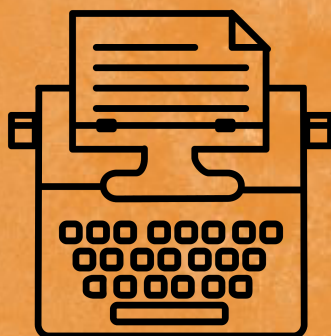


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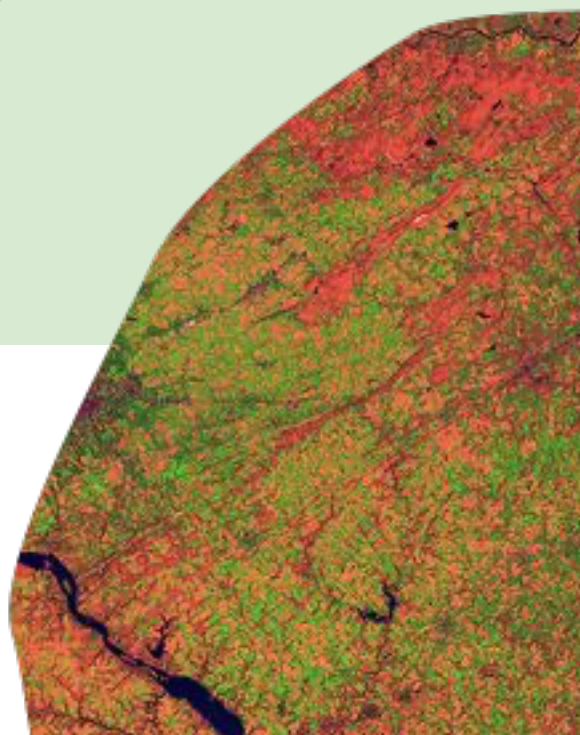
Author:

Occupy Climate Change (OCC!)

*Creative story
entry*



FORMAS



Streams of Serenity, Rains of Remembrance

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I

The narrow street, Köpmangatan, swelled with people. Even in the drizzle, crowds shuffled and pressed close, their laughter and shouts of celebration filling the air. The nine-hundred-year mark had drawn many people out and I felt the weight of it too, these cobblestones holding their stories beneath our feet. Jostled by the bodies around me, I scanned the street for a clearer path.

I had planned for a straight route down to Skeppsbron, but seeing the throngs of people spilling toward the alleys near the water, I knew I'd have to take a detour. I looked down the street ahead, mentally tracing a longer route that might keep me from getting caught up in the celebrations. I'd need to keep a careful pace to make it to the ceremony on time, and yet not rush – regenerative sorrow, like this city, was a slow process, something to sink into, and letting urgency creep into my thoughts would impair it. These ceremonies always asked a lot of me beforehand, testing my patience with its deliberate unfolding, and yet, the community, the sense of collective renewal, always outweighed.

Someone stumbled against my shoulder, interrupting my thoughts. "Sorry!" they exclaimed. The couple who brushed past me was a striking pair: one draped in the elegance of the 1890s, corseted and veiled in lace, while the other wore the casual layers of the 2020s, baggy jeans and a puffer jacket. Their outfits, a nod to the street's nine-hundred years, blended into the crowd's patchwork of eras, everyone wrapped in borrowed time.

I watched them disappear into the crowd and felt myself pulled deeper into the street's memory. These stones had seen everything, from kings' processions to working lives passing by. A hundred years ago, they'd almost lost this place. The rising water levels had put this entire neighborhood at risk, every corner of this low-lying district under threat. A couple of centuries ago they rebuilt Slussen – planning only for half a meter sea level rise. It was fascinating to me that society at one point had deemed the "cultural environment" and "urban cityscape" more important than long-term ecological resilience and the safety of future generations – knowing that the sea level would rise. If not for the city's need to hold onto its

history, it might have slipped away like so many others. I wondered what would have happened if this had been Fågelkärr, where the rising waters came quietly at first, until the neglected streets were canals. The desk drawn dikes filled their purpose on paper, but not with runoff water. Fågelkärr didn't have the Old Town's advocates and postcards. It wasn't marked for saving in the city's maps or minds.

No, the water alone didn't decide Fågelkärr's fate. It was the lines put on paper in offices far away, budgets carved to protect what mattered most to someone else. Was it because of a well written history or proximity to the center of power that we can celebrate the cobbled streets of the Old Town today? Fågelkärr, with its former industrial plots and non-native speakers, couldn't demand such protection. So it soaked. The water filled basements and swept the streets from cars and trees, carrying the poisons of a long-forgotten past. The ones who came to stop it were of course too late. It wasn't just water rising; it was the slow erosion of decisions made and remade, until there was nothing left to save.

I felt my Auricula clink in my left ear.¹ No need for batteries, no external charge, only the simple movement of my head. Sander's voice blended with the crowd. I tapped my ear.

"It's crowded down here," I said, tapping the Auricula again to send the message off. "I'll take the long way," I tapped anew.

"Better that," he replied, his voice slightly strained. "I'll be here on Skeppsholmen, getting the last things together. I'll wait."

¹ The Auricula is a ring-shaped device placed in the auricle that harnesses kinetic energy from movements of the head – nodding, tilting, or walking – using piezoelectric materials or oscillating weights to power its low-energy communication technology. Connected to a mesh network, it transmits sound through bone conduction without obstructing the ear canal. Made from soft, eco-friendly biopolymers, it blends naturally with the ear structure, with the idea of no radiation, no waste, and no isolation from the surrounding environment.

II

Sander was leaning over the railing of the *segeleka*, the weight of our supplies shifted to the opposite side to lift as much of the hull as possible out of the water. I shouted “hey” to announce my presence.

“She dried out in the past few days of sun,” he replied down to the water surface, not looking up. His voice carried the same ease as his movements, practiced and sure. He dipped his hand into a tin of grease and smeared it along the hull. The scent of it drifted upward, earthy and sharp. The sunny days are rare, but I recalled this happening last summer too, the wood shrinking when out of water in the sun. The grease would hold the water at bay until the planks swelled again. Skeppsholmen had been a place of traditional boatbuilding for generations. This particular boat, though, was only a few years old. Sander had built it together with this mother and I had been with them at her maiden voyage. It was my first ship launch, but Sander’s family had been building boats for generations, ever since the Great Simplification of the early 22nd century. It came in the wake of the Crash, when humanity could no longer ignore the consequences of crossing planetary boundaries. Resource scarcity and deteriorating living conditions compelled societies to restructure their lives in harmony with Earth’s limits. Former industrialized societies, weary of the failures of overambitious plans and technological quick fixes, embraced a cultural shift toward simpler, more mindful ways of living – rooted in community and closer to the non-human world. Many had returned to older ways then, living slower, closer to the earth.



'Liten segelbåt med pojke' by Clas Günther. Public domain From [Sjöhistoriska museet](#).

The small wooden boat Sander was caring for by the dock was an inheritance of that shift, each curve of her hull shaped by hands that understood the patience and craft of connection – not just to the wood and water but to the world itself.

III

The mist had lightened up with the breeze as we moved further out at a slow pace. The city had long receded, leaving only the open water, the rhythmic slap of waves against the boat, and the muted gray sky above. The drizzle had stopped, left was only the moisture in the air. It felt cool as I breathed it in. The sail flapped as it relaxed every now and then. I laid down on the flooring, listening to the clucking against the oak, a cradle in the water. I realized I was under the surface now. Each dip and rise of the boat seemed to echo a kind of steadiness I was reaching for.

But Sander was restless, his gaze sharp against the low sky, hands moving anxiously along the edge of the boat. His words began spilling out, each one laced with a dissatisfaction that settled heavy in the air between us.

“It’s always the same with these winds,” he muttered, almost to himself, though his words seemed directed at the whole scene around us. “If we missed our window... it will get dark before we get there...” He trailed off, as though the weight of his words were enough to fill the silence. He went on, painting what-if after what-if: how the ceremony would be interrupted, how we might get lost without the light, how the wind would die down to leave us still and unmoving.

I listened, feeling each anxious note press against the quiet I’d drawn around myself. I tried to keep my own breathing steady, to stay in the slow stream of the water. To stay guided by the wind, when it would allow so, moving without a clock, recognizing that there were no fixed plans, no need to get anywhere – but his thoughts, quick and urgent, pulled at me.

“A motor would have changed this whole thing,” he said finally, his voice cutting through the air, sharp against the water’s calm, moving surface. “With a motor, we could have pushed through, beat the current, make it to the island by now, instead of leaving it to chance.” His words pressed on, each one a subtle accusation against the very water we sailed and the wind carrying us forward, as if it were holding us back, conspiring to slow him down.

I wanted to let his words fall past me, to keep them from reaching that place within where a calmness now resided, where there was space to wait for forces of the water and the air to bring us with them when we were invited. But each of his words was a pebble cast into the still water I’d hoped to keep undisturbed. Although it was only a dream – decades had passed since anyone used motors, their days numbered first by cost, then by the unraveling of a society no longer accustomed to living on energy surplus – his misplaced longing still reached me. As his thoughts gathered speed, I could feel my own sense of ease slipping, replaced by the silent tug of his frustration.

In the slow roll of the boat, the peaceful mist dispelled, I found myself drifting further from that peace I'd conjured up, and closer to the edge of his impatience. I could feel it, that need to control the water, to push against its natural slowness – his wish to break free of this gentle passage and carve a path straight to our destination, unbound by the movements of the wind and the water. My mind moved with his, locked on the destination, a censorship of the here and now. I could feel it rising in me, too, this unease, rising like the sea level over least centuries, unsettling the calm I'd thought I could carry, as we drifted forward, both together and apart.

IV

”This won’t work.”

Sander’s tone was clipped as he ordered me to furl the sail while he unhooked the gaff. His sharp glance cut toward me as the boat lurched, an unspoken warning. I rolled the sail tightly against the mast as he worked, his movements tense. When it was secured, he told me to sit in the stern. Without a word, he settled himself on the rowing bench and took hold of the oars. Part of me wanted to offer help, but something held me back. I thought that his need to fix things, to *do* something, to occupy the world, might be stilled if he rowed. I watched as his arms moved in rhythmic pulls, the water slicing away behind us, yet his restlessness still hung in the air between us, almost knotting itself tighter with each stroke.

One of the ceremony’s mantras, “*Don’t try to push the river. Go with the river. That’s what surrender is*”, was repeated with each oar stroke in my mind, until I let it out.

“But really, only dead fish follow the stream” he muttered in reply, the expression ringing apart, like something from the 20th century streber culture.

If so, I thought, what killed it?

Like flooded dikes, the restlessness of the situation overflowed within me, pulling with it other anxieties into my mind. Would this continue in the ceremony? What if his agitated mind might shut him out of the ceremony entirely, just when I thought he needed it most?

My gaze moved to the horizon. It was neither a boundary nor a refuge, but a trembling line where the muted sky and earth murmured to one another in mutual embrace, ever-shifting as we moved. It opened something in me, knowing that this boundary and fixed destination was just in my imagination. Getting to the island, there would be new illusions of places to get to. The horizon would still be there.

The ceremonies of regenerative sorrow had become a common ritual in our grandparents’ time as a way to meet the grief they carried and build the resilience the planet now asked of us. The ceremonies began as serene gatherings in the wake of the Great Acceleration, when there was a collective need to grieve all that was irreversibly lost and at the same time find ways to unfold new paths. They grew slowly, a grassroots weaving of grief and renewal, as people sought ways to mourn the forests felled, the rivers poisoned, the species vanished. Grander ceremonies took shape far from urban areas, in Stockholm often in the remaining woods, or on islands among the skerries – places where connection to the more-than-human could be felt most keenly, both the beauty and the pain. Smaller gatherings found their home in old churches, buildings that had shed their monotheistic past to become places of sacred

interbeing. In the ceremonies, sorrow met acceptance, the rituals inviting to stay open over closing; recognition over avoidance, and a forward gaze, fostering resilience that carried within it the seeds of restoration. A resilience that did not imply “bouncing back” from the pain, but to live a meaningful life even while carrying the pain of grief.

I grew up traveling to the bigger ceremonies outside urban areas, as my mother had been very devoted. As a child, I didn’t understand much of it – the loud expressions, dancing, the slow movements, silences, and holding – but as I grew older, they began to take on weight, becoming more meaningful with each passing year. It wasn’t until then that I started to see the threads of meaning that wove through those gatherings: the active hope that could emerge in the midst of shared sorrow, and the importance of small, deliberate actions, even when their outcomes were uncertain. Active hope, I’d come to learn, often grew in connection with others, with a shared purpose. In the company of others working toward something larger than ourselves, I began to find solace, a kind of unspoken strength in the community. But it was only when the ceremonies ceased to feel like a duty that I could truly appreciate what they offered and allow its ideas to become perspectives to live by.

I wondered if Sander would let any of this reach him – or if he’d keep rowing, pushing past the very thing he needed. I did my best to keep my thoughts to myself, to resist the urge to colonize his mind with my own notion of peace.

As the last glow of twilight brushed the horizon, Sander's oar strokes slowed. The tension that had clung to the air between us had begun to dissolve, not in a sudden break, but in the gentle way water smooths a jagged stone over time. He paused, letting the oars rest in the water, and looked at me.

"I don't know why it's so hard," he said, his voice softer now. "I just... I feel like I'm failing at keeping it all together. But if I don't fix this, it'll all fall apart."

His words hung in the air, and for a moment, I wasn't sure if he was speaking about the boat, the ceremony, or something far larger.

"You've already done more than enough," I said quietly. "Sometimes the hardest thing is to let go."

He looked at me then, his eyes shadowed with distrust but searching. "And what if I let go, and everything falls apart?"

"It might," I admitted. "But it also might not. And either way, you won't be alone."

The silence that followed felt different than before – not the strained silence of unspoken words, but the kind of silence that holds space for something new. Slowly, he nodded, and with a sigh, he let go of the oars.

We sat there, letting the boat drift with the current, carried by forces larger than ourselves. The island loomed in the distance now, its edges blurred by the soft evening mist and a light spot from a fire. The ceremony would begin soon, whether we arrived in time or not.

I listened to the water lapping against the hull, a distant booming call of a bittern, and to Sander's breathing. In that moment, the horizon seemed less like an unreachable boundary and more like an invitation – not a place to arrive at, but marking a space in the world we inhabit.

The ceremony, I realized, had already begun. Not on the island or in the rituals we were heading toward, but here, in the still act of letting the wind and the water take us where it would.

Further reading:

Developmental plans for Stockholm. Stockholms stad (2023) gathers information on their developmental plans and climate adaptation. On the Swedish site it says that they are planning for “A sea level that is approximately 0.5 meters higher than today in the Stockholm area,” although the Swedish Meteorological and Hydrological Institute expect the sea level rise to be 2–2,5 meters (controlled for land elevation) and the County Administrative Board in Stockholm incorporated their recommendations two years earlier (Länsstyrelsen i Stockholm, 2021). The motivation in 2023 was: ”Adapting Slussen to levels far above the likely sea level rise would negatively impact the cityscape and cultural environment.”² The Old Town is already sinking because it was built on wooden poles and rubbish which rot as the ground water gets drained, and creative post-hoc solutions have been applied to save the sinking island (Connheim, 2018).

Urban environmental (in)justice. If the fictional example of Fågelkärr interested you, read more on urban environmental (in)justice in Joel Tarr’s (2017, pp. 73–92) chapter on urban environmental history. Although focused on America, it examines the complex relationship between cities and their surrounding environments. Here, he highlights how urban growth and industrialization expanded cities’ ecological footprints, often at the expense of marginalized communities. Tarr also underscores the role of governance, technology, and social inequities in determining which areas received environmental improvements and which were neglected, showing how urban planning often exacerbated social and spatial inequalities.

The Great Simplification. “The Great Simplification” is a concept developed by Nate Hagens (2020). It refers to a future societal transition from a highly complex, growth-driven, fossil-fuel-dependent economy to a simpler, more sustainable way of living within Earth’s ecological limits. His focal point is on the interplay between declining energy availability, ecological overshoot, and the need for systemic, cultural, and behavioral changes to build resilient, equitable, and low-energy systems.

Entanglements of Life in an Open World. Anthropologist Tim Ingold offers rich and perspective-opening insights and Kantian critique in his article “Binding against boundaries:

² My translation from Swedish. Org: “Att anpassa Slussen till nivåer långt över den sannolika havsnivåhöjningen skulle påverka stadsbilden och kulturmiljön negativt.”

Bindings against Boundaries: Entanglements of Life in an Open World.” (2008). Among else, he writes on the dichotomy “occupying the world” versus “inhabiting the world”, and philosophical perspectives on the horizon and the surface.

Ecocriticism. The presence of the ocean and the wind, as well as the water metaphors, in the story draw inspiration from a discussion between environmental historian Erin Stewart Mauldin and Jennifer Gidley on *The Oxford Comment* (2021). They explore ecocriticism, nature’s past literary prominence, and how such perspectives shape our environmental understanding.

Emotions. Lisa Feldman Barrett’s *How Emotions Are Made: The Secret Life of the Brain* (2017) challenges traditional views of emotions as universal and biologically hardwired. Instead, she argues that **emotions are socially constructed** through cultural and social contexts, shaped by our experiences and perceptions. Her work focuses on contemporary examples, but applied to historical situations, it allows us to explore how emotional cultures evolve and influence individual and collective experiences and behaviors. Read more about **mood congruency** in Leonard Berkowitz’s book *Causes and consequences of feelings* (2000, p. 76–78). Another emotional concept that is woven into this short story is **emotional contagion**, and a seminal article on this concept was written by Elaine Hatfield and colleagues in 1994. The ceremony of regenerative sorrow draws from **acceptance and commitment therapy** (ACT), having in mind that ACT “does not focus on the elimination of psychological distress, but rather on the development of a new relationship with one’s experiences in a way that enhances value-guided action.” (Williams & Samuel, 2024). **Active hope** is a concept introduced by Joanna Macy and Chris Johnstone in 2012 (rev. ed. 2022). This book offers a framework for cultivating resilience and proactive engagement in the face of global challenges (as climate change, war, extreme inequality, economic upheaval, and the dying back of nature) and uncertainty. It stresses the active part of creating a better world, as a difference to passive hope that outsources action to external forces.

Abstract

Below is an abstract of the “idea-infrastructure” I have behind the story.

This story takes place in Stockholm in 2223. Grounded in Lisa Feldman Barrett’s theory that emotions are socially and culturally constructed, and drawing from historical insights that emotions, attitudes, and behaviors toward the non-human world have been shaped and re-shaped by both material and immaterial forces, this story imagines a rainy solarpunk, post-dystopian society centered around new emotional concepts.

The story takes off in Stockholm’s Old Town, where rising sea levels have both metaphorically and literally redrawn the urban landscape, the story portrays, through a phenomenological perspective, a fundamentally transformed relationship between humans and the non-human. The unnamed main character experiences emotions somewhat new to the contemporary reader, such as *eco-serenity* – profound peace from living in harmony with nature – and reacts to her friend’s disharmonious ignorance. They are on their way to participate in a ceremony of *regenerative sorrow* – which allow for mourning past environmental destruction while fostering acceptance, resilience, and active restoration. The narrative unfolds against the backdrop of a slow-living, mindful society which developed place after the Great Simplification 2080–2120.

The story, though post-dystopian, is aesthetically influenced by solarpunk – without the solar. A brighter future without avoidance requires radical acceptance of the realities of climate change, which in Sweden will manifest as increased rainfall. Drawing from Joanna Macy and Chris Johnstone’s this could be labelled as active, rather than blind, hope.

Feldman Barrett’s theory underpins the worldbuilding of this story by imagining how purposeful cultivation of emotional frameworks can address planetary and mental health challenges. Through the theme of this transformed emotional culture, the story’s aim is to put theory into mental practice.

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