

The Last Straw

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'It's just one straw, said 8 billion people', humanity's most convenient excuse. The world was on fire, quite literally, on fire. California's skies had turned orange from endless wildfires, choking both people and animals. 18,000 homes and 38,000 acres of land, gone. 43 humpback whales washed up on the North American shores, their bodies bloated, and stomachs filled with plastic. The once flourishing Amazon forest, 'the lungs of the earth' was being ripped apart tree by tree. The Great Barrier Reef, once bursting with colour, faded to bone-white skeletons, wilting in the warming seas. Over a million species stood on the edge of extinction by 2050, their habitats destroyed, their voices silenced. Above it all, Rosie and Papri soared in the Resolution Mobile, ROLO, a silent ship gliding through the sky, witnessing a planet gasping for breath.

They could vaguely make out the figure of an island as they hovered closer to the Pacific. Rosie frowned, not having seen the unfamiliar landscape on a single map. She continued to scan the horizon, squinting against the scorching sun, "Oh! Is that an island?" she curiously asked and within mere seconds her excitement faded into somber realization. The so-called "island" was an unrecognizable heap of refuse, nearly twice the size of Texas. Coca-Cola cans clinked against shampoo bottles, blanketing the surface in plastic. Broken fishing nets tangled with old rubber slippers, while swollen polyethene bags floated like jellyfish on the waves. Syringes, straws, styrofoam. Headless dolls, dismembered teddy bears and flaccid footballs. A worn-out tyre drifted past them, half-submerged, its tread now worn out by the striking sunlight. Millions of empty juice boxes, milk cartons and food tins all enmeshed together. Rosie could make out their faded print still stubbornly readable "100% Natural". It was a colossal garbage dump. At a loss for words, Papri simply gazed at the island. "We created this." she muttered sorrowfully. Their next destination, the Atacama Desert. "What a unique mountain!" Rosie exclaimed, her voice slightly tinged with confusion. Papri merely shook her head, unable to utter a word at the sight. A vast pile of discarded clothing had piled up to create a 'mountain' significantly visible from space. The synthetic fibers shimmered in the sunlight, an unsettling sight of the consequences of fast fashion. The pile was never ending, mirroring the callousness of human beings.

In silence they travelled further to the infamous polar regions of the Arctic, only to find despair awaiting their arrival once again. The ice that once served as a home for a plethora of creatures had melted away with the heat. A family of shriveled up and weak

polar bears struggled in the icy waters, their fur matted and soaked. They lay clinging to a piece of ice far too small to accommodate them all. Their suffering in spite of their innocence flooded Rosie with tears. There were no more hunting grounds, no icebergs to call home. If the situation worsened their extinction was inevitable during the course of the next decade. Rosie watched in horror as the emaciated bears struggled to stay afloat. Their bodies were weak and their movements slow. Rosie turned to Papri, the weight of the situation settling over them both. “We’re losing them.”

Wiping her tears, she stared at the damage, the quiet hum of the ROLO accompanying the silence. “There had to be a solution”, she thought. It was then that something began to stir inside her, something far stronger than her anguish. She sat upright, her hopeful voice suddenly flushed with clarity. “We are going to stop this. Not just the two of us.” It took the whole world to create this catastrophe, and it would take the whole world to reverse it. The Council of Youth Innovators was born and from that moment on Radical Rosie made use of her superpowers and radicalized the world.

With their mission clear, the girls turned vision into action. The Council didn’t aim to fix everything at once, it was about doing something, anything, and doing it together. The ROLO became their base as they zipped across cities and mountains, deserts and islands, picking up kids who refused to wait for adults to finally take accountability. From Indonesian treehouses to Kenyan classrooms, Rosie and Papri reached out to children with dreams, skills and ideas. They meticulously picked each and every council member with extraordinary talents. The Council grew quickly, spreading across boundaries. Every child inspired the adults around him. From village councils in India to tribal elders in South Africa, people began to listen. Hope spread like fire but this time, the kind that healed instead of destroyed. River cleansing programmes, building solar lanterns, tree plantation drives and designing apps to track pollution levels were building blocks in a dream so unimaginably vast. Plastic bottle by plastic bottle, river by river, they made a difference. A young Bangalorean boy led a weekly clean-up of his riverfront. A girl in Chile used discarded denim clothes to create insulators for village homes. Children in Norway built nets using plastic bags and bottles to catch waste before it reached the sea. These budding eco-engineers and waste warriors became the dire spark for change our earth desperately needed.

Each of them received a ‘Hero Patch’ stitched to their sleeves. It lit up with every project, glowing with the number of lives or animals they had helped save. Their mission became gamified, collective and unstoppable. From above, Rosie looked down on Earth not to observe garbage or melted ice, but tiny sparks of green blooming across

continents. Signs of healing. Signs of hope. Bangalore became the city of lakes again. The oceans sparkled with whales and life, not with garbage. Scientists discovered new species almost every day and Governments finally began to take charge. Problem-Solving Papri beamed, her pink cheeks glowing with pride. She felt lighter than she had in years. Change was no longer a distant dream. It was real, it was now, and it was being led by voices once unheard. Because hope, after all, wasn't a superpower. It was passed from hand to hand, igniting a movement powerful enough to reunite our ecosystem. The planet had started to breathe again. This was only the beginning. And there was no stopping them now.