

Response to E.O.Wilson's HALF-EARTH: Our Planet's Fight for Life

Also thanks to Diana Bryer for her painting *Gaia's Angel*

EARTH ANGEL

Earthday 2016

for E.O. Wilson

I

This Earth Angel's
 a nut-brown Lolita -
 thirteen at most
black hair silky to her waist
she cradles the earth
between her chubby childish arms
 her cheek
 caressed by some ocean
she's cradled
 by her wings
 by wings
 a magic carpet
floating her across the universe
She wears a dress
her great-grandmother made
 from a printed flour sack
 such as mothers in that day
 used to fashion
 daughter's dresses
This earth angel never had a
 a store-bought dress
Her mother made do with
 whatever was at hand
This earth angel never covets
 store-bought dresses
She floats on her wings
 across the night sky
 across the universe
 scattered with stars,
 planets, suns
 what have you

II

Stop whining about your own demise -
Think of those tribes
 those colonies
living in and on our bodies
co-evolved to assist us
 in our daily living
 too insignificant
 to be encompassed
 by our
 shall we say
 meager
 sensory organs
Then there are creatures
 too large to be
 taken in with a quick glance
 say mammals living in the sea
 or elephants
 tramping through the woods
There are lots of bones in the woods
 bones of all sorts of creatures
 even men
The elephant pays no heed to any of these
 stepping on them
 or brushing them away
Until she comes across bones
 bones of an elephant
Then she sits down and picks up each elephant bone
 caressing each in turn
then sits a while longer amidst the
 elephant bones

Is she listening to the songs
 of this long gone soul
or is she mourning the loss

of a spirit once dear to her
perhaps of a child
lost to her long ago
but remembered
forever

We cannot know
anymore than we know
why the ravens are convening
or where they go when we see them no more
So stop whining about your own demise
and think about all the other
creatures who will be gone
All those creatures who make up
the intricate web of life
of which we are only a tiny twig

So when our angel's childish
chubby arms get tired and she lets
slip the burden she is bearing
think of that loss
of the large and the small
the whole web of life will be gone -
a much greater loss than just you or me
or even our children and
grand children
multiplied down
through the ages

Stop whining about your own demise
We are only a small twig
with little meaning
to the greater cycle
As top dog
we over use
resources from the Commons
the air
the water
the food
the energy
the beauties of earth and sky
of waterfalls and lakes

Poets have written their hearts out
for hundreds of years:

Generations have trod, have trod, have trod
All is seared with trade,
bleared smeared with toil
And wears man's smudge
and shares man's smell,
the soil is bare now
*nor can foot feel being shod**

The books have all been written
Our Libraries are overwhelmed

We have sung all the songs
over and over

E.O. Wilson argues
oh yes
science has agreed

III.

Things fall apart;
the center cannot hold. . .
and what rough beast
its hour come round at last
*slouches toward Bethlehem to be born***

NOW

The time has come
for our angel is to be saved
otherwise she will float
beyond our ken
to universes unknown to us
No longer will gravity hold her here
or hold our earth together
Her chubby childish arms will slacken
since we didn't hear her cries
We didn't care
for all her creatures
We only care for ourselves
She loves all her creatures
however large or small

She needs each one
 tiny or tall
Each one has a place
 a purpose
in her web her circle her cycle
there are
 the hunters
 the hunted
 the leaf eaters
 the meat eaters
for all must eat

Never say she didn't try
Rather it is us
 who didn't try to save her
She will be gone
as will her circle of life
all because we didn't heed her cries
We didn't see her tears
We didn't stop
 to say *I love you*
 who didn't comfort her when we could
Perhaps she drowned in an ocean
 of her own deep salty tears
because we did not care

This stupid little twig - humanity -
we still whine
about our own demise
when that is not what matters
 It matters
 not a whit
when you begin to see the whole picture

IV
the world
which seems to lie before us
 like a land of dreams
so various so beautiful so new
hath really neither joy nor love nor light
nor certitude nor peace
nor help for pain
and we are here as on a darkling plain

where confused armies
*clash by night****

SPRING WIND

the trees in their new green
all dance in place throughout the valley
The green of leaves
 barely open
is the cleanest color in the world
This green pierces my heart with fresh hope
as the trees all dance together
Wildwood was a place up the canyon
where there was a group of small cabins -
not cabins really just shacks
 no indoor water
 no lights
My mom's aunt Vivien had a cabin there
the porch was built overhanging the stream
and she dropped a bag filled with food
into the stream to chill
We picnicked on a grassy place
where the stream merged with river

My dad filled a jar with water from the stream -
held it against the sun and said:
Isn't this the most beautiful thing in the world
- fresh clean cold mountain water
In those days we could drink from any mountain
stream with no fear
- they were all sparkling clean and fresh
This was before Robert Redford
 bought *Wildwood* and turned it into
SUNDANCE - his own *SUNDANCE*

I knew not to drink from irrigation ditches
in town and asked my dad the difference
Mountain water comes bouncing
 over rocks
 through the air
 in the sunshine
and is thus purified.

AS a child I knew that the folks

who had these summer cabins
"had money"
(not money like Redford - but some)
I knew we didn't have money
didn't have a summer cabin
didn't even have a car
but in my mind we were never poor
We always had a warm old house house
my dad was fixing up
My mom made me cute dresses
I ate homemade bread
although I always wanted
to taste Wonder Bread
- but never did
and I would have liked to have had
one store bought dress

Suddenly EARTH ANGEL is here again
She takes my hand and we skip
along the dirt path by the stream
back to before

SUNDANCE

Did you remember
when children skip
they are totally off the ground
during part of each skip?
maybe like an instant of flight

Then the angel and I skip some more
and then we fly
out of the desert over cities
over rivers
mountains and fields

WE fly to the dank dark mossy southern woods
where the old man has his sanctuary
He is walking
through the wetlands
on his boardwalk
thinking about ants
perhaps
remembering his boyhood
He is delighted I have actually read his book

He finds a stick and smoothes out
an area of sandy dirt
He draws a map of the whole world
and then points to half of it
the Angel's playground
where all her creatures
are protected
all creatures -
tiny microbes
and ants
and wolves
and elephants
and us with all our
great grand children

The cleanest color in the world
is the green of leaves just out
the deep sweetness of that color
pierces my heart
with fresh hope

We all smile as hope grows stronger
new green leaves open above us
as more of us share E.O.'s vision

I give my copy of HALF-EARTH to my daughter
and ask her to pass it on
to someone else when she has read it.

May it circle the earth
time and time again
like yarn wound into a ball
as more of us share E.O.'s
life-affirming vision

* Gerard Manley Hopkins

**William Butler Yeats

***Matthew Arnold

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