

Changing the World, One Park at a Time

Esme slammed the locker door shut, walking over to her friend Maeve's locker. "Hey."

Maeve didn't answer, stuffing papers into her binder angrily.

"What's wrong?" Esme asked worriedly.

"Nothing."

"No, something's wrong," Esme pressured, looking Maeve in the eyes. "What is it?"

Maeve sighed. "The city is tearing down the park and making it a parking lot."

Esme's eyes widened. How could she not have heard this? Her neighbor was a city councilperson!

"But they can't do that! We went there all the time as kids! Heck, we even go there lots of times now!"

Maeve looked at Esme sadly. "Apparently they can. It's supposed to be 'better for the people living there' or whatever. Nothing we can do, anyways. They start tearing it down next week."

Esme's shocked expression turned into pure determination. "Never say never."

"I didn't say never. I said nothing." Maeve corrected.

Esme sighed. "You know what I mean."

The next day

"98, 99, 100!" Esme counted excitedly. "Is that enough?"

Maria Rhodes shook her head sadly. "I'm afraid not. You need at least 1,000."

"1,000? How am I supposed to get 1,000 signatures by next week?" Esme asked in disbelief, looking through the 3 pages of signatures.

"That's kind of the point. They want this." Maria said. Esme noticed she said they, not we, despite being on the city council herself.

"Can't you do anything?"

"No, I'm outnumbered. But maybe..." Maria mused, trailing off in thought.

"What is it?" Esme asked, leaning forward slightly, gripping the papers tighter.

"Maybe I could get them to move back the date so you could have more time to get the signatures. I know it's not much--"

Maria was cut off by Esme running over and hugging her. "That would be amazing! Thank you!"

"I-I," Maria paused. "Okay?" But Esme didn't hear. She had already run out the door.

Later that day

"Pleeeaaaseeeee?" Esme begged. "I'll clean my room. I'll do the dishes. I-I-" she looked around the room for ideas. "I'll give you 20 bucks!"

Esme's mother crossed her arms. "I don't know. I'm not so sure about this."

"But it's for the park! It's the only way!"

Her mother raised an eyebrow. "The only way?"

“Well...maybe not. But it’s the quickest way, and I need it to be quick.”

Her mother sighed, Esme wearing her down. “You know you’re going to regret this, Amanda.” She muttered, before raising her voice and saying, “Sure. I’ll do a post.”

Esme grinned so bright she could light up the room. Her mother was a social media influencer with over 500,000 followers. She tried to avoid posting anything that had to do with her family, though this one time was an exception.

Some of them had to live in the area and sign it, Esme thought. She was starting to get desperate. She recently had got a call from Maria saying that she wasn’t able to move back the date, and Esme was devastated, before turning to the last resort; possibly becoming broke for a park that was her childhood.

The day of the deadline

“How many does it have now?” Esme asked, part nervous, part excited.

“Calm down, you’ve been asking every day since. Still...” Amanda’s eyes widened. “50,000! That can’t be possible!”

“What?” Esme exclaimed, pushing her mom out of the way and grabbing her phone. There it was, in black and white.

“People outside the town must have heard about it and signed it,” Amanda mused.

Suddenly, Esme got a text. She shoved her mom’s phone back to her mom, and pulled out her phone. It was from Maeve. It read: **Come quick, starting to tear it down!**

Esme knew what it was, and quickly told her mom to print it out, fast. They needed to get down there as soon as possible.

At the park

The printer broke. Of course it did. They didn’t have time to fix it, so they ran over to Maria’s and used hers. Luckily, Maria’s printer actually worked. They had jumped into the car as fast as humanly possible and drove to the park, breaking several speed limits in the process. But that’s not the point.

The entire ride, Esme hugged the papers to her chest, tapping her foot on the floor. This had to work. It just had to. There was no other option.

When Amanda and Esme arrived at the park, Esme took off running. The ground rumbled from the steamrollers starting, and Esme’s heart broke. She was too late. But as she ran up the hill, her heart mended with what she saw. It was all of her friends, her neighbors, her family, and people she didn’t even know, standing in front of the steamroller.

“Wait!” Esme shouted, running in front of it as well.

“Esme!” Amanda yelled, stopping just before the steamroller. “Stop!”

Esme ignored her. “I have paperwork!”

The man in the truck sneered. “What is it, a crayon drawing? Get out of the way!”

Suddenly, Maria stepped in front of them as well. “She’s not lying. I’ve seen it with my own eyes. Would *you* like to see it?”

“Ci-city councilperson Maria! I didn’t know you would be out here.” The man stuttered, clearly nervous. He went through some mental scenarios, it looked like, trying to decide what the best option would be.

“You know, it would be a shame if you...had your permit taken away.” Maria said, inspecting her nails.

The man’s eyes widened, before his shoulders sagged, showing he had given in. “I-I guess it would.”

As he stepped out of the steamroller slowly, the crowd in front of it cheered. Esme quickly located Maeve in the crowd, running over to her and tackling her over in a hug. “We did it!”

Maeve smiled back. “I guess we did.”

The next day

“Look!” Maeve said, holding out a paper to Esme. The headline read, “Local girls save park from demolishing”. She sounded excited and Maeve was never excited.

“I know right? My mom already bought five copies to mail to my family!” Esme said, grinning. She’d spent all night, just...staring at it. And she and Maeve had spent more and more time at the park, savoring every moment.

The sound of the doorbell echoed throughout the house, and Esme ran as fast as she could to the door, almost slipping the entire way. It was Maria, who wanted to come in person to congratulate her.

When Esme opened the door, there was a grinning Maria, who walked in, a little pep in her step. When Esme closed the door, Maria hugged Esme tightly, whispering “You did it! You really changed the world.”

Esme smiled back, whispering as well. “I didn’t change the world; but I definitely did something.”