

# A Comforting Green

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The room was awash with a green glow. Leaving her bed, she dragged herself with heavy footsteps towards the window. That was the first morning she actually saw it. The 'Ivy Cloud'. Tendrils of fallout from some distant nuclear conflict, stretching across the planet. Its emerald hue of altered sunlight, would soon be over her city.

Dawn checked her phone. As expected, there was no longer a signal. She assumed that the approaching cloud, combined with the mass exodus of the city's population, had finally crippled the infrastructure. There was a tight feeling in her chest, and her mind was restless. Her eyes dashed between objects. Reminders of the past scattered around her flat. A vine had crept down from a hole in the ceiling, and coiled itself around a picture framed upon the wall. It was a group photo taken with her friends on their final day of high school. Dated only three weeks prior to the current day. She packed what few supplies she had remaining into a backpack, and left the flat.

She exited the building, and was met by the explosion of greenery that had engulfed the city. Despite the slow speed of the Ivy Cloud, the war was of such magnitude that it had blanketed the planet in an immediate low-level fallout. What followed, was a rapid increase in the growth rate of plant-life. Dawn set off in the direction of the high school. She walked through grassy streets and past buildings swallowed by roots. No longer was Earth the home of humanity. No longer, she thought, was the city her home.

"Dawn! You're here!" A young woman around her age called out with a thin voice from the entrance to the school.

"Carla, of course, we promised we'd meet here when—" Dawn looked to the cloud behind her. She moved to sit by her friend.

Carla was sitting slouched against the wall, her face was sickly, her eyes were milky. With thin hands she held a flower that sprouted from a vine beside her. The vines. Carla was surrounded by a dense mass of ivy, roots, leaves, and all manner of twisting flora. All of it was a vibrant green — even the flowers.

"I don't think I can stay." Dawn broke the silence between them.

"What?"

"The city, I think I need to leave; join the refugees and get out of here."

Carla sighed deeply, "this is your home — our home."

"It was our home," Dawn grabbed a vine and tore it from the wall, "not anymore."

Carla took out her phone and began to scroll through her pictures. Memories of their past together. Their other friends who were yet to appear. She came to a photo of the whole group standing in the park together, and held the phone up to eye it side by side with where the park had been. Across the street, where now there was only a thick mass of woodland.

“I’m dying,” Carla placed her phone on Dawn’s lap, “and I’m going to die here.”

Dawn attempted to ignore her words, but she knew what Carla was saying. “What’s this for?”

“Throw it away for me, will you?” Dawn moved to object but Carla put her hand up. “Photos aren’t worth much, really. I’ve got what I need in here,” she pointed to her head.

Dawn stood up and threw the phone. She threw it far and hard, far and into the overgrown park ahead of them. She gave out a defeated sigh. “I’m sorry Carla, but I don’t want to die.”

“Do you fear death?”

Dawn thought for a moment. “Yes, yes I do.”

Carla outstretched her arms, and Dawn moved in to hug her. “Alright, live. I forgive you.”

She left Carla by the school. Only then did she again notice the strained feeling in her chest. Like her heart was being torn apart. Dawn did her best to ignore it, and began to make her way to the main street.

“You going to join the group?” A man called out to her from what appeared to be the smashed window of a shop. He was difficult to make out, but she could see that he was wearing a uniform — tucked in shirt and black trousers; and his hair was neatly combed back. “C’mon, I’ve got some gear that might help you out.”

The man’s demeanour presented no malice, so Dawn obliged and jogged over to his store. As with everything in the city, the shop was overrun greatly with foliage. She could just barely read a sign plastered across the back wall: George’s Survival Gear.

He returned with a set of walking poles, a compass, and various other pieces of equipment for Dawn.

“The grass is tall past the city, it’s almost impossible to see where you’re going.”

She held the compass and inspected the north indicator. A big red arrow to cut through the green seas. “I’m sorry, but I—”

The man cut her off and chuckled, “What am I going to do with money? They’re free to take.”

“Thank you, Mr. George. Although, aren’t you looking to get out of here too?”

"It's just George, and no problem." He turned to face the window. "I had left already before."

"You came back?"

"Funny, isn't it? It feels as though I'd spent my whole life preparing for a situation like this. I was ready for the survivalist life — you could say I still am, but the moment I stepped outside the city, it just felt wrong. I just knew I couldn't leave."

Dawn gave a puzzled expression.

"Sure, my shop is in ruins and everyone I knew is gone. But even still, I feel privileged. Privileged to have run the shop, and to have known those people for so many years."

"But you'll die if you stay here."

"I know, and that's okay. Because this city; it's my home."

Dawn stepped outside and faced the cloud once more. By tomorrow at least, both Carla and George will have met their end.

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She found herself agitated within the camp environment. It was set up indoors, throughout the upper levels of a parking complex where the plant's reach was minimal. Around her were the last of the city's people. Those who had waited as long as possible before leaving. Those who did not truly want to abandon their town, yet feared death more than loss.

The sunset had come, and once again was the city bathed in the emerald hue reflected off of the Ivy Cloud. It was time to go. She was to join the first group of more well-equipped refugees that were to forge a path for the others to follow in the morning. She grabbed her bag and made for the journey, leaving behind the final photo of her and Carla that she still held. "This is your home, I won't take you from it." She said to the picture before laying it down on the concrete.

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Each step that she took past the city limits felt heavier than the last. Her heart pumped as if she were ascending a mountain, yet they walked through only low fields and wet plains. The group trudged slowly through the grass like a pack of pained animals fleeing from a burning forest.

They passed hundreds of trinkets, items, photos — objects pertaining to memories, dropped by those who had left before them. She spied a truck nearby, poking out from over the tall foliage, and trekked over to it. She climbed the side of its frame and hauled herself onto its roof, standing atop it to see the city one final time.

As her gaze fell upon the familiar skyline, a strand within her heart — the one which tied her to the city and that she wished to break — grew stronger. It was as if the Ivy Cloud itself had reached out to ensnare her, and it began to reel her in.

Dawn dropped her bag. She dropped her gear. She dropped everything that would hinder the speed at which she could run back to the city. Back to her friends. She ran faster than her body had ever let her. She cut a trail through the grass, through the shrubbery of the streets, and directly towards the high school.

There they were; her friends, gazing up at death above them. Dancing together, telling their final jokes, letting go of regrets. She ran straight to Carla and hugged her. Dawn attempted to apologise but Carla shushed her. “Welcome home,” she simply said.

It mattered not what the city had become. It mattered not that each of them lay precisely on death’s doorstep. The city was not home, and it never was. Her friends were home — Carla was home. A black rain began to fall upon them, but as it hit her skin, Dawn saw it was green. All around her was greenery, and her heart finally felt at ease.