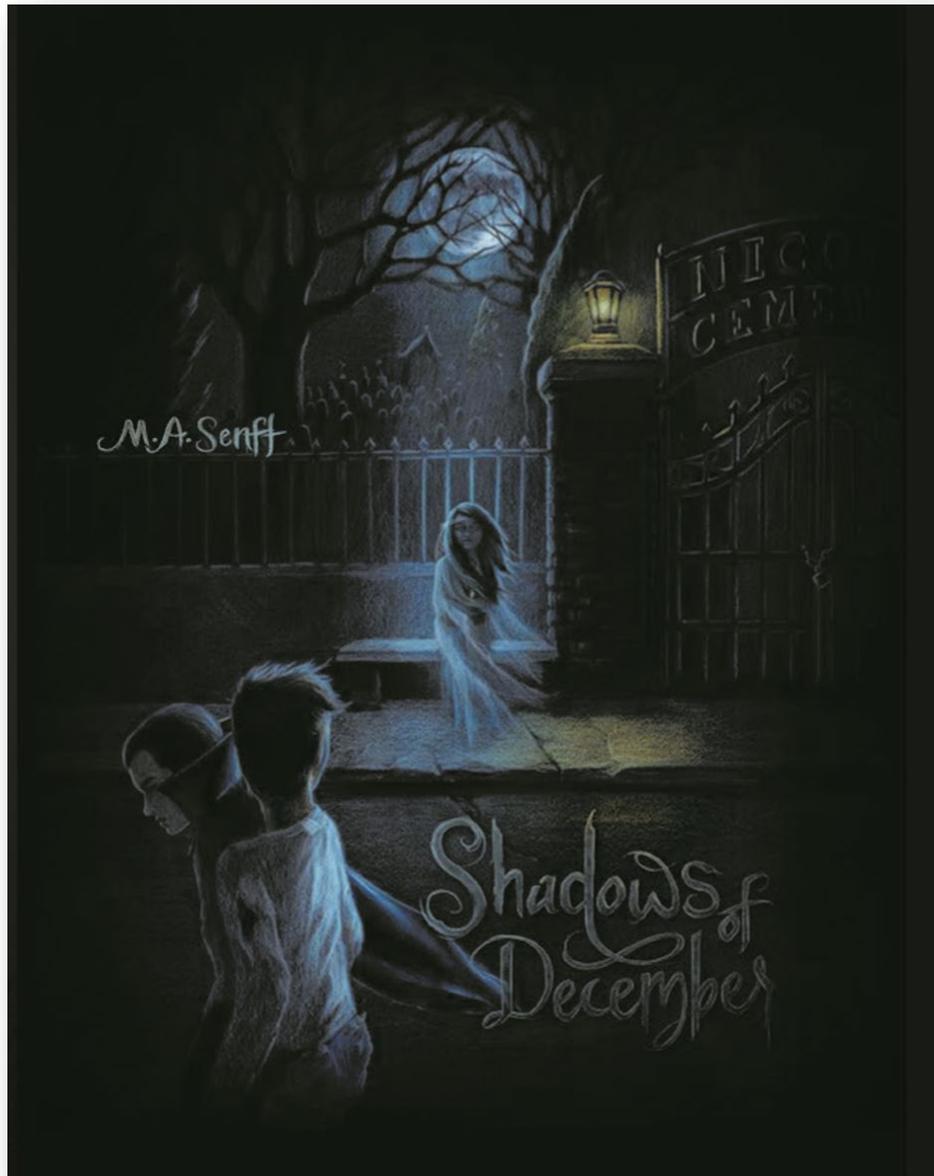


Shadows of December

Illusions of Time



Written by M.A. Senft

From Chapter 31

A New Kind of Christmas

It wasn't until Jay saw a large, deep crater, miles off in the distance, that it dawned on him what she meant. "What is that over there?" he asked fearfully, pointing to what appeared to be an enormous, endless basin. With his heart caught in his throat, he waited for her to reply. Convinced he was looking at an ancient lakebed, he prayed he was mistaken.

"You don't recognize it?" Danielle scoffed. "That's Lake Itasca! We're not too far from where your home used to stand."

"This is Lake Itasca?" Jay cried, hardly able to choke down her words. He gawked out the windows at the abandoned buildings and barren landscape on the other side of the glass. Jay probed for a more reasonable explanation than the one Danielle had given. There were a few clusters of trees off in the distance but nothing like the dense, lush green forest he was accustomed to seeing in and around Lake Itasca.

"This isn't Lake Itasca!" Jay insisted, refusing to believe what Danielle had imparted. "Nothing about this place resembles the place I live. Why do you tell me this? When you know it's not true! You're lying." Jay's face looked like he might pass out. "You're trying to scare me."

The quaint small town that fringed Lake Itasca had vanished from existence, along with the enormous body of water the town was named after. Woods and meadows—gone. Replaced by countless ruins dotting a bleak landscape. If this indeed was Christmas Day, in no way did it resemble the place he had awakened to that morning.

Danielle spoke in a matter-of-fact tone, "Your hometown wasn't so special. You said so yourself. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder. Haven't you heard? Your Lake Itasca isn't any more unique than these people's version of it."

Jay snapped, feeling paralyzed at the thought he was standing in Lake Itasca. He didn't appreciate Danielle spewing his words back in his face. "Do I look stupid to you? No way is this Lake Itasca! And you're not going to convince me otherwise!" "I wouldn't dream of it," Danielle challenged with a gleam in her eye. She knew his ignorance would turn to knowledge soon enough. A pleasant surprise it would not be. But until then, Jay could hold tight to his version of reality.

Nothing about this place resembled Jay's hometown, and he wasn't about to buy into a story designed to frighten him. "For some reason, you are bent on upsetting me! Don't

you think you've done enough?" Jay spat. "I demand you take me back. This very instant."

Jay wasn't about to let his guard down. Although he looked as if he would crumble, Danielle was certain he would not. To appear anything less than a man, albeit a young one, was not about to happen.

"What you don't know is that within one century of your time, a severe imbalance took place, largely caused by humans. Lack of respect for the planet and overuse of resources brought devastating droughts in some places and catastrophic floods in others. Humankind's day of reckoning had arrived."

Danielle gazed out across the landscape. "You see the aftermath before you. It was an unspeakable time of loss. However, discovery rose from the rubble." She smiled. "People here live by the slogan 'You can do the impossible when you've been through the unimaginable.'"

"I don't understand," Jay said in a low voice. Feeling ignorant, he tried to clarify his remark. "I mean weather doesn't have this kind of power. How could it cause a transformation on this scale?"

Jay surveyed the land and felt sickened by what he saw. "Are you telling me, for real, that I've moved forward in time?" Jay's eyes widened. "Like a real time-traveler?" His mind visited one of his comic books, recalling a fictional scientist that had figured out how to move forward and backward in time. Comic books were make-believe, but Danielle was telling him that he had crossed time barriers to end up here. Jay had no way of reconciling this in his head.

Danielle stared deep into Jay's eyes, leaving no doubt that what she was telling him was, indeed, the truth. "The abuse was a prescription for extinction." Her face was grim. "Toxic bacteria got released that had been previously buried in permafrost. From species that had died off millions of years earlier. Sadly, that was only the beginning. Mother Earth is equipped to take care of herself. And that she did. When glaciers started melting in the early twenty-first century, sea levels rose, destroying many large coastal cities. Tornadoes, fires, hailstorms, and hurricanes on a scale you cannot imagine eradicated entire regions."

With her hand on Jay's back, Danielle gently nudged him through the door. Outside the building she said, "Greed is how it all started. The rest was a trickle-down effect. No one really paid much attention to the rising temperatures and increasing storms at the start. But that soon changed when catastrophic weather became more widespread and billions of people lost their lives. Triggered displacements and deplorable living conditions inescapably led to all-out worldwide mayhem."

Danielle continued her narrative, taking in the streets and the crowds moving through them. "The globe is noticeably warmer than it was in your day. Winter season

temperatures range seventeen degrees higher on average than in 1947. There is no measurable snowfall. It's nearly always above freezing. A pretty big difference from back then." She looked to Jay to see if her words had sunk in. She could tell they had.

"During summer months, there is even a greater temperature gap. Much drier conditions, a consequence of escalated evaporation years ago. Precipitation patterns are erratic at best. Many lakes have shrunk to almost nothing or have evaporated entirely. When it does snow, it snows heavily but melts quickly because of the warm ground temperatures. Rains often turn into downpours."

"I can't take all of this in. It's too fantastical." Jay felt stunned by what she claimed had happened in the past. He was clinging to the thread of hope his situation wasn't permanent, that it would, indeed, revert backward in time—hopefully to the instant before the trapdoor appeared on his radar. Before he climbed down the hole.

"You'll find out soon enough that what I've shared is unfortunately true." They stood on the steps, watching the crowds move about. Danielle led Jay down to the street. "These poor people inherited your violated, ravished world. One destroyed by amoral acts of utter selfishness."

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Praise from Early Readers

As a professional editor, I found this book to be well-written, well-paced and very intriguing.

~ Grace M. | Louisville, Kentucky

I finished your book at 1:00am. It was terrific. My husband now has it to read. When he's finished I am going to read it again. It appealed to my spiritual side and my beliefs philosophically. It made me smile, it made me cry, and it scared the be-jeezus out of me.

~ Dusty F. | Indianapolis, Indiana

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I see the learned man in what you say!

What you don't touch, for you lies miles away;

What you don't grasp, is wholly lost to you;

What you don't reckon, you believe not true;

What you don't weigh, that has for you no weight;

What you don't coin, you're sure is counterfeit.

—Goethe, *Faust II*