

## Danaus Plexippus

by Kevin Perez

When I was in the 2nd grade, our teacher brought monarch caterpillars into the class  
And for weeks we took care of them and watched them grow, until at last  
The day came to let them go  
And I watched as these once tiny creatures now emerged from their cage fully formed  
I saw wings on their back that weren't there before  
I saw the colors they had, a new paint they wore  
I saw that the caterpillars we once ignored were reborn as the butterflies we chose to  
adore  
And I heard this word be used to explain what had happened  
A word that describes change

Humans know a lot about change  
The world runs on change  
We see change everyday  
We see it in trees, in oceans, in ecosystems  
We see it in the buildings that weren't there before we came  
We see it in animals, the ones we place in zoos  
We see it in stores and factories and malls  
We like to hear it jingle in our pockets  
We like to feel it in our hands  
When we look at each other, the only thing we see is change  
We spend our whole existence chasing down change  
Change determines every part of our lives  
The world runs on change

How do we create change?  
We build machines that tear the flesh from the Earth's bones  
We drain the blood from its veins until all that's left is hollow carcass  
We feed on our surroundings, devour our resources, consume our home  
And yet we disguise it under the name of progress?  
But that's not even the worst of it

The true tragedy is knowing that the day will come when our children's children will no  
longer get to see butterflies take flight  
The day when our children's children will no longer see stars on the darkest night  
The day where every prediction we've made about the death of life on our planet is no  
longer just a prediction

And we prove ourselves right

Mahatma Gandhi once said

“The greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated”

If that's so, then what do the thousands of species that go extinct each year say about us?

Does this send out the message that we are someone you can trust?

When we treat our neighbors on this world like tenants to be evicted,

Do we ever feel sorry for them, do we ever feel conflicted?

Here's a fact about butterflies, did you know that they don't have mouths?

Which is ironic considering that we are the ones who, having mouths, choose to remain silent

We who, having ears, choose to remain deaf to the world's cry for help and stay noncompliant

We witness it spill enough tears to fill oceans

As the fruits of our labor put global warming into motion

Yet when faced with a dying climate

We couldn't change ourselves

When we saw the water rising beneath our feet

We held on to our 1st person point of view

Stuck in the mindset of “I” and “I”

Until the whole world went blind

And we drowned in a sea of our ignorance

We've spent so much time blaming each other for our mistakes

Kept pointing fingers, not knowing that when you do, there are three more pointing back at you

We've spent even more time calling each other hypocrites and racists that we never took a step back

To notice how the human race is slowly going extinct

How long have we locked ourselves up in the prison of greed and selfishness

That we've forgotten the feeling of freedom through true selflessness

We remain trapped in cocoons of our own making

Echo chambers where the only thing we hear is our own opinions bouncing off the walls

And the only thing we see is our shadow nodding with us in agreement

But this is not the end of our species, it will not be our downfall  
There is still time to act, there is still time to renounce all  
Of our bad habits  
Because just like smoking kills, so too does inaction

So forget about the change that buys cigarettes  
And focus on the change that ends threats  
We must shed our previous beliefs and develop a new form of thinking  
Before the mistakes of our past become too much to bear and we start sinking  
We can learn to give life instead of take it  
We can learn to protect the cycle of nature instead of break it

Because the enemy of empathy is not apathy, it is indifference  
To not care enough to care  
To not care enough to bail water out of a sinking ship  
To not care enough to hit the brakes when driving towards the edge of a cliff  
To not care enough to witness the horrific world your children will grow up in and do  
something about it  
That is indifference  
That is the indifference that now metastasizes across every corner of the globe  
That is the indifference that morphs this planet into something it was never meant to be  
That is the indifference requires us to place the emphasis on the only kind of change  
that will ever matter

I read something about butterflies the other day  
That I thought you should know  
It said:

From the moment it is born, the caterpillar will devour everything in its surroundings in  
order to ensure its survival. Even its own home, the egg it hatches from, is consumed to  
provide sustenance for the caterpillar. When it finishes feeding, the caterpillar will  
purposefully trap itself in a cocoon of its own making called a chrysalis. The caterpillar  
will then shed its previous body and begin to develop a new form. What emerges from  
the chrysalis is a butterfly that will now dedicate itself to pollinating the plants it once  
ate, returning the life which it previously took. The completed cycle of change that leads  
to the birth of the butterfly is called metamorphosis