

The Light

by Naomi Stevens

The green moon slowly dropped out of sight beyond the horizon. For the next 20 minutes, Hora would be in complete darkness, until Fera III rose and shone its red light over the parched soil.

Nothing grew on Hora now. At one time it had been a busy bustling little planet. More of a showplace for visitors, rather than anything else to do with commerce, its attraction had all been natural. During the day it was the exquisite colouring and shapes of its flora and fauna, but more especially at night, as now when the pale green luminance faded to nothing, leaving black velvet hung with diamonds, which as suddenly as the flick of a light switch, turned red.

It was this red light, that turned the colours of ordinary living things, into such beauty as defied description. Fera III only stayed visible for about an hour, but during this time all life on Hora renewed itself. Flowers produced their shoots, trees blossomed or fruited, the animal life either copulated or gave birth. The abundant translucent stones which covered the ground reflected the red glow and man looked on in wonderment. But man, being man, was not content to leave all that beauty 'Untouched by human hand.'

The first travellers to Hora returned to Earth full of the beauty and wonders of the planet, especially when Fera III was shining. It didn't take long for big business to realise the potential of tourist revenue. Within a year of the discovery a monstrous spaceport had been erected, giving access to more spaceships to bring yet more men to ogle at the beauty of the planet.

Gigantic hotels blossomed around the spaceports. Roads and more hotels cancerously crept all around. More businessmen claimed acres of land for

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developing shops. Animals were killed for their fur, for the exquisite ivory of their horns and for their flesh. The flora were robbed of their blossoms and their fruit. Huge areas of ground were completely cleared of their wonderful translucent stones to sell as souvenirs to the visitors.

Those same businessmen then claimed more land to build themselves homes to be near their shops. Yet more of them claimed land to develop property to sell at a huge profit to elderly millionaires as retirement homes. They also collected souvenirs. Everyone collected souvenirs. As the soil lost its covering of the delicate stones, its consistency changed. It became waterlogged in one place or dry as dust in another, blowing away in the slightest breeze.

Little bits of Hora were picked or pulled or killed and stuffed and placed conspicuously in some Earthside display cabinet, or on a coffee table or mantleshelf of that home planet.

Slowly but surely, the buildings spread across the face of the tiny planet, joined by the throttling roads. The trees, the flowers, the animals, although fewer, were still there, still putting on their exquisite show night after night.

Then the shrewdest of the businessmen had his brainwave. Why not create artificially, the light of Fera III?! With an artificial version of this tiny moon, no one would be limited to just one hour. It could be kept on for much longer, giving visitors a longer show and him bigger profits. He was astounded that no one had thought of it before him. In complete secrecy, he gathered together technicians, engineers, bio-chemists, etc., and started to construct THE LIGHT.

Various dignitaries were assembled around the 'Shrewd Businessman's' multi-million dollar complex. They had been invited to Hora from all the inhabited planets throughout the explored parts of the universe to witness the unveiling.

It was the best kept secret in all the solar systems. None of the visitors knew the nature of the 'Surprise to end all surprises' that they had been promised. THE LIGHT was already in position, having been launched several days before.

Fera III's hour of beauty drew to its close, and everyone prepared themselves for the vague sense of disappointment that overtook everyone as the red light went out.

Ten seconds exactly after Fera III set, THE LIGHT came on.

Panic ensued. No-one had expected it and it violated nature, nay it raped nature. The gentle movements of all life, coloured not one minute before by the gentle natural light of Fera III, suddenly became grotesque distortions of themselves. Plants and trees grew so fast that they died within minutes. The animals just born, died from exposure too soon to a light they should have seen later, but should not have seen ever. Other animals had childbirth forced on them too early and could not exist under the strain, their offspring stillborn. Copulation went mad, with those trying it dying literally of exhaustion. Within half an hour, the only life left on Hora was the cluster of visiting 'Dignitaries' now covering together beneath the shadow of the complex.

When they finally realised what had happened, they all turned towards the spaceport and the spaceships to take them away from this hideous place.

The 'Shrewd Businessman' switched off THE LIGHT, and followed his guests.

"Oh well, you can't win 'em all."

He boarded the first of many ships that carried the rest of humanity away from Hora for ever.
