

The day the air went gray. 2070. Sai Thompson

I run. The air feels sticky and gray drops of the surrounding smog fall off my chest but drip down onto my empty stomach. I jump. The moss covered log is slick and I'm falling. Fast. The scab on my thigh rips off for the fourth time and each time it grows. The blood is dark, a bad sign, increased oxygen saturation. The animals have gotten too big to kill with a knife. All of the power went out three months ago today. I haven't seen another human sense, well not any that are actually still in human form. They have all been affected with the radiation exposed when the power went out just like all of the creatures on the planet. I hide under a leaf as the morning sparrows, now the size of planes, fly overhead.

I have a rare genetic mutation, Hypocolrosymic Amisralia. They told me I was found unconscious in front of the Bosman Hospital approximately ten hours after birth. They, the scientists, took another 48 hours to make the right type of air designed for my body. That toxic shit in the air today. It's almost pure radiation and I have no idea how they figured out that was the right thing to give an unconscious child to live. They said I was blessed. I was cursed. Do you have any sense of what it's like to be locked up like that? On a ventilation system, hooked to every limb, tied tight to a hospital bed every hour of the day for 37 years, do you understand? That day the power went out. I remember it clearly. There was a shock, I couldn't feel it, but I could see a wave of yellow sparks hit my room. The locks must have been electric because the second after the wave the locks clicked open and so did all of the doors and windows around me. I sat up, they had injected me with nutrients every day twice a day to keep me strong. I stood up. The wires fell from my shins and forearms as I took weak steps out of the room. The men in white that had watched through the small square window on my door morning noon and night were on the ground. They didn't move. I stepped over them. Small steps. The light hit my skin. The light was warm and dust filled making its tint red. I pushed the sliding doors open to the seemingly dead town. My bare feet burned on the cement sidewalk. I breathed for the first time that day. The day the air went gray.

The morning sparrows are gone now. I step back out onto the mud ground, the mud now dry and cracking like the dirt on my skin. I'm headed to the towers. That's where I can turn the power back. Only 15 miles left. It's easier to travel at night because the lake reflects moonlight on the tall towers making them visible, allowing me to not stray off the path. The bugs are large now too. A spider sleeps about 100 feet from me. He is the size of a small car. I walk slowly so as to not crunch the leaves and wake him. I'm almost past him when a squeak as loud as a firecracker goes off behind me. I don't look back, whatever it is it can't be good and looking would only scare me, slowing me down. I'm running again now. These three months of trying to find the towers has made

me quick on my feet. The loud noise is still following me but is now the sound of paws on the cracking trees above my head. It moves fast and is able to follow me even with my ability to crawl under leaves, branches, rocks, and the occasional flower. I go faster, but so does the thing. I slow down trying to trick it, stopping under a fallen piece of bark. The noises stop and the forest goes quiet. I close my eyes tight, scrunching my nose up to my forehead. I step out with my eyes still closed. A warm breeze breathing quietly in my scrunched up face. I open one eye slowly. A nose the size of my chest looking back at me. Big green eyes staring me down but more curious than anything else. Its head alone is four times my height, making this one of the largest cat-like animals I have seen mutated. I reach out, her nose is rough but covered in a thick coat of slobber. She bows its head even lower in front of my feet, I reach up. Her fur is rough too. I crawl up between her eyes as they stay watching me. She is not scared I talk to her. Telling her about my plan hoping she will help, even if she can't understand. I explain that I'm trying to get to the towers. The electrical towers that went off sending the radiation wave out. I tell her this is the only way for people to get back to how it used to be even if the jungle that has been growing for months is going to die along with all of the animals the radiation has mutated. Not to mention that I will have to go back to breathing on a machine for the rest of my life. But I know it will work and it's the only way to keep humans as a species. I say this she starts to run, she startles me and falling back grabbing tight to her coarse fur. She runs all night. The towers are getting closer and closer. I must have fallen asleep because I woke up on a mound of moss without the cat in sight. Just as I was thinking about how I didn't say thank you to her, a bright red light starts flashing above me. The towers. I immediately start climbing up to the lever. The ladder was shaking in the warm wind, my hair curling up my nose and in my eyes. I see it. Reach. Pause. Not thinking about how I will have to go back to life in the hospital but instead the destruction that humans had been making to the planet before it had time to over grow. I think about all of the animals that are now thriving after being almost killed off. I think about how the soil is thicker and damp now after being farmed for so many years. I think about Earth. Earth doesn't need humans, earth doesn't need me. The three months I had breathed where all I needed. I jump. Hundred of feet above the cliffs I jump. The fall is long but only lasts a second. It's quiet. Earth survived today.