**“If we can do this, we can do asteroids!”**

**An excerpt from *Our Shared Storm: A Novel of Five Climate Futures***

**By Andrew Dana Hudson**

Diya hated talking to rich people, but she was good at it. She was one herself, or had been, though that sense of isolated entitlement never quite leaves you, she feared. The lingering rich needed most to be made to feel that they were winning, in charge, going of their own free will, even as the sea overtook them. So, that’s what Diya offered them.

“This, my esteemed friends, is the kind of glory your money can buy.”

Diya stood at the prow, shouting to be heard over the wind and the waves and the low hum of the sail yacht’s electric control motor. Her audience sat on cushioned benches bolted to the deck of the boat. They drank mimosas and wore gold ‘VIP’ badges which glinted in the summer sun, an ego-stroking touch Diya was particularly fond of.

She waved at the octagonal structure looming ahead of them. It looked impressively industrial, in that very 20th century way. But was also draped with greenery, vertical crops hanging in sheets from four of the sides. Around the structure the open ocean was broken by smaller works—a farming flotilla of rafts and buoys, beneath which hung yet more crops: kelp, scallops, mussels, fish traps, and soil bags growing a dozen kinds of artisanal aquatic vegetables. It was one of the more impressive offshore agriculture projects in the region, providing significant fish protein to nearby Buenos Aires and helping reduce local acidification levels in the surrounding waters. But Diya wanted to keep her audience’s attention on the rig.

“The platform you see before you began life at a shipyard in Itaguaí, Brazil, at the cusp of the Transition Era,” Diya continued. “It was destined to be an offshore oil drilling rig pulling toxic hydrocarbons out of the Argentine Basin, at the behest of a hungry market and hungrier investors. But we have found a better use for it. Mr. Campbell?”

Her audience turned to Noah, who grabbed hold of a rope and hauled himself up to stand unsteadily beside her. She had brought Noah along to explain the technical details of the storage project, but also to remind her guests of the powerful unions they might come up against if they said no. She would be the carrot, Noah would play the stick.

“Far below us, under the ocean floor, is a large, porous formation of sedimentary rock,” Noah explained. “Right now those pores are filled with saline—salt water. With robots and special concrete-setting microbes, we have fashioned that formation into one of the world’s first carbon waste reservoirs. Carbon dioxide is transported here in a flexible undersea pipeline from an air capture plant tethered to the offshore wind and solar farm a few dozen klicks further out. Here it is pumped down into the reservoir, where it forces the saline out into the ocean and pretty much stays put. The technical details are obviously more complicated, but I promise you the chemistry is too boring to be worth getting into. The gist of it is, we take clean energy, use it to fix waste carbon out of the atmosphere, then put that sky trash more or less back where it came from—underground, where it contributes to neither radiative forcing nor ocean acidification. Questions?”

“Why do all this, instead of planting more trees?” asked a man with thick plastic sunglasses—showy and expensive given the limits on non-essential plastic manufacturing.

“As I understand it,” Noah said, “that’s an ongoing debate at the COP—the balance of these strategies, anyway. But one answer is nutrient bottlenecks. We’ve got a lot of waste carbon, but that’s not true of everything we’d need to do huge amounts of afforestation. Another is land, which people don’t always want to give up to plant carbon dark forests. Plus, because of the sensitivity of weather systems, if you plant a new forest in one spot, it can reduce sequestration in a neighboring area. A third answer is time. Industrial air capture works somewhat faster than trees mature.

“And finally, when trees eventually die, they release much of the carbon they captured back into the air—usually on a shorter timeframe than we are looking for with carbon storage. That’s fine when you’re working at scale. You count the forest, not the trees, as it were. Still, forests catch fire, trees burn, and then you’re set way back on your drawdown. Living systems take a very different kind of management. Nothing wrong with that, but we think it’s better to put as big a chunk of the problem as we can away for good, and not all in the tree planting basket.”

“Why the pipeline?” someone else called out. “Why not just do the capture right here?”

“Eventually, yes, we hope to incorporate generation, capture, and disposal all into the same facilities. But right now these pieces are largely being built out in a modular way while the carbon trades find their feet. The other reason is that we might want to pipe CO2 in from other sites, depending on the eventual capacity of the reservoir and where the solar surplus shakes out.”

“You don’t *know* the capacity of the formation?” A bottle blonde in the back raised a skeptical eyebrow. She wore a high-fashion version of the jumpsuits coming out of the new European clothing provision houses—a statement of either scorn or envy for the empowered masses, Diya didn’t know which.

“It’s hard to know anything for sure about anything that far underground,” Noah said, unfazed. “This isn’t some big cave we’ve dug. We’re talking about rocks, under more rocks, under the ocean. But we have sensors, we know where the carbon goes and whether it stays there. The biggest challenge now is building an organization that can ensure the integrity of those sensors and the data coming from them, and be financially responsible for any leaks that occur over the minimum time we want the carbon to stay put. Say about 500 years. Which, I guess, is where you all come in.”

Diya took the prow again.

“Esteemed friends, you know I have brought you here today to show you the vital work funded by the Planetary Trust. This is but one of hundreds of beautiful, state-of-the-art storage sites we are building. They are true marvels, a great gift to all the world and every living thing in it, and to a hundred generations yet to be born. We are also funding a great deal of the aforementioned afforestation, and countless other projects that benefit the planet as a whole. But when something benefits me, I pay for it. When something benefits a city or a nation, that city or nation pays for it. Who pays for something that benefits everyone? We need a new kind of institution, one whose mandate is both broad and long. That is why most of the parties to the UNFCCC individually—soon to be followed by the UN as a whole—have instituted a global wealth tax that pays into the Planetary Trust.”

The mention of taxes made the crowd shift uncomfortably.

“I know, I know,” Diya said, giving them a knowing smile. “A topic sure to ruin an otherwise lovely day out on the yacht. That’s why I’m here to offer you an alternative. All of you control significant private assets, and while your investments have been smart, much needed, even world changing, we now have ever more data showing that private mobilizations of capital are deeply inefficient for achieving long-term climate stability.

“We need to put the world’s capital into the hands of the Planetary Trust if we are going to build projects like the platform you see before you and operate them for the next five hundred or one thousand years. And we need that money fast, because, esteemed friends—we are still up against it. The storm our fine host city experienced this week is a reminder of the tipped-over world we are desperately trying to right. Every year that passes with this much carbon in the air continues our planet’s slide toward the hothouse. We need every resource available to us to build the removal industry at scale and at speed!”

At this Diya stepped down from her perch and took up a champagne flute of mimosa. She held it up, as if making a toast.

“My most esteemed friends, today I ask you to make this possible. Hand over your assets to the Planetary Trust, so that we might accelerate our plans and stabilize the world. Why wait for the wealth tax to siphon them away year by year? I know, as well as any of you, the burden of these vast, clunky masses of capital. Masses that many of us never asked to be charged with keeping. They are in their own ways as toxic as the oil this rig had once been built to dig up. Relieve yourselves of them, put them to better use. And in return, you will be cared for all your life, with freedom to go and live as you please, a citizen of every country party to the Trust. You will be honored forever on these monuments for your generosity. You can build us a stable climate future. And if we can do this, we can do asteroids! We can handle the many dangers that lurk in deep time. The Planetary Trust can ensure a prosperous human future where your names will be remembered!”

She swept back up to the prow and pointed at one of the massive struts lifting the platform above the water, which had just come into view. On it were freshly carved names—famous names of ultrarich people Diya had already talked out of their fortunes. Diya raised a toast once more.

“To you! May your names be honored for a hundred generations!”

She drank. Many of the others drank with her. Those who did not glanced away, not able to meet her eye. She’d get them too, soon enough.

Diya’s speech was done. She did not mention how paltry the perks and pensions and honors were compared with the titanic sums they’d be giving over to voluntary democratization. She did not mention the increasing legal precedent for holding the megarich accountable for what their investment portfolios paid for in terms of fossil extraction, deforestation, ecosystem damage, and political dithering. The Hague’s climate trials had a momentum all their own now, with prosecutors always hungry for new enemies to feed into the environmental justice maw. She did not mention what she would hint at later, in private conversations: that the best way to avoid a dangerous audit was to just give their money up now, after which prosecutors would look the other way. She did not mention that the unions Noah was representing were clamoring for the Trust to move forward with more hostile expropriations of such “stuck capital.”

Noah caught up with her on the ride back.

“Heckuva pitch,” he said. “If I were a lonely, anxious billionaire, I’d be jumping to give you my money. Though, it leaves a sour taste in my mouth, seeing their egos stroked like this. They are my class enemies, after all.”

“There’s only brief catharsis in seeing your enemies humiliated,” Diya said. “Letting your enemies save face, however, can prevent them from becoming your enemies again. Noah, understand, these people used to basically run the world. Now we are, shall we say, laying them off from that position. Today’s theatrics are just the difference between saying ‘you’re fired’ and saying ‘we’re letting you go.’ If that difference helps them shuffle quietly into the night, I say we let them have their dignity.”

“Still, it rankles. Why should some rich assholes get their names on that strut, instead of the workers who actually built the thing?”

“Because the world isn’t fair, Noah. Not just yet, anyway.”