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When the Day Ends

By Naomi Corona-Gonzalez

“Always be prepared,” people used to say. The phrase was meant for things like bringing cash with you in case you get hungry or carrying mace just in case you get attacked while walking down the street.

Y’know, normal things.

Nowadays, the phrase is rendered useless. You can’t always be prepared, it’s impossible.

I used to think you could. I remember spending all my time training in martial arts, researching the easiest plants to grow with little to no resources, and learning how to administer first aid. I thought I knew it all.

Oh, how naive I was.

It’s almost impossible for me to believe that twenty-four hours ago I was just an ordinary teenage girl. I only have vague memories of the life I had before this whole mess began, before they landed on Earth and took over.

Life was so simple back then. I wish I hadn't taken it for granted.

Let's start from the beginning.

April 3, 2019

9:13 A.M.

Today feels windier than normal, I'm getting a little chilly waiting at the bus stop. My practice uniform isn't very warm, with my black 'Lincoln Bullfrog Dance Team' t-shirt and my black camo leggings barely giving me any comfort. The thin pink zip-up I'm wearing isn't doing much in this wind, either. So now I have to wait here while the wind force-feeds me strands of my auburn hair.

As I enter the bus I'm hit with the faint smell of leftover food and sweat. Looking around, I'm surprised to see that most of the seats are occupied. Normally when I step into the double doors of the bright red public bus I see 4 people, apart from the bus driver Anna.

We have the two elderly women sitting in the front row who are always holding onto their matching grocery carts filled to the brim with fruits and Mexican candy, which they sell next to the church up in Encanto.

Alongside them is a little girl, whose name is Daisy. I know this because the two women are constantly telling her to stop messing with the stop request cord. Poor Daisy. She's adorable, though. She's always dressed in these poofy floral dresses and cute little black church shoes with bows. Her hair is styled up into braided pigtails, also decorated with bows. She's like a doll.

And finally, Ellie, the one person I can't live without. Ellie, who stands by my side no matter what. Ellie, who knows me better than anyone else in the world. Ellie, my best friend.

The first time I met Ellie was on this exact bus, on my first day of middle school. I remember being terrified that day waiting at that same stop, uncomfortable in my new uniform that my mom had bought last minute, like always. The collar of my white button-up shirt felt tight around my neck, almost like it was choking me. The velcro tie it came along with pissed me off as well. It's as if the heads of the school believed us poor kids were too stupid to tie a real tie. The skirt was cute, though, it was plaid and had the school colors; green, blue, yellow, and white, and went down to right above my knees. But the worst part of the outfit were my shoes, these Converse knock-offs that my mom had gotten from Mexico. They were ugly and bulky and just fake. I despise those shoes to this day.

The moment I first stepped into the double doors, I spotted Ellie. She was sitting in the back, looking out the window, earbuds on. Her long and curly dark brown was up in a bun and she wore her signature dainty gold chain around her neck, which to this day I have never seen her without. As terrified as I was to go to school, I wanted to make at least one friend, so I approached her.

“Hi...” I said trying to sound as friendly as possible, “Can I sit here?”

She looked up at me and smiled, removing her earbuds, “Oh hey, yea you can sit down,” she removed her backpack from the empty seat and tapped it, motioning me to sit, “I’ve never seen you before, are you a sixth grader?”

“Yup,” I mumbled as I sat down, smoothing down my skirt, “What grade are you in?”

“Seventh,” she answers, “I’m Ellie, by the way. What’s your name?”

“My name is Dahlia,” I give her a shy smile back, warming up to her friendliness, “but you can call me Day.”

“Well Day,” she began, reaching her pale hand out to me, holding an earbud, “Do you like Hamilton?”

After that moment, we became inseparable.

She’s not here today, though. Instead, I see 18 other strangers. I take my place in the back of the bus and face the window.

The drive to school is surprisingly peaceful despite it being slightly fuller than usual. Well, except for that one person in front of me who’s playing their phone a little too loudly.

“...Un video que muestra una posible nave espacial se ha vuelto viral. Grabado en Giza, Egipto, el video muestra un objeto misterioso aterrizando en el desierto. No se ha confirmado más información...”

That’s strange...

9:40 A.M.

The bus reaches my stop, 1329. It drops me off right in front of my school, Lincoln Prep.

Lincoln Preparatory Academy is one of the most famous charter schools in San Diego, known for its “inspirational” story about a school that went from one of the most dangerous in the state to holding a 98% average college acceptance rate, and has expanded to both middle school and high school. This was all due to a man named Robert Devrell, our principal. We get the talk about the history of the school every year, along with a review of our mission statement, school song, and mantra. I think every student who has ever attended the school has it all memorized at this point.

As soon as I step out of the bus, I'm ambushed by the smell of cut grass and the bright colors of the front lawn, with the perfectly trimmed bushes, the recently bloomed Jacaranda trees, and the giant eucalyptus tree in the center of it all. The main building is painted this hideous azule with tan brown accents and doors. The entrance is this giant fence gate with the words "Here walk the greatest minds in history." I'm not so sure about that quote, though.

But I'm not entering through that door today. Instead, I must enter through the side gate in front of the dance studio. I walk along the sidewalk, stepping on the fallen Jacaranda flowers as I go. The side of the school is relatively the same as the front, with the same ugly blue and brown combination. The fence surrounding the school is covered in posters showing all the previous shows put up by the school, a tradition born since the first dance team was formed in 2015. I like these posters, I remember looking at them in middle school, dreaming of getting into the team and performing in front of crowds.

For some reason, I can't seem to get the news report out of my mind. There are so many questions going around in my head right now; Is the spaceship thing real? Was it one of those staged videos that became viral on Twitter? Are the aliens friendly? What would I do if a spaceship suddenly appeared? I'm kind of creeping myself out right now.

When I finally approach the fence gate, Ellie appears from around the corner sitting in the passenger's seat of Chris's black Camaro.

Chris is Ellie's...friend, kind of. They have been seeing each other for around a month now, but, according to her, they still haven't put a label on their relationship.

"Wow, I see how it is. You didn't wanna tell me you were getting a ride here, huh? I had to be in the musty bus alone, girl."

Ellie laughs, shutting the car door behind her, and hands her gym bag to Chris. She runs to me, her long curly hair moving effortlessly behind her, and throws her entire weight on me, almost knocking both of us down onto the grass. She smells like baby powder.

“Sorry Child, I forgot to tell you we went to get breakfast before coming here. Please forgive me.” She said while pretending to cry. I dramatically push her away, acting heartbroken.

“I don’t think I’ll ever be able to forgive you for what you’ve done. You have betrayed me.”

I turn away and sulk while Ellie drops to her knees and puts her hands together, begging for my forgiveness.

“You two are so dramatic, bruh,” Chris interrupts laughing. His unusually sharp K9 teeth make an appearance through his smile.

He locks the car and approaches us both, lifting Ellie from the ground as we all laugh and puts his arm around her.

“We’re basically theater kids, it’s what we do,” I roll my eyes while dapping him up. I open the gate for us and we enter the studio together.

Dance practice doesn’t start till 10, so Ellie and I enter the dressing room to talk with the other girls who arrive early. All of us girls like to hide in the dressing room, which is little, about 12ft by 12ft, where we all change and get our makeup done. We have a small couch in there, along with spinny chairs and stools we use to sit in front of the vanities. We come here during our breaks to talk chisme and go on our phones.

“No, listen, he was caught cheatin' on her with a girl from Hoover. FROM GODDAMN HOOVER!” Nadia explained, clapping her hands with every syllable.

Amy stops sipping from her coffee and laughs, scrunching her freckled nose, “Bro the girls from there are so ghetto, of course someone from there would go for a guy like him.” She places her cup on the vanity and glances up at us, smiling.

“No like seriously,” Esther adds, looking up from her phone. “That guy looks like a fugly troll.”

Ellie and I sit on our usual spots on the couch and I take out my jazz shoes from my bag. As I slip my right shoe on, I ask, “Hey did you guys hear about the alien spaceship in Egypt-”

“Ya’ll, Mr. P can’t make it,” Esther interrupts while looking at her phone in shock.

We collectively groan, upset that our dance instructor won’t be here for Saturday practice.

“Don’t tell me we’re gonna have to do our practice through Zoom again. It’s so much harder to learn the choreography through a screen, oh my god,” Ellie whines, throwing her body back onto the couch. She’s not wrong. The last time Mr. P tried to teach us a choreography through Zoom he froze five times and we couldn’t hear the music at all. It was a messy and frustrating day.

Esther furrows her brows as she reads the email, “No, he said he needs to...prepare his bunker? What does that even mean?” She puts down her phone and stands up, stretching out her arms. “So it looks like we’re gonna be on our own today. He wants us to head back home and “get ready”, but I don’t think Mr. Cole is gonna let that happen.”

She leaves the room, already exhausted from what’s about to come. Since Mr. P isn’t here, Chris and Jordan, the co-captains, are gonna lead today's practice which means only one thing: torture. Those guys like to make the most difficult warm-ups and drill the choreo without breaks till it’s “perfect” and Mr. Cole lets it all happen.

1:34 P.M.

“COME ON YA’LL, I WANNA SEE ENERGY!” Jordan’s voice echoes through the studio, making it into the boys’ and girls’ dressing rooms.

We’ve been dancing for almost 4 hours, only having a 5-minute break at the top of each hour. Like I said before, this is torture.

Mr. Cole exits his office and approaches the front of the room, his heavy boots harshly hitting the floor with every step.

“Everybody, I have to go out and get my extra camera battery out of the car, I’ll be right back,” he says in his usual dry monotone voice. “Keep dancing, and don’t burn the place down.” We all watch as he leaves, the smell of wet socks exiting with him.

With a clap, Chris brings our attention back, “Aight let’s keep going from the top. Five, six, seven, eight!”

I lazily move my body to the beat, barely paying attention to what everyone else is doing. Something just doesn’t feel right, strange things have been happening all morning. I kick-ball-change and march to the back. I don’t know if I’m imagining things or if I’m overreacting, but I don’t feel good. I feel like I’m already dying.

As I get ready to jump, a blaring sound blasts from the speakers in the room, startling all of us. It isn’t just any ordinary alarm, though, it’s the Emergency Broadcast System alarm. Concerned, I run up to check the computer just as the alarm reaches everyone’s phones. The Spotify playlist on the computer is now replaced with a message on a black screen which reads as follows:

This is not a test.

Attention all residents:

At 1:34 P.M. today, multiple credible reports have confirmed that extraterrestrial entities are initiating attacks across various regions. For your safety, you are urgently advised to follow these instructions:

Remain Indoors: Stay inside your home or nearest building. Do not venture outside for any reason.

Secure Your Premises: Lock all doors and windows. Close blinds and curtains.

Avoid Communication Blackout: Keep your communication devices charged and accessible. Stay tuned to this station or other official channels for updates.

Stock Essentials: Gather essential supplies such as food, water, and medications in an easily accessible location within your home.

Stay Calm: Refrain from panic. Follow these instructions to ensure your safety and that of your loved ones.

Authorities are working diligently to manage the situation. More information will follow as it becomes available. Your cooperation and adherence to these guidelines are crucial for your safety.

Repeat: This is not a test. Stay indoors and secure your premises immediately.

Oh my god, oh my god, oh my god what the hell is happening? Why isn't Mr. Cole back, where is he?

I quickly run out of the room, my jazz shoes slapping the ground as I go. Other students follow behind me and we make it to the fence looking for the old man. Mr. Cole was still in his

car parked across the street from us, searching for the battery. We instantly yell over to him, trying to get his attention.

“Mr. Cole!”

“Get back inside!”

“Sir get inside!”

He turns to face us looking confused, “Is something actually on fire? I was only joking, you guys.”

He closes his car door and calmly walks toward the building, looking straight at us. The man does not seem to have a clue about what’s going on and I think he left his phone in the classroom. My heart is beating so fast I can feel it against my chest and I feel like I’m about to pass out.

“HURRY UP SIR!” I yell, trying to rush him.

Mr. Cole doesn’t seem to like my comment very much. He gets red in the face and stops walking, now pointing directly at me, “HEY WATCH THAT TONE LADY! I’M NOT GONNA GO ANY FASTE-”

A thing emerges from the roof of a nearby house and jumps down to the road. I can’t even begin to describe how horrifying it is. It runs toward Mr. Cole, fast as lightning, and disappears taking our teacher with him. All that’s left of him is a trail of blood.

Everyone gasps and we run back to the studio, horrified by what we just saw. Mr. Cole has just been tackled by a goddamn alien in plain sight.

Inside, all my members are panicking, unsure of what to do now. Chris and Jordan are trying to calm everyone down but no one seems to pay any attention to them. Instead, many are calling their loved ones to ask if they’re okay. Others are huddled with their friends, trying to

regain their composure. A few people seem to be in shock, not responding to a single thing that's happening around them. In short, everything is a mess.

I quickly run to the dressing room, looking for my backpack. I zip it open and desperately dig through its contents till I finally find what I'm looking for, my inhaler. After taking two puffs of it I take deep breaths, trying to process what just happened. So this is actually happening, I am actually experiencing an apocalypse. Please tell me this is just a dream, I can't do this.

I hear some knocks at the door and Ellie proceeds to open it, looking whiter than she normally does. All the color is drained from her face and her eyes are swelled up with tears. She sits next to me on the couch and gives me a big hug, one that you give someone when you're about to enter a situation where you might die. I don't hesitate to hug her back, squeezing her like my life depended on it. We stay like this for a good minute, just silently hugging each other in worry.

"What's gonna happen to us, Day," she finally asks, "What are we all going to do?"

I slowly let go of her face, grabbing her hands, "We're gonna have to stay here till it's safe."

"How long do you think it'll take?" Tears finally escape her eyes as she waits for my answer.

"More than a day."

