

PLANET EARTH

PROLOGUE

THE DEVIL'S COMET

The comet streaked through the dark confines of space. The people on Earth were terrified, their fears fueled by social media conspirators who were calling this celestial body the Devil's Comet. The orbiting anomaly in space occasionally erupted, spewing ice crystals and carbon from its inner core like a fountain. A buildup of this material on two sides of the comet resembled horns, thus giving the space rock the name it would so well deserve.

The Indigenous leaders on Earth sent out an ominous warning to the white cultures who had stolen their land throughout history. Their ancestral elders had prophesized a doomsday event would occur when the moon covered the sun. In the coming days, a solar eclipse would turn the sky dark in the middle of the day.

As the Devil's Comet drew closer to Earth, a panic ensued, the people sure the end was near. The sky grew black in the early afternoon, as if all the twinkling stars visible in the night sky had suddenly been turned off. The people gazed upward, a bright light, which was the Devil's Comet, drew closer to the Earth.

A fiery rain fell over the land, as hot ash and toxic chemicals erupted from the comet's inner core; death to all life on Earth followed. The toxic air left in the aftermath of the comet made life on Earth unsustainable for thousands of years. The Indigenous cultures were left to die, like their brethren before them, in this vicious cycle called life.

THE AFTERMATH

Seen from space, the Earth appeared to be shrouded in darkness. After the passage of the comet, a feeling of horror swept across the land. The comet's orbit had changed, which brought the fire breathing dragon closer to Earth than anticipated. Plumes of hot ash spewed from the belly of the beast, toxic gas and fire raining down upon the planet.

Fate meant a barren, lifeless Earth was left orbiting aimlessly, with no life in its future. The pervasive darkness would last five hundred thousand years, before the first signs of a rebirth would take place. The Earth had been selected for rehabilitation by an alien species, their scientists having developed a master plan.

Water once again flowed on the planet's surface, making it easier to reconstruct life which could thrive in this environment. Once the seeds of life were planted, the Earth was left to evolve and replenish itself for thousands of years. When a healthy environment was established, animals, gathered from other worlds, would be delivered to repopulate the Earth with life. The goal of this interstellar project was to recreate Earth, like the one destroyed thousands of years ago by the comet.

The last life form added to the planet was to be human, redesigned through genetic engineering to be less violent and more cooperative, especially with regard to living in their environment. The planet was ready to accept the humans who would restart the cycle of life on Earth again.

CHAPTER ONE

The spacecraft hurtled through space, toward its destination; planet Earth waited for the new arrivals. The first humans to plant their feet on the ground in over a half a million years would be disembarking soon. A large, open meadow beckoned the craft to land. Inside the ship were two human bodies, housed in tubes which had kept the couple in a state of suspended animation during their long trip to Earth.

The spacecraft landed safely in the green meadow with the two humanoids inside. Beautiful wildflowers in a variety of colors surrounded the ship. Art and Maureen were released from their prison; a gas pumped into their sleeping quarters had awakened the couple, who felt as if they had been in hibernation. The doors of their spacecraft opened, a ramp leading from the ship beckoning them to the ground. A view of their new world was that of an unpolluted planet, unspoiled by the hand of man.

The aliens had taken Art and Maureen from the old Earth before its destruction. Their bodies had been immortalized, placed into suspended animation for half a billion years. Upon awaking from this dream, the young couple were left with their last memories of Earth, just before being abducted and put in storage until needed. As they looked around, life was everywhere. The trees were sporting beautiful flowers, their magnificent limbs reaching skyward. Everything appeared to be living harmoniously together, in what seemed a perfect world.

Art and Maureen walked down the ramp, exiting the craft. The doors closed suddenly behind them, and within a minute the craft lifted off from the meadow, flying out of sight. Fear gripped the couple, as they realized there was no escape from this new life they were about to embark on. Art and Maureen had no idea why they had been brought here. Standing in awe for a few minutes, taking in their surroundings, the couple decided to seek shelter, walking in the direction of the forest.

Orchards of trees, laden with fruit, dominated the forest paths. Unknown species of birds, from alien worlds, filled the treetops, their song unlike anything the couple had ever heard before. After a thirty-minute walk, Art and Maureen came upon a long dirt driveway leading up to a farmhouse. The couple walked toward the building, feeling alone in this new world which they had been thrust into.

A sense of shock and apprehension overtook the couple as they approached the old red brick farmhouse; it was Art's family home. The house he grew up in as a child stood before them. Maureen was also familiar with the house, as she had spent her last year of life on Earth here; before being abducted, she had lived with Art in this house. The couple entered the building together, their family dog, a small black mutt named Jethro, running to greet them.

Art picked up his favorite memory and hugged the dog tightly. The couple were questioning their sanity, not knowing if what they were experiencing was even real. They walked through the house,

as if in a dream, deciding to stay in these familiar surroundings. Art and Maureen's world was mysterious and unexplainable, a world they were beginning to realize they did not understand.

CHAPTER TWO

The old farm house was cold and damp inside, one thing that had not changed on this new Earth was the weather. The calendar on the wall was turned to the month of April with the number fifteen circled, making Art and Maureen wonder if this was the date of their arrival at the house. Art headed into the dark, cold basement to retrieve some firewood. A shiver ran down his spine as he remembered days long past, from his childhood, regarding this spooky part of the house.

Art had always thought something evil lived in the basement. As a child, one of his chores was bringing firewood up for the woodstove, a task he hated because of the trek downstairs. As he descended into the basement, Art felt he was being watched. As he neared the bottom of the stairway, his old childhood fears returned. Reaching the bottom step, he looked around. A large pile of wood graced the corner, where it had historically been stacked. Dad's potato bin was full of potatoes, ready to eat. Along the far wall, stood a table and shelves, piled high with jars of his mom's preserves.

Retrieving an armload of wood from the pile, Art returned upstairs to start a fire in the woodstove. He planned to return later to retrieve jars of his mom's preserves. Art soon had a roaring fire burning, Jethro laying down beside the warming stove to enjoy the heat radiating from the hot metal. Maureen told Art she had completed an inspection of the house, and it appeared to be just as it was when he was a child. The only thing missing were his parents. There was food in the refrigerator, clean dishes in the cupboards, and meat in the freezer. The beds upstairs were made, the linens clean, as if they were laundered yesterday.

The couple decided to explore the outside of the house. Dad's garage sat alone, the barn swallows he had shared this space with could be seen darting to and from their nests inside. Cages with eight baby rabbits were set up under the shade tree, the animals appearing healthy and waiting to be fed. As Art opened the gate to the barnyard, the sound of activity coming from the barn caught their attention. Expecting to see cattle walking out of the barn, the couple were mesmerized by a herd of unicorns, observing their graceful movements and exceptional beauty as they exited the structure. The mystical creatures joined the couple, mingling with them, allowing Art and Maureen to enjoy the beauty of these animals, which had previously only existed in fairy tales.

There were no bovines left in the universe. An unknown disease had eliminated this species of hoofed animals before scientists could develop medicine to save them from extinction. Unicorns were plentiful across the universe and were used to replace the extinct cattle. These animals were not considered livestock, but were specifically placed in the presence of humans for the joy the human spirit felt in their presence. These animals never needed to be fed and appeared when least expected, always pleasantly surprising their hosts.

The upper floor of the barn appeared undisturbed, pigeons cooed in the rafters and a barn cat with her babies appeared from behind the pile of hay bales looking for food. Art thought Maureen and himself could take over the farm, living there and managing it like their own. The couple headed back to the house, mingling among the unicorns which blocked their way.

Reaching the front door, the couple encountered a spider web, the size of the doorway, blocking their entrance. Looking up, Art and Maureen were shocked to see the beady eyes of a giant spider staring down on them, as if daring them to cross the threshold. They both stepped back, not knowing what to do. Their decision was not long in the making, as the spider and web magically disappeared. The scene had been an illusion; it was not real.

CHAPTER THREE

The couple slept upstairs, in the bedroom Art had used as a child. The bright rays of the morning sun streamed through the bedroom window, awakening the couple from a deep sleep. After a lengthy conversation the night before, Art and Maureen had decided to leave the farmhouse and move on to a different location.

Automobiles, as well as all other fossil fueled motors, had been removed and were not part of this new Earth. The couple decided to walk into town, to find bicycles and supplies. The road system seemed to be intact, but no humans were using it. The thought that maybe they were the only people living on the planet had entered the minds of the young couple.

Art and Maureen left the farm, following the deserted road into town, a three-mile walk. They were not accompanied by Jethro, who, like the spider, had obviously been an illusion and had disappeared. The same had happened to all animals they had seen around the home and barn.

The couple passed farms and houses along the way, all empty. After a long walk, they reached the outskirts of town. No signs of activity greeted the couple as they walked through the deserted streets; a ghost town was all they found. Art and Maureen walked to the hardware store in the middle of town, selecting two bicycles, backpacks, and camping supplies for a long trip. They planned on cycling to Ottawa, in hopes of finding people who had escaped the extinction which had apparently taken place on Earth. They made one last stop at the grocery store, to stock up on food for their journey.

Within two hours of arriving in town, they were ready to leave. Art and Maureen's travels took them through many empty towns. Unfortunately for the young couple, the new Earth was merely an illusion created by scientists, which would disappear shortly after their journey began. Earth's light was never observed in the universe again, leaving Art and Maureen to peddle their bikes forever, through a darkness which would never end.

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