Six Hours

by Paul de Denus

First Hour

Rounding the high curve along the front beach access, I come upon it.

There are perhaps fifty cars, stopped dead in traffic, more on the opposite side of the double yellow disappearing east. The occupants are abandoning them, hurrying toward the water. There, the wind blows our bodies and scatters our thoughts but we sway like dazed birds, helpless to move, our eyes on the horizon. A smudge the color of tobacco streaks along the rim of the world, blending the flat white sky mocha like a wet watercolor landscape. Then the air ‘whumpts' and ‘chops' all around us with giant noise and metal as military helicopters buzz overhead and dart away toward the sun.

Second Hour

We stare, uncomprehending. We wait for a signal from some authority to tell us what's happening, that it's a dream, a government exercise perhaps. The signal doesn't come. Hundreds of people are arriving, drawn to the water's edge only to collapse in the sand. My cell phone shakes; it's my father's voice calling my name - so far away - with long distance crackle and panic on the line. I can hear Mom in the background saying the picture is snowy - on all the news stations - and then there is a muffling sound and she is on, weeping softly “are — you - alright?” and the phone goes dead.

Third Hour

The helicopters shoot past and skim a few hundred yards off shore. They don't venture toward the horizon anymore; the first ones that did vanished… simple as that. No explosion… no attack… just gone… as if absorbed by the air. The beach is now standing room only, the air heavy, humid and humming as we watch the spectacle. Along the horizon, long black mirrored cylinders rotate, smooth and seamless, resembling cigar tubes, cylinders the size of aircraft

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carriers, hundreds of them, more. They sit silent, suspended above the water.

Fourth Hour

The man next to me is sobbing. He whispers, “this can't be- it can't.” He stands in an open stance, his legs apart, a small pistol quivering in his two handed grip, the front of his jeans soaked in urine. Along the darkened rim, the cylinders double in size, then triple as if magnified, rising up like sudden skyscrapers, blotting out the sky. The sobbing man places the gun to his head and I don't stop him. Instead, I run.

Fifth Hour

The mind falters when overwhelmed. It staggers, protects… closes down. I do not know if I will ever be open again. I don't know my own name. Some primordial instinct instructs me to burrow away… to hide in this expansive house nestled in along the dunes. Like a badger, I burrow deep in a dark downstairs closet, clawing under fallen wardrobe, unable to look past neither the drawn drapes nor the next ticking second.

Sixth Hour

They are upstairs. I can hear them ‘sliding' across the floor. It is a sound I can't describe. They are like music: a musty melody worms inside my head, slightly nauseating, pleasing. That could be a good thing, I whisper to no one… it can... it will. It is.