

## The End of the World

We were sitting in Calculus when the sirens went off.

Mrs. Finch told us it was a drill, but I knew she was lying. The principal's voice came over the PA, something about remaining calm and staying inside, but I wasn't really listening. The lights went out. The sky became dark as night. Everyone went to the windows. An inky black mass had taken over the sky.

People got their phones out; some were taking videos and thought it was some kind of stunt; some were calling their parents and panicking. Others even started to pray, desperate for some kind of control. I thought about calling my family.

Too late, I thought.

I just stood there, watching the thing cover more and more of the sky. Silent tears ran down my face. I was terrified, and there was nothing I could do. I felt someone grab my hand, and I turned in slow motion. My girlfriend, Emily, looked back at me, and I grabbed her, holding her tight. Neither of us spoke. We knew that whatever this was, it wasn't good.

We began to see a light in the middle of the sky. It became brighter and brighter. It was blue, the color of the sky on a summer's day. The people taking videos brought down their phones and stared with the rest of us. Murmurs were coming from all around the room.

"What do you think it is?"

"I don't know, but I'm scared."

"Is it aliens?"

"Probably."

"Maybe it's the Rapture," said one of the students who had been praying earlier.

I didn't doubt it. It felt like the end.

"Are we gonna die?" I looked over to Emily, and I held her tighter.

"I don't know," I said.

I didn't want to think about it.

The building started to shake, a little at first, getting more and more violent. Emily and I were torn apart. I grasped for her hand, holding on as tight as I could.

Many of the students began to scream. Some tried to run to the door, but Mrs. Finch got on her desk and began to yell.

“Okay, everyone. Remain calm. We aren’t sure what’s going on, but panicking isn’t going to solve anything.” I could hear her voice begin to break. She was trying to do that thing that adults do. Trying to comfort us all while screaming inside.

Some of the students ignored her and tried to make a break for it. We watched them as they ran to the outside. As soon as they stepped out the door, they were pulled up by the black cloud. We huddled together, some crying and some just staring out the window. The blue light became brighter and brighter until it was too bright to bear, and everyone closed their eyes.

A flash of light.

Screams.

An acceptance of my fate, or at least that’s what I told myself.

Then everything went black.

\*

I wake up in a white...space.

“Emily?” No answer. Where am I? I start running, hoping to find a wall. Now I’m terrified. “Emily! Where are you? Is anyone there?” There’s no end to this place. I feel myself losing my grip on reality. Maybe I’ve already lost it. I’m crying, screaming out for Emily and the others.

“Hey! Is someone there? Why am I here? Who are you? Where are my friends! Where’s Emily! Answer me! Show your face! COME ON! Are you—” An unknown voice rang through the nothingness.

“You should remain calm. Your companions are stable.”

I start laughing humorlessly.

“Stable? STABLE? You killed them! Tried to suck them up into...whatever that was. Don’t lie to me!” I wait. Nothing. “Do you hear me?”

“Your companions are not dead. They were merely caught before they could get away. We needed all of you for the experiment to work.” A sudden chill runs down my spine. Experiment?

“What do you mean, experiment? Who are you?” Silence. “Hello?” Nothing. “HELLO?” I hear a mechanical whirring behind me. There’s a syringe, attached to a

robot arm. It's coming toward me. I try to pick up my feet to run, but they're stuck to the ground like magnets. I'm stuck. The needle gets closer. I feel a pinch, and the darkness envelopes me again. One last thought passes through my mind:

Please let Emily be okay.

\*

I wake up again in the same blank white void. I feel someone watching me, so I lift my head to speak. What else have I got to lose?

"Hello? Is someone there?" Nothing. "Hello?" I sigh and put my head back down, closing my eyes.

"Um, hello."

I jump at the new, feminine-sounding voice. The voice laughs at my response. Actually laughs.

"Oh, you humans are funny little things, aren't you?"

"Yeah, we're hilarious. I'm Lily, who are you?" I figure this creature already knows who I am, but the habit of common courtesy prevails.

"I'm called unit 5270. I don't have a 'name,' as you call it on Earth. I'm just a guard."

She giggles again. She sounds way too excited for my taste.

"Well, unit 5270, this has been fun, but do you think you could let me out?" She doesn't respond for a few moments. "Pretty please?"

"I'm sorry, but I can't do that. My superiors say you have to stay here until we find a use for you." A "use?" What am I, a mop?

Desperately, I try for another request. "Can I at least see Emily? I just want to know that she's alive and okay." My voice isn't as confident or demanding as I would have hoped. Unit 5270 doesn't respond, and now I don't care about my dignity. "Please? I'm begging you. I just want to know that she isn't hurt. I need to see her." Silence. "Plea—"

I hear a whoosh behind me. I turn around, and there she is. She's standing in an open doorway; the grey of the outside walls is the only indication of our location. An unseen thing pushes her in, the door closes, and before I know what I'm doing, I'm sprinting toward her.

“EMILY!” She looks up at me and meets me in a crushing hug. I pull back and I kiss her hard. I can hear her as I pull away, and I rest my forehead against hers.

“What’s going on?”

“I’m not sure. I remember something about an ‘experiment’ but I don’t know what they mean. Have they tried to do anything to you?” I start checking her for marks or injuries, terrified of what I might find. Emily grabs my wrists.

“Lily! Stop! I’m fine. As far as I know, they didn’t do anything.” Emily’s hands slide down into mine. She gives them a gentle squeeze, and I look up at her. “Listen to me. I know that this is an awful situation. I mean, talk about a bad day at school...” I let out a small chuckle. “But as long as we stay together, we can get through this. I love you. You know that right?”

“Yeah. I love you too.” I lay my forehead against hers, but our moment is interrupted by a loud screech.

“Sorry about that! These stupid microphones do that sometimes.”

Not this crap again.

“Hello, Lily and Emily! Oh, you too are just too cute! I regret to inform you that this visit is over. Time to go back to your room, Emily!”

“Wait, what?” I scream at the voice in the walls. “No, you can’t do that!” I hold onto Emily as tight as I can, feeling her tears through my shirt. She’s being pulled away from me, and I try to keep a hold on her.

“It’s okay. It’s okay. Stay strong.” Emily repeats soothing words through her tears as she is ripped from my arms. I can’t stop screaming. They can’t do this! I try to run after her—

Sharp pain in my chest.

Emily screaming.

I’m coughing up blood.

More screaming as I hit the ground.

The last thing I see is Emily running toward me.