

Bringing Forth the End of Days

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PROLOGUE

THOMAS HARVEY was a man of simple pleasures. He sat looking out into the distant sky thinking ‘how funny things were.’ It was funny to him how after all this destruction around him, after all the disease and killings, and even after all the hatred and bitterness that had consumed the world, how the beauty of an evening sunset in the distance could still take his breath away.

At the beginning of time when the world was new, beauty like this could be seen all around, in any direction you looked. The water was pure, the air was clean and safe, the ozone layer was flawless, and all of God’s creations lived together in perfect harmony.

People had spent thousands of years debating the existence of God and would surely continue the debate until the very end of time.

People wouldn't accept the fact that the debate itself was pointless and we would never arrive at a satisfactory conclusion, as the only possible affirmation of its holy existence would come to us at the time of our death. It would be at this very point that some people may drift gracefully up to the euphoric ivory gates of heaven, to be greeted with open arms and smiles from all those that had passed before. There would be the sounds of children laughing, the smell of freshly baked cookies maybe, and that warm fuzzy feeling inside that you just cannot describe in words. Some however, may plummet deep into the burning lava of hell, spending the rest of eternity paying for their earthly sins. There was a time when these beliefs were held by the vast majority, which in themselves kept most people fearful and honest. But as the people's need for proof became more prevalent, atheism slowly gained majority rule over the population, leaving room for only one possible conclusion: that we would just rot away in the ground and become food for the worms.

Tom had spent much time in his life thinking about that very matter, never quite deciding which direction to sway. It seemed to him that most other people in the world had already acquired a firm point of view on the matter, although many of these were mere victims of parental brainwashing by overpowering figures that were too stubborn and ignorant to accept other possibilities. Others made up their own minds about what they believed from things that they had read, experiences they had, and what just felt right inside of them. Tom's mother's side of the family were very religious. They were old-fashioned people who always went to church on Sunday and ate fish on Friday. Tom's father had no family or strong

influences in his life and had become completely agnostic. When Tom was born his parents decided that they wouldn't influence him in either way, letting him make up his own mind over time. But that was the problem, he couldn't. Tom was very bright as a child, and like most bright people he tended to question the unquantifiable and the unproven. Facts were real, undeniable, and irrefutable. They were certainties and absolutes which gave Tom reassurance and comfort. But facts were dull. They left no room for faith, beliefs, or possibilities.

Some people claim to have had experiences in their lives that reinforced their faiths. Maybe these were nothing more than delusions and misinterpretations, but either way these experiences seemed to empower the recipient, and give them hope and enlightenment. Tom remembered his Grandma Dunn and what she had said to him on her deathbed. She said that she had received a vision, a vision in which the Virgin Mary came to her in her sleep and told her that she had nothing left to fear. Grandma Dunn died in her sleep the following night, quietly and peacefully. Tom also recalled an old friend of his from college, a friend who was dying from an extremely rare brain disease. The doctors treating him knew almost nothing about the disease and all previous sufferers of the disease had been unsuccessfully treated and died. The friend had decided to undergo experimental surgery. It had never been done before and he came out the other side as fit as a fiddle, never to be sick again. The friend believed that God himself had watched over him that day, and had kept him on this earth for a purpose. From that day forward he began attending church again. He hadn't attended since he was

young. Eventually he became a vicar himself, to talk of his experience and to reinforce the faith of others.

Tom had experienced nothing in his lifetime that would give him reason to have faith. But Tom wanted more than anything else for justification to believe. The whole concept of Christianity, or just religion in general was appealing to him. He liked the idea that we were all put on this earth for a reason, the idea of life after death, and a drive for honesty and morals.

His longing for a heaven was an unselfish wish too, as he longed for its existence purely for the sake of his loving family and all those who had passed before him. He wanted to think that everyone that he had loved and cherished were now in a better place, a place where they would be happy and at rest. It was an unselfish wish because he knew that even if a heaven did exist, it would undeniably refuse him access and there was no amount of good deeds or repenting that would save his soul from eternal damnation.

Regardless of what people believed, whether it was thunder and lightening and the creation of the world in seven days, or that the world and its inhabitants had grown and evolved over billions of years from random clumps of electrons, neutrons, and protons. Either way, Tom had found a common cynical agreement that the planet had first started to degenerate the day that mankind first set foot upon it. We stomped around with such arrogance that we caused the destruction and corruption of the world's once beautiful innocence. We polluted the water and the air, we destroyed the ozone, wiped millions of species into extinction, and spent the rest of our time killing each other and blowing random things apart to

make a pointless statement. It felt inevitable to Tom that eventually we would completely destroy our own planet. It was only a matter of time. Be it Mother Nature, or God himself, someone had made a serious mistake when they invented man.

Tom believed this more than anything else, but could never quite pinpoint the root cause of our own destructive nature. He contemplated the influences that our own intelligence had on the matter. As it stood, we had arrogantly declared ourselves the most evolved and intelligent species that inhabited our planet. But maybe that was the problem. Most other mammals seemed to live a simple life contented with only the most basic of needs, to eat, breath, reproduce, and then die. Tom saw great beauty in its simplicity and grace and wondered why it was so hard for us to live the same way. Why did we demand so much more from life to keep us mildly satisfied? These animals never built contraptions of war. They didn't pollute and kill their own environment, and they didn't form armies and alliances to fight for supremacy.

It seemed to Tom that we as a species had been given the great gift of intellectual thought processes and the ability to design and create. But yet we did not have enough drive and common sense to use these gifts positively and use them to protect and encourage the fundamental things that made our very existence possible.

It was true that when we all envisioned alien life forms in science fiction books and movies, that we portrayed them as a nation unified—a nation of great wisdom and intelligence, perfectly evolved and adapted to suit their environment. Maybe we portrayed them this way because it was precisely how we longed to be ourselves but

in reality could never quite achieve it. Tom considered the thought that maybe mankind was nothing more than a virus of the earth, consuming every natural resource in the area before multiplying and spreading to the next, until we had made our mark on each and every square inch of the planet.

Tom's thoughts came to a sudden halt at that point, as he could no longer ignore the pain from the sharp pieces of metallic shrapnel beginning to cut into his side. He shuffled around uncomfortably on the pile of rubble where he was precariously perched, rubble that had once been the walls of a college. It was the same college that he had attended when he was a teenager. He stared out emotionlessly at the sunset, watching as it slowly started to fade out, the final red and orange rays shimmering and bouncing off the top of collapsed buildings and burnt out cars in the far distance. The buzzer then started to emanate its annoying monotone beep from the oxygen canister upon his back, warning him that only ten more minutes of air remained. 'Damn thing!' He thought. 'Why didn't they last longer?'

The streets and alleys surrounding Tom were now littered with these discarded canisters and only a few remained functional. Normally after about nine hours of use they had reached the end of their lifespan and were deemed useless. Tom however, had recently devised a method of successfully modifying these old canisters to make them easily reusable. He would do this by hooking up the canister's air valve to the PGOGM (Photo-synthetically Generated Oxygen and Glucose Machine) at the house. Tom had now refilled his canister almost every morning since, giving him the freedom that he cherished to venture out into the open and experience the beauty

of the sunset. He had also modified several other canisters in the house too, hoping that his housemates would someday join him outside and share the beauty of the sunset with him. But they had respectfully declined his offer, preferring to stay inside the house at all times. After all, the streets were not safe places to be anymore.

The dangers outside were not just from the deadly carbon dioxide pollution, but they had something else to fear now too. There had been numerous alleged sightings of the Jehovah's Enforcers in the area, and their intentions nowadays were a little more involved than just knocking on your door and inviting God into your lives. They were now more likely to slice you up into little pieces with a rusty implement. Even the thought of it inside Tom's own head sounded somewhat ridiculous and unbelievable to him, but he could understand how in desperate situations people would go to extremes.

Tom's own disbelief of these accusations was firmly put to rest a while back, when the fanatical group had ambushed him and an old college friend down a dark alleyway. Tom had managed to escape the brutal assault with a few minor scratches after having beaten his assailant to death with a lead pipe. His friend at the time was not so lucky and had quickly become the consistency of mincemeat. Tom had remained behind bolted doors for a long while after that, watching the sunset with longing eyes from his distant bedroom window. So he could fully understand the fear and hesitation of his new housemates.

It seemed that one key figure within the Jehovah's Witness faith had voiced his own interpretation of what was happening to the world, the poisoning of the air, the wars, and the growing sickness and death

of the world's population. He claimed these events were the start of the upcoming apocalypse, the end of days. He said that God himself had spoken to him in a vision and employed him to aid in the final stages of the apocalypse. This talk caused immediate uproar from within the faith and he was branded a lunatic by many of his peers. They claimed his words were the voice of the devil and banished him from the faith forever. But his words had struck a bitter chord with many of the followers, who then left the faith to join him in a newly formed sect of the religion calling themselves 'The Jehovah's Enforcers.' Through either belief or fear they slowly converted almost eighty percent of the faith to their new sect, along with hundreds of previous atheists who now found reason and purpose to believe.

The new sect of the faith soon dropped their previous refusals to take part in blood transfusions in surgeries, enabling them all to undergo the 'Wagna procedure' (pronounced varg-ner), helping them to survive in the desolate world just long enough to finish off what they believe God had started. They believed this to be their final earthly task. They believed that sacrificing the remaining population of the earth (including themselves), would bring forth 'Judgment Day,' a time they believed would only occur once every soul on earth was free of its own human entrapment. They believed that our souls could then stand united in the presence of God to be judged. This was a day that the faith had been waiting for since it was first formed centuries ago, and now that the day was so close, they were certain not to let anyone stand in the way of it.

These interpretations and events brought up another key point in Tom's debate about religion and forced the question of how exactly

each religion got started in the first place. Was the essence of these religions still what had been intended at the beginning? Exactly how much of each religion had been changed or left out over the years to suit people's own personal goals and beliefs? Religion and God had been used as an excuse for war from the very beginning of time, so surely becoming a member of a specific faith was just a means of persecuting people of a different one?

The buzzer sounded on the oxygen canister once again, warning Tom that only five more minutes of air remained. It was now very late for Tom to start walking back, especially as the house was a good few minutes away, even if he ran. The facemask was becoming increasingly uncomfortable at this point and the clear silicon air tubes were itching and irritating his nose, but he dared not remove it, not even for a second.

He reached down into his left trouser pocket and took out a shiny medal shaped in a cross pattern and embossed with the depiction of a lion mounting a crown. The inscription on the front of the medal read 'For Valour' and was suspended from a crimson silk ribbon. He caressed the embossed front with his thumb, wiping clear any dust and grime from its features. He then flipped the medal over to repeat the same action on the back. The engraving on the back read: Leonard Dunn, the name of Tom's grandfather. The medal was the Victoria Cross, the highest and most respected military award available, awarded only to the bravest men for acts of valour in the face of the enemy.

Grandfather Dunn had been awarded the medal for his courage and bravery in the Second World War, in battle against the Nazis. It

was the middle of winter, with blistering cold winds, icy fields, and imminent snow. The rest of the officers in Dunn's regiment had either been killed off or taken prisoner by the Nazis and he had only managed to avoid detection himself by hiding underneath a mountain of rotting corpses for a day and a half. He waited patiently, smothered from head to toe in the blood of his fellow officers, until he was sure that the Nazis had vacated the area. He then followed their tracks to a nearby Nazi campsite and with the element of surprise; he single-handedly fought to take them all down. The brave soldier survived multiple bullet wounds and gashes to his tattered body and even when his left arm was savagely blown apart by an exploding grenade, he still continued to fight them, until every last one of them was dead. With his last ounce of energy he then freed all his surviving comrades from their decrepit jails cells and was hailed by all as a hero. After receiving basic medical care for his afflictions, he was then sent home to be with his loving girlfriend Suzie, who had been desperately praying for his safe return to her. He later went on to marry Suzie and they had two children together, Robert Dunn (Uncle Bobby), and Samantha Dunn (Tom's mother).

Tom was strangely pleased that his beloved grandfather had passed away just before the world had started to fall apart and would never know what had become of the world that he fought so passionately to protect. When he died he had left Tom the prestigious medal in his will. Tom had admired the medal all of his life. Even when he was just a small child he had repeatedly asked his granddad if he could hold it, and so it felt appropriate for Tom to look after it. Tom had cherished the medal and kept it close to him ever since, to

remind him what honourable blood he had running through his veins. On many occasions Tom had considered actually changing his surname to Dunn, to match that of his grandfather's. The surname Harvey, passed down to him from his father, bore no honour, nor history. His father, raised in an orphanage from the age of two, never knew any of his family, though it was believed that his mother used to work as a prostitute in London back in the '50s, and that his father was nothing more than a common punter. Tom knew that none of this was the fault of his father, but still longed for the honour of being a Dunn.

Tom stared at the medal a while longer with a nostalgic smile on his face. The airflow in the mask's tubes then started to fall more dramatically and the sun completely disappeared into the distance. It would have been so easy for Tom to have just ended all his troubles right there and then. He didn't need to do a thing. Just sit, and watch as the world faded out around him. Never would suicide be quite so easy for anyone, and if it wasn't for his relentless conscience, he would have taken the option a long time ago. Yet he knew he was undeserving of such an easy way out, especially when so many others had suffered so badly, innocent people with promising lives and loving families.

He finally shook off these thoughts, as he had done many times before. He rose to his feet and ran back towards the house before it was too late.