

Whatever It Takes



Table of contents

Table of contents	2
List of Authors.....	3
Copyright	4
Acknowledgements	5
Chapter 1	6
Chapter 2	9
Chapter 3	12
Chapter 4	14
Chapter 5	16
Chapter 6	18
Chapter 7	20
Chapter 8	22
Chapter 9	24
Chapter 10	25

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PARAMETERS

Primary Character 1:	A Camel Owner
Primary Character 2:	Pilot
Non-Human Character:	Cane Toad
Setting:	A Beach
Issue:	Re-vegetation

Random Words which must appear at least once somewhere in the story:

Nurse
Heart
Joy-ride
Underground
Sneeze

Copyright

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Chapter 1

“You almost ready?” I ask for the third time.

“Hold your horses Oscar,” Shane replies, “I just have to finish packing my back-pack.”

“Ohh,” I groan, “Come on we don’t even need most of that stuff.”

“Yes we do,” Shane adds, “And you’ll thank me if we have an emergency.”

I sighed in defeat. I knew he was right; he always was. I don’t know what I would have done without him. Since mum and dad have died he has always been there, looking after me, getting me fed and keeping me safe. There’s nobody in the world I’d rather spend a day with.

As Shane puts the satellite phone into the back pack he says, “Alright we’re all set. Have you got Occa ready?”

“Yes,” I say impatiently.

“Alright I think we’re right to go then.”

“Finally!” I gasp. I race down the hall of our house that our parents gave to us and burst through the door into the gleaming sunshine of the Australian Outback. Although it is still early, the sun’s rays are already radiating their immense heat, scorching the already sunbaked earth.

Just as got ready to jump onto Occa, Shane emerges from the house and says, “Geez, it’s going to be a scorcher today. Have you got some sun-block on?”

“Yes!” I reply dismally, “Can we just go already?”

“Fine. You want front or back?”

“Front!” I yell and race over to our humped Bactrian camel- Occa. In one swift move I jump up onto his back and grab hold of the reins. “Your turn,” I laugh.

“Not likely,” he jokes and with that he makes a much steadier mount onto Occa’s back. “Lead on!” Shane demands in a very posh voice and points at the vast expanse of rugged desert. Both in hysterics, we begin to march. I loosen the reins and give Occa a gentle tap with the side of my boot and he responds with a gentle trot.

Shane passes me my Akubra and I pull it down tight to protect myself from the suns powerful rays, ever present on this hot summer’s morning. “You ready to step things up a notch?” I ask Shane with a sly smile.

“Ready and waiting.” I laugh and give Occa a slightly more forceful kick, to which he responds like a bullet escaping the chamber of a gun. He bursts into the anonymity of the desert, leaving but a trail of dust.

After many hours of taking in the breathtaking beauty of the desert, we slow to find a suitable spot for lunch. As Occa steps with surprising grace over the sharp rocks and pebbles, my heart skips a beat as from underground I see the unmistakable head of snake arise. Curious, it slithers towards us.

“Sh- Sh-Shane,” I stutter. But before I can alert him to the looming danger, Occa sees the snake and rears up on his two hind legs. Shane and I

topple off his back onto the unforgiving ground. Shane's head hits the solid earth with a sickening thud. "Oh my God! Shane! Are you ok?" I ask horrified.

"Yeah I'm fine," Shane replies, clearly in great pain. By now Occa has sprinted away at an explosive speed and is already at least fifty metres away. "What happened?" Shane asks stunned, "Where's Occa?"

"He bolted," I say, "He saw a snake and-". I'm interrupted by a scream of pure agony from Shane. "What is it?" I ask nervously. As Shane brings his leg around, I see the vicious snake, with fangs deep into the flesh of Shane's leg. I gasp in horror and force myself not to vomit as blood begins to ooze from Shane's leg, coating the snake in a vulgar varnish.

Bone chilling screams from Shane force me into action. I search the surrounding area frantically for anything I could use as a weapon. My eyes are drawn to a solid and sharp looking rock. I grab hold of it and lift it above my head.

"Hold still!" I screech. With precision of time untold I aim at the struggling body of the snake and swing down with all my strength. I connect solidly with the snake's wicked head. Instantly it falls limp. I pull it out of his leg and refuse to look at the blood dripping from its lethal fangs. Just as I am about to hurl the snake away, I stop. I have never seen that type of snake before so in a moment of clear thinking I realise that if there is an antivenom we will have to know the correct type of snake. I throw it towards the back pack and rush to Shane's side.

"Oh my God! Shane!"

"It's okay, it's okay. Just calm down," Shane says calmly.

"What are we going to do?" I ask as tears begin to well up in my eyes.

"Just relax. What you need to do is go to the back pack and get the satellite phone and call the emergency services. Get somebody to get out here as quick as they can."

"Who do I call," I say as my voice trembles with panic.

"Dial 112 and ask for someone to pick us up. We're about 50km east of Anthony Lagoon and make sure you tell them we're in the Northern Territory."

"I'm not an idiot," I yell as the tears welling up in my eyes begin to fall. I race to the back pack and pull out the satellite phone and hurriedly punch in the numbers.

"Hello emergency services. Please state your emergency."

Acting as calm as possible I tell them what has happened and where we are. After a while I was transferred to the Royal Flying Doctor Service and the calm but strong voice of a man came through the receiver. "Hello son I am Doctor McCullen of the Royal Flying Doctor Service and we have a unit in the area so they should be there within the next 10-20 minutes. In the meantime it is best you use whatever you can to apply a firm but not too tight bandage above the wound and keep your brother immobilised."

"Thank you," I reply, "Please hurry."

"We'll do our best. Just be brave." And with that I hang up and look across at Shane.

"Well done Oscar," Shane states, "You did well."

“Thank you.” Although we both put on a smile, I worry about the constant torrent of blood coming from Shane’s leg and I pray inside my head that the help will arrive in time.



Chapter 2

I head back towards Shane. He is lying on the ground, sand piled up around him. As I near him, I see him sitting up holding his leg in his arms, his face contort with pain. By now Occa had returned and was lying next to Shane, shielding him from the flying grains of sand. The dead snake a few metres from them, lying unmoving, half buried underneath the sand. Shane is now sweating, and his face is a bright red, but turning more purple with every painful second that passes. He is squeezing his leg where the snake bit him.

‘Shane’, I call out, my voice soft, barely carrying over to him. The wind is picking up. Sand is now whipping at my heels, biting into the flesh. ‘Shane, are you okay?’

‘Yeh, I think so’, I can just hear his voice carried on wind. I am still a few metres away. I close the gap between us and kneel down to hug him. ‘It’s going to be okay, Oscar. It’ll be okay’, He whispers in my ear. I squeeze my eyes shut. Tears still manage to leak out.

‘I know, Shane. I know.’ My voice is feeble and weak. I gently pry Shane’s hand off his leg. The two little holes in his leg from where the snake bit him were now turning the surrounding skin a dark shade of purple, and the bite marks had a dark, almost black surrounding. I take of my shirt and wrap it around Shane’s leg. He grimaces as I pull it tight and tie off my make shift splint. It’ll do for now, I think. Shane looks at what I’ve done.

‘Ha, I’ve taught you well’, he says, as he tries to smile. I smile back, but both our heads look to the skies as we hear a faint, low humming sound. After a few moments of scanning the sky, Shane calls out and thrust his hand at the sky.

‘Look Oscar, there! A plane. A plane! They’ve come to get us!’ He cries out exuberantly. I didn’t say anything, but I was laughing on the inside. They’re here, I thought, they’ve come to rescue us! I look at Shane and hug him. The smile on his sweating face beaming, as the bags under his eyes get heavier, and his skin goes a pale white.

The plane lands about twenty metres away from where we are. I help Shane onto Occa, and then, carrying the snake, lead him towards the plane. As we near the plane, a man who must be the pilot comes out to greet us. He is a reasonably tall man, with a strong physique. Aged in around his thirties, he has a hard, but caring face with a weathered look to it.

‘I’m Doctor McCullen. I must’ve spoken to you on the phone’, he says in a commanding voice, pointing at me, ‘Now, have we got an idea of what the snake looks like?’

‘Yes’, Shane pants, ‘Oscar has the snake in his hand.’

‘Well, that’s even better’, he says, almost laughing. His face turns dark, as he looks at the snake. I hand it to him at his gesture. He throws it away and looks at Shane. His face is stern and serious, ‘There is only one cure for this poison. This is a Konodo Viper, one of the most deadly in the world, however its poison takes longer to work than most. We must hurry. I’ll fix you up on

the plane. Julie! Bring out the stretcher!’ As he calls out, a curly, red haired woman bustles out of the plane carrying a stretcher. She is wearing a nurse uniform. She hobbles over to where we are standing and places the stretcher on the ground. She glances up at me and gives me an assuring smile. She is quite fair skinned, with a few freckles dotted over her face.

They lower Shane onto the stretcher, and lift him up, the Doctor at the front, and nurse at the back. I follow them as they load him onto the plane. I tell Occa to follow us. Doctor McCullen and Julie disappear on the plane. Moments later, I turn around to see the doctor poke his head out and tell me to hurry up. Occa follows me as I head up the temporary staircase leading to the plane. Doctor McCullen shakes his head, ‘I’m sorry, Oscar, but your camel can’t come with us.’ I stop as he speaks those last words. My camel. My Occa. The last thing my father ever gave to me. Tears well up in my eyes, as I look at Occa. I have to do it. I have to say goodbye. For Shane. I walk up to Occa.

‘Occa’, my voice trembles, ‘This is it, buddy. I have to go. But I love you. I really do. I’ll miss you. Goodbye’, I whisper the final words as I hold his head. I hug him, and let him go. He seems to understand, and trudges away, back into the outback, the great Australian backyard. Tears rolled down my cheek. ‘I love you’, I whispered, before making my way back to the plane.

As I entered through the hatch, I looked around. I saw Shane lying on the white stretcher, his face looking worse than ever and sweat covering his body. He was crying out aloud and mumbling. I took a seat next to Shane, with him in the middle, and Julie on his other side, monitoring him. She had strapped up his leg properly, with a proper pressure bandage.

‘All right everyone. Time to get going’, the doctor called out, who was also, it seemed, the pilot. The engine whirled into life, and started grumbling. The propeller spun into life, and the wheels rolled forward. In moments we were in the air, flying away from our troubles. With Shane resting peacefully, I took the opportunity to go and talk to the pilot. I made my way up to the cockpit. As I entered, the pilot looked around at me.

‘Hello Oscar. Don’t worry about your brother, he’ll be fine. It’s only in its early stages.’ I felt re-assured, but still clueless. I asked him where we were going. ‘Call me Neil. We are going to the coast of Queensland to find the cure, which is a plant, or a shrub rather, called the Dwarf Harpullia. It is a very rare plant, but it will save your brother’s life.’ I nodded, and looked out the window at the amazing scenery. An hour or two passed before I realized, as we flew over a green, lush forest. We circled a beach and Neil told me that was where we had to be, that that was where we would find the shrub. ‘Darn, I can’t land there. We’ll have to go back and trek through the forest.’

‘You up for a trek’, a voice behind me called out. Julie’s head appeared. ‘Don’t worry, it’ll only take a few hours at the most’, she assured me. We headed back around to the forest and Neil said that was where we would have to land. ‘Buckle your seatbelts ladies and gentleman, it’s going to be a bumpy ride’, he joked. Both Julie and I sat with Shane. As we were starting to descend, the plane jumped around a lot, as we hit turbulence. Shane was shaking and sliding all over the place. I heard Neil swear as the plane bounced from invisible wall to invisible wall. My heart was beating in my chest, as fear

took over. All of a sudden, neither Neil nor Julie was smiling. Julie gasped, and the colour drained from her face as she peered out the window.

‘Oh my God’, was all she said, as we approached the landing without slowing down.



Chapter 3

The floor whinged and groaned as the glossy black landing wheels pop out of the fuselage, I squeeze Shane's sweaty palm tight he looks up at me with his watery hazel eyes that say to me it's all going to be 'okay'. I do believe Shane I believe he is going to make it and we are going to be 'okay', suddenly Neil turns around and blurt out "hold on!" Julie quickly seizes the straps on the plane wall trusts them towards me and instantly I clipped them into the nearest holder. Shane wheezed somewhat of a breath as we constricted his lean slender frame into the white sturdy stretcher, my stomach flipped on itself as the plane promptly descended towards the flat red sand.

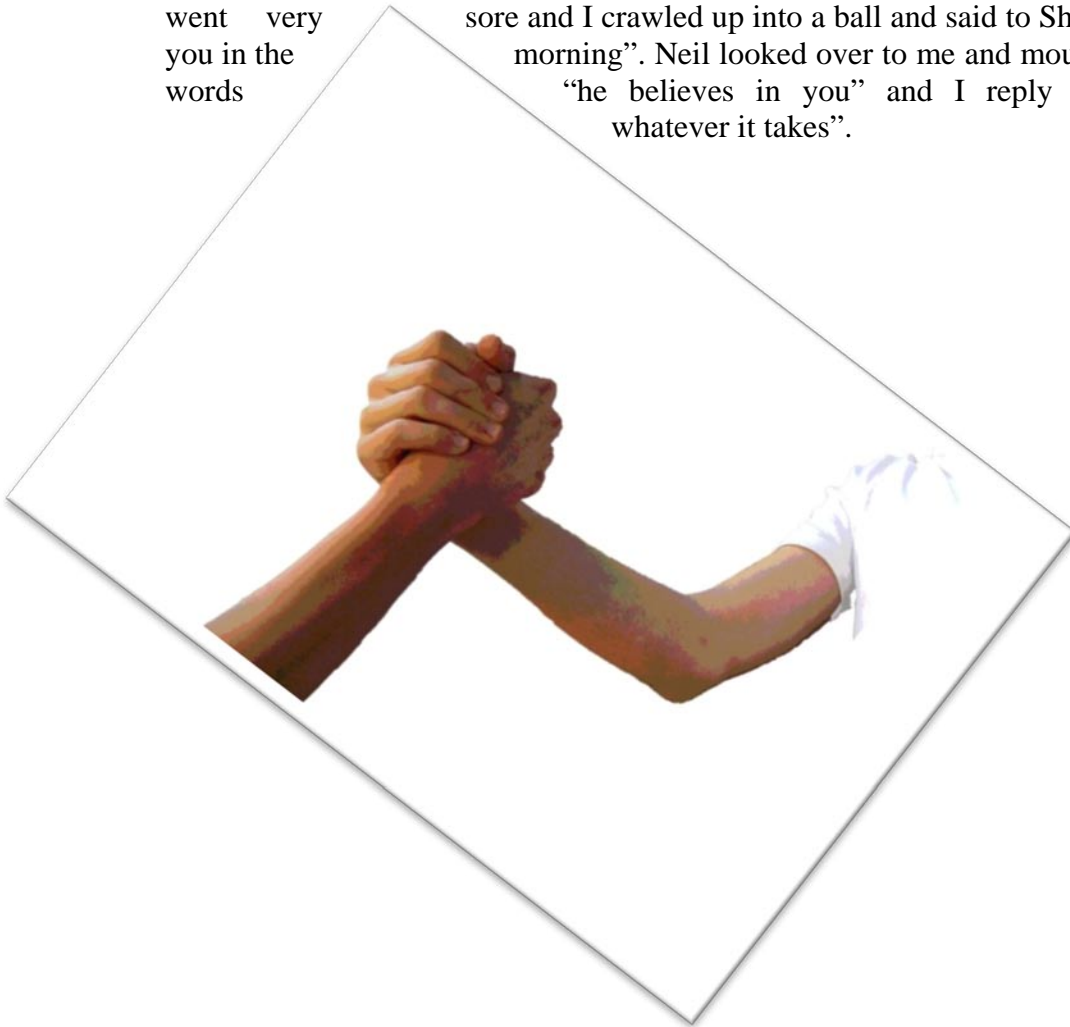
THUD! The wheels bounced hard off the ground, THUD! THUD! We connected and stuck to the earth, "if this wasn't so serious it would be a bit of a joyride wouldn't it?" Shane chuckled. Storming towards the forest Neil flapped the wings and slammed on the brakes we to some extent slowed down, thankfully we did because the front window now is utterly covered with braches and leaves. Julie popped her head up above the stretcher; her curly red locks bobbed slightly, collecting herself up off the floor "Too easy ay darl?" Neil replied "Course, I could have done it in my sleep. Now let's get that shrub".

We all gathered around the door (I had Shane propped up on my shoulder which was practically killing me) Neil disarmed it but it wouldn't budge, Julie took Shane off me and onto herself, I hopped over to the door and pushed with all my might, it clearly did nothing my scrawny muscles weren't helping. Neil puffed the words "come on mate". I feel the strain on my upper body through the heavy door, after some time the door creaked open; instantaneously Neil jarred the fire extinguisher nozzle into the splinter of a gap. We all pried the door open to find it had been stuck on a broad tree with. I leapt down from the plane and took a couple steps back and stood in awe at the forest that is placed in our way and in the way of my brothers' life. It is the most green I have ever seen; Neil wasted no time in organising the jobs for the forest. I am hurt inside as he allocated me the job of leading the way through the mass of green. Inside I hold these feelings and emotions so I won't seem weak towards Shane I want him to feel safe as possible and let him know I can be brave like he is. "Is that okay Oscar?" I nod in quick reply, gripping the machete with white knuckles. Slicing through the first couple of trees seems easy I take pride in my work and stand very tall. We soon came along denser forest; I clambered over the thick roots of a forest red gum. ARGH! Shane cries in utter agony I spin around to see Shane on the damp ground convulsing while Julie and Neil crouch over the top of him.

I rush over, machete raised in anger, "what did you do!?" Neil not phased answers "we can't stop it, the poison is spreading he needs to keep his body temperature stable. You need to find us shelter we won't make it to the beach today. Calm down everything is going to be fine if you can get shelter to

Shane.” Without hesitation I was off into the forest searching, watching and waiting for destiny to hit me.

BOOM! It hit me or more like I hit it; I collapsed to the ground my head pounds I look up to see a vast rock structure before me. I pick myself up off the damp now dark ground and walk around to the entrance of an immense cave which has loads of aboriginal artworks. This place was perfect. I quickly checked for anything in the cave, as I turned back towards where Neil, Shane and Julie were I could see a diminutive glint of sun on the horizon. Lifting my spirits I broke into a sprint. Shane’s condition had worsened by the time I got there; Neil and I collect his limp body and carried it all the way to the cave, as I walk into the deep cave I could hardly hold my eyelids up. My body went very sore and I crawled up into a ball and said to Shane “see you in the morning”. Neil looked over to me and mouthed the words “he believes in you” and I reply “I’ll do whatever it takes”.



Chapter 4

I awake to the distant sound of breaking waves. I awoke before anyone, and stepped out into the fresh morning air and fill my lungs, ridding them of the dank tasting air of the cave. I stay outside for a few minutes before returning to the cave to find Shane and Neil awake. Shane says he is feeling fine but I know him better, he doesn't want anyone to worry too much about him. We leave him in the cave and left to collect some food for breakfast.

I still feel a little intimidated by Neil, but I feel that I was getting to know him a little better. I don't know much about what we can and can't eat but Neil looks like he was born in the forest, picking up berries here and there and grabbing certain fruits of the likes I have never seen. As he plucks the various fruits and berries he began to teach me what they are and how they taste and before I knew it I was chatting happily with him, my shyness completely gone towards him.

We return to find Julie awake and ready to start the day. We enjoy a filling breakfast and head off following the sounds of the waves, luckily for is Shane was still able to walk without any help but according to Neil that would change. Neil is bashing away plants and clearing a track for us as we trudge along through the bush. We walked on for about an hour, and then all of a sudden Neil stopped dead in his tracks, "what's wrong" Julie whispered to Neil but there was no reply he slowly bent down to pick up a thick long stick off the ground, we can't see what is ahead but Shane and I know it is not good. We stand still for about 15 seconds which was feeling like a lifetime, until a loud and startling bark broke the silence and then for the first time we caught a glimpse of what had stopped us, it's a dingo! And quick as a flash it pounced, but Neil swung with bone crunching force at the Dingo THWACK! The dingo died in an instant, the blow had snapped the dingo's neck.

"We need to get onto that beach as soon as we can otherwise that is gonna happen again; there are all kinds of deadly animals out here."

We keep going, through the harsh bushland trying our best to navigate towards the beach, the sound of the waves are gradually getting louder a great sign that we are well on course, I noticed that Shane was limping a little, he looks like the poison is beginning to take its toll on him

"How are you feeling?"

"I don't know it's like my legs are going a little stiff or something it's really weird."

"It's gunna be all right once we get to the beach and find the cure, it'll be fine".

We decide that it is best that we stop for lunch and get to the beach afterwards, Neil goes into the bush to find some food.

"I'll stay with Neil" I yell.

I lay down next to Shane and we rest until Neil and Julie come back, we quickly gulp down our lunch and we are off again, we push our way through

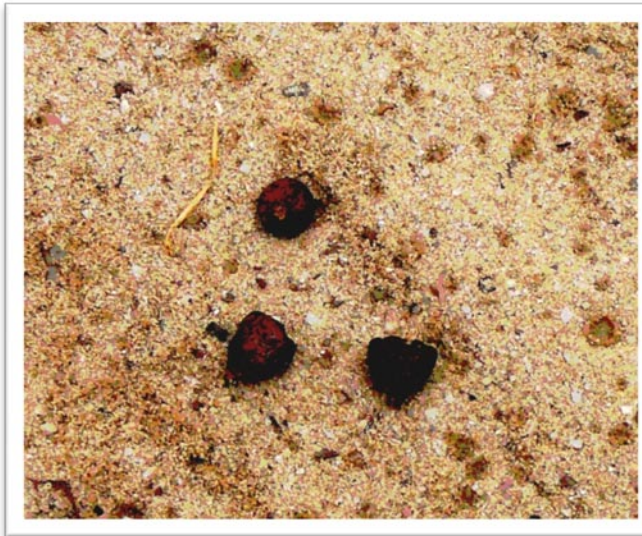
the unforgiving terrain for hours, and finally just at night fall we reach the beach!

We set up a small campsite on the edge of the forest and all got some much needed sleep.

Chapter 5

As I wake the golden sunlight pierces into my eyes. Yawning, I stand up and fold the blanket into a neat square, placing my shoes on top; I guess everyone else had already left the campsite. Still half asleep I walk towards the beach nearby. Stepping on to the soft white sand I close my eyes as I inhale the salty breeze, coming from the sea. There was nothing like this back home, the pure, soft powder between my toes, the sparkling ocean in the distance...the lack of plants? Suddenly a thought occurs, jerking me out of my walking slumber. Looking around, I ask myself, where were all the plants!? Sure there were grass and trees before the sand, but barely any flowers or shrubs, all that was left were stalks, merely empty shells of their former beauty. What had caused all this destruction? Who or what would do such a thing? Then suddenly it hits me, What if this Dwarf Harpullia flower was gone as well!?

Catching sight of what were most definitely Shane and the others, inspecting the ground, in the distance, I ran towards them with the aid of an adrenaline rush, busting to tell them of my new revelation.



“Neil! There aren’t any pla...”

“Plants, we know, we’re trying to see if there are any Dwarf Harpullia left”. I look over at Shane, even with his sickly pallor he seemed full of life and energy but could we help him in time?

“Look on the bright side” says Julie “Maybe there are some like, seeds or something somewhere around here” I sure hope

so I am thinking.

“Well since we have no other option” Neil states “I guess we’ll just have to look around”

“Just so” said Shane, coughing in the process.

“Well then” Neil started, “I propose we split up, we’ll cover more ground that way. I don’t know if we’ll find any but the Dwarf Harpullia looks like a red flower with big pods in it.”

“What about the seeds?” I ask

“I’m not sure what they look like but they’re probably the pods from the flower so maybe pea sized, maybe bigger, maybe smaller, keep an open mind everyone, now, let’s go!”

A little worried with Shane going off alone I stand anxiously for a moment but the thought subsided. Everyone else went off to different parts of the beach so I decide to head back to the forested area; it would make sense for it to grow there. Still bare-footed I make the transition from the powdery sand to something rougher. I walk around, carefully inspecting the grass amongst the sand for the would-be pods. Ten minutes later, still nothing, overcome by frustration I strike a nearby tree, Shane's life was riding on finding this plant and I don't even know where to find it! Suddenly three small, dark pebbles catch my eye. I walk towards them, hopes high. Examining them, they are brown, yet give of a glossy reflection. Ecstatic, I call over the others.

Chapter 6

As Neil lent down to further examine these radiant pods amongst the glistening sand, my heart started racing as various feelings of excitement and confusion overcame me as I started wondering to myself what exactly these things really were. Neil brought them up to his eye as a look of awe came upon his face as he announced, "These appear to be some variety of seed"

"Well it appears there is at least some vegetation here!" Julie says, "Perhaps we should further venture through the shore." Neil suggested, securing the seed's safely as we made pace toward the shore. Off in the distance, the peaceful sound of crashing waves against the beaming sand became disturbed by some somewhat terrible singing. "Someone lives here!?" Neil exclaims. It seems I wasn't the only one who heard it. Making haste toward the singing, terrible as it is, we stand before a gentle looking middle-aged lady, who was nurturing what seems to be a number of tropical plants. We interrupted, enquiring what it was she was doing and if she could help us. "Uhh, excuse me Miss, my names Neil, this is my wife Julie, and two boys in need of help, Oscar and Shane, would you happen to be able to help us."

"Gosh! You scared me then! Excuse my singing. Anyhow, allow me to introduce myself! My name's Dorothy and I've been living here for the past few years. If you hadn't already noticed the land around here is a bit lacking, but I have been trying to re-vegetate it with all my heart! But anyway, how can I help?" She was a lovely looking lady, with delicate and fair hair and a sweet, yet battered face. She wears a linen magenta linen blouse and a pair of stonewashed jeans, and some lime hush puppies on her feet.

"Well... Long story short my young friend here has been bitten by a Konodo Viper and well, we're trying to find the Dwarf Harpullia for the antidote, would you happen to have any idea where we might be able to find one?"

"Oh my Lord! How long ago was he bitten, he looks to be in terrible shape, come, we'd best give him a place to sleep, come, I'll take you to my shack and we'll discuss this situation further" she grabs Shane's arm and drags him to her shack, just metres away from the shore. "Is he going to be okay Miss? P- Please tell me he's going to be okay" I ask, as feelings of immense sadness come over me. "At this stage I suppose only time will tell."

As we open the front door we are welcomed by an influx of cane toads madly hopping towards us, taking refuge in the nearby terrain. "Bloody things, can't get rid of 'em!" Dorothy exclaims in annoyance. "Now, come and lie down... Shane is it?" Dorothy says as she aids Shane's limp body up onto her single mattress. "So, Dorothy, you seem to know a lot about plants, do you know if there is any Dwarf Harpullia in the area? Oh and by the way, we found these seed like things on the ground, would you happen to know what they are?" he asks as he hands her the seeds. With a look of disbelief on her face, she stuffs the pods into her pocket and leads us out of her shack into an open clearing alongside the shore, Neil not far behind carrying Shane in his arms.



Chapter 7

“And this is where the last Dwarf Harpullia grew, before it was ravaged by cane toads,” says Dorothy, as she brushes her tough, calloused hands through her wavy sallow hair. I can tell by the look on her rough and weathered face that she is trying to hold back a monsoon of tears from pouring out of her icy blue eyes. Every one of us turns to Shane, a limp body so unlike the one I knew before. I can hardly recognise his frail and defeated figure, almost like a rag doll in a young girl’s arms.

“That’s terrible,” snivels Julie as she wipes her tears off her cheeks, “We need to plant the seeds we found on the bea-”. She is cut off by Dorothy, now focused and fired by Julie’s illogical comment.

“We can’t do that,” she snaps, “It’ll be impossible for the flower to bloom in time, and even if some miracle was to occur and it did blossom, those bloody cane toads will beat us to it!” This unexpected outburst from Dorothy reminds me of the time that mum told me off for leaving the back gate open and letting Occa into the garden to eat all the flowers.

“Well, we have to at least try,” adds Neil, whom I feel so much more respect for from this moment on. He really has a concern about my brother, he is not just another patient, another figure or statistic; he is almost like a pet to him – not able to communicate verbally but a friend all the same. “Isn’t there something else that you have – apart from this stupid Harpy-whatchamacallit – that will ease his pain or at least buy us time to get the antidote? Please, think of the boy. As I said before, we need to do whatever it takes.” After a brief period of Dorothy looking as though her head is going to explode, her face lights up.

“I think there is something might work - a thing I learnt from a witch-doctor tribesman in Southern Africa many years ago. I’ll show you when we get back to the bungalow. Suddenly, Shane lets out a cry of agony as he falls unconscious.

Shane wakes an hour later, shaking and sweating with an initial reaction of surprise. He sees Julie, Neil, Dorothy, and I sitting in a circle around his bed, or Dorothy’s bed as it is, holding hands and chanting a rich, rhythmic, and unbreakable song. The mantra is broken by a sneeze from Julie which fuels the fire that starts Neil’s dislike of the exercise.

“This is stupid, it’s not worth it” moans Neil, who breaks the chain and walks out of the room, Julie follows awkwardly in an instinct of compassion. “Isn’t he the one that said we need to do “whatever it takes” in order to save Shane?” says Dorothy in a know-it-all voice.

“Do you have any herbs or painkillers for him?” I squeak, as I watch Shane fall in and out consciousness once again. “Painkillers will have hardly any effect on these sorts of bites from the Konodo viper. I’ll try all the healing herbs that I have, but just don’t expect them to work.” Says Dorothy solemnly, as she pulls the Dwarf Harpullia seeds out of her jeans pocket and

places them in my hand. “Here, take these and plant them in the most fertile and open clearing in my garden as you can”.

I tighten my fist around the seeds and say, “Thank you, you have come to my brothers aid when we all need it, I can’t imagine what we would do if we hadn’t found you”. Dorothy looks at me with her piecing stare and somehow manages a smile.

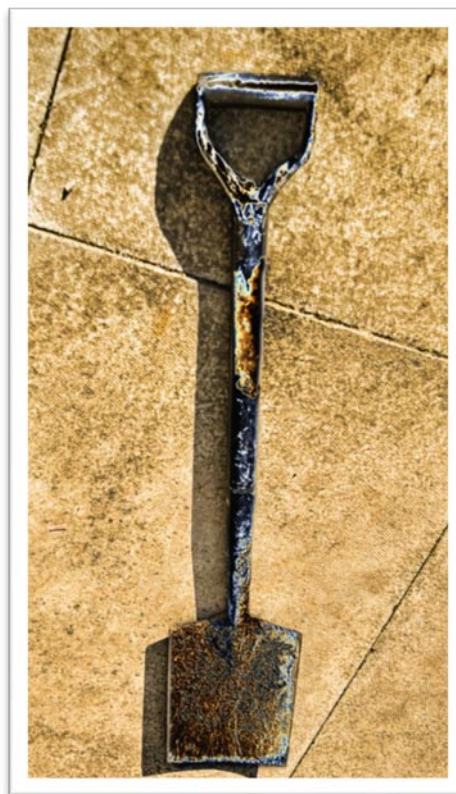
“You’re welcome,” she whispers as I walk out the door.

As I reach the garden, I find that the hole has already been half dug. I see Julie rubbing Neil’s shoulders as he straightens up from digging. He is holding a small shovel that he must have salvaged from Dorothy’s tool shed.

“I couldn’t just wait for your brother to die; we need to attempt to grow the plant, at any rate. As soon as I’ve finished the hole, you plant the seeds then I’ll begin on the moat –we need some form of protection from those ruddy cane toads. We’ll also need to take shifts over the next couple of days so that we can keep them in the ground.” Neil says as he points in my clenched hand.

After planting the seed, Julie and I walk back inside to check on Shane. We find Dorothy dressing the now infected bite with a green and brown paste. She ignores us as we our footsteps disturb the silence, except for the inconsistent moans coming from Shane’s mouth. His eyes shut, he begins calling out.

“Mum, dad, help me! Oscar, please help me!” Tears streaming down my face, I kneel by his side and hold his hand. “It’s me, don’t worry, I’m here”. I stay there unmoving until the late evening when I hear the call of Neil from outside.



Chapter 8

I walk out of the shack into the cool night air brooding over what to do. I go over to where Neil is finishing the moat around where our Dwarf Harpullia is beginning to take root. Without looking up he says,

“Oscar, could you watch over the plant for a tick while I catch a few hours of sleep?” I nod in approval and he hands me a stick, I look up curiously and open my mouth but before I could say anything he says “Professor Dorothy said that Cane toads were roaming this region and if one eats this plant then I’m afraid that you brother doesn’t stand much of a chance.” He motions to the stick “don’t let them near it.”

I watch him as he disappears into the shack and I sit next to the plant, guarding Shane’s salvation. My eyes droop as I think of the sleep that I’m not having and the waves crashing melodically on the shore make me yawn but one thought of Shane and how he was lying on the bed sweating, and crying out for help, snaps my eyes open in an instant. I lift the stick and give it a few experimental swings. I look around at my surroundings, bathing in the moonlight.

Everything is swaying gently in the ocean’s whispering breeze but one particular bush is swaying randomly, almost convulsively, against the wind. I watch it for a little longer and sure enough a cane toad darts out and goes for the plant. It’s bigger than I previously thought they were and seems very dull in colour. It looks slimy, but I don’t want to touch it to find out. It leaps at where the seeds are planted as I stare at it stupidly. The plant is within its slimy grasp, but it falls into the moat that Neil had dug, and that saved the plant. I shake my head to clear it and raise the stick menacingly. The stupid toad seems to understand and flees back into the bushes.

I lower the stick and realise that in the all excitement I have forgotten to breathe. I let out a sigh as I silently promise to myself that I would keep better vigil. I look at the Dwarf Harpullia and gasp aloud as I see that it is already beginning to grow up from the ground. It is only a tiny stem but it was something. I sit there for another few hours fighting back sleep when I see Julie and she claims that it was her shift and that I could go and get some sleep. I walked into the shack, collapse onto the floor and fall asleep in an instant.

I dream of a tomb stone with Shane’s name on it and the group standing around in private reflection. I awaken, sweating, trying futilely to shake the unpleasant dreams away. I stand up and move to where the plant is growing to see Neil with bloodshot eyes. “Do you want me to take my shift now?” I asked him.

He smiles at me and says “thanks Oscar that would be great”. So I take up the stick and begin my second watch.

Over the next two days the plant is making good progress and the toad keeps coming back. On my third watch I see the toad yet again and notice that it is the same bloody toad as the first time and the second time and, I thought

probably all other watches yet to come. After scaring it off I decide to give it a name, after a watch worth of thinking I decide on the name 'Tailor' as I have no way to distinguish whether it is a boy or a girl.

By the third day the plant starts to develop its pods. This news is very good as Shane's condition is worsening with each passing hour. On the third day I walk into the tent to see Shane looking worse than ever.



Chapter 9

“Quickly” I shout,” He’s in a terrible state.” Shane had started to develop a rash around the bite area. I thought nothing of it before, but it had started to scab up, and appears to be spreading at a rapid rate. “There isn’t much we can do” Julie replied, “We just have to hope for the best, and let time tell.”

There wasn’t much we could do at all, Julie was right, pain killers and water were our only form of relief, but they weren’t much good anyway. I don’t know how long he could hold on, but I hope long enough. I’m not ready to loose another family member. After mum and dad left us, I was distraught, and Shane was there to keep me going, if I lost him, I’d have no one. I ventured outside towards the garden, to see how the progress on the Harpullia’s going.

“How long do you think, Professor?” I asked.

“A matter of hours now, the flowers are starting to bloom, and as soon as this happens, we can grind it up, mix it with water, and extract the serum, and before you know it, your brother will be as good as new.”

I sensed that the Professor was nervous, and unsure of the outcome, but this was our only option, and I wasn’t about to give up. I walked around the back of the garden to check on the plant. The cane toad had returned, and was heading straight for the Harpullia. I couldn’t let the cane toad eat the plant, I wasn’t about to risk my brother’s life. I picked up the shovel that we had dug the whole with and “SMACK!” I made sure I cleaned up the mess, but I couldn’t put my brother’s life at risk.

“Oscar, Come quick!” Professor yelled “The plant is ready”. We pulled it out of the ground, and ran into the shack where Shane lay, slowly deteriorating, and losing energy by the minute.

“Hurry up Professor”, Julie said, “His heart rates rising and his fever is at 40 degrees”. Professor brought the plant in and proceeded to initiate the extraction process. She placed the plant on the bench, and pulled out the flower. She then ground it up in a bowl and added water to the mixture. At this point I was really getting nervous. “What’s his heart rate Julie?” I asked. “O my goodness” It’s stopped beating. I’ve lost his pulse. “No!!! Get the serum Professor, now!” Professor ran over with the serum. “It’s not too late, it can’t be, he was fine a minute ago, what’s happening!?!”

Professor opened Shane’s mouth and poured the serum in. Nothing, he hadn’t moved. “I can’t believe this, an hour ago he was sitting up, going to the toilet,

and now he’s gone.

“Not quite little bro”

“Shane! But I thought...”

“I know Oscar, I know, but I’m up now”



Chapter 10

Shane is recovering at a rapid rate and was quickly back up on his feet walking around the beach shack that now felt like home to us. I was slowly realising over the last part of my journey to save my beloved brother, not only had I helped myself grow stronger but the person who made me blossom with confidence most was Dorothy. The mysterious shack lady who had taken Shane and I into her home when in need, and when all hope was lost; Dorothy was there to make things better. I had become close to her and she was a role model who was willing to give her best effort, to give my brother another chance to live. To leave a person who now, had provided and given so much including a place to stay, would be devastate Shane and I. I could not even imagine where I would go if I were to leave here.

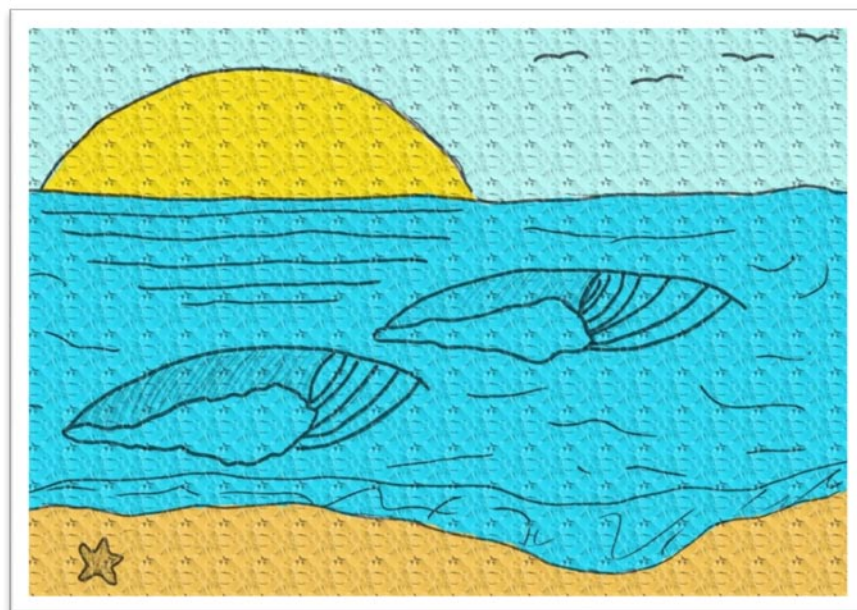
Thinking hard and long of what to do about the problem at hand was one of the most difficult tasks having to encounter at the present time. After rustling up some courage I walked out onto the front porch of the beach shack where I found Dorothy standing upright and simply gazing off into the horizon. Suddenly out of nowhere I was jabbering to Dorothy, “Dorothy....pl....pl...ease....c...c...an.”

“Calm Down” Dorothy whispered as she hugged me reassuringly. “Now start again, what do you want to tell me?”

“I want to ask you a very important question,” now I was sweating intensely, “You don’t have to say yes but it would mean a lot to me if you did.”

“Sure, go right ahead,” Dorothy said softly still comforting me.

“Ok,” I took a deep breath, “Would you mind if Shane and I stayed with you a little longer here, it would mean the world to us?”



Dorothy's face immediately lit up with amazement and her smile broadened.

"So is it a YES?" I asked anxiously.

"Of course you can stay Oscar," Dorothy replied now hugging me tighter, "You can stay as long as you like!"

Dorothy and I then simply stood there watching the almighty sunset and all I could think of was the immense journey and people I had met to change my life.

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