

Earth's Retaliation

On May 19, an international group of geologists by the name of ICE flew out to Antarctica with plans on drilling into earth to reach its mantel. Their operative was simple and with the advancement of technology the decade long mission was finally being launched with hopes of discovering further information about the planet. The announcement to the public first created concerns, but they were soon diminished once the intentions were made clear. With gathered information after the journey the prediction of natural disasters could come hours before they took place. Thousands of lives could be saved, new minerals from the mantel could replace harmful fuels, and understanding of the importance of earth could change the minds of humans from wasteful to frugal in order for the continuation of a sustainable planet. Little did ICE know, as they watched a mechanical drill tear through the hoarfrost of Antarctica, that they were going to cause worse than what the public was first concerned about.

Two months later...

“Why couldn’t we move the crap from your game room to the basement?” Meesha whined, snatched the handle of a birdcage, and raised it off a hook from which it was dangling from. She accidently slammed it against the doorframe of her bedroom and sent frightened Canary into a fluttering frensy. “I’m sorry. Daddy is taking you out of your space for now.”

With a soft sigh, Meesha’s boyfriend, Brian stepped around her as she stood in place until the bird calmed down.

“It’s only going to be for a while.” He said as he picked up a large bag of bird food. “And besides this use to be his old bedroom. It would be a shame for him to sleep on the couch during his stay.”

“You’ll be sleeping on the couch, then.” Meesha mumbled.

Brian rolled his eyes, started out of the bedroom, and down the hall with his girlfriend trailing behind him still complaining about a temporary room change. The unopened bag of bird food felt like it weighed a ton on his back. As he made his way down a set of steps into the basement of the three bedroom and two-story home, he took deep breaths in and out to ease the pressure. Upon hearing the voices of his parents, the Pomeranian pet, Biscuit, scurried out of the kitchen and joined them in the move.

“You better take cover.” Brian whispered to the dog. “Mother’s mad.”

“I’m not mad!” Meesha retorted. She wasn’t standing too far from Brian to not hear his comment. She placed down the birdcage on a stand and folded her arms across her chest. “I’m irritated. You don’t know how long it took me to change that room up.”

Brian let the bag slip from his shoulders onto the ground and exhaled. “It’s a pet room Meesh. I’m sure that bird and Biscuit won’t mind sleeping in the basement for a week.”

The young woman dropped her folded arms and shook her head. “Whatever.” She then turned her gaze to a large flat screen television displaying the morning broadcasting of the news. A small group of protesters were standing in front of the white house waving signs that read, “Save the Environment” “Leave Earth Alone” and “Quit Picking with Our Planet”. Brian scoffed and took a seat on an old beat up plaid patterned sofa.

“What are they fighting about now?” He said.

“Read the signs.” Meesha answered and took out her cell phone.

“I can see that. But what now about the environment? What are they trying to save now?”

“ICE is drilling into the planet.”

“ICE?” Brian raised one of his furry eyebrows.

“The International Caretakers of Earth or the Environment, something like that.” Meesha paused to huff. “It’s said that they are trying to drill into the mantel to see if they could dig up rocks or find any microscopic lifeforms to study. I’ve been following their progress on Twitter and they’re close to their destination.”

Meesha plopped down on the couch besides Brian. Biscuit, their Pomeranian dog follows behind her and forces himself between his owners.

“So, what’s the reason to protest?” Brian asked.

“I don’t know.” Meesha said with a shrug and kept her eyes glued to her cell phone. “My guess is, there’s so much other scientific shit to study that could help the environment, why make it worse by piercing a hole into the globe.”

Brian chuckled. “Well I need to protest about the construction going on in town. Did you know they’re tearing up the street to work on something in the sewage? It’s making the whole area smell like crap.”

Meesha didn’t respond to his complaint. Brian glanced at the screen of her phone to see what was causing her to zone out. As she scrolled a lengthy time line, he caught sight of a few

photos. People bundled up in heavy winter gear standing around large steel pipe that disappeared into Antarctica's surface.

Meesha placed her phone in rest mode and stood up from her place. "I better get the smell of animals out of the room." She said and trotted upstairs.

Brian stood up as well and walked towards the basement window to see if his brother had already arrived. There was no indication that he had. The parking space was empty. Brian then focused his attention to the sky when his peripheral vision caught sight to a flock of birds scattering from a tree a few feet their home. They, like the Canary was flapping in a fury as if something startled them but stayed grouped together. There was an overcast moving in place of the clear blue sky and bright sun. Maybe the birds were getting away from the oncoming change of weather. Maybe a storm. Brian followed them while leaning on a wooden table underneath the window. If it was open, he would have been able to stick his head out.

As the birds traveled further and further into the air, they almost made it out of Brian's sight and suddenly dropped all in union. He felt his eyes widen with shock and backed away from the window. *Can birds randomly drop while flying?* Brian glanced over at the Canary going crazy inside of its cage. Its tweets were louder than usual, and Biscuit was barking as well, but Brian wasn't sure if the dog was disturbed by the bird's cries or something else. He was barking at something in the air.

He stood in complete confusion when he felt his phone vibrate in his pocket and a chime sound off. The LED screen showed his brother's name and he swiped right to pick up the call.

"Hello."

“BRIAN!” His brother’s panicked voice blared through the speaker. “Get somewhere underground! Now! I-I’m on my way. Move now! There’s so-

The phone went dead.

Brian looked at the screen that read Call Dropped and shoved it back into his pocket. His heart suddenly beating rapidly. His phone vibrated again and instead of the soothing chimes of an incoming call, he heard a siren sounding off. With trembling hands, he fished out his cell phone and switched on the screen. It was a text message with a caution signal flashing. AIR-TO SURFACE THREAT LOCATED IN YOUR AREA. TAKE COVER IMMEDIATELY. THIS IS NOT A DRILL.

“What the fu-

“BRIAN!” Meesha shrieked and came stumbling down the stairs with her cellphone raised high. She had the same notice too. “Something happening! We have to take cover.”

Frighten, Brian stood feeling an unusual heaviness at the crown of his head and a twitching in his ear as his hearing picked up on a creaking sound that was all around him. Meesha’s voice became a fuzz and her touch on his arm was almost numb. Something was happening.

“Brian.” She screamed and ripped at him. “We have to mo-

There was a crash from above them and the walls began to rattle. Every photo hanging on the walls fell from their hooks and crashed on the floor. The lights in the basement flicked twice on and off before all power was cut off leaving only a small hint of light from a rectangular basement window. The sun dimly shined into the room before its rays faded away. Meesha took

Brian's hand. He pulled her close, kissed the top of her head, and whispered into her ear, "I love you."

"I love you too." She wept.

They embraced and pulling back, Brian gazed into Meesha's face that was stricken with fear. He listened carefully to noises within their stilled silence. They were sounding off all around them. Crunches and long creaks. Their home was breaking down. He looked up at the ceiling of the basement and watched as the roof formed a stretched crevice that extended and branched in several directions. A choice had to be made fast. Either run out of the house into warned danger or let it fall on them.

He took her hand. "We have to get out of here." Brian whispered. "Now."

Two steps into their dash towards the door, a dense force suddenly yanked both Brian and Meesha to the ground at the same time. There was a flash of bright light as his head slammed against the tiled floor and within seconds of feeling his mental and physical state go numb, darkness surrounded his vision.

He hadn't realized he was knocked unconscious until he heard her cries not too far from him. Moments later, Brian opened his eyes and winced at the pain circulating around his skull and the back of his neck. Meesha was screaming at the top of her lungs. He huffed and felt a sudden heaviness on his chest. It was as if a five-pound weight or a chunk of the breaking ceiling was laying on his esophagus. His lungs weren't getting enough oxygen, so he inhaled again, but to no effect he still couldn't breathe right.

After releasing all internal air, Meesha inhaled as well, but choked. Her eyes widened in shock of her own lack of oxygen. "Brian," She huffed frantically and attempted to sit up.

Gasping for air, Brian turned his head in her direction. Clutching Biscuit close to her chest, Meesha was laying on her side. She used her elbow to raise herself only inches from the ground, but there was a heaviness presence on her that knocked her back down. Her body landed on the pet. He didn't respond to the jostle of his body.

"I...I...can't move... I can't...breath." Meesha wheezed.

Brian shut his eyes and closed his mouth as the thought of death overtook every thought in his mind. An unknown force had taken his breath, majority of his strength, and the house had collapsed from above them. The planks holding the upper foundation was on the brink of snapping from the additional weight. His was going to die to suffocation or crushed.

"Meesha." Brian huffed. He rolled over onto his stomach and slid on his belly to his girlfriend.

"I...can't breathe." She whimpered. He moved close enough to take a whiff of bad odor on her body. Meesha was covered in a panicked sweat and urine. She continued to gasp for air until Brian placed his hand over her mouth and commanded she breath through her nose. The action was enough to avoid death through hyperventilation.

"Please. Calm. Down." He said through breaths and stared deeply into her brown eyes. She was still panicking, but with each passing second of getting a decent amount of oxygen into her lungs, her tensed muscled began to relax. Meesha slowly placed her head on the floor, closed her eyes, and breathed.

We're not dead yet, Brian thought and rested his heavy head as well.

"What's. Happening?" Meesha questioned.

“I don’t know.” He whispered and looked at the motionless dog.

“He’s. Heavy.” Meesha said.

“Knocked. Out?”

A tear ripped itself away from her eye. “No.”

His hand was heavy to move, but Brian was able to touch the dog and glide his fingers down the animal’s back for confirmation. Meesha was right. There was a drop at the center of the dog’s spine. Brian pulled his hand away with frightened quickness, lowered his head and softly cried. The dog must have felt the pull as well, but it was too much for it’s little body to bear. The death was instant.

“We’re. Going. To. Die. Too.” The young woman panted.

Brian raised his gaze towards Meesha and caught sight onto a light from behind her. The rectangular basement window and it was still in tack. The creaking from the house had stopped, however Brian knew the rest of the home would collapse. The longer the stayed inside the quicker death could take their lives from being crushed.

“We. Have. To. Get. Out.” He said and pointed to the window.

Meesha shook her head. “I. Cant. Get up.”

Brian’s eyes expanded and locked onto Meesha’s. “Crawl.”

On her belly, Meesha slowly followed behind Brian to the window. There was a table set underneath it, used folding the laundry and it was high enough to reach the window. Since the atmosphere had become tensed to the extreme, the only difficult the two faced was standing up straight to climb on it, open the window, and crawl out.

Meesha was the first to tackle the act. Brian commanded her to only breathe through her nose, use her legs to lift the weight of her upper body and keep her back hunched to avoid it from snapping. Whether it was common sense or an almighty entity whispering in his ears the right orders, she accomplished. The table was sturdy enough to hold her and the weight of the air. Meesha used every strength in her body to unlock the bolt and push open the window. She nearly fainted until Brian shouted, "GO!" He was then pulling himself up and copying her movements.

The air outside was heavy, however not as deep as the space inside the home. Meesha was able to take deeper fuller breaths as she laid in the grass and noticed every single blade was flattened against the earth. Her eyes soon traveled around to examine her surroundings. The sun had vanished behind a blanket of grey clouds, but it wasn't the typical overcast. Patches of the sky contained different shades of grey ranging from near white to sections of black that formed a trail in the air. Meesha followed the trail as Brian struggled to squeeze through the window. He felt his body lighten with the atmosphere the further he pulled himself free from the enclosed space.

"Look." She pointed with a trembling finger at the black line and traced its path from the sky to somewhere on ground far out in the distance. "A plane crashed."

Brian stared with disbelief only for a moment before tearing his eyes away. "Move away from...the house."

They continued to crawl on their stomachs and made it onto the blacktop of the main street. There was a snap following with long stretching creaks behind them. Looking back where the noises were coming from, the entire house's upper floors fell into the basement. Meesha wailed at the top of her lungs and dropped her head down while Brian gawked at what was left of

his home. A sunken pile of rubble he miraculously escaped from. He grabbed onto Meesha and wept with her.

“It feels like I am being...shoved against the Earth.”

“Or something underground. Like a magnet. It’s pulling everything in.” Brian softly said while staring into the grey sky. “At least. We can breathe better.”

“We almost died.” Meesha said with shock still residing in her voice. She gasped tight onto Brian’s hand.

He turned his head toward her and saw a river of tears flowing from her eyes. He closed his eyes fighting back the rush of sadness and whispered. “Stop.”

“Huh?”

“Stop. Crying. Right now, we need to survive.”

“But, how?”

Brian gazed out at the stretch of the main road. It took them directly into the entrance of Kooskia, Idaho with a five mile walk into town. He estimated the time to get there on foot and dreaded the worse outcome. What would normally take a half on hour on foot, it would take them nearly an entire day to reach civilization with the added pressure of air pressing down on their bodies. However, what little choice did they have for surviving. Getting in town was the only option. Not for just for help, but for answers to what was happening.

He forced himself up to his feet. It was as if he was carrying the weight of a cinderblock on his back. “Let’s go.”

Meesha remained on the ground and huffed, “Where?”

“We gotta go to town.”

“Why? What is there?”

“Let’s go, Meesha!” Brian used all his breath to growl.

She only glared at him for a moment before turning to her side. Brian dropped down on his knees besides Meesha, grabbed onto her shirt, and ripped her body to face him.

“Not now.” He said. “It’s not the time for distance. Move Meesha.”

He helped her up to her feet while instructing her to stand like him. Keep a hunched back and breath through her nose. The thought suddenly came to Brian that it was what he had told himself earlier in the day while he was carrying the bag of bird food. The same weight of it felt as if it was still strapped onto their backs.

Meesha grabbed ahold of his hand as he lead her down the road. While moving, she felt not only the weight of excess gravity, but intense heat from the oncoming afternoon summer. Even though it was covered, the sun’s rays pierced through the overcast and burned onto the back of her body. It also increased the foul odor of her own fluids. She placed one hand on her thigh and felt the dried material of her pants. Walking was highly uncomfortable and extremely difficult with the thought of desiccated urine on her body.

Meesha stopped in her pace and dropped to her hands and knees. “I can’t do this.” She huffed.

Brian dropped as well and whispered, “Come on. Please.”

He helped her back to her feet and continued walking on the long stretch of road.

“What do you think...is happening?” Meesha questioned. “War?”

He felt a bead of sweat jet down the side of his forehead. “No. No man can do this.”

“God?”

Brian shook his head. “I never heard of it. Not in the bible.”

“You never even read the bible.” Meesha pushed out a laugh. Brian smiled, appreciative of her comic relief, but it was only a ploy to keep herself from breaking down in terror.

From that point on the two remained in total silence for speaking only drained more of their energy. Brian kept his gaze straight ahead while Meesha had hers lowered toward the ground. The weight was affecting her more than him, so he used most of his strength keeping her from dropping back on her feet.

They passed by a neighboring house after thirty minutes into their travels. It had succumbed to the same downfall as their own home. Meesha repeated in her mind not to look at the horrid display of dissembled houses and trees that have been mutilated of their branches leaving only a structure like a toothpick logged into the ground. On the other hand, Brian wondered if there were families inside and did they make it out the same as he and Meesha did. Not a single soul besides them was out on the road. There was a car parked in a driving lot, but it was deeply dented from the roof to the wheels like a soda can squashed. He had parked his own car in the garage, but it must have crunched in with the weight of the pull of earth and piled underneath rubble of their house.

Brian then thought of his brother and his call. It was panicked. His brother was trying to warn him of something. Possibly the end of the world? He didn't have his cell phone to find out.

It had fallen out of his pocket when he was yanked to the floor. He hopped once they arrived in town there was some way to get information and contact with his brother. Meesha thought different. ICE and their studies. Apparently, it did influence the entire planet. Drilling a hole into the mantle must have unleashed something.

She grasped tighter onto his arm and nearly fell from the weight on her back and neck, but Brian held her up and urged her to keep going.

“Brain.” Meesha raised her head to speak. “I’m tired.”

“I know. Me too.”

“Can we stop. Just for a moment?”

“I don’t think that’s a good idea.” Brian gazed into the sky and seen that the grey sheet of clouds had darkened by three shades. There was no longer any sight of the sun’s circular shape through the clouds nor the heat of it’s rays. He wasn’t sure if something else was going to happen. Maybe a thunderstorm and it wouldn’t be a good idea to stand out in the open of it.

Brian thought of his brother’s words to take cover, but where to other than town. He remembered that construction on the sewer lines had created an opening large enough for him and Meesha to crawl into without lifting the cover to the manhole. They just needed to make it there.

“If we pass another house with a way to hide in, we can stop there.” Brain said and urged Meesha to keep moving.

“I’m thirsty.”

Brian sighed. “There’s a lake not too far from here.”

Thirty minutes had passed and by then Meesha and Brian were both dragging their feet, moving slower and slower within each step they took until the weight was just too much to bear. He fell first on his hands and knees and she plummeted onto the pavement, belly first to avoid slamming her head on the ground. It had not rained yet, by the sky had become completely darkened. It would have become pitch black outside if the sun had gone down.

Brian took deep breaths in and out to quickly regain his strength. He had no clue how far they have gotten in their journey. He only could tell by familiar homes that gave him a suggestion of the length left to reach town. There was a farm, however and as he could remember it was located next to a pond. After that landsite, it would mean they would have two miles left to go.

He lifted his head to peer out into the distant and with a huff of relief, he caught sight of the piled remains of an auburn painted structure just a few feet away from them.

They scurried through a field that was before the waterhole in anticipation and unknowingly kicked and stepped over dead birds that laid pressed against the ground. Meesha released an exhausted laugh and licked her dry lips. Brian held tight onto her hand while searching for the pond. He knew it had to be there, but from his sight of the distance there was nothing. No crystal-like glimmers of moving water. Only a large opening of where the pond once was. Meesha's laughter turned abruptly into woeful tears. She released Brian's hand and dropped on her knees.

"Where's the water?" She cried.

Brian stood with an agape mouth.

“We are being punished? Is this another judgment day?”

Laying besides Meesha, Brian opened his eyes at the sound of her soft voice. He stared at the blacked sky. Somewhere hidden behind the clouds, the sun was supposed to be in midair, but he could not make out a circular ball of glowing light anywhere.

“Brian.” Meesha said and reached out to take his hand. “I don’t think I can go on any longer.”

“Yes, you can.” He said.

“No, I can’t!” Meesha was then crying, making her breathing between speaking harder. “We are not going to survive this. Whatever is happening...is meant to kill us. It’s not warfare. It is our mess up. The planet is getting revenge.”

Brian closed his eyes to fight back the forming tears. His girlfriend was right. No man had the power to create such a strong and lasting force in gravity that would kill anything light enough that couldn’t withstand the power. Their dog, Biscuit, birds, and tress were eradicated. Thousands of lives that were once in air were taken in from an unstoppable plummet. Homes were destroyed possibly with people in them. Cars were crumbled which meant there was no chance of being saved for those wandering out on the streets like themselves. All this for an unexplainable reason except for the idea which Meesha formulated. Had the planet taken enough trauma over the years caused by human hands that it would just retaliate against them? There was literally no way of survival. Even the water, an important element of life, had been taken away as if the earth soaked in the liquid or converted it into steam to evaporate what was left to assist life.

As his legs hung limp over the edge of the terrain, Brian attempted to lift himself from his back, but was too weak. His lips cracked, and his mouth began to form a thick coat of saliva. Nothing would help more than just drinking a cold glass of water to regain a bit of strength back. He was only able to pull himself an inch from the ground before dropping back down and huffed deeply in exhaustion.

“We are going to lay here for a little.” Brian panted. “Then...we can move.”

“Why?” Meesha questioned. “There no po-

He interjected with a growl, “There’s water in town. Bottled water. And we need it.”

Meesha gazed at her boyfriend. She couldn’t understand his determination to get into town, but it was giving him the strength to do so. She, on the other hand feared the outcome of reaching their destination. Passing by little destruction of the rural setting accumulated fear of what’s to be found in a heavily populated region of Kooskia, Idaho. Imagines of collapsed building with bodies of those who tried to escape sticking out between the spaces, crumpled vehicles with dead passengers, and children too weak to take the gravity increased flashed before Meesha’s eyes. She dreaded the upcoming scene of massacre caused by earth and cried until she had grown to exhausted to keep her eyes open.

Brian was the first to awaken from a light sleep, stirred by a heavy, sour sent that filled his lungs. He gasped for air, choked, and rolled over on his back to pull himself up on his feet. Pieces of his brown hair was moving with a light breeze that carried the odor. It wasn’t as hot as before, and it was still light outside despite the obscure clouds that covered the sun. Brian looked up to find the ball of light for indication of time, however something else caught his attention.

The sky. He could see it through the black clouds and it was a faint reddish-orange color. Reminiscing back to his childhood years in school, Brian recalled what made the sky this tint. The sun was beginning to set. He felt a rush of joy circulate through his body. They still had time before nightfall to make it into town. Brian focused his eyes back in the air again and peered through the clouds at the sky again. The sky was clear. So, what was the black clouds only inches above him?

Brian searched near by for a thin stick and walked over to the pile of rubble after finding one. He carefully stepped up onto a large rock and used nearly all of his stretch to extend his arm with the stick in his hand and poke it into the clouds. He stirred the piece of wood around and saw the clouds were moving in a circular motion around it. Brian drew the stick back to eye level and gasped. There was black matter at the tip where he had poked it into the clouds.

“Meesha.” He grabbed onto her shirt and yanked her body back and forth. Meesha jolted awake. “We have to move.”

“Oh, Brian.” She whined. “I need more rest.”

He shoved the stick in front of her face with a trembling hand. “Look.”

“What is it?”

“I don’t know. It looks like tar.”

Meesha laid her head back on the ground and closed her eyes. Brian reached out at her again and this time instead of grabbing onto to her clothing, he grabbed onto her chin and yanked her face towards his. “It’s moving closer to us with the wind. Don’t you understand? We’re going to breath this in.”

Suddenly there was a strong gust of wind that knocked Brian from his feet. He reclined himself upward on his elbow still feeling the heaviness of gravity and looked at the black clouds moving with the wind. Lower and lower. Closer to the ground as if they were being pushed by the increase of gravity

“Those aren’t clouds.” He whispered to himself. “It’s smoke from the airplanes.” He stood up while holding onto Meesha’s hand and assisted her back to her feet. “We have to keep moving. Lets go.”

Their steps were longer and faster than before. Brian made sure Meesha kept from falling to the ground. As much as she whimpered and pleaded that he stopped so she could catch energy and breaths, he ignored her. They were getting closer to their destination. He just knew it. From the pond they only had a mile left to go after traveling up a hill. From that elevation he would be able to see the buildings of stores and a towering gas station sign just before the entrance, however with everything yanked down with the pressure, Brian thought he wouldn’t be able to tell until stepping foot into the district.

Another rough breeze blew with more force than the previous blow. From his perspective of the distance up ahead, Brian got a clear view of the smoke, like a morning fog as it hovered close to the road at the top of the hill.

“Brian!” Meesha cried out.

“Don’t talk!” He screamed back and gripped her hand tighter. “Keep moving.”

Reaching the starting point of the hill, then Brian released his grasp and the two started their walk that felt more like a climb. The further they dragged their feet with a hunched back up the road’s escalation, the harder it became for them to bear the added weight of the atmosphere.

Brian thought of the lives that were thousands of miles in the air and imagined the sudden plummet of the aircraft like the birds he had seen earlier. They didn't have a chance of survival. No matter how trained the pilots were, there was no pulling upward. However, he and Meesha did have a chance. They needed to get into the sewers.

"I cant walk." Meesha panted. She fell to her knees and Brian did the same. He looked back at her and seen that she was covered in sweat.

"It's just like working out." He said with a nervous laughter. It was best for him to keep up a good spirit in hopes Meesha would see his attitude towards the situation and think the same. "Come on." He reached his hand out to her. "We can crawl from this point."

From hours under the sun, the pavement against their hands felt like an electric stove. Brain felt the heat on his knees that were burning through his jeans and sympathized with Meesha since she was only wearing a light fabric sun dress. She was whimpering and stopped every second or two to pull her hands away from the road before her flesh was burned away. He did the same feeling the wind picking up in frequency if strong blows, then light breezes. It was the only thing keeping them from being totally wiped out from the climb as it felt good against their sweat coated skin.

As they reached the top, Brian finally stopped and lowered his head to catch his breath. Meesha reached up to him with her head slumped over as well.

"We made it." Brian chuckled and raised his head to see the town. Within an instant of feeling joy throughout his body, it was abruptly snatched away leaving nothing but shock and anguish. What was left of the civic looked like a warzone. Rows of buildings that were once clothing, hair grooming, or food marts couldn't be signified individually. Some structure made

with stone were strong enough to withstand the force, but the only thing remained were wood piles. Even the tower made of steel that displayed the gas station logo and prices was destroyed, bent over like twisted straw.

“I can’t go!” Meesha shrieked. “Just leave me here to die, Brian.”

“No.” He snarled, took her by the hand, and turned his head to gawk at her. “We made it this far.”

“What’s the point! There’s no one alive down there. I can’t walk anymore.” Meesha yanked her hand away. “I don’t want to go.”

Brian stared at her. His mind screamed at him to give up and from the sight of the town, Meesha was right. There couldn’t be any survivors. Although there were cars, crumpled in, some crashed within the rubble of buildings, there couldn’t be a soul found from where he was positioned.

“We came all this way for nothing, Meesh.” He softly spoke.

“I wish we would have died in our home.”

Brian felt the ridged blow of breeze and inhaled deeply. His nose took in the fumes of the smoke now lowered to his level in a crawling stance and for a moment his airway tinkled like an inch. He coughed, took a breath in again and felt the tinkle once more, but it unexpectedly shifted into a burning sensation that increased and traveled into his lungs. Meesha wrapped her hands around her throat and released a distressing, gagged, shriek. The smoke was toxic.

I’m not dying here. Brian took a hold of Meesha, held his breath and began to crawl with her dragging behind him.

They reached the town, keeping their bodies underneath the smoke. If the wind didn't blow, the toxic fumes didn't move.

The construction on the sewer lines was inches ahead on the main intersection. Brian kept his eyes focused on the yellow caution signs and red cones that redirected traffic only inches before him. Meesha continued to cough with spews of blood.

The wind blew once more. Stronger than ever, it picked up dust and rubble from destroyed builds and the fumes moved with the stir. The smoke had declined in dept that it was impossible to escape from. Getting into the sewers was their only hope.

Just as he reached the agape hole in the road, Brian gasped for air and his throat and lungs became inflamed. He collapsed with his hand over the edge of the opening, took a final deep breath and spewed out globs of blood.

Two months later...

What happened to the planet? The increase of gravity, evaporation of water, and the toxic fumes. Meesha assumed it was a day of judgment. A moment when earth was fighting against its living organisms for tampering with natural order or things meant to be untouched. The accurate way to explain the reason of events was that Earth itself was a living organism. The drill that penetrated a sensitive realm caused the planet to retaliate against harmful matters like a human body fighting off a cold. The only thing that resides now under the atmosphere is cleanliness.