

## Otter

Silence. Deafening silence.

Perfection. A sunrise roams the air, like a pudgy, raucous three-year-old discovered a paintbrush - leaving bold red and sienna streaks. Sunlight filters through the vegetation and the growing azure sends a joyful fizz through my heart. Except everything is wrong. A distant hum of a digger penetrates the air. Burly men bellow and shout whilst cementing ugly buildings.

Ten minutes later, Mama awakes her ears twitching tentatively. I know she can hear it too. Our greatest fear hangs in the air unspoken.

Humans are sometimes brutal. Monsters. I can sense it. I know what runs through their veins. These men have the sharp tang of out-of-date sour cream flowing through them, whilst my romp have treacle. Rich and sweet. I lay for a while, my head resting between my paws, trying to block out the clatter of that digger, threatening to destroy our lives like smashing glass bottles in pieces that can't be glued back together.

I smell it before I see it. A sharp odour stings my nose and overwhelms my thoughts. Tobacco. Then huge thudding footsteps rattle my body. Eight muscley men come into view armed with huge machines. Dread crawls down my spine and seeps through my bones. Fear dissolves and determination emerges. I poise myself. Humans always seem surprised by my swift movements

The hum switches to an ear-splitting roar. The machine starts cutting trees...

My siblings huddle into mama and papa, quivering but I stay bold, snarling. I watch the men. So careless. Saplings fall gracefully to the ground and then our gnarly, beloved oak comes crashing to the ground with a thud, all the life sucked out of it in a fraction of a moment. Do they know what 'home' means?

A sudden energy jerks through my body and I lurch for the men, tugging ferociously at their tough overalls. A pearl of blood appears on their ankles, but I carry on despite their indignant yelps. I MUST do this for my family, for my home. It's at stake and I'm their only hope. I snarl and snap. Rows of tiny razor-sharp teeth on display. That's what does it.

They mutter rapidly, discussing what they should do. The only thing I can do now is hope. Miraculously, the ghastly men turn on their heels looking relieved, but also peeved they were scared away by a mere otter.



If I were a human I would be celebrating, punching the air and dancing, but I just lay down again watching the men walk away until they become a tiny dot in the distance. In a hundred years from now, will another little otter be sitting here wondering whether they will ever get noticed for who they actually or will they always be seen as pesky rodents and most importantly will there be a new oak standing proudly and protectively again looking over his otters?

The roar of the digger halts.

Silence. Deafening silence.

**By Zena, age 10**