

I Am.



I am forever. I have existed from the dawn of creation to the end of time, privy to the innermost workings of the Earth. I flow from river to ground, sea to sky, in one unfathomable cycle. I was there as the light broke through the darkness. I saw the trees and plants grow and bring forth fruit according to their kind. I witnessed the two great lights being hung in the sky. I watched the mountains rise from the deep, the birds of the air and the fish of the sea come into existence. I observed the creation of wild animals, the fearsome beasts, every creeping thing that crept upon the Earth. And man. I was there when the first man was brought into existence from the dust of the Earth.

I am strong. As the years flowed, I did too. My power swept across the Earth, soaking the ground, moisturizing the air, and breathing life into every plant and animal I touched. My currents swept nutrients through the ocean, pushed soil across the Earth, and sculpted the

mountains and hills you see today. Everything on this globe has been touched by my quiet strength.

I am beautiful. My colors spread across a wide spectrum. Clear, emerald, turquoise, azure, cerulean, cyan, slate, black, and so many more. For centuries, I have enchanted civilization with my pure and untouched allure. Wild waterfalls, misty ponds, crashing seas, calm lakes. A mellifluous symphony of organisms from this orchestra we call life.

I am feeling. Waves pound angrily, lakes shimmer peacefully, brooks burble jubilantly, and rainy tears streak down a window. My soul is intertwined with the Earth, every life and death healing or hurting me. I am one with the planet and the people, the glue that holds ecosystems together.

I am loving. I care for my people, for they depend upon me. Each child, parent, and grandparent has a special place in my heart, for I am the one keeping them alive. I water their crops, wash away their grime, and nourish their bodies with my quenching, luscious taste. I see their hopes and dreams, and my heart aches for their sorrows and rejoices at their successes. I love my children no matter what.

I am battered. As humanity has evolved through the eons, they created machinery and chemicals. Great, hulking, metal monstrosities and liquid death that has leeches through the Earth. They artificially alter each landscape, destroying the vegetation and nature I have created, a dagger to my soul. They restrain humans and creatures in small boxes, isolating me from my children. They pour chemicals into the Earth, imbue me with chlorine and fluorine, spray my designs with pesticides, and slowly sever nature's harmony, like a dull knife sawing through a tendon. The poison permeates the Earth, slowly sinking into me and dulling my appearance. I am no longer a source of life for our planet. Now, my presence brings death as I extinguish the lives

of marine creatures and other animals. Plastic floats on my surface, choking the existence of those who are caught. My waters are muddied, no longer the pure source of life from days past. Oil casts sick rainbows over me, painning any living being it contacts. And I am powerless to stop it.

I am broken. My purity and beauty have been destroyed by the descendants that I breathed life into. My immaculate waters have been tainted and sullied by the waste forced upon me. My potential has been addled and crippled by trash, leaving me scarred and bruised. I can only sob as the spark is choked out of my children. The same waters that once gave them life will now be their downfall.

I am dependent. In my vulnerability, I cannot spare or save myself from impending doom. If pollution continues, I will be no more. If I am gone, life will be no more. I am trapped on a sinking ship, defenseless and weak.

I am healing. One day, my children looked at me, really looked at me. They saw beneath the wounds, the bleeding, the trauma, the debris. Instead of seeing a sick and broken body, they saw potential. They saw life. They made connections between my illness and the toxins they were dumping into me. They took pity on me, their life-giving mother, and began to mend the damage. New regulations put in place, trash cleaned up, oil removed, fossil fuel use decreased, and harmful procedures and products banned. Some people and organizations even dedicated their careers and lives to studying, understanding, and caring for me. Slowly but surely, I began to heal, my waters returning to their normal colors as life returned and abounded. With each new creature and plant, I weep tears of joy and relief. I am able to smile at the birth of every child and not fear for their future.

I am hopeful. As technology and knowledge evolve, ways to care for and preserve me will too. Maybe, together, we can mend old mistakes and save our planet. We can never change the past, but we can alter the future. The beauty of life is that when we hit rock bottom, we can rise up again, resilient. Managing and tending to me will ensure clean water for future generations, and a safe and beautiful planet for all. While I am grieved at the actions of my children, I will never stop loving them. Like a post-partum mother, I will never be the same, my mind and body eternally altered by the actions of others. But I would have done it a thousand times again for my children. They rely on me for life, but I rely on their efforts too.