Hillsboro

1:27 PM PST, Hollywood, CA: “This is Howard Ellings reporting. Approximately fifteen minutes ago, the first of the estimated one hundred bombs dropped near a bar in Lansing, MI. I am being told that at least one bomb will be dropped in every major city in the United States.”

3:39 PM CST, Chicago, IL: “I am standing here in the midst of a horrible hailstorm to tell you that the United States Government has issued a statement. According to Secretary of Defense George Sheridan, the Government has not yet agreed to any form of evacuation. In fact at this point, they are willing to wait it out.”

4:42 PM EST, Miami, FL: “Cindy Rodriguez here live from news station 47. A bomb has just been spotted in the Atlantic Ocean, off the coast of Miami Beach. Apparently, it was headed to mainland Miami, but the wind must have blown it off course.”

4:45 PM EST, Providence, RI: “A local delivery truck driver says he watched a metallic object, thought to be some sort of bomb fly overhead at around four o’clock eastern time. He stated that he watched it in the sky for about five minutes before grabbing his family and proceeding with the towns evacuation”

3:48 PM CST, Kansas City, MS: “At three thirty this afternoon, a bomb struck Millidge Library, located on the campus of Stone College. The bomb reportedly exploded instantly, exerting an immediate heap of smoke. The Kansas City Fire Department has already reported over sixty fatalities. This is the first major tragedy on a day which is expected to have over one hundred locations in the United States under attack.”

This is indeed a tragedy. In fact, it is a downright shame. The United States might have finally met its match. It comes in the form of small bombs made from various chemicals and metal planes carrying dive-bombers and thousands of bullets. This story is told over a five day period and revolves around the lives of two families living in very different locations of the United States. First, let’s take you back a few days. Let’s catch up with our first main character, Connor Riley.

Connor is a nineteen-year-old college student in Kansas City. He first

heard of the possible “attacks” on Thursday, August 11th, 2011. That was two days before he’d have to fight for his life.

Thursday, August 11th, 2009 9: 27 PM CST

Connor was just finishing his homework. He knew it was his night to take out the garbage and do the dishes. He couldn’t believe it was nine thirty already. He also couldn’t believe how much homework he had. It was only the fourth day of college. Connor was nineteen, but only a freshman. He was held back a year of school way back when he was nine. That was the year he began his free fall. He was somewhat of a troubled kid, and his disciplinary problems caused him and his family many problems. He moved to Kansas City with his mom, dad, and his brother Carter. They have been living there for about six years now. Connor finished his chores and decided to watch television. “Hey Carter, you watching TV?” He didn’t get an answer, so he grabbed the remote. He flipped through the channels, seeing nothing that caught his eye, so he grabbed his iPod. He would listen to music instead. He put down the remote and left the TV on the news channel. He was half way asleep when he saw a news flash out of the corner of his eye. The bottom of the screen read: “BREAKING NEWS: BOMBING PLANNED FOR AUGUST FIFTEENTH” Connor automatically knew what they meant by bombing. There had been an ongoing arms race between the US and rival country North Korea. The North Koreans had seemingly been working on weapons of mass destruction for a while now, and told the US government to expect an attack in the summer of 2011. Connor forgot about the whole situation, because they gave that warning back in late 2008. He threw off his headphones and turned up the volume on the TV. “President Hill has yet to make any statements regarding this situation. As of now, all we know is that an anonymous letter was mailed to Secretary of Defense George Sheridan. Inside the letter, the whole outline of the attack was given by the North Koreans, as well as the locations of the supposedly one hundred bombs that are to be fired. In the letter, the North Koreans say. “Plan all you want. Prepare all you want. There’s nothing you can do.” This just in, another letter was received earlier today at the White House. According to White House officials, this letter read, “大规模的毁坏.” Translation…“Massive Devastation.” Connor’s eyes grew wide and he called out, “Hey guys remember that bombing from North Korea?” His mom and dad came into the room and began watching the news with him. They continued to listen closely. “President Hill has just raised the terrorist alert to red for the first time since April 12th, 2009.” Connor couldn’t bear to watch any longer, and

decided to go to bed. He knew this news would create quite the buzz at school.

Friday, August 12th, 2011 8:14 AM CST

Connor had just arrived at Stone College, where he is now a full time student. His first class wasn't until nine, so he went to the student lounge and bought a coffee & the newspaper. He glanced at the paper and couldn't ignore the headline: "BOMBING PLANNED FOR SATURDAY AFTERNOON!" Connor was still a little curious as to why the North Koreans would issue a warning. An unplanned, random attacked would do more damage. Connor sat in the lounge and read the paper uninterrupted. Once he finished, he began making his way towards the dorms. Connor decided to forego the dorm expenses, and just live at home. Stone College was only a few blocks away from his neighborhood, so it wasn't at all a problem. Connor's first class on Friday's was American Literature. So far, that class proved to be a little challenging. Connor's mind was all over the place. He had trouble focusing on his professor. He was wondering how other people were handling the frightening news.

That brings us to our other main characters, the Parsons. Kelly Parsons is a very prominent reporter. She has been dubbed as one of the fastest rising TV personalities in the western United States. The only thing keeping her from the top is her lack of audience. Kelly lives with her daughter Morgan in Beaverton, Oregon. She doesn't exactly get the same publicity as reporters in major cities, although her talent is second to none. Eventually in this story, Kelly and Morgan will find themselves in search of one another amidst the chaos ensuing in Missouri. First, however, let's see how they got from Beaverton to Kansas City.

Thursday, March 17th, 2011 4:13 PM PST

"Morgan, the mailman is here." Kelly called to her daughter, who was awaiting letters from six different colleges. Morgan came running down the stairs, and met the mailman in front of the mailbox. "Thanks Sam, wish me luck," she said to the mailman. She ran back into the house, and placed the envelopes on the table. "So, which ones are they from?" Kelly asked her daughter. Kelly grabbed the envelopes. "Carson College in Arizona and what's this one? Stone College in Missouri. I didn't know you applied in Missouri?" Morgan grabbed the envelopes. "Just keeping my options open mom." She quickly opened both envelopes, and placed the letters next to each other on the table. "Alright, here it goes." She started with the one from

Stone College. “Dear Morgan, we are very pleased to inform you that you’re application turned a lot of heads here at Stone College. We are both excited and enthused to tell you that we would love you to attend our university in the fall. I got in. I got in!” Morgan began jumping around the house. She had finally been accepted to college. Well, it turns out that Stone College was the only college that accepted her, and she had no choice but to attend.

Wednesday, June 22nd, 2011 7:30 AM PST

It was Morgan’s graduation day. She would be leaving for Kansas City in a few weeks. Kelly was hoping for a rushed ceremony. She wanted to see her daughter graduate, but she had a lot to do. She had been waiting for this moment since the day Morgan was born. However, Kelly had recently been promoted. She was to go on assignment and cover a story about the wildfires in California. She needed to be on location, and her plane was leaving at nine thirty. The promotion came with a lot of traveling. Kelly was now reporting from locations all over the United States. This put a strain on her relationship with her soon to be departing daughter. Luckily, Kelly was able to see Morgan get her diploma before leaving for the airport. They had a celebration dinner the night before Morgan left for college.

Friday, August 12th, 2011 8:21 AM CST

“Mom, I’m in the student lounge right now. Do you have an early story this morning? I mean, it’s only six o’clock at home.” Morgan sat down and continued talking to her mom on the phone. “No mom, I haven’t made any new friends yet. I know, but it’s only the first week. Right now? Uh, there’s some people playing cards, a few people on their laptops, a girl studying in the corner. Behind me there is a couple making out, a professor grading papers and a guy drinking coffee reading a newspaper.”

The guy with the coffee was Connor. Morgan talked to her mom for a few more minutes before heading to her first class. Morgan missed all of her friends back home. She was popular in high school, and had yet to achieve similar success in college. She left Beaverton for Kansas City at the beginning of July. She can still remember the looks on the faces of her friends when she pulled out of the driveway. How much she needed those memories right now. She had no idea she’d be in way over her head. This whole being an adult thing was overwhelming. Nonetheless, she knew she had to it. It’s not as if her mom was around to help her out. She loved Kelly, and understood that her promotion would cause complications, but sometimes a girl just needs her mother. Especially since her father up and

left them years ago. Now, she was hearing all of this talk about "The end of the world." She didn't want the world to end, she just entered it. Morgan was never one to worry. She would just let the bombs fall. After all, it couldn't affect her. Right?

Friday, August 12th, 2011 4:38 PM CST

Connor had a rough day at school. He was assigned two major projects, and had less than a week to finish them. He couldn't stop laughing over something a classmate had said to the professor. "But, why are we getting this assignment? We'll all be dead come tomorrow night." Connor found that very amusing. He wasn't one to buy in to all the hoopla about terrorism. In fact, he ignored it all together. Deep down however, the thought of it terrified him. That fear alone though, couldn't convince him to take this threat seriously. He got to work on his project as soon as he got home. He was uninterrupted, except for his mom telling him that the experts suggest taking shelter in a safe place tomorrow afternoon. "Sorry mom, but I gotta go to the library."

Meanwhile, Morgan was in her dorm room, waiting for the news to come on. She wanted to see her mom in action. At five o'clock, she turned on her TV and flipped to WSC8, her mom's station. "This is Kelly Parsons reporting to you live from Seattle, Washington. It is now less than twenty-four hours before the most anticipated encounter in American history. Millions of Americans have already begun to take shelter. Others are going to more extreme measures. It will truly be a day for all of us to take personal interest in." Morgan decided to take it easy for the rest of the night. She would have the rest of the weekend to study.

Saturday, August 13th, 2011

9:44 AM CST, Detroit, MI: "It is the morning of the most dreaded day in recent memory. By the end of this day, you can only wonder what will be left of America."

10:13 AM CST, Kansas City, MS

Morgan was alone in her dorm room studying. She had a non-exciting day, for the most part. She planned on doing her laundry and going to the library. After about forty-five minutes, she called Kelly.

12:44 AM EST, Cleveland, OH: “This is Kelly Parsons reporting to you live from Cleveland, Ohio. We are all waiting patiently for the supposed attacks from the North Koreans…

Kelly was hard at work. She was running behind and did not have time to take her daughters call.

1:12 PM CST, Kansas City, MS

Connor was at the store with his brother Carter. Carter would be leaving for school in a year, and Connor tried very hard to spend time with his little brother. Carter was a straight A student, and Connor figured he could help him with his project. “Hey what are you doing later? Wanna help me with my project?” Carter looked at his watch. “I can’t. I have to work at 3.”

2:48 PM CST, Kansas City, MS

Morgan watched as her roommate left with her boyfriend. It had been so long since Morgan even flirted with a guy. She couldn’t worry about guys. She had to focus on school. Biology to be exact. Instead of going to a party, she was going to the library.

3:59 PM EST, Cleveland, OH

Kelly was hard at work. She’d spent her entire morning interviewing locals about the possible attacks. She knew there were only a few hours left. She looked at her watch and sighed.

3:39 PM CST, Kansas City, MS

Connor was working hard at his project when he overheard a fellow student say “Just now, Lansing Michigan. A huge bomb. It’s all over the news.” Connor quickly went to Google.Com. Sure enough, there it was. At the top of the page. “Bombing in MI, nearly 45 killed.” A chill ran down Connor’s spine. “Is this really happening?” he thought to himself.

Morgan was also in the library. She was sitting on a couch with her reading glasses on. There was a television on in the distance. She began to notice many students running around. She looked up and caught the headline on the bottom of the TV. “No way” she said as she quickly grabbed her bag.

Connor sprung up when he heard the librarian announce a second bombing in New Orleans. If America was indeed under attack, he had to get home. The library was crowded, as it always was on Saturdays. He scurried past a group of Asian students and maneuvered his way towards the exit.

Morgan looked at the time. It was now 3:47. She realized she'd better head back to her dorm and see if her mother was covering the story. She got up off the couch and began walking. She could hardly find her way towards the front door, and began getting bumped by others attempting to leave.

Connor dodged a big group of athletes, and finally saw the door. He proceeded to make one big lunge when something struck his elbow. He looked down and saw a girl on the floor. "Sorry about that, are you trying to get out?' he asked. The girl shook her head. "Here, follow me" he said. He skipped past another student and finally opened the front door. Once outside, he got a better look at the girl. "Sorry about the elbow, my name is Connor." The girl put her phone into her left hand and shook with her right. "Morgan Parsons" she said, "and its ok, I forgive you."

It was at that moment the two heard a large roar and looked up. Overhead was a long, metal airplane flying dangerously low. Before either Connor or Morgan could blink, the bottom of the plane opened and let out a huge missile. It seemed to be heading directly towards the library.

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There was nothing but smoke. Connor opened his eyes and looked around. He could smell something burning. He stood up and saw nothing but ashes. He examined his body and saw a pattern of cuts and bruises on his arms. His shirt was ripped at the shoulder. He tried to walk, but tripped over something. He crouched down and noticed a person lying on the ground. He realized it was Morgan. "Hey, are you alright? Morgan?" Morgan turned her head. "Wha…what happened? Where am I?" Connor helped her to her feet. "I don't know, but I think we just got bombed." Morgan looked around for a second. "I can't see anything. Come closer. Oh it's you, the guy with the elbow," she said. "Connor." The two started walking through the ash. "So how bad do you think it was?" Morgan asked. Connor finally caught a glimpse of the library, about a half block from where they were. "Bad" he replied as he pointed out the view. "Oh my god!" Morgan said and the two raced towards the library. It was completely shattered, nothing but rubble and ash. There were bodies everywhere, as well as small fires. "They're all dead," Morgan said as she reached into her pocket. "My phone, it's gone. Do you have yours?" Connor remembered. "It's at my house. My house! I gotta go home!" Connor started running towards his house. "Are you coming?" he called back to Morgan. Morgan caught up to him. "When we get to your house, I have to call my mom."

They arrived on Connor's block. The air was a lot clearer, and they could finally see their way around. There were only a few houses left standing. "Which ones yours?" Morgan asked him. Connor just stood for a second astonished. "That one" he said as he pointed. Connor's house had been ripped to shreds. The roof was gone, and half of the upstairs was missing. The windows were broken and the porch was gone. "Stay here" he said to Morgan as he ran into the frame where the door used to be. "Mom? Dad?" he called each of their names repeatedly. "Are you guys ok? Mom? Dad?" He looked around in each room. He couldn't see them. He ran back outside. "Hey where is your mom?" he asked Morgan. She looked confused. "Ohio. She was covering the bombings." Connor began walking. "Well you have to get in touch with her, to see how bad this is. There are payphones over there." Morgan spoke up. "And just where are you going?" she asked him. Connor walked over to her and pointed to the phones. "I'm going to find my family."

"I want to come with you," Morgan said to him. "Just let me call my mom and then we'll go." Connor looked down for a second. "Ok" he said. "Let's go." They ran over to the payphones, and Connor put a quarter in.

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3:01 PM EST, Cleveland, OH

Kelly was in the studio, when she overheard her co-anchor. "This is Bonnie Jordan reporting live from WSC8. We have news of another attack. Millidge library, located at Stone College in Kansas City, was struck by what is believed to be a large bomb. The entire city seems to have been wiped out. Stay tuned for more; we'll have updates for you very shortly."
Kelly began acting impulsively. "Morgan" she whispered to herself as she walked out of the door. She walked over to her car and put the key in the door when she was stopped by her boss. "Kelly, where do you think you're going?" he asked. Kelly turned to him. "My daughter was in the library. The one in Kansas City. I need to go get her." Her boss grabbed her arm. "Kelly, we need you out there. These are huge stories to cover and we're already shorthanded. I'm sure your daughter is fine." Kelly pulled away from him. "Jack, the entire city is in danger. Morgan included." Jack looked at her. "You realize how dangerous this is; you could get injured, or killed." Kelly got in her car. "I need to find my daughter!" She began to drive away as Jack yelled. "Kelly if you leave, you're done with this station and reporting all

together!" Kelly flipped him off and drove away. She was driving well over 80 mph when her cell phone rang. She picked it up after one ring. "Morgan honey, it's you. I'm so glad you're ok. Where are you?" Morgan was calmly holding the receiver to her ear. "I'm at a payphone near the library. Everyone is dead. What happened mom?" Kelly drove faster. "It got bombed. I'm so relieved to hear your voice. I'm coming to get you, so stay put." One of Kelly's tires popped, and she swerved a little. Then a bullet hit her windshield. "Mom, are you still there?" Morgan asked. "Mom, answer me." Kelly was out of control. "Morgan, I'm under attack, and I can't see what I'm doing. I love you." Morgan began to cry. "Mom" she yelled in to the phone. "Sweetie I got to go. Listen to me; I'll meet you in Hillsboro."

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The phone went dead. Morgan screamed "mom" into the phone a few more times. She sat down on the ground, put her head to her knees and cried. Connor sat down next to her. "Hey. She's gonna be ok. I'll make you a deal. If you help me find my family, I'll help you find your mom. But we gotta stay together. Cuz I don't see anyone else." Connor took her hand and helped her stand up. Morgan looked at him for a second. "Ok"

They began walking silently for what seemed like an eternity. They just looked around at the city. Everything was gone. Decimated. The buildings were down and houses were burning. There were bodies lying all over the street. Arms, legs and heads scattered everywhere. Eventually, Connor spoke up.

Connor: "So I thought we'd get my brother first, He should be at work."

Morgan: "Where's that."

Connor: "The pizza place on 14th Street."

The two remained silent until they reached 14th street.

Morgan: "So, where is it?"

Connor: "It's supposed to be right there."

Connor motioned to an empty space next to a few houses. The pizza

place was gone.

Connor: “Carter! Carter!”

Morgan: “Carter!”

Connor knew no one could hear him. He looked at his hands, which were covered in ash. He turned to Morgan.

Connor: “You know what I don’t get. Why us? Why are we the only two people left? What did we do differently?”

Morgan: “I don’t know. But it’s a blessing.”

Connor: “Blessing? You call this a blessing? Here we are two teenagers amidst a major terrorist attack. We’re stuck in a ghost town. We have no contact with anyone, and for all we know, we could be the only two people left on the planet!”

Morgan turned away and wiped her eyes.

Connor: “Morgan. I’m sorry. Your mom is fine. She’s coming to get you. She’s probably on the road right now.”

Morgan: “Knowing my mom, she’s probably rescuing people and piling them in her car. She always puts other people first. It gets on my nerves sometimes.”

Morgan was sniffling. The thought of never seeing her mother again was now controlling her mind.

Connor: “Well there’s no use in hanging around here. If there are more survivors, we should try to find them. Soon enough, I’ll find my family. But they can take care of themselves. I say we just start walking.”

Morgan: “To where?”

Connor walked over and put his arms on Morgan’s. He looked her right in the eyes.

Connor: “Hillsboro!”

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4:13 PM EST, Cleveland, OH

Kelly could smell the gasoline. Her car was caught between guardrails. As she came to her senses, she could hear yelling and sounds of panic. She unbuckled her seatbelt, and opened her door. She could taste the blood that was streaming down her face. She looked at the window and saw her reflection. Her face was horrible. There was a large gash in her forehead, and blood covering her nose and mouth. Ash covered her brown hair. She certainly didn’t look like Kelly Parsons, the attractive 37-year-old newscaster. She heard someone run past her, and looked up. “God help me,” she said when she saw the view. Below, the entire city of Cleveland was destroyed. Skyscrapers hanging by a thread, cars flipped over, people running in frenzy. It was complete hysteria. The skies were black with smoke. She made her way down the hill towards the destruction. She saw a police car nearby and ran over to it. “Excuse me, officer. Officer.” She noticed him sitting in the front seat, keeled over. She tried to open the door, but couldn’t. She grabbed a rock and broke the window. “Sir, can you hear me?” She climbed through the window and took his pulse. There was nothing. He was dead. She saw the news station in the distance. She began making her way towards it.

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Connor: “You said your mom was covering the attacks, what do you mean?”

Morgan: “She’s a reporter. For WSC8. Kelly Parsons.”

Connor: “Wait, Kelly Parsons? I saw her on CNN. She’s good. You’re her daughter?”

Morgan: “In the flesh.”

Connor: “Then why are you here at Stone? Shouldn’t you be at some fancy school in New England or something? Don’t tell me you can’t afford it”

Morgan: “We can afford it. Actually, this is the only place that accepted me. I didn’t do too well in High School.”

Connor: “Why not?”

Morgan: “I don’t know. I have always been smart, I just stopped caring. Once my dad left, things went downhill. My mom worked all the time, and I just stopped trying. Why do something good when there’s no one to notice?”

Connor: “That’s rough. But it’s like the total opposite for me. I’ve never been able to make my parents proud. No matter how hard I tried. I was never quite good enough. If I got an A, Carter got an A+. If I got an award, Carter got a better one. I guess that’s why I started getting in trouble. For the attention.”

Morgan: “What kind of trouble?”

Connor: “Vandalism, Trespassing, Assault. All sorts of stuff. It all started when I was like 8 years old. I would ride my bike down to the ghetto and find all sorts of trouble. I stopped going to school, and got held back in 4th grade. That pretty much killed my parents. I continued down a troublesome road until we moved here when I was 13. What about you? Ever been arrested or anything?”

Morgan: “No sir. I’m a good girl. I have to be. I’m a Christian. I have morals, and values. I cannot jeopardize them for anything. I’ve never even been grounded.”

Connor: “Wow. That’s very admirable. So where are you originally from?”

Morgan: “Oregon. Beaverton.”

Connor: “Oregon? Sounds like a lot of fun.”

Morgan: “Bundles.”

Connor: “Boyfriend?”

Morgan: “No.”

Connor: “How’d you manage that?”

Morgan: “It’s easier than you think. Girlfriend?”

Connor: “Negative.”

Morgan: “What a shocker.”

They came across what looked to be a hospital.

Connor: “We should probably go inside.”

Morgan: “Why?”

Connor: “Eventually we have to eat, and you might wanna clean up a bit. You look like hell.”

Morgan: “Don’t say hell, I’m a Christian, remember? Besides, you look awful.”

Connor: “Well then I guess we’re going in.”

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Kelly walked into the remains of her studio. It was in terrible condition. She walked into the production room. “Jack!” She ran over to her boss, who was lying under a desk. “Are you ok?” She crouched down and turned him towards her. His face was very pale, and one of his eyes shut. He spoke. “I…I don’t know. I can’t feel my body.” Kelly pulled him a bit, and looked down. His entire lower body was detached. “Oh no” she cried. “Jack, you’re going to be fine. I’m going to get some help for you.” She put her hand over her mouth and began to leave. “Kelly wait. I’m sorry about before” Jack said. Kelly looked back. “None of that matters now.”

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5:44 PM CST, Kansas City, MS

Morgan and Connor are inside the hospital. Connor turned on a TV in the lobby.

“America is in shock. The resilience of our country is in question. The North Koreans have succeeded above and beyond. Over 75 attacks have been registered, and the United States is in shambles. We are still awaiting word from President Hill, but we did get a statement from the Secretary of Defense George Sheridan. “This is indeed historic, and highly unexpected. We are already taking extreme measures of evacuation. Strategically, the enemy attacked in the least unexpected of places.” Sheridan also commented on whether or not he expects these attacks to continue, in which he said, “It’s not likely.” Whether that’s true or not, this has been the most destructive and worst day in American history.”

Morgan: “I can’t believe it. Hey, at least we know we are not the only people left. We just have no idea where anyone is.”

Connor: “Hey, I’m gonna go to the cafeteria and get us some food. See if you can get a dial tone on that phone over there.”

Morgan nodded and tried the phone. She couldn’t get anything. She opened a first aid kit and began cleaning her foot.

Connor: “That’s a nasty cut. You need to clean it out. Here.”

Connor tossed her a bottle of hydrogen peroxide. Morgan took it and poured it onto her cut.

Morgan: “So where do you think your parents are?”

Connor: “You mean if they’re not dead?”

Morgan: “Stop it. They are not dead. You need to stay positive, especially now.”

Connor: “I know, I know. I’m just naturally negative. It’s a character flaw. They’re probably safe in some shelter or something. I hope Carter is with them though. But I need to get to them. I know they’re worried sick about me.”

Morgan: “Yeah. My mom is worried about me too. By now, she’s probably assembled a large group of people and set up a nationwide search.”

Connor: “Yeah I bet. Hey lemme help you with that.”

Connor grabbed the rag from Morgan and began wiping her face. He ran his fingers down the sides of her mouth and her cheek.

Morgan: “Hey. That tickles.”

Connor: “Sorry. Hey what color are your eyes?”

Morgan: “My mom calls them sparkling blue.”

Connor: “Yeah. They’re beautiful.”

He pulled back her hair and examined her face. It was the first time he really saw her. They’re eyes locked and they moved towards one another.

Morgan: “You have a bump on your head. Better get some ice for that.”

Morgan stood up and walked away.

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5:01 PM EST, Cleveland, OH

Kelly was in a state of shock. Never before had she seen such melee within the United States. There was so much chaos amongst the few left living in the city. All she could think about was Morgan. She had no phone, nor any means of transportation. Her best bet would be to flag down the next working vehicle she could find. As she made her way through the city, she saw nothing but graphic images. Men and women with all sorts of organs sticking out, people burning alive, kids screaming for their lives. But she erased it all from her mind. At this point, she was no longer a helpful citizen. She was a concerned parent. Every face she walked past stared at her with bewilderment. Her arms were scratched, her hair was a mess. She looked down at her shirt. She had a badge that read: “Kelly Parsons, WSC8.” She stopped for a second and stared at it. It had been such a big part of her life. She took a deep breath and ripped it off her shirt, watching as it fell to the ground. She had no life now. No job. Just hope. Hope that the most important thing in her life was still breathing.

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6:14 PM CST, Kansas City, MO

Connor and Morgan continued walking through the remains. They stopped at a bus stop.

Morgan: “Finally, something useful.”

Connor: “Yeah what’s that?”

Morgan: “A map.”

Connor: “The entire state?”

Morgan: “Yes. At least now we know where we’re going.”

Connor: “Very attentive Miss Parsons. Very attentive.”

Morgan: “Okay, so we seem to be on the right track. I say we continue going north. There’s Hillsboro over here.”

Connor: “Sounds good boss. I guess you’re now in charge of all navigation.”

Morgan: “Yeah, I’ll direct us toward safety while you do what again?”

Connor: “Look cute?”

Morgan: “Not quite. You just keep an eye on things. Make sure some creepy three eyed monster doesn’t jump out of the bushes or something.”

Connor: “Awesome. I can do that. Let’s keep going.”

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5:47 PM EST, Cleveland, OH

Kelly was exhausted. She had been walking non-stop. Every thought possible was running through her mind. She was thinking about not only Morgan, but the rest of her family as well. Her parents, her sisters, even her

ex-husband. Who was alive and who wasn't? Finally, she came across a middle-aged couple. They informed her of a bus leaving for Canton. There was a base at Canton that provided food and shelter. Kelly figured she'd rest for a bit, try to call Morgan's cell, and see what was going on. She rushed to the bus station.

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7:07 PM CST, Kansas City, MO

Morgan: "Can you hotwire a car?"

Connor: "Oh yeah. I learned that in third grade along with cursive writing and pronouns. Of course not."

Morgan: "Well it would have helped that's all. My legs are getting tired. I don't know how much more I can walk tonight."

Connor: "Well, we could sit for a bit. Eat some of this wonderful hospital food we have."

They walked up to what seemed to be a campground. It was windy outside.

Morgan: "We need to start a fire. Can you at least manage that?"

Connor: "Depends. Are you gonna jump down my throat if I can't?"

Morgan: "I just might. Go get some wood. I'll rub some sticks together."

Connor: "How productive."

Morgan sat on the ground looking at the stars. She glanced at each one with concentration; hoping one would lead her to her mother. It had been so long since she'd seen stars. Nights for her in Beaverton meant eating microwavable food and watching game shows while she waited for Kelly to come home. After about ten minutes, Connor came back with a handful of wood.

Connor: "Here, this should do."

They threw the wood into a pile and Connor watched in amazement as Morgan rubbed two twigs together. Sure enough, she got a spark, and the fire was lit. They sat next to it.

Connor: “Where’d you learn that?”

Morgan: “Girl scouts.”

Connor: “That actually explains a lot.”

The two smiled at each other and began eating.

Morgan: “I’m imagining this is a gourmet meal, and I’m in my kitchen eating with my mom.”

Connor: “That’s nothing. This is a number seven at Taco Bell.”

They continued eating while they watched the fire.

Connor: “So what do you have in your pockets right now?”

Morgan: “What?”

Connor: “Your pockets. What’s in them?”

Morgan: “Um let’s see. Chap Stick, A hair tie and three nickels. My purse and my phone flew off during the blast. Do you remember anything that happened?”

Connor: “No. I remember leaving the library with you, then looking into the sky. Then I looked at you. Then I woke up and everyone and everything was gone.”

Morgan: “So you didn’t see the thing in the sky?”

Connor: “No. But I definitely heard it. It was the loudest thing I’ve ever heard. Just a roar.”

Morgan: “A rumbling. I remember it. So hey, what’s in your pocket?”

Connor: “Ah. Well, my wallet, which contains money that is useless to us at this point. A candy bar wrapper, a notepad, a pack of batteries and lint.”

Morgan: “Interesting.”

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6:49 PM EST, Canton, OH

Kelly got off the bus and entered the building that was being used for rest. There were bunks for sleeping, and Kelly laid down on one. Above, she could hear what sounded like snickering. After a few minutes, she realized that someone was crying in the bunk above her. She got up and climbed up top. She saw a small boy curled up in a ball. She tapped him on the shoulder and looked at him. He was very skinny and had dark skin. “What’s wrong sweetie?” she asked him as she wiped a tear from his cheek. “I can’t find my family. They left without me.” The boy was talking quickly and covering his face when he spoke. Kelly grabbed his hand. “No honey, they didn’t leave you. They just got lost. They’re looking for you right now.” The boy placed his hand in Kelly’s and she put his head to her shoulder. “My name is Kelly. I’m looking for my family too. My daughter Morgan. What’s your name?” The boy poked his head from under Kelly’s bosom. “Isaiah” he said softly. Kelly grabbed his hand and led him off the bunk. “Well Isaiah, what do you say we stop lying around, and we find our families?”

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8:49 PM CST, Kansas City, MO

Connor and Morgan continued sitting under the stars, watching the fire burn.

Connor: “So how long were you a girl scout?”

Morgan: “Most of my life. My mom got me started when I was real young, and I guess I just stuck with it through junior high.”

Connor: “You and your mom are really close huh?”

Morgan: “Yes. She’s my best friend. Hey that reminds me of this incident that happened one year.”

Connor: “What happened?”

Morgan: “We got a big shipment of girl scout cookies. We had all of them. Chocolate, coconut, vanilla. Any type of cookie there was we had. Anyway, because we had so much, we had to sell door to door. Usually, all of our cookies were pre ordered, and we weren’t allowed to go door to door. There are dangerous people in Beaverton.”

Connor: “Oh I bet.”

Morgan: “So my mom and I went door to door selling cookies. It took us all night. We bonded and had a blast. We talked about everything from the spice girls to gigapets. I loved moments like that. Just my mom and me. Sure I missed my dad, but I always felt at my best around my mom. I really need to find her Connor!”

Connor: “We will. We’ll find her. So do you have any other interesting stories?”

Morgan: “Too many.”

---

7:16 PM EST, Canton, OH

Kelly was running around trying to find ways to leave. All transportation had been shut down for the night. Isaiah stayed close behind, not sure whether or not to trust a lady he had just met.

Kelly: “How old are you?”

Isaiah: “Ten.”

Kelly: “That’s a fun age. I remember when Morgan was ten. She would play with Barbie dolls and little ponies. What do you like to play with?”

Isaiah: “Stuff. With my brothers and sisters.”

Kelly: “Do you have a big family?”

Isaiah: “Yes.”

Kelly: “Where are you from, Isaiah?”

Isaiah: “Macon, Georgia.”

Kelly: “Oh my. And you’re all the way here in Canton.”

Isaiah: “I don’t know where I am. There was a loud noise, and my mommy was gone. A soldier brought me here.”

Kelly came across a bright light up ahead. She took Isaiah’s hand and ran over to it. It was a car. The keys were still in the ignition. Kelly directed Isaiah into the car. She hopped in and fastened their seatbelts.

Kelly: “Listen to me. We’re going to get my daughter. Then I’ll take you to your family. I promise.”

---

10:02 PM CST

Morgan: “So that was probably our first big blowout. To think, it was over birth control.”

Connor: “Yeah and it wasn’t even for you. I bet your friend Meagan felt terrible.”

Morgan: “Yeah she did. But really, I should have thanked her. Because it just made my mom and I closer.”

Connor: “Yeah.”

Morgan: “So who are you closest to in your family?”

Connor: “Me? Carter.”

Morgan: “How old is he again?”

Connor: “He’s seventeen. Yeah we’ve always been close. It’s been a lot

harder lately though. With him busy preparing for college and hanging out with his friends, we don't spend as much time together as we used to.

Morgan: "Well that's normal."

Connor: "I know. It's just hard to think that he is all grown up. I've always just seen him as my younger brother. I guess it was about six months ago when I realized that he's not a little kid anymore."

Morgan: "Ooh sounds like a story. Do tell."

Connor: "Well it was laundry day. My dad was doing the usual, which for him is making sure everything was perfectly folded and perfectly placed. My mom was going through the dirty clothes and putting them in the hamper. It was a team effort. I was in my room playing a video game when I heard her scream my name. I hopped out of my bed and went into the kitchen. "What the hell is this?" my mom asked me, holding up a condom. "You're having sex!" For a second, I had to ask myself if I *was* having sex. "Those aren't my pants" I said. "They're Carters." I saw my mom's eyes light up. It was a realization for all for us. Carter was all grown up, and obviously having sex. So my mom waited around for him to come home, and when he did they talked. My mom tried to expand the conversation to include me, until I informed her that I wasn't having sex, nor would I if given the opportunity."

Morgan: "Why not?"

Connor: "Why not what?"

Morgan: "Why wouldn't you have sex?"

Connor: "Because I'm not ready. I may not have the same ideas that you do about sex, but it still means a lot to me. I wanna find the right girl. Morgan, I'm not that guy from the wrong side of the tracks. The one that parents warn their daughters about. Sure, I've made some mistakes and I have some regrets, but don't we all?"

Morgan: "Yes of course. We all do. And I wasn't insinuating anything. I'm not a judgmental person Connor.

Connor: "I know you're not."

Morgan: “But it’s good to know he was using protection. Carter.”

Connor: “Yeah he’s too smart not to. I really miss him. I miss my parents too. We need to keep looking, first thing in the morning.”

The wind continued to blow, creating a cold draft around the two.

Morgan: “It’s really cold up here.”

Connor: “Yeah and heat is supposed to rise. Let’s just hope the fire doesn’t die.”

Morgan: “Um Connor. Could you hold me? You know, warm me a little?”

Connor: “Uh yeah. I can do that.”

---

9:44 PM EST, Canton, OH

Kelly and Isaiah were in the car. Kelly was driving in the neighborhood of ninety miles per hour. Kelly began thinking about Morgan again. She missed her so much. It had been so long since she’d seen her. She couldn’t believe it’d been eighteen years already. It seemed like just yesterday she came home after being dumped, or asked her to sleepover at a friend’s house. Where did that time go? That time was gone. In fact, all time was lost. She could only hope Morgan was safe, and in good hands.

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Sunday, August 14th, 2011

7:03 AM CST, Kansas City, MO

Morgan’s head was pressed against Connor’s shoulder. The fire had been dead for hours. Birds chirped up above. That’s what woke Morgan.

Morgan: “Connor wake up, it’s morning.”

Connor rose from his slouched position and his eyes sprung open. It

was a beautiful morning.

Connor: “So I guess it wasn’t a dream. What time is it?”

Morgan: “I have no idea. How’d you sleep?”

Connor: “Like a baby. You?”

Morgan: “Fine. The fire’s out.”

Connor reached for the food and grabbed two bags of Lays potato chips. He threw one to Morgan.

Connor: “Yeah it is. We’d better get an early start.”

He got up, shook himself a little and looked around.

Connor: “Ready?”

Morgan looked up at him as he extended his hand. She grabbed it.

Morgan: “Let’s go.”

They began walking south towards the next city.

Connor: “Hey, we’re gonna have better luck today. We’ll probably even find your mom.”

It was a bit awkward for them. They walked far away from each other, neither of them willing to bring up the seemingly inevitable.

Morgan: “So”

Connor: “So”

Morgan: “Last night. Should we talk about it?”

Connor: “There’s not much to talk about. We were both tired. It was cold. So I kept you warm. No big deal.”

Morgan: “Are you sure? Because it seemed like more than that.”

Connor: “Look not right now. We have far bigger things to think about. So did I enjoy holding you? Yes, I did. Would I do it again? Yes, I would. But right now, we need to find our families. We shouldn’t let anything get in the way of that.”

Morgan: “Okay.”

Connor: “So I’m not sure about this, but I think we’re almost out of the city.”

Morgan: “This is by far the most I’ve ever walked in my life. And I could really use a shower.”

Connor: “Yeah I know. I can smell you from over here. So what did you do for fun in Beaverton, Ohio?”

Morgan: “It’s Oregon. And lots of stuff.”

Connor: “Ok like what?”

Morgan: “I don’t know. All kinds of things.”

Connor: “Like?”

Morgan: “Fishing. Bass fishing.”

Connor: “Bass fishing?”

Morgan: “Yes.”

Connor: “Ok then. I never should have asked. Do you play any sports?”

Morgan: “Soccer. Seven years.”

Connor: “You look like a soccer player.”

Morgan: “And what does a soccer player look like?”

Connor: “Oh you know. Tall, blonde hair, nice body. The kind of girls who would walk right past you in the hallways. Soccer players.”

Morgan rolled her eyes.

Morgan: “Whatever. So what do you do for fun Connor uh…I don’t even know your last name.”

Connor: “Riley. And I do a multitude of things. Ranging from writing poetry to boxing to gardening. I’m a jack of all trades.”

Morgan: “What are your poems about?”

Connor: “Stuff. Usually whatever I’m feeling. Not really one thing in particular.”

Morgan: “That’s cool.”

Connor: “It really is. It’s a big help. Instead of falling apart after a bad day, I can come home and just put it all on paper. It’s therapeutic.”

Morgan: “Wish I could do that. I always keep all my feelings inside. Like in a box.”

Connor: “There’s nothing wrong with that. You just need someone to help you open it.”

Morgan: “Do you know anyone?”

Connor: “I might.”

They looked at each other and turned away. Morgan began watching the rocks scatter as she kicked them away. Connor put his hands in the pockets of his blue jeans. He was shaking. They continued walking silently for about an hour before Morgan spoke up.

Morgan: “So do you have a lot of friends? Or, did you?”

Connor: “No not really. True friends are a sham. You really don’t get too many. And I don’t waste my time with people who aren’t true.”

Morgan: “I understand. Most of my life it’s been my mom and I. None of my friends were real close to me either.”

Connor: “So you weren’t the Beaverton prom queen?”

Morgan: “Hardly. I didn’t even go to my prom. My mom and I stayed home and did crossword puzzles.”

Connor: “Okay I got one for you. A word that describes this journey of ours. Eight letters.”

Morgan: “I don’t know. Hopeless?”

Connor: “That’s it. That’s exactly what I was thinking.”

Morgan: “Hey don’t be so negative. Don’t you believe in happy endings?”

Connor: “Happy endings are oxymorons. They don’t exist.”

Morgan: “What about faith? Don’t you have any of that? I realize that things are bad, but we’re still alive for a reason. God will make everything ok. Hey what’s that?”

She pointed to an image up ahead. It looked to be a building.

Connor: “Let’s go.”

They ran until they could see the details of the building. There was residue at their feet, and Connor looked to his left.

Connor: “Welcome to Marshall Missouri. We’re getting somewhere!”

They continued walking for hours. They talked about any and everything they could imagine. They did not stop.

Morgan: “Okay okay here’s one. Favorite song ever?”

Connor: “Ooh that’s tough. Iris by the Goo Goo Dolls.”

Morgan: “Not bad.”

Connor: “What’s yours?”

Morgan: “My heart will go on.”

Connor: “The song from Titanic?”

Morgan: “Yeah.”

Connor: “Okay then.”

Morgan: “I have others. Like Love is a Battlefield and anything by Sarah McLachlan.”

Connor: “Hey that’s cool. A little eighties rock. I could get used to that.”

Morgan: “Birthday?”

Connor: “September 27th. Yours?”

Morgan: “June 18th.”

Connor: “Favorite breakfast food?”

Morgan: “Mm waffles. The way my mom makes them on Saturday mornings.”

Connor: “Well that beats mine. Cereal. My parents don’t usually make breakfast.”

Morgan: “Least favorite day of the week?”

Connor: “Probably Monday. I don’t know many people who like weekdays. Why what’s yours?”

Morgan: “I hate the weekend.”

Connor: “Why?”

Morgan: “Because my mom is actually home. Her station has their own weekend correspondents, so she gets at least 2 weekends off a month. It kills me. We spend the entire weekend together and it’s amazing. It feels real.”

Connor: “So what’s the problem?”

Morgan: “It ends. Monday morning comes and everything goes back to normal. Her job once again becomes the number one priority.”

Connor: “I’m sorry.”

Connor looked at Morgan, who shrugged.

Connor: “So what were you at Stone for? What do you wanna be?”

Morgan: “Criminal Justice. I want to be a defense attorney.”

Connor: “Cool. I bet you’re a regular Judge Judy.”

Morgan: “Yeah something like that. And if that doesn’t work out, I’d love to work with kids. I volunteer at a camp every summer. What about you Mr. Riley? What are your aspirations?”

Connor: “I think I wanna do the whole writing thing. You know. Late nights, long hours, locking yourself away for days. I think that’s a neat way to live.”

Morgan smiled. To think, she initially thought he was just another typical guy. But she was quickly realizing how wrong she was.

Morgan: “So what do you think all of this means? For our society? For America as a whole? Where do you think this leaves us?”

Connor: “I don’t know. I guess that’s something we’ll have to wait and see. But really, I don’t want to know.”

Morgan: “Why not?”

Connor: “Because as of right now, my family is MIA, my house is ruined, and my school is in pieces.”

Morgan: “Just keep believing Connor. God will not let you down.”

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9:13 AM EST, Scottsburg, IN

Kelly had been driving non-stop for twelve hours now. She looked over at Isaiah, who was sound asleep. She kept thinking about his resiliency. Kelly could barely function, yet this ten year old boy remained poised and under control. She could hardly keep her eyes open, and was in serious need of coffee. Yet she refused to stop, not for anything. Every minute that she drove was a little closer to finding Morgan.

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3:29 PM CST, Jefferson City, MO

Connor and Morgan had reached Jefferson City. From there, they hoped to find another source of transportation.

Morgan: “Connor, I don’t know how much longer I can go. I’m exhausted.”

Connor: “So am I, but we can’t stop. We owe to it to our families to keep going.”

Morgan: “I’m beginning to feel so tired and weak. Mentally, my head is in it. But physically, my legs are not.”

Connor: “Look we made a deal. And we’re gonna honor that, even if I have to carry you!”

Morgan smiled at Connor. She was really beginning to trust him. So far, he’d been nothing short of spectacular throughout this entire voyage.

Connor: “Hey, do you see that?”

Up ahead was a shadow. It was moving back and forth.

Morgan: “It’s a person Connor! A person!”

Connor ran as fast as he could towards the shadow. After about thirty seconds, he looked back at Morgan. She was hardly in his sight, so he turned

and ran back.

Connor: “What are you doing? We have to go!”

Morgan: “I know, but I can’t run. I can hardly walk.”

Her voice was getting raspy, her eyes barely open. Connor knew what he had to do.

Connor: “Okay, hop on.”

Connor bent over and motioned for Morgan to jump on his back.

Morgan: “Are you serious? This is ridiculous.”

Connor: “Morgan, we need to get down there as fast as we can. If you can’t do that on your own, then I’ll have to help you. Now jump on my back!”

Morgan did just that, and Connor restarted his jog. After a minute or so, the two could clearly see the shadow. It was a man. As they got closer, they saw more and more shadows. They reached the shadows and Morgan jumped down. The two kids stood astonished. They had reached a camp. A recovery camp.

Connor: “Excuse me, sir. What is this?

Man: “This is a refugee camp. For those who were injured. You two look like you need a bed to sleep in. Please, feel free. We have food, phones, and television sets.”

Connor: “Thank you. Thank you very much.”

Morgan took Connor’s hand, and the two raced for the telephones.

Connor: “Try your mom again. Then we’ll get some food.”

Morgan’s fingers were shaking as she dialed. She waited, until she heard Kelly’s voice. Unfortunately, it was only her voicemail.

Morgan: “Nothing. Just voicemail.”

Connor: “Alright come on, let’s go rest.”

They ran into the building, which appeared to have originally been a bowling alley. It was extremely crowded, and people were running around hysterically. Morgan grabbed a bottle of water, and Connor found two empty cots for them.

Connor: “So I figured we’d sleep for a few hours, then get going.”

Morgan: “I need to sleep.”

Connor turned on the TV, and then dropped next to Morgan on the cot.

Morgan: “It’s the news. We can get another update.”

Connor: “Yeah well it’s too loud in here. I can’t hear anything.”

Connor got up and walked over to the TV. He turned up the volume, and then took a few steps back. Morgan stood next to him, her eyes glued to the screen.

New York City, NY: “The destruction here is at its worst, as more than 15,000 people have lost their lives. Monuments, skyscrapers and historic landmarks have been destroyed. Subway trains are scattered across the streets, people and animals lying dead on top of them. The remains of several skyscrapers are floating in the Hudson River. People are hanging from their apartment windows. Helicopters have been shot down, and fires remain burning around the area. The Brooklyn Bridge is in half, and I am standing in what used to be Time Square. Just moments ago, a man was rescued from a burning taxi cab. Ladies and gentleman, I have never before seen anything quite like this. To think, this is just one state. Now, imagine this destruction in all fifty.”

Connor changed the channel.

Houston, TX: “We have now received word that over one half of the United States population has been killed, and a third of the remaining injured.”

Connor looked at Morgan, who had tears rolling down her cheek.

Morgan: “She’s dead.”

Connor put her head under his left arm. He just stood there while Morgan’s tears moistened his shirt.

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4:42 PM CST, Salem, IL

Kelly was making incredible time. At this rate, she would be in Hillsboro by nightfall. Isaiah woke up when Kelly hit a bump in the road.

Kelly: “What the hell was that?”

Isaiah: “I don’t know.”

Kelly stopped and got out of the vehicle.

Kelly: “Oh My!”

She put her hands over Isaiah’s eyes and turned him away. She looked a little more closely. It was a body.

---

5:13 PM CST, Jefferson City, MO

Connor had been resting for over an hour. He wanted to continue walking, but he knew Morgan needed more time.

Connor: “Hey.”

Morgan: “Yeah.”

Connor: “I’m gonna go for a walk. Clear my head.”

Morgan: “K. I’ll be here when you get back.”

Connor: “Get some rest.”

Morgan: “Wait, Connor.”

He turned around and looked Morgan right in the eyes.

Connor: “Yeah?”

Morgan grabbed his hand and smiled.

Morgan: “Be careful out there.”

He smiled and let go of her hand.

Connor: “I will.”

Connor got up and walked past the mounds of people sleeping on the cots. As he passed the man from before, he tossed him his pillow. There was no way he’d waste another day sleeping. Instead, he decided to call his parents again. After six rings and no answer, he left the building and wandered around outside. He walked for a few minutes, seeing nothing but the desolation he had already passed by. He began to wonder what would happen if he actually did find his family. What would he say? And how would they react knowing that he had come all this way? Here he was, a nineteen year old male who had not only taken full responsibility for himself, but had helped guide a fellow youth to safety. After all, he had to stay strong for Morgan. He had formed an incredible bond with her. The thought of letting her down almost turned his stomach. Just as fear began to drown out his head, he heard a voice in the distance. It was familiar, and right away he knew who it was. Carter!

---

5:14 PM CST, Salem, IL

Kelly ran over to the silhouette and turned it over. It was a girl. She looked about Morgan’s age. Obviously, there was nothing she could do. She looked at Isaiah, who stood next to the car. He was astonished. Kelly kneeled next to the body and began to cry. That could have easily been Morgan. For the first time, Kelly felt hopeless. The fate of her daughter was out of her control.

---

Connor turned around. There he was. Carter Riley. His little brother. Carter was standing strong, as if he'd reached the top of Mount Everest. Connor cracked a smile, his first in days. The brothers stood still for a second, before Connor began to walk. The two came in to contact seconds later. Neither of the Riley boys had been known to show much affection. Reunited however, they hugged for what seemed like an eternity.

Connor: "I can't believe it!"

Carter: "I know. It's crazy."

Connor: "Mom and dad?"

Carter: "I don't know. I haven't been able to contact them."

Connor: "Me neither."

Carter: "How did you find me?"

Connor: "Long story."

Carter: "We've got nothing but time bro."

They walked back into the building.

Connor: "So I'll start. When it happened, I had just left the library. I was with this girl, Morgan Parsons. We kind of helped each other get outta the library. Then, we heard the plane overhead and looked up. The next thing I remember is waking up in a circle of ash. Morgan was lying next to me. I went home to look for mom and dad, but no one was there. The house was destroyed. So we went to the pizza place to get you, but that too was gone. Morgan called her mom, who said to meet her in Hillsboro. So we've been walking ever since. What happened to you?"

Carter: "I was at work. There was a rumble, then a shaky feeling. The pizza place fell with all of us still in it. Only a few people were injured, but everyone proceeded to run away from the blast. Eventually, we came across another group of people who told us about the camp here. So I came here and got fixed up. I was just about to leave when I saw you."

Connor: “And your arm?”

Carter’s arm was in a sling.

Carter: “Broken in three places.”

Connor: “That sucks. Hang in there. I have to go wake Morgan. We’ve gotta keep moving if we want to make it by tonight. After we find her mom, you and I can look for mom and dad.”

---

6:02 PM CST, Jefferson City, MO

Morgan was awake. She felt refreshed. It was time to get going. The more time elapsed, the more she missed her mother. It was time to find her. The room seemed to be even more crowded than before. She looked around for Connor, but she didn’t see him. She looked at the television. The news was still on, recapping the attacks of the day. She turned away when they announced Cleveland, Ohio. She glanced at the time on the bottom of the screen. It was 6:05. At that moment, an alarm began to sound. Everyone began to scurry. People were grabbing their bags and running outside. Morgan looked around bewildered. What was going on? She felt someone grab her arm and pull her aside. “Are you alright?” he asked her. She shook her head yes. He pushed her towards a group of people vying for the door. In unison, they walked out of the door, to the outside. Morgan finally spotted Connor. He was confused, and ran towards her. Before she could speak, a man grabbed Connor and pulled him away. “Men stay here. Women leave” the man said. Connor broke free and tried once more to get to Morgan. This time he was tackled immediately.

Morgan: “Connor! No, leave him alone!”

Connor: “Morgan! I can’t get past them. Just go. I’ll come for you.”

Morgan: “No! I want to stay with you. We have a deal.”

Morgan was almost out of sight.

Connor: “Don’t worry! I’ll find you Morgan!”

Morgan was gone. Connor was suddenly unable to move. How could he have let this happen? He stood staring at the view up ahead. After all of this, after everything they'd been through, it was over. He may never see Morgan Parsons again.

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8:13 PM CST, Jefferson City, MO

Kelly had finally reached Missouri. With Isaiah asleep in the backseat, she pulled up to what looked to be a shelter. She got out of the car and knocked on the door. A man answered. "Can I help you?" He asked. Kelly peeked inside, but saw nothing but empty beds. "Uh yeah. I'm looking for my daughter."

Connor was sulking. He couldn't understand why he was so unhappy. He found his brother. He knew at least one member of his family was safe. He should be ecstatic. Instead of spending time with his brother, he was agonizing over Morgan. Someone who he just met suddenly meant more to him than his own brother. He had spent the last two hours watching the door, hoping she would come walking through. He took another glance at the door, and saw a woman showing the door man a picture. Connor immediately recognized the girl in the picture. It was Morgan. He hit Carter on the shoulder and motioned to the door. Together, the Riley boys ran towards the door. "Kelly. Kelly Parsons."

Kelly: "Can I help you?"

Connor: "My name is Connor Riley. This is my brother Carter. I'm a friend of your daughters."

Kelly: "You know Morgan? Where is she?"

Connor: "I don't know. I've been with her ever since the attack. I was there when she called you, and we've spent the last few days heading towards Hillsboro to find you."

Kelly: "Well where is she now?"

Connor: "She was here with us a few hours ago, but they took her away."

Kelly: “Where to?”

---

9:04 PM CST, Kansas City, MO

Morgan had been sedated. She woke with a heavy sweat. She tried to stand, but she was still woozy. She sat on the edge of the bed, her feet touching the cold floor. She was barefoot. In fact, she wasn’t wearing her clothes at all. She had on a hospital gown. Her hair was cut and her nails no longer had blue polish on them. She was very uncomfortable. Around her, she saw tables of food. Bananas, bread and milk were placed on a small tray in front of her. Past the rows of food, there was work out equipment. She wanted to get up and explore, but her body disagreed with her. Luckily, she found a cane on the other side of the bed. There was another pillow, and the sheet was half way off of the bed. Obviously, Morgan wasn’t the only one in the bed. She grabbed the cane and stood up. Her legs were shaky. She was a bit hungry, so she began chewing the bread that had been provided. She watched as girls ran the treadmill, and others worked with a yoga instructor. She looked for a phone, a TV or a clock. Anything that would prove that she was indeed alive, and not dreaming. There was not a single trace of the outside world. She looked for doors and windows before something bumped into her from behind.

Morgan: “Oh I’m sorry. My name’s Morgan.”

The girl seemed to look right past her, and she finally spoke. “Alexandra Charles.”

Morgan: “Can I help you with something?”

Alexandra: “Actually you can. You can give me my cane.”

Morgan: “Oops. Sorry about that. Where are we?”

Alexandra: “We’re in Kansas City. This is a women’s rehabilitation center. They took all of the girls from the shelter and brought them here, so they can regain their strength. Which reminds me, you need some clothes.

She put her hands around Morgan’s waist. Then she started feeling the

features on her face.

Alexandra: “We’re about the same size. You can wear something of mine.”

Morgan grew confused. She looked down and saw the cane, then she realized.

Morgan: “You’re blind.”

Alexandra: “As a bat.”

Alexandra gave Morgan a t-shirt, a pair of shorts and some flip flops.

Alexandra: “Want to go for a walk?”

Morgan looked around. She had seen nothing but walls for the past six hours.

Morgan: “Sounds good. Let’s go.”

---

9:17 PM CST, Jefferson City, MO

Connor was busy telling Kelly the entire story about him and Morgan. He explained how much Morgan wanted to find her.

Kelly: “Well Connor, I guess I owe you something.”

Connor: “What’s that?”

Kelly: “An apology. You shouldn’t have had the burden of carrying Morgan around with you. You’re just a kid. I’m sorry.”

Connor: “Burden? No offense Miss Parsons, but Morgan is no burden. In fact, without her, I don’t think I would even be here. She’s done more for me these past few days than I could even have asked for. It was an honor having her alongside me.”

Kelly looked at Connor with suspicion.

Kelly: “Really now?”

Connor: “Yes. She kept me sane. She brought up all this stuff about faith and belief. I can still hear her in my head.”

Kelly: “Yep, that’s Morgan. Always spreading the word about our lord. You seem very fond of her Connor.”

Connor rubbed his brow, and cracked his neck.

Connor: “I just want to find her.”

Kelly: “Then let’s find her.”

They began asking around for information on Morgan’s whereabouts. Eventually, they overheard the words, “rehab center in Kansas City.” That’s all they needed to hear.

Kelly: “I have my car out front. Let’s go.”

The two ran for the door until Connor stopped and turned. He looked around for a second, and then ran over to one of the beds.

Connor: “Carter!”

Carter stood up, and looked his brother in the eyes.

Carter: “I know what you have to do. Go do it!”

Connor: “Are you sure?”

Carter: “Connor, I’ll be fine. Go!”

Connor ran outside and found Kelly at the car.

Connor: “Who’s this?”

Connor saw a kid sitting in the backseat of Kelly’s BMW.

Kelly: “This is Isaiah. I’m bringing him home once I get Morgan.”

Connor: “You Parsons are such do-gooders. Do you have a selfish bone in your body?”

Kelly: “I don’t know. But let’s stop chatting. And from now on, call me Kelly.”

---

9:36 PM CST, Kansas City, MO

Alexandra and Morgan walked slowly side by side. Alexandra, cane in hand, was able to keep up with Morgan, who was still loopy from the medication. Morgan, not knowing any better, started a conversation with Alexandra. For some reason, it seemed like walking and talking was all she knew how to do anymore.

Morgan: “So how old are you?”

Alexandra: “Sixteen.”

Morgan: “Are you in school?”

Alexandra: “No. I’ll go for my GED in a few years. School was never really for me.”

Morgan: “It must be so difficult for you, given your disability.”

Alexandra: “It’s hard, but I’ve dealt with it for awhile now, so I’ve grown accustomed.”

Morgan: “Can I ask how it happened?”

Alexandra: “You just did. I was born without sight.”

Morgan: “I’m sorry.”

Alexandra: “Not your fault.”

Morgan: “So how did you end up at the rehabilitation center?”

Alexandra: “I was working when it happened. At the hospital. It all happened so fast. We were all very lucky to be evacuated. I’ve been at the center ever since.”

Morgan: “Connor and I were at the hospital. It was empty.”

Alexandra: “Who’s Connor?”

Morgan: “Oh. He’s this boy I- this guy that helped me after the attack. He and I were on our way to meet my mom in Hillsboro.”

Alexandra: “Well where is he?”

Morgan: “I don’t know. The last time I saw him was at the camp. They split us up. I really want to see him again. You’d like him, he’s great.”

Alexandra: “Do you love him?”

Morgan wasn’t what you would call a girly girl. She wouldn’t usually get giddy over a guy, but the thought of Connor sent shivers down her spine. Suddenly, she couldn’t stop smiling.

Morgan: “I don’t know. He’s really nice. I wouldn’t be here if it weren’t for him. But I’ve never been in love, so I wouldn’t know how it feels.”

Alexandra: “I understand.”

Morgan: “How about you? Ever been in love?”

Alexandra: “No. I’ve never even had a boyfriend.”

Morgan: “Yeah I haven’t been very lucky with relationships either.”

Alexandra: “No. That’s not it. I don’t trust guys. Not one of them.”

Morgan: “I hear a lot of girls say that. I suppose it makes sense.”

Alexandra: “No. You don’t understand Morgan. I don’t trust *anyone!”*

Morgan: “Why not?”

Alexandra: “When I was nine, my father raped me.”

Morgan: “Oh my.”

Alexandra: “He took me to the zoo, bought me lunch, and then put his hands on me. I was nine years old, and he was my dad. I just thought it was supposed to happen. I didn’t know any better.”

Morgan: “What did your mom do?”

Alexandra: “Nothing. When I told her what happened, she didn’t believe me. She told me I was making it up for attention.”

Morgan: “That’s horrible. So what did you do?”

Alexandra: “I left. I grabbed my things and just left. Here I was, nine years old, leaving my family. And the worst part was, they all watched me walk out of my house. They didn’t even try to stop me.”

Morgan: “Where did you go?”

Alexandra: “I slept in the playground of my elementary school for three days until someone found me. They referred me to a shelter and I was placed in the system. I’ve lived with four different foster families. There aren’t too many families willing to raise a young blind girl. When I turned fourteen, I withdrew from the system and got a job. I had to become an adult a lot faster than I should have.”

Morgan: “That’s so sad. I am so sorry.”

Alexandra: “I know you are. And no offense, but I’m sick of it. The pity, everyone feeling sorry for me. I got raped when I was young. I am blind, so I couldn’t even see what happened. I’ve had five different moms, eleven different brothers and sisters. But even through all that, I still feel normal. Grateful even. I’m alive.”

Morgan hugged Alexandra as hard as she could.

Morgan: “You are so strong.”

Morgan paused for a second.

Morgan: “My father left when I was three. Just decided he’d leave Oregon, and not tell anyone about it. My mom says he had a lot of debts he couldn’t pay, but that’s no excuse. I hate him. The bible tells me I’m not supposed to hate, but I don’t care. I hate him.”

It was at that time, the girls heard a roaring sound in the distance. A harsh wind began to blow, and the ground seemed to tremble bit. Morgan recognized the sound; it was the same one she heard at the library. They were under attack.

---

10:04 PM CST, Warrensburg, MO

Kelly was driving over 80 miles per hour. Connor sat silently in the passenger seat. Isaiah was in the back, staring effortlessly at Connor. Kelly turned on the radio:

“This is the voice of Charlie Sweeney. Normally at this time we would be having our countdown of the top 10 country songs of the week. Sadly however, I am on the air tonight to inform you of another set of attacks on the United States. So far, in the last forty minutes, Seattle, San Francisco, Denver and Arlington have been bombed. This comes as quite a shock considering up until this point, the majority of the damage had been in the eastern part of the country.”

Kelly changed the station:

“You are listening to WP97 and we have breaking news: The east coast of the United States is yet again in danger. We have heard reports of attacks in both Philadelphia and Indianapolis. We have also been told that they seemed to be moving along to the mid eastern states. I’m currently broadcasting from Baltimore and I have just been told to end this show and evacuate. Before I go, I would encourage anyone in the mid-eastern United States to grab your loved ones…and pray!”

Connor looked over at Kelly, who was staring right back at him.

Connor: “There’s no way we’re evacuating.”

Kelly: “Agreed.”

Connor: “Hey Isaiah, buckle up buddy. We’re going to save Morgan!”

---

Morgan and Alexandra were indeed in the midst of a major attack. They had taken refuge behind a set of bushes. As horrible as it was for Morgan, it had to have been even worse for Alexandra, who couldn’t see what was happening. After three minutes or so, Morgan realized that they were not safe. She began to think about Connor. What would he do if he were here? How would he keep not only himself safe, but the sixteen year old blind girl who had clearly been through enough already? Only one thing came to mind.

Morgan: “Alex, we have to get out of here. I think we should head back to the center.”

Morgan was shouting over the noise.

Alexandra: “Morgan, how bad is it?”

Morgan looked back for just a split second.

Morgan: “Really bad! Grab my hand, on the count of three; we are going to run back towards the center. Ok?”

Alexandra shook her head.

Morgan: “Alright. 1...2...3!”

---

10:27 PM CST, Kansas City, MO

Kelly had finally made it to Kansas City. She didn’t even bother slowing down. As for Connor, he was busy looking at what used to be his hometown. He watched as they sped past his neighborhood, his brother’s pizza place, and the library where this had all started. Isaiah sat in the back,

not sure exactly what was going on. Connor looked over at Kelly, who was staring straight into the destruction in front of them. Never before had he seen such determination in a person. He was beginning to feel like everything might turn out alright after all.

---

Morgan held Alexandra's hand as the two young girls raced for their lives. Behind them, missiles were being launched into nearby buildings. Trees were falling over, cars being flipped. Clouds of smoke filled with rubble seemed to follow them. A tear formed in Morgan's eyes every time she heard the sound of a missile, or a plane overhead. They came across what looked to be a junkyard. There wasn't much room to walk.

Morgan: "Alex, jump on my back."

Without saying a word, Alexandra hopped on Morgan's back. Morgan continued running through trees and smoke, until she saw what she'd been hoping for. There were people, lots of them. They too, were running around, panicking. The closer Morgan got to them, the bigger the crowd became. Morgan breathed a sigh of relief. She told Alexandra what was going on, and she let her down from her back. It was certainly frenzy, but at least they were safe for the time being. Military officers were assisting people, and Morgan noticed a few medics. Suddenly, three tanks appeared, and two militia got out of each of them. This caused somewhat of a riot, and in the midst of the hysteria, Morgan lost track of Alexandra.

Morgan: "Alex! Alexandra! Can you hear me?"

It seemed hopeless. There were too many people, too much noise.

---

Kelly was about to slow down when Isaiah shouted "Look! Up ahead!" It was at that moment both Connor and Kelly smiled. They too had reached the crowd of people. They exited the car, and stood for a minute, taking it all in.

Connor: "We should look for her."

Kelly: “Okay, but let’s split up. Meet me at the car in fifteen minutes.”

Connor: “Gotcha.”

Kelly began walking away from Isaiah and Connor.

Connor: “Hey, good luck.”

Kelly smiled and nodded. Then disappeared into the crowd.

Isaiah: “Hey Connor, what’s going on?”

Connor: “We’re trying to find Kelly’s daughter. She’s gotta be here somewhere. C’mon, let’s walk this way.”

Isaiah: “Okay.”

Connor grabbed Isaiah’s hands, which were abnormally cold.

Connor: “You hanging in there buddy?”

Isaiah: “Yep. Are you hanging in there?”

Connor stared thoroughly at every person, hoping it was Morgan. Then he looked down at Isaiah.

Connor: “I’m trying to.”

Kelly wasn’t having much luck. The fumes from the smoke were making her cough, and somewhere along the way her contacts fell out. After a good ten minutes, she came across a girl lying on the ground behind one of the tanks. She was unconscious.

Morgan was sitting on the ground, rubbing her eyes. This had been the longest day of her life, and quite possibly, her last. She wanted so badly to go back to Beaverton.

Connor was frantically pushing his way through civilians, looking for just one particular face. One beautiful, innocent face. Isaiah tugged at his arm.

Isaiah: “I think it’s been fifteen minutes.”

Connor looked around for a second, then down at him.

Connor: “I think you’re right.”

They walked back over to the car and reunited with Kelly, who was holding a young girl in her arms.

Connor: “That’s not Morgan.”

Kelly: “No, but I think she needs help.”

They both turned their attention to one of the military officers, who was standing on one of the trucks.

Military Officer: “Ladies and Gentlemen, it is comforting to see that you have survived the second set of attacks. However, another wave is imminent. Therefore, I would ask that each and every one of you come with us to our training base in Tucson. There, we will provide you with the best food, shelter and comfort we possibly can, not to mention trained EMT’s for those of you who have sustained any injuries. There will be a sign in sheet waiting for you as you arrive. My officers and I would ask that we do this quickly, but in a calm and orderly fashion. In a few minutes, we will begin loading you all into our vehicles. If you have any further questions, now would be the time to ask. Thank you.”

At least one hundred people began yelling at the officer, voicing both questions and opinions. Kelly and Connor agreed right away to re-locate to Tucson. Perhaps they’d have a better chance at finding Morgan there. Connor grabbed hold of Isaiah and Kelly continued to carry the unconscious girl, and they walked towards one of the military trucks. Connor overheard someone ask the officer, “After we go to Tucson, what’s next?” He waited for the officer’s response:

Military Officer: “We wait. And we pray to god this ends with all of us still breathing.”

At that moment, Connor got into the truck.

Morgan was still sitting, contemplating whether or not go to Tucson. All she kept thinking about was Alexandra. How could she lose her? Connor never would have lost her. She figured worst case scenario, she'll go to Tucson and find her there. Maybe they'd have a phone and she could call Kelly again. And best of all, maybe she'd see Connor. That pretty much sealed it. She was going to Tucson. She ran to one of the trucks, and hopped in.

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Monday, August 15th, 2011

2:22 AM MST, Tucson, Arizona

The brigades had finally reached Arizona. The survivors from Missouri were amazed by what they saw once they reached their destination. Clear blue skies, grass, houses that remained intact. It was almost paradise. Kelly, Connor and Isaiah left the tank they had traveled in and looked around. They were given nametags to wear, making it easier to be traced.

Kelly: "Why don't you go sign us in, and see if Morgan has done the same? I need to bring this girl to a doctor."

Kelly still held the young girl in her arms. She had not moved since Kelly found her. Kelly ran to the first medicinal booth she saw.

Kelly: "Excuse me, this girl needs help! I found her like this in Kansas City."

A man took her from Kelly and studied her closely.

Man: "We'll do our best ma'am, you can trust us."

Kelly: "Thank you."

Isaiah was still clutching Connor's hand, which seemed to have lost all feeling.

Connor: "Hey, you may even see your parents, or your brothers and sisters. Wouldn't that be cool?"

Isaiah: “Yeah…but I like being with you and Kelly.”

Connor: “I like being with you too kid.”

Connor saw the sign in desk, and frantically wrote his and Isaiah’s names on the sheet. He looked around for a few seconds, and then wrote down “Kelly Parsons” as well. He wiggled his fingers, and proceeded to let go of Isaiah’s hand altogether.

Connor: “Buddy, I need you to do something for me.”

Isaiah looked up at him, bewildered.

Isaiah: “What?”

Connor: “I need you to stay here for a minute. Right in this spot. I have to go talk to that man over there.”

Isaiah: “Okay.”

Connor: “Don’t go anywhere, don’t talk to anyone. Sing a song or think about your favorite toy. I’ll be right back.”

Isaiah: “I’ll stay here Connor.”

Connor: “Alright.”

Connor ran over to one of the military men.

Connor: “Sir, excuse me.”

Officer: “Can I help you boy?”

Connor: “Do you have any information on the southern part of the United States? Virginia, The Carolina’s, Georgia?”

Officer: “Well I’m not exactly at liberty to say.”

Connor: “Please. I have a little boy with me whose family lives in Georgia. I

just want to assure him that they're okay."

Officer: "What's your name son?

Connor: "Connor. Look, do you know anything or not?"

Officer: "Well Connor, I'm sorry to be the one to break this to you, but…"

Connor: "But what?"

Officer: "Most of the south has been destroyed. It's very unlikely that anyone living in Georgia is alive."

Connor put his hands over his eyes. He took a deep breath, and then shook his head. "Thank you" he said to the officer. Then he went back to Isaiah.

Connor: "Okay, I'm back. Good job waiting for me buddy, good job."

Isaiah: "I sang a song, like you said."

Connor: "Oh yeah? What did you sing?"

Isaiah: "Oh Happy Day. It's my favorite. My mom always makes me sing it in church."

A tear ran down Connor's face. He put his hands on Isaiah's shoulders and began to hug him. Before he could fully wrap his arms around him, Kelly interrupted.

Kelly: "Hey"

Isaiah broke free from Connor and ran to Kelly.

Connor: "Hi. How's the girl?"

Kelly: "Still unconscious. But the man said they'd do everything they can. Any luck here?"

Connor: "Checked the list up and down."

Kelly: “Nothing?”

Connor: “Didn’t see any recognizable names. Not Morgan’s or Carters. Not even my parents.”

Kelly: “Dammit. I thought for sure we’d find them by now.”

To their left, there was a group of kids running around, playing a game. Isaiah spotted this and looked up at Kelly.

Kelly: “Go ahead. Go play.”

Her and Connor watched as Isaiah ran over to the group of kids. He joined right in with the game, smiling and laughing the entire time.

Connor: “Kelly. You know his parents are dead right?”

Kelly: “Yeah. We’re all he’s got now.”

---

3:31 AM MST, Tucson, AZ

Morgan’s tank arrived a bit later than the rest. She stood up, brushed herself off a little, and then looked around for the sign in sheet. She grabbed a banana and a small carton of milk. She was barefoot again. She walked past mounds of people standing in line for food and/or medical assistance. She looked up at the sky, hoping to find a sign. She prayed on the way here. However, she was beginning to think it was all for nothing. Just as she was peeling her banana, she heard a sound. It was very feint. “Morgan.” She could hardly understand it. “Morgan. Over here.” Morgan grew suspicious, and turned around. Suddenly, she dropped her banana and smiled. “Alex!”

---

Kelly, Connor and Isaiah were under a pavilion, eating a meal that seemed to them like a grand feast. The three of them were relatively silent. A female military officer approached them. She was rather good looking, although Connor failed to notice. There was only one girl on his mind. The female officer walked up to their table.

Female: “Mr. Riley?”

Connor: “Yeah, that’s me.”

Female: “There is someone here who wishes to see you. He says he’s your brother.”

Connor: “Carter! Where is he?”

Female: “Come with me please.”

Connor easily obliged. He turned to Kelly, who nodded. He high-fived Isaiah and jumped out of his seat. He walked directly behind the officer.

Female: “I’m Officer Parks by the way. Kimberly Parks. I’m here if you need me.”

Connor: “I’m Connor.”

Kimberly pointed.

Officer Parks: “He’s right over there.”

Connor saw him. A feeling of relief came over him.

Connor: “Thank you, officer Parks.”

Connor walked over to the picnic table where his brother was sitting. He walked up behind Carter with a huge smile.

Connor: “So, I heard you wanted to see me?”

Carter turned around.

Carter: “That’s right, I did.”

The two laughed. Then they hugged.

Connor: “Oh man, I’m glad you made it here.”

Carter: “Yeah, same here.”

Connor: “How’s your arm?”

Carter: “Broken. So I take it that you didn’t find Morgan?”

Connor: “No. Not yet at least. I checked the sign in sheet for mom and dad.”

Carter: “Me too.”

Connor: “Well c’mon, let’s go eat.”

Carter: “Alright alright. Major happenings in the world right now and you’re worrying about food. Typical.”

Connor pushed him towards the pavilion.

Connor: “Let’s go smart ass.”

Kelly watched in awe as The Riley boys made their way towards her. It was nice to see Connor in a good mood. He had been strong, but she could tell he’d also been dying inside. Connor had an unusual spring in his step as he walked over.

Connor: “Hey Isaiah, this is my brother Carter. Now he’s not as cool as I am, but I’d appreciate it if you were nice to him.”

Carter: “Funny. It’s nice to meet you Isaiah; I hope you’ve been taking good care of Connor.”

Isaiah: “Well he’s gotten out of line a few times, but I think I did okay.”

Connor rubbed Isaiah’s head.

Connor: “You did great buddy.”

Kelly tapped Connor on the shoulder.

Kelly: “Ahem.”

Connor: “Oh. Right. Carter, you remember Kelly?”

Carter: “I do. It’s nice to see you again. How are you doing?”

Kelly: “Hanging in there.”

Connor: “Kelly came across this unconscious girl and brought her all the way here.”

Carter: “Wow.”

Kelly: “That reminds me, I should go check on her. Be back in a few.”

Kelly left the three young boys and walked towards the recovery area. She saw Officer Parks, and immediately spoke.

Kelly: “Hi. I dropped off a young girl a little while ago, she was unconscious. I’m just wondering if I can get an update on her.”

Officer Parks: “You must mean Alexandra. She’s awake now, and doing very well. She’s with a friend now, but I can see if she wants to meet you.”

Kelly: “That’d be great. Thank you very much.”

Officer Parks walked into the building in which Alexandra was being kept. She had formed a small bond with Alexandra, seeing as Kimberly herself was just twenty years old. Alexandra was in the midst of what seemed to be a long conversation. Kimberly interrupted.

Officer Parks: “Hey Alex.”

Alexandra turned.

Alexandra: “Hi Kimberly. This is my friend, Morgan Parsons.”

Kimberly looked over at Morgan.

Kimberly: “Nice to meet you Morgan. Any friend of Alexandra’s is a friend of mine.”

Morgan smiled.

Morgan: “Nice to meet you too.”

Kimberly smiled back.

Alexandra: “We were talking about the boy Morgan is in love with.”

Morgan hit Alexandra with a pillow.

Morgan: “Am not!”

Alexandra: “Don’t listen to her. It’s an interesting story though. It’s really romantic.”

Kimberly: “Aw that’s nice. What’s this boy’s name?”

Morgan: “Connor Riley. I hope he’s okay.”

Kimberly gulped. Right away, she realized that she knew Connor. She thought he was cute.

Kimberly: “I’m sure he’s fine.”

She then remembered why she’d interrupted in the first place.

Kimberly: “Alex, the woman who brought you here is outside. Would you like to meet her?”

Alexandra: “Send her in. I’d like to thank her.”

---

Connor, Carter and Isaiah finished eating. Connor wanted to use this time to re-connect with his younger brother. They reminisced, and told Isaiah stories about when they were his age. Isaiah hung on every word.

Carter: “So did you hear? They are expecting the next set of attacks to be the worst. And I guess the government wants to fight back.”

Connor: “Wow. I dunno whether that’s smart or not. But if it gets us any closer to ending this, then so be it.”

Carter: “Yeah. The problem is, a lot of our country’s military is dead. So they want anyone who is willing and able to fight. I obviously can’t because of my arm. But you can. Would you?”

Connor: “I don’t know. I really haven’t thought about it. Let’s just hope it doesn’t come to that.”

---

Alexandra was excited to meet the woman that saved her. She had so much to thank her for.

Morgan: “Hey, I’m going to grab some food. That will give you some time to talk to this woman. I’ll come back in a little while.”

Alexandra: “Thanks Morgan. Bring something back for me will ya?”

Morgan: “Of course. Bye.”

Alexandra: “Bye.”

Morgan left. Alexandra sat anxiously for a few minutes, before Kimberly arrived. She wasn’t alone. Kelly stood right beside her, gleaming at Alexandra.

Kimberly: “Alex, this is the woman who brought you here. I’ll leave you two alone. You know where I’ll be if you need me.”

Kimberly left, leaving a nervous Kelly standing over an ecstatic Alexandra.

Alexandra: “Hi.”

Kelly: “Hi.”

Alexandra: “Please, have a seat. Anyone who saves my life is entitled to a

seat."

Kelly sat down next to Alexandra. Kelly examined her for a minute before speaking up.

Kelly: "How old are you?"

Alexandra: "I'm sixteen. I can't thank you enough for what you did. The doctors told me you found me lying unconscious, and that you brought me all the way here."

Kelly: "I did. And I'm glad to see that you're ok. Can I ask what happened?"

Alexandra: "You just did. My friend and I were going for a walk. We got caught in the line of fire. We ran as much as we could, until we reached common ground. I don't remember much after that. The doctors say I fainted. They said I'll be fine."

Kelly: "That's amazing."

Alexandra: "You're amazing. You truly are. I don't know many people who would risk their own safety to help out a sixteen year old blind girl."

Kelly: "I'm extremely happy to see that you're alright. Do you have family here?"

Alexandra: "Nope. I was pretty much an orphan before all of this, so I haven't lost anything. Do you have any family here?"

Kelly: "I don't know. I haven't been able to locate my daughter. I've been looking for her since the initial attacks. Officer Parks mentioned that you were with a friend?"

Alexandra: "Mhm. My friend Morgan. She just went to get some food. She'll be back shortly. I'm sure she'd like to meet you."

Kelly grew suspicious.

Kelly: "My daughter's name is Morgan."

---

The boys were throwing a football. They were all drained, and it was nice to relax for a little while.

Isaiah: “I have to use the bathroom.”

Connor: “Alright. Let’s go.”

Carter stopped him.

Carter: “I’ll take him. I have to pee anyway.”

Connor: “Okay. I’ll be right here when you guys are done.”

Connor watched them head towards the bathrooms. It was great to have his brother with him. He looked around for a place to sit down. He noticed the officer from before sitting on a nearby bench. He walked over and sat.

Connor: “Kimberly, right?”

Kimberly: “Connor. How’d things go with your brother?”

Carter: “Good. Thanks again for reuniting us.”

Kimberly: “No problem. It’s my job.”

Connor: “Yeah about that, is there any truth to the rumors? Are you guys recruiting able bodied citizens to fight off the Koreans?”

Kimberly: “I don’t really know. But I hope we fight back. Those bastards have it coming.”

Connor: “Well I’m with you on that.”

Kimberly was definitely attracted to Connor. She moved closer to him.

Kimberly: “So why haven’t you made a move on me yet?”

Connor grew very confused.

Connor: “Um, well it’s complicated. Don’t get me wrong, you’re hot. I mean if this were any other situation, I would have. But…”

Kimberly: “But what?”

Connor: “There’s someone else.”

Kimberly: “Morgan.”

Connor turned is head. He looked right at Kimberly.

Connor: “How do you know Morgan? And how do you know about her and me?”

Kimberly shrugged.

Kimberly: “I sort of just met her.”

Connor stood up. He was yelling now.

Connor: “She’s here!”

Kimberly: “She’s with Alexandra. At the recovery center.”

Connor: “And you knew this. You knew about us, and you’re sitting here asking me why I haven’t made a move on you?”

Kimberly: “I didn’t know the details. She just mentioned your name.”

Connor: “I can’t believe this! And I can’t believe you didn’t tell me right away.”

Connor started running. Kimberly called out to him.

Kimberly: “I’m sorry! Good luck.”

Connor ran over to the bathrooms, just as Isaiah and Carter were

leaving.

Carter: “Whoa, slow down. What’s going on?”

Connor: “Morgan. She’s here! At the recovery building”

Without question, Carter and Isaiah joined Connor in his sprint.

---

Alexandra: “So that’s pretty much how I ended up living in Missouri.”

Kelly and Alexandra bonded. For some reason, Alexandra had no problem opening up to her. It was just like talking to Morgan.

Alexandra: “What do you do for a living?”

Kelly: “I was a reporter. I was in Cleveland when the attacks started.”

Kelly heard a lot of noise coming from outside.

Kelly: ‘What’s the ruckus?”

Alexandra: “I don’t know.”

Outside, Connor was trying to convince the officer at the door to let him inside.

Connor: “You don’t understand. I need to see her!”

Officer: “Unless you have a loved one inside, I can’t let you in. It causes too much distress.”

Inside, Kelly grew weary of the distraction. She wanted to examine it.

Kelly: “Alexandra, I’ll be right back. I’m gonna see what all the commotion is.”

Kelly got up and walked to the window. She was surprised to see Connor outside. She walked to him.

Kelly: “Connor, what’s going on?”

Connor: “Morgan’s in here! But it looks like you already know that.”

Kelly motioned to the officer. He let the boys through.

Kelly: “Morgan’s not here.”

Connor: “Kimberly-Officer Parks said she talked to her.”

They walked to Alexandra.

Kelly: “Alexandra, what is your friend’s full name?”

Alexandra: “Morgan Parsons. She’s your daughter isn’t she?”

Connor: “Where is she?”

Kelly: “She went to get food. We need to go get her!”

Connor: “So you haven’t seen here yet?”

Kelly: “No.”

Alexandra: “She said she’d be right back. I don’t know what’s taking her so long.”

Connor: “How do you know her?”

Alexandra: “We met at the rehab center in Missouri. Are you Connor?”

Kelly: “He is.”

Connor: “Well, enough standing around, let’s go find her!”

Kelly: “Ok. We’ll go get her, and we’ll all come back here. Alexandra, we’ll be back soon.”

Connor rushed for the door, Carter and Isaiah following close behind.

Kelly paused for a moment and stared at Alexandra. Then she headed for the door as well. She caught up to the boys, just as Kimberly passed them by.

Kimberly: “Guys! Guys. Connor!”

They turned to acknowledge the voice.

Connor: “Kimberly. What’s going on?”

Large groups of people seemed to be making their way towards one of the pavilions.

Kimberly: “Another set of attacks. The colonel wants everyone to gather. He’s making a speech.”

Kelly: “What about?”

Kimberly: “I guess the rumors are true. We’re going to fight back.”

A male officer motioned to Kimberly

Kimberly: “You all have to come with me…now!”

Kelly: “NO! I need to get my daughter.”

A male officer intervened and demanded they follow Kimberly. She led them to a highly populated area. The colonel was in clear view. He spoke up:

Colonel Jacobs: “I’m United States Army Colonel Jack Jacobs. First off, I’d like to inform you all that we are indeed under attack. There is also speculation that they our headed this way. We are no longer safe here. Secretary Sheridan proposed that we try our damnest to fight off the enemy, and congress has granted his wish. However, due to previous circumstances, our military has been depleted. We are asking that anyone able to assist us do just that. We need men to fight, and women to nurse the wounded. We’re currently bringing in choppers that will take the wounded to our safe zone in Anchorage. Women and children will be flown first. We don’t have much time, so I need to ask all of you. Are you willing to battle? If so, please grab your belongings and follow our officers. You will then receive your

assignments. We will deploy in forty five minutes. An hour from now, I want this area completely deserted. Thank you all, and good luck."

Connor looked over at Carter, who obviously couldn't help. Kelly broke the silence.

Kelly: "I'm going to volunteer. After I get Morgan."

She grabbed Isaiah's hand and explained this to him. At the same time, Connor looked his brother in the eyes. Connor had never been patriotic, and Carter knew this.

Connor: "I guess I have to fight for my country."

Carter realized what his older brother had been through these last few days.

Carter: "No. Not for the country."

Carter looked around, then back at Connor.

Carter: "You have to fight for the one you love."

Connor shook his head. He walked over to Kelly.

Connor: "I'm in. Let's do it."

They stood there for a few seconds.

Kelly: "Alright, so Isaiah and Carter will go to Anchorage. That way they'll be safe."

They flagged down Kimberly.

Connor: "We're ready to help. I'm gonna fight."

Kimberly: "Good. Because you're both in for a hell of a fight. Kelly, we're going to have you doing a number of things. Cooking, nursing the wounded and most importantly, being one of our eyes and ears."

Kelly: “Perfect.”

Kimberly: “Connor, you’re one of the healthiest people here. We need you in combat. Are you up for that?”

Connor looked at Carter for reassurance.

Connor: “I am.”

Kimberly handed them both a piece of paper with their assignments listed.

Kimberly: “We’re leaving shortly. We already have a helicopter ready for them. See you both very soon.”

Connor whispered to Kelly.

Connor: “What about Morgan? We can’t leave without her.”

Kelly: “She’s made it this far on her own. If we don’t fight, we will all die, and what good would that be? This is what she would want. This is for her.”

Connor: “Okay. Let’s do it for Morgan.”

Both Kelly and Connor looked down at the paper and smiled. They looked at each other.

Carter: “Where are you guys going?”

They both said in unison:

Kelly and Connor: “Hillsboro.”

Kelly was reminded of Alexandra, who is lying in a building, unaware of what’s going on.

The four of them walked back to the recovery building. Alexandra was sleeping.

Kelly: “Hey. Alexandra. Honey.”

She was whispering. Alexandra moved her arm, and then sat up.

Alexandra: “What’s going on?”

Connor: “You’re going to Anchorage. It’s safer there. Kelly and I are headed to Hillsboro. We’ll meet up with you in a little while.”

Alexandra: “What about Morgan?”

Kelly: “We didn’t find her. But she’ll probably go with you. You can meet up with her there. Right now, we have to get you up and into the helicopter.”

Connor and Carter helped Alexandra to her feet. Kelly grabbed her cane and handed it to her.

Kelly: “Is everyone ready?”

She heard no response.

Kelly: “Let’s go.”

They met up with Kimberly. The helicopter had arrived.

Connor: “I guess this is it. Time for you guys to go.”

Carter hugged Kelly, and then made his way to Connor.

Carter: “Be strong. Stay focused. Make it back in one piece.”

Connor: “I will. See you soon.”

Carter stepped into the helicopter. Connor turned to Isaiah.

Connor: “It’s your turn kid.”

Isaiah walked over to him.

Connor: “Take care of my brother alright?”

Isaiah: “Well somebody has to. I’ll miss you Connor.”

Connor: “I’ll miss you too buddy. But we’ll see each other soon, I promise.”

Connor hugged him, and then moved out of the way. Kelly swooped in.

Kelly: “I’ll be thinking of you the whole time. Sing lots of songs for me okay?”

Isaiah grabbed her hand.

Isaiah: “Kelly?”

Kelly: “Yeah.”

Isaiah: “Will you be my mommy?”

Kelly started crying. She clutched both of his hands.

Kelly: “I can’t be your mom Isaiah. But I’ll tell you what. I can be your friend, and I am. I’ll always be here for you.”

Isaiah: “Okay.”

Isaiah hopped aboard the helicopter. He turned around to Kelly.

Isaiah: “I love you Kelly.”

Kelly’s tears resurfaced. She wiped them off of her brow.

Kelly: “I love you too.”

With both Carter and Isaiah on board, it was time for Alexandra. Before she could say anything, the pilot spoke up.

Pilot: “Kimberly told me you only had two people. I don’t have enough room for her.”

Kimberly: “I forgot. Its fine, she can have the next one. Is that okay?”

Alexandra didn’t mind waiting.

Alexandra: “That’s fine.”

The pilot closed the doors. He began the propellers. Through the windows, both Isaiah and Carter looked at their loved ones. Isaiah put his hand to the window. Kelly, Connor and Kimberly looked on as the pilot used his radio.

Pilot: “Chopper number thirty one ready for takeoff. Secure skies.”

The helicopter began to rise off of the ground. Within seconds, it was almost out of sight. Below, Kimberly began to explain the art of soldiery to Connor. Kelly consoled Alexandra, who was exhausted. Out of nowhere, the sounds of the propellers reiterated. The helicopter was suddenly back in sight. It was spinning out of control. A few military members ran over.

Officer: “It’s been shot. Mayday Mayday. Prepare for crash. Clear the area!”

Kimberly directed Kelly and Alexandra to safe ground, both with tears in their eyes. Connor looked on in amazement. They watched the sky, hoping to see that the helicopter would regain control. Connor ran over to the girls, who were still crying. He put his arms around them. Above, the helicopter seemed to have straightened out when all of a sudden; it was struck by a missile. The entire helicopter was blown to pieces. Before anyone could react, four enemy planes flew overhead, firing at the ground below them. Connor jumped in front of the girls and pushed them to the ground. Nearby, they watched as a young man fell to his death. Once the planes passed, they ran into the nearest building.

Connor: “Son of a bitch!”

Connor was acting irrationally.

Connor: “They killed my brother. And Isaiah.”

Kelly responded.

Kelly: “They did!”

The entire area was in frenzy. Kelly was in shock. She was trying her hardest to keep herself together. She saw Kimberly up ahead, and ran over to her. She grabbed her.

Kelly: “You guys said it was safe! You killed them!”

She pulled at Kimberly’s hair and slapped her a few times. A few men interfered and pulled Kelly away. Kelly glared at Kimberly. There was rage in her eyes.

Kelly: “Murderer.”

Kelly took Alexandra’s hand, and the two stormed out of the building. Kimberly tried her hardest to keep a solid face. Being a military officer, she had to stay strong. But Kelly was right, it was their fault. She looked over at Connor.

Kimberly: “Connor I’m sorry.”

Connor was sitting. He had his hands folded, and his head down. He was trying not to cry.

Connor: “I know. It’s not your fault. It’s the Koreans. They killed my brother and my friend. Now we need to kill them!”

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Kelly brought Alexandra back to her bed. The two sat on the edge, both of them crying hysterically.

Alexandra: “I should have been on that helicopter.”

Kelly hugged Alexandra.

Kelly: “No, sweetie. Don’t say that. Don’t think that way.”

Alexandra: “Kelly, think about it. Had I gone first, one of them would still

be alive. Maybe Connor would still have his brother. Better yet, maybe Isaiah would still be here. It's not fair."

Kelly dried her eyes.

Kelly: "None of this is fair. That's why we are going to stop it. You need to get on the next helicopter, and go to Anchorage. I need to know that you're gonna be safe before I can focus again."

Alexandra: "I'm made of bricks Kelly. I'm going to be fine. Go put a stop to this."

Kelly kissed Alex's head, and then helped her to stand.

Kelly: "Alright, let's get you out of here."

---

Morgan had survived yet another set of attacks. She made a deal with herself not to think about who is or is not alive. Instead, she would try her hardest to make it through all of this. She was on her own now. No Kelly, No Connor, No Alex. She felt a strong urge to volunteer for battle, but reconsidered, realizing that she'd have a better chance of running into a familiar face in Anchorage.

---

Kimberly continued to train Connor as fast as she possibly could. There were only a few minutes until their departure.

Kimberly: "Have you ever fired a gun?"

Never in a million years did Connor think he'd ever hear that question.

Connor: "Do video games count?"

Kimberly quickly went over the basics of handling a firearm.

Kimberly: "It'll be simple Connor. If you see 'em, shoot 'em. I'll be there

with you the entire time. You ready?”

Connor replenished himself. He felt his face, which now had a stubble, and ran his fingers through his hair. His hair was no longer silky, and it wouldn’t even stand up straight.

Connor: “Let’s get Kelly. It’s time to go.”

They met up with Kelly and boarded a chopper. It was off to Hillsboro.

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7:44 AM CST, Hillsboro, MO

Connor and Kelly landed in Hillsboro. By the looks of it, it had recently been attacked. Upon arrival, men and women were split up. The women went to the camps, while the men met up with the remaining members of the military. Connor was forced to say goodbye to Kelly.

Connor: “Good luck Kelly. You’re gonna do a great job. I will see you in Anchorage in a little while. We’ll get that daughter of yours.”

Kelly: “Thank you Connor. Good luck to you too. Stay safe.”

They initially shook hands, before Kelly stepped back. She looked at Connor, with pride in her eyes. Connor hugged her, and then left. Kimberly had given Connor a number. It represented the platoon in which Connor would be a part of. His number was four. He walked around the tented areas, searching for his own. After two or three minutes, he found it.

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5:01 AM AKST, Anchorage, AK

Morgan had just gotten out of the shower. That was her first in almost four days. For the first time in a while, she didn’t feel dirty. She had nothing but time on her hands. All she could do was wait. Wait to hear word from Hillsboro. Although she hadn’t spoken to her mother, she was 100 percent sure of her intentions. There was no doubt that Kelly was helping. No doubt.

Morgan curled up in a ball, and examined the Alaskan sky. She was

still wearing Alexandra's t-shirt. She laid her head against the soft ground and slowly drifted to sleep.

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9:13 AM CST, Hillsboro, MO

Connor was a broken man. After finding his platoon, he sat. Waiting for an order, or a command. Nothing. How was he supposed to know what to do? A multitude of random emotions began to hit him. Sorrow, regret, compassion, nostalgia, jealousy, rage. He was all over the place. However, he would not cry. He couldn't. Not if he was going to be a soldier. He couldn't sit around any longer. He stood up and brushed himself off. No more whining. No more sulking. The Koreans killed his brother, and possibly his parents. Connor was sure of only one thing. He was going to kill the Koreans.

Kelly was a nurse. She was patching up cuts, cleaning wounds and spreading ointment on burns. It reminded her of girl scouts with Morgan. She thought back to a day long, long ago.

Sunday, April 22nd, 2001

Thirteen tween girls were running through Kelly's backyard. It was absolute pandemonium. Kelly was a mess. She was making finger sandwiches, and trying to find the Britney Spears CD the girls wanted to listen to. Why did she agree to host this weekend? She could be out with Jerry. Even though she had just recently begun dating again, she liked Jerry. He was nice, and very good with Morgan. Nine year old girls are hard to deal with, and Kelly was quickly finding this out. She finally put the CD in, and went outside to deliver the plate of sandwiches. Halfway through the song "Lucky" she heard a scream. She rapidly turned her head and saw Morgan crying her eyes out. She ran down the porch steps and onto the grass.

Kelly: "What's wrong honey?"

Morgan was hysterical.

Morgan: "It hurts mommy. It hurts!"

Kelly inspected her, and didn't see any cuts or bruises.

Kelly: “What hurts?”

Morgan stretched out her arm. One of the other girls spoke up.

Girl Scout: “She burned herself on the grill.”

Morgan and the other girls were earning their outdoor cooking badges. Kelly gave Morgan a hug.

Kelly: “Okay sweetie, calm down. What did I tell you about burns? Blow on them. Come on.”

Kelly blew a soft wind onto her daughters arm. Morgan stopped crying a little.

Morgan: “It’s not working. It still hurts.”

Morgan was pouting now. Kelly ran into the house and began to scurry. She was talking to herself.

Kelly: “Where did I put that damn cream?”

She was having such a hard time doing this whole single mom thing. She loved Morgan with all of her heart, but that didn’t make it any easier. Trying to juggle parenthood and a career was overbearing. Not to mention, having a social life. Kelly was only 27 years old. She was very pretty and loved to go out with her girlfriends. Nightclubs and bars were her coping mechanisms. Karaoke and Mechanical bull rides were her escape. After Ronald left, those were the only things keeping her sane. Besides Morgan. Oh right, Morgan. She searched the house up and down for that cream. In the background, she could hear Morgan’s whimpering. Suddenly, she heard a yell. She was back in the present. Back to reality. A young African American boy, around age 13 lay in front of her. He had a large gash on his face. Kelly quickly grabbed gauze and poured solution on his cut. As she bandaged him, she examined his innocent face. He looked like Isaiah. She needed a break. She went for a walk.

11:43 AM AKST, Anchorage, AK

Alexandra’s flight landed hours ago. She had a multitude of thoughts

running through her mind. She kept replaying the sounds of the last attack. The one that killed Isaiah and Carter. It sounded horrible, and more so, it damaged the lives of many. For the first time in her life, Alexandra Charles was happy to be blind. She couldn't imagine having to see the onslaught that ensued. Hearing it was bad enough. She wondered why she was still alive. How ironically lucky she is. After a few hours of non-stop thinking, she decided to wait patiently. After all, what else was there to do? Waiting was her only option. And it was killing her.

3:19 PM CST, Hillsboro, MO

Connor was sitting silently. He had literally done nothing since arriving in Hillsboro. All morning, the experienced fighters were training. Connor began to wonder why they even need him to be a soldier. He began to doze off until he was abruptly disturbed. He looked up and saw a large figure blocking the sun from his eyes. "You alright guy?" He extended his hand and helped Connor to his feet. Connor brushed off his ratty camouflage uniform. "I'm fine." The man just stared at him, almost as if he were waiting to be re-addressed. He continued to creepily stare at Connor until it came to him. He forgot to call him "Sir." Kimberly had told him to always call other soldiers "Sir." Male or female, it did not matter. He stood up straight and looked the man in his eyes.

Connor: "I'm fine, sir."

The man nodded his head, and moved a step toward Connor. He looked disgruntled. Connor raised his eyebrow in bewilderment. The man got face to face with Connor……and smiled. "I'm just messin with ya rookie! I don't do any of that yes sir, no sir bullshit. Names Wade. Keith Wade." He extended his hand once again. This time, Connor shook it.

Connor: "Riley. Connor Riley. Nice to meet you man."

Wade: "Likewise. Ya gotta firm up that grip there though. The colonel's a real hard ass."

Connor: "Will do."

Wade: "Damn, you look like a baby. How old are ya kid?"

Connor: "I'm nineteen."

Wade: “Really? God damn, I thought you were eleven. Ya gotta baby face.”

Connor shrugged.

Wade: “Ay ain’t nothing wrong with it. Probably does you well with the young girls huh?”

Connor: “Uh. Little bit. How old are you?”

Wade: “Twenty two.”

Connor: “Only 3 years older than me. How long have you been in the Army?”

Wade: “Marines. Since I was eighteen.”

Connor: “I can’t even imagine that. I don’t think I could ever do it. Under any circumstance.”

Wade: “Look around kid. You’re doing it.”

Connor shrugged.

Connor: “Yeah. But I don’t want to.”

Wade: “Then why the hell are you?”

Connor: “So I can safely be with the girl of my dreams.”

Wade: “Typical. I knew you were a ladies’ man.”

Connor: “It’s weird man. I’ve never been a risk taker. I’ve never done the right thing. Here I am, putting my life on the line. Fighting for my country’s existence. All because of her.”

Wade: “You’re a brave one Riley.”

Connor: “No, that’s not it. Either I’m thinking constantly about her and haven’t had time to process this, or the thought of saving her life has

instilled a fire inside of me. Either way, this is all about her."

In the distance, the two young men heard an annoying voice calling out: "All platoons gather and meet at base."

Wade grabbed Connor and pulled him towards their next adventure.

2:08 PM AKST, Anchorage, AK

The sun was baking the temporary residents of Anchorage. Morgan Parsons is uncomfortably nesting on yet another cot. Her mind is blank. She is not dreaming. She's doesn't snore. She doesn't drool. She sleeps like a baby. A lonely, unaware baby. Unaware that the two people she loves the most are currently in danger.

Hillsboro, MO

"Enemy fire!"
"Mayday"
"Send reinforcements from camp"
"WATCH OUT!"
"I've been hit!"

Those were just a few of the many things yelled during the current attack, which happened to be in Hillsboro. The base in which Connor was stationed was decimated, leaving scattered bodies and dwindled hopes. Connor had found safety in a small jeep. It seemed to be out of the line of fire. He looked on as the others in his platoon laid on the ground, immobile. The attack lasted 4-6 minutes, and had just come to an end when something came over the young soldier.

Connor: "I'm a soldier now. A fighter. I gotta be brave. This is it Connor. Time to become a man."

He hopped out of the jeep and onto the ground. Within seconds, he came across a body. It was lying on its stomach. Connor crouched down and turned it over. It was a man. Probably in his mid-thirties. Connor knew what to do next. He had to check for a pulse. He thought back to a particular day when he was in Middle School. A doctor came in attempted to teach the unruly kids how to check for a pulse. Connor paid no attention, as he was busy being the class clown. Now, he wished he had. He knew of the spots

where a pulse could be located. He decided to try the man's neck. He felt around for it, which felt extremely uncomfortable. After thirty seconds or so, he gave up. Connor had never been patient. Suddenly, a familiar voice spoke to him. "He's dead kid. Don't waste your time." It was Wade. Connor propped up.

Connor: "You sure?"

Wade: "Yes sir."

Connor looked down at the man. He had never seen a dead body before. He began to feel weak.

Wade: "They're all dead."

Connor wiped a tear from his eye.

Connor: "How did you…"

Wade: "Strategy Riley. I know what I'm doing. Most of these men were amateurs. They had no combat experience."

Connor: "Like me. I could have been one of them."

Wade: "Damn straight. But you're not. You're standing here, alive. So let's go!"

Wade began walking towards one of the other camps. Connor followed slowly behind. He was looking around, taking it all in. Wade started speaking:

Wade: "Here's the deal kid. They're gonna attack again. Soon. We gotta be ready."

Connor: "How do we do that?"

Wade: "Well, first off. We gotta make you a soldier."

Connor was intrigued by the change in Wade. An hour ago, he was cracking jokes and speaking in a unique accent. Now, he was all serious. He

had to be. Wade stopped, gazed at a rifle and picked it up. He threw it to Connor.

Wade: “There ya go.”

Connor’s eyes widened. It was a day of firsts.

Wade: “It’s all set. Just point and shoot.”

Connor put the gun to his shoulder. It was definitely real. For the first time, he grasped the magnitude of this entire ordeal.

Connor: “Is that it?”

Wade: “That’s the easy part. Connor, there is more to being a soldier than just firing a gun. It’s about instinct, and intuition. If you feel something is wrong, then it probably is. You’re already good at that. You survived back there. Now let’s go.”

A campsite came into view.

Connor: “We have to find survivors right?”

Wade: “We can check more pulses. But I wouldn’t expect much.”

At that exact moment, the men heard a rustle in the trees. Wade turned and raised his gun.

Wade: “Show yourself!”

Connor didn’t see anything, but he heard a voice.

Voice: “Don’t shoot.”

He immediately recognized it.

Connor: “Keith, put the gun down. It’s Officer Parks.”

He ran into the woods.

Connor: “Kimberly, its Connor. I can’t see you.”

Kimberly: “Over here. Follow my voice.”

Wade: “I got her.”

Wade motioned to Connor. Kimberly was positioned behind a Maple tree. Connor ran over to her.

Connor: “What happened?”

Wade: “Gunshot. Right leg.”

Kimberly: “I’m alright. Just can’t put pressure on it. Help me up.”

The men helped Officer Parks to her feet. They walked her to a nearby bench.

Kimberly: “Is there anyone else?”

Wade: “Not that we know of. Another attack is imminent.”

Kimberly: “I know. Oh Connor, I’m so happy to see you.”

Connor: “You too.”

Kimberly: “I had my doubts about you, but you’re here. Good work.”

Wade: “The kid’s a thinker. He kept himself safe.”

Kimberly smiled at him.

Kimberly: “He’s been keeping people safe since the initial attack.”

That comment was bittersweet. It made him think of Isaiah and Carter. He had to keep his head on straight. He remembered Alex and Morgan of course. And Kelly!

Connor: “Kelly! Where is she? I have to get her!”

Kimberly: “She’s in the next camp. I don’t know if she-”

Connor: “She’s alive. She’s strong. Let’s go.”

Wade stopped him in his tracks.

Wade: “Hold up kid. It’s dangerous. They will be attacking soon.”

Connor: “Which is why we gotta go right now!”

Connor was determined.

Wade: “It’s too risky. I can’t let you go.”

Connor grew angry. He got in Wade’s face.

Connor: “I’m going to get Kelly. If you wanna stop me, you better be ready to use that gun!”

Wade threw his gun down.

Wade: “I don’t need a weapon to teach you a lesson.”

Kimberly interrupted.

Kimberly: “Let him go Wade. He made Kelly a promise.”

Wade stepped back.

Wade: “Okay kid. Go.”

Connor took a step back. He looked over at Officer Parks.

Connor: “You’re coming, right Kim?”

Kimberly pointed to her leg.

Kimberly: “I can barely walk. I need to stay here. I got a fight to prepare for.”

Connor: “Okay. I’ll go get Kelly. Then I’ll come back. Be safe.”

Connor took off like a bat out of hell.

7:17 PM AKST, Anchorage, AK

Morgan just had dinner. She kept spitting, trying to get the undesirable taste of dry Mashed Potatoes out of her mouth. She walked around for a bit, before stumbling upon a record store. To her surprise, it was still in Commission. She paced up and down the aisles, looking for a particular album. After 3 or 4 minutes, she decided she’d just ask the clerk. Morgan needed faith. She needed re-assurance. She needed familiarity. She walked up to the front counter and waited to be assisted on. That’s when she heard it. It was coming from afar. It was feint and soft, but she could tell exactly what it was. Unchained Melody, one of her favorites. Someone was already playing it. It was coming from the “Soft Rock” aisle. Morgan approached gently, not wanting to disrupt the light flow of the song. She got within a few steps, and then stopped in her tracks. She smiled and pulled the headphones from the girl’s ears.

Morgan: “I should have known we’d have the same taste in music.”

Alexandra turned and smirked.

Alexandra: “Why of course we do!”

Alex threw down the headphones and grabbed Morgan. She wrapped her arms around her and began to cry.

Alexandra: “I am so happy to hear your voice.”

Morgan: “It’s good to see you. I knew you’d make it.”

Alexandra: “We both know it takes a lot more than some vengeful Koreans to keep me down.”

Morgan: “Have you seen my mom?”

Alexandra: “She’s in Hillsboro. She wanted to help.”

Morgan: “I figured she would. I hope she’s ok.”

Alexandra: “She’s fine. It’s been a stressful couple of days.”

Morgan pointed to a nearby snack bar.

Morgan: “Let’s get you some food. You can tell me all about it.”

---

Connor was running swiftly through the marsh. He thought back to his days on the track team. That was before he started getting in trouble. He didn’t think he had the stamina for it anymore. In times of distress however, people do extraordinary things. He arrived at Kelly’s camp in minutes. To his surprise, there were many people alive. They were on the ground, examining their wounds or hiding in anticipation of the next attack. He had gotten to know Kelly pretty well. He knew she wouldn’t cower, nor would she sulk. She was doing exactly what he had come to do. It was a relatively small camp, so she couldn’t be far. He circled for a few minutes, but could not see her.

Connor: “Kelly! Kelly Parsons!”

Connor heard no response. He gazed at a few of the wounded people in his area. Then he looked at his gun. He had authority now. He saw a tank nearby, and hopped on the roof. He spoke up.

Connor: “Excuse me. Can I have your attention? I’m Connor. Officer Connor Riley. I’m gonna cut right to the chase. There is an attack on the horizon. There are two soldiers in the next camp over. They are ready to fight. They’re calling for reinforcements and medics. We need to get everyone from this camp over there, ASAP. I need anyone healthy enough to help to do just that. Let’s start by loading the wounded into this tank. I need a volunteer to drive this thing. You, over there. Perfect, thank you. We have no time to waste. Let’s get to it.”

The healthy men and women began assisting the less fortunate into the tank. Connor had just helped a middle aged man with a broken leg into the tank when her heard in the background, “Hell of a speech there soldier.” Before he even turned around, he responded:

Connor: “Thanks Kelly. You would have done the same.”

Connor turned with a smile and hugged her.

Connor: “I’m glad you’re alright.”

Kelly: “Like there was any doubt.”

Connor’s smile faded.

Connor: “Look. After we get these people to safety, we need to go. It’s only a matter of time before Anchorage is attacked too. I want to be there when it happens.”

Kelly looked at him in disbelief.

Kelly: “Connor, there are soldiers here. It is a lot safer where we are right now. It is not a good idea to leave. It’s a death trap.”

Connor: “I have to protect Morgan. I have let her down enough. I can fight here, or I can fight there. Either way, I’m doing what I said I would.”

Kelly: “The people in Anchorage aren’t soldiers. The chances of survival are slim to none.”

Connor: “Kelly.”

Kelly: “You’ll die Connor.”

Connor kicked the dirt in front of him. He wiped the sweat from his face, so he could look Kelly in hers.

Connor: “Then I’ll die a hero.”

They were interrupted. “Mr. Riley, we’re all set. I think we’re ready to go.” Connor shook his head.

Connor: “Excellent. Thank you. What’s your name?”

The man answered. “Mark.”

Connor: “Well Mark, rev it up and let’s go.”

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Alexandra: “It was the worst thing that has ever happened.”

Morgan was crying.

Morgan: “That’s so sad. I can’t believe Connor lost his brother.”

Alexandra: “It was bad Morgan.”

Morgan: “He must be crushed. I wish I could be there for him. I just wish all of this was over.”

Alexandra: “Every person in America wishes that right now.”

Morgan: “What happened? After they died?”

Alexandra: “Connor and your mom went to Hillsboro, and they flew me here. That was after your mom beat up Kimberly.”

Morgan: “That sounds like mom. Can’t blame her though.”

The girls sat in the darkness. They began to hear screams from various people around them.

“Oh my god.”
“This is horrible.”
“It’s only a matter of time before they get over here.”

The girls were unaware of what was happening. Suddenly, Morgan looked up. That’s when she saw it. She grabbed Alexandra’s hand.

Alexandra: “Morgan, what is it? What’s going on?”

Above, the sky had been illuminated. The previously empty night sky was lit like the Fourth of July. Except these weren’t fireworks, and America

was not celebrating. America was dying.

“Daddy, are those fireworks?” A young girl asked. Her father responded. “No Katie, they’re not. Those are bombs.”

Morgan was in shock. Alexandra spoke again.

Alexandra: “What is it?”

Morgan’s eyes widened.

Morgan: “I think it’s……the end.”

Alexandra was stunned by that response.

Alexandra: “The end? Of the war?”

Morgan looked up again. She saw a large cloud of fire in the distant sky.

Morgan: “No, The end of us.”

Morgan thought for a second.

Morgan: “We have to go. I can see the bombs, but we can’t hear them. That means they’re not close yet.”

Alexandra: “Where can we go? They’re going to get us eventually. I’m tired of running.”

Morgan was trying to stay strong for her blind friend. However, her optimism was gone.

Alexandra: “I don’t think there’s anything we can do.”

Morgan put her hands together and closed her eyes.

Morgan: “Yes there is. Dear Lord……”

The girls began praying to god.

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The tank arrived at the camp. Kimberly and Wade greeted them.

Wade: “Good work Riley. Let’s take the wounded ones first. We’ll do our best to patch them up. After that, we must prepare.”

Connor looked at Kelly. She nodded.

Connor: “You have to prepare. We have to go to Anchorage. I’m gonna fight from there.”

Wade scowled.

Wade: “Are you crazy kid?”

Connor looked around.

Connor: “I am. I’m crazy about Morgan Parsons. And if I’m gonna die; I wanna do it knowing I fought for her honor.”

Kimberly and Kelly smiled. Wade rolled his eyes.

Wade: “And just how do you plan on getting to Anchorage?”

Kimberly spoke up.

Kimberly: “I’m going to fly him there.”

Wade looked at her, disgusted.

Wade: “You’re a disgrace. Fine kid, go on. I ain’t gonna stop ya. Nice knowing ya. I hope you have a peaceful death.”

Connor clenched his fist. He took a step towards Wade, but Kelly stopped him.

Kelly: “There’s no time to waste. Good luck Officer Wade.”

Kelly, Connor and Kimberly ran to the helicopter.

Connor: “You can fly this thing, right Kim?”

Kimberly smiled and joked.

Kimberly: “Sure. I used to fly on expert in Medal of Honor. Gotta love that Playstation 2.”

Connor opened the door, and took his seat. Before doing the same, Kelly stopped and looked at Kimberly.

Kelly: “Thank you for doing this. And about before, what I said…I’m sorry.”

Kimberly saluted her.

Kimberly: “No hard feelings ma’am. All aboard.”

Kelly took her seat next to Connor. They buckled their seatbelts and prepared for the ride. Kimberly took a seat in the pilot’s chair. She started up the engine and the propellers roared. She grabbed the pilot mic. “United States Army Officer Kimberly Parks ready for takeoff. Next stop, Anchorage Alaska!”

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All 50 states had know been attacked, as well as parts of Canada. The North American population had been cut in half. National landmarks, skyscrapers and trees now rested on the ground next to the deceased residents of The United States. The Koreans had certainly sent their message. It was almost over.

The helicopter containing our three characters landed in Anchorage, Alaska on Tuesday, August 16th, 2011 at 1:54 AM, Alaskan Standard Time. Kelly exited the chopper first. It was pitch black.

Kimberly: “Here are some flashlights.”

She handed one to Kelly. Connor got out of the helicopter next, gun in hand. Kimberly was the last to leave the helicopter. She closed the door

behind her. The women turned on their flashlights. Connor walked a pace ahead of them. They walked for a good twenty minutes before they saw any sign of life. Finally, they reached what had been the camp. They were not at all surprised to see nothing but dead bodies.

Kimberly: “Take a look at this.”

Kimberly shined her light on a large metal plane. It was painted black and had foreign symbols on it.

Kimberly: “Enemy plane.”

Kelly: “They crashed right into the camp.”

Kelly put her hands over her mouth and looked at Connor. He knew what she was thinking.

Connor: “She’s fine. I bet she’s hiding in the woods or something.”

As soon as he said that, he heard the bushes move. It startled him, and he dropped his gun. Kelly ran behind him.

Kimberly: “Is someone there? We’re here to help.”

She inched closer to the trees. Kelly and Connor looked on in amazement.

Kimberly: “I think I see someone.”

Those were the last words Kimberly Parks ever spoke. Seconds later, she was shot and killed. The blast sent Kelly into a panic.

Connor: “Kelly, run! Take cover!”

Kelly ran off into the night.

Connor ran up to Kimberly. He didn’t have time to examine her body. He reached for his gun, but was shot at. He looked up and saw a man emerge from the trees. He was dressed in all black, and was practically invisible. All Connor could see was his face. He was Korean, and looked no older than

Connor. He jumped out at Connor, yelling something in his native language. He took another shot, which Connor dodged. Connor's gun was too far away from him. The shooter was relentless. A bullet grazed Connor's left hand. He had no choice. He ran full speed at the shooter, grabbing his gun just before he got off another shot. He tackled him to the ground. The gun flew out of reach. The two soldiers rolled around, neither one gaining the upper hand. Connor mounted him, giving him the advantage. He punched him a few times. "This is for everything, you bastard!" Connor continuously hit him, until the shooter reversed. He started choking the life out of Connor. Obviously, the Korean had been trained. Connor was turning blue, and began to lose breath. Kelly ran back into sight and grabbed Connor's gun. She fired at the Korean, but missed. The Korean looked at Kelly and let go of Connor. He got up and made a run at her. Kelly did her best to outrun him, although he eventually caught up to her. Connor was weakened, but recovered enough to get to his feet and grab the other gun. He took off running, in pursuit of the Korean. He could hear Kelly screaming. She was nearby. He was able to pinpoint her, and ran up to her. She was not alone. The Korean now had his hands around her throat. Again, he was yelling something foreign. Connor didn't think twice. He fired the rifle, and watched as it pierced the Koreans cheek, sending him to the ground. Kelly watched the bullet fly right through his face, in one cheek and out the other. She continued breathing heavily. Connor ran up and grabbed her. They looked at the body for a second or two, before heading back towards the camp. They were both in a state of shock.

Connor: "I just killed someone!"

Kelly grabbed his hand.

Kelly: "You did the right thing Connor. He killed Kimberly, and was going to do the same to us."

Connor was crying. He fell to his knees. This entire ordeal had finally gotten to him.

Connor: "I never wanted any of this. A few days ago I was a slacking college student. Now I'm a murderer."

Kelly knelt down and hugged him. He had been strong for both her and Morgan. Now it was her turn to be strong for him.

Kelly: “Listen to me. You are not a murderer. You are a hero. Now you need to get up. We came here for a reason.”

Connor wiped his eyes and stood up.

Connor: “You’re right. Thank you Kelly. Let’s go.”

They ran over to Kimberly’s body. Connor grabbed her flashlight.

Connor: “There might be more Koreans. Look around for another gun.”

Kelly ran over to a picnic table. She grabbed a shotgun.

Kelly: “I think this will do.”

She loaded it. Her and Connor began walking north. They very well may have been the only two people still standing.

Kelly: “Morgan! Honey! Can you hear me?”

Kelly’s voice was almost gone.

Connor: “Morgan, it’s me. Are you here?”

They kept this up for several minutes.

Kelly: “We should split up. We’ll cover more ground that way.”

Connor shook his head no.

Connor: “I don’t think that’s a good idea.”

Kelly: “I’ll be fine. If we don’t, this will take forever. There could be another attack. We need to get Morgan, get in the helicopter and get out of here.”

Kelly was right. Connor knew this.

Connor: “Alright. I’ll go left, you go right. Be careful. Be ready to shoot! You’re a soldier now too.”

Kelly saluted him.

Kelly: “Yes sir. Good luck.”

Connor saluted back. He began walking to the left. He had so many things going on inside his head. He thought back to his time with Morgan. It was brief, but it seemed like it lasted forever. To think, the worst day in American History had also been the day Connor Riley fell in love.

Kelly was doing a lot of thinking as well. She thought about how she could have been a better mother. How she could have tried harder to make things work with Morgan’s father. Her stupid job. How she could have been around more. How much she hated herself for being away from Morgan when this all happened.

Connor was being negative. He knew he wasn’t going to find anyone alive. He walked passed corpse after corpse, not even bothering to look at them. He had seen enough dead bodies to last him a lifetime. A lifetime. How much longer was that? A few hours? He needed a rest. He sat down on a log. He hoped to see the Parson women running towards him, hand in hand. No such luck. Secretly, Connor was proud of himself. Aside from losing Morgan in Jefferson City, Connor had done everything right. Unfortunately, it wasn’t enough. He failed. He lied to Morgan. He promised to find her. For a split second, he contemplated putting the gun to his own head. He never got the chance to do it. The most unthinkable thing happened. She spoke to him.

Morgan: “So, what’s in your pockets right now?”

Connor looked around. He couldn’t see her. Her voice was cracking. She sounded weak. He looked behind him, then straight ahead. Nothing. Looked to his left. Still nothing. Finally, he looked over his right shoulder. There she was. Ten feet away. Connor had never moved so fast. He was over there in milliseconds. She was lying on her back. Her face was covered in dirt. She smiled at him.

Morgan: “I knew you’d find me. I prayed for it.”

He smiled back.

Connor: “I can’t believe it. It’s really you.”

Connor started crying.

Morgan: “It’s me.”

Morgan’s hair was covering her facial features. Connor pushed it to the side.

Connor: “Hi.”

Morgan: “Hi.”

Connor examined her. It was the most beautiful she’s ever looked.

Connor: “You were right you know. Your eyes really are sparkling blue.”

Morgan smiled at him. For the first time in days, Connor felt good. He was happy.

Connor: “How did you manage to survive all of this?”

Morgan looked into the sky.

Morgan: “God. I told you Connor. I have faith.”

He brushed his hand against her cheek.

Connor: “So do I. I’m here with your mom. She’s looking for you. I’ll bring you to her. I just want to a few minutes with you.”

Morgan: “I can’t go anywhere. I’m afraid to move.”

Connor: “Why?”

Morgan pointed to her stomach. Connor looked down. His mouth dropped. There was a hole in her stomach. She was shot. Her entire mid section was covered in blood. He looked up at her, with worrisome eyes.

Morgan: “There was an attack. They brought planes for us. Alex and I we’re going to fly together. I put her on the plane, and then they shot me.”

Connor looked at her in disbelief.

Morgan: “It’s funny. It doesn’t even hurt.”

Connor’s tears of joy quickly turned to sadness.

Morgan: “Did you take care of my mom?”

Connor: “She took care of me. She misses you so much.”

Morgan: “Tell her I love her.”

Morgan held Connor’s hand. She grimaced.

Morgan: “Ouch.”

Connor could tell by her face that she was in unbearable pain.

Morgan: “It’s bad.”

Connor took off his coat. He covered the wound. He grabbed her hand tightly.

Connor: “It’s not that bad. You’re gonna be fine.”

Morgan smiled. She remembered how strong he was.

Morgan: “Connor, be honest.”

He looked away. He was crying harder than he ever had before. He couldn’t lie to her.

Connor: “Okay.”

He stroked her hair, and looked her right in the face.

Connor: “You’re gonna die. And I don’t want you too.”

He collapsed. His head now rested on her chin. Morgan felt the warmth of his tears run down her neck. She was crying now.

Connor didn't know what else to do. He kept his position, crying. Morgan rubbed his head. She was slowly fading. Her eyes were barely open. She could no longer speak. She managed to say one word.

Morgan: "Kiss."

Connor rose from his position. He looked at her lips. They were pale. He caressed them. They were freezing cold. He lowered his head and kissed her. It was the ultimate feeling. It lasted six seconds. Six seconds he wouldn't trade for anything. His lips left hers, and he lifted his head.

She was dead.

Connor: "No."

The crying was overwhelming. His tears fell on Morgan's face like snowflakes. He took hold of her hands, and put his face directly over hers.

Connor: "I love you Morgan Parsons."

He looked up at the stars. He wiped his face and looked at her for the last time.

Connor: "I love you."

He stood up. He felt his heart drop. He walked away.

He thought about what he would say to Kelly. How her reaction would be worse than his. Maybe he shouldn't even tell her. He can say he never found her. He made it back it back to the helicopter. He sat and waited for Kelly.

Kelly made it back to the helicopter at 3:49 AM. As she approached Connor, she could tell by his demeanor that something was wrong. Connor was looking down. He heard her footsteps. He looked at her. She could tell by the look on his face.

Kelly: “No. No!”

Connor had tears on the sides of his eyes. His mind was blank. He couldn’t form an expression. Kelly crumbled.

Kelly: “No!”

She looked at Connor. He looked back.

Connor: “She’s dead.”

Kelly: “No.”

Kelly was sobbing. She started punching the ground below her. She pulled out strands of her hair.

Kelly: “Why?”

She got up. She was furious. She walked over to Connor. She started punching him repeatedly.

Kelly: “Why?”

She was beating him. She reared back and tried to throw a haymaker. Connor caught her hand and put his arms around her.

Connor: “I’m so sorry.”

They stood in the darkness, hugging for hours. There was nothing but death around them.

At 6:12 AM, Kelly took hold of Connor’s hand. They started walking. They had no idea where they were going. They were in no hurry. They eventually made it to the Alaskan Border. Before they crossed it, they stopped. They turned and stared into the blank night. “Goodbye” they both said as they left Alaska.

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Friday, August 26th, 2011

Washington, D.C.

President William Hill: "It has been over a week. The attacks are over. This country is still alive. North Korea has been depleted. We owe it all to our soldiers. I will not stand up here and make a grand speech. I will instead, hand it over to the real heroes. The men your children will read about in the history books. Mr. Wade, the stage is all yours."

Keith Wade: "The American military lost over 20,000 soldiers. I was one of the lucky ones. But really, how lucky am I? Sure, I'm alive. But I have to live with this for the rest of my life. We all do. We will be constantly reminded. We have to watch this country rebuild and grow. I'm not a speaker, I'm a soldier. I've been called a hero by many. Maybe I am. If I am a hero, then I'd like to know what is above hero status. Because that's what Connor Riley is. This kid risked his life to save many others. He had no military training. He became a soldier. A damn good one. He showed more courage and bravery than I thought was humanly possible. He should be the man up here. Thank you."

Connor Riley: "I don't know what to say to you. I wish I could stand here and tell you how patriotic I am. I'd be lying if I said I did what I did for America. I didn't. I did it for the love of my life. Her name was Morgan Parsons, and I watched her die in Anchorage. I'm standing here because of her. I'm alive because of her. I am who I am because of her. Everything-everyone we lost will forever be imbedded into my brain. We're not here today for the President, or the soldiers. We're certainly not here for me. We're here to commemorate the lives of those who have passed. This isn't for us, this is for them."

"This is for my brother, Carter Riley. He was seventeen years old. He was going to be a doctor."

"This is for Officer Kimberly Parks. She was the bravest soldier of them all."

"This is for ten year old Isaiah Wilson. All he wanted was a family."

"This is for my parents. I never found them. They almost grounded me. Had

they, I would have died with them. I love you mom. I love you dad."

"This is for Morgan Parsons. It was all for her. She deserves to be here in front of you. You all would have been mesmerized. She was stunning. She was the greatest person that ever lived."

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Monday, September 5th, 2011. 2:12 PM PST, Beaverton, OR

Kelly Parsons is watching the news. The woman that replaced her is speaking. Kelly rarely even has time to watch TV. She is usually busy running the "Morgan Parsons Center for Underprivileged Children." She doesn't go it alone. She gets plenty of assistance from her adopted daughter, Alexandra Charles. Kelly heard a knock at the door. "Alex honey, could you get that?" Kelly heard no response. She got up and walked to the front door. There was another knock. She opened the door and smiled.

Kelly: "Connor! Hi."

Connor: "Hey."

Kelly: "What are you doing here?"

Connor: "Well, Alex told me that she made the girl scouts. So I thought the three of us could sell some cookies. Door to door."

Kelly smiled.

Kelly: "As long as we don't end up in Hillsboro."

Alexandra ran down the stairs. The three survivors walked outside, into the fresh air. Alexandra walked in the middle, holding both Kelly and Connor's hands.

Alexandra: "It feels so good to finally have a family."

Kelly and Connor looked at each other proudly.

Kelly: "So Alex, you thinking about going to the Homecoming Dance?"

Alexandra smiled.

Alexandra: “Actually, I have plans that day.”

Kelly: “Really?”

Alexandra: “Yes. I’m staying home with you and Connor.”

Connor spoke up.

Connor: “That’s a Saturday. So I figured we’d do crossword puzzles and eat waffles.”

Kelly shook her head.

Kelly: “I think that’s exactly what Morgan would want.”

They all nodded in agreement as they walked into the Oregon sun.