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SECTION ONE: THE MOTHER EARTH FOUNDATION

CHAPTER ONE

THE FIRST MOTHER EARTH DAY

Autumn in the Caledon Hills can be breathtaking. The Credit River winds through the valley nestled at the base of the Niagara Escarpment, and at this time of the year the trees on the hillside flash orange and yellow and red. The weather changes frequently, going from bright sun, to white fluffs of cloud, to almost menacing black skies and back to sun again. The strong gusts of wind in the foothills require a less than casual grip on the steering wheel as you drive through the ups and downs that curve along the country roads.

It was such a day that greeted Magda as she made her way to Belfountain Farm for the interview. The early morning sun was peeking through the trees and out from behind patches of occasionally thick fog. Despite the mist, Magda could catch glimpses of a different vista at each turn of the road. She could feel her shoulders relaxing as she left the City and crossed that imaginary border into the peace and tranquillity that visitors often discover in this part of the world.

The day before, Magda had called the Foundation office and asked to speak to Paul Cohen or Katherine Sanderson and she was surprised to hear, "This is Katherine."

"Oh," said Magda. "I wasn't expecting to get through to you so easily."

"Well, everyone in the office took the day off to be at home and finish their arrangements for tomorrow. So it's just Paul and I left to answer the phone."

"I see. Anyway, my name is Magda Kerbel. I am a freelance journalist and I have been planning an article on the Foundation. The reason I am calling is to ask if I can come out to the farm to interview you and Paul immediately after the big event."

"Hm. I don't know. I mean four in the morning is a pretty unusual time to be interviewed and we were sort of hoping to make this a private celebration for our family. Are you aware that there is a press conference scheduled for 2 p.m.?"

"Yes," Magda answered, trying not to sound too pushy, "but I was hoping to catch you and your family soon after the event to get your reactions in a more personal setting. Has no one else made a similar request?"

"Actually, no. I guess most people, even reporters, are planning to spend the time with family and friends."

"Well, I have no family and I would love to have the opportunity..."

"Listen, Ms. Kerbel..."

"Magda."

"Magda. You are welcome to join us for breakfast."

"Great! Thank you!"

"How's 7 a.m.? We figure we are unlikely to go back to bed after the celebration."

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Magda had a slight Czech accent, which most people found intriguing. She hated it. It irritated her. So she tried to suppress it by imitating an American accent. But she did not have a good enough ear to eliminate it completely. Whenever she got upset or excited, it would sneak back in and become more pronounced. She was not aware of this, though.

Magda Kerbel had emigrated to the United States seven years before. She had been working as an independent writer, trying to make a contribution through analysis of social conditions in Czechoslovakia. She believed she had talent and that her writing was important. However, she was never able to get any of her work published in her country due to the "controversial" nature of the material. Fed up with the communist repression of political writers, she decided to defect and ply her trade as a freelance journalist. She had family in New York who came to the U.S. three years before her. She had never kept in touch with them, but since they were her only bridge between the two countries, they suddenly became very important to her.

Once she became established in her profession and had the resources to be independent, she saw them less and less. Eventually, the relationship was reduced to the occasional phone call, then a letter or two each year and finally the annual birthday card to please her Aunt. Magda was very utilitarian when it came to relationships. She never got close to anybody without a reason. She often would assess people consciously in terms of their potential usefulness to her. If they had promise, she would condescend to get to know them better.

Although she was determined to be an independent person, she did crave company at times. She had even become involved two years before with a musician from Boston. She met Jake Gartner at a party of a mutual friend. He entertained the guests with his guitar playing and Magda was quite taken by him. They had a rapid, almost torrid, relationship which never progressed to the point where either was prepared to give up their own apartment.

Jake was also the independent type and seemed quite preoccupied with his own career. Eventually, their relationship cooled. Besides, Jake's circle of friends turned out to be less influential and useful to Magda's career plans than she had originally estimated. The last Magda had heard of Jake he had had some kind of motorcycle accident. Apparently, after he recovered, he decided to move out West. He never even called to say goodbye.

Now, at forty years of age, she had rationalized her existence and was resigned to be a career woman. She was thoroughly mobile, with no husband or children to encumber her, free as a bird.

Magda was certainly independent. She was also very intelligent and well read. She had a prodigious memory, especially for visual detail. She was a highly skilled communicator, articulate and rational, capable of winning most arguments and her melodic, almost sultry, voice gave her an added advantage. Most noticeable, however, was her striking appearance. She was tall and willowy, with long, dark brown hair, which she often braided. Her eyes were remarkable, large and almost as dark as her hair. She had high cheekbones, an aquiline nose, full lips and a strong chin. When she walked, she glided gracefully, giving the impression of a well-tuned athlete.

In reality, Magda was not very fit. She kept her figure, not by exercise, but by dieting on an irregular basis. She was very aware of her appearance and wore a minimum of makeup. She dressed comfortably and enjoyed lounging around in a big sweater and jeans. She did not get dressed up very often but, when she did, she enjoyed wearing an elegant outfit and the effect it had on people.

She was a cool character, a bit of a cold fish, “a cranky bitch”, according to some of her colleagues. She tended to keep somewhat aloof. She had no really close friends, but there were several people she saw on an irregular basis who valued her wit and talent. For the most part, though, she was a loner.

Magda Kerbel made a reasonably good living as a journalist. She had been employed as a columnist by the New York Times, but she soon came to resent the restrictions placed on her by her editor. She was good, damned good, and it was not long before she quit the paper to resume her freelance status.

What she did best, as well as anyone in the business, was interview people. She had a way of disarming a person. Her physical handsomeness, her incisiveness and her antenna for a good story enabled her to get the raw material for a potentially compelling article.

And Magda could write. She had a punchy style very reminiscent of her idol, Ernest Hemingway. Several of her pieces had been considered for an award, but she had never actually won a prize. At first it did not bother her. After a few years, however, she began to tire of being a perennial runner-up. She wanted recognition by her peers. In fact, it was becoming a bit of an obsession for Magda. A desire for fame now coursed through her veins.

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Once she knew she had to be at Belfountain Farm in the early morning, Magda booked a flight to Toronto arriving the evening of October 9th. She had not planned to be with anyone in particular for the Mother Earth Day celebration. In fact, she had not planned to celebrate at

all. Her interest in the interview with Paul Cohen and Katherine Sanderson was purely journalistic. She had read the Mother Earth Covenant, but she was unmoved by its rhetoric. She lived a very alienated existence and had little feel for community and even less sense of the urgency to act collectively to heal the planet. As far as Magda was concerned, it was a load of liberalist crap. But it was big news! For whatever reason, millions of people were caught up in the excitement of the first Mother Earth Day and Magda's nose for a story told her Belfountain Farm was where she should be.

She called an old acquaintance she knew in Toronto to ask if she could stay with her overnight. Leah Carpenter was a magazine journalist. She wrote for MacLean's, a Canadian version of Time. Magda considered her more of an entertainer than a journalist, but she respected her writing ability and they had some friends in common so they kept in touch.

"Magda. How are you?" Leah seemed less than enthusiastic.

"Not bad, thanks. Listen, Leah. I will be in town tonight and I was wondering if I could come over for the night."

"Well, sure. I don't see why not. Of course we expect to be pretty pre-occupied with the celebration, but you can join us. We have some fun things planned with the kids."

"That's really good of you, Leah. I can be at your place by about 8 o'clock."

"Can you join us for dinner?"

"Thanks, I'd like that."

When she arrived, it was clear to Magda that she was really intruding on a very personal family experience. Leah was quite gracious, but almost all of her attention was given to her two young children as they prepared for the celebrations for early the next morning. Leah and her husband intended to play on wooden recorders and they had kazoos for the boys.

"You could play a kazoo or you could sing or whatever you wish." But Magda suddenly felt out of place. She felt silly. She decided to take a motel room for the night and ended up watching celebrations around the world on Cable TV, alone in her room.

"I don't really mind this", she thought. "It's no big deal anyway." Magda was a born cynic. She was fascinated by the possibility that Paul Cohen and Katherine Sanderson might be frauds who had managed to pull the wool over a whole lot of eyes.

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So it was that Magda arrived at Belfountain Farm on October 10th with tape recorder in hand and visions of a Pulitzer Prize-winning story in her head. She joined Paul and Katherine and their two daughters for a light breakfast.

Afterward, Katherine suggested they go for a walk. "You must both be thrilled with the success of this day," Magda began, as they walked through the grounds around the farmhouse.

Katherine was glowing in her enthusiasm. "We feel tremendously gratified by the overwhelming response. It really did exceed our expectations."

"I guess you're relieved that none of the predictions by the geophysicists were realized."

Katherine smiled. "It never occurred to us originally that there might be risk associated with the event. I mean the thought of millions of people playing the same musical note at the same time seemed harmless enough to us. But when scientists predicted that the sympathetic vibrations might cause severe weather disturbances, it certainly made us nervous. Fortunately, the impact of the cumulative effect was entirely positive."

"So whose idea was this in the first place?"

"It was Paul's idea. He really does get some wonderful inspirations at times."

"But Katherine is always the source of my inspiration." Paul laughed and kissed Katherine on the cheek and squeezed her lovingly.

"And why for 10 minutes on the 10th day of the 10th month at 1000 hours Greenwich Mean Time? There is obviously something significant about the number 10."

"It is derived from the twenty count in Metis spiritual teachings," Katherine explained. "The number 10 signifies that "all things are possible." The degree to which we believe that all things are possible is a measure of our self-worth as a planet. We wanted to create an event that would allow people around the world to become acutely aware of each other and, at the same time, celebrate an optimistic vision of the future.

"To be honest," Katherine confessed, "we never dreamed that close to one billion people would become involved this way. I suppose the real impact of today is yet to be realized."

"Now with the success of the book and the concert," Paul added, "we have enough funds to begin the real work of the People of the Earth. In the Spring, the Foundation will be able to fund some 800 Mother Earth Communities."

Magda observed the couple as they walked. Each of them was attractive in a different way. Katherine was a big woman, almost six feet tall, with a big-boned, generous physique. She had thick, tightly curled, salt and pepper hair which she usually wore long. Her blue-grey eyes had a sad, puppy dog expression which transformed into a sparkle when she smiled. She had pronounced facial features and wore no makeup. On the whole she was an imposing figure, and when she greeted you, she would literally envelop you in her affectionate embrace. She radiated a joy of life and created an overall impression of a peaceful, physically powerful woman.

Paul was also an imposing figure. He was not exceptionally tall for a man. In fact, he was the same height as Katherine. He also had a big-boned physique which appeared even larger because of his full, greying beard and long hair. He usually wore his dark brown hair in a ponytail. He had a prominent nose and blue-green, watery eyes that were slightly slanted, a throwback to his Cossack heritage. Overall, he had a bear-like appearance that was somewhat

intimidating. Aware of this first impression, Paul endeavoured to be more welcoming and open in his manner. But he was only partially successful in this regard.

Side by side, they were an attractive couple, although neither of them was overly handsome in the usual sense of the word. Because of their unassuming manner and relaxed demeanour, they were easy to be with. They were openly affectionate with each other, which made them even more appealing.

Paul had a passion for social justice and social change. He was an idea man with a flare for the dramatic. Katherine had a love for people and a caring and compassionate nature that oozed from her every pore. She also had a keen intellect and was a perfect mirror for Paul's entrepreneurial spirit. Over the years they had strengthened and honed their shared vision of the connectedness of people. Everyone who knew them well marvelled at the power of their partnership.

It was getting chilly. Both Magda and Katherine were shivering.

"Would you like to go back in for another hot cup of coffee, Magda?"

"No thanks. But I'd like a rain check. What I mean is, would the two of you consent to an in-depth interview, a sort of biographical piece that would describe the events that led up to this incredible day?"

Paul and Katherine looked at each other. "Sure," Paul said. "As long as the emphasis is on the work of the Foundation."

"No problem," Magda promised.

As she drove away from the farmhouse, Magda became restless. She could not resist the thought that something was not quite right with this picture. "They're too good to be true", she thought. She was convinced that there was a story in this business. "Millions of people have bought this stuff about collectivism and healing the planet, but there has to be an angle, something worth exposing, something juicy!"

Magda's cynical world view was not unique and she could not be expected to understand what motivated people like Katherine and Paul. She would expend great energy over the next two years trying to expose this couple. And only a personal spiritual rebirth, and Mother Earth herself, would create a shift in Magda that would open her up to a different perspective.

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The press conference was originally to be held in the Foundation office at Belfountain Farm. However, the response of the media was so overwhelming that the Foundation requested the Board of Education to open the auditorium at the local high school to accommodate the throngs of international reporters who flocked to the Caledon Hills that afternoon.

The scene was near bedlam until Katherine appeared at the microphone with Paul at her side. She was used to the calming effect her presence had on people, even in large gatherings. Both Paul and Katherine were to make an opening statement, to be followed by a question and answer period. Almost two hours later, everyone seemed satisfied. For the most part, the reports that appeared in the media derived their content from the initial remarks by the co-initiators of the Foundation.

Katherine began by reviewing the conception of the first Mother Earth Day. "First, I wish to express the appreciation of the Directors of the Foundation to all of you for your commitment to this truly important event. We felt from the outset that there was a critical need for people around the world to develop an increased awareness of each other, an appreciation for the things we have in common, our aspirations, our fears, our dreams for a better life for our children and our love for Mother Earth.

"The concept of the first Mother Earth Day was simple. As one friend put it, "Toot that horn and we will heal the planet together!" Of course we did not presume that playing the note "middle C" for ten minutes would do the job all at once, but we hoped for a significant beginning.

"The continued popularity of the book, "The Foundation: The Work of the People of the Earth", and the financial success of the concert last May, have been very encouraging. Next Spring, the Mother Earth Foundation will begin funding several communities in every region of the planet. However, we feel it is even more important for all those who are not able to be part of a Mother Earth Community to have a shared experience that will create a universal feeling of closeness to one another.

"The number "10" from our teachings signifies that "all things are possible", hence the date and time chosen for the event. We wanted to appeal to the hearts of the People of the Earth, and what better way than through the universal language of music? Our objective was to provide an opportunity to celebrate an optimistic vision of the future and I think, in that sense, we were extremely successful."

Paul then stepped to the microphone to describe the planning process. "Through the support of the Canadian Public Health Association and the World Health Organization, we began the process of generating interest in the event. Ultimately, we went to the United Nations for formal endorsement, and I believe the unanimous resolution in July made our task infinitely easier. We appealed to government and non-government agencies and associations and grass roots organizations at the community level in literally hundreds of countries.

"As Katherine said, the success of the book and the concert certainly helped to create the overwhelming response to the event. The idea seemed to appeal to the collective imagination of people everywhere. Toward the end, the publicity and the planning seemed to snowball and almost develop a life of its own!

"At this point it is difficult to estimate the number of people who participated. Nevertheless, our sources in each of twenty regions around the world indicate as many as one and a quarter billion people may have celebrated the first Mother Earth Day together.

"There is no denying that these are difficult times. The international economy is teetering on the brink of depression, the environment and our fragile ecologic systems are under constant assault from industrial pollution and carelessness, the political climate in many nations has seen the emergence of a new conservatism that ignores the needs of the most vulnerable amongst us, and the volatile situation in the Middle East continues to threaten world peace.

"For many this has been a time of profound insecurity and despair. Mother Earth and her people are truly in need of healing. Mother Earth Day was designed to help reverse this downward spiral - first, by permitting the People of the Earth to dream of a better world and, second, to allow us all, even if only for ten minutes, to rejoice in the collective feeling of a united planet."

Katherine then returned to the microphone. "This has been a most encouraging day. It has served to confirm my conviction that we are getting closer to the time when our greatest aspirations will be realized. Early this morning, at the end of the celebration, our two daughters both commented on how important it was for them to be a part of this. I believe all our children must become aware of what's happening in the world. That at this moment in our history, nothing is more important than the healing of the planet, our beautiful Mother Earth.

"I have been very fortunate to do a lot of travelling in the past few months and to meet and talk to many people around the world. I have come to know and love the People of the Earth. We are a truly remarkable people, and I believe we can survive anything if we stand together! Thank you."