

They found Jacqueline Harris Tuesday morning. It took them nine days, twelve hours, thirty minutes, fifteen seconds, and forty milliseconds. But hey, who's counting?

An hour after the news snaked its way into town, Kerry Peters finds herself staring at the intercom button.

*Breathe. One, two...* She takes a breath, exhaling with all her might, hoping to push out the turning in her stomach, the rattling of the doorknob, the rapid, staccato taps. She wipes her hands onto her jeans in one swift motion. She then presses the button.

*Good afternoon, students of Myras High School. This is your Student Council President Kerry Peters...*

Kerry stops. She tries to gather her thoughts together. The puzzle pieces are right there, waiting for her to reach out and grasp them. All she really wants is to flip the table.

The air is still, buzzing with the squeaks and groans of the intercom. The students begin to speak despite the stern hushings of the teachers. A few minutes go by, and then the voices begin to die down. As quiet settles over each room, they realize there is a peculiar noise behind the high-pitched protests of their school's outdated intercom system. Hiccuping breaths sound throughout the halls. A faint sound of banging and shouts can also be heard in the distance. The murmurs of the students begin to rise, and that is when Kerry finally finds her voice again.

*As we all know, Jacqueline Harris, one of our fellow colleagues, has been missing since last Monday. Her last known whereabouts was her sister's radio station, which we all hold so dear, which she promptly left around eight, which we can confirm because of Mr. Garrettson, who was walking his dog, Sprinkles, who is such a cute dog. A Great Dane. We thank Mr. Garrettson again for allowing us to bring Sprinkles in for Spirit Week, which Jacqueline...which Ms. Harris participated in planning. Which was odd since she never much cared for all those kinds of activities, or dogs-Did she always dislike dogs or was that new? I could never tell-*

The banging in the background gets louder. The speaker squeaks. Kerry coughs, the sound echoing through the halls like a ghost.

*I apologize. It seems I have to get to the point. As I stated previously, Ms. Harris was reported missing last Monday even though her last known whereabouts were on a Sunday.*

*We townsfolk started the search that very day, but the police didn't come out until Tuesday. Like today... They waited twenty-four hours. That makes forty-eight hours since they last saw her. Forty-eight hours... What was she thinking when she waited? Did she wait? Was it- oh God-*

The speaker squeaks again, this time more violently, piercing the air, stabbing into everyone's ears, shooting to their cores. They can't see her, but Kerry lurches forward, breathless from an invisible sucker punch to the gut. Her breaths-when she finally remembered she could breathe- came out in heaves. The laborious task makes her nauseous. The world spins as the vice president, having rushed past the janitor with his key, grabs her, his voice sounding over the intercom. He sounds concerned but calm. No one could tell he was crying. Kerry admires that in the farthest recesses of her mind. Maybe she will tell him later, how much she appreciates working with him, how in those thirty seconds when they overheard the news she was grateful for the stoic way he locked his jaw. These compliments can come later, if at all, but it won't be now. It *can't* be now.

There is a moment of silence, a moment where the students start to murmur in waves, and then suddenly the speakers squeak once again, and this time it is the voice of the Assistant Principal.

*Apologies for the sudden interruption, students. I'm afraid our president is unable to deliver the news, so I will. This morning the police found Jacqueline Harris in the abandoned mines. No further information has been given out but we will keep you all updated as needed. I know how distressing this news must be for all of you. Jacqueline was a part of our community. We will be providing counseling services for everyone who wishes to talk to someone. We also have references to our local therapist, who has offered counselling free of charge to all those who need further support. I am deeply sorry for the loss of such a loving soul.*

Five minutes and forty-five seconds later, everyone remembers to breathe, and that's when the world ended.