

Machine Stops Summary

The Machine Stops takes place in an advanced society where humans have lost the ability to survive on the Earth's surface. Therefore, individuals are isolated and packed into small beehive-like structures underground. Furthermore, travel is allowed but often avoided and unnecessary. The thought of direct contact is believed to be impolite and vile. Moreover, everyone is provided with the right equipment to survive much like a life-support system, or they will die. The Machine is there to supply the basic human needs and everything takes place with the click of a button. Travel to the surface of the Earth is permitted only with the approval by the government group. Most humans are kept underground to generate "ideas" for the Machine and they will share these "ideas" through the speaking apparatus which is similar to video chatting.

In the story, a woman named Vashti lives on the opposite side of the world from her son, Kuno. Kuno have always questioned the ways of his society and the functions of the Machine. Furthermore, he has always been curious about the life on the world above underground. On the opposite, Vashti is considered to be a very civilized person by the rest of the world because she is always generating "ideas" and she greatly worships the Machine, much like everyone else in the society. Vashti believes that visiting the surface of the Earth and having direct contact is brainless and feeble-minded. Vashti is fully dependent on the Machine and completely follows the rules of the society without question.

One day, Kuno requests Vashti to visit him in person while the two spoke through the speaking apparatus. Vashti does find any reasonable explanations to visit his son because she dislikes to talk to people in person, to be almost touched by sunlight, to walk, and to see the view of nature because this does not inspire her to have any ideas, but she decides to visit Kuno anyways. Once Vashti arrives, Kuno explained to her that he had visited the surface of the Earth without the government's approval and is threatened by Homelessness which means death. Furthermore, Kuno described his experiences while he traveled to the surface such as being able to finally move independently without any life-support and how the undiscovered darkness/ the passed away spirits accompanied him to the surface before the Machine had captured him. While experiencing the outer air, Kuno realized the flaws of the Machine, how the Machine is controlling the humans, and it was the humans that created the Machine instead of the Machine that created humans. Vashti is disgusted to hear Kuno's thoughts. Therefore, she leaves and return to her own room.

Kuno's journey have explained important scenarios throughout the story. The humans underground have re-built a religion they worship and is fully dependent on the Machine. The origin of the Machine is lost, everyone forgot that it was humans who first created the Machine, and human-to-human experience are thought to be forbidden. The Machine's needs always comes first before their own. The generated "ideas" are always unoriginal and used over and over again. Anyone who questions the Machine and does not worship it are threatened with Homelessness.

As time passes, Kuno was transferred to a cell near Vashti's. Vashti continued with her daily life routines which is to generate "ideas" and to worship the Machine. One day, Kuno interrupts Vashti by telling her "The Machine Stops" because Kuno believes that there is something wrong with the Machine. As Kuno's predictions predicted, the music starts to malfunction, the artificial fruits began to rot, the bed will not appear when it is summoned, and etc. Furthermore, the situation worsens day by day, but the people do not know how to fix it because the knowledge of the Machine is lost along with their freedom and imagination. Finally, the Machine completely stopped to function and the underground civilization started to crumble and break down. Kuno then tells Vashti to believe in hope since there are people on the surface that will bring back the civilization. Vashti finally realized her own fault: to think that the Machine was greater than humans. Ultimately, both mother and son had died along with the rest of the society.