

The Last Spring

“I remember the last spring. It was eighteen years ago.”

Violet had a hard time believing half of the things her grandfather told her. She couldn't think of anything other than the eternal summer and sweltering heat. A time when she would have to wear a jacket or even cover her arms for anything besides the sun was unthinkable. Her parents would sometimes talk about 'winter' or 'fall' with a mix of longing and disgust. Only her Grandpa Jack ever spoke of spring and that was only at bedtime when it wasn't too hot. Violet lay on her mattress, not bothering with the blankets and listening to her grandpa tell his tale.

“Fresh, ripe fruit,” Grandpa Jack, dabbing his forehead with a cloth. “None of that dehydrated stuff that you need suck on before you get any flavor from them. A cool breeze and the smell fresh flowers...”

“Flowers? Like this?” Violet pointed to the cactus she kept by her bed, a small pink flower coming from the top.

“Sort of,” Grandpa Jack said with a sly chuckle, “but compared to that old cactus of yours, the blossoms would be enormous. And we would walk through the fields and pull fruit fresh off the vine and eat it—“

“Fields? Outside?”

“Used to be miles of fields,” Grandpa Jack. “Before we had to move our agriculture indoors to keep it from drying up in the heat. If the Last Spring had come when I was your age? I doubt we'd be able to survive like we do now.”

“Where did spring go?”

“If you figure that out, my dear Violet,” Grandpa Jack sighed and wiped the back of his

neck with his handkerchief, “you would be the most remarkable person of your age. The truth is, spring left us long ago. Some people say it was an effect of global warming. Some people say we tried messing with science we didn’t understand. A lot of people said we offended any number of gods and were being punished. Unfortunately, we spent so much time arguing blame that we forgot to look for a solution. Your parents and I could tell all about the inefficiency of men in suits, yeah? Well, something they did broke the seasons and put us in this summer. Now? I hope we can see it end.”

Grandpa Jack didn’t live to see spring return. He, like so many others, died of heatstroke. Violet had been at her first college class when she got the news that her grandfather had passed away. At the funeral, Violet swore to end the endless heat in her lifetime.

It started with her college research. She didn’t know where to start, so she started with history. She studied ecology, meteorology, and other subjects until she changed her major at least a dozen times. Her parents were exhausted each time she changed, but Violet couldn’t find anything that was what she wanted to do. After she graduated, she worked at the moisture farms until she earned enough to get a motorcycle. Stocking up her saddlebags, Violet took off one day after work, desperate to keep her promise and find spring again.

Traveling during the day was out of the question. The sun was too intense and Violet stayed hidden inside her tent during the day. She would gain a fair distance on the empty roads at night and spent time resting and planning her voyage during the day. The first few days were driving on the road, endless swaths of dust-covered with dead and brown plant life. More than once, she found dead animals that were nothing more than dried out, hollowed husks.

By the fourteenth day, Violet was exhausted. She’d had a quick brush with road pirates,

but a clever escape by riding through an abandoned mall where their trucks couldn't go. She had lost some travel time to a violent thunderstorm that nearly took her tent with it, but survived by getting to a bridge to avoid flooding. She'd gotten a little turned around in the flatlands of what was Arizona, but she was saved by the light of the North Star.

After day twenty, Violet was in Colorado and she could remember the last time her skin hadn't been cracked and dry. She had restocked food at the last outpost and she'd been able to trade for water a few towns back. There was enough to last another few days, but the water was too valuable a resource to wait until she was almost out.

Violet stopped her motorcycle by a sign and pulled her goggles off her face. A building on the outskirts of Boulder blocked off by concrete barriers and a chainlink fence. The only indicator that this was anything other than a ruin was the sign warning people to stay out. The research she had done led her here, where they first noticed the temperature changes that preceded the endless summer. Pulling her goggles back down, Violet wove her bike through the barriers and rode up to the front of the building.

With nothing more than a heavy piece of pipe, Violet walked up to the building. The glass door had been shattered a while ago, the shards crunching under her foot when she stepped into the empty hall. The crunch echoed through the hall and Violet shuddered when she realized how dead the air in here was.

Violet wasn't sure what she was looking for. A machine, maybe, or perhaps a detailed report of what had happened. She'd even accept finding a ritual circle of some kind. Anything that could lead her to an answer. Most of the rooms were abandoned and dusty, cracked computer monitors and paper files that were dried out and brittle. Violet noticed that the walls were solid glass, starlight and the moon easily passing through them. Unlike the solar glass on

the newer buildings, the glass would turn the office building into a solar oven if she stayed for more than an hour after sunrise.

Violet pulled up a file and flipped open the front cover. The researcher in her cringed at the thought of upsetting the scene, but the detective in her was willing to work around it. The folder was a list of temperatures, pressure changes, and storm cells. The records went back almost thirty years, which checked out with her grandfather's stories of the Last Spring. She tried to turn on one of the computers but wasn't surprised when it didn't power on. Leaving the small office, Violet frowned and walked over to another office.

Through her search, she found a few more physical files, but the readouts were more weather records, expense reports, interoffice memos. The facility was her best chance at finding the solution, but it looked like people hadn't been here since before the Last Spring. Throwing another folder aside, Violet cursed and rubbed the sweat from her face. It would take days for her to go through all of these offices and without a map, she wouldn't know where to start. Heading out towards the exit, Violet looked up at the elevator and noticed the door was opened. Stepping inside, she poked at a few of the buttons, curiously. After the expected first, second, and third floors, she noticed several four additional buttons that marketed out basement layers.

"Sub-basements," Violet's brow furrowed. If she could find a staircase, she might be able to get to the levels beneath the ground. She'd be able to look around a little longer and maybe find somewhere cooler to sleep during the day. After looking around, Violet found an emergency stairwell that opened as she shoved it hard. She almost took out her flashlight, but there was a faint, green glow down below the stairs. Rushing down the stairs as safe as her excitement would allow, Violet ran down to the next basement.

A door marked 'B2' was illuminated with a green lamp. Pressing her ear up to the door, Violet couldn't hear anything but nearly jumped away from the door in surprise. She pressed the back of her hand against the door confirming what had startled her. The metal was cold, near freezing. The promise of a cold place to sleep was too much for Violet to ignore and she broke the handle with her pipe trying to get in. She pushed the door open with her shoulder and nearly choked on the frigid air in the basement.

The basement was a room of black, aluminum casings that buzzed and clicked with blinking lights. Cooling fans hummed all around her and Violet pressed her face against the flat, cold metal. Air blew her hair back, frigid as she took a deep breath through her nostrils and smiled as she exhaled. Dropping her backpack and taking off her layers of sun protection, Violet laughed and lavished in the cold until she nearly shivered. After a final sigh, she rubbed her arms and looked around the basement, following the dim, blue glow that illuminated the basement. She approached one of the casings, opening the access panel and looking at the glowing screen. Using a set of physical buttons on the edges, Violet searched through the computer's functions.

It was an old processing system, but the display was easy to navigate. The terminal and the rest of the consoles around it were all running calculations based on meteorological data. If Violet was right, the computers were running algorithms for predicting the weather. However, even the oldest computers could calculate rough weather forecasts without this much processing power. Even computers of the early 2000s would be capable of predicting the weather on a laptop. Yet, it seemed that all of these consoles were all working on the same predictions.

Violet carried her backpack on one shoulder, skin prickling in the icy air. She'd pulled on

of the consoles from the wall and picked through the wires apart until she found the bundle that was sending data. One bundle in her column led up to what she guessed were the satellite dishes on the roof. The second bundle connected to a structure that collected the other bundles from other rows of consoles into a metal grate that ran down to the far end of the room. Backpack over her left shoulder and pipe in her right hand, Violet followed the wires, until she saw them turn down.

Leaving the comfort of the frosty, cold computer room, Violet descended one more floor in the building. The stairs ended at B3 and Violet found the door locked with a keycard authentication with a single red light blinking. A few smacks with her trusty pipe and Violet managed to expose the inner workings of the system. Sparking the wires together, Violet managed to trip the security system and get the door to unlock. Since no one had been around for years, she was sure they wouldn't care that she broke in any more than what she'd already torn through their files on the ground floor.

This room was also kept very cold, a sensation that Violet wasn't sure she'd ever get used to. There were rows of more aluminum casings, but all connected to a larger console with a large monitor. When she saw the cables from upstairs ran down into the primary console in the room, Violet approached and touched the head of the high backed chair. She turned, expecting to find a body glaring back at her, but let out a sigh of relief when she found it was empty. Sitting in the seat, Violet coughed and waved her hands, trying to get the dust out of her eyes. She pulled herself up to the keyboard and tapped at the space bar.

The room was filled with blue light from the monitor, nearly blinding Violet until her eyes adjusted. The computer was still active and the screen hadn't been shattered by the extreme heat. The screen prompted her: 'Project Demeter: Password?'

Violet furrowed her brow and turned through the notebooks left behind. Most of them were similar notes to what she'd found upstairs, but nothing that would have been a password. Violet thought for a minute, trying to recall if any of the conspiracies she'd read about had anything to do with Project Demeter. Tapping her fingers on the keys, Violet noticed that there was a bit of paper sticking out underneath the mousepad. She pulled out the wrinkled note and typed the word scrawled on it: 'Persephone'.

"Nice of them to leave the key under the mat..." Violet said. She knew she'd gotten very lucky, but the idealist in her felt that someone else was trying to help her on her quest.

The computer welcomed her and opened up about a dozen windows, updating the computer with tons of information that Violet recognized as weather data from the past fifteen years. Whoever had been doing this cleared house a while ago and hadn't been back since if the computers automated systems were any indication. Violet took a thumb drive out of her backpack and started downloading all of the computer's information, a whopping two hour download time to wait through. While she waited, she browsed a few folders of old data and found "Demeter Progress Logs". She opened them, reading the logs while her download worked in the background.

Project Demeter was a government project initiated in 2015 with the intent of controlling the weather. As such technology was declared illegal by the European Union, Project Demeter was classified above Top Secret. Atmospheric Manipulation agencies that came before Project Demeter were shut down and consolidated into a single agency. There was a fair bit of science in some of the initial progress logs that Violet didn't understand at first glance, but she was sure she could decode it if she had time. She'd look over the files on her tablet the next time she set up the tent.

The main question Violet had was how anyone could control the weather. Looking aside at the massive scale of a project like that, the ecological catastrophe that would follow would—

“Not would follow,” Violet thought, “the catastrophe that is...”

The flash drive finished copying all the files and programs, alerting Violet with a tone. Violet ejected the memory stick and plugged it into her tablet, ensuring that the files had properly uploaded. When she was satisfied, Violet looked back up at the computer. She couldn't leave it here. Project Demeter, or whatever it was called now, needed to be shut down for good. She accessed the disk drive and attempted to clear the hard drive, shutting down the processing systems.

“Terminal 4 cannot be deactivated without administrative access.”

“Terminal 4?” Violet gawked aloud. She searched the progress logs and found a document listing fifty terminals scattered across the planet. Violet leaned back and looked up at the ceiling. She couldn't believe how close she'd gotten to completing her goal only to find that she'd barely scratched the surface. Now, she'd have to travel to find these random outposts all around the globe.

“No...” Violet said, leaning forward and examining the terminal file. “These terminals need each other. One fails and they all fail.” Without the information input, Violet figured that the other Demeter Stations would destabilize and the weather might return to normal. The chain reaction would take longer, but Violet could start the process by shutting down this terminal. The only problem was that she didn't know how to get administrative access.

Violet checked her watch and noticed the sun was coming up. It was too late to do anything for now. She found a part of the terminal room upstairs and wrapped herself in layers of sun protection to keep warm. She couldn't remember sleeping as well as she did,



tucked away in the hum of the air conditioners.

When she woke up, she took a generous swig of water. She might find some water somewhere in the base. If there was power, there might still be access to the waterlines. If it wasn't for her limited supplies, she'd like to stay here in the cold air for a few days to—

“The air conditioners...” Violet said, setting her hand on the cool metal side. Without the air conditioners, the terminals would overheat, which would cause them to shut down. “Or,” Violet considered, “they'll burst into flames. Either way, the system will fail.”

Violet crawled over the top of the air conditioners toward the wall and found the thick cord that connected it to the wall. She took out her knife, cutting into through the thick outer layers of the cord. After she stripped the bundled wires, she cut at the cables broke the connection. The air conditioners powered down until the fans slowly spun slow to a stop. The only sounds on the floor were the soft whirl of the terminals. Violet touched the side of one of the consoles. Already, it felt warmer than when she last touched it. She wasn't expecting it to take very long, but the side was already warmer than she was prepared for. The terminal must have been working harder than she thought.

Packing away the last of her things, Violet pulled the layers of sun protection back on and walked back outside. She was relieved to find her bike still where she left it. Loading her equipment back onto the bike, Violet checked the coordinates of the other Demeter Terminals.

“Well,” Violet sighed, looking up at the moon, “Canada should be nice this time of year...”

Kicking the motorcycle to life, Violet kicked up gravel as the bike peeled out of Demeter Terminal Four, heading north. Fifty wasn't that many with the hope of cool breeze and spring flowers to urge her on.