

Mars or Earth

Chapter One Voices Far, Far Away

By C.C.Fehr

“NASA has been working on this program for the last 19 months,” exclaims Alex, now walking even faster down the hallway, trying to keep up with a beautiful blond head, he then continues, “I don’t think they’d be asking for volunteers unless they felt it was ready.”

“Ya well maybe you think they got their act together but I think one 6 week long test on some mice is not good enough for a man, or as in my case a woman,” replies Sara, walking along side Alex.

Alex an average height and looking young man replies, “You know that this isn’t the only test, they’ve been testing these machines now for the past two years.”

Sara, “Yeah, all on mice and such,” nothing exciting she says disinterested. She walks even faster with a little anger in her step now.

Alex says, “They tested it on some monkeys.”

Sara says, “Yes and they never woke up.”

Alex reaches in front of himself to get ready to open the doors, that were coming up fast, “Those were the only ones. All the other tests came out fine.”

Sara stops and turns then looks him square in the eyes and says, “I’m not going to do it, no matter what they say.”

Alex freezes, not knowing how to respond, still standing trying to think of something to say, when she brushes past him and opens the doors on her own. When she walks into the room, she hears a large number of people talking.

He knows he has to shake off her response because it will drive him crazy. Then continues in before the doors close in on him and he will be on the outside not wanting to be looking in. He sees Sara sitting herself in the front row, just in front of the stage. He rushes over and sits down beside her to listen to the rest of the speech.

The speaker announces, “And further more I feel that we are almost ready for this launch. All our tests so far have come out positive, now we’re approaching our final stage of the program. By suspending two subjects, a man and a woman, in the Hyper Chambers it will assure the astronauts that at the end of their 20 year journey they will awaken and be able to complete the tasks at hand,” he pauses for the clapping and then continues, “As

you all have heard the journey will take 20 years to get to 31019PEP, our second Earth. Upon reaching said planet they will set up a colony there and begin studying the planet and its resources.”

“Yes but 20 years and how do you know for sure the planet is habitable?” come from the crowd of reporters.

He continues, “How do we know that it is habitable, we don’t. This is the only planet close enough, with a breathable atmosphere, we hope. All other planets have shown us that they either have no atmosphere or it is un-breathable for humans, inhospitable and the list goes on. We estimate that we have enough resources to last us for little more than 50 years, and then we’ll run out. So yes, we hope this will work.”

“So they get there, what’ll that do for us here?”

“As you all know we built a working worm hole. What the crew is going to do once they get there, one of their first tasks is to build the other end of the worm hole we are currently building here.”

“Just how many people do you plan on sending?” comes from another area in the crowd.

“I believe the number is 12 at this time. But we are trying to make it more like 20.”

“How long before they launch?”

“In next 32 months we’ll know more,” he pauses and then looks down toward Sara and Alex and motions them to come up onto the stage.

They both stand and walk over to the far right and walk up the stairs provided.

“Now, I would like to introduce the young lady and young man who have graciously volunteered for the Hyper Chambers and will be the first people to be suspended. Everyone give a big hand to Sara Waters and Alex Dorothy.”

The crowd gives them a thundering ovation.

Alex steps forward to receive the mic, “I would like to thank you Doctor Peterson for that grand introduction, furthermore I would like to say that we, Sara and I feel privileged to be the first people ever to be suspended in time.”

Sara looks at Alex with a look that would knock out a bull elephant in the middle of a stampede. She steps up to Alex and steps on his foot as she grabs the microphone from him.

“I would like to say,” she pauses and looks at the crowd then, “thank you for this chance to be the first woman to be suspended. I would also like to thank Alex here for

volunteering me for this. Thank you Alex.” She turns and gives him a look that only those on stage and Alex could see, and then hands him back the mic. Then she walks to the back of the stage and sits down.

Alex doing his best not to show his pain, continues, “I would like to now give the mic back to Doctor Peterson. Thank you.” He hands over the microphone and limps back to where Sara is sitting.

“Thank you Alex. Now if there are any questions, please feel free to ask and we’ll do our best to answer them,” Doctor Peterson said sternly.

“And just how much energy is this going to take from us?”

Doctor Peterson, “Yes, sorry, forgive me please, here is the person best suited to answer those kinds of questions.”

After question period was over, General Stewart along with Doctor Peterson walk over to the two of them.

Doctor Peterson, “What the hell was that?” with anger and shock in his voice.

Alex starts to say something, “Well... uh...uh...”

Doctor Peterson, “Not you, you!” He says looking at Sara.

“I wasn’t told about this until this morning sir.” She replies with disgust.

Doctor Peterson, “What do you mean you weren’t told about this?”

Sara, “Sir, Alex hadn’t told me anything until we arrived just a few minutes ago.”

Doctor Peterson, “Is what she saying true, son?”

Alex goes to swallow but he finds his throat to be bone dry, “Well sir, she was off in ...”

Doctor Peterson, “So she knew nothing of this, is what you are trying to say?”

Alex with his head down = speaks with a squeaky voice, “Yes”.

“Speak up son and look at me when you talk!!” demands Doctor Peterson.

Alex looking up repeats his answer nervously, “Yes sir, I mean no sir she didn’t know, sir.”

Doctor Peterson just looks at him for a minute and then turns to Sara, “I’m sorry we put you on the spot like that young lady, when you clearly have no interest in doing this. You

may go, we'll find someone else. Thank you Ms. Waters." He turns to the General standing next to him and starts to talk with him when he hears ...

"I'll do it," squeaks a voice.

The Doctor turns and looks at Sara.

Sara, "I'll do it." she answers him coldly.

Doctor Peterson, "Are you sure? You know you don't have to!"

Sara, "Well after you guys saying I was going to do it and all that, I think I can muster up enough strength and gumption to do this."

General Stewart, "That's all nice and dandy, but we need a little more than that."

Sara, "Sorry sir, I know I can do this. Alex and I ... we've done almost everything together, ever since we were kids, so I guess that's why he just assumed I'd go along with this. I can't blame him." We are a good team, we work well together.

Doctor Peterson, "You know you don't have to?"

"I know," she answers as she looks the Doctor straight in the eyes.

Doctor Peterson, "Welcome aboard. I look forward to meeting you Saturday."

"Saturday," she says a little surprised, "I'll be there, sir."

The Doctor and General turn and walk away from the two of them, then Sara turns and looks at Alex, looking like a lost puppy.

"Sara, I did try to get in contact with you," whimpers Alex.

"I know," replies Sara.

Alex, "You know? You didn't answer me, or call me back?"

Sara, "I was having so much fun; I didn't want it to stop."

Alex looks at her, "What's his name?" with a jealous tone...

Sara, "It doesn't matter now, he dumped me once he found out I wasn't rich."

Alex places his arm around her and pats her head with his hand to try and comfort her as she begins to cry. "Sara, it's his loss. You'll find the right guy, you just got to stop looking for him, in all the wrong places."

Sara, "I'm such a loser. Nothing seems to go right."

Alex pats her on the head and says, "That's true, but you're a cute loser." Smirking and giggling.

Sara pulls away with tears in her eyes and a smile on her face and slaps Alex on the shoulder, and then says "It takes one to know one."

Alex smiles and hugs her and says in her ear, "You've always got me to come back to. Your one and only bestest friend in the whole wide world." You know we are right for each other."

She laughs and slaps him lightly on the shoulder and says, "I know, friends for life." glowing from the inside out.

Alex, "I still remember the day we first met back in third grade I thought you were the cutest and you thought I was too." He says with a smile.

Sara, "There you go thinking I liked you again. I thought of you were some dumb ass, who thought he knew everything. You were always joking around, never serious."

Alex, "I did know everything, everything an eight year old needed to know, at the time."

Sara laughs at him and then says, "So what about this going to sleep thing?"

Alex, "Well it'll give you a lot of time to forget Romeo." Hoping that her thoughts move back to him.

Sara, "And how long is a lot?"

"Six months."

She looks at him and said nothing, but her expression says it all, 'are you nuts!'

The next day Alex goes to find Sara at her apartment. He walks up to her door and knocks.

"Who is it?" Comes, from behind the door.

"Sara, I'm here to take you to the facility and let you meet some of the scientists working on this project."

Sara opens the door keeping it between her and Alex. "I don't know if I can go through with this."

Alex, "I thought you might be thinking this way. So all we're going to be doing today is

meeting with the group that'll be taking care of us while we sleep.”

Sara thinks for a second and then says, “Okay, I guess I can do that.” She then opens the door and lets Alex in.

Alex walks in and notices that she hasn't even gotten ready for the day, she's still in her housecoat.

Sara, “I'll get ready and you wait here.”

Alex, “You got anything to drink?”

Sara, “I may have some diet cokes in the fridge. Grab me one too.”

Alex goes to the fridge, grabs a diet coke and closes the fridge. After about 30 minutes they're in Alex's car driving to the laboratory.

Sara, “How much longer till we're there?”

Alex, “We're about ten to fifteen minutes away.”

Sara, “I'm still not sure about this, if I'll be able to go through with this or not.”

Alex, “Let's just wait and see the team and let them explain to you what it is they are going to be doing. I know that once I talked to them I felt a lot better about doing this. I wasn't all that sure to start either.”

It seems to take forever to drive the last few miles.

No words were spoken until they come to the main gates and guard house.

“Is this the place?” asks Sara as they drive up to the gates.

Alex, “We're almost there.” He rolls down his window and gives a card to the guard who then hands it back and then walks into the small building next to the gate, the gate opens.

Once it is clear enough for the car to run through Alex steps down on the accelerator and drives through.

Sara doesn't see anything, as far as the eye can see. Nothing but dirt, a few dead trees and a mountain side. That Alex seems to be accelerating toward.

Alex smiles and steps on the accelerator harder, the car lunges forward. He then turns the car so it heads directly for the side of the mountain.

“Alex!” exclaims Sara.

As the car continues to speed up and goes faster they get closer and closer.

“Alex, STOP!”

She screams just as they are about to hit the rock face, then suddenly all goes black and Sara thinks she is dead.

Then just as suddenly it is light again.

Alex slows the car down to a crawl as they come to where there are a number of other vehicles parked. He then parks in one of the empty parking stalls.

Sara notices that she is now under the mountain in a very large cavern. It was like being in the upper half of a bubble that had formed under the mountain, millions of years ago.

She looks up and can just make out the cave walls and ceiling. Down lower she sees a wall, manmade, not quite reaching the ceiling, in fact it only went about half way.

Sara, still not knowing how to react to what just happened, reaches over and slaps Alex as hard as she can on the back of his head.

Alex, “Okay, I guess that was a little too much. I am sorry and must say I deserved that.” He reaches down and opens his door, now out of the car, he walks around to her side and opens the door.

Sara looks up and gets out of the car, she looks around then back at Alex, “What the hell was that?”

Alex, “It’s the latest in holomatrix. I had to speed the car up to go through.”

“Why?”

“Well you see if you just walk up to it, the wall feels hard, like it’s really there. In order to get through it, one has to drive extremely fast,” answers Alex. He motions her to come with him and then continues, “This way. Did I forget to tell you how much they are willing to pay us for this?”

Sara looks at him and says, “I hope it’s a lot.”

They both walk through an opening in the wall and then head toward another guard station.

Alex smiles and says, “On top of paying off all your bills, half a million.”

Sara, “Is that all, they think your life is worth?”

“Sara, just give them a chance. They’ve made every precaution and they have the latest in medical equipment,” explains Alex.

Walking past the station Alex shows his card and continues walking. They reach the elevator doors and just then Alex reaches into his pocket and pulls out another card, one that slides through a card slot next to the elevator doors. Then a panel opens revealing a numbered panel. Alex enters in a code and then presses the enter button at the bottom of the panel.

The elevator doors open and Alex walks in then turns and looks at Sara and asks. “You coming?”

She looks at him and then steps onto the elevator. The doors close behind her and they start their descent.

“How far down do we go?” asks Sara.

“We’re about four stories underground. They wanted to have a completely isolated place to do this,” answers Alex.

“What happens if the power goes out, how do we get out?” she asks with a panic tone in her voice.

“For one thing this place has its own nuclear power plant, so power outages are not to likely, for another there is a staircase that leads up from below, just in case the elevators are out.”

Sara, “What about the chambers?”

Alex, “Oh, those. They have their own nuclear power source.”

“Are you sure they are only going to explain things to me not just assume ...” she hesitantly asks?

Alex, “I phoned the doctor last night and told him that you were having second thoughts.”

Sara, “So they know?”

Alex, “Yes, they know. They don’t want someone who isn’t of sound mind entering a deep sleep. It could affect the outcome.”

Sara, “You mean in a negative way, like me dying.”

Alex reaches over and presses the stop button. The elevator halts. “I see now that I’m asking too much of you. I’m going to take you back home.” He reaches over and presses

the button up.

The elevator starts back up.

Sara softly says, "I'm sorry. I've heard rumors about this and they were all bad."

"They did have some problems at first, but that was with different equipment and scientists. They've rebuilt the whole thing from the ground floor. It's all new, with new people too." Alex answered.

The elevator doors open, Alex steps out and goes to say something when he realizes she hasn't stepped out with him.

"Sara," Alex asks, "are we going or staying?"

Sara looks at him and in a quiet voice says, "staying?"

"Are you sure?"

"No." she pauses and then continues, "I did say I'd do it though, didn't I?"

"Yes, but only after I trapped you. You don't have to if you don't want to."

"I'll stay." Sara insists.

"Okay, let's not keep them waiting any longer." Alex walks back into the elevator, and presses the down button. The doors close and don't open again until they reach the bottom. Sara didn't open her mouth or utter a sound until the doors opened, again.

Standing there were two other people, whom Sara had never seen before.

Alex, "This is Doctor Martha Sheppard and Doctor Mark Holt."

Martha, in a European accent says. "You must be Sara. We've heard all about you, so much so I feel I know you already."

Mark says, "We also heard you're having second thoughts about this. Well I can assure you it is completely safe."

Sara inquires, "If it's so safe, why don't the two of you do it?"

They both look baffled and unsure at how to answer that.

Martha sounding stern, "We offered, but they said no. Who would wake us, if something was to go wrong? We are the only two, who can fix it."

Sara still wasn't totally re-assured by her answer but left it alone, for now.

They spent what seemed to be hours explaining the ins and outs of the operation not making any sense to Sara. Then they brought her over to where the Hyper Chambers were being held.

“This room is a special kind of room. It floats in another room,” Says Martha, then looks at Sara and sees a puzzled look on her face. “Let me explain. This room is suspended on what some might consider to be springs and hydraulics. Yet they are a lot more complex than that. They hold the room up more like, floating on a cloud. This is to help to simulate some of the effects of space. There are a number of cables and pulleys along with air being removed ...”

Alex, “I think she gets the picture.”

“Oh, yes sorry about that. I sometimes just ramble on.” Martha, Says smiling.

Sara, “Okay, now that you've got me more confused, then when I first came here. What does this do for the beds and to me?”

Martha, “It helps to give us a better understanding of what the effects of weightlessness will have on you both, while you are in a hyper state.”

Sara, “Yeah I got that. But what will it do to me while I'm sleeping?”

Martha, “Well it's not going to really make any difference to you. It'll just give us much more accurate readings rather than to just have you in some regular building. Gravity shouldn't be as noticeable, thus creating a more realistic affect on your bodies.”

Alex, “They want to see if it'll have any long lasting effects on our muscles.”

“Oh.” Sara sounding worried.

“I don't think this is doing her any good. I'll just take her home and we'll have to get someone else.”

“No, I'll be fine,” Sara says looking at Alex and then turns to Martha and says, “I'll be ready. This Saturday, right?”

Martha, “That is right and I must say we are so looking forward to having you as our guests for the next six months.”

Sara looks at her and says nothing. She then looks at Alex and asks, “You'll be picking me up at my apartment?”

“Yes, of course.” Alex pauses, “Is eight a.m. OK?”

Sara, "That'll be fine."

Alex, "Okay, Martha and Mark we'll be here with bells on at eight o'clock Saturday."

Martha and Mark both smile and wave the two of them off.

They are both about to step off of the elevator when Alex turns and asks, "What is wrong?"

Sara, "What do you mean?"

"Well, not more than two hours ago, you were about to leave this place screaming and now ...?"

Sara, "I figured what the hell. I'll make half a mill. Doing nothing but sleeping and I sure can use the money."

Alex, "You sure that's all it is?"

Sara, "I need the money and you're my friend. Your going to basically be gone for six months and right now I don't know that I could handle being without my best friend for that long. So why not go with you and sleep and make a bunch of money at the same time."

Alex wasn't sure how to respond to what she had just said and was trying to think of something when he notices her staring at the guard at the front desk.

"Mike, is that you Mike Walker from St Francis High?"

The guard, a dark skinned man looks at her and then squints his eyes to get a better look and then he too says, "Sara, Sara Waters? Is that you girl?"

Sara, "What the hell are you doing here?"

Mike, "I work here girl, what's your excuse?"

Sara is now standing next to Mike's desk and says, "I'm going to be one of their guinea pigs in that sleep thing."

Mike, "Are you nuts girl? They couldn't pay me enough to take a chance like that."

Alex, "Well they didn't ask you now did they?"

Mike looks at Alex for a second and then turns his attentions back to Sara, "So tell me girl what you've been doing with your life?"

“I just got back from Europe and now I’m going to make a bunch of money sleeping,” answers Sara.

Mike, “No, no that isn’t what I want to know. How are you doing, have you found mister right, did you stay in school and finish your doctorate?”

Sara, “No, I didn’t stay in school, I found it to be boring. As for a boyfriend, well not yet, the rest of my life has been pretty uneventful.”

Mike, “Now that’s hard to believe, a hot chick like you. And girl I was really hoping you had finished your schooling.”

Sara, changing the subject asks, “What about you?”

“Well not long after I left to go to the police academy I met the most beautiful girl in the world and married her,” answered Mike.

Sara’s eyes open wide and a big smile comes across her face, “I am sooo happy for you. I have got to meet this fine lady. Do you have any little ones, yet?”

Mike smiles and reaches for his wallet and then opens it and takes a couple of pictures out and hands them to Sara.

Sara again a big smile, “Oh they’re so cute! They sure didn’t get their good looks from you.”

Mike, “You got that right. Their mother is a bomb shell, even after bringing those two little hellions into this world. She’s a great mom and an even hotter wife.”

Sara looks at the pictures again and then hands them back to Mike who places them back into his wallet.

“Well Mike it is good seeing you. Will you be here this Saturday?” asks Sara.

“I’ll be here all day,” says Mike.

“I’ll see you then. It sure is good seeing you and I’m so happy for you and your family. I’m sure you’re a great father. See you later,” she says as she starts for the car.

Alex waits until they are out of hearing distance of the guard and then says, “Sara, he isn’t supposed to know classified stuff, like the time we are going under. You’re not to tell anyone.”

Sara looks at Alex and says, “Don’t be ridiculous. That meeting yesterday with those reporters...”

“They have all been instructed not to publish anything until after we are under,” interrupts Alex.

“Oh, sorry. I just thought that since Mike works here ...”

“I’m sure that’ll be alright, but you can’t say anything to anyone else.”

“What about my mother?” she asks.

“Sorry, she’ll be informed after we are under. You can write her a letter and they’ll be sure that she gets it, or you can make a recording, that she’ll see later,” explains Alex.

“I understand, it’s just hard not being able to tell someone.”

“Well you’ve told all the people you are going to be able to, until we wake up in six months, no one else must know.”

The Voices Fade Away and the Lights Go Out

Saturday morning, the sun is shining in the early morning skies. A thin beam of light manages to find an opening in the not quite closed curtains beside Sara's bed. The beam shining on her shoulder is now on a race to her eyes, a race against the alarm clock ticking ever closer to the waking time, preset the previous evening.

As the sun moves toward the midday sky, the beam of light moves as though it were in a race to awaken Sara before her alarm clock. The beam hits and Sara finds out just how bright and beautiful the morning is.

Her alarm, now sounding, is quickly turned off, so as not to disturb the day ahead.

She gets up and puts on her robe and then walks over to the window, throws open the curtains to reveal a clear blue sky. One she hadn't seen for some time, due to the normal morning smog, yet today was clearer than normal.

Then looking down onto the streets she notices all the people rushing about, doing what they need to do to complete their own daily tasks, thinking that she may never be able to look and see the hustle and bustle of ordinary people again.

She heads for her washroom to get ready for the day at hand.

Alex hadn't slept all that well and was packing some last minute things for the third time, when his alarm reminds him it will soon be time to leave and pick-up Sara. He readies himself by having breakfast a couple of cups of coffee and some burnt toast.

He soon finds himself walking to his car looking up at his apartment and wonders if he'll ever see it again. Will he go to sleep and awaken in a war, or will he ever awaken.

He shakes his head and says to himself not to think such stupid thoughts and continues on to his car.

Knocking comes from Sara's door, she walks over to the door and looks through the peep hole, seeing an old girlfriend. She quickly opens the door, "Mary, how are you?" greeting her with open arms and gesturing her in.

Mary hugs her and says, "Sara, I am doing great. I am here to invite you to my wedding."

"Your wedding? I didn't even know you were seeing anyone."

"His name is Bill and he is the best thing that has ever happened to me."

"Tell me more, how did you meet, when did he ask you and where ..."

The two ladies talk for what seemed to be just a few minutes when a knocking came from

the door and Sara knew that, that had to be Alex. She froze not knowing if she should answer the door or not.

“Sara, are you alright. You’re looking very pale. Did you want me to get the door and tell whomever it is to go away?”

“No, no I’ll get it. But first tell me, when is the all important date?”

“Two and a half months from now and I want you to be my maid of honor.”

Sara doesn’t know what to say, “I’ll be right back.” She walks up to the door and looks through the peep hole once again and this time sees Alex. She thinks maybe he’ll go away, what am I thinking. Of course he won’t go away. She opens the door.

Alex seeing her says, “Well you ready for the big day?” not knowing she has a guest.

“Um, Alex do you remember Mary?” she asks as she motions him to follow her into the kitchen.

Alex, “Mary how are you? Long time no see.”

“Alex I’ve got the most wonderful news, I’m getting married and I’ve just asked Sara if she’ll be my maid of honor. What do you say Sara?”

Sara looks at Alex who looks just as bewildered as she feels.

Sara, “I really wish I could, but I’m leaving town and won’t be back for six months or so.”

Mary, “Oh, can’t you postpone it for awhile?”

Sara, “Sorry, Alex and I have committed ourselves to this job. And if we miss out on it it’ll cost me a lot, contracts and all that.”

Mary, “Maybe I can talk Bill into waiting for you to get back, then after you get back you could still be my maid of honor.”

Sara, “You know I’d love to be your maid of honor, but you shouldn’t wait because of me. You got this man now, don’t take a chance of losing him.”

Mary, “Oh, but I want you to be there.”

Sara, “I know you’ll do fine without me. Save me a bunch of pictures and a piece of cake, okay?”

Mary, “You got it. Well I’d better let you two do what you got to do. I’ll call you in six

months and let you know how things are going. Can you write me?"

Sara, "I'll try, but I can't promise you anything."

Mary gets up and starts for the door, while walking, "I hope all goes well and I'll see you when you get back."

Sara walks her to the door and as she is closing the door she says, "I wish you all the best and hope that you have really found the right man. I only wish I could be there, bye."

Mary nods her head and continues down the hallway as Sara closes her door.

Sara turns and looks at Alex, "You know I would have loved to have gone to her wedding."

Alex, "I know you would have and you would have been a great maid of honor. There'll be other chances after we get back."

Sara, "Are you sure?"

Alex looks at her and says, "If you're asking will we awaken, of this I am sure. If you are asking will there be another wedding, well only time will tell."

They leave and Sara finds herself wondering, as they drive along, if she would still be able to make Mary's wedding. "*Maybe the machines will malfunction and I'll be able to make the wedding,*" She thinks to herself.

Alex pulls into the same parking stall he had when they were there the other day, gets out and walks around to Sara's side of the car and opens the door.

"We're here, are you ready for our big appearance?"

"Alex, I'm as ready as I'm ever going to be," as she is saying this she stands and walks with Alex to the back of the car.

Alex opens the trunk and reaches in and grabs Sara small suitcase and then his own and they both begin walking toward the elevators.

"Sara, so you made it for the big day, huh?" a voice comes from ahead of them. Sara looks up in the direction of the voice and sees Mike standing there.

Sara, "Yes I'm here. So how are you?"

Mike, "Good. Did you hear Mary is getting married?"

Sara smiles and then says, "Yes, I know. She was at my apartment this morning," she is

now standing at the desk and continues, "She asked me to be her maid of honor."

Mike, "Well that's nice, I'm just not so sure about the guy she's going to be marrying though."

Sara, "Why, what's wrong with him?"

Mike, "He gives me the willies. He's kind of creepy."

Sara looks at Alex standing next to her. Alex says nothing and then continues on to the elevators.

"Alex, you heard what Mike just said," says Sara as she runs up beside him.

"Sara, if you don't want to go, fine. I'm sure they'll find someone else. But we can't postpone this. We are on a strict schedule and we have to meet the time allotted otherwise we may never go anywhere."

Sara looks at Mike and says, "Tell her Mike. Tell her what you feel."

Mike, "I will. You don't worry about anything, I'll look in on your apartment and let Mary know where you are and why you couldn't tell her."

Sara looks at Mike and nods her head and waves as the elevator doors close. She begins to cry, quietly.

Alex looks over and then puts the suitcases down and gives her a hug. "I'm sure Mike will make sure she doesn't do anything wrong."

The elevator doors open as they reach their destination. Alex reaches down and picks up the suitcases and follows Sara out of the elevator.

They are greeted by Doctor Peterson, "I am so glad you both made it. You are going to be the first people ever to go into hibernation. How does that make you feel?"

Alex, "We are honored sir, but a little apprehensive too."

Doctor Peterson, "Sara?"

Alex, "She's very nervous."

Doctor Peterson, "Yes, yes. I heard your two cents. Sara, are you feeling alright?"

Sara, "I'll be fine sir. It's just like Alex says. I'm feeling a little apprehensive, as well."

Doctor Peterson, "I'm sure that will all pass. Now if the two of you will follow Doctor

Martha Sheppard and Doctor Mark Holt. I'm sure they'll help you feel a whole lot better."

Martha, "How was the rest of your week Sara?"

Sara, "My good friend Mary has finally found someone and is going to get married."

"That's good news. I wish her all the best."

Sara not wanting to say how she really felt says, "Yeah, me too."

They arrive at the special room's door and Doctor Mark Holt opens the door and then waves them all in.

Sara stopping only for a moment turns to see Doctor Peterson waving her on. She smiles turns back and continues on in.

Inside the room were two large bed like capsules in the center of the room. Along the back wall are a number of packages containing items such as food and seeds. Along the right side of the room is another row of different foods in different forms of preservation. To the left is a water and air filtration system with bottles of water and tanks filled with air.

Sara thinks this odd so she asks Martha what those things are all about.

Martha, "We are not only placing you in a chamber to sleep, but we are also testing this equipment through different kinds of problems that may occur while the astronauts are asleep on their long journey. So if there is a problem, we here on Earth can attempt to fix it while they sleep. We even have some of the equipment and vehicles they'll be using on the other planet, upstairs."

Alex overhears that last part and asks, "What kind of vehicles are we talking about here?"

Martha smiles and says, "We'll show you in six months."

Alex, "Hey, something to look forward to once we wake up," he says with a smile on his face as he steps into his closet changing room.

Sara steps into hers and Martha helps her change into a very tight suit. A body suit made of something she's not familiar with. "What is this made of?"

Martha, "It is a new type of material made specifically for this experiment."
Sara looks at Martha and says, "I really wish you wouldn't say experiment."

Martha looks at her and then says, "I'm sorry for that. I keep forgetting just how dangerous you think this is. It's not really, these machines have been tested and re-tested

a million times, or so it would seem.”

Sara, “I know you have the outmost in confidence in these machines, but it still isn’t you going under.”

Martha nods and finishes helping Sara into the suit.

They both walk out to find Alex already standing next to his bed.

Alex, “Wow, Sara you look hot in that thing.”

Sara, “The only reason you say that is because it makes me look like I am almost naked.”

Alex, “Well there is that too,” he says with a big smile.

Alex then gets into his bed and Doctor Mark Holt talks to him in too low a voice. Too low for Sara to make out. He then begins to connect a bunch of wires to Alex’s suit.

Sara looks at Martha and she smiles, Sara then sits herself on the bed and swings her legs over and onto the bed. She then lies her head down and Martha begins to connect the wires to Sara suit.

Martha, “This is so we can monitor you while you sleep. These wires will help us monitor your breathing which will be slowed so slow that it takes a computer to notice how well you are breathing. They also monitor your heart and other body functions. Once we connect the suit we’ll then place this,” she pull out from behind Sara’s head what could be best described as a divers rubber hood, with wires coming out of it.

Martha Places the hood on Sara head and then begins to explain, “This’ll help us to monitor your brains. It’ll let us know if you are having any problems before they occur.” She connects a few more wires and then steps back.

The Sara and Alex climb into what looks like a cigar shaped container.

Sara, “What’s the matter?”

Martha, “Nothing, don’t worry. I’m just waiting for further instructions. Then I’ll close the bonnet and will then communicate with you through an intercom in the bonnet. Okay?”

Sara looks up at her and says, “Okay.”

She sees Martha close the bonnet and walks away, out of her sight.

“Hello Sara do you hear me?”

“Yes, Martha I hear you loud and clear.”

Martha, “Alright, in the suit are a number of needles. Not the kind that poke you but just spray onto your skin. So what you are going to feel are a number of cold areas as the mist penetrates your skin. Here we go.”

Sara even after being alerted to the procedure still jumps as she hears and feels the mist hit her body.

Martha, “Okay, Sara soon you’ll start to feel sleepy, don’t fight it. Just let it happen.”

Sara thinks to herself, “Yeah right, just let it happen.” She no sooner thinks this and she feels herself falling asleep. She starts to panic and hears a voice off in the distance say, “Just let it happen Sara, your going to be alright.”

And the voice fades away, as the lights go out.

What Time Is It

The clock is ticking on Sara's bed when "Malfunctioning" suddenly appears on the display.

This blinks off and on along with a buzzer sounding from the unit for a few minutes.

There was no response, so the machine goes into automatic re-animate mode. And flashes "Auto Awakening Engaged".

The lights go on and one can hear air hissing in the room and inside of the Sara's chamber.

This goes on for fifteen minutes or so and then just as suddenly as it had started the bonnet opens much the same as a door opening.

Sara draws a deep breath and then sits up coughing trying to get her breath. She falls back onto the bed.

Sara opens her eyes and finds she can't see, everything is a blur, everything looks like looking through thick, thick pane of glass. She then tries to lie on her side and finds that she is very stiff and noticing that it is extremely difficult to move yet she is soon able to roll over.

She moves her hand and finds that too to be difficult. She reaches her eye with her hand and begins to rub, she then tries to utter some words and finds she cannot. She tries to swallow and finds no saliva in her throat.

She opens her eyes again and this time she can see out of the one a bit better and can make out that Alex's unit is still closed. She feels alone for all she can see in the dimly lit room is a dusty haze and no other sign of life.

She decides to lie back and try to get herself together and does so for some time.

After awhile feeling stronger, she again tries moving and finds that this time it is a lot easier, seeing better now and tries to get out of her chamber.

She stumbles and almost falls once or twice yet finally finds herself standing next to her chamber, with its help. She moves toward Alex's unit, to see if she can find out if she can wake him, finding his chamber operating, with no sign of opening, anytime soon.

Leaning on his chamber she manages to make her way to the front of the unit and finds its controls. She finds the emergency re-animate button and then presses it. Up pops a message on the screen, it asks, 'Are You Sure You Want To Do This Action, Yes No' She touches the yes side and the machine starts up and soon she can hear hissing coming from within his chamber.

A few minutes go by and she finds that she can almost stand on her own. Her eyes are getting clearer and she manages to notice the water purifier just below the jugs of water she had seen before going under.

The machine buzzes and the bonnet opens and reveals Alex still sleeping. Then suddenly his eyes open and he starts to cough and gasps for air. She tries to talk and is only able to whisper, "Alex, wake up."

He tries to answer her but finds that he cannot talk, or see her.

Sara walks over to where she had seen the water purifier and looks for a way to get herself and Alex a drink.

She finds a small lever on the end of a nozzle and turns it. Out comes what appears to be liquid rust. She lets it run and it eventually it clears up. She presses her dry lips to it and begins to swallow.

It hurts at first, but she soon finds that as the water wets her throat it begins to get easier to swallow. The water tastes tinny but she is so thirsty she cares not. She also splashes water on her face and in her eyes. After she has had her fill, she then goes back to see how Alex is doing. She finds him lying on his side still trying to talk.

"Alex," she notices it is much easier to talk now, "you've got to get up," she says this as she reaches down and helps him out of the chamber.

She helps him stumble over to the water purifier and shows him where to drink. As he is filling his thirst she looks around. She finds that there are no lights on, outside of the chamber. She walks over to the door and attempts to open it. The door knob won't turn. She looks beside the door next to the knob and notices a key pad.

"Alex do you know the password?"

Alex, now standing upright, looking at her he attempts to look at what it is she is looking at, but his eyes still won't focus. "It's really simple," he whispers in a hoarse voice, "1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6."

Sara presses the keys and the door buzzes. The lights go on, on the other side of the door as she opens it. With ease the door knob turns and the door opens, air rushes past her, she steps out of the outer room and begins to cough in the stagnant air, she is now breathing.

She can hear the fans starting and can tell that the ventilation will clean the air. So she steps back into the chamber room and closes the door, in order to give the ventilation enough time to clean the air.

She looks at Alex and asks, "What is going on?"

Alex shakes his head and replies, "I wish I could give you an answer," his voice a bit clearer now.

She goes and helps Alex so he can walk to the windows so that they can both look out and see if they can see something, or someone, anything to tell them what is going on.

Sara, "It looks old and dusty. Like there hasn't been anyone in there for years."

Alex now has enough strength to walk on his own and is now able to see better says, "I don't like the looks of things. This isn't right. I mean I did say to you that we'd wake up, but as for this, well ..." he coughs.

They both stand looking for a time as their strength grows, so does their curiosity.

Sara, "The air purifier has been on for about 20 minutes, the air should be breathable." She no sooner finishes saying this, opens the door and then steps out.

This time she doesn't begin to cough, so she steps away from the door and toward the elevator. She arrives there and presses the button, nothing happens.

"Alex the elevators don't work."

He walks up to her and looks down and notices that the main switch is off. "I'll go find the key and you take a break. You're not looking so good." He notices how white her skin is and she looks at him and says, "You don't look like a bill of health yourself."

Alex laughs as he enters the chamber room and walks out with his pass cards and keys. He walks over to the elevator and puts his key in and then turns it. The light, lights up on the up and down buttons.

Sara reaches over and presses the up button.

Soon one could hear the hum of the motors and something moving behind the elevator doors.

The doors swing open and the two of them step in. Sara presses the up button inside and the doors close as the elevator begins its ascent.

Third floor ... Second Floor ... then suddenly the elevator stops.

Alex presses the up button and the elevator goes down then opens on the second floor.

Sara sees what appears to be a large room full of offices, cubicles. Desks with their computer stations some of them with their blinking little lights still on, as though they were waiting for their owner to arrive soon.

Alex, “The stairs are this way,” he motions and starts to walk.

Sara follows him like a lost puppy, unsure of just where to go.

Alex opens the door marked staircase and steps through, Sara is right behind him. They walk up the one remaining flight to another door. It swings open on a floor in a wide open area.

They step through the doorway and gaze at the well lit room and see debris scattered all over the floor and dust over the debris and everything else.

Sara notices a figure sitting in the chair at the guards station, “Mike, is that you?” she hollers as she walks past Alex at a quick paces toward the desk. She arrives at the desk and reaches over to grab the guards shoulder and then turns him around to be greeted by a grizzle sight a skeleton were there should be the face of a man.

“Aaaaaaah!” she screams. She gathers herself enough to look at its ID and sees ‘MIKE’ in bold letters.

She falls to her knees, face in hands crying.

Alex reaches her and kneels down beside her, “Sara, you’ve got to pick yourself up and we’ll get through this.”

“Alex, what’s going on? What happened?”

“Those are two very good questions. All I can say right now is I don’t know for sure.”

“What is it that you’re not sure about?”

“Well, I think there must have been an earthquake or something, a big one by the looks of things. And we may have been buried and forgotten.” He says this looking in the direction of his car and sees that the ceiling has caved in on the parking lot, making that way in and out blocked for good.

“If that’s the case, what do we do?”

“There was more than just one hole cut into this mountain and I have a good idea where I can find out where it might be. I think the best way is to go back to that computer room and it may give us a schematic, or a layout of the place.”

“How can you be sure?”

“I’m not, but what other way do we have at this time?”

“I guess you’re right. I can’t stop thinking about Mike and his family. They must miss

him,” she pauses for awhile and then asks, “Do those beds have how long we were asleep on them?”

“Better than that, they’ve got the current date and the date they placed us under. Why?”

“Are you sure this is only six months later?”

“I imagine they most likely set the timers, to make sure that they’d work.”

“I’ll go check there and you find out about the computers,” says Sara as she leaves for the elevator, seeing how they were on the second floor now.

Alex finds a terminal on and the monitor still working, he types in a request for a layout of the place and finds that, that information to be restricted. He wonders if his password would give him access. He types it in.

The computer buzzes for awhile and then a full drawing of the place appears on the screen. He then presses print screen on the keyboard and another machine not far from him starts to hum.

Alex walks over to the machine and notes that he has to wait for the machine to warm up. So he stands there and waits.

Sara gets to the chamber and walks over to the closest unit and notices the word malfunction blinking on her display. She scans the buttons with her eyes hoping to find a button that might help her to determine what button does what, namely the date.

She then notices a button partly faded due to the dust on it stating date. She presses it and then looks back at the display. Noting the number on the display it burns into her brain, she stumbles backward and sits down in the other unit.

Shaking off the feeling of shock she thinks she read it wrong or she pressed the wrong button, so she goes to the second chamber and looks at its display. On this unit she doesn’t have to press any buttons, it reads ‘2374.07.29’

She looks for the “set” button and presses it 2047.08.19

She then presses the button that says “time end” and another number appears ‘326.10.21apx’

She walks back over to the area she was just sitting in and sits back down.

A few minutes later Alex walks in with a smile on his face, but when he sees her face all white as if she had seen a ghost, all his happiness disappears. He asks her, “What is the matter?”

Sara turns and looks at him and says, Look at the display on this bed.

Alex looks and says “There has got to be something wrong with this, we couldn’t have gone back in time.”

Sara looks at him and says, “No stupid that isn’t the date,” after saying this she stands up and presses the date button.

Alex looks and says nothing, but goes almost completely white as he falls back on his behind.

He looks up at Sara now standing over him and asks, “How many years was that?”

Sara, “That was more than 326 years.”

Alex, “That’s why I had to print this out ten times; I had to find a good piece of paper. Even this isn’t all that good. Look at how dim it is,” he is still in shock as he says this and then comes out of it.

“Over 300 years. Sara, I didn’t know.”

“Alex, how could you. This wasn’t planned, of that I’m sure. It just happened and now we have to see if there is another way out. Does the map show a way out?”

“Yes, it shows two other ways aside from the parking lot.”

“Did you find your car?”

“No, it was buried under a ton of rock, but if we go up to the guard area and head to the left instead of the right, we should be able to get to a large storage area that has an opening outside.”

Sara, “Okay, then let’s see if we can go that way.”

They both head back to the elevator up to the second floor and then up the stairs into the guard area, they turn left and come to another door, locked. Alex finds out that his card or keys won’t work, after trying to open it.

Sara, “What’s the matter?”

“Doors locked.”

“Smash it in, or something.”

Alex looks at her and then thinks well it’s been over 300 years. So he takes a couple of steps back and throws himself at the door.

Alex bounces off just as if he were made of rubber, then falls to the floor holding his shoulder.

Alex, "Even after 300 years, it's still got my respect."

Sara, smiles as she sees him on the floor, in pain and yet is still able to say what he just said.

"If you've enjoyed the show, maybe you can now go over to the front desk and see if you can find a card or keys."

Sara looks at the desk and starts to tear up.

Alex sees this and as he is getting up says, "I'll look and you see if you can clean up the keypad so I can see the numbers and letters better."

Sara, "Thank you, I'll do that."

Alex walks over to the desk and walks around behind it and starts to look around. He glances at the key ring hanging from the side of Mike's pants on his belt. So he reaches over and grabs it. He then decides to start looking in his pockets for the cards.

He finds a card holder in his right pocket and pulls it out and sees three cards in it. He then stands up straight and looks at Sara. "Mike had them all along."

Sara smiles, knowing that Alex was doing his best to make light of the whole thing, knowing how she felt for the guy.

Alex walks around the desk and heads back for the door. Upon getting there he starts trying the different cards, none of which works.

"The magnetic strips must be no longer any good, or the card lock has no power."

Sara, "Try the keys."

Alex doesn't say anything just does what she asks and tries about four of the keys out of seventeen and then the fifth one turns the lock. "We're in," he exclaims as he opens the door into darkness.

Alex, "There must be a light switch here somewhere," he says as he reaches further and further around the corner. Then finally, "Found them!"

Sara hears a number of clicks as Alex turn on the entire panel of switches. The room slowly begins to light up. At first one can hardly tell the lights were even on, but slowly they begin glowing brighter and brighter, until finally one could start to make

out different shapes.

At first, one can only see shadows of what appeared to be indiscernible objects. As the light gets brighter one could see that these objects were the machines that were going to be used on the new planet.

Once it was light enough in the room one could tell that a few lights were not going to work. For what reason one could only guess, they may have been burned out long ago, or over time they just stopped working. They could see the vehicles plainly now.

The closest one was a four wheel, it looks like a dune buggy, but it wasn't going anywhere the rubber tires were so badly broken down all one had to do to remove them was pick it off. The rubber had rotted almost completely off of the rims.

The second vehicle was shaped like a van, it too had wheels falling off.

The best way to describe the third one was it looked more like an armoured motorhome, with three satellite dishes on its roof. Two of the dishes were rather big and on their backs and the third little one was more rectangular shaped and remained upright.

The top also had two machine gun tripods, with a black metal rod coming out were the guns belonged.

Alex gets a little closer and finds that this machine has no wheels, but rather tank like tracks, with the exception of the front, having two rubber looking tires. But they weren't flat, or rotting. He gets up next to them and notices that they are not made of rubber, but rather a substance that closely resembles a kind of plastic. This was one of the substances that were replacing rare materials like rubber. Rubber and oil are, to name a few items, are hard to come by, so scientists had been experimenting with new composites to replace rubber. Alex believes this is what they'd come up with.

"I think this one is going to work," says Alex as he looks for a way inside.

Sara walks along beside him and asks, "Work for what?"

"Work as a means of transportation."

"To where?"

"Anywhere but here," he answers somewhat grumpily.

"Is there something wrong with me?"

Alex looks at her bewildered and then realizes what and how he had just answered her so says, "There isn't anything wrong with you. I just feel we might stand a better chance out there in this, rather than by walking."

“I’m sorry for being so snappy; it’s just that we’ve missed it all. Mary getting married and finding a lifelong partner. You know, me getting married to the right guy.”

Alex looks at her with a heavy heart and says, “I’m sure you’ll find him and then the two of you can go far, far away from me.”

Sara, looks at him and then realizes what she had just said, “I meant that we could be alone and if we go away from here, how are we going to survive and how do you know that there isn’t someone coming to find us.”

Alex hears what she just said and is not quite sure as to what to say, without upsetting her so says nothing.

The two of them load the motor home, for lack of a better word, with everything they can find. The food in the chamber, the water purifier and packages marked seeds.

They find a small freezer that they move into the motor home. It’s marked ‘Frozen Embryo’s/Live Stock’.

Alex sits down in the captains’ chair at the front of the motor home and the front panel in front of him lights up and he hears a voice.

“Good afternoon sir. How may I help you today?”

Alex almost jumps out of his seat, “Who’s there?”

“This is the computer of this mobile exploration unit. How can I help you today sir?”

“This machine has artificial intelligence?”

“That is correct. How may I help you today sir?”

“Sweet,” exclaims Alex.

“I am not sure what it is you would like that is sweet, sir.”

Alex laughs and is looking around the dashboard when Sara walks up, “Who are you talking too?”

Alex looks at her with a big smile and says, “The motorhome.”

“Are you nuts? And I suppose it’s talking back too,” she replies in a huffy voice.

“As a matter of fact, say something machine.”

Alex waits and there is no response.

“Alex, grow up,” says Sara as she walks away, to get more supplies.

Alex looks on the dashboard and then says, “What are you?”

“I am an automated computer that can do most things a driver can do and more. I have sensors that allow me to scan up to eighty kilometers in any direction. I maintain life support and can be used in a battle, for defense.”

Alex, “What should I call you?”

“They called me M.I.C 101, short for mobile intelligent cruiser 101.”

“Why 101?”

“There were 10 different designs before this unit and the 1 is for being the first unit, of this design.”

Alex, “Can you scan, beyond the cave walls and tell me what is out there?”

“This units power supply is too low for anything else, but communications.”

“Tell me how to get you to full power.”

“In the rear compartment, outside, is a small compartment. Inside is a power cord that will plug into the wall outlet.”

Alex gets out of the chair and out of the motor home then he heads to the rear and finds a small door. He presses it and it then opens. He reaches inside and finds the cord that MIC 101 had just described and pulls it out.

He then looks for the plug on the wall that matches this unusual male end. He soon sees it and begins walking toward it, but is stopped short. He tugs it and looks inside and finds that all of the cord has unwound.

He places the cord down and walks back to the front of the motor home then stepping in asks, “Is there enough power in the vehicle to back up?”

“I am sorry, this unit’s power supply is too low, for anything aside from communications.”

Alex steps back down and then notices Sara coming in with another load of food stuffs. “Sara, could you put that down and give me a hand pushing this thing back toward the wall?”

Sara looks at the vehicle and then back at Alex, then she says, "You are nuts. How do you think that the two of us are going to be able to push that thing, on tracks, anywhere?"

Alex looks down at the tracks, having forgotten about them, "Sorry, your right. We can't push it. But we have got to move it backward in order to power it up."

Sara, "Maybe there is some pulley that could move it back for us, but I know we're not going to be able to do it."

"Yeah, you're right, I'll look over here if you look over there."

"Okay."

They both look around and Sara sees something then asks, "What's this?"

Alex walks over to where she is standing and then turns his head to see a box marked "Hydrogen Cells".

Alex smiles and says, "You struck the mother load Sara. Give me a hand and we'll move this box on board."

They both reach one end of the box and find, "Alex, this box must weigh a ton. I can't move it."

Alex finds his end to be just as bad, so he opens the box up and looks inside.

"Sara, we're going to have to move these in one at a time," he no sooner finished what he was saying and notices that Sara wasn't there.

He hears a rattling sound coming from just ahead of him and notices Sara pushing a dolly.

"Where did you find that?"

"I noticed it just a few minutes ago when I was looking for a pulley. This will work, won't it?"

Alex smiles and says, "Like a dream, just like a dream."

Where Have All The People Gone?

Once they get the Hydrogen Cells on board and connected the onboard computer tells Alex that it has enough power now to back up and charge its other batteries.

It takes almost two days to charge the batteries, enough time for Alex and Sara to find all that the base had to offer and then some.

They grabbed extra computer parts listed by the MIC 101 as well as all foods that were still good.

They found their own clothes and changed into them. Sara says, "They're more comfortable."

Alex thinks it's because they showed too much of her figure, something he noticed she let him see less and less of.

The motorhome is fully powered. Alex and Sara get into it and are ready to leave when it occurs to Alex that he hadn't scanned outside of the main doors.

"Computer, MIC, scans outside these walls and let us know if we can drive through and what the weather is like."

One could hear the dish on the roof of the motorhome moving and buzzing as it does and then, "All is clear. Winds are in excess of 60 kilometers per hour and the temperature 14 Degrees Celsius."

Alex looks at Sara and asks, "Isn't it midsummer?"

Sara, "Computer, what month is it?"

"It is the month of July."

Sara, "Are there any life signs outside?"

"Negative."

Alex, "Is there any plant life within your scanner range?"

"Negative."

Alex, "Can you gain access to any satellites?"

"Not inside the mountain."

Sara, "Can you open and close the main doors?"

“Yes I can. Would you like me to open them now?”

Sara looks at Alex and he looks just as unsure as she does.

Alex, “Computer, do the winds ever slow down?”

“According to long range scans it appears this is the normal wind speed for this area. Until I am able to get outside, I am unable to do a complete and thorough scan.”

Sara, “Computer, what are the O2 readings outside? Is it life as we know it?”

“Analysis shows that life would not be able to survive long, with the current air supply.”

Alex, “You are a self contained unit, correct?”

“I can support life almost indefinitely.”

Alex, “Open the doors and let’s get out of here.”

Sara, “Are you sure?”

“Do you want to stay in here for the rest of our lives?”

She looks at him sighs and says, “no...”

“Computer ...”

“Doors are beginning to open, sir.”

As they begin to rise, in rushes the wind and the sand, covering everything inside. The doors reach their safe distance and the motor home starts moving, on its own, out the door.

Alex and Sara both sit back and watch as they exit the mountain. They see very little ahead of them due to the sand storm currently blowing around them.

Alex looks in the rear view mirror and sees that they are now outside of the mountain and can still make out the doors as they close. They disappear as they then turn into the side of the mountain.

The vehicle stops.

Alex, “Computer, is there something wrong?”

“Negative.”

Alex, "Why have we stopped?"

"You said move outside of the mountain. You haven't set a course."

Alex smiles, and then says, "Can you find any satellites?"

"One moment. This may take some time."

They sit listening to the wind against the side of the vehicle, as it whistles by. They both just spend time looking to see if they can find anything that remotely looks familiar to themselves and yet see nothing.

The computer breaks the silence when it says, "I have located two satellites in range. Both units are working. Both units need commands to gain access."

"Computer, can you bypass any of their safe guards?"

"I will try."

Sara, "What do you think you are going to gain by getting connected to those satellites?"

Alex, "I hope to see if there are any areas of green left on Earth."

Sara, "Oh, What if you don't, what then?"

"Let's just see if the computer can connect to one of those satellites first, then we'll talk about the other."

They both sit waiting, a few minutes goes by and Sara says, "This isn't going to work, that computer isn't going to get anywhere with those satellites."

She no sooner finishes her sentence when.

"I have connected with both satellites. I can get you information on most of the North American continent."

Alex, "Can they locate any areas of new growth, green growth, or human life?"

"I am checking," a few minutes goes by and the computer says, "There is an area of green growth north east of your current location, as for human life signs, I see none."

Alex, "How far, to the new growth?"

"Approximately 403 kilometers, by aircraft."

Alex, "How far is it by land?"

“The terrain varies. It would depend on which route you wish to take.”

“Can you show me a geographical map?”

On the screen appears the land mass, showing where they are and the green vegetation.

Alex begins to study it when he notices something odd about. “Computer, this doesn’t look like North America. Are you sure you are showing me the right map?”

“This is a live feed from one of the satellites.”

Alex looks again and notices the entire west coast was altered. There was no sign of Vancouver Island or the peninsula off of the west coast.

He studied it even closer and realizes that almost the entire west coast of the United States was missing.

He says aloud, “It’s all gone, the whole west coast is gone.”

Sara, “What do you mean it’s gone?”

Not realizing he had said it aloud says, “What, are you talking about?”

Sara, “You said that the west coast is gone.”

Alex, now not sure how to say this to her says, “Come here. I have something to show you.”

Sara moves over next to him and then Alex asks, “Computer, can you bring up an old map of North America, on the same screen and overlap it onto this one?”

“How old would you like it?”

“About 400 years ago.”

Up pops another map and one can now see more clearly just how much of the west coast is missing.

Sara begins to cry.

Alex, “Something big must have happened. I’m not sure what but it must have been big to cause that to have happened.”

Sara, “What could have caused it?”

Alex, “That’s a very good question maybe we can find out. Computer, do you or these

satellites have any information on just what happened, to cause this?"

"My logs state nothing of this. I will check with the two satellites."

A few minutes pass and the computer comes back and says, "I have been able to retrieve the recordings for the past three hundred and fifty years, from one of the satellites. There is a lot of information to land mass changes over the last 350 years."

Alex, "Can you break it down into a short story. Say about 30 minutes?"

There is some silence for awhile and then the computer says, "Here is a short narrated version of what has been happening the past 350 years."

On the screen appears North America, the way it was 350 years ago. Then suddenly the earth shakes and water appears out of nowhere all over the west and east coasts and inland. Then the west coast begins to sink, throwing massive amounts of dirt up into the upper atmosphere, also one can see masses of dirt or plumes of ash blow-up into the air. Soon the entire planet, or what they could see of it, was covered with dust and ash.

They watch as the year and month indicator in the corner of the screen ticks by the years like seconds on a clock. The earth is hidden from their view for almost 75 years. Once they can clearly see it again, it is covered with ice.

From the far north to the far south, nothing but ice can be seen. Then just as suddenly as the dirt had filled the sky, the ice begins to melt and pulls back to reveal a dead, new world, where there was once life and now there is none.

As the ice creeps back further and further one can begin to make out small patches of green and then they begin growing bigger and then stops.

Alex, "Computer, is that it?"

"That is all that the satellites logs contain."

"Could you slow the beginning down to about ten times that of normal speed and just show up to where the earth is covered with dirt in the upper atmosphere?"

On the screen appears the old world, one can make out the cities and roadways. Then the earth shakes and shakes again and again and water appears to swallow the east and west coasts, then it subsides and suddenly the earth begins to shake again, but this time the west coast sinks into the ocean.

This time however Alex notices rings of dirt appearing in the upper atmosphere, before the west coast sinks and then more after it sinks.

Alex, "Okay, that's enough, computer. Bring back the current map and I'll let you know

when I am ready. Once I program the location into your system, can you head in that direction?"

"Yes sir, I can drive there with very little assistance."

Alex sits down in front of a screen and starts to study the map.

A few hours go by and Sara makes them something to eat, out of the packets that they had found.

"Alex, you've got to eat."

"Alex looks at her and says, "Thank you, Sara." He continues to watch her as she walks away and then asks, "Sara, what if we are the only two human beings left alive on Earth?"

Sara turns and looks at Alex then answers him, "I've been thinking about that for some time now. I still don't know how to answer that. But I can say I feel we've been robbed, taken away from us the life we've always known. To be left here alone, I don't know, I just don't know." She turns and walks back over to where she had been sitting and sits back down and continues eating her meal, as she is caught up in her own thoughts.

Alex turns and pretends to be studying the map when he is trying to think of something to say to her, but is unable to think of a single thing.

After careful study Alex comes up with a way, "Computer, this is the way I think best suits us, please confirm."

Alex uses a stick that looks like a pencil and draws out the route he thinks would be the fastest.

The computer goes over it and comes back with a few changes, "There are a few things in the way that may slow us down so I have made another suggestion that only adds on two more days."

Alex, "How long do you estimate it'll take us to get to that location?"

"It will take approximately 69 days."

Sara, "And what will we find when we get there?"

"Trees and other vegetation."

Sara, "Then why are we going there?" She begins to cry.

Alex, "Because we need some place to grow new food stuffs and I hope that there'll be

air there that we can breathe.”

Sara sits back down and says nothing more for the rest of the day.

They spend the next week saying very little to one another, the whole time Alex worrying about his friend, wondering if she is going to be able to deal with all that has happened.

They are on the road for about 19 days and find themselves approaching an old city, so Alex decides to go in and see if he can find more information on what happened to change earth into what it is today.

Alex, “Computer, how is the air in this area. Is it breathable?”

“The air is very thin here. You will need to use an added air supply to assist you in breathing.”

“Sara, are you going to be alright?”

“What do you mean, I’m going with you.”

Alex decides not to argue with her, but rather helps her with her air supply.

They both walk into the air lock together and close the door behind themselves and then open the outside door.

Alex leads the way into the old city and is soon able to find the local newspaper building.

They walk into the building looking for something that will tell them what happened.

They search for about an hour and are about to give up when Alex finds on the third floor a room that processes recording and pictures.

Alex finds a few recording disks and video crystals that seemed to be the last recording that this paper ever made.

They take them back to the motor home to review them.

Alex sits himself down in front of the viewer and places the crystal in the optical player and presses play.

There is some static at first and then a picture appears with a man standing in a dark setting.

“Are we on? My name is unimportant, I’m just hoping that someday someone will find this recording and know what happened to mankind. Why we died off or almost died off.”

“It has been three months now and the atmosphere isn’t clearing. It grows colder by the day. Soon our power supply will run out and we will all perish from the cold. I only hope that mankind survives this cataclysm and learns from his mistakes.”

“The world is dieing and we’re not sure how much longer this dust cloud will remain, blocking out the sun.”

“People with breathing problems, were the first to go. The dust in the air and the oxygen depleting made it impossible for them to breathe.”

“We never saw it coming, until it was too late. An asteroid as big as Mount Saint Helens, hit just off the coast of India. It sent waves of fire clean across Asia, Europe and Africa. They didn’t even know what hit them, lucky bastards.”

“It sent up tons of dirt into the upper atmosphere and caused massive earthquakes, all over the world. Then both of the coasts were hit with tidal waves, they swept their way inland for miles and to make things worse the volcanoes all on the west coast and in our great park blow up even more dust and gas, went into the upper atmosphere.”

“We thought it was all over, and then the west coast gave way and threw tons more into the upper atmosphere, but not before triggering almost every volcano in the world to erupt.”

“Now the air grows thin and it gets harder and harder to breathe outside. Soon it will be impossible to breathe even inside. But I fear the cold will likely kill us all before that happens.”

“Earth is all but dead. Every living creature is dead, all but a few humans to stubborn to lie down. I only hope that someone will find these recordings and understand them and most importantly, learn, learn from our mistakes. Don’t take mother Earth for granted, she kicks back and kicks back hard.”

The recording ends and there is nothing more said. They now knew what had happened and that they may be the last two human beings alive.

“That can’t be, no way. That just can’t be,” exclaims Sara.

“Sara, you’ve got to calm down. You’re going to have to adjust, you’ve got to let it go.”

“LET GO!” “LET GO!” she breaks down and begins crying and falls to her knees and then to the floor.

Alex stands up and begins to walk toward her and then stops, not knowing what to do he approaches her hesitantly, Alex reaches down to try and comfort her.

She pulls away, so Alex tries again and this time she doesn't, instead she reaches out and grabs Alex in a hug, then continues to cry even harder than before.

The Way Things Are

Staying at the current location for a few days, helps Sara to calm down. Alex manages to talk her into thinking that they may not be the only humans left alive.

He didn't like lying to her, but felt she wouldn't take it any other way. When she finds out for sure that they are alone, with just each other, Alex is hoping that she'll be stronger then.

Alex hopes he is ready for such a thing and also has feelings for Sara, but from the start has never known how to express his innermost hopes and dreams to her.

For when he had bared a little of just how he felt, well she might as well have slapped him in the face. Rejection from the only woman left on earth. It sure wasn't doing his ego any good.

At times he wondered why he was doing this, but as he kept telling himself life must go on.

They went on their way, finally. Not talking much for fear that just about anything might send her off again.

To Alex it was like walking on egg shells, not knowing if this or that would send her off into a fit or an uncontrollable rage, or curl up into a ball of tears.

The next few weeks went by slowly, but they made good time getting closer to the green on the screen every day. And making sure not to say anything wrong to Sara.

They were about two days from the location on the map and Alex had the computer stop and tries to get a better scan of what was ahead. Hopefully some life, but again the computer said nothing aside from the trees and other vegetation.

They continued on and the night before they arrived, Alex thought that he'd stop and make their way there in the morning, rather than late evening.

Alex sat next to Sara and asked, "How are you today?"

"I'm fine, Alex. Is there life ahead?"

"I'm not going to lie to you or try and get your hopes up. The only life ahead is vegetation. No animal life."

"Well then we'll go onto the next one then."

"Sara, this is the biggest one. This one can support life."

“So, we have to keep looking.”

“When we arrive tomorrow, I would like to set up camp and maybe build a home for us.”

“Well, you can do that. I’ll go on.”

Alex wondered how he was going to convince her that there might be no others to find.

“Sara you need some rest. When we get there tomorrow I’ll have you stay with me until I’ve built a shelter.”

“Alex, I’m going on.”

“Sara, I need the motor home until at least I’ve built myself a shelter.”

“Well ... ok, but after the shelter, I’m on my way.”

Alex agreed with her hoping and wondering if she would change her mind.

The next morning came with wide eyes in both Alex’s case and Sara’s. They leave the rest area and continue on to their way to destiny. They arrive at the crest of a hill and the sensors show a green valley beyond, reaching out for miles. Climbing the hill they reach the top and Alex looks down at something that he believed was the most beautiful thing he had seen, all his life.

A forest of trees divided only by a small river running through the center of it, a picture perfect land untouched by man. There were no buildings anywhere to be seen, no gates or fences, no pavement, walkways, or signs saying do not walk on the grass, no swings or ropes on the trees to swing over the river.

He pulls out a set of binoculars and the first thing he sees are berry bushes everywhere and different trees full of fruit.

This reminds him of an old story, told to him when he was but a child. A story read from the bible about the Garden of Eden.

He turns and looks at Sara staring in amazement at something she had never seen before, a garden and flowers growing wild. Colors too numerous to describe and varied in shapes and sizes

“What do you think?” asks Alex.

“It’s breathtaking.” She replies and continues looking, as though she were already lost in it.

Alex pushes the controls on forward and the two of them continue to watch in

amazement, as the vehicle gets closer and closer to the first blades of grass.

Just as they arrive on the edge of green Alex turns the motorhome doors toward the green and stops.

The two of them look at one another and then walk to the one door directly outside.

Alex reaches up and presses a button that reads the level of O2.

Sara, "Well, can we breathe it?"

Alex looks at her and smiles and then replies, "It's almost the same as in here."

Sara reaches down and turns the knob of the door that leads directly to the outside atmosphere. The door swings open and the smells and different scents fill their nostrils. One could only be described as honey suckle, yet so much more.

The smell was intoxicating and soon the two of them found themselves running for the trees, hopping and skipping as though they both were 13 again.

Alex jumping with joy falls in the grass and rolls laughing . He grabs a handful of grass and places it in his face and inhales deeply.

Sara soon follows and she finds that this is heaven on earth, with the sweet smells and the green grass. She soon finds herself lying face up staring at the blue, blue sky. Watching as small clouds slowly float on past.

Alex soon finds where some of the marvelous smells are coming from and picks a handful of them and mashes them into his mouth and onto his face. He lets the juices flow down his cheeks and laughs as he fills himself with all the different kinds of berries.

"Sara, Sara! You've got to come over here. These berries are oh so divine. Come and try some."

Sara rolls onto her side and looks at him and begins to laugh, "What have you done? You're purple and red all over your face and on your clothes."

Alex laughs, "Come and taste these berries that are so sweet and heavenly, they awaken your taste buds. They are like nothing I've ever had before."

Sara stands and runs for the bushes and then begins to pick and eat.

They both eat their fill and then continue on looking and studying the trees and the grass.

They soon find themselves in an orchard, the trees filled with apples, oranges, lemons and pears.

They pick a few and then continue on and soon find circles of corn. And not far from them a number of vines producing peas and beans.

Alex turns and looks at the oasis and then turns and looks at Sara. His thoughts of her leaving were now tearing him apart.

He feels that now is the time, the one and only chance he'll ever get to tell her, "Sara, I love you."

She looks at him and then says, "I love you too."

Alex, "No, I mean I LOVE YOU."

She looks into his eyes and sees he is about to tear up, she then says, "I know you do. Alex I've known for a long time. I just thought you'd never say anything."

"What do you mean?"

"I had hoped you would for a very long time and when you didn't I thought you had lost interest, until I came back. I seen you were glad that I hadn't found someone, yet I was still not sure."

"Why didn't you say something, let me know, anything?"

"I guess. I needed to hear you say it first."

Alex looks into Sara's eyes.

Sara looks into his

The two of them reach for one another, embrace and then kiss. They seem to float to the ground in each other's arms fearing that if one lets go now this moment will never return.

Hours seem like minutes and minutes like a whisper in time and before they know it they find themselves making love for what seems to be all day.

They find themselves walking, even though it felt more like floating back to the motor home and continue to embrace one another for the rest of the night.

The next morning Sara looks into Alex's eyes and says, "I'm so sorry for being the way I was, it's just that it's hard being the only two people left on earth. It's doesn't have anything to do with you, it's just that I had my life all planned. I was so caught up in my dream, I didn't see what I had right here in front of me all this time. A man who loves me and who would take me broken or anyway he could. I am sorry Alex."

Alex takes a big breathe, "I know what you've wanted all your life Sara and I've always been the one hoping that you would truly find what it is that you are looking for. I too have had dreams. I was never going to tell you about them, I was always hoping you would include me in them. In some ways I am glad the two of us are here and like you I too miss our friends and wish they were all here right now but I've loved you from the first time I saw you and still do. I guess I always would have, had you found someone else. "

"My only hope now is that we can make a new dream together. Something the two of us have never thought of. A dream creating a new life on this planet that man destroyed and we now have a chance of making it better then it ever was."

They kiss and hold one another again.

Sara says, "I would be honored to be your Eve."

Alex, "And I your Adam." They lay down embracing one another.

As this is happening, static comes over the radio, "Hisses... "We"... hisses.... "And" ... we'll take ... want."

"... be there soon."

"They won't know what hit them."