

I am Luff.

I stayed in my Safety Zone.
I did my job.
Every day.

I kept my head in my Aegis Box as required.
I bought as many Thingies as I could.
I did what I could to keep Order strong.

I didn't know why.
It seemed useless.
I wanted something more.
I needed to understand.

Why did I need to keep my Aegis Box safe and secure?
Why did I need to stay in my Safety Zone?
I wanted to know.
I needed to wake up.
I decided to leap past the Curtain Wall
To find out what was out there.

As soon as I jumped
I wanted to go back.
I was scared.
I found myself surrounded and submerged
by eerie sounds and darkness.
It seemed familiar in some strange way
As though I knew them from some other life.

I had to keep going even though
everything around me frightened me.
I became determined
and moved slowly on.
As I passed through
the border of the wild
I felt the fear begin to fall away.
I shed my initial doubts and
clutched my Aegis Box tightly.

I eventually came to a place
where I felt overwhelmed.
The wind was blowing directly at me
coming in from across a large expanse of water.
I could not see the other side.
I didn't know what to do or where to go next.

I didn't know if I could make it further.
I sat down and began nestled into the sand.
Was my journey over already?
Was this all that was outside my zone?

A beam of sunlight began to stream through the clouds
glistening on the water ahead.
I got up and walked along the shore.
I walked for a long time.
I found an old man sitting by a couple of old boats.
After talking with him,
I learned he knew how to sail against the wind.
He had tried crossing the water before,
but had never had the courage
to sail beyond sight of the shoreline.
He taught me how to sail.

The sails made a fluttering sound
when pointed into the breath.
I was moving against the wind.
I found new strength
and gathered my determination
to see the journey through.

I thought about the stranger.
I knew now that the journey
wasn't just about me.
Others had tried to find answers here.
And others would follow.

I leaped into the boat
and sailed into the expanse.
I looked back
and could see the shoreline as it disappeared.
Fear tried to creep into my Aegis Box.
I had to keep swatting it away.
Anxiety crawled into my boat and began to pry at my box.
I had to keep kicking at it while I was sailing.

I looked back.
Another storm came and capsized my boat.
I swam for a while toward the sound
of a bouy that guided me in the distance.
I don't know how I survived.
I managed to cross the expanse
and finally crawled back up onto the shore.

I thought about my past.
Why had I built the Aegis Box to begin with?
I remembered building it to keep Order.
It was Order that required it.
I wanted to find out why.

I found a school nearby and walked in.
Children were still being taught
to build their Aegis Boxes
just like they did when I was in school.
Things were not exactly
the way I remembered it though.
Now it all seemed too easy and silly.
Then it had been so important.

The teacher talked about Order
and showed the students how to build their boxes.
The teacher told stories and sang songs.
I could see now that Order wanted us to believe
that an Aegis Box
was the best way to be safe and secure.
It would protect us.

I knew that it wasn't the whole truth.
Maybe not outright lies,
but not the truth either.

I no longer felt safe and secure,
I tucked my Aegis Box under my arm
and walked away.

I had left my Safety Zone,
and traversed the wild unknown.
I faced an expanse of fear and anxiety,
and then found out that what I thought I knew
wasn't exactly true.

That only led me to more questions.
I thought I might find more answers where there was more people.
I found a vehicle and started off down the highway.
I didn't know of any other way to get to the city.

On the highway people were crowding into each other.
They yelled at each other to get out of the way.
Worry, anger and frustration

around them was working it's way inside their boxes.
I don't think they even noticed.
The highway was a mass of confusion.
It was stressful.
The signs were clear
about how fast you should go.
My radio kept telling me
how I should keep buying Thingies.
So did the Big Boards along the road.
They showed directions
where to find an answer
for every problem.
It was too hard to get off the highway.
I stayed on it too long.
I missed my goal several times.
I got lost and didn't know which way to go.

I saw a fellow in trouble
on the side of the road
and stopped to help.
I was able to help him get going again.
He jumped into his vehicle and drove away
without saying anything.
I shrugged and returned to the highway
to search for my destination.

The pressure to keep moving with the traffic was high.
I was working hard to find my way.
I kept getting lost in the mayhem.
I felt like I was only a passenger
who was being pushed along.
Many times I wanted to just go along
and quit fighting.
Eventually I was able to find an exit to the city
by following one of the Big Boards to the Smilers Paradise.
I was very tired and needed a place to rest.
It looked nice so I decided to stay there
and rest for a while.

I left my Aegis Box with attendant who had a very big smile.
I signed the register and they led me to a wonderful room with lots of Thingies available.
I lost track of time.
It was nice here.

A couple of the Smilers came back
They said there were more travelers that needed to rest

They asked if I would mind sharing a room.
They took me to a larger room where there were many travelers.
It wasn't as well lit,
but it had all the amenities.
We moved quite a few times to even larger rooms each time.
I woke up one day and noticed that it was quite dark in this room.
In fact, I couldn't see anything.
In fact, I didn't know how long I had been here.

I heard coughing nearby,
but couldn't see in the dark.
I got up and tried to find the door.
I tripped many times.
It was very crowded here.

I saw a faint light ahead and moved toward it.
It was a door.
A Smiler greeted me.
He led me back toward the darkness.
The Smiler asked me why I wanted to go.
The Smiler told me that they would get me anything I wanted
if I would just stay.
The Smiler kept questioning me.
I got to the door and went through.
There were more Smilers there.
They kept asking what they could do for me.
They kept trying to guide me back to the darkness.
Their voices were becoming annoyed,
but they kept smiling.

I ran down the hallway.
They were chasing me now.
Still smiling.
Still asking me what they could do and
Apologizing for anything they had done wrong.
I couldn't find another door to exit.
I saw daylight coming from a grating
low on the wall.
I took it off and crawled in.
The light seemed very distant,
but I kept crawling.
The Smilers were still behind me,
but growing fainter.
I reached the light and fell into the street.
Exhausted.

My journey had lead me to this.
Lying on the street
Hungry. Still tired.

Then I noticed I had lost my head.
My Aegis Box was nowhere to be found.
I had left it at the front counter,
with a Smiler when I had first arrived.
I shook myself and drummed up courage.
I had to get my Aegis Box.

When I walked into the Paradise,
The Smilers welcomed me back.
I told them that I only wanted my Aegis Box.
They laughed, showed me the small type on the contract.
It had been sold.
They said that the Tellers might have it.
I would have to check with the Bank of Order.
I went to see the Tellers.

The Tellers at the bank
thanked me for my contribution.
When I told them I wanted my head
they all laughed and said they couldn't give it to me.
They told me that my Aegis Box and code
was being used by my Dupey at the Festival Market.

It was impossible to get it back.
I had to leave it with them
so they could continue to use it
to benefit both of us.
They were counting on me.

I left to find the market and get my head back.
I searched there for a long time.
I was nearly ready to give up when I saw it.
The Dupey.
It looked and acted just like me.
It was buying a cart full of Thingies
and using my Aegis Box and Code to do it.
I ran up to it and grabbed my box.
It grabbed right back.
We fought over it.
Back and forth.
Round and round.
Thingies went flying everywhere.

I wasn't going to stand for this any longer.
I pulled with all my strength.
The Aegis Box came free and flew high into the air.
The Dupey and I flew backwards onto the ground.
The Aegis Box seemed to be suspended
in mid-air for an eternity.
I felt relieved.
I had found it.

Suddenly, it came down with a crash.
The Box came apart with one side flapping open.
I reached in and grabbed my head
and shoved it back on my shoulders
as quickly as I could with satisfaction.
I had done it.
I had retrieved my head
and no one was going to take it
away from me again.

I thought about what I had done.
I had put my head back on.
My Aegis Box was still sitting open at my feet.
I looked at the Dupey
It melted into the ground and disappeared.
I didn't know what to do with the box.
I didn't need it anymore.

I looked around to see if anyone
was paying attention.
They were too busy doing what they always do
to even notice the commotion.
I left the box there
for someone to wonder about.
Maybe it would cause them to ask a question
or two.

The next part of my journey
Would be difficult.
I had to go back.

I went to the Smilers Paradise
and helped as many as I could find their way out.
Most didn't listen.
But a few stood up and made their way out.

I found my way back through the highway.
This time I could see the misleading signs.
I pointed them out to any who would listen.
Some of them made it through and were grateful.
Most kept their heads down in their boxes
and barreled on into the fray.

At the school
I was stopped and was not allowed to enter.
One teacher stopped me as I was leaving
and asked if I would come back.
I made it a point to try again.

On the opposite shore
I talked to the old man.
I told him that I had made it.
He patted my head and looked very proud.

The unfamiliar wild was not scary any longer
It looked normal and inviting.
The circle of Curtain Walls around
the Safety Zones looked ominous and daunting.

I was determined to make it back
and share what I had learned.

I climbed through the shrouds
surrounding the living areas
and walked through the old work place
I listened to the sounds
It seemed like nothing but grating noise
and the clanging of the Order's machinery.
I wondered how I had ever lived and worked like that.

There were many voices within that noise.
They were telling everyone how to live in the system
and how great it was.
They spouted how they controlled everything.
No one seemed to want to do anything about it.
No one seemed to care anymore.
I could see they were tired.

I started talking with as many people as I could find.
Many of them took one look at my head
and saw I had no box.
They walked away as quickly as they could.

Others listened reluctantly,
still clutching their boxes close.
They looked scared.
I understood.

I found others with their heads on.
They had made the journey too.
They had been helping others and.
We began to work together.

We told listeners about our individual journeys.
We explained what we had experienced and seen.
Order had one thing right.
People do respond to story and song.
That is why I tell my story.

I am Luff.