

38 Minutes by Ava Gharib

Minute 0

Bzzz. Bzzz.

"Fiona, can you answer that?" Anne asked her daughter.

Fiona hesitated.

"NOW PLEASE!"

"I could do it," piped Leo. His blonde curls bounced as he jumped up.

Bzzz. Bzzz.

"Why thank you Leo!"

Leo walked past Fiona to open the door to their quarters. Suddenly, Fiona heard,

"PLANET NORTH KORA BALLISTIC MISSILE THREAT INBOUND TO SPACECRAFT 800," an emergency hologram declared. "SEEK EVACUATION IMMEDIATELY. THIS IS NOT A DRILL!" Fiona stepped into the hall, where she and Leo saw many more hologram warnings lighting up at every door down the hall.

"Mom, we have to evacuate the spacecraft!" Fiona called to her mom.

"What are you talking about?" Anne asked.

"There are emergency holograms everywhere telling everyone to evacuate," said Fiona.

"I think it's real," added Leo.

"We need to pack our stuff! Let's go," said Anne.

Leo and Fiona ran upstairs. All of Fiona's clothes were already packed because she planned to run away from time to time, so she didn't have much to do other than to grab her bag.

"ATTENTION ALL CITIZENS OF SPACECRAFT 800." Suddenly the speaker started blaring. "INBOUND BALLISTIC MISSILE THREAT. YOU HAVE 40 MINUTES TILL IMPACT."

Minute 5

The three ran out of their quarters and into the nearest three single-person Escape Pods. Anne got in one, Leo in another, and Fiona got in the third.

"Launch the pods, Mom!" Fiona yelled.

"I tried. It's broken," Anne said. A streak of worry slashed across her pale face.

Fiona jumped out of her pod. "What do you mean it's broken?"

"When I press the button, nothing happens."

Families all down the hall began noticing this, too.

Minute 8

"Go to the Evacuation Bunker!" Mr. Zimmerman, a kind, old man yelled as he hobbled towards the elevators. Many families started pushing and shoving others to get there. Fiona's heart was pounding. She dragged Leo and her mom as she pushed her way down to the Evacuation Bunker.

Just then, a young man grabbed Leo's arm and yanked him backwards.

"Leo!" Fiona yelled. She started going against the flow of the people to reach Leo, pulling her mom by her side. She saw the man who grabbed Leo. He was pushing more people while pulling his wife and two daughters to safety into the Evacuation Bunker. "Are you okay?" Fiona asked Leo. He nodded. "We better hurry if we want to get a space."

Many families were already in the Evacuation Bunker, but there was still enough room for the three of them to have their own bunk. As more people poured in, the Evacuation Bunker sent a warning.

"Warning. The Evacuation Bunker can only hold 250 persons. There is not enough oxygen for more." Of course, everyone ignored the warning and kept piling in. Someone closed the door that connected the Evacuation Bunker to the rest of the Spacecraft locking out many more people who were still clamoring to get inside. The tension rose. Would there be enough oxygen? The murmur grew among the people in the Evacuation Bunker.

Mr. Zimmerman slowly made his way to a platform in the middle of the Evacuation Bunker. "Settle down everyone!" The chatting instantly died down because of everyone's respect for the wise old

man. "From now on we are to take minimal breaths in order to maintain the oxygen as long as possible." Fiona, Anne, and Leo immediately held their breath.

Minute 14

A baby began to cry.

"Silence that baby!" a man with dark red hair shouted. "Crying takes up too much oxygen!"

Mr. Zimmerman ordered two men to send the baby out of the Evacuation Bunker.

"Wait! I can make her quiet!" the mother said. She began nursing the baby until she was quiet. The men retreated to their bunks.

Minute 20

'These may be the last minutes of my life,' Fiona thought. Fiona glanced at the iClock on the wall. Ten minutes had already passed since the hologram warning had been issued. Fiona's mind was eerily calm. She remembered how Leo would always get what he wanted, how she wanted to run away to a different family. Before today, those were the big challenges of her life. Now they seemed trivial.

Fiona looked around at everyone. They all had worried, fretful faces. Even Mr. Zimmerman clutched his cane tightly, a small bead of sweat trickling down his forehead. Mothers were holding their children, praying for the best. The children didn't dare make a peep after what happened with the mother and the baby.

Minute 27

Fiona and Leo were sitting on the top bunk while Anne lay on the bottom bunk rubbing her head. That's when Fiona noticed something. A family of a mother, father, and son were sitting below them, but the son wasn't holding his breath. He was nervous and hyperventilating. His brown bangs covered his eyes as if to help him go unnoticed.

"Slow your breath!"

"He's a cheat!"

"Get him out!"

Nasty comments were being thrown at the poor kid left and right.

"Emmet! Slow your breath!" the mom said. The kid shook his head, wide eyed with fear.

"This kid needs to be thrown out. He's wasting our oxygen," someone said.

"N-no. He can hold his breath," his father stammered. He whispered something to Emmet. Emmet shook his head. His lips moved, but no sound came out.

Mr. Zimmerman ordered two men to take Emmet out of the Evacuation Bunker.

"Wait - don't open the door to the spacecraft." Anne sat up. "There are thousands of people outside the door wanting to get in." The people in the Evacuation Bunker could hear the distant clawing and pounding on the other side of the metal door.

"Very well then," Mr. Zimmerman acknowledged. "Take him to outer space."

"No!!!" Emmet's parent's shrieked. Emmet fought and kicked at the men, but they paid no attention. They were headed toward the escape door. They opened the inner door of the airlock, put Emmet in, and closed the door. Emmet's silent shrieks could be seen as his face was pressed against the glass of the door. Then the men opened the outer door. Emmet's body instantly froze and began drifting into outer space.

Just then, a hologram lit up on the center platform.

Minute 38

"Sorry, for the confusion, fellow members of Spacecraft 800. The warning was a mistake. You may now return to the spacecraft..." Everyone stared at each other. For 38 minutes they had been wondering whether or not they would live. 38 minutes that was forever seared in their minds.

After a few moments of silence, the wife of the young man who grabbed Leo started to cheer, followed by others. Calmly, kindly, and in single file, everyone returned to the spacecraft.

"You may now return to the spacecraft and resume your lives," commanded the hologram. Everyone did as they were told, except for Fiona. Somehow, there was no returning to her former life.

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Note: The text below is a slightly revised version of this story and is what I excerpted from with the author on 4/28.

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"Fiona, could you answer that?" Anne asked her daughter.

Fiona hesitated.

"Now, please!"

"I could do it," piped Leo. His blonde curls bounced as he jumped up.

Bzzz. Bzzz.

"Why thank you Leo!" Anne praised. Fiona rolled her eyes.

Leo pressed the button to open their door. "PLANET NORTH KORA BALLISTIC MISSILE THREAT INBOUND TO SPACECRAFT 800," an emergency hologram declared. "SEEK EVACUATION IMMEDIATELY. THIS IS NOT A DRILL!" Fiona stepped into the hall, where she and Leo saw many more hologram warnings lighting up at every door.

"Mom, we have to evacuate the spacecraft!" Fiona called to her mom.

"What are you talking about?" Anne asked.

"There are emergency holograms everywhere telling everyone to evacuate," said Fiona.

"I think it's real," added Leo.

"We need to pack our stuff! Let's go," said Anne.

Leo and Fiona ran upstairs. All of Fiona's clothes were already packed because she planned to run away from time to time, so she didn't have much to do other than to grab her bag.

"ATTENTION ALL CITIZENS OF SPACECRAFT 800." Suddenly the speaker started blaring. "INBOUND BALLISTIC MISSILE THREAT. YOU HAVE 40 MINUTES TILL IMPACT."

Minute 5

Anne, Fiona and Leo ran out of their quarters and into the nearest single-person Escape Pods. Anne got in one, Leo in another, and Fiona got in the third. After a minute of impatient waiting, Fiona stuck her head out of her pod to see the cause of the delay.

"Launch the pods, Mom!"

"I'm trying. It's broken," Anne said. A streak of worry slashed across her pale face.

Fiona jumped out of her pod. "What do you mean it's broken?"

"When I press the button, nothing happens."

Families all down the hall began noticing this, as well.

Minute 8

"The escape pods are broken! Everyone, go to the Evacuation Bunker!" Mr. Zimmerman, a kind, old man yelled as he hobbled towards the elevators. Many families started rushing towards the Bunker. Fiona's heart was pounding. She held on tight to Leo and her mom as she pushed her way down to the Evacuation Bunker.

Just then, a young man with red hair grabbed Leo's arm and yanked him backwards.

"Leo!" Anne yelled. With Fiona by her side, Anne pushed against the flow of the people to reach Leo.

Fiona looked up to see the red-haired man as he pushed more people aside to pull his wife and two daughters to safety into the Evacuation Bunker.

"Are you okay?" Fiona asked Leo. He nodded.

"We better hurry if we want to get a space in the Bunker," said Anne.

Many families were already inside the Evacuation Bunker, but there was still enough room for the three of them to have their own bunk. As more people poured in, the Evacuation Bunker sent a warning.

"Warning. The Evacuation Bunker can only hold 500 persons. There is not enough oxygen for more." Of course, everyone ignored the warning and kept piling in. Finally, someone closed the door that connected the Evacuation Bunker to the rest of the Spacecraft locking out many more people who were still clamoring to get inside. The tension rose. Would there be enough oxygen? The murmur grew among the people in the Bunker.

Mr. Zimmerman slowly made his way to a platform in the middle of the Evacuation Bunker. "Settle down everyone!" The chattering instantly died down because of everyone's respect for the wise old man. "From now on we are to take minimal breaths in order to maintain the oxygen as long as possible." Fiona, Anne, and Leo immediately held their breath.

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"Silence that baby!" the man with red hair shouted. "Crying takes up too much oxygen!"

Mr. Zimmerman ordered two men to send the baby out of the Evacuation Bunker.

"Wait! I can make her quiet!" the mother said. She began nursing the baby until she was quiet. The men retreated to their bunks.

Minute 20

'These may be the last minutes of my life,' Fiona thought. She glanced at the clock on the wall. Twenty minutes had already elapsed since the hologram warning had been issued. Fiona's mind was eerily calm. She was remembering her frustrations with her Mom, how she felt Leo was always favored, how she wanted to run away to a different family sometimes. Before today, those were the big challenges of her life. Now they seemed trivial.

Fiona looked around at everyone. They all had worried, fretful faces. Even Mr. Zimmerman clutched his cane tightly, a small bead of sweat trickling down his forehead. Mothers were holding their children, praying for the best. The children didn't dare make a sound after the incident with the mother and the baby.

Minute 27

Fiona and Leo were sitting on the top bunk while Anne lay on the bottom bunk rubbing her head. That's when Fiona noticed it. A family of a mother, father, and son were sitting across from them; the son was hyperventilating. His brown bangs covered his eyes as if to help him go unnoticed.

Other people began staring at the boy, too.

"Emmet, slow your breath!" the mom whisper-commanded. Emmet shook his head wide-eyed with fear.

"This kid needs to be thrown out. He's wasting our oxygen," someone said.

"N-no. He can slow his breathing," his father stammered. He whispered something to Emmet. Emmet shook his head. His lips moved, but no sound came out.

Mr. Zimmerman ordered two men to take Emmet out of the Evacuation Bunker.

"Wait - don't open the door to the spacecraft." Anne said, sitting up. "There are hundreds of people outside the door wanting to get in." The people in the Evacuation Bunker could hear the distant clawing and pounding on the other side of the metal door. Fiona looked at her mother, puzzled. Had she said this to save Emmet?

"Very well then," Mr. Zimmerman acknowledged. "Take him to the airlock."

"No!!!" Emmet's parent's shrieked. Emmet fought and kicked at the men, but they paid no attention. They were headed toward the escape door. The two men opened the inner door of the airlock, put Emmet inside, and closed the door. Emmet's silent shrieks could be seen, as his face was pressed against the glass of the door. Then the men opened the outer door. Emmet's body instantly froze and began drifting into outer space.

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After a few moments of silence, the wife of the red-haired man started to cheer, followed by others. Calmly, politely, and in single file, everyone returned to the spacecraft. Emmet's mother's fingers lingered on the glass door of the airlock, and then she too returned to the spacecraft.

"You may now return to the spacecraft and resume your lives," commanded the hologram. Everyone did as they were told, everyone except for Fiona. Somehow, there was no returning to her former life.