

Doomsday

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Millionaires decide to live on remote island!

The young millionaires Jack and Jess Hollister (35 and 34), shareholders of the world renowned company, "Profex" announced yesterday, that they have spent \$200 Million to arrange a lifelong stay on an Island off the coast of America. „We want to raise world awareness for Global Pollution.“ Mr. Hollister told the Daily Mail, „That is why we have decided to cooperate with the NHO (National Health Organisation), to let them conduct experiments on how an untainted environment affects our bodies.“ This project has been planned carefully and is now finally ready to start. „Of course, our subjects are in no mortal danger.“ NHO spokesperson Wilfred McMann said, as we asked him about the wild animals the NHO shipped to the island. „They have received important survival training and know how to deal with certain situations.“ Even though this project has many supporters throughout the globe, some are also against it. On our Twitter webpage, a user writes: „This is utterly unnecessary. Think about it, wild animals are shipped from their natural habitat to succumb to the needs of rich people, who can afford it.“ Another person tweeted: „I would not be surprised, if this is just an excuse to gun down a few prized tigers and lions.“ (Responses have been edited for length and clarity) If you want to share your opinion on this debate, visit our official website on www.thetimes.co.uk

The familiar rush of the waves woke me up. Immediately, I knew that something was not right. Something felt wrong – very wrong. Shielding my eyes from the sun which burned down on us, even at such an early hour, I sat up. The first thing I noticed was that Jack was gone. His carefully woven mat of grass lay crumpled on the floor, as if he got up in a hurry. He never went without telling me, since the jungle was a dangerous place. Alarmed, I jumped up and ran outside of our modest hut. I could feel my pulse throbbing as I scanned the beach. I could not discern any figure amongst the white sand. *Maybe he is just getting water at the stream.* I told myself. *There is nothing to worry about.* Still, I checked our weapons to see if Jack had gone out armed. It would give me a clue as to where he was. But all of our spears and knives were still stacked in the same orderly fashion I arranged them the night before. Before I could think of anything else though, I could hear twigs breaking and branches snapping under some invisible force. Slowly I turned around, knowing that no big predator would dare to show itself in the unprotected area of the beach. At least, not since we are here. But a big panther slunk itself out of the bush, and fixated me with its yellow eyes. These animals were highly dangerous and could kill me in seconds. I would have to fight back. But it would be absolutely impossible to kill it by myself. I needed Jack. All I could now do was to fend it off until he arrived. *If* he arrived, the sad tone in my thoughts becoming more apparent now. I tried my best not to be caught into that fierce glare, offering

a submissive look instead. The NHO briefed me about how to act when faced with a meat eater. The last five years had not been easy for me but now I was already a professional. However, this upcoming danger was not like any of the other encounters I faced. There was something urgent about the cat, coiled like a spring. Not dangerous. It was more of a warning. Gripping my spear more tightly, I slowly inched backwards. Usually Jack and I would edge apart to confuse the wildcat, but now its focus was drawn on me, only me. The panther did not follow me. It only stood there, at the edge of the jungle, tense as ever. I hoped it would retreat back into the trees. After two seconds, that felt like an eternity, I saw the big paws move, faster now, running straight towards me. It closed the gap quickly. My head snapped up, just in time to see the massive black body bearing down on me. Even though I knew it was too late, I raised the spear. The cat bounded over me. Startled, I whipped around, following every of its movements with my eyes. It walked along the coastline, always staying out of reach of the waves. Then I saw a sharp movement. Its paw sliced into the water, as if to catch a fish. No success. This worried me. What was a panther doing, hunting for fish? What scared it away from its natural habitat? I turned my back on the wildcat now, knowing that no danger would come from it. I had more pressing issues. Jack. If he had not shown up yet, he surely was up to something. But then a terrible thought came. What if food was so scarce that even bigger animals, such as tigers, saw no other choice but to feed on humans? Perhaps some had tried fishing, just like this panther, and Jack had found them? Had tried to fight them off? But what if, before he could reach for a weapon, the tigers had dragged him away? My mind was racing wildly, but I forced calm upon it. I hadn't checked at the water hole yet. Maybe he wanted to go there, but had to hide from the panther? Here, everything was possible. I got my trusted knife, the one with the carved handle and the specially melded point, and started moving towards the stream. Usually, the second I stepped into the jungle, I was engulfed in beautiful noises of nature. I would hear the frogs croaking, the squirrels nibbling and the birds singing love songs. But today the whole balanced rhythm was out of sync. I could only hear a lone crow screeching out into the blue sky. Odd. Never, in my five years of residence, I encountered such a phenomena. As I moved deeper into the high trees, I noticed that I could not see any animals, except a few birds. This worried me. Now I started to run, because I feared the worst. Did a disease break out? It did not take me long to arrive at the stream. The first thing I noticed as I jumped in, to wade across, was that the water was warm, not cold like it usually was. It was also not crystal clear, but looked oddly tainted. Then I looked across the stream. I gasped. In a wide semicircle around the water lay dead animals, birds, reptiles and big mammals, such as stags. I saw a beautiful doe, her breathing laboured. The knife I was holding slipped from my numb fingers and landed with a muted thud onto the soft moss. I ran over her, stepping carefully over the carcasses. Once, I tread on a dead parrot, feeling its bones breaking under my foot. Horrified, I jumped back. It was now too late for the poor doe, which had already closed her eyes. I did not care anymore, since I spotted him at that moment. Jack was lying a few feet away from the doe, his features turned to stone. „No! “I screamed, running towards him. „Jack!“ He did not move. As I reached for him, I crouched down and put a hand over his heart. I did not feel his pulse, because I could never

find quite the right spot. Agonizing seconds passed, as I waited for a movement under his chest, any movement. Then I felt it, weak thuds against my hand. I nearly cried with relief. I cradled his head in my lap for a few moments, until I reached to cup some water in my hands to give him some. It was then he awoke. „Jess... No!“ He croaked. „Not...water!“ Puzzled, I looked at him, touching his cracked lips. I suddenly noticed the greenish tint of his skin. He was sick. Very sick. I pressed my lips to his flaming forehead. „Honey.“ I whispered. „We have to get you to the beach.“

Two days later

Jack was resting in the hut, protected from the sun. I visited the stream regularly, to see if something had changed, but nothing did. Only the number of dead animals around it seemed to multiply by the hour. Yesterday, Jack managed to tell me, that he tried to investigate the sudden lack of sounds. He became thirsty and had gone to the stream. He noticed the dead bodies, around twenty of them. The water was just as tainted as when I saw it, but with the difference that he drank from it. He felt dizzy and fainted. As he woke up, he could barely move and had to watch as innocent animals drank from the water and died. I felt helpless. Our water supplies were nearly exhausted and there was no way of getting more. I have to get us off this island, and quickly. I could not cure Jack by myself. He needed to get to a hospital as soon as possible. I walked to the back of our hut, where we have planted a small bush to mark the spot of our „Survival kit.“, as the NHO like to call it. I started to dig with my bare hands. It was buried just deep enough to ensure that no animals could find it by accident and destroy it. After a couple of minutes, I found the hard plastic box, which resembled a red toolbox. I opened the huge clips with a click and hoisted the heavy box onto my lap. It was the only source of technology on this island. I found a satellite phone, various power banks and headphones. I took it all out and dug a bit deeper, looking for the medical kit. I nearly cried with relief as I found the medicine, water bottles, a thin aluminium blanket to conserve warmth and some canned food. The fever tablets will surely aid Jack. In this case, the needles and thread for stitches were absolutely useless, as were the plasters. I sighed, aggravated. Did the NHO presume that we would only be attacked by wild animals or hurt ourselves physically? Did they not think of diseases? I could still unearth some stomach- and headache tablets, as well as a small bottle which was wrapped in gauze. Morphine. Hopefully, we will survive with these items until the NHO fetched us. After I gave him the medicine, he fell into a deep slumber. It was time. I took the satellite phone and walked all the way to the other side of the beach, so that nobody could interrupt me. I dialled the number I was forced to remember. I waited. A few seconds, I could only hear static. I became nervous, as the night crept in around me. The silence was ghostly, and my body was overwhelmed with the instinct to flee. But I stayed, urging calm upon myself. Then I heard a voice. „Hello? Who is this?“ „Hello, NHO.“ I said in a steady voice, trying not to breach protocol. „This is Subject 2 calling from Station 5. I have an emergency situation to report.“ I waited. Heavy breathing could be heard, followed by a sigh. „Please wait. I will transfer you through to Operator

number 4.“ „Understood.“ I expected to hear another voice immediately, thinking that my situation had top priority, since they did not hear from us for so long. A few minutes passed, until I was on the line again. „Hello, this is Operator number 4, receiving an emergency call from Subject 2, calling from Station 5. Is that correct?“ „Yes.“ „So please brief me about your current situation.“ I cleared my throat. „Sir, the water here seems to be contaminated. Nearly all wildlife has been eradicated, and my partner, Subject 1 is severely ill, He drank from the water. We need help immediately.“ There was a pause on the line. „Is there any other clean water source?“ „No, only the few water bottles I found in the emergency kit.“ My operator seems to be hesitating, but then said in a gentler voice: „Jess, it’s me, Brian.“ Heat rushed into my cheeks. Brian was our trusted friend at the NHO. „Brian! You have to help us!“ „Jess, I’m sorry.“ „What?“ „I said, I am sorry.“ Brian repeated. „You do not understand the situation we are in.“ I felt so weak, I had to sit down, hoping I heard wrong. „Things are not going so well. We have to handle catastrophic conditions right now, and we cannot let you off that island.“ I said nothing. „Our population has reached 10 billion now. Census numbers were manipulated in the past, especially in some developing countries, and there are more people living on this planet than we were lead to believe. Yes, over the last five years our population exploded.“ He started sobbing. „We are soon going extinct, Jess! Not only your water is dirty, but so is ours. But that is not the only problem. I don’t think anyone will survive.“ „No.“ I whispered. „Africa is going down first. Not only because of the huge Ebola break out but acid rain has killed so many, and 4 billion people, 4 billion, are currently awaiting their death.“ My mood turned stony. This sounded utterly absurd. „4 Billion, Brian? I don’t believe you for a second. Five years ago, everything seemed okay!“ At this, he laughed. „Oh did it? Trust me, world governments have been covering up many things, and we were forced to cooperate. For example, as you left, it was predicted, that global warming would reach a catastrophic peak only much later. They were wrong. It happened much faster and it was kept secret from the public. The sea levels rose so quickly, that it destroyed many coastal areas. Your island only survived until now because of the surrounding islands and rock formations. The radiation from destroyed power plants, chemicals from the chemical factories and oil from offshore drilling sites, leaked into our water systems. The rivers and oceans are being destroyed. Fracking did not only cause earthquakes but the chemicals they used also leaked into our water systems. Natural earthquakes, enhanced by global warming, caused even more destruction all over the world. The dangerous mining chemicals leaked into water systems, especially in Africa, South America and China. However, the worst that happened was the biological warfare between the USA, China and Russia. Jess, they used the worst kind of warfare under the umbrella of normal disease. They let out deadly viruses over huge cities such as Moscow, Beijing, Washington, London, Berlin, New Delhi. Too many cities to recite. It obviously spread. Humankind turned into an aggressive cancer and we destroyed our own body....“ I was appalled. We were lost. „So how are we going to die, Brian?“ I asked in a low voice. „Will you let us die of thirst?“ I became angry now. „Because that is not right! What happened to humanity? I thought that is why this stupid organization was founded for in the first place!“ Tears ran down my cheeks, hot and wet. „That is not

fair! Not fair at all!" Brian turned cold. „If it is any comfort to you, an acid cloud is heading your way. Chances of survival are slim.“ I fell silent. Our death was inevitable. „How long?“ I croaked. We have just been sentenced to death by our best friend. „Three days, if my calculations are accurate. If you want to live through it, and die of dehydration instead, then I suggest you go into the heart of the jungle and build a strong cover. This acid is stronger than what we've ever seen. It burns through a piece of thin wood with one droplet.“ I could not believe this was coming out of his mouth. „So tell me, Brian.“ I said, spitting out the words. „Are you amongst the people who are going to be saved?“ I knew the answer, but I asked anyway. „No. I will die like the animals on your island, just like the rest of the world, if that's any comfort to you.“ „No. But don't you understand, you can DO something! You have a lot of influence at the NHO! You are an Operator! You have all the information! Help us, help your family! Do you want your own daughter to die?“ I have met Miranda once, a very cute 2 year old little girl. To imagine her dying broke my heart. Brian said: „She will be fine. They will try to save the children between 3 - 15 years of age, along with a few adults to guide them.“ His voice broke. „If they survive underground, they will be the start of a new world.“ „You know that's a lie. That must be over two billion people!“ „Three, to be exact. Yes, Jess, I know that it is highly implausible. But it is one strand of hope we can have.“ „Don't you hear me? Hope isn't enough! Take action, Brian! Help saving three billion kids!“ „That is out of my hands. The government will decide what is best for all of us.“ „Weakling.“ I spat into the receiver. I was about to end the call, but Brian stopped me and said: „Before you go, I want to still tell you something. I have been going through the health data I have been receiving from you. You know, from the chip.“ „Yeah.“ I said, curious. „It turns out that you are pregnant. Fourth month. Mortified, I looked down at my stomach. „Thanks.“ I whispered, and pressed the end button, before Brian could express his congratulations or condolences. Numbly, I walked back to our hut, instinctively patting my tummy and looking at the sky. I saw no hints of the upcoming storm, but the grim truth settled upon me. We, Jack, my unborn baby and I, nearly a happy family, were going to be destroyed. I felt the urge to protect the little child in my womb, but I knew it was going to be impossible. Even if we survived the one bout of acid rain, more was going to come, I was sure of that. I could also not go without water for five months, until my baby was born. The realization dawned on me that my unborn child has absolutely no chance of survival. This was a mess. What did humankind progress into? I do not know if I should consider myself lucky that I chose to live on this island. Would my unborn child have had a better chance back home? Did my own foolishness kill it? I reached the hut, hoping Jack was awake. We had to discuss the matter, debate our three options. All of them ended in death. Mercifully, when I shook him, he opened his eyes. He looked rested, but still ill. I regretted not asking Brian about Jack's health and the best way to cure him. It probably did not matter anyway. In the three days time, it would be irrelevant. He smiled. „Hey, darling.“ I forced my mouth to curl upwards and relayed my conversation with Brian. I left out the pregnancy though. I don't know why I did it, but it seemed wrong to deplete his last drops of the energy. „So we have three options.“ I finished. Jack sighed. „I can guess. Prolong our death or not.“ He looked at me questioningly. „Are you

really prepared to take your own life by acid rain?" Yesterday, I would have said yes. But now I carried a bigger responsibility. My baby. It already developed a tiny body, floating in mine. Hoping it was safe. If I gave up, I was a murderess. I would kill my own child. I had to try. „No.“ I answered Jack. „We will find a way. We always have.“ It looked as if he was fighting back a smile. „That’s my girl. But how?“ „I have a plan.“ I said, hoping it was true.

Two days later

The storm was going to hit anytime soon. I could already see the purple clouds moving towards us. The clear blue sky above us seemed reassuring, but I knew that this was probably the last time I would see it. Nonetheless, I stayed cautiously optimistic. Just yesterday, I had another talk with the outside world, this time with another operator, who revealed that there was thin syrup in the trees, good to drink. We would be able to drink it for about two years, before our systems would start to reject it and crave the minerals only water had. With any luck, we would be rescued by that time. I have built a shelter in the heart of the jungle. I had nothing, except some wood and various supplies from our hut. The two big trees served as support rungs and I tried my best to stack everything as high as I could. Then I used the remaining gauze to wrap everything together. It seemed stable, but Brian already warned us about the severity of the acid. A droplet could burn through a thin piece of wood. I desperately tried to find some metal, but without success. Only our cooking pot could be used as something useful. I put it onto my head to prevent the acid from burning through my skull. I almost laughed at my flimsy attempt for protection. Jack was still lying down at the beach. He demanded that he stay down there, since he was anyway too sick to move. He told me that he wanted to see the beach while he still could and I would be a terrible partner to not grant him his last wish. I agreed just to appease him, but I would fetch him soon. I could not just leave him there to die. I already started moving towards the beach when I saw the thick clouds gathering right behind us. Horrified, I stared while images began playing in my head, dreadful ones. Small children, dying of starvation. Animals, swathed in plastic, dying of suffocation. The seas, once a brilliant blue, a muddy brown. The earth we were supposed to be cherishing, crumbling beneath our skin. Was everything going to end like this? Was there even a way back? I nearly reached the beach when I heard a loud crack. It sounded like an enormous release of energy. I broke into a sprint, in order to save Jack. But then I saw it. An enormous, brown wave, full of dead fish was heading towards us. Just like in my fantasies. I could not hear anything, only my muted scream. My shelter could not withstand this. For a moment, I was torn. I still ran a few strides towards Jack, but my mother instinct told me to run. My baby. „For our child, Jack.“ I whispered, while hot tears ran down my face. He would never know why I deserted him. But I still glanced over my shoulder one last time. He was a lonely figure on the empty beach staring at his impending death until it swallowed him. I did not even hear a scream.

My heart was breaking, I was falling apart. But still, I ran. The wave had no intention of slowing, and it was closing in fast. I kept looking at the sky. The clouds formed a closed dome. No light was ever going to escape it again. It started to rain. Acid, falling from the sky, burning my skin. Dirty water, crashing through the trees. I was the only one fleeing, and I suddenly knew I was not going to live. The acid burned holes in my skin, until I was bleeding from all the countless wounds. I could feel the water lapping at my heels and suddenly, I stopped dead in my tracks. Blocking my way was the water stream, which seemed more contaminated than ever. Like acid replaced the water. I knew that I could not cross, because I would die the second my skin touched the water. The tsunami nearly reached me. If I could, I would fall into the river of chemicals to end my suffering, but I had somebody else to think of. Fleeting, I darted sideways, parallel to the wave, hoping to find a way around the poisonous stream. I could not even collect myself. The water was over me, crushing all the air from my lungs. It was a lukewarm temperature, and for a moment I felt safe. But a current brought me to the surface and I could gasp for air. The whole world I knew was flooded by pollution. The murky brown colour seemed to be expanding into the blue ocean by the second, like a nasty oil spill. There was no way to stop it. And the acid showers did not show any sign of ceasing. I dived as deep as I could into the water to escape the torture, especially since the impact with the wave had knocked away my cooking pot. But it did not help. Even as I dove deeper, the burning never stopped, and I was bleeding too much anyway. Hands folded over my stomach, I offered a last prayer and rose back to the surface. The first drop burned itself into my skull, and I was screaming of pain. For a moment, I was hallucinating. I saw the clear blue sky with the cottony, white clouds and the sun. I remembered how it was, to hear birds sing and everybody living in peaceful harmony. The next moment, everything went black.