

# Dead Air

(B. Yekcam)



It began silently, like you might expect. Quietly, perhaps in the early hours of morning, or the late hours of night. Where no one was there to watch, safely tucked away in apartments and homes and corners, blindly unaware. A silence not easily broken.

---

An insistent beeping sweeps away the remnants of my dream, washed down the drain with the toothpaste. At first I assumed it to be the alarm, perhaps I had hit snooze instead of off in my frantic attempt to stop the sound early this morning. A quick check proved otherwise.

“Summer!” Called my father from the kitchen. “Breakfast is ready!” Ah. Dad never had been the best cook, but ever since mom had left, he had tried his best to provide for us.

As I entered the kitchen, the scent of burnt toast assaulted my nose and I scrunched it up in response. Dad must have seen because he immediately rained down a storm of apologies.

“Oh hun, I’m sorry! I know it’s not the greatest. We probably have cereal somewhere if you want that instead? There’s no milk in the fridge, but there’s clean bowls in the cupboard above the sink,” he relayed softly.

I sighed, before plastering on a smile and brushing aside my short brown hair. “No Dad, it’s fine. This looks perfect to me.” The blackened edges of rye and the sad over-cooked yolk on top were but. However, the effort Dad made every morning was worth some burnt toast.

He looked a bit doubtful shoving his feet into shoes and arms into a jacket, but didn’t question otherwise. “Okay, well, I’ve got to head out here, don’t want to be late for the temp.” Can you make sure Pacific wakes up on time and has something to eat before you two leave?”

Nodding, I picked at the plate of toast, before leaning back in the chair.

“Thanks Sum,” Dad said smiling. “I love you, okay? Have a good day and be safe.”

“Always, Dad,” I smiled back.

Like a hurricane of disaster, he was out the door and off. This was the third temporary job in just as many months and I knew he was hoping to keep this one. But then, the same could be said for all the others. He tried, for our sake, and that was all that mattered to me.

A shuffling could be heard from the hall and soon Pacific appeared from down the hall, messing with his carefully styled quiff to no avail.

“Heyyy,” I mumbled. “Quit messing with your hair, you’re making it worse.”

“Heyyy why don’t you shush,” he replied, punching me in the shoulder by way of greeting.

Sticking my tongue out in reply, I move to get rid of my dishes and dump the remainder of breakfast.

“Dad make breakfast again?” Pacific asks, following me with his own untouched plate the contents of which are tossed into the bin.

“Who else,” I reply.

Pacific shakes his head in exasperation. “I don’t know why he bothers. Not like it’s any good anyways.”

“Rude,” I say, smacking his arm. “But not wrong either.”

After cleaning up the dishes and leaving them to dry in the rack, I grab my bag and start to push binders and books in as Pacific deals with his own across the hall. The school is far, so we don’t need to take a bus or anything, but we still almost never make it on time.

Mornings are not our strong suit.

The streets outside are eerily quiet as I heft my bag over my shoulders, snuggling my face into my jacket as the cool morning air hits my skin. I follow Pacific outside, tiny compared to his football player frame. A few cars pass as we make our way through alleys and sidewalks to find the quickest way to school. I think little of it, Monday mornings are always less chaotic, and the side roads stay clear as people use the highways to rush towards commitments and responsibilities that they'd rather stay away from.

Maybe I should have, too.

We arrive at school and Pacific splits off, finding his jock buddies and making their way to the senior wing. I look around for Rainy and Abigail, but neither is present. They might have already made their way to class at this point though, so I'm not entirely surprised.

A shrill screech sounds, and the classrooms are abuzz with conversations as students and teachers alike rush to get to their classes before the second bell rings. I join the throes, but unlike usual, don't get knocked around by a flood of teenagers. It's quieter here too, I notice. Not so much as the darkened morning streets, but noticeable in the smallest of ways.

My classroom is no different. 32 becomes 13 and unlike I had assumed, Rainy and Abigail are not in fact in class. Abigail wouldn't surprise me, flippant as she is, there are at least two days a week that find her absent or late. Rainy on the other hand, has likely never missed a day of class in their life. They are the overachiever of overachievers and missing a class is as good as a failing grade in their mind. But maybe there's a bug going around, it is flu season after all. They'd be here tomorrow though, flu or not, Rainy wouldn't miss more than one day of school, and Abigail knew better than to miss two in a row, lest she get behind in class again.

I didn't see them tomorrow. Or the day after. Or a month later.

The principal walks in, looking a disarray as he studies the less than full class. He clears his throat, catching our attention as the second bell rings. “Classes are cancelled for the day. The office will call your parents and see if we can get you home.”

Huh? My brain short circuits. How odd. Is it because there are so few kids today? Surely they wouldn’t cancel classes because of a flu bug. But then again, maybe it wasn’t worth covering the material if so few students were present. Weird but, I suppose understandable. Oh well. The office wouldn’t be able to get ahold of Dad in any case, so I guess Pacific and I would just walk ourselves home.

Names are called over the announcements, one by one until there’s only four students left in my room. I stare at the clock, watching the seconds pass irritatingly slow as the silence drones on, until finally the call of *Summer Taylors and Pacific Taylors to the office please* comes over the static of the outdated intercom. I push my chair back, listening as the screech cuts open the lull, and leave the room, the three still inside watching as I go.

I won’t see them tomorrow, either.

Pacific meets me down the hall, waving me over before we make our way to the office. They won’t have gotten ahold of Dad, I know this still. We don’t have a car of our own either, so we would be walking regardless of whether or not they managed to get a hold of him anyways.

The secretary watches us come in, and I can see the pity failing to hide behind the thick lenses obscuring her eyes. “Summer. Pacific. Do you have another home contact we can call? Your father didn’t pick up,” she asks, fidgeting with the cord from the phone.

Pacific speaks before I can, ever the charmer. “No ma’am, our mother’s gone and our grandparents are in Dallas. But our emergency sheet should say we have permission to walk in the case of a closure?”

She sighs, pushing up her glasses and running a hand across her forehead. “I’m sorry, hun. But that’s not going to fly, not today.”

I’m confused. Why not? It’s never been a problem before, when the powers gone out or the weather is too bad. I don’t have a chance to ask though, before the Principal comes out.

“Stacy, the kids’ files do say that they are authorized to walk home in case of an emergency closure. We can’t very well keep them here, And besides, they’d be by themselves here. Better we send them home,” he says.

“Thank you sir,” I say, nodding. “We’ll be going now, then.”

“Wait,” he calls out, and I turn just a little, so I can listen to what he says. “Be safe out there. Walk home quickly and don’t stop, not for any reason.”

“Okay,” I agree, unsure of what I’m agreeing to, but doing so nonetheless. Pacific and I exit the office and continue down the hall to the door. The weather outside has become dark and torrid. Students pile into cars as their parents instruct them to buckle up and speed away. I pull my hood up and stuff my hands into my pockets as we venture towards home. The streets are still, more so than the morning, and the gloom of dead air fills my ears as I trudge, step by step, along the way.

Step by step, second by second.

I stop suddenly, running into Pacific’s back as his still form stands in front of me. I look up as he looks down and I hit the ground as the earth rumbles around me.

I lie on the ground as a massive cloud obscures the sky and when I close my eyes, a shadow scorches the pavement.

The world is silent because no one is there to hear.