Earth 4All

Stories of the Future Creative Challenge

The future seen through the eyes of young creatives

Featuring works by:

Ayaan Nasir Malik
Ghina Yehya
Yeonjae Lee
Angelyn Anna Johny
Maria Feofanova
Miloslava Klimova

From the judges

Why imagine the future?

At a time when headlines of climate emergency and growing inequality seem almost inescapable, it can be difficult to picture a world in which things might look different. Stopping for a moment to imagine that world is what the Stories of the Future Challenge is about. Stories help make our vision real and tangible: they remind us of what is worth focusing on and where we should put our energy. They give us hope that something different might be on the horizon, and the impulse to walk towards it.

At Earth4All, we believe in the power of culture to help change the story of our planet this century, which is why every year we invite young people to tell us what they think that story could be. This year's entrants take us on journeys into the future that do not shy away from the challenges we face, but also draw inspiration from nature, science and community to overcome them.

It is always a pleasure to read the stories of so many young people from around the world, and we are grateful to the more then 100 creators who submitted their entries. We are delighted to share the 2026 winners whose stories remind us of our purpose and inspire us to keep working towards our vision: wellbeing and prosperity for all on a stable planet.

The floods that saved our future

Ayaan Nasir Malik. 17. Pakistan

The dawn of a new century was upon us, the grand twenty-second century. It was a distinctive summer evening; the air was thick with moisture, and the ambience was heavy. I looked outside my window. The dainty crops nestled in the bright brilliance of the Sun, and the soil gleamed with the rich inundation blessed by the seasonal gifts of the river Indus. The sky was pure azure, untarnished and royal.

I soaked in this spectacle, as I had for so many years. It never grew old. In my reverie, my grandfather came up beside me. He took a wide sweeping glance at the farm he had nurtured for so many years and had sustained so many lives; he muttered a prayer of gratitude. I wondered what great wisdom and familiarity he held, and out of curiosity I asked, “Dada Ji (Urdu for grandpa), what was life like when you were young? Was everything the same as it is now?”

His generally radiant countenance morphed into one of deep grief and distress. He opened up about the catastrophes that took place in his childhood and how big an impact they had on millions of lives.

The decades of 2030s and 2040s were turbulent ones. Issues previously unaddressed and ignored began to haunt inhabitants of the Earth. Drastically increasing temperatures and the accompanying climatic changes were always predicted to dishevel human existence, but in what ways and to what extent were beyond the imagination of people whose instinct was evasion of reality. Like so many other changes, it interacted with peculiar geographical circumstances and set into motion chains of events which led to unforeseen catastrophes. A new pattern of destruction sprung up; every summer brought with it floods that were unprecedented in their intensity and ferocity. The rivers would burst open their banks, and the waves and waves of water would relentlessly take away whatever stood in their way. Fragile growth was blotted out right in front of the poor farmers who had toiled so hard and pinned all their hopes to the bounty of Mother Earth. Infrastructure built up over years was swept away in the matter of seconds.

My grandfather specifically recounted one incident. It was a sunny day when my grandfather was basking in the morning Sun and gazing at the crops with a kind of inner satisfaction, but an eerie feeling of apprehension lurking in his rather fearful mind. Outwardly a kind of calm prevailed over the scene.

Without warning, the wind picked up, followed by a fierce downpour as if the sky had ruptured. Accelerated glacial melt had already filled the rivers and tributaries to the brim and they were in no mood to accommodate any further insult. Before he could recover from its awe and fury, the nearby canals and channels began gushing with water. Sensing the mood of water, he rushed to shift his family to a safe area before it got out of hand. The precautions taken earlier in anticipation of such an eventuality appeared too meagre to be of any use. All of a sudden, the wind evolved into a gale, tore through the wooden structures of the house, and took them away like straws. That day, grandpa lost his beloved buffalo that was with him since birth.

Before long, the world had changed, and life would never be the same again.

My father tells stories of the routines that shaped his days. At sunrise, their phones would buzz with SMS messages which reminded them to take precautions before the rainy season.

The entire family would step out while the breeze was still fresh and take readings from the soil moisture sensors planted in the crops. After tending to the crops, they would be fatigued. But then they would rejuvenate themselves, remembering what they worked for. They would move toward the cattle shelters, repairing walls and strengthening drainage channels, working on mitigation plans agreed on by the entire village.

Even when the Sun began to retire, he would sit outside with other villagers, sharing water schedules and comparing river updates, making sure every household had enough to last through the dry weeks ahead.

Occasionally, the entire village would get together and settle beneath the open sky for a grand meeting and would pore over what the future held for them. Once the talks ended, a tree-planting session along the riverbanks would follow. Families would strive together, pressing young saplings into the warm land, their hands covered in mud, restoring the riverbanks one tree at a time. It was a vow to oneself and to others and a shared promise to hold steadfast against whatever the next season might bring.

Against all those odds and prophecies of gloom and doom people of my village, like elsewhere, showed extraordinary resilience, courage, and ingenuity. They tried every possible measure, both those introduced from above, and those improvised by them patch by patch and moment by moment. They were apprehensive but not fearful; hope for a better future kept them going.

Today, years later, I stood once again at the precipice of the fields contemplating the flow of time as it started drizzling. My father stood beside me. The rainfall appeared to gather momentum. My attention instinctively went to the hatch leading to the emergency shelter. It was covered in silt and foliage glistening like jade. My attention reverted to the dark loam. The soil drank up this blessing from the heavens to her heart's content. Now my father, with all arrangements firmly in place, serenely surveyed the emerging scene. The embankments held strong, like veterans who had braved the experience of a thousand storms. We stood there quietly with confidence born of the efforts made to mend our relationship with Mother Earth.

About the author

My name is Ayaan and I'm from Lahore, Pakistan. Visits to my ancestral village and my grandmother's farm have always been a cherished part of my life. Most times, these visits are marked by sentiments of joy. However, every now and then, when we dare to venture forth during the rainy season, the slippery mud of the narrow pathways plays mischievously with our fragile vehicle and the swathes of water keep it bobbing dangerously up and down. I remember once our car slipped into the fields and my uncle had to get it back onto level ground using a tractor.

The girl who invented tomorrow

Angelyn Anna Johny. 14. UK

The first time Maya showed the machine to the world, nobody believed her.

It sat on a small table in the corner of her school science fair, squeezed between a homemade volcano and a model wind turbine. It wasn't shiny or impressive. Wires spilled from its sides, and one of the panels was held together with tape.

"What does it do?" people asked.

Maya smiled and said, "It shows tomorrow."

Most people laughed and walked away. A machine that could see the future belonged in films, not in the hands of a fourteen-year-old girl.

But Maya wasn't trying to predict lottery numbers or exam results. Her machine did something much more important. It showed consequences.

Every choice created a different future, and the machine allowed people to see where those choices would lead. When Maya dropped a plastic bottle into a recycling bin, the screen showed cleaner rivers, healthier oceans, and cities filled with trees. When she threw the same bottle into ordinary rubbish, the screen changed. Beaches became covered in waste. Sea animals disappeared. The sky seemed greyer somehow.

The future shifted with every action.

At first, people dismissed it as a clever trick. Then scientists arrived. They tested the machine for weeks, examining every wire, every circuit, and every line of code. Yet no matter what they did, the results remained the same.

The machine worked.

News spread across the world. Soon, leaders, business owners, teachers, and students were all standing in front of Maya's invention. For the first time in history, humanity could see the paths lying ahead.

A mayor considering whether to build more parks watched temperatures fall and air quality improve. A company deciding whether to switch to renewable energy saw cleaner cities and healthier communities. Governments debating policies could see how decisions affected people decades later.

The machine didn't force anyone to choose a particular future. It simply revealed the truth.

And sometimes the truth was uncomfortable.

People saw futures where inequality continued to grow until entire communities were left behind. They saw futures where climate change brought floods, droughts, and displacement. They saw futures where hatred and division created suffering that lasted generations.

But they also saw something else.

They saw better futures.

Futures where countries worked together. Futures where technology solved problems without harming the planet. Futures where children everywhere had access to education, clean water, and opportunity. Futures where differences were celebrated instead of feared.

For years, humanity had argued about what might happen. Now they could see it.

The machine became the most important invention in history.

Yet something unexpected happened. After a while, fewer people came to use it. Not because it stopped working. Because they no longer needed it.

The lessons had already been learned.

Students grew up understanding that every choice mattered. Businesses began thinking beyond the next quarter and planning for the next generation. Communities worked together more often because they understood that their futures were connected.

Slowly, the world changed. Not overnight. Not perfectly. But steadily.

Decades later, Maya stood in a city transformed. Green roofs covered buildings. Clean energy powered homes. Public gardens stretched between streets once clogged with traffic. People from different backgrounds worked side by side.

The problems of the world had not vanished completely. New challenges always appeared. But humanity had learned something powerful.

The future was not a destination waiting at the end of a road.

It was something people built together, one decision at a time.

As Maya walked through the city, a child approached her.

"Are you really the girl who invented Tomorrow?" he asked.

Maya laughed.

"Not exactly."

The child looked confused.

"But everyone says you did."

Maya glanced around at the thriving city, the trees swaying in the breeze, and the people talking and laughing together.

Then she shook her head.

"No," she said softly. "I only built the machine."

She pointed toward the people around them.

"They're the ones who invented tomorrow."

About the author

I'm originally from India, and I now live in the UK. I've always enjoyed writing, especially stories that explore ideas that matter to people and make readers think. I was inspired to write this story because I wanted to imagine what the future could look like if people came together and made positive changes instead of leaving problems for the next generation.

If we all work together, I hope for a future that is kinder, fairer and more sustainable, where people look after each other and the planet, and where everyone has the opportunity to make a difference.

The spark that set everything ablaze

Maria Feofanova, 15 , Ukraine

In 2052, I am thirty-two. I look at our city, at the groves that have sprouted through the remnants of old highways, and at the rivers where life ripples once more. I feel a sense of responsibility that borders on sadness. We call this the "Dawn." But I remember what this dawn looked like from the window of a classroom in 2035.

I was fifteen. We were constantly told about conscious consumption and our ecological footprint. We were forced to sort plastic caps while, outside, the sky was smothered by the gray smog of factories running at full capacity. We read about the extinction of species, about oceans emptying from endless overfishing, and about wars that left the earth a lifeless, scorched wasteland. It all felt like pure hypocrisy. We were told to protect nature, yet the adults did everything to break it beyond repair.

I remember that Tuesday. We were sitting in class, listening to yet another report about another species gone forever. When the final bell rang, we stepped outside and continued discussing the topic. We could not find the words to describe the horror that gripped us at the thought that we might be the last generation to see he world in dim but still visible colors rather than in shades of gray. Either the adults did not understand what they were doing, or they simply did not care about what would come tomorrow. The next day, I raised my hand and asked: "Why do you teach us to be honest and compassionate if you yourselves are building a world where only those who know how to destroy can survive?" The teacher went silent. The room became so quiet I could hear the hum of the ventilation. She had no answer, because there was no answer for that in any textbook. That day, we realized that no one was coming to save us. We had to stop waiting for permission to change and begin claiming our right to life ourselves.

At first, there were only thirty of us in that classroom, but it became the spark that set everything else ablaze. Instead of marching with "Save Us" signs, our generation asked a question that paralyzed the adults: "Why do you need technologies that are killing us?" We began to act as a barrier to their progress.

Every project, every construction site, and every innovation was met with a single demand: "Will this be good for the Earth?" If the answer was no, we did everything in our power to keep it from moving forward. We managed to force a shift in their focus. We declared that it is senseless to invest billions in searching for life on Mars while we are losing it here on Earth.

We must restore our home first before we ever try to conquer space. It was not a call to abandon progress but a shift in priorities: we redirected the energy of development toward creation. And it worked. When billions of people stop building what they want and start building what is needed, the economy changes on its own.

Today, humanity no longer manages the planet. We are not its masters, but its stewards. Instead of forcing the world to fit our own constraints, we are learning to follow its rhythms. We do not build where we should not, and we do not take more than what nature can replenish.

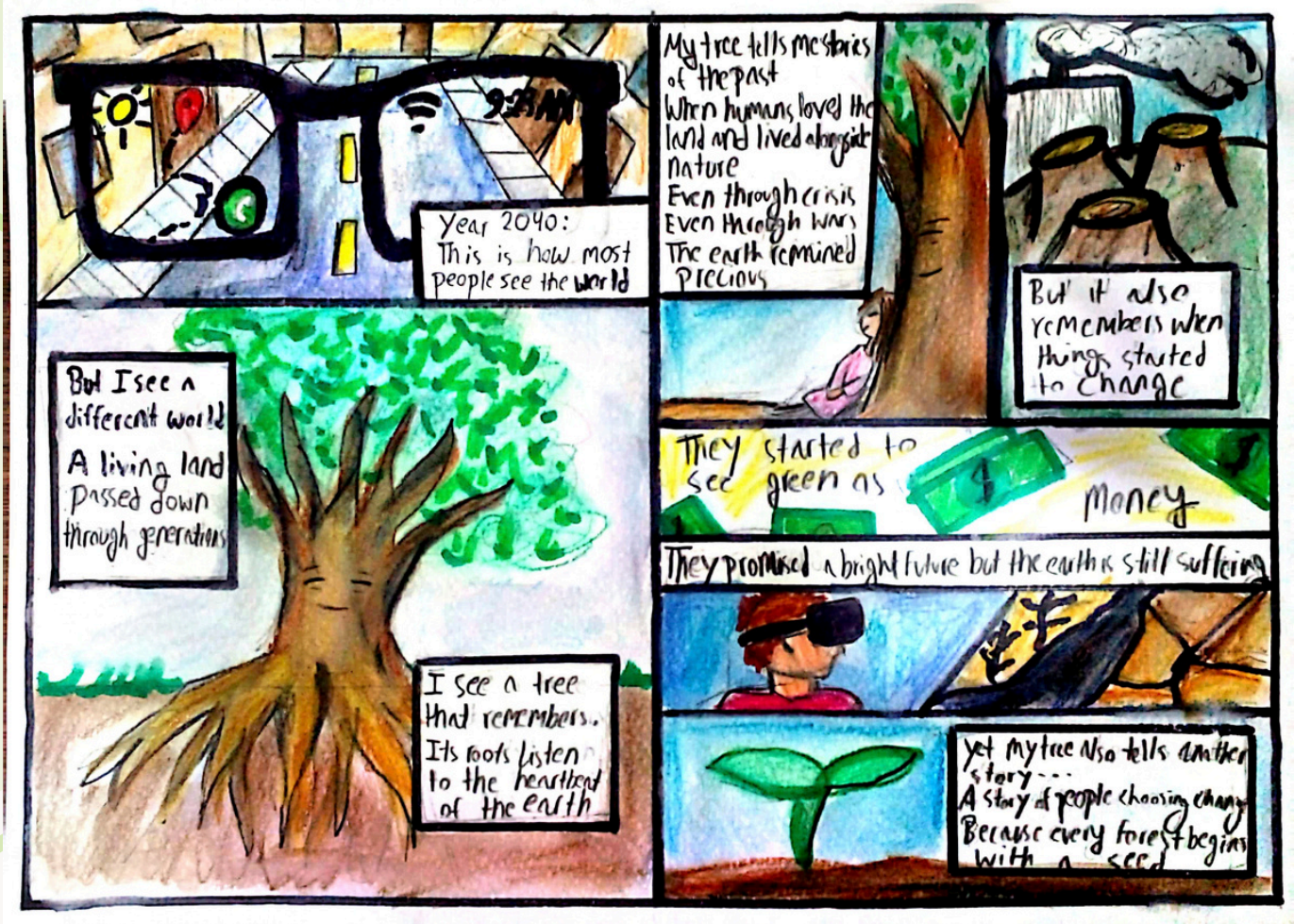
I look at my eleven-year-old daughter. She does not know what it is like to see burning forests, parched earth, or the silence where birds used to sing. Yet I tell her this story, not as a fairy tale of victory, but as a warning. The future did not just happen on its own. It was wrenched from a system that viewed us as children incapable of asking the right question. And we are still asking it. Now, every time someone wants to build or invent something, they look back to us first. We are the generation that stood our ground for the right to live, defending the last walls of what we call home.

About the author

My name is Maria, and I am an aspiring actress from Ukraine. Living through such a challenging time has taught me that the things we often worry about are insignificant compared to the value of our planet and our shared future.

I wrote this story because I believe it is time for us to stop losing sight of what really matters and start working together, with real purpose. For me, storytelling is a way to explore how we can focus on protecting our home. I am sharing this vision in hopes of inspiring others to realize that we have the power to create a better world, if we finally choose to act as one.

Ghina Yehya, 15 . Lebanon



About the artist

I am a 15-year-old student from Lebanon with a passion for mathematics, creative expression, and creating positive change in my community. I enjoy combining analytical thinking with storytelling through writing, poetry, and art. I aspire to use my skills to inspire others, address real-world challenges, and contribute to building a more sustainable, compassionate, and equitable future.

Earth 4All

The Redwood that listened

Yeonjae Lee, 13, South Korea

A boy walked into the woods and approached a tall redwood, daydreaming. He sat down in its shade, leaning his head against the sturdy base. Turning an ear towards the bark, he felt as if the tree had a pulse.

“My name is Rob. What’s your name?” He mused, half to the tree and half to himself. “Mom and Dad are always at work. Can you keep me company?”

The boy stared into the distance, numbed by the Californian heat. Weirdly, he felt comforted by the tree’s presence. It was nice to be able to talk to someone, something, without being judged. As the birds continued their conversations, the boy continued his with the tree.

“In school, Ms. Park talked about climate change,” the boy said. “She said that the world is becoming so hot it’ll be unlivable if we don’t do something about it. Countries are burning or underwater, suffering from our choices. Silly, right?”

The boy twisted towards the tree’s branches, seeking some gesture of comfort. The branches seemed to lean down at him, offering a gentle hug. It made him feel seen and determined.

“Someday, I’m going to be as tall and strong as you are, and I’m going to take care of the entire world!” he exclaimed, before running back towards his house, his arms outstretched like he was flying.

…

The boy, now a teenager, approached the same tree he had made friends with all those years ago. A girl accompanied him.

“How are you doing?” the teenager asked the tree. “It’s been a long time.”

The tree's branches swayed back and forth in the wind, as if beckoning him to come closer. He stepped forward and gave the tree an embrace. The trunk was so massive that he could only clutch the bark. The tree didn't seem to mind, shuffling its leaves in a happy response.

"My parents want me to get a career in software engineering. Artificial intelligence, like them," he said in a hushed voice, as if he was whispering a secret. "But I'm not going to. I don't want to contribute to destruction. I just want to invent things that will help us all." He looked at the tree sadly. The girl mirrored his expression.

The teenager stepped back, silently appreciating the way the red bark glistened with dew. The girl moved beside the teenager and laced her fingers through his. She, too, was admiring the redwood.

"This is Mia," the teenager said. "She's my girlfriend." The girl grinned and waved a delicate hi towards the grooved bark. The two of them then sat under the shade, speaking to the tree about the fragile state of the world, until the sun had set under the horizon.

…

A man walked through a forgotten trail. He could only be identified as the boy, Rob, through the determination in his eyes. He approached an ancient redwood.

"It's been a decade. Do you remember me?"

The man leaned his forehead against the bark, seeking the sturdy comfort he once sought as a child.

"I'm a biomedical engineer now, working on preserving seeds and creating more resilient crops. You inspired me. The world isn't a perfect place, but it's headed in that direction. Since wealth isn't so concentrated at the top anymore, there are funds to divest into independent communities that prioritize equality and equitable sustainability. There are even ideas about implementing a basic income in other places of the world. I think these changes will have real, lasting effects on the rest of the world. Maybe it'll create a better future for you too."

He took a deep breath and smiled at the tree, as if trying to store a part of the tree within him. He stepped back, looking at the tree up and down.

“I should go. Mia’s pregnant, and I shouldn’t leave her for long. I’ll work hard to make sure our daughter grows up with you, too. Be good to her,” the man said with a smile. He turned away from the tree and walked away, humming.

…

A man, a woman, and their daughter walked up to a tall redwood tree.

“Hi,” the man said to the tree. His wife waved timidly, and his daughter performed an elaborate bow.

“The world is so different now, compared to when we first met. It felt like a distant dream, to have governments prioritizing people and independent farming becoming commonplace. Food prices and waste have decreased as a result of communal living. My daughter will grow up in a society that prioritizes financial freedom, women’s autonomy, and even clean energy.”

His daughter giggled, blissfully unaware of the future that could’ve become.

“Can you feel it too?” the man said. “The soil has replenished and the water table is restored, thanks to the decentralization of private farmland. The air is cleaner too, now that wind and solar power are prioritized over coal. It feels like humanity finally agreed on how we should move forward. All of this, it feels unreal.” The man talked rapidly, like a child trying to impress a mother. He was proud, and rightfully so.

Even as an individual, he was among billions who had worked to restore the balance of the world. His daughter stared up at the tree with wide eyes, at the towering canopy.

“It’s so tall,” she remarked.
“Yes, it is. It’ll be here for the next thousand years, still growing bigger and bigger, just like you will,” her mother said.
“Whoa. Can I hug it?” the girl asked, looking at her father but seemingly seeking the tree for a reply, too.

Her father took her arms and wrapped them around the trunk. She could almost feel the life within the tree. She put her ear to the tree, as if trying to find a heartbeat. She didn’t know if it was just her imagination, but she swore she could feel a faint pulse in the tree, slowly syncing with her own.

About the author

I'm from Seoul, South Korea. I was inspired to write because of the many talks about AI data centers and the deteriorating conditions of our planet. I hope to see a future where the wellness of everyone living, both in regard to rights and healthy environments, is prioritized over values like money/profit and power.

The sky didn’t always look the same

Miloslava Klimova, Russia

My name is Wylie, I’m fourteen years old, and I live in Moscow.

Every morning before school, I stand near my bedroom window for a few minutes and look at the sky. I started doing it when I was little, and somehow it became a habit. My younger brother Leo says it’s strange because “the sky looks the same every day anyway.”

But it doesn’t.

Some mornings the clouds are soft and silver. Sometimes the sunrise turns the whole city orange and pink. In winter, snow falls quietly onto the rooftops covered with gardens and solar panels. And at night, if the air is clear enough, you can see stars above the city again.

My mom once told me that when she was my age, people in Moscow almost never saw stars.

I thought she was joking.

But she wasn’t.

A few weeks ago, my class visited the Historical Memory Center, and after that trip, I finally understood why adults talk about the past so differently.

The building itself looked modern and bright, but inside it felt strangely quiet. Huge holographic screens covered the walls, showing archived videos and photographs from the 2020s and 2030s. At first, everyone in my class was talking and laughing like usual. We thought it would just be another boring school excursion.

Then the first video started.

A forest was burning under a dark orange sky.

The fire moved so fast that people had to run carrying children and animals in their arms. Smoke covered everything. Even through the screen, the air looked impossible to breathe.

The next video showed floods destroying streets and houses. Cars floated through the water like toys. Then came videos of crowded cities covered in grey smog. People wore masks outside every day because pollution had become dangerous.

The room became completely silent.

I remember staring at the screen and thinking that it didn't even look real. It looked like a dystopian movie, not history.

But it was real.

Our teacher walked us to a small glass case standing in the middle of the room. Inside was an old child-sized air pollution mask.

One boy from my class laughed nervously.

"There's no way kids actually wore these."

But our teacher nodded.

"They did. Sometimes even during school breaks."

Nobody laughed after that.

I kept looking at the mask. It seemed so small and ordinary, but suddenly it felt terrifying. I imagined being eight years old and putting something like that on before going outside just to breathe safely.

At that moment, history stopped feeling distant.

The children in those videos were almost my age.

One archive clip showed a teenage girl standing at a climate protest somewhere in Europe. Her hair was messy from the rain, but she still held her sign high above the crowd.

It said:

“Will we still have a future?”

For some reason, that sentence stayed in my head for the rest of the day.

Because I’ve never had to ask myself that question before.

My generation grew up differently.

Leo complains when the Wi-Fi stops working for ten minutes or when his favorite park closes for restoration. He has never worried about toxic air or deadly heatwaves. To him, clean rivers, green streets, and quiet electric transport are completely normal things.

And maybe that’s humanity’s greatest achievement.

Not flying drones delivering groceries.

Not smart buildings.

Not even the clean energy systems that power entire cities now.

I think the best thing humanity achieved is that children are no longer growing up terrified of tomorrow.

Of course, the world still isn’t perfect. Some countries still argue with each other. Natural disasters still happen, and some places are still recovering from the damage caused decades ago.

But people finally understood something important: ignoring problems only makes them worse.

Years ago, governments cared too much about competition and money. Companies polluted oceans and forests while pretending everything was fine. Many people believed that one person couldn’t change anything anyway.

But slowly, things started changing.

Scientists kept warning the world. Young people organized protests. Countries began sharing clean technologies instead of hiding them. Schools started teaching students how to solve real problems together instead of only memorizing information for exams.

The changes were slow at first.

Then little by little, they became impossible to ignore.

By the time I was born, many cities had already changed. Public transport became cleaner. Rivers were restored. More energy came from renewable sources. People started planting trees faster than they cut them down.

Humanity finally realized that progress means nothing if people destroy the planet they live on.

That evening after the museum visit, I came home feeling strangely quiet. Leo was sitting near the balcony with a notebook in his hands.

He was drawing constellations.

“What’s that?” I asked.

“A star map,” he said proudly. “My teacher says the sky is much clearer now than it used to be.”

I sat beside him for a moment.

Outside the window, Moscow slowly disappeared into evening lights. Electric trams moved silently below us. The river reflected the sunset like gold.

Then Leo suddenly asked,
“Do you think people back then imagined the future like this?”

I didn’t answer immediately.

I thought again about the girl from the archive video holding that sign in the rain.

Will we still have a future?

Maybe she never got to see the world becoming better herself.

But she still hoped for it anyway.

And because millions of ordinary people refused to give up, my generation can now live without carrying the same fear.

Later that night, I stood alone on the balcony looking up at the sky above Moscow.

It was calm, dark, and filled with stars.

No smoke. No sirens.

No feeling that something terrible was coming. Just silence.

And for the first time, I realized why older generations speak about the sky so differently.

For them, it once looked like a warning.

For me, it simply looks beautiful.

About the author

Well,my name is Mila Klimova and I have won olympiads in history and cultural studies, but I do not want to just study the past, no.

Moreover, I would like to help construct the future. And this competition is my chance to write a story where people and earth live in balance, and I suppose that if we cannot dream it, we cannot create it.

About Earth4All

Earth4All is an international initiative driving one of the most ambitious transitions of our time: transforming our economic system into one that puts people and planet first.

Backed by world-leading scientists and economic thinkers, Earth4All champions five extraordinary turnarounds that together create a pathway towards our vision: **wellbeing and prosperity for all on a stable planet.**

The Earth4All initiative is guided by clear principles:

1. We can achieve wellbeing for all within the limits of our planet.

2. The crises we face are interwoven and need to be approached with a systems thinking perspective. For example, we cannot solve the climate crisis without also tackling the poverty and inequality crises, and vice versa.

3. Solutions must work for the majority, and they must be seen as fair and just or they risk rejection. Transforming our economic system requires widespread support.

To achieve this, we encourage citizens from all walks of life to engage in discussions about transformative ideas. Together, we can jumpstart the transformation of our economic system to one that puts wellbeing above growth. *Earth for All: A Survival Guide for Humanity* presents two science-based scenarios for the future: Too Little Too Late and the Giant Leap

Visit our website: earth4all.life

Feeling inspired? Why not use our Stories of the Future Facilitation Guide to inspire your own, or to use in classes or workshops to get people thinking, talking and writing their visions of a future where we take a Giant Leap.