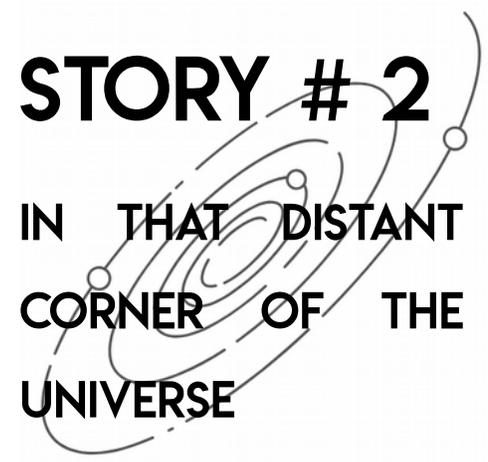


STORY # 2

IN THAT DISTANT CORNER OF THE UNIVERSE



A crash sounded, and he knew he had landed somewhere.

All around him, the emptiness resounded with infinity. The darkness of the universe was only illuminated by the light of the new star that the Agency had discovered twenty-five years earlier. It was a mission that had been organized for a long time, in which it was planned to exploit the enormous power of that sun to produce new energy. The Earth had become an overheated planet, and there was the need to increase the power generation. He had been entrusted with that mission sometime before and was incredibly honoured, fascinated by the possibility of helping to save the world from an announced catastrophe that had become reality. No one had listened to the messages from the scientists and the young people: selfishness had prevailed, and now everyone was paying the consequences. Migrations, dictatorships, floods: the chances for a better future were nil. All that remained was to set off into space, in the direction of other planets, to understand how to find extraordinary new energy sources.

Now he was somewhere, alone, in the universe. He had spent the last two months in a spaceship, a bubble launched at speeds never before reached, in total solitude. He had found company in his thoughts and in the image of her, whom he had met that night, on the steps of a club downtown. He had asked her out for a coffee or a dinner, and sometimes they had succeeded, but the course of events had not allowed for full clarity in their relationship. He was in love with her determination and her being so indifferent to the judgment of others. The delicate colour of her face, sprinkled with freckles, matched the brown of her hair and the hazelnut sweetness of her big eyes. He had said goodbye to her before leaving, without being able to describe the nature of his mission. Everything had to remain secret: there were too many risks of failure and the Agency had managed to avoid any leaks.

He had landed on that circular, almost balloon-shaped asteroid, where he was to install huge green panels capable of capturing the star's energy and transmitting it directly to Earth. As he opened the large hatch of the spaceship, he thought of those who, a few centuries before him, had landed on the Moon, giving humanity a new hope. Now, he was making a gesture of equal importance, but no one was aware of it. The few steps he had to go down seemed endless, but he soon began to realize that to survive in that condition he had to find a way not to go mad. As he pulled out the instrument from the pocket of his large white suit to open one of the ship's many doors, he thought about what she had told him the first time they met. To the embarrassment of him, who was afraid to say even a word, she had responded with a disarming naturalness, which had left him speechless. They had discussed the unusual colour of her shoes, while her hair was waving in the hot air of February.

The first panel had been extracted: despite its gigantic size, it weighed very little. The technology had made such progress that an incredibly small surface was enough to produce exceptional amounts of energy. For an entire metropolis, only a hundred of these panels would have been enough. It was an innovation that was being tested for the first time. Scientists from all over the world had worked on it, spending nights and days locked in underground laboratories – almost an absurdity, as he was now immersed in the boundless universe.

Technology, climate change and emotion mixed into one: he diverted attention from the small tubes that would have supported the panels to think about the rest of the conversation they had had in the club. Perhaps he had spoken too much about himself, stressing on some personal experiences: the work he had obtained at the Agency was extraordinary, but he could not disclose anything about it. He talked and talked, even describing his city. Perhaps he should have asked her about herself, but instead, they ended up laughing at his unfamiliarity with her different language. The night had finished too soon: the rising sun called them back to their lives. Then, they saw each other a few more times, but he had never been able to tell her the sincere, deep feelings he had for her. His falling in love was a condition similar to the loneliness that surrounded him, in that distant corner of the universe.

The pipes were now connected, and on the surface of the asteroid, a grid had formed that recalled the game he used to play as a child in the schoolyard. There were jumps that had to be made in precise squares, until completing a route of great difficulty. He was fascinated by them, but he never managed to go more than halfway, overtaken by companions faster than him. From those moments on, years, decades had passed, and his revenge had taken place. But one difficulty had remained a constant in his life: the inaptitude to make his ability to manage human relationships equal to his intellectual capacities. The situation he was in was the best example of this. The most difficult mission had been assigned to him: he could have entered history if he had been able to return to Earth, but he was not able to express his sentiments towards her. The spatial void that surrounded him, which had only been broken by the thud of his spaceship on the asteroid, was the mirror of his feelings: a space that was just waiting to be filled with the extraordinary nature of love.

He returned to install the panels, dreaming, in an indefinite point of the universe, a radiant future for humanity and some instants of joy for him.

DRAW YOUR STAR HERE