

Fleeing From The Flames

A short story

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Emaan Zahra Ijaz

~A short story depicting the experiences of various animals, including a koala, rabbit, and a wombat (also a human), through the recent Australian Bushfires.

Each chapter is narrated from a different perspective, with harrowing struggles interrupting the character's day to day lives.

The book was written in an effort to raise awareness regarding global warming and its consequences, one such example being the Australian Bushfires.~

Acknowledgments

“I would like to thank my editor, my friends,
and family without whose help this book
would never have been completed. Thank you
for your guidance and support.”

Preface

Global warming and climate change are steadily becoming and has in fact, already become a global crisis. Increasing temperatures, melting ice caps, and the very recent Australian Bushfire, all these should be enough proof that is visible to everyone. I believe that this is the result of a rise in human activity and that it will not just cause us harm but also wildlife and our planet.

We only have one home as of now and why is it that we are already looking for another planet to call home. Is it because what we have done has reached a point of no return? What will be of our next generation? Will they have to pay for water to live? I am positive that as long as there are people who are trying their best in their own ways, there may be hope for our future and the future of our successors. Writing is a hobby to me, and I wish to use it to place a positive impact on our society and be a part of those raising awareness of the global crisis.

Let this book be a message. Animal life is as important as Human life. Let us mend the planet who brought to us happiness and life before we find another.

“Dedicated to the recent Australian Forest
disasters and raise awareness of the results of
human activities on innocent wildlife.”

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Chapter 1:

The Beginning Of The End

Koala's POV:

After I wake up from my twenty hours of slumber, I climb down my tree branch to wake everyone else from my family and then proceed to sniff around for absolutely no reason, it's a habit my mother doesn't stop me from doing, so I do it anyway. However, something smelt strange, a slight sniff could detect the whiff of ash, but it was very slight at the present, so I did not have the need to bother worrying about it, then again, I do not really worry much since I

refuse to consider myself very adventurous. For some time, I moved on to take part in our family's little game time which does not have a name since it became our daily routine, so I suppose I would not call it a game either but I shall still keep doing so. Well anyway, the rules are easy, we just have to keep eating chewy leaves and the last one standing wins, see, very simple.

Or so it seemed to be.

It was my turn to collect the leaves from around our territory but finding them now is a lot tougher than it used to be. Father once said that it was all because of the Humans who stole our food for themselves and now there is barely enough for us to survive. That is why searching for leaves became a mini hunting game to make us, Koala's, habitual of the new life. Finally, after being able to gather a satisfactory number of green, chewy leaves, the game began and

ended as my elder brother was declared the winner, now he gets the privilege to sleep on the top branch!

No Koala must ever underestimate the tree's top branch, for this branch on our tree has the best cushioning to it with perfect, symmetrically positioned leaves that make the head feel the comfort of the Koala's life. The branch itself has such fine wood with no prickly ends, none at all, along with the angle between the tree and itself, making it the ideal sleeping spot, to which the winner is rewarded.

We then went back to sleep after this long day of eating and sniffing. This routine kept going on for a few days and every time the whiff of ash my nose picks up gets stronger (I must add that my nose never lies to me), the sky somehow seemed darker and greyer than usual, the heat for some reason felt intense and much grave to the point I brought this concern of mine up to my family, especially my mother, whom I consider

the smartest of the species, only to see them laugh in the laziest ways saying:

“Yer a young little thing, ‘course you’d pick up somthi’n like that” So, I did what any koala would do next... go back to sleep.

But little did I know that destruction of all of animal kind was going to pay us a visit. This was our beginning of the end...

Drenched in sweat, feeling as if my fur was trying to rip itself off my skin. I wake up to a deadly and nauseating sight of my family covered in a black coat of char with a slight crimson flame. They were dead, burnt to a crisp, not moving. I then looked around to analyze my situation, but it did not make me feel any better. Rabbits, Deer’s, my friends, the forest, it was all on fire. I looked back at my dead family and quivered in fear. If only they took me seriously... If only I had told them about the smell of ash sooner, at least this would not have happened. I thought this to myself, crying, and

wailing. While the session of bellowing continued, I sensed the same crimson flame coming for me. So, I ran for my life as the fire chased behind me but alas! I was a tad bit clumsy and ended up accidentally stepping on a patch of burning leaves. Pain instantly flared within my paw and I collapsed for a second from shock but got up after seeing the flames catching up with me. As I was going around here and there to stay away from certain death, I noticed that the sky was covered in a spread of grey and black, the same color as the fur of everything below it.

Indeed, this was more terrifying than anything I had ever been through up till now. Even the predators were forced to stoop down to the level of their prey and die with them and I can say that this, to them, is an embarrassing death. This is the great inferno myth my father had told me once. The myth of a large raging fire, set by none other than humans, that would engulf us all to death and that would be the end of our

existence. Of course, I was a kid back then, but I too was made to believe that this myth was just a fable my dead grandfather had told. To think that it would actually be true, was a nightmare that would not stop. I was not the only animal alive though. No.

On my way to flee from the blaze, I met scattered rabbits and goats running around to even closer to the fire. *They're just knocki'n on death's door, those fools.* I thought. Soon a bunny joined me in the escape however, at one point it just left me, and I was never to see it again. I just hope it did not fall prey to the monster in the disguise of fire.

Chapter 2:

Close Escape

Bunny's POV:

The forest around me collapsed from the blazing inferno which surrounded the area as far as the eye could see. Several creatures including myself made our escape across the scorched undergrowth. During the panicked frenzy that ensued, out of the corner of my eye, I caught a glimpse of a small, bumbling koala. Its fur grey with ash and soot and limping from what was a burnt paw. Our eyes met for a split second and in that instant, I could see it was falling into despair. Looking down upon such a pitiful creature truly makes one grateful. I bid the koala adieu, racing past the sorry animal, and continued sprinting for a good amount of time. All the while other animals dipped in and out of

my vision. After a while, I found myself leaving the forest and entering a narrow clearing, where the ground was grey and rockier than normal.

There were no flames to be found on this side for now, so I decided to rest for the time being. Once I began to loosen up, my body at once collapsed from the exhaustion I had accumulated from the recent events, as the need to rest finally caught up to me.

As my vision blurred, I saw a large figure approaching me in the distance, draped in a layer of red. While it got closer I noticed that the air got swelteringly hot, and the orange-red flames reappeared, fueled by while the few trees that remain of the forest on the edge of this clearing. Within seconds the fire spread and made its way closer to me, as did the large creature.

As it came closer, I realized it was a Human. This time I decided to forget my pride and rely on it, I had no way to escape and my body was in poor shape, so I thought. The human picked me up and carried me away into a place I was not familiar with. He whispered, "*You are safe.*" This made me think to myself, I won't be the flame's nosh anymore because I am safe, just as the human said.

While all of this was being processed in my cunning brain, I smirked to the thought of that poor koala and decided to not waste my energy on that feeble thing, tired as I already was.

I was taken care of, fed to, and made to quench my thirst all while the other animals were suffering in the forest of doom. I was injured and relying on Humans was the only thing to do but the safety of my place kept me to think how lucky I was, how lucky I was to be one of the survivors of this destruction.

So, I thank the Human who brought me to this place, a place where I can survive.

Truly not all Humans are made of the worst hearts.

Chapter 3:

The Will To Live

Koala's POV:

My eyes were beginning to droop, and my vision blurred. The only source of food for us Koalas, eucalyptus leaves, was dwindling at an alarming rate. With my slow and clumsy nature, if I were to eat from one of the surviving trees, surely, I would risk getting caught in the fire's path and I decided to not take that risk. Water was even harder to get and flaming vegetation surrounded the closest river, this was true despair.

My entire body ached, and my muscles screamed from the effort of sprinting constantly for the past few days. I was only known to two things, sleeping, and eating, sprinting was never in my routine!

But I want to live -I thought as I blacked out...

~

What? Mother? How are you alive? How are you all alive?! It doesn't matter!

I see my family gathered in front, without me.
I want to cuddle in your arms mother! I want to see us laughing and sleeping as a family together.

They look at me one last time and crawl forwards.

Wait ...no ...Mother! Don't leave me, I want to be with you!!!

Mother takes a glimpse of me and says her final words...

“ Live...you're going to be fine ”

Mother... I say, unable to hold my tears back up. Everything suddenly transitions to white and my family is all gone. Big brother and sister, father, mother, all.... Gone

~

I woke up to a movement that was not mine.
My eyes open as a surge of water flowing within
my body.

I see a human! Kind and with an expression I
have seen only from my mother, worried for me.
The female human species fed me with water
enough to quench my thirst, which was a lot, I
am wrapped in a cool blanket that almost
resembled fur and was carried into a means of
transport for the humans.

“You’re safe little guy.” she says.

I knew that this Human would take good care of
me, she already was. I looked outside of the
moving vehicle to see the trail of fire
disappearing behind the horizon. A sense of
relief spread throughout my fur and so I closed
my eyes smiling not from happiness slightly but
from the fact that I am now out from the flames.
I wondered about that dream and I thought to
myself as a teardrop ran down my cheeks ...

“I’m alive, mother”

Chapter 4

A Wombat's Plight

Wombat's POV:

The smell of dew, the sky punched with clouds giving it variety and shape, the lush earth, the plants that bear fruits, the warmth of the sunlight hitting every inch of the soil and the leaves, everything seemed so lucid. I could hear the songs of the birds flying in flocks, loud enough to be able to hear the chorus underneath my burrow. I climbed out of my burrow after a harmonic slumber to get my first meal of the day although I really did not have to go so far to hunt.

Somehow, a pile of leaves was placed in such a mouth-watering manner right in front of my tiny eyes. Without hesitation, I quickly went up to the stash but as I did, it started getting further and further away from me, so I ran.

I kept running. The chirping of the birds stopped, actually, they disappeared and instead, dark clouds started to flood the sky. I turned around, ignoring the fact that my grub was running away from me, to see the horrific sight of my burrow and my neighbors too, on a rampaging fire. I stared into the pits of hell when I noticed yellow-black sparks below me. My eyes slowly fell to the sight on my paws that told me.

I am on fire.

~

I had just woken up from a dream. My sight gazed upon the soil above me in terror of those vivid scenes playing back in my head, repeating themselves to remind me of the horrors in life, maybe. I then sat up straight and looked at my paws that were shivering and...sweaty?

It was getting hotter and hotter and I got more muddled than ever.

Why can I hear the sounds of birds screaming and cows yelping and why is it that my burrow tremors? Is it because animals have been darting over my home!? I questioned myself. !? I questioned myself and tried taking a little peek over my burrow only to perceive that my guesses were right but that played only a tiny portion of my concerns.

What I saw was my dream ... come to reality.

I then went back in my hole to be in an even more apprehensive state. I curled and lied down, quivering, when another wombat poked its head in my burrow to make it plain to me that I was going to die if I did not join them in the marathon of barely surviving and then he left.

My thoughts flashed back to my dream and at once climbed out of my home to see that I was already so far behind every animal. So, I started running. I ran without any remembrance of my home and food, just like in my nightmare, I ran

thinking about how I wanted to live more than anything in the forest right now.

Even though I tried to bolt away from the flames, it kept catching up to me. Slowly but surely. I could still make out the distinct sounds of animals being engulfed into the wildfire that was so giant, it felt as though it could swallow millions in one go which sadly, I was to witness that happen in front of me.

My neighbor, who came to warn me previously, burnt his paw and was, unfortunately, prey to the blazing, orange monster that could easily take the spot of the king of the forest as it asserted its dominance over the entire animal kingdom. I looked in horror at that moment, shock, fear, and every negative emotion spread through my body. But the death of my own kind made it clear...

I did not want to die!

Survival within these fires was tough, but time seemed to pass by, and the fiery beast calmed down and I was able to call myself a survivor,

one of those who lived. No food, exhaustion, blisters, and racking pain in the body. I collapsed onto the still hot ground and started to breathe profusely. My eyes, even if I did not want to, shut down although I was still conscious of my surroundings, to everyone, I must have looked like I went to sleep.

The scenes started to playback again in my head making it harder to forget that hell did not pay us a visit but then again, how could I forget it. Not aware of the time, I still lied down on the earth when suddenly I could feel hot drops falling onto my black fur coat. This feeling eventually got heavier by the second to the point when I finally got my eyes to open, I was half-submerged in water.

A part of me was happy that the intense flames were out of the way even though my home, food, and my pals were mostly gone, but the other part of me was back in survival mode knowing that I could suffocate to death if I do not swim back

up. Water is not my fears, so that got my confidence to life back, but little did I know what was to come next!

The rain did not stop flooding the area, and I was too tired to keep paddling my way out to the lower ground. I quickly held onto a burnt tree that I thought was enough to keep me out of the water for now to rest.

Alas! everywhere it was wet and slippery, not allowing my paws to grab hold of the tree and at once, fall back into the water making an immense splash due to the height of my fall. While swimming back up, I noticed the corpses of many animals floating and drifting away so I closed my eyes, trying not to imagine myself in their position, held my breath, and swam away.

I then drifted to a nearby hilly area where I saw a few of my own kind. So little, I could count them if I knew how to count but they had some food, enough to share and that was all that

mattered at that particular moment of time. I approached them and I sat down tired and soaked up. Them having no problem in sharing and knowing the current situation we all were in, gently slid their leaves (that were a little soggy but edible), toward me as well as some herbs they found while swimming up here otherwise, everything else was burnt to a crisp.

We shared our end of the stories to each other while the rain kept flooding the lower grounds. We were safe for a good amount of time. We were not alone.

Still. Everything was petrifying.

Chapter 5:

Consequences Of Our Avarice

Human's POV:

I dare not say that my day went normal, no, not at all, unless, if one considers waking up to an evacuation alert messages spamming the phone, then maybe. But it was not. Twenty minutes approximately after I read the alert messages, which I knew was genuine due to the undeniable weather outside, I immediately packed up. Phone, laptop, emergency food and obviously, lots and lots of water. I did not bother taking my house keys, though to be honest, I did think of doing so, but I figured that by the time everything would settle down, my house would be no more than a charred husk when I get back. I got into my car and started the engine.

Everything felt hot and gloomy including the audible and distinct cries of the forest's animals. It was miserable. As soon as I held the hot frame of the steering wheel, my hands felt a little prick but clearly, that was nothing compared to the real deal outside, so I drove. I followed the pathway lead by the police and firefighters only to see burnt bodies, not of humans but animals, enough to form a bridge on the side of the road, though I would not want to imagine that purely because it was revolting and I did feel the urge to chuck up at the sight of these corpses would follow my sight no matter where I looked, taking my driving into consideration that is. The mist of smoke was able to blind my vision however, it could never cover up the carcasses of those creatures.

While I was giving my best shot at driving in this fog that felt like a thick grey blanket really, I had finally reached the evacuation spot. I met up with my neighbors who provided me with a mask sufficient enough to keep the smoke away

from me while breathing. After a healthy discussion about the situation which I believe to be the first adult-like conversation I have had after turning nineteen last year, gone are the days where I was a simple introverted girl. Anyway, I decided to get closer to my car in case the police begin an emergency evacuation. I looked above at the sky rather, smoke and try to imagine what would happen after the fires are out, hoping they do go out. For a good two days, everyone kept driving to safer places which eventually would get caught up in the blazing fire.

Finally, when we stopped by a beachside, I considered to pull over and rest so that is what I did. Then suddenly, I heard a really loud thud nearby.

The sound echoed from the forest which faced the opposite side of the beach picking my curiosity, and it seemed as though whatever fell down was very near. So, I instantly followed the sound which brought me to a sleeping koala.

My body moved on its own and the result was clear... I had to save it. I brought it into my car and tried to quench its thirst knowing it had not had a drop of water since the beginning of the bushfire.

I soon wrapped it in a blanket, I could hear it wailing like a baby even though it was faint and drove my vehicle to the nearest police car stationed and told the officer to further drive it to safety, so the police officer told me the directions to a clinic stall set up to supply first aid. I went there as fast as I could and at once found a nurse. I looked at it one more time and remembered its teardrop to its cheek. I was relieved. I found not only the koala I sent in, but also a little bunny sleeping soundly in the arms of a young lad. I went up to him and started a conversation.

“Yours?”

“No actually, I rescued it from a fire on the last street. The little thing was crying and hopping in the fire”

“Must’ve been scary?”

“This whole situation is. I saw you bring in that koala.”

“Yeah, same thing here, heck the bunny and this guy might’ve crossed paths without even knowing!”

“Possible.”

We both laughed off the conversation and went back to following the police to safety.

The fires are being ignited due to our selfish needs as humans and we place innocent creatures, fauna, and flora, in pain.

~

I thought at that moment that, what if God gave us a second chance to live... Would we still follow our desires? Would we still follow our greed?... Will the outcome remain the same?

~

Published Works by the Author :



Let's be responsible Earthlings



The stepping stone to success-failure



Knowledge is empowering



I reach out to the youth and say...



Life is not on repeat!

Authors Note

From the day we enter into this world, it is our duty as human beings and as people, to care for what we have been given from our breathtaking planet. We take resources from it like coal, oil, minerals, and whatnot, but why do we only take and not give?

It is true that there are people who care and wish to make the next generation's lives more prosperous than what we get now, and the generation after and the generation after them.

These people deserve the utmost respect for their commitment. The reason climate change and global warming is, well I do not need to write it out because now we can see it with our very own eyes, feel it in the weather and smell it in the air.

This blame cannot be pushed on one another, it goes out to everyone living on planet Earth so therefore, we should work together to continue to bring out the beauty of our planet without any harm to any living thing including ourselves.

Let this book be a message. Animal life is as important as Human life. Let us mend the planet who brought to us happiness and life before we find another.

~Emaan Zahra Ijaz

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Emaan Zahra Ijaz



I am currently a high school student of the age 16 and a young writer.

Fleeing From The Flames is my first published book but definately not the last. I enjoy writing descriptive realistic fiction among any other type of writing but ofcourse I have dabbled in a few other genres including Haikus and Fantasy.

Apart from the book, I have been writing and still am, for multiple famous publications and magazines such as Young Times, Writers Cafe, TeenInk (Yup, they all are magazines

and online writing communities!)

My goal as a writer and author is to place a positive impact on the society with my books.