

## When the Earth Stopped Blooming

I look around at the barren, desolate landscape before me as I wipe a bead of sweat from my forehead. It hasn't even been a full week since all the plants on earth have become nothing but dust. The world is unrecognizable. Nobody really knows how it happened; I woke up one day, and everything had changed. Scientists tried to find the problem, but they are left as baffled and clueless as the rest of the world. The experts call it impossible; I call it the end.

The plants in my front yard look sad and depressed. Their disconcerting color makes my front yard look like a desert. What used to be long, luscious grass is now a brittle, withered wasteland.

I'm on my way to the car, where I'm driving to the sixth store this week to see what food they might have left. All the other stores were out of canned foods, which is crucial if we want to survive, if it's even possible. The first day people heard the news and were told to stock up on food, everyone rushed to the nearest store. Scientists say we have months, maybe years, before extinction.

Dying is the last thing I want to think about right now. As long as I can find a store with some food left, my family and I should be fine for a while. I'm going to be fine. My brothers and sisters are going to be fine.

It's all a lie.

Even the short walk to my car is grueling. It's still fall, but the temperature has spiked to highs over 90 degrees. I fear what conditions could be like in even a few more weeks.

With a family of 9, our household food supply is already practically gone. Ma expects me to come home with enough canned goods to provide for our entire family for at least a few weeks. I don't want to make her even more disappointed than she already is by showing up a sixth time without anything to give.

I'm 16, and the eldest of all my siblings. Every chore, every job, every responsibility is mine. And after Dad died last year, I had to get a job just to support the family. All my mother does is cry and pine. Most of the time, she's either asleep or yelling at me to work harder.

Everyone tells me to wait for things to get better. They tell me to calm down and that everything is going to be okay.

Now, the world is ending.

Nothing is going to be okay.

Nothing is going to be fixed. The government can't change anything. They can't bring these plants back from their lifeless state. There's nothing left to do.

And I can't sit here and grieve my life anymore. I can't cry while my father holds my hand, because he's not here anymore. I can't bring him back, and it kills me.

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I already knew the store was going to be empty before I even walked in. With my own disappointment, I decide not to head back to the house quite yet.

Instead, I go to the only place that truly feels like home. It's my dad's place. He used to take me here during the summer and teach me how to fish. The lake is the only place I can go to be alone. To think.

Hot rage bubbles inside me, my heart burning. I cover my face with my hands.

*How could this be happening?* I ask myself.

It doesn't make any sense. Nothing does anymore. Not even my own self. I've lost everything. I've lost my Dad, my Mom, and myself. But if I try, maybe I can find it.

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I remember a Dr. Seuss quote that my dad loved: "Don't cry because it's over, smile because it happened." I can't control what happened to Dad, and I can't control what happened to the plants. I want to run. I want to scream. But none of that will help. I've tried to take control of life, but I just keep losing it. Maybe that's how it's supposed to be. Maybe I was never supposed to have control in the first place.

There isn't much left to do but try to move on from the past and all my fears. I should enjoy what time I have on this planet, whatever it may be. I don't have to grieve a life that I haven't even finished living. My story isn't over; there are still countless memories to make.

And when the time comes to leave this place behind, I have a choice to make. I can cry because it's over, or I can smile because it happened.

I choose hope.