

Three centuries later

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World has gone crazy. The waters had silenced, and the birds had stopped singing on the early spring mornings. Only if there was a spring.. Temperatures ranging from far below zero to hot, hardly bearable numbers in the matter of hours, all year around are not an exception. Someone could think that vegetation isn't going to survive in such weather. Don't get me wrong, it is just too much for the nature. Hundreds of miles of dirt, and rocky mountains stretch across the continent. From time to time you'd come through a city if you really traveled, and maybe even bumped into a community of humans. The night sky isn't as bright anymore. With every year, the moon distances a little further from planet Earth, and everyone forgets the beauty of full moon .

People had changed, too. Senses switched intensities. They don't need to depend on smell and taste anymore. Labels will tell them what is fresh indeed, and fine to consume. Their sense of touch and vision has developed, grew stronger, as a wave of materialism took over their hearts long ago. Technology that was created to help, became more intelligent than themselves, now is irresistibly spreading, almost endangering the human species.

She lied among remains of what once used to be a full street of beach houses, glazed up the sky, feeling as irrelevant as she possibly could. Everything was quiet, and relatively dark. While she waited for her friend, she watched the world revolve, and couldn't help but wonder about Earth.

Her thinking was disrupted when a crunching sound, as if someone was marching and its feet were crushing dirt below, created light vibrations that reached her. "That must be him!" she thought.

His figure was disproportionate rather than slender. A first glance at him revealed artificial limbs, suggesting that his age is not that low of a number. She was obviously younger and stronger, having only her lower part replaced. Skulls of both of them were exposed in baldness.

She picked up her half-human, half-robot body, and started running just to throw herself at him, a bit too excited about sharing an information she learned the previous evening.

They did not have a need to greet each other.

"Let's go further inshore." he said right away. Even though, there was only mud left of the ocean, for some reason the sandy part was still called 'beach'.

"Does it honestly matter? They are everywhere." said she, looking at a barcode on her forearm, where the tracking/stalking device was located.

"You said you had a secret to tell me?"

"Yes. Yes, I do." she said with half a smile.

"Let's go then."

They walked a few miles, before they settled in a corner of a street that's quite busy on normal basis. But it was night, and everyone followed the Public Curfew rules.

No one leaves assigned living cell after dark, and stays there until no sooner than sunrise.

Almost everyone.

They sat as close, and spoke as quietly as they could. Yet, they were aware that every word of their discussion would be recorded and put on a permanent record whether they wanted or not.

He looked at her, and calmly waited for her to start talking. She looked at him, and took her time waiting for the right moment. For a while she hesitated. What if there'll be some trouble out of this? She certainly wouldn't want to get him into any uneasy situation.

Deeply inhaling; "Casistia came by last night." she started slowly.

Again, a long quiet pause.

"What did she say?" he finally broke the silence.

"You know...the things mothers say." she said with her eyes focused on an object far on the horizon.

"Sure, but I suppose that's not why you called me out here in the middle of night. What else did she say?" he urged. Even though he couldn't express his emotions very well, a bit of an encouragement could be heard in his voice.

"No, it's not indeed. I have come to tell you about the things we wonder most about....I have learned about the life on Earth long before us."

"Then what are you waiting for? Tell me already." he demanded.

"Have you ever heard about a substance called water?" she asked first.

"Never." he nodded.

"I'll tell you what it is, then. Some time ago, there used to be water - a liquid substance, used for absolutely everything by people. Cooling, washing, and cleaning! People had a system in their living cells, they'd simply pull a switch, and they could have as much as they pleased for little compensation." she said with a strange expression of fear, excitement, and amazement on her face all at once.

"Ok." he listened.

"What's more, they used jaws to chew food!"

"Food?"

"Yes, they've put things into ground, and after some time, they'd remove them, and process it through their bodies. Not only that, they killed other creatures, too."

"Really?" from now on she had his full attention.

Due to the consideration of the Higher Power, the ratio between humans and robots is inadequate, and the number of humans isn't crucial enough to preserve traditional nutrient intake. Therefore, they have developed a Transdermal Nutrient Delivery System. The principle is following - nutrients vitally necessary are absorbed into the body through skin. It works much like a band aid. That way, there's no dependence on producing food, and the government and other leading organs can invest in other fields such as science.

"Not many people made it to their hundredth year of age. Their body was just weak, and extremely irresistible to the environment. Also, they mostly did not have the advanced medical choices we have today."

"I heard that there was a certain type of entertainment. You could only process it through ears, and it was filled with emotions!, all you can imagine..happiness, anger, anguish, love even." she smiled at some secret idea.

He stared blankly at her, obviously not sharing the same thoughts.

"There's one more thing." she added. "Not everything is wireless. There is supposed to be a cable that was installed not even a hundred years ago that is connected to other computers, but in the end controls every single step of everyone in this world."

"Well, what do you think?" she asked with the final parts of the story.

He had to hide the genuine curiosity, and push off voices that told him something could be right. "What I think is that you shouldn't believe everything you hear."

She was getting ready to defend these theories, she opened her mouth, but nothing ever came out. Two creatures abruptly appeared out of dark and aggressively grabbed her arms with just a few, quick moves. She wanted to scream for help, but they shut her down. They had taken her in captivity.

He stood by, afraid of his own life. It did occur to him that he wouldn't see her again, but he immediately pushed that thought away. The Public Curfew was still in effect at that time, and so he ran towards a shelter, expecting someone to go after him. For his surprise, the streets were empty as if no one was ever there. He decided to stay down, and wait until sunrise.

It was morning, and he went to his cell, where others were expecting him. "Where were you last night?" they all asked. "Why would I tell you?" he asked right back. "We should've reported you long ago."

"So be it. No one will care anyway. They have taken Kara last night."

"Alright, we will let you go, just for this once. But if anyone knows anything about you leaving in the middle of night, and not returning until noon, you and us, we are all doomed."

"No one knows! I'm telling you." finally screaming.

He went into his area of rest, and started thinking about what would follow. There was absolutely no way of running, they had it recorded, and mapped out. His escape would have no meaning. The only thing he could do was to wait.

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Two nights have come and gone, before someone seized into his cell. Not only have they taken him, but his roommates as well.

What happened to them, he never found out. When he woke up, conscious again, there was only light too bright to see anything else. From the beginning he was aware that this was a very fancy place. He wasn't tied, but couldn't move freely either. Because he couldn't do anything except for waiting, he gave in, and fell to trance again.

Waking up, he was shocked and horrified. Light's intensity was a bit lower, he saw everything. He found himself locked in a place that could remind someone of a very modern basement. Toward his right side, there was Kara, tied to a bed. She was hooked onto many machines. 'At least I know where she is.' he thought. He discovered that he could move, and so he decided to take a little tour.

First, he walked out a huge door that led through long hallway. There, on a wall at least two meters high, hanged pictures of creatures, and scenarios unseen by current population. One has especially caught his sigh. A river with birds, and insects flying around. He thought it was magnificent. In fact, he was so fascinated with these photos that he stood there for a long time before he returned to their room. Except when he came back, Kara was not beside his bed anymore, she was gone.

He ran out again, and started looking for her, fearing. He sneaked into a study to explore it. A map of the place was set on a desk. He studied it for a while before discovering a safe-deposit box in the back of the room with the doors open a bit. Letting himself in, the worst expectation fulfilled. Her body laid there lifelessly. He did not know what happened, he just knew she was dead.

He took the body, and grabbed the map, and suddenly he saw *it*.

Holding a corpse of his dearest friend, with the pictures of splendid settings, and creatures in his mind, and thinking about the details given some five nights ago about

Earth's history..that's when he realized that there was absolutely nothing to do, but to end this planet's suffering.

"You know what? If the stories about our ancestors *are* true, then those were some lucky times." he whispered into her deaf ear as he plugged out the cables. Silence resonated ever since.