

The Day the Sun Didn't Rise

On the day the sun didn't rise, alarm clocks rang, as usual, people got up, as usual, and started the day, as usual.

At 6:30, Howard Silverstein poured the last of his pot of coffee into a thermos and looked to the East. He silently noted there was no band of gold or pink at the horizon, but his dog tugged on his leash toward the door, and they hurried out into the morning.

At 6:35, LaToya Jackson bucked her son into his carseat, shut the door, and turned to the East, stretching her back, tight from bending over. Another cloudy day, she thought, and turned to open her own car door.

At 6:36, Monica Ryland, toothbrush in mouth, turned on the radio to catch the end of the weather update.

“Partly cloudy today, temperatures reaching the mid-30s. Sunrise today was at 6:31 and sunset will be at 4:35. Expect a sunny day tomorrow with temperatures in the 40s as a warm front comes up from the southwest pushing today's clouds out over the lake. Your five-day forecast after these messages from our supporters.”

Across town, Kari Pataski turned off her radio alarm, stretched, and rolled to her side to get out of bed. Yawning and shaking the sleep out of her body, she raised the blinds on the three windows in her bedroom one by one. The light didn't change. Looking out over the dark street of her neighborhood, she saw lights on in houses, tail lights moving up the adjacent street, a neighbor walking his dog. Glancing at the clock on her alarm, 6:45, Kari looked out the window again.

Darkness. All at once, it dawned on her: where is the sunrise? Kari turned the radio back on. Flipping through the channels, all stations were broadcasting alerts.

Howard, walking his dog, noticed a silence that morning unlike a silence he had ever heard. His dog didn't bark at the other dogs they encountered on their walk. He noted seeing two cardinals on his walk, but never hearing their cheery call. Even the orange cat that crossed their path was silent. He stopped in his tracks, turned East, and quickly hurried home.

LaToya had the radio on in her car when the broadcast started. It was sudden and jarring, and woke up her sleeping son, who blinked his eyes but did not cry out.

Monica left the radio on but was in the shower when the broadcast began at 6:50. By then, the sun was 27 minutes late for the day, but Monica was determined not to be. Washing her hair and loudly singing, she missed the blare of the broadcast alert. Upon shutting off the water, she heard the worst song: voices shouting over one another with no perceptible rhythm, so she shut off the radio as well.

Kari hurried to the television, each channel had broadcasters struggling to explain the day's events. In her part of the world, of course, the sun hadn't risen, but the major news networks were airing reporters from all over the world describing their extended noon hours, sunsets, and sunrises.

The meteorologists scrambled to explain how this phenomenon would impact temperatures in all locales when another emergency announcement started.

Howard turning on the television in time to the White House newsroom come on the screen, the Secretary of State being prepped by three others, the muffled sounds of the microphone.

"Candice, you're going to want to come in here!" He called to his wife, still in bed.

"To witness the miracle of you leaving coffee for me?"

"Maybe not that, but come on in here!" He turned the volume up.

As the worldwide emergency and immediate curfew was announced, LaToya pulled over her car, unbuckled her seatbelt, and got out. Looking around her, the street lights shut off and the street plunged into darkness. A police car slowed next to her, window rolling down.

"Ma'am, there is an immediate curfew in place--"

"Officer, what is going to happen?" LaToya interrupted.

He paused, "I don't know, ma'am."

Another car drove past, diverting the officer's attention, who quickly turned on the vehicles lights and abrupt siren.

I don't have time for this, Monica thought as she pulled over. Oddly the officer pulled up alongside her and indicated she should roll down her window.

“Officer, I wasn’t speeding! And I didn’t run that stop sign! I definitely came to a complete stop.”

“Ma’am, you need to return home now.”

“What?”

“Ma’am there is an immediate curfew in place, and you need to return home now.”

“What?” Monica gaped.

The officer looked at her with puzzled eyes before saying, “Ma’am, the sun? Turn on your radio.”

Monica looked out her windshield to the dark sky in front of her.

News reports rolled in all morning until it stopped. The government decided to pull all broadcasting in an effort to reduce nationwide alarm, and it may have actually worked, too. On the day the sun didn’t rise, or for some, on the day the sun never set, there were only a handful of injuries worldwide, mostly accidental. Parents reported their children didn’t cry all day, dogs yawned but didn’t bark. The weather stood still midday, and with the last shake of the dry branches it seemed that everyone sighed.

Kari shut off the television, put the kettle on the stove, and decided to keep her slippers on.

When Monica returned home, she climbed back into bed and pulled the covers over her head.

LaToya and her son went home. With their free day together, she pulled Chutes and Ladders off a high shelf and taught him to play.

Howard and his wife made another pot of coffee.