

## IT TAKES FEELINGS TO BE ALIVE - A DYSTOPIAN STORY

Morning. Six o'clock. Vic opened her eyes and stared at the roof of her room, waiting for her parent number one to come and tell her to get up.

"Victoria", said *Parent N1* as he opened the door after ten minutes, "Get up, time to go". She immediately obeyed him: she made her bed, checked her daily health device and went to the bathroom. As she stood, all the grey machines started taking her night clothes off, while the water ran on her, and the machines were now lathering her hair. Vic kept her eyes closed during all the morning-washing-process: she perfectly knew all the passages of the procedure after seventeen years of life, and she also disliked looking at herself naked in the large mirror in front of her. She always hated seeing her body, despite of all the other members of the village. Because Vic lived in a place which had always been called The Village, and she never asked herself why, she didn't even know why she had never demanded about the origin of The Village. It had always been like that, was it so important to know the truth?

By the way, the Villagers never got ashamed of their bodies, as they were perfectly structured and balanced. But Vic felt... She didn't know how to describe herself; once her *Self-Knowledge-Trainer* made her stand up in front of all her companions and asked her to find a word to describe herself, and Vic panicked. She started sweating and laughing nervously, and could no longer control herself. The trainer immediately had called the *Students-Errors-Supervisor* and as soon as he entered the room, Vic started running away. She didn't want to be appeased, she didn't want to feel that electric shock again in her body. In addition, being appeased meant having bad headaches for a week and isolation, as people with headaches or other illnesses were separated from the rest of the Learners. But she could not manage to avoid the Supervisor, who strongly grabbed Vic's arm, hurting her. He then looked into the Trainer's eyes, which revealed some sort of pride, as Vic was finally about to be punished for her weakness she closed her eyes while she was walking to school, to evade that memory which had been hunting her for the past three weeks. Nevertheless, she met Alex. It happened in a moment, a simple, brief moment. It had been quite fun, actually: Vic was staring at her boring and grey meal in a depressed way, in the part of the *learning-building* canteen reserved to punish Learners, when suddenly a spoon fell into her food and soiled her white-identical to others-t-shirt. She quickly stood up and looked for the responsible of that embarrassing act; it didn't take a long time, as the guy was behind her and right after Vic rose they bumped into each other. She blushed and asked the boy for forgiveness, that was the Village's custom in case of disturb, she then rushed to the toilets.

Vic had tried to remove the stains, ignoring what that meal effectively was, it had been impossible to clean the t-shirt, and so she gave up trying, opening the toilet's door in an

unhappier mood than before. With great surprise, the boy she bumped into was standing in front of her, maybe waiting for something, thought Vic. But he only wanted to talk to her, and she realized that they were in the same *Learning Room*. He told the girl that he had admired her for the courageous act of running away from the Supervisor, and Vic blushed again. They spent the afternoon together talking about every topic they could deal with. She had never felt so free in her entire life: the rest of the Learners were happy and matched perfectly with the community life; but Vic and the boy realized that they didn't need the Village and the rules to be happy. He accompanied her home; his name, he told her as they reached Vic's *Block*, was Alex. Although during the days after that episode Vic felt guilty, as she thought she was betraying her community, she couldn't wait to see Alex again. However, he was always grounded (that's the reason why Vic hadn't often seen him). Punished *Learners* didn't have the right to stay with the others, and so that's why the two had never really met before.

That day the boy's punishment should have been over, and Vic was excited because she could finally see him after three long weeks. As she sat in the Learning Room, she noticed that Alex was not there. He didn't show up even the day after, and neither he did the following days. Vic felt broken and during the night meal with her *Parents N1 and N2* she didn't say anything, and that was strange even for her, so her *Parent N2* interrupted her *nutrition time*, worried she had to call the *Son's-Problems-Supervisor*, and asked her daughter what was wrong. A strict parent like *Parent N2* didn't like Supervisors in her *Block*, as that could cause a bad reputation among the other Villagers, and she despised being different from anyone else; the purpose of the community was, in fact, not to be nor feel separate from the others. Vic didn't say anything, she only took hers and her Parents' plates, threw them away and went to her bedroom. She didn't need to do the dishes, she could get injured with the cutlery or the water and soap could damage her skin, that's the reason why in The Village every risk of hurting was cancelled: there were no corners (everything was smooth and soft), no sharp objects and no grades. People, as it was said before, couldn't feel different, and they didn't want neither.

Vic though had a strange feeling which was hunting her soul: she was suffering since she didn't manage to fit in; everyone out there were perfect villagers, why did her head work in her own way? And, was it a mistake, after all? Alex wanted to know her also because he was moved by her reaction to the usual punishment! Vic's head started to hurt, so she decided to take a deep breath to rest her mind from those thoughts and she took her personal electronic device, she revised the homework and then decided to do something the old Vic would have never done.

The Village web was called *Safernet* and people had only access to selected sites, but Vic was extremely skilled and passionate about information technology so she succeeded in hacking the archives of the Central Network and was determined in finding Alex's report. When the girl read that Alex had been at home for an extremely serious and dangerous act of rebellion Vic initially got scared, but as soon as the memory of the feeling her heart

experienced, while she was talking to Alex, came to her mind, she could no longer account for her actions and decided to do something foolish.

She waited for the curfew and when all the lights were out, Vic sneaked out of the bed, opened the window and jumped. The fresh night air hit her face since she was running as fast as she could; the hacked GPS showed where she had to go to find Alex. As she arrived at Alex's home, she just had to figure out what expedient she would have used to catch the boy's attention. A pebble was the best choice, thought Vic, and so the little rock was immediately launched at Alex's window. It took three or four launches to finally make Alex open the window, and no words could be found to describe his reaction at Vic's sight.

"What are you doing here?!" Asked as he was sure he wouldn't faint and fall from the window.

"I hadn't see you for weeks and the first thing you ask me is 'What are you doing here?'" replied Vic, on the edge of a nervous breakdown, still smiling.

"I mean, I missed you Vic, but you're going against the rules!" said Alex blinking.

"Who cares about the rules! And, what does 'I missed you' mean?" Vic was dazed.

Her friend looked into her eyes and simply jumped from the edge of the window. Luckily, all the Blocks were quite short, so Alex didn't hurt himself at all. He moved closer to Vic and put his arms around her; the girl was scared, but as soon as she was in the boy's arms she felt a strange feeling of warmth, and she tried to repeat Alex's gesture.

"It's called 'hug'", said Alex after a few minutes, "And... I miss you means... How can I explain it to you... It's when you don't see a person you care about for a certain amount of time and your heart starts to ache, because you want to see this person, as he means the world to you..."

Vic suddenly realized that part of her pain was right about the fact that she *missed* Alex. A lot. And she needed him in her life, he was the only one who perfectly understood her feelings and her thoughts.

The two looked at each other's eyes for a long time, then Alex took Vic's hand and they started to run away. They didn't know where they were going or how they could manage to escape, but they didn't care at all. In that moment they were both happy, and even though Vic couldn't name her feelings, she knew they were right.

*1 year later...*

The sun was rising and the boy and the girl who succeeded in running away were now standing on a hill admiring the morning light holding hands and smiling as never before. Vic had a wonderful idea to hide in the laundry lorry, though Alex, while he was staring at the girl's face illuminated by the golden light of the dawn.

They started a new life with a community of escaped people, who now lived happily in peace. Vic knew a lot of new words, and she was excited to share them with everyone. Her new village was now her home, and she would finally feel free forever, having by her side people that really loved her.