

## Losing the Sky's Blue.

“Lucas, what are you doing?” Mrs. Jennings shouted from the living room. She could see her son getting ready to go outside. “What, mom?” Lucas asked confused as he gripped his hand on top of the door knob, leaning back to see his mother in the living room. Her arms were folded at her stomach and she looked like she was waiting for an answer. “You’re forgetting your mask!” she exclaimed after a while. “Oh, right. Sorry, mom!” Lucas kicked off his sneakers and ran upstairs to his room. On the nightstand laid his mask. Lucas walked towards it but stopped at the window, looking outside at his neighborhood. The skies that were once painted with a lovely pastel blue was now flooded with the ugliest of brown. Clouds of steam, carbon dioxide, and various other chemicals were being pumped out of nearby factories. This was normal, it happened every day.

“I think there’s another environmentalist freak outside Grandpa’s factory,” Lucas said as he was stopped at the foot of the stairs to say goodbye to his mother. “He tied himself to the gates with chains.” Mrs. Jennings sighed and rolled her eyes. “Those people are complete idiots, Luke. Thank the lord there aren’t many of them. Don’t they listen to the government? We have enough resources to last us forever.” The boy seemed to relax now. The idea of having a shortage on fossil fuels never bothered him for he knew that the government would handle such business. “Bye, mom!” Lucas added before he slipped on his gas mask and ran out the door.

“Juliette! Wait up!” Lucas was running behind a girl with blonde hair. “Hey, Lucas,” She said stopping to allow him to catch up. Juliette and Lucas were best friends. “What’s up?” Juliette always like to use slang from the 10’s, the 2010’s that is. The year was 2102 after all. “Can you stop talking like that?” he asked politely. “Fine.” She whispered and continued walking. Lucas ran a hand through his brown hair, which was not nearly as dark as the sky had turned over the years. “It’s looking pretty good today, isn’t it?” Lucas raised an eyebrow at the smoke coming from his grandparent’s factory. “Yeah,” she hesitated. They continued to walk to the bus stop.

“So, what did you do this weekend? You never messaged me back on iContact.” Lucas said as he took a seat near the window. Juliette slipped in next to him and rested her book-bag on her lap.

“Oh, yeah. Sorry! I guess I’ve just been a bit busy lately.” She apologized.

“Right. Of course. It’s not that big of a deal.”

The bus stopped exactly at the front of their school building. “Everyone off!” yelled Joseph, the old and cranky bus driver. They stumbled to their feet quickly and marched off the bus.

Juliette turned her head to look at the carbon dioxide coming out of the idling bus.

“See you at lunch,” Lucas hollered as he ran to the smaller building, towards the left. “See you then!” Juliette continued to walk into the main building.

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“Hello, Juliette!” Called her friend Ophelia. “Come, sit. Did you have Mr. Bryant yet?” Juliette took a seat at the lunch booth and opened her lunch box. “No, why?” she asked after taking out her Jelly Beans and nibbling on the blue-raspberry one. “Oh, well, let me just tell you that you’re in for quite something! He’s giving us a 5 question pop quiz during the first 20 minutes of class. Then he’s going to grade it and read your score out loud to everyone! I got a 94. It isn’t that bad.” Ophelia liked to secretly brag about her spectacular grades. “Well, that’s because you’re a genius. What about the mediocre kids like us?” Ophelia laughed and Lucas joined the table. “Hey, guys. Did you hear? Some ‘janitorial emergency’ happened and we get to leave school 2 hours early!” He took a seat next to Juliette. “That’s unfair. Then that means Juliette’s class doesn’t get to take Mr. Bryant’s death quiz!” whined William, one of their friends. “He’s probably going to let us take it tomorrow, its fine. A spill from the factory next door must have leaked onto school property and contaminated something. It happened last week, so they’ll fix it quicker this time.” Juliette reassured them. Just then, Principal Marshal’s voice blasted through the PA system. “Okay, students. Due to a particular janitorial emergency, we’re dismissing you all 2 hours early. School will resume tomorrow at 9 am as usual. School dismissed” After hearing the message, the students grabbed their book-bags and ran through the door.

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During the bus ride home, Juliette was completely silent. She looked a little worried and didn’t answer Lucas when he asked her if everything was okay. When they got out of the vehicle and started walking, Lucas tried again. “Hey, Juliette ...Are you okay?” She looked like she’d seen a ghost. Lucas knew she wasn’t feeling okay. “Juliette!” He stopped walking and stood in front of Juliette. “What’s going on with you?” She looked up from staring at her iSamNok and apologized. “Sorry, it’s just...nothing. Sorry.” Lucas hated when she led him onto something and then bailed. “No, tell me! You have to tell me now,” he laid his hand on her shoulder. “Please, you can trust me.” She sighed and pushed her iSamNok into her side pocket. “You have to promise not to tell anyone,” she whispered. Lucas used his index finger to action a cross gesture on his chest. “Okay, come with me.” She led him down the street and around the corner. She handed him a book, something they no longer used living in 2102. “A book?” Lucas was confused. “Yes. Someone gave it to me last night.” She gulped as he opened it and scanned through the pages. “Edmund? Who’s he?” Juliette didn’t quite know how to answer that. “Is he your...boyfriend?” Lucas hesitated and shut the book. “Is he?” “No, of course not! He’s no one. Well, if I tell you, you have to believe me.”

“Fine.”

“His name is Edmund Berkeley and he’s from the past.”

Lucas wasn’t sure whether Juliette was joking or if she had lost her mind, so he decided to play along. “Scientists haven’t discovered time travel yet, Jules.”

“I told you that you wouldn’t believe me! Ugh, why did I even try?” Juliette stormed off leaving Lucas behind.

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Later that day, after reading Edmund’s journal, Lucas decided to go over to Juliette’s house to apologize. Upon arriving, he did things old-fashioned and knocked on her door.

Juliette’s mother answered. “Hello, Mrs. Kirkland. Is Juliette home?”

“Why, hello Lucas. She’s upstairs. Go on up.” She opened the door wider and allowed him to run up the stairs and knock on Juliette’s bedroom door. “Juliette? It’s me, Lucas.” To his surprise, Juliette quickly opened the door and pulled him in, shutting the door behind him. “Woah. Does that mean you forgive me?” Lucas said half-jokingly. “Eh,” Juliette took a seat at her desk and spun the chair around to look at him. “So... I read the first few pages of this journal. If what’s in here is real... I don’t know. How could it be real? It describes the sky being blue and the water being clear. It talks about extinct animals and oxygen coming from trees instead of bottled containers.” Lucas wanted to believe her, but what this journal was saying was absurd. “Let me guess? You want some sort of proof?” She crossed her arms.

“If you could, I’d appreciate it.” He didn’t want to make her angry again, so he chose his words carefully. “If you don’t want to, you don’t have to.” He added quickly.

“No, it’s no biggie.” There she went again with the old slang, but he didn’t dare to criticize.

Juliette got up from her chair and opened the door to her closet. “Come on out, Ed.” She whispered. A young man, maybe in his early 20’s, stepped out.

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His shadow trailed behind him as he approached them. He had curly auburn hair that fell into his piercing green- hazel speckled eyes. “Uh-” Lucas was speechless. A strange, older man had just walked out of his Best friend’s closet. That didn’t happen every day!

“Don’t panic,” Juliette said quickly. “This can explain.” She grabbed the notebook from Lucas’s cold hands and flipped to a page.

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Dear Journal,

Oh, how I am feeling nostalgic. The blue skies are starting to look darker and its growing warmer with each passing day. My father, a real estate agent just sold the acres of forest three neighborhoods away. I fear this is only the adding on to the millions of other factories here. Natural gas, coal and oil are running terribly low. Our consumption rate has tripled in the last 10 years. I would hate to say goodbye to our trees, animals and ourselves. The Earth as I know it is gone, and oh how I miss it.



The days are feeling shorter and many have been getting sick. I'm not sure if it's just another virus or it has something to do with what the government won't tell us. Tomorrow, Professor Henry Thomas and I are going to test run an invention of his. He says it can allow him to travel through time. I don't believe in anything as silly as time travel, but the way he sounded- it made me change my mind. I'll write again as soon as I have a chance. If I don't write back, it's because Henry's invention worked.

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"Do you understand now?" Juliette flipped through the rest of the pages following that entry. They were blank. "B-but," Lucas was stunned. He would have never thought that something like this could be accomplished. "But how did your friend, Professor Henry, find the formula for time travel? It's impossible!" Juliette couldn't believe that Lucas was still being skeptical towards all of this. "Listen, Lucas. It happened. He doesn't know how Henry did it or where Henry even is!" She was almost shouting. "The point is, he's here. He used to live here. He says that things used to be different." This would sound absolutely absurd to anyone. "Different? Our elders say things have always been like this. Our government says things have always been like this." How was Juliette and Edmund supposed to explain something so complex to someone so close minded? "They've been paid for their silence, Louis." Edmund said. "Lucas. It's *Lucas*. But what about the government? President Francis wouldn't keep such information private. If our coal was running out and factories were polluting more than their share, he would tell us. Better yet, he'd allow us to vote for what we think would be a better resolution!" Lucas was trying to defend something that he wasn't sure of.

“Oh, poor Lucas. You’re being so naive. If voting made a difference, they wouldn’t let us do it. The government that you speak so highly of is a scam. They keep more than half the things hidden and pay off people who know certain things to keep silent.” Edmund said bluntly. “You have no idea what it used to be like. We didn’t have to wear gas masks to protect ourselves from our environment! We didn’t receive bottled oxygen from a lab weekly! Almost nothing is the same as it used to be. Not even the color of the sky.” He went on. Lucas raised an eyebrow, now wrapping his mind around it. He looked down at the empty pages of Edmund’s journal and then looked a Juliette, who was standing across the room next to Edmund. “Please, Lucas. Understand” She begged.

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Lucas swallowed hard and looked at Edmund. “I believe you. But, I don’t think it really matters if I believe you or not. The real question is: what in the world are we going to do about this?” Juliette sat back down on her chair and Edmund paced around the room while they all brainstormed. “Maybe we could go to the council?” Juliette proposed. “No, they’ll just try to brainwash us and tell us we’ve got everything wrong.” They went back to thinking. After about fifteen minutes, Lucas had a brilliant idea. “We could protest.” It was simple, but there was more to it. “I mean- we can chain ourselves to my grandfather’s factory. He’s bound to listen to me! I remember a man did it this morning and maybe if we do it too, they’ll realize that maybe they don’t have to do things the way they do it. They’ll understand that there are more sustainable ways to do what they do.” Juliette smiled. “Lucas, you’re a genius!” She looked at Edmund for reassurance and he nodded. “So, let’s do it.”

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They picked Friday morning to execute their plan, not only the busiest day of the week but also the busiest time. “Hey, Luke.” Juliette said when she called him Thursday night to make sure everything was set. “Are you sure we want to do this?” Lucas turned over in his bed and laughed quietly. “Yes, I’m sure. Jules, why do you sound like that?” Her voice was low and brittle. “It’s just I don’t want to get in trouble fo-” He cut her off. “Jules,” Lucas sat up on his bed and turned the lamp that was on the nightstand right next to him. The dim yellow light brought warmth and light to the room. “It’s okay to be afraid. You should know that I wouldn’t let anything happen to you.” The line went silent for a while and then she spoke. “Thanks, Luke. I know I can always count on you.” Lucas blushed to himself and felt the tiredness hit him. He didn’t want to say goodnight to Juliette just yet, but he had too. “Listen, I have to go now but remember that everything will be fine. Once we inform them of how outrageous their fossil fuel consumption is and how much they are polluting they will understand where we’re coming from. Edmund will show them the photographs he took of the times before and that will be their proof. We’ll show them trees and the sky and the animals. Don’t worry, Jules.” Juliette yawned and

thanked Lucas again. “Goodnight, Luke.” She whispered into her phone and Lucas replied back. “Goodnight, Jules.” Then, the line went dead.

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Friday morning had finally arrived and they were set and ready. Edmund and Juliette met Lucas at the gates of his grandfather’s factory. “You’ve got the chains?” Lucas asked. Edmund held up his navy blue back pack and set it back down. He unzipped it and pulled out a long rusty chain. “Let’s get this show on the road, shall we?” Juliette and Lucas pressed their spines against the gates and allowed Edmund to wrap the chains tightly around them. When he was finished, He handed Lucas and Juliette a picket sign that showed pictures of green trees and animals like birds and squirrels on them. “THIS ISN’T HOW IT ALWAYS WAS. THINGS WERE DIFFERENT. OUR ENVIRONMENT IS OUR HOME, TREAT IT WITH RESPECT!” Juliette started hollering and Lucas decided to join in. “DON’T POLLUTE! CONTROL YOUR CONSUMPTION! DON’T POLLUTE! CONTROL YOUR CONSUMPTION! USE ALTERNATIVES!” They said together. Edmund picked up a picket sign and joined in, walking back and forth in front of the gate. “DON’T BE RASH! CONTROL YOUR TRASH!” They were saying a combination of rhythms to get people’s attention and finally they did. Lucas’s grandfather and mother ran out from their home and to the gate. “Lucas Nathaniel Jennings!” Lucas’s mother shouted as she crossed the street. “What on earth are you doing out here? You’re supposed to be at school!” She kept on screaming for a few moments and then Lucas’s grandfather took over. “Lucas, I’m not sure you know what you’re doing. Things like this is not acceptable in our community. I think it would be best if you stop-” Lucas cut him off. “No, Grandfather! I know exactly what I am doing. And you know what? I think *you* know what you’re doing! This is horrible, grandpa. You’re destroying the world!” Mrs. Jennings flinched when she heard her son’s voice so hoarse. “Don’t speak to your grandfather like that, Lucas! You don’t know what happens to people who try to speak out like you and your friends. Just get out of there and we can go home and talk about it.” Lucas was in no mood for them to try to tell him what he didn’t know. “I’m not moving, mother. Just treat me like any other environmentalist! I will not stop until we get justice!” “Listen here, if you don’t get off my property I’ll have no choice to call the officials on you and your rag-tag group of hippies. Now, I ask you for the last time: go away.” How could his grandfather be so rash? “Call them.” Juliette commanded. Grandfather didn’t want to, but he did as she requested and dialed them.

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“Lucas Jennings?” the officer approached them. “That’s me.” Lucas replied. “Isn’t this your pop’s factory? I would have expected more from you.” the officer sighed and pulled out a pair of handcuffs from his belt. “We can’t have people like that,” the officer gestured to Edmund, whose hair was frazzled and picket sign was raised high. “around here.” Lucas felt ashamed but

kept his front. “No, I think you do need people like us. Do you know what’s going on here? Everything we’re doing is ruining the Earth! Even a simple hamburger is adding to the destruction!” Lucas yelled. “I’m sorry we have to do this, Lucas. I really and truly am. You had so much potential.” More officers came and cuffed them. They threw them into the back of their police van where they stripped them of their gas masks, allowing them to breathe the unsanitary air.

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When they woke up they were somewhere completely dark and isolated. No one ever heard of or from them again. No one received any of the knowledge they were so desperate to share. No one knew about the past and no one cared for it. No one made an effort to remember the sky’s blue or the animals that once inhabited the forest. Most importantly, no one saw the extinction of the human race coming a few years later either. No one.

The end.

### ***Author’s Statement:***

My name is Regina and I am in the 7th grade at Metropolitan Expeditionary Learning School. In my 7th grade English class we’ve been learning how our actions impact the environment. After watching a film entitled ‘No Impact Man’ we decided to make a list of 10 things we do that negatively impact the environment- yet won’t be too hard to give up for a month. Later on we returned to that list to cull one action to give up for a month. I chose ‘No Restaurants’ which meant I could not eat anything from a restaurant, cafe, stand, etc. Even the little things like producing a hamburger and littering a small gum wrapper affect the environment in huge ways. For example, did you know producing just one hamburger uses enough fossil fuels to drive a small car 20 miles? That’s far and a lot of unnecessary fossil fuels! We also learned things in our science and social studies classes. In science class we’ve been learning about fossil fuels (how they are formed, how they are used, what they are used for, how to extract them). One of the things I learned in Science class that shocked me was the fact that we have to burn coal (already polluting a lot) to use it for electricity, but way before that we have



to extract it from the ground in horrible mining methods! Explosives and removing the tops of mountains aren't environmentally friendly whatsoever. Explosives and MTR mining (mountaintop removal) aren't even the most dangerous type of mining! Hydraulic fracturing (a.k.a: fracking) uses harsh chemicals and tons of water to extract natural gas and oil. Harmful chemicals and our environment shouldn't ever mix! In Social studies class we're learning the textile industry and what it takes to make our clothing. We learned about the cultures of the people who once held our clothing, about the machines used to sew the threads together, and more. One big take-away I got from learning about all of this is that we have the opportunity to change what is happening. We have a choose what to eat, purchase, represent. If some of us were to stop throwing away perfectly good clothing because it's not 'in season' or it's 'so last year' maybe people in Bangladesh and other third world countries wouldn't have to work so hard to produce what everyone is consuming. Maybe if we demanded less clothes, people in places that use machines to produce our clothes like Indonesia will have time to think of alternatives to fuel their machines and electricity. Maybe if we all stopped and thought about how our actions impact our environment, the world would be a better place. My short science fiction story shows my understanding of our two English class learning targets of 1) I can evaluate the impact of my choices on the world and 2) I can synthesize my learning in other classes to connect to my real world experiences. My story shows my understanding of learning target 1 because in my story I explain that the world hadn't always been the way it was. I bring in my character Edmund to help explain that by consuming more fossil fuels and polluting frequently over the years, the world has changed into a different place- one less desirable to live in. My story shows my understanding of learning target 2 because I have Juliette and Lucas pitch a protesting idea, similar to what we saw on our expert day in Social studies. Model Sara Ziff had went to Bangladesh to study the conditions of the garment workers, and in order to try to receive better working conditions many of the garment and ex garment workers protested and held riots. I also mention a lot that we have learned in science class in Edmund's journal. For example, the weather growing warmer (global warming due to pollution) and our fossil fuel consumption rates tripling, thus running out sooner than we thought.