possible to reach a higher level of development.”

“You mean that it was basically a natural evolutionary process and almost a positive loop? The better off people are, the more they develop?”

Katharina nodded. “Basically, this is also quite natural. A plant grows more splendidly the more favorable its environmental conditions are. It's the same with humans. They can develop all the better, the more conducive their environment is. Of course, this is not limited to basic material needs, but goes much further: How loving are your parents? How supportive are the school years? How nurturing and inspiring is

the social environment? Those who are given good starting conditions can, usually, develop further. In a way, therefore, it is precisely the most privileged among us who have a special responsibility, because these people are most likely to develop a broader perspective.”

“That sounds a little elitist, though.”

“Well, let's take the two of us. The fact that we used to stand up for refugees and animal rights certainly had to do with our great privilege. We had the capacity to extend our compassion to foreign people and other living beings. Do you really think we would have developed that capacity if our daily lives had been a struggle with worry?”

Lena shrugged somewhat reluctantly. “Possibly not.”

“In a better environment, those who used to be small-minded and xenophobic angry citizens would perhaps develop into open-minded, reflective and empathetic people, too. But that used to be seen far too rarely by us privileged people.” She smirked. “From our lofty perspective, we preferred to look down on *these retards* and boast of our moral superiority.”

Lena blushed slightly and Katharina laughed. “Do you feel caught?”

Lena looked uncertain. “Possibly a little.”

“Don't worry about it. We all had to go through such painful realizations at some point. In recent years I've been taking a lot of coaching and psychotherapy to integrate inner shadows and to move forward.”

“You did psychotherapy?” Lena laughed. “I used to be the unstable one, not you. Why did you do that?”

“Why?” Katharina raised her eyebrows. “I'd say it would have been negligence not to do some kind of therapy. Believe me, we all have our demons. Compared to many other people, I may have been relatively psychologically healthy in the past, but we lived in a traumatized society. That's where everyone gets their baggage.”

“Traumatized society?” Lena frowned. “How am I supposed to understand that?”

“The way I say it. Many people used to be moderately to severely traumatized. People were alienated from their bodies, from their feelings, and from their fellow human beings. Most may have pretended that everything was fine and always worked dutifully, but deep traumas lurked beneath the surface of normalcy.”

“Really, that's how you see it? I totally agree that a lot of things used to go wrong, but isn't the term trauma a little too strong?”

“I don't think so.” Katharina looked sadly at Lena. “World War II, in

particular, left deep scars in Germany's collective psyche.”

“World War II?” Lena frowned. “I’m confused. What do you mean?”

“Did you know that trauma can be transmitted across generations?”

Lena looked at Katharina in amazement and shook her head.

“Today it is known that traumatic experiences are passed on over generations. There was once an interesting experiment with mice. They were exposed to electric shocks, while at the same time the scent of roses was released in the cage. The offspring of these mice reacted panic-stricken to the scent of roses, although they did not experience the original shock.”

“Fascinating.” Lena looked thoughtfully into the distance. After a pause, she continued, “When I see big demonstrations, something always gives me the creeps. Could this be something like that?”

“Quite possibly.”

“And how does that work?”

“The mechanism is a mixture of epigenetics and unconsciously learned patterns in childhood. Over several generations, stressful experiences can thus be passed on to descendants. Moreover, a traumatized parental home is not exactly the ideal place for growing up. World War II may be over for a long time ago, but it has left a dark legacy in our collective psyche.”

“You mean that the alienation in society still had its origin in the war?”

“Oh yeah. Part of it, definitely.” She shook her head sadly. “Just think of the legacy we’re carrying around here in Germany. The war, hunger, the moral burden of guilt and defeat, and if that wasn’t enough, then came the GDR and the Wall. The result was a country full of emotionally broken people. There probably wasn’t a single family in Germany that didn’t have to deal with some kind of trauma.” She pointed to the city in front of them. “Here in Asia, it doesn’t necessarily look any better. Here, above all, the Vietnam War, the genocide in Cambodia and, of course, colonization and exploitation have wreaked their havoc on people’s souls.”

“Damn. Maybe that really explains why a lot of things used to be so lifeless and gray. How is it dealt with these days? Is society less traumatized today?”

“Yes, definitely. With time, the burden lessens by itself, but you can also actively contribute to your own healing. As I said, I have spent a lot of time and money on psychotherapy and personal development seminars over the past decades.”

“And what did you do there? The psychoanalysis I used to do didn’t

really get me anywhere.”

“All kinds of things. Over the years I've tried a few things: Working with inner parts in conflict, Somatic Experiencing, Bioenergetics, EMDR, Family Constellations, Pantarei...” Katharina grinned. “A long list, huh?”

“Most of those terms I've never heard of before. Did it help you all in all?” Lena looked skeptical.

Katharina smiled. “Oh, yes. Most of it was worth every minute and every penny. I can understand if you're skeptical. Classical psychoanalysis is ineffective compared to modern approaches. If it's normal for that kind of therapy to typically involve a hundred to two hundred sessions, that doesn't speak well for the method's effectiveness. In my view, psychoanalysis is just outdated and there are now much more effective approaches.”

Lena cocked her head to the side thoughtfully. “Sounds logical. Human progress doesn't stop anywhere.”

Katharina nodded. “For example, it makes a lot of sense not just to talk in therapy, but to include the body. Body and psyche are two sides of the same coin. Wilhelm Reich, a contemporary of Freud, made some interesting findings in this regard already a hundred years ago, but unfortunately only recently his findings had a revival.”

“You sound really convinced about therapy.”

“Yes. It has helped me massively! The more mental baggage I shed, the more I was able to entrust myself to the flow of life and enjoy the wonders of the world. The last few decades have become so much easier and happier for me. My life used to be beautiful too, but compared to the joy of my life today, I did not live up to my full potential.” She looked deep into Lena's eyes. “Believe me, there is incredible potential lying dormant within us. Most people used to have no idea how wonderful life can be. And that potential lies within each of us. I'm convinced of that.”

“But aren't there also differences in brain chemistry? As far as I know, some people just produce less dopamine and happiness hormones. My psychiatrist used to say that I had an imbalance there.”

“Certainly there are different genetic predispositions, but our genetic makeup is not static. Our environment has a massive influence on us. When people have worked through their own psychological baggage and then live in fulfilling community, deep relationships, meaningful activity and flourishing nature, it is difficult not to be happy and fulfilled. But hardly anyone used to meet these criteria in the old times.”

“Hmm. Yeah, maybe you're right.” Lena took a deep breath and was silent for a moment, lost in thought. The sky was slowly getting dark and Singapore was a fantastic sight in the evening twilight.

Finally, Lena turned back to her friend. “Are you still doing psychotherapy or are you by now...,” she faltered for a moment, “done?”

Katharina grinned. “No, I don't do therapy anymore. But for a few years now, I've held regular meetings with a good friend on topics that concern us. We call it Growflection.”

“Growflection?” Lena raised an eyebrow. “The vocabulary of change has obviously changed.”

“Yes.” Katharina grinned. “Growflection stands for personal growth and reflection. We meet on a weekly basis to talk about personal challenges, life goals and whatever else is going on in our lives and to support each other. It's incredibly empowering.”

“Sounds nice. And you do that every week?”

Katharina nodded. “Every week for an hour and a half, for four years now. If you had been there, I would have loved to have started this with you!”

“Yes.” Lena smiled. “What are you two talking about?”

“It varies. Partly we reflect on events of the last week that are still on our minds. Partly we use therapeutic methods with each other, like inner constellations or provocative coaching. For example, a few days ago I had a very demanding visitor at the hotel and was overwhelmed with her special requests. In the Growflection meeting, I then tried out different reactions to this in a role play with my friend. It was really interesting to see what my behavior was likely to trigger in the woman in each case and which approach worked well and felt coherent to me.”

“That sounds interesting. I want a Growflection too!”

Katharina grinned. “In that case visit me again next week!”

“I'll definitely do that!” Lena beamed.

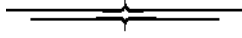
They sat in silence for a while. Then Lena looked to her friend. “I'm pretty tired. The humanoid will find its way home on its own, right?”

“Yes. Just log out. I'll throw him out.”

“All right. Thank you for this day. It was fantastic! I was especially touched by the elephant reserve.”

“Yes, me, too.” Katharina looked deep into her eyes, then winked. “Come back soon! I don't want to wait another thirty years for you.”

They hugged and then Lena tapped the off switch on her forehead. After a gentle fade-out, she found herself in the neurostimulator and wearily peeled herself out of her suit.



Jannis had also spent most of the day in the neurostimulator. However, he had not wandered through distant cities, but had tried out a racing simulation. He had arranged to meet Damian for dinner, who was already waiting at the dining table when Jannis arrived. “Hey Jannis, how was your day?”

“Awesome! I was speeding down Highway No. 1 in California in a Batmobile.” He grinned broadly. “These simulations are incredibly realistic. I could feel the acceleration throughout my whole body.”

Damian nodded enthusiastically. “I sometimes do virtual races, too. The other day I shot through the Alps in a Star Wars Pod Racer. That was quite an adrenaline rush, chasing through the mountain pass with such a killer machine.”

Jannis looked at the steaming pot on the table. For dinner they had lentil soup with freshly baked bread. He pulled the pot close and shoveled soup on his plate.

“Obviously, virtual worlds have become much more realistic and intense than the computer games of the past. Do people spend a lot of time in such simulated realities these days?”

Damian shrugged. “Some do, some don’t.”

Jannis raised his eyebrows in surprise. “Aren't there big problems with addiction and escapism? It used to become more and more of a problem. I had expected that in the future it would become much more problematic and wide swaths of the population would spend much of their time in these worlds. That hasn't come true?”

“There have definitely been such tendencies and in certain countries like China it has become a problem. But ultimately, virtual worlds can't compete with reality. You can get a good thrill here or there, but it just doesn't come close to a real human encounter or a walk in a real forest. As realistic as the images are, you feel something is missing.”

Jannis thoughtfully moved a spoonful of soup into his mouth. “But you could have said the same thing before.”

“Yes, in principle that's true. But everyday life in the past was probably much less appealing to many than it is today, so virtual worlds represented a pleasant escape from reality. But if one's life is fulfilling,

there's no reason to spend one's lifetime in fake worlds. Virtual realities can numb the inner emptiness, but the hole is never really filled. That can only be achieved in real life.”

Jannis was silent for a moment, chewing thoughtfully on some bread. “That sounds exactly like our conversation about drugs yesterday in Berlin. I wonder if you could use the extent of drug and VR use as an indicator of how fulfilling people find their lives.”

Damian spooned the soup into his mouth, laughing. “Yeah, probably.”

For a while they ate their soup in silence. Jannis seemed to be thinking about the indicator and had put his head to one side. Then he picked up the conversation again. “I was driving around a bit in virtual France earlier. There were several strange clusters of buildings with green houses and little towers. They looked similar. What's that all about?”

Damian thought for a moment. “Ah, yes I think I know what you refer to. Those were probably concept villages. They're popping up all over the world these days. The concept villages are some kind of mini-villages that are completely energy self-sufficient and self-sustaining through energy-efficient construction, natural resources and composting toilets. Usually, around sixty to eighty people live in these self-sufficient communities.”

“And that's what a lot of French people are into?”

“It's not just the French. The concept villages are very much in vogue. They offer a high quality of life, community, tranquility and natural idyll with low living costs. And thanks to capsule cabs and trains, a bustling city is never too far away. For many, this is the perfect vision of the good life.”

Jannis looked at him skeptically. “I grew up in a village and found the small horizons of many people quite troubling. Everyone gossiped an awful lot, as if they had nothing better to do. Which I think was the case for a lot of them.”

“Oh, really? Then they must have obviously been very bored. I have a few friends in village communities like that and they're very happy though.”

“All right. Everyone has to know for themselves,” said Jannis and scraped together the rest of the lentil soup on his plate.

After a while, he looked up again. “Another question occurred to me earlier. Who are the economic wise man by now? Maybe I even still know one or two of them.”

“The economic wise men?” asked Damian in surprise. “That doesn't ring a bell. Sounds so religious. Who are they?”

Jannis looked at him in confusion. “That’s just the colloquial term for the German Council of Economic Experts. It was an economic advisory body for the federal government.”

“I see. But that doesn't tell me anything either. I'll check the Internet.” Damian tapped his bracelet and said, “What happened to the economic wise men? Short answer please.”

From the bracelet, a soft computer voice replied, “The German Council of Economic Experts was abolished in 2028 under the *Democratic Renewal* government. The reason given was that the body was to be regarded primarily as a political instrument and did not adequately represent economic expertise.”

“Oh,” Jannis muttered.



It is night. Lena stands balancing on a large piece of wood floating in the dark sea. Powerful waves push the beam back and forth and she struggles desperately to keep her balance. A light rain is falling. Her clothes are soaked and she shivers with cold. The spray from the waves splashes her feet. The full moon shines down on the scene.

Out of the corner of her eye, Lena sees something bright flashing in a distant wave. But when she looks there, it has disappeared again. She wipes a wet strand of hair from her face. The waves clap noisily against the beam below her as she continues to struggle for her balance.

Again she sees something flashing in a wave, this time closer. With great horror, she recognizes a pointed fin sticking out of the water. A shark.

Naked panic seizes her. Even more desperately, she struggles to keep her balance so as not to fall into the shallows of the sea. A larger wave rolls over the wood. She rows her arms and by going down to all fours saves herself from falling into the water.

The dark fin swims right next to her. Panicked, Lena cries out. The fin dives down and she feels a bump under her feet. The beast seems to ram the wood from downunder. She makes it through another attack and is even able to stand up again, but the third blow knocks her off balance. She frantically flails her arms to keep her balance, but as if in slow motion, she falls to the side and slaps into the water. She frantically rows her limbs to bring herself back to the safety of the wood, but several waves sweep over her, tossing her around and taking her breath. She snorts and wipes water from her eyes, trying to clear her vision as she sees the angular fin gliding toward her a few feet away. She screams in terror, expecting a deadly bite to grab her at any moment and to pull her down into the wet darkness.

But to her surprise, no bite comes. Instead, a dolphin jumps out of the wave in front of her.

Lena can hardly believe it. The deadly shark of her imagination has turned out to be a dolphin.

All of a sudden, the tension falls away from her and she has to laugh out loud. Tingling relief sways through her body.

While she swims to the piece of wood and holds on to it with one arm, she watches the beautiful creature. The dolphin also seems to look at her and begins to chatter happily.

More dolphins emerge from the waves around her. Illuminated by the moonlight, they jump in a circle around Lena. A gentle chattering concert rises up. The moment has something deeply magical about it.

Lena feels enchanted. She reaches out to touch one of the dolphins next to her when she feels a slight tug in her back. When she looks around, she realizes that one of the dolphins has grabbed her sweater with its snout. Thinking it's a game, she wants to turn and laugh at him, but the dolphin won't let go and pulls at her again and again. Slowly, apprehension swells in her.

The dolphin tugs at her more and more violently, as if he wants to pull her down into the sea, and finally Lena kicks at him. He deftly dodges and cackles in protest. Then two more dolphins break away from the circle, swim towards her and dive down.

To her horror, Lena now also feels her pants legs tearing. She holds on to the wood with all her might and kicks her feet, but the pull into the depths mercilessly drains her strength. Desperately, she looks up to the sky in search of rescue. There she sees two large blue butterflies dancing in the wind above the sea.

She understands

Once again she sucks air deep into her lungs. Then she relaxes her body and lets go.

In an instant, she glides down through the surface of the sea. To her surprise, it is bright there and a shining paradise full of colorful fish in the most magnificent colors and patterns welcomes her. Long green seaweed and seahorses float by. The three dolphins have let her go, swimming around in front of her and nodding their heads as if in greeting. A purple jellyfish and a group of small turtles also glide through the water. Lena watches the scene and is enchanted.

She looks around dreamily and feels something bumping against her foot from behind. When she turns around and looks down, she is overcome by pure horror.

It is the corpse of her brother.

Day 6 - Community

Lena, Jannis and Damian walked through the rural streets. Damian had suggested to visit the local school. Some of the schoolchildren in the village were very curious to meet and question the time travelers, he said. After breakfast, therefore, they had set off.

Lena turned to Damian, "I had another disturbing dream tonight." She looked at him worriedly. "That's probably due to the neurostimulation as well, isn't it?"

He nodded. "That's quite possible. What did you dream of?"

"The night before last I also had an intense dream, but at least it was positive. It seemed to be about my anger management. But tonight's dream threw me off track a bit."

He looked at her with understanding. "I'm sorry about that. Do you want to tell a little more about it?"

Just then they crossed Greta Thunberg Square. Lena nodded. "I was in the middle of the sea and was attacked by a shark. I was terrified. But the shark then turned out to be a dolphin. Next, a group of dolphins swam in circles around me. That was beautiful." Damian and Jannis listened curiously. Lena continued, "But then the dolphins grabbed me and tried to pull me down into the sea. I resisted at first, but then understood that it was about trust and that I had to let go. That's what I did. It turned out to be the right thing to do and under the water it was incredibly beautiful. Everything was full of colorful schools of fish and sea creatures. I was completely enchanted." She took a deep breath and tensed up. "But then suddenly my brother's dead corpse appeared. I panicked and woke up in cold sweat."

Damian put a hand on her shoulder and looked at her sympathetically. She sighed and looked at him questioningly. "What is the meaning of this?"

He tilted his head to the side thoughtfully. "Probably through the dream your subconscious is processing the experiences of the last few days. Indeed, it sounds like it's about fear and letting go. You said yourself that at one point in the dream you realized that you had to trust. But I find the ending with your brother very striking." He rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "Honestly, I also noticed a few days ago that you get very tense and serious when you talked about your brother. Now add the dreams to that. That suggests some unprocessed trauma."

"Oh, God. Just yesterday I was talking to my friend about trauma. Now the first one is already knocking at my door."

“There are also trauma therapy specialists working at the clinic. If you want, I can book a session for you.”

“Uh, I don't know.” Lena looked at him uncertainly.

“I can understand if you have reservations about tackling such a subject. Everyone is afraid to look at demons from the past. You know, Rilke once wrote very aptly, *perhaps all the dragons in our lives are princesses who are only waiting to see us act, just once, with beauty and courage*”

“Wow. That's touching.” Lena gazed thoughtfully into the distance.

Then her features became firm and determined. “Okay, book me a session.”

“Gladly. Modern trauma therapy is very effective. With the right understanding about the physical-psychological connections, deep wounds can be healed relatively quickly. In the end, it's usually much less bad than feared. Sometimes the dragons of the past even turn into cute little lap dogs.”

Lena had to laugh. “What about the payment for the session? Does the health insurance cover it? How am I actually insured?”

“That's not a problem at all. You are, of course, automatically covered by the general citizen's insurance. In addition, everyone in Germany has an annual quota of up to five free therapy sessions.”

“How nice!” said Lena in surprise. “And I can choose anything?”

“Yes, the quota can be used for psychotherapy, physiotherapy, health coaching or nutritional counseling. Since everyone usually knows best who and what is good for them, they can choose a therapist freely and easily. By the way, such health prevention measures have proven to be extremely good investments for society. Well, let's look for an appointment.” Damian tapped intently on his bracelet. “If you want, there's a session available with a trauma therapist tonight. Do you want me to book that for you right away?”

“That's so soon.” She seemed slightly uneasy and thought for a moment. Then she smirked. “As they say, there's no good unless you do it!”

“All right. It's booked. This afternoon, five o'clock. Just register at the front desk at the clinic.”

“Perfect, I'm very curious how that will turn out.”

Shortly after, they reached a venerable two-story building with an overgrown green facade. At the entrance it said: “Margrit Kennedy School”. In front of the school, a boy and a girl were playing table tennis.

“Margrit Kennedy? Never heard of her.” Lena narrowed her eyes. “Is that a relative of John F. Kennedy?”

Damian laughed. “No, no - and she wasn't shot either. Margrit Kennedy was a German architect, ecologist, and thought leader on money reform. She lived in your time.”

“I've come across her name somewhere before,” Jannis said thoughtfully, but seemed to come to no conclusion. Lena pointed to the school. “What has changed about the school system since we... were away?”

“Free schools like these focus on self-determined learning, a lot of freedom and practical projects,” Damian replied. “A few classic schools with separate classes and a focus on transferring knowledge still exist. I had to go through that for half of my school career, too. But in recent years, such free schools have become more and more widespread. The focus is not so much on teaching information, but on helping young people to develop their personalities and their individual abilities and gifts. As a rule, the children there learn very independently and on the basis of projects and self-chosen challenges. Most parents prefer such schools for their children to get prepared for the good life, or rather, to start that immediately.”

Lena beamed all over her face. “Schools that prepare for the good life? Now that's something!”

“That sounds all well and good.” Jannis made a face. “My sister's son also went to an alternative school and well... it all sounded very nice and progressive there.” He hesitated. “But I'll say this, not all that glitters is gold.”

“Sure. Not everything, but some things. Feel free to make up your own mind.”

“All right.” Jannis shrugged his shoulders.

Damian led them to the building and held open the heavy wooden entrance door. Inside was a spacious foyer. A globe hung from the ceiling, cardboard partitions stood to one side, and the walls were decorated with colorful prints of hands. A green footprint was also among them. Lena wondered about the story behind it. Two girls sat on the steps of a wooden spiral staircase and looked over at them curiously.

“Please take off your shoes. You can put them here and take slippers from there.” Damian said.

After Jannis and Lena had taken off their shoes, they took a few steps into the foyer. There they spotted a large wooden board with the heading “Margrit Kennedy School Mission Statement.”

Lena read the first sentence aloud: „We create an atmosphere characterized by joie de vivre.“

She shook her head in amazement. "School and joie de vivre... In my life experience, that didn't necessarily go together." She made a cynical expression. "The mission statement at my high school back in the day was primarily concerned with the sanctity of punctuality and getting homework done dutifully."

Then she read on: *We trust in the natural motivation to learn and discover and learn joyfully, across subjects and ages, from and with each other and use different forms of learning and working.*

She looked up. "Sounds really good."

We live sustainable and equal relationships in which people meet respectfully, mindfully and appreciatively and grow together. In this way, we form the basis of our family-like school community, characterized by trust, as a prerequisite for the freedom of the individual.

Lena took a deep breath and now looked sad.

We communicate openly, transparently and non-violently, approaching conflicts holistically, constructively and with understanding. We learn together to succeed in dealing with mistakes and conflicts, because mistakes are part of the learning process.

A tear ran down her cheek, which she quickly wiped away. "Wow," she mumbled softly. "Now that's what I call a mission statement."

Jannis nodded silently as well.

Damian smiled sympathetically at her and handed her a handkerchief, which she took from him somewhat sheepishly. "I'm a little emotional these days. Usually, I rarely ever cry. Don't know what's going on."

"I don't find it surprising," Damian said. "Waking up 30 years in the future with all the new impressions is challenging. It's no wonder you're a little more vulnerable."

They heard footsteps. From the stairs several children came down, followed by a tall man with long brown hair and oversized glasses. The children surrounded them curiously. Some shook Damian's hand and high fived him. The unfamiliar newcomers also received a friendly welcome. The perky, red-haired boy and the older girl from the student garden were also among them. Then the teacher reached them. "Good morning, I'm Hannes."

Before he could say anything more, a girl of perhaps twelve with freckles and wild curls pushed her way to the front: "Hello! I'm Momo. We are all very curious to know more about your time and how things were back then. May we ask you a few questions?" A few of the other children nodded excitedly.

"Sure," Lena said, smiling to the crowd.

A boy with a green T-shirt started, "You guys came from the past,

right?”

Jannis wanted to correct him, but Lena said quickly: “Yes, that's one way to put it. We're coming from the year 2020.”

“Wow!” exclaimed some of the children. The boy gestured them to be quiet and continued, “Did you really always have to be at school at eight o'clock sharp in the morning? My father always claims that. But I don't believe him.”

Lena grinned. “Yes, that's right.” The boy looked incredulous and Lena added. “But sometimes a class was cancelled and then I didn't have to go to school until nine or ten o'clock. That was great.”

“When do you have to go to school?” asked Jannis.

Momo answered, “Core times are between ten and thirteen o'clock, that's when everyone should be here. But in principle, we can choose for ourselves. I sometimes come as early as eight o'clock. My older brother is a late riser, he usually gets here after ten.”

“If you come rarely, you'll be asked what's wrong,” added one girl.

The little boy with the red hair, whom they knew from the school garden, interfered excitedly: “And of course you have to check when the working groups are taking place that interest you.”

“That sounds great.” Lena nodded appreciatively to the group. “I honestly thought my school days were pretty dull. It all sounds so much better here.”

A slightly older girl took a step forward, “Your times must have been pretty tough. I've heard that the cities were gray and ugly, the people unhappy, and there were many meaningless jobs that were no fun.”

Jannis looked a bit puzzled. “Well, it wasn't that bad. Many people were doing very well.” Then his face lit up, as if he had an insight. “Or maybe you mean the GDR?”

A few smaller children looked a bit irritated, as if they didn't know the term, but the older girl replied, “No, no. Of course, the stuff about the Berlin Wall, the Stasi and pseudo-socialism was also totally crazy. But I definitely meant the tenners and twenties at the time of the many crises.”

Jannis scratched his forehead.

A boy with glasses and a blond pot haircut added, “Is it true that nature was totally exploited and that quite a lot of animals were kept in huge death factories? My mother says that it was super sad, but that most people didn't care to know and wanted to eat meat every day.”

Lena looked sadly at the floor. “Yes, I'm afraid that's true. It was terrible what we did to the animals.”

Meanwhile, Jannis looked a little embarrassed. Momo pushed her way

to the front again. "My grandpa told me that there were noisy cars everywhere and bad air in the cities. Many people were sick and lonely, he said." She looked at them both with wide eyes. "Did you feel the same way?"

Lena looked at her thoughtfully for a moment and then nodded sadly. "I didn't find it easy at all to live in those times. In the big capitalist machine, everything was about growth and money. On the one hand, of course, this gave us extreme comfort and luxury. But behind the beautiful facade lurked superficiality, exploitation and destruction." She shook her head in annoyance. "It wasn't easy to live in a world where animals were mistreated, where war was waged for oil, and where centuries-old rainforests were cut down for some palm oil plantations. There was a pretty mask of prosperity and freedom, but behind it lurked emptiness and mountains of trash." She looked down at the ground.

"That sounds very sad." Little Momo took Lena's hand as if to cheer her up. "How did you handle that?" The other children were silent and looked at her sympathetically.

"That's a very good question." Lena blushed slightly, regained her composure and continued in a bitter voice: "I withdrew often, killed time with dull tv-series and waited for a miracle. At some point I couldn't stand it anymore. So finally, with hope for a better future, I decided to time travel to leave all that behind." She looked at Jannis as she continued. "But I think most of the people back then closed up inside, gave in to the system, and were barely alive."

"Didn't you ever have anyone to hold you and comfort you?" one boy asked cautiously.

Lena looked at him. "Maybe so, but it wasn't easy to show up with all that sadness and heaviness. Everywhere I went, I was expected to be strong and to function."

"But hiding one's own feelings from others is not strength," the boy replied with confusion.

Lena was silent for a moment and then had to smile involuntarily. "You're right about that. I guess in our times that was seen differently."

The children looked very concerned. Silence fell for a moment.

The teacher had been watching the conversation intently and broke the awkward silence. "Would you like a tour of the school?"

"I'd love to." Jannis and Lena nodded.

Hannes turned to the older girl, "Sarah, would you like to lead the tour? You're good at that kind of thing."

Apparently, that prospect made the girl a little excited and she nodded

happily. Sarah led her up the wooden staircase, where several rooms led off from a long hallway. The other children followed them in a small cluster. "Here we have the project and theme rooms." She pointed to the doors one by one. "Here's math and physics. There's biology. Over there is big history."

Jannis interrupted her. "Big history? What's that?"

The little red-haired boy answered, "Big history includes everything from the Big Bang to the origin of mankind and all cultures and such."

"That's ambitious."

Hannes jumped in, "Big history is less focused on nations and their wars, but on patterns in the big picture and the role of humans in the universe. The perspective is much broader than the traditional subject of history."

Sarah led them on. "We shouldn't disturb the work in the project rooms, but we can go to the break room over there."

They entered a large room full of sofas, beanbags and hammocks. Many children were sitting in small groups eating sandwiches or playing board games. Others seemed to be dozing in hammocks or hanging out reading in colorful beanbags. As the newcomers entered the room, several children looked up curiously

"What a cozy bunch we have here." Jannis grinned. "I guess this is where the less motivated kids like to hang out?"

Hannes looked puzzled. "What do you mean?"

"Well, if I'd had the opportunity to lounge in the hammock all day at my school, I wouldn't have done much math." Jannis laughed.

"Oh, that's what you mean." Hannes chuckled. "No, that's not a problem. Regular time off from studying is important. Besides, young people usually want to learn something and don't want to lie around here all day." He looked around at the children with a smile. "Right?"

They beamed happily at him. "I want to know everything!" exclaimed one girl. At this, the red-haired boy pointed at her. "She's the smartest of all." Jannis and Lena had to stifle a laugh.

Hannes turned to her again. "If a child does become excessively lazy and has no drive to explore and learn, it's usually the consequence of problems at home. If that's the case, the school psychologist talks to the child. Usually a solution can be found and sooner or later the joy of learning returns."

He pointed to an empty corner of a sofa. "Shall we sit down?"

They settled into a comfortable blue fabric couch. The children bustled around them. Hannes stepped up to a small kitchenette. "Would you

like something to drink?"

"I'd love to," exclaimed Lena. "Do you have any lemonade? I'm in the mood for something sweet right now."

Hannes grimaced. "I'm afraid we don't have sweet drinks here anymore. They've been banned from school."

"Banned?"

"Yes, that was decided by the student body. We are organized sociocratically here, so the schoolchildren have a say in everything. After a project day on nutrition a few years ago, there was a heated discussion about what should and should not be drunk and eaten here. After careful consideration of all the arguments, in the end it was unanimously decided that there should only be healthy food."

"Oh, come on. And the students decided that themselves?" asked Jannis.

Several of the children nodded proudly. Hannes looked around with a smile. "Yes. We teachers are sometimes surprised ourselves at how conscientiously most of them get involved in school politics. Many say clarity helps them to focus on the important things."

Jannis had frowned. "You just said you are sociopathic or something. What does that mean?"

"Sociocratic," the older girl improved him. "Don't you know sociocracy?" She looked at him in wonder.

Jannis shrugged his shoulders.

"Sociocracy is a toolset for self-organized and democratic organizations," she explained. "In our school, we have individual working circles for the different areas of responsibility, such as learning, finances, food and events. In the circles, all decisions are made. In principle, you are allowed to participate in every circle. If you are particularly good, you can even be elected to the steering committee, which oversees everything. Also, we decide by consent." She gave a thumbs up and the other children laughed and all showed an outstretched thumb as well.

Lena raised an eyebrow. "Consent? Can you explain that to me?"

A boy wearing a bright red scarf jerked an arm in the air. "Shall I?"

Hannes smiled at him. "You're welcome, Mimon!"

"So. When someone makes a proposal, you ask for consent. If you have no objection to the proposal, you show your thumb. Like this." He showed his outstretched thumb again. "But if you have any objection, then you don't show a thumb, you show your open palm. Like this." He held out his palm to them, which was opened upward.

The little red-haired boy excitedly interjected, "An objection is considered a gift!"

"Exactly," the blond boy continued. "Because that brings in a perspective that others may have forgotten. You have to justify your objection, though. Next, the proposal gets improved until all objections are gone and everyone gives consent." Again, all the children showed their outstretched thumbs and laughed.

In the meantime Hannes had brought a few cups and a carafe of water.

"That sounds like consensus," Lena said. "Only the hand gestures are new. I do know this."

"No, no," Damian replied. "With consensus, everyone must be in favor for a proposal. With consent, on the other hand, no one must be against it. Sounds similar, but makes a big difference in practice. With consent, it's easier to entrust responsibilities to others, so things start flowing."

Lena looked thoughtful, pulled up a cup and poured in water.

"Are free schools like this private?" asked Jannis.

"Yes and no," Hannes replied. "Most schools are self-governing and collaboratively run. That means parents, teachers and the student body make the most important decisions together. However, most of the costs are covered by the state and each school gets a fixed budget per school child."

"And do you still have exams and grades?"

"There are various tests." Hannes looked at him. "Such tests are helpful, after all, to see how well something was understood and where there is still room for improvement. For foreign languages, for example, there are tests for the various grammar areas, for vocabularies and for the overall level. In a similar way, learning progress is measured for topics such as mathematics or biology. Learners can view their progress at any time in the online learning platform. For many topics and projects, however, tests are difficult to implement or too one-sided. We tutors therefore give feedback on kids individual strengths and abilities but only after they have assessed themselves. This combines self-perception and the perception of others and works very well and trains the students' own ability to reflect. But traditional report cards with grades and subjects no longer exist. To be honest, I find it quite unpleasant to be evaluated as one-dimensionally as it used to be."

Lena turned to Hannes. "What subjects do you teach here at school? Are there any further new subjects besides big history?"

Hannes smiled. "In principle, there are hardly any restrictions. Except

for a few core competencies that everyone is expected to acquire, we provide the greatest freedom possible so that the schoolchildren can pursue their own interests and talents. And these are very diverse. For example, she is totally into astronauts and planets.” He pointed to a girl who had been holding back so far and was now beaming at them. Hannes continued, “We learning facilitators can't possibly cover everything with our own knowledge, of course, but the online learning platform is fantastic. Additionally, there are often experts from outside the school who offer seminars or workshops in their area of expertise.”

The little red-haired boy intervened. “Jeannette will show us non-violent communication later. And later Hassan's father will come and explain to us how solar systems function. He works with that kind of thing. I'm really excited about it.”

“Yeah, it'll be great.” Hannes said. “We do a lot of field trips to nature or local businesses and projects.”

Momo raised a finger, drawing attention to herself. “And we have personal challenges on a regular basis.”

“Challenges?” Jannis looked puzzled.

“Yes, it's super cool! Twice a year, together with our learning facilitators we choose a special project for exactly two weeks. During that time, we learn a lot about it and get important experiences. For example, last year I made a film about bees.”

“That's interesting!” exclaimed Lena, looking around the room. “What challenges did the rest of you choose?”

The older girl replied. “I built a tree house with two friends and we lived in it for a week in the forest.”

“I suggested that a new adventure playground be built in the forest,” the boy with red hair exclaimed excitedly. “There's a model of it in the project room. The mayor even shook my hand.”

Lena smiled at him. “I'm curious to see one of your project rooms.” She turned to Hannes. “Would that be possible? We can be very quiet.”

Hannes nodded. “Okay, that's fine. Let's go to biology, that's where I'm in charge right now anyway.” They rose and walked back down the hall to a large door covered with animal posters. The project room was full of plants and terrariums. Colorful illustrations of felines and exotic trees hung on the walls. Several young people of various ages sat and stood around the room reading in books, typing on tablets, or peering into microscopes on a large wooden table. It was a highly concentrated atmosphere.

As the group entered, a girl moved up to them and turned to Hannes.

“Do you have some time for me later? I have a question about oxygenic photosynthesis.”

“Sure. We have visitors right now, though. I’ll join you later.”

Lena and Jannis looked around the room for a moment, then they all moved back to the hallway.

“Given that no teacher had been present, they were really conscientious about what they were doing.” Jannis seemed impressed.



They had left the school again and walked along a small trail past a forest onto a paved road. From there Damian led them to an imposing house.

“This is where I live,” he announced with some pride in his voice, making a welcoming gesture. “Welcome to the Community Sea Air!”

Jannis pointed at the house. “What a fancy building. And pretty big. How many people live in your community?”

“Currently, thirty-four adults and thirteen children. I’ve lived here for about three years.”

“Thirty-four?” asked Jannis in amazement.

“Yes. This is just the main building. There are more houses on the other side. There are a few shared apartments, too, but most of the families and couples have their own units. And there are a lot of common areas. I’ll show you around in a minute.”

As they walked down the path to the house, they spotted a dark-skinned woman behind a bush with a baby wrapped around her breast. Damian went up to her, kissed the baby on the head and the woman on the mouth. “Hey Taja! I bring visitors from another time.”

“Oh, how nice! Hello!” She beamed at the newcomers. “This must be exciting days for you.”

“Oh yes, but with such a fantastic guide, we are well prepared for this new world,” Lena replied, winking at Damian.

“Thank you! That’s nice of you to say.” Damian smiled. Then he turned to Taja with wide eyes and pointed to the bush. “Are you making raspberry muffins later?”

She lifted her chin. “I won’t tell you.”

Damian laughed. “If you need volunteers for the tasting later, we’re

available!" He gave her another kiss and led his guests onwards to the house.

As they continued walking, Jannis turned to Damian. "Where's your girlfriend from?"

"From Freiburg," Damian replied.

"No, I mean from where originally."

Damian was about to answer but Lena intervened. "My God, Jannis, what kind of stupid question is that?" She had put her hands on her hips and was glaring angrily at him. "Damian's girlfriend is obviously from Germany. Do you think just because her skin is not as white as yours, she can't be German or what?"

"Oh my goodness!" Jannis also stopped and rubbed his forehead. "It's obvious, after all, that she has African roots. Aren't you even allowed to notice something like that anymore? What's your problem?"

"My problem is the everyday racism that people like you display."

"Hey, hey," Damian called out with his hands raised. "I think this is getting a little out of hand right now. Maybe you folks want to take a break for a minute and take a deep breath?"

The two stared angrily at each other and remained silent.

At that moment Taja came to them, two full bowls of raspberries in her hands. "I've picked enough for today. Do you want to try some?" She held the bowls out to them. Noticing the serious faces, she frowned. "Did something happen?"

Lena cleared her throat and raised her chin. "We had a little incident of racism here."

"Racism?" asked Taja in amazement. Lena pointed with her head in the direction of Jannis.

The latter blushed. "I merely asked Damian where you came from and..."

"I come from Freiburg," Taja interrupted him with a smile.

"Yes, I've already said that, too." Damian ran his hand over her arm with a grin. "You should show off that sexy Freiburg accent of yours to those two!"

Taja winked at him seductively and turned back to Jannis. "But I guess you're getting at where my non-German roots are, right?"

The latter nodded uncertainly.

"My father is from Kenya."

"Ah, okay. I was in Tanzania for a year once, and your features reminded me of the people there. I was just curious if I was right about that."

“You were close.”

There was a short awkward silence. Then Jannis addressed Taja again: “I hope that was okay with the question. It all got a little awkward now.”

“That’s fine.” She smiled. “It used to be different. There were times when questions about my origin could really annoy me.”

“Why is that, actually? For me, I can’t really understand why it’s so charged.”

“Because those questions often implied that I was not German. But I was born and raised in Germany. Those questions often gave me a feeling of being different and not really belonging here. I also had a few unpleasant experiences when looking for an apartment or a job. Because of my skin color, sometimes there obvious discrimination against me. That was pretty painful. Being confronted with that ‘where are you from’ question often brought that hurt up.”

Jannis nodded. “Hmm, I see. I can understand that.”

“In recent decades, however, there have been some positive developments in this regard among the general public. A lot of educational work has been done and many cities have hosted so-called encounter cafés. That has created a lot of awareness of the problem among the population and generated a more sensitive culture.”

“That sounds promising!” said Lena.

Damian nodded. “I heard from the school kids the other day that they had a project week at school on identity, origin and interculturalism. I think it’s incredibly helpful to make young people aware of these issues early on.”

“Indeed.” Taja pointed to the baby at her breast. “I hope our Mala will grow up in a world where she will know racism and discrimination only from her mother’s stories.”

Then she pointed in the direction of the house. “I’m going to go back inside and get to work on the muffins. See you!”

She then disappeared into the house. Then they too went to the entrance, where he held open the door to a wide bright hallway.

“Shoes off, please. You can put them on the shelf here on the right and take a pair of slippers.”

As Lena slipped off her shoes, her eyes fell on a large poster on the wall. There was a large compass on it, the four directions had been replaced by four feelings: joy, anger, sadness, and fear. In the middle was shame.

“What’s that?” she asked with surprise, nodding in the direction of the illustration.

Damian turned to her and looked at the poster. "This is the emotional compass. A very practical model on basic human emotions and their functions."

"Only five basic feelings?" Lena frowned. "And why are there four negative feelings and only one that is positive?"

Damian smirked. "Typical question. Very telling of the state of society in 2020, by the way." He grinned at her.

"Okay." She seemed a little unsettled by the answer.

"There are no negative feelings," Damian continued. "There is only a destructive way of dealing with them. All five basic feelings have important functions in our lives. They give us a compass for the challenges we face." He pointed to the arrow of anger on the right. "We talked about the power of anger the day before yesterday, right?"

Lena nodded and looked again at the feeling compass. "What's the good thing about the other feelings? How about fear, for example?"

"Fear helps us to confront the unknown. Fear gives us large amounts of energy. It brings alertness to recognize dangerous situations and to survive them. Fear also generates creativity to escape threats."

"Okay." Lena thought for a moment. "And grief?"

"Grief helps us to accept situations that we cannot change. Also, grief creates connection with other people. For example, if you lose a loved one and allow grief, it will help you to accept the loss, stay connected and also be able to look ahead again."

"And shame?" now asked Jannis.

"Shame turns the spotlight inward. Sometimes the problem isn't on the outside, it's on the inside, and shame gives you the energy to change and adjust your behavior."

Jannis didn't look too convinced. "That sounds very idealistic."

Damian nodded. "Any feeling can take negative forms, of course. You're right about that. The key thing about shame, for example, is the distinction between action and self-worth. I can do something stupid and feel ashamed of it, and therefore change my actions in the future without it causing me to question my self-worth. But when shame is coupled with your self-esteem, things become unhealthy."

"I hope my inner critic just listened carefully." Lena looked a little concerned.

Jannis also seemed thoughtful now. They walked down the hall and Damian led them through a few rooms. "Down here on the second floor are the community rooms. We have a big dining room with a kitchen, a community hall, a seminar room. In the basement there's a sauna and a

big gym.” He grinned at Lena. “There’s a punching bag there, by the way.”

“So-so. So that’s where I can go when I’m angry again, right?”

Damian smiled at her and pointed to the ceiling. “On the floors above us are various housing units for couples, families and shared apartments. Outside, there are more buildings and tiny houses.”

“What’s a tiny house?” asked Jannis.

“These are clever little houses that are very easy to build and are usually largely self-sufficient in energy. I’ll be happy to show you those later.”

He led them through a room filled with several sofas and armchairs. Lena noticed some paintings of animals on the wall. She pointed to a large elephant at a waterhole. “Wow, those are beautiful!”

Damian nodded. “My girlfriend painted those.”

“Oh, she’s an artist?”

“Among other things. She has many skills,” he said with some pride in his voice.

Lena looked around the community hall. The room had a decidedly warm and cozy atmosphere. But some of the sofas were a bit worn out and one of the animal pictures was askew.

“A good friend of mine participated in a housing project in Eberswalde,” Lena said thoughtfully to Damian. “I visited her there a few times and found it quite interesting. But even for my taste it was a bit too chaotic and…” she hesitated, “...hippie-like.”

Damian laughed. “Hippie-like sounds fun. I can imagine what you mean. We do like to sing and dance together sometimes, but overall I think we’re pretty down to earth. In terms of age structure, we’re mixed, too, and I think that brings some grounding as well. My grandma Petra, for example, is seventy-eight and also lives here. My grandfather has already passed away, but since grandma has been living here, she has noticeably blossomed. She feeds half the community with her cakes and all the kids love her stories.”

Lena thought of her late grandma. “That sounds really nice. My grandma spent her last days in a nursing home. We couldn’t handle the care at some point.” She looked sad. “The home was okay, but also very lifeless. I think she would have really liked it in a community with kids and lots of people.”

Damian nodded. “Probably. We humans are communal beings.”

They heard the stairs creak and shortly after a woman with flowing white hair came up to them.

“Hello Damian!” she said, “Whom did you bring?”

“Hey Barbara, this is Jannis and Lena. They woke up a few days ago after a long coma sleep in the clinic. I'm currently showing them our housing project.”

“Nice to meet you.” She shook their hands. “I was about to do a midday meditation in the workshop room. Would you folks like to join me?”

“Fine with me.” Damian looked at his companions expectantly. “What do you think?”

“How long takes the class?” asked Lena hesitantly.

“About half an hour,” Barbara said.

“I've done yoga before, but never really meditated. If you give me a little introduction, I'd be curious to join...” She smiled questioningly at Damian. He in turn looked at Jannis, who looked rather skeptical. “I don't think meditating is my thing.”

“Are you sure?”, Barbara asked him. “I'm not doing any mumbo jumbo, it's mostly about relaxation and inner centering.”

Jannis visibly struggled with himself. Everyone looked at him. Then he shrugged his shoulders. “All right. I don't want to be a killjoy.”

Led by Barbara, they went into the workshop room where a young girl was already sitting. The walls were decorated with colorful cloths and a large Buddha statue stood at the side. Lena had to smile as she read on a large banner: *The secret of a long and happy life: Eat half as much, walk twice as much, laugh three times as much and love without limits!*

They took seat cushions from the side of the room, sat on them, and Damian explained the process. “There are dozens of variations of meditation. Basically, I recommend trying different approaches to see what comes easily to you and feels best. For starters, I recommend mindfulness meditation, though. It's very easy. Focus on your breath and let the thoughts pass. You will lose focus periodically, but it doesn't matter. Once you notice, just come back to your breath and relax. In and out. In and out.”

“Doesn't sound too complicated. I could make that work.” Lena grinned.

“Yes. But you may be surprised at how difficult it is to maintain focus. The mind has a life of its own. If thoughts or impulses come up, don't fight them, just gently try to bring your attention back to the breath. Okay?”

Both nodded.

“Great! As an introduction, Barbara will lead a short body scan and at the very end we usually chant a short mantra. Have fun!”

In the meantime, two older women and a gay couple had joined them. All sat on cushions and formed a circle. Barbara murmured a short greeting and struck a singing bowl that lay on a red cushion in the center of the circle.

After the sound faded, she guided their attention through their bodies. First they were to focus on the body sensation in the head and forehead and then go lower to the jaw, neck and chest until they finally reached their toes. Lena had to yawn several times during this process and felt a pleasant relaxation.

Then the time for meditation began and Lena directed her attention to her breath. After the intense last few days, it felt good to let go of her thoughts and feel into her body in this way. She sank into her gentle breathing rhythm.

Jannis, on the other hand, couldn't do much with sitting around silently. After a while, he got up and left the room with some noise. Irritated by the unrest, Lena opened her eyes and looked questioningly at Damian. Damian had also briefly raised his eyelids and whispered to her, "He'll be fine, don't worry about him."

After that, the time flew by. When Barbara struck the singing bowl at the end of the meditation, Lena felt regret that it was already over.

Barbara picked up a guitar and began to sing a mantra, which the others joined in. Lena did not know the lyrics, but she enjoyed listening to the gentle melody from her newfound state of inner peace and simple being. Finally, the group fell silent and Barbara acknowledged the end of the session by striking the singing bowl one last time. Thereupon, the cushions were moved to the side and people left the room again.

"How was it?" Damian looked at Lena expectantly. Then he laughed. "You look like you're a little high."

Lena beamed. "That did a lot of good. Indeed, it wasn't easy at first not to lose myself in my thoughts. But then my head calmed down and I found a deep sense of peace inside me. I haven't felt that in a long time."

"Nice! I'm glad to hear that."

In the anteroom, Jannis was sitting on a sofa, leafing through a thick book that he had apparently taken from the large bookshelf.

Damian nodded at him. "I'm glad you took care of yourself and got out when you found it wasn't your thing."

"This sitting around doing nothing drives me crazy. I already suspected it."

"Then you're lucky you're not Russian." Damian laughed and Jannis looked up in confusion. Damian continued, "There was a mandatory

morning meditation for all Russians for some time in the thirties. Due to skyrocketing health care costs, the government had determined that regular meditation was the health measure with the best cost-benefit for society. Every morning at ten o'clock, therefore, all people in Russia had to meditate - including all state employees."

"Seriously? In Russia?"

"Yes." Damian nodded with some amusement. "From a scientific point of view, regular meditation is extremely beneficial to health. But of course, forcing that on people backfired, and it was abolished after a few months."

Jannis seemed puzzled, shook his head briefly, and pointed to the book in his hand. "Interesting concept."

Lena glanced at the book and read aloud the title, "*Financial Abundance through Financial Cooperatives*." She looked around questioningly. "What is a financial cooperative?"

"This is a group of people who communize their finances," Damian explained. "My income is your income." He grinned. "Similar to finances in a marriage, but without the romantic component and with more than two people."

"And what's the purpose of that?" asked Lena.

"There are many reasons. Solidarity, cohesion, trust. The distribution of money and wealth is often unfair, and a financial cooperative creates balance and security." He smiled. "By the way, Helge, with whom we were at the permaculture farm a few days ago, has been a member of a financial cooperative for twenty years. He says it helps him to reflect in the group on how to deal with money and not to be alone with financial decisions."

"You'll have to tell me more about that when you get a chance!" said Lena curiously.

"Gladly." Damian went to the bookshelf, searched for a moment, and pulled out another volume. The title was *The Crisis as an Opportunity - Money and Financial Market Reforms after the Big Bang*. He handed the book to Jannis. "You should be interested in this one."

"The crisis as an opportunity? Aha." Jannis looked curiously at the blurb and read aloud, "What an irony that in the end it was the banks, that brought down financial capitalism. The book shows why the Big Bang as the collapse of the financial system did not lead to the feared depression, but became the turning point for a new beginning of society." Jannis looked up with satisfaction. "That sounds interesting indeed. May I borrow it?"

Damian nodded. "Sure."

"Sounds like an economist thriller," laughed Lena.

Jannis ignored the statement and pointed toward the hallway. "I was in the bathroom and was amazed to see that you have a Japanese toilet here. How come?"

"What do you mean by Japanese toilet?" asked Lena.

"They have those retractable water spray arms for..." Jannis paused for a moment, "for cleaning up afterwards."

Lena giggled and Jannis blushed slightly.

"To my knowledge, toilets like this boomed after the Corona Crisis," Damian explained. "The traumatic experience of the toilet paper shortage during that time led some people to get one of these toilets in the aftermath. They make people less dependent of toilet paper. Since then, Japanese toilets have spread throughout Germany."

"Toilet paper shortage?" asked Jannis incredulously.

They heard footsteps approaching and a broad-shouldered man about Damian's age appeared in the doorway. When he saw Damian, he jumped into a wide-legged crouch, opened his eyes and stuck out his tongue with a nasty look. In addition, he slapped his chest and forearms with his flat hands like a wild monkey.

Jannis and Lena backed away in fright, but to their surprise Damian imitated the strange performance, also widening his eyes and mouth and shouted, "Waaaaah. Tchuwakaaaah!"

The newcomer slapped his thighs and responded with, "Tchuwakaaaah! Haka Teeee!"

"Haka Teeee Waaaaah," responded Damian.

Finally, with a crazed look on their faces and their tongues sticking out, they both yelled, "Waaaaah."

Then the strange behavior stopped as suddenly as it had begun.

The two stepped towards each other, put their hands on the back of their necks and held their foreheads together with closed eyes. After a deep breath together, they took a step back and looked deep into each other's eyes, grinning broadly. Then Damian turned to his companions, exhilarated. "Sorry about the show. We haven't seen each other in a while."

Laughing, the man held out his hand to them. "I'm Anaru, by the way."

"Anaru has been visiting his family in New Zealand for the past two months," Damian explained. "Since we hadn't seen each other for so long, this greeting seemed appropriate."

Anaru laughed. "Damian insists that I always greet him with the haka

dance. I hope you didn't get too scared.”

Jannis face lit up. “Oh, was that the war dance which the New Zealand rugby teams always performed?”

Anaru nodded.

“Do you live here, too?” asked Lena.

“Yes. For three years by now.” He smiled. “I love this place. We have a really wonderful community and the direct access to the lake is awesome! I can very well imagine growing old here.”

“Are there many such communities in the countryside?” asked Jannis.

“Yes. They offer more quality of life than squatting alone in a small apartment,” Damian replied. “The older people help with childcare and often enjoy cooking for the community, younger people bring energy and drive, playing children refresh our place. It also brings together many different talents. One person bakes fantastic breads, someone else makes beautiful music, I have a hand for repairs and crafty things around the house.”

Jannis still seemed a little skeptical. “And how is this different from a normal apartment building?”

“Well, the sense of community and especially the many community areas,” Anaru replied this time. “While many of the residents have their own living units, we have several shared kitchens, dining rooms and living rooms. There is a large meeting room for parties and workshops in addition to the seminar room. Also, the sauna, a tool shed and a workshop. We also order a lot of food together in large quantities. And we have a large vegetable garden, which we tend together.”

“I have to admit that your enthusiasm is contagious.” Lena looked at him curiously. “But what do you do in case of conflicts or if anyone behaves in a difficult way?”

“Then Damian dances the haka,” Anaru said with a laugh.

“Exactly,” Damian said, grinning broadly. “That intimidates all quarrelsome people to such an extent that all problems vanish.” Lena and Jannis looked amused.

“No, seriously, of course there are conflicts,” Damian continued. “Then we have to talk about the issue openly and see where the core of the problem lies. A good solution can always be found if it is sought constructively. Friction generates warmth, we always say. This community has existed for twenty-three years. I have no doubt that it will still exist in fifty years.”

Lena raised her eyebrows in surprise. “The communities I know all had major conflicts. That sounds almost too rosy for me.”



Damian shrugged his shoulders. "In the early days, I guess things got pretty heated. Of course, it's crucial who moves in together - that should be thought through very well. Over time, good communication and conflict resolution structures have emerged. Of course, it was a long learning process to get to the stability and harmony we've achieved."

Anaru added, "It doesn't hurt to have some helpful tools and counseling services, which the government provides. For instance, we once used mediation services. Further, many children are learning about best practices of living together in their school. So in my experience, the younger generations can actually often fit in more easily."

Lena nodded thoughtfully.

Damian clapped his hands. "Alright, shall I show you the rest of the property?"

Lena and Jannis nodded. So Damian went ahead and led them through the kitchen to a porch at the back of the house. There was a spacious garden plot, with several interesting-looking buildings. Some vegetable beds were on the side. Towards the center, the property bordered on a big lake. There was a rowboat on the shore of it and a few children were playing in the sand.

"That one should look familiar," Damian said, pointing to the water.

"That's the lake I look out on from my room, isn't it?" Lena's eyes glanced over the property. "It's really beautiful here! I'd love to have a garden like that."

"Who doesn't?" asked Damian with a smile, pushing aside a tricycle from the garden path.

Jannis approached one of the houses and turned to Damian. "What kind of strange buildings are these? I've never seen anything like that before. Are these the tiny houses you mentioned earlier?"

"Yes, exactly. Those two are so-called Ownhomes. That one," he pointed to the first house, which was just over two meters wide and had a conservatory in front of it, "is a second-generation Ownhome. And that one," he pointed to the second, somewhat wider and taller model, "is a fourth-generation Ownhome. These are ingenious constructions. Largely self-sufficient in energy and water, and for the limited size, there's a lot of comfort. At the time the climate crisis was worsening, some people here had the urge to plan for the worst and become self-sufficient. Fortunately, that is no longer necessary, but the houses save on electricity and heating expenses in any case."

"That sounds exciting. Can I see it from the inside?" asked Lena cautiously.

“Sure.” Damian knocked and after no one answered, he opened the door. “Dennis, a young man, lives here at the moment. He won't mind if I show the house to others. So come on in.”

Inside the house a shelf that doubled as a ladder to the upper floor, a fully equipped kitchen with a modern wood-burning stove and a bathroom alcove awaited them. It spanned around eighteen square meters.

Lena pointed to the restroom. “That's a cute toilet.”

“This is what's called a dry separation toilet,” Damian explained. “Hard stuff and liquids are separated and used as compost and fertilizer, respectively. Humans are thus reintegrated as an important component in the cycle of nature. The house also has its own plant-based water treatment system. It sits under the floor and filters wastewater from the shower and sink.”

“Is the house not connected to the local water supply?” asked Jannis.

“No, it's unnecessary. In the past, there used to be difficulties with the legal regulations because of that. But now the state subsidizes such houses and it's all no longer a problem.”

Lena approached the stairs and looked curiously into the upper floor.

“Upstairs is the bedroom,” Damian explained. “It's surprisingly spacious up there.”

Lena climbed a few steps up to get a glimpse.

“That's romantic!” she said with a smile. “I imagine that's exciting, living in a cottage like that away from civilization somewhere in the mountains.”

“Yeah. You think that until it gets cold and the bear eats you,” Jannis said seriously.

Damian shook his head. “It doesn't get too cold in here. The stove heats up nicely and there are heating pads stored here in the floor under the wood.” He flipped up a wooden tile to reveal a large blue package underneath. “Inside is a special chemical that stores energy when it's warm. When it gets colder again, the heat is released slowly. That helps to keep the building at a consistently comfortable temperature.”

Jannis touched the wall. “And this is made entirely of wood and clay?”

“Yes. Wood, clay and chalk. So everything is sustainable, organic and inexpensive. By the way, I also lived in such an Ownhome for half a year some time ago. I liked that very much. I felt closer to nature than in a large stone or concrete building.”

One by one, they stepped back out into the garden. “The Ownhomes, are so simply constructed that they can be assembled by yourself without

much expertise. We had put them together without any professional craftsmen at all.”

Damian pointed to a similar, slightly larger house next door. “This Ownhome can even house a whole family. From the basic principle, it's similar.”

“And those houses there?” Jannis pointed to a building further back and a roundish building that was still under construction.

“That is a straw bale house. The walls are filled with compacted straw and plastered with clay. So it's maximally sustainable and ecological.”

“Doesn't that burn down easily?” Lena frowned.

“No, the straw is compacted so that there is no increased risk of fire. Proper technique is critical, of course, to prevent mold and insects from getting into the walls. But with proper construction, it's a very advanced method.”

“And that roundish house there?” Jannis stepped up to the building, whose foundation walls seemed half finished.

“This is not round, but a hexagon. The architect is a representative of the Sacred Architecture movement. They avoid rectangular spaces and construct very fancy buildings. A couple who lives here saw other houses of his, while on vacation in the Czech Republic and decided they wanted to live in one too. I am very curious to see how it looks when it is finished. By the way, this house uses a material for wall insulation made from a special mushroom.”

“From a mushroom?” Jannis raised an eyebrow in surprise.

“Yes, mushrooms are incredibly versatile. As building materials, mushrooms have therefore become very trendy in recent years. It's cheap and natural.”

Damian led them on to an area enclosed by a small wall on the side of the main house. “This is where we have our compost and recycling area.”

On top of an earthy pile were potato peels, plastic wrappers, envelopes, paper pages, and all sorts of other trash. Lena frowned. “Don't you separate your trash?”

“Hardly at all. The vast majority of packaging and cardboard is organically degradable these days. So we can throw it all in a pile here and within a few months it turns into perfect humus for the garden.”

“And what about glass and metals?”

“They're disposed of separately. Just like non-degradable plastic waste in your time. Once a month, such extra waste is picked up by recycling drones.”

“Recycling drones?” Lena laughed. “Are these the modern garbage men?”

“Yes, they're very practical. The drones are solar-powered and when they have nothing to do, they pick up trash around town and in parks. If you're too lazy to separate your trash at all, you can order a recycling drone for an extra fee to regularly scour your own compost pile for non-compostable waste. Then there's no need to separate anything.”

“Interesting.” Jannis rubbed his chin. “I'm surprised all the stuff breaks down organically so easily and quickly.”

“We help a little. Once a month, we sprinkle a bacterial powder on the compost. That contains special designer bacteria that accelerate the decomposition of the garbage. Microbes and fungi, by the way, have been used extensively in recent years to clean up large dumps full of old plastic and chemical waste. Often, they can even be used to convert hazardous waste into energy-rich biogas.”

Lena looked out at the lake. “Is this also used to clean up the oceans?”

“As far as I know, there are currently some research groups trying to design special algae that break down plastic. Because of the risk of these algae upsetting the ocean's ecosystem, they have not yet been used on a large scale. Instead, drones and autonomous crawlers are predominantly used to scour the water for trash. A lot of progress has been made with that, but unfortunately there's still a lot of trash floating around in the oceans.” Damian led them further to the shore of the lake and looked contritely at the water. “Dumping a truckload of trash into the water is easy, but picking it all back out is a lot of work.”

Jannis turned to Damian. “What do you folks pay in rent here?”

“So for my apartment together with my girlfriend all in all we pay around 400€.”

“What? So little?” Lena's eyes snapped open. “How's that possible?”

“Why should it be more expensive?” Damian looked a little puzzled. “After all, the house has been built more than 100 years ago, there's plenty of space here in the country, we generate most of our own electricity with solar panels, and the utilities aren't much either.”

“Who owns the property?” asked Jannis.

“That belongs to the state.” Jannis and Lena looked puzzled, and Damian added. “There was a major land and tax reform a few years ago. As part of that, much land ownership was communized.”

“Communized?” Jannis seemed slightly upset. “That sounds like communism.”

Damian laughed loudly. When he saw Jannis looking irritated, he asked,

“Are you serious?”

Jannis shrugged his shoulders. “Yeah, but never mind.”

At that moment a soft blue ball hit Damian in the back of the head and they heard a child's laughter. They turned around and at the corner of the building stood a boy with wild hair and a wide grin.

“Hobin, you snot!” Damian rushed at him, laughing. “If I can get my hands on you!”

Instantly, the boy disappeared behind the house, giggling, and Damian returned to his companions, grinning.

“So bandits are living here, too?” asked Lena with a grin.

“Indeed. Take care!” Then Damian pointed to a hammock that was swinging not far from them on the lakeshore between two trees. “Do you feel like hanging out in the hammock for a bit? Three of us can fit in that huge family model over there.”

“Yes, absolutely!” Lena clapped her hands, ran over laughing, and dropped into the big orange and green patterned hammock. Damian followed behind and lay down next to her on the right. Next to him he kept a large space free for Jannis and looked at him invitingly. Jannis hesitated though, looked around searchingly, and finally pulled up a deck chair from the lawn.

Lena leaned back, stretched her arms and legs far from her and looked up at the blue sky. She enjoyed the gentle swaying. She hadn't felt as relaxed as today for a long time. Jannis, on the other hand, sat somewhat tensely on his chair and gazed at the lake.

Damian looked at him. “Are you okay?”

Jannis hesitated for a moment. “It's all so different from what I expected.” He looked unsettled. “Don't get me wrong. It's really nice here. It's hard for me to admit this, but I sometimes feel like a foreigner. I had imagined the future to be different.”

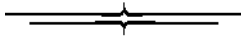
Damian sat up in the hammock and looked at Jannis with understanding. “Thank you for your honesty. That's how some coma sleepers feel, by the way. However, I'm sure you too will find a place in this time and in this world. Give yourself some time and stay open to the changes.”

Jannis nodded thoughtfully and Damian pointed to the lake. “Do you feel like going for a swim?”

Jannis looked at him and smirked. “Was that a rhetorical question?”

He then rose, stripped off his clothes and folded them neatly into a small pile on the deck chair. Then he stepped into the water and swam away. Lena looked after him. She let her thoughts drift and closed her

eyes.



Lena must have dozed off for a moment, at least without her noticing Damian had moved to the deck chair next to the hammock and had three muffins next to him. Her nose was running a little and when she rummaged in her pocket for a handkerchief, she found the business card of the man who had approached her in the park in Berlin. From all the new experiences, she had almost forgotten about him. She took the card in her hand and looked at it more closely. *Manuelo Fagundes - guitar repairs of all kinds*. She looked amused.

Damian seemed to have noticed that she was awake again and looked curiously in her direction. "What have you got there?"

"When we were in Görlitzer Park the day before yesterday, a man approached me. He complimented me and gave me his contacts."

"Oh how nice! What a good start." Damian grinned. "When will Juliet get back to Romeo?"

"I think I should really arrive first before I jump into a love adventure."

He nodded. "Too bad for Romeo, but sounds reasonable."

"Tell me, Damian, how have relationships and sexuality evolved? What is normal today?"

"Uh." He laughed. "What's normal?" He thought for a moment. "Compared to your time, things have probably gotten a little more relaxed and more diverse. There just isn't one way that's right for everyone. Just like everything else. What's right for you may not be right for me, and what's right today may not be right tomorrow. So, in general, freedom and diversity are seen as a basic requirement for a healthy approach to love, sexuality, and relationships."

"Sounds good. Freedom and diversity sound a lot like polyamory though. Is that common now?"

Damian grinned. "No, I didn't mean it that way. I referred to freedom more in the sense of personal freedom to choose from a variety of options."

"I see." Lena hesitated for a moment and asked him cautiously. "Do you practice free love in your community?"

“What do you mean by free love?” He narrowed his eyes.

“Well, everyone sleeps with anyone.” Lena smirked. “Or at least is allowed to.”

“Oh Yeah! Sex, Drugs and Rock'n'Roll.” Damian laughed out loud. “The absolute motto of our community. Grandma Petra right up front.”

Lena had to laugh. “Oh, God. I guess I'd better take it back then that my grandma would have been comfortable here.”

“No, seriously. What you describe I would not call free love, but free sexuality. Since free sexuality can lead to chaos and drama quickly, we avoid this practice in our community. It requires a very high level of mindfulness and reflection. There may be people for whom this is just right, but I think for many, free sexuality quickly becomes toxic. To what extent free sexuality also involves love is another question.”

“What do you mean by love?”

“Love, of course, is a big word. The ancient Greeks distinguished between different forms of love. Eros, philia and agape. Eros is the erotic-physical love. Philia is the more spiritual connection of people who have the same interests and ideas, and agape is the deep unselfish spiritual love. I mean by love rather this third form. The feeling of deep connection, affection and partial oneness with another person. I would almost equate love with this special feeling of deep connection. In a book I once read a very apt definition. Love is the extension of one's self to someone else for the benefit of mutual spiritual growth.”

Lena let the words sink in for a moment and sighed. “That's a really nice definition.” She looked at Damian thoughtfully and somewhat sadly. “If I'm honest, I've hardly ever experienced love like that with anyone in my life by that definition. In my last relationships I definitely had very nice and special moments. The sex was usually great, too.” She hesitated and looked thoughtfully at the lake. “But the shared spiritual growth was not the main focus.”

Damian nodded. “It sounds like you experienced being enamored, but not spiritual love.”

“What's the difference?”

“I think spiritual love and being enamored are two different things. Being enamored is the hormonal roller coaster ride.” He laughed. “Butterflies in the stomach and manic obsession with the other person.”

“Oh yeah.” She looked up at the sky and smirked. “Being enamored I know very well. But I think my past relationships, after the first stages, were fun-entertaining communities of interest at best. And honestly, it rarely looked any different in my friends circles. Instead, there were lots

drama, co-dependencies, and power plays.”

Damian made a contrite face. “I’m honestly sorry about that. I’ve encountered relationships like that, of course. But that’s the exception rather than the norm these days.”

She looked up. “So you feel this form of deep love for your girlfriend?”

Damian nodded. “Yes. And not just with her. I would also describe the relationship with my family and some very close friends as spiritual love. This love is a conscious choice. We are there for each other and support each other, especially when the other person needs it most.”

Lena smirked. “Wow, you seem to be really polyamorous.” Damian shrugged his shoulders.

After a while, Lena said, “I have felt such a deep connection to other people only very rarely. I feel a very great longing for it inside me, though.”

“It seems to me that there was not so much love in society in the past. Basically, we can fall in love with the whole world. My love is not limited to people. There are animals and natural places for which I feel that connection.”

He picked up a small stick from the ground and bent it. “When I was a little boy, there was a patch of woods where I spent a lot of time. I always felt incredibly good and content when I was in that forest. I felt like the forest knew me and I knew it.” He was silent for a moment, thoughtful. “Then at some point a big part of the forest was cut down to put a shopping center there.

“Oh, no!” Lena sat up in the hammock.

Damian nodded. “It was like a part of me died.”

“I know what you mean. When I used to watch documentaries about rainforests being cleared or factory farms, I felt like I’d been hurt myself.”

He smiled sadly. “That’s the tragedy of opening your heart. The more open you become, the more things can break your heart.”

For a while, they gazed silently at the lake. Jannis was still happily swimming his lanes there. He seemed to be in his element.

Lena pointed to the cupcakes. “Those look good!”

“Oh yeah, I forgot all about those. Would you like one?” He picked up a muffin and examined it contentedly. “They’re even still warm.”

Lena beamed. “Absolutely!”

He handed her a muffin and bit into his with relish. While Lena nibbled on hers, she had her eyes closed. “Delicious.”

After she had finished, she looked greedily at the remaining third

muffin, which lay on a plate next to Damian. She grinned at Damian. "I bet Jannis isn't a big muffin fan, is he?"

Damian looked amused. "Would you consider that to be a loving thought?"

She rubbed her hands together. "Self-love is also a form of love, isn't it?"

"Touché." He laughed and shoved the last piece of his muffin into his mouth.

"How do you think love and sexuality are related?" asked Lena thoughtfully.

Damian rubbed his chin. "I think that sexuality can be a good gateway for love and vice versa. But sexuality as physical erotic attraction is pickier. It needs tension to work. That's typically triggered by polarity with the opposite sex."

Lena frowned. "But such tension doesn't necessarily exist only between a man and a woman."

"That is true. But I would not talk about male and female, but about masculine and feminine energy. A biological man typically has primarily masculine energy and a biological woman has primarily feminine energy. Therefore, in a heterosexual couple, the man typically has the masculine part and the woman has the feminine part. Yet it can be the other way around, because each person has both parts in different proportions."

Lena raised a critical eyebrow. "I guess if we're not talking about masculine and feminine energy, but yin and yang qualities, I can go with that."

Damian smirked. "As you like. Words are relative."

"Interesting perspective in any case." Lena cocked her head to the side. "So you mean for each couple, there's typically one person with stronger yang energy and one with stronger yin energy?"

"Exactly. In the relationship, however, it is possible to play with the energies and alternate in the roles. The further apart the poles are, the more powerful Eros is. I have an image in my mind of two magnets that are strongly pulled to each other. This tension creates the excitement for each other. Nevertheless, in Eros they remain two separate magnets. That's okay. Playing with the tension is just what is exciting. In contrast, spiritual love is the merging of two beings into one. Too much merging can be very problematic for Eros love though, and conversely, too much polarity and tension can be detrimental for spiritual love."

"And that's why you're skeptical of free love?"

"I think you just mean free sexuality again. But yes, from experience,

free sexuality means playing with fire. But as I said, what's right is something that each person has to figure out for themselves. For some, free sexuality works very well."

"Yeah, that makes sense to me." Lena wiped a few crumbs off her sweater. "I once attended a community that cultivated the high ideal of free love."

"Free love or free sexuality?" probed Damian.

"Good point." She smirked. "There was talk of free love, but I think they actually meant free sexuality. There was a lot of drama and hurt lurking behind the nice, progressive surface. It didn't seem that well thought out to me, anyway."

"I think after the suppression of sexuality by the church, and after centuries of a patriarchal, oppressive society, a healthy relationship to sexuality needed to be rediscovered again. The hippies in '68 made a start. But partly the liberated sexual energy broke out quite destructively at first. The first steps of sexual emancipation were therefore mainly characterized by defiance against the old and not so much by what was natural and healthy and by a truly free love."

Lena nodded. "In the process, I guess there were a few dead ends to go down. What do you mean by free love though?"

"I think free love in the sense of deep attachment is a very natural thing. In principle, you can fall in love with the whole world and all people. A few wise people have probably achieved that. This love does not diminish from being shared widely. It would be absurd to tell a partner to close his heart to the world. But as I said before, it quickly becomes problematic when this agape love gets mixed with eros. Because when I feel deeply connected to someone and at the same time there is sexual attraction, it feels very natural to pursue Eros. As a heterosexual man, I can therefore enter into deep attachment love with male friends much less problematically than with women I find physically attractive. It's harder to keep a boundary there."

"And how does it work in your relationship? You're monogamous I guess?"

Damian nodded. "At some point, we experimented with open models, but that didn't work so well for us. What became more crucial for us was that we could talk about anything and we didn't have to hide anything from each other. And importantly, a person with a fulfilled sexuality doesn't have to chase every sexual adventure that comes along."

"How long have you been together?"

“Nearly nine years. We're even married.”

“Oh, wow!” Lena looked appreciative. Then she winked at him. “And what about Eros?”

He smiled. “There are ups and downs, of course, as always in life, but it never gets boring. We've gone through so many developments and experienced so much together. Plus, Taja regularly discovers and develops new sides of herself. This is another reason why it always feels fresh. I'm practically sleeping with someone else on a regular basis.” He grinned. “And she keeps encountering into a new Damian every now and then.”

For a while they looked at the lake in silence. When Jannis looked in their direction, they waved at him and he came swimming back to the shore. As he walked ashore, he was beaming from ear to ear, brushing water off his skin as he walked. While he was putting on his clothes, Damian asked him, “You have a special connection to the water, don't you?”

“Yeah, probably.”

“Where did that come from?”

“Good question.” Jannis put his head to the side thoughtfully. “I never thought about that before.”

“Has it always been like this?”

“I think so. When I was a kid, in summer I spent a lot of time in the water. There was a very nice lake not far from where I grew up.”

“And you went there a lot?”

“Very often.” Jannis nodded. “But then the lake was drained for open-pit coal mining. The whole area around it was fenced off and from one day to the next I couldn't go there anymore.” His face showed features of annoyance. “I haven't thought about that in a very long time.”

Lena looked at him sympathetically. “Was this lake a special place for you in your childhood?”

“Yes. Whenever I swam there, I felt very happy and powerful. During the summer vacation I was there almost every day. The calm water and the forest around made me forget everything else. Sometimes I also went fishing. There were huge pike there.”

Lena shook her head. “That damn coal industry.”

Jannis looked over the lake, lost in thought. “Once I secretly climbed over the fence to swim anyway. But the little water that had remained was strangely murky. There were even a few dead fish floating on the surface. I didn't want to swim there anymore. I never went back to the lake after that.” He looked thoughtful. “I think that was a really stressful

experience for me at the time. I didn't feel like doing anything for a while. Even in school, my grades dropped after that.” The memory seemed to make Jannis very thoughtful.

“It sounds like a typical climate trauma,” Damian said. “When a natural place that you feel so connected to gets destroyed, it's like you get hurt yourself.”

Damian's bracelet beeped. When he looked at it, his eyes widened. “Damn! My community here is having a plenary meeting now. I totally forgot about that.”

Lena looked at him questioningly. “And now? Shall we go back without you? We'll surely find the way.”

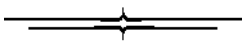
Damian thought for a moment. “Hm, if you like, you can come along. Probably no one would mind and it might be interesting for you. We'll use some interesting facilitation tools and talk very directly about needs, thoughts and feelings.”

“Why not?” Lena looked at Jannis. “What do you think?”

“It can't get any worse than the deans' meetings at my university in the past.” He grinned. “Maybe I can learn something.”

“Great! I'll take you with me. Here, this is for you, Jannis.” He handed him the muffin.

While Damian hurriedly led them back to the house, he turned around once more. “Just so you're not surprised. We are fans of what we call radical honesty in our community. This may seem unfamiliar to you, but authentic and clear communication often makes living together much easier than politely beating around the bush.”



About a dozen people sat in a circle in the community workshop room. Anaru and Taja were also present. Barbara, who had previously led the meditation circle, opened the round: “Welcome to our plenary today. Damian has brought us two guests who want to see how we handle our meetings methodically.” She pointed to the two guests, who were seated slightly away from the circle. “These are Lena and Jannis. The two of them have been in a prolonged coma sleep and are currently exploring the society of our time with Damian as their guide. Welcome!”

Those present nodded curiously at them.

Barbara continued, "Let's start as usual with a quick check-in round." She picked up a small colorful ball. "Who would like to start?"

A woman raised her hand and Barbara threw the ball to her. She caught it and began to talk, "I'm doing fantastic. I just got back from my hero's journey three days ago and I feel like I'm still floating in the clouds. Those were intense processes, but equally wonderful moments with the group. I think the demon day was my highlight. Totally liberating." She beamed at the group. "Now I'm happy to be back here and with you, and I'm curious about the plenary."

The others cheered her and she passed the ball to her neighbor. He looked at her. "When I hear that, I'm a little envious. I'd like to go on a hero's journey again sometime, too. I didn't sleep so well tonight and I'm a little bit exhausted from it. So I don't think it would be too bad if we ended a little early today." He smiled into the round and passed the ball on. They made the rounds until everyone in the circle had shared their state of mind and news.

When the ball moved back to Barbara, she began to speak while looking at a flat tablet in front of her, "You all have the agenda in front of you. The first item is about the construction of the house. Hakim, can you give us an update?" She tossed the ball to an Arab-looking man who reported, "Yes, construction is going well. In the next few days we need two more helping hands to plaster the walls. Does anyone feel like it? Otherwise, I'll ask again at dinner." Anaru and a woman came forward. "Great! Thank you, Anaru and Carolina. There's not much else to discuss about the construction right now. Next month, we should talk about finances again." He tossed the ball back to Barbara.

"Okay, next item. Since Michaela and Tom will be moving to Spain in the next few years for work reasons, their apartment will become available. Anaru has suggested that he would like to move in there with Carolina, as they currently share a room and would like more space. His shared room would be free then. Does anyone have any objection to this?"

Instantly, everyone in the circle pushed their hand forward with their thumb extended upward. Only one woman showed the open palm. Barbara glanced at her. "Verena, what are your concerns?"

"So honestly, I think you, Anaru, move a little too often. You've only been here three years and this would be your third move. I think you should start deciding where you want to live."

Anaru looked at her somewhat contritely. "Sorry, you're right. I was

really curious about the Ownhome, but then it was difficult with the music and our band and now I'm with Carolina and we would really like to live together. I don't think I will continue moving back and forth. And I solemnly vow that if I move again within the next two years, I'll do the community area cleaning for a whole month alone."

"All right." She grinned. "I take back my resistance."

"Okay, great," Barbara said. "That's settled."

Anaru and Carolina beamed at each other.

"Next agenda item," Barbara continued. "Our annual garden party. At the recent one we had a surplus of 867€ due to the donations from the raffle and the gift box. What should we do with it? Suggestions submitted so far are: a) We use it to build a tree house in the garden for the children. b) We donate the money to the community chapter for local projects. c) We put the money into our discretionary funds. Or d) We get a 3D printer for our workshop room. I suggest we use systemic consensus to come to a joint decision. Does anyone have another suggestion before that?"

Hakim spoke up. "The main house could use a new coat of paint. I think we should invest the money in it."

"Okay, good thought. Any other ideas or is that it?" No one came forward. Barbara tapped on her tablet and then the five suggestions appeared on the wall behind her, one below the other.

"We could do a round of opinions now, of course, but since it's not too much money and the proposals are pretty self-explanatory, I think we can go right ahead with the voting. Do we have consent for that?" All thumbs went up.

"Great. Please enter your resistance points for each option then."

Everyone present tapped on small tablets. Damian turned to Lena and Jannis and whispered to them, "Do you remember the systemic consensus method? I showed it to you briefly in Görlitzer Park." They both nodded.

A moment later, Barbara clapped her hands. "Everyone has voted and we have a result."

She tapped once on her display and then the respective resistance scores appeared on the large wall next to the suggestions:

- A) Tree house: 42 points
- B) Donation to local chapter: 68 points
- C) Free resources: 35 points
- D) 3D printer: 49 points
- E) Painting: 32 points

“With that, we have a decision. We're going to invest the money to repaint the main house, and if there's anything left over, the money will go into our open funds.” The group cheered shortly.

After that, the plenary continued with a discussion about communal grocery purchases, thoughts about an extension to the main house, and about a new community member who seemed to be a bit difficult at times.

Finally, Barbara announced, “That wraps up the official agenda. Are there any other items we should discuss?” No one came forward. “Great, let's wrap it up for today. I suggest we do a quick round of appreciation. I ask for consent on three. One. Two. Three.” On three, everyone gave a thumbs up. “Great!” She looked around with a warm smile. “Then the space is open now for five minutes of expression of gratitude and appreciation.”

An older man made a hand gesture and Barbara threw the colorful ball to him. “Christian and Sophia, I wanted to thank you for bringing in the Sacred Architecture project. In the beginning, some people were skeptical whether we really needed another building here and if we had to try something that exotic. After all, we could have built a tried and tested straw bale house again. But after you put so much heart and soul and energy into the project, I have the feeling that it will be really exciting. In general, you two often bring in new ideas that I'm sometimes a little critical of at first.” At this point, everyone laughed. “But I have to say that I find you folks to be a great asset here. I hate to admit it, but sometimes I secretly almost wish you would come around with more of your silly ideas.” Sophia looked at him lovingly and put her hand over her heart.

After a few more heartwarming contributions, Barbara spoke up, whereupon the ball flew to her. She looked at Damian. “Damian, I think it's great how sensible you are with the kids. When Ranna's cat died last week, it was pretty hard on her. It was great that you told her stories all night and stayed with her when she needed to process that. I couldn't think of a better godparent for her. Thank you so much!” Damian beamed at her.

“Okay, time's about up, time for one last thank you. Who wants to?”

Lena spoke up and cleared her throat to draw attention to herself. “May I too?”

“Sure. Why not?” said Barbara and tossed the ball to the visibly excited Lena.

“I want to thank all of you. I have never felt so welcome anywhere. I've

been through a very difficult time, and I didn't have much hope that the world I come from had a future worth living." Her voice failed for a moment. She looked a little lost until she regained her composure. "But the last few days, and this warmhearted round, have proven me wrong. Thank you for letting me be part of it today. Most of all, I want to thank you, Damian!" Jannis also nodded affirmatively at these words. Damian was smiling from ear to ear.

"It's our pleasure!" Barbara let that moment sink in. Then she struck a cymbal.

"Thank you all for this beautiful round of appreciations! With that, we'll move on to the closing round."

Similar to the check-in, the closing round was a short round for afterthoughts, reflection and anything else that wanted to be said. When it was over, Jannis looked at his watch. The plenary had lasted only fifty minutes. Jannis shook his head in disbelief. "That was by far the most effective meeting I've ever experienced. I wish we had had this kind of meeting at my university."

"I'm blown away, too," said Lena. "The round was totally participatory and harmonious, and incredibly effective at the same time. I didn't know the two could be done together."

Anaru came up to them. "Damian, when is the next co-transformative space anyway?"

"Next week Saturday. Eleven to six o'clock, as usual. Are you in?"

Anaru looked at his bracelet and nodded. "Yes, looks good. Great! I'm totally up for joining in again. Is there a theme?"

"Yes. Money."

"Money?" Anaru looked excited. "Very good. I'll be off then. See you later." They bumped their fists together and Anaru disappeared.

"What is a co-transformative space?" asked Jannis.

"It's a special workshop format. Mostly it's about inner and social transformation. The whole thing is co-creative, so there is no predefined agenda, but rather we decide spontaneously together in the group how the workshop will be structured. Hence the name co-transformative space. Sometimes there's an overarching theme that sets a rough framework, but otherwise, anything can happen." He laughed. "Really anything."

"Like what?" asked Lena.

"Sharing rounds on interesting topics, dancing, coaching, improvisational theater, anger processes, massages, music. Usually, the result is a really colorful mix. The special thing is that exactly that

happens, what everyone is in the mood for. After each activity, we have another round of brainstorming about what's going to happen next. So nothing has to be prepared.”

“Sounds really interesting,” Lena said.

“If you'd like, you're welcome to join us next week.”

“I'd love to!” said Lena enthusiastically.

Jannis nodded. “I'll think about it, too.”



After Lena registered at the clinic reception for the therapy session, she was met by a middle-aged Asian-looking woman. She extended her hand. “Hello Lena, my name is Meilin Sheng. Feel free to call me Meilin.”

She led Lena into a small, very comfortably furnished room with two wide armchairs in the middle. A large painting of a sleeping tiger decorated the wall. Next to it, stood a floor-to-ceiling plant. A small fountain gushed in the corner.

With a welcoming gesture, Meilin motioned her to sit down and poured her a glass of water from a large carafe. “What can I do for you?”

Lena looked a little uncertain. “I think I have a traumatic memory that I want to work on.”

Meilin looked deep into her eyes. “How are you feeling right now, Lena?”

“Quite okay. But I'm a little apprehensive about diving back into that memory and engaging with the past. I don't want to wake up any old ghosts.”

Meilin nodded. “Yes, I understand that.”

Lena continued. “But I think the time has come for me to face old demons and come to terms with them.” Lena smiled hesitantly at her. “It's about that moment when I found my dead brother.”

“Okay. Have you ever had trauma therapy before?”

Lena shook her head.

“In that case, I suggest that I first tell you something about trauma theory before we begin. For many people, it's helpful to understand the dynamics. Then you feel less at the mercy of your situation.”

“Yeah, that sounds good.”

“I’ll start with the basics.” Meilin took a deep breath and smiled. “Trauma is an overload of the nervous system. A situation is so overwhelming that, in a sense, humans get stuck in time. In post-traumatic stress disorder, PTSD, the body remains in this state of alarm. That can even last for decades. The body just can’t shut down.”

“Hmm, that sounds familiar.” Lena looked thoughtfully out of the window. “After that incident I could barely sleep for a while.”

Meilin nodded in understanding and continued: “The decisive factor for the creation of trauma is not whether an experience is objectively crass, but whether or not one’s own nervous system is overwhelmed by the situation. In principle, even a visit to the dentist or an embarrassing situation can lead to a trauma if it is too much at that moment. Conversely, even extreme experiences like rape or war don’t necessarily have to lead to trauma if the nervous system manages to deal with it.”

“Okay. And what does it mean that the nervous system can handle it?”

Meilin thought for a moment. “In dangerous situations, there are three genetically programmed options for action, so to speak: Fight, flight or freeze. If fight and flight seem hopeless, then the body falls into freeze.”

Lena interrupted her. “I’ve heard that before. But why is that? That’s extremely impractical, isn’t it, to freeze in a dangerous situation?”

“Not necessarily. In a job interview, yes, but the evolutionary advantage is that the hunting instinct of predators is dampened by such a lack of movement. For example, if a mouse is caught by a cat and plays dead, the cat potentially loses interest. Or it may think the mouse has been dead for some time and is no longer edible at all.”

“Okay, I see.”

“Such a freeze, however, is by no means a relaxation of the nervous system, but a total tension. In a freeze, the two antagonists of the nervous system, sympathetic nervous system and parasympathetic nervous system are both highly active.”

Meilin pressed her palms forcefully against each other to illustrate that. “Even though my hands are almost motionless now, the system is under great tension. In comparison, when I hold my hands against each other without force, it looks almost the same from the outside. However, there is a huge difference internally.”

“Yes, that makes sense. I know that inner tension. It’s terrible.”

“In nature, at some point when the danger is over, the mouse would come out of shock and hop away. In the process, its nervous system would regulate itself back down.”

“And why doesn't that happen with humans?”

“The problem is that our conscious thinking often suppresses our body's natural impulses. For example, you want to run away from a job interview, but you forbid yourself to do so. This builds up internal tension. When the interview is over and the danger has been averted, it would in principle be possible to make up for the flight and thus relieve the tension. But our conscious mind often suppresses such adaptive impulses out of fear and shame. As a result, they get stuck in the body.”

“I understand.”

“Part of the relieving of tension is shivering. Shivering happens when a charged nervous system slowly relaxes and lets the tension out. That's totally healthy. But in the old days, that wasn't known. In hospitals, people were sometimes even given sedative injections for tremors, suppressing the healthy discharging process.”

Lena made a stern face.

“The good news is that if the processing of the traumatic experience is made up for later, in principle any trauma can be healed. To do this, the traumatic event must be relived in a safe setting and then finally completed by the nervous system. The decisive factor is a safe frame in which this rerun takes place, and this is where the functioning of memory comes into play. Memory, after all, does not function like a hard drive that simply plays back static memories. Rather, each memory as it is recalled is re-stored in a new way. Your emotional state and posture influence how the memory is re-stored.”

Lena looked thoughtful. “That means, for example, if I'm in a really good mood and then tell a good friend about an unpleasant situation, that memory will be stored in my brain as less unpleasant afterwards?”

“That's right! Your organism notices that your body is relaxed when you tell it. So it couldn't have been that bad. From then on, the memory suddenly gets a little less unpleasant.”

“Ah, I see.” Lena nodded and took a sip of water.

“So in trauma therapy, the trick is to first get yourself into a relaxed, safe, and positive state, and only from there to carefully step into the stressful memory. This should be done slowly and step by step. As soon as your body is about to fall back into a state of alarm, I get you out of the painful memory and bring you back into a safe relaxed state.”

Meilin put her hands together in an inviting gesture. “That's what we can do today. Would you like to do that?”

Lena looked at the picture of the tiger and nodded resolutely. “I have traveled thirty years into the future. It's time to stop running away from

my past. Let's do it!"

"Alright!" Meilin refilled their cups and looked deeply at Lena. "Now please take five deep breaths in and out and relax." Lena closed her eyes and began to breathe deeply

"Good, how do you feel right now and how does your body feel?"

Lena focused inward for a moment. "I can feel my heartbeat. My stomach is a little tense." She squinted her eyes. "I can barely feel my legs." Then she looked up again.

"Okay. Then let's get you positively charged up and grounded before we step into the past." Meilin rose. "Stand up, please, and stretch your arms far up." Lena followed the suggestion.

"When was the last time you felt really powerful and confident?"

"Hmm." Lena thought for a moment. "When I helped a family of refugees to get a permanent residence permit. The family was going to be deported and it was a battle with the authorities. But in the end we succeeded and the family was allowed to stay. That was a great day." As she told the story, Lena visibly straightened up.

"Can you feel this power of success in your body?"

Lena nodded and Meilin continued, "Where do you feel it?"

Lena closed her eyes in concentration. "I feel a warmth in my chest. Also a slight tingling in my throat. I feel more relaxed, also more firm. I'm feeling my feet much more right now."

"Perfect. Now memorize that feeling, and when you're done with it, please sit down again."

Lena remained in the posture for a while. She was standing very upright. Then she opened her eyes. Pride was in her gaze. She smiled at Meilin and sat down.

Meilin looked serious. "If you're ready for this now, please tell me how you found your brother."

Lena looked at her and her features hardened abruptly. "Okay." She gathered herself and began to talk. "I had tried to contact him for a few days. He wasn't answering the phone and wasn't responding to messages. Of course, he had been having a difficult time after our parents died. But being unavailable like that was very unusual for him. So I decided to stop by and see him."

Meilin nodded and listened to her carefully.

Lena continued: "I finally stood in front of his apartment door and rang the bell, but he didn't open the door. I therefore decided to take a look inside. He had given me an emergency key to his apartment some time before." Lena's face grew tense and her hands nervously fingered

the armrests. "So I unlocked the door and entered the apartment. It smelled moldy inside, almost repulsive. I took a few steps through the apartment. In the bedroom, I found him." Her eyes had widely opened, her face gotten deadly serious.

"Okay, Lena. Let's make a cut here for now. Now please stand up again, stretch and tell me what you had for breakfast this morning."

"Uh," Lena looked confused, stood up and raised her arms. "Cereal with berries and nuts."

Meilin also stretched and leaned to the sides in turn. "That sounds delicious. How does your body feel right now?"

"Hm. Strange. Tense on the one hand, but the movement right now feels good. My head is a little dull and my chest is tight again."

"Okay. Then shake yourself some more and when you feel it's enough, stand still again and try to recall the positive memory with the refugee family."

Lena closed her eyes. After a while, she straightened up noticeably.

"Very good. How do you feel now?"

"Quite well. My chest is expanding again."

"Then use the memory to strengthen yourself a bit more until you're positively recharged."

After a short while, Lena let herself sink back into the chair.

"Do you want to continue?" asked Meilin.

"Yes."

"Okay, then please continue your story."

Lena nodded and looked out of the window. "So I was in his apartment, standing in the doorway to his bedroom. There he was hanging by a rope. The rope around his neck was attached to a hook in the ceiling. That's where his punching bag had usually hung." Lena's breathing quickened and her chin began to tremble slightly.

"What are you feeling in your body right now?"

"Anxiety. A lump in the chest, pressure in the head."

"Take another deep breath, please."

Lena breathed. Then she began to shake violently.

"That's good. Allow the tremors. Trust your body. The shaking corresponds to a discharge. Your nervous system is just realigning. You don't have to do anything."

After a while, the trembling became gentler and then ebbed away. Lena looked at Meilin questioningly.

"If you want to, go on."

"Okay. I stood in the doorway and felt frozen. There was a chair on

the floor underneath him. So he had hanged himself and left me alone.” Lena’s mouth was a thin line, her posture seemed rigid. “His eyes were sticking out and...oh God.” Her eyes looked panicked and her breathing quickened again.

Meilin showed a concentrated look. “Okay, Lena. Look at me and give me your hands. Now feel your feet on the floor. Name three objects you see!” Lena looked somewhere between panicked and confused. “Come on, three objects.” Lena looked around aimlessly, “That picture there...the lamp and the book back there.”

“Perfect! Now stand up and stretch your arms upward.” Lena followed the prompt.

“Breathe in deeply, three times.” Lena filled her lungs and some tension fell from her.

“You’re doing great. What’s twelve times seventeen?”

“Uh... A hundred and uh, I don’t know...”

“That’s good enough.” Meilin laughed. “I just wanted to put your brain in a different mode,” she said with a wink.

Lena seemed confused, but calmed down again. She was out of the inner panic zone again.

“How are you feeling right now, Lena?”

Lena looked rather confused. “A little funny. Pressure in my head, tension in my face. My legs are tingling a bit.”

“Okay. Let’s get into another positive memory this time. When was the last time you felt really safe and secure? Maybe a walk in the woods or a cuddle?”

Lena thought for a moment. “Yeah. I got something.” She closed her eyes. Instantly, her head jerked. Then tears came, running down her nose and dripping onto her sweater.

Meilin put her hand onto Lena’s shoulder. “Just let it out. Whatever comes up. You are a very strong woman.”

The tears continued to flow for a while.

Finally, they dried up, Lena opened her eyes and looked relieved. She seemed more relaxed.

“How do you feel now?”

“Lighter. My head is lighter. I feel relatively empty now, but not in a negative way. More like freed from a burden.”

“Very well. Then stretch again, and when you’re ready, let’s go back to the old memory with your brother.”

“Okay.” Lena stretched out her arms once more. Then she began to talk again, “So I was standing in the doorway and I saw him hanging

there. On the desk, I discovered a note. I didn't know what to do. I felt pure horror. First my parents dead and then him, too. I felt left alone.”

“Now please feel into your body again. Is there any impulse to move?”

Lena concentrated. “Yes. In the legs. I think to run away.”

“Aha. Then let's try to catch up with this impulse. Please stand up once and imagine that you are now standing in the doorway with your brother,” she pointed to the corner, “and your brother is hanging there. Now reconnect with this escape impulse and follow it through. So really run out of the room, if that's your inner impulse. But please do this very consciously and very slowly, as if in slow motion.”

Lena nodded, mentally got back into the memory and closed her eyes. Then she turned and fled in slow motion. She pushed open the door, stepped out and disappeared around the corner. Meilin went after her. “Very good. If that's enough, stop for now and feel how your body feels now.”

Lena's legs began to shake heavily. “Whoa. I have a very intense tingling in my legs.”

“Very good, Lena! Something's loosening right now.” Meilin put her hand on Lenas back. “You're doing fantastic. Just feel into your legs and let it out, whatever comes up.”

A few minutes passed before the trembling stopped.

Afterwards, they went back into the room and sat down.

Meilin took a big sip of water and looked at Lena. “Principally, we could go on, but I have a feeling that it's enough for today. What do you think?”

“Yes. That was a very extreme experience.” Lena took a deep breath. “I think I need to digest that first.”

Meilin nodded. “I know how exhausting it is. But you're really strong and this session should have taken quite a bit of charge out of your system already. The memory should be a lot less scary now.”

Lena looked thoughtful and then nodded enthusiastically. “That's right. Now when I imagine telling the whole thing to anyone, it already feels much less challenging than before. Still very messy, but nowhere near as horrifying as before.”

“Great!” Meilin smiled. “I think a few more sessions on the subject would be useful. Often other feelings come up under the first layer. You are welcome to book another session in the next weeks. Just get in touch if you want to continue.”

“I will definitely do that. Thank you so much!” Lena beamed.

“My pleasure!”

“What's the name of the method you used?”

“I have combined various methods, but the so-called Somatic Experiencing is most formative for my work. It goes back to the psychologist Peter Levine, a prominent pioneer of trauma research. I once had the honor of attending one of his seminars. The approach is extremely effective, which is why I have been working predominantly with it for some time now”.

“So basically it's about consciously reliving the trauma?”

“Yes, but as I said, the conditions how you do it are crucial. In the past, some people thought they simply had to tell traumatic experiences over and over again until desensitization occurred. But it's not that simple. It can work, but in the worst case, it can lead to retraumatization and even push the emotional charge up and up.”

“Ah. That makes sense. A friend of mine used to tell me I needed to talk to her about these things, that it would set me free. But I had a bad feeling about it. Then I guess my gut feeling was right.”

“If the friend doesn't have therapeutic training and might be overwhelmed with holding a safe space for you, probably yes.”

“And this running away in slow motion was sort of a stuck motion impulse from the past?”

Meilin nodded. “Something like that. When such movement impulses are suppressed, they get stuck in the nervous system. When you acted out your escape impulse, your nervous system was finally able to unwind. The shaking corresponded to a decrease of that charge. Doing the whole thing in slow motion gives the process more attention and thus takes it deeper.”

“Wow!” A sigh escaped Lenas lips and she took another sip of water.

“Yeah, I'm always impressed by these processes. You can let all kinds of stuck emotions and actions out. Very interesting with anger, too. You can beat up your ex in slow motion.” Meilin laughed.

“But isn't it dangerous, to allow such destructive impulses? I mean, doesn't that lower the inhibition threshold to do something like that in reality?”

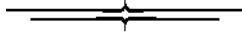
“Quite the opposite. It is precisely by getting the pressure out of the system that relaxation occurs in everyday life. Therefore, violent acts actually become less likely. It is much more dangerous to suppress such impulses for a long time. Then the pressure increases until it explodes...”

“And ones becomes choleric,” Lena muttered.

“Exactly. Or the anger turns inward and leads to depression.”

Lena closed her eyes and shook herself again. “That was really intense.

But I feel really relieved right now. Again, thank you so much!”



Lena stands in front of a dark brown door. A few colorful postcards are stuck to it, which she recognizes. It is the door to the room of her youth. She hesitates for a moment, then grabs the handle, opens the door and steps over the threshold into her girl's room.

In the middle of the room is a large bed. Sitting on it is a teenage girl who looks familiar to her. Lena looks around. The large windows are wide open and a light breeze plays with the blue curtains. There are stacks of books on the desk and posters of various boy bands on the walls. The closet is full of colorful clothes. Socks lie scattered on the floor. On a shelf stands her stuffed bunny Hanno.

She spent much of her youth in this room, laughing with friends, crying, writing love letters and crumpling them until the paper balls piled up in the trash bin. Here she has raged at the injustice of her parents, celebrated birthdays, mourned dead pets. How often did she lie on the bed and stare at the white ceiling? So many things began in this room.

Lena takes a few more steps toward the bed. The girl on the bed turns around and looks at her. But she can't remember who the girl is.

Lena goes to the bed and sits down next to her. Then intense emotions run through the girl's features. Lena looks into her eyes with understanding and takes her in her arms. Thereupon the girl sheds heavy tears of grief, goes through blood-curdling anger and teeth-chattering fear. Lena is not frightened by anything and holds the girl. She guides her through the emotions and gives her security and support.

Finally, the girl's features calm down. Lena looks into her deep eyes. At this moment she finally recognizes herself, recognizes the youthful Lena. She closes her eyes.

When she opens her eyes after what feels like an eternity, the girl has disappeared. Instead, two blue butterflies are sitting on the edge of the bed.

Lena feels clarity and wholeness. She feels reconciled with her past and youth. Reconciled with all parts. The two butterflies rise from the bed and fly out of the window. At this moment Lena feels the pull of the wind. It is like an inner magnet that leads her to the window. Standing on the window sill, she looks out. She hesitates for a moment. Then she closes her eyes and jumps.

A lightness unknown flows through her body. When she opens her eyes, she floats in the wind. She can fly.

She soars into the sky, shooting through bright clouds and gliding over snow-covered mountains. She flies higher and higher. Flies over bright blue seas, over the roofs of vibrant cities and over rice terraces.

A feeling of deep joy and fulfillment flows through her. She cries tears of joy and they rain down on blossoming deserts below her.

Day 7 - Earth College

“Please start the boarding now!” A woman gestured to those waiting at the gate. Jannis picked up his small backpack and walked with the others toward the waiting airship. His eyes fell on numerous other large airships parked to his right in the Tempelhof Airport. He boarded the red airship via a small ramp. Inside, a spacious interior awaited him. In addition to the normal rows of seats, there were several air sofas on one side of the cabin, which a group of young people had already taken into their possession. Innovative solutions had obviously been used to save weight. Jannis sat down at a window seat. There was a pleasant amount of legroom. While he looked through the round hatch at the Tempelhof Field, an attractive woman, perhaps in her thirties, sat down next to him and gave him a friendly nod.

Shortly thereafter, the pilot announced the upcoming departure. A little later, a small jolt went through the airship. They had taken off and were floating toward the sky. Jannis looked out of the window as the Tempelhof Field beneath them grew smaller and smaller.

He turned to the woman sitting next to him. “This is my first airship flight,” he confessed to her with a smile. “Have you flown in one like this before?”

She looked confused for a moment. “Yeah, I fly on airships all the time. My parents are from Sweden and every few months I visit them.” She looked at him curiously. “How come you've never flown one before? Fear of flying?”

Jannis laughed. “No, no. There are a few developments I missed. I've been in an induced coma for a few years and only recently woke up. Now it's a matter of rediscovering the world.”

Her eyes lit up. “Then you must have been away a long time.” She extended her hand. “My name is Nora.”

“I'm Jannis.” He shook her hand. “Nice to meet you!”

“Nice to meet you, too! What makes you travel to Malmö, Jannis?”

“I am a professor of economics and want to visit an old colleague there. Hopefully he can enlighten me about the current state of my discipline. Economics has obviously changed considerably in recent years.” He looked at her seriously. “I've been away for almost 30 years.”

“That's long! Thirty years ago, I was a daisy.” She laughed.

He looked at her curiously. “May I ask what you do for a living?”

“I am a biologist. I work for the European Commission for Nature Conservation and am mainly involved in the renaturation of the new

nature reserves on the German coast.”

“Interesting!”

Once again, the pilot made an announcement. She said they were expecting the best flying weather and would probably reach Malmö on time. The airship turned slightly north. The flight was pleasantly gentle and quiet, and Jannis let his thoughts wander as the green roofs of Berlin passed beneath him. After a short time, they had already left the city behind.

Jannis turned back to his neighbor. “The landscapes below us look so different than they used to.”

“Less monoculture probably.” She smiled. “When I was a kid, it looked a lot more monotonous and boring from above.” She shook her head. “Crazy times back then. If growing corn for biogas plants was lucrative because of the subsidies, then corn was planted. Regardless of whether the soil was suitable for it or not. With the right fertilizers and pesticides, almost anything worked.”

“And today?”

“Today, consistent care is taken to preserve the soil, maintain crop rotations, and use pesticides only in emergencies. Meanwhile, most farmers follow permaculture principles and combine different plant species.”

“But isn't that much more complex and expensive?”

Nora laughed in surprise. “More expensive? No. The practice of old times, that was expensive. Maybe not directly for those who bought the crops, but for nature. The price was paid by the environment, the soil, the insects and by people getting sick. And without the EU subsidies, most crops would not have been lucrative anyway.” She shook her head in annoyance. “Nowadays, environmental destruction is no longer subsidized. Besides, permaculture is highly efficient. If the right plants are cleverly combined on a healthy soil, there's no need for fertilizer, much of irrigation or costly plowing.”

Jannis grinned. “I visited a farmer a few days ago and he said something similar. Honestly, I didn't take it seriously and dismissed him as ideologically stubborn.” He laughed. “But maybe I'm the ideologically stubborn one.”

Nora smiled at him. “We're all children of our time. Who knows what people will think about today's society fifty years from now?”

Jannis looked amused. For a while they were silent.

Finally, Nora picked up the conversation again: “Recently I visited a high-tech field in the UK. It was freaky, I tell you. There were drones

and autonomous machines everywhere. Planting, pruning, tending and harvesting - all fully automated. There were even little miniature beetles biting off weeds. These things were solar-powered and run around the field all day.”

“Sounds very interesting. Is it otherwise unusual to use drones in agriculture?”

“At least not to that extent. Some modern farmers are purists and want to do everything naturally as much as possible. But in principle, drones can be extremely helpful, especially in the design of permaculture fields.”

“In what way?”

“Drones can independently check soil conditions, measure and analyze everything. Meanwhile, a computer system can calculate the ideal cultivation plan for the field from the wealth of data. Humans can specify which crops should be grown. Parameters such as soil conditions, weather, rain runoff and so on are taken into account. In the end, the system spits out a highly detailed plan of what should grow where.”

“That sounds impressive. So the fields are individually designed?”

Nora nodded. “To unleash the full potential of the land, there are no prefabricated blueprints that are imposed on the land.”

“It sounds like a farmer can leave most of the work to automated machines.” Jannis laughed. “Maybe I should become a farmer, too after all.”

Nora laughed and shook her head. “I’m afraid the use of these technologies will probably be reserved for large cooperatives or state-owned enterprises for the benefit of the general public. It makes little sense for society if wealthy people can set up such computerized fields and later harvest and cash in without any effort of their own.”

Jannis looked at her with amusement. “In the past, I would have dismissed something like that as communism. But I have to admit, it makes sense to me.”

For another moment they were silent. Jannis looked out of the large window. Below him, he saw green forests and lakes.

Nora glanced at him. “If this is your first Airship flight, you probably haven’t been on the upper deck?”

Jannis shook his head. “No.”

“Well, then I should give you a little tour. Otherwise you’ll miss the best part.” She smiled at him and rose. He followed her to a staircase that led to the upper deck. There were more seats there and also a couple of hammocks dangling from the ceiling.

Jannis looked around excitedly, "It is really comfortable here!"

Nora nodded. "Indeed. If you're tired, you can take a nap here."

"It's no comparison to flying before. I could never sleep because of the noise and the cramped conditions. Long-haul flights in particular were a torture."

"Oh yes, and air flights are much better for the climate, too."

Nora led him to the front end of the upper deck, where an arched window front awaited them, offering a fantastic view of the landscape below. A man stood there with his daughter and pointed to a couple of flying objects in the distance that Jannis could not identify. He pointed at them and turned to Nora, "What's that back there?"

"These are flying wind farms. Like this airship, the wind turbines float through light gases and are fixed to the ground by a rope. Since the wind is much stronger at these heights, comparatively more energy is produced than by wind turbines on the ground. Moreover, no one needs to complain about the noise. Only during heavy storms do the turbines have to be hauled in and anchored firmly to the ground."

Jannis looked at a dozen or so of the flying wind turbines below them. Nora pointed to the coast. "By the way, that region down there is one of the nature reserves I'm in charge of professionally."

Jannis nodded appreciatively. "It seems, nature has recovered in the last decades. In your view, what have been the key actions that have slowed climate change?"

She thought for a moment and then pointed to two hammocks. "Shall we sit down?"

After they had moved to two hammocks, she continued: "Different regions of the world have found different approaches to deal with the climate crisis. In the beginning, a few small countries in particular showed what was possible. Iceland, Costa Rica and Sri Lanka were pioneers of an eco-friendly transformation of their cities and economic policies. To avert the climate crisis, it was crucial that the focus of action broadened, from merely reducing CO₂ emissions, to regenerating ecosystems and local biotopes."

Jannis looked at her uncertainly. "What do you mean? Wasn't CO₂ the absolute main problem?"

"CO₂ concentration is a key driver of climate change, but it's a symptom rather than the cause."

"And what was the real cause?"

"The destruction of the earth ecosystem." Nora took a deep breath. "The real problem has been the destruction of nature through forest

clearing, monocultures, pesticides, pollution of the oceans and the resulting extinction of species and insects, drought and advancing deserts, extreme weather, and so on. All of this, of course, leads to massive concentrations of CO₂ and other climate gases in the atmosphere, but that's often rather the end of the chain of effects rather than the beginning.”

Jannis frowned thoughtfully. “But doesn't a high CO₂ concentration make everything worse?”

“Sure, everything is connected. But suppose a gigantic machine had been developed to pump CO₂ into the ground in huge quantities. Would that really have ended the climate crisis? Would that have meant we could have continued to merrily cut down the rainforest? Could we then have proceeded with fishing dry the oceans and filling them up with garbage instead until plants and animals would be wiped out?”

Jannis scratched his forehead.

Nora continued, “The focus on CO₂ blinded us to all the other important factors of a healthy climate. In trying to quantify everything, the baby was thrown out with the bathwater.”

“What do you mean?”

“All model calculations are based on simulations, which can never capture the true dynamics of an ecosystems. In science, it may be possible to calculate that one hectare of forest absorbs so-and-so much CO₂. Does that mean corporations can happily cut down the Amazon rainforest in exchange for planting a few trees in Brandenburg?” Nora said with a sharp voice. “And what about the whales? At first glance, they don't absorb any CO₂. So can we fish them off?” She looked at him with a piercing gaze and Jannis looked back a little embarrassed.

Nora shook her head. “No, of course not. Whales are extremely important for the marine ecosystem. Just as basically all living things take on an importance for the functioning of their habitats. But this realization has come about only gradually and very slowly. Neither ecosystems nor living things should be reduced to just one function. The true value of a forest cannot be expressed in terms of its carbon storage capacity alone. Forests, mangroves and wetlands are more than that. They are the lungs of our planet.”

“And what was the right course of action?”

She smiled at him. “The focus on climate change mitigation shifted to regenerating nature and protecting local ecosystems. Most countries have focused on subsidiarity and decentralized, ecoligent solutions.”

“Ecoligent?”, Jannis interrupted her. “What does that mean?”

“Ecological and intelligent at the same time. Local people usually have the most interest in ensuring that nature is doing well and know best what that requires. From a decentralized, local and eco-friendly approach, a massive reduction in CO2 emissions is an automatic side effect. So is recovering insect populations, safeguarding biodiversity, and halting desertification.”

Jannis rubbed his chin. “That sounds really impressive. I don't even know what to say to that.” He laughed.

“Then keep quiet forever!” she said and laughed.

They were silent for a while. Eventually, Nora looked at him. “Did you know that forests create rain cycles?”

Jannis shook his head. “I heard something like that once, but I have no idea how it works.”

“Forests create low pressure areas that attract rain clouds. In addition, trees secrete microparticles into the atmosphere on which evaporating water condenses, causing rain to fall over forests.”

“Really?”

Nora nodded. “The wonders of nature are amazing. Life creates the conditions for life. In Egypt, parts of the Sahara have been greened again. Millions of trees have been planted to take back the land from the desert, piece by piece. As a result, the microclimate in these regions has changed and rainfall has increased.”

Jannis got goose bumps. “Really? That's possible?”

Nora nodded. “It will take time. But one day, parts of North Africa and the Middle East could be forests again. Just as they were thousands of years ago.”

Again, the pilot announced that the airship was about to reach Malmö and that they were about to land. Jannis looked at his watch. He had been on the airship for only an hour and a half.

As they walked back to the lower deck, Jannis turned to Nora, “That was fast. Have you ever made a long-distance flight with an airship?”

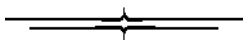
She nodded. “Yes, I once flew to Nigeria. The flight took a good twenty hours, but I was able to sleep very well and got off fresh the morning I arrived. The much more expensive plane would have taken only six hours, but I would then have needed time to recover from the flight.”

They reached their seats again and Jannis looked out of the hatch. The rooftops of Malmö already stretched out below them. Similar to Berlin, the city had undergone a massive greening. Most of the houses and roofs were densely overgrown.

A short time later, the airship descended on Malmö Airport. The passengers walked to the exits and Nora also rose. "Have a nice stay here in Malmö!" she said.

"Thank you! It was a pleasure to meet you. Thank you for all the info! It was very interesting to me."

"The pleasure was all mine." She leaned forward and took Jannis by surprise when she warmly embraced him. She took a step back, waved goodbye once more and disappeared into the exit.



Jannis took his backpack, left the airship via a ramp and walked across the landing field to the airport building. The arriving air travelers were met by their families and others, and Jannis also spotted a familiar face. Professor Erich Langenberg was an old friend from student days and held a professorship in economics at Malmö University. He was a small man who was always in a good mood. Jannis walked up to him and when Erich spotted him, his eyes lit up.

"Jannis, my good man!" he called from some distance away, "good to see you!"

Jannis held out his hand, which the latter ignored. Instead, he embraced him.

"My God Jannis, you look almost exactly as I remember you, only a little thinner. Haven't you aged at all? I can only dream of such full hair." Erich laughed and ran his hand over his almost bald head.

Jannis grinned. "You're only as old as you feel."

Erich grinned. "Well, then, I'm still a good twenty-five."

"You look really fit!" said Jannis.

"Thank you. How are you?"

"Very good. The airship flight was an interesting experience." He hesitated. "But times have changed quite a bit. I guess I still have to get used to some things. «

"Yeah, times have changes indeed, my dear. It's good to see you again!"

Erich led him to the exit. "I suggest that we first go to my university. There we can have lunch together and I'll show you around. I'm here now at one of the most advanced universities in Europe. You'll like it."

“Sounds great!”

They left the airport building and Erich escorted him to the platform of a magnetic train. “The university is located on the outskirts of the city. The maglev goes directly there.”

A little later, a streamlined train pulled in. They got onboard and sat down in two seats at the front. Since the train was obviously driverless, they could watch through the glass front as the vehicle glided through the streets.

Jannis looked at Erich expectantly. “Tell me, what is life like as a professor in the year 2048?”

“Fantastic!” Erich laughed. “Really fantastic. Much better than it used to be.”

“Sounds good. Fewer obligations and more freedom to research I guess?”

“Oh yeah. It's a real joy to be a professor. When I think back to the old days, it gives me the creeps.” He grimaced. “Those awful university bureaucracies, nerve-wracking power struggles everywhere, and that horrible courting of outside funding.” He shook his head. “That was not a good age for science.”

Jannis looked at him in surprise. “What exactly has changed?”

Erich's eyes lit up. “For example, there are new conference formats that promote constructive exchange of ideas in science.”

Jannis raised an eyebrow. “New conference formats?”

Erich nodded. “It used to be absurd that researchers often used to fight each other like religious communities. That had little to do with objective truth-finding. That's why there are now public research institutions that organize moderated discussions. These bring together researchers with different views on scientific issues and engage them in a constructive exchange of ideas. In the process, hidden assumptions and value judgments are analyzed and revealed, and an attempt is made to uncover the origin of the different perspectives.”

“Fascinating,” Jannis said.

Erich's eyes lit up with excitement. “Oh yes! Often the different views complement each other and expose blind spots. This often leads to new insights and new perspectives emerges. Of course, this requires open-minded listening and sufficient time. I tell you, the diversity of economic perspectives is a rich treasure that just needs to be mined.”

“You sound like those students from the Network for Pluralist Economics,” Jannis said with a grin. “But don't you think science should allow different approaches to argue? The strongest perspective usually

wins out over time.”

“Of course, science should allow conflict, but I doubt that fighting is a constructive form of exchanging ideas. After all, in the past it was often not about finding the truth and the best arguments at all. Especially when money, positions or one's own reputation was at stake.”

“And these new formats are so much better?”

“Yes, much better. Of course, they require the right conditions and an experienced neutral facilitator to guide the process constructively. It can take two or three days to complete such a process, but it's worth it.”

“I'd like to experience that for myself someday,” Jannis said thoughtfully.

“Oh yes. Usually, everything is recorded on video and posted on the Internet. For example, a recent event on negative interest rates was very exciting.”

“Negative interest rates?” asked Jannis curiously.

Erich nodded. “Interest on financial assets mainly favors the rich. Those who are rich automatically get even richer without doing anything. Negative interest rates, on the other hand, turn the tables. They effectively prevent the toxic accumulation of wealth. However, the practical implementation of a negative interest system raises some questions and problems. Big topic. In any case, the exchange round was most interesting. You should check it out when you get a chance.”

Jannis nodded and looked out of the window. From the elevated maglev, they had a good view of the city life. Small yellow buses and capsule cabs drove around in the streets, but most of the downtown seemed to be exempt from car traffic. Bicycles were everywhere, people sat outside small cafes and children ran through the streets.

Jannis pointed out of the window. “Scandinavian cities have been pioneers in terms of quality of life and climate protection before. But now things seem even better.”

Erich smiled. “I can't complain.”

Jannis was silent for a moment and looked curiously at his old friend. “Has the life of a researcher changed in any other ways besides the new conference formats?”

Erich nodded. “There is now a central database where all research is sorted and evaluated.”

“How does that work?”

“It used to be a pain in the ass how you had to gather relevant research from the many different journals. Now instead, all research results are classified in the central database and are therefore much easier to find.”

“Sounds reasonable,” Jannis said approvingly.

“Yes. I can barely imagine any more how absurd it used to be to have to spend ages crawling the internet to see if anyone had already done any work on a research question.” Erich shook his head.

“And you said the studies are evaluated? How does that work?”

“There are criteria by which research papers are evaluated for objectivity, strength of argument, and added social value. Criticisms are also collected. However, you can only write reviews if you have a personal account. The higher your own scientific level, the more influence you have in the rating process. A kind of weighted Wikipedia. In addition, the results of various studies on a research question are summarized. Also, everything is accessible free of charge and not behind a paywall as in the past.”

Jannis wrinkled his face in annoyance. “That used to annoy me a lot, that as a researcher I submitted my research papers to scientific journals for free and later the universities had to pay to make those research articles available to them.”

Erich smiled. “In the old days, public institutions often allowed shrewd entrepreneurs to pull money out of their pockets.” He took a handkerchief out of his pants and blew his nose. “By the way, suggestions for research questions can be posted on the platform by NGOs, politicians and interested people. Researches can leave a note that they will take on a research question and work on it.”

“That means you don't even have to look for journals that want to publish your work, you just put everything in the database?”

“Exactly. If you do a bad job, your study will be rated poorly. But overall, the system has the advantage that everything is published and not just the spectacular results. In the past, many things were not published at all if the results didn't suit one's intentions. So the study that coffee helped against cancer caused a stir, but the ten other research papers that couldn't prove a positive effect were ignored.”

Jannis nodded thoughtfully and Erich continued. “I can tell you, the platform has made the public discussion much more informed. You can get an overview of the general state of knowledge of science in a very short time. The government or companies can no longer refer to any study that suits them. And when researchers' opinions on a topic diverge, a conference on the topic is organized. That usually moves the debate forward quite effectively.”

Jannis wanted to ask Erich something, but an announcement in the maglev said that they had reached the final stop: Earth College.

“Earth College?” asked Jannis. “What does the name mean?”

“You’ll see in a minute,” Erich said with a smile.

The exit of the maglev train led to a high platform. From there, they had a good overview. Modern curved buildings with spacious terraces and intensive plant growth on them stretched around them. Solar panels were mounted on most of the roofs and equally served as shade for roof terraces.

They descended from the platform via a staircase and walked along a paved path between the buildings. Everywhere were trees, bushes and colorful flower beds. Tables, inviting benches, playgrounds for children and sports equipment stood around. Cars were nowhere to be seen, but e-scooters and bicycles. It was pleasantly quiet.

“This model city was laid out about good twenty years ago with the goal of creating a modern, livable, climate-friendly suburb.” He pointed to the houses. “All these are passive buildings. The entire site is energy self-sufficient thanks to solar panels and heat pumps. Due to intensive vegetable gardening on the roofs and vertical farming on the sides of the buildings it’s also more than fifty percent self-sufficient regarding food.”

“That means this is some kind of prototype of a modern city?”

“Yes. Earth College is a campus for urban planning students and researchers from around the world. The ideas realized here have spread worldwide at a rapid pace over the past two decades. There are now similar cities all over the world, from Argentina to Kenya to Japan.”

They had reached a small square by now and Erich approached a group of parked pedal scooters.

“Let’s take the electric scooters.” He pointed to the handles of an orange one. “Just hop on and turn here to accelerate.” He rode a few feet and looked expectantly at Jannis.

Jannis grabbed a blue one and off they went.

“Don’t you have to sign up for it?”

“No. In the Earth College district, all scooters are free. GPS is used to monitor that no device leaves the zone. Similarly, usable bicycles are also available.”

They passed a pleasantly quiet yet lively neighborhood as they drove by. Children played in the streets and young people sat and talked everywhere. In small parks they played table tennis or sat in deck chairs reading books. A few of the young people seemed to know Erich and greeted him.

“Are there no cars here at all?” asked Jannis.

“Only police, ambulance and unavoidable transportation with special

permission is allowed in.”

“How do people do their shopping?”

Erich laughed. “On foot, by bike, when it gets bigger with something like this.” He pointed to a cargo bike that passed in front of them. “Otherwise, there are delivery drones that can transport all kinds of things.”

They reached a large round building with a curved roof, a large glass front and, as seemed normal in this area, green vegetation.

“This is the main university building,” Erich explained.

They parked the scooters next to a few others on the side of the building and went inside through a swinging door. Pleasantly cool air welcomed them.

“Are you already hungry?”

Jannis nodded.

“In that case, let's go to the dining hall first.” Erich led him down a small hallway into a bright large dining hall. Along the side were various stations lined up with different meals. The model of a university dining hall had seemingly changed little. Jannis looked at the offerings with surprise. “Are there no meat dishes at all?”

“No, most cafeterias in Sweden are vegetarian or vegan. When this was introduced, I was quite annoyed at first and went to the barricades with some colleagues.” Erich grinned. “But now I'm a vegan myself.”

Jannis opened his eyes in amazement. “You are vegan?”

“Who would have thought that, hm?” Erich nodded with amusement. “When someone would have predicted that twenty years ago, I would have taken that for a joke.”

Jannis shook his head in surprise and finally joined the line for the fried potatoes with smoked tofu. Erich went for vegetable soup and a large salad. They took their trays and went outside, where they sat down on a large wooden bench in a flowering garden. Many young people sat around them on other benches or on blankets on the lawn.

Jannis picked up the conversation again, “Why did you become vegan?”

“Some of my students kept bringing up the connection between animal factory farming and environmental exploitation and that made me curious. At some point, I dug into the topic and had to realize that factory farming used to be one of the worst climate killers of all. I watched a few documentaries on the subject, which made my stomach turn. I haven't been able to touch meat since. Further, factory farming is a breeding ground for antibiotic-resistant germs and often the

birthplace for pathogens that jump to humans.”

Jannis nodded thoughtfully. “I see.”

With his fork he guided a fried potato into his mouth. He pointed at his food. “Tastes not bad at all for a university cafeteria.”

Erich nodded. “Yeah, the dining hall is run by a student cooperative. They are quite devoted to creating delicious and healthy food for the people here.”

Jannis nodded appreciatively and bit into his fried tofu. “You told me about the changes in research.” He pointed to the students around them. “What about teaching? Is that organized differently, too?”

“Teaching runs predominantly through open online courses. This means that the best lectures and courses are available to students anywhere in the world. But overall, the structure of the entire education system has loosened. Classic courses that prepare students for the world of work and for specific professions have become less important. Instead, most young people value learning for life and developing their personal talents and interests. Whether or not that takes place within the framework of a formal degree program is of secondary importance to most students.”

“What does that mean?” asked Jannis confused.

“Most students don’t enroll for a specific field of study, but first do a kind of Studium Generale, in which they get a chance to try things out, get a taste of many disciplines and only gradually specialize. Also, since the introduction of a basic income, many young people are joining together in self-organized learning circles to learn and research in peer-groups.”

Jannis raised an eyebrow. “Self-organized learning circles?”

Erich laughed. “Yes. At universities, there is now more freedom and a wide range of courses open to everyone. Since most of the lectures and all the knowledge is available online in video courses and books anyway, young people tend to organize themselves.”

“And what are you doing as a professor when you seem to be largely relieved from classical teaching?”

“I am not completely relieved. I frequently hold research colloquia and supervise research papers and student projects. I also teach an online course on the economics of the common good, which I offer regularly and keep revising.”

“Economics of the common good? I’ve heard that’s become quite popular, but I always thought it was nonsense.”

Erich laughed. “I used to think that, too. But on closer examination, I

found that in many respects the economy of the common good wonderfully fills the principles of a social market economy with life. Many say it has finally struck the ideal balance between the dysfunctional poles of rampant capitalism and egalitarian communism.”

“That almost sounds like the holy grail of economics,” Jannis said with a grin.

Erich shrugged his shoulders. “For a few years now, here in Sweden in addition to the gross domestic product, the total common good product is also measured.”

“The common good product? What is that?”

“Just like the common good balance sheet for companies, many factors of social well-being are captured for society as a whole, such as transparency, democracy, fairness, income distribution, and so on,” Erich said with obvious enthusiasm.

He tapped on his wristband and showed Jannis a circular graphic that was divided into different sections. Numbers were on the side and seemed to indicate the score.

“Here you can see the current common good product of Sweden. This conveys at a glance in which social areas the country fares well and where there is room for improvement.”

Jannis looked intently at the graph. “Democracy and international responsibility look very good. But there's obviously some catching up to do when it comes to sustainability.”

“Exactly. Such a nuanced view of our society's prosperity makes more sense than trying to lump everything into a single number that measures only material consumption and goods production.” He tapped his display again. “With the slider here, you can look at different years and see the chronological development. Here you can see the 2028 common good product in comparison.” The graph showed lower numerical values and some red bars on the chart. “As you can see, some things were significantly worse back then.”

Jannis moved his finger over the slider. “What happened in 2031? There are some jumps there.”

Erich thought about it for a moment. Then he brightened up. “That was probably due to the introduction of the basic income and the ecological tax reform. If I remember correctly, that came in 2030.”

“Speaking of basic income. How is that financed?” asked Jannis.

“Sweden has successfully implemented a model, which is primarily financed by land leases and value-added tax. The funding varies greatly from country to country, though, but Denmark, Finland and Norway

have now largely aligned their tax systems with the successful Swedish model.”

“You said the financing is through land leases and sales tax? How does that work?”

Erich grinned. “All the land in this country has been socialized. All income from land leases thus flows to the public.”

Jannis looked horrified. “The whole country has been socialized?”

“Yes. In fact, it was quite simple. The land tax was increased a little bit every year, so that land ownership became less and less profitable. At a certain point, it became cheaper for landowners to donate the land to the state or to sell it cheaply than to pay high land taxes. The process is still ongoing, but now most land is publicly owned.”

Jannis looked at him, aghast. “But given such a massive nationalization, there must have been quite an outcry.”

“Partially. It was a process, of course, until public opinion was in favor of it. Some civil society organizations had been pushing the issue for years before.” He paused and looked seriously at Jannis. “There are really few good reasons why land should be privately owned. After all, the earth should belong to all people. It is absurd that individuals should be able to stake out a piece of land and exclude others from using it and then charge money for it. Besides, most land appropriations have historically resulted from violence and wars.”

Jannis looked skeptical. “Puh, that was long ago.”

“Yeah, maybe, but inheritance isn't necessarily fair either. Just think what a huge redistribution machine private land ownership used to be. From bottom to top, I mean. A few rich people owned most of the real estate, forests and lands, and the rest of society paid high rents and leases to them every month. Without the owners providing any service or work.” Erich shrugged his shoulders. “Therefore, at some point, most people here felt that the land should belong to everyone.”

“And how is it all managed? Isn't there a problem with mismanagement if it's all state-run?”

“The land is publicly owned, but mostly leased on a long-term basis, so it is mostly privately managed. However, all lease income flows to the public purse and is redistributed from there to all people via the basic income. The system is based on long-term lease. Also, tax avoidance is almost impossible. After all, you can't take your land to the Cayman Islands so easily.”

“I have to admit that your arguments don't seem completely crazy,” said Jannis smiling. “That's very interesting, indeed. And it should

generate a lot of income. But is that enough to fund a basic income?"

"No, the income from land lease only funds about one-third of the basic income."

"And the rest comes through income tax and sales tax, I assume?"

Erich laughed triumphantly. "What income tax?"

Jannis raised an eyebrow in wonder and Erich proudly announced, "Income tax has been abolished."

"Abolished? A basic income was introduced and at the same time the income tax was abolished? That's impossible!"

"If you really want to do something, you'll find a way. If you don't, you'll find an excuse," Erich said with a grin. "When there was agreement that there should be a basic income, experts did the math. They put forward various modes to finance it. One included the possibility to abolish the income tax."

"But why eliminate the income tax?"

"First, because the income tax drives a wedge between the value of labor and the price of labor. With a high income tax, the incentive to work is much lower and many jobs do not pay out. In contrast, without an income tax, labor income becomes much more attractive. Second, any income tax usually requires a complicated income tax statement, which is a huge pain in the neck for most people."

Jannis nodded thoughtfully. "There was a saying that the income tax statement should fit on a napkin. I guess that wish is fulfilled now."

Erich laughed. "Indeed. You certainly can't campaign with that slogan anymore."

"Okay. So instead of the income tax, there are higher value-added and property taxes?"

"Exactly. The wealth tax depends on the amount of wealth. It starts at 0.1 percent and increases steadily up to a maximum of three percent. This significantly prevents the accumulation of wealth."

"And how much is the sales tax?"

"Ninety percent," Erich replied.

"Ninety percent? That's intense. Doesn't that make everything much more expensive?"

Erich shook his head. "No. Remember, that companies save money on the income tax. As a result, products have become only slightly more expensive overall."

"That's true, of course." Jannis considered the information for a moment. "In terms of incentives, this is indeed a very interesting system. What about inheritance tax?"



“Doesn't exist in Sweden.”

“Why not?” asked Jannis with surprise. “Wouldn't it fit in well into the mix?”

“In principle, I agree with you, but if there is a wealth tax, the inheritance tax is unnecessary. Almost any inheritance tax can be expressed as a corresponding wealth tax. Whether you pay a one percent wealth tax for thirty years or a thirty percent inheritance tax after thirty years amounts more or less to the same thing. But people are more willing to pay one percent on a regular basis than thirty percent at once. Also, in terms of tax evasion, people would probably be much more creative in trying to save such high inheritance taxes.” Erich looked thoughtful. “However, there were one-time property levies in many countries to finance climate protection measures. That was a good twenty years ago. At the time, inequality was problematic and some redistribution was needed.”

Jannis leaned back and looked at Erich with impression. “That's quite a revamp you've done here to the tax system.”

“Oh yes! And that's not all. Resource consumption is now heavily taxed, too to protect the climate and the environment. Ecological costs are taken into account and that often keeps resources in the ground, where they belong. There is also an internationally coordinated financial transaction tax of 0.1 percent on all transactions and transfers in the financial sector.”

“Impressive. Was this a major blow to the banking and financial sector?”

“No. It curbed high-frequency trading and senseless financial bets, but that was quite intentional. There was a lot of whining before, but we're talking about 0.1 percent. Compare that to the value-added tax that all other parts of the economy have always paid. Financial transactions that turn unprofitable by such a measly tax obviously can't be too meaningful to society.”

“I'm impressed. It sounds like a well thought-out tax system that you have set up in Sweden. What's the situation in Germany? Have we taken a similar path?”

“Germany, unfortunately, is not that visionary.” Erich scrunched up his mouth. “There is still an income tax and a highly controversial inheritance tax. Inheritance is tax-free up to one million, above which the tax rate rises gradually up to fifty percent. Land is still largely privately owned, but at least the property tax has been raised considerably. A number of interest groups have resisted reforms as

fundamentally as here.” He screwed up his face. “Sometimes I get the impression that Germans like it complicated.”

Erich's bracelet began to beep. He looked at it and looked excitedly. “Uh, the prime minister wants to talk to me.” He looked at Jannis a little confused. “Damn! This is really urgent. We're currently working on a big project with the government. I took the day off for you today, but I can't keep the Prime Minister waiting. I have to go back to my office as soon as possible.” He was visibly uncomfortable.

“No problem at all! It's better not to keep a high politician waiting,” Jannis smiled at him. “I'll be fine.”

Erich rose. “Okay, thank you for your understanding. I'll send someone over in a minute to show you a little more of the university. Please excuse me.”

“Really, no problem at all,” said Jannis. Erich then hurried away, while Jannis looked after him, amused.

A few minutes later, a dark-haired woman came to Jannis' table and looked at him curiously. “Are you Jannis Wagner?” He nodded.

She held out her hand to him. “Mia Reisch-Rosshaar. Pleased to meet you.” Jannis rose and took her hand.

She continued. “I'm currently doing a PhD with Erich on economics and risk ethics. He asked me to show you around the campus.”

“Ah, perfect!”

“If you want to, we can get started right away.”

“Yes, I'd love to.”

“We can go to the roof terrace. There's a good view over the area from there.”

She led him through some corridors and stairs until they reached a kind of beach bar on a high rooftop terrace. Sand was laid out and young people sat together in small groups in deck chairs and hanging chairs. Mia stepped up to the railing with Jannis and pointed into the distance, where a few wooden houses overgrown with plants stood between flower beds and conservatories.

“That's where the residential neighborhoods are. Most of the university's students and employees live there. In the past, refugees were taken in, too and integrated into Earth College operations. Now, many of those have returned to their home countries, but a few have stayed and became citizens of Sweden.”

She continued to point to the side. “There's a forest over there, it was replanted thirty years ago. A very nice nature recreation area. And here's a lake.” They walked to the other end of the roof terrace. “In this

direction are mostly university buildings - offices, seminar rooms, workshops and laboratories.” She pointed in another direction with multi-story buildings full of solar panels on the roofs and on the facades. “And there is the city center, where most of the stores and the weekly farmers market are located.”

Jannis nodded. “What a nice neighborhood.”

“Indeed,” Mia said with a smile.

She led him back down the stairs into a large hall flooded with light. In the middle of it were several large trees and plants with long vines hanging from the ceiling. Around the trees were tables where students sat and read intently in books or on tablets. On the walls were large shelves full of books. Sunlight streamed into the hall through the glazed ceiling, spreading a warm atmosphere.

“This is the library,” Mia whispered, “We call it the big conservatory. We have to be quiet here.”

They continued walking and reached a large hall with many small stalls offering various goods: Clothes, handicrafts, jewelry, books, vegetables and various delicacies. Quite a few people strolled around and examined the stalls.

“This is the marketplace,” Mia explained, leading him down the hall.

At the other end, she pointed to a workshop. “This is our repair café. Here, students and employees of the university can repair their bicycles or household appliances themselves or have them repaired for a small fee. We can take a quick look inside.”

Inside, tools and equipment hung on the walls. The shelves were filled to the brim. Several people were concentrated on their work at large work tables. One man, who was tinkering with a printer, wore a conspicuously large pair of glasses. Jannis pointed at the man. “Are those VR glasses?”

Mia nodded. “The glasses superimpose information in your view on how to proceed with the repair. You get a live, interactive instruction manual that adapts to your steps.”

Jannis laughed. “That should be especially handy with Ikea furniture.”

“Ikea?” asked Mia. Jannis waved it off. He stepped up to a work table where similarly sized glasses lay and took one of them curiously in his hand.

“Can I try it out?” he asked.

Mia nodded. “Sure.” She picked up a tablet from a work table and tapped on it. Then she turned to him and pointed to a bike.

“I set it up for you to change the chainring on this bike over here. You

can communicate with the glasses via voice control.”

Jannis put on the VR-glasses and looked at the bicycle. The bicycle chain was marked in red in his field of vision. In addition, text appeared: “Should the bicycle chain continue to be used or be replaced?”

Jannis thought about it for a moment. “Keep using the chain,” he said.

The upper area of the chain was then highlighted in red, “rivet” was written next to it, and the image of a small tool appeared in Jannis' view at the side. *Tool needed: chain riveter* was written next to it.

Jannis looked around the room until he found one, returned to the bike, and squatted in front of the chain.

Now a small preview video was displayed in his view on how to proceed with the riveter.

Jannis rose and walked up to Mia. “Impressive! That really makes things easy.”

“Yes. With this technology, any dork can fix up a bike or whatever needs repair. Since all appliance manufacturers have to put repair instructions online for free these days, and as you can get most replacement parts yourself with a 3D printer, most things can be fixed pretty easily.”

Jannis nodded. “I can imagine it's more fun with the glasses because you're less likely to get it wrong.”

“Yes, that's true. Plus, of course, it's easier to get things done with professional tools.”

Jannis took off the glasses and put them on the work table.

As they walked out of the room, Jannis asked, “What happened to Google, Facebook and co? Who are the software companies of today?”

“Google and Facebook are pretty insignificant now. There was a small IT revolution at the end of the twenties. Due to the difficult political situation in the U.S., a large part of the software companies moved from Silicon Valley to Estonia. The country had created fantastic conditions for the IT industry and attracted many bright minds with its digital entrepreneurship and minimal bureaucracy.”

“And probably no taxes,” Jannis grimaced.

Mia frowned. “That would be news to me. The government framework there is just very conducive. Besides, twenty years ago Estonia cut all its military spending and transferred it to an Open IT fund. The money was used to fund the development and deployment of free software to support democratic structures and self-organized businesses. It was used to program all sorts of applications, tools and messengers with great user-friendliness and privacy. Most of these products are provided free

of charge to everyone in the world. The small country sees this as its contribution to development aid.”

Jannis nodded, impressed. “That’s what I call a good initiative.”

As they walked down a hallway, Jannis spotted a human-like robot walking along in front of them.

Jannis pointed at it. “What’s that over there?”

Mia grinned. “That’s the coffee robot for the professors.”

She raised her voice: “Hey Knut! Wait a minute!”

The robot stopped and turned around.

“The robot is called Knut?” asked Jannis in amazement.

“Yes. His full name is Knut Heinrich Forty-Two. He chose the name himself.”

Jannis raised an eyebrow. “That’s a strange name for a robot.”

Mia shrugged her shoulders. “He likes polar bears and knows the meaning of life.”

Jannis looked at her in confusion, whereupon Mia laughed. In the meantime, the robot had come up and stood in front of them.

“Hello Mia,” he greeted her, waving his metal arm.

“Hey! This is Jannis, I’m showing him around the university right now.”

“Hello Jannis, may the force be with you!”

Jannis looked at the robot in amazement and turned to Mia. “You said he’s the coffee robot?”

Mia nodded and was about to reply, but the robot interrupted her. “Good coffee must be hot as hell, black as the devil, pure as an angel and sweet as love. - Angela Merkel.”

Jannis looked even more confused. “Angela Merkel said that?”

Mia laughed. “Unlikely,” she replied with a grin. “Misattributed quotes are his thing.”

Noticing Jannis’ puzzled look, she continued. “A few students have tried to calibrate the robot so that its demeanor reflects the average humor of the professors in the department. The result, unfortunately, is pretty mediocre humor.”

“After God created the world, he created man and woman. To save the whole thing from destruction, he invented humor. - Alice Cooper,” said Knut.

Jannis continued to look at the robot with surprise. Some kind of coffee machine seemed to be integrated into its belly.

“Knut goes to the professors’ offices when called and brings freshly brewed coffee,” Mia explained. “Would you like some?”

Jannis shrugged his shoulders. "Why not? A latte would be great."

"What kind of milk? Soy? Rice? Oats?"

"Cow's milk if you have," Jannis replied.

Mia frowned and turned to the robot. "Please make us two coffees. One latte with cow's milk and one espresso."

"With pleasure," said Knut. Thereupon they heard a soft hiss and a little later a flap opened at his belly and presented the desired order. Mia took the two cups and gave Jannis the larger one.

Jannis sipped his coffee and nodded appreciatively. "Not bad at all. I should probably get a coffee robot like that, too."

"Stupid thoughts everyone has, but the wise man keeps them quiet - Donald Trump," Knut proclaimed.

Mia suppressed a laugh and Jannis grimaced. "Looking at this candidate, it seems that robots did not evolve into a serious threat to humanity."

"No, I don't think so." Mia shook her head. "Unless they were so clever about it that we didn't notice," she added with a wink.

"Is it common to use such robots in everyday life?" asked Jannis.

"Certainly more common than thirty years ago. Service robots can take over many unpleasant tasks so that you have more time for the nice things. But many people prefer not to automate everything and become so dependent on technology. Preferences vary there."

Mia turned to move on. "Goodbye, Knut!"

"Goodbye Mia and Jannis," replied the robot. "If you're brave enough to say goodbye, life will reward you with a new hello. - Kim Jong-l."



Mia and Jannis were sitting at a table on the terrace in front of the cafeteria.

"What are you currently researching?" asked Jannis curiously.

"I'm working on the risk ethics of historical financial crises."

"Historical financial crisis?" Jannis looked at her with interest.

"Yes. Right now I'm dealing with the crash of 2007 and the Big Bang."

"I see," said Jannis. "I lived through the crash of 2007, but I guess I slept through the Big Bang."

“Are you kidding?” Mia looked at him with a raised eyebrow in irritation.

“I’m older than I look. I went into a coma sleep in 2020 and just woke up a few days ago.”

“Oh.”

Jannis laughed. “I have a lot of catching up to do. A few days ago I saw a short info video about the German constitutional election. What happened after the new constitution was implemented and the government resigned?”

“First, there were new elections, in which the alliance of organizations behind the constitutional referendum set up its own party, Democratic Renewal. They took a good share of votes and went straight into government in a coalition.”

“And how did Germany navigate through the financial crisis?”

“Fortunately, a committee of experts in Germany had already prepared for the crash before it hit. The so-called Financial System Future Council had worked out different scenarios and a crisis plan with experts from academia, civil society and business and had a plan what to do. The new government followed this plan. The insolvent major banks were placed under the management of Federal Financial Supervisory Authority and...”

“Wait, not so fast!”, Jannis interrupted her. “If this Future Council had worked out a good crisis plan, why didn't the previous government follow it?”

“That's exactly the question I'm dealing with. Obviously, at the time, policymakers were taking all kinds of risks just to protect the property of corporate banks and the super-rich.”

“But the new government listened to the Future Council?”

Mia nodded. “The government swiftly passed a green stimulus package and the central bank backed it all up with helicopter money. It was a finely tuned crisis policy. The insolvent corporate banks were gradually wound up and...”

“They let the banks go bust?”, Jannis interrupted her so loudly that some other people looked at them.

Mia laughed. “Oh dear, they must have scared you terribly about that move!” she said sympathetically. “But the population didn't have to bear the costs. Much like Iceland in the great financial crisis of 2007, people's assets were saved, but the big investors were held fully accountable.”

Jannis looked very surprised. “And it just went like that? Didn't bank runs occur?”

“It wasn't easy. It was definitely a blessing that the ECB and the Bundesbank had already set up a corresponding payment infrastructure for digital central bank money. In Germany some people had already switched to the e-euro. In the course of the banking crisis, all remaining bank balances were converted into e-euros at the central bank in one swoop. This safeguarded the payment system against bank failures and ensured normal business operations for companies and the population.”

“That is, all of the bankers' bank deposit money have been replaced by digital central bank money?”

“Exactly. Similar to how banknotes were once privately issued and only later nationalized due to abuse and crises, nationalization of electronic money has been made up for.”

“But isn't it dangerous if the state provides the payment infrastructure and thus has the account data of all citizens? That gives me the creeps, to be honest.”

“It's all a question of technical implementation,” Mia explained. “Thanks to crypto-blockchain and decentralized account management by private payment service providers, privacy for euro transactions is assured. In other countries, however, things are quite different. China, for example, has abolished cash and, by controlling electronic money, absolute surveillance.”

“And what happened to the banks if they weren't bailed out? Are there any banks left at all?”

“Of course! Only the failing large banks and financial conglomerates were wound up or broken own into smaller units. But the real backbone of the economy are the small savings banks and ethical banks. Even in the Big Bang, very few of these were threatened. They formed the basis for financing the socio-ecological transformation of our society and for providing long-term investment without creating financial crises or requiring bank bailouts.”

“And these types of banks still exists?”

“There have been some structural changes in the banking landscape, of course. But there is still a need for a supply of credit for the countless good ideas and companies. Banks collect savings and redistribute them. Banks make sure the money goes where it will do the most good. Today's bankers help to finance the realization of one's ideas and dreams.”

“What happened to big investors? It seems, they weren't bailed out, right?”

“No, they weren't bailed out. Because assets were artificially inflated to

a massive degree, there was no way to avoid a market shakeout. That was very painful for some of the wealthiest, but most people and companies came out just fine and inequality has been significantly reduced as a result.”

“How about the insurance companies and pension funds? They must have suffered massive losses, that in the end, also affect ordinary citizens.”

“Yes, some of the insurance companies and pension funds got into trouble. But you need to see the bigger picture. Financial assets are just numbers on a computer. Our true wealth is and will remain in the people, in our businesses, in our knowledge and, of course, in nature. The crisis hit the exuberant financial economy hard, but the foundation of our prosperity was mostly unaffected. The real challenge, therefore, was not to save the insurance companies, but to ensure that the economy continued to run smoothly and that the fruits of our prosperity were distributed appropriately among the people. That has been done. The pension system, for example, has been reformed and since basic income is in place, many economic structures have been simplified.”

“Very interesting. Overall it sounds like there is lots of new regulations for financial markets.”

“Yes and no. Some new rules were needed to prevent abuse of power and to put the system into an orderly framework. For example, high-frequency trading and many highly complex derivatives were banned. New financial products must pass a public interest test, and a hard capital requirement of ten percent was introduced for all banks. But overall, there has been massive deregulation. Compared to regulations like Basel III back in the day with 300 pages of legal text, most of these regulations fit on a little piece of paper. In your time, there was a lot of regulation with little effect. For the small and ethical banks in particular, it was stifling, while the corporate banks with their armies of lobbyists made sure they could get around most of the rules. Now there is little regulation with much effect.”

Jannis nodded thoughtfully. “That’s really fascinating. How about the state. How did the stimulus package work?”

Mia took a deep breath. “The government of the Democratic Renewal party distributed helicopter money directly to all citizens. Further, a lot of money has been used to push the ecological transformation of our economic system. For example, the government set up a large fund to promote the expansion of sustainable agriculture and sustainable energy plants, and in the cities it was used to massively expand bicycle paths

and public transportation. The railroads, of course, too. Money was invested in universities, schools and kindergartens. Much of it was distributed unbureaucratically through the states and municipalities so that the money would be widely spread. In addition, the new Ministry for Democracy was launched. It has been given a large budget to initiate civil society projects throughout the country. This has also brought many committed people into meaningful employment. And finally, political incentives were created for reductions in working hours, which many people have taken advantage of.”

“Phew, that's really a lot. How did they finance all that? The national debt was already problematically high in the past.”

Mia looked a little annoyed. “Government debt is an artificial problem. Of course, it was pretty stupid that the states of your time forbade themselves to finance themselves directly through their own central banks and instead created dependent on commercial banks. A great thing for the banks, of course, but complete nonsense for society. Those rules have been abolished. So the ECB just financed the stimulus policy.”

Jannis frowned. “But isn't that dangerous when the state gets financed by its own central bank? That's where politicians get greedy and paving the road to high inflation.”

“What nonsense!” said Mia with a furrowed brow. “After all, stimulus policy is what is needed when there is too little money in circulation. And in general, Canada's history is a very interesting case in this regard. Canada was financed directly by its own central bank until the 1980s. Those were fantastic times with virtually no government debt and a stable currency. It wasn't until the system was hollowed out and policymakers became dependent on private banks, that public debt increased there, too.”

“Okay, okay. It all sounds so simple. Too simple,” Jannis said, distraught. “The financial system is highly complex, after all. How does that all fit together?”

Mia smirked. “The former financial and monetary system and its many regulations were indeed very complicated. One of the most important reform steps was therefore to simplify the system so that people could understand it. The right core principles are basically quite simple and, I think, intuitive. First, clear and simple rules. Second, clear liability for private players and companies. Third, diversity in the banking world. Fourth, as much transparency as possible, and fifth, a foundation of a functioning democracy.”

“Doesn't sound too complicated.”

“Yes. I think the real challenge in the past was not so much finding the right solutions, but getting them through politically. The lobbyists had too much of a grip on politics back then.” She laughed. “And the economists approved of it and gave it all ideological legitimacy with their theoretical models.”

“Well, I wouldn't see the role of economists quite so negatively. Of course, there were one or two black sheep, but the science was independent.”

“Independent?” Mia raised her brows in amusement.

Jannis folded his arms. “What are you getting at?”

Mia shook her head. “The whole discourse and the crucial institutions were subject to massive power influences. Take the need for external funding, well-paid think tanks, the tenure committees, the architecture of scientific journals - do you really believe that objective and neutral science can take place within that framework?”

Jannis dismissed this statement with a wave of his hand. “Maybe we'll leave that subject out for now.”

“As you like.” Mia shrugged her shoulders.

“Another question: obviously there's still the euro, but how does the global financial system work?”

Mia's eyes lit up. “A lot has happened there. After the fall of the U.S. from power and the loss of the dollar's importance, the euro, yen and renminbi had gained great importance in the international currency market. But many countries have expressed great concern that a single currency could again gain status as an international reserve currency, once more giving one single country such a massive advantage.”

Jannis nodded. “Understandable. Whereas the euro as an international reserve currency would certainly have been less problematic than the dollar.”

“Probably less problematic, but not good. Anyway, back in the early 2030s, people from politics, business, and NGOs from almost every part of the world came together at a big conference in Rome to design a new international financial order.”

“And what was the result?”

“What came out, interestingly enough, was a plan that had been on the table almost 100 years before.” Mia smiled. “The Bancor Plan by the great economist Maynard Keynes.”

“Seriously!” exclaimed Jannis. “That must have made old Keynes spinning and laughing in his grave.”

Mia laughed. “Most likely. Anyway, since then, the so-called Bancor has been used as the currency for international trade. The Bancor is a kind of unit of account and is made up of a basket of the various national currencies.”

“Interesting.”

Mia nodded. “It also introduced fixed exchange rates and a stabilizing set of rules and sanctions for trade imbalances.”

“What exactly does stabilizing rules and sanctions mean?”

“In the past, some countries had structurally exported much more goods to other countries than they imported.”

Jannis nodded proudly. “With Germany right up front.”

Mia looked critically. “Oh, yes. But if a country permanently sells more than it buys, then some other country has to go into debt. Accordingly, ever larger mountains of debt pile up between countries, which of course is not sustainable in the long run and often leads to political conflicts, like the Greek crisis.” She made a crumpled face and continued. “With the new Bancor trade surpluses as well as trade deficits are subject to punitive interest rates for all countries. This prevents structural imbalances and the accumulation of mountains of debt.”

Jannis nodded. “That means that if Germany now exports more goods to other countries than it imports, Germany will have to pay penalties?”

“That's right. I think they're three percent or something like that. The money goes to the UN.”

“Alright, and the traditional exporting countries haven't prevented the implementation of these rules?”

Mia shook her head. “Being the world's export champion may sound great, but in the long run it's not a good strategy. After all, at some point the importing countries have to be given the opportunity to earn money to pay back the debt. So at some point, the exporting country must either become a net importer or cancel the debt, which would then imply that the earlier exports were given away freely. Otherwise, the math doesn't add up. I think that was realized at some point.”

“Interesting. And the Bancor system works well so far?” asked Jannis curiously.

“It works excellently! There are no more wars over oil to protect the petrodollar, no more countries are accumulating strategic foreign currency reserves, and there is much less international debt in general. Overall, thanks to the Bancor Plan, a historically unparalleled level of stability and equity has been achieved for the international economic and financial system.”

In this moment Erich got to their table. "Here I am again. I'm sorry for the interruption." He pulled up a chair and sat down with them.

"No problem at all. I had a very interesting conversation with your colleague" Jannis said smiling. "What kind of project are you actually doing for the Prime Minister?"

"The project is called the Transparent State, and the name says it all," Erich replied. "The idea comes from the Ministry of Democracy. All public data is to be put on an Internet platform and made freely viewable. That includes all tenders, contracts, negotiations, official talks and so on."

"Seriously? This is all just going to be put on the Internet?"

Erich nodded. "I think it's a very sensible measure to curb corruption and reduce any waste of public money. Personally, I think all public institutions should make their data publicly available. It's also planned that all companies with 1,000 or more employees will have to disclose all their finances."

"And how are you involved?"

"I'm working with a team right now on a computer algorithm that scans this data for anomalies. The program is supposed to look for suspicious patterns such as connections of ministries to certain companies that win tenders too often and so on. We're in the testing phase right now and plan to go public with the project next week."

Jannis smirked. "And the prime minister worries that anything unpleasant will come to light, or what did he want from you?"

Erich laughed. "No, on the contrary. He was one of the drivers of the Transparent State project and he is very keen to make sure that we launch on time in full functionality. The prime minister's name is Hanzi Freinacht, a visionary man."

Mia's eyes lit up. "Thanks to him, Sweden is at the forefront of political innovation on an international level. Freinacht launched several new ministries during his political career. The idea for the Ministry of Democracy can also be traced back to him."

"Sounds impressive. I was told there's a ministry like that in Germany, too?"

"Yes, the idea has spilled over from Sweden to the whole world," Mia replied enthusiastically. "Makes lots of sense to continuously advance democratic institutions."

Erich nodded enthusiastically. "Freinacht has shaken up the democratic playing field. Nearly twenty years ago, he helped build a party whose goal was to improve the political process rather than to argue for

specific policy positions.”

“How so?”

“His party, Metamoderna claimed to be constructive and positive in all regards. Therefore, party members communicate in public in a non-violent manner. Devaluing and degrading other parties and people is not tolerated within the party. This has struck a nerve with many people. Many were more than tired of the political squabbling.”

“And that made a lasting difference?”

Erich nodded vigorously. “In public discourse, over time this has established much more constructive manners and values. People used to jump down each other's throats in politics. That's different now. People listen to each other and engage with each other - because that's honored now.”

Mia laughed. “The Metamoderna Party, for example, copied most of its own party program from the other parties and openly said they were building the best of everything. Afterwards, the party leadership even formally thanked the other parties for their good groundwork and emphasized what important positions each of them brought in.”

“Very interesting!” Jannis shook his head. “What does the name of the party stand for?”

“For metamodernism,” Erich replied. “This is a political-philosophical philosophy whose goal is to promote human development. There is even a debate at present about the creation of a Ministry of Existentialism.”

“A Ministry of Existentialism?” asked Jannis, amused.

“Yes. The ministry is in charge to allow systematic deliberation on existential questions about the meaning of life and what it means to be human. Freinacht has been instrumental in developing the metamodern worldview and has written several influential books about it. Metamodernism is understood to be the stage of development following postmodernism.”

Jannis raised an eyebrow. “Can you elaborate on that a bit?”

Erich nodded. “You know the modernity of the past with its focus on innovation, growth and ratio. Then came postmodernism as a countermovement. That brought important new insights and exposed weaknesses of modernity. But for all the critical questioning and the many deconstructions of domination, gender roles, and exploitative relationships, few functioning alternatives were put forward. Metamodernism makes up for that. The approach is very integrative and focuses on the meta-level. It analyses complex systems and how their

functioning can be improved.”

“Metamodernism,” Jannis repeated thoughtfully. “What a concept.”

Erich raised a finger. “Freinacht is also the one who got the constitutive branch going. Have you heard about that?”

Jannis narrowed his eyes. “I learned a few days ago that there is a Monetative, as a new branch of government in Germany. Is that...”

“No, no,” Mia interrupted him. “The idea behind the constitutive branch is that there needs to be a power that constitutes the foundation on which the other powers are based. That foundation is typically the constitution. It used to be common for the legislature to take that over, but that didn't separate the branches of government so neatly.”

Jannis frowned in confusion and Erich explained: “The people are the sovereign and the people should therefore set the framework within which democratic institutions operate. This framework is the constitution. Only the constituent assembly can therefore make constitutional changes, no longer parliament or the government.”

“Okay. I think I'm starting to understand,” Jannis said thoughtfully, rubbing his chin. “And who forms the constituent assembly and how do they make decisions?”

“The people are the constituents. Here in Sweden, constitutional amendments can be proposed by petitions from the people or from parliament. If there is a sufficient number of votes or a majority, respectively, the proposal goes to a citizens' council drawn by ballot from all people.” Erich looked questioningly at Jannis. “Are you familiar with how citizens' councils work? They're relatively new, too.”

Jannis waved it off. “Yes, I am. About 100 citizens are chosen randomly and consult intensively on challenging issues and then decide on them.”

“Exactly. If the citizens' council comes out in favor of a constitutional amendment, then the proposal goes to the entire population by referendum. If that gets a majority, the proposal is accepted. The government then has to implement it in exactly the same way.”

“I see. So the constitution is really determined by the sovereign through and through.”

Mia and Erich nodded.

“But how about the monetative branch. Do you have that as a fifth government branch in Sweden, too?”

“No.” Erich shook his head in amusement. “There is no need for a separate state power for everything. In this country, monetary policy is assigned to the executive branch. The finance minister decides on

money creation. Newly created Swedish Kronas move directly from the central bank into the state budget.”

Jannis raised an eyebrow. “Doesn't that bring about irresponsible government finances?”

“Why?” asked Mia. “If the minister of finance were to create too much money, it would lead to inflation and devalue all money. This would cause all other government revenue to lose value in real terms as well.”

“That's true, of course.” Jannis nodded thoughtfully. “Indeed it seems like Sweden has created a very interesting political system. The different institutions make good sense.”

“I'll get back to my research,” Mia said, rising. “Goodbye, Jannis. Nice meeting you!”

Jannis rose and formally shook her hand. “The pleasure was all mine. And thank you for your illuminating remarks on the financial crisis.”

“Gladly.” She smiled and walked away.

Erich looked at Jannis. “How was the tour of the university?”

“Exceptionally interesting.” Jannis grinned. “I met your coffee robot.”

“Good Knut is an old chap here at the faculty.” Erich laughed. Then he looked curiously at Jannis. “Did you already make plans what you want to do professionally? In these new times I mean.”

Jannis was silent for a moment. “I had assumed that I would continue to research and teach as a professor of economics. But the field seems to have evolved massively. I have the inexplicable feeling of being decades behind.” They both had to laugh.

Jannis shook his head. “I can imagine how Newton would feel if he traveled into the future and then heard Einstein talk about the theory of relativity.”

Erich looked thoughtfully at Jannis. “I guess time travel has its price.”

Jannis nodded, then shrugged his shoulders. “I had a stimulating exchange with Mia about the Big Bang. Seems like I slept through some big crises.”

“Oh, yes,” Erich said thoughtfully. “Exciting times lie behind us.”

“That's how it seems. I was told that shortly after I started my coma sleep, there was even a global pandemic. Is that true?”

Erich nodded. “There have been curfews and almost all international flight traffic has been temporarily suspended.”

“Unbelievable! How did you experience the whole thing?”

Erich made a serious face. “It was quite a surprise. I had also caught the virus and went through a severe course of the disease. As a smoker and with my congenital cardiovascular weakness, I was in the high-risk

group. During my illness, I looked death in the eye. That was quite challenging.”

“Oh damn.” Jannis screwed up his face. “I’m sorry to hear that.”

Erich nodded, lost in thought. “My statistical probability of dying was thirty percent. That raised some existential questions.”

Jannis listened to him attentively and looked serious. “I can imagine that.”

“Fortunately, I had competent and empathetic nurses and doctors. They did a hell of a job during that time! When I was fit again, I donated my next three months’ salary to an NGO that works for better working conditions for medical care staff.”

“Fine thing. I’m glad you made it through.”

Erich stroked his head. “The experience made me rethink my health. I quit smoking immediately afterwards and started eating better.” He grinned. “Salad and vegetables instead of lung buns.” Jannis had to laugh and Erich continued. “Also, I’ve been running regularly ever since. A few years ago, I attended the Berlin Marathon.” Erich grinned. “I’m telling you, the next pandemic can’t do me any harm.”

Jannis laughed.

Erich’s gaze wandered into the distance. “At that time I thought a lot about death. Two things became clear to me. First, that death used to be too much of a big taboo in Western society. We took a lot of depth out of life because of it. Our culture was almost panic-stricken in trying to hide and conceal all the symbols and signs of our own transience. But those who run from death also run from life.”

Jannis nodded thoughtfully and Erich continued, “Second, I realized that dying well is important.”

“Dying well?” asked Jannis. “What do you mean?”

“The last chapter of one’s life should be worthy of one’s life. I don’t want to spend my last days isolated in an artificial contraption, surrounded by noisy beeping devices. Instead, I wish for my end to be in clarity and wakefulness among my loved ones and in peace with my own life.”

“Yeah, I agree.”

“The Corona crisis forced upon us many essential questions about being human, about life and death. It seems to me that addressing these questions had been long overdue.”

For a while they were silent.

Then Jannis asked, “How did the economy get through the crisis? I heard there were huge government bailouts?”

“Oh yes. The economy took quite a hit and had to be massively propped up by the state. Most Scandinavian countries navigated quite well through the Corona crisis, though.”

“How?”

“Denmark, for example, has taken the opportunity to try out a small basic income. Under the circumstances, this was much more practicable and quicker to implement than checking individually who needs what. It also gave financial capital a fair share of the cost of the crisis by setting all interest rates to zero for some time and even suspending all rent payments and loan repayments nationwide. That, along with a few other measures, allowed most businesses and self-employed people to freeze their operations, if needed, until the worst was over. The whole thing could probably be compared to your coma sleep.” He looked at Jannis with amusement. “When things finally returned to normal, commercial operations were able to resume relatively quickly and unscathed.”

“And how was that funded?”

“In the short term, the state increased its debt and was indirectly financed by its own central bank. In the aftermath of the crisis, a one-time wealth levy was imposed to pay for the crisis. But overall, the debate on government financing by the central bank was raised again. It became obvious that, in principle, the state can always mobilize money through the central bank.”

Jannis shrugged his shoulders. “How did Germany fare in the Corona crisis?”

“In Germany things were more complicated and bureaucratic than here. When most state administrations were overwhelmed with the implementation of the economic stimulus package, nationwide helicopter money was paid out to everyone in Germany. This was subsequently offset again via the tax return. In this way, the state recovered the money from those who did not need it. Otherwise, we got through the crisis quite well. Many things didn't work out perfectly, but overall there were comparatively few deaths. The economic damage was not insignificant, but it was bearable.”

“And how did it play out in other countries? Did it differ much internationally?”

“It did,” Erich said thoughtfully, looking off into the distance. “Southern Europe, especially Italy and Spain, initially struggled a lot with the virus and had high death rates. It was nice to see that many countries provided great assistance to the most affected countries by sending medical personnel and relief supplies. The international community has

definitely emerged stronger from the Corona crisis. It became obvious: we are all in the same boat. Only together we are strong.”

“That’s nice to hear!”

“Yeah. The EU has also blossomed in a wave of new solidarity. Even Germany accepted the communitization of sovereign debt through euro bonds to help stabilize the financing of southern countries.”

Jannis nodded. “I’m glad to hear that! When I started my long sleep, the EU was still struggling with the aftermath of the euro crisis and Brexit.”

“Oh, yes.” Erich screwed up his face. “Great Britain was hit hard by Corona, by the way. But I think it hit the U.S. the hardest.”

“How come?”

Erich shook his head. “The dark legacy of decades of neoliberal policies combined with poor crisis management. The stimulus packages primarily supported the big corporations. They were all coddled and bailed out, but numerous small and medium-sized businesses went bust. In addition, the U.S. had poor public infrastructure and, for large segments of the population, a lack of health insurance. This caused great hardship for many people. The U.S. ended up with the most deaths in the world.”

“That sounds really bad! With Trump in charge, a responsible crisis policy was probably not to be expected.”

“Absolutely not. His divided cabinet was completely incapable of dealing with the crisis responsibly. At least it came at a price for him, too. He could forget about a second term. Generally, many populists were punished. It became obvious that they are good at making angry speeches but not much more.”

“Well, at least there was something good about it.”

“However, governments in some countries have used the crisis as justification to expand surveillance of the population through cell phone data and to permanently restrict basic civil liberties. In the UK, there was an attempt at times to abolish cash, claiming it was a germaphobe. Actually, the point was to expand government control over the population. Fortunately, this all failed due to the spirited rebellion of some non-governmental organizations and the resistance of the British population.”

Jannis was silent for a moment and looked at Erich questioningly. “Why didn’t the Corona crisis lead to the outbreak of a financial crisis, given all the trouble for the economy? The Big Bang only hit a few years later, right?”

“Well, there was a financial crisis. Many companies were bailed out by the state or bought up by the central bank. For the ailing big banks, the Corona crisis was the ideal excuse to shift the blame for all their problems away from themselves and onto the pandemic.”

Jannis nodded thoughtfully. “So government bailouts prevented the crisis from breaking out?”

“Yes, the real eruption came a few years later, because the basic problems of the financial system had stayed in place in most countries. Just because a crisis doesn't erupt doesn't mean there aren't any problems. With each bank bailout, democratic and free-market principles were further undermined, inequality increased, and socially harmful disincentives created. Just think of all the mathematical geniuses who developed complicated financial products in the financial towers to exploit some tax-trick instead of doing research on curing diseases or preventing climate change. Social cohesion was thus systematically eroded, and the population finally revolted against this.”

“It sounds like the Corona virus has laid the groundwork for some changes.”

“Absolutely. A lot of things changed: The business world was no longer the same after that. Home offices and virtual meetings became commonplace, and sociocracy as an agile form of organization spread everywhere.” Erich nodded thoughtfully. “I also remember that after the shutdown was lifted, there was a run on the villages. Especially in the cities, where people had been cooped up in their small apartments for months, many felt a need for more outdoor space and a garden of their own.”

“I've seen concept villages in France. Were they created afterwards.?”

“Yes, exactly. The Corona virus really changed a lot.” Erich was silent for a moment and then continued. “I think the Corona crisis was one of those historic moments when anything was possible. I remember well how confusing it was to hear completely different assessments of the situation. Some predicted great doom and mass death, while others interpreted the forced deceleration in the shutdown and shining examples of solidarity as the awakening of a new humanity. Probably all were right in their own way, and each of these scenarios was a possible future. It was up to humanity to choose.”

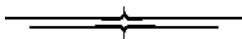
“And how did we choose?”

Erich smiled. “I think overall we have made a good choice. More solidarity, more international community, more deceleration and, above all, more sustainability. It has been shown how quickly the Earth can

regenerate if we humans let it breathe again. Maybe we wouldn't have stopped climate change without the drastic experience of the Corona crisis.”

Jannis raised an eyebrow in amusement. “The much-vaunted crisis is an opportunity.”

Erich smirked. “Yeah, probably...”



While Jannis had traveled to Sweden, Lena had first talked to her friend Katharina on the phone and after a walk through the forest decided to visit Helge again in his permaculture garden.

They sat on his large property in the shade of a walnut tree.

Lena took a cherry from a small bowl on a table between them. “The world has changed incredibly. What were the most important political changes? Were there any reforms that you think were particularly crucial?”

Helge thought for a moment. “I don't like to be pinned down to one thing, but there was once talk of the triad of transformation.”

“That sounds momentous. And what constitutes that triad?”

Helge raised three fingers in succession. “Basic income. Citizens' councils. Sovereign money. These reforms each represented powerful changes in their own right. Once all three were implemented together, there was a fertile ground for everything else.”

“Why those three?”

“Ultimately, the decisive factor is power. The unconditional basic income gave people back the power over their time. It freed up a large amount of energy for social projects, political commitment and personal development. It has created new perspectives. With citizens' councils, people have regained power over political institutions and the rules of the game in society. And sovereign money reform has given society back power over money and the financial markets.”

“That sounds plausible.” Lena popped a cherry into her mouth.

Helge grinned. “Some others spoke of the magic square: Basic income is the basis, sovereign money provides the means, democracy constitutes the form, and the common good is the goal.”

“That magic square sounds powerful, too.” Lena laughed. “What about redistribution? Isn't that also a key factor for change?”

“You're right about that. Huge wealth inequality used to undermine democracy and social cohesion considerably. In recent years, therefore, there has been massive redistribution.”

“How was this accomplished?”

“Quite classically. The top tax rate and the taxation of capital income were raised significantly, and at times there were wealth levies.”

“And how could that finally be enforced?”

Helge nodded. “Where there's a will, there's a way. The main problem was not the millionaires, but the super-rich with their many billions. It helped a lot that some of them voluntarily gave up large parts of their wealth.”

“Voluntarily? Really?” asked Lena.

“Yes. The Buffet-Gates initiative has persuaded many billionaires to transfer large portions of their wealth to Earthland. The money could thus be redistributed directly to all the people of the world or was used to buy privately owned land.”

Lena frowned skeptically. “And the super-rich suddenly gave away their fortunes just like that?”

Helge laughed. “Extreme wealth has become more and more socially ostracized in recent years. I guess the increasing prevalence of trauma therapy and personal development coaching has had its share.”

“What do you mean?”

“Manic accumulation of wealth often has to do with existential fear. To quieten that, no fortune in the world is enough. Once this is recognized, one can heal the true core of the fear and the associated delusion of control through the right therapy. With a new basic trust in the world, enough is enough. People can begin to let go and trust. Monstrous amounts of wealth turns into a heavy burden and sharing can suddenly bring joy.”

“Very interesting,” Lena said, eating another cherry.

“The many institutional system changes have had a massive impact on the distribution of income,” Helge continued. “The reforms in the monetary and financial system have put a stop to the collective fraud of corporate banks and financial conglomerates on society. The upgrade of democratic institutions has pushed through crucial changes to the tax system. And last but not least, basic income has fundamentally improved the bargaining power of employees.”

Lena nodded thoughtfully. “Basic income was coming up in my day,

but I didn't have the other reforms on my radar at all.”

Helge grinned at her. “Thoreau once said, there are a thousand hacking at the branches of evil to one who is striking at the root.” Lena had to grin at that, too.

A moment later, she made a serious expression again and looked at Helge thoughtfully. “I wonder if I've been hacking at the branches with my activism, too.”

“I can't answer that for you.” He nudged her with his foot and laughed. “But it's possible, of course.”

“Dumb-ass!” She threw a cherry at him, which hit him on the head. Helge then slumped down on his chair as if he had been fatally shot.

“But seriously,” she continued. “I've learned a lot about the society of this time in the last week. But I still can't comprehend how all those changes were accomplished. In my time, there were thousands of people who fought against the old system and worked for change. But still, it seemed everything just got worse and worse. What did we do wrong back then?”

Helge scratched his forehead. “Good question. When exactly did you go into coma sleep?”

“Early 2020.”

He rubbed his chin. “After that came turbulent times. Everything was in upheaval.” He thought for a moment. “I think what was most crucial was thinking social and environmental reforms together. In the old days the different movements for change were pitted against each other. But social and ecological transformation were not competing goals, but two sides of the same coin. Without a solution to the social question and more social justice, it was not possible to win majorities for climate protection, and conversely, the aggravation of environmental damage led to social tensions and inequality.”

“There are no jobs on a dead planet,” Lena muttered.

“Exactly. At some point, it was realized that environmental protection and social change belong together. Further, there were more and more networking and collaboration efforts in the NGOs. Before, they often even competed with each other. But gradually, people came to understand their different fields of action as different pieces of the common big jigsaw puzzle of positive transformation. Whether it was animal welfare, democratic reform or refugee aid, it became clear that these were all basically about the same change, namely towards a world of interconnectedness, cooperation and justice for all people and living beings.”

Lena nodded thoughtfully. “But how was that accomplished? There have always been efforts to build networks. Most of the time, they didn't work out too well, and sooner or later everyone was at odds again.”

“Yeah, yeah.” Helge nodded in embarrassment. “The Judean People's Front vs the People's Front of Judea.”

Lena looked irritated. “What's that?”

“That was a reference to a Monty Python movie.” He grinned and now threw a cherry pit at her. “But yes, I think I know very well what you mean. In my own early days as an activist, often I got bogged down with internal squabbles in my groups.”

Lena looked into the distance and shook her head. “Terrible!”

Shortly after, she spotted a woman with a small shovel coming toward them from the garden.

“Huhu,” Helge called out to her.

The woman approached Helge, slipped off her gloves and gave him a kiss. Afterwards, she turned to Lena. “This is my wife Sally,” Helge said. “And this is Lena, Damian's newest time traveler.”

Lena rose and was about to offer her hand to Sally, but she spread her arms laughing. “You can't get away from me without a hug.” So they embraced each other in greeting.

“We're just talking about the great transformations of the last 30 years,” Helge explained. “Do you feel like joining our revolutionary circle?”

“Yes, I'd love to! I'll just wash my hands and be right back.”

She disappeared into the house and came back shortly after with a tray full of cookies, fruit and lemonade.

“Mea culpa!” exclaimed Helge, turning to Lena with a contrite expression. “I didn't even ask if you were thirsty.”

Laughing, Sally lowered herself into a chair next to Helge. “Helge understands the most intimate needs of plants and trees, but he still has a bit to learn when it comes to dealing with people.” At that, she pinched Helge's butt.

“Lena just asked me how we managed to achieve the big changes back then. What do you think? What made it all possible?”

Sally put her hand to her chin thoughtfully. Then she looked up. “I'm convinced that the commitment to outside transformation can't be separated from the transformations inside. That used to be too separated.”

“By transformations inside, do you mean psychotherapy and things like that?” asked Lena.

“For example. If you want to change the world, you have to start with

yourself. Inner healing and coming to terms with one's own wounds and shadows is enormously important. Psychotherapy can be helpful, or seminars, self-help groups, meditation retreats or coaching."

Lena smiled. "Many roads lead to Rome."

"Exactly. At the same time, there used to be a lot of people who were always just circling around their own problems and processes." Sally took a big sip of lemonade. "I used to have this friend who ran to her therapist every week and saw the solution to all the world's problems in reconciliation with the inner child. She felt she had to heal everything inside herself first for the world to change."

"But isn't there some truth to that?"

"Sure. But it's a battle against windmills, to try healing all people individually in a crazy world that continually makes people sick. Inner healing is important, but it absolutely needs the accompanying changes of social structures."

Lena nodded. "The refugees I used to work with were almost all traumatized. I've sometimes thought that if the money and energy that goes into helping refugees had been put into peace work and international reform a few years earlier, maybe some of the wars and all this suffering could have been prevented."

Sally nodded. "That's exactly what I mean. At the same time, there were a bunch of unreflective activists who would have benefited greatly from a little coaching and self-reflection on their inner child. Then they wouldn't have had to burden their activist groups and organizations with their inner conflicts."

"Oh, yeah," Lena screwed up her face. "I know those folks too well. So you mean it takes work both on the outside and the inside?"

"Exactly. But in the past, it seems everything was separated and split apart. That's when environmentalism was gleefully pitted against social issues, rich against poor, men against women, north against south, and old against young."

Lena looked down at the ground. "Damn! That was so frustrating." Then she looked up. "But what led to this turnaround? It seems that at some point the movements united. How did that happen? How did more and more people make the leap?"

"Perhaps it can be described as an evolution of human consciousness that one day the time was ripe for integrating the supposed opposites. There was definitely a sudden switch at some point that went through the change movements in this respect. At the same time, some powerful social technologies such as sociocracy, Dragon Dreaming, Theory U,

Circling, Art of Hosting, non-violent communication and so on were spreading. This made collaborating effectively so much easier.”

Lena's eyebrows drew together. “Most of it hardly means anything to me.”

Helge jumped in: “That was exactly the problem. Most activists in the past lacked the right tools for transformation. These are methods for effective, harmonious and meaningful collaboration. As far as I remember, most of these only emerged after the turn of the millennium. Moreover, it takes time for such methods to spread. In any case, these new approaches were extremely helpful in creating a more trusting way of working together. In social movements and NGOs, collaboration thrived much better as a result.”

“Sounds promising.” Lena thought about it for a while and ate another cherry with relish. “Suppose I could travel back in time again. What insights would you have given me as an activist thirty years ago?”

“Not to fight against the old system,” said Sally, “but for a more beautiful world. The world needs inspiring visions and compelling examples of change. In the past, activism was often too negative.”

Helge nodded in agreement. “That's right. Fighting and resisting are the methods of the old paradigm. What it takes for positive change is compassion, understanding and connection. That was a very important lesson for me. If you only fight the old, you wear down your own ideals. Just like the many freedom fighters who overthrew dictators and then became dictators themselves.”

“But if evil is not fought, won't it gain more and more strength?” Lena said in irritation.

“Of course there is a period of struggle and resistance,” Helge said. “But most of the time, positive transformation requires other methods.”

Sally added, “Moreover, the elites of the old system had the weapons, the money, the surveillance state, the police and the media. We just couldn't win a fight in the form of a direct confrontation.”

“And what should be done instead of fighting?” asked Lena.

Helge raised an index finger. “The first thing is to make sure that you are doing well yourself. If you exploit yourself, you're not helping anyone. Second, take time for the joyful things. Otherwise, you forget why you do what you do.”

Sally made a meaningful gesture. “In the hopes of reaching the moon men fail to see the flowers that blossom at their feet. Albert Schweitzer.”

Lena looked a little downcast. “Uh, I'm very touched by that, and at the same time I feel guilty. If I'm honest, I was quite lost in the self-

exploitation mill. There was not much time for flowers and joy.” She took a cookie from the table. “Do you have any more good advice in store?”

Helge nodded vigorously. “The revolution must be fun!” Sally laughed in response and looked at him fondly. “Helge sometimes went to political demonstrations in a giant polar bear costume.”

“And you as an angry oak.” Helge laughed out loud. “Remember when a dog peed on you?”

Lena had to grin. “In that case the disguise must have been really good.” She looked thoughtfully at the garden. “Yes, fun is important. I think my projects were often way too serious.”

“We activists used to be a humorless crowd at times.” Sally shook her head.

The topic got Helge going. “All these supposed justice warriors who just showed off their moral superiority didn't necessarily help build alliances and friendships.”

Sally nudged him. “Oh come on Helge, you weren't completely innocent here. But admittedly you were the sweetest social justice warrior of them all.” She gave him a kiss on the cheek.

He grinned. “Sometimes it takes a troublemaker.”

Sally turned back to Lena. “I think an important factor is to practice understanding for the old system.”

“Understanding for the old system?” asked Lena, irritated.

“Yes. For the people in the old system. Even if there were good reasons to be angry at people in leadership positions in politics and business, most people there were trapped in their roles and worldviews.”

Lena frowned. “What do you mean?”

“Let's take a financial speculator - the classic bogeyman par excellence. Imagine in school and university you are trained to perform and compete. Your parents always had little money and you are afraid of falling back into such poverty. For your social environment, material success, a good career and status symbols count above all. You were also taught at university that maximizing corporate profits creates innovation and prosperity, and that the financial system optimizes the distribution of risks and thus functions as the grease of the economic system. And now you are sitting in the office tower of a large corporate bank and your supervisor wants to see profit. Would you speculate with food if that's lucrative right now or not?”

“And your wife just wants your money, too,” Helge said with a grin.

Sally ignored him and continued, “Within that framework, ask yourself

with all seriousness, what it would be like to be in these shoes?”

Lena looked thoughtful. “Whew. I think I see where you're going.”

“Exactly,” Sally said. “Then imagine some left-wing freaks come in and scold you for being greedy and tell you to quit your job immediately. What are you going to do? Will that open you up to quit everything and to open a cute little repair cafe instead?”

Lena shook her head, slightly amused. “Hardly. But that still doesn't justify unethical behavior.”

“No, it doesn't. But it's very powerful to empathize with these people, to understand their challenges, conflicts, and worldviews, and to see that inside is a person who has fears, who wants to be liked, who wants a nice life, and who probably loves their children. But the boss wants to see numbers, the shareholders demand a high return, and the mortgage on the house wants to be paid off.”

“Okay. I don't think I've actually ever really put myself in the shoes of a financial speculator. But what do I do with these insights? Their behaviors and actions are extremely problematic, whether you like it or not.”

Sally looked at her piercingly. “Yes, that's true. But instead of judging these people from the moral high ground, it's just so much more powerful to meet them from a position of understanding and at eye level, and to invite them into a new story.”

“What's this new story?” asked Lena.

“That these people also want to protect the environment and would like to have more time for their children. That they know deep inside that many things are going wrong and that they long for a more beautiful world. That it can be very fulfilling to build this more beautiful world together and to watch stories of small successes everywhere, but that the old systems logic often puts us in structures and roles that make us do things that no one wants.”

Lena sighed. “That sounds really powerful.” She chewed thoughtfully on another cookie. Then she looked up again. “But I don't know if I could really muster that understanding when I'm facing an oil company executive or a financial lobbyist.”

“Sure. It's not easy at all.” Sally looked at her sympathetically. “And that's where we come back to the inner work. I was in a group once where we practiced doing just that, putting ourselves in the shoes of our perceived enemies.”

Helge nodded. “After all, the real enemies was not the people, but the system structures. It's the system, stupid!”

Sally nodded. "The problem was the big capitalist system with its incentive structures, norms, and laws. Basically, all the established institutions were part of that system. Even many of the big NGOs, as I discovered at one point. There were so many absurd power games and intrigues going on that the idealistic energy bled off without making any difference."

Helge laughed. "Someone once spoke of the military-industrial-pharmaceutical-financial-educational-NGO complex. That probably sums it up pretty well."

"Oh, God!" Lena grabbed her forehead. "Those institutions are so overpowering. It's like David against Goliath. How to win this game?"

Sally smiled at her. "Life finds a way. Always."

"I think it was also a generational thing in the end." Helge rubbed his chin. "Many of the older generations were in too deep to even imagine the fundamental changes it took. In the end, therefore, I put my energy into young, fresh grassroots movements. That's the only place I found the right allies. Alone, you'll be eaten up by the old system, but join up with like-minded people and you can accomplish anything."

"It makes me think of an old saying," Lena remarked. "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together."

Helge nodded. "Exactly. And the big change took a long way."

Sally put her hand on Lena's arm. "I think the most important aspect in all of this was not to wait for change, but to start living in the new world today and now. As Gandhi said, be the change you want to see in the world." She took a deep breath. "Of course it took all the big changes and ideas. But the oases of the more beautiful world were first created in small acts. Human beings cultivated wonderful communities, connected with nature, built organizations of trust and cooperation. So much could be done: investing one's money ethically or giving it away to activists, consuming sustainably and, above all, consuming little, stopping to eat meat, bringing joy and hope to the world."

Lena smiled. "That sounds lovely."

Sally looked at her and nodded. "The good life doesn't take place in the future, it always takes place in the here and now. The cultural philosopher Charles Eisenstein once wrote: The sky starts where the ground ends; we need only look with different eyes to realize we are already there. is a collective shift of perception away. Abundance is all around us.«

Lena got goose bumps and let this sentence sink in for a moment. Then she pointed to the floor in front of her. "It's true. The ground ends

down there. We're walking in heaven.” She laughed out loud.

“Have you ever heard of Sacred Activism?” asked Helge.

“Sacred Activism?” Lena shook her head. “No.”

Helge looked at her with a deep gaze. “Sacred Activism stands for seeing one's own work as something sacred and putting oneself at the service of this wonderful planet. It means answering the call of the heart that knows the more beautiful world. It means carrying this new world within and nourishing it with every thought and deed. Sacred Activism means being a warrior of light and inspiring the world with your radiance.”

“Wow,” Lena said. “That sounds powerful.”

“Yes. But don't take it the wrong way.” Helge looked at her seriously. “It's not about starting even more grandiose projects. Rather, it's about creating a new world in the many small acts of each day, about dealing with other beings differently and about looking at the world differently. Everything is interconnected. The smallest gesture can change the course of history.”

Sally smiled. “A beautiful African proverb comes to my mind: Many little people, in many little places, doing many little things, can change the face of the earth.”

Lena nodded thoughtfully. She took another cherry and let it melt in her mouth. For a while they were silent and enjoyed the chirping of the birds and the warm sun.

Finally, Sally spoke out. “If you were to go back to your past with the new impressions you've gained over the past week, what would you do differently?”

“Good question.” Lena cocked her head to the side and contemplated the question for a while. “I would have new hope. Knowing that a world so much more beautiful was possible and so tangible would have given me great strength.” She looked down at the ground thoughtfully for a moment. Then she looked up again, her face beaming. “I would stop wearing myself down so much by fighting the old system. Instead I would take more time for myself and spend it in nature. And I would look for spaces where I can live and build the more beautiful world right away.”

Epilogue - 2049

“What's that?” A boy from the group of visitors looked questioningly at Jannis.

“This is what's called a leaf blower,” Jannis replied. “I'd be happy to demonstrate it.” He strapped on the machine and pulled the starter, causing the engine to howl. Then he used the device to blow up a pile of paper on the side of the hall. With an elegant twist, he briefly aimed the blower at the visitors, who stood in a semicircle around him with enthusiastic expressions. One man's hat flew off his head. The group laughed.

While the group applauded his short demonstration, Jannis turned the leaf blower off again.

A young woman looked at him incredulously, “And that thing was seriously used to sweep up leaves back in the day?”

Jannis replied, “Oh, yes. Real work had to stink and make noise.” The people laughed again.

An elderly gentleman raised his voice. “This may seem funny to us today, but I can tell you that the constant noise in the cities in the past was terrible. The constant humming of cars and machines. Be glad that noise is regulated so much better these days!” Some people nodded.

Jannis cleared his throat: “This is where my tour ends. I hope you enjoyed this little glimpse into the recent history of modernity. Thank you for your attention!” The group clapped enthusiastically.

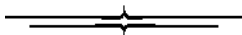
After a short pause, Jannis continued: “Our newly opened Museum of Big History is also looking forward to your feedback. You are welcome to share any suggestions or requests on the tablets back there. Otherwise, I recommend our permanent exhibit, *Production for the Landfill*.” He pointed to a large double door on the side that was decorated with plastic trash. “Over there we have an impressive collection of some very fun products that turbo-capitalism has produced in its heyday. My favorites are the high-tech slippers, the underpants with Christmas music, and the electric banana slicer. I hope you enjoy it!”

Jannis earned a final round of applause, bowed slightly, and headed for the relaxation room.

As Jannis had hoped, the relaxation room was empty. He took a meditation cushion from a wooden shelf, placed it on the thick blue carpet in front of the large window, and sat cross-legged on it. He closed his eyes and concentrated on his breathing. His thoughts were still

circling around the past tour. The new job was still unfamiliar and the groups challenging for him. But in the research projects on economic history, he was often able to contribute with good ideas. His thoughts wandered to his colleague Sophia. Maybe he should invite her to lunch with him sometime? He turned his attention back to his body and his breath. Breathe in and out.

Calmness slowly descended on his mind. He smiled.



“Lena, can you throw the spade to me?” Helge squatted between two bushes a few rows away. He planted a small tree there. “Only if Madame doesn't mind, of course,” he added.

Lena countered cheerfully. “Madame fears the royal spade is not intended for use by simple country bumpkins.” She stood by a raspberry bush and ran her hand over the red fruits. They were almost ripe. A petite white cat rubbed against her leg. Lena bent down and patted its neck, whereupon the cat began to purr.

“Damn roots!”, Lena heard Helge swear and remembered the spade. She picked it up and brought it to him. He took the spade from her and, gasping, rammed it into the ground where the tree was to be planted.

“For a city kid, you're not doing too bad here,” he said, wiping a few beads of sweat from his forehead. She had to laugh out loud.

Helge smiled at her. “Nice of you to visit.”

“Yeah, I really enjoy being out in nature. I would never have thought that country life would do me so much good. But working on the land is a fantastic balance to my job at the Ministry of Democracy. The projects and people are super exciting, but the peace and quiet here feels very good, too.”

Helge leaned on his spade and nodded. “Oh, before I forget: Could you feed Erna and Che with the green scraps over there? These are their favorites.”

“Of course! I would do anything for Che.”

Helge saluted. “To the revolution!”

Lena laughed, looked up to the sunny sky, and nodded. “To peaceful transformation.”



*“Another world is not only possible, she is on her way.
On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing.”*
- Arundhati Roy

Afterword by the author

About the origin of this book

In the last years I have done very different things and have been a (pluralist) economist, money reformer, coach, alternative practitioner for psychotherapy and organization developer. In the process, I have encountered numerous very inspiring ideas for the transformation of the societal system at large as well as for organizations, groups and individuals. These many building blocks of change have come together in my mind like jigsaw puzzle pieces for a more beautiful world. As a result, with time a clearer and clearer picture emerged in my mind of what a different society of deep connectedness, beauty, and freedom might look like, one in which the many solutions symbiotically connect and complement each other. Having such a comprehensive vision has given me immense strength and inspired my activism on a daily basis.

At the same time, I had the impression that most people in our society lack a holistic idea of what a more beautiful world could look like. I also generally experience public discourse as very negative and lacking in perspective. Dystopias are everywhere, but bright visions for a more livable future are rare.

So in August 2019, the idea was born to write a book about this more beautiful and livable world that resides in my heart. I hope that the result, *Utopia 2048*, inspires, touches and motivates to participate in the creation of this world in an entertaining and accessible way. With the book, I especially want to help spread the word about all the good solutions and visionary ideas that already exist. Many of the brilliant ideas that are mentioned are so far not widely known and rarely put to practice because they have a hard time competing against the logic of the prevailing political and economic system or are simply still very young. I am convinced: Most of the solutions and technologies for our social problems are already there. They *just* need to be more widely spread and implemented.

Utopias have a difficult history. Many utopian visions did not lead to a more beautiful world, but were used as a justification for oppression and war. However, I think it is wrong to abandon utopias for this reason altogether. Instead, it depends on the right application. Utopias should not be dogmatic visions or ready-made blueprints, but inspiring food for thought, a basis for discussion, an open offer. *Utopia 2048* was written with this attitude and is intended to inspire, broaden perspectives and spark social dialogue about the kind of future we want to live in. The

aim of *Utopia 2048* is therefore not to present a ready-made vision for our society. For this reason, not all of the ideas in the book are intended to please unconditionally. Some are meant to confuse or provoke. The main thing is that new, stimulating perspectives emerge. I therefore wish for many more and different social utopias in literature and film.

Of course, everything will turn out differently in the end and the world in 2048 will look completely different from *Utopia 2048*. Nevertheless, the society described in this book does not strike me as totally unrealistic. In any case, my aim in writing it was to remain realistic and grounded enough for this utopia to seem possible and conceivable in principle thirty years from now. I hope that one day someone will hold this book in his or her hands and be delighted to discover that the world I once dreamed of has become a bit of a reality.

Of course, this also implies that not everything is perfect in Utopia 2048 and that an even more wonderful future is conceivable. However, significantly farther-reaching social changes will probably take even more time and will probably fit better into a *Utopia 2098* or *2148*.

In addition, I want to acknowledge that the story is shaped by my specific perspective as a privileged, white, heterosexual, German man. The fact that some topics, especially those that are important for other population groups, receive less attention in the book does not have to do with the fact that I do not regard these as important, but rather that I simply did not feel qualified enough to write about them in more detail.

By the way, the book title *Utopia* is not exactly appropriate, because a utopia is a “non-place” (from ancient Greek ou=“non-” and τόπος=“place”). However, since many of the ideas taken up have already been implemented on a small scale (such as the countless permaculture gardens, free schools, democracy experiments, housing projects and sociocratic enterprises), the term *Eutopia 2048* would have been more appropriate (eu=“good” and τόπος=“place”). However, due to the almost identical pronunciation of utopia and eutopia in English, the term utopia has come to be used for both meanings, while eutopia has mostly disappeared from the public vocabulary.

Utopian Artworks

For the book cover, I had commissioned an artwork of a utopian Berlin of 2048. I was so enthusiastic about the result, that I ordered several further utopian images from my illustrator that accompany the chapters in this book edition. I hope that the beauty and power of the artworks will make my vision of a better future even more tangible. To allow other

people to use these graphics for their projects, the images do not come with classic copyright, but with a Creative Commons license, which allows for private and non-commercial use and redistribution for free. More info about the license and a growing number of utopian artworks can be found at www.utopia2048.de.

Thoughts on the Corona crisis

As I write these lines, the Corona virus is raging in the world. Crazy times have begun. Suddenly there are curfews in Germany, supermarket shelves are being bought empty and people with breathing masks are walking the streets. Many people and businesses fear for their existence. Others even fear for their lives or the lives of their loved ones.

Major social issues lie ahead:

How do we care for the weak?

Where is the right balance between effectively containing the pandemic and protecting civil liberties?

How can we prevent an economic collapse?

In early 2020, I co-organized a major conference in Berlin on *the next financial crisis as an opportunity*. Only a few weeks later the Corona crisis hit and financial turbulences started. The next months and years will bring great changes. The world after Corona will be a different one. What will it look like?

I believe that humanity is currently at a crossroads where anything is possible. The spectrum ranges from collapse and chaos to the dawn of a new world more beautiful than we ever dared dreaming of. For many countries, the crisis may end in the permanent abolition of civil rights, widespread surveillance, and increased separateness and fear, or it may end in an awakening of solidarity, a transformation toward a sustainable economy based on solidarity, and a rediscovery of the value of community and closeness.

My greatest source of inspiration, Charles Eisenstein, pointed out in an essay that the word *corona* comes from the Latin term for crown. He asked: Could the Corona crisis be a crowning for our civilization in the sense of an initiation into something new? Is the Corona virus for humans the initiation from the archetypal tyrant who wants to control and dominate everything to the archetypal king who serves life and all living beings?

Every initiation holds great dangers and the death of the old world. At the same time, it carries the potential to integrate old shadows, release great power and initiate significant developments.

*The Cosmic Spirit seeks not to restrain us
But lifts us stage by stage to wider spaces.*

[...]

*Even the hour of our death may send
Us speeding on to fresh and newer spaces,*

Excerpt from *Steps* by Hermann Hesse

More than ever the world is ripe for new ideas. I hope that *Utopia 2048* can help to spread the right solutions and to give hope in these challenging times.

By the time the Corona virus hit Europe, most of this book had been written. In the last minute before publication, I decided to take up the topic anyway and to include a few ideas for economic policies. I hope that my cautiously optimistic Corona scenario will perhaps even be surpassed by reality and that we as a society will grow beyond ourselves through this challenge.

At the same time, I am deeply concerned about the current outlook for the future of many people. Especially in the already strained countries of the global South, millions of people die every year from hunger, war and preventable diseases. The Corona crisis has the potential to multiply this suffering.

It also seems paradoxical to me that international air traffic was so quickly brought to a halt to contain the Corona virus, but not before to prevent the climate crisis, which has much more destructive potential.

In any case, the Corona crisis has shown that incredibly fast changes are principally possible and can be implemented if politicians are convinced of their necessity.

What would be possible if humanity agreed to create a more beautiful world like the one described in *Utopia 2048*?

The Weltschmerz of the Utopian

During my writing this book, I wondered why dystopias are so prevalent and why there is so much public discourse about what is going wrong in society, even though it is so much more fulfilling and joyful to engage with inspiring and powerful utopias.

I suspect that the explanation lies in the fact that the personal opening to the possibility of a more beautiful world can paradoxically be a painful process. The more one allows the feeling that this world could be incredibly more beautiful, the more painful it becomes to endure normal everyday life. I myself have regularly gone through grieving processes in

recent years, especially after experiences of touching closeness to nature, of deep community life and of inspiring encounters with people. Returning to the “normal” everyday life of our society after such experiences sometimes made it very clear to me how cut off we typically are from ourselves, from nature and from each other, and how much suffering there is beneath the surface of normality. For example, I once facilitated a mission statement workshop at a free school and was positively touched by the deep desire of parents and teachers there to make the school a loving and joyful environment where children can freely and happily develop into strong personalities. When I returned to my apartment in Berlin later that evening, I was overcome by a deep sadness about how loveless and alienating my own (comparatively carefree) school days had been in contrast to the spirit of this school. I later learned that my colleague, with whom I had co-facilitated the workshop, had felt the same way that evening back home.

In this regard, the preoccupation with the possibility of a more beautiful world can open the heart, so that not only the good things are felt more intensely but the many sufferings in society as well: The collective loneliness and superficiality, the misery of our fellow creatures in factory farming, the refugees at our borders, the destruction of nature, the collective traumas, and the noise and ugliness of many cities. Fittingly, I recently read in a book, *“Only broken hearts can save the world.”* The path to a new world probably also leads through a valley of tears. However, those who shy away from this valley are not making a good decision. For those who close their heart to the pain in the world close it just as much to its beauty. Just as the ears cannot be set up to only hear Beethoven and birdsong but block out all noise, the same applies to feeling: All or nothing. The price of not feeling the sorrow and pain of the world is to be less alive. This seems to be the case for many people. But more than ever, we need sensitive people with open hearts. To return to the analogy of hearing: It needs people who do not close their ears to the noise, but perceive it in full and therefore go about eliminating its source.

Every experience of a more beautiful world makes the old one less bearable. That is exactly what it needs: More and more people who become painfully aware of the suffering of the world, who find it impossible to continue participating in the great machine, and who thus bring the old system to a standstill so that something new can emerge. I am convinced: we have hardly any idea of how incredibly more wonderful this world could be. So let's dare some utopian Weltschmerz

Let's do it!

There are days when I think: With all the wonderful people and ideas in this world - how can the great change not succeed?

And there are other days when the suffering of the world floods over me and I want to bury my head in the sand. Both hearts, that of despair and that of hope, beat in my chest.

Nevertheless, I am now tired of the discussion as to whether we will make it into a better future or whether we will drive full speed ahead against the wall. It is and remains a collective decision which is still to me made.

This world is created every day by the countless decisions of nearly eight billion people and can therefore literally be "recreated" every day. So what kind of world do we want to create?

If you feel the same way as I do and the world in *Utopia 2048* seems more worthwhile in large parts than today's society, then it's time to roll up our sleeves!

Each and every one of us can positively influence the lot of many people, creatures and places. On the next page, I have therefore listed numerous possibilities to actively contribute to positive change.

In particular, I encourage people not to be intimidated by the overwhelming power of the global machinery and not to underestimate the power of many small, local changes. Charles Eisenstein, in his book "Climate - A New Perspective" aptly wrote: *"If everyone focused their love, care, and commitment to protecting and regenerating their local places, while respecting the local places of others, then a side effect would be the resolution of the climate crisis."*

Of course, fundamental systemic reforms are needed on a large scale. At the same time, it needs the many small changes in our everyday lives, in our families, businesses, schools and communities. I am convinced that when these countless small waves unite to form a sea of change, anything is possible.

Who, if not us?

When, if not now?

Where, if not here?

How if without love?

Let's do it!

With eutopian greetings

Lino Alexander Zeddies

Suggestions for change

Listed below are some ideas on how one can contribute to change and support the *butterfly economy*:

1) Subscribe to positive and solution-oriented news through *Good News* or the *Good News Network*.

2) Put your money into an ethical bank and switch to a bank that is member of the *Global Alliance for Banking on Values*.

3) Eat organic, fair, seasonal and regional food and build a community permaculture garden or join a *Community-supported agriculture* project.

4) Learn and disseminate methods of change and attend a seminar on *Nonviolent Communication*, *Dragon Dreaming* or *Theory U*.

5) Enjoy your next trip consciously and slowly. Travel by bus & train, carpool or hitchhike. Take the time for cycling, canoeing, hiking and climbing tours. Experience the country and its people better and more sustainably via *Couchsurfing* or as a *WWOOFer*.

6) Support local networks and communities of change and become active in *Transition Town*.

7) Change your job and work for a social enterprise, an ethical company, an NGO or found something yourself or with others to actively support social transformation with your energy and creativity. You can find jobs with meaning at *tbd.community*, for example.

8) Educate yourself about how the monetary system works and question your personal relationship to and dependence on money. Find more information and your local money reform organization at the *International Movement for monetary reform*.

9) Buy clothing and consumer goods as ecologically, sustainably and fairly as possible.

10) Spend much more time in nature and fall in love with this wonderful planet earth.

11) Read *The Power of Feelings: A Practical Guide to Emotional Intelligence* by Vivian Dittmar and engage in the integration and healing of emotional wounds and traumas.

12) Consume only what you really need. Share and repair instead of buying new stuff.

13) Enjoy your life, sing and dance - change should be fun after all!

14) Give away your financial abundance and donate money to organizations that work for social change.

15) Ride a bike and use public transportation instead of driving a car.

16) Be inspired by the book *Reinventing Organizations* by Frederic Laloux for more self-organization, purpose and wholeness in the workplace and inform yourself about and experiment with methods from Sociocracy and Art of Hosting and the Systemic Consensus principle.

17) Slow down your life and start meditating. To get started, try the apps *Headspace* or *Insight Timer*.

18) Support upgrading democracy in a progressive political movement or party, support the introduction of citizens' councils or join the movement of the *Economy for the Common Good*.

19) Watch the documentary *Earthlings* or *Conspiracy* and switch to a vegetarian or vegan diet.

20) Start a community housing project.

21) Switch to green electricity and gas suppliers.

22) Unleash your full potential through attending a powerful self-development seminar.

23) Watch the inspiring documentaries *Tomorrow, 2040* or *The Biggest Little Farm* together with your loved ones.

24) Give this book away to others who might like it.

More information and links to these suggestions and to the ideas in this book can be found at: www.utopia2048.com

Intellectual property, gifts and pay-what-feels-right

I don't believe in intellectual property. Yes, the institutions of copyright and patents possibly stimulate research and innovation, but I still don't think it's true that anyone can really own words, ideas or a song.

In the same vein, I don't feel like I own the ideas for this book. They came to me as a gift. Additionally, I am a big fan of flexible pricing models where you can pay-what-feels-right and where no paywall prevents anyone from accessing content.

Therefore, I have decided to make the digital version of this book freely available on www.utopia2048.com and to equip it with a Creative Commons (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) license that allows for free copying and sharing of the text for private and non-commercial purposes. This book shall be a gift to the world, so feel free to share it with anyone who might enjoy it, too!

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Is that not a reason for hope?

Feedback, comments and suggestions are very welcome. Mail me at:
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