

## The Dome

(A Short Story by T. U.-P.)

Megaville is a town of 250 000 inhabitants. At its entrance gate, a large monument entitled “The Big Waste” commemorates its early beginnings as a landfill site turned into a thriving semi-urban and semi-rural paradise. Walking along Megaville’s central artery named Freedom St., a newcomer named Solomon could not help but feel bewildered by the cleanliness of the town and the absence of panhandlers or what a narrow-minded person might term the ‘ugly dirty poor’. No litter could be found and as he walked down a boulevard, he felt as though his shoes might track dirt onto the spotless sidewalks. Most of the buildings were made of fireproof brick from the Chicago gothic style. It all seemed like a haven for the petite bourgeoisie or the nouveau riche. Solomon pondered how the town maintained its perfect cleanliness. As a former dog owner, he had never seen a place so immaculate that there wasn’t even a single turd found even off the curb from a pet owner in a hurry to walk their pet before a tight appointment, meeting or rendezvous.

Continuing along, Solomon walked within an allée of beech trees which stood like Popsicle sticks of greenery, each one the exact size of the others. On benches nearby, a couple or two were sitting and conversing in the shade, fitting in within the landscape almost too perfectly with their neatness and congruent body symmetry. In the distance, standing like an iconic rocky giant, Solomon could still see the town’s defining monument: a fist of stone pointing up to the sky, symbolizing the elevation of the Town of Megaville from a rural dump to a world fit for first-class citizens. Throughout the town’s boulevard, the recognizable skyline of Megaville with its iconic monument could be found on advertising and street signage to give visitors and townsfolk a sense of pride for their neighbourhood.

At this point, Solomon decided to head into a narrow laneway between some tall brick buildings where a quaint xeriscape garden meandered with quiet shade and more shrubbery. There in that spot, Solomon found a bench and laid down to rest. Our tired traveler felt weary and lay there asleep through the dusk and remained in the spot as a blanket of darkness enveloped him with dim stars punctuating the darkened theatre night-screen overhead. As it had grown pitch black, Solomon’s eye lids began to move and he rose slightly disoriented about his location. As he sat up, he noticed a flickering light coming from a pillar nearby. As his eyes sought out the source of the light, the garden grew dark again as though a door had been shut with light on the closed side. Solomon rubbed his eyes a few times and thought he had seen a person holding a torch vanish by a garden pillar with a possible secret entrance. He then looked at his watch and headed out of the garden where he had slept for over four hours. It was almost midnight when Solomon got back to his rental unit which he planned to keep until he had purchased a suitable loft unit in Megaville from a reputable town real estate agent.

After a short and troubled sleep in his small rental condo, Solomon rose feeling a bit disoriented once again after dreaming about a torched procession marching through a dark laneway in a strangely familiar night-scape that he may have visited in his recent travels. The dream made him want to re-explore the xeriscape garden pillar for a hidden entranceway where a torch-bearing procession may have vanished out of thin air when the underground chamber door sealed off the light that briefly punctuated the darkness of the immaculate garden space outside.

Prior to his appointment with the real estate agent on Freedom St., Solomon rushed off to the garden from the night before, anxious to quell his suspicions about a secret underground society that may have been conjured up while slumber-dreaming on a park bench. Retracing his steps, Solomon found the Boulevard, the allée of beech trees and finally the laneway between the tall buildings. Wandering back into the xeriscape garden, he found the same bench and the pillar some 25 or so metres away where a conspiracy came about following the flickering light. As Solomon approached the pillar, looking for the signs of a hidden door, a voice hollered out: "Hello Sir! Please mind the plants!" Solomon, turned his neck around and spotted an officer with a pad and paper in his hand.

"Please stay away from that bed sir! The pillar is off limits. Only Town of Megaville gardeners can tread that way please!"

"My apologies officer. I was just admiring the efficiency of the drainage on this laneway garden bed." Solomon told the officer politely.

He then backed away from the pillar, noticing that it was wide enough to contain a stairwell to an underground realm were there an opening on its south side facing the bench where he had dozed off the night before. After trying to convince the officer that he was just being a curious garden enthusiast and not a conspiracy theorist, Solomon, looked at his watch again and headed to the appointment in the centre of town. As Solomon headed toward the real estate office, the town's monument grew closer in the distance and he couldn't help but feel as though it was part of a larger whole. Strangely enough, he almost envisioned the stone fist as belonging to a larger statue of a stone giant and in his critical mind he wondered if the legend of Megaville was really a history of pillage and profiteering. With those strange thoughts in mind, Solomon reached the real estate office and headed in.

"Good day Sir!" A voice clammered from the front desk.

"Hello. I'm here about the unit on Saucer St. Are you Ken Klimpt?"

"Yes, I'm the agent in that district. Call me Kennedy. You're interested in loft 37b?"

"I believe that's the one. I liked the images of the space online. What I'm looking for is a quiet and private space that I could also use as a design studio."

“The Saucer St. unit you’ll find is quite versatile. I can give you my word on it.” The agent exclaimed with a hint of zealous energy. “Many others have shown interest but I’m feeling this is the one for you.” He added.

“I’m favoring this spot but I’m not quite ready to commit to it yet.” Solomon told Mr. Klimpt.

“Ok then! I’ll give you about a day then I may go for another buyer.” The agent said in a slightly pushy way. The two men shook hands and Solomon felt a touch of insincerity in Mr. Klimpt’s demeanour.

“Saucer St. is a lot more charming than the outer margins of town. One word of advice about Megaville, Sir... Avoid the big dome on Dump Rd.! It’s a part of town we Megavillers feel embarrassed about!” Mr. Klimpt told Solomon just before he was out of the door.

Solomon felt a tad puzzled as he exited out onto Freedom St. All of a sudden he felt compelled to find out more about the town’s less idyllic side. Perhaps, he thought to himself, Dump Rd. offered some clarity about the town’s mysterious beginnings and its roadside motto: *“Megaville—From Dump to Resplendent Paradise”*.

Solomon decided to rent a bike downtown and venture to Dump Rd. on the westerly margins of town. The plan was to get a sense of the town’s true nature and feel before he signed Mr. Klimpt’s Saucer St. lease the following afternoon. Riding along the side streets of Megaville, eventually losing the fist monument from his view, Solomon headed west toward Dump Rd. at the outer edge of town. Finally, before reaching Dump Rd., a large dome-shaped edifice could be seen in the distance as the sun made its descent onto the west horizon. As he approached Dump Rd., numerous transport trucks could be seen near the large dome’s loading bay area. As Solomon approached the dome, a transport truck rolled by with a driver wearing Ray Ban sunglasses. The driver appeared to be none other than Mr. Klimpt taking part in transporting strange cargo to the outskirts of town. On the back of the truck Solomon noticed a bumper sticker that read: *“Keep Megaville FREE of ALL filth”*. Solomon stationed his bicycle near a post office some 50 metres from the dome and made his approach toward the cryptic and modern cocoon-like structure. Once he got 20 metres or so away, he noticed an outlet at the rear of the dome where a tank of gas was affixed. On the tank, a symbol could be seen representing a face with a gas mask to indicate the toxicity within the tank and how to avoid dangerous exposure. Suddenly, a tall and stocky man wearing a gas mask could be seen at the far end of the dome with a body slumped over his shoulder. Terrified at what he had just witnessed, Solomon headed into the nearby post office to avoid suspicion. Through the small window in the vacant hut, Solomon could see several men loading human cargo from within the dome into trucks. The dusky low-light and the masks the men wore made identification near impossible, but Solomon began to comprehend from this scene that the town’s nearly impeccable cleanliness depended on the strange poverty cleansing ritual he had just

witnessed at dusk by the Dump Rd. dome. Eager to get back on his bike without being noticed, Solomon attempted to leave the confines of the post office when he felt a pair of eyes staring back him from behind the mailing wall. No sooner had he noticed the eerie feeling of being watched, a hidden latch popped up from underneath him and a head emerged from close to where the terrified observer stood. To avoid a confrontation with the secret conspirator, Solomon rushed outdoors and quickly got to his bicycle. Luckily, he hadn't locked the bicycle up so he quickly straddled the seat and rode off, desperate to get as far as he could from Dump Rd. and the body snatcher dome nearby. As he rode on through dusty roads back into town, Solomon was haunted at the sight of the town's center-piece monument and the hidden away 'dirty secrets' that visitors and newcomers scarcely found out involving the town's elite and their murderous schemes to keep the sidewalks and streets of Megaville "*FREE of ALL filth*". A part of Solomon wondered whether he would ever encounter a large statue of a stone giant with its rocky fist removed by relic plunderers, who later founded the Town of Megaville as a profitable real estate venture. When he finally reached his rental unit, Solomon decided to leave town first thing in the morning feeling haunted at the sight of Mr. Klimpt driving a transport truck and what this meant about the signed lease for the loft on Saucer St. He also worried about the secret underground society that had emerged first in the xeriscape garden downtown and then in the small post office close to Dump Rd. By this time tomorrow he thought, they could be planning to put him in the euthanasia dome to keep the town secret intact. As he caught the first bus out of town the next day, Solomon was glad to leave Megaville and the strange conspiracy behind him. As the bus exited the east end of town he noticed a sign vanishing in the distance. It read: "*You are now leaving Megaville, where CLEANLINESS is our TOP PRIORITY!*"

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The End