

Sawyer hated news channels. He hated the negative stories that appeared on every channel, and he hated that nothing was positive. Nothing was heartwarming or beautiful and nothing seemed to be going right in the world. Endangered species got more endangered, fossil fuels continued to be burned, more people were shot in the streets, and more people were struggling to put food on the table.

What an imperfect world.

Nothing is perfect—no one is perfect—so naturally you wouldn't expect the world to be perfect. Not every animal was as cute as a rabbit, and not every plant tasted as good as watermelon. Sawyer knew imperfections were everywhere—But Earth was imperfect to a fault, and this was because of humans.

Humans have proven that they simply could not live in harmony with the environment, or with each other, so Sawyer never turned on his TV for fear of learning a new imperfection about his unsalvageable world. It seemed so helpless. How everything was broken beyond repair. Everyone always said, "Take baby steps—Solve one thing at a time," but Sawyer knew that was a pointless way to look at it.

Then one morning it all changed.

Everything was different. Everyone was different.

Let's back up.

Sawyer was in the middle of his walk home. His backpack was over one shoulder, a binder in his opposite hand. Without realizing, he had been walking behind a boy from his class the whole time. Jared. Jared always had a Starbucks cup in his hand. Every time Sawyer saw him, he was sipping away at his drink. Today was no different, but this time it was empty.

Jared seemed so focused on whatever was happening on his phone that he didn't care what happened to the cup. He cartoonishly tossed it behind his back as he walked.

With quick reflexes, Sawyer caught the cup in his free hand. "Hey. You gonna throw this out?" he asked.

Jared spun around and looked up from his phone. "What the hell?"

"I said: You gonna throw that out?" Sawyer tossed the cup back to Jared.

Jared dodged it. "No. Leave me alone." The cup bounced off the ground before stopping. "I don't have time to find a trash can." He slowly backed away, before running off.

Sawyer shook his head and grabbed the Starbucks container off the ground.

Sawyer slung his backpack over his other shoulder. It was so heavy that it was starting to make his arm sore. It was the best time of the day—The few hours between the end of school and bedtime. There was just something special about that time. His school hours were finished, his homework was (usually) minimal, and he could use the rest of his free time to do pretty much whatever he wanted.

He stepped through the door. His father was in the kitchen as always, and his mother was reading in the living room.

"Another successful day at high school," Sawyer greeted, throwing his bag on the floor.

"That's not what you said yesterday," his mother replied, her focus remaining on the words of her page.

"Well, today was different." He opened up his lunch bag. It was filled with recyclable waste because there were no recycling bins at school. He took out his bottles and cans and threw them in the family blue box, including Jared's cup.

Sawyer glanced over at the TV. It was on, and his father was watching a news channel. Sawyer covered his face so he couldn't see. The last thing he needed was some horrible situation going on in the world to ruin his favourite time of the day.

"Oh, Sawyer. I'm so sorry." His father picked up the remote control and shut off the television. "I totally forgot about—"

"It's fine, it's fine." Sawyer ran upstairs.

His mother looked at his father. "Dammit, Leroy."

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry."

Sawyer rushed into his room and closed the door. He pulled out his phone and began scrolling through YouTube. He read the titles of the videos carefully, before quickly scrolling past. "A new COVID-19 variant . . . A new charity to support the homeless . . ." His breathing grew heavier. "Climate change grows in intensity and severity . . ."

He shut it off.

He couldn't even look through YouTube without having his anxiety triggered. Was there anything he *could* do? Nope. All he could do now was go to sleep and try to forget about everything, wasting the few hours of his favourite time of the day. So much for the free time.

What an imperfect world.

He shut his blinds and changed into his pajamas. Sawyer slowly crawled into his bed and tried to close his eyes. An hour passed. Then two.

His eyes shot open.

"How long has it been?" he whispered to himself.

Sawyer sat up. The first thing he noticed was that his room was different. It was all tidy. There was not a speck of dust anywhere. His floor was vacuumed. His things were placed nicely in their proper spots. His closet door was closed.

"Mom?"

No answer.

He got out of bed. Suddenly, a metal arm shot out of the wall and grabbed the corner of his quilt.

"Jeez!" Sawyer shouted, startled.

The arm pulled the quilt back into its proper position and flattened out all of the wrinkles in his bed, then retracted back into the wall.

Sawyer was extremely confused. "Uh, thanks." He ran over to the window and threw his blinds out of the way. It was snowing hard. "Weird. It never snows."

His door opened.

"Mom . . . A robot came out of the wall and made my bed for me," Sawyer said confusedly.

"I know, I know," she replied. "Just like how a robot tidied and cleaned your room. And how a robot made your breakfast and it's getting cold."

"But . . . Dad always makes my breakfast."

"Well, Dad is already at work, so our bot did it for him."

Sawyer checked his clock. 5:00 AM. "He never leaves this early." Sawyer left his mother in his room and made his way to the bathroom. The toilet was very misshapen, not how a normal toilet usually looked. The bowl was much wider than usual, and it did not have a lid or any water inside. "Mom, what's wrong with the toilet?"

She paused. "Toilet? Where are you from? The sixteen hundreds?" His mother laughed. "That's a modern waste-removal machine. You know-WRM."

"How do I—"

"Are you okay, sweetie? You seem like you have a flaw."

"A flaw?"

"You know, an illness. A mistake."

Sawyer opened the door to the bathroom. "I don't know what a WRM is."

"Yes you do. That's where we send away *all* our waste."

Sawyer looked all around him. "The house is so clean."

"Thanks to our cleaning bots."

He ran downstairs. The news was on. He quickly looked away, but he could hear what the anchorman was saying: "Global population has dropped to one billion thanks to our solutions to world hunger and vaccines for every disease. People in third world countries no longer have a need to have many children, and

less people are being born every day, which helps us better distribute our sustainably-sourced natural resources.”

Sawyer couldn't believe his ears. Less people? World hunger solved? Vaccines for every disease? Sustainably-sourced materials? It was too much to take in, but Sawyer couldn't help but lower his hands and watch.

Imaging on the news was filled with beautiful landscapes and happy people. It made him want to watch more. He slowly walked over and sat down on the couch.

“Mom? Did you hear about all of this?” Sawyer took a bowl of cereal from the metal arm that served it. His mother walked downstairs.

“What? The news?”

Sawyer continued staring.

“It's always talking about stuff like that. Welcome to the perfect world.”

Perfect world. What an amazing thing to hear. Strange and unexpected, maybe, but amazing nonetheless. As Sawyer took a bite of his cereal, he let his thoughts go wild. Maybe all of the countries worked together towards a common good and wars no longer existed. Perhaps the oceans were clean and beautiful. He couldn't wait to discover what was next.

Quickly, he finished his cereal. The robotic arm grabbed it from him, sprayed it with something, which cleaned it instantly, and placed it back in the cupboard.

"Okay, Mom, I'm going to school." Sawyer grabbed his backpack and opened the door. Over and over his brain told him, *Something isn't right*, but he quickly kicked those thoughts away. Before he even had time to think critically about it, the thought was already gone.

His mother watched him leave without saying a word.

He began walking. It was colder than usual, with clumps of snow laying here and there. Now that he thought about it, climate change probably wasn't even a problem anymore. The thought made him smile.

He watched a car drive by, but no exhaust was shooting out the back. A plane flew over his head—Not leaving its usual white streak across the sky.

A perfect world.

Sawyer came up behind Jared. He had his classic Starbucks cup, but this time it looked to be made of some kind of metal, and when he finished, he put it back into his backpack.

More and more Sawyer realized the sheer amount of trees all around him. They had grown extremely tall extremely quickly, all in many different species and variants. This made room for a

biodiverse range of wildlife and plants, which made the whole street feel calm and peaceful.

When he arrived at school, there were recycling bins everywhere, although they were simply called WRMs. The toilets were WRMs. Everywhere that waste could go was a WRM.

The bathroom was completely clean, and there was nobody vaping in it. After using a WRM himself, he flushed away the waste without the use of water.

"Where does it go?" Sawyer asked another boy.

"The Waste Collection Centre, where it is stored until recycled," he answered. It sounded strange, but Sawyer decided it was better than thousands of pounds of garbage ending up in landfills and oceans. Once again, a thought entered his head. *What is going on?* After a second, it passed.

What a perfect world.

Back at home, Sawyer noticed that his father still hadn't arrived.

"Where's Dad?" he asked his mother.

"Oh, at work sweetie," she replied.

It was strange. His father never worked this much. He never stayed past his hours and was always back in the kitchen before Sawyer got home. "Did he get new hours or something?"

"No, dear. He's always had the same schedule."

Sawyer began growing uneasy. "Tell me the truth."

"I am, dear."

"No, you're not."

She shrugged, and Sawyer stormed downstairs to the basement in anger. Once again, his favourite time of the day was ruined. He liked going to the basement. No one else went down there, and it was a good place to catch some alone time.

He turned on the light and saw something that he knew for a fact hadn't been there yesterday.

A small trapdoor.

Confused, he stepped closer to it. There was a lock, but it appeared someone had left the key in the hole. Carefully and quietly, he turned it. Then he lifted the door open on its rusty hinges.

Instantly, he was hit by a wave of heat. A huge pit laid below the trapdoor about fifty metres down. The pit appeared to be thousands and thousands of kilometres wide and long—It was massive. In the pit sat piles and piles of garbage—some of which were ablaze. Sawyer shielded his eyes from the small pools of light radiating off the flames. Other than the glowing fires, the whole pit was very dark.

He looked closer, and realized there were also little people far below the trapdoor—Sitting and standing around at the bottom in the piles of waste. There had to be billions of them, all just hanging out down there. Poking his head in deeper, he could see slightly better, his brain barely making out little faces on the people. One man, who was the closest to him, kept trying to climb the piles of garbage to reach something. He was trying to reach the trapdoor. He was trying to escape.

Sawyer stared closely.

It was his father.

"Don't poke your head too far in there, Sawyer," said a voice behind him. Sawyer turned around and came face-to-face with his mother.

"What is that down there? Why is Dad down there?"

"Sawyer, you just don't understand." She chuckled pitifully. "You're too young to understand."

Sawyer glanced back into the pit. His Dad was giving him a sorrowful look.

"Tell me."

She shook her head. "It's the Waste-Collection Centre. All the WRMs go here."

Sawyer listened. His mother continued.

"In a perfect world like this, sacrifices must be made. Waste must be hidden. Everyone must be happy."

Sawyer thought about what his mother had said earlier: "That's where we send away *all* our waste." The news had said the population had dropped significantly to better distribute resources. Did they put a selection of people here in the waste pit to hide? Did *people* count as waste?

"Those people should not be living there," Sawyer finally said.

"Sure, they're forced to live in poor conditions. Sure, they may be a bit malnourished. But like I said: Sacrifices must be made to help the rest of us."

Sawyer didn't even know what to say. How could anyone be so despicable—Even in a perfect world like this? He thought about the idea of a perfect world: It was impossible. Nothing is perfect. No one is perfect. He looked back down into the pit. Back to his father.

Suddenly, he felt a kick in his lower back, and he plummeted through the trap door into the pit—Falling fifty metres into one of the flaming piles of waste . . .

Awake.

Sawyer sat up, gasping for air. He was covered in sweat.

Was he on fire?

He lifted his covers. No. He was back in his bed.

Morning.

"It was a dream," he said aloud. "Obviously, that was a dream." He sighed, looking out the window. The birds were chirping. The sun was shining. The morning was beautiful.

His mother and father burst into his room. "Sawyer, you're late for school!" they said. Thank goodness—They were both okay.

Sawyer smiled. "The world may be imperfect. But it could be much worse."

His parents looked at each other, then back at their son.

"Okay."

His father raised an eyebrow. "Well, that's a positive way of looking at it."

At school, Sawyer stormed into the main office.

"Hey, I just had a concern about the lack of recycling bins at this school," he said.

He may not be able to make the world a *perfect* place to live, but he could sure take some baby steps.