

**Title:**

*Author:*

# Occupy Climate Change (OCC!)

*Creative story entry*



FORMAS



*Jessica Verheij*

She woke up with the siren going off. It didn't shock her; it had been raining non-stop for six days now and the city service had already issued warnings about downtown flooding. Apparently the wetlands outside the city, where surplus water is usually directed to, could no longer handle the continuously ongoing rain. Alex, her neighbor, had told her the other day about images made illegally by a drone of some activist movement, showing the camps of the people trying to make a living on those wetlands. She didn't get it: with so much land in the world, why would you choose to live there? Also she hadn't actually seen the images, and Alex was known for its sense of drama. The camps were probably not as big as it had said. Anyway, no time to think about this now, time to start moving.

She rushed down the stairs and got her emergency kit from the closet. Then she froze. How could she have been so stupid? Her outfit was downstairs, in the basement! They would not forgive her if she would show up at the meeting point without it; not to be prepared during an emergency evacuation could cost her a big part of her allowance. She would have to run down to the basement, get her stuff and make sure to make it to the meeting point on time. Outside in the hall she ran into Alex: "Alex, shit! My outfit is downstairs in the basement. Please PLEASE wait for me!". She noticed its immediate discomfort, but it didn't have the means to resist her pledge – being friends with a programmed being had its advantages. And so Alex waited in the hall while she rushed downstairs as fast as she could. She opened the door to the basement, ran to her deposit, switched on the light and... There was someone there. No doubt about it, she could see a foot linked to a leg with jeans on, right behind the two boxes in the back. "Who's there?", her voice trembled. The foot disappeared behind the boxes. She waited 2 seconds, but then remembered that the clock was ticking. "Look, whoever you are and whatever you are doing there, we'll both be in trouble if we don't show up at the meeting point on time. So please don't hurt me, let me get my emergency outfit and I'll be out of here." She heard some moving behind the boxes and suddenly a face appeared: a human face, very white with brown eyes and brown hair. He looked terrified. She immediately felt pity for him, understanding that he was not there to harm her or to steal anything. "WHAT are you doing here? WHY are you here? Didn't you hear the siren?? You must be crazy. Come, we need to start moving!". Luckily she knew exactly where her outfit was, on the shelf in the left corner. She grabbed it and started to move away, expecting the visitor to follow her. But he did not. He remained right there, behind the boxes, not saying a word and still looking terrified.

At exactly the same moment, Alex came down the stairs. "Lina, WHAT are you doing? We NEED to go NOW!". She could clearly hear the panic in its voice. "The-there... there is someone here", and she pointed at the boxes. Alex looked at the boxes, noticed the face and within less than 3 seconds he concluded: "he doesn't belong here". "What do you mean, he doesn't belong here? Of course he doesn't belong here, this is my deposit, this is our basement. What do you mean!!", replied Lina, almost desperate. "I mean that he is not a citizen of Lisbon and he has also not been registered as a visitor. He doesn't belong here." At that very moment the man made a sudden move, the boxes fell down and he ran in their direction, trying to escape. "There is no point, you wouldn't be able to pass

through the door without us, everything is being checked and monitored”, Alex said. The figure stopped and turned around. Lina had never felt so much pity in her life: it was as if the man was about to have a mental break down. “Who are you?”, Lina asked. “I... I am a... I am a marginal”, those were his first words. At that moment Alex turned to Lina: “Remember the images I showed you the other day?”. And finally Lina understood: this man was one of those living on the wetlands outside of the city, and for some reason he had been hiding down here in her basement. She had caught him.

“We don’t have time!”, Alex was almost screaming. “But we can’t just leave him here! What if the water comes? He will DIE!”, Lina replied. One of the disadvantages of being friends with a programmed being: Alex wasn’t very good at understanding her feelings. It looked at her, puzzled, confused and clearly frightened: “But we need to go to the meeting point. It’s not up to us. It’s not our business. We need to go to the meeting point NOW!”

Alex’s last words were interrupted by the sound of a second siren going off. The three looked at each other: they knew what this meant, it was the end. All citizens of downtown Lisbon were required to be present at the meeting point, fully equipped for an emergency, before the second siren would go off, fifteen minutes after the first one. Lina didn’t exactly know what happened to the people that did not show up at the meeting point on time – but she knew the punishment would be hard. She looked at Alex: “What now?”. “Let’s go to your place, the three of us. Your apartment is on the fourth floor, it is not likely that the water will reach it. We stay there, and we think of what to do.... Of what to tell them...” Alex looked at the man: “Come with us, you’ll probably die if you stay here”. The man still looked frightened, but he realized he did not really have a choice – he followed them upstairs.

Once inside the apartment, Alex couldn’t help it: “What on earth are you doing here? How did you end up in this basement? Didn’t you know the water was coming?” Lina again felt pity for the man, seeing the look on his face: “What’s your name?”, she asked him. “My... my name is Milo”, he said. “I got stuck. I couldn’t help it. I was in the city mining the whole day, as I do almost every day, but I made a huge miscalculation. I...” Lina interrupted him: “What do you mean, mining?”. Alex turned to her, clearly impatient – Lina knew it had a very hard time dealing with so many unpredicted events – “Mining, I told you the other day. Do you ever listen to me? It’s what marginals do to make their living, they go around the underground systems of the city to collect materials left behind by the waste collectors. Especially plastic is very valuable, and they can sell it to people outside the cities. It’s how they make a living, basically”.

Lina didn’t know what to say: two minutes ago she felt this couldn’t get any more confusing, and now it was. She didn’t get it; had Alex told her this? Had she really not listened? Why did Alex know all this? How? She was sure this type of information was not being distributed by the city service. Could Alex know things that it was not supposed to know? She turned to Milo: “So that’s what you do? You go around the city to mine trash? And then you sell it?”. “Yes, that’s basically how I spend my days. We know the underground system better than the city service itself, and as long as we don’t run into anyone there’s usually no problem. Except today...” “So there are more people like

you?”, Lina asked. “Oh yes, right now we are around 150 people living outside the city walls, but there’s people coming and going all the time.”

Why had she never heard of this? Was this really happening? Did so many people have to collect trash to survive? Why could they not receive an allowance like her? Suddenly she became aware of how comfortable and secure her own life was. She had always thought this was normal, that everyone in the world lived like this... But as it seemed, at least 150 people outside of the city walls did not have an apartment, did not receive an allowance, and had to roam around the city whole days and collect plastic. Maybe they hadn’t even received an education? “What about education, did you get any?”, Lina asked. “We educate ourselves. We pass on our knowledge from generation to generation. Around 20 years ago, the last person that had lived before the Great Disasters of 2117 died. She had still witnessed a world where education was freely accessible, where people could find information about almost anything. She, and others with her, educated the new generation, and they educated us.” Lina didn’t know what to say – what kind of world was this? “But why? Why do you choose this life? Why don’t you want to live in the city, like us? It’s.... It’s nice, it’s comfortable.”

Now it was Milo’s turn to look confused. Alex intervened: “Lina, don’t be ridiculous. It’s not their choice. They’re not allowed in. They’re not one of us.” Milo opened his mouth, as if he was going to object Alex’s words. Then he closed it again, waited for a few seconds and said: “We *are* one of you. I am exactly the same as Lina, except she is a female and I am a male. But our group is made of both females and males. Only humans though, the programmed beings haven’t joined us. Yet. In other places they have, I know of a group living outside of Warsaw where some programmed beings were banished from the city. But we are the same, we are all humans. It’s just that they don’t want us. We don’t fit. They believe we will be a threat to the city and to its structures once they let us in. They believe we will pollute the streets, go against orders, try to change things. They don’t want us... *You* don’t want us.”

Suddenly Lina realized the danger she and Alex were in. This person, Milo, was standing in her apartment, and he was clearly not supposed to be there. Soon the drones would pass by to check for any movements inside the houses, and there was no way they could escape it. They would find them, in the company of a marginal. Lina looked at Alex, and she realized it knew it too. Lina started to despair – she had no idea how to turn this situation around. Once the government would find them, they would all be banished. She was sure of that. She didn’t even know exactly what this meant, but she knew her life would never be the same again. And regarding Milo, she had no idea what happened to people that were in the city illegally, but she knew they wouldn’t let him go. He would be send to one of the prisons on the Azores, in the middle of the Atlantic. She had seldom heard of these places, but... Why did she know so little about all these things? It felt like her whole life had been a lie. Why did no one ever informed her about this?

“I’ll tell them I broke into your apartment. That I came in to rob you, that I kept you as a hostage and that I didn’t let you go to the meeting point.” Milo’s voice was calm now, almost determined. “What? What do you mean? Why would you say that?” Lina looked at him amazed. “To save us.

He's saying he will sacrifice himself once the drones find us" Alex said. It was as if Milo had read her thoughts. He said: "If they find you here with me, it will be the end for you. Not having showed up at the meeting point on time will be a minor problem compared to this. They will banish you. Both of you. It will not be pretty." "No, but what about you?? It will not be pretty for you either. What will they do to you?" Lina said. "They will find me anyway", Milo replied. They all were silent for a while – again Lina did not know what to say. She felt her life was being decided, right there and then, and at the same time she felt she still had no clue what was going on. "He's right" Alex said. "I have analyzed the situation based on the value of costs and benefits, and he's right. If we tell the true, it's the end for all of us. We will be banished, and Milo's punishment will be worse than that. We will all lose our lives. If Milo sacrifices himself, only he will lose his life. Rationally speaking, his life is worth less than ours. He doesn't have as much to lose as we do. Hence it only makes sense that he is the one sacrificing himself. He'll be caught anyway, no matter what." Lina looked at Milo: his face seemed calm, but she could see a sense of panic in his eyes. She was sure Alex did not have the ability to register it, it was too subtle. But she saw it. And she understood what it meant for him. He had a life too. Different from theirs, maybe less comfortable, but still... A life. He had people around him, maybe even family. He would never see them again. They would never hear from him again. But she couldn't help to think that Alex was right. Milo will be caught, no matter what. And now there was a possibility of her life being saved, and Alex's. They would be able to keep on living. All this would not be more than an unfortunate episode. They would probably forget about it, never talk about it again.

That moment, they all heard the whizzing sound of a drone outside the window. They turned and saw it holding still in the air – it was tiny, but they knew it had registered them and that the city service was being informed instantly. Soon a group of guards would show up at the door. They would demand an explanation.