

THE STORM

It was eerily still and quiet. Foreboding storm clouds had been gathering for sometime. I watched and waited in readiness for the first bolt of lightning to ignite the sky and thunderclap to break the silence. It didn't take long. Within minutes the torrential rain began, tramping my rainforest undergrowth and turning what were once walking trails into muddy river-lets streaming down to my lagoon, taking with them anything in their path.

Strong wind gusts lifted anything unsecured into the air, randomly depositing them back to the ground onto piles of debris from earlier storms. My once pristine shoreline did not escape the developing onslaught either. Powerful sea swells combined with the wind gusts rhythmically pounded my rocky shore, and then retreated to pound and retreat, over and over again.

There was little I could do but hold on tight and wait patiently until the storm passed and tranquillity restored. It always did. The cycle of storm and calm had been going on for as long as I could remember but it had become more frequent over the last hundred years and each storm more destructive than the one before. There was not enough time between these regular assaults for any recovery and regeneration. My rainforest, lagoon, and coastline once flourished with life but I was no longer a safe habitat.

I used to listen, fascinated, to the sounds coming from my rainforest, especially at night. Small animals would scurry around in search of night time snacks or to meet up with their mates. Insects would buzz and chatter in high-pitched crackles and frogs would join in the chorus with their own special songs. But their numbers had gradually diminished over time. Birds once nested on my cliff tops but with local food sources declining from raised sea temperature. Now only a few hardy ones would bother settling here.

My lagoon used to be a marvellous place for all kinds of aquatic activities and teem with marine life too. Many local and exotic fish, turtles and aquatic greenery had called it home for centuries, proving a food source for other life here, but the gradual encroachment of sea water and the constant attack by storms made it a difficult place for them to thrive.

The humans that had called me home for centuries were eventually forced to leave and find higher ground and a more stable environment to live and raise their families. As well as the

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demise of their small scale tourist ventures and the decline in availability of local food sources, fresh water too had become a scarce resource due to the increased salinity of ground water.

Every day I miss them. I miss the regular pace of their daily lives. I used to enjoy watching them fishing on the reef and bringing their catches back; children frolicking on the beach, dipping in and out of the waves on very hot days; the aromas coming from campfire cook-ups when families got together to share a meal and take pleasure in each others company. There was always something to enjoy about their presence here. I needed to get used to the idea I had now been deprived of all that energy and delight. It made me sad.

Forever etched in my memory are scenes of the days the last groups of humans left in a flotilla of boats. For good. Tears ran down the faces of children clinging tightly to their mothers who it appeared were trying to show a stoic acceptance of their fate. Most of the men had already left to set up new homes for their families and find work elsewhere. It was an overwhelming sight.

I had always enjoyed visitors, chuffed that they found me a place they wanted to explore. This always made me feel special. But the only visitors that have arrived regularly recently were groups of scientists and environmentalists measuring changes in the shoreline; assessing wildlife varieties, counting their numbers and testing waters. It bothers me to think that they believed they will be able to do anything about the issues their investigations reveal. But deep down, I hope they can.

Eventually the rain, sea swell and the wind began to ease and the dark clouds started to dissipate. It was then time to survey the damage they left in their wake: a task I dreaded every time. However, the hours after a storm passed was often also a magical time as cracks of sunlight peeping through created glistening effects on wet leaves and small signs of the remaining life began to emerge. And if the atmospheric conditions were just right, a multi-coloured rainbow would appear to brighten up the sky. As I started to relax after this last tempest, I really hoped one would.