

Transcript

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[introduction music]

Welcome to Easy Stories in English, the podcast that will take your English from OK to Good, and from Good to Great.

I am Ariel Goodbody, your host for this show. Today's story is for advanced learners. The name of the story is *The End*. You can find a transcript of the episode at [EasyStoriesInEnglish.com/End](https://www.EasyStoriesInEnglish.com/End). That's [EasyStoriesInEnglish.com/End](https://www.EasyStoriesInEnglish.com/End). There, you can also download the episode as a PDF.

Recently, I've been connecting more and more with nature. Despite growing up in a family which loves going on camping and walking holidays, I was never really interested in nature as a child. I was always absorbed in my own world, and I preferred staying inside and playing video games to exploring the great outdoors.

For most of my adult life, I've been able to appreciate nature, but equally I've felt very disconnected from it. It frustrated me that I didn't know the names of trees, that I was ignorant of much of what was going on around me. It didn't help that I associated it with my parents, who always seemed to care *too* much. When we were in the car, they'd brake out of nowhere to point up and say, 'Look, a buzzard!' A **buzzard** is a kind of bird of prey, a bird that hunts other animals. I saw my parents' extreme interest and found it a bit embarrassing.

But as life got more stressful over the years, and as climate change has become harder and harder to ignore, I've found myself returning to nature more. A few months ago, I read a book called *How to Do Nothing: Resisting the Attention Economy* by Jenny Odell, and it completely changed my attitude.

The book talks about the 'attention economy', the idea that, these days, big companies like Apple and Google are fighting for your attention, and that to pay close, slow attention to things is often an act of resistance, a way of fighting back. So the book isn't really about 'how to do nothing', but rather how to be more **intentional**, how to move through the world consciously and think about what you're doing.

Of course, these days there are plenty of courses and discussions about digital detoxing, where you cut yourself off from technology for a set period of time. But these are usually seen as personal actions, a way to reduce stress and go back to work more refreshed. What Jenny Odell argues in her book is that we need to 'do nothing' as a political act, as something for our own well-being as well as that of others, not just for productivity.

A concept she talks about a lot is **bioregionalism**. This is the idea that, instead of basing our identity in the town or country we come from, we should focus on our connection to the ecosystem, the wildlife, of the area. I loved this idea, and it completely changed how I

thought about things. No longer did I want to learn the names of trees just to know them—I wanted to connect with the world *directly around me*.

Based on the advice in the book, I started being more thoughtful in nature. I slowed down, listened to the birds. I even went and inspected all the trees in my local park individually. In fact, I do this most times when I go, and I see how they change over time. It's been a small change, but I can feel my relationship with the world shifting. For example, I used to view rain as a nuisance, but now I welcome it, because after such a hot summer, I know that the land needs it. I'm happy to see all the plants and trees thriving after a good rainfall.

It's been strange, actually. Connecting with nature has made me more aware of the destruction going on, but it has also lessened my anxiety. I suppose it makes sense. If your relative is dying of an illness, you'd rather know exactly what's going on, rather than just knowing that things are bad. And hearing about wildfires in California and ice caps melting in Antarctica isn't the same as feeling the earth change beneath my feet.

So, although today's story might seem a bit pessimistic, it has been **cathartic** to write—it has helped me get out a lot of difficult emotions. My feeling now is: life will go on. The trees and plants were around millions of years before we stepped out onto the earth, and they will continue after we're gone. I'm lucky simply to be a part of such a beautiful planet, at a point in history where we're able to live in relative comfort.

So I hope today's story isn't upsetting. And if it is, I invite you to go outside and hug a tree. No, really. Go and put your arms around it. Feel her branches, examine his leaves. Let them know that you care about them. And if you hear a bird singing, sit still and listen.

OK, I'll just explain some words that are in today's story.

Cymbals are a kind of percussion instrument—musical instruments that you play by hitting them. Cymbals are big circles made of metal. Two cymbals sit together, and when you hit them with a drumstick, the cymbals hit each other and make a sound like [cymbal noise].

The **horizon** is the line where the land, or sea, meets the sky. So when the sun rises and sets, it goes over the horizon. There is nothing lovelier than going to the beach on a sunny day and watching the boats and swimmers, and even the sunset, on the horizon.

A **millennium**, and the plural is **millennia**, is a thousand years. 2000 was a very big year, because it was the turn of the millennium. I was only seven at the time, but I remember there were lots of big parties to celebrate the new millennium, and in London they built a special building called the Millennium Dome where they had an exhibition all year round.

Curl up means to move into a ball shape. Some people curl up into a ball while they sleep, although this is bad for your back. You might also curl up on the sofa with a good book, or curl up on the floor when you are sad. In autumn, the leaves on the trees curl up, turn red and fall to the ground.

Solace is a sense of comfort in a very difficult time. For example, if you are experiencing grief because your mother just died, it might be a solace to know that she died painlessly, or that she was happy at the time of her death. Sometimes, a little solace is all we need to get through a bad situation.

A **roar** is the sound a lion makes, like [roar]. We also use it to talk about very loud things, like the roar of the ocean, or the roar of a lorry.

Tinnitus is a medical condition where you hear ringing or buzzing in your ears, like [tinnitus noise]. Some people experience tinnitus from birth, and some people develop tinnitus by going to too many loud rock concerts. I have tinnitus, but I didn't realise for a long time because I just assumed everyone had it. So I can never really enjoy pure silence, because there's always a ringing in my ears, but fortunately mine isn't too loud.

Mourn means to show that you are sad after someone has died. Nowadays in the UK, people mourn at funerals by crying, but in the past, mourning was a lot more complicated. Women often wore black for years after their husband died, to show that they were in mourning. In some countries, performers are paid to mourn loudly.

The **umbilical cord** is a rope that connects a baby to its mother. While the baby is inside the mother's womb, the umbilical cord feeds blood to it. After it is born, the umbilical cord is usually cut off.

Agony is extreme pain, especially pain that you go through when you die. If someone is in agony, they are experiencing a lot of pain. Sometimes, when something is really boring, or there is a pain that goes on for a long time, we say that it is **agonising**.

Cannibalism is when humans eat other humans. Cannibalism is a taboo in most cultures—it is not accepted, and it is considered a crime to practise it. But in some cultures in the past, cannibalism fulfilled certain roles. For example, you might eat parts of the body of a relative who died, in order to mourn or help their souls pass into the afterlife.

Instincts are those feelings that help you make decisions or figure out a situation. For example, when I'm teaching, I sometimes feel that students don't understand me. I know this just through instinct. **Base instincts** are our most simple instincts, the kind we used to survive in the past. So our base instincts might lead us to kill someone if we are hungry enough.

When a flower **blooms**, it turns into its most beautiful form. Most flowers bloom only once a year. For example, roses bloom in spring or autumn. However, some **rare blooming flowers** only bloom once a decade or even longer. For example, the corpse flower, which smells like a dead body when it blooms, only blooms every seven to ten years.

A **tapestry** is a piece of art that is made with cloth and hung on a wall. In the medieval period in Europe, tapestries were a very popular form of art, and often showed great battles or nature scenes. In the UK, there is a famous tapestry called the Bayeux Tapestry which shows the Normans invading England in 1066.

By the way, there are a few plant and animal names in today's story that I decided not to explain, since they are not common words and not important to understanding the story. Actually, given the theme, it makes sense for them to feel a bit distant and mysterious. But if you are interested, you can of course look them up yourself.

If you enjoy the podcast and want to support me, you can join my Patreon. If you give \$2 a month and become a Hard Worker, then you get exercises with each episode, and for \$5, you can be one of my Star Students and watch my monthly videos. Actually, September's video was all about my relationship with nature—basically an extended version of what I talked about today. Go over to Patreon.com/EasyStoriesInEnglish and join today. That's Patreon.com/EasyStoriesInEnglish.

A big thank-you to my new patrons: laosai, Igor Chychekov, Valeria Monti and Lucie Krizkova.

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OK, so listen and enjoy!

The End

The waves jumped and crashed, **cymbals** without drums. She stared out to the **horizon**, wishing that an answer would rise over it, but nothing broke the thin blue line which melted into the muddy white clouds like sugar.

Every day had been like this. At first, she had searched desperately for life, climbing through former fields and forests. The trees were still there, but their souls had departed. The leaves were beginning to die, but in a way like no autumn had ever passed in the planet's many **millennia**. They did not redden and fall, but went stiff and broke off at the slightest touch. The roots **curled up**, hiding in the sharp shells of their former trunks.

Now she sought the sea, the one **solace** remaining. But though it crashed and boiled, it was no more than a dirty glass of water. Simply knowing that no mysteries lay beneath its surface, that no ancient masters swam its depths, was enough to turn its beautiful **roar** into a harsh **tinnitus**.

It had come so suddenly, like a stone to the chest. Those who had dedicated years of their life to **mourning** the natural world continued to cry the loudest. There were a stubborn few, naïve children of the universe, who did not care about the loss. They forgot that plastic was squashed up dinosaur bones, a transformed postcard from ages past, that electricity was lightning, that societies more diverse than any human moved and thrived behind tree cover. They didn't know that every living thing, from oak to robin to humpback whale, had a soul and a meaning, that humanity, for all its clever inventions, had never cut the first **umbilical cord**.

Most mourned quietly. This was the End of History. It did not come with a slow, **agonising** hellfire. It did not end with a nuclear storm, nor failed fleeing to Mars. It ended with the hand of God, descending like a child into a doll house, sweeping away everything that had given existence meaning.

All other life on Earth was gone, which meant humans were no longer alive.

She came to the sea, day after day. The waves boiled and crashed like dancing flames. Had Leviathan risen from the depths to swallow the Earth? Was another cycle of existence about to begin?

At first, the hunger had been unbearable. Men, women and children who had never known more than temporary pain were dipped into **agony**, smashed into suffering like the plants and animals whose habitats they had destroyed. Weeks of fighting, chase and **cannibalism** broke out; **base instincts** conquered society. But the energy gradually ran out, and they collapsed, either lying down to wait for the end, or desperately seeking the remains of life.

She was not the only one on the beach. She stood right at the water's edge, but far enough away to avoid the lick of the waves. Another stood a hundred metres to her right, and a few others gathered on a cliff nearby. They did not speak to each other. Words had become as precious as **rare blooming flowers**, and companionship had lost its warmth.

Aside from those murdered, nobody died. The hunger grew until one day you woke up different. You felt not hungry, not tired, and pains melted from your body. Yet there was no joy in life, no way of understanding the death around you when you would live forever. Nobody knew what was happening, and nobody wanted to find out. Explanation would make it real.

She came to the sea, day after day. Most didn't bother. They lay on the ground, piling up by roadsides, in the broken-glass **tapestries** of former forests, or **curled up** in beds. Human walls and furniture, despite their natural origin, stayed as they were. You could wrap yourself up in a reproduction of life, with palm-tree bed sheets and teddy bear bestiaries. There was no solace in this. The fabrics formed a thick layer, like dirt thrown on a grave.

She came to the sea, alone that day. The other visitors had gradually gone. How much time had passed? Moonlight dulled like an old coin, and sunlight shone on emptiness.

Clocks and watches were absurd, like cars built out of potatoes. Time lived in everything, yet humans insisted on capturing it in glass bottles.

She walked. The sea did not hug her as it had in her childhood. It brushed against her like an unfriendly dog. But soon, she felt nothing. Not even when the water reached her neck, covered her chin, her mouth, and finally her eyes.

She came into the sea, the final day. The weight of millennia pressed her to the ocean floor. She passed no fish, no coral, no sharks. Seaweed floated like knives. A few pieces brushed her cheeks, slicing them open.

She came to the bottom of the sea. But she was no angler fish. She had reached a place that humanity had dreamed of seeing, and saw nothing. Pressure roared in her ears, and she almost felt it. The idea was too much, and she shut her eyes.

And God said, Let there be darkness: and there was darkness.

THE END

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