

Fresh Voices

Issue 1:

# The Last Breath of a Dying Planet?

Student Voices on Climate Change





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# THE LAST ONE LEFT

*Ethan Crane*



# THE LAST ONE LEFT

*Julie Crane*

On the classroom wall, there was a picture of a polar bear. Mal stared at it intently. What an odd creature: it looked almost mythical. The world must have been a weird place when such things existed. Everyone knew the legend of the last polar bears - how two of them had terrorised that village and tore the children, limb from limb. He couldn't quite remember the name of the village, but it didn't matter. Those bears were shot dead, so no one had to worry about them again. And then there hadn't been any more. Mal was grateful that there were no more wild animals: it seemed a dangerous notion.

Mal pushed his empty water bottle into his bag, ready for the long walk home. He was the only person in the school. All schools had closed 4 months ago - but Mal didn't have anything else to do. The building walls echoed with his memories.

Mal stepped out into the blazing sunshine and squinted. He was used to the acrid smell of melting plastic, and it didn't bother him. It would take him over an hour to climb across the county's historic rubbish mound to get home. He had to go slowly; the county bank had run out of water months ago and water was almost impossible to get hold of, so no one ever hurried anywhere for fear of getting thirsty. It would be better when flood season came again, but they'd been waiting more than three years since the last one. Mal thought it was probably just as well, since all those people went missing when that flash flood hit. His mother had warned him about playing in the rain because when it starts, it doesn't stop.

He'd already decided he wouldn't go to school in flood season, so he'd have to find something else to fill his days. He missed his mother.

Mal's belly flipped and rumbled; he wondered what he could find to eat. He clambered up to the top of the rubbish mound, tired and sweaty; he reached into his bag for his water bottle, forgetting that it was empty. The bottoms of his bare feet were leathery, caked in brown dust and blackened dried blood. It was always annoying when his foot found the sharp edge of a bottle or something that cut him, but his injuries were less frequent now; he had grown quite adept at scaling the piles of plastic that formed the steep sides of the mound.

His grandfather used to tell him stories about the things he'd found as a child, hidden beneath the old plastic artefacts. Like the time when he had found six torn pages from something called a travel brochure. His grandfather had kept the crumpled words and pictures - which he then gifted to Mal. Mal treasured the pages and stored them safely under his mattress. Sometimes, when he had trouble sleeping, he would carefully take them out and look at them. He liked the idea of a California, the tall trees, green forests and big white homes nestled in hills. The California used to be a place, he wasn't quite sure where, and he had never seen a tree; it didn't matter, he was hungry.

It was quiet today. Really quiet. Like a lookout in the crow's nest, Mal sat and watched over the city. From the top of the mound, he could see the industrial zone to the east, and the living zone to the west. The ancient ruins of the brick-built factories stood in the distance.

The hazy heat hanging in the air made their silhouettes wobble on the horizon. They had been phased down centuries ago, he had learned about them in his history class a year or two back. Mal could not see a soul. The air felt dead. He smoothed himself out a comfortable little area at the top of the mound, pushing aside a few bottles and laying some plastic bags across the top. Looking across the city, he realised not much had changed since he was little, but the familiar was comforting, so it didn't matter. Mal shouted:

“Can anyone hear me?” His voice disappeared into the hot afternoon.

Exhausted, hungry and thirsty, he lay back and closed his eyes. The thought of those two polar bears, wandering into that village, wandered into his mind; it scared him a little, but he knew they were hungry, just like he was. He needed to sleep; he probably wouldn't make it back home tonight. It didn't matter; he knew he was the last one left.

# BARREN

*Lilli Cullen*

You can cope with blissful heat.  
And the earth screaming  
as she boils alive.

Her tears stream freely and fresh from the tap.

So, you won't see them marred;  
thick with your filth.

Sweet florals overpower and rob you of your sense.

Too strong for you to inhale as she;  
too distracting to succumb  
to the agonizing sound of her choking.  
Begging.  
Pleading.

She will remain unheard; the flames will continue to burn.

She will suffocate.

You will never feel her anguish.

Never notice her darkening being  
or the bruising overtaking,



tarnishing her clouded skin.

Blue succumbing to slate,  
sinking to the depths of darkness.

You watch her drown, smoky tendrils clawing through her expanse  
overtaking every inch of her being,  
and ignore it.

But there will come a time.

You can't ignore the barren tree.

You will not look past her anger.  
Or the disgrace,  
or the shame  
of seeing what you have allowed.  
Ignored.

You will not be able to ignore her accusing branches,  
pointing dead, bare fingers  
in the face of blissful ignorance.

*It will be all that remains*

# CARROT

*Jade Andrew*

She slips between the fallen bricks and broken glass like a shadow. The air is still but heavy, settling on the rubble with a thick layer of grey. Every step is a small battle; one mistake could send her plummeting. But she's slow, cautious, testing every possible path with a gentle tap, before following through, footsteps light. She displaces the air around her like a whisper. She ducks under a metal beam, curves between jagged concrete rocks, hops over a pile of reflective, shattered glass. Paws outstretched, she lands with a soft thump on what appears to be a roof tile. The dust is a vicious beast, suddenly jumping up to latch onto her orange fur, painting her grey.

She tries to shake it off, a quick flick of her wrist, but the ground suddenly moves beneath her. Ears shooting upwards, she quickly glances around, but only various pieces of rubble greet her eyes. She's enclosed. Sharp nails instinctively dig into the brown clay below her, and she braces herself. There's a short moment—perhaps only a second—where nothing happens, and she blinks. Then, the ground lurches upwards, she feels herself turn upside down, and it all goes black.

A few hours pass until she comes to, but she is unaware of such human concepts. She rises slowly, placing all four feet on the floor below her, relieved to be on solid ground at last. But the relief doesn't last long when a ripple of pain shoots through her back leg. She winces, letting out a mewl, and lifts the injured paw to tuck protectively against herself. She licks it gently, releasing a series of cries to reflect the pain coursing through her body and her heart. If her human was here, she would have cuddled her and given her food which healed her. But she is alone. She has never been alone before. Even in the womb, she was pressed tightly against six of her brothers and sisters. Now, no sounds reach her ears, no soft fabrics shroud her, and—

A weak scent of food brushes her nose. She inhales deeply, calculating its source. Her head shoots up in hope, eyes wide. It's nearby. She looks up and realises she is underneath a slanted piece of plasterboard. It's stained black but specks of blue peek through, illuminated like stars from the light that shines through a small crack where the plasterboard meets the ground. She hops closer, the surroundings simultaneously encroaching on her. She freezes. Her whiskers are now almost flat against her face, and her chest touches the ground. Her injured foot is uncomfortably pressed against the cold concrete, sending pain in waves that cascade through her body. But the light emanating from the crack is stronger now, and the air carries a small breeze. She's taken aback. For weeks, she has been surrounded by dusty, stagnant air, cooped up between the rubble of her fallen home, surviving on the loose pieces of food she had found scattered among the shreds of her old toys. Moving air promises more; it promises life. She crouches low, muscles tensed and pushes through.

The plasterboard crumbles around her easily. The light that welcomes her is hot and harsh, burning through her eyelids quicker than fire burns through wood. Her pupils instantly narrow, evolutionary instincts kicking in, and she leaps forward, cautious to not land on her injured paw. The old, blue wall collapses behind her, and more rubble instantly rolls into its place. She pauses, staring at the remains of her old home. There's not a lot she recognises in the pile of rubbish staring back at her. A heartbroken whine crawls up her throat and escapes through her lips. It was a sound her human would never ignore, instantly rushing to her side to cuddle her. She cocks her head to the side, peering at the broken mess, hoping for a sign of movement. Hoping for her human to appear. But the minutes pass by, and the sun's rays are overwhelmingly hot on her fur. With one last mewl, she turns away and leaves.

The smell of food grows stronger with every step, and she leaps the best she can with her broken paw tucked protectively against her body, as it guides her into the heart of the city. This is

unfamiliar land—before everything collapsed, she had never wandered this far, as the streets were always full of other humans and their noisy vehicles. She notices that everything is bigger; from the leaning buildings with their shattered windows, to the metal poles lining the street that used to glow during the night. Each step seems to get her no closer to her goal. Suddenly, there's a gust of wind that pushes her backwards and she takes a sharp right, diving underneath the cover of an upturned car. The buildings around her come to life, creaking and groaning. She watches as they begin to sway, ever so slightly, but it triggers a deep rumbling as rubble gets dislodged inside different skyscrapers, landing on the ground levels with a heavy crash. Clouds of dust pour out of the cracks in the walls. Then, the car above her begins to screech, loud and deafening, the sound of metal on metal, and she watches it fall in slow motion above her.

She almost lets it, tired and hungry and hurting, but she catches another whiff of the food, stronger now, perhaps because of the wind, but it's enough motivation to keep her going, and she jumps away just as the car brushes her fur. It collapses behind her, and she doesn't stop, running, leaping, battling the wind but chasing the smell of safety. The air is dusty, getting stuck in her eyes, but she fights against the discomfort, and to her relief, the scent grows stronger and stronger. She suddenly takes a left, climbing over a sideways vehicle then diving under a fallen advertisement board and crawling into the interior of a building. The wind doesn't reach her in here, and she pauses, looking around. The ground is coated in layers of dust and old newspapers. In the centre, a human sits facing a small fire. She watches, eyes wide, as the human slowly spins what looks like a dead pigeon on a stick. She instantly begins salivating, the smell of real food so strong and overwhelming, and she meows loudly. The human turns around to face her impossibly fast, his eyes wide. They're the same colour as her beloved humans' were, and she lets out a small whine.

“Oh-oh my god,” the human utters, almost choking on his words. “A cat.”

She crawls closer, pupils sharp and flicking between the human and the food. She's aware he may also wish to eat her. If she plans this correctly, she can grab the food and run away without taking any more injuries.

"It's okay," the human says, his voice hoarse. "I won't hurt you. Here."

To her surprise, he throws the entire bird to her. She leaps towards it, letting the human out of her eyesight, survival instincts clouded by her hunger, and she rips into the meat. It is tender and warm against her tongue. And there's plenty of it. More food than she's had in weeks. She devours it within minutes, insides and all, and sharpens her teeth with the bones. When she looks up, she finds the human staring at her.

"Sorry, I don't have any more," he says. She wonders if he knows that she cannot understand him. She assumes he doesn't, because he continues talking; "I saw that poor bird get squashed by a falling desk chair, but I'm kinda glad you showed up. I dunno if I would've been able to stomach eating it."

He smiles at her, a sort of apologetic smile that her human used to have before sending her to the dreaded V-E-T. Now, even that seems like heaven compared to this. Because no matter how long she had to be asleep for, she would always wake up in her human's arms, enveloped in a sea of coos and cuddles.

"You can come closer to the fire, y'know," the human continues to babble, "I promise I won't hurt you. S'not like you understand me anyway," he adds with a quiet laugh. He turns his body towards the fire, reaching for a small, dirty bag beside him. He pulls out a metal tube, then opens it and pours something into the top part. He slides it slowly towards her, then moves to the other side of the fire, before taking a sip himself directly from the tube.

She looks at it cautiously, taking a few wobbly steps. Now that her hunger is mostly sated, the pain in her back leg hurts tenfold. She sniffs the liquid; takes a small sip. It tastes like water. She laps up a few more drops, then curls down beside it. She's close enough to the fire to feel warm, and far away enough from the human to feel safe. Through the flames, he gazes at her.

"You're hurt too, huh. Same here," he says, raising his arm and pulling down the sleeve of his jacket. There's some fabric tied tightly around his forearm, and it's almost completely stained red. He twists it one way, then the other. The parts that aren't a dark red are instead a dull brown. "Still hurts a bit, but I think it's getting better. Somehow. I can try bandage up that leg of yours, whenever you begin to trust me." He laughs, but it feels forced, grating against his throat. "I was training to be a— Well. You might not like the word. But I was training to be someone who helps you. And other animals. Before—before all this happened."

She decides the human is safe. At least for now. He clearly likes to talk, and his voice is somewhat soothing. And besides, the fire is warm, her body is tired, and all she wants is to rest for a while.

"You don't even know what happened, poor thing. It was the fault of us humans, of course. Destroying this planet. Destroying ourselves. I was beginning to think I was fully alone. Y'know, I only saw other people once, like, a week or so after the explosion happened, and everything collapsed. But they were already, like, savages. The kind of shit you see in movies. They just screamed at me and waved kitchen knives about. I don't even know how many of them there were. I wonder if they're still alive, but what would that even change."

She begins to purr. She doesn't understand what he is saying, but she finds him entertaining, nonetheless. It had been so silent on her own; the only noises she had heard for months were the

sounds of rubble falling or more buildings collapsing. Now, the air is filled with the hoarse, but gentle, voice of a human who fed her, and the vibrations of her own purring.

“Man, you’re so cute. Man. You remind me of my old cat, Carrot. A silly name, I know, but I was only four when my parents got him, and they let me name him. I miss him. In a way, I’m grateful he died a few years ago, so he doesn’t have to witness this. You’re the only cat I’ve seen alive, I think. After getting to the city, I’ve seen things move around, y’know, in the shadows, and I just tried to believe it was, like, my imagination. Being alone for so long can make you go crazy, y’know. But now, I’m thinking that maybe some animals have survived. Maybe foxes, or more cats, or something. I hope it’s animals, and not humans. You guys have a proper chance of bringing our planet back to life. If plants start growing again, that is.”

He pauses, sighing. He looks out of the large window, seeing the back of the advertisement board that she had manoeuvred around to get inside. In the corner of the window, some of the sky is visible. It’s glowing pink and red. The sunset still exists. Still purring, she lets herself fully relax, eyes falling shut.

The human clears his throat. “I think I’m gonna try to go to the coast tomorrow. That’s always where people go in the movies. And, at least, I can see a large stretch of the city from the coast. See if there’s anyone else setting up fires, y’know.” He yawns, then pauses. She opens one eye a millimeter, and notices he’s no longer looking outside, but instead staring intensely at the fire. It glows from below him, making his eyebags look deeper, his cheeks hollower than she had initially thought. Suddenly, he barks out a laugh, soulless. She shuts her eyes.

“Good night, I guess,” he mumbles. “You look so real, but I bet I’m gonna wake up and you’re not gonna be here and then I gotta convince myself I didn’t just spend an hour in the night talking to myself and hallucinating Carrot.” He laughs again. There’s the sound of shuffling, and

when she opens her eyes again, she sees him laying down, one arm tucked under his head and another arm clutching his bag to his stomach, sound asleep.

She wakes up the next morning from the light of the morning sun shining through the corner of the window. The fire has gone out, and the ground is cold. The human she met last night is still asleep, and she walks over to him, more curious than cautious. She watches his chest rise and fall. His lips look blue, and he shivers every so often. She decides she'll stick around with him. She misses her human dearly and he will never replace her, but he's nice, and hasn't tried to kill her yet, so he's worth staying with. If she's lucky, he has some more food for her. She pulls his bag away and crawls under his arm, settling close to him. She breathes in tandem with him. It's nice. It reminds her of all the nights she fell asleep cuddling with her human; it reminds her of further back still, of cuddling with her brothers and sisters and mother shortly after being born, wet and sticky and warm. Feeling each other's hearts beating. Hearing each other's blood flow. Hearing movement; the sound of life, of hope.

She purrs softly, whilst he slowly wakes up.



# SOLAR CLINIC

*Bea Taylor*

She heaves. One breath. Three. Not stagnant; shuddering, shedding her skin for the last time, her umbrella cloak falling into still water and submersion of every sense, she drowns, she's drowning. Would it have been enough? Would all the roots in the soil, all the magma below the crust, all the water of the wideness, satisfy you? No. But you'll eat her up anyway. And she'll struggle for air, while clasping you above the wave-breaks, keeping you afloat while she sinks, she burns, she suffocates. Are we classed as rot? I cannot pin the idea of fungi to our lapel for they intercommunicate in ways we could never quite figure, for all our mouths and voice-boxes and vim and vigor. A bacterium, then. Not even a eukaryote, a living organism that takes and takes and takes, thriving in suffering, threshing in stupor. Perhaps, for a chance at a breath again, prescribe penicillin. Treat the infection. Rot for rot. Inflammation in the forests, flooding in the lungs, a temperature of fifteen Celsius and rising. Final diagnosis: *homosapiccus pneumonia*. Symbiosis is no longer feasible; a pathogen must be planted. Advised to have the autumn mushrooms grow year-round. Chanterelles, Boletus, Inkcaps, amanitas; Destroying Angel, Fly Agaric, Death Cap. Do not temper the poisonous. Advised to let the mold grow. Mycelium carpets and spores to spread. Hyphae to match every flagellum. Have the candida bloom, let their mouths that speak nothing be covered in their white flag, let their time-wasting alcohol feed the protozoa, let their sex be tarnished with itching and scratching until they grate off the last of their distractions into tattooed lacerations, permanent fixtures to remind them. Until they can look nowhere else. Let the wood crumble again. Treat the infection. Rot for rot.

# THOUGHTS

*Kay Morgan*

When you wake up as a bug,  
and there's nothing you can do  
but listen  
to lives that seem so much more vibrant  
than yours ever was.

Each laugh resounding,  
each cry filled with pain.

An addiction  
to fill your own thoughts  
with something else  
because thoughts are all you are.

They will love, and they will leave,  
never knowing you were there

or how much they meant,  
how they filled your idleness.

Idleness is all you are now  
a passive form of death.

And once you run out of  
thoughts  
people.

You have nothing.

Because all you ever were  
was someone else.

# THE DECAY OF BROKENNESS

*Annabel Lee*

The planet on which I park my sadness is spinning,  
spinning so fast the axis is beginning to break.

The planet where I hold my hurt is cruising,  
cruising at an altitude - I thought I could never catch up with it.

I run and I run, and I run,  
but the planet spins and spins and spins.

I run and I run, and I run,  
but the sadness builds and builds and builds -

How am I to stop feeding the brokenness which fuels the merry-go-round which I inhabit?

The answer is, I don't stop it at all.

The answer is, I stop running and running and running.

The answer is, she catches me.

She builds and builds and builds -

She takes that planet and creates a new universe for me.

She creates a version of life where I do not orbit this one planet as if it were the sun,  
instead - she becomes my sun.

With her, that planet decays.

That planet on which I park my sadness stops spinning.

It takes its last breath as she tells me she loves me,

the final decay of brokenness and the spark of looking forward to a new day.

# Biographies

## Ethan Crane

Ethan likes both traditional and digital art; he enjoys designing unusual characters and creating unique concepts. He has also drawn political and historical cartoons which were published in a school magazine.

## Julia Crane

Fuelled by Toblerone, Julie has returned to university after a short 35-year hiatus. She enjoys reading and writing about children's experiences in WW2 and The Cold War. She is currently binge watching Call the Midwife with her youngest daughter.

## Lilli Cullen

Lilli Cullen is a student and aspiring writer with a passion for storytelling and writing in all forms. Currently studying English in Bournemouth; Lilli writes short stories and poetry exploring a variety of themes and is looking forward to expanding in different directions with her writing.

## Jade Andrew

Jade is an English student at Bournemouth University and an aspiring writer, who mostly enjoys creating pieces of contemporary and literary fiction. They love to write long, intricate descriptions, and aim to make their work feel realistic and full of emotion.

## Bea Taylor

Bea Taylor, 20, is an aspiring writer studying BA English at Bournemouth University. She focuses primarily on honing her fictional prose and poetry skills, having performed her poetry live at Winchester's Railway Inn and regularly submitting poetry and prose to various national competitions. Bea's work hosts a variety of themes, including queer discourse, environmentalism, history, architecture, nature and politics. Bea hopes to someday have her work published and win a national writing competition.

## Kay Morgan

A film student studying at BU who scribbles down words from time to time.

## **Annabel Lee**

Annabel is a third-year Bournemouth University student, who enjoys writing about things she loves and cares about, while maintaining a focal point of LGBTQIA+ themes or life with ADHD! She is optimistic about her life post-graduation and is wishful that her future career will reflect her passions.

# Letters from the Fresh Voices Team

*From our Deputy Editor*

Dear Readers,

As we wrap up this first publication of *Fresh Voices*, I find myself beaming with gratitude for the incredible support that has grown around our magazine. The hard work and dedication from all on the *Fresh Voices* team is really something to behold and none of this would've been possible without their skills and creativity!

Secondly, I want to extend a heartfelt thanks to all our contributors. The depth, creativity, and authenticity in your submissions did not cease to amaze us. Whether you're a first-time writer or a seasoned contributor, your willingness to share your voices has enriched these pages.

To our readers, I thank you for your time in reading this wonderful collection of stories that debate 'The last breath of a dying planet?' A prompt leading us all to think about the growing concern of climate change and the effect it is having on our world as we know it. As you flick through these pages, I hope you'll find it just as thought-provoking and well-written as we did while putting it together.

Thank you all for being a part of this journey. I'm looking forward to our next publications and I hope you are too!

Sincerely,

Amber Blundell

*Deputy Editor*

*Fresher Publishing*

## *From our Editor-in-Chief*

Dear readers,

Thank you for reading Issue I of *Fresh Voices* literary magazine.

I created this magazine to give undergraduate students a platform to creatively express their feelings about serious world issues. We received incredible pieces, all of which interpreted the prompt 'The Last Breath Of A Dying Planet?' in a unique way.

From deteriorating human health to extreme weather and food insecurity, climate change is happening at a rapid rate, and its consequences are irreversible. We must take action now to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and mitigate the effects of climate change.

Alongside our readers, I'd like to thank Dr Tom Masters, our Editorial Director at Fresher Publishing, as well as Amber Blundell, our Deputy Editor at *Fresh Voices*, and my amazing team of interns: Rosheen Huges, Kiera Thaper, Eli Turner, Hannah Hill, Keira Bigland, and Karine Wells. Their passion and dedication brought this issue to life.

Thank you for spending time with *Fresh Voices*. It was an honour to give creators a space to house their work, and I look forward to the next issue and other exciting things to come.

Sincerely,

Jay Caitlin Hildreth

*Editor-in-Chief*

*Fresher Publishing*



## Thank you to our contributors:

Annabel Lee

Julie Crane

Ethan Crane

Kay Morgan

Bea Taylor

Lilli Cullen

Jade Andrew

This issue wouldn't have been  
possible without you!

