

Alone?

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Markus was an ordinary fellow, not expecting anything unusual as he was doing his first ski run of the year at Sugar Bowl. Whilst this was going on, the staff at the ski resort permitted scientists to test out their high-energy particle avalanche blaster. This blaster was still experimental, and the scientists did not know what side effects it could cause. To be safe, they made a 500 square yard border made of caution tape surrounding the blaster. Meanwhile, Markus was just getting off of the ski lift and put a new battery in his GoPro camera. He skied down the run about halfway when he opened the corresponding app for his camera on his smart phone. He knew the ski run so well that he could do it with his eyes closed. He was looking down at his phone, changing settings on his camera when he skied right through the caution tape.

“Gosh, what was that?”, questioned Markus. “Probably a tree branch,” he muttered to himself.

Markus went on, skiing right through the danger zone. He was planning to have lunch at the lodge at the bottom of the mountain.

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“Rob,” said Jim. “How’s the power supply doing? Are we at 500,000 volts yet?”

“Almost,” said Robert. “There’s about ten seconds till we fire. Once it’s started there’s no turning back.”

“Yes, I remember that,” said Jim. “Is it aimed at the loose snow area?”

“Of course it is,” said Robert in a dull tone.

“Did you see that?” Jim asked.

“No.”

“I could’ve sworn I saw something moving there! Are you sure? I could’ve sworn I saw something moving there!”

“It was probably a bird, Jim. No one would be dumb enough to cross the line. Especially since we had the staff warn everyone not to do that!”

“Okay, okay, you’re right, I just wanted to ask you if you saw anything.”

“You should probably put on your goggles, unless you want to be blind for a few days.”

“Oh shoot! I forgot them in the car. I’ll just have to cover my eyes.”

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Markus was pulling out an energy bar from his pocket and that’s when it happened. The blaster fired right at Markus. Quadrillions of high-energy sub-atomic particles ripping him apart and tossing him throughout the multiverse. He was rapidly heating up and cooling down. At this point he was unconscious and floating through space and time. His atoms were being split by nuclear fission while some were being fused together. He was flying past planets, stars and galaxies faster than the speed of light...a lot faster. It appeared that time and space didn’t matter to these supercharged particles. They ripped through the borders of universes, carrying Markus with them. Markus aged and became youthful again many, many times in a very accelerated fashion. Eventually, it all started to slow down. Markus came out through a hole in space-time fabric. It was as if God stitched the fabric back together. Markus woke up with a sore bottom which was sunken into the trunk of a tree. He was clueless as to what had happened and fell asleep. The night swept in. It was surprisingly warm for a

winter night in Tahoe. There was also a full moon that rose up from the back of the mountains. And there he was sleeping on the side of the mountain, stuck in a tree hole.

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The next morning he awoke at the crack of dawn, everything was hurting. His arms and legs especially hurt. He wasn't sure what happened to him. He ate an energy bar and drank some water. After massaging his limbs for about a half hour, he worked up the strength to get up and ski down the run. There were no people on the slopes. He skied all the way down to The Village Lodge. He took off his skis and went up the stairs and tried to open the door. For some reason it was locked. He tried knocking on the door. First, with a very subtle knock. As he grew increasingly impatient, he knocked really hard and broke the glass door. He walked through the broken door and yelled to see if anyone would respond. He decided to have a seat. He reached for another energy bar in his pocket, but all that came out was an orange piece of paper with a warning on it. He read it aloud to himself.

“Dear skiers and riders, today there will be a scheduled testing of an experimental quantum particle blaster. If proven safe to use, we will use it to artificially clear avalanches. It is still unknown how the quantum particles will react with each other. Please stay away from the caution tape surrounded area.” He sat there and banged his head on the table and muttered to himself, “God, I am such an idiot. Now I'm probably the only living thing on this earth or wherever the heck I am!” He was sort of right, he was the only human there.

He realized this when a mouse crept up under his foot and a tree fell over in the wind. What was weird was that all the man-made objects were

still there. The ski lifts, snowmobiles and the gondola were still there. He was very confused and decided that he would just ski for the rest of the day. He went to the lodge's basement and turned on the main power switch. This turned on all of the lights and the ski lifts. He took a couple bottled waters and cans of soda from the refrigerator in the bar and stuffed them in his backpack. He went outside and put his skies back on and skated to the lift.

“Ah, no lines today” he chortled to himself as he got on the lift. He got off of the lift, and skied down the first run of the day.

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After some time, Markus decided to go down one of the double black diamond slopes. He felt a little overexcited. He went down very fast and hit a bump that sent him flying through the air. He landed with so much momentum that his ski got stuck in the snow, twisting his body and broke his right leg. He slid into a patch of wet dirt, passed out and fell asleep there, nestled under a tall pine.

In the morning he arose from his sleep in agony. He could barely breathe because it was excruciating to move anything. He drank some water and fell asleep again. This time he slept, hibernated, really, for nearly six weeks.

When he awoke, he opened his eyes. The pain had left his leg. He was still reluctant to put any weight on it. He looked for food in his pack. All that was left was one can of soda which he drank down almost instantly. As he searched around he felt something leafy, what was it? It was the potato that his cousin put in there and asked him to plant what seemed like just the other day! That's exactly what he did. He took the potato which was

already beginning to sprout and broke it into four pieces and planted them into a six-inch deep hole.

After four weeks of Markus just eating snow and occasionally bitter tree bark and pine needles, he checked on the potato pieces he planted. He dug around and lo and behold, there were twenty fully-grown potatoes! He ate one and planted the rest of them. After a month of eating more tree bark, he dug up more potatoes. This time there were almost one hundred of them. He ate three of them and put some in his backpack for planting in other parts of the resort. At this point, he felt confident his leg would hold up and gingerly skied down the rest of the run.

At the Village Lodge, he found a patch of dirt and planted potatoes there. He skied to the other side of the resort and planted potatoes in another patch of dirt. He skied back to the spot where he crashed and set up a campsite. He gathered dead wood and got a magnifying glass out of his survival kit and started a fire.

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Markus gathered logs for the future. He tore off branches from trees and built a teepee out of them. The next morning he added wood to the embers of the previous fire. He blew on it and brought his fire back to life. Having a fire enabled him to roast potatoes and do away with eating them raw. He took two rocks and put them on both sides of his fire. Then, he placed a large, flat rock over the two rocks and resulting in a makeshift burner inside his teepee. That night it snowed.

He reinforced the teepee so that it stood up well. The next morning, he stoked the fire and snow started to melt off the top of his teepee tent. He went out to fill up his water bottle. Fortunately, about 500 feet from his tent, there was a stream! He drank the water. This was very refreshing. He sat in

his tent sipping his water thinking about what he would do with the rest of his life. Would he just ski or would he travel to other places? Would he stay right where he was, eating potatoes and growing older day by day? Could it truly be that he was the only human being left on the planet? Markus got frustrated having to walk every time he wanted water. He took a stone and went to the stream. He made a fork in it sending about one-quarter of the flowing water down through his teepee. He created an intricate system so that some of the water would flow through his fire so that he could have hot water.

His life went on peacefully. Boring, monotonous...but nevertheless, peaceful. It was very lonely though. He would often dream about meeting another person.

His days were predictable. Markus would find a rock where he sat and thought for the whole day and then went back to bed, ate a potato, slept, woke up, thought on his rock and repeated this process every day. Each morning and evening he would write in the journal he had in his backpack.

One morning, Markus started to feel strange. Reality slowly drifted from him. He felt wet and hot. There was a bright light shining in his face. He twisted himself so that he was laying on his back. He was in a bed, drenched in sweat. He thought he was dreaming so he pinched himself and tugged at his hair. Nothing had changed. He heard voices outside! He wanted to scream and jump for joy. There were finally humans! Markus was almost naked, wearing only underwear. He reached for a piece of clothing, his jacket. He put it on and rushed out of his hotel room. He vaguely recalled being in a teepee and wasn't quite sure what hotel he was in.

Walking out of the elevator were a few children who had just come up after playing in the indoor pool downstairs. He greeted them and they

replied, “Good morning! It’s a beautiful day out there...another fine day for skiing!”. As he reached into his jacket pocket to look for his hotel room key card, he felt a piece of paper. It was the warning about the blaster.

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