



At the End of the World

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We're running as fast as possible. You're pulling ahead just a little and in the middle of fearing for our lives, I'm suddenly hit with the knowledge that you now run faster than I do. Maybe what they say about life-threatening situations is somewhat true, because even though my entire life is not flashing in front of my eyes, fifth grade sure is. The cement playground, the rusty red wired fences, and all of us in white and grey uniforms. If someone told me then that the girl who ran like a frail skipping duck, with her arms extended to the sides, would someday be outstripping me in a chase, I would ask them if they could share some of what they were on.

We had planned to take refuge in a two storey building that looked like it could have been a *moglai* restaurant roughly 20 paces ahead of us, when abruptly a large flaming boulder flies towards it and sets it ablaze. Our steps falter only slightly, before we're alerted by a distinct accelerating beeping coming from the very spot on which we are standing. We barely manage to jump behind a large pile of rocks in front of us, before the landmine we stepped on goes off, singeing the hairs on the back of our heads.

We let our heads fall against the rocks, and catch our breath. Panting, I look towards you. I can tell by your expression that at this moment my face is a reflection of yours, grime-covered and tear-stained. After a minute, I'm struck by a ridiculous thought, as I'm always prone to in your presence.

"Hey, would you rather die from an explosion, or be eaten by one of those creatures?" I ask, casual as ever, despite the shortness of breath that persists. You turn

your head towards me with pursed lips and the most stoic expression ever, staring at me with mortal disappointment. In the next second we both burst out laughing against each other. I always look at you when you laugh but today's feels significant, for obvious reasons. Your whole body shaking, your face contorted and your mouth wide open; it's a hilarious laugh. Somehow, mid laughter, I can also feel renewed tears streaming down my face.

After catching your breath a second time from all the laugh-crying, you say, "I think I would take the explosion. Quicker that way, right?"

"I dunno. At least if the creatures get us, they'll make a clean job of it and leave nothing behind," I say, and then after a second thought, "But then again, do I really want to be extraterrestrial poop? Hmm."

Another bout of laughter. This time accompanied by an exasperated shake of the head. The incredulity of the situation still hasn't set in. After all, it's only been a week since they arrived. Who knew our lives could be turned upside down so drastically in a mere seven days? We were celebrating your return from training. You were finally done, and after three long years apart, you would once again be only a phone call away. Just like old times. Just like fifth grade.

One minute we were eating at our favourite burger joint, discussing where we should go for dessert, and in the next, we heard the loudest bang. A blinding flash of light could be seen in the distance, and in the span of three seconds, everything seemed to turn to ashes. The next thing I remembered was you shaking me awake. We were covered in a pile of rubble, and were among the few fortunate people in the restaurant who had survived.

Then, through the fog created by the

explosion, they arose. There was not a doubt in my mind that whatever they were, "friendly" was not likely to be their MO. Unlike the other patrons of the restaurant, we decided to run immediately. Unlike the other patrons, we are still here.

A constant cloud has settled on Dhaka since their appearance, and the sky has remained a permanent blood red looming over the blue and black grounds with the brilliant orange of live flames scattered about. The atmosphere is not unlike standing in an upside down volcano at night.

There are splinters and drifting ash everywhere. A lonely Mr. Twister stares at me from a packet of chips littered on the floor beside us. We had not been in contact with anyone we knew since the blast. The aftershocks of the initial explosion, and those of the ones that followed, had taken down all communications' centres. From what we could gather, we were amongst a very small minority of people who had survived the light. And our numbers were dwindling drastically with time. The only other people we had seen were also doing what we were doing - running for their lives, escaping, trying to figure out their next move so they didn't lose yet another family member. As for our family, we hadn't been able to reach them. We didn't know. We didn't know if we wanted to know.

Over the last week our ears had grown highly attuned to picking up one particular sound over the uproar caused by collapsing buildings, exploding mines, and falling debris. We both hear it at the same time. A distinct clicking noise, that of their pincers, ringing cleanly over the ruckus surrounding us. Judging by the volume of the sound, this particular group is roughly two blocks away. We know that they can cover this distance in an instant with their twenty foot

long limbs, that is, if they get a hint of our presence here.

Our current spot is just too exposed. We need to find better shelter. I spot a barely standing local tea stall some distance away. It's not much, but at least it has a ceiling. I nudge you with my shoulder, and nod towards it.

"We should move," I whisper.

"Ok. Listen, we need to stay low. As low as possible. You have to crouch like this," you say, while demonstrating how we are about to shift our hiding spots, "and then go as fast as you can."

The sound is getting closer. We take a few deep preparatory breaths against our trusted pile of rocks.

"Man, I wish we weren't the kind of friends who told each other how much they loved each other frequently. I understand why people don't express their emotions too often now. It makes moments like these more dramatic. When two stoic friends finally tell each other how much they appreciate each other, just before leaping to their deaths, it's a real tear jerker. Just...better TV, you know," I ramble. We can never keep our mouths shut in stress situations.

"Like Sherlock and Watson in that train," you say, laughing through the tears. Your voice hitches.

"I'd totally be Sherlock," I say, my own voice getting caught mid sentence.

"I would be offended, but you're right. Plus, I'm the one with the defense training anyway," you say. The sound gets even louder. It's now or never.

I grab your hand again; squeeze it tightly one last time. You pull me up, and together we make a dash for safety.

For my best friend, at the end of the world, I'd trust you with my life.