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AnthropoScenes

A climate fiction competition

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Introduction

AnthropoScenes: A Climate Fiction Contest

The Anthropocene is the era in which human activities bear trace on systemic change on a global scale, on the atmosphere, the climate system, the oceans, the ecosystems and habitats of all other species. Climate change is one of the most prominent aspects of this human impact. But how can our agency – now as a ‘natural force’ – be understood and related to? While climate science produce scenarios, graphs and projections on how the climate system might change and what likely impacts that will have on us, the stories of what it might be to live in those worlds are produced in fiction.

In all of its forms and genres, fiction imagines and depicts the human – and, sometimes, the non-human – experience.

Future-oriented fiction tasks us to conceive, anticipate and authorise subjective accounts of life being lived in circumstances different from our own. This isn’t (just) about new gadgets or dystopic disasters; it’s about the challenges of living in a world that, at present, we can only imagine.

But all lives are lived differently, and every perspective is unique: there is no “The Future”, but many imagined futures, plural and unevenly distributed in space and time alike. Each story told can help us learn a lot about how we might live with climate change. To collect more such stories, and encourage their writing, the AnthropoScenes competition was launched as part of the Climaginaires research project in 2019.

The position we have taken in this competition is that for a story to count as climate fiction, it is not enough that it deals with, or is about, a changing climate *or environmental degradation*. ***What should be in focus is anthropogenic climate*** change – that is, a changing climate which has been caused by human activities. The contestants could submit a story into five different categories: urban, rural, ecosystems, making and travel.

By August 2019, we had received more than forty stories from all over the world. They covered a wide range of topics with a wide array of characters. The submitted stories were scored on five aspects: World building, Characters, Language, Rhetorical quality and Originality.

The five winners included in this volume scored well across the board, though the jury does note that it was a close race and many stories made them think about climate change in a new way.

The winner in the Urban category, *A reconciliation* by Anna Orridge, won “for its ability to disclose the existential implications of climate change through a subtly narrated family drama”. This category received the most entries by far, showing a clear priority for urban stories versus rural which was the least entered category.

In Ecosystems, the jury chose *Nets* by Heather Elgar due to it being “a beautifully written exploration of the complexity of responses to climate change and how short-sightedness occurs on several levels at once”.

Inas Hamdan’s *Skyscraper Reflections* won the Making category with the motivation “a moving story about the making of energy, which plays out in a world where the lines are sharp between the perpetrators and those affected.”

In the rural category, Andrew Villeneuve’s novel excerpt won for its “engaging illumination of the effects of ocean acidification on relationships, economies and communities”. We look forward to one day reading the end of the story.

Being a Swedish university, we decided to also accept entries in our mother tongue. In the travel category Cecilia Falkman’s outstanding short story *Glob av glas* won for its “excellent portrayal of the difference between two generations in emotional response to a sustainability transition”. For those of you who don’t speak Swedish, it’s a story about a father-daughter trip to the new ‘eco centre’ where you can visit and ‘experience’ every tourist location on Earth. Suffice it to say, there is a generational divide between those who were able to experience unlimited plane travel and those who grew up without it...

Some of the other entries have been published with the authors permission on our website (written at the back of the publication).

We really enjoyed reading the stories, and we hope you do to,

Ludwig Bengtsson Sonesson,
Alexandra Nikoleris,
Johannes Stripple,
Paul Tenngart

A reconciliation

Anna Orridge

Peculiar thing, estrangement. If only I and my brother were genuine strangers. The clean indifference would make a nice change.

In my bitterest fantasies, I'd always imagined Declan living in a proper dump: boarded-up windows, urine stains on the doors, weeds grasping at the side walls. But the block of flats was actually pretty snazzy South London new-build: a ziggurat of glass boxes with a certain sort of sheen that indicated they were, in fact, solar panels. There was a long strip of living wall too, the mosses trained to make a long plait, each strand a different shade of green. And I could see plants peeking over the roof, so there were probably vegetable patches up there as well.

I pressed the buzzer and the intercom farted into life.

'Hello, is that Ed?' A female voice, deeper than average.

'It is.'

'Sorry, lift's out of order. You'll have to use the stairs. Fourth floor, second door on the right.'

The stairs were steeper than I'd anticipated. Three floors up, I stopped and leaned on the wall to cough up a little phlegm. I swallowed it, a tarry oyster at the back of my throat. God, I needed to give up smoking. As much for my wallet as my lungs - tobacco gets more expensive with each year of warming.

'Are you okay down there?' Declan's girlfriend Abi was leaning over the bannister, flustered face between strings of hair.

She had the Emotionally Intelligent Manager voice: the kind used to issuing tactfully worded but firm instructions to subordinates. Was that how she talked to Declan when they were on set? Right Declan, you need to go down a bit, that's right. Zoom in, yes, oh...

I restrained a malicious grin.

'Just a bit out of breath,' I called. 'I'll be up in a second.'

'It's really nice to meet you, Ed.'

We shook hands. Her rings were proper clunky New Age efforts - glaring pimples of amber set in rusty silver.

I was instantly stumped for something to say that did not stray into dangerous territory. Just as there are nice set phrases for memorial plaques and gravestones, there is a conversational template available for brothers meeting future sisters-in-law, jokey and conspiratorial.

I've heard so much about you... All good, I hope? Ha, ha, ha... Well, you know what Declan is like...

Declan probably hadn't even mentioned my existence to her until last week. Jokey and conspiratorial would not cut it.

'I was really sorry to hear about your mum,' she ventured, laying a hand on my shoulder. 'She's such a lovely lady. Declan is in absolute bits about it.'

In bits? When I broke the news over the phone Declan sounded mildly irritated, as though a delivery had been delayed. Even after eight years, it was easy to recognise my brother's voice. The rusty-bicycle whine had gone and his baritone had shed its adolescent awkwardness, but the tone and timbre, oddly flat, were exactly the same.

'He's still in the shower,' Abi explained, as I followed her into the flat. 'Would you like to come and have some coffee while you're waiting?'

'Coffee would be amazing, thank you.'

Her attractiveness bothered me. Declan always had pretty girlfriends, even when he was fourteen. I could remember them stalking through the house, combat trousers slipping off bony hips, eyes cat-like between smudges of smoky eyeliner.

Abi's beauty, though, was of an entirely different order. It even rendered her poor fashion sense irrelevant. Upper lip overhanging the lower. A smear of freckles over the nose. She reminded me of one of those slow-burn Pre-Raphaelite muses. I wouldn't have suspected my brother of that kind of good taste in women.

She made a decent cup of coffee, too. No flinging stale instant grains into a grubby cup. Instead, she brought out a proper coffee maker, a sleek rocket of steel and glass. She pressed the filter in with the care of a little girl handling her best doll's house furniture, teeth poised on lower lip. Measuring the coffee out carefully, she pushed down the top with exaggerated effort, a little knot of a frown above her nose.

Throughout this ritual, the rush of the shower next door persisted. They had to have some AMAZING solar panels to produce hot water in those sorts of quantities. Most people were lucky if they got more than two minutes of lukewarm dribbling.

When it stopped, I put my elbows on the kitchen counter and grasped my coffee cup.

'Sorry about the wait,' Abi murmured. 'You know what Declan is like.'

I nodded sympathetically, taking another sip. They had to be pretty loaded to afford coffee of this quality – even the instant stuff was expensive now.

'This is absolutely excellent, Abi' I gasped. 'Like, real Vienna coffee shop standard. I used to work there, so I know.'

'Vienna, huh? Aren't you just the swank?' We turned round. Declan, fresh out of the shower, peered out at us from under the towel he was rubbing his hair with. I got up to greet him.

'Not really. I had a masonry project – we were working on the new cathedral.'

St. Stephens had burnt down in 2040. It used to be the case that people wanted their old buildings back just as they were. But with the massive heat waves, it became clear that structures could not be resurrected just as they had been. St Stephens, rather than the old blue zig-zags and diamonds of its famous roof, was to have a similar design, only with different shades of moss, sucking up all that excess carbon. It meant, of course, that people would have to go up there regularly to garden and trim.

Architecture was a lot less stand-offish than it used to be. 'A roof over your head': that's what people would often call a prospective home. But now a lot of them were built like a bird's protective wings – round, open courtyards. to better withstand the lash of storms and hurricanes. But it was also a gesture of invitation. Perhaps that was why masonry had had something of a renaissance – people wanted their names on these structures they'd so often planned and helped to build.

Declan padded over to me.

For a brief, horrible moment, I thought he might try to hug me, or pound me on the back. But no, thank God. He extended a hand, using the other to rub his hair dry, and I shook it. I'd forgotten the way his palms were always so warm and dry.

Abi was sidling towards the door, clutching a handbag to her chest. Declan grabbed her by the elbow and pulled her in for a quick kiss.

'I'm really sorry to go like this,' she said, twisting her head round to grin at me awkwardly. 'but I've got to get to the studio. Nice to meet you, Ed. Give me a ring later, OK, Dec?'

Dec? So Declan had finally allowed someone to shorten his name. As a teenager, he refused to respond if anybody called him that. He went through a stage of introducing himself as 'Clan', just like his best mate was Rew, rather than Andrew. Pretentious little pricks, the pair of them.

Declan rolled his shoulders back a few times and sat on the stool opposite me. He had filled out a little, enough to make his old nickname 'Shrawny' (shrimp crossed with scrawny) redundant.

'How's Mum, then?' he asked.

I looked down at my coffee. There was one last island of foam floating on that little 'O' of darkness. 'They've done the usual blood tests. Can't find anything specific.'

'You don't think it's come back then?' he asked hopefully. No need to clarify the 'it'.

'Not as far as they can tell. But the doctor made it clear I should get her affairs in order. The periods of clarity are getting rarer. So we need to do this as soon as possible.'

Declan rapped his fingers on the counter and frowned. 'Do you really think she is going to swallow this...reconciliation thing?'

'Of course. All that's required is a little Let's Pretend. She wants to know that we'll be there for each other when she's gone.'

He raised an eyebrow. 'Mum doesn't come out with clichés like that.'

'Look, it's not too much to ask, is it?' Exasperation leaked into my voice. Christ, we'd only been talking for all of two minutes. 'Just one visit together, okay? We exchange some smiles, act like we're friends. Make her happy.'

Declan raised his hands in surrender. "Fine...fine. If you think it'll help Mum, I'll do it."

'Great. When? How about today? No time like the present, right? We can go in my kayak. It's a two-seater.'

Declan closed his eyes. 'All right. Just let me get dressed first.'

'I hate hospitals,' Declan said, letting his fingers brush over the surface of the water. We'd reached a strong current, so there was no need for either of us to paddle. 'The smell...'

'Well, just think how Mum must be feeling.'

Last time I was at the hospital, she had a smell I couldn't quite identify, raw fish mingled with butter.

'I've been trying to get to see her too,' Declan protested. 'It's hard with the hours I work. Do you think we should get her fruit or flowers...or something?'

'No. Triggers allergies. And, you know, hygiene.'

'All right. Can I at least go and pick up a sandwich from over there? I haven't even had breakfast.'

He was pointing at one of the artificial islands of the estuary, where a small stall perched at the edge of a line of vegetable patches.

'If you must,' I sighed.

I pulled the canoe up onto the sandy bank and Declan got out. I decided to join him. We paid the young man sitting behind a row of

baguettes and rolls. I selected a wholemeal, and he a seeded baguette. He smeared some mushroom pate over his, and I went for a meat substitute.

'Help yourself to salad,' said the stall holder, waving at the vegetable patch. We both ambled over to the patch with the water cress.

'I don't understand how it could have happened this quickly.' Dec murmured, as he began shredding leaves into his sandwich. 'She came over to help me and Abi paint the flat just a few weeks ago and she seemed absolutely fine.'

That would have been around the same time I'd invited her to the unveiling of one of my plaques at a university. She'd been a tad late, looking flustered, only just in time to hear the beginning of the speech. Perhaps she'd just got back from the painting job. She must have felt like a cheating wife sometimes, endlessly shunted between the two of us, making up excuses for why she couldn't be here or there. Had the stress and heartache contributed to that first cell metastasise?

In the first couple of years after our estrangement, she'd often had a go at sliding Declan into a conversation, like a gambler slotting his last furtive coin into the fruit machine. We were talking once about a television company which I'd done some work for, when she put down a cup she was drying. 'Talking about television, Declan had a few weeks' work experience at the BBC. He says he'd like to be Assistant Floor Manager. I don't even know what that means.'

'Neither do I,' I snorted. 'Perhaps it's the politically correct term for the cleaner.'

The spite was unnecessary, which was, of course, what made it so satisfying. Mum sucked in her lower lip. 'If it gets resolved, then it'll be you two who sort it out. You're the ones who have to find a way out of the impasse. I mean, honestly, the girl who caused all of this. It's not as if she's even on the scene any longer. Things can't carry on like this.'

Things did, though.

I put a few ambiguous red leaves in my salad. A good thing about these island stalls was that you had to try new stuff. Declan was frowning as he shredded watercress over his pate, but he seemed a little more relaxed than he had been at the flat.

Once we had finished, we walked down to the canoe. The current was against us, and it took me a while to paddle back. I was about to turn my head, when a violent jolt nearly capsized us. My elbow smacked painfully against the side of the kayak and I gasped.

'Fucking hell, Ed!' Dec grabbed his paddle and managed to rotate the kayak. We faced a chap with his little girl in the back. I could see there was a great big scuff down the side of his cobalt blue canoe.

He scowled at us. 'Didn't you see me?'

'Sorry!' I raised a hand. 'Distracted. Our mum's in hospital.'

His face fell. 'Oh God. No. Sorry. I hope it's not serious.'

I gave him a rather weak smile rather than an answer, instantly feeling guilty that I'd used mum's predicament to avoid a tirade. He wrote down the address of the library he'd borrowed the canoe from. 'I don't reckon it'll cost you too much,' he said, as he handed it over. 'It's just a scratch.'

I took it with a nod.

As we paddled away, Dec sighed. 'You know I really missed cars when they got banned. But you never get the same aggression with boats and canoes as you used to get on the roads.'

I shrugged. 'I suppose it's the fact you have to look people in the eye.'

There was probably more to it than that, though. With cars, you always felt as if you should be in control. Not the case, of course. You were hemmed in by junctions and roundabouts and a raft of maddening laws and limits. But a steering wheel and gears gave you the feeling you were the master. In a kayak, you know that it's the river in charge – you can only hope to appease it with your oars, your paddle, and some skill. This encourages humility.

Anyway, no chances of any collision on this stretch of the waterway. I knew each kink, each caprice of the current.

Once we'd turned a curve in the river, the hospital came into view, with its great spread of artificial islands, each one a green oasis, surrounded by rocks. Most of the green places in the city were either meadows or young forests. These sensory convalescent islands, with herbs and flowers selected for their scents, and moss pictures that you could feel your way round as well as see, were practically the only manicured gardens left. When Mum was not quite as unwell, I had helped her through the maze island. It was covered with a vine roof, hundreds of birds beneath it, so you felt as though you were being serenaded through the path of yew bushes. Mum, unfortunately, was not likely to ever be able to go to any of those islands again. She was in the main building, at the heart of the complex, the one that patients did not come out of.

I recognized the nurse who let us in. The last time I'd been here, she'd been laughing and joking with Mum as she got her catheter sorted out.

No smiles today. She nodded at Declan, though. 'You must be Sandra's younger son. I'm glad you made it today. I'm afraid you need to steel yourself. There's been a deterioration.'

I don't think Declan was really listening to her, though. He pulled on my sleeve. 'You'd better do the talking. This was your idea, after all.'

We went into the ward. Mum looked up at us and smiled.

I felt pain seep through my chest and throat, as though I was trying to swallow an ice cube. Tears sprung to my eyes. I managed to smile back, though. Declan, on the other hand, dropped his bag and gasped.

Christ, she looked terrible.

Even in the middle of chemotherapy she'd still had the light in her eyes, that way of tossing her hair to one side when she was amused. But all that had gone. Her lips and skin were dry. Her throat undulated painfully as she spoke. 'Well, I never thought I'd see you both together in a room again. What a smashing surprise.'

I dropped into the chair next to her bed. Declan dragged one over and sat next to me. I noticed the tears streaking down his face. I realised that what I had interpreted as apathy was probably denial. Like Abi said, he was in pieces.

Mum put a hand over his. 'Don't take it so badly, petal. They've got the pain well under control. I want to talk to you both about what comes next. When this is over.'

Declan made no move to withdraw his hand. Not even when his mobile phone went off. That would be Abi, probably, wanting to check up on him.

I took Mum's other hand, warm and dry as a bleached bone in the sun.

Her eyes rested on me and she swallowed. 'Ed, you're best placed to help me with this. I've decided I want to be cremated. I'd like to be made into one of the barrier mounds. And, if possible, I want you and Dec to join me. You know what I mean.'

I did know what she meant. But Declan, I guessed from his tight knot of a frown, did not.

'Mum,' I said. 'We're just going outside for a bit to get some coffee. You slip your oxygen mask back on and get some good deep breaths. All right?'

She nodded and gave me a wink.

* * *

When the oceans rose and the storm surges on the Thames became so regular that they stopped being called surges, people's first instincts were to build walls and to barricade the roads and the houses. We would tilt our chins up to Mother Nature, whom we had so affronted, like a wrestler turning his chest to an opponent.

We were, of course, soon flat-out on the floor.

Although some cities held out with the same tactics, it became clear fairly quickly that we would have to put up a different kind of resistance. Our cities would need to have their knots of infrastructure loosened rather than tightened. We let the waves claim those buildings on ground too low to be reclaimed. Some went up on stilts, but most retreated. The roads were allowed to become rivers, and the old buildings on low ground, islands and stepping stones.

Even the old barriers, with their great walls of steel, were overcome eventually by the waves. They were replaced, instead, by mounds, that at least broke some of the strength of the surges. Those mounds were made from concrete. Not the old type of concrete – we'd long run out of the right kind of sand.

* * *

Declan crossed his arms and stared at me, his eyes still red from crying. 'Okay. I understand this stuff about the barrier. But why is Mum saying that she's going to be...part of it?'

I sipped my coffee, trying to find the words that would make this as palatable to him as possible. 'Well, it's partly carbon sponge, as you'd expect. But, there's other stuff in there too.'

'Yeah?'

'Most people are buried nowadays, as you know, in the new forests, under the trees. But if somebody really wants to be cremated, as Mum does, there's an option to pay for the carbon to be captured. And for their ashes to be put to good use. There's a type of new concrete, porous stuff, that can be manufactured partly using those ashes. And it's a very good substance for making a reef...'

Declan's face darkened. He put down his mug of tea. 'I don't like where this is going.'

I shrugged. 'I don't see what the problem is.'

'She'd be underwater, I...'

'But loads of people used to throw their relatives' ashes into the sea and rivers. Why would this be different? Mum has always loved this

city. Now she has a chance to protect it. And she wants me to carve her name and a message on the mound. It would be my honour.'

Declan swilled the dregs of his tea round in the bottom of the cup and looked out of the window at the concentration of islands outside.

'Well, okay. That's legit, I guess. And it's up to Mum, ultimately. But what was all that about you and me joining her?'

I pressed my hands together and rubbed nervously. 'Right, well, the mounds get eroded, obviously, by the currents, and they have new layers put on. And those layers can be...family members, who, you know, make the same end-of-life choice.'

Dec smacked his tea cup on the table. 'Are you suggesting that we both get smeared round her after she's gone?'

'Smeared?' I smacked my cup of tea down. 'Do you think that's an appropriate word to use in this context?'

A nurse gave us a sharp look as she ushered somebody into the ward. Our voices had got very loud, very quickly. This wasn't the way things were supposed to go today. We were meant to have a brotherly reconciliation...or at least a good feign at one.

Christ, I could do with a cigarette.

I shut my eyes and breathed in. 'Look, it's not as bad as you think. I mean, people used to live with corpses. Seriously, in the Stone Age, they'd dry out granddad's head or wait until he was a mummy and actually have him in the house. It's only recently that people wanted their family's remains well out of the way, kept in a nice little urn or stored away in a graveyard, well away from them. And, if you think about it, it's not all that long ago that people used to have mausoleums, with all their bones mixed up with Great-Uncle Alfred's.'

'You're not selling it to me. Look, Ed. We've hardly spoken for ten years. I'm not sure we really spoke before that, when we were kids. Not Spoke spoke. We just kind of talked at the same time. Loudly.'

I blinked a few times. But then I nodded. 'You know, when we fell out over that girl, I was actually relieved. Because we had a decent excuse not to talk to one another any longer.'

Dec offered me a tight smile. 'The fact is, there are some people you're just not meant to be around. And sometimes they're related to you.' He see-sawed his shoulders up and down slowly. 'And I don't think there's any point trying to get Mum to believe we're friends.'

'I mean, can't you even make the effort...?'

'It's not about effort. Ed. Mum may be dying but that hasn't made her stupid.'

My hands dropped. I realised it was the first time either of us had mentioned death since we'd met this morning.

Dec was right. Damn him.

'So, what are we going to say to her?' I asked.

His face closed and he sucked his lips in. 'Look. I don't really care what happens to me when I'm dead. It's not like I need that body any longer. But you should know about Abby... She's pregnant.'

I don't think I betrayed my shock. Should I offer my congratulations? They would have sounded hollow, of course. Luckily, Dec spoke before I had a chance to. 'And I think, really, she and the child have a right to a say in what happens once I'm gone.'

'Are you going to tell Mum about this prospective grandchild then?'

Dec closes his eyes. 'I haven't decided yet. I mean, it seems almost cruel, doesn't it? When she'll almost certainly never meet him or her.'

I swallowed. My throat was dry. 'Almost as cruel as telling her we're not going to respect her final wishes?'

Dec sighed. 'Ed, she knows we'll never get on. She reconciled herself to it long ago. And she'd have seen through this whole fake kiss-and-make-up thing you had planned. Look, does it occur to you she's more concerned about you than you are about her?'

I blinked a few times. 'Why would that be?'

Dec frowned. 'I don't mean this in a funny way, but you've always been a bit of a loner. She's worried you'll end your life with nobody.'

I smiled. 'Fat chance of that. Not since the floods.'

And it was true. Before the great inundations, I had been almost alone in my flat, not talking to anybody for days. Community – a word I always used to despise. Made me think of dusty jumble sales and tea in chipped mugs.

I turned round and opened the window, withdrawing my cigarette packet. This was a no-no, of course, but I'd make sure the fumes all drifted outside the visitors' room. I lit up and inhaled.

'Let me tell you a story. Before the great storm surges, there was this old fellow who lived next to me that I really didn't like. He was a real Neighbourhood Watch sort, the type who'd tug your ear for hours about some new development or a car that had been left out on the street for hours.'

Dec nodded. 'I know the type. Curtain twitcher.'

'Exactly. But after the second great surge forced us out of the flat, I had to go to one of the meetings of my Strip.'

Dec nodded again. Everybody had to do that. Not that it was compulsory. But when the city was divided into nine strips according to the new boundaries imposed by water, you didn't have much choice

other than to attend the local assemblies. Otherwise, you wouldn't find out about where to find clean water, otherwise, or what to do in case of a surge.

'Anyway, we were both assigned the role of water wardens, and we had to communicate every day after that to decide the position of the water stations and stuff like that. And he still kind of annoyed me with all his fussy shit, but I did start to realise the value of all that attention to detail. I mean, he knew EVERYONE, and the location of all the hydrants and where to find hoses and nozzles and...He was a natural administrator and organiser. That wasn't something I'd ever really respected before, but I don't know what we'd have done without him. I'm not saying we became great friends or anything. But you kind of learn something from tolerating someone. Anyway, he died last summer. Heat exhaustion, probably. We had good air conditioning set up, but he spent so much time outside talking to people and one day... it caused a heart attack. I did the carving on his barrier mound. I even had fucking tears in my eyes, would you believe it?'

Dec leaned back and raised his eyebrows. "There's a moral in this, isn't there?'

I sighed. 'I know it freaks you out and I can understand why. But I really like the idea of the barrier mounds, each generation coating the next. It's a bit like tree trunk rings, in a way.'

Dec's smile was not ungenerous. He shrugged. 'Well, I'm not stopping you. But think about it, do you really want your ashes mingled with mine for eternity? And what about Abi? How does she come into this? Not on top of us, I'm guessing, or in between.'

I shook my head and stubbed my cigarette out on the sill, dropping it carefully in the toxic waste bin. 'God, you're disgusting.'

Dec slapped the top of my arm lightly, and it actually felt genuine, rather than fake macho bonhomie. He jerked his head to one side. 'Come on. Let's get back on the ward and do our filial duty.'

GILLIAN GERALDINE AVERY 1981-2057

I was proud of this inscription, simple as it was. I'd surrounded it with a twisting vine, dotted with flowers. Soon, the holes around it would be full of darting fish.

I finished off the '7' with my chisel. I was using Ecologia, one of my favourite fonts. They were inscribed on my memory, the form of each of those letters. I know each incremental jerk of the finger muscles necessary to get the perfect line and thickness.

I looked round to see Abi caressing the wisps of hair on her baby's head. They'd gone with Ismenia as a name. Not a huge fan – but it shortens handily to Izzy.

Both she and Ed had finished crying now, and looked somewhat refreshed by the wind battering them, sending their mourning clothes fluttering out behind them.

Once I'd finished, the workmen lifted the mound from the ground with some reverence, before they waded into the Thames. Not so much a single river now, but more a loose braid, streams running around and into each other much like the strands of a three-part harmony.

We bowed our heads instinctively, although none of us were religious. Mum's mound gently sank, lowered by winches and careful hands, the waves lapping it gently.

Silence, broken by the 'pee-wit' of a Lapwing. I looked up to watch the bird tumble and soar.

Then my niece's cry rose, a wild precious icicle of sound in the estuary.

Nets

Heather Elgar

Distant — but present, and certain. The call swept through the stillness of that night and the shatter of her mind: *twit-two*. The call that had persisted throughout the years in their corner of Somerset in a world where soil had turned to sand and fresh had turned to salt. It woke her briefly from her sleeplessness.

Alone in the bed, she became aware of the heat and the damp surrounding her. She considered the net that was suffocating her and sighed. A glance at the alarm clock: 04:13. Had she slept?

Up surged a desire to run into the night and cry to the moon. But she couldn't forget the net which she had sorely fastened two days before, and so she stayed, frozen in the heat.

Daybreak.

Leonie threw open the net and climbed out of bed. She slipped into yesterday's clothes and hurried to the car pool. The car dropped her at Bristol's edge, where she took the metro to the hospital.

"Joe Phillips. I'm here to see," Leonie stammered to the receptionist. And after some minutes that felt like hours and others that flew by in seconds, the consultant arrived and walked her to Joe's bedside.

"The tests confirm it is malaria, as we suspected," the consultant explained. "Joe is stable for now — he's just sleeping."

Leonie stared at the man knitted with tubes.

"We believe he might have been over-exposed through his work."

After a long pause, Leonie blinked and said, "What can I do?"

The consultant rubbed her arm tenderly. "We'll keep him as comfortable as possible."

Leonie had met Joe eight years earlier, at a protest against the mass deportations of refugees when they were both still in the city. Joe had accidentally trampled on Leonie's foot in a rampage when the police had begun to set in, and had escorted her to safety in a quiet street. And as the throbbing numbed, so the strangers learned each other's stories: of the girl who believed in the power of numbers and the boy who loved nothing more than the music of the trees.

So when Leonie was offered a new job casting ecology into equations just outside Bristol, Joe followed as she escaped the city. They

set up home together on the edge of a woodland through a Community Land Trust, and, because it was the policy heyday of breaking even with Nature on what we'd destroyed, Joe was able to spend his days encouraging life in new wetlands, wildflower meadows and woodlands — their services towards clean water (and everything else) paid for by new developments, infrastructure and industrial activity.

"Oh, Lee," her mother cried down the phone, "I'm so sorry. Just awful. Malaria! How? In England!"

"The doctor said he was exposed through his work. He's focused a lot on wetlands recently. Ponds. I guess the mosquitos breed there." Ponds I had prescribed, she thought. A kaleidoscope of near-identical pond plans flooded her vision.

"But I don't understand. Why do you say there's nothing they can do?"

"The old antimalarials don't work anymore, Mum. The mosquitos have adapted to them."

"But surely they've developed new treatments in the meantime?"

"Obviously not. Oh I don't know Mum, I'm not a bloody doctor." Her voice broke as she fought back. And to the silence down the phone, "Things have changed."

"The doctor said you can hear me, babe," Leonie whispered, stroking Joe's forehead.

"We're doing okay. The garden is looking beautiful. Your tomatoes are delicious. Everyone sends you their love."

She looked at the forest surrounding them. She followed the ivy climbing up a giant beech (or was it an elephant hiding in the trees?) until their brush strokes were stunned by the right angle of the hospital ceiling.

"And you're on the news! A national superhero, you are. Putting the nation's water first."

That evening, when Leonie returned home, she looked back through old photographs of when she was a child in Malawi and her mother drove around in jeeps providing medical assistance to rural communities.

She tried to recall how it had felt when she'd had malaria. It was something like the cruel passing of time. Reliance on everyone else. Constant checking. Thermometers thrust in her mouth. It was the kind of memory that was so removed and altered that it probably didn't happen that way at all, but she held onto it all the same because it was hers. And she remembered how everyone was off school from time to

time with a little bit of malaria. But that was then, when a few pills of doxycycline still did the trick. And this was now, in England where the winter day turns to night at 3.30pm and where researchers were scratching their heads as to a possible cure.

She researched through the night. "Malaria cure." "Antimalarials". "Why can't we protect against malaria anymore".

And she stumbled across the most terrible of answers, in an archived blog from 2010 that prophesied a time when we could no longer rely on the great forests' bounty for new medicines because we had destroyed them.

She had, of course, come across this answer before. This was no news: other diseases were resurrecting for the very same reason. But still it numbed her, because she hadn't accounted for it.

Leonie was a professional accountant of nature's services and saw interconnected stocks and flows balancing all around her. She had learned to trade a historic mile of hedgerow for a central boulevard of wild cherry and silver birch saplings in a new development. She balanced the loss of peatland with green roofs.

She knew deeply that the forest was irreplaceable. But irreplaceable was not compatible with the free market or the promise of technology, and so she, as had the entire profession, had latched onto anything that might balance the loss with some gain. And thanks to a raft of global policy requirements and tax incentives, offsetting schemes had flourished beyond carbon to include water, soil and wildlife, providing some relief from the impacts of deforestation — and all ecological degradation — where for decades there had been virtually none.

So over the years, irreplaceable had come to be measured, in perpetuity had come to mean a decade, and Leonie had started to believe the balance sheet.

Joe passed away a week later. Leonie had sat beside him, under the elephant beech, holding his hand as he slipped away.

The first victim of malaria in the UK, his passing caused a fierce and crudely public national debate.

"We must fill in the ponds," a public health consultant said on the evening news. "The general public is absolutely exposed."

"No doubt this is tragic," a DEFRA representative replied. "But now is not the time to be short-sighted. The ponds are critical, for all of us. They're a fundamental part of the water system — we need clean water! They're vital for our flood defences. And they're strategically

placed — with precision — to strengthen wildlife corridors. We need our pollinators — as we all know!” She paused. Composed herself. And directly to the camera, her eyes pleaded. “If we fill them in, we will only create bigger problems for ourselves.”

Leonie watched from her home by the woods, numb and unsure of anything she’d ever known. The migrant mosquitos were turning everything she was and loved upside down. And her world of numbers— built on great algorithms that modelled everything we understood about nature — had not seen this coming.

And the next day, hordes of terrified Brits emptied the garden centres of sand and buried the ponds, and all the newts and dragonflies breeding there.

And as she followed the stories of the destruction, as systematic as the installation of the ponds on every new housing estate, Leonie’s head throbbed thinking about how on earth to balance this fresh crater in nature’s accounts.

Once she had returned to her firm, the journalists came, who had been there since the story broke.

“We are so sorry for your loss,” they began.

“What does this mean for Natural Capital Accountancy?”

“If you didn’t anticipate this,” And why wouldn’t the mosquitos move north? “What else has been missed?”

“Have companies been overpaying the whole time?”

“Shouldn’t we be severing the green corridors to stop them moving further north?”

“Does this mean the NHS is entitled to charge nature for the cost of sorting out this mess?”

What a stupid question.

And as soon as the journalists were shown the door, the calls from clients flooded in.

“Please send us your assurances that all effects of climate change have been fully incorporated into your models. We can’t afford any overpayments.” To the natural world, Leonie fumed, for which we owe everything.

“I’m really sorry, truly, but we need to close our contract. If we’re linked to you, our accounts will be too heavily scrutinised.”

And from another, “We’ve been offered 98% accuracy from another firm. Can you match that?”

Can you match that?

In her dreams, Joe spoke in circles. And while initially it was indecipherable, and terrifying, she soon relaxed into her own pulse and embraced the chaos, and heard every word — infinitely. And as she drifted in and out, she heard the not-so-distant and familiar comfort, twit-two, which she came to recognise was circular too.

She gave one interview. She explained with pain and precision that we can't guarantee accuracy. Climate and ecological breakdown have everything in common, including this: the loss of stability in complex systems that have evolved over millennia. It is categorically impossible to predict with accuracy in wholly unpredictable times, however smart we think our algorithms are. And with anger and glory, she said that accounting might not be the only approach after all.

Leonie was sent off work. She was clearly still wrought from Joe's death and perhaps hadn't been ready to speak to clients, let alone the media. A flurry of clients had cancelled their contracts after seeing the article, claiming they had no confidence in an acclaimed accountant who admitted she had no confidence in her ability to count. Normally it would be grounds to let her go, but in the circumstances, they were extending an act of kindness.

As the years passed, Leonie grew into her new situation, spending some time every day in the woods by her home. She never did return to her office just outside the city.

It started in the way it always does: a brisk morning walk to clear her head. But where she had previously always looked upwards to the birds and the light through the canopy, she started going underground. She followed the burrowing ants and tracked the mycorrhizae highways that teased the world above with its mischievous flowers. She traced the midnight forest by the grasp of its bark and the tickle of its ferns. And, as winter thawed to spring rose to the heady fragrance of midsummer, her fear of mosquitoes vanquished and Leonie took to napping under an old hawthorn tree. Slowly all the things Joe used to say started to mean something new — and wholly ancient. She learned to hear the music of the trees.

Now, you will remember that, a few years earlier, the people of Britain decided to do away with their ponds. (Except for those which were staunchly protected, because there is always a diversity of action: such is the human experience.)

People wondered what all the fuss had been about. Developers felt swindled. The rain still drained away.

As trust in the equations rusted, and vested interests pecked away at the policy, the infrastructure that, for a time, seemed to deliver on commitments to increase natural capital collapsed. What had become a level playing field for treading lightly — or at least with due compensation — became deeply pitted, corrupted and unsure.

In the confusion, the invitation was set. It was not long before the invisible hand was slashing through wildlife corridors and polluting remastered soils. New hydro dams were installed without requirement for fish passage. Developments tore through restored grasslands. Some polluting businesses were let off in court, because there was no knowing the real numbers.

On a particularly humid day in September, after an especially hot summer, the skies turned black and it started to rain. And the rain poured for fourteen days.

The flood defences failed, compromised as they were, and thousands of homes were drowned — all across the country. And while the Government launched an Inquiry, Britain's first thousands were added to a global toll of millions (and rising) of the wandering landless.

And somewhere in Essex, a researcher made a connection: that, despite the obliteration of standing water, the cases of malaria had soared.

Skyscraper reflections

Inas Hamdan

"Greed is what put you here and hard work is what will bring you out. As long as the skyscrapers stand strong you have to pay back your debt."

Dante didn't listen as the mantra came out from the loud morning speakers. The old bed made crackling sounds as he was kneeling on it. He was looking out from the window, looking at the far off wall, wondering when the officials would come to take him there, but all he could see was the hoards of people trying to escape the cruel desert sun. Every now and again his eyes would catch the old abandoned skyscrapers that still stood strong, those he had seen his whole life. But then he would look back towards the wall, anticipating the rest of his life there.

"I noticed you weren't present at breakfast."

Without looking Dante knew it was Maria. She had walked into his room with a plate of nutrition pudding. The bland grey food he would never have to put in his mouth again after this day.

"You know, having connections with us in the kitchen has its benefits."

Still looking out of the window he thanked her as she put the plate on his desk. He actually didn't want to eat, but her bringing him food was nice. She was still standing there as he glanced over to check, careful to not touch the dirty walls in the cramped room. Dante usually had a habit of cleaning the walls, but he hadn't cared to do so for the past weeks. All the dirt and dust from the outside had made the white walls almost the same colour as the meals.

He heard her sigh and could have sworn she was about to say something, but instead he was surprised by the loud sound of the door closing. Maria had always looked out for him. Since the first day they met she told him that his metallic blue eyes reminded her of the past. Ever since he had been ashamed of his eyes, but strangely she meant it as a compliment. She was one of the sweetest people here, but also so mistaken. He was ashamed he wasn't called in before the age of twenty-five but she was five years older and still hadn't gotten a call.

Many times before he had tried giving her advice on how to behave, but she never listened. She didn't respect the officials and even spoke well about the sinners of the past. Those who killed earth.

"Perhaps they weren't aware of the consequences of their actions," she always said.

But Dante knew that they were. For decades they were warned of what would happen and they didn't stop until it was too late. Until their greed ate up everything that earth could offer. Until he was doomed to a life here. Today all that stood left was their skyscraper offices on this side of the wall, to remind people like him of where their ancestors committed those crimes.

Dante started feeling the hunger and went towards his desk. Looking down on the gray mush in front of him he wondered, as he had done so many times before, how something so bland could smell so bad? He thought about the strawberry Maria had told him about before. How would it taste?

The sound of his stomach rumbling made him sigh as he swallowed a big lump of pudding to silence it. Since that first day in the energy generator facility, when Ms. Flower told him that the only way he would get to eat was by working, he had hated it even more. He already hated eating it, but now he had to work for it?

"This is not a punishment, but simply the only way forward for us. We have not doomed you to this reality. Those in the past have."

It was common for kids to break down during their first days at work, and seven year old Dante was no exception. Ms. Flower had taken him to the side and spoken to him strictly.

"Remember, those of us who are from the other side are benevolent. Keep your head down, work hard and you be able to leave this place one day"

She told him that he had five minutes to get himself together or he wouldn't get any dinner that day. Since then he had always been careful to do his job as best he could. Generating energy for those on the inside was important, he always told himself. The weakness he had shown was probably something he had inherited from those in the past, and he made sure to get rid of it.

And his last day wouldn't be the day he would fuck up, he thought, as the sound of yet another mantra made him realize it was time to leave for one last shift. As he walked through the desert he looked at the wall, wondering what he would be doing if he was on the other side in that moment. How he would never have to wake up by the harsh sun reflected from the tall skyscrapers. But in the midst of those thoughts Maria walked up to him.

"Oh my, you're almost unable to walk."

It was true, Dante had started getting weaker. Even his blond short hair had started falling off. Maria was the oldest one in the camp but was still strong. She had told him before it was because she ate the leftovers of the officials' food. She had tasted bread, strawberries and even wine once.

"I'll miss you."

The words came out automatically and he only realized how truthful they were after the fact.

"You don't have to go."

He did and she knew that.

"I'll see you on the inside."

"It's not what you think it is. The officials, they're not like us."

No, they're better. And soon he would become one of them. He couldn't be any help to Maria anymore.

"I hear them speak all the time. They don't see you as human. We can not be blamed for the sins of our forefathers. They are no better than you and I."

The words of Ms. Flowers echoed in his mind "This is not a punishment, but simply the only way for us forward." He wrapped his arms around her and held on tight to stop her from saying something more. Maria had always been the only one to notice him, but she was so mistaken. As he let go of her, he made sure to not make eye contact.

"I'll miss you."

He could do nothing but pity her. Turning around, the last thing he saw before he went was a tear falling down her cheek. While entering the energy centre he walked through the hundreds of bikes. He scrunched his nose as the smell of sweat entered his nostrils. It always hit him hardest when he first came in. After a while he would slowly get used to it. Walking to his position had become automatic long ago. Number 692. He read the metallic sign on his bike as he stepped on it and started biking. The numbers on the timekeeper in front of him started going down, and they were moving slower than ever.

A little boy walked in with Ms. Flower as his shift started coming to an end. He must be his replacement. He didn't seem to be older than six. They always took the oldest of the kids when someone was supposed to leave. They took them away from their parents and put them in their own rooms.

"From now on, if you want to eat, you work."

It was so clear that Ms. Flower hated her job. And he couldn't blame her. Having to interact with them all day? Even he couldn't stand it.

"For each hour, you get one meal. No work, no food."

Quick to the point as she always was. He saw them walk towards him.

"From tomorrow you will be 692. This right here will be your position."

Dante felt the happiness inside him as he remembered being in the little boy's position many years ago. Now that moment seemed so far away. Impossible to reach. He gave the kid an encouraging nod and kept biking. The last thing he wanted was to get into trouble on his last hours here.

"692 will generate better energy from tomorrow." she said in her earpiece as she walked away.

With time his legs had gotten taller and it had become easier to reach the pedals. But his legs hurt more than ever and he had to stop every few moments to collect himself. He really was getting much weaker, he thought, but quickly brushed it away as he realized it was time to leave. As he was leaving he saw Ms. Flower approach him once more. Alone

this time. It was finally time! He was so happy that she was the one who would bring him in.

"Number 692. Get changed into this and meet me outside in 5 minutes."

Dante knew it was foolish, but he expected more. Maybe a smile? He was one of them now after all. Ms. Flower handed him a stack of neatly folded clothes and walked to the outside. Everything was white, but he would get much nicer clothing there, he thought, while putting them on.

As he walked out he gave Ms. Flower a smile, but she didn't look at him. She didn't even acknowledge his existence as he followed her. Ms. Flower's swift steps through the sand made it impossible for his weak legs to keep up without getting his clothing dirty. Her wavy black hair standing despite the strong desert wind from all the hairspray she had put on. It was the last time he would see the hoards of people just laying there, waiting for something, anything. But as they reached the entrance at the wall, he realized he wouldn't miss them at all.

He had thought many times of the moment when he would stand there. How he would finally feel human. Walking through he took a big breath, waiting to feel the change. But instead, all he felt was a bit of pain in his right ankle from the walk followed by a big rush of disappointment. The entrance led to a long white hall and as they walked through it he tried to force out a feeling, but he just felt tired, as he had his whole life. He felt so weak, unable to keep up with Ms. Flower's strong long steps.

"Miss..."

He didn't know if she heard his plea or if they had suddenly reached their destination, but she turned around to a big sign with the number 12 and opened a door to a room where they sat down. As they stepped in Dante shivered from the coldness in there. The office was small. The only things there were two chairs and a loud machine that blew out the cold air. Not even a window, which explained the clean white walls around him.

"So, number 692."

"Dante."

He knew he wasn't supposed to interrupt her, but he should be called by his name now. He had earned this.

"Right. You have served us well. And today your service have come to an end."

That was quite a strange way to say his time on the inside had started, but Dante kept quiet. He didn't want to insult her by interrupting again.

"I'm actually quite sad to see you leave, as you have been great for morale in the facility."

He felt a rush of confirmation and he thought of a compliment. Maybe tell her how much he admired her.

"I have requested that we don't go through this, but it's protocol. Something about 'showing respect to all sentient beings'. Laughable, don't you think?"

Dante didn't understand what she was talking about but still gave a small chuckle.

"You will not be allowed on the other side."

There was a long moment of silence before Dante understood what she had just said.

"I have to go back?"

He wondered if Maria had said something to get him into trouble.

"Don't take it personally, if we were to take every one of you in we simply wouldn't be able to generate enough clean air and water. We already have too many people inside."

What? But they said...

"This is the only way to get your kind to work. It's not our fault your ancestors decided to take the privilege of nature from you. We are just looking out for ourselves." He couldn't believe what was happening. Was this a test?

"And you actually come from one of the biggest criminals of the past. The owner of the world's biggest oil company. It's not strange that you were such a hard worker in the camp."

"But why?"

Without even acknowledging his confused look Ms. Flower turned away and started walking out from the room. As she locked the room Dante realized how cold he was getting.

"Nutrition pudding in room 12 in five minutes."

The last thing he heard was her steps as she walked through the corridor and her voice fading away. They were going to feed him? How long were they going to keep him in here?

The big machine at the corner of the room kept freezing the room up and Dante could now see small crystals form on his hair. He tried to collect his energy to try and shut it down but ended up on the floor, just laying there. He couldn't move his body and thought about the striking sun reflecting from the skyscrapers. How it would have warmed his now pale white skin. How that would have been his home had he only been born before. How he would have been just as bad as his forefather, following whatever the expectations of him were. He would have been just as weak as today.

Perhaps they weren't aware of the consequences of their actions? Dante thought about Maria's words as his metallic blue eyes closed.

An acid sea

Andrew Villeneuve

Excerpt from a novel

"Keep bailing, Jane. We're not back at harbor yet."

Jane sheepishly turned her wandering eyes from the glittering August sea back to her sister, seated aft in the dory. Her sister bared her teeth in a grin of exertion as she pulled hard on the oars, squinting even behind her cheap sunglasses.

"Sorry, Ally. I can't help it." And Jane couldn't. This was one of those moments whose essence Jane adored but could never recall fully when she wanted to retrieve this feeling of bliss. Watching her older sister pull hard and long strokes and feeling the subsequent catch and glide as they sliced through the Gulf of Maine waters, smelling the salt and seaweed and the cool offshore air filling her lungs. Feeling as if there was nowhere else on earth that she could be, and that she was made of the same elements as the sea and the sky and her sister.

Jane scooped more seawater flecked with rockweed in her half-milk jug bailer and sloshed it overboard. Scoop and toss. Scoop and toss. She liked to synchronize the grating of the milk jug and the gurgle of the water splashing overboard with the squeak of the oarlocks and Ally's grunts as she strained the dory forward. The metronome of their bending forward and leaning back must make them look like a clockwork toy from shore, Jane mused. Two figures sawing back and forth in a metronomic rhythm. As she bailed water, she admired her sister's toned thighs and shoulders, so big and strong compared to her own lankiness. Ally had told her to not worry, that she too would become sinewy and powerful as she got older. "Once you finish puberty, you'll get strong. Everyone feels weak when they're twelve." Jane just wished she didn't have to suffer all the other trappings of puberty just to row a dory as fast as her sister.

The dory soon lurched its way into Stonington harbor and nosed between the hulking masses of 50 foot lobster boats to reach the floating dock at the lobster co-op. Jane helped Ally ship the port oar before scrambling out and tying up the bow and stern. The Herring

Gulls wheeled impatiently around the new arrival, impishly swooping low to spy what might lay in the fish crate between Ally's knees.

Equally as interested was Ronnie, one of daddy's oldest lobstering friends, who was watching them come into harbor from his usual loitering post atop the granite pier. "Hello theyah, Ally! And Jane! You bring us back any suppah?"

Ally's grin even wider than usual, she lifted up a saucer-sized scallop from the fish crate. "Hey Ronnie! This one here's for market, but we sure got a good haul. They're getting bigger by the week. It's incredible how well this strain survives in the acid water." The shell held aloft in Ally's crooked arm silhouetted the waning light, and Jane watched the golden water droplets drip and drop back to their home in the harbor. Her eyes followed the light as it slanted through the green waters at low tide to reveal the topography of the harbor bottom. Beneath the hull of the dory carrying so much life lay a morass of mussel shells, bleached white and pitted with uncountable cavities, nestled in beds of ghostly rotting kelp. The mussel shells in the harbor mud once lived on the dock pilings, but they slowly died off in the acidifying soup. By the end of the fall after Jane was born, daddy says, all the mussels had died, and they had been dissolving into their base elements ever since. Daddy also told her that the Wabanaki people's shell middens of oyster and clam shells would accumulate for hundreds of years, and even four hundred years after their genocide, one could still see the middens.

Jane sometimes had nightmares that she would fall overboard and be swallowed into the gallimaufry of white skeletal shells, taking the entire town down with her.

She looked at Ally's, so unencumbered with the burial mound beneath their legs, so enthralled in the scallops she had tended all year, face radiating with pride. Jane wondered if she could feel the dead beneath her, too.

The scallop farm started out as an inkling Ally had revealed to Jane last May. They both were sprawled on the hot granite on a headland further down the island. The air had been cool from the incessant offshore winds that buffeted the mass of rock, and the sisters absorbed the heat radiating off the rough bedrock as basking lizards. Jane had slumped her arm over her eyes to block the sunlight, her hair haloing around her

head on the rock while Ally propped up on an elbow to watch the sea. Beside them lay a cloth bag filled with kelp and dulse, but the buckets of periwinkles sat huddled in the shade of a black spruce further up. They were destined to become dinner; mom hadn't been able to afford much food shopping this week, even with the food stamps. Daddy had taken Sea Hag, his Holland 38 lobster boat, up coast for the week hoping for a bigger haul near the Canadian border. It was a week where they had to choose gasoline over a stocked pantry.

Jane looked rolled her head to the side to catch a sun-washed glimpse of Ally. "Why you so quiet, Ally?" Ally was usually so animated and chatty outside. Not today.

"Just thinking, Jane. Did you hear about the marine warden who came to the high school today? About the sea farms?"

Jane had. It'd be hard to not notice visitors at the high school, attached to the middle school. Once, they were located on opposite sides of town, but now they both shared the same building. Too many kids had been leaving with their families.

"The warden told us about farming scallops, and how down near Casco Bay they're not fishing no more. Hasn't been lobstering for years. But they been growing scallops out in the water, on great big lines. Something about the State giving money to people to start growing, if they don't sell out-of-state."

Jane wrinkled her nose. "Scallops? Isn't that what all the rich folk want to eat?" She had never seen one in person. Sure, she had heard tales of the big scallop dredgers that had left harbor decades ago, but all they came back with were white fleshy plugs, tissue stripped from their shell at sea.

"Yeah, but the warden says they're one of the few things we can still seem to grow out here. Some scientists bred scallops that can survive the acidic water, and the State wants to get people growin' 'em. Offerin' to give you the seed scallops and the line, and they say they'll help find good places to moor the lines."

Jane sat up, startled. "They can get the scallops growing? Here?" To grow up here on the coast, hearing about the death of clamming and lobstering and fishing, one didn't here much about anything growing.

"Only the adults. The baby seed still gotta be grown inland, in these big facilities."

This was startling for Jane. How many times she had heard from daddy, or Ronnie, or her teachers, about how the water was too acidic for the baby lobsters and the baby clams and the baby scallops. The adults were fine, moving when they had to, maybe dying earlier as the acid water slowly broke down their shells. But the plankton were so delicate and fine, cobwebs of life floating in the sea. Daddy told her about the strange summers back 20 years ago where he stopped having to defoul the hull of the Sea Hag and the clambers couldn't find any small clams. The plankton had started to melt away into the green soup of the Gulf of Maine. People talked about black tides, as the decomposing plankton washed ashore each summer and hung the air with its stench. For a while, the adult lobsters and halibut and sea bass stayed put. At least, until recently. But who hadn't given up on a sea renewal, of not only new baby lobsters and clams and scallops, but of growing them?

"Can we even eat scallops? Seems like a lot of work for nothing much at all."

Ally stood up on the ledge and began to pace, becoming excited – "That's the thing, the rich people back in the day just ate the white muscle. But we can eat and even sell the rest of the innards, just like oyster or mussels." She stopped over one of the highest of tide pools, tannin-browened and bath-warm. The water was strangely listless, sheltered by the ledge from the ripping breeze, reflecting perfectly the clouds above. Little blue springtails gathered on the surface in their own gently pulsating clouds. "I think I want to do this, Jane. They say they need determined young people to help feed the community. I hate seeing our neighbors go hungry, I hate seeing daddy leave for strange harbors to make money, and I hate eating kelp and periwinkle soup!"

Jane scrambled up and clutched Ally close, her fingers wrapping around her back. "I want to help, Ally. Let me help."

They both stood there in the buffeting wind, spindrifts of hair dancing like halos around their heads, as the dissolving sea lashed against the steadfast shore. In the cacophony of wind and waves and gulls screaming, Jane still felt as if they were the only two living beings in the world.

The night daddy came home from sea was always a celebration.

After a hundred miles over the raw Gulf of Maine from the northerly lobster grounds, the Sea Hag chugged into harbor with daddy leaning out the starboard cabin window and waving. The small lobster boat was crammed with as many black and green traps as she could hold on the deck, boxing in daddy and his mate Nathaniel into the cabin. Jane ran down the steep gangway to the floating dock to help tie up the springline.

"Hey theyah, Janey!" boomed daddy, "how's my big girl doing?"

Jane strained against the cleat as she brought tension into the springline. "Just fine, daddy, just fine. You catch any big lobsters for me?"

"You just wait and see, Janey, I may not bring in the numbahs but I always bring in the big bugs."

Jane stood aside and watched a few crates packed with lobsters as they were lifted out of the hold. Every trip Jane thought she counted fewer and fewer crates. And while daddy did bring in lobsters so big she could barely wrap her hand around their mottled shells, he always seemed worried about how many big ones he brought in. "I tell you, Janey, back when I was a boy on my father's boat we would bring in crates of these big 'uns. Now we only get one or two."

Daddy also never used to do overnigheters.

When Jane was very little, she remembered daddy returning to harbor each day right as she got out of school. But only a few years later, he had to take an overnigheter to follow the lobsters up the coast, sleeping with his deckhand in shifts below deck. The one night became two nights. Then, three, and he would return exhausted with only a few crates. The lobsters were all moving up Canada-ways, he told her. The sea was getting too warm and acidic for the young to survive. Each year, towns farther and farther north found themselves catching much smaller lobster, and they seemed to be accelerating to a sprint into Canada. What with the price of marine gas and all, daddy had to spend more time each trip catching lobster to pay for fuel.

"Did you see Canada, daddy? You almost saw it through the fog last time."

"Jane, I was able to spit over the gunwhales onto Canada! I was way up by Lubec with every other damn lobster boat this side of the border. The Canadians were none too happy how close we were."

He grinned down at her from behind his wire rimmed glasses, his orange bibs hiked over his knees in the impossibly hot May sun. "Boy is it nice seeing you, Janey. Can't wait to have supper with you girls."

* * *

The suppers when daddy came home were always as rich as they could afford them to be. A bowl of chowder with the periwinkles and dulse the girls had collected sat in the center, prepared by mom after she finished both teaching and haying on the Mallory's farm. Mom was as absent as daddy, working hard on the small dairy farm the Mallory's owned up the inlet where the saltmarsh grasses grew thick. She was able to bring back precious little jars of fresh milk, which you couldn't find in the stores anymore, but she also seldom came back earlier than 9 o'clock. But tonight, she got off early to cook the briny, but delicious, chowder with a little bit of that precious cream. And, there was bread! Jane's heart lifted when she saw the small brown loaf sitting steaming at the table center. What with the wheat failures in the Midwest and all, flour now cost more than lobster by the pound. The flour you could get was rationed severely anyways, and most folks around took to hunting, foraging, and growing.

Ally sat at the scarred and rickety wooden table between her father and mother, spoon hanging carelessly from between her thumb and forefinger in the periwinkle chowder flecked with dulse. Jane watched her sister bite her lip and play with one of her thick braids – Ally always thought long and hard before speaking. Her bright eyes suddenly steeled, and she finally spoke up.

"Dad, the marine warden came to school today. He said the state was giving people money to start farming scallops – the state gets a share to distribute, but the farmers get the rest. Scallops we could sell or eat."

Daddy barely looked up from his chowder "Scallops don't grow no more, Ally. The state scientists been saying the water's too acidic for the scallop seed to grow."

Ally wrinkled her nose in slight frustration. "Yes, that's been true for all the wild scallops. But," she shifted upright in her seat, flicking a braid behind her back, "they said scientists at the University have figured out how to raise the scallop seed past that vulnerable stage, and they've got some new strain resistant to higher temperatures. They're growing 'em up big enough in the lab that you can hook all the scallops on a line and moor them wherever." She began to draw the scallop lines and the moorings in the air with her spoon animatedly. "The state people will help set up the moorings and the lines, they just need people to watch over them. They don't need feeding or nothing, just cleaning the scallops and lines as they foul. And after a year, the state takes two-thirds and we keep a third."

Daddy choked on a spoonful, "Ally, don't be a fool. That's daylight robbery, indentured servitude!"

Mom piped up, "Ally, you've got too much going on. Between working at the café, gathering up food, and helping out your dad with maintenance on the Sea Hag, you're too busy to take on this. Why are you suddenly feeling so strongly about this?"

"I want to help feed our neighbors and my family. I hate just working at the café for money when it's food we need. You keep saying it's a damn shame everyone's so unwilling to do something about the food issue, that everyone's just got their head down." She was becoming more animated, and Jane became more and more in awe of her sister's resolve. "I think I can do something. I'm not going to solve our food problem or bring the lobsters back or bring the tourists back. I can feel that this is can be my part in getting people food. It's not like we're eating any of the lobsters daddy brings back."

She turned to daddy, an apologetic look flashing in her eyes. "This is just time out of my life, not money, dad. It won't cost us anything but time. But," she paused, "I'd need the dory to get to the lines."

Daddy sat back in his creaking chair and dropped his chin to his chest. All was quiet for a while as the great maple tree murmured in the evening breeze and the crickets chirruped in the grasses and daddy thought. "You always act ten years older than you really are, Ally. I wish you could just work a normal summer job being my sternwoman on the Sea Hag or working at the café." He looked up, and Jane saw to her terror a tear beginning to descend down daddy's cheek into his black and gray scruff. "I wish you could just grow into yourself without

worrying about your family. Or food. Or our neighbors.” He wiped the tear away with a calloused finger and breathed in deeply. Mom looked at daddy with a look of pain in her eyes, her lavender colored napkin balled between two clenched hands. “Ally, we just don’t know if it’ll be worth the time,” mom said finally, twisting the napkin slowly in her hands, “It’s a pilot project, anything can go wrong. All the time you’d spend working out on the water, instead of working at the café, and all your scallops may die. And your father might need the dory.”

Daddy looked up at mom with a tired look, his eyes still slightly red. “It’s OK, Genevieve. Ally is her own woman now. If she wants to do this, she has my blessing. Chrissake, she’s just tryin’ to be hopeful.” He turned his eyes to Ally and gazed at her intensely. “Ally, you should keep working weekends at the café. And keep up on your schoolwork. But you can have the dory.”

Jane didn’t quite know why her parents, always a beacon of steadiness, appeared so tired and scared in that moment. She felt fear like she had never really felt before, but awe as well of Ally, quietly listening to her father and the wind at the same time. “I have a condition,” she found herself piping up. “I get to be her first mate.”

Daddy stood up unsteadily and walked around the table between Jane and Ally. He kneeled down and wrapped his big arms around their shoulders, looking into the gathering night through the kitchen window. “I’m so proud of you two girls. So damn proud.”

Even as the moment of excitement and possibility swelled Jane felt a discoloration in the twilight. Through the kitchen window, the sea glimmered in the distance through the boughs of spruce trees. Jane turned her face into daddy’s broad shoulder, away from the harlequin light. Sea dissolving light, sea dissolving shell, sea dissolving bone.

En glob av glas

Cecilia Falkman

Min pappa samlade på kartor. De flesta hängde på kontoret och i hallen. Den allra finaste, en antik karta över Grönland inramat i guld, fick en hedersplats i vardagsrummet bredvid familjefotona. Min favorit var annars den över Koreahalvön som fanns i pappas arbetsrum. När jag var liten kunde jag sitta i timmar under hans skrivbord och titta på den. Jag älskade hur bergskedjan på långt håll bildade som ett mönster och närmare, när jag stod på en stol, avslöjade sig i en mängd underbara exakta detaljer. Städerna var utmärkta med olika stora prickar och floderna ringlade som blodådror över landmassorna. Det var underbart just för att det var så exakt. Men den var också förbjuden att röra vid. Inga kladdiga barnfingrar på pappas kartor. Det gjorde kartorna och dess främmande platser ännu större, viktigare och mer magiskt oåtkomliga. Jag undrar vad jag hade tänkt om jag hade fått ta på kartorna, och då känt det bara platta mot mina fingrar. Visst förstod jag det där med projektioner, men jag kände det inte. När jag var liten var kartorna helt enkelt världen.

Det var en stor dag för både pappa och mig. Vi hade pratat om den här söndagen länge. Vuxna förstår inte hur lång tid en vecka eller två veckor kan vara för ett barn. Man ska inte berätta om spännande nyheter för tidigt och definitivt inte koppla ihop det med ordet "snart". Snart finns inte för ett barn. Vi skulle besöka vårt lokala ekocenter, bara han och jag. Mamma tyckte att vi var söta och kanske lite löjliga när vi satt i köket och planerade var vi skulle åka. Mamma hade gett pappa en gammaldags jordglob i present för länge sen och det var den vi satt och snurrade på. Pappa gjorde noggranna anteckningar av koordinaterna där jag pekade. Koreahalvön var ett måste, och pappa ville gärna till Egypten och ett ställe som han hade besökt när han var ung. Kvällen innan hade jag svårt att sova. Jag tänkte på pappas kartor och platser lång, långt borta. Det var svårt att föreställa sig något annan än här. Hur jag än ansträngde mig ville bilden av det där andra inte ta form. Men imorgon skulle jag få veta. Då skulle jag få se världen. Den lugnande tanken fick mig till slut att falla i sömn.

Först tog vi buss, sen en spårvagn och den sista sträckan skulle ske med färja. Vi var tidiga och fick stå i hamnen och vänta. Pappa köpte kaffe. Jag minns det som att mina sinnen var särskilt känsliga den morgonen. Doften av kaffe och hav var överväldigande, för att inte tala om skriken

från måsarna, gnisslet från spårvagnen, det dova surret från elbilarna och sorlet från alla människor omkring oss. Det var inte så ofta vi var i den delen av stan. Väntrummet var både utvändigt och invändigt fullt av reklam för ekocentret. Det var det andra som hade öppnats i landet. *Nyfiken på världen – vi tar världen till dig*. Slogan är fortfarande densamma. Pappa hade heller inte varit i ett ekocenter och verkade lika entusiastisk som jag. Han köpte en kaffe till. När färjan kom var vi först i kön och lyckades få plats på övre däck. Jag pekade på varje ö vi åkte förbi och frågade om det var den. Eller var det den? När väl ekocentret kom i sikte gick den inte att ta miste på. Komplexet bestod av fem öar och de stora kupolerna glänste i solljuset. En sval röst från högtalarna förklarade att båten tillbaka till fastlandet avgick en gång i timmen fram till klockan nitton. Den neutrala robotrösten påminde mig om skolan. Jag var tvungen att få pappa att visa mig de förköpta biljetterna ännu en gång. Den sladdriga lappen var stor som min handflata, liten för att vara så viktig. Det fanns vissa förhållningsregler berättade rösten. Privat fotografering var förbjudet med undantag för de för ändamålet avsedda områdena. Pappa hade med sig sin gamla Nikon – jag har fortfarande kvar den. *Tveka inte att kontakta personal vid frågor. Vi tar världen till dig!*

Än en gång fick vi ställa oss i kö. En stor port ledde in i en luftsluss och sen vidare till receptionen. Shopen låg till höger. Havsljuden stängdes effektivt ute av glaset och ersattes av en kort melodi som spelades i en evig loop. Jag kände igen snutten från reklamen. Pappa och jag log mot varandra. Vi var äntligen här. Kvinnan i receptionen redogjorde för samma information som vi hade fått på båten. Hon gav oss en karta och varsin hörsnäck med tillhörande guide. Ha det så kul ute i världen! sa hon och blinkade till mig. Vi slog oss ner på en bänk vid ett underligt träd som jag aldrig hade sett förut. Det var en palm. Pappa skrattade åt mitt förstummade ansikte och vecklade ut kartan. En riktig palm. Kartan visade översiktligt vilka breddgrader som fanns på vilken ö och sektion, och ville man ha mer exakta angivelser kunde man knappa in koordinaterna på guidens skärm.

Vi bestämde oss för att börja med Korea. Det var fullt med folk på ekocentret och jag höll mig tätt intill pappa. Vi satte på oss hörlurarna och gick in i det svarta mörkret i en annan luftsluss som skulle ta oss till den första ön. Sektion D.3 hette det på kartan. Det stack i kroppen av spänning. När dörren öppnades stod vi plötsligt vid en sjö. Välkommen till Gwangjuprovinsen, sa hörsnäckan. Det är nu tidig vår och temperaturen ligger på 15-20 grader. Jag upptäckte att det hade blivit kallare omkring oss. Lagg märke till de blommande *Prunus cerasus*,

körsbärsträden, till höger om dig. Körsbärsträdet är en viktig symbol för Koreahalvön och även ett älskat vårtecken. Pappa tog av sig hörsnäckorna och jag gjorde som honom. Vi vandrade runt i den nya världen. Jag tittade upp och försökte se kupolen, men den syntes inte. Himlen var bara blå. Körsbärsblommorna var rosa. Två kvinnor klädda i smala mönstrade klänningar kommer gåendes mot oss med korta steg. Det såg nästan ut som om de flöt fram. En röst från någon sorts dolda högtalare påminde oss om att det var viktigt att hålla sig till den angivna stigen. Kvinnorna log mot oss och stannade utanför den markerade området. De sa något på ett språk jag inte kände igen och gick vidare.

I flera av miljöerna mötte vi projektionerna. Ofta såg de inte alls speciella ut, men man kände igen dem på att de alltid befann sig utanför stigen. I Egypten såg vi en flodhäst strida mot en annan flodhäst bara några meter från där vi stod. Vattnet yrde och jag var tvungen att hålla i pappa i handen. Jag ville gå vidare, samtidigt som scenen var så spännande att jag inte kunde ta ögonen från den. De frustade och verkade så stora och tunga att varje rörelse måste ha varit en ansträngning. En vuxen hanne väger mellan 3 och 4 ton. Det är nu parningstid och... Pappa såg underlig ut. Han ville gå till basaren. Basaren finns i sektion F.35, förklarade hörsnäckan. Vi går en promenad istället, sa pappa plötsligt. Ekocentret var skickligt konstruerat. Öarna var visserligen stora, men med de omsorgsfullt konstruerade optiska illusionerna verkade ytan helt oändlig. Förmodligen gick vi runt i cirklar men det märktes inte. Pappa berättade om den gången han såg en flodhäst som ung. Jag hade hört historien förut, men det var ännu mer spännande efter det vi just hade sett. De var stora som hus, sa pappa. Jag sa att de varit stora men inte så stora. Vårt hus var mycket större. Pappa tvekade. Det har du förstås rätt i.

Nordamerika, norrsken, Kapstaden. Efter ett tag blev vi trötta och tog en fika. Allt var speciellt på ekocentret utom bullarna. De var precis som dem på simhallen. Sen gick vi till fotoområdet. Pappa tog bilder när jag stod vid ekocentrets skylt och framför det stora akvariet. Vanligtvis brukade han säga en massa roliga saker för att få mig att le. Jag log i alla fall, fastän han bara stod tyst bakom det där mörka kameraögat. Jag märkte nog att pappa inte vara så glad och kanske helst ville åka hem, men jag ville verkligen förbi shopen. Färjan tillbaka skulle ju inte gå än på ett tag. Shopen var fantastisk. Längs ena vägen var en stor skärm vars motiv skiftade från öken till djungeln till hav, och andra bilder från jordens alla hörn. Jag stirrade. Och det fanns böcker. Och små föremål att ha med sig hem som souvenirer, en liten pingvinunge, ett lexikon över de största rovdjuren i världen, pennfodral. Jag tog mig till

upptäcksrhyllan och fastnade direkt för worldview. Byggt på gammal teknik men med nya perspektiv stod det. Jag visade den för pappa som otåligt stod borta vid vykortet och kylskåpsmagneterna. Jaha, ett kalejdoskop. Kommer du verkligen använda det? Jag tjatade och till slut gick han med på att ge mig ett förskott på veckopengen. Vi åkte hem.

Jag hade ju insett att utflykten inte hade varit en succé, men inte förstått varför. Vid middagen pratade pappa lite, medan jag pratade desto mer för att kompensera för hans bristande entusiasm. Jag var dock besviken och till slut orkade inte heller jag hålla humöret uppe. Vi åt glass fastän mamma brukade tycka att det var dåligt med efterrätter. Efter maten satte sig pappa i sitt arbetsrum med några gamla fotoalbum. Det svaga rasslandet av papper mot papper var det enda som hördes från den öppna dörren. Jag visade mamma mitt kalejdoskop. Min favorit var tundran. Hon satte maskinen framför ögonen och jag visste hur hon såg vidderna breda ut sig åt alla håll framför sig. Hon flämtade till, och sa att den var mycket bra. Jag kände mig rik som ägde ett sånt föremål. Det var förstås inte som ekocentret på riktigt men en bit av den att ha hemma. Jag tror inte att pappa gillade ekocentret, sa jag. Mamma tog bort kalejdoskopet från ögonen. Hon såg bekymrad ut. Pappa jobbade som en reporter när han var ung, försökte hon förklara. Han reste mycket. Men det var ju det vi hade gjort idag? En jordenruntresa – hemifrån, sa de på reklamen. Vi hade rest med ekocentret. Jag förstod inte. Det var annorlunda förut, sa mamma.

Jag har inte kvar många av pappas kartor. Några finns på vinden, andra har jag gett bort och faktiskt sålt, men några har jag satt upp i min lägenhet. Över mitt skrivbord hänger en gammal karta över ön Ven. Tycho Brahes observatorium är tydligt utritat mitt på ön. Det var där han satt och försökte beskriva och förklara världen. Jag tycker att det är lite lustigt att man kan förklara världen så att säga uppifrån nedifrån. Resten av ön är relativt sparsamt tecknad i förhållande till observatoriets exakthet. Jag ser på den med en sorts ironisk respekt, en påminnelse. Han var en person som ville skapa sina egna kartor, men som inte riktigt kunde se det som fanns omkring honom. En gång på åttiotalet gjorde jag en resa till Nordafrika, ungefär samma tur som pappa gjorde då en gång i tiden. Det var mycket längre än jag hade trott och resan tog flera veckor. Jag tänkte hela tiden på hur pappa kan ha upplevt det jag såg, vad han kan ha sett, och insåg så småningom att min resa inte hade någon mening. Pappa hade dött året innan och han fanns varken i Nordafrika eller någon annanstans. Sen dess kan man väl säga att jag inte har flyttat på mig. Jag ville inte bli en sån som letar efter sig själv

överallt. Man behöver inte hela världen för att försöka förstå den, men jag förstår nu att pappa ville ha mer. Här var inte nog, han kunde inte vänja sig. För andra räcker det med en ö.

What is Climaginaries?

Climaginaries is a three-year research project initiated in September 2018, financed through the Swedish research council FORMAS. The overarching aim of Climaginaries is to advance the understanding of imaginaries as means through which to catalyse the forms of political, economic, and social responses required for transitioning to a post-fossil society. We want to understand better what climate imaginaries are, how they come into being, how they are being used and in what ways they might help the transformation towards a more sustainable future. We therefore also aim to enable new ways of telling stories of how climate change is experienced, lived with and how we might reach a post-fossil world.

More information can be found at: <https://www.climaginaries.org>



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