

The heat was unbearable, from living in Boston for nine months to the hot Arizona summer, the change was extreme. The burning sun was heating the car by the minute. The first time I left for school, I was nine and I was forced to leave. I didn't want to leave my parents or Charlie, but the fighting was getting too much to handle. We never saw Dad since he was always at work, or a bar, but whenever he was home he was screaming at Mom, he even hit her once. Mom tried her best, but she didn't want us to see him anymore so she sent us to Boston.

Noah doesn't remember any of the fights, so Mom's idea had its benefits. He only remembers the fun side of Dad. The side where they used to play soccer in the front yard on the weekends or when he would take us to the park and play tennis with me while kicking the ball towards Noah. We made Noah sleep in my room whenever Dad came home so that he wouldn't hear any of the fights.

My school was like what regular people think of home. It was fun, I couldn't wait to go back to school.

"Iss, I need to leave now."

"Shut up, being 10 minutes late won't get you kicked off the team." Noah took his soccer a little too seriously, it was getting annoying.

"We're not even buying anything, you're just looking at the aisles."

"It's called shopping you idiot, and I do need something. Mom asked us to get her a new salad bowl. Remember? Our sick mother, sitting in the hospital, asking us to get her a new salad bowl while you were on your phone."

The second I said it I knew I shouldn't have. Noah didn't like talking about Mom, when she got diagnosed he didn't believe any of it for months till her hair started falling out. "I'm sorry, okay?" I wasn't sorry, he needed to wake up from his delusional haven of our "happy" life. "I'll be done in five minutes."

Noah looked at me in shock. "Five minutes! It doesn't take five minutes to grab one salad bowl!" People were starting to look at us, Noah was almost yelling about a salad bowl in the middle of Target. I was turning red as I locked eyes with my ex-best friend from freshman year, Kayla Jackson.

Kayla and I were best friends for years straight. We met in third grade when she asked for a pencil because her dog ate hers. Every second of every day after that, we were joined at the hip. We were so close people thought we were dating. We would hang out at school, after school, on the weekends, and my parents would even let her come on our family vacations. We went to Hawaii, Cabo, and Mami with Kayla, those were my favorite trips. For a second, I forgot why we stopped being friends, but I will never truly forget what she did.

I turn away from her to grab a random bowl. "Let's go." I walked out the automatic doors when a loud siren started wailing in my ears. I forgot to pay, I can't believe I just walked out completely forgetting about paying for the bowl.

"Seriously," Noah said, looking like he was about to die of laughter. "You forgot to pay?!" The security guard walked up to me grabbing the bowl out of my hands.

"Mame I'm going to need you to pay for this or leave without it." I was so embarrassed, everyone was looking at me, and Noah was on the floor suffocating with laughter. I walked over to the cashier, kicking Noah on the way.

“Will this be all?” I could tell the lady was holding back a laugh, I guess it was pretty funny. It was going to be a story to tell.

“Yes,” I tried smiling at her, but I just couldn’t hold back the absolute pettiness of her asking that. “That will be all.”

I grabbed my bowl walking back over to Noah, who had a huge, wide smile on his face. “You forgot to pay.” He was never going to let this go.

I gave the security guard a slight nod, walking through the automatic doors once again praying the screeching siren doesn’t go off again. The siren didn’t scream, but people did. The ceiling fell on everyone, with no warning, it just dropped. I felt Noah pull me away from the building and everything turned to dust. I stared at the dead security guard with his skull crushed by the cement. A second later white beams appeared from the sky, they looked like tubes as they forded around certain people lifting about five people through the now visible clouds.

I was in shock, I had no idea what just happened, my mind went blank. The dust started settling, rising turning the sky a dark brown while blocking out the sun. We stood there for a few minutes hoping this was all a hallucination.

Then Kayla Jackson, the one person I hate most in the universe, walked out with barely a scratch on her arm while everyone else in the store was crushed to death by several tons of cement. She looked at me with confusion. “What just happened?”

## 2

We stood there staring at the building for a few hours before someone finally said something.

“We need to go.” Noah’s voice was cracky, it was probably from all the dust. “We need to leave and find someone.” He was talking, but I wasn’t listening. I just saw innocent people die right in front of me. The old cashier lady that I wanted to strangle was dead. She will never see her kids again, her grandkids, her husband, she was dead, gone, never to come back.

“Yeah.” My voice was cracky, my throat hurt with every word. “Yeah, yeah we should go.” I grabbed Noah’s arm and walked through the parking lot, leaving Kayla standing there. Part of me wanted to invite her to come with us, but the other part of me wanted her to stand there forever and slowly rot as she thinks about everything she did.

“Kayla!” Well, Noah solved my problem for himself. Kayla didn’t move her body but just turned her head in our direction. “Come on! We’re leaving.” She turned her head back at the automatic doors, before following us.

We walked slowly since there was no rush. It took us a good five minutes to make it out of the parking lot, and when we stepped outside, we wished we could just walk back in. The sky was a reddish, orange color covered in clouds. The sun was shining through the clouds making the rays of light look red. The air was filled with dust and dirt, it was almost suffocating. With every breath I took, I could taste a chunk of dust in my mouth. It got to the point where we put our shirts over our mouths to slightly filter out the air.

All the buildings had collapsed, and some were even on fire. I looked around trying to find something that looked alive or even just an uncrushed store. All the trees had somehow lost all their leaves and turned black, and there wasn’t a single person in sight. I could hear several car alarms going off in the distance when I heard a stomp. I looked to my left to confirm with

Kayla that she also heard it, and she gave me a confused look. We both turned around to see something in the parking lot.

It was big, a big dark figure, it was slowly making its way out of the dark shadow the parking lot had cast upon it. I was about to scream when I saw its huge horns on its head and the hundreds of spikes on its back. Not to mention its scale-type skin and how it was fifteen feet tall. It turned to the sidewalk, going the opposite direction from us. We all started backing up slowly, we didn't think it saw us until Noah tripped on the curb and fell. The thing whipped its head at us, staring at me with its beady red eyes. This time I screamed, then Kayla screamed, and we all started running. Well, Noah was crawling on the floor while we ran away.

We ran and ran for what felt like hours straight before we finally lost the thing. I was out of breath, I felt like my lungs were going to explode with how hard I was breathing. My heart was pounding so hard that I could hear the pulse in my ears. Don't even get me started on how thirsty I was, my throat felt like someone just dragged sandpaper against it, then burned the walls of it with matches.

We had been sitting on the floor for a few long minutes before Noah came running at us screaming. "You idiots left me there!" I was too tired to even turn my head to look at him. "You left me there to be eaten by that thing!" He sat down next to me, breathing heavily as I built up the energy to look at him.

I looked him in the eye, so tired that I could fall asleep right here, right now. "You still wanna go to soccer practice?"

### 3

I don't even know what time it is. I woke up like ten minutes ago, Noah was still sleeping, but Kayla was gone. Maybe the killer demon came back and ate her, she deserved it. Unfortunately, she came back, but with water and chips.

"I found a broken vending machine." She tossed me a bag of Doritos, knowing they're my favorite. "There's also some apples in there, I just couldn't carry it all."

"Thanks." I tried not to sound rude, but I honestly didn't care. The chips tasted so good, the water was even better.

"How was boarding school?"

"Good." Now she cares about my life? Now that everything and everyone I loved is gone, she wants to know how school is?

"Nice."

"Listen, I don't want to be all friendly with you, I owe you nothing." Now I meant to sound rude. "Noah only brought you because he felt bad leaving you there to rot. We're not going to magically become friends again, even if we are the last people left on Earth." I ate my chips in silence thinking about what I had said. Were we the last people left alive?

We started walking again, this time with a destination. We decided it would be best to go to the Green Flock park to see if anyone was alive. The Green Flock park had this huge tower with a telescope at the top. We used to go there as kids all the time, even though it's a place for tourists, it was so fun to see all the people in town through a tiny circle. If we could get there without being eaten by another giant monster, we could see who is left.

"I think this is the apocalypse." I looked at Noah, confused by what he said.

“What?”

“I think that God took all the good people to heaven, that’s what all the white beams were. Then he brought hell to Earth, that would explain the monster.” It made sense, but if so, why were we still here?

“That’s ridiculous, we went to church and Sunday school every week, there’s no way we would be left behind.”

“I don’t know. It’s just the only reasonable explanation.”

We walked miles before we reached the park, well I wouldn’t exactly call it a park. The entire tower was gone, and the park was just a giant hole. A huge hole in the ground, probably fifty feet wide, took the place of our favorite park.

“Well unless you want to jump into the lava-filled hole in the ground, we no longer have a plan.” Kayla was getting on my nerves, so my plan didn’t work out, at all. It doesn’t matter, at least I thought of something.

“Well, if you’re so smart, why don’t you come up with your plan.”

“I say we find somewhere to sleep.” Find somewhere to sleep!? We’re living in a sci-fi movie and she wants to find somewhere to sleep?

“I agree with Kayla,” I was ready to just get up and leave now. “We can’t just sleep on the floor again, especially if we have no way of telling if anyone else is even alive.” If I wasn’t so mad at them, I would probably think it was a good idea, but I felt like pushing them into the hole myself.

“Fine. You guys go, I’ll wait here.” Even though I could get eaten by a monster and die alone. It was better than dying and the last thing I see is Kayla’s perfect little face.

“No,” She reached her hand out to help me up. “We all need to stay together, no matter how tired you are.” I was too annoyed to argue with her and just started walking.

“Well, aren’t you guys going to come?”

We had walked for a long time before we finally found a grocery store that was still standing. I was so happy, I sat on the cashier’s chair feeling the soft cushion and the nice back support of the chair. I was overwhelmed by the rows and rows of food stacked up, all for us. Kayla and Noah immediately started eating, devouring about ten bags of M&Ms, three turkey sandwiches, and a lot of beef jerky. I wasn’t even thinking about the food just about how good it would feel to fall asleep.

I sat with my eyes closed for twenty minutes before I realized I just couldn’t fall asleep. I got up and went to the back of the store, there had to be some sleep pills somewhere in this store. “Noah, did you see any medicine aisles?”

“No, you need a special license to sell medicines.” Great, now I can’t fall asleep till I’m tired. I sat down with them grabbing a beef jerky stick, it was stale.

“Ugh, how are you guys eating this?” I tried taking another bite, but I felt like I was going to crack my tooth. “It’s as hard as a rock!” And that says a lot since I ate a rock in 8th grade. No wonder there was no blood in the store, all the food was so old that even the owner couldn’t stand to be here.

I finally fell asleep after a few hours of joking around. Maybe Kayla wasn’t as bad as I remembered her to be. She was funny, but I wasn’t going to be friends with her. I know she’s a bad person inside.

The sun was rising when I woke up, or it was still setting I couldn't tell. Noah and Kayla were asleep, snoring like pigs on the floor. It was cold, well probably not for Kayla. She pulled the blanket off of me in the middle of the night and took it all for herself. I didn't know what to do, I didn't want to get up and just stand there, but I didn't want to continue sitting here watching them sleep, it was creepy. I slide over to the glass wall to watch the sun instead of Kayla.

It's amazing the way the Earth makes the sun look, how it gives a "rising" image across the horizon. It looks so close, you think it is a mile away. If it wasn't for science any person in the right mind would also say it looks a mile away. I missed the type of sunrise, as I looked at the sun all I saw were red clouds and what looked like another giant hole in the ground. I had no idea how to fix everything. Twenty-four hours ago my biggest problem was that I couldn't choose a salad bowl, and now everyone on Earth is dead.

"Hey," Noah came and sat next to me. His voice sounded better, almost normal besides the slight raspiness. "Interesting thing to look at."

"Yeah." I guess it was interesting in a sense, it would have been interesting to myself two days ago, but I think my mind is in such shock, it isn't processing what I'm looking at. The more I thought about the red sky, I realized it was bizarre, maybe this was the apocalypse and hell had been unleashed on Earth.

"Wow! How does it not hurt your eyes to look at it?" his eyes started tearing and he looked away. "Iss, look away it's going to blind you. I didn't want to but I forced my eyes to look away, I did realize a slight tingle, but the light wasn't enough to blind me.

Kayla got up and walked towards us, "Hey." She sat down next to me so I got up and walked away. "What's up with her?" Even her whispering sucked, I could hear her from 10 feet away. I acted like I couldn't hear, but I was interested in what she had to say about me.

"I don't know," Noah didn't even try to whisper, he knew that I could hear them. "She's in shock. This is all so crazy. We're the last people alive and giant lava rock monsters are attacking us and she's stuck with the two people she hates the most." Did he think I hated him?

"I can't believe she's still on that. I didn't mean for the plan to backfire on her, Kayla did the wrong thing at the wrong time and screwed up the plan. We weren't supposed to hurt Kayla, just Jason."

"Why would you want to hurt Jason?" Noah was getting all my answers for me, he knew what he was doing. "Did he even do anything? Or was it just because you guys were jealous?"

"You know why," Kayla was starting to get a little annoyed. "He was a terrible person, the school would have been better without him."

I stepped out from behind the cereal aisle and laughed inside as her face went cold. "We should continue searching. Maybe there are other people also in hiding." I grabbed Noah's hand and pulled him up, leaving Kayla on the floor.

"Which direction?" He said looking around.

"The school. There might be kids hiding there." I threw a shady look at Kayla and grabbed a bag to stuff food in. If there was no one there, we probably would need to find a way back to the store. I grabbed one of the lighters in the cigarette case and pushed through the doors, setting off the little bell that sat on top of the door frame.

"Kayla!" Noah ran outside behind me, I could hear the little bell again. He grabbed my arm, "Where are you going?!"

“I’m just getting leaves for a fire,” I threw his hand off my wrist and continued walking towards the dead oak tree in the middle of the sidewalk. I bent down to touch the crippled leaves off the floor, hoping that with a little bit of gasoline it would light.

“What do you mean you’re starting a fire? It’s like 200 degrees outside! Are you trying to cook yourself?!”

I got up, flipped my hair over my head, and looked at him. “No, you idiot. It’s to make it easier to find the store if there’s no one at the school.” I was having a smart person moment when he completely ruined it.

“Yeah but it might also attract the monster thingy and it would destroy our only source of food. Ever thought about that, you idiot.” It was annoying but he was right, the smoke might attract the monster. I guess I have been away for a long time, Noah was never the smart one let alone the type of person to talk back to me. I liked this new him, it was refreshing. I dropped the lighter and walked back inside, frustrated that my genius idea wouldn’t work. “So how are we going to find our way back? We walked for miles and miles and this was the only standing place with food. The likelihood that we’ll find another one is one percent. You realize that, right?”

Kayla walked over and decided that she had an opinion. “Yeah, but we can’t make my signals, because Noah was right it would bring the monster straight to the store. We’ll just have to leave the store and if there’s no one left, then we’ll try to make it back. If we can’t, oh well there has to be another way to survive out here.”

“Fine.” I grabbed the bag of food and Noah grabbed the water bottles. We knew exactly where to go, besides all the buildings falling, the sky being red, and it being unnaturally dusty, it looked just like it did when we used to walk to school. Dad was always too drunk to drive us and Mom was too tired to take us, so we walked a mile and a half every day just to get there, and another mile and a half back. It kept us in shape though.

## 5

Once we got to the school, I was shocked. It was like nothing had even happened to the school, it was standing, not dusty, and the light-up sign at the front gate was still shining. I looked over at Noah to see his shock.

“When the world ends and it’s hell on Earth, it’s no surprise that school is the only place that didn’t get destroyed.” We all started laughing, it was funny. I started walking forward to the closed gate when we heard a roar. I saw a tall figure coming our way, and we all started running towards the school. The second we started running the monster walked faster, it was coming at us like a charging bull. I jumped on the fence, climbing up it as fast as I could. Kayla and Noah were climbing a few steps behind me.

I jumped off the top and ran across the hall. I waited for a few seconds, realizing they were still behind me. We ran to the end of the school and into the gym, hoping that the monster wouldn’t bother coming this deep into the school to find us. We cramped behind the carts in the ballroom listening as the stomps were getting louder and louder. My heart was racing as terrible thoughts raced through my head. What if I died in a school? What if I died by being torn apart and eaten by a giant monster? What if I had to watch my brother get eaten alive in front of me?



No. Nothing was going to happen because this was all surreal. There's no way that the world could have ended. There's no way we could have been the only ones alive. I probably got hit when the ceiling fell in Target and this is all a dream. Yeah, it's all a dream, it doesn't matter if you die in dreams.

"Issie?" I heard Noah's voice from behind me, but it was so dark I couldn't see anything.

"I'm right here," I think he could hear the fear in my voice, the way my voice cracked like it does when I cry. The steps got louder before they stopped. Maybe it heard us, I closed my eyes not wanting to see anything, and stood. Paralyzed in fear, we waited for about thirty seconds before there was a roar, and Kayla screamed.

I instantly covered her mouth, but I wasn't quick enough. The loud footsteps began to shake the ground, I bit my lip knowing this was the end. I was going to die because of Kayla because she had to scream I was going to die. Everything that she touches is ruined. Now she officially ruined my life.

The door creaked open so slowly, you would think it was a human. I could see its devilish fingers around the doorknob, it slowly pushed further and further as it was trying to build up the drama. My heart was pounding like a butcher with a piece of fresh meat. Part of me wishes it would just end now so that I didn't have to go through this torture.

I could see its horrendous body as the gym light shined on its back. I closed my eyes waiting for it to be over, there was nothing we could do now, it found us, we were trapped. I was going to die in a school ballroom that smelled like dead rats. What if no one ever found our bodies and the rats ate us? I tried to stop thinking but even during meditation, I was never good at clearing my mind.

I leaned forward and whispered in Kayla's ear, "I forgive you." If this was my last moment alive, I wanted to die with nothing on me. Even though she's the one that is making me die. Then an idea hit me. What if I could distract the monster for Kayla and Noah to getaway. "I love you Noah." And I didn't bother whispering it this time. I pushed past Kayla sliding through the small space between the cart and the wall. It seemed much easier when we got in. I saw my first clear sighting on the monster, and I realized it wasn't the one from the very beginning, it didn't have those beady red eyes but instead a matte black eye and an eye socket with no eye. "Hey!" I was trying to get the thing's attention, but I don't think it could hear me 40 feet up. "HEY!!" I screamed at the top of my lungs when it finally turned its head towards me. This was it. "YEAH, YOU!!" I started leaning towards me, almost making me scream, but I couldn't show my fear, I had to act tough. I turned my head over to the corner where Noah and Kayla were watching and signaled for them to run out of the room. They looked confused for a few seconds but eventually, Noah got the idea.

They speed walked to the door and as Noah left through the door, I realized what I got myself into. I was standing alone, defenseless in the room with the monster. I started spinning to confuse the monster when Noah and Kayla burst back into the room.

"NO! TAKE ME!" Kayla screamed at the monster, making him turn to her. "Issie, I'm so sorry for killing your dog and boyfriend, it was an accident." At that moment I knew she meant it, maybe it wasn't an accident, but at this point I forgave her. I looked at her as the monster bent down to grab her with its giant hand, and I started screaming again. The monster turned back to me, starting to get a little annoyed with us.

I looked at it in the eye as its cold long fingers grabbed my feet and flipped me upside down as it went up. I felt like I was a witch in the witch trials being boiled upside down. The next thing I know Noah jumps in the room screaming and I go swinging as the monster turns its head. I could tell my face was tomato red with all the blood rushing to my head. The next thing I know, I'm on the floor in an impressive amount of pain. I think I had blacked out for a few minutes, but I stood up and slowly walked over to Noah and we all prepared to be eaten together. With our arms linked together, we all started simultaneously screaming. The monster was confused as to what happened; it just stood there for a few seconds.

We were also confused until the ground started shaking and the ceiling started falling in on us. It was happening again, everything was just like it was in the Target, and just like the Target white light beams struck down from the sky around us. Three separate beams circled us and started pulling us up. It was like being abducted. Oh my gosh, maybe we're being abducted. I closed my eyes and let the beam pull us up. At one point I felt cold, then the beam stopped. I hopped my eyes when I heard Noah laughing and we were in the clouds. Not in the clouds, we were standing on clouds. There was a woman in white standing in front of us, she had three gold rings in her hands and she walked up to each of us and floated around our heads. We had halos! I bent down and touched the clouds and it felt like cotton candy, so soft and light. I had no idea how it was sustaining all of us. I looked into the distance and saw huge gold gates, they were probably bigger than the monster. Two lion statues were posing on either side of them. But then one of the lions moved, which was very confusing to me. I looked at the angel lady with a hopeful look in my eye. "Where are we?" She smiled and looked at me with a wise look in her eye.

"Welcome to heaven." The angel lady disappeared and the gold gates in front of us opened with a bright light at the end. We all linked arms and happily skipped off into the distance, forgetting everything that just happened, and ready to have the time of our dead lives in heaven.