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The Glow

It was a blazing November day when I decided I had enough. Gritting my teeth at the sweat trickling down my stomach, at my too-tight shirt and the tickle on my neck from hair that had gradually grown unbuzzed, I declared that this would be my last back-alley lunch break. My last demeaning shift. My last wiping of forehead sweat with that suffocating, black canvas apron embroidered *Old Tyme Country Café – Est. 2067*.

Another trickle of sweat. I stood abruptly, threw down the apron, and took off with no real destination. The sidewalks of historic downtown Norway were flooded with day-trippers itching for the novelty of being served by other humans, and for that small-town feel which quickly eroded within a few blocks of Main Street. I stormed past immaculate storefronts and manicured hedges, aging apartment buildings and cracked sidewalks, dilapidated homes and the industrial park, until I found myself at the Farms.

The Farms. Nowhere in the world did I feel smaller and lonelier than in the shadow of the towering buildings that produced our region's food supply. In elementary school, we were ushered through the maze of vertical farms and told it was a miracle. My dad chaperoned; he raged all the way home. "You know what was a miracle? The community farm. We grew through droughts and floods and freeze-thaw shifts and if it wasn't for that damn wildfire—"

My dad was from a generation who saw the transition as a chance to rethink our relationship with the earth, and with each other. I couldn't fault him for that, though as hard as I tried, I could never understand his undying hope that it wasn't too late.

"Well, sorry Dad," I muttered to myself as I set my eyes on the Farms' water tower and, half-joking, marched towards it.

My movement triggered the Farms GrowStream, which activated with an obnoxious trill that echoed over the empty campus. "Hey everyone! Thanks for visiting the Farms. It's your girl Decarb Barb here, back with another clean energy spotlight in honor of Exxon's World Energy Week."

I reached the base of the stairs that wrapped their way to the top of the tower. The gate was unlocked; the tower's use was quietly encouraged.

"I'm just an hour from Portland at a very special solar farm. This was the final farm in Maine to come online before we totally broke things off with oil, and isn't she cute! Thank you sun, and thanks to BlackRock for letting us use this land!"

Resolutely, I began my climb. It was just me and Decarb Barb as I looped my way to the top. She went on to explain how the five square miles of panels powered the Farms, and the Noyes Luxury Apartments, and the factories at the Oxford County Jail, and the...

I reached the top of the tower, soaked in sweat and panting. The tower's edge beckoned, and I began walking deliberately towards it when I suddenly noticed a warm, pulsing glow in the corner of my eye.

I turned to face the glow. The source was a formless, swirling globe of golden light, hovering around chest level. I froze, feet planted as though roots bound me there. Tendrils of light tested the air as the source lazily drifted towards me. I held my ground and my breath. The light paused about a foot away. It seemed to be waiting for something. Without words, I willed it closer.

The light glowed brighter and, with little warning, shot into my chest like a dart.

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For a moment, we were ice-cold with fright. And then we weren't.

After a beat of blinding light, we blinked until our vision returned to reveal a golden aura draped over the world. Silky threads of light now weaved across our view, and we traced their path until we found the origin: our chests. Tentatively, we tugged at a thread and unleashed a cacophony of ideas, knowledge, desires, and pains that were not our own. We let go abruptly, wincing. But accompanying the overwhelming wave of another's humanity was a peculiar, reassuring feeling. A nameless sense of connection; unloneliness.

We breathed deep and tugged another thread, and another, and another. This one, the mournful prayers of a woman who lost her family in a flood that swept through her village like a bull, just weeks after sewing the shirt on my back. This one, the righteous rage of a teenager, the one who I had run into at the cooling center from time to time, listening to their grandparents tell stories of the world they tried to fight for in the 20s. Another, the steady and patient rumble of a tree producing the oxygen I had just gasped down.

Eventually, we noticed that some of the threads had started echoing a similar message: *"I'm here."* We meditated on that, sending the message out until our heads filled with a harmonious hum of *I'm here*. Now, a new message appeared (Was it mine? Or another's?): *"Let's gather."*

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Some of us met on the lake's edge, where we found each other on a marshy stretch that was once a public beach before the investment firms swooped in. Those who arrived first shuffled knee deep into the cloudy water to make room.

Some of us wept heavy, jagged, shoulder-wrenching sobs. Others hummed, sang dirges. But as we gathered and the thrill of intimacy gripped us, we felt a shift. Someone's sob broke into a staccato laugh and we were struck by the hilarity of our bizarre exodus towards the shoreline.

Together, we rode the waves of emotions. Whooping in celebration and moaning in anguish and screaming with rage and singing, singing, singing songs of our future as we gazed across the scarred and plentiful landscape.