

Coloring Up the Ocean

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Nadya couldn't wait. She was going all the way to Australia with her parents and her best friend, Charity, to see the Great Barrier Reef! They would do all kinds of amazing things when they got there. They would go snorkeling, diving, sailing... EVERYTHING!!! She was giddy with excitement.

The time finally came for them to take their bags, and go on an excruciatingly long plane ride. Does getting from California to Australia usually take this long? When they went off of the plane, Nadya's legs were wobbling, and her ears were popping. She had to lean on Charity's shoulder for support, but she was unstable too, and they both came crashing down with peals of laughter. They set their bags down in their hotel, got their swimsuits and wetsuits, and headed to the Great Barrier Reef.

The sight was beautiful to behold. It took Nadya's breath away. Everywhere she looked, she saw golden beaches and a sky blue ocean. She breathed in the fresh, salty air, and smiled. She was gonna like it here just fine. They put on their wetsuits and scuba gear, and dived in.

The water was not as cold as Nadya thought it would be. It was warm! Around 70 degrees! She put her head under water and gasped, getting a mouthful of water in the process. She couldn't believe how beautiful marine life was. She scolded herself for not visiting this place until now. The ocean was so alive! There were tiny fish and big fish, and corals of every color imaginable! She even spotted a small gray shark, but it swam away as if it did not have the time of day for little eleven year olds. She wished she brought her camera, but it was back at the hotel. She was so excited to get here, she forgot to bring it. She continued forward above the reef. There were colors all around her. She decided right then and there that she wanted to be a diver from now on.

But soon, something looked wrong. The corals looked as if the colors were draining from them. She came across an area that was pure white. There were hundreds of thousands of white corals, stretching on and on. It looked like there were hundreds of skeletons. It gave her the creeps. She swam away from the graveyard and found Charity absorbed at a seahorse uncurling itself from a piece of coral. Nadya

grabbed her arm and dragged her to the white corals. Charity gave bubbles of protest, but let herself get dragged until she reached the place of the white corals. It didn't look better the second time Nadya looked. It actually looked worse. She even saw on closer inspection that chunks of them were brown and dead.

Nadya and Charity raced out of the ocean and went to find Nadya's parents. "Mom! Dad!" Nadya yelled as soon as she spotted them. Charity burst in, "We saw a WHOLE bunch of white coral thingies, and we don't know what they are!"

Nadya's mom laughed at the expressions on their face and replied, "Those are bleached corals."

"Like the kind of bleach you use in houses?" Nadya replied quizzically.

Her mom continued, "No. Bleached corals happen when the corals are stressed by the change in condition, like warmer water temperatures which are caused by global warming, and pollution."

"So, how do we stop it?" Charity asked.

"I don't know. Maybe do some research," Nadya's dad replied.

That night, Charity and Nadya spent nearly all night researching bleached corals and how to prevent it from happening. They found out that recycling, conserving water, not polluting, planting trees, and keeping the beach clean were major ways to help the corals. The next morning, they went completely off their plan for snorkeling. Instead, they sent out posters telling people to sign up if they want to preserve the corals in the Great Barrier Reef.

When they went back into the lobby, they were surprised to see almost 50 people lazing around in the lobby. They took the meeting outside and told the people about 5 ways that they could help preserve the corals. Recycling is the very first step you can take to make a change. Conserving water means the less runoff and wastewater that makes it back to the water. Not polluting and picking up waste also helps keep the ocean clean for the corals. Planting trees helps with the pollution and keeps the ocean clean.

At the end of the day, more than 30 trees were planted and not a single bit of waste was found. It is a small step towards keeping the ocean clean, but if everyone does their part for the ocean, we can protect the corals and save marine life.