

The Last Green

Evan woke up and looked out his window at the grey sky. He knew from pictures that the sky used to be blue, red, orange, pink, at dawn and dusk. But now the sky was always grey-- every single day.

Evan's grandmother told him that the world used to be filled with green. On every street corner and lot, there would be trees, grasses, and bushes, all sprouting light green leaves every April. There used to be woods filled with trees as tall as buildings, and green fields in the mountains filled with wildflowers.

Evan saw pictures of what the Earth used to look like, but for all he knew, this world was a fiction. The world he lived in was hot, crowded, dusty, and grey. Uniform, square houses with fading artificial neon green lawns lined the streets. All the same distance apart, all the same style. The same white and brown. The same faux wood plastic building material.

Evan's world was a world of plastic and order. A world of opportunity, wealth, and growth, or so he was told. Everyone celebrated having plenty of food, new clothes, new cars, new devices, new and bigger houses, new phones, new appliances, new jewelry. Buying things was so important that, every year, the world celebrated Freedom Day and went to the town's Growth Rally to celebrate all the new economic gains of the year. Even though food got more and more expensive every year, each year's Growth Rally made bolder and bigger proclamations. The celebration is topped off with fireworks, a lot of speeches, food trucks, and noise. A lot of shouting and cheering, and, afterward, parties and drinking and splurging on buying more things.

Normally, Evan looked forward to going to the Growth Rally, but today, something felt different. Evan did not want to listen to the noise. He did not want to listen to the nationalism, the pomp, the optimistic speeches. It was the day before his twentieth birthday, and Evan wanted something to be different. He was going to be twenty years old, no longer a teenager. There should be something else to look forward to other than just the Growth Rally. He wanted something real.

Going to the Rally was also a problem because of the heat. Inside, buildings were kept at a cool 74 degrees, but outside it was always in the upper nineties and one hundreds. That's why hardly anyone even went outside except for the Growth Rally. His grandma told him there was once a time when there was cool weather outdoors. When there was such a thing as cool rain, cool breezes. Breezes which felt refreshing as it blew past your body. Now, every time the wind blew, it picked up dirt and dust, so people wore plastic jackets to avoid getting dirty on windy days. Every day was hot, dry, and smoggy.

There were still green and natural places, with wild rivers, forests, and mountains, but only the rich could afford to visit them. When he was little, his father promised Evan that they would save enough money to visit by the time he was twenty. Now he had turned twenty, and they had never made the trip. Something always came up, it was always “next year.” Of course, “next year” never came, and Evan’s years turned into two decades.

A text lit up his phone. “You comin’?” asked his friend Rowan. “We need to get there early to get a good spot for the Rally.”

Evan keyed in a “Yeah, I’ll be there” and started to get himself dressed. He thought about skipping, but that would not have gone over well. There was no rule about it being necessary to attend the Rally, but that kind of decision just does not go over well. It is seen as uncooperative, unpatriotic. His friends and family would be worried. He ate breakfast, got himself cleaned up, then started driving to the town center for the Rally. It was 10:12, the rally would start at 11:00. He was going to be late, but he didn’t care.

The town center was crowded with people wearing foam fingers or Rally hats. Stadium-style music blared over loudspeakers. Evan found his friends Rowan and Johnny, plus some others in the group, and stood waiting for the event to be over with. It was an especially hot day; standing among the crowd, it was even hotter.

Gerald Jones, the town mayor, stepped up to make a speech:

“Hello Everyone! Welcome to this year’s Growth Rally. This year, Pike Peak has produced more cars than ever before, opened up more stores, more restaurants, and more factories than any year before. We have more wealth, greater opportunities than we have ever had before in history. Growth is what drives our economy, motivates the human spirit, and gives us the quality of life we deserve. There was once a time when the government set regulations and hindered that growth.”

The crowd booed at that last line.

“Not anymore! Since the abolition of those rules, our quality of life has grown at an unprecedented rate, and we are now the most prosperous society in the world. And we will continue to grow more and more prosperous forever!” The crowd cheered.

At that point, a sick feeling began welling up in Evan’s chest. He could not stand it anymore: the ridiculousness of the whole thing, the unquestioning devotion to the value of growth. Something about it came across him as wrong; something uncomfortable. Arrogant. However, if there was anyone else who felt this way, nobody dared to say anything. Evan left the town center and started driving on the highway. He was going to get away, he was going to find someplace green and real. He drove for miles, but the only thing on the road was billboards, gas

stations, and corporate parks. He kept driving, going north, not knowing where, but just knowing that he needed to be somewhere real. Somewhere where the sun was visible. Somewhere which wasn't so hot.

“Where are you going?” asked the GPS/car stereo. “I can help you get to where you're going!” it chimed.

Evan ignored it and kept going. After a few days, some small bushes dotted the side of the road. Then trees, then taller trees. He saw mountains in the distance. Soon, he was in the middle of a thick forest. He hesitated. What would it feel like to step outside? Did he really want to know? What if it was not as good as he imagined? What if he was stung by an insect and killed? He unlocked the door. He took his shoes off, closed his eyes, and slowly put his foot on the outside ground and felt hard concrete. He opened his eyes and saw that he was in the driveway in his house. The car had just played a video. His escape was a lie.

He smashed the windshield to his car and drove off again, searching for something different.