

The New Village

Written and Illustrated by
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Chapter 1

Renee



Published by Saronti Ltd

Facilitated by Clare Ford at the Switched On Academy

Have you ever had the feeling something amazing is going to happen, and it does?

I'm Renee, I am 12 years old, a kind, confident and mischievous sort. I have dark, long curly-coiled hair, which I regularly wear in two braids. I live just outside the city border in the Inaki Village with my Mom and my Aunt Maxia, a doctor, who works in the city.

It is 8am, and the sun hits the back of my neck with a warm smile. I am on my way to meet up with my school friends Kyla and Suki for a swim in the clear, sapphire waters of the Tango lagoon. As I walk along the dusty road, I hear the loud laughter of small children counting as they play hide and seek in the pretty front garden of the village nursery. With my red and white striped rucksack, full of essentials, draped over my shoulder and my hair tied back in one, I hurry

to meet my friends, eager to hear the latest school gossip from the twins.

As I stepped forward to cross the road, about five hundred metres from the lagoon, I noticed something out of the corner of my eye. I turned to see two of the village Elders wildly waving their hands, motioning to me as they headed in my direction. I suddenly remembered what day it was. Sluggishly, I walked towards them, clear in the knowledge that my self-care moment in the Tango lagoon was over. The taller of the two, Elder Samuel gave me a hard, stern look.

I knew then that I was in trouble. "Oh, the new girl!" I exclaimed remembering it was only yesterday that the two Elders had told me that I was to go to Guadeloupe

Airport with Elder Jack, and meet the new girl and her Mom, then give them a quick tour of the village, before escorting them to Mama Bennetts.

“Yes,” said Elder Samuel in a rather exaggerated manner, “and we are counting on you to make a good impression. Please no silly business today, young lady,” he continued, looking over his glasses as he spoke.

“I will be on my best behaviour, Elder Samuel,” I replied with a prolonged sigh.

Ohh, I so hated it when the Elders spoke to me in that manner. It made me feel like a teacher's pet. For not only was I a straight A student when I put my mind to it, I also got up to some mischief! Detention for

climbing on the desks during French lessons, detention for bunking 1st period, then another detention for eating lunch on the roof of the school cafeteria (with 5 other girls), all in the same week. I never understood that one because it was still part of the school. Mom said crossly that I could have had a nasty fall but it was too hot to sit in the cafeteria, I repeated, especially when the air conditioning wasn't working. I was grounded for 2 weeks!! The detention lasted a full week and included scrubbing off gum from the 9th and 10th grade classrooms, emptying the food waste bins in the kitchen and mopping the floors of the boys' toilets! Yuck!!

Anyway, it was because of my excellent grades that I wasn't expelled. The school Elders knew I was

intelligent but lacked focus and so they decided to give me some "responsibility".

" Responsibility, it helps to focus the mind young lady," I could hear Elder Samuel's words ringing in my ears.

So here I am, sitting in a shiny, double seated pick-up truck beside Elder Jack, country music blaring from his car radio. As we drive along the dusty village road, we pass rustic painted bungalows on stilts, rainforest flora of all colours and sizes along the side of the roads and luscious, tall trees with wide green leaves and yellow, red and purple blooms. Passers-by wave at us and Elder Jack responds with a rapid toot from his horn.

We soon leave the familiar village roads and cross the mile long Amerit bridge and enter the city. The city is like a concrete jungle: crowded, smelly and loud, with people and tall buildings all around.

We come to a sudden stop as the traffic begins to build up in front of us. "We can't be late," Elder Jack repeats, under his breath as we begin to crawl at a snail's pace. "Sorry Reene, you will have to walk from here, if we are to meet them on time," he remarks.

"Really," I replied reluctantly, the thought of walking along the city streets, filling me with dread!

Within minutes of leaving the pick-up truck, I am pushed and shoved, like an old tired ball. I look down

as I hurry along the streets and notice my pretty white sandals are soiled from the city's grime. I am melting in the city heat!! My head is hot, small pearls of sweat running down my forehead. So I take off my red baseball cap and fan myself for a few seconds as I stop outside a clothes store full of various sized mannequins all colourfully dressed in designer gear. Only three blocks more, I whispered to myself. I looked back to see Elder Jack's truck but with the streets being so crowded, I couldn't see him. I continued in the direction of the airport and fifteen minutes later I finally *arrived*.

But I was not ready for what was in store for me. Not one bit!

Chapter 2

The Arrival



Tired and sweaty, I quickly finished my bottle of water and entered the arrivals lounge. I looked down at the photo in my hand from Mama Bennett's, her daughter

and granddaughter smiling. They would be arriving soon.

Chief Ishmael had mentioned that flight 206 from Sydney, Australia was due to arrive at 2pm local time. It was 1.55pm, not long to go.

I looked up at the arrivals board, and suddenly felt a gentle tap on my shoulder. With a curious look, I slowly turned round to see a mouth full of braces smiling back at me. I recognised the face immediately - it was Mama Bennett's granddaughter.

"Hello, would you happen to be Renee?", the girl, about my age remarked. "Yes", I replied, nodding my head. As she led me to where her Mum was seated, I followed a couple of steps behind, admiring what she's

wearing. I possibly have a rival, I thought enviously. There was no doubt that I was the best dressed 12-year-old in the village, as my Mum was an award-winning fashion designer and her speciality was young fashion. Furthermore I had been eating and breathing fabric, cut and colours since before I could walk, so I knew a lot about style.

This Ryan girl however was killing it, in the fashion stakes!! She wore three afro buns in her hair, a short-sleeved leopard print T-shirt with distressed black denim shorts and beige and white sandals to complement her white cat-eye shaped sunglasses.

Hastily but subtly pulling myself together, I greeted her Mum, "Nice to meet you too, did you have a good

flight?", I said in my poshest voice. "If you'd like to follow me this way, I'll take you to Mama Bennett's and give you a quick tour of the village along the way."

Now this brings me back to my first point: have you ever had the feeling something amazing is going to happen and it does?

Well, this was the day I met my best friend, I just didn't know it yet.

We caught up with Elder Jack who was parked right outside the automatic doors as we left the arrivals lounge. "I managed to get a good spot for once, " he said proudly, "but we need to be quick". I introduced

him to Ryan and her Mom, as he loaded their luggage into the back of the pick-up.

Myself and Ryan sat in the back, which was a little bit tight for my legs but for Ryan, it was worse, with the front seat rubbing against her long legs. She had to move her legs slightly to the right to get some relief. For the first few minutes of the ride there was silence, only the sounds of the busy city could be heard through the open windows.

This silence was soon broken with a loud toot from the horn, as Elder Jack slammed on his brakes, to stop his vehicle from hitting a young man with a large sombrero who had staggered into the road. Cursing,

the man raised his fist as we drove past. Elder Jack gave him a cold stern look but said nothing.

I was casually gazing at Ryan's accessories, the matching silver necklace and bracelet set she wore had a Ying Yang design, which I thought was very pretty. Her small leather satchel handbag was beige & white with two buckles and a zipped pocket at the back. I admired how lovely the stitching looked, not a thread out of place.

I could hear Elder Jack in the background telling Ryan's Mum his life story and she was enjoying every bit of it. When Ryan said, "What is that?", pointing to a tall reddish brown totem-like statue positioned at the

entrance of the Amerit bridge, I explained what it represented and its importance in the history of our village.

It was approaching sunset, when we arrived at Mama Bennett's white bungalow. "Ohh you're finally here," she said excitedly, with a wide smile, as her daughter stepped out of the pick-up truck.

Ryan's Mum climbed the steps and met Mama Bennett on her verandah, filled with the scent of lavender and jasmine, they hugged, tears running down both their cheeks. Then it was Ryan's turn; she hadn't seen her grandmother in the flesh since she was five years old, when Mama Bennett spent six months with her daughter in the suburbs of Sydney.

Mama Bennett hugged her granddaughter so tight that from where I was standing it looked like Ryan had stopped breathing. Everyone looked so happy and content. By the time Elder Jack and I said our goodbyes, it was nearly 8pm and I suddenly remembered that we didn't do the village tour but tomorrow was another day and it would give me a chance to see Ryan again.

The following day, everyone was talking about the new visitors. New people don't come to our village that often, ever since the cliff diving accident, ten years ago. Three Italian tourists visited our village; it was the final day of their holiday and they wanted to go for a swim in the Cameti sea but instead of entering the

waters from the shore, they decided to go cliff driving instead.

The emergency services were called as all three of them had to be airlifted and rushed to the city's hospital. A week later one of them died and the other two suffered serious injuries.

The news spread like wildfire to other villages and up to the city. There was a big investigation: the police questioned a number of the villagers; the Elders were summoned by city officials who demanded answers. It was eventually found that the Elders and all those involved in the village had acted responsibly but the

media coverage meant that the village was painted in a bad light, and its reputation tarnished.

The Chief Elders at the time decided to ban tourists altogether, which had a devastating impact both economically and socially on the village. The village is only now recovering and the new Chief Elders have now lifted the ban, but certain restrictions remain.

Chapter 3

The Treehouse



By the time I met up with Ryan and her Mum at Mama Bennett's bungalow the next day it was midday and already 25 degrees. Ryan's Mum stated she was

feeling tired after the long flight and wanted to rest but Ryan was eager to explore the village. After a short discussion, it was decided that the tour should be abandoned, as it was far too hot and I would take her back to my house and show her my treehouse instead. Ryan was filled with excitement.

As we walked, we took in the sights, sounds and smells of village life. Mama Etta, who lived across the road, waved at us from her painted-pink verandah as we walked down the drive from the bungalow. "She used to be the headteacher of the local school, but had retired years ago," I whispered to Ryan. As we headed onto the road, we could hear the squawking birds high up in the trees, as they built their nests and the scent of oil, herbs and spices coming from

neighbouring kitchens. I caught the scent of banana fritters, frying fish and plantains, which made my tummy rumble and my mouth water with delight.

We arrived at my house and entered through the turquoise gates, crossing the front yard where my Mom greeted us on the steps of the duck-egg blue and white painted verandah. Her hair was wrapped neatly under her headscarf, with matching silk snakeskin printed loungewear.

"Hi Mom, this is Ryan, the new girl I was telling you about." I said.

"Oh wonderful, nice to meet you Ryan and welcome to our village. Are you showing her the treehouse?" I nod

in agreement. "Go on ahead, I'll bring out some snacks in a few minutes," she replied.

"Thanks Mom, we'll call you if we need anything," I finished.

"And nice to meet you too, Mrs Watson." Ryan added. Mom smiled and went into the house.

Walking round to the back of the house, we made our way down to the treehouse my Dad had built for me as a surprise for my ninth birthday.

I remember how elated I was, when I came home from school and I saw it there in the garden.

The treehouse was made from combining a number of materials such as twigs, branches, moss and wide dried leaves. It rested on a beautiful natural wood base and had a wooden step ladder leading up to the

front and a rope ladder from the mango tree leading to it from the side. It was filled with colourful foliage from the rainforest.

Once inside, Ryan sat down in awe, taking in its charms.

"This is beautiful, " she sighed, "the prettiest treehouse I have ever seen."

She asked about the various different items on display. Proudly and enthusiastically, I explained them to her: a stool made out of a tree trunk, a painting of my Mom I did and a selection of cushions that I'd made with my Mom's old sewing machine.

Mom soon brought us pink lemonade and snacks as promised. A gentle breeze blew through the open windows, making the treehouse cool and comfortable. I sat back, resting on my chair bed and smiling, thinking about my Dad and what he would say, if he were here now.

I noticed a confused look on Ryan's face. I asked her what was wrong. "Oh, nothing," she answered. "It's just..." she continued, "My Mom was telling me on the way here that, a few years ago, there was a serious accident and the village was cut off from the rest of the city. Is this true?" I was speechless. Nobody talks about that time, I thought to myself.

"Really! She told you that?" I said, exhaling slowly.

"It's never really spoken about. It was a sad time in the village's history. I don't really know why the Elders decided to ban visitors from coming into the village at the time."

"But they felt it was the right thing to do," I continued.

Ryan still looked confused but said nothing more about it. Instead, she poured herself another glass of lemonade, took a sip, lay back on the floor, closed her eyes and smiled.

Chapter 4

The Meteorite



After spending nearly all day in the treehouse yesterday, Mom wanted me to catch up on my

chores... *This is so so boring*, I thought as I swept up the last of the leaves in the front yard.

The mango tree was laden with mouth-watering yellow mangoes, not quite ready to drop yet and the sweet smell coming from them was intoxicating.

I thought about my Dad, and how much he loved mangoes. *He would sit under the tree in the late afternoon sun and eat at least three of them, smiling with every bite...*

Abruptly, my daydreaming was interrupted by a loud boom; I looked north and saw white smoke rising in the sky.

Mom came running out of the house, rollers still in her hair, wearing the tired red apron that I had made for her in my sewing lessons two years ago.

"What was that noise?" she asked in a panicked voice.

"I don't know," I replied nervously. I looked up and down the road and noticed that all our neighbours were staring towards the north of the village with a look of horror, some covering their mouths, others with hands on heads in disbelief at the sight before them.

"Renee!" Mom called firmly, "I want you to go into the house and stay there until I get back."

"But Mom!" I exclaimed.

"No buts!" Mom shouted, holding her bag of supplies. I took a step back in shock - she rarely shouted at me.

She noticed my expression and immediately gave me a tight hug, "I'll be back soon," she whispered. Mom had trained as a nurse when she was younger, so she knew what she had to do in serious situations- and this was a serious situation.

As I stepped into the house. I heard a scream, then another, then another. I quickly turned to see if Mom was watching. She hastily told me to lock the door and shut all the windows and then she was gone...

* * * *

It has been 4 weeks since I opened my front door. I was too afraid to do it before now....It's 8 pm and the silence is deafening...

I wrapped Mom's favourite silk scarf around my face, covering my mouth and nose and closed the door behind me. The white-grey mist was back again, thick and heavy. I didn't want to take any chances, as it may be toxic....

The light from the full moon provided just enough light to see a few feet in front. In the darkness, the street was deserted and frightfully quiet. I missed the usual sound of the crickets, or the jazz melodies from Elder Johnson's place or the sweet smell of homemade bread and cakes from Mama Bennett's.

As I made my way, slowly wandering down the dark street, each step I took pierced the silence.

I could hear what sounded like a child sniffing in the distance.

Blindly making my way through the white mist, I headed towards the sound, the sniffing getting louder and louder with each step. A few feet ahead, I started to make out what looked like a dead sloth lying in the middle of the road.

Cautiously, I moved closer only to realise that it was not an animal at all. I'd recognize that blue logo anywhere.

It was Ryan!

"Ryan!" I said louder than I intended to.

"Are you alright? Are you okay? Oh Gosh, you're alive!" I said desperately, as I knelt down beside her.

"My Mom," she said in a distressed voice, "I lost my Mom," she continued.

“One minute she was next to me, we started running, there was a stampede, I fell over and someone stepped on me... I want my Mom!” she started to cry again, shivering like a kitten on cold winter's day.

“Where is my Mom?”....

Chapter 5

Ryan



It has been two weeks since we had arrived and both myself and Mom were enjoying being in the village. Everyone was so nice and friendly and we loved the community spirit.

"Mom, am I allowed to go over to Renee's house today?" I pleaded.

"No, sorry Ryan, after you both spent the whole day at the treehouse yesterday, Renee didn't get to do her chores," she replied. "But that's okay because I have something for you to do, go get the mixing bowl, we're going to make your Grandmother's cake for her birthday tomorrow."

"Okay then," I huffed.

I wandered over to the glossy, white kitchen cupboards and carefully took out the glass mixing bowl. Just as I rested it down on the worktop, a sudden shrieking interrupted "New York" by Alicia Keys playing on the radio.

What was that?, I wondered. "Mom, did you hear that?" I shouted. As I went out onto the verandah, I noticed grey smoke rising and everyone looking up into the sky.

"Mum, what's going on?" I asked, getting worried.

"Go back into the house, Ryan and pass me my cell phone." Quickly, I grabbed her cellphone from the white coffee table and handed it to her. She dialled the Doctor's practice, and male voice answered. He relayed that there is a sudden emergency at the north side of the village, people are hurt and they are sending a rescue party to the area; suddenly the line went dead.

Hello! Hello! Hello!, I heard my Mom say, with a sudden panic in her voice. The look on her face told me that this is serious. As she threw some items into a

bag she said firmly, "Go to my room and don't leave till I come back,"

"I... but... Mom... no... wait!" I called after her.

No, just no! I couldn't stay here without her. What would I do? So I ran after her, "Mom!" I shouted.

Luckily I ran quickly enough to catch up with her.

But it wasn't for the best. All of a sudden, a crowd of people sprinted towards us like cheetahs. They trampled all over me like a wildebeest stampeding across on the planes. That was the last thing I remembered...

* * * *

Now we're here.

"Where is my Mom?" I asked again, staring hard at Renee.

Renee didn't have an answer for me.

"Let's go back to my house." Renee suggested cautiously, helping me up. "You must be hungry..."

Chapter 6

The Plan



I don't know how long we'd been asleep. All I know is that a strange, buzzing noise woke me up. I looked over, to check on Ryan and she was still asleep,

making a bee-like sound, while drooling all over Mom's favourite pink silk pillow cases.

As I turned over, thoughts flooded my mind. *It's been a week since I found Ryan lying on the ground in the still of the night, in the middle of the street. What is going on?*

My house was the closest to where I found her, so I decided to bring her back here. As I helped her up the stairs and to the bathroom, I sat her down and tended to her wounds. It was mainly cuts and grazes which were easy to deal with, but her black eye was a different matter. I got a bag from the kitchen, filled it with ice and placed it on her face. She suddenly jolted but I understood why, it was painful. She kept it on her face for about ten minutes. The purple swelling

needed to go down. I left her to shower and went downstairs to prepare some toast and a hot drink. By the time I got back upstairs, Ryan is under the covers, in Mum's bed, fast asleep.

I sat on the edge of the bed watching her, as I ate the toast. Wearily, I stepped into the shower, grateful for the hot water running down my back. I got dressed and slowly crawled into the bed, hoping not to disturb her.

Soon, I was falling asleep too, hoping that this is all a dream and Mom will walk through the door, with tales from the fashion world.....

I drifted in and out of sleep until I was suddenly awakened by the sound of Mom's alarm clock, blaring at me.

Beep! Beep.Beep.Beep.

I am surprised it's still working, I thought, as I jumped out of the bed, to turn it off "Ryan," I whispered into her ear. "Ryan, Ryan." Finally she woke up.

"Morning," she said through yawns and a long stretch. "What time is it?"

"It's 8.30am," I replied sadly. I slowly went into the bathroom, shutting the door as I started crying..... *I guess it wasn't a dream,* I thought. After a while I heard a light knock on the door. Quickly, I wiped my tears, washed my face then opened the door. Passing by Ryan I pretended nothing was wrong, and went downstairs to start breakfast with whatever I could find.

Ryan meets me in the kitchen, along with the smell of eggs, plantains and bread. Without hesitation, she sat down and tucked into the plate before her.

"Look, Renee, while I was sleeping," she said through mouthfuls, "I had an idea, a sort of plan but I'm going to need your help. Gather your stuff because we need to go to my house. ASAP!"

"Umm...but...what...sure...okay..." I said, confused. I didn't know what Ryan was thinking but whatever it was, it needed to be done quickly... because there was no-one else here except just the two of us left... at least that's what I thought...

The village was still shrouded in that dismal whitish-grey cloud.

The city was apocalyptic. Parts of the rainforest are completely desolated.

Even though it was a bright day, it felt far from cheerful.

"Right, are you ready?" she urged.

"Yeah... okay... let's go." I replied, as I threw the last of some essentials into our bags, still not knowing what we were going to do.

It was 10.30 am by the time we left. Ryan began to speed walk toward her house, with me running so I could catch up. After a further 15 minutes we found ourselves on Ryan's doorstep. Carefully opening the door, we timidly stepped inside. Immediately, Ryan bolted up the stairs.

"I'm just going to my Mama Bennett's room to get something," she called back.

Giving her a thumbs up, I looked around the abandoned house; everything looked neat and tidy. A new layer of dust and dirt had already settled on the table and shelves. I looked out of the window remembering the happy days.

Even the sun looked dull now. The clouds, just black patches forming in the sky...

Chapter 7

Grandma's book



Coming back down the stairs with a tattered, dusty cream-coloured A5 book in her hands, Ryan said, "I've got it."

"Got what?" I asked, still puzzled.

Ryan lay the book on the white glass table in the middle of the kitchen.

"It's my Grandmother's book on plants." She replied, "It has remedies and cures for illnesses and diseases." As she flicked through the pages, I noticed recipes for illness and notes on wild edible plants, noted and circled using different coloured pens.

"Oh of course your Grandmother was a herbalist!" I exclaimed.

I was remembering the time Mama Bennett gave my Mom some crushed herbs to rub on a rash that had appeared on my leg after falling over in some red shrubs a few hours before. The herbs burned when first applied but eventually the burning stopped and within two days the rash was gone.

"Exactly! With the right recipe we can find a cure to help those that might be sick," she continued. "Well that's my theory anyway, it seems most logical. Don't you think so?"

"What are you saying? Do you think that others might be alive out there?" I asked in frustration.

"Renee, you might think I'm silly but I have a feeling that we are not alone and there are people out there that need our help".

Renee was stunned, she never thought there might be any survivors. She hoped to see her Mom but that was it.

"Look, we live in a rainforest, which is full of healing shrubs and plants that can be used as a cure," she

explained, "but we need to travel to the north side of the rainforest," she said nervously.

"Oh!" I said, swallowing hard. I finally understood the situation.

Ryan gathered some supplies - flares, water, tiny cutters, some cord, a pestle and mortar, matches and a torch. Renee re-packed her bag: with food, water, blankets, first aid kit and a torch.

Ryan opened the front door in an uneasy manner. It's a nine mile hike to the north side of the rainforest. As we walked across the front yard, our shoes left small indentations on the dusty ground.

"I hope we make it back here", expressed Renee with a worried look on her face. "Me too," said Ryan, with an anxious grin.

"We will, I promise," she continued. She took Renee's hand and as they crossed the road, they could hear the rustling of the trees as they disappeared into the forest.

Chapter 8

The Three Herbs



After six hours of walking and a lot of stops, we finally approached the north side of the rainforest. It was 16:35 pm, according to my watch.

Staring into the depths of what looked like a graveyard for trees, we took a deep breath and carefully stepped onto the deserted landscape.

We searched through the dishevelled foliage, only to find what looked like one of the same exact plants that we needed.

“Yes, yes, yes yes, that’s it! That’s a Wasai plant, we’ve found one,” Ryan chuckled.

“Good, now we know there's still some existing vegetation here. We might be able to find the other two plants before the end of day.” I said with relief.

The exhilaration had hit us and it hit us hard, we believed now more than ever that we could do it.

One hour later, after continued searching, I came across a medium sized shrub. It was a green spiky plant with white flowering buds on each leaf.

"I think I've found something, Ryan, over here!" I shouted out to her. Sprinting over, Ryan looked through her Grandmother's book and found that we had discovered another plant. "We've got another one!" she said excitedly.

Two down one to go, finally we almost had everything we needed. The hope of saving the world and stopping the gas from spreading was getting to me. As we sat down on a nearby log to take a short break, tears slowly began to slither down my face.

I thought about my Mom and I how much I missed her warm smile, the way she twisted my hair, the sweet smell of her honey-brown banana cakes. I wondered if she was watching me from up there in those grey pillow-like clouds. Looking up at the stars I make out a

strange constellation which reminded me of her smile, and how all I'd see was her face when she woke me up in the morning; the sun shining onto her silk headscarf projecting colourful patterns on the ceiling.

"Wait, what's that?" I said, pointing at a peculiar glowing shrub under a fallen tree.

"Hold on," Ryan replied quickly, flicking the pages in her Grandma's book.

"Ughhh! The suspense is killing me, did we do it or not?" I asked impatiently.

"YES! Yes!" she shouted, her voice echoing throughout the rainforest. "Quickly, get the pestle and mortar out of my bag," she urged with a wide smile.

Picking up her bag, I passed it to her, while she carefully took each plant out of the spare plastic bag we carried with us.

Picking about three leaves off each plant, she placed them in the mortar and gently ground them with the pestle, until it formed into a neon blue liquid.

After a couple of minutes, mutli-coloured swirls began to rise out of the mortar getting higher and higher, illuminating the sky. A burst of colour suddenly exploded through the clouds, and a fine mist spray covered us and the land around us, the vegetation started to become healthy again, moulding itself back into the rainforest it used to be.

A tall dark man appeared from behind the trees and walked towards us, he had a nice face and a friendly smile. I recognised him straight away. It was Elder Jack. I ran towards and hugged him tight, tears streaming down my cheeks.

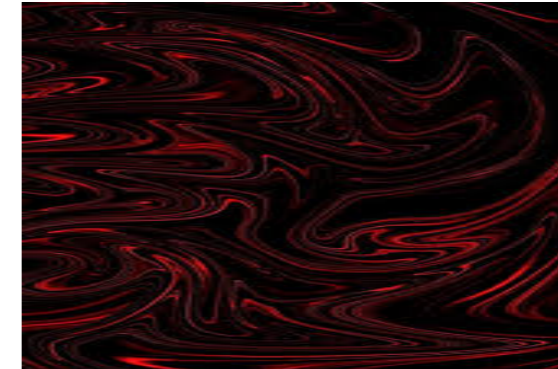
I began to notice silhouettes, I couldn't tell who they were. Slowly, more and more figures began to emerge from the forest depths, short ones, slender ones, tiny ones until what looked like a group of 90 people standing on the border of the rainforest gathered around us. Eyeing them closely I recognised that the adults were all wearing a green plaited bracelet intertwined in the strands was a single gold thread holding the bracelet together with a clear circular bead.

It was then that I knew they were from my village. Every year during summer, on the eve of the full moon, the Elders held a ceremony to mark the transition into adulthood. All the kids age 16 are presented with a green and gold bracelet.

As one of the other villagers stepped forward, a beaming, yellow light appeared and I instantly recognised who it was. I looked over to see Ryan, with head held high crying with joy... It was Mama Bennett. She had survived.

Chapter 9

The Future: 3 Years Later



As I approached Ryan's house, I could smell the banana fritters that Mama Bennett used to bake and Elder Samuel's jazzy rhythms being played by his nephew. The village was different now.

For weeks after Ryan and I made the sky swirl with colour, some of the remaining men from the village would go out everyday and look for the missing but at the end of each day they would return sad, exhausted and empty handed.

3 months after the Meteorite had struck our village, the surviving Elders decided that the searching should end and we should now focus on rebuilding.

During those 3 months, everyday, I would go to the village centre and help record the names of the missing. There was sadness but in some weird way I felt close to Mom here. Ryan didn't come, she said, it was too painful. Instead she assisted the doctors and nurses at the medical centre looking after sick patients.

Three years later, Ryan was living with Mama Bennett, and I was living with Aunt Maxia (who had returned from the city) and Kiara, she was a teacher from the city, who was funny and very intelligent.

She and about ten other teachers, had helped to set up a new school in the old nursery building. It took six months to complete all the refurbishments. When it was time to go back, she and three other teachers decided to stay behind and help support the forty kids varying in age from 5-18 years that had survived.

The Elders had announced earlier that week that every year we'd have a ceremony to celebrate those who had survived the meteorite landing and honour those whose lives were lost, so as to keep their spirits alive.

A monument was created to honour the missing and this became the centrepiece for the yearly celebrations.

Only thirty five percent of the villagers had survived but the future looked promising, as a new village was beginning to emerge from the old.

We hope that you and your family and friends enjoy the book that you have created.

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