

## Changing Times

*By Luke Waldie*

A chance wind is all it took. Carried from my mother's branches, a seed burdened with limitless potential is blown far away. High over gum-filled hills and pine-choked forest floor, the wind battles to and fro; uncertain of its own leading hand in my destiny. Eventually, with a breathy sigh, I am deposited. Clear blue skies present themselves above me. Rolling hills before me, nestled in a valley. A realm untouched. I sigh with content and allow my roots to bury into black volcanic soil. The years flow by like the wind.

The gentle breeze is flowing up the valley. Dancing through untamed long grass, bushes and trees untouched for decades. The wave sweeps towards me, words of solidarity carried from afar that bristle through my leaves and gently flex my green trunk. The stream, boisterously professing itself a creek, gently babbles below on the valley floor, weaving between boulders and stumps that mark the eons old battle between the growth and flood. With a content creak, I right myself against the wind. From my perch nestled high in the valley, I can see things are as they always were.

A new sound rises above the cacophony of life in the valley. A rumble, like the bowels of the earth ruminating on its past fiery life. Yet, no mountains are rendered asunder. No fire spews forth. A metal box rumbles across the field below me. Figures stumble out, surveying the land like I am surveying them. Gibbering noises rise from the figures, wild gesturing and enthusiasm. Something new, but like all moving things I assure myself it will pass. Things will always be as they were.

The figures stay, longer than I thought. As the green shifts from my trunk and into my branches, a box is created near me. The figures sit in the box, hiding from the moon. During the day they place shining lines along the valley, despite the futility of demarcating land that has never known lines. New creatures are brought in; creatures who munch on four legs and transverse the valley slopes with mute neutrality. The long untamed grass falls to their hunger, replaced by seas of buzzcut green. I hope things will always be as they were.

The figures stop placing the shining lines, and for a while the valley returns to normal. The new green seas and munching creatures quietly spread across the valley, unnoticed by all except those with deep roots. But when the buzzcut green seas fill the valley, things change. The figures emerge with screaming devices of steel and teeth, falling countless fellow trees. The creatures migrate to the creek, contaminating its babbles with hooves and excrement. Forests fall to the metal teeth, and the green sea spreads further; a visual spectacle turned to a plague. Silence reigns in the valley as all its mobile former inhabitants flee from the orchestra of chaos. The woods thin, and my branches sag with despair. Leaves drift to the ground, unable to be replaced due to the impotent fury wanting my brethren scythed down. I fear things will never again be the way they were.

As suddenly as it started, it stopped. The metal screamers were put away, and a silence returned to the valley. Not one of fear, or loathing. A bird cries out, quietly at first, but every time louder. More shining lines are placed, not for conquest but purpose. The munching creatures are cordoned off from the stream; the hoof marks and faeces allowed to wash clear. The figures work tirelessly; leaky weirs spring up, prompting reeds, birds and bushes to resprout. The death of the forest, originally on a knives edge, is arrested. Saplings are planted, cared for, and new voices join the flora whispering on the wind. New leaves appear on my branches. One of the original figures, who emerged from that metal box all those winters ago, approaches. Greyed from the years, they silently place a hand against my trunk. The sounds of the figures subside. The sound of the valley returns. I can see things are as they always were.