

Great Green Sky

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The comet was first seen 7 months ago as it passed Saturn. Scientists calculated its course and announced it would pass within 5 million miles of the Earth. A near miss in astronomical terms. News sites and social media sites covered the story for days. The best time to see it, which cities would have the best view, the significance of such a unique new comet. Then everyone forgot.

Until the sky turned green.

A day before its due date, the comet appeared in the sky. Most people wouldn't have cared too much. They weren't going to go out of their way to see it. Jon and Nicola included.

They sat now in the diner, enjoying their eggs benedict and drinking coffee.

"Kinda weird about all those people whose eyes changed color." Nicola said.

"Yeah. Out of nowhere too. I bet it's some kind of virus." Jon replied.

"I don't know. Other than their eye color, everyone who it happened to has been completely unaffected. Don't get me wrong, it's scary because it's unknown, but I think it's harmless." Nicola said.

Jon sips his coffee before replying. "I think we should get out of town for a bit. Out to your family's. We can take care of them and we'll be out of the way if this thing goes bad. It might be harmless now, but I don't want my eyes turning green. What do you think?"

“Okay,” Nicola agrees.

She squeezes his hand and smiles reassuringly.

A scream draws their attention to the outside streets. They struggle to make sense of it. A couple of people charge at a woman across the street, the entire scene bathed in a greenish tint. There are two assailants, each noticeable by their glowing green eyes. They grab the woman and force her to look up to the sky. Jon follows her gaze, but can't see anything from his vantage point. The woman's face washes of expression. Her eyes slowly start to change. They start to glow softly, quickly growing in intensity until they are a luminous green. The screaming subsides. She's almost animal-like. Feral. The trio sprints off down the street.

A waitress turns up one of the TVs as the diners back away from the window.

“...see the comet with their own eyes instantly show signs of madness. Victims can be identified by their eyes, which are said to be unnaturally glowing green. Scientists are investigating the unexpected phenomenon. In the meantime, scientists and local officials are urging everyone to *stay inside* and close all windows. Ignore any messages or social media posts...”

The kitchen door *slams* open. The cook bursts into the dining area, cooking knife in hand.

“You guys GOTTA come out back and see this,” he says, green eyes enthusiastically targeting the patrons. He stomps toward the waitress, cornered and screaming. Jon and Nicola run for the door.

On the street, they're taken aback by the calamity around them. They make a beeline for their car. They hop inside, and Jon puts in the key. Nicola gasps.

Jon can't look fast enough as a pickup truck careens sharply into the back driver side. They're jolted sideways. Neither vehicle is going anywhere right now. The driver of the truck yells maniacally and tries to claw off his seatbelt. Jon feels a sharp pain and looks at his leg. It doesn't feel broken, but the trickle of blood wasn't a good sign. He pulls himself out of the car and helps Nicola out.

A group of green-eyes spots them from down the sidewalk and charge. Jon and Nicola duck into an alley and sprint for it. Jon desperately knocks over a few trash cans and crates, hoping it might buy them a few precious seconds. After a few turns, he tells Nicola to stop.

"I think we lost them. Let me look at you."

He quickly examines Nicola. Her eyes are their usual shade of blue.

"How are my eyes?" he asks.

"They're fine. What about your leg? You're bleeding!" Nicola replies.

"It looks worse than it feels. I'll be alright," Jon says in response.

"Now what do we do?" Nicola asks between shaky breaths.

Jon anxiously thinks for a moment.

"Like I said, your family's place. There or the mountain overlook would probably be the safest places, but we don't have a car now." He glances around. "We can stick to the backroads and make it to the edge of town a few blocks that way. Are you ready to go?"

Nicola nods.

Jon looks at her with concern before looking ahead through the alley.

“Jon...”

He turns.

“If I don’t make it...”

“Don’t say that! We’ll get out of here together.”

“*Jon*. If I don’t make it, don’t stop for me. Keep going. Save yourself and my family. Promise me.”

Jon’s face turns pale with the thought of losing her. “I promise,” he croaks.

“Okay,” she answers, on the verge of tears. Then she takes a deep breath and steps forward. “Let’s go.”

They peek out to the next street. Clear. They sneak out and cross over. The street is empty but the distant chaos still echoes from all sides. The local park is up ahead.

Out in the open is risky...

Jon considers a path through it. If they stick to the right, the trees can provide cover. He encourages Nicola on. They pick up into a rapid sprint, Jon with a noticeable limp. Despite the circumstances, the alien view was oddly beautiful. The green light clashed with the yellow honeylocust leaves, setting the foliage in a brand new season.

A movement up ahead catches Nicola’s attention.

A pack of green-eyes is on the hunt. Jon looks at her. He gestures to the right and they head to the open side farthest from the pack. They’re already halfway there.

The pack spots them and burst forward.

“You have to see it!” one of them yells.

The distance closes. Twenty meters.

“The truth is with those who choose the green!”

Ten meters.

Jon looks for somewhere to go next or something to use as a weapon.

A few more steps. The pack is a few meters away.

Nicola yelps. The ground is suddenly coming up toward her. Jon turns back. The green-eyes leap...

It wasn't fair. There was no time to help her. There was nothing but utter hopelessness as the most dreaded outcome unfolded. Jon watched as the pack grabbed Nicola. Every ounce of his being screamed to save her. He saw her blue eyes fill with fear and sorrow, but she didn't scream. She managed to mouth one word: “go.”

Jon backs away. He knew he had to keep to his promise, no matter how much he wanted to save her. No matter how little he cared if he made it without her.

The green-eyes hold her face toward the comet and force her tear-filled eyes open. Her cries subside and her expression becomes deceptively tranquil. That deep blue that Jon knew too well began to glow bright green.

Jon finally tears himself away.

It's not fair! It should have been me! I'll come back and find you, when we figure out what this is. I'll come back and I'll save you.

He blindly charges through the alleys and yards. Was he still getting closer to the edge of town?

He spots an open cellar. Without pausing to think, he ducks into it and slams the door closed. Seconds later the green-eyes crash against it, banging to be let in.

Jon feels for a light switch and turns one on when he finds it. The cellar has a few shelves of supplies. General house repair stuff, gardening equipment, emergency food. There's a mirror and a sink against one of the walls. An empty cot lays against the back wall. Defeated, he resigns to it.

Jon awakes. It's been three days, or so he thinks. The room seems less and less familiar. The shelves have gotten smaller. Each morning when he checks the food, it seems like the cans have restocked themselves.

But the magic beans are the last thing on his mind. He can't stay here forever, but the green-eyes won't let him leave. Three or four times each day they'd come by, like clockwork.

"Just look at the comet, Jon. One glance and you'll be free," they'd taunt him. "Green is good. Please come back to us!"

He'd curl up on the cot and yell back. "Leave me alone!"

He thought of the mob outside the door. There were probably hundreds of people surrounding him now with those bright green eyes. What if he couldn't get out.

Maybe he *should* just join them. They probably won't hurt him if he was one of them. In a few months, the scientists will have this all figured out. He and Nicola will be cured, then they can reunite. Sell the house. Move out into the mountains.

"Snap out of it!" Jon scolds himself. "You can't trust the scientists to save you."

"Jon?" Nicola's voice calls through the door.

Jon's draws in a sharp breath.

"Nicola?"

"I miss you Jon."

"I miss you too."

"I wish you could see it's not that bad," Nicola says. "The green is good. I can't explain it, you just have to trust it."

Jon thinks about the green-eyes outside. They were wild, delusional.

It's not really her! he dejectedly tells himself.

He makes his way over to the mirror. He takes a breath as he looks at his reflection. The eyes looking back were still their usual brown.

"Jon, I'll wait for you."

Jon says nothing, frozen with this indecision. As badly as he wanted to be with Nicola again, he didn't know how. He was stuck here, this nightmarish purgatory.