

Ouachita Baptist University

## Scholarly Commons @ Ouachita

---

Honors Theses

Carl Goodson Honors Program

---

4-20-2024

### The Survivors

Abigale Ralston

Follow this and additional works at: [https://scholarlycommons.obu.edu/honors\\_theses](https://scholarlycommons.obu.edu/honors_theses)



Part of the [Children's and Young Adult Literature Commons](#), and the [Fiction Commons](#)

---

# SENIOR THESIS APPROVAL

This Honors thesis entitled

**“The Survivors”**

written by

**Abigale Ralston**

and submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for completion of  
the Carl Goodson Honors Program  
meets the criteria for acceptance  
and has been approved by the undersigned readers.

---

Dr. Benjamin Utter, Thesis Director

---

Dr. Tim Knight, Second Reader

---

Dr. Jason Doroga, Third Reader

---

Dr. Barbara Pemberton, Honors Program Director

April 22, 2024

### Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge many people who helped me during the process of writing this novella. I would like to thank my mother, father, and sister, Susannah, Christopher, and Hope Ralston, and my friends, who supported me during this process. I would also like to thank those who edited my book and helped me make it the best it could be. The people involved in editing my novella include Dr. Utter, my thesis director, Dr. Knight, my second reader, and Dr. Doroga, my third reader. I would also like to thank Dr. Pemberton, the director of the Carl Goodson Honors Program, who helped make this possible.

## Table of Contents

Preface Page 4

Monday, November 15, 2286 Page 5

Tuesday, November 16, 2286 Page 14

Wednesday, November 17, 2286 Page 18

Thursday, November 18, 2286 Page 21

Friday, November 19, 2286 Page 33

Saturday, November 20, 2286 Page 52

Sunday, November 21, 2286 Page 61

Wednesday, December 1, 2286 Page 66

## Preface

I have wanted to write a novella for several years. I saw the requirement for a thesis as an opportunity to fulfill this dream. After I got approval to write a novella as my thesis, I needed to come up with an idea for the novella. I got my inspiration for this novella from many dystopian novels I have read. The primary novels that inspired me were in the Hunger Games trilogy by Suzanne Collins.

Coming up with the idea for a novella was a difficult process for me. I do not have a background in creative writing, so this was a new process for me. The idea finally came to mind as I was taking care of a neighbor's dog over the summer. I was sitting on the back patio when the idea hit me. I excitedly took notes before I forgot about the idea. Once I had an idea, I was finally able to start the novella. I worked on it a lot over the summer. I wrote multiple times a week and generally added 500 to 1000 words each time. Starting this novella over the summer gave me a good foundation for continuing the book during the semester.

I experienced more obstacles during the writing of this book. The primary obstacle was writer's block. I would have a difficult time coming up with ideas of how I could continue the book. Thankfully, I came up with ideas to continue the book, but it did take a while. The hardest part of the book to write was the end. I was very excited when I had an idea and was able to finish the novella.

Writing this novella was one of the most difficult projects during my time here at Ouachita. This project required a lot of time and dedication. I also had to use skills that I had not used before, such as creative writing. Despite the difficulties, I am grateful I had the opportunity to write this novella and fulfill a dream I have had for several years.

I have learned many things about myself and my abilities during the writing of this novella. I have gained self confidence. I was able to prove to myself that I could complete difficult projects. I learned how to incorporate aspects of my life into the novella itself. The abrupt changes are inspired by abrupt changes in my life. Some examples of these abrupt changes include the COVID-19 virus that shut down the world, the transition from high school to college, and the move to a new state for college.

I hope that this novella brings joy to those who read it, inspires others to write, and shows others that they can fulfill their dreams.

**Monday, November 15, 2286**

Darkness. Screams. Fear. The Professor is attempting to gain everyone's attention. "Hello everyone! This is just a test. The Council wanted to see how everyone would react in an emergency situation, such as a power outage. As we now know, this class did not react well. In situations like this, we need to remain calm, stay where we are, and await further instructions." Most of my classmates stop and listen to what the Professor, Dr. Hansen, is saying. Dr. Hansen is one of the Professors at the Education Compartment. Dr. Hansen can be very strict, but it is known among students that she cares, so many students respect her. I am usually one of these students, but right now, I can't believe what she is saying. Does she truly believe that this power outage is a "drill?" Is she saying what the Council is telling her to say? Why are these events happening? This is the second... As suddenly as they went off, the lights came back on. Then, there is an announcement over the intercom.

"Hello Citizens. Do not worry, nothing is wrong with the Ship, this was merely a drill to see how people will react. This drill did not go well. There was far too much chaos and fear. No one was following directions. As a result of this, a Pamphlet containing instructions of what to do during an emergency will be dropped off at each apartment. You will be expected to know this information thoroughly, as you will be randomly quizzed by officials tomorrow as they walk about the ship. If you get any information wrong, you will get written up. Remember, if you get written up three times, a punishment will be issued. Thank you for your cooperation, resume your roles as citizens, and have a good rest of the day."

Well, I suppose they aren't canceling School for the rest of the day. The Professor begins to get everyone's attention and continues the lecture about history. Finally, the day ends. I grab my bag, and walk down the maze-like hallways to my Compartment, Compartment C.

My apologies. You are likely confused. You do not know what has happened that has led the human race to this point, what is happening to us now, or what will happen in the future. Currently, we are in the year 2286. According to books in Storage, and what we have been told, the human race used to live on a blue planet called Earth. Apparently, humans had lived there for thousands of years. There were also other living things. Such as things called "cows" or "snakes." They look so interesting in books. I've never seen one in person. Anyway, I'm getting sidetracked. Earth used to be a really pretty place. There were plenty of resources for people to live off of, and many people lived well there.

Things changed, though, which is what led the human race to where we are now. According to what we have been told, things were tense between nations in the late 21st century. While things were tense, no one did anything that could endanger the human race, at least for a while. That changed on December 2, 2086. On this day, around 8 in the

morning, an unknown country launched a nuclear weapon. When the bomb detonated, millions of people were killed from the force of the explosion. The nation that was hit, also unknown, retaliated, launching their nuclear weapons. Then, allies got involved, and every nation had launched very deadly weapons at each other. Some nations tried to stay out of the conflict, later known as World War Three, but after they were attacked, they also had to get involved. The launching of all of the nuclear bombs on the planet almost led to the extinction of the human race. Before the war, there were about 10 billion people on Earth. After all of the bombs went off, only 50,000 people were left.

You may be wondering how these 50,000 people survived. Many of these people were top generals or people who held high positions in the military. Other people who survived also included very wealthy people, who, in exchange for donating millions of dollars to building this Ship, were promised a spot on the Ship if it was ever needed. The rest of the people on the Ship, a small minority, were people who happened to be at the right place at the right time. These people were near the area of the Ship when the disaster occurred, and were allowed to come. The survival of these people was the only thing that kept the human species from going extinct. Apparently, many animals also came on the Ship, but no one other than the Council knows where they are. There are many things the Council doesn't tell us, but more on that later.

Ok, back to the present. So what I just described was how the human race got to be in this situation. Now, I am trying to figure out not only my situation, but also the situation for the rest of us on the Ship. So, at the beginning of this story, there was a power outage. I imagine many would refute my claims by confirming what the Council stated, which was that the "outage" was only a "drill." I'll let you in on a little secret. I do not believe anything the Council says about this situation. You may be asking why I have to keep my opposition a secret. Well, anyone who openly opposes or criticizes the Council is punished. No one really knows what it means when someone is punished. All we know is that when someone is punished, they disappear and are never seen again.

I don't believe that these power outages are "drills," as the Council says. I think something is wrong with the Ship. I don't know what it is though, or how to prove that something is wrong. These outages are becoming too frequent and are lasting too long to merely be "drills." Surely, as leaders of the Citizens of the Ship, they would have more things to do than having these "drills" three or more times a week. I think the Council is trying to cover something up. Maybe there is a problem with the Ship that could lead to the extinction of the human race. I'll have to think about this more. Maybe my friends, Paige and Leon, could help me out. I can trust them with my life. Yes, then we could figure out...

My thoughts are interrupted by a knock at the door. I jump to my feet. Perhaps one of them is here. I'm disappointed when I open the door to see a Governor. I stand there, paralyzed by fear. Has the Council found out about my opposition? Is this person going to

take me away? The Governor must see the panicked expression on my face. He looks at me, confused.

“Why are you so panicked? Are you hiding anything?” he asks gruffly.

“Of course not! I was just, um,” I yell at myself internally to think of something.

“Well?”

“I was just surprised that I had the honor of having a Governor at my doorstep. I apologize for the shocked look I must have given you.” Yes, I’m exaggerating a bit, but my life is at stake here! I move my black hair out of my face. I need to look as professional as possible.

The Governor gives me a confused look. I don’t think he is buying it. I hope he does. The governor coughs and looks at his bag. He retrieves the Pamphlet. “Kid, I was only here to give you the Pamphlet. Thank you for your respect, I guess? Well, anyway, remember to study that well tonight. Members of the Council and the Governors will be walking around and may quiz you at any time. You may avoid this, but I wouldn’t take the chance if I were you.” He checks his watch, nods his head, looks at me, and then walks away. I close the door and sigh.

Hours have passed. I have studied the Pamphlet until I deem that I am ready. “Well,” I think to myself, “I did what I could. Hopefully this is enough.”

The next day, as I am walking to class. I am stopped by the same Governor that delivered my Pamphlet yesterday. At 6’ 6" tall, he is much taller than I am. He has darker skin, short, black hair, and wears the characteristic red robe that sets the Governors apart from the average Citizen. All of us Citizens have to wear these plain gray uniforms. Gray shirt, gray pants, gray shoes, even gray socks. I am envious of the colors that people with higher rankings get to wear. I wish I could wear those colors but I don’t want the position. The Governor coughs, startling me from my thoughts. I hope he hasn’t been standing there for too long.

“Excuse me, Mr. Tenor. I hope you can come to this conversation. I don’t have all day to wait while you are deep in your thoughts.”

Well, I guess he has been standing here for a while, and he doesn’t seem happy about it. Great. I’ve offended a Governor.

“Hello Governor. I apologize for being distracted. I was merely reviewing everything I studied in the Pamphlet we received last night.”

The Governor gives me a skeptical look. I don’t think he believes me.

“Well, Mr. Tenor, let’s see how well you were able to study.”

Oh boy, here we go. I hope I get this question correct.

“Mr. Tenor, this question will have four choices.”

Choices? This is odd. I’ll have to keep track.

“As I am sure you are aware, we had a power outage drill yesterday. As you also know, no one in your class reacted appropriately. I could hear the screaming from a long distance away. When you are confronted with another power outage, what do you do? Do



you A., stay where you are, B., Yell and cause chaos, or C., Proceed to the emergency hallways and wait for further instructions.”

“Governor, the correct answer would be C.”

The Governor looks at me and gives me an approving nod.

“Well done. You have answered this question correctly. I will ask you one more question. If you get this answer correct. I will let the other members know that you have demonstrated your knowledge of the Pamphlet, and you will not be quizzed by anyone else.”

Ok, good. Everything is going well.

“Ok, Mr. Tenor. You have answered your first question correctly. As I just stated, all you need to do is to answer one more question. What color are the letters at the front of the Pamphlet?”

What? Not a question I was expecting. Come on, think!

“The letters were red. I remember this because I enjoyed seeing some colors.”

For some context, colors are a rarity in the Ship. Except for gray. Along with our clothing, for both males and females, the walls are gray, the ceilings are gray, the floors are gray, everything is gray except for the food we eat, the pictures we see in books, and the robes the Council members wear. There aren’t even different shades of gray, the Ship sometimes seems like a lot of square panels that were put together. There aren’t even windows. I can’t believe millions of dollars were spent to build this.

“Mr. Tenor, that answer is correct. I suppose it was nice to see some colors on the ship. Colors are very pretty. I do wish that we could see more colors. Well, good job. I will tell the other members that you do not need to be quizzed. Congratulations. You may now continue to head to class. If you are late, inform your Professor about what happened, and you will be allowed in. Have a nice day.”

The Governor turns and walks to another person, probably to also quiz them about the Pamphlet. I decide to stay and see how this person will do. As I watch, it appears that the person is not doing well. The Governor has asked a question, and you can tell the person is nervous. The person is looking at the floor, trying to think of the answer. I wish I could help. Then, the Governor gives them an approving nod, and walks away, probably to someone else. I give the person a thumbs up, and walk to class.

I look at the clock on the wall. It is 7:57 a.m. I begin to fast walk to the Education Center. I would run, as the Center is not very close, but running is not allowed here, except for during Work. I hope I make it. I wonder if the late pass the Governor gave me would still be valid since I waited and watched him talk to another person. 7:58. 7:59. 8:00. I sit at my desk as the bell rings. The Professor walks into the classroom and asks if anyone has been talked to today. There are about 100 people in the class. About 70 people, including myself, raise their hands.

“How did everyone do? Did everyone pass?”

We all nod our heads. The rest of the 30 students sit there quietly. I think they are nervous. I decided to try to calm their fears. I raised my hand.

“Yes, Mr. Tenor, do you have something to say?”

“Yes, Professor.” I turn to the class. “Don’t worry too much about the Pamphlet. If you have studied, and have paid attention to what people have said over the intercom, you should be fine.”

“Thank you for talking, Mr. Tenor. Now, class, we are going to talk more about history. Please open your textbooks. We will be talking about the Industrial Revolution.”

Finally, this class is done. The way School works is that we only have one class a day, each day of the week. They can be so boring. The reason we only have one class a day is for a couple of reasons. One reason is that each class is relatively long. Each class is about 4 hours. Another reason is because we have other things that we need to do. People need to take care of the Ship, after all.

Other than School, there are a lot of things that us Citizens need to do. The duties of each person are different for each age group. Even the youngest kids have responsibilities, even if limited. For me, a 17 year old male, I have a lot of responsibilities. One of them is to complete my education. Everyone has to learn. We have to learn about history, math, english, reading, and more. I honestly do not like this responsibility, but I guess everyone has to do it, so there is no getting out of it.

Here is what my daily schedule looks like. Everyone has to wake up at 7 am. You may be wondering how this is monitored. Well, we have to complete a mini survey every day on our Tablets. It is pretty simple. After waking up, we receive our daily schedule. I don’t know why we get our schedules every day. It is always the same. After waking-up, we have 45 minutes (7:00-7:45) for Breakfast. After this, we have classes from 8 am to 12 pm. Then, we have Lunch from 12 pm to 12:45 pm. After Lunch, we have to go to Work. Work is different for all age groups. For people in my age group, we have to exercise. This may seem odd to you, but exercise is part of how we get energy to power the Ship.

Ok, I know this seems really odd. Before I finish talking about my daily schedule, I will explain how this way of getting energy works. So, this is not the only way of energy. It would be almost impossible. The main way we get our energy for the Ship is from solar energy. However, it is not enough. We don’t have enough solar panels. To get the rest of the energy, we exercise. There is some exercise equipment, such as bikes and treadmills that produce energy. The people who built the Ship came up with a way for the energy we generate by exercising to go directly to the Ship. We, kids and young adults, have to exercise three hours a day. There are probably about 17,000 of us. That helps us to produce the rest of the energy needed to keep the Ship running, which keeps the human species alive. I wish the people who built the Ship came up with a better way to get energy, but I suppose the alternative, which means not existing, is worse.

Now that I have explained the importance of exercise for us, I can continue to talk about the rest of my schedule. As I explained, we have Breakfast, School, and Lunch.

Then, we have Work. Work lasts from 1 pm to 4 pm. After this, we get 30 minutes to clean up. At 4:30 pm, we have time to study until 6 pm. Next, we have dinner from 6 pm to 6:30 pm. Then, we have to clean for an hour, from 6:30 pm to 7:30 pm. Someone has to keep the Ship clean, and it is very large, so everyone has to help. Then, there is Maintenance from 7:30 pm to 8:30 pm. This means that we make sure the ship is repaired and kept up. Next, we have Free Time, which is time that we can use to relax, hang out with friends, etc., from 8:30 pm to 9:30 pm. This isn't a lot of time, but any amount of time where you can do whatever you want, within reason, is nice. Everyone looks forward to it. Then we have to be in bed with lights out at 10 pm.

Like I said, most days are the same. We have Wake-Up, Breakfast, School, etc. Lately, I have begun to notice abnormal things happening. This is worrying. The Council seems to have an emphasis on keeping things normal, so something must be going on. As you saw when you first started this story, there was a power outage. These are starting to become more common. Actually, just as I was talking to you, another outage occurred. This one was shorter, only lasting a few minutes, but it was still unsettling to have two outages in two days. Previously, there would be one every month or so. I wonder if the Ship is failing. What could happen if... I shake those thoughts out of my head. I have a busy day ahead of me and I need to stay focused.

After I completed class and had Lunch, I headed to Work with my friends. When the Council first implemented this exercise as a way to get energy, we were not allowed to choose who to work next to. I think it was feared that people would talk to each other and get distracted if they sat with their friends. However, for an unknown reason, the Council got rid of that rule and we can now sit with anyone. I'm grateful for the change. As my friends, Leon and Paige, walk with me, we are silent, probably lost in our own thoughts. After a couple of minutes, Paige can no longer stand the silence, and starts a conversation.

"That test was awful, wasn't it?"

The test is why I had a busy day today. We don't have them very often, so they are a big deal. They are very rigorous and they count for a lot of our grade. If you fail one exam, it is nearly impossible to recover your grade. That is why I had to stay focused. I'm lost in my thoughts again. Paige is looking at the both of us, waiting for a response.

"Are you guys going to say anything? I know we are tired but I still want to talk with my friends."

Leon and I look at each other. We have missed talking as a friend group. Lately, all of our Free Time has been devoted to studying for the exam today. The exam is over, though, so I guess it would be nice to start talking to my friends again. I decided to respond.

"I honestly don't think it was too bad. Except for the essay part. I'm terrible with those."

Leon laughs a bit. As he laughs, his brown curls bounce up and down.

“Yeah, you are, but you are much better at the other parts of the exam than the rest of us.”

Paige rolls her blue eyes at us and shakes her head. Her red hair gets in her face and she puts her hair back into a braid. “Guys, we are here. We need to get our assignments.”

She pulls up the assignment and looks up our names in the database.

“Ok, we are assigned to the exercise bikes today.”

Well, that is much better than the treadmills. I hate running. We sign in, and head to the bikes. However, I see something unsettling. There is another issue. Some of the bikes have “out of order” signs on them. This is not good. These bikes are part of how we get the energy to power the Ship. If more of these break, who knows what will happen.

The three of us simply move over to functional bikes. Leon and Paige are talking. They don’t seem to realize how bad this situation could be.

“Earth to Alex, what is going on? You have been lost in your thoughts a lot lately. Even more than normal.”

I look up. Leon is staring at me. His brown eyes stare at me in concern. I think the concern is for me though, instead of the possible more serious situation at hand.

“Sorry, I’ve been worrying about things.” I lower my voice to a whisper. “Guys, I think something is wrong with the Ship. I don’t want to talk about it now, people of the Council may be here, but maybe we can talk during Free Time. After all, we won’t have to study tonight.”

Paige and Leon look at me again. Paige decides to speak up.

“I agree, I think something is up. We need to talk elsewhere though, like you said. A Council member is here.”

The Council member walks close to us. He appears to be examining the bike. He walks around it. He takes notice of the sign, and sighs. Then he pulls up his Tablet and appears to call maintenance. Hopefully they can fix it. I look over at my friends. They are seeing what is happening too. Unexpectedly, the Council member turns to us.

“Hello. I see that you have noticed this bike as well. Did you happen to see it when it malfunctioned? Was someone involved? If someone was involved in the damage to this bike, we need to know so that the person can be punished.”

Leon speaks up.

“My apologies sir. The sign was already on it when we got here.”

The Council member looks at us.

“Very well. If you notice anything, or have any information about what may have happened, please let us know.”

We nod our heads. Even a few people around us nod, even though they were not initially involved in the solution. They are probably a bit scared too, and want to show their cooperation.

The rest of Work goes by without any issues. No more bikes malfunction, and we meet our quota for the energy that needs to be produced. After Work, we leave and go

back to our Compartments to clean up. Then, the rest of the day goes relatively normal. I say relatively because the day seems to be going by very slowly. I guess I am just focusing on the conversation I will be having with my friends later. Finally, 8:30 comes, and we have Free Time. We had decided to meet in my apartment, so I waited for my friends to arrive. After a couple of minutes, they came.

“Hey guys, what’s up?”

Paige and Leon both stare at me. Paige answers my question first.

“Alex, we should be asking you that question. You have been acting so weird lately. You are lost in your thoughts even more than usual, and that is saying something. You also seem to want to talk to us about something, but you are too scared to talk about it in the open. What is going on with you?”

Fair question. I do owe them an explanation.

“Ok. I’ll explain everything. Just keep your voices down.”

My friends just stare at me.

“Ok.” Paige says. “Now, tell us what is going on. I will not take no for an answer.”

I decide that it is safe to talk to them. They are my best friends, and it would be nice to get someone else’s opinion on what I have been thinking about.

“I think something is seriously wrong with the Ship. Have you not noticed that stuff has been weird lately? For example, think about the power outages that have been happening. A couple of years ago, outages were unheard of. However, now they are becoming relatively common. Also, more and more bikes have started to malfunction, which has led to less energy being produced.”

Once I am done talking my friends look at me. Then, Leon speaks up.

“I suppose things have been weird. Isn’t it possible that these things are just normal, but we haven’t noticed them before?”

Paige stares at Leon in disbelief.

“Leon, I could see how we could miss seeing the malfunctioning equipment. It is a large room, and we don’t see all of the equipment at once. The thought of missing complete power outages is ridiculous. There is no way we could have missed those. Also, now that I think about it, have you noticed how our superiors have been acting odd lately?”

“Paige, don’t they always act odd?”

Paige sighs.

“Leon, people here do act odd, but I feel like something is different. Here is an example. When there was the “drill,” did you see how worried the Professor was? Yes, all of us were worried, but aren’t our superiors supposed to stay calm when everyone is panicking? Also, I’ve heard that the superiors are warned when “drills” are supposed to occur. They are warned so that they can plan their lectures around the “drills.” If the “drill” was real, I believe that the Professor should have known, and if she had known, I don’t think she would have been as scared as we were. Also, the Council members have

been acting odd too. They have seemed to be more defensive than normal when people ask questions. Even if it is a normal or harmless question, the Council members seem to want to answer the question, or avoid it, and get out of the conversation as soon as possible.”

Paige has stated many good points. However, I noticed that she emphasized that she does not believe the outage was a “drill” by using the tone of her voice. It is a relief to know that I am not the only one who has doubts. Perhaps I am not crazy about what I have been thinking about lately. Maybe something bigger is going on.

“Paige. You also think the “drill” was a cover-up to avoid admitting the occurrence of an actual outage? I thought I was the only one.”

Paige just looks at me.

“Of course I think the “drill” was a cover up. Do you really think that people believe that it is a “drill?” In fact, I’ve heard whispers from others that they also think the “drill” was an actual outage.”

“Paige, if people, many people if what you are saying is correct, don’t think that the “drill” was a drill, why don’t they say something? If more people talk about the outage, maybe people would be brave enough to talk to the Council about it, and offer a solution.”

Leon looks at the two of us, and holds his head in his hands.

“Are you guys crazy? That sounds like a terrible idea. Don’t you guys remember Tommy?”

They fall silent. Paige speaks up.

“Fair point.”

“You don’t think we should try to do something?”

“Paige, I don’t want you to get punished. Remember our former classmate that spoke against the Council when the first outage happened? Do you remember what happened to him?”

I do remember Tommy. He was near the top of the class. He always said that we should do what is right, which I admired. Naturally, when he saw that there was an issue, he spoke against the Council and suggested a way for the problem to be fixed. I guess the Council viewed the suggestion as an attempt to overthrow them, which is ridiculous, and Tommy was punished. We don’t know what happens when someone is punished. All we know is that the person disappears and is never seen again. It has now been almost seven months.

I look over at Paige. She looks solemn. She is remembering him too. After a few painfully silent minutes, Leon speaks up again.

“Guys, I am sorry if that came across as harsh. I agree with you. Something needs to be done. However, I don’t want to lose my best friends. Just, be careful please. Or better yet, don’t do anything.”

Paige looks at Leon in anger.

“Leon, something is wrong, and we need to do something about it. Remember how a lot of disasters occurred in the past? Before the disaster happened, people knew about it. However, no one ever said anything. These disasters can serve as an example. Many lives could have been saved if someone said something. Right now, history is repeating itself. A disaster could be happening, let me correct that, it is happening, and we have the chance to change something. If we try to stop this from happening, we could save many lives.”

She has a point. We need to do something. I decided to speak up.

“Paige, that is a good point. However, we don’t even know what is going on. All we know is that there are some outages, and that some bikes aren’t working. Could there be more issues happening? Also, even if we do figure out everything that is happening, how would we fix it? How could we avoid getting in trouble by our superiors? If we are going to do something, we need to think strategically.”

We all pause and think. There are many implications to the idea of trying to solve the issues occurring in the Ship. However, Paige has convinced me. I’m not sure about Leon though. He is staring into space, lost in thought. Suddenly, our Tablets go off. Free Time has ended, and we are required to go to our Compartments.

We all look at our Tablets, then each other. Leon speaks up.

“Well, I guess we have to leave. Can we talk about this tomorrow? Maybe we can try to figure out what to do. We could also talk about what we have noticed while walking around the Ship. We need to make sure we don’t make anyone suspicious.

Paige’s eyes light up.

“I can’t believe that you guys are actually going along with this! We could make a difference here! Ok, I’ll see you guys tomorrow.”

Paige and Leon leave my Compartment, leaving me alone with my thoughts. The thought of us solving this issue is crazy, but Paige is right. We need to do something so that we can save humanity.

### **Tuesday, November 16, 2286**

I’m really nervous. I’m beginning to understand the implications of what we are doing. If we get caught, nothing good will happen. We could all get punished. We were thinking about this last night, but maybe the excitement was overruling logic. However, I already promised that I would participate. I can’t just back out and betray my friends. I guess I’ll have to do my best to not get caught, and hope that my friends do the same. I met with my friends for Breakfast. For the first few minutes, we eat in silence. I think that they may be considering the possible implications. Paige finally speaks up.

“We need to make sure we don’t give up. We can do this. We just have to be careful.”

Leon’s eyes widen in fear as she whispers.

“Paige, quiet down! We need to be quiet about this. We can only talk about this during Free Time. There are always Council members around. If one of them hears us talking about this, we could get caught before we start.”

He has a point. In fact, there is a Council member close by. Wait, I think they look familiar. He is familiar! I’ve run into him multiple times. He quizzed me over the Pamphlet, and he ran into me again when I was with my friends during Work. I’m starting to wonder if this is purposeful. However, up until now, I haven’t done anything to make anyone suspicious. I’ve gotten good grades, I’ve been meeting my quota for energy production, I have cleaned well, and I have never gotten in trouble. The thing I’m about to do, though, would definitely be against the rules.

“Earth to Alex. Are you here?”

“Sorry guys, just thinking, you know, about the crazy homework we got yesterday.”

Paige and Leon are definitely not buying it. I glanced over at the Council member, suggesting that I was trying to provide a rational explanation for what Paige said earlier. There isn’t much I can do about the “we just have to be careful” part, but I think I convinced the member.

Paige and Leon do a slight nod in understanding, and change the subject. The Council member goes away. We all breathe a sigh of relief. Then, it is time to head to School.

“Guys, that was a close one. We can’t say anything until Free Time each night. We have to act as normal as we can. Remember, we can’t get caught.”

Everything goes as normal. We go through our daily routines. Before we know it, we are now at Work. I don’t know if Paige or Leon have noticed anything. I haven’t, unfortunately, so unless I see something later on today, I won’t have anything to report tonight. So far, I won’t be of much help.

We walk to the Work Room and we immediately notice something. The bikes have been fixed. The signs are gone. However, it doesn’t seem to matter. Just like yesterday, the bikes aren’t being used. This is abnormal. Usually, every piece of exercise is used during Work. After all, we do need to produce enough energy to run the Ship. I quickly look around the room. About 100 people were gone. This may not seem like a lot of people to you, especially when the 100 people are compared to the 17,000 people that do this, but all of the energy counts.

I tried to observe any other possible signs throughout my day, but I wasn’t able to. Hopefully Paige and Leon had more luck than I did. I guess I’ll have to wait until Free Time tonight to find out.

The rest of the day goes by very slowly. I keep waiting in anticipation. Yes, it is true that my friends and I meet up a lot throughout the day, like at meals, School, and Work, but we agree that it is likely not safe to talk about possible issues with the Ship in front of Council members, or other people in general. It is possible that someone could overhear us and report what we said to the Council. If they do, we could get in trouble, just like Tommy, or worse. No matter how hard it is, we all have to wait until Free Time.



Finally, Free Time is here. My friends promptly came into my Compartment. I think they have been as nervous as I have been. We all look at each other. I decide to speak up first.

“So, I haven’t noticed much. I noticed the bikes, and that 100 people were missing, but I’m sure you guys noticed that too. Did you guys have better luck than me? I hope so.”

Paige looks at me.

“Alex, I have bad news for you then. I didn’t notice anything either. I didn’t even notice the exercise bikes or the lack of people!”

Leon says he noticed the same thing as Paige.

“Alex, Leon, I think we will need to do something else. Even with all three of us trying to find something, we didn’t really see much. Does anyone have any ideas? What about you Leon? You haven’t said much.”

Leon looks up. He seems to be deep in thought. Then he speaks up.

“I think there is something we could do, but it would be really risky. Nothing good would happen if we got caught, but we aren’t going to find out about anything if we keep doing what we are doing. If something is happening, the Council will want to hide as much as they can. One of us needs to be on the inside. Then, they could find more information and we could use that information to figure out a plan.”

Paige and I stare at Leon in shock. Out of the three of us, he is the rule-follower. I don’t think he has broken a rule in his life. Now, I like to think I follow the rules, but I have broken some. Paige also breaks rules. The rules are small, but still. Some of the rules that Paige and I have broken include sneaking out of Work a couple minutes early, and trading some food. Like I said, Leon has likely never broken a rule. I can’t believe he would suggest something that bold and reckless. Personally, while I think it could be a decent idea, the consequences would be far too extreme. Paige seems to be excited though. This isn’t too much of a shock. She is the more rebellious one of the group.

“I think that could be a great idea. However, it would be very dangerous. Not only could the consequences be really serious, or probably deadly, it would also be very difficult to pull off. The process of becoming a Council member is very rigorous. You have to have really good grades, a really good track record, and more. I don’t think any of us meet those criteria.”

We all ponder about what Paige said. It is true that it is a very difficult process. It is also true that we likely don’t have all of the requirements. I guess Leon does. However, I doubt that he would do something like that. I decided to ask him anyway.

“Leon, don’t you meet those requirements?”

Leon looks at us. He doesn't seem pleased that I would ask that question.

“You guys know that I care about this cause. Really, I do. Even if I wanted to, though, I wouldn’t qualify anymore.”

Paige and I stare at Leon in surprise. He has it all. He has the good grades, the track record, or lack of a track record I suppose, and a great work ethic that would help him get through the strenuous process of becoming a Council member. Paige asks the same questions I had.

“What are you talking about? You don’t have a bad track record, your grades are excellent, and you have all of the qualities that would help you to become a Council member. What could possibly disqualify you?”

Leon hangs his head in shame.

“I don’t qualify anymore. My grades have dropped since the class we started this semester. I bet you can guess which class it was.”

“Leon, you are one of, if not the smartest people here in the Ship. What class could it be?”

Paige asks the same question.

“It is Calculus 3. I’ve studied and studied, but nothing makes sense. I went from having all A’s to mostly B’s and a borderline D. I’ve been so focused on studying for Calculus that I haven’t really been studying for my other classes.”

This explains a lot. Leon has seemed so stressed and upset lately. I can’t believe I haven’t asked what was wrong. I feel like a terrible friend.

“Leon, I’m so sorry. I’ve noticed that you have been stressed, but I didn’t even ask what was going on. Why didn’t you tell us what was going on? I know you don’t like asking for help, but we all need help at one point, or more than once.”

Paige agrees and also apologizes.

“Guys, it’s ok. I’m sorry I didn’t say anything. Now, I am ruining the plan because no one qualifies to even start the process.”

Paige and I both reassure Leon that it is not his fault. Everyone has at least one class that we are not good at. For me, it is any English class. For Paige, it is mostly Math classes, and some Science classes. She speaks up.

“It’s ok. Like we said, we all struggle with at least one class. However, surely at least one of us might qualify?”

Leon looks at me.

“Alex, don’t you have pretty good grades? Your track record is also decent. Maybe if you improve your grades, and your track record, you could qualify.”

I think about what he has said. We still have one more year to improve my grades. I have gotten a couple of B’s, but maybe that could disqualify me.

“My grades are ok, but don’t you have to have all A’s? I have a few B’s, and we still have to think about my track record.”

We think about a possible solution for a few minutes. Then, as Paige is about to speak up, our Tablets go off, indicating that Free Time is over. Paige groans.

“Already? I was about to suggest something! I don’t know if I’ll remember it by tomorrow. Should I write it down?”

Leon shakes his head.

“Bad idea Paige. What if a member of the Council becomes suspicious and then searches our apartments? We’ll need to talk again tomorrow. Anyway, we need to leave now before we are late. We can’t miss curfew. If we want to be Council members, we need to have a good track record, and being late negatively impacts that.”

We decide that he is right, and Paige and Leon leave the apartment, agreeing to not only come back together, but to also make observations and see if they notice anything is wrong. I guess we will have to wait to find a solution.

### **Wednesday, November 17, 2286**

The next day comes. This is now the second day of us trying to find something wrong. I wonder if we will have better luck today. Wait, why are we hoping that something is wrong. Shouldn’t we be hoping to find nothing wrong? If something is wrong, that could have consequences for all life on the Ship. I guess we all are so sure that something is wrong, that we want to find what is wrong so that we can fix it and help everyone.

I go through the day as normal. I go through Breakfast, Class, Lunch, Work, etc. However, unlike yesterday, I noticed something that is wrong. Lots of people are absent from Work today. If this keeps up, more power outages will occur. We really need to figure out what is going on, and fast.

As I’m thinking, a cough distracts me from my thoughts. Then, the one cough turns into two, then three. After a few seconds, the person is coughing a lot, way more than a normal cough. It is a cough that only sick people would have. The person keeps coughing so much that one of the people in charge of Work tells them to leave and head to the hospital. This is really concerning. Could this person spread their illness to other people? If that happened, fewer people would be able to work to produce energy, maintain the Ship, and fulfill other necessary duties required to keep the Ship going. This could lead to nothing but trouble. This will be another thing to discuss with my friends during Free Time. As I’m thinking, another person begins coughing, and then another. By the time Work is over, seven people have left, coughing and looking sick.

The rest of the day goes normally. I don’t notice anyone seeming sick and leaving, which is good. Hopefully, the few people that left during Work was an isolated incident. I guess the only way we can see if more people become sick is by waiting and watching.

Free time finally comes. My friends come to my apartment right on time. I think they are as anxious to talk about what they have seen too. I wonder if they noticed anything that I missed, and I am also curious if they noticed what I noticed. Well, let's find out. I wonder who will speak up first.

Paige and Leon both attempt to speak at the same time. We all burst out laughing, which was nice. We’ve been so stressed out lately, we haven’t had any fun in a while. Leon allows Paige to speak first.

“I didn’t notice too much today. I noticed that some of our classmates seemed pretty stressed out today. I’m not quite sure why. It is true that it is almost time for exams again, which makes everyone more stressed, but everyone seems even more stressed than normal. I wonder if they are noticing what we are. What do you guys think? Did you guys notice what I noticed? Or did you guys notice anything else? I’m only one person, so I won’t be able to notice everything.”

I’ll have to admit that I didn’t notice that. I was probably lost in my own world with everything that I was having to think about. I’ve been focusing on my exams and seeing what has been going on.

I look over at Leon. It seems like he didn’t notice that either. He speaks up.

“I’ll admit that I didn’t notice that. I noticed that a couple pieces of equipment were not working, again. If stuff keeps breaking down like this, then more outages will occur.”

Leon stops talking and looks at me.

“Alex, did you happen to notice anything? It seems like Paige and I both noticed something, but the things we noticed were pretty insignificant.”

“I noticed a lot. One thing I noticed is that a lot of people got sick during Work. At least seven people left coughing. That could be bad. When those people left, we lost energy that could have been produced. Also, when people are sick, more resources than normal will need to be used to help them recover. Now, I know this may seem selfish. I’m not trying to sound selfish, but I’m concerned about what consequences this could have for the citizens of the Ship if the situation gets worse. I think we should keep an eye out and see if anymore people leave sick.”

Leon and Paige nod in agreement, so it appears that we are all on the same page, then Paige says something that surprises me.

“I remember what I was going to say before I was interrupted! Alex, I think you could be the person in this friend group who could apply to be a Council member.”

Leon and I look at each other and shake our heads. Paige has clearly gone crazy with all of her ideas.

“Paige, we talked about this. My grades aren’t great and I don’t have the best track record.”

Paige scoffs at us.

“Alex, how long has it been since you have broken a rule?”

I have to think about it for a second. The last rule I broke was trading food with Paige. It wasn’t a big deal in my opinion. I don’t understand why it is a rule, but I guess it is a rule, so I have to deal with it.

“Earth to Alex. We only have a few minutes left of Free Time. Answer my question already!”

I look at the Tablet. Sure enough, we only have ten minutes left. How does Free Time go by so fast?

“Alex!”

“Ok, sorry. Lost in my thoughts again. I think it has been seven months or something, but I’m not positive. What does that have to do with anything? Everything stays on your track record permanently right?”

Paige shakes her head and scoffs again. Then she pulls something out of her backpack.

“Look at what I found at the library.”

Leon and I look at the book. It is the complete rule book, and it has even been updated. This is surprising because sometimes it takes forever for the Council to update their rule books.

“How did you get it? Isn’t that book always checked out?”

Paige looks at me and shrugs.

“I just got lucky I guess. Anyway, I skimmed through it right before I went to bed last night, and I found something that you may find interesting.”

She opens the book and looks at the table of contents. Then, she flips through the pages until she gets to page 101. The title of the chapter is “Track Records: Additional Information.” There is a lot of information, and I can’t find the information she is talking about.

Paige skims through the page and points at a paragraph near the end of the page.

“Guys, the new rules state that if you haven’t broken a rule in six months or more, then your track record will be cleared. This solves part of the issue of you becoming a Council member. Now, all we need to do is figure out a solution for the other issue, which is your grades. However, the rule book also states that Council members look more at your track record than your grades. I would still work on getting better grades though. We can figure that out though.”

The Tablets go off, signaling that Free Time is over. Once again, Free Time has gone by too quickly. It always seems to end as soon as we start to think about solutions. It’s honestly kind of annoying. Oh well. At least we have found a solution to one of the problems.

Paige speaks up.

“Alex, Leon and I have to go. We don’t want to be late. If we are, it would go on our track record. We can think about solutions for the grade issues, and then we can talk about it tomorrow.”

Leon and I look at each other and nod.

“That seems like a good idea guys. I’ll see you guys tomorrow.”

Leon and Paige leave, and I am alone with my thoughts. Do they really think I could be a Council member? Do I think I could be a Council member? Should we even be doing something like this? Becoming a member of the Council to find corruption and issues would not work out well for us if we got caught. I’ll have to wait until the morning though to think about this more. I need to sleep.

**Thursday, November 18, 2286**

I wake up with a start when the Tablet goes off. The Tablet states that it is time for Breakfast. I yawn and get out of bed. I did not get much sleep last night, maybe only a couple of hours. Even the few precious hours of sleep I got were not great. My thoughts were racing. I was thinking about everything. There is the possibility of becoming a Council member, the crazy things I would have to do, and the implications of getting caught. I have no clue what will happen, but all I know for certain is that I have to get ready. If I am late for Breakfast, it will go on my track record, and that would ruin my chances of becoming a member. I would also have to go without food until Lunch, and I become very irritable when I go without food for long periods of time. The thought of this gets me out of bed, and walking to the Cafeteria.

While I am walking to the Cafeteria, I notice that the same Council member is watching me. I begin to get nervous. Does the Council already know about our crazy plan? Why do I keep running into this specific person?

While I am in my thoughts, the member begins to walk over to me. Oh no, please don't have any bad news. I can't get caught, I don't want to be punished. He is here now. I put on my best smile, stand straight, and nod respectfully. Nodding is how we acknowledge those with a higher rank. The member talks to me.

"Hello, Alex. I know you are trying to head to Breakfast, so I won't keep you long. As you likely know, people that are 18 or older are able to apply to be Council members. While you are not 18 yet, it is a good time for you to consider becoming a Council member. As you know, the process is extensive, and you should take the time and effort to check that you would qualify."

Wait, did he just say that? I stare at him, dumbfounded. Surely he thinks I am someone else. I am definitely not qualified. Oh, he is staring at me, waiting for a response.

"Sir, do you mean me?"

The member looks around. I do as well. What is he looking for?

"Well, do you see anyone else around here that is 17 years old and that has the name of Alex?"

He has a point.

"I suppose not. I apologize for my reaction. I just didn't think I would qualify."

The member laughs.

"I understand. When I was first approached by a Council member, I was shocked as well. I was actually concerned that I had done something wrong, but then the member asked me if I wanted to be a member. We talked about the requirements, and, well, here I am."

He pauses and looks at me, waiting for a response. What do I say? I decided to respond as respectfully as possible.

“I am honored sir. I will admit, I am surprised. I will definitely have to think about this.”

He smiles at me.

“Great. I will send the requirements and duties of a Council member to your Tablet, and then you will have more information to make a decision. I wish you luck.”

“Thank you, sir.”

The member turns and walks away, leaving me standing in the hallway in shock. I am beginning to get weird looks from other Citizens. I look at my Tablet and rush to Breakfast. I only have ten minutes left.

I reach the Cafeteria with 8 minutes left. I accept the food, and scarf it down. Normally, you are supposed to show more manners, but I am limited on time. I still try to have as many manners as possible, even while I am eating very quickly. I am able to eat my food, and then I have to go to class. As I am walking to class, I work on slowing my breathing and my heart rate. If I am going to do well in class, I need to be paying attention. It is hard to pay attention. As I know from experience, it is hard to concentrate when you are freaking out. Thankfully, I am able to calm myself down, mostly, by the time I arrive at class.

My Professor looks at me as I walk into class.

“Good morning, Alex. Are you ready for the exam today?”

Hold on, there is an exam today? I did not know about that! Oh no, I must have been so focused on the Council stuff that I completely forgot about the exam! This is bad, very bad. Well, there is nothing I can do.

I look up. My Professor is looking at me with a worried expression on her face.

“Sorry, Professor, I was thinking about everything I know for the exam.”

Yeah right, I don’t know anything.

“Yes, I am ready. Hopefully I will do ok.”

My Professor smiles at me.

“Don’t worry Alex. I bet you’ll do just fine. Remember, this exam is open book and open note. You have also been answering questions correctly in class. You will be fine. Your exam will be at your desk. Do not turn it over until I tell you to do so.”

I return the smile and walk over to my desk. I grab my textbook and my notes, and I get everything organized. I write good notes, most of the time anyway, so I should be ok. The Professor walks to their desk, and gives everyone the same speech that she gave me.

“Hello everyone. As you all know, there will be an exam today. The exam will last two hours. After the exam, we will still have class, so don’t leave as soon as you are finished.”

The class groans.

“Why are you groaning? We are never dismissed early. I don’t understand why you would assume that we would change policies now. Anyway, as I was saying, we have an

exam today. This exam will be open note and open book. Please get your materials out now, if you have not already.”

The Professor pauses and waits for some of the students to get their materials.

“Alright. Now that everyone is here and is ready, we will begin the test. The test will be two hours long. Remember the basic rules. There will be no cheating, talking, getting up from your desk, or looking away from your tests. If anyone is caught doing any of these actions, the person that is caught will face many consequences. Some of these consequences include failing the exam, failing the class, and an appearance to the Council.”

One student gasps and raises their hand.

The Professor raises their eyebrows and looks at the student.

“Yes, Stacy? Do you have an objection or question about this policy?”

“An appearance to the Council? That seems a bit extreme. Don’t you think?”

The Professor gives all of us a stern look, especially towards Stacy.

“As you know, what we think about the procedures does not have any merit. All we should care about is following the procedures as closely as possible. Remember, we are not supposed to question the Council. The Council has our best interests in mind.”

Stacy looks at the Professor.

“Always?”

“Always. Now, I will not tolerate any more interruptions. We have already wasted ten minutes. By the way, these ten minutes will be taken from your exam time, so now you all only have one hour and fifty minutes to complete the test. I would recommend that you start now.”

Everyone glares at Stacy for taking time away from our test, and then we rapidly turn over our tests and begin to complete them. I hear some groans from students. They must not be prepared, although I wasn’t either. The students start to grumble and complain.

The Professor slams her hand on their desk. We jump in our seats. The Professor is normally very calm. We have never seen her this angry.

“Stay quiet and take the exam or else you will all fail!”

Everyone is quiet after that threat. You could hear a pin drop. Finally. They were distracting me. I get to work on the exam. With my detailed notes, it turns out to be pretty easy. Before I knew it, I had completed the exam. I put down my pencil and turn my paper over. I look at the clock. It is the only thing we are allowed to look at other than the exam. One minute left. I finished just in time.

The Professor claps their hands. Everyone looks up.

“Students, the time for the exam is over. Please wait while I come around and pick up your tests. Remember, your pencil is to stay on your desk and out of your hands. If I see you attempting to alter your answers on your test, you will face consequences.”

The Professor takes up everyone’s exams and walks back to their desk. The Professor still seems to be frustrated with us, and for a minute, I wonder if she is about to give us a



lecture. The Professor pauses, and then turns to the white board and gives us a lecture about history. I do not care for history. Why should we learn about the people that lived before us? Those people left us in a bad position. They left us with a devastated planet. Now we have to live on the Ship, and we have to live the lives we are living today. I wonder if I am the only one who feels this way. Many people state that we should learn about history so that we can learn about the mistakes that our ancestors made, and hopefully avoid them. I don't think that is a good enough reason. It could help, but I guess I am too bitter to want to care. Oh well. I have to learn anyway so that I can bring my grades up. I bring my thoughts and mind back to the lecture the Professor is giving. It is so boring.

Finally, the lecture is over. The Tablets alert us that it is time for Lunch. I won't have to listen to the lecture again until tomorrow. As we get up from our desks to head to Lunch, I see that the Professor is waving me over. I wonder what she wants. I haven't been misbehaving, well, lately anyway. As I have mentioned earlier, I haven't always had the best track record.

I nervously head over to the Professor. Hopefully she can't tell I am nervous. If I want a chance at being a Council member. I need to show confidence. I've heard the phrase, "fake it until you make it." I straighten up and approach them.

"Hello, Alex. Don't worry, I won't keep you here for long. I know you need to go to Lunch."

She's right. I need to go. Hopefully she speaks faster and gets to the point.

"I would like to speak with you about the last exam."

Oh no, did I fail or something? This can't be good news.

"I would like to congratulate you on getting the highest score in the class. I assume that your notes helped you significantly. I have noticed that you have been paying attention lately and have been taking better notes."

She pauses, and seems to be lost in thought.

"Alex, be honest. Why have you suddenly started to care about your classes? Of course I am pleased, but this is not normal for you. Is there a specific reason? Peer pressure, perhaps?"

That is a fair question. If I don't care about the lecture, which honestly happens a lot, then I usually don't pay attention. What should I say? Maybe I can say I want to be a Council member. She could help me by sending them a recommendation letter.

"Professor, I have begun to consider becoming a Council member. I know that there are many requirements, one of which includes having good grades, so I figured I should start to improve them. I still have a few months to improve before I am eligible to apply, so I figured I should start now."

The Professor looks shocked. She stares at me. I don't blame her. I never thought I would want to be a member either. Well, I don't really want to be one, but I need to be one to figure out what is going on with the Ship.

“Really? I have never thought that you would have wanted to be a Council member. What has made you consider this?”

Oh no, what do I say? I obviously can't say my true intentions. I would likely get punished, and Paige and Leon could get punished too, as everyone knows we are always together. There would likely be suspicions that they worked on the plan with me.

“Professor, I have decided that I want to make a difference. To make the best difference I can, I need to have influence and power. No one has more influence and power than the Council members.”

The Professor looks at me with approval.

“Well, Alex, this is unexpected news, but I am pleased. I am glad that you are finally maturing, and that you have realized that people need to make a difference to ensure that everyone on the Ship has a better quality of life. Tell you what, if you continue to behave, and pay attention in class, I will write a recommendation letter to the Council. How does that sound?”

I did not see that coming, but it is definitely good news.

“Professor, that would be great. Thank you so much.”

“No problem Alex. I am very proud of you.”

The Professor looks at her Tablet.

“Goodness, it has been eight minutes! I need to let you go so that you have enough time for Lunch. I hope you have a good Lunch and rest of your day.”

“Thank you, Professor.”

I walk quickly to Lunch and get my food. Today, the food is pasta, salad, and some sliced peaches. Not too bad. We have no choice on what we eat. Sometimes it is bad, and sometimes it is good. Thankfully, it seems to be good today. I look around and spot Leon and Paige at our normal table. I walk over and sit down. They look at me with curiosity. I think they are wondering about why the Professor called me over. I decided to ask.

“Why are you guys staring at me like that? Are you curious about why the Professor called me over?”

I decide to start eating while I wait for their response. Thankfully, the food seems to be alright today. Paige decides to respond.

“Of course we are wondering what is going on! The Professor never calls people over, unless they are in trouble. What happened? You haven't done anything. Well, lately, anyway.”

Really? Was that last comment necessary? I responded back.

“First, you probably shouldn't yell. People are looking.”

“Wait, they are? I didn't yell that loud.”

Paige looks around, and sure enough, people are staring.

“What are you guys staring at? Mind your own business!”

People look surprised and stop staring, although you can see glances in our direction. You are not supposed to yell. It is not courteous, and being courteous is important. Also,

Paige is normally pretty calm, so that probably shocked them. Leon talks to her before I do.

“Paige, what was that? Are you trying to call attention to us?”

Paige looks sheepishly at us.

“Sorry. I guess I’m stressed with everything that is going on. I’ll chill out.”

She takes a deep breath and composes herself. I don’t blame her for being stressed, I am too, but we need to act normally.

“Now, Alex, why did she call you over?”

“You guys won’t believe this. She congratulated me on getting the best score on the exam in the entire class.”

Leon nearly chokes on his food when he hears what I said.

“You? Getting the best score?”

I gave him a look.

“Yes, me. Remember, I need to improve my grades.”

“Well, good job Alex. Hopefully you can continue to improve your grades.

Paige nods in agreement.

“Yeah, I agree with Leon. Nice job Alex.”

Leon and Paige seem to be more relaxed now. I think they are happy that our plan is beginning to work. I am pretty happy as well.”

“Who knew, right? I guess I can do well in School. Even if it is boring.”

Paige and Leon laugh, and Paige also rolls her eyes.

“Now there is the Alex we know. I was honestly wondering if you were an imposter. What about you Leon?”

“Nah, I know he can do anything he puts his mind to.”

As we continue to talk and eat Lunch, the Tablets go off, signaling that it is time for Work.

“Well, here we go.”

I lower my voice to a whisper.

“We need to see if anything else is wrong. We can talk during Free Time.”

Paige and Leon nod in agreement, and we walk over to Work.

As we walk into Work, we sign in with our Tablets. This part is very important. If you don’t sign in, even if you did the work, then you will not get any credit, and the “absence” will go on your record. I should know. I have seen this happen, and ok, I will admit it, I have done it myself. This is another reason why I didn’t have the best track record. Now, I always make sure I sign in. After we all sign in, we walk over to the bikes. Leon and Paige give me a look as we are walking.

“Why are you looking at me?”

I have to whisper, although the whispering probably makes it more suspicious.

Paige looks at me in shock.

“Alex, you really don’t see the problem?”

Leon looks at me too.

“Seriously Alex? Just look around you. Get out of your head for a few seconds.”

“Ok. I’ll look.”

As I look around, I don’t see anything at first. Then, Paige moves her head toward the direction of the issue. I look and my jaw drops. How did I not notice it? There are now three rows of bikes that are without power, and some of the bikes that are operational are not being used. This is a problem. Usually, every single bike is being used, all of the time. It is necessary to keep the Ship going. If this many people can’t Work, how has the Ship not had more blackouts? I notice people looking at us. We should probably start Working now.

“Hey guys, we should probably start working now.”

Paige and Alex notice that people are looking at us, and we all start Work. Paige looks at us.

“Why are so many bikes not working? Why are so many people missing?”

Leon looks at her in shock. Why does he seem so concerned?

“Paige! We can’t talk about that. Not here, not now. There are Council members here. Remember, we aren’t supposed to seem like we are doubting the Council. We need to make sure that it seems that we are obeying and believing everything they are saying. We can talk during Free Time.”

Paige looks down and seems frustrated. I’m not sure if she is frustrated at herself, Leon, or both. I’m going to guess both. What Leon said may have seemed harsh, but he has a point. We can’t look suspicious. We can’t appear to be questioning the Council. Whenever people question the Council, at least very openly, they disappear. When people disappear, it is like they never existed. Their name is wiped from the database. Any friends they may have had are not allowed to talk about them or to mourn. I guess the Council thinks that if people mourn the person, then they support the person and what they did. I personally think it is harsh, but I have no power over anything. At least, not yet.

I decided to stop thinking about this. I don’t want to go down a rabbit hole. That can be pretty dangerous for me and my friends. I need to find a way to distract myself. How can I do that? I look over and see that Paige and Leon are talking to each other. Why didn’t they involve me in the conversation? Maybe they saw that I was deep and thought and assumed that I wouldn’t want to be disturbed. Fair enough. I glance over at them and clear my throat and get their attention. They both stop talking and look at me. Paige starts to laugh.

“Why are you laughing at me? I wasn’t doing anything.”

Leon starts laughing too.

“Guys, what is going on?”

I guess Paige had pity on me, because she explained what was going on.

“You were so deep in thought...”

“How is being deep in thought funny?”

“Hold on, let me finish the explanation.”

Leon chuckles at our conversation.

“Don’t you start.”

“Alex, don’t get so frustrated, listen to her explanation first. Then you can decide if you are mad or not.”

“Fine. I’ll listen.”

Paige looks at me and begins talking again.

“First, why are you getting so frustrated? You know we tease each other. What are friends for?”

Leon laughs. People are staring at us now. Paige elbows him.

“Quit calling attention to yourself. Ok. Alex, when you were deep in thought, you were making the funniest facial expressions, and the most random ones too. I’m surprised we weren’t laughing sooner. Also, it was funny how long you were deep in thought. Usually it is only for a few minutes, maybe thirty minutes max. You were deep in thought for at least an hour.”

I look at her in shock.

“Hey! There is the funny expression again!”

“Hey, Paige, remember when Alex was lost in thought for thirty minutes during Lunch and it looked like he was staring at someone?”

“Yes! The man pointed at us and asked why the kid with the brown eyes was staring.”

They both burst out laughing. When I frown, Leon stops laughing, but Paige is still laughing quietly.

“Ok. Sorry. It was just funny, and we haven’t had much to laugh about lately. Life has been stressful.”

Paige finally stops laughing and nods in agreement.

“Yeah. I agree with Leon. We shouldn’t have been rude though. Sorry Alex.”

Now I feel bad. They just needed something to laugh about, and I just got frustrated. I wonder what I looked like.

“No. I’m sorry. I’m just stressed with everything too. Are we good?”

Paige and Leon nod. Good, I’m glad we are back to normal.

“Ok. Now I have a question. You said the expressions were funny. What do you mean by funny? What did I look like?”

Paige looks at me.

“Well, when we say funny, we mean that your expressions looked weird and were able to make us laugh, and, well I guess that is it. I wish that we had pictures to show you.”

I see Leon grin. Oh no. Paige sees it too, and her face lights up. Why do I have a feeling that I am about to see a picture of myself? Leon picks up his Tablet.

“I don’t know if you guys remember this, but our Tablets got updated. We are now able to take pictures, well, sometimes. We can’t take them in Class. I guess they don’t

want pictures of exams going around, which is fair. However, Work is a place where the camera works.”

No, no, no. I think I see where this is going. Leon must see the look on my face, because he laughs and takes a picture. Well, now I know.

“Ok guys. Tell me. How bad is it?”

Paige leans over and looks at Leon’s Tablet. I can tell that it is taking everything within her for her to not laugh hysterically. I think she is trying to not bring attention to us.

“Leon, this is gold.”

“Will you guys just show me already?”

They grin and pass the Tablet to me. Oh no, here we go. I look at the Tablet and almost drop it.

“Hey. Don’t break it! I don’t need a broken Tablet on my track record.”

“Sorry, I’ll be careful. You guys weren’t kidding. These are definitely pretty interesting.”

I guess I am trying to keep some pride by not admitting that it is funny, but I can feel myself starting to smile. I try to stop before they see it, but it is too late.

“Hey Paige, now we know for sure it is funny. Even Alex thinks it is funny!”

“No I don’t. It is interesting, but interesting doesn’t always mean funny.”

Paige shakes her head.

“Let go of your pride. You were about to laugh.”

Leon nods in agreement.

“Ok, fine. It was funny. I didn’t even know I was doing it. Please tell me I don’t do that all of the time. I don’t, right?”

“Sadly, you don’t, that would be great though, wouldn’t it, Leon?”

“Nah. If he did it all the time, it wouldn’t be funny anymore. It would be normal and boring.”

“Ok, I agree with you there.”

Our Tablets go off, signaling that Work is over. We head to our Compartments to get ready for Dinner.

“I’ll see you guys at Dinner. That was so embarrassing. Will you tell me if I ever do that again?”

Leon nods.

“We will, but we will get pictures first.”

I hit my head against the wall.

I walk back to my Compartment and I get ready for Dinner. We have a little bit of time to do things like taking a shower and cleaning up. We can also use this time to clean our Compartments. The Council does room checks every once in a while. The thing about these checks is that they can happen at any time during the day.

After I take a shower, I still have about 20 minutes to clean my Compartment. This is when it is good that the Compartment is small. It is 7 feet long and 7 feet wide. It could be smaller though, I guess. Anyway, like I said, this is one thing that is good about how small the Compartment is. It is easy to clean. I vacuum, clean up any trash, organize my desk and drawers, and then I make my bed. After all of this is done, I walk over to Dinner. As I am walking, I see Paige and Leon. They wave me over and I walk over to them.

“What have you guys been up to?”

They look at me. Paige seems like it is obvious what they were doing.

“Why are you looking at me like that? How am I supposed to know?”

“Don’t you remember about the essay that we have that is due tomorrow?”

Oh no. I did not remember that.

“Are you guys serious? I did not remember that. I think I started it, but it is not finished. What should I do?”

Leon thinks for a second.

“Well, I guess you could do it during Free Time, but isn’t that when we usually talk?”

I don’t want to do this during Free Time. This time is the only time we can talk about what is wrong.

“What should we do? I don’t want to lose that time.”

“Alex, I don’t see anything else we can do. I think we will have to not meet up tonight. Remember, you have to keep your grades up if you want to be a member.”

Paige does have a point there.

“Yeah, you are right. I’m sorry guys.”

“It is ok. Don’t you remember when I messed up?”

“No.”

Paige looks at me.

“You don’t? It was pretty funny.”

“It was not funny. I guess I shouldn’t have said anything then. Anyway, I have messed up. Remember the exam we had last year? The final that was worth half of our grade?”

“I don’t remember. We have had a lot of exams and they are starting to blend together. Wait, when did we get to the Cafeteria?”

“Alex, you always get so deep in thought, you don’t see where we are walking. Honestly, it is impressive that you have never bumped into anyone, or that you know how to get to places on your own.”

“I was paying attention.”

“Ok then, tell me how we got here.”

“Well, Paige, I can absolutely do that.”

“Stop stalling then and tell us.”

“Wait guys, we are at the front of the line to get food.”

“You got lucky, don’t think that I won’t ask you again when we sit down.”

You do have to admire that about Paige. It can be annoying sometimes, like in this situation, but she can stay focused on something for a while. I guess this is the new thing she will be focused on.

We get our food and head to a table. We have pork, vegetables, and fruit tonight. The food seems to be decent again. As we sit down, Paige looks at me again. I bet she will ask me again. Three, two, one...

“Ok. Let’s resume our conversation. How do we get from our Compartments to the Cafeteria?”

I knew that she would ask again. Leon looks at us and seems amused by the situation. He starts to eat while waiting for the conversation to continue. I’ll be honest, I would probably think that the conversation would be funny too, well, if I wasn’t the one being interrogated. I have to think of something fast. Paige is still staring, even while she is eating. Her patience won’t last much longer.

“I know how to get there. I use my muscle memory.”

Leon laughs.

“I don’t think that’s the kind of explanation she was looking for.”

“Hey! She hasn’t said it was an unacceptable explanation.”

Leon grins, and looks at Paige.

“Yet.”

“Whose side are you on?”

“Neither, but this is funny, so I am keeping it going.”

“I am going to get you back for this.”

“How, exactly? If you do anything, you could get in trouble.”

“I’ll figure something out.”

“How many times have you said that in the past?”

“I mean it this time. I’ll find a way to mess with you. Maybe I can move something and make you find it.”

“First, that would not be very funny. Second, you just told me what you would do. What would stop me from taking precautions so that you can’t do that?”

Paige rolls her eyes.

“Can I finish my conversation now?”

“Fine, but I think this conversation was even more funny, which I didn’t know was possible.”

“Anyway, Alex, Leon is correct. The explanation you gave was not what I was looking for.”

“I answered your question. You asked how I got to places, and muscle memory is how I get there.”

“Maybe I should have been more specific. I want you to explain the route you take. Imagine that you are having to explain the route to someone who is lost. Also, this is an issue that you can’t explain how to get to places. If you want to be a member, don’t you



think you should be able to explain stuff like that? You will be looked at as a leader, which means people would ask you questions as they would believe that you would be a good source of information. Maybe we should start teaching you how to explain stuff like this.”

She has a point.

“You do have a point there. I didn’t think about that. How should I memorize stuff like that?”

“Don’t you remember that I have the rule book/manual for Council members? You could probably find all of the information needed there. I can give you the book later.”

“Thanks Paige. That will be a great source for me to figure out what I need to know.”

“No problem. I know I always save the day. What would you guys do without me?”

Before Leon and I have time to answer her question, the Tablets go off, signaling that Dinner is over and it is time for Cleaning. I believe I have said this earlier, but one of the things us Citizens have to do is Cleaning the ship. Sometimes you have to clean the Cafeteria, or sometimes you are assigned to other parts of the Ship. Tonight, Paige, Leon, and I are assigned to clean the Cafeteria. Our specific task is to help with wiping down the tables. There are a lot of tables, so sometimes this takes a while. We don’t have time to talk during Cleaning. We are trying to finish our tasks before Cleaning ends. I think Paige and Leon want to talk, as this can get very boring, but we need to finish our tasks. Finally, after what feels like forever, we finish our tasks. Our work is approved by a superior and we are allowed to leave. We now have Free Time. Sadly, we can’t meet up tonight. I have to work on the essay. I would ask my friends to stay with me so that I could ask for help, but that is against the rules, and I can’t risk anything that could add something negative to my Track Record. As my friends and I walk to our Compartments, we say goodnight and go our own ways. I wonder what they will be doing. I shake my head. I need to stay focused.

I arrive at my Compartment, sign in to my Tablet, and begin to write my essay. Well, I try to begin my essay. I have never been great at writing, but I need to do well to bring my grades up. I need to figure something out. I decided to look at the prompt again. The prompt talks about the importance of learning history. I groan. Really? The essay has to be about this? I hate learning about history. It is so boring. Also, it appears that I have not started the essay, as I had hoped. Luckily, the essay doesn’t need to be too long, only one page, but I still don’t want to write. I need to write, though. I have no choice, and I am running out of time. I look at the time. I have 45 minutes left. I need to come up with an answer now.

I think I have the answer! One of the reasons I don’t like history is because I don’t think we should take the effort to learn about our ancestors. After all, their actions left us in this state. I have read about a beautiful planet. There were trees, mountains, animals, and more. There were colors other than gray, which included red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and purple. People did not have to follow such strict rules. They had freedom. Then,

World War III began. Nuclear weapons were used. These weapons destroyed the environment, and forced us to leave the planet. Now we are in this situation. We are stuck on a Ship, have to follow strict schedules, and we can't really think for ourselves.

I can talk about how we need to learn about history so that we can avoid repeating the same mistakes that our ancestors made. The mistakes that lead humanity to this point. If we can avoid making the same mistakes, we can stop our current situation from getting worse.

With an answer in my head, I get to typing. As I am typing, I look at the time. I have ten minutes left. I need to write one quarter of a page now. I am almost done. I keep typing, and typing. This essay actually hasn't been too bad to write. Maybe it isn't bad because I like my answer. Of course, while writing my essay, I don't mention my thoughts about the strict schedules and how I believe that we are stuck on a Ship. I talk about everything else. I can't talk about some things because it could appear like I do not support the Council. This could never be allowed. While it is true that the Council would not be directly reading this essay, the Professor would be, and the Professor is required to report any signs of someone who does not agree with the Council. Getting reported would definitely ruin any chance I would have of becoming a member, so I have to be really careful.

As I finish my essay, and turn it in through my Tablet, the Tablet goes off, signifying that Free Time is over, and that it is time for sleep. I breathe a sigh of relief. Somehow, I actually finished the essay, and I think I did pretty well. While I didn't have time to proofread, I am usually good at spelling and grammar, so I should be ok. Hopefully this essay will improve my grades, or at the very least, won't lower my grades. I turn off the Tablet and get ready to go to sleep. At least, I try to sleep. My mind is racing, mostly with thoughts about how I could possibly become a member and our crazy plan to figure out what is wrong with the Ship. I need to clear my thoughts so that I can sleep. I need to sleep so that I can stay focused on proving that I can be a good Council member. Finally, fatigue overtakes me, and I fall asleep.

### **Friday, November 19, 2286.**

I am woken up by the Tablet and I nearly fall out of the bed. I turn the alarm off and begin to get ready. That alarm scares me sometimes. You think that I would be used to it by now, but I guess not. Oh well. After I get ready, I head over to the Cafeteria, and look for Paige and Leon.

I see Leon waving me over. I grab my food and walk over to him.

"Where is Paige?"

Leon looks around.

"I don't know. She isn't usually late. Do you think she is ok?"

"Don't worry Leon, we all have those days."

“Paige never has those days.”

“Do you think something happened?”

“No idea.”

I see Leon breathe a sigh of relief. He is looking behind me. I look and see Paige quickly walking and I breathe a sigh of relief too. She looks at us.

“What are you guys looking at? I just woke up a little bit late, but I still got here on time.”

Leon speaks up.

“Paige, we were worried about you. We have never seen you be late to anywhere before. I thought you had gotten in trouble.”

“I had the same thought.”

“Guys, I’m keeping a low profile too. All of us have to so that we can help you. Also, it wouldn’t be a bad idea for me to keep a low profile anyway. It keeps you out of trouble. Next time, don’t worry.”

We nod, and we start to eat our food. There is some awkward silence after our conversation. I think Paige is annoyed that we got worried. I don’t know why, but she is so maybe I should apologize.

“Sorry if I annoyed you. I was just worried.”

“Same.”

Paige sighs.

“You guys have a good point. You were just worried about me, which means that you guys care about me. I guess I’ve just been stressed lately. I shouldn’t have taken it out on you guys. I’m sorry. Are we good?”

Leon and I look at each other.

“We were always good. It is a stressful time after all. Everything is stressful right now, but we will figure it out, like we always do.”

Paige smiles, and looks relieved.

“Thanks, also I completely understand now why you would be concerned. I just didn’t get much sleep last night.”

Well, at least I wasn’t the only one who didn’t get much sleep.

“It is interesting that you mention that. I didn’t get much sleep either. I’ve been stressed too. There has been a lot of stuff going on. There have been classes, grades, and the Council member stuff. Oh, speaking of class stuff, I finished my essay.”

Paige and Leon look at me in shock.

“Wait, you were able to finish it? I thought you had barely started it.”

“Yeah, about that, I actually hadn’t started it at all.”

Leon looks at me in confusion.

“Wait, if you hadn’t started it at all, how did you finish it? The essay wasn’t too long, but you hate writing essays, and you probably hated what the essay was about.”

“That is true, I definitely hated the prompt, but I somehow came up with an answer, and I think the essay was decent. I barely finished it.”

“Well, finishing it on time is the important thing.”

“Guys, let's focus on the important thing. Alex finished the essay, which means his grades won't go down. Actually, they will probably go up if the essay went as well as he thought it did. This is good because he needs to keep his grades up if he wants to be a Council member. Speaking of becoming a Council member, I looked at the application process and there is some stuff I need to discuss with you guys. We can do that during Free Time.”

“Sounds good. Leon, can you meet up tonight?”

“Sounds good.”

The Tablets go off. We throw away our trash, put up our plates, and walk to class.

As we walk into class, I can see the Professor looking at me. She calls me over. I nervously look at my friends, and I walk over.

“Hello, Professor. How are you doing today?”

“I am doing well. I have something I would like to discuss with you.”

“Ok. Is everything alright?”

The Professor laughs. Oh no.

“Sorry for laughing. No, you are definitely not in trouble. I have good news for you.”

She hands me a piece of paper.

“What is this?”

“Turn it over.”

I turn it over and almost yell in surprise. It is a recommendation letter.

“Wait, you wrote me a letter of recommendation? You truly think I can do this?”

The Professor looks at me.

“Well, of course I do. I wouldn't write a letter if I didn't think you could do it, would I?”

“Thank you so much. This will help me a lot. What else do I need to do to apply to be a member?”

“Actually, we were going to talk about that in class today. You will get the information then.”

“Thank you, Professor.”

I head over to my desk and sit next to my friends. They look at me nervously.

“Well, what happened?”

I grin.

“Tell us already!”

“Ok, ok. You guys should be patient. I can tell you during Free Time, but it is good news.”

Paige rolls her eyes.

“That isn't very specific. Can you tell us what the news is about?”

Leon asks the same thing. I start to laugh.

“What is so funny? I just asked the same question that Paige did.”

“Remember how you messed with me earlier? I have a way to get you back, for real this time.”

“What does that have to do with anything we were just talking about?”

“I’m not going to tell you until Free Time so that you have to wait in anticipation all day.”

“You are not serious.”

“I am.”

“Can I get everyone’s attention please?”

The class goes silent.

“Thank you. Before I start the lecture today, I have some information to tell you.”

“Does this information have something to do about the applications for becoming Council members?”

Everyone turns and looks at the student in surprise. We all know that we are not supposed to interrupt the Professor.

“Please do not interrupt me. I will tell you the information when needed.”

We all look back at the student and it appears that all she wants to do is to disappear into thin air. I kind of feel bad for her.

“Look at me please. We can’t waste anymore time. Now that I have everyone’s attention, I will talk about the information that I told you about a few minutes ago. As some of you may know, the applications for becoming Council members have opened. The instructions to apply and the requirements to become a Council member will be downloaded onto your Tablets during Free Time tonight. Now, we are going to start the lecture.”

Really? She said she was going to give me more information about the application process, but the only information she told us was instructions on how to find the main information needed. Oh well, I guess I’ll have to find out during Free Time. Wait. I’m getting lost in my thoughts, again. I need to stay focused.

Somehow, I am able to stay focused and get through the rest of the class. Our Tablets go off, signaling the end of class.

“Oh! One quick thing. All of your grades have been uploaded onto your Tablets. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me. This is important because grades are a big part of the Council member requirements. Alright, have a good day.”

We all started to walk to Lunch. Students are all talking about the application process. I guess I’m not the only person who wants to be a member. I will have some competition. I’ll have to look at the requirements later and hope that I have a chance. I get to the Cafeteria and get my food, then I see Paige and Leon waving me over.

“I’m coming.”

I walk over to the table and sit down. Paige and Leon still look nervous. They must really want to know what is going on. They should be calmer though since I told them it was good news, right? I am starting to notice an awkward silence.

“Alex, can you please tell us what is going on? I understand if you don’t want to tell Leon...”

Leon looks at her in disbelief.

“Hey! What was that for?”

“I just want to know what is going on.”

She looks at me.

“I understand that you are trying to get some sort of revenge on Leon for something he could have done that I don’t know about, but I am getting affected in the process. Just let it go and tell us. Please?”

Fair enough, I hadn’t thought about how it would affect Paige. I was only thinking about Leon.

“Sorry Paige, I didn’t think about that. Alright, I’ll tell you guys. It has to do with the Council membership application stuff.”

Leon looks at me.

“Does this have something to do with the Professor calling you over before class started?”

“It does. Turns out, she actually thinks I could be a member.”

Paige looks suspicious.

“How do you know that she thinks this?”

“Well, I would say that her writing a recommendation letter for me would be a pretty good sign.”

Paige looks convinced, but Leon doesn’t.

“How do we know that you aren’t making this up?”

“I guess you would have to ask her.”

Paige looks at Leon.

“I’m pretty sure he is telling the truth, He is a terrible liar. Don’t you remember when we were playing a card game?”

She has a point. Maybe that will convince him.

“Ok, I’m convinced. Thank you for telling us the news.”

“No problem.”

We stop talking and continue to eat. I guess I started to get lost in my thoughts because Leon is waving his hand in front of my face.

“Alex. Are you there?”

“Uh, I’m here. Just thinking.”

“About what?”

“Council member stuff. Everything is so overwhelming. I’m not sure what to think. What if I don’t get in? What would we do then? Our entire plan...”

Paige shushes me.

“Hey. We can’t talk about that here! Don’t you know how much trouble we could get in? We can’t talk about this until Free Time.”

“She’s right.”

Leon looks up and nods his head to the right.

“Look over there. I think we are being watched.”

I start to look.

“Don’t make it obvious!”

I start looking around the room like I’m looking for something. Then I see what Leon is talking about. It is that member again! Why do we keep seeing him? Oh, no. He is walking toward us. Paige’s face goes pale.

“What is going on? Isn’t that the same member that we keep running into?”

Leon looks back at Paige.

“We need to act naturally. If we act guilty, they will be suspicious. Act like everything is normal.”

We all agree to try to act like normal. Good timing. The member is at the table.

“Hello. I’m sorry if I am interrupting anything. Can I sit down for a moment?”

Paige looks at him.

“You can.”

The member sits down.

“You guys looked scared whenever I made eye contact with you.”

He chuckles a bit. If that was meant to be reassuring, it definitely did not work.

“Nothing is wrong. Don’t worry. I just have something to tell Alex.”

“Do I need to leave the table to talk with you?”

“No, I can tell you here if that is ok with you. I know that you likely tell Paige and Leon everything anyway, so I may as well tell the news to all three of you.”

He has a point.

“That is acceptable. What is the news?”

I guess Leon can’t wait anymore.

“Sir, is the news about the member applications?”

Paige looks at him in disbelief.

“You can’t interrupt a member!”

The member looks amused at the conversation, but I can tell that he has to be somewhere. He keeps glancing at his watch.

“Excuse me.”

Paige and Leon stop talking and look at him.

“Sorry sir.”

“I am also sorry.”

“It is alright. I know it is not normal for a member to walk up to people during Lunch, so I understand if you don’t know how to react properly to this situation. Now, I would

like to discuss some news with Alex. He said that you two could stay and listen to our discussion, so you are allowed to stay if you would like.”

The member turns to me.

“Well, I see that you are still interested in becoming a Council member. I am glad to hear that. I think you would be a good member.”

Wait, did he just say that? Am I being pranked?

“The letter written to us by your Professor was very impressive. She had nothing bad to say about you. She talked about how much you have improved lately. She was impressed by your work ethic, grades, and critical thinking. She also stated that your essay was very good. She truly believes in you. I would say thank you tomorrow morning if I were you. She wrote one of, if not the best recommendation letters that I have ever seen. Due to the letter, you are moving on to the next phase of the application process.”

Wait, there are multiple phases? I did not know that. I guess the member sees my confusion. He seems amused by it and chuckles.

“Did you not know that there are multiple phases for the application process?”

I shake my head. How would I know? I thought the process was normally kept a secret.

“Well, now you know. More information will be on the Tablets this evening, so you can look at it during Free Time. I would advise you to do that, as it could help you do well during the next phase if you have an idea of what to expect. Of course, not every detail will be disclosed, but you will get a good idea of what to expect.”

Well, I suppose I will be doing a couple of things tonight during Free Time. I will be writing a thank you letter and I will be looking at the information. I wonder if I can talk about this stuff with Paige and Leon.

The member must be reading my thoughts, because the next thing he says directly answers my questions.

“I am almost certain that you three talk about almost everything together. You are allowed to discuss the information disclosed on the Tablets. However, once you are in the next phase, there will be some information that you will not be allowed to disclose to anyone outside of the Council. This also applies to any information you will receive if you are accepted. Ah, that reminds me. Remember, just because you have been accepted into this next phase does not guarantee you a spot as a member. You still have to work hard and prove yourself to be the best among the others that have been accepted into the next phase.”

The member’s Tablet beeps and he glances at the message.

“Well, I suppose I am being called to a meeting, so I will have to go. Once again, I would like to say congratulations. Make the best of this opportunity and please take it seriously.”



He gets up, so I do too. We shake hands and he walks away, seeming to be in thought about whatever he has to do next. Still in shock, I look back at Paige and Leon. Then I begin eating quickly because we don't have much time left during Lunch.

Paige looks stunned.

"Was that real? Did that actually just happen?"

Leon turns to her.

"I guess so. That was unexpected. How do you feel about all of this Alex?"

I look up and see that they are both staring at me. A million thoughts are running through my mind. What should I even say?

"I honestly have no idea. I don't think it has hit me yet."

Leon grins. What is so funny? Am I making a facial expression again? Leon seems to be able to read my thoughts too.

"No facial expressions, just your normal stressed out/bored look. I just have an idea on how I can help."

I'm not sure how much I can trust him, especially because of the way he is smiling, but I decided to give him the benefit of the doubt.

"Help me? What can you help me with?"

"I can help the news hit you."

Before I can react, he reaches over the table and punches me in the arm.

"Ow! Leon, that hurt!"

Paige laughs and almost chokes on her food.

"Guys, don't make me laugh while I'm eating. I almost choked!"

Leon shakes his head at her and turns back to me. I glare at him in return.

"Come on, I just helped you. I helped in multiple ways actually."

"How did punching me help exactly? The only help I am noticing is that you helped me to feel more pain."

Leon shrugs. I'm not sure if he even feels guilty, which is a bit annoying.

"Ok. I can tell you are mad, but let me explain."

I cross my arms and look at him, waiting for a reasonable explanation.

"Alright Leon. I'm waiting for a very reasonable explanation for an unreasonable action."

"Ok then. You can be sarcastic..."

"Leon, he has earned the right to be sarcastic. I would be sarcastic too."

"Paige, you are always sarcastic."

"Ok, fair enough. I do want to hear the explanation though."

"Guys, if you want to hear the explanation, you have to let me finish talking first."

Paige and I look at each other and then look back at Leon.

"Ok, tell us your explanation."

"Finally, you guys are listening. Ok. As I was saying, I helped in multiple ways. Paige, I even helped you too."

We both give him a skeptical look.

“I can see that you are doubting me, that hurts. Ok. The first way I helped you was by proving that the event was real, and that you aren’t dreaming.”

Ok, I am starting to think this explanation will be ridiculous.

“You can’t feel pain while you are dreaming, right?”

“Right.”

“Well, if you felt pain from my punch, that means that you are not dreaming, which means that this is real and actually happened.”

He has a point there, but I’m not telling him that.

“That is also how I helped you, Paige. You were also doubting if we were dreaming or not. By convincing Alex that this is real, I convinced you that this is real.”

Paige looks annoyed. She is also understanding Leon’s argument. I don’t think she likes that Leon has a good reason for doing something that is this immature.

“I also helped the news hit you.”

“How did you help me do that exactly?”

“It’s simple, really. I imagined that my fist was the news while I was punching you. So, I helped the news hit you.”

“Are you serious right now?”

“Yup.”

I’m trying to think of a clever comeback, but while I am thinking, the Tablets go off, signaling that it is time for Work. He seems to notice that Paige and I don’t have anything to say. I think he is enjoying this. We keep talking while we are walking to Work.

“Hey. If it makes you guys feel any better, I think the punch hurt my hand a bit too.”

He shakes his hand. It does look a bit red.

“I feel a bit bad for saying this, but it honestly does make me feel a bit better. At least I’m not the only one in pain. I still think I am in worse pain though. I’ll probably get a bruise. Wait, isn’t punching people against the rules?”

Leon scoffs.

“Nah. I’m not worried. The member wasn’t here when I did it, and we rarely see any other members around here. It wouldn’t matter anyway. It wasn’t really a punch.”

“Explain that to the bruise that is likely going to develop in a few hours.”

“It was a playful nudge. It isn’t my fault that you are sensitive.”

“I am not sensitive.”

“Explain that to the hypothetical bruise.”

I sigh. Why must Leon always have a retort to everything? Maybe I’ll have one of my own one day. While I am lost in my thoughts, hopefully not making any facial expressions again, we walk to Work. Once we get there, I look at my friends, and they seem to be whispering something to each other. I whisper to them too.

“What are you whispering about? Am I making a facial expression again?”

Paige looks at me.

“Sadly, no. That would be funny though, wouldn’t it?”

Leon grins.

“Yup.”

“Ok, I get it, I can make funny facial expressions. Just tell me what you guys were talking about.”

They look at each other, then back at me. What is going on? Paige points to something behind me.

“What is it?”

“Shhh. Don’t stare too much. Just look.”

I look over my shoulder and immediately notice what she is pointing to. A lot of people are missing. This time, there are at least 30 people gone. There are also a lot of bikes that are malfunctioning.

“That isn’t good.”

“You think?”

Our Tablets go off, signaling that Work has started. We rush to our bikes and start to exercise. Even while we are working, I can tell that my friends are worried about something.

“You are still worried. Is there something you aren’t telling me?”

They look at each other, seemingly hesitant to tell me whatever is going on. Their behavior is confirming my suspicions.

“Just tell me, please. If it is something important I feel that I need to know.”

“We can’t talk here. We can talk during Free Time. The only thing we can say is that things are getting worse.”

I definitely agree with that statement.

“Just keep an eye on things and make observations, like what we were doing earlier this month when we first noticed that something was wrong.”

Leon nods his head.

“Ok. That sounds easy enough.”

Leon looks at us seriously.

“Hey. That Council member is here. Let’s talk about something else, something trivial and boring.”

“Well that is easy. Just talk about School.”

Paige starts the new conversation, and stops whispering. Good. Whispering likely makes us more suspicious.

“Isn’t class so boring? Who wants to learn stuff like history?”

Leon nods.

“Or math.”

“So you guys don’t like some parts of School?”

We jump and look behind us. It is that Council member again! Is he stalking us or something? How does he sneak up on us like that?

“I apologize. I didn't mean to sneak up on you. Also, I can tell you are noticing that we run into each other fairly often...”

Only fairly often? We run into each other all of the time now!

“We are not watching you, or anyone. We just happen to keep crossing paths. I have noticed that you have gotten more nervous, so I wanted to reassure you that everything is alright.”

I don't believe him. I doubt that Paige and Leon believe him. However, we nod at him, acting like we do believe him.

“I can assure you, you are not the only ones I run into a lot.”

He looks behind us and calls to another group of people.

“Isn't that correct? Don't I run into you a lot?”

They nod. The member turns back to us.

“See? Nothing is wrong. Also, I wanted to speak to you, Alex.”

What does he want now?

“I wanted to remind you to look at your Tablet tonight. There is crucial information that has been downloaded to it. Also, I will give you a little bit of information about the next phase.”

Is he serious? I need to listen and understand what he is about to tell me.

“It will take place during Work.”

He chuckles.

“Isn't that a good thing? You finally get a day off.”

I simply nod. He then leans in, dropping his voice to a whisper.

“Be prepared for anything.”

I tried to ask him for more details, but before I could get a word out, he had already walked out of the room. He is now talking to someone else. I look over at Paige and Leon, my face pale. I think I'm going to throw up.

Paige and Leon look at me in shock.

“What does that mean?”

“No clue. Maybe they will give me a test?”

“We can talk about it during Free Time. Now, we still have an hour left of Work. I would suggest that we focus.”

Fair enough. We stop talking and focus on making our quota of energy that is to be made. We are all pretty close, so we aren't too worried. Well, at least about the quota. We are certainly worried about everything else.

The next hour goes by very quickly, and before we know it, our Tablets go off, signaling that Work is over. We get off of our bikes, sign out, and head back to our Compartments. The walk is silent. We are all lost in our thoughts. Maybe we will be able to make sense of our thoughts before Free Time. I hope we can. Our Free Time is limited, and we can't afford to waste a second of it.

I study, and then get ready for Dinner. It is honestly a miracle that I can even focus enough to study. Somehow, I do. After I study and get ready, I meet up with Paige and Leon, and we walk over to Dinner. Paige and Leon seem to be more calm now, as they are joking with each other. As they become more calm, I calm down as well.

“I’m glad you guys are calm. It is helping me a lot.”

Paige talks to me, and explains why they are so calm.

“Well, we have realized that we need to help you as much as possible. We have determined that if we continue to be stressed, you will be stressed as well. We all know that it is hard to focus when we are stressed, and you need to be as focused as possible.”

They have a really good point.

“You guys are correct. Thank you for helping me. I have the best friends anyone could have.”

They smile and nod at me, then we arrive at Dinner.

As we arrive at Dinner, we wait in the line, grab our food, and then head over to our table. Tables aren’t necessarily assigned, however, everyone has their table, and group, that they sit at for every meal. It is kind of an unspoken rule. While I am lost in my thoughts, we start eating. After some silence, at least it isn’t awkward this time, Leon asks me a question.

“Hey. Alex.”

I look up from my meal.

“What’s up?”

Leon leans in to get closer to me and Paige.

“What do you think will happen in the next phase?”

Paige shoves him away. He looks surprised and a bit frustrated. I can’t blame him for that.

“What was that for?”

Paige looks annoyed and puts her head in her hands. Leon and I look at each other, confused.

“Paige, something may seem obvious to you, but it is obvious that we aren’t seeing it. Can you explain?”

Paige lifts up her head and sits up.

“Leaning in looks suspicious, and we are trying to look normal.”

She has a point. I look over to Leon to see what he thinks. He appears to understand what Paige is saying. He nods and goes back to eating. Paige speaks up again.

“When I say that, I’m not saying that we can’t talk at all, we just need to be normal at the moment.”

I speak up.

“Paige, that is impossible.”

“How exactly is that impossible? It just requires some acting, that’s all. Surely it can’t be that hard.”

Leon looks confused too. I grin, which makes them even more confused.

“What is it?”

“Guys, we aren’t normal. We can be crazy and immature. Therefore, if we try to act normal, we are going against our personalities.”

Leon looks at me.

“Let me see if I understand what you are trying to say.”

This should be fun.

“So, you are saying that we normally act weird.”

Paige speaks up.

“Newsflash, captain obvious.”

Leon ignores her.

“So if we act normal, we are acting weird.”

“Right.”

“So we need to act weird to act normal? I’m confused.”

“My head hurts.”

Leon and I look at her in concern.

“Are you ok?”

She looks up at us in annoyance, or possibly frustration. I can’t tell which. Honestly, she is probably feeling a mixture of both.

“I’m fine. Well, my head will stop hurting as soon as you start understanding me!”

Leon looks confused again.

“How does our behavior affect your health?”

Paige hits her head against the table.

“One, you just made me hit my head, so that is one way. Also, frustration, which is what you guys are causing, gives me headaches.”

Leon snickers.

“Well then, it’s a wonder that you don’t have a headache all of the time.”

I laugh.

“Not funny guys. I think you understood from the beginning what I meant when I said that we needed to act normal. You guys are just being difficult.”

I speak up.

“Ok, we’re sorry.”

“Hey. Don’t speak for me!”

Paige and I gave him a look. He looks down at the table and messes with his food.

“Ok fine. I’m sorry. I really don’t understand what you mean though. I really mean this right now.”

I guess Paige believes him, because she gives him her explanation.

“Trust me guys, I am fully aware that we are not normal. It is what makes you guys fun to hang out with. Normal is boring.”

“Aw. You just called us fun to hang out with.”

“Don’t make this weird Leon. Anyway, when I say that we need to act like normal, I mean that we need to act like everything is normal. In other words, we shouldn’t be acting suspicious.”

Leon finally looks up from the table.

“Ok. That makes sense. Can I give a couple examples so that I know for sure that I understand?”

“Sure. Go ahead.”

Leon pauses for a second.

“Ok. I’m trying to think about what you have told me to stop doing.”

“We could be here for a while.”

“Hey!”

“Alex, let him think before he gets sidetracked.”

“Fine, but that isn’t as funny.”

Leon continues to think.

“Ok. Here are a couple of things that I can remember. I remember you telling me to stop whispering.”

Paige nods in approval.

“That is correct. Anything else?”

“You also just told me to not lean in.”

“Why did I tell you to stop doing those things?”

“You said it makes us look suspicious, like we are hiding something.”

“Exactly. So, like I said earlier, when I say we need to act normal, I mean we need to stop acting suspicious. We already have a Council member that we keep “running into.””

“You don’t believe him when he says it is a coincidence?”

Paige shakes her head.

“Nope, not one bit. So, we need to make extra sure that we act “normal.””

Leon and I nod at her in agreement. Then, the Tablets go off, signaling that our time for Dinner is over, and that it is time for Cleaning and Maintenance.

We look at our Tablets to see our assignments for the day. It looks like we are split up. I have dish duty, which means I have to wash what seems like thousands of dishes. It is my least favorite assignment, but I guess it could be worse.

“Are you serious?”

I look over at Leon.

“What’s wrong?”

“I have to take out all of the trash. I do not like this assignment.”

“It could be worse. You could be having to do the dishes.”

“I would want to do that over picking up trash and taking it out.”

“Sadly we can’t switch.”

“You are right. You guys can’t switch.”

We look over at Paige.

“What assignment did you get?”

“I have to clean the tables. That isn’t too bad.”

Leon speaks up.

“We need to get started on our assignments. Let’s go.”

He has a point. We nod in agreement and split up to start working. Sadly, now I have to go to wash some dishes. I walk over to the area and I look at my Tablet to see where I need to go. It looks like I need to go to the first station.

Once I get there, I stare in shock. There has to be at least 500 dishes here. Well, there is no use in complaining. I need to get started. I see that someone else is walking towards me. I don’t know them personally, but I think they are in my class.

“Uh, hi?”

Usually we have to do everything independently, so I don’t know what is going on.

“What are you doing here?”

“I have no clue, to be honest. My Tablet just told me that this is where I need to go, so here I am.”

He stops talking and looks at the pile of dishes.

“Uh, I think I’ve figured out why they sent me here to help you. It would be impossible for one person to do this alone.”

That makes sense. We start to wash the dishes. He washes them, and I dry them. I prefer drying the dishes to washing them, so this turned out to not be too bad. I do wonder why I got so many more dishes than normal. Usually the dishes are divided into groups that are feasible for one person to wash and dry by themselves.

“Hey Adam.”

“What’s up?”

“Why do you think they gave me so many dishes?”

He shrugs his shoulders.

“I honestly have no idea. Maybe there are some people that are not able to help?”

“That makes no sense. If you don’t show up, you get punished and then it goes on your Track Record.”

Adam looks at me.

“That is normally the case, but there is a “legal” way that you can miss doing these assignments..”

“How?”

“If you are sick or injured, you don’t have to be here.”

“How did you find this out? I’ve never heard of this before.”

“This information is on the Tablet. Remember how the Professor told us that some information would be on the Tablet? You know, for becoming a Council member?”

“I guess I just haven’t had enough time to read the information yet. I planned on reading it during Free Time. When did you read it?”

“I read it during Lunch.”



“I should have thought of that.”

Adam looks around and then looks at me.

“Why do you think so many people are gone? Could this many people be sick? That would not be good. Could the amount of people that are gone explain why you got so many dishes?”

“That is probably the reason. Also why do you think that so many people could be sick? Wouldn’t the Council have said something already?”

Adam shakes his head.

“No way. The Council wants us to think that everything is fine. If they told us that something is wrong, such as the amount of people on the Ship being sick, then there could be chaos and fear among the Citizens. This would weaken the faith the Citizens have in the Council. The Council would never allow that.”

“That is true. I still think that they should tell us. We deserve to know what is going on.”

“I completely agree with you. I don’t think we can change anything though.”

I stop and think for a second.

“What are you thinking about?”

“I think I just found a way for us to change things.”

Adam looks surprised.

“Really? How?”

“We could become Council members. I’m trying to do that myself. You’ve read the information, so I assume that you are thinking about it.”

He nods.

“You are right. I am thinking about it. I don’t know if I’m good enough though.”

“You never know until you try. You should talk to the Professor.”

He looks deep in thought, then he nods.

“That is a good idea. I’ll probably do that.”

We stop talking and clean the dishes in silence. Adam speaks up again.

“I’m glad I’m not the only one who has noticed that something was wrong. I thought I was going crazy.”

I shake my head.

“Nope. I’ve noticed things too. That is actually why I’m wanting to be a member. I want to get to the bottom of what is going on, and I also want to see if I can do anything to help the situation.”

“That is why I’m thinking about becoming a member too. Hopefully everything works out.”

I look over at him.

“Alex, are you ok? You look worried.”

“We can’t tell anyone else about this. If word spreads about what we are thinking and why we are interested in becoming members, things could get very bad very quickly. We need to act normally.”

Adam nods in agreement. We continue to wash and dry the dishes in silence. Before we know it, we are done, and then our Tablets go off. We say goodbye and walk our separate ways. I met up with Leon and Paige.

“You guys won’t believe what I found out.”

Paige looks at me and whispers something.

“Shhhh! Be quiet.”

I stop talking, for a second anyway.

“Calm down, I’ll explain during Free Time. For now, we can just rant about something.”

We all nod in agreement and walk to my Compartment. As we enter the Compartment, we talk about normal things until the door closes. Once the door closes, we wait for a few seconds, and then Leon starts to speak. Before he can finish his sentence, Paige stops him and reminds him to speak quietly. He nods, but he seems a bit annoyed.

“Can I finish my sentence now?”

Paige gives him a look and rolls her eyes.

“Oh. I’m sorry. I’m just trying to make sure that we avoid suspicion so that we stay safe.”

Paige speaks sarcastically a lot. I consider it to be one of her personality traits. I notice that Leon looks annoyed again. It may seem like Paige and Leon argue a lot, and honestly, they do, but we all know that we are friends and that we care about each other. Right now, though, I need to intervene so that their argument does not continue to interfere with the small amount of Free Time that we have.

“Ahem.”

Paige and Leon stop talking and look at me.

“What?”

“You guys need to stop arguing. The argument is taking up the little amount of Free Time that we have, and we need this time to talk about things.”

They look at each other, and then back at me. Paige speaks up, and surprisingly, she isn’t sarcastic this time.

“Fair point. Sorry. We need to start talking about what we have observed. Has anyone noticed anything that could be useful?”

Leon shakes his head.

“Sorry guys. I haven’t noticed anything. I hope you guys have more useful information than me.”

Paige looks at him.

“Don’t worry about it. Just keep looking. It can be hard to look for information without being suspicious. I think I noticed something though.”

“What is it?”

“It happened while we were doing our assignments. You know how we are usually supposed to work independently?”

“Yeah, and?”

“Well, I wasn’t working by myself. They had two more people helping me.”

Leon looks at her in shock.

“What? We have had to participate in Cleaning since we turned 10, and I don’t remember any time where we worked with someone else.”

“Exactly. That is why I was confused when someone walked up to me and started to help. I tried to stop them, but then they showed me what their Tablet said. Sure enough, they were assigned to work with me. They seemed just as confused as I did. However, the Tablets usually have the final say in things, so we just shrugged it off and started our assignment. Well, I pretended to shrug it off. I was worried and deep in thought the entire time. Hopefully it wasn’t obvious.”

Leon snorts. Paige looks at him.

“What is so funny about this? This could be serious!”

I agree with Paige and nod.

“Leon, I agree with Paige. There is nothing funny about this.”

“I disagree.”

“How? What is the “reasonable” explanation as to how this is funny?”

“Remember how Alex made a funny facial expression when he was deep in thought one time?”

I groan. Not this again. They will never let me forget about that.

“Will you guys ever let this go?”

“I have, mostly, but I doubt Leon will.”

He grins at me, confirming her statement.

“Ok. We get it. Alex made an expression. What does that have to do with this very serious situation? Notice how I emphasized serious?”

“I did notice it. So, just let me explain. When you said that you were worried and deep in thought, I imagined you making the same expression that Alex made.”

Paige looks at him, dumbfounded. Leon just shrugs.

“I couldn’t help it.”

I decided to speak up again.

“Guys. We are getting distracted again. It has already been ten minutes. Remember, we only have one hour.”

Leon looks at us sheepishly.

“Oops. Sorry.”

He then looks at Paige.

“Finish your story.”

Paige sighs and continues her story.

“Honestly, that was about it. I just noticed that there was something different about Work, and that never happens. The Council seems to be obsessed with routine and keeping everything the same at all times.”

Paige looks at me.

“Well, Leon says he didn’t notice anything, and I just said what I noticed. So, Alex, it’s your turn to speak. Did you notice anything?”

I nod.

“Actually, what I noticed was eerily similar to what you described. Someone else helped me with Cleaning, which, as we have discussed, never happens. When I questioned them, like you did, they had the same response. They showed me their Tablet. However, instead of you and your partner working in silence, we spoke about it. The pile of dishes that I was supposed to wash by myself was too large, so we believe that is why someone had to work with me tonight.”

“It is interesting that you and Paige have very similar stories. Do you think others had stories like yours?”

Paige thinks for a second.

“It is very possible. Maybe we should keep an eye out during Cleaning tomorrow.”

Leon and I nod. I then decided to speak up again.

“That wasn’t all.”

Paige and Leon look at me.

“What else was there?”

I lean in and lower my voice to a whisper.

“We are not the only ones who think something is wrong.”

Paige and Leon gasp in shock. Then Paige speaks up.

“No way! Who is it? What did they say?”

“I don’t want to say who it was. I want to keep them safe.”

“Ok. Fair enough. Can you at least tell us what you guys talked about?”

“The person said they were also wanting to become a Council member to find more information, and to possibly make an impact and possibly help to solve a problem, if there is one.”

Leon is looking at me in shock.

“Are you good?”

He leans back.

“I just can’t believe that we aren’t the only ones who are noticing that something is wrong. What if more people are noticing something too, but they just don’t want to speak up?”

“That is definitely a possibility.”

Our Tablets go off, signaling that Free Time is over. We groan.

“Really? Already. Free Time is never long enough.”

I nod in agreement.

“I completely agree, but you guys need to get back to your Compartments in time. In the meantime, before we can meet again, we can think about what we have talked about tonight.”

We all agree, and Paige and Leon leave. I got ready to sleep, and then I got into bed. However, sleep eludes me. I need to get some sleep so that I can be fully alert. I have the test tomorrow, but my brain is racing a million miles an hour. Oh no, why did I have to think about the test? I definitely won't be getting a great sleep tonight, or so I think. I guess I am so overwhelmed and exhausted that after I calm my thoughts, which takes about half an hour, I sink into a deep sleep.

### **Saturday, November 20, 2286**

Before I know it, morning is here, and the Tablet wakes me up, signaling that Breakfast is happening soon. Well, here we go. I get up, get ready, and meet up with Leon and Paige. Then, we walked over to Breakfast. We sat down at our table and then we started to eat. Paige looked at me and asked a question.

“So, Alex, what are you thinking right now?”

I have to pause for a second before I can respond.

“Well, I'm thinking about a lot of things, to be honest. I'm thinking about everything that is happening, and I am also thinking about the next phase of becoming a Council member. The member who talked to me told me to “be ready for anything.” What does that even mean?”

Leon shrugs.

“Not trying to be annoying, but it could literally be anything. Maybe they could test you to find a weakness?”

I shrug.

“What would that accomplish?”

“I wasn't quite finished yet. Maybe, after they find a weakness, they could give you a test to see how you handle your weakness.”

Paige speaks up.

“I think I have another idea.”

Leon and I look at her.

“What is your idea?”

She pauses.

“I have no clue how reasonable this could be, but maybe they would just test you on basic information.”

“What would this “basic information” include?”

“I'm not sure. Maybe it would include the history about how we got here...”

I groan.

“I really hope not. I hate history.”

Paige looks at me. I think she is a bit annoyed since I interrupted her. I look down at the floor.

“Uh, sorry.”

“It’s ok. I’ll finish my explanation in a minute. I do have a question though.”

What could she be curious about? We know almost everything about each other.

“I’ve always heard you complaining about history, but I’ve never asked why. Why do you hate it so much? There is no way you can think it is boring. There is so much that happened.”

Leon nods in agreement. I decided to give my explanation.

“I’m not completely sure...”

“We all know that is a lie.”

Like usual, Paige is correct. Well, it looks like I need to be honest.

“Ok. You’re right. I’m completely sure. There are a couple of reasons. One, I honestly do think it is boring...”

Paige opens her mouth to protest, but Leon stops her.

“We all have our interests. Remember that I love math but you hate it? You can love history but Alex can hate it. Regardless, he still has another reason. I’m curious to hear what it is. Alex, please continue.”

Paige stops and looks at me.

“Ok, the next reason is the main reason. I don’t know if the reason is petty or not, but it is how I feel.”

I sigh.

“I don’t think our ancestors deserve to be remembered...”

Paige and Leon look at me in shock.

“What did you just say?”

“Think about it guys. They are the reason that we are in this position. In history, we have read about a beautiful planet. A planet called “Earth” with many colors and wildlife...”

I look around and extend my arms.

“Many more colors than gray.”

Paige and Leon are looking at me intently now. I’m starting to feel uncomfortable and I start to shift in my seat.

“Uh, why are you guys staring at me like that? You are staring at me like I have three heads or something.”

Leon continues to look at me, then Paige speaks up.

“I hate to admit it, but I can definitely see your point. I still think history is interesting though.”

“I can see why you would think it would be interesting, but I guess I am just petty and am holding a grudge.”

“I can’t blame you. Honestly, I’ve had the same thoughts here and there. However, I have a different interpretation of history. Our Professor told us about this interpretation.”

Now I am interested.

“What is it?”

“The Professor says we could notice the mistakes our ancestors made and avoid them in the future. This could keep us from getting into another catastrophe.”

“That is a good way of looking at it. I’ll try to think about it that way more. I still don’t think I will like history very much.”

Paige shrugs.

“Fair enough. As Leon mentioned, we all have our likes and dislikes.”

Leon grins.

“What are you grinning about?”

“Ha ha. I was right about something.”

Paige sighs.

“Alright, alright. I will admit that you were right about something.”

She pauses.

“For once.”

I snort.

“Hey! I’m right about some things.”

“Paige, I have to agree with him. He isn’t right all of the time, but he is right about some things.”

Leon looks at me.

“I feel like your comment was kind of an insult, but you were still standing up for me. So, thank you, kind of.”

“No problem.”

Our Tablets go off, signaling that Breakfast is over. I speak up.

“Well, it looks like it is time for us to go.”

As we started to walk to class, my Tablet went off again.

“Wait, I’m confused. Why did my Tablet go off? It never goes off at this time in the day.”

Paige and Leon look at my Tablet.

“Hey! There is a notification that popped up. Click it, then maybe you will be able to figure out what is going on.”

“Good idea, Leon.”

I looked at my Tablet, and then I felt sick to my stomach.

“Are you good?”

“The Tablet is telling me that it is time for the test.”

“Oh. Where are you supposed to go?”

“I have no idea. There is a map, but I have never seen this part of the Ship.”

Paige looks at the map.

“I don’t recognize this area either. What about you Leon?”

“Nope. I guess you’ll just have to go over there and see.”

“I can’t believe this is happening now. I am terrified.”

Leon put his hand on my shoulder.

“Don’t worry. I believe in you.”

Paige nods in agreement.

“Me too. You’ve got this. Just walk over there and don’t think about it.”

“Ok. I’ll do that. Wish me luck.”

“Good luck.”

As Leon and Paige walked to Class, I looked at my Tablet. Then I heard Leon.

“Hey Alex!”

“What?”

“Don’t mess up!”

Paige punches Leon in the arm.

“Ow! What was that for?”

“That was not helpful! Good luck Alex.”

I grinned at them and then I walked to the destination that the Tablet gave me. As I arrived at the destination, I saw a couple of Council members. They saw me, and waved me into a room. Well, here we go.

I am now in a room with about 40 people. They are all wearing the robes meant to distinguish themselves from us Citizens. They are all sitting on a raised platform, staring me down. I believe the robes and the platform are meant to be an intimidation tactic. Well, it’s working. I look up at the members, seeing if I can distinguish who the main leader is. One of the Council members must have noticed that I am looking for something, because he decided to speak to me.

“You appear to be looking for something. Or someone?”

Another member looks at him.

“He is probably looking for a leader.”

He directs his attention to me.

“Hello. I am the Leader of the Council.”

I nod.

“Good. You seem to understand things quickly. Now, I imagine you are curious about what the test will be. Well, you will find out in a moment.”

A third Council member speaks up.

“You have stated that you have wanted to become a member. You have a good record, and a good recommendation letter from a Professor who is notorious about refusing to write letters. These are good accomplishments, but these alone, will not be enough. You must prove yourself today. Before we begin the test, do you have any questions?”

40 people looked down at me.

“No sir. Let’s begin the test.”



“Very well. Let’s begin.”

The lights go out and everything goes black. Did the power go out again? Is this part of the test? I look up. Maybe I can figure out what is going on based on their reactions. If they are confused, this is a power outage. If they are not, then this must be part of the test. I look up, and to my surprise, nothing is there. The platform, the people, everything just disappeared.

What could this mean? I’ve gotten zero instructions except to begin the test. Am I supposed to figure out what the test is? How do I even do that? Is this a power outage that stopped the test completely? If that’s the case, why hasn’t a member come to me and explained the situation? I’m on my own for now. I need to figure something out. I can’t fail this test. Everyone is counting on me now, even if they don’t know it.

I see a faint blue glow in the distance. I decide to walk down one of the many hallways that lead out of the main room. I’m concerned about becoming lost, however, especially in the pitch black darkness. I don’t have much of a choice. This glow is the only clue I have. I’ll just have to do my best to remember the turns I make.

I begin to walk. Thankfully, I haven’t had to memorize any turns yet. I am being led down a straight path. As I get closer, I hear voices speaking. I have to turn a corner. I tell myself to remember that I turned to the right after walking about 200 steps. As I turn the corner, I see that there are two Council members speaking to each other. It’s hard to hear their conversation. I need to come closer. Is this part of the test? Do I need to remember what they are talking about and complete a quiz after the conversation? I walk closer to and listen to what they are saying. The Council member to the right speaks up.

“We need to overthrow the Council. The current members are not doing their jobs.”

The other member nods in agreement.

“I agree completely. How would we do that? The Council has all of the Citizens brainwashed into believing that they do everything perfectly and that nothing is wrong. Surely at least one of them is aware of an issue. Not to mention that we would be charged with treason if someone found out about this plan. We both know what would happen to us then. Don’t you remember what happened to one of the original members?”

They both look down. They have solemn looks on their faces. The other member speaks up.

“Of course I remember. Don’t you agree that the risk is worth it? Humanity is at stake here!”

I fight to keep my emotions from showing on my face. Are my friends and I really not the only ones who notice that something is wrong? There are Council members that are concerned too? I take note of the names on their robes. Perhaps I could get their help.

As I am thinking about what to do, both of the members stop talking and turn around. I try to duck behind the corner before they see me but it’s too late. The Council member to the right speaks to me.

“You! What are you doing here? You are just a Citizen! You are not permitted in this area. You must leave!”

The other Council member looks terrified.

“How long have you been watching us? What have you heard? I mean, I’m not scared that you heard what we were talking about. We weren’t saying anything wrong. We were just talking about how to help the Citizens. That reminds me. I have a question for you.”

Where could this be going? The Council member to the right speaks up again.

“Listen. We aren’t fools. We know that you heard everything.”

At least this Council member is brave enough to admit it.

“I’m actually glad you heard us.”

The other member looks at him in shock.

“Are you serious?! You just gave us away!”

“Quiet! As I was saying, I’m glad you heard us. Perhaps you could join us in our plot to overthrow the Council.”

I have to remind myself that this isn’t real. As much as I would love to join them, this is a test. Surely, the Council wants to see how loyal I would be. To prove my loyalty, I have to report the rogue members. I decided to speak.

“I’m afraid I can’t do that. The Council is in charge, and has been for some time. I do not believe that they are “brainwashing us.” They keep everyone safe, and they keep everything in order. Without them, there would be chaos.”

“So, you are telling me that you support what the Council does?”

Now I have to lie again. Great.

“That is correct. In addition to stating my support, I have to prove it.”

The rogue members look confused.

“What do you mean? How would you do that?”

“I have to report you.”

The other member looks at me in shock, then looks angrily to the member standing to the right.

“I told you this would happen! Now we will be charged! Everything is ruined!”

He directs his attention to me.

“Boy, I’m warning you. If you do this, humanity will become extinct, and it will all be because of you. Do you really want to have that on your conscience?”

“Let him do what he wants. The others won’t believe him, he is merely a Citizen. We are members. Go. Report us. See what will happen, which is nothing.”

I look around, seeing if there is anything I can use as proof. I then see a camera. I can’t tell them about it. I just need to walk out of here and tell the other members.

“You may be correct, but I can still try.”

I walk back to the room where the test first started. It is still dark. How am I supposed to report the rogue members if I can’t find anyone to report them to? Perhaps I can just talk and see if any members come? It’s worth a shot.

“Hello? Is anyone there?”

Nothing. I decided to try again.

“Hello? Listen, I know I’m not supposed to get help during the test, and I’m not trying to. I found some critical information that the Council needs to hear.”

I can hear a loud voice from a distance.

“What is this information? It must be important if you are interrupting a test. Keep that in mind before you speak.”

“It is important! Please, just listen.”

“Very well. Speak.”

“You all are in danger. There are two members that have gone rogue. They are convinced that the citizens are brainwashed and that there are many problems. They plan to overthrow the current Council. I heard them talking.”

Silence. Did the voice vanish?

“That is a very outlandish and serious claim. Do you have any evidence?”

“Yes sir. I heard them talking in a hallway. You walk 200 steps and then turn to the right. There is a camera to the left corner of the hallway that, if it was working, should have recorded everything. Please. Believe me.”

There is silence again. Why do things keep disappearing? After a long time of silence, I hear the voice again.

“Your claim has been proven to be true. The members have been arrested and will be charged with treason. You have done a great service to the Council today, and your actions will be rewarded.”

After the voice stops speaking, the lights turn back on, and I see the Council members. However, there are only 38 now, instead of 40. The Council member who started the test stands and talks to me.

“Congratulations. You have passed. You will now be inducted as a member of the Council.”

“Thank you sir, this is an honor.”

As I am talking, the two missing Council members come into the room. I guess I look confused, because the Leader speaks up.

“I can see your confusion. Do not worry. This was all a simulation. There are no traitors in this Council. We wanted to test your loyalty. As I said, you passed the test. We have a meeting every Wednesday. You will join in this next meeting. You will not wear the robes that we wear. That privilege will not be granted until you graduate.

“I understand. Thank you for this honor.”

The Leader looks at me.

“I must give you a dire warning. Everything, no matter how small, must not leave the meeting. If we find out that you told anyone anything, the repercussions will be great. The most severe being execution, however, usually you are thrown into prison for the rest of your life.”

He looks at me, and it takes everything within me to appear brave and look him in the eye.

“I understand.”

“Very well. Congratulations. As I have said, you will be in our meeting this Wednesday. The meeting starts at 8 pm. Do not be late.”

“I will not be late. You can count on me.”

“I hope so. You are the youngest person to ever be allowed into the council. Do not make us regret our decision.”

“You will never regret your decision.”

I hope I’m sounding confident, not arrogant.

“Good. You are dismissed. You will learn more about your duties during the meeting on Wednesday.”

I nod and leave the room. I exhale and walk back to my Compartment. My Tablet goes off. It is now 8:30, Free Time. The test must have taken all day. Instead of the normal happiness that I feel when it is Free Time, I feel dread. How am I supposed to tell Paige and Leon that I can’t tell them anything? That was the entire point of this. I hope they will understand. As I am thinking this over, I hear a knock on the door.

“Alex? This is Paige.”

“And Leon.”

“Of course he would know you were here too. We are always together during Free Time.”

“Sheesh. We get it.”

It is hard for me to resist laughing.

“Ok guys. Just come in. Quit arguing.”

Paige and Leon come in. Paige asks the obvious question.

“Ok. We are going to address the elephant in the room.”

She looks around.

“Did you get in?”

I nod, trying to look excited about it. I guess I didn’t do well enough. Leon catches on and gives me a confused look.

“You don’t look very happy about this. Why? You have spent so much time studying and worrying, and now you have achieved your goal! Shouldn’t you be celebrating?”

I feel like I’m about to throw up.

“I don’t know how I feel. What have I gotten myself into?”

Paige looks concerned.

“Ok Alex. You can’t hold this in. What is going on?”

“Alright. You guys know why all of this started. We wanted to figure out what was going on and help everyone. Well, there is a bit of an issue with that plan.”

Paige and Leon look at each other, then back at me.

“Ok Alex. Just tell us what is going on.”

I take a deep breath, here we go.

“Our plan is never going to work!”

Paige and Leon look surprised.

“Alex, be quiet. What are you talking about?”

I lower my voice to a whisper.

“I can’t tell you guys anything. For the plan to succeed, I would have to figure everything out by myself. I can’t do that.”

Leon shakes his head.

“What are you talking about? Of course you can tell us. We won’t say anything.”

“No. You guys don’t understand. After I was told I was a member, they gave me a very serious warning. They said if I told anyone anything, even the smallest detail, I could be executed. I assume it would be for treason.”

Paige looks at me, stunned.

“Seriously?”

“Paige, do you think he would really joke about something like that?”

“Fair point.”

“Unfortunately, that is not all.”

“What else is going on?”

“So they didn’t tell me this directly, but I assume that you guys would be in danger too if I told you anything. I’m not sure what would happen, but it wouldn’t be good.”

Leon speaks up.

“Do you think we would be executed too?”

“I have no idea. It’s a possibility.”

“Why would they care about us knowing?”

Paige looks at him.

“Are you that dense? If something is going on, and someone else knows, wouldn’t the Council be concerned about that person spreading the information?”

“Ok. Fair point.”

I decided to get the conversation back on track.

“Guys. The point is, the plan is gone. I feel like the fate of the human race rests on my shoulders now! What am I supposed to do?”

“Ok. We can figure something out. We can think during the day tomorrow, and hopefully at least one of us will have an idea. Would you agree, Paige?”

“It’s possible I guess.”

“Guys, I appreciate everything. For now, the best thing we can do is to act like everything is normal. If we think of something, maybe we can figure out what to do.”

The Tablets go off, signaling that Free Time is over. As Paige and Leon leave, Paige speaks up.

“We will try to do everything we can. In the meantime, just try to get some rest. You have gone through a lot lately.”

Leon nods in agreement.

“Alright guys. I’ll see you later.”

Paige and Leon leave and I am left alone with my thoughts.

I know that Paige told me to get some rest, but that task seems more impossible than saving the human race right now. How am I supposed to rest with everything going on? I wish I could walk around the Ship, but we aren’t allowed to leave our Compartments until the morning, and my Compartment is too small for pacing. I sit up in my bed and put my head in my hands. What have I just gotten myself into? As I’m about to give up, an idea comes to my mind. It’s risky, but I’m not sure if I can do everything by myself. I’m scared of what could happen to my friends, but I can give them a choice on if they want to help or not. For now, I really need to get some rest.

### **Sunday, November 21, 2286**

I wake up to the sound of my Tablet going off. I guess I must have fallen asleep at some point. I have no clue how. I shake the thoughts out of my head and I start to get ready for Breakfast. After about 20 minutes, I meet up with Paige and Leon as they are walking to Breakfast. Leon looks at me.

“Did you ever get any sleep?”

“I must have, I woke up to the Tablet. I still feel exhausted.”

Paige speaks up.

“Don’t worry, hopefully you will get better sleep tonight.”

“How is he supposed to do that? The problem will still be there.”

“Be quiet! Don’t mention anything about a problem.”

I look around and notice that people are looking at us.

“Guys, quit making a big deal out of the test we have in a few days. It’s not that big of a deal.”

Paige looks confused for a brief second, then appears to understand what is going on. She pretends to look embarrassed as she notices people staring.

“Yeah, you are right. We still have a few days to study anyway.”

“Paige, Alex is right. It’s no big deal.”

One of the people who was staring chuckled. What is so funny?

“Believe it or not, I understand what you are going through. I was in School once. Your friend is right. Just keep doing what you are doing and you will be fine. I would recommend being quieter though. You don’t want people thinking there is a real problem and people around here generally don’t like being disturbed anyway.”

Now I think Paige is actually embarrassed. I’ve never seen this before.

“Yeah, uh... yeah. Sorry about that. School just causes stress sometimes.”

The person just shrugs and walks away.

Thankfully the test excuse seemed to work. No one is staring anymore and we continue our walk to Breakfast. Paige looks like she is about to explode with anger but she is keeping it in pretty well. Hopefully people will just assume that she is being an angry teenager or something. Oh no. Leon looks like he wants to say something. Please don't make this worse.

“Paige?”

She stares straight ahead.

“Paige? I can keep saying your name over and over until you respond. You know this.”

Paige sighs.

“What do you want?”

“Sorry about that.”

“It's ok. Everything seems to be ok. Now, let's continue our day and not bring more attention to ourselves.”

Leon and I both nod. It sounds like a good plan.

We go through the normal routine. We have Breakfast, School, Lunch, Work, etc. After Work, my Tablet notifies me that I am to go to a meeting with the Council immediately. My face goes pale. Leon notices.

“Are you ok?”

“I've been summoned to a meeting.”

“Remember, you are a member now. You aren't in trouble anymore when you get called to a meeting.”

“Alex, Leon is right.”

“That is true. I haven't gotten used to it yet. Alright, I need to get to the meeting.”

Paige and Leon give me a thumbs up as I walk away.

My mind is racing. What could be going on? It is true that I am probably not in trouble since I am a part of the Council. This means that I could be a part of making decisions that could impact everyone. This is terrifying to think about. It is a lot of responsibility. It is a tough decision about if I would rather want to be in trouble or be in charge of very important decisions. Well, no one knows what happens to those who get in trouble, so I suppose I would rather be in the situation I am in now.

Before I know it, I've arrived at the meeting. I take a deep breath, and walk into the room. I see the Council members look stern, but concerned. I walk in, not sure what to do. One of the members must have noticed my confusion and motions to the empty seat next to him. I walk over and sit down. He leans over and tells me what is about to happen.

“So, this is your first meeting?”

“Yes. Is it that obvious?”

He chuckles.

“Yes and no. I can tell you are a bit confused, but I also know everyone here, so if I see someone new, I know it is their first meeting.”

“I understand.”

“Don’t worry. You will figure out what to do soon. We follow the same pattern every time, so it is relatively easy to get into a routine. Right now, we are waiting for the rest of the members. This is a slightly different meeting. Usually, we have scheduled meetings, but I suppose something else is going on.”

“You don’t know why we are having this meeting either?”

“No. It is likely that only the Leader is aware of what is going on, but we will know soon. Hopefully everything is relatively ok.”

“Well, I guess we will find out soon.”

After a few more minutes pass, everyone is in the room, and the meeting begins. The Leader stands and begins to speak.

“Hello everyone. I apologize for the short notice. Something has come about that requires our immediate attention.”

Once he said this, any of the members that appeared bored paid attention.

“First, I would like to congratulate and welcome our newest member, Alex.”

How is that important? I look around and people are clapping, but I can tell they are ready to hear what the Leader has to say.

“Now, onto the topic of the meeting. I’m sure you have noticed several issues that have occurred over the past few weeks. More people are missing from School, Work, etc. I’ve had people complain that maintenance of the Ship, particularly the cleaning after meals, has become very difficult because there are not enough people to do the work. We have also continued to have power outages, once again, because there are not enough people. Everything is beginning to break down, and I believe that people are starting to notice.”

The Leader pauses. It looks like he is hesitant to say what he wants to say next.

“Before I continue, it must be stressed that what is said in this room, stays in this room. Failure to keep what is talked about here will lead to serious consequences.”

Everyone tenses up and we all look at each other.

“Alright. So, we all know what project we started several months ago. Well, it has not gone as planned.”

I guess I look confused, because the Leader decides to talk about the problem.

“It has been a while since we have discussed the specifics, so I will repeat what has been said. Many years ago, there were many black outs, food shortages, water shortages, and more. We figured out that most, if not all of the problems were occurring because of overpopulation. If things continued at this rate, the Ship wouldn’t be able to keep up with what was needed to sustain it, and it would eventually fail. Once it fails, humanity will cease.”

I did not know this had happened. Is this what is happening again?



“This problem is different. This problem is happening because of a lack of people. I believe that this was preventable. The first virus was released by us in secret. We believed we had stopped the virus after the population had decreased, but we failed. We have unintentionally allowed the virus to infect too many people. Unfortunately, the virus has also mutated, so the vaccines we originally made will no longer work.

We do get vaccines when they are needed. After all, we can't afford to lose more people than we already have, but I guess something happened anyway. I wonder what we can do about this?

“We are currently in the process of identifying what the new virus strain is. Once that occurs, it should only take about 10 days for us to create a new vaccine and get everything under control.”

I glance at the other members, curious about their reactions. Most of them look relieved, as one would expect. However, it looks like one is frustrated. Why? They should want everything to be ok for humanity. I hear the Leader continue to speak.

“The problem is, as I mentioned before, that people are noticing that something is going on. People are noticing the shortages and the lack of people. Hospital staff are noticing the increase in patients. We won't be able to keep everything in the dark for much longer. Hopefully, we will be able to figure everything out soon. We are hoping to have everything solved by 10 days. Until then, there is nothing we can do except for keeping concerns at bay and keeping everything as normal as possible. Once again, I want to stress that nothing, I repeat, nothing that is said in this room may leave this room. Does everyone understand?

We all say “yes.”

“Alright. You will receive a notification on your Tablets notifying you to come to a meeting if anything new arises. You are dismissed.”

As we get up and leave, I wonder what I am supposed to do. I can't tell anyone about this, including Paige and Leon. The Council made this very clear. I'll have to break the news to them. We started this process together, and I wouldn't want to do this without them, but the risk of being caught and the possible punishment is too much. I'll have to tell them tonight.

The rest of the day goes by very slowly. I am just going through the motions. Before I know it, it is Free Time, and I meet up with Paige and Leon. I decided to say it right away.

“I can't say anything.”

Paige and Leon look confused.

“What are you talking about?”

I drop my voice to a whisper.

“Paige. In the meeting, they made it very clear that nothing was allowed to leave the meeting room. They talked about a severe punishment. I believe it would also include the

people who were told the information. I think one of the punishments could be execution.”

“Are you serious? What are we supposed to do now?”

Leon looks deep in thought.

“What if we talk in code?”

I shake my head

“I still think that is too risky. If we write on paper, that could be used as evidence.”

“What if we make up our own language?”

“Leon, I still think that would be too risky. If anyone would hear, they would assume, rightfully so, that we were keeping a secret. No one approves of keeping secrets. We would still get in trouble.”

Paige looks stressed.

“Well, I understand where you are coming from. Unfortunately, I agree with you.”

Leon looks at Paige.

“Seriously?”

“Do you have any better ideas?”

Leon is silent.

“There is a way you guys can help me.”

Paige and Leon look up.

“How can we help?”

“Support me. You may not be able to help me reason about any decisions, but you can help me to cheer up if I seem stressed. Maybe we can just laugh and joke like we used to, and try to keep everything as normal as possible.”

Leon speaks up.

“So, we just need to help you to not be stressed as much as possible?”

Paige looks at him.

“If I understand correctly, we just need to continue to be his friends and support each other.”

They both look at me. I sigh in relief.

Paige laughs.

“Alex looks pretty happy. I think we figured it out.”

“You both figured it out. Thank you.”

We spend the rest of Free Time joking and laughing. We also determine that we need to keep up with our homework. That part is not as fun, but I suppose it is necessary. When Paige and Leon leave, they tell me to get some rest.

I am more at peace now. Paige and Leon are safe from danger, and I can work on figuring out what to do. For now though, I need to get some rest.

**Wednesday, December 1, 2286**

10 days passed. Nothing seems to have improved. Power outages are becoming more common. I notice people whispering when I walk by. More people are disappearing from Work and School. As I am lost in thought, I got a notification that another emergency meeting was being called. We were to report to the meeting as soon as possible. I'm hoping for good news. After all, everyone believed that a new vaccine would be developed in 10 days and the problem would be solved. As I walk into the room, that does not appear to be the case. Everyone looks somber. We sit down and all look at the Leader. He clears his throat and begins to speak.

"As you all know, we have been experiencing many difficulties. People have begun to notice, and it is no longer a secret. Unfortunately, this is not the worst part of this news." We all look at each other. How could this get any worse?

"We have been unable to find a new vaccine for the virus. It has also been proven to be fatal. There is a 100 percent mortality rate within three days of being infected."

Everyone gasps. Another member speaks up, interrupting the Leader.

"What are we supposed to do then? Are we all going to die? What will happen to humanity?"

The Leader stops him from speaking further.

"We have a plan, but it will be difficult. After some calculations, it has been determined that 90 percent of people have come into contact with someone who is infected, which means those people will die soon. The remaining 10 percent have been identified and isolated. They are our only hope. We have had an escape plan in place for some time. There is a smaller Ship with all of the knowledge we have acquired so that it can be used by the people to rebuild society. There is enough fuel to get them to the nearest habitable planet. We were days away from landing and being able to start over."

Someone else speaks up.

"Will we be able to land with them?"

"No. We have been infected as well. The 10 percent, the Survivors, have already been notified and will depart shortly."

So we are all going to die. That was unexpected. I thought we were safe because we didn't have any symptoms.

"I can see that you are all confused about being infected. We didn't have symptoms because the virus does not show symptoms for 48 hours after infection. Everyone will start showing symptoms within the next 24 hours. It will not be pleasant."

The Leader stops talking.

"I am sorry that this is how everything will end. I have failed as the Leader. We have failed as a Council, but hopefully the Survivors will be able to save humanity. I have already created a video to explain everything. It will be sent to all Tablets within the next 12 hours."

He stops talking again and looks at me.

“Alex, I notice that you appear to be writing in a journal a lot. Have you written anything that could be useful for the Survivors and future generations?”

“I believe I have. I’ve explained life on the Ship. Perhaps they could use my story as an example of what not to do. Why do you ask?”

“I would request that you put your journal on the Ship the Survivors will be in. It could help them in their survival and give an explanation of our history to future generations.”

“I would be honored. May I add a quick note to the Survivors? I would like to give them additional instructions and insight.”

“That would be acceptable. Can you write it now?”

“Yes. I will need a moment to think.”

“Very well.”

I write down everything I want the future generations to know. I make sure all of the details about our history are written. I talk about the knowledge we have. Although I believe it is pointless, I also write an apology.

“Hello. If you are reading this, it means the time has come. It is the end of the world. You may be the only hope that humanity has to avoid extinction. We have avoided it once. With your help, could we prevail again? Here, use my story. Understand the mistakes we made to get us to this point, and avoid them. Perhaps, you can find the solutions for our mistakes and save us all. Humanity is worth saving. I would also like to apologize for everything you are about to go through. I hope you can forgive us, but I understand if you are unable to. Please understand that while we may have contributed to the problem, we are sacrificing ourselves by not getting off of the Ship with you. I wish you the best of luck in your journey. Persevere. Keep humanity alive. Everyone is depending on you. Good luck.”

“I have finished the note. Should we all sign the journal?”

“No. We are not worthy. Besides, we need to get the journal to them as soon as possible. They will depart soon.”

The Leader leaves the room and a surveillance video appears on our Tablets. We are able to watch history as the Leader gives the Survivors my journal. As he walks away, the Survivors leave the Ship and head to the planet. The Leader walks back into the room and sits down.

“They have left.”

I raise my hand.

“Yes.”

“May I ask who the Survivors are?”

The Leader smiles.

“Your two friends are among them. They wanted to stay to be with you, but I told them what needed to happen for humanity to survive. They understood and left.”

“They are safe?”

“Yes.”

Another member raises his hand.

“Yes?”

“What do we do now?”

“All we can do is wait until the end, and hope that the Survivors can preserve humanity.”

We all nod, wish the Survivors luck, and then wait for the end. The end that will occur tomorrow, December 2, 2286, exactly 200 years from the last catastrophe.