

Ozone : Chapter 1

Ella Fleck

“What is the shape of a tesla?” warbled the generated voice. “I don’t think I know the answer to that,” I said. The crystal ball stared back at me dumbly. “If you do not know the sha-“ it boomed. Not this shit again. I rolled the ball in my palms, noticing how the molten glass blobbed and unblobbed between my fingers before throwing it up into the ozone layer. The ball spun sharply upwards like a liquid pinwheel. “-pe of a Tesla, then please don’t think so...” I could just about still hear it squealing the end of its stupid sentence before it was sucked into the thick band of orange light above the sky. *poof* The ball combusted into black powder. Soot sprinkled down all over my white seersucker outfit. I brushed it off and blew the remainder from my fingers, just another day under the blazing heat of a triple XL atmosphere.

“The ozone layer”. Some people thought it was the Earth’s halo. They were silly Evangelical types. I think Christianity is spiritually whatever but that’s just my opinion. My biological parents raised me Baha’i so I am meant to believe in everything kind of. But, the ozone layer was getting closer everyday and that was utterly undeniable at this point. It was descending upon us, thick and hot like a front line of raging golden beams. I thought that one day it would get so close that humanity’s last resort would be to lie together on the ground like a global slumber party. We would watch it edge closer until it blinded us... burning the tips of our noses off... then our eyelashes... and eventually consuming us entirely to be spat out as cosmic dirt. For we are dust and to dust we shall return. My Mom calls it our forever sunset.

I began walking back along the highway, plodding my rubber heat retardant boots into the tacky tarmac and looking at the new billboards. The first was an advert for a museum located in The Mind’s Eye - The Archive of Psychic Disturbances. The second was for some kind of horse themed Domsday group, The Four Horse Girls of the Apocalypse. The third was for a government initiative against the encroaching ozone layer called Little Mozart. Once upon a time they thought the problem with the ozone layer was that it would grow holes and disappear. If only. Sometime after Quantum Computing kicked in, it started to thicken and jellify at an exponential rate. Now it’s like a giant magnifying glass amplifying the Sun.

Little Mozart entailed drilling down into the Earth to make more room before the ozone layer reached us but not so far down that the Earth’s core would explode. Like how Venice is on stilts but in reverse. They were shooting all the excess chipped off earth straight into the fiery sky every 2 weeks and calling it the *Festival of Ash. I’m sure inhaling that much ash is carcinogenic but no one else seems to care. My Ayahuasca tutor told me she thought the government didn’t know what they were doing and I resented her for being right because she is expensive.

I checked my Thoughts, it was 1.01 and I had a new \$message. It was an imprint of a book page from an illustrated copy of Daphnis and Chloe sent by my soulmate. You see, I had fallen in love. It was with the same person I would fall and had fallen in love with in every lifetime. We had just realized again. This

time it took us 5 years from our telepathic meet cute. Last time it took us 32. The time before that it took us 1 millisecond but in that world we were gas particles swarming around each other so... My soulmate says they figured it out before I did. I'm not sure I believe that. I love them but that doesn't mean I have to trust everything they say just yet. Besides, we've never even met in person, only in Thoughts because they live on the other side of Earth's central valley - aka The Crack.

What is the point of love when you live on the planet of doom? I don't know. It's all temporary ... a playmate... a tear stain... the best feeling, the worst feeling. "Love and loss are two sides of the same thing hun!" Jaana used to tell me. *Blah blah, blah blah, blah blah*. All I know is: nothing matters because every time we respawn we forget everything until we find each other again like magnets, and then we remember and forget and remember and forget over and over until eventually we stop forgetting and reemerge separated elsewhere to start the cycle again. Them first, then me. Born again star crossed lovers. Let us go then you and I etc etc.

I had reached the yard now. It was green and lush with big red and pink roses squirting out explicitly at me. I could feel afternoon dew drops forming on my nipples. Big Nature is very cool, I only wish there was more left of it. Amidst the greenery were two figures - Aloïsa and Miroslav. They were watering the bushes in big paper sun hats and whistling Secret Love by Doris Day. We call it watering but really it's not water, it's a blend of artificial hydrogen, oxygen and bleach pipetted into the plants arteries. I smiled and waved at them and took a Mental Picture to send to my soulmate in Thoughts.

They greeted me in Czech, "Ahoj!" I greeted them back in English "the flowers look beautiful today". "Děkuji" they beamed, "prosím". The fake wind rumbled and blew Aloïsa's long hair across her round cheek. The strand trembled in the air like a theremin player's hand, slapping against her powdery pixelated skin. I watched it, thinking deeply about time and space when suddenly it fractured and froze with static. "FFF.." I muttered to myself. The flowers did look beautiful, everything did but I was starting to feel cold and awkward. My eyes were fast filling with salty water and my knees were growing heavy. And it was all because I was reminded that Aloïsa and Miroslav were holograms in the garden and I was still flesh and blood on this boiling planet.