

THE VELD FIRE



"Oh help!" I cried. "It's the end of the world!"

It was dark outside, but red and orange flames were leaping wildly in the air. Sparks were flying in the gusting wind. It looked like the whole world was on fire. The air was thick with smoke so I could hardly breathe. What was a little cat to do? Where could I run? The fire was rushing towards me – I could hear the crackling of the burning trees and then a big bang as a gum tree exploded with flames and sparks flying.

But what was that? A shadowy figure, silhouetted against the fiery glow, was dancing on the flames, stamping his feet on the sparks as they flew towards me. "It's my Rob human!" I cried, "He's come to save me from roasting in hell." I was so relieved that I let out a loud 'meow'.

Rob looked in my direction. "Stripes!" he shouted, "I'm coming!" he scooped me up and ran like the wind.

Just then I could hear a fire engine's siren. The big red engine came to a screeching halt and the brave firemen leaped out with fire hoses at the ready. They poured water on the flames, beat out the sparks and saved our lives.

They told us that the fire had been started by children playing with matches. The fierce wind whipped up the flames and blew the sparks far into the dry veld. Fires sprang up everywhere and soon a huge fire was raging. Even trees were burning like huge flaming candles, especially the alien trees. The children were very sorry for starting a fire that could burn down houses and kill people and small animals like tortoises and lizards and mice – and me.

‘Sorry often comes too late,’ said the fireman, sadly shaking his head.

After the panic was over, and only black earth and smouldering stumps were left, my Rob human sat me down and said. ‘I’m so glad you’re OK Stripes. Fires can be so dangerous. Remember how hot and dry it’s been all summer? And the fierce winds? That’s why we get so many veld fires these days.’

‘But why is the world so angry?’ I wanted to know.

‘It’s because we humans are not caring for our environment enough’, he said. ‘People are burning too much coal and gas and oil to make electricity, and driving too many cars that all make dirty gases. The gases are like a blanket over the earth that makes it get warmer and warmer. So the earth feels all hot and bothered and makes fierce winds and storms – and terrible fires’.

I blinked my eyes and tried to understand why humans care so little for our environment. Before I could think of something clever to say, Rob went on.

‘And that, Stripes, is what we call climate change’.

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