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In our day and age, we are surrounded by all kinds of technology. Planes where you can surf the web from 30,000 feet above the ground, smart televisions that supply vast options of entertainment on demand, pocket sized computers that masquerade as phones, and cars that drive themselves. All this technology has created an environment where many people’s daily lives do not require much physical effort to survive. More importantly, a world where things or experiences can be delivered immediately and we are no longer confined by our physical location. A good example of this is how my Grandmother who lives three states away can easily join us at the dinner table via Skype. What we don’t realize is how quickly those things can be taken from us. How quickly the easy lives that many of us enjoy can be destroyed. In Emily St. John Mandel’s novel, *Station Eleven* a pandemic kills most of the population in just a few weeks and destroys the familiar world we know and love. The few survivors were left to live with no electricity, no stores, and no government – the entire planet a wasteland.

The story opens with the tragic death of a famous actor, Arthur Leander. He suffers a heart attack on stage while acting in a production of *King Lear.* Standing on that same stage, watching in horror as her friend dies is a nine year old actress named Kirsten Raymonde. That same night, a plane of dying tourists arrives in Toronto. That marked the arrival of the terrible Georgia flu that spreads like a wildfire across the world, killing nearly every man, woman, and child in its path, rocketing the few survivors headfirst into an unknown and treacherous world.

When Kirsten was just nine years old, the world she knew was stripped away from her. She lost her family, her friends, almost everything that was familiar to her. Even things you don’t normally think about like electricity or running water. What would it be like to not be able to bake food in an oven or take a cold shower after a hot day? This makes me think about how I would survive if the world were ever to face such a catastrophic event like this. What would happen to my family? What would I do if something happened to them? It seems almost unimaginable to be able to live without the comforts and people who surround me now.

In the story, readers are fast forwarded twenty years after the pandemic, where people live in gas stations and airports, hunt and grow their own food, and worry about the threats of cults invading their homes. Despite everything that happened to Kirsten, she found a way to live a meaningful life again through acting with the Traveling Symphony, a nomad-like group which performed productions for the survivors living around the Great Lakes. There is a quote used often in the book is one from the television show *Star Trek* that reads, “Survival is insufficient.” To me that means to not merely just live, but to make life worth something so much greater.

The fact that Kirsten was able to create a life that was worth more than simple survival, despite all that was stripped from her, has taught me huge lessons. By imagining myself suffering through her same experiences, my appreciation for my life and country has grown greater. Every day I get to go to school, eat a good meal each day, and have a house to live in. I am not struggling for survival, I am safe and most importantly I have a family that loves and supports me. Sometimes I don’t realize how lucky I am. I am guilty, like many others, of focusing too much on the minor details rather than taking a step back and looking at the bigger picture of life. Kirsten inspires me to be grateful for what I have as well as remember that just existing isn’t enough, that we have to work to build a meaningful life, regardless of our struggles.

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