

“By now, a balance had been reached: the plants used the gases from the air to grow and released them again when they died. They trapped the heat of the sun, and what was left could escape through the clean, light air. Ice formed at the tips of the planet, and the sea levels fell. And so the planet stayed not too wet and not too dry, not too hot and not too cold, the air not too thick and not too thin, and the plants and animals not too many and not too few.

“But all this time, the heat and gases of a million years were not gone, but corked beneath the rocks as oil and coal, a *genie* in a bottle, just waiting to escape.”

“A dangerous *genie* to release, then,” said the boy.

“A very dangerous *genie* indeed,” said the old man.



The boy looked up once more at the yellowed planet above.
“So what went wrong?” he asked.

“At first, Man used only his own energy to survive, and lived in balance with his world: his crops were harvested by hand, his mills driven by water and his ships by wind. And he made only what he needed.

“But then he wanted more. So he dug iron from the ground, burned coal to smelt and forge it, and from it built machines and goods, and the trains and boats to deliver them. And his machines and trains and boats, in their turn, also burned coal for fuel.”

“And the heat and gases trapped in that coal for those millions of years?” asked the boy.

“Released in the blink of an eye,” said the old man.

“And the world began to heat up again.”

“And Man got worried?”

“And Man didn’t notice,” said the old man.

“Oh, dear,” said the boy.



“Then Man burned coal to make electricity, which powered the lights and appliances in every house and the machines in every factory which made them. And the more electricity that was used, the more coal was burned, and the more heat and gases that were released. And the gases began to blanket the world once more, trapping the heat within.”

“So what did Man do then?” asked the boy.

“He started burning oil as well,” said the old man.

“Oh, dear,” said the boy.

10 **Reality check** Give an aircraft carrier to everyone in Chicago and six blue whales to everyone else in the US, a space shuttle to everyone in the UK, a jumbo jet to everyone in India, 10 big cars to everyone in China, and an African elephant to every single person in Spain,

France, Italy, Canada, Saudi Arabia, Colombia, Iraq, Egypt, Belgium and Peru... and this is the weight of the CO₂ stored, *just in oil.*