# **To My Climate Sceptic Friend**

By Sherona Nichols

Dearest Neela

I never thought I’d be writing a letter in the 21st century but you’ve left me no choice. Seventeen years of friendship shouldn’t conclude this way, with me blocked on every platform I could use to contact you. I love you Neela and I won’t let this ruin us. Our history is too vast and too rich to let it all fade away because of a fight.

Neela, you say you don't understand why I’m so passionate about climate change. I say that I’ll never understand why you spend so many hours on sketches only to throw them away.

You never stopped explaining to me why you did so, and neither will I.

I know the danger that lurks right beyond the horizon. I know what has brought us to this point and where it’ll lead us. I can’t turn a blind eye to that. I can’t sit back and not do my part.

Climate change is undeniably the fight of our generation, Neela. It’s our moral responsibility to join the fight in any way we can to protect the only planet we have.

An appreciation for the arts is what separates humans from mere animals. That’s something I heard recently - from where, I don’t recall - but it resonated with me. Not regarding the philosophy of what it means to be human, but I focused on an appreciation of the arts.

How can humans claim that an appreciation of the arts distinguishes us as a species, yet they destroy nature, the very blueprint for artistic expression?

Sometimes I sit outside at dusk, listening to the crickets chirp and the leaves rustle in the gentle breeze. I hear symphonies. I see the sun disappear behind the Northern Range every evening and I think how lucky I am to be alive, in this country, at that moment to witness nature create art.

Art imitates life.

Why do we ruin the landscapes that inspired humanity’s greatest artists if we claim to appreciate art so much? If someone were to destroy The Starry Night, I can’t begin to fathom the public outcry that would arise. We’d have lost a 100-year-old global treasure. Yet, my heart aches when I think of the 2500-year-old olive tree that burnt in Greece last week. We care so much for the products of creativity… why not extend that to the inspiration?

With the way we treat this planet, I think we’re no better than the animals. Yet, the animals don’t abuse the environment… they sustain their habitats. They ensure that their succeeding generation can live and thrive. Aren’t we supposed to be the species with the moral high ground? Shouldn’t an appreciation of our environment be ingrained into our very beings?

I say all this, Neela, to pose you this question. You’re an artist… what inspires you?

I’ve seen your art; I know your love of trees and sunsets and birds and fruits. Remember when we used to run away from our parents and spend hours in the forest behind my house? Of course, a punishment was guaranteed but it was always worth it. I collected rocks and leaves and flowers. You painted the rocks and leaves and flowers. I’ve never seen someone make *breadfruit,* of all things, look so stunning.

You have an appreciation for the arts, Neela, because you appreciate nature.

So, it baffles me why you won’t fight to save it.

Why wouldn’t you want to protect this country?

Will you still paint the sunset over the Northern Range when the mountain tops are barren, and the horizon is forever hazy with smoke?

Some people blame industrialization for climate change. I choose to blame ambition. We, as a species consistently strived for greatness, using every resource at our disposal to achieve it. We arrived at a point where our desires have drained the very thing that has sustained us for so long. Ambition could drain a planet, Neela.

Our ambitions should never blind us. You want everything that life has to offer, but I beseech you, don’t let it blind you to the plight that looms over us all.

Fighting with you isn’t what I want, and I’d like to think you agree. But I cannot stand back and watch the person I grew up with, the person that entered this world in the hospital room next to mine, be so aloof about an issue that has so many negative implications.

What do you think the world will look like ten years from now?

When we fell out, you told me that all I do is speak about “scientific predictions” and “statistics”. I’m not going to do that now. I just want you to imagine what your life and the world by extension will look like in ten years.

Since I know you so well, I already know what you’re thinking. Your art studio would have been up and running for five years now and Neela’s School of Art is in the developmental phase. Since you’re so convinced you’ll meet your husband at university, you’ve just celebrated your ninth wedding anniversary (seriously, good luck finding your husband in the next year). Your precious baby Nalini will only be a year old; your passport will be filled, and you just bought the house of your dreams on the Amalfi Coast. It’s your dream, and you deserve it.

But picture this alongside it. In the last few years, average rainfall in Amalfi has increased so much that mudslides are now a regular occurrence. What was once an ultra-expensive vacation destination for the rich and powerful, is now nothing but a hazard.

You’ve always thought zoos were terrible, so you and your husband take Baby Nalini to Kenya to see giraffes.

The heat is so scorching that you can’t be outside for more than an hour. Nalini’s little body can’t take the heat. You get a glimpse of the giraffes from your air-conditioned hotel room, and you imagine them, day after day, grazing on bare savannahs in this extreme heat. They don’t get to come inside and escape.

Nalini may never see a tiger in the wild.

Hopefully, we will.

We’ve always had big dreams, Neela. Trinidad and Tobago’s border has never been the limit for us; we’ve always considered ourselves citizens of the world. But that world is dying.

Not in ten years, not in twenty, it’s dying right now.

You can’t tell me you haven’t felt the heat lately. A few years ago, we saw fog come out of our mouths at Christmas time. We thought that our lifelong dream of snow in Trinidad and Tobago was about to come through. Yesterday, I put my sheet in the fridge before bed, thinking it’ll stop me from sweating to death during the night. It’s hot, okay!

Even so, we’re lucky to live in Trinidad and Tobago. Think about our neighbours that are right on the hurricane belt. It's terrifying to know that you’re susceptible to such cantankerous weather that’s only becoming more powerful and frequent. We had Tropical Storm Bret a couple of years back and the country shut down. I think about what Hurricane Maria did to Dominica that same year and I shudder. Could you imagine what Trinidad and Tobago would look like if we were only a bit higher on the globe?

Climate change is real Neela and at this point, it’s not about preventing it, we have to deal with it.

It’s easy to ignore it, to write it off as someone else’s problem to solve because we live in a country where the effects are relatively small. It won’t be that way for long, unfortunately. These damaging consequences are going to increase exponentially, affecting every aspect of our lives.

It might be someone else’s problem to solve, but isn’t it ours to suffer through? Neela, I want to go to the beach too. I want to travel all over Trinidad and Tobago, to know my country like the back of my hand. But I want to go to clean beaches that actually have shores and I want to carpool across the country. I want to have just as much fun as the next eighteen-year-old. But I want to do it in a way that is sustainable and healthy for the planet. I want my peers to look at me and be influenced by my actions. Not for my glory, but for Earth’s safety.

So, I’m not asking you to single-handedly save the world with me. However, we can contribute in any way that we can to this global mission to salvage what’s left of the Earth. We can help ensure that someone from Italy will one day get to see Maracas Beach in all its glory. In this same way, someone in Italy is fighting to make sure Venice doesn’t drown before we can see it. We’re a small part of a much bigger picture Neela, but we’re still a part of it.

I want Nalini to see a tiger in the wild, and I know you want that too.

So, fight to give her a tiger-filled future. Fight for your house on the Amalfi Coast. Fight for Northern Range sunsets. You have big dreams, but they aren’t going to come find you, you have to fight for them.

You might think that your contribution is naught, but it takes one person to start a revolution. It takes one person to stand for what is right, and people will follow. Do not invalidate the power that’s in your hands. Your contribution, no matter how small, is valid and worthy.

I’ve said all this and yet, there’s a chance you might still doubt the effects of climate change. The thing is, I can’t learn everything for you. You have to educate yourself. You have to pick up your computer and learn about what lies ahead for the planet if we all sit back and do nothing.

Come to the march next week. Come to the beach clean-up the week after. Come to the seminars, to the outings to the forums. That’s how you learn Neela. You have to immerse yourself.

You’re my sister Neels… we crossed the friendship threshold long ago. I want you with me in this fight because with you by my side, the world is ours for the taking. We haven’t borne witness to all there is to see on this floating rock. Come fight with me, so that in the end, we’ll come home and we’ll listen to the crickets chirp knowing we’ve seen and experienced all there is. Above all, we’ll know that we did our part.

Call me, please, I love and miss you so much.

All My Love,

Sherona