

## The Chosen

Morning beckons, shrouded in a diaphanous pink haze. But is it morning? I don't know how long I've been asleep. My neck hurts and my eyes feel gritty. Sleep. Something I used to take for granted, a welcome respite... a release from the tedium of the day. Now I catch a few hours when I can. When I feel safe.

The pocket calendar attached to the visor hides a lighted mirror that I use to check my bloodshot eyes, which appear to be getting worse. July 13 is circled in red; five large slashes appear after that date.

I stare at my new wristwatch, a birthday gift from my husband.

"It's lovely, but why do I need a watch?" I remember asking him.

He smiled that lopsided grin that nearly knocked me over the first time I met him. "You never know, it might come in handy. Just wear it. You'll always know what time it is," he replied.

Next to me, on the passenger seat, sits a small rectangular glass bottle humming softly. I say glass, but it must be another type of material because there were no broken shards when these bottles began falling from the sky.

"Is it hailing?" Dave asked as we were eating breakfast. We both jumped up and ran to the kitchen window, expecting to see an unusual summer phenomenon. What we didn't expect to see were these small bottles pelting the earth.

"What the hell?" was all Dave could say.

"Do you think this is a situation like the fish falling from the sky in Blue Ridge, Georgia?" I asked. "Or maybe some plane lost its cargo?"

As we walked to the front porch, Dave insisted that I stay inside.

"I'm not letting you go out alone," I replied. "I'm just as curious as you are."

"Kylene..."

"Save your breath..."

Holding hands, we stepped onto our covered porch. The noise intensified.

Next door, our neighbor covered himself with a golf umbrella and ventured gingerly across his lawn. He stood transfixed then bent down to pick up a bottle.

"Hey, there's a piece of paper with a message inside," he shouted to us.

He placed the top of the bottle between his teeth and removed the lid. In an instant, a red light emitted from the bottle and he collapsed into the lavender patch at the front of his lawn.

Across the street, the Davidson's three boys flew out the front door, ran into the street and started picking up bottles.

"Hey, stop!" Dave yelled as they opened the bottles. But it was too late. Three red blasts hit the boys. We watched as they fell like ragdolls.

"Dave I'm scared. What the hell is going on?" He put his arm around me and pulled me to his chest. I could feel his heart beating as he kissed the top of my head.

"I don't know, but I'm going to find out!"

“Don't!” I urged as he pushed me inside the house and ran down the steps. He picked up a few bottles and quickly returned to the cover of the porch.

"Are you frigging crazy?" I yelled from behind the screen door. "Don't open the bottle!"

But he did open it, and a red light streamed out hitting him in the chest. His knees buckled under him as the note inside the bottle drifted to the floor.

A shrill “NO” erupted from my throat as I pushed open the door and fell beside him. God help us I prayed as I covered his body with mine. Crying, angry, unable to grasp what just happened I reach for the slip of paper near his head and crumble it in my right hand.

I don't know how long I clung to Dave. Gradually, an eerie silence covered the house and the porch light came on. I sat up, wiped my face and reached for a bottle sitting on the top step of the porch. I open it ... ready to die.

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I'm sitting in my car at the top of Windy Hill. The floor and front seat are cluttered with clothes and whatever nonperishable food I could stuff in a large canvas bag. I'm determined to locate the small slip of paper that was in Dave's bottle. I find it under a half-eaten bag of pretzels. Smoothing it out, I place it on my right thigh along with the note from my bottle.

The word DEATH screams at me again.

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