

Earth Rescue Mission Committee

Characters:

Archangel Gabriel; patient and statesmanlike

Angelica; young and enthusiastic

Anthea; cheerful, homely and knits through the meeting

Dorothy; brusque and businesslike

Henry; suave and knowledgeable

Geoffrey; grumpy

Board room. All but Angelica are seated chatting quietly to each other.

Gabriel: I'd like to call this ERM committee meeting to order please. Is everyone present?

Angelica rushes in panting.

Angelica: So sorry, sir – didn't mean to be late... got my wings stuck in the revolving door. Oh – you're not wearing any.

Anthea: *(leaning over confidentially)* We like to dress down for these committees – save the wings and halo outfit for when we need to impress the humans.

Gabriel: *(Frowning)* Right. Now, is everyone present?

Anthea: You must be new here, dearie.

Angelica: Yes. I'm Angelica.

Gabriel: I call this ERM committee meeting to order.

Anthea: Nice to meet you, Angelica. I'm Anthea.

Gabriel: Would you please look at the notes of the last ERM meeting –

Angelica: Hi Anthea. Nice to meet you too.

Gabriel: *(Trying to patiently ignore the conversations)* Does everyone agree that this is the true and correct record of the last ERM meeting? *(mutters from the others)*

Angelica: Have you been coming long? I feel honoured to be here at all with all you senior angels!

Gabriel: All in favour... *(mutters of assent)* Carried.

Angelica: It's so exciting – a proper committee and voting and everything!

Gabriel: Perhaps we should take this opportunity to welcome our new member of the ERM committee meeting.

(Altogether the angels greet Angelica)

Anthea: So nice to have a new face among us.

Henry: Good evening my dear.

Dorothy: Welcome. Welcome.

Geoffrey: Bah. Much good a new person will do.)

Angelica: Oh – er – hello everyone! My name’s Angelica, and I’m very excited to be here!

Gabriel: Welcome Angelica. I’m --

Angelica: Archangel Gabriel! Oooh – I know! I couldn’t believe it when I saw your name on the list –

Gabriel: Thank you --

Angelica: I sez to me mates... Oooh I’m on this committee and guess whose chairing it? Only bloomin’ Archangel Gabriel, that’s all!!

Gabriel: Yes well, shall we –

Angelica: “Aren’t you the lucky one” they sez to me and I sez well it’s not all pleasure you know; it’s quite a responsibility ...

Gabriel: (*Firmly*) Thank you. My job as Archangel of this committee is to ensure we stay **on track** with the topics for discussion.

Angelica: Oooh – that’s...

Gabriel: And so; matter’s arising from the last ERM meeting. Please check through the ERM meeting minutes.

Angelica: He says ‘erm’ a lot, doesn’t he! I thought he’d have more practise with public speaking, being an Archangel an’ all – here from the beginning of time so to speak. Makes me wonder how Mary didn’t clock him one all that ‘umming’ and ‘ahhing’.

Anthea: It’s not ‘umm’ – it’s ERM, dearie.

Angelica: That’s what I said.

Anthea: ERM. Earth Rescue Mission – it’s the name of our committee, you see.

Angelica: Oh! Silly me! Earth Rescue Mission. Oooh – how exciting! Does the Earth need rescuing then?

Dorothy: Haven’t you read your briefing notes? It’s in a dire crisis. Things are becoming catastrophic!

Henry: At this rate the Earth will barely squeak to judgement day.

Geoffrey: Bah! Serves them right if you ask me.

Henry: He’s a bit upset about it all. Brings back memories.

Geoffrey: I remember the Garden of Eden as if it was yesterday. Beautiful it was. Beautiful.

Henry: He really was there, you know. One of the minor angels responsible for locking up the gates after you-know-who were expelled from it.

Geoffrey: Always said there'd be trouble... knew it couldn't last. All that (*spitting it out*) joy and laughter. It was just the slippery path down to this mess.

Gabriel (*patiently*): So are there any comments about the first item on the Earth Rescue Mission - deforestation?

Angelica: Deforestation?

Anthea: Oh yes, they're cutting down all the marvellous ancient forests to make bigger farms or just because they like the wood.

Angelica: Not the Garden of Eden?

Geoffrey: Nope, they can't get their grubby little hands on that one. We've hidden it, hee hee.

Angelica: Why do the forests matter?

Dorothy: Oh there are terrible repercussions. You see when our Lord God made the Earth it was all in balance.

Henry: The ecosystems worked together in harmony. Each delightful creature and growing thing had a purpose to help another.

Anthea: That's what kept it going, dearie.

Dorothy: No point creating something that needed winding up every night. Had to set it going once and for all and pretty much leave them to it.

Geoffrey: Until the humans wrecked it all. Always said it would be trouble. Opposable thumbs, that's what did it. Never approved of the design plan when I saw it. Opposable thumbs. I said to myself, this'll be trouble, you mark my words. Give them manual manipulation like that and they'll think they own the world! I remember when...

Gabriel: The point, Angelica, is that deforestation to the extent we already have it causes a vital imbalance. The trees are crucial in combating pollution, keeping soil in place, producing quality air worldwide. Now these are gone, causing terrible suffering. Animals losing their habitats and dying out, diseases where the remedies were just waiting to be discovered and now never will. So much knock-on effect.

Dorothy: Such a short-term vision humans have – cutting down forests that took millennia to grow.

Gabriel: So are there any helpful comments please to support the anti-deforestation plans?

Angelica: Bendy trees.

Gabriel: I beg your pardon?

Angelica: Bendy trees. Make it so they can't cut the trees down; the bark is so rubbery that the axes bounce off.

Gabriel: Any other thoughts?

Angelica: Well I thought it was a good idea.

Anthea: I'm sure it was, dearie.

Angelica: Well then, why not explain it to the humans how you've explained it to me. Then they're sure to stop!

Dorothy: We already have. Inspired scientists all over the world to see and report on the dangers.

Henry: They have set up international committees to debate it.

Geoffrey: Bah! Committees never achieve anything. Talking shops, the lot of them.

Gabriel: Hmm. I know the feeling. Moving on!

Dorothy: I have an idea about the next item. Overpopulation.

Angelica: We haven't finished with the forests.

Anthea: We never do, dearie. There is only one real answer and they'll never do it.

Angelica: What's that?

Geoffrey: Stop cutting the blasted things down.

Henry: And replant diverse forests for a long-term solution.

Angelica: But I thought you said they'd take millennia to grow?

Dorothy: That's why they won't do it properly.

Anthea: They have done some here and there, but a bit half-hearted.

Dorothy: They'll never do anything they can't see instant results in.

Geoffrey: Free-will, you see. I said it'd never work, giving them free-will. Opposable thumbs and free-will. Dangerous combination.

Gabriel: Actually – if you read your notes you'll find that we have made a few suggestions about what can be done now.

Angelica: Oooh – do tell!!

Henry: To start with people can choose to avoid buying the slow-growing hard woods and only use sustainable sources of wood.

Angelica: But how can we tell? Wood's wood if you ask me! One plank looks pretty much alike another.

Dorothy: There are ways you can tell. In some countries there are special guides that show which are acceptable woods to use. Some of these environmental groups that we inspire have got information showing what to use, like the 'good wood' guide.

Henry: For instance in the UK, you can use woods which are FSC certified.

Angelica: FSC? What's that when it's at home?

Anthea: In the forest more likely, dearie. It's the Forest Stewardship Council. Gives advice on good uses of sustainable wood.

Henry: Did you know that softwoods like pine, larch and spruce are planted on a 60 year cycle – so they are cut down when they are 60 years old. Whereas oak and other native hardwoods take over 100 years to mature.

Gabriel: If we've quite finished rehashing old notes, please can we get back to the matter in hand. You had an idea for the overpopulation?

Dorothy: Free satellite dishes.

Angelica: Oooh, I love TV.

Gabriel: I beg your pardon?

Dorothy: They tried it in northern Brazil. Had a problem with families of umpteen children so they gave everyone free and discounted satellite dishes. And low and behold, people stopped having children. It's true. I saw it myself. There's nothing like lots of TV channels to wreck good human communication.

Gabriel: Well I don't think that's a realistic plan anyway. Many of the places with population crises haven't got electricity, let alone TVs.

Angelica: What's the problem with big families? Didn't Joseph have eleven brothers? Not to mention his sisters.

Henry: It's a case of limited resources. There's simply not enough to go around.

Dorothy: It took until the early 1800s for the population to reach one billion. Now each billion is added in less and less years. The population will grow by a billion people within the next 13 years.

Angelica: Scary.

Henry: But it's a complicated issue. In areas where there is greatest poverty, starving and disease, people require a lot of children because sadly so many won't survive.

Dorothy: We all know it's mostly the rich countries with few children who use everything up. One person in the rich North and West consumes as much as 100 people in Africa and Asia, and then they throw a lot of it away because they have too much. So much waste. Makes you mad.

Henry: It's certainly not fair to blame poorer countries. They would be in a far better position if the richer countries hadn't come and cut down their forests, making deserts and droughts because the soil was no longer any good for farming...

Dorothy: And taken the natural wealth God carefully planted to give them resources in time of poverty.

Henry: Diamonds, gems, precious metals, oil.

Dorothy: All found and taken, or bought at vastly low prices by the richer nations who basically bullied their way to it all.

Henry: And not to mention the pollution.

Gabriel: That's the next item. We're racing past any new solutions.

Angelica: What about the pollution?

Anthea: Haven't you noticed that where there used to be a lovely blue-green planet it's a lot browner and there's lots more areas of yellowy smog; the ozone is thinner in places. The whole balance and beauty has just about gone. Homemade biscuit anyone?

Angelica: Well I had noticed it was looking a bit dull. The view's not as clear as it used to be and there's lots of swirly winds and raging seas. Floods and earthquakes where I don't remember as many before.

Geoffrey: And everyone blames the Lord God when it's blatantly their own fault. As if God would wantonly destroy his own beautiful creation! No, it's directly the result of human greed, greed, greed.

Angelica: Opposable thumbs and free-will?

Geoffrey: And television.

Angelica: Television? I didn't think that was one of God's creations?

Geoffrey: No, quite the other way.

Dorothy: Now then, people have always been selfish. Wars over territory and belongings have been fought, well, since the beginning of time.

Geoffrey: Yes, but with television, people see exactly what it is they wish they had. Consumerism is the new religion. The new creed is "I believe I want. I believe I must have. I believe I will have it right now and pay later, no matter what the cost to me, my family or anyone in the world."

Angelica: Oh but I quite like pretty things too.

Gabriel: It's the balance.

Henry: The Native Americans had the right idea for the most part. Only take what you need and return the rest back to nature.

Geoffrey: Now it's all gone mad. Happiness in a box.

Anthea: It's all so wasteful, so much rubbish. So much we can't possibly ever use, all designed just to make us want it. Sure no-one wants a biscuit? Freshly made this morning?

Dorothy: Look at Easter eggs. What are they about?

Angelica: I like Easter eggs. Pretty, tasty, full of joy.

Dorothy: Full of waste. All totally unnecessary.

Angelica: A celebration of our Lord's resurrection.

Dorothy: Yes, maybe, but it came from a pagan ritual anyway. But forgetting that; they are just an example. I'm not suggesting getting rid of them.

Angelica: Phew!

Dorothy: But look at them! The shops are full of them for months, enticing people in; for what? Chocolate.

Angelica: Yummy.

Dorothy: Cheapest quality chocolate spread very thin and packaged in layers of sparkly foil.

Angelica: Pretty.

Dorothy: Which doesn't biodegrade and uses vital resources.

Angelica: Oh.

Dorothy: Then plastic protective layers. Doesn't biodegrade. And then a large box to con you into thinking it was worth the expensive outlay in the first place. All wrapping. All waste. All unnecessary. Yet sold by the million because of..

Geoffrey: Television, free-will and opposable thumbs.

Henry: Must have, must need. "I am not an adequate person unless I have the same or more than others." Clever marketing.

Angelica: Oh dear.

Anthea: Better stick to the fair-trade chocolate dearie. At least you know the price is fair for the workers.

Gabriel: Back to pollution.

Henry: And then because of all the excess in the West, the world's pollution goes up and the poorer nations suffer again.

Angelica: How do they suffer for others' greed?

Anthea: Well dearie, for one, most of the rich nations are clever and the acid rain is carried on wind currents and dumped on someone else's area. And they pay poor countries to take their rubbish because the poor countries can't afford to refuse their refuse.

Angelica: Refuse refuse? That's very clever. (*Anthea giggles*)

Henry: And through their World Trade agreements, the rich nations have got a kind of club which keeps out the poorer nations so that they can't ever really catch up. They give grants and top-ups to their own rich members while shutting out countries in Africa and other places who have to charge full price.

Dorothy: Now at least with the Fair-trade scheme, people can make their own choices whether they help pay a fair price to local growers world-wide; or whether they'd rather save a few pence and give the money to the multi-nationals who keep the poor countries suppressed.

Anthea: Sadly, most people leave the poor farmers starving just to save a few pounds on their weekly shop.

Angelica: That's not fair.

Geoffrey: See? Free-will, opposable thumbs..

Angelica: Television?

Geoffrey: Yes, because that keeps the Western propaganda. Tells them they're better than everyone else and deserve more, and makes the other nations buy into that TV culture which gives the rich even more money and stature.

Henry: Then the pollution from industry; cars, planes and such-like start creating havoc with the ecosystem. The climate is hotter, the ice-fields melt, the sea rises, the storms come, the problems are felt more in poorer countries.

Angelica: That doesn't make sense. Surely earthquakes and hurricanes don't only hit poor countries?

Dorothy: No but you've seen it. If an earthquake hits a rich country, hardly any damage. Expensive well-built structures, often specially designed to withstand problems. And if there is any damage, the money is there to compensate and build. In poor countries, the infrastructure is already stretched and the housing is poor. The materials are basic and cheap. So when disaster strikes, everything collapses. And there are more rebuilding costs because of more damage and less money to do so. It becomes a vicious circle, starting hundreds of years ago when one nation emptied another of its wealth.

Henry: If only the richer nations would think a little laterally and stop using fossil fuels; stop spending vast sums of money on fighting over and protecting the few reserves they have left but rather spend the money on research into other forms of energy.

Angelica: Like what?

Dorothy: Oh – there's plenty of ideas only few have been taken seriously because the oil giants have got their slimy hands on most of the power in the world, and alternative fuels are a threat to their monopoly.

Angelica: But these humans haven't got wings like us, have they – they need terrestrial transport.

Henry: Ah - but do they need it as much as they think they do? And can they not use it less and on more sustainable energies?

Anthea: An adjustment of the mind is what it needs luvvie. Back to good old communal transport; cheap frequent and efficient – if it was run and funded properly.

Dorothy: Development of wind, solar energy, hydro-electric power, and other types not yet discovered.

Henry: There's even a car now that can run up to 70 mph just on air!! Invented in Europe and about to be mass-produced in India. Amazing what people can do when they put their minds to it.

Geoffrey: Humans are perfectly capable of developing new types of destructive weaponry at the speed of light when they want it – why can't they put some of their own energy into developing a future for their children and grand children, I ask you.

Angelica: Why can't they all help each other? Surely there's enough left in the world?

Gabriel: Look at the last page.

Angelica: Conclusion: "Short-term solution" – I thought you said there wasn't one.

Dorothy: There's always a solution; it just depends on whether people will bother to stick to it when it inconveniences them.

Anthea: Read it out dearie, I could do with a refresher.

Angelica: "The short-term solution is to reduce what is used; re-use as much as possible, and as a last resort, recycle the rest." Seems simple enough.

Henry: One would have thought so, but heigh-ho.

Dorothy: Read the next bit too Angelica.

Angelica: "The real long term solution for an Earth Rescue Mission is to encourage nations to work together; for the rich to recognise responsibility to the poor." Well if you've got the solution why are we still meeting?

Geoffrey: Free-will, opposable thumbs and television.

Gabriel: For it all to work together, for a positive future, we have to regain balance in the world. Balance means redistribution. Less to the rich nations and more to the suffering nations. And the rich don't want to give things up.

Angelica: But I've seen it. Even when things are redistributed and given to places like Africa, then often there's wars and stuff that stops it going to the needy, anyway.

Anthea: People give that as a terrible reason to give-up on Africa.

Dorothy: But where there isn't enough to go around, there are more fights. Desperation breeds trouble. Greed and poverty breed violence.

Henry: Besides which, many of the wars and conflicts are sponsored by the rich countries because it suits them for one reason and another.

Angelica: But that's terrible!!

Anthea: Terrible, but true.

Dorothy: That's why it's so important to invest money in ethical funds. People don't even realise that some of their hard-won savings actually goes into sponsoring warfare world wide!

Angelica: Never!! But why don't people realise it?

Geoffrey: The human is a master at head-in-the-sand denial. What you don't see can't possibly be true. And they think they are the top of creation, I ask you.

Henry: But the conflicts and such-like are no excuse for not trying to help Africa. We can't give up on responsibility just because the money might not get where it needs to be.

Geoffrey: (*Smugly*) Each person will have to answer to the Lord God for their own actions come Judgement Day.

Anthea: Not for someone else's.

Dorothy: Each person has to do their bit.

Angelica: But I suppose it just feels overwhelming. What can one little person do?

Gabriel: If each person did what they could, that's all God asks. Be responsible. Don't use more than you need. Do what you can for others.

Angelica: Would that really make a difference?

Gabriel: Undoing all the damage won't be easy, but people have a choice.

Geoffrey: Free-will, never a good idea. People always choose the selfish way.

Gabriel: Not always, Geoffrey, not always. All through history there have been examples of the few that made the hard choice and made a difference.

Angelica: But this will be a hard journey – it needs lots of people to change.

Gabriel: But change always starts with ourselves – change always begins within.

Angelica: Ok, so let's start then! Item 1.

Gabriel: I think, Angelica, we've done enough for today's meeting. I need a bit of a lie-down; I'm not as young as I used to be. We'll reconvene the ERM committee...

Angelica: Earth Rescue Mission.

Gabriel: Thank you, Angelica – next week. Please come with some fresh ideas.

Angelica: A space ark! What about a space ark! We could tell someone to build a giant boat and get two of each...

Gabriel: Thank you very much everyone, see you next week.