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## The Cost of Doing Business

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## KIMBERLY CHRISTENSEN

### *The Cost of Doing Business*

Every day I go to work in a suit that I had to finance because between rent and student debt there's no money for clothes and I have to dress the part and keep my eyes on the screen tracking the Dow and the Nasdaq and the other indices and I'm sweating about other people's money and prepared for some red-faced guy to call me screaming from his private jet because somehow I fucked up his investments and why do they hire kids like me to handle these deals anyway. But today breaking news scrolls across the bottom of my screen where normally there are colour-coded numbers and it says that the last polar bear, the one in the Berlin Zoo, has died and now polar bears aren't just functionally extinct, they are actually extinct and never coming back just like they've said it would happen my entire life to the point where I didn't think I'd care but now my brain flops around in my skull like a fish gasping for breath and even though I stare at the screen and try to watch for a breakout in oil futures, I can't do it anymore.

I leave the building.

It's not even time for my lunch break or what should be my lunch break except that I normally work through it and anyway I just walk straight out of that building and when I get to the plaza it is packed with people in suits like mine but also barista aprons and yoga pants and school uniforms and nobody is saying anything and instead we just look at each other and then look away again before anyone can breathe the word *extinct* and I know that if anyone reaches out their hands to me as if to keep them from drowning I will go under with them instead.

So I walk.

The bay is closer but instead I walk toward the ocean with the arctic glaciers dissolved into it like tears and I join up with a stream of people walking toward the sea too and they all have this look about them like they've spent the past decade shooting heroin and everything has blended together except now they are getting clean and it hurts like everything is too bright, but there is also this world that we have forgotten about and here it is and it doesn't have polar bears in it anymore. Tears run hot down my face as all the things I have on-purpose not been paying attention to play through my brain like a PowerPoint on climate disaster: houses swallowed by eroding beachfront; rainforests toppled by ravaging bulldozers; wild-eyed animals fleeing fire vortices; and in the back of my mind I have known the money I'm moving around until it makes more money is pouring out in pipelines run through native lands and poisoning the water and

heating the atmosphere and that people have been jailed trying to protect the water and the land while I have been protecting somebody's wallet.

And maybe it is my own.

We reach land's end where I want to hurl my wallet and the phone vibrating in my pocket and the red-faced man on its other end into the waves below as if the water will wash away all my years of pretending that I was just one person who couldn't do anything but the crowd has stopped moving and we stand in a silence that is only punctuated by tears until someone wails and soon everyone is crying out and rocking themselves and I take the hands that are reached out to me and do not drown. Some kind of signal spreads through us like we are trees communicating with our roots and we all know what we have to do and it is not standing here feeling sad that we live in a world that doesn't have polar bears in it anymore.

So we walk.

Some walk to where the fishes have washed up dead by the millions and some to where the fires have burned scars across the land and to where the mudslides have buried everything in their path and to where the mighty coast redwoods are choking under the weight of poisoned air. Some go to those places like the monarchs go to Mexico and the swallows to Capistrano without knowing anything about the how of it except that suddenly it is urgent to look at the things they have been turning away from for too long.

But I turn back.

I am pulled to the epicentre where steel and glass towers choke out ocean and redwood and monarch, carrying with me the iceberg tears that have stained the suit that I don't yet fully own. In the shadows of skyscrapers I strip it off and lay it out in the middle of the asphalt next to green coffee-stained aprons and blue school blazers before stretching my own self out in the hushed downtown streets outside the places where the numbers scroll relentlessly.

I am not alone.

We say nothing and we chant nothing but all the greying pinstriped people who did not walk with us pale as the primitive part of their brains finally grasps that the polar bears are dead and we are no longer willing to pretend that this is the cost of doing business.

**KIMBERLY CHRISTENSEN** lives and writes in the Pacific Northwest alongside towering cedar trees and colonies of honeybees. You can find her at [KimberlyChristensenAuthor.com](https://www.kimberlychristensenauthor.com).