

## The Colours in Tomorrow

I tapped my sapphire-jewelled choker (a habit of mine), uselessly wondering for the zillionth time if it was real or not. Gemstones weren't mined anymore - like fossil fuels - both had been banned for a long time, so buying them was expensive. Still, it was better than sitting in a moving light car - solar-powered, as the name suggests - with nothing to do for three hours, which wasn't my idea of fun. But my older sister, Hua, had other plans.

"I know you'll like it in Toronto," she said while driving. "Yeah, not love," I responded sarcastically. We'd been living in Stratford our whole lives. I didn't see any reason to move.

I sighed and tore myself from the memories and looked at the buildings passing by. The glittering, colourful solar panel windows flashed by in a blur, reflecting a whole lot of colours. We were going to *live* in one of *those*. Just when I thought I was about to throttle myself, the light car stopped. Hopping out and giving myself a quick stretch, I eyed our new home. It had moss growing on the sides of its tall frame, with colourful solar panel windows. As soon as I walked into the apartment we were going to live in, I dashed to claim my room, choosing one with a big area for storage space (I'm not very organized).

Tapping away on my iPad later that night on my *new* bed in my *new* room, it didn't feel like home - *yet*. At around ten, I finally got off my tech and fell asleep.

 *Two weeks later...* 

I woke up and had breakfast with Hua, who tried to make me feel better about moving, but gave up after a few hopeless attempts (like before). Polishing off

my plate, I walked up to the roof and took a few deep breaths to clear my mind, and then facepalmed myself for forgetting that I was starting school the next day.

I flew back down to my room and started packing stuff I'd need, plus a few extras. I packed everything in a pastel green backpack made of recycled cotton and hooked on a mini solar flower keychain, a little gift my friends had given me before I left. I was still caught up in my thoughts when the doorbell rang. "I'll get it," I called down the hall to Hua, who was listening to the news.

I headed to the front door and there, on the welcome mat, was a package for me. I walked back to my room and opened it. Inside was a school uniform, a plain white shirt and brown cargo pants. At the edge of the shirt and cargo pants, there were little flowers and plants embroidered on, showcasing my new school's mascot - a Lily Stargazer flower. It was made of soft recycled nylon and cotton, and looked nice, though upon closer inspection, it had a few frayed threads.

Popping it in the washer, I went back to look through the other things in the package. It included a registry pendant, a bracelet with green cat eye glass beads, and a pink Lily Stargazer charm, with accents of rose gold. I loved the fact that I could wear cargo pants to school, and was obsessed with the big pockets (curse Brenda Wilcox for FAKE POCKETS!).

Returning to the outdoors on the rooftop garden, overflowing with green vegetables, from lettuce to cucumber to herbs and everything in between, to hang my washed uniform, I breathed in the crisp, earthy air and admired the golden rays of the sun that reflected off the buildings, forming a radiant city of light, every colour in the air like a rainbow had been pulled from the heavens and had been woven into the sunbeams as it dipped below the horizon.

"Golden hour," I whispered to myself, feeling the warmth on my face as I

closed my eyes. As the sun slowly dipped under the horizon, I opened my eyes and strode back to my room, sleeping a dreamless sleep.



*You got this, Mei! First day of school!* I was mentally hyping myself up. I was wondering if I wasn't dressed fancy enough or if my customized uniform wasn't cool, as I looked around the campus, a tall building that looked like it had been bombarded with plants, the blazing sun overhead, showing off the morning dew glinting on the leaves. Taking a deep breath, I stepped into the building. We had an assembly that morning to welcome everyone, and we would get our assigned lockers and homerooms as well as our schedules.

I made my way down to the cafeteria and found an empty seat near the middle of the room beside this girl with long black hair fading into a pastel pink; small braids adorned her head that twisted into a very intricate style. Yup, now I feel underdressed. Her uniform had little swirls and sakura flower petals on it that matched her hair. I averted my attention to the assembly, which was coming to an end.

"Now, if you hear your name, you are in Mrs. Jones's class. Jenny Anderson; Mike Andrews..." I look around and see people stand up and join Mrs. Jones. "...Lily Grace..." The pink-haired girl stood up and joined the rest of them. "...and Mei Fu. If you have any questions, you may ask them now," concluded Principal Harrowsmith as she glanced around, looking for any raised hands. When she spotted none, we were dismissed. We followed Mrs. Jones to our homeroom, where we chose our desks and settled down as she handed out locker numbers. I ended up with the locker beside Lily, the pink-haired girl from the assembly.

She made a face of pure disgust. “What’s with the hair?” she asked in a mocking tone. “Runnin’ late, sleepy head?” “What?” I replied, not sure if I’d heard her correctly the first time. “Yeah, you,” she said again, looking annoyed. “I just didn’t style it, why?” I replied with confusion lacing my voice, unsure of what she meant. “Uh, never mind,” she responded with a huff, rolling her eyes and stalking away (though it didn’t do much because her locker was beside mine). The rest of the day passed in a blur, with lots of introductions and a whole lot of icebreaker games (never again).

The next morning, I biked to school on my bike with an electricity generator on it. I locked my bike to the bike rack since most of us at the school lived close enough to walk or bike to school, which was well encouraged, and went to the activity board. There were many different clubs I could pick, but I only chose two. Eco Club and Art Club. I had just grabbed the last flyer for Art Club from the stack and was walking toward homeroom when I heard a shrill voice cry, “There are no more Art Club flyers!” I turned around and saw Lily having a meltdown in front of the activity board, her mascara flowing down her face in ugly sobs. I approached her and left my flyer in front of her silently and crept away, hoping she’d see it and stop crying, wondering why she didn’t grab a Drama Club flyer, because clearly she had it in her.

Dropping off my bag in my locker, I headed to homeroom and asked Mrs. Jones if I could get a copy of the Art Club flyer since there were no more left. She handed me one, so I thanked her and went through with my day.

Lunch was the first official Eco Club meeting. Mrs. Maple was nice to all of us and showed us around the school courtyard, where we’d be planting a Little Forest later. She showed us the compost where our food waste would go to help fertilize the Little Forest, and all the rooftop gardens, too. Thankfully, everything went well at the meeting, and I carried on the day feeling better than I had in a long time, especially since I had made a new friend! Her name

was Vivian, and although she wasn't in my homeroom, she was in most of my other classes, as well as being my neighbour! She had curly caramel brown hair with a hidden layer of teal underneath, and she customized her uniform with her love of stars, little sequins glinting in the light.

We talked for *ages* (or a few hours) on the phone (though we didn't need to), and she told me all about Lily Grace. "Yeah, she was sooo mean! I mean, the teacher had to call her parents. I heard she's good at art, too, like WOWZA good. She won 1st place every year for the past two years at Stargazer." Vivian rambled on to me. "Yeah, she was crying really hard this morning when she didn't get an Art Club flyer," I told her, describing what happened, excluding the part where I gave her mine, just so she'd stop making a scene.

We ended our chat a few minutes later, agreeing to meet up in the morning to walk to school together. I thought about Lily. Why did she act like that? Was she really that good of an artist? Why should I care? Thoughts swirled around my head as I fell asleep.



Days passed in a blur. Winter break came and went, and soon, it was time for the annual Art Contest. Though Lily's discreet rudeness tried to discourage me, I still signed up for it.

Painting has always been my passion, as well as all forms of art. Though it always hit different, so I chose to do a piece of art that reflected all the different medias of art. I didn't want to just draw the present or the future. No. I wanted to help us embrace our past. I drew a beat-up looking cottage, over a littered hill. In the background were factories with smoke coming out of it, all these things in black and white, symbolizing our past. Then, I pulled out some thick white paint and dipped a wide flat brush in it, and painted a flat line of

white across the canvas, making sure to still have the original drawing of the littered fields and all the pollution. After that, I shoveled some more of the white paint on and waited for it to dry. For the last thing, I used watercolor and pencil crayons to create a stunning view of a cabin surrounded by a large open field. In the background, the factories were now tall skyscrapers, bursting from the ground, completing my art.

The next morning, it was dry and wrapped in bubble wrap, nice and ready to go. Walking to school with a spring in my step (though not too springy), and was practically bursting from the seams as I made my way to the art studio. While there, I took a look at Lily's art for this year's contest, and her past winning art pieces. They were all the same-ish, all with watercolored rooftop gardens, though at different view points. Vivian was right, Lily was good. I just hoped I could top it.

"I already know I'm gonna win again, like, it's so obvious," I heard Lily bragging to her crowd of admirers. I rolled my eyes.

I could barely do anything all week as I anxiously waited for the results. The whole school was there on Monday, and I was a nervous wreck.

"In second place is... Lily Grace! Congratulations Lily," Principle Harrowsmith congratulated a fuming Lily, who accepted her award with a scowl. "And in first place... Mei Fu! Fabulous work!" She announced as I went up there in shock and joy. Walking off the stage, I heard Vivian cheering loudly and congratulated Lily on her work. Though she was tight-lipped, she managed a curt nod. I smiled. *Not bad, I told myself.*