

The Alert

The bright Saturday morning sunshine cascaded through Harley's breakfast nook. The partially cloudy sky masked enough sun for giant cloud shadows to dance across his backyard. Harley watched his eight-year-old golden retriever prance around the yard as he barked good morning to all the birds.

He picked up the hot cup of coffee steaming in its cup. His wife sat a stack of chocolate chip pancakes on the table. Their son gasped covering his hands over his mouth.

"Thank you, thank you, thank you!"

"You're welcome, Xavier," Vanessa said, winking at their son. She took her seat next to Harley. He cupped his wife's hand in his own and brought it to his lips. She giggled the same way she used to when they were in High School.

Xavier stabbed at the stack of pancakes in front of him. "Can we go see a movie today?"

Harley picked up his cup of coffee. "Not today. It's nice enough outside we should go to the dog park and let Turk play with other dogs."

A high pitched siren squealed from the bedroom. Harley's wife jolted out her chair. "Is that the emergency thing on my phone? I'll check it out."

Taking another glance outside, Harley's nose scrunched. *What could that possibly be about?*

His wife returned with her phone in hand. Her eyes glossed with sorrow and panic.

"Babe..."

She turned her screen toward Harley with the emergency notification still pulled up on her phone. Harley read it silently to himself. *An asteroid will make fatal impact with the earth in approximately four minutes.*

Harley's stomach coiled. With wide eyes he glanced up at this wife. Her lip quivered. He took her phone from her and re-read the message again. *Is this real? What if this is some kind of mistake- like that thing in Hawaii? What if it's not? How am I supposed to protect my family from this?*

"What's wrong, Mommy?" Xavier asked with a mouthful of pancakes.

Vanessa threw her hands over her eyes and broke into tears. Xavier put down his fork and glanced at his dad for help. *We only have four minutes to be alive together.*

Cupping Vanessa's face in his hands, Harley kissed the top of her head.

"I love you... You know what sounds good to me? A cuddle party in our bed. You guys go get comfy, I'm going to let in Turk."

The edges of his wife's mouth curled into a saddened smile. She reached for Xavier's hand and pulled him along into the bedroom. Harley sauntered to the back door, attempting to keep his calm. *No need to spend our last minutes in panic over something we can't control. I'd rather spend it in the arms of my family.*

The vibrant morning sky dipped into a yellow tint. Harley twisted the door open and Turk dashed inside. He locked the door behind him and smirked. *Guess there isn't any need for that.*

Harley took a deep breath and tried to lighten his expression as he walked to his bedroom. Turk jolted past him and dove onto the bed. Xavier's giggle made Harley's nose burn as he forced himself to hold back his tears.

His family shifted beneath the blankets to let him in. Vanessa curled onto his chest and their son laid his head between their linked arms. Harley took a deep breath.

"Xavier, I think we will go to the movies today, and get an ice cream afterwards."

Xavier's eyes brightened with excitement.

"Really?"

Biting his lip, Harley nodded.

"Yeah, buddy. I want to finish our cuddle party first."

His wife's soft lips pressed against his cheek. "I love you so much. Thank you for being my best friend and the world's best father."