

Plastic Soup

i. glutton

No one really cared about me at first, but then again, I wasn't quite as voracious back then. And to be completely honest, my greediness was encouraged. The humans didn't know how hungry I was, how truly big I could grow. They simply knew I provided a convenient place for them to throw their unwanted things. I was their garbage dump. And I, I was such a glutton. I stole everything they threw to me, gobbling every piece up with my greedy, salivating jaws.

But maybe I'm wrong; maybe I'm not as much of a glutton as I think I am.

After all, the humans feed me. I am their pet, their universal trash can. I am the junkyard for the forgotten and discarded. Plastic bottles to dirtied linen to unnecessary newspapers to leftover foods; I eat them all. I swallow them up into my ever-expanding stomach. I devour and chew my way through everything they feed me, slurping up every bit of garbage and waste.

Inside my stomach, they rot. Their half-decomposed carcasses meld into each other as I drift. Paper decays into slime, and food corrodes into mush, but the plastic remains. I am burdened with this plastic that refuses to rot.

Something is wrong with me. Perhaps I am eating too much. Perhaps this is

why I have become so unstable.

ii. look

The ocean's currents were the ones that created me. They fashioned me out of mangled plastic bottles and crushed aluminum cans, fitted together with mounds and mounds of all the other waste that had been emptied into the rivers by the humans. They breathed into me their breath of life, to let me live and drift and *observe*. As of now I am still new. There are many things left for me to see.

The currents throw to me tons and tons of garbage each day, weighing me down. Parts of me sink to the ocean floor, but most of me break down. Always, however, the currents swirl around me. *Look there*, they say, *look at that goose and this fish. Look at the sky, the sun, the wind. Look at the trees and the islands and the stars; look at us.*

Then one day their caring attitude changes. I sense something resentful in their tone.

What is it today? I ask cautiously, feeling their bitterness, like the rotten scent of salt on the wind, like a current of hidden heat circling just beneath the surface, *what do I look at today?*

Silence meets my question, heavy with unspoken words.

Look at yourself, they finally say.

iii. numb

My body is numb with weight. It is numb with discarded boxes and sheets after sheets of plastic, twisted Styrofoam trays and chunks of plaster, rotting and rotting and rotting.

I am so numb that my sides have become undone. The ensconced seams of my body have split, and now I am too heavy for the currents to keep part of me in. Pieces of me are washing up on beaches and islands. The humans have begun to take notice.

iv. poison

It's not an unusual occurrence for an overhead bird to swoop down every now and then and pick off a piece of garbage. I don't really mind – after all, why should I worry when there are hundreds more similar pieces that make up my body?

But that's where so many misconceptions about me are made. I am not a floating mountain of trash, I'm not entirely filled with garbage anymore. Instead, the plastic parts of me have begun to break down, becoming smaller and smaller until they meld with the ocean itself. I have submerged into the ocean.

The chemicals from all the waste I've eaten have become condensed into the photo-degraded pieces of plastic upon which I float. The fish that swim

underneath me suck in those miniature pieces of plastic – along with the poisonous chemicals. Beneath my depths, the choked fish struggle to breathe, their gills flapping for unpolluted water. But I've been far too greedy, and the humans much too compliant. They've fed me so much that I am bloated almost beyond repair. The fish are dying in swathes, sinking by the masses, adding to the rotting flesh that is mine.

v. bones

I see the distressed looks on the humans' faces as they stare down at the corpse of a rotting albatross, already half-buried in the beach's gritty sand. They are not worried about the bird, no, no. They are worried by the pieces of plastic that have been exposed underneath its bones, barely digested, fresh and new. I can hear them whisper to each other in confusion, in worry, in nervousness: *Something must be done. Something must be done.*

vi. doubled

I have grown nearly twice as much in size from only a year ago. New innovations – the hover train, the mosquito drones, the holographic lights – have become commonplace. The deep sea is no longer a mystery with new submarine technology, and outer space has become a dull and trite conversation starter. Of course, the plastics I have been swallowing have doubled as well, in both resilience and quantity.

Now people are starting to turn in my direction. They squint their eyes, tilt their heads. They rub their chin. I do not like the way they look at me.

vii. plastic soup

The humans, despite their shouts of worry and alarm, continue to feed me, and I continue to grow.

These days a few people seem to be drawing up a plan to clear away all of my waste. They want to lift parts of me away somehow, bit by bit, and remove me somewhere else. But it won't work. I know it won't, because the particles of plastics in me have become so tiny that they've melded with the ocean itself. While my body isn't completely substantial, it is very much filled with all the plastic waste I've been fed over the years. I am a soup bowl of plastic floating in the ocean. I am the ocean. And you cannot, no matter how hard you try, destroy the ocean.

viii. bacteria

They've destroyed me.

They've destroyed me!

Oh, humans, you innovators, you destroyer of worlds and builder of civilizations. You ever so resourceful humans, always seeking to improve. Always seeking to destroy. This time they have outdone themselves.

Three short years ago, a certain scientist came up with a terrifying – and amazing – creation. It was the culmination of decades of hard, long, suffering work in the lab. How it must have plagued his dreams! How it must have consumed his life! But oh! this new genetic mutation of his was *perfect*.

It was perfect, and it would destroy me.

He had successfully created a new strain of bacteria so dangerous it could be considered a biological weapon: a bacterium that feeds on plastic. A plastic cup, coming into contact with this kind of bacteria, would decompose into nothing but easily digestible organic material, which the normal bacteria in the ocean could then degrade into minerals and carbon and oxygen within a mere twenty-four hours.

This scientist is being heralded as a genius. Everyone is ever so proud of him, for this great new genetic mutation of his that could potentially get rid of all the waste they've created, but they fail to realize how big I am. Why, with these water-thriving, plastic eating bacteria everywhere...who knows where it will go?

ix. karma

Look at yourself, they told me.

Back then, I didn't quite understand what they meant. Now I do. Now I realize that in the end, perhaps the ocean currents did not create me out of love.

Perhaps they created me to make a point, as if to say, *look at what you are giving us. This is everything you have given us, this pile of garbage, this sloppy mess of plastic and food and chemicals.*

I am alive because of the currents, but the humans were the ones who tossed the trash that makes up my body into the oceans in first place. I am a reflection of humans, and the ocean wanted the humans to look into the mirror.

The bacteria will not stop with me. I am certain it will spread, mutating and mutating, turning into something entirely different from how it was before. It will grow, feeding on this soup bowl of plastic. Then it will travel to land, carried by the fish, the birds, the wind, the currents. It will ravage civilization, tearing down decades of technology, monuments that have stood for years. All to get rid of me.

The bacteria are feeding on me, killing me in patches and patches. I used to be the size of a small continent; now I am the size of a large country. Now I am the size of a large city. Now I am the size of a large house. Now I am ...