

Nowhere to Hide

The crystal blue waters off Higgs Beach in the Florida Keys started to turn that certain hue of green before a storm. Only longtime Sandies like Ellie could spot the change in the watercolor so early. Ellie raced up to her house and the retinal scanner with face I.D. opened the door intuitively with a hiss as she approached. “Hey, Mom, there’s a storm coming,” she said, grabbing a strawberry flavored synth bar off the counter.

Inside, the family robot, Robbie was chopping carrots for dinner, while Mom was already watching the news.

“This week’s hurricanes will be quite severe. Incoming reports and Accuweather 17.0 expect 2 Category 5 hurricanes: Leia and Carson on Tuesday and Thursday, respectively. Storm surge will reach between 20 to 30 feet, swallowing roads up to miles inland. To keep you safe, government and state forces are out H.O.M.E. vehicles or Habitat Occupancy Mobile Environments. H.O.M.E. safety trucks are your home away from home and are already in every major city. ...”

“So, we have to evacuate?” Ellie’s Dad said from the living room couch with just enough eye-roll that Mom wouldn’t get on his case.

“T.V. says we don’t have a choice. The government ruled on it,” her Mom said with a tremble of fear in her voice.

Ellie repeated the reporter in a nasal tone, “All Non-evacuators will be prosecuted to the full extent of the law and will be forcibly evacuated.”

El’s dad said, “There’s no way we’re staying in a semi-truck with fifty strangers and guards for a week. Let’s just board up the house and catch a flight.”

“Where should we go?” said her Mom.

“Let’s go to California!” Ellie put in.

“No chance,” her Mom huffed.

“My brother’s got his place in Palm Springs. Could be a nice getaway, honey.”

Her Dad shuffled over and called his brother on the holophone. After a second, up popped a faded 3D lifesize projection of Ellie’s uncle.

The man answered the phone with a question, “Is Ellie around?”

“Yes, she’s right here. El come say hi to your Unc-”

Ellie began to walk over before her uncle's grim voice stopped her.

“Grant, not now. Put me in private.”

Ellie’s dad nodded and swiped his hand from right to left in the air and Uncle Allen’s face blurred into a vapor and his voice went silent, being projected only into Ellie’s father’s earpiece.

“Allen, wait, slow down. Say again.”

Both Ellie and her Mom watched attentively.

“Yeah, I got it, but you can’t come to stay with us. Cause we were calling to stay with you!” Dad spoke in a hushed voice. “Yeah ... tornadoes and storm surge. What are you dealing with? Fires? How much acreage so far? ... How close is it? Allen, you gotta get outta there! Well, hop transport! What do you mean ‘the Hub is at capacity?’ ... What about drone evac? Allen. Listen! Allen?” The image of Ellie’s uncle running away from the window in his house evaporated in our kitchen and then it was ghostly quiet.

Ellie's dad slowly walked to where his brother had been standing in the kitchen and then typed a quick message into his watch holo. Ellie's mother, Mia, walked over and hugged Grant while he hung his head.

"What's going on?" Ellie asked finally.

Her dad looked up with silent tears in his eyes and said, "Robbie, go order us three tickets to Dallas."

"Yes, Grant," Robbie said.

Ellie started to comfort her father when Robbie piped in again, "Grant, the Dallas area is inaccessible, there are no flights inbound."

Ellie's mom asked Robbie, "Are there any flights to Munich? We can stay with my sister."

Robbie responded, "Mia, since 2025, two-thirds of the world's population has faced water shortages (Water Scarcity). As a result, the Water Wars in Europe is raging once again and flights have been suspended."

Ellie's mom whispered a curse and her dad said, "Everyone pack your things. We're going to our H.O.M.E. truck."

"Dad, noooo," Ellie whined

"There's nowhere to hide from this. Go pack!" Ellie's dad snapped.

Less than fifteen minutes later, Ellie and her mom were packed on the front porch while Dad told Robbie to close up the house and when to power down.

"Robbie says the nearest field is inside Fort Zachary Taylor," said Ellie's dad. Then, the family rode in silence on autopilot to their designated H.O.M.E. safety truck.

When they arrived, the ocean had turned a hue of black. The clouds were so thick they looked like a mirror above the sea. The fort extended into the ocean, its hard gray bricks contrasted the black sloshing sea. Ellie could see a swarm of people gathering into huge green boxes, the size of classrooms.

“Welcome home!” A lady with a ponytail and a government jacket smiled while handing Ellie, her mom, and her dad a bottle of water each. “Last name, please?” she asked.

“Forte,” Ellie’s dad muttered, staring at the raging ocean, meters away.

“Grant, Mia, and Ellie?”

“That’s us,” Ellie’s mom said flatly.

“Great! Right, this way,” The woman led on.

Ellie gaped at the scene of rushing choppy waves taller than her, just thirty meters off, and the looming skies in the distance. She piped up, “Um ... Miss? Isn’t it a bad idea to be so close to the water?” she gulped.

“Good question, Ellie! Actually, it’s the safest place to be. This whole area will be underwater in hours, and when it is, flying debris and high wind won’t be able to get you. Isn’t that nice?”

“But, we’ll be underwater,” Ellie tried to swallow but her throat was suddenly dry. Ellie’s mom tightened her grip on her husband with this new information.

“Correct! All H.O.M.E. trucks are submersibles with a two-week supply of water, food, and oxygen,” the lady beamed proudly.

As the family stepped into their submersible, rows of people were hunkering down into small recliner type chairs with blankets and supplies. A small projector was playing a kid’s

movie on the wall in between painted realistic pictures of windows looking out over fields. The scene reminded Ellie of a long flight. Then, as the wind picked up, the government employee shouted a command and the opening near Ellie's seat gasped closed and they were momentarily plunged into darkness. A woman screamed and a few kids started crying before small UV illuminations came from below with a quiet hum.

A scared middle-aged woman next to Ellie said, "We never should have let our government pull us out of the Paris climate agreement in 2017. Once we did that ... it was only a matter of time before the planet hit the 2-degree Celsius threshold that destroyed our way of life"

"It's not too late to turn it around," Ellie said.

"Look around you!" the woman wailed in desperation.

"It's not too late to fix it," Ellie gritted her teeth. "If we can build things like this to survive this world, we can build things to repair it, too." Ellie stared at the painting of a fake field and felt angry tears in her eyes.