

The Last Tree

I bit my nails, a bad habit that I just discovered. I looked behind me, a tree towered over me. *The tree towered over me.* How could it have come down to this? After all these years, how could they have fallen? I couldn't think about that, not at the moment, no at this moment in time I had other things to worry about. For example, the huge bulldozer coming to run me, and the tree, over.

Earlier that morning

I woke up to the sound of birds chirping angrily, but not at my window. They were in my basement, trying to be kept alive. After all, the trees were gone. Nowhere for the birds to live, to stay, to build their homes. It's sort of depressing, well it's all sort of depressing. After people realized that climate change was real, it was too late. Big corporations had all the cards, they didn't like the fines for ruining the planet, but they could pay them. It's all so infuriating. I can't even open my window because of the lack of trees, plants, anything green basically. The bees couldn't be released into the wild because there weren't too many of them. Bees, you'd be on in a million if you saw them outside.

My parents are part of a team, they're sort of like superheroes, except they help the world, not humans. My mother takes care of birds and other animals that lost their home when trees fell. She has a makeshift tree in the basement, it's all made out of metal though. My dad goes out and tries to stop evil corporations that will destroy everything in their path.

My brother and I? We do nothing. Absolutely nothing. We stay at home because we can't go outside anymore. It's like the world is a nuclear wasteland, who am I kidding, it is a nuclear wasteland. You can't even go out of your house without a gasmask, unless you're standing right under a tree. My brother hates it, and so do I. I hate feeling helpless to the world around me, and today that feeling was especially strong.

"Mary! It's ON, COME DOWN, FAST!" My brother, he likes to scream. I slide out of my bed, letting myself drop to the floor. "COME ON THE NEWS-THEY'RE GOING TO ANNOUNCE IT!" I sprang upward, remembering. The last tree on Earth was supposed to be cut down today, but some people sued the big corporations. Those 'some people' are my parents' team, that was why the birds were chirping so angrily! My mom wasn't there to feed them. I ran down the stairs, spun around and ran down the other set of stairs, toward the basement.

I quickly fed the birds then ran back up to the sound of my brother yelling. "IT'S ON, IT'S ON!" He shouted. I wanted to put my hand over his mouth, but I held back.

Sliding into the chair next to him I began to listen to the news. I was in and out, listening here, trying to get a hold of my parents there. But they wouldn't pick up, and soon I found out why.

Slumping into the kitchen my brother fell into the chair, I knew he was trying to cry slightly. My parents and their team had lost the case, the last tree on Earth would be cut down, and there was nothing that we could do about it.

"Wait," My brother echoed my thoughts.

"Aren't they waiting till tonight?" I asked, stunned.

"Uh, I, uh, I think so," He said, his voice rising. "You think-"

"I know,"

We walked into the front entrance way and grabbed the spare keys from the little bowl they were in. I spun them around my fingers and walked to the garage.

"You think that this is a good idea?" I asked. My brother shook his head then shrugged.

"I don't know," he swung the car door open, "but, here we are," I smiled, even if he was only 8 it reassured me. I hopped into the driver's seat and turned on the car, programming it to go to the tree wasn't hard, but making it go fast, that was out of my hands. My brother, Lee, climbed over me and began to fiddle. In about 20 minutes we were on the road, cruising to our destination.

It took about 5 hours to get there, 6 tops. Lee was so bored he went to the backseat and slept, me on the other hand, I looked at my phone, hoping my parents would call, or text, anything really. When we got there the car slid into a parking spot on the side of the road. We unbuckled our seat belts, put on our gas masks, and saw the bulldozer. It towered over us, it was a massive monster and we... We were just kids, we couldn't stop it, even if we tried. The bulldozer would run over the tree and anything in its path.

I bit down on my nails, every muscle in my body wanted to run, to hide, to fear the big beast in front of me. I looked over at Lee, his mouth was wide open, he looked crestfallen, as if the bulldozer was about to run over him. He had the strange ability to do that, to feel bad for everything. But the tree was living, right? So if they cut it down, they weren't only cutting down the last tree, but they were ending a life. Even if the tree didn't feel it, the tree was still alive.

This thought, echoing through my veins fueled me, it fueled my rage, it fueled my disappointment. I stormed up, walking past the beast that we had learned to fear, walking past my surprised parents, walking past the people who stood in disgust staring at the bulldozer. I stopped right in front of the tree.

"GET OUT OF THE WAY!" The booming voice caught me off guard. I stumbled a bit, what could I say, how did I get up here? I saw my parents, they couldn't do anything,

their hands were tied. They sat there and watched as my future was about to be destroyed. They watched as the bulldozer's pounding engine got louder and louder. And suddenly I was crying, this was my world too. This was all we had left, this one tree, standing big and thick and mighty. Everything else had collapsed, and it felt like the walls were crowding in on me, trying to suffocate me. But there weren't any walls, there weren't any limits, if they ran over me, then what good would it do for them? They would get a bad reputation. No one would trust them. That was when I realized that I had the upper hand, a 12 year old had the upper hand! We could win if I played my cards right, because my hands... were not tied.

"GET OUT!" screamed the voice again. I pinpointed where it was coming from, the cockpit of the bulldozer. I smiled and let myself slide down the tree, sitting under its shade, something I never once did before. Tears still raced down my face, but I ignored them. Anyone who was in this position would cry, right? No time to worry about that, I remind myself, all I had to do was save the tree. Taking a breath I looked at the bulldozer, straight on.

"Get out?" I questioned, looking amused. "You know, I would say the same to you," confidence I never knew I had streamed through me. Suddenly Lee was by side, nodding in agreement. "This is my future, is our future," I said looking around to see the kids in their gas masks. The kids who thought the fight was over, who thought that their voice didn't matter. "You can't wreck our future," I said this thought was screaming at me, telling me to speak for the kids who couldn't, to speak up. To speak strong and clear.

"Watch me," the man said. The bulldozer began, the engine rumbled to life and it was plowing right toward us. Oh no, what have I gotten myself into? If I move, the tree is gone for good, but if I stay, well that happens. The thought of anything so burtle struck me hard. He was actually going to run over me, wasn't he? My shoulders fell, I slumped. If this was the way we were going, then why try to save our future? It seems to be already ruined, by past generations that didn't care that didn't care about their grandchildren, or about their great-grandchildren, but more about themselves.

"No," I whispered into the air, letting my voice drift off into the rumbling. "No!" I said, this time loud enough for Lee to hear. I jumped up, stretched my arm so they covered the truck of the tree, and screamed, "NO!"

The bulldozer stopped, the man must have been surprised. To be honest, I was a bit surprised myself. But my mouth keeps moving, speaking my thoughts, letting everyone hear me, "If I give up, if we give up, then what about our future, you might have one, but I don't, my children don't. And what about the tree, it's alive too. If we do this, then who are we? Letting our world go to waste because of evil corporations, and people like you! Who are too afraid to stand up, or who don't care enough to stand up, to realize that this is wrong, really wrong. So go ahead, cut down this tree, take me with it, because I don't want to live in a world run by you!" I let my tears run down my face, breathing heavily. The words were true, they had to be said. Because why would you have a voice if

you were too afraid to use it? I let them gawk at me, I did something that most of them wouldn't, given the chance. But I believed in what I did, and no one stopped me. Well this bulldozer was going to stop me.

The bulldozer started back up and I stood strong. Right before the bulldozer hit, though, Lee pulled me away. He really was a good brother.

I watched the tree snap in half. That just proved my point, we were messed up, all of us.

"Mary,"

"Save it Lee," I watched the tree, I watched as the men stepped out of the bulldozer, and walked away, like it was no big deal. But it was a big deal, it was the biggest deal.

About a week later the corporation lost its funding, all thanks to me and Lee, or atleast, that's what the news is saying. Because the corporation lost funding the stump won't be removed, it'll stay there, forever hopefully, and remind people just how cruel they can be. But I went back, day after day, and watered the stump. I still don't know why I did, I guess I thought maybe a flower would grow in the stumps place.

Five years later

"Wow, Mary just, wow," that's all my brother could say. It was there, a new beginning, hopefully. A small bud, after five years of waiting. Something grew in the stumps place, it was the tree, the same tree.

80 years later

"There are some people who think that the cutting down of the tree in the center of the town is a myth, but others know that it's real. It grew so much in the past 80 years. I got to see it all. Now the tree rises high above other evergreens, and even some cottenwoods that came out of nowhere. But sitting here, under the shade, I knew that my future had been great, and I knew that there was still room for improvement. In the tree population, and in our community." I said, standing before the tree, one last time.