

When The Sky Turned Black - Aidan, Year 11, ACT

Four months before the day the sky turned black, Jordan and Kaylee sat before their parents. Really, just Kaylee's parents. Jordan didn't have a father, and his mother hardly spoke. She hadn't for a while, not even to call him down to watch their favourite show on Friday evenings.

The only thing she had time for on Friday evenings now was a bottle and a glass. Kaylee's parents were the opposite – they talked too much, asked too many questions – but they were silent now. They glared across the table at Jordan and Kaylee, their eyes brimming with the words they couldn't say. Or maybe they were tears. He didn't know.

At one point Kaylee looked up, meeting her father's harsh gaze. She looked back down quickly. Her body shook with sobs, the exhales only just audible in the silence that lay like a dense fog between them. Jordan reached under the table and gave her leg a squeeze. She didn't respond.

Kaylee's distress came not from the repercussions of their mistake – she had come to terms with that, was content with it, even, although the same could not be said of him yet – but from the judgement of her parents. In a strange way, Jordan envied that. To have such a relationship that the opinion of his parents mattered to him, to have such a relationship where he *cared*, and they cared *back*.

A sudden bang on the table made Kaylee cry out, and Jordan drew his attention back to the moment, taking her hand in his. Kaylee's father's hand was balled, his eyes averted, jaw clenched. Kaylee's mother tried to touch his hand with hers, but he drew it back. He shoved his face in his hands, then dragged them down till they were free of his face. Then he pushed his chair out, stood, and left the room.

Jordan's mother, whose attention had been elsewhere, watched this unfold with a strange detached look. That was the one she wore often now.

Kaylee's mother stood as well, following and reaching out to her father simultaneously.

'David, just–' her voice trailed off.

Jordan turned to look at his mother. Were those tears in her eyes?

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A month before the day the sky turned dark, the baby arrived. Albeit an event tainted by the circumstances which had arranged it, it was joyous. For both of them. But still, at the back of his mind and nine months down the track, Jordan was still struggling to accept it as reality.

But he had time, didn't he? *They* did. To sort this out *together*. There was no pressure on them, not financially, not familiarly. Neither Kaylee nor Jordan had spoken to their parents since that night, although that didn't say much for Jordan. At least Kaylee's parents had tried to talk to her. She didn't like to talk about her parents, but neither did Jordan, so that was ok with him.

The nurse held up the little thing, all screams and blood and skin. That was a little piece of him, he thought. He turned to look at Kaylee, who beamed at it. And a little piece of her too.

The nurse offered it to him, to hold. Jordan took it with reluctance, but, he admitted, there was something in that face. Something special, something worth giving love to.

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The week before the day the sky turned dark, Jordan smiled at the child. A full, proper smile. He hadn't smiled like that for... months. It still didn't have a name, but there was no pressure.

They had time, and if they were going to do this whole thing – planned or not – they were going to do it right.

The day after leaving the hospital they had gone shopping together. All three of them. Jordan had picked out a nice pair of blue baby socks, complete with little puffy white clouds.

Jordan's life really seemed to be turning around. It wasn't just the baby, although that was a big part of it, but socially, occupationally. He'd been hired at a law firm, just around the street from their house – his name was due to be added onto the door tomorrow. And he'd made a friend, too. Their next door neighbour. Him and Kaylee had been invited to dinner on Friday and – as a family that had recently had a child themselves – they were going to give them some advice, and some spare clothes and toys.

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The day before the day the sky turned dark, they named the child. Eva. It had been Kaylee's decision. It meant 'life'. Kaylee had said it was perfect – reminiscent of their new life, away from their parents. Jordan had liked the name a lot more than Kaylee knew.

Friday had rolled around fast, and their new friends, Morrigan and Kane, had greeted them at their doorstep, their child Mallory in Morrigan's hands. It had been a nice dinner, and Morrigan and Kane had done nothing but share helpful stories of their own experiences that would surely come in handy. But there was something about it that made Jordan feel sick in his stomach.

Maybe it was that the food didn't sit well with him, but maybe it was that they were sitting in the exact same positions that they had been that night with Jordan and Kaylee's parents – Mallory the baby filling Jordan's mother's spot.

In the end, Morrigan and Kane forgot to get the spare clothes and toys, as did Kaylee, apparently. Jordan couldn't bring himself to remind them.

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The morning of the day the sky turned dark, the noises started.

The air hummed, and there was a low buzzing that sounded like there was a fly constantly beside his ear. Kaylee, trying unsuccessfully to feed Eva, asked what it was, but didn't seem worried. Jordan didn't like it.

Maybe that was the feeling from yesterday's dinner persisting.

It got louder throughout the day. Finally, while Kaylee and Jordan were playing with Eva, she asked him to find out what it was. Outside, the street was oddly quiet. Not a bird whistled, nor a dog barked, or child yelled. The only sound was the rustle of the leaves in the trees and the buzzing in the sky. Jordan watched for something, anything that would give him a hint to what the sound was. There was nothing.

Absolutely nothing.

In the middle of the street now, he realised how surreal everything was. It was Saturday. People should be out, doing things. People should be awake, alive. It felt, truly felt, that the world was asleep.

That the world was dead.

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The evening day the sky turned dark, Jordan and Kaylee sat at the dining table. The baby was asleep, much to their relief. It was evening, a cool summer wind blowing through the open window. The curtains floated from it, held by the gentle embrace of the wind. They sat in silence, although there was no one there to judge them.

Morrigan and Kane had messaged him, offering for him to come over and pick up the clothes and toys. He decided to just do it, and messaged back a quick grateful yes. It would have seemed odd had he declined.

It was similarly surreal tonight, the buzzing even louder. He raised his eyes to the sky, and finally the source of the sound was revealed.

Planes.

Just a couple, but they were large. They unnerved him, as did the silence, the wind. It felt as if the wind was being pushed towards him.

He hurried to Morigan and Kane's, eager to get back. As he went, there was a strange whistling sound, and he hastened his speed.

They opened the door, and he took the proffered tub of clothes, said a quick thanks and left without another word. They stood there, looking after him, still holding the other tub of toys. He was halfway across their lawn when the bomb hit. The half of their house closest to the bomb – the opposite side to Jordan – was shattered into shrapnel of wood and bricks and their livelihood. Jordan was flung back, dazed and dizzy. As soon as he could stand, he bolted inside, yelling for Kaylee first, then Eva too.

He found Kaylee unconscious but alive splayed against a wall. Blood poured from the back of her head, matting her hair. Outside, Jordan could hear other explosions. Other bombs. He rushed through the house frantically, calling, yelling, screaming. He could hear gunshots now. Artillery.

He ran through the house, crashing through doors and flames.

Finally, tears pouring from his eyes, he limped, burnt and scratched, out the front door.

Right there, right ahead of him, in the middle of the road, was a sock.

A single sock.

He cocked his head. Walked a little closer. The edges of his vision faded out, until all he could see was that sock.

It was blue.

Sounds collapsed. The smell of smoke wafted away.

There were little clouds on it, burnt and black.