

## The E8

-I'm fed up,' Earth said emphatically, in a low grinding voice.

-'Yes, It's been too much,' Fire blazed, kindled by the enthusiasm of the others.

-'I think,' spattered Water, 'we've given enough warnings. For years I didn't rain and it became dryer and dryer, then I rained a lot, the land flooded and I became dead tired. It's time to swing into action. Let the ice cap melt!'

-'We have to convene a general meeting with the board of directors, urgently.' Air said, hitting all other elements in one emission of her breath. Air, together with Earth, Water and Fire, completed with Sun, Moon and Wind formed the E7. Over the last sixty years they'd had to increase their meetings more and more, because things were going wrong. They shared their concern about World, who became filthier and fuller. Richness had become too powerful; Wisdom manifested himself not enough. Faith, Hope and Love didn't prove themselves at all. War and Peace never stopped quarrelling and Flora and Fauna were ruined by the ignorance of all the others. If the E7 didn't do something, Life would die.

Air breathed to Wind, 'call everybody together. The President Sun, Moon the Vice-President, and all the Ambassadors, Poverty and Richness; Faith, Hope and Love; War and Peace; Young and Old; and don't forget Flora and Fauna. And these two hard-headed folks, Wisdom and Stupidity. And of course Life, don't forget to invite Life to the meeting.'

Wind was the secretary-general of the E7; an industrious little fellow who had several times out of enthusiasm, blown the whole pile of World's paperwork out of the window. Earth nodded approvingly, her arms resting on her bulging belly, 'Yes, if Life won't learn, she'll die.'

Life depended on the Ambassadors served by the Ministers, of which there were an awful lot. However, the problem was that they were all working against each other. Beautiful and Ugly, for example, worked in the Department of Environment, so

did Clean and Dirty. Money and Barter and Give and Take worked in the Treasury. Rise and Fall, Progress and Stoppage fell under Transport. Hunger en Gluttony made each other's life a misery in the Department of Food and Fisheries. Holiday and Work were the two Ministers who daily beat each other's brains at the Department of Industry.

Wind did his best. All the Ambassadors and Ministers were blown together with the E7 on the 23rd of March in the year 2012. It was the biggest meeting of the century. -'It's been enough,' opened Earth and banged her fist on the table, so hard that her pockmarked face full of craters and volcanoes almost burst. When she did that, her intestines would rumble for days afterwards. She leaned backward in her enormous chair and looked menacingly from one to the other. She continued, 'Poverty and Richness, you are ruling the world but do nothing about maintaining a balance. Wisdom, you were supposed to win from Stupidity, but Stupidity seems to be stronger whilst you act more stupid. War, when do you learn from Peace that your presence is not wanted at all. Flora and Fauna, you do disappoint us, you let yourself be trampled over and destroyed by Life, who can't live without you.' Earth was backed up by Air, who started to fulminate against the other Ambassadors, 'you, Faith, you have failed. Love, you are so egocentric you only think about self-love and you Hope, you left Life in the lurch many years ago.'

Old and Young were dismayed. Young patted Life on his bent head, she realised the game was over. They had been trifling too much with the big guys. Together they had laughed at the Elements. They had been playing cat and mouse with them and had called out, 'catch me, catch me if you can, you can't get me.' The E7 was uttering its vexation now, or rather, they were angry, very angry.

-'Life,' Sun spoke with her ever so dominating charisma. When she opened her mouth everything and everybody paled. 'We will suspend you and take over the rule indefinitely. I'm not talking about months but years, hundreds of years. Death will be your destiny, of course one or the other depends on Faith, Hope and Love. But we of

the E7 do agree. Wind will start to blow, Water will rise, Fire will ignite and I'm going to shine.'

Exactly nine months elapsed before their words became action. From the 23rd of March to the 23rd of December in the year 2012 it didn't blow. All the elements remained static. There was no Wind from Europe as far as Japan, from China to Lapland, from Africa to Siberia and India to South- and North America. These months were necessary for the preparation. It was the big lull before the storm.

Then on the night of the 23rd of December 2012 the light didn't fade. Sun kept on shining. Water crept on the land, as a greedy monster. She sucked on roots of trees and foundations of buildings. Dunes, dykes and mountains became saturated with her ruthless fluid. Sometimes a tentacle of Water grabbed, in one wave, a whole city or a forest into her depths. Cheered on by Wind whole countries were swept from the map. Life crawled up the mountains together with Fauna. They tried to save themselves under Flora's shade. Nothing worked. Higher and higher they had to climb, as far as the mountain tops. And there again were Wind, Fire and Sun to harrass them. To stay alive, Life had to dispatch old Life. The young and strong ones nibbled on toes and fingers of the Old and weak. Poverty and Richness disappeared. Faith, Hope and Love let Life down, again. Flora and Fauna did their best to help where they could, by offering themselves as nourishment with their roots, berries and raw meat. Wisdom and Stupidity were constantly negotiating. When Wisdom thought of something clever to survive, Stupidity wrecked it immediately.

It took some years, ten, fifteen, a hundred, that the Land of living Life changed into a Land of dying Death. At first the E7 spoke of Land of Young Death, but after some hundreds of years more, they called it Land of Old Death.

They had their way, Sun and Moon, Earth, Water, Air, Fire and Wind. Life was sentenced to Old Death. Earth had become nothing more than Blowing Sand, Choppy Water and Singeing Fire.

After nine hundred and ninety years the E7 had another meeting.

-I'm bored,' Earth sighed. She suffered from the heat. She was fatter, but looked much better, less polluted.

-'You wanted this,' Sun said irritated.

-'Yes, but so hard, so relentless, so vast and void I have become into one boundless desert,' Earth moaned.

-'But what else do you want?' rippled Water, 'Do you want Life back on Earth?'

-'No, no, that is the one and only source of trouble. To give Poverty and Richness a leg up again, together with Hunger and Gluttony as Ministers?' cried Wind.

-'And where do we find Flora and Fauna so fast?' crackled Fire, who had become very self-confident, because he played a role of importance now. However, it had helped having his new girl friend, TwoThousandDegrees. Thanks to her he hadn't stop glowing.

-'Faith, Hope and Love have to be somewhere,' Earth said again. 'They are old souls and not easy to bring to their knees.'

-'Do you have a clue where they will be?' blew Wind to Air. She always pretended to know everything, but this time she shook her misty head.

-'Okay, you know what,' Water said, 'I draw back, I'm fed up with this endless flowing.

'Wind, why don't you abate and Fire, if you extinguish, lets see what happens.'

He stoked up and said, 'Yes but, eeh, when I snuff out what'll I do with TwoThousandDegrees?'

-'Get rid of her, she is far too hot anyway,' Moon said with his pleasant full-mooned face. He never said much, but when he said something everybody listened. Fire nodded and smouldered shyly.

-'I don't care. I shine anyhow, a bit more or less doesn't matter to me,' blistered Sun.

Another ten years past. Earth kept on turning around Sun. Wind dropped. Water slipped off into the depths under Land. Fire smouldered softly on. Water heaved shining and lovely in the distance between the barren, though proudly erected mountain tops on the distant horizon.

The E7 waited, but nothing seemed to happen. Once TwoThousandDegrees had pulled back into the cool shadows, Earth started to steam. The atmosphere began to enclose her again. The nights became cooler; Moon gave space to the Stars. Autumn changed into Winter and Water into ice.

Although Earth had become wasteland, there was one place that had escaped the fury of rising Water, fiery Flames and storming Wind. In this place the sand had also been blown into heaps. But there were some trees left, though they were black scorched silhouettes, firmly fixed on thousand year old roots, still visible as dead branch arms in deep craters, struck by Wind and Water. There were some walls still standing, piled up by human hands. The stones had fossilised, which indicated Life lived there once. A piece of a tarmacked road lay broken up leading to nowhere. An iron wire coiled in a noose hung on a branch, its prey decayed long ago.

The E7 had, in spite of all its fury spared this place, without knowing I was sleeping here. Water had rippled past me. Fire had only licked and singed around me. And Wind had experienced the benefit of a lull in this place. I had hidden myself in a nest of sandy grains for 1001 long years. Sometimes I had opened one eye and observed that the world about me was still in turmoil. Then, I'd turned around, sighed and slept on, for another hundred or more years.

It was in the year 3013 that I really woke up. Winter was once again overtaken by Spring; a cool breeze stroked my bald skull and a dew drop landed on my lip. An unprecedented power of growth inflated my breast. In a few hours my head stood alert on my neck. I stretched my stiff limbs, looked around and was startled by the dead scorched landscape around me. I was alone and wondered if I would survive. Daily, without effort I grew a few feet into the air and the ground. I smelled the briny sea in the distance and some days later, as I towered above the sand dune I saw its vast simmering surface too. The sky above it was glowing red. Sun sank behind Earth, and as Moon rose into the night, he smiled at me. I grew and grew, my body became thicker and my feet became firmly rooted into Earth. With a thousand arms and ten

thousand fingers I became a Tree of Life. But I stood alone, I couldn't move, I couldn't go anywhere.

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It is still the year 3013 and I 'm dozing. I believe it is summer now. I believe it, because my leaves produce so much shadows around my trunk, that I'm not sure about how much light is in the sky. I sense movement in the air as my crown starts to rustle. Instantly, I'm fully awake and peer through my foliage into the empty landscape. Above me hangs a spider as large as life. It shines and blisters in sinking Sun. Its body is wide and high, with eyes like windows and huge antennas. It descends slowly scattering the loose sand and lands on its somewhat bent, high steel legs, only a few feet away from my trunk. After a while a door opens; I wonder why this beast has to land here, just here.

I'd seen these sort of monsters landing on Earth before, more than 1001 years ago. I then stood between the trees in the forest, watching TV, we did so quite regularly. We trees looked at big flat digital screens with a very clear picture. I didn't understand all of it, but I found it very interesting.

Suddenly, I see movement from the giant. A ladder is thrown out, it unfolds in five segments. Someone descends. On further inspection I see it is Scotty, from 'Beam me up, Scotty' of Star Trek. He is followed by no less than Ken and Barbie, with long, stiff legs they sink deeply into the loose sand. Seconds later the Tele Tubbies tumble out. For a short while nothing happens, then someone is pushed out. It looks like he resists and argues. When I realise it's Bill Gates, I'm frightened. Wasn't he the ambassador of Richness? An elderly man follows him now; he looks like Nelson Mandela. I recognise Pope Paul II, even after his death he stayed the ambassador of Faith. Now Love is coming out, it's a beautiful girl, no one less than Nicole Kidman. A critically sufferer of AIDS stumbles down the ladder, while leaning on Nicole. And then, I don't believe my eyes, I see George Bush descend, wasn't he Stupidity? Another

handful of celebrities sweep down, Bono, HE2? and Geldof; even that asshole Saddam; Armstrong, wasn't he a cyclist? I see Ayaan Hirsi Ali and Oprah Winfrey, both in white starched blouses and black pencil skirts, stumble down into the loose sand, their hair still straight. Arafat and Milosovitsj are on the stairs now, both waving with their familiar arrogance. The last one on the ladder is a bend old man who stumbles over his beard. I saw him only a few times on a striped video, it's unmistakably Bin Laden. I've forgotten who he was, Wisdom or War.

Somehow, these old Ambassadors and Ministers have escaped the frenzy of the E7. Did they spend 1001 years together in that Spaceship? It sure is big, but big enough for all of them? I think I might be dreaming and pinch one of my branches. Then I hear the sweet voice of Nicole.

-'Look, there is a tree!' She walks towards me and unfolds an old chequed blanket, right under my arms. She sits down and says, 'Come Georgie-boy, be good and sit next to me. And you Binnie, you sit over here.' They both obeyed her, Stupidity and Wisdom or were they War and Peace, and trotted instantly towards Love. The sufferer of AIDS leans tired and broken against my trunk. Richness put a few hundred dollar notes in his pocket. As if that would be of any use here. Nelson, together with Ayaan and Oprah hobble along to join the others, it's a funny sight with the two women in high heels. The three of them sat on the department of Hope, I remember. Now Bono and Geldof draw closer together, with Saddam. Didn't they represent Good and Evil? The Pope jumps behind Armstrong on the bike, they won't get far in the loose sand, or Faith must think he's Jesus walking over water.

'What a blessing this fresh air, after all those choking years in space,' says Ayaan. 'It's like paradise here'.

-'Yes Ayaan, that's how it started, don't you remember', says Bin.

-'The axe of evil,' mumbles George.

-'No', Faith says, he slides off Armstrong's bike and flops down on the blanket, 'don't get everything mixed up'.

-'Who's mixed up here?' says Bono.

-'Wasn't I the axe of evil?' it's Saddam, who interrupts.

-'Yes exactly and that's one of the reasons we ceased to exist. I gave so much money away and had such a good idea to digitalise the whole world. War would have disappeared and everybody would have been rich and happy.' Bill Gates says.

-'Do you, f-----g believe that?' Geldof asks Bono.

Arafat mumbles to Milosovitsj, 'we know everything about it, don't we, the Jews may have been the chosen people, but Palestine is ours.'

'Exactly, that's how it is,' says Milo.

-'Come on boys, don't quarrel, we have coped together in Space for more than thousand years. And now, back on Earth, we're squabbling again?' It is Oprah, who jumps up, straitening her skirt. Nicole backs her up, she too gets up and places a hand on each of the shoulders of Bin and George.

-'I have an idea, let's do a role-play and turn the tables. George, you play Bin; Saddam, you put yourself in Nelson's place and Nelson, you be Pope.' She walks towards the Pope and taps him on the cheek, 'you have AIDS'. To the poor sufferer of AIDS, she says, 'How about you become Bill, and play the rich guy'.

-'Good idea, Nicole,' Ayaan claps her hands in pleasure. 'Let these men demonstrate where it went wrong. We'll give the instructions.'

'Tut tut, ho ho, are you saying that it's all the men's fault?' Armstrong asks.

-'Hey, Nicole do you have a role for me? You must know I loved playing games as a child, I especially liked folding aeroplanes out of old newspapers,' laughs Bin.

Nicole bites her lip as she ponders on his question, a deep frown creasing her smooth forehead.

'Alright Bin, you play me, Love'.

I tower high above the party and laugh out loud, what a bunch of children they still are. Scotty, Barbie and Ken, assisted by the Tele Tubbies, are busy cleaning and securing the Spider. With iron wires and stakes they fix it into the sand. Suddenly it looks like a big tent. Once ready they approach the group.

The newly appointed actors are preparing for the play, clothes are changed, beards are shaven, and hair is dyed. I'm the witness of a real spectacle. It seems to be an open-air theatre, where they are rehearsing a Shakespeare play.

-'Thou shall not steal or kill,' I hear Binny-Bush say.

-'Lend me your wife', says Kidman-Bin to the AIDS suffering Pope.

-'Yes, but then you'll get sick too', he answers.

-'I don't mind, I want to be a human belonging to a real world'.

-'How does it feel to be a Catholic?' Saddam-Mandela asks Mandela-Pope

-'Great, but I was already one, when being Mandela. But you? Must be a different feeling for an Islamic'.

-'Come on guys, try to be serious,' Nicole shouts. 'You have to take some pains to really act your parts and in particular to listen to each other. We call that communication.'

It's going to be a pretty kettle of fish, the evening falls and Scotty turns on the headlights of the Spider. My branches throw long shadows acting as wings in the theatre. The play turns macabre. The men can't stop any more. They change roles constantly now. Bono plays Bush and Bob is Bin. They argue about 9/11. Bin says that Bush flew the planes. Bush gets furious and says that it was Arafat. Mandela jokes, saying it was Gates. Armstrong, who just has arrived on his bike says, 'it was me', because he thinks they were arguing about who won the latest Tour the France. For a second the tension is awkward. Then, Oprah bursts into laughter. Ayaan too, followed by Nicole.

Bin, Saddam, Milosovitsj, even Bush, whose known for his lack of humor, start to laugh, albeit stiffly. But the laughter is contagious and within minutes everybody shrieks with laughter. They roll over and bend double around my trunk. I don't know what comes over me, but a smile appears between my foliage.

Nicole stands straight and shouts over the shrieks, cries and howls, 'Cut, okay guys, this was great. Tomorrow we are going to film, the best shots we'll send to the

E7. They have to see that we are dead serious, that we are fit and able to rule the World, with one God, one Faith and one Community of Love.'

The next morning the Spider has gone. I still wonder if I have been dreaming. But not long after Life returns to Earth lichen grows on my trunk. Beetles and ants tickle my branches as they scuttle up and down. Birds make nests between my leaves. The foundations of the old fossilised stone walls become the bases for new houses. A town grows up around me. The tarmacked road is restored and provides a link with the outside world. People come and go and they look happy. I hear their laughter and chatter as they pass me. I heard they had made that film and it was well received by the E7, so they have given Life another chance. I've even heard that Life joined the E7, it now operates as one solid and peaceful organisation called the E8.

December 2005 © Maryet Maks