

When It's Colder Than It Should Be

"Daddy, why're you always at work?" My father looks down at me, smiling.

"Because I have a really important job, Emmy. We only have one Earth. So it's up to us to try and rescue it."

My father was very big on saving the world. And it got him killed.



It's been more than 15 minutes now since I decided I was lost. I've probably sat on the bus for way too long. But what do I know? I wish I was in mom's car. I wish the person next to me didn't have such a huge backpack, and the person across from me would stop whistling. I pull my jacket tighter around me. It's definitely cooling down. Or should I say, "it's cooling down!!" A lot of people are excited about it. They don't, however, consider people like me. People who would rather a hotter world, who don't believe in the change. Pessimists. 'Animal killers', because according to my little sister, "but *Emerald!* You're killing the polar bears!". But Ellie was very young when dad died, and doesn't miss him nearly as much as I do. She hasn't sworn to hate his job and everything associated with it.

I remember when it happened. *Why* it happened. In a sudden and unexpected snowstorm, 13 of the unfinished windmills my dad and a few of his coworkers were fixing fell down. 164 tonnes of steel, crashing upon them. None of them made it out alive. And so that's what happens, when it's colder than it should be. That's why I can't let this happen, when my favourite childhood memory is swinging on a swing in the beaming sun, feeling the warmth seep through my veins, dad's hands on my back, pushing me higher and higher towards the sky — and my least favourite memory is, well... obvious. I understand there's still summer; we're not starting an ice age. But still — it won't be the same.

I peek out the window. We pass by a familiar strip of bright green — the roof gardens of my neighbourhood. My mom and a team of other adults in the area planted all sorts of vegetables in them, and every week they all get together to split up what's grown. So... I guess I didn't miss my stop after all?

I hop off the bus, shout back, "Thank you!" and then head down the sidewalk towards my sister's school. I make a point of walking a wide circle around the hanging O-wind turbines (a kind of wind turbine that looks like a ball — my dad would have loved to see them implemented in our neighbourhood) even though it means walking close to the middle of the road. My mom hates that I do this, but there are so few cars driving by I don't even have to be careful. I reach the school, and Ellie is waiting for me with a smile on her face, the same smile she willingly shares with everyone she meets. No one would guess the pessimist is her sister. She spots me and her smile grows even bigger.

"Lot time!" She calls to me. I pull her backpack off her shoulders and place it over mine.

"Race you there!" I laugh at how quickly she zips away. I lag behind because of the two backpacks I'm carrying, but our age difference (she's 10, I'm 16) keeps me close behind her. We reach the empty lot (hence the name 'lot time') a few minutes later, panting and out of breath (she got there first). Ellie clambers up onto the tallest mound of rocks and sits down. I climb up and plop down beside her. We've been doing this for years now, taking the slight detour from home to come hang out here. It's the lot where the old car dealership stood, before they tore it down. Ellie and I used to always press our faces against the glass windows, peering through at the cars we proclaimed we would buy when we were old enough to drive. They were gas cars, however, and so the place went bankrupt, was shut down, and soon after, demolished. I pull myself out of the memories.

"How was school?" I ask.

"Fine..." I look at Ellie. Usually her answer is, "Great!" along with some great story. Then she bursts into tears.

"Mrs. Martin said they're building on the lot... it's going to be roped off tomorrow! We— we won't be able to come play here anymore." I hadn't realised how much she'd cherished our time in the lot. Sure, it was fun, talking and laughing, climbing and jumping over the mounds of dirt and rocks, and it had definitely brought us closer... I put my arm around her.

"Hey," I whispered. "It's gonna be okay. We adjusted to the car store going away, right?"

"But Emmy... I've adjusted to my limit." *Me too, Ellie*, I think.



When we get home Ellie tells mom the news, but with a fake smile plastered on her face. She sees how much my dismal adapting skills bother mom.

"I think they're planting a forest there," mom says. "I read somewhere they're able to plant mostly grown trees as long as they have shallow root systems, which is what they're planning to do here. They plant the forests in empty lots while it's decided what will be built there, and then they can remove them when it's time for construction and put them in new places to stay. You girls are lucky," she adds, "because the forest is staying with us!"

"I'd rather a new car place," I mumble, and she shoots me a look – which turns to a look of surprise when Ellie says, "Me too," and then bolts up to her room. Maybe she's finally on my side!



We have chicken pot pie for dinner, made with what my dad used to call 'happy chickens', meaning they weren't mass raised on a factory farm. He always claimed he was 'vegetarian' – but the kind that allowed him to still eat meat as long as it had been grown in environmentally conscious ways. Eating this meal – well, really any meal – reminds me of him.

"Girls—" mom begins after nearly a whole meal in silence, "the forest is a good thing. Your... your father would've thought so." Ellie nods, but I don't comment. How can I argue when I know it's true?



I wake up the next morning to my new soundless alarm — my light turning on. I bash the off button, but the light stays on with a weird crunch. I look over and realise I've only accomplished smashing off one of the petals of my new miniature solar flower.

"Shoot!" I exclaim. I'd forgotten it was there — hopefully it's not broken. I grab a piece of tape from the dispenser on my desk and try to press the petal back on — good enough. It probably won't work as well, but at least mom won't find out I snapped it. I pull on my new 'recycled material only' school uniform and glance in the mirror. I have to admit, it's kind of pretty (a plaid skirt, blouse, and blazer) but I am determined to hate it. Determined to hate anything my dad's job might have had a role in.



A typical day at high school in 2104: get to school, go to your classes mostly as usual, but nearly all the work is on computers. If we have to use paper, then the teachers will hand out 'seed paper', a kind of paper made of seeds and a few other materials that can actually be planted after use. Once a month we have a yard cleanup period, and at the end of the year we all hand in our uniforms to be recycled and reused for next year. But, according to my mom, the biggest change is that school buses have been eliminated. Everyone walks, uses their bike or scooter, or takes one of the many electric public transit options. Technically your parents could drive you, but it is intensely frowned upon unless you are carpooling or driving an electric car. We used to have an electric car... but it was with Dad when the storm hit.



When I arrive at Ellie's school, she smiles nervously at me. No doubt wondering, like I am, what has become of our favourite playground.

"Do you want to go check out the forest?" I ask. Her smile turns a bit more genuine.

"I can't not," she says, which is exactly how I feel. We can't just abandon the lot without even giving it a chance! She slips her hand in mine and I squeeze. We inch down the sidewalk, unsure of what we will find at the end.

We reach a line of hanging turbines, and I start to pull my hand from hers so I can go around them. But she holds on tight.

"No," she declares. "You're going under them. They aren't regular turbines. They're not even that big."

"Let go of me!" I snap.

"No!" I look at Ellie and she stares back at me. "You're coming with me." I hold my breath the whole time. We have to pass under five of them, all in a row, hanging from a (hopefully!) strong cable suspended between two power lines. She pulls me along to run the last bit.

"See, that wasn't so bad, right?" *It really wasn't*, I think, but I don't say that because I don't want her to be right. I just let out my breath and shrug. I can tell that she knows what the shrug means, so she doesn't bother me about it. After that, we stay silent... until we reach the forest. It's beautiful. I hate it. And it's staying with us... I'd rather another car place... would I?

Ellie just looks at it in awe. Each new tree is probably only ten feet tall, so one near the back corner stands out. It's an oak, around thirty feet, that had shaded the lot since the first car dealership. She points to it and says, "I wanna climb that one," and runs off into the canopy of leaves.

"Ellie — wait — ELLIE!" I yell. I know how this is going to end. In a sudden and unexpected snowstorm, the trees will fall down. And Ellie will fall with them. I race after her. When I catch up she's already climbing, just like she used to on the mounds of the lot.

"Ellie," I pant. "Come back right now." She turns to look at me.

"I know what you're thinking, Emerald. The tree's gonna fall?" I nod. "Well, it's not. And you can't stop me from climbing anyways. 'The brave may not live forever, but the cautious don't live at all,'" she quotes. Then her voice softens. "So come on. Please?" and I do the only thing I can do. I follow her up the tree.



Perched on a branch probably 15 feet up the tree, I put my free arm around Ellie.

"Thanks... for making me do this." Ellie smiles at me.

"I thought you needed it," she replies. "Y'know... Emmy... dad would be proud of you. He wouldn't want his death to ruin your life."

"It didn't ruin—"

"Yes, it did. You hate everything eco-friendly, and more and more of those things are going to be popping up. Let it go, Emmy."

I think about my uniform. It *is* pretty. And my solar flower. And the city bus, and the wind turbines, and the forest. Maybe I don't need to hate these things. I think about me and Ellie, sitting on the branch, our feet dangling over the edge. The afternoon sun peeking through a cloud, shimmering down upon us. Our breath barely visible in the crisp air. I guess *this* is what happens. When it's colder than it should be.