

# Nuclear Country

[Regan.p.matte@gmail.com](mailto:Regan.p.matte@gmail.com)

Word count: 2,689

I awoke to being shook awake by my mother. She had my little brother on her back in a sling, but was still dressed in her PJ's.

"It's ok Lucy," she whispered, "we just got to go, there's been an emergency and we have to leave."

"What?" I replied groggily, my four-year-old brain not processing what was happening.

"Remember when I told you to be ready to leave the house at any time, just in case? Well, we have to leave now," she answered.

"But, I have to bring my stuff!" I replied, on the verge of a tantrum.

"We have to go now!" she said hurriedly, "can you be a big girl and help me?"

"Yes mommy," I replied, wanting to prove my maturity.

"Ok, but you've got to move fast, can you do that?"

"Yes!" I replied excitedly, still not realizing the seriousness of the situation. Of course, now I know that night was going to change my life forever.

After hurrying downstairs, we were greeted by a stern looking man in an official looking military uniform, but he didn't have on the same ones that I had seen on TV.

"Captain McCarthy, Aerial Corps, Department of Nuclear Security," he said gruffly, "Mrs. DiMarco, we hoped it would never come to this, but you must report to your nearest government-sanctioned nuclear shelter." I looked towards my mother confused.

"What's that?" I asked.

I was met with my mother's deep brown eyes filled with sorrow, "There's been an attack on Movibia. We must go now."

After we gathered all we could carry, we walked out our front door in a rush. Standing on the front lawn, I saw swarms of people marching out of the neighborhood. I looked back towards

my house over my shoulder. I scan the outside of my home, seeing the shutters my father had painted blue, the rainbow wildflowers littering the front yard, and our bright red front door. I didn't realize this would be the last time I saw these things.

At the end of our street, there was a large bus packed with tons of people. My mother grabbed my hand and led me to some of the last empty seats. Suddenly, I remembered something very important.

“Mommy, where's Dad?” I asked. She looked at me with eyes full of sorrow.

Then, I wake up.

I shoot up in my cot, breathing heavily. I try to be as quiet as possible, so I don't wake the 10 other women, including my mother. I run my hands along my scratchy, hospital blue sheets. I've had the same dream haunt my sleep for the past few nights now. I guess it's because the 10 year anniversary of living here is coming up. I slowly lay back down and attempt to fall asleep against the rough texture of my pillow.

“Ring! Time to wake up! Breakfast today is scrambled eggs and hashbrowns. There is a meeting for the Halloween committee this afternoon after lunch,” the daily wake-up blared out of the loudspeakers.

I hop out of bed and gather my toiletries and flip-flops and turn to walk down the long hall towards the shared woman's bathroom. As I walk out, I bump into my mother.

“Good morning, Honey,” she greets.

“Good morning mom,” I reply.

“Hurry to get ready today, I know you were late to school yesterday,” she scolds, “and walk your brother to his school too, you know how lost he gets.”

“Ok, I’m sorry for being late and I’ll take care of Anthony,” I reply while walking out the door, and went to get ready.

When I finished, I walked out to the rec room area where my brother waits for my mom and me every morning. He was laying on one of the free couches, where he was staring up at the ceiling.

“Anthony, let's go, it's time for school,” I say.

“Do I have to go?” he whines, “school is so boring.”

“Come on, if you go I’ll play video games with you after,” I bribe.

“Ok fine,” he concedes, “let’s go.”

As we walk through the dark, dank, crowded shelter, I pay special attention to where I was going. Though you may think the shelter might be small, it is actually very big. There are many long, winding hallways and large rooms, so everyone could fit. When we finally get to the school wing, I walk my brother to the 5th grade classroom. I then walk to the 9th grade class area, and wait at my desk for school to start.

“Lucy, how are you?” my best friend Ashley asks.

“I’m good, I wonder what we’re doing today?” I wonder aloud.

“Well, I heard we got a new teacher today. She's taking Mrs. Johnson’s place because she retired,” she tells me.

“Really? I wonder who she is,” I question.

“I don’t know,” she says, “but I heard she’s nice.”

“Alright class, take your seats,” a tall woman with long, dark brown hair, bright blue eyes, wearing a long yellow dress says. “I’m your new teacher, Mrs. Marcus.” She walks over to the chalkboard and writes on it *Curiosity Project*

“This year, we will be doing a research project,” she continues, “you may do it on any topic you want, and you will present it in class at the end of the year, now get out your notebooks and start thinking of ideas.”

Oh no! What could I do for this project? Nothing happens down here. I do the same thing every day, my life isn’t interesting. What could I do? I have to talk to Mrs. Marcus to see what I can do because I can not do the project.

“Ring!” The bell clangs. It’s time for lunch.

I approach Mrs. Marcus’s desk.

“Mrs. Marcus, can I talk to you?” I ask.

“Of course,” she looks at her roster, “Lucy.”

“I don’t know what to do for this project,” I whisper.

“Why?” she asks.

“I don’t know what to do it on,” I reply.

“Well look for details in your life, try to notice things you haven’t before,” she advises.

Then, the bell rings and students file back into the class.

On the way home, I ruminate on what Mrs. Marcus said. Look for details in your life? What is that supposed to mean? I decide to scan around the shelter and look for things. Looking around I notice something strange. A small, tight hallway where I have never been before. I turn towards the hallway and walked down it. As I walk down, I see a small door with a large combination lock on it. As I approach, I see signs that say *DANGER* and *KEEP OUT*. I reach the door, and touch the handle. As I do, an alarm starts blaring. Looking around confused, I run out of the hallway, feeling like I have done something wrong.

I sprint all the way back to the dorm room, where I see my mom.

“Hi honey, how was your day at school?” she asks.

“Good,” I say, out of breath. “What’s wrong? Why are you so out of breath?”

“Nothing,” I say quickly.

“OK,” she replies suspiciously, “let’s go to dinner.”

We walk in silence to the cafeteria, where we get our rations and vitamin C supplements.

After I finished eating, the loudspeaker dings to life.

“Will Lucy Dimarco please report to the mayor’s office?” it says.

“The mayor’s office? Why are you going to the mayor’s office?” my mom questions.

“I don’t know,” I lie, having a sneaking suspicion that it had something to do with the door.

“Well, you better get going,” she says, “you don’t want to keep the mayor waiting.”

As I walk down the hallway, I am freaking out about what the mayor wanted. Will he be angry? Will he put me in jail? I’ve heard rumors about him putting people in jail for doing stuff he didn’t like. What if that happens to me? I finally reach the ornate wooden doors of the mayor’s office. I reach up to grab the large gold door handle, pull on the heavy door, and walk into the office.

I walk into the office, and I see the mayor sitting at his desk.

“Lucy,” he says, “take a seat.”

“Why am I here?” I ask.

“I heard you discovered something interesting today,” he replies.

Does he know about the door? How could he?

“What are you talking about?” I say nervously.

“I think you know,” he say, “it’s about the door,”

“Um, what about it?,” I squeak out.

“I want you to stay away from that door,” he warns, “it is very dangerous for you to be snooping around there.”

“Why?” I inquire curiously.

“That is not something you should worry about,” he replies, “just stay away from the door, or there will be consequences. You may go now.”

I turn and walk out of the fancy office. That was interesting, I thought. Why doesn't he want me near the door? Well, I guess I know what I'm doing my project on now.

In bed that night, I think about ways I could find out more information about this door. There must be some documents somewhere that have some sort of information on the door. The library has many different important books in it, maybe it will have something.

The next morning, I wake up with a mission. After I quickly got dressed, ate breakfast, and said goodbye to my mom, I go to the library. Walking up to the library, I see the simple door leading inside. I open it, and go up to Mrs. Smiley, the librarian. Though, Mrs. Smiley is kind of an ironic name because she has a very grumpy disposition.

“Good morning Mrs. Smiley,” I say with a huge smile on my face, trying to butter her up.

“What?” She says coldly.

“Well, I wanted some information on the door in the hallway,” I say.

“Well we don't have anything on that-” She is interrupted by the loudspeaker dinging to life.

“Will Lucy Dimarco please report to the mayor's office immediately!”

When I get to the mayor's office, he is sitting at his desk, looking less than pleased.

“Did I not tell you to mind your own business about the door?” he shouts.

“How do you know I asked about it?” I ask nervously.

“Don’t worry about that!” he exclaims, “why were you asking for information when I specifically told you not to!”

“I was just curious,” I reply, “I think anyone would be.”

“Well, stop being curious,” he says.

Then, his phone starts ringing. He looks at it, takes a deep breath in, and turns back to face me.

“I have to take this. Stay right here,” he instructs me. Then, he rises from his chair and walks out of the office. As he walks out, I hear him speaking muffled through the door.

“What if he’s saying something important?,” I think to myself, “I have to know.” I stand silently out of my chair and slowly rise to my feet. I then tip-toe over to the door and put my ear against it.

“Yes sir the girl will be taken care of,” he says, “she won’t go telling anyone about this.” Taken care of? What is that supposed to mean? Will he throw me in jail

“The door is still secure,” he continues, “the girl knows nothing.”

Wait, what am I supposed to know? I worry.

“What’s funny is that she is the daughter of Joe Dimarco. Remember him? He’s the guy that tried to blow the cover on our whole operation. Fortunately for us, he was taken care of,” he laughed. “Anyway, how are things going up there?”

Up there? Does he mean the surface? But how could anyone live on the surface? It’s much too dangerous up there. And my father? What happened to my father? What do they mean by “taken care of”? Did they do something to my father? What are they talking about? Suddenly, I am drawn out of my thoughts by the mayor continuing to speak.

“I’m gonna go to the bathroom, then I’ll continue to deal with her,” he murmurs.

What do I do? How can I stop this? I need to get out of here, but everyone will see me leave. Suddenly, I remember something. The lock on the door! It was a combination lock! And, if you want to remember a password, you need to write it down. I eye the mayor's desk dangerously. He must have the password somewhere in his drawers!

I hop over the mayor's mahogany desk and pull on the first drawer. I rifle through all the papers quickly, scanning the documents as I go. Halloween party, cafeteria menu, complaint letters asking for bigger rations, nothing of note. I check the next drawer, nothing again! I sort through all the drawers, all containing nothing, until I get to the very last one.

“Please be in here, please be in here, please be in here,” I whisper as I open the drawer. I sort through the drawer until I finally find something. It is a thick packet titled *The Plan*. I pick it up and start reading.

“Overpopulation is a big issue in Modivia,” it says, “we must prevent this issue by using the old nuclear shelters as a storage container for people that Modivias deems should go there. Our wealthiest families and brightest minds will stay on the surface and the rest will go below.”

Oh my gosh! We’ve been lied to for years! How could the government do such a thing? My father must have tried to alert people, but the government got rid of him. I need to find this password, or they will do the same to me.

I continue to flip through the pages in disbelief. This is totally crazy! The government ruined thousands of peoples’ lives so that wealthy people could live nicer. I am in total shock. Finally, I reach the end of the packet, where there is a highlighted paragraph, “In case of emergency, government officials may be evacuated by using the password 195621.” Yes! I’ve found the password! As I am celebrating, the door suddenly flew open.

“You have really done it this time, Lucy,” The mayor says with disgust in his voice, “You are in for it now.”

What can I do? Suddenly, I have a great idea. As the mayor starts on his spiel, I inch closer to the loudspeaker microphone.

I subtly grab the microphone and shout, “Everyone, evacuate the dorms!”

The mayor looks at me with a purple face.

“You-” he starts, but as he is speaking, I sprint towards the door and down the hall. Behind me, I hear many footsteps chasing me out of the office. I shove through the large groups of people standing in the hall, awaiting further instructions.

As they see the mayor, they stop and ask him “What's going on?” and “What is this all about?”. I am free from the mayor. Now I just have to make it to the door.

I run as fast as I can down the hallway, ducking and dodging bodies of confused people. I finally reach the hall to the doorway and run for my life down it. I brush past the *DANGER* and *KEEP OUT* signs and ignore the alarms letting people know of my presence. I reach the door and quickly type in the password, 195621. The door opens with a satisfying click.

There is a sewer-like pipe behind it. I hold back my fear and run down it. The dank pipe leads to steep stairs. I hurry up them and pop a manhole cover out of it. I feel the heat of the sun warm my face, and fresh air in my lungs. I hop out of the cover, hoping that everything is good up here.

I feel the fresh green grass tickle the bottoms of my feet as I make my first steps outside in ten years.