

An Ode to Mother Earth

I decline to write stories of romance, because I am sixteen, and I know nothing of being in love and of romance. To write of something you know nothing of like you know something of it is a sin. But for the world, for the earth, perhaps I can write, because I lied earlier. I know of love. In fact, I am in love. I am in love with life, and in love with this world. I am not the first. Mother Earth has inspired odes and ballads of love from artists spanning from the earliest echelons of time to the age of now, of glimmering electronics and modern constructs.

Any art is a labor of love, a labor for love. My voice is not beautiful, my hands are not a painter's hands, and my voice and hands tremble when I speak, but I have my words, and I have my writing, and that is the only way I know of to express how much the natural world means to me, and how precious it is, and so here is my ode to the Earth.

Patched through and well, the world is worn, and yet it never ceases to amaze me.

I am nine years old and I am sitting with the rest of my fourth grade class in the middle of a redwood forest. We are at sleep-away camp, and it is nighttime, and there is the distant hoot of owls in the trees. The air is cold, but the campfire around which we are huddled is not. We are clustered around a woman, and I do not remember her name, only that she was a Native American storyteller. She speaks of the Earth, her relationship with the land, of the birds and the animals, who are her brothers and sisters, and we sit, twenty-four wide-eyed children as she sings and talks, and taps on the drum in her arms.

“This is the Earth.” She drops the drum and opens her arms. “Love it,” she says, and me, I say that I will, and it is a curse, a blessing, and a promise that I strive to keep.

Later that year, I hear Chief Seattle’s speech, and I did not understand then, but I do now, at least, more so, the gravity of his words, and I think of them often. “Every part of the earth is sacred to my people. Every shining pine needle, every sandy shore, every mist in the dark woods, every meadow, every humming insect. We know the sap which courses through the trees as we know the blood that courses through our veins. We are part of the earth and it is part of us. The perfumed flowers are our sisters. The bear, the deer, the great eagle, these are our brothers. The rocky crests, the dew in the meadow, the body heat of the pony, and man all belong to the same family.” I do not pretend to understand everything, but as I upturn my face to the sunshine and breathe in the smell of pine needles, I think that I am beginning to.

Mother Earth, she does not care if I am tired, weary, and bitter, she does not care if my mind is clouded with self doubt, if poisonous words exist on the tip of my tongue, and she does not care if my hair is greasy, or if I am so tired, that I am about to fall asleep, or if I am so sad that it hurts to breathe. She does not care that I am but sixteen but feel the heavy weight and burden of life and impending disaster. She does not care that I had four tests at school today, or if I have not been playing well recently in volleyball practice, or if I have fallen in a slump and cannot seem to get up. I go to the forest, to the sea, to the hills, and the Earth wraps its arms around me, and frees me of judgement, of responsibility, of the crushing weight on my chest that threatens to overwhelm at times, and this is why I love it so deeply.

I bury myself in grassy fields, in dewy meadows, hot desert sand, ocean waves. I stick my head out the window of the car, and smell California orange blossoms in the air. I press the side of my cheek to the rich soil, and hear the heartbeat of a thousand lives, and love, breathe, and *live*. The world, it sings to me, and it humbles me.

I exhale humility, and all my sadness into the Earth, and it breathes me back life.

The world is truly a wonder.

And then the other way around. It frees me, and yet, the Earth enshrouds me, shackles me with responsibility to care for it, to give it back as much as it gives me. The Earth, as it is, is exhaling its damage, and darkness to us, and when I put pen to paper and write about environmental damage, about global warming, climate change, I breathe life back into our Earth.

Pick up your paintbrushes, your pencils, your cameras, your instruments, and draw breath into our dying Earth.

Embrace the Earth, my fellow artists. It embraces you.