

what once was

move with me
like the clouds
do the sky
slowly dancing
to nowhere
but with everywhere
to go
- anonymous

TO THE NEXT GENERATION,

LEARN FROM OUR MISTAKES AND CHERISH YOUR PLANET. THIS STORY IS DEDICATED TO YOU, THE STEWARDS OF TOMORROW, IN THE HOPE THAT YOU'LL SAFEGUARD EARTH'S FUTURE WITH WISDOM AND CARE. IT'S UP TO YOU NOW.



The last leaf on the last tree on the last planet starts to fall.

Twenty-sixth of February, 2051 - Earth One

You used to sit on the front porch all day, ice tea in hand - back then it was hot and humid and sweat trickled down your spine like a runaway train. Back then, the sun blazed a trail everywhere it went - painting trees shades of yellow, orange, and gold. The dogs that were barking for a stick turned rusty and red all over. Nowadays, the sun doesn't come out as much, and when it does it isn't the same. Men from the news tell you, *the sea levels are rising rapidly. Flood warnings are in place.*

Some people said it was just rubbish, something that would scare the Left Behind, but others said it was coming no matter what. You are too young to understand, and you ask Ma what they are talking about. But instead of an answer, she holds you close, puts her hand in your hair, and says in a calm voice, *"Don't worry about it muffin. It's going to be okay."*

The sun slips beyond the clouds, it's farewell like a whispered secret. You wonder where it goes. Is it going to a better place? Ma calls you inside, and you leave your drink resting on the windowsill. You don't come back for it.

The leaf swoops lower towards the ground, carried along on the last echoes of wind - if there were anyone left, they would smell the thick layer of radioactive waste lingering in the air. The leaf drifts downward on the breeze and waves goodbye to where the family of squirrels used to be. It waits patiently for a reply that never comes.

Eighth of November, 3946 - Earth Four

It was the 899th anniversary of humanity coming to Earth Four. It wasn't like the first Earth - the air tasted sweeter, the sun was warmer, and heat licked your back like a puppy, or like flames...

You lie in a bed made of flowers, their beauty unlike anything on the other planets. Curly hair drifts in the wind, strewn across your freckled face. Warmth hits your skin like the heat of the oil lamps you forgot to turn off. As the gentle sway of the meadow's tall grasses lulls you into a peaceful sleep, your eyelids grow heavy, and you surrender to the whispers of slumber beneath a golden sky. You dream.

You dream about Earth One, and wonder about the lives the people there lived. Were they like you? You think about what you had learnt in class - how humans had drained the life of Earth One like insatiable parasites. The more humankind harmed the planets they clung to, the worse it got - melting ice caps caused floods that swallowed countries whole, and emissions from cars and cities rendered the air unbreathable: suffocating and choking entire populations. The scientists realized what was happening too late.

The people who couldn't afford the rockets became the Left Behind, those who could went to Earth Two. Before that was destroyed as well. Scientists stayed in contact with Earth One for five years before they lost connection. You can only wonder: what happened?

You stir from the depths of a peaceful dream, the meadow breeze gliding through the tall grass, carrying with it the sweet scent of wildflowers. But as consciousness begins to dawn, a sharp tang of smoke taints the air: a sense of unease within.

With eyes fluttering open, you behold a once serene landscape - now blurred by a haze of rising smoke, tongues of fire licking hungrily at the edges of your vision. Panic surges through you as realization dawns - it is coming, tendrils creeping closer with each passing moment. The tranquillity of the meadow shattered, replaced by the urgent need to run. Run. Run. Run. But there was nowhere to go.



The leaf embraces the ground - its touch upon the barren land sends shockwaves through the empty planet. Alongside it, the last signs of humanity disappear; leaving behind only silence and the memory of what once was.

<https://open.spotify.com/track/4J7s7j5ulwElPG7HaGQDXR?si=a0583451ca4148b2>