

What do I value in the natural world?

Mara Menzies

As a child, I could always be found climbing up trees or floating in the Indian Ocean. I was sometimes punished for being late for dinner, having lost track of time on my many explorations and adventures in the nearby forest. I was about eight years old, though, when I first became acutely aware of the magic and magnitude of the natural world.

I remember the very moment as though it were yesterday, visiting a friend in a neighbourhood known as 'The Ridge'. I found myself picking at an itchy scab on my knee, as I sat on an old dead tree stump overlooking the sprawling valley behind their house, and marvelled at the vastness of the view! I gazed down at the thin, silver river that snaked its way through the bottom of the valley. The sun was setting and, as families began to prepare their evening meal, tiny smoke spirals from households across the ridge rose into the air. The rays of sun hit millions of tiny, jagged pieces of quartz gently protruding through the

sand and the entire landscape shimmered and sparkled, just for me. I

remember feeling that this must be the most beautiful sight in the world.

There was silence, save for the wind, and just then, the most extraordinary sound echoed across the valley. Somebody, somewhere, was playing a flute, a reed flute with a beautifully pure and resonant melody. It was unrestricted, uncontained, light and joyful. And, as if giving permission to the birds, a chorus of ibis began their evening cackling before soaring across the skies.

When I travel the world, driving across deserts in northern Kenya, climbing the Munros in the Highlands of Scotland or dog sledding across the tundra of the northern Finnmark plateau, I still think fondly of that moment. Sometimes, I consider what it is that makes our world so spectacular. I wonder if it is the silence, which those of us who live in the city rarely experience. But even snow has sound, and the desert squeaks and groans if you pay attention. There is a difference between peace and quiet. The sounds are sparse when I first set foot in a forest. Only the birds, well out of the reach of danger, chirrup sweetly. Should I stop and sit still for a few moments, the sound changes. The insects, leaves and branches, perhaps having become accustomed to my presence, sensing no danger, go about their daily business. The forest springs to life – chaotic, pulsing, vibrant – and I am fully part of it. Perhaps it is this I value so

highly. In the city, it is easy to feel utterly disconnected in a room full of people. There is noise, but it can often make no sense. Out here in the natural world, I find I am connected to something greater than myself. I hear and feel everything, and it is good.

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Mara Menzies is an award-winning performance storyteller, having won THE STAGE award at the Edinburgh Fringe 2022 and her debut novel *Blood and Gold*; won the Saltire award for best fiction book of the year 2022. She draws on her rich dual Kenyan/Scottish cultural heritage for inspiration while crafting narratives and her passion for myth and legend, enable her to explore contemporary problems through ancient ideas. She builds worlds and invites us to enter within.

A recording of this text can be found at writersmosaic.org.uk

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