Lola's chestnut wings raised the trio higher and higher into the sky . The plains of emerald rolled beneath them dotted by a few buildings, the only sign of civilization here . They had just escaped the attack of the robots with the help of Zoe .

Mary wished Zoe was with her upon the arched back of the eagle. She and her had become friends despite having spent just a short period of time together . Nevertheless Mary welcomed the wind zipping past her , the scenery , the warmth of the sun that seemed to seep through her clothes, warming her skin , sinking into her bones . Mary loved flight the thrill was incomparable .

When Mary pulled on the soft feathers on Lola's neck, silently commanding her to pass the clouds . The eagle having understood her request flapped her wings a few times soaring higher. Lola's muscles rippled beneath the trio. As much as Mary would’ve loved to stay in the sky, she couldn’t, as they had to get to the potion , and fast .

Ahmed's ears popped when Lola soared even higher in the azure sky, they had surpassed the clouds by now . Ahmed could barely breathe, as his lungs refused to accept the deep breaths he was taking. When they had left Zoe, after defeating the robots, the rush of adrenaline had shielded him from his fear of heights . But now the excitement had faded from his blood and all that was left was raw fear .

"So how much longer are we going to stay up here "shouted Mary, trying to make her voice be heard over the thundering rush of the wind as they flew." I mean the view is great, but we had better get that potion fast don’t you think?"

"I agree," said John

An expectant silence stretched as John waited for Ahmed's answer . When it didn’t come, he flipped his face over his shoulder and saw the boy's brown skin turning pale , while his eyes were wide with fear . John acknowledged Ahmed's heaving chest with concern shining in his teal eyes .

" Ummm Mary I think we have a big problem here " called John, his voice laced with worry.

"What do you-" Mary's words died on her lips before she could utter them, face suddenly drained of blood as it became as pale as a sheet" oh my god Ahmed. Are you okay? "

John didn’t know what to do, how to react, how to help. Ahmed was clearly having a panic attack and there was nothing he could do. A wave of helplessness swept over him, but he refused to succumb to the emotion.

" Ahmed " called John , when Ahmed didn’t answer he called his name again, louder this time " AHMED "

That snagged the frightened boy's attention.

" Look at me " ordered John in a calm but assertive voice.

Ahmed raised his drooping head to his friend, his gaze locking with his .

"It's okay " said John " it's fine , all I want from you is to breathe. Okay. Can you do that for me? "

Ahmed tilted his head, barely a nod but that was all he could muster. He tried to take a breath but it got stuck in his throat . Fear seized him as he imagined plummeting off Lola's back into the hard unforgiving ground . A new emotion sprouted in Ahmed .

Frustration .

It's taste was bitter on his tongue , here both his friends were fine while he was shaking from fright .

"Inhale. Exhale "soothed Mary interrupting his spiral of thoughts" we'll be there soon ".

Ahmed forced himself to breathe. *Inhale. Exhale* . John held his hand and breathed deeply with him. Ahmed no longer fell ashamed. Soon the fear faded away as the breaths lulled him into a sense of peace and tranquility.

"Good job " said Mary .

John's answering beam filled Ahmed with a sense of pride. Before the trio knew it, Lola landed on Ahmed's roughly arched roof . The hawk quickly flew away, leaving Ahmed, Mary and John on the roof .

After all this time and effort John could barely believe they were finally here . The journey was enjoyable as it was exhausting . While he met people, and saw things he would never forget , he couldn’t help reminiscing . But still John carried an unwavering desire to see the earth free of pollution , that’s what drove him forward , what drove them all forward .

Mary's eyes ignited with determination. " We barely have time to waste. Let's get that potion and save the world".

Ahmed nodded and joined John and Mary on their careful stride along the roof. Then john came to an abrupt stop , Ahmed nearly smacked into his back " why did you stop? " he asked.

John's eyes swept the sunbaked concrete streets that were void of human use , so were the cars, and the many small shops that surrounded Ahmed's house . They were all empty . A puzzled frown twisted John's features, "don’t you realize the place is empty? " he proclaimed, gesturing to the ground below "I mean there are no cars, no people walking, no animals. It's practically a ghost town ".

A shudder rocked through Ahmed as he realized the truth of his friends words. The streets truly were bare. Ahmed rubbed his hands against the sudden chill that overcame him , they were alone . What happened to everyone? Where were they?

Mary stopped and surveyed the place but still her determination didn’t waver , " we'll find out where they went later. But now we need to get to the potion ".

Ahmed treaded to the right side of the roof till his sight zeroed on the small window in the roof . It would be a tight fit , but they would manage . The soles of his feet were barely able to keep him from slipping , but he had scaled this roof a million times . He knew every crevice and gap the red turned copper colored tiles had between them . Ahmed fiddled with the lock of the window , but to no avail. It wouldn’t budge . Mary slid beside him ,followed by John and slid a small golden key into the lock .

John raised an eyebrow " how did you get that ? ".

Mary barely spared him a glance and opened the window " I have my ways "

The female opened the hatch, and lifted it up wide enough so she and both her friends could squeeze through .

They landed on the ground of Ahmed's attic with a thump . Dust swirled around them, making John cough loudly, the air carried a musty scent . Box after box were stacked on top of each other , filled with everything from family pictures to old clothes . As John rubbed his back, Mary ran to the screens imbedded into the wall , she peered at the bright rectangles . They showed a camera feed of Ahmed's neighborhood and the ones after it The streets in Ahmed neighborhood were empty as were the streets beyond . *Looks like whole town fled.*

Lastly Mary went to the big screen in the middle , the one that showed the globe and how polluted it had become . She had expected it to be hazardous , but to her astonishment it was the contrary . The meter had lowered from red to yellow nearing the green section . Mary's mouth was open as she gaped at the meter, sure pollution wasn’t gone but it had decreased rapidly . " Hey John, Ahmed . Take a look at this " she said ushering them over.

They both came to her and soon their features twisted from neutral to confusion and shock, mirroring her own expression.

" I'm getting a little freaked out here " exclaimed John " I mean first everyone is gone, now pollution has gone down . Have people finally seen the error of their ways? ".

" Doubtful " muttered Ahmed, eyes narrowed in disbelief.

Mary quickly shuffled to the tower of boxes . After digging around for a bit, she found the crimson box that contained the potion . Mary removed it and went back to her friends.

The female twirled the vial of bubbling emerald liquid in her hands . "Guess there is no use for this anymore ".

" Wait ! " exclaimed John , as he opened the internet to one of the screens on the far right.

Before he could type anything in the search bar, he saw dozens of articles in the recommended section, all talking about some virus called corona.

Mary and John, already behind him ,asked John to scroll down . The headlines got worse and worse as they did .

*Economy paralyzed because of the corona epidemic.*

*Worry spreads through the citizens of the world as countries declare quarantine.*

A few minutes later of searching , the trio came to the conclusion of there being a quarantine because of a virus called corona , the plague's deadly talons sunk into all the countries of the world. Effecting every aspect of life.

"So because of this so called virus, people are staying at home " declared Mary.

"Which means no cars , no factories , no cutting down trees " cried Ahmed " this is amazing ".

"Not really " retorted John " this is still a virus, and thousands are dying ".

" True , It is bad. But you can't deny the positive impact it has on the environment " Ahmed replied.

" You have to admit, Ahmed has a point " added Mary " I wonder what will happen after this is over ".

**One year later**

It had been two months since the government had deemed it safe for people to return to the streets. But life was never the same afterwards.

Mary John and Ahmed had all decided to meet in his backyard to see each other again. After having video chats as the only way of communication, for more than three months.

Sweat gleamed on John's forehead as he took a breath of the dry summer air . Thankfully the large swaying chair he and Ahmed sat on was cold. Meanwhile , Mary was perched on the wooden railing of the balcony in front of them . It had been way too long since they had last met and it was a relief to see each other again even as the sun radiated scorching waves of heat.

Mary sighed as she drank from the chilled lemonade glass in her hand. "Turns out the potion wasn’t that important " she mumbled, while glancing at Ahmed's siblings as they played football behind them in the backyard.

"True" agreed John " but after all we went through to get. It’s a shame ".

"Actually I may have to disagree with you " replied Ahmed " I mean people, after the corona epidemic ended , saw how the earth had improved when they finally realized how much they stopped had been polluting it ".

"In my opinion it was both a curse and a blessing " added Mary.

"I'm still shocked though , I still can't believe the heads of the countries declared the renewable energy project finally being done " exclaimed John, with a smile gracing his lips " this is such an improvement ".

"I noticed the air is cleaner and doesn’t smell so bad , so are the plants, they are growing much better ". Added Mary with a grin.

"I'm just happy humans discovered the error of their ways, before it was truly too late " said Ahmed.