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Empty World

Samuel Tanner

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Samuel Tanner

HCOM 434

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Empty World

The stranger watches.

He waits for morning, ready to observe and record what he's found.

The sun rises over a still, quiet town. Some things are the same as they ever were. Birds chirp in the trees. Squirrels run across the streets, looking this way that that and occasionally stopping. A thin layer of mist rises above the town, only to be burned away by the morning light.

The rolling hills are bright, almost blinding green. They sit placed against a clear blue sky, once a pasture for cattle.

Same as it ever was.

Yet as the day draws on, there is no traffic. The local theatre, once a hub of the community, plays no more films. The posters at the front are starting to fade, displaying features that will never be watched again. The shopping center sees no flood of customers.

Because there are no more customers.

No more *people*.

It's not clear how it happened. One moment they were here, the next they weren't.

Perhaps some unseen anomaly passed over the planet, taking each of them out of existence. Some rip in the fabric of space-time which changed almost nothing, save the existence of these creatures which called themselves the human race.

Or perhaps God finally decided enough was enough, choosing to finish what he started with the Flood and wipe the slate clean. With a snap of His fingers, every man, woman, and child were gone, until He decides what to do with this little planet next.

Whatever it was, calamity followed. Planes fell screeching from the sky, crashing into flaming ruin. Nuclear sites, with no crews to maintain them, went into meltdown and poisoned the lands around them.

Animals which had grown dependent on their bond with their human masters would face near-extinction. There were exceptions to the rule, some small number who lived on in this now-quiet world. But not enough to repopulate in the humans' absence.

Other creatures which faced encroaching human industry and urbanization thrived. The northern and southern poles of the planet may yet survive. Different species of insects, birds, bears, all stand more of a chance now than they did before.

As the stranger returns to his ship, he looks out on this quiet, strange planet. Where did they go? Will they ever return?

And will things be any different next time?