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INTO THE DARKNESS

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Online Edition

Into The Darkness

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It's going on three weeks since a solar flare stretched its long hot sweaty claws across the night skies and with a harsh swiped plunged the world into darkness. It knocked out the satellites, power grids, and sent humanity back to the stone age. People are struggling. The worst part is that it happened at the coldest time of the year for North Americans.

The snow crunching under my heavy boots, looking up at the night sky there were billions and billions of stars that you normally couldn't see with the light pollution. Still feeling a little drunk, I stopped and scanned the night sky. The northern lights were putting on a show as they danced across the night skies. I was just over at my brother Steve's home which was a couple streets over from my home. He had invited a few people over to celebrate his wife Carrie's birthday, she turned 34. It was a nice gathering until one of her friends Jeff mentioned his conspiracy theory that aliens were behind the solar storm, they caused it and then they were going to harvest Earth for all the humans. It was a crazy theory and unfounded. I wonder where these crazy people get their ideas from.

The sky was breathtaking, looking up in awe, it's hard to believe it was all caused by some sun storm. This was just a sun storm we get them all the time according to Steve, but this time it was a really big one. Aliens couldn't have caused it. That was a dumb theory. Pressing on, the snow crunching beneath my feet I reach my driveway and there is a small part of me that finds my house in darkness a little daunting. Looking up and down the street, the other houses were shrouded in their darkness. The whole street looked abandoned. Is this what it would look like after all the humans disappeared? A shiver snakes down my back at the thought. Swallowing hard, I continued up my steps, each step echoing loudly in the dark night. It was going on ten o'clock, I reminded myself. Unlocking and letting

myself in. There was no heat inside, but it was a little warmer than living outside. I went into my living room where my extra warm clothes were and switched from outside clothes to home clothes.

Wrapping my new favorite comforter around me I headed to my favorite old chair. I lit the candle and warmed my hands. I picked up my book and continued to read where I left off. Reading out loud to fill the emptiness of my home. The joys of living alone. Normally I love it. Since the great darkness, it feels vacant, lonely, foreboding, the shadows seem darker and alive. It's unsettling. My home was once my oasis, now I felt like an intruder. My home belonged to the dark shadows that lived there long before I came along. Drifting off to sleep the quiet world fell into an abyss of dark shadows and deafening silence, except for me snoring.

Waking up to the sun shining through the curtains. It was another day, maybe things would be back on today. One could only hope. Stretching, I got up and went about my morning routine. Peeking out the window I saw my neighbors outside checking with each other. No changes. Frowning, the little spring in my step of hopefulness slowly dissolved into this nightmarish life that I was becoming accustomed to. My sister-in-law Carrie's friend Jeff might be on to something. This would be a great time to attack Canadians, or anyone in North America for that matter, we all know that the US didn't play well in the sandbox with others recently. Maybe they would be the real target and everyone else collateral damage?

Steve said it was global, he was listening in on his hand crank radio and it was a global event that affected everyone not just us. Workers were working around the clock to get the power grids back online, finding proper replacement parts was an issue since those were made in factories which needed power to make them. They would have to improvise. I opened the can of beans that Steve gave me a few days ago and dumped it into a bowl. Breakfast was served!

Getting a spoon, I took a small bite, trying to savor the moment. I walked over to the living room window and watched my neighbors. Some of them went about their lives like nothing happened. I worked for the post office and was sent home when I showed up for work. Was told they would contact me once things were up and running. It wasn't very reassuring.

This is what it boils down to. Eating a can of cold beans from a bowl wearing layers of clothing standing in my living room staring out the window at my neighbors. Shaking my head. Would it be so bad if aliens attacked us at this point? Jennifer and Chris were fighting again. Chris was a nurse, Jennifer worked for the government doing something impressive. I couldn't remember what, she was a bit full of herself and I tried to avoid her as much as I could. Chris wanted to go help people. Jennifer was telling Chris to help their family first. They had two pretty young girls, under 12, they were always busy and loud. Jennifer was meeting someone. Their voices carried as they got heated. A military jeep came down the street, stopped out front and Jennifer got in. I stood there gapping at the scene. It was the first vehicle I saw drive through in the last week. I had half a tank of fuel left in my truck, but it was locked in my garage when everything went offline. I had tried to gas up my truck but the pumps were down at the station, no power to get them to work. I drove my truck home and locked it in the garage.

Grabbing my coat, I went out to talk to Chris. "Hey Chris," I called to him.

"Pete, good morning. Sorry if we were so loud."

I shrugged; I was used to it. They liked to argue, and they were very vocal about it. "Where is Jen going?"

"Work."

I nodded. "Does she know when things are going to get back online?"

"Should be by the end of next week if not sooner."

"That's good to hear." I could hear the kids from the next street over, playing loudly, sounded like a robust game of street hockey.

“Hey, could you watch my girls for a couple of hours? I know there was a problem just outside of town and there are a lot of people at the hospital. They are swamped and can use my help.”

“Shouldn’t you be here with the girls with everything going on?” I asked gently.

“I am needed at the hospital,” he snapped. “The girls understand.”

Babysitting a couple kids when there was no power wasn’t my idea of a good time. “Don’t you have anyone else?”

“If I did, I wouldn’t be asking you. Come on Pete, I’ll owe you one.”

Sighing, I knew this wasn’t going to be ideal. “How long are you going to be?”

“Just a couple of hours.”

“Will you be home before Jen?” I was more scared of Jen who was only 5 feet 5 inches tall whereas Chris was 6 feet 8 inches and burly man, but an angel compared to Jen when she was on the war path.

“I promise,” he nodded.

“You promise? Like one hundred percent promise that you will be back here before Jen?”

He nodded, knowing all too well of my concerns.

“Okay,” I reluctantly agreed.

“They have been fed already; I will be back before lunch time.” He pulled his snowmobile machine out and gave me a wave then took off down the road.

Slouching I trudge my way into their home. It was warm, friendly, and inviting. The girls were on the floor in front of the fireplace playing board games.

“Hey ladies.”

“Hi Pete,” they said in unison and then looked at each other and giggled. They went back to their game. I poked my nose into the kitchen and found they had hot coffee! Quickly I found a big mug and

poured a cup. They had a backup generator of some kind that's how they had some power. Damn I made a mental note to make sure when this was all over to pick myself up one.

Sitting back down in the living room I sipped my hot coffee and enjoyed the noise of other people in the room. The girls were little angels and when they were done with the board game, they put it away and took out another one. They invited me to play but I turned them down. It was just really nice to sit somewhere warm and not alone.

The clock on the wall said it was going on one. Frowning as Chris' words echoed in my mind, 'just a couple of hours.' The girls were standing before me, shaking my arm.

"Hey Pete, we're hungry. Can you make us something to eat?"

"Yeah of course," I mumbled and rubbed my eyes. I must have dozed off. Getting up I headed to the kitchen to see what I could scrounge up. Finding some bread and peanut butter I made them sandwiches and gave them a juice box each.

They sat at the kitchen table and dug in as they planned their afternoon play time. I looked around and found cooked chicken.

"Did you ladies want any chicken?"

They shook their head no, "we like peanut butter better." The older one informed me.

I made himself a chicken sandwich and put another pot of coffee on. I felt like a king. After eating the sandwich and starting on my third cup of coffee the girls had taken off to the living room again where they were playing tea party. I was allowed to sit back in that chair near the fireplace and drink my coffee in peace.

Watching the clock, it was approaching three o'clock. Still no Chris. I couldn't call him; cell towers were still down. He promised he would be back before Jen. The girls decided to take a nap on the pile of pillows in front of the fireplace.

At this rate if they weren't home soon, I'd have Steve looking for me. I made more coffee and another chicken sandwich. It wasn't long after I had finished both Chris walked in the front door. He didn't look good.

"Pete, is Jen here?"

"No. Are you okay?"

"It was horrible. There were a hundred people that were attacked by something. No survivors. No clue as to who would do such a thing."

"Steve said there were looters making their rounds to smaller communities. Taking what they want. Maybe it was the looters?"

"That could be it," he paused frowning. "How are my girls?"

"They just took a little nap."

Steve nodded. "Thanks for staying with them."

"Sure, no problem."

"Do you want to stay for dinner?"

"I am supposed to go over to Steve's for dinner tonight. Otherwise, I would."

"No, no I understand."

"Are you sure you're alright?" He didn't look like himself.

"Yeah, I'm fine it was just a long day."

I nodded, grabbed my coat, and left. Before long, I was standing on my brother's front step and knocking on his door.

Steve answered, pulling me inside. "Pete, how do you manage?"

"What?"

"I mean you don't have a clue and just bumble around through life."

Frowning I waited. And then he continued his ranting apparently there were land pirates raiding small towns even set fire to a couple old homes. Then Steve asked. "You're using the comforter I gave you right?"

"Yes."

"Good."

"Why?"

"Because it has a shielding panel, it makes you invisible to infra-red lights."

"I'm really not following you."

"Don't worry Pete, I got you covered." He laughed, amused at his own joke. "I got you covered."

Carrie had dinner made and I sat down to eat with them. It was some place up north that got hit. No survivors. I wondered if that's where Chris had disappeared. It didn't matter. There was nothing I could do to help, especially if everyone was already dead. It was going on eight but when you looked outside it looked like midnight. I just wanted to get home and sleep.

"Maybe you should stay here tonight?" Steve suggested.

"Nah, there's nothing to worry about you said so yourself. Things are happening up north."

"I know but it's always better in numbers. Right?"

"What is?"

"You know in case something happens."

"I'm kind of tired."

"We have a warm bed here."

"Thanks, I'll come back over tomorrow." With that I quickly slipped out of Steve's home.

The first thing I noticed as I stepped outside was a brisk breeze out tonight. The borealis was shimmering and dancing across the starry skies. I didn't linger, I headed home as quickly as my legs and feet would carry me without gasping for air. I had an odd feeling that I was being followed even though I

was alone. I came to my street everything was covered in darkness. The snow offered some light as the moon shone down on the light snow fall, we had recently. The snow crunching under my boots was the only company I had. My neighbors had gone to bed. Or they were sitting in the dark quietly. There wasn't a sound. Fumbling for my keys, I unlocked my door and felt happy when I could close and lock it behind me. Safe, I felt safe. I didn't change my clothes I just went over to the sofa and covered myself with the comforter that Steve gave me. Shivered for a few minutes and then I began to feel warmer. Slowly I felt the heat washing over my body. Closing my eyes, I dozed off.

It was like any other day. I woke up and grabbed myself a can of beans and dumped them into a bowl. Stood by the window and there was no one outside. There didn't seem to be any life across the street. That's weird, usually there is some noise. I continued to eat and wait. Maybe they slept in? already dressed for the outdoors I put my empty bowl in the kitchen and decided to pop by Jen and Chris, to see if they would invite me in for some coffee. Mmm fresh coffee. That was the goal.

Crossing the road, I noticed there wasn't any noise in the neighborhood, at least yesterday there were kids playing in the distance. Today it was completely quiet. I walked across and knocked on their door. Nothing. Knocked a little louder in case they slept in. I tried the door handle, it wasn't locked. I opened it, "Chris? Jen?" No one answered.

Stepping in I looked around it looked like their place was ransacked. "Chris! Jen!" I went from room to room and there was no one there. I checked the garage, just their vehicles. So, if they left, they took someone else's vehicle. Maybe it was the military? I crossed back over to my side and knocked on both the neighbors that lived on either side of me. Nothing, their doors weren't locked, inside it looked like it was looted. No bodies found. They were here yesterday, I thought. Maybe I was wrong?

I checked the other homes on my street, no answer, doors unlocked, and no one was left inside. Fear bubbled from my stomach. Steve!

I wasted no time as I rushed over to Steve's house. My heart sinking to my toes, trying the door which was unlocked. I knew there was something wrong. Steve and Carrie always locked their doors. I looked for them everywhere, they were gone. Gone, but where?

I searched Steve's home for a few supplies then headed back home with everything I could and grab the comfort wrapping myself in it. I went downstairs to my basement, sitting in the darkness I tried the crank radio. Nothing but static. Maybe I was using it wrong.

Closing my eyes, I silently prayed I wasn't the only human left in my community. I tried a different station. Someone was speaking but it was cutting in and out and I couldn't catch everything they were saying. I caught part of the message, that we were under attack, this is not just a solar storm, it is a ruse, we are being invaded. Invaded by who? Russia? The Americans? Who?

I tried a different channel, obviously the person wasn't in his right mind maybe friends with Jeff? I sat there all day and night in my basement trying to find some answers. I must have drifted off.

I woke to the radio, "hide where you can, fight only if you don't have a choice. This was a planned attack. They are going to kill us all!" Followed by static. I had more questions than answers. A deep uncomfortable feeling that I was left on my own. No one was coming to rescue me. It was just me left here on this little, lonely, abandoned street.