



A MANIFESTO FOR THE LIVING WORLD


On a spring day I walk along a familiar path.
The wind is rising, almost to storm force; the spruce branches comb the air,
the trunks sway in harmony. I remember an old riddle:

If a tree falls in a forest and no one is there to hear it, does it make a sound?

I reach a bend and peer through the branches, toward a meadow further on in the forest. At first I see only a dark shape, then the entire bird. A capercaillie is moving slowly across the meadow. It gazes at the treetops or at some parallel reality. It is seeking out a rival or a mate, but it notices me with the corner of its eye.

I stop. The bird edges farther away. I continue cautiously. It stands at the edge of the meadow, then starts to approach me.

And I run.



When you have to flee from an enraged wild creature,
you understand the answer to the old riddle:

If a tree falls in a forest, someone is always there to hear it. If not a human, then a capercaillie, a goldcrest, a ribbed pine borer, a wood ant, a moss mite, a potworm, or any other creature among nature's immeasurable multitudes. Even plants respond to sound waves.

The world is full of single-celled beings, protozoa, plants, fungi, and animals, each experiencing its own twists of fate, adventures, and calm moments. Nature's inhabitants form a network whose threads are beyond the control of any individual.

Yet among humans there is a widespread belief that our species is the crown of creation, the top of the food chain, the end point of evolution.

If you asked any representative of another species, they would say we are mistaken. We eat, drink, need shelter, carry microbes within us, are born and die, live by the sun's energy, by the grace of photosynthesizing plants – on an equal footing with everything else.

Thousands of years ago we began to clear and fence, quarry, cause havoc.
Now biodiversity loss and climate change show that nature cannot be conquered.
It has revealed its limits – our limits.

We can grill every inch of the planet until we ourselves are the barbecue.
Or we can admit that we have understood the warning.

No one is commanding us to change. No one is granting us one last chance.
What we do is our own decision. Every one of us is responsible for the ecological crisis;
every one of us can decide whether the crisis deepens or lessens.

We travel across the planet's surface as tiny particles, as small and as vibrantly alive as our fellow travellers – from tardigrades to spruce-needle fungi, from the spring vetchling to the mistle thrush. Each of us has been given a moment to marvel at the hums and hisses, pipings and chirrings and commotions and frolics that have arisen in this corner of the cosmos. Each of us is given our own lifetime to build a future instead of a catastrophe.

In former times we were called subjects; nowadays we are called consumers.
We are capable of more. We are not subservient consumers.
We are inhabitants of Earth – creatures of the Living World.

As creatures of the Living World, we want a planet where

- the airspace is reserved primarily for birds and insects, not aeroplanes
 - plants cover more of the land than asphalt and buildings
 - seas, lakes and rivers are sources of life, not ponds of poisonous sludge
- we try to protect every creature's home by all possible means, wherever that nook or hollow may be – in a tree cavity, a pore in the soil, or any other tiny corner.

As creatures of the Living World – and especially as humans – this is what we wish:

- that humans would stop striving after what they do not need
- that when threats appear, we don't just ponder solutions – we carry them out.

To achieve these goals, we, creatures of the Living World, are resolved to act.
Each of us can find our own voice and use it – on our own behalf and on behalf of those whose language humans do not understand.

Since ancient times, people have painted and told stories, played instruments and sung.
So too shall we, creatures of the Living World, from now on. We shall reach toward the beauty that buds on the horizon of our imagination; we shall dream, explore, and create art.
We shall bring the dream into reality, set an example, and trust one another.

The future does not belong to the brawlers who barge into bunkers or squeeze into rocket ships.
The future belongs to the whole Living World.



On a spring day in the forest I flee for a moment, running from a capercaillie.
It is agitated. By felling trees and draining swamps, we have fragmented its world.
The bird is not crazy. It has merely been left isolated.

When I stop and look over my shoulder, the capercaillie stands far behind me like a statue.
It is the owner of the forest – not I, nor any human.

I continue on my way, and the bird stops following me.
It has guided me to a path where I can walk without disturbing others. The path leads to the future.
Like every path, it comes into being as soon as enough people walk on it.

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