

The Oasis

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

“Last call for the 7am ferry to Providence!” A burly ferry dock attendant with a full beard shouts aloud one last time before closing the tall black iron gate.

Picking up the pace after showing his ferry ticket just after the pay kiosk, PH4 (also known as Darryl), quickly boards the Onigawara before the ramp to the ferry slip is raised and the mooring line is detached. After going through the gangway into the stern of the ferry, Darryl finds a seat in the lower level with a view Providence Island in the distance.

“What got you up this early in the morning?” A woman’s voice to Darryl’s left inquires.

Looking over his shoulder, Darryl sees a woman with a dark complexion sandwiched between two large large and heavy bags of groceries.

“Do you live on the island?” Darryl asks.

“Yeah. You can say that... I live on the residential eastern tip... Been livin’ there for over twenty-five years... What brings you to the island? You runnin from something?”

“Well... I guess you can say that... Been told that this is a good place to visit and check out... I will be checking out the westerly part of the island... That’s where the water treatment plant is... Isn’t it Miss?”

“Call me Angela... Not much over on the west side in terms of sightseeing. I guess there’s the old haunted lighthouse at Gyre’s Point. This time of year it gets pretty quiet. Most of the folks that take the ferry over live here through the winter.”

“Nice to meet you Angela. How far is the water treatment plant once we get to the island?”

“How far? Let me see... Should take you no more than a 45 minute walk west from the docks.”

“Thanks Missus!”

After settling back into his seat, Darryl watches as the still semi-darkened skyline of Trench Megacity starts to grow smaller to the north. After a few more minutes of cutting through the slender ice sheets over Lake Wataraju, the Onigawara belts out its last wail before preparing to dock on Providence Island.

“Sir... Tell me the truth about this... I know a lot of things about this island I call home... Are you headed to the place they call ‘The Oasis’?”

“Well... Yes... I suppose... Yes Angela... Been told it’s a good place to go for refuge in these days of economic hardship...”

“If you heading there... Go toward the lighthouse... When you get to the lighthouse, go into the first stand of Junipers and you’ll find a culvert hidden behind them... Go into the frosty culvert and you’re there... Tell im’ Angie told you the way.”

“Much appreciated Angela. I’ll do that. How do you know about ‘The Oasis’? ”

“We’ve got to get off the ferry now, Sir. Just know that this is between you, me and the folks you’ll find at ‘The Oasis’, you hear me?”

“Sure thing Missus. ‘Preciate your guidance. God bless.”

After lining up by the cordoned off bow of the ferry, a dock attendant unties the rope and lowers the ramp. Darryl and about twenty others pass over the Shore End to take their first steps onto the wintry shores of Providence Island. After watching Angela trudge through a few inches of powdered snow in the direction of her abode at the eastern tip, Darryl heads the opposite way, following a row of sturdy cedars supporting the extra weight of snow on the outstretched limbs of their tiered bows. After taking a route by the lookout jetty constructed off the snow covered shores of Willow Beach, he follows Angela’s instructions and trudges west, in the direction of the old lighthouse. After about twenty minutes along the snowy island’s main artery, Darryl notices a small pond to his right that had been frozen over. Noticing that someone had been playing hockey there by the presence of an old net left at the center of the pond, Darryl continues his trek west, reminiscing to times of old when he used to play hockey on Greenwich Pond in Park Heights. After about another thirty minutes of snow hiking, Darryl suddenly spots the reddish tip of the Gyre’s Point Lighthouse. Happy to be close to the secret entrance to the water treatment plant, Darryl picks up his pace, looking for a path that leads to the base of the tall old beacon of light. After reaching an old heritage plaque entitled “The Ghost of Gyre Point”, Darryl finds a path through a stand of red-stemmed dogwoods that leads to the base and large red door to the abandoned lighthouse. Remembering Angela’s instructions, Darryl contours the octagonal lighthouse and notices a stand of Junipers close to its westerly side. Ducking down, he pushes aside parts of the evergreen shrub and spots the hidden culvert. Getting down on all fours, he summons his courage to go in. After crawling a few meters into the culvert, Darryl enters the water treatment plant, noticing that the space opens up from within.

“Who goes there? Identify yourself!” A loud gruff male voice shouts from further into the frosty cavernous concrete expanse.

“My name is Darryl... I’m on the run from Skeltopp... Angela told me about how to find this place they call ‘The Oasis’.”

“Are you being followed?” The same voice asks from its well-dissimulated lookout space.

“Not anymore... The sentries lost track of me when I headed out of Trench City’s central ravine.”

“If you’re ok to Angie, you’re ok to us.” A female voice says stepping out of the murky depths and into the low light by the culvert tunnel.

“We don’t want no trouble here. If you’re Skeltopp you’re like us I suppose... However we need to always keep ‘The Oasis’ a secret.” The same sentinel presence says, hopping out of a catacomb-like hideout hidden in the plant’s darkened walls.

“You must be cold... Follow me and I’ll show you around.” The same woman says to Darryl.

After following her through a tunnel located on the opposite side of the culvert, Darryl is lead into an area where a group of runaways are huddled near a makeshift fire pit. On the walls by the warming cavity, a few icicles are dangling down like icy fangs, seeking to extend their reach toward the floor.

“This is Darryl everybody! He’s a Skeltopper as well. Make some room and let him warm up a bit.”

“Sure thing... Tell him about ‘The Network’ Judy!” Another younger-aged man says shuffling over to give Darryl some room by the fire.

“Well... Ok... Darryl... In the space just next to us, we actually have limited electricity to power a cell phone for example and even a slightly dodgy internet connection.”

“‘The Network’ is growing baby!” The same man shouts exuberantly.

“Wow! The in-ter-net! I’m amazed! How did that ever happen?” Darryl inquires.

“Well... We can thank Angie for that. She’s a big time ally of ours on the island. She’s involved in helping slaves kind of like with the underground railroad...”

“More like the underground S#\$\$@-hole!” Another person by the fire hollers aloud, hoisting a frosty mug containing a questionable type of brew in the air.

“I could get used to this place...” Darry says aloud to the group.

Soon, Darryl begins to settle in to his new secret habitat, changing into a new pair of clothes. He is then shown to a small hidden nook where a cot is set up for new arrivals. Tired after the day and a half of being on the move, Darryl hunkers down and sleeps deeply in the heart of the depths of ‘The Oasis’.

The End...