# **Enough is Enough**

Chop. Chop. Chop. My father’s axe hammers the wood. He stands to observe the paddock behind him. Hundreds of trees lie on the ground, leaves blowing peacefully. He turns to me.

“Only two more to go, Brooke! Then we can bring in the cattle.”

Heave, heave, ho. My father grunts with every movement. Creak, snap, crash. Dead.

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“I’m sorry for your loss.”

“Thanks.”

“He’s in a better place.”

“Thanks?”

“I’m sorry for your loss.”

“Shut up.”

“I’m sorry for your loss.”

“Shut up!”

“I’m sorry for your loss.”

“I said, SHUT UP!”

The school hallway froze in place as my outburst bounced around the walls. I grimaced and turned to face the mass of students who looked around at each other, uncertain.

“My dad is dead. I know you all don’t actually care about me; you just want to know how he died. You just want to get a fresh, juicy new piece of gossip that you can pass around at lunch. So here it is. My dad was hit by a falling tree branch. He was clearing an overgrown paddock so we could bring in new cattle. We had two more to go. The branch that hit him wasn’t even from the tree he was cutting. His death was gruesome. I can still hear him screaming.” I paused, seeing the shock on everyone’s faces.  “That’s the whole story. I hope you’re happy.”

I turned back towards my original path and continued, the wave of students parting for me.

I was called into the principal’s office later that day. She tried to offer words of support, but they were hollow, and I could see the notes she’d scribbled on the back of a piece of paper. She didn’t mean it. She tried to tell me that Dad didn’t chop in the ‘sweet spot’, so the tree fell forwards instead of back. Once again, I told her how the branch that fell wasn’t the one that he was cutting. She didn’t believe me. I knew that no one in the hallway earlier today had believed me.

Lunchtime was harder today. People still stared and they started whispering the second I walked past. Sitting with my friends at a table, I could feel the whole canteen’s eyes on me. I felt like an animal in a zoo. I couldn’t stand it. I knew my friends didn’t know what to say. I couldn’t bring this pressure onto them. So, I turned to the library for shelter. I had only meant to spend the first few days there, but it became more and more comforting. I spent my lunches with my nose buried in a book like a timid rabbit. As I walked in later that week, the librarian called me over.

“Brooke, dear, we’ve just got a new stock of books in, and I thought you might be interested in some of them. Have a browse through and let me know which one you go with.”

I smiled, grateful for her gentle kindness. I picked up one with a cover the colour of the sea on a stormy day.

“I think I’ll go with this one.”

“That one’s quite popular in Sydney, apparently. Tell me what it’s like.”

And so, I sat down and read. I poured over the pages. It was a historical fiction novel about a captain on a whaling ship off the coast of Tasmania. He had killed thousands of whales in his lifetime and knew the ocean like a lion knows its Savannah. The book told of a wild storm that arose from nowhere. This powerful force of nature threw him overboard into the dark swirling waters. As the end of lunch bell rang, I flicked to the end of the book. The captain was never seen again after the storm. Almost as though the ocean swallowed him whole. As I shuffled to class with everyone else, I started thinking. What if Mother Nature is actually real? What if she got angry at Dad for destroying her trees and so she punished him? How else could a branch fall from a perfectly healthy tree and hit Dad when he wasn’t even cutting that tree?

My brain roamed aimlessly as I sat in geography. The topic of the day? Natural disasters. Mr Kelley reads a list of topics to be discussed.

           “2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami, Hurricane Katrina in 2005, Haitian earthquake of 2010, the 2011 Christchurch Earthquake and the 2021 flooding in NSW.”

He continued, outlining what life was like before the natural disasters and how each location was using the environment. More like abusing, I thought, as he shifted through PowerPoint slides with pictures of a beach covered in plastic, fields of crops as far as the eye could see and houses built right on top of a river. Then disaster struck. An ocean surging onto land like a plague of mice running wild. Towns swallowed by water, buildings falling into great splits in the earth, houses reduced to rubble. No, no, no, no. This can’t be true. It can’t be happening. In all these places, the environment was being mistreated. A heavily polluted ocean, overfishing, logging, deforestation, pesticides. Then nature struck. People were left homeless and struggling for survival. They had no control over what happened to them. Nature had flexed its muscles showing how insignificant humans are. It had to be her, right? What else could explain the sudden reversal of power?

I walked home cautiously that day. My eyes scanned the trees for any suspicious movements of branches and even birds or bugs. I arrived home without a scratch. Mum was sitting in the living room, face red from the heat that was radiating in through the open window.

           “Hi Mum, what’re you watching?”

She turned towards me, eyes like a flood.

           “Picnic at Hanging Rock. Dad’s favourite.”

I sat down beside her as the familiar windpipes drifted across the scene. Four girls dressed in white exploring a rock. One girl pauses, turns, and stared up at where they are being filmed. I shivered at her expression. Then it hits me. The girls are sitting in the shade trying to escape from the heat, ants are crawling over their finger buns, but most of all, it looks like the bush is consuming the girls. The bush was being destroyed to make way for new farms so are these girls paying the price for the destruction of nature? I know they never return. Just like how Dad never will.

           “Mum, is this based on a real event?”

“No one really knows sweetheart. Some people think so, others think it’s all just a story.”

I turned to face the TV again. What if it was based on a real story? What if the girls did go missing because of how people were treating nature? Invading the bush with houses and farmland. Suddenly, I don’t want to be here anymore. I can’t watch the rest of it. I feel sick watching something so blatantly connected to Dad’s death. Mumbling an excuse about studying, I walked to my room.

Plonking my bag down, I sat at my desk with a sigh like the wind. I’m really not in the mood to study. Instead, I open up my emails and click on the last link Dad sent me. He loved to share the news. It’s a page about COVID-19 and the Venice canals. When COVID-19 struck, nobody could go to Venice. Nobody could go anywhere. No boats, no cars, no motorbikes, no aeroplanes. Without the swarm of tourists, the canals became clearer. Healthier. The whole world could breathe again. My heart started knocking at my chest like a woodpecker. This all happened because of COVID. Because humanity was forced to stay inside. We couldn’t travel. Even now, scientists aren’t entirely sure where this virus came from. It just appeared. Right when the natural state of our world was about to collapse. Mother Nature. It had to be her.

Dad died after cutting down trees. He had two left. He intended to bring cattle into the newly cleared land. The cattle would have eaten the grass. Would have stomped on the small native plants growing. Mother Nature was angry. She was fuming. She had no other choice. Dad had been cutting her down, tree by tree. She had to do something. She killed him. I run to my window. The cut trees were still lying in the paddock. Lifeless. Leaves shrivelling up. Sap oozing out of the gashes. Like blood…