

The Inevitable End

Chloe Reynolds • 8 • short story

It had been 2093 when we had to evacuate our home in Modesto-Merced, California, during the humid summer. The pollution in the air, on the ground, and in the water became too life-threatening. I was eleven-years-old when we had to start wearing anti-pollution face masks. The next year, children stopped going to school physically. The government became concerned about safety, and all schools became limited to only being online. Day to day living had become making sure that every connection to the outside world was sealed off. Life has become about surviving; all activities that I enjoyed have converted into dull memories. It is a cruel thing to raise a child in this world.

My name is Valeria Davis although my eight-year-old sister, Cecilia, and my mother, Claudia, both call me Vee. I never knew my father, but I know it is better that he is not in our lives. I once craved a traditional childhood because so much of my life had been trying to survive and take care of my sister. I found myself in a constant state of exhaustion. I did not want to be in charge of someone; I wanted to take care of myself. I understand that appears egotistical, but I had never gotten to focus on my life or my needs. However, those thoughts were before my life started to tumble downhill, and it all began like any other day.

"Valeria, do not tell me that you

are still sleeping! You know that I need your help in taking care of Cecilia. You cannot keep behaving like a child. It is time for you to grow up," my mother scolded me at the foot of my bed. She had subtle tones of disappointment in her voice. I regret treating her the way I did.

"I'm on my way. Calm down! Aren't you supposed to be the adult?" I thoughtlessly insulted. She did not acknowledge my commentary. I knew that I had hurt her, and I knew that she was working as hard as she was able. I wish I would have known that Cecilia was listening to our dispute. Perhaps if I had been kinder to my mother, our journey would have been better. I stepped through the house and approached my mother, anxiety evident in her facial expressions. "What is so important that I had to get up an hour earlier than usual?" I questioned, thoroughly vexed.

"We are leaving today. It is no longer safe here. The anti-pollution masks are not fully filtering out the toxins anymore due to the increase in pollution," Mother said calmly, but I could detect her distress and see the dark circles under her eyes. She was fidgeting with the locket that my grandfather gave to her before this all began. She did this when she was concerned about something.

"Leaving? Where are we supposed to go? If we're not safe in the house, we won't be safe traveling across the land." I did not desire to go. Life may not have been blissful in Modesto-Merced, but it was my hometown. "What will we tell Cecilia? Oh hi, you have to leave the only place you've ever known. Oh,

and you probably won't be able to take most of your belongings. I'm sure she will respond wonderfully to that," I knew I was harsh, but I did not want to part from my home.

"Go. You need to wake your sister. Help her pack a bag and pack yours. We will leave in one hour," she commanded me with all the composure she could dig up. I reckon that Cecilia overheard me advancing towards her room because when I opened the door, she turned over in her bed and clenched her eyes, feigning sleep.

"Vee, are we going to a new home now?" Her voice was quivering, tears welling in her eyes, and her nose and cheeks crimsoned. I should have been more reassuring. What right did I have to tear her spirits?

"I doubt it. We probably won't make it past the river," my voice was monotone, and my tone was sharp.

We set out for the Safe Place, or the city as my mother kept addressing it, fifty minutes following. We were all clothed in our anti-pollution masks, long-sleeve shirts, and pants, to shield our skin. The days were long-drawn, and Cecilia began to feel fatigued from the non-stop traveling. I did not feel much better. We eventually came to the river that is about a two-week journey from our home. The food rations were running low; we knew that we would have to start preserving what little we had left.

"Remember, the river is not shallow, and the current is strong. You will need to stay together. I want both of you to cross before me so I can throw you the supplies," Mother's voice was strict and commanding, the tones of anxiety were adamant when she spoke. After both Cecilia and I had crossed the river, Mother tried to throw us the supplies, but the pack had not reached from her to us. She shouted to us that she was going to make a trip to a nearby town to rummage for food, and we should stay where we were by the river until she returned.

**As long
as I had
Cecilia to
look after, I
would always
be there to
protect
her.**

River Song
Chloe Reynolds • 8 • digital art

One week passed, and I knew that we would not survive with the amount of food we had remaining if we lingered in our encampment any longer. Summer was ending, and we needed to leave. "Cecilia, we need to leave," I uttered solemnly.

"What about Mom? Shouldn't we wait for her? She told us to wait for her to come back," Cecilia was always loyal to our mother. I knew it was going to be challenging to get her to leave. I considered telling her that Mom wasn't coming back, but I couldn't hurt her like that. I was all she had left, and I wasn't going to let her down.

"Mom will meet us at the last city. She wouldn't want us to stay here without any food."

"What about when she comes back? Won't she be confused about where we went?"

"She'll know where we went, and she'll understand that we had to take care of ourselves," I hated lying to my sister, but I couldn't take away any of the hope she had left inside her heart. I should have been kinder to my mother before she was gone. I never understood what it was like attempting to raise children in this world, but now I'm afraid that I know all too well. Cecilia did not want to listen to me. She was determined for me to be wrong. She was a bright girl, and she knew what I was implying. Neither of us was ready to accept that we had lost the only parent we ever had. As food became even more scarce during our journey, I stopped eating so that Cecilia could. My hunger was attempting to get the best of me, but I would not

let it. As long as I had Cecilia to look after, I would always be there to protect her. The days merged into weeks. We had stopped through the occasional abandoned town on our journey, searching for any possible trace of food. Summer was over, and the bones underneath my skin were more visible now than ever. We were close to the city, but I was afraid that we would not achieve our goal and make it.

We eventually ran out of food. Making it to the city seemed less likely every hour that we kept walking. Fatigue and hunger began to overtake our bodies, but I swore to myself that I would protect my sister at all costs. I did not want to break that vow as we were now so close to the end of our travels. We walked until our legs gave out, and we were hungry to the point of starvation. "Vee, I'm tired. I want to go home. I want to see Mom," the weakness in my little sister's voice broke my heart as I held her in my arms.

"I know. Go to sleep. Everything will be okay. I love you," I knew this was the end for us, so I pulled my journal out of my bag as my sister drifted away in my arms. I pulled out a pen and started writing because it was the end for both of us. I wanted to document our journey from beginning to end, and I am afraid that this is the end of my story. I was no hero or savior in the end. I was just a girl.



Buds of May
Emily Metcalf • 9 • printmaking