

The Visitors on the Fourth

Dana William Paxson

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WE DRIFTED IN GUSTS, sometimes quick like our photon brothers, sometimes slow like our electron sisters, swirling through the solar storms to this little planet coated with water. Water! Great swaths of it, tiny dribbles of it, long strings of it crossing humid land. We found a puddle and sank gently down through a darkening evening to its center, where an object floated. Life-forms moved about upon it. We penetrated their electricity and danced with its images: fires in their hands, fires they were preparing, to tickle the night sky for the thousands of their kind gathered on the shores of this—lake?—their word for the water, their word in waves of sound.

We scattered to the lake's edges. More of these—humans—large and small, gathering, feeling the electric pulses of each other growing. Some of us whispered, and the little ones pointed at us and said, "Fireflies!" The big ones laughed and squeezed each other.

The fires began, climbing from red sparks from the lake up into the darkness and exploding into holy words of joy. And we all sang with them, and raced out in a blaze to where the humans set the fires on their raft, and we watched the words of angels form and fade in eternal night; and when the last words were said all together in a great shouting chorus, we answered with our own galactic symphony of light, filling their eyes with the story of the Making until they all jumped up and down and forgot their sad apehood. And then we said goodbye and soared away, dusting them all with the scintillas of our memory, a rain of silver and gold that frosted even the naked skins of the lovers lying entranced and hidden on the shore.