

## The Orbit MIVI

Maya shuddered. She had hoped that a supply rover would have come by now. If it didn't arrive soon, she would die. Maya, like so many others, had been forced into going and studying other planets to find out if they were suitable for human colonization. They needed supplies – fast. With Earth, Venus and Mars decimated, all of their supplies had come from saved up stores.

After the decimation of the 3 planets, some of the human race had survived on one spaceship, a 2087 model Orbit MIVI. The new generations had lived through life without ever hearing or seeing anything natural. They were surrounded by metal everywhere. Besides the metallic hues, there was no quality to life, no color.

Maya remembered her grandma telling her about how sweetly the birds chirped, how beautifully the flowers bloomed, the way the water flowed and bubbled, having your hair blown into your face by the breeze, and feeling the warm sunshine. How everything had been clean and pure.

Maya had always dreamed of all these things and imagined what it would have felt like to have the sand seep through your toes and having the water, cool and sweet, soothe your feet. To her, the stories would come alive and she could almost feel the things described. The stories that came out of her grandmother's mouth formed an imaginary, yet once real, world of hope and beauty. She yearned to experience things people had taken for granted.

And then her bubble of happiness popped. When her family died in an epidemic, Maya was taken to a junior army training camp, of rigid control and oppression. More often than not, Maya was caught daydreaming and punished. Other kids scorned her for her dream. She was abused because she had hope. But even through all this, she endured and nurtured her dream – to have an Earth once more. After the junior and senior army training camps, she had graduated from their only college with flying colors. Then she went into training to be a studies professional, or, in Earthen terminology, a scientist. There, her mind, so full of imagination and creativity, finally met its true calling. Gradually, she climbed the ranks until she was head of all the studies.

At first, the government officials were lenient with her. They had smiled and talked sweetly to her. But after a while, when she started voicing protest against some of their policies, they turned on her.

They no longer wasted their time chatting amiably with her about the decisions the council made, but simply passed on the order and demanded her fulfill it. Every time she made her appearance in a meeting, the conversation was cold and curt. They tried to oppose her in every way they could.

For the common people, life continued as usual. Then, gradually, everything showed signs of halting. Hospitals started to turn away patients. Stores went bankrupt. Schools could no longer operate. Medicine was rarer and harder to get, rations started to shrink, and people began to die. The Orbit MIVI was running out of supplies. Out of desperation, the government started sending out people to study planets and find out if they were suitable for human colonization.

The government authorities were so distracted they forgot about their feud with Maya for the time being. Then one of them proposed a cunning idea. Using a newspaper story as a cover, they could blame this whole mess on Maya. They would be spared the anger of the people. All they had to do was publish a story of a nonexistent investigation blaming her of the crisis. And they did. The people were tired, starved, and yearning for their troubles to end. Given a target to blame, they vented their rage at it. The rumors spread like wildfire. Soon there were protests to remove her from her position and put her in prison. All too cheerfully, the government dismissed Maya and arrested her.

Through all of this, Ryan Hutchinson, a close friend and colleague, helped. He had visited her and comforted her. But one evening, he never came. Later, on that fateful day, a government official had appeared in the prison. He had informed Maya that the government had decided to give her a chance to redeem herself. The only catch was that Maya had to take part in the research program finding habitable planets. She would collect data of the planet for 9 months. She accepted. The process of take-off had gone well. Government officials had been there, chatting and talking with Maya, waving good-bye.

The only person missing, she had noticed, was Ryan. Shouldn't he have been happy that she had had such a chance?

Reflecting, Maya realized that Ryan would have been there if everything had been fine. So what could have happened? Had she sent here, to this distant planet, not to *study* it, but to *die* in solitude? But the government needed to find habitable planets, new supplies. Why would they throw away a chance to survive?

And then a frightening thought occurred to her. What if they had found one? And simply didn't need her anymore? It could not be! All she had done, all she had found, all she helped, how much she had tried to do the right thing, only to be sent to die. It wasn't *fair!* Maya's dream of a new Earth was a shared one, and she had longed so much to fulfill it!

Deep in thought, Maya spotted the supply rover. So they still needed her! She ran to pick it up and found it unusually light. Wrenching it open, all she saw was a paper. She unfolded it with trembling hands. After reading it, Maya crumpled it and lay down on her cot. She fell into a deep sleep with vivid dreams of Earth and its splendors, never once feeling a pang of hunger. She never woke up.