

Faster than Pain

Eleanor Grady, Napier Girls High School

"Lizzie!" Sarah called, already by the door and slipping on her shoes. The brand name ran in gold letters across the white material, which never seemed to fade in colour: *Distant Horizons*.

"You always rush me," Lizzie said, scowling as she came into view around the corner.

Sarah shrugged. "It's the only way to get you to get ready. Unless you want me to wait another two hours just for us to leave?"

"Let me put on my shoes at least," Lizzie groaned, brushing her short black hair out of her eyes.

"This is the third time we've been late for our date," Sarah said, grinning at the way the other girl blushed.

"It's not... We're going to the supermarket for food," she said, finally finishing tying her shoelaces. "How is that a date?"

"When you're a couple, everywhere you go is a date," Sarah said, beaming. Her long auburn hair was tied back in a high pony, its frizzy waves already trying to escape.

"You're crazy," Lizzie said, shaking her head.

They stepped out the door, walking down the path to the road.

"Traffic's busy today. You ready?" Sarah asked.

"You think *this* is bad? Were you, or were you not, listening in today's history lecture about when people had to drive cars?"

"That doesn't count," she said. "That was *years* ago."

"It was only just before we were born," Lizzie protested. "Not that long ago."

They both stepped up to the edge of the road, holding out an arm to indicate that they were stepping into the traffic.

"And... go!" Sarah said, pressing the activating switch on her wristwatch as she spotted a break in the oncoming people.

Their shoes lit up, the mechanics in them activating. In a split second, they were both running a hundred miles an hour, soaring along the road at the speed cars used to. It was funny to think of a world of cars. Of course, you still saw them today—in museums and the occasional scrap yard where they had yet to be recycled, but it wasn't often.

It only took them a few minutes to enter the town and, when they did, they slowed down to hop off on the sidewalk.

"You got the list?" Lizzie asked.

Sarah held up her smartwatch to indicate that it was there. "I double checked all the vitamins we need," she said. "You can't be too careful with all this stuff that's going around online."

"You're a worrier," Lizzie groaned, linking their arms together.

"It's not just me," Sarah said in annoyance, breaking apart and tapping her smartwatch again to type something into the search bar. "It's everywhere online, in proper reports and everything."

"Reports that who exactly wrote up? Strangers?" Lizzie frowned. She caught Sarah's arm before they could walk past the shop, pulling her in the automatic doors as Sarah continued to scroll for the thing she was trying to find. "Didn't you say this was a date?" Lizzie asked after a while of silence. "It's not a very good one if you're glued to that stupid watch."

"Here!" Sarah exclaimed, ignoring her. "I've found it." She shuffled closer, enlarging the text so they could both read it.

Thousands of People Admitted to Hospital - Is Distant Horizons the Cause?

In the span of the last two weeks, over ten thousand people around the world have been injured, the only apparent connection between the bizarre cases being Distant Horizons' latest brand of shoes.

"The speed at which they allow the body to run has never been safe," says Doctor Smith, head of the World Health Organisation. "Now that there is technology allowing people to reach speeds of two hundred kilometres per hour, I fear for the long-term health of our people."

According to thorough research, Distant Horizons' range of new shoes is damaging to the bone, joints and muscles of the leg—contrary to what they advertise. Although they have almost entirely eliminated Global Warming by taking cars and public transportation out of the picture, Distant Horizons might just be slowly killing off the human race as they weaken our bodies day by day.

"That's crazy. That is absolutely insane." Lizzie folded her arms.

"It's not!"

"Slowly killing us off? How? Does it make us more likely to get broken bones or something?"

"That's what people are saying," Sarah said, wide eyed. "Maybe we should stop using *Distant Horizons'* shoes?"

"And what?" Lizzie flung her hair over her shoulder. "You expect us to walk everywhere? Cars don't exist anymore! Neither do any other forms of public transport. If we don't use *Distant Horizons*, we have nothing."

Sarah's face fell as the truth sank in. "It's how they've got us," she said slowly, "by making themselves the only choice."