

Paradise

The big ape moved slowly through the treetops of the jungle. It was a good day as most days were, calm and lazy with the sun shining in a big blue sky. The ape didn't mind the rain much, but he preferred days like this, enjoying the sense of calm. Not all animals were lazy though. The bees, the butterflies and the hummingbirds were all busy gathering nectar from the flowers. Amused by the thought, the ape reached out for a fruit and ate it in a few mouthfuls, feeling the juices running down his chin. He carefully wiped off the juices and laid back to enjoy the sunlight. A hummingbird flew up to drink from a half-eaten fruit in front of him. He could reach out with his hand to touch it, but he didn't. All his instincts told him to leave the hummingbird alone. He did enjoy watching it though as it stood there in mid-air and drank.

A four legged animal not unlike a deer appeared on the ground. It sensed the ape but was not afraid. There were no predators to be afraid of in this jungle, nothing to give cause to fear. The animal did not know, but on most other planets it would have been game for other animals to hunt. It found a bush with its favourite leaves and started eating, ignorant of its fortune but happy nevertheless.

A sudden noise disturbed the calm. It was a flock of birds nearby that obviously felt the need to communicate. The ape, curious by nature, had to climb to the top of the tree he was in to get a look. He saw the birds in the distance landing in a tree that the ape guessed was full of fresh fruit. There was no shortage of fruit in the jungle, but different animals had their preferred fruit that they enjoyed more than others, and for some reason the birds had to communicate their luck in finding a delicacy to the other birds in the flock. In fact there was never a shortage of food in the forest. The ape did not know, but this was because of the biology of its inhabitants. If an animal did not get the nourishment it needed, or was in lack of vitamins or minerals, the animal would become infertile, not producing offspring. The result of this was that the population of each of the species was kept in check in a gentle way, and that no animal would normally die of starvation. Not even sickness was an issue except in old age where the superior immune system and the organs would start to fail. But in old age death came quickly, as the inner timer causing the system to fail hit the various parts of the system around the same time. Not even broken bones were an issue, as the body mended itself quickly. Short of a broken neck not much could cause the untimely death of an animal in this jungle.

The ape was about the climb down into the shadow when something else caught his eye. It was similar to a fog, but not quite, and it constituted only a thin vertical line, which was very unlike a fog. His mind spun wildly to find an explanation, but it found none. He had to investigate.

As the ape approached the strange fog he noticed an area where there were no trees. This was not surprising in itself, but the fact that there was no sign of a lake or a river puzzled him. It looked like nothing he had seen before, like something or someone had removed the trees. He jumped to the ground and stepped out from the tree line and into the open area. He did not know that he was about to meet his makers.

The sight that met him was like nothing he had seen before. In the middle of the open area was something like a rock, but oddly shaped, clearly not natural, and with holes in it covered with a water like material so you could see through it and into the cave beyond. In front of it sat two apelike creatures with no hair on their bodies except on top of their heads. One of them had short hair, the other one long hair. Between them was some black thing with something glowing on top, and the strange fog came out of it, rising into the air. There was a weird and intense smell coming from the fog.

"Hello friend", the ape with long hair said. "Don't be shy". The ape was shy, and he didn't know the meaning of the strange sounds, but took a few steps towards the apelike creatures anyway. He made a sound of his own, which in ape language meant something like "hello". He did not want to get too close to the strange fog.

Galath and Orchid who were sitting by the fire on the porch smiled at each other as the big ape stepped out from the trees. They had been expecting something like this to happen, but were still pleasantly surprised by the visit. They both noticed how the ape stared at the fire anxiously, and Galath pointed at the fireplace.

"This is a fire", Galath said. And when the ape looked at him with inquiring eyes he repeated: "Fire".

"Fiii...ree", the ape repeated, tryingly. He got closer to the fireplace and stared into the fire. He could feel the heat. He then raised his head and stared back at the jungle.

"You are anxious to get back into the jungle?" Orchid asked. "It is alright, run along. You can come back here any time."

And as if the ape had understood what she said it ran towards the jungle, climbed the trees and hurried back towards the tribe. Galath and Orchid were once again alone on the porch.

"I like this place", Orchid said, "let us stay for a while".

"I agree with you", said Galath. "Not only because I like this place too, but also because we still have a job to do. One day our friend and his fellow apes will become the master of this planet. And we have an obligation to mature them. To prepare them for the journey. Maybe if humanity had had someone to guide them we would not have had such a violent past."

"Maybe", Orchid said.