

SAVING THE WORLD ONE PAINTING AT A TIME

There was a tree on the wall of the petrol station.

I slowed down my pedalling, then hopped off my bike, staring in confusion through the dusty afternoon sunlight at the place where once there had only been grey bricks and now there were branches spreading across the side of the building, roots stretching over the pavement as if to break the concrete. It was so vivid that, to start with, I didn't realise it was only a painting.

There was a messy haired girl on a step ladder finishing off one of the top leaves. She clambered down, tucking her paintbrush into her pocket where it covered her shirt in green, and took a step back to survey her work before she saw me staring. She waved.

I took a moment to check she was waving at me- the street was deserted- then said skeptically: "Isn't graffiti illegal?"

She rolled her eyes and turned back to her tree. "My parents own this place. They asked me to do it. Besides, it's a little more important than graffiti."

"Oh yeah?"

"It's going to save the world."

I snorted. "A picture of a tree is going to save the world?"

"Not single handedly." she admitted, "But when people see it, they'll remember. They'll remember how we're destroying the environment, and maybe they'll only remember for a little bit, but the more reminders they get, the more they'll care."

She dug a spray-paint can out of the duffel bag on the floor and sprayed the words 'STOP KILLING US' in blood red over her beautiful tree. I winced as the harsh lines cut through the delicate painting. It seemed a shame to ruin something so beautiful, but I guessed that was the point.

"You think it'll work?" I asked.

"Worth a try." She smiled at me as she zipped up her bag, "You should try it. Paint something where people will see it, spread the message, save the environment."

I rolled my bike around, suddenly nervous. "I'm not much of an artist."

She gave me a one armed shrug. "It's not the art that matters."

There was a crash. The door of the petrol station swung open and a red-faced employee pointed at the girl. "Hey! What do you think you're doing?"

I turned to her. "I thought you said your parents owned the place."

"I lied." She grinned, grabbing her bag and sprinting away, shouting over her shoulder at the employee: "Stop using fossil fuels!"

The guy started to run after her but, before I knew what I was doing, I pushed my bike forward- straight into his path. He went crashing into it, tumbling into a sprawled heap on the floor. The girl turned and gave me a salute, then sprinted into the distance. She turned a corner and she was gone, leaving behind only dripping paint and a strange new idea in my mind.

The petrol station painted over it within a day, but it didn't matter, because the girl had been right. She'd planted the seed in my head, and now possibilities unfurled before me. I stood in front of the wall with the brand new paint I'd bought that morning, assessing the wall where they'd covered up the tree. I smiled. It looked just like a canvas

ENVIRONMENT POEM

Think of all the fish, choking in the ocean.
Think of all the grass turning dark brown.
Think of all the cars bellowing out emissions.
To solve all this, we have to act now!

Remember all the trees, cut down, burned down,
Under the wrath of the new human influence
Microplastics, found inside us now.
To stop all of this, action must be taken.

Pumping poisonous gasses into the atmosphere,
what did you expect? Laughing and cheer?
I'm sure if we asked nature her opinion,
She would say, "I don't want this extinction."

Then we say, "Who's to blame for all this?"
Pointing the finger and making a list.
Well really, all of us have to take responsibility
And solving this is not out of our capability.

CO₂ Methane and all the rest,
Evidently, for our atmosphere, they're not the best
They trap the sun's energy warming up the planet,
And they consume us using the fire we lit.

All of these gases are produced by us,
From factories to homes to the harmless school bus.
This cycle of death which we choose to activate,
Was found out, many years too late.

We've found solutions for this disaster,
But we don't have long, for climate changes is getting faster.
We must all do our bit, to keep destruction at bay,
Then we can live, to call tomorrow: today.

“WHAT ABOUT US?”

As I sit on the rocks edge, desperately eyeing the water for movement of fish or crustaceans, the world around me painted a picture of bliss and harmony. The sky was beautiful and pink with such intricate colours and stratus clouds you would believe them to be painted by Picasso. The Aegean waves came with such force from the outer shore yet they cascaded ever so gently at my feet, echoing a swooshing sound. It is peaceful- too peaceful.

“No luck yet momma?” came a cute perk from Inesa behind me. “Not yet my love, but soon I promise” I sighed, kissing her head and nuzzling her under my chin. She jumps up, grabbed a nearby stick and starts playing in the water. “I can get us breakfast momma, I am faster and the fishies like me more” “Oh, is that so? Because I think I’m faster!”

I laugh, leap off the rock into the water and chase her. She giggles and squeals and splashes me. I catch her, lift her up and spin her around and kiss her all over. Inesa looks up at me and pulls a white hair out of my face and behind my ear. “Momma promise we’ll play together forever?” I smiled and tried to hold back the tears, treasuring the moment. “Of course baby.”

A lightning bolt strikes violently through the sky, cutting through the canvas sky. In the distance the sea becomes rougher and the waves contort into rising snakes, the pink sky starts to be dimmed by fossil grey clouds. My stomach turns as my heart dropped out of my chest. I look over to the others around me, they look equally aware of what was here-what we knew would happen. It was never a gradual change.

“Okay baby come with me.” We turn from the swarming sea and sky and begin to run more inland. A few miles ahead was the failed implantation of forestry to maintain the population, it only made the icy structure unstable. Lightning struck in the distance, edging closer to us. “There! Up ahead go to that shelter!” A small mother with her eight small children yelled to us across the way.

“Momma look the sea ran away!” Inesa giggles. I whip around, she was right it had retreated, and the surface began to tremble beneath me. I pull her up onto my back and kept running to the abandoned shelter with the others. One of the mothers’ children behind, fell and she stopped to help them. In the blink of an eye the tsunami swallowed them and others. I scream and tears cascade down my face. We finally

reach the metal building, I bash the door down with my body and start to climb up the stairs on all fours. I was having a panic attack and hyperventilating, Inesa choking my neck as she clung to me did not help.

On the twenty second floor I heard the water burst through, I was so tired I felt as though I might pass out, but Inesa whimpering in my ear kept me pushing through. We reach the roof and I shove some tonnes of wood over the threshold. The scene in front of me was terrifying. The tsunami took down a lot of the small shelters and power outlets and left the water electrified and power leads zapping out of the water like eels in the Amazon. At sea there was a malevolent hurricane and fifty foot wave and cyclone cronies. The tsunami had done its worse, maybe it was safe to go? I turn to Inesa she's hiding under my legs crying.

"Go where?" I say to myself inside, as I watched the lightning strike the trees and start blood orange flaming fires, burning mothers, fathers, and babies hiding in the trees. As I watch lovers lose each other's grasp as they fall into the water. As I watch lava shoot out from pockets of cracked land and trap the legs and arms of the elderly as it hardens. As I watch the world lose its life and colour.

There's only one destination for us now. A fiery feeling in my heart ignited, contrasting the gut wrenching black hole eating me inside. I roar and scream into the storm letting out my storm inside of indescribable pain, desperation and feeling of the life inside me being sucked out.

I drop to my hands and knees and surrender to the long lost war of obliteration, chaos and horror surrounding me. Inesa holds me and rubs her face against my hand and whispers "its okay momma, the Earth is just fighting back too!" As I shake uncontrollably with exhaustion, my tears stinging my numb face and I grasp my heart trying to catch my breath, to stop the feeling of it being torn and ripped out. Her touch is the only ease, her big soft blue eyes stare into mine and she transports me back in time, to her first walk, our first kiss and our first play. When I held her close the day she was born and promised to never let her experience pain and keep her safe. To keep her forever innocence and dreamer spirit alive.

"Hey baby" I fix her hair, wipe her tears and kiss her nose. "Let's play in the sea" Her eyes light up and she grabs a nearby stick. "I'm ready for my next adventure!" I didn't even feel my tears anymore they just bled down my face. I wrap her around my back, descend down the stairs to the ground floor of debris, bodies and tree branches. "Hold your breath my love" I shakily muster. We dive out through the door and I try to reach a wooden board to avoid the ahead electrical waters.

We paddle out to the shore and I see the sky has an opening of crimson, rose and lemon in the sky. A last memory to share a last moment of love to experience. I felt calm for a moment. But suddenly the board snaps and we're thrown into the hot sea. "Momma!" Inesa screams being carried out by the current. "No!" I swim towards her fighting the determined current. She grabs onto a small iceberg and climbs up to it.

“Momma get on, the sea is even faster than you!” She grins obliviously.

The atmosphere and ozone layer now utterly surrendered and exhausted cannot protect us from foreign celestial bodies. A meteor shower begins to occur and large jagged sediments come crashing into the sea all around us. The iceberg begins to wobble and is rapidly melting, Inesa is slipping and her fear takes over her dreaming.

“Momma, momma I’m slipping, momma help!” I hold her face in my shaking hands and smile. “My love look at the sky! I want you to absorb the beautiful colours of the sky and make a wish on those falling stars!” She hesitates, climbs into my arms and gazes above. “I love you momma” I hold her tight and sob as we slip into the rough sea. “I love you too baby. I always will”

In the distance I see dozens of large ships, appearing to be getting prepared to dive under the water. I am filled with inextinguishable hatred. Those damn humans did this to us, and they left us here to die. I close my eyes, stop paddling my paws, kiss the wet white fur of my baby, the last polar bear and we sink to down below the surface.

THE ENVIRONMENT

I am a mighty polar bear,
Who never did do wrong,
I raised a family of my own,
And once my will was strong,
I liked to wander far and wide,
Across the caps I'd roam,
But every year things seemed to change
It feels no longer like home.
My world is falling into the sea
I've had to pay the price, I have nowhere that I can live
My land is melting ice.

I am an Emperor penguin
And I have a tale to tell,
I raised a family of my own
Together we did well,
each egg I cradled carefully
While bitter winds did blow,
But every year things seemed to change
I watch it slowly go.
My world is falling into the sea
I've had to pay the price,
I have nowhere that I can live
My land is melting ice.

I am a lonely Arctic seal
Who's resting on the shore,
So many of us used to come
In years that passed before,
But sadly now I'm all alone
My friends no longer here,
Yet still I wait in yearning
That one day they shall reappear.
My world is falling into the sea
I've had to pay the price,
I have nowhere that I can live
My land is melting ice.

A BETTER PLACE

We live in a world
That was once a better place
Before it was destroyed
By pollution and climate change.
When trees stood tall and strong
In forests that spread beyond
When calm waves lapped at the golden shores
Of white sand that sparkled under the sun.
Before wild fires obliterated natural wildlife
Before native animals grew extinct
Before plastic pollution overwhelmed the crystal – clear oceans
Leaving them tainted with ugly blotches of plastic.

So blot out the plastic that ruins the ocean
Make it not only crystal – clear,
But make it shimmer like diamonds
Protect the wildlife and native animals.
Remove the plastic that taints the shores
Cleanse the seas so they sparkle like stars
Care for the trees and prevent deforestation
Ensure they remain strong forevermore
Change yourself to save the world
From pollution and climate change
And together, we can make our world
A Better Place.

I sat at my desk for the first time in a year. It was chipped, old and coffee stained from those times of writing through the night and others when I would bang my head on the desk from writer's block. It held my memories but more importantly, my most prized possession: my typewriter. It was black and bold and perfect for my hands. My fingers slipped into position against the keys and I took a deep breath. "Dad, here you are?" It was my daughter. She and her husband were visiting with their kids. "Yes," I peered into the mug she was holding, "I hope that coffee's for me!" She laughed and placed it on the desk. "You haven't been here since mum passed; I'm proud of you," she kissed my cheek and headed towards the door. "Willow? Your mother would always tell me how to begin. Could you..." "Well, start easy, how about writing about something you know? A memory, perhaps?" she smiled and shut the door, letting the room flood with memories and ideas, leaving me among them. "Start easy then," I whispered to myself as I pressed the first key of the story, the first key to unlock a whole new world.

When I was a young lad, I lived with my parents in a large country house. Surrounded by nature, I was always outdoors; always in the woodland just past our garden. I had scoured the woods; found the perfect climbing trees and picnic spots. I knew which paths to take and which would end with a lake and soggy clothes, and how to tell which bird was whistling by its call. One day, I was high in a tree, listening to nature when I heard a whistle that I had not come across before. I jumped down, returning the call but was met by silence. Perhaps this peculiar bird had flown away? I walked on and heard the whistle again. I ran towards it, climbing up a tall tree when I thought I was close enough. I looked around but my attention wasn't caught on a bird, but rather, a girl on the ground. I watched her and her strange features: forest green hair and chestnut coloured eyes. She was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen. Eager to speak to her, I clambered down the tree as quickly as I could manage but by the time I got there, she was gone. A sea of trees were the only things in sight.

The next day, I went to the same spot and she was back again. I went the next day and the next, but no matter how many times I tried to meet her, she would disappear! I was persistent and went every day. For three months. Until one day, while perched in a tree, the girl looked up to me and whispered, "Boy, why do you watch me?" I was so taken aback that I nearly fell. I approached her slowly and this time she didn't disappear, she just watched with her wide eyes. "I'm Joseph," I said. We were now within arms reach. "Joseph," She said, testing my name on her tongue. Her hand reached out and touched mine. Her fingers were icy cold but soft and swift. Our fingertips touched and a vine that had been wrapped around her hand, curled

around mine. I watched it grow until a flower bloomed on my palm. I watched, astonished . “My name is Ivy,” We met everyday in the woods; she showed me parts of the forest I had never explored before. Ivy showed me a whole new world filled with forest girls and magic. She would dig her fingers deep into the dirt and trees would burst out of the ground. We would lie in barren fields and she would grow daisies and daffodils. When she was sad or angry, flowers would wilt and trees would brown but when she was happy, the birds would sing and that’s when the forest would truly bloom. She was the forest, the nature, the environment, and my world. That's why, when I was old enough, I married her.

ENVIRONMENT

Nature is beautiful yet destructive
A sight many take as material to take
Trees can fall at the thundering crack of an axe
Under the ground so frail and damaged as they fall
Reaching deep down where the badgers burrow
Ever so strong yet the fall too great

All so peaceful, all so noisy the forest is a sweet and sour place to be
Neverending waterfalls and rivers rushing through reed and bushes
Diving deep, jumping high, soaring over rivers are little magpies

Treetops filed with chirping wonder's, safe in their nest's
Happy songs fill the air while birds are gliding like they just don't care
Evergreen trees so beautiful in a moment so hard to relieve

Every morning frost covered snowy slopes to slide upon
Never ending winter I the cold heart of the peaks of the arctic
mountains

Vertical, horizontal and diagonal slippery icebergs floating through the
icy cold sea

In ice, in snow burrowed deep down little lemmings live under the
ground

Rough currents and waves sweep in from the harsh atlantic seas
Overgrown coral deep under the sea a safe place to be for little fish
Never ending oceans flowing throughout the day

Monsters from legends that are thought to lurk deep down
Eco food chains are sad but true, necessary for the seas to be blue
No creature deserves a life of being hunted when they should be free
Troublesome times to live on this land and under its seas

Apex-Predators prowling on high ledges ready to pounce
Reef destroyers lurking in the dark depths of the ocean
Eagles swooping down on prey, the true kings of the sky

Over the mountains and in the city animals still scurry
Never stopping danger for prey of the great predators of this world
Everyday a new danger to overcome, a new creature to pray upon

THE EARTH'S DIARY

245 million years BC

Dear diary,

My glorious planet finally has life on it! In the depths of my turquoise oceans ferocious megalodons feast upon the vast amounts of prey, whilst on the land gentle brontosaurus munch on leafy plants. Above the clouds pterodactyls soar through the magnificent sapphire sky. I'm so proud of my achievements and I can't wait to see what new plants and animals appear.

1850 AD

Dear diary,

Things have changed so much! Now in the deep blue oceans there are many wonderful species, including strange eight-legged octopuses and, one of my favourite creatures, the great blue whale (the largest mammal of them all). Fluttering around the canopy of the lush rainforest, beautiful rainbow feathered parrots squawk and chatter to each other. In the vast sweltering deserts only the most adaptable species survive. Camels subsist in the desert because they store fat in their humps allowing them to go for long periods of time without food or water.

But diary, I am worried. There is a species called humans who have invented factories and machines. These factories spew poisonous smoke and gasses into the air. I can feel the poisonous burning holes, allowing the sun's harmful rays to get through to my surface. I hope that these humans realise what they are doing and quickly change their ways for the good of all of us.

2022AD

Dear diary,

It seems there is only bad news now. Some humans estimate that between 10,000 and 100,000 species are becoming extinct each year. Also, habitats like the rainforests are being destroyed for their resources and to make space for growing food. Why are they doing this? Even more

poisonous gases are being excreted from factories causing the polar ice caps to melt. My oceans are also influenced by human actions. Microplastics fills them to the brim. Sea animals mistakenly eat the plastic or choke on it and die. Nuclear contamination has also devastated ecosystems. All of these catastrophic disasters are caused by humans.

But there is a glimmer of hope.

Young humans believe that there is time to change. I hope that they are right.

The future – you decide

2100AD

Dear diary,

I fear this will be my last entry. Plastic and pollution fill the seas and all life is dead. Poisonous gases saturate the air, and all life has choked on them. All of the forests have been burned or chopped down, the Amazon rainforest (the lungs of the Earth) has been destroyed and therefore nothing can breathe. Nothing living is left and rubbish is piled mile high in nauseating mountains. This is the end.

OR

2100AD

Dear diary,

I am joyous! The humans have changed their ways! They are now using renewable sources of energy, such as solar power, wind power and hydroelectricity. Bees and many other species are thriving. All single use plastics have been banned, and many, if not all, humans grow their own food rather than relying on trucks delivering food to the grocery shops or even to their own homes. I am so glad the human youth have saved me. I am now looking forward to the future!

10th October 1975

Dear diary,

I'm on a truck as I have just been produced in a factory filled with mechanical noises, which brings me to say that although I'm writing this diary, I'm not human I am a disposable plastic bottle filled with juice. I'm squashed with hundreds of other plastic bottles filled with many different drinkable liquids, meaning that none of us get along with each other, which I find peculiar because we might be stuck in here for days.

14th October 1975

Dear diary,

I am blinded and frozen since these humans have just put me in what they call a refrigerator in this supermarket of dull hell, which I think is their way of saying "I'm the superior boss here – you follow my orders". The orange cordial next to me told me that he had been here for three weeks already and nobody had looked at him, never mind brought him, meaning that I would probably be here for a lot longer than I expected.

31st October 1975

Dear diary,

After only two weeks I have been bought, which I find a relief because I couldn't wait to get out of what I call the most distressing place ever although I know in my later life I will experience worse, much worse.

I was bought by a lovely family, who had a cat called Jaffa Cake. They started to use the delicious apple cordial inside me. I felt like I should have had a smile stretching ear to ear although that's not possible being a plastic bottle.

18th November 1975

Dear diary,

Black, it's all black. I'm in the bin.

20th November 1975

Dear diary,

I think I have experienced the foulest noise and smell that I ever will since this big machine is worse than all of the factory ones. I got thrown inside it, crushed a bit and launched into the most massive heap of rubbish I have ever seen.

20th November 1990

Dear diary,

Nothing has happened for exactly 15 years then today I was picked up by a bird, a seagull to be exact. 20 minutes later the bird dropped me and, panicked, I fell into the water.

3rd May 2002

Dear diary,

It has been ten years of boredom then finally something happened. A whale engulfed me and I got stuck in its throat and I didn't know what to do because I couldn't move. I knew this might be my final moments until the whale seemed to do something like a burp and I was thrown out and got stuck on a guano-covered rock.

22nd June 2411

Dear diary,

There is only a tiny bit of me left now so I will say goodbye to the fading world and be gone. There are not many humans left and those that live are dying because of the heat and all the natural disasters that have been going on. Goodbye world...