

A Chance to Change Forever



Cars zoomed past the piles of trash. Smoke rose from the sky. Outbreaks of fires devouring forests. The environment was filled with toxic fumes. Thousands of animals had been driven to extinction and some are on the brink of survival. Natural disasters were regular visitors in this world. Yet, humanity is oblivious to Mother Earth's warnings.

This is year 2100.

This is the cold, harsh reality of the world.

Devastating, cruel and unforgiving.

Alex knew about this reality and he had seen it coming. Alex, a short-haired, smart boy who had never ever spared a thought for the environment, coughed persistently. Alex pinched his nose. The toxic fumes were choking.

He had read about the fall of Merlion. How it got coated in oil during an oil leakage in the sea. While Merlion was drowning in oil, people noticed and left it in the black ooze at the incident. The magical creature was betrayed by emotionless people and even when they saw its pain, they did not give a second thought. It sat there idly, a forgotten statue of Singapore's once magnificent waste-free glory. Koalas which were once believed to have been a god to people in an animal's form, were on the verge of extinction. Animals' homes were destroyed by the mindless, carefree humans. They were driven out of their beloved habitats from all the pollution. Alex listened for a long second. The only thing heard was the wails of the sorrowful animals.

People would dismiss this with a single wave of their hands. This resulted in litter strewn all over the streets. Instead of appreciating the effort made by people in the 21st century to make sure the world could be a better place for future generations, people in the 22nd century were just using up all the natural resources they had without a second thought.

On Thursday evening, 22nd April 2100, Alex was strolling along the once beautiful beach, scrolling through his smartphone while drinking a cup of bubble tea . Once he realised it was empty, he habitually threw it onto the ground and walked away without a second glance.

"Stop! That's not right! Please pick it up and throw it into the trash bin!" a voice hollered from behind.



Alex turned, only to see a milky white creature with a lion's head and a mermaid tail standing behind him with a frown of disbelief on its face. Next to this creature was Koala. Koala had cloudy grey fur and two chubby hind legs and two arms for climbing up trees. Alex was bewildered by the creatures. He was left frozen and his heart leapt to his throat. He was at eye to eye with a mythical and a magical creature. Alex fell backwards in terror of what he had just witnessed. Merlion did not look anything like what the book he had read about. It was as white as a dove, with not a single patch of black! Koala was one of the last of its kind too!

Snapping out of his stupor, Alex picked up the plastic bottle gingerly.



"Who... who are you both? Are you a Pokémon? Wait...you can't be Merlion...right? And you... are you a koala? Koalas are so rare these days!" Alex stammered in shock.

"Yes, I am Merlion, from the year 2025. And this is my dear friend Koala, one of the very last koalas in the world right now," the milky white Merlion replied. "So, you should know about global warming and the rising sea levels, right? Also, before I continue, please pick that empty plastic bubble tea cup and throw it into the trash bin."

Stunned, Alex did as he was told, though somewhat reluctantly. After picking up the plastic cup from the edge of the sea and throwing it into the trash bin, Alex turned back to Merlion and Koala.

"So... What are both of you doing here? Also, I thought you were covered in oil, Merlion. Since when were you this sparkling white?" Alex snapped rudely, annoyed that the creature he had just met was already bossing him around.

"Well Alex, don't you know that throwing plastic cups near water bodies contributes to water pollution? These cups are light and can be blown by wind into the water bodies, then out to sea. Water pollution contributes to global warming in several interconnected ways — not as directly as greenhouse gases like carbon dioxide, but by disrupting natural systems that regulate the climate," Merlion told Alex firmly.

"Why is it so complicated? Why can't we just throw things into the sea? It's way easier! It's not like anything bad is going to happen!" Alex grumbled, arms akimbo, seething with rage as Merlion told him off.

"Sigh, my boy. Don't you understand? Looks like everyone here is ungrateful! Come with me, Alex. Let me show you the effort that people from the 20th century had made, and compare it to your world now," Merlion sighed, unimpressed by the behavior of Alex. Then, after giving Koala a tiny glance, a swirling, circular shape appeared in front of them. Sharp, angular forms splinter outward from the core, creating a sense of dynamic, almost mechanical energy reminiscent of a whirlwind. Where am I going?

Am I going to die?

Alex thought, he felt himself as light as a feather, he was floating! Scared out of his wits, he squeezed his eyes shut. He felt as though he was spinning and nausea overcame him.

Alex finally felt his feet on solid ground, only then did he open his eyes. He was next to a river! It had boats and old houses he had never seen before! Merlion elucidated, "This is 1965 this is what it was like before everything bad started happening."

As he squinted he saw the famous Mr Lee Kuan Yew, the first prime minister of Singapore. He was leading a clean-up of the river!

"Mr Lee Kuan Yew was inspired by countries that were surrounded with nature. He even planted trees!" Merlion announced proudly. The scene switched to the community, together as one, growing trees.

"Let's move on, we are going to see 2025's green action!" Merlion said proudly.

With a strong swipe of his powerful tail, a vortex appeared. Alex and the rest were transported to 2025. He was amazed by how clean Singapore looked compared to the polluted city he knew, it was almost like a city in a garden.

Alex could see the 'One Million Trees Action', a project where people were planting trees and there were rooftop gardens on almost every HDB (Housing Development Board) flat! Wind blew in his face, something he had not felt in a long while, it was not like the usual inferno he was living in! The atmosphere was cool around him, he relished the fresh air as he took the sights in. The houses were old just as how majestic it was. The scenery would have been the most artistic thing you have ever seen.





Alex was astonished, he was brimming with awe, lush green grass surrounded his feet as he stared at a light blue sky dotted with clouds. It was almost as if no pollution had existed! Alex recalled how Singapore looked like currently, litter strewn everywhere, even a single sprout was not spared. Alex felt his conscience gnaw at him.

"I can't believe we ruined everything Singaporeans in the past had done," he thought.

With a powerful swipe of Merlion's tail, they were transported to Australia in 2025.

"Australia's history of looking after the environment has changed a lot over time. For thousands of years, the first Australians known as indigenous people, carefully managed the land using clever techniques like small, controlled fires to keep it healthy. When the British arrived, they changed the land a lot, clearing trees for farms and bringing in new animals like rabbits, which damaged the natural environment," Koala sighed sorrowfully as they walked along the clean streets of a city in Australia.

With another swipe of his tail, another vortex appeared and Merlion transported the trio to Australia in 1970.

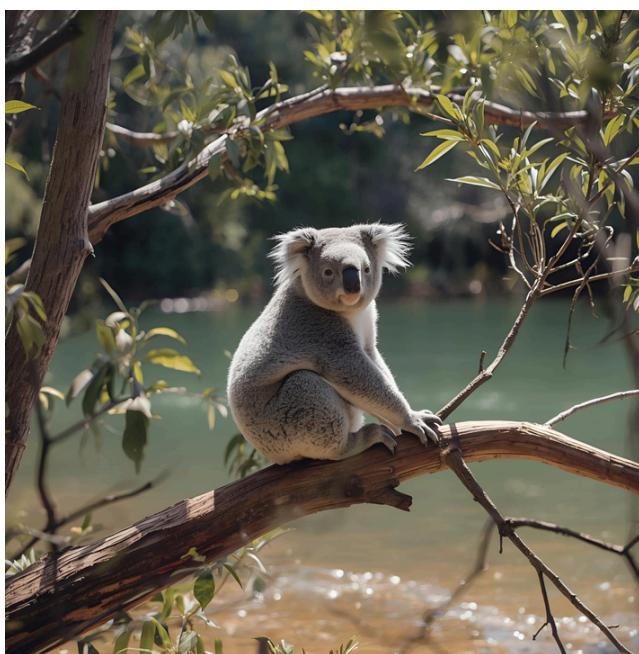
"In the 1970's to 1980's, the caring Australians started to worry about the damage. People protested to save beautiful places like the Great Barrier Reef and the Franklin River from being harmed by things like mining and dams. These protests worked, and the government created new laws to protect nature," Koala continued. "It was beautiful in 2025, but now in the year 2100, Australia has an environmental problem," Koala sighed.

"At that time, we had special days like Clean Up Australia Day and "The day where everyone helps clean the Earth". The government also had rules to stop pollution, deal with climate change, and protect the unique animals and plants that call Australia home. You could do the same too, just like the government of Australia did in the past, and the future potentially," Koala said, a gentle smile forming on his face.

While we walked around Australia, Koala explained that Australia will be a problem in future years. Koala added that Australia has a pretty long way to go, to fix global warming and Australia's extreme heat waves.

While they walked around Melbourne, Alex saw lush green grass, vivid flowers, looming pine trees and beautiful forests.

"Australia looks so... different from what I know now, Australia was so... breath-taking," Alex whispered, his heart filled with regret. "If we had treasured our beloved Earth, we could have had luscious grass, amazing scenery and the world filled with flora and fauna."





With a snap of the Merlion's fingers, the trio was transported back to 2100. Merlion stared at Alex, noticing that his head was bowed.

"Alex, I hope you know why we should appreciate the effort put in by your forefathers, it may not seem like much, but blood, sweat and tears was put in to make Singapore and Australia clean in the future, but we have not respected that. Now, it is your turn to leave your generation's own legacy and make the world beautiful again," Merlion smiled encouragingly. Alex turned to look around. He vowed to do something about it.

Alex turned to see Koala and Merlion. They just seemed to vanish into thin air, without a trace.

Alex stared at the polluted world that he was living in. As he glanced around, he spotted a plastic bottle from the corner of his eye. Now, without a word, he picked it up. This time, Alex hoped that he and his generation could leave behind a lasting legacy. A legacy that will change the future and the present forever. What they do now will have a deep imprint on the future and the present.

THE END

