



End of the
World

Jeff Hayes

4

End of the World

Passing out of the way



J E F F
H A Y E S



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Breeze

Dedicated to Mona
Her attentiveness keeps
this author true to course.

And a special shout-out to CS
for the inspirations.

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CHAPTER I
A Passing

*H*um of rubber on metal decking. Tires rolled off onto the concrete ramp. One solidness of a temporary nature was traded for another: gritty paint for slick.

“I’m glad to be back on land.”

“You think?”

“Well, yeah. Glad to be done with that crossing anyway.”

“So you say.”

“Am I sniveling? Guess so. There weren’t many vehicles on the ferry. We were first on, first off!”

“And you are complaining?”

“No, no.”

“What are you thinking then?”

“That the customs officer will be waiting for us, eager for conversation.”

“Just keep a vacant look.”

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“I’m good at that.”

“I know you are,” she said joking while pushing at his shoulder.

“And there he is, as foretold.”

“Waving at us to pass.”

Watching the rear-view mirror, “I thought he was a construction mannequin. You know, like one of those with only an arm that moves, mechanically waving a caution flag back and forth.”

“His arm did look like it was attached by a hinge.”

“Gray face matching his uniform.”

“No complaints.”

“None from me either. We would have been there for an hour while the camping gear was gone through, the spare tire taken out. It would have been first off, but last on the road for us.”

“And Kara.”

“Yes. We would have had to get into the whole explanation thing if she would have been found out. The paperwork...”

Silence. A turn signal came on and the car turned.

Let us introduce Zuni and Darren. Their partner, Kara, was the reason for the trip. The three were off to Kara’s favorite place. End of the World, she had called it—always cheerfully. The name stuck. The most northern point of a continent.

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Where a sea meets an ocean in turbulent play, with a spit of land jutting into the mix.

Kara had passed away recently. Her cremated remains were in a nondescript metal cylinder. A container within a nondescript box. Zuni and Darren had promised her they would take the remains to the end of the sandspit, that she would be committed to the churning mix in joy, in celebration of life. This had been Kara's request. Her partners' reply had been solemn. Through tears the promise was spoken. They would celebrate the visits shared there, the memories of sun and fun enjoyed in the lonely isolation that was an end of land. In joyous play, it would be done.

Shortly after the promise was sealed, the trip was undertaken.

"So foggy. It has been like this since we rolled off the ferry. Wasn't it sunny out at sea?"

"Well, we didn't see when the fog started as you wanted us in the car before the ship entered the harbor."

"I wanted to get off before the trucks."

"I know, Darren. I am as anxious about this trip as you are."

He looked behind to the empty seat. Gone was Kara, her energy. The contagious smile leaning forward over the seat, her cheery words. The teasing she and Zuni would tag up on.

His eyes met Zuni's. "I know," she said.

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A sob started; his eyes began to water.

“Celebration. Remember, Darren. Joy.”

He wiped at his face. “We don’t need to stop in the town, do we? Nothing was forgotten?”

“No.” She looked again at the back seat.

“Good. It is so early anyway. The shops won’t be open for hours.”

“It really is quite deserted here.”

The road carried on through the village.

Approaching the far side, the houses were spaced further apart. A familiar intersection approached.

Both their faces lit up in a grin. Looking at each other, they said, “That’s the signpost up ahead. Your next stop, the End of the World!”

A turn signal came on. The car turned.

Along the highway, the white line segments emerged out of the fog. Trees were passed; their summer foliage heights disappeared into the mist. The sun glowed slightly, with an obscured halo.

Inside the car it had remained silent. The two occupants were lost to inner-space reflection.

Zuni asked, “Are you OK? Would you like to stop for a sandwich or something?”

“No. We would just get cold out there in the dampness. I would rather keep on. Is that OK for you?”

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She leaned over. Her head found his shoulder. Hands found each other. She said, simply, “Yes.”

The remainder of the highway drive passed like this.

Approaching a graveled road, a turn signal came on.

Zuni had been asleep, her head still against Darren. She sat up, feeling at a stiff neck. Darren became roused from the drive lethargy.

There was a change in the light. It was Zuni who mentioned it first, “Fog seems to have burned off.” She opened the glove compartment. “Sunglasses?”

Darren held a hand up against the glare, dropping the visor. “Oh, yes. Please.”

The car rocked, splashing through water filled chuckholes. She was jostled against him. “Oh, sorry.” He turned into her kiss as the car kept on.

Before them was The Lighthouse. This was the road end. The car pulled into the small parking lot, stopping in a spot out of the way.

The Lighthouse was an oddity. Upon their first discovery of it they were amazed. The building was quite old, historic. It was reputed to be one of the first in the area. But the ancientness of the structure wasn’t what had them curious. It was the huge sand dune mountain between the lighthouse and the ocean. It was as though the light passed into the night for

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the wayfarers crossing the dunes rather than for seafarers approaching the cape. Kara had been deeply taken by the place. She had explored each brick in the building, climbing up and down the stairs repeatedly. Though Zuni and Darren had also been impressed, Kara's enthusiasm exceeded them both. But that was Kara. She was a force of nature, contributing energy into a system and beyond.

Thoughts were pregnant within Zuni and Darren while the car was unloaded. Silently, the cart had been assembled, the camping gear piled on. Kara's urn cylinder was snuggled within the middle.

They began the path towards the pass between the sand mountain peaks. The beach was just beyond. Darren was in front, pulling. Zuni was in back, pushing. Initially, she had pushed from the side; adjusting to the middle, it was a reminder that their partner was not present to assist. The way up was work for the two of them. The wheels were bogging down into the sand. A few stops to catch their breath were necessary. No complaints; neither one would be the first to utter any. But they kept on, reminded of the silent cheers of Kara's missing laughter.

The pass was met; they had made it to the top. The view below was of beach stretching off into the distance. Ocean filled the remainder of the infinity.

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Zuni, “It has gotten really hot, hasn’t it? I am like totally soaked through. I totally overdressed.”

“Who knew? It had been so wet cold during the drive.”

“But not here. It’s like desert hot. I’m gonna strip down.”

Darren looked to the beach, “Don’t see any people down there for you to thrill.”

“Dang. That is disappointing. It was Kara’s and mine best sport.”

“I know it was. You girls, such the combo tease.”

“Tease?” she said, as the shirt pulled over her head. “I think not. We were totally serious. The right personality would have the key for our lock.”

The last of the clothing had been put in a bag.

“And what about you, mister? Will you be my companion tease in this adventure?”

“Naturally, miss.”

“And yet you seem to be awkwardly overdressed. Do you want me to be embarrassed? Naked? Exposed to the wild elements?”

“Wild?” he chuckled. His clothes also found the bag.

The downhill trek was begun. They took to the front of the cart, restraining its energy potential.

Darren, “Kara would have run down the hill letting gravity overtake her, laughing the whole way—”

“Her lovely blond hair streaking behind.”

“Your blond hair is lovely as well.”

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“You like my curls?”

“Love ‘em.”

“Would you be OK with the cart if I streaked with them down the hill?”

“I would love that sight of you. Show me. The cart and I will be OK.”

“Well, sir, my Mr. Active Imagination, I believe you,”—pointing—“Ahem.”

“Yah! On your way, Ms. Vixen.” A palm was applied to an ass cheek.

While rubbing at that cheek, a grin came to her, “See ya at the bottom, lover.”

“Long time.”

And she was off, legs flailing with abandon, down the sand mountain face. Over her shoulder, she shouted, “Promises, promises.”

She made it most all the way down until the planned trip occurred and the roll began. It was carried on, exaggerated comically, onto the flats, where she ended up, spread-eagle. She began to make a sand angel.

Darren continued down along the less steep route, laughing at her antics. He joined her to make a second sand angel.

They continued to lay side by side. The sand heated them through to the core. There they remained, sweating the poisons out in this dry sauna until neither could take it anymore. Without a cue, both sat up and leaned arms atop each other’s

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shoulders. Foreheads touched, eyes closed. Each breathed deep, holding their breath before releasing a sigh.

Zuni sprang up and pulled Darren to stand. Reaching back, she gave his ass a big slap. “Ouch! You hurt my hand, Mr. Buns of Steel.”

“Aww, you just didn’t do it right. Give it another go, but this time, with feeling.”

“No way. You are too into it and I’m too sandy.”

“Off with us then!”

They began sprinting towards the water. “First one to surf a wave cooks, last one cleans.”

“I’ll accept that challenge!” Darren said, getting ahead.

“Hey! No fair! I don’t have a jogging bra on.”

He stopped and looked back. She ran by laughing and leaped into the water, porpoise diving ahead.

Darren put on a good show of it, but Zuni body surfed the first wave. She surfed it back to the shore. It was a lovely sight, her emerging from the water and awaiting him on the beach. Both were grinning like maniacs when he surfed in.

Later, at their camp.

“Tomorrow, right?” Zuni asked.

“Yes, after the tide. When the water recedes, the tip of the sandspit will be exposed.” The last stake was pushed into the sand. “Tonight is a night for nice BBQ and bubbly, followed by a long lay-out under the stars.”

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“There will be the moonrise later. It will be a full one. The first since...” She paused for a breath, “We will share the celebration with our Kara.”

“Yes. We will remember a lot of the firsts with her.”

She perked up. “My roommate, sharing her cool guy with me, for instance.”

“She set me up!” he pleaded.

“Come on. You knew. You were just playing along.”

“No, I actually was clueless. We didn’t have the talk until after she brought me home. You weren’t there at the time, by the way. Strategically so.”

“You two could have had the talk earlier.”

“It was too noisy at the club. Great band that night.”

“Afterwards? During the stroll scrambling the jetty rocks?”

“Too busy.”

“Yeah. Those lights reflecting off the water can be distracting. Pretty erotic, as I remember the telling.” Retrieving a tray out of the ice chest, she asked, “Would that be one wurst or two? They are the big ones.”

“Two, please, as you require.”

“At least. I’ve an appetite.”

“Yes, my dear.”

The meat sizzled on the grill, which flamed up.

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The meal was finished in silence. Surf break provided the backing tune. As Darren cleaned up, Zuni said, “I was just thinking. When I came in on you two—”

“Are you still on about that story?”

She looked at him with a pout.

“Alright, I’ll play along. You came right in and turned on the light—in a dark room.”

“Hey, it wasn’t dark. The lava lamp was on. Anyway, the bed was a wreck. You two looked rather ragged and totally sweaty. Remember what I said?”

“Kara and I were blinking from the glare. You were standing in the doorway, hands on your hips, nude. Yeah. I remember what you said. ‘Hope you left some of him for me, roomie. I’m hungry!’ You pranced across the room to the bed in a few leaps and dived between us. Then, you introduced yourself, ‘Hi! I’m Zuni. You are going to like me.’”

“And? There was more.”

“There was, wasn’t there?”

“I said, ‘Kara and I share, so that’s gotta be hip for you too if we’re gonna keep you around as our pet service unit.’”

“So it was, eh? Second wind, as I remember.”

“Yes, Darren. So wonderful, you proved to be a worthy unit.”

He gave her a playful swat, leaving a red handprint behind.

“Oh! Now you’ve done it, mister!” she said, pushing at his shoulder while rolling atop him.

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“But Zuni,” he meekly protested in fun, “the moon has yet to rise.”

“Man-rise is what I need for the moment. Service!”

The daylight found the couple entwined within a blanket. They woke together.

Darren asked, “You didn’t get cold during the night, did you?”

“No. I stayed warm beside you, my heater.”

“Yes, Kara kept the heat up. You, the sandwich—”

“Meat! I want more protein. Gimme!” she said, leaning across him for the remaining wurst. Taking a big bite, the roll had gone stale. Bits flaked off.

“Want some?” she said, through a mouthful.

“Could never resist your offer,” he said. “I did like you from the start.”

“Naturally. She wouldn’t have brought you home otherwise. Kara’s got good taste,” she said, licking mustard from the corner of his mouth.

She sat up, her face had gone flat, “Had, I mean.”

“I keep imagining her as having just stepped away, gone off down the beach out of sight to pee. She’ll come back, sneaking up. With a surprise yell, she’d jump at us sitting here—knocking us over with a tangle of tickles. Finally, the wrestling would stop after we could no longer breathe from

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laughing so hard. She would say with a Looney Tunes cartoon voice, ‘What’s with all the seriousness, eh?’”

“Mel Blanc. Bugs was her favorite.”

Zuni became silent. Darren as well. There was nothing verbal left to be said for the moment. The next was about to begin.

Together, they both got up. Darren retrieved the metal canister from the cart. The point was down the beach, distant but visible. The wet sand was hard. Water rushing up to meet their feet was briefly icy. After a distance, the temperature was a comfortable balance with the sun heat.

Zuni said, pushing at him, “I can’t take it. This is much too solemn. Come on. Remember the tickles!”

He looked at her, but didn’t say anything.

She ran ahead backwards. “Come on! Fun, yes?”

Still, nothing.

“Alright, sourpuss. How’s this then: if you catch me, you can have me!” She sprinted ahead, laughing.

Darren remained quiet, but began to jog along behind her. When the surf ran up, his feet splashed the water, kicking and throwing it before him. Sometimes he succeeded in getting Zuni wet. As her role, she would shriek in appreciation. When the water receded, feet pounded onto wet sand. Footprints were left behind for the water to erase, one set of prints, one break at a time. In the distance behind, there were none remaining.

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The curve of the point was ahead. Zuni was already out a distance on the sandspit. The low tide revealed a finger of land at this meeting point of ocean and sea. She had continued until the end. When Darren came up to stand beside her, they were knee-deep in the water. The current pulled. The spit carried on a distance, inviting to wade further out; however, the water here was dangerous. Depending on the direction of the tide, the current carried into the deep ocean or sea. Either direction was quickly away from land.

Her eyes were expecting, awaiting his next action. The canister was cradled in his arms.

“No, Zuni. It is not yet our time.”

She replied firmly, “Isn’t it?”

He said, his voice soft and resigned, “No.”

“You are wrong, Darren, but I indulge you, my love.”

In answer, the canister lid was unscrewed. It took many turns before coming free. The lid fell into the water, sinking, ignored. The gray contents were inside, staring up at the couple above.

Together, they tilted the canister, spilling the first into the water.

Darren said, “My love. Pass well.”

Zuni said, “My love. Until we are rejoined.”

The remainder was spilt. It clouded the water, carried away in a plume—a letting go.

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Now empty, the spent canister was dropped. It floated, trailing behind the plume, which had dissipated. When the metal canister sank, the last physical trace of Kara was gone, released back into the unbound universe.

They turned to the beach. Darren's foot brushed against the lid. He retrieved it, showing it to Zuni, and had a brief crying laugh.

"Chuck it," she said.

He obeyed. It skipped across the water until its energy was dissipated; then it too disappeared beneath the surface.

Darren didn't see. He was running back to the beach and continued on. Zuni was slow to follow.

Time had lost cohesiveness of one moment gliding into the next. Without knowing, he had stopped running. How long had he been standing there? He was covered in sweat. The heat had become stifling. The cool water was just there, however, it was not inviting. There was a curiosity before him. It wasn't there when they had passed this way to the point, or was it? It was up on the dry sand. Surely, he would have noticed. Touching at its solidness, in the sun, it should have been hot. But in fact, it was cold, as though it had just emerged from the icy ocean depths. He touched it again as Zuni came to stand beside him. She too was dripping with sweat. Her hair was matted to her shoulders, stuck to her back.

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“Binoculars,” he felt the urge to explain to her, “mounted on a tripod.”

She looked at him concerned, reaching to brush wet hair from his eyes.

“This is antique. Made of metal with brass eye cups. And the tripod is some ancient hardwood. Rather stout.”

He leaned forward to them.

She said, “Don’t. Darren, you shouldn’t.”

“But why not? I want to see where they are pointed. Look at the rigid mount. The angle is fixed.”

“I don’t want it to end.”

“Nonsense,” he said, putting his face to the eye cups. She touched at his hand.

The lenses were clear. It was his eyes that were blurry. After a moment, they adjusted to the change in light.

“There’s a ship. I can see a ship.” He pulled back and looked across the ocean distance. “I don’t see it, do you?”

She said, reluctantly, “No.”

“These glasses are really strong. Take a look.”

“I don’t want to.”

“Suit yourself.” Peering back into the glasses, he said, “The ship is there again, but closer. The profile is sharpening.”

She had moved to the other side. Her hand found his, but released it to grip his thigh. Fingers were pressing into the muscle tissue. Pressure.

“Ow! That hurts!”

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“Sorry,” she said, stepping back. “I love you, Darren.”

Not hearing her, he dictated the vision, “The ship’s color is white overall with blue at the water line. It has red trim. The stacks are also red. The image is growing quickly; it must be making really fast time.”

Realizing he had neglected to say, “I love you too,” he turned away from the binoculars. She was no longer beside him. Looking long down the beach, she wasn’t there either.

He shouted, “Zuni?!”

Nothing.

Again, “Zuni!”

Only the surf drummed in reply.

“Did you go back to camp?”

In that direction, the dunes and haze across the distance obscured the way.


Speaking into the wind, he said, “I love you. I love you both.”

The binoculars were before him. The white and blue image of the ship was in the lens, upside down. Putting his face forward, the image reverted.

“It’s a ferry.” The moment he said the words, the world changed. It was pulled within itself into a point with a roar. As the point was achieved, the world rushed back out with the roar reversed.

CHAPTER II

Obscured by Trees

fter they came aboard, while in the corridor leading to their cabin, they had a moment of crisis.

Darren had insisted they go below to the car deck before the ferry arrived at port.

“It’s not allowed, Darren.”

“I know, but the ship was completely booked out. We have to be ready to get off, or we will get impossibly stuck in traffic at the customs. It will take forever and there’s such a long drive ahead.”

Zuni had offered to drive the distance. Like a guy, he insisted on driving; he would take care of them. She worried that he couldn’t even take care of himself.

His mind was made up. Zuni understood not to argue. Kara’s death had him on the point of crazy since the day of her

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passing. He had remained the suppressed calm one: there for her, and reassuring to Kara.

But from the moment the doctor came into the room and spoke the words, “Kara is gone,” so was he.

As the key slotted into the lock of the cabin door, the words replayed in her head.

The week crawled by while the hospital processed the remains. Darren had taken time off from work. Zuni couldn't manage it. The company where she worked only allow bereavement leave for death of a spouse or other immediate family member. The boss knew of Zuni's relationship with Kara and Darren. It was no secret. She was openly out to the world. He begrudged her for behavior he thought was immoral, saying, ‘I only keep her on because she is the top in the field.’

When she came home in the evening, Darren was on the couch where she had left him. The day's detritus was scattered across the table—the remains of the meal she had arranged for him before leaving for work. Some soup and bread had been eaten. Dregs floated in the bottom of a glass tea pot.

Seeing the sorry state of her man, she asked, “Love, have you been here all day?”

“Yes.”

“Did you watch TV, or read, or something?”

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“No.”

“You just watched the lava lamp, like, all day?”

The dark room was aglow in monotone color from the large lamp.

“Yes.”

“I miss her too, you know. But I don’t get time to grieve.”

Darren’s eyes awoke startled. He looked at Zuni and pulled her to sit. Returning among the living, he said, “I know. I’m sad about how they treat you at work. It’s not fair your boss punishes you for being out. Our lifestyle is none of his business. Just hold on, love. You will have all next week off.”

She buried her head into his chest. Holding tight, he said, “This was my last still day. Tomorrow I’ll do the shopping and organize the camping gear into the car.”

“And Kara? Will you pick her up in the morning? Do you have the address where they took her?”

He took in a sharp breath. “You only need to worry about what to wear. I will take care of everything else.”

“That is what I worry about: your need to take care of everything. It is too much. I do the best I can, but please, allow me to help take care of you too. I need that. We need that.”

He kissed the back of her head and stroked at her hair, running fingers through, stretching the curls out their length to rest on the curve of her hip.

“You do, Zuni. You do take care of me.”

“But today on the couch?”

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“It’s my last day of stillness. I chose to pass it watching Kara’s lamp. It carries me away, back to meditate on memories of her, and of you, of us.”

She looked up to him, her face wet with tears. “You have earned some hefty frequent flyer miles this week.”

“Oh, my love,” he said, brushing a cheek, eyes tearing. “You’ve got me started as well.”

The ferry had been booked. It was full of people traveling on their summer holidays. As luck would be, they rolled on near the front. That would make them among the first off when the ship offloaded at the destination port. As they exited the car deck, Darren was calm. The distance across the water would take 24 hours.

After an early dinner, they retired to their cabin. Before the echo of the closing door faded in the hallway, clothes were tossed to the floor. They showered together in the impossibly small stall. Tension held dearly tight was allowed to be released, flow through the drain, and pass into the beyond. Eyes were each for the other. The bliss they disappeared into was the first occurrence for this sad week. Afterward, they cuddled, intertwined on the small rack bed. Sheets had been long lost to the floor. Only a pillow remained with the couple, reclaimed from a corner. Their nude forms passed in time through the night.

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As the crossing progressed and morning arrived, he awoke nervous, anxious to land at port and continue the journey. Yesterday's clothing was bagged. As a prank reboot, they decided not to shower. Instead, to pass the day with the perfume aroma remaining from their passion.

'Let those who pass close know of what we share, and of the possibilities of life.' These words Kara had spoken on the morning of their last ferry crossing.

Zuni had teased her that she was just too lazy to shower again, and that they all were too hungry for breakfast to protest. Darren enjoyed going along with the girls' prank.

This morning, standing in line for the breakfast buffet queue, Kara's presence stood with them. Zuni and Darren smiled, knowing what was on the other's mind. A woman had come up behind Zuni. The energy of the couple's smiles radiated, gifting one to her as well. Zuni saw Darren acknowledge her.

She turned around to the woman and said, "Hi!"

Saying back, "Hi!" she checked them out before continuing, "you two look to have had a nice night."

Zuni, "Yes. It was very, ahem,"—Darren visibly nudged at her—"restful."

The woman looked to Darren and then back at Zuni. "Shame we didn't run into each other last night. I take it you two made an early evening of it?"

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“Sir?” There were no people remaining in front of them. The breakfast chef was trying to get Darren’s attention. “Sir, how would you like your eggs? Fried or omelette, perhaps?”

“Oh, no. Sorry. Actually I had wanted a crêpe.”

“I can make that for you. Sweet or savoury?”

“Order savoury for me too, will you, Darren?”

The woman offered her hand, “I’m Jillian.”

“Zuni,” she said, accepting. “Will you sit with us, Jillian?”

“I think that would be most fun.” Speaking to the chef, “Spinach omelette, please.” Turning back to Zuni, “I love the smell of your perfume.” Bringing her head in closer, she whispered, “I believe in unicorns, don’t you?”

“Oh. I do, Jillian. I most certainly do. Darren as well. In fact, we consider ourselves connoisseurs, rather adept—alert for those occasions when one might grace us with its rarefied presence.”

At that moment, a pan chose to flame up. The chef quickly moved it aside. He smiled to the two women giggling before him, and shrugged.

The women crossed the restaurant floor to join Darren. Passing a couple who were deeply involved with their meal, Jillian nodded and waved a greeting. They nodded in return. The woman gave a thumbs up. Zuni looked to Jillian, who explained, “Fellow truckers.”

Taking a seat beside Darren, mystic serenity projected from Zuni.

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Jillian, “Might this be a quick breakfast, if you don’t mind? I would be interested in trying a sampling of your perfume, Zuni. Would you indulge me? That fragrance really does something.”

Darren, “I think we have time before port, don’t you, Zuni?”

“Certainly, at least for a sampling. Jillian, if you are so taken, perhaps on another occasion we could follow up when time is more at a leisure for exploration?”

Smiles were shared around while the remainder of the meal was consumed. Jillian and Zuni ate single-handedly, as their other remained occupied. Darren enjoyed the luxury of his crêpe.

After a brief stroll through the ship, the second course was begun.

Jillian moved to leave, needing to return to her cabin. She drove a long-haul truck. This ferry crossing was a regular route: a load dropped here, another picked up there, she had earlier explained.

The couple watched her at the sink as she washed. “I have found the perfume most agreeable. You know, on the return leg, I could be available for a meet-up, if you two are so inclined.”

Zuni propped herself up on an elbow, serenity across her face. Darren had been sitting up. He managed a, “Hmm...”

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Zuni, “Could you make a weekend of it?”

“A proper exploration of fragrance at the source? Yes! Definitely! Let’s sort that out after I get my return scheduled. I will contact you.”

They departed the cabin, bidding a fond au revoir. Jillian turned down a hallway leading further into the ship. There remained a light bag to pack, and paperwork to be done before the landing. Darren and Zuni went down the stairs that lead to the vehicle deck.

Zuni, “That was a surprise encounter.”

“Eyes open as opportunity presents itself before us—fleeting, but profound.”

“Your energy brings smiles to those around you. You know that, don’t you Darren.”

“If you say so. To me, I’m just responding. You are the one who takes me there.”

“I really enjoyed watching you with Jillian.”

“You watched? When did you have the time?”

“Well, I did. We all did, watching each other, I mean.”

Darren thought, reliving a moment, then said, “Yes. There is a connection, don’t you think?”

“I do. She realized it too. The light bulb came on for her.”

“That’s what I meant. The moment, the actual moment, we were all present. But you know, Zuni, she connected with you as well.”

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“Well, yeah. That’s a girl-girl thing. It happens quickly, either on or off. With girl-guy, the hormones mess with us, maybe revolving as a playful fencing match—back and forth. However, with you two it just clicked. I had thought it would be so, back at the breakfast table. That was fascinating to watch in our cabin, and erotic as hell to participate in—”

Turning against the bulkhead, he stopped the babble, trading with her a deep, intimate kiss. They remained pressed together until eventually coming up for air. A quick adjustment was necessary.

“I love you, Zuni. Your compersion is beautiful.”

“It is, isn’t it? We are alive, you and I. We celebrate the present by striving to remain enthralled in the moment. The yesterdays pass in brilliance to light the way into the promise of tomorrow.”—Darren matched the words Zuni spoke, eyes focused to each other—“Clinging to possess material or person or time puts lead into our balloon, limiting the heights of our ascendance. In freedom, we grow. In love, we bond. As plural, we are no longer one.”

“And, we remain to celebrate the spirit of Kara’s beautiful words.”

“We do.”

They entered the car deck, the latch had been ajar. The solidness of the hatch closing echoed briefly above the deep hum vibration of the ship’s engine. There were no other people visible as the couple made their way among the cars. At the

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ship's bow there was greater vertical movement; the cycle of ocean swells was apparent. The design of this ferry was such that vehicles rolled on from the stern and rolled off from the bow. Both ends opened by lifting the structure, a giant mouth pivoting open upon huge hinges. Vehicles were eaten before the voyage, and vomited out at the journey's end. The massiveness of the bow structure was before them.

Darren pushed at the key fob. The car chirped awake. Their bag was put on the back seat, the seat absent of Kara's corporeal form. Her absence was deep in their minds.

Entering the car, their eyes met. "Zuni, what do you think if we were to sell this car? Would you be OK with that?"

Automatically, she clicked herself into the seat belt. The action gave her a moment's pause. Brightening, she said, "I was thinking exactly the same thing. Memory of her doesn't belong to stuff, but some things bear too strong of a reminder."

"This has been a good car. It has always been faithful to us..."

"But let's give some other people the opportunity to appreciate the faithfulness of this car."

"Decided. We will sort it out upon our"—a loud screeching sound vibrated strongly, transmitted through the deck.

Zuni, "What was that?!"

Again the sound, louder, intensifying into the sound of metal being tortured, screaming in terror.

"Darren?"

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The nearby vehicles were all riding their suspension, oscillating up and down, slowly at first. But as the sound of the second hit intensified, so did the movement. It had become violent. He turned to look behind, but could not see beyond the nearest; their small car was surrounded by bigger ones.

Momentum of the ship jerked, slowing rapidly, as though a giant brake pedal had been mashed to the floor. They were lifted from their seats. The slowing was now joined with a strong movement leaning to the side. A strong turn was being committed. The far side of the car deck lifted, as had the rear, putting the front corner low.

Zuni reached over suddenly, grasping in terror at Darren. From the car's movement, the seat belt mechanism had become confused. It didn't release; instead, it held her rigid in place against the seat.

She cried, "What is going on?!"

Darren gripped tightly at the steering wheel with a hand; his other was with Zuni. The rear of the car began to slide, coming around in a spin as though on ice. He looked at the corner of the ship where the bulkhead was jointed with the bow door as the car slid into it.

Zuni screamed, "Ah, No!"

Darren turned just in time to see the front corner of an SUV collide into them. Their car door was pushed in slightly. Then, the SUV lurched, as vehicles on the other side slid into it, each amplifying the force. Zuni groaned as the door compressed her

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seat inward. The seat belt held firmly against the force which was crushing her chest. There was a gurgle noise and her hand grasping Darren's fell limp.

The horror of the scene, of Zuni being cut twain by the belt, was all Darren could see in the collapsed tunnel of his perception. The steel rod that had speared the car and drove through his thigh was not apparent. Detritus rained into the corner, caroming across vehicles to fall upon the couple's car.

Another shriek of metal and the front of the ship was torn away. From where the bow had been, only open space pressed into a cliff face. A small avalanche of rocks were tumbling down. Some were bouncing inside the deck, bouncing upon the forward cars, crushing the thin metal of hoods, shattering glass.

There was movement. As the ship retreated from the wall, several cars slid forward and out, falling into the water. The couple's car remained pinned, crushed into the corner. More distance was gained from the cliff. There were no longer any sounds from the engine, but the ship was vibrating from another source: it was grinding deeply against the submerged rocks.

The deck swooned. This was Darren's vision distorting. He felt at his leg, discovering that it had been pierced.

"Harpooned am I, Ahab," he managed to say. "Curse you. By your own rope I will pull you down to drown in your private death." The chuckle was cut off by a hacking cough of blood.

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Uncounted time had passed. Had it been a few minutes, or many? By remaining still the leg didn't hurt, but there was so much blood. The car interior was saturated with it. Mostly, it was not his. He reached out for Zuni; she lay dangling beside him. The seat belt had cut most of the way through her, like a cheese knife. Earlier he had managed to close her eyes, but the mouth couldn't be managed.

Breathing shallowly of the air heavy with gasoline fumes, he awaited the inevitable—wishing the finale would hurry along and get it over with. For a while, the calliope of ship noises had been joined by a chorus of human voices, but then they stopped. The light swirled in his head as he became overcome with black. “Zuni,” he gasped.

Darren felt a hand grasp his; it squeezed firmly. He pulled back from the brass eye cups of the binoculars. His eyes painfully adjusted, blinking at the light before they could focus. There was a form. A woman.

“Kara?”

She smiled deeply.

“Oh, Kara,” he said. Reaching out, he hugged at her. The firmness was returned without hesitation; she pressed her whole body into his.

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“Easy, boy,” she said. “I’m here. It’s like you missed me, or something.”

“Hey! I want in on this too!” said another.

He turned from Kara’s shoulder to see Zuni was standing before them, hands on hips—her classic pretend pout.

They offered an arm to her. She jumped into the hug; each disappeared into the other as the singularity was formed.

“I love you both with all my being,” said Darren.

“I love you too,” said Zuni.

“As do I, love us,” said Kara.

The sun was warm on nude flesh, adding to the heat of their embrace. Surf broke on the beach carrying a slight salt smell on the breeze.

“If you are done with this distraction,” Zuni said, indicating the binoculars, “I’m getting a bit hungry”—she leaned back, arms around her partners’ waists—“for food, Kara.”

“Ahh,” Kara said, feigning disappointment.

Zuni continued, “Let’s go back to the camp and get something on the BBQ.”

Exaggerating an Australian accent, Darren said, “Put another shrimp on the barbie?”

Both girls sang out, “Prawns!”

THE END.

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ABOUT JEFF HAYES

Jeff Hayes has been working for many years as a Software Engineering Consultant- not to be confused with his evil-twin, of no relation. Now located in Switzerland as an employee with a financial firm, he has found several hours free in his daily commute. Daydreaming out the carriage window on the green Swiss countryside, the idea came to him to consider the train commute as renting a public space office. Balancing the distraction of the fellow passengers with life within office space cube walls, thus began Jeff's side work realizing his thoughts into words.

Though many pets and a few horses have graced Jeff's life, he presently finds himself pet free, for the short term.

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CONNECT WITH JEFF HAYES

Jeff enjoys talking with his readers for reflections words can bring. Their impressions can be fascinating and unexpected.

He can be reached at his website, depli.com



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Summary

[End of the World](#), a short story. Part, the fourth, in [Rabbitry](#), a pentalogy.

Grief from a death is visited upon the surviving members of a polyamorous family. The departing partner's wish: scatter her ashes upon the waters at a cape they had frequented.

Honoring the promise given required traveling by a road less frequented. Will the imbalance of the broken relationship be overcome, sealing their resolve? Or, do tragic consequences await the survivors before the [End of the World](#)?

*Let those who pass close know of what we share,
and of the possibilities of life. —KARA*