

A Depraved Blessing
By D.C. Clemens

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Prologue

It would be prudent to refer to this galaxy as Nimbus, for that is what it is known as by its assortment of inhabitants. While Earth's human denizens share in its crowded history, their presence is not yet necessary and their account is forthcoming. The species that will occupy our consideration can be described as humanoid in their leathery physique and their level of technology has yet to make exploring their own system an economically viable option. Also, as most primeval species believe, they think themselves alone, having no tangible evidence to state otherwise.

Their world, Evon, accommodates two moons in its elliptical orbit. The largest and uglier of the pair is the brown-shaded Tess, while the other is a buttery little sphere named Newt. The tectonic forces proceeding in Evon are sluggish compared to Earth's, consequently presenting only a few mountain ranges across the face of their world. The equator appears the most earthlike with its green pastures and strips of woodlands, but is otherwise drier and more windswept the nearer one travels to the northern and southern poles. Much of the planet's surface is covered in arid landmasses, with the remaining third filled by relatively shallow seas.

Some among Evon are believed to have been blessed by their deities. These few are able to wield the elements and their states of matter, but whether this sacred gift can aid their species in their time of uncertainty is yet to be determined.

Chapter One Impact

My father was taken from the realm of the living quite early in my life. So young was I, in fact, that I had more memories of being in mourning than of his actual presence. One of the sharpest of these remembrances transpired soon after the memorial service. The presiding cleric strode over to me, and while I remembered his traditional blue robes more than his face, I do recall the words he imparted to me. As he leaned down to meet my glassy, yellow eyes with his own, he began to preach that no matter how difficult the looming years might seem to me, to know that today was actually the first day of healing. I remember thinking at the time how it felt much more like the first day of the end of the world...

“Good morning citizens of Dirth! The time?”

“Way too early for us!”

“Well, can you at least give us the weather?”

“It’s the start of the hot season, meaning we won’t see last week’s temps anymore! You can bet your life savings on that! Expect today and the next few days to dip no lower than 95 degrees, and the midday temps to easily reach a blistering 135 in most areas.”

“We have the cure for those balmy temperatures! The cooling songs of Sir Sa-”

I snappily hit the snooze with the ball of my palm, allowing me to hear the more pleasing voice of my wife across the hall waking our son to the newly roused light, which pitilessly made its way to my listless eyes. I could not help but become mesmerized by Lizeth’s songlike tenor within my sluggish state. Her whisper beyond was soft and soothing, echoing a melody into my ears which could never be imitated by any other. She could make a blind man fall for her with that voice alone, even if she were spewing the vilest of curses at him.

Much to my reluctance, we performed our morning ceremony. We would go to the same place, at the same time, and do the same things. Nothing was changed in that respect for the last several years. It was all so monotonous sometimes. What I wouldn’t give now for it to have remained that way. I was sitting at the breakfast counter eating slices of grilled fruits and toast with my wife close by me, although, she was more concerned with arranging the pantry than with any thought directed at me. Meanwhile, as I was meditating on my upcoming schedule of the day, my son walked in. Once our eyes met, his innocent face lighted up like a firework. He

always carried his biggest of his smiles in the morning, as the nine year old obstinately seemed to enjoy the prospects a fresh day brought, unlike his father. He settled himself on the stool to my right.

“Dad, can we go to the shockball game tomorrow?” he asked in a rapid sort of manner, as if hoping I would not notice his newfound venture at maturity.

“Dayce, what do you mean by ‘Dad?’” I asked in return, acting more serious than I actually was. “What happened with calling me ‘Daddy?’”

“Seaver says only babies say ‘Daddy,’” he stated as his excuse, slyly grabbing his share of toast from the plate before me. “And I’m not a baby.”

“Well, I guess that means you’re all grown up then. Good, I can kick you out of house soon. Wait, that also means you can buy your own ticket for the game tomorrow. I’ll see you there.” I stood from my stool and half turned my back to pretend I was leaving him.

“No, Dad, I don’t have a job yet.”

“Now that’s too bad, because only ‘daddies’ buy tickets for their sons.” Then, after contorting my face to imply I was thinking through an unsolvable problem, I sat back down and placed my full attention upon him. “Okay, how ‘bout this. When it’s just you, me, and Mommy, you call me ‘Daddy’ and in public you can call me ‘Dad?’”

The signature grin stamped on his bright face approved of my idea. After gobbling up the last piece of toast from his hands, he replied, “Okay, Daddy.”

“All right,” said Lizeth, looking at Dayce and placing my packed lunch near me. “Now that I know you still need school, it’s time for you to go. Hop in the car my little prince.”

Our son complied, snatching his backpack atop the dining room table behind us before heading out the front door, though not without leaving me his farewell firecracker.

“I’ll see you after work,” she told me, barely looking in my direction as she reached for her purse on the table. “I should be home early today.”

She pecked my cheek with the brink of her lips, but as she attempted to walk away, I held on to her blue blouse.

“Hey, sorry again about yesterday,” I said, giving her an overzealous apologetic look that I knew could melt her heart at any time, which is why I used it sparingly.

“Forgiven and mostly forgotten,” she responded, her serene expression letting me know I was indeed forgiven.

“You know, we never officially made up,” I pointed out teasingly. “Think Dayce will be back in the next five minutes?”

“Going for a personal best?” she asked, matching my humor. “I might be able to work something out later if you come home for lunch.”

After a longer and more dotting kiss, she parted.

I reached my office about half an hour’s drive later. It was located in the fourth floor of the university’s science department, a building infamous for having an antique elevator that would take two miracles to work, never doing my morning any good. I had always felt suffocated inside my compressed and dismal office, not even the sham of a window on the back wall could save that reality. There was a day shortly after I had moved in when I attempted to enliven the space by adding a few pictures of the most beautiful streams and wildlife ever seen on this world, but they only served to cause the place to become even more sorrowful than before. I knew they did not belong trapped alongside me. The semester mornings were pretty much clockwork for me. I had an early lecture, progressing more leisurely than I was used to, and any time I had alone was filled with the grading of biology assignments, which was generally quite relaxing for me, not taking into account the times I met an unforgivable error from a student’s paper.

My second class began not long before the sun was grazing the highest point in the sky. This particular session was always filled with the greatest agitation out of all my classes. Many were just beginning to feel the effects of low blood sugar and were impatiently watching the clock tick by until the designated time to eat arrived. For my part, I was starting to sense I cared more about my words than anyone else in the room, which was, sadly, never unordinary, but when I was about to show a video about the cardiovascular system on the projection screen, I began to hear the voices swelling in the room. They were not by any means loud exchanges. In truth, their conversations ascended so gradually that I couldn’t even distinguish exactly when they were created. I also would not say they were disruptive, for they were only whispers, and yet, even whispers could reveal more distress than in the loudest of screams.

“May I ask what all this commotion is about?” I inquired, not without a little aggravation in my tone.

As I turned to address the crowd, I realized that this was the first time I had truly examined the state of the room. Much of their attention was fixed toward a student in the center

of the dimly lit auditorium, with some acquiring seats near him for a better view. They were leering on his laptop resting before him, the light of it reflecting off their fretful faces. In spite of me, everyone was so enthralled by their recent interest that their subtle murmurs continued on. As I remained reticent for a moment, though it could have been longer, their conversations ceased. They must have finally sensed my stillness, for all their eyes soon fell on me and the room was filled with a silence only ominous news could bear.

A bolder student, who was involved in the center circle, said, "Um, Professor Rosyth, something happened in Dorvale. There was a big disaster. A huge explosion of some kind. A lot of people could be dead."

It took a moment to fully grasp his explanation. Dorvale was one of the largest cities in the potent Valland Nation. On a globe, Valland was situated almost directly opposite from Dirth. Before I could ponder a guess as to what had happened on my own accord, I was already staring at the early reports on my computer. I did not even recall taking down the cardiovascular video I never had the chance to explain. The news bulletin was also mirrored on the projection screen to the left of me. I looked back and forth between them, as if I could not believe what either screen showed and hoped that one of them would change to a less harsh truth.

Every headline I came across stated: "*Breaking News*" in bold red font. The words afterward did not bring much promise either, generally stating: "*Rescue operations underway as massive detonation plunges Dorvale into chaos and takes out power to much of Valland. Dorvale and much of the surrounding regions are obscured with heavy dust and smoke. This does not appear to be a nuclear strike as no nation has declared responsibility or detected a missile launch, however, the Valland military is on high alert.*" I kept seeing the same words over and over again on other articles, like a never ending sequence of bad news déjà vu.

There was an off chance someone may have spoken to me before my ears ultimately picked up a female voice asking, "Professor Rosyth, what do you think it is? Could it have been an asteroid?" but given that I was so enthralled by the information portrayed to me, I did not hear them. I didn't even recognize whose far-off sounding voiced had reached me; my eyes never reached hers.

"It's looking that way," I answered her. My words were mindless, there was no sense of self-control. "The Valland have no active volcanos or calderas, which are the only other natural sources that could possibly affect such a large area."

“How many live in Dorvale?” another student asked, originating from the far left side of the room.

“Isn’t it about six million?” added someone new near the top right.

“Shit, millions wiped out!” were the last words I heard to snap me out of my trance.

I raised my head and looked at the class, feeling like I was no longer a professor to them. Most of the students were still speaking over each other, louder than they had ever been. “We don’t know if it was a direct hit or not,” I said in my soundest voice, hoping to obtain everyone’s attention, which succeeded. “Let us all thank our ancestors it didn’t hit a few hours earlier or later. Dorvale is nearly at the same latitude we are and only a minor time difference might have saved us. We should pray to the Spirits for those who are affected.” I was not really the religious type, but it felt appropriate to say, given the circumstances. “Listen, I’m not saying to go crazy or anything, but I know a sizeable asteroid strike can end up affecting the weather for the next few years, and Valland trade will definitely be impaired, so the price of food and numerous items will certainly be on the rise shortly. I advise all of you to stock up on nonperishable food items as soon as you can. You are all dismissed for the day.”

As soon I gave my consent to leave, they were gone. They could not have departed any faster if the room was on fire. I did not feel the same eagerness they felt, so I stayed behind. I don’t think I wanted to feel the collective foreboding that was to be expected after a tragedy of this magnitude. Furthermore, I liked the idea of being alone for a while, understanding it would be difficult to achieve afterwards when I and the rest of the world would be obsessed for new information for the foreseeable future. All the while, I stared blankly at my computer screen, eventually staring at a sleeping monitor. If there were any new reports being made, I didn’t want to know about them.

In the midst of my solitude, I received a message in my cellphone. I knew who it was from and what it said before I read it. My assumption proved correct. It was my wife asking if I was okay. It was just like her to think that way. A disaster occurred halfway around the world and she was concerned about me, as if I had perhaps gone there without telling her. At that instant I recognized where I needed to be. I immediately felt guilty for taking time for myself, knowing how worried she was about me, no matter how senseless. After replying back that I was heading home, I left as fast as I could, though not before forwarding a message to my students and leaving a note on the auditorium door that classes were canceled for the day.

I reached home in due course, remembering little of the actual drive there. All I discerned was that when I had arrived and opened the front door, my wife fell into my arms. She was trembling and must have been for some time, but as I wrapped my arms around her, I could feel her nerves unwinding throughout her body. It was easy to forget how emotional she could be. I always did take pride in knowing that I was one of the few who had an incredible easing influence on her. Her parents could never hide their amazement when I would put their daughter in her most tranquil state of mind without much effort.

We made ourselves lunch, though we had no real intention to eat it, while we watched coverage of the catastrophe. No new reports were being made. It was the same phrases I had read before, except there were faces behind the words. We did come to see the first disclosed images together, or more like the lack thereof. Everything was concealed under the night. All anyone could detect were the packed clouds of dust and smoke churning in an atmosphere only illuminated by Newt. We couldn't even identify the signature skyscrapers that stood so tall in the proud city of Dorvale. Seeing nothing was almost worse than seeing what was really happening, as it made my imagination run wild. We placed the freshly made sandwiches on the little glass table before the television, with their expected fate to become stale. Most of the babble in the room came from the various gathered authorities and guests on the screen. I had sat down on our big red couch whereas Lizeth remained standing, but she lingered within arm's length of me. She could never be still, no matter how calm she became, so I did not expect it during this particular interval.

"Oh, Roym," were the first strained words Lizeth said to break our long silence. I almost didn't hear her low voice above the broadcaster. "Dayce will have a lot of questions."

Comforted that the muteness was finally ended between us, I was assertive enough to say, "Don't fret, Liz. I'll take care of it."

"Please, try not to scare him. You tend to be too blunt with him. Do you remember telling him the sun will eventually explode? He cried in his room the whole day." She sat down on the arm of the couch next to me, indicating her allaying mind.

"This is a natural disaster," I said to her, a little annoyed that she thought I couldn't be tactful with our son. "Maybe if it was a terrorist attack or outright war I'd understand your worry, but you can't sugarcoat a dust storm or volcano. Besides, Dayce is older now, he must have only been six when I told him about a star's lifecycle. He shouldn't cry now."

“He doesn’t have to cry to be scared,” she responded, carrying the same stressed tone she started with.

She became silent, but again rose from her place. I followed, positioning myself behind her. I then wrapped my arms around her waist and pressed my chest to her back.

“Many will be afraid, there’s no helping that,” I said as calmly as I could express it.

“It’s just so randomly horrible though, isn’t it?” she asked, pulling away from me. I nodded back to her. She took a quick glance at the television and said, in a voice suppressed with lively antipathy, “I can’t stand some people at the firm. You know, I overheard Alun today, do you remember him? That fat fuck from my boss’s party last year? I heard him complaining about how this would affect his quarterly numbers, and I know he wasn’t the only one thinking it. Working with people like him makes me hate my job sometimes.”

“Don’t I keep telling you? Join me at UKI and you can teach some business classes. You’ll be much happier there.”

She stared at me with her most serious look and said, “But the pay is so shitty.”

I cracked a smile. She followed my lead. We then burst into a fit of contagious laughter.

Lizeth managed to remain home and didn’t return back to work as she would normally have done. In the interim, my hunger returned to me and I realized just how starved I really was. I ate the sandwich that I made earlier, with no heed to how long ago I made it, and immediately lamented leaving my hearty soup in my office. After shoving the miserable sandwich down my throat, I went to go take a quick shower, which took longer than I anticipated when Lizeth joined me. I suppose being reminded how fragile our existence was could make some feel the need to emphatically embrace life’s most precious moments. We remained in this blissful physical and mental state until the moment I had to go pick up Dayce from school. It was time for us to return back to reality.

Chapter Two Revelations

When I observed Dayce approaching the car, he lacked his laugh and smile. I missed them already, fearing how little I would see those spectacles of joy in the coming future. He entered the backseat without saying a word. I had already come to the conclusion that I would let him confront the news first, so I merely continued to gauge his disposition. He remained in a contemplative state for several minutes into the drive, a sight that was so foreign for me to witness. The muteness seemed to grow between us with every sporadic glance I made to him in the rearview mirror, which happened as much as I was safely able.

Finally, after I thought he might be waiting to speak with his mother instead of me, he asked, “Are we going to get hit, too?”

I couldn’t help but grin a little, mainly because I was relieved to hear his voice, but also due to the manner in which he stated the question. It made me realize how simple the conversation could be. “No, Dayce,” I said with a lighter heart, making sure we locked eyes in the mirror. “Impacts like this are rare. It could be hundreds, maybe thousands of years before this happens again.”

“No one knows when it could happen, then?”

“Sometimes we can see it coming, but we have to learn not to live in fear of what *could* happen. I definitely wouldn’t be driving right now if that were the case. It wouldn’t be a healthy way to live.”

“So, you’re not afraid, Daddy?” he asked, his mood relaxing.

“Your mother wouldn’t marry a coward, would she? Her men have to be brave for her, Dayce, and then she won’t be afraid. Do you understand?”

“I understand.” He settled with a smile into the plush seats of the car. “I won’t make Mommy worry.”

This was the last conversation we had that day about the calamity. He was a resilient boy, and seemed, from my perspective, to be taking the tragedy rather well; better than I or his mother could have hoped. Taking what I said to heart, Dayce appeared to make his sole purpose to keep his mother distracted. Lizeth enjoyed the unusual amount of attention her son gave her. She listened with great diligence at everything he said, even wearing a wonderstruck expression that I

found endearing. She made it seem as though he was disclosing a revolutionary new discovery to her, despite him just talking about his schoolwork or his favorite athletes. Dayce must have learned well from his father, seeing as Lizeth didn't seem at all anxious after we had arrived. It was a good arrangement for them both. However, it was soon wearing on him. By the end of the day, his feet were dragging and he appeared to be in a constant struggle to keep his eyes open. He went to bed earlier than customary, though not without me hoping for him to have pleasant dreams that night.

None of us were aware of what was happening on the other side of Evon. We had severed any connection with the outside world after Dayce came home, so for some time we could pretend everything was the same as before. But once Dayce was asleep long enough for us to know he would not wake up any time soon, we knew we could not avoid it any longer. There was a subconscious uneasiness growing within me all throughout the day, and my qualms were actualized the moment I revived the television in my bedroom.

The dawn light was just beginning to shine on the blurry city horizon of Dorvale. It was recently confirmed that there was no direct strike on the city. The reputed asteroid impacted the nearby Gears Mountain Range roughly six miles away from the heart of Dorvale, though no one would have guessed it by the hectic scene. Helicopters soaring in the sky revealed the first murky images of the ruined cityscape, as the thick mists of dust and yellowish fumes were beginning to disperse in the strong winds. Most of the weaker buildings had collapsed in the shockwave, malformed into nothing more than piles of unrecognizable fragments. The ones that did manage to remain standing were almost a sadder sight to behold. The former embodiments of sanctuary were dusky and bleak, nothing but thin streaks of flashlights gleamed through their ruptured windows. There was a sense of stirring on the streets, where people were beginning to emerge out of the rubble that were once their grandest constructions. Hundreds of thousands were expected dead, which was the worse vision of all, even if it wasn't shown in the images.

There was a spark of hope in all the despair and anguish. Countries from all parts of the world were responding to the disaster and sending in their support. Even acknowledged enemies of Valland were promising their assistance and expressing their condolences. Emergency services were already well underway, exposing themselves in every corner of the city in what was conceivably the biggest relief effort in all of history. It was inspiring to witness. It made

Lizeth shed tears and nearly made me do the same. Well, maybe one eye may have accidentally leaked out a miniscule droplet of moisture.

We recognized we had to stop watching with the night creeping ever deeper. Whereas sleep was the furthest thing from our minds, Dayce was not, and we each foresaw we couldn't face the day in general after a sleepless night, even if that appeared unavoidable. As we mutually came to this decision, the manner of the newscaster's voice, who had accompanied us for most of the broadcast, abruptly changed from somber to ambiguity.

"I'm sorry to interrupt you," he said to the crisis expert he was interviewing, "but I just received word that the first visual of the impact site on the Gears Mountain Range itself is about to be revealed to us. The clearing of the dust has finally allowed our helicopter to fly through."

The scene then shown was difficult to make out at first. There was nothing but haze and distortion from the dust as it continued to fill the entire screen. It was like that for such a long stretch of time that I almost assumed the monitor had went to static. Even so, with neither my wife nor I taking more than two breaths between us, we could begin to see the vague outline of the mountain range.

"This is a live shot," said the news anchor, his voice lingering in the background. A tremble of anticipation quivered his vocal folds, which I'm sure was felt by all watching. "I'm being told they will shortly exit the dust cloud and, if I'm correctly hearing this, we will then be able to see a live shot of... Is that right? Of the asteroid itself? Let's give them a moment."

In the course of that short period, my mind was completely controlled by the screen in front of me. In essence, anyone watching became a puppet to the impending future. I was able to see the uneven terrain ascending and the soil becoming more ridged as the video climbed the mountain peaks. Sharply, before it could reach the sky, the image stirred and focused on one particularly battered mountain. As the picture adjusted, my eyes roamed closer to the bottom of the jagged landscape and I was able to see something that was completely different from anything I had ever seen before. First off, at the base of this mountain, there was an immense crater reaching the neighboring mountains nearby, although that was not what caused me to suddenly struggle for breath. Within the crater laid the apparent asteroid, but it wasn't what I expected to see in my naïve mind of mine. This object appeared intensely dark and oblong shaped. The video was not yet completely distinct, with billows of dust still haunting the screen,

so I kept blinking my eyes thinking the image would transform into something more ordinary, but at every release, all remained the same.

The object was far larger than I had first supposed, and that was granting some of it was buried deep within the mountain's foundation, with the exhibited portion being a third as long as the mountain was high, making it at least a mile in length. Questions were beginning to run through my mind like grains of sand in a sandstorm. How could that much of the asteroid survive such an energetic impact? And why, then, wasn't the impact even greater? An object that massive should have released enough energy to level a continent, not just a nearby city. Before I could begin to say these questions out loud, I noticed that the asteroid I had been studying all this time was molded in an unnervingly consistent, rectangular shape.

I heard a voice say, "That's a strange looking rock."

It sounded so much like an echo that I originally thought I was hearing it from my own head, but a quick recalculation told me it had arisen from Lizeth. I had forgotten all about her in my trepidation. I wanted to look at her, but a magnetic glue forced my eyes to glare at the screen in front of me, hoping the image was all in my feral imagination. I *needed* it to be my imagination.

"Roym?" Lizeth uttered, with some concern in her voice.

Still I did not turn to her. I felt her eyes piercing me like a cold dagger, and while I could feel the grim puncture on my face, I continued to look onward. The rest of my body was absent, and everything around me was void and vacant.

"What's wrong?" she asked me, with more nervousness than before, for she must have felt my anxiety by that point.

The sound of her acutely troubled voice must have revived me at last, because it was then that I finally turned to her. Her cocked head, pursed lips, and watery eyes revealed her distress, and it escalated when she saw my own face. I knew she was scared, I don't think she had ever seen me like this before. I stared back at her, but nothing came out of my gaping mouth. I knew any word from me would have comforted her, but I could not form one. Nonetheless, I soon didn't have to, since the broadcaster spoke for me, which I was grateful for, knowing I would have remained senselessly silent all night.

“That appears to be the... the object that generated the blast,” said the unconfident newscaster, saying every word with great carefulness. *“Perhaps we can try to get the astronomer, Dr. Lynn, back on? She might be able shed some light on the image we are seeing.”*

It was official. It wasn't my imagination. The anchor struggled with every syllable he pronounced because he and I were thinking the same damn thing. He knew, just as I did, that the asteroid we were witnessing was actually not an asteroid at all. It was alien.

Chapter Three Reaction

Today rotated to tomorrow. The world's fascination and focus was now directed to the object in the crater. The struggle in Dorvale became a distant concern in everyone's minds. All spellbound eyes were watching the flood of new pictures and video coming in as the dust continued to vacate the region by order of the strengthening daylight and winds. Helicopters were swarming the mountain that was now integrated into my memory to every last perceptible pebble. Its visitor, which seemed to have turned darker each time I looked at it, never left the screen, allowing for more extensive analysis. The base of the structure was about a quarter wider than its ceiling and was raised from the crater's floor at a slight angle, but the deceptively small ascent was enough to create a space of about six hundred feet between the body and the ground at its presumed stern. Its walls inclined upward from the base and formed a flattened plateau on top to make the roof. The mysterious vessel reached about one-fifth up the mountain, giving me a good idea of the structure's true stature. Most mountains in the Gears Range were known to touch the clouds, and this one in particular reigned over them all, indicating that the object's height would dwarf all but the tallest buildings in the world.

Despite fragments of the mountain masking a good portion of the foreign craft, unveiling themselves were a few shallow cracks flowing across the otherwise sleek, uniform surface. How it was left with only those few scars, or how it could have survived a collision that intense at all, no one could fathom. Most agreed that the energy expended from the impact—which experts had equated to several times the detonation of several nuclear weapons of the largest yield—should have vaporized any known material, or at least have destroyed it to the extent that there would be little to salvage. Even with the scarring, the interior remained a secret to everyone. There were no windows of any kind or cavities to speak of to disclose any hint of the inside. Another detail I could not disregard was the lack of a visible engine. There was nothing giving the impression of a propulsion mechanism, or any trace of how it could have drifted through space, if that's allegedly what it was designed to do. The engine, or engines, I hypothesized, could have been concealed where it was buried, hidden inside of it, or may have not needed one at all.

None of these speculative observations helped to release my thoughts from the unrelenting questions: Why did it crash? Where was it going? Was anyone alive inside? What

would they do if they were? I naturally became frustrated by it. I was beginning to think that none of it was fair. Today was supposed to be the world's first day for healing.

Another inquest breached my mind, however, this one came via Lizeth, who asked, "What's going to happen?"

I subconsciously thanked her for taking me out of my stupor. "I'm sure everyone is thinking the same thing," I mechanically replied to her, for I was still only half myself. I felt her devoted hand over my arm and she gently squeezed it, but even so, I could hardly feel her slim fingers on my skin. My entire body felt numb. I felt a need for her to crush my arm somehow, so then maybe I could feel something.

This was not something that was supposed to happen to me. As a biologist I thought I was prepared for an occurrence like this. Out of the billions of planets in our galaxy alone and the innumerable galaxies beyond that, it had always made sense for me to envision that some type of life existed outside our solar neighborhood. There would therefore be some type of life that would, in due course, become articulate and practical enough to develop technology that might be more advanced than our own. But seeing the spacecraft from another existence resting within the crater somewhere on my world made my blood run cold until it felt as though my entire body was experiencing brain freeze. The last time I must have felt this unsure of myself was when I exited the womb. Everything was reintroduced to me; reset. All facts were now buried in a previous age.

This was not me. It never was. I remembered the time when, just weeks before receiving my driver's license, my mother and I were involved in a vicious car accident. The clouds had uncharacteristically lost control of the rain that evening, making my mother lose hers. The car flipped over anywhere between one to a hundred times; feeling more like the latter. It sent each of us to the hospital and she had to remain there for over a month. Three weeks after her release, I received my driver's license with avid expectations. It was as though the accident had never happened. My youthful spirit had wholly possessed me, freeing the terrible event from my mind. I had seized the freedom given to me instead of fearing what it could bring.

Currently, it was the complete opposite. The feeling of dismay conquered all of me, and each of the possibilities and opportunities I thought my scientific mind would grasp were entirely deficient. I could now sympathize with an animal that had watched a fellow creature get shot down by a peculiar hunter with an otherworldly weapon. In any case, notwithstanding my

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