



What we do now matters

Taken from the book 'Letters to the Earth'
Introduction by Emma Thompson.
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BY CLAIRE ROUSELL

They are wanting to tell us something, the future people. The people of whom we are the ancestors. Yet they are the wiser.

They are wanting to tell us that what we do now matters.

They want us to know that they see the dismembered ways that we live and how difficult it is for us to re-member how to return to the family of all things. But their existence is testament to the fact that it is possible. They know we feel trapped by this system of entanglements and obligations and the amputations of our imaginations in a system that only ever intended to keep us blind to the bars of our cages. But they want to remind us that there was a time when we could not imagine a world order that was not based on the divine rights of kings. And before that even, there was a time when we knew what it was to belong. When we knew we were Eland, Mantis and Dancer. When we knew we were the firefly and the ocean, the stuff of stars and the breath of birds.

They ask us, stroking our hair and touching our faces, how did you know that something else was possible? Where did that idea germinate inside you? Show us, point to the place. Tell us the story of summoning your brothers and sisters to revolt for a life of connection and dignity? For what dignity is possible if dignity is not available for all?

They ask us, how did you manage to build this world in the flames of capitalism, and yet all the while you were disconnected from your rituals, from the rhythms and songs of your people, the tiny sacred acts of care that ensure that the world is recreated with every dawn chorus? How did you handle knowing all that you knew without becoming paralyzed with terror and despair? What did you do with your despair, personal, collective, ancestral? How did you carry its magnitude in your heart without being overcome with madness, or perhaps while carrying your madness, your addictions and your chronic sadness, never really knowing the full extent of your vitality?

Did you carry pieces of it everywhere you went, stuffed in pockets and purses like used tissues? Pulling out every pot and pan as the house flooded with tears? Did you feel it hanging in the air and walking alongside you, the ghosts of extinct creatures following you around reminding you of all that is at stake, suffocating you with the thickness of their memory? Did you taste it in your food, forced from the soil and sea with chemicals and violence, food that no longer nourished but flared up in rashes and welts as it entered your body? Did you feel the suffering as you dressed yourself in the forced labour of people and animals, their exhaustion stitched into the seams and hems of your clothes?

We see you, they say, standing on the shore with five hundred years of industry and environmental wreckage and slavery and torture at your back, gasping under its weight, with only the vast black sea in front of you. We see you.

We see you holding the crumbling world in one hand and the germinating seed of life in the other. We know you are listening. Listening to your children, to the wind, to the birds, to the voice the startles you from sleep just before dawn, to the harbingers of a new consciousness. We feel how you allow your heart to be broken while every day preparing the house for love, making up her bed, setting a place for her at your table. All with no good reason for hope and every reason to despair.

We see what is to come for you. And what will remain when the storm, from which there will be no refuge, is over. We see in you the thousands of varieties of potato and corn and wheat, the cornucopia of culture and craft, language and art, the compassion and commitment to the value of the life of the individual and the group. We know what you have known across time and species, across geography and incarnation. We know what you are capable of.

*We salute you. **Because what you do now matters.***