

STORIES TO EMPOWER
QUANTUM SOCIAL CHANGE

OUR
ENTANGLED
FUTURE

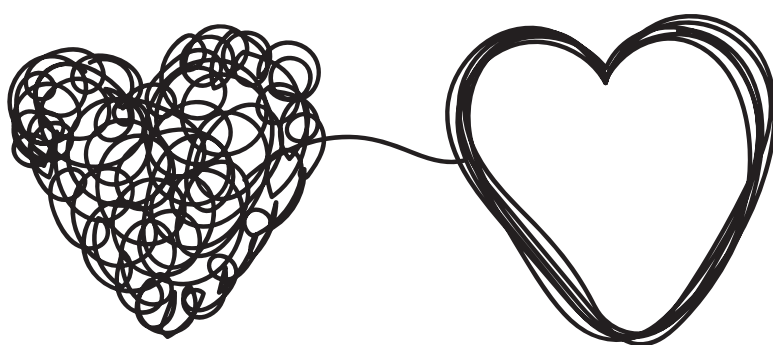


EDITED BY

KAREN O'BRIEN
ANN EL KHOURY
NICOLE SCHAFENACKER
JORDAN ROSENFELD

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This book was produced as part of the AdaptationCONNECTS research project, which is studying the relationship between climate change adaptation and transformations to sustainability. This 5-year project is funded by the Research Council of Norway (Project Number 250434/F10) and the University of Oslo.

O'Brien, K., El Khoury, A., Schafenacker, N. and Rosenfeld, J. (eds). 2019. *Our Entangled Future: Stories to Empower Quantum Social Change*. AdaptationCONNECTS Research Project, University of Oslo: Oslo, Norway.

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<http://cchange.no/ourentangledfuture>

ISBN (ePub): 978-82-691819-0-6

ISBN (pdf): 978-82-691819-2-0

ISBN (paperback): 978-82-691819-1-3

Cover: Michelle Fairbanks at Fresh Design
(mfairbanks.carbonmade.com)

Interior Design and Formatting: Qamber Design and Media
(qamberdesignsandmedia.com)

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PREFACE

Can we tell a new story about climate change? Can we use characters, imagery, and metaphors to communicate a sense of collective agency and reveal the potential that exists in every moment for social change? We thought it would be a good idea to try! This project came together because of a shared desire to bring potentiality to the forefront of our storytelling. We live our lives through stories, and if we want to create a thriving, sustainable world, we will need to change our story. We need narratives that convey our deepest values as humans and our greatest potential to respond collectively to climate change.

Our Entangled Future: Stories to Empower Quantum Social Change is part of the AdaptationCONNECTS research project, which is funded by the University of Oslo and the Research Council of Norway. AdaptationCONNECTS focuses on the relationship between adaptation and transformations to sustainability and explores the contributions of creativity, collaboration, empowerment, and new narratives. It also investigates the potential for new paradigms or thought patterns to shape the future, including those based on ideas drawn from quantum social science. The research engages with a growing recognition that to adapt successfully to climate change, we need to adapt to the very idea that we are creating the future right now. Adaptation is about transformation at the deepest levels, and there is no better way to transform than by telling new stories about ourselves and our significance in an entangled future. Could the use of new metaphors and images really contribute to a different narrative about climate change?

We announced a call for short stories related to the notion of “quantum social change,” fully recognizing the ambiguity of the term. We wanted stories to explore a quantum paradigm, and were curious about the different ways that this would be interpreted. We deliberately pitched the call to both writers and researchers, in recognition that many of those who work daily with climate change are engaging with wider and deeper solution spaces. We sought stories that engage with a creative agility to reimagine the world from the perspective of a new paradigm.

The nine authors featured in *Our Entangled Future* responded with thoughtful, agency-driven characters and a revitalizing view of our world and the context in which we find ourselves. One of our favorite aspects of this collection is the global character of the stories. The writers or their work originate in Australia, Denmark, Germany, Mexico, the Netherlands, Pakistan, the Philippines, and South Africa. A development process for each text was also built into our project and we are grateful to writer and co-editor Jordan Rosenfeld for her careful hand in bringing forth what makes each narrative exceptional.

Three of the nine stories received jury awards for their innovation and excellence from our expert panel of Amy Brady, Adeline Johns-Putra and Rebecca Lawton. The award winning stories, *The Witnesses* by Chris Riedy, *The Drought* by Jessica Wilson, and *The Ephemeral Marvels Perfume Store* by Catherine Sarah Young provide three different interpretations of quantum social change. Interestingly, all of them take place in the future, yet draw attention to the potential we hold right now to generate transformative shifts. Partway through the project, we recognized the opportunity to feature compelling and evocative visual art, and we paired each story with an original image that relates to entanglement and the natural environment.

This book is a response to society's tepid progress on addressing the root causes of climate change. We consider these root causes to be fundamentally about how we see ourselves in the world, how we relate to each other and to the environment, and not the least, how we engage with the future. Writer and ecologist Robin Kimmerer speaks about writing as "an act of reciprocity with the world."¹ Reading too, can be a reciprocal, even a quantum, act. In fact, readers of these stories are participating in the unfolding possibilities described in this anthology. We hope you enjoy these nine stories and the accompanying art. Better yet – we hope that they inspire you to write your own story about quantum social change!

Karen O'Brien, Ann El Khoury, Nicole Schafenacker, and Jordan Rosenfeld
September 2019

1 Kimmerer 2013, p. 152.

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save us.” The story of climate change is often told as a heroic battle of good versus evil, right versus wrong, and us versus them. As this plot unfolds, many people are starting to look more closely at the narratives underlying the story of climate change. What kind of stories are we actually telling ourselves and each other about our future in a changing climate? More importantly, what messages are we conveying about our potential to influence the future, right here and now?

Stories play a powerful role in transmitting personal and collective experiences. They allow us to “feel” climate change in ways that can move us emotionally and open our imagination to new possibilities. They raise our awareness not only to what is happening in the world, but to how it may be experienced by others, both now and in the future. In doing this, stories can change our world. Indeed, the climate crisis requires us to imagine other ways of living—a task to which, of all cultural forms, fiction is the most suited. As Amitav Ghosh writes in *The Great Derangement*, “let us make no mistake: the climate crisis is also a crisis of culture, and thus of the imagination.”¹

Climate fiction, or “cli-fi,” is a literary genre that is rapidly expanding in response to the climate crisis, with new books and anthologies coming out every day. Cli-fi is located within a broader genre of speculative or science fiction. Speculative fiction is particularly well suited to addressing the climate crisis, as it can activate both reflection and engagement and thus serve as an effective vehicle for expressing experiential impacts, social criticism and alternative scenarios. Speculative fiction can also be used to develop strategic thought experiments related to both practical and philosophical ideas. As an art-science form, it has a unique capacity to envision possible, probable, and preferred collective futures based on projections of available scientific data. It can also draw attention to the importance of consciousness, subjectivity, agency and lived experiences of the climate crisis. It demonstrates humanity’s complex co-implication with the natural world in a more subjective and emotional way. Speculative fiction has the potential to help us to recognize our own potential in co-creating the future. This potential has not yet been fully activated.

1 Ghosh 2016, p. 9

THE WITNESSES

by Chris Riedy

But speak the truth, and all nature and all spirits help you with unexpected furtherance. Speak the truth, and all things alive or brute are vouchers, and the very roots of the grass underground there, do seem to stir and move to bear you witness.

— Ralph Waldo Emerson, Divinity School Address, 1838

We weren't trying to save the world. Not at the start anyway. I wish I could say our motives were always pure, but the truth is more complicated, messier, harder to pin down.

We did care. The world was burning around us, roasting in its own excess. The airwaves were saturated with a jarring mix of disaster and hedonism – extreme deprivation and obscene wealth. Media was everywhere, but meaning was elusive. We knew something had to change but we had no idea how our actions could make any difference. The world was charging off a cliff with eight billion souls on board.

Politics had turned into a circus—there was no salvation there. Corporations were mostly psychopaths, focused on tearing profit out of the Earth as fast as they could, with no thought for the future. Movements came and went but none of them built lasting power.

To top it all off, there was no sense of urgency. We experienced climate change as a slow-motion disaster that seemed to hurt people far away from us in time and space—future generations or the poor global masses. Doom crept up behind us but our wealth cushioned us from the worst impacts.

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And so, I'm sorry to say, we tuned out. It all seemed too hard and too far away, so we escaped into our screens, our shopping, our addictions, our socials, our splintered tribes. We tried to shut out our desperate and meaningless reality by retreating into other worlds. Those worlds became increasingly real and immersive, far more compelling and meaningful than the crumbling civilisation around us. This made things worse, of course. We spent more and more time in the virtual and paid less and less attention to the truths written in the unravelling of ecosystems and the screams of refugees.

Yet, even in the comfort of the virtual, many of us had a nagging sense that something was missing. In the virtual, nothing real was on the line. We knew that, deep down. In the virtual, we were heroes and gods, but when we took off our sets, the real world came rushing back. The contrast was jarring. We stepped out onto a treadmill of working and shopping and posing and fighting for space on a crowded planet. Our mental health suffered, as we struggled to bridge the disconnect between the real and the virtual, to find some way to align those very different worlds. That's how it started. We were looking for something real in the virtual. It's not a nice story, but bear with me—it ends well.



I crouched in the corner of a tiny, cramped room, mud under my bare feet, a tin wall rattling at my back. A woman and four children huddled with me, terror shining in their eyes, their bright clothing soaked through and blotched with filth. The noise was visceral, a howling wind and pounding rain that shook our cramped shelter. The tin roof jumped and clanged back into place, then, with a great tearing sound, it lifted away. The din intensified and rain pounded my skin. I crawled through the mud toward the door but before I could get there it burst open and a torrent of brown debris-filled water rushed in. The force knocked me into a corner. I tried to get to my feet but could make no headway against the powerful flow. I reached for the others and clung to them as the room filled and my vision blurred. I pounded the wall with desperation once, twice but it made no impression. Distorted by the water now filling the room, I looked into the face of a little girl as she opened her mouth in search of air and gulped

filthy water instead. I opened my own mouth to scream, the world tilted as the wall behind me collapsed and my vision faded into black.



I tore off my set and light flooded back in, illuminating the familiar surroundings of my room.

“What the hell was that? It felt so real,” I said.

“It was real. You just died, mate.” Jed’s voice floated over my shoulder from behind me.

“What do you mean?” I said, turning to face him.

“It’s the latest thing,” he said. “It’s called a *scene*. They pay some poor schmuck in Bangladesh or somewhere a few bucks to have a V-cam implanted that uploads the footage.”

“Seriously? Who’d agree to something like that?” I thought maybe he was winding me up.

“You’d be surprised, mate. Life’s tough over there. The surgery is really simple, no big risk. And the money can make all the difference when you’ve got a family to feed. Heaps of people have gone for it. They give up a bit of privacy to survive.”

“Of course,” Jed continued, “most of the footage is rubbish. Life in the Third World isn’t exactly riveting entertainment. But when something big happens, like those Bangladeshi floods or a resource war, they comb through the footage, pull out the best stuff and sell it to rich kids like us who’re looking for a thrill.”

“No way! Are people really that desperate?” Another thought occurred to me: “Who’s *they*?”

“I dunno, but it’s all over the dark web. Not just storms and floods either. There’s all sorts of bad shit from the Third World,” Jed said. “They must be raking it in for that one though—have you ever felt anything like it?”

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“Never. Don’t you think it’s kind of sick though? They’re living off the misery of those poor people.”

Jed was unmoved. “Sure, but it’s not like they’re being forced to do it. It’s a good deal for the cammers if they survive, and if they’re dead, what do they care who sees the footage? Check out this site if you want to see more. But be careful. That one was pretty tame compared to some of the stuff out there.”



Images of children’s faces, distorted by muddy water, haunted my sleep that night. In the morning, I took to the web to find out more about what I had seen. Everything I could find indicated it was genuine footage from the recent Bangladesh floods. I’d heard about them in the news—tens of thousands dead, millions displaced—but in a sea of bad news those numbers had meant little to me. Somehow it was different now. Those numbers had faces, families. Each was a moment of horror followed by blackness.

I struggled with my conscience for a while. Did I really want to be a voyeur into these broken lives? But the *scene* had moved something in me like nothing else had in a long time. It was a shocking glimpse of reality, so foreign from my sheltered world.

I didn’t feel good about it, but I went looking for more.



The sun was bright, so bright. I was in some kind of desert landscape, trudging in a line of emaciated, ragged-looking women. The earth beneath my feet was parched and cracked. The world around me was yellow and brown, no green to be seen. I held my arms up, as if to steady an object on my head, but it was out of sight. Other women in the line were balancing large clay pots on their heads. The line shuffled forward and, ahead, a crowd gathered around something hidden from view. Our line foundered as it met the seething mass of people and I was quickly surrounded by a press of bodies, all pushing towards the centre of the circle. People were shouting, voices raised in anger and fear. A woman near me stumbled,

her pot crashed to the ground, and she was quickly swallowed by the crowd. A gap opened ahead of me for a moment and I squeezed into it, catching a glimpse of the object at the centre of the crowd—a water pump. A great shout rose up from the crowd, rippling outwards. I didn't understand the words but they sent us all into a frenzy. The crowd became a mob, dissolving into chaos, all pushing towards the centre. I fell, my vision dipping suddenly and sickeningly toward the ground, and the pot I was carrying crashed and shattered in front of me. A dizzying blur of feet surrounded me, pressing in on all sides. Once again, briefly, I had a clear line of sight to the water pump. A woman pumped the handle frantically, but nothing flowed from the tap. Then the feet pressed in again and my vision faded to black.



Scenes used brand new technology, hacked from what the big corporations put out. Devices had got so tiny they could be implanted with minimal risk to the host. We weren't at the point where you could tap into what people were actually seeing or feeling but you could implant cameras beside their eyes and mics by their ears and with some fancy software you could stream video and audio that was hard to distinguish from reality. Even in our social media world, not many people in the rich countries and enclaves were willing to share their lives to that extent. But in the poor majority world, just as Jed had said, there were plenty of people who would endure the inconvenience to put food on the table.

In the early days, the *sceners* were ambulance chasers. They waited for news of a disaster or conflict and then combed through footage from anyone in the area who was cammed up to find the most compelling and dramatic moments, to be sold on the dark web. Later, they developed software algorithms that could process vast quantities of footage to find the drama in the mundane. The *scenes* became more sophisticated and the *sceners* got better at telling stories. It was a sick little industry, a product of our times, pandering to rich kids who wanted to experience something real in a manufactured world.

For me, it became an addiction, for a while. I hunted down these moments

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of horror driven by a morbid fascination and a sense that here, at last, was something real in the din of the virtual and hedonistic. Sometimes I felt dirty, but there was a weird purity to it as well. As if I was bearing witness to these lives cut short, giving them a dignity that climate disaster had taken from them. I know that doesn't make much sense. It was a messed-up time for me. It felt like the world was crumbling around me and there was no meaning to be found in my life, so I looked for it in these other lives.

I wasn't the only one. It didn't take long before I hooked up with others who had gone down this path. There is always a tribe to be found these days—there's so many of us on the planet now, and we're so connected. Ours was a dark web community, under the radar of popular media. The implanted V-kits used to record the *scenes* were illegal so we were engaged in something illicit. I have to admit, that added to the thrill. Despite the danger, the risk of discovery, we still found each other. We linked up, we shared *scenes*, we talked. Some of those conversations, tentatively, awkwardly, started to touch on what we could do for the people whose lives we were spying on. How could we move from powerless voyeurs to something more? And some of the *sceners* started to tell different kinds of stories.



I am surrounded by blue light streaming down in rays from above, bubbles rising around me. I am suspended above a rich tapestry of life, a coral reef, teeming with colourful, tropical fish. I move slowly forward and can see my hands reaching out, pulling water, propelling me. The scene is one of great abundance. Hard and soft corals of many kinds stretch as far as I can see, tiny fish dart in and out amongst them, and larger silver fish pass by in dense schools. Then—a moment of total darkness before the blue light rushes back in. Jarringly, the scene is utterly changed. I am in the same place—I can recognise a distinctive rocky outcrop that I had been looking at. But the colour is gone. The corals have become white skeletons. Where there were schools of fish are now only drifting clouds of pale jellyfish. With another dizzying transition, I am sitting in a boat, alone on a blue sea. My brown, calloused hands are in front of me, pulling on a rope that runs over the side of the boat. I heave on the rope until a net emerges from

the depths. I lift it into the boat, loosen the rope encircling the mouth of the net and pull it open. A few gelatinous bodies—jellyfish—are all that the net contains. My hands rise to my face in a movement of despair and the scene fades to black.



You probably think I'm going to say I had an awakening, an epiphany, a sudden moment of clarity. I didn't. It's not that simple. I wish it were, but it's not. Growing your compassion for the distant other is a slow and painful transformation, with steps forward and steps backward. It's messy. I started in a pretty dark place, with no sense that I could have any impact on the world around me, but even so, I know I was already changing when I experienced that flood in Bangladesh. I was already searching for something. That first *scene* was an important marker on my journey. I started, slowly, to care about people I knew nothing about, far from my life. A seed was planted in my mind that grew and grew. But along the way there was no moment of clarity, just a sense of wrongness about my life that drove me to search and strive to make it right. I still shopped, drove, drank, did all those things that made me part of the problem. But I started to make changes, make connections, expand my circle of care until I was part of something bigger, and there, I eventually found meaning.



I'd been to Kho Pha-Ngan before. I'd done the Full Moon Party, done the drugs, done the scene. I'd blogged about it, enthusiastically. But this time, I felt hollow. I couldn't connect to the thumping beat, the pulsing crowd, the dancers with their glazed eyes and fixed smiles. I wandered, aimlessly, towards the beach and found my way out onto a rickety pier.

A voice from the darkness startled me: "Why you out here?" The red glow of a cigarette illuminated the wrinkled face of an old man for a moment. "Party that way" he added, gesturing with his cigarette.

"I know. I just needed some air." I squinted into the darkness, tried to make out his face.

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“Plenty air out here. You sit?” The glowing tip of his cigarette waved towards the pier edge, beside him.

I sat. It felt like the right thing to do. We were both silent for a moment, then he said “I used to fish here. Many years ago now. There were many fish for my family. Now, fish are gone. Only Farang come here now.”

I glanced at him. There was no rebuke in his voice, just a weary resignation. We talked for a while. He told me a little of his life, his family, his beloved island, the changes he had lived through, his fears for the future. Mostly, I listened. My stories, from a life of privilege, seemed insubstantial compared to his. As he spoke, I could feel an unfocused pain growing in me, for all that he had lost—for all that *we* had lost. Then he finished his last cigarette and went on his way. I sat on the pier until light seeped into the sky, seeking some answer to the pain.



We called ourselves the Witnesses. There were four of us—Rohit, Cassie, Aamira and me. I was a pro blogger. I wrote, I recorded, I cast, and I lived off hits and ad revenue. A few years back, I would have been called a journalist, but the walls between corporate and social media had come down and anyone could write or cast for a living now, if they were good enough. I was good enough, although money was usually tight. I wrote travel pieces mainly, working my way around the world searching for new experiences, new angles that would get me enough views to keep moving. I had a good following and my first tentative attempts to write about the impacts of climate change viewed well, so I kept on going. I didn't mention *scenes* explicitly—they were illegal after all—but I wrote about those borrowed experiences as if I had been there and a lot of people seemed to connect with these tangible stories of the havoc wreaked by climate change. Then, I met Cassie.



I am making my way through an immense hall filled with stalls, exhibits, entertainers and throngs of people. The big screens flash “Regen10:

Technology to regenerate the Earth.” These Regen conferences began as a side event alongside the annual UN climate change conferences, but now, they feel like the main game. They’re a showcase for world-changing technologies. I meander between exhibits about new solar film technologies, self-recharging wearables, fast-growing trees, lab-grown carbon-neutral meat and automated electric cars, pausing to chat with some of the exhibitors and hear their crowdfunding pitches. They are all trying to save the world in their own way, and regenerate the damage we’ve already done.

In the centre of the exhibition hall there is a crowded bar. I grab a seat at the bar, just vacated by a tall Indian youth whose t-shirt is emblazoned with a single staring eye. I order an over-priced organic beer and settle back to look at the big screen above. Traditionally, Regen conferences provide a focal point for colourful climate change protests, but this one has turned violent. The footage shows a striking dark-skinned woman being dragged away by police. She’s screaming at the camera: “You call this a crime! Climate change is the real crime. My people are dying while you talk in circles and play with your toys.” I shake my head.

“You disagree?” The question comes from a woman beside me, blonde, well-dressed in eco-chic, North American from her accent. She looks at me with an unsettling intensity.

“No, it’s not that,” I say. “She should be angry. I’m angry too. I just don’t think we’re going to win most people over with that kind of argument. And the violence makes climate change look like an issue for extremists, not the mainstream.”

“I completely agree. There’s no strategy to what she’s doing.” She smiles and extends her hand. “I’m Cassie by the way.”

She tells me she’s Canadian, a consumer psychology and marketing expert. She worked for big corporations early in her career, learning how to sell anything to anyone. She took a job at Tesla, not because she cared about the planet, but because “it was cool.” She rolls her eyes as she says it. That job changed her—or rather, the people she worked with and their passion for change really got to her. She started to question her purpose and it

wasn't long before even Tesla felt like part of the problem.

"I felt like we were just selling toys to rich kids and we weren't ready to step up and tackle big problems like poverty and climate change," she says. "There wasn't much market in selling renewables to the developing world so we didn't try. I got out, floated through a bunch of social marketing roles in the NGO world and wound up working with EarthTech. They're not perfect, but at least they're tackling the real problems and trying to repair the damage we've all done."

She pauses, looks thoughtful and meets my eye again with that same strange intensity.

"You're right you know," she says. "Anger is important. Protest is important. But it needs to be one tactic in a much bigger strategy."

We talked into the night, and the idea for the Witnesses was born there, at an unremarkable bar, scribbled on a coaster.



Aamira's story is more mysterious. She was the woman on the screen, whose righteous anger inspired Cassie and me to connect. Cassie reached out to her through socials after Regen10. They had a heated argument about tactics that rolled on for several weeks, before they came to an understanding and started to strategise together. But even when she was part of the Witnesses, she didn't share much and didn't like to talk about her past. We knew she was Sudanese-born and that she had lost family in the Pan-Africa Famine. No doubt, that fuelled her anger and militance. She was connected into activist and civil disobedience networks and perhaps some shadier groups. If we needed something done, she knew a way to make it happen. More importantly, she was our conscience, the voice of the climate refugees. Any time the Witnesses started to feel like a game for rich kids, she would remind us what was at stake, and not gently.

Which just leaves Rohit. A Bangalorian hacker. He'd made a lot of money developing apps for the booming Indian market but his heroes were people like Julian Assange and Anonymous—hackers who turned over

rocks and shone a light on what was crawling underneath. His dark web contacts introduced him to *scenes* when they first popped up and one from rural India really got under his skin. It sent him off on a pilgrimage into the heartland of his own country, part spiritual awakening, part bearing witness to the horrors of climate change. India has all the extremes that the rest of the planet has within the boundaries of one nation, and Rohit witnessed them firsthand. He toured the villages of Tamil Nadu after the monsoon failed and saw families dying of thirst, local water wars, and failed crops as far as the eye could see. The contrast with his privileged life in Karnataka punctured his middle-class apathy and lit a fire that drove him to make a difference. He reached out to me when he recognised that one of my blogs was describing one of the *scenes* he had recently viewed. It was Rohit who came up with our name: the Witnesses. He wanted us to bear witness to what was happening, and help others to do the same.

So, then there were four of us. We were a great team. Cassie knew how to reach people and what would speak to different tribes. She looked at the tangled web of socials and could see where to pull a thread to keep building the momentum of a movement. She would analyse the streams and tell us what we needed to do next and she was usually spot on. My job was to come up with the words and images and she told me where to put them. She helped me build my followers exponentially but we also did a lot of work that wasn't public, joining conversations in the dark web, trying to open the eyes of those who were still just voyeurs of disaster. This was Rohit's domain, a network where he was respected. He got information where it needed to go, legally or otherwise. While we publicly told the stories of the climate-affected, he engaged in a more clandestine campaign, undermining the stories of the politicians and big business, and finding points of connection between disparate groups. And Aamira—she was the fire that drove us on. More than that, she recognised that we would never change the world through a socials campaign alone. For all of Cassie's skills, the socials' world was shallow and fickle. Someone might be struck by a *scene* and then shrug it off and be laughing at a cute puppy video a minute later. We needed other kinds of momentum.



“It’s time” said Cassie’s voice in my earbuds. “We need to hit now for maximum impact. Are you ready? And Rohit?”

“We’re ready,” I said. “What about Aamira?”

“I just heard from her, she’s good to go.”

“All right. Let’s do this thing,” I said. “Stay out of touch for at least 48 hours and then we’ll take stock. See you on the other side.”

I broke the connection and turned to my screen. My job was simple; I just had to hit publish on a blog piece. It felt like a big deal though. It was the first time I’d written about the *scene* that started it all for me, the Bangladeshi flood. More importantly, we were bringing the *scenes* into the mainstream. I had written openly about them and provided links to a painstakingly compiled and curated collection. Rohit had worked his wizardry—something to do with mirror servers I think—to make sure this public *scene* collection would be hard to take down. We were taking a big risk but Cassie assured us that the time was ripe and the public would be on our side. As soon as I published, Cassie was poised to get the piece out through all the socials, using all the tricks she knew to send it viral.

Aamira was already out on the streets, putting her piece of the plan into action. Rohit had pulled together a catalogue of climate crimes and linked it to our collection of *scenes*. It provided the facts on how much the biggest fossil fuel corporations had contributed to climate change and how long they had known about it without acting. Juxtaposed with the devastating reality of the *scenes*, it made compelling reading. I hit the publish button and I knew that Aamira was immediately signalling teams of well-trained activists to gather at the head offices of all of those corporations and make as much noise as possible - occupying, obstructing and protesting while the *scenes* were projected on walls and broadcast to sets for everyone to witness.



Of course, it wasn’t just us. Four people can’t change a world of eight billion. We were just one cell in something much bigger. We were all networked

together through the dark web, to avoid surveillance and interference from the powers that be. We learned from each other, we disagreed, sometimes we undermined each other, but sometimes our discordant voices entangled in a symphonic moment that was bigger than any of us.



It was the work of decades, and it never really ends. Our movement grew too slowly and much was lost that should have been saved. There are no more tigers in the wild, most fisheries have collapsed, too many people have died. Yet, somehow, we're winning. The RegenTech sector is the powerhouse of our economies, delivering renewable energy and bio-mimicking technologies that recirculate materials and nutrients. Millions of people are working to re-forest the world and to bring food production into our cities. Most importantly, the vast majority of people, and the media, now agree that we need to transform our way of life to eliminate greenhouse gas emissions. The public and political debate has been won. There are still plenty of resisters but they've been driven to the fringes and lack real political power.

Groups like the Witnesses sprang up all over the planet and did whatever they could, whatever made sense to them, to wake up the world. The *scenes* played a pivotal role. We threw them into the mainstream but we used them to tell stories that would inspire empathy, not mere voyeurism. As socials took over from corporate media, everybody was sharing their worlds, building up webs of empathy as we all realised how our lives were entangled with each other and the planet. Something intangible shifted, at the level of our values and stories. The hollow promises of growth at all cost no longer rang true and we found ourselves increasingly seeking well-being in our connection with others, wherever they might be.

It was a turbulent and chaotic time. There was conflict and resistance, wins and losses. People clung to power and the many corporations that fell did great damage as they thrashed about in their death throes. But we continued to bear witness until a great global movement arose that swept away the old order. It was a movement that affirmed the value of life wherever it exists on our planet and eschewed practices that destroyed

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life. Eventually, marked by no particular day, it just became normal to think that way.

So now, we regrow the forests so that tigers may one day stalk the wilds again. For now, we only fish valuable plastic from the oceans, leaving fisheries to recover. We limit incomes in the rich world and use our resources to help those parts of the world where help is most needed. The planet and its people will take a long time to recover but there is a real sense of meaning, of purpose, in this great task of stewardship—regenerating the Earth.

People still make and share *scenes*, but they're different now. I'll share one of my favourites. A friend stitched it together from what he saw every day, for decades, as he walked out his front door. It tells a story of gradual change that adds up to something transformative.

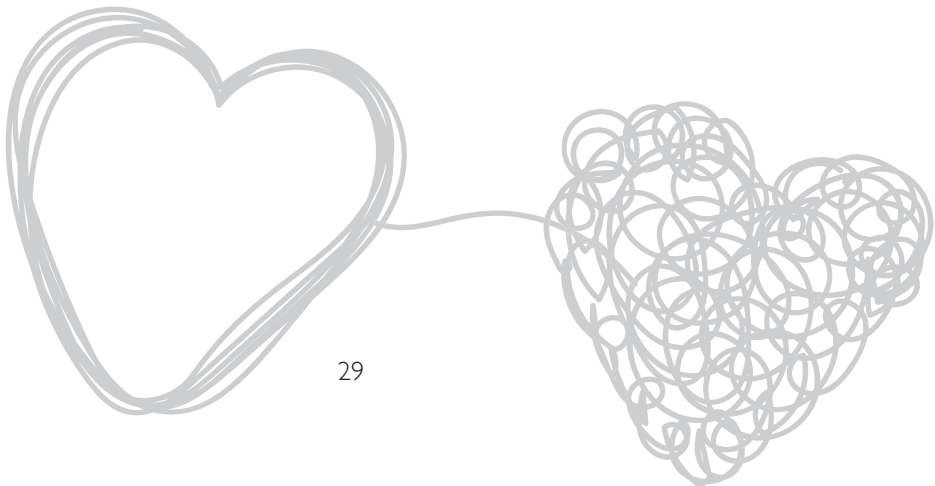


I look out across a slum—filthy, chaotic, polluted, depressing. Very slowly, it starts to change. Ramshackle shanties are torn down and replaced with gleaming new buildings. Solar tiles appear on rooftops. Most noticeably, the colour changes—from greys and browns to myriad greens and blues, as nature is welcomed back into the city. A concrete stormwater channel transforms into a meandering stream, lined with trees. The buildings seem to grow along with the trees, vegetation creeping over them as it becomes part of the building fabric. Electric vehicles and bicycles appear, first many, and then fewer as an underground transit system clears the streets for walking and living. Birds and animals appear.

There is no moment of perfection in the *scene*. The transformed city is imperfect. One building is abandoned, the greenery in one lot has been neglected and dies, a solar panel is cracked. There is always still work to be done. Nevertheless, there is a moment during the *scene* when the realisation hits you that this is no longer the place it was. It creeps up on you. Suddenly, something about the colours is different, more vibrant—something new has emerged. I love that moment. I love that I witnessed it.

AUTHOR STATEMENT, CHRIS RIEDY

This story was inspired by the quantum idea of entanglement – a sense that if we could become more aware of the ways that our lives are entangled with other lives and places, our collective values would start to shift. There is particle-wave duality here too; the characters and world are both dark and light, depending on the angle.





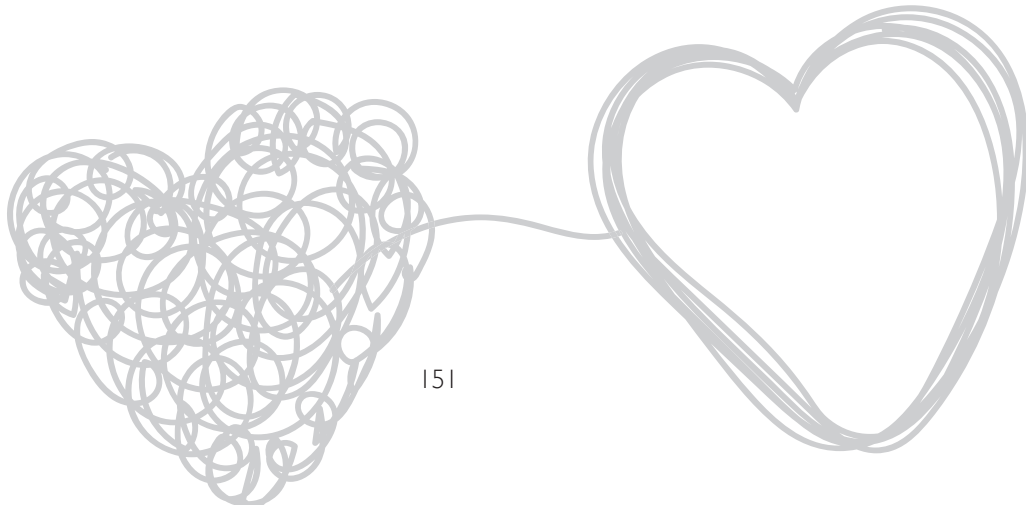
*49%, or Polypropylene from the series, Rising Horizon
by © David Cass, davidcass.art*

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to thank Ann Kristin Schorre and Linda Sygna for their assistance with managing this project; Michelle Fairbanks for the beautiful cover; and Nada Qamber for her creative interior design and formatting. We are also grateful to the University of Oslo and the Research Council of Norway for funding the AdaptationCONNECTS Toppforsk project (250434 /F10). CONNECTS is short for “Combining Old and New kNowledge to Enable Conscious Transformations to Sustainability.” *Our Entangled Future: Stories to Empower Quantum Social Change* is part of the Art Connects work package, which explores the potential of narratives to empower collective agency in response to climate change and sustainability challenges.



To participate in this project, we would appreciate it if you could answer a short and anonymous survey that will be used for research purposes:
www.surveymonkey.com/r/ourentangledfuture



OUR ENTANGLED FUTURE

We live our lives through stories. They shape how we see the world, how we relate to it, and not the least, how we engage with it. Now more than ever, we need compelling stories that inspire both individual and collective action. The nine short stories presented in *Our Entangled Future* are rooted in the complex reality of the climate crisis. Rather than painting a dystopic future, they present agency-driven characters whose insights will inspire readers to contemplate and realize the potential for quantum social change.

We have seen the data and modeled predictions. We have the preponderance of agreement among scientists. Now we need more than anything the storytellers, artists, dancers, painters, musicians, and other creative souls to interpret the numbers and graphs in ways we can embody and act upon. Our futures are entangled, all right. Through these stories we acknowledge our interconnections and are empowered to get to work. – **REBECCA LAWTON, writer, geologist, and Executive Director of PLAYA residency program for artists and scientists in the Oregon Outback**

The stories in the *Our Entangled Future* anthology draw us in with a variety of tropes, tones, or themes that we seem to recognise, but they deploy these in order to challenge our understanding and to engender a new way of seeing the world. – **ADELINE JOHNS-PUTRA, Reader in English Literature at the University of Surrey, UK**

The stories in this collection transcend the dualistic storytelling structure of “man vs. nature” by presenting collectives that span human and nonhuman relationships. These stories are undoubtedly “quantum” in nature: The characters are entangled with each other and their landscapes, true models of compassion and empathy. Taken together, these stories reverberate with the themes of the Anthropocene and will, in turn, inspire new ways of navigating the future. – **AMY BRADY, Deputy Publisher of Guernica magazine and Editor in Chief of the Chicago Review of Books**

COVER: Fresh Design

