

A photograph of a red dandelion seed head in a field of tall grass at sunset. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright glow and lens flare. The sky is filled with soft, orange and yellow clouds. The dandelion is in the center, with its seed head glowing from the light. The grass is golden and backlit by the sun.

The Red Dandelion

1944

It wasn't natural. The little girl was transfixed by a pulsating orb of light that denied gravity and reason itself. Anamorphous amber waves emanated from its interior and amalgamated into indescribable colors. She tried to blink, but her eyes opened wider.

I shouldn't stare at the sun...but its... not.

Billowy clusters of cumulonimbus clouds blew across the sky, but the light defied concealment. A lone streak of luminosity pierced the veil and radiated into the girl's retinas. Her pupils dilated yet she didn't retract.

Unable to move, the girl shook violently in place. A platoon commander would identify reverberations from the V-12 gasoline powered Maybach engines fueling Panzer tanks, but she only identified fear itself. Her family was gone. She was alone and desolate. Machines of destruction had not failed to perform their duty, and geared forward as they razed the small town. Burning ash dotted plumes of smoke while water rippled in puddles of mud deformed by half-track treads.

The child's mouth quivered with unfathomable pain, but tears did not come. Water dripped from her opened eyes, albeit only to wash away dust from the shockwaves of mortar fire. She wanted to run fast and far, but her body failed to function. Her heart and her mind raced as the world around her seemed to slow. The light pulsed through her and radiated out into a protective sphere, sheltering her from the deafening explosions that splintered wood and melted metal. A hailstorm of artillery erased any form of civilized existence, but not a hair on her head perished.

It mattered not that the now-deceased residents weren't part of the resistance. They stood in the path between Axis forces and capital city targets, and this was enough to absorb the wrath of warmongering despots.

Immobilized, the dainty girl clutched a dandelion, plucked minutes ago from the ground elevating the body of her dead mother. The dandelion was unremarkable except that it was red instead of white, matching the color of her maroon-dyed dress. A turbulent breeze blew the seed heads off the innocuous flower, and they traced a path through space and time. A wish made by the wind without words.

1975

The fate of the company and Emma's job depended on the next twenty-four hours. The board of directors of Lumière Energy Corporation remained locked in the penthouse of the expansive office building, making critical decisions to restructure the company. Dissident shareholders had been partially successful in installing like-minded board members, and they intended to excise R&D departments to cut costs and redirect funds towards advertising.

Within Lumière Energy Corporation, Emma directed the Division of Materials Modification, a small skunkworks team developing space-age metals and instruments for the subcontractors of NASA's Langley Research Center and Jet Propulsion Laboratory. Her department showed a consistent proficiency in product integration and patent development, but they had recently lost a bid to a competitor, which spooked management.

The board of Lumière wanted to hire former NASA officials as lobbyists to influence decision makers in Congress to win future bids. Most members of the board also advocated spending millions on negative advertising campaigns to discredit their competitors. Emma vehemently opposed both notions. She believed endless politicking took away valuable funds from their manufacturing process and wanted to focus on improving the consistency of the products.

Emma labored towards this goal as her typewriter feverishly clicked and clacked. Mechanical keys punched the paper against the platen to produce word after word for her white paper proposal. The setting sun, now hiding its lower half below the edge of the earth, entered her sightline and siphoned her

attention. She expected the direct rays to be blinding, however, they were strangely soothing. Even more unusual, white sun spots appeared to fabricate some physiognomic features of a powerful face. She stared intently as time seemed to stand still. Emma tried to deconstruct the ethereal image into something her human mind could decipher, but failed. The deeper she gazed, the more complex the figure became, as if staring into the infinite intricacy of a fractal.

Moments seem to slip into an eternity, and she had to pull her attention away to focus back on the white paper. After staring at the sun, she expected to see a negative afterimage burned into her retina, but there was nothing at all.

Emma thought long and hard but couldn't come up with an explanation for what she saw. This scared her, so she decided to shun the light and close the blinds. Emma made it halfway across the room before being postponed by a firm knock on the door.

A tall man with a chiseled jawline strolled in, looking comfortable in a bespoke taupe vest and matching patterned tie. Emma's eyes were drawn to him.

"Thomas, thank you for your vote of confidence at the meeting. You were the only one that understood my plan, and your words were," she paused, "monumental." Emma's delivery of the line came off as wooden, and she immediately regretted that she had rehearsed it. She tried to pivot towards something more spontaneous but was too nervous to think.

She waited, but he didn't respond. He looked at her with a calm sense of longing, like he used to when they were together. She could see deep thoughts forming in his mind, but his countenance didn't reveal what his disarming demeanor disguised.

After a long while, she became frustrated with the silence. “They’re going to fire you for what you said. You know that, right?” she snapped.

“I don’t always know the right answer, but I do know what’s right. Keeping the team together is paramount,” he said, looking into her eyes, “and we’re good together.” His expression suddenly changed, and he pressed his lips tightly together as if scolding himself. “Damn, that line sounded better in my head.”

Emma broke out in a loud, uncharacteristic chortle and couldn’t stop laughing.

“Mine too,” she piped.

She strove to reshape her visage into a professional mien, but could only manage a smile.

“What other lines did you have for me?” Thomas asked.

“Well, I was going to say ‘You spoke the least, but your words carried the most weight. More than all others combined,’”

“That’s sappy as hell,” he laughed.

“Yes, but at least mine had a better dramatic pause,” she said.

Thomas saw Emma’s glowing complexion, but he wasn’t sure if it was from the aura of the sunset on her face, inner beauty radiating outward, or animal magnetism.

“Just moments earlier, I was at my desk looking at the setting sun, thinking, ‘Isn’t it amazing there’s something that provides energy for all life on earth—and we can’t even look at it without being blinded?’” He turned towards Emma. “It’s kind of humbling isn’t it?”

“It’s interesting you should say that, because I was just looking at the sun *not* being blinded.”

“Opposites attract.”

That’s sappy as hell,” she said

He responded with a smile that began to melt away the thick-walled encasement of Emma’s strong psyche.

Thomas approached her to put down a revised legal document for review, but realized her desk was completely covered with stacks of scientific papers. One stack was being weighed down by a miniature model of one of the Viking Orbiters, a satellite scheduled to be launched in a few months on a mission to mars. The miniature made for a solid paper weight, which Thomas promptly picked up.

“Not many of those were ever produced,” she said. “NASA gave them out to employees as souvenirs, and someone in their office of procurement sent me one as a favor for some work I did awhile back.”

Thomas rotated the metal model in his hand, impressed by the level of detail. “Look, you can see the delineation between the light gray solar panels and dark blue solar cells.”

“I personally like the gold paint on the high-gain antenna,” she said.

Thomas ran his index finger across the antenna and suddenly jerked back, revealing the thin metallic edge had sliced his skin. “You don’t expect to get cut by a small-scale toy, but I guess it wasn’t designed to be played with,” he quipped, trying unsuccessfully to suppress the bleeding.

“Let me get something for that.” She walked over to the medical kit and handed him some gauze and a band-aid.

As Thomas finished cleaning his hand, a light beam shifted through the distant tree line, illuminating a pool of blood on her desk. The intensity of the color overwhelmed and ensnared her. Emma felt a sharp pain in her chest. Her breathing became sporadic and she struggled to focus.

“Reminds me of”—she stared at the blood—“a red dandelion.”

“Dandelions aren’t red,” he stated.

She knew this. She had known this.

Dandelions aren’t red.

The words transformed into pure devastation as she excavated the catacombs of her mind. The dress she wore that calamitous day was ivory in color and the dandelion was ruffled alabaster. The dandelion and dress were painted maroon because they were covered with her mother’s blood.

For the first time in ages, she broke down sobbing. Decades of sadness from recessed memories coalesced into a torrent of tears. Thomas held her tightly in his arms, and their silhouettes became one. His presence soothed her spirit as she looked up. His eyes resembled the cool coral in the tessellation of a tropical ocean. No words were exchanged, but none were needed. This man had been her friend, was now her love, and would become her husband. But for now, he held her.

1989

“Mommy, look!” the little boy shouted as he held up a two dollar bill. “The tooth fairy gave me money.”

“Wow! No one carries around two dollar bills anymore. You’re lucky to have one. It’s also special because it’s the only bill that depicts a historical scene. All the others have buildings or monuments on the back.” She flipped the bill around. “See, it shows the signing of the Declaration of Independence.”

“But mommy, I have a question. Where do tooth fairies get money from?”

“Hmmm. That’s a good question. You know what, I think your dad knows the answer.” Emma turned toward the doorway and called out, “Thomas, Johnny has a question for you.”

Johnny’s face brimmed with curiosity as he sprinted out of the room. From the other side of the hall, she thought she heard Thomas say something about a fairy dust factory that sold Pixy Stix candy.

Emma had spent the morning catching up on work assignments in her home office. After hours of reworking fluid dynamic equations, she leaned back in her chair to stretch out. As she yawned, her eyes caught a glimpse of a book that described dark energy. She had been endlessly fascinated by this theorized force that caused the universe to expand at an accelerating rate. As one of the biggest mysteries in cosmology, some physicists believed dark energy was akin to a fluid with negative pressure, permeating the entire universe and counteracting the force of gravity. When her fatigue transformed cogent thoughts into theoretical fantasies such as this, she had learned it was time to take a break.

Emma laid down a stack of technical papers on her mahogany desk and walked down the steps into the living room. Her daughter Lizzy, was watching a rerun of the movie Flight of the Navigator on their new 32-inch Magnavox television. Lizzy sat on the couch with her legs crossed, sipping an Ecto Cooler flavored Hi-C juice box.

“Interesting movie, right?” Emma said.

The plot of Flight of the Navigator revolves around a twelve-year-old boy who rode in an alien spaceship that traveled near the speed of light. Due to time dilation, he only aged a day in the spacecraft, while everyone on Earth aged eight years. When he returned, his younger brother had become his older brother, and everything was different.

“I don’t get it. Why didn’t he age?” Lizzy asked.

Emma sat down on the couch next to Lizzy and explained: “The faster one moves, the slower their clock ticks compared to a stationary observer. The universe seems to slow time down as speed increases, although you have to move very, very fast to notice any effect. The movie takes this concept to the limit and asks, ‘What would happen if you approached the speed of light?’”

“So what happens is...you would age very slow and everyone else would age fast?”

“Something like that. Everyone would think time progressed normally from their own perspective, but when the near-lightspeed traveling boy and his parents met, there would be a significant disparity in the passage of time due to Einstein’s Special Theory of Relativity,” Emma explained.

“But you told me last week you can’t travel as fast as light.”

“You and I can’t, because we have mass. It would take an infinite amount of energy to accelerate an object with mass to the speed of light, which would violate the laws of physics. But photons are massless, so they can travel at the speed of light.”

“If the clocks of people slow down as speed increases, what happens to the clocks of light?” Lizzy asked.

Emma started to speak but realized she had no answer. The equation told her that time dilation becomes infinite for an observer moving at the speed of light, so from the perspective of the photon, would the clock stop?

“I don’t know.”

“I thought adults had all the answers.”

“That’s what I used to think when I was a kid. But I can assure you, adults *definitely* do not have all the answers. In fact, the more I know, the more I learn that I don’t know.”

“What do you mean?”

“As your circle of knowledge increases, so does your perimeter of ignorance. The area outside of your circle of knowledge will always be greater than the area inside, so the unknown is always greater than the known.”

“Mom, save that stuff for work.”

Lizzy crumpled up her finished juice box and walked to the kitchen to throw it away.

Emma peered through the window to behold a vibrant rainbow stretching across the horizon.

“Lizzy, come outside with me.”

They stepped on the porch to gaze at the striated layers of color. Their skin was at the mercy of the sun and wind, who alternated between baking and cooling on a whim. Emma and Lizzy shared a fervent silence as the heat waves rose, distorting the outline of the red and blue hydrangeas in their yard. A strong, sweet floral aroma wafted over from honeysuckles growing up the side of the porch. Lizzy reached over the railing to pluck a honeysuckle. She proceeded to pull the stem from the back and suck out the sugary nectar.

“Dad said a rainbow is God’s promise after it rains to never destroy the earth by flood again, like with Noah’s Ark.”

“He does say that.”

Emma didn’t believe in God. Not really at least. Any belief she may have had as a child had been long eroded by decades of logic and reason. Now she only believed in what she was able to perceive, and God wasn’t something that she could touch, taste, smell, see, or hear. Besides, she certainly didn’t believe in an omniscient being. Omniscience would require having all knowledge from the past to the future. Since it was impossible to experience all time in order to obtain all knowledge, the thought of omniscience was illogical and unnecessary to her.

Emma glanced around and noticed that everything was extremely dry. “It hasn’t rained. Also, the sun is out. It’s unusual to have a rainbow in conditions like this.”

“Maybe it’s from Great Grandma Anna. Didn’t you say grandmas send rainbows down to earth when they die? This is the first rainbow I’ve seen since her funeral last month.”

“Yes, I did. That’s what she told me, as her grandma had told her,” Emma said, but half-doubted. Emma didn’t think heaven

existed, which made it hard to conceive how rainbows could be sent from the realm of the departed.

Emma looked at Lizzy, then peered into the sky and sighed. She felt lost. On the surface, she had a wonderful husband, two kids, a well-paying job, and a spacious house. Yet a part of her was incomplete. Her heart ached for that elusive piece that would make her whole, but it remained a distant dream. She felt a sorrow within but maintained a stoic face as best she could in front of her daughter. Amidst the dismal discourse on death, Emma could see a tear roll down Lizzy's cheek, as if she had absorbed Emma's sadness through osmosis. Emma leaned over and pulled Lizzy into her with a half bear hug.

"Mom, promise me you'll live forever."

"Lizzy, you know I can't do that. There's a time to be born and a time to die. But I'll try my hardest. I'll live as long as I can."

"Then promise you'll send a rainbow when you die."

"I promise."

Emma became a renowned mathematician in her old age, with accomplishments as numerous as her grandchildren. Even as a centenarian, her mind remained vibrant, and she enjoyed consulting with researchers and scientists in the field. Emma reveled in advancing the frontier of human understanding, redefining its boundaries one thought at a time.

Despite her rapidly deteriorating health, she took time out of every day to walk the trails in the woods overlooking poppy fields. As her body struggled to move forward with every step, her mind effortlessly floated from thought to thought. The very motion of propelling her body forward became an amusing chore, and the challenge itself had built up some semblance of beauty in her mind.

She peered down at the health watch, transfixed to the back of her hand, which integrated her bloodstream into its invisible circuits. The watch had no band, and its circular, translucent face was a mere millimeter thick. She held up her hand to examine the display. She could see that her blood oxygen level had fallen from 88% to 87%.

The very thing that helps keep me alive, reminds me of my impending death.

Emma's husband Thomas had recently passed, but they had many decades of love and companionship, and wonderful years with their children, and their children's children. In over a hundred years of life, she had experienced war, disco, quantum computing, and microtonal music. Between the first man on the moon and the first flyby of Pluto, her favorite invention was still refrigerators with icemakers. After interminable eons without it, iced tea with ice cubes on demand still felt like magic.

After the stroll, she retired to the gliding chair on her front porch, pushing herself to and fro with her tippy toes. Enjoying the sunshine on her face, she closed her eyes. The endorphins felt lovely, and she imagined herself swinging on a cloud. As the minutes marched on, her daydream was invaded by a high-frequency humming.

“Are you Emma Clarence Colbald?” the monotone voice emitted. It sounded like a person but without any trace of timbre.

“I liked it better when you sounded like a robot,” she said, rocking back and forth. “A human voice coming from a machine is creepy.”

She opened her eyes to face the delivery drone, which had been automated to drop off medication seemingly every day now. This type of drone used camera sensors to initially identify a potential recipient, but legally required verbal consent and biometric verification to receive prescription medication.

Throughout the years, Emma had resisted gene therapy, neural implants, and even an exoskeleton that could help her walk. She took the medication, however, because she needed it to live.

The drone continued to hover in place.

“So, you seek to know who I am,” Emma continued. “You can only perceive the universe through the prism of your own consciousness, if you have one at all, so I am exactly the culmination of everything you perceive me to be.”

“Response not understood. Please identify yourself.”

With the onslaught of recent deliveries, harassing the drone’s artificial intelligence had become her new favorite game.

“I will answer your question if you answer mine,” Emma proposed.

“I am an automated delivery drone. I cannot be held liable for the information presented. Please proceed.”

Emma cleared her throat, “In the logical paradox of Hilbert’s Grand Hotel, a hotel has an infinite number of rooms that are all occupied. If every room is occupied, how can the hotel accommodate more guests?”

After a brief pause, the drone responded, “The guest in room one can be moved to room two. The guest in room two can be moved to room four. By moving each guest to a room number that is twice that of their previous room, an infinite number of new guests can be accommodated.”

“That is technically correct but with no imagination. The real answer is simple: the hotel is expanding. The hotel was always expanding because it was never finite. Only finite things have limits. The hotel is infinite, so it has no limit.”

“Allotted amount of delivery time approaching; will leave in sixty seconds.”

“Yes, I am her. I am Emma Clarence Colbald,” she capitulated.

The drone scanned her body and took biometric readings that confirmed her identity beyond the required threshold. Then, after a slight rotation, it advanced towards her.

“No, stay there; I need the exercise.”

The drone obeyed.

She used every ounce of strength to lift her body upwards from the chair and walked very slowly towards the drone to sign the digital forms. A small carbon fiber door opened, revealing the life-extending drugs she would consume.

A car pulled into the driveway as the drone departed, and Emma's daughter Lizzy got out of the vehicle, followed by Lizzy's son Levi.

"Hi Lizzy! Hi Levi!" Emma called out.

Levi gave his grandma Emma a big hug, and she fully embraced him.

"When I was your age, cars had drivers and heavy, flammable, toxic rubber tires that were filled with air," Emma said.

Her grandson appeared perplexed as he examined the nanocoated hexagonal tubes that formed the wheels of the self-driving vehicle.

"If ancient tires were filled with air, does that mean they could pop?"

"Yes, it does, and they sometimes did."

"That's the most ridiculous thing I've ever heard. I'm glad I wasn't alive back then. I'm going to go grab something to eat, Grandma. You need help getting in?"

"No, you go in and make yourself at home and help yourself to anything in the fridge."

Emma had a soft spot for Levi and was happy to declare it. The name Levi meant "joined" or "joining" which seemed to be fitting of his natural ability to bring family together. She could see Levi joking around with his uncle Johnny as they were walking

towards the house. Levi put on a pair of augmented reality glasses, then handed Johnny a pair. She witnessed fast, subtle finger movements as Levi showed off the new technology. She smiled.

The compendium of all human knowledge at his fingertips.

The family visit was deeply pleasant and filled her with joy. The scarcity and finitism of time allowed her to savor the sweetness of her remaining days even more. As the sun dropped below the horizon, Emma contemplated whether it was civil or nautical twilight.

It doesn't matter; all will be dark soon.

Emma moved to the cavernous guest room on the first floor that had been converted to the master bedroom, as she was no longer able to climb stairs. Her caretaker had left at sundown, and she laboriously inched her way into bed.

Emma propped herself on a pillow against the headboard. An E-Ink book lay on a side table adjacent to the mattress. The book united her past and present: the tactile feel of real paper, which she still loved, with a coating of digital ink on each paper page that could display the blackest of blacks and the most vibrant pixels of color. She tried to reach for it, but her muscles stiffened, and her breathing slowed. She imagined herself with the book in hand, but when she opened her eyes, her hands were empty.

A brilliant yet soft light shone from the crack in the bedroom door. As it grew she opened her eyes wider to let its warmth and knowledge permeate her presence. Some unreal form of a

soothing substrate diffracted into tidal waves, crashing over the entire room mid-air. Emma's body was failing but she would not need it anymore. Her spirit was invigorated with a new comprehension of the known and the unknown.

"You protected me during the attack when everyone else perished. Your light surrounded me with an impenetrable shield. You heard my prayer, the prayer of a helpless girl on a battlefield," Emma spoke but her mouth did not move.

"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened," the voice declared. It was neither human nor machine but carried an unmeasurable weight of wisdom.

"You shone a beam of light into my office so many years ago, that brought Thomas and I together."

"Two became one flesh, a destiny fulfilled. For I know I have plans for you, in this life and the next," the voice trumpeted.

"The books of antiquity say you are all-knowing, but I didn't believe it could be true. I didn't believe because having all knowledge requires existing throughout all time. But time only exists for those who bear the weight of matter and are bounded below the speed of light. The photons from your presence are transient, commencing and concluding simultaneously. You are pure energy, you are massless, and you are no man."

"I am no man. I am all time and no time," the voice declared.

"You are the force that encompasses the entire universe. The might we could not measure. The phenomenon our physicists called dark energy, whose nomenclature only reflected the darkness of our own ignorance."

“I am The Light.”

The door fully opened, and in an instant, a winter’s night turned into a summer’s day. Emma knew not whether her eyes were open or closed, but she looked into the light. She saw, and she believed. She was complete.

“It’s time to come with me,” God’s voice projected into her soul.

I am ready.

Emma's passing brought the arrival of her family to the matriarch's house. Lizzy and Levi were the first to arrive, followed by Lizzy's brother Johnny. They planned to sell the Victorian-era, Italianate-style abode, and would finish preparing and cleaning while they reminisced about bygone days.

As the family stepped out of the vehicle, their somber mood was pervaded by memories of good times. Joyful remembrance, sorrow, and apprehension didn't mix, and they needed an emulsifier. Spring showers brought much-needed rain to the arid area but failed to wash away the sadness within.

Levi felt this too as he walked through the front door. Unlike the others, Levi had determined he would be the architect of his own mind. He explicitly rejected the sepulchral sullenness of death and opted to absorb the permutations of remaining life.

The house was as he remembered. The old wooden steps creaked as he ascended to the landing on the second floor, and he felt a force drawing him into his grandmother's study. Levi proceeded to enter tepidly through the archaic doorframe with ornate carvings. Slowly encircling the interior with his footsteps, he scanned the room as if looking for something he didn't know he had lost. An artifact of his youth she had kept? A forgotten memory? A remnant of her presence?

The sweet smell of rosewood, mahogany, and worn leather elicited visions of Emma toiling away at her desk while he peppered her with a trillion questions about her mathematical pursuits. She always answered them all and with a polite smile that seemed to reward his intellectual curiosity. It pained him to think of these memories fading. It had only been a few months

since her demise, but the passage of time was already softening the memory of her beloved wrinkly face.

Levi moved towards the window where towering stacks of papers had accumulated over the years, each piling up towards the ceiling in a helical spiral. He pulled off a paper on top and read:

Gödel's Ontological Proof of God's Existence, 1941

- Ax. 1. $(P(\varphi) \wedge \Box \forall x(\varphi(x) \Rightarrow \psi(x))) \Rightarrow P(\psi)$
- Ax. 2. $P(\neg\varphi) \Leftrightarrow \neg P(\varphi)$
- Th. 1. $P(\varphi) \Rightarrow \Diamond \exists x \varphi(x)$
- Df. 1. $G(x) \Leftrightarrow \forall \varphi(P(\varphi) \Rightarrow \varphi(x))$
- Ax. 3. $P(G)$
- Th. 2. $\Diamond \exists x G(x)$
- Df. 2. $\varphi \text{ ess } x \Leftrightarrow \varphi(x) \wedge \forall \psi(\psi(x) \Rightarrow \Box \forall y(\varphi(y) \Rightarrow \psi(y)))$
- Ax. 4. $P(\varphi) \Rightarrow \Box P(\varphi)$
- Th. 3. $G(x) \Rightarrow G \text{ ess } x$
- Df. 3. $E(x) \Leftrightarrow \forall \varphi(\varphi \text{ ess } x \Rightarrow \Box \exists y \varphi(y))$
- Ax. 5. $P(E)$
- Th. 4. $\Box \exists x G(x)$

He recognized the name Kurt Gödel. In his youth, he had heard his grandmother speak of the Austrian genius: "The most seminal logisticians since Aristotle," she would say.

He read the title again.

Impossible.

Levi ran his finger down the faded paper, tainted yellow with time. The short proof contained notations in pure logic. On one side of the page were alien-looking symbols. On the other side a written description of the extended syllogism. He studied the mathematical symbols intensely, trying to distill some essence from their existence. The longer he looked, the more complex they became. He emphatically wanted to know what these symbols meant, how they were derived, and what they could create. Levi stood in awe and disbelief that an obscure, century-old paper could reveal a truth so decisive and revolutionary. He committed to comprehending it.

This is going to take some time.

Levi clutched the proof as he tried to imagine what Grandma Emma would have thought as she scrutinized the page. Then he imagined the possibilities of a system of logic so powerful that it constructed the entire foundation of mathematics.

By the time the family was ready to depart, the sunset had begun to paint the horizon with fiery hues of crimson and gold. The light was blinding, and Levi stumbled over a rock as he put on sunglasses. After being spun around, he regained his footing and stared into the stratosphere. He saw his shadow in front of him and looked up to see light continue to emerge, accumulate, and combine into something surreal: an expanding spherical globe that effervesced outward and subsumed contiguous clouds. Radiant yellow-orange rays projected in all directions, casting a warm glimmer around them. A verdant expanse of grass swayed back and forth in the wind, lapping up the smoldering afterglow.

The crisp air caressed his skin and carried a sweet fragrance from the poppy fields as the breeze ebbed and flowed against his face. He watched, mesmerized, for a time that felt like forever.

Levi removed his sunglasses to get a better view, but the light wasn't blinding; it was soothing instead. White sunspots on the vibrant orb formed a figure he couldn't comprehend. Surprised, he looked behind him. He thought he was facing west, where the sun should set, but after examining the position of the house, he confirmed the orange orb was due east. Levi put his sunglasses away; he would not need them again.

He looked around the surrounding sea of grass and noticed a lone dandelion. As the clouds shifted, a beam of light from the orange sphere cracked the sky, vividly illuminating the flower's pearlescent shell. Levi plucked the dandelion from the ground and rotated it with his fingertips. A carousel of phosphorescent white seed heads flew off, catching light waves to create a tapestry of fragmented brilliance.

Levi took a step forward to fully enter the orb's light. His eyes widened and mouth opened as he saw a flock of birds freeze mid-air in time and space. Waving grass blades became motionless. Drops of moisture hovered endlessly. Illuminated pieces of dandelion that had blown away, now floated in place, as if capturing a still frame from fireworks. A deer and her fawns became statues by the outlying stream.

Immersed in the brilliance, a rainbow appeared. Beyond the visible spectrum of red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet, were inconceivable colors. Above the red layer of the rainbow, he could see the deep incantation of infrared light. Below the violet arc, he could perceive the normally invisible ultra-violet layer. The light from the rainbow fully embraced him, as if to say

“Hi Levi.” His soul basked in its warmth. The light smiled at him. He smiled back. He would stay awhile.

In the distance, Lizzy loaded moving boxes into her trunk. As she picked up the last box, she saw a strange saturation of colors diffused by the uneven texture of the cardboard. She turned around to witness the otherworldly rainbow and its impossibly visible hues of the electromagnetic spectrum. She dropped the box in shock and shook with overwhelming happiness.

You kept your promise.

Her eyes sparkled chromatically with tears that reflected resplendent colors as she smiled with joy.



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