

HOW TO
SAVE THE
WORLD

WITH A
CHICKEN
AND AN
EGG



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Chicken
House

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*To the animals of Planet Earth with our humblest
apologies and our deepest love.*

‘After a short time in the country, it was no longer possible for one thoughtlessly to kill a fly, and I have never in the presence of a Tibetan squashed an insect which bothered me. The attitude of the people in these matters is really touching. If at a picnic an ant crawls up one’s clothes, it is gently picked up and set down. It is a catastrophe when a fly falls in a cup of tea. It must at all costs be saved from drowning as it may be the reincarnation of one’s dead grandmother. In winter they break the ice in the pools to save fishes before they freeze to death, and in summer they rescue them before the pools dry up. These creatures are kept in pails or tins until they can be restored to their home waters. Meanwhile their rescuers have done something for the good of their souls. The more life one can save the happier one is.’

Seven Years in Tibet, Heinrich Harrer

‘. . . there truly is hope. Other peoples, other species, even other kinds of sea turtles – in situations as bad, sometimes worse – have recovered. Turtles have taught me this: do all you can and don’t worry about the odds against you.

*Voyage of the Turtle:
In Pursuit of the Earth’s Last Dinosaur, Carl Safina*

‘The world is changing because we’re changing it. And that makes me understand, at least, what kind of person I’d like to be. A person can seek ways, whether big or small, to heal the world.

‘One doesn’t wait for a revolution. One becomes it.’

*The View from Lazy Point:
A Natural Year in an Unnatural World, Carl Safina*



I. IVY

It's hard telling a story. There's never really a beginning. Something always happened before the part you *think* is the beginning, and there are all these details you need to add so everyone understands the whole set-up. The beginning of this story was probably when the world was formed, creatures started walking around and humans decided they were boss, but I can't start there because it'll take way too long. And I can't start with the strange feeling I had inside that *something huge was coming*, or the night on the beach when it actually came and the impossible possible happened. No. Important things happened before that night. So I should probably start by saying I can talk to animals.

Yes. You heard correctly.

This doesn't mean I blab at them and they stare at me blankly, wondering who this weird human is and

when I'll shut up and give them food. I mean I understand them like I *am* them. Like I've *zshoomed* inside their brain and they've *zshoomed* inside mine. Which *can* be awesome, but it can also be heartbreaking and land me in big trouble.

I don't know when it started. I must have been very small because one of my earliest memories is of being a duck. This was before I knew I was a human, and before Daddy Jeremy explained that my skin was where I ended and the rest of the world began. The way I saw it in my baby brain, life was one big whirl of colour and smell and noise that somehow included me.

I was watching Polly at the time. When I was a duck, I mean. She was an Indian Runner, which is a breed of duck that has a long neck and waddles but can't fly. She could quack, though, and not all ducks are quackers. Most male ducks are completely silent, which is just as well because you should hear the females. Shocking moaners, ducks. Mind you, they've got good reason, what with their habitats being destroyed and their ducklings being feisty little bigmouths and everything.

Most ducks live for ten years, but Polly only lived for five because a fox nabbed her and left a trail of brown and white feathers where Polly used to be. I did like Polly, but she sprayed liquid poo everywhere

so she wasn't the best pet if you wanted a clean yard or a clean baby. Not that I noticed. Right then, my eyes were fixed on her bobbing up and down as she ate oats in front of my upturned toes, and that's when it happened.

She lifted her head and looked at me. I looked at her. Everything else went *zshoom* and out of focus. Her mind sank into mine and we sort of . . . merged and became one. I could feel this hazy glow where the two of us zinged together in a duck/girl mish-mash, with no edges or borders or rims.

Later, I figured out I wasn't a duck at all. The time had to come sooner or later, I suppose. How could I be a duck when I was also a dog, an ant, a starfish, a spider, a seagull, a horse and a crab? Because that merge thing? It started happening with other animals as well. All of them. Even *snails*. And it kept happening.

When I found out I was human it was a huge shock. Huge.

It's nice being a duck. I recommend it if you ever get the chance. It's fun being lots of creatures, actually, except they all have their problems, and some more than others. I have them, too, of course. My main number one problem is that I want to save the world and I have no idea how to do it because the world is extremely massive, full of crazy people, and I'm not

even twelve yet.

I wouldn't even know where to begin because that's not a subject we're taught at school, even though you'd think that would be the most vitally crucial thing we could ever learn. And there aren't any 'How to Save the World When You're Eleven' type books in the library. I know because I've checked.

All I know is that animals need me. But what are you supposed to do when you're only eleven and you don't have a jeep or money or veterinary skills? I have to sit around, knowing whole species are endangered, suffering and dying, and I can't do a single thing about it. I mean, obviously, I give sugar solution to tired bees, leave seeds out for hungry birds and go on slug- and snail-moving missions on rainy nights with rubber gloves on to stop them getting squished, but everyone does that. Some people even do it *without* rubber gloves on.

But what I really want to do is save creatures. All of them. And the coral and the seas and the forests and the air. Which is a mission, I admit, but it needs to be done. I can't just sit around and watch everything die.

If people don't believe me then fine, whatever – it only bothers me because it interferes with my ability to save the world. No one listens to you if they think you're making things up. They get mean about it too.

It makes my blood fizz when humans are horrible to animals, but when they're bad to each other? Seriously, what is *that*?

Unfortunately, I've experienced this myself, so I stay away from humans and do small acts of kindness to help animals have a better life. Just to, you know, pass the time until I get old enough to do something world-changingly serious. But while I was passing time until I could do something world-changingly serious, something world-changingly serious happened. Something impossible. Obviously it *wasn't* impossible, because it happened, which means it *was* possible. It was an impossible thing that couldn't possibly happen, but somehow, impossibly, did.

Look, it makes total sense to me. And it will to you too in the end (hopefully).

This story isn't about ducks, by the way. It's about secrets, the seaside, and how seagulls trick worms into thinking it's raining. It's also about mucus, fudge and dogs needing a wider variety of sniffs. But if you want the simple version, it's about what happened here last summer. It involves animals too – lots of them – and an unusual boy called Nathaniel with a mystery to solve. So we should probably start with him.