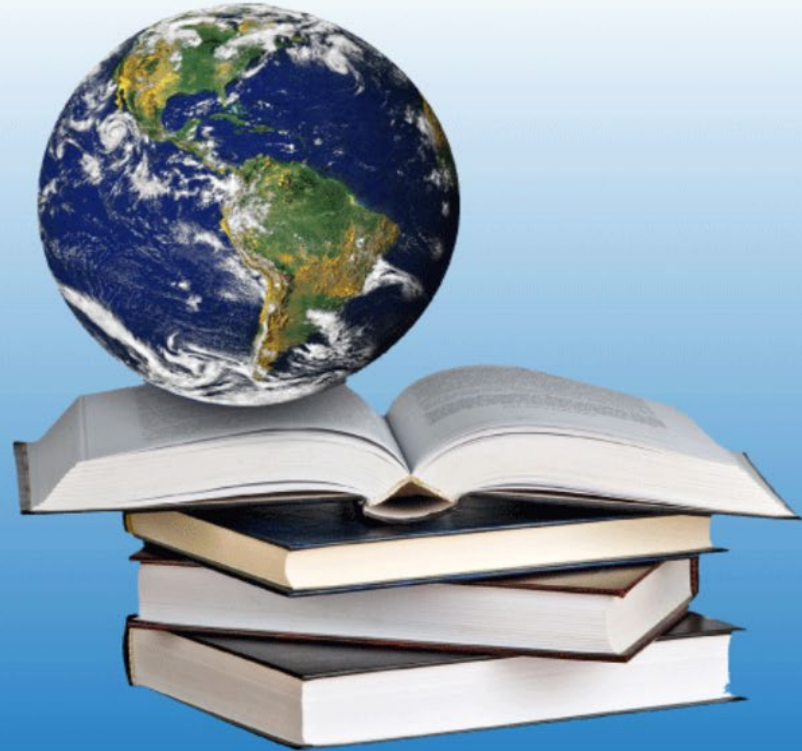


Climate Future Fiction 2022

A Citizen Science project at SDU



Best stories in class

Authors: Written by high school students from Nyborg Gymnasium, Svendborg Gymnasium, Middelfart Gymnasium and Odense Katedralskole.

About the project: In 2022 seven high school classes participated in the citizen science project *Climate Future Fiction*, as a part of their English course. Each student participated in a flash fiction exercise and expanded afterwards this to a short story. The focus was to develop fictional stories about how, in 2062, climate change will have impacted the lives of people. Here is a collection of the best short stories from each class.

[See more about the project here](#)

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If you use any of the stories or extracts from the stories, we expect you to acknowledge the project and the researchers (Patricia Wolf, Bryan Yazell and Karl Michael Attard). If you publish any research related to the stories, please inform the researchers (pawo@sam.sdu.dk; yazell@sdu.dk and karl.attard@biology.sdu.dk).

Short stories

Center of the World

Untitled (Short Story no. 15)

Below the Surface

The Great Flooding

Eternity Sand

Over the Hill

Changes are not for Everyone

The center of the world

The air is crispy and cold. My footprints in the soft, fresh snow show my path up the mountain, along the spruces heavy of snow and icicles. I'm surrounded by a circle of triangular mountaintops, as far as the eye can see, as if I'm the center of the world. There isn't a single cloud on the sky. I look up at the top of this tall mountain, the tallest of them all. The top is almost as small as a star and blends in with the rest of countless shining stars, on the dark blue night sky. Only the sound of my boots towards the snow interrupts the calmness of this quiet night. I look over my shoulder, at the breathtaking landscape of mountains, and as my footsteps go quiet for a moment, the sound of the waves is suddenly hearable. The pitch-black ocean beneath me is getting closer, rising faster than ever. I must reach the top, before the water reaches me. I continue my journey, faster than before, and my white breath is visible in the cold, dark blue air. The frozen leaves shiver as I walk through them.

After walking for a while, the trees around me get smaller and smaller. I walk further, until they at last disappear. Being so far away from actual ground, nothing is able to grow anymore. The mountain is now bare rock, except for the meters of snow covering it. I continue my trip carefully, through the thick layers of snow. As I look over my shoulder, the trees are now completely gone, and covered by the ocean, as if they were seaweed. Only the snow-covered mountains, the stars, and the dark ocean are there to keep me company. I can't see anything underneath the water's surface, except pitch-black darkness. I continue my walk, mindful that I don't fall into the deep, endless sea.

Suddenly I hear footsteps behind me and turn around. "Is anyone there?". No one answers, but I hold my breath, as the silhouette of a tall shadow appears through the mist. "Hello", answers the shadow, who towers over me. She's wearing a big leather coat, big boots and big gloves. She doesn't have to tell me her name, or introduce herself in any way, I recognize her immediately. She smiles at me, and I can tell she recognizes me too. She's the last person I'd expected to see here. "Eda, I can't believe you're here". "I could tell you the same thing", she replies, with her warm voice. Neither of us ask each other why we are here, or where we are going. After all, there is only one way - up. I look hesitantly at Eda, but we start walking side by side. I look over my shoulder and see the water closer than ever. The top of the mountain feels as far away as the stars. It is nice to see her again, and she holds my hand to keep it warm. Not long after, she starts humming a melody. At

first, it feels as if the melody is buried deep inside and far into my brain. The longer Eda hums the melody, the more I remember, and suddenly I catch myself humming along. It quickly feels like we aren't climbing a mountain but are just back in the schoolyard. We continue walking, hand in hand.

Out of nowhere, snowflakes slowly start falling. At first, they are smaller than a grain of sand, but quickly turn big and icy. The wind starts blowing fog around the air, and everything turns into misty dust. I wrap my scarf tighter around me, and continue walking, as fast as I can. The more steps I take, the more difficult it gets. It feels as if I'm walking towards, and into, a cold wall. The snowflakes feel like needles on my cheeks. I see Eda's silhouette in front of me, but only vaguely. A strong puff of wind almost knocks me over. I can't see anything but grey fog, not even my feet are visible. "Eda?!" I yell, whilst panicking and trying to look around. I hear her voice somewhere, vaguely. The snowflakes cover everything, and I have no idea where she is. I yell again and again, whilst looking around hysterically. No one answers. The snow now reaches and covers my knees, and I know I have to keep going, if I want to escape being buried in snow, and soon on the ocean too. I try to work my way up the mountain, through the storm, whilst looking for Eda. I can still only see snow through the fog, and not a single glimpse of her big coat.

After walking for a while, the storm slowly fades out. The snowflakes get smaller and smaller, until they disappear completely. The fog fades away as well, and soon I am able to look around again, and see my own footsteps. Behind me, the ocean is closer than ever, rising very fast, and my heart beats even faster. The top of the mountain, however, is also closer than ever. I just have to keep going. The thick layer of snow is difficult to walk through, so I walk much slower than before. My eyes are still searching for Eda but can't see her anywhere. The mountain is huge, and she could be everywhere. We'll meet at the top, I tell myself, she's probably finding her own path somewhere.

I am closer to the stars than ever and feel like I'll almost be able to touch them when I reach the mountaintop. It isn't far away, and I start to walk faster. The path gets steeper, and the closer I get, the more I have to climb instead of walk. I climb very slowly and carefully, to make sure I don't lose grip and fall deep into the black ocean underneath me. My hands feel frozen, and my clothes are wet of snow, when I finally take the last step, and reach the top of the mountain. I look around, but

no one is here yet. I look down, into the ocean, that slowly absorbs the snow and mountains. The water is rising all around me, as if I'm the center of the world, here, on top of the world. All of the mountaintops around me gets smaller and smaller, until they look just like upside-down ice-cream-cones. There is still time, Eda can still make it. I expect her to show up, through the darkness, any time now. In the meantime, I open up my backpack, and pull out my fishing rod. I throw the long line into the ocean, and sit down, hoping to catch something before Eda arrives. My feet dangle over the mountain's edge, as I look for Eda, and attempt to catch us a meal.

Below the surface

In 2050 a warm April day it began to rain. And it didn't stop. It just kept raining and raining, making the water rise all over the world. The water in small ponds and lakes overflowed speeding the process up. The water was a strange temperature, it wasn't cold, nor warm, but warm enough to melt the ice in the two poles as soon as it hit. The water was rising at an alarming speed. The weather scientists and researchers gave the world a couple of months before what was known would be completely covered in water. The small islands where the first to go. Then came the cities and countries closest to the ocean, including the city once called Chicago.

Alfred had lived all of his five years in this city, his entire life he had lived here. He knew everyone and everyone knew him. The city was like any other city, with its houses, streets, supermarkets, gardens and all the things that come with a city. The only difference was that the year now read 2062, and the city was under water. And the reason Alfred knew everyone was because he had never been outside the giant dome that was their life.

The month leading up to the flood, the citizens of Chicago, had spent every waking moment building a colossal dome that could hold most of the city. So, when the water arrived, they were ready. The water slowly swallowed the buildings in the enormous bubble, renaming the city Seachago. The sea through bubble as everything Alfred knew and would ever come to know. His everyday consisted of school with the other kindergarteners, checking the bubbles walls for leaks with his parents and starrng longingly at the surface above. His favorite past time was looking up at what his parents called "the surface". The surface was in Alfred's eyes the most dazzling thing to ever exist. He would spend hours on end, watching the glistening surface, where lights flickered. It looked like a painting had come to life, hundreds of different shades of blue and green, slowly blending and swirling around one another. The colors in there never-ending game of tag with each other. His favorite part was when specks of yellow would show their rare appearances. Instantly he would burst out laughing, clapping his small hands. He then knew the sun had come out and was somewhere up there. He had only ever heard stories of the sun. A warm glowing ball that was said to tickle your skin and make flora

bloom. Alfred just knew it was beautiful beyond imagination. His biggest wish was to one day see it, to rise from under the surface and feel the rays of sunlight. His wish grew bigger and bigger for each day, until it consumed every part of his tiny body. It was this wish that presumably made him “forget” to alert his parents of the hole, he one day found in the bubble. The hole was no bigger than a football. Water was steadily running through it onto the pavement. Alfred stood, watching it, while an internal battle raged inside of him. *To stay or not to stay*. One to many adventure books could have been the convincing factor. Alfred ran as fast as his small legs could carry him, all the way home. Here he rushed into his room, his yellow room, grabbed his yellow goggles and his favorite stingray teddy bear, Mr. Sunray. Together they found themselves in front of the hole in the dome once again. An old moldy wheelbarrow made the stairs for Alfred. He climbed on top, once again stopping up. Reconsidering his decision. Hesitantly and slowly, he lifted his arm touching the water. He then took a deep breath and squeezed through the hole, finding himself floating in the clear blue water, slowly rising to the surface. For some reason, a song started playing in his head, his mother’s bedtime lullaby:

You are my sunshine
My only sunshine
You make me happy
When skies are gray

You'll never know, dear
How much I love you
Please don't take
My sunshine away

It was the little boys love for the sun which had driven him to this crazy decision. With no oxygen, no sense of direction, and no way of learning how to swim, the boy would be expected to panic. Alfred did not panic. He smiled as the minutes went on, because of the light that now entered his vision. Blinding white light, which could only be the sun. He was still

smiling as his tiny body grew quiet, never loosening his grip on Mr. Sunray. He was still smiling because he had seen the sun. Smiling, floating below the surface, as the sun luminated the ocean.

Short story

My great grandmother was one of the last 'Earthers'. She lived on Earth until she moved to Mars at age 24 together with what was left of humanity. The population was only about four million people back then. It sounds weird considering how many there once lived on Earth and how many we are today. She had witnessed the condition of Earth worsen as she grew up. The weather got more and more extreme. They barely had enough food to survive. The animals died of inexplicable reasons. Fortunately, NASA had been working on establishing a community on Mars. They had figured out a new way of life for humans. I contained drastically changes, but they all knew that a new 'home' was a necessity. Humanity simple could not survive on Earth. They had damaged it too much. Taken its resources for granted for way too long. Even though climate changes had been visible to everyone for centuries, no one did anything significant enough to stop the climate changes. Everyone listened to the politicians who promised everything would be alright eventually, and that it was possible to stop climate change. But of course, it wasn't. Humanity had simply damaged earth too much for it to be fixed ever again.

Back then they didn't have the same technology as we have nowadays. They had to physically fly every single human to Mars in a spaceship. They didn't know how to teleport. Isn't that crazy? Somehow, their plan about flying everyone to Mars succeeded. Then they just had to start a new way of life as Martians. Some people died during the first few years because they forgot their spacesuits when going outside, but other than that, the former Earthers enjoyed life on Mars. When the first generations of new Martians grew up and started asking questions about Earth, they were told everything there is to know. They even had a subject in school called 'Earth-history'. But as time went by, the Martians got less and less interested in humanity's former life on Earth. Slowly Earth was forgotten. But I haven't forgotten Earth. I love reading and listening to stories about Earth. My friends think I am crazy because I don't have the same interest as them. They don't care about history and the past. They only care about the future. Just like everyone else.

Last year I found the journal my great grandmother kept when she was moving from Earth to Mars. I have read it many times because I am so fascinated with her life. She has written detailed descriptions of what her house back on Earth looked like, the people she travelled with and even her hopes for the future during this time. I can only imagine how it must have felt to leave Earth behind.

Just to give up on it, because humanity had been too selfish and ignored every single sign about Earth slowly becoming uninhabitable. It must have been terrifying leaving Earth behind and just move to another planet.

I also feel a lot closer to my great grandmother when I read her journal. I feel like I know her just from reading her journal, even though I have never met her. There is one story in her journal that especially made an impact on me. It is the story about the day she had to leave it behind. Earth. Moving to Mars was optional. My great grandmother believed that humanity only had one chance of surviving. On earth. She thought that moving to Mars was very unnatural and not what was meant to happen. She addressed this many times in her journal. My great grandmother would rather have chosen to stay behind and 'go down with Earth' as she described in her journal. But for the sake of humanity, she chose to move anyway. In her journal she also described, that leaving Earth behind was like leaving a piece of herself behind. She was not complete without Earth. This makes me feel so sad. She prioritized humanity over herself and what she really wanted. I am in awe and will forever be grateful for her making this unselfish decision.

Speaking of decisions. I am currently considering participating in an expedition to Earth. The University of Mars is making a study on Earth, and they are planning on sending a team of trained Martians to Earth. They want to check if Earth will ever be safe for humans to live on again, and they need volunteers. I want to do this for my great grandmother. To live her dream. To visit Earth for her. The expedition will be extremely difficult because we have no idea what to expect. Earth might be thriving again. It might be in even worse condition, than when it was left behind. The only way to find out is to go there. Although I might risk my life by participating in this expedition, I am still curious. I want to see the home of my ancestors. I want to experience the planet where it all started.

Ten months later.

Today is the day. I am leaving Mars to go to Earth. I am saying my last goodbyes to my loved ones before the journey. I am not afraid of never returning to Mars. I want to follow the footsteps of my

great grandmother, even though I must leave everything and everyone I love behind. During these last few hours on Mars, I am thinking about her. She must have felt the same way I am feeling now. The difference is that her travel took about seven months, while my travel will take just a few seconds thanks to teleporting. She must have been so scared.

On one hand I feel honored to get the opportunity to visit Earth. But on the other hand, I am furious. If humanity had done something to save Earth, when Earth was still worth saving, I wouldn't be in this situation. We would have just stayed on our home-planet. Feeling safe. Feeling curious about outer space. I wish I could go back in time and tell people to fight for Earth. Tell them that living in outer space isn't as great as it seems. There is a reason why life started on Earth. They will sacrifice more than what they will gain from moving to outer space.

This is it. I am walking into the teleport-machine. Having second thoughts. Feeling nauseous. Feeling curious. Feeling scared. I press the button. Close my eyes. The journey begins. I feel the usual rush from teleporting. Suddenly I feel a light breeze on my skin. I hear unusual sounds. I must be on Earth now. I do not dare to open my eyes. What if all my worst nightmares about Earth will be true? What if Earth lives up to all my hopes and dreams? I take a deep breath and open my eyes. I am shocked.

The great flooding

2062 - the polar caps have melted after a climate catastrophe and the water masses have flooded the continents. The few people who survived live on boats or the few islands that are left. Those have once been high mountains like Mount Everest or Godwin Austen. The people hardly get any resources and it's a hard life.

"Oh shit!" The small, dainty girl cursed loudly. There was no one here who would complain to her anyway. Yelena had woken up just to see it raining heavily outside. She disappeared below deck again, only to return shortly afterwards with two large buckets. This was the perfect opportunity to refill her low water supply. It hadn't rained for days and her supplies were running very low. She still had enough food. Cans were stored in her small kitchen and she even had a small lemon tree on board. Yelena was one of the few who survived the disaster. She had taken precautions and stowed many necessities on the boat, but she had almost not come on board when it happened. She had now been at sea for several weeks. Until now she hadn't met anyone, but she was sure to meet other survivors at some point. This hope was not disappointed. A few days later, she actually met another boat. It just appeared on the horizon and when she saw through her telescope, she recognized a boy on the other boat. At first she didn't notice it, but later she could see another ship. Meanwhile, the boy was close enough to be able to communicate with her. "Turn around and see you get out of here!" He sounded panicked. "Why? Who are they?" "The Pirates on their hunt." "What are they hunting?" "US!" Her eyes widened. She turned around and ran to the wheel. In a daring maneuver, she turned the ship around and sailed as fast as she could. She heard the pirates behind them roaring contemptuously. She picked up speed and soon had overtaken the boy, who would have no chance on his boat. The pirates were close. Suddenly, something hissed towards her and hit the rear of the boy's boat. It was something like a harpoon attached with a rope. Another bullet hissed in. "You need to come over here!" Yelena shouted in panic into his direction. The boy looked at her in amazement and fear. He began to sail closer to her skeptically. He slowly moved to the railing. "Hurry up! Jump!" She leaned over to him and nodded to him confidently. He jumped and Yelena grabbed his hands. The boy was now just holding hands above the water and was quite panicked again. But Yelena used all her strength and pulled the boy onto her ship. When she had just made it, all you could hear was a hiss and shortly afterwards her cry of pain. A harpoon had scratched her leg. She gritted her teeth and grabbed the wheel. She started the engine and the boat picked up speed again. The pirates became smaller and smaller, until at some point they were gone. Yelena collapsed and tore off a piece of fabric from her shirt. She tied it around her leg to stop the bleeding. The boy sat in shock in a corner of the boat and looked at her with widened eyes. "That was close." "Too close," she said.

The next few days passed quietly. The boy had introduced himself as Zane and helped on the boat wherever and whenever he could. They had plenty of time to talk and he told her that he had lost his father to the great flooding. He had been traveling alone since then and then came across the pirates. Yelena became sad and began to tell her story... She remembered it as if it was yesterday.

Yelena ran as fast as she could. She hadn't expected it to happen today. She had grabbed her mother and little brother by the hand and dragged them with her. She ran purposefully towards the spot where she had built her boat. But there were so many people in the harbor that after a short time she lost sight of her family in the crowd. They were simply gone. She had been looking for them, but when she had no success, she ran to her boat - hoping to meet her brother and mother there. Her hopes were dashed and when the flood came, she

knew they wouldn't come again. Now she didn't even know if they were still alive or death.

"I'll help you find them! Let's do it together." Without a word Yelena gave him a big hug. She was so happy not to be alone anymore and to have found a good friend.

"Yelena, would you please come for a second!" Yelena hurried on deck. She came to him and took the telescope from his hand. When she looked through, she recognized a ship. It was a huge tanker. "Pirates?" "I don't think so... I just don't know what else it is. Maybe some survivors." "Should we try and sail towards them?" "Let's try!" Zane changed course. They were now heading straight for the big tanker. As they got closer, they realized that there were a lot of people on it and that several boats were stowed on the sides of the ship. A ladder was lowered. Yelena and Zane exchanged a look. Yelena grabbed the ladder. "Take the wheel for a moment." She climbed up and arrived on deck shortly afterwards. An older man was already waiting there. He smiled brightly at her, "Welcome on board." He called over his shoulder. "Guys, another ship is waiting to be stored!" Several men climbed down the ladder and stowed the ship. Zane came up instead and asked: "Who are you?" "Survivors - just like you! We organized this boat days before the flooding and are now something like a reception center for refugees." "How do you have all the resources for so many people?" Yelena was honestly amazed. "Let's introduce ourselves first. I am the captain of this ship, but just call me Bob. Who are you?" "I'm Yelena and this is Zane. I just met him a few days ago." "Are you all alone?" "I don't know if my family is still alive. Zane lost his dad." Yelena looks down sadly. "Wait - is your name Yelena Wreed?" Yelena's eyes widened. "How do you know?" The old man laughed happily. "I met your brother" "Sammy is here? Where is he? Can he come, please!" Bob turned to one of his men: "Jack, would you please go and get Sammy?" The men disappeared and Yelena could hardly sit calm. Zane hugged her reassuringly. "He's alive. You have your brother back." "Yeah, I still can't believe it... What about my mother. Is she alive?" "I'm sorry, your mother didn't make it..." Yelena swallowed. She had already guessed it, but it was harder to really be sure.

Then someone rushed towards her. It was her little brother. He ran towards her and when he arrived Yelena lifted him into her arms and whirled him around. "Sammy, I have missed you so much. I thought you were dead. I'm so sorry I couldn't protect you and mum" "Big sister, I will always come back to you. I love you. Mamma would be proud!" Meanwhile, tears ran down Yelena's cheeks. She would never leave him alone again. She wouldn't let him go all afternoon and as evening came, Sammy fell asleep in her arms. Zane had looked at the two with a smile at their reunion. Now he turned to the Captain. "You haven't answered Yelena's question yet. How did you manage to have so much food and water for everyone?" "Oh, a few tricks I picked up on a trip to Africa. We get the water every time it rains. We have several large basins where it is kept. Everywhere on the tanker are rain gutters, where the rainwater can flow into the basins. We also have several greenhouses on board. In addition, we use two methods to save water. One of them is Deep Water Culture, where you place several plants in holes in a plastic tube. The pipe is filled up with water to the top and at the end of the pipe there is a pump and a filter system. The other option is called Nutrient Film Technique and for this we needed the same plastic pipes where we can accommodate the plants. However, these pipes are not fully filled. It's a system that is constantly in motion. There is a draining hose, which fills the water into another container where it is filtered and pumped back into the plant tube with a pump. So you can reuse the water." "Wow, I didn't think it could be so effective. I guess this could work for some time." Bob's expression was worried and he didn't answer. "Bob! What's wrong?" "You see, there are some problems. I'll tell you tomorrow!" There was a silence until Bob made a good proposal to the three of them.

"I think I should look for a cabin for you children now and you should go to sleep very quickly!" This was followed by murmurs of approval. Zane helped Yelena by gently lifting the little boy out of her lap. He took Sammy in his arms and Yelena stood up. When they entered their cabin and Zane laid Sammy in a bed, he found himself in a surprise embrace from Yelena. "Thank you!" He smiled and when she broke away he pressed a kiss on her forehead. After that, the two also lay down in their beds and Zane fell asleep shortly after, but Yelena thought of the last words of Bob: there are some problems."

The next morning, Yelena woke up late. The previous day had contained so much tension that she had been exhausted. Zane and Sammy had apparently already gotten up. Their beds were empty. Yelena quickly changed her clothes and left the cabin to go on deck. She met Bob. "Yelena, come with me. I'll show you right away where you can get your breakfast. Besides, I need to tell you and Zane something important." There was it again. This worried expression on the captain's face. When they finally got to Zane and Sammy, Yelena sent her little brother outside to play with other children. She suspected worse news and did not want to burden Sammy with it. He already had far too much to carry on his little shoulders anyway. Zane asked: "What is it?" Bob looked serious." Well, the truth is, that our systems aren't that professional. Firstly: Rain is water that has evaporated from the Earth's surface and risen and eventually falls back down to Earth. When ascending, it leaves behind all the minerals and the pollutants. However, if the water falls back to earth in the normal way, it absorbs all sorts of things: dust, bacteria, pollen ... The longer it stands, the greater the risk that possible pathogens will multiply in it. In the EU, rainwater was not approved as drinking water due to the possible contamination with bacteria. There are already several cases of illness on this tanker, and I fear we won't be able to get by with rainwater for more than a few years." An oppressive silence ensued. Yelena felt queasy. Here stood the captain of the ship and tried to explain to them that they all probably only had a few years to live. It took her some time to digest the shock. "Thank you for telling us Captain. I guess there's nothing we can do about it?" "I'm sorry, we haven't found a solution, yet."

Zane and Yelena had withdrawn. In their cabin, they looked at each other seriously. "I had so many plans. Looks like we're screwed. Right?" Yelena nodded. "If there's anything you really want to do - better do it now!" Zane looked at her. "There's only one thing I really must do. Stay with you the rest of my life!" "It's not that hard anymore, " Yelena said sarcastically, "Firstly, we are on this ship for the rest of our lives anyway and secondly, we probably won't live much longer."



Nutrient Film Technique



Eternity sand

Flickers from the fire blew in the wind. All she could see was smolder and fire. Strength, light, and warmth as well as chaos, death, and malice. She had always been fascinated by fire. The colors and the way it spread so easily. It was so alive but then again just as dead. It was like an ex-boyfriend that kept coming back, just to leave as quickly as he entered her life. It was not always like this. At times there was no fire, then there was sand. Everywhere. It used to be dirt, but she liked to call it sand, since it had the same color as sand, and it was dry like sand. She did not live in a desert. It did look like one sometimes. Only, a desert does not burn. People called her land “The dead land”. She did not think of it that way. She thought there was beauty in the way it never changed. She had always been different in every way. Maybe it was because of her appearance. Her black hair acted like a wild animal. Untamed. Her brown eyes made her look guilty. Her former classmates called her “crane fly” since her legs were quite long, and she walked like one. The teacher told her to stop having such a dark mind. It must have been her drawing that led him to think she had a shadowy mindset. In class once, they had to do a project and she handed in one of her drawings. It was a tree more specifically the ogre tree in the school yard. She could have used green for the leaves, but she decided not to. The tree wasn’t green, then why would she color it green? The only green thing on the tree was the plastic covering the top. That was common. To hide the dead branches on trees with artificial neon green chunks. The project had the title “Hope”. Although the tree was dead, she hoped that it would stay unharmed for many years. It had a story to tell, she hoped someone could see that. It symbolized a time where humans took care of nature. The tree was gone the following year and replaced with one made of plastic. She could remember how she spend her break crying in the schools’ toilets. Just to go outside and hear students praise the replacement. Saying that it was more nature-like and beautifully done. One of the girls even said, “It was about time they took down that old mess”.

Picturing the old tree became harder and harder. Especially when she went for walks in the sand. Sand. Everywhere and then again; It wasn’t sand. It was cinder mixed with dirt. It haunted her in her nightmares and kissed her in her dreams. Now that it was the only thing she looked at. She did not think it was scary. She wasn’t scared of destruction or of the world ending. She had one big fear. She would like to think it did not control her, but it did deep down. Distracting herself helped her cope with the fear. She could spend hours drawing. At the end her hands would be covered in the black ink. Her fingers moved quick and silently on the canvas while the white surface turned into a new world of vessels, smaller ships, and war on the open sea. When she thought of the people

starving further north, one of the last forests burning outside the capital and about all the people, who had lost their home in the chaos. Then her fingers would move even faster and the war on the canvas, would become brutal and inhuman. The waves could sometimes swallow a whole vessel and it would disappear and be replaced with a black spot on the canvas. When the waves filled the whole painting, she could start over. She would avoid showing the black paintings to her dad, when he visited and asked to see her creations. He used to be a painter as well. He did not retire as the government called it; however, he was forced to work in the coal-fired power station. He would come home with black hands and clothes covered in a smell of black smoke. She got some of her inspiration from his dirty hands. At the beginning, she drew his hands on the canvas. His comments were always the same:

“Use some colors, it is too dark”

She could have used beige for the hands, but she decided not to. The hands weren't beige, then why would she color them beige? After she moved to her new room and away from her dad, she started to draw “wars at sea” as she called them. Never had she seen the sea, but she imagined it to be black. She knew that it used to be blue, like in the old songs, but she was sure, that it had turned black because of pollution. All these thoughts started outside, the first time she saw the sand, when she moved into her new room. The fire came in December. A warm night. She had woken up and looked outside, where she saw the fire dancing in the sand. When she told her friend about the fires, he didn't believe her. “Sand can't burn just like that. You must be making it up!”

She decided to paint the fire for him next time it came around. She showed him a week later a black drawing with big flames covering the paper. He looked at the drawing and called her crazy. She could have used red or orange for the flames, but she decided not to. The flames weren't red or orange, then why would she color them red or orange?

She could go around in the sand for hours and almost feel like she was a part of it. Then a sinking feeling would go through her stomach and her legs would carry her away and inside her room. When she talked with her classmates about their art projects and they asked to see hers, she would leave them baffled.

“Don't you have any hope for the future?”

“That is very dark”

Her biggest fear wasn't the judgment from other people. It wasn't to get retired like her dad and wasn't nature disappearing. It was not fire either. Her biggest fear was becoming sand for all eternity.

Changes are not for everyone

“So please, Aram, tell me some more about yourself” asked the interviewer. He was a nice-looking man with glasses and a very expensive-looking suit. “Well, I live together with my wife Monique, and we like to travel together. We like to hike and be outside and visit places you don’t normally go” answers Aram in a very confident way. They small talked for a while and Aram answered some more advanced questions about his education and motivation to work for the company. Aram was trying to get a job at a small but very important factory where they design and build motors for electric cars and other types of transportation. Monique had taken the day off from work to be with Aram and support him. She was waiting by their car when he suddenly appeared in the parking lot, with a paper in his hand and a big smile on his lips. “Finally, I get to be a part of the war against climate change, I feel like I can finally make a difference just like you” Aram told enthusiastic. Monique worked for a firm that specialises in solar power and had made a lot of money by selling their technology to other companies to make them more climate friendly.

They live together in a terraced house in a suburb to Paris. The year is 2062 and the climate is better than ever before. All the European countries put up a lot of money to fight the climate changes and it has made a big impact on their lives. Aram and Monique went to inner Paris to celebrate the new path of their lives. They took a walk around the Eiffel tower and talked about where they wanted to travel next time. It was getting late, and they walked back to their car to go home. “What is that on our porch?” Monique asked confused, while driving into their driveway. It was evening and the only light came from the car and a lamppost on the pavement next to the road. Aram stepped out of the car while holding his phone as a flashlight in one hand, and his suitcase from work in the other hand as defence. He was shaking a bit because he was afraid and didn’t knew what it was. His first thought was that it was a stray dog, but as he got closer, he realised that it wasn’t. It looked like a big pile of blankets or some other type of fabric. When Aram got closer, he could sense that the pile was shaking.

He lifted one end of the pile and looked underneath. At first, he jumped back because he got surprised, but he took a deep breath and looked again. It was a man, lying on the cold ground in front of the house with a shirt full of holes and no shoes. Aram woke him up gently and tried to get in contact with him. The man woke up and seemed confused. He looked down on his legs, then up

on Aram and then over at Monique, who was slowly getting out of the car. “I am s- s- sorry mister” said the man with a shaking voice. “I was walking around the neighbourhood trying t- t- to get a new set of gloves or some food to survive the cold and didn’t have any more energy to walk further”. He had tears in his eyes, he was shaking because of the chill temperature and was very embarrassed. Monique wasn’t afraid anymore, so she walked inside. While she walked by Aram, she whispered and told Aram to let the man inside so they could help him.

The big countries with large green energy firms had made a lot of money and the social differences had grown bigger because the owners were greedy and kept most of the money themselves. Aram felt sad about this and decided a long time ago that someone must do something about it. Monique and Aram had spent a big amount of their salary to help poor people and also spent some of their vacations to do some voluntary work for poor villages around the world. Now Aram had the chance to make a difference for this one specific man, and in his own country. “Come inside, I will make some soup and some coffee for you, what is your name?” The man stands up slowly and walks inside with Aram. Monique had turned on the shower while the men had been standing outside. The homeless man got very excited because he finally had the opportunity to take a shower. He told the couple that his name was Alexander.

When Alexander got out from the shower, Aram gave him a new set of clothes to put on and Monique gave him a cup of coffee. They all sat down to get some food. Alexander told Aram and Monique his story. He used to be a climate refugee from the middle east where they hadn’t been able to save the climate in time. His city had been flooded and they didn’t have the capacity to overcome the changes. The fields around the town had been washed away and the houses they lived in, which was built poorly had been crushed by the hot temperatures and the water. In other words, Alexanders livelihood was destroyed. Alexander had migrated to France where he got a job at a gas station, but he was fired after a while because of the electric cars that had taken over the streets and the gas was no longer needed. He got a new job as a gardener, but it was hard to get work in the big cities where people mostly had vegetable gardens or greenhouses, so his company went bankrupt. He got used to a life on the street, where he earned his money by begging or selling newspapers, but newspapers were made electronical because of the climate changes. So now he was a climate

refugee again, this time because the changes destroyed companies and the world no longer had jobs for people without an education. Everything was getting so high-tech that only the rich and educated had an opportunity to become something.

Aram was deeply shocked by Alexander's story. He knew about the large number of changes that the society had to adapt to and live with, but he had never thought about this type of consequences. He had always seen positive on the progress because it made the world a greener and healthier place to live, but he now realized that it wasn't the case for everyone. They finished up dinner and Monique was so moved by Alexander's story, that she offered him a bed for the night. Alexander was very exhausted, so he thanked the couple for everything they had done for him and then he went to bed. Aram and Monique went to the living room and talked about what had happened. They were very silent in because of what had happened, until Monique got a glimpse of light in her eyes. She started to smile and fumbled around to find her phone. Aram was confused and excited at the same time because Monique was so agitated. She finally found the phone and sat down calmly next to Aram. She started to type a number into her phone, and it started to ring. "Hey mr. Roy, sorry for the late call but I have an important question" she said and stood up again. She walked around the house while the man was still in the phone. Aram fell asleep on the couch.

The next morning Monique woke Aram up and he saw Alexander standing in the kitchen wearing a workers uniform from Monique's work. The man on the phone was her boss and he had hired Alexander to put up the solar cells that the company are selling. Alexander seemed very stoked and proud that he finally had the opportunity to make his own money again, and hopefully get a new beginning. Aram had his first day of work as well as Alexander and all three of them took off at the same time. Aram was proud of himself and his wife. They had given a complete stranger an opportunity to prove himself and to prove that social differences shouldn't make such a large impact on society, just because the governments try to save the climate. Through the day, Monique kept Aram updated on Alexander and how he was adapting to the new life as a full-time employee.

As the day went on, Aram began to feel like this wasn't enough. Alexander shouldn't just start to work and pretend like everything was fine. He had been on the streets for too long to not be

recognised and appreciated. Aram sat down at his desk and started to do some research. He took contact to different tv-talk shows and online newspapers. He wanted everyone to hear Alexander's story, and to make sure that the problem got addressed. Suddenly his phone got barraged with phone calls from journalists who all wanted to speak with the couple and with the homeless man who suddenly got a career. Aram was stoked and started telling everyone to meet them at Monique's workplace so they could interview everyone including the boss. Aram took off and arrived way too late. All the journalists had entered the company like vultures finding a carrion. Everyone wanted to get the first and golden interviews.

Monique was standing in the entrance and looked even more confused than when they first saw Alexander. Her boss on the other hand was very pleased with the positive publicity his company was going to get and he looked very satisfied at Monique with an approving nod. Aram tried to explain what he had done and at first Monique wasn't very happy. She thought that it was too much and unnecessary, but when she took a look around the press, which had surrounded Alexander, she realized that the problem was way bigger than them and the thought about starting a movement got to grow on her. When the mob of journalists was done with Alexander, they moved on to the couple. "Why did you invite a homeless man into your own vulnerable home?", "Did you feel a responsibility to give him a second chance?". "Do you think more people should move to action like you did?", "Is all of this because of a poorly arranged battle against the climate changes?". The questions came from left to right and it felt like a massive wave above the couple who were very overwhelmed.

They looked at each other, locked hands and Aram took one of the microphones from a very excited journalist. He looked around, focused on one of the cameras and said: "The challenges we stood against as a society were massive. All possible outcomes could have had ups and downs. It all comes down to helping one another and go through fire and water as a community. I have learned a lot about myself and my relationship with my wife and I am ready to do anything to help people like Alexander in the future."

He took a short break and smiled.

“The climate changes would have been bad for everyone, but these changes are not for everyone either, let's go together and change this” Aram said proudly into the microphone.

Over the hill:

“... peace, dignity and equality on a healthy planet.”. The air sang, resonating with the cell that must have become so familiar with those words. A warm, jovial tone leaked from the shrieking speaker, filling the air and embracing us with its wild intensity. My right hand sought a beam of a bunk bed as my eyes gripped the radio. A cold chill grasped me and I shuddered, but the following, deceiving silence warmed me. Whispering, it convinced me that time had come to a stop and that this moment of anticipation would last. I believed the silence until I was ripped out of my delirium by a slight flutter at the corner of my vision. I turned to my comrades, slowly. Their retracted eyelids revealed frantic leers, shifting rapidly from face to face, each of which was grinning with a contorted smile. Then, finally, they settled. My comrades looked at me and my corporal with a queer joy in their eyes. A weight overcame me, and I sat down in the bunk bed, panting, unable to meet their ravenous gawks. Only half conscious, I heard squeals of relief which soon changed into mocking, congratulatory howls that mixed and turned into a grotesque symphony at the many cries of my unpopular corporal, known as “Next” due to him being next-in-command after myself.

The wild throws of Next soon caught the cruel interest of the troop, who playfully sought to spark more misery. In an instant, Next was dragged to the middle of the concrete floor and the symphony reached its climax. As he was beaten there, his jerks and cries decreased until he was completely still. This performance would only last until a particularly evil soldier felt an especially nasty impulse. His hand began tearing at Next’s shoelaces and Next instantly came to, hopelessly battling the soldier to everyone’s great amusement, being only clobbered harder.

As this spectacle unfolded, a mucky hand finally found its way to me. Then, a dozen. I too was yanked onto the floor, now slimy with the sweat and blood of Next. As I lay there, the clobbering stopped and I was robbed of anything useful or mildly valuable, as was Next. My tattered boots and jacket, my canteen, still half-full of precious rainwater... The men I had seen as close comrades were now in the process of securing my bleak fate, but I understood. Their usual stern, reliable faces had been warped by demented, pointy sneers into something fiendish, but I understood. I understood that it wasn’t them I saw in their faces, but unkempt demons born from the bowels of the barracks; nearly inhuman, hunched-over creatures forged in the flames of maddening hunger. I understood why they squealed with joy, as their claw-like nails dug into my feet and yanked viciously and why their greedy, beady eyes searched my person and why their dirty, almost hairy appearances ravaged us - for I had before heard of creatures devouring each other in starved lunacy.

The last I felt of my comrades was a fierce tug at my coat and then nothing. Next and I found ourselves among the other nominees in the corridor, who also had been forced beyond their cell doors as ordered. Some of them had begun trudging toward the gate just as the radio had commanded. The look in their eyes told me that what little our relatively green squadron had heard was more than just the crazed rumours of a starving division. No surprise in their eyes - they had known this was coming. Judging from the three chevrons embellishing the shoulders of the members in this herd, we were not the only ones who had been appointed to the infamous position of sergeant and corporal. Of course, the Bulgarian and the Russian in the squadron never really stood a chance. Our recently conquered homelands were hated by the UN-sphere as they were renowned for their defiance of the Global Goals and their cooperation with the Peking Pact - the collection of developing countries unable to economically comply with the Goals without sacrificing the lives of many million citizens. This was also the case with both Russia and Bulgaria whose populations have been decimated.

In silence, I tried to get Next to his feet with a slight tug. He was curled up on the dirt-ridden corridor and didn’t react, seemingly not wanting to follow the stream of dead-eyed sacrifices. I now took his arm and pulled harder, but he did not budge. “Next,” I said, “would you rather die in here, or out there?”

“Why help psychotic bastards?”, he whined “Fuck you.”

I gave him an unenthusiastic kick, “C’mon. If the military police get to you, you know what happens back home. You don’t have a goddamn choice. Get up, Next.”

Hesitantly, he lifted himself off the ground, his arms shaking. I had to bring him along; we were sent out into the Sahara jungle in pairs of two and each pair had to bring back a full 40 litres of food, out there in the equally starved jungle. We had to, somehow, find a volume of roughly 20 litres of food per person, in a starving warzone inhabited by locals, who have spent much of their lives in the young jungle. We all knew that the mission was a farce, but despite realizing the suicidal nature of the order, we were bound to follow it. I wrapped my arm around Next’s abused body, and we started halting toward the gates.

Our march felt disturbingly short, and before we knew it, we were there. The nominees had stopped their trudge, becoming more embittered and inconsolable with every step. We were all gathered in front of the gates, not in orderly lines, but in a large, random mass. A pile of burlap sacks was being distributed, one for every sergeant. I saw some waving it through the air, filling it, trying to judge how much they would need to find, those optimistic few. Some never even took a sack, giving up their potential ticket back. The distributors didn’t care.

A figure captured the crowd's attention, “Sergeants and corporals! You have been selected for this season’s Gathering!”, his voice rang from the rusty balcony sticking out of the camp wall. It was raised high above our heads, and when we raised our heads to meet the source of the voice the morning light cut into our eyes. The red African sun framed the speaker as if it were a bloody halo. “As you might have felt, our food supplies remain low, as they do all over the UN. Drought, war, insubordination, and man-made climate disaster are to blame; a climate disaster which the honourable countries of the West have felt and combatted, a disaster which has been battled for many centuries, but a battle which now is being prolonged by our enemies. Yes, our misery is no longer to blame on man, but on the creatures of the Peking Pact. Think of this as you fight, you starve, you die... Soldiers, lay all your starving hate upon the enemy, for you are not the only ones to feel its tearing lashes!”, one could sense his restrained snigger, “Of course, you realize that there are many mouths to feed in the UN, both at home and at the front. As soldiers, you have a responsibility for the starving civilians. Protect them! As commanders, you have a responsibility for your soldiers. Save them!” His thundering voice rolled over us as he swung his bloated arms, “Do your duties, men! Fill your bags with whatever nourishment nature presents you with in the jungle, and do not come back until it is done!”. A dramatic pause was held, in which the eldritch cries of distraught soldiers could be made out. Then the speaker elegantly unfurled his hands, pointing his pale palms to the skies and lifted his arms, forming a shadowy cross on the bloody sun, “FOR PEACE, DIGNITY AND EQUALITY!” he howled as the gates split, letting in the green, enchanting light of the jungle.

For a moment we stood still, partly taken in by the deceptively harmonic sight, partly not wanting to enter the mawkish scene. A series of shots were fired behind us, and a single mad scream beckoned the manic charge into certain death.

I laid my arm around Next as he clenched my shoulder. We ran limping on the painful gravel, desperate to follow the crowd. Falling behind, we were last out of the gate that was promptly shut. The stampede went uphill through an artificial clearing, created by periodic burnings of the ever-approaching wilderness. The hill was steep and the soil was soft with sharp rocks that cut deeply into our exposed feet. I had to practically drag my deadweight companion uphill in a race to keep up with the others, who curiously began to lose their frenzied vigour at the top of the hill not far ahead. ‘Well,’ I thought, ‘at least he’s light.’

Nearing the top I heard rapid gunshots being fired, gunshots which I knew could not be those of our own soldiers, as hardly any man had brought a gun with him - I’d guess most had had their weapon

stolen by their respective squadrons, perhaps they never received a weapon in the first place like Next and me, or perhaps they chose not to bring one; those with weapons were often shot first.

“Why the hell are there so many?” Next asked stutteringly, “And so near camp, too. Usually, you’d have to go a mile or two into that hellhole before meeting any of those wide-lipped monkeys! How the hell did they know?”. ‘Monkeys’ is what the common soldier called the native African population, partly due to their hiding in the jungle - an effective guerrilla tactic that had led to great results for the Mauritanian military, as there was no real front to fight on and no positions to capture. A true pain in the ass for our division. Our enemy’s offensive nickname had, in fact, been promoted by our leaders, if not invented entirely; it helped the troops forget their sins and ‘reach their potential’, they claimed.

Out of breath, adrenaline-driven and having accepted what was to come, I carried on. No matter what, we had to continue the shaky climb upward, for that was the only way we could go. Every direction meant death, and only *one* could offer a field of decoys. Nearing the top with Next, just behind the others, a terrible sight awaited. There, strewn over the clearing and reaching into the jungle lay the corpses of nearly half the task force, some still twisting, others still whimpering. Above the bright green of the scattered uniforms and the tall grass, I saw soldiers using their comrades as shields and others hiding beneath heaps of fallen.

I stood stunned, but Next, teary-eyed, was quick to react. He managed a crying, feeble scream, before hobbling into the green hell. I follow stumbling, now grasping Next tighter. We tripped over corpses and snailed toward the illusory cover of the jungle, shots firing overhead, somehow stepping on every damned rock, stick and beetle on the way there. Somehow, we neared the jungle still breathing. Next’s whimpering stopped for just a moment, nearing relative safety. My thin legs toiled and took increasingly ambitious steps before for some reason losing their balance. I let go of Next, who fell to the ground as I tumbled to safety. Barely realising what happened, Next struggled to raise himself in terror. I crawled towards him, reaching out my arm and grabbing onto his forearm. With a hard pull, I reeled him in. His slender body seemed unexpectedly heavy, “Crawl, you fat bastard!” I yelled.

Dragging him to the side of a tree, I saw sunken eyes in his battered face and heard his rasping, struggling breath. Then, I saw. Pools of dark red blood came spilling out of Next’s abdomen, gushing with exposed guts blown out into the open. Red meat hanging in fat flaps around the mortal wound. Red meat... I look away, horrified. Grabbing him, I lean against a nearby tree trunk and haul him over me holding him tight, perhaps trying to keep him warm. “Next, you poor son of a bitch...” I cry softly.

Somehow, I begin drifting away, being lulled by the rhythmic gunshots, Next’s struggling, slowing heartbeat, his faint breaths, his warm, gushing blood...

In a cold sweat, I open my eyes. I can’t see much, except the light spilling over the walls of camp. Then my nose catches a powerful rust-like fragrance, and I recall. A wave of anguish overwhelms me and crying I push the meat sack that once had been Next off of me. But then, I feel something else. An extreme, growing pain, as was it me who had been shot, although my blood-covered body had been accidentally disguised throughout the slaughter.

I look back at camp, then at the field of corpses. Then at Next.

I grab him and use his fleshy wound as a handle to lift him off the ground, testing, thinking. I look back at camp.

For each painful step in the night, my wails gradually evolve to screams as I haul the burlap-covered corpse over the hill.