

“Where’s our water?” A voice rang out from the muddled crowd.

I felt cold inside.

“I don’t know.”

Chaos broke out that day. Even though almost every resident had a stock of unfinished water, it couldn’t last more than two, maybe three days.

That night I went to the Water Pod.

I placed my hand lightly on the scanner on the wall and flinched as the door groaned its protest from the abuse of the other residents. The screen spanning the left wall lit up and a chair unfolded.

Welcome, Resident Morgane. The translucent words glowed softly on the screen.

Sitting down, I hesitantly opened the resident’s tracking-grid. An array of 342 resting blue dots flashed across the grid. They remained clustered in their Housing Pods and I gave a small sigh of relief. It seemed that only I was mad enough to choose to be away from others on a night like this.

Then I pulled up the second tracking-grid, the one for water deliveries, and saw the still dots of the hovercrafts sitting hundreds of thousands of miles away. My head sunk. None of them were coming.

Nothing was coming.

Ping.

My eyes flickered towards the screen in astonishment. A message from The People, our government, was flashing on the screen.

To be received by the Water Distributor and for the Residents of Sector 53:

As you know, our water supply has been depleting since the 25th century. Our ancestors thoughtlessly took from our earth in careless and overwhelming quantities.

Now in 3907, over a thousand years have passed and we are paying the price.

With the world covered in more than 99% desert we now get our water from our one receding ocean, water vapor, and dwindling pockets of underground reserves.

However it will not last. We have over a thousand scientists working on formulas for synthetic water but they have not found a solution.

We simply cannot afford to provide water for a rapidly growing number of residents.

We regret to inform you that for all Sectors with over 300 residents, our only choice is to stop your water provisions if we wish for the human race to survive.

This will be the last that you hear from us.

The People.

I stared blankly at the screen, struggling to process the words in shock. Numbly, I typed out a message for the residents.

All residents report to the Water Pod immediately.

Suddenly rage took hold of me and I struck the corner of the screen, my fist passing through the glass as shards rained in a blizzard through the air.

Harsh banging on the pod door snapped me out of my frenzy. I wiped my eyes as the door struggled open.

The hopeful gazes of the residents fell as they stared at me. Absentmindedly I glanced at my hand, barely registering the seeping blood.

I shook my head slowly and their shoulders sagged. One by one, I let the residents in and explained.

That night I fell asleep with the cold floor kissing my cheek and my eyes locked on the unmoving blue dots on the tracking-grid.

I sluggishly sat up and stared at the mess around me in confusion. Slowly I remembered.

No water. I'd forgotten.

Hope wilted.

The water didn't come that day.

Every news report was about the dying sectors. From my research I'd learned that The People had cut off water for 42 out of the 100 Sectors.

I licked my lips, but it only made the dryness of them sticky. I kept reading.

Moreover there were reports of over two dozen riots by family members living apart from those in the cut-off Sectors. The disarray that The People were forced to deal with brought me a glimmer of happiness.

But still the water didn't come.

Ping.

I bolted up from my chair and checked the time, two in the morning. Suddenly I was grateful I'd begun sleeping in Water Pod because flashing on the screen was a message from The People.

To be received by the Water Distributor and for the Residents of Sector 53:

My fingers twitched.

Our heroic scientists of The People have against all odds discovered the formula for synthetic water and will begin its formulation when we run out of the Earth's supply.

We can only hope that you will not receive this message too late. We are disembarking our hovercrafts immediately and every Sector will receive their provision.

We apologize for the turmoil you have been through.

The People.

I let out the breath I'd been holding. And while an apology would never be enough I let a smile spread across my face.

All 342 residents stood huddled in the Water Pod as the familiar hum of the hovercraft grew louder.

Stand by for water drop-off in one minute.

I'd never felt so happy to see those words flash across the screen.

Bottles of water began to pass through the opening in the ceiling and I chugged down the remaining water that I'd been saving over the past few days and took one of the new.

For the first time in days I fell asleep in my own bed.

Water falls from the sky and trickles and cascades across my skin.

But then the cool of the rain begins to burn.

I try to run but flickering blazes dance up my arms and beneath the disarray of fiery red I bleed clear water.

I scream —

Beep beep. I woke up with a gasp, as I was wrenched from the clutches of a nightmare.

I willed my heart to slow as I double tapped my watch and a remainder flashed on the small projected screen. *15 minutes until intake of Meal-Pill #1.*

I rubbed my eyes in exhaustion, hoisted myself out of bed, and grabbed my untouched water bottle. The air seemed uncomfortably heavy and I wiped a bead of sweat from my face.

As I stood, I was able to pinpoint the source of my discomfort. Not only was it abnormally bright but the sun's heat felt especially intense. I used my arm to shield my eyes.

"I think the power's been cut off."

I whirled around as our sector's electrical manager walked towards me.

"See how it's brighter and hotter than before?" She pointed to the sky, "It's because the Dome isn't working. Usually it dims and cools our Sector because the sun is naturally too powerful, but it seems like something's wrong."

"Can it be fixed?" I asked.

"Well, it's actually only controlled by The People. But it's not just the Dome. After six in the morning, almost everything stopped working. I tried to call, but it wouldn't go through. I—"

She suddenly stopped and started gagging.

"What's happening? What's wrong?"

She fell to the ground, her face striking the floor. I turned her over with a growing sense of dismay.

Blank eyes stared into mine and I backed away in horror.

Then a stronger sense of panic began to rise.

Despite the fact that it was nearly noon the pounding of my heart was quite literally the only audible noise. I approached the nearest Housing Pod in dread and cracked the door open.

Two figures lay slumped on the ground. I pressed my hand against one's cheek. Still warm, but getting colder.

I felt like I was about to vomit.

I checked the next Pod, and the next, but the same scene greeted me with every open door.

My breath grew shallow as I struggled to comprehend.

Then I understood.

Poison.

Last night, when everyone had received their water, I'd seen every single resident immediately drink from it—except me.

The thought made my mouth grow dry and I hurled the water bottle I'd been clutching so tightly away from me. The top broke off and the toxic water spilled across the ground, evaporating almost immediately.

I forced myself to calm down but hysteria had already taken its hold.

I drew in a deep, shuddering breath of the poisonous-feeling air and locked myself into my Housing Pod. Another wave of apprehension began to wash over me.

Their scientists never discovered a formula for artificial water, did they. The pit of resentment grew stronger.

They lied so there wouldn't be any more riots. My hands formed fists and I pounded at the ground. I bruised, then bled, but the anger remained.

They gave us only enough time to announce that we'd received water before cutting off the power so we couldn't tell anyone that they were killing us.

I lay on the ground, tears and blood around me, and willed myself to close my eyes.

I strapped my backpack tight on my shoulders and grasped the Survival Manual I'd taken from our Sector's Ancient Relics Museum.

I flipped to page one and stared at the large tear I'd made in the smooth wall of the Dome.

I don't know what I am doing.

I took a step forward. A cloudless blue sky and an ocean of ivory-white met my eyes.

I don't know where I'm going.

Soft sand met each step and I kept walking.