





Paper: a never-ending material

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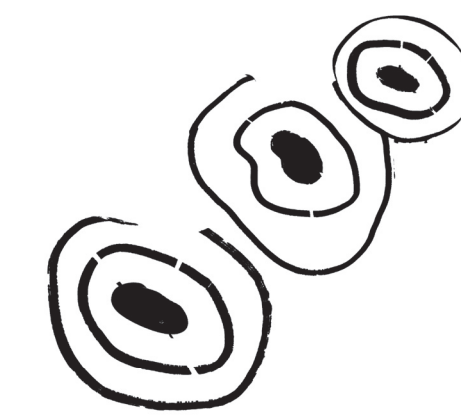
tracks, walking decisively toward William and Colette. They joined the pair and introduced themselves. There was Jian, 93, a Chinese map maker from 1760.

There was Enzo, a bold young man, with a name tag pinned to his chest for all to see. He had no voice, as he had been born mute, came from Brazil in 2041 and was 35. There was a 70-year-old Italian woman from 2018 named Lucia. She wore a scarf on her head and her greatest passion was to bake cakes and work in the kitchen. And there was Martin, a 24-year-old Englishman from 2139. He was very much in love and had an empty bottle in is hand.

The first incredible thing about this extraordinary encounter between a group of people so distant in time and space was that everyone spoke their own language and, without needing translators, they all understood each other perfectly.

Martin was telling Enzo about being in love with a girl who was far away. Lucia was sharing the secret to a perfect sponge cake with Colette. Jian the map maker was amusing William with an anecdote about international borders, something he knew better than anyone else.

Behind them were huge green mountains, villages with brilliant white sheets hanging in gardens and fragrant flowers of every kind whose perfume knew no bounds. Each person was there for a very specific reason. They knew exactly where to go and why. In some sense, they had always known; it was a part of them. Without further delay, everyone set out together.



The first stage soon arrived. They all stopped in their tracks when they saw an enormous pile of tree trunks. There were so many, and they were all piled on top of each other. It was William who told his companions about the process they were involved in.

“These trees all come from the renewable forests of Northern and Central Europe.”

To Jian and Colette’s surprise, he added, “The trees are part of a sustainable cycle to help fight climate change. They remove atmospheric CO₂ with the aid

of photosynthesis and carbon storage. However, there is a limit to how much carbon plants can store. Absorbed CO₂ is stored in the wood, which is then used for paper products, where it stays, trapped, and thanks to recycling, helps to keep carbon out of the atmosphere. Every time we plant a new tree, we continue to draw CO₂ from the atmosphere in a potentially endless process”. A simple but poetic image popped into Lucia’s mind. “Those sheets we saw hanging outside when we arrived are so white because of the clean air.” Everyone laughed, and Lucia blushed.



In the meantime, as trains loaded with tree trunks continued to arrive one after the other, they all set out again. The second stage came after a few more meters. William pointed to a maintenance door which Enzo showed the group through. Mrs. Lucia lit the way with a torch, Martin began to daydream, and Colette held hands with Jian, who proceeded slowly. They all entered and saw a new machine, where tree trunks were loaded in the front, then stripped of their bark by an enormous robot.

“Come over here so you can see the shredding.” Martin used this word to explain to everyone that, “here, the tree trunk is cleaned and becomes wood pulp, a soft and malleable material.” He took a piece from a tub and showed it to everyone. They all touched the warm, sticky material with their hands. Jian was moved, Enzo sniffed it and William thought about all the different forms it could take.

As they continued on their journey, the cellulose rhomboids were stacked one on top of the other. They all got closer to watch as another powerful device mixed the two elements together with water.

A little later, even more excited, they continued their walk. They could feel the

moment they had all been waiting for approach. They walked another twenty meters, everyone watching every detail of the process with great detail, which seemed to go on forever.

Finally, they found themselves in front of the most magnificent and mammoth mechanical masterpiece ever made:

“The machine that never ends,” they all whispered in unison.



And it is in front of this intimidating apparatus, both in terms of size and structure, that everyone began to shiver with excitement. The moment had come, the moment that would reveal the reason they had all ventured to this place.

They continued, eyeing the different gears, press rolls, grooves. Finally, at the end of the process, they saw sheets of paper being wound onto reels. The sheets were ten meters wide and long, extremely long. One reel could span the distance between two cities. Their eyes were nearly popping out of their heads they were open so wide; everyone felt a new sensation come over them, almost like being inebriated, overcome by a wave of excitement and happiness such as they had never experienced in their lives. The paper appeared before them, marking the end of a timeless, moving and enlightening journey. And that paper, with its endless possibilities, was the tool they would all use to fulfil their own destinies.

Everyone in the group began thinking about paper, using their imaginations, laughing and shouting.

“Paper really is the best way to overcome barriers and boundaries,” they all thought. “It’s where the seeds of purest love sprout and grow. It is the best way to respect and care for the environment. It’s the tool which has made it possible to share knowledge. It is a friend, allowing people to travel and explore or simply imagine doing so. It is the most essential household necessity, after food and water.”

Time went by as all six of them got straight to work, each person taking a reel, and in that magical place outside of time itself, they made their wildest dreams come true.



Enzo the Brazilian, the young man without a voice, began cutting the paper into thin strips and studying a revolutionary way to communicate with the world and voice his thoughts. William, Dr. Ecosystem, carefully studied the production process, which is as ancient as its development possibilities are advanced. He wrote a report on its secrets and a series of surveys on the health of flora and vegetation near paper mills. For Colette, the paper took on a more literary form: because of her dream, books were appearing everywhere, filling libraries and covering the desks of billions of people all around the world. Jian used his drawing skills to create geographical maps of every country in the world, for every era and in every language. Sailors were able to set their courses at sea, children hung maps in their bedrooms and dreamed of exploring far-away lands, astronomers charted the stars.

Mrs. Lucia made napkins, baking paper, tissues, boxes, playing cards, glasses, wall paper and cookbooks filled with recipes for the finest and most beautiful cuisine in the world. Her imagination helped make homes more inviting and practical; kitchens were equipped with all the necessities, and every room in the house became important and filled with brilliant details. Martin, the young man in love who came from the future, remembered an old custom and used his paper to write a love letter. He closed it inside the bottle he had with him, entrusted it to the waves and nurtured his dream of a life filled with love.

It was sunset once again and time for the group to say their goodbyes.

Enzo mouthed “goodbye” and smiled, giving everyone a strip of paper covered in words; it was his

new way of saying “until we meet again.” Colette left with the draft of William’s report under her arm; she wanted to make it into a book for her library, where paper is a means of exchange and connection. Sweet Lucia used a tissue to dry Jian’s eyes who, at the age of 93, was so moved after having finally realised his dreams, which also happened to be made of wood pulp, water and cellulose.

A small black spot appeared in the distance. A new group of people was about to meet, because this is a story that never ends. Just like the uses of paper.

A fifty-year-old Australian was the first to arrive. His name was Hans, and he was a tall school teacher from the 2000s.

After him came...



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