

It was dark outside. Everyone in the Iakovidou family was asleep, except the father. He couldn't sleep that night. He had sat down at the kitchen table, drinking slowly a glass of wine, staring at the bills in front of him. They were safe that month. But what about the next? The fields could no longer feed his family, the crops were dead. The bloody weather... The climate was really unstable: days and days of unstoppable rain or extensive droughts destroyed whatever he tried to plant. Agriculture was dying. The situation was tense. Everyone lived with the fear of war, especially now that the planet was running out of food. Water was enough. For now... Another drought like the last one would deplete the countries' stock a lot faster than most people thought. That would mean the end, he knew it. Earth was slowly reaching her expiration date. The soil whispered it to him.

Marios finished his wine and poured himself another glass. War wouldn't break out in Greece first. But it would reach them, soon... They were strategically located, they had water. Athens would fall first and then the surrounding areas, one by one. In Creta, they would have some extra time; they were protected by sea and mountains. They too would fall in the end. The way he saw it, they had approximately two years until the moment of surrender... This thought bothered him. Perhaps they would already be dead by then, from starvation. It was very hard to transport food from other areas and supplies were already low.

A few years back, he had a chance to leave, to go to America and work there. When that company made him an offer, he declined it. He didn't want to leave his village, his country, the graves of his mum and dad. When his wife died, they made another proposal. He rejected it - again. How could he go and leave her in that cold graveyard? Now he regretted it, a bitter feeling. Borders closed shortly after her death, three years ago. All transportation of people and goods was strictly prohibited. Everyone had to fight with their own powers. Poor, Greece... Poor, he!

He finished his drink for the second time, but he didn't get up to get another. He remained seated, with his head rested in his palms and his thoughts scattered all over the place. He was confused... and scared. Yet another night, terror took over and he struggled to breathe. His legs started shaking, everything became blurry. He knew the feeling all too well. He patiently waited several minutes until his heart stopped racing and his breathing was easy again. Then he got up. Panic attacks always strained him of energy, physically and emotionally. It was time for bed.

He went to his sons' room first. Kostis and Dimitris were sleeping peacefully, with the window open. He closed it. It wasn't safe. He left, stepping on his toes, and went to his girls' room. He stood at the door and watched them for a second; the twins were sleeping peacefully. He gave them a kiss on their foreheads and went to his bedroom. His youngest son was still awake, waiting for him, like every night.

"Go to bed, Andrea. We have talked about this a hundred times, you don't have to wait for me". He gave him a hug, tucked him in and lied next to him. He fell asleep instantly.

...

Andreas' loud scream woke him up. He jumped from the bed immediately, alarmed and upset. He looked around nervously, looking for his son. He had fallen from the bed. His wife was so much better at taking good care of him. She knew more about his needs and his problems. Damn! He was doing the best he could. If only he could do more to help. There was

a doctor, the neighbours talked about him with awe, but he absolutely couldn't afford to call him. He got up and took his son in his arms. Then put him back on the bed.

"I have been stupid, my Andrea. This problem has an easy solution. Here is what we can do, big guy" he said with affection and removed everything on his son's side of the bed. Then he pushed it to the wall. "Now we are talking" he said happily and went back to bed, hugging the distraught teenager. "Don't worry, my boy. It is all over now. It will not happen again, I will always look out for you, no matter what. Your dad is here. Alexandra was better, I know. But I am trying and I am getting better, right?" he asked and got some meaningless sounds as an answer. "Uh, I wish you could speak. It would be so much easier if I could understand you... I am sorry, I shouldn't have said that". He sighed. He turned off the light, made himself comfortable and tried to go back to bed, without success.

"What is it, Andrea, my boy? I cannot understand what is happening. What are you showing me?" he said annoyingly. His son's screams and gestures wouldn't stop. He got up, took a deep breath and relaxed. Then he tried again to understand. "What do you want from the table?" he asked when he understood. There are only bills there" he said but the child continued.

He felt immensely tired. He approached his wife's old desk and started looking. God knew what he was hoping to find. He took the bills and stacked them, one on top of the other, and then put them aside. He opened the drawers, just to find them dusty and empty, as usual. He looked at his son. Same gestures. Another sigh. He pulled the drawers and removed them from the desk. He examined them, flipped them and finally put them on the floor. Then he started feeling the desk with his fingers, until he stumbled upon the edges of a rough paper, glued above the left drawer. He looked at his son with a surprised expression. Andrea smiled at him and continued pointing towards the desk.

*What is happening?*

Marios removed the paper slowly; he didn't want to rip it. His hands were heavily shaking. It was yellow, from the humidity of the room, folded in half. His name was written, with calligraphic letters.

"Alexandra" he uttered in pain and sat on the bed. He felt as if his legs suddenly couldn't carry his weight anymore. He started crying. He missed her so much, it was unbearable. The thought alone that he could read something of hers, hear her voice, even if it was just on paper, made his heart melt and race. "Why, Alexandra? Why did you have to go? Why did you leave us? You were so young. You had a full life ahead of you, a husband who adored you and five children who needed you. Why did you choose death? Why did you leave me all alone, my love?" he said, looking at the letter desperately. How could he open it now? He was terrified.

"Thank you, my boy" he finally said and gathered all his courage. He slowly unfolded the letter and waited a couple seconds, until the letters became clear. Then he read.

*My dearest Marie,*

*I miss you terribly. This feeling hurts me, even though I haven't experienced it yet, even though you are in the kitchen right now, just meters away from me. I wish I could fill this letter with encouraging messages and sweet words. Better yet, I wish I didn't have to write this damn letter at all, but things don't always happen the way we want them to.*

*Marie, my love, read this carefully. You were right all along, even though nobody in the village believed you. The weather isn't normal. The end will come, just as you feared, and Earth will be lost. We will be the ones who destroy it until there is nothing left, not even a trace of our kind. The climate will worsen gradually; Earth is still trying to remind us who is in charge. This will only make the situation more tense. Then diseases will come. Famine. Thirst. War. Nobody will win. You and I are already lost, please don't hope. It will be better that way. But our children can survive this. Andreas is the key for their salvation. He can take them with him, when time comes. In reality, since you're reading this, time has come!*

*I'm sorry I can't tell you anything now. If I do, I have to take you with me. I don't want my children to be left alone, orphans in this hell. It is hard for me to leave you behind, but I had to know. I had to make sure they would survive. This was the only way. I will do it tonight, after you go to bed.*

*I love you so much. Be brave, my love. Trust Andreas.*

*I hope to find you again soon.*

*I kiss you softly, your Alexandra.*

Marios folded the letter and pocketed it. He looked at his son, struggling to contain his frustration.

“What the hell is this, Andrea? Why now? Why did you decide to show me something so important after all these years? If I had known she was writing this, if I had known she was planning to do this unspeakable action, I could have helped her in some way, I could have done something to prevent her. I lost her so young... Why?” He asked but he wasn't really waiting for an answer. He sighed.

He approached the bed to tuck him back in. He wanted to go back to the kitchen. He had to read the letter again.

Andreas was on his feet before he reached him. Marios stood there in utter shock. He had never done that before. He never said anything, he never walked, he wasn't strong, he didn't understand much, or so it seemed. And now... Now he was standing in front of him, looking straight into his eyes. A few seconds passed before he even thought to speak. Andreas was again faster.

“You heard her, dad. You have to help me” he heard in his head. Andreas' face was calm, yet the tone of the voice was alarming.

“How?” he said, still confused. Andreas didn't move an inch; his mouth was sealed and his expression vague. But he was hearing his voice crystal clear in his head.

*What is happening?*

“I am not alone, dad. If I am late, they will leave without me and then there is nothing I can do. I won't be able to save them. Wake them up and follow me”.

“Who will leave, Andrea? Have you gone mad, my boy?”

“The Others, dad, the ones who brought me here. The ones that brought *us* here. Hurry!” he yelled. Zero sense. Marios understood nothing. But Alexandra told him to trust him. And he

did. He went and woke everyone up. He helped the twins get dressed and somehow managed to stay calm. How would he leave them? They weren't even five yet.

He held their hands, one at each side. They went out and started running, following Andreas. Nobody understood where they were going; they were merely running. Andreas was the fastest, glancing behind to check on them. They were too slow, he thought in terror. He waited for them and grabbed the twins in his arms. He didn't even stop. Then he yelled again.

"Run, as fast as you can. And then run faster". Time did the same. Andreas was the only one who understood it though. They soon arrived near a steep cliff. Only then did he stop. He checked an imaginary watch on his wrist for the final time.

"We made it. Is everyone okay?"

"Where are we?"

"Dad, we don't have time. Mum left another letter. If you read it, you will have the same fate as her. If you choose not to, you will live long enough to see the end. It is in the kitchen, in the cabinet near the sink. Now say goodbye" he said in a fierce tone.

Marios stood in awe. His wife's words were echoing in his mind. "You and I are already lost, please don't hope. It will be better this way. But our children have hope". If there was a chance to save them, he would grab it, even if it was the last thing he would ever do. He hugged his sons for the final time. He kissed Athanasia and Marianna on their foreheads and whispered some words. He couldn't even remember what he said. His last word was "I love you", uttered in agony and sorrow. Andreas tapped him on the shoulder. He heard a vague sound of engines. Then everything was lost.

When he opened his eyes, he was back home. He run to the rooms, but none of his children were there. They were gone, it was true, he realized and staggered back in the kitchen. He immediately opened the cabinet. Two minutes later he was holding her letter, but he hesitated to open it. He didn't know what was worse: to see everybody die or to cause his own death? Alexandra used a rope, but he was afraid of pain, he was afraid of dying. For a while he wavered, but finally he decided he had to know if his kids were safe. He poured himself a glass of wine and drank it all at once. Then he sat down, in his rocking chair and unfolded the letter, welcoming knowledge and death.

*My dear Marie,*

*I knew it! I knew you would open it. I never doubted the love you have for our children. I've always known how strong your soul is. Thank you for not letting me down.*

*It's time to know. Earth will be lost; mankind, too. But some of us will survive. The Others made it happen. They predicted everything in a way that you and I will never fully grasp. They sent charismatic children to help us. Kids like our Andreas were born within a year all around the globe. They call them shells. Their body was here, but their soul wasn't. That's why he couldn't talk. But he understood everything! He was sending data back home all along, helping the others select the families that deserved to be saved.*

*They will live, my love, far away from us, in a different Galaxy. The Others will take care of them until they come of age. Then time will start for them again. They will be the first*

*generation of a planet who will meet hundreds. They will build a new society, a better one. Don't be scared, everything would be okay.*

*While you are reading this, our children are leaving the planet. Nobody must know. Only the chosen ones will go. If word gets out, the chance will be lost. He Others are very strict. Only the parents can know. They cannot live once they find out. There's more to know, but I wrote enough. It's too dangerous already.*

*Remember that they are safe, happy, and alive. In the envelope there is a pill. See you on the other side.*

*Your Alexandra.*

Marios got up. Fear was gone. Doubts had disappeared. He swallowed the pill and burnt the letter. He lied down and passed away shortly after. Alexandra was there the whole time, watching over him. She knew how stressful it was at the beginning to live like that. All the parents who found out shared a common fate.

She gave her husband a gentle caress and patiently waited for his spirit to enter the new dimension. The Others made sure they could see their children. They gave them access to the Dimensions. The parents can move through them, readjust time and space, on one condition: they have to deliver the Others' messages. It is a grave cost, but it is worth it.

Alexandra looked around. The images were changing constantly, time was moving with no linearity or order. She stared at the fuzzy figures around her, carrying their burdens. She almost lost track of time and didn't understand that her husband had arrived.

"Alexandra, where are we?" she heard him say. She didn't answer. She hugged him, gave him a kiss and sobbed.

"Welcome to the Dimensions. Are you ready to see our children's new home?" she asked excited. He agreed instantly. She grabbed his hand and started changing the images around her, linking time and space, until she saw it: the new planet unfolded in front of them, green, with clean water and children's laughter.

Yes, it was all worth it, for just a chance to see this!