

## New Beginning

The evacuation siren didn't sound like a cinematic herald of the apocalypse. It sounded like a dying microwave.

"That's it," I said, pointing a soggy spatula at the flickering TV screen. "I'm not cleaning the gutters. There is officially no point."

Sarah didn't even look up from her Kindle. "You haven't cleaned them since 2019, Dave. Don't pretend the impending heat death of the planet is your 'get out of jail free' card."

"It's a New Beginning," I replied, quoting the holographic billboard that had been hovering over the cul-de-sac for weeks. "The brochure said we leave our burdens behind. I'm categorizing the gutters as a burden. Along with your mother's insistence that we use coasters on the 'good' coffee table."

The "New Beginning" was actually a fleet of silver, pill-shaped transport ships currently idling in the upper atmosphere.

According to the United Nations (or what was left of it), Earth was basically a rental apartment that we'd trashed so badly we were losing our security deposit.

The solution? Move to Kepler-186f and try not to set that one on fire.

The official manifest allowed for twenty pounds of "personal effects."

"I'm taking the espresso machine," I declared.

"It weighs eighteen pounds, Dave. You'll be wearing the same pair of underwear for three light-years."

"It's a brave new world, Sarah. I'll be a visionary. A smelly, caffeinated visionary."

In the end, we settled for a bag of heirloom seeds (Sarah's idea of being a pioneer) and my vintage collection of physical comic books (my idea of being a cultural curator).

We stood on our front lawn, waiting for the transport beam, surrounded by neighbors who were all trying to look more stoic than they actually were.

Old Man Miller from across the street was clutching a garden gnome. "They aren't taking my property rights!" he yelled at a passing drone.

The drone ignored him, mostly because it was programmed to look for biological life forms, and Miller was roughly 40% bourbon at this point.

The "beam up" felt less like a spiritual experience and more like being sucked through a very long, very sterile straw.

When we popped out on the other side, we weren't in a gleaming city of the future.

We were in a pressurized holding cell that smelled faintly of lemon-scented bleach and existential dread.

A sleek, silver-skinned android with a voice like a customer service representative greeted us. "Welcome to your New Beginning. Please step forward for de-contamination and bureaucratic processing."

"Is there coffee?" I asked.

The android tilted its head. "Nutrient paste is distributed at 0600 hours. It contains 100% of your daily requirements for survival."

"So, no," I sighed. "The New Beginning is basically a very expensive juice cleanse in space."

We were ushered to a viewing deck while the ship prepared for the jump. There it was: Earth.

From up here, you couldn't see the plastic in the oceans or the smog over the cities. It just looked like a very pretty, very lonely marble.

"Are you going to miss it?" Sarah asked, her voice losing its sarcastic edge for a brief, terrifying second.

I looked at the blue horizon, thinking about the gutters, the taxes, the 24-hour news cycle, and the guy who always parked his truck across our driveway.

"I'll miss the tacos," I said. "Everything else? It's just a lot of lore I don't feel like catching up on anymore."

The engines hummed—a deep, rhythmic thrum that vibrated in my teeth. A giant neon sign on the ship's interior wall flickered to life: **HUMANITY 2.0: THIS TIME, WE MEAN IT.**

"I bet you five credits we find a way to invent taxes before we even land," I whispered.

Sarah finally cracked a smile. "Ten credits says we find a way to start a war over who gets the window seats on the colony shuttles."

"Deal."

As the stars began to stretch into long, white lines of light, I realized the New Beginning wasn't about a new planet or a fresh start for the species.

It was about the fact that no matter how far we traveled, we were still the same idiots—just with better views and worse snacks.