

Mother's Anger

Tread softly as you walk upon my gentle earth.
I am sleeping still and do not wish to wake.
You, my children, to whom I've given birth,
Please listen now for all our sakes.

At first your play was loving, soft;
My hills and valleys rang with mirth,
So that I did allow, but -
Your games are irritations now.

All is not well, it seems.
You have grown unkind and begin to trouble my dreams.
Your roads begin to bind me; cities press their weight.
(Tracks and towns I tolerate)
You furrow my skin, spend my riches in your haste,
And turn my trees to waste.
You spread your poisons wide and dig for fuel deep,
Yet still I sleep - but my dreams for you grow troubled.

Fear lest I wake:
Lest fire spews and mountains quake:
Lest seas rise up or ice-age shuts the door on your short lives:
Or lest I change my track around the sun.
There's little fun in being fried.
Your weather's presently quite mild and shacks and surface scrapes contrive.
All that of course would change and you've nowhere else to hide.
The mother sometimes turns against the child.

You cut my hair and break my very bones - for toys!
You plunder secret treasures, kill the seas. Treat me with some respect, please!
My sanctuaries reverberate with noise. Why all this strife?
Sacred hoards, not necessarily laid down for you, are scattered wide.
You hew down stately trees - for paper, boards.
I'd planned for you a very different dream, a glorious fate. You could not wait.

A while ago, I woke with hate and changed my face.
My children then, dinosaurs long-lived but slow, are old stones now.
It was their turn to go. They had grown rather dull!
But when next I wake, I won't discriminate
Between those of you with grace and those who wreck a dream made long ago.
One cannot check a total cull of those who desecrate.

So tread softly as you walk upon my gentle earth.
Your childish mirth may change to dread
When I give birth to children more considerate. ⁱ

ⁱ Discovered later: There is nothing new!

*What does the bloodthirsty passage of time not leech away?
Our parents' generation, worse than their parents',
Has given birth to us, worse yet – and soon
We will have children still more depraved.*

Horace, *Odes*, 3.6.45-8.