

Snow
by
Laura Ruby

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After a long train ride into the city, packed into a car with hundreds of happy revelers, a young woman, barely out of her teens, makes her way toward Grant Park. It's a colder November evening than it's been in decades, the temperatures dipping below forty degrees. *Impossible*, the young woman thinks, but her freezing toes say it's true. She pulls the collar of her cloak tighter against the stiff wind coming off Lake Michigan. It must be the Cloud Quarry tech her father kept saying would never work, scrubbing the CO2 from the air, cooling the overheated earth bit by bit. Or maybe it's large swaths of poplar and pine and oak trees—some natural, some artificial and able to absorb a thousand times more carbon dioxide—now required in every town and city across America. She takes a deep breath, savoring the woody, minty scent of the spruces, the sweet exhalations from the hanging gardens on the nearby buildings. Though it seems too much to hope for, she wonders if Imnek and Siku, the first polar cubs born in the Lincoln Park Zoo in years and some of the last polar bears left on the planet, will one day feel the crunch of snow underneath their paws, taste it on their eager tongues.

Someone brushes against her cloak and a man not much younger than she is shouts, "Sorry!" before hurrying past her, his robot companion racing alongside, that robot cheerfully decked out in colorful lights for the coming celebration. The young man's uniform is smart and sleek and beautifully cut, not at all like the boxy, itchy uniforms she and her friends wore during their two years of mandatory service. She flexes her left hand and bends the arm, metal bone and synthetic skin that terminates at her shoulder, a reminder of a battle she yearns to forget and probably never will. She envies the young man, not because of his elegant uniform made of

the softest recycled polyester or his happy robot bedecked in blinking lights, but because the battle she fought in has already been written into the history books; the only thing he'll have to fight for is the top bunk in the barracks. And now the Second Cold War is over too, the last oil refinery closed in favor of solar power for all. Her father says trade will begin again, and soon they'll have real silk and sugar, spices and chocolate, maybe even coffee. She's never had coffee in her life, but her mother says it's like drinking magic—at least, once you got used to it.

She thinks she could get used to it.

She's finally reached the park, which is already bursting with people, hundreds of thousands of them. Some have come in uniform, like the young man who bumped into her, while others are dressed in their finest—suits and dresses of all kinds, even some gowns with scraps of lace and metal buttons and salvaged zippers. She spies a grizzled, white-haired man sporting a vintage leather jacket with a fur collar, something that could never be made new today, unless you were a billionaire. Most people's clothes are made from recycled materials, fabrics and thread spun from the now-outlawed plastic bottles and other waste. But isn't that better anyway? She admires her own cloak that she'd pieced together by hand, touches the necklace of gears she wears around her neck and the bracelet of cogs around her artificial wrist. This is a kind of magic too, creating something lovely out of something discarded, like the country her mother says they've trashed a thousand times, and then remade again.

The wind blows harder and the air grows colder still, and she wishes her friends were here to brave the chill with her instead of spread all over the states, watching at home on video. Soon, though, the crowd cheers and warms her, like a cup of her mother's mythical coffee. She sings and she dances and she stands on tiptoe for her first glimpse of the woman they have just elected President—the third woman in the history of the country, the second person from the city of Chicago. And as the music swells and the stage curtains part, the silver sky bursts and it begins to snow.