

## The Four Momentous Animal Tragedies: A David Attenborough Narration

### Preface

I was inspired by David Attenborough's BBC wildlife narrations. I decided to describe these animal events using a third person approach. As a writer, I had fun imagining a character Warren (An English derivation of my Chinese name "Wei Ran" in pinyin form) with David Attenborough speaking about Warren's emotion and observation. These short stories show the importance of being observant of animals in their lives and their own emotional connections. The animals could be dogs in a shelter, pigeons in search of food scraps, or a fawn crossing a street.

### I. Steps on the Blacktop

At noon of Daycare, the weather is especially hot. On the basketball court, black carpenter ants scurry across the blacktop pavement that matches their color, effectively camouflaging them from potential predators. They are in search of food scraps dropped by the children who ate lunch minutes ago. Finding food is no hard task, but ants that search out in the open are putting their lives at stake.

An ant can withstand 50 times its body weight. However, it cannot withstand the weight of a 40-pound four-year-old. The shoes of a young boy land on the helpless insects. This boy is Warren. He jumps around the court, crushing the ants with utmost accuracy. Squishing ants to him is as fun as popping bubble wrap. As a four-year-old, Warren does not understand that bugs have lives much equal to his own. As he leaves more dead bugs in his path, he will eventually learn the true meaning behind the lives in nature.

### II. Night Knight in Black and White



There is a brush among the garbage pails during the storm at a house in the suburbs; a night knight in black and white emerges from the drenched sheets of dark plastic.

Here is an adult skunk, looking for shelter from the rain. Skunks are known for releasing odorous smells of sulfur, but these smells cannot combat the heavy downpours from Mother Nature. Its fur coat is not the best raincoat either. The skunk settles by some trash cans for the night, and prepares for a rest.

However, the hopes for sleep are immediately foiled; the animal is spotted by the angry residents of the house. A man and woman scream at the skunk. The residents frighten the skunk so much that it forgets to spray the noxious odor, which is what these residents fear it for. They see this nocturnal creature of black and white as a demon, not a soldier. The skunk flees its shelter, and trudges into the openness of heavy rain. Drenched and fatigued, the skunk falls on the rough pavement, shivering from the cold of the seething rainwater. Now, it can only hope that the rain will cease.

Unfortunately, its moment of hope is disrupted when it comes face to face with the blinding headlights of a pickup truck. The vehicle strikes the skunk in the head, and the truck veers, crushing the skunk with its heavy-duty tires.

The skunk's bones are reduced into brittle smithereens, and a pool of fresh, red fluid floods through the clear, streaming rainwater. Despite the horrific sight, the driver continues on. He will forget the kill in no time. The pouring rain gives the skunk's body a final bath, and washes away the blood. The night knight's existence is washed away with it, before being drained into the nearby sewers of oblivion and forgotten.

The skunk would only live on in Warren's mind. Upon seeing its resting body the next day, he realizes that this skunk was what his parents were shooing away from their garbage pails in the rainy



darkness. He, much like a majority of the neighborhood, feared skunks beforehand. Now, he wonders if such fear for these vulnerable creatures is a mere exaggeration. He would only feel a sense of shame every time he sees the lifeless, forgotten, night knight in black and white.

### III. Scavenger of the Skies

It is late November. The fallen leaves have turned brown and crisp with the approaching winter dryness. The temperature is near freezing. Only a few more days, and dew from the grass will turn to frost. Squirrels have been gathering as many acorns as possible to prepare for the winter, when the woods become cold, barren, and coated in ice. One not-so-lucky squirrel was run over by a car. A dead squirrel will look like an attractive Thanksgiving meal to no predators except one:

A turkey vulture pridefully soars with its wings spread in a V-shape. The antihero of the skies has arrived. The scavenger bird uses its powerful sense of smell to pick up sulphurous chemicals from carcasses miles away and above. It has picked up an odor of a fresh meal waiting below. The vulture dives towards the plumes of the scent. The V-shape of its wings help reduce turbulence as it glides through the windy air, approaching the earth.

Finally, it lands on a rooftop, confirming its target. The carcass is indeed an appetizing meal to the scavenger. However, the vulture sees that someone else has already got to its target first. The bird sees a teenager wearing apparel that it itself doesn't need. The boy is wearing a bike helmet which the vulture mistakes for a black, pointed beak. The two remain silent, staring at each other in amazement. The boy suddenly starts to wave in a similar V-shape, attempting to get his father's attention. The vulture assumes that the boy is trying to shoo it away because he got to the prey first. The vulture spreads its wings, and flies into the distance, allowing the boy to keep the dead squirrel. The boy, Warren, watches



vulture vanish into the horizon of the sky. He looks down at the dead squirrel, and wonders if there are beings in the world who benefit from the deaths of others. All he can only hope that the answer is no.

#### IV. Dancer in the Blue

In the early weeks of June, a young blue jay sits on the driveway in front of a house. It appears as a young girl with blue hair tied in a bun, a black ribbon tied around her neck, black stockings, and a beautiful dress mixed with blue, black and gray.

The blue jay has fallen from its nest and injured its right eye upon landing. Fungi has been growing on the untreated eyelid. If it stays out in the open ground, the possibilities of survival are low.

Luckily, help is on the way for this juvenile blue jay. Arriving to it are two siblings: Warren and his older sister Ingrid. As they observe the bird, loud chirping clamors from the towering, green trees surrounding the trio. The blue jay responds by opening its beak and shouting out weaker chirps. The jay hops and spreads its wings out. It takes off, attempting to reach the source of the noises. The kids watch as the bird flies to the top of their house's roof. The jay tries to perform the flying dance its mother taught it, but its wings tire out and it lands back on the ground. The fledgling raises its wings and tries again. Again the bird quickly runs out of energy and it cannot reach the trees. That is until it slams into the wall of the family's house and falls to the pavement. Miraculously, the blue jay is alive and well.

The blue little bird stares up at the trees, and continues to chirp to the surrounding noises. Warren deduces the chirps from the treetops come from the jay's family.

Ingrid knows the bird needs to practice and build stamina to fly back to its home. She searches for food around the house, hoping to give it the energy it needs to effectively perform its dance to the skies.



The family's lawn soil is rich with worms from spring to autumn. By the time Ingrid gets back, she has collected about 30 worms, more than enough for a blue jay fledgling. She takes one worm and the blue jay chirps again, now with some excitement. Ingrid lowers the worm in the the blue jay's beak, and it happily swallows its snack.

In the evening, the family has to go out for dinner, but they do what they can to protect their new friend. The parents take out a basket. They place it over the young jay to protect it from meeting an untimely demise. The jay will have both space and air inside the shelter. The family drives away in the car, but the two kids sit in the back, eyeing the basket shelter as it disappears behind the trees.

Two hours later, blinding headlights gleam in the darkness of the woods. The jay awakens from its nap as the headlights glare at its cage. It doesn't care, however, because it knows who they are. The headlights turn off, and the jay finds itself back in darkness, returning to its slumber with relief.

The next day, all four family members rush out to say hello to the jay. The blue jay is also excited, and happily chirps as they remove the shelter. Warren wants to play with the bird, but he has to go to school. Ingrid promises to guard the bird while the rest of the family is away.

However, the moment Warren enters the school hallway, the jay is the least of his worries. The clocks strike 8:30, and focus turns onto his school activities.

Once school ends, Warren excitedly skips to Father's truck and asks, "Is the blue jay ok?"

"No," Father responds, his voice trailing off.

Warren looks at his dad confused. Father's furrowed brows grip onto his gleaming glasses.

"What happened," Warren desperately asks.

His father explains the madness of nature as Warren's face shifts from concern to horror.



Warren stares ahead of the truck, and sees their house. Their fifth family member should be on the blacktop, but nothing is there. As the truck inches closer Warren observes thoroughly, but all that remains is the empty, rough pavement. When he gets out of the truck, the shock drains his legs of strength. He collapses on the blank parking space, too terrified to cry.

At dinner, Ingrid explains everything:

*The blue jay excitedly eats its last meal from its new mother. It watches Ingrid vanish into the caverns of the garage. Before she closes the door, the fledgling looks up and shrieks in terror for help. It screams for its parents, both birds and humans together. The birds' helpless responses pierce the early summer air. They know what will happen if nothing is done. Ingrid doesn't know why the blue jay is in panic. The blue jay helplessly stares at the sky, trying to hop away as a V-shaped shadow dives to its location. The screaming within the surrounding woods grows like a disease spreading from tree to tree. The trees themselves seem in pain. Now, Ingrid understands the trouble, and her screams join with those of the surrounding birds. The blue jay's squinted, damaged eye meets a yellow pair of wide, hungry eyes. The shadow's brown feathers illuminate in the sunlight as it spreads its wings. The jay feels a brush of air as a red fan of a tail swoops in front of it and razor-sharp talons grip its delicate body. The jay cries as its new home becomes more distant. Suffocating from the tight grip of the claws, it sees Ingrid emerging from the shadows of her house. It watches as Ingrid cries helplessly from below, and it lets out a final, strained chirp, before the last of its breath departs.*

The next afternoon, Warren finds Ingrid's sketchbook, still in shock from the sudden loss. The page displays a drawing of the blue jay. Below it reads an obituary::



“Remember little Blue Jay - 6/12/11–6/13/11 Fledgling who we cared for, but was grabbed by a hawk in the morning (8:30 am).”

8:30 was the moment Warren’s school began, when he let go of his thoughts on the jay. Was it because he forgot about the jay that it died? Was it that life stops when one is not thinking about it? At 8:30, Warren stopped thinking about the jay. At 8:30, his sister was to depart from the fledgling to continue her activities. It was because the jay was left unguarded by devoted attention and thought that it was vulnerable to all the surrounding danger. Warren imagines feeding the friend, helping it fly, perhaps returning it to its parents, and watching it mature into a magnificent adult blue jay. Sadly, this is only wishful thinking. He would not see any of that occur.

The young boy sees the other animals joining the jay on the drawing: the ants, the skunk, and the vulture. He asks himself if all animal encounters end in such tragedy. He becomes fearful. If all animals he meets will die by his hand. Was he responsible for this fledgling’s tragedy? He remembers Mother’s statement at dinner, “You two should be grateful. Even if the bird is gone, I’m sure it was thankful that it had you two to protect it.”

Still devastated, his mother’s words can only remind him that it wasn’t his fault. However, he remembers how happy the blue jay was to see him win those few hours.

Now Warren sees the drawing of the jay emerging from the colorless page to thank him. He pictures this fledgling perching on his hand, playfully flapping its wings like a dancing girl in an ocean-blue dress. Warren finally pictures the fledgling winking its fungi-covered eye at him, spreading its ocean-blue wings for a final dance, flying off, and vanishing into the sunlit clouds. From the pillows of the glowing white he hears one last chirp of goodbye. The clouds glide away from Warren’s house and nature moves on with time.