

SCOTTY: A SHORT STORY

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Scotty tried to keep from being scared as his parents lead him through the front doors of the high school. They told him it would be alright, that there was nothing to be afraid of. It was hard, though, not being afraid, because they looked so scared. Everyone did. They lead Scotty down the hall, past more army guys like the ones outside, up the stairs to the second floor, past more kids with their parents, past an old man that looked like a janitor, to a hallway with lockers on both sides. Lots of people. A few of the army guys were up there. They had guns and were scaring people even more, even though they said they were there to help.

Scotty had seen lightning before they brought him to the school. It was nighttime, and the lightning lit up the clouds in the sky every few seconds. His parents told him not to look at it during the car ride over, that it was best to just keep his eyes closed. He could hear thunder, though his parents had put a CD in the stereo to try and cover it up. It didn't sound right, the thunder; there was too much of it. The lightning didn't look right either, turning the clouds orange and yellow, the colors of fire. He'd snuck a few peeks out the window, up at the sky, at the other cars on the road, at the army guys waving at them. Everyone looked scared except the army guys. They just looked mad.

Where was Jayden? He didn't want to ask. This is Jayden's school, Scotty thought, so maybe he'll be here. He sat on the floor of the hallway with his parents, their backs against the lockers. There were a lot of people in the hallway and the nearby classrooms, and it sounded like even more were further down the hall, around the corner and out of sight. Some he recognized; they were faces from all over their town. There's my teacher, he thought, standing over there in the

doorway of the nearest classroom. There's Julie, one of his classmates, with her mom sitting a few feet away. That old man, the janitor, who was calmly walking down the hall. He smiled at Scotty as he passed, even though he didn't look like he wanted to smile. It made Scotty shiver.

Scotty tried to think about something else. He thought about school, his own school. He wouldn't be in high school for a few years. Jayden started last year; Scotty remembered when they'd taken pictures on Jayden's first day. Scotty tried to figure out when his own first day of high school would be, but his mind couldn't work out the math.

More army guys came down the hall, telling everyone to stay calm. Didn't they know that they were only making them more scared? Scotty thought about his toys, playing with them outside in the driveway that afternoon. He had army guys, just like the ones there at the school, with tanks and trucks and big guns. They never fought each other; Scotty put them into battle against aliens, any toy he could find that didn't look human. The aliens always won, not like in the movies when the good guys always came through in the end. Scotty just couldn't believe that the aliens could lose, even though he himself seemed to always side with the good guys. More thunder from outside, this time closer and louder, and everyone got real quiet for a minute.

Was it aliens, outside, with the army guys? He'd made up his mind about the lightning, that it wasn't really lightning. Something else was going on. He listened for the thunder, and felt a sudden thud in the floor of the hallway. He realized that his parents were no longer next to him. He saw them at the windows in the classroom. He got up to join them.

Scotty could see the sky through the windows, in between the heads of all the people standing there. He pushed through the crowd for a better look. The sky looked like it was on fire, especially way off in the distance. There were big clouds of smoke way out there, rising up into the sky. Closer to them, down below, the army guys had parked their trucks out by the street, and he saw a bunch of them standing down in the parking lot, all watching the smoke and lightning.

One of the army guys behind them in the hallway yelled for everyone to get away from the window. Scotty turned to look at him as a super-bright light flashed outside. Some of the people screamed as Scotty looked back. Something big had exploded, way out there, throwing a huge fireball into the sky and a whole bunch of smaller chunks of fire in all directions. Scotty could see the houses way out there, clear as day in the light of the fireball, before they shattered into a million pieces. Someone grabbed him and pulled him away from the windows, and he was moving with the crowd, crushed against legs, shoved against the doorway, then out into the hall, where the crowd ran in both directions, leaving Scotty stumbling into the lockers, trying to find his parents. He caught a glimpse of the fiery sky through the windows, the scared faces of the people running away, and there was his father, who fell to his knees in front of Scotty and grabbed him, sheltering him, as the floor was violently knocked out from under them. Scotty felt a painful spray of wind and broken glass on his arms as he threw them around his father. They were both slammed into the lockers, hard, and Scotty felt a sudden pain in his head and ears, worse than anything, before everything went dark.

Scotty woke up on his back, daylight in his eyes. His body felt stiff. Everything hurt, especially his head. His ears were clogged; he couldn't hear anything. At first he couldn't remember what had happened. He turned his head, felt pain in his neck, brought his hands to his ears. It hurt to move, but he stirred slowly, rolling over, getting to his knees. There were people in the hall around him, his father next to him, all asleep. Pieces of the school were everywhere, covering some of the people. Lots of glass, papers, pieces of the desks. He could see wires and

pipes through holes in the ceiling as he stood up. Grayish-yellow light was coming through the windows.

He didn't make any sound when he walked. He rubbed his ears to try to clear them. It didn't work. He walked over to the windows. He stood looking for a while, at smoke, parts of houses in the street, fires still burning. Gray ash blew around in the breeze. He felt wetness on his cheeks. He was crying, but he couldn't hear himself. He wiped his eyes. Aliens did this, he thought. He saw some of the army guys, too far away to tell what they were doing, but they looked different. Different color uniforms. Their trucks were gone, the ones that were down in the parking lot.

Had to be aliens, Scotty thought. People wouldn't do this to themselves. He went back out into the hallway and sat down, waiting for the army guys to come find him.

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