

BEER, BUGS, AND THE END OF THE WORLD

A flash fiction homage to Douglas Adams

By Rachel Aukes

Some days you're the windshield, some days you're the bug. Easy guess which kind of day it was for Jack.

He sighed, opened the car door, and lumbered to the blue and chrome bicycle laying in the middle of his driveway—again—while the culprit was obliviously preoccupied chasing some flying insect. Jack carried the bike, colorful streamers dangling from the handlebars, over to the grass and dropped it. The bike landed with a pleasant *thump*, with an echoing holler from the kid.

Ignoring foul words no kid that age should know, he climbed back into his car, pushed the button on the visor, and waited as the garage door opened. He'd already hit the button again, bringing a blissful end to the racket outside, before he shifted the car into park.

From the passenger seat, he picked up the cardboard box containing everything from his desk and promptly dumped the box and its contents in the garbage can. Funny, how ten years of long hours and hard work could be nullified with one innocuous-looking severance letter. Before she'd left him, Margaret had always told him he was bad luck. He could almost hear her *I-told-you-so's* now.

Determined to enjoy at least thirty minutes of his day from hell, Jack made a bee line to the fridge for two cold ones and then to the counter to scoop up a book with a well-worn spine. He headed to the patio and popped open the first can as he sat down in a lounger. Leaning back, he took a long draw of beer, then another. He'd never drank when Margaret had lived here, never had the time to read. Maybe things were finally looking up. He opened *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. Great book if you didn't try to rationalize the premise. C'mon, like someone would blow up a planet just to make way for an intergalactic highway. Even with the luck he'd been having, that wasn't going to happen.

He alternated between reading and glugging beer, both a welcome distraction. He was partly into Chapter Three when the sun disappeared behind a shadow. Strange, he stared blankly at the sky for several seconds. There hadn't been anything about an upcoming solar eclipse in the paper. Shrugging, he cracked open the next beer and kept on reading.

Several minutes later, Jack frowned. He looked up and realized why this eclipse was taking so long. A shadow didn't block the sun. Something entirely different was in the way of my sunlight and was growing bigger by the second. Little rain drops fell, and the wind picked up.

He glanced down at the book in his hands and then back up at the sky. "You gotta be kidding me."

No one was kidding because right then *something* flashed its headlights and drove right through the earth and blasted the blue planet into a zillion cosmic pieces.

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