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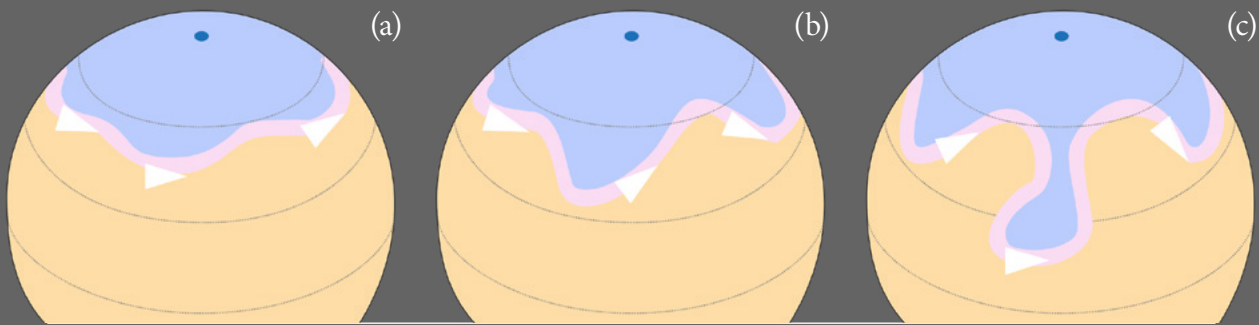
Study

Inhospitable A Short Story

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Meanders of the northern hemisphere's jet stream developing (a, b) and finally detaching a 'drop' of cold air (c).

Blue: cold air masses. Orange: warmer air masses. Pink: jet stream. Source: Wikimedia Commons. Author: Fred the Oyster (CC licence 4.0).

Emil Rune's thick glove appeared above the open bonnet and made a circle in the air. Emil pushed the start button again. This time the engine started. Rune slammed the bonnet shut, and as he traipsed back to the passenger side of the car, his breath enveloped him in a thick cloud of vapour.

A sudden rush of cold air entered the car as he sat down huffing next to Emil and pulled back his hood: "Ok. Go." Rune took off his grey woolly hat with the Danish flag and began to play around with the settings of the seat heater.

Emil adjusted the air conditioning to clear the windows, took his foot off the brake and let the car roll slowly towards the exit of the underground car park. He pressed the remote. The door opened, snow came whirling in.

Rune's beard scratched against the collar of his thermal jacket as he turned towards the driver: "The Thunberg station had problems with frozen diesel again yesterday – did you put enough antifreeze in the tank?" "I did," replied Emil curtly and manoeuvred the car out into the snow storm.

Greta Greta stepped back from the window. Her face was a little too close to the shimmering heat of the glass. She peered down again. To the left she could make out two thirds of Jumeirah Beach Hotel rising up out of the water. The Burj Khalifa was visible at a distance in the sea. She could barely see the rest of Downtown Dubai through the haze.

"Are you wondering what else is down there?" Olivier asked, walking over to her. With a towel he wiped the sweat from his face and rubbed his hair dry.

When Dubai was submerged by the sea, people initially thought they were experiencing one of the floods that had become a regular occurrence. But the sea rose higher than before, and rather than subsiding, it just continued to rise higher and higher. The people of Dubai fled the city in panic, leaving almost everything behind in the floods. In a city like Dubai that was a lot. A lot of valuable, a lot of unique, a lot of sensitive items.

Cli-fi, short for climate fiction, is literature that deals – more or less speculatively – with the effects of climate change. The following short story falls into this genre and is set in the near future.



Greta turned away from the windows. Her eyes followed the power cable of the solar collector to a table on which thin metal blocks – corroded by salt water – were neatly stacked and stowed in transparent boxes bearing the golden *DGD* logo. With the exception of three camp beds and laptops, some scattered utensils and toiletries, a portable air conditioner and lockers containing food and diving equipment, the huge room on the top floor of the Burj Al Arab was completely empty. The 360-degree view was phenomenal. When she first came here, Greta had tried to imagine the lavish receptions and parties that used to be held at the five-star, sail-shaped hotel back in the days when it was still in business. It had now become her second home and the improvised *headquarters*, as Olivier called it, of the *Dubai Gold Divers*.

“The main thing is that the clients know what they are looking for,” she said to Olivier, shrugging her shoulders. “Are you sure there weren’t any more solid-state drives?” she asked, pointing to the boxes.

“Yes, definitely. Alexandra and I went through all the server cabinets one by one. None of them are missing. No one was there before us. But I bet the memories are down the drain. I don’t think the forensic teams will find anything. Another year or two and we’ll have to re-think our business model, Greta.”

“We’ll see. People are always looking for something. And, hey, the sea level keeps rising.” Greta put a hand on Olivier’s shoulder and said with a wink: “That’s why our business is absolutely future-proof.”

“Ha ha,” said Olivier, dismissing her remark with a wave of his hand. He looked across at Alexandra who was already getting her luggage together and pointing towards a fast-approaching white point outside. “Stop gabbing, you two,” she said. “We need to get going.”

Greta and Olivier also began packing their backpacks as the electrical whirring of the approaching shuttle rapidly grew louder.

It was only a few steps up to the roof and a quick dash across to where the air-conditioned tilt-rotor drone was waiting outside on the landing platform. But the heat and humidity in Dubai had become so extreme that even Greta’s well-trained team was close to suffering a heat stroke as they struggled with the luggage and heavy boxes. Under these conditions, the human body was simply not able to sweat enough to cool down sufficiently.

Olivier and Alexandra had already put on their brilliant white *beekeeper suits* and were blowing cold air into them, checking that the suits were sealed properly when Olivier suddenly turned to Greta and pointed questioningly at her cooling suit. Greta reached for the satellite phone. “Go on ahead. I need to make a short call and switch off the air conditioner. I’ll be with you in a minute.”

Emil Emil drove the car carefully along the narrow path between the huge mounds of snow. He stopped, put his mask on and pulled the hood over his head. Rune did the same, trying to get as much of his beard as possible under the mask. “Keep the engine running,” said Rune.

Emil signalled his agreement and both of them opened their doors. Ice-cold air hit Emil and the heating in his thermal overall kicked in immediately. Braving the wind, he trudged through the crisp snow towards the measuring station. As he turned, he could see the two thin gas plumes emerging from the jeep’s exhaust pipes. Anywhere else in the world, he would have gone to jail for this crime. But CO₂ legislation was one thing, the fact that electric cars no longer worked properly in a Europe engulfed by polar air was another.

Emil paused as his mask displayed an incoming call. Rune, who was now a few steps ahead of him, turned round. Emil could see Rune’s questioning look



behind the visor. He gestured to Rune that a call was coming in and shouted: "Greta." Rune just nodded, pointing to the weather station behind him, and trudged off. Emil answered:

"Hello?"

"Hi there. How's it going? Cold?"

"It certainly is. Minus 33, with the wind chill factor minus 60."

"Where are you now?"

"Tiergarten."

"Ah." Greta fell silent, the only sound being the humming of the telephone. She seemed to be caught up in memories. "We used to have barbecues there. Do you remember?"

"Sure do. Those days are gone. But at least no one pees in the bushes any more. And all those Asian tiger mosquitoes have frozen to death. So I suppose there's a good side and a bad side to it all."

Emil could almost hear Greta smiling on the other end of the line.

"And what about you?" he asked.

"We've finished here," she said.

"And now? Having a barbecue on the hotel roof?"

"At 60 degrees in the shade that would definitely be an option. You wouldn't even need a grill."

Greta paused for a moment. Then she said in a thoughtful voice: "I wonder how long this will go on for."

Emil gazed at the icy landscape of the Berlin park. He couldn't see far on account of the driving snow.

"No idea. The jet stream has stopped and the models aren't giving us any clues yet. We need to collect more data. I guess Rune and I will have to keep driving around the empty city for a while and try our luck at the measuring stations."

The low sun bathed the park in a dull grey light. Emil felt an icy shiver despite his thermal overall.

"I have to go and help Rune. It's vital we get back soon. As you know, it can get pretty nasty here in the evening when the wind picks up."

"Oh, ok. Well, I should be off too. Take care. And keep an eye on Rune. Otherwise he's bound to take something off again. Hurry up. And please call me as soon as you get back."

"I will. As always. Have a good flight. See you."

"Bye."

Rune had already opened one of the shuttered sides of the measuring station and was busy with something inside when Emil came over to him. He shuddered when he saw that Rune had taken off one of his gloves. The skin on the back of Rune's right hand was bright red and his fingertips had already begun to turn white in the arctic cold.

"Put your glove on. Look at your skin, old man."

"Less of the old. If you don't mind."

Rune put his glove back on and, gritting his teeth, began to clench and unclench his fist to get the circulation going. Emil made sure that Rune's glove was properly connected to his overall so that his frozen hand could warm up again. Rune pointed to the station's equipment:

"It's working again. But we need to get the power supply sorted out," he grumbled underneath his mask. "We should have ..."

"... should have switched to radionuclide batteries long ago. I know, I know," Emil interrupted him. "That seems to be your answer to everything lately. But you don't put something like that in a park in the middle of Berlin."



You might as well just hang a sign on it saying: 'Free strontium-90 for terrorists. Get it while stocks last.'"

"You're such a drama queen," Rune sighed, rolling his eyes. He pushed Emil gently to one side and closed the side of the measuring station. He then turned towards the car. Emil was right behind him.

"I'm just saying," said Emil, not wanting to let the matter rest. "Our planet has almost had it anyway. Not a good idea to make things even worse by dumping radionuclides all over the place."

Emil was looking down at the snow and following Rune's footprints. Suddenly Rune began to walk faster. Emil looked up. In the twilight, he could see the jeep surrounded by masses of snow and now also covered by a thin white layer. That's strange, thought Emil. I'm sure the doors were closed. Shouldn't the windows be free of ice if they're warm on the inside? Rune went running up to the jeep, almost stumbling in the deep snow. When he reached the back of the vehicle, he first looked down and then at Emil. Now Emil could also see that the jeep's exhaust fumes had stopped. Emil looked at Rune and saw the panic in his eyes.

"The engine's off," said Rune with a horrified look on his face. 🙄

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