



*At The End Of The Tunnel* by Vincent Tram

# Ask

Safiya Shah

Electronic synchronised beeps enter my dream as I wake up to the familiar sound. “Cora, off the alarm” I demand. The small, smooth, white device lights up and hovers to my side. The alarm turns off a moment later. I make my way out of bed leaving behind the crumpled sheets and heading to the washroom. Cora follows me and I ask, “what day is it today?”

“Wednesday,” Cora replies, “You begin work at 8:37, considering the road conditions you should leave at 8:15.” I consider the information as I brush my teeth.

I always leave at 8:15, but I’m glad I can ask Cora just in case something on the road has changed. The small device would know, it holds an infinite amount of information.

I eat breakfast quickly before heading out and asking Cora to start my car. “Your car is fully charged” she assesses as I enter the vehicle. It is exactly 8:15, the perfect amount of time for me to get to work just as Cora had suggested.

After 10 minutes on the road Cora warns “there seems to be a sudden amount of traffic

up ahead.” My palms turn sweaty. Cora’s morning predictions about traffic patterns are never wrong. “I can guide you through an alternate route that will be quicker” Cora suggests.

“Okay” I reply. Cora’s shortcut suggestion brings me out of my panic, as I follow her directions down another street.

As I pass the road I would have stayed on, I see that the cars on it are continuing as normal. I wonder where the traffic Cora was talking about is.

“Turn right at this intersection” Cora demands, snapping me out of my thoughts. It doesn’t matter which road I take; Cora always gets me to work on time. “Your destination is on the left.” I recognize the street as I pull into the building’s parking lot.

A young girl is walking with her mother on the street. The mother is talking to someone on her phone. I watch as the girl runs ahead of her mother and picks up a flower from a bed of grass near the sidewalk. She asks the small device hovering beside her “What’s this?”

“A dandelion” it replies before going on to explain more about the flower.

“Wow” the little girl exclaims while twirling the flower between her fingers.

“It’s 8:36, you have one minute” Cora announces. I come back to reality and walk into work. The shiny white walls of the building bring me into a familiar mindset as I prepare myself for the long day ahead of me. I organize papers and distribute information for Plasma Tech.

“Good morning, Lily” Mary says to me.

“Good morning” I reply with a smile. Mary always makes work better.

“How was your weekend?” she asks.

“Cora what did I do this weekend?”

“You spent Saturday binge-watching shows and Sunday cleaning” Cora replies.

“No better way to spend it” Mary says, “Lana, what did I do this weekend?” she asks the small device hovering by her side.

“You spent Saturday with Gracie and Sunday mostly sleeping” Lana replies.

I hear the door from the other room open and turn my head slightly to see who enters. Our supervisor comes in with two officers, conversing sternly.

“We should get to work” Mary suggests.

“Yeah” I reply before heading to my desk. “What do I have to do today?” I ask Cora.

“You have to compile files for Project X and send it out to all board members to start.”

“To start” I sigh, before turning on my computer and getting to work. I sneak a look at the supervisor every now and then. I’m curious as to what she is talking about with the officers. I want to ask Cora about it, but I can’t get away with doing so discreetly right now. “What files do I need to compile Cora?”

“Files labeled 3, 7, 4, and 5.” I pull up the files and begin to put them together.

“How are you doing Mary?” The supervisor asks.

“I’m doing great, what about you, Susan?”

“Perfectly fine, how are you, Lily?”

“I’m good, thanks” I reply.

“What are you working on today, Mary?” Susan asks.

“Lana, can you explain the to-do list for today?”

The device replies “today you are updating the company’s insurance files.”

“Well good luck with that, Mary. And you Lily?”

“I’m compiling files for Project X” I reply. Both Mary and Susan give me a confused look



*Response to Octavio Paz's I Speak of the City by Darian Feakes*

and I wonder if I'm maybe doing the wrong thing.

"Is your device broken?" Susan asks looking towards Cora.

"No, I just" I pause searching for an excuse as to why I didn't ask Cora for my to-do list. "I just remembered what to do; I didn't need to ask" I reply desperately.

"Alright then" Susan says with a small smile before leaving. I look to Mary, but she is buried in her work once more. I get back to work as well, trying to forget about my little mishap. It's probably just weird for them to see me remember without Cora, but surely I don't ask Cora about everything.

At about 3:00 I am almost finished my work when the supervisor enters again with the officers. I try to ignore them and get back to finishing up.

"Hey Lily, I wanted to ask you about something?" I jump with surprise at Susan's sudden appearance but quickly recollect myself.

"Yeah, what about?"

"What do you think our next step for Project X should be?"

"Oh, well I think we should discuss the project further and consider its consequences before we begin experimentation." Susan looks at me worriedly and the officers turn tense.

“Is there something wrong with your device” Susan asks again.

“No” I reply. “Wait is that what this is about” I laugh, “because I didn’t ask Cora?”

They continue to look at me with concern, even Mary. “I’m sorry Lily” Susan says before nodding to the officers. They make their way towards me reciting “You have the right to remain silent” while trapping my wrists in handcuffs.

“Wait” I plead quietly. “Wait!” I yell this time. “I just forgot to ask, I’m sorry!” They lift me up from my chair and begin to drag me out of the office. “I’ll ask next time I promise” I plead again as hot tears burn their way down my face and blur my vision. Susan is gone, but I see Mary still silently working. Mary is my best friend. Mary who has been with me every day. All the stories we have shared with each other. All the things that she knows about me. Mary is my best friend. “Mary!” I yell out between sobs. “Mary please tell them I mean no harm. It was an accident.” She remains glued to her work. “Mary don’t let them take me.”

“I’m sorry” she says finally looking up, finally looking at me. There is no sadness in her expression, just what might be pity. I look away from her, feeling completely defeated.

Just as the officers have reached the office door, I see Cora. The small device is turned off and lying lifeless on the floor. No longer hovering by my side. “Cora” I whisper to myself. The device remains off, as I stare at it, then the office door closes, and Cora is gone.

*Among Us* by Belle Villar

