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Christopher Kuhl

The Storm Is Coming: An Essay on Climate Change

1.

I am sitting at my desk in the school with big windows. They're filled with purple and black clouds, like someone has sucker punched the sky. The class is quiet, reading something—something probably boring. I haven't opened my book. I feel as though I am physically incapable of moving. But I am compelled to blurt out, "Storm's coming." Really, I'm worried about something more. But the class laughs, snorts; they've all turned in their seats to stare at me. The teacher claps her hands, trying to draw attention away from my anguish. There's more to this than meets the eye. But what? The teacher asks the class why, in *Franny and Zooey*, does Franny, a Jewish girl, keep repeating the Jesus Prayer. Why?

2.

Dinosaurs roamed the earth for 160 million years, until 65.5 million years ago, when they were all wiped out by some catastrophic event. Most scientists believe a huge asteroid crashed into the earth. Others say at least some kind of climate change must have been induced, a sort of

mini-ice age, such that the poles, rivers, oceans saw significant drops in temperature—some were covered in ice—and food, flora, and fauna died off. The dinosaurs starved to death in the cold. These cold-blooded creatures had no way to get warm; besides starving, they froze to death. But all of this is just theory.

3.

I live in an area of northern New York State known for its dairy farming. I am in my last year of school and, as a child, was diagnosed with high-functioning Asperger's. Everything is alien, anxiety-inducing; even now, a disruption in what I am comfortable with—the presence of people I don't know; something other than Malt-O-Meal for breakfast; lunch at a time other than when both hands of the clock merge into one, straight up at the "12"—can trigger either a shut-down, which can last the whole day, or a violent outburst. With an outburst, there is serious danger to those around me, and myself. I don't know what is happening but, like a young calf, need my mother. I don't like my (scary) father.

4.

The last four or five years have had atypical seasons. Cold summers, temperatures often not much above sixty degrees for the high. Autumns too wet, so wet farmers can't get their winter cover crops planted—triticale, wheat, winter rye—in the five- to six-day window they have for planting. The fields are nothing but mud, boot-sucking mud: there's no point in trying to plant anyway, because there are no rows for the tractor to run, pulling the seeder to do its precise distribution of seeds. And the equipment will get stuck, mired in what amounts to a mud crater. No crops, no livestock feed. The farmer has to buy and buy; he's already running at a loss.

Likewise the spring: the fields are waterlogged. Fortunately, the planting season is a little more accommodating for putting in field corn; if it's still too wet in April and May, there's always June or July. But even then, the harvest will be late, thrown back up against the winter crops. How are they going to feed the cattle? This seems overwhelming, and I don't want to think about it.

5.

Winter is my favorite season. I can make snowballs for an imaginary battle with the trees. I make snowballs for hours, piling them neatly and securely. But not this winter or winters the past five or six years: there's no snow in what has always been the snowiest place in the lower forty-eight states. People in the cities are generally happy about this. Sure, it's cold, but it's easier to get around. But in snow country, the farmers are frightened. They need lots of snow because as it

melts it moistens the fields, and planting and harvesting can go on as usual, as ideal. But not in these last few years. Depression is a fact of life among farmers and those who depend on the farmers' success.

6.

I've heard of climate change, but what kind is it? With no snow, it doesn't seem like a mini-ice age is coming. Is this global warming? Global cooling helped kill off the dinosaurs. With global warming, will people die? Will I? Will the livestock? Fifteen miles away, while the black and purple clouds continue to fill the school windows, a group of men and women are loading tractors, seeders, combines, and other machinery and equipment onto flatbeds, and a whole herd of cattle into a whole herd of cattle trucks. Like so many before them, this farm family, after years of struggle, debt they can't pay off, and no more services or resources to turn to, has sold the farm, down to every last blade of grass. They will have to move into town, bankrupt, and hope they can hire out onto someone else's farm. They are ashamed. One of the men packing up the farm looks up at the sky's purple and black clouds and says to no one in particular,

“Storm's coming”—

7.

And I hang my head and sob. What more is there to see? In another month or two, there'll be one less bankrupt farmer on this earth.

“Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy upon me, a poor and miserable sinner.” It's nobody's fault; yet as humans, we're all culpable to some degree. We, even I, in this global warming, are in a whole world of dark.

Christopher Kuhl has a bachelor's degree in philosophy and in music composition. His short story "Wade" was nominated for the 2017 Pushcart Prize, as well as being named the Annual Editor's Choice of Best Work in Fiction by Inscape Magazine for 2016. He has been published in Big Muddy, California Quarterly, Carbon Culture Review, Crack The Spine, OVS Magazine, Euphony, Prairie Schooner, The Anglican Digest, Ensemble Jourine, Ink Pantry, Inscape Magazine, Kane County Chronicle, Edison Literary Review, FRiGG Magazine, Rising Phoenix Press, Valparaiso Fiction Review, Mississippi Literary Review, North Dakota Quarterly, Paragon Journal, Piedmont Literary Review, The Round, Zzbaggins Poetry Victims, Schuylkill Valley Journal of the Arts, Thin Air Magazine, Tulane Review, Glass: A Journal of Poetry, Alabama Literary Review, OxMag, Superstition Review, The Griffin, Streetlight Magazine, Diverse Voices Quarterly, Poydras Review, Vox Poetica, Whistling Shade, and The Critical Pass Review. His most recent book of poetry is Blood and Bone, River and Stone: Memoirs of Lewis County. He enjoys reading a wide array of literature, as well as philosophy and history. His other interests include studying higher mathematics and classical Greek and Hebrew, as well as drawing and colored pencil and photography painting. He is never bored.