
The sounds of the city had been fainter than usual that morning.

Thalia liked leaving the windows open for air when they slept, but Seattle was so noisy. She laid in bed, half awake, half asleep, listening to the cars and sirens and trains and airplanes. Nightmares still whispered. They came worse if the windows were left ajar. Everything was worse this year, worse than any year. The dense politics created an agony across the country, the world. The constant bleak news squeezed the air out of the city. Between the high-rise condos, offices, and buildings, distress fell into the city like an emergency mask dropped down from above. The world was losing pressure and plummeting. One could not even trust the air.

Last night there had been yet another march—with thousands upon thousands of people to protest the most recent action from the President. Thalia had lost track of what the President had done this time. Thankfully these citizens hadn't. As much as she wanted to resist along with them all, sometimes she simply needed to sleep.

She opened her eyes and lay in bed. Trying to drive the nightmares of her few hours of sleep from her mind while simultaneously remembering the night before.

Tense from work, tense from reading the news, tense from watching prices on food quadruple in the last month, tense from rummaging the freezer for dinner, tense from trying to find enough air to breathe, Thalia's bones ached. Last night, all she had the energy to resist was the noise from the streets below. She shut the windows as snug as they'd go to hold off the constricting city air.

As she baked frozen pizza and unzipped a convenience salad pack, she realized that at least this particular march was a peaceful one. She'd joined several of the other marches before this one, but they were occurring weekly now and if she wanted to keep her job, she couldn't join them all. Americans who still had jobs to go to, they, like her still worked—40 hours a week, 8am to 5pm. Like she did. Like always. What else could they do? One still had a mortgage, still had to eat, still had children.

People now occasionally tried on Normal Behavior like it was a new pair of jeans. *Does this peaceful attitude make me look like a fat banker?*

Sometimes, it was the best one could do. It encouraged survival. It included girls with sleepovers.

Her daughter, Bee, had her best friend, Rory, over for a sleepover and they had done what any 13-year-old girls would do—watch a movie, eat chocolate, and talk about music, movies, soccer, their classes, even a little about love.

After handing them their dinners, Thalia found a good movie for them to watch. She clicked the lights off and shut the blinds in their condo, settling them into the inky darkness of the Pacific Northwest at 8pm in the winter. It was the best Thalia could do and it gave Bee some peace.

Her son, August, 13 years old like his twin sister, spent his usual evening playing video games and only went to sleep when Thalia threatened to confiscate his electronics. The prohibition on “Excessive Internet Use” imposed by the government limited August’s computer time. Since Thalia had told him he would pay the hefty fine, not her, if the government caught him, he didn’t resist his mother or bed.

The windows had sealed out the noise; eventually sleep had hunted them all down.

So, she wasn’t surprised at how quiet it was when she woke up. Unfortunately, the morning quiet allowed her mind to wander, to fill worry as it often did these days.

Election year had come and gone. An entire country stood, open-palmed, as their rights blew like shredded prayer flags onto the side of a never-visited mountain in a hurricane gale. Beautiful, useless poetry.

The people not frozen, however, protested. Enough people had lost their jobs to fill the streets of most major cities anyway. The marches stepped up weekly. Bans and rights once fought for by indigenous blood, women’s rights as well; jail time lifted for white collar criminals, as well as environmental protections—all lifted with the ease of lace skirts in a breeze. The dissonance was sickening if one paid attention. New bans, spurred on by zealot churches and banks and mining corporations, slammed down with the heat and heave of a forge. A perpetual rise and crash of terrible allowances and worse restrictions.

The people of the earth. Shades of skin, genders, and ethnicities were played coyly as pawns against each other by corporations in an engineered for-profit war. Hate whispered like demon butterfly wings across the world. In places where once was peace, worship became a warship.

City water in municipalities now matched the skin color of the people who lived there. The pipeline company executives, white as their privilege-treated water, paid the police who murdered the indigenous tribes who fought for the clear streams that afterward ran red.

The borders between nations, now walls with cameras and guards. Infants and children corralled and kept to punish their parents who tried to cross a country line in hope for a better life.

Like naked children with all their dignity removed, the American people protested. And even that right was being stripped away. Tear gas and pepper spray hurled into crowds by storm-troopers, masked police. Resist. Persist.

The Earth herself. All corners of the world were either flooding or ablaze. Daily a new fire was announced—California, Australia, British Columbia. Rising sea levels had taken Venice, the coast of Vietnam, parts of the Netherlands, and were threatening Seattle’s coast. Areas of the world she’d had on her bucket list of places to see, destroyed by crude oil spills, by mining, by floods, by fires. The Amazon. The Congo. Denali. Certainly the areas on the earth still existed, but now charred dark ash. Wildlife photographers now captured deathlike swathes of black earth and crumbling, burnt trees instead of pungent rich green miles of verdant jungle and forest.

The news last night used the term The Sixth Mass Extinction again.

The last rhino. The last Patagonian huemul deer. The last klugi dragonfly. The last sundew flower. Animals she’d dreamt of seeing. Gone. Vaquita porpoises. Orca whales. The last ones. Gone. No one would ever see them again—except as a feature on the International Union for Conservation of Nature’s Black List. More than once, she had imagined a what-if scenario—she and her children, the last humans. Who would be left to put them on a list? *What would it be like to die knowing your child was the last of her species?*

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