

The Reset

Logan turned the two-way radio off and strapped it to his belt. 'I'm needed at Orca Bay.'

Selene furrowed her brow. 'What's happened?'

'Another beaching. Three adults and a calf.'

'Shame,' she said, shaking her head. 'Well, let's hope they're healthy this time. We could all do with the meat... and the oil.'

'Fingers crossed.' He picked up his gladstone bag and kissed the top of his wife's head. 'I should be home before dark.'

Logan stepped outside of the log cabin he'd built with his own hands and looked towards the horizon. The sun, though partially obscured by haze, shone low in the sky. Several hours of daylight remained. But winter was coming. Soon, the eight thousand inhabitants of Zone Sigma would be plunged into darkness for twenty hours a day. Of the many drawbacks living so far north, Logan despised the long, dark winter months above all else. Not that he, nor anyone, could survive anywhere but in the Arctic. Any further south and the heat would be unbearable.

Still....

Without the sun's rays, the solar panels he'd salvaged from ruins could only power the generators for so long. Treating patients by candlelight was hardly ideal.

As Logan trod carefully down the footpath towards the beach, a glint of something metallic caught his eye. Glancing across the bay to where the vibrant city of Anchorage once stood, he saw the frame of a building jutting a few metres above the water's surface. How, he wondered, could a civilisation capable of engineering such marvellous structures, fail so miserably at preserving the planet for future generations? From what Logan had read in journals written long before The Reset, mankind knew that unless they changed their destructive ways, Mother Nature would fight back. They'd been dutifully warned.

The End began when warming global temperatures unearthed an ancient mass grave in thawed permafrost somewhere far east. The discovery and subsequent research unleashed a deadly plague that had been frozen in time for tens of thousands of years. Within six months, nearly half the world's population had succumbed to the lethal virus, which in turn led to the breakdown of international supply chains. But instead of forming a united front during this time of crisis, nations went to war over scanty resources. Conflict ensued for decades until the powers that be deployed weapons of mass destruction as a last resort. With farmlands no longer cultivatable and communication, transportation, and service infrastructures annihilated, those few who survived the nuclear blasts were left with two options: Stay put and face an inevitable death or migrate to the largely uncontaminated temperate regions of the north and start afresh.

‘Doc! Over here!’ Arden called out when Logan came into view.

Logan waved to his apprentice and headed straight for the cove where four lifeless Bowhead whales had washed up. As expected, news of the beaching had travelled fast amongst Sigma’s residents. Hundreds of curious onlookers stood at safe distances from the magnificent beasts whispering hopeful murmurs. Whilst no one would dare celebrate the animals’ demise, a single adult Bowhead provided up to 60,000 kgs of meat and blubber. And there were three... not to mention the calf.

‘How long?’ Logan asked as he neared the whales.

‘One, maybe two hours, tops.’ Arden wiped sweat from his brow with his T-shirt. ‘No sign of their being diseased as far as I can tell.’

‘There’s only one way to know for sure,’ Logan said, running his hands along the largest whale’s underbelly. ‘Did you bring the saw?’

Arden nodded, then ran to his supply kit and drew out a compass saw with an extra-long blade.

Logan took the saw and made a shallow, foot-long incision along the animal’s abdomen to split the skin. He put his face near the cut and inhaled. ‘It smells fresh.’

He cut deeper through the blubber to pierce the stomach wall then stood back. If there’d been a build-up of methane, the carcass would’ve exploded.

But nothing happened.

Logan smiled. ‘Well, that’s a positive sign.’

The crowd gathered as he continued slicing the abdomen until blood, intestines, and stomach contents—including its last meal—spilled out onto the sand. Logan bent to pick up one of dozens of fully-intact plastic bottles from the sludge. ‘Good God!’ he exclaimed.

‘What is that?’ Arden asked.

‘A PET bottle.... The pod must have been caught in the Pacific Garbage Patch. But....’ He examined the bottle. ‘They banned production of these in the mid 21st century.... A hundred years before The Reset.’

Arden knelt to pick one up. ‘You mean to tell me these have been floating around the ocean for... more than 450 years?’

Logan sighed. ‘It would appear so. And God knows how many millions more are still out there.’