

The deluge essay



Exhausted, Kendra leaned back against the tree. The quiet of the night surrounded her, and in the distance she could see a small orange glow here and there of fires set by those who had been forced to leave their homes and set up camp in this park.

She closed her eyes, rested her arms on her knees, and put her head down on her arms, cushioned by the sweatshirt she wore. The sweatshirt smelled of fresh air and smoke. She pulled the sleeves down over her cold hands.

She sat like that for a while, motionless and quiet, until she heard footsteps behind her: heavy, slow footsteps. Then she heard breathing, close. She held her own breath. The footsteps stopped. Kendra turned around slowly, clenching her fists. “ Oh, its you,” she said, letting out her breath in relief. “ What are you doing here?” “ Looking for you, I guess. What are you doing?” “ Resting. Watching. Waiting.” She stared off into the distance, but could see nothing but patches of flame and sparks, and smoke as it trailed off into the night. “ Im so . . .” “ Tired? Hungry? Thirsty?” “ All of that. And cold.” “ Come on, then. Weve got a fire going, and Colin is out gathering more wood.” Kendra got up slowly and stretched. Nathan came over and pulled her toward him, wrapping his arms around her. Kendra awkwardly accepted the hug.

“ Kendra, Im going to take care of you,” Nathan promised. “ Youll see. You dont have to worry.” “ Lets go.” Kendra said as she started to walk down the hill. She tried not to show her annoyance at what he just said. Why did he think she needed him to take care of her? Because she was a woman? It

didn't help that she was so small. Men thought she looked like she needed taking care of.

Colin was standing by the fire, arms crossed, staring into the flames. He looked up quickly when he sensed them, and squatted down and warmed his hands before the fire.

“ Kendra's back,” Nathan announced.

“ Great.” Colin replied, still staring into the fire.

Kendra went to the fire, turning around so that she could get warm on all sides.

“ Was that you on the hill, sitting under the tree?” Colin asked.

“ Me? Yeah, that was me. I didn't think anyone could see me. It's so dark.” “ I could only see your silhouette.” Colin shook his head. “ You shouldn't be alone.” They were silent, listening to the crackling of the fire and their own thoughts. Kendra sighed. She wanted to complain, to tell them how hungry and cold she was, but she knew she shouldn't. They were all cold, hungry, and tired, and there was little relief in sight.

“ Look, Kendra, Colin, why don't you go to the car and get some sleep? I'll keep watch,” Nathan suggested.

Colin looked at Nathan. Kendra was sure she saw a flash of suspicion on his face before he assented.

“ Yeah, that sounds like a good idea. Kendra, you go ahead and use the car.” Colin looked around on the ground, then sat down on the ground instead of going to the car. He gazed into the fire, then up at the moon. Kendra watched him for a while as the reflection of the flickering flames danced on his face. She looked away quickly when she realized she had been staring too long. Nathan was watching her, and then he looked away.

She tried to snuggle further into her sweatshirt, tried to make herself smaller so that more of her would fit inside her clothes. She walked over to Colins old BMW. “ Come on, Colin. Itll be warmer in here.”“ Maybe in a minute.” Kendra opened the car door and sat down on the back seat. She punched up the pillow she had grabbed from the living room as they fled and slumped down in the seat, pulling the jacket shed left in the car over her.

Six days. Every night, before she fell asleep, she counted the days to herself. Six days, five nights. Six days ago, she had stepped out of the shower, dried herself, walked into her bedroom, put on clean clothes – these jeans and this sweatshirt – and walked out into the crisp autumn day. She had gone out to the front porch in her socks and sat on a rocker. As she rocked back and forth and sipped coffee, she had felt at peace and admired the bright blue sky and the patchwork of colorful leaves. She had watched as children rode their bikes by on their way to school, as Mrs. Emerson across the street piled her brood into the car and drove away, and as Colins car pulled up in front of the house. Colin was her fathers teaching assistant, and he often stopped by to drop off papers he had graded or to have coffee with her father before going to the university to teach a class. But that morning her father had already gone. He had left early to drop off some dry cleaning and meet with

the Dean for breakfast. That morning she had talked Colin into staying for a while and having some coffee, and had gone in to get him some while he sat in another rocker on the porch and waited. When she came out with his coffee she made sure she was smiling and welcome.

They sat there a few minutes. She tried to make small talk, something Colin was dreadful at doing. He seemed to become more and more uncomfortable, and finally put his mug down on the wicker table and stood up. “ Well, I have to be going. Classes to prepare, papers to grade.” He tried to smile. “ Thanks for the coffee, Kendra.” He turned to go and was almost down the steps when there was a loud boom, then another and another. The porch shook and smoke filled the air in the area of the university, which was a mile away. “ What . . .” they both said at once as they turned in the direction of the noise. They stood silently as they watched giant clouds of smoke fill the sky. There was another sound like thunder, then another. Finally, Kendra turned to Colin, horror in her eyes. “ Thats at the university! Some kind of explosion!” she cried. Her eyes were huge.

People came out into the street: Katie Emerson, Mrs. Peavey, Nancy York, Lisa Spano, five or six students from the apartment house two buildings down, where Nathan lived.

“ What is it?” someone shouted. “ What happened?” Mrs. Peavey cried out. She stood in the street in her pink robe, holding a cup of coffee.

They all turned toward the thunder and smoke, watching. Suddenly, Kendra ran into the house and found her running shoes. She quickly put them on

and ran back outside. Then, without thinking, she began to run toward campus.

“Kendra, no!” It was Colin. He ran until he was alongside her, then grabbed her arm. She stopped. “What are you doing?” As he spoke, there was another explosion. He looked around, trying to determine where it came from. “Do you see what I mean? Don’t go to campus! They’re destroying it!” “But what if father . . . ?” She looked at him. She could tell he was thinking the same thing.

Sirens were everywhere. Kendra looked down the road toward the fire station. She could see the front of the truck pulling out, watched as the car parked on the street in front of the firehouse exploded and debris flew through the air and hit the firemen and the truck and several nearby houses.

“Oh my God,” she breathed. She put her hand on Colin to steady herself. “Colin, Colin, Colin, oh my God. What’s going on?” She looked up at him, searching for assurance that her father was safe.

People were screaming. Mrs. Peavey, still holding her cup of coffee, stood in the street, her eyes and her mouth wide open. Then she fled into her house and slammed the door.

Colin put his arm around Kendra and led her back to her house. They walked up onto the porch. Nathan ran up behind them. Kendra turned at the sound of his footsteps. “I’ll take care of her,” he said to Colin. Colin stepped away.

Damn him! Kendra had dated Nathan several times in the past two months. She liked him, but not as much as he liked her. She could see that he

thought now was his chance to be some kind of hero.“ Nathan, Im fine,” she said, brushing her dark hair out of her eyes and pushing up the long sleeves of her sweatshirt. “ Lets all go inside, okay? Ill turn on the TV.” They went into the comfortable living room and Kendra turned on the television. She sat down, remote in hand, and flipped through the channels until she found a local station. Lucy Penkava, a local newswoman, pretty and blonde in a pink suit, was staring into the camera. On her right were the words, “ Downtown bombing!!” They all leaned forward and listened.

“ We have a helicopter on the way,” Lucy was saying. “ Charlie, what can you tell us?” The picture changed to a disheveled-looking man. His face was smudged and his eyes were red.

“ Lucy, all I can tell you right now is that there have been multiple bombings in the area of the university. They wont let us near the area, of course, but Ive been told that the library and the academic records building have been hit. On my left here . . .” There was another terrific blast; Charlies hair actually blew to one side. The camera fell or was dropped, but continued to roll. On the screen were running feet, falling cement. Then, Lucy came back on.

“ It looks like . . . is Charlie all right?” Panic on her face, Lucy looked around the studio. Then she turned back at the camera and composed herself. “ We seem to have lost contact with that location,” she unnecessarily explained. “ But it does look like another bomb has exploded. That would make - ” someone handed her some papers. She took them and read the top page. “ Ladies and gentlemen, seven bombs were detonated in the downtown area

today, near the university. This is a tragedy the likes of which our town has never seen.” She shifted nervously in her chair. “ The mayor, police chief, and fire chief have all asked me to announce that no one will be allowed into that area.” She hesitated for a second as she read to herself, then spoke again. “ No one. They are evacuating the area between Vine Street and Summerland Avenue.” Kendra, Colin, and Nathan quickly glanced at one another. “ Between Vine and Summerland and between Pratt and Jefferson. And the university is being evacuated. This is serious, folks.” “ Thats us,” Kendra said quietly. “ Thats here. We all live in that square.” She looked at the men. Still, they sat.

They heard a loudspeaker. “ This is the Goldfield Volunteer Police Force. We have been asked to evacuate the area. Please pack up a few belongings and get out of the area.” Kendra got and looked at the window. Someone was walking up onto the porch. She went to the door.

“ Miss, Im Volunteer Mitchell Davis, and Ive been asked to go to each house and see that the occupants evacuate.” “ Yes, uh, were . . . ” She turned to Colin. He stood up.

“ Well be taking my car. Ive got a full tank of gas.” He put his hands in his pockets and smiled reassuringly at Davis. “ Kendra, Nathan, go get a few things. Ill start up the car.” Colin and Nathan went out. “ Wait, Mr. Davis,” Kendra said. “ What about my father? He teaches at the university.” “ The university was evacuated immediately, and he wont be coming here.” Davis looked at her sympathetically.

Kendra completed his thought: if he even survived.

“ Dont forget to lock up. And you should go to the high school.” He gave a quick wave and left.

Kendra ran up to her bedroom. Jacket, toothbrush, soap. Towel? She threw two clean ones into an overnight bag. Clean underwear – surely shed need no more than two pairs. Clean socks. What else? She grabbed the novel she was reading and put it in.“ Kendra, come on! The cops are standing out by Colins car, waiting for us to leave!” Nathan shouted from downstairs.

Okay, I can do this, Kendra thought. She went into her closet and grabbed another pair of jeans and a t-shirt and stuffed them into the bag. Then she grabbed her purse and ran downstairs. Nathan was standing at the door, holding a small bag, a laptop computer, and his cellphone.

“ Oh!” she cried. She found a piece of paper and a pen and wrote her father a note. Dear Dad, it said. Had to go. With Nathan and Colin in Cs car. Then she drew a big heart and wrote an R inside it. She put the note on the hall table, picked up a pillow from the sofa, grabbed her keys, and followed Nathan out, locking the door behind her.

That was six days ago. What had happened since then? More bombs. The police couldnt find them all. Some of the bombs had been buried in the flower beds on the university! Twice, dogs sniffed them out, but they exploded as soon as someone tried to dig them up. The library, administration building, humanities building, music studios, theater, and bookstore were destroyed, as were eight other bookstores in town, three theaters, and seven churches. A car bomb went off in front of police headquarters, but only did minor damage. Three fire stations were

destroyed, and six fire trucks. Various residences around town were damaged, sometimes individual homes, sometimes apartment buildings. Every Greek house on campus sustained damage. The homes of eleven professors, all of whom were teachers of English, music, art, drama, or humanities, were blown up.

Kendras father taught English literature. She didnt know if her house still stood, or if her father still lived.

The human toll was far worse. On campus, over a hundred people died at last count. Twenty-eight members of the university faculty and staff were either dead or missing. Children were dead. Pets were dead. Kendra whispered a silent prayer for her father, then stared up at the full moon. Maybe her father was looking at the moon right now, too. She tried to send him her thoughts.

When they evacuated, they had first been sent to the local high school gym. A few hours later, though, the authorities had decided that was too dangerous, and suggested that anyone who could should go to the state park, which was about twelve miles outside of town. Because there were few buildings at the park, people could stay in their cars, or tents, and be fairly safe. The restroom facilities were heavily guarded, and park staff was used to enforce security and take care of problems.

The Red Cross and National Guard came in a few times a day with food. Today, however, they hadnt shown up. The rumor was that two supply trucks had blown up on the highway, and that, until more armed guards and bomb detectors could be brought in, they were going to go hungry. The front car

door opened, and Colin slid into the front seat. He leaned back against the passenger door. Kendra reached down to the floor of the back seat to get Nathans soft overnight bag and gave it to Colin, and he placed it behind him as a cushion. “ Thanks, Kendra,” he said softly. He closed his eyes.

“ Should we try the radio?” she asked. They had been keeping in touch with “ the outside” by turning on the radio for a few minutes every day; by using Nathans cell phone to call friends in nearby towns; by going online, using Nathans laptop and his cell phone; and, of course, by updates from the park grapevine. Oddly, though, most of the small groups of people who had come to the park kept to themselves, and most of the information coming into the park through word of mouth wasnt exactly trustworthy.

From accessing the Internet through Nathans laptop, they were able to find a declaration from the group claiming responsibility for the bombings. The bombers claimed to be a tightly organized network of self-labeled “ technonerds.” The group called itself Art Is Dead, or AID. They had managed to infiltrate every science, math, and computer department in almost every university in the world and convince students and professors in those departments that the arts were dead. The arts, they said, especially drama and visual art, were siphoning money away from the sciences, and that society was suffering. At least one campus in each state in the United States and, worldwide, at least one in each country had been had been targeted on the day the bombings began, and the fine arts departments of all those schools had been heavily damaged. In many cities, museums were also targeted; there was actually a debate about that, though, between the bombers. Some thought museums should remain untouched and kept as a

reminder of the waste of intelligence and money that went to producing and maintaining art; others thought that every kind of art and what it stood for should be destroyed. The groups main target, though, was education. AID was determined to convince politicians, benefactors, and administrators that education meant the sciences and nothing else.

Another disagreement rumbling through AID was just how to interpret the word “ art.” All of its members agreed that drama, including the theater and cinema, and visual art, including paintings, sculpture, mobiles, and collages, were a waste of time, energy, and money. There were a few members who tried to defend photography as a scientific process, and the group had decided simply not to identify photography as an art for the time being. The greatest dissent came with the discussion of writing and literature. While AID agreed that writing was essential even to the sciences, many of its members said that there should be specific guidelines delineating when writing became art. All agreed that both writing designed for entertainment and writers of entertainment should be abolished. Those who presently were wasting hours writing novels, short stories, and, particularly, poetry, should be “ reprogrammed” (their word) to write technical manuals and scientific reports. AID, as a group, seemed to despise poetry more than anything.

Any building that housed a server integral to the Internet was either protected from terrorism before the bombing began, or had been infiltrated either physically or by modem and, somehow been either reformatted or bypassed so that all transmission via computer would remain unaffected. Now, six days after the siege had begun, the members of AID were in place at each stop in the giant worldwide network. With rare exception, AID was in

control of the Internet, the World Wide Web, and the network of every institute of higher learning in the world. The group was protecting companies like Microsoft and NASA, but there was little trouble there, anyway, since the many of the employees of those companies was a member or sympathizer of AID. The group had been able to control small portions of the federal governments network, only because several government employees were sympathetic to the cause. AID threatened to destroy any art or literature in the Internets vast library, although rumor online was that at this time they were simply denying access to anyone who tried to obtain that information. Nathan experimented and discovered that that was true. Nathan found that he was only able to access some areas of the Internet, and that number was diminishing daily. Now, when he logged on, he was greeted with a long, rambling, and often semi-literate message from AID.

Kendra, Colin, and Nathan had learned all of this over the last five days. Nathan was able to recharge the batteries for both his cell phone and his laptop by plugging them into the BMWs cigarette lighter. They also turned on the radio three times a day, for 15 minutes or so, to listen to the news. On the second day of the siege, Nathan had tried to convince Colin to leave the park and drive. Drive where, he wasnt sure. His parents lived two hours away, and he had contacted them by phone. They told him they were all welcome to come and stay, but to please be careful. For the first three days, the bombings were frequent and unpredictable, and they decided to stay put. On the fourth day, there was only one bombing locally, and Kendra convinced Nathan to stay. It was selfish, maybe, but she wanted to be near her father. The fifth and sixth days had been relatively quiet, unless the

rumor about the supply trucks was true. Consensus was that the only sound that was coming from the terrorists now was the tapping of keyboards and the hum of modems as they quietly worked to make the world their own.

Colin rolled the car window down a few inches and lit a cigarette. “ Its 11,” he said. “ Lets listen to the news.” He turned on the radio and called out the window to Nathan. “ Nathan! News!” Nathan slowly walked over to the car and got in the front seat with Colin.

“ We now continue our around-the-clock coverage of the terrorist attack on the world by AID, or Art is Dead. It is Day 6 of the siege. We have this report from Warren Marcus, spokesman for AID:“ Greetings from the members of AID. We want to assure the citizens of the world that we only have your best interests in mind. All of you must agree that what we are doing is what is best for the world. It is now time for everyone to join in the betterment of the human race by joining AID.”“ There is no longer room in the world for art or for artists. We do not wish to destroy those who produce art; rather, we would ask them to join us by using their talents to further the cause of science. Artists who join our battle will be asked to redirect their talents to the production of graphs, charts, and technical manuals. Writers who are now wasting time producing works of fiction can join our cause and be used, after a brief retraining period, in the production of scientific reports, software programs, and technical manuals.”“ AID sees no value in the work of poets and suggests that persons who indulge in that pastime be used as child care workers or janitors.”“ Many of you have asked what role we see for musicians. AID is presently formulating its view on music. I have to tell you that this is a difficult area for us. Many of us enjoy music and do not want to

give it up. There is also the idea that good music is based on scientific and mathematical theory. We are hoping to find more support for that idea.”“ I am now ready to announce that the work on Phase I of our plan is complete. Starting tomorrow morning, those of you who had to evacuate your homes may return. We promise you that, if you cooperate, no harm will come to you.”“ Tomorrow is the 7th day of the start of our cause. Do not think, however, that it is a day of rest for us. You may not see us at work, but we will be there, quietly working from our computers. We will be changing the world as you know it. From now on, AID will control your telephone lines. We will control your cable TV. Airline flights will be under our control, as will the workings of most of the major utility companies. I could go on, but I think you get the picture.” Colin turned off the radio. He and Nathan looked at each other, then turned to look at Kendra. “ Well?” she said.

“ Lets pack up and go home,” Nathan replied. He got out of the car and went over to the fire and gathered up the few belongings they had left there.

Colin slid over into the drivers seat and started up the car. Nathan got in on the passengers side.“ Okay, Colin, lets go!” As they approached the exit to the park, the ranger on duty walked out of his booth. Colin stopped and opened his window.

“ Did you hear? We can leave!”“ Tomorrow,” the ranger said, sighing.“ We need to go now.” The ranger looked at them. “ But were not prepared to let you go. If you go, everyone will want to go.”“ Well, were leaving.” Colin said. He glared at the ranger. The man sighed heavily again, then opened the gate. “ Good luck.” He said grimly.

Nathan laughed. Colin turned onto the main road and drove back toward Goldfield. The road was deserted. “What do you think? What are you going to do? Are you going to go along with them?” Kendra asked.

“Do we have a choice?” asked Colin.

“Yeah, we really don't. Besides, I tend to agree.” Nathan replied.

Kendra leaned forward and put her chin on the back of the front seat. “So you're willing to go along with them? You, Colin? I thought you wanted to be an English professor!” “Well, I can still teach. Grammar and so forth.” Kendra tried to see his face. He was unsettled; he must be. “And you can still teach first grade, Kendra. Math, science, language. Computers.” “And I can still go to med. school. Surely that's acceptable,” Nathan added.

Kendra's head was spinning with the implications of what was happening and going to happen.

“Green Eggs and Ham.” She said quietly.

Nathan laughed. “What?” “And The Secret Garden. Come on, guys. Monet! Dickens! Garcia-Marquez, Colin. You love Garcia-Marquez.” “And Dostoevsky. And T. S. Eliot.” He said mournfully. “Prufrock.” “Nathan, what about you? What are you going to miss?” Kendra asked quietly.

“Awe, cmon, guys. You can still read those books.” “I'm not so sure,” Colin said. Kendra may be right. “Well never see a play again. Nathan, no more Jim Carrey movies! No more Beverly Hills Cop!” “I guess you're right.” Nathan frowned, then shrugged. “Oh well, it'll give me more time to concentrate on

medicine. Thats good, isnt it?" "I wont have to fret over the novel I always wanted to write," offered Colin.

"I wont have to worry about my students getting paint on their clothes," added Kendra sourly. She sat back in the seat and crossed her arms. They were entering the outskirts of Goldfield. No one spoke as they passed bombed-out churches. The library was a pile of rubble. Colin turned down Kendras street.

"Come in with me, please," she asked. They pulled up in front of her house and stopped. The house was dark. She slowly walked up onto the porch. From there she thought she saw a light in the kitchen.

"Dad!" Kendra cried. She found her key, unlocked the door, and pushed it open. She ran through the house to the kitchen, not even noticing that the bookshelves that had been brimming over when she left were now empty. No one was in the kitchen. From the basement came the faint strains of music. Bach. Kendra opened the basement door and ran down the stairs. Colin and Nathan were right behind her.

Her father sat in the corner on an old easy chair in a corner of the basement. He had put the chair, a table, and a lamp there years ago and often went down there to read.

"Daddy!" she cried, and ran to him and knelt down beside him.

Her father embraced her. He was thin and haggard and, like Colin and Nathan, had coarse bristle on his chin. "Kendra," he said quietly. His eyes were full of tears. "Finally," He was holding a thick book. "Shakespeare," he

said, holding it up. He looked much older than his 54 years. Colin came over and shook his hand, then Nathan did the same. “Im glad youve all come back in one piece,” said her father, smiling through his tears. “I thought you were dead. In the bombing.” Kendra asked softly.

“I was having breakfast with the Dean, remember? We met at a diner on Adams Road. We stayed there most of that first day. I knew you had been evacuated, but the phones there were dead. But I knew youd be all right.” He put his hand on her face. “Im so glad I got to see you one more time.” “What do you mean, father?” she asked.

He turned to her. “Dear daughter, you know I cant live in this world.” He squeezed her hand, then took a long drink from the glass on the table next to him. “Youre all young. You can adapt. And I dont think any of you love art and music and literature as much as I do.” He bowed his head. “Jim Wright said we should fight this. But I know better. Ive seen it coming. Its been coming a long time.” He reached down to the floor and picked up a notebook. “Ive written a treatise on why this should not happen. On why it will end up killing us.” He shook his head. “You cannot stop man from creating. Oh, I know these people dont want us to stop creating; they only want us to stop creating art. But that will be the death of our spirits and our souls. Promise me you will read this, all of you.” He took another drink. Kendra stared at the glass, then grabbed it. “No! No!” she screamed. Panicked, she looked at Colin. “Call 911!” She cried.

Her father smiled sadly. “Kendra, do you really think they will bother sending an ambulance to the home of a literature professor? Dont you know

they control everything now?” He put his trembling hand over his eyes. “ Robert Strobridge. Ellen Morris. Glenn Goldberg. And myself. Weve all written treatises, and weve all decided that this is the end.” The three young people knelt next to the dying man. Kendra held both his hands, and Colin put his hand on the mans knee. Nathans hand rested on the mans shoulder.

Kendras father breathed slowly a few more times. She put her mouth to his ear. “ I love you. I love you,” she whispered. Her father slumped. The heavy book slid off his lap and onto the floor.

Category: English