

Solar

I was fifteen when the solar storm hit. Living in Philadelphia, life couldn't have been more boring up until that day. I thought that's what life had in store for me, just a century of nothing. I was wrong.

My best friend, Taylor Bright, had convinced me to skip school halfway through the day. We went back to her house, and everything seemed normal. We were just going to sit around, eat whatever we wanted, and sneak out before her parents got home.

The second we turned on the television, all we saw was a panicked group of people, some dressed in lab coats, others in plain clothes, sitting around the news room where the usual, overly-attractive anchors were. The scientist in the middle was doing most of the talking.

"For those just tuning in, we advise you to seek shelter. There has been some abnormal activity on the surface of the sun, turning into storms that may hit Earth if they grow too much," he started.

I stood there in shock and watched as a formally dressed woman looked around to her peers and continued where the last had left off.

"While the chance of this is exponentially low, the possibility that this storm reaches us is still there. If it does, you will want to make sure to be prepared. Please, make sure wherever you go is equipped with a radio."

Taylor grabbed me by the arm, tugging me towards the back of the house.

"Kelsey, we have to go," she said. I didn't budge, my eyes locked on the television.

“What would be the point of a radio?” one of the plain-clothed men asked. “Wouldn’t a solar storm fry every bit of technology on the planet?”

“The radio is for the very likely chance it doesn’t happen. This is just another psyche-out!” a man stated, slamming his hands onto the desk. “You’re just trying to get some fear into us, right? Well I’m tellin’ you, I know for a fact there’s no storm headed here.”

Once again, Taylor tugged on my arm.

“Kelsey, let’s go!” she shouted. Never in my life had I heard this girl raise her voice at anything. It snapped me right back to that moment.

“Taylor?” I stammered. “What’s happening? Is this real? Where are you—”

She didn’t respond to any of my questions. Instead, she started pulling me out the back door, and into what looked like a cellar a few feet into her backyard. She flipped the top open, and I was greeted with a staircase going quite a ways down underground.

“Get in,” she demanded, tears welling in her eyes.

I peered down the hole once more, then back up at my best friend.

“I don’t understand,” I mumbled. “They said that the chance of this happening... They literally *just* said it.”

“They’re wrong,” Taylor said firmly. “Now, please.”

I looked into the tearful eyes of my favorite person, and knew it would be best not to argue any further. I did what I was asked, and started the descent into the dark cellar.

I didn't hear Taylor's steps behind me, so I looked up to see where she was. She had stepped into the cellar, but sat on the top step. Before I could even ask, she answered my question.

"I'm waiting for my parents, for as long as I can."

That shocked me. I still had so many questions I needed to ask, so I sat down a few steps down from her and started with the most important one in my mind.

"What is all this? Why do you have this place?"

"My parents are the type of people who prepare for the apocalypse. Every dollar they've ever made has gone towards this," she explained in a grim tone. "This, as well as a second bunker across the city, are their life's work. I bet they're so excited to see that it's finally being used for something."

"Or maybe they're freaking out, because you're supposed to be at school," I rebutted. "I sincerely doubt a public high school has an apocalypse shelter."

"I sincerely doubt that. They put much more work into preparing me for this than anything else. I'm lucky I was even able to go to a regular school."

Silence fell for a moment after that. I couldn't imagine what that must have been like, living every day expecting the end of the world.

Taylor's leg had started shaking anxiously as she stared up at the opening.

"Come on..." she mumbled under her breath.

I rested my head on her shoulder, and attempted to help ease her mind the best that I could.

“Didn’t you say they have a second bunker? Maybe they were just closer to that one, and just decided to go there,” I assured her. “If your parents taught you everything they know about this, I know for a fact they’re already safe.”

“They told me to wait no more than twenty minutes for them. If they’re not here by then, I was told to close the door, and hope they were somewhere safe.”

“That’s sort of…” I started, but Taylor had finished my thought.

“Messed up? Yeah. Putting your own lives in the hands of your daughter, who didn’t sign up for any of this.”

We waited the rest of the time in silence. Taylor kept an eye on her watch, while I sat there rubbing up and down her back. I had to try my best to keep myself composed, but I knew already what this meant for my side of things.

My parents, of course, were exactly where we had feared Taylor’s would be. Racing to school, trying to find me. They didn’t know about Taylor’s family and their hobby. Their only thoughts were to spend our final moments together. Instead, they died thinking I was alone.

Taylor broke me out of my thoughts when she slowly reached up to the hatch. I wanted to tell her to stop. To let me out and find my family. But I knew she wouldn’t let me. She would never resign herself to an unknown amount of time completely alone, and even less often would she want to live without her best friend. She and I both knew that she wouldn’t make it like that, no matter how strong her parents conditioned her to be.

Taylor closed and locked the hatch, leaving us in complete darkness.

“There are candles and matches in the main room,” she explained. “Enough to last a lifetime, if needed.”

“You don’t really think we’ll be down here that long, do you?” I asked as I started to descend the stairs.

“I don’t know what to think. But if we are, at least I know it’s with someone I can stand,” she replied. The first somewhat positive comment I’ve heard from her all day.

Taylor grabbed me by the hand and led me to the main room. It was clear that, even in complete darkness, she knew her way around this bunker. She was able to easily find a candle and matches, and within that instant, there was light once more.

In the center of the room was a radio, which Taylor flipped on. It was already tuned to the news, and we heard the familiar voices of the group from the television earlier.

“Keep an eye on that, let me know if they say anything of note,” she ordered me, to which I nodded.

While I lowered my head into my hands and listened to the men and women over the radio, Taylor placed a lit candle in every room. The bunker was pretty, furnished just as well as their house. I couldn’t help but think about how this might be a nice place to stay for a little while, until things cool down.

Taylor sat across from me and reached over, grabbing my hands with her own.

“We’re gonna get through this,” she assured me, having regained a bit of her composure that was lost throughout the day. “Hell, maybe that one guy’s right, and we’re just down here for the night. We’ll go back up in the morning, and everything will be back to normal.”

As if on cue, the voices on the radio began to fade into static. The last thing we heard from the five around the news desk was the skeptic.

“What the hell is—” he started, but was cut off with a whirl of the radio’s circuits. It juttet out in a puff of electricity, and then fell silent.

Taylor and I looked wordlessly to each other, unable to come up with the words to explain what we just witnessed. We both looked up to the ceiling, surely imagining our own versions of what might be going on up above. There was only one thing we were certain of now. We were going to be here for much more than a night.

End