

Sheriff Raymond Arbuckle of the Onondaga County sheriff's department lazily reclined in his cruiser sipping his now cold black coffee, a content smirk of amusement on his face as he observed his new deputy. The normally young and enthusiastic Deputy Levi Chen, who the seasoned sheriff had jokingly nicknamed "Bright-Eyes", was hunched nursing his stale coffee from earlier in the shift, not embodying the nickname.

"Night shift is always hard to get used to, son. You'll get adjusted to it soon." the sheriff chuckled.

"Yes sir. I'm sure I will, I've just never been a late night person sir." His deputy resonated, the forced cheerfulness painfully obvious in his voice.

"Call me Ray, you're making me feel my age with all that 'sir' talk."

"Besides," Ray continued lightheartedly, taking a gulp of coffee "interesting things always seem to happen on the night shift."

"Like what s- Ray?"

"Officer Scott said he had seen a UFO up by Green Lakes."

"Scott said that? He never said anything to me..." Levi mused, his interest peaked.

"I'm afraid I don't know son, but it makes for an interesting night shift story, eh?" Ray murmured.

Deputy Chen checked his phone, the bright screen blinding him for a second before he saw the time displayed on the screen.

6:09 am, Thursday, 3/11/27.

"Only an hour and half left and we can go home." He stated, relieved.

The static of the police radio cut off Levi Chen, they both waited for a couple of seconds but no voices could be heard over the static. Sheriff Arbuckle frowned and reached for the radio comms, "Hello? This is Sheriff Arbuckle, over." The radio connection ceased.

Before the men had any time to even look at each other in confusion the shaking began. They both yelled in shock as their cold coffee cups were catapulted out of the holders covering them in the contents. Car alarms started blaring as the whole earth seemed to shudder and shake. Lights started rapidly appearing in the neighbourhood windows as the frightened cries and shrieks started to grow louder and louder. Trees swayed back and forth as birds flew, cawing and shrieking up into the sky. As suddenly as it began, the quaking stopped.

Both the Sheriff and Deputy looked at each other with wide eyes, as the smell of coffee encompassed the car. They both bolted out of the cruiser to survey the damage.

“Was that a...” Ray whispered,

“ Earthquake.” Levi finished.

“We never get earthquakes like that in New York, we need to survey the damage and get back to the station ASAP.” Ray stated as the shaken townsfolk started to emerge from their homes.

As soon as the men had jumped in the car they got in contact with the station in Fayetteville.

“ Maggie! Is that you?” Levi yelled into the handset.

“Chen! Thank God you're reachable! Is the Sheriff with you?”

“Yes, we are heading back to the station. Do you have any intel on what the heck just happened?”

“ As a matter of fact I do, a few minutes ago we got an alert from the Earthquake Hazards Program saying that a freak tectonic shift was imminent and would cause an earthquake. We tried to reach you but the radio wouldn't go through. They say it had a magnitude of 4.8.”

“Any significant damage reported?”

“Nothing so far. There have been ambulances dispatched as people were hit with tiles falling off roofs and other various things but as far as I know, no fatalities. There are some concerns about mainline gas pipes breaking but considering it was not a catastrophic earthquake it should be fine. Apparently it was felt in Minoa, Lyncourt and Syracuse too. We are in touch with the stations in the surrounding area, so far no major damage or injuries reported to Minoa, but apparently calls have been coming in from Syracuse that the Goethe–Schiller Monument has collapsed as well as some internal damage to the Everson Museum and other buildings. I expect we will be hearing more reports sooner rather than later of more damages.”

The deputy let out a breath he didn't know he was holding in.

“This reminds me of the earthquake that hit the D.C area in 2011, which cost upwards of \$200 million in damages.” The Sheriff grumbled, clenching his jaw. He picked up the handset and barked, “ Maggie, make sure all officers who can be spared are ready to be dispatched. I am positive there will be some break-ins and looting today. Natural disasters leave businesses and homes vulnerable. Set up a press conference with the local news outlets, and send out a statement on all social media platforms, also called Mayor Fairchild. We need to talk to her about how to proceed. We need to ensure the public are assured there is no imminent danger.”

“Yes, Sir.”

The crackle of the radio ceased, plunging the cruiser into silence.

“I guess we won't be going home soon then, huh Ray?” The Deputy quipped with a smile.

“Well at least you look more awake now Bright-Eyes.” The sheriff retorted, with a chuckle.

“I told you something interesting always happens on the night shift.”

As the slew of calls and stops the two law officers had to make due to the damage, the initial plan of getting back to the station as soon as possible had been abandoned very promptly. The clock read 8:23 as the two officers were making their way back to the station. The chatter inside the cruiser was still very much earthquake oriented.

“I can't believe it, I have never been in an earthquake before- LOOK OUT!”

The brakes of the cruiser screeched to a halt leaving the two men to stare stunned at the sight before them.

“Is that.. a dead horse?” The sheriff rubbed his eyes and squinted.

“Not just a horse..”

Deputy Chen broke into a run calling into his radio for an ambulance. The sheriff paused, taking in the ghastly scene before him. An unassuming farm, with fields of dead cows, horses, sheep.. and that's when he noticed the farmers family. The first thought that flashed through his mind was mass shooting, only there was no blood. There were no weapons, there was no sign of a fight, no sign of injuries. No sign of life. He ran over to Deputy Chen who was barking into his radio ..” no signs of any type of physical altercations, it's like they just dropped dead. No visible injuries on anyone. It doesn't make any sense.” He looked over at his superior who had an expression equal parts confusion and horror.

“This didn't happen just because of the earthquake.”

As the cruiser pulled up to the station both men were struck at how it had transformed in only a few hours. The normally relatively calm station was now ablaze with news cameras, reporters and the general public. Ray and Levi were ushered swiftly behind the makeshift fence of tape and security guards as they were bombarded with questions.

“Do you have any information on the deaths that have happened?”

“Why are the Green Lakes National Park now inaccessible?”

“Why are there bodies turning up all over Onondaga County!?”

“Is it a biological attack?”

“Was the water poisoned by-”

The door slammed shut behind the officers and Levi quickly noticed the grave looks on the surrounding officers' expressions as the Sheriff led the way into the station. He glanced at his wristwatch, 10:57 am.

”Maggie! Any news?”

The normally stoic and calm Maggie Dunn shifted her weight uncomfortably.

“Agents from the FBI showed up only seven minutes ago. They are out back with the scientists from the Heroy Geology Laboratory, and the people from the Natural Disaster Response and Recovery unit. Oh, and the National Earthquake Hazards Reduction Program people are back there too. They all want to speak to you.” Maggie tumbled out leaving her breathless, in all her twenty-seven years of service Sheriff Arbuckle had never seen her this flustered.

“Very good Maggie. Thank you for that. Can you show me and Levi where these people are?”

“ Sir, before I do, I was talking to Dr. Lisa Monroe, she works in the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry,” she gestured to an authoritative looking woman who was making her way over ,” She thinks she knows what has happened, and it has to do with the- I don't really know how to explain it- it's something to do with the CO2 in the lakes and them not mixing and creating an explosion. However it explains why all these people are dying and also being admitted to the hospitals saying they can't breathe.”

“ Thank you Maggie, I think you need to take a break. Go get some rest.” As Maggie walked off, the Sheriff turned to the new acquaintance, “Dr. Monroe, will you please accompany me and Deputy Chen to the meeting room? Perhaps you could explain in more detail what you believe has caused this devastation to the whole group.”

“Yes Sir.” She responded promptly as they made their way down the corridor. The hum from the meeting room infiltrated the hallway, betraying the heated conversations happening inside.

The room went quiet as the sheriff and deputy walked in with the doctor. Mayor Fairchild rushed over,

“Sheriff! We got the press conference over with, but this situation has now garnered national media attention! Almost all the large news outlets have covered the story and its spreading panic across the nation. They are saying that it is a possible biological attack from foreign hostiles, or maybe even domestic terrorists. There's even online discussion that it could be a biological experiment for a new type of weapon. I am sure you are already aware of the more local issues we are facing. Traffic collisions, home invasions, looting, rioting. All sorts of chaos, droves of people are leaving this part of New York out of fear! Not to mention all the panic around lakeside homes!” She stopped to take a breath.

“We have been exhausting all avenues of investigation, we have the Environmental Protection Agency testing the drinking water. We have some geologists researching whether it could be a gaseous poison released from the earth's crust after this morning's earthquake.” The Sheriff responded.

Mayor Fairchild leaned in and lowered her voice. “Some photos and videos were taken of the FBI arriving. Worse still, the Federal Emergency Management Agency was spotted taking away the dead animals in the forests, and photos were posted on social media, let's just say that hasn't helped calm the storm of speculation.”

She turned as she was addressed by an FBI agent. Another agent greeted the group.

“Sheriff Arbuckle? I'm Agent Hume of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.” He shook the sheriff's hand as he was introduced to Deputy Chen and Dr. Monroe.

“Well Agent Hume, do you have any idea what we are up against?” Deputy Chen asked.

“I am afraid nothing is certain now, but we are working on it. The agents from the Natural Disaster Response and Recovery team along with the personnel from the National Earthquake Hazards Reduction Program are hard at work as we speak. Not to mention the clean up crew, we can't have any diseases spreading in all that stagnant flooding water. Some pretty important people are very concerned about this.”

“I would think everyone in America is right now, with over a hundred bodies found in only a few hours it's only natural the country is-”

“Oh, not just this country, Sheriff.”

“What do you mean?”

“This is strictly on the need to know basis, but as this local government who will be knee deep in this mess, you need to know the international impact this is having. The Canadian government has contacted Washington, with the border being a mere three hours away. The media has also been running with the gossip of it being a bio hazard that might spread to the Great Lakes. All the speculation of biological attacks and experiments have had more of an impact than rumors' usually have.”

A breathless intern burst into the room.

“Dr. Monroe! I got the tests back! You were right!” She gasped as she thrust a messy stack of papers at Lisa.

Dr. Monroe frantically flipped through the papers, with a satisfied sigh she turned to the bewildered looking crowd of detectives, scientists and agents.

“I know what happened.”

The room was silent as Dr. Lisa Monroe concluded her analysis.

“A limnic eruption?”

The question hung in the air, highlighting the confusion.

“Yes. Look I know it seems confusing, but this data right here coupled with the security footage of the tsunamis in both Green and Round Lake, it’s the most reasonable explanation. Look ”, she pointed to the footage being projected onto the screen behind her, “ see how the lakes almost look like they swell, causing the waves? A limnic eruption is also called a lake overturn, this happens when the CO<sub>2</sub> from the bottom of the lake displaces the water and collects above the surface in a deadly cloud that will asphyxiate any living thing. I am sure that the earthquake this morning triggered a shift in the tectonic plates below the park causing the already meromictic bodies of water suddenly exploding into limnically active lakes. The resulting cloud of CO<sub>2</sub> that was released was blown by the wind which was travelling at 13mph, west. It all aligns up with where the casualties have been found.”

“She's right.” agreed Dr. Taylor,” All the patients who have been admitted from this disaster have shown symptoms of Carbon Dioxide poisoning. We have already sent out an emergency supply of Oxygen Tanks and Hyperbaric oxygen tanks to treat the survivors.”

“ How do we handle this?” Agent Hume questioned.

“The CO<sub>2</sub> in the lakes needs to be brought back into balance. I suggest we replicate the degassing program used for Lake Nyos in Cameroon. In 1986 a similar disaster happened and upwards of 200,000 tons of CO<sub>2</sub> was released. 1,746 people asphyxiated. We need to set up a pipeline to pump out the water and recharge the lake's water back to its natural balance. It will need to be heavily monitored of course. The National Disaster Recovery Framework needs to start working on this immediately.”

The room sprang into action, the rush for the door was intense as agents and officers all ran to inform the involved agencies of the plan of action. Within seconds the room was empty leaving Ray and Levi sat with a dazed expression on their faces.

“ You were right Ray.” The deputy chuckled bitterly,” I guess interesting things do happen on the night shift.” He quickly made two cups of coffee and handed one to the sheriff.

“ You know what? After this, I don’t think I'll complain about them anymore.”