

Life  
A short story by Moubon Kurukumbi

This is a story about a girl who did everything for one thing. It all started when she saw the tree. The tree was filled with life, love, and hope. It was a home. She watched the tree everyday and sketched the animals as they squabble and loved. She longed to be accepted like them. She loved how all the creatures coexisted. How they all worked together. How they all loved each other. She sketched the skunk helping the crow. She drew the squirrels collecting for the barn owls.

Then she saw the red tape. Red for blood, death, and endings. She watched as the tree was destroyed and drew the stump. The ending of a home, a community, and a family. The animals skittered away, no longer friends. No longer ready to face the world together. She cried for the animals. She cried for the home and the love they shared. She headed to school with a heavy heart, her curly black hair heavy on her head. The kids at school didn't accept her. They teased her. She drew by herself. All day long. Until she reached her haven. Art Class. She felt transported. She pulled out her sketchbook and drew and learned, better than in any other class. At the end, the teacher wrote these words on the chalkboard: "Art in the Community." Then she assigned them to go and pick a problem. They then would use art to solve it. The girl was confused. Art always made sense, but what did she mean? Art to help the community? She must be crazy. But she couldn't fail art, and was determined to try.

She went home and the tree caught her eye. Or rather, the place where the tree had thrived. She soon understood her teacher's words. She went home and began to work. Late into the night, she kept at it, a smile on her face and a twinkle in her eye. She painted and sketched, colored and wrote. She scribbled and scratched, and soon had the project finished. The next day, it was done. She asked her parents to drive her to school. In the backseat, she clutched the masterpiece. As soon as her lunch bell rang, she headed to the art room to talk to her teacher. She went through the school day dazed, but determined to make it through to get to art. When she reached the art room, all the other kids had small speeches and pictures. No one really understood what the teacher had asked. The girl asked to go first in the presentations. She wheeled her artwork to the front of the classroom, overalls covered in paint but her enthusiasm infectious. Soon, everyone was excited. She looked to the teacher, and with a nod, she unveiled the artwork.

She had made a sculpture of the tree. She'd created all the animals, loving, caring, and joyful. Then she began to speak.

"I created a home. There is a tree near my home which has been destroyed. These loving creatures have become homeless. A wonderful home where they coexisted in harmony is now gone. A place where they were friends, had loved and were loved. This place is now a stump. A place where no animal lives, no love is shared. Over 3 billion of these homes are destroyed each year. Only 5 million were planted last year. So many were lost. I have created a website where people can share their art and ideas. A place where we can all solve problems together. Whether it be school shootings or climate change, poverty or refugee camps, share with people who care. Make a difference together."

The whole room was clapping. Her brown eyes lit up with excitement. No one noticed as the teacher recorded her speech and sent it to the principal.

--1 month later--

The girl came home from school and opened her mailbox. Inside was a letter.

“Dear Nadia,

You have been selected for the state’s most prestigious award for your work with deforestation. You have been nominated by Ms. Spence and your principal, Dr. Ling. Your art will be sent to the Virginia Art Gallery and your website will receive funding from the state. For your receiving of the medal, wear suitable attire for black-tie event. The ceremony will be in 2 weeks time, and have a speech prepared. Thank you for your service.

Shay Paterson  
Virginia Governor

--2 weeks later--

“Next up, Miss Nadia Porter! She is the winner of our Kurukumbi Award, awarded first to a young girl who stood up for change and action, who will now be giving the award,” said the announcer.

Nadia walked down the aisle to receive the award. She was wearing a midnight blue gown with little pearls to signify stars, but that night her eyes shone the brightest. Everyone stood up and applauded her as she reached Dr. Kurukumbi. Nadia received the award and began her speech. “I need to tell you a story. This is a story about a girl who did everything for one thing. It all started when she saw the tree.”