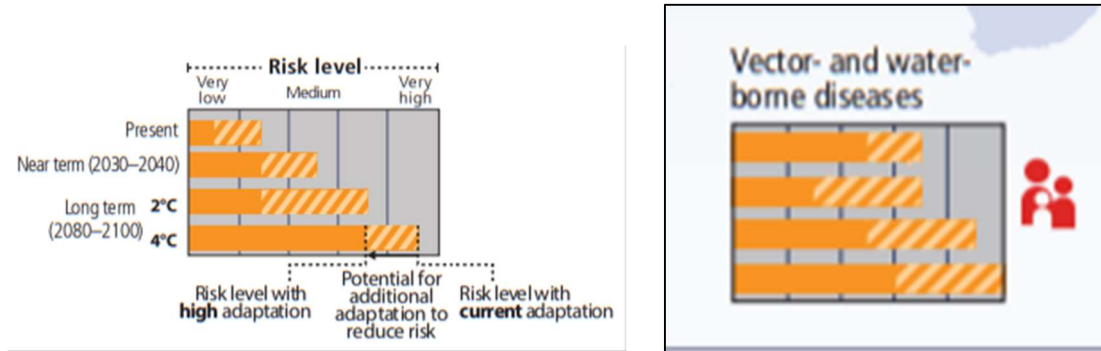


Nothing Gold Can Stay

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I dedicate this story to all who have been impacted by the global wealth disparity and mosquito borne diseases.



The AR5 Synthesis report predicts a high risk for an increase in mosquito-borne diseases in the long term (2080-2100).

Forward

It all started when they got rid of the cashiers, then came the mailman, the baristas at Starbucks, the construction workers, the EMTs- replaced with mechanical arms that rotate seamlessly, never making a mistake or stopping to take a break. The world sprinted ahead at an unimaginable pace with the development of organs on a chip to alleviate the worldwide organ crisis and the discovery of a new crop that requires less water and soil nutrients. The world was focused on innovation, but those who could not keep up were left behind until the implications of global warming suddenly shook the world.

Who would have thought that mosquitoes would be found in swarms in the wintertime in New York? It all happened so suddenly. So, the scientists and engineers quickly discovered a gas that could be added to the atmosphere to counteract additional greenhouse gases, but the existing greenhouse gases remained in the atmosphere. The Earth remained warm and allowed the mosquitoes to expand their range. Those who lost their jobs were employed in jobs to deal with the mosquitoes by adding mosquito nets to shop windows, eliminating standing water, and making protective clothing. Despite the impacts of global warming, the scientists, engineers, doctors, and lawyers all moved toward the small area of land that was not affected by the mosquitoes, but a majority of the world's population was stuck in the greater part of the world, overrun by mosquitoes. The **Nozone**, an area safe from mosquitoes, and a region called **The Other**, the rest of the world, was born.

Jacqueline-Nozone resident-age 6- may require extermination

“Hello class, open your tablet to today’s geography lesson,” The teacher instructed as Jacqueline sat in her front row seat of the small classroom. She slowly turned to page 7, marveling at each page and the illustrations of the Nozone orbiting around the sun.

“Jacqueline, Jacqueline,” The teacher repeated trying to catch her attention. Jacqueline suddenly looked up.

“What is your answer to number 2 in yesterday’s assignment?”

“The purpose of the wall is to keep out the fun.” She answered in a nonchalant tone, but the whole class gasped with mouths open wide and Mrs. Cherry’s face turned as red as a cherry.

“The class is dismissed for recess, except Jacqueline.” Laughter and chuckles filled the room as the children ran out to recess ready to play in the fresh morning snow. Jaqueline sat in her seat, knowing exactly what would happen next. She looked down fiddling with her thumbs.

“I’m sorry Jaqueline, but if you continue to disrupt my class, I’ll have to speak with the principal. I have already sent a mail to your parents twice this week,” Mrs. Cherry said as she logged Jacqueline’s noncompliance in the system.

Jaqueline remained silent, refusing to make eye contact with Mrs. Cherry.

So, when Jaqueline returned home from school that afternoon, her mother was furious. “I just got the third e-mail this week from Mrs. Cherry. You will apologize tomorrow morning and there will be no virtual games today. You will simply do your homework and then read from your tablet.”

As Jaqueline unpacked her tablet from her binder, her mother placed her daily pill in her hand.

“Take it right away,” her mother reminded her, but as her mother turned toward the kitchen, Jaqueline slipped the large pill into her pocket. She looked up at the camera in her family room but was reassured that it was facing a different direction.

When her mother returned, Jacqueline had already got started on her homework and her mother began to retrieve the package from the front door. This time, when her mother returned, Jacqueline was drawing in her tablet for her art project for class. Jaqueline was adding the finishing touches on the wall and some colorful unicorns and monster trucks on the other side.

As her mother peered over her shoulder to see what she was doing, she was horrified.

“What is this?” She yelled, her voice seething with anger. Jacqueline was silent again.

In her frustration, her mother snatched her tablet and deleted the drawing before handing it back.

“The wall keeps us safe. Discussing or depicting the wall or what is behind it is not permitted. You know better than this and if you keep at this, we will all get in trouble. Go to your room now and finish the rest of your homework. I will not tolerate such behavior.”

Jacqueline got up from her seat, tears filling her eyes and threatening to escape while she gathered her tablet and backpack and lugged her belongings to her bedroom. She set her backpack down on the floor and took the pill out of her pocket and carefully added it to the growing pill sculpture in her closet, each pill carefully balanced on another.

That was when she heard it.

BANG! *What was that?*

BANG!BANG!BANG *Again?*

It was coming from her closet. Jacqueline began moving the heavy boxes filled with her drawings and art projects out of the closet to find the source on the loud bangs. Much to her surprise, she found a small white door behind one of the boxes. *Had this always been there?*

BANG- there is was again and the doorknob was shaking.

A1E- resident of The Other- age unknown

I awoke to the sound of thunder breaking in the distance and the loud downpour of torrential rains. A welcome sound, indicating a morning free of the constant buzz of mosquitoes, but also the looming upwelling of the creatures once the rains settle down. My parents had already left for work at the distribution center.

I checked my watch noting that it was almost time for school and placed our water filter outside the house to collect water for making coffee as I got ready for school.

As I was brushing my hair, I heard a guard walk into our living room. It was Thursday-mandatory inspection day. The guard walked all around the house with heavy footsteps and I could hear him flipping through our books, something he had never done, before leaving back through the front door.

The rain was still pouring when I ran outside in my black protective clothing to fetch the filtered water. First, I prepared a cup for my grandfather who had just awoken, but soon realized that we only had enough coffee beans for a single cup. No coffee today I guess.

“Good morning papa” I said in an excited tone as I handed him his coffee and he reciprocated with an even more energetic “Good morning A1E!”

I glanced at my watch again, I’ll be late if I don’t hurry. “Bye papa, got to get to school!”

Papa waved as I ran to the front of the house, folders and notebooks haphazardly stuffed into my bag, my thick protective clothing sheathing my body making it difficult to bend down to tie my shoes. I saw the bookshelf that the guard had inspected to my right and suddenly I felt the sharp corner of a book on my head. I looked down and one of the books had fallen off the shelf. I finished tying my shoes and noticed that the book's cover was worn away and faded. Curious about this book that I had never seen in our house, I stuffed it into my backpack and ran to school as quick as I could.

I walked into class a minute late and the teacher had already begun talking about the book we were reading on mosquito control systems. I immediately took my seat at the front of the classroom and took out my notebook, but then remembered that I was already out of paper and would not get my next ration for a few weeks. My friend B1R noticed and slid a sheet of paper towards my desk. "Thanks" I mouthed.

Before I knew it class was over and I told B1R to meet me in the library. Waiting for her to arrive, I found a quiet and empty section of the library and took the old book out of my backpack. The cover was destroyed, and the pages were dogeared from years of usage. Opening the book to the title page, I noticed the title- *Tom Sawyer*. As I flipped through the pages, I realized that all the pages were still legible. Then, I got to a page with an illustration, but was shocked to see a young boy with his face and ankles exposed, eating an apple outside. I quickly closed the book, worried that someone had seen the illustration. I tucked the book back into my backpack and I could see B1R walking into the library. As she placed her backpack in the seat across from me she asked, "What happened to you, you look as if you were just bitten by a giant mosquito!"

"I am fine, just tired." I replied hoping that she would switch the topic of the conversation.

"Want to play mosquito catcher?" She asked and pulled out the board game before hearing my answer.

"Sure," I said with what I hoped was a friendly smile. I tried to concentrate on the game, but my mind kept wandering to the book.

When I got home from school that day, I could feel the secrets and mysteries of the book that I had discovered weighing down my backpack. I set my backpack in my room and placed the book under my dresser, worried that someone may find it.

My grandfather was reading in his room and asked if I could take some of his books down to the cupboard in the attic for him. I immediately grabbed the huge box of books and fumbled down the stairs. I was relieved once I got to the cupboard but noticed that it was already full. There were stacks of books on top of books, all of which were worn out and tattered like the Tom Sawyer book. There was a page that appeared to have been torn out of a book- a poem by someone named Robert Frost. I grabbed the sheet and it was a marked. A stanza was highlighted. I whispered the stanza to myself, making sure that no one could hear,

“Snow falling and night falling fast, oh, fast

In a field I looked into going past,

And the ground almost covered smooth in snow,

But a few weeds and stubble showing last.”

Confused by the word snow, a word that I had never heard, said, or read before, I continued to pull more books out of the cupboard.

When I reached the bottom of the stack, I noticed a small knob at the bottom of the cupboard. I pushed the rest of the books out of the way to reveal a medium sized door. I tried to open the door, but it is locked.

“AIE,” Papa called and I stuffed all the books back into the cupboard and shut it making sure to leave everything back in its place before running up the stairs to his room.

“Do we have any more beans?” Realizing that it was getting darker outside and mother and father would be back from work soon, I replied, “I’ll make some dinner.”

I looked though our scanty pantry and found a half empty can of beans from last night and two slices of bread. I heated up the beans on the stove and cut each slice of bread in half, saving some for my parents and took some to papa’s room for both of us.

After dinner, I finished the rest of my homework, but it took longer than usual because my mind kept wandering. Wandering to the door in the cupboard, the poem, and the Tom Sawyer book.

By the time all my homework was finally complete, my parents burst through the front door, it had stopped raining and a warm breeze of night air traveled through the house. My parents looked exhausted from a long day of work. Sweat covered their nose and forehead, but my father looked especially tired.

“Are you ok?” I asked, concerned by his fatigue.

“I’m fine,” he insisted as he removed his thick shoes and then went to lie down on the sofa.

My mother looked concerned as and I went into the kitchen to heat up their dinner. After serving their dinner, my mother insisted, “he’ll be fine, he’s just tired. Get to bed, you have to be up early for school in the morning.”

So, I said goodnight to them and then to papa. I tried to fall asleep, by my curiosity kept me awake repeating the word over and over again- *snow*. Once I finally fell asleep, my mother shook me awake, interrupting my dreams of the mysterious book and door.

“Your father,” she said concern filling her voice and eyes, “he just passed.”

Tears streamed down her face and I had no words.

She grabbed my hand and led me to the front of the house where two guards in ultra-thick protective gear and medical masks and gloves carry a long white bag out of the house. Papa stares at his hands as he sat in his rocking chair.

Is that really dad? How could he have gotten sick? We always follow the safety protocol to prevent mosquito bites.

“One of the safety nets in the section of the distribution center where he works failed. Several mosquitos got in and seven workers were bit. He never told me that he was bit. No one told me about the failure,” she explains as she squeezes my hand.

I am frozen there, standing next to my mother. Confused by how quick it all happened and believe that I am still dreaming even when I know I am not. How I wished that that could have been a dream.

We don’t even see my father’s body before it is taken away and burned in the street in front of our house. I can’t watch. I run to my room, but on my way I trip over something that protrudes from under the hallway carpet by papa’s room.

That was when I saw it- a key. At first, it was just a key. Then I remembered- the door. Could this be the key to the door? I grab it and put it into my pocket before running down to the basement. With tears running down my face and anger pulsing through my veins at the disease that controls our society, Morgeria spread by mosquitoes, I throw all the books out of the cupboard and plunge the key into the lock. It creaks open. Shocked, I wipe the tears off my face and walk through the door, taking the Robert Frost poem with me.

I keep walking and it appears to be a short underground tunnel. But where does it go? The tunnel is lit by small lights in the ceiling of the tunnel. I keep walking until my I can walk no more and sleep overcomes me.

I wake up back in the tunnel, confused by the grey walls that envelope me. Then I remember where I am. I shake the sleep from my limbs and continue walking.

I continue to walk through the tunnel until a blue door comes into view ahead. When I reach the door, I try to open it but it is locked. I grab the key out of my pocket, hopeful that it will unlock the door.

Jacqueline-resident of Nozone-age 6- may require extermination

The door suddenly opens. Jacqueline jumps back in fear, but when she sees a young girl come out of the door with a confused look on her face, she simply says, “Who are you?”

The girl looks shocked, but she says, “I am A1E. Where am I?”

Jacqueline looks at the girl’s strange all black clothing and wonders why it covers her entire body and why her hair and face is so dirty, she replies, “My name is Jaqueline. This is my house in Nozone. Why are you so dirty?”

A1E ignores her question and says, “The Nozone. I’ve never heard of it. Where is your protective clothing? You are going to be bit by mosquitos. It’s dangerous.”

Suddenly, Jaqueline hears her mother walking in the hallway toward her room.

“Hurry,” Jaqueline whispers, “get under my bed.”

A1E quickly scrambles under her bed as Jaqueline’s mom opens the door and gasps.

“Why are you still in your PJs, it is almost time for school!” she says to Jaqueline as she presses a few buttons on her tablet and the closet dispenses Jaqueline’s school uniform and a pair of fresh socks.

“I’ll be back in 5 minutes and you better be ready by then with brushed teeth.”

As Jaqueline’s mom leaves the room, Jaqueline tries to pull the mysterious A1E out from under her bed. When Jaqueline is able to get out from under the bed she looks very lost.

“What are mosquitos?” Jaqueline asks.

“You don’t know?” A1E says as if all young children should know. After all she has learned about mosquitos since she was 3 years old at school. “They are deadly creatures that bite and cause disease.”

Jacqueline is in awe. “Are you from the other side of the wall?”

A1E puts together the pieces of the puzzle and realizes where the tunnel has taken her. “Is this the other side of the wall?”

“Wow!” They exclaim in unison, but just as they are starting to figure everything out, Jaqueline hears her mother walking down the hall again.

“Time for school,” her mother says, “Did you brush your teeth?”

Jaqueline nods and A1E silently chuckles knowing that she has not brushed her teeth. As Jaqueline leaves her room to get to school, she waves back at A1E. Her mother keeps walking, but asks, “Are you saying goodbye to your stuffed animals?”

“Yes,” Jaqueline says and keeps walking with her mother, but then turns around and says, “OOOh, I forgot something.” She runs back to her room and whispers to A1E that she will be back soon before joining her mother at the front of the house to get on the school bus.

A1E- resident of The Other- age unknown

A1E is still disoriented. *So this is what is on the other side of the wall!* She looks around and sees so many toys and gagets scattered about and her eyes locate a big book in Jaqueline’s room. She turns it over and it is titled, A Collection of Robert Frost poems. She begins to flip through the book and discovers another poem,

Nature’s first green is gold,

Her hardest hue to hold.

Her early leaf’s a flower;

But only so an hour.

Then leaf subsides to leaf.

So Eden sank to grief,

So dawn goes down to day.

Nothing gold can stay.

The poem reminds her of her father, his life so quickly stolen from him. She recalls all who have lost their lives to Morgeria and the never-ending cycle of death and grief of her community. It brings tears to her eyes again.

She brings herself to look at the window and she sees white powder floating elegantly from the sky. The ground coated in a white blanket. She places her hand against the window, and it is cold to the touch. She feels herself shiver and shake. It is Colder than she has ever felt. She just sits there looking out at all the white and replays the events of the past few days in her head.

Jacqueline-resident of Nozone-age 6- may require extermination

When Jaqueline arrives at school, she is too excited, and although she knows that she shouldn't, she can't help but tell Suzie about her new friend. From the other side of the wall. Jaqueline and Suzie are full of excitement at the discovery and try to hold in their squeals.

The children file into class and take their seats at their desk. The teacher instructs them to take a seat and take out their tablet. They will have to answer a writing prompt today about the most exciting thing that happened over the weekend.

Jaqueline and Suzie are excited to write all about their newest discovery, completely forgetting that they are supposed to keep her a secret. They draw pictures of the girl and her black clothes and disheveled appearance.

Mrs. Cherry goes around to collect their assignments and when she gets to Jaqueline and Suzie's table and collects their writing, she takes a brief look at the title of their story and their drawings and drops the entire stack of assignments.

She furiously points them to go into the hallway and immediately calls the principal.

Within seconds, the principal walks down the hallway and behind him follow a group of officials wearing black framed glasses and suits. The two girls are crying, tears flowing down their face.

"We are sorry," they cry out, but the teacher maintains her stern look. The two girls are placed in handcuffs by the officials and all the students in the classrooms fill the hallways eager to find out what is going on. The girls are squealing but everyone is silent and the officials inject something into their arms and their mouths are taped shut.

The officials take the girls away without explanation and the teachers escort all the students back to their classrooms.

A1E- resident of The Other- age unknown

The door to Jaqueline's room suddenly breaks open. A1E cowers by the door, surprised by the loud sound. Two tall men wearing black glasses and suits storm in and grab her, placing handcuffs on her wrists despite her futile attempts to escape their grasp. They carry her out of the house, sealing her mouth with some sort of tape so that she doesn't make a sound.

As they go through the living room of the house, Jaqueline's mom is sitting on the couch whispering something indecipherable to herself as she watches them take A1E out of the house and through the automatic doors. Something is injected into A1E's arm and she is taken away with no trace left behind.

When A1E opens her eyes, she is tied down to a chair. Across from her are two small girls who are also tied down- one she recognizes, the girl she just met- Jaqueline. Surrounding the three girls are a crowd of people, rows and rows of people. All watching with eager eyes and adorned in fancy jewelry and no protective clothing. A1E makes eye contact with Jaqueline and the frightened girl next to her, but they cannot speak with their mouths sealed in plastic. A gun is placed before her and she looks from the gun to the smiles on the people in the crowd. As she sees the bullets heading straight towards her, she recalls the last line of the Robert Frost poem - *Nothing gold can stay.*

Jacqueline-resident of Nozone-age 6- may require extermination

She cannot stay still. Every effort she makes to escape from the constraints only elicits laughter from the audience. Her new friend is gone, she knows that she is next. She glances into the audience and sees her mother stare back at her with a smile on her face. Those in the audience hold colorful signs that say- "Non-compliance must be exterminated." Jaqueline and Suzie fix their gazes on each other, not daring to blink or look away. Jaqueline thought about what life must be like on the other side of the wall. And then it was done.