

The normal curse of life



The sound of the doorbell drowned out the voice of the presenter. Sam got up and switched off the television. The TV-solar battery would need charging now. He wasn't in a rush. He already knew who was waiting for him. Today it was Lily who was picking him up as part of their company's car share scheme.

They arrived at the office half an hour later. Six of his colleagues worked from home today, so he was in charge of the paperwork. He would not be using much. They were on reduced paper allowance, so most things had to wait. He called a few clients. It would have been nice to meet some of them, but flights were too expensive.

His eyes wandered around and stopped at the triple towers of Dar Es Salaam. Workers had just completed them and they were impressive. It was interesting how the world had changed in the last few years. All the financial headquarters had moved from New York and London to the Middle East and Africa because of the well-educated, cheap labour here.

Immigration to Europe and America had stopped years ago, when it became obvious there would just be badly paid jobs in the agricultural

sector. Tanzania's politicians were thinking about closing the borders to immigrants from those continents. There were just too many. It was crazy. There was a lack of people in those countries, but the work was here. So, the overcrowding got worse instead of better.

Sam's fingers drummed a complicated, nervous rhythm. He was thinking about the past and how quick his life had changed. But he had to concentrate on work if he wanted to keep his job.

He moved uncomfortably. So far he hadn't found a solution for his and his wife's problem. He worked as hard as he could, but it wouldn't be enough. Manisha couldn't find a job. Few people wanted to use a woman. Fights for equality had stopped a long time ago. Why should they try to get women into jobs, if there weren't even enough for all the men? This was a problem for him and other people on a moderate income. It would have been nice, if his wife could find a part-time job, but that wouldn't happen very soon.

Suddenly he heard a loud bang and the lights went off. *Not again*, Sam thought. The bang was a familiar noise. Obviously the lifts had come to a standstill and the lights had gone off because of a power cut. The solar operated generator just kicked-in. The lights flickered and started working again. Sam looked up from his paperwork, whilst chewing the end of his

pen, and started thinking about his five-year-old son Miki. What would the future hold for him?

Would the population shrink and would there be new technologies to overcome the general problems of shortages everywhere? They already used alternatives for oil and gas. Over the last few years recycling had become mandatory in the world and violations were punished quite severely. A lot of things now worked with solar, wind or water or weren't used. A few things that couldn't be replaced and still used oil were so expensive, that just very rich people had them. One example was planes. He smiled.

He remembered the stories his dad told him when he was a young boy. About normal middle-class people going on holiday at least once a year and using flights to get there. It was considered normal. But how could they afford it, he had asked his dad. And he had told Sam, that flights were a lot cheaper in those days. But even now not everything was bad.

People helped each other more, because there were forced to live closer and were more depended on each other. Things were repaired instead of being thrown away. People spoke to each other and supported their families, not with money but by being there and helping physically. The world was a lot smaller. That wasn't a bad thing, but there wasn't much

hope anymore. Everybody just seemed to think about survival.

Sam looked at the reports in front of him. He had to do a few calculations. His boss was mainly interested in statistics and dissections of the amount of resources that were still available in East Africa. In this specific case it was mainly about natural gases and rare earths. It didn't look good. The country had only enough for about 20 years, if they used it for their own needs and not for exporting. But that would be difficult if they wanted to prevent wars. There were just too many countries which didn't have these treasures and would do anything to get their hands on them.

Sam sighed. They lived in difficult times. He did, however, not worry about the world-wide problems too much. He had to solve a private one first, which was much more urgent.

He knew what Manisha thought and it would be painful to tell her what he had decided. She was such a soft, emotional person. It wouldn't be easy for her to get over it. But the laws were clear. You had to pay a fine if you had more than one child and they simply couldn't afford it. An abortion was free and they would get all the medical expenses paid. That's why she hadn't told him when she found out and now she was already three months pregnant. He still wouldn't know about it, if he hadn't found the ultrasound scan in her handbag two days ago. He loved her and couldn't stand for her

to be in pain, but they couldn't keep that second child. He would have to tell her tonight.