

Utopian Storm

The bell went off above her head, a sharp shrill sound that pierced her dreams and forced her to open her eyes. The room was pitch black and she fumbled before turning on the light. She looked at the clock, 2.30 AM. A small groan escaped her mouth. A small red light flashed on and off again as she put on her work clothes. Maddie Bonna looked at herself in the full length mirror. Nothing felt right about herself, her legs seemed too long for her body and her arms were too thin. Her cheeks were hollowed out from lack of food and her blue eyes sunken in. Maddie had no beauty left in her. Another buzzer went off above her, a signal that she didn't have long till the next transport bus came along to take her to work.

The street was cold and the wind bit at her jacket, as if it were trying to pull it off her. She shielded her face and waited by the building, trying to listen for the bus. Seconds passed and then minutes and finally she could hear the old engine turning over and stopping in front of her. She put one foot into the bus and handed the driver her ticket. He didn't smile at her, or give an encouraging nod of his head, but merely waved her on, closed the door and started out again before she had a chance to sit down. She stumbled but quickly regained her footing.

The streets rolled by, the houses, half falling down, looked dark and dismal, and she remembered her own little room in the government building: a small room that consisted of a table and two chairs, a book shelf and a desk and a bed with a side table. The bathroom was in the hall so everyone shared it. There was no wastage. She remembered the posters that had gone out last year, the benefits that City life offered. But she had never seen half of those benefits. She was supposed to be a Government official yet she felt like a street creature, a nobody. The bus pulled into the small space in front of the building. An

immaculate building that stood fifty stories high and seemed to gleam in the midnight light. Another work day lay ahead of her.

The offices were dark, the lights still turned off. She fumbled around till she found her desk and sunk into the soft plush seat. The lights flickered and turned on and in front of her, stood the clerk, ticking his little note pad, checking if she had arrived. She noticed the date, fifth of March 2031. Already she had been working here a year but still had never had a big job doing what she was trained for, an investigator.

She watched the many faces that passed her office and sighed, there were no friendly faces anywhere. She turned to the window, darkness was all around her, outside, in the office, in the faces of others, it surrounded her and took over her mind.

“Get to work Maddie Bonna, get to work. The day is short and there is much to do.” Maddie recognised the arrogantly booming voice as that of the Head of Government, Preston Deviday.

She flicked on the side lamp, hoping to get some more light in the room, but it didn't help. Piles of papers stood on the desk, waiting for her approval. She hated the menial job that she was forced to do, approving previous cases so that they could be published as articles about what was happening in the “slums” for the City dwellers. Maddie recalled all the countless articles and posters she had seen as a child about the “Slums”, a place that was dirty, and full of people that wanted nothing but your money and possessions. A place full of thieves. Maddie actually hadn't been to the p[lace but she read about it and despised it.

A buzzer went off, like the buzzer in her bedroom which indicated the beginning of lunch. Maddie didn't bother moving from her desk, the lunch in the cafeteria was no good

and there were no shops close by. Maddie looked at the poster she had produced. The poster that outlined the benefits of living in the City for the month of June. The benefits she had never received: more food and money, a better living lifestyle, cheaper prices and better working hours. For months Maddie hadn't eaten a decent meal and the food was more expensive than ever, pay packets were still as low as ever.

Maddie noticed a stray article on her desk, stuffed between two files. She read it out of curiosity and was reminded of a place that was more a myth than reality. "Szabadsag" - the quiet place a person lived without the constraints of a Government system, the benefits that people received were the benefits that they worked for. Maddie knew of the place, everyone did, but it was a myth. No-one had been known to go there or come from there. Maddie imagined her life in "Szabadsag". No hassles, no past memories of failed marriages and lost love. A place where she could feel free. A tear escaped her eyes as she remembered her marriage and its failed love. a teenage love that lasted a few brief years before she was taken into the love of another who wanted nothing from her but her love, a love she knew should belong to someone else but belonged to him. Her refusal to let the affair happen and the realisation by her husband resulted in the loss of both her husband and her true love. Maddie cried before she let her thoughts return to the imaginary place of "Szabadsag".

The buzzer went off again and lunch was over. Another half a day of work left. But all she could think of was her freedom, getting her life back where it should be. The day seemed to pass quickly for Maddie as she worked with speed. Finally the last approval was done, but there was still time before the next bus would be there to take her home. She closed her station down and wandered through the building, watching the people working, alone, not talking to anyone. She watched as a young woman quickly glanced at a young man opposite her, smiled and quickly looked away again. Love

was blossoming between them, it filled their stations and ran their lives, each moment they had apart, only made them want to be together more. Maddie turned away from them, upset by their hidden love and sexual secrets. She walked on, trying to shut her mind from the thoughts of those around her. A gift she was given by her mother, a gift she despised because of its lack of privacy and the knowledge of how others were thinking, about what they were thinking and what they were going to do. About their happiness and sadness, their lives that were always happier than her own. She tried to shut them off but was unable to get the image of love out of her mind. It surrounded her but there was no-one to show it to her, no-one to experience it with.

The bus dropped her off at her building and she thanked the driver with a smile. The day was just beginning yet she felt tired, run down. The apartment was cramped with her knick knacks but it didn't feel like home. She had to escape, to find herself. She walked through the quiet streets of the City, admiring the tall buildings and the doorman that monitored those that entered. She admired the shop window displays and the candy shops. All the things that she couldn't afford. She went to the water and looked at the Harbour, the water was still and motionless except for the small rippling waves that hit the corroding brick wall. She sat and dangled her feet into the cold water, it lapped at her feet, and ebbed her loneliness away for just awhile. Grey clouds were sitting on the horizon but she took no notice of them; they drew closer and closer and Maddie began to realise, with each inch that they moved closer, why she was so unhappy. Her loneliness was her fault, the failed marriage, the lost love and the job that was going nowhere. But she didn't know what to do about it, how to change her life and how she felt. She drew out her packet of Melga cigarette's from her pocket and lit one, inhaling the sweet smoke and holding it in her throat for a few seconds before exhaling it. She basked in the release the cigarette gave her before moving off towards home.

The night was beginning to settle in by the time she reached the apartment door. She heard cries of joy and sadness coming from units surrounding hers but she ignored them, unlocking the door and entering the small place she tried to call home. The lights were dim and offered little light, but it didn't bother Maddie. She had a million thoughts racing through the highways of her mind and a lot of time to think about it all. She went over the feelings she had at the Harbour wall and how she could make it all possible. She had an inkling she knew what had to be done but couldn't put it down to one thing. The thoughts of "Szabadsag" and happiness ran through her mind till she finally fell asleep.

The buzzer went off above Maddie's head and she sat up abruptly. She had a new vitality and train of thought today. She had a plan today. She caught the same bus she caught every morning to work but this time the driver smiled at her, and the people around seemed to notice her too. A strange looking girl with a vacant seat next to her, offered her the seat. Maddie took it with a thank you to the girl.

"What department do you work in?" Asked the girl, not looking at Maddie.

"I work with the Investigative Department. And you?" The girl glanced around her before answering

"I work with the Head Government official. But don't tell anyone, because no-one is supposed to know who does it all." Maddie nodded her understanding and nothing more was said. The bus stopped at the building and they all filed out, the strange girl turned and waved discreetly at Maddie before disappearing into a lift. Maddie went to her desk, but this time it was bathed in light and the darkness didn't bother her as much. The articles on her desk were waiting and Maddie was keen to start so she could finish early again. There was a Department she wanted to visit before she left for home. A small note was attached to one of the articles about a "Slum dweller". She read the article, but her disgust was replaced with a bit of admiration for the man. She read the note which was sealed by the Head of Government:

I would like you to investigate this man. Bringing back all the information on him that you can, anything. He needs to be shut down immediately. Be as quick as possible. All expenses will be taken care of, of course. Everything you need will be ready for you to pick up from my office at 10.30 AM.

P. Deviday

Excitement filled every crevice of her body, it was a breakthrough for her. Even though she despised the "Slums", the run down buildings with dirty people hanging around them, she couldn't help but feel elated. The lunch buzzer went off but Maddie kept working, she wanted to finalise every detail on the man she was going to investigate, write down everything she needed to know about him. Finally she was finished and able to fulfil her plan. The unknown waiting for her in the next Department.

She knocked on the door titled Facts Department and waited for an answer. It came by a small yell from within. Sitting at large oak desk sat a middle age man with small glasses. "What can I do for you?" He asked, flipping through some files.

"I need some information for an article I am researching." She lied, " I need anything you may have on "Szabadsag" and its origins." he looked at her, pushing his glasses further up his nose. He seemed to study her for a long time, but then shrugged and searched for the files.

"Everything you may need is in these files. I will need them back when you are done. Who can I say is borrowing them?" Maddie walked out of the office, ignoring the man. If anyone knew she had the files she would be in trouble. She had no legal right to look at them or have possession of them. Punishment was severe for lying to a Government Official. Maddie skimmed the articles about "Szabadsag" . It was as she had imagined it. Maddie recalled the reason she wanted to find the place commonly known as "freedom". Since the break up of her marriage she had found it harder to live in the City, constantly

being ordered by people to do things that didn't interest her. She wanted to live in a place that she could be herself and forget her lost love and failed marriage.

Maddie stepped up to the reception desk in the Head of Government's office. The girl that she had met on the bus smiled at her, and beeped her into the office that lay beyond.

"Come in. I am Preston Deviday, Head of the Government system. Now your name is...Maddie Bonna. Uh yes, the investigator who is going to the "Slums". I think you are ready to go on your first assignment....actually, no-one else wanted to go so I have to send you. It is your job to investigate this man, Alistair Jones and write about his activities in an article. He has been known to hijack Government cars when they are travelling through his area of the "slums". There seems to be no real purpose as to why he is doing this, but I want to know and I think so do the rest of the City people. Here is the money and the details you will need to get there. Hope you have fun, but of course you won't in the "slums". Come back as soon as you have everything I need. Goodbye Maddie Bonna."

Maddie sat in the chair, looking at him with contempt, all her feelings of elation were gone as she looked at the painfully truthful man staring back at her. His black hair was gelled flat to his head, his small black eyes penetrating into her soul. She hated him she decided. Walking out of his office, she thought she could hear him laughing at her.

Maddie switched the small light on in her apartment, bathing the small pieces of furniture in a fake glow. The cold from outside seemed to surround her in the room and she tightened the jacket around her shoulders. She didn't have much to pack, but it would be cold in the "Slums" she heard. She walked around the streets and picked up various items she would need, including food and clothes. Now all she had to do was wait.

The Transport Link bus arrived on time. There was only a handful of people on the bus so she could sit wherever she wanted. She chose a seat near the window. The trip would take a few hours, but the Link bus was the fastest way to get to the "Slums". The scenery was ever changing, the green trees turning into brown trees. The water went from blue to a murky green. Maddie remembered why she hated the "Slums" the last time she was here. She remembered the look on her husband's face when he took her hand and saw her disgusted face

"You can't expect me to stay here." She had said to him, as he led her into a crummy hotel. He shrugged and tried to pull her in. She yanked her hand away and walked back to the bus stop.

"There are no buses till the morning. We have no choice." The walls were cracking and decaying as they ascended the stairs to their room. The bed was a single, creaky and the mattress damp. It was the last time they had slept in the same room or done anything together. The "Slums" brought back so many lost memories of her husband and the failed marriage.

Finally, the Link bus stopped at the bus stop in the middle of what they liked to call Town.

"Where are you headed Miss?" The driver asked with a hint of an accent. She passed the piece of paper Preston Deviday had given her, trying not to touch his grimy hands

"I see, well, you have to get off here. You walk to the next street and turn right, then down that street and it's on the other side of the road, right opposite the opening of the street. Are you visiting from the City? We don't see many...." Maddie ignored him, picked up her luggage and got off the bus. She could still hear him talking to himself, the questions aimed at her. She followed his instructions and in front of her, across the street, stood a hotel. There were no decaying walls. The receptionist showed her the room she would be

staying in for the next few days and left her to herself. The room was different to her own, there was more space and furniture. The heaters in the room gave it a homely effect and for a minute, Maddie felt like she was at home again with her mother and father. She lay on the soft bed and closed her eyes, falling into a deep sleep.

Morning shone into the small window. She sat up, already awake for a few hours and dated the top of a page Seventh of March 2031 and began writing points she had to remember. She wasn't looking forward to the trip that reminded her of her failed marriage and the last time she was in the "Slums", five years before to celebrate her marriage anniversary. She pushed all thought so her past out of her mind. The day was beginning and so was her mission.

After a number of hours searching for Alistair Jones and his business, she finally arrived at what seemed to be, the good side of the "Slums". A tall, muscly man stood in front of her, his arms rippling as he sanded at the corner of a chair. He smiled at her and wiped his hands on a rag.

"How can I help you, Miss?" Alistair asked, in a deep resonating voice. For a moment she was taken aback by his strong exterior, but she quickly came back to reality.

"My name is Maddie Bonna" she produced a small laminated card that showed her name and address with a small photo of her to one side, "I just need to ask you a few questions about your business here. Is there someone where we can go?" He nodded and took her hand in his rough, calloused ones. She allowed herself be led by him into a brightly lit room at the back of the house. On the walls were pictures of a happy family and tokens that had been gathered over the years.

"My name's Alistair Jones. Would you like something to drink?" He waited for her answer by the bar. She asked for a cup of coffee and once they were both settled, began her questions

“What can you tell me about the business you have set up here?”

“I like to create things and I’m good with my hands. It’s been up and running for a few months, business was slow at first but it has picked up. I even get some City folk coming in to get things, secretly of course. I guess that’s where you are from, the City.” She looked away sheepishly. She didn’t realise it was so obvious. Maddie looked out the window, in the distance, dark storm clouds were gathering and she remembered the day, not so long ago when she was sitting by the Harbour. For a moment, a thought of love flickered through her mind. She quickly admonished the thought and went back to the conversation.

“Yes I am from the City. ” The conversation went on further until the clouds were surrounding the house, thunder could be heard and flashes of lightning streaked across the sky.

“There is a storm. I guess you are staying at the hotel across town. You won’t make it there in time. You will have to stay here Mrs. Bonna.”

“It is Miss Bonna. I am not married. I can’t stay here.” A hint of disgust coming though in her voice. He ignored it and locked the doors.

“So tell me about the City.” A little shocked, Maddie answered

“I guess you’ve never been. I grew up there. I’ve actually only ever been here once, along time ago. I have often heard that the “slums” are meant to be a newer image of the what it used to be life, all over the world. Before 2010 the world was so different. Freedom was available to everyone. You could move from place to place with no-one telling you not to. Then the Government came into force underneath a man called Michael Gell. He changed everything that the world had ever known. He had been working for many years as an underground society, trying to compromise a government system that was so elite that everyone would jump at the chance of having a better controlled society. He came into power through an election. And then he took over the world, in one big sweep he changed government systems everywhere. He controlled human thought and action. No-one really

knows how he did it exactly, it just happened. One day we were all free, the next we were being controlled by an elite group of Government officials.” He handed her another cup of coffee.

They talked into the night, the storm continuing over head. Maddie soon forgot where she was and what she was supposed to be doing. Suddenly, a knock at the door stopped their conversation and brought them back to Earth. Standing in the doorway, silhouetted by the lightning, stood an old lady. She was hunched over, and leaning heavily on a walking stick, the stick crooked as well. Alistair helped her in and sat her down on his warm chair. She didn't speak for a long time.

“My name is Ella Devina. You are from the City I can see.” Maddie nodded, a bit dumbstruck by the woman's presence. She sensed something in her, a surge of free feeling. Alistair and the old woman talked for a long time, seeming to forget about Maddie, but she was intrigued and soon joined in on the conversation

“You have been there, haven't you? I can sense it. A place that no-one knows its whereabouts, a place that is more a myth than reality. But you have been there. Touched its soil and lived with its people.” Ella smiled but said nothing. The smile said it all, and Maddie knew what the woman was telling her...silently. The night wore on and the three of them talked around the fire place. Time didn't matter to any of them. Ella managed to delve into the minds of Maddie and Alistair and find out what they truly wanted from life. Like Ella, Maddie was looking for a soul mate and true happiness. Ella knew that Maddie would be happiest at “Szabadsag” but she had to figure out a way to get her there, in secret.

The sun was finally filtering through the clouds that were still sitting in the sky from the storm last night. Maddie felt relieved, a bit disoriented at all she has said through the night, but content. Walking back to the hotel, she couldn't stop thinking of Ella Devina, a mysterious woman who seemed to know everything about her. A lady that had managed to

learn her deepest secrets without actually asking. Alistair too, was a gentle person who put Maddie at ease. Something stirred deep within Maddie but she didn't know what it was, or how to find out. Her mind wondered back to the reason she was in the "Slums", to research Alistair and his involvement in the car hijacking. He was a man with high status in the "slums" fighting for their rights and what he believed in. Maddie thought this was the reason Preston Deviday wanted him investigated, she felt Preston saw him as a threat to the City. Why, she wasn't sure. Maddie admired him a little for having the courage to stand up to officials. For a moment, she felt a pang of guilt.

The hotel room was musty and she dated the page again, one day had passed since she arrived in the "Slums" but now she didn't want to leave as much as she did before. She walked around the small town square and came to a book shop owned by Ella Devina. She stepped in, hearing the tinkle of the door bell go off in the back room. Ella came out, relying heavily on a crooked cane. She smiled at Maddie. She knew she would be back.

"Hello my dear. Are you looking for something? I have many books, some are very old." Ella stepped closer to her, almost breathing on her neck.

"I want to know more about "Szabadsag", I want to go there. " Ella moved away as quickly as she could, her expression was stern

"I don't know anything about it. I know why you are here and I know who you are. I cannot give you any information that would help you. I am a poor lady that wants to live the rest of her life in peace. Please don't ask me anymore." Maddie was a bit put off.

"I understand that you want to keep it a secret because you think I will tell, but I crave for Szabadsag, I crave to be free from all the hassles this world has to offer. There is no solace in any of it. I dread the days and the nights, lonely days and nights that have no meaning. I want to feel the air that brings Szabadsag with it. And you know where that place

is." Ella sat on a stack of books, careful not to tip them over. A sigh escaped her lips and she felt defeated.

"I can tell you but it will only bring you misfortune. Nothing good has ever come out of that place. You go in good and come out a changed person. I was like you twenty years ago, I wanted it all but I couldn't have it here. So I looked for "Szabadsag" and I found it. And I was disappointed in it. All the dreams I had of that place became nightmares and I soon found that I wanted to leave. You may be lonely here but there, they don't want to know you unless you have something to offer them. I had nothing. Soon I fled the horrible place I wanted so badly."

"But surely you are over reacting. This place is everything I've always wanted. Why would you want to leave? It couldn't have been that bad that you felt like you had to go."

"I did. It was a small place, but full to the brim with people. Each had a special talent, a special something they could give the community. You want to get away from the system of government we have here, but it is all the same. They too have a system based on status. And you have to be very high in that structure to stay. You have to offer them a talent, or a gift that they do not already have."

She switched the closed sign on the door at exactly five p.m. The sky was getting dark outside and Maddie felt Ella wouldn't talk anymore.

"Talk to Alistair about it if you really want to seek the place they call "Szabadsag".

Maddie perked up a bit at the mention of Alistair's name in relation t "Szabadsag". Why him, she thought.

The roads were dark without any street lights and Maddie stumbled her way to Alistair's house on the edge of the small suburb. He was standing, as if waiting for her, out the front. She felt a bit shy about being there but he didn't seem to notice and led her inside, taking her cold hand in his warm one.

"You have been speaking to Ella I guess." He poured a cup of coffee and Maddie lit a

cigarette. An uncomfortable silence fell over them before Alistair continued

“I want the same thing you do. I want to go to “Szabadsag” and escape all this here. But she won’t tell me where to go or how to get there.”

“She won’t tell me either. She says that it is a place not worth going to. But I have seen it in my dreams and I know she is wrong. I have to find it and fast.”

“Who are you really?”

“I work in the City for the Government and I was sent here to investigate the “Slums” and the actions that are happening out here. I was supposed to move on to another suburb by now but....” Alistair stood, walked to his desk and pulled a file out of a drawer

“I don’t really care why you are here, I just don’t like lies. I have this. It isn’t much but I got it from my mother when I was little. I haven’t thought to look at it until now.” He opened them and a map fell to the floor. Both knew what was on it.

“I want to go there. I want to go as soon as possible.” Maddie almost yelled at him. Ripping the map out of his hands. He tore it back from her.

“You may want the same thing that I do but I don’t know if you can be trusted. We can’t leave soon anyway. A lot of plans have to be made before anything can happen. We have to find out how to get there and by what means. It could take months.” With tears in her eyes, Maddie stood over him

“I have waited my whole life for this, I am not about to give it up because you are making plans and lists. Ella Devina knows everything we need to know. She can tell us and then we can go within a couple of days.”

Maddie moved quickly. She had to take care of work first and managed to send a package to Preston Deviday telling him she was caught up in the investigation. It was the partial truth, she was caught up in an investigation, just not the one he sent her there for. She arranged a meeting with Ella Devina with Alistair.

“I know you don’t want to tell us anything but you have to. We have the map to

“Szabadsag” but we need your help in getting there.” Ella stood away from them, small creases forming on her forehead and cheeks.

“I have never told anyone this. You have the map, you need transport. I will organise it for you. Come back with everything you want to take in two days. It will all be ready. But remember, the less you bring the less chance you and Alistair have of being caught by the Government.”

“I can’t thank you enough Ella.” Maddie and Alistair walked the short distance to his house.

“I have never felt this way before. About anything. I have dreamt about this day for so long. Don’t you have a dream?” Alistair looked at Maddie long and hard. Her red hair stood out in the sunshine and glimmered at him. Her eyes had a sparkle he had never noticed before. Her smile stared at him, enticing him almost.

“I have dreamt about many things before but I never thought it would come true with a woman from the City. Especially one as pretty as you.”

The door was ajar when they arrived at his house. He took precautions in moving inside. Seated on a chair was Preston Deviday. His black hair gleaming at them like the devil, his eyes just tiny slits in his head. He stubbed his cigarette out on the arm of the chair.

“I see you have finally arrived. I have been waiting for a long time.” Maddie stood between Alistair and Preston.

“What are you doing here? Didn’t you receive my package?”

“I did and it made me a little curious. See I knew that your investigation wouldn’t take this long. Then I found out you were snooping in some confidential files at the office. I was disappointed, I had high hopes of you. I can’t say I know what you are planning but I know it can’t be good.” From outside, two men stepped into the sunlight holding handcuffs. They clicked them around Maddie’s wrists, snapping them tight. Alistair was shocked at the

action Preston was taking.

“As for you Mr. Jones, I have no need for you, you have nothing that would threaten us. Say goodbye Maddie Bonna to your friend Mr. Jones.” His sarcasm didn’t affect either of them, but Maddie became increasingly worried, her dream was being shattered before her eyes.

Preston shuffled Maddie into the black car that was behind the house. The engine roared into life and with the smoke from the exhaust, Maddie’s dream went out the window.

“I see you have good investigating skills Maddie. Pity it didn’t last. Soon you will see what happens to traitors. It won’t be pleasant. I must say I am a bit surprised with your actions. I didn’t think you had it in you. But these things must come to an end.” Small tears trickled from her eyes and she hid her humiliation behind her handcuffed hands.

The cells were small and smelly. Maddie, not accustomed to them, vomited numerous times. In between vomiting and crying, she tried to think of a plan. She had two days to get back to Alistair and Ella. She didn’t know how she was going to get out of the cell or the City, but she needed to find a way. Before long, Preston joined her again. His nose curled at the smell as he said

“Today is the day that you will see what is in store for you. I have made plans for a large crowd to witness it, I will use you as an example of what can happen to traitors. It will deter them for awhile I am sure.” The cell door was slammed, the sound ringing in her ears for a long time after. Preston smiled at her, the corners curling in a sneer. Maddie felt the sudden urge to spit on him but bit her tongue, she didn’t want his plans to be put forward. Preston swoon became a moving shadow from the cell.

“I don’t think it will happen Preston Deviday.” Maddie sneered at him under her breath, determined to find a way out of the cell blacks.

From the corner of her eye Maddie could see a dark figure coming her way. She could hear

keys jangling with every step. The figure stopped in front of her cell, facing the other way.

"I am here to help you. I know what it is like to be in here. Please, be careful when you leave, there isn't that much security but it is dangerous. You have to hurry. He will be back soon, go get as far away as possible from here. I wish I could do more for you." The keys slotted into the hole easily and the cell door opened with a creak. Maddie stepped out

"Why are you doing this for me?"

"He is a nasty man. Find your happiness where-ever you go." Maddie turned and ran from the figure, avoiding the main doors and heading for the back alleys in the building. Getting outside was easy enough, now Maddie needed a ride to the "Slums". The trams were waiting at the stop, as if for her. She threw money at the driver and sat at the back, staying covered with blankets. The trams left the City within minutes and Maddie could hear the sirens sounding near the building, signalling to everyone that she had gotten free. Once again she saw the country side rolling past her. The clouds were building up on the horizon again and Maddie was thankful for them. They had become like a security blanket for her, protecting her when she needed it. With the clouds hope filled Maddie. The "Slums" was bathed in darkness when she arrived. Alistair and Ella were waiting for her by his house.

"We weren't sure whether you would come or not so we waited. how did you get out?" Alistair asked her, putting a blanket around her shoulders.

"Someone helped me, I don't know exactly who it was but she let me out and I managed to get onto a tram." Maddie spoke straight to Ella, the glint in their eyes proving what they both already knew. A black car was parked a little way down the street and it glinted in the lightning.

"We have to go. We don't have much time. Have you got everything you want?" Both nodded and stood by the few possessions they wished to take. It would be a long journey, they both knew it. And not all of it would be by car.

Ella stood by the car and opened the doors for them. There was no driver in the front and

no comfortable seats. Ella sat in the drivers seat and started the engine. It was quieter than Preston's car but just as big. The smoke rose like blue flame from the exhaust and they hurried to get in.

"I am taking you as far as I can. when we get there, I will give you directions for the rest of the way. It is too dangerous to go the whole way with you, people may have followed you Maddie from the City." The big car pulled away from the curb and drove out of town, towards the City. Alistair and Maddie were both astonished but didn't say anything. Ella knew which way to go, they were merely passengers being led blindly through the night. The road seemed to be endless, but the outcome the same, the City gloomed in front them, getting closer and closer until the colour of the lights became distinguishable.

"We are getting closer to the drop off point. I have written the directions out for you. Read them carefully and memorise them as well as you can. You must burn this as soon as we are out of the car. I have let people at "Szabadsag" know you are coming. Arrangements have been made for accommodation and food. You will be able to walk up from there. Remember don't tell anyone about the place if you come back. Maybe one day I will see you there. Around this corner I will stop the car, you will get out, burn the paper and then start on the last leg of your journey." The car turned the corner and before them was a line of parked cars, their head lights glaring through the window of the black car. Maddie began to panic, Preston had found her. Ella stopped the car a kilometre from their position. From there, they could see Preston standing in front of the cars, a single line of three men stood next to him, ready for his instructions.

"Get out and run. Run as quietly as you can."

"I don't want to leave you. Come with us." Maddie pulled at her to get out.

"I can't. I have to face up to this some time. It must be now. I have been there, it is your turn. Remember what I have said." Maddie and Alistair jumped from the car and ran into the bush. Preston ordered his men to follow. They blindly ran into the forest, unaware of their position or where they were going. Maddie and Alistair split up, running in opposite

directions from each other but each knowing where to go. Maddie heard Preston call his men back, a shout that could be heard for miles as it rang through the trees and bounced back to Preston. Maddie, carefully following the men, slithered back to the clearing. Ella stood by her car as Preston walked slowly towards her.

"I asked you not to interfere with my business didn't I. I have never asked much of you Mother and when I do you don't do it. I stopped them putting you in jail, I stopped them using you as an example. All I asked was you didn't tell anyone about "Szabadsag". But you disobeyed and now they have gone there. More people will hear about it and it will be sought out by more people. I don't know what I can do with you now. I have to put you away and throw away the key. Maybe then you will listen to me."

"I have listened to you for too long now son. It is time I moved on. You have nothing good to offer me anymore and even if you did, I wouldn't want it. I will go and I will never come back. Then no-one will know how to get there and it will turn into a myth once more." Maddie, though she had the feeling they were related, was shocked to find them mother and son. Preston took his coat off, slinging it across a nearby tree branch. He moved towards his mother and slowly pulled out a gun from its sling on his hip. Ella stood her ground by the car and watched as he drew nearer. Maddie went to stand up and stop what was happening but a hand clamped down on her mouth and held her firmly in a sitting position. The action seemed to unfold like a story book before their eyes. Preston glared at his mother, spit forming at the corners of his mouth as he aimed the gun at his mother. Ella showed no fear and stared back at him, looking deep into his eyes. Maddie could feel the tears falling but had no control over them. Preston, the gun now aimed at her head, flicked the safety off and put his index finger onto the trigger. Ella still stood her ground and without making a noise she smiled at her son. Preston pulled his finger back and a small pop was heard as the bullet travelled from the gun into Ella's third eye. The body of Ella sunk to the ground with a soft thud. And then there was silence. Nothing moved. From the tree line, the three men, unable to find Alistair and Maddie, looked at Preston in

astonishment. Hiding a small distance from the parked cars, Alistair sensed that Maddie was unable to overcome her emotions. He pulled her back from the tree line and onto the pathway that would lead them to their dreams. The path was hard to find as it was not used frequently. Soon Maddie could walk on her own but her sadness didn't not go away. The trees seemed to whiz by even though they were walking at a moderate pace. The clouds that had been coming over soon were upon them and soft drops trickled down their faces into their clothes. Maddie didn't seem to notice until the thunder boomed over the top of them.

"We will have to find someone where to camp till the storm passes. It is no use in walking on in this weather." Maddie agreed and they found a small cave that could just fit them both. They huddled together, arms around each other as they watched the storm as it let its fury out above them. The rain seemed to drain their sorrows away and Maddie began talking again.

"How much further do you think it is? I can't imagine it being this close to the City."

"I have been thinking the same thing. Why would a place called "Szabadsag" be so close to the City. If this place of freedom is what it is said to be then it should be as far away from the City as possible. I think we only have about another hour or so of walking. There are supposed to be new gates built that lead into it but I have seen no evidence of any people or equipment being brought through here." the storm subsided into a dull roar again and it was safe for them to continue their journey. They didn't speak for the rest of the journey, each nursing their own thoughts of what was laying ahead of them.

The trees grew more dense and green as they neared the end of their journey. No horizon could be seen. They thrashed their way through the thick foliage and before them stood a large set of gates with gold letters reading "SZABADSAG" on the top. Relief filled Maddie as she saw the gates open and a pair of smiling faces come towards them.

"I think we have arrived to our dreams Alistair." The couple greeted them and took

their meagre possessions. Maddie and Alistair could do nothing but follow. A small house on the outskirts of the perimeter was open for Alistair and Maddie, a greeting sign hanging over the door. The couple showed them their house and told them about the perimeters, which were extended every once in a while.

Alistair and Maddie settled into the small house and community living quickly. They told the people of Ella's death and a small mural was built for her. Maddie found herself relying more and more on Alistair's company and friendship and as they lived together, they slowly became closer.

Maddie sat on the small beach, looking out towards the ocean. She took a cigarette, the first she had had in a long time, and took a long puff on it. The smoke filled her lungs and she began to cough. The black storm clouds could be seen coming over the ocean and moving towards her. she greeted the storm with a smile and could feel herself becoming refreshed. Going to the "Slums" was the best thing she had done and Alistair had become the person who had saved her from the City life, the madness that she used to live. She was unsure of what she would do in the community, Alistair had begun making furniture again and was greatly liked by the community, but Maddie brought no special talent with her, nothing she could give the community.

She stood and looked in the distance, the City stared back at her. She could see the building she used to work in, with its small windows and dark walls. She had been amazed when she first discovered the City was so close to the small community she liked to call "Freedom". The City was unaware of its existence so close to them but it made life easier to live, knowing she could look back at her old life and be happy she was hear. Alistair walked up beside her, cradling her in his arms and pulled her into a hug. She could smell his sweat and wood chips flickered from his hair onto her shoulder. He kissed her gently before leading her back to the community they now chose to call home together.

Reflection Statement:

I intended to write a short story aimed at people my own age, I knew there was no point in writing about a topic or for an audience I didn't know about. Although I knew my audience, the story was a lot harder to create in my mind. Finally, an idea was formed. I felt that writing about the future would be fun and I enjoy small love stories. Once the idea was formed and finalised with the teacher, I was able to do some serious thinking. I asked myself "who would the characters be, what they be like and who could I base them on". I knew writing about the future would be very difficult as it was my personal view of what the world would be like.

I wanted to write a story that would interest young adults and keep them interested. Writing about the future was a good way of doing this as it was something that no-one could verify or oppose against, it is my personal view. The purpose of my story was to prove to young adults that dreams do come true, whether now or in the future and it is just a matter of aiming for them.

I was unsure where to start by writing and investigating. I knew for my story to be good I had to investigate and research different ways of writing and different ways of including certain elements. Having been a keen story writer for years, I went back to an old book I had that looked at how to plot storylines and build characters. With each page that I read more ideas started to form and I was able to start the basis for a number of characters and storylines. This process of reading and absorbing the information was tedious and hard at times. In a year when I am plagued with many things to do in other subjects, it was hard to be motivated to think of a story and work on it. Another step to creating a major work was what was the future going to be like, what did other people think it would be like. To get a wide view of the topic I read fiction books and web sites that had different views. One of the hardest parts at researching the topic was finding

the information on the internet. I thought that there would be a wide selection of material but it was time consuming and often showed little or no results. The frequent disappointments unmotivated me even more and the major work seemed to be more of a burden than an achievement for my HSC. But I persevered because I didn't want to disappoint my parents by dropping the course.

My story soon developed from sheer determination. I wanted to have a good end result and to get that I knew I had to work. My story began to develop with elements that were related to the character and plots of the story shining through. Images and sub plots emerged through my writing and I was able to be proud of my achievement with my major work.

Through the course of creating a major work , I was able to investigate different forms of writing, styles, themes and plots as well as character building. I can see that this investigation has led me to have a wider understanding of how to write a short story and how to go about it. I have learnt how to weave themes and plots together and to create a finished piece that I am happy with and that I know I have done. It is an achievement that shows independent investigation can have a great impact on the development of a major work. Without my investigation I would not have been able to have such a story that is believable for the future and one that uses ideas that I have explored myself.

Without my own investigation, I think that my story would have been boring and lifeless. But because I was able to integrate all that I had learned from my investigation, I believe that my major work is something to be proud of, an achievement in a year where there are so many pressures. I was able to do something for myself and the end result is a major work that will be submitted as a finished piece, a piece that I worked on for my own benefit. Not only does my major work benefit from my investigation to create

a better, more fulfilling story but I also go away from the experience with knowledge I didn't have a year ago. The knowledge and capabilities of independent investigation.

When my story was forming I was able to see clearly what my investigation I had led to. A work that was interesting to others that used simple language and concepts that could be easily understood. I could not have completed my short story if it had not been for my independent investigation process.